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The General Strike;
Southern European Socialist Parties.

REVIEW



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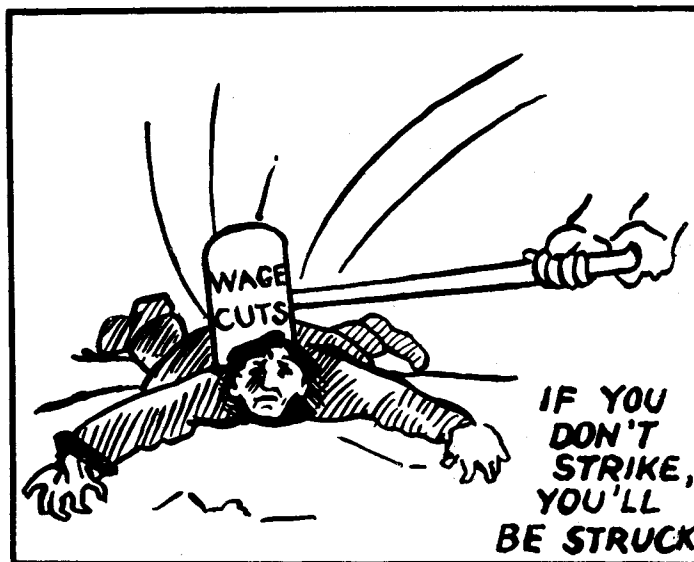
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THE GENERAL STRIKE: 1926 AND NOW

By Lynn Walsh



Cartoon from the *St Pancras Bulletin* [No 4 May 6th]. In July, 1925, the *Daily Herald* quoted Baldwin: "All the workers in this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet". As one of the coal-owners bluntly put it: "It is of no avail to suggest that the wages received do not permit of the miners having a proper standard of life."

General strikes are not accidental occurrences, simply the result of mistakes or misunderstandings between leaders. Nor can general strikes be brought about merely by small groups of political activists calling for general-strike action regardless of the time and conditions. A general strike inevitably arises from the open clash of class forces. Like all such clashes on a large scale, a general strike is inevitably rooted in the relationship of economic and political forces, and prepared and precipitated by events. This was certainly true of the 1926 Strike, which flowed from the momentous struggles after 1918, marking a decisive turning point of the class struggles in the inter-war years.

"The whole of Europe is in a revolutionary mood," Lloyd George wrote to the Paris Peace Conference: "The whole of the existing social, political and economic order is being called into question by the mass of the people." Britain was no exception. Faced with revolts in India and Ireland, the British ruling class was also confronted by a radicalised working class at home. In 1919 there was an enormous upsurge of strikes (35 million days lost) as workers struggled for better conditions and to strengthen their organisations. In many areas, Councils of Action—soviets in all but name—sprang up to prevent British intervention against the October revolution.

Underlying this revolutionary wave was the disastrous economic position of the capitalist economy. British industry was in ruins, its world position catastrophically undermined. 1919-20 actually brought a boom which the government frantically stimulated to try to dampen the revolutionary mood of the soldiers and workers. It was followed, in 1921-22, by a deep slump. Production fell by a quarter, company profits by a half. Exports fell sharply. Worst affected, were the old heavy industries, the railways, coal and cotton. The bosses saw only one way out: savage cuts in the workers' share of the wealth in order to restore their profitability.

No one denied that all the main industries in Britain were in urgent need of modernisation. The question was: How, and in whose interests? The crisis in the coal industry, which was at the heart of the conflict that led to the general strike, was typical of industry as a whole, though more acute. So decrepit and inefficient were the mines, that during the war the government had been forced to take control in order to guarantee coal supplies. When government control, which involved large subsidies, ended in 1921, the stage was set for a massive confrontation between the coalowners and the ¾ million-strong Miners' Federation. The government-appointed Sankey Commission had recommended outright nationalisation, but the government itself rejected this in favour of 'modernisation' under private ownership. The only 'reorganisation' the owners were interested in, however, was wage cuts and longer hours. Then



Lloyd George skillfully defended the bosses' interests against the threat of revolution.

they would 'consider' modernisation. 'The issue at stake,' one historian has correctly written, 'was not so much the industrial question as the government's role in the total economy and on whose behalf the government powers should be used.' Unceremoniously discarding all his opportunist promises to the miners, Lloyd George threw the whole weight of the government- and the forces of the state- behind the coalowners. This, together with the collapse of the Triple Alliance, ensured the defeat of the miners' strike in 1921. Lloyd George was well aware of the wider implications of the conflict in the coal industry. 'The whole future of the country might be at stake,' he said, 'and if the government were beaten and the miners won it would result in a soviet government.' The conflict in the coal industry not only posed the question of whose interests would be served by reorganisation, but also pointed to the revolutionary implications which would flow from a determined attempt to carry it out at the workers' expense.

"I feel bound to tell you," Lloyd George cynically taunted the trade union leaders in 1919, "that in our opinion we are at your mercy...if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw... Gentlemen, have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?" Lloyd George recognised the enormous potential power of the working class. But he also had the measure of the official trade union leaders. While he—and later Baldwin—astutely played for time, waiting for the revolutionary mood to dissipate, and preparing for an offensive when the right time came, the labour leaders made neither political nor organisational preparations for the inevitable battles. They had no programme or perspectives on which a lead could be given. When he demagogically offered them the power, Lloyd George knew they would fearfully decline it without delay.

15th April, 1921, went down in labour history as "Black Friday". This was the day that the trade union leaders, notably Jimmy Thomas, broke the Triple Industrial Alliance (of the railwaymen, transport workers and miners) which had been pledged to support the miners against wage cuts. The defeat of the miners after four months opened the way to an employers' offensive against other sections. The engineering lock-out in 1922 also led to a devastating defeat with wage cuts. The working class was forced onto the defensive.

But the militancy and fighting capacity of the workers was still far from being decisively undermined. Although all the important elements of the

1926 events were already present in 1921, the ruling class was not yet prepared to take on the labour movement in an all-out struggle.

In 1924, the first Labour government forced the coalowners to increase wages by 13% by threatening to enforce a legal minimum wage throughout industry. For the time being, the owners were cushioned by the French occupation of the Ruhr, which cut off competition from that direction. In 1925, however, with the return of a Tory government, the resumption of coal exports from Germany, and the return to the gold standard (which increased the export price of British coal), the coalowners again clamoured for cuts.

