

# workers' ACTION

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## STRIKES

## CHALLENGE

## LOW PAY

## BOSSSES SQUEAL IN ALARM

ROAD HAULAGE drivers earn £53 for a basic 40 hour week. In terms of basic pay, they are low paid workers.

Only long hours of overtime — the longest hours of any industry in the country — push the drivers' wages above that miserable rate. The bosses' offer — a new rate of £60 — would leave the drivers no better off after a year's inflation.

The drivers are determined to win their claim of £65 and come out of the struggle with some real gains.

The crisis talk, the union-bashing speeches by Margaret Thatcher, and the bosses' calls for a state of emergency to be declared and troops sent in, are all signs of the fact that the drivers can win. So can the Texaco tanker drivers, who are stick-

ing out for something better than an offer which is called "worth up to 15%" but in fact would bring £3 on the basic week. And so can the ASLEF train drivers, also demanding an increase.

The alarm bells are designed to put the frighteners on the strikers and to prepare the ground for strike-breaking. The people who sound the alarm about possible shutdowns and shortages never draw the conclusion that the workers should get their money now!

But the road haulage industry and the giant oil firms are rich. These claims can be won at the expense of profits.

And if they are won, that will further weaken the government's attempts to impose the 5% limit on one million local government manual work-

ers who are demanding a £60 minimum wage. It will make it easier for the public sector workers to force the government to pay out more state money for wages... and less for weaponry, for top state bosses' and armed forces chiefs' salaries, and for handouts to the bosses.

The bosses' talk about 'crisis' and 'chaos' only shows up the nature of their system. Under this system, where production is for profit and profits depend on exploiting workers, a fit of panic can be caused by any determined refusal by workers to submit to the bosses' plans.

Let them panic. The drivers and the local government manual workers need to win their demands. Support the lorry drivers! Finish off the 5% limit! End low pay!

## IRAN: the Shah quits and the cracks widen

THE IRANIAN dictatorship has cracked at last. For a year the Shah held firm against escalating street demonstrations; for four months he held firm against a strike wave which has paralysed Iran's economy.

The tremendous wealth devoted to building up Iran's armed forces, and the powerful backing the Shah got from the US and Britain, gave his tyranny exceptional strength. But since early December, street militancy has burst the bounds of the

Iranian state's military and political control.

Now the Shah is to quit the country, leaving the government in the hands of a tame politician, Shapour Bakhtiar.

This crack is important. Just because the Shah's dictatorship was so rigid, a tremendous shake-up is likely once the smallest crack is opened. The first sign came a few days after the Shah's handover to Bakhtiar was announced:

the army's commander-in-chief, Gen. Oveissy, resigned and quit the country.

With the Shah gone, with Oveissy gone, the army's discipline must become shakier and shakier. And the mass movement shows no sign of being duped by Bakhtiar. Even the ultra-moderate National Front has condemned him.

Bakhtiar has ended press censorship, and promised partial dismantlement of SAVAK, a 'gradual' end to martial law, and elections within six months. But he is unlikely to last long.

There is a very narrow basis for bourgeois democracy in Iran. The bourgeoisie depends mainly on getting a share of the oil profits gathered in by the state, not on its own productive enterprise. It has little political tradition, no solid parties.

The US and the British government knew what they were doing when they supported the Shah's rule as the regime most likely to provide a stable framework for capitalist exploitation in Iran.

Bakhtiar could be replaced by a more radical politician, who offers more reforms in an effort to stem the mass movement short of socialist revolution. The chances of such political deception working rest on the fact that clear working-class demands have still not made themselves heard in sharp contrast to the catch-all Islamic slogans, and the limits that the movement must run up against through sheer physical exhaustion if it does not make a decisive step forward soon.

But the promises of reform will be worth very little. For once the revolution begins to be tamed, an army coup becomes the most likely formula for counter-revolution.

The US has not dropped its involvement in Iran because the Shah is quitting. A senior general, Robert Huyser, has just gone to Tehran to discuss with Iranian military chiefs.

Now, probably, the US is advising against a premature strike. But when the time comes they will give the signal as they did in 1953. And we can expect the British government to be the faithful supporter of US foreign policy, as usual.

Our solidarity is still necessary: full solidarity with the Iranian workers, until they carry their revolution through to workers' power. And if the Shah chooses Britain as his place of refuge, we must make sure that he get the welcome that befits a bloodstained tyrant.



## Boat people: An exercise in anti-communism

THE press is aflame with angry articles describing the plight of the 'boat people', the thousands of Vietnamese who have fled their country by sea. The human sympathies of millions of readers are exploited in the interests of a campaign against Vietnam's anti-capitalist regime.

The common line has been that these "human cargoes" are refugees fleeing from the insufferable abuses of a 'communist regime'.

Who, then, are the 'refugees'? The vast majority seem to be leaving Vietnam for economic reasons. A number of leading officials of the Vietnamese Communist Party have recently admitted that the country is in a state of complete economic disorder — and that the Party's policies are partly to blame.

### Crisis

The dominant factors behind the economic crisis, however, are the country's devastation and exhaustion after the long war against the USA. On top of that, recent harvests have been very poor because of bad weather conditions.

The economic situation — above all the food shortage — has dictated a policy of mass mobilisation of 'unproductive' townspeople for agricultural work. According

to the Vietnamese government many of the 'boat people' are people who have not been prepared to carry out what is generally admitted to be difficult and unpleasant work. Some of their own statements bear this out.

### Exodus

The very high proportion of ethnic Chinese among the 'refugees' — not to mention those entering China from the North of Vietnam — does suggest that the Chinese minority in Vietnam feels very insecure in the face of Vietnamese nationalism. In part the large number of Chinese leaving in the South is accounted for by the government action against traders, of whom a high proportion are Chinese.

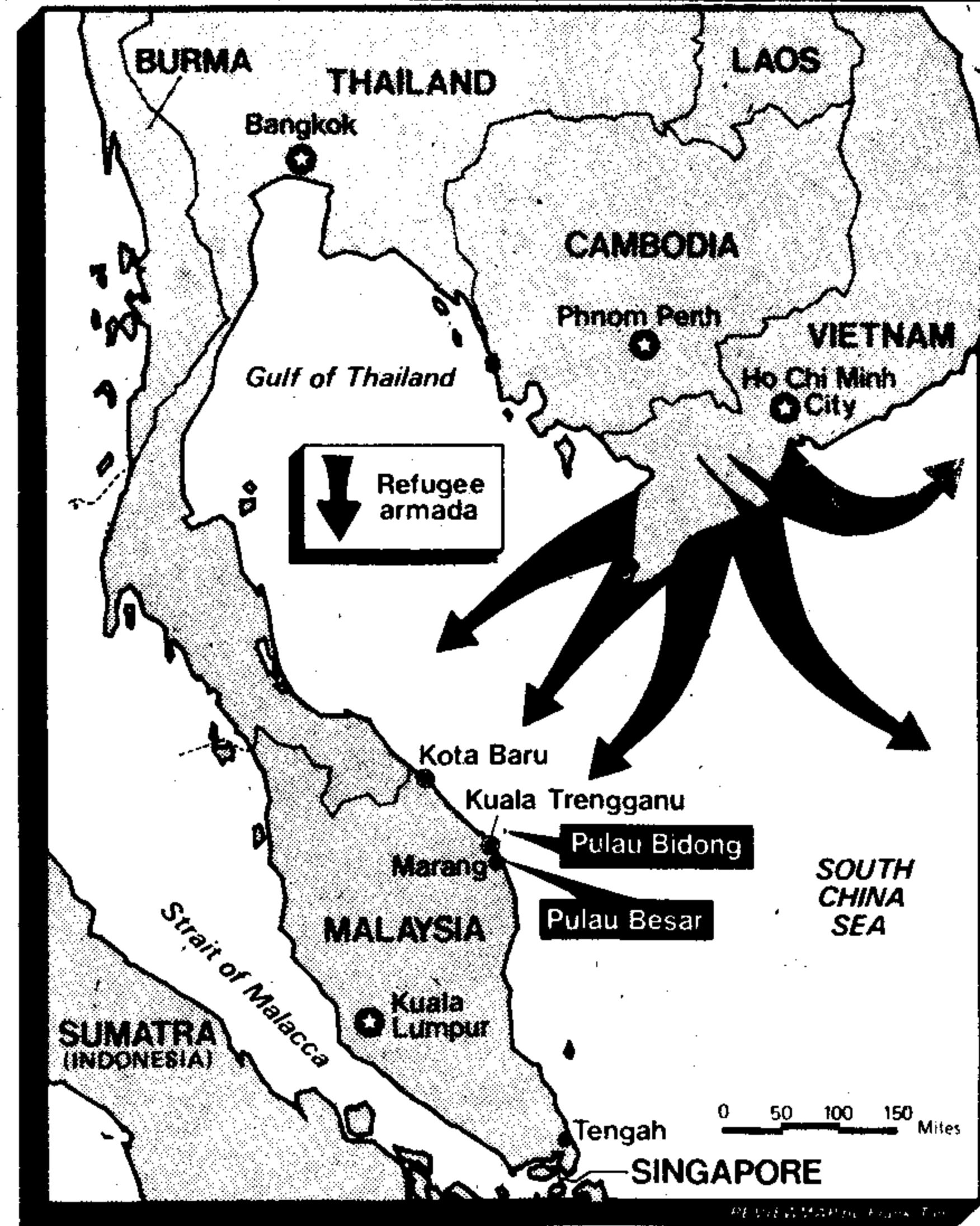
From many quarters there has come the complaint that the Vietnamese government is not stopping — is even helping to organise — the exodus. No doubt if Vietnam were to stop it, those same voices would be accusing it of being a virtual prison camp.

The cry of various governments that their countries are overcrowded and can't afford to take in the 'refugees' is ridiculous. It appears that most of them would like to go to Canada, Australia or the United States — very

crowded countries indeed!

If there were a rapid absorption of these people by the countries that they themselves want to live in — countries that spared no expense when it came to bombing Vietnam — there would be no problem at all. But that would take away an incident easy to exploit for the purpose of anti-communist propaganda and for a belated attempt to justify the war on Vietnam.

JAMES DAVIES



Luong Bot Chau and her children finally arrived in Malaysia... after their ship was attacked by pirates off the coast of Thailand.

## Cambodia: the masters of war shed pious tears

NO-ONE outside the country knows just what the people of Cambodia think about the overthrow of their government on Sunday 7th January.

Certainly few of them will regret the fall of the regime set up after the collapse of the American-supported Lon Nol government in 1975. Whether this ultra-nationalist regime caused the death of millions, or 'merely' of tens of thousands, with its political purges and forced population movements; whether its crushing of all individual liberty was as total as reported, or merely partial — it was an oppressor not only for the old ruling classes but for the mass of the people.

A military-bureaucratic totalitarian regime clamped down on Cambodia and tried to 'revolutionise' Cambodian society by flattening it, using wholesale massacres and terror not just against former exploiters but against the whole people, particularly against the town population.

At the same time, not many Cambodians will be glad at the fact that their capital has been taken by the Vietnamese army.

The Vietnamese say that the government led by Pol Pot, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan was overthrown not by Vietnamese but by an internal revolt of the Cambodian people. The 'National Salvation Front' of Cambodia dates back, they say, to a

rebellion led by one of Pol Pot's former lieutenants, So Phim, in May 1978.

