

# Libertarian Communist

15p

## PUBLIC SECTOR WAGES STRUGGLES ARE POLITICAL STRUGGLES

**RECENT months have seen a determined fightback against the government's plans for another period of wage restraint particularly by workers in the public sector unions.**

A number of other major areas such as the teachers, civil servants, and possibly miners, railwaymen and power workers as well are also about to enter into similar struggles.

It is true that because of a combination of inadequate leadership from the bureaucrats, the lack of a tradition of struggle of many of the workers and unions involved, and distorting headlines and pressure from the Press, workers at present in dispute are likely to settle for inadequate rises.

A main feature of the present round of pay disputes is that the problems of the low-paid have been brought to public attention. However, it seems likely that they will be bought off by a mediocre rise and some kind of comparability deal.

Comparability deals are a con. Recent events in the Civil Service show this. There, workers were bought off last year by the assurance that they would be allowed "comparability" via an independent pay research unit. The unit has recommended around 25% rises, but the government are now talking about phasing any increase that they do allow over a period of years.

It is clear that the low-paid are unlikely to come out of the present round of negotiations any better off than they were before. After all, the low-paid are necessary for capitalism, they are the pool of cheap labour doing dirty jobs on which our society depends. The hypocrisy of the Press praising the bravery and loyalty of workers such as nurses and then condemning them when they try for a fairer wage is sickening, but it does conform to capitalist interests.

What effect will the present round of disputes have on the forthcoming elections? Well, the Labour government knows that its image as the party that can 'control the unions' has been dented. As a result they have cobbled together a 'concordat',

which is unlikely to hide the fact that no government, whatever its supposed outlook and allegiances, is able to impose continuous pay restraint on the working class.

Undoubtedly the coming election poses a problem for socialists. As we have argued in the past, although it is true that 'whoever you vote for, the government always gets in' it does make a difference which government. The election of a Thatcher government will mean a real setback for the working class. It means repression will be intensified in Northern Ireland and against Britain's black community. There will be even greater attacks on all our public services, schools, hospitals, social security benefits etc. It will mean a legislative attack on the rights of the trade unions. It will mean a very determined attempt to increase the profits of British industry at the expense of the class.

Nevertheless, it can be argued at there is little difference between Labour and the Tories. Certainly both parties, despite the rhetoric of Labour's left wing, are committed to running the country within the framework of capitalism. Certainly, Labour has slashed public spending and allowed profits to rise in an attempt to solve the crisis at the expense of the class. The fact remains that they will not hurt as severely as a Tory government.

We do not believe in campaign-

ing for a vote for Labour. This is not an agitational paper, and even if it was, we would not legitimise parliament and bolster illusions in social democracy by calling for a Labour vote. Rather, we believe that comrades should vote Labour where there is no acceptable alternative to their left, but we believe that the main focus of our activity should be to put forward anti-fascist propaganda, propaganda in support of the Irish struggle etc., that can lead to the strengthening of working-class political currents to the left of the

Labour party. We work for the creation of a genuine socialist alternative which is a campaigning alternative.

Indeed, the present situation is important to us for its overall political relevance, its relevance to the development of the consciousness of the movement, not just the election.

The recent upsurge in wages struggles is revealing. It shows that many workers, not just 'militants', that is those already experienced in struggle who have developed an understanding of

the necessity for opposition to the system, are perfectly aware that their own interests override any talk about the 'national interest'.

The publicity given to the present disputes, above all those in the public sector, shows the awareness on the part of bourgeois commentators of the integration of both political and economic decision making. As we have argued repeatedly in our coverage of the public sector, the state is the employer and the government takes the decisions about levels of service etc. We have concentrated

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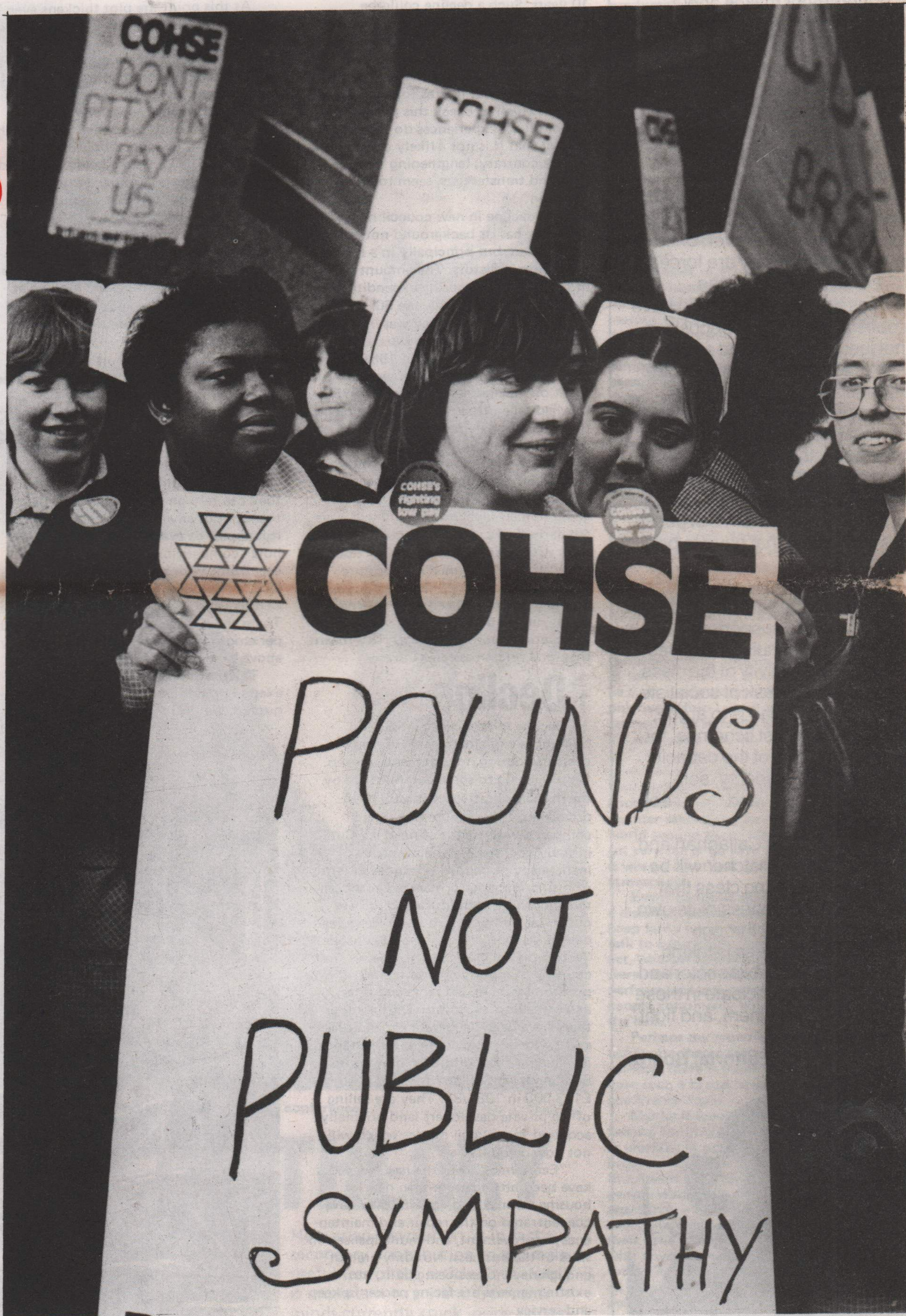


Photo John Sturrock (Report)



# Public Sector

CONT. FROM P1.

on the service side of the public sector, that is education, the National Health Service, the Civil Service etc, but the same integration also appears in the conduct of state monopolies such as the railways and the Post Office, which now have to be 'profitable' although in theory they should be run for the benefit of the people.

Workers in the public sector who challenge their employers' wage deals are therefore immediately challenging the assumptions that the government makes about those services; that they have to be profitable, that wage rises will result in cuts in capital expenditure on hospitals, schools etc.

Workers involved in wage struggles in the public sector then, face a more determined opposition than those in the private sector. The opposition to them is united at a political and an economic level. However, once they start to fight they are forced into a reassessment of the priorities that the state would have us believe exist. Their opposition is not just to one isolated employer but to the present structure of the welfare state and state enterprises. We shall have to take care that this feeling is not exploited by the right wing as an opposition to the idea of public ownership itself, but rather argue that it is the present forms of public state ownership that have to be changed.

The present situation should not be a cause for pessimism amongst our readers and supporters. Recent and continuing struggles reveal the combativity of the class. As we see it, the task of socialists in the months ahead is to argue, against electoralist schemes, for the strengthening of the capacity of the class for solidarity, self-organisation and self-consciousness.

The betrayals of Callaghan and the onslaught of Thatcher will be resisted by a working class that develops an awareness of its own interests as a class through struggle. This process is taking place now, in the public sector and elsewhere. We participate in these struggles, support them, and fight for their extension.

Editorial Board



Photo Andrew Wiard (Report)

## SUPPORT DIRECT LABOUR

In this public sector feature we want to take a brief look at the situation of a group of workers who don't often hit the national headlines — those employed by local authority "Direct Labour Organisations" (DLOs). These workers are responsible for much of the repair and maintenance of council property, and for a proportion of new construction and improvement work in the fields of council housing and other public building. There are

about 200,000 of them, and many of their jobs are at risk.

DLO workers are caught up in the difficulties which everywhere beset local authority housing provision. Although they are engaged occasionally on projects other than council housing it is this which is their main concern.

Our graph shows the pattern of council house new building over the last 10 years. Such a decline could be explained by the circumstance that the housing pool was requiring in this period fewer and fewer new houses to keep pace with need. Unfortunately, we can't find any national figures for waiting lists against which to check this possibility, but our local experiences do tend to suggest that it is not a likely explanation. On the contrary, lengthening waiting lists, and transfer lists, seem to be common.

The decline in new council house provision has its background not in falling need, but principally in a number of economic factors. The amount of money going on housing expenditure rose dramatically in the late 60s and early 70s. But this money was increasingly being claimed by considerations other than new building. In 1968-69, 89% of council housing money was spent on new homes, but by 1974-75 this had fallen to 50%. In the first place, the proportion demanded for repairs and maintenance was growing with the age and size of the housing stock. And secondly, rising interest rates meant that a greater proportion of the money was going to loan repayments (councils have regularly financed part of their expenditure with borrowing). What decreased proportion of increased expenditure finally got through to new house building was then faced with soaring costs — in particular, the property speculation boom of the early 70s meant that land prices rose enormously.

### Decline

Decline in new council house building is explained by these rising costs of housing provision and upkeep. Despite being to some extent offset by the municipalisation of private properties, it does represent, when compared with trends of need, a "Cut" initially operated by the simple inadequacy of council resources in terms of maintaining performance. On top of this housing expenditure, like other public sector budgets, has in recent years been coming in for its share of conscious "economising". On the one side we find councils trying to improve their financial position by increased rents and rates, and by selling off houses. On the other there have been deliberate expenditure curbs. Nottingham council, for instance, is reducing expenditure on new house building from £28.5m in 1976/77 to £173,000 in 1981/82. They are selling off to private developers land originally acquired for council houses which will not now be built.

"Economies" over the last few years have been hitting more than new housing. If anything, in fact, they have concentrated on the repair and maintenance, improvement, and municipalisation sides of the business. Not only are not enough new houses being built, but existing tenants are facing poorer upkeep and service.

We've commented enough in the past on this crazy system of social prioritization which does not begin from basic questions of need, but rather turns to them from the vantage point of higher "economic realities" due more to particular social relations than to any absolute truth about human production.

The housing provision situation threatens DLO workers both in their jobs and their conditions. In Wandsworth for instance, where no new council housing is to be started in the next four years, the DLO is to be cut from 850 to 200 workers. The GLC is implementing cuts involving a loss of more than 2000 jobs. In Birmingham, Swansea, Colchester, Bradford and Widnes the new building sides to the DLOs have been closed down. In Manchester DLO workers are facing an attack on their

pay-pocket through a wage-cutting bonus scheme.

At this point the plot thickens even further. Enter stage right the private building contractors.

DLO workers facing the consequences of economic gloom in their sector of employment, have also faced an enthusiastic attack, made by the private building contractors, on their very worth as an element in council housing provision. The DLOs are being presented by these interests as extravagances in the building world which we should be glad to be shut off.

It is worth going in some depth into the argument of the private contractors. It has become the first line of attack the DLO workers now face, and looking at it will, moreover, give us a fuller idea of what we all stand to lose if the DLOs get the chop.

The private contractors argue that because the DLOs aren't profit-motivated they are bound to be internally "inefficient". They claim that the DLOs aren't stirred to maximum performance by the threat of bankruptcy and other business risks. And they say that the DLOs have an unfair advantage in that they can rely on council funds to bail them out of any trouble. They back up this appeal to everyone's awareness of how "competition" brings the best of everything with statistics taken from the DOE's "Private Contractors Construction Census" and "Census of Production". These show that the value of gross output per employee in the private sector is way above that of the DLO employees.

The first thing we can turn to in examining this case is the statistics quoted. We find that they are used some-

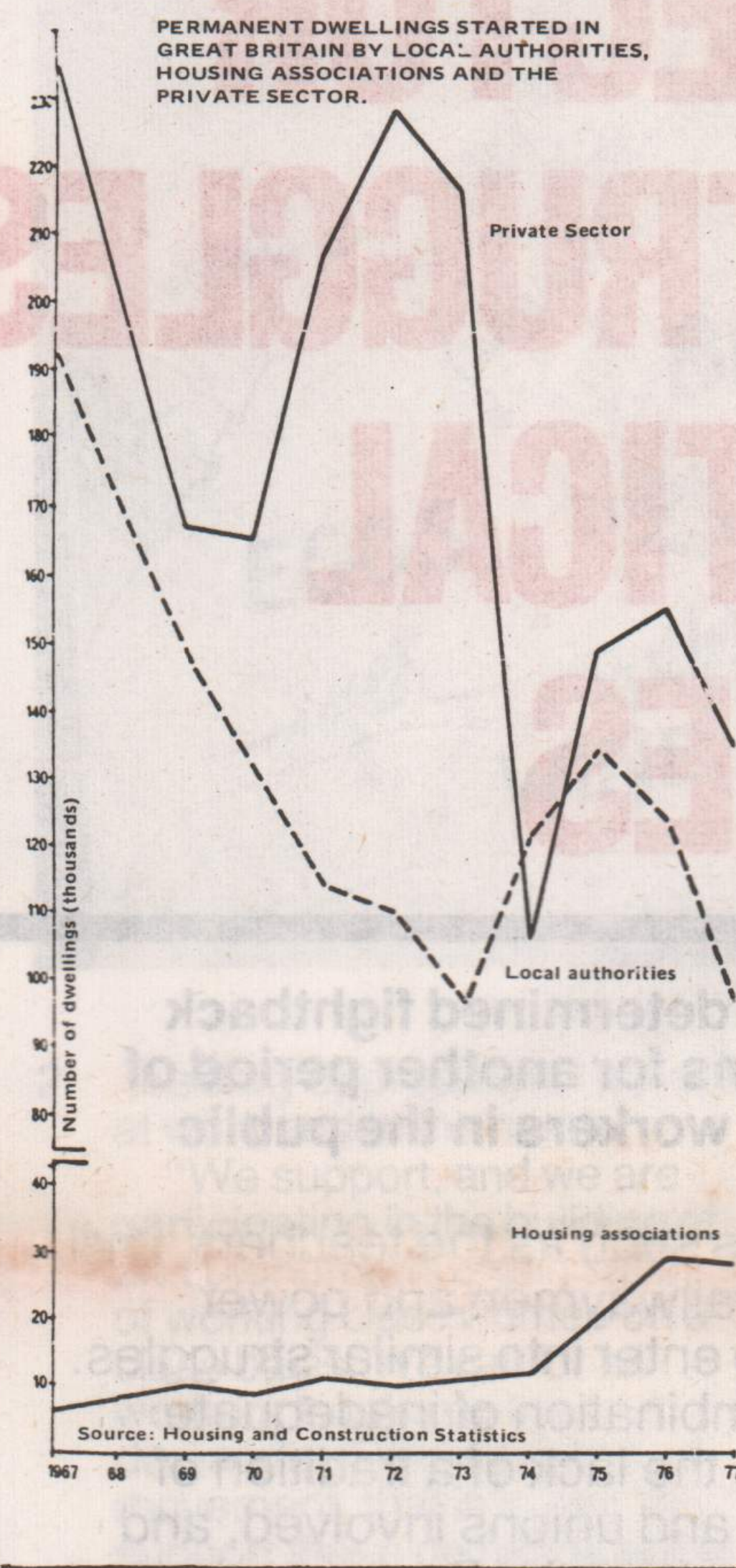


Photo John Smith (IFL)

what loosely, and don't in fact show that private sector workers are more (or less) "economical" than DLO workers. Using "gross output" as a basis for comparison one will inevitably find the greater "output" per worker wherever there is a higher proportion of materials to labour on a job. Thus the big contracts undertaken by the private sector invariably show greater "output" than the repair and maintenance jobs which occupy a large and increasing proportion of DLO time. What's more, when the private contractors send in their figures for output they include the figure for profits! (They also inflate their value of work per employee. They do this by dividing their total output only by the number of their own direct employees, thus leaving out of the equation those who work for them on a labour only "sub-contract", the "lump" workers).

### Narrow

Even if DLO workers could be shown to be less "productive" than private sector workers, there is no reason even on narrow budgetary grounds why this in itself should lead any council to favour private contracts unless things actually got to the stage where DLO work was costing more. Accurate comparison is admittedly difficult here because the different systems have different terms of reference for accountancy. The fact that DLOs sometimes overrun their initial budget estimates is used, for instance, to present them as essentially "loss-making" and dependent on ratepayers hand-outs. But errors in cost estimation affect private tenders to an equal if not a greater degree, and are often passed on to the customer. Some local authorities have in the past come up with impressive estimates as to the overall saving accrued from having a DLO. The GLC, to give one example, estimated in 1976 that its maintenance work, which cost £40m pounds, would have cost an extra £8m if put out to the lowest alternative private tenders. It's also worth noting that the absence of DLO "unfair competition" can in itself send contractors' estimates rocketing! In St. Helens, for instance, the DLO tries not to let contractors know when it intends to tender in competition with them for a contract — experience has shown that tender prices are higher when the contractors know there will be no DLO estimate to deal with.

DLOs are accountable to their councils and act in a responsible way when presenting estimates. When private contractors are jockeying for work however, they are sometimes willing to budget for cut corners — a practice which leads to skimmed and shoddy work and contributes to high repair costs in the future. Again, where final costs on private contract work exceed original tenders councils have little power to check that this isn't simply a follow up to a deliberately low first estimate. And one final risk with private contractors is that they have been known to go bankrupt slap-bang in the middle of an operation, sometimes leaving a site in chaos as a result of their last-gasp efforts to make ends meet. In Sandwell in 1977, for example, Kelly Homes went into liquidation having finished only 8 out of 80 council houses at Union St., Smeth-



Direct labour workers march against cuts: Manchester. Photo John Smith (IFL)



# Health & Safety

wick. When the DLO took over they found houses without foundations, and drains and sewers not properly connected.

DLOs have a reputation for solid, good quality work done cheaper than private contractors can offer. Within terms of reference of cost effectiveness and *product quality* alone there are good reasons why councils should hang onto them for dear life. Compared with the private contractors, moreover, the DLOs have a better record in other areas, excepting pay. DLO workers have been assured of settled employment and are more likely to be unionised. Though their pay and bonuses are lower than in the private sector — something which should, of course, be rectified — their wage does at least come regularly and its security does not depend to such a degree on the arbitrary whim of superiors as on an unorganised site. Accident frequency rates (in a generally dangerous trade) are lower for DLOs than for the industry as a whole. Manchester DLO is used by the factory inspectorate as a basis for comparison with other concerns because of its recognised high standards.

The attack made on DLOs by private contractors' organisations like the NFBTE is wretched and spurious. But exactly how does it fit in with the present situation?

Some of the big construction firms have been showing good profit returns over the last few years. These returns do not however indicate a condition of stable growth in the industry. Cash for the settlement of lucrative deals made in the early 70s still flows into the corporate coffers. But there is (even taking into account a mild upturn at the moment) a dearth of ongoing work. This has led to bankruptcy in many smaller firms and to an estimated 221,817 unemployed building workers at the beginning of this year. The building material industry is beginning to moan and much plant lies idle.

## Anxious

Such a situation calls up a number of responses. The big firms have no interest in seeing their productive base eroded through lack of activity. They are also conscious of the fact that the contrast between their own wealth and the unemployment of their workers is liable to raise the ire of sections of the labour movement and stimulate new calls for nationalisation. For these reasons, and according to the basic accumulative logic of business success, they are simultaneously anxious to secure more work and put the shutters on any idea that greater public control of the industry is required.

Discrediting DLOs is one way of discrediting public building. Whether or not it immediately opens up new markets is at first sight questionable. The running down of DLOs promises more council work in the future — but at the moment it seems to be accompanied by suspensions of new building. Where immediate market interests are at stake is in a rather round about way. In 1976 the labour government came up with a bill for direct labour. Its main proposals were: 1) to allow the DLO of a County Council or District Council to work in its own county for any local authority, housing association or new town authority, 2) to allow district council DLOs to work for contiguous District Councils in other counties, 3) to allow a DLO to work for private owners in General Improvement Areas, Housing Action Areas, or in any houses formerly owned by the local authority, 4) to allow any DLO to work for other local authorities not otherwise specified, with the permission of the Secretary of State for the Environment, and 5) to allow a DLO to work for other public bodies. These proposals were the catalyst which sparked off the private contractors campaign against the DLOs — for obvious reasons. They set out a way in which DLOs could be preserved, but one which would have bit into new sectors of the available building work.

## Profile

As we have already indicated, the attack on DLOs is already well under way with numerous Conservative councils in its van.

The Conservatives have adopted the private contractors' arguments because they fit in with their "cheap, effective management" profile. It is not for us to say whether or not they are also cynically acting in the private con-

tractors' interests. Certainly they are a party apparently much appreciated by the building trade. Amongst the firms recently cited by the Labour Party Research Department as allegedly giving them funds we find Newarthill (a McAlpine company), £27,380, Tarmac, £10,000, and Taylor Woodrow, £15,000.

Unfortunately, the DLOs stand to gain little protection from the Labour Party. The original Freeson Bill was ditched as part of the Lib-Lab pact. Its proposals have recently appeared again in a DoE Direct Labour Working Party report, but allied to proposals for the re-structuring of DLOs adopted from proposals made in 1975 by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. What these entail is DLOs becoming trading departments, "municipal Enterprises" working on a profit and loss basis. They have roused a good deal of suspicion. When experiments along their lines were made in Wandsworth there was evidence of

excessive bureaucratic costs and delays. Maybe this was just one case worse than need be — but the proposals would certainly everywhere entail new administrative duplication in councils. Tendering is itself an item of expense which *extension* of DLOs on a service basis would do away with! Moreover, although DLOs seem at the moment to work out cheaper than private contractors, and although excessive tenders were part of the background to their original establishment, we must remember that these things are not their sole rationale. There is the quality of their work, their flexibility, their availability when private contractors turn up their noses at public work (as they have done when there have been rich pickings in the private sector), the standard of their working conditions. The concept of DLOs as a public service places these considerations above that of profitability, should a contradiction arise between them.

At the moment, defence of DLOs is left exclusively to working-class self-activity. In Wandsworth, for instance, DLO workers have begun an enthusiastic struggle against reduction of the strength of their DLO and for a general extension of Direct Works. Defence of the DLOs calls for contributions from many levels of the working class. Nationally there is an inter union liaison body, the confederation of Local Authority Worker's Stewards, which has an excellent programme. It calls for the extension and defence of DLOs, for implementation of the original Freeson proposals, for expansion of public works to build for people and not for profit, leading to public ownership of the building industry; and for an end to local authority sub-contracting. CLAWS has sought to encourage local action groups. The potential for local co-operation does not, as CLAWS recognises, end with the Trade Unions. Council tenants have a direct interest in the affair, and in their

contribution to DLO defence may find the development of new direct links with housing department workers covering basic issues of house management. In Sandwell, for instance, the Tenants Liaison Committee meets regularly with DLO shop stewards to discuss repairs problems.

Much of the above article is taken from a booklet written by the Direct Labour Collective of the Conference of Socialist Economists. It's called "Building with Direct Labour" and is available from Housing Workshop of the Conference of Socialist Economists, 55 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AE. Price: £1.75 or for orders through trade unions, tenants organisations and trades councils: 65p. Plus 25p p&p. We're sure they won't mind our extensive use of their work if it helps the fight to save the DLOs.

Cheques etc. payable to: The Political Economy of Housing Workshop.

Ian Gallagher

# The poisonous graveyard

The development of British capitalism in the early nineteenth century saw the introduction of much new machinery and many new industrial processes. The rising industrialists were determined to maximise the profits from their machines and this led to a grim era of accidents and disease caused by the new machinery, and abuses such as child labour.

The working-class fight back was led by the Chartist and the trades union movements, organising to defend against bad working conditions and to fight for reform. The gains were gradual. Child labour was progressively abolished, factory inspectors were gradually introduced to check up on the employers and prevent the worst abuses.

By 1914 the Factory Acts had been extended into most industries, hours were regulated and health and sanitary conditions were improved. Factory inspectors had been established as a trained and specialised body.

This change in the situation had been partly won as a result of the struggles of the class, but also reflected the changes within British capitalism. The increasing benefits of imperialism and the concentration of industry into fewer and more efficient hands contributed to the decline of laissez-faire ideas. The idea that the state could intervene in the capitalist industries and factories became generally accepted.

Apart from safety legislation, there has been a change in attitudes towards new products. New machinery is manufactured to be safe and safety measures are taken into account at the early stages of design and development. For example, care is taken to see that switches are built in. New materials and processes are also tested before being introduced.

The problem though is that it is never the workers who decide what is 'safe' and what is not. It is always the profit motive that overrides the safety factor, as it were.

Take the example of new materials. These are introduced into industry with little knowledge of their long term effects. Asbestos and fibre-glass are examples of two materials that have been fairly recently introduced and have now been found to have drawbacks. It is still very unclear what the relationship is between exposure to chemicals and industrial processes and cancer.

Dangers to health at work are innumerable. They can, however, be divided into dangers which are inhaled, e.g. asbestos, those which damage the skin or can be absorbed through the skin, e.g. acids, and those which are physical and external,

things falling on building sites, dangerous machinery etc.

I'll look more closely at the dangers involved in welding, as that is my own trade. The main danger is from inhaling toxic substances. In some gas-shielded processes ozones which normally exist only in the earth's outer atmosphere are produced. These are dangerous. Highly toxic fumes are produced when welding galvanised iron, aluminium, cadmium plated and stainless steel. Carbon dioxide is also used in many welding processes and is, of course, dangerous.

So many dangerous fumes can be inhaled during welding processes that many welders today are incapable of running more than five paces. Many welders, settlers and foundry workers have to give up their jobs for health reasons, which means that you might have done a 4 year apprenticeship only to be out of work with no pension from the firm that poisoned you. Of course there are many forms of safety gear available, boots, hats, goggles, etc., and safety processes using exhaust hoods, air monitoring and filtering systems, etc.

The point is that these processes are dangerous, but that though this is realised, it is also seen by the bosses

that it is too expensive from their point of view to really do anything more than reduce some of the risks. There are inadequate provision for those damaged by industrial accidents and processes. Disability pensions, even if granted, are now. Many firms, for example those employing welders in the building trade and smaller engineering firms, do not pay any attention to even the inadequate safety regulations that already exist.

Another problem is that accidents are still very often considered to be due to incompetence on the part of the workers. It may be true that accidents are often caused by incompetence on the part of the worker, but bourgeois doctrine would have it that such incompetence is entirely the worker's fault. This ignores contributory factors such as bad lighting, poor ventilation, long hours and stress, and also the basic point that workers are there not through choice but because they have to work, and also because it is the individual capitalists and their system that have put them into that position.

The new Health and Safety Acts, which incorporate and strengthen existing safety legislation, do give workers more rights to set up Health and Safety Committees and to call in Health and Safety Inspectors where they feel that the employers are not doing enough about any problem. However, the Inspectors are few and far between and also it is to be expected that our present trades unions will be unlikely to allow disputes over these matters to go very far. Organisations such as the Coventry Health and Safety Movement, set up

in 1976 and doing much good work to monitor and highlight hazards, show one way to start to combat the problems. Certainly the existing legislation does not go far enough, not covering government departments, and not covering the development of new chemicals and new processes.

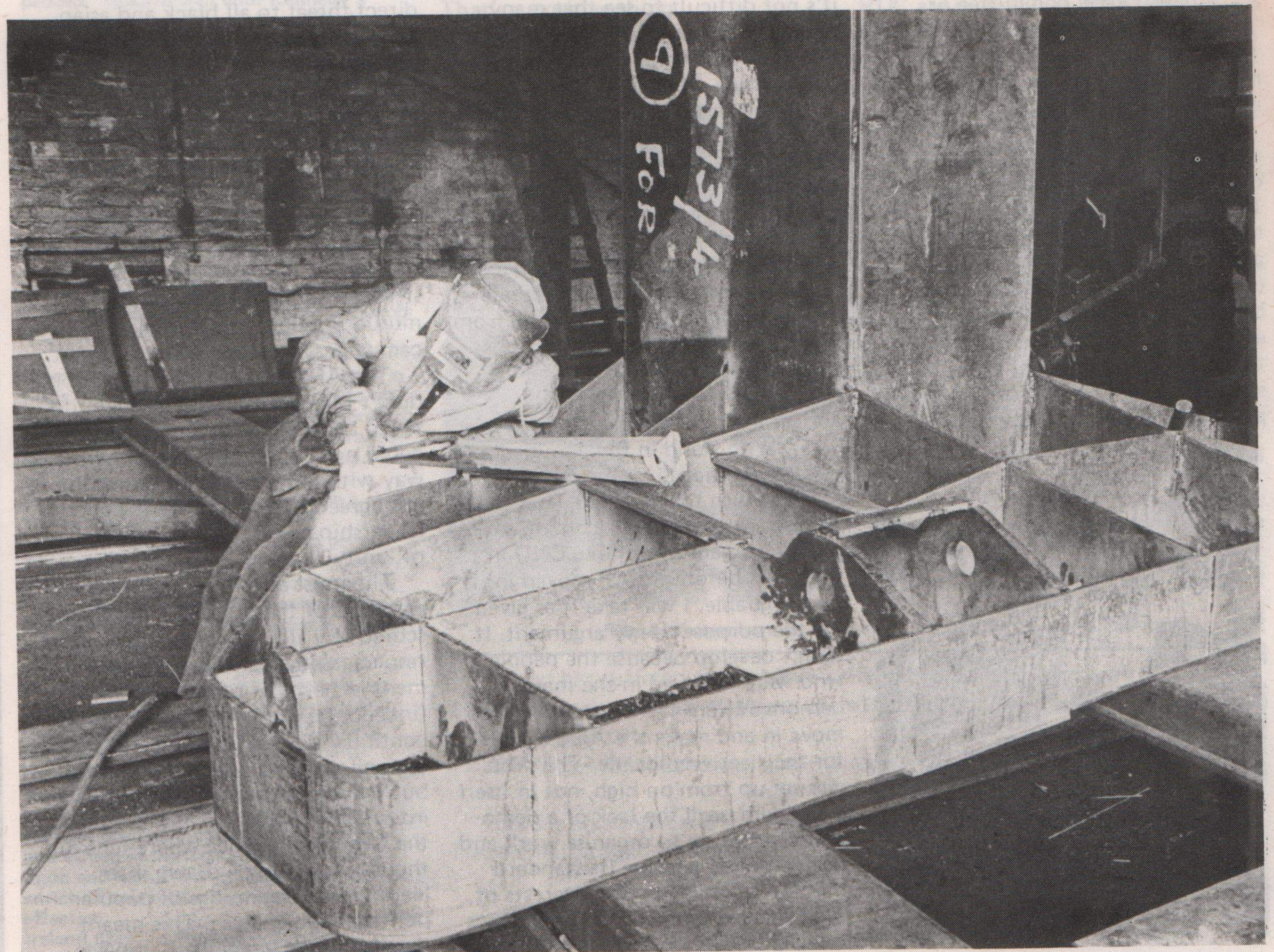
The example of the present plans for the introduction of nuclear power stations and of plants for processing nuclear wastes shows the frightening irresponsibility of the system. We have little or no power over the decisions being taken now on this field, which threaten not only us but future generations.

In the short term we should try and raise the issue of safety in the unions and in workplaces. Certainly there is no shortage of skilled workers who would be able to devise safer and better ways of organising work. We should try and gain more say over where money is spent on research, and what new technologies and chemicals and processes are developed.

In the long term though the truth is that our priorities are different from theirs. Capitalism seems bent on making the world a poisonous graveyard, where we will be required to dress up like astronauts to earn a living in a totally hostile environment.

When we have swept away their system of greed, repression and disease we will make a new society where science and technology will be brought under the control of the workers through the democratic federation of workers' councils. Then we will produce goods safely, for need, not profit.

Geoff G.



Govan welder Photo John Sturrock (Report)



## Forum

# What happened to the ANL?

At the time of writing (Spring '79) racism and fascism have disappeared in Britain. Are you surprised? We certainly were when we contrasted the left wing papers of the last three months with those of last summer and found that this must be the case because no-one seemed to feel that the subject needed to be dealt with except as a hangover item about the arrests of people last summer who had been involved in anti-fascist activity and whose trials have become "current" news thanks to the efficiency of British courts.

The fervent articles for and against the Anti-Nazi League have disappeared. Even the *Socialist Worker's* previous calls for a thousandfold multiplication of every sort of group against the Nazis and for anti-fascist activity on the shop floor has definitely slowed to a very low level ticking over of the main ANL bodies and the withering away of many others. Sectarians Against the Anti-Nazi League have also gone quite a bit quieter.

Alright. So why is it worth making this point? Because it shows up a number of points about the way the left works in general and equally importantly raises some questions about the nature of opposition to racism and fascism as it has been developed in the last two years.

On the left's method of operation it's worth pointing out that the skipping from point to point and issue to issue is not just an impression gained from the kind of arguments the socialist papers put forward to cope with each new development in the world, i.e. this week 'racism' gets 5 pages, next week the 'public sector', but it is also reflected in the activities of the left — this week's ANL organiser is last week's Right to Work organiser is next week's Strike Support Cttee organiser or Iranian Solidarity Cttee organiser.

This doesn't just reflect the fact that there is a world to win and there are only so many people as yet available to win it, it also reflects a decent if overdone reaction to the style of politics that used to predominate when left wing politics hardly existed outside the left Labour and Communist Parties. In those days facts and events had to be pushed through the grid of the established orthodoxies (and they got pretty chopped up going through) before they could be fitted into the activity of the old parties and a new 'Peace' committee or 'Friendship' association set up or last year's 'Marxist Leninist' paragons revealed as lifetime agents of western intelligence services.

The new left (note not New Left, which is a thing that inhabits academic books about deviancy in the 1960s, but the generation of people that set out to win the world in '68 and after) at least engages itself directly with events as they occur, but its 'undogmatic' enthusiasm for events as they happen and its fear of the kind of blinkers that made socialism a dirty word to working people for generations carries with it

a different but similar sort of danger — that all the sound and fury leaves little behind it when the dust settles. Has anyone seen a live Right to Work Cttee locally? When did you last see a free range Socialist Unity group (except at election time when it was the child of the local established socialist organisations and manned entirely by them)?

This leaves as much of an impression on working people as did the previous activities. Although the left doesn't carry with it the kiss of death like the CP (who have probably killed off more manifestations of popular political involvement than the CIA — from the postwar anti-homelessness campaigns, through the anti-nuclear bomb movement, to their current 'boosting' of the low paid workers by cuddling up to Alan Fisher and printing long articles by him), the left is simply not taken as seriously as it deserves because of its inability to leave anything behind it in its wake.

This doesn't mean that campaigns have to be kept going for years, it means that the experiences gained over the years have to be *openly* and *continuously* absorbed into the current life of the socialist organisations. What is necessary to remove the fly-by-night image and the fly-by-night practice is the kind of open democracy in the left press and organisations that is the *real* opposite of the CP method.

The LCG has, rightly, been taken to task for not explaining enough of its internal life and arguments to people interested enough to read our publications and work with us; it isn't saying much to say that our record is better than the major organisations of socialists in this country — the IMG argues for unity first and democratic argument afterwards inside a united organisation — surely it's not difficult to see that many people are worried by this interpretation of unity and democracy? The SWP, which used to be the first to argue the sort of questions and problems this article seeks to raise, has never written a word about its own practice, problems etc. which would raise a discussion on anything nearer than the early 1950s, and its lack of internal democracy is rapidly becoming a byword of how not to create a revolutionary organisation (e.g. from its practice in rank and file groups, its sudden decisions to run candidates in the AUEW, its equally abrupt and restricted decision on whether to stand in the coming general election).

To return to the ANL. That the ANL was capable of becoming a mass popular organisation (like CND in the years before the CP moved in) is now arguable. I will take it as given for the purpose of my argument. It didn't develop because the people who were involved in the mass demonstrations were *not allowed* to move in and make the ANL a place for their activity locally. The ANL was set up from on high, not in itself a problem until the lack of a democratic structure to organise work and decide policy became its standard method of work. In the interests of the broadest possible 'unity' politics was deliberately excluded from the ANL.



Photo Mark Rusher (IFL)

Many socialists argued that the Anti-Nazi emphasis was mistaken, that the problem of racism and particularly the institutionalised racism of many institutions and the state apparatus itself needed to be taken up if ever the ground was to be cut away from which the fascist weed sprang up. In particular this meant a turn against the immigration laws for two reasons — they are the central expression of state racialism and because they are experienced as a direct threat to all black and asian people (even those born here are regularly harassed by the widespread use of immigration legislation). They are the key area for work to involve those people in their own defence and in their own activity to make their lives better. Around the immigration laws lie the areas in which socialists and the immigrant communities can achieve a unity that would stretch from local defence and mutual support to national campaigns.

The ANL hasn't faded because it didn't take up this issue though, it failed because the argument for it could not be raised in any concrete way within the ANL, indeed nothing not agreed by the SWP-Left Labour leadership could. All this in the name of 'unity'.

The most advanced and socialist elements of the old CND movement scored few victories against the more respectable leadership of the movement in terms of remaking policy (indeed the main fight was against a continual dilution of the early stand for unilateral nuclear disarmament) but the existence of the healthy internal life up to the mid 60s made the Campaign a place where tens of thousands could be drawn into learning the beginnings of popular political involvement. This meant that for many years the Campaign had an extraordinary life and vitality.

It seems likely that the ANL will be dusted off as the SWP's main front for work during the General Election — again it will emphasise the danger represented by the National Front — but it will do this in a way that cannot provide any long term opposition to the growth of racism and thus of fascism. IT WILL NOT FIGHT THE IMMIGRATION LAWS and so will not make a link between the civil liberties of the mass of the population, gained over generations of democratic and working class struggles and now threatened by State pressure for 'fixed' trials and the curtailment of trade union rights, and the daily repression of immigrants by the Immigration Acts so as to keep blacks and asians in the position of cheap and expendable labour. IT WILL NOT DIRECTLY STAND AGAINST THE NAZIS for to run any candidates would upset the Labour Left just as much as pointing to their role in the creation

and operation of the racist immigration laws. IT WILL DIVERT MANY SOCIALISTS from the question of standing candidates against all the capitalist parties, working to build a long term and broad ranging socialist movement which unites all the problems and issues that working people face in developing and fighting to apply socialist policies.

When it's all over it seems very likely that we shall not be one step nearer either local democratic activity against racism and fascism or the beginnings of a national socialist opposition. Even the SWP will almost certainly just have passed through another period of a big turnover of membership. Whether it comes out of the experience with at least the possibility of open discussion and assessment of the period depends upon the members of the SWP.

K.N.

## THE PLATFORM OF THE LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISTS

This document was written by members of the Dielo Trouda(Workers Truth)group. They were class struggle anarchists who had participated in the Russian Revolution and the insurrectionary mass movement in the Ukraine, which had a profoundly libertarian impulse. They attempted to communicate their experiences and what they had learnt to the international anarchist. They stressed the essential need for disciplined libertarian organisation, built on and relating to the working class. The Platform was severely attacked by the anarchist 'celebrities' almost without exception, who saw the formation of just such an organisation as a threat to the 'inalienable rights of the individual'.

This historical document has been rediscovered and has been instrumental in the development of libertarian communism in the 1970s.

send a cheque/P.O. for 20p+7p p&p to LCG, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London E.C.1.



Photo Andrew Wiard (Report)



## International

# MARCHING TO BURNTOLLET

The last year has seen a series of massive demonstrations in the North. Called by the Relatives Action Committees and the Provisional Sinn Fein, and supported by wide sections of the republican movement, they mark the tenth anniversary of the current struggle. In August there was the massive Coalisland to Dungannon march, in October 15,000 were on the streets of Derry and in November 7,000 marched defiantly through Armagh.

*Libertarian Communist* interviewed two members of East London United Troops Out Movement who went on the long trek across the North commemorating the historic march attacked by the RUC at Burntollet Bridge in 1969.

**Libertarian Communist: Why did you go on the march?**

**C:** We were told that the people in the North would welcome support, as a holiday and of course so we could learn to appreciate the situation at first hand. It was an individual decision to go over even though at UTO Movement Conference it was mooted as a good idea. I was the only person who hadn't been across before. It made what was an intellectualisation a real experience.

**D:** I'd been over before but this time I talked to more people and saw the RUC at work. For a short time I felt myself really part of the same struggle. It gave me an extra drive to carry on the work over here.

**C:** There was very little hostility to the fact that we were "Brits" on the part of the march's supporters in the North.

**LC: Who did you go with?**

**D:** There were about ten of us from London and five from Birmingham. We started off marching as a contingent, but soon mingled with the rest of the marchers. People were carrying each others' banners. There was none of the sectarian feeling that you sometimes find in England.

**C:** On the march we saw quite a few political groups, the Irish Republican

Socialist Party, various others, and of course notably the RACs.

**D:** Political differences did emerge in the speeches at the end of the march but there was no friction during the march. Sinn Fein didn't officially support it, because the route was filed for, but a number were there in an unofficial capacity. The organisers of the march had to file to make sure it could take place at all. Otherwise it would have been harassed out of existence by the police before it even started.

**C:** Harassment of a legal march made the police look much worse. They couldn't claim it was illegal to justify themselves.

**LC: What was the march like itself?**

**D:** As soon as it started, about 150 of us, helicopters were overhead. Soon there were RUC Landrovers behind and in front of us.

**C:** There were 1500 police mobilised continually for the march. It must have cost a fortune! Armed police "escorting" the demo and waiting around in backstreets. Ulsterisation is costing a lot.

**D:** At Bellaghy the state's opposition to the march, made clear by Mason beforehand, was shown in the police action. About an hour after we started they blocked the roads into



PAC speaker at rally during Coalisland Civil Rights march anniversary. Photo Derek Speirs (IFL)

"The demand 'self-determination for the Irish people as a whole' is intended to focus on the crucial position of the British state and its relation to Partition and to sectarianism in Ireland. "Raising it, along with the complimentary 'Troops Out Now', is the way in which British workers can most effectively contribute not merely towards a resolution of the present troubles but also towards a situation where the working class in Ireland will see more clearly the outlines of their mutual class

interest.

"The withdrawal of troops, within a 'self-determination' context, will probably not, it must be admitted, end all immediate prospects of violence.

"It is, however, the only policy which will produce the long term conditions for this, and for the ending of present oppressions and working class disunity."

*Anarchist Worker 1976*

Bellaghy, a friendly town where we'd arranged to have lunch. It seemed as if they were doing the UDA's work for them. This could easily be seen in the way they treated us. You could feel their hatred. I thought they were going to mow us down with their machine-guns. They didn't, but the tension was there the whole time. Behind the scenes their chiefs just kept control.

The RUC presence at Burntollet could have kept the UDA away, and they did prevent Bob Overend shooting one of us dead. But between Maghera and Dungiven, a totally depopulated area, no-one

there to protect us from, they marched closely at our side, and when we wanted to take a short-cut onto the main road, they blocked our way and roughed us up. I saw at least one person streaming with blood from being hit in the face with a rifle butt. The police wouldn't let the first aid people through to him.

There were numerous such outbreaks of violence throughout the march when the RUC, ordered to be restrained, just could not control themselves.

**LC: What sort of slogans were used on the march?**

**D:** Kids from Belfast had a very dim view of the police. Slogans such as "SS RUC" and "What shall we do with the RUC? Shoot, shoot, shoot the buggers!"

**C:** Many of the chants on the demo were supporting the Provos.

**D:** Again this was from the kids mostly. The political people from the North weren't quite so into that.

**C:** Provisional Sinn Fein at their first conference were discussing the problem of relating to Loyalist workers very much in a socialist framework. That's a positive thing.

**LC: What kind of support did the march get?**

**D:** There was a considerable degree of support from the people in the republican areas we marched through. Locals joined the march, showed us short-cuts and fed us on route. They came from miles around to show us their support.

**C:** Dungiven was an amazing place to go through. Morale climbed about 400% as we entered the town. A band greeted us and there was a huge crowd of people on the streets.

**D:** The RUC didn't dare to follow us in there, our support was so strong.

**C:** We were given vast amounts of food by people who would accept nothing for it. At Dungiven, a very small town, most of the marchers, now about 400 strong, were put up locally. When we marched into Burntollet there were about 2,500 of us. We were so strong the police couldn't do a thing, so they claimed there were only 300 of us afterwards in their press statements. The RUC was taking over the army's role, though you could see the army hovering about in the background. Ulsterisation doesn't change a thing though. And it fools no-one. The RUC are regarded as Brits. And we from Troops Out aren't.



'Blanket' marchers on the Coalisland march. Photo Derek Speirs (IFL)

"Ireland has suffered at the hands of British administrators a more prolonged series of evils, deliberately inflicted, than any other community of civilised men."

Roger Casement 1916

"The history of Ireland explains my 'crime', and justifies it."

Thomas Meagher 1848

"There is no simple and immediate answer. There is and has been a war. There still is a war. We have to deal with it on that basis."

Dunn, Under Secretary for Northern Ireland, March 1977

"Every people has the right to be itself and no one people is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its language, its opinions or its laws."

Bakunin

## IRELAND SOCIALIST REVIEW

The editorial collective, supported by Socialist Charter, Haringey UTO, Hemel Hempstead Troops Out Committee and now Big Flame, have in common the demands 'Troops Out Now' and 'Self Determination for the Irish People'. The first three groups, from whom the bulk of the articles so far have come, are also committed to patient work in the labour movement. This has, of course, determined the content of the contributions put forward. It's only a partly limiting factor as the material so far published is excellent.

There is much discussion around the question as to why "The labour movement is not convinced of the necessity for a Troops Out campaign, largely because it is not convinced of the progressive kernel of the nationalist struggle and the relationship between this and socialism" (C. Davies ISR number 1).

The genesis of the various reformist perspectives on the Irish Question both in Ireland and in Britain are mapped out. Specific investigations are made of the reactions of the Labour Party in 1969 to the struggle in the North, explaining, and not just condemning, the origin of the futile, 'well-intentioned', Better Life For All Campaign and Bill of Rights mentality.

The specifically colonial situation is examined and the mutilated development of the Irish labour movement is explored.

## Despair

Many who see themselves as socialists have despaired at the divisiveness within the working class in Northern Ireland. Examining the situation through the eyes of the media, and from within the traditions of the British labour movement, they conclude that the working class, Catholic and Protestant, must unite before they can start campaigning, in the time-honoured British way, against the evils of capitalism. Divisions exist, they say, half remembering their Marxism, because of economic inequalities.

These have to be evened out to dispel "sectarianism". They say huge subsidies must be pumped in by Britain to develop capitalism in the deprived regions of the province.

This strategy, totally impractical as it is, requiring a capital input far beyond the means of crippled capitalist Britain, is at the same time steeped in chauvinism. It does not recognise the ability or the right of the Irish to govern themselves. Further-

more it placates the guilty Little Englander by partly blaming the conflict on the Irish themselves and paternalistically striving to put things right for them.

## Solidarity

In ISR it is shown that the republican movement, although largely petty-bourgeois in its origins over sixty years ago, has necessarily become the focus for the oppressed of the North. It is shown how the movement, with the class composition it has and the problems that it faces, is becoming increasingly socialist in its perspectives. Republicanism does not represent the negative religious sectarian response to Orange bigotry as is fondly believed by the reformists of the Communist Party and the Militant tendency within the Labour Party. It is, at the moment, the only progressive political current the oppressed can attach themselves to.

Chris Davies and Colin Kennedy have explored this theme closely in all the ISRs to date. In number 3, Kennedy introduces the 1920 Parliamentary Labour Party Enquiry into the atrocities committed by Britain during the Black and Tan terror. The report at the same time both reflects the then contemporary internationalist consciousness of a working class blockading the export of arms to be used against the Soviet Union, and displays the limitations of a politics nurtured in the purely domestic spheres of trade union concerns, and based on the assumption that all that society needs is better social administration.

The document has a characteristic striving for compromise: "We believe the solution lies somewhere between the extremes of the 'no change' policy of Ulster and the 'clear out' policy of Sinn Fein." The report also states that partition was no solution. But its overall lack of

clarity and commitment enabled British imperialism to do just that under a democratic guise, with hardly as much as a murmur from the British labour movement.

## Tribunal

This investigation of a "formalistic, bureaucratic view of the democratic process" links in well with Kennedy's caveats concerning the Tribunal in the previous issue. The lesson one must learn is "the inherent ability of reformist consciousness to reconcile unpleasant, and even brutal facts, with a support for the main principles of bourgeois rule". We can't expect too much from a Tribunal if all we are able or prepared to do is put before it a list of atrocities committed by the British Army.

Concentrating on a single tactic: the Tribunal, anti-recruitment, or even the entirely correct demand for POW status, just isn't enough. We have also to attack a consciousness that sees Free Derry as mob rule and power sharing as democracy.

A review of Irish solidarity work by Peter Chalk and the reply by Big Flame's Chris Marshall certainly helped me to disentangle the politics from the vituperation still sadly present in some quarters today. Contradictions are explored in a responsible fashion and not frozen into a fetishistic principle, to be used like a club to hammer one's opponents.

For those who really want to get to grips with the problems of Irish solidarity work, and are not content with inserting formulae, derived from the calculations of others, into their political debates, the ISR is an invaluable contribution.

Hopefully its concerns, still largely confined to the terrain of the Irish and British labour movements, will broaden out. Feminism, anti-racism, youth and student work (especially around anti-recruitment) are all areas where support for the Irish struggle has at least some resonance. The experiences of tenants' associations, claimants, women's groups and others in the North can be drawn upon and learnt from. Theory can thus be enriched and action be made more effective.

ML

Ireland Socialist Review — 30p  
Nos. 1 - 3 80p post free, c/o 60, Loughborough Rd., London SW9.



## Review

# 'We saw the cracks in the earth open wide; and when we spoke of it they called us visionaries'

## A look at the life and work of VICTOR SERGE

One of the most interesting political writers of the twentieth century is a Victor Serge, a libertarian and a Marxist who took part in revolutionary upheavals across Europe.

Now, over thirty years since his death, many of his books are being translated into English for the first time as a dramatic reawakening of interest is taking place in his work.

Serge was one of the most principled, honest and consistent writers of his time. He wrote with breathtaking vision and foresight, time and time again anticipating the march of events.

Yet his penetrating analysis and unswerving adherence to his principles did not render him dogmatic. The contradictions in his ideas and experience existed in a creative tension that produced a richness of consistent political insight.

The son of exiled Russian revolutionaries, Victor Serge was a proletarian intellectual who had no formal education.

In the years before the first

world war he was active in anarchist circles in France, editing *l'Anarchie* at the time of the Bonnot outrages, for which he spent five years in a French prison.

Deported on his release, he made for Barcelona where he took part in the 1917 rebellion.

After another spell in prison in France, he reached Russia fourteen months after the Bolshevik revolution.

He threw himself into work for the young Soviet state, using his skills as journalist and compositor, and working for the Communist International.

Serge had become a Marxist, and he joined the Bolshevik Party.

He was still a libertarian however, and he maintained a critical independence of the party that allowed him to trace its mistakes and failures, while supporting it as the mainstay of the revolution.

He sympathised with the Workers' Opposition that demanded control of production by the

unions, and later was a member of the Left Opposition that criticised Stalin's encouragement of petit bourgeois classes and absolute suppression of democracy.

Arrested, persecuted, his writings censored, and deported for three years to Orenburg, only his reputation as a writer and an internationalist and an outcry by European socialists secured his departure from Russia in 1936, just before the purges that took the lives of many of his comrades.

Few countries would permit residence to a revolutionary of Serge's calibre in those stormy days, and he finally found a home in Mexico.

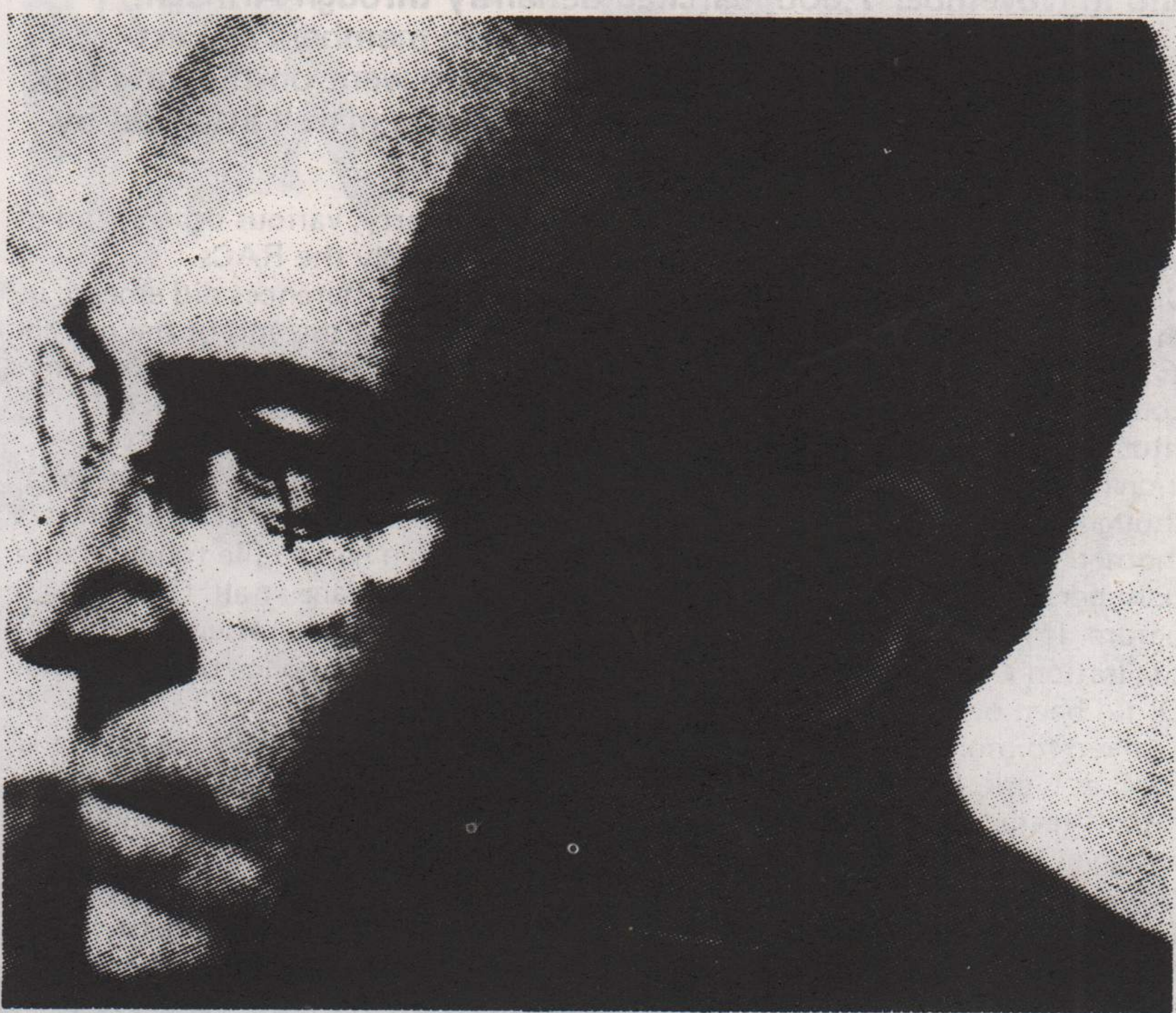
Rarely are Serge's writings precisely fiction, documentary, or history, but rather a curious blend of all three. His novels in particular are closely based on actual events, sometimes dropping into autobiography. He described himself as a participant and a witness of events, free to comment as well as to record: thus he stood in opposition to the bourgeois historian who sees himself as objective.

His dialectical approach gave his work a stunning sense of scale, and a unique grasp of the movement of history.

He combines this with an intense humanism.

Serge described himself as a 'personalist', believing that human personality was a key component in

## visionaries'



history. This was not individualism, for he asserted that the meaning of human life lies in the conscious participation in the making of history. For him only collective thought, collective needs, and collective struggle were important, and even his autobiography *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* is written in the collective 'we'.

This does result in a certain detachment from his personal life (as an illustration of this his wife and son are barely mentioned throughout his *Memoirs*, which we can perhaps understand as the response of a revolutionary attempting to grapple with the hurricanes of change sweeping up millions of people throughout Europe, and rejecting the individualist model of bourgeois fiction.

While he is thus silent on the politics of personal life, his reflections on the relationship between the individual and the collective are highly stimulating.

police intrigue was interfering with the life of the Party.'

He located one of the major problems of Bolshevism in its sense of the possession of absolute truth and consequent doctrinal rigidity. He believed passionately in the importance of the critical spirit, asserting that this attitude of the Party, and Lenin's 'proletarian Jacobinism' and contradictory talk of the broadest democracy, 'leads to a sort of natural selection of authoritarian temperaments'.

There were, Serge was certain, alternatives to the intransigence of the Bolsheviks, and alternatives to the road taken by Stalin. A Soviet democracy was a real possibility, which would have achieved much more than Stalin's despotism.

However, despite the monumental tragedies he records, the repression in Russia, the betrayal of the Spanish Republicans, the Purges and so on, he remains optimistic in the future in

### Kronstadt

Serge saw the massacre of the people of Kronstadt as one of the great tragedies of the revolution.

In his *Memoirs* he describes how in 1921 the inhabitants and sailors of the garrison town of Kronstadt, an island off Petersburg (now Lenin-grad) rebelled against Soviet rule.

The sailors of Kronstadt had been renowned for their revolutionary enthusiasm — Lenin once described them as the 'flower of the revolution' — and they were bitterly opposed to the tyrannies of War Communism.

They published a programme that demanded free elections to the Soviet, freedom of expression, the freeing of revolutionary political prisoners and an end to requisitioning (Serge called it a programme for the renewal of the revolution).

In solidarity with the strikes then taking place in Petersburg, and in support of their programme, the garrison mutinied, arresting some Soviet officials.

The Bolshevik response was swift and ruthless. Lenin and Trotsky issued an ultimatum: 'Surrender or you will be shot down like partridges'.

Serge took part in an attempt with a number of anarchists to mediate, threatening to leave the party. They had no success, and the Red Army was thrown against the people of Kronstadt, who died shouting 'Long live the world revolution!'

Many of those who survived were arrested, and shot in the following months.

Serge was highly critical of the role of his party in the massacre. Of Trotsky he wrote, 'The single fact that a Trotsky did not know what all the rank and file communists knew — that out of inhumanity a needless crime had been committed against the proletariat and peasantry — this fact is, I repeat, highly significant...'

He was indignant at the lies spread by the Bolshevik press, which claimed that the mutiny was a counter-revolution led by a White general, and he accused high party officials of provoking the rebellion.

However, Serge ultimately sided with the party. He concluded, 'with unutterable anguish', that even though Kronstadt was in the right and was 'the beginning of a fresh liberating revolution

for popular democracy', the situation in the country as a whole made it impossible. Ravaged by the civil war, the revolution was without food, without production, without stamina. The ranks of the militant workers had been decimated, and while in Kronstadt the leaders of the mutiny were revolutionaries, behind them stood opportunists whose only interest was the disintegration of Soviet power. So Serge sided with those who put the maintenance of Soviet power before mass politics; he believed that the Party was the only way forward for the Russian masses.



Wartime safe-conduct pass issued to Serge in his real name of Victor Kibalchich by French authorities in 1941.

It will be the task of libertarian Communists to proclaim by their criticism and activity that the crystallization of the worker's State must be avoided at all costs. (*The Anarchists and the Experience of the Russian Revolution, 1921*)

Serge's attitudes to the early years of the Russian revolution are tempered by two principles he maintained: his belief in historical necessity and his commitment to truth.

While perceiving the tragedy of many of the events he was a witness to, he accepted their inevitability. No defeat is final, he tells us, but merely the preparation for some future battle. In his three novels *Men in Prison*, *Birth of Our Power*, and *Conquered City* this sense of history is particularly explicit, and by it Serge shows us the link between defeat and victory, and between struggles in different places and different times.

Serge was always quick to attack deception by the communist press, 'The first socialist Press and hence the first unbiased and uncorruptible press in the world!' as he wrote when it was 'positively beserk' with lies about Kronstadt.

On the lies about White officers being involved in the Left Opposition he wrote 'For the first time a squalid

Russia and in the abilities of the Russian people.

The reawakening of interest in Serge's works is indeed appropriate today, when his concerns are particularly relevant. These concerns are once more on the agenda, with the emergence of Marxist humanist currents, and the growth of libertarian communism in Europe.

Phil Green

A selection of Victor Serge's works available in English:

**Year One of the Russian Revolution** (1930). Allen Lane 1972.

**From Lenin to Stalin** (1937). Monad Press 1973.

**Memoirs of a Revolutionary** (1951). Oxford University Press 1978.

**The Case of Comrade Tulayev** (1948). Penguin 1968.

**Men In Prison** (1930) Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative 1977.

**Birth of Our Power** (1931) WRPC 1977.

**Conquered City** (1932) WRPC 1978.

**The Sun at Midnight** (1939) WRPC 1979.

**The Serge - Trotsky Dossier** WRPC 1979.



## Review

"THE POVERTY OF THEORY and other essays. E.P. Thompson. Merlin Paperback £3.90.

Edward Thompson and others played a vital part in the development of the socialist movement in Britain when they provided the public voice of perhaps a third of the membership of the CPGB with their opposition to Stalinist orthodoxy following Khrushchev's partial revelation of Stalin's crimes in 1956 and the Russian invasion of socialist Hungary in that year which showed just how limited destalinisation was intended to be. Their duplicated journal, *THE REASONER*, was banned by the Party and its editors driven out. Thompson has a very good case as an important, if often self-isolated, standard bearer of the liberation of the socialist movement from Stalinism and of the liberation of Marx's work and method from its jailers. When he calls himself a libertarian communist he is to be taken seriously.

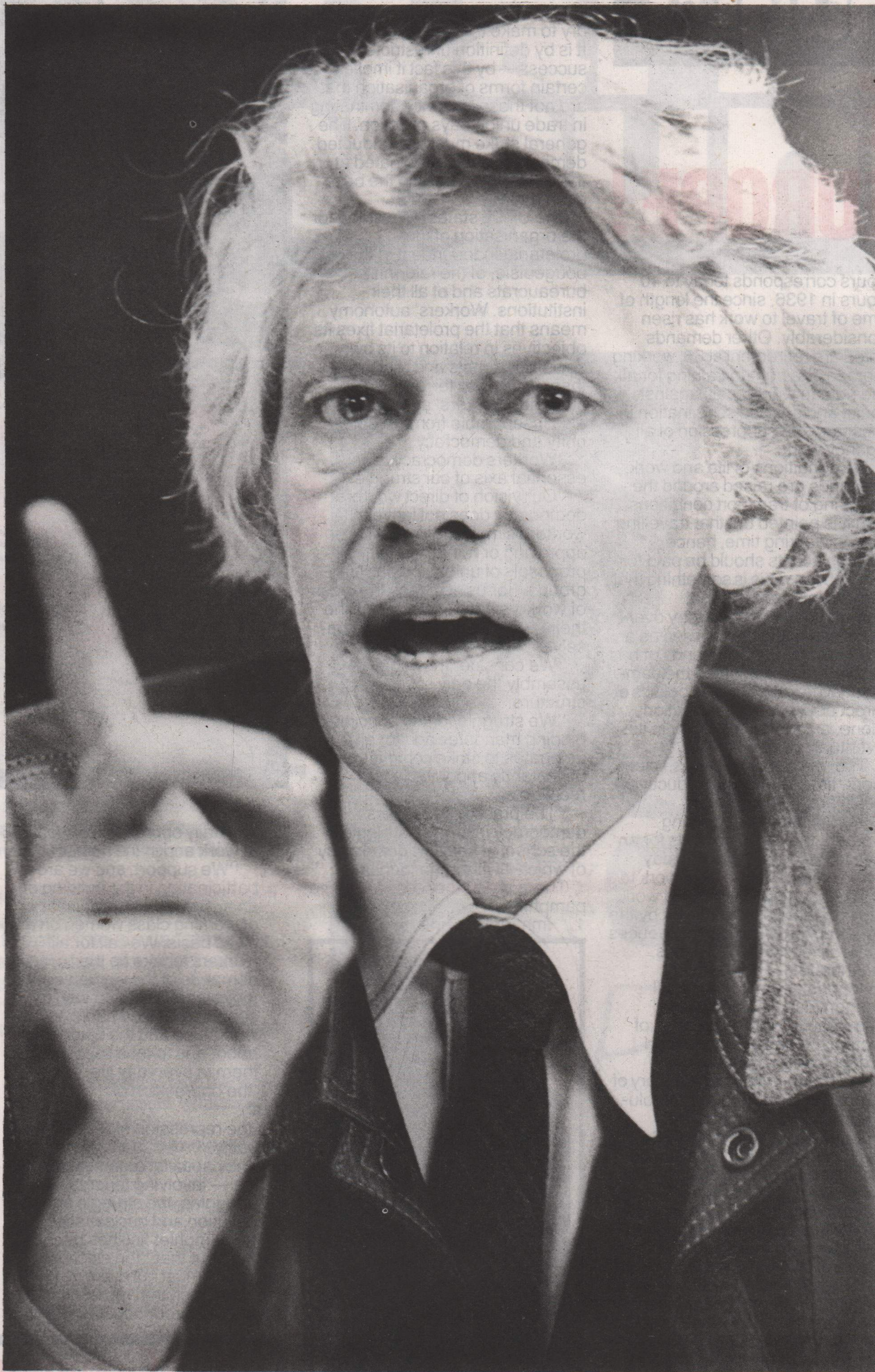
## Perched

His subsequent works, *The Making of the English Working Class*, *William Morris*, and his collaboration in the essays *Out of Apathy* and in the 1969 *May Day Manifesto* demonstrate not only his continued devotion to that task but also the problems of pursuing it. Thompson had the problem of actually situating his practice. His commitment to the working class movement is not to be doubted but the broadness with which he interprets the movement has often left him perched precariously on the far edge of left-labourism. A sort of thinking person's Ken Coates. His ideas and contributions are first rate but the audience he chooses to address is too often reading Tribune while he speaks.

These essays cover the period from 1960 to the present and each contributes some excellent summaries of what a libertarian marxism must be as well as illuminating the position of important areas of the socialist movement he is arguing with or to.

## Vintage

Thompson's involvement with the new generation of the left which he helped to free from the CP (as much by the practice of opposition and subsequent haemorrhaging of the CP of thousands of members, as by his writings which are not widely known to socialists under 30), was and is rather limited. He broke contact with the New Left Review when in the early 60's it turned into an academic Marxist's paradise but he didn't set out to replace it with the journal that was necessary and so it can be fairly argued that the predominance of the Old Left in new forms over the generation of 68 (which includes anarchism, Trotskyism, Mao-Stalinism) is to be partly situated in the preoccupation of the Marxist intellectuals of 1956 vintage with the Labour Party and its left. That gap has to be made up and socialist activists have to learn about the ideas and activities of previous



Thompson speaking at ABC meeting at the Labour Party conference. Photo Andrew Wiard (Report)

# THE POVERTY OF THEORY

generations of militants.

With the last two essays in this collection, particularly his demolition of the Althusserian inquisition, Thompson himself helps us to bridge

the gap. The removal of the threat represented from Althusser—of a counteroffensive by the forces that lost their hold of the socialist movement as their tanks ground down the

Hungarian Revolution, is in fact a secondary contribution to the main usefulness of the article. It certainly is important to try and free some minds currently stuck inside university penitentiaries undergoing training in dehumanising structuralism (building mental tanks in preparation for the day when their consciousness might become being). The spread of the disease as a growth inside the CP's giving the illusion of debate between "eurocommunism" and "althusserian marxism" has threatened to provide a spawning ground for new generations of liberals and stalinists. It is in asserting what Marxism can be, how it can be used, its links with history, human practice and values, that Thompson does his greatest service. He also shows how far the generation of 68, which the LCG and most of the British socialist organisations derive from, has still to

## letter

Dear Libertarian Communist,

I went to the Libertarian Festival in Manchester in October hoping that I would find an open and constructive opportunity for discussions and the chance to have a good time with other libertarians. Unfortunately this didn't happen and I came away feeling that much of the weekend had been a waste of time.

The "Festival" was attended by about 200 people but was really more of a conference, made up entirely of workshops, than a festival. Most of the workshops I went to weren't at all productive, though other people have told me that workshops they attended were better (e.g. Politics of Sexuality and Shop Floor Organisations). It seemed to me that a major problem was that many people simply did not see themselves as being part of the "left" and were only prepared to work with other anarchists.

At times I felt I was being branded a traitor for having occasionally worked with "leninists" and "trotskyists", or even people who considered themselves to be unaligned socialists. In a few cases, people had had such bad experiences of working in broad based groups that they understandably felt that they couldn't any more.

But most of those opposed to working in broad based groups or campaigns did so for mostly abstract and theoretical reasons (e.g. remember Kronstadt), and weren't interested in discussing how libertarians can effectively work in such campaigns, or how to prevent them becoming so alienating and sterile for those involved.

The worst experience I had was during the workshop on racism and feminism where a small group of men dominated the discussion. They attacked anyone who was prepared to work, however critically, with the ANL or other anti-fascist/racist groups, and they seemed to be mainly into a "kick them off the streets" approach to anti-fascist work. Most of us felt too intimidated to criticise their "street fighting man" approach and the workshop just degenerated into a sterile argument between those who wanted to work out ways of countering fascism and racism, and those who wanted to smash the ANL.

I was surprised and disappointed at the almost total absence of any awareness of feminist politics in what turned out to be a very male dominated weekend. The only workshop I went to where people seemed to be strongly influenced by feminist ideas was the "men against sexism" workshop. I enjoyed this much more than the others and it was good to find a group of men who wanted to talk about their experiences of trying to counter sexism in themselves and the world around them. We perhaps didn't get very far or go very deep, but at least it was an open and sympathetic atmosphere.

Even the social side of the festival was a disappointment. Everyone seemed to keep fairly much to themselves and only talk to people they knew already. Counter-act, who performed a play on Saturday, were really enjoyable even though their performance was rather disrupted by people continually going in and out of the hall.

Perhaps my experience of the festival was worse than others, but I'm not sure whether there is much point in trying to have such a broad based festival or conference again.

Maybe it would be better to have one festival for libertarians who are interested in working in practical ways to create a broad revolutionary movement — even if this means occasionally working with people who don't call themselves anarchists — and another for the pure-at-heart anarchists who wish to remain in their little sects, untarnished by contact with anyone on the left who doesn't totally agree with them. Finally, despite all the problems, I would like to give a public thanks to all the hard work put in by the conference organisers.

Love 'n anarchy  
Danny

go but that the ground is there before our feet.

I can think of few books I would care to recommend you to read as much as this one. What is left is to take up a discussion with Thompson and his generation, to continue our own escape from the ancient orthodoxies that threaten to trap the new socialist movement and in doing so to bring Edward Thompson in particular into a circle of discussion and activity which will end his isolation.

## SUPPORT LIBERTARIAN COMMUNIST

The Libertarian Communist Group is a very small organisation, even by the standards of the weak and small British far left. However, this does mean that our National Conferences, which are our supreme policy making body, are small enough to allow for good discussions to take place. We had a good conference in London in December at which we took a number of decisions about this paper.

We decided that the paper should try and maintain regular production and should try and encourage people outside the LCG to contribute articles and letters. We will try and produce the paper every 3 months, in June, mid-September and December. Copy for these issues will have to reach us on these dates respectively: May 14, Aug. 27 and Nov. 12. Copy should be typed, double spaced on A4 paper, with margins on either side. We don't guarantee to publish everything you send in!

We agreed that the next issue should cover race and education, students, technology, the firemen, and that the supplement would be on Trotskyism. Contributions on these topics would be very welcome, as would criticisms of this issue. We would also be particularly grateful for material on Ireland, especially people's views on the British Tribunal on Ireland.

Remember that there are other ways besides writing articles by which you can help the paper. Please take bundles to sell if you can, and please send us money to finance the costs of the paper, which include typesetting and printing and postage. Please send us snippets of news which you find interesting or instructive or amusing. Please send us graphics and cartoons.

All these things, which you are sure to be desperate to send in, should be sent to: LCG, 29, Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.



# Libertarian Communist

## NO TO THE BOSSES EUROPE!

IN March 1978, the group in France with which we have strong political ties, the Union des Travailleurs Communistes Libertaires, (Union of Libertarian Communist Workers) together with two other organisations, the Organisation Combat Anarchiste (since collapsed, many of its members joining UTCL) and Combat Communiste (Leninist, seeing Russia and China as state capitalist), issued a joint manifesto "For a Revolutionary Alternative".

It put forward a number of demands around wages, unemployment, conditions of life and work, working women, the army, school, youth and the repression of sexuality.

Now that the elections for the EEC are approaching the UTCL are proposing that 'For a Revolutionary Alternative' should form the basis of a Europe-wide campaign of opposition on the basis of abstention and building a revolutionary alternative.

Discussions are taking place with other libertarian communist groups in EEC countries, including the LCG, around the pamphlet.

The pamphlet denounces the demand for nationalisation as a dangerous "socialist myth", pointing out that parts of the capitalist economy cannot be separated, and that wage-earners are still wage-earners under a nationalised industry. Wages for public sector workers, in fact, are no better, and in many cases worse, than those for private sector workers.

The pamphlet regards as essential the fight for workers' unity, and to assist in this fight calls on a unifying programme of demands with a minimum guaranteed wage for all unemployed, including school leavers and pensioners, equal pay for equal work, and opposition to the hierarchy of wages.

In the section of unemployment, the 35 hour week is demanded immediately as a step to the 30 hour week, pointing out that 30

hours corresponds today to 40 hours in 1936, since the length of time of travel to work has risen considerably. Other demands listed are retirement at 55; working women: the right to training for all, the right to work for all; against racist and sexist discrimination in jobs; and the suppression of all agency work.

On conditions of life and work, demands are raised around the bettering of transport conditions, and it is pointed out that travelling time is working time, hence season tickets should be paid for by the boss. This is something that the group Fare Fight that campaigned in this country over fare rises could have raised as a relevant issue to thousands of bus and tube users. Instead the campaign was trapped in the politics of direct action, and direct action alone, a contributing factor in its eventual collapse.

The end of speed-ups, piece-work, time study and productivity deals are called for.

On the subject of working women, the pamphlet calls for an end to the double working day, when women return from work to home for a second round of work. This problem can be solved by the construction of collective resources (collective kitchens, creches, washhouses). The pamphlet demands free abortion for all women including minors and immigrants, and the creation of workplace and neighbourhood creches and nurseries.

In France, with its long history of intense class struggle, of revolutionary trade unionism, the Popular Front period of 1936-7, the Occupation and Resistance, and the heady days of May-June 1968, struggles are more advanced than in Britain, and the UTCL feels confident enough to bring forward the idea of the General Strike. I quote:

"The unification of struggles, a unifying platform of demands, these are two stages that prepare for a single effective reply to the bourgeois offensive: the general

strike.

"The general strike marks a new step, a higher arena of the class struggle because it is no longer a matter of 24-hour strikes but a trial of strength between classes. It lasts as long as necessary to make the employers give in. It is by definition unrestricted until success—by this fact it implies certain forms of organisation that are not those currently dominating in trade union days of action. The general strike must be conducted democratically, co-ordinated at the base, taken back to the base each day."

The UTCL states "We stand for the organisation of the proletariat independent of the bourgeoisie, of the reformist bureaucrats and of all their institutions. Workers' autonomy means that the proletariat fixes its objectives in relation to its own specific interests and realises them on its own terrain: social struggle. Workers' autonomy is also inseparable from workers unity and democracy."

"Workers democracy is an essential axis of our struggle."

"Our vision of direct workers democracy does not leave to workers simply the possibility of approving or rejecting the proposals of union and political groups. For us, it means the mass of workers determining what line their struggles should take themselves."

"We consider the base assembly the only sovereign structure."

"We struggle for the principle of binding mandates and for all delegates to strike committees to be instantly appointable and recallable."

"The practice of workers democracy in today's struggle is the school of socialist democracy of which it will be the foundation."

There are further sections in the pamphlet on:

1. immigrant workers;



### Jim Partial

I saw Iranian revolt

FROM my seat in the bar of the Tehran Hilton, I watched as extremists toppled the much-loved Shah of Iran.

I saw millions of rent-a-mob demonstrators, many of them clearly not locals, gather in Tehran's main streets, egged on by a tiny minority of mindless militants.

I saw the Shah's tanks, attempting to clear the obstructed streets, brutally set fire to without regard for life or property.

If the gentle, peace-loving Shah of Iran can be forced to leave his own country by the mob, where, I ask myself, can it end?



Photo Mike Sheridan (IFL)

2. the daily oppression of women at work and in the home.

"We support, and we are participating in the building of an autonomous organisation of working class women on a class basis. We call for all workers to take up the demands of the women's movement, that is to say, to support these demands in the workplace and the neighbourhood, and to take account of them in everyday life."

3. the oppression of youth;

4. the repression of sexuality;

5. the capitalist organisation of life — involving tenants' struggles, the struggle against pollution and nuclear sites.

The pamphlet finishes by pointing out that "the election campaign must not make us forget one giant fact, that repression is advancing throughout the world."

"Repression against the workers grows daily and regimes from Gdansk to Soweto wallow in blood."

"Solidarity is necessary at a time when the bourgeoisie of the entire world, under the pretext of 'combating terrorism' is implementing an agreement that will let them deport their respective 'dissidents'."

Copies of the pamphlet in English translation can be obtained from LCG c/o 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

We regard the document as a worthwhile foundation for discussion on demands to be put forward in general and during campaigns at election times, including the EEC elections.

We hope for greater cooperation with the UTCL and other libertarian communists internationally, in the long and difficult task of building a libertarian communist International.

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visations in industry; e.g. they resurrected small bakeries to win the support of their petty bourgeois allies, and in the process created a bread shortage that led to large queues for bread in the working class suburbs whilst restaurants had plenty for the rich. Collectives were not integrated so that there were examples of workers being beaten up for asking for payment of bills. Whilst the CNT pursued an alliance with the UGT it compromised itself as the defender of the workers' collectives. When a pact was finally signed it represented the organisations' bureaucracies — but not the workers' movement.

There was no involvement in planning who should produce what within each factory assembly. Durrutti had prophesied a 'state socialist' economy more or less correctly. The policy of compromise pursued by the CNT therefore implied the negation of the revolution. The right wing tendencies who argued that the state was no longer repressive took hold of the movement through bureaucratic means, just as they were using similar means to run the economy and army. Opposition papers which did not reflect the line of the central CNT leadership were banned. No assemblies of CNT members took place to ratify the decisions that were taken. The national committee was supervised by permanent regional delegates, rather than delegates who had to report always to their own assemblies. In this context the organisation of national Industrial Federations to replace the *sindicatos unicos* reinforced the bureaucracy of the CNT. Similar processes took place in the FAI too. The development of these trends therefore implied a destruction of the revolutionary organisations and their replacement by a bureaucracy of full time officials representing an organisation whose members were silent and censored.

*Politically the development of these tendencies compromised the CNT as a revolutionary class organisation. The political alternative to this betrayal developed in many places.*

Camillo Berneri wrote some erudite articles about revolutionary governments exposing both the Leninists and the ministers. In December 1936 he wrote '... There is a smell of Noske in the air. If Madrid were not in flames one would be obliged to recall Kronstadt ... The dilemma 'Madrid or Franco' has paralysed Spanish anarchism. Today Barcelona is situated between Burgos, Rome, Berlin, Madrid and Moscow. Besieged ... we can still perform miracles. Caught between the Prussians and Versailles, the commune lit a fire which still lights the world. Between Burgos and Madrid there is Barcelona. ...'

The Mujeres Libres group made a novel demand on the rest of the anarchist movement. They asked that they should be given equal representation with the FAI, FIJL, and CNT.

Many in the militias refused to accept the decrees that mobilised them as part of the popular army.

In March 1937 a federation of collectives attacked by state police organised a defence front between themselves.

The FIJL organised a campaign in defence of the patrol committees who were ordered by the government to surrender their arms.

Perhaps the culmination of this opposition was the alliance formed in the streets in May 1937, when the PSUC attempted to intimidate the workers' organisations. Rank and file CNT members, POUMists, a few Bolshevik-Leninists (Trotskyists), and an illicit CNT group, the Friends of Durrutti united behind the barricades. In May they had condemned the CNT leadership with

this manifesto: '... We are the friends of Durrutti and we have sufficient authority to condemn those individuals who through incapacity and fear have betrayed the working class. Whilst we have more enemies in front of us they gave power to Companys again (the leader of the Generalitat), public order to the reactionary government of Valencia, and the defence commissariat to General Pozas — treason is immense.' They called for a revolutionary junta of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Later they declared: 'G. Oliver, F. Montseny and the leadership of the CNT have permitted the stalinists and assault guards to cruelly assassinate C. Berneri and the young F. Ferrer ... since 19 July the anarchist leaders have capitulated many times before the demands of the bourgeoisie and in the name of anti-fascist unity have arrived at openly betraying the working class. Anti-fascist unity has been only subordination to the bourgeoisie — it has entailed the military victories of Franco and the counter-revolution at the rear ...'

*'To beat Franco we need to beat Companys and Caballero. To beat fascism we need to crush the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist and socialist allies. The capitalist state must be destroyed totally and there must be installed workers' power depending on rank and file workers' committees. Apolitical Anarchism has failed. To beat the bloc of the bourgeoisie and its allies — Stalinists, socialists, CNT leaders — the workers must break clearly with traitors on all sides. Their vanguard, i.e. the revolutionary militants of the friends of Durrutti, POUM, and the youth, must regroup to elaborate a programme of proletarian revolution.'*

Beneri was dead. The revolution was dead. Between Burgos and Madrid Barcelona had died isolated, but still struggling.

# Libertarian Communist

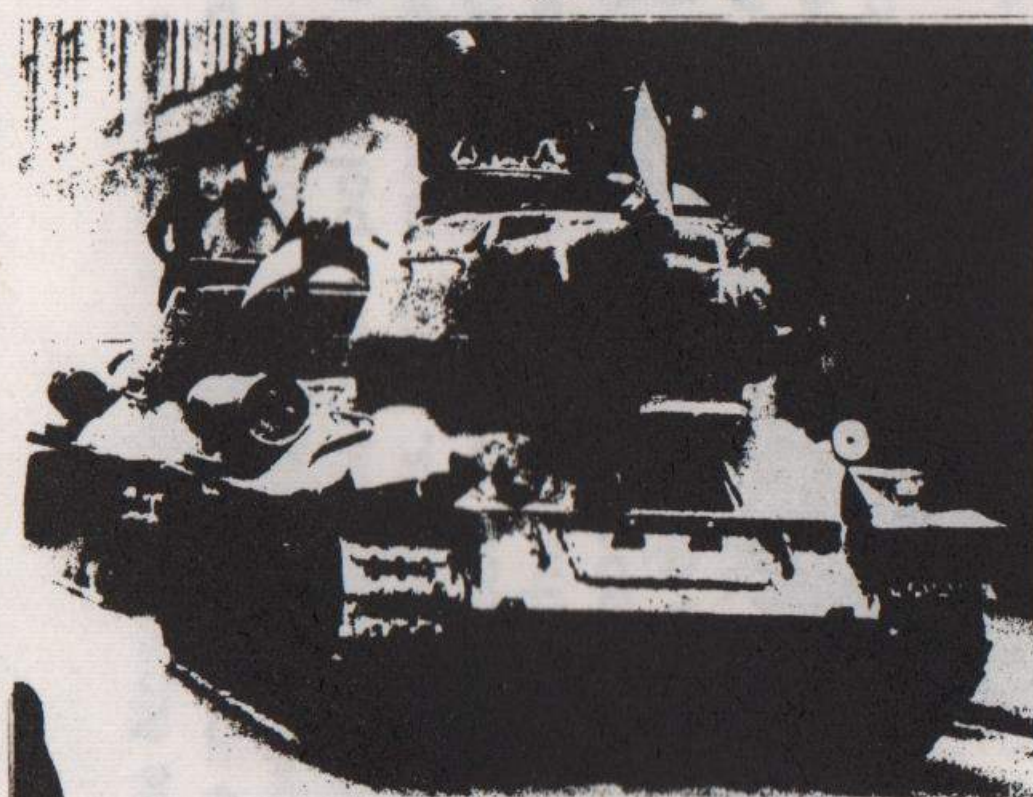
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# SPAIN 1936



Affinity groups such as the Nosotros were not political tendencies so much as support groups of friends. Nosotros was consistently radical and emphasised direct action but did not have a line, more a group emphasis. With this situation prevailing it is difficult to fully follow the developments within the FAI. By 1936 it had lost much of the independence that it had had before 1931 from the reformists and the then autonomous CNT. Differences seemed to spread through the FAI once it assumed the leadership of the CNT in 1931. Important differences were maintained by the regional divisions within the CNT. The Asturias consistently followed a policy of co-operation with the UGT. The Aragonese were hard line anarchists, hence the FAI inspired choice that it should be the seat of the National Committee up to 1936, rather than Barcelona which had a history of debate between 'purists' and 'Catalanists'. The National Committee naturally took on the political character of the city in which it resided, and by whose local federation it was elected. Few theoreticians developed within the CNT. Perhaps the most noticeable was V. Orobón Fernández who died in 1934. Orobón went into exile during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and participated in the international conference organised by supporters of the *Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, which was written by Russian exiles to draw on their experiences. In 1931 Orobón returned to Spain and participated in the Comedia congress where he supported the move to develop industrial federations. In 1933 he was one of the main speakers for the abstentionist campaign, but worried by the isolation of the CNT he spoke out in favour of a revolutionary alliance with the UGT. He pointed to the example of the unsuccessful revolution in Bavaria in 1919, where socialists, communists, and anarchists (Landauer, Muhsam) had co-operated. His demand for an alliance on the basis of a five point plan influenced the Asturias. The points were:

1. Tactical planning, no co-operation with the bourgeoisie.
2. Socialisation of the means of production, integration of the unemployed into the workforce, production for social wealth, not commodity production.
3. Organs to integrate the economy.
4. Recallable elected executives.
5. The immediate aim of revolutionary workers' democracy.

Unlike the other politicians, the CNT did have a clear idea that the coming revolution would be a proletarian one. At its Congress in 1936 a motion describing libertarian communism had been unanimously passed, by *trentistas* and others alike. The conference ratified reunification with the 50,000-strong minority. The failure of the CNT was its lack of direction, and its lack of preparation to counter the coming military rising. A proposal that militias should be trained was defeated by one favouring the 'more anarchist' idea of guerrilla warfare. The

## GLOSSARY

Esquerra	"Left". A bourgeois Catalan party.
FIJL	Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth.
Generalitat	The autonomous 'government' of Catalonia.
GPU	Stalinist secret police.
ILP	Independent Labour Party.
IWMA	International Working Men's (sic) Association, anarcho-syndicalist international founded in Berlin in 1923.
PCE	Spanish Communist Party.
PSOE	Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (Second International)
PSOP	French Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party, a split from the Second International Party.
SAP	German Socialist Workers' Party, a split from the Second International party.
sindicatos	
unicos	"single unions".
Solidaridad Obrera	"Workers' Solidarity", paper of the CNT in Barcelona.
trentista	"the thirties". CNT moderate faction so named because thirty of them signed a manifesto opposing tactic of unprepared spontaneous revolution advocated by the FAI.

response to military risings was to be the revolutionary general strike. The policy of alliances was also agreed, since 30,000 political prisoners were held by the state and reorganisation was proceeding slowly. By the time of the Congress the CNT had ½million members, by the end of the year 1½m plus. The Congress accepted a transitional programme for industry that included temporary demands as well as revolutionary ones. The programme for the peasants centred on the expropriation of land, but peasants were badly represented at the congress. Sexual relations and some cultural questions were discussed, to the frustration of some delegates who thought such time was wasted. Congress agreed that the 36 hour week should be introduced but had no plan to implement this demand. This led to clashes with the UGT in the building industry, who were prepared to settle for 40 hours. *In practice unity in action had still to be won when the military uprising came.*

By 1936 the Spanish working-class movement had been through many experiences and was fundamentally strong. The CNT was vital, containing the mass of the determined workers. A weakness was the dominance of the reformist UGT in Madrid and the Basque country. Although the danger of a military coup was understood by the Nosotros group, and their view that a revolution was the only way out of the crisis was accepted by the CNT, no mass preparations had been made. A great weakness of the CNT was its lack of internationalism. Little or nothing was done by the CNT to aid revolutionaries in Morocco or France. The lack of help from the latter and the 40,000 trained troops from the former would alter the balance of forces decisively against the revolution, just as the reformists would sap it from within. The whole of the CNT instinctively welcomed the revolution which came on July 19th, but ultimately *their lack of political strategy was to be the factor which disorganised and then destroyed this revolutionary enthusiasm.*

In July 1936 Dolores Ibarruri (the present president of the PCE) declared: 'In our country what is happening is a bourgeois democratic revolution, which in other countries like France, happened a hundred years ago . . . we communists defend a regime of liberty and democracy'. *In fact a revolution of the working class had taken place.* The basic struggle that went on throughout the period of the civil war was a class struggle by the unco-ordinated organisations of the working class, and the recreated strength of the bourgeois state. In this struggle the militias, watch committees, revolutionary committees, rural collectives, political organisations, and socialised industries of the working class were destroyed or degenerated under the pressure of a bourgeois coalition composed of the right wing socialists (followers of Prieto), the PCE and the republican and regional parties. The rest of this pamphlet will attempt firstly to describe in outline the organisations of the working class revolution, and secondly will ask the question 'Why was the revolution stifled, and by whom?'.

## Rising

On July 19th 1936 in all the major industrial centres of Spain an attempt by the army to destroy the government of the republic was defeated, mainly by the energies of the mass of the workers who disarmed the officers and soldiers who had joined in the conspiracy led by General Franco. Rumours and preparations for the attempted army coup had been obvious to all but the Casares government, which, afraid of the workers more than of the army, refused the demands that arms should be distributed to the people. The seizure of the barracks and the arms that they contained by the workers in all of southern Spain (excepting Cadiz, Seville, Cordoba and Grenada), as well as in Catalonia, Asturias, Santander, and 2/3 of the Basque country — deprived the government of its monopoly of force. The basic strength of the revolution developed through the arming of the people — this took two forms: firstly, the organisation of watch committees and patrols to prevent fascist attacks; secondly, the organisation of the popular militias. Since the greatest concentration of class power and organisation, and the largest amount of information relates to Barcelona and Catalonia, most of the following relates only to this area. Ten days after the revolution there were 18,000 people organised in the militias (The relative strengths were: 13,000 CNT-FAI, 2,000 UGT, POUM 3,000, police etc. 300). The militias differed from ordinary armies in various ways. Their members did not cease

political activity by entering them — they remained formally members of their organisations with the right to contribute to political decisions. Whilst they stayed in the cities the militias did not live in barracks but continued to live at home whenever possible; this meant that they were in much greater contact with other people and could not be separated from the political debates going on there.

Generally speaking they were complete improvisations; little or no preparation had been done. Although the CNT had collected arms from the unsuccessful Barcelona uprising of October 1934 there had been no training of militias, even after the return of the republic in 1936. At the CNT congress a motion proposed by the Nosotros had been defeated. This group had played an important part in defeating the conspiracy. They had planted informers in the barracks to find out what the conspirators planned, and helped to lead the attacks on the barracks — some of them were killed. Later Durutti was to lead one of the columns that led to retake Zaragoza from the rebels. Each column was composed of a number of groups of 500 men which were in turn divided into groups of 100. The latter was directed by an elected 'centurion', and by four representatives of the ¼ sections of each century. There was no rank as such; orders were given and obeyed not because an officer had been appointed to run the unit but because the unit had elected their representative and accepted the need for collective discipline.

There was thus no specific officer corps. Everyone ate, slept and fought together irrespective of their responsibilities. Nor was there any uniform — except that it was common to wear similar clothes with red or black neckties. Given their lack of expertise professional soldiers were used — but had to be supervised. One column of soldiers and revolutionaries leaving Valencia split up, with the soldiers massacring the militias.

The columns that left Barcelona did not achieve their goal. The volunteers' enthusiasm did not make up for a lack of effective armament, or ammunition. Whilst there were some lapses of discipline nothing could alter the basic problem for the militias: after two weeks they had used up most of their ammunition. Although guerrillas in one or two small groups continued to be active, the Aragon front was to remain static for much of the war. The supply of arms was never effectively organised by the revolutionaries to ensure that they could move on. After the departure of the majority of the militias for Aragon and Valencia internal security was supervised by Patrols which developed throughout Barcelona. The majority of the members again belonged to the CNT (325 as against 145 — UGT; 185 — Esquerra; 45 — POUM). The patrols were linked to an investigative commission and to Revolutionary Tribunals composed of representatives of the various parties. This new justice was free. All judicial records prior to the 19th July were burned. At the frontiers with France the old guards were also replaced.

## Collectives

One of the most interesting features of the Spanish revolution was the reorganisation of the economy attempted both in industry and agriculture. Trotsky acknowledged that the cultural level of the Spanish revolution was way ahead of that of the Russian one. The CNT was after all an anarcho-syndicalist union and considered that the reorganisation of economic life — and its management by the workers themselves — was one of the touchstones of any revolution. One of the grounds for rejecting links with the Communist International which the CNT had provisionally joined was the CNT's refusal to accept that either trade unions should be subordinated to parties, or that the workers should have little or no power to manage the economy through co-ordinated decision making.

It is impossible in a short space to outline even the wealth of experience of self-management in the revolution. Readers can easily obtain G. Leval: *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, and S. Dolgoff: *The Anarchist Collectives*. Most of the material here is from F. Mintz: *L'Autogestion dans l'Espagne Révolutionnaire*, which is unavailable in English. Mintz summarises the extent of collectives in agriculture as involving in July 1939 0.4m people in 802 collectives. He estimates that 1.5m people overall were involved in these experiments. The extent of the anarchist movement in the countryside is remarkable because the CNT was by 1936 a largely urban organisation. Aragon, which was protected from the intrusion of the communists by its geo-

graphical position and the presence of the revolutionary militias until late 1937 provides the most developed picture of rural revolution. Whereas Popular Front administrations were organised early on elsewhere, the Council of Aragon was not recognised until December 1936 by the central government; even then half its members were in the CNT, and one in the syndicalist party. Only three quarters of the province was unoccupied by the Francoists.

A CNT organised congress of collectives attracted representatives from 80,000 collectivists (before May 1936 there were only 34,000 CNT members over all of Aragon, Navarre and Rioja.). The 275 collectives were grouped into 23 federations. Of 0.43m inhabitants 69.5% were involved in collectives, running 70% of the land, according to one estimate. Many had done away with money internally — distribution was made either by rationing, by the use of collectives' own credit notes, or totally freely. A few were able despite the war to begin improvements — machinery, irrigation, etc. Generally speaking wages were paid to the family, with wives and children receiving an unequal share. Schools were often set up for the first time. Most collectives voluntarily sent large amounts of food to the front. The basic structure of all the collectives was similar. Those that joined it shared out their land and worked in small groups run by their own representative. Priorities were decided by general assemblies with everyone present.

Some of the collectives were formed near parts of the front where the POUM and PSUC were active too, and independently of the CNT. Relations with the UGT varied; the CNT policy was that the small landowners who joined the UGT to protect themselves against the revolution should only be allowed to work land which they could use themselves. A few of the collectives agreed that a bank should be set up — not an interest earning bank, but a bank for the exchange of commodities between collectives, between town and country, and for international purchases.

## Industry

Industrialisation in the towns was less profound than in the countryside where the basic structure of life changed entirely. The necessity to improvise a vast war industry, to produce explosives for the first time in Catalonia, and therefore to work long hours, imposed limitations on the possibility for socialisation of the urban economy. Again only one example can be given — Barcelona; the centre of anarchist Spain. The socialisation of the economy in Barcelona was undertaken spontaneously by the workers. The Catalan regional committee of the CNT had merely ordered a general strike and a resumption of work. Most of the larger businesses — railways, trams, engineering, electricity, etc. were collectivised in the first week of the revolution. One of the first measures was to reintegrate all the unemployed into their former jobs. Wages were often made equal, and increased. Some trades were substantially reorganised — wood and furniture, hairdressers, bakers, etc. with smaller shops being shut down in favour of more modern, economical ones.

One of the important features of the revolution was the attempt to maintain the goodwill of technicians to help run the factory. In some cases they were granted representation on executive bodies where their professional expertise was most needed, but they did not have any greater power over hiring and firing or other day to day matters, which were generally controlled by the two major unions working together (the POUM union seems to have disappeared by 1936).

The economy suffered from two problems: firstly, one in four factories suffered from a lack of raw materials from abroad and from Francoist Spain; and secondly from lack of finance. In September 1936 a regional plenum of 200 unions passed a motion that left it open for unions to collectivise generally; the CNT also made some attempts to set up a labour bank which would be used to co-ordinate exchanges between co-operatives, in August 1937. Another novel feature of the collectives was the development of social and health measures to improve workers' standards of living which were often free. Abortion became legal for the first time. One of the significant features of the Spanish revolution was the development of a women's organisation. *Mujeres Libres* began in Madrid where a women's group began to teach women how to read and write. By 1938 it was a 30,000 strong movement organised throughout republican Spain. While it did not develop specifically



as a feminist organisation, feminist views did develop in it. Emma Goldmann wrote in the December 1936 issue of their paper that whilst class or sexual oppression existed there could be no revolution. The war allowed many women to enter jobs for the first time. Mujeres Libres helped this development along; although many of the jobs were still preserves for men, women were organised for work in transport, sanitation, health, food, etc. The groups also organised creches in factories. Simultaneously Federica Montseny, an FAI member who became Minister of Health, helped to provide birth control and legalised abortion. The organisation of the Mujeres Libres group was a positive step, helping women to become aware of and fight against their oppression; e.g. Pepita Carpena '... at first I was not very enthusiastic, but later I realised that there was a vast work to do among ourselves'.

Although it is difficult to describe there were more general aspects to the revolution. Abel Paz talks of militants who didn't sleep for days. George Orwell notes that everyone called each other tu, and comrade, instead of being formal. Clothes changed. Revolution came from abroad. Papers were printed on the capitalists' presses. Buildings were taken over. Churches and fascists were burnt and killed. Prisoners were freed, even criminals, some of whom went to the front in the Iron column near Valencia. The libertarian youth organised a popular university. The revolution and the counter-revolution that followed affected all areas of life.

## Failure

Although a proletarian revolution obviously began, why did it fail? If any reader still doubts the bourgeois character of the PCE, B. Bollotten in *The Grand Camouflage* provides a detailed exposure of their activities. The PCE and its Catalan PSUC played a crucial role in defeating the revolution. They opened their parties to all the opponents of collectivisation and militias and supported the parliamentary forms of government. The PCE was at the centre of a coalition whose nominal head may have been republican, or socialist, but whose strength depended on the flow of Russian arms, to approved police units. These arms were used to revive the police forces which were powerless in July and August. By December 1936 40,000 Carabineros and 28,000 national Republican Guards were created anew, with arms that were needed on the front. These troops and others led by Lister formed regular but communist troops in the popular army, and were used to destroy the collectives of the Levant and Aragon in 1937/8. For the bourgeois PCE it mattered most to destroy anything that savoured of revolution under the pretence that such 'excesses' were frightening off potential help from the liberal democracies. In reality this policy fitted in with Stalin's. Stalin had made a pact with France to frighten Nazi Germany. However if one looks at the dates of arms supplied to Spain by the USSR one notes that virtually no

arms were supplied to Spain after late in 1937. Instead Stalin made a pact to divide up Poland with Hitler. No one can doubt that the PCE meant to destroy the revolution with its slogan of 'The war first'.

## Dilemmas

The problem posed to the revolutionary left was of how to defend and extend the revolution, and win the war at the same time. Essentially an explanation for the defeat of the revolution and the victory of Franco has to relate to the way the revolutionary left faced this problem.

Why did the CNT not build the revolution? 'No Libertarian Communism — first crush the enemy where he is' (*Solidaridad Obrera* 21-7-36). '... the government of the Popular Front in Spain is no more than the reflection of a compromise between the petty bourgeoisie and international capital' (*Sol. Ob.* 3-9-36). When after the CNT had joined the national government in Madrid (4-10-37): 'circumstances have ... changed the nature of the Spanish state and government, it has ceased at this moment as the regulator of the organs of the state to be an oppressive force against the working class' (*Sol. Ob.*).

Durrutti seems to have believed that there would be an anarchist seizure of power, after Zaragoza was taken. Santillan, according to Abel Paz, proposed 'democratic collaboration', not dictatorship, i.e. rule by the CNT alone would be against anarchist principles, and might provoke armed intervention from foreign powers. After a few weeks of this policy G. Oliver who at first had argued that revolution was inseparable from the war told Durrutti in August 1936



*bourgeoisie, when one attacks foreign property, when public order is in the hands of the workers, when the militia is controlled by the unions, when, in fact, one is in the process of making a revolution from the bottom up, how is it possible to give this a legal basis?'*

These are just some of the arguments that went on in the CNT. The arguments of the Nosotros group appear to have been defeated by Santillan and the ex-trentistas first in Barcelona where the tide of revolu-

weaker and therefore more liable to pressure from outside groups) all reinforced this compromise.

Two arguments need consideration: (1) What was the effect of the policies adopted? (2) Was there any alternative?

The most persuasive argument appears to be that the CNT had to be moderate to win foreign aid. The CNT seems to have had some naive ideas about this aid: One article in *Solidaridad Obrera* gave uncritical praise to the USSR, without asking who the arms would go to. In any case all the arms went to repress the revolution as much as to fight at the front. Operations launched in the Balearics to entangle Britain and France against Italy, on the grounds that neither party would allow the other to gain influence, achieved nothing.

In fact the policy of placating the liberal democracies had great costs. It meant that the revolution made no attempt to destroy Franco's base in Morocco by supporting an anti-imperialist struggle. Spain also accepted that there should be no attack on Algeciras where troops arrived from Morocco. Thus the Spanish navy, which remained in republican hands for most of the war, was left idle, where it could have struck an important blow. Britain was unhappy about warfare in the vicinity of its base at Gibraltar. The government compromise also related to the use of the Bank of Spain's gold deposits. The IWMA had co-operated in a plan to use the money to buy arms after the gold had been seized by a force led by Durrutti and Santillan. The latter however developed cold feet at the thought of alienating the government of Madrid. Subsequently the gold went to Russia and the arms deliveries ceased.

The effect of the policy of working within the parliamentary institutions which the CNT leadership developed from the beginning of July, also had counter-revolutionary effects on the development of the armed forces. Whilst the leaders worried about imposing dictatorship, the forces were recruited that were to retake Barcelona. Whilst some anarchists were saying we must take Zaragoza before building libertarian communism in Barcelona, the PSUC prepared for the confrontations of May 1937. The CNT accepted the destruction of the watch committees at a time when the Spanish branch of the GPU prepared for the murder of embarrassing militants. The leader of the POUM, A. Nin, was taken by the GPU and killed, possibly in Moscow. Other well known militants disappeared, notably Camillo Berneri. Rumours persist that Durrutti was shot from behind. Meanwhile at the front militarisation was accepted. Concessions were won, all the CNT units being kept together, but militarisation still meant the destruction of revolutionary self-discipline in favour of regimentation. C. Mera who at the Zaragoza CNT Congress had opposed militias (he wanted guerilla warfare) ended up by making a speech where he declared that as a General he would no longer speak to an ordinary soldier!

## Economy

Within the economy there were two problems: finance and the UGT. The failure of the CNT to destroy the capitalist economy, its failure to organise and plan the economy for itself meant that raw materials for collectives were not secured, orders for uniforms were sometimes made abroad rather than going to revolutionaries. The PSUC used its positions to reverse collecti-



that it was necessary to build the revolution secretly from within a government. He replied: 'When the workers expropriate the

tion was strongest, later in national meetings where the representatives of the CNT from outside Catalonia (where the CNT was

The revolution and civil war in Spain in 1936-1939 contained some of the greatest moments in the history of the European working-class.

It is important for libertarians to remember that the largest single organisation of the working-class in Spain was the CNT, the anarcho-sindicalist trade union.

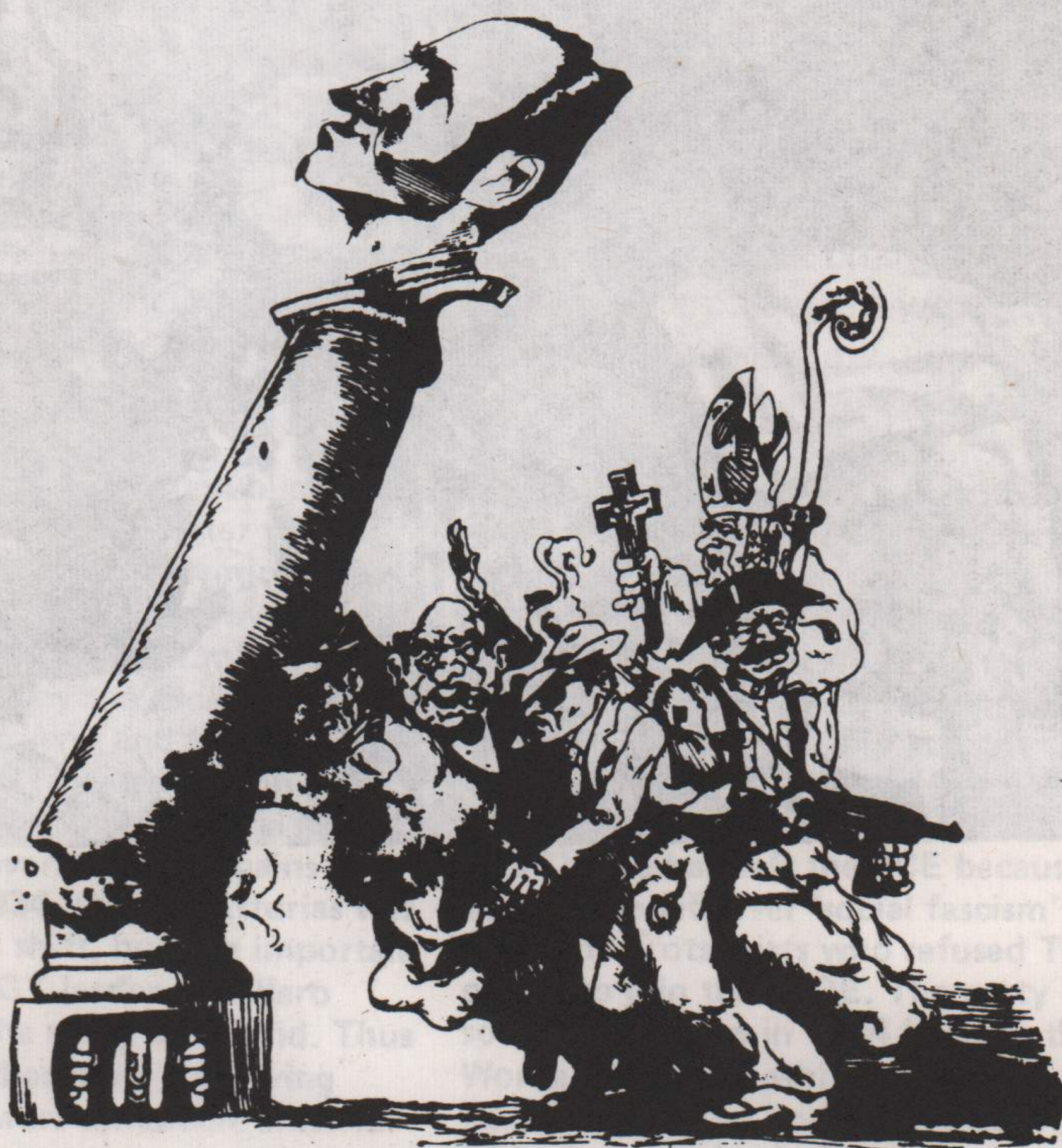
Today, 40 years on, does the libertarian tradition have any importance in Spain?

The answer to that question must undoubtedly be yes. Despite being ignored by most of the revolutionary Left in Britain, the Libertarian movement has grown rapidly since the death of Franco. The CNT is growing rapidly, and now has perhaps as many as 30,000 members. As important, it seems to have learnt from the mistakes it made in the Civil War.

The Libertarian Spain Committee believes that solidarity work with Spanish libertarians is vital for us in Britain, and sees Spain as "the weak link in European capitalism."

Libertarian Spain, bulletin of the LSC, is available for 20p inc. postage, bundles of 5 for £1 cash with order, from LSC, 136 Burley Rd, Leeds 4. No 1, still available, covers the rebirth of the CNT, the June elections, economic and political background. No 2, available from January, covers recent developments, the counter-culture etc etc.

## Libertarian Spain





The Revolution which started on July 19th 1936 took place in a period of Spanish and international political and economic crisis. Spain had suffered badly in the 1931 Wall Street crash and the Depression. Its industries had developed largely in the 1914-1918 war, when there was no competition and the demand from both sides was high. By 1936 unemployment was over 30% in many towns and industries, and estimates of the number unemployed in a total industrial work-force of about 3 million vary between ½million and 1 million. Agriculture was also badly affected, but here the basic problem was a structural one, with 20,000 latifundia owners holding 2/3 of the land. Forms of land ownership varied but outside a belt of Catholic tenant farmers between Leon and Navarre, small holders and peasants were discontented and prepared to seize the land. Seventy per cent of the population was still living on the land, whilst the urban population was split between Madrid and Barcelona with over a million each, and a number of smaller towns. Over the five years up to 1936 the cost of living had risen by over 80%. The international context for the coming revolution was very unfavourable. Mussolini had early on given his support to the right wing in Spain. Hitler was to use the war as an opportunity to train his troops in action. By 1936 Stalin had wiped out all opposition to him in Russia. After imposing a line that characterised the socialists as social-fascists in the period after the rise of Hitler to power in 1933, he had imposed on the Communist International a rapid turn to the right, emphasising the need for alliances not only with other workers' parties but also with 'radical' bourgeois parties. In 1936 in France where a socialist government supported by the Radicals took office, this policy had the effect of the Communist Party calling for a return to work to end the strike wave that had broken out there. The French CP thus blocked the way to independent class organisation which had been developing in the assemblies of the strike committees. In Spain the Communist Party was transformed. It ditched calls for revolution, halted its own youth and union organisations and merged them with the socialists — yesterday's 'fascists' no more.

Spain also had its colonial problem. This was Morocco, which like Ireland for Britain was a training ground for an otherwise sedentary army. In 1934, when Asturias had risen against the conservative CEDA party government, it was these Moroccan troops which were used to destroy the isolated uprising.

## Fascism

Spain's working-class had the misfortune to face the rise of fascism alone. Whilst international volunteers did come to their aid, they represented little in terms of mass solidarity. Many were refugees from countries where fascism was already dominant. The volunteers from Britain, France and the USA did not represent the majority of their fellow-workers, who followed events only through the distorting prism of bourgeois and socialist papers. 1936 was not a year like 1918 where socialist organisations throughout the advanced capitalist world were affected by the ending of the war and by the Russian Revolution. Rather the Spanish workers were the last to survive undefeated from that crisis. The simultaneous crisis in France was accompanied neither by the autonomous development of class organisations such as militias and strike committees nor by the development of any of the revolutionary political tendencies into mass organisations. Instead the fragmentation of the workers' movement there increased.

Politically there was little to encourage confidence in the parties of the Spanish left. The Socialists (PSOE), the Communists (PCE) and 'left' Communists (POUM), all agreed that the coming revolution was a bourgeois one, a continuation of the 1931 revolution. They believed the revolution should limit its targets to the monarchy, the latifundia owners, the army, the church and Castilian centralism. The popular front of these parties and the 'radicals' centred around the perpetuation of legality.

The record of the PSOE was unusually bad even for a reformist socialist party. Under the semi-dictatorship of Prima de Rivera the leader of the PSOE and its union the UGT (General Workers' Union) had served as a State Councillor and had supported mixed commissions of employers and trades unionists to resolve strikes. The CNT had refused this compromise which deprived workers of their autonomy and had been outlawed. This pattern had been repeated in



# SPAIN 1936

By 1939 the working-class had been defeated, temporarily, all over Europe. In Spain, Italy, Albania, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria fascist or militarist governments ruled through repression, preventing working-class organisation. In Russia, where market capitalism had been defeated, Stalin ruled autocratically over a state capitalist economy. In Britain and France and other European democracies the working-class movement had been directed into collaboration with the bourgeoisie to face the threat of Hitler under bourgeois control.

Millions would die fighting over the next few years in a struggle which did not achieve any changes for working people other than the partial destruction of fascism. The working-class movement which in 1910 appeared to be moving towards revolution had been unable to prevent two world wars, the degeneration of the revolution in Russia, and their co-option into popular fronts which if they ultimately defeated Hitler in 1945 did so at the cost of preserving capitalism.

Looking back today it is difficult to imagine in this context the enthusiasm of the Spanish Revolution. History is made after all by people, and their actions are not 'inevitable'. Beyond the Stalinist Communist International, which at its Seventh Congress placed itself firmly in favour of bourgeois Popular Fronts, reflecting illusions about 'socialist' state capitalism in one country, a number of political tendencies of all shades, anarchist and Marxist and the mass of the working-class attempted to build a socialist revolution in Spain.

In the face of the defeat of the Revolution this supplement intends to concentrate on two points which were crucial to the revolutionary movement and remain so because they illustrate the problems that have to be resolved if the movement is to progress. First, the capitulation of the leaders of the CNT and the FAI (the anarcho-syndicalist National Workers' Confederation and the Iberian Anarchist Federation) who prevented the co-ordination of the revolutionary organisations and the destruction of the state; secondly, the development of industrial and economic collectives, which changed the working lives of the millions who participated in them. Before we can examine the political and economic successes and failures of the Revolution we shall try and place these problems in context.

the first years of the Second Republic (1931-1933) and in 1936. However, after the defeat of the left in the 1933 elections, as a result of an abstention campaign by the CNT and the mobilisation of large numbers of peasants for the right by the *caciques* (bosses), the socialist rank and file had begun to move left. The UGT peasant union had re-emerged as a massive force as rural bosses sacked workers in revenge for the gains won before 1933. The 1934 rising in Asturias was characteristic of this shift, but it is important to realise that the UGT leader Caballero refused to support the rising in Madrid. Thus Caballero and the other more right-wing leaders of the UGT were unreliable allies for the revolution.

The positions of the PCE before 1936

followed the twists and turns of Comintern policy; it had few members and little influence.

The POUM (Workers' United Marxist Party) was a peculiar mixture. On the left were covert Trotskyists, who criticised the timidity of the leadership and objected to the popular front. The party resulted from the fusion of the Workers and Peasants Bloc (BOC) who had left the PCE because of its turn to the left over 'social fascism' and dissident Trotskyists who refused Trotsky's orders to join the PSOE. The party had won some importance in 1934 backing the Workers' Alliance which had led to the risings in Asturias and Barcelona. The CNT had refused to back this rising except in Asturias because it felt itself too weak and

had also argued that nothing should be expected from alliances with the 'radical' bourgeoisie in Catalonia. The POUM had perhaps 30,000 members in 1936, concentrated in Catalonia, especially in the town of Lerida. The POUM joined the popular front but it criticised it too, saying that it seemed that only the workers made concessions. Whilst the POUM would support all the revolutionary initiatives instinctively throughout the civil war, it placed them in no context. It saw the CNT as the decisive voice of the workers and was prepared to wait for them to push for the revolution. It was not prepared to fight on its own, outside of its implicit relation to the CNT, which it criticised for lacking Marxist politics. Internationally the POUM was linked to the ILP, SAP, PSOP, etc. in the 'London Bureau'.

Outside of these parties were other leftists, Bordigists, dissident Trotskyists, and foreign exiles like the anarchist Berneri. Such people managed only to write some good commentaries on the revolution.

## Anarchists

The anarchist movement was split into different tendencies organised largely into four groups, the CNT, the FAI, the youth (FIJL) and the women (*Mujeres Libres*). Since many commentators who should know better persist in talking of 'the anarchists' some of the basic tendencies will be explained here.

Within the CNT there were followers of all the anarchist tendencies except Pestana's Syndicalist Party. Pestana was the leader of the CNT from the murder of Segui until he was expelled in 1931. He had advocated support for the government and participation in the labour commissions. The expulsion of Pestana and his party saw their reformism increase and they eventually joined the popular front.

The minority tendency of the CNT were the *trentistas*. In the 1931 Conference they won majorities for the key proposals for national federations to link workers in each industry (as opposed to *sindicatos unicos* which grouped workers from every factory into a town or city federation) and for a patient strategy towards the government which excluded uprising. It was this point that was the dividing line for the 'extremist' faction of the FAI who gained control after the strikes failed in Barcelona. They argued that the minority were compromising with the Generalitat, while the *trentistas* replied that as they were not ready for the revolution they needed some understanding with the politicians. The FAI were understandably angry when the Generalitat was to see in their faction fight the intervention of the irresponsible wing of the CNT.

In 1934 the *trentistas* did support the joint rising of the Catalanist radicals, socialists and POUM. In the wave of risings that followed the *trentistas'* fears were proved justified. Whilst the Barcelona workers were already suffering from Generalitat repression, which spread to the suburbs and towns around Barcelona where support for the insurrections was strongest, the rural risings were defeated one by one in Andalusia, Aragon, the Levant, Catalonia etc. The FAI dominated revolutionary committees organised many risings, as well as a successful campaign to boycott the elections, but each rising focused on a new region, whilst the previous centre was too weak to make any serious effort. Never did all the regions where anarchism was strongest unite and rise simultaneously.

The FAI itself was split into various tendencies. Evidence for the political differentiation of the tendencies is sparse and sometimes contradictory. Abel Paz's book *Durutti: the People Armed* details most of the controversies the 'Nosotros' group was involved in. Little information other than this and Peirats' *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* is available in English. More is available in various memoirs, many unpublished, and works such as C. Lorenzo's *Les Anarchistes Espagnols et le Pouvoir*. Besides the Nosotros group which included the Ascaso brothers, Durutti, G. Olivar and R. Sanz, there were other groups around H. Prieto and M. Buenacasa who appear to have developed a moderate line, and the supporters of Diego Abad de Santillan who advocated a planned economy run by the industrial unions in opposition to Federica Montseny's plan for a free federation of communes. Whilst Montseny's view prevailed at the Zaragoza National Conference of the CNT in 1936, the alternative was partially implemented in the self-managed industries after July 1936.

The basis of the FAI up to 1936 was loose affinity groups which worked jointly with the important committees of the CNT.