On "Red Friday" (30 July) 1925, the government agreed to pay a subsidy to the coalowners to avoid pay cuts. The government was still not ready. Public opinion was sympathetic to the miners (and needed working on) and the government's preparations for battle were not complete. "We decided to postpone the crisis," wrote Churchill, "in the hope of averting it, or, if not averting it, of coping effectually with it when the time comes." Ever since it revived the Imperial Defence Committee in 1919 to supervise "internal security", the government had been making counter-revolutionary preparations. Now, unlike the labour leaders, the government began to take systematic, practical measures to face a general strike and possible civil war. Army and Navy forces were strategically placed, the police force increased, Civil Commissioners appointed for every region, and the semi-official Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies geared up for action.

At the beginning of 1926 the government used the Samuel Commission to gain more time. In its report, which attempted to provide the basis for a compromise, this Royal Commission proposed extensive reorganisation of the coal industry, but together with wage cuts. Any decision by the government, however, was pre-empted by the owners, who intransigently proposed a 13% wage cut and an 8-hour day (a one hour increase) from 1st May. The TUC, which had swung to the left at the end of 1924, was pledged to support the miners. Even the trade union leaders could not fail to realise that another serious defeat for the miners would lead to a frontal assault on the living standards of the whole working class. On 1st May, with the miners already locked out, the TUC voted by 3,653,527 votes to 49,911 for a general strike. Within a couple of days over 3½ million front-line "troops" were drawn into the biggest-ever struggle in British working class history.

THE ROLE OF THE LABOUR LEADERS

The trade union leaders made no serious preparations for the strike, and when it was pushed onto them their over-riding aim was to bring it to an end as soon as possible, whatever the terms. Even a few days before the strike (on 19th April) Jimmy Thomas, the railwaymen's leader said "to talk at this stage as if in a few days all the workers of the country were to be called out was not only letting loose passions that might be difficult to control, but it would not be rendering the best service either to the miners or to anyone else.... instead of organising, mobilising and encouraging the feeling that war was inevitable, let them concentrate on finding a solution honourable and satisfactory to all sides"

In his own words, the well-heeled, social-climbing Thomas "grovelled" in front of the Tory government. All his statements reveal the blindness of the right-wing leaders. How could there possibly be a solution "honourable and satisfactory to both big business and the workers? Thomas's statements make it clear that, in reality, the right wing were prepared to come to terms even at the cost of enormous cuts in workers' living standards. This attitude did not merely reflect a political trend. Underlying this willingness to compromise or, if necessary, capitulate to big business, was the determination of the trade union leadership to preserve its privileged position at the head of the trade union apparatus. In the hey-day of British capitalism, when Britain was still the "workshop of the world" and dominated world trade, the ruling class made a conscious effort to dampen the workers' movement by granting a privileged position to a section of the skilled workers. Based on this, through a combination of bribery and flattery, they also strove to buy off the trade union leaders in order to exercise a restraining influence over the whole movement. The part played by Thomas and others like him in 1926 showed that this far-sighted policy paid ample dividends at a time of crisis.

The right-wing leaders represented "Red Friday", when the government

temporarily extended the subsidy to the coalowners, as a great victory. But it was clear to the lefts on the General Council—and to the active workers—that the government was merely giving itself time to prepare. Herbert Smith, President of the Miners Federation, told his members: "We have no need to glorify about victory. It is only an armistice and it will depend upon how we stand between now and May 1st next year". The rank and file were under the illusion that preparations were being made. As R. Page Arnot wrote afterwards: "Everyone looked to the General Council to give the lead.... In many places it was assumed that the General Council was secretly making the full preparations. The presence on the Council of a left-wing (comprising Purcell, Swales, Hicks, Tillet, Bromley and others) lent colour to this idea". In reality, however, no preparations were being made. When the crisis confronted them, the TUC General Council found, according to Ernest Bevin, that "the only definite steps taken were of a mediatory character. No definite proposals (for action) had been formed and put down."

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the outcome of the General strike was determined solely by the General Council's lack of power or by the lack of preparations. Lack of preparations at the top were amply compensated for by the initiative and action from below. But the General Council's failure to prepare was a symptom of its underlying attitude to the conflict. It was more afraid of the spontaneous, independent action of the workers than of defeat at the hands of the government. In the absence of an alternative leadership capable of breaking the hold of the right-wing and the vacillating lefts, the General Council's influence prevailed, steering the movement to certain defeat.

The right-wing leaders' fear of the independent action of the workers is quite evident from many statements. Jimmy Thomas confessed: "What I dreaded about this strike more than anything was this: If by any chance it should have got out of hands of those who would be able to exercise some control..." Charles Duke, Secretary of the GMWU, said afterwards: "Every day that the strike proceeded the control and the authority of that dispute was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control, no responsibility and were wrecking the movement from one end to another."

It would be difficult to conceive of greater treachery than that of the right-wing of the General Council. As the strike started, they were still searching for a "formula" for compromise, one such formula including acceptance of the Samuel Commission Report "with the knowledge that it may involve some reduction in wages." On May 6th, J. Thomas began secret negotiations with Lord



Herbert Smith, Arthur Cook and Bill Richardson, the miners' leaders, on their way to Downing Street, 26th August, 1926.

Samuel, who returned from his holiday in Italy to act as mediator, in fact tricking the General Council with a compromise to which the government was in no way committed. On the 12th May the 'British Gazette' admitted: "There is little sign of a general collapse of the strike." Yet on the very same day the General Council called off the strike. Not only were the workers amazed and horrified but even their opponents couldn't believe it. "So overwhelmed were Conservative members by the news," Baldwin reported to the King on 13th May, "that they found it difficult to believe that the surrender of the TUC was unconditional."

In view of the General Council's frantic attempts to avert the strike and then to call it off, the question arises: Why did they call a general strike at all? "If the 'Daily Mail' incident had not occurred," wrote Baldwin's recent biographers, "the TUC might have broken off the strike on their own, as they did ten days later. The evidence suggests that it needed the whole of the strike to bring them to that pitch." (Middlemas and Barnes, "Baldwin", p409) The Daily Mail incident, in fact shows the different forces which came together to produce the Strike.

The day after the General Council had sent out the strike notices, the print workers at the Daily Mail took spontaneous action to prevent the publication of a leading article denouncing the Strike as "a revolutionary movement intended to inflict suffering upon the great mass of innocent persons in the community." The hard-liners in Baldwin's Cabinet siezed on this as the opportunity they needed. They were aware that the General Council saw the Strike simply as a threat, a negotiating weapon. But a negotiated compromise that would probably give way to new conflicts was not enough. They wanted the opportunity to inflict a crushing defeat on the labour movement. The cabinet therefore siezed on the spontaneous class action of the print workers as the excuse they needed to push the General Council into an all-out general strike and, if necessary, civil war. At that stage, only open warfare could provide the opportunity of inflicting the decisive defeat on the working class that they needed to be able to carry out their "modernisation" plans for industry.

