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OGRE OF THE EIGHTIES: MASS UNEMPLOYMENT



Photo John Sturrock (Report)

Mass unemployment will be a major factor in British life in the 1980s. There are already 1,300,000 registered as unemployed. There are predicted to be between 2 million and 2½ million unemployed by the end of 1981. By 1984 there are likely to be 3 million unemployed.

Of course work under the present system isn't particularly wonderful. Wages are low and workers control over how and when they work and what is produced is minimal. However, unemployment, with no money except to cover bare necessities, and little future, is worse. Mass unemployment is one of the sickest symptoms of that disease, capitalism. Below we attempt to analyse why unemployment exists in Britain, and why there is little that can be done within the confines of the capitalist system to prevent unemployment increasing. We sketch out how we think this can be opposed.

The figures show that unemployment is rising and that at the same time the number of vacancies registered with the Department of Employment is falling. On top of this there have been the recent announcements of 'restructuring' plans for British industry that will result in the loss of 10,000 jobs in shipbuilding, 25,000 in British Leyland and 52,000 in the British Steel Corporation.

From 1948 until the mid-1960s unemployment was usually around 350,000, or about 2% of the total workforce. Shortage of labour was a common business complaint. However the total never fell below 500,000 between 1967 and 1974, and has risen steadily since then. To the official figures should be added those who are unemployed but do not register, mainly married women not entitled to benefit. This figure was estimated to be on average 250,000 between 1971 and 1976. It has undoubtedly risen since then.

number of people to whom wage-labour is, quite understandably, so totally repulsive as to be avoided at all costs. No study has ever shown such people to be anything more than a tiny minority though. Moreover, there already exist quite adequate regulations for the DHSS to deny such people benefit, indeed even prosecute them. Also, there are certainly some people who are better off on the dole than they would be working. This is because they have large families and at the same time are only capable of getting low-paid, unskilled jobs. The point is that it is not true that benefits for people who fall into the 'poverty trap' are too high, but that their earnings if in work are too low.

The Tories intend to reduce benefits. They plan to tax unemployment benefit, and also to change the system of index-linking, so that benefits no longer keep pace fully with inflation. They have decided to do this because they want to make unemployment an even more unattractive option than it already is, so that those remaining in work are prepared to take a loss in the real value of their wages rather than be made redundant.

They are making this attack under cover of attacking the unemployed. In this they are helped by their lackeys in the popular press who love to print stories about 'scroungers' but are surprisingly unwilling to write about claimants dying of hypothermia, or not being able to feed their children. Try as hard as they can they will not be able to persuade people that unemployment is merely a result of changes in public attitudes to work. The fact remains that it is the result of too few jobs and too many workers, the result of capitalist slump as in the 1930s.

Also, it should be born in mind that unemployment is not shared equally across the country or between social classes. Scotland, Liverpool, Northern Ireland and other similar areas are worse off than the South-East, women worse off than men, unskilled workers more likely to suffer than skilled ones. Unemployment has also fallen hardest on immigrant communities, on school-leavers and on those nearing retirement age.

Blame

The Tories are attempting to blame the contemporary unemployment problem on the unwillingness of people to work. They argue that some people are simply 'work-shy', whilst for other benefits are so high that they prefer to claim rather than work. There is little evidence to back such ideas up. There are, of course, a

Trend

The disappearance of 'full' employment since the mid-60s has to be seen as a result of the general process of development of the British economy in that period. The main trend was away from the manufacturing industry towards the public sector. The number of workers employed in the manufacturing industry fell from just over 9 million in 1964 to just under 8 million in 1973. New techniques have been introduced in order to produce more sophisticated and relatively cheaper products and thus gain a market advantage or respond

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MASS UNEMPLOYMENT

to the capital initiatives of others. Capital investment in plant and machinery meant new techniques which needed fewer workers.

More and more jobs were created in the public sector to absorb those coming out of industry. The state and local authorities assumed an ever increasing role as employers. Education, local government and the National Health Service all expanded. The growth of the public sector was not viewed with much alarm. It was seen that this expansion improved the quality of life for all, by providing more and better social services, hospitals, etc. It absorbed the labour expelled by the private sector. Finally, economic theory then held the view that increasing government spending maintained demand and also expanded the money supply so that real wages could be brought to their acceptable market level via inflation.

This process got under way in earnest during the Wilson government of the 60s. A 'temporarily' higher level of unemployment was seen to be necessary to stimulate greater productivity per head. Employers ditched labour on an unprecedented scale, and the underlying growth rate of productivity did increase sharply. However, industrial output did not spring forth to take up the new surplus of labour. British industry continued to lose out internationally. New public spending failed to reduce unemployment below 500,000.

The situation was aggravated in 1974 when the economies of the capitalist world went into recession as a result of the dramatic increase in the price of oil. Real energy prices had dropped sharply throughout the 50s and 60s, encouraging manufacturers to develop energy intensive industries. Their cost structure was now given an unpleasant jolt. Britain suffered worst because her industries were already uncompetitive. On top of this the labour force was growing at a record 200,000 a year as a result of the large number of babies born the prosperous mid and late 50s coming onto the labour market.

It appears that British manufacturers held onto their work-force in this tricky period. Productivity per head fell, showing that workers were being kept on. However, when the economy started to recover in 1975 and 1976 unemployment did not decrease. Instead employers used their spare capacity. In fact throughout this period employers continued with their long-term plans and the net loss of jobs continued in the manufacturing industry. Meanwhile, restraints on real purchasing power and on public expenditure began to hold back the absorptive capacity of other sectors.

Bleak

The future certainly looks bleak. For a start, the British labour force is expected to rise by 2.2 million in the period 1977 to 1991. Much of this growth is predicted to occur in the period up to 1985. This is partly due to the large number of teenagers born in the late 50s and early 60s, and partly due to the fact that now retiring is the exceptionally small number born during the 1914-1918 war. Added to this, the number of married women seeking employment is expected to continue to rise.

Another problem is that reducing the number of people unemployed is not just a simple matter of 'creating more jobs'. In fact output has to increase fast enough to absorb existing spare capacity as well as create new jobs. The reality is that a rise in output of on average 2.7% per year, and of productivity of 2.5 on average per year between now and 1991 would still mean a rise in the total out of work, up to 2.6 million by 1986 and 3.3 million by 1991. Meanwhile, the current forecast for growth in output in 1980 is nil!

On top of all this, we have yet to see the impact of the dreaded microprocessor revolution and also the new technology of robotics. Remember that technological advance will only ensure renewed profitability if British investment and innovation in this area is in advance of that in other countries. Even if this is the case, it may well be that the benefits of the new technology are felt mainly in terms of making British industrial processes more efficient, allowing industrialists to invest in the new mechanised methods and lay off workers. A massive increase in total output would be needed to create enough jobs to compensate for this. The alternative is for Britain not to implement the new technologies, but this would result in many being made redundant again, as Britain would then not be able to compete with those using them.

Output

According to the laws of capitalist economy, mass unemployment in the near future will only be averted by an increase in output at internationally competitve levels of productivity. There are four main factors which influence British Business' capacity to achieve this.

First, there is the amount spend on research and development. Compared to most other industrialised countries, a high proportion of British investment is overseas and little is spent on research and development at home. The Tyder report on British Leyland said that the firms most serious weakness was that so much of its equipment was 'old, outdated and inefficient'. In all the other industrialised countries spending on research and development has increased since the late 1960s. In only Britain and the United States has it fallen. Even when Britain did spend a lot on this area in the 50s and 60s, it was mainly on prestige products such as aircraft, nuclear power and military electronics. This left us competing mainly with the United States, and often ineffectively. Other industrialised countries have always concentrated on more bread and butter developments in machine tools etc, and, as stated before, they are now spending far more than Britain.

Secondly, the situation can be eased through increasing the productivity of those already employed. Some hope to achieve this by imposing 'speed-ups', reductions in manning levels etc. However the trades union movement will rightly resist such steps. In fact, the problem really lies in the spare capacity which exists but cannot be used in the existing economic climate, rather than any unwillingness on the part of those in employment to work. Low productivity per head is also of course associated with the existence of outdated machinery and lack of investment in new technology as outlined above.

Thirdly, there is the question of wage levels. Employers naturally see the cost of labour as being a major factor affecting their competitive position, though maintaining an adequate balance between wages, productivity, demand and credit is complicated. Keynsian methods (such as increasing public spending stimulate demand and thus boost industry) are now discredited. The shift has been towards making the working-class accept a drop in wages, disguised by the effects of inflation. However, the class has shown itself capable of repeatedly resisting this, winning unprecedentedly high wage claims to cover for the effects of inflation. The problem of finding an 'acceptable' i.e. profitable level of wages still occupies the capitalists, but their present strategy is centred on scaring those in work into accepting lower real wages by lengthening the dole queues and cutting unemployment and supplementary benefits.

The last factor influencing the ability of the British economy to return to conditions of 'full' employment is the situation of the world capitalist economy of which it is a part. The last five years have been characterised by a number of significant changes: the relative decline of the United States economy, a drastic rise in the cost of oil and therefore energy, and the rise to prominence of new manufacturing centres such as Japan and South Korea. None of these developments bodes well for the future of British industry. A world slump is predicted for the 80s and is likely to hit the weak economies, such as Britain, hardest.

Are there any policies not covered or suggested above which might limit or eradicate unemployment without the same disquietening implications for the working-class?

