

Libertarian Communist

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CUTS HURT



No real fightback yet

The Tories have been in power since May. They have been correctly characterised by many as the most right-wing and rigidly ideological Tory Government since the war.

They are aided by a sycophantic media and Press, desperate for Thatcher and the Tories to be able to assume an aura of 'natural government' in the long run and to 'prevent a repetition of last winter' in the short run.

However, for all the apparent confidence of the Government, there is a touch of desperation about their every action.

It would be tempting to describe the Tories as both mad and incompetent but that would disguise the fact that there are only two responses open to the capitalists as they try to solve the problems of the capitalist economy in this country. If they are to increase the profitability of British industry and make British exports cheaper abroad, then in the present situation that means they have to cut working-class living standards. The Tories are desperate because they have seen that Labour's method of doing this, by having a rigid incomes policy has failed. The 5% limit was a laughing stock; the heavy cuts in social services, which are still coming through in all their devastation, provided the nails in the coffins.

The Tories have not yet been able to opt for wage restraint, because of the political legacy of the Heath government. They have taken the only other choice open to them — that of wholesale elimination both of government subsidies and vast areas of social service spending.

An "anti-socialist" crusade is used to disguise a crude attempt to accumulate vast new amounts of capital into private hands. This does not effect its inevitable failure as an economic strategy.

Booming private industry will not equal new jobs.

New technology has meant that production can increase with little if any increase in the work force. For the Tories even the comfort of a moderate revival in industry is probably an illusion. Unemployment, soaring fuel costs, and inflation

arising from the cuts in government subsidies mean that the revival in peripheral consumer and service industries will not take place.

The speed and viciousness of Tory cuts have completely demoralised an already witless T.U.C. leadership.

No campaign has been forthcoming from the T.U.C. over the cuts. It is probable that many of the T.U.C. General Council agreed with Callaghan's pruning of the social services. It is this legacy of the pact between Callaghan, Healey and Murray which produces paralysis in the T.U.C. today.

The fightback can only come from the grassroots. The Labour lefts in parliament are in no position but to sit back and enjoy their own rhetoric. Even if Callaghan were to be replaced by Benn in some leadership shock-horror, it would not effect the length of Tory rule.

The fightback must involve repossession of the resources taken away from working class communities. Tactics such as occupations of empty hospitals, schools, houses and factories will lead to a far sharper clash between the government and the Labour movement than has been seen for many years.

Such responses will both raise questions of what workers control really is, and what are the best ways to organise to resist. We believe that local cuts committees have to be reformed in earnest and should be drawn on a delegate basis not only from all the local trade union branches but from every other organised labour movement body. We must also learn the lessons of the collapse of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions and the atrophy of the Rank and File organisations.

It would be a disaster if mass retaliatory action by the working class were nipped in the bud by manipulation from left groups or betrayal by bureaucrats.

EDITORIAL BOARD.

Public Sector

THE DECLINING BRITISH ECONOMY

Reports over the summer indicated that the Treasury has produced an assessment of immediate economic prospects understood to be one of most pessimistic ever. The Treasury officials are thought to argue that prospects are poor for any general expansion of the British economy, and that in spite of rising North Sea Oil production there may be little or no growth in total UK output over the next few years. Gloomy prognostications have emerged also from other quarters. A table of recently published forecasts presented by the "Financial Times" on the 3rd September revealed an ominous degree of unanimity amongst a dozen leading economic forecasters. All had predicted that output growth is likely to be negligible, and that unemployment would soon rise to new levels.

Those of our readers who happened to watch the pre-election party television broadcasts may remember one in support of the Conservatives in which athletes representing British industry were assisted in their race against international competition by the removal of several weights supposedly placed around their necks by the Labour administration. Looking whimsically at the present forecasts, one might contemplate the possibility that these weights were subsequently dropped onto the athletes' feet! Certainly, the brash, "let's get cracking" tone of the Conservative advertisements must soon appear hollow to many who did not at the time fully appreciate the true nature of the reality they packaged.

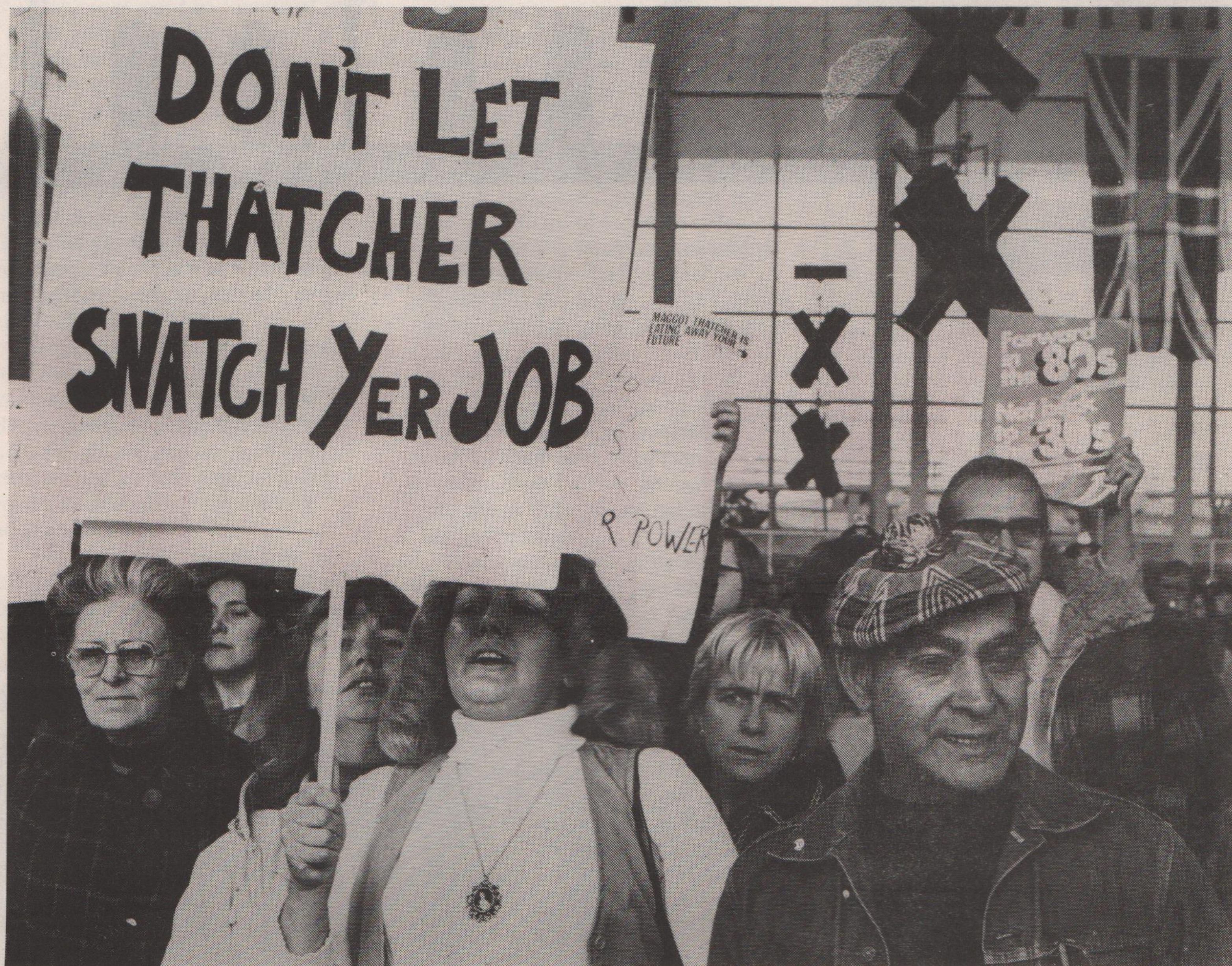
Responsibility for the state of our domestic capitalism does not, of course, lie exclusively with either of the main Parliamentary parties. Both have been called upon to deal in recent years with an underlying reality they cannot absolutely control. A recent government study (see the "Economist", 1.9.79, p.75) has gathered together data showing how manufacturing profitability has been declining over the last quarter of a century in all the major capitalist countries. The trend was one of slow decline throughout the 50s and 60s, leading to the sharp collapse of the seventies. The international nature of this tendency is sufficient to suggest that more than the governmental tribulations of any one state is at stake. Interpretations of this worldwide development do differ even amongst the socialist economists. It is nonetheless clear to all of them that here is the real cornerstone of contemporary economic problems: one which has, moreover, been associated everywhere with similar expressions—the co-incidence of inflation and unemployment, for example.

Within this international context there are limitations to the discussion of the affairs of any one country purely in local terms. Differing national performances do exist, however, as the domestic variations on the general theme. These domestic variations are important as the channels through which the general situation of capitalism presents itself to the workers in different

countries, and also because the worldwide characteristic of declining profitability brings to the fore the problem of rivalry between the different capitalist states. British capitalism's relative decline is thus invoked in chauvinistic appeals for national sacrifice etc. in the interests of more efficient competition. At the same time, however, it is a real component of the particular situation in which British workers find themselves: part of the environment we must assess in deciding any course of action. That is why, given our lack of resources, we concentrate in this paper upon regular reviews of the British scene.

British domestic industrial performance has been declining relative to that of the other major capitalist nations since the end of the nineteenth century. This decline has been particularly pronounced in the years since the second World War. In 1954, for instance, the gross domestic product (GDP) of France was 22% lower, and that of W. Germany 9% lower, than the British: by 1977 the French GDP was 34% higher, and that of the Germans 61%. Britain's share of manufactured goods exported by the member countries of OECD fell from 18.9% in 1954 to 8.5% in 1977, whilst that of France rose from 7.2% to 8.2%, and that of W. Germany from 12.2% to 18.8%, in the same period. Meanwhile, Britain's trade balance with other major industrial countries has progressively weakened. The share of the UK home market for manufactured goods held by domestic producers has fallen from 87% in 1960 to 57% in 1978. (See "Sir Nicholas Henderson's valedictory despatch", "Economist", 2.6.79).

Underlying this weakness of growth and loss of market position has been a low level of domestic investment and a comparatively slow rate of increase in productivity (measured as output per employee). Between 1960-72, investment as a percentage of GNP fell in the UK in a range of 16-18%: in Japan the range was 30-35%, in W. Germany 23-27%, and in the US 17-18% (figures from "Revolutionary Communist" 3-4). Recent government figures (published in the April 6th "Trade and Industry" and in the July "Economic Trends") show that



Thatcher got a hot reception opening this Milton Keynes civic centre. Photo Andrew Wiand (Report)

BUILD A PUBLIC SECTOR ALLIANCE

Every issue of Libertarian Communist has contained a piece on activity in the public sector. During the Labour 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

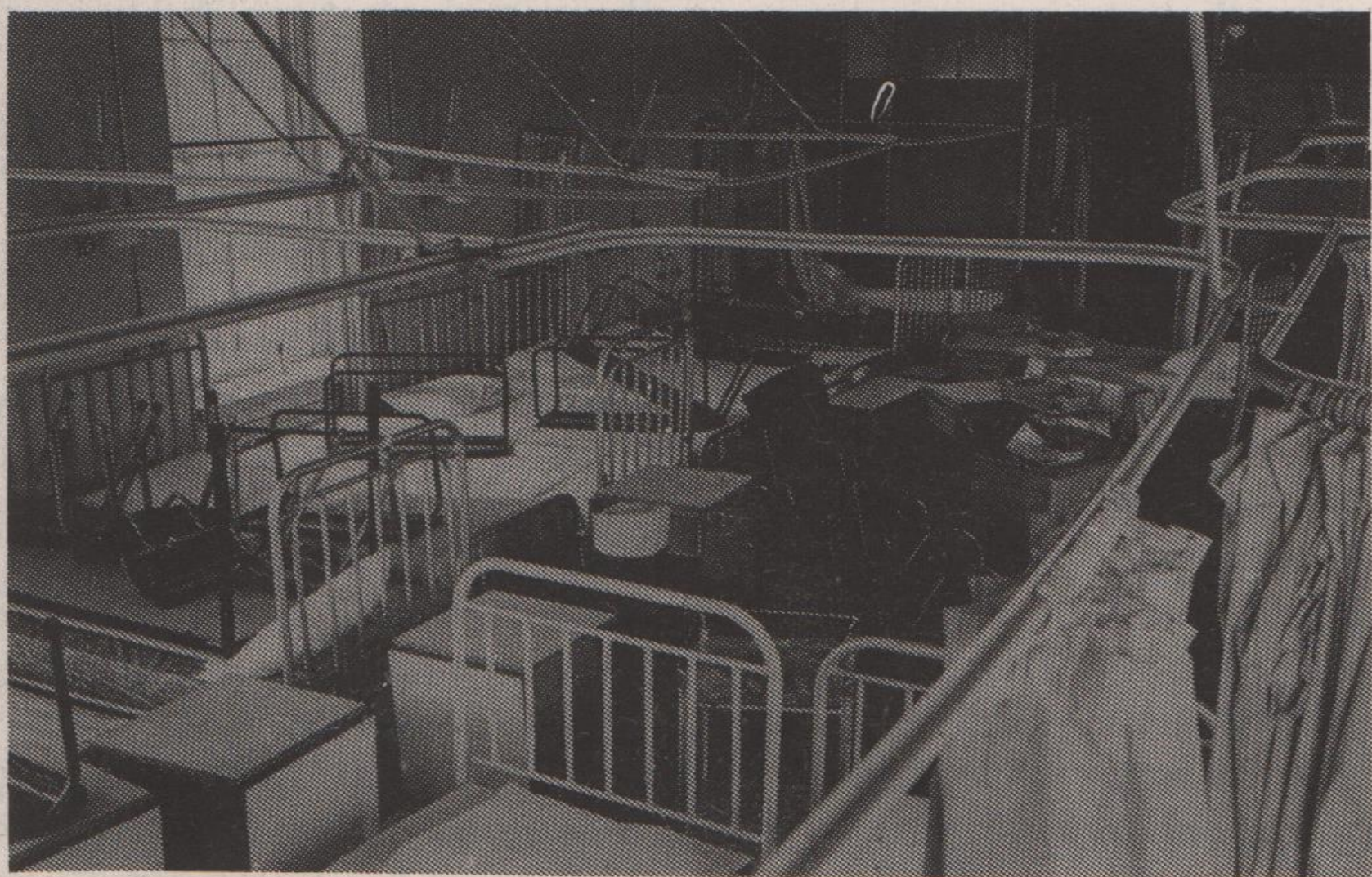
will, however, be of special importance. First, the growth of unified action amongst public sector workers themselves, and their creation of a common strategy for the public sector as a whole. Second, the support of the wider labour movement for this process, and also its contribution to the advancement 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.

Research and Development expenditure has in real terms fallen in the UK (and in the US) in recent years, whilst increasing in France, Japan and W. Germany. UK spending fell by 11% between the late 60s and early 70s, while there was a 44% rise in W. Germany and a 17% rise in France. In 1975 (admittedly a

recession trough in Britain) there was spent in the UK \$52 per head on research and development, compared with \$110 in the US and \$95 in Germany. It is interesting in the context of the above to note the low rate of productivity growth in Britain and the US, as compared with the other major capitalist

nations. From 1965 to 1972 the gross productivity increases in the major economies were as follows—US 20%, UK 36.6%, Italy 41.5%, W. Germany 42%, France 53.5%, Japan 130% (Revolutionary Communist 3-4). (In 1973, however, the level of productivity was still highest in the US, lowest



DECLINING BRITAIN: new hospital extension in Portsmouth that will never be used.



Clyde Iron Works: shut.



Staff shortages closed this ward at St. Georges hospital. Photos by Andrew Wiand and Chris Davies (Report)

Public Sector

in Britain, Italy and Japan. The growth of productivity 1973-79 has remained lowest in the US, so that by 1978 W. Germany had a higher level of output per head. With regard to the 7 major economies as a whole the rate of change of growth has been dropping: the aggregate yearly rate of increase has slowed to 1.5% post '73, compared with 4.5% in the previous decade. It may be mentioned while we are in parenthesis that the R+D side of industry affects the quality of products produced, as well as the quality of fixed capital involved. A further point is that in Britain, a large proportion of R+D money has gone on nuclear and military developments, rather than on developments in commodity manufacture).

Any fundamental restructuring of British industry will require a break from the low investment, low growth, low profit environment which has its roots deep in the late 19th century world domination of the British economy, and the patterns of domestic and overseas development which arose from this. The paucity of domestic achievement within the cut and thrust of the recession-struck world market indicates to workers in Britain the necessary scale of any such overhaul. What we know in general about increases in productivity arising from new investment suggests that, in the short term at any rate, absolute employment has tended to fall as investment grows. Between 1964 and 1973, for example, there was an increase in plant and machinery at constant replacement cost of 33.5% in the metals, engineering and allied industries co-inciding with a decrease in employment of 11.9%. In the bricks, pottery, glass and cement industries during the same period a plant increase of 68.1% co-incided with a labour loss of 9.4% (Revolutionary Communist 3-4). Quite a considerable growth of the economy as a whole must be required before the unemployment created by such a process can be re-absorbed. Meanwhile, any search for more competitive performance will demand an overhaul of working practices and costs as much as of the machinery itself. Workers will have to work more intensively or flexibly, and their wages be determined by reference to company performance rather than to any previous level.

When the Conservatives talk about revitalising British industry it is to this sort of overhaul that they ultimately refer. Their means of achieving this objective is significant not only as an address to the working class but also as an example of how a change of attitude is forged within the heterogeneous councils of capital itself.

According to the Conservatives, the crucial mistake of previous administrations has been that of allowing too free a scope to those factors which have prevented the need for restructuring from presenting itself critically at the level of enterprises themselves. A series of "valves" in the sphere of circulation has to a limited degree shielded industry, at the price of generalised inflation, from the consequences of its poor performance. Of critical importance here has been the ability of the banks to create credit money, which has repeatedly covered the higher prices set by manufacturers to cover crises of profit. The expanding state debt also assisted this price lubrication, though this was not its sole motivation. And both these features were associated with repeated devaluations of the pound, which allowed greater flexibility in price formation against overseas competition.

Unfortunately, the above circumstances could also be described as inflationary price setting and imported inflation. Domestic productivity offensives tended to resort

to jockeying for position within the resultant price/wage spiral. On the level of real performance little was achieved. Although company profits seem to have risen massively in recent years, that has largely been a reflection of inflation. The real pre-tax return which industrial and commercial companies have made has risen since 1976—from around 3% to around 5%. But this is still only about half the return averaged in the sixties. Meanwhile, the international decline of the currency has not been an entirely welcome development for a commercial world so deeply committed to overseas investment (a higher proportion of GNP than anywhere but the US). Neither growth nor competitiveness have been improved.

Conservative policy (in part it must be said inherited from Labour) involves a narrowing of some of the circulation valves in the hope that the subsequent pressures on the corporate sector will encourage, indeed force, the initiative of a deep restructuring. Public spending is being restrained to limit government borrowing and the amount of credit formation associated with it. (Alongside the subsidiary intention of reducing government competition with private enterprise in the loans market). The idea is to attempt to ensure that the basis for a higher exchange rate than that of the 70s, given by North Sea Oil, will not be eroded by internal money creation. Companies will consequently have to look more to internal productivity and costs, and less to a favourable exchange rate, to achieve competitive price comparisons with foreign competitors.

The strategy has stark implications for the immediate future. On the public sector front the Cabinet will release in the Autumn, alongside the Treasury report mentioned earlier, first details of a decision to limit total public expenditure in 1980-81 to within £1-0.5 bn of this year's level—a reduction of between £4-3.5 bn from the level proposed for 1980-81 by the Labour government Expenditure White Paper in January. This revised public expenditure programme will need to accommodate an increase in expenditure on the police and "defence". And it will be a reduction in levels that were already part of a slimming programme, and already obsolete in terms of their projections for the inflation of costs.

On the industrial front, meanwhile, industrialists are already themselves trembling at the thought that the cold bath before them is so bad it harbours icebergs and polar bears. The rise of sterling, gradual over 1978 and somewhat more rapid this year, lowers the price of imports relative to home-produced goods, and raises the price of British exports relative to the price of goods in countries they try to penetrate. The resulting pressures cut profit by restricting price flexibility, to the extent that there is no compensating increase in productivity. 1978 in fact saw the beginnings of a "squeeze" on profits, and recent official statistics indicate that this has intensified in 1979. Profits, excluding North Sea Oil, dropped by nearly 23% in the first three months of this year compared with the Oct-Dec period of 1978. No doubt bad weather and industrial disputes accounted for some of this decline, but most commentators see it as also representing the impact of the exchange rate.

In July Sir Arthur Night, chairman of Courtaulds, claimed that his company's pre-tax profits would have risen by a further £20m if sterling had adjusted to the faster rise in costs at home than abroad. In the same month the CBI submitted a paper to the NEDC in which it observed that "Many companies feel that just recently the pound has been rising too fast, to a level at which, if they are to stay price competitive in

the short term, their profit margins must be pruned to the bone, and deeper." An engineering industry working party report this August further reflected this pessimism, arguing that between 1976 and mid-1979 UK machinery export prices rose approximately 44% against US prices, 41% against Japanese prices and 16% against W. German prices.

Prospects for the future are further clouded by the co-incidence of a new tendency of international increases in the prices of major raw materials. The cost of industrial raw materials rose, for instance, by 9.1% in the first six months of this year compared with only 0.3% in the comparable period of 1978. Forecasts are poor, moreover, for the general buoyancy of the world market. So far this year deflationary policies have been introduced in Canada, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand and the US.

We return, as it were, to the forecasts mentioned in our first paragraph. Employers over the next year will find themselves with their backs to the currency wall in a hostile market climate. Simultaneously, domestic price rises, (given

a further push by the feeding through of the winter wage rises and by the Budget tax changes), will be moving towards a 17-20% rate of increase on the year by the end of the year, thus laying the ground for renewed working class efforts to maintain real living standards. The first response of the employers will be to try and resist these wage demands in order to recoup some degree of competitiveness. As we have seen above, however, the medium term response must, if the authorities keep up the pressure (and it is reported that ministers are steeling themselves for the prospect of bankruptcies), entail a more fundamental revision of work, embracing both new technology and new types of industrial relations.

Hopefully we have shown above the ways in which current prospects are to some extent an expression of those Conservative policies which were given such a zippy pre-election build-up. The prospect is for great upheavals in working class life, whether this is occasioned by restructuring or by the stimulus to it. Does this mean, however, that workers would be better off supporting any alternative strategy

within capitalism? In one sense, socialists do acknowledge different "balances of class forces", according to the ability of organised labour to frustrate the ideal capitalist trajectory. But balances are hardly permanent solutions. In the first place the question still remains for the ruling class of how long it can tolerate such a state of affairs before redoubling efforts to re-establish accumulation. And in the second, without such a re-establishment a capitalist society is ailing, and the consequences are still repeatedly presented to the working class. So long as the capitalist relations of production remain, even if in beleaguered form, they will continue to frustrate and pervert any attempts to deal directly and humanely with the vast and intricate problems of modern social life. There is only a short term sense in workers resisting elements of capitalist development without resisting the whole. Ultimately, decisions will have to be made on the grander scale, and the problems concerning the deepest seat of social organisation confronted.

I.G.

Build anti cuts committees

THE CUTS are on their way and we have to organise to resist them. We are seeing a massive and co-ordinated attack on the basic elements of the welfare state, the National Health Service, state education, the benefits system and local council services.

The attack is part of the Tories overall economic strategy, part of the shift of resources from the public to the private sector. Of course, as we explain elsewhere in this paper, though the Tories may well succeed in cutting working class living standards and their social wage, there seems little chance that they will actually encourage investment and jobs in the private sector. What they take away with one hand they don't give back with the other!

We have been warned in advance that this is an ideological attack. The Tories cut direct taxation and increase indirect taxation. They ruin the state education and health systems and boost private education and health care. They attack the benefits system and preach a gospel of self-reliance. All these measures hurt the poor and benefit the rich.

The Tories decided in the wake of their defeat by the miners in 1974 that in any future confrontation with the unions they should take on white collar unions such as those in the Civil Service rather than well-established industrial unions such as

the miners. These plans were leaked in a secret Tory 'Think Tank' document eighteen months ago. It does now seem that those in the front line of the Tory attack will be the public sector unions, all according to the Tories plans.

What will be the effect of the cuts at this stage? In education, there will be fewer teachers employed and also increasing shortages of such things as text-books. In hospitals there will be ward closures and less capital expenditure. In local government there will be cutbacks in the number of clerical and administrative staff employed and thus a lower standard of service to the public. Also there will be cuts in the number of local council manual workers employed and a further rundown of direct labour organisations in favour of fly by night contract labour.

The Trades Unions involved in these sectors will fight the cuts but we cannot rely on them. They are essentially defensive organisations, good at defending their members standards of living but not good at saving jobs, and certainly not good at fighting for a shorter working week, at questioning the type of work their members perform etc. Also, it is already apparent that the Tories can make substantial cuts in staffing in local government and the Civil Service without having to resort to large scale compulsory redundancies. The cuts can be made by simply not replacing staff who leave for other jobs or retire. This will be very effective as there is traditionally a high turnover of staff in these sectors.

The unions, and unfortunately their members as well, are unlikely to fight cuts which do not mean redundancies. They will not fight to save services or to save staffing levels. Perhaps it is fairer to say that they will not fight effectively in these circumstances.

Another problem we face in fighting the cuts is that the effect of the cuts is often not immediately obvious to those not directly involved. It is hospital workers who know that ward closures and cuts in spending on equipment will mean worse health care even deaths. It is civil servants and local government workers who can see where the cuts in staffing levels and spending will hit the service given to the public. It is therefore vital that different groups of workers facing cuts meet together to share their knowledge. They have to go back from these meetings to their own members to explain to them the overall threat the cuts pose.

We hope to see anti-cuts committees coming together all over the country. They should contain activists from all the sectors under attack. Armed with the information that these activists can provide they can then go out to the public and propagandise against the cuts

Of course we want the widest possible working class support for action against the cuts, which are indeed a direct attack on the working class itself. However, a major problem here is that what we are defending from the Tory axe is often completely inadequate. We should at all times make it clear that it is not enough to maintain the present organisation and levels of service in health, education and social welfare. The struggle against the cuts automatically raises the question of control. We must say not only that the Tories have no right to attack these things which we need, but also that we have the right to structure them and use them as we choose as a class.

Also, we have to argue in this way so as to make it clear that it is not just the nasty Tories who are at fault. We should make it clear that many of the cuts brought in the last six months have been the result of Labour implementing Tory policies in its last couple of years in office. We don't believe that the solution to the problems faced in the public sector can be solved by simply electing a Labour Government. In the long run it is only in a socialist society that proper education, health and welfare services will be provided, as there they will be provided on a basis of need not profit.

We believe that a massive movement has to be built to resist the cuts. It should contain workers from all the areas affected, who should also be fighting at the same time within their unions for rank and file opposition to the cuts. The anti-cuts committees have to go out and win public support. They should try to involve those who are affected as consumers of the services just as much as those who are affected as workers within the services. Within them, socialists should campaign not just for a better level of services and for the removal of the Tories, but for public services controlled by those who work in them and by those who use them, given all the resources they need to be able to give an adequate level of care.

c.m.

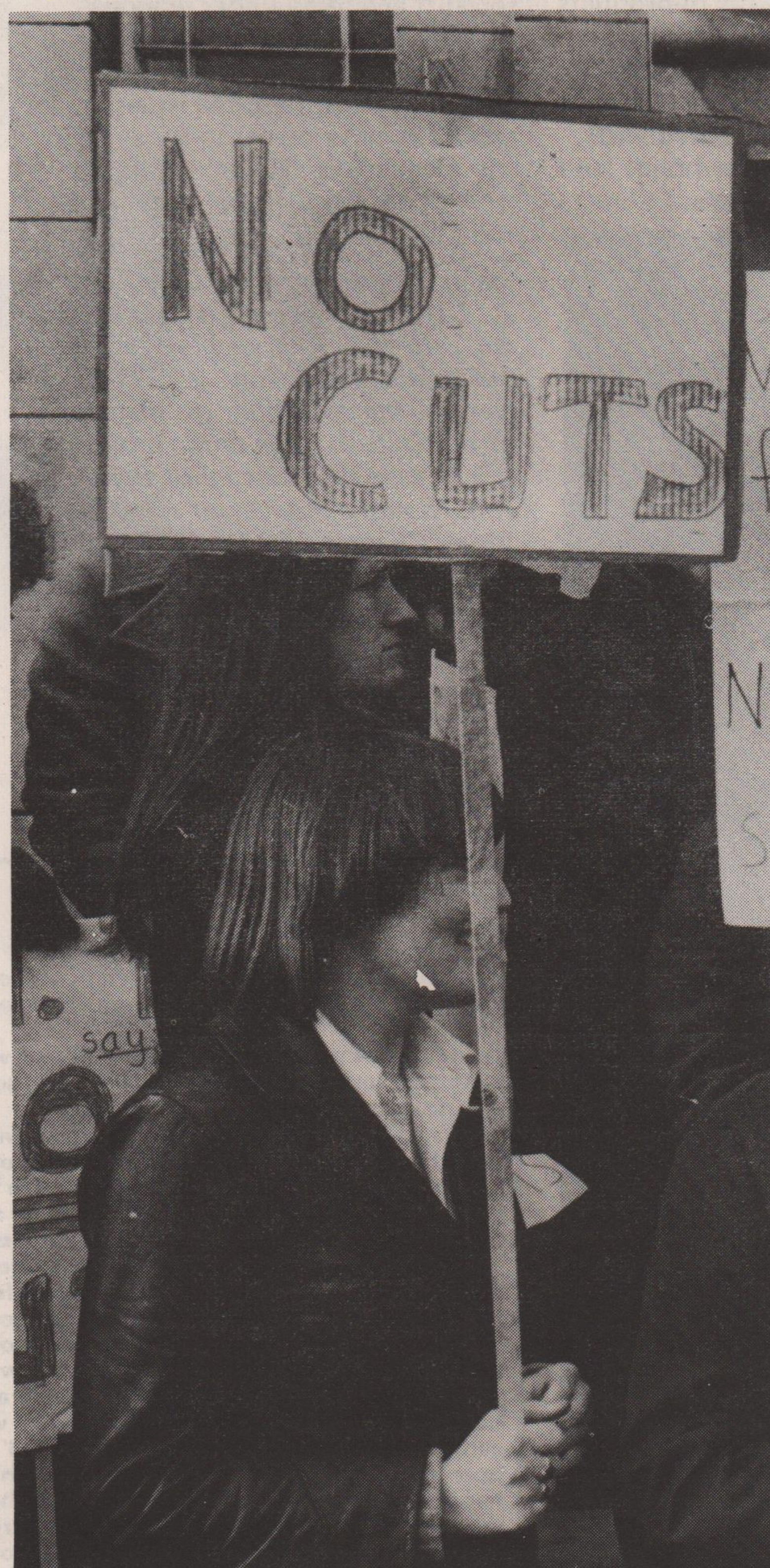


Photo John Smith (IFL)

Nukes

It is almost crass to point it out but History constantly seems to be repeating itself. In the early nineteenth century radicals strived to create would-be practical alternatives to the growing alienating technologies of the day. After the Communist Manifesto's denunciation of these utopian experiments Marxist orthodoxy firmly wedged these radicals into the dustbin of history. Nothing useful could be learnt from them.

Over the last decade or so a similar development has taken place with the emergence internationally of an 'ecological movement'. For most of this period the established left both reformist and revolutionary have dismissed their insights as just so much liberal twaddle. Indeed demands for zero-growth, less consumption with visions of cabbage growing communes and chicken-shit technology did nothing to reach the hearts and minds of working people, attempting to defend their living standards.

The labour movement left could thus feel safe in ignoring these wolly headed prophets of doom and get on with the more tangible job of combatting the crisis.

But the 'crisis' we have been experiencing since the early seventies is not just a standard crisis of profitability — capitalism chewing off its own tail with overproduction. The environmentalists are right, on at least one score; resource depletion. The massive expansion of the 50s and 60s — has meant that capitalism has irreplaceably used up raw materials and energy sources historically crucial for the maintainance of industrial society.

Both nationally and internationally this has meant a temporary shift in the ballance of power towards those directly producing such items. Coal miners, marginalised by cheap oil in the 50s and 60s could bring governments to their knees in the 70s. Oil exporters, no more than neo-colonial puppets after the last war have recently been able to dictate political terms to their once all-powerful masters.

It is in this context that Nuclear power has become of immense strategic importance for both the capitalist west and the so-called socialist countries.

Unprofitable

Not so long ago a nuke was useful militarily for the plutonium it

provided and as a sort of super-concorde prestige symbol. Despite claims made for it during the 'white heat of technology' period twenty years ago, it has never proved immensely profitable and most Nuke industries, even in the USA, are to a large extent subsidized by the state. Nonetheless, because of the profits to be made in servicing this subsidized military/prestige fuel cycle, and also in anticipation of future more favourable developments, some of the largest and most socially irresponsible firms in the world have decided to sink their teeth into nuclear development. These include GEC, Rio Tinto Zinc, McAlpines, Esso and Gulf Oil.

It is these multi-nationals, in conjunction with state corporations enshrouded in secrecy, who control the pace and direction of development. They have sold reactors, whose bi-products include the bomb ingredient plutonium, to some of the most reactionary and volatile countries in the world. They have advocated the large scale development of processes, subsequently proven to be highly dangerous. They are on the verge of immensely increasing their power. They must be stopped.

The immediate development of nuclear technology would be a manifold set-back for the working class. Like the development of the 'silicon chip' it would throw countless thousands out of work, with no obvious guarantee of re-employment or work-sharing. It would reduce the rights of workers associated with the industry to nil. It would introduce massive and unacceptable security operations to safeguard reactors, reprocessing sites, dumps and transportation routes. These operations once started would have to continue, for the bi-products remain radioactive, for centuries, even thousands of years. We would thus be bequeathing upon future generations a world peppered with radioactive risks, security police, and alienating work conditions.

NUCLEAR POWER

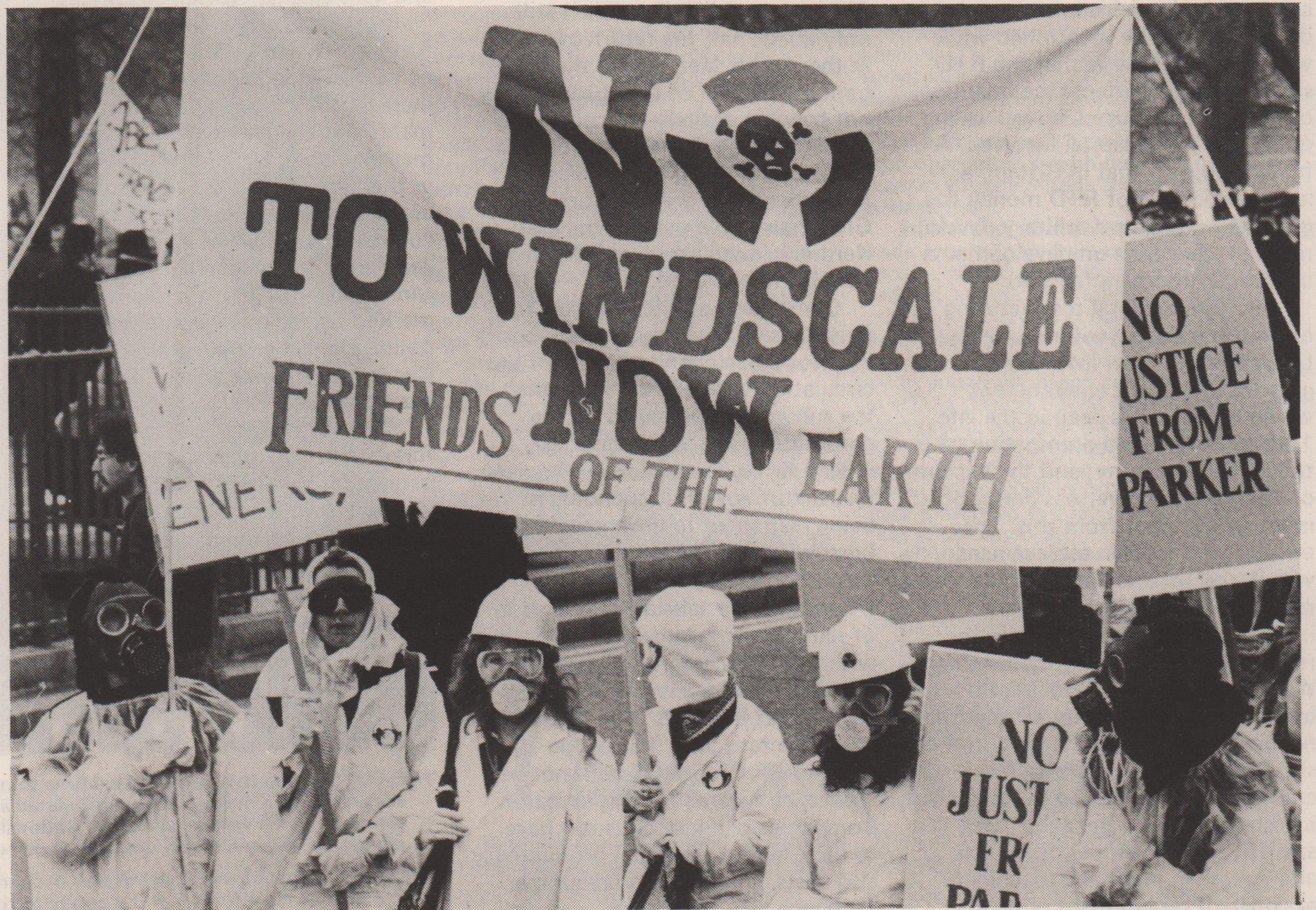


Photo Mark Rusher (IFL)

It is clear, therefore, that current programs for nuclear development should be put an end to as soon as possible. Yet a number of questions remain unanswered. The first is, if nuclear technology poses such threats to the future, why do the bulk of TUs still see it as one of society's great hopes? Secondly can nuclear technology be easily accommodated to the development of a socialist economy under workers' control, and lastly in the light of clear answers to the second question, how do we best raise the issues around nuclear power in a way that will most effectively arm us in the struggle for democratic socialism?

"In this debate there are two major camps: there are those . . . (say) . . . we should now stand still and reflect, even if we have to reduce our standard of living The other camp — the camp that the majority of the British trade union movement is in — says that we cannot stand still, let alone reduce our standards." Frank Chapple EPTU 1977 Labour Party conference, speaking against anti-nuclear motion.

There has always been a section of the trade unions in Britain that has been seduced into compromising its interests by the carrot of increased Gross National Income.

Productivity deals, 'socialist'

incomes policies, the Social Contract are products of this mentality. It finds its most perfect expression in the likes of Basnett and co. who freely confess themselves to be prepared to put up with a Brave New World of permanent shift work — a nuclear paradise with one year off in ten for the worker to recover from the effects of fatigue

The unions chiefly responsible for pushing nuclear power are those who see their sectoral interests as being furthered. More jobs for their boys.

Alongside their bland technological optimism exists a sort of technological nationalism. They see the development of nuclear power as being inevitable on a global scale, and therefore exhort trade unionists to demand that their bosses should be quick in at the kill. This attitude is attractive to, and often sustained by, the 'left' import controls lobby.

Those now objecting are unions who find their jobs endangered, such as the NUM. They stress the need to more efficiently exploit existing energy sources.

A few, such as NALGO have put forward resolutions urging government "to promote a much greater investment in research programmes dealing with methods of energy conservation and the uses of other sources of energy (solar, tidal, wind

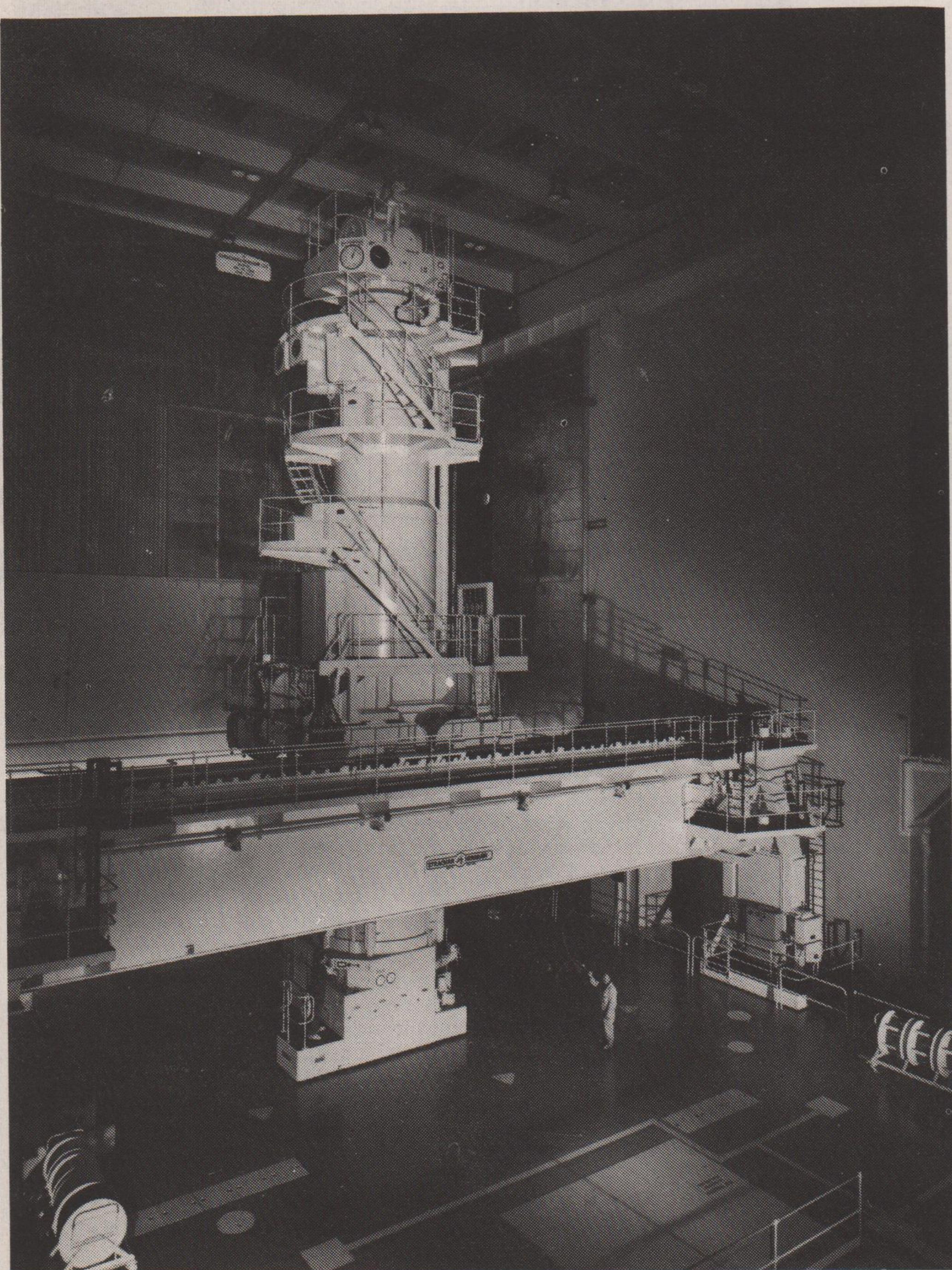
etc) so that clear non-nuclear alternatives can be presented in the final argument." The Power Engineering TU Ctte. has taken an internationalist stance on the issue demanding that smaller units are produced not just "because they are more labour intensive . . . (but also because they) . . . cover the needs of emerging nations."

These are, roughly, the sides of the debate within the labour movement. The pro-nuclear lobby and those desiring greater energy conservation in the traditional industries. There are also those pushing a partial nuclear position — skeptical of 'luddite' attitudes — and those advocating alternative technologies, above all else.

Demands

It is in this arena that the arguments against nuclear power have to demand an immediate halt to nuclear power on the grounds that it is too dangerous physically and socially. They will have to demand free access to all information so that future decisions can be democratically arrived at.

It is conceivable, but only just, that some form of nuclear technology can be made safe. But this will be generations from now, indeed it is vital that we don't limit the possible



Reactor Pile cap at Dungeness A.

CHINA SYNDROME

The China Syndrome (A). Directed by James Bridges, USA 1979. Starring Jane Fonda, Jack Lemmon, Michael Douglas.

As a rule this paper doesn't carry film reviews, but as this film is both excellent and on general release, and so likely to be on near you, it seemed worthy of an exception.

'The China Syndrome' is a well-acted, well-directed, very taut thriller about the dangers of nuclear power. Fonda is a reporter on a TV news show, Douglas is her cameraman. On a routine visit to a Californian nuclear power station to make a feature about sources of energy they witness a near disaster. Jack Lemmon, a supervisor at the plant, becomes increasingly concerned about the cavalier attitude to safety shown by his superiors, and so works with Fonda to expose the danger.

The film gives an excellent demonstration of corporate power at work in America, though as you would expect it makes no general criticism of capitalism as a system. It shows how Fonda's superiors in the TV company want her to concentrate on funny news items, not on 'hard' news. It shows how they are prepared to knuckle under, and try not to use her exposure of the unsafe plant. It shows how the company who run the power station and the engineering corporation who built it for them are prepared to cut corners and avoid the statutory safety procedures if it will save them money. It also shows them prepared to go to any lengths to prevent the news

of their blunders being made public.

Most papers on the far left would make the standard criticism at this point, i.e. that the film is not revolutionary and does not contain an overall revolutionary analysis of its subject. Of course, that is all true, but it also redundant. This is a commercial entertainment first and foremost, a film about the dangers of nuclear power second. In fact it is very successful on both counts.

The ideas contained within it are really those of campaigning Hollywood liberalism, nothing more. Nevertheless, it will be seen by a far higher number of people than films which are much purer and more revolutionary. Although it is not even a full treatment of the problems raised by nuclear power, dealing as it does with just one type of possible accident, it raises the issue and will be seen by many people. To show how one should take advantage of this, there were a group of people from the local anti-nuclear group outside the cinema where I saw it, giving out leaflets and collecting signatures for a petition. An excellent tactic!

This then is not only a film you should go and see, but also one which you should circulate petitions and leaflets at afterwards!

c.m.

Nukes

options for the future by asserting that nukes can *never* be used, in any circumstances. But to commence by asserting their probable viability obscures the very great dangers that any development of nuclear power in the near future would entail.

Too often socialists, revolutionaries, have believed that it is quite possible to take over the economic system and paint it red. That all that is needed is a more efficient and democratic distribution of the product of labour. But if we are to avoid the pitfalls encountered to a greater or lesser extent by every single attempt to build socialism so far, we must stress the democratic element necessary in the process of production itself.

Nuclear power, like the production line, is not neutral. They are both the product, and partly the reproducers, of specific social systems. They cannot be imported wholesale into a workers democracy.

Part of what we do, must therefore be to advocate strategies of *alternative production*. The workers at Lucas Aerospace and Speke have shown a way forward. It must be taken up by any larger anti-nuclear

movement that develops in this country. In so doing we must not be seen to encourage an anti-technology sentiment or the illusion that decentralized workers co-ops are a solution to all this inhuman and alienating hardware. What is necessary is the encouragement of an attitude amongst workers and users that it is they who must determine the nature of what is produced and how it is produced. In no way can nuclear power in any of its present forms fit into this pattern of development.

The movement will probably gain its first impetus, like CND, and

others before and since, outside the traditional confines of the labour movement. Demonstrations, occupations and other forms of protest have already involved the 'culturally disaffected' and are attracting support from 'locals' affected by proposed reactor sites, reprocessing and development sites and rail transport routes. Such campaigns must also seek to lobby and pressure local labour movement bodies, such as trades councils, raising not just the No Nukes! demand, but also the more positive 'alternative' perspectives.

This article has only gone into the broad political problems associated with nuclear power. The facts and figures of the arguments were omitted for clarity's sake. They are, however necessary for a fuller understanding of the debates. *Nuclear Power For Beginners* £1.80 is definitely the most easily understandable introduction. Other excellent books recently published include:-

Walter Paterson: *Nuclear Power* 80p

Ian Breach: *Windscale Fallout* 90p

Dave Elliot: *The Politics of Nuclear Power* £1.95

Roberts and Medvedev: *The Hazards of Nuclear Power* 95p

Robert Jungk: *The Nuclear State*

Periodicals of interest are:-

SERA News, CIS Report: *The Nuclear Disaster, Undercurrents.*

Debates in *The Leveller*

M.L.



Photo John Birdsell

New Technology



Word Processor in use at a Huddersfield engineering firm. Photo John Sturrock (Report)

Machines that take over the boring work in offices and factories. Machines that do the cleaning, and the dirty and unpleasant jobs. Machines that guide tools on assembly lines. Sounds like a socialist paradise, but it's well on the way to being a capitalist hell.

The possibilities of the technological revolution are breathtaking. Virtually all the unpleasant, dangerous and dirty jobs could be automated; the working day could be radically shortened for everyone; tedious routine work could be eliminated, leaving people free for more creative work; jobs now reserved for small elites of highly skilled craftspeople could be made accessible to more people.

The new technology *could* give us all these things, but will most likely mean none of them if capitalism has its way. What it will mean for workers is being thrown on the dole rather than freed for creative work, and destroying the skills that they do have.

What is it about the new technology that can do all this?

The micro-electronics of the silicon chip means that highly complex computer systems can be built far more cheaply and far smaller than their predecessors. So a micro-processor can be used as the 'brain' of a piece of equipment, using a programme to

carry out a sequence of tasks far faster than a human operator. This can be applied to an enormous range of machinery. For example, micro-processors can carry out many typist's functions such as indentation and carriage return; they can programme lathes to carry out precision turning at high speeds; and they can be used in automated assembly lines.

Closely allied to these developments in micro-processors are the advances in laser technology. Laser pulses through 'optical fibres' are beginning to replace traditional circuitry for the transmission of signals within micro-processors, and lasers are being

used in typesetting systems and in manufacturing equipment.

All these developments could be of enormous benefit to workers.

The working day could be dramatically shortened, work could be made easier and safer, and further research could be aimed at automating unpleasant jobs.

For capitalism, however, the new technology has a completely different meaning.

The strategy adopted by capital to deal with the crisis is the *restructuring* of industry to maximise profits, where possible with the co-operation of reformist trade union leaderships.

The main elements of this restructuring are:

- * wholesale closures of less profitable plants
- * driving down workers' wages and conditions
- * a new world division of labour, making use of cheap labour in the third world
- * reasserting control over the work

process

* reducing the costs of production by cutting workforces while maintaining output

Much of the new technology has been around since the early sixties, but has only begun to be brought into use as the drive to restructure production has got under way. New technology is of central importance to this strategy, since it allows managers to destroy much of the power of skilled workers by deskilling their work, and enables massive reductions in workforce levels at relatively low cost. This latter point can be clearly seen in the way micro-processors have been most extensively used so far: in conjunction with practically the cheapest of machines, the typewriter, with the sole purpose of cutting the number of typists employed.

Other countries have been quick to use micro-processor technology in large manufacturing plants: Completely automated production lines make cars in Japan and Italy, a wide range of electrical consumer goods in Japan, and newspapers in the United States. British capitalism is markedly reluctant to invest in industry, however, preferring to export its capital; thus it is likely that in its attempt to restructure on the cheap, the emphasis will be on automating those jobs that require a minimum of new investment. First to go will be jobs in the civil service and local government, clerical workers, office jobs and typists — all jobs usually done by women.

Clearly, if a rapid worsening in working conditions and living standards is to be prevented, there must be an effective resistance to this strategy. But there are several problems in mounting such a resistance. By choosing to cut jobs largely done by women, many of whom are outside the trade unions, employers are able to attack the least organised section of the workforce. They are also able to enlist the forces of the state, which is pressuring women to remain at home to take over many of the tasks of a decimated public sector.

Moreover, reformist trade union leaderships are committed to the 'mixed economy' and to the success of capitalism. They accept the arguments for greater profitability, and are prepared to do no more than negotiate over the actual numbers of workers sacked.

Redundancies should never be a matter for negotiation, but something to be fought tooth and nail.

Any serious resistance to capital's strategy for restructuring must put workers' interests above the needs of profit. *This means, above all, demanding no redundancies and a radical reduction in working hours with no loss of earnings.*

Once this is established as a basis to struggle from, it is possible to raise demands around the way in which new technology is introduced: within the workplace, on issues like control of methods and speeds of working, and also on the social implications of the development and use of new technology.

PG

Although over the last few months, we have received requests from people asking for bundles of paper to sell, we would appreciate it if more people could do the same. Write to us for bundles of ten upwards on a sale or return basis.

As usual, we are asking for any sort of feedback regarding the paper and the ideas in it. If you disagree with something in an article, or even if you agree and think you have something further to add, you can always write a letter or an article to us. The same if you are involved in or know of a struggle that might interest the readership of *Libertarian Communist*, feel free to write in.

We would appreciate your comments on cultural or sexual issues, or reviews of books that you think are important or useful to read. We also, of course, appreciate any comment on the way the paper is designed, and ways in which you think it can be improved. Any contributions you do make should, if possible, be typed, double-spaced, with margins on A4 paper.

Bringing out *Libertarian Communist*, even at its present frequency, is a big task for us. The LCG is a small organisation and its members are all very poor. The production of the paper is financed by money we pay in dues, and even then runs at a loss. You are probably also aware that paper and postage continue to increase in cost, and that bills for typesetting and printing a paper can be quite considerable. In short, we need money to keep on appearing.

In the last number of *Libertarian Communist* we said we were asking for £1,000. We have still got a long way to go to reach that target! If you can afford anything, no matter how small, please contribute. We will publish details of how much money we have received in the next paper.

Please send any contributions, articles or money, to LCG, c/o 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

[illegible]

It's a question many a good English lefty asks themselves whenever their conscience is dragged over the coals by a dramatic turn of events in Ireland. In the past year such events have come thick and fast, bursting through the usually silent or sketchy media presentation.

The wall of silence having cracked open a little, the possibilities of building a larger movement calling for withdrawal are great indeed. How ought we to respond to this challenge?

For some the battle to combat the chauvanist consciousness of a reformist working class movement is the priority. They call for solidarity as the main requirement of any working class based organization. Their propaganda rests

chiefly on the campaign for prisoner of war status for jailed republicans. They not merely criticize those who disagree with their tactics, but resort to disruption of a kind that sows confusion, rather than shedding light upon the audience they seek to reach.

For others the opportunities offered by the current shift of opinion are tempting them into what they anticipate to be the larger, more moderate block of people

calling for withdrawal. Often, it is their sincere gamble that building a movement calling for *eventual* withdrawal, though fighting for a more radical line themselves, will speed the whole process up. The balance having been thus tilted in favour of the oppressed in the north, their victory will sever the material base of imperialist consciousness. The revolution in this country will thus be on a sounder footing.

Some others have far more opportunistic reasoning behind their qualified

advocacy of a watered down withdrawal position. They apply the rationale of party building to the situation and look for new cohorts to recruit.

Whatever their motivation, their tactic is misconceived. There will be new forces provoked into activity by revelations of torture and mounting troop casualties. But those drawn into activity by moderate demands are not likely to remain moderate and active. — They will have to choose. What the tactic relies on is the willingness and ability of the labour movement bureaucracy to mobilize and pressure: to do our work for us. But as we have seen with the Anti-Nazi League, a movement that you create to tail end, often starts wagging you!

It is more than probable that a dead-weight of reformist superstars, co-opted onto the leadership of a withdrawal movement, will falter and back down at the crucial moment. They could thus assist, rather than oppose, a solution dictated on Britain's terms. 'Ulsterization' could thus be seen as an acceptable compromise. The strengthening of a strong state loyalist north, in return for the bringing of our boys back home. Should we build a movement that would end up doing that?

The movement we build has to be *structurally* independent of the institutions of reformism, yet be able to act upon them. The United Troops Out Movement, with its demands for Troops Out Now and Self-Determination for the Irish people as a whole, can become just that. Its demands inherently oppose the imposition of imperialist solutions, and are designed not to dictate to the Irish struggle nor be dictated to by any section of it.

The links that UTOM branches have developed with the labour movement over the years of propagandizing activity must be tapped. Much has already been done in

the form of local conferences, joint meetings and dayschools. UTOM plans to involve itself in this year's Labour Party conference fringe meetings on Ireland, and has advocated setting up a UTOM national commission on the labour movement to coordinate initiatives.

An absolute concentration on the labour movement, on whatever level, can however only limit the options for future development. The links established by UТОМ with other arenas of struggle, such as those with black groups fighting British racism, have enriched the left as a whole, providing new insights and potential alliances. The argument put forward by some, such as *Workers Power*, that these connections with oppressed groups can be made exclusively within the labour movement, is erroneous. The very nature of their oppression, as with the Irish, has led them to struggle outside the reformist institutions.

To best capitalize on the gains it has made over the past few years, UTOM must become more coherently structured on a national level, firmly outlining its main priorities of activity. It must also ensure that this structuring does not lead to the development of undemocratic leaderships owing greater allegiance to forces outside of UTOM than to UTOM itself. Control must remain firmly in the hands of the branches. Direct democratic structuring is a need not a luxury if the movement as a whole, and not just its full-timers, is to learn to respond to a rapidly changing pace of development.

All this should, *and must*, come out in the wash at UTOB's national conference in December. Hopefully we will emerge with a movement with a clearer idea of its purpose, able to turn its unique campaigning experiences more effectively still to the benefit of those fighting for their freedom in Ireland.

The revolution and civil war in Spain in 1936-1939 contained some of the greatest moments in the history of the European working class. The largest single organisation of the working class in Spain was the CNT, the anarcho-sindicalist trade union.

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

The answer to that question must be yes. Despite being ignored by most of the revolutionary left in Britain, the libertarian movement has grown rapidly since Franco's death.

The CNT now has perhaps as many as 500,000 members.

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 from LSC, Box 3, 73 Walmgate, York YO1 2TZ. Make cheques payable to York Community Bookshop. Donations towards the work of the LSC would also be gratefully appreciated.

Towards a Fresh Revolution – The Friends of Durruti Group. *New Anarchist Library, Cienfuegos Press.* 48 pages, 75 pence.

This little book comes in a format that reminds one of the little pamphlets that socialists used to produce from the turn of the century onwards, intended for sale to working people, to acquaint them with the basics of socialist ideas. Unfortunately while these cost 1 or 2 pennies, the price of this little volume is rather prohibitive.

However, the contents of the book are very instructive, for those who want to attempt to trace the origins of the libertarian communist current and its development.

Like the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, this document was written after the failure of a revolution. Arshinov, Mett, Makhno and the others wrote in 1926, after they had witnessed the failures of the anarchist movement to consolidate the great sympathy they had among workers and peasants.

This text was written after the betrayal of the Spanish revolution by the Stalinists; compounded by the inadequacy of the leadership of the CNT, the mass libertarian union, and the FAI, the anarchist organisation to combat it.

The Friends of Durruti Group was formed to further the revolution, and to win the war against Franco and the Fascists at the same time. Its members and supporters were anarchist militants who had fought on the battle-fronts. The foreword, written in 1978, was penned by Jaime Balius, one of the leading activists of the group.

The text gives a brief political and economic description of Spain from 1923 onwards up to the revolution and civil war. It denounces the collaboration between the socialist forces and the bourgeoisie, and calls for the socialisation of the economy.

Like the Russian comrades who learnt so much from an actual revolutionary moment, the Friends of Durruti saw that traditional anarchism was lacking. "Revolutions cannot succeed if they have no guiding lights, no immediate objectives Although it had the strength, the CNT did not know how to mould and shape the activity that arose spontaneously in the street. The very leadership was startled by events, which were, as far as they were concerned, totally unexpected. They had no idea which course of action to pursue. There was no theory." The Friends of Durruti, like the Makhno/Arshinov group stepped outside the sacred and hallowed doctrines of anarchism. They saw the need for a central body, a revolutionary junta or national defence council, elected by democratic vote in the union organisations. This body would carry on the management of the war, the supervision of revolutionary order, international affairs and revolutionary propaganda.

The body would be controlled by the assembly of the workers and all posts would be subject to reallocation. This was too much for some anarchists to stomach. They identified this body with the State. They failed to see that would be an organ of the working class to suppress the bosses, and that unlike the

state, it would be under the full democratic control of the masses.

Jose Peirats in his book *'Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution'* (Solidarity Books, Toronto) accuses the Friends of Durruti of "revolutionary Jacobinism". He claims that they never had the importance ascribed to them by foreign historians when all the evidence points to the contrary. "The relative unimportance of its members, POUM participation, and the Marxist flavour of some of its communiques all served to dilute the real influence of the Friends of Durruti."

A partial list at the end of the pamphlet shows that the Friends of Durruti were lifelong activists in the libertarian movement. As to working with the POUM and accusations of Marxism, arguments like these are always used by those in the anarchist movement who cannot rise above the crudest abuse and who wish to remain "pure."

The fact remains that the Friends of Durruti attempted to push the revolution forward, while others vacillated and were bogged down in confusion and in collaboration with the Stalinists and the bosses.

The pamphlet displays some of the weaknesses of the Spanish anarchist tradition. It asserts without evidence that Stain is the epicentre of the European revolution. It is excessively anti-clerical. Also it emphasises the role of the revolutionary unions without reference to other areas of struggle. Nevertheless it is a useful introduction to the ideas of an important and sadly ignored revolutionary current.

International

TIMOR: BREAKING THE SILENCE Student movement-assessment

There has been an almost complete silence on the struggle of the East Timor people for national self-determination, and freedom from their Indonesian oppressors. This in spite of mass slaughter of the population by the Indonesian army.

East Timor was for a long time a colony of the Portuguese Empire. The mountain people have repeatedly proclaimed their right of self-determination since World War 2. They eagerly awaited the first steps to freedom which followed the Portuguese Revolution of 1974. As soon as it was announced independence would be granted several political parties were formed, the foremost being FRETILIN and the UDT. The latter, through its connections with the old colonial administration, its lack of positive policies, and its initial reluctance to support the ultimate goal of full independence was discredited. In August 1975 UDT attempted a coup, starting a civil war which ended a few weeks later with victory for FRETILIN and between 2-3,000 dead.

From September until December 1975, East Timor was administered by FRETILIN, who had a moderate reformist programme. Immediately after this victory, Indonesia began border raids on September 14. On October 16 Indonesian troops with a few Timorese in support roles captured the town of Balibo about 10 km from the border. Five Australian newsmen were murdered by the Indonesians in a fairly well-publicised incident. The town of Atabae fell to Indonesian occupation on November 28 after 2 weeks of intensive bombardment. The expanding Indonesian attacks and lack of foreign reaction led to a decision by FRETILIN to declare independence on November 28 1975.

In all of this, the United States and Australia played their expected reactionary role. The U.S. government and press has denied or concealed the atrocities committed by its Indonesian ally, and has continued to support military aid to the Jakarta regime, which not only massacres the East Timor people, but has imprisoned hundreds of thousands of its own dissidents in concentration camps in appalling conditions.

The United States condemned the invasion, but surely knew about it before it happened. The invasion took place immediately after President Ford and Kissinger had left Jakarta after a visit. Diplomatic cables leaked subsequently in the Australian press reveal that in August 1975 the Australian Ambassador to Jakarta had informed his government that the U.S. State Department had expressed the view that the "U.S. should keep out of the Portuguese Timor situation and allow events to take their course."

The U.S. claimed to have suspended military assistance to Indonesia from December 1975 until June 1976. Military aid during this period was actually above what the State Department had originally proposed to Congress, and has increased since.

In July 1976 East Timor was formally incorporated into Indonesia. Despite this, nine months after 'integration' the Country Officer for Indonesia in the State Department, David Kinney, had to admit that only about 200,000 of the 650,000 people of East Timor "would be considered in areas under Indonesian administration."

The Indonesians in their invasion of East Timor have inflicted the most

frightful massacres, as attested by refugee reports, church officials and letters smuggled out. Almost all independent observers estimate the numbers slaughtered at between 50 and 100,000. The Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Adam Malik, estimated the number killed as "50,000 people or perhaps 80,000" (Age, April 1, 1977). Local priests estimated numbers killed at 100,000. The Australian Parliament Legislative Research Service said that there was mounting evidence that the Indonesians have carried out "indiscriminate killing on a scale unprecedented in post-World War 2 history" (Eds. note: this was before the atrocities in Kampuchea were known to the West).

According to the French photo-journalist Denis Reichle of Paris Match, the Indonesians do not seek combat with FRETILIN forces but "were 'systematically wiping out' the populations of villages known or suspected to be FRETILIN supporters." The Australian MP Michael Hodgman charged in parliament that between 30-40,000 people had died in East Timor because defoliants had destroyed their crops.

Despite these terrible massacres the people of East Timor kept up a fierce resistance, although they were forced to retreat to the mountains from the towns. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the Indonesian troops.

There has been a conspiracy of silence engineered by the United States and Indonesia over the occupation of East Timor. This silence was recently broken by a Portuguese priest who had spent three years in the mountains with the FRETILIN guerillas. Father Leoneto De Rego stated that the Indonesians had forced the population to flee from one area to another without being able either to grow or to harvest their crops. The decline of the resistance in 1978 was due to hunger, and lack of medicine and arms. The FRETILIN guerillas were still using the Portuguese army weapons they were using when Indonesia had invaded. De Rego went on to say that "the East Timorese will never accept the occupation, and I think the resistance will grow again. There is no area where Indonesian control is secure."

While the U.S. administration trumpets loudly and with great ostentation about human rights, it props up some of the vilest totalitarian regimes in the world. 90% of the arms used for the invasion were provided by the U.S. and the Carter government has been stepping up military aid to Indonesia.

As Noam Chomsky said in his address to the United Nations in November 1978 "Whatever the situation may be in Cambodia, it is beyond the reach of Western human rights activists. But the case of East Timor is radically different. Even a show of displeasure by the great power that provided 90% of the arms for the Indonesian invasion and that continues to provide Indonesia with material and diplomatic support for its depredations while labouring to conceal them, would be likely to have significant effects, and the same is true of the other powers that are working to bury the issue as quickly and completely as possible, as they seek to join in the bloodshed by supplying arms themselves." E.L.

The crisis of capitalism in the 1970's has been reflected in the form and content of higher education. From Thatcher's proposals on student union autonomy in 1971/72 through to the latest round of cuts introduced by the Tory government, the student movement has faced a series of concerted attacks. Inevitably the brunt of such attacks is borne by the most vulnerable sections of the student movement such as women, overseas students and students in Further Education colleges. Yet over the past few years the level of resistance by students to the attacks has rarely assumed a significant character.

The explanation of many revolutionaries involved in student politics is that of a "crisis of leadership". Undoubtedly the present Broad Left leadership of NUS have proved in adequate on numerous occasions. However the real problems which students face cannot simply be subsumed to an elitist/Leninist conception of inadequate leadership. The failures of the Broad Left are reflected in the various very real theoretical and practical failures of those groups as related to the various needs and demands of the student movement.

An examination of the current state of the student movement cannot divorce itself from the historical context in which the current situation arose.

In 1962 the Robbins Report envisaged a massive expansion in higher education. At the time there was a definite logic behind these proposals. Historically higher education served primarily as a means to provide a "classical" education to children of the ruling class. The post war "boom" altered this situation. It became increasingly necessary to produce large numbers of skilled intellectual workers capable of satisfying the expanded demand for such people of post-war capitalism.

This can be seen in practice in the nature of the expansion in further education. The greatest

expansion of education occurred in the public sector (i.e. Polytechnics and FE colleges). Such institutions were intended to be orientated towards practical and vocational courses as opposed to the "abstract" orientation of the older universities.

An inevitable result of this situation was the development of a "binary" system of education. This situation is fundamental to any comprehension of the contemporary student movement. Whilst the FE colleges have been a major focus for expansion since 1945, in practise students from such colleges have always occupied an invidious role in comparison to their colleagues in Universities and Polytechnics.

This discrimination can be illustrated in practise in the situation over grants. Since 1962 the full student grant has lost 25% of its value. At the same time the capitalist recession has produced successive cuts in public expenditure, firstly by the last Labour government, and now in an even more severe squeeze in expenditure by the Tories.

In this respect it is students from FE colleges who are most severely affected. Whilst students in Universities and Polytechnics can expect to receive mandatory awards from their local authorities, most students in FE colleges can only hope for "discretionary" awards. The "discretion" possessed by the local authorities involves in practise

complete power to determine whether to award grants to students in FE colleges and also the size of these grants. Frequently grants are refused for the most insignificant of reasons. In practise this means that most FE students receive no grant whatsoever and those who do generally receive sums which can only be described as laughable. The cuts in public expenditure can only serve to make discretionary awards even harder to obtain and the sums involved even less.

There is an economic logic behind the governments cuts in education expenditure. Since the need for skilled intellectual workers which initialled the post war education expansion cannot be denied what is being attempted is to cut the unit-cost of education. The slow drop in the real value of the student grant since 1962, the discrimination against FE students, etc, all reflect this strategy.

Women also occupy an especially invidious role in higher education and one which the cuts can only serve to worsen. Most local authorities view college nurseries as a luxury rather than a necessity. Hence the vast majority of colleges have no nursery facilities or at best grossly inadequate ones. In the present context it is unlikely that the establishment and expansion of nursery facilities is unlikely to be assessed as a major priority. This can only result in many women deterred from seeking higher education. Lack of nursery facilities is not the only form of discrimination against women in higher education. There is a massive degree of conscious/unconscious bias against women in

contd. on back page

LEG DAY SCHOOL

The Libertarian Communist Group is holding a day school in London on Saturday, November 10th. Registration fee will be £1 and those who register in advance will be sent documents relating to topics to be discussed at the day school.

The event will take place in the Small Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn).

The morning session will start at 10 a.m. with an introduction to the Libertarian Communist Group, the reasons for its existence, and the present situation in Britain and abroad. There will be a break for lunch at 12:30; the day school will recommence at 1:30 with history workshops on Spain, Russia, France and Hungary. From 2:45 to 3:45 there will be workshops on Trotskyism, on the book *Beyond the Fragments*, and on Socialism and Democracy. The day school will end with a plenary session on future developments in this country, and the fight ahead. A creche will be provided, so those people who want to attend with children, please let us know in advance, if possible.

We hope that the day school can act as an introduction to those people who are beginning to express an interest in libertarian communist politics and in their development throughout the struggles of the last hundred years. We don't see the day school as a school in the way that is usually understood, with a teacher laying down a set of dogmas to a crowd of passive pupils.

Libertarian communist politics should relate to the way people advance and develop in struggle and

debate. Unlike some left sects, we think that we have as much to learn from people in struggle, as we have to give. As one of our comrades wrote recently in a review of *Beyond the Fragments*: "By their

insistence on the universal validity of their ideas and the identification of 'advanced consciousness' with the party, Leninists have elevated theory above experienced reality, so that it 'hangs above us in ahistorical space'."



Please send me the documents for the day school, for which I enclose £1.00.

I would like to see a workshop on

I am coming with children who will want to use the creche. Their ages are

Name

Address

Post to LCG, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

Libertarian Communist

Student movement -an assessment

contd. from page 7

assumption that women should be doing (for instance) Humanities rather than engineering. Much course content is blatantly sexist in nature. Overseas students are another group suffering from very specific problems. These take the form of quotas applied by colleges to limit the number of overseas students and discriminatory fee levels and accommodation charges. Apart from this there is the tendency for a lot of course content to portray the British Empire as a "civilizing" mission, the unfortunate colonised peoples as "primitives", "savages" etc. Thus the overseas student constantly finds his/her culture downgraded and devalued.

The question of student union autonomy is also very important.

Twice this decade (Thatcher in 1971/72 and the last Labour government in 1978) attempts have been made to bring student union financing under the control of local authorities. This is a clear consequence of the move by student unions away from the function they fulfilled until the late 60s (i.e. basically social clubs) and towards serving as militant and campaigning bodies in the defence of their memberships interests. Through control of union financing local authorities would effectively be able to control the actions of student unions through the threat of with-holding funds. It is inconceivable that the Tories will simply let the question of student union financing rest. This has particularly serious implications

for FE colleges. On the one hand many such colleges have a near-non-existent union structure but on the other in some colleges over the past few years a serious attempt has been made to break out of this situation. The introduction of the kind of proposals seen in 1971 or 1978 would mean a very serious step back for these colleges in particular.

The question of course content has in the past few years been largely ignored by revolutionaries in the student movement in favour of more "bread and butter issues". Yet it is a matter of great importance. Students have virtually no say in the form or content of their education. Most courses dull the critical faculties of the students involved in favour of a passive regurgitation of knowledge passed down from "on high". Given where the control over education lies it is not surprising that its content tends to accept a priori existing social relations. The orientation towards examinations reinforces this situation since most students perceive the passing of these exams as being the primary purpose of their courses. It is vital that a critical look is given to the forms and nature of control of education.

The outline has been given of some (though by no means all) of these issues of concern to the student movement. Yet it is not simply a question of recognizing where problems lie but also the nature of the response made to them which is very important.

The nature of students as a group does produce specific difficulties in developing struggles. Students tend to be isolated and fragmented. Hence struggles tend to be volatile and ephemeral. It is possible to get thousands of students involved in a particular militant action one week and hardly any the next. Revolutionaries must work towards developing a strategy capable of overcoming this problem.

In this respect forms of campaigning and of student union democracy must be considered as being of vital importance.

The only political group which has experienced any growth in the past few years has been the Federation of Conservative Students, paradoxical as this might seem. In the early 70s the FCS has a negligible number of delegates to NUS conference. Now it can fairly consistently rely on 8-90. The basis for this alarming development lies quite specifically with political failures by the left in the student movement.

The Tories have attempted to make considerable political capital out of the issue of "democracy". For them "democracy" means secret ballots as opposed to decision making by mass general meetings. Thus the isolation of the ballot box is counterposed to a situation where students can actually listen to arguments put on particular issues and make decisions on this basis rather than on who can produce the flashiest leaflets, etc.

The response of the left in the student movement to these ideas has been to say the least inadequate. The predominant group in NUS is the Broad Left, comprising an alliance of CPers and left-Labourites. These people have a conception of student unions as being "pressure groups". Thus "progressive" alliances are advocated between student unions and college authorities. By a stroke of the CP magic wand obvious enemies are transformed into apparent friends.

Recent developments have taken the Broad Lefts position to its logical conclusion. Convinced of the need to develop a "broad", "radical" front the Broad Left have developed an alliance with the Union of Liberal Students. To exemplify the levels

to which the Broad Left could sink in its quest for "unity" it is necessary to do no more than point out that at the founding conference of this new alliance last May proposals that its programme should be described as socialist were rejected. Naturally enough the Broad Left share the general characteristics of all union bureaucrats insofar as they have a fear almost running into paranoia of any mass actions which stand to get beyond their control. Thus a wave of occupations in teacher training colleges in 1976 over teacher unemployment was met with active disapproval by the Broad Left. The total failure of the Broad Left to develop a perspective which goes beyond "negotiations" means that they have little of value to offer socialists in the student movement.

The revolutionary alternative is largely posed by two organisations, SWSO, student organisation of the SWP, and the Socialist Students Alliance. The SWP nationally have tended towards a sectarian attitude coupled with a grossly inflated sense of their own importance. In practice their politics amount to little more than rhetorical calls to "build the party".

The Socialist Students Alliance was set up two years ago and operates on a distinctly different basis to the SWP. It recognised the definite desirability of a unity of socialist forces in the student movement opposed to the practice of the Broad Left. It could offer coherent alternatives as opposed to mere calls to "Join the party".

Nevertheless it has to be admitted that the SSA has very real political shortcomings and that these to a considerable extent reflect the dominant position of the IMG in the organisation. The IMG's interpretation of the state of the student movement is taken straight from the Transitional Programme and hence issues are reduced to a question of "Leadership". In practice this has resulted in undue attention to NUS Conference, elections etc. At times there has seemed a real danger of the SSA simply becoming a kind of left bureaucratic alternative to the Broad Left rather than a focus for students in struggles. Unfortunately events do not in practice fit into the IMG's neat timetable of getting the correct people elected to NUS executive, getting the right motions passed at conference and then building campaigns.

For the SSA to have any real relevance it is vital that links are built with students in struggle rather than developing a concentration on bureaucratic procedures.

The SSA has made a great deal of the running debates such as that on student union autonomy. It has developed a significant level of support in many colleges. What is now necessary is the development of a socialist opposition in the student movement capable of providing an alternative in action to the Broad Left.

Comrades active within the student movement are urged to work within the SSA. Despite its shortcomings the SSA has at least begun to develop a conception of a fight back against the reformist policies of the Broad Left. The period of the Tory government is without doubt going to witness a concerted attack on student union autonomy, further discrimination against overseas students, an even greater decline in the real value of the grant etc. In these circumstances it is vital that a socialist alternative is offered. The SSA lays at least the basis for this kind of opposition. It is up to student militants to see that it materialises in practice.

Tim Gregory.

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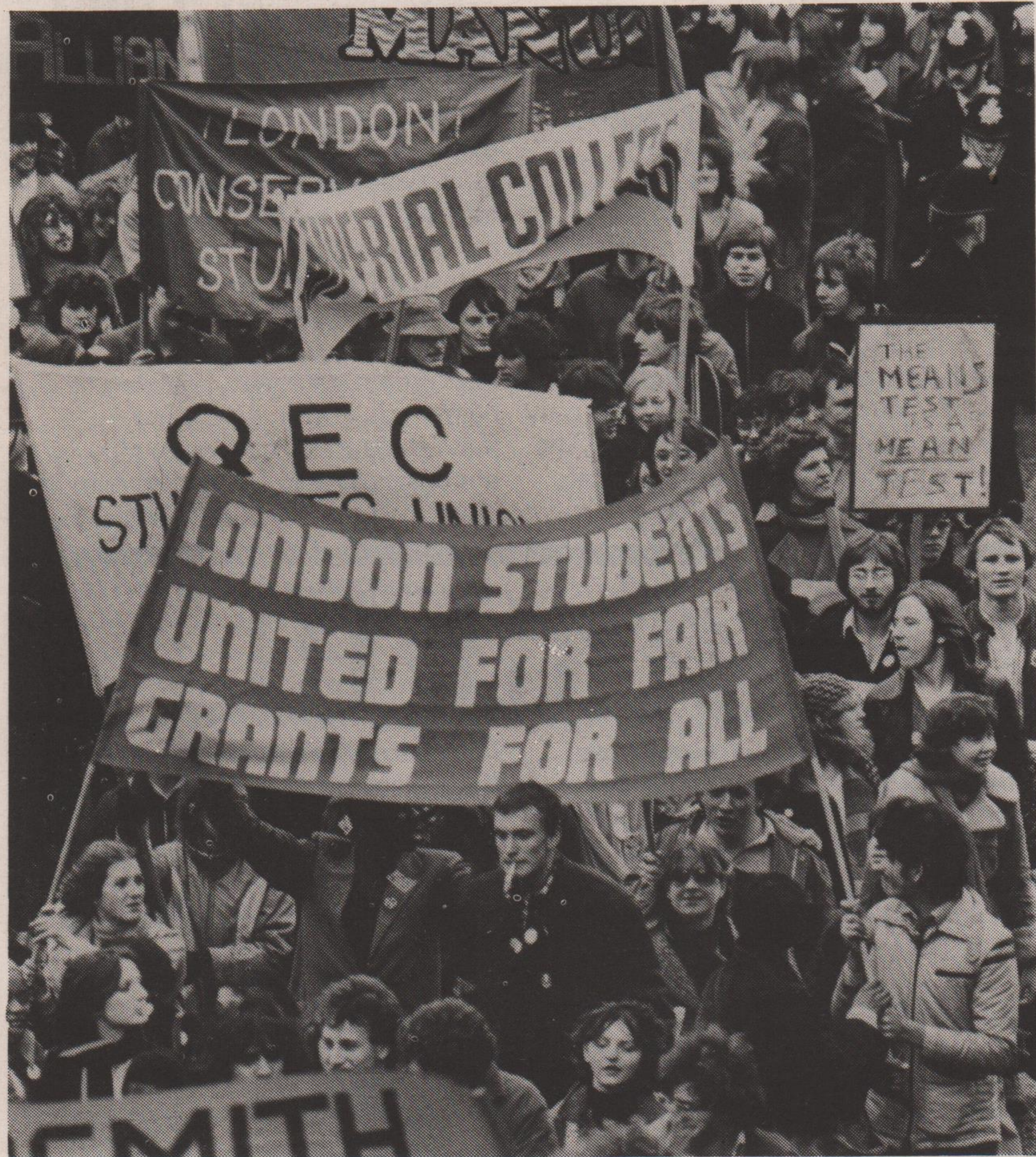


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