For its part, the General Council, although it saw the Strike as a negotiating counter, rather than a class weapon, was pushed into calling the Strike by the pressure from below. If they had failed to respond to the very real threats of the coalowners and the provocations of the government by calling a general strike, the General Council would

have faced unofficial action from below. The miners were locked out anyway. Other sections would have supported them, even without official backing. The Daily Mail incident showed the readiness of the workers to move. At the same time, the lefts on the General Council were not prepared to capitulate at the beginning of the Strike. During the course of the Strike, because they lacked a clear programme and perspectives and feared the workers' power and initiative, the lefts were remorselessly forced over to the position of the right wing. Those like A.J. Cook, the miners' leader, who did not openly

betray the Strike, but had no alternative to offer, were able only ineffectually to denounce the right. After nine days, the right-wing leadership was able to capitulate and still maintain its position at the head of the movement. They had no real reason to regret the defeat of the Strike, since it dealt a crippling blow to the demands for militancy to which they had always been opposed. Once that "militancy" had been shown to have "failed", they were able to return all the more easily to their own chosen policy of collaboration with the government and accommodation with big business.

THE QUESTION OF POWER

From the beginning and throughout the nine days, the General Council insisted that the conflict was merely an industrial dispute. With the hardened prejudices of generations of trade union negotiators behind them, they refused to see the Strike as anything more than a means of exerting pressure on the government. Having sent out the mobilisation orders to a powerful army, they immediately retreated to parley with the enemy leaders to continue the search for a "formula"—for capitulation. "The workers," pronounced the "British Worker" (9th May), "must not be misled by Mr Baldwin's renewed attempt last night to represent the present strike as a political issue. The trade unions are fighting for one thing, and one thing only,—to protect the miners' standard of life."

However, the events of 1926 again confirmed that, no matter what the original issue—however limited—a general strike, once it is set in motion, cannot be restricted to limited, partial aims. A general strike inevitably takes on a logic of its own. The very fact that a general strike arises reveals a fundamental conflict between two opposed classes contending to reorganise society. Either the capitalist class will carry out retrenchment at the direct expense of the workers; or the working class will reorganise industry on new socialist foundations. Once the workers are mobilised and aroused by a general strike, the question is posed even more sharply. As the workers move to take things into their own hands,

and the ruling class feels industry and the levers of power slipping out of its hands, the problem of power—of which class will run society—is unavoidably posed in immediate, practical terms. This makes nonsense of demands—such as we have sometimes seen in the recent period—for an "unlimited general strike" for such *limited* aims as defeating a pay policy, the abolition of anti-trade union legislation, or forcing a general election.

Unlike most of the General Council, the more clear-sighted members of Baldwin's Cabinet understood very well what was at stake. The representatives of the ruling class—especially Churchill and Chamberlain—deliberately used threats of revolution and civil war to scare the labour leaders. Even Baldwin, whose class determination was generally concealed beneath a studied air of indolence and unconcern, eventually posed the issue squarely: "The government," he told the Commons on 3rd May, "found itself challenged with an alternative government; the General Strike was threatening the basis of ordered government and going nearer to proclaiming civil war than we have been for centuries past." The threat of civil war was blazoned across the pages of the British Gazette, edited by Churchill: the General Strike was not a strike "in the proper sense of the term"; it was "an attempt at revolution". Yet it would be a mistake to think that the government's threats of civil war and revolution were merely a ploy to scare the labour leaders (although as

such they were effective enough). The ruling class was prepared, if it came to it, to face a civil war to achieve its objectives. They were well aware of the very real revolutionary implications of the general strike once it was set in motion.

Although the General Council allowed the movement to drift into the Strike without any real preparations, the response of the workers to the strike call was overwhelming. "We have from all over the country", said the General Council's communique on May 4th, "reports that have surpassed all our expectations. Not only the railwaymen and transport men, but all other trades came out in a manner we did not expect immediately. The difficulty of the General Council has been to keep men in what we might call the second line of defence rather than call them out". This was no mere diplomatic exaggeration, either

The rank and file were in no doubt about the political nature of the strike. A report from Deptford Labour Party recorded that: "after the third day of the strike if you spoke about the coalowners the audience would listen to you with polite indifference, but if you attacked the Government, or even mentioned the word, you had the audience with you and that with cheers and wild enthusiasm. The issue was the T.U.C. and the government—the miners and the owners were a secondary issue".

All over the country, the workers' organisations sprang into action, demonstrating tremendous powers of initiative and improvisation. In many areas, the Trades Councils were broadened to involve the Co-ops, Labour Parties, housewives' committees, and so on, thus forming Councils of Action which gave local and even regional direction to the strike. "The controlling body in each town had various names. Often the trades council formed itself into a council of action (at Ilford an 'action committee'), and a central, or joint strike committee would work in harmony (or otherwise) with it." (Wilkinson, Horrabin and Postgate: 'Workers' History of the Great Strike', 1927).

The example of one area, that covered by the Northumberland and Durham Trades and Labour Council (documented by R. Page Arnot in his history of the miners, "Years of Struggle"), provides a magnificent example of the response of the workers. At the start of the strike, it drew up a "Plan of Campaign", which defined its objective as follows: "To defeat the Civil Commissioner appointed for this Region. The Civil Commissioner is appointed by the Government and is armed with the Emergency Powers Act in order to break the strike. Our immediate aim is to prevent him doing that in



Baldwin and Churchill, the two faces of Toryism. Bitterly hostile to the labour movement, Churchill pressed the government to provoke a head-on clash with the unions. "We are at war, we must go through with it," he shouted at his less belligerent colleagues. Baldwin, no less determined to defeat the workers, understood the advantages of combining well-organised force with a show of reasonableness and moderation. "I still think we were right in buying off the strike in 1925," he said afterwards. Baldwin bought time to swing middle-class "public opinion" initially on the miners' side, against the unions. "A general Strike with public opinion on your side would be short and sharp; without its support, long and difficult." With all the instinctive skill of an old-fashioned Tory, Baldwin completely outmanoeuvred the pusillanimous TUC leaders.

this town. But in order to do that effectively we must offer a resistance throughout the whole region over which he has been given plenary powers. That is, we must defeat the Civil Commissioner and all his strike-breaking apparatus."

From the minutes of this body, we can also see the scope of its activity: "Councils of Action. The first task: Tonight's meeting should set up a Council of Action and plan out all the machinery and all the tasks for the locality. The second task is to set up replicas of this Council of Action in every corresponding locality throughout the various counties, so as to make a network of Councils of Action linked up with a central directing body whose authority and scope would exactly answer to the Civil Commissioner." Later in the same minutes: "Tasks of Councils of Action: The Council of Action will have a number of tasks for which sub-committees should be set up. These will include: Communications (Dispatch Riders etc); Feeding Centres; Food and Transport; Co-operative Societies; Local Government; Sports (to serve a double purpose); Defence Corps; Picketing; Permits; Organisation of Women; Publicity (a) Local Stencils, (b) Other Publicity; Information."