One argument frequently heard on the left is that import controls would give British industry a secure domestic market and allow demand to increase at home without worsening our balance of payments. There is a socialist objection to this policy in that if successful it merely succeeds in exporting unemployment abroad. However, would it be successful? There is the problem of retaliation. Other states would ban British exports, or would alter exchange rates to make them unattractive. Foreign firms banned from exporting to Britain might concentrate on their own domestic markets, thus again denying Briths exports a future. Also, British manufacturers, knowing that there would be no competitors in Britain might raise their prices substantially in this country.

Government subsidies and training programmes are another well-canvassed means of shortening the dole queues. Training programmes and the Special Temporary Employment Programme have been savagely cut back by the present government. They did give school-leavers and others job opportunities, but since they cost quite a lot to finance they have been chopped by the Tories. Subsidies to employers have helped them to cut their labour costs and provided work. They too have been attacked, presumably not only because of the cost but also because of the Tories belief that economic salvation is to be achieved by letting the free market economy run its course with as little intervention as possible.

Longer holidays and a shorter working week are another idea that has been put forward. Indeed, figures show that British workers work longer hours and have shorter holidays than most other European countries. However, such an idea is unlikely to find favour with a government committed to increasing the productivity of labour. A reduction in overtime is similarly opposed by industrialists. They also favour overtime working because it means greater flexibility when coping with fluctuating workloads. All of these plans would result in workers working less for the same reward, and no Tory government ever bought that!

Finally, one suggestion that is sometimes put forward is that the male retirement age should be lowered to sixty. Of course, this would be opposed by the Tories on the grounds of the cost as more would probably be paid out in pensions than would be saved in unemployment and supplementary benefits. Also, since those living on pensions are hardly living in the lap of luxury, the idea as a whole suggests that poverty should merely be transferred from one section of society to another.

Sacrifices

What strategy can be devised to confront the rise of unemployment? A number of ideas should suggest themselves if you have stuck with us this far.

First, the Tory lie that unemployment is somehow a result of conscious choice should be vigorously contested at every step.

Secondly, the introduction of new technology should be monitored by trades unions, and they should contest every job lost, even if it is lost by natural wastage. The workers of this generation have no right to sacrifice the jobs of the next just because they are not immediately threatened.

Thirdly, subsidies and training programmes should be defended. They are vital methods of giving a future to those made redundant by technological change or who have never had a job or a skill.

Fourthly, a reduction in the working week, longer holidays, voluntary retirement and a reduction in overtime with no loss of pay are all worthy goals to strive for. They would radically improve the lives of many.

The point has to be made that though capitalism might be able to grant some of the reforms suggested above (although the present government will stridently oppose all of them) unemployment in this period cannot be abolished merely by reforming bits of the system.

We have shown how unemployment is a product of the logic of capitalism. It is only by arguing for a compassionate, socialist society with entirely different goals to that of capitalism that important changes can be made.

In the struggle against the present form of organisation of society there is clearly a role for the unemployed themselves, organising beyond the useful but defensive scope of the Claimants Union, and the irregular spectacles of the Right to Work Campaign. Something on the lines of the Unemployed Workers Movement of the 30s, with protests, demonstrations, and a clear socialist perspective, needs to be built.

Editorial Board.



The state will resort to violence to push through its plan to restructure industry. Mass picket at Sheerness Steelworks. Photo Andrew Wiard (Report)



The consequences of the Tories plan for industry: closures and wage cuts. Steelworkers are beginning to put up a fight. Photo Andrew Wiard (Report)

FOR A MASS CAMPAIGN OF RESISTANCE TO THE CUTS

Local authorities provide a number of useful services to all of us: schools, housing, libraries, social services etc. They will be slashed by the Tories. Below we outline how the Tories are planning to do this, even in areas in which Labour is in control of local government, and how we think they can be opposed.

It is now clear that Heseltine and the Tory Government intend to destroy the services provided by local authorities through manipulating the Rate Support Grant. An explanation of how they intend to do this is imperative if we are to understand and resist the Tory strategy.

At present Local authorities only raise a percentage of the money they need and central government provides the rest. For the last three years the government has calculated that it has had to provide 61% of the total amount spent by local authorities.

Francis Wheen explained the system in his article 'The end of local government?' in the New Statesman 23.11.1979. *'At present the amount that each local authority needs is fixed at a percentage of their "relevant" expenditure and is broken down as follows: a "domestic" element which is a straight forward subsidy to domestic rate payers, the "resources" element, supposed to compensate for variations in councils rateable resources and the largest; the "needs" element. This is paid according to their expenditure needs, as assessed through a complicated multiple regression formula which incorporates various social and demographic factors and an area's previous spending pattern.'*

System

In this system the assessment is therefore done by the government based on local authorities figures for their previous spending, not by the local authorities themselves. Nevertheless it does commit the government to taking into account the unique social factors in each authority, at least to a limited extent.

Heseltine intends to do away with this system of assessment by 1981/1982. The Tory objection to it is that it encourages authorities to 'overspend', because it places too much weight on a council's previous spending when assessing future needs. The Tories are planning a Bill which will allow the Minister to decide how much local authorities may spend, and also what their rates should notionally be. For each percentage point that the councils spend over the Ministers estimate they will find that they have to increase their rates by a rapidly increasing amount. Finally, the new Rate Support Grant will be a 'unitary' grant. When the Minister is assessing the needs of the local authorities he will base his calculations on the number of old people, children etc there are in each area, making no allowance for the intensity of their needs. The social problems of areas with high unemployment, or of the inner cities will no longer be a factor in government calculations. Shire and city authorities will be considered alike, thus shifting resources to the Tory shires.

Stages

The Tory attack on local authority spending is to take place in three stages. The first attack was on the spending for the 1978/1979 year, the second on that for 1980/1981, the third on that for 1981/1982, by which time their new assessing method will become law.

When they were elected in May the Tories had to face the fact that councils were spending at the levels agreed with the outgoing Labour administration. Their only apparent control over this was the announcement of the new Rate Support Grant figures to cover 1980/1981, but that wasn't due until November '79.

They decided to 'govern by White Paper'. They demanded, without any legal sanction, that local authority spending should be cut by 3% immediately. Most authorities fell over backwards to achieve this, even though their 1979/80 budgets were already committed. The cuts that we experienced in 1979 then were the product of a double hammer blow of reduced expenditure imposed by the previous Labour government, which had reduced the budgets for 1979/1980 anyway, plus those budgets being hacked away at half way through the year by entirely voluntary cuts imposed by the local authorities themselves.

Wolverhampton, Coventry, Sandwell, Newham and six Scottish authorities did refuse to implement the demanded cuts, standing out amongst those scenes of abject cowardice. Others, such as Lambeth, said that they couldn't make any cuts as their money was all already spent or committed, but that they would be good boys and make cuts in 1980/1981. In fact, the Labour group in power in Lambeth has since been forced to give up that idea by the opposition to cuts from within the borough. Rumour has it though that they may yet give in for this year.

Heseltine's immediate assault was on balance a success. Most authorities achieved cuts of about 1.5%, half what he had asked for, but pretty good considering it was already half way through the year and he had no legal right to enforce such a request at all.

Choice

The next step came last November when Heseltine announced the Rate Support Grant for 1980/1981. He only allowed for a 13% inflation rate in this. However, since inflation on local authority spending is running at 17.5% they now all have the choice of cutting their spending by 4.5% or raising their rates to get the extra money. Most will of course decide to make the cuts. This cut of around 4.5% comes close to the cut of 5% that Heseltine demanded for 1980/1981 in his non-mandatory White Paper.

Indeed the situation is likely to get worse this year, because the allowance of 17.5% for the rate of inflation seems now to be too low. The rate of inflation nationally is rising. On top of this, the local authorities are affected by the present record Bank Lending Rate of 15%, as this determines the interest rate they have to pay on their borrowings in the past. Also, the Clegg Commission on teachers pay has yet to report and local authority workers have pay claims in the pipe-line. Both of these claims will add to the costs of the councils.

The final phase of the attack on local authority spending will take place in the 1981/1982 year, when Heseltine will then have the legal power to control council spending down to the last drawing-pin. Inflation by then will probably have risen to at least 20%. Cuts of at least 10½ are certain, cuts of the sort we have never seen before, dramatically reducing all services to the public.

Tory authorities will fall over themselves to implement cuts. Most Labour authorities will probably make a few loud complaints, and then crumble, so deeply are they infected by Callaghanism. A few may resist the cuts but will raise the extra money by raising rents and rates. This will have a direct effect on all householders and doubly so on all council tenants. This will lessen the chances of building a mass movement against the cuts.

Strolls

A very few Labour councillors will understand that they have to organise a mass campaign of resistance to the cuts. To succeed in this the creation of the unity in action of the whole labour movement is vital. Such action will have to be of a different character to any previous anti-cuts campaigns. One day strolls around London mean nothing whether they are organised by the Labour Party, the TUC or anyone else.

The only way for Labour councils to resist the cuts is to spend as they have done previously and not raise rents or rates. They have to make the whole labour movement aware and involved in their action, and to demand of the labour movement that it takes sympathetic industrial action. They have to try and rally the entire local community behind them in their struggle. They should also consider defaulting on the interest payments they owe the banks and finance houses on past loans, though if they require loans at this time this step would mean that they would be refused, so this is a double-edged tactic.

Nationally we should consider every type of industrial action, including occupations of buildings that contain services that are being cut. Undoubtedly the TUC leadership and a large proportion of Labour Party MPs and councillors would oppose such drastic measures. They would be forced to accept such action if not support it if there was a real mass movment backing it.

Industrial workers and public sector workers have to strike together. The industrial muscle has to be used to back the workers who have little industrial power themselves but provide vital services to the community as a whole. A general strike against the cuts and for the preservation of the social wage is not a utopian fantasy; it is the only choice open to us.

John Bangs.

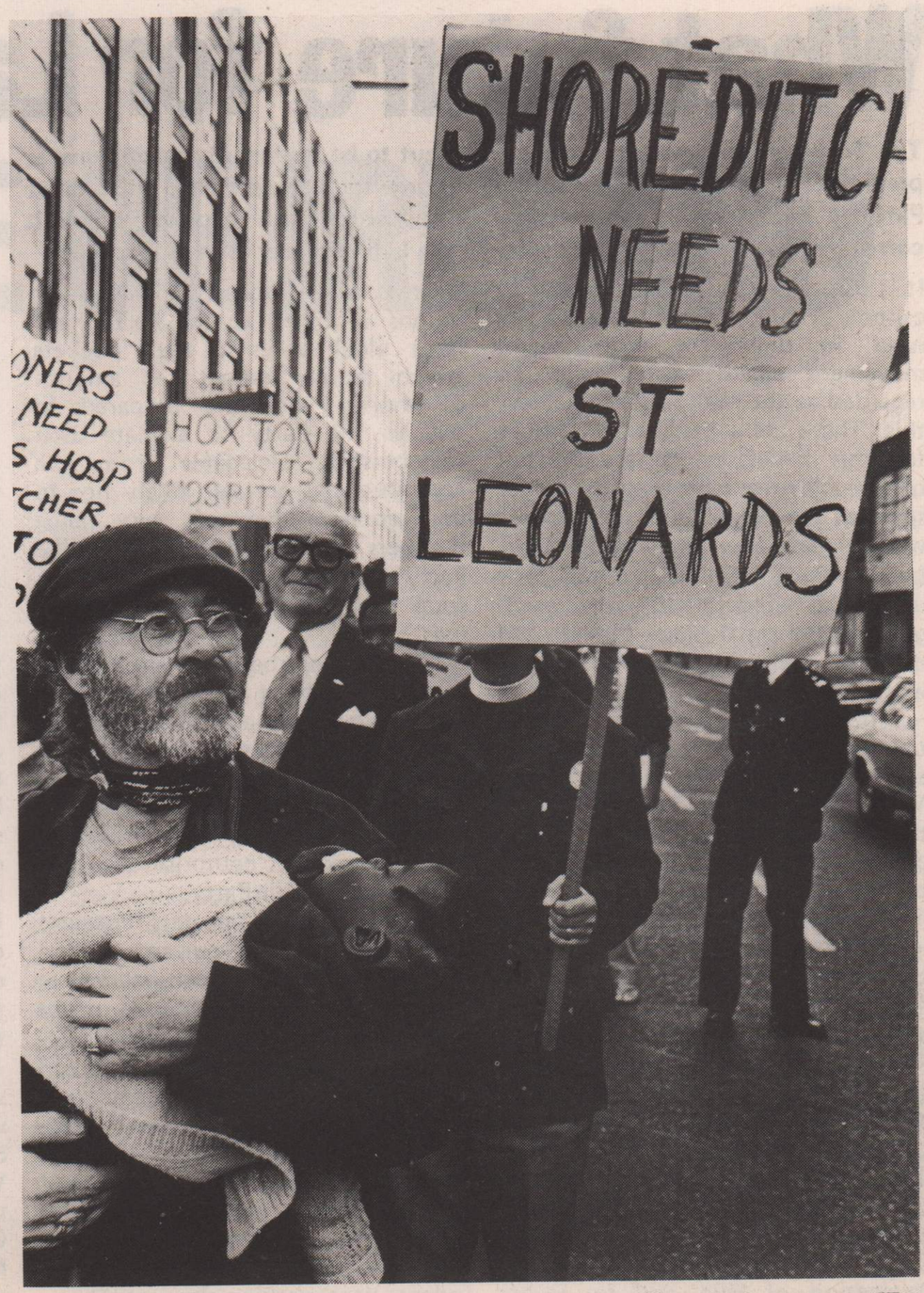


Photo Carlos Augusto (IFL)



Demonstration against closure of St Leonards Hospital. Photo Carlos Augusto (IFL)



Photo John Sturrock (Report)

Public Sector

What future for Labour ?

The Tories are in power and are turning out to be as viciously reactionary as predicted. Many militants are turning towards the Labour Party. The Labour Party is always much more radical in opposition than in office, but is it correct for socialists to join and support the Labour Party even at this time?

It is our belief that the Labour Party cannot, even now when there is a real need to unite the working-class movement against the Tories, be regarded as the right route to achieve this. There are a number of reasons for this belief, which are set out below. Also, we have tried to analyse some of the politics and ideas of the various left currents within the Labour Party at the moment. It is useful to understand why such groups have the outlook they do and not just to dismiss those we disagree with.

The present direction of the Labour Party has been fundamentally affected by the defeat in the May 1979 election and the failures the Callaghan government. The center-right coalition that is in charge of the Parliamentary Labour Party has lost prestige and confidence. The left in the Party, strongest amongst the constituencies though led by figures such as Benn and Heffer, achieved success at the 1979 Labour Party Conference over two of the three points for which they have been arguing for the last few years.

The election of the leader of the Labour Party has been left firmly in the hands of the Parliamentary Labour Party, that is, the elected Labour MPs; the demands for the reselection of MPs, and for wider control over the manifesto, at present the final responsiblity of the leader of the Party, were won at the Conference. Both of these points have been the focus of campaigns by the left-wing of the Party, and they were pleased with their success, but an enquiry has been arranged which will determine exactly how reselection and a wider degree of participation in the manifesto are structured. Callaghan himself has said that 'I don't believe that reselection will have much effect on the security of sitting MPs'. Indeed the change is likely to give the Constituency Labour Parties more access to the ear of the Parliamentary Labour Party through some kind of consultative procedure, and not complete control over MPs. The manifesto is likely to be entrusted to the National Executive Committee after consultation with the rest of the Party.

The left are obviously keen to have control over 'their' MPs and 'their' leader. They think it important to control the manifesto. They place a great reliance on rhetoric, and on the acquisition of positions of power within the hierarchy. It should be clear though that the whole debate over the democracy of the Party was carried on in isolation from any mass working-class sympathy either for or against the proposals. The major unions affiliated to the Party have large block votes in their pockets which merely reflect the amount of money they are prepared to pay to the Party to affiliate their membership. Delegates from the constituencies are also likely not to be representative of very large numbers of activities, given the Party's continuing decline and the small numbers attending local meetings.

The left of the Party are keen to make the Labour Party into a fighting one, and are aiming for recruitment. It is very doubtful though what will be achieved in the long term if a Labour government is re-elected. It is useful here to look at the forces which comprise the 'left' within the Labour Party.

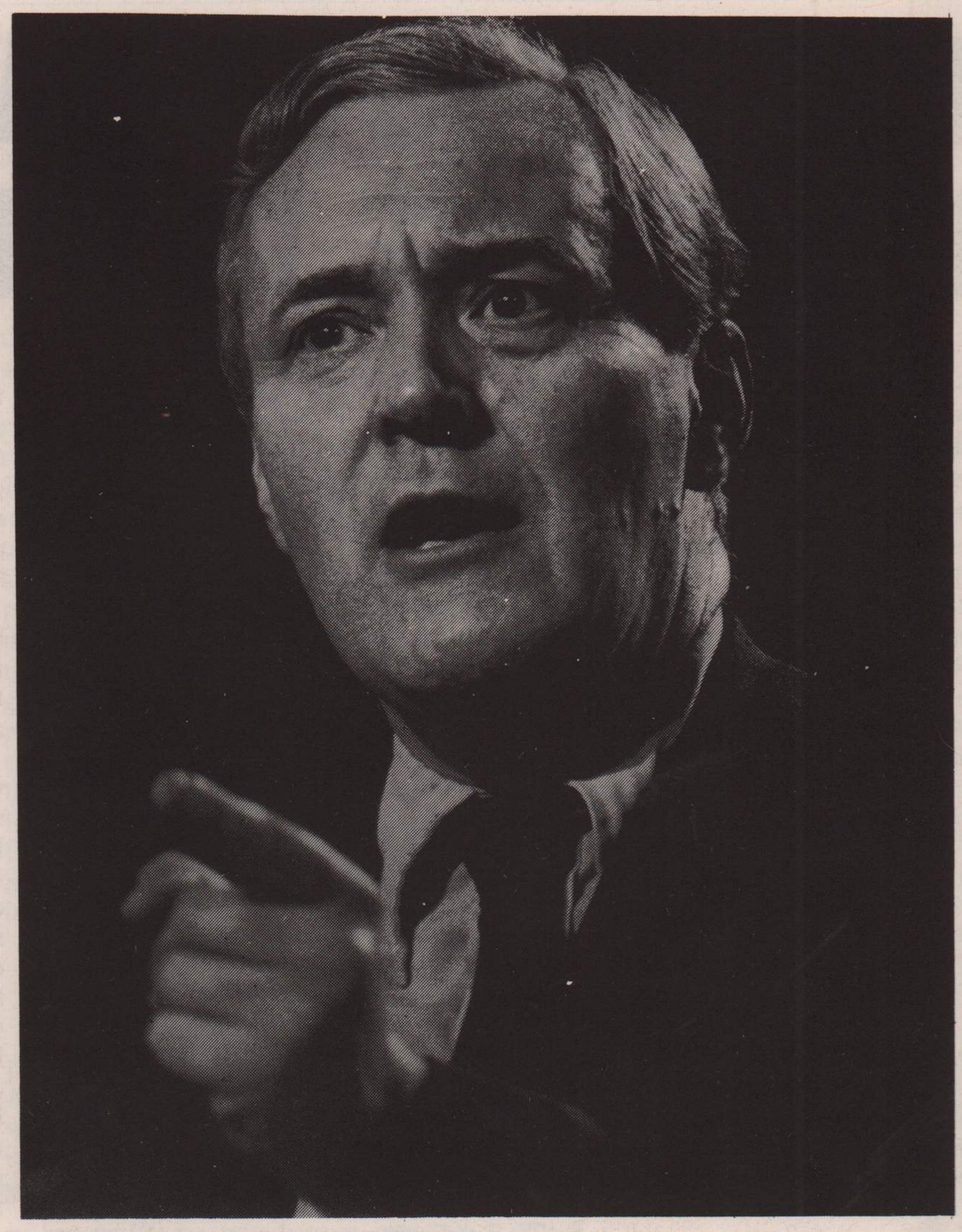
Benn and his supporters represent the most powerful current on the left. There is no inconsistency in such left-wingers placing so much emphasis on structure and on leadership. They believe that socialism can be achieved through Parliament, a socialism based on increased state intervention. There is no place in their scheme for the dynamic of working-class struggle. The class is merely passive voting fodder. These ideas fostered by Bennism undermine independent working-class activity.

They are handicapped by their belief in the legality of the system. Will Benn be supporting occupations against redundancies? Will he be supporting strike action against the Tories? Will he be condemning the legal state violence of the police on picket-lines and elsewhere? Undoubtedly not. This section of the Labour left believes that socialism can be achieved through Parliament and pefectly 'legally'. This fails to understand that as in Chiile and else elsewhere those who benefit from capitalism are prepared to take any steps necessary against those who threaten them, however 'legal' that threat may be.

The Militant Tendency, who seem to be fast replacing Tony Benn as the media's favourite ogre, are a Trotskyist grouping of a couple thousand people, strongest within the constituency parties, one or tow white collar trades unions, and the Labour Party Young socialists, which they control. The attempt to witch-hunt them out of the Labour Party is of course a ploy by the Party's right-wing, designed to be part of their counterattack on the left. It does pose a real threat to the Militant, though, as they have been inside the Party for so long they appear to have forgotten why they went in in the first place. Their strategy for the achievement for socialism is little different from that of Benn, even if on some points, such as their call for the nationalisation of the 200 leading monopolies they are formally a little to his left. They too see socialism as achieved through Parliament. They too see it purely as an extension of state control over the economy. They too see little scope for auotonomous working-class activity. Indeed, their postion on Ireland is horrific. One expects this from Benn, but with their political tradition it is surprising. They do not support the withdrawal of the British troops from Ireland. Instead they place their faith in the eventual construction of a Northern Ireland section of the British Labour Party. When arguing against supporters of the Troops Out Movement in the unions they have been known to repeat the feeblest smears of the British states propaganda machine against the republican movement. In this their integration into the Labour Party is almost complete. They now exhibit the narrow-minded imperialism and national chauvinism that has dogged the Labour Party since its foundation.

The final active left grouping within the Labour Party that we wish to consider is that around the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, composed mainly of supporters of the Workers Action and Chartist newspapers and independent Marxists. This grouping is both socialist and principled. They support the Troops Out Movement, as well as many of the demands and campaigns of the anti-racist, womens and gay movements. However they too place far too great a reliance on the existing structures. They are keen to see the election of their suporters onto Labour councils. Indeed they sometimes seem to see local councillors as shop stewards leading the fight against the cuts. They are more to the point when they admit that in general councillors have a managerial role, making cuts in housing, hospitals, education etc as required. The crucial factor is resisting cuts at the local level is the strength of the local working-class movement, not how good or bad. a local councillor is.

The problem of the SCLV's involvement in the structures of the Labour Party was shown in the last election. Their supporters were simultaneously distributing their own hard-line leaflets and the usual rubbish put out by the local Labour candidate. In Bradford they called for a vote for Mason, Labour Minister for Northern Ireland, and not for his opponent Brendan Gallagher, standing on a Troops Out Now platform.



We are then opposed to supporting or joining the Labour Party. However, it is wrong to dismiss those on the left within the Labour Party as either irrelevant or basically evil. The reason why so many activists do remain in there is that they are not unnaturally sceptical of the far left. We are small both in numbers and in influence. We are often characterised by dogmatism and arrogance. There is also, counterposed to the Labour Party's insistence on the Parliamentary road to socialism, an emphasis within the far left on violence and extra-legal activity with frequently little explanation as to why this is necessary.

Undoubtedly the disastrous Callaghan government weakened the Labour Party. It lost many of its traditional supporters by its adoption of anti-working-class policies. However, that is not to say that all those disillusioned militants immediately joined the nearest far left group they could find. In the main the betrayals of the Labour government had the effect of weakening working-class morale and self-determination. It is to be hoped that in the process of resisting the Tories the working-class movement can be strengthened, and that the end product of our struggle will be something more than the election of another Labour government prepared to walk all over us in heavy boots!

Even those on the left of the Labour Party, whether Benn and his followers or Trotskyists of various sorts, exhibit an elitist atttitude to politics. Socialism can be solved by electing the right leadership, who will then go ahead to bring about the millenium by nationalising everything in sight. Most of the left believe that socialism can be achieved peacefully through Parliament, and disagree with the far left's belief in illegal and direct action. They have little respect for the internationalist perspective of the far left, believing in the establishment of socialism in one country and not supporting the struggle of the Irish for self-determination. They do not understand the vital importance of the womens movement and the other autonomous struggles to the building of a genuinely free socialism.

We do not despair of such people. We wish to win them to our point of view. If we cannot win activists on the left of the Labour Party to our side, then we have little hope of winning the support of the vast majority of the working-class, which is the necessary base for socialism. They will only be won after the creation of an independent mass movement to the left of the Labour Party, committed to working alongside the autonomous movements.

Geoff Goss and Billy WIlliams.



Brendan Gallagher
Photo Andrew Wiard (Report)



Roy Mason Photo Derek Spiers (IFL)

BUILD A PUBLIC SECTOR ALLIANCE

Every issue of Libertarian Communist has contained a piece on activity in the public sector. During the Labuor government we pointed to the attacks they were making on the public sector. Now it is clear that the Tory government intends to intensify the assault on the social wage (see editorial).

We now know that the loss of 100,000 jobs amongst council workers is just one of the grisly things lined up for us. There is also a concerted flow of lies and distortion from the media, depicting as callous thugs those public sector workers who try to protect their own interests and those of the rest of the working class. Those who behave responsibly and try to defend services are portrayed in lurid colours as totally irresponsible. Who is more irresponsible, the governments that axe services or the workers that defend them? The governments that shut hospitals or the workers that try to keep them open?

A realisation of the common interests of the working class and of how the current crisis is an attack on the working class as a whole can provide a basis for the unity and solidarity necessary for successful resistance.

Such unity will not be built easily. Nor will it be the result of any single, simple process. Two elements will, however, be of special importance. First, the growth of unified action amongst public sector workers themselves, and their creation of a common strategy for the public sector as a whole. Second, the support of the wider labour movement for this process, and also its contribution to the advancement of a workers plan for the services involved.

In the next issue we hope to have an article on nurseries. If you have anything on this or on anything else concerning the public sector, please send it to our contact address.

A DIFFERENT SENSE OF IRELAND

Do you remember being confused by the split in the IRA, rumours of physical intimidation and intra-republican warfare? Were you alarmed at the high and often civilian casualties of the last ten years?

The picture you have of the struggle in the north is made up of many and often contradictory elements. Most obvious is the impression formed from a regular intake of the news media. Despite very occasional lapses, this will be a clear black and white, pro-British and anti-Republican, caricature. Peace keepers versus the men of violence.

There are also more insidious ingredients that have gone into the making of your opinions; processes less obvious than media bias and black propaganda. The ideas you have of freedom and democracy have at least been influenced by the institutions and ideology of reformism. Sentiments of nationalism and racism are painfully prevalent in our society, and even if you quite rightly abhor them, ideas you have of the struggle in the north of Ireland have developed in this climate.

Equation

It is best to begin with the most obvious element in the equation. The media. In the last year two important documents have been published which have made more generally available an analysis of the roles played by the TV, radio and press in forming our ideas over the Irish War. The first, 'The British Media and Ireland', published by the Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland is an invaluable dossier of facts and opinion largely produced by media workers in Britain. The second is no. 6 in a series of Bulletins produced by the Belfast Workers Research Unit, a group of committed republican socialists.

Both detail numerous incidents of censorship, the direct banning and remoulding of documentaries and articles by those at the pinnacle of media control. How journalists wary of reprimand and intimidated by the difficulties of their job effectively censor themselves. They show how the security forces, especially the army, have developed public relations to such a degree that most journalists rely almost exclusively on the information provided by them, in putting their stories together. Indeed 'story' is the operative word for a good many have been totally fabricated in the course of the past ten years media reporting. Some of these have been flights of fancy by opportunist hacks. More significantly others have been the product of deliberate black propaganda. The current crisis was almost inaugurated by this phenomenon, the media reporting certain 'bomb outrages' actually committed by extreme loyalists as being the work of republicans.

The army was quick to get in on the act. Based on previous experience they adopted certain tactics enshrined in Kitson's 'Low Intensity Operations' and elsewhere which served not only to throw the nationalist community into confusion but were deliberately designed to check any opposition at home to the so-called need for oppressive measures in the north. The SAS have practically from the outset of the struggle been involved in covert counter-insurgency operations, assassinating not only republicans but also totally non-involved members of the nationalist community. This has been done often in collaboration with loyalist forces (a tactic advocated by Kitson) and engineered to appear the work of republican forces occasionally by some bogus splinter group such as the IFF.

This is intended to stress the 'criminal insanity' of the 'gunmen', and the 'mindless divisions' within the republican movement. This impression had been partially fostered by the nature of the splits that did occur within republicanism. The officals, whose links with the Communist Party of Ireland had led them to adopt a Stalinist–'stageist'–form of Marxism, publicly labelled the Provisionals, and others who would not accept compromise with imperialism, as 'green fascists' and subsequently engaged in assassination and terror tactics to quell opposition from within their own ranks (the future IRSP).

Such behaviour, with what little evidence there really was of corruption in the Republican Movement, seemed to corroborate the impression fostered by army PROs, media hacks, and neurotic government officials that the IRA was no more than a protection racket, a group of ruthless godfathers hungry for power and money whose aspirations had sod-all to do with ordinary folk.

Gloss

Thus it has become quite possible for so-called revolutionaries in the Labour Party, such as the Militant group, to actually believe themselves when they tell others that the IRA is the Irish equivalent of the Mafia. Those who know better inappropriately wheel out quotations from Trotsky on individual terrorism in order to give their mistaken political perspectives a scientific gloss. *For whatever one's programatic differences with the Provisional Republican Movement one thing is certain it is the political current which at present carries the greatest respect amongst the oppressed nationalist population of the north.* The army itself admitted as much in a secret document captured by the provos last year.

How one actually does express what criticism one believes one has of an anti-imperialist movement of the oppressed is another matter. What the left has done in Britain is to fit the extremely distorted picture of events of the struggle in the north that it has gleaned from the media into political perspectives that it has, often incorrectly, developed from experiences elsewhere.

Thus the Militant group forces the reality of the Northern Ireland conflict into its entrist strategy for Britain. The Irish must forget, at least for the moment, that they are oppressed as a nation, as a colony. They must struggle in the unionist dominated Trades Unions and work with the totally bankrupt pro-partition NILP. As is more often found in the Stalinist variety of Leninism they submerge all facts beneath their perceived strategic necessities.

The Communist Party has approached its presentation of the crisis in a very similar fashion. Its dropping of its overt Stalinist edifice has only accentuated the class collaborationism already present in the CPs of the 30s (of Spain and elsewhere). Thus whilst admitting the reality of the national struggle, it has forced it into a gradualist context. Bourgeois democracy in the form of a Bill of Rights, and working class unity in a campaign for jobs for all, must be the prime concern of the Northern Ireland working class before the national question is resolved.

Ironically, these demands necessarily frustrated by the ruling class of a statelet that requires such differentiations and inequalities within it in order to maintain its own existance, only serve to bring to the fore for the oppressed of the north the need to bring the Northern Ireland state to an end.

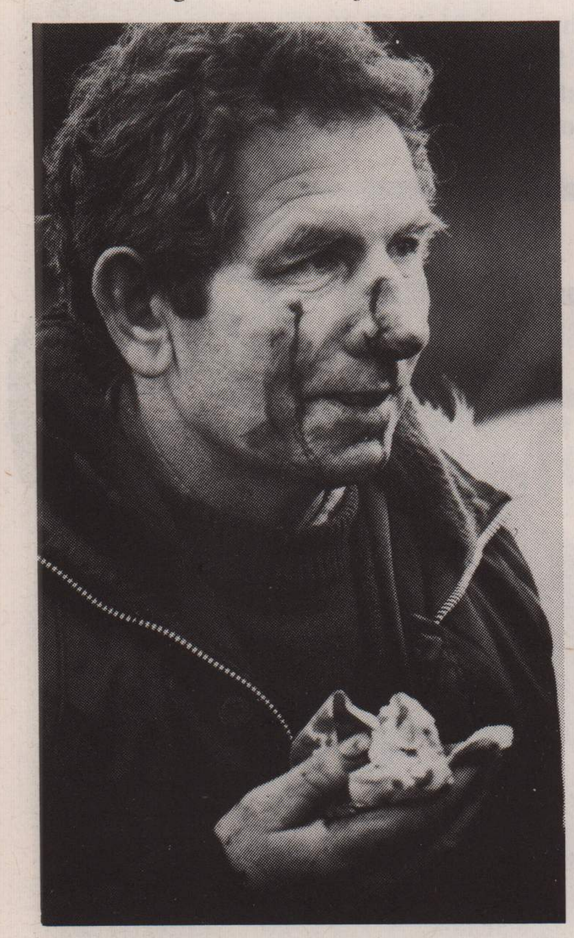
In this country however this perspective can only reinforce the belief amongst the working class that Britain's presence in Ireland is of potential benefit to the latter. Stories of torture have often been discounted or seen as minor aberrations, and so no real criticism, or even consciousness, of Britain's imperialist role is fostered.

It is therefore hardly surprising that even fairly politically conscious activists on the labour movement are often extremely hostile to suggestions that the republican movement is fighting for the freedom of the Irish people.

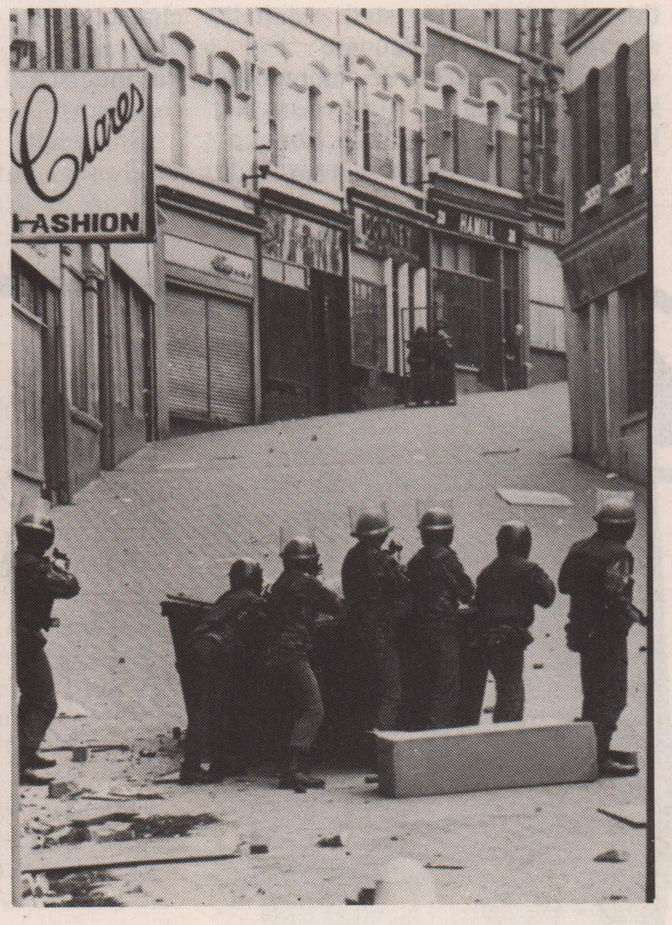
The revolutionary left, by whatever criterion one seeks to define them, have on the whole failed in the task of combatting the media reinforced concensus on Ireland. Like the reformists they have often slotted the struggle into some niche of their program thus fulfilling a need for self-definition but avoiding coming to terms with the problem in any greater depth. Positions have ranged from purist support/denunciation of nationalism to almost complete open endedness and confusion. Any thorough investigation of the British revolutionary left and Ireland would lengthen this article by many pages and even then not do justice to the subject. It would be a history of factionalism in Britain over the last ten years. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that much of what has been said by our comrades–and ourselves–has reinforced rather than dispelled the confusion felt by most people on Ireland. This was particularly true mid-way through the 70s when the military and propaganda victories of the British army forced some on the left into compromise, others into self-righteous paranoia and most into burying their heads in the sand. Thus we painfully learn that we are as much the objects as the aspiring subjects of history.

But hopefully we learn more than that. No matter what pressures we are under we must never criticise another genuine organization of the oppressed in a fashion which *seems* to put them on a par with the oppressors. At the same time we should never liquidate our own perspectives into what we think are those of others, but should clearly put forward our programatic differences in a comradely fashion. These are not points of liberal moralism but necessary methods in developing a democratic communist movement that can engage productively in dialogue with all oppressed groups and learn from its mistakes.

M.L.







Intimidation is a way of life in Northern Ireland. When every peaceful march is harassed by armed and hostile men, organising politically becomes a problem. Photos Derek Spiers and Eamonn O'Dwyer (IFL)

Reviews

Century of the Unexpected

'The Century of the Unexpected–A new analysis of Soviet-type societies' by John Fantham and Moshe Machover. 24 pages. 65p.

This pamphlet brings a breath of fresh air to the apparently never-ending debate about the class nature of the Soviet Union, and the 'socialist' countries of Eastern Europe and the Third World.

This debate, although fascinating for Leninists, has been paid little attention by anarchists and libertarian Marxists. They have been prepared to damn Stalinism and capitalism equally, and ignore any finer distinctions. Unfortunately this attitude seems, particularly in the light of this pamphlet, to be inadequate.

It is necessary to analyse the nature of Russia, Eastern Europe, and the 'socialist' countries of the Third World because so much depends on the position you take. Are Russia's exploits in Southern Africa and Afghanistan 'imperialist'? Should one have supported the MPLA, backed by Russia, in Angola, or the FNLA and UNITA, backed by the United States and by China? Should one simply have abstained on the issue? What is the likely future of the Soviet-type societies? What direction should revolutionaries in the West hope to see these societies take? All these important questions are dependent on what position you take over the nature of these societies.

Sides

Traditionally there have been two sides to the argument in Britain. The orthodox Trotskyists represented by the International Marxist Group, the Workers Revolutionary Party and various smaller groupings have held to Trotsky's view that Russia is a degenerated workers state, while the Socialist Workers Party have broken away from Trotsky's analysis and believe it to be state capitalist. The pamphlet points out that both sides have effectively demolished each others arguments, whilst unable to prove their own.

The state capitalist idea certainly has its merits. If you call Russia state capitalist at least you don't feel that you have to defend it when it does totally indefensible things. You make it clear that when you are talking about socialism you are not talking about what exists in Russia but about something infinitely more democratic. Unfortunately, the basis of any definition has to be an analysis of the mode of production in that country. It is the way in which production and distribution are organised and controlled that is crucial. By this standard the state capitalist description is inadequate. For a society to be capitalist commodities have to be sold on the free market. In Russia many transactions are only 'paper' transaction anyway, for instance those involving industrial producer goods, which are bought and sold to each other by state concerns with no real money being exchanged or profit being realised. Consumer goods on the other hand, have their prices fixed centrally, irrespective of supply and demand. Undoubtedly Russian society has many defects, however the authors of the pamphlet see that as no reason for calling the system capitalist.

The 'workers state' theory has an interesting history. Lenin originally used the phrase to describe Russia immediately after the revolution. He meant that the state, in the sense that Marxists and anarchists alike use the term, to describe the law, police, army, civil service, etc, was under the control of the workers. The economy of course was still run on capitalist lines, and, in many places, by capitalists.

The term is now used not to describe the state in its political sense, but in an economic sense. The Trotskyists argue that Russia is some form of workers state because the economy has been nationalised and because the economy is centrally planned. Why should these things in themselves be in the interests of the working-class? The pamphlet explains clearly that the Russian working class is exploited, they have no control over the surplus product of their labour. That is to say that, as under capitalism, the workers are only paid for a proportion of their produce, the rest is taken for nothing by the state, although unlike in capitalist societies no profit is actually made on that proportion of their produce. The crucial point is that they have as little control over the organisation of their society, their work and the products of their labour as they would in the West.

To call Russia state capitalist then is to misunderstand the defining characteristics of capitalism, to call it a degenerate workers state is to misunderstand the nature of real socialism.

So what would Fantham and Machover put in place of these theories? They argue that Russia is a 'state collectivist' society. They believe this term can be applied also to the countries of Eastern Europe, to China, and to the Third World countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Cuba etc. Their most significant view is that the state collectivist form of society is not necessarily progressive or reactionary. The traditional Marxist view is that capitalism is followed by a qualitatively higher form of human society, socialism. The state capitalist and the deformed workers state views take account of this. The former holding that Russia is basically at a similar stage to the West, the latter that it is at a higher stage of development. State collectivism is not within this scheme. It is instead a route taken by capitalist countries, which, because of the absence of revolution on a world scale, could not achieve socialism. They took a state collectivist path, which although obviously not ideal, did in all of them, Eastern Europe in the past and the underdeveloped countries of the Third World today, allow for a greater development of those countries productive resources.

This does answer a major question that has been increasingly tricky for socialists of all varieties; why are the Soviet-type regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe obviously repressive and undesireable when similar regimes in the Third World, although by no means ideal, have brought considerable progress? The authors argue that state collectivism is at the beginning progressive. It has proved itself capable of overcoming capitalist underdevelopment and permitted extensive industrialisation. This is still going on in the Third World, but in Russia and Eastern Europe this form of organisation has achieved all it can.

This framework then allows us to point out the advantages that such regimes have for the countries of the Third World that have suffered from imperialism and at the same time criticise those countries in which state collectivism has exhausted its potential. This of course does not prevent us from calling for international socialist revolution, but rather gives us a framework within which to put such a project. It after all remains the case that socialism depends upon the creation of abundance, and that it is therefore easier to foresee fully-fledged social revolution occurring in Russia and Europe rather than in the Third World.

Solve

The pamphlet does raise as many problems as it hopes to solve and the authors realise this. If the traditional model of transition to socialism from capitalism is capable of modification, how far can this modification go? Are the state collectivist regimes capable of returning to a form of capitalism, or progressing on to socialism, or even to a different form of society altogether? If the state collectivist regimes of the Third World are really so progressive, can one rule out socialism altogether in countries just on the grounds that they are not yet so far materially advanced? What does the project of social revolution entail in such countries? Indeed, having questioned so much, what are we left with?

The pamphlet certainly contains a lot of food for thought. One disadvantage is that it is written in the normal dense Marxist terminology and is thus difficult to digest. I have tried to outline its argument in a comprehensible fashion, but even so I have had to simplify a lot and leave many points as simple assertions without any of the arguments to back it up. I have tried to put forward some of the questions that I think it raises without being able to give a definite opinion on it. The next step is up to you. Please read the pamphlet and let us have your views on it, preferably written in a fairly accessible way. If we receive enough contributions we will try to include them in a supplement in a future issue of Libertarian Communist.

C.M.

IT'S WORTH READING!

A revolutionary paper should be able to attack and criticise all aspects of life as it is organised under capitalism. Politics is about life, how to struggle to gain some control over the processes that work in society. That is the way the ancient Greeks in their democratic city-states understood the word, rather than in the narrow sense of the word as generally understood in the UK.

A revolutionary paper needs to address itself to all the problems facing working people–inflation, speed-ups, deterioration of the community and the environment, nuclear power and the energy crisis, the threat of war, the liberation of women, gays, and ethnic minorities, the rights of young people, sexual politics, economics, philosophy, etc. Obviously Libertarian Communist has a long way to go before it can achieve these goals. We are a small group producing for a limited readership.

However, things can slowly change the more we get feedback from the readership, and the more we increase the size of that readership. We would like to ask all our friends, sympathisers and readers to help us improve our distribution. You can do this by:

taking out a sub (if you haven't already done so).

giving us the names of people you think might be interested in it.

mentioning LC to friends, and showing them a copy.

giving gift subs to your friends.

We think our paper is worth reading. Please help us make sure that it does get read. We'll appreciate any help you can give us.

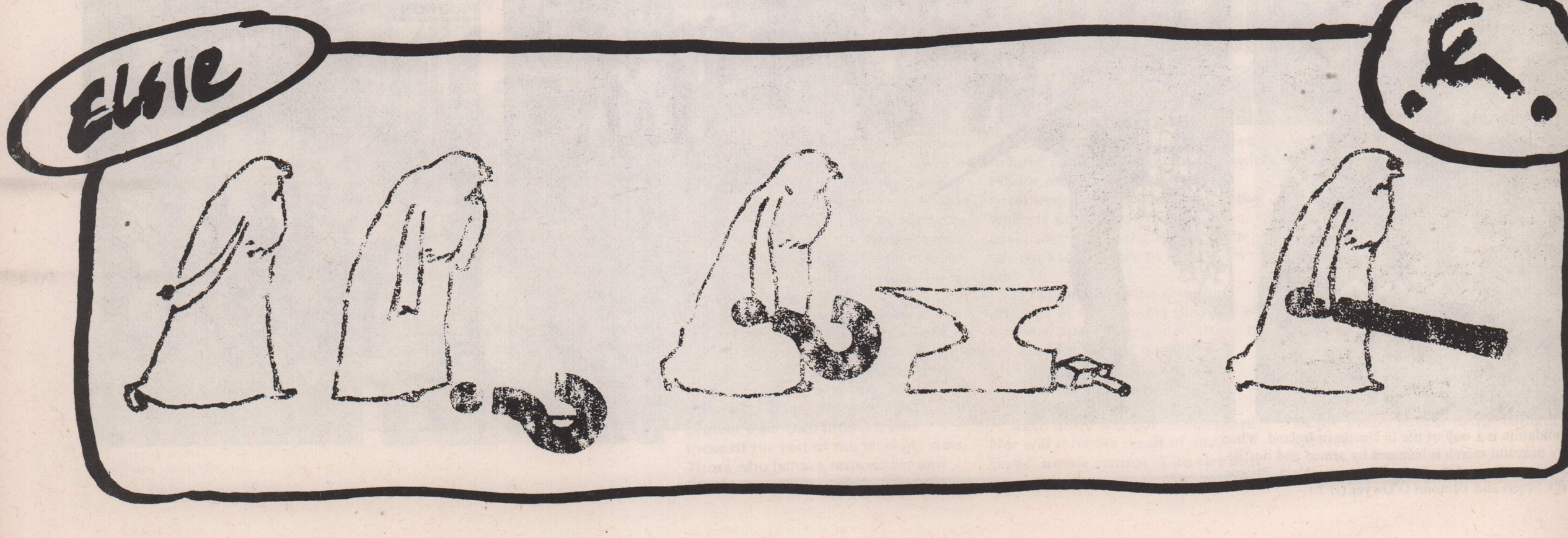
We are generally aware how capitalist newspapers approach 'news' and what interests are served by their selection and analysis of it. The common mistake of the left is to assume that it is necessary only to reverse the bias, to select and interpret from a socialist viewpoint rather than a capitalist one.

The result is a left press that is little more than a mirror image of the capitalist press. Readers are lectured and harangued; 'lessons' are pointed out in the best manner of traditional authoritarian pedagogy, and fantastic tasks are barked out as orders.

What is ignored is the way communication occurs. Real communication should be dialectical, both in the sense of being a dialogue, and in the sense of leading to the transformation of those participating or listening.

Libertarian Communist has sometimes been guilty of the above sins. However, we feel things can be changed in this respect, and LC can become a useful weapon for revolutionary militants. A lot, of course, depends on the response we get from you, the readership.

So far we have raised £152.29 towards our press fund target of £1,000, so we still have a long way to go. Rush donations, letters, articles, to LCG c/o 27 Clerkenwell Close, E.C.1.



The future in the present

The Future In The Present–Selected Writings of C.L.R. James. (Allison and Busby. 272 pp. £2.95.)
Indignant Heart A Black Workers Journal. Charles Denby (South End Press (Boston) 295 pp.)

Both James and Denby were black revolutionaries who at one time were in the same revolutionary organisations–first the American Socialist Workers Party and then the Marxist-Humanist current that split from the SWP and the Fourth International.

While Charles Denby was a Southern black born in Alabama, where he experienced from birth the bitter racial oppression that scars the States below the Mason-Dixon line, James was a Jamaican intellectual who came to Britain where he worked as a cricket correspondent for the Manchester Guardian. In 1936 he became a Trotskyist in the Revolutionary Socialist League at the same time editing 'International African Opinion', the journal of the International African Service Bureau. In 1938 he went to America, where he was active over the next 15 years until his expulsion in 1953.

Denby, on the other hand was born in poverty, the son of a share-cropping family. In 1924 he moved north to Detroit where he obtained work in the car factories becoming active in the left-wing caucus of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and later joining the Socialist Workers Party in 1945, leaving in 1948, and later becoming involved with the Marxist-Humanist grouping.

The collection of James' writings is quite a miscellany, and gives a feeling of dissatisfaction with its bittiness, ranging as it does over the whole gamut of James' career. There are good essays on the betrayal of the Chinese revolution by Stalin, the Hungarian workers revolution of 1956. and an account of revolts in Africa against European imperialism. This last essay is important because it shows us the level of opposition to the inroads of the colonialists and the revolts 'hidden from history'.

But in my opinion, the most important essay in the anthology is the one entitled 'The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA'. It was actually the text of a conference report to the Socialist Workers Party, which is, as James noted, 'a clear political programme which summarised the political attitudes and ideas which I had placed before Trotsky in 1938'. It concerns the need for blacks to organise themselves autonomously without being subordinate to the leaderships of the trade unions or marxist parties. James took issue with the idea that the black struggle is weak and has no more than an episodic value.

James states that the independent black struggle 'has a vitality and a validity of its own'–with an organic political perspective; that this independent black movement is able to intervene with terrific force upon the revolutionary proletariat, that it has got a great contribution to make to the development of the proletariat in the United States, and that it is in itself a constituent part of the struggle for socialism.

James explains these positions in great detail, ending with the observation: 'Let us not forget that in the Negro people, there sleep and are now awakening passions of a violence exceeding, perhaps, as far as these things can be compared, anything among the tremendous forces that capitalism has created. Anyone who knows them, who knows their history, is able to talk to them intimately, watches them at their own theatres, watches them at their dances, watches them in their churches, reads their press with a discerning eye must recognise that although their social force may not be able to compare with the social force of a corresponding number of organised workers, the hatred of bourgeois society and the readiness to destroy it when the opportunity should present itself, rests among them to a degree greater than in any other section of the population in the United States'.

Denby's book is an account from childhood of life in the South, and then migration to the North, where he laboured in the car factories. Along the way it destroys the racist myth that there was opposition at all to the 'Jim Crow' system in the South from the blacks, and cites many instances of combativeness and belligerence. Denby became politicised through his life as a worker and as a black, and he saw the need for a socialist revolution and the independent role of the black movement. Bypassing the Communist Party, whom he mistrusted because of the consistent way in which they manipulated unions and campaigns, he joined the SWP of James Cannon. Here, however, even among these revolutionaries he experienced deep-seated racism. It is worthwhile to read this and compare it to the smug statements of comrades of the Fourth International when they proclaim that they were far ahead of anyone else in supporting the cause of black self-organisation.

Denby saw deep resentment about the black men and white women in the party going out together. 'On one occasion a young Negro who had recently joined was riding home with a white man who had been in the party for five years who made this remark to him: "The Negros are raising hell about their equality. But under socialism the whites will stay where they are and the Negroes will have to keep in the same place." Some came right out and were opposed to white women going out with Negros at all!'

Denby reached the conclusion before the 1948 conference that the SWP, like the Communist Party, put the party first and last. Blacks and workers never came first with them whatever they said in their writings.

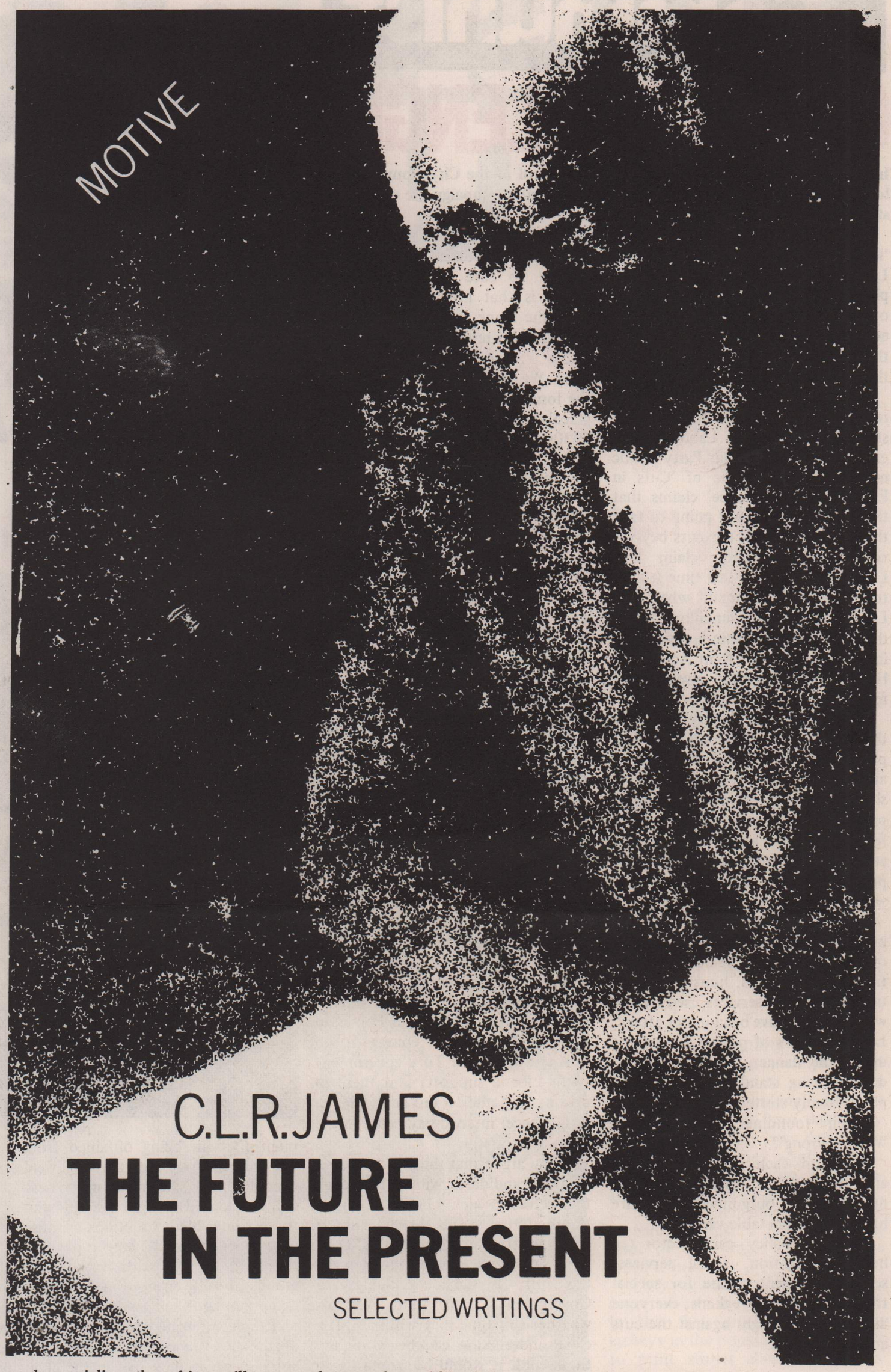
The resolution that James put to the meeting had Denby in raptures. It was adapted and he felt that he now had something to build around. He did build an active group around the resolution, but within a month he felt that although the party had accepted the resolution they were pushing any idea of independent struggle to the rear. This came to a head when the group was ordered by the Central Committee to direct themselves into the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, or else be dissolved. Most of the group were already members but were sick of their do-nothing politics. Denby left the party.

He states: 'I felt worse about the Party than I did about the South. The party got me to believe in them. In the South nobody ever made me feel they would accept me. But these people I took in my corner and I felt a sharp pain. I felt the way the average human being feels when a friend double-crosses him. You expect it from the enemy, then its not surprising. But they stood like a shining star over these questions and when I saw them fall I felt bad.'

These two books are a valuable contribution to the continuing and in fact intensifying debates around the role of party/revolutionary organisation and class and the role of the autonomous movements. It was not surprising that both James and Denby were members of the Marxist-Humanist current, which not only affirmed the role of the autonomous black movement but that of the womens movement and the youth movement. These books, along with the considerable contribution of 'Beyond the Fragments', can help in the debates that socialists of all currents, who wish to discard dogma and reaffirm the critical nature of Marxism will engage in over the next few years.

Apart from this Denby's book reads as an interesting account in unadorned language of the struggles of the black American people, a struggle often bitter and tragic. Despite the frequent horrors and degradation of black life in America, blacks have again and again attempted to assert a semblance of the true dignity of humanity.

Nick Heath.



FORMAT CHANGE

At our recent National Conference we decided to change the format of Libertarian Communist. From next issue it will appear as a magazine in A4 size (i.e. half the size of the present paper, but with more pages) and will cost 40p. We came to this decision because of the problems we have had selling a newspaper type publication on a quarterly basis. The new magazine format should enable us to broaden our coverage to include reviews and more cultural issues. Of course, many of the old features will be retained, such as the supplements, regular in-depth analytical articles, material on the public sector, and the rantings of that notorious Fleet Street hack Jim Partial.



Libertarian Communist

CUTS CHALLENGE

In Leeds where Labour is poised to gain control of the City Council in the local elections next May, members of an anti-cuts campaign are considering standing candidates.

The group, which calls itself 'Resistance', has stated that unless Labour candidates are willing to pledge themselves to a clear platform of opposition to the cuts in health, education, and key social services then they will stand candidates themselves.

The campaign began locally as a result of dissatisfaction with the statements made by Labour councillors at a local Labour Party public meeting on the topic of 'Cuts in Education'. 'Resistance' claims that the councillors are not going to take their opposition to the cuts beyond verbal protest. They claim that Labour's record the last time it controlled Leeds Council, when the Labour group of councillors defied their party membership and voted to implement the Fair Rent Act of the Heath Government, gives good reason to be suspicious.

'Resistance' has already leafletted the greater part of one ward and has plans to set up branches in the other areas of the city. The local press have shown a lot of interest in the campaign with front page lead stories and feature articles on their aims and activities. 'Resistance' are now producing and distributing a free weekly broadsheet.

They are arguing that in Leeds, as in every other part of the country over the last few years, the jobs, trades union rights, housing, education and health services used by the working-class have been under attack. Large numbers of people are waking up to the danger, yet the fight to defend living standards has in most places hardly started.

Their founding statement asks 'What's wrong'?

Isolation—each factory, school and hospital and estate feels outnumbered and outgunned as they are hit by the respectable vandals.

Lack of policy—each sector (eg health, education, social services) seeks to present a case for special treatment. This weakens everyone and prevents a fight against the cuts and their causes.

The Result

Custers's last stand in every battle.

The dim hope that a Labour Council after the May elections will be the cavalry to save us. (Though the worry is that last time they rode onto the scene they were more like Sitting Bull's reinforcements.)

So . . . many people just don't fight. We get slowly pushed back to the long dole queues, 'knowing your place', and all the beauties of the 1930s that the Hovis ads don't mention.

The first step is for all those who want to fight to thrash out a policy that will defend the living standards of working people.'

They offer the following points for a discussion on this:

1. Link expenditure in key areas such as health and education to the rate of inflation.

2. Make the accounts of local authorities and services open to the inspection of trades union and community representatives.

3. Grasp the nettle of rate increases and find ways of making the rich pay more.

4. Stop spending which makes the rich richer, such as subsidies on hotel and office building and the road and motorway schemes that are for the benefit of the road haulage brigands. The scandalously low industrial rates in Leeds haven't increased investment in new jobs, they've just made profits higher.

5. Defy government limits and spend what is needed. In the thirties the Labour councillors in Poplar in East London had the courage to do this, and when the Tory government (with Liberal support) sent them to prison, they stuck it out and won.

6. Cancel interest payments to the financiers.

They argue that the second step is to find candidates willing to pledge themselves to such a policy as can be thrashed out. The Leeds Labour group must come clear on this. They must say if they intend to implement the cuts, as they did the Heath Government's Fair Rent Act, or whether this time they will fight. If a clear undertaking can be won then they think it would be wrong to do anything other than support Labour next May.

In the event of no clear commitment to fight being obtained from the Labour group then they will field candidates in the elections. These will be pledged to fight the cuts and to act under the instructions of those who elect them. Wherever possible they will be representative of local groups already engaged in defending living standards and services.

People interested in the activities of the 'Resistance' group in Leeds, either because they live in the area, or because they are active in fighting the cuts and want to compare experiences should contact them at

Resistance
c/o 6, Graham View
Leeds 4
Yorkshire

The Yorkshire group of the LCG has been involved in the 'Resistance' campaign. It is through information and publications from Leeds that we have constructed this article. Obviously the campaign is still at an early stage, with only the rough outlines of demands and strategy worked out.

Nevertheless, we feel that they are certainly on the right lines, and closely parallel many of the suggestions made in our article on local authorities.

Any contribution from readers on the subject of how to resist the Tory cuts at the local level is welcome. Please get them to us by the middle of April for inclusion in our next issue.

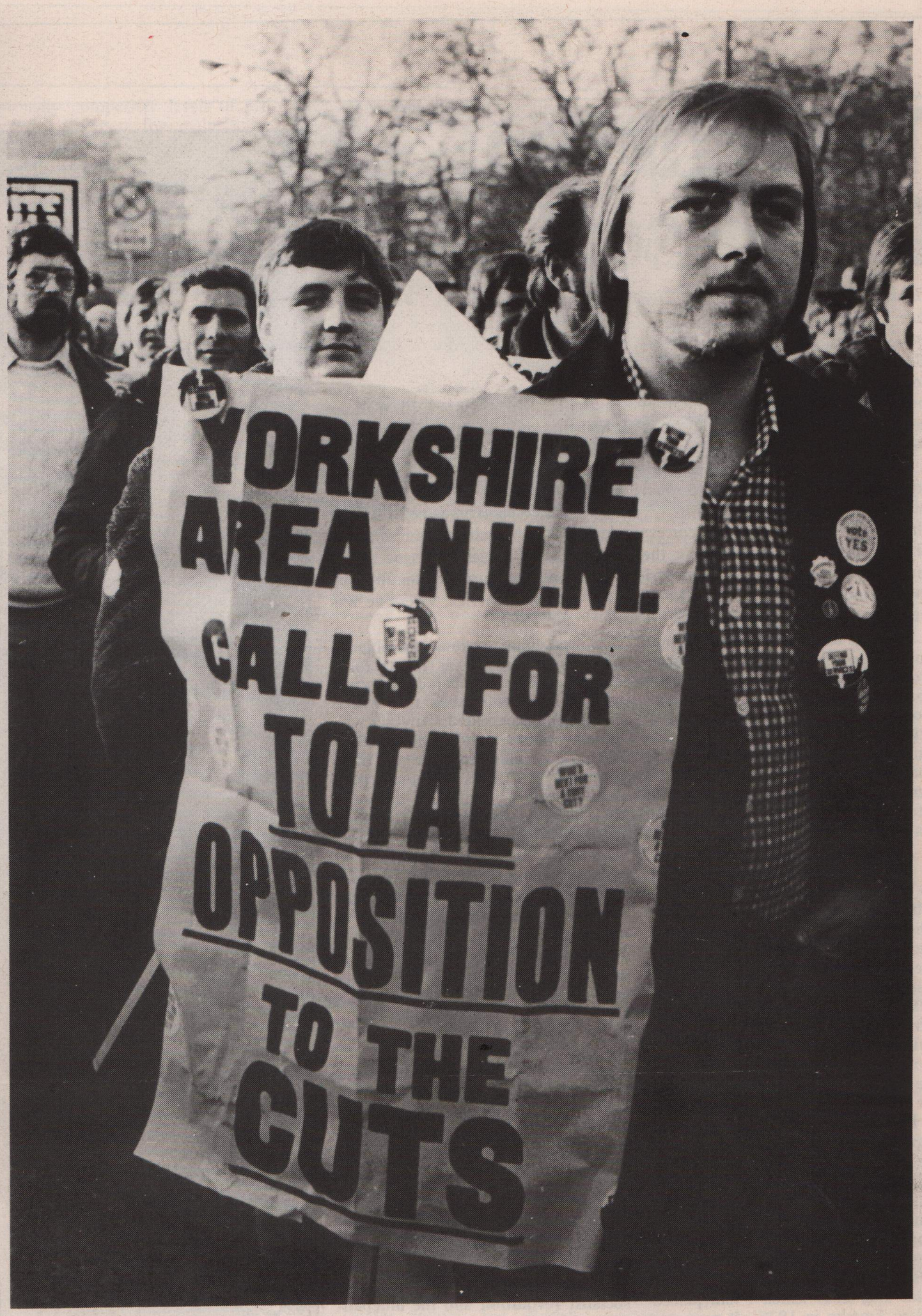


Photo Laurie Sparham (IFL)

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Recent strengthening of the Social Security 'Fraud Squad' has struck fear into the hearts of dole-queue scroungers throughout the land, writes our roving reporter Jim Partial.

JIM PARTIAL

From my vantage point in Finch's Wine Bar a clear picture emerges of the terrible strain put upon the state by a city like Liverpool, where the high rate of unemployment suggests the widespread activities of social misfits and ne'er-do-wells.

Informed sources indicate that vast amounts of public money are being drained into the Geneva bank accounts of the back street 'dole tycoons'. Liverpool's clubs, restaurants and wine lodges are full of wily claimants, flush after their daily walk to the Post Office to cash their giros.

The scroungers eat and dress well. Their suburban villas are packed with the latest electronic games and labour-saving devices. One family in Birkenhead is even reported to have been provided with a luxury castle in the South of France by local Social Security officers bound by the generous 'Exceptional Needs Payments' rules.

This year's winter season at St Moritz saw crowds of Liverpudlian holiday-makers litter the ski-slopes with empty Guiness cans and dog-eared football programmes. Their traditional love of sport and alcohol is expected to draw vast hordes of Merseyside claimants to this year's Royal Ascot, to Wimbledon and to the Henley Regatta.

Before this happens, however, the government's tough policy may have cleared the entrances to the dole offices of their traffic jams of claimants in customised sports cars and Rolls-Royces. At last, perhaps, a cure has been found to the problem of unemployment in Liverpool.