

Revolutionary Socialism

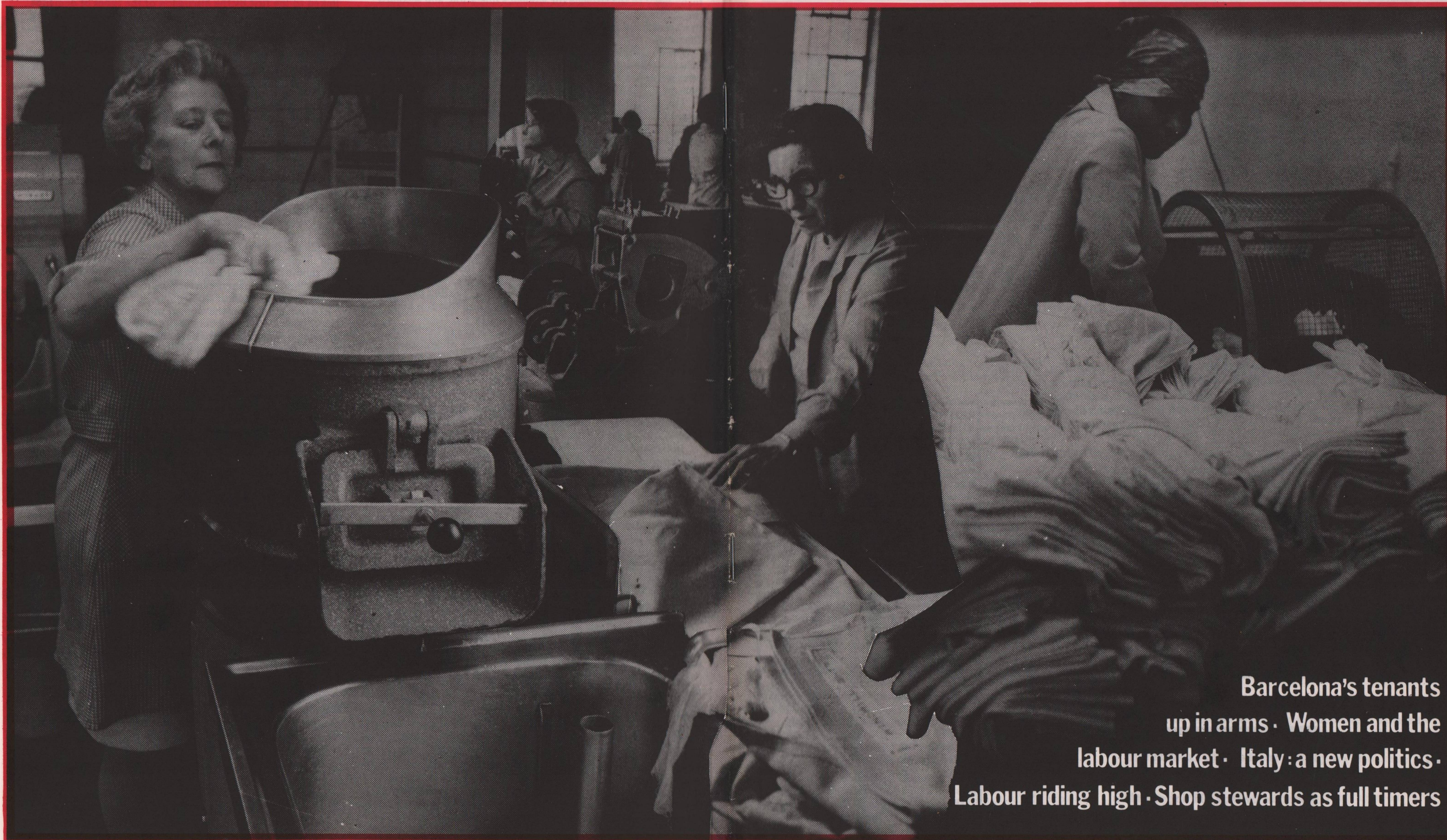
The Journal of Big Flame

Revolutionary Socialism

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3

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Barcelona's tenants
up in arms · Women and the
labour market · Italy: a new politics ·
Labour riding high · Shop stewards as full timers

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RED NOTES — WORKERS' AUTONOMY AND THE CRISIS

Red Notes publishes a series of pamphlets about the development of working class struggles in the UK and abroad. Detailed accounts, combined with interview materials, useful chronologies and relevant background materials (maps, charts etc). We are Marxists, and base our work on the "working class autonomy" perspectives developed in recent Italian theory.

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A 1978 Dossier is also being prepared, plus work on a 1972 Dossier, on the TGWU, and on Prison Struggles. For further details, write to Red Notes, Box 15, 2a St Paul's Road, London N.1.

THE LAST twenty years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of part-time women workers. How and why has this happened and what are its implications for the trade union movement? Collen Chesterman and Jill Hardman look at the changing pattern of employment since the war, and at what it has meant for women.

Some call it an advance

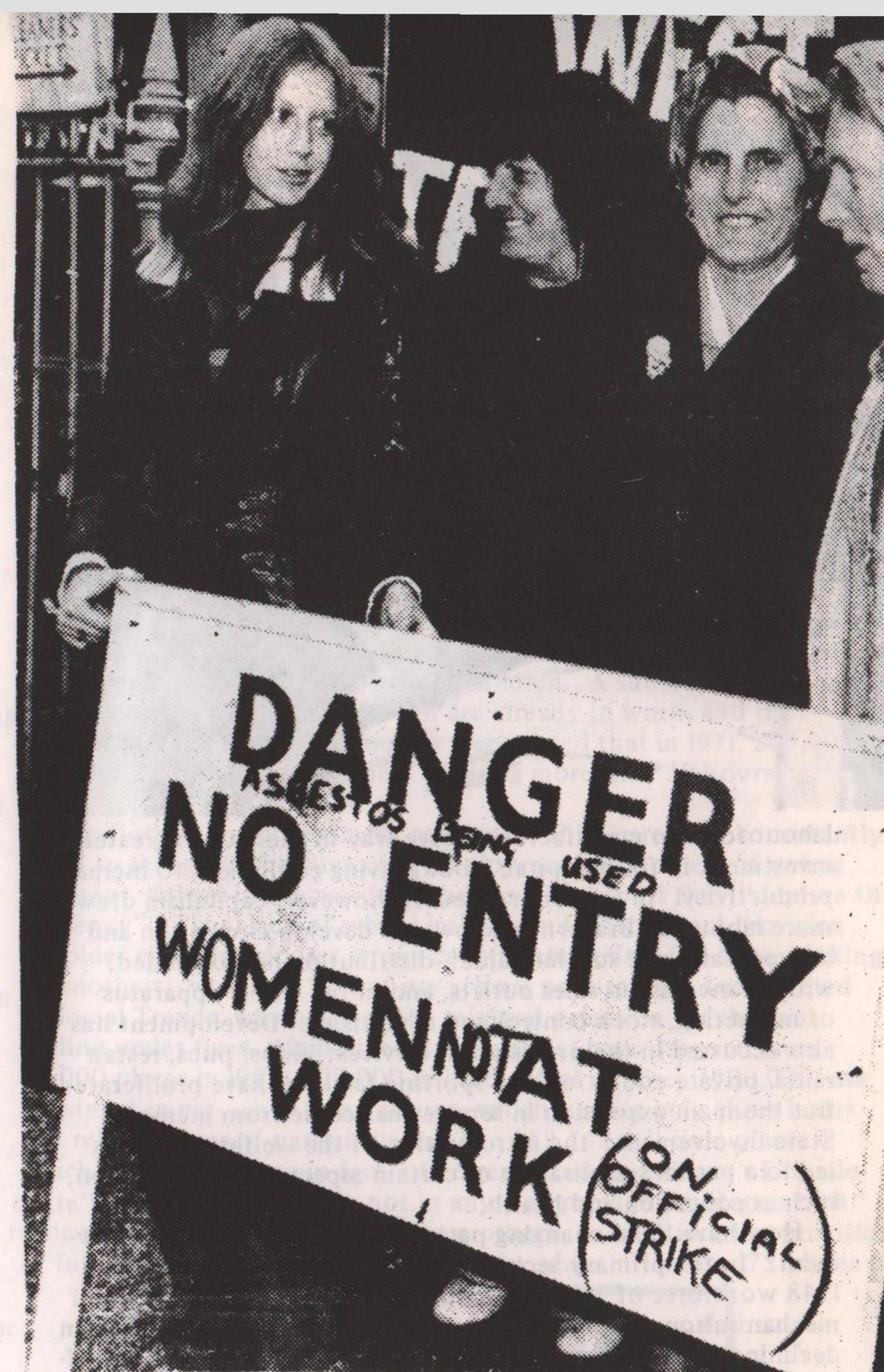
The entry of women into waged work is traditionally seen by Marxists as a progressive force, but it is neither so simple, nor is it unproblematic.

Women are caught: they retain all their domestic responsibilities with little assistance in terms of social provision, so that they enter the labour market on unequal terms. Thus, in waged work they are disadvantaged in terms of wages, conditions, and employment stability — in almost every respect.

In the immediate post-war period, the development of part-time work was seen as a way of resolving these contradictions, to the extent of enabling women to manage two roles. We show this development, but our argument is that in no way can part-time work under capitalism resolve the problem; for in fact, it exploits the situation of women, its instability, cheapness etc. are advantages reaped by employers, and the women bear a double burden.

It is informative, when viewing women's employment, to differentiate between manufacturing and service sectors. In both spheres, employers utilise the 'flexibility' which part-time working provides; in manufacturing, fluctuations in employment are more marked, and in services where part-time work is more structured, cheapness and availability during unsocial hours are crucial. The long term crisis in British capitalism and recent recession have thrown into sharper relief, the problems for women — heightening the fluctuations, increasing employment and earnings instability while on top of this, social service provision is being cut.

What role have trade unions played in this situation? The demand for part-time workers remains, and so does the need for such income as this provides. Trade unions have not proved, on the whole, receptive to the problems of working women, and are slow to change either the view that part-timers are peripheral or those policies which simply serve to reinforce the position of this group of particularly exploited workers. We would like to suggest that this situation must change and that women's struggle to change it is an important one and should not be underrated.



To begin with, therefore, we will examine the changing pattern of women's employment since the second world war. First it is necessary to understand some part of the wider context within which changes in patterns of women's waged work have occurred; for instance, the way the structure of employment as a whole has altered both between and within different industrial sectors and occupations in this country. These changes are themselves a consequence of complex long term movements in capital accumulation, characterised by the uneven contraction and expansion of interrelated economic spheres — not merely on a national scale.

But all that can be attempted here is a brief sketch outlining the main changes in the structure of the labour force as a whole, within which we can outline some dominant features of women's employment. We go on to examine these developments in more detail than has been done hitherto, in the hope that this will enable us to understand more precisely the implications of the 1974-75 recession on women's employment, and some longer term aspects of the crisis in British capitalism, which must include some discussion of the responses of the trade union movement — in terms of the influx of women into the labour force and to aspects of this crisis.

EMPLOYMENT SINCE WORLD WAR II

The period since the second world war has seen a dramatic transformation of the pattern of employment in the United Kingdom. The long period of expansion, characterised as the third technological Revolution, initially saw an increase in the rate of profit, marked by increased concentration and centralisation of capital, improved production techniques and reductions in the value of raw materials. Initially the labour force expanded as capitalist employers looked for new areas of expansion and development, provided in manufacturing by consumer goods industries, and chemicals. But the growth of the



labour force in manufacturing gave way in the face of greater investment in fixed capital, labour saving equipment to increase productivity. In the services sector, however, capitalism drew in more labour, as Braverman shows, to develop circulation and the realisation of surplus value: distribution has expanded, with an increase in sales outlets, and in the whole apparatus of marketing, stock control and advertising. Development has also occurred in the provision of services; clubs, pubs, restaurants, private education and sporting facilities have proliferated. But the main expansion in services has come from increased State involvement: the introduction of the welfare state has led to a partial socialisation of certain aspects of reproduction, such as education and health.

How have these changing patterns affected areas of employment? In the primary sector (agriculture and mining), the 1948 workforce of 1½ million has more than halved, because of mechanisation and the development of cheaper fuel sources. In declining industrial sectors, such as textiles and clothing manufacture, facing overseas competition and dramatic technological advances, there has been a long term decline in employees: textiles, for example, has shed 101,000 workers since 1971, following a loss of 255,000 in the previous twenty years. Expanding industries, such as food and drink manufacture, with the growing markets in convenience foods, tinned, dried or frozen, took on large numbers of workers in the twenty years after the war and have begun to shed labour only in the last five years. In many of these industries, however, the main job losses are yet to come. Particularly in electronics, the revolution founded on micro technology will mean a change from skilled, labour intensive work to the relatively simple assembly of bought in parts. K.G. Corfield, managing director of STC has pointed out that the introduction of System X, a wholly electronic system of telecommunications "would eliminate the jobs of 90% of the workforce currently employed on the production of TXE4, the semi-electronic system." (*Financial Times*, 11.3.77)

In the services sector however, the picture is completely different. As we have mentioned, much of the growth can be attributed to the expansion of the state sector, both in the field of state intervention in the economy and in the growth of welfare services. Professional and scientific services have expanded, particularly higher education since the publication of the Robbins Report. Local authorities have increased their budgets, and with them the associated accountancy and organisational functions. But not all the growth in the services can be attributed to the expansion of state bureaucracy, as Bacon and Eltis would seem to suggest. The increasingly complex organisation of monopoly capitalism has called for the growth of a vast administrative apparatus, both to control internal structures, and to administrate the network of credit, financial and marketing services which companies need in order to enter the market on competitive terms.

In short, the pattern of employment in Britain since World War II shows several distinctive features, common to most advanced

countries. There has been a decline in the traditional areas of waged work, in the manufacturing industries, and an increase in the services sector, which is highly labour intensive. This shift is mirrored within the industrial sector, by a shift in occupations, from manual jobs to jobs defined as non-manual, even if much office and shop work has now been deskilled. It has, as well, been a shift from highly paid and highly organised sectors, such as mining, to relatively low paid and un-unionised sectors. Finally it has been characterised by a shift from male, full time jobs to female and often part time jobs, a shift which raises important implications for labour.

WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

The changes in the structure of employment have meant that women have now assumed an unprecedented importance in the waged workforce. In June 1976, almost 9 million women were in paid employment, and this figure does not include women working in small businesses or as homeworkers, who would number at the very least estimate, another ¼ million. This means that women constitute 41% of the workforce. Table 1 gives some indication of how these numbers have risen since the 1951 census, an overall rise of 26%. During the same period male employment has declined from 16 million in 1951, to 13,097,000 in 1976.

Obviously it is an important question to ascertain how this change has occurred. It should first be realised that the change has not occurred evenly across all sectors of employment. It has taken place in the context of a strong sexual division of labour which relegated women workers to a few delimited areas of employment; Judith Hunt has described this as the "existence of a sexual apartheid at work which is a central factor in the low pay and limited opportunities that face women in industry." (*Organising Women Workers*) Table 2, drawn from the 1976 census of employment, shows the existence of this segregation. The reasons for such a split are complex. Some industries such as the preparation of food, or clothing manufacture are associated with traditional female tasks. Others such as light engineering were initially highly labour intensive, and utilised women as a cheap source of labour. The service sector again would seem to develop some of the personal care attributes which are associated with women in their domestic role. What is clear however, is that once industries have been classified as women's industries, once the sexual division of labour is established, both male workers and employers reinforce the distinction. Male workers will not enter these sectors characterised as they are by low pay, lack of status; employers find it in their interest to continue to draw on women workers, whose assumed dependence on a husband ensures that they can be paid less than a living wage, and be kept in a low position in the job hierarchy.

Looking in this way at industry statistics is only one way of seeing women's segregation in the job market. We need as well an occupational breakdown linked to the industrial classification, which would show how women are restricted to certain jobs in those industries. This is not available, though research has shown how, for example, in the car industry women are limited to certain tasks: clerks, canteen assistants, seat cover makers. In distribution, an industry where women form 50% of the workforce, they in fact comprise 80% of shop assistants, the lowest paid category. Some sense of occupational hierarchies can be gained from the 1971 census. This shows that 75% of all women workers were employed in only four occupational groupings:

	Total	% of female workers
Total female employees	8,334,100	
Clerical workers	2,429,800	29.1%
Service, sport, recreation	1,931,700	23.2%
Professional, technical, artists	994,600	11.9%
Sales workers	896,400	10.7%

These occupations in turn rapidly become stereotyped as women's occupations. In 1911, one clerk in five was a woman, by 1971, three out of four were women. The isolation is remarkable: 1.1 million work in jobs where 90% of the workforce are female (nurses, typists, canteen assistants); another 2.2 million work in

jobs where over 75% of the workforce are women (shop assistants, cleaners, hairdressers). We should note that more than any other factor this segregation has made the achievement of Equal Pay impossible; there are simply not many jobs where women do the same or broadly similar work as a man. It is therefore not surprising that full-time women's average weekly earnings have risen from 55.6% of men's in 1971 to only 64.3% in 1976.

The existence of this strong sexual division which leads to the separation of men's and women's work is particularly significant in that so much of the post war expansion of employment has occurred in sectors which are characterised as women's work, such as services both in the private and the public sector. Women have not in any clear sense been used as a substitute for male labour, or even as part of a "deskilling" process, though this has obviously happened in particular firms. Instead, the influx of women into paid work has been in the development and expansion of new areas. The "demand" for female labour cannot be seen as a simple reason for the increase, but points to a complex interrelationship between the expansion of capitalist accumulation and the sexual division of labour. Capitalism has utilised the already existing sexual and hierarchical divisions within the workforce to pull into employment a large, and vulnerable sector.

The final factor we should consider in the increased employment of women is the availability of labour from other sources. The implementation of Keynesian policies in the immediate post-war period has led to "full" male employment. By 1951, 96% of all single women were also in employment. Other European nations were beginning to make use of the system of guest-workers, and Britain during the 1950's had welcomed Commonwealth immigration for work in the public transport and national health service. But in the early 1960's Conservative calls for immigration control, leading to the 1962 restrictions on Commonwealth immigration limited this supply of workers. For the massive labour force needed in particular for the labour intensive service industries, married women were the obvious source.

WAGED LABOUR AND DOMESTIC WORK

Thus the post-war period has seen an increasingly intense contradiction between women's participation in waged work outside the home but no equivalent socialisation of the areas of domestic work which had become increasingly defined as her preserve during the development of industrialisation in the Victorian era. The ideological thrust of much legislation in the post-war period, most particularly the

Beveridge report, affirmed women's primary role as that of homemaker wife and mother, an ideology supported by the popularisation of Freudian theories about the importance of maternal deprivation by psychologists such as John Bowlby.

Yet more married women are available for waged work. Women are marrying younger, and having fewer children spaced more closely, so that their child-bearing years take up less time. The availability of contraception and abortion facilities has helped free women from unwanted child-bearing. While in pre-war years the normal pattern seemed to be for women to marry late and to leave work on marriage, the post-war pattern of childbearing meant that women tended to leave the labour force on the birth of their first child, to spend the years between 20 and 30 in child care, and then to be ready for return to work after 30. The department of Employment, Jan 1974., has done a series of analyses which show the increased participation rates of women over 30. But recent evidence from Family Expenditure Survey and Thomas Coram Institute, shows in fact that women are now tending to look for work even during the years spent looking after pre-school children. A substantial number of women with children under ten are already in work, and the number is rising rapidly: it has been estimated that in 1971, 205,000 pre-school children had mothers working more than 30 hours per week.

Significantly the government reports on child-care have consistently failed to recognise the increasing employment of mothers of young children: indeed in the words of the Plowden report they "deplore the tendency". Thus, lack of school holiday and after-school provision for older children imposes strong constraints against full-time working for mothers; while the lack of pre-school provisions is documented in Social Trends, which shows the minimal provision for the four million under fives. Maintained day nurseries have dropped from 40,000 places in 1951 to 27,000 in 1976. Most children (400,000) are registered in pre-school play groups, which run for only three hours and rely on parents' participation. The 112,549 full-time places which are provided are in fact, often restricted to children of "inadequate" mothers, and thus do not in any way provide a system which recognises the real needs of working mothers. In addition, the provision of full-time day care is regionally varied: while in London 72 places per



In the teachers' union, 75 per cent of the members are women—but only 8 per cent of the officials. How equal are women in your union?

1,000 children are provided, in the North this drops to 17. It is not surprising that one researcher found that most working mothers relied on unofficial family help with child-care to enable them to work. It is also not surprising that most surveys available show that up to 40% of non-employed mothers would like to work if adequate child care facilities were available. Little wonder that large numbers of these women are condemned to the grossly exploitative system of home-working.

If facilities for socialised child rearing are limited, and pose a threat to women's ability to work, even more limited are the opportunities for women to rid themselves of other aspects of housework. There is little evidence that the sexual division of labour within the family has altered to present a more equal distribution of tasks. Although the sales of labour saving goods such as freezers, washing machines etc. have risen, they are by no means universal and many workers are unable to afford them. But even the possession of these appliances does not necessarily alter the time a woman spends on housework because the maintenance of a house with modern appliances, with concomitant rise in standards often expected, means that the hours expended on housework have remained relatively constant through the century. In addition, women's responsibilities for sick members of the family, for the care of aged parents and relatives remains, and is not assisted by any sizeable state provision. Services such as contraception and abortion which enable her to get some freedom from constant child-bearing, often involve much time and energy to attain; indeed the provision of family planning services has declined since they became part of the National Health Service. The maintenance of the present abortion law (limited though it is) is a constant struggle.

THE GROWTH OF PART-TIME WORK

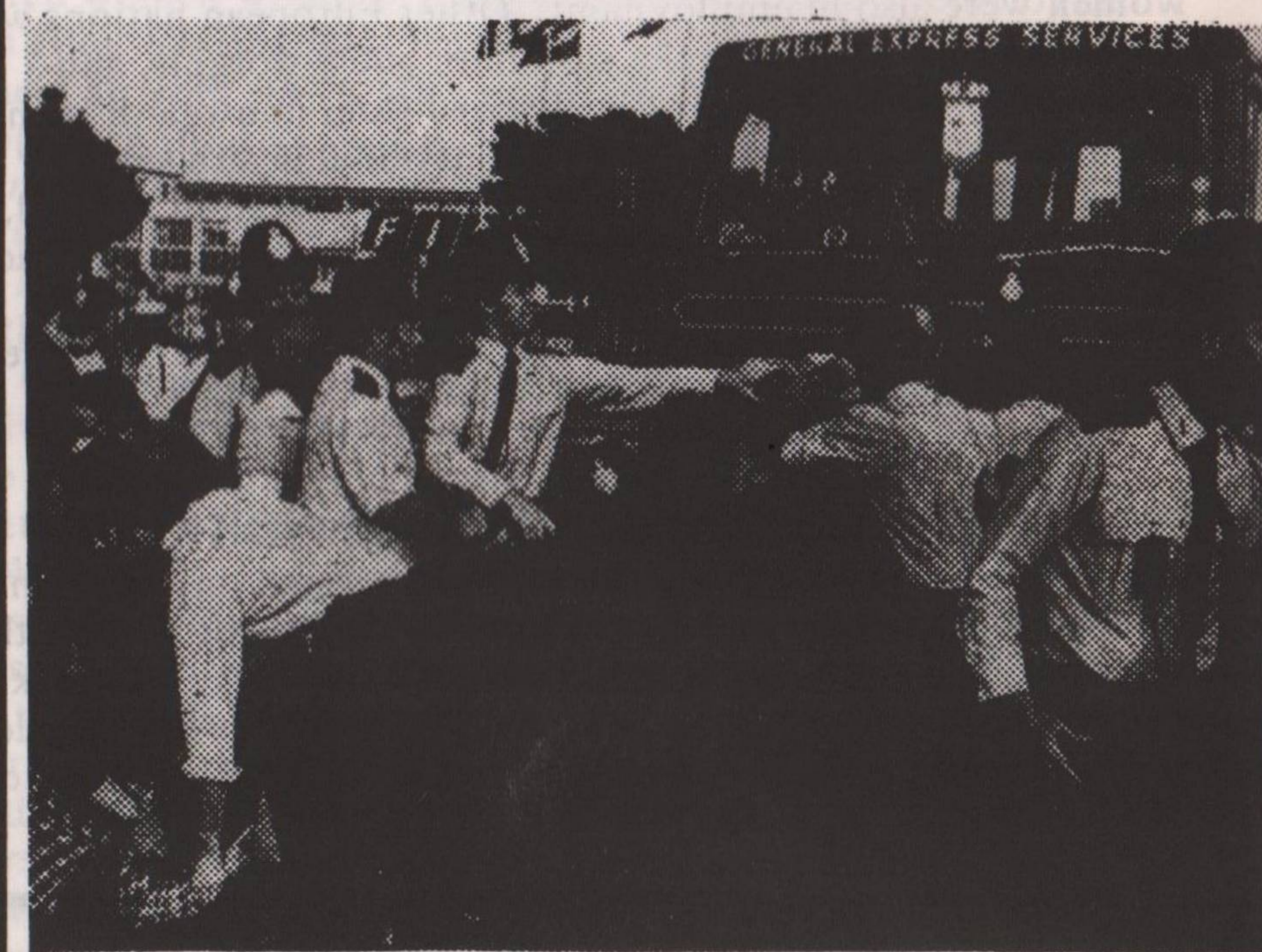
An outcome of the contradictory demands of home and work, a way of managing them, would seem to be demonstrated in the enormous growth of part time work since the war. It is probable that women had long been working part time and were not picked up in the census statistics but it was not until the 1960's that it was realised that part time work had become such an important structural component of women's work. For women's work it undoubtedly is. In June 1976, one in five employees were working part time, which is defined as under 30 hours. The majority, four out of five of these part timers, 3,585,000 out of 4,284,000 were women. While only one male worker out of twenty works part time, two women out of every five do so.

From the 1971 census it is possible to get a picture of the sort of women who work part time: they are married (83%), returning to work after a period of child bearing (80% were over 35) and with small families. The majority worked over twelve hours a week, many of them between 24 and 30 hours. It is clear that much part time work takes place during unsocial hours, or, if seasonal, is intensive during holiday periods. Thus part time work imposes a tremendous strain on those very family relationships whose existence would seem to require it — not to mention the strain on the woman herself.

If we look at the distribution of part time work by industry, we realise that it is extremely concentrated, more so even than women's work as a whole. Within manufacturing it is performed almost entirely by women, and its incidence is marked only in those industries where large numbers of women work. For example, in vehicles, with a small female workforce, only 2% of the workers are part time employees in clothing and footwear, with a larger proportion of women, 16% of the workforce is part time. It is most common in food and drink manufacture, where 35% of the female workforce is part time; it would seem these workers are used to cover seasonal fluctuations in food processing.

Nevertheless, although part time work is not an integral part of work organisation in manufacture, it has increased over the post war period. In 1950, only 12% of the female workforce were part time, but by 1976 this had risen to 23%. Thus the rise in the numbers and proportion of part time workers has accompanied the decline in the number of full time employees which we have already referred to and which is shown in Table 4.

In the services sector part time work becomes more significant. Although full statistics are not available before 1970, we do know that between 1961 and 1971 employment in services rose by 1.3 million, 1.2 million of whom were part time women workers. Overall services employ the greatest number of part timers: 85% of all female part time workers in services, and 87% of all male part timers. But it is women workers who dominate in each of the sectors where part timers are employed.



In these sectors part time work has obviously become integrated into the organisation of the labour process.

This integration is confirmed when we consider how across all industries jobs of a service nature have been overwhelmingly constituted as both female and part time. 87% of cleaners are female, and 87% of those work part time; 96% of canteen assistants are female, and 69% of those work part time. Evidently employers have found it advantageous to use part time working to cover short term market or seasonal fluctuations, and particularly useful over the mini-boom of 1973-4. Little advertising is needed to recruit a relatively tame labour force quickly, complementing a longer term policy of shedding labour through the process of rationalisation which goes hand in hand with technological change. The part time labour force may then be shed in the face of recession, and shed with extraordinary rapidity. As the figures for electrical engineering show, they are fired instead of the full timers: in the two years from 1974 38% of the female part time workforce lost their jobs, compared to 15% of the full time female workers.

It is also possible to see that the growth in services is accompanied by a marked increase in part time workers — possibly absorbed from the manufacturing sector. This option is less available to male workers thrown out of industry, because of sexual divisions, and the associated low pay. But rationalisation is taking place in some areas of services as well, involving a shift of some processes e.g. food preparation from the service area proper into manufacturing. Food can be prepared on production lines, and distributed to canteens, where it requires merely heating and serving. Similar changes can be seen with the centralisation of laundry services, typified in a small way by the use of roller towels. In retailing, commodity presentation, previously the work of shop assistants, or specialist displayers, is now largely taken over by pre-packaging processes done in the factory, and the assistants become shelf fillers.

As a result of these changes the flow of work is rationalised and can be controlled as a production process. But where work is subject to the demands of clients and consumers, a demand which cannot easily be controlled, part time jobs are left, unskilled and low paid, drawing on a labour force who are restricted to such work.

Clearly the fact that women need part time work lends an element of compulsion which serves the "needs" of capital in important respects. It is an advantage to employers to take on part timers because they are lower paid than full timers in most situations, because they are effectively excluded from most bonus schemes, and from sick pay and pension schemes. (none of which are covered by the protections afforded part timers working over 16 hours in the Employment Protection Act). And yet part-timers also have a reputation for working with higher productivity than full timers, particularly since statutory meal breaks and tea breaks can be missed.

But perhaps an even more important factor for employers is the flexibility in the use of labour which part time working can provide. This is true of both manufacturing and services, although the flexibility needs of the two sectors may appear to differ. In services in particular flexibility is needed to meet peak demand during certain times of the day or week:

"part time employment is vital for an economic and flexible manning policy given the wide fluctuations in trading activity which traders experience in any week." (Distributive Trades Economic Development Council, 1976). Similarly it may be in the nature of some jobs, e.g. serving school meals, that workers are required only for a few hours at certain times.

In manufacturing we can see that firms operating under ever larger investment in fixed capital, characteristic of monopoly capitalism, seek to avoid what can prove to be increasingly expensive fluctuations and uncertainty from the market. Twilight shifts and other part time systems provide an easy means of rapidly extending or reducing plant utilisation, particularly of expensive machinery, and of increasing the length of the working day.

In the end, the question of flexibility comes down to one of costs. Employers count labour's inflexibility as a cost to themselves and it is important to see that their attempts to gain flexibility are imposed as a cost to the workers in terms of employment instability and earnings insecurity. Where organised labour has succeeded in gaining employment stability for large sections of the workforce, employers' room to manoeuvre is more limited, and "flexibility" may be passed on, where possible, to other groups

Table 1: Growth of female labour force showing the increased participation of married women

	1951	1961	1971
Total labour force	22,610,000	23,381,000	25,103,000
Number of women in labour force	7,419,000	8,064,000	8,584,000
Women workers as % of all women	34.7	38.0	43.0
Women workers as % of labour force	30.8	32.5	36.6
Married women as % of female labour force	38.2	50.2	63.1
Total number of married women working	2,700,000	—	5,800,000
Married women working as % of all married women	22.0	—	42.0

Source: Extracts from Census of Population

less well organised, or easier to utilise in this way: immigrants, women, part timers. While male workers will do overtime, and struggles around it come to constitute a central trade union issue, employers find it easy to institute or abolish a twilight shift for women.

The relative weakness of these groups of workers will remain as long as they are considered marginal, peripheral to trade unions' main concerns. For example part timers who find themselves the butt of employers' policies may be considered expendable by other protected groups of workers. Women workers may be criticised for causing youth unemployment. Their vulnerability is exemplified when we consider what has happened to the employment of women during the recession.

WOMEN AND THE RECESSION

What impact has the recession had on women's employment? proportion of women represented as part of the total unemployed has risen to 28% and is still rising. Even though women's full time employment has fallen less than men's, the unemployment rate among women has quadrupled — indicating a massive increase in the numbers of women seeking paid work, or seeking to change from part time to full time employment. And the figures of unemployed women are substantially understated: the Department of Employment estimates that up to 200,000 women do not register, which could also be a low estimate in that other sources have suggested that only a third of women actually seeking work register. If this were so, the number of unemployed women would be 1.2 million.

In manufacturing industries, the effects of recession within the longer term capital restructuring has resulted in exaggerated trends rapid cuts implemented through lay-offs, or direct job loss caused through bankruptcies and closure. In a redundancy situation women, and part timers in particular, are under heavy pressure to leave e.g. in GEC's seven Coventry factories, evening shifts, including one of 700 women, have been cut with one days notice, in supposed response to cuts in Post Office orders, though very much in a long term pattern of job shakeout.

In the services sector, the picture is somewhat different. Private sector services, e.g. finance, retailing, hotels and catering have appeared less directly responsive to the recession, while in the public sector the full weight of the political decision to implement expenditure cuts has yet to be felt. There has as yet been little direct job loss, but instead a general policy of job freezing and attempts to cut hours, as part of an overall work intensification process which is hard to combat. In sectors such as nursing, these policies often lead to inadequate coverage of wards, and intensified work for the remaining staff. In sectors such as teaching, part time staff are being employed instead of full timers, often teaching more hours than the permanent staff but with none of the security. But as the cuts bite deeper, and the programme stretches to the 1980's, the effects on women, both as predominant employees in the public sector, and as unpaid providers of care in the home, will be heavily felt.

We have already pointed out that with the strict sexual division of labour in our society, most domestic labour — household, child-care etc.

is performed by women. Although this article has concentrated on waged work, we cannot ignore the effects of the recession on domestic work.

Obviously, the initial effects of the recession in terms of unemployment of one or more members of the family, has led to falling wages; this, combined with rising prices, has made the business of housing and feeding a family much more difficult. This is particularly true for low income families, who as the Low Pay Unit point out, spend proportionately more of their income on necessities; the price of these necessities has risen more than the price of luxuries which form part of spending of families with higher incomes. The difficulty of women's budgeting is often not emphasised, but surveys have shown that house-keeping money allocated from the wage-packet has not risen in the last ten years, and often husbands are readier to blame the woman for "bad management" than the difficulty of stretching a limited budget.

But other aspects of women's work in the home are also affected by wider aspects of the crisis in particular the cutbacks in social services spending on areas which have taken over some of the "caring" functions previously preformed in the family. The post-war period has seen growth in residential and day-care centres which have assisted in the care of the elderly, the sick and handicapped. These are now being cut, in particular residential care, from a growth rate of 13.8% in the early '970's to a growth rate of 4.6%. While caring for an elderly or sick person in their own or a relative's home may be more humane, the women in the family, normally responsible for this care needs help from back up services such as day centres and home helps. And instead of these community care services expanding, they are being even more savagely cut.



Women at Courtaulds' Wigan factory demonstrate against its closure.

THE TRADE UNIONS

How can women organise in response to these changes which affect every aspect of their lives? Trade unions may become one possible channel for women in paid employment, but unions are reluctant to pursue demands which extend beyond the workplace, even though their female membership is so dependent on facilities which lighten the domestic burden in order to enter and remain in waged work. There are, moreover, fundamental difficulties. On the one hand, these organisations pursue general policies accepting wage restraint and cuts in state services — and thus reinforce the generally high unemployment rate for women. On the other hand, they pursue bargaining policies which specifically nominate part-time workers e.g. a twilight shift, to be the first laid off. Clearly, the ability of women to push through their demands strongly and consistently, is undermined at the start. The unemployed no longer hold a union card, and short-term membership is no basis for organisation.

Nevertheless, women have been joining trade unions in large numbers and at a faster rate than men. Between 1948 and 1974 women increased their total union membership by 89%, and men by under 12%, but still over half the male work force is unionised as against just over a third of women workers. Part of the problem of getting their interests represented is both due to, and reflected by the under representation of women in positions of responsibility in trade unions, which is very marked (see Judith Hunt, Sept. 1975). This is so, even in industries dominated by women, for example, 80% of shop-workers are female and they comprise over half the membership of U.S.D.A.W., which nevertheless, only has five women out of 124 full-time officials, only one woman on the executive, and one woman out of 25 in research, only 15% of local level councils, 17% of Branch secretaries and five out of 21 delegates, are women.

It is interesting to note the possibilities of a more expansive outlook where a trade union pursues a positive organising policy directed towards women, such as the National Union of Public Employees, recruiting many part-timers and showing very rapid growth — total membership doubled in ten years from 1965 and the proportion of female membership increased from just under a half to two-thirds in the same period. N.U.P.E. has played a central part in the campaign against the cuts, but even so, has failed to widen issues beyond traditional trade union boundaries. Last year the executive squashed proposals to campaign against the rise in price of school meals. The result was a 10p rise in the cost of school meals to 25p per day and a drop of 650,000 in the numbers of children eating them. Women have been doubly affected: as canteen workers they have had their hours cut and replacement posts are left unfilled; as mothers they have had to provide hot meals at home or packed lunches. (The number of children taking their own food to school is up by 68% in one year). A further 10p rise is predicted this September (Labour Research March 1978). Within trade unions these issues are being raised by women, but unfortunately too, this is often where their struggle starts. This year N.U.P.E. delegates succeeded with a motion at the T.U.C. Women's Conference requiring free provision for the under-fives to be made a major priority area of public investment. Will this lead to an effective trade union — led campaign, or is it just another motion, more words?

Still, even in terms of traditional trade union practice, much can be done to further the interests of women workers. The Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination legislation are evidently inadequate in that they in no way confront the unequal sexual division of labour, but are still important tools for women to use. Similarly, the Employment Protection Act does offer some protection, even for part-timers; but the very fact that employers are able to cut hours below 16, makes us doubt that the legislation will ever be adequate. Indeed, given the current debate about reducing the working week, it may be better to campaign for protection for all workers, regardless of how many hours they work.

Action outside the union movement, but not in isolation from it, is also necessary. Experience gained in local community struggles has shown how important it is to make links with the local labour movement as well; workers involved in the "Wandsworth Fight-back" have formed an area shop-stewards committee, which cuts across trade union lines and will, hopefully begin to break down rigid distinctions between what happens within the workplace and outside it. All women, not only those in employment, are, as we have seen, central in any campaign against the cuts. The national momentum of this campaign has died, but in individual places, such as the E.G.A. Hospital work-in and the south Oxford nursery, where parents and community refused closure and occupied, there are still examples of how we must go forward. There are few campaigns which link demands associated with both home and work — the Working Women's Charter Campaign, with its Ten Demands did attempt to do this. However, the discussions at the moment going on within the Women's Liberation Movement about the status of the Six Demands and the process of clarifying who they are made for and how campaigns should be waged, may produce a plan for action.

Shop stewards as full-time officials



Last autumn's Ford strike saw the growth of a rank and file combine committee in competition with the national convenor and steward structure.

Three interrelated problems assume central importance for a Marxist understanding of trade unionism. They are indicated by the familiar but imprecise concepts of sectionalism, economism and corporatism. Trade union action is both a manifestation of class struggle and a reflection of the manifold differentiation of the situations of different occupational and industrial groups both within and without the immediate sphere of production. Within the working class, interests and loyalties are typically defined naturally and parochially; and the normal boundaries of trade union action — particularly notable in the British context — express and reinforce this fragmentation. The principles of inclusion of a specific group within the bounds of a particular form of collective organisation and action serve simultaneously to exclude the remainder of the class. At times, indeed, the trade union struggle may involve an identification of interests and a formulation of strategies through which other sections of workers — rather than the particular employer, let alone capital in general — appear as the principal antagonists. An adequate theoretical conception of the contradictory relationship between sectionalism and broader class consciousness and organisation is a necessary precondition for the formulation of strategies for effective anti-capitalist struggle.

The analysis of economism derives from Lenin's classic critique of 'pure-and-simple' trade unionism in *What is to be Done?* As Lenin himself later insisted, his contri-

FOR MANY years socialists have made an important distinction between the 'unofficial' shop stewards movement, and the 'official' trade union machine. The distinction has formed the basis of the strategy of many revolutionaries in their approach to the trade union movement. But is it still valid? Richard Hyman argues that the last few years have seen what he calls the bureaucratisation of the rank and file. His article suggests that a new strategy is needed.

bution to the internal party polemic of 1902 oversimplified the issues; but his identification of the problem, even though not his specific solutions, has proved persistently influential. Central to his argument was the tendency for the trade union struggle, developed autonomously, to assume forms in no way incompatible with the continuation of capitalist relations of production. Only through integrating the industrial struggles of groups of workers organised in unions with the actions of other oppressed strata and with more general forms of resistance to social oppression could the anti-capitalist potential of trade unionism be realised. In any analysis of contemporary British trade unionism it is of course necessary to recognise, first that the notion of 'economism' as traditionally conceived fails adequately to indicate the importance of organised resistance to capitalist control over the labour process, second that a serious struggle for reforms would prove highly disruptive in a period of capitalist

crisis. It is nevertheless clear that British trade unionism has traditionally matched many of Lenin's characterisations of economism and its limits (he was of course profoundly influenced by the Webbs' account), and that this accommodation to the possibilities of piecemeal reform within the framework of capitalism has both encouraged and been encouraged by the sectional boundaries of collective action.

The concept of corporatism points to the emergent relationship of accommodation and subordination between trade unions and those agencies which they originally arose to resist. Often applied primarily to the relations between unions and the state, the term may also be used to indicate a typical development (particularly where trade union purposes are predominantly defined in terms of collective bargaining) in relations with employers. The resources of discipline and control which are a precondition of effective collective struggle contain the potential

to be turned back against trade union members in their interests of capital. The development of corporatism implies the dominance of this repressive potential over the explicit purpose of unions as agencies through which workers collectively pursue their own distinctive interests by mobilisation and struggle. There are clear links between corporatism and economism: for the logic of a strategy of pursuing relatively marginal adjustments to the form of the capital/wage-labour relation through the machinery of collective bargainings is a commitment to the principle of 'orderly industrial relations' which would be threatened by any 'undisciplined' resistance by workers to capitalist control.'

UNION OFFICIALS

It is a familiar argument that those continuously engaged in the organisational activities of trade unionism can perform a crucial mediating role in sustaining such tendencies. If corporatism represents an accommodation to the power deployed by those external agencies with which trade unions are obliged (indeed exist) to deal, those within unions who conduct the external relationships channel and to some extent shape the nature of the interchange. Three important influences on this process may be noted. Those in official positions in trade unions possess a direct responsibility for their organisations' security and survival, a role encouraging a cautious approach to policy. In particular, this is likely to induce resistance to objectives of forms of action which unduly antagonise employers or the state and thus risk violent confrontation. Because of their ongoing relationship with external parties, officials normally become committed to preserving a stable bargaining relationship and to the 'rules of the game' which this presupposes. And finally, the rationale of officials' positions is typically a competence to perform specialist functions. To sustain a belief in the significance of their own role, there is a natural tendency to define trade union purposes in a manner which emphasises officials' own expertise and activities: stressing 'professional' competence in collective bargaining rather than militant mass action. These three powerful (though not necessarily irresistible) tendencies help explain why union officials, though often politically and socially more advanced or progressive than many of their members, frequently perform a conservative role in periods of membership activism and struggle.

Among sections of the British left in recent years, awareness of these tendencies has encouraged an analysis in terms of a dichotomy between 'trade union bureaucracy' and 'rank and file', and a political strategy emphasising workplace struggle and shop steward militancy. The controversy surrounding this position has not always been marked by a high degree of theoretical coherence. On the one hand, the notion of 'bureaucracy' has often served as a descriptive category

or derogatory slogan rather than a concept adequately embedded in a theory of trade unionism. In effect, the term can be employed to present trade union officialdom as scapegoats for contradictions inherent in trade unionism as such. But conversely, critics of this position have at times treated the limitations inherent in trade unionism under capitalism as an alibi for the actions and inactions of trade union leadership (or at least a favoured group within this leadership).

THE RANK AND FILE

It is however the notion of 'rank and file' which is of particular relevance in the context of this paper. This term also lacks obvious theoretical foundation: indeed it represents no more than a military metaphor. The main implication is the lack of differentiation of interests and of hierarchical control within the main body of union membership. Just as, in military usage, privates and corporals might be classed together, so the notion of trade union rank and file has normally included 'lay' officers and representatives. Discussion in the 1960s often treated shop stewards, in particular, as an essential component of the rank and file, sharing the same employer as the ordinary membership, participating in the same experiences and aspirations and subject to their control. From this perspective, three aspects of shop steward organisation and action were commonly stressed. First, unionism within the workplace — as at national level — was predominantly economic in orientation; yet because of its direct engagement at the point of production, it was necessarily involved in struggles against managerial control of the labour process. This concern with issues of job control could be viewed as a basis for more ambitious movements towards workers' control of production. Second, the very intimacy of the links between shop stewards and the small groups of workers they represented could accentuate the problem of trade union sectionalism; isolated militancy over parochial issues made workplace union power highly vulnerable to a concerted counter-attack by the employers. This problem of fragmentation was however mitigated by the development of joint shop steward committees and — usually against the opposition of national officials — combine and multi-plant bodies. Third, the proximity of shop steward organisation to the shop floor inhibited bureaucratic tendencies and corporatist developments. Indeed, the existence of autonomous workplace unionism represented a key defence against the incorporation of the national organisations; for if the official leadership were to compromise too far (by collaborating, for example, in government wage control) they would be faced by a rank-and-file revolt spearheaded by the stewards' movement.

DONOVAN

It is interesting that a somewhat parallel conclusion was drawn by conventional writers on 'industrial relations' particularly in their role as government advisers. Thus the central proposition of the Donovan Report of 1968 was the existence of 'two systems' of British industrial relations. Whereas conditions of employment were ostensibly determined at industry-wide level in negotiations between national officials of unions and employers' associations, it was bargaining within the workplace (at least in key sectors of manufacturing industry) which was in practice more significant. Such bargaining was typically piecemeal and sectional, remote from the control of full-time union officials or senior management, and commonly resulted in unwritten understandings and 'custom and practice' rules. To this divorce between official institutions and actual practice were attributed several consequences. Small-scale, unofficial negotiation was matched by a similar pattern of strikes. Upward pressure on earnings (particularly where payment by results applied) could not readily be contained by managerial resistance or government policies. And employer control over the labour process was substantially eroded. For many commentators, the combination of these features was considered a major barrier to the profitability and competitiveness of British capital.

Some sections of the ruling class proposed a solution primarily in terms of direct legal repression. Others advocated greater reliance on gradualist institutional transformation. Thus the major recommendation of the Donovan Commission was the formalisation and centralisation of collective bargaining at plant or company level. In this process employers should assume the main initiative, reconstructing payment systems and bargaining machinery and elaborating their internal procedures of management information and control. Unions for their part should appoint far more full-time officials in order to intervene actively in workplace negotiations and supervise the work of their shop stewards. The priority, Donovan insisted, was for employers and trade unions together 'to recognise, define and control the part played by shop stewards in our collective bargaining system' (1968 p 120).

In the subsequent decade, the relations between unions, employers and the state have of course exhibited several major upheavals. Today, it seems to me, it is possible to argue that the Donovan strategy has proved far more effective than is generally appreciated. At the same time, developments have not precisely matched the scenarios drawn by both advocates and opponents of 'reform' during the 1960s. Moreover the 'offensive' of employers and the state, though clearly significant, has not alone been the decisive influence. No less important have been the emergent tendencies within workplace unionism itself, which have interacted with the

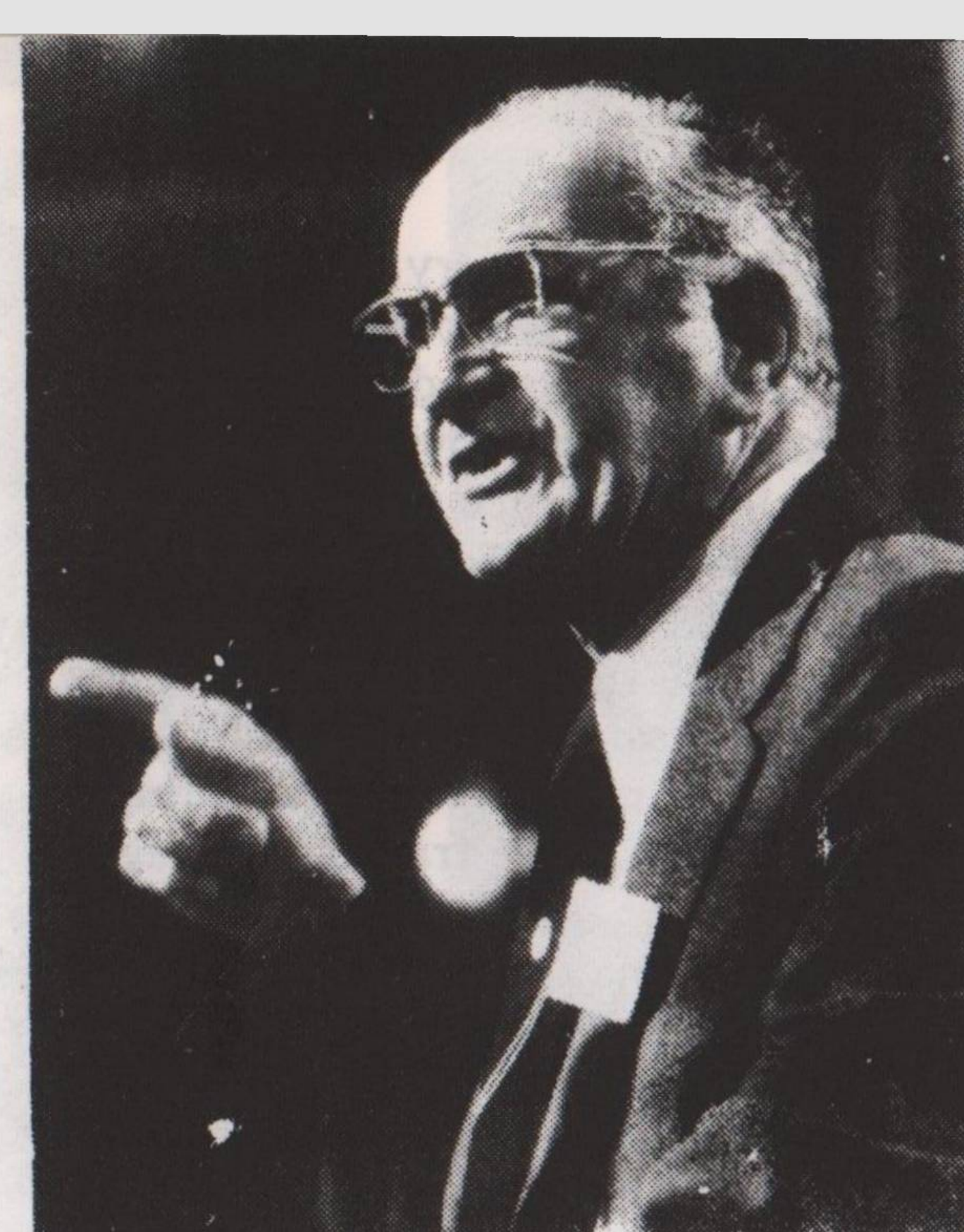
strategies of employers, governments, and full-time officials.

A NEW BUREAUCRACY?

A central feature of the past ten years has been the consolidation of a hierarchy within shop steward organisation. The tightening of internal management controls and the introduction of new payment systems, job evaluation structures, 'productivity' agreements and formalised negotiating and disciplinary procedures have often reduced significantly the scope for bargaining by individual stewards at section level. Workplace negotiation has become a far more centralised process, often involving the application to individual issues of an explicit set of 'rationalised' principles. But in the main this has not — as Donovan anticipated — become the responsibility of full-time officials from outside the company; in a period of rising union membership, the rate of new appointments has been limited. Rather, the introduction and operation of centralised bargaining arrangements has been the responsibility of a new layer of full-time convenors and senior stewards. The number of such representatives, it would appear, has quadrupled during the past decade, and considerably exceeds the number of ordinary union officials. And no longer can it be suggested, as Donovan argued (p 107) that 'it is the exception, rather than the rule, for a chief shop steward to have a room put at his disposal as an office'; facilities provided by employers for senior stewards have expanded as substantially as their numbers.

This trend has been paralleled by a centralisation of control within stewards' organisations. In the past, joint shop stewards' committees have tended to fulfil the functions of co-ordination rather than control, to depend upon the voluntary agreement of the various sections and their representatives rather than upon the exercise of sanctions. Today it is far more common for such committees to exercise a disciplinary role, forcing dissident sections of the membership into line. But at the same time, the small cadre of full-time or almost full-time stewards within a committee often possess the authority and the informational and organisational resources to ensure that their own recommendations will be accepted as policy by the stewards body.

These developments have in turn coincided with a significant degree of integration between steward hierarchies and official trade union structures. In the past there existed a considerable detachment (though exaggerated by some commentators) between workplace organisation and the branch-based decision making machinery of most unions. Union rulebooks were slow to recognise the negotiating functions of shop stewards, and few even mentioned the position of convenors. Often those elected as lay representatives at different levels in trade union government were branch



Hugh Scanlon



Jack Jones

We used to know who the bureaucrats were. It's less clear today.

administrators rather than shop-floor bargainers. But in the past decade there have been extensive changes, often carried through under the slogan of greater union democracy. In some cases, workplace leaders have been given an official role within union constitutions; they have become represented on many national negotiating bodies; some unions have created industrial committees and conferences composed of workplace activists. Rulebooks have begun to define the rights and obligations of convenors and joint shop stewards' committees. Education and training schemes for shop stewards (typically emphasising the importance of negotiating expertise and orderly procedures rather than membership mobilisation) have burgeoned.

Against this background it is not fanciful to speak of the bureaucratisation of the rank and file. The developments of the last ten years, in those unions and industries where workplace organisation has long been strongest and most autonomous, have made possible a considerable degree of articulation between union

policy at national and shop-floor level. A key mediating role is now performed by a stratum of shop steward leaders who have become integrated into the external union hierarchies and have at the same time acquired the power, status and influence to contain and control disaffected sections and sectional stewards. This fact is crucial in explaining the effect of the TUC/government wage curbs since 1975. The very limited opposition and resistance on the shop floor cannot be explained simply in terms of the level of unemployment, or political commitment to a Labour government, but owe much to the new ability of national union leaders to win the backing of major convenors, and of these in turn to deliver the acquiescence of their own workplace organisations. The internal politics of trade unionism today involves a complex system of linkages between the relatively inactive membership on the shop or office floor and the top leadership in the TUC Economic Committee. The ability of national leaders to contain, control and manipulate the ordinary membership depends to an important extent on their success in establishing loyalties, understandings or trade-offs with groups at different levels in this elaborate hierarchy who are able to deploy a variety of forms of influence and sanctions.

These developments have more general implications for a theoretical understanding of trade unionism in contemporary British capitalism. In the past, the existence of 'two systems' of industrial relations contained important limitations to the influence of national leadership and the corporatist tendencies of trade union organisation, in those areas of industry where relatively autonomous workplace struggle provided a power base largely independent of both management and full-time officialdom. As the duality always inherent in shop steward organisation has become accentuated, so its potentiality as an agency of control over the membership has emerged more clearly. There is every reason, to assume that this process will continue. The very rapid concentration and centralisation of British capital since the early 1950s entails persistent pressures for greater centralisation within British union organisation. Recent labour legislation, and union employer moves to broaden the scope for collective bargaining, have generated a powerful impetus for the 'professionalisation' of workplace representation. Any serious moves towards 'participation' machinery (whether by legislation or through incorporationist strategies by major companies) are likely to extend such developments still further.

OLD v NEO UNIONISM

At this point, two qualifications are called for. The first is that the force of any generalisation concerning British trade unionism is limited by the immense

variety of traditions, institutions and contexts. The trends so far discussed have been widespread and important, but far from universal. In particular, it must be noted that shop steward organisation driving substantial autonomy from an active and extensive process of workplace bargaining has traditionally been confined to a relatively small proportion of British trade unionists. Its strongest roots were in sections of engineering, and a few other manufacturing industries, characterised by fragmented piecework systems and a general lack of sophisticated managerial controls (often because of 'soft' product market conditions in the 1940s and 1950s). Multi-unionism was often an additional factor inhibiting effective control by outside union officials.

A considerable contrast existed in much of the public sector, within most 'white-collar' occupations, and even among a wide range of private-sector manual workers. For most trade unionists it is reasonable to argue that national agreements determined fairly closely the actual earnings and conditions of employment, that shop steward organisation was relatively weak or even non-existent, and that full-time officials played an important role in whatever plant negotiations occurred. In many such contexts, the main trend of the past ten years has involved a certain de-centralisation of collective bargaining and union organisation. Paradoxically, sophisticated employers have recognised a need for the existence of workplace union representation. Recent years have seen major strategies of capitalist rationalisation and intensification of the labour process (encouraged by a variety of state agencies), typically involving the introduction of new production and manning standards and the tightening of the nexus between pay and performance. The successful introduction of such schemes, with the minimum of worker resistance, was seen as dependent on their negotiation with representatives familiar with workplace conditions and able to exert authority over the labour force. If shop stewards did not exist, they had to be invented. In some cases, employers themselves took the initiative in providing recognition, facilities and 'training' for workplace representatives. In others, shop steward organisation was 'sponsored' by national union leaderships: at times anxious to collaborate with such managerial strategies, at times motivated by a genuine interest in greater membership involvement in union affairs, at times alarmed by the militant revolts against national negotiators which were a feature of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Introduced largely from above, steward machinery in such circumstances is normally far more closely integrated into the official structures of trade unionism and collective bargaining than where its origins lie in independent initiative from below. Nevertheless, the implications are

potentially contradictory: such organisation, once established, may develop an unanticipated degree of autonomy, perhaps providing an effective basis for resistance to the politics of management or union leadership;

This leads to the second qualification which must be specified. Arguably, the previous discussion of centralisation in shop steward organisation was unduly negative in tone. The traditional fragmentation of workplace struggles has always been a major source of weakness, and has become increasingly debilitating as capital itself has directed a co-ordinated attack on workers' conditions. The detachment of powerful shop stewards' organisations from national trade union politics was a reflection of the dominance of economism in the 1950s and early 1960s. Even in terms of workplace action, this could create a fatal vulnerability; in a period of rapidly developing direct state intervention in industrial relations, with the close involvement of national union leaderships, continued detachment is impossible. Moreover, it would be unrealistic to deny the need for both leadership and discipline within shop-floor union organisation. Effective strategies to advance workers' collective interests at every level cannot be expected to emerge spontaneously; arbitrary acts of opposition by isolated individuals or groups may dissipate the strength of factory unionism or prove dangerously divisive. Such considerations have been influential in encouraging the emergent tendencies towards centralised control within shop steward bodies themselves.

A NEW STRATEGY

Notwithstanding these reservations, it remains the case that serious problems arise from the increasing dualism of what were previously far more predominantly agencies of opposition and resistance. The trends discussed create a far more substantial basis for corporatist tendencies within British trade unionism than has hitherto existed. If the centralisation of workplace organisation is inevitable and desirable, the question of democratic centralism (if one may use the term in this context) assumes vital importance. Some relevant issues are not difficult to specify: the stimulation of ordinary members' involvement and activism, as against dependence on the 'expert' bargaining functions of a cadre of leaders; the extension of reports-back and discussion as against constraints of secrecy and confidentiality; the encouragement of procedures of initiative and control from below, as against the distrust and manipulation of the membership which even militant shop steward leaders can at times exhibit. All these are themes which have long been confronted in the analysis of trade unions as national institutions, but rarely considered in

the context of workplace action. Any strategy for democratisation, it need scarcely be added, will face immense obstacles: the entrenched interests of those in positions of leadership, the impact of powerful external forces, both material and ideological, the limitations inherent in trade union action itself. Ultimately, indeed, the problems of union democracy cannot be dissociated from those of the general political consciousness of the working class.

It has been the contention of this paper that, with recent changes in shop steward organisation, the contradictory politics of trade unionism in Britain have entered a new phase. Traditional categories and strategies are now of diminishing relevance. Their reformulation in a manner adequate to the present conjuncture represents an urgent task of both theory and practice.

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Who will destroy this paralysed monster ?

The nature and effect of the working class in generating contradictions for British capitalism takes place not only at the industrial level but also in and through the dominant political institution of the British working class — the Labour Party. It is through the interface of the industrial and political spheres that the particular nature of the struggle becomes manifest. It is for this reason that it is important to inquire into the way in which the Labour Party has acted to strengthen or weaken militancy and to examine its capacity to continue to act in this regard. This is not 1902 and this is not Russia, and a call for a return to the maxims of *What is to be Done?* cannot but be a hollow and shrill exercise except in the context of a recognition of the historical mobilisation, institutionalisation and crystallisation of workers political participation in Britain over this century through the Labour Party. The question of revolutionary strategy is therefore not one of political mobilisation, but of political remobilisation.

Any analysis which attempts to locate the Labour Party must begin by noting the apparently contradictory character of the Party. It is a working class party, and yet a national party; it is a reformist party, and yet one that seeks to stabilise the existing economic structure; it is a party whose organisational, electoral and financial strength lies on its

FOR GENERATIONS socialists have studied the ambiguous nature of the Labour Party. This article looks at the way class conflict has been both expressed and contained within the Labour Party, as revealed in tensions between the unions and the party, conference and leadership, the Labour left and the Parliamentary Party. It goes on to look at the apparent contradiction between the shift to the left of the Party in the early 1970s and the conservative policies of the current government. It is written by Leo Panitch.

extremely close links with the trade unions, and yet a party which has acted, with open determination, to restrain the economic demands of its trade union base. This duality derives from Labour's location as the crucial mediating link between the British state and the working class.

The Labour Party has in many respects been the bearer and galvanizer, as well as the electoral beneficiary, of working class strength. At the beginning of each of its post-war terms of office, in 1945, 1964, and 1974, it has introduced a number of reforms to which the labour movement had been long committed and which were themselves crucial to trade union strength. Some of these were defensive in nature. Indeed, it is significant that virtually the first tasks undertaken by each of the Labour Governments involved restoring to the trade unions

rights removed under previous Conservative administrations. Thus in 1945 it repealed the restrictions imposed by the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act after the failure of the General Strike in 1926, the consequences of which failure the unions had to bear for two decades. Similarly, in 1964 it reversed a judicial decision (*Rookes v. Barnard*) which had undermined gains won as early as 1906. And in 1974 it immediately set about the task of removing from the statute books the previous Conservative Governments Industrial Relations Act. Other achievements were more positive, going beyond the restoration of the "status quo anti". This was particularly true in the case of the 1945 Government, whose commitment to full employment, nationalisations, National Health Service Act and welfare

reforms still stand as the beacon of "success" for the labour movement. But it was also true in a more limited sense in 1964, in terms of social policy reforms like the Redundancy Payments Act and the abolition of prescription charges, although these proved less stable as this Labour Government later reneged on many of them under dominant class pressures. The reform initiative was of course taken up again in 1974 through such measures as The Employment Protection Act, the maintenance of selective price controls, and the repudiation of wage restraint policy enforced by legal penalties.

Yet what is missed by simply listing these achievements, is a recognition of the broader, political context in which they occurred. And that is Labour's role as the guarantor of the post-war capitalist order. Labour, unencumbered by a tradition of "laissez-fair" and an explicit bias towards business as were the Conservatives, and enjoying the loyalty the working class, has proved particularly well-suited to strike the settlement between capital and labour which was necessary in the context of the growing working class pressures we have identified. Its suitability derives from the fact that it is a working class party, in terms of its electoral base and constitutional links with the unions, but one with an ideological orientation which rejects the idea and practice of class struggle and promulgates the idea and practice of "social harmony" and class collaboration. While considerations of income and wealth redistribution and of strengthening and broadening union organisation do concern the Party, they are confined within a pre-dominant concern for national unity in which making the British economy viable is paramount. This class-neutral definition of "economic Viability" is shared in common with Britain's dominant classes. In other words, the Party does represent immediate working class demands but does so in the context of inculcating the working class with national values and symbols. In this light, the Labour Party restrain and reinterprets working class demands by mediating between nation and class. By upholding the values of parliamentarism, "responsibility", and "economic viability", against the values of direct class action and "irresponsible", "sectional" wage demands, the Labour Party acts as an agency of social control against the objective expression of working class dissent.

This ideology, never ubiquitous throughout the Party, but always dominant in it, was not a post-war product as is often alleged, but enfolded the Party from its very beginnings. It was not something picked up in the course of post-war attempts to appeal to a growing new middle class, nor was it adopted only when the profitability problem of the economy emerged in full view. Rather its electoral strategy and its conventional response to Britain's economic difficulties derived from its long-established ideological position. It is not the crisis of accumulation that determines the Labour Party's actions when in Government, it is rather the Party's ideology that determines its

actions vis a vis this crisis.

To be sure, Labour's national orientation became more obvious in the post-war period, in a political and economic climate which both provided it with electoral success and gave it a direct role as government in administering the society. Before the war, the principle of class harmony, of cooperation with Britain's ruling classes seemed to contradict the Party's programmatic concerns — limited nationalisation, welfare reforms, public control over the economy — given capital's steadfast opposition to these proposals. This left unanswered the critical question of how these might be introduced in the face of opposition from the capitalist class (except during the 1929 period of Government when the answer was baldly given — they would not be.) After the war, however, Labour's ideology and programme became more at one with each other, in a climate where capital accepted, if not promoted these changes in the interests of a kind of state interventionism that muted class conflict and sustained capital accumulation. Of course, Labour's own moderate critique of the capitalist system, in addition to the economic and political dangers that beset it, was a factor in the greater readiness of the capitalist class to accept state interventionism by the end of World War Two. As such, most Labour leaders came to believe that the Fabian goal of educating the ruling class to "socialism" had been practically achieved, and that the labour movement could now deal with an efficiency-orientated managerial class for whom the national interest ultimately took precedence over profitability.

The 1945 Labour Government which set the pattern for future developments gives a good illustration of social democracy's role as a key element in modern British capitalism. In conjunction with its reform measures, it progressively dismantled the direct administrative control mechanisms introduced during the war, and substituted Keynesian fiscal techniques which were consistent with private ownership and which were designed to rest on the profit-motive as the dynamic of the economy. It consciously replaced command planning with what it euphemistically termed "democratic planning" — what later came to be called "indicative planning" — by virtue of the fact that it allowed considerable freedom of action for private enterprise, with pressure being exerted through the market mechanism. Nationalisation was mainly limited to unprofitable and failing industries, generous compensation was paid (thus freeing up capital for new, and more profitable, private investment) and the new state corporations were run, in terms of their internal authority relations, along traditional business lines. Perhaps most significantly, its initial redistributive taxation policy came to be restricted by the necessity of maintaining profits. Thus union demands for higher profits taxation and a wealth tax, consistently demanded by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) since 1940, were resisted. In 1948 Stafford Cripps then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced at the annual TUC that there was no relief for wages to

be had from profits, and pointed out that the sharing out of even one-fourth of all distributed profits (retained profits had to be reserved for investment, he said) would only bring 4 pence on the pound for each wage and salary earner. This argument that the distribution of the national wealth would not of itself yield a high standard of living for the working class, became stock in trade for subsequent Labour Chancellors. And while the point was simplistically true, it could not of itself undermine the case for greater equality. What lay behind it was rather the necessity for inequality within a society which relies for economic growth on profitability and the constraints this imposes on a party based on the principle of cooperation with the ruling class of such a society.

What must be understood in this regard, however, is that the elaboration of social democracy's national orientation in the post-war period, does not provide the programmatic and ideological foundation for Labour to become an inter-class party. For its very success as a national party rests on its structural integration with the working class through the trade unions, which the other major parties do not share. This is most clearly visibly in the fact that each of the post-war Labour Governments have secured union co-operation in a wage restraint policy, while no other post-war Government, despite repeated attempts, has been able to secure this. The importance of this aspect of social democracy's role, electorally and in terms of the Labour party's acceptability to the dominant class, was least apparent in the 1950's when the growth of the British economy concealed its underlying problem, and this provided the economic basis for the belief, trumpeted under Hugh Gaitskill's leadership, that Labour should loosen its ties with the working class. But with the OECD's urging of an incomes policy in the U.K. in 1960, and with the Conservative's unsuccessful attempt to obtain union cooperation of its National Incomes Commission, even the Gaitskillite journal *Socialist Commentary*, came to see that Labour's "close alliance with the unions is an asset, which it alone enjoys, and not a liability. Labour must be able to show,.....that the unions will cooperate wholeheartedly only if Labour is in office."

Despite certain skepticism among social scientists as to the question of whether incomes policies "work", there can be no doubt of their effect in providing British capital with at least temporary respite against wage pressure. Labour's first wages policy of 1948-50 brought real wage rates, which had risen from a base rate of 100 in 1938 to 106 in 1946, back down to 101 by 1950. Similarly, the 1964 Labour Government's incomes policy reduced the rate of increase in incomes by about one percent per annum between 1965 and 1968, and in fact real earnings actually declined in four of the six half-yearly periods after Labour's 1966 re-election. Indeed, when we take into account taxation as well as inflation in computing net real income,

as Turner and Wilkinson do in the following table, a stark contrast emerges between Labour (1948-51, 1964-70) and Conservative (1951-64, 1970-74) periods in office.

RATES OF GROWTH IN NET REAL INCOME, MANUAL WORKERS

Annual compound rate of growth	Net Real Income %
1948-52	0.7
1952-56	3.5
1956-60	2.1
1960-64	1.3
1964-68	0.5
1968-70	1.3
1970-73	3.5

To stop at this demonstration would be, however, to present a static and one-sided picture of the Labour Party. It would miss, above all, the way in which class struggle takes place at the political level within the party itself, and the condition under which working class ties to the Party are maintained and renewed in the context of the limits of this struggle. What must be noted immediately with regard to the wage restraint policies of both the 1945 and 1964 Labour Governments, is that these policies broke down, industrially and politically, not after Conservative Governments were elected, but before. And in both cases, the breakdown was accompanied by significant tensions within the labour movement — between the TUC and the Labour Government, between Party Conference and Party leadership, and within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), between union-sponsored MPs and the Labour left on the one hand, and the Cabinet on the other. The critical difference between these two periods, however, and one that indicated the acceleration of political crisis together with the economic, was that these tensions continued and broadened out to other policy issues in the latter period, while they were contained in the former. The basis of the change was that (what Robert McKenzie has identified as) the "bond of mutual confidence between the parliamentary leaders and a preponderant part of the trade union leadership which is the essential key to the understanding of the functioning of the Labour Party," wore down in the crisis of the late 1960's while it was maintained in the late 1940's.

The trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party formally have the vast majority of votes at Party Conferences, control a majority of seats on the extra-parliamentary Party's administrative body,

the National Executive Committee (NEC) and have substantial influence over the (at least one third of the total)MP's who are electorally union-sponsored. Nevertheless, the independence of the PLP (enshrined in the Party constitution) to decide policy priorities, the operation of Michelsian oligarchic factors to the benefit of the party leadership, and the "bond of trust" between most of the union and Party leadership, have traditionally given the Parliamentary leadership preeminent control over the PLP, the NEC and the Party Conference.

The particular importance of the union leadership in sustaining this control was especially seen during 1948-50. A barrage of constituency and dissident union resolutions at Party conferences proposed that wage restraint be made conditional upon the introduction of a directive economic plan, extended price controls, statutory profit controls, a wealth tax and the maintenance of war-time price subsidies on essential goods (which were being phased out). In general the union leadership supported these demands, but removed the conditional element from official resolutions and proceeded to speak to the resolutions in terms of a straight-forward defence of the wages policy and the Government. In this way, the union leadership was able to deflect the consequences of dissent for the Government, while continuing to look — in terms of the wording of resolutions — as though they were pursuing their members' interests.

The union leadership itself, however, increasingly came under heavy pressure from their members as the effects of the policy were felt. This was evidenced in a decline in union membership, an increase in unofficial strikes and finally in the defeat of the TUC General Council itself on the issue of wage restraint at the 1950 Congress. This led to the collapse of the policy (despite Government attempts to revive it), but it did not signal a change in the Party's direction. This was because the union leaders recognised the common grievances being voiced by the dissidents in the Party and by their own militants against a leadership in both wings of the movement which shared a common ideology of growing conservatism in social and economic policy and a commitment to American hegemony and anti-Communism (a highly salient issue at the time). In these conditions the Party leadership could keep dissent in the Party quite effectively bottled up, especially during its years in opposition. Except for one minor vote in 1950, not a single Conference vote went against the Party leadership until the unilateral nuclear disarmament defeat of 1960, and even that was reversed in the following year.

The 1960 Conference defeats for the leadership on foreign policy and "clause iv" (the commitment to a publicly owned economy in the Party Constitution) were harbingers of the changes in union-party relations that were to come to plague the next Labour Government. These changes were, however, slow in coming, despite the election of Frank Cousins as a leftist leader of the largest union, the Transport Workers. Cousins

patched up his differences with the Party leadership on the earlier issues, supported the party-union agreement on incomes policy in 1963, and joined the new Labour Cabinet as the key government link with the union movement. In the early years of the Government, the unions showed remarkable loyalty despite the very rapid abandonment by the Government — in face of the balance of payments crisis it inherited upon taking office — of the economic growth, social expenditure, and planning policies upon which it had been elected and upon which it had secured union cooperation in incomes policy. This loyalty extended to tacit support for the introduction of a statutory incomes policy (involving criminal penalties on trade unionists who did not support the policy), which the Government turned to in 1965-6 under pressure from the American Treasury. And it even extended — in effective and concrete terms as well as in party votes — to the wage freeze and massive deflation of 1966.

But the cement could not hold. Cousins himself resigned from the Government on the statutory incomes policy issue, and in any case he had not mobilised union support for the Government, being opposed in Cabinet to the direction of policy generally, and supportive of his own union's early opposition to the incomes policy. By the end of the year of wage freeze, other unions began to follow the Transport Workers lead in droves. The key factors were a tremendous increase in rank and file militancy on the one hand, which the union bureaucracy either had to lead or lose control of, and on the other hand, a decline in union membership in 1966 and 1967 of unprecedented post-war proportions. (This was marked by the large fall in individual trade unionists paying the unions "political levy" to the Labour Party since 1927). The 1967 Congress came out against the incomes policy, and this was followed by the TUC initiation of an annual economic policy. The election of Hugh Scanlon to the leadership of the Engineering Union later in 1967 by a left-Labour and Communist alliance in the union, put the largest unions into the hands of a left-wing leadership. Cousins was succeeded in 1968, by Jack Jones, who was directly associated with the left-wing Tribune Group in the PLP. These were union leaders who, together with the leadership of the white collar Supervisory, Staff and Technicians Union (the fast growing union in Britain) and some new leaders in the Mineworkers, were less inclined than their predecessors to protect the party leadership from Conference, or expect union MP's and the Party Executive to act as "instruments of the Government."

A number of deeper structural changes in the unions explain this reaction. The sustained period of high labour demand under full employment had created favourable conditions for local shop floor bargaining, led by militant shop stewards close to the rank and file and ready to lead unofficial strikes (often as much against a conservative union hierarchy as against



Ministerial power has always had a corrupting influence on Labour's left MPs.

the bosses). It was this development which came to form the backbone of working class industrial strength in the 1960's. The election of the new leadership in the unions was often a product of this development, and although they were not always at one with the shop floor militants, there was an initial readiness to open the unions out to rank and file pressures. Another important structural change was rooted in the growth of white collar employment, which provided the main avenue for union growth, and gave rise to a number of new TUC affiliates. A number of these were organised and led by people on the left of the Labour Party, and sometimes outside of the Labour Party on the left. Although their membership was the least likely to be affiliated to the Labour Party, the very fact that they did not have to take account of a strong appeal to loyalty which a Labour Government exercised over the members of manual unions, gave these leaders a high degree of independence in expressing political dissent against Government policies.

The effects of these shifts on the Party were considerable, although on the critical question of incomes policy they took some time to work their way through. At the 1966 Labour Party Conference the platform was defeated on three major issues, but the wage freeze was sustained. At the 1967 Conference, the leadership again were defeated three times. But despite the fact that the TUC had voted against the Government's incomes policy a month earlier, the party leadership was able to sustain its policy at the conference by a narrow vote of 3,212,000 to 3,091,000. In 1968 however, the roof fell in. With Frank Cousins announcing that the Labour Party was "almost getting to the state of accepting that the workers are on one side and the Government is on the other side," the leadership suffered five major defeats, including a resolution against the statutory incomes policy by a five to one majority. A resolution moved by Scanlon pledging support for the Government "subject to the reservations passed on the policy decisions of the TUC" was also passed.

Indeed a measure of the breadth of the conflict was given when a radical constituency party resolution, entirely out of spirit with the dominant ideology of the Party, was defeated by only

3,282,000 to 2,291,000 votes. It declared:

"That the policies of the Government have been and are dictated by the monopolies and the big financial interests.... only by taking into public ownership the 500 monopolies, private banks, finance houses and insurance companies now dominating the economy can the Government effectively develop the resources of our country for the benefit of the people."

These defeats did not change the direction of the Government. But when the Government in the following year attempted to forestall the coming wave of industrial militancy by legislating penalties against unofficial strikers, the dissent that had come to pit the labour movement against the Labour Government finally broke through to Westminster. Unable to carry the vast majority of Labour MPs with it, the Government was forced to abandon its "In Place of Strife" legislation. Until this point most MP's, including the vast majority of the Trade Union Group, had sustained the Government through thick and thin — mostly through thin. Yet certain changes in the PLP were notable. Most scholars have pointed to the continuously growing proportion of Labour MPs from middle class (i.e. professional) occupational backgrounds, while the proportion of workers have continuously declined. Between the 1951 and October 1974 elections, which elected respectively 305 and 319 Labour MPs, those with professional backgrounds grew from 31.5% to 49%, while the number of ex-workers (skilled and unskilled manual, clerks, and miscellaneous white collar) had declined from 42.9% to 31.9%. There is scant evidence, however, that this has materially affected the ideological direction of the Party, particularly since the largest increase by far occurred among teachers and lecturers, whole ideological autonomy from the class structure is relatively high in degree. More significant, and not revealed by statistical calculations, has been the entry of a new type of union MP since 1964, with considerable direct experience of, and personal sympathy for industrial militancy. In the 1964-70 Parliaments these MPs made up about half of the Tribune Group of approximately 30 hard-core members and changed the character of the PLP left by giving it a stronger base in the union movement.

The Tribune Group conducted a series of (what one Tribune MP called) "regretful revolts" in the Commons, primarily designed to register protest rather than defeat the Government on the issues. Nevertheless, these MPs acted as the "official opposition" of the labour movement inside the House of Commons and maintained particularly close ties with Leftist union leaders. And by 1968 they began to gain more committed adherents. On an amendment to defete statutory wage controls from the 1968 Prices and Incomes Bill (thereby removing the guts from the legislation,) 23 MPs actually voted against the Government and 20 more abstained. The Government was only saved by a last minute deal with the Liberals.

It was, however, a harbinger of the following year's events around "In Place of Strife", when the Labour Government attempted to restrict severely the legality of unofficial strikes, and thereby undermine the key of union militancy.

It should be pointed out that despite these open conflicts there was very little danger in fact that the Party would break up under the pressures of the 1964-70 Labour Government's actions in defence of British capitalism. Even during the "In Place of Strife" controversy, the attitude of the vast majority of MPs was conditioned by the concern to preserve the alliance with the unions, and if the TUC had been prepared to "do a deal" with the Government on the legislation, the PLP would have accepted this with alacrity. Harold Wilson himself was fully committed

to maintaining the alliance, recognising that without it, Labour "would become a reformist party uneasily poised between the Liberals and the Bow Group". (It is highly telling that he did not place such a party even to the left of the Liberals.) Finally, the union leadership itself was far from anxious to bring down a Labour Government, and despite the victory they secured by defeating the "In Place of Strife" proposals, they refrained from carrying this forward, at least during the remaining life of the Government, to a challenge to the Party leadership itself or the fundamental ideology of the Party. The "bond of trust" had stretched, strained, creaked and growned, but it had not broken.

It is in this context that the shift to the left of the Labour Party during its years in opposition from 1970 to 1974 must be understood. That a shift took place cannot be denied, but it took place within the rubric of Labour's dominant ideology and without a marked change in the Party leadership. The policy changes were indeed substantial. Spurred on by the tremendous industrial militancy of the early 1970s and a degree of industrial and political class conflict (mainly around the Conservative's Industrial Relations Act) unseen in Britain since the mid-1920's, Party conferences recommitted Labour to extensive public ownership and price control, massive redistributive policies and non-interference by the state in collective bargaining by statutory means. The radicalism at the base of the Party was seen not only in constituency party and union resolutions, but in candidate selection, as 28 of the 50 new Labour MPs elected in February 1974 immediately joined the Tribune Group (bringing its number to 68). The sentiments quoted by Tony Benn at the beginning of this paper were shared by a very broad section indeed of the Labour movement.

But the idea of "fundamental change" can be interpreted in various ways. The word revolution has become commonplace enough in the advertising industry to make one aware of the difference between form and substance. And the main test of the difference lay in the failure — based on the union leadership's unwillingness — to change the Party

leadership or even the Party structure so that the leadership was subject to conference control. Resolutions from local constituency parties which would have required MPs and Ministers to abide by conference resolutions were either kept off the conference agenda altogether or remitted to the Party executive. And Harold Wilson successfully asserted the Parliamentary Committee's right to exclude from the Party Manifesto an NEC pledge to take controlling interest in 25 of Britain's largest companies. The result was that the 1974 Party Manifesto, albeit much more radical at the level of rhetoric, looked less so in terms of substance.

The key to the question of the future direction of British social democracy, however, continued to lie in its attitude to the industrial militancy which is the contemporary source of the British crisis. For the essential question was whether Labour would lead this industrial class conflict into political channels or seek to contain and restrain it as British capitalism requires. The answer was largely provided by the Party leadership's urgings against the overtly political strikes which rendered the Conservative Industrial Relations Act inoperative and which eventually defeated the Government. It was provided more explicitly by Harold Wilson's own attitude to the class conflict the Act engendered, when he complained of inadvertent fostering of revolutionary tendencies in the working class: This is not to say that the leadership's attitude on the question of industrial militancy did not change. It did. But it did in the sense of a pragmatic recognition that direct statutory state control over the union movement was as dangerous economically and politically as a decision to reject the Keynesian alternative would have been in 1945. The British trade union leadership's opposition to statutory interference in collective bargaining rests on the desire for maximum freedom of action in their bargaining activities, but it has gone beyond this and become a cornerstone of their ideology. Their immediate and genuine response to legislation in this field is that it is dangerous to democracy as is freedom of the press, speech or assembly. Of course, this doctrine is not the only aspect of the ideology and can be — and was — overcome at times by appeals to patriotism and party loyalty, or by threats of mass unemployment; but it is abandoned only reluctantly and usually only temporarily.

It was in terms of the decision to work with, rather than against, this central element in the union ideology, that the Labour leadership set about reknitting the "bond of mutual trust" that it had so disastrously allowed to decay to the detriment of Labour's capacity to perform its critical role in British capitalism. A crucial element in this process was the absorption into the leadership of Michael Foot, who in terms of the close relationship established between the Tribune Group and the left

wing union leaders, was cast in an important mediatory role. In January 1972 a Liaison Committee was established between the PLP, the TUC and the Party NEC to frame what came to be known as the social contract, which laid the basis for a volutary incomes policy in combination with statutory price control, large scale income redistribution, the new elements of state intervention already referred to, and the long-elusive wealth tax.

The 1964 Labour Government inherited a balance of payments deficit of £800 million per annum and an inflation rate of 3%. The 1974 Labour Government inherited a balance of payment deficit of £4,000 million per annum and an inflation rate of 19%. That with this kind of acceleration in the crisis of British capitalism, a Labour Government ostensibly committed to the kind of programme outlined in the social contract should have been elected at all in this situation was a significant measure of the balance of class forces in British society. But it was an event full of contradictions for the British working class. The repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, the abolition of the Conservatives Pay Board (together with the temporary maintenance of price-related threshold wage agreements which allowed workers to keep pace with rampant inflation in 1974), and the reintroduction of food subsidies, all represented important gains. But the fact that the union leadership so quickly — and effectively — joined the Government in a wage restraint policy was no less significant. In the summer of 1974 the TUC agreed to a zero real income growth, and the following summer to a £6 pay limit. The effect of the success of these policies reduced workers real incomes, and this was followed by a TUC-Government agreement on a 4.5% ceiling on wage increases plus modest tax cuts for 1976-77, which, as estimated by *The Economist* was designed to produce a 2.75% reduction in real wages. Not surprisingly *The Economist* also noted that "if the pay deal sticks, there is no escaping the conclusion that companies are in for a Bonanza."

Given the Government's explicit commitment to "a private sector which is vigorous, alert, imaginative - and profitable," the actual introduction of the redistributive programmes envisioned in the social contract was quickly placed outside the bounds of "serious" consideration by the Labour Government in the condition British capitalism found itself. Yet the 1975-6 pay limit was endorsed by the General Council, and subsequently by the Annual TUC Congress and Party Conference. And the 1976-7 wage restraint policy received increased majority support from each of these bodies. That the Labour Government was able to secure this kind of support in the absence of its meeting most of the conditions of the social contract, and in the context of over a million unemployed, signalled for all to see the effective re-establishment of the "bond of mutual trust" between Party and union leaders. To be sure, the tensions that ran so high before did not disappear. In March, 1976, the Government suffered a major defeat on its White



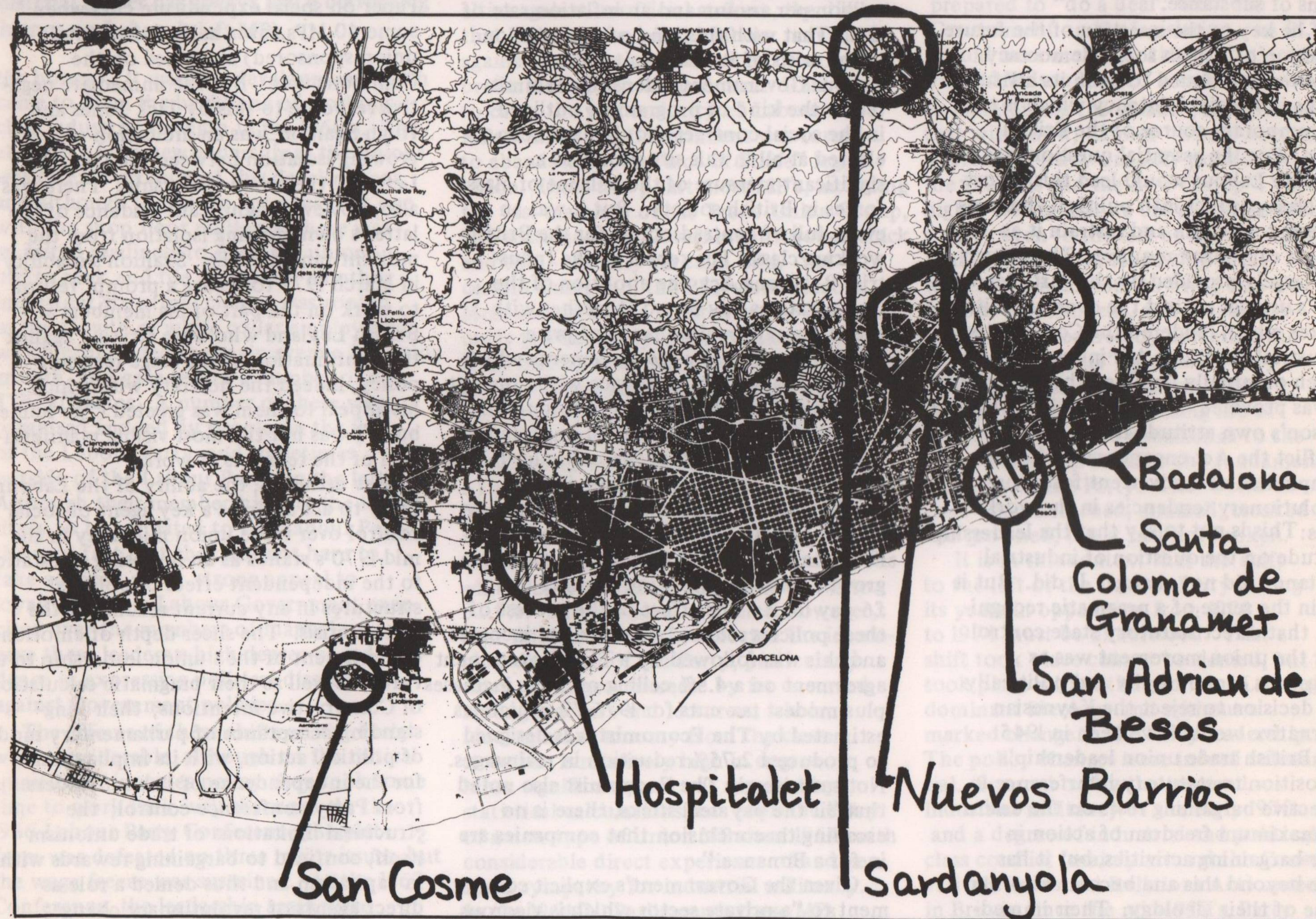
Paper on social expenditure cuts when some 40 MPs (over half of them trade union-sponsored) abstained on the Commons vote. But the immediate negative response to this by Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon, was an indication of growing isolation between the Labour Left and the union leadership. There was also, however, significant evidence of the latter's own growing isolation from the militant rank and file. Scanlon's inability in March 1977 to secure a prompt return to work on the part of his members at British Leyland who were striking against the continuation of the wage restraint policy, indeed the hostility with which his appeal to them was greeted ("go home, bum") was but the most visible manifestation of the tensions at work.

Nevertheless, the ability of the Labour Party to act again as a key agent of social control over trade union militancy in the mid-1970's stands as an imposing attestation to the independent effect of political structures in any current reading of the British crisis. The sheer depth of emotional commitment of the union leadership to the Party, as well as their pragmatic calculation of Conservative intentions; their long-standing acceptance of parliamentary modes of political action, with its implications for the independence of Labour leaders from Party conference control; the structural limitations of trade unionism itself, confined to bargaining rewards within capitalism and thus denied a role as direct agents of revolutionary change; the ideological hegemony of Labourism over the British working class, (especially its direct and enormous role as an agency of political socialisation for working class activists) which has consigned Marxism to the margins of the history of socialism in this society: all these factors serve to give the British Labour Party a relative autonomy from the economic strength and industrial militancy of the working class, and a continuing role as a national integrative force over and against that strength and militancy.

The reassertion of social democracy's political hegemony over the British working class to defuse class conflict, however temporarily, stands as yet another warning against theories of crisis which embellish economic "laws" with mere political "detail". It may serve as a reminder of "one of the basic axioms of historical materialism: that secular struggle between classes is ultimately resolved at the political — not the economic or cultural — level of society."

INTERNATIONAL SECTION

The Barcelona urban movement



IN BRITAIN, the left has a sorry record of neglect of social struggles, practically and theoretically. Maybe this has something to do with the nature of those struggles: often sporadic, underpoliticised, and liable to turn too easily towards individualistic forms of problem solving. Moreover, as Cynthia Cockburn has recently shown in her book *The Local State*, the emergence of a coherent movement based on social struggles has been held up by the development of the local state. Sweeping management reforms in local government and the growth

of the double edged weapon of community development have combined to head off, control and defuse urban unrest.

The Spanish working class has faced a very different and more brutal reality. A tough, politicised movement has arisen in the cities, alongside the workers movement. Its organisational basis has been the neighbourhood association (asociación de vecinos).

The urban movement, which survived Franco's repression, like the whole working class and socialist movement in Spain, now faces its most difficult moment. In the

midst of a tense transition to a parliamentary system, the neighbourhood associations are debating their relationship to the soon to be elected democratic town councils. As David Clark points out in this article, the positions being adopted in this debate are closely linked to the overall political strategies offered by the parties of the left, especially of the Catalan Communist Party (PSUC).

Clarke, who lives and works in Barcelona, has concentrated his attention on the development of the urban movement in and around that city.

"Last Sunday for four hours the municipal transport company in Barcelona 'lost' two of its buses. The history of the disappearing buses began when a 500-strong group of members of the Neighbourhood Association of the Torre Baro area stopped the bus in Canyelles..... informed the bus driver that it had been hijacked and that he had to leave his normal route and take the bus to Torre Baro." (Mundo Diario, 9th May)

This latest tactic in the three year struggle for a bus service to connect Torre Baro with a Metro station, ended with a confrontation with the police, several arrests and a statement from the neighbourhood association that they should repeat the action unless.....

In this sort of action the urban struggle is visible every day in the Barcelona newspapers. The urban movement, a phenomenon of the last ten years, is now a very important political element in Spain, particularly in the largest of the Spanish cities.

THE URBAN MOVEMENT

The urban struggle has developed partly in response to a growing crisis in the cities. In Barcelona the impact of the so-called Spanish 'economic miracle' changed the face of the metropolis in the decade after 1960. As one of the centres of industrialisation that followed the opening up of the economy to foreign capital, Barcelona was the focus for a wave of immigration from other parts of Spain; a whole new ring of satellite cities was thrown up around the old urban area. One of them was Santa Coloma de Gramenet. In 1960 it had 80,000 inhabitants, by 1975 150,000, of whom only 11% were born in Barcelona and 34% had come from Andalusia. By 1975 there was a shortage in Santa Coloma of 8,000 school places, not one park, one clinic with 40 beds (the result of an intense struggle in 1970) and an acute housing problem. House prices had risen three times faster than the cost of living between 1964 and 1975. Urban problems were skillfully exploited, and created, by increasingly concentrated finance and construction industries protected and abetted by a local government structure firmly within the orbit of the Franco regime. Sta. Coloma was not alone — the statistics and the experience can be repeated for Hospitalet, Badalona, Sabadell, San Adrian de Besos, Cerdanyola.....

An organised urban movement in response to those conditions made its appearance in the working class areas of Barcelona at the end of the 1960s. The form that the movement took — the fact that it developed an organised collective approach to urban problems and that, particularly in the working class areas, it had an immediate political and class perspective — owes much to the nature of the Franco regime and its extension into local government. Conspicuously reactionary, the local state in Spain also had neither the powers of local intervention nor the sophistication of the participation and cooperation approach that have done so much to defuse or confuse the struggle in England.

Initially it was clandestine movements, such as the Neighbourhood Commissions which organised around specific crisis issues. Then in the early years of the 1970s with the general upsurge in political resistance to the Franco regime the first *asociaciones de Vecinos* were formed, often as semi-legal bodies.* Between 1972 and 1974, the peak years of growth, the associations became the focal point for urban struggle in nearly every district of the city and the surrounding metropolitan area. They operated across the major fronts of the struggle in housing, education and health — and responded at all levels, from issues of rubbish collection on the streets to city wide planning processes. By 1975, with the death of Franco, Barcelona had 140 neighbourhood associations, 40 of which were organised at the district level and the others around particular estates, as well as a Federation of associations where the new groups had displaced the previous cliques of paternalist 'street associations'.

* Neighbourhood Associations were able to take advantage of a loophole in the law to apply for recognition as a legal cooperative association — up until recently few received this recognition in full but the process of application and consideration afforded some protection.

NUEVOS BARRIOS

In 1972 the local authority in Barcelona published a partial plan for District ten of the city. The partial plan, a way of 'adjusting' the comprehensive plan for the city, was a favourite weapon of the council and capital interests in the city, in the '60s. It provided an official cover for often highly speculative development schemes. It has been estimated that in the last fifteen years 25% of all partial plans published were issued to give retrospective cover to illegal developments. In the case of District Ten, a huge new working class zone in the north of the city, the partial plan of 1972 was proposing two new motorways to be driven through the area, two urban ring roads as a complement to these and in consequence, a net loss of several thousand houses.

The plan provoked the immediate federation of the existing associations in the zone into the Asociación de Nuevos



Francoist deputies have always strongly opposed the associations.

Barrios, representing 150,000 inhabitants. Previous scattered campaigns against the threat of new development were now concentrated in a set of not entirely defensive demands. These included maintaining the housing stock in the zone; compensation for those affected by demolition and preventing the isolation of some areas by the new road structures. The City Council was also asked to use the Partial plan structure to remedy the acute deficiencies in the provision of social facilities in the area.

During the year-long campaign the associations in the new federation held 18 mass meetings. Two of these were for the whole zone, with over 1,500 people at each. Others were held in each area to discuss the partial plan, counter measures and discuss several parallel struggles. The most important of these has been a 'non-payments' strike in Trinidad Nueva over appalling construction and repair problems in a public housing site there. The mass meetings were the basic decision centres for the strategy of the federation, in addition there were elected executive bodies at federation and association level and regular bulletins at both levels. Permanent work groups of the most active members would meet around the key issues of the zone. One of the associations in 1973 had four work groups meeting weekly or fortnightly on education, urban developments (including housing), health, and culture.

A wave of petitions and a publicity drive started the campaign off against the partial plan. It quickly attracted city wide support within the urban movement and within radical professional groups — for example in the College of Architects. Finally the associations were forced to gate crash a crucial council meeting. Finding the public seats conveniently occupied by over-zealous council officers, they took over part of the town hall itself and then marched through the centre of the city in protest. The police broke up the march but the Council, in session, had in the meantime decided to freeze the plan. A partial victory, sugared by some marginal immediate gains (for example construction of crossing points on main roads), but an

important one.

The struggle in the Nuevos Barrios is seen as one of the key moments in the history of the urban movement in Barcelona. It showed that the movement could mobilise and maintain mass support, not just around immediate issues but around the more abstract and long term threat that planning interventions posed. It was a defensive struggle and the tactics the associations could use were severely limited by the nature of the regime and its constant threat of physical repression. Nevertheless the Nuevo Barrios associations were able to build a sharp alternative, even if still largely a symbolic one to the way in which the local state intervened in their zone, with their complex organisational structure responsive to a breadth of local issues and a determinedly democratic practice based firmly on mass meetings. A striking contrast to the corrupt, inefficient and unrepresentative City Council.

The demand for a democratically elected local government structure was in fact one of the main planks in the programme of the asociaciones de Vecinos from about 1972 onwards. It reflects the fact that as well as being the dominant force in the urban struggle, the associations were a very important element of the general political resistance to the Franco regime. In Barcelona the associations were leading elements in the organisation of campaigns around an amnesty for all political prisoners and for Catalan autonomy. With the upsurge of struggles in the factories there were several cases of action in support of industrial struggles, notably around the Seat car factory as well as on linked issues such as unemployment. In areas of popular culture the Asociaciones were responsible too for the development of a whole wave of activities, acting either as sponsor or parent to youth groups, sports groups and a whole network of other schemes. The reactivation of neighbourhood social life that took place during this period stems directly from the actions of the neighbourhood associations.

THE LEFT AND THE URBAN MOVEMENT

The relationship between the associations and the still clandestine Spanish left was inevitably close. Many militants from the left groups worked openly in the associations which were semi-legal bodies. Some groups — for example Bandera Roja in Barcelona — place great emphasis on the urban struggle within

their overall strategy of political work. The presence of left group militants within the associations encouraged a broader and more explicitly political position, it also encouraged some latent tensions. In this period the tensions were not so much reflected in open attempts to bring the associations in under the wing of any one tendency; the formal autonomy of the associations was generally respected and an absence of open sectarian politics was a notable feature. There were tensions however already around the pace and direction of the struggle and around some of the broader political perspectives for the future of urban politics. In most associations these were contained but in 1974 in Santa Coloma de Gramenet the organised urban movement split with one group, the Neighbourhood Commission accused of taking an 'ultra left position'. This group was said to be subordinating the immediate struggle within the area to more explicitly political work, and to be wanting to work in a semi-clandestine manner. This 'vanguardist' position, it was argued, would split the movement from its mass support. The Neighbourhood Commission counterposed the policy of working towards a structure of 'democratic town halls' with their demand for a more radical democracy as the alternative within local government (direct election of representatives through mass meetings and the right of recall). The Asociacion de Vecinos, formed out of the split, saw its task instead as being to move the struggle into a 'legal framework' and to create 'a popular instrument for the democratic struggle'.

Here we have the outlines of the much more open and clearly argued fight over the strategy for the urban movement that has now developed between sectors of the revolutionary left and the reformist working class parties in the context of the current, and changed, political conditions.

THE STRUGGLE TODAY

Three years after Franco's death, a year after the first general elections since 1936, the urban struggle takes place in conditions quite different to those in the peak years of its growth, 1972-74. It is the regime's stubborn capacity for survival which has plunged the whole working class movement into a heart-searching political crisis. The largely untouched structure of the local state is one key element. The highly centralised nature of the Franco regime left its mark on the

town halls; local government in Spain gets only 10-12% of a public sector budget that in turn represents only 25% of the gross national product (corresponding figures for Britain would be 31% of 50% in 1974) and has no control over the key areas of education, public housing, major roads and health expenditure. Most major urban authorities are in a state of constant financial collapse. The City Council does however, have a range of powers to intervene negatively in city development, used extensively in Barcelona, for example, to cede chunks of urban land to private capital. It was the cynical use of these powers as well as the general air of reaction, corruption and inefficiency that did so much to polarise urban politics in the late '60's and generate the response of the Asociaciones de Vecinos.

So the continual postponement of municipal elections, the unchanged legislative framework of local government and the refusal of successive post-Franco governments to engage in even minimal structural reforms, leaves the town halls as an active reminder of the past. There have been certain opportunist changes of mind by individuals; in some municipalities too the parties of the left have formed shadow 'municipal management' teams which exist in an uneasy relationship with a discredited set of councillors but have no formal power. The result of all this has been the acute paralysis of the local state; a paralysis compounded by the restriction of public expenditure by central government as part of a package to meet the current economic crisis.

The effect on the urban movement has been two-fold. On the one hand the Asociaciones de Vecinos have found themselves increasingly forced to move into the vacuum left by the paralysis of the town hall but with no formal status or power. Increasingly they are drawn into direct negotiations on problems within their area with central government departments, the private sector, or the local council itself.

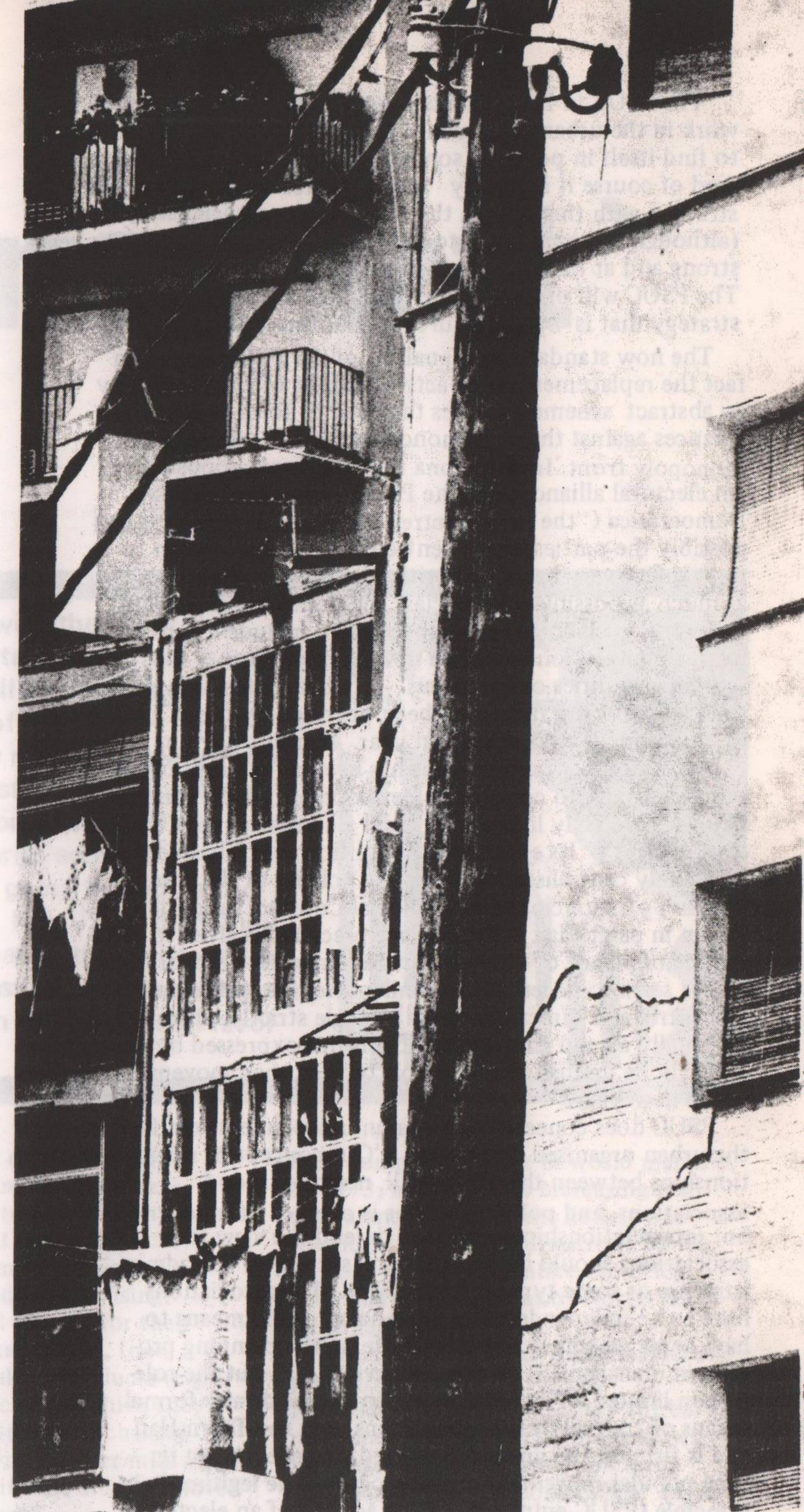
This 'recognition' of their role has increased their integration into the urban power structure and has also required them to generate a more consistent and prepared counter approach — many for example have an 'alternative' team of urban economists, architects and planners to draw on. But a consequence of this has been a certain professionalisation and bureaucratisation at the expense of the democracy of the base. A complaint recently voiced in one association was that the 'work groups' now used the assemblies more to give information than to receive directions — their work has acquired a dynamic of its own.

And on the other hand in many areas the persistence in power of the 'local bunker', its hostility to the urban movement and the full stop on initiatives has made it very difficult to make any real progress on urban issues. Many associations are going through, as a result, a severe crisis of demoralisation and are experiencing a sharp downturn in active participation.

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS — A KEY TEST

The municipal elections in Spain have been repeatedly postponed by the present government of Adolfo Suarez. There are clear reasons for this; the government is aware that after the elections, the local authority structure of many of the big cities in Spain will pass into the hands of the left opposition parties. Certainly in Barcelona the so-called 'red ring' of working class areas around the city will return a majority between them of socialist (PSOE) and communist (PSOC) representatives in any new council.

It has to be said that the government has done its best to minimise the possible 'damage'. The electoral legislation is blatantly in favour of a bi-partisan result between the government party (UCD) and PSOE. Any opposition coalition that captures 'municipal power' in addition will find that power severely circumscribed. The new local government will face an unchanged state structure which still holds most of the powers for intervention in urban areas. The old legislation controlling local government activity is still intact and there are no proposals as yet in sight for extending the financial base of the Ayuntamiento. (Town Hall). The new local government will too take up the reins in the middle of an acute economic crisis; a crisis in an economy controlled by an oligarchy which has made



Public housing in Barcelona; cramped, lacking in facilities, jerry built; the antithesis of social planning.

very clear its bitter resistance to radical social change.

Nevertheless the municipal elections do present a very important moment in the urban struggle. They represent an opportunity at least to dismantle the most blatantly corrupt inefficient and reactionary elements of the old local state structure. And they offer a potential for more; the use of new structures could, at their best, provide a real stimulus and a focus for the development of the struggle around urban issues. This depends of course on two key factors; the political strategy which the majority left parties bring to municipal al government and the development of their relationship with the already existing and important organised urban movement.

Within the left and particularly within the neighbourhood associations this last point has produced a sharp debate; a debate however where, at first sight, everyone seems to talk of respect for the "independence" of the associations, their need to continue to function as "grass roots bodies" and their right to maintain a role of their own. In order to get a clearer idea about this debate we can look at the position of the most important working class party in Catalunya, PSUC, on the municipal elections.

San Cosmo goes on the warpath

In 1967 the estate of San Cosme was opened in Prat de Llobregat, near Barcelona. The 2,500 houses were built under the state aided Obra Sindical de Hogar scheme (OSH), a byword for working class housing of the most appalling quality.

By 1969 San Cosme, in a joint action with several other OSH estates in Barcelona, was in the middle of its first "payments" strike (the houses are sold rather than rented — an obvious advantage to the state given their standards of construction). The focus of the strike was repairs to already deteriorating houses. When finally the government conceded money for patching up all OSH property in 1972, the Barcelona group of estates, with 10% of national stock received 40% of national money, a tribute to their unity and militancy. Unfortunately for the government, however, the Barcelona movement was taking by now a more aggressive stance; in the case of San Cosme, the Neighbourhood Association was demanding a basic remodelling of the area and already had its own team of architects working in parallel with the

OSH on repair work. The battle was one between the Association and Madrid (the Ministry of Housing) — the local council had no powers over OSH housing and became one of plan and counterplan. Faced with several unsatisfactory alternatives from the Ministry the Association used its own consultative team to prepare, discuss, exhibit, and finally agree a design for a total rebuilding of the estate. The fight took six years, six years of delay and resistance from the Ministry and six years of constant campaigning by the San Cosme residents.

Alongside the rounds of negotiations, San Cosme built up city-wide publicity, maintained a local information bulletin and took the fight out in the form of demonstrations and meetings. The links with other OSH areas were kept up and strengthened. At about the same time as the formal collapse of OSH this year, the local council was wheeled out to play its one and only part in the affair — to rubber stamp the final plans. Plans that are expressly "anti-speculative" with a low density of houses, control on land use and a commitment to provide collective

facilities.

The AV is aware that it will need to oversee closely the whole reconstruction and subsequent administrative phases; for this it has built in a control commission which might later include local political groups who gave active support in the later stages of the fight. The San Cosme fight and its results are seen as a possible model for other ex-OSH areas — Barcelona province has nearly 50,000 houses built under the scheme.

An interesting point about the struggle here and many others is how much was achieved with relatively few possibilities for, or use of, "hard" tactics; for a regime like that of Franco's in its last years it seems that the presence of a broad organised working class movement presented a sufficient threat in itself to achieve some gains. It's another question again why the regime could not or did not use repression against the urban movement as openly as it still did against the workers movement at the time.

The PSUC in Barcelona is a party with a long history of work in the urban movement. It is a party which can expect to find itself in power in some of the areas around the city. And of course it is a party which shares a common global strategy with the PCE on the transition to a socialist Spain (although the opposition to the Carillo line in the PSUC is very strong and at times has been dominant). The PSUC will present in the municipal elections a political strategy that is Spanish Eurocommunism writ small.*

The now standard class analysis of the PCE which is in fact the replacement of an active analysis of class forces by an abstract scheme, dictates the need to form broad class alliances against the large monopoly sector — an anti-monopoly front. In Barcelona the PSUC are proposing an electoral alliance with the PSOE, the Convergencia Democrática (“the more centre left than centre right”) and possibly the parties of the centre right. The intention is to “achieve very broad majorities, of 70-80% and to unite as much as possible middle class and popular sectors with the working class”. The alliance would include a commitment to govern jointly in the new councils.

A similar ‘politics of consensus’ — “what unites us is more than what divides us” — has been operated by the PCE at the national level in the last year. Its most obvious consequence in strategic terms has been an attempt by the party centrally to control the development of the class struggle, precisely in order to build a consensus with the ‘centre right’. Its expression in political terms has been an acutely centralised activity; the politics of the ‘pacts’, the Pact of Moncloa (Spain’s Social Contract) and the Constitution in particular. The absolute precedence given to the maintenance of a cross party alliance at the local level would seem to necessitate a similar attempt by the party to control and direct the urban struggle strictly within a nationally agreed strategy. How is this expressed by PSUC in its discussion of the role of the urban movement in the new year?

PSUC does concede on paper an independent role for the urban organised movement. “Our concept of relationships between the Town Hall, neighbourhood associations, and political parties is one not of independence but interrelationship....we don’t defend the view that associations should become either a section of the administration or some type of dual power. The associations have to be independent but they have to find means to have some weight in municipal life, in the planning process, in management of certain services....” But the role is then limited. The PSUC is not in favour of any formal means of control of the associations over the Town Hall and is firm on the limits of justified struggle against it; “the popular movement must recognise the legitimacy in principle (PSUC emphasis) of the actions of an elected administration. It must always be prepared to negotiate

*Footnote: The analysis of the state and class forces in modern society which underlies the Eurocommunist position leads them to give considerable importance to the urban movement. Manuel Castells, now one of the architects of the PCEs urban strategy, has descended from the lofty and pretentious heights of his work on “urban theory” to argue that as essentially “interclassist” and “anti-capitalist” movements, the neighbourhood associations offer a school for political struggle to groups previously untutored in these ways — “professionals, functionaries, small and medium commercial and industrial sectors”, precisely those class sectors which it is necessary to capture for the “democratic road to socialism” to succeed. Castells’ lack of an active class analysis means that he is incapable of appreciating and noting the difference between a limited and temporary class alliance against the dictatorship and its urban consequences and the very different political ends to which various class groups are now looking in a period of uncertain transition. The gap between Castells’ abstract premises and the current realities of the urban movement would be incomprehensible if it wasn’t clear that, here, reality has to accommodate to the Eurocommunist model and not the other way round.

with the administration and articulate its claims within the framework of legality.”

The concept of the new local government that PSUC offers is clearer in its emphasis on administrative/structural changes — eliminating corruption, increasing efficiency, decentralising the activities of the town hall — than on the political content of any programme. The model, much influenced it seems by local government reforms in other European countries, includes the familiar offers of “participation and information” to movements in the locality — a double edged weapon which heightens the danger of integration and control of the struggle.

The implications in the words are picked out more clearly in the strategy. The PSUC are now mounting a campaign to extend their area of control much more explicitly within the urban movement in Barcelona. A party whose chain of priorities flows downward from the initial insistence on the maintainance of an inter-class alliance, from central agreements which then have to be sold to the base, will always have a primary emphasis on control of the struggle. In urban politics this is now the threat. Three years ago Jordi Borja, one of the leading urbanists in the PSUC, wrote that the Associations “will perhaps be able to ensure that rising social expectations do not lead to uncontrollable forms of direct action which would merely exacerbate tensions without producing political solutions.” Such a view of the development of struggle leads logically to the PSUC’s present position.

While PSUC move towards the municipal elections with this position the revolutionary left finds difficulty in posing a viable alternative strategy. Most groups are clear about the acute limitations that the new councils will present: the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria for example argues that they “will not represent the type of social organisation that can carry through a radical transformation of the mode of life” being “an inseparable part of the apparatus of the bourgeois state”. Yet then the LCR (along with many other groups of the left) go to suggest, having recognised the shape of the problem, that a realistic strategy can be offered now in the form of a local “dual power” or radical democratic control: “We understand the relationship (between the council and the associations) as one of control; the municipal working commissions must be open to commissions, the right to control, to have referendums, to revoke, to propose, must all be there for the associations. But with complete independence with respect to the council.” The balance of class forces in Spain offers no such immediate prospect. The very analysis of the nature of the new local government structures that the LCR makes implicitly recognises this. Unrelated to the realities of the current state of the struggle, offering nothing as an immediate strategy, the fall back (yet again) onto the model of “dual power” unfortunately says more about the poverty of ideas on the revolutionary left even in Spain around what is still considered a “secondary” area of work.

The current period for the urban movement in Spain is a difficult one. Despite the rising tide of sectarianism which has jolted many associations, despite the uncertainty over the future role of the movement in the new municipal structures, the struggle does continue. Regular and numerous accounts in the daily press bear witness to the activities of the urban movement, to new tactics and to their successes. Last October in San Adrian de Besos the occupants of six blocks of flats had to move out overnight after sudden subsidence left huge cracks in the walls and ceilings and gave rise to fears of a collapse. An immediate campaign was launched for new housing, while the tenants affected camped outside outside the old blocks. In the face of repeated statements by the local authorities and Ministry of Housing that the houses were not in a dangerous state and could be reoccupied and repaired the Neighbourhood Association organised a one-day general strike in the zone. It achieved a 90% success amongst shopkeepers and small businesses and the tenants themselves held a demonstration of 3,000 which cut off the main access roads through the area in an afternoon of running battles with the police.

Peter Anderson

The new ‘new left’ in Italy

THIS ARTICLE is written with the belief that knowledge about the class struggle in Italy is important to us and that almost all of the knowledge available in this country is of little use — being examples of the “what they need is a revolutionary party” approach. To understand what has been happening in Italy is to become aware of the problems facing revolutionaries active in an advanced capitalist country going through a prolonged economic recession. If any one theme is central to this article it is that of the divisions that exist within the working class and the problems they pose for the implementation of a successful revolutionary strategy.



We start from the argument that the Italian revolutionary movement, through the offensive it sustained from 1968 to 1973, forced on the Italian ruling class a new strategy. This strategy has been able since 1973, to substantially shift the balance of class forces in its favour and has caused theoretical and organisational disarray amongst the Italian revolutionary left. Some of the capitalist class gains have been necessarily short-term, others may be more permanent. There are signs that out of this situation the revolutionary left is beginning an essential process of self-criticism; a pre-requisite for its being able to regain the offensive. The advanced nature of the struggle between capital and labour in Italy makes it a reference point for revolutionaries throughout Europe.

THE ECONOMIC HISTORY

In the early 1960’s, the Italian economy experienced a “miracle” based on the ability of Italian manufacturers to win export markets because of the comparative cheapness of their products. Their products were cheap because wages were low. Wages were kept down because of the existence of thousands of peasants from the South who migrated to the Northern cities, in particular Milan and Turin (the city of Fiat), and acted as a reserve army of labour and secondly because the left-wing trade unions and political parties were weak and divided.

But from 1965 onwards, the reserve army of labour diminished, partly through emigration. The economy was

moving to a position of relative full employment and many workers were becoming less ready to accept an economic boom built on their backs which provided them with none of the fundamental needs like housing, transport, health and schools for their kids and which, in many cases, took the form of them making products (e.g. cars and washing-machines) which they did not have the means of purchasing.

In 1969, this growing worker militancy came into contact with the student movement whose “workerist” wing wanted to get out of its student ghetto — the result was explosive. It marked the beginning of the “Hot Autumn” which was to last for four years — a period in which the right of factory management to manage was put in doubt. In the end, the reformist leadership of the workers movement (that is the trade-union and PCI leaderships) were able to recuperate the “Hot Autumn” and translate its qualitative demands (“against work, against any form of bonus payments for the election of autonomous factory delegates) into quantitative ones (for a reduction in the working week, for substantial wage rises, for delegates elected by union members only) but the process of recuperation took time and cost the capitalists a lot of money. And in the meantime a state of “anarchy” prevailed in many Italian factories — in which management lost control over the production process. In this period, the cost of labour shot up, and goods lost

their competitive edge in world markets. By 1973, inflation was increasing fast, the balance of payments deficit was soaring; it was made disastrous by the oil crisis given that, unlike the U.K., Italy had no equivalent of North Sea oil to fall back onto.

The response of the Italian capitalist was two-fold:

- 1) At an economic level, they cut back investments in industry. Broke down the larger units of production into sub-contracting and home-work. Invested in property and banking and moved the rest of their money abroad.
- 2) At a political level; they formed a Christian Democrat government which carried out the austerity programme laid down by the conditions of an IMF loan. IMF conditions similar to those imposed on the British government in 1975 and which included wage controls and cut-backs in public expenditure. And they formed an alliance with the PCI in which the party agreed to use its influence with industrial workers to keep things quiet at the factory level.

The result of these policies was a sharp rise in the rate of unemployment to the present figure of 8% of the working population (1.5 million), over two million part-time or under-employed workers and a rapid increase in irregular, “lump” work (without cards etc.) The effects were particularly disastrous in the South of Italy which has always had a higher rate of unemployment than in the North, but now

finds no country for its male workers to emigrate to. (Traditionally the painful solution forced on the working class).

THE RESPONSE OF CAPITAL

It is not always satisfactory to see the capitalists as a united class — rival factions always exist within the class. This is especially true in Italy where national unity is a relatively recent phenomenon and where there remain fundamental differences of interest between the Northern industrialists, the Southern land-owners and the patrons of Christian Democracy whose financial interests depend on state corruption and the nepotistic favours of national and local government. For instance, there are clear occasions in which Agnelli, the boss of Fiat who is the voice of the Northern industrialists, has tried to ditch Christian Democracy either by creating a new party of "progressive capital" centred around the existing Liberal Party or by demanding that the PCI be brought into government. At the same time industrial capital has been concerned to off-load the state sector loss making sectors of the economy — this has been successful in that by now loss makers like steel, ship-building, Alfa-Romeo cars etc. are all part of one of the state holding companies (I.R.I. etc). The industrialists have also demanded, and got, from the government large subsidies for new investment, state financing of redundancy payments and a reflationary economic policy which made sure it was the working class that paid for the crisis. In the work-places, there has been a determined push to roll back the gains made by the workers in the 1969-72 period and this has involved re-asserting control over labour mobility, introducing automation in those parts of the production process where worker organisation was the strongest (e.g. the introduction of robots on the lines at Fiat), decentralising production in a network which bring together large plant, sub-contractor and home-worker and exporting labour-intensive production out of Italy (e.g. in Latin America and Eastern Europe) and investing in Italy in capital-intensive projects (e.g. petrochemicals), real estate and the service sector.

At a political level, the capitalist class as a whole has had three simultaneous strategies. Firstly, it has since 1966, supported right-wing terrorism and the Fascist movement. There is now no doubt that the "respectable" right was involved in the bombings that began in 1969 (at the Milan Fair in April, at Piazza Fontana in December, of the "Italicus" train in 1974) and formed part of the "strategy of tension" that brought together some CD parliamentarians, members of the Mafia, high-ranking officials in the Italian secret service and NATO and leading members of the neo-fascist Social Movement of Italy (MSI) and other Fascist organi-

sations. The way the CD leaders hoped the "strategy of tension" would evolve was that by giving free reign to fascist and Mafia elements to create a state of unrest, this would lead to popular demands for a "law and order" state which would allow Christian Democracy to govern on a much more repressive and authoritarian basis. This "strategy of tension" was defeated by a militant, often violent anti-fascist movement that acted in conjunction with revolutionary newspapers like "Lotta Continua", which continually was able to produce evidence on the strategy of tension, and left-wing judges who continued to uncover evidence that implicated the Fascists in the bombings. At present, the MSI is in retreat (its last electoral score was 5%) but the Fascists are still useful to the ruling class, who get them to beat up factory and community militants burn down the offices of left-wing parties.

Secondly, there was an attempt to clean up Christian Democracy. For instance, after the Lockheed scandal, it was felt necessary to get a couple of DC leaders to take the rap for the bribe. That they were not the only ones involved can be seen by the subsequent resignation of the Italian president Leone who also took back-handers. But it is very clear that any attempt to clean up the CD party can only be a very superficial business since corruption is at the very base of its system of government. This

"clientism", as everyone calls it, not only involves jobs for its industrial and financial supporters but also jobs for a small selection of the many working people who vote and campaign for the DC. This system of patronage is rife at the level of national and local government.

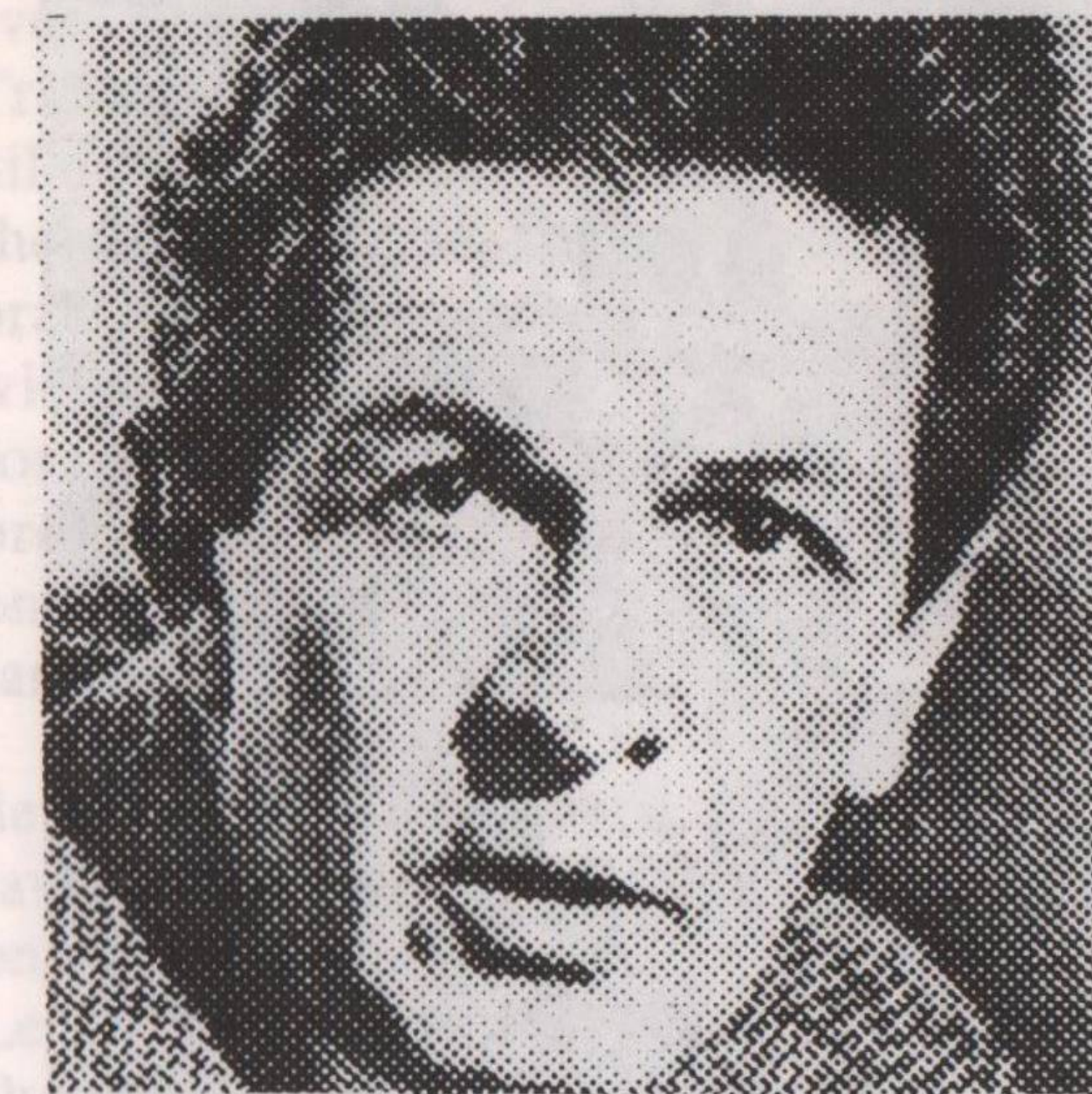
Thirdly, progressive capitalists have used their influence inside CD to try and get it to accept the "historic compromise" offered by the PCI and to form a coalition government. These progressive capitalists want the PCI in government as an exchange for the sterling work it is doing for them controlling the struggle in the factories. They realise that one of the reasons that the PCI has been able to control its rank and file is this promise of a coalition government. They know that as the promise wears thin, the PCI leadership will be forced to take a more militant stand or lose the support of its followers as is now happening. But the progressive capitalists have not got a majority inside the CD and its majority is not in favour of a coalition government with the PCI.

THE RESPONSE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

We are used to define the PCI as an Euro-communist party. No doubt, there are important similarities between the policies of the PCI and those of the French and Spanish Communist parties. But in discussing Euro-communism, there has been a tendency to concentrate on its ideological positions (e.g. its line on

the Soviet Union, on Leninism, on the dictatorship of the proletariat) and not on the actual political and economic policies of these Communist parties. And if we turn our attention to these latter issues, the differences that exist between the different Euro-communist parties become more apparent — for instance, the "Common Programme" with the Socialist Party, followed until May 1978, by the French CP, is an alliance with very different forces from the "historic compromise" of the PCI which is an alliance with CD that excludes the Italian Socialist Party in the hope of marginalising it. Another misconception that the concept of "Eurocommunism" can lead to, is that the Communist Parties adoption of non-insurrectionary road to socialism is a recent event. In fact, the PCI made its final break with holding an insurrectionary position in 1944 with the "Turn of Salerno" when the strategy of parliamentary alliances was first taken up. Togliatti, who was at that time leader of the party, described as "duplicité" (doppiezza) the relationship between this new parliamentary road and the Leninist road to revolution which many militants still believed to be the real strategy of the party (many thought the parliamentary road was a ruse to mislead the bourgeois parties). But when it forced members of the resistance to hand over their arms to the state in exchange for participation in the post-war government, the PCI made it clear that it had adopted a parliamentary strategy for real. The exact form the PCI's historic compromise with Christian Democracy was to take was determined by the events in Chile in the 1970-73 period. Immediately after the fall of Allende, Berlinguer, the leader of the PCI wrote this: "We consider Parliament as an essential institution of Italian political life, not only today but also in the phase of the transition to socialism and of its building.....So Parliament cannot be used as in Lenin's time, and as it can happen in other countries, as a platform for denouncing capitalism and bourgeois governments.....In Italy, it is also and especially a place where the representatives of the workers' movement develop and make concrete their political and legislative initiatives.....The opposition and a frontal collision between those parties who have roots amongst the people (he means the PCI and CD) and through which important masses of the population are represented would lead to a division, a real split in two of the country which would be fatal for democracy and would overturn the very base on which the survival of the democratic state depends". This is why the PCI sees as essential an alliance (the historic compromise) with the CD and of course for this alliance to be acceptable to the rank and file of the PCI, the DC must be made acceptable. In the same article, Berlinguer does this: "The major error that must be avoided is to judge Italian Christian

Democracy and also the other parties that bear this name, almost as an a-historic, quasi-metaphysic category which would make it always and everywhere a party lined up on the side of reaction....."



Enrico Berlinguer, PCI leader and exponent of eurocommunism.

The PCI's aim is a government of national unity with DC. As it gets closer and closer to this aim, it has to make sure that it develops policies that are acceptable to those social strata whose support it has to win to make its electoral strategy a success — that is skilled workers, supervisory grades, small and middle business men, professional strata (doctors, lawyers etc.), junior managers and civil servants etc. Taking for granted continued working class support, the PCI leadership has gone ahead with very rapidly developing industrial, social and international policies that amaze in their conservatism. The economic policy starts from the point of view that capitalism and the working class have a common interest; it is clearly stated by Asor Rosa, a leading PCI intellectual

"The working class and capital (not only taken in its pure form as in books) can find a long phase in which they have a common interest in (economic) development and in this they can see as standing against them both privileged parasitic strata and non-privileged parasitic strata, the latter never getting beyond the arid and desperate perception of their own needs." And if you understand this, you understand, according to Asor Rosa, a far deeper truth and that is: "That the way out of the capitalist system is through its extreme (most profound) realisation and not through the stunted way forward of an ideological refusal to face up to the laws that determine its development." What Asor Rosa is legitimating in this disgusting article is the PCI's support for the capitalist class and their laws and their police against what he calls "parasitic sectors"; is the unemployed, the students, the youth and all those who have been marginalised by the capitalist system of production. Does this mean an alliance with sectors of capital? Of course it does as the PCI economic research department makes clear: "The important fact contained in the 1974 conference on small and medium enterprises consists

in the fact that, for the first time in an explicit way, the PCI proposed an alliance with an important layer of the bourgeoisie... a layer of the bourgeoisie which produces surplus-value through the exploitation of the work force." Not surprisingly, it is argued that between industrialists and workers; "We must go beyond an alliance, towards a great national pact" To get the economy going, it is necessary for industrialists to increase investment and this they will only do if "the industrial climate" improves — that means if the workers are controlled by the unions. Lama, a leader of the PCI and the leader of the CGIL, the Communist trade-union, states clearly the need for austerity and redundancies to "get capitalism going again." The need for working class austerity was a central part of the PCI's election campaign of 1976 and nowhere is it put more clearly than in this speech by

Amendola, one of the historic leaders of the PCI: "All left-wing policies, all policies of democratic transformation and social renewal require an austerity, a discipline, a strictness that the working class as force of national leadership must be prepared to accept. Any demagogic policies, even if presented in an extremist form, can encourage dangerous centrifugal tendencies, which express the refusal of a national discipline that is essential for a policy of renewal. But this policy must not be imposed, it must be accepted and it demands discussion, popular participation, mass consensus for the measures taken — what this means is self-discipline. The communists must be in the forefront of this difficult task of democratic self-discipline." It is not good enough that a policy of austerity be imposed on working people, they must be led to willingly accept this austerity!Basta (enough)! By now, you will be asking yourself, "with friends like these who needs enemies?" And this is quite correct, almost on every issue imaginable (e.g. membership of NATO, abortion, law and order, education, economic restructuring etc.) the PCI has taken an anti-working class position. Its most recent performances were to oppose any negotiations with the Red Brigades during the kidnapping of Moro and to campaign against a referendum that demanded the abolition of the Reale laws — that is the extremely repressive "anti-terrorist" laws passed by the Italian government in 1975.

This new strategy is an accurate reflection of the changing class composition of the PCI. In most of the large towns and in the regions, the PCI is the party of government. For instance, in Emilia, where the PCI has been in power for a long time, many of its members are small capitalists that used to be skilled workers — they now own a small engineering shop that sub-contracts work from companies like Fiat. So it is quite natural that the PCI has developed policies that favour small and medium capitalists and civil servants — they are an important part of its political base. In Bologna, the PCI has the support of shop-keepers and middle-class urban dwellers for its rational urban planning



Fiat boss Agnelli; popular representative of Italian industry.



policies and its use of the police to kill left-wing demonstrators.

It is customary for left-wing commentators (e.g. Flores and Moetti in NLR 96) to claim that the PCI strategy is working. But the strategy is not working and the PCI faces a very serious crisis. This failure can be seen in the PCI's recent electoral performances, (the vote is down to the traditional 20%), membership of the party is declining, workers are now only 35% of the membership, membership of the PCI Youth is declining and the party has failed in its principle objective to form a coalition government with Christian Democracy.

And the PCI has certainly failed in its attempt to crush all opposition on its left, though this opposition is still in a period of organisational flux. Without doubt the PCI is in crisis. There is not yet evidence of organised internal opposition

to the leadership's 'historic compromise.' But as working class opposition to austerity grows and the PSI begins to reap the fruits of its anti-government positions, the PCI will be forced to radically re-think its policies. The most likely consequence is a rejection of "the historic compromise" in favour of an alliance with the PSI and other "progressive" parties. A change of leadership may well accompany this change of policy. What is true to say is that the PCI's "turn to small and medium capital" has profoundly disorientated the revolutionary left. This we turn to now.

THE RESPONSE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT.

A ny overall analysis of the revolutionary left in this period must distinguish between the "party" and "non-party" left.

between those comrades active in revolutionary organisations (in particular 'Lotta Continua', 'Avanguardia Operaia' now fused into 'Democrazia Proletaria' and 'Il Manifesto - PDUP') and those comrades active in 'movement' politics. And once such a distinction has been made there are many factors which have to be taken into consideration including the level of militancy inside the working class, the actions of other forces in Italian politics, in particular the PCI and the urban guerrillas and those factors of crisis which are common to the revolutionary left throughout Europe. The PCI and the ruling class have used every ideological dirty trick to divide the working class and to portray the revolutionary left as the supporters of terrorism, the unemployed, all "marginal elements" etc. Even under this provocation, the majority of the revolutionary left did not take up the position of seeing the PCI as the main enemy and in the election period they called for a PCI-PSI government which made no sense at a time when the PCI was set on the "historic compromise." What relation to take to the PCI has been a cause of a split within the "party" revolutionary left. Between those who continued to argue against all evidence that the PCI remained a working-class party and those who saw it clearly as a bastion of social-democracy. At the founding conference of the organisation "Proletarian Democracy" (a fusion of AO and PDUP-Manifesto) it was argued that: "what brings us together is the gamble that it is possible to build a revolutionary organisation in a period that is not revolutionary. In fact the Italian bourgeoisie has regained the initiative that it seemed to have lost in the 1968-72 period. It is strengthening itself through a reinforcement of Christian Democracy with the aim of an authoritarian democracy based on some kind of a conflictual alliance between DC and the PCI." At the same conference, Vittorio Foa made the point that it was the "new" DC that was the focus for political and social restoration and that since the PCI was totally integrated in the system, there was no chance of it changing its strategy even if it returned to the opposition. But he reminded the conference that if the contradiction between the PCI and the DC was no longer a live one, the contradiction between the PCI leadership and its base was — offering a large space in which the revolutionary left should immediately begin to insert itself beginning with the struggles that are taking place around the industry-wide contracts.

On the other hand, Lotta Continua has broken with a position of tactical support for the PCI though from a very different organisational perspective. Since the 1976 Rimini conference Lotta Continua no longer exists as a structured organisation but with its daily paper that has a circulation of 35,000 and a growing "area" of sympathisers, it remains a central focus of the revolutionary movement. With its industrial base in decline, Lotta's growing support comes from those sectors of the working class who have been hardest hit by the economic recession — unempl-

oyed workers, unemployed students, women and prisoners. Given the "divide and rule" offensive of the ruling class, there is a permanent tendency for militants from these sectors to adopt a position of hostility towards the industrial working class. The newspaper "Lotta Continua" reflects very accurately these tensions within the working class and between those who favour and those who are against some form of "party" organisation.

Solutions to these tensions cannot be imposed from above. And since they are rooted in the material conditions of the Italian proletariat, their solution only becomes a possibility when the revolutionary movement begins to develop ways of struggle that confront these material divisions.

THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY TERRORISM

The ability of the revolutionary left to respond to the ruling class offensive has been hampered by its own workerism and by the policies pursued by the PCI. Another obstacle has been the strategy followed by the urban guerrillas; in particular the Red Brigades and the NAP, (Nuclei of Armed Proletarians).

Before discussing the formation and actions of these groups one argument must be dismissed; that is the argument that describes them as "Fascist" and as some kind of provocation by the Italian state or the CIA. Whilst there is no doubt that on many occasions the actions of the armed parties have been against the interests of the working class, and there is every likelihood that they have been infiltrated it is also clear that the Red Brigades and the NAP have very clear roots in the revolutionary left — both in terms of their political theories and in terms of the personal histories of their members. To take the last point first — all the leading members of the two groups were active for a time either in the PCI or in a revolutionary left group: and many of them came from PCI families where the tradition of the Resistance was strong. All the first generation of urban guerrillas were fully involved in the wave of struggles that followed the Hot Autumn of 1969 — some of them like Curcio were active in the student movement, others were Fiat workers who participated in the worker-student assemblies and the entire leadership of NAP were at one time in the Prison commission of Lotta Continua and were politicised in the wave of struggles that swept through Italian prisons in the early 1970's in which the revolutionary left (especially Lotta) played an important role.

The political ideas of the "armed parties" were the result of a confluence of their experience of the struggle and the very classical Marxist-Leninist framework of ideas that they possess. It must be remembered that the state used very considerable repressive forces against the struggles that were developing at this time — in the factories, in the schools, in the communities. On the 2nd december 1968, the police opened fire on a demon-

stration of agricultural workers who had blocked off a road near Avola in Sicily — the police kept firing for 25 minutes, long after the workers had fled to the fields. Two workers were killed and many were injured, including children. Throughout Italy, there was shock and horror at the events of Avola — the reaction of the Trento student assembly was "they have killed two of ours, we must kill two of them". Of course, this was not put into practice at the time, but it reflected a widely held feeling that the balance of forces was not going in favour of the progressive forces and that this could only be reversed if the struggle was militarised.

The project of the urban guerrilla developed as the experiences of an unfavourable balance of forces was grafted on to the Leninism of these militants. Leninism gave them the concept of the vanguard that operated as the "revolutionary consciousness" of a proletariat that on its own could not go beyond trade-union consciousness. Their Leninism gave them the moral strength necessary to choose the armed struggle; for them to be a Leninist meant to dedicate yourself life and soul to the revolution — which became the reason for being. As an Italian militant, Francesco Alberoni has written: *Their moral being was to be a revolutionary, to act for this end and to sacrifice for it everything else; their personal life, tastes, choices, love, motherhood and children..... Leninism is a way of doing politics in which there are no rights since everything is made subordinate to a goal.* If they got from Leninism this vanguardism which enabled them to feel justified to act on behalf of the masses, they also

got from Chinese marxism a "third worldist" analysis of the world which saw the world divided on class lines with the countries of the third world as the world's proletariat. To these traditional Marxist Leninist views, the urban guerrillas added the view that the epoch of the mass strikes and demos was over and that what was needed was the armed party — "a political-military vanguard that presents itself in front of everyone and shows the way forward." To progress it was necessary to "build an armed movement with a rigorous and single political line in which would be recognised the youth of workers' autonomy, the womens movement freed from small-bourgeois ideas, the immigrant workers, the unemployed, soldiers and prisoners." That is a 'third-force' able to build the "unity of the revolutionary movement within the combat party." For the Red Brigades, it was clear that the urban guerrilla has to precede the development of working class autonomy and not vice versa. As one of their key texts makes it clear: *It is within the guerrilla that the resistance movement and the area of autonomy is built and not vice versa. To enlarge this area means in the first instance to develop the organisation of the guerrilla.... The "autonomous assemblies" cannot go beyond the false polarity between "legality" and "illegality". They are not able to locate the question of organisation on the basis of real political needs and so end up by limiting these needs to those catered for by the types of legal organisation that already exist.* For revolutionaries, propaganda is no longer enough,



It is an open secret that the armed parties like the Red Brigades have very clear roots in the revolutionary left, both in terms of theory and members.

what must be aimed for is political destabilisation that is achieved through "smashing the bureaucratic, military machine of the state." which "is an essential condition for any real proletarian revolution".

With these ideological positions the NAP and the Red Brigades began in the early 1970's their urban guerrilla campaign whose aim was to reveal to the masses the repressive nature of the bourgeois state and in so doing provide recruits for the armed party — the only force that could successfully conclude a revolution. It is important to remember that initially many working class people saw the guerrillas as "Robin Hoods" their actions which included bank robberies, putting capitalists into a people's prison, wrecking factories in support of strikes often had a considerable amount of popular support. At a time when the PCI and the unions were actively sabotaging any working class resistance to the government's austerity programme, at least the guerrillas were doing something even if their actions were elitist and not under any democratic control of the masses.

This popular sympathy diminished rapidly with the first "executions" of 1976. These executions reflected a desire of the guerrillas to escalate the struggle but they also reflected how badly their logistic forces have been hit by the repressive forces of the state. During the 1971-76 period, most of the "first-generation" guerrillas have been either killed or imprisoned, many of their weapons' caches and hiding places discovered. A "second generation" of guerrillas now run the show who have neither the political formation nor the logistical infrastructure of their predecessors. And very quickly, their action become no more than a series of hit and run shootings and rub offs. What was meant to be a process of politicisation becomes a shoot-out between the guerrilla and the forces of state law and order. As the violence escalates, the guerrillas are forced to adopt the ways of operating of the class enemy. The whole working class movement becomes a passive spectator of this shoot-out in which it has neither the desire nor the possibility of getting involved. The more pressure the guerrillas are under, the less politically coherent their actions become. A good example of this being the killing of Moro which has had the effect of stabilising the Christian Democrat government. Amongst the many political criticisms that can be made of the Italian urban guerrilla, the following stand out:

Their analysis of how the ruling class in an advanced capitalist democracy keeps itself in power is totally erroneous. To say as the guerrillas do that it relies only on coercion is as one-dimensional as the Euro-communists who say that it relies only on consent; in fact it relies on a mixture of consent and coercion.

Though the Red Brigades were correct in their texts to describe the current crisis of capitalism as a structural one they were



The armed parties quickly alienated popular support.

incorrect to claim that the system was "on the point of collapse". Their economism makes them unable to see that capitalism will not collapse for economic reasons. It can only be replaced when there is a revolutionary socialist alternative that wins the support of large numbers of working people.

And most importantly, the urban guerrilla with its inevitable escalation of violence is an elitist struggle that excludes all but the very few who are prepared to take "the leap into clandestinity." The important criticism to make of the urban guerrilla is not that they use violence but that there is no organic relation between their violence and the mass movements. The structures that they have developed make it essential that it is they who decide what acts of violence to commit. And as time goes by, their decisions come to reflect their needs and capacities and not the needs of the mass struggle.

It is also the case that they had a very outdated, military concept of "smashing the heart of the state" and "seizing state power" — use of this kind of language presumes that state power is localised in a centre and that all that has to be done is to smash the centre. Such inadequate analysis of the monopoly capitalist state leads to mistaken political actions (i.e. you rub out political leaders with the [incorrect] expectation that they are important to the system as individuals) and to an under-

estimation of the resilience of the state. For instance, the failure of the Red Brigades to assess the role of the mass media in the consent/coercion domination of the state prevents them from seeing the power of the propaganda organs of their class enemy have in getting their interpretation of the Red Brigades' actions accepted by the masses.

It is quite clear that the actions and existence of the urban guerrilla has caused problems on many levels for the party revolutionary left. Firstly there is the fact that there are personal and political ties that link many members of the urban guerrilla with left groups — especially Lotta and the, now dissolved, Petere Operaio (Workers Power). These personal ties (in which there also is a sense of responsibility) have led many on the revolutionary left to describe the urban guerrillas as "comrades who have made a mistake" which is an obviously inadequate description for the purpose of a political analysis. Secondly, the actions of the urban guerrilla over which the revolutionary left has not control have provided the repressive forces of the state with useful pretexts to raid, harass, imprison, murder militants of left groups. And it is incorrect to suggest that this would have happened anyway — the guerrilla actions have been the pretext for the state to pass emergency laws in which anything goes. Thirdly, the guerrilla actions — in many cases badly thought out and badly executed — have strengthened the position of the right-wing parties amongst the working class and the small bourgeoisie; this is clear from the gains made by Christian Democracy (at the expense of the PCI) in the local elections that took place after the death of Moro. In these "state of tension" conditions, it is all too easy for the revolutionary left to be branded as "terrorists" and associated with political actions that they neither agree with nor have any control over. In fact, it is a tribute to the political maturity of the vanguard sections of the working class that they did not accept (as happened in West Germany) the major parties' attempt to criminalise the revolutionary left. For instance, the unions' call for a two-hour strike the day of Moro's funeral was hardly followed and there was some working class support for the position of "Neither the State nor the Red Brigades" put forward by some sections of the revolutionary left including "Lotta Continua."

THE EFFECT OF THE MOVEMENT

From outside, the political space of the revolutionary left has been threatened by the PCI on one side and the urban guerrilla on the other. From inside, it has been shaken by movement politics — in particular the demands raised by the women's movement. Feminism has successfully questioned both the form and content of revolutionary left theory

and practice. At the level of form, it has introduced consciousness raising anti-hierarchical structures and the small group into a way of doing politics that was very traditional in its leader-orientation. At the level of content, feminism has questioned the traditional order of priorities; no meeting was complete without a "conjunctural analysis of the epoch, there was always an emphasis on an analysis on what the government and the PCI was doing. Whereas those active in the women's movement have developed a way of seeing things that starts from their own needs and desires and builds a political strategy on these.

It is this perspective of starting from your own needs that has been behind the political movements of 1977 that together made up the Movement — women, the unemployed, proletarian youth, gays, prisoners. A movement that immediately confronted the 'centrality' of the industrial working class.

THE PROBLEM OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

But if Movement politics, which reached its high point in 1977, was able to assert the specific needs of the non-workplace sectors of the working class, it was not able to put forward a strategy for unification. The Movement is now divided between those who have given up the possibility of any unified struggle and those who still believe it possible, if only in the long-term. For many Italian revolutionaries; the present is a period of self-criticism and questioning. Unfortunately, the continual dramas of Italian political life make any retreat into reflection and analysis very difficult.

Though it is true that the main causes of the crisis of the revolutionary left were not organisational, they did influence the debate on revolutionary organisation that was always a live issue within the Italian revolutionary left. The most interesting formulations of the debate occurred in Lotta Continua which was always aware of the potential antagonism between its democratic centralist concept of the party and the needs of the vanguards of the autonomous movements — many of whom were also in Lotta. And there is no doubt that whatever its ideological positions, Lotta Continua was the only revolutionary organisation able to respond to the flood of autonomous struggles that developed in successive years — women, prisons, courts, health, etc.

Unfortunately, whilst in many ways the influence of Maoism on the leadership of Lotta Continua was positive, it also has its negative aspects. In particular, it led them to an incorrect assessment of how the relationship between the party and the autonomous struggles of the masses should be resolved. It led them to underestimate the tension that exists in this relationship and to over-estimate the ability of the party

to recuperate these autonomous struggles by a deft change of line. Their uncritical assessment of China made them unable to see that on many occasions the Chinese CP (the government) had to use the force of the army to re-establish control over the masses. So it is not surprising that the Lotta Continua leadership, who did not have an army, lost their grip over the "Cultural Revolution" that they were confident that they could control. The leadership of Lotta Continua were never able to free themselves from their Maoist vision of the party as paternalistic educator which sits squarely in the Leninist Jacobin tradition. An internal document of Lotta Continua of 1975 shows clearly how the organisation was trying to go beyond this traditional Third International concept of the party. Later Lotta Continua went on to formulate the idea of the revolutionary party as the "constituent assembly" of the mass autonomous movements. These formulations were always counter-balanced by more centralist ones and never put into practice.

Right now at the end of 1978, the workers are organising to fight the settlement of their bi-annual contracts. This will be an opportunity for internal vanguards and revolutionaries to re-assess the possibility of some organisational recomposition. Whether this happens or not will in large part depend on whether the industrial worker vanguards have changed their views on the "centrality of the factory." There are now many autonomous movements in Italy whose members quite rightly believe in the specificity of their own struggle for communism. They will not accept an organisational compromise that insists on a vertical hierarchy of struggles. On the other hand, there are signs that the ruling-class policy (supported by the PCI) of "divide and rule" is under pressure. For instance, the organisation of the unemployed together with workers struggle for "less work — work for all" is an encouraging instance of unification.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR US?

It is always very dangerous to make generalisations about either capitalist strategy or revolutionary developments that jump glibly from one country to another. And in Big Flame there have been too many uncritical adoptions of the Italian experience. Looking at the factors mentioned in this article, we can say:

* The capitalist plan of decentralisation of production is not as advanced here as in Italy. Institutions like the closed shop make it more difficult for the industrialists to introduce sub-contractors — though this is beginning to happen in the chemical industry and the mines — and of course, it has always been common in the building industry. Homeworking is no doubt on the increase but it is limited to the competitive sector of the economy (rag trade etc.) and has not spread to the monopoly sector as it has

in Italy. And we have not reached the situation that exists in Italy where the work-force is totally split between unionised workers and non-unionised migrant workers doing the shit jobs. * the CPGB has nothing like the influence and support amongst the working class and middle strata that the PCI has in Italy. A majority of working class people in this country vote Labour but they have in no way the level of identification with the party that is felt by the members and supporters of the PCI. And it is difficult to overestimate the blow to working class struggle that has been caused by the rapid rightward shift of the PCI. But the other side of this coin is that we do not have inside the working class a marxist tradition and the tens of thousands of communist militants who can be won over to revolutionary positions.

The fact remains that Britain will be as well as Italy a stagnating industrial production for a long time. And with constant increases in productivity, this means continual decline in the numbers of industrial workers. Many of the traditional sectors of working class leadership (e.g. the docks) have been decimated.

In comparison to the weakness of revolutionary organisation amongst the industrial working class movements of personal liberation are comparatively strong in this country. Thus, a different balance of forces makes unlikely the confrontation between feminists and industrial workers that occurred in Italy.

But even if the confrontation is not violent, it does not mean that movements of personal liberation do not bring into question traditional revolutionary organisation in this country as well. The revolutionary tradition that goes from Marx to Lenin to Mao is very much based on the idea of a class whose revolution will be based on the rejection of their exploitation at the point of production and whose revolutionary discipline will be the discipline they have learnt in the capitalist factory. And yet there is much evidence to throw doubt on this tradition — in the third world revolutions are often led by peasants and in the advanced capitalist countries, many revolutionary mass movements have no direct connection with point of production issues (the women's movement, the movement of the unemployed, self-reductions in the community etc.) In Italy, the internal vanguards of these mass movements have made it quite clear that they are not prepared to remain in revolutionary parties as second-class members. In this country, the disaffection of thousands of militants with revolutionary left organisations is not as confrontational and visible but it is nonetheless an important phenomena. It may well be the case that, once again, the Italian revolutionary movement is, because of its successes, the first to have to confront fundamental problems that all of us will have to face — sooner or later. Once again, we have a lot to learn from what is happening in Italy — whether we admit it to ourselves or not.

—LETTERS—

ABORTION WHAT'S IN A SLOGAN?

Wendy Clarke's article in *Revolutionary Socialism No 2* is important both because of its object and because of its relation to the current situation. Its object is twofold: to make feminist positions and issues relevant to socialists;

and to integrate the demands of the women's movement with those of the revolutionary left. Recently, there has been a lot of debate over the relationship between the women's movement and the left, prompted by the emergence of a socialist feminist tendency, and in the context of wider discussions on the issue of 'left unity'. Changes in social policy are now likely, given Callaghan's and Thatcher's increasing concern with 'the family' — or rather, given that women, and married women in particular, are an increasing section of the labour force. This may open up valuable opportunities for political and ideological intervention.

The questions raised by Clarke are therefore important, but her answers inadequate. Both her feminist and socialist premises are questionable.

Feminists have begun to challenge — and hopefully reject — the idea that there is such a thing as a 'woman's nature' which only awaits liberation; or the related notion of a true, unconstrained 'sexuality' which will surface once capitalism is overthrown. To these notions Clarke still seems to adhere as she uses expressions like "natural labour", "woman's experience", distorted sexuality". Something is "distorted" only by comparison with something which is "normal" or more "genuine" — as the ideology of "perversions" amply demonstrates. She also seems to equate "natural" with uncontaminated by technology or even science — here the more or less explicit anti-technologism and her fond reminiscing of times of witches and herbs is indicative. All such notions were understandable as ideological reactions at the beginning of the women's movement, but they are totally anti-marxist. Neither women nor men have an "essential nature". Beside some basic biological constraints, what we are is determined by and within a complex of social relations.

In trying to connect abortion with everything else, Clarke falls into meaningless generalisations. The development of the women's movement has made us realise that talking of oppression in general is neither helpful for the purposes of analysis nor for political and ideological struggle. "Oppression" has specific forms and conditions of existence which have to be specifically understood and fought over. No slogan, however vague, can deal with oppression in general or with "sexuality in all its aspects". Furthermore, combining marxism and feminism does not entail the indiscriminate application of marxist concepts to problems for which they were not meant. This mistake was made in the past when the marxist concept of exploitation was illicitly extended to private domestic labour. The result was a reactionary demand: wages for the housewife. It is even worse to compare performing labour and being in labour, as Clarke does.

The article focuses almost exclusively on a slogan — "A woman's right to choose" — which is couched in moralistic and ideologically loaded terms: abstract rights, free choice of individuals. The slogan invites the replies it usually gets: what about the rights of the foetus, the father, etc.? It can hardly be given the class content Clarke claims for it. In fact, it turns up that the slogan is not a specific demand for particular rights or anything else, but it serves a purely ideological function, what Clarke calls "raising questions". It is meant as an attack on an ideology, but the fight takes place on that ideology's terms.

Clarke's demotion of a concrete demand — "free abortion on request" — to secondary status with respect to its ideological back-up is clearly connected with her 'reconciliation' of feminism and revolutionary socialism. Concrete demands by themselves are bound to attract the charge of reformism — which is what Clarke is anxious to avoid. In its attempt to move away from reformism, the British revolutionary left has paid too little attention to concrete demands and has largely failed to develop any socialist programmes. It has restricted itself to defencist and oppositionist stands, and has put forward demands mainly for propaganda or "consciousness-raising" purposes. The problems of developing a socialist programme and that of its relation to a revolutionary movement are difficult ones. But they are not going to be resolved by the purely formal means Clarke is proposing: pairing a concrete demand with an ideological slogan which supposedly gives it revolutionary content.

Demands or policies cannot be solely judged by the ideological sign under which they are put forward. They have to be primarily judged by their effects. That is, we have to determine how both the struggle to achieve them and their implementation may help to preserve or change existing social relations. We cannot afford to dismiss each and every social reform that some future government might decide on simply because it is brought about in the name of the family. In defence of the family, for instance, Callaghan could decide either to allow the cost of domestic help to be set against tax or to increase state nursery provisions. The latter would be preferable as it would benefit a large number of working class women, free others for social production, and go some way towards undermining the material conditions of existence of the very ideology in whose sign the reform is introduced. There need not be a necessary, one-to-one correspondence between social policies, the ideological 'intentions' of those who advocate them, and the actual effects of those policies.

Nor is the state a monolithic structure with no internal contradictions, and no contradictory effects, as Clarke implies. These contradictions must be identified and exploited to our advantage. For instance, not all welfare cuts are against working class interests. While we must continue to defend, and fight to improve health, housing, and education provisions, we have no interest in defending the administrative and ideological apparatuses that go with them. However, the anti-cuts campaigns that feminists and socialists have mounted often result in an indiscriminate defence of the status quo.

Distinguishing between different aspects of the "welfare state" is particularly important if the question of users' and workers' control and popular self-administration is to be raised. Clarke does raise it, but only in relation to medical practices and their associated technology. No argument is given as to why this should be the central problem. From her description of today's conditions, one would conclude that the height of users' control was reached when stoic patients held the lamp for the operating surgeon. One of the problems with medical technology is that it is not used enough — for instance, in preventative medicine. On the connection between medical practices, technology, political structures and social relations, the article does not go beyond ritual condemnation of the giants of Geneva and the midgets of Whitehall — Clarke's twin evils, "multinational drug companies and state control".

Her critical review of past contraception and abortion campaigns may be extended to the present and taken as an indication that new political and ideological practices are needed. For instance, a more concrete approach to the issue of abortion may be useful. Abortion should be straightforwardly presented as an inevitable complement of contraception, as long as contraceptive methods are neither totally reliable nor safe. As such, it has already been accepted in some capitalist countries. If made generally available on an outpatient basis, it would cost less than fewer in-patient facilities — not an insignificant point in the context of public spending restrictions. In this form, it would also be easily accommodated within the trend towards "community health care".

These are all arguments that feminists have commonly employed, but they have often been overshadowed by slogans like "a woman's right to choose" and by interminable wrangles over such issues such as that of "viability". Ideological obstacles and pressures must not be underestimated, but this type of slogan does not help to diffuse the moralism surrounding the

whole question. Nor does it add one iota of socialism to our answer.

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A Reply

Maria Black's reply to Wendy Clarke's article "A Woman's Right to Choose" brings out two major areas of controversy, which I feel need further discussion. Firstly, the relation of modern technology to the struggle for women's liberation, and secondly the debate surrounding the abortion slogan "A Woman's Right to Choose" and the more "concrete" slogan "Abortion on Demand".

Wendy Clarke is accused of "anti-technologism", but I believe the real problem is that certain questions in her article were not taken up with sufficient complexity, due to the fact that the major point of the article lay elsewhere.

The original article points to two stereotyped situations with regard to abortion. The "sinister quack" — luring women into abortion, and the various forms of "women's culture" where methods of abortion were passed by word of mouth and the necessary drugs could be bought at the herbalists counter. Neither view of the past is exclusively "true" — both of these situations have existed alongside each other.

One does not reject technology, with the recognition that women's oppression throughout history has led to the development of a certain "understanding" between women. Faced with common problems — a body of information accumulates that may or may not be useful for solving these problems. This is not a romanticisation of the situation, as Maria Black implies. The passing on of methods such as the drinking of gin in a hot bath can only be counterproductive. However, historical evidence does suggest that women in earlier periods knew of more effective abortion methods, and that this knowledge was fairly widespread amongst women.

In a society where medical technology is not in the hands of the people using it — particularly in the case of women — someone needing an abortion is faced with extremely limited choices. To avoid what may be a humiliating encounter with the medical profession, a woman may deny herself the benefits of modern medical facilities. On the other hand, the woman who chooses to attempt to make use of these facilities often has to accept all the moralising that goes with it — if indeed she can get the use of these abortion facilities at all.

In the Middle Ages, when technology was anyway less developed, the choice was somewhat different. A doctor had no access to better abortion methods than the women themselves, and therefore the question of the use and control of technology did not arise. But today, knowledge of these older abortion methods has virtually disappeared, along with access to the various drugs and herbs. The "choice" of more "self reliance" now means crude abortion instruments such as hairclips, sewing needles or coathangers.

Even though this form of 'self-reliance' is extremely harmful to the women who are forced to resort to it, it is important to point out, as Wendy Clarke has done, that in the past women have had greater control over this aspect of their lives. This is not to romanticise women's position in the past, or look back to a 'Golden Age', but to challenge the generally accepted concept, that social and sexual relationships are "inevitably" as they are lived today, and to point to a situation which contained some aspects of what women today are trying to achieve.

I am not advocating a return to the 'herbs and drugs' of the past, where modern technology has superseded them, but rather that a situation where women had some control over reproduction is extended and applied to the more sophisticated methods that are now available.

Similarly, the point that Maria Black raises about "natural childbirth" needs further elucidation. Again, the choices open to women today are all far from perfect. The rejection of drugs gives the woman a certain independence from the medical bureaucracy, and thus more control over her own situation. This is particularly true when the only drugs offered to women in labour are either unsafe or unpleasant and debilitating.

On the other hand for women in socialist society, the options may be different. Medical technology could well develop to a point where it could prevent pain whilst being free from un-

pleasant side effects, and thus present a positive alternative to women. It is capitalist, sexist social relations that oppress women — not technology in itself. There seems to be no real reason why women would not avail themselves of this technology, if it did not entail either harmful physical side effects, or professional manipulation.

Whether the pain experienced in childbirth is essential women's enjoyment of it, as many advocates of natural childbirth claim, is a question that can only be decided by the women of the future — in a situation where there are positive alternatives.

The second area of disagreement raised by Maria Black is linked to the first by the discussion of the types of demands and questions that the women's movement should be raising.

Maria Black's criticism of the use of the term "rights" in the slogan "A Woman's Right to Choose" has some truth to it. People often take the word to mean "natural, God-given" rights, as opposed to guarantees and benefits that have been conceded by the state in the course of struggle. However, the way we intend to use the term can be clear from any discussion of the subject.

More importantly, the ideological function of the slogan "A Woman's Right to Choose" that Maria Black so derides is of central importance in the struggle for women's liberation. The very idea of women making important choices about her own life, challenges the whole moral system of thinking, not only of capitalist society, but of most earlier societies also.

Her article states that by posing the question of abortion in this way we invite questions about the "rights" of the father or the foetus.

She is quite right! And this is what revolutionary socialists and members of the women's movement should be doing. We should "invite" such questions, and then attempt to answer them. And our answers can raise many important points about the oppression of women.

In this society it is the women who bear, and usually raise the children. It is the woman's life that will be primarily affected by the decision to have children, and therefore, the choice must be hers.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the bearing and raising of children by women, is one of the prime methods by which women are "kept in their place", and it also serves as justification for this state of affairs. In demanding control over reproduction women are actually challenging a much wider spectrum of the existing social relations.

On the other hand, the more "concrete" slogan that Maria Black prefers — "Abortion on Demand" fails to raise certain important questions about the nature of women's oppression. The fight for abortion facilities has essential differences from such campaigns as those for more kidney machines, or cancer research, important as they are. The lack of abortion facilities is due both to inadequacies in the NHS but also to the moralism that surrounds women's sexuality and reproduction.

Maria Black writes that "demands must be judged by their effects", by which she means the success in forcing the medical authorities to set up more abortion clinics. But the "effects" we wish for entail a great deal more than this. Changes in people's ideas are of fundamental importance if they are to question, and reject the whole of capitalist relations. If the slogan "A Woman's Right to Choose" draws people attention to the sexist "moral" ideas about women, and offers an alternative way of seeing things, then it is serving a useful purpose.

Maria Black wishes us to present the question of abortion "straightforwardly" as a "low-cost part of community health care", and to play down the "wrangles" over such questions as "viability". But these complex issues are vital to our understanding of the world, and to our ability to challenge the ideology of capitalist society.

The achievement of better abortion facilities should be only one aspect of our activities. Through the fight for these facilities we can attempt to explain why women are denied the capability of controlling our own bodies, and the effects this has on other areas of our lives. I believe the slogan "A Woman's Right to Choose" thrusts these questions forward, and gives us a chance to provide some answers.

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