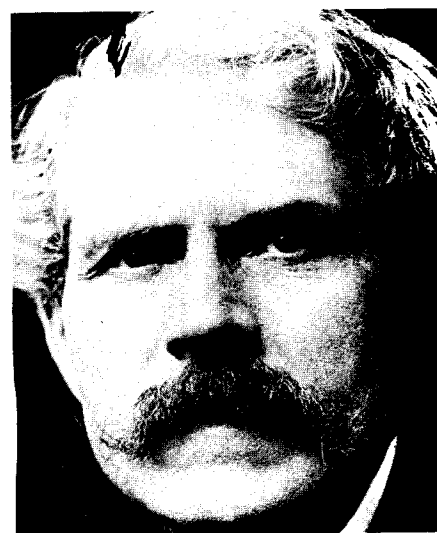
The regional authority took shape, early on Tuesday, May 5th, as the Northumberland and Durham General Council, together with a joint strike committee, which took over, and was given supreme authority subject only to the T.U.C. General Council. Their organisation was so effective that, within forty hours, the Civil Commissioner came by night to negotiate personally with the Strike Committee. Later, the Commissioner, together with the regional army commander, came to plead for "dual control" of the transport of food. This proposal was immediately rejected by the Joint Strike Committee ("we cannot agree to our men working under any form of dual control" read the minutes), which at the same time decided: "that we now use the discretionary powers vested in us by Trades Union Congress and withdraw all permits today". On the fourth day of the strike, the minutes recorded that: "On Friday the success of the general strike seemed completely assured. It was clear to everyone that the OMS organisation was unable to cope with the task imposed upon it. The attitude of the population was favourable to the strikers and unfavourable to the Government. There were no disturbances.

the Trade Unionists maintained an almost perfect discipline....The situation as a whole was now well in hand."

This impression of the complete solidarity of the Strike, involving even the unorganised workers and achieving an almost total paralysis of industry in the main industrial areas despite the presence of troops and strike-breaking volunteers, is confirmed by Wilkinson et. al. in their "Workers' History of the Great Strike": "By the second week the strike organisation, in nearly all the towns of which we have information, was in full working order and the workers were reaching out to fresh development. They were, as numerous reports put it, 'just beginning', and the full force of their attack was only commencing to be felt. Mass pickets, defence corps, propaganda, commissariat, federation over wider areas—all these were just coming into play."

The Strike was "just beginning"! Alan Hutt recalls ("Post War History of the British Working Class" p.151) that in Methil, at the end of the

Strike, he found the men thinking: "Well, in another day or two we'd better walk into power...!" Through realising their power in the Strike, the workers felt their power in society. Having become conscious of this power, they inevitably began to feel that no mere concession on wages, which in any case would only provide a temporary respite, could satisfy their new-found sense of power. Having taken on the ruling class in an all-out struggle, they had either to advance towards power, or retreat and face defeat. Only a complete change in society could provide success. But while the workers actually held the power in their hands in most of the key localities, at national level they were waiting on events. Because there was no political leadership capable of giving the Strike socialist aims, the initiative was bound, in the end, to pass back to the Government, which still had the state apparatus in its hands and which was able to bend the official trade union leaders to its own ends.



JAMES WATSON, leader of the Labour Party in 1926. His support for the General Strike was less than enthusiastic. A few hours before it began he said: "I don't like General Strikes. I haven't changed my opinion. I have said so in the House of Commons. I don't like it; honestly I don't like it; but, honestly, what can be done?"

of our class...The new phase of development which is world wide has entered on the next and probably the last stage of revolt. It is the duty of all members of the working class so to solidify their movements that, come when the time may for the final struggle, we shall be wanting neither machinery nor men to move forward to the destruction of wage slavery and the construction of the new order of society based on co-ordinated effort and work with mutual goodwill and understanding..." The lefts adopted, at least in words, a militant stance, talking in terms of the class struggle and the need to prepare for a decisive struggle. In 1925 the General Council decided to demonstrate its solidarity with the Russian revolution by forming the Anglo-Soviet Joint T.U. Advisory Committee (on which Hicks, Purcell and Swales became the British representatives). Hysterical denunciations of this move from the capitalist press gave the lefts a certain revolutionary aura. But, as Leon Trotsky warned at the time, the lefts hoped to use a radical stance on an international issue as a safety valve, exploiting it as an alternative to a genuine revolutionary stand on the issues facing the movement on its home territory.

The General Council's adherence to the Anglo-Soviet committee was the main justification used by the Communist Party leadership for its increasingly uncritical support for the "left" leadership. Trotsky's warning (of January, 1926) went entirely unheeded: "It would be a mistake to overestimate the influence of these lefts upon the unions as organisations of class struggle...The left faction on the TUC General Council is distinguished by a total ideological formlessness and for this very reason it is incapable of consolidating

THE "LEFTS" AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

From their own point of view, the serious bourgeois commentators have come to the same conclusions as Marxists: "Having once committed their forces to a lost cause," (i.e. preventing wage cuts) writes J.C.L. Thompson in the "Sunday Telegraph" (3rd February 1974) "the General Council could only either surrender, or change direction and convert the strike into a full-blooded insurrection which they dreaded as much as anyone else."

The role of Thomas, Bevin, Citrine—the "right" and "centre" on the General Council—was quite consistent with their ideas and actions in previous years. The advanced workers were far from expecting them to turn the Strike into a struggle for power, giving it socialist aims. Nevertheless, however hard this may be to believe now, among the active workers there were strong illusions in the readiness and ability of the General Council to provide leadership. This was because in the period before the Strike the "left" union leaders had gained a strong, seemingly dominant, position in the

T.U.C. leadership. High expectations in these lefts was reinforced by the enthusiastic support of the Communist Party

The defeat of the Labour Government had given way to renewed industrial struggle in 1924–25. The Minority Movement (founded in 1924) became a strong influence, gaining the support of 1¼ million union members. This provided the Communist Party with a strong industrial base. At the same time, reflecting the pressure from below, the official leadership came under the influence of a group of "lefts". They included Fred Bramley, T.U.C. General Secretary, Lon Swales of the AEU (T.U.C. President, 1925), Alf Purcell of the furnishing trades (T.U.C. President, 1924), George Hicks of the AUBTW, and, notably, Arthur Cook, recently elected General Secretary of the Miners' Federation on a Minority Movement platform.

