

# WORKERS' FIGHT

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4p

## COLLABORATORS!

Anyone who thinks the working class can't smash the Industrial Relations Act if only it stirs itself must have been asleep during the week the dockers were in jail. Perhaps Vic Feather was.

To settle for anything less than the smashing of the Act now is a betrayal of the Trade Union movement. Every action of the TUC, every step towards collaboration with the Government and the bosses must be seen in that light.

So must the "Independent" arbitration committee made up of Confederation of British Industry and Trades Union Congress delegates and so-called experts in ind-

ustrial relations. It is not 'independent'. It is an adjunct of the Industrial Relations Act. By smoothing over normal industrial conflict, it helps the government use the penal sections of the Act as a big stick in reserve.

After the recent mass strike wave the government is more than ever scared that an insignificant little employer, some upstart container firm, will set the NIRC in motion and bring the country to the point of a General Strike - which the Government is not ready for. They are relying on the TUC to help stabilise the system by setting up the fraud of 'Independent' arbitration

as a front for the NIRC.

The TUC also is frightened of militant direct action and of being pushed into a fight with the state. They don't dare fight the government to smash the Act. They hope to avoid penalisation and more fines under the Act by being "good little boys" - so that the Tories don't need to sting them. They are vocal opponents of the Act, and yet help the Tories smooth its passage - and pretend the CBI is not the real beneficiary! Simultaneously they are negotiating with the Government on "the economy" Whose economy? Run by who in whose interests?

The slavish psychology of knuckling under in the hope of avoiding a blow - that's the spirit of these labour leaders. Even after the stupendous demonstration of working class power which opened the gates of Pentonville jail!

The TUC doesn't mind having the halter of the Industrial Relations Act around the neck of the working class - so long as it can fix it with the CBI that it doesn't bite too deeply into the tender necks of the trade union bureaucracy.

They are settling down to live with the Industrial Relations Act. The working class, however, cannot live with it. We must smash it.

## TROOPS TO STRIKEBREAK?

As the dockers strike enters its second week the prospect of troops being used in the dispute draws nearer. Under pretence of "maintaining essential services" they will be used in an attempt to break the strike. Already all the dirty tricks the bosses have up their sleeve are being used. The families of Mersey dockers who worked to allow 600 children to go on holiday - and donated their wages to charity - have been viciously penalised by withdrawal of Social Security benefits.

Massed ranks of police attacked dockers' pickets at Goole, and arrested 17. The police outnumbered the dockers.

If the army is used the labour movement should react as sharply as to the jailing of the Five. There is little doubt how the dockers will react: sharply and violently.

And it won't just be their affair. The dockers are still the spearhead of the working class fight back against the Tory government.



## RACIALISM:

### A danger to working class unity

"Britain could face influx of 80000 Asians" gasped the normally level-headed 'Guardian' on August 5th. Other papers also splashed the story of the impending expulsion of Asians from Uganda. They have British passports but no automatic legal right to enter Britain. They are usually forced to attempt to enter three or four times before even a temporary permit is granted.

The sensationalism of the Press

pinpoints a very real threat to working class unity - the threat of division on racial lines. Only four years ago the racist demagogue Powell whipped up mass hysteria on the race issue, and has been trying to repeat the performance ever since. Now he and his like will have a fresh chance.

The bosses need to take that chance. They are not able to beat the working class in a head-on clash. They must chip away at

the strength and militancy of the working class. Racism - turning black and white workers against each other - is one of their major weapons in dividing the working class. They will use it.

They will have observed that the great militant mobilisation of the class against the Tories has seen black and white workers uniting, realising their common interest in opposition to a class with which neither has anything in common.

They will have seen black faces on picket lines, men with Indian turbans refusing to cross picket lines, black people demonstrating in support of the dockers, some of whom fell for Powell's claptrap four years ago.

They also know that there is a great deal of ignorant racist feeling in sections of the working class. There are people who believe that unemployment would be

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## Revolutionaries on trial

THEY DON'T HANG DISSIDENT Communists any more in Czechoslovakia, as they did in the early 1950s during the trials that included the notorious Slansky trial.

But still they try and sentence men and women whose only crime is to believe in "socialism with a human face" and to refuse to recognise that the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Russian and Warsaw Pact troops was a "fraternal service" rendered the Czech Communists.

Since 1969 the repression of the liberal tendencies in the Czech Communist Party has gathered force and become more exacting and savage. The current spate of trials are possibly the herald of a new clamp-down of unprecedented ferocity. Husak, C.P. General Secretary (himself a victim of repression in the 1950s) may resist the pressure from Russia for a full reversion to the pre-68 regime, but slowly, inch by inch, the drive is in that direction.

The bureaucratic vested interests feared the Czech liberalising movement not for its "market socialism" economic policies. (In fact these were explicitly endorsed by Moscow, and were anyway only a variant of the policies of a number of Warsaw Pact countries.) They feared it rather for its ending of censorship and opening up of the channels of communication to real discussion.

So the Russians organised their invasion, and the tanks rumbled into Prague.

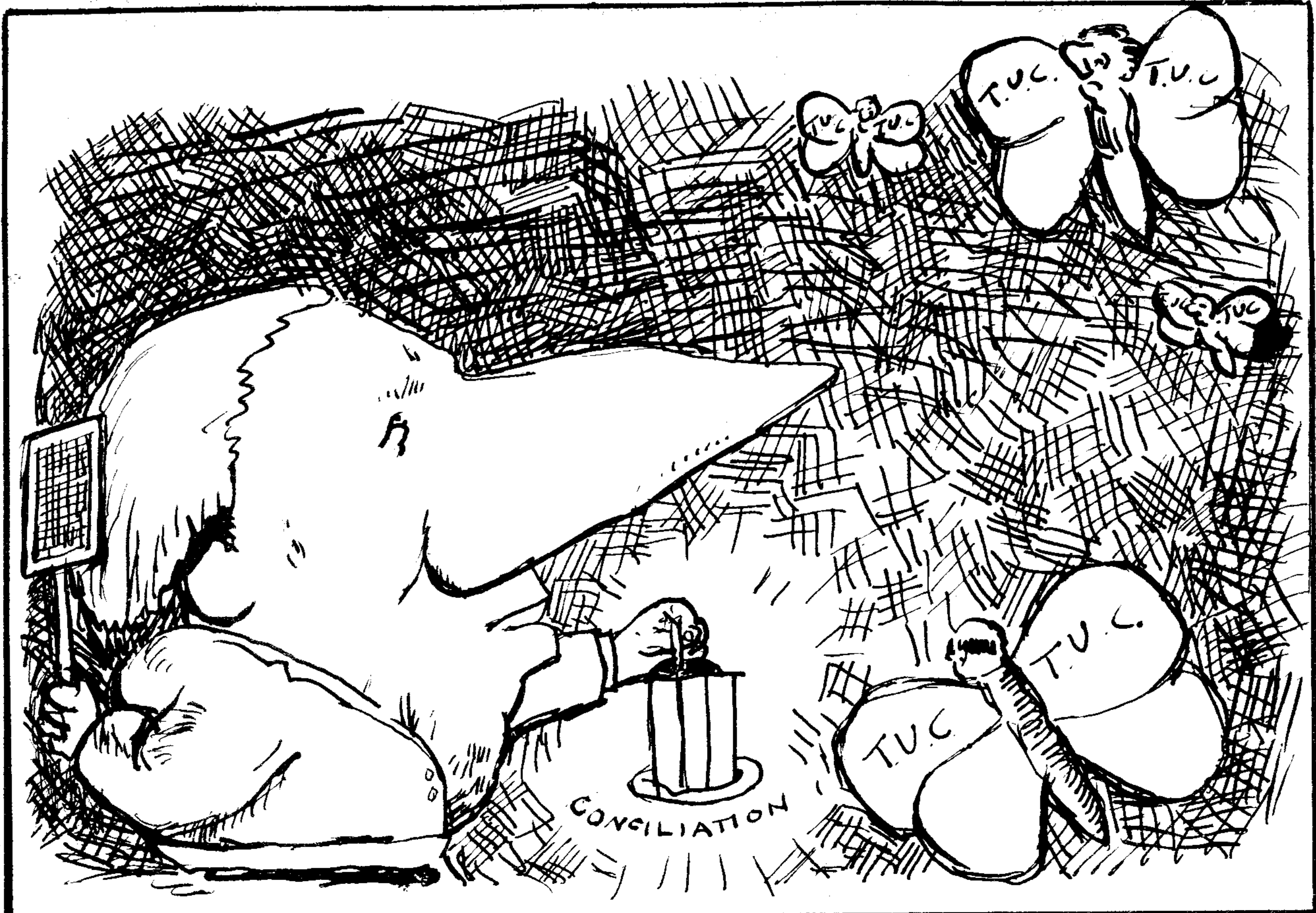
Since then half a million communists have been purged from the Party. Thousands are in jail. Tens of thousands are exposed to hardship and starvation through loss of jobs on account of their political disaffection. Very many more have emigrated.

These are not reactionaries, but communists struggling for a non-Stalinist set-up. The trade unions also have been purged of 50,000 militants since 1969.

The right to strike, a product of the 'Prague Spring', has been withdrawn, and yet again rigid bureaucratic rule is the norm in Czechoslovakia.

Communists are on trial, not reactionaries. Their crime is not in trying to overthrow the nationalised economy in favour of capitalism, but in trying to purify it and strengthen it against internal Stalinist reaction and thus prepare it to face external pressure from imperialism.

Socialists in the west must make it clear that they stand solidly by the Czech communists — against Czech neo-Stalinism.



# The super-exploitation of immigrant workers

IN FRANCE AS IN GERMANY and Britain, the capitalist class when faced with rising wage costs due to working class militancy, has had to turn to a cheaper source of labour than the population of the home country. They have brought in huge numbers of workers from abroad, and these immigrant workers are forced to work for lower wages, for longer hours and often in atrocious conditions.

The increasing reliance of certain sections of industry on immigrant labour is well illustrated in France. In 1954 there were 1.7 million immigrants; at the beginning of 1972 there were over 3.3 million.

One labourer in five is an immigrant. The majority of these workers are from the ex-colony of Algeria (over 697,000), Spain is the next largest supplier of 'cheap labour' (over 645,000) followed by Portuguese workers (over 592,000) and Italians (Over 170,000). The rest of the three million plus is made up of Poles, Tunisians, Yugoslavs, Africans and Vietnamese. However the concentration of

these workers varies; generally they are to be found in the building trades, and more particularly in the huge car factories of Renault and Citroen. Due to the fact that it is in many cases cheaper to employ Algerians and Portuguese than it is to use machines, much dangerous work is done by them.

The accident rate is horrifying. In the building trade three men are killed every day and there are 30,000 accidents every year. Of course the bosses are not too worried about this — they make their profits just the same, whereas safety precautions cost money.

At the car factories virtually all the unskilled and semi-skilled workers are immigrants. They must work at the production line, work which is poorly paid, boring and soul-destroying. Militants (troublemakers to the bosses!) are few and far between; fearful of deportation and victimisation, the immigrant worker is easily exploited.

Not only are the working conditions and pay of the immigrant workers atrocious, accommodation and housing are usually very

sub-standard. The Portuguese agricultural workers who work during the harvest season are often herded into disused barracks; in the working class areas of Paris tin shanties can frequently be seen.

However, the picture is not totally dismal. The spirit of 1968 has reached the immigrant workers and they are agitating for a better deal. Strikes and militant action by immigrant workers have increased recently.

The CGT, the "Communist" dominated General Confederation of Labour, has been guilty in the past of neglecting the immigrant workers, but is now increasingly having to take up their cause; mainly because the CGT bureaucracy is concerned about the large numbers of young workers joining revolutionary left wing organisations.

The French bosses, aware of the increasing dissatisfaction of the immigrant workers at their terrible working conditions (in the motor industry they are treated as little more than machines) are making a good deal of play with the cult phrase of 'job enrichment'. But like all those innovations introduced by the bosses it is solely for their benefit — a 'happy' workforce works harder, creating more profits.

Yet workers the world over know that as long as a human being is treated as a source of profits for a tiny few, then such a thing as widespread 'job satisfaction' cannot exist.

Meanwhile any real improvements in conditions of immigrant workers — here as in France — will be brought about not through management 'schemes' but by a hard fight and by the solidarity of all workers, in a common struggle against the parasites who sit on all our backs.

John Cunningham



an immigrants' tin-can shanty just outside Paris



## The Irish Republican Army: A CORRECTION

In the last issue *Workers' Fight* criticised the Irish Republican Army for indiscriminately bombing civilians. At the time of writing information was very scanty and we believed that the Belfast bombings were preceded by no warnings worth speaking about. We now know that in fact warnings of an hour or more were given to a number of agencies in Belfast and were, certainly, in the hands of the army in plenty of time to evacuate the areas.

Why were they not evacuated? Why were the warnings suppressed? Why did the authorities allow the bombs to explode in areas crowded with people?

The Belfast bombings gave the Army a much desired public 'justification' to invade the no-go areas which the Catholic victims of police and army terror had erected in self defence.

If William Whitelaw had written the scenario he couldn't have found one better calculated for his aims. The suspicion is inescapable that the Army brass which had an iron grip on Belfast before during the bombing consciously desired the bloody carnage as a propaganda weapon against the IRA.

These men are, after all, the butchers of Derry, responsible for shooting down 13 unarmed civilians in January.

The real criticism of the IRA is that its current tactics lend themselves to such use by the Army and are, even with warnings, largely indifferent to the effects on ordinary people. As such they are self-defeating. The line at which damage to the economy and the rulers of Northern Ireland merges with the help they give to the Army by provoking the Protestant workers and demoralising many Catholics is increasingly difficult to distinguish.

But in criticising the Republicans' tactics in their struggle, we must be absolutely clear that our basic attitude is support for them in that struggle, for the self-determination of Ireland and against British imperialism.

## ARMY CLAMPDOWN ON PEACE MOVE BY SOLDIERS' WIVES

After its splendid victory in occupying the former liberated areas of Northern Ireland, overrunning the slums and ghettos with an armory of tanks and armoured cars, the Army's top brass has run into a little 'family' difficulty. The wives of men of the 29 Commando light regiment Royal Artillery and Royal Marines of no 42 Commando have started agitating for 'peace' in Northern Ireland.

The women, some of whose husbands were recently deployed in Northern Ireland, first organised a petition calling for better communication with their men in Northern Ireland.

Then five Royal Marines wives got an even more daring idea: they would go to Ireland to try to promote peace. Remember the various 'peace' delegations and committees which erupted in Northern Ireland before the short-lived truce? Remember how they were publicised and hailed as the voices of humanity, sanity, and reason? Here, surely, were their genuine sisters of the British army.

But there are 'peace' movements and peace movements. And the Army wasn't tolerating this one. Officers of the 29 Commando light regiment RA ordered the men of the regiment to get signed certificates from their wives re-

tracting their support for the petition! They got their certificates.

When the original five held a meeting it was attended largely by the wives of senior NCOs who made a row and condemned the 'peace' movement. Remember the publicity when Belfast women, Republican stalwarts, did the same thing to the 'peace' meetings in Northern Ireland? Little publicity this time. The N.I. peace movement was an aid to the British army - this peace movement was close to 'subversion', a small but perhaps not insignificant crack in army morale.

All talk of peace begs the question - whose peace, on whose terms? The only peace in Northern Ireland that will be lasting is a peace based on democracy for the Northern Ireland Catholics and the majority of the people of Ireland. The essential step towards that peace is British Army withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

In so far as the army wives with their 'peace initiative' may be edging towards such a demand it is perhaps the beginning of a serious British movement demanding their withdrawal. The top brass knew what it was doing when it cracked down on them. But they are the first of many.

**"FOR A WORKING CLASS OFFENSIVE -  
AGAINST THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
ACT" - a programme for Councils of  
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From p.1

less pressing if no immigrants had jobs - forgetting the massive unemployment of the 1930s when there were few immigrants here. There are those who have been brainwashed with the lie that black people live off the Social Security and "the taxpayer", when in fact the vast majority are working people, contributing far more to the common life of the people of Britain than the profiteers and spivs and con-men who own British industry and run the British Government.

The significance of the degrading affair of the Ugandan Asians - with 80,000 people being treated as outcasts because of their race and colour - can be a starting point for a racist campaign to divide

the working class.

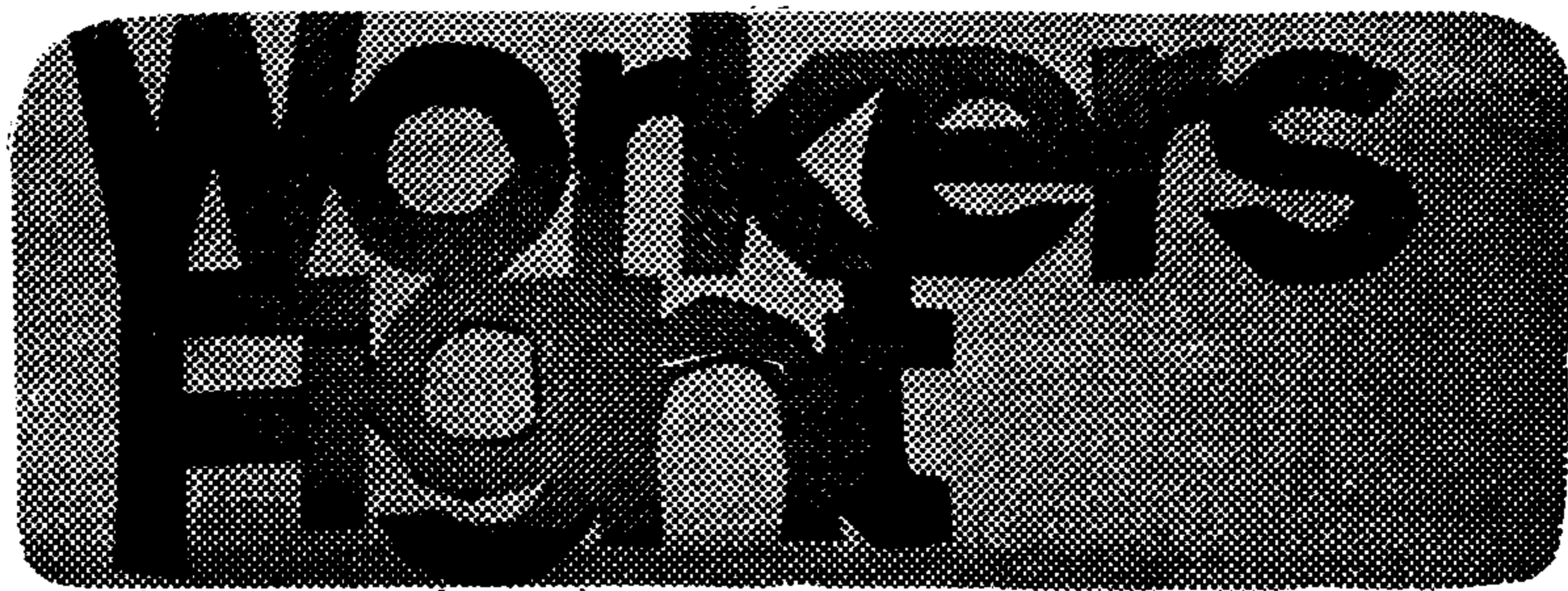
Militants must meet the challenge head-on.

1) Oppose immigration control: It is inhuman, racist - and gives the bosses a constant option of raising an 'invasion' scare to bamboozle sections of the working class. The enemies of the prosperity and well being of the British working class are not potential immigrants but the Tory governments and the bosses it serves. The immigrants are our allies

2) Form Trade Union anti-racist committees NOW.

3) Defend the immigrant workers - physically where necessary.

4) Defend the right of black workers to form their own defence squads.



## SMASH THE ACT Build Councils of Action!

According to the legend the Hydra was a monster with a peculiar constitution: when one of its heads was cut off others grew in its place.

The Hydra was a myth. But there is nothing mythical about the Tory Industrial Relations Act.

At the very same time as it stepped down in the confrontation over the jailings it spawned another challenge. The House of Lords reimposed the £55,000 fine on the T&GWU - with an added £25,000 for costs.

This means that it is the Trade Union leaders who are back in the firing line, and the Industrial Relations Act is operating according to its original intention.

They never planned to jail shop stewards. Now they plan to use fines and other pressure to turn the union leaders into efficient policemen against the working class.

Their goal is the complete emasculation of militant trade unionism. The Economist, a militant ruling class weekly, contemptuously explained what they really want to do with stiff-necked working class fighters like Bernie Steer, Vic Turner, and the rest of the Five:

"In any sensible industrial system the right sanction against the likes of them is not a jug, but the sack. If they persist with their unlawful industrial practices, they should be dismissed from the trade union whose rules they will be flouting, and then from the docks where they will be steadily rendering all jobs uneconomic: arguably with due compensation for the loss of those jobs, but more arguably not."

To do that they need the active support of the union leaders. They need the sort of trade union structure that, for example, existed in the docks section of the T&GWU before the breakaway union movement of 1954 started.

A closed shop existed by virtue of an agreement between employers and trade unions. It was used by both union and bosses, hand in hand, to sack workers who refused to bend the knee.

### STRAITJACKET

In the '30s, '40s, and '50s, many unions hardened into semi-totalitarian bodies working hand in hand with the employers and their state. One of the foremost examples was the T&GWU under Arthur Deakin. (The ban on Communist Party members in the T&GWU was lifted only four years ago).

In the post world war 2 boom the power of the bosses was gradually eroded, as the central trade union machine became less important in determining wages and conditions. The shop floor became the focal point of the struggle, the shop steward its leader, the direct action of the rank and file, almost invariably unofficial, its effective weapon.

The bureaucratic straitjacket came to fit more loosely as the way the unions operated changed.

Now the pressures of international capitalist competition leads the bosses to demand that union leaders join them in reasserting con-

rol over the shop floor. Do you want to see the model trade union the ruling class are aiming for? Look at the EPTU. The union machine is a major weapon in the hands of the employers. Electricians who don't want to have their cards revoked and lose their jobs can only protest at the scab leaders of their union if they wear masks to prevent being recognised! The bosses want that throughout the labour movement.

For the union leaders there is no half-way house between surrender and struggle - a fight to defend trade unions, and therefore, ultimately, against the system that demands the subordination of the unions.

To see preserving the union funds as the major consideration is a recipe for surrender. It leads to a policy of paying up when fines are imposed, and of disciplining militants, for fear of having heavier fines put on or union assets seized.

But the union treasury - so seldom used to aid militant struggle - is the God of the union bureaucrat. Already Jack Jones, one of the most left wing of union leaders, has been prepared to pay the Tory court's fine.

Trade Unionism, as a fighting organisation serving the interests of the rank and file, must be protected from the union bureaucrats as well as from the Tories.

We need a major offensive against the Industrial Relations Act from the rank and file - and the militant rank and file itself will have to organise that offensive.

Councils of Action, linking up militants in each area, are necessary. In some localities, Trades Councils or local Liaison Committees may be able to fill the functions of a Council of Action. If not, an independent Council of Action must be organised.

Had an organised, nationwide, militant rank and file movement existed last week there need have been no demobilisation when the Five were freed. We could have continued the fight - and we would have smashed the Act and the Government, too.

Now we need a drive for Councils of Action, an effort to develop a programme of preparation, of action, and of struggle for democratisation within the labour movement.

There can be no compliance with any union leadership which revokes the credentials of a militant steward on the say-so of the bosses' Court. Strike action is the normal response to victimisation of militants.

As for seizure of union funds - if they seize union funds, workers can seize factories. If the leaders won't fight, the rank and file must.

We must fight for an understanding in the Labour movement that the Tory monster will continually sprout new 'heads' or regrow old ones until we hit it at the heart and smash the system, replacing it with a working class socialist system. It is capitalism which is attacking trade unions. We must settle with capitalism, and arm the movement to defend trade unions with the understanding that it is either the laws of capitalism that are smashed or the unions.



# In Brief

## PROPPING UP THE SYSTEM?

While the majority of the working class face a showdown fight to preserve the rights won in 150 years of trade union struggle, a small section of workers are beginning to fight for rights they never had.

For a brief five days the two sections met — under the roof of Pentonville Prison!

A 24-hour jail strike on August 4th demanded the rights to vote, the right to parole, the right to conjugal visits, the right to educational facilities, the right to trade union membership, the right to fair pay and working conditions, and the right to join the newly formed, militant prisoners' organisation, PROP (Preservation of the Rights of Prisoners) which has helped and encouraged 43 demonstrations in 18 prisons during the 3 months since its formation.

The vast majority of prisoners are offenders against laws which view capitalist property as sacred. These laws are the product of a system which worships profits and degrades people. And most of all the system seeks to degrade and isolate those who break its rules. Its vindictiveness is indicated by the list of elementary rights still denied to prisoners.

In organising together to take collective action to fight for human conditions and minimum rights, prisoners are showing very clearly what class most of them come from. And trade unionists, who are now threatened with jail for breaking the bosses' new rules, will do well to give every support to the prisoners' struggles for basic rights.

## BITTER-SWEET ON THE BOSSES

The firm of North East Crimpers Ltd, a synthetic yarns factory on Teesside, have levied a £12 fine on 20 machine operators who walked out on July 13 after the manage-

ment had refused to negotiate a pay claim. The fine is to be knocked off their wages at £2 per week when they return to work, after the holiday shutdown, on August 7.

The men, who are not in any union, are very bitter — but have decided to accept it. They are all going to join the Transport and General Workers' Union.

It seems like shutting the door after the horse has bolted.

## 24 HOURS STRIKE — OR JUST A LONG WEEKEND

When the TUC General Council decided to call for a General strike to last for all of 24 hours, did the ruling class of this country tremble and quake? If their journal *The Economist* is anything to go by, they didn't, it seems, miss any sleep over it . . .

"The Trades Union Congress's reaction was merely to authorise a one-day sympathy strike next Monday which would have been a fairly painless way of taking a long summer weekend. One-day strikes are a way of doing one's thing without seriously disrupting much; providing the TUC would give more notice, they might be an inexpensive European habit to pick up. (They) are a very useful way, as the French have found, of letting off steam without doing any harm."

It was the spontaneous action of the workers that really scared the bosses.

## UNITY IS STRENGTH

The International Socialists are for "the unity of all revolutionary groups" — Socialist Worker says so. Really? On the Monday the dockers were in jail two WORKERS' FIGHT members attended an I.S. public meeting, to explore prospects of joint action during those tumultuous days.

But they found no "bliss was it in that dawn" spirit at Tony Cliffs meeting. Only rabid factionalism. Members of W.F., and of other groups, the I.M.G. and R.C.L., were refused the right to speak from the floor. The chairman picked I.S. speakers only. Even when no I.S. people had their hands up to speak, he still ignored non-I.S. people — and sat it out until rescued by some I.S. 'stalwart'. Perhaps humorously, many participants in this filibuster spoke for unity and against . . . sectarianism! But naturally they didn't protest when a member of the I.S. E.C. rushed at Andrew Hornung (who had tried to make an orderly protest) with the well-known ecumenical cry "I'll kill the bastard".



# 'A Libel on the Human Race'

NEAL SMITH writes on THE MYTHS OF THE POPULATION 'EXPLOSION'

The mass media tell us again and again that there are too many people in the world, and not enough food to go round. Paul Ehrlich, in his book *'The Population Bomb'*, backs up these ideas. He argues that unless universal birth control is implemented soon, the world is doomed to famine and an ecological death from pollution.

## PARSON MALTHUS

This idea is basically very old. It was first systematically popularised by Thomas Malthus in *'An Essay on the Principles of Population'* first published in 1798. His argument is simply that human population increases more rapidly than the means of subsistence. One consequence of this was that the plight of the masses could not be alleviated.

He says that: "To remove the wants of the lower classes of society is indeed an arduous task . . . To prevent the recurrence of misery is, alas!, beyond the power of man".

Such a theory is very convenient for a ruling class, as it shows that the masses' poverty is a result of natural laws, and that therefore little or nothing can be done about it. "...No possible form of society could prevent the almost constant action of misery upon a great part of mankind", wrote Malthus.

It was this reactionary theory which Marx referred to in one of his letters as "this libel on the human race". Malthus' theories, and also Ehrlich's, fail to take into account the development of production and the consequent increase in the provision of the means of subsistence.

During the first 150 years of capitalist industrialisation, from about 1800 to 1950, the population of Europe grew threefold — and Malthus' prediction of famine was invalidated by technological advances in agriculture and in health and public medicine.

## 'THIRD WORLD'

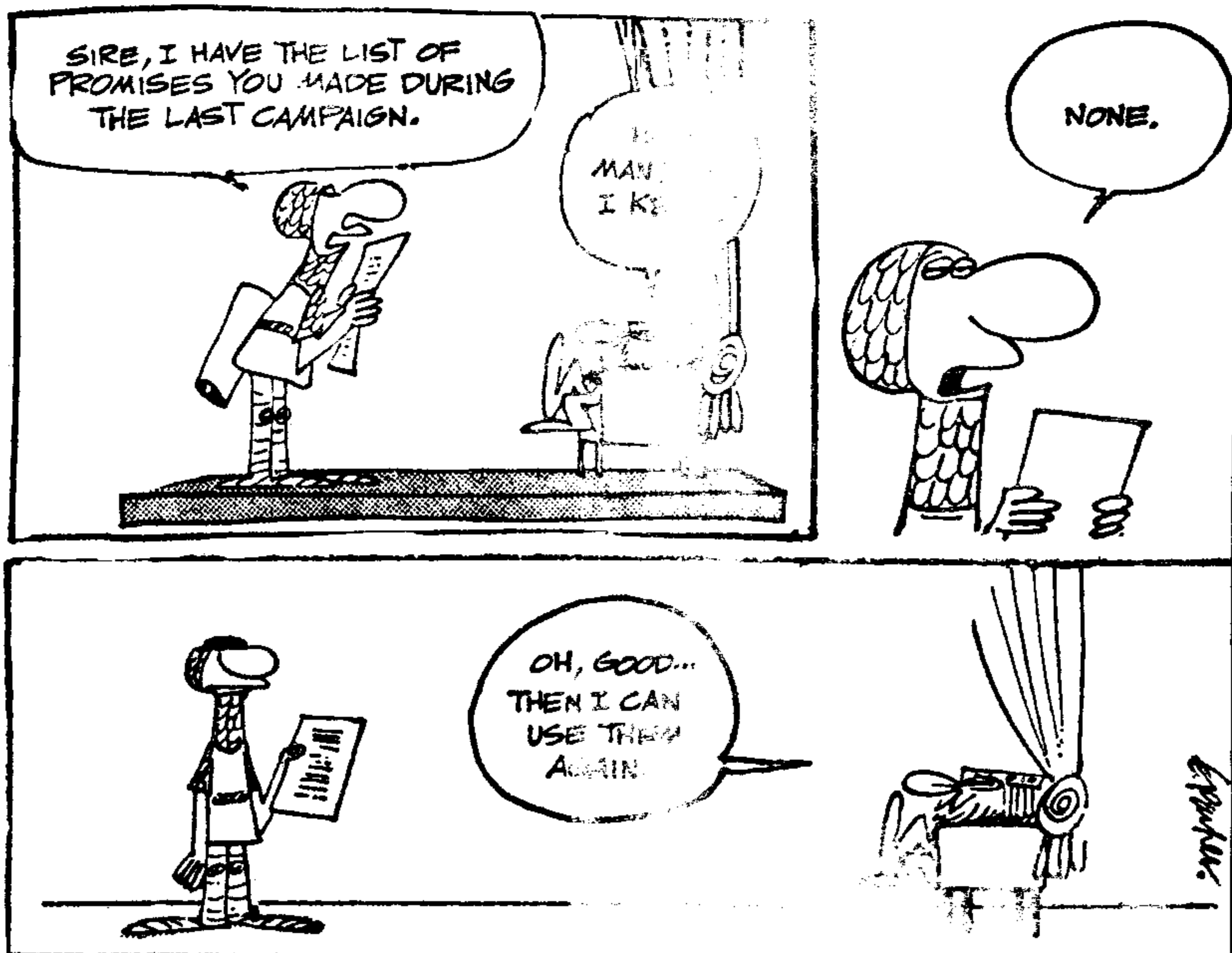
Since the early 1950s, increasing attention has been paid to the poor countries of the world. It has been argued that their poverty is a result of the 'population explosion' in those countries eating up economic progress.

Until recently the population of these countries was fairly static, with the birth and death rate both running at about 4%. However, the introduction of better public health and medical schemes has reduced the death rate by about 3%, and therefore most poor countries are increasing in population by about 2 to 3% a year.

This may not sound much, but continued growth at this rate would cause the total population to double in about 35 years. This sort of figure leads Ehrlich to conclude that Malthus is right. In *The Population Bomb* he says: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. The famines of the 1970s are upon us — and hundreds of millions more people are going to starve to death before this decade is out." The only hope, according to Ehrlich, is in birth control, reducing the population to the level at which the means of production can maintain it.

## FAMINE

Such a hope is a delusion, . . . worse — because it ignores the



fact that the problem of famine is only a symptom of the relationship of domination exerted over the 'Third World' by the advanced capitalist states. It is as a result of this that the developing countries are advancing in a slow and often unbalanced manner, under the pressure of the world market and the political and economic requirements of imperialism. This is the root of famines.

This is not an argument against birth control, which is an extension of human rights, in particular those of women; and which, while doing nothing about the causes of mass poverty, would undoubtedly alleviate it in the short term in many parts of the world.

But all the talk of birth control diverts attention away from the real cause of the problem, and in this sense is more dangerous than a simple delusion.

To those who adopt the position of Ehrlich, the question must be raised as to what is 'over population' anyway? At first sight, this seems easily answered by replying that it is when the population exceeds the available resources.

But is this an absolute, eternal law of nature or is it relative to particular situations? For example, in nomadic societies there are usually 40-100 people per square mile. In the urban areas of this country densities of over 15,000 per square mile are found (living at a higher material level than the nomads). This shows that with a higher development of production, a greater population can be supported.

No concrete discussion of population is possible without analysing the type of society and the development of technology. But this is what the 'populationists' ignore.

#### LIMITS?

It is possible to imagine a situation in which there are physical limits to population levels, but this is a long way off. Present 'over-population' is a result of the stagnation of capitalism and the exploitation of the Third World. There are in existence techniques of intensive food production, processes to massively increase the production of medicines, processes to reduce the present high deterioration level of food. **These are not applied.**

This is not because of 'over population'. Rather their non-application produces the symptoms diagnosed as 'over-population'.

In advanced industrial states many industries are working below capacity, food is being over-produced and dumped in the sea, the production power of thousands of workers languishes in dole queues — all this waste could go to solving the problems of food shortage in other parts of the world.

#### CAPITALISM

The roots of these problems lie in the irrational nature of capitalist society — in its inability to utilise fully the productive forces. Malthus, and our contemporary 'libelers', do not explain the real causes of famine and pollution.

In fact they justify the status quo which creates pollution and famine, by presenting existing conditions as a result of unalterable natural laws.

This is why all their arguments remain on the level of biology — whereas to look at the level of society means to pose the task of replacing this society by one which would eradicate famine and poverty.

# GEC

# A REDUNDANCY MACHINE IN ACTION

First the miners, and now the dockers with wide working-class support, have managed to defeat the government. But the labour movement has yet to defeat GEC and Arnold Weinstock.

The three firms which united to form today's Weinstock Empire — GEC, AEI and EE — all used to be rather paternalistic, slow-moving firms which often told workers "you may not get as good wages as elsewhere but at least your job's secure".

The bosses stopped being paternalistic and slow-moving some time ago; the workers haven't caught up yet.

Progress in catching up has so far been slow. But when workers start to move, then often the struggle develops in leaps and bounds. That is one of the lessons of recent battles and of the current wave of sit-ins. If GEC workers start to move then it will be more than ever important that militants understand what makes Weinstock tick and the needs of the struggle against redundancies.

GEC is big — but only just big enough to scrape into the world league in the electrical industry. These are recent figures for total sales:

1. General Electric (USA)	£3 225 m
2. Western Electric (USA)	£1 550 m
3. RCA (USA)	£1 250 m
4. I T & T (USA)	£1 159 m
5. General Telephone & Electronics (USA)	£1 092 m
6. Philips (Holland)	£1 006 m
7. Siemens (Germany)	£ 919 m
8. GEC — EE (UK)	£ 912 m
9. Hitachi (Japan)	£ 570 m

Before the 1968 merger, the figures were: GEC — AEI £ 450 m, EE £ 350 m.

Now as a general rule, under the capitalist private profit system, big firms win out against small ones. The big firms' resources enable them to use the most advanced technology. In some technically advanced sectors it is only the big firms that can even make a start. For example, the minimum sales of integrated circuits necessary for profitable operation are one million units per year: the total European market is 250,000 units.

And the big firms are in a position to monopolise Government contracts and make super-profits out of them. GEC benefits from a monopoly position together with Reyrolle Parsons it dominates the market provided by the Central Electricity Generating Board. In 1967, for example, the CEGB made an agreement with its switchgear makers (then GEC, AEI, EE, and Reyrolle Parsons) guaranteeing them a 15% profit margin on turnover. But the opportunities for easy profits and subsidised research for European firms are nowhere near as big as in the USA, with its massive Government armaments spending.

The result can be seen by looking at some figures for net profits as a % of sales:

European firms:	
GEC	7.0%
Siemens	2.6%
AEG — Telefunken	1.5%
Philips	4.0%
Montedison	2.5%
American firms:	
General Electric (USA)	5.7%
IBM	13.5%
Western Electric (USA)	5.0%
RCA	4.9%
General Telephone	8.2%

These figures are not all from the same years, and completely up-to-date figures would be different — for example, Montedison's latest figures show a massive loss. Nevertheless a general picture is clear: the GEC—AEI—EE merger and the cuts and rationalisations that have followed it have been aimed at establishing GEC as a competitor in the world market.

The urgency GEC sees in this task can be judged from the 1971 figures for its major competitor, Reyrolle Parsons — a massive loss. As the big business weekly 'The Economist' pointed out: "If there is to be any sparkle in GEC (sparkle for the shareholders, that is!) it must come from overseas sales". It is significant, for example, that in Turbo-Generators export orders went up from 30% of the order book at the time of the merger to 70% in 1971. From 1969/70 to 1970/71 GEC exports went up 6% while total sales went up only 3%.

Government policy has been closely involved in all this. The 1964-70 Labour government made the creation of larger units in British industry one of the main planks of its economic policy.

Its Industrial Reorganisation Comm-

ission actively backed the GEC—AEI—EE mergers, as well as the formation of the British Leyland Motor Corporation and International Computers Limited. And the efforts of successive governments to enter the Common Market have been driven by the need for the big businessmen of every European country to develop larger — European — firms with a larger home market, to compete with American giants.

There may well be further mergers coming. From Weinstock's point of view the best merger partner is probably the German firm Siemens. They have about the same turnover as GEC, and, since they manufacture a similar range of products, a Siemens — GEC merger would be followed by extensive rationalisation and massive redundancies.

#### RATIONALISATION

The GEC—AEI—EE merger has been followed by an enormous programme of redundancies. Up to July 1971, 40 000 jobs in GEC (out of a total of 265 000 before the merger) had been lost, 60 000 workers had been affected one way or the other by sacking, redeployment or the sale of their factory, and 39 had been closed or were in the process of closure.

For Weinstock this comes under the heading 'Rationalisation'. 'Rational' for whom? Certainly it has not been 'rational' for the GEC workers who have lost their jobs. From Weinstock's point of view, however, the cuts have a rationality — a capitalist rationality.

The GEC bosses' main arguments are, firstly, a reduction in the market,

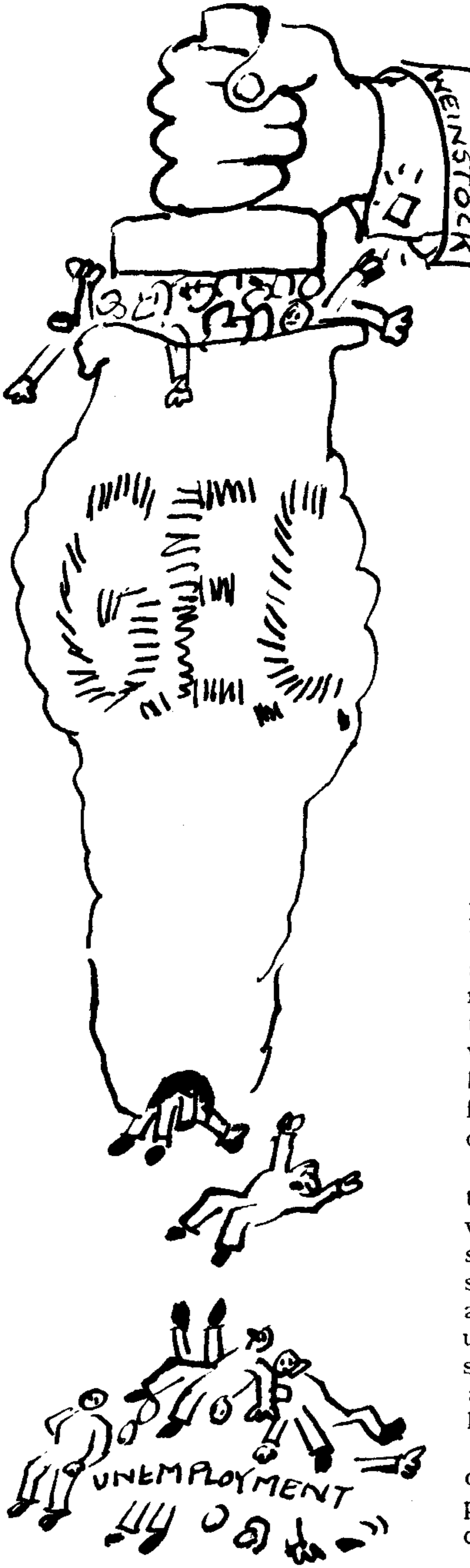
especially in CEGB orders; and, secondly, the need to eliminate overlaps and duplications between the three firms.

Both these arguments have a basis in fact, within the logic of international capitalist competition. It is true that the Government, anxious to reduce inflation, has cut capital spending. In the present condition of economic stagnation, investment by private firms is low, too. The CEGB, having made a massive overestimate of future demand in 1964, has been cutting down orders for new plant. In 1969 all orders for new plant were cancelled, and the future programme reduced.

The Redundancy Payments Act of 1965 was brought in specifically to aid Weinstock-style rationalisation. It has been a great success. Despite the massive toll that redundancies have taken since 1965, and despite the big overall increase in the rate of strikes, there has actually been a lower rate of strikes over redundancy since the Act than there was before. Workers whose resistance to redundancies had been weakened by the payments soon found that they had been sold a bad deal.

41% of semi-skilled workers had to take unskilled jobs, 19% of skilled workers had to take semi- or unskilled jobs, and 69% of redundant senior managers ended up with jobs at a lower level 18% of them as unskilled manual workers. 66% of a sample of workers receiving redundancy pay would have preferred to keep their old jobs.

An additional factor in the high rate of job loss in GEC has been Weinstock's policy of insisting that each of the divisions, taken separately, should



Continued on p.11



# THE WEEK WE COULD HA

## HOW IT HAPPENED

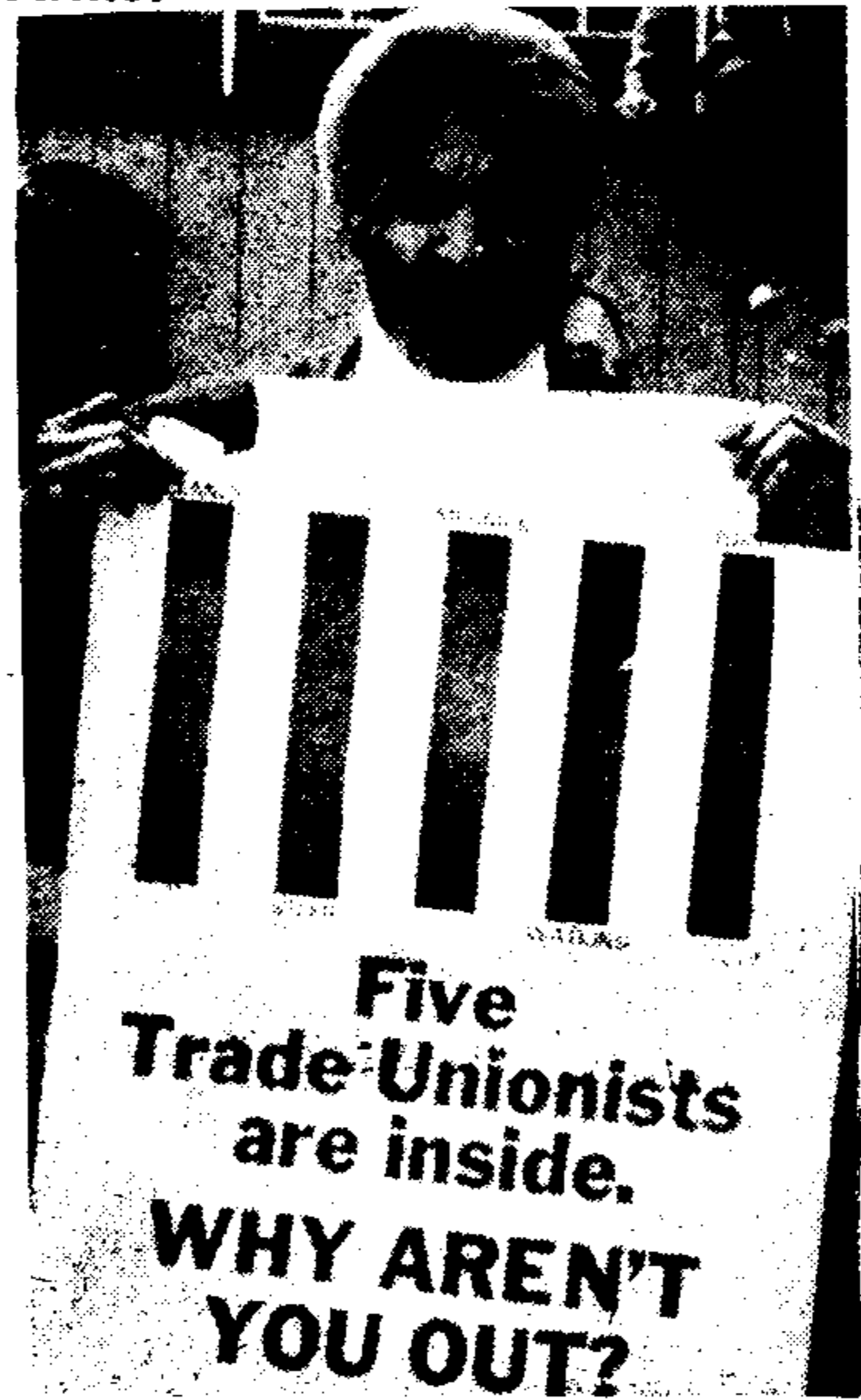
The Tories may have thought that they could escape with only a minor show of resistance if they jailed the dockers. They may have based some hopes on the "worker vs worker" aspect of the containers dispute and on the lying image of dockers as work-shy, strike-happy, overpaid, etc put out by the media.

If so they were mistaken. At the jailing of the Five, the dockers came out nationwide, even in the small ports. The lorry drivers who had had differences with the dockers were out, too. Their leader said "as trade unionists, we must fight the Industrial Relations Act together".

Print workers in NATSOPA were also on strike, first on Fleet Street and spreading right across the country, shutting down most major newspapers.

There was growing action on a local scale.

In London, container workers, warehousemen, market workers, ship repair workers, busworkers, and Tower Hamlets municipal workers struck against the jailing. Heathrow Airport was shut down by industrial action. And train drivers and ticket collectors on the Southern Region at Waterloo voted to strike.



▲ Solidarity from black workers

In Liverpool, 8000 lorry drivers came out on strike. Action was also taken by building workers on a number of major sites, factory workers at Fisher Bendix and Krafts, and Cammell Laird ship repairers. In St Helens, transport workers struck and militant building workers formed a mobile picket to bring factories out.

Building workers in Manchester had a half day strike and demonstration of 2000 - on their claim but also on the Act - on the Wednesday. Construction workers at Shell Carrington were out on strike, as were factory workers at Platt International, Oldham, and Churchills, Altrincham.

In Birmingham, as elsewhere, many major factories were on holiday, but SU Carburettors struck.

Construction workers on Tees, 3000 and in Scotland, miners at a number of pits and Glasgow Corporation electricians also took action.

The movement was spreading, but it hadn't freed the Five - on Wednesday 26 July. Even on Wednesday morning, a mobile picket organised

by militant workers in Kirkby, near Liverpool, brought out several small factories on the Kirkby Industrial Estate.

A number of factories, including militant car factories, were due back from holidays the following Monday, and many would have voted to strike. Even in less militant areas where there was no strike action, such as Bolton, the feeling of ordinary workers was moving substantially in support of the dockers.

Bolton engineering union leaders were pressured into calling on the TUC to organise automatic strike action in the event of any fines being extracted or unionists jailed under the Industrial Relations Act.

And, of course, if the official trade union leadership had done anything to justify the title 'leadership' - then industry would have been at a standstill.

But the first few days alone showed a solid phalanx of leading sections of the labour movement standing up against the Tories. The basic mechanism of trade union solidarity is in good working order.

## GO BEYOND MERE TRADE UNIONISM!

It has been said of some revolutionaries that when the time comes to seize the railway stations, they will insist on buying platform tickets, first.

Unfortunately some parts of the British labour movement seem to have a similar view. In the tremendous upsurge against the Industrial Relations Act and the Tory Government, the old routines of everyday trade union struggle over wages and conditions still lay heavy on many minds.

An example of this was the policy of the Print unions during the crisis - against any papers appearing.

During the crisis, the daily socialist papers Morning Star and Workers' Press did not appear. The weekly Socialist Worker was printed late.

Even the rank and file dockers' paper THE HOOK, produced by Manchester dockers, could not be printed.

Generally the shutdown of the left wing press was just as effective as the shutdown of the bosses' press.

There was a reasonable motive for the union policy. Right wing sections of the union membership could have seized on the appearance of socialist papers as an excuse for advocating a general return to work. Trade unionists may have felt that the strike was not yet strong enough to start making exceptions, however, as those exceptions may have been in order.

But surely this is a shortsighted. It is suicidal to regard those papers which are supporting

On Wednesday 26 July, Liverpool Trades Council called a meeting attended by over 600 shop stewards, Trades Council delegates, and trade unionists.

This meeting was the undeniable focus of the labour movement of the most militant industrial city in Britain. It was a barometer of the state of the labour movement immediately after the jailed dockers had been released.

On Monday, the Executive had decided to call everyone out on Merseyside until the Five were freed. And the resolution finally passed on Wednesday committed the Trades Council to call a general strike immediately if another trade unionist is jailed under the Industrial Relations Act.

In many ways the militancy of the British working class is actually at a higher level than it was before the General Strike of 1926. In the whole series of miners' struggles leading up to 1926, there was no serious blacking until 1925. In this year's miners' strike, a basic level of blacking was almost a matter of course.

The proportion of strikes where the issue was simply a wage increase went down from two thirds in 1940 to a quarter in 1960 (and 40% in 1971). Issues of control have been raised more and more. And the rate of days lost in strikes - 15.4 million in the first half of this year alone - is greater than any since world war I except 1919, 1921, and 1926 itself.

Obviously the labour movement has gained greatly in self-confidence from 25 years of successful industrial struggle since world war 2. But it hasn't simply been 'grab what you can' wage militancy at the expense of more long-term trade union principles. The TUC doesn't call a one-day general strike because people want higher wages ..!

The fundamental limitation of trade unionism to bargaining within the system, taking the system as a whole as unchangeable except perhaps in some misty utopian

and aiding the strike movement as "scab papers". For, whilst those printers working on the bosses' press best aid the strike movement by downing tools, printers on the socialist press should be working to produce weapons against the bosses.

The result of the shutdown of the socialist papers was, of course, that the bosses still had their most powerful propaganda media - the television and radio - and the



## The state o

future, still grips the movement. But within that limitation there has been a real boost in political consciousness. Wages struggles have been generalised into issues of control over working conditions, defence of trade union organisation, and combatting Government policies.

### THE WEAK SIDE

But the weak side, the limitation of trade unionism, was also shown in the meeting. The opening speaker from the Trades Council Executive said "of course, the situation has changed"; and went on to substitute for the General Strike call a resolution advocating:

- 1) The T&GWU should not pay the fine;
- 2) The TUC to continue with its plans for a one-day strike;
- 3) Recall of the TUC to launch a campaign to kick out the Tories and bring in a Labour Government pledged to socialist policies.

That is, the Trades Council should do - nothing. (The call for a strike in the event of future jailing was passed as an amendment). No question of using the limited victory of the release of the Five as a springboard for the smashing of the Act.

The resolution was backed up with arguments that only the TUC General Council can call a General Strike, or that to call for a General Strike is to call for a revolution, and thus unrealistic. These ideas are plainly contradicted by such experiences as France 1968, and anyway are paradoxical. Workers who fully understand the need for self-reliance and direct action in wages struggles were delegating tasks such as a General Strike and smashing the Act to precisely those union and Labour Party bureaucrats whom they wouldn't trust in an everyday local struggle!

And to fail to call for a General

working class was deprived of the few slight means there are of putting across our side of the news.

The consequences were not disastrous - this time. But imagine a general strike situation with all papers sympathetic to the workers' cause closed down!

In the docks or the mines or many other areas of industry, it is normal practice to make exceptions during strikes, to maintain some essential services under the control of the strike committee. Shouldn't

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# WE SMASHED THE ACT

## f the movement

... on the grounds of the lack of adequate political leadership of the labour movement would have been, in fact, to renounce the task of putting forward militant policies round which to build an alternative to the existing leadership.

... most noone at the meeting was historically believed that a Lab-Government can or will introduce genuine socialist policies. Most everyone knew that the Labour Party spokesman, Prentice, had said of the Five, "We have no sympathy with them. I don't think they deserve the sort of other workers."

... the Executive resolution was passed through, as a ritual. Trade-union self-reliance can go hand in hand with political fatalism. Confidence that direct action can get a bargain on a sectional, industrial level leads to a relegation of political alternatives to "pie in the sky, by and by".

... and so the particular case of the dockers was separated from the general issue of the Industrial Relations Act. One speaker - Bill - of the Socialist Labour League - did make a stand against the deflation of the movement; unfortunately in such a hysterical manner as to gain little support.

### WHAT NEXT ?

... militants must continue the fight. **General Strike to Smash the Act.** No stable equilibrium, of a decisive defeat for the Tories or a decisive defeat for the unions, has been reached. A situation of confrontation will arise again. Next time there must be a struggle to see that the movement doesn't stop at restoring the status quo.

... it has to be realised that a General Strike is not just a large-

scale ordinary strike. In a local wages struggle we may be able to go home, sit down, and wait for the employer to give in. Certainly we can't defeat the Tories "with arms folded".

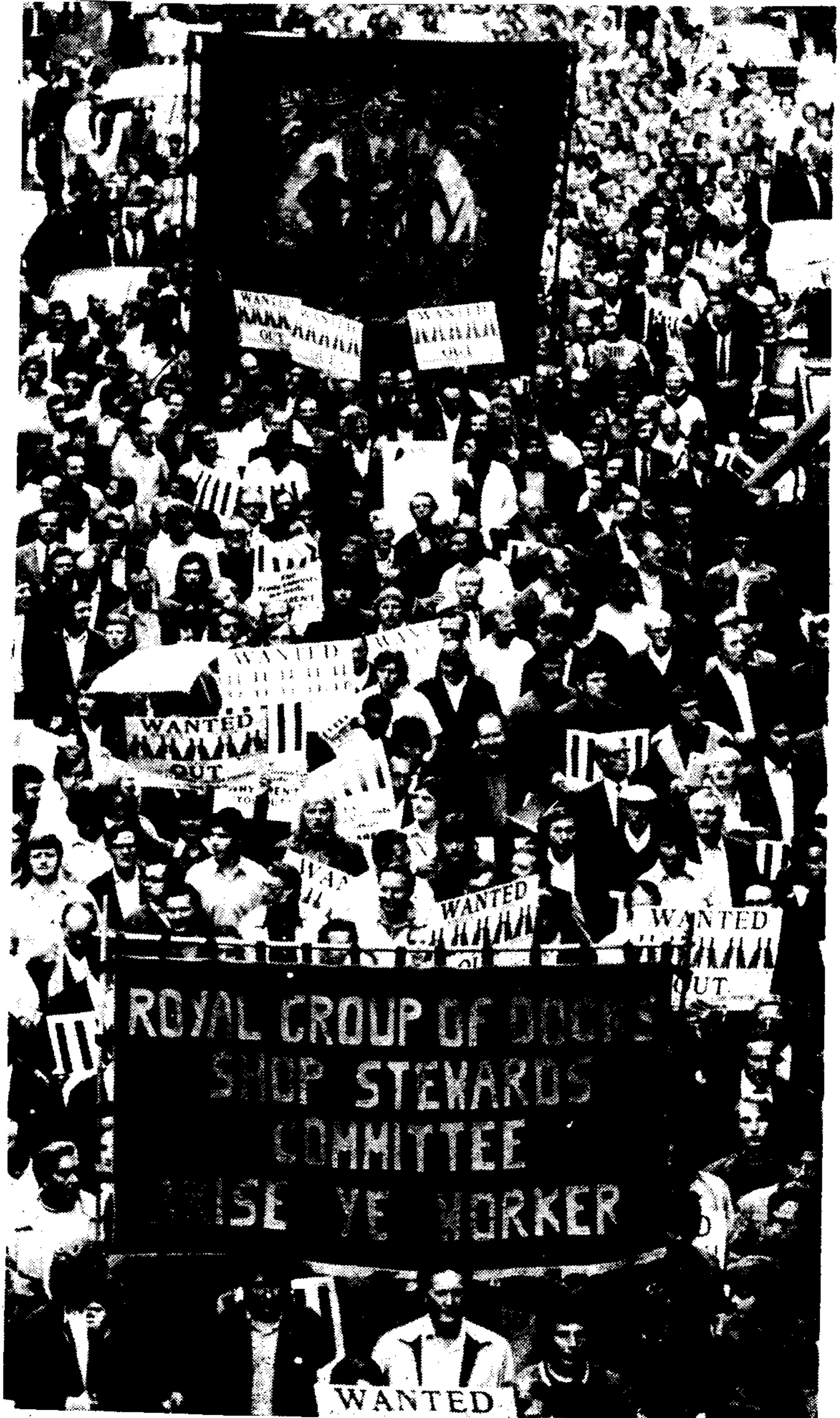
A major step is already being taken, and must be spread further - the use of mobile pickets. When the miners started using this tactic, the bosses' Press was deeply shocked - because the mobile picket is quite different from the section-by-section, "we've got our grievance, you've got yours" tactics the bosses are used to.

Who pioneered mobile pickets? Certainly not the top union leaderships! There is an urgent need for links to be built up in the labour movement at rank and file level, cutting across bureaucratic ritual - links within industries and unions, through various rank and file papers and groupings; and links across industry and union boundaries, through local Councils of Action - with a perspective of weaving those links together into a national rank and file movement.

With such a movement, the careerists, the 'sunny day leaders', and fainthearts in the unions could be pressured, compelled to act or replaced, and made to feel a fresh breeze of democracy in the unions.

And meetings would more often get above the level of unanimous votes for resolutions which express worthy intentions and tremendous militancy in the abstract, but no concrete action!

The backbone of a rank and file movement must be a solid core of socialists, arguing against the view that "we can deal with freeing the Five, but leave smashing the Act to the Trade Union and Labour Party leaders".



Thousands of workers march on Pentonville ▲▲

... news coverage from a working class point of view be considered an essential service?

... Socialists in the print unions should be arguing for a socialist, and not simply a trade-unionist, conception of what a strike is. That means that strikes should close down the millionaire press (or, where they are strong enough, take it over for the workers), but leave open all papers giving uncompromising support to the workers' cause.



Vic Turner and Bernie Steer on their release from prison.

## LAW AND ORDER

The Industrial Relations Act is a politically motivated Act. Who will deny it? If the Tories really want us to believe that the Act is designed according to universal principles of justice, then they should see to it that their courts don't change their ideas of eternal justice quite so quickly.

But socialists have to argue that the whole system of law is politically motivated. Its impartiality is a botched, capitalist impartiality.

"The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to steal bread, to sleep under bridges, and to beg for food" - as the socialist writer Anatole France put it.

Take the law on theft, for example. A hungry man who steals food out of a supermarket is a 'criminal'. The supermarket boss who makes enormous profits out of his underpaid workers is a respected citizen. Justice? Take the law on murder. Most people sentenced to punishment for murder are in fact sick, more in need of treatment than of punishment. But every year some 600 to 700 workers are killed in industrial accidents - and reports by the Chief Inspector of Factories suggest that in at least one third of cases employers' negligence is involved. Are these employers

ever brought to trial for murder?

In any society the law serves the general interests of the ruling class - in our society, the employing class. That is why the bleatings of Tories and Labour MPs about the "rule of law" are so nonsensical. Certainly it is true that an extent of orderliness is necessary in society. The Tories and the Labourites regard it as more orderly to have workers thrown out of their jobs as and when employers please; to have men working overtime to build cars designed to collapse in five years while millions are dying of malnutrition; to have the world living with the fear of nuclear annihilation.

We regard it as more orderly to regulate society by the organised will of the working class. The question of which definition of 'orderly' you prefer is a political question.

In a secondary sense there is a difference between the Industrial Relations Act and most other laws. Most laws simply aid the running of capitalist society in general; the Industrial Relations Act is designed to further the particular strategy of the bosses in this particular period. So, many laws can function with relative independence from the Government of the day,

but the use of the Industrial Relations Act is directly affected by the detailed plans of the Government.

The Tories' plans are discussed on page 3 of this issue. It is important to notice one dangerous possible outcome - a policy of isolating militant sections. When a militant section of a union takes action - dockers in the T&GWU, for example, or Southern Region men in ASLEF, or car workers - the initial attack, through the bosses' courts, press, and TV will be on the union.

The union is fined. Then the right wing in the union and the bosses line up together against the militant section, with the union right-wing blaming the militants for "destroying the union". We must be clear that we want to preserve the unions - but to preserve them as fighting organisations, not as docile and terrorised collaborators with the bosses' State.

**Every union branch and shop stewards committee should vote now to strike immediately if any union funds are sequestered, any union member is disciplined at the demand of the National Industrial Relations Court, or any trade unionist is jailed under the Industrial Relations Act.**





"I hate the revolution like sir!" said the hangman of Germany's 1918 revolution, the Social Democrat Ebert. Less direct, but equally

clear after the events in France, is the recent statement of the parliamentary leader of the Communist Party of France, Robert Balanger: "When we talk about the revolution we now think in terms of a political struggle in which our party agrees to fight the bourgeoisie with their own weapons."

The PCF leadership does not, of course, openly hate the revolution. Its feelings are repressed, producing a sort of 'hysterical blindness'. It simply refuses to see the revolution, even when it looms suddenly in front of it.

There was, we are told, no revolutionary situation in France: only ultra-lefts say there was. Since what is ultra-left at any given moment is determined by the current stance of the PCF, which is forever shifting to the right, the ultra-left gets bigger all the time. It now includes those bourgeois journalists who have depicted the real situation and the actual roles of the participants in events.

In 1920, for the benefit of some real ultra-lefts, Lenin defined the cardinal conditions for revolution: "For revolution it is necessary that the exploiters should not be able to rule and rule in the old way. Only when the 'lower classes' do not want the old, and when the 'upper classes' cannot continue in the old way, then only can the revolution be victorious. This truth may be expressed in other ways: revolution is impossible without a national crisis, affecting both the exploiters and the exploited. It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand the necessity for revolution and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes should be in a state of governmental crisis which draws even the most backward masses into politics (a symptom of every real revolution is: the rapid, tenfold and even a hundred-fold increase in the number of hitherto apathetic representatives of the toiling and oppressed masses capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government and makes it possible for revolutionaries to overthrow it." (Left Wing Communism, p.56.)

Which of the above conditions obtained in France? Was there an objectively revolutionary situation in France? If so, how and why did it develop and what happened to it?

### THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

In 1967 the standards of the French workers were seriously cut: social security charges were raised by £250 million, extracted from the workers. Consumer prices had already in ten years risen by 45%. And wages? Whereas national wealth since 1958 had risen nearly 50%, workers had benefited little. One fifth of the total industrial labour force had a take-home pay of less than £8 a week.

Despite expansion, France's economy is sick: the only west European country in which the share of employment in manufacture has declined. With a decline in industrial investment, France finds herself at the bottom of the league for industrial expansion. Stagnation in the building industry has led to the most chronic housing shortages in Western Europe.

Against this background, the deflationary cuts of '67, merging with the world economic slackening, generated the highest level of unemployment in 15 years. In January 1968 it was half a million, having increased in 12 months by 32% (51% in the Paris region, and 59% in the run down northern mining areas.) Most indicative of a sick economy, and a sick system, is that 23% of the total unemployed are youths — many of whom have never had a job.

The first spectacular explosion was among the students. Not integrated into a bureaucratized, domesticated routine of day-to-day struggle, and sensitive to ideological movements, they were the first to respond to the growing crisis. Already in the early 60s they had been the main force of solidarity with the Algerian revolution, and lately the Vietnam issue had produced another militant mobilisation.

### THE LEFT

France's labour movement is marked by a revolutionary temper — expressed in spontaneous outbursts of class action going right back to the first workers' state, the Paris Commune of 1871, and also in the allegiance of the workers to what they have regarded as the revolutionary party.

Already in 1936 a similar wave of sit-in strikes engulfed France, to be hoodwinked by the bourgeois Popular Front government and the Communist Party. In 1944 the armed communist workers of the resistance started to take over the country. They had disarmed the Paris police and begun to take over the factories, only to be again deflected from their purpose by the leaders of the Communist Party, who entered the bourgeois coalition government and disarmed the workers, helping the capitalists to rebuild their state. Again in 1947 a mass strike wave hurled back the advance of de Gaulle's then neo-fascist party.

Traditionally the CPF is the workers' party, and gets 25% of the total vote. Thorez, its late leader, claimed primacy in developing the theory of peaceful roads to socialism. After its expulsion from the government at the beginning of the Cold War, it again assumed the role of an old social-reformist party in opposition, biding its time and the workers' time too. It differed from an ordinary social democratic party only in its allegiance to Moscow and in its rigidly undemocratic internal regime.

The CPF has, partly because of its unrestrained methods, effectively retained control of the working class, using demagoguery and smashing down with violence of various types and degrees on any opposition to its class-collaborationist policies. It suppresses the sale of Trotskyist literature to this very day by systematic thuggery, which increased sharply in the last year as the tension built up.

Besides the CP, there is a variety of bourgeois and petit bourgeois 'left' parties, some gleaning workers' votes. In the last three years efforts at unity have led to the formation of a Federation of the Radical and Socialist Left, composing the Socialist Party, Republican Clubs, and the rump Radical Party (worn-out bourgeois liberals).

Essentially a re-alignment of the parliamentary riff-raff of the 4th Republic, the Federation is led by one Mitterand (11 times a Minister, Colonial Minister in 1950-51 and a defence witness for OAS leader Salan at his trial). They plan finally to merge into a social democratic party, with a predominantly petit bourgeois base. Collectively they dispose of 4 1/2 million votes, but that is no match for the amalgam of Rightist groups making up de Gaulle's party.

And so the Left Federation's eyes have turned to the pariah party, the CP.

The CP also wants unity. Not revolutionary unity for struggle in factories and streets with the followers of the Federation — but a parliamentary unity with the cynical scoundrels like Mollet and Mitterand who dupe and betray the petit bourgeois and the non-Communist workers.

The CP supported Mitterand for President in '65, as a gesture of goodwill without making demands. In the '67 election they formed an alliance against the Gaullists, collectively gaining 59 seats. Rochet (CP Secretary) made it clear that their policy was neither for communism nor socialism — but for "an end to the regime of personal power" and "a little bit more justice for the working man": mild reformism indeed!

Both the Left Federation and CP in fact accept the de Gaulle constitution imposed 10 years ago by the army — they merely wish to cut 'bonaparte' down to the size of a strong president by revoking Article 16. The biggest practical difference between the CP and LF is that one looks east to Moscow and the other west to Washington. And that means, ironically, that the CP supports de Gaulle's foreign policy, whilst the LF opposes it.

But necessity makes strange bedfellows. Sharing a perspective of a peaceful, endless road to an impossible 'socialism' the CP and LF have a lot in common: to be precise, 49% of the vote in 1967.

With a growing bond of mutual utility, things were looking bright. Time would smooth out the disagreements on foreign policy. Meanwhile the electoral margin would grow, the General would get

The British ruling class last week heaved a big sigh of relief, as the House of Lords and the Official Solicitor pulled their chestnuts out of the fire.

Since the end of the War, as Western Capitalism prospered and workers won better standards, it was generally put about that the industrial working class was dead as a revolutionary force. Students might demonstrate; the 'third world' might take up arms; but the European workers were satisfied with their cars and TV sets.

But in 1968 in two short weeks the workers of France swept all that complacency away, and put the European workers back on the revolutionary map.

With little warning, in May 1968, the French working class rose to its feet, pulling its trade union leaders — "Communist", "Socialist" and Catholic — and political leaders helplessly behind

it.

Effortlessly, it brought the country to a standstill. By instinct, without any real leadership — and initially against the 'leadership' — it seized and held the productive forces of society which it had wrenched from the powerless hands of the capitalists.

Factories, mines, docks, ships at sea and in port, theatres, offices — all were swiftly occupied and placed under the control of workers' committees.

Everybody joined in. Grave-diggers and chorus girls, footballers, bank clerks and taxi drivers, trade unionists and non-unionists: the whole of the French working masses were in action. Journalists refused to lie to order, and printers censored their employers' press. Farmers joined in. So did schoolchildren, who took over the schools. And they were joined by their teachers! In the vanguard

were the workers of the giant Renault car plants.

Unlike last week's strikes in Britain, which never quite got past the defensive stage, the French General Strike was from the very start a vast, angry offensive against the system. And yet, despite that, despite the participation of 10 million and the existence of a mass party calling itself revolutionary, the system remained intact. Why was this so?

The answer to that question is of vital concern to militants and revolutionaries in Britain today. For this reason we reproduce an edited version of an article published immediately after the strike in *Workers Fight*, in June 1968, which examined the objective possibilities for a workers' victory, and the factors which led instead to a capitalist victory.



# MAY 68

# When 10 million workers had Capitalism by the throat

older and maybe one day die: all was well and getting better.

But then the bloody workers went and spoilt it all by taking things into their own hands. For them, of course, things had been bad and were getting worse.

### THE UNIONS

Not more than 30% of France's workers are unionised, split into three blocks: Force Ouvriere ("Socialist"), 600,000 members; CFDT (Catholic), 750,000 members; and the biggest and most important, the CGT ("Communist"), 1,900,000. (It had 5 million at the end of the War)



Top C.G.T. Bureaucrat, George Seguy

The colours of the CGT banner are red and yellow: red for the workers and their aspirations, yellow for the stalinist bureaucrats and their way of life.

Were the CP and CGT revolutionary, with a realistic perspective of mobilising the workers in class struggle, then the discontent of the French workers would have developed openly in mass struggles. But the antics of the CGT in day to day industrial issues have made them past masters at repressing the militancy of the workers, paralleling industrially the CP's role politically.

Thus the CGT deliberately divides the workers, factory from factory, grade from grade, conducting separate, isolated, limited strikes instead of serious struggles. Such demoralising tactics as half-hour strikes in a single shop, token one-day general strikes and extreme timidity in demands (with one fifth of the workers on less than £8 a week) have contributed to the explosive frustrations and led to the fall-off in membership since the War.

As unemployment grew, as social shortages like housing remained chronic and social benefits and real wages were cut, the meanderings of the CGT only masked and disguised the resentment and thus prepared the violent and sudden character of the explosion.

Last Autumn they called for a general strike against the cuts, a token strike like so many others. There was little response. This must have encouraged the bureaucrats to explain their own behaviour in terms of working class apathy. They forget, these bureaucrats who are accustomed to commands from above, that the working class isn't an orchestra to play to order, that it must develop confidence in itself and in its leaders before it will respond — and there have been too many token strikes in France.

The whole behaviour of the CP and the CGT since 1944 and earlier, and particularly the industrial antics of the CGT, had been designed to destroy any confidence in

their own ability to win. They needed a fighting lead, the prospect of a struggle rather than a charade, to rouse them with the hope of winning.

This hope the student movement, with its magnificent struggle on the barricades and in the streets — in the great tradition of the Commune itself — gave them.

### STUDENT GUERRILLAS

The students, free from the restraint of an ingrained loyalty to the CP, were responsive to revolutionary propaganda (Trotskyist, Castroist, Maoist) which helped them develop the revolutionary plan to face the state in pitched battles.

When they stood up courageously in protest against police occupation of the Sorbonne, they were joined on the Night of the Barricades (May 10th) by many unemployed youth, attracted by their militancy. According to the Assistant Editor of L'Express these fought most bitterly and, of the 30,000 on the barricades, were the last to retreat.

The heroism of students and unemployed against the brutal police riveted the attention of the workers, who loathe the police, especially the strike-breaking CRS. A wave of sympathy swept through the working class.

To head off moves for serious solidarity action the unions called a one-day token general strike — one more token strike, but the response on May 13th was anything but token. 10 million workers, three times and more the number organised in trade unions, struck. Meanwhile the students' Insurrection, and the very threat of a general strike, had forced the Government to retreat: it capitulated — the students had won.

And the workers, who had earlier ignored the call for a futile pseudo-struggle, under the baton of the CGT bureaucrats, suddenly had found a blueprint for their own



needs — they too would go out to win. The single spark of student action had landed on dry tinder.

Meant by the leaders as a safety valve, May 13th only convinced the workers of their own strength. Immediately an aggressive mood built up. In spite of the general return to work ordered for May 14th, some strikes continued. From May 16th the takeovers began. Workers seized Sud-Aviation; the students seized the universities. The workers in the most militant factory in the country, Renault at Billancourt, took control.

By the weekend a million workers throughout France had seized the big plants. The Red Flag was hoisted over the means of production. The strikers demanded wage rises, shorter hours and "a real policy to deal with unemployment". A great wave was rising, one which placed in question the very foundations of the capitalist system: its property.

## REARGUARD OF THE ADVANCE

This was entirely spontaneous. The CGT and other unions had reined in the background. Now the CGT endorsed the strikes and takeovers, moving quickly to catch up with the runaway workers. But it made it plain that at that stage, with only a million out, it was not calling a general strike.

But still the strikes continued to spread like a grass fire. Desperately now the CGT fought for control of the workers' movement. "The behaviour of the Communists has been fascinating to watch. From the beginning of the crisis they have been more concerned to crush the guerilla challenge of their left than to overthrow M. Pompidou's government." (Observer, 26.5.68)

The students, who had detonated the workers' revolt, were the first target in its campaign to reassert its control. At the beginning of the upsurge L'Humanite (the CP's daily paper) had denounced them; now it resorted to damagogy about outsiders interfering in the affairs of the workers. The student leader Danny Cohn-Bendit was consistently referred to in their usually chauvinist press as "the German".

Students were refused the right to participate in workers' demonstrations. When on May 17th they marched to Billancourt they were refused access by CGT officials (but the workers came out over the road to greet them).

Later, the only official CGT posters at Renault were numerous warnings against... sellers of 'ultra-left' literature! A student



(Above) Farmers joined in plan to march on the Radio building on the 18th to protest against Government news control had to be cancelled because the CGT denounced it as a 'provocation' and warned all workers against taking part.

plan to march on the Radio building on the 18th to protest against Government news control had to be cancelled because the CGT denounced it as a 'provocation' and warned all workers against taking part.

Yet despite all this, the CGT and CP had to run very fast just to keep up with the growing wave of workers' action. "The paradox which underlies this controlled chaos is that the Communist Union... the Gaullist government they... the challenging are really... the side of the barricades... this way... (i.e. by endorsing strikes) "can the apparatus which leads the Communist unions... its control and protect its

base from contamination. Economic dislocation and incredible inconvenience are the price which French society is having to pay to head off an insurrectionary movement which no one saw coming and few have yet understood." (Observer, 19.5.68)

By mid-week 23rd May the peak of the wave was reached with 10 million workers in possession of the factories up and down the land: control seemed to have slipped out of the bourgeoisie's hands.

## TWO PERSPECTIVES

By its scope, tone and temper the mass strike was insurrectionary — the workers' drive was clearly for a total reconstruction of society. It raised inescapably the big question: which class is to rule? A choice of two perspectives faced the workers: keep physical control and take over entirely and go forward; or else settle for big concessions by way of ransom from the powerless bourgeoisie, which would — for the moment — gladly make them.

To attain workers' power the necessary steps were:

a) To prepare organs of workers' power by generalising the factory committees (already taking many decisions not normally taken by workers) into local, regional and finally a National council of workers' deputies — thus opposing an embryonic workers' state to the bourgeois state.

b) Begin to actually run the factories, under control of the workers' councils.

c) Decisively smash and dismantle the bosses' state and consolidate the new order as a workers' state.

Was this physically possible? What was the relationship of forces?

The workers had the factories. On 23rd the Police Union declared itself in sympathy with the strikers, and unwilling to be used against them. The unknown quantity was the army: because of military discipline the only way to test the conscript soldiers is to confront them with a struggle which forces them to choose — and gives them an opportunity to cross over.

In The Times Charles Douglas Home (Defence Correspondent) wrote: "In an extreme emergency the troops could be brought into operation, but it is appreciated that they could be used only once, and then only for a short while, before the largely conscript army was exposed to a psychological battering in a general campaign of subversion which it would probably not withstand." (31.5.68) This would confirm all past revolutionary experience.

The nominal armed strength of the bourgeoisie was: 83,000 police including 13,500 CRS; 61,000 gendarmes; 261,000 soldiers in France and Germany. In a clash they could only firmly rely on a few battalions of regular soldiers, and presumably the CRS.

But there were 10,000,000 strikers, and over 400,000 members of the CP alone.

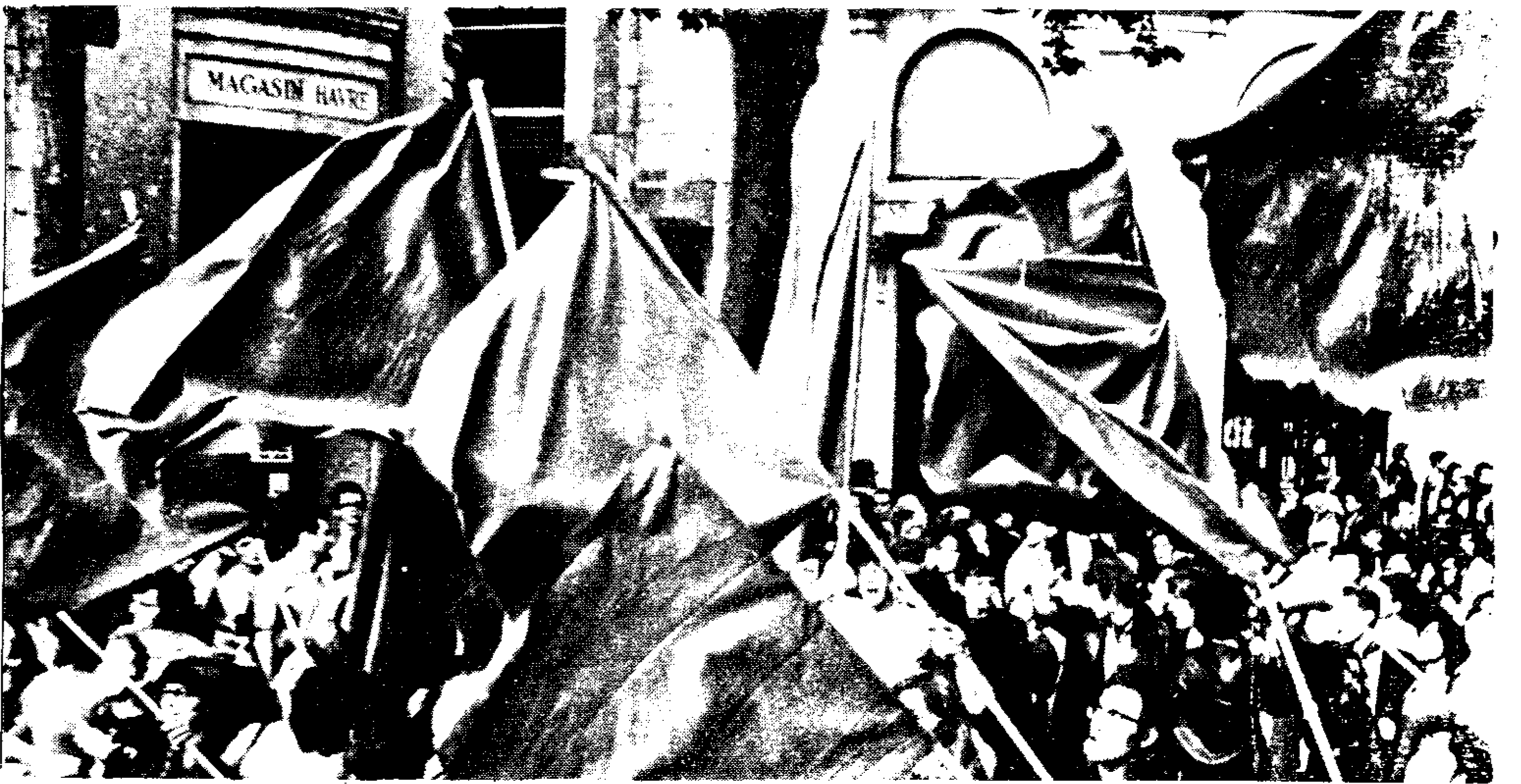
Yet the CPF and their apologists say the workers would have faced massive defeat had they attempted revolution.

In fact it is clear that with a minimum preparation, during the mass strike, the bourgeois state could have been smashed and dismantled. The strongest element of 'material' force that protected the bourgeoisie was the reformist, social democratic routine, the anti-revolutionary legalist-pacifist theory, and plain funk of the CPF leadership.

A party aiming at leading the working class to power in that situation would face the following tasks:

1) to raise the slogan of a workers' and farmers' government, as the immediate objective of the strike;

2) popularise the idea of workers' councils of self administration to organise the life of the country and begin to elaborate a counter-state, leading to dual power such



Red Flags in the Streets, and Renault occupied



as that in Russia between the rise of the workers' councils (soviets) in February and their victory in October 1917;

3) it would begin to form workers' militias, initially its own cadres, drawing in militants from all the factories — thus arming the workers for an uprising to disarm and suppress the paralysed organs of bourgeois power and establish the workers' state.

A revolutionary party would have propagated this long before the upsurge. But even in the middle of the strike, such a programme of action, by a party with the ear of the masses, would have galvanised the workers — and at least led to a period of dual power.

## ROCHET'S "REVOLUTIONARIES"

But the "revolutionary Party" chose a different course: initially it did not even dare pose the resignation of de Gaulle and his government as an objective of the strike!

Amidst the greatest workers' movement for decades, and France's biggest ever general strike, the CP/CGT concentrated on getting wage concessions.

Running hard to keep control of the workers and to isolate the students and revolutionaries, the CGT and CFDT from the start of the upsurge demanded talks with the Government. (The Morning Star, 25.5.68, took Pompidou to task for being slow to reply!) Even the Catholic CFDT went further than the "Communist" union in demanding structural reforms to the system, as well as bread-and-butter concessions: and in fact they remained consistently to the left of the CGT!

By the morning of May 27th they had got their 'Big concessions': 10% all round increase; 35% rise in minimum wage; progress to a 40-hour week; social security cuts rescinded, etc. (By way of a tip, CGT leader Georges Seguy was promised that henceforth the CGT too would be eligible for government subsidy for the training of its officials...)

The size of these concessions is the measure of the bosses' desperate need to enable their labour lieutenants to placate the workers.

The happy band of bureaucrats,

smiling and giving the thumbs-up sign for the cameras, hurried to Billancourt, symbol of Labour Militant, to bring the glad tidings — and call off the strike.

But the proletariat is an ungrateful class. Seguy and Franchon the CGT bosses were shouted down, and their 'big concessions' scorned.

All over France the same thing happened: the workers refused to call off the strike. They wanted more — in fact they wanted everything. But the CP and its union — built over decades on talk of socialism — stood four-square across their path, dithering and wriggling.

And so, instead of advance, there was stalemata.

And how? Who could control the workers and end the bosses' period in limbo?

The General seemed eclipsed, and there was nothing remotely resembling a government in sight. The students and revolutionaries, despite the CP's anathemas, were gaining: "The... success of the student leaders was to rally... thousands of young workers disgruntled with the strike in the mad unions..." to a mass rally on the 27th. Despite a number of CP counter-meetings 30,000 attended, demonstrating the chasm that separated the timid leaders from large sections of the workers.

But what was to be done? Mitterand on May 28th hurried in with a solution to harness the workers' energies in the best interests of capitalism and of... Mitterand: a Provisional Government to supplant de Gaulle immediately — headed by Mitterand, with Mendes-France as Premier.

Naturally the CP agreed — but it had to haggle with these bourgeois politicians in whose small shadow it chose to walk, for a promise of a place in the new Government.

A mass demonstration for "a change of policy opening the way to progress and democracy" covered Paris, 2 miles long, on the 29th. It looked as if by sheer strength of the mass movement the Left leaders and the CP would be lifted into the saddle — despite their earlier reticence.

But then de Gaulle came back on stage, having met General Massu and arranged for CRS reinforcements

and tanks to converge on Paris. On 30th May he made his second, belligerent speech, drawing confidence from the proven timidity of his opponents and their ability to dupe and confuse the masses, rather than from any other real strength he and his class possessed.

Recognising that the strike must end either in insurrection or collapse, he said in effect to the cowardly social democrats of the "Communist Party": 'Attempt to take power, or put your hands up!' Knowing his opponents, and perhaps preparing their retreat, he announced a General Election.

## THE VANGUARD OF THE RETREAT

Within 2 hours of the ultimatum, in a situation where they were not merely strong enough to boycott any capitalist election but could actually prevent it being held, the heroes of the CPF announced that they accepted this election, stage-managed by the Gaullist state!

"There was (in de Gaulle's speech) also an element of bluff: had he really the power to break the strike it is continued and made elections impossible? ... (How in any case could (the election) have been organised in a country paralysed by strikes — who would have printed the voting slips?)..." (Observer 2.6.68).

De Gaulle could safely bluff. He was aware of one great asset: the inbred social-democratic inertia and fear of action of the CP, who had publicly proclaimed their intentions by maintaining their dog-tail relationship with Mitterand and Co.

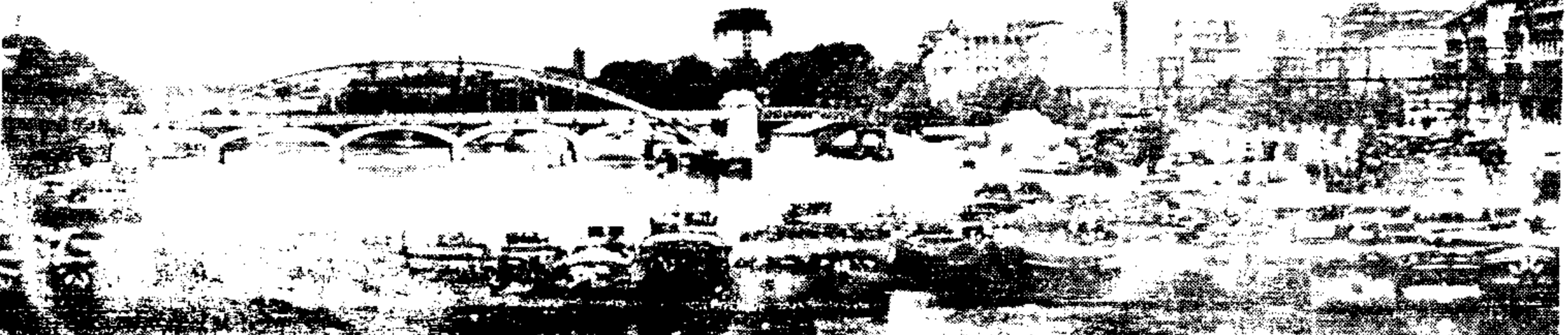
Their demand for de Gaulle's and the government's resignation, so belatedly adopted, was now dropped like hot contraband. The other 'lefts' followed, with varying degrees of protest, where the CP led: "Even before the cabinet had announced its promise to respect last weekend's wage increases, the trade unions, disassociating themselves from the students, were engaged in back to work talks with their employers." (Ibid)

With de Gaulle's speech and the non-response of the workers' parties, his supporters raised their heads: "Paramilitary Committees of Civic Action sprang up here and there across the country, in one or two areas celebrating their legitimised thuggery by firing a few shots at trade union or CP office buildings..."

The police, which had vacillated now regained its loyalty to the force which appeared strongest, in face of the CP's feebleness: "at least we now know where we are" was the general police reaction to de Gaulle's speech, as reported in The Times (31.5.68). And the Gaullists took to the streets, 500,000 strong, some chanting: "Cohn-Bendit to Dachau". (He had habitually been referred to in the bourgeois press as "the German Jew"; in reply the students and young workers took up the slogan "We are all German Jews" and young Algerians, making a distinction which many 'lefts' have yet to perceive, between Jews and the reactionary State of Israel, chanted that they too were "German Jews").

Having accepted the elections, the CP again ignored all but bread-and-butter issues. It explained to its militants, as it did the latest summersault, 'we have not changed — life has!'

Meanwhile the police began to break up the strikes, starting with the post offices, radio, TV and fuel. The CP stood on the sidelines — warning against 'ultra-left provocateurs'. The Morning Star reported as follows, on June 1st







# WHERE WE STAND

workers fight

□ CAPITALISM is inseparable from the exploitation by the bourgeoisie of the working class 'at home' and (since 'advanced' capitalism became imperialist) of the workers and peasants in the colonies and neo-colonies abroad.

It is a vicious system geared to buttressing the strong against the weak, to serving the handful of capitalists against the millions of workers, and to keeping many millions in poverty so that a few may prosper. Capitalism exalts property and degrades life. It is at the root of the racialism which poisons and divides worker against worker. It is a system of massive waste and social disorganisation, at the same time as it forces the working class to fight every inch of the way to better or even maintain its wages and conditions.

Having once been progressive, in that it at least developed, in the only way then possible, the productive resources of mankind, it is now a totally reactionary force in history. Its expansion after World War 2 gave it merely the appearance of health: in reality the boom was like the flush on a sick man's face. And already economic expansion has given way to creeping stagnation.

□ TODAY the ruling class can keep their system going only at the cost of large scale unemployment and attempts to cut the living standards of workers in the 'rich' parts of the world, of massive starvation and bloodshed in the 'poor' two thirds of the world, and of the ever-present threat of the destruction of humanity through nuclear war.

□ THE ONLY WAY OUT is for the working class to take power and to bring the resources of the modern economy under a rational working class plan, in place of the present unplanned and blind private-profit system. Having overthrown capitalism and established social ownership of the means of production, the working class will build towards a truly communist society, in which at last the principle will be "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

□ The working class has created political parties for this purpose — LABOUR PARTIES, COMMUNIST PARTIES, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES.—But in country after country these parties have joined capitalist governments and managed capitalism. They have betrayed the socialist aspirations of their working class supporters, tied the labour movement to the bosses' state, interest and ideology, and destroyed the political independence of the working class.

□ The task is therefore to build a socialist party which will stand firmly for the interests of the working class. WORKERS' FIGHT is a group of revolutionary socialists, aiming to build that party: a party which is democratically controlled by an active working class membership, which preserves its political independence and fights the ideological domination of the ruling class.

□ The basis of our activity is the scientific theory of MARXISM, the only theory which gives a clear understanding of present day society and of the necessity of revolutionary change.

□ Although they cannot organise the struggle for workers' power, the TRADE UNIONS are indispensable for the defence of workers' interests. We fight for the independence of the unions from all state control, and within the unions for militant policies and for democracy. We see the trade union bureaucracy as a distinct stratum which acts as a broker between workers and bosses. Its life and work-situation is quite different from that of the working class. Lacking a direct, necessary allegiance to working class interests, or any fundamental historical interests of its own, its general tendency is to work with the bosses and their state against the working class.

Only a mass national rank and file movement, linking up the different industries and guided by the ideas of revolutionary Marxism can, in this period, turn the trade unions into reliable instruments of working class interests, independent of the bosses' state.

□ We fight against the INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT, against any incomes policy under capitalism, and against any legal restrictions on trade unionism.

□ We fight against UNEMPLOYMENT; for a national minimum wage; for work or full pay; against productivity bargaining.

□ We fight to extend the power of workers to control the details of their own lives in industry here and now. We stand for the fight for WORKERS' CONTROL with the understanding that it can be made a serious reality only in a workers' state. We are against any workers' 'participation' in managing their own exploitation under capitalism.

□ We believe that the "PARLIAMENTARY ROAD TO SOCIALISM" is a crippling illusion. The capitalist class will not leave the stage peacefully; no ruling class ever has. Socialism can be built only by smashing the capitalist state machine (army, police, civil service) which is the ultimate defence of the bosses' power in society, and replacing it with a state based on democratic Workers' Councils.

□ The LABOUR PARTY is a capitalist party in its ideas, its policies, and in its record in government. At the same time, the bedrock organisations of the working class, the trade unions, support and finance the Labour Party. There is an open valve connection between the Labour Party and the unions, allowing the possibility of large-scale active working class participation in the party.

We relate to the Labour Party, therefore, not by simply denouncing it, but by attempting to advance the working class towards outgrowing and breaking through the stage in its own development — ideological, political and organisational — represented by Labourism.

□ We fight for full and equal rights for WOMEN, for female emancipation from the male domination which has co-existed throughout history with class society and which has its roots in such society. We fight, in particular, for the emancipation of women of our own class, suffering a double and triple exploitation, who have been most accurately described as the "slaves of the slaves."

□ We fight against RACIALISM and against immigration controls. We fight for the integration of immigrant workers into the labour movement and for a united fight against capitalism, whilst supporting the right of black minorities in Britain to form defence leagues or independent political organisations.

□ We give unconditional support to the struggles of oppressed peoples everywhere fighting against IMPERIALISM, and to their organisations leading the fight.

□ British workers have — fundamentally — more in common with every single worker throughout the globe, irrespective of race, religion, nationality or colour, than with the whole of the British ruling class. We see the fight for socialism as a world wide struggle, necessitating the creation of a world revolutionary party. We give critical support to the FOURTH INTERNATIONAL.

□ We stand for a political revolution of the working class against the bureaucracies of THE U.S.S.R. and the other countries called 'communist', which we consider to be degenerated and deformed workers' states. The social regime of the different Bureaucracies has nothing in common with socialism, let alone with real communism. At the same time we defend the nationalised economy in these countries against capitalism and imperialism, unconditionally: that is, irrespective of the selfish, usually anti-working class and anti-revolutionary policies of the ruling bureaucrats, and against those policies.

□ There are OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS (including the official British section of the Fourth International) which have generally similar aims, but methods differing from ours, or differing conceptions about what needs to be done here and now. We consider all these groups to be seriously — sometimes grossly — inadequate in theory and practice. We favour unity in action with these groups where possible, and a serious dialogue about our differences.

Continued from p.9

the statement of the CPF: "(it) warned today that General de Gaulle had threatened to use 'other means than the elections'". ... Yet "the Communists would enter the electoral battle with confidence and (the CPF) called on everyone to guard against giving any opening to provocations wherever they might come from. ... Cancellation of last year's social security cuts will not now be part of the present settlement, because the government has said the issue should be discussed in the new National Assembly."

Lack of shame or self-consciousness is one major asset these people possess!

Thereafter the CP, guided no doubt by the notorious injunction of their late leader Thorez that "one must know how to end a strike" energetically set about getting the workers back to work, splitting up their unity (by instructing everyone to return to work as soon as their separate settlements were made) and isolating the hard core to face the now increasing violence of the police, which was to result in several deaths.

The Party's mind was on the coming elections, as that 'ultra-left high-Tory paper the Sunday Telegraph put it: "Now there can be elections. The energy and violence generated by the upheaval can be canalised into a campaign for votes" (2.6.68). That is, of course, pretty much what Balanger said in the first place.



"Return to normal" — one of a spate of posters

## WAS REVOLUTION POSSIBLE?

Between May 16th and 30th, as we have seen, and even after that, there was a mass working class movement openly striving for more than just wage concessions. There was active support from the petit bourgeoisie in town and country. (Western farmers offered the workers cheap food for the duration.) The state was almost totally paralysed — even the police wavered.

Objectively, had the movement developed in accordance with its own drives, the ruling class would no longer have been able to rule, and in fact their rule was momentarily suspended. There was a deep, long germinating national crisis, an eruption of 20 years of working class frustration. The deepest layers of the normally unorganised masses were brought into action by the struggle. Conditions were uniquely favourable for a relatively easy takeover by the workers.

One element was lacking to transform a revolutionary upsurge into a revolution: the 'subjective' factor.

The organisations of the working class of all shades and stripes held it back, derided it, split it up and allowed the bourgeoisie to ride out the storm, regain the power of its political limbs and re-establish its suspended control. The workers' organisations were not merely passive or negative, but actively hostile to the interests and the drives of the working class. The decisive role in maintaining the bourgeoisie in power fell once again to the Communist Party of France.

The Paris correspondent of The Economist described it thus: "The French Communists did everything in their power to control the revolutionary wave, and once the General had made it plain that he would not abdicate, to direct it back to electoral channels. On the night of May 30th there was a risk of confrontation between the armed forces and the army of labour. Next morning the risk had vanished because the army of strikers had been dispersed. M. Seguy, the boss of the Communist-dominated CGT, could not demobilise his followers. But, followed by other trade union leaders, he divided his troops into separate battalions, each seeking additional gains, particularly in wages, from its employers. What had begun to look like a frontal attack on the state, rapidly became a series of individual skirmishes.

And L'Humanite, the Communist

Daily, started to use the language of an election campaign. ... The Communist decision to call a retreat and the General's speech marked the turning point in the crisis. They were more decisive than the big Gaullist demonstration that followed the General's speech on May 31st." (8.6.68)

Instead of focussing the movement of the workers on the goal of workers' power, the most extreme demand the CP dared make was for a change of bourgeois regime, removing the mild bonaparte de Gaulle and putting in Mitterand as President and Mendes-France (Premier when the Algerian War started) as Prime Minister.

Instead of workers' soviets, they put pressure on the bosses' parliament (which pressure drove the centre to the Right). Instead of revolutionary leadership, traitorous manoeuvring to frustrate the workers' desires. ("Behind the smoke-screen of public polemics M. Pompidou and France's Communist leaders established a secret link at the very beginning of the strikes. Messages were exchanged everyday and it is known who the contacts were and how they operated." New Statesman, 7.6.1968.)

Instead of unity of workers, students and farmers in action, deliberate attempts to divide them and confine "unity" to the parliamentary tops.

Instead of a workers' militia, the most cringing self-abasement and cowardice before even the threat of the violence which it was by no means certain de Gaulle could inflict.

Instead of being the left party, the CP and CGT were usually to the right of both the Catholic unions and Force Ouvriere — and even of the bourgeois radical 'socialist' Mendes-France.

And the final infamy: the government's ban on the Trotskyist, Maoist and Anarchist groups which sparked the movement didn't even call for a whisper of protest from the CP or CGT.

What could have been a great revolution looks like ending as a lost election, with the bourgeoisie and de Gaulle strengthened. There is a cruel dialectic during such periods in the relationship of the three main classes in society. The petit-bourgeois rallied to the workers, propelled by their own dissatisfaction. Had a revolutionary momentum been maintained they could have been taken along even to the point of struggle for power. But many may now rally behind the entrenched Party of Order in disillusion with the Party of Revolution which did not even dare put forward a policy.

Again let the Paris correspondent of the Economist, who shames the pseudo-marxist apologists of King Street, explain: "A general strike is a tactic for seizing power, not for persuading voters. If the Left had seized power, it would now be the new order itself; but it stopped half way — after frightening many floating voters among the middle classes" (8.6.68).

If they lose the elections they will naturally say it proves there was no revolutionary situation. The point however is that to let capitalism canalise revolutionary energy into the rigged channels of its institutions; or to see 'Revolution' only through the reversed telescope lens of the bosses' legality; or to try to filter an explosive mass revolutionary ferment through the slit in a bourgeois ballot box is to forego forever the prospect of workers' power.

These institutions are specifically designed to prop up capitalism — not to knock it down.

## REGENERATION

Nevertheless the mass strike, the self-mobilisation of the masses, is the 'natural' regenerative process of a stagnant labour movement. Writing in 1936 of the French workers' upsurge then, Trotsky's description of this process is still alive with meaning for us today: "The strike has everywhere and in every place pushed the most thoughtful and fearless workers to the fore. To them belongs the initiative. They are still acting cautiously, feeling the ground under their feet. The vanguard detachments are trying not to rush ahead so as not to isolate themselves. The echoing and re-echoing answers of the hindmost ranks to their call gives them new courage.

"The roll call of the class has become a trial self-mobilisation. The proletariat was itself in great need of this demonstration of its strength. The practical successes

won, however precarious they may be, cannot fail to raise the self-confidence of the masses to an extraordinary degree, particularly among the most backward and oppressed strata.

"That leaders have come forward in the industries and in the factories is the foremost conquest of the first wave. The elements of local and regional staffs have been created. The masses know them. They know one another. Real revolutionaries will seek contact with them.

"Thus the first self-mobilisation of the masses has outlined and in part brought forward the first elements of revolutionary leadership. The strike has stirred, revitalised and regenerated the whole colossal class organism. The old organisational shell has by no means dropped away. On the contrary, it still retains its hold quite stubbornly. But under it the new skin is already visible."

## POSTSCRIPT, AUGUST 1968: THE "ELECTION OF FEAR"

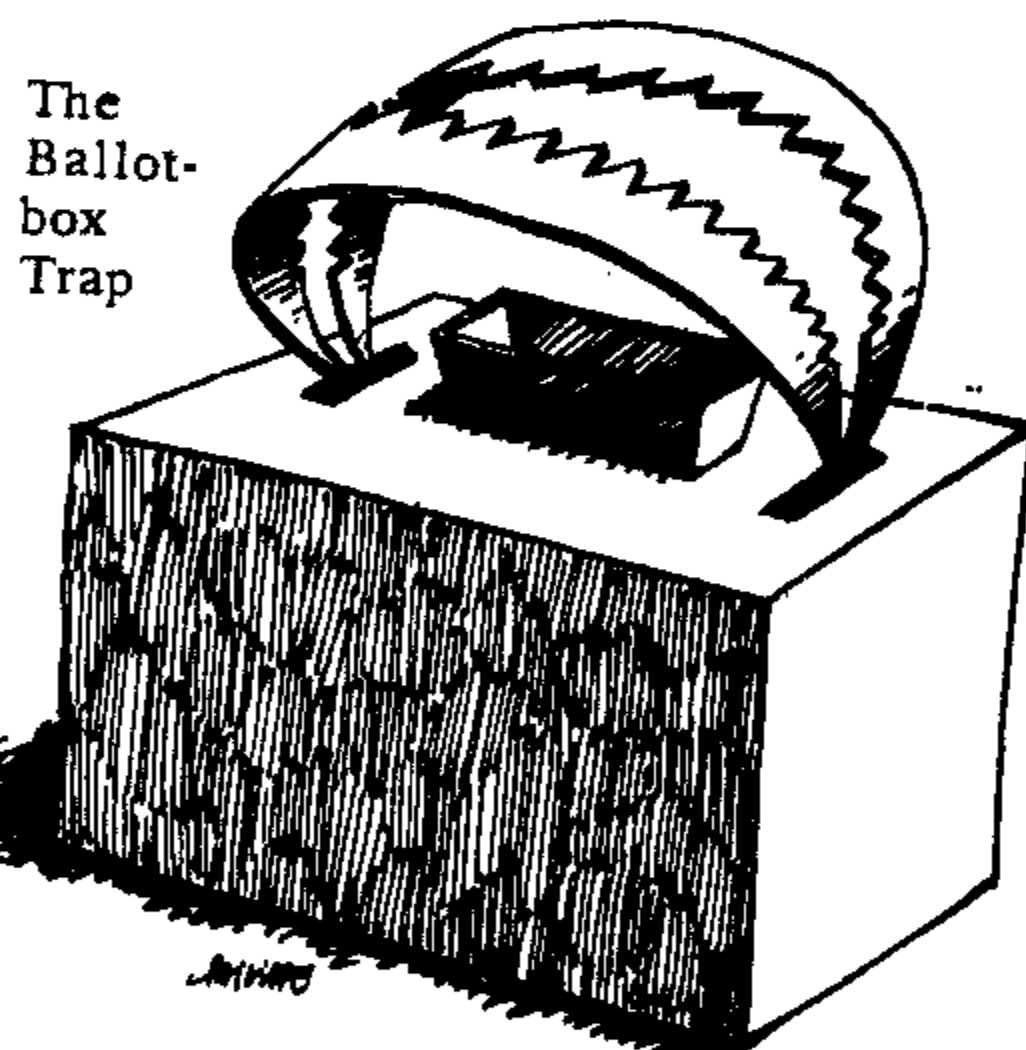
Of course the Gaullists won. Their opponents got no thanks at all for allowing the elections to take place: and they failed to win the electoral support of many petit bourgeois and even some workers who had actively supported the movement in May.

Any party which abandons its fortified position to fight on its opponents' ground is bound to get the worst of all possible worlds.

The Gaullists fought on a slogan of NEVER AGAIN — cashing in on the inability of the workers' parties in May to go beyond the necessary anarchy of the strikes. And this slogan appealed to many who during the strikes had seen the anarchy as a prelude to something better, but who in disillusionment now saw them only as an interlude of anarchy leading to possible repression.

The CP and Left Federation, remaining silent at the CRS re-occupation of the Sorbonne and the brutality of the police, took the same line and thus endorsed the Gaullist propaganda: "Keep the Gaullists and there may be a bigger explosion later!"

But the Left's respectability was easily outdone by the persuasion of fear so lavishly used by the Gaullists. "Hopelessly torn and bewildered by the revolutionary crisis" the Left "was permanently on the defensive, trying to prove that it had nothing to do with riots and barricades. Whether this was true or not turned out to be irrelevant. As a champion of established law and order M. Waldeck Rochet could not compete with M. Pompidou." (Economist 29.6.68)



Finally the CP and Left Federation succeeded in getting less votes than the number on strike in May. Only the small opportunist PSU of Mendes France, which defended the students, made any gains.

Many workers and petit bourgeois who could have been led forward in May step by step in conflict with capitalism and its state — given revolutionary leadership — were simply not ready in the cold anti-climatic atmosphere of the election to vote for those who had stood in their way. Many didn't bother to vote at all. On the other hand, the Right and Centre rallied to de Gaulle. The CP lost 39 seats out of 73, and the L.F. 61 out of 121.

The parliamentary cretins foresaw nothing of this. They were trying to force the heat of revolution onto the "cross" square of a ballot paper. Instead they succeeded only in hurling back the advance of the masses and alienating from revolutionary activity many who were beginning to be educated in class action.

Revolutionary parties which sell out revolutions rarely win the elections or plebiscites called by those in power to put the seal on their victory!

Sean Matgama



# The GEC Machine

run at a profit. He hasn't been willing to set the losses of one division off against the profits of another. This is a logical consequence of the policy of decentralisation that has endeared him so much to the whizzkids of 'modern management'. Whereas, for example, EE and AEI used to employ a total of 180 people in their central personnel departments, GEC now employs three.

The problem is this. Modern technology clearly demands large industrial units. In fact, it lays the basis for socialism, the planning of the whole economy as one unit under democratic workers' control. But under the capitalist law of the jungle large scale production can't be run as large scale cooperation — instead we get clod-hopping bureaucracy. Weinstock attempts to get over this problem by decentralisation. We can leave it to those sacked as a result to judge the value of Weinstock's solution.

The aim of GEC's rationalisation has been to make the workers pay the cost of the chaos of capitalism — the lack of planning, the economic crises, the bureaucracy.

## TACTICS

"On no occasion in the course of more than 30 closures, so Scamp (*Jack Scamp, the GEC bosses' 'trouble-shooter'*) says, did GEC ever succeed in obtaining the workers' agreement to a shut-down. On the other hand, nor did the unions, for their part, ever succeed in stopping a single closure. In the last resort force prevailed...."

"Force prevailed...." But it's not quite as simple as that. How can a handful of bosses deprive 40,000 men and women of their jobs by sheer force? How can they get away with it?

The GEC bosses have succeeded only because GEC workers let them succeed. The bosses are well-organised, they have a strategy, above all they are united. On the workers' side — divisions between different factories, between different unions, between white collar and shop floor. The workers at Woolwich did try to raise company-wide support, but when they appealed to their fellow-workers at Coventry all they got were messages of sympathy. The Combine Shop Stewards Committee, never really effective, has been allowed to decline.

So the bosses have been able to operate a salami tactic, to push through redundancies slice by slice.

Announcements of redundancies have often been met with a flurry of militancy.

In the face of such militancy the bosses may well beat a tactical retreat — a retreat sufficient to defuse the workers' resistance, but not sufficient to concede anything of substance. They will carry out cuts through natural wastage or voluntary redundancy; they will offer improved redundancy pay.

But the jobs are lost, just the same. The unemployment figures still go up. And the workers are weaker when the next battle on redundancies comes round. Most dangerous are 'voluntary redundancies'. What do they mean? Workers who are nearing retiring age, or who see the redundancies as inevitable anyway, or who have become fed up with GEC's miserable wages and want to try their chances elsewhere, take their redundancy pay and get out. They leave their workmates weaker in the fight against GEC's cuts, and they themselves may soon find that they've been sold a bad deal — but then it'll be too late.

The slogan "No Loss of Jobs" is

the only realistic answer unions can give to these 'softly softly' tactics.

Another main weapon in the bosses' arsenal is that of productivity bargaining and work study. The point here is quite simple; increased productivity means that fewer workers work harder to turn out the same or increased production and increased profits.

In Turbo-Generators, between the mergers and 1971, the order book went up £120 million to £230 million while the number of employees went down by a third. In the British Thompson Houston works in Rugby, output doubled with only 10% more workers.

## ALTERNATIVES

Should our policy be to advise the Government to increase capital spending, in order that GEC's markets can be expanded? Or to advise Weinstock to relax his strict profitability criterion?

But GEC's and the Government's policies have their own rationality, in capitalist terms. They put profit first because the law of their capitalist system is that those who don't grab sufficient go to the wall.

Any effective trade union resistance to redundancies must be based on a different rationality — which says that as long as industry is run for private profit we accept no responsibility for making it 'competitive'. Otherwise we are left in the abject position of petitioning the powers that be for crumbs that may happen to fall from their table.

The Government, anxious to try to smooth out the recession, has actually increased its capital spending plans —

the CEEGB has brought forward a new power station, Ince B. This might slow down the rate of redundancies in GEC. On the other hand, it might not. The bosses push up productivity a bit, and install some more advanced machinery, they could well get increased productivity from a smaller workforce.

The clash between capitalist rationality and working class rationality can't be solved by petitions and logical arguments.

We can only rely on the direct action of the working class. And the key slogans in that action must be:

*No Loss of Jobs*

*Trade union unity* — between white collar and shop floor, and combine wide. As a start, union committees for product divisions.

*For higher basic rates of pay.* As long as workers rely on bonuses and overtime to get a living wage, GEC can almost force them into accepting redundancy by dropping them to the basic rate.

*Cut the working week with no loss of pay.* It is an indication of the lack of seriousness of the Trade Union leaderships that not one of them has yet managed to bring in even a uniform overtime ban in GEC. And so more men are being kept on the dole queue, and the fight for higher basic pay is kept back.

*Occupations as the answer to factory closures.* When employers are closing down a factory, they will usually want to move machinery out. They will not want a situation where their valuable property is under the control of militant workers.

But this demand must be linked to the question of *Nationalisation under Workers' Control*. This idea means basically as follows: we place responsibility for keeping the factory open with the employers' agent, the State, accepting no excuses that it "it's not competitive" and the like. But we fight to extend workers' control. We do not grant them the power to determine wages and conditions, hiring and firing.

And when we raise the question of Nationalisation under Workers' Control we raise the question of the capitalist state. We raise the question of turning capitalist rationality on its head.

JOHN STERLING

# Car Management push for MDW

At Jaguar (Browns Lane), Coventry, 2000 assembly and trim workers (mainly NUVB members) have been on strike for seven weeks. The company have refused increases on piecework prices since they want Measured Day Work introduced.

A similar dispute at Morris Engines (Courthouse Green) Coventry has only recently been resolved. The dispute has laid off 3000 other workers at Jaguar and is costing the company an estimated £450,000 a day. The strike has also crippled the launching of the new Jaguar XJ-12.

British Leyland are hoping for success with the XJ-12 in the EEC luxury car market. They plan, with MDW, to increase production tremendously, reversing the old Jaguar policy under Sir William Lyons — who has just retired — of producing too few for the market and thus keeping the prices up. Rumour in the town has it that 900 new jobs will be found in Coventry's Jaguar plants.

## MEASURED DAY WORK

So desperate are the management that FRW England, the new chairman, by-passed shop stewards and sent a "personal message" to all 9000 Jaguar workers complaining of "the suicidal business of incessant squabbles over piece-work earnings" and promising high wages under MDW.

Most workers will not be convinced by these promises since they can see the results of MDW at Chrysler, nearby. With piecework, comes wage-drift, or wage-drive — the tendency for militant shop-floor bargaining to push actual pay well above nationally negotiated rates. And the worker has some control over his own pace.

Under MDW track speeds and wage rates are controlled more firmly by the management, and the power of the shop stewards and shop floor workers is sapped.

A similar tactic to England's has been tried at Austin Morris (Longbridge) Birmingham, where detailed promises of pay increases under MDW were sent to each employee. Already MDW has been imposed on

workers at Austin Morris (Cowley) Oxford. If Longbridge goes under, Coventry will be next in line.

Stewards representing 9000 workers at Triumph, Coventry, have so far refused management's offers and a large-scale confrontation seems likely.

## INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION VS. WORKERS

British Leyland's scramble for Measured Day Work is part of their rationalisation plans ready for the EEC. Although they have the largest slice of the British home market in cars, they are UK-based, and, unlike Vauxhall, Ford, and Chrysler, they don't have big brothers in the USA to rely on.

The managing director of Fiat recently stated that, to keep going, a major firm must take 10% of the world market — that is, about two million cars a year. British Leyland hardly produced one million.

It costs £50 million to tool, design, and develop a major new model like the Hillman Avenger. This is a minimum, not including selling the vehicle. So mistakes cannot be afforded.

British Leyland are not yet in the international league in the car industry — but they must get there if they are not to fold. They still have problems of rationalisation, with 60 sites, many of which manufacture similar products, and colossal transport costs between sites.

Already they are entering Europe, buying up Innocentis (Milan), and building up their plant at Seneffe (Belgium) to produce 150,000 cars a year. The problems of international capitalist competition mean that British Leyland bosses can't afford to have strong shop stewards organisation in their plants. That is a main reason for introducing MDW.

If British Leyland workers accept the logic of this international competition, then the road is opened for MDW, speed-up, lower wages, higher productivity, and in the end redundancies.

Dave Spencer.

# GEC

THE PROFITS

OF REDUNDANCIES

GEC reported recently on their results for the year ending March 31, 1972. Their profits have increased over £14 million, from 1970-71's £62.9 million to £77.0 million. So much for the Prices and Incomes freeze!

It is no accident that this increase should coincide with a peak of unemployment. GEC have contributed more than their share. And they haven't stopped yet.

Four GEC plants employing 4000 workers in Lincoln have given notice of strike action. The issue is the threatened sacking of 380 workers at Dorman Diesels, Lincoln.

Over 1600 workers, mainly women, at the GEC telephone equipment plant, Middlesbrough, are on strike for a substantial increase in pay.

The Coventry-based GEC telephone exchange installers and technicians are stepping up their campaign for substantial pay in-

creases. The strike committee, representing 2100 ASTMS members, which met in Birmingham on July 15, decided to withdraw labour from a further 10 GPO exchanges nearing completion.

The company have offered £2.50 to weekly staff and £13 a month to monthly paid staff. The workers say that for three years they have limited wage claims because of the promised increases under GEC's new regrading system. These increases have not happened, so the workers are demanding a 20% rise.

Key exchanges have already been affected at Tunbridge Wells, Dover, Hastings, and Saffron Walden. Now the campaign will affect exchanges at Motherwell and Woodcroft (Edinburgh), Southport and Irlam, Bury St Edmunds, Rainham, Robertsbridge, Walton on Thames, Redhill, and the huge Rampart exchange in London.



# Coventry Aug. 14th: MASS STRIKE ON £55,000 FINE

by DAVE SPENCER

When five trade unionists were jailed, the labour movement replied immediately, dramatically, with direct action.

But there is more to the Tories' plans to curb the unions than their obvious, spectacular, measures. The basic, intended aim of the

Industrial Relations Act was to force the union leaders into policing the rank and file more strictly. And it is that aspect of the Tories' plans which is brought to the fore by the reimposition of the fine on the T&GWU.

It is just as important to fight these plans to police the unions as it is to fight the jailings.

A mass meeting of the T&GWU stewards for Coventry and district

has decided, by a vote of 400 to 3, to hold a one-day strike on August 14 in protest against the reimposition of the fine. And already the Coventry and district National Union of Vehicle Builders has decided to join the 61 000 T&GWU members. Other workers, especially engineers, many of whom were on holiday during the jailing of the dockers, will almost certainly come in too.

The decision should be a signal for a general campaign. Every union branch and every shop stewards committee should vote now to strike if any union funds are sequestered, any union member is disciplined at the demand of the National Industrial Relations Court, or any trade unionist is jailed under the Industrial Relations Act.

## JONES-ALDINGTON: wage cut or the dole

by Harold Youd

The only thing that the report of the Jones-Aldington Committee proves is that we can't solve our problems short of the 9 demands of the Dockers' Charter.

The T.U.R. 'pool' is to be abandoned on September 4th. Its 'inmates' will either take severance pay and leave the industry, or be absorbed back into employment. The Register is to be closed until January 1973, and possibly for longer. The Government will pay out a subsidy to compensate employers for hiring labour they 'don't really need'. Minimum severance pay is up from £1,000 to £2,000, and maximum up to £4,000 (for the next 5 months) — for less fit men and those over 55.

The problem of container depot work will be solved by "negotiation".

Those are the recommendations of the Jones-Aldington Committee. What do they really mean for dockers?

All dockers will welcome the abolition of the pool, and some will be happy to take the increased severance pay. But these proposals — whatever they may do towards helping the bosses solve their problems — do not solve any problems for the dockers.

They hope to weed out as many of us as possible, particularly older and weaker men. But with the present level of unemployment, those who take severance pay will have little chance of another job — especially the older men.

The report says: "Industrial agreements — in many cases existing agreements — will establish the appropriate level of payment to men for periods when there is not work available for them. In this way men now fully employed will make an appropriate contribution to the additional costs that will result from the employment of an abnormal number of surplus men".

What that means is that the general level of dockworkers' wages will be depressed. This is not work-sharing with no loss of pay. It is unemployment-sharing, and wages-sharing, to tide the employers over a difficult period of adjustment.

There are 1,650 men in the pool now, mainly in London and Hull. The bosses say that about 10% in work are really "unnecessary" and

"surplus".

But the idea that there are too many dockers is ludicrous! The work is hard, dirty, dangerous and exhausting. There are too many hours being worked — not too many men.

The working week should immediately be cut to 30 hours, as the Dockers' Charter demands. A 30-hour week is already T&GWU policy. Why aren't they fighting for it where it is desperately needed?

The only way to guarantee that there will be no cut in earnings is to get the high minimum wage demanded by the National Shop Stewards Committee.

The report completely evades the containerisation issue — except for vague talk about negotiation and "encouraging" the companies to "give preference" to the "recruitment" of registered dockwork-

ers. That is no solution! There are no guarantees — just vague talk from Jones. Dockers will not trust Jack Jones on this: we know who sold us down the river on the container issue in the first place.

The only thing dockers can settle for is that all container work should be brought under NDLB control — with all work at dockers' wages and at dockers' conditions. Only by cutting out the possibility

of cheap labour can we stop the bosses dismantling and dispersing the docks industry.

The Jones-Aldington report is the "mixture as before" with a bit of money thrown in to buy off the anger of the dockers. It solves nothing for the dockworker. Only by gaining the demands of the dockers' Charter can we do that.

### DOCKERS' CHARTER:

1. No redundancies
2. Retention of the National Dock Labour Scheme.
3. All loading and unloading of containers to be controlled by the NDLB.
4. All workers in a port to get the average wage in the port; for the 'pool' to be in fact temporary.
5. Earlier retiring age.
6. Strict adherence to the Bristol Committee's definition of dockers' work.
7. A minimum national manning scale.
8. A 30-hour week.
9. Nationalisation of all ports under workers' control.



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## DOCKERS AND CONTAINERMEN REGISTRATION IS THE KEY

IN RECENT WEEKS THE BOSSES have been gloating over the disunity between dockers' and containermen and drivers.

There is no doubt that a division like this in the working class is a tragedy. However, merely to call for unity is not enough. The important thing is the kind of unity to be forged. Anything which allowed the employers to attack the hard won gains of the dockers would be a betrayal of their struggles.

These struggles have often been to redress the situation which was created by the T&GWU leadership. In giving the employers the right to man container bases with non-registered labour, they established a situation in which the bosses could push ahead with containerisation, and at the same time undercut dockers' rates of pay and job security by the use of cheap, non-registered labour.

The blacking of container depots and non-registered ports is the only defensive measure available to dockers at the moment. But it is limited. The bulk of the stuffing and stripping is now done at the large inland container bases, such as Birmingham and London.

These bases are not registered.

The only solution in the long term is one that ensures that all dock work, regardless of where it is, is carried out by registered dockers.

In the past registered dockers have approached non-registered container workers with a view to the latter becoming registered dockers. For example, in Preston, approaches were made by the 270 registered dockers to the non-registered workers, numbering about 900, who operate the container base.

The container men, offered the opportunity of dockers' rates of pay, dockers' manning scales, and dockers' job security, turned down the offer of joint action. So, the forging of unity may well be difficult.

But there are container workers who would be prepared to fight the employers shoulder-to-shoulder with the dockers. By extending a hand to container workers as a whole, the dockers should be able to split off the true trade unionists from the scabs.

Ted Johns, leaders of the Drivers' and Warehousemen's Action Committee, which acted against the dockers, has said that he is in favour of a joint campaign to save jobs by reducing the working week. This is also one of the National Port Shop Stewards Committee's nine points. On points like this solidarity can be forged, and eventually the system of non-registration can be ended.

## Builders out for living wage

In Liverpool on 3rd August, a meeting of building workers in the centre of the city decided to march to the most notorious scab labour site in the area. They marched — and in a short time had the site shut down.

That was the latest example of the "commando picket" in the building workers' present struggle. In Manchester, groups of workers have been touring sites and successfully enforcing the union's ban on overtime.

The overtime ban is being coupled with selective strikes, on sites where it will hit the bosses most sharply, to back up the current claim of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians for a basic rate of £30 for 35 hours.

The employers have made three offers so far, all rejected. The latest this week is a £3 increase in basic rates, a guaranteed bonus of £2 from November, and a further £3 increase in basic and £1 in bonus to bring the guaranteed (not the basic) rate up to £29 in May 1973. It offers "talks on hours over the next year".

Many militants will now be calling for an all-out strike.

The militancy with which the claim is being fought — in some areas now moving to total stoppages — is partly due to the efforts of the Building Workers' Charter

group. The Charter started in 1969 around militants involved in the Barbican dispute. It has grown to be probably the strongest militant rank and file organisation in any industry, especially in Merseyside and Manchester.

The Charter programme centres round the claim for £1 an hour and the smashing of the Lump (labour-only subcontracting) system. It calls for a cut in hours from 40 to 35, and the full nationalisation of the building industry. (No mention of workers' control, however.)

At the last UCATT conference, the Charter was strong enough to get most of its points accepted.

In fighting the claim, UCATT is in part fighting for existence. Out of 1.2 million building workers, only 300,000 are in UCATT, and only half a million unionised at all. Membership had been falling, and only the militant tactics of the strike have pulled it up again, especially in Birmingham and Manchester.

In their fight, building workers are showing that they understand that the old ways of low basic rates (in six years only £6 was gained on the basic!) and relying on site-by-site bargaining is no good for the present period of economic recession. The employers are using weapons they haven't used for many years — and so must the