A genuine internal movement of opposition to Pol Pot may well have existed. It is not conceivable, however, that it could have formed itself into regular army units, complete with artillery, in a few months. The taking of Phnom Penh was clearly the work of the Vietnamese.

One journal — the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, a Hong Kong business weekly — has made some effort to assess the degree of support among the Cambodian people for the Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies. "Surprisingly", it reports, "the Front seems to be getting popular support..."

### Bombs

Apart from that — and apart from the Moscow-aligned press's parroting of the official stories coming from Hanoi — the press coverage of the conflict has been almost unanimously anti-Vietnamese. The press sees a chance to 'prove' once again that revolutions always turn out badly.

Official Western hypocrisy had a feast with its condemnations of Vietnam. The US State Department, which only a few years ago was dropping as many bombs on Cambodia as the arms factories of the richest country in

the world could produce, piously condemned Vietnam's intervention "on principle".

It is a fact that any Cambodian inclined to trust the Vietnamese would do well to be more suspicious. In Laos, the Vietnamese rudely dominate the country, flouting the wishes of the Laotians.

But only the most empty liberalism can put the Vietnamese government's crimes — which do exist, and which the Vietnamese leaders must responsibility for — on a level with the terrible devastation inflicted by the French and by the USA on Indochina. Indeed, the root of the present troubles lies in that devastation... and in the treachery of the Russian and Chinese bureaucracies during Indochina's long wars for liberation.

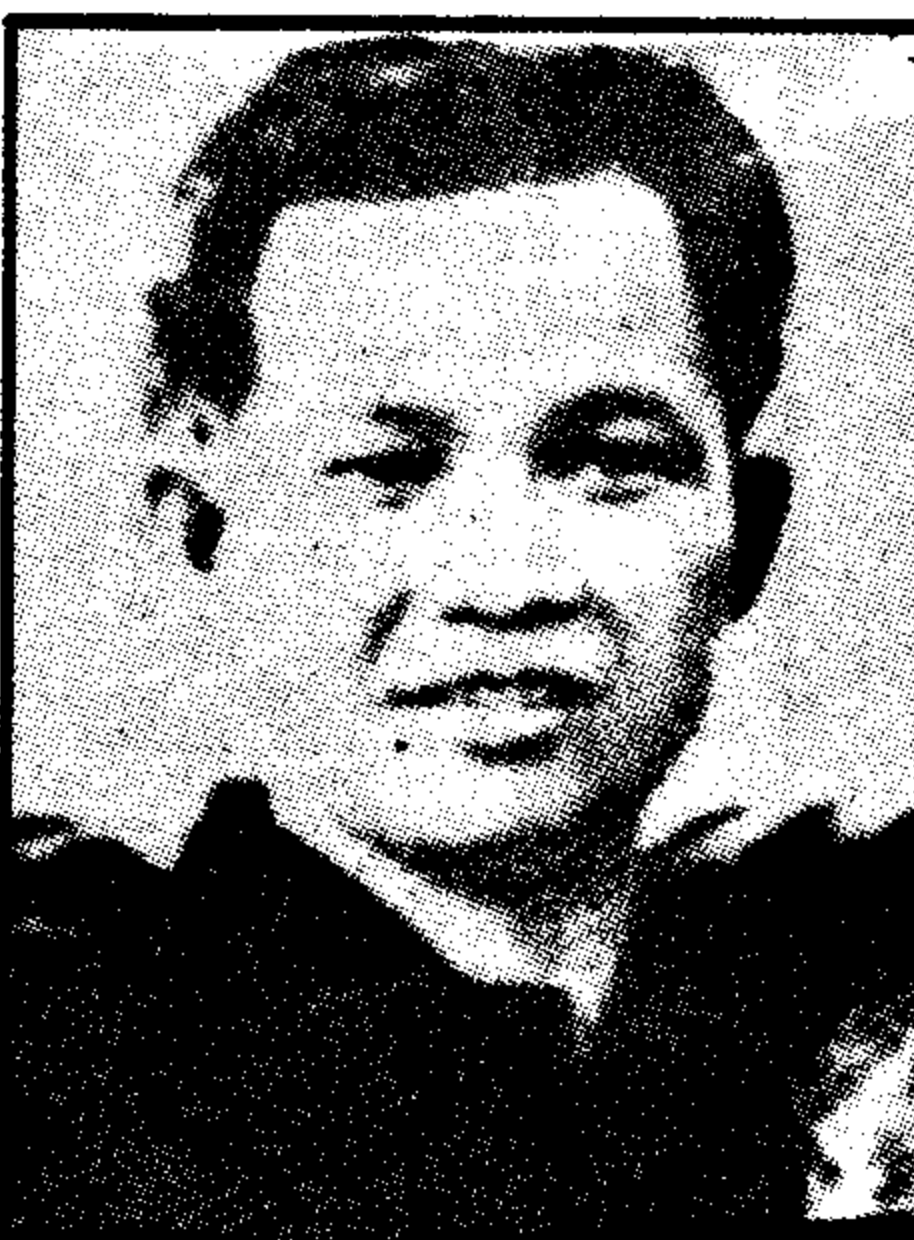
The split between the Pol Pot / Ieng Sary / Khieu Samphan group of Cambodian nationalists and the Vietnamese revolutionaries seems to date back to 1954. In that year the Vietnamese, under Russian pressure, accepted a deal ending their war against French colonialism. Although the French had been practically routed, the deal left South Vietnam within the sphere of imperialism. It also instructed the Cambodian revolutionaries to lay down their arms and submit to Prince Sihanouk.

The Cambodian nationalists' bitterness against Viet-

nam became more intense in 1973, when the Vietnamese concluded the Paris Peace Accords with the USA.

The Vietnamese had little choice but to make concessions: in just 11 days at the end of 1972, US bombing over North Vietnam had exceeded the total tonnage dropped by Germany on Britain in the whole period 1940 to 1945. China and Russia had blandly stood by, making minimal protests, more concerned for their 'détente' with the USA than with the fate of the Vietnamese people.

One of the concessions made under threat of being bombed back into the Stone Age was that Cambodia was left exposed to the full force of the US military machine. 100,000 Cambodians died in the months that followed.



Cambodia's deposed Premier Khieu Samphan

The Cambodian revolutionaries came to power in 1975 as embittered nationalists. They took the Stalinist notion of 'socialism in one country' to an extreme of isolationist economics, and the Jacobin notion of revolutionary levelling to an extreme of totalitarian terror.

Even with China, their relations were not close — a fact illustrated on 8th January, when the Peking Government put up Sihanouk to give a press conference denouncing the Vietnamese but also condemning Pol Pot's government. However, China, wanting to make sure that Vietnam did not become an important and de-stabilising rival in Asia, had encouraged Cambodia in its border conflict with Vietnam.

Fighting broke out in September 1977. Both states kept a thick wall of secrecy over the war, making it impossible to trust motives on either side.

Now China will give aid to Pol Pot to continue guerrilla warfare against the new Cambodian government — tying down the Vietnamese, further straining Vietnam's war-shattered economy, and thus serving China's purpose of preventing the emergence of a powerful state on its borders.

The origins of Cambodia's tragedy do not lie with revolutions being bound to go wrong, or with any 'Vietnamese imperialism'. They lie with the horrors imposed on Indochina by French and US imperialism, and the cynicism with which the Stalinist bureaucracies of China and Russia have misled the Indochinese revolutionaries and used their struggles as small change for their diplomatic manoeuvres.

COLIN FOSTER

## Iran demos: we must be able to unite

BETWEEN December 9th and 17th there were three separate Iranian solidarity demonstrations in London, all on almost identical slogans: Down with the Shah, stop arms sales.

And the demonstrations themselves were marred by disputes over the exclusion of particular political groups. At the Iranian Solidarity Campaign demonstration (on the 9th) the Campaign Against Repression in Iran was refused a speaker. One of the major objections many Iranian militants have to CARI is that it does not exclude supporters of the Tudeh Party (the Iranian Moscow-aligned 'Communist' Party). And on more than one demonstration recently, a left wing group, the Spartacist League, has been excluded because of its slogan 'Down with the mullahs'.

### Radical

Arguments are produced that CARI has been slow to raise radical slogans, that the Tudeh Party is (because it has so closely reflected the USSR's territorial and economic ambitions in Iran) qualitatively more discredited and reactionary than other Stalinist parties, or that the Spartacist League's slogan is reactionary.

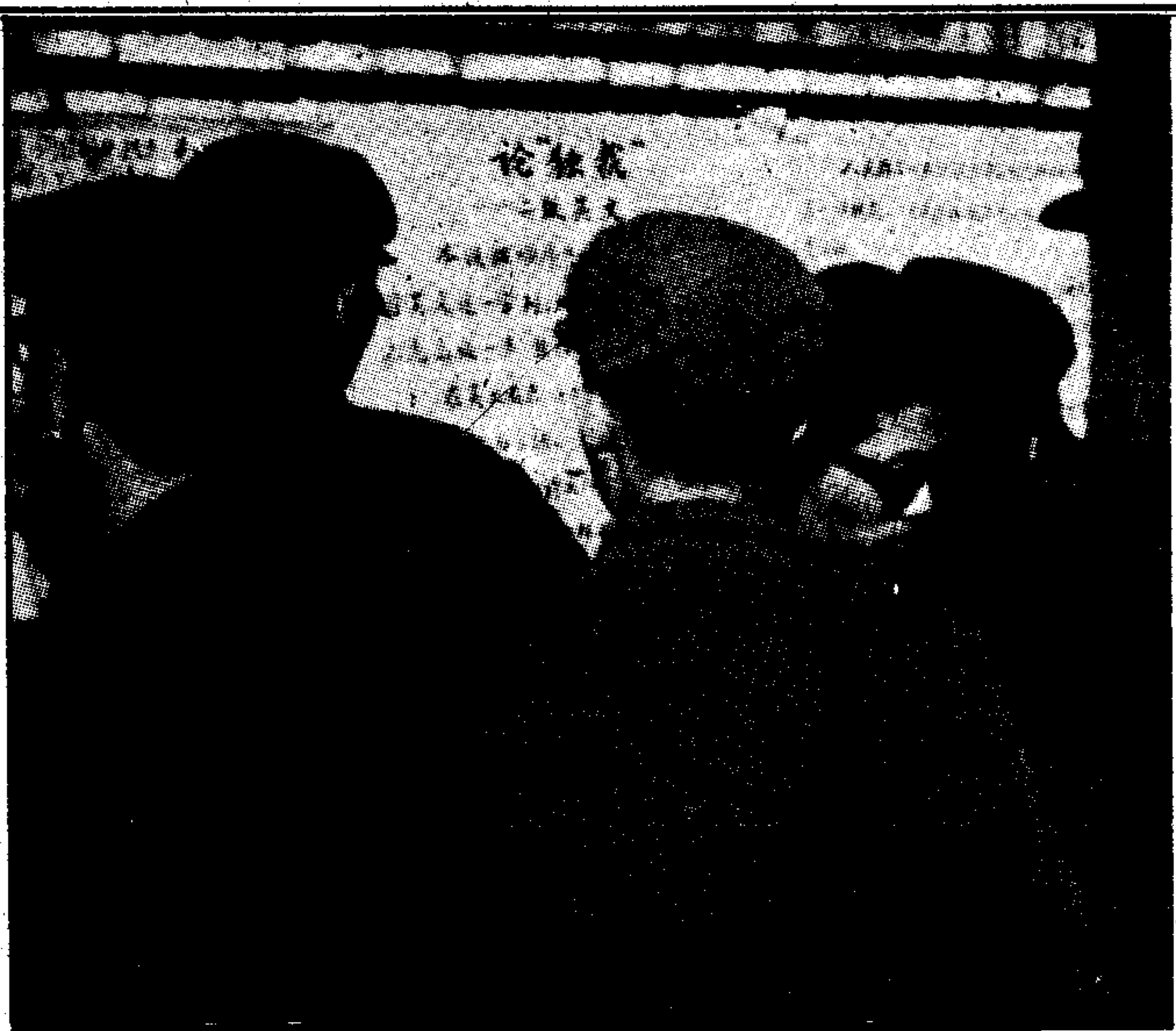
These arguments are in our view contrived, and in any case besides the point. The way to build a strong solidarity campaign is through a united front, without political exclusions.