In his presidential address, Swales told the 1925 Congress: "We are entering upon a new stage of development in the upward struggle

around itself *organisationally* the leadership of the trade union movement."

This warning proved to be deadly accurate. Although the "left" Swales was chairman of the T.U.C. "Special Industrial Committee" which was responsible for strike preparations, nothing was done. Only the Miners Federation really prepared at all. Because they had no clear perspectives, when it came to the decisive test of events the lefts could provide no alternative. First they vacillated and then retreated to the position of the right. With the right, wrote Trotsky, "stands tradition, experience and routine and, most important, with them stands bourgeois society as a whole which slips them ready-made solutions". The right and centre knew what their position was. Pugh (who succeeded Swales as T.U.C. chairman) argued that "sound tactics implied an acceptance by the miners of the (Samuel) report in substance, subject to subsequent negotiations on any point of reasonable modification." Bevin was privately drawing up plans for putting the Samuel report into operation "to the advantage of the miners". Lacking any worked-out, consistent socialist policy, the lefts had no alternative but to accept the "solution" of the right.

Afterwards, the lefts collaborated in the justification of the General Council's policy and the suppression of discussion of its role in the Strike. Even Cook, who continued to denounce the General Council's betrayal of the miners, agreed to the postponement of a special executives' conference until the miners' lock-out had ended. He also suspended the sale of his pamphlet "Nine Days" in which he had attacked the Council's conduct of the strike. Later Cook lent his enormous authority to Pugh in the chair at the Bournemouth T.U.C. when he ruled that the delegates could not discuss the Strike and the General Council's conduct of it. Having been implicated in the sell-out by the T.U.C. leadership, the lefts now had no interest in discussing the lessons of the Strike.

What was the role of the Communist Party? Immediately before the Strike it had about 4,000 members and undoubtedly embraced the most militant and politically conscious workers. Through the Minority Movement it has had a strong influence in the unions. Broader layers of sympathetic workers regarded it as the party of socialist revolution. Today, the apologetic "theoreticians" of the Communist Party print long articles (rightly) showing the enormous influence of the Party in the key areas in 1926—but then going on to argue that it was "too small" to alter the outcome. Yet despite its relatively modest size, the Party could have

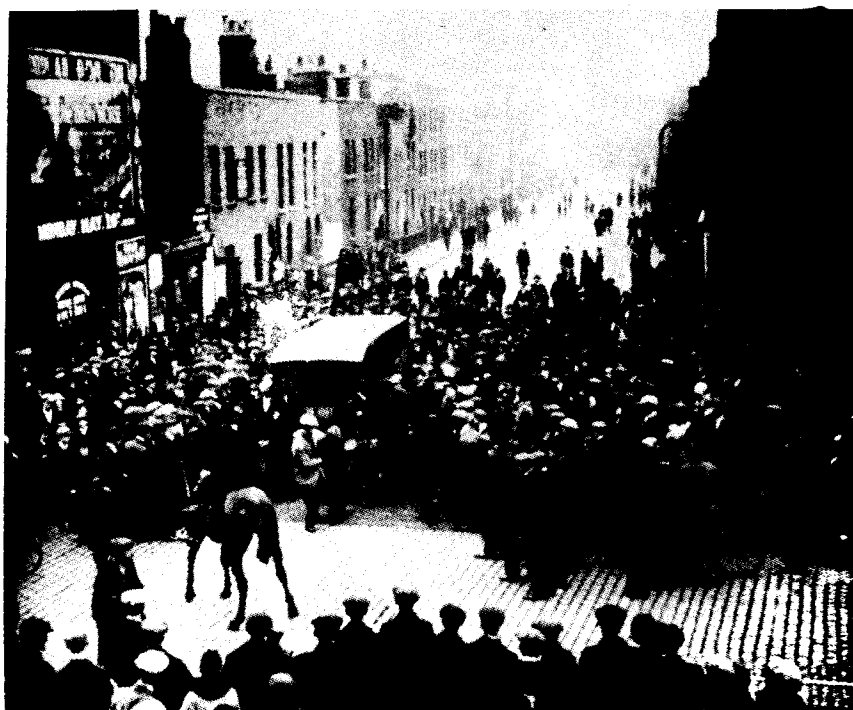
had a decisive influence on the course of events in 1926—had it been armed with the correct strategy and tactics.

In 1924 J R Campbell, one of the CP leaders wrote: "It is the duty of the Party and the Minority Movement to criticise its weakness and endeavour to change the muddled and incomplete left-wing views of the more progressive leaders into real revolutionary viewpoint" (Communist Review, October 1924). But this is precisely what they did not do. Following the formation of the Anglo-Soviet Committee, the Communist Party gave increasingly enthusiastic and uncritical support to the trade union lefts. When these same lefts supported the exclusion of CP members from the Labour Party, they contented themselves with mild strictures for this "mistake". Demands and activities which might embarrass the lefts were played down. The CP's main demand was for the granting of full powers to the T.U.C. General Council, with only vague references to its "obligation to use the power to fight more effectively the battles of the workers". By uncritically supporting the lefts, the CP covered up for them. The Party's euphoric welcome to the left leaders' rhetoric at the 1925 Trade Union Congress undoubtedly contributed to the disarming of the advanced workers. "When Swales delivered his opening speech," rhapsodised the "Workers' Weekly" (18 September, 1925), "the real temper of the Congress began to manifest itself. The more militant became the mood, the more delegates responded to his fighting challenge." If the lefts must bear a heavy responsibility of "lend-

ing colour" (as Page Arnot wrote after the Strike) to the idea that the General Council was making preparations, the CP leaders must bear an even heavier responsibility for "lending colour" to the credibility of the General Council lefts in the first place.

The main responsibility for the authority of the lefts in the movement, however, rested with the Stalinist leadership of the Russian Communist Party and the Communist International (Comintern). The bureaucratic elements on whom Stalin's control was based had become more and more remote from the working class, especially internationally. This disastrous degeneration arose from the isolation of the Russian revolution and the country's barbarous cultural level which, together with the concessions made to private businesses and the rich farmers under the New Economic Policy, fostered the growth of bureaucracy. The Stalinist leadership reflected, at first unconsciously, the pressure of this ruling elite for privileges and stability. This increasingly conflicted with the internationalist perspectives of October. The bureaucratic leadership saw more security in an opportunist alliance with the official trade union lefts in Britain than in a successful revolutionary movement. Thus, instead of giving reliable guidance to the relatively weak and inexperienced British CP, the Comintern leadership only reinforced its confusion, imposing a line that suited the foreign policy interests of the Russian bureaucracy rather than the interests of the world working class.

After the event, the CP turned to



A mass picket in the East End of London stops a van and removes the driver.

criticise the lefts. In June, 1926, the EC of the Comintern passed a resolution saying that: "The 'left' leaders, who had a majority on the General Council, put up no resistance whatever to the deliberate traitors like Thomas, but marched all the time under right-wing orders. In fact Thomas and Co. ran the General Council throughout the course of the strike.... Thus the 'left' played an even more shameful role..." Since 1926 there has been no shortage of denunciations of the 'lefts' from the leaders of the CP. But it came too late, and even then the denunciations were never accompanied by an honest and thorough discussion of the CP's mistakes during the Strike. The CP were not wrong to support the lefts when they

were actually moving left and reinforcing the militancy of the movement. But it should have been *critical* support, accompanied by a campaign for an independent Marxist policy. When the lefts began to vacillate and move towards capitulation, the CP should have decisively broken with them. Because they lacked clear perspectives—and because they were subjected to pressure from the Comintern leaders *notto* break with the lefts—the CP failed to do this. Instead, they continued to call for "All Power to the General Council". Thus, although the CP played a leading role in many of the councils of action, they failed to provide a viable political alternative at a national level.

But the strike did not come to an end immediately. Once again, in spite of the TUC leaders, the workers took matters into their own hands, this time to prevent the rout that had been invited by the General Council's precipitate surrender.

Despite Thomas' pathetic appeal to Baldwin to act with generosity and to ask the employers "to make the position as smooth and easy as possible", Baldwin announced that the government had "no power to compel employers to take back every man who has been on strike, nor have they entered into any obligation of any kind on this matter". This was naturally seen by the employers as an invitation to smash the power of the unions and to put an end to collective bargaining. Many men reporting for work on Thursday morning were refused work. Others were offered re-employment on condition that they accepted wage cuts, loss of pension rights, or agreed not to join a union. The railway bosses especially tried to exploit the situation to victimise union militants.

Had the men returning to work succumbed to the pressure of their employers, the union leadership would have been able to do little about it. "The bosses in all trades," reported one group of strikers, "felt that now they had the trade union movement at their feet, and all they had to do was stamp on it." Thomas had not even asked Baldwin to give the assurances formulated by the TUC negotiating Committee. The General Council had told the strikers to follow the instructions of their own executives, thus abdicating any responsibility for ensuring a return to work without massive victimisation. Even Ernest Bevin, who had been one of the most forceful supporters of a negotiated settlement, was alarmed: "Something has happened, and the best way to describe today if we are not quick, is that we have committed suicide. Thousands of members will be victimised as the result of this day's work".

Without waiting for a lead from either the TUC or their own executives, the strikers refused to accept the humiliating and disastrous terms which the employers were trying to dictate. Their anger was reinforced by the knowledge, by now general, that the TUC had called off the strike without the miners' assent. *As a result, on the Thursday, the tenth day of the Strike, there were 100,000 more workers out than on any other day.* In some areas, the strikers stayed out for another week to fight against victimisation and reprisals.

Alarmed at the rank and file action and desperate to regain the initiative, the executives of the transport workers and of the three

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEFEAT

The General Council called off the strike on 12th May on the grounds that they had "obtained assurances that a settlement of the mining problem can be secured which justifies them bringing the general stoppage to an end." In fact, they had no such assurances. Even though Sir Herbert Samuel had given them his word—"a British gentleman who had been Governor of Palestine," as Thomas, who had been Colonial Secretary in MacDonald's government, put it—Baldwin's government completely repudiated his conciliatory "assurances." The government simply used Samuel's proposals to provide the General Council with a pretext, for which they were frantically searching, to call of the Strike. In any case, the miner's leaders had completely rejected them because they involved wage cuts. When they announced their surrender, Baldwin refused to give the General Council any assurances whatsoever. In his broadcast to the country, the Prime Minister said that it had been ended "without conditions entered into by the government. No government confronted by such a menace could enter into a conditional negotiation, the very undertaking of which would involve treachery to the accepted basis of our democratic constitution."

Baldwin's broadcast gave the lie to

the General Council's self-congratulatory statements which, despite the fact they were well aware of the real situation, represented the outcome of the Strike as a great victory for the miners and the workers generally. "General Council Now Satisfied that Miners Will Now Get a Fair Deal" proclaimed the *British Worker*. "Miners thank their allies" ran another headline, in spite of all the miners' leaders' denunciations of the General Council's gross betrayal of their position.

Some strike committees apparently took the General Council's bogus claims at their face value, only to be rapidly disillusioned. Others thought that the telegrams and statements purporting to come from the TUC to have been faked by the government as a manoeuvre. Most Councils of Action, however, realised only too well what was going on. At one mass meeting, news of the TUC's surrender was greeted with "furious boos and hissings". At another, copies of the *British Worker* were thrown into the faces of the TUC volunteers handing them out. Hull reported: "Alarm—fear—despair—a victorious army disarmed and handed over to its enemies." "It was too early to shout that we were betrayed," wrote the chairman of Lewisham Council of Action, "but privately that was the only thing of which we were certain."

rail unions ordered their members not to return to work until previous agreements were recognised. The General Council belatedly issued an appeal to "Stand Together". Later the General Council made even stronger statements, warning the employers that the trade union movement "is not beaten. It is not broken. Its strength is unimpaired and reinforced by the solidarity which the response to the General Strike revealed." While the trade union leadership was pushed into taking steps to defend the organised basis of its own position, the government itself was now alarmed at the new turn in the situation, which threatened a stormy sequel to the General Council's action. Baldwin was forced to change his tune and make a new statement denouncing any attempt to undermine working conditions or to destroy trade unionism: "I will not countenance any attack on the part of any employers to use this present occasion for trying in any way to get reductions in wages below those in force before the strike or any increase in hours.... there can be no greater disaster than that there should be anarchy in the trade union world. It would be impossible in our highly developed system of industry to carry on unless you had organisations which could speak for and bind the parties on both sides."

The determination of the strikers to resist victimisation, the last minute about turn of some of the trade union leaders, and Baldwin's appeal had their effect. By the weekend agreements were reached in all the main industries. The terms were better than those originally offered, but still involved considerable reductions in living standards and the erosion of trade union strength on the shop floor. There was still widespread victimisation, especially on the railways, but the strength of the workers, even in defeat, was still sufficient to prevent mass victimisation and the crushing of the trade union organisations.

The miners stuck it out until they were forced back, in November, by hunger and despair of success. The coalowners had refused to negotiate at all until the miners accept wage cuts. The government had repealed the Seven Hours Act and the coalowners imposed longer hours and lower rates on the miners who were gradually drifting back to work. The TUC even refused to impose an embargo on the big coal imports which were undermining the effects of the stoppage. When the Miners Federation was forced into submission, the miners had to accept district agreements, longer hours, and lower rates; and a large number of miners remained unemployed.

In 1927 the government enacted the Trades Disputes Act, which put a

legal stamp on the defeat suffered by the trade unions. The Act made general strikes illegal and prohibited sympathetic strikes. It provided wide protection for blacklegs and made all effective forms of picketing illegal. Civil servants were barred from joining unions affiliated to the TUC or the Labour Party. The political levy was changed from "contracting out" to "contracting in", which considerably reduced trade union contributions to the Labour Party in the following years. Undoubtedly, on paper, the most reactionary anti-trade union legislation since the Combination Acts of 1799-1800, in practice the Trades Disputes Act remained largely a dead letter. Because of the gradual improvement in the living standards of employed workers, fear of unemployment, and the collaboration between the trade union leaders and the employers, there was a marked decline in the number of strikes in the late 1920's and 1930's although there were big strikes in the textile industry and the rank and file increasingly resorted to

unofficial action to circumvent obstruction from above.

Having sabotaged a successful strike, having capitulated without even trying to secure a line of retreat, and having even suppressed national discussion of their policy, the General Council proceeded to rationalise defeat. By their actions after the strike, the TUC leaders again confirmed the idea that, in a period of crisis, policies polarise to two extremes: either change society on socialist lines—or accept the brutal logic of capitalism. Thus, sure enough, the TUC leaders openly turned to collaboration in a capitalist revival as the main line of their policy.

At the Labour Party Conference in October, 1926, Robert Williams, the transport workers' leader, clearly expressed the new line of the leadership: "Let us seek industrial peace through methods of conciliation. We cannot subvert or overthrow, we must supercede capitalism."



J.H. Thomas, General Secretary of the NUR [1917-1931]. Reporting on his negotiations with Baldwin to the Conference of T.U. Executives on 30th April, 1926, Thomas candidly told them: "My friends, when the verbatim reports are written, I suppose my usual critics will say that Thomas was almost grovelling, and it is true. In all my experience—and I have conducted many negotiations—I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today, and I pleaded not alone because I believed in the case of the miners, but because I believed in my bones that my duty to the country involved it....".



A.J. Cook, General Secretary of the MFCGB

—although, as he frankly admitted, “whether socialism will come in our time...is a matter for conjecture.” At the Bournemouth Trade Union Congress, Arthur Pugh (Iron and Steel Trades) laid stress on what he called a “scientific wages policy”. The unions he argued, were an “institution” of capitalist society, “as much part of the life of the community as the Law Courts or Parliament”. Pugh’s statement clearly prefigured the tendency of the next period of the trade union leadership to become tied in with the state as an instrument of its policy against the workers.

Only a month after the enactment of the Trades Disputes Act, George Hicks, one of the former ‘left’ leaders, took the initiative (in his presidential address to the 1927 Congress) of offering to co-operate with the employers “in a common endeavour to improve the efficiency of industry and to raise the workers’ standard of life.” A truly magnanimous offer under the circumstances! Later a group of twenty leading businessmen, led by Sir Alfred Mond the founder of I.C.I., wrote to the T.U.C. indicating their willingness to have joint discussions. Mond’s letter stressed that “industrial reconstruction can be undertaken only in conjunction with, and with the co-operation of, those entitled to and empowered to speak for organised labour.” More to the point, it said that “the prosperity of industry can, in our view, be fully attained by full and frank recognition of facts as they exist, and an equally frank determination to increase the competitive power of British industry in the world’s markets.” An old, familiar song! The workers will make sacrifices on the Altar of Profit.

The T.U.C. leaders subsequently set up a National Industrial Council together with the Employers’ Organisations, which in turn established a Joint Standing Committee to operate a policy of joint wage agreements and compulsory arbitration. In return for national recognition by the big monopolies, the trade union leaders agreed to police their own ranks. It was in this way that most of the national wage bargaining agreements, many of which still formally exist today, were established.

“Given intelligent exploitation by ‘wide awake capitalists’ of the ‘new age of electricity and chemistry’”, said Philip Snowden (one of MacDonald’s lieutenants) with amazing optimism

in 1926, “then the capitalist system will be given a new and more powerful lease of life.” True, after 1945 under the new conditions that emerged, capitalism entered a new period of growth. But for this the workers had paid the price. Taking unemployment into account, the real wages of 1913 were not attained again until 1930. In the 1930’s, real wages rose only very slowly. Unemployment fluctuated between 1½ and 3 million. And it should not be forgotten that the defeat of the British workers in this period contributed to the world-wide defeats of the working class which paved the way for the rise of fascism and the Second World War.

THE GENERAL STRIKE TODAY

The 1926 events, in spite of the defeat for the workers, nevertheless demonstrated the immense power of the class once it moves into action. The rallying of the strike after the General Council’s capitulation deterred the ruling class from attempting to smash the unions and to some extent curbed the employers’ attacks on the workers. Now, two generations later, the potential of the working class is much greater.

Even the growth of the struggling British capitalism—especially the concentration of industry into the hands of a few big monopolies—has provided the basis for a thousand-fold increase in the strength of the proletariat. In its size, cohesion and weight in society, the working class is

incomparably greater than in 1926. At the same time, the trade unions have been greatly strengthened. In 1926 only about 28% of the workers were organised. Now approximately half of all workers are in unions. There are 10½ million trade unionists affiliated to the TUC. Including their families, this now constitutes a big majority of society. There has been an even greater strengthening of trade union organisation at a local, factory and combine level. With at least 300,000 shop stewards in Britain, the shop stewards’ organisations have an extremely powerful position in many sections of industry. White-collar and semi-professional workers, civil servants and teachers, who in 1926

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By Roger Silverman & Ted Grant

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were not part of the labour movement and could be drawn on for strike-breaking volunteers, have now been to a large extent organised and involved in struggles of their own.

The increased complexity and inter-dependence of the modern economy—highly dependent, for example, on a centralised electricity supply grid—has also increased the ability of the workers to paralyse the economy. The Northern Ireland Ulster Workers' Council strike in 1974, although organised on a completely reactionary basis, clearly demonstrated this. Faced with a strike by the power engineers and technicians, the military authorities flew in naval technicians to try to run the power stations. But the military technicians had no idea of how to run them and were completely confounded by the voluminous instruction manuals. "The army therefore concluded," writes Robert Fisk in his book on the strike, "The Point of No Return," "that they could do nothing to maintain the power system in Northern Ireland, and by inference anywhere else in the United Kingdom, without the assistance of the technical operators, the middle management who controlled the supply and grid." At the time of the 1972 miners' strike, the Electrical Power Engineers' Association, which is affiliated to the TUC and had itself been involved in strike action against the Heath government, informed the government that they would walk out completely if soldiers were sent into the power stations, and Heath made no attempt to use them.

The marked difference in the attitude of the students, many of whom scabbed in 1926 but who were publicly thanked by the miners' leaders for their help in the 1972 strike, is symptomatic of a wider shift in the attitude of the middle class. Their unquestioning loyalty can no longer be taken for granted by the ruling class. Because of Britain's disastrous decline in the world, they can have little confidence in the future under capitalism and many sections are now sympathetic to the working class, as Heath found out to his cost between 1970 and 1974.

For much of the post-war period, the boom in western capitalism disguised and cushioned the decline and decay of British capitalism. The last period, however, with a slowing down of world trade and, last year a world-wide slump in production and trade, has laid bare the rottenness of the system in Britain. With a drastically reduced share of world trade and a shrinking manufacturing sector at home, British capitalism's position is being rapidly undermined even further by the continuous devaluation of the 'floating' pound and soaring inflation. Notwithstan-



Edward Heath: forced to reverse all his policies and retreat from deliberate confrontation with the trade unions.

ding the recent upswing in profits there has been a disastrous long-term decline of big business profits. The conclusion drawn by the representatives of capitalism is that there must be a massive cut in the living standards of the workers, and also some of the middle layers, to pay for reinvestment and to restore the profitability of big business. To do this, however, they have to find some way of overcoming the accumulated power of the workers' organisations now considerably augmented by the gains of the boom period.

Demoralised by its economic failures and exasperated by the tenacious opposition of the workers' organisations, the ruling class is split and uncertain of its policies. This was shown by the Tory government of 1970 to 1974, which was forced to abandon or reverse all its major initial policies. Heath deliberately set out to take on the trade unions, but only succeeded in arousing and uniting the working class in an unprecedented manner. Tory policies resulted in the highest number of strike-days lost since 1926. They brought about the first big official national stoppage in a number of industries since the 1920s, besides giving rise to a number of unofficial political strikes against anti-trade union policies. Local authority workers, post office workers, railwaymen, electrical power workers, the miners and others were moved into action. New sections, such as the previously weak and highly exploited hospital workers, were involved in strike action for the first time. Civil servants, teachers and professional workers were also pushed into action and brought into the labour movement.

Heath's attempt to fetter the trade unions with the Industrial Relations Act also came to grief. The arrest of five London dock stewards under the

Act immediately aroused other sections against the government. The TUC General Council called a 24 hour general strike only when the government was already on the retreat. But if the government had not quickly released the five stewards, the strike of the dockers would undoubtedly have spread to other industries. In 1972, the TUC was reluctant to organise support for the miners. But the flying pickets, which cut off coal supplies from the power stations, the almost complete refusal by other workers to cross the miners' pickets, and active support for pickets under attack from the police, as at Saltley, ensured the complete success of the strike. In 1974, even without the flying pickets, the recognition of picket lines (in some cases simple notices) by other trade unionists, was enough for the miners to succeed again. Heath was obliged to retreat and call a general election to get the government out of a mess. The contrast between the wavering and bungling moves of the Heath government and the ruthless and determined tactics of Baldwin's government in 1926 is another indication of the changed relationship of forces which exists now.

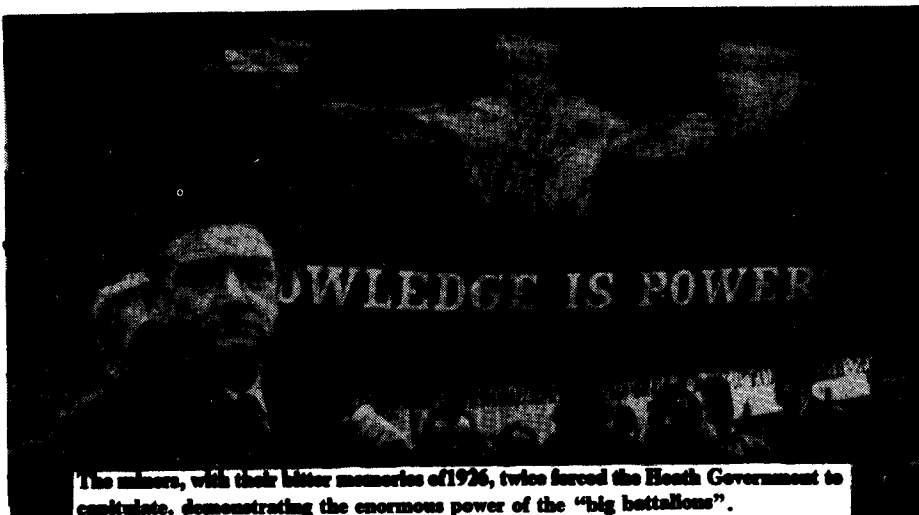
Since the return of the Labour government, the industrial struggle has subsided and the chances of a general strike are, for the time being, remote. A profound aversion to any return to a Tory government and traditional loyalty to the Labour leaders has dampened working class opposition to the crisis policies being continued under Labour. The complete lack of any alternative from the 'left' labour leaders has enabled the government to obtain the "reluctant acquiescence" of the movement for its pay policies and the cuts. Nevertheless, the possibility of a general strike will undoubtedly be brought to the fore again by events. The replacement of the Labour government by a Tory government or, more probably, a 'National' coalition government—in reality a Conservative government disguised by the inclusion of Labour renegades, Liberals, Nationalists, etc., would very quickly lead to big industrial battles. The tempo of events will depend on the economy. The precarious position of British capitalism, which has entered a period of short upswings and slumps, creates a potentially explosive situation in which small strikes or sudden political changes can rapidly flare up into much bigger battles.

A general strike in the future, because of the changed balance of forces outlined here—and also the changed relationship of forces internationally—would take place under completely different conditions from 1926. In the last decade, the May events in France in 1968, the series of

general strikes in Italy after 1969, and the 48-hour strike in Argentina in February 1975, revealed the crushing preponderance of the workers and their enormous power when they move into action.

In spite of the role of the 'leaders' of the trade unions, who were pushed into calling, or forced to go along with, general-strike action, these strikes all shook the capitalist system to its foundations. In France, in 1968, the ruling class was forced to retreat before the power of the mobilised workers, and grant considerable economic concessions in order to bring the strike to an end. Because the strike did not lead to the workers taking over power and reorganising the economy on socialist lines, many of the gains were later taken back by counter-measures and inflation. During the strike, which drew in thousands of unorganised workers and sections of the middle class, the workers, who had taken over the factories and the streets and paralysed the economy, instinctively realised that they could only succeed by taking political power into their own hands. The ruling class themselves recognised the real situation: De Gaulle flew to consult with the French NATO commander in Germany and was forced to admit, "the game is up." But the leaders of the 'