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Crisis of leadership

Four months of striking by the miners has had a substantial effect on the Labour movement. As the dispute develops into the most bitter and protracted struggle the NUM has fought since the General Strike, and into the hardest fought struggle against the Thatcher government ever to take place, a number of important lessons have become starkly clear.

Some of the lessons of the miners' strike are ones which will be familiar to regular readers of this magazine. For example, the famous and basic Marxist proposition that it is only in the course of struggle that workers become conscious of their own ability to change the world has been demonstrated in a thousand cases in this dispute.

The miners doing the picketing outside Orgreave and elsewhere are not, by and large, the veterans of 1972 and 1974. Certainly, there are some people who went through the battle at Saltley twelve years ago but the majority of the miners who are fighting with great courage and resource are young. They have learnt in the course of struggle. They were not and are not supermen: simply workers who have started to learn how to change the world.

Those lessons are learnt at an uneven pace. Not all miners learn the same things and not all of them generalise from their immediate experience to society as a whole. Take for example the role of women in the strike. The self-organisation of the women of the mining community has been one of the most impressive developments of the strike. As we show in a later article such actions are part of the traditions of the mining industry.

But at the same time there is present amongst many miners a deep strain of sexism. The Mansfield demonstration was a particularly bitter example. Despite a magnificent demonstration two days before by thousands of women in Barnsley, in Mansfield there was a very high level of abuse directed against women who had come to support the strike. Many miners might have learnt to hate the *Sun*'s reporting of their strike, but they have not yet got round to burning Page 3.

Role of politics

Obviously, those attitudes have to be fought and fought hard, not simply because they are objectionable, but also because they have the potential of crippling the struggle itself. Just because miners are ready to fight the police in large numbers, it does not follow that they are automatically transformed into fully-rounded socialists opposed to all aspects of exploitation and oppression. Ideas change in struggle, but not automatically. It needs hard political arguments too.

Nowhere will those arguments be more important, and nowhere will they be more difficult, than over the role of the trade union leadership and in particular the left figures in the NUM.

At the same time as the pickets started to build up around the Orgreave coke works, the NUM and the NCB started secret talks to explore ways of ending the strike. (It is a

socialist REVIEW

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Et tu, Brute?—Scargill calls for mass pickets at Orgreave but Yorkshire area president, Jack Taylor (left), insists his pickets go to Nottingham

bitter irony that Solidarnosc—attacked by Scargill and now in no position to stop the flood of coal the Polish regime is pouring in to help Thatcher break the strike—used to broadcast all negotiations over loudspeakers!)

It is important to be quite clear that the talks pose a major threat to the outcome of the battle. The coal board will only concede defeat if British industry has ground to a standstill.

We have seen already in this strike how little value the promises of bureaucrats actually have. Take the example of Ravenscraig. There the leaders of the ISTC in particular and the so-called triple alliance in general promised control the movement of coal, and promptly allowed their members to shift very large quantities out of Hunterston into the steel works.

That, it can be argued, was the result of the notoriously right wing leadership of the ISTC. But take the case of the allegedly left led rail unions, the NUR and ASLEF. There is no doubt that their members have, in general, been very principled about the movement of coal, and there is no doubt that their anger over pay was one of the by-products of the miners' strike.

Central question

But the leadership of these unions showed no inclination to use this new mood of anger and solidarity amongst their members to mount a serious fight over pay and stop what has been a long retreat by the rail unions. They gave BR long notice of their intention to take action and then jumped at the first miserable deal they were offered. A deal, it is now confirmed, designed by the Tory cabinet itself to head off solidarity action between striking railway workers and miners. What is more, they even had the cheek, these left wing leaders, to try to sell the deal to their members as a major victory.

If many miners will accept that argument for the leaders of other unions, it is not the case that as yet at least, they will accept it for the leaders of their own union.

Therein lies a real danger. Despite all the talk about police states and the like, it is still the case that this strike will be ended by the NUM executive and not by the Association of Chief Constables. And that executive has come under more and more pressure over the last few weeks. The Labour Party, and Neil Kinnock in particular, have been openly denouncing 'violent' picketing and privately pushing for a deal.

The right of the NUM leadership must be looking for a compromise solution. Probably the left, or at least Scargill, think that there is still more to be gained by fighting on. But they are powerless as individuals; if the executive agrees to a sell-out deal, Scargill will be trapped by his own past. Because he has no organised base outside of the official machine, he will be forced either to go along with the majority of the executive or try to fight them through the bureaucracy. Whichever way he goes he will be unable to beat them.

Indeed, the sorry tale of the struggle around the Orgreave coke works shows just how little impact one individual bureaucrat has when he is neither willing nor able to break with the bureaucratic machinery and habits which he has been responsible for running and developing.

It is obvious to the ruling class that Orgreave is a vital turning point in the struggle: if the pickets win there then their morale will be lifted and they will go on to other victories. If they are beaten at Orgreave then they will not have the same enthusiasm and determination elsewhere.

The same point is clear to Scargill and it is clear to the militants in the Yorkshire region. But it is apparently not clear to Jack Taylor, the local NUM leadership and the local Labour councillors. They have consistently dragged their feet over turning out masses of pickets, sometimes they have openly sabotaged efforts to build a big picket, and on occasion they have worked damned hard to stop serious picketing taking place.

Incredibly enough, one of the things that weighs on their collective minds is the damage that violent scenes might do to Labour's electoral prospects in, of all things, the EEC elections.

The local leadership who have obstructed this struggle are part of the 'left' of the bureaucracy, as are the leadership in Wales and Scotland who have performed similar tricks around their own steelworks.

Arthur Scargill knows about this treachery and betrayal but however much he himself may reject it, and however much he may want to close down Orgreave, the one thing that he will not do is to go over the heads of the bureaucracy, denounce them to the rank and file, and appeal for independent organisation.

That is not the result of personal failings but of political ones: without an organisation no individual, however 'left' they might be, can actually alter the course of the strike. The only organisation Scargill has is the very NUM bureaucracy which he has so lovingly perfected and which has put him where he is now. He is, in the end, the prisoner of that very machine.

Self activity

That would not matter too much if there was any other force in the union that could act independently of the left bureaucracy, but there is not. The rank and file militants have fought hard, and they have pushed their leaders to the left, but they are not an independently organised force capable of acting against their leaders. They are very dependent upon Scargill and his co-thinkers. If they shift to the right, then it will be very difficult to stop them.

The fact is that the outcome of the miners' strike is still very unpredictable. A great deal hangs on imponderables. Take the battle over the coke works. The great model for that sort of fight was the Saltley struggle. That was won, in the end, by the action of thousands of Birmingham engineers who struck in solidarity. The week-long struggle fought by the NUM was the crucial focus through which wider class action organised.

This time round things do not look quite the same. There is, no doubt, substantial sympathy for the miners, other groups of workers have a new feeling of confidence, and there are a number of other important disputes bubbling away. But as yet there has not been that crucial breakthrough to sustained solidarity action that won in 1972.

That too is something that needs a sustained political argument to change. There can be no doubt that the major lesson of the miners' strike so far is a familiar one but a vital one: there is no substitute for socialist politics in a major class struggle, and there is no chance of socialist politics without an organisation which can fight for the arguments.

Wives, mothers and fighters

The miners' strike has seen both very backward sexist attitudes from some miners and a wonderful mobilisation of miners' wives and girlfriends to help win the strike. Norah Carlin looks at the background.

The best story of the last month was the one about the policeman who looked into a car carrying Yorkshire miners' wives to a picket in Nottinghamshire. 'Right, ladies, on you go,' he said. 'We're looking for pickets, but we can see you're not pickets.'

Miners' wives and girlfriends all over the country have been organising to support the strike. They have moved from setting up soup kitchens and collecting money to demonstrating and actual picketing. In all this, they have re-established in a very public way the solidarity of working class women with their men when their families' livelihood is at stake and their communities under threat.

This solidarity among miners' families is far from new, and militant action by miners' wives goes back a long way. In 1844, women drove off Cornish scabs from a striking colliery in Durham. In Lancashire in 1868 and 1881 they also helped to drive away blacklegs and addressed large open-air meetings in support of the strikers. At Murton in Durham in 1910 men, women and children together raided stocks of coal at the pithead to heat their homes during a strike.

Naked

The commonest kind of action by women during miners' strikes, however, was always the harassment of local scabs outside their homes with 'rough music' — banging, shouting, parading with flags on clothes props or dressed in funny costumes. The tradition is centuries old, and it happened as late as 1935 in the Durham area.

So it should not come as a surprise that women have been involved in the current strike. But the miners' history and traditions are often represented as being hostile to women from at least the time of the 1842 Mines Act that banned women from underground work. The 'traditional' working class family with the full-time housewife and large numbers of children was strongest in mining communities, and it is a pattern which we now see as oppressive for women.

There can be no denying that present-day miners are often sexist, with naked pin-ups in miners' papers and strikers on demonstrations chanting '*Show us your tits*' at passing young women.

But young married miners minding the kids while their wives travel to picket lines, and the enthusiastic welcome given to women's contingents on recent demonstrations, show that there is another side to the picture.

Not all miners support the most aggressive sexist behaviour: at one college where a handful of the miners who were staying there while picketing a nearby port harassed women students, the majority admitted that they were against it. (The important thing in this case is that the students who argued with the miners were supporting the strike, not criticising the miners from a remote and hostile position.)

Some of the 'sexist' comments heard in Nottinghamshire have been part of the argument between strikers (and their families) and scabs (and their families). Scabs telling women to go home to their kitchens, and strikers accusing the scabs of being under their wives' thumbs, are reaching for convenient insults rather than attacking women as women.

To see the history of the miners as simply sexist is a great mistake. The role of women in this history has often been controversial, and the controversies have often got caught up in outside arguments about women, sexuality and the family. But an understanding of nineteenth-century mineworkers and their families shows that they cannot be interpreted in simple terms of antagonism between men and women.

Most male miners supported the banning of women from underground work in 1842. These women had worked in appalling conditions and in the most backward pits in a few areas only. Most of the women interviewed by the parliamentary commissioners hated the work and longed to be rid of it. No one except the local coal owners and the most doctrinaire opponents of state interference believed that such barbaric exploitation should be allowed to continue.

But the 1842 Act threw these women out of work all at once and with no compensation. Their families needed their wages, and there was no prospect of alternative employment for most of them. In those areas where women did work underground, both men and women miners had reservations about the Act — the division of opinion was not between women and men so much as between areas where women worked underground and those where they did not.

Some miners' spokesmen did adopt the argument that work underground was a 'moral danger' for women. This idea was born of middle class prurience, fascinated and shocked by women and young girls working scantily-clothed and in trousers in close proximity to men. This was the aspect of women's mine work most luridly publicised by the illustrated press, and it was taken up by some miners from the areas where women did not work and by union officials.

Men who worked alongside women surely knew that there was no opportunity for sexual contact at work, and that husbands, brothers and fathers were usually around for protection!

Later in the century, the 1842 Mines Act came to be seen as having introduced the pernicious principle that working class women were not to be treated as adults — it was the first piece of industrial legislation not confined to children. It did become the springboard for later attempts to regulate women out of all 'unfeminine' occupations. But at the time it was seen mainly as establishing the valuable principles that the state could set a limit to exploitation, and that women were entitled to protection of their health and safety — both of which principles were later to be extended in the direction of men's work.

The problems of miners' families in the nineteenth century are underestimated by those who see women's right to work as the only principle at stake. Miners' work was not only dirty, it was often damp as well: clothes had to be washed and dried daily, and hot water available for washing and bathing.

In many families, husbands and sons would be working different shifts; in others, disabled miners would have to be cared for. Servicing the family was a full-time job, heavy indeed though not as heavy as pit work. The division of labour between men and women was regarded as desirable not only by miners but by most working class men *and women* a century ago.

The male miner regarded a 'family wage', sufficient to support himself, his wife and young children, as a necessity. Yet even in mining a relatively high paid occupation, one wage was rarely enough. It was the older children in miners' families who earned the extra wages. Miners' families had more children than the average working class family right up to the 1930s. As long as the industry was expanding, employment for miners' sons was virtually guaranteed.

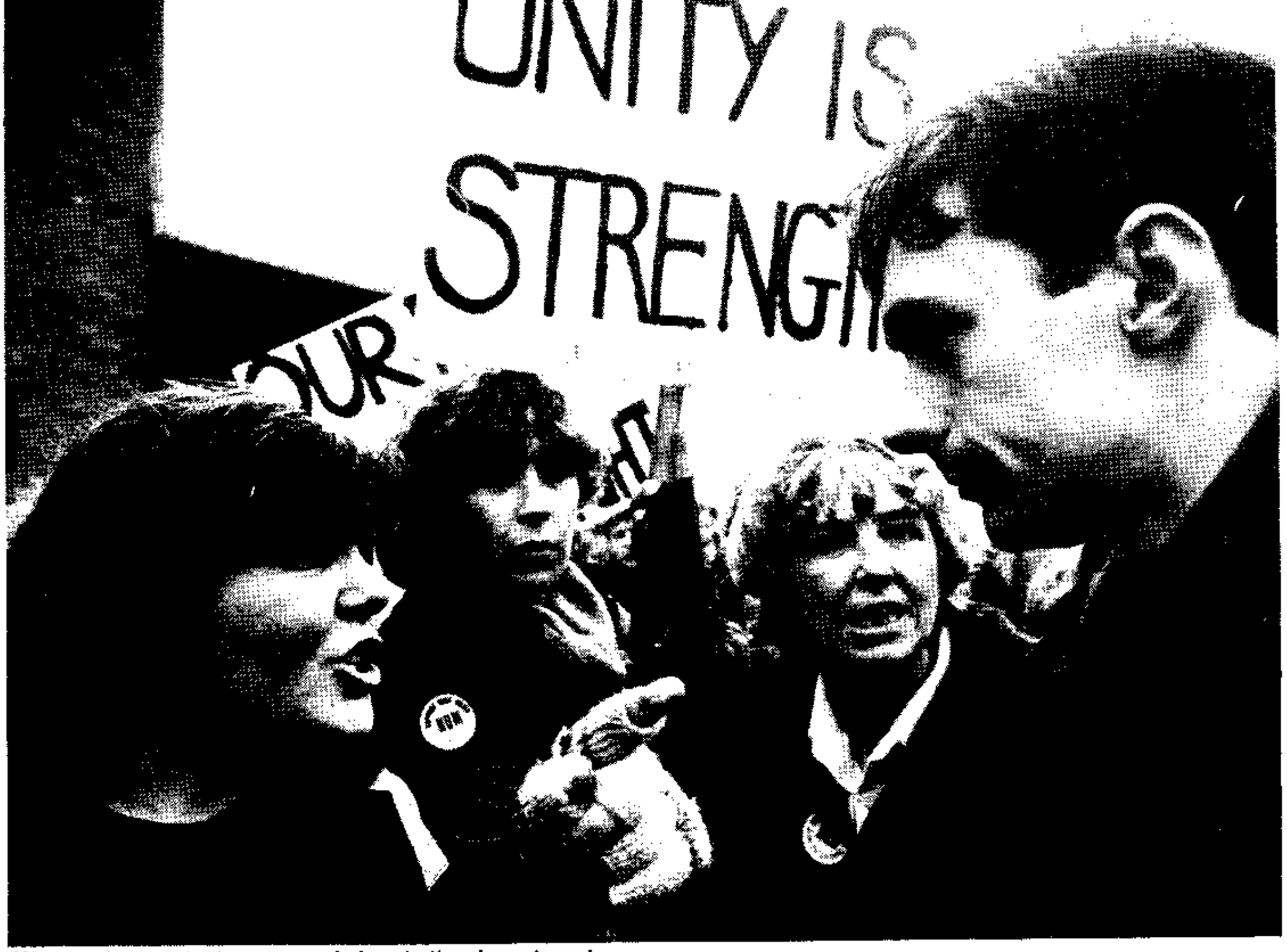
Teens

This division of labour was advantageous to the miners' families, and when times were good they enjoyed a comparatively high standard of living. The first Inspector of Mines, Tremenheere, who opposed the exploitation of women and children, also deplored the 'reckless spending' of miners' families on meat and poultry, fresh vegetables, beer and spirits, and 'excursions in carts and cars'!

In some areas the miners' daughters also contributed to the family income, being employed as 'pit brow lasses' unloading, screening and sorting coal and moving tubs and wagons at the pit head. Most of these women were in their teens and twenties, though miners' widows and wives supporting disabled husbands often joined them.

There were several unsuccessful attempts to ban women from pit brow work, but they survived until 1972 when the last two were made redundant in Cumberland. Once again, the most vigorous campaigners for abolition were middle-class moralists who denounced the work as 'unfeminine' and the trousers worn in the Wigan area as immoral.

But they were joined by the National Miners' Union and the miners' Liberal MPs in the 1880s, while the growing women's rights movement took up the women's case and denounced 'selfish' male miners for



Miners wives—winning an equal place in the class struggle

wanting the jobs for themselves.

Locally, feelings about the banning of women from surface work were mixed. The union agent for the Wigan miners who campaigned for the ban was later thrown out by the miners for failing to represent their views on this and other matters.

The question of women's labour being cheap, which led many miners to support exclusion, was double-edged. Men demanded a family wage — but the women were contributing to the support of their own families. They had never received help from the miners' union officially, though they sometimes supported miners' strikes. When they organised themselves to strike for higher wages, as at Pemberton (Lancs) in 1867, they were on their own.

This changed only during and after the First World War, when the union decided at last to recruit the surface women. The miners' 1919 claim included (and won) a substantial improvement in the women's wages. It is no accident that this was at the height of the miners' strength, in the year when they turned back the employers with what many regarded as a threat of revolutionary action.

But by the 1950s pithead mechanisation was squeezing women out of jobs, and the wholesale pit closures of the 1960s and early 1970s wiped out all the remaining women mineworkers, except cleaners, canteen and office workers.

Some miners today seem to regard the exclusion of women as a fundamental moral principle — it is said that in 1982 some striking women hospital workers were kept waiting outside lodge meetings while they voted solidarity' action. This tradition is probably strongest in the North-East, where women had long ceased to be employed at mines when the union took shape in the 1840s.

The prejudice is clearly outdated. If it came to a question of women working underground today, modern conditions and mechanisation, with the principle of equal pay for equal work, would prevent any return to the days before 1842. Since 1974 women have worked underground in the USA — 2,500 of them by 1979, most of them attracted by decent wages rather than by feminist principle, though equal rights legislation paved the way. It is not very practical, however, to argue that women should enter the mines in Britain at the moment, when the loss of so many jobs is threatened.

Baths

Few miners' wives or daughters would want to go down the pit in any case — they know its hardships and dangers too well. But like most working class women today, many miners' wives are full-time or part-time workers themselves.

Compared with their grandmothers, the lives of women in mining communities have been changed by the coming of pithead baths and showers, better housing with running hot water, bathrooms, washing machines and other modern conveniences. They have fewer children over a short period of time, and children do not become wage earners till they are almost grown-up by nineteenth-century standards. Miners' wives work when they can for the extra income their families need — they are no longer tied for life to the tin bath and the washing line.

Perhaps more slowly than other working class women, miners' wives are beginning to break out of their 'separate sphere'. But in many areas, the opportunities for women to earn good wages are still few and far between. Meanwhile, the miners' role as breadwinner is threatened by redundancies and pit closures. It is hardly surprising that in this situation there are tensions, that miners cling to a macho image and insist on seeing women in traditional ways.

The important thing that the 1984 strike has shown is that these tensions do not and should not wipe out the tradition of unity between women and men in the struggle to defend the miners' jobs. Miners' wives may be workers themselves — one woman proudly described herself as 'breadwinner and picket' for the duration of the strike — or they may be housewives, but by organising for action in support of the strike they can show that they have to be taken seriously and are not just passive appendages of the men.

The best way of fighting sexism is to show that women have to be taken seriously, as equals, by male workers. In the long run, women will have to be freed from economic dependence and being tied to the home, so as to be able to act and organise for themselves. But in the present situation, miners' wives and girlfriends have shown just how much solidarity with the men on strike can do towards winning an equal place for themselves in the class struggle■

Limits of syndicalism

Fleet Street thrives on images of Arthur Scargill as a power-crazed, egocentric madman. But Scargill is not the first miners' leader to have newspaper editors foaming at the mouth. Here, **Jane Ure Smith** recalls another.

Arthur Cook, general secretary of the Miners' Federation (MFGB) in the 1920s, came in for vicious press treatment. Even those supposedly on his own side were frightened by Cook's militant stance. Labour establishment intellectual Beatrice Webb was drawn to Cook as 'a man you watch with a certain admiring curiosity.'

But at the same time her middle class sensibilities were clearly offended. Cook, she said, had 'no intellect and not much intelligence, he is a quivering mass of emotions ... an inspired idiot, drunk on his own words ...'

When Cook was elected miners' leader in 1924, TUC general secretary Fred Bramley burst into the office of a colleague saying:

> 'Have you seen who has been elected secretary of the Miners' Federation? Cook, a raving tearing Communist. Now the miners are in for a bad time.'

Raving, tearing, yes — at least a lot of the time. Cook stands head and shoulders above most trade union leaders of his time — or indeed any time. But strictly speaking he was not a communist.

Cook's politics were forged in the South Wales coalfields during the massive struggles that took place before the first world war. At their height the South Wales miners' strikes of 1910-11 involved around 30,000 men — and most of the action was unofficial.

Mass selling

In this militant atmosphere socialist ideas took root easily. Socialist newspapers sold like hot cakes. At one point during the strikes members of the Marxian Club at Blaenclydach complained they were unable to get a single copy of the Social Democratic Federation newspaper *Justice* from the railway station to the club. Five hundred copies sold on the way.

But while SDF papers may have sold during the strike, for the most part the organisation's politics proved unsatisfactory to many South Wales militants. The SDF had come to put more and more emphasis on local municipal reforms, almost disregarding industrial struggle altogether.

These same militants were even more disgusted by the Labour Party, which avidly went for shoddy compromises with the Liberals in the hope of gaining parliamentary power. And allied with the Labour Party was the ineffective leadership of the South Wales Miners' Federation — many of who were themselves Labour or Lib-Lab MPs.

Not surprisingly then, a current of syndicalism ran quite strongly through the Welsh mining valleys. Experience had bred a deep distrust of 'politics' — which was identified with the parliamentary road. Radically reformed, industry-wide trade unions were seen as the instrument for changing society.

Cook was drawn into a syndicalist milieu at the age of 22 when he joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in the Rhondda in 1905. The leading figure there was David Noah Ablett, a one-time follower of the American Industrial Union of Daniel De Leon, who later became involved with Tom Mann's Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) and contributed to Mann's journal the *Industrial Syndicalist*.

When Ablett and other militants set up the Unofficial Reform Committee (URC) at the end of the 1911 strike to push for reorganisation of the South Wales Federation along 'fighting lines', Cook was actively involved, becoming secretary of the Porth branch in 1913.

Contrary to what is sometimes said, however, he was not one of the authors of the famous pamphlet the *Miners' Next Step*, published by the URC in 1912.

In these years before the war Cook was active in a whole host of militant, syndicalist-inclined organisations: he joined the Daily Herald League, the Industrial Democracy League and was an active teacher at the Central Labour College. Cook's heart lay in organisations like these. He kept on joining them for the rest of his life, never abandoning his distrust of political parties.

When war broke out in 1914, Cook's opposition was not on a revolutionary basis. His main concern seems to have ben rising food prices. This stance however, was enough to provoke the colliery management into trying to sack him. But he ws reinstated when miners in the area threatened strike action in his defence.

In 1915 militancy began to reawaken in the coalfields after two and a half quiet years. Cook played a part in the revival of the URC which had virtually disappeared by the end of 1913. He was also actively involved in the Rhondda valleys' Anti-Conscription Committee.

He expressed his opinion of the war in no uncertain terms:

> 'I am no pacifist when war is necessary to free my class from the curse and enslavement of capitalism ... As a worker I have more regard for the interests of my class than any nation. The interests of my class are not benefitted by this war, hence my opposition.'

Statements like this won Cook re-election as chairman of the Lewis Merthyr Employees Joint Committee, the local shop stewards' body. They also put the police on his trail.

The local chief constable must have spent long evenings writing letters to the home office presenting 'evidence' to suggest Cook should be charged under the Defence of the Realm Act. He finally got his way in 1918. Cook was jailed for three months for making speeches likely to cause disaffection.

Strikes broke out in the Rhondda, but Cook stayed inside. The ministry of labour noted: 'Considerable agitation has been caused by the imprisonment of the extremist Arthur J Cook.' These events gave Cook a certain reputation beyond his own area and in 1919 he began in earnest to climb the ladder to higher things in the Miners' Federation.

That year he was elected agent to the Rhondda No 1 District, defeating Noah Rees, one of the authors of the *Miners' Next Step*.

This step into the lower rungs of the bureaucracy proper seems not to have dampened Cook's revolutionary stance. When the South Wales Socialist Society (SWSS) was formed in 1919 he was quick to join.

The SWSS was one of the groups which came together to form the British Communist Party. But the process of forming the CPGB involved lengthy negotiations. The rows between the groups centred on their differing attitudes to the Labour Party and to the question of using parliament on a tactical basis to gain a wider audience for their ideas. While the arguments were going on Sylvia Pankhurst jumped the gun and drew a group of supporters into forming the Communist Party British Section of the Third International (CPBSTI).

Cook was a part of that venture. He helped to found the Communist Party of South Wales and the West of England, a strictly anti-parliamentarist group.

Communist Party

When the CPBSTI came round to joining the Communist Party proper, Cook joined as well, but he lasted less than a year. His months of membership, however lasted through the bitter miners' strike of 1921.

This dispute turned out to be a dress rehearsal for the General Strike of 1926: the miners were left to six months of struggle and defeat after the TUC called off solidarity action — on a day now remembered as Black Friday.

At the end of the strike Cook was jailed on a trumped-up charge of having intimidated a safety worker. On his release he announced he was leaving the CP. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why.

It is clear that he was unhappy with the CP's intervention around the strike. On one occasion he lashed out at the party, calling it a 'hindrance to the whole of the trade union movement.'

> 'They are causing division inside the ranks of the whole movement, and I am of the opinion that we shall as a trades union movement, eventually have to fight the Communist Party.'

This is undoubtedly a remark Cook would rather not have made. Yet it exposes quite vividly the different pressures he was under. By this stage, he had a seat on the executive committee of the MFGB. But in trades union terms his politics had not shifted to the right. Still a member of the URC, he spent a good deal of the time attacking the union leader-

ship. In the brief miners' strike of October 1920, he argued the URC line for seizure of the pits.

Early in 1921 at a special miners' conference he had this to say:

> 'I am told by many older men that we must again try constitutional methods, that is, parliament ... That is why we are getting no further. If we cannot move parliament to do something, we ought to be able to do it ourselves. We have been talking about control of industry. We have talked about national combination. We have first of all to destroy the system, if we have come to the conclusion there is no solution under the present system ...
>
> 'We may not solve the problem by a general strike ... but we shall have brought it to a head, then will come the situation when we as organised labour have to tell the democracy whether we can take over the industries.'

Cook at that stage seems to have had a simple faith in rank and file trade union power. Before the lockout of 1921 he wrote along with Ablett and two other South Wales leaders: 'Trust simply and solely in your economic power, in the wholehearted support of your comrades of the Triple Alliance and of other trade unions.'

Trade unionism

Black Friday seems to have shattered that faith. After six months of the miners struggling alone, Cook went along with an executive proposal to call the strike off. He was clearly disregarding the views of the rank and file he represented in South Wales. Two lodges in the Rhondda called for his resignation.

The Communist Party too argued against calling off the strike, and it is most likely that this provoked Cook's resignation and the bitter accusations that the CP was a 'hindrance to the movement'.

The limitations of Cook's syndicalism show up here. His rejection of 'politics' — and hence the CP — left him with no real strategy for salvaging the remnants of union strength in the aftermath of defeat. The Communist Party was still in its infancy and by no means a model Bolshevik Party, but involvement within it would have made it easier for Cook to act as a revolutionary in a very demoralising period.

Instead he was trapped within the limits of trade unionism and he lost confidence in his base. For a few months, in the face of massive wage cuts, rising unemployment and a seriously weakened union, Cook moved rapidly to the right, arguing along with the right wing leaders for industrial peace and higher productivity.

Again there were calls for his resignation. It was not long however, before the union dropped its policy of co-operation with the owners and Cook swung back to the left. He flung himself into the Minority Movement as he had done with the URC, seeing it as the means of rebuilding rank and file strength. He urged miners 'to form Minority Movements in every district, attend your branch meetings, and let us again rally the miners to the great struggle that is in front of us'.

By 1923 the old rhetoric was in full flow:

AJ Cook 'a raving, tearing communist'?

> 'Comrades! Let us unite together to forge the weapon for our salvation. He that would be free, let him strike the first blow. Let the words of Marx still ring loud. Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lost but your chains, and a world to gain.'

It was this kind of fighting talk that finally got Cook elected general secretary of the MFGB in 1924. Page Arnot, a Communist Party member who wrote extensively on the miners, sums up Cook's election in this way:

> 'The choice of him by the miners was eloquent of their sufferings for the past three years. It was a token of spirit undismayed by hardship. It was a choice which meant renewal of the struggle.'

And so Cook led the miners into the struggle that was to provoke the General Strike of 1926. He did waver on occasions. Before the strike he agreed to accept wage reduction, but was over ruled by his executive. After the strike he agreed to the TUC not calling an early meeting of trade union executives. Later at the TUC annual conference of 1926 he agreed to dampen down the debate on the strike.

But during the strike, Cook fought an uncompromising battle on behalf of his members in the face of the pathetic sell-out by the TUC.

His unwillingness to kick the TUC in the months after the strike, suggests he was pushed to the right through demoralisation as he had been in 1921. But almost as in a rerun performance of the earlier years, Cook was up and fighting within a year.

Almost a lone voice within the official trade union movement, he campaigned against Mondism — a series of TUC/employers' get-togethers on the bosses' terms. His opposition was on the hard basis which had characterised most of his political life:

> 'You cannot be a socialist and at the same time help the employers to rebuild capitalism. Capitalism and socialism are antagonistic terms. We must *either* decide to stand by capitalism and abandon socialism, or work for the destruction of capitalism. There is no middle ground.'

That statement should perhaps mark the end of A J Cook's political career as far as assessment on our part goes. By that stage the Communist Party was well into its Third Period ultra-leftism; it was no Bolshevik yardstick to judge Cook's actions against. He was denounced vehemently in CP literature for opposing the breakaway union set up in Fife under party auspices. But Cook was right, the CP were wrong.

People will tell you that Cook then sold out completely, signing a statement put out by Mosley's New Party. That was in 1931. Cook had already had a leg amputated and he was to die from cancer before the end of the year. Whatever he did at that stage of his life is of little relevance.

Fierce militant

Cook was a fierce trade union militant for the greater part of his short life. Better than that, he was a revolutionary who wanted to see capitalism brought to its knees. But we can learn something from looking at the weaknesses of Cook's strategy for gaining that end.

On a number of occasions around the two vital miners' strikes of 1921 and 1926, Cook swung to the right violently. Yet it is no use saying that if he had been a member of the CP he would have behaved differently. The line the Communist Party adopted in 1925 under pressure from Stalin's post-revolutionary Russia — All Power to the General Council — would not have been much use to him.

But it is clear that without a revolutionary party, Cook's strategy for changing the world sometimes ran up against severe limitations. Because he rejected '*politics*' — never really accepting that could mean more than the parliamentary road — Cook's fight was often hauled back within the limits of trade unionism.

There, because of the nature of the bureaucracy, the right wing always has the upper hand. Arthur Scargill may seem no less a tenacious class fighter than Arthur Cook, but the same dangers stand in his path. ■

Getting in the mood

The wave of small disputes in British Leyland is one example of a new mood of confidence amongst workers. Andy Zebrowski looks at the details.

The rising level of strikes at both Cowley and Longbridge is due to the successful turn-around in the popularity of Leyland cars.

Employment has risen, particularly at Cowley. A couple of years ago between 3,000 and 3,500 workers were employed there. A shop steward estimates that today the figure is around 5,000. This important change means that workers can see physical signs of BL's success on the shopfloor.

After years of running down the workforce the company started recruiting in late 1982. They took on 'green' labour to produce the new Maestro. These are very young workers with no trade union or factory experience. The regime was very harsh, foremen could get away with murder. People would get dismissed sometimes without the union hearing about it. The dismissals often occurred for trivial offences such as lateness on one or two occasions.

The workers' morale really began to shift in the 'hand-washing' dispute last year. The background to it was the 39-hour week conceded two years ago. The unions agreed that the company would not lose production.

Complained

Relief times were cut and extra work was put on the Man Assignments. (Relief time is the time allowed for tea-breaks. The Man Assignment defines Grade 3 operator's work. The Grade 3 operator is the track worker who performs the same repititious tasks on several cars an hour. Each task is broken down and timed).

The extra work loaded onto the Grade 3 operators meant that instead of having about six minutes in the hour spare they now had only three minutes.

The hand-washing dispute arose out of the practice of stopping the tracks three minutes early at the end of a shift, to allow workers time to get ready for going home.

The strike occurred early last year. It was the first time the 'greens' were involved in industrial action. But the much-publicised weeding out of Red Steph and the Cowley Moles in the summer of last year showed that management could still get away with victimisations unchallenged.

In the last few weeks, however, the changed mood of the workers has been expressed in a series of stoppages. These are typically very short strikes, sometimes as little as half an hour long. These unofficial stoppages are known as 'downers'. They circumvent the company disputes' procedure which was agreed two years ago.

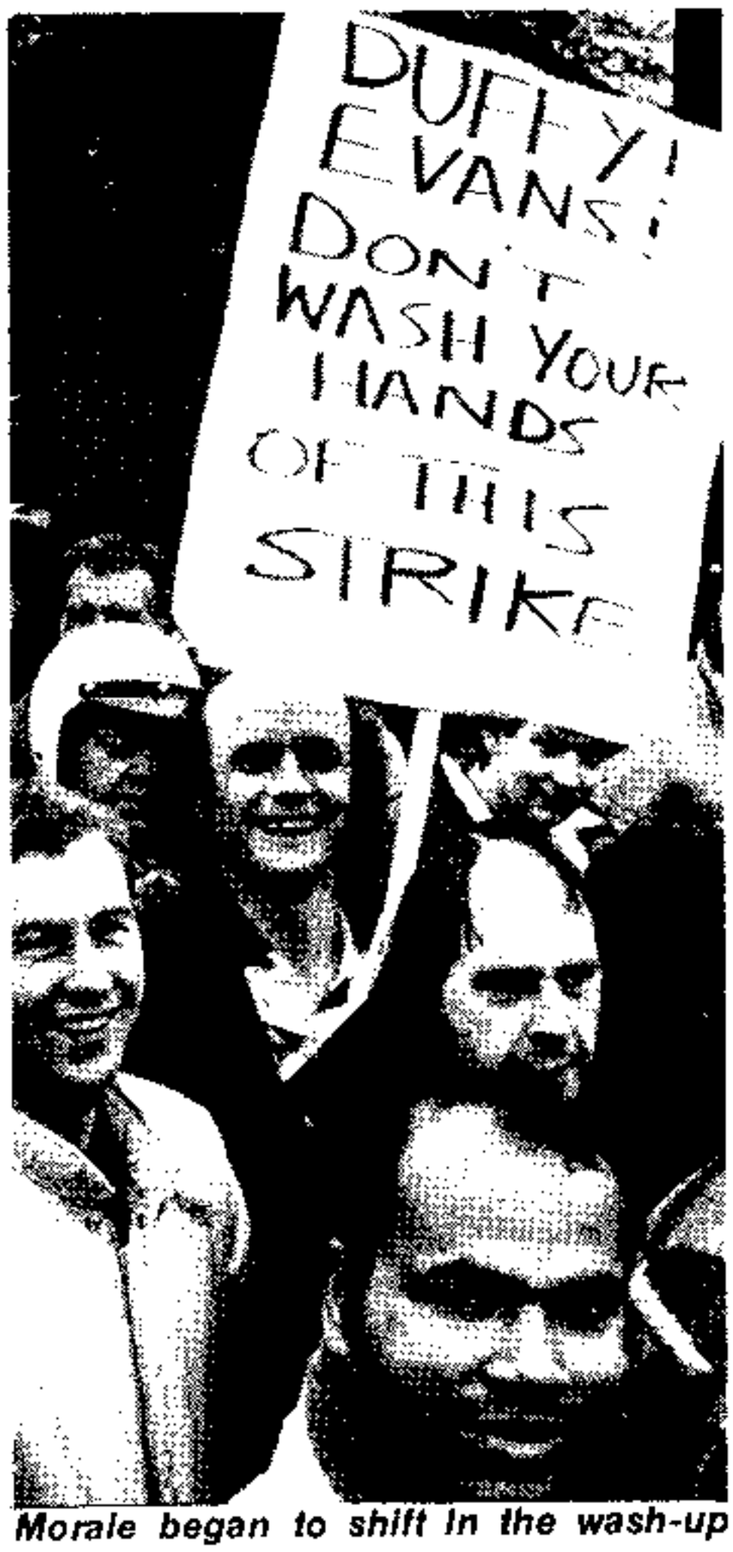
Workers had become very cynical about the procedure because any dispute would often take months to work its way through. The new left factory leadership with Ivor Braggins as convenor, is more sensitive to the impatience of the shopfloor. But it still sees itself as tied by the agreement which takes about 20 days to work through. After that workers must give five days' notice of any industrial action.

There is another factor encouraging downers. A couple of years ago the company forced the full time assistant convenors back to the shopfloor in both Longbridge and Cowley. The two convenors (TGWU and AUEW) are now the only full-timers among the senior stewards.

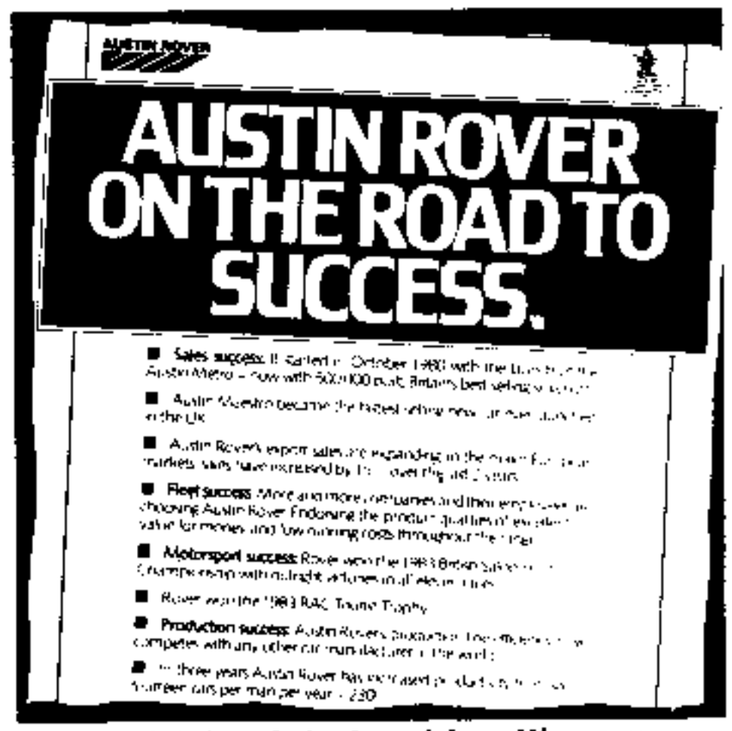
This was not a clever move. The deputies had acted as firemen. They would come down to the scene of a dispute and persuade the workers to go through procedure. This is more difficult to do now.

The mood at Cowley at present is best shown by a dispute which started in early May. There was a stoppage over low bonus. The senior stewards explained that the company was in fact in the right. So the workers complained about the 'out of sequence mix'. There were too many more technically advanced models on the tracks.

More complicated cars such as automatics take longer to work on than the cheaper



Morale began to shift in the wash-up dispute last year



...now driving into trouble with new 'green' labour

models. There had been a downer five weeks earlier. The workers were promised extra help if they required it. Management even offered to stop the track if there were two automatics back to back. This was not done so the stoppage resulted.

But the workers wanted payment for the time on strike to show that management were acting in good faith this time. This was refused so the 20 workers went home. The company couldn't find 20 workers to fill in. The whole 'system' was shut out; some 500 workers.

The next night anger grew. The 20 engine workers still wanted payment. Other workers on the Montego were up in arms. They were angered by the way the 30 or 40 workers who management keep back at work whenever a system is shut down were chosen. Workers are only paid if the dispute causing the lay-off is outside the company.

Another group of 15 to 20 stopped work because they had been promised they could work on the day before. Just before the end of the shift management told them they were laid off as well. They wanted full pay because of the broken promise. Added to this there were other disputes on the Maestro at the same time.

Ruling class attack

The atmosphere of fightback was contagious. Management were forced into another shut down for the second night running.

The mood at Longbridge has also shifted substantially in recent months. The first stirrings date back to last year when there was a strike against police anti-theft raids on workers' houses while they were at work.

Also last year there was an overtime ban. Although not total, it did force a reversal in the demanning for the first time since Edwardes began swinging his axe in the late 70s.

In CAB 1 (Car Assembly Building) there has been a long-running dispute for the last 18 months. The direct workers are refusing to inspect their own work. Management have held back. They want the flexibility but are frightened of forcing the issue.

Since Michael Edwardes came in in 1977 the workforce at Longbridge has been halved. There used to be some 20,000 workers. By 1982 this had dropped to under

10,000 (a shop steward's estimate). The success of the Metro did not initially mean any extra labour. The management took the opportunity of cutting a swathe through the workforce and vastly increasing productivity.

They claim that output per worker used to be seven cars a year. Now it is 25 cars a year. The recent taking on of more workers has meant a considerable strengthening of the workers' willingness to fight, particularly in the last six months.

Just before the GCHQ stoppage on 29 February, there was a three day strike demanding metres to gauge the speed of the tracks. The speed had become so fast that the stewards did not even have the chance to use a stopwatch to check the time. The dispute was won, metres were installed.

The GCHQ stoppage itself was a great success. Most of the plant stopped for half a day. The strike lifted workers' morale and intensified the feeling of confidence.

That afternoon the senior steward in the transport department was given an official warning for refusing to allow anyone from outside his section to do any loading. The transport department struck and management withdrew the warning.

The victory last month over manning levels was significant because the whole plant responded for the first time in years.

At the end of April a six-man gang was warned for 'going out of station' (moving down the track). Management had forced a two-man reduction in the gang from eight to six. The men refused to accept the warnings and were taken off the clock for refusing to work. Immediately both Metro twin tracks stopped, joined later by the night shift.

Some 400 struck that Monday. By the end of the week between 2,500 and 3,000 were on strike and some 5,000 were laid off. Throughout the week there had been an eagerness to join the strike before the inevitable lay-off.

After a week picket lines were organised on all the gates. The pickets were not numerous but the fact the gates were covered was a step forward for organisation at the plant.

Perhaps one of the most recent disputes most graphically demonstrates the growing willingness to fight over issues which last year would have been ignored.

A black stacker driver was called a 'black bastard' by a foreman, whom he promptly punched. He even told his workmates all about it. The driver was sacked and some 20 other drivers struck. He lost his appeal and the drivers struck again. At time of writing the dispute continues.

Worried

The contrast with the years of the 'slaves charter' (Edwardes' blueprint for hammering the workers) is marked. Management are obviously worried. They try to claw back any gains made by the workers. For example they are already trying to renege on their promise to take on 100-200 new workers made after last month's manning dispute.

But although the workers are not yet on the offensive the rampant management onslaught of a few years ago has been slowed down considerably.

The level of disciplinaries has sharply decreased. Shop stewards used to spend a couple of mornings a week defending people on charges.

There has been the beginnings of reorganisation. The dispute over inspection in CAB 1 mentioned above, for example, has led to many meetings on the shopfloor. A few more people are willing to take on stewards' positions as at Cowley.

Areas without stewards are being pulled into the factory organisation. This is putting a stop to the idea that all that is required is a foreman who will dish out plenty of overtime. Some of the new stewards are right-wingers. But the important thing is to get the sections organised.

The present situation at Longbridge was described by one steward as one of guerrilla warfare. In contrast to the acceptance of doing everything through negotiations a short time ago, the past year has seen a sixfold increase in hours lost through strikes.

These strikes are not big enough to require intervention from the dead hand of national union official bureaucracy. The plant leadership at both Cowley and Longbridge has been forced to take the workers' grievances more seriously. Their opportunity for policing the workforce has been lessened by the company's policy of attacking all levels of organisation.

The occupation against redundancies at BL's Bathgate truck plant in Scotland shows how workers sometimes fight back when they feel that enough is enough. The situation at Cowley and Longbridge shows what can happen when sections of the economy start to pick up. Then workers' fight from confidence.

In all these plants the mood connects with the atmosphere outside. The miners' strike is an important backdrop to the events inside Leyland. It has an encouraging effect on the people who want to fight and accentuates the purely local factors.

The opportunities for intervention by revolutionaries are increasing. Looking for young formerly 'green' workers to take on shop stewards' jobs at Cowley is an example. So is arguing for the extension of shop stewards' committees inside Longbridge. The concrete proposals for industrial action on local issues needs to be linked to building solidarity for the miners and other workers

And the generalised arguments explaining the crisis and the need for a political alternative inside the workplace have to be posed. Today these tasks are that little bit easier ■

A new militancy but the important thing is to organise the sections

Class struggle

The past three months have seen a remarkable shift in the mood of teachers. The issue around which they have united is the claim for a 12½ percent salary increase. **Dick North** examines the background.

Although economic hardship is a factor in the upsurge of militancy amongst teachers, it is not the major one. Ten years ago teaching was a secure and, for a brief period, relatively well-paid job. Today morale is at rock bottom.

Thousands of teachers are employed on temporary contracts which expire at the end of each term and many more face compulsory transfer to another school as LEAs, including those run by Labour Lefts, seek to drive down the number of teachers employed. Equally significant has been the sustained ideological attack on the work of the schools, initiated by Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan in his speech at Ruskin College in October 1976.

Teachers have made increasing efforts to compensate for the effects of the cuts by working harder and longer outside normal school hours. The 3 percent salary offer (subsequently increased to 4½ percent) was the final insult. At last teachers decided to kick back.

Capitulated

The downturn has certainly affected teachers but not in precisely the same way as it has most industrial workers. Firstly, there has been no offensive national salary struggle since 1969/70, and subsequently the leadership has capitulated each year without offering even token resistance.

Secondly, the scale of job loss is much lower — about 8 percent nationally. There has been no national fight on jobs although some area struggles have ended in partial victories. The NUT claims that none of its members has yet been made compulsorily redundant, but this doesn't include those whose short-term contracts have not been renewed. In short, we may say that teachers have experienced profound demoralisation but not any major defeats.

The employers completely misread the mood of teachers. Had they offered 4½ percent in March the NUT leadership would have accepted and sold the deal to the membership with little difficulty. It would be easy to ascribe this error to the stupidity of the Tory backwoodsmen who dominate the Association of County Councils. But it is clear that they have been acting under government orders and for Thatcher the stakes are much higher.

The implications of rate capping are a loss of 60,000 teachers' jobs nationally. To achieve this it is necessary to inflict a decisive defeat on the teachers' unions and this will remain the political priority for the Tories. If even small concessions were made these would be seen by most teachers as a victory, so the Tories will certainly stand firm.

Without the miners' strike the teachers would not have moved. Not that the overwhelming majority of teachers perceive a common struggle. On the contrary, outside the heady swamp of Inner London where coal dust and chalk dust are held to be synonymous, anyone arguing for support for the miners is likely to provoke a chorus of groans. But had the miners already been defeated, it would have immediately been used by the union leadership as the pretext to back down. Indeed, this is the argument that they have used every year since 1975 to justify acceptance of inadequate settlements that have led to the relative decline of 31 percent in teachers' salaries since that time.

Lip-service

In February 1969 teachers accepted a 6 percent increase, in accordance with the Labour government's Prices and Incomes Policy, to run for two years from April 1969. But just as the Easter 1969 NUT Conference was assembling the airline pilots smashed the freeze with an award of 15 percent. They were soon to be followed by the dustmen. The conference now passed a motion for an interim increase of £135 a year. But the NUT executive had no intention of implementing the resolution. It was not until the ILTA called an unofficial half-day strike for 9 July 1969 that things started to move.

At the time it was a massive step forward for teacher trade unionism. There had been no significant unofficial strikes since 1919 and most members looked on the NUT as a professional association. 7,000 of the 9,000 ILTA members struck and the executive was forced to call token strikes, selective two week strikes and finally indefinite strikes in Birmingham, Southwark and Waltham Forest. On 3 March 1970 the employers capitulated and offered £120 for all teachers.

But in 1971 the employers struck back — imposing the system of separate salary scales that has helped to undermine collective struggle ever since. Houghton reinforced this structure but it had another purpose — to buy off teacher militancy in the period leading up to the education cuts of 1976. There were further sweeteners.

In 1975 teachers secured a 22½ percent increase following an arbitral award and those in the more difficult 'social priority' schools were given bonus payments. The single London allowance area was divided into three zones — at a global cost to the employers larger than the amount claimed by the unions.

All official union thinking is dominated by the myth of Houghton: In May 1974, Labour Education Minister Reg Prentice set up a committee of inquiry chaired by Lord Houghton. The committee reported in December recommending global increases of 29 percent in teachers' salaries backdated to May.

Today such an increase would look like a pools win. At the same time it aroused bitter resentment because of the way the increases were distributed — £228 (15.7percent) for class teachers at the bottom and £2,067 (32 percent) for top heads. 1974 had been an all-time high for unofficial action among teachers.

In Scotland, over 15,000 had struck in support of a flat-rate increase of £15 per week and in London over 60 schools had been involved in unofficial strikes for a London Allowance of £500 a year. When the Houghton award was announced it led to an unofficial strike in Liverpool (14 January) and two strikes in Leicester (12 December and 14 January).

In London the NUT headquarters were occupied in January and representatives of over 100 schools backed the demand for an unofficial strike in support of a flat-rate redistribution of the Houghton money. In Langdon School, Newham, teachers came out for three days. Even the *Teacher*, the official NUT paper, reflected the disappointment of the ordinary classroom teacher.

The intention of the Houghton Report was to effect a massive widening of the pay differentials. It was hoped that teachers instead of looking towards collective action to improve their salaries would seek individual advancement up the salary scales. Prior to 1971 all teachers except heads and deputies were paid on the same basic scale. There were above-scale payments for additional responsibility but these were small in relation to the basic scale.

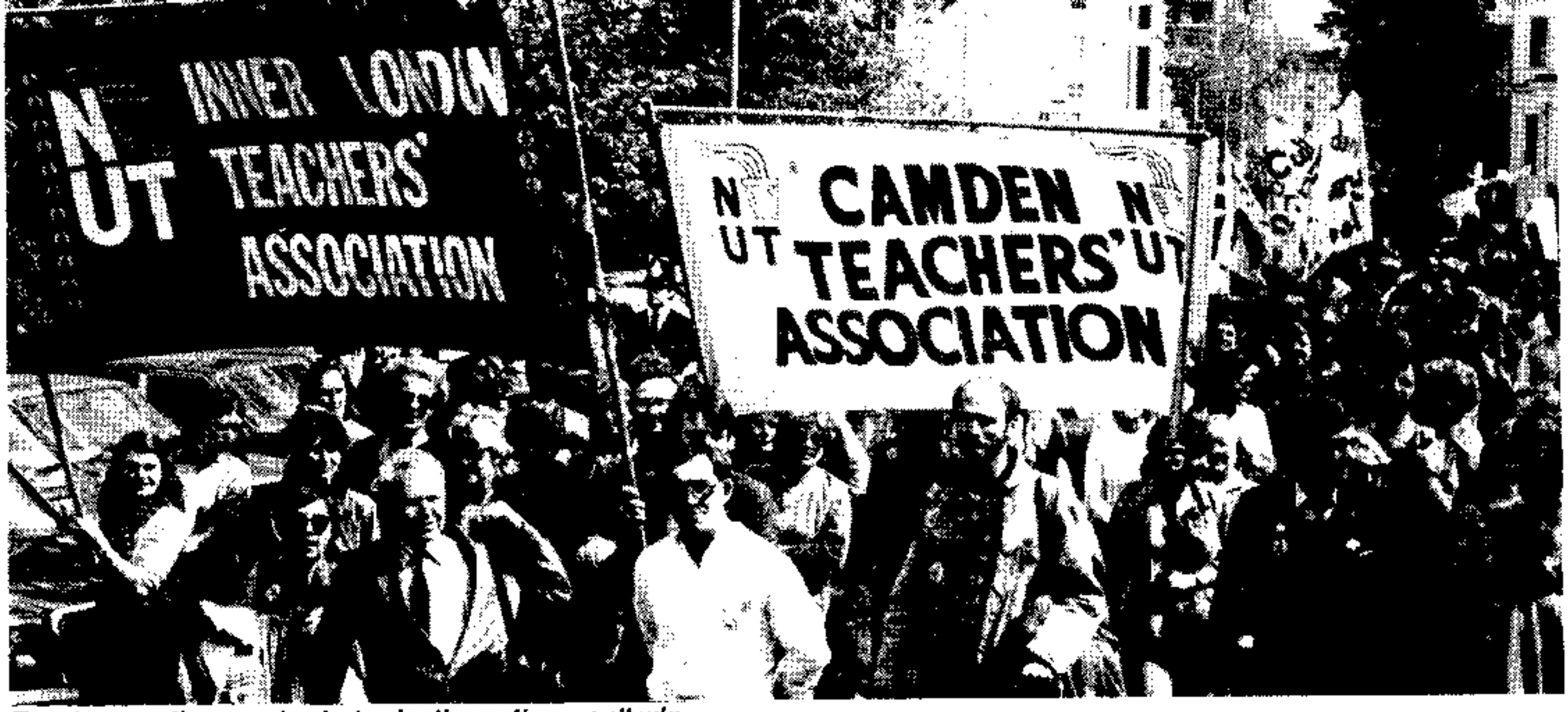
Bankrupt

For the employers and the Labour government the strategy worked perfectly. Turnover in the schools was so high that for a short while teachers were promoted very rapidly. When the first cuts of 1976 were implemented following Healey's negotiation of the IMF loan there was minimal resistance.

Suddenly the plans to expand teacher numbers to 520,000 by 1980 (proposed, ironically by Margaret Thatcher in her 1972 White Paper) were put into reverse. Promotion prospects dried up and two thirds of all teachers, most of them women, were stuck on the lowest two scales with little confidence to fight back.

By 1984, teachers' salaries had slipped back by 31 percent in relation to other groups of workers with whom their salaries were comparable in 1974. In that year teachers' weekly earnings were £15.92 less than that of the average policeman. Now the difference is £127.61 — an eloquent testimony to the political priorities of both Labour and Tory governments and to the bankrupt leadership of the NUT.

The change in mood first showed itself at the NUT Easter Conference 1984 and not only on the salary issue. The Conference is hardly a representative body. It is dominated numerically by the more backward rural



Teachers on the march—but selective action won't win

delegates and by local bureaucrats many of whom are elderly headmasters.

Yet the Conference voted to hear an NUM speaker (unfortunately, not with the required two-thirds majority), organised a miners' collection, threw out the Executive's proposals for opposing redundancy as not worth discussion, beat an attempt by the Chair to rule out of order discussion on CND affiliation and opposition to NATO and vetoed the executive's attempt to filch £¼ million from the strike fund in order to finance communications.

It carried proposals for the amalgamation of the first three salary scales (which encompass three-quarters of the teaching force) and for a flat-rate increase as the basis of the 1985-86 claim. However, because the result of a card vote in the salary debate was not available until after the close of proceedings the NUT was left with no salary policy for next year

Conference overwhelmingly backed the executive strategy in relation to the current salary claim. This comprised withdrawal from activities outside normal school hours, including lunchtime supervision, refusal to cover for absences known in advance or for other absences after the first day, a national one day strike and ballots for extended selective strikes.

The objective was a satisfactory settlement or the reference of the claim to arbitration. The SWP amendment was the first to be debated and proposed:

* a flat-rate claim of £20 per week for all teachers;
* *no arbitration;*
* national all-out action to win.

In the vote we were supported by a tenth of the Conference.

The Communist Party played a particularly odious role at the conference, giving full backing to the Executive strategy and providing the strongest speakers against the flat-rate demand. The CP teachers represent a bastion of Stalinism within the party — actually reprinting Stalin's articles in their 'theoretical' journal *Education Today and Tomorrow*. Just before the Conference there was a palace coup and both Euro-Communist and Stalinist versions of the journal are now being produced.

The CP teachers align themselves with the right wing of the Labour Party or even, as in Brent, with the Tories. There, leading CP teacher John Poole has welcomed the *'realism'* of the Tory Council's school closure plans and is actively working for their implementation, despite opposition from the schools concerned

This should leave a sizeable vacuum for a Broad Left organisation within the NUT but the obvious contenders, the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, have only a fraction of the influence of their equivalents in other unions.

Disastrous

The STA was formed in 1977 as a breakaway from the Rank and File organisation. It consisted of Trotskyist groupings who have subsequently entered the Labour Party, and who objected to the political leadership of the SWP within Rank and File: in particular our emphasis on unofficial action and the primacy of school-based activity.

Now that most former members of these groupings have been fully absorbed into the Labour Party, the STA increasingly resembles an orthodox Broad Left formation.

On the strategy to win they faithfully repeat the standard BL line, arguing for extended strike action in selected areas supported by a levy of those who remain at work. Some of them claim that this will help build confidence for all-out action, others that it is the only possible strategy as teachers will never come out without strike pay.

SWP members at the conference pointed to the disastrous results of such tactics during the hospital workers' and civil servants' disputes. During any selective action the minority involved become isolated and demoralised, getting no sense of the collective strength that can develop during an all-out strike.

Those at work become frustrated at not being properly involved — collecting money and token one-day stoppages are no sub-

stitute for effective action. The point is amply borne out by the experience of the current wave of three day strikes which involve about 2 percent of the NUT membership — there has been a massive clamour from the schools that were not balloted with threats of substantial unofficial action if they are not called soon.

Above all, selective action cannot win against determined employers and government, especially when there is far more at stake for the Tories than a few extra percentage points on teachers' salaries. Any substantial concessions will give a great boost to the confidence of other workers moving into action.

Despite the stab in the back from the Broad Left NUR leadership, the college lecturers (NATFHE) have thrown out the 4½ percent deal concluded by their negotiators. Civil servants, post office workers and water workers are next in line. If they move into all-out struggle with miners and teachers, the Tories can be beaten.

Vanguard

Despite the change in mood, teachers' consciousness is very uneven and the understanding of what is necessary to win generally shallow. On 9 May the NUT called a national strike which enjoyed nearly 100 percent support. Massive rallies of up to 4,000 teachers were held in each locality and pickets were out at hundreds of schools. But outside London there were only a handful of collections for the miners, practically all initiated by the SWP, and only small minorities backed our line.

In Inner London, always the vanguard of any teachers' struggle, there were official collections for the miners at all 11 mass meetings. In Lambeth 320 teachers raised over £358. Eight of the mass meetings backed the flat rate, seven rejected arbitration and three supported all-out national action. However, there is an enormous gap between the conviction that all-out action is necessary and the willingness to actually undertake it.

Teachers' strikes are feather-bedded. NUT rules stipulate that teachers should receive full pay from the Sustentation Fund for any strike longer than one day. Taking into account the tax rebate you can actually make money while you are on strike! However, if there were an all out national strike this fund would last at most two days. Therefore any all-out strike would have to be without strike pay.

The failure to recognise this gap has led the Rank and File 83 group to make the disastrous error of organising local ballots for all-out national action.

Their ballot is a recipe for demoralisation. If it ducks the question of strike pay it may well get good support and raise the expectations of members but with no prospect of realising those expectations. If the question is honestly posed it will receive the support of a small minority and the results will be used by the right wing as a justification for selective action.

The Rank and File 83 group consists of members of the former R&F organisation who disagree with the SWP on our analysis of the downturn, believing that certain groups of public sector workers, particularly teachers, have been exempt from its effects.

They believe that there is still the basis for an organisation with a programme of reformist demands, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and, they would say, of any political organisation.

The fact that their organisation is smaller than the SWP teachers' fraction is an indication of who was correct on that question.

They are characterised by an extreme voluntarism — if only we worked harder we could get teachers to move.

So what is to be done? Teachers have been starved of action for years, and as a result, militants are putting forward a wide variety of proposals for escalation. Many of these are excellent but others risk isolating a minority. Our instinct is to support any proposal for unofficial action but our criterion should be whether it helps to raise the confidence of teachers and the level of union organisation in schools. Already there have been some errors. In one London Association opposition to selective action was interpreted as unwillingness to take part in the current phase of three day strikes.

Because there was no base for unofficial action the result has been no action at all — a classic confusion of strategy and tactics.

A more serious mistake was the attempt by ILTA to organise a half-day stoppage on 24 May. The ILTA Officers, dominated by the STA and increasingly distant from the school base, thought that a leaflet arriving in schools two days beforehand would be sufficient to galvanise the masses. Actually, it didn't even galvanise the Officers themselves as only two of them bothered to turn up! Luckily for them the SWP had raised the issue in the schools and we organised the 500 teachers present to march to the DES, followed by a rally.

Token action, unless it has a specific focus such as picketing the Burnham Committee or the NUT Executive, is likely to be counter-productive. An extended national strike without pay would represent a real advance but we are in no position to deliver it. Our activity must focus on the schools and here the immediate demand should be the refusal to cover at all.

This has already been adopted by 14 schools in ILEA and one school in Newham — it is extremely popular and relatively easy to win. It also provides an opportunity for joint action with the NAS/UWT, helping to guarantee that each union respects the other's picket line. Where schools are taking part in strikes the priority is to visit other schools, building support for all-out action, and the workplaces of those other sections likely to be involved in struggle in the near future. At local level we should be demanding committees of school representatives to monitor the action.

Geographical

The SWP does not represent an alternative leadership in the teachers' dispute. We can argue what is necessary to win but there is no chance that our demands will be adopted without the movement of massive forces over which we have no control. Our real audience is a small one, but it is much larger than the group of teachers who have regularly bought SW or contributed to our miners' collections.

Finally, it is one thing to agree with a revolutionary socialist on how to win a dispute, quite another to accept the whole politics of the SWP. Unless the teachers that we attract around us are quickly brought into the geographical branch, all the effort that has gone into explaining the tactics and historical lessons will have been a complete waste of time. Experience suggests that it is relatively easy to recruit teachers. We now have the best opportunity to do so for 15 years■

Playing cat and mouse

The local elections saw Liverpool Labour council make big gains. **Alan Gibbons** looks at how that has affected their ability to defy the Tories.

On 3 May the voters of Liverpool gave Labour a thumping seventeen-seat majority on the city council. 34 seats were up for election on the 99-seat council. Despite a massive press campaign to discredit the Militant-influenced Labour Party the Labour vote remained solid. Labour won seven seats. The Liberals lost two. The Tories were annihilated, losing five of the eight seats they were defending.

The position on the council is now Labour 58, Liberals 28 and Conservatives just 13. Five of the Labour councillors will still vote against their party's budget, but so large is Labour's majority that the five right wing 'rebels' no longer hold the balance. The Labour Party can pass its budget whenever it wishes.

Deputy council chief Derek Hatton, a leading Militant supporter, was understandably jubilant about the election result. He said:

> 'The vast majority of the people of Liverpool are saying they want jobs and services, and are not prepared to accept the dictates of the government.
>
> 'The people have spoken very loudly and very clearly in favour of the policies of the Liverpool Labour Party and it is a warning Mr Jenkin must take notice of.'

Derek Hatton is quite right that the working class of Liverpool are utterly opposed to Tory spending cuts which could mean the loss of 5,000 jobs or rate rises of 200 percent. All three parties turned the election into a referendum on the budget issue. Nobody can have been ignorant of the issues. An election will not however win a struggle in which the stakes are as high as these.

Major breach

If Liverpool were to prove in practice that Tory cuts could be fought then the example could open a major breach in the government's strategy.

The vote can be taken as an indication of the unpopularity of the central government cuts, but that is all. There is still a Tory government, which has reserved the option of appointing commissioners to implement the cuts over the heads of the elected council. There are still the capitalist courts which crushed the GLC's 'Fares Fair' campaign. Elections in capitalist society can *reflect* the class struggle. They are not the class struggle itself.

The Tories grasp this simple fact better than the self-appointed Marxists in the Labour Party. Environment secretary Patrick Jenkin appears to have settled upon a

strategy of leaving Liverpool to go bankrupt. He said:

> 'There is no question of our even contemplating putting in commissioners until the situation has dramatically broken down in Liverpool, until the local council has absolutely shown beyond a peradventure that they are not prepared to keep services going, they are not prepared to do what is necessary for the city to remain within the law.'

The government is prepared to wait for the money to run out. It calculates that when wages are no longer paid, support among council workers for a fight will ebb.

Liverpool Labour Party are quite happy to go along with the game of cat and mouse. Their first act after their success at the polls was to postpone submitting their budget until after Jenkin visits the city on 7 June. Labour clearly do not believe that Jenkin will take one look at the sorry housing conditions and cough up the £30 million Liverpool is demanding. They are bound to such hazardous tactics because they fit Labour's electoralism.

If you believe, as does *every* section of the Labour Party, that politics is about voting, then your every move is determined by the need to appeal to the electorate in general and not to the organised working class in particular. The council campaign swings from urgent appeals to workers to display their collective strength on demonstrations to complete silence on their role. Since the massive one day strike and demonstration on 29 March there has been little preparation among the council workforce for a real fight over jobs and conditions. Council workers were encouraged to canvass for Labour and then ... nothing

Derek Hatton continually justifies the softly-softly approach, saying. 'The ball is in Jenkin's court.' True, but the initiative also lies with Jenkin. The Labour Party, like the council workforce, can only sit and wait for the Tories' next move and that move may be weeks or months in coming.

In the meantime there are forces in the working class movement who are more faint-hearted in their desire for a fight than the Liverpool Labour Party.

Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock continues to argue for compromise. Advising the Liverpool councillors to fix a legal rate and implement government cuts, he said:

> 'The Labour councillors would do best by the people of Liverpool to stay by every means in the position to which they have been elected so that they can mitigate, protect, dilute the effects of central government cuts.'

The national executive is reluctant to stray from the Kinnock line. *Militant* made much of the NEC support for Liverpool. The resolution was utterly toothless, however. It failed to even mention the illegal budget!

Militant and its Liverpool supporters are equally unwilling to face up to reality when it comes to the trade union bureaucracy. If it does come to a fight, the leaders of the unions to which the council workforce belong will play a crucial role. The general secretary of the largest council union, the GMWU, David Basnett, is a hard-bitten right winger. The second largest union, NALGO, has the sad distinction of having sold out the Liverpool typists' strike. The NUPE District Committee campaigned against the 29 March day of action. In other words, the union leaderships are likely to be an obstacle to a gloves-off fight with the government.

Treachery

Militant remains silent on the real and proven treachery of the Labour leaders and the future treachery of the trade union leaders. It continues to lead the workers of Merseyside into a confrontation with the government without honestly informing them of the difficulties they will face. Their Broad Left strategy leads them to describe as allies the very people who are likeliest to stab them in the back.

Their electoral politics lead to a dangerous passivity. After building the massively successful 29 March day of action, the Labour leaders have put workers' action on ice. All their energies went into canvassing for 3 May. Now the whole emphasis is on manoeuvres such as the budget postponement to win public support. Workers are treated as a stage army.

They have been called onto the streets on 19 November last year, and 29 March. They have been used as canvassing fodder on 3 May. Now they are told that Labour has its majority and all is well with the world. All they have to do is keep their powder dry and wait for the next call. The harsh reality is that you can't turn on workers' activity like a tap. As the weeks drag on and the anxiety about lost wages' increases, confusion and apathy may begin to sap workers' confidence

An all-out, indefinite strike is the key to defeat the Tories. The bitter class war in the British coalfield and the significant increase in working class resistance to the government make such action more plausible. It would be a tragedy if the politics of the Labour Party prevented it happening■

More than just a bore

The response of the average *Socialist Review* reader to any discussion to the Common Market, and especially of this month's European elections, is certainly one of total boredom. In this, at least, we are at one with the masses, as **Curtis McNally** explains.

Only thirty percent of the electorate bothered to vote in the 1979 European elections. Even the *Economist*, a dedicated advocate of the EEC if ever there was one, has said that the European election 'threatens to be the bore of the year'.

Yet behind the boredom one fact remains: the ruling class and its representatives take the EEC very seriously indeed. At the time of the parliamentary debates on British membership of the Common Market in 1971, or again at the time of the referendum in 1975, the main political parties in Britain were split down the middle. MPs who normally trooped through the lobbies like zombies in mindless loyalty to the party line saw the EEC as the supreme issue of 'conscience'. As ardent a place-seeker as Shirley Williams threatened to give up her political career if Britain withdrew from the EEC. If *they* take the Market so seriously, we can't afford to wholly ignore it.

The Common Market is a product of the contradictions of capitalism. The particular contradition in this case is that a modern capitalist state can be neither consistently nationalist nor consistently internationalist.

Modern capitalism is a highly integrated international system. Production is organised across national boundaries, trade and finance operate on a world scale, and the arms race gives a unifying dynamic to the world economy. No single unit of capitalist society can jump outside of this system.

Contrary to the utopian dreams of some on the extreme right and the reformist left, there is no way that Britain can simply put up the shutters and pursue its own economic destiny within its own frontiers. The only state in recent years that has seriously tried to put up the shutters in this way was Cambodia after 1975. The results were scarcely encouraging.

Thus the capitalist ruling class are compelled to think in terms of international co-operation and even planning. Hence the various 'economic summits' and similar charades. Indeed, many national states are now too small to function adequately in terms of the needs and pressures of modern capitalism.

In terms of pure logic it would make good sense for them to merge. Nothing could be more rational than the various nation states of Western Europe should merge into a single political and economic unit able to stand on a level with Russia and the USA.

But capitalism does not operate by logic and rationality, and such a merger remains in practical terms impossible. In the last two hundred years in Europe there has been no significant merger or division of national states without violent upheaval.

The unification of Germany and Italy, the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the redivision of Germany — all resulted from war. The fact that Europe is still full of such anomalous enclaves as Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, The Channel Islands or the Vatican shows just how difficult it is to adjust national frontiers.

The reason is obvious. The modern state is a powerful and weighty piece of machinery. It employs hundreds of thousands of people, and is closely intertwined with the economic mechanisms of society.

Military

The political legitimacy of the ruling class — especially its ability to suck out millions of pounds in taxation to pay for 'national defence' — is tightly bound up with the preservation of the national state and national boundaries. Only a very powerful military or revolutionary upheaval could break the grip of such national states.

Certainly the EEC today is not in any sense a potential substitute for the existing national state machines. For every hundred thousand citizens of the EEC countries, there are 4,200 national government officials, but only seven 'Eurocrats' or functionaries employed directly by the institutions of the European Community. To shift that balance a very substantial war would be needed — and at the end of it there would be very little left to merge.

It is against the background of this contradiction that the emergence of the EEC must be seen. The second world war was a disastrous internal conflict between European powers. The post-war economy was smashed and devastated. Industrial output in 1947 was only 27 percent of the pre-war total in Germany, 66 percent in Austria, Italy and Greece, and below pre-war levels in France and the Netherlands.

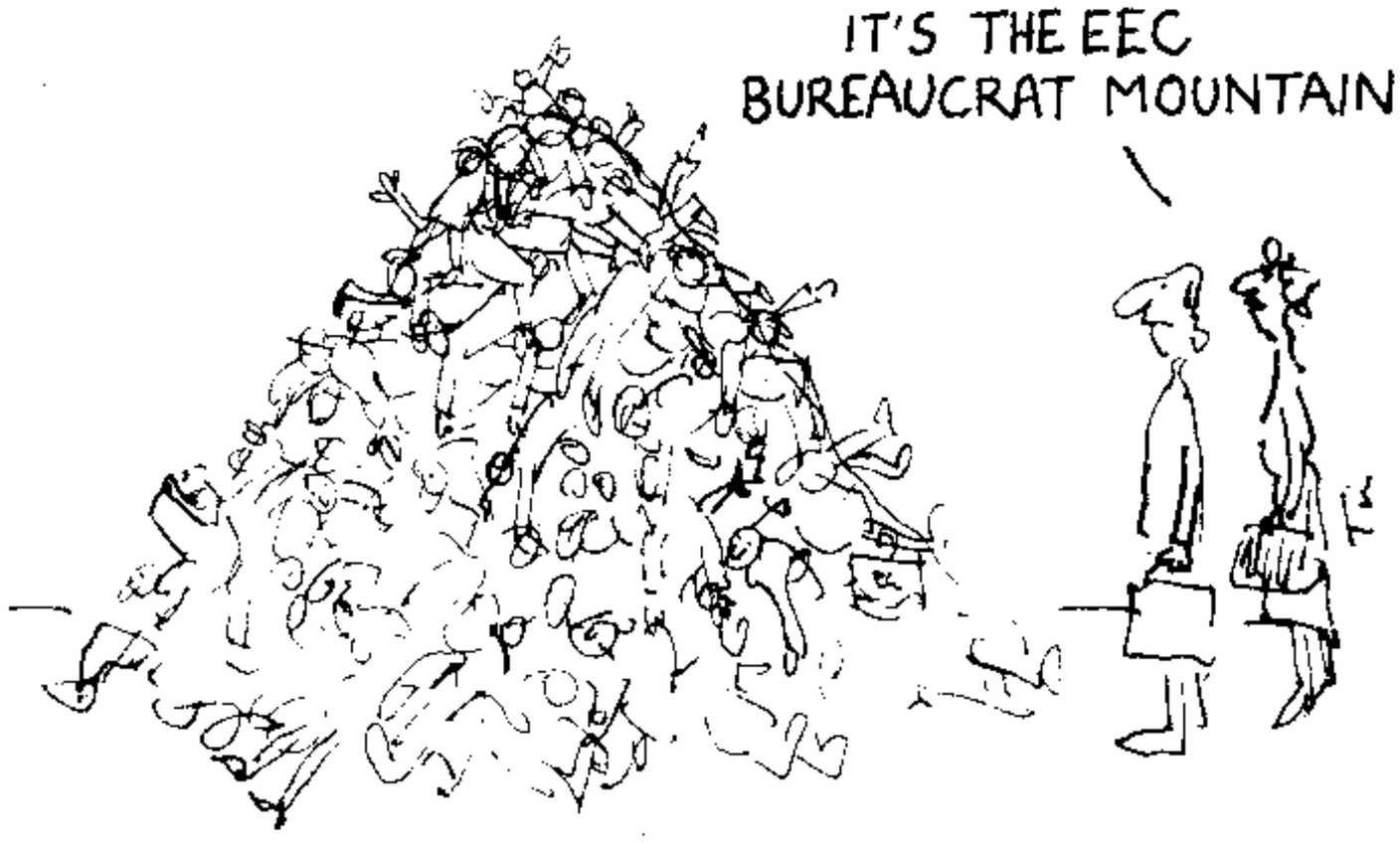
The various European ruling classes recognised that to get back on their feet they needed a greater degree of co-operation. The United States, concerned at the 'Communist threat' (around 20 percent of votes in France and Italy were going to the CPs) was thinking on similar lines. By the end of the 40s the various European states introduced a series of measures to facilitate trade between them. Tariffs were cut, quota restrictions reduced and the beginnings of a multilateral trade system built up.

As early as 1946 Winston Churchill had declared:

> 'We must build a kind of United States of Europe ... The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany ... the first practical step is to form a Council of Europe ...'

A flood of similar nonsense about the 'European spirit' issued from the mouths of European politicians of various ideological hues during the next decade. By the end of the fifties the Treaty of Rome had been signed and the original Common Market of six (France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) was set up.

To begin with Britain, still obsessed with its disintegrating Empire and its 'special



relationship' with the United States, stayed aloof from developments in Europe. When the European Steel and Coal Community (a trial run for the Common Market) was established in the early fifties, Harold MacMillan (a future Tory Prime Minister) declared:

> 'One thing is certain, and we may as well face it. Our people will not hand over to any supernational authority the right to close down our pits or our steelworks.'

The brave words sound ironic today, in the light of the achievements of subsequent Tory — and Labour — administrations in doing the job all by themselves.

During the sixties British capitalism had to think again. First MacMillan, then Harold Wilson made bids to join the EEC, but were thwarted by the opposition of French nationalism.

It was only in the early seventies that Edward Heath was able to implement a policy that had been 'logical' for British capitalism since the fifties. Britain, together with Ireland, Denmark, and later Greece, became members of the new augmented Community.

The EEC, then, represents an uneasy compromise between nationalism and internationalism. This compromise is reflected in the political institutions of the EEC — the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament.

The Council is made up of representatives of the governments of the member states. All ten member states send one or more representatives — usually, though not necessarily, the minister or secretary of state responsible for the matters under consideration, such as the minister for foreign affairs, agriculture, transport etc. Each member state assumes the presidency of the Council in turn for a period of six months.

Member

The Commission consists of a number of Commissioners who work full-time on EEC business. They are appointed by 'common accord' of the governments of member states. At present there are fourteen Commissioners, with at least one from each of the ten member states. Larger states like Britain normally have two Commissioners. Each Commissioner has responsibility for co-ordinating work in a particular field, but the Commission can only act collectively.

What emerges clearly from the constitutional complexities of the EEC is that the Commission is subordinate to the Council. The Commission submits proposals and drafts for Community rules to the Council, obeys Council instructions and is subject to a Council veto. In other words, the 'European bureaucracy' is firmly subordinated to the will of the component national states.

According to the rules of the Community, voting in the Council should take place on the basis of what is called a 'qualified majority', that is, the larger states have more votes than the smaller ones. Britain, France, Germany and Italy have ten votes apiece, the other states between two and five.

In fact, since 1965 — that is for two-thirds of the time the EEC has existed — this system has not worked. Following a French

Euro-blurb—trying to jolly up 'the bore of the year'

boycott of Council meetings, it has been accepted in practice that all decisions on significant matters must be unanimous. The will of national states prevails over the 'will' of the Community. In February of this year the European Parliament introduced a measure to restore majority voting. This will, however, take ten years to phase in, and may never amount to anything.

To sum up, it is scarcely possible to better the description given by an editorial in *International Socialism* in 1975:

> 'The EEC is a customs union plus a dear-food agricultural protection scheme plus a super-national bureaucracy with considerable formal regulatory powers but no guns.'

The European Parliament is icing on this not very well baked cake. Initially the Parliament consisted of members of national parliaments nominated to serve in Strasbourg. But since 1979 an attempt has been made to enhance the tattered prestige of the Parliament — and of the EEC — by instituting direct elections.

In fact the Parliament is largely a meaningless charade. The normal role of a Parliament is to ratify or overthrow a government. But the EEC does not have a government in the normal sense. The Council, which as we have seen, is the supreme body, is not answerable to the Parliament, but only to the national states that compose it.

The Commission does have to report to the Parliament, and technically the Parliament can make the Commission resign. This would, however, be a futile gesture as it has no control over the composition of the Commission, and the member states could appoint the same old Commission all over again. The only area where the Parliament has even minimal teeth is in the establishment of the budget, and even here it can do little when there is a head-on clash between national interests.

A symptom of the Parliament's insignificance is the bizarre voting arrangements. Four quite distinct voting methods (simple plurality, single transferable vote, proportional representation with national or with regional lists) are used in the ten countries. No body claiming a serious representative legitimacy could allow such an anomaly.

Ideal

The list of candidates for the European elections shows just how seriously the Parliament is taken by British politicians. Those aiming to go to Strasbourg are generally either young aspirants who haven't managed to get a Westminster seat, or political has-beens, who have been bounced out of Westminster and prefer Strasbourg to working for a living. There is no evidence that anyone who could get a Westminster seat would actually prefer to serve the 'European ideal'.

In times of stability such a ramshackle constitution can hold together. But a period of crisis means an intensification of competition and subjects the EEC structures to intolerable strains. At the end of last year, Gaston Thorn, president of the EEC

Commission, declared:

> 'We are agreed that Europe is in a state of crisis and that the Community has been seriously weakened. Paralysed by its internal contradictions and by its inability to make decisions, the Community no longer seems to be the expression of Europe's shared aspirations.'

Symptoms of the crisis are not hard to find. The EEC now has thirteen million out of work. The lorry drivers' blockades earlier this year drew attention to the fact that a so-called 'customs union' still has well-developed and inefficient — customs. In March, while the EEC discussed Spain's application to join, a French naval patrol opened fire on Spanish trawlers 'poaching' in French fishing waters. Next year is supposed to see the phasing out of national passports in favour of EEC passports, but France has just withdrawn the right of British day-trippers to visit Channel ports without passports.

But the crisis appears most visibly in the disputes about the EEC budget. The problem is obvious from the division of funds in the 1984 budget. Sixty-five percent of the total goes to the Common Agricultural Policy, 5.7 percent to the regional fund, 6.4 percent to the social fund, and 6.8 percent to research and industry. A planned reform of the CAP will cut support prices and impose quotas on milk production. But the reform is timid and will not save money for at least two years.

Fraud

The complex regulations of the CAP make it an easy prey to rule-bending and open fraud. Indeed, the whole system preserves agricultural inefficiency, Common Market farmers get £365 a tonne for sugar, while the world market price is £110 (meanwhile a Third World country like Jamaica has to close half its state-owned sugar mills because it cannot compete). And last year Eton College profited to the sum of £10,000 by getting cheap surplus EEC butter due to its status as a 'charity'.

The dispute over British contributions to the EEC budget fits into this context. Thatcher, arguing that Britain is subsidising agricultural inefficiency, wants Britain's contribution cut by three-quarters, from £1200 million to £300 million. Mitterrand, on the other hand, knows that any sharp cut in the agricultural part of the budget would provoke the anger of French peasants and lead to yet more loss of votes for the Socialist Party. The problem is compounded by the fact that agricultural spending this year will probably be well over £1000 million in excess of the maximum fixed in the budget.

The EEC may simply run out of money altogether by about the middle of November. The whole dispute has simply been shelved until the elections are over. In fact some compromise will probably be dredged up; the British Tories have already backtracked on threats to simply hold back Britain's contributions.

Given the ramshackle state of the Market — and the total irrelevance of the European Parliament — it is hard to understand the importance given to the European elections by the Labour Party and especially the Labour Left. In February the Labour Co-ordinating Committee held a conference called 'Fighting the European Elections', and in March *Tribune* carried a piece by Michael Barratt Brown, Ken Coates and Tony Topham called *'This is the way to fight the Euro-Elections'*, which describes the 14 June vote as a 'general election' and calls for 'an enthusiastic search for a new internationalism.'

Now it is true that a good performance for Labour in the Euro-elections would be a setback for Thatcher. But it is also clear that a victory for the miners would be a ten thousand times greater blow against Thatcher than the biggest Labour landslide. For the Labour movement to put energy into Euro-elections at this time is more than a diversion, it is a betrayal.

Socialists should undoubtedly wish for the demise of the Common Market. It is a fraudulent abuse of the name of internationalism, a desperate alliance of ruling classes striving to preserve their own squalid privileges. But we must be clear as to how such a demise might be achieved.

To campaign for British withdrawal — as even sections of the Labour Left are now recognising — is a nonsense. Opinion polls may show 55 percent of the British population in favour of British withdrawl — but few of those are likely to take to the streets on this issue. And the reformist left have no viable alternative for the British economy.

It will be quite a different matter if the Common Market collapses as a by-product of working class struggle. German engineering workers are fighting for the thirty-five hour week, French steel workers and British miners are fighting to save jobs. If they can win, they lessen their own ruling classes' margins for manoeuvre. National states will be driven into more and more intense competition and will be less and less able to make concessions in order to help Europe hold together.

Such a situation could start to rekindle the flames of true working class internationalism, and commit the shabby rhetoric of the European ideal to the scrapheap of history■

Coming to terms with APARTHEID

IN the following pages we print two articles on South Africa. In the first **Alex Callinicos** looks at the background to the signing of the non-aggression pact between Mozambique and South Africa that has ended the hopes the ANC had of their guerilla strategy liberating South Africa.

On 16 March the great and the good of South Africa and Mozambique gathered in the little northern Transvaal town of Komatipoort, on the borders between their two countries. The prime minister of South Africa P W Botha, and the president of Mozambique, Samora Machel, met in a railway carriage perched over the Nkomati river. The result of their meeting was a non-aggression pact. Under its terms Mozambique promised to deny guerilla bases to the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. In exchange, Botha undertook to cut off support to the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MRM), which has for the past nine years been conducting a highly effective campaign of subversion against the governing party, FRELIMO.

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Nkomati pact. The apartheid regime has scored perhaps its greatest diplomatic triumph.

Ten years ago the Portuguese dictatorship fell, undermined by the colonial wars in its African empire. The liberation movements which had led these wars came to power in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. A South African attempt to overthrow the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was defeated with Russian and Cuban help in 1975-6. There followed an escalating war of liberation in Zimbabwe, waged mainly by the guerillas of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) based in Mozambique. The sweeping electoral victory won by ZANU under Robert Mugabe's leadership in March 1980 suggested that the tide of black liberation was now lapping at the borders of South Africa itself. The fall of the apartheid regime seemed only a matter of time, as ANC guerillas operating from Mozambique launched a growing number of armed actions.

Today, four years after Mugabe's victory, things look very different. The Botha administration has used South Africa's overwhelming military and economic predominance within the region to wage a campaign of destabilisation against neighbouring black-ruled states. The Nkomati pact is a direct outcome of that policy. But it is more than that. FRELIMO is perhaps the most radical ruling party in Africa. Committed since 1977 to 'Marxism-Leninism', Machel's regime has been prepared to some extent, to match their words with deeds, above all by supporting guerilla struggles in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Especially during the latter days of the Zimbabwean war this policy cost Mozambique dear, as the Rhodesian settler forces launched devastating air attacks designed to destroy the country's economic infrastructure. That it is FRELIMO which has now bent its knee to Pretoria is an extraordinary triumph for Botha. No wonder that he has been rewarded with official invitations from Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl.

'Masterstroke'

FRELIMO's Western apologists have been quick to spring to its defence. Paul Fauvet, one of the Commmunist Party's Southern African experts, described detente with Pretoria in the *Morning Star* as a 'diplomatic masterstroke' on Machel's part. And an anonymous 'special correspondent' wrote in *Anti-Apartheid News* that 'developments such as the Nkomati pact reveal an inexorable shift in the regional balance of forces against the apartheid regime.' The same correspondent complained: 'Too often the readiness of governments like those in Angola and Mozambique to talk to their arch enemy South Africa is taken as a sign of weakness and not recognised as the pursuit by diplomatic means of the very same aims ... for which they have fought militarily'.

Samora Machel himself has far fewer illusions about his 'diplomatic masterstroke' than his foreign sympathisers. Jonathan Steele described in the *Guardian* of 22 May a meeting last January between Machel and Oliver Tambo, president of the South African ANC in Maputo, the Mozambican capital:

> 'Tambo knew that evening that Machel was engaged in talks with South Africa ... But Machel mentioned no details. When Tambo finally left, the Mozambican president could contain himself no longer. According to well-placed Mozambican sources, he broke down for a moment and cried. He had not the heart to tell Tambo what the looming pact with Pretoria was to mean for the ANC.
>
> 'It was left to another minister to give the stunning news — no more transit facilities for ANC fighters to pass through Mozambique, and a drastic reduction of their permanent presence, down to only ten people in future; a non-aggression pact with Pretoria; an open door to South African capital, and abandonment of Africa's policy of trying to isolate the apartheid regime.'

Within a week of the Nkomati pact, armed soldiers raided ANC farms and houses in a search for weapons. Even handguns for personal protection from Pretoria's assassins (who murdered veteran South African Communist Ruth First in Maputo in August 1982) were confiscated. Shortly afterwards the government of Swaziland announced that it had signed a similar non-aggression pact with South Africa two years previously. The agreement had not stopped ANC guerillas infiltrating into South Africa from Mozambique via Swaziland, but the Swazi government is now implementing the agreement.

There was a series of gun battles between the ANC and Swazi troops in the middle of April, and a number of ANC members are in detention. There is nowhere else for the ANC to go. Angolan troops are co-operating with the South African Defence Force in policing the latter's withdrawal from southern Angola. Despite Mugabe's Anti-Apartheid rhetoric, the Zimbabwean government has yet to allow the ANC a diplomatic mission in Harare, let alone guerilla bases. The ANC strategy of overthrowing the apartheid regime by infiltrating guerillas into South Africa is in ruins.

More than the ANC's hopes have been destroyed by Nkomati. The strategy which the ANC has pursued in South Africa succeeded in bringing similar national liberation movements to power in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. All these movements — FRELIMO in Mozambique, MPLA in Angola, ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe — describe themselves as socialist, even Marxist. Their strategy was based on the assumption that peasant-based guerilla movements could wrest control of the colonial state. Once in power the movements could use the state apparatus to build up strong independent national economies

The conception of socialism involved in the guerilla strategy was unfounded

which would provide the material basis for the construction of socialism. In other words, the strategy involved two stages — first win control of the national state, then, once economic as well as political independence has been achieved, build socialism.

In Zimbabwe, for example, the emphasis on the socialist nature of the regime is constant — Zimbabwean Television mixes together *Dallas, Dynasty* and the like with earnest discussions of the 'Marxist-Leninist way', and 'national social transformation'.

What Nkomati has shown is that the very conception of socialism involved in this strategy was unfounded. It rested on the belief that the new regimes could build strong independent national economies. This belief is quite incompatible with the simple fact that capitalism is a *world* system. The economies of countries like Zimbabwe and Mozambique were constructed during the colonial era to fit into an imperialist world division of labour, and a regional system dominated by apartheid South Africa.

Divided

Thus, if we take Mozambique, it appears, and is, a very backward country, with 85 percent of the population living in rural areas, most of them peasant small-holders. However, the specific form the backwardness takes is a product of imperialism. The Mozambican economy is divided into three regions. In the north, peasants predominate, but produce cash-crops such as cotton which the Portuguese introduced to provide their metropolitan industries with cheap raw materials. In the centre, foreign-owned plantations produced crops like sugar. And the south was a labour reserve, providing hundreds of thousands of migrant workers for the South African mines. The ports of Maputo and Beira were built to serve the industries of the Witwatersrand and of the Rhodesia settler state.

To imagine that such an economy could, from its own resources, develop the material foundations of socialism was the purest fantasy. The difficulties which would have in any case existed were intensified by the economic collapse which followed FRELIMO coming to power in 1975. The Portuguese settlers fled the country, causing the disintegration of trade, and the paralysis of much of the more developed portions of the economy. FRELIMO was forced to fill the gap, nationalising abandoned farms and businesses.

However, a virtue was made of necessity. Resources were poured into the plantations which had been taken over by the state on the principle that this was the best way to develop the productive forces. Since all machinery, fertilisers and pesticides had to be imported, the policy involved an enormous foreign exchange loss, and the minister of agriculture responsible was eventually sacked for 'putting machinery before people'.

A comparison with Zimbabwe is instructive. The Zimbabwean economy is one of the most advanced in Africa. The white regime encouraged import substitution, especially after their unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in November 1965 brought down upon them UN economic sanctions, until by 1979 manufacturing accounted for 25 percent of gross domestic product. Manufacturing production per capita is the highest in Africa after South Africa itself.

However, this industrialisation has made Zimbabwe heavily dependent on the world market. Without foreign exchange, Zimbabwe's factories, mines and farms cannot get the necessary machinery and spare parts. The foreign exchange can only be got by exporting. Total imports and exports constituted respectively 60 and 56 percent of real Gross Domestic Product in 1981. The Zimbabwean economy rises and falls in line with export earnings.

This has had major consequences for the policies of the Mugabe government. First, agriculture is one of the main foreign exchange earners. But most of the marketed agricultural output (77 percent in 1979) is produced by the 6,000 commercial ie white farmers. The settler economy rested on the allocation of 45 percent of the land to this group, while 600,000 black peasant families languished on the rest. The war of liberation was a peasant war, driven by land hunger. Yet Mugabe's programme of resettling black peasants on former white farms has hardly touched the position of the commercial farmers. The reason is simple: their export earnings are vital to the economy.

Secondly, Zimbabwe's trade with the outside world is dependent on South Africa's goodwill. In 1982 South Africa bought 18 percent of Zimbabwe's exports, and provided 24 percent of its imports. About half of landlocked Zimbabwe's remaining trade passes through South Africa's road and rail network and ports. This position gives Pretoria enormous power.

Zimbabwe's position is that of southern Africa writ large. The black leaders of the region have long recognised the problem, and in 1979 set up the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) in an effort to pool resources. It has made little difference. The economies of the region, designed in colonial times to export raw materials to the European metropolis, do not complement each other, and thus do not provide a market for each other's goods. Each depends instead on the demand for its products in the West. They are part of a world division of labour, not a regional one.

Suffered

The world slump has consequently had a disastrous effect on the region. Zimbabwe, having enjoyed a phenomenal boom in 1980-81 (11¼ percent real growth in 1980, 12¼ percent in 1981), has since suffered a severe depression — only 2 percent growth in 1982 (slower than the 3½ percent rate of population increase), and a five percent drop last year. Added to this have been three years of drought, the worst southern Africa has known in living memory.

The consequence has been to remove any margin for manoeuvre the black states might have had previously. Already in 1979-80 Machel was moving rightwards. FRELIMO's main political base during the war of liberation had been in the peasant north. As they took control of the more developed centre and south, the new regime encouraged workers to organise and even to develop 'collective self-management' in an effort to assert political control over the capitalist farms and businesses they seized from the departing settlers.

In December 1979, Machel reversed this policy, launching a 'Political and Organisational Offensive' one of whose main themes

was the right of managers to manage. 'Let us say in real terms', he said in a celebrated speech of 18 March 1980, 'at the level of every firm, the power is exercised by the director'.

FRELIMO had never broken off all links with the outside world — for example, depending heavily for foreign exchange on the remittances of migrant workers in South Africa. But, from 1979-80 onwards, serious efforts were made to woo Western investors. Machel's relations with the Thatcher government were especially good, thanks to the former's role in imposing the Lancaster House agreement on ZANU-PF which ended the Zimbabwean war. Mozambique's reintegration into the world economy will be facilitated by the economic clauses of the Nkomati pact.

The Zimbabwean government reacted to the slump with what an *Economist* survey described as 'Thatcherite zeal' (21 April 1984). Finance Minister Bernard Chidzero, having signed an agreement with the IMF, introduced a budget last July which raised taxes, slashed food subsidies and cut off funds for the land resettlement programme. The government, having ruthlessly crushed the strike wave which followed independence in 1980-1, has drawn up legislation which will effectively ban strikes and reintroduce a form of influx control.

Slump has also undermined the political security of the black-ruled states. The drought has particularly affected those farming areas which rely on more cattle than on crops.

Added to this has been South Africa's policy of destablising neighbouring states. The SADF occupied a region stretching several hundred kilometres within the Angolan border, and has given vital support to the anti-MPLA guerillas of UNITA. In Mozambique the MRM were able to make major inroads, especially in the centre of the country where FRELIMO had never developed the sort of political base it had in the north. South African agents pulled off a spectacular coup when they destroyed a quarter of the Zimbabwean Air Force at Thornhill airbase near Gweru in July 1982. Pretoria has given support to opposition guerillas in Lesotho, and raided its capital, Masaru, in December 1982. There have been other overt military operations mounted against neighbouring states, for example, the bombing of Maputo in May 1983.

Hegemony

The point of destabilisation was less to overthrow the black regimes than to force them to recognise South African hegemony. Ever since becoming prime minister in September 1978 P W Botha has advocated a 'Constellation of Southern African States' dominated by Pretoria. The crushing defeat of Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Botha's chosen puppet in Zimbabwe, in the 1980 elections seemed to have destroyed this policy, but destabilisation has brought the idea of such a 'Constellation' closer to reality than at any time since the mid-1970s.

In all this, Botha has enjoyed a degree of tacit encouragement from a sympathetic administration in Washington. Chester Crocker, the senior state department official dealing with Africa, has for example generally supported Pretoria's insistence that South African withdrawal from Namibia should be matched by the departure of the Cuban troops in Angola. The talks held in Lusaka last month in an effort to end the Namibian war failed on precisely this issue. These negotiations will continue in some form; in addition, Pretoria is following their Mozambican success with attempts to pressure Lesotho, Botswana and Zimbabwe into security agreements.

The Nkomati pact therefore represents not just the difficulties of the FRELIMO regime, but the collapse of the political strategy which movements like it represent. Not only have Machel and Mugabe been unable to build strong national economies, but they have been unable to give the ANC the sort of support on which their own victories depended.

What follows from this? Two fundamental points. First, there can be no hope of genuine national independence in Southern Africa while the apartheid regime survives. National liberation in Zimbabwe or Mozambique is meaningless without revolution in South Africa. Secondly, that revolution cannot follow the pattern of its predecessors.

This is not only because the ANC has been deprived of the bases essential to the success of a guerilla strategy. South Africa is, in many respects, an advanced capitalist economy, accounting for 40 percent of the industrial production of sub-Saharan Africa. Capitalism in South Africa as elsewhere has been built on the destruction of the peasantry. Unlike Mozambique or Zimbabwe, the bulk of the South African population are wage-labourers or their dependents.

It is the black working class, as an accompanying article shows, increasingly organised and militant that alone has the capacity to destroy apartheid. The fate of the region, indeed of Africa as a whole, depends on revolutionaries within South Africa understanding this fundamental truth. If the Nkomati pact hammers this lesson home, then its balance sheet will not have been wholly negative ■

Breaking the chains

Botha's recent visit serves as a reminder of the horrors of Apartheid. Here, **Nigel Dickinson** looks at the force capable of ending the regime — the black South African working class.

With the South African economy in deep recession and with rising unemployment, the strike figures released by the Department of Manpower show a spate of 104 strikes for December last year — this is almost half the figure for the previous 11 months. The first three weeks of 1984 saw a strike wave unmatched since the early 1970s. In total at least 20,000 workers were involved in strike action.

A wage dispute between South African Chemical Workers Union (SACWU) and AECI (a subsidiary of ICI) culminated in South Africa's first legal *national* strike, involving more than 8,600 workers. The strike failed in its immediate objectives when workers returned to work after threats of dismissal. However, union members had achieved a total national one week stoppage at AECI.

In a dispute between UCAR minerals, the NophuthaTswana Homeland government and the National Union of Mineworkers, the NUM strike forced the management to negotiate over working conditions, and to recognise the union's shopfloor stewards' committee. This is important as it was the first strike against the homelands government's decision to ban South African based unions on its territory. The union, not prepared to recognise the homeland government, forced the company to negotiate independently for union recognition.

The homelands are renowned for trade union repression. In 1983 the Ciskei homeland outlawed the 100,000 strong South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), a community-orientated organisation. There followed arrests and imprisonments in the Ciskei stadium, a situation reminiscent of Chile 1973.

South African economy now relies on semi-skilled black workers

In spite of severe repression black workers are organising with increasing confidence

The homelands, ruled by black puppet governments, operate as large reservoirs of cheap labour for South African capital. They are legitimised through the ideology of separate development of racial groups 'apartheid'. Whilst the whites legally own South Africa, the homelands, deemed as separate nation states, belong to the black population.

The homeland policy effectively transforms their residential status from South African citizen to migrant labourer. This solves South Africa's unemployment problem: squatter camps are regularly bulldozed by the South African police — the inhabitants are then carted off to the nearest homeland.

In this climate of severe repression, typified by threats of dismissal by the bosses, bribery and intimidation of union members and frequent harrasment by the police: a number of trade union groupings have emerged stressing careful industrial and shopfloor organisation.

The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), organised in the early 1970s by white marxist intellectuals, the General Workers Union (GWU), the food and canning unions (FCWU/AFCWU), the commercial and catering unions (CCAWUSA), the Captetown Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA) and the council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), have all expressed commitment towards a combined trade union federation.

At present three bodies FOSATU, Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) and the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) organise roughly equal numbers of workers. This drive towards a deeper industrial power base stronger than any existing trade union federation, with at least 300,000 members, would dominate eight major industries.

Last year also saw the birth of the United Democratic Front, a loose multi-class alliance relying heavily on mass-based popular support. It is strongly supported by the banned African National Congress, indeed its declaration reads very much as a diluted version of the ANC Freedom Charter.

Parliament

The UDF was launched shortly before the white-only referendum on the government's constitutional proposals. These were for a three chamber parliament of whites, coloureds and Indians (the whites, of course, maintaining tight political control). The UDF was unable to develop an effective strategy against it. Recently it launched a huge campaign to collect one million signatures rejecting the new constitution.

The UDF publicity secretary Mosiuoa Lekota says:

> 'Our strength has been demonstrated by our highly successful campaigns ... we are confident that ... our people will challenge the legitimacy of the government to implement these plans.' (*ie the constitution*)

Many unions have affiliated to the UDF. However, FOSATU, GWU, CTMWA and FCWU/AFCWU, the backbone behind the broad trade union federation initiative, gave support but refused to join the front.

These unions have been severely criticised by the UDF for their stand. In fact so strong is the resentment that popular democrats will cross the road when they see a so-called 'workerist' approaching and refer to threats from Dar es Salaam (the ANC base).

On the unions, Lekota states:

> 'The more workers come in (to the UDF) the closer we are to gaining a truly national character ... by national we mean all classes ... members of trade unions can participate in other organisations which take up other issues; for example, bus fares and rents. Such issues require a different type of organisation. The workers must be organised beyond the factory and need to form an alliance with other classes.'

In a recent FOSATU education week run by shop stewards, workers discussed the need to organise strength within factories, to break down *apparent divisions* between community and factory issues, and to force the bosses to take responsibility for the conditions in townships that capital creates and benefits from. As one worker said: 'It's simple; we force management to add the increase to our wages.'

Chris Dlamini, general secretary of the GWU, states:

> The source of oppression is the bosses and the state ... the UDF has to ask itself whether its programme facilitates the fullest participation of the working class. Our members simply don't feel that way ... the working class is the largest and most muscular group in society. They are the only social grouping with a class interest in democracy ... their priority is in the formation of a federation (of trade unions) ... where workers would have the necessary base from which to participate in multi-class organisation.'

Joe Foster, general secretary of FOSATU has been critical of the ANC and the South

The grim repression of apartheid: above, a workers' hostel...

African Communist Party (SACP). FOSATU's *Workers News* broadly supported Solidarnosc whilst the SACP trotted out the orthodox line, that Solidarnosc had links with the CIA and other western agencies. Foster warns against populist politics:

> 'It is essential that workers strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider political struggle ... and ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters.'

Unions affiliated to the highly centralised FOSATU have made important gains against management. Last year, after seven months negotiation followed by legal strike action the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) won a crucial dispute against Natal Thread. The workers won their wage demand plus back pay, and legally bound the bosses against making selective dismissals or re-engagements of workers during strikes.

At the JNA multinational, NUTW forced management to break its closed shop agreements with TUCSA, the most right wing trade union body, and recruited more than 80 percent of the workforce. FOSATU's Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) recently joined the National Industrial Council (NIC), a body of 45 employers and 15 trade union organisations. The NIC has been an important bargaining forum for mainly-white unions, fighting for differentials. MAWU, in contrast to rightwing TUCSA, has not traded shop floor organisation for privileged positions, but has used the NIC as a forum for mass mobilisation on a national scale. However MAWU's capacity to sustain rank and file control will be tested within the NIC.

Within the new federation of trade unions there are differences regarding its industrial and political character. Indeed the recent talks have been fraught with problems. CUSA's black consciousness vision of a Free Asania is likely to clash with FOSATU and other unions' principle of non-racialism. Cyril Ramphosa, general secretary of CUSA's NUM, argues for a strong industrial based black workers' movement. However, he speaks with the stagist rhetoric of the National Forum Committee.

Taxation

FOSATU and CUSA's argument for a 'one union, one industry' approach does not fit comfortably alongside those of smaller community-orientated unions like SAAWU. There have already been heated exchanges over alleged poaching and disruption.

Union resistance has gathered momentum recently against the government's plan for a centralised tax system for blacks and whites. Previously there were two separate systems of taxation. Eight union groupings including FOSATU and CUSA issued a joint public statement rejecting this 'as it perpetuates the inequities of the apartheid system of taxation without representation ... it discriminates against married women' and would mean double tax for migrants already taxed in homelands.

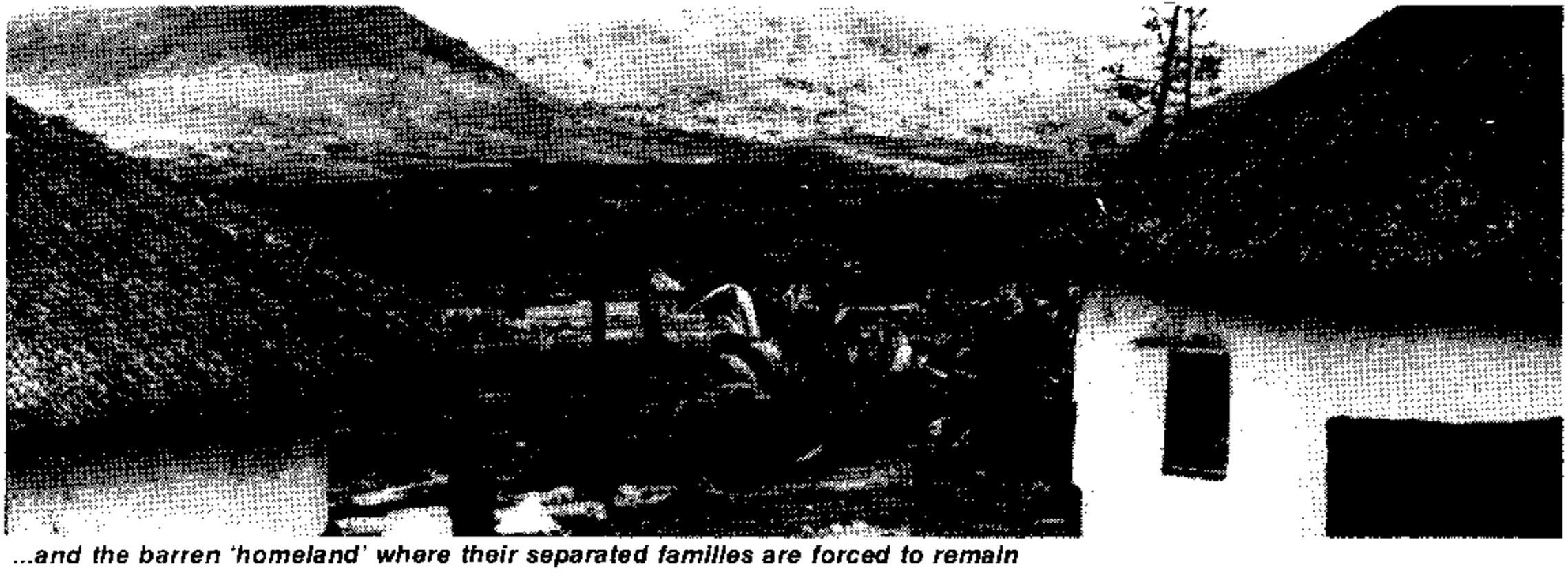
This promises to become a crucial workplace issue, even more so with a new budget and inevitable tax increases on the way, and may lead to mass political action by workers against the state.

In 1981 mass strikes in the car and metal industries challenged the government's Pension Bill. The bill prevented workers from casually dipping into their pension funds, especially whilst on strike. Black unions proclaimed solidarity and the Metal and Industry Federation put pressure on parliament to relinquish its stand. 29 black unions, with a membership of nearly 200,000, sent delegates to a solidarity meeting.

This in itself was a measure of the political breathing space created by the strike wave. Only a few years back the delegates would have been imprisoned. So far every other aparthied law has failed to quell the strike movement.

Workers, many in SAAWU, at Union Flour Mills have staged the first strike against the tax system. The strike was sparked when workers were told, by a government official, that taxes would be paid to the KwaZulu homeland government. Many workers already pay tax to the KwaZulu authorities.

Practical issues such as the new tax act have much greater workplace political impact than all the one million signatures rhetoric of the UDF. The creation of a strong broader federation of trade unions in South Africa, is likely to define the future political role of the workers' movement. But it remains to be seen whether the flavour of 1981 political strike action can be captured yet again■



...and the barren 'homeland' where their separated families are forced to remain

A rat crawls out

Events at North London Polytechnic have been making the news recently. Mass pickets by students to prevent NF organiser Pat Harrington from attending lectures have led to high court injunctions being issued, judges threatening to send students and staff at NLP to prison and riot police smashing their way into the college. Paul McGarr and Ginny Holland look at the background.

For the moment the campaign looks to have ended in a partial victory. The law has been successfully defied, Harrington is to be segregated from other students for his exams and is unlikely to return to the poly and a clear warning has been given to the fascists that they will be confronted by a mass mobilisation every time they crawl out of the sewer.

The history of the campaign goes back to last year. It was then that Harrington first appeared at NLP. However, following an article in the student newspaper exposing him as a Nazi organiser, he vanished from the scene. When he returned in March of this year at a philosophy lecture the other students in the lectures refused to be taught with Harrington and mounted pickets to keep him out. The initiative in this came directly from students in the philosophy department, not from the student union leadership despite their anti racist policies.

The pickets were successful and by the end of last term over 100 students were involved in the action. When they returned from the Easter break it was to find that Harrington had obtained a high court injunction, specifically naming a black SWP member and the Socialist Worker Student Society at the college, ordering the pickets to be lifted.

Blocked

On May Day Harrington duly arrived at NLP armed with this injunction. The response was magnificent. Hundreds of students blocked the entrance to the college, ripped up the injunction and drove Harrington out of the building.

At a mass meeting following this SWSS members argued for an immediate occupation of the college as the best way of forcing the authorities to kick Harrington out and beating off the attacks by the courts, but this was lost after being opposed by student union executive members.

The Nazis and the courts moved onto the offensive following this failure to step up the action. The editor of the student newspaper was summoned to court and, unfortunately, agreed not to publish details of the pickets. This was to be the way the law was used throughout the campaign. The mass of students who openly defied the courts were not touched, rather student union officials who were likely to, and did, back down in court were picked out as a means of undermining support for the pickets.

The college director also weighed in on the side of the NF by threatening to suspend students involved in the picketing and even to shut the college down completely. Despite these attacks rank and file students stepped up the pickets.

Faced with this defiance the courts produced a character known as the tipstaff who was ordered to escort Harrington to his lectures and arrest anyone obstructing him. Again the response was magnificent, over 400 occupying the college and barricading the entrances.

The ILEA, which runs the poly, with its famous, and useless, 'anti racist guidelines' then appeared on the scene, announcing that Harrington would be given tuition away from the college. A solution was hours away we were told — so we could all go home. This tactic, in effect an attempt to stifle the militant activity of the students, was to be tried on several occasions. Each time no such 'solution' was forthcoming. Fortunately the students ignored the hardened anti racists at County Hall and kept the barricades up.

The real face of the law and the police was then revealed as riot police, complete with visors, shields and batons, smashed their way into the college through the barricades, bringing Harrington with them before taking him away 15 minutes later.

Unfortunately, despite arguments by SWSS members to remain in occupation and force the police to repeat their performance if they wanted to get Harrington in again, the National Union of Students executive who had now arrived at NLP successfully argued for students to leave and only return for Harrington's next lecture five days later.

When students turned up to picket this lecture they found that the college had indeed been occupied — by the police! They had been in the building all night and hundreds of them surrounded the college. Nevertheless a militant picket was mounted outside and a 'silent' protest inside the building.

Harrington was thus able to get his first lecture for several months behind police lines at North London Poly.

Several students who were in the lecture attempted to walk out when Harrington was brought in by the police. But the tipstaff, who sat in the lecture, said they would be arrested for disrupting the lecture if they did so. When the students then tried to raise the 'ethics' of fascism — quite reasonable in a philosophy lecture on ethics, you might think — they were warned by the tipstaff that this too was disruption and would lead to arrest and imprisonment.

So much for 'freedom' of education in our 'democratic' society.

Harrington's 'minder'—high court tipstaff George Baber

Harrington's final lecture of the term on 24 May was a repeat performance. Another police occupation of the college — this time they refused to allow many NLP students into the college until Harrington had been given a free lift home in a police van — and several hundred students continued to defy the courts by mounting a militant picket. Harrington will now have his exams separate from other students, and, for the moment, a victory has been won with only a massive police operation being able to get him in and out of the college.

All-out action

The only notes of reservation are that by more effective and determined action earlier in the campaign the victory could have been decisive and, at the time of writing some lecturers still face court proceedings for refusing to identify students photographed on the pickets. The lecturers at NLP will take all-out strike action if any of them are jailed for taking this principled stand and, if this happens, students will support their picket lines and the action will have to be spread to other colleges.

As well as exposing the real role of the courts and police, if this was still necessary after three months of the miners' strike, a number of lessons emerge from the campaign.

The first is that the law can be successfully defied by determined rank and file action.

Mass mobilisation—a clear warning to fascists they will be confronted every time they crawl out of their sewers

The courts throughout sought to undermine the base of the campaign by picking out token bureaucrats, who would grovel in front of the judge rather than be part of the open defiance of hundreds of students.

Secondly, the campaign was initiated and run by rank and file students through mass meetings and militant action. The various bureaucrats and officials, from the student union executive through to the NUS leadership and the I.E.A. only moved when forced to do so by pressure from below and then always sought to find compromises and ways to control and limit the action. They were successful in this at least to the extent of preventing the one form of action which could have ensured a decisive victory, all-out occupation.

Coherent force

Finally, the need for an organisation which links socialist ideas and self activity, which links rank and file militants together was never more illustrated. SWSS was the only consistent force arguing against the vacillations of the bureaucrats, making the links with workers' struggles, such as the miners' strike, and explaining how society can be changed and racism permanently defeated. This was not lost on the 50-plus students who attended SWSS meetings throughout the campaign and the eight (including several of those who initiated the pickets) who joined the SWP.

Finally, it is worth dealing with the arguments put forward by sections of the media and 'liberal' opinion, typified by the recent London Programme on TV (24 May 1984) and an article in *The Guardian* by two members of the NUS executive (28 May 1984). Firstly there is the argument that Harrington was being denied his democratic right to 'free speech' and access to education. Secondly they argue that the tactics of the campaign were such that they swung 'public opinion' behind Harrington and thus gave a boost to the National Front. Let us look at these in turn.

Harrington is no 'ordinary' student (for a bona fide student it is surprising that he did not even enrol in the college library). He is assistant editor of *VF News*, an NF student organiser and treasurer of Kensington and Chelsea National Front branch. His very presence in the college is a threat to other students and intimidates them, especially in view of the NF's habit of publishing the names and addresses of their political opponents. Freedom of speech for Harrington is incompatible with that of the other students at NLP.

The argument that the campaign, due to the militant tactics employed, has given a boost to the Nazis is equally groundless. Those who argue this have short memories. How do they think the NF were defeated in the mid-70s when they were on the verge of becoming a serious political force in Britain? Was it by ignoring them in the hope that they would go away or by refining our concept of *'the civil right of anti-discrimination and the liberty of equal treatment'* (!?) as the national secretary of the NUS argues? Of course not.

They were defeated by mass mobilisations which confronted them wherever they appeared. They were kicked off the streets at Lewisham in 1977 and opposed on every occasion they marched or organised. Such tactics worked. The Nazis were demoralised, driven to fragment, and, for the most part, rendered an ineffective force.

There is no other way to fight fascism and those who pander to 'public opinion' and condemn militant action against fascism would do well to remember that it was the failure to confront the Nazis whenever they crawled out of their sewers which allowed them to grow and come to power in Germany.

Mass mobilisations to confront them wherever they appear is the only way to defeat the Nazis. In this respect an important victory has been won at NLP which should boost all militants and socialists■

Stuck in the mire

There have been a number of attacks on gay rights lately. **Noel Halifax** and **John Lindsay** report on the seizure of books by the Customs and Excise, and on the campaign to fight back.

On 10 April, the Customs and Excise raided *Gay's the Word* bookshop in London. They held the staff for several hours, took away 800 titles and raided the homes of some of the directors. *Gay's the Word* is a bookshop and coffee shop providing books and a meeting place for lesbians and gays, and sells a selection of works on homosexuality, women and sexual politics.

It has been open for over five years. The raid took place a few weeks after the police had raided a nearby gay pub. Recently the police applied to the Camden local council to get the bookshop registered as a sex shop. The application was turned down on the grounds that in no way could *Gay's the Word* be considered a sex shop.

The bookshop's owners and workers face prosecution by the Customs & Excise under laws where though a book published in Britain might not be deemed obscene or illegal, but can be held and prosecuted if it is foreign and imported. Customs and Excise are not bound by the obscenity laws, and have wide ranging powers on any imported goods. These powers are being used to attack the gay community. The bookshop could also be forced out of business by legal costs and the loss of 800 titles.

Solidarity

The Sunday after the raid there was a meeting called at the GLC's County Hall to discuss and plan a campaign against the raid. Though it was called with only a few days notice, almost 200 people turned up.

As part of the build-up to the meeting, a *Socialist Worker* leaflet was circulated arguing for an immediate demonstration against the raid, and linking the attack by the Customs to police action against miners and the need for solidarity.

The meeting was the largest seen for some years. The audience was much larger than the small group who work around the GLC gay committee. The meeting lasted some three hours and in it wide differences emerged over how you fight against oppression, showing the consequences of different theories of oppression and the way the movement has gone over the last five years.

The meeting was controlled and managed by the bookshop people. There was no voting or even the idea of democracy and coming to decisions by democratic means. In what is now seen as normal practise, the committees set up were 'self-selecting' and open to anyone.

This means self-appointed unaccountability, controlled in this case by the bookshop. Though two strategies were put forward which clashed on most points they were not voted on, but just given opinions which the committee could consider.

This tradition of self-appointed and self-perpetuating 'leaders of the gay community' with no democracy or structure is one by which the GLC gay committee is run and now the norm for the gay movement.

The two strategies put forward reflected wide political differences. One was that put forward by members of the SWP but receiving support from many others; maybe a third of the meeting. We called for pickets, demonstrations outside the court when the case comes to trial, and outside the Customs as soon as possible, and to leaflet and organise inside the civil service unions whose members work for the Customs and Excise office.

We argued for picketing and trying to intervene via sympathetic civil servants inside and outside the forthcoming conferences of the civil service unions. This strategy aimed to get the widest possible support, from straights as well as gays, and to organise at the base. It also meant electing a committee which can and should act without the sanction of the bookshop.

The alternative strategy was put forward by the bookshop people. It received much wider support, including gays and lesbians who work round the GLC and local left councils. To them the key was to raise money to get the best lawyers to fight the court case, to write to MPs, and to get local Labour councils to pass motions condemning the raid.

A picket of the Customs office was seen as 'probably all right, but not a demo or picket of the court as it might prejudice the case.' Behind this strategy was the idea of concentrating on winning over the liberal establishment, the GLC, left MPs, *Guardian* readers, etc on the injustice of the raid. Much time and words were spent reading out a motion criticising the raid which had been passed by the NCCL. The campaign was to be respectable, reasonable and in the hands of the bookshop. In particular, some took offence at the *Socialist Worker* leaflet linking the raid with the miners' struggle.

Of the 200 present, about a quarter to a third were women. Half-way through the discussion on how to fight against the raid, some of the lesbians raised a further issue which split and confused the meeting. Speaking as 'socialist feminists', they said they were disturbed how lesbians were being pressurised into supporting a gay men's struggle, and how the meeting was ducking the issue of pornography.

They wanted to know what the books were that had been seized before they could decide whether to support the campaign or not. After all, some of the books might deserve to be burnt. They also wanted a women-only meeting to discuss the matter and decide what lesbians thought about it.

The issue of pornography is one on which the gay movement, like the women's movement and some of the left, is confused and embarrassed. The prevailing attitude of tokenism towards lesbians is such that many will not or cannot criticise views when expressed by lesbians, particularly 'political lesbians'. The idea of always giving oppressed minorities separate meetings ensured that a women-only meeting was held halfway through the meeting proper — in what had been planned as the coffee break. So half way through a meeting called to discuss ways to fight against the raid, a women-only meeting was called to discuss whether there should be any support for the bookshop at all.

The bookshop people, half of them women, were particularly upset at this turn of events since it spoilt their idea of a reasonable and respectable campaign. They dislike arguments revealing the splits inside the gay movement. But they were incapable of taking up the argument. By a combination of guilt feeling, moralistic arguments and the fear of counter argument, the socialist feminists got their way.

Sabotage

The debate over pornography has been one within the left, gay and women's movement. Now the issue is affecting the ability or willingness of the gay movement to fight back against oppression. By putting conditions on their support the socialist feminists are standing by while the state attacks gays and lesbians. But even if this is not the final outcome, the tradition of self-appointed leaderships without any voting, and the catering to all minority interests, means that a small minority can sabotage and hinder the campaign.

Pornography is still a subject over which many on the left get into a quandary. In this *Review* we have argued that pornography is not a key mechanism by which women are oppressed or men educated into sexism, but rather a mirror of sexism in society generally. You do not change reality by smashing its mirrors. The issue of pornography has been one way by which some have given a left and moralistic cover to a rightward shift in politics. The shift has been away from self-activity of the oppressed and towards an accommodation with parts of the capitalist state, whether the soft face of the GLC or the hard face of demanding increased policing.

After the women-only meeting, some 150 returned to the reconvened full meeting. The lively debate that there had been in the first half was lacking in the second. The meeting was told that in order to reflect the interests of the lesbians there would be a mixed committee open to all and a women's-only committee which would liaise with the mixed committee. One of the first tasks of the campaign would be to draw up a list of all 800 titles with a short description of the contents so that anyone interested could see and decide on the campaign's validity. Instead of campaigning in the first vital weeks the committee was to spend its time drawing up a book list! A picket of the Customs was not

called till weeks after the meeting.

When the picket finally took place one lunchtime a couple of weeks later, something like a hundred people turned up. The picket was cheerful and confident. The people running the meeting at County Hall, now members of one or both committees, assumed stewardship. But rather than the stewards leading the chanting, they organised self-policing: 'stand back against the wall', 'leave a gap', etc. They were very upset when some of us insisted on selling *Socialist Worker*.

That morning we had leafleted the office telling the workers of the raid and the picket and linking it to other struggles (Cheltenham, Sarah Tisdale, the civil servants' pay claim etc) and urging them to join the picket and to raise the issue in their union. We later intervened at the CPSA conference.

Peers

Another open meeting was called on 20 May to discuss the direction of the campaign and to report back on the activities of the Committee and its sub-group. At the meeting, again at County Hall, some 40 people turned up to hear what had been done in the past six weeks.

The bookshop people again chaired and directed the agenda. The discussion in all lasted some three and a half hours, the first two hours of which were spent in a detailed report back of what had been done to date. The support work (separated out to different sub-groups) was divided into four categories: work with MPs and Peers; local government; the labour movement (trade unions and Labour Party) and the media. It is an indication of the priorities of the campaign that the debate on work with MPs and Peers and the media both lasted over 30 minutes or more. Local government took 15 minutes and the labour movement just ten minutes. The vast bulk of the work had been in trying to influence the right people and influence the liberal establishment.

The one MP present and who had been taking a leading role in getting MPs' support, was Simon Hughes, Liberal MP for Bermondsey. Ironically, he was elected as the result of a vicious anti-gay witch hunt against Peter Tatchell.

After some two hours of reporting back of activities the meeting moved to a discussion of the direction of the campaign. This revealed a division within the campaign, but it was one which the bookshop people were unhappy to acknowledge. Their response to any expression of disagreement of what had been done was to propose another sub-group, so that all views would have its own little sub-group within which to press forward with 'their campaign' ideas.

We in the SWP argued for the campaign to 'come out of the committee and into the streets'; for its prime activity to be organising action, a picket or demo for which support could be won. The campaign is in great danger of wasting away the support that it has on just asking for money and letters to MPs. The campaign should spend its time before the case comes to court building as wide as possible support for a picket and demo against the raid. After a disjointed discussion, it was finally agreed that the coming Gay Pride demo (re-named this year as the 'It's not a phase I'm going through demonstration'!) was something for which the campaign should organise for and on.

The issue of a raid on a small gay bookshop in the light of the miners' strike is not one of prime importance to the class struggle in Britain. Even when you place it in the context of the harassment of gays that has been happening recently, it is still not on a scale that merits the front page of *Socialist Worker*. However the raid did raise anger and showed the potential that there is for a fightback.

As this description of the arguments and debates inside the campaign has tried to show, there are inbuilt problems to getting that potential to be realised. The ideas of the movement are hindering the development of a campaign. The differences that revolutionary socialists have with many in the gay movement are not just a matter of a different interpretation of Engels' *Origin of the Family* and how it explains gay oppression, but of a different analysis giving rise to different strategy, and tactics for fighting gay oppression.

The combination of separatism and reformism that now dominate the movement together with the tradition of trying to find the lowest common denominator in any campaign to avoid argument, all makes for the meetings to be long, tedious and incomprehensible to all except the politically-committed, or experts in local government politics.

The context within which ideas are created and accepted is determined by the balance of class forces. The struggle of the miners is important for fighting gay oppression, not just because they are up against the same enemy but also because a defeat for the miners will be a defeat for the working class and determine the political climate that will make a fightback against gay oppression that much harder.

Withered

The merging of separatism into reformism has also made the argument for self-activity and action harder. Many now see the way forward of the gay movement in terms of winning over the right people, getting in touch with local left councils etc. The idea, born from GLF, of activity on the streets and linking the fight against gay oppression with the labour movement by going on demonstrations with a gay banner and leafleting has been replaced by the idea of getting in touch with a working party or sub-committee inside the unions. The stress is constantly on working within the political system, within bits of the state and within the trade union bureaucracy.

For all its faults and it had many, GLF saw the fight for gay liberation as a struggle of gay self-emancipation and collective action. Today those ideas have withered, to be replaced by municipal socialism and the old CHE strategy of getting reforms in the small committee room and pulling the right bureaucratic strings.

Gay liberation can only be achieved by gays fighting their oppression themselves, linking their fight with the class struggle. We have to fight the ideas that all gays have a common interest that masks the great class divide. This prevents working class gays from being involved or effected by the gay movement. It means arguing for class politics inside the gay movement. The importance of the miners' strike is a good example. At the same time, we have to fight against all forms of sectionalism within the working class: racism, sexism, or homophobia. We need to show that the methods of fighting for workers' self-emancipation are the same methods by which gay liberation can be won■

Striking for the 35 hour week

Over the past few weeks we have seen German workers on picket lines. **David Paenson,** of our German sister organisation the SAG, writes about the background.

On 14 May at 6 o'clock in the morning the German metal workers' union (IGM) — the biggest single union in the world — pulled out 14,000 members in 15 factories in the region of Nordwürttemberg/Nordbad. A week later a further 11,000 Daimler Benz car workers in Sindelfingen and 35,000 metal workers in nine factories in the region of Hessen followed suit.

The economically much weaker but more left wing printers' union has been organising rolling strikes over the past five weeks.

The bosses didn't take long to hit back. In Baden-Württemberg they layed off 65,000 workers in various car plants 'because of lack of components', and more lay-offs are to follow in other factories producing car components. By the end of the month the whole of the German car industry could well be at a complete standstill and anything up to a quarter million workers laid off.

The massive lay-offs extending beyond the region of Hessen and Württemberg to the whole of Germany are part of the bosses' strategy to frighten the union leaders into backing down.

When the union leaders went ahead with the strike they chose to pull out precisely those factories specialising in a few precision components and for which no quick substitutes, not even from outside the country, can be found. The 2,300 workers at Kolbenschmidt for instance produce 80 percent of all pistons used in the German car industry as well as pistons for export. The union leadership named their strategy 'Minimax': maximum effect with the minimum of effort.

It looks like the trade union leaders bit off more than they can chew. In Germany union members get strike pay — up to two thirds of their normal pay packet. As for those workers who got laid off, at least those *outside* Württemberg and Hessen, the union leaders were entertaining false hopes that they would get lay-off pay from the labour exchange. But a binding decision rushed through just five days after the beginning of the strike by Heinrich Franke, newly appointed boss of the national governing body of all the local labour exchanges and a very close friend of the conservative government, has put an end to all this.

Heinrich Franke puts his case quite simply: since the demand for the 35 hour week is a *national* demand and the other parallel demands on wages and conditions advanced by the different regions differ only in minor details, all the IGM members would benefit from a possible breakthrough in Hessen and Württemberg. Members in other regions are therefore directly involved in the strike and have no right to claim lay-off money.

Mayr, the general secretary of the IGM, has said he wants to go to court over this. A big protest march against this 'unbelievable breach of the law' was also being planned for 28 May in the capital city of Bonn. In the meantime laid-off workers are not supported financially by the IGM, so they're being forced to turn to social security for help. There they have to go through the humiliating experience of proving that they haven't got any money on their savings' account and being told that they have to get a second mortgage out on their house before they are entitled to benefits.

Bridge

The bosses hope that the laid-off union members receiving no strike money will turn against the striking members who do. Mayr's answer to this threatening split right down the middle of the union membership is to try directing the members' anger against the conservative government-controlled labour exchanges — if need be even occupying them.

Just how bent he is on not taking any positive steps within his own power to bridge the gap between laid-off and striking members was shown in the case of Daimler Benz. As soon as the workers there heard of the planned lock-out for the coming Monday 21 May they voted for immediate strike action as from 16 May.

The IGM-leadership's answer to this kind of 'insubordination' was to reassert their right to call strikes when and where they think right, and insist that the Daimler workers get no strike money before 21 May.

Trade union bodies at convenors' level in some of the better-organised plants are planning factory occupations to overcome the threatening split. Convenors and senior shop stewards are however relatively isolated from the shop floor and there is practically no independent rank and file leadership to spread this kind of tactic and carry them through to the end.

'Do you think we'll get the 35 hour week? And what about inflation? Prices will just go up and up and up if we do. But on the other hand I would never be able to walk up those factory stairs again with a clear conscience if I scabbed. So that's why I'm here on the picket line,' a young woman worker at Triumph Adler, which produces computer typewriters and other office equipment, explained.

The union leadership was able to get over 80 percent of *all* union membership of IGM Hessen and Württemberg to vote in a ballot that they're prepared to strike for the 35 hour week. According to union rules, 75 percent are required. But this high percentage was more an expression of the strength and discipline of German trade union organisation and much less an expression of any new militancy on the factory floor.

So any factory occupations that do take place are likely to remain isolated and collapse as soon as any kind of compromise with the bosses is reached.

In fact the trade union bureaucracy sold the strike down the river even before it started.

Stienkühler, ex-general secretary of the Baden-Württemberg section and now

The workers at this plant produce the pistons that keep the German car industry on the road

Members of the biggest union in the world on strike for the 35 hour week

directly under Mayr as sub-secretary of the national IGM and considered to be a left-winger; said he was prepared to give up the work-free Saturday — a reform workers had had to fight for in the fifties — in return for a shorter working week. Ferlemann, general secretary of the printers' union, has offered the bosses a 35 hour week 'costing nothing'.

The IGM leadership have placed their hopes in the more capital-intensive wing of the large factory owners, the bosses of BMW, Opel, Daimler-Benz and Co. This branch of industry has invested heavily over the past few years in automated machinery, allowing them to reduce even further their dependence on skilled labour. For them it is now a matter of paying off their investments as quickly as possible. BMW for instance have put forward a plan for a 36 hour week for 40 hours pay — but at the same time introducing a third shift *during the day time*.

This new scheme would allow BWM to use its machinery 108 hours a week instead of the present 80 hours — an increase of 46 percent — thus reducing overall costs and in the short run at least making BMW more competitive than its rivals.

At the present time it is still the large number of smaller machine-tool companies and other specialised firms which are calling the tune in the bosses' Gesamt-metall-Organisation. These firms are much more dependent on a skilled workforce and are against shorter working hours even if the union is prepared to accept a corresponding cut in wages.

They say that the lost hours would simply be irreplaceable, and it is they who by their complete intransigence forced the IGM into calling a strike.

But they could well be outvoted by the more 'progressive' wing of Gesamtmetall as soon as they felt that the strike was biting. Already talks have been re-opened behind closed doors and a sell-out something along the lines suggested by the conservative labour minister Norbert Blüm — who by the way started his career as a metal worker himself in the Opel works and is to this day a member of the IGM — might be agreed upon: a reduction in the *yearly* quota of hours leaving it up to the individual union bodies on the factory floor to negotiate the concrete details.

This kind of compromise might get the union leadership off the hook and even give the membership for a brief period of time the feeling that they have neither won nor lost. But in the long run it would mean increased pressure on the workforce to work extra hours at such times when the boss says so, and just sit around at home when production is being run down.

Just how awful this kind of flexibility is can be seen in the chemical factory BASF, employing 45,000 workers and only just recently reached the top of the German chemical league. There the trade union signed an agreement giving the workers a guaranteed 32 hours work for 32 hours pay and with the obligation to work up to 40 hours when required. Hours get counted as overtime only over and above 40 hours a week!

This kind of contract is the first step backwards to the hire-and-fire practices of the 19th century.

Pale

The final outcome of the strike could be a situation similar to that following the steel strike in Great Britain. Increased redundancies and unemployment figures soaring above the present 2.5 million out of work would leave behind the feeling that the fight for the 35 hour week only made things worse. A massive drop in trade union membership — which in spite of the crisis and a massive shift to the right has remained relatively stable over the past few years — would be the result.

The German revolutionary left, from its hay-day when it numbered tens of thousands, has virtually disappeared from the scene — or turned a pale green. (Though to be fair it must be mentioned that the Green Party did print colourful posters for the 35 hour week.)

A national conference organised by oppositional members of the metal workers' union last December on the question of the 35 hour week brought together a mere hundred-plus activists. The general line adopted by the conference was uncritical support for the IGM-campaign combined with the perspective of being 'more militant' and suggesting 'better tactics' than the higher rungs of the bureaucracy. Thus, they claim, a sell-out might be prevented, or at least they will come out of the conflict with more credibility. The factory occupations now being planned are part of this strategy.

But the left's insistence on limiting itself to criticising the *tactics* of the trade union leadership without stressing the importance of an independent rank and file organisation strong enough and politically motivated enough to openly defy the union leadership as soon as and whenever it starts vacillating, will leave the left politically even more isolated at the end of the strike than they already were at the beginning.

The DGB (German equivalent of the TUC) officially supports the IGM and the printers' union in their fight for the 35 hour week. The DGB has organised sympathy demonstrations and token strikes and there is talk of a one day general strike in Baden Württemberg to coincide with the planned demonstration in Bonn. The DGB bureaucrats are frightened that an all-too obvious defeat of the IGM will weaken their own position in regard to the employers.

But their solidarity is very shaky indeed. The chemical union, one of the most important, has settled to keep the 40 hour week until 1987. Together with the building and cement workers' union, the catering and cigarette workers' union, the textile workers' union and the miners' and energy workers' union, it has come out quite openly against the solution of a general shorter working week, favouring instead the government solution of early retirement from 58 years. The only thing they are demanding of the bosses is to add a further 10 percent to the 65 percent of net wages already promised by the government to early retirers.

As for the other unions officially demanding the 35 hour week, the transport and civil servants' union, the post office workers' union, the train workers' union and the teachers' union, they chose to time their talks with the bosses for a later date, which of course, leaves them with a back door open to drop out of the campaign altogether ■

Reagan's war game

The arrival of Ronald Reagan will be hailed as a visit of the leader of the free world. Here Peter Binns looks at the other side of Reagan; his attempts to back right wing dictators and overthrow the popular regime in Nicaragua.

The military assault by the CIA and US-backed 'contra' guerrillas against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua continues unabated. More than a thousand people have been killed in the past year. Extensive damage has been sustained from sabotage on oil terminals, bridges, and government installations. Up to fifteen thousand 'contras' have been involved in occupying extensive zones in the north, the south and along the Atlantic coast.

All the principle ports on both ocean coasts have been mined; three Nicaraguan fishing boats have been sunk and a dozen freighters from foreign countries — Britain, Russia, Japan and Holland included — have been damaged.

The attacks are set to continue indefinitely, in spite of Reagan's acceptance of the ruling of the World Court at the Hague that the mining is illegal. The State Department claims that the ruling 'was not inconsistent with current US policy towards Nicaragua'. Yet this policy consists of direct CIA involvement with the mining, coupled with the pretence that it is the 'contras' not the Americans, who are doing the mining.

Firepower

The pretence is pretty thin; even the *International Herald Tribune* recently reported a prominant contra leader who admitted that 'the CIA did it and we were told which location to claim credit for.'

Besides, according to *US News and World Report*, American naval attacks 'are likely to continue long after the abandonment of the mining operation.'

The military operation is unlikely to defeat the Sandinista army. With 50,000 troops, many reservists and access to far heavier firepower, nothing less than an American invasion on the scale of the Vietnam war (and that can be ruled out in an election year) is likely to dislodge the Nicaraguan regime. In fact, by making their operations so grandiose, the CIA and the contras may have, to a certain extent, sacrificed military goals to proganda ones.

It was probably more than just bravado that led to the claim by Tomas Borge, Minister of the Interior, that 'Bigger units are easier for us to locate...They are better targets for our artillery and other heavy weapons.'

But then the main reasons for the mining and the incursions by the contras are economic rather than military.

The mines, for instance, are acoustic ones and it is clear that while they have inflicted some damage, they have usually been set to go off at a distance instead of actually sinking ships; the purpose being to drive up insurance rates for international shipping to unacceptably high levels.

These and other measures have certainly had a major impact on Nicaraguan trade. Last month saw the largest port, Corinto, bottled-up with British and Japanese ships loaded with cotton and molasses. (The export of cotton being cut 30 percent in the process).

The United States government has tightened the economic screw in 'legitimate' ways as well. Recently it annouced a cancellation of landing rights for aircraft and an embargo on banana imports from Nicaragua. And since it suspended aid itself in 1981 it has managed to block most aid and loans from international agencies too: it blocked $30 million from the Inter-American Development Bank in November 1981 and September 1982, $40 million from the World Bank in February 1983 and $2.2 million from the IDB in June 1983.

The war against the contras has also hit the economy hard. More than half of the coffee crop, for instance, one of Nicaragua's most important sources of foreign exchange, has just not been harvested. Then there is the very heavy burden of defence, already a quarter of the GNP, and set to rise still higher.

As the Internal Report of the Sandinista National Supply Commission gloomily put it: 'The aggression will continue, probably with greater intensity, damaging production and requiring greater allocations for defence'. It forsees 'No productive solution...until the end of the decade'.

Yet faced with these co-ordinated attacks, the Sandinista regime has still not repudiated the vast debts (now valued at $3 billion) bequeathed by dictator Somoza. Where then are the resources to be found to pay for all this damage to the Nicaraguan economy?

Unlike Cuba in 1960 — which many, mistakenly, see as the model the Sandinistas are presently following — Nicaragua has not yet got the money by a squeeze on private industry. In fact the regime is trying very hard to go in the opposite direction. The private sector still accounts for 60 percent of GNP, and in spite of very obvious links between Cosep (the Higher Council for Private Enterprise — a sort of Nicaraguan equivalent of the Institute of Directors) and the contras, every effort is being made to placate its members.

Prosecutions for sabotage have been cut back, and Cosep members previously imprisoned have been released. The bourgeoisie is permitted its own newspaper, *La Prensa*, and in spite of their opposition to the continuing State of Emergency and the postponement of elections to 1985, they are still able to recruit people to the Christian Democrats, to pass out literature and to protest against government policy.

More recently the Sandinista government has gone further still. At the end of last year it announced amnesties for a number of contras and gave guarantees against 'indiscriminate' expropriation of large landowners fully 12 percent of agricultural holdings are still of 500 hectares — about 1,250 acres — or over. It sharply scaled down the Cuban presence in Nicaragua and kicked out the representatives of the El Salvadorian FDR/FMLN guerrillas altogether.

Both of these latter events are the product of circumstances largely outside Nicaragua itself.

In El Salvador the military strength of the guerrillas is improving and they probably need the Nicaraguan connection somewhat less. Recent evidence shows that now most of their weapons come not from Nicaragua but — via captured and defecting soldiers — from the US State Department itself. The election of Jose Napoleon Duarte, who has made vague references to peace talks with the guerrillas, is a recognition of this fact.

This does not mean that a constitutional rather than a military solution is in the offing. On the contrary, last month, at the bidding of the military and the death squads, El Salvador's Assembly voted again to suspend constitutional rights and continue the three year old state of siege which places all power in the hands of the army. Duarte will, once again, be a prisoner of the military. *Newsweek* reported that the 'officer corps warned him he could be Commander-in-Chief only in name'.

The initiative for the Cuban withdrawal quite probably came from Havana as much as from Managua. Certainly it would fit with Castro's changing global politics at the present time: Cuban troops are being withdrawn from Ethiopia and moves are afoot to disengage them from Angola too, no doubt as part of a wider deal involving South Africa.

Torres

Castro is anxious to keep on good terms with western bankers. Falling sugar prices have contributed to a mounting debt problem that Moscow seems increasingly unwilling to underwrite, and last month Sr Raoul Leon Torres, Minister-President of the Cuban National Bank, was forced to announce that Cuba will pay interest but will not repay principal on its 1984 foreign debt.

Keeping in with the banks has meant that Castro is now firmly holding on to Mexico's coat tails, above all in foreign policy. He along with the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, backed the call of the 'Contadora' group of Latin American countries (the largest and most important of which is Mexico) in rejecting 'all armed action that might destabilise any country in the region.' This policy implies support for the death squads against the guerrillas in El Salvador.

Cuban officials have taken great pains to repeat this frequently over the past year. President Ricardo Alarcon 'definitively ruled out the possibility of military [aid]

vention in Central America in spite of Cuban expectations of ever-increasing US pressure in the region'. But even their civilian intervention in Nicaragua — mainly teachers and other technical personnel — are being rapidly withdrawn too. At all costs Castro wants to avoid another repeat of Grenada with Cuban nationals at the receiving end of the military adventures of the CIA and the contras.

The Grenadan debacle has highlighted an increasing divergence between Havana and Moscow. For Castro, the group around Coard is to be attacked for killing Maurice Bishop and thereby being unable to sustain itself. For Moscow, on the other hand, Bishop's killing was not the work of Coard but of the CIA, and so they do not attack him at all. The fact that Moscow's line is a pack of lies is less important, however, than what it reveals about Moscow's differences with Havana.

Roles

For Moscow, the overriding concern is to put as many spokes in the wheel of American imperialism as is prudently possible. For Havana the overriding concern is to accommodate itself to a situation in which, whatever happens, that self same imperialism will go on remaining the most powerful single force in the region. The result is a reversal of the roles that they once played in the late 1960s.

Now Havana is seen as the bastion of caution while Moscow is seen as the supporter of revolutionary adventures in the region. Several pro-Moscow groups have blamed Castro for failing to send reinforcements to Grenada prior to the invasion last year, and the Costa Rican Communist Party is now split between a pro-Moscow guerrillaist 'left' and a Castroite constitutionalist 'right'.

There is no doubt that the Sandinista regime is feeling exactly the same pressure as the Castro regime. It has been even more fulsome in its praise for the initiative of the Contadora group for disengagement in the region. It is this which explains the concessions it has been making to private capital within Nicaragua itself. The Sandinistas see this as the necessary price they have to pay to gain respectability in the world's trading and financial circles.

They have now dropped any alternative vision of a 'socialist' road carried on independently of the law of value and the world market. In a remarkably frank interview at the end of last year, a leading minister, Jaime Wheelock, explained what that meant in practice.

First of all it meant defending private capital:

> 'Although we may have socialist principles — and we do have them — the solution to transforming our society does not lie in expropriating all the means of production'.

Secondly, it meant the abandonment of any real attempt to plan the economy:

> 'At one time...we tried to get rid of the law of value. What actually disappeared was almost all basic foodstuffs. We tried to set a fixed price for beans...What happened? Not only did the price rise even higher because of the shortages, but the product disappeared from the market.'

Finally, it meant the recognition of the world economy within which Nicaragua is situated:

> 'We are part of a general market system in which our planning capacity alone doesn't determine whether the plan will work or not.'

But this leaves the Sandinista regime with only one alternative. The burden of defence debt repayment and economic development must be placed on the shoulders of the very class that brought the Sandinistas themselves to power — the working class. The Internal Report of the National Supply Commission thus envisages stagnating or falling living standards for workers for the rest of the decade. The minimum wage is to remain at £30 per month while prices of basic commodities are set to rise.

Not surprisingly, independent trade unions cannot be tolerated if such demands are to be placed on Nicaragua's workers. Instead there is a state-run union federation, the CST (Sandinista Workers' Central) to which no rivals are permitted. Last year six members of a Corinto-based dockworkers' union, for instance, were jailed merely for trying to remove their union from the CST.

Inevitably, then, the strategy of accommodation which the Sandinista regime is using to hold itself together must lead to the progressive weakening of its working class base. In the short run the regime may well survive in the face of attacks from the CIA and the contras. But what will not survive is anything which has much in common with socialism.

Regime

If this scenario looks gloomy, it is important to realise that it is only part of the story. The Contadora initiative seems certain to fail anyway; it depends on the willingness of Reagan to co-operate, and there is just no sign of him doing so. On the contrary, the money for the contras will continue as will the massive funding for the El Salvadorian army.

Reagan will continue to put massive pressure on the countries that surround Nicaragua to participate in the attacks, and this will have a profoundly destabilising effect on them — above all in the case of Costa Rica, but also in Guatamala and Honduras too.

The end result will certainly be, as we have seen, to weaken the working class base of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But it might just place a whole number of other Central American countries into the melting pot at the same time.

Whether anything more positive might emerge from such a scenario depends on an ingredient that is still missing in all these countries — a revolutionary socialist party dedicated to the creation of workers' power. To create it will require a decisive rejection of most of what passes for 'left' politics in Central America today, including, of course, the confused politics of the latter-day followers of Sandino in Niracagua■

Now the US seeks to topple the Sandinista regime that overthrew the right wing dictator the US backed

The most complete democracy

Pete Goodwin looks at how workers move from striking against the system to overthrowing it and setting up their own state.

In 1899, Lenin wrote about Russia:

> 'Every strike reminds the capitalists that it is the workers and not they who are the real masters — the workers who are more and more loudly proclaiming their rights. Every strike reminds the workers that their position is not hopeless, that they are not alone.'

His words apply with equal force to Britain eighty-five years later. Every strike projects the blurred vision of workers' power. With a big, long strike like today's miners strike the vision begins to become clearer.

This simple, forceful vision is a huge leap forward from believing that unions are simply about wages, jobs and conditions and that change in society as a whole should be left to some reforming government. It is the beginning of revolutionary wisdom.

But it is only the beginning. For there are far more links in the chain between strike and workers' power than the 'one big strike' vision allows for. What are those links? Let us start towards the end of the chain, with workers' power itself.

When we talk about 'the workers taking power' we mean it quite literally. We do *not* mean the SWP or any other group — no matter how idealistic — taking power *on behalf* of the working class. We mean *the vast majority of the working class taking power directly into its own hands.*

Emancipation

That is what we mean when we say that the basic principle of revolutionary socialism is, in Marx's words, that:

> 'The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself.'

And that is why we describe revolutionary socialism as 'socialism *from below*, whereas even the most left wing reformist socialism is 'socialism *from above*'.

But how can the vast majority of the working class directly run society? Through a network of workers' councils or soviets ('soviet' is simply the Russian word for 'council').

Workers' councils are rooted in the workplace. Each factory, office or other workplace in a locality would elect delegates who would form the local workers' council. Below it each of those workplaces would have its own factory or office council of delegates elected from the shop floor. Above it each local workers' council would send delegates to a national (and eventually international) congress of workers' councils.

In this network of workers' councils every delegate is of course elected, but she or he is also subject to recall. Those who elected them can *at any time* (not just on 'election day') meet together and decide to replace them with somebody else. So democracy in workers' councils is an everyday affair. It isn't just a question of putting your cross by someone every five years.

Workers council democracy is also an active affair. Because it is rooted in the workplace, the 'electors' are much more than voting fodder. They meet together daily, discuss and decide together every issue as it comes up — not just leaving it to their delegates.

And workers council democracy is a total affair. Even according to its own claims democracy in Britain or any other capitalist country today extends to only tiny areas of life. Most of the people who take the decisions, from private capitalists, to heads of nationalised industries, from judges to generals and so on — all are unelected. But in a workers' council all 'officials' are delegates — in other words all 'officials' are elected and subject to recall. And 'officials' in a workers' council gain no material priveleges from their position because even if they need to be full-time on their post they are still paid only the same wage as an ordinary worker.

The final distinctive feature of workers' council democracy concerns the use of force. Workers having taken power would to begin with have to use at least some degree of force to coerce the incorrigeable anti-revolutionary minority. But they would not devolve this task on some special 'socialist police force'. Once again they would do it themselves. Workers' councils go hand in hand with an armed working class.

So when the workers take power they do so through workers' councils. But where do workers' councils come from? From the outline description we have just given it may sound as if they are a scheme dreamed up in the heads of revolutionaries. They are not. Our outline of workers' councils comes not just from the revolutionaries of the past. It comes from the workers' councils actually set up by workers in various countries and at various times in the past. And in each case, those workers' councils were set up not according to some revolutionary blueprint but came out of immediate working class struggles.

Demonstrations

Take the first and most famous case, Russia. The case from which workers' councils got their better known name — soviets. Soviets appeared twice in Russian history: first in 1905 and then in 1917.

In January 1905 peaceful, mainly working class, demonstrators marched in the Russian capital of St Petersburg to bring their grievances to the attention of the Czar. The Czar's soldiers fired on them killing

Not a professional police force but armed workers

hundreds, but sparking an explosion of strikes and protests that thundered through the year, shook Czarism to its foundations and have gone down in history as the 1905 Revolution.

The strikes of 1905 were both economic (over wages and conditions) and political (over aspects of Czarist rule). The best account we have of them, Rosa Luxemburg's *The Mass Strike*, points out how the political strikes affected the economic strikes and how, in turn, the economic strikes would produce political strikes. The political strikes gave workers the confidence to struggle over their own wages and conditions, and then those economic strikes in turn encountered new political problems that would generate new political strikes. The same process can be found in other big strike waves.

One of those economic strikes started at Stytin's print works in Moscow on 19 September. The typesetters struck for higher piece rates, including payment for punctuation marks! In the atmosphere of the times the strike rapidly spread to the rest of the printing industry and other industries in Moscow. Railway workers spread it throughout Russia and by October a general strike, now against Czarism, was paralysing the country.

Deepening

As part of the process of spreading and deepening the strike a meeting of factory delegates was called in St Petersburg on 13 October. The meeting was called, incidentally, on the initiative of the local reformist socialists, the Mensheviks. It set up a soviet (council) of workers' deputies. Within a month the soviet had over 500 delegates from 180 factories and workshops in St Petersburg. Moscow and other towns followed St Petersburg's example, and set up their own soviets.

The St Petersburg Soviet had been set up as a strike committee. But from the first day of its existence it was forced by the circumstances surrounding it to confront and provide solutions to wider problems. So, for example, the St Petersburg Soviet found itself organising food supplies, and implementing press freedom and the eight-hour day in the city. In other words it and the other soviets found themselves acting increasingly as an alternative government to that of the Czar.

I will return to this aspect of workers' councils shortly. For the moment let us finish answering the question of where workers' councils come from. In St Petersburg 1905 the answer is clearcut. A strike committee was transformed into a fully fledged workers' council by the sheer depth and scale of the strike it was conducting and the combined viciousness and weakness of the government it was opposing.

In St Petersburg in February 1917 the process was somewhat different. There were no months of strike as preparation as there had been between January and October 1905. And the Soviet in February 1917 was not set up as a strike committee as it had been in 1905. This time workers and now also the soldiers remembered their past experience of the Soviet and so when, in February 1917, a spontaneous insurrection in St Petersburg overthrew the Czar in a matter of days it seemed quite natural to the participants that they should straight away set up a soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies.

In other countries at other times when workers' councils, or something approaching them have emerged the process has had different variations. In Germany in November 1918 as the fleet mutinied to bring the war to an end workers and soldiers' councils (or in some cases parodies of them) mushroomed everywhere within a matter of days. Why? In part it was the pressure of the immediate situation with the old order simply collapsing around them, in part there was a network built up by the militant shop stewards who had organised anti-war strikes in the engineering industry — and in part there was, of course, the example of revolutionary Russia.

To move to more recent times, take the examples of Hungary in 1956 and Chile in 1972/3. After the Russians invaded Hungary in 1956 they were confronted with a general strike organised by a network of workers' councils of which the most important was in Budapest. Again, the extreme circumstances forced a strike committee to take on other tasks and become a fully fledged workers' council (although one doomed to defeat at the hands of Russian tanks so long as it remained confined to Hungary).

Finally, in Chile in 1972/3 as the bosses moved increasingly militantly to bring down the reformist Allende government, workers' resistance — maintaining supplies during the lorryowners' strike for instance — centred on committees from factories in each of the industrial suburbs of Santigo — the *cordones*. These committees were not quite fully fledged workers' councils — but they were approaching them.

Very different experiences, in which sometimes workers' councils seemed to have emerged fully-fledged in a matter of days out of apparently nothing, in others where they have taken months to mature out of bodies with clearly more limited goals. But behind the differences there are a number of important common features.

First of all, workers' councils or something tending towards them, are a product of revolutionary times; a product of big general workers' struggles when the survival of the old regime is seriously questioned.

But second, workers' councils do not arise according to some plan by revolutionaries. They come out of the class struggle. They emerge to perform concrete,and often to begin with, fairly limited tasks: whether those initial tasks be organising a strike, maintaining production against bosses' sabotage or the rather more general one of filling an apparent power vacuum.

And that brings us back to the point we have already touched upon in the case of Russia 1905. Whatever their origins workers' councils have a tendency towards being an alternative government. The expression Lenin and Trotsky used to describe the situation that resulted from this was *dual power*. It is a very useful concept and it is worth looking at exactly what it means. Again we will use the example of Russia.

Take the year 1905 first of all. We have seen that from its formation in October the St Petersburg Soviet (and soon other soviets) was an alternative government to that of the Czar. It was not just an alternative that *could* at some time in the future take on the functions of government. *It already was governing* when it controlled food supplies, implemented the eight-hour day and stopped press censorship. But the old Czarist government still remained. In other words there were *two* governments existing alongside each other in Russia at the same time — *dual* power.

There was not and could not be any permanently agreed division of authority between these two powers. Each was by its nature fundamentally hostile to the other. Sooner or later (and in all likelihood sooner, for the knife edge of dual power cannot last long) one would have to destroy the other. Either the Czar's government would crush the soviet or the soviet would crush the Czar's government. At the beginning of December the Czar's government dispersed the St Petersburg Soviet and arrested its leading members. The Moscow Soviet hit back in the only possible way — a general political strike and armed insurrection. But after nine days of street fighting they were defeated. Dual power had lasted two months and had been ended by the Czar's government crushing its rival.

Taking power

In 1917 the dual power between the soviets on the one hand and the provisional government on the other lasted for eight months. It was ended by the soviets crushing their rival and taking power.

What did it take for the soviets to win? Two things. First of all it required a well-conducted, well-coordinated and well-timed insurrection. There is no escaping from that. Armies can be massively subverted by political argument, but at the end of the day the last threads have to be cut by insurrection. Unless that happens then the old military discipline can be very rapidly reestablished and the armed forces once again become a firm instrument in the hands of the ruling class.

But even the best-planned and best-timed insurrection would be a foolhardy putsch unless the time actually was right. And for the time actually to be right it is necessary that *the majority of the working class are convinced of the need to take power into their own hands*. But how does that happen?

Let us look at how it happened in 1917. A spontaneous workers' and soldiers' revolt overthrew the Czar in February 1917. And as we have said the workers and soldiers who overthrew the Czar immediately followed the example of 1905 and set up soviets. It was a colossal leap in political awareness such as we have to pinch ourselves to imagine.

But enormous though the leap was it was by no means total. The soviets were effectively the only source of real authority immediately after the overthrow of the Czar but they *gave that authority up* to a provisional government of various 'liberal' politicians. The provisional government promptly set about rebuildng an effective

Hungary 1956: The Budapest workers' council proved in action that working class power and a stalinist state had nothing in common

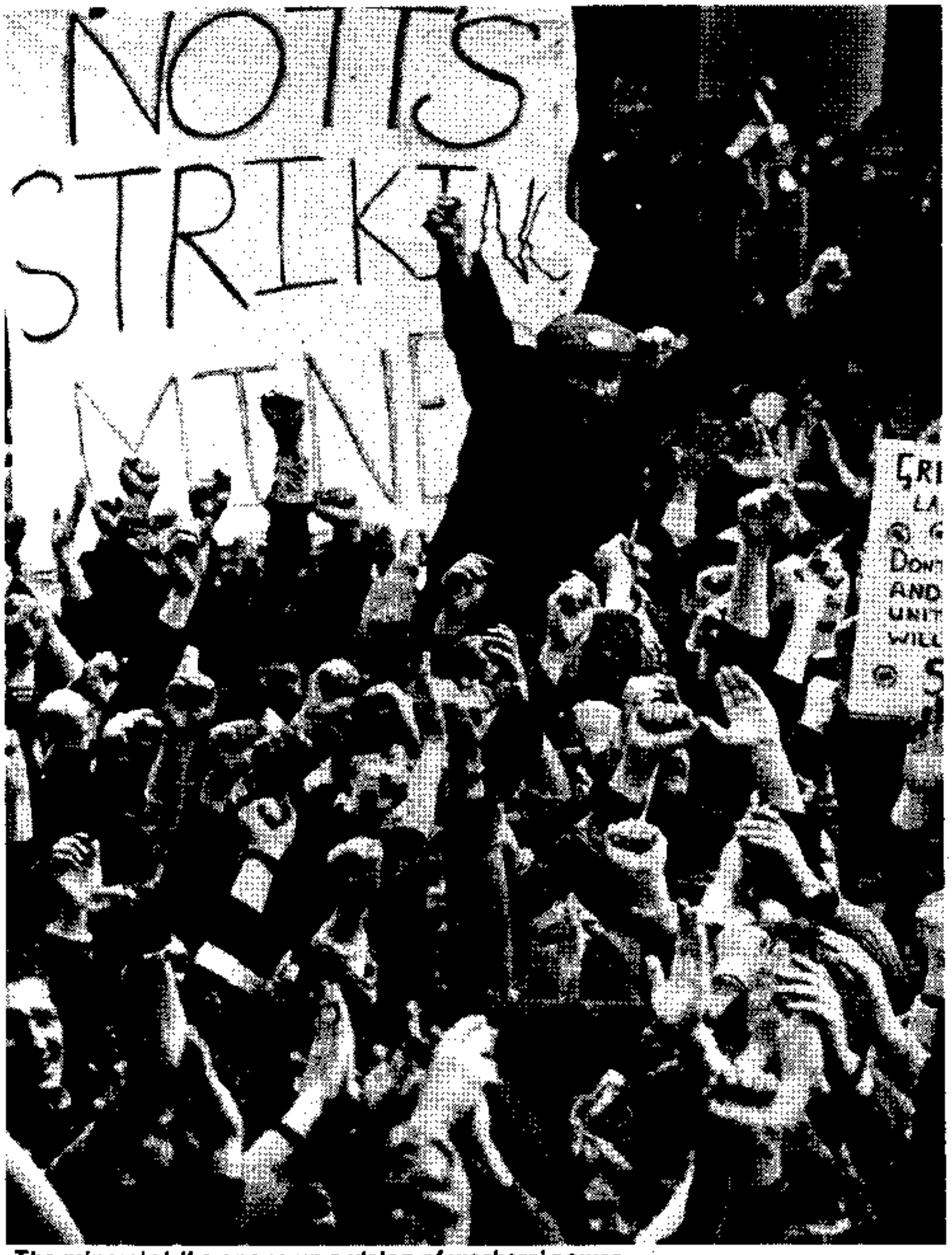
capitalist state machine in which, ultimately the soviets would have no place.

It was not an accident, or the result of a trick, that the soviets in February gave up their power. (Indeed you can find almost the same thing happening in Germany in November 1918 and in Spain in 1936). The reason why they gave up their power was because the vast majority of their delegates did not believe they should have the power in the first place. In other words the vast majority of the soviet delegates were reformists (in this case trading under the names of Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries).

Again there was no accident or trick in the fact that the vast majority of the soviet delegates in early 1917 were reformists. That has been the case wherever workers' councils have been set up, and it reflects the state of mind of the working class that sets them up.

For all the enormous leap in political awareness all sorts of old habits of deference or lack of confidence remain. So it seems quite natural to believe that useful though the workers' councils are, the business of central government should be left to some of the 'big names' among the former opposition politicians.

What happened in Russia between February and October 1917 was that the majority of the working class lost their illusions in the ability of reformist politicians to run things and gained a clear awareness that they themselves, throught their soviets could and would have to run things. That shift in the politics of the working class,



The miners' strike opens up a vision of workers' power

resulted in a shift in the political composition of the soviets. After February the vast majority of the delegates were Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, by October the vast majority were Bolsheviks.

Experience

In large part, that shift in workers' political awareness was the result of experience. Between February and October they experienced the fact, for instance, that the provisional government would not end the meaningless slaughter of the war. But the same sort of experience had been available to workers in other situations without producing the transformation of the majority of the workers into seeing the need to take power for themselves. Why did that happen in Russia in February and October 1917?

Because from the beginning, the Bolshevik Party was there hammering home the lessons of the workers' experience, hammering home above all the need for the workers to take power.

What did the Bolshevik Party require in order to be able to successfully hammer home the message 'All Power to the Soviets"?

First of all it had to know what that fundamental message was. It had to be a thorough-going *revolutionary* organisation. That may sound simple. But the pressures of the outside world are always to blur and distort revolutionary politics, to make them revolutionary in word only, but reformist underneath. There were many people like that (the whole of the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary Parties for instance) in Russia in 1917. The Bolsheviks had remained a real revolutionary organisation because they had a disciplined membership and because they had taken seriously questions of revolutionary theory.

Secondly, the Bolsheviks had to be in a position to get their message through to the large numbers of workers. That meant that they themselves had to start from a position of some *size*. Otherwise they would simply not have been heard, or at least they would have been heard too late. The Bolsheviks entered February 1917 with at least a sprinkling of members in most large workplaces and a wider layer of militants used to listening to them, only because they had built their party through both the good times and the bad times in the previous years.

But the Bolsheviks required a third thing. It was not enough to know what the message was and to have the forces to be heard. They also needed to know *how to get the message across*. And that was not easy. It was not just a question of repeating at every possible opportunity 'All Power to the Soviets', nor even of being able to provide the most sophisticated abstract arguments in support of that slogan (important though that was in individual discussions). It was necessary for them to know how to lock their message in to the experience of the workers. In other words it was necessary for them to know how to *intervene* in struggle, and how to *agitate*.

To do those things properly requires experience. It requires an organisation which knows how to operate together, which knows how to assess the balance of forces, the time to advance and the time to retreat, how to steer the narrow course between being sectarian and abandoning its distinctive positions.

It takes time, *during non-revolutionary periods*, to develop those qualities in an organisation. Leave it to the revolutionary times and even if your revolutionary party has the principles and by some stroke of luck the forces, without the experience, it will mess things up. And in revolutionary times you are not given the chance to try again!

Starting point

Now that brings us back near the starting point of this article; the links between miners' strike and workers' power. Workers' power, we have seen is the power of workers' councils or soviets. Workers' councils begin to emerge at high points of class struggle, as a product of some of the immediate demands of the struggle. They tend, by the pressure of events, to be an alternative government.

All this can happen without the organised intervention of revolutionaries (although, no doubt the organised intervention of revolutionaries can speed and deepen the process). What the organised intervention of revolutionaries is necessary for is winning the majority of the working class over to the need to take power and organising the insurrection in which the working class finally takes power.

For that organised intervention of revolutionaries to actually happen requires that at the beginning of a revolutionary crisis there is already in existence a revolutionary party of the Bolshevik type, principled, sizeable and experienced. It will not be in existence then unless it is built now — out of struggles like the miners' strike.

Of all the many links in the chain from miners' strike to workers' power, the link of the party is the one we can — and must — grasp here and now. The miners' strike we began by saying, will open up to many people a vision of workers' power. But it will remain that, a vision (and a fading one) unless it serves as an impulse to turn the vision into reality.

In other words, as the impulse to join in the building of a revolutionary party. That is why, during the miners' strike, we are so pushy and so unashamed in calling upon people to join the SWP.■

Red Ken's gravy train

Citizen Ken
John Carvel
Chatto & Windus £2.95

Ken Livingstone has two great assets for a politician. He can live with and handle the media better than any other person on the left with the possible exception of Arthur Scargill, and he is a good speaker that can win over a hostile audience with his good humour and charm, a speaker on the same level as Tony Benn or Denis Healey.

But neither of these abilities would have been much use if Livingstone had not been projected into the public eye. Unlike most other left reformist leaders Livingstone has come to fame without a mass popular base. His following has come in reaction to media attention. Unlike Scargill's base in the NUM or Benn's in the constituency parties, or Scanlon's in the Broad Left, Livingstone has been the creation of the media.

The rise of Red Ken is most unusual for a left leader, working in the usually ignored petty intrigues of local government, once the area of the Labour right, corruption and municipal socialism.

The third great ability of Livingstone's that has helped his rise to infamy is his ability to win a majority in small committees and his involvement in the rather squalid petty wheeling and dealings that make up local politics.

Good causes

With these three assets and abilities comes a mixture of idealism and pragmatism. Our Ken has spoken out over Britain's role in Ireland, against gay and women's oppression and for a number of good causes. Many of these we totally support.

At the same time he has gone along with the law lords kitting of Fares Fair and sabotaged the Can't Pay Won't Pay campaign. He has crossed picket lines at County Hall and denounced the workers under his charge.

We have had a flood of socialist opinion and words on a whole range of topics but with little action supporting it. In a reverse of the past regimes of the 50s and 60s who controlled local government and gave real reforms (built houses, schools, baths etc) and preached reactionary ideas, Livingstone has preached socialism while delivering little.

In fact as this book shows at key points in his career, Livingstone has been saved politically by the government's over-reaction against him; that and his pragmatism. So while he was hailed as the great Marxist threat to life as we know it by the press, he was quietly dropping the GLC programme of reforms he had been elected on.

Who would have thought that the government in abolishing the metropolitan counties would win over the great majority of Londoners to supporting Red Ken? Who would have thought that he would have gone round the conferences of the SDP, Liberals and Tories to speak at fringe meetings *and* win standing ovations?

At present, it would seem (more by good fortune than planning) that Ken has won through. From the *Sun*'s most hated man in Britain to come second in Radio 4's poll of man of the year (second to the pope) and second to Paul Weller in the NME's most wonderful person poll, is no mean achievement.

So much for the great influence of the press and the media some of the left go on about. Who else could figure in both a Radio 4 and an NME poll? Who else could be given standing ovations by the SDP, the Tories and speak on Socialist Action and Socialist Organiser platforms? To those who see our Ken as a great left leader, what on earth can they make of the SDP and Tory adoration?

But he is not all hype and twinkling grin on the TV chat shows. Though he didn't get to where he is by building a large base he has won a following being head of the GLC, and again it seems to have been by good luck rather than planning.

The GLC has not built any houses, new sports complexes or solved the plight of the down and outs. Indeed poverty and deprivation has increased since he took over. The one growth area has been the grants dished out to community and minority groups.

The GLC has been literally able to buy off political protest groups and in the period of low levels of struggle many have been sucked into the GLC machine. The remnants of the 'new left' of the 60s, people who once thought of building barricades in Red Lion Square, are now populating the ever-expanding sub-committees at County Hall. The gravy train of local government which was once the home of the Labour right, corrupt housing contracts and the like has been replaced with the gravy train of the GLC grant programme.

Some Tories see this as a great scheme by Livingstone to construct a patronage system of political power similar to that operated in 18th century England. They point out that if only 50 percent of the population vote in local elections, you only need 25 percent of the vote in marginals to gain and maintain power and that 25 percent can be won over by appealing to gays, women's rights supporters, black groups and other 'special interest' groups.

This conspiracy theory of the right is obviously nonsense, but it does contain a grain of truth and that is the economic base from which Ken has built a sizeable and vocal following. But it owes little to 18th century Whiggery and much to the 1960s and 70s American example. In America local government is even more corrupt than here. There it really is a complex web of special interest groups fighting it out over the grant allowances.

In Britain such grant-giving politics is new. Local government politics was like national politics only even more boring and with even greyer politicians. Red Ken has changed all this by moving towards the American model. And of course, it is so much cheaper than real reforms. Tokenism is the name we give to such grants. Instead of the hundreds of millions needed to solve a problem the GLC will give a few million to the campaign fighting or studying the problem. It's cheaper and you neutralise the would-be vocal opposition. It also covers the weakness or incapacity of reformism to deliver the goods.

This then has been the essence and style of Livingstone. It is too early to tell whether he will make it to be leader of the Labour Party or even into parliament but he has the style, pragmatism and double-think.

Noel Halifax

China on the surface

Beijing street voices
David S G Goodman
Marion Boyars Ltd £5.95
Alive in the bitter sea
Fox Butterfield
Coronet £4.50

Ten years ago, writing on China was dominated by naive liberals who churned out endless numbers of books devoted to proving what a wonderful place China was, and how much the ordinary people loved their great leader, Chairman Mao. As the post-Mao leadership have shown this up for the nonsense it always was, such writers have gradually dropped out of sight. They have been replaced by a new school of cynical liberals, whose writings show something of the brutal realities of life in China. But while fewer lies are being told, the quality of analysis is in most cases, little better.

These two books demonstrate very well both the strengths and weaknesses of this new school. *Beijing street voices* is essentially an anthology of poetry from Peking's Democracy Wall, drawn from the first five months of its existence. As such it is a useful document for China specialists, but too limited in its scope to be of real interest to anyone else.

Crushed

It is also extremely depressing. For while the short accompanying essays are quite sharp on the weaknesses of the movement which led to its downfall, there is no account of how it survived the repression of 1979, albeit in a much smaller form, and organised underground until it was finally crushed in 1983. And in focussing on the poetry of the movement, it gives very little idea of their politics or their activities.

The only exception to this, is an essay by an (un-named leader) of the movement, which is highly critical of the early optimism of the movement, and by stressing the centrality of theory and organisation, tries to point a way forward for the movement. It has a clarity and a smell of struggle almost entirely missing from the rest of the book.

Alive in the bitter sea is much broader in its scope, and in consequence much better. A journalist's account of the two years he spent in Peking as a reporter for the *New York Times*, it gives a marvellously vivid picture of daily life in the cities. Interviews with Chinese met more or less at random contain detailed insights into the inefficiency of the bureaucracy, the cynicism and bitterness of the mass of the population, the hypocrisy of official sexual morality and the sheer viciousness of the Cultural Revolution. It is one of the best empirical descriptions of China since Mao, yet produced, if only because it allows the Chinese interviewed to speak at length about China as they see it.

What is missing is the Chinese working class. The chapter on industry, to the extent that it mentions the workplace, relates stories of workers sitting around playing cards and taking long mid-day naps. No mention of the horrific health and safety conditions in Chinese factories, nor of the extremely long hours worked in them. And in a book that pays so much attention to dissent, it is astonishing that not a single strike is mentioned. The author's focus on oppression leads him to see struggle in China as simply between democracy and totalitarianism, without any notion of class.

If the account is a liberal one, the analysis (what little there is of it) is even worse. We are told, for instance, that Mao came to power because 'more than 2,000 years of imperial tradition have created in the collective unconscious the desire for a supreme, quasi mystical leader.' The book is littered with similar trite idiocies about human nature and the strength of the 'Chinese spirit' (though what that is we're never told).

Despite these faults, the book is well worth reading as an attempt at depicting how Chinese society looks on the surface. But for an understanding of the dynamics of Chinese society, comrades will have to turn to Nigel Harris's much-underrated *The Mandate of Heaven*.

George Gorton

Rules of war

Bruce Kent, general secretary of CND, has been addressing himself to members of the armed forces at Greenham Common. In a speech last month (published in the *Guardian*) he urged them 'if no other course of action is possible refuse to obey illegal and immoral cruise missile-related orders'.

It is excellent that such a call should be made. We certainly aren't going to get rid of nuclear weapons or the system that produces them without soldiers refusing to obey orders.

Unfortunately, there is however a serious problem with the way Bruce Kent frames his appeal.

The problem concerns that phrase 'illegal and immoral'. It isn't the 'immoral' that worries me. Bruce Kent and I have some very different views on morality but we are in complete agreement that wiping out the population of Kiev or Gorky (or Cleveland or Minneapolis) thereby starting a world-wide nuclear holocaust, would be an act of total immorality.

It is the 'illegal' that worries me. And it worries me a lot because CND has devoted much attention recently to the 'legality' of nuclear weapons and Bruce Kent makes the issue central to his argument.

'We seem to have forgotten', he says 'that, over the years the international community has laid down norms which were meant to be observed to restrain even the barbarity of warfare. They range from the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 to the Geneva additional Protocol of 1977.'

'War crime'

Bruce Kent then quotes approvingly Article 25 of the Hague Convention of 1907 which reads: 'The attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended is prohibited.' From that and other League of Nations and UN resolutions, he concludes that the use of nuclear weapons would constitute a 'war crime' and therefore orders to soldiers to use them would be 'illegal'.

Just reflect a moment on that Hague convention article on the 'bombardment of undefended towns'. Back in 1915 when the Hague Convention was fresh in people's minds and the First World War even fresher there was much outcry in Britain about the bombardment of undefended towns by the Germans. The Irish revolutionary socialist James Connolly had this to say about it:

> 'One would think to read such diatribes that it was not a recognised practice of all naval warfare. For generations the public of these islands have been reading of Great Britain sending punitive expeditions against native tribes in Africa, the islands of the ocean or parts of Asia.
>
> 'It may be that benighted native has stolen a cask of rum from the compound of a missionary, and thrown a stone at the holy man of God when the latter demanded the return of the cask in question. Immediately a British man-of-war is ordered to that coast, opens fire upon and destroys the whole town, indiscriminately massacring the majority of its inhabitants ... all to punish one or two persons for a slight on a British subject ...
>
> 'Up and down the world the British fleet has gone, carrying out such orders and bombarding such undefended places without ever moving the inkslingers of the jingo press to protest. It all depends, it appears, upon whose houses are being bombarded, whose people are being massacred, whose limbs are torn from the body, whose bodies are blown to a ghastly mass of mangled flesh and blood

James Connolly executed—'rules of war' did not apply

Bruce Kent—asks soliders to disobey 'illegal' orders

and bones. The crime of the Germans seems to consist in believing that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.'

Of course no one is accusing Bruce Kent of the sort of double standards to which Connolly was referring and which could be found on the front page of the *Sun* during any day of the Falklands War. Far from it. Bruce Kent quite rightly devotes the vast bulk of his attention to the armed forces of his own ruling class.

But who is right on the question of 'the rules of war'? James Connolly who dismissed them with contempt? (His article was entitled 'Can warfare be civilised?' and he concluded with a resounding 'No!') Or Bruce Kent who wants to use them to reinforce his argument?

Connolly, alas had little time left to develop his case — he was dead less than eighteen months later after these lines were written. But the manner of his death shed some light on the 'rules of war'. The British government had him executed after he and his fellow soldiers in the Easter Rising had surrendered. Hague Conventions about the treatment of prisoners don't unfortunately apply if the prisoners are not part of the army of a legally recognised state!

But what of the 'bombardment of undefended towns' in subsequent years. Bruce Kent adds to his legal case a resolution proposed by Britain and passed unanimously by the League of Nations in 1938 that 'the intended bombing of civilian populations is illegal.' Within seven years the British government had killed hundreds of thousands of civilians in the terror bombing of Hamburg, Dresden and other German towns and happily endorsed their American ally doing the same in Tokyo and — it is really staggering that Bruce Kent doesn't mention this — in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

It does not take much imagination to work out what would have happened had bomber crews refused to fly these particular missions. There would have been a summary court martial and, in all probability, summary executions. And the plea that they were disobeying 'unlawful' orders would have been quite literally laughed out of court.

The only way those bomber crews could have made their refusal effective and actually stopped those bombings would have been to mutiny — and mutiny successfully. Successful mutinies require a crisis in society as a whole, which is one of the reasons why I think Bruce Kent is wrong not to try and link the fight against nuclear weapons with other issues. They also require at least some measure of violence, which is one of the reasons I think Bruce Kent is wrong to be a pacifist.

And, most obviously, successful mutinies require a clear and resolute disregard for the mystique of law and authority. That sort of attitude is not fostered by asking us to take seriously Hague conventions and Geneva protocols. Nor is it fostered by asking us to accept as the 'international community' the international assemblies of robber barons who periodically mouth pacific platitudes so as to better dupe their subjects.

Pete Goodwin