Every group supporting the general campaign slogans should be able to participate with its own ideas and banners. There is only one condition: that these groups are not disruptive... but that also means that they respect others' right to put forward their ideas, even when they disagree.

### Police

Any worker can see that in a strike Catholic workers, Protestant workers, Muslim workers, atheist workers, Tory workers, socialist workers, must all be able to unite in action while still having the right to express their various ideas. The same principle applies to demonstrations and solidarity movements. Splits and exclusions are counter-productive. They also often give an opportunity for the police to interfere.

A united solidarity campaign for the Iranian struggle must be built: and the only possible basis for stable unity is non-exclusion.



## China and the US: the pay-offs and the sell-outs

FROM BEING the Red Threat in the Far East, China has rapidly become the favourite friend of right-wing Western politicians. CHEUNG SIU MING explains why.

THE USA's opening of official relations with China, as from January 1st, has finally drawn a line under Maoism as a political current. China's support for dictatorships like Iran, Chile and Argentina is now declared to be the rule, not an exception: China's international alliances are with the imperialist powers, and directed against the USSR as enemy no. 1.

The present trend dates back to Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Peking in 1971. In 1972 Mao welcomed Nixon while the B52s poured down bombs on North Vietnam. A series of talks and visits since then have paved the way to agreement.

But the roots of the right-wing line go back before 1971. China's nationalist bureaucracy has always preferred diplomatic manoeuvres to the perspective of international revolution. It has always subordinated the international struggle to its supposed 'socialism in one country'.

### Bait

After its break with the USSR, in 1960, China could find allies only among Third World countries. Correspondingly, it preached an apparently-radical line. The radical phrases were always muted by the 'bloc of four classes' theory which put 'national-democratic revolution' next on the agenda in the Third World countries, not socialist revolution.

As the USA came to recognise the inevitability of defeat in the Vietnam war, and tried to adjust its foreign policy correspondingly, the door opened for China to come to terms with imperialism. The radical phrases were twisted into the 'Three Worlds' theory (the 'fight against the superpowers', which quickly became a purely anti-USSR line).

The Chinese-US agreement offers economic gains on both sides. On the Chinese side, the bureaucracy needs advanced technology from the world's most powerful nation if it is to succeed in its policy of 'four modernisations' — modernisation of agriculture, industry, science and armaments.

At the same time, US capitalist interests want to make sure they get a big share of the business openings created by China's turn away from an isolationist, self-help economic policy. Up to now, because of the lack of official relations, US interests have been lagging behind the Japanese and the EEC.

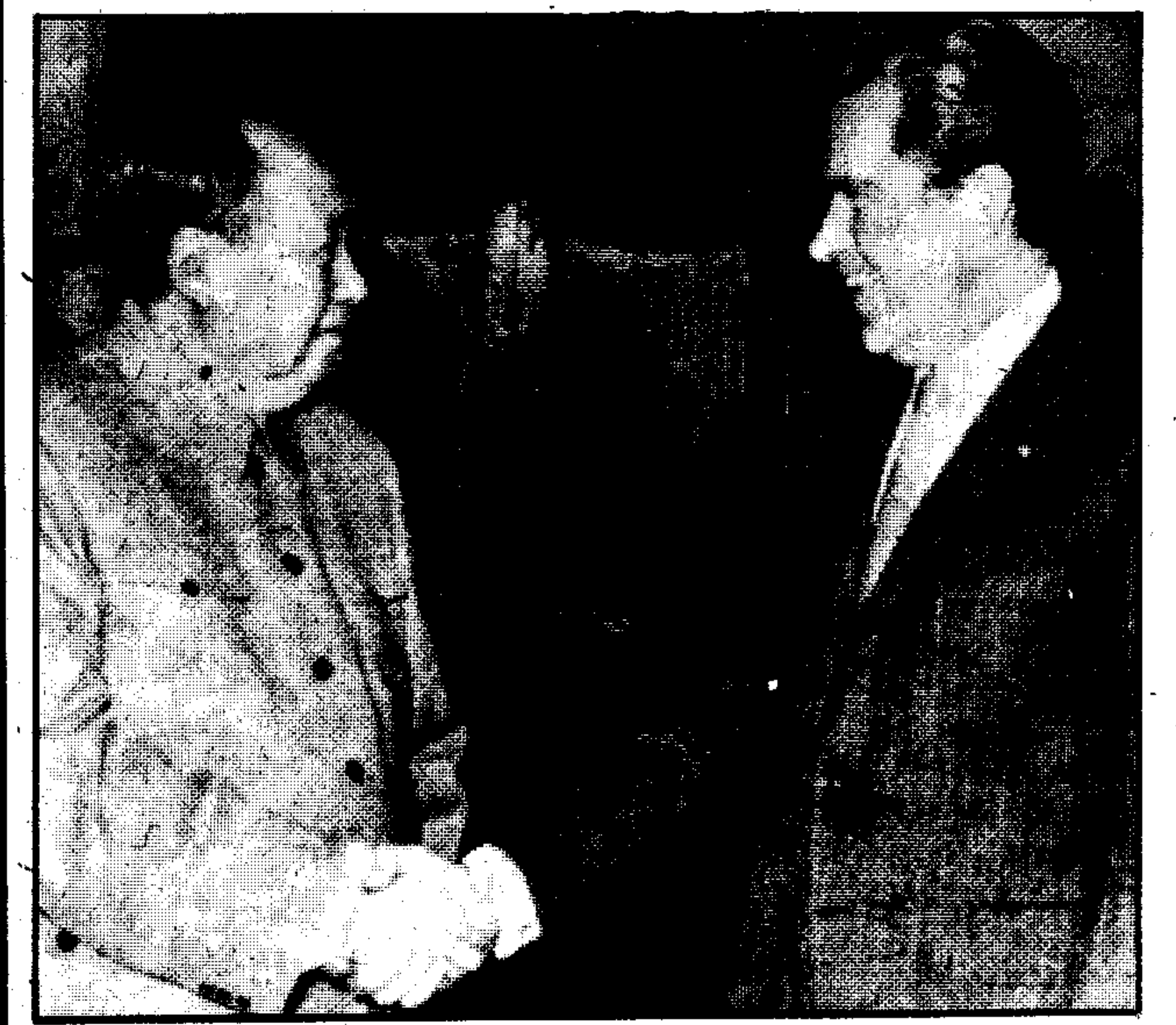
### Break

US Steel is negotiating a \$1,000 million deal for a steel mill — but no other US company has a Chinese deal agreed or in prospect which is anywhere near so big. In contrast, Japanese interests have two deals worth more than \$1,000 million, and EEC interests have five.

US businessmen hope to boost their Chinese trade from \$1 billion last year to \$3 billion annually within the next few years. In US eyes this profits bait — and the political advantages — make it worthwhile to face a little trouble with Taiwan. (And the US has no intention of sacrificing anything at all as regards its economic interests in Taiwan).

Communist Parties in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, which have looked to Peking but which regard the US as their main enemy, have been left in the lurch. Now they may develop their own 'Asia-communist' policy: the Philippines CP's front journals are already debating the Vietnam-China conflict.

In the abstract, of course, the Chinese state has every right to seek diplomatic and trade deals with the big capitalist powers. In practice, it has simply dumped all the Maoists who looked to China as a bulwark of revolution.



## 'Smash through the pickets', says T&G official

STRIKING Transport and General Workers' Union lorry drivers in the West Midlands have been faced with an intense campaign of sabotage — by our own union officials.

Regional secretary Alan Law has instructed drivers to cross picket lines.

The union's recall road haulage conference, on December 19th, instructed officials to conduct negotiations with the employers and hold report-back meetings before January 2nd. These meetings could then decide whether to join the Scottish drivers in striking from 3rd January.

Alan Law, the regional trade group secretary who is the official responsible for our negotiations, failed to do this. In Birmingham no arrangements for a meeting were made.

An emergency meeting of the coordinating committee which runs the four 5/35 branches (which include most of Birmingham's lorry drivers) was held on New Year's Eve. It decided a mass meeting must be held, and set Wednesday 3rd January as the date.

Because of the New Year holiday, and the short time available to publicise the meeting, only about 150 attended.

But since most of them were shop stewards, the meeting was probably fairly representative. It decided, with a single vote again, on an immediate all-out strike for the national claim, and two committeemen from each branch were appointed as a strike committee.

Law refused to allow them to use the Commercial Transport office at Birmingham's Transport House as strike committee headquarters. Instead, he and his two secretaries spent the following day telling anyone who phoned that the strike was unofficial and unauthorised, and that we should all return to work.

Callers were told blatant lies, such as that the strike committee chairman, Dennis Mills, was himself working. Drivers who phoned for advice were instructed to run through picket lines.

### PICKET

This led to an ugly incident when an owner-driver, acting on instructions from Law's office, charged a picket in Smethwick. Two drivers on picket duty came within inches of death when they slipped on ice trying to get out of the way.

The pickets were incensed, and the following morning a

dozen branch members peacefully occupied Law's office to prevent him from using it to break the strike.

Law then departed to hold secret talks with the bosses, without telling the 5/35 branches' delegate on the negotiating committee where these talks were to be held. The next day, Saturday, he finally held a report-back meeting for stewards. But only those from whom he expected support were invited. The strike committee were not told of the meeting.

To the chosen few he revealed the deal that had been made. There would be an immediate return to work with no extra money. Instead, we were to wait for everyone else to settle and the employers would then make our wages up to the highest regional wage rate that resulted.

One of the best-organised areas in the country was to sit back and let everyone else fight on our behalf and then expect to reap the benefits. But the strength of the West Midlands could make a substantial difference to the final national settlement, and the strike in Birmingham had already split the bosses, with 15 to 20 employers agreeing to pay the full claim.

The 5/35 strike committee promptly condemned Law's

deal, and the next morning a mass meeting of Wolverhampton drivers voted 637 to 4 to strike in defiance of Law and his negotiating committee.

Only the West Bromwich branch, whose chairman chaired the negotiators, voted to accept.

Not content with selling us out in private, Law went on TV on Monday 8th January to denounce the strike and dismiss our strike committee as "little men of no consequence".

### VOTED

Nonetheless, he has found it advisable to move out of his Birmingham office, and is said to be operating from the safety of the regional office in West Bromwich.

Last autumn both branch meetings and a meeting of shop stewards voted overwhelmingly for Law's replacement as our negotiating officer, yet he is still there. It is rumoured that he may be replaced soon — but by whom?

The fact is that until we get regular elections for full-time officials, with a right to recall them before the members at any time, we shall have very little control over their activities.

SIMON TEMPLE  
[5/35 Branch TGWU]

## WHAT THE STRIKE IS ABOUT: LOW PAY, LONG HOURS

AFTER A slightly uncertain start, the lorry drivers' strike has spread to most parts of the country and is gaining strength every day.

It started on January 3rd, when drivers in Scotland and at Tilbury came out on official strike. Negotiations had broken down in December after the employers had refused to offer more than a £60 basic in reply to the union's £65 claim.

A recall road-haulage conference of the TGWU on December 19th voted for strike action in all areas where the employers did not make higher offers.

Leeds, Southampton, Birmingham, Liverpool and Hull were among the districts to strike from the start. By last Monday (8th January) most parts of the country were out, although the T&G Executive had failed to make the action official.

In Sheffield, members of the small, right-wing United Road Transport Union voted to come out in defiance of their union executive, who had already accepted the bosses' offer.

In some areas, including Birmingham and Leeds, drivers working for the state-owned British Road Services group have joined the strike. They are covered by separate negotiations, but their wages are normally linked to those in the private sector. It is possible that all BRS drivers will soon be called out officially, if talks with their employer, the National Freight Corporation, break down.

In all, over 30,000 drivers are now on strike. Nearly all container traffic is at a standstill and virtually nothing is leaving the major ports being picketed. Already several companies, including British Leyland, have started to lay workers off, and many others are likely to follow suit within the next few days.

Last Tuesday, Mr Leonard Reeves-Smith, chief executive of the National Food and

### THE DRIVERS' CLAIM

- £65 for 40 hours
- £8.50 for a night away from home
- £1.50 per day meal allowance
- Four weeks' holiday after 12 months' service
- Holiday pay at average

Drink Federation, said that supplies of meat, fruit and vegetables would be seriously affected by next week and claimed that a state of emergency would have to be declared if there was no solution within 48 hours.

That could lead to troops being sent in to break the strike on the pretext of moving 'essential' supplies. But pickets are allowing urgent medical supplies and similar items to go through anyway. The troops would simply be used to sabotage the strike and divide the workers.

If the government tries to bring troops in, they should be answered by an all-out strike of every lorry-driver in Britain. Other workers should refuse to handle any goods moved by troops and all supplies to military installations should be

### earnings

- Improved sick pay and pensions
- All work done after Friday midnight to be at double time
- Time and a third for night work
- 35 hour week

blocked.

The employers are clearly worried. Many of them are small concerns with little capital in reserve to withstand a long fight. Quite a few have already broken the Road Haulage Association ranks and agreed to pay the full £65.

The official negotiations with the Road Haulage Associations have so far failed to come up with an improved pay offer, except in Hull, where £64 has already been rejected.

It seems that the bosses hoped to isolate the Scottish drivers, beat them, and use the settlement there as the standard for agreements in England. They were dismayed, however, by the rapid spread of unofficial action around the country.

Two other factors have stiffened the employer's

resistance. While fuel supplies were blocked in the terminals they knew they could only operate for a few days before running out of diesel. Secondly, the government has until January 24th to implement a Prices Commission report on haulage rates which recommended that only small price rises should be allowed. The bosses fear that this may be used as a sanction against them if they settle too far above the 5% pay limit.

Until now the strike has been led, primarily, by branch officers and shop stewards. The behaviour of the paid officials has varied from inaction to active sabotage. At the time of writing the strike seemed likely to be made official throughout England and Wales. But the initiative needs to be kept in the hands of the rank and file. The bureaucrats who lead the TGWU are most concerned to achieve a settlement with as little embarrassment to Callaghan as possible.

Unfortunately in many areas the claim for a 35 hour week has been dropped. The fact that it was kept separate from the wage demand of "£65 for 40 hours" shows that the union leaders never planned to take it seriously.

Even so, some areas are still fighting for it.

The most important priority now must be a campaign against the tradition of low basic wages and long hours of overtime which has resulted in longer average hours in road haulage than in any other industry. The £65 claim is nothing like enough to achieve a serious reduction in overtime, but it is at least a step in the right direction.

The strikers should be getting the full support of every other worker. No deliveries should be accepted from haulage firms or from owner drivers taking on work normally done by the striking drivers.



# Germany 1918-1919

## The Imperialist War turns into a Civil War



IN THE First World War of 1914-18, millions of workers were thrown into the battlefields to massacre each other for the sake of their capitalist masters' colonies, profits, and markets. As the war drew to an end, the workers began to revolt against this butchery... turning imperialist war into class war. RAY SAUNDERS describes the events in Germany.

IN 1917 the Russian Revolution showed that it was possible for the workers to fight back and win. In the following years, revolution swept through Europe. But Ger-

many was central. Germany, with its mighty working class, was where the communists' hopes for extending the socialist revolution beyond backward Russia were focused.

In January 1918 there was a general strike in Vienna, and soviets were set up. Soon afterwards, the proletariat of some twenty German cities went on strike. These were the first bright flames of what was soon to become a revolutionary conflagration.

On October 28th, the fleet at Kiel was mobilised for a desperate, last-ditch attempt to forestall the now-certain defeat of Germany in the Great War. The Kiel sailors

rebelled. Workers in the town joined their struggle.

By November 4th the governor of Kiel had been forced to resign and the town was under the control of the Workers' and Sailors' Council. The German revolution had begun.

With the army crumbling, even the most die-hard conservatives realised that the only way to head off the revolution was to have the Kaiser (Emperor) abdicate and to end the war.

On 9th November the Kaiser appointed the SPD chief Friedrich Ebert as Chancellor. Ebert assured the Kaiser: "I hate revolution like mortal sin".

unionisation was guaranteed; old-age, unemployment and sickness benefits were improved; press censorship was abolished, and political prisoners were released from jail.

This — so the SPD leaders said in reply to the workers' demands for a Socialist Republic — was the 'Social Republic'. But private property was not touched, and the bosses' forces of repression were re-stabilised and built up.

Workers' councils were spreading through Germany, and soldiers' councils through the army. The SPD dared not oppose the councils. Instead, it encouraged them. Indeed, in many places the SPD set up the councils. But it tried to keep them toothless, their aims no more radical than defending the new Republic against the (non-existent) threat of a monarchist-militarist comeback.

In Kiel, the SPD leader Noske managed to break the power of the sailors' council. Presenting himself as the Socialist leader who would make sure their demands were heard in Berlin, he got the previous Council replaced by a new one made up of the most moderate and timid delegates.

The army chief Gröner — who was in constant consultation with Ebert — tried to trick the soldiers' councils into agreeing to restore full power to the officers. Addressing a Congress of Soldiers' Delegates at Ems on 1st December, he told them that there was anarchy in Berlin.

He could have won the day, if the left-USPD shop stewards' leader Emil Barth had not arrived from Berlin in time to nail his lies.

### Soviet

Gröner's defeat, and the spread of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils throughout Germany, were a warning to the SPD leaders and the military chiefs. The Councils, set up in the first days of the revolution while the workers were still very much under the influence of the nationalist war ideology, were dominated by stolid social democrats. But it had been like that in Russia, too, at the start.

In Russia, the Councils had moved rapidly to the left as the workers discussed politics, learnt from experience, and found new leaders. The revolutionary minority led by Luxemburg and Liebknecht, the Spartakists, were agitating for the German Workers' Councils to follow the road of the Russian Soviets.

A witch-hunt against the radical left was necessary, as well as the soft-soap and trickery. Posters appeared announcing: "Workers! Citizens! The downfall of the

fatherland is imminent. Save it! It is not being threatened from without but from within: by the Spartakus-group. Strike its leaders dead! Kill Liebknecht! You will then have peace, work and bread!"

### Zealous

In Hamburg and the Rhineland counter-revolutionary conspiracies were uncovered in early December. In Berlin, 200 men seized the editorial offices of the Spartakists' new paper, *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag). Eighteen people were killed and thirty wounded when troops fired on a demonstration of the left-radical Red Soldiers' League ... on the instructions of the very authorities that had permitted the demonstration.

Later investigations showed the hand of the SPD leadership even in the arrest by right-wing soldiers of the (pro-SPD) Executive Committee of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council! It appears that Ebert wanted to check what the reaction would be to the suppression of the Workers' Councils.

The Berlin Commandant — Otto Wels, another SPD leader — founded a 15,000-strong Republican Soldiers' Defence force, directly financed by capitalist groups.

Meanwhile the rapidly demobilised troops usually melting after arrival. Soldiers and sailors were ordered to march off their shoulders as if they were red cockades.

But Ebert did not want to rest off the army and the navy. When he marched into Berlin on 10th December, he said: "You return to the field of

On December 19th there was the first Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Thousands of workers joined a Spartakus demonstration to greet the Councils. In the process, however, they were

The SPD was in control. The delegates were far behind the rank and file. Out of 100,000 workers only 10,000 were Independent Social Democrats.

The resolution was radical in words but nebulous in content. The Spartakus leader Eugen Leviné was angry: "We do not have very high hopes from the Councils. We knew that we,

## From Social-Democracy to the Spartakus League

SIXTY years ago, in 1919, the official Social Democratic Party in Germany, the SPD, came out as the leader of counter-revolution.

It broke not the power of the big landowners, the militarists who had sent millions to the slaughter, the bankers or the industrialists, but the growing power of the militant workers, soldiers and sailors. It took over from a bankrupt monarchy and saved the power of the social forces that had dragged Germany into one world war and were soon to drag it into another.

Before 1914 the SPD had been the greatest workers' party in the whole international movement: strongly organised, apparently unshakable in its Marxist orthodoxy, based in one of the world's great industrial nations.

But decades of cautious tactics had rotted its revolutionary spirit. From operating within the system, it had gone over to propping up the system.

In August 1914 the SPD, the 'party of peace', voted to support German imperialism in the war. It promised 'civil peace' between the classes so that the war might be won by Imperial Germany.

A revolutionary minority, led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, opposed the war from the start. They formed a faction called Spartakus.

Despite its political importance, the Spartakus group was organisationally very weak: a small, politically rather loose federation. Their Spartakus Letters, and Rosa Luxemburg's 'Junius' Pamphlet on

the war, reached only a small audience. Their leaders were jailed.

As the war progressed, another group formed in the SPD, taking up a centre position between the revolutionary internationalist politics of Spartakus and the rabid pro-war position of the Majority Socialists.

They voted against further war credits, not because they counterposed class war to wars of imperialist rivalry (as the Spartakists and Bolsheviks did) but because they judged that "Germany's borders were now secure".

Even this centrist opposition was intolerable to the right-wing bureaucrats who now ran the SPD, people like Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann and Gustav Noske. The centrists were driven out of the SPD. In 1917 they formed the 'Independent Social Democratic Party' (USPD).

The USPD was a mish-mash. On the left, the Spartakus group joined it as a faction. The 'Revolutionary Shop Stewards' in Berlin were members of the USPD. But the party also included such people as Eduard Bernstein, the leading spokesman of outright reformism in the pre-war SPD.

To the workers, the USPD appeared as a revolutionary party: most of the radical workers' leaders belonged to it. But at the top its policy was one of alliance with the Majority Socialists or nerveless dithering.

In north Germany — particularly in Bremen — there were other revolutionary groups closer to the Russian Bolsheviks, who felt that the Spartakus

group did not properly understand the need to make a clean break with the Centrists of the USPD. It was time, they thought, for a new party and a new International.

And indeed, the Spartakists' delay in organising a tightly-knit party — or even faction — weakened the revolutionaries crucially in 1918-19.

The German Communist Party was set up in the midst of the revolutionary tumult: inevitably it was small, ill-organised, and immature, despite the prestige, experience and theoretical ability of leaders like Rosa Luxemburg. The fake-leftists and semi-leftists of the USPD leadership kept their hold over the majority of revolutionary-minded workers.

Rosa Luxemburg had argued against the Bolsheviks' conceptions of rigorously defined revolutionary organisation, believing (wrongly) that they implied an underestimation of the revolutionary spontaneity of the working class. In 1918-19, it was the lack of a Bolshevik-type organisation which permitted the defeat of that revolutionary spontaneity.

Trickery and ruthlessness were the Majority Socialists' weapons, when the workers moved towards revolution in 1918-19. When the workers called for a Socialist Republic, they promised a Social Republic. When workers' councils sprang up, they diverted them from seeking power and promised them instead "a guaranteed place in the constitution". And then they shot down and bludgeoned the revolutionary minority who refused to be tricked.

### Kaiser

Ebert still wanted to save the monarchy. But vast crowds in the streets of Berlin were calling for the abdication of the Kaiser. Another SPD leader, Scheidemann, addressed the crowds. He finished his speech: "Long live the German Republic!"

The SPD was now the ruling power — indeed, the only possible pro-capitalist ruling power in Germany, given the terrific collapse and discredit of the old order.

On November 11th the war officially ended. Now the Social Democratic leaders had to defend German capitalism against the class war of the workers.

Their policy was threefold: to neuter the workers' councils; to damp down the workers' revolt with social reforms; and to prepare for the bloody suppression of those who refused to be damped down.

A Provisional Workers' and Soldiers' Council had already been set up in Berlin, before November 9th, by left wing shop stewards. On November 10th the SPD called a more representative meeting — and persuaded it to endorse Ebert as the leader of a provisional government of four Majority Socialists and two members of the more left-wing, but indecisive, Independent Socialists (USPD).

### Secret

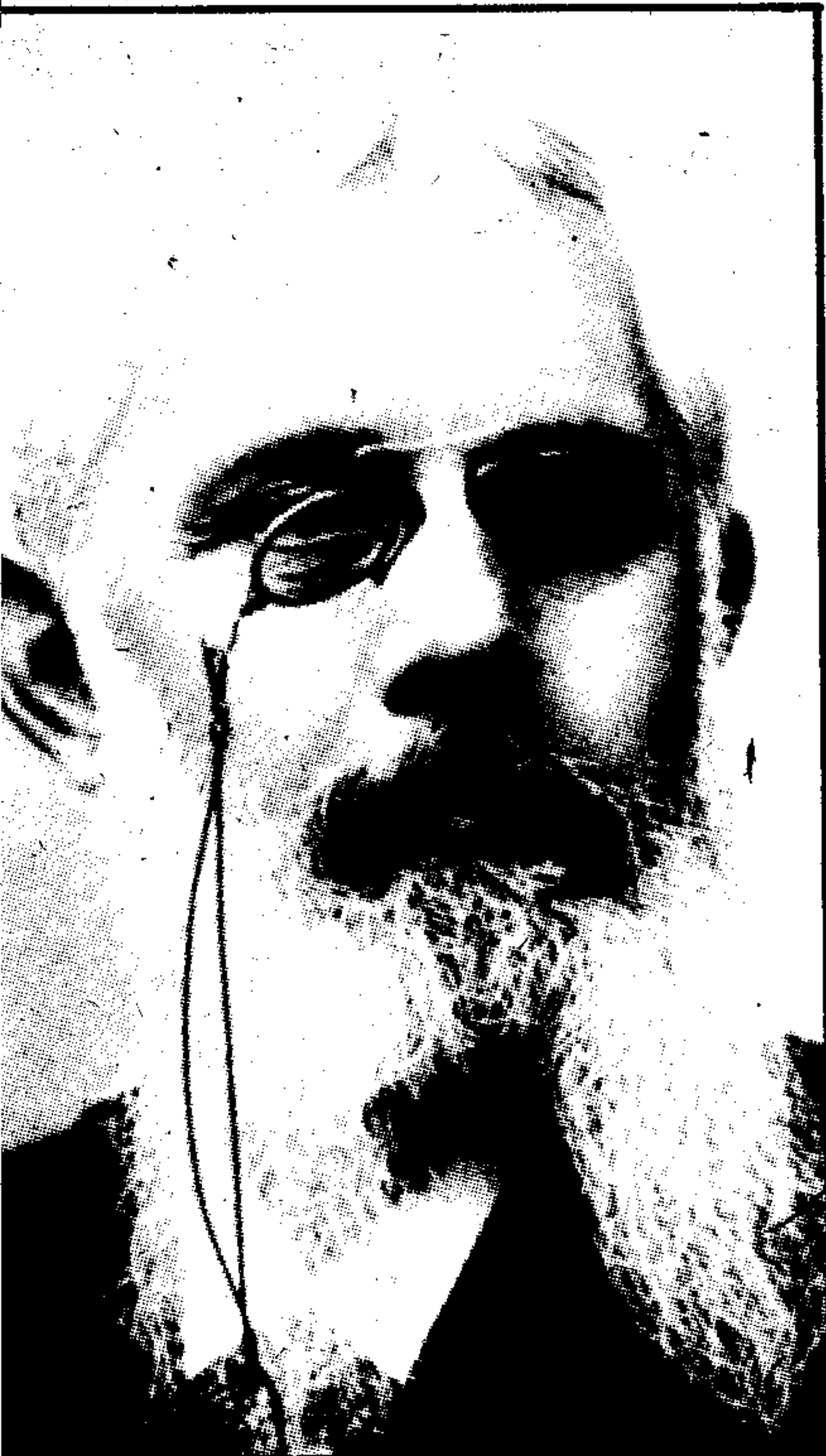
Ebert swore that the government would operate under the control of the Workers' Council executive ... and then went off to conclude a secret pact with the heads of the military staff, aimed at suppressing the Berlin workers by force of arms.

In the days following November 10th, Ebert, Scheidemann, and the four other Commissioners elected by the Berlin Workers' Council passed a series of laws. The eight-hour day was intro-



Philipp Scheidemann, Gustav Noske, Friedrich Ebert

# The unions All out to defend the existing order



DIE LEBENDEN DEM TOTEN . ERINNERUNG AN DEN 15. JANUAR 1919

Above: 'From the living to the dead: in memory of 15th January 1919', a memorial for Karl Liebknecht by Käthe Kollwitz. From left: Spartakus leaders Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg. In 1919 Mehring, aged 72, was in hospital, unable to participate in the struggle. He died soon after hearing that Luxemburg and Liebknecht had been murdered.

'In all former revolutions the combatants entered the lists with their visors up: class against class, programme against programme, shield against shield. In the present revolution, the defenders of the old order enter the lists not with the shields and coats-of-arms of the ruling party, but under the banner of the Social Democratic Party'. Rosa Luxemburg

the army was... Reg-... to Berlin... away soon... revolutionary... greeted... they arrived... of rank... and giving...

ists, would be a tiny minority and we also knew that our neighbours on the right, the Independents, would not have a majority either. "Nevertheless we would never have imagined that it would, in fact, present such a hopeless picture, nor could

we have envisaged that the Soviet Congress would be composed, as one comrade has remarked, of Party Secretaries with their numerous 'tickets', and zealous Trade Union officials, indifferent to the interests of the workers and concerned only

with narrow Party interests; that those would be in the majority who are ready to stake the interests of the working class and the revolution for the sake of picking up mandates to the National Assembly... "On the crucial questions,

such as the National Assembly and the declaration of the Congress as the supreme authority, we of course had no hope at all. We knew that the National Assembly would be passed and that the Congress would also approve the report of the government and the Executive Committee. It was also clear that nothing would come of nationalisation...

His conclusion was clear: "We must put an end to this unnatural alliance (with the USPD), this marriage of fishes and young lions. We cannot possibly act the part of the whip that drives the Independents. How can there be an alliance between a whip and a donkey which digs in its heels and declares 'you can go on whipping me but I won't budge'? If we continue to ally ourselves with the USPD, we shall be the donkeys".

From mid-December, the Spartakists steered towards a clear break with the USPD, founding the German Communist Party at a Congress on December 30-January 1st.

The Spartakists had counterposed the Workers' Councils to the Assembly (Parliament) called for by the SPD leaders. "The present government" they declared "is calling a Constituent Assembly in order to create a bourgeois counterweight to the Workers' and Soldiers'

Councils, thereby shunting the revolution onto the track of a mere bourgeois revolution and conjuring away its socialist aims."

"The National Assembly is an obsolete heirloom of bourgeois revolutions, a husk without content, a stage-prop from the period of petty-bourgeois illusions about a 'united people', about the 'freedom, brotherhood and equality' of the bourgeois state."

## Press

Rosa Luxemburg explained: "From the upmost limit of the state down to the tiniest parish, the proletarian mass must replace the inherited organs of bourgeois class rule — the assemblies, parliaments, and city councils — with its own class organs, with workers' and soldiers' councils. It must occupy all the posts, supervise all official needs by the standard of its own class interests and the tasks of socialists."

Now that the Congress of Workers' Councils had refused to make itself the power in the land, and had approved the Assembly elections to take place on January 19th, the Spartakists had to make a difficult tactical shift.

On 23rd December their paper, *Die Rote Fahne*, announced that they were in favour of participation in that 'stage-prop of petty-bourgeois illusions', the National Assembly, to combat it from within and use it as a forum for revolutionary agitation.

The SPD leaders did not believe that Assembly Elections could solve anything any more than the Spartakists did. They set about trying to crush the revolutionaries, to make sure that the Assembly elections would set the seal on a firmly re-consolidated bourgeois power.

Counter-revolutionary troops had now been assembled round Berlin. On December 24th they began to shell militant sailors who had been occupying the Imperial Stables and had now kidnapped Commandant Wels. They had to stop when hundreds of workers — many of them women — surrounded them and began taking weapons off them.

The counter-revolution began in earnest in the New Year. As the hounds run ahead of the huntsmen so now the clamouring press opened up the next round of the reactionary offensive.

After the USPD withdrew from the Government,

continued on page 6



everything... the credit... the officer... the divisions... Berlin on 11th... told them: 'unvanquished battle'...

16th-20th... National... workers' and... Hunds... of workers... st demonst... the Congress... l power for... ide the Con-... it was

firmly in... gates lagg... the militant... of 489, 288... mocrats, 80... nts (USPD)... Spatakists... were often... but always... nt. ... ist leader... reported... d not have... of the Con-... start. We... he Spartak-

**BRUCE ROBINSON** describes how the trade union leaders — representing the solid right wing of the SPD — drew the revolutionary sting from the workers' councils.

WHEN the German Social Democratic Party voted to support war, in August 1914, Lenin was shocked — at first unable to believe it. Right up to August the SPD had been firmly condemning the coming world war.

What Lenin did not fully realise was that behind the scenes the real power in the SPD lay with the trade union officials. Immersed in day-to-day bargaining, they cared little for the wider interests of the working class as a whole, still less for the socialist revolution, and not at all for Marxism. One thing they knew for certain: they would not have their organisations, so painstakingly built up, put at risk by radical policies.

As war approached, both the SPD and the unions took steps to safeguard their funds. The SPD sent an official to Switzerland with the party treasury. The unions approached the German Government — and, even before the party decided to support the war, the unions had agreed to 'class peace' for the duration of the war, in return for a guarantee that their funds would not be seized.

## Stunned

All that was left was for the party to fall into line. The process through which tactical prudence shaded over into organisational conservatism, conservatism into adaptation to the existing system, and adaptation into outright treachery, had reached its culmination.

Throughout the war, strikes were repressed with the support of the unions. They supported laws introducing strict state control of labour, and joined committees set up by the state to enforce these laws in the factories.

The working class at first was stunned. Almost every one of its leaders had gone along with the war effort. Working class politics were drowned by the nationalist hysteria.

Slowly, revolt began to grow. It exploded in 1918, when workers' councils were set up, independent from the conservative union machinery.

The unions moved quickly to re-establish their authority. Not strong enough to crush the workers' councils, the union bureaucracy tried to draw their revolutionary sting by making them powerless. All moves towards workers' control and socialisation of the means of production met with determined opposition from the bureaucrats.

On 15th November 1918, four days after the ending of the war, the trade unions reached a major agreement with the employers' associations. The bosses were prepared to make many concessions as long as their property remained intact, knowing that they could get their own back once the revolution was defeated.

## Betrayal

Many of the unions' traditional demands were granted. The eight-hour day was instituted and the unions were given recognition for collective bargaining at all levels. In the factories, committees were set up to 'represent the workforce and, in cooperation with the employer, to see relations in the factory are regulated according to the collective agreement.'

At a national level there was to be the 'Working Group' (Arbeitsgemeinschaft) made up of equal numbers of employers and trade unionists, with the aim of "a common solution to all economic and social questions affecting German industry and trade, as well as any legislative and administrative affairs affecting it."

The unions leaders were making it clear that they would do nothing about the workers' widespread demands for nationalisation. And they undercut the workers' councils by insisting on the unions' sole right to represent the workers' economic interests, backed up only by factory councils which would concern themselves with factory-level disputes.

The workers' councils, which usually had Social Democratic majorities, were often willing to accept this. The Berlin Executive Council stated in mid-November: "The representation of the economic interests of all those working in the factories of Greater Berlin is the job of the Free Trade Unions" (ie those linked to the SPD).

As the political power of the councils was removed and the National Assembly was set up in Weimar, this reformist conception of factory councils took root, though it was still opposed by thousands of workers who had expected that at the very least the major industries would be nationalised. The right wing SPD leader Scheidemann tried to convince the workers that this betrayal was in fact a great advance: "The workers' councils will be fundamentally recognised as representatives of economic interests and anchored in the constitution" he promised.

Many of the leaders of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the left USPD, such as Richard Müller and Ernst Däumig, were drawn along behind this idea of getting workers' councils a guaranteed place in the constitution. The revolutionary leader Karl Radek described their attitude: "Their very great service of having brought the Berlin workers into councils degenerated into a belief in the building of a council system in the midst of the raging counter-revolution, without this becoming an object of revolutionary struggle. Däumig and Müller conjure up utopias. And in order to secure their construction (which, without revolutionary struggle, is a house of cards) they have to take up the treacherous demand of 'anchoring the councils in the constitution', which has been cooked up by the head chef in the USPD's kitchen of 'compromise, Hilferding'".

## Model

The advance of the counter-revolution in 1919 ruled out any extension of true workers' councils or workers' control. In 1920 the SPD passed a law setting up 'Factory Councils' on a basis very similar to the class collaborationist Works Committees that had been set up by the Kaiser during the war; one of the most right wing union leaders admitted that "the difference is not considerable; it is a change of name".

Thousands of workers demonstrated against the law. But the trade unions and the SPD had successfully gutted the revolutionary content of the councils which had existed during late 1918 and early 1919. The law of 1920 served as a model for the class-collaborationist participation schemes set up by the West German state after 1945, which still exist to this day.

## From centre pages



the right-wing opened a campaign for the sacking of the left-USPD Berlin Police Chief Emil Eichhorn, and the dissolution of the workers' militia which he had built. It was all part of the struggle to crush the new centres of workers' power and to restore to the bourgeois state its monopoly of the means of violence.

On 4th January, Eichhorn was sacked. The Berlin Executive of the USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards realised that the Social Democrats were trying to remove Eichhorn in order to clear the decks for an official terror campaign directed against the whole radical left. They called a demonstration for the next day.

The demonstration was a huge success. But its leaders had little idea what to do next. When it finished, the suggestion was made — by an agent provocateur, it later turned out — that the office of the SPD paper *Vorwärts* should be occupied. Later that evening several other newspaper offices were also occupied.

This was what Noske, the new SPD Minister of Defence, had been waiting for. On his appointment he had proudly stated, "Someone has to be the bloodhound. I shall not shirk my responsibilities."

## Dithered

On the pretext of fighting for 'freedom of the press' he ordered troops to shell the workers occupying *Vorwärts*.

The USPD was confused. It called another demonstration, and a declaration was drafted — and signed by the impetuous Liebknecht — calling for the overthrow of the government.

Having issued the call, the USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards dithered, not mobilising broader forces for the struggle but negotiating with the enemy. The SPD took their chance without any dithering.

In the following days, the riff-raff into whose hands the SPD had thrust the banner of 'Peace, Democracy and National Defence' murdered hundreds of militants. They said they were putting down a "Spartakist rising". And on January 15th they finally tracked down Luxemburg and Liebknecht and butchered them ... claiming that they had been shot while trying to escape arrest.

Before the January events,

Rosa Luxemburg had already warned of the danger of premature confrontation: "(The authorities) are the people who are trying to saddle the socialist proletariat with the responsibility for anarchy and putsches fabricated by themselves so that they can unleash real anarchy at an opportune moment".

In the Russian Revolution, there was a similar moment: the "July Days", when the right-wing used a premature revolutionary demonstration in St. Petersburg as an opportunity to mount a counter-offensive. But in Russia the Bolshevik Party was suffic-

iently well-organised and politically firm to make sure the militant workers retreated in good order, with minimum losses.



born in so much blood, was a sham. Its reforming promises soon faded away. It was raddled by inflation, unemployment and poverty. In 1933 the President of the Republic — a President put in office with Social Democratic support — was to call Hitler to power.

By then the German CP had been corrupted by Stalinism, and it was crushed without a shot being fired. But in 1919, repression failed to crush the revolutionary vanguard, however many of its leaders were murdered. The German CP survived, found new leaders, became a mass revolutionary party, and led new revolutionary struggles.

1919 proved conclusively

In the months after January, the terror knew no bounds. Berlin saw one punitive expedition after another. In Bremen a counter-revolutionary offensive in February removed one of the few real revolutionary Workers' Councils. What happened in Bremen was repeated in the nearby Northern ports of Bremerhaven and Cuxhaven. Then the right-wing pogromists turned their attention to Central Germany.

In Berlin, the revolutionary spirit still had not been crushed and fighting broke

out again in March. Now Noske excelled himself. The bloodhound became a vampire. As Commander-in-Chief he announced his infamous Schiessbefehl, the order to shoot on sight any person opposing or obstructing government troops.

The numbers of victims jumped from hundreds to thousands. Heroic resistance in the Ruhr and in Brunswick was crushed too.

And finally came the turn of Munich, where May Day 1919 was a day of celebration for the blood-thirsty rabble that destroyed the Bavarian Soviet.

Ebert's 'Social Republic',

that, while the social democrats identify revolution with violence and constitutional reformism with peace, they are ready to shed blood on a massive scale to avoid revolution. It proved that bourgeois constitutionality is a thousand times more soaked in blood than the socialist order.

Rosa Luxemburg has since been 'adopted' by numerous centrists, Eurocommunists and 'social-democrats'; her criticism of the Bolshevik dispersal of the Constituent Assembly in Russia is frequently cited as an 'alternative' conception to Leninism — 'communism with parliamentary democracy'.

Such political philistines and ideological hucksters hide the fact that, faced with roughly similar problems to those faced by Lenin and forced to deal with them more concretely than before, Rosa Luxemburg endorsed in theory and practice the policy of Lenin.

## Blood

The German events of 1918-19 confirmed in blood the same lessons which some try to pass off as 'peculiarities' of 'backward' Russia:

□ That the old state power must be smashed.

□ That it must be replaced by a new state power — one which is openly a class dictatorship, but infinitely more democratic than bourgeois parliamentarism: a proletarian state power based on workers' councils.

□ And that the working class needs a disciplined revolutionary party, able to lead the decisive battle for state power in the few days or weeks in which the chance of revolution remains open, before being crushed by bloody counter-revolution.

The main difference in conditions between October 1917 and January 1919 was that decades of Parliamentarism in Germany had bred 'socialist' politicians whose hypocrisy and ruthless treachery far outstripped anything the Russian social democrats could do against the Revolution.

1919 proved conclusively



Ebert reviews the troops

# No more 'lambs to the slaughter'

**FOR YEARS now the British Steel Corporation — with the cooperation of steel union leaders — has pursued a 'divide and rule' strategy to cut jobs in the steel industry. Closure plans are proposed, withdrawn, and proposed again. One plant is played off against another.**

**PETE RADCLIFF [GMWU, Stanton Ironworks] analyses this year's round — and the growing rank and file resistance.**

THE re-appointment of Sir Charles Villiers as Chairman of the British Steel Corporation along with the announcement of another year of job-cutting, redundancies and closures in the industry, will come as no surprise to steelworkers. It is simply the first stage of the farcical ritual annually performed by BSC and union leaders in the steel industry.

As the annual pay negotiations approach, BSC announces probable plant closures in the coming year. The union bureaucracy isolates the workers in the plants threatened with closure — and then encourages them to draw up reasons why their plant should stay open while others get the chop. This of course further isolates them.

The union leaders know well that this will achieve nothing — but it will keep the threatened steel workers diverted from any real struggle.

At the same time other steelworkers are assured that it is the union's good behaviour and the leaders' 'responsible' attitude that has saved their jobs. Of course, this collaboration involves ignoring the threatened plants and accepting the paltry pay increase negotiated by the union leaders.

This criminal ritual was nearly upset last year by the Tory outcry over the mammoth losses of £443 millions by BSC in 1977-78. Fearing that BSC's closure plans might be brought out into the open the union leaders, with Bill Sirs (Chairman of the TUC Steel Committee) at their head, rushed to defend Villiers and Eric Varley against calls for their resignation.

The conspiracy between government minister, steel bosses and union leaders was preserved for another year, while the Clyde Iron, Hartlepool, East Moors and Shelton works sank in silence.

But the inclusion this year of the 35-hour week demand in the annual ISTC pay claim reflects the growing concern shown by steelworkers about continued attacks on their jobs. If this demand is taken up by the 95,000 remaining ISTC workers, it could be the signal for the long overdue fightback against BSC's trickery and the union leaders' treachery.

What is surprising is that this fightback has taken so long to develop. For the pretences made by Varley, Villiers and Sirs over the past few years have been nothing less than an insult to the intelligence of steelworkers.

They have continually lied in response to workers' questions about job security in the industry. They have for instance pretended that they have made no decisions regarding cut-backs in the workforce. They back this up with talk about the "un-

predictability of long-term trends" (that is, it seems, anything over 12 months). They talk about the need to identify the high-cost plants (though this was the very job done by the Beswick Report in 1975) or they talk about the need to "progressively consider the closure of other plants", as Varley and Villiers are fond of putting it.

All this of course is pure codswallop. As figures released last year to placate the Tories and the bourgeois press (over the 1977-78 losses) show, long term redundancy plans do exist. Their secrecy is only maintained to ensure the plant-against-plant sectionalism which has been so beneficial to the bosses so far.

The BSC paper *Steel News* commented at the time: "Early action on BSC's losses ... would have meant widespread closures, loss of many thousands of jobs resulting perhaps in a national steel strike".

Figures released at the same time showed that BSC liquid steel production in the period up to 1982-3 will be at the most 22 million tonnes and may indeed plummet as low as 16 million tonnes. In BSC's optimistic period, in 1973, they had estimated that they would be producing 37 million tonnes with 175,000 workers by 1981!

BSC's production targets have dropped by between 31% and 57% and a comparable drop in the industry's employment would mean up to 90,000 further jobs being put in jeopardy.

Even the modern and expensive Basic Oxygen plants at Llanwern, Port Talbot and Redcar would be threatened.

The exact closure intentions of BSC could only be found out by the workers gaining access to BSC's 'business secrets'. The demand for an opening of their books would be at the head of any successful fightback in the steel industry.

Of one thing steelworkers can be sure: the 13000 threatened jobs at Corby, Consett and Shotton works and the 5,000 other jobs threatened throughout the rest of the industry are only the top of a very long list.

Steelworkers must do their utmost to build the very thing BSC are so frightened of: a united national strike. This would break through the union leaders' cosy plotting with the bosses. Its main aim should be worksharing with no loss of pay, organised and administered by the workers in the industry themselves.

This isn't exactly the bosses' idea of an answer to the steel crisis. But giving the same answer as BSC to help it out has simply meant going like lambs to the slaughter. Steelworkers need their own answer to the steel crisis, not the bosses' answer.

## Clutching at a straw on the bathroom floor

THE Editor said she wanted a TV column. The paper's becoming too heavy and highbrow, she said. The trouble is that most of the people who produce *Workers Action* never get to see the telly, what with meetings, conferences and arguments in the pub.

Well, I have been laid low for the past few months with what my doctor calls 'industrial fatigue', and it must be admitted I've done little else but watch the box. I'm even beginning to get into *Crossroads* — very worrying!

My intention was to take careful notes on all the Christmas/New Year viewing and produce a detailed analysis of what passes for entertainment over what

passes for the festive season. But for some reason it hasn't worked like that, and I have only the vaguest memories of the Morecambe & Wise show, which managed to provoke a lively debate in our house on the possibility of life after death.

Another sad spectacle was the *Two Ronnies* — a genuinely funny double act that shouldn't have to sink to Irish gags and sexism to get laughs.

Someone told me that they thought *The Sound of Music* was a "profoundly moving anti-Nazi statement" (along with *Casablanca*?...), but as I was relaxing on the bathroom floor throughout Xmas afternoon and am thus the only person in Britain yet to

see the film, I wouldn't know.

1979's viewing hasn't been very encouraging so far. ITV has started a new series called *Room Service* which must take the prize for the most offensive 'comedy' show yet to be produced in this country (which seems to make a speciality of such things). Imagine *Are You Being Served?* switched from a department store to a hotel kitchen, with (impossibly, but truly) a more boorish script and you have the general idea. Thirty minutes of anti-women, anti-gay, anti-Irish, anti-Italian, anti-Black and anti-union 'jokes' propped up by women's busts, thighs and bottoms and endless obvious double-

entendres concerned with the size of the male organ ...

The only bright spots so far this year have been the serialisation of Dashiell Hammett's *The Dain Curse* and — believe it or not — *Coronation Street*, in which the women are finally beginning to turn into human beings. Dierdre Langton has given hubby the boot and is striking out on her own; Rita Fairclough is demanding a fair cut of the family income; and Hilda Ogden (of all people) is refusing to cook Stan's meals.

Not exactly a feast of socialist feminism, I suppose, but after the *Two Ronnies* in drag and *Room Service*, I'm clutching at any straw.

JIM DENHAM

## BOXED IN

# RANK AND FILE REVOLT GROWS IN GERMAN STEEL INDUSTRY

UNION NEGOTIATORS in West Germany's steel strike have agreed to a sell-out, endorsing an agreement which offers no advance for the workers' central demand for a 35 hour week. According to union rules, only 25% of the workers need vote for this deal in order for it to be accepted. But the bureaucrats may still be rebuffed, writes PETE FIRMIN.

THE world steel industry has been in crisis for four years now. In West Germany, steel making is running at 61% of capacity, while an average 1000 jobs a month have been abolished over a number of years. (120,000 altogether since 1961). A further 75,000-100,000 jobs are expected to be lost in the EEC steel industry by 1985.

Only a drastic reduction in the working week can halt this loss of jobs. According to Eugen Loderer, the leader of

the steelworkers' union IG Metall, a 16-hour cut in the working week will be necessary by 1985 in order to keep the present number of jobs.

The 35-hour week demand — rather than the pay claim — has therefore been central in the six-weeks' strike that began on 28th November. But the union leaders have never wanted a real fight.

Up until the last minute before the strike started, the IG Metall leaders continued

to negotiate with the steel bosses, despite the fact that they refused to offer anything at all, and despite pressure from the rank and file.

The trade union bureaucrats are closely integrated in the running of the industry. Loderer and others have positions on many company boards as part of the extensive workers' participation scheme in the steel industry. As such, they have been personally responsible for the job cuts they are supposed to be fighting against. Sometimes they have made verbal protests, sometimes not even that!

Even after the workers voted by an 87% majority to strike, the union initially only called out 37,000 workers in eight steel works. The bosses responded by locking out a further 30,000 on December 1st. Not until January 3rd were 23,000 more workers, from 3 steel works, called out

on strike.

The IG Metall leaders limited their demand to a 'progressive introduction' of the 35-hour week. They agreed, despite massive opposition from the rank and file, to arbitration with North Rhine Westphalia Minister of Labour.

But despite the strenuous

efforts of the bureaucracy to restrain militancy and confirm their adherence to 'social peace', they have not had it all their own way. Many shop stewards have sent resolutions objecting to the fact that they have not been called out, and some have taken unofficial solidarity action.

At a demonstration against the lockout in Duisburg on December 8th, 30,000 took part, and all local public transport workers stopped work for one hour to show their support. On December 12th there were further demonstrations in 33 towns. There have also been vociferous demonstrations outside negotiators' meetings.

In Bremen, print workers prevented the printing of an advert from the steel bosses in two regional papers.

Last year the West German print union leaders agreed to a sell-out and had to back-track only a few days later because of rank-and-file pressure. Even if the IG Metall leaders do not meet the same fate this year, the signs are growing in West Germany of rank-and-file revolt against the 30-years' 'social peace'.



Krupp workers demonstrate: Stop the jobs-killer

AFTER TWO years of on-off negotiations, arguments, conferences and behind-the-scenes deals, it looks likely that special steel imports into Britain will soon be subject to some form of price control.

So the rallying cry that has united such diverse elements as the Tribune left, the trade union bureaucracy, much of the rank and file, and certain sections of the capitalist class — Import Controls — has materialised.

Special Steel, or exotic steel as it is sometimes called, is the only real money spinner in the steel industry at the moment. Special steel goes into cars, the aerospace industry, cutting tools... anywhere where high performance and special requirements are called for.

In this country the special steel industry is concentrated in Sheffield.

The Sheffield branch of the Import Controls crusade consists of Martin Flannery MP, the local leadership of the steelworkers' and engineering workers' unions (ISTC and AUEW), the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and the Master Cutler (a sort of local CBI chairman)... backed up by the right wing *Sheffield Morning Telegraph*.

As far back as March 1977, the *Morning Telegraph* treated its declining readership to the screaming headlines: "9,000 steel jobs are in danger". The lead article went on to say, with absolutely no evidence at all to back up its claim, that "2,000 steel jobs have disappeared in the past two years because Austria, Sweden, Spain and Japan have been flooding the UK market with dumped special steel".

We were not informed where this steel went, which firms have made 2,000 redundant, when, what connection there was between imports and the job losses... or why the *Morning Telegraph* had suddenly become concerned about workers losing their jobs.

To show how sincere they were, the *Telegraph* quoted a few of the local trade union 'leaders'. The first was Mr Joe Pickles, once described as "the only man in Sheffield who negotiates on his hands and knees".

Our Joe is a local full time official for the ISTC (Iron & Steel Trades Confederation, the main union for production workers in steel). Not

## A shorter working week or just more shadow boxing?

A CAMPAIGN against job cuts looks like winning a 'victory' soon. Import controls will be introduced on special steels. But

this 'victory', argues JOHN CUNNINGHAM, is one for the British bosses' national interests, not for the working class.

one for vitriolic outbursts, he merely said he was "concerned" about the situation.

So over we go to talk to Bro. Richard Caborn, AUEW convener of Firth Brown, the largest steel producer in the private sector in the country. Bro. Caborn, whose semi-racist pronouncements about 'Japs' taking 'our' steel orders are well known in Sheffield, went straight for his favourite hobby horse. "We have been warning of this danger for some time. Voluntary agreements with importers are simply not

a member of the Communist Party, George Caborn must take first prize in the chauvinism stakes with the following statement, which appeared in the *Morning Telegraph* on October 10th of this year:

"The government realises that Sheffield is an important part of the British economy in a very special way. We are ahead of every other nation in the world in our special steels industry. We cannot afford to lose that lead for the sake of our economy and our defence".

Bro. Caborn did not say

once again instead of a real fight we get the shadow boxing of delegations going down to London to see this or that Minister instead of fighting on the shop floor.

Too many redundancies have been lost before they even really started by playing the game of delegations and petitions to this or that well-padded Whitehall bureaucrat. The paper that has been wasted in petitions, proposals and plans would surely encircle the globe a few times if laid end to end.

And what has now become

a militant socialist than to see his brothers lobbying the TUC, not with demands for the 35 hour week, earlier retirement, guaranteed lay-off pay and work-sharing, but with the reactionary and totally diversionary call for the banning of steel imports from Germany.

Instead of chasing myths, and ranting about the supposed 'yellow peril' of Japanese steel (steel produced by Japanese workers, who are just as concerned about the state of their industry, just as proud of their skills, and just as worried about the future as steel workers here, in Germany, or anywhere else for that matter), let's look at some cold hard facts — a rare commodity in Sheffield these days, with all the drivel from the local trade union officials, Martin Flannery, the Master Cutler, and the Institute of Production Engineers.

In the USA, import controls were introduced by the Carter administration in May 1977. The US is the largest steel producer in the capitalist world.

Earnings, per share of stock for all the major steel corporations (except Bethlehem Steel) showed an increase in 1978 over 1977. US Steel increased its earnings per share by 90%, from \$1.66 to \$3.15; Republic Steel, from \$2.54 to \$4.75.

What effect has this development had on the fortunes of the American steelworkers? None. If anything the situation is getting worse.

Up to August 1978, 21,000 steel workers had been laid

off permanently or were on some form of short time working. Last year there were major redundancies at Youngstown, Lackawanna, and other steelworks in the USA. At the Bethlehem Steel plant at Lackawanna, well over 3,500 workers were made redundant in 1977.

All told, in the years from 1950 to 1977, production has gone up 29% and jobs have gone down 34%. What is causing redundancies in the steel industry in the USA, in this country, and elsewhere, is the steel barons' relentless drive for profit.

The track record for import controls in this country is not very impressive, either. For example, the introduction of import controls in 1932 (levies of 20% on finished products and 33% on semi-finished products) did nothing to alleviate unemployment then.

The present Labour government has already taken more anti-dumping measures (levies and controls) than any other country in Western Europe, particularly in the steel sector. In December 1976, a charge of £38 per tonne was placed on South African steel. An anti-dumping levy of 10% was placed on all Spanish stainless steel in October 1976, and this was further tightened up in April 1977. Also in April 1977, a levy of £20 per tonne was placed on Japanese light sections, and action was also taken against steel from Sweden and Austria. In May 1977 a provisional charge of £15 a tonne was placed on imports of Japanese flat steel.

And steel jobs are still going down the river at an alarming rate. In the private sector in Sheffield, jobs have gone at Swift Levick, Neepsend, and Sanderson Kayser; redundancies are imminent at Brown Bayleys and Dunford Hadfield.

What is needed if this depressing misery-go-round is to be reversed is a campaign amongst steelworkers for a strategy that will actually fight against redundancies, not just the shadow boxing we have seen over the past few years. We should start the fight here and now, against our boss class, instead of directing our hostility and anger at our fellow workers in Germany or Japan, workers who are our allies, not our enemies.



enough. They can be broken arbitrarily, as has been done by the Japanese". Remember Pearl Harbour?

The answer of course was tougher and more sweeping 'anti-dumping' measures, i.e., import controls.

Richard Caborn's relative George has also put his or in several times on this topic. AUEW District Secretary of the powerful Sheffield and Rotherham area and also

who "we are supposed to be defending ourselves from. The "we" on that occasion included the management of the special steels firm Swift Levick, who had just announced 200 redundancies but were calling for import controls.

So once again the dreary old theme of import controls to save jobs has resulted in another set of workers charging into a blind alley. And

of the workers of Shelton Bar, East Moors, Clyde Iron, Irlam and other places, who used these very methods? They are statistics, unemployed statistics.

At Shotton, too, the workers, angry and wanting to fight as they saw their livelihood taken from them, dissipated their seemingly boundless energy in lobbies, petitions and delegations. And what sadder sight for

# TEXACO CAN STILL WIN MORE THAN £3

NOW THAT Esso, Shell and BP tanker drivers have accepted their bosses' 15% offer, the Texaco drivers who have rejected a similar offer face a growing attack for taking strike action.

TGWU general secretary Moss Evans attacked them for 'jumping the gun' and not accepting official union advice.

Tory leader Margaret Thatcher attacked them and sounded off against the whole trade union movement on London Weekend TV, saying that a Tory government would legislate to 'persuade' unions to use postal ballots, would cut off social security benefits to strikers, and would end the right to strike in essential services.

The Labour Government has plans to use the army to break the strike if it spreads beyond the Texaco drivers' unofficial action.

The Texaco offer is calculated to be worth 15% on average. But most of its value comes from the effect on bonuses and overtime pay of the consolidation into basic pay of increases paid under Phases 1, 2 and 3. The straight money increase on basic pay is only £3 — and that is all the offer is worth to a driver who works no overtime.

The Texaco drivers don't want to be dependent on overtime for a decent wage. They want a real increase in basic pay.

Although Texaco covers only 8% of fuel distribution,

the strike has had a big impact. In Manchester, the Texaco drivers struck on Wednesday 3rd and picketed all the distribution depots in the North West. Esso and Shell drivers refused to cross their picket lines, as did the depot workers.

So Manchester bus services were cut to nothing in three days, all the schools in Stockport stayed shut, all but a few petrol filling stations ran dry in three days, and major factories were threatened with shut-downs.

The Texaco drivers deserve to win, and can win — despite their officials' opposition — if other trade unionists respect their picket line.

NIK BARSTOW

# WORKERS' ACTION

## Newspaper bosses' nerve cracks as NUJ strike stays strong

AS THE STRIKE by 9000 provincial journalists enters its 6th week, the employers' nerve is beginning to crack. The Newspaper Society, the bosses' organisation, is reported unofficially to have made the NUJ a revised offer of 13½% in all-night talks on 8th-9th January.

### TALKS

Further talks are scheduled before the union's negotiators consult the membership.

Christmas on the picket line, with no regular strike pay, failed to dampen the journalists' will to fight. A delegate meeting of chapel officers held on 2nd January voted unanimously to continue with the strike until the Newspaper Society was forced back to the negotiating table with 'an appreciably improved offer'.

The bosses, on the other hand, were obviously finding it more and more difficult to maintain their tough stance. Over the Christmas period they stood by their offer of 8.9% and refused to meet the union before there was a return to work. But effective mass picketing, together with solidarity from the TGWU and in some areas the print unions NGA and Natsopa, crippled or stopped altogether hundreds of local papers, at the time of year when the most expensive advertising is normally

carried.

Some managements quickly offered to meet the union's claim, but the NUJ refused to call off the pickets unless the companies concerned first resigned from the Newspaper Society. A few did just that, but the rest were left to pressure their federation for a settlement.

Sighs that the Newspaper Society were caving in came over the weekend of 6-7th January. Improved offers were 'informally' made — and rejected. Then the Newspaper Society dropped its 'return to work' condition on negotiations, and the offers increased.

The final package will be put to a reconvened meeting of chapel delegates for approval or rejection.

### OFFER

It is clear that the offer will not approach the union's claim for £20 and an hour off the day. But already the mood among many members is that the union has scored an important victory. This is the first national strike in the union's history, and it proves that the NUJ can take on the bosses in a straight fight, and at the least slog them to a standstill.

After years of apathy, nursed by a treacherous leadership, a battle organised mainly by rank and file union members has shown what can be done.

JAMES RYAN

## Women reclaim the streets



In October last year, 16 women were arrested during a police attack on a women's 'Reclaim the Night' demonstration through Soho.

This was one of many demonstrations that have taken place throughout the country demanding the right of women to walk through the streets without harassment, without fear of rape and free from sexist abuse, insult and varying degrees of assault.

On that occasion, the police quite suddenly laid into the women, brutally beating them with truncheons, kicking them, twisting their arms, and arbitrarily arresting those they could conveniently cart away.

A new 'Reclaim the Night' demonstration has now been organised for Saturday January 20th in Soho. Police brutality is now an added hazard from which to 'reclaim the night', and in response to it, the organisers of the protest (the Women's Movement and the NUS) are calling for a national mobilisation (but women only). The demonstration will start at 6.30pm from Leicester Sq.

## DIARY

Saturday 20 January Car-workers' conference: the crisis in the car industry. Called by the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement. 11am to 5pm, at Digbeth Hall, Birmingham.

Monday 22 January. Trade Union day of action: End Low Pay! Assemble 11.30am at Speakers' Corner.

Sunday 28 January. Bloody Sunday Commemoration demonstration, called by Provisional Sinn Fein. Assemble 2.30pm at Speakers' Corner.

Saturday 3 February. Stop arms sales to Iran! Demonstration in solidarity with the Iranian workers. 1pm from Trafalgar Square (provisional arrangements). Called by SWP, IMG, Workers' Action, Big Flame.

## EVENTS

Small ads are free for labour movement events. Paid ads (including ads for publications) 8p per word, £5 per column inch — payment in advance. Send copy to Events, Box 1960, Rising Free, 182 Upper St, London N1, to arrive by Friday for inclusion in the following week's paper.

Friday 12 January. The Struggle for a Revolutionary Programme. Debate between the Revolutionary Communist Tendency and the Spartacist League. 7pm at Essex Rd Library, 115-117 Essex Rd, London N1. Angel tube.

## TIMES UNIONS PLAN A WORKERS' PAPER

A MASS RALLY and march in protest against the sackings at *The Times* is to take place on January 23rd, organised by an all-London liaison committee of print unions and the SE Region of the TUC.

The Liaison Committee has also decided to produce a paper called the *Times Challenger*. A national trade union conference on the Times dispute is scheduled for February 10th.

The fact that the Liaison Committee has been set up is encouraging. It is the first major step towards unity of the print unions in the face of the Times bosses' efforts to split them up.

However, the focus of the campaign is directed away from the Times and Fleet Street, and towards putting pressure on the Labour Government. Various schemes have been floated, such as Tony Benn's idea that the Times should be taken over by the BBC.

Jake Eccleston (NUJ FoC at the Times) has tried to get an inquiry, under an 'independent' chairperson, which would make recommendat-

ions about the Times closure. The government has flatly refused such an inquiry.

There is no doubt that Thomsons have no intention of letting go of the Times or of re-opening it without getting the unions to concede their demands. The Labour Government aren't at the present time going to step in and take it over from Thomsons. No mediafor or inquiry will save the Times workers if they don't start the fight themselves.

Thomsons are going to wait until the unions crack. Unfortunately, because no fight has been waged at the Times about the sackings, cracks are already appearing. Natsopa RIRMA want to reopen talks with the management.

There has been no occupation, no picketing at the Times. This has meant that it has been difficult in the rest of Fleet Street to get solidarity action. The workers who were at the Times are quickly being dispersed into other chapels to do temporary or casual work.

Time is running out.

## A blow for the rights of the rank and file

IF SOMEONE gets up in your local Labour Party and asks the hopeful candidate for a well-paid job in the 'Euro-parliament' a complicated 11-part question adding up to "are you a good British nationalist?", they've been reading *Labour Activist*, the broadsheet of the *Labour Coordinating Cttee*. The "Questions for Labour Euro-candidates" written for the Committee's broadsheet by Brian Gould MP produced an immediate counter-attack from the right-wing *Manifesto Group* of MPs. They objected to "self-appointed groups" and asked 'who'll be next' to try and organise grass-roots activities in the Labour Party.

The Common Market wasn't the real issue, nor is the LCC's real interest — though they share the nationalist standpoint that has befuddled and demoralised Labour's left wing for so long.

The Common Market wasn't the real issue, nor is the LCC's real interest — though they share the nationalist standpoint that has befuddled and demoralised Labour's left wing for so long.

The LCC was set up by two of Tony Benn's full-time advisors with his former PPS Brian Sedgemoor, and it is trying to establish a current in the Labour Party with the unstated aim of pushing Benn forward as a candidate for the Labour leadership if the Tories win the general elections.

What the right wing chiefly object to is the attempt to organise people. For militant socialists in the Labour Party who don't share the LCC's interest in promoting Benn, this question of the right to organise in the Party should also be the central one.

On one issue *Labour Activist* struck a decidedly healthier note than its questions on the Common Market. And this, too, raises the same issue.

It proposes a model resolution for Labour Party members to put forward in their wards and constituencies,

calling for local Labour Parties and affiliated organisations to receive copies of major discussion documents from the Party's policy subcommittees before these documents go to the NEC or Conference for final decisions.

The right to circulate model resolutions in the Labour Party has always been hedged around with unwritten prohibitions and threats of witchhunts. In 1975, when the newspaper *Workers' Fight* circulated its supporters with a model resolution against the

newly imposed £6 limit, the *Sunday Express* somehow got hold of a copy and carried a screaming headline "Red letter plot to smash pay curbs".

The LCC's model resolution should be supported — for its own sake, but most of all for the sake of establishing the right to circulate model resolutions in the Labour Party without such an idiotic fuss being made.

*Labour Activist* is available from the Acting Secretary, LCC, 9 Poland Street London W.1., for a subscription of £2.

This GMC asks the NEC to require party policy study groups and policy subcommittees to circulate major long-term proposals to CLPs and affiliated organisations for comment, before sending them to the Home Policy or International Committee for submission to the NEC and conference. Study groups and subcommittees should make their final decisions on draft policy proposals in the light of responses from CLPs and affiliated organisations. CLPs and affiliated organisations wishing to take part in such a scheme should contribute to the postage and duplicating costs.

## Socialist Organiser

Paper of the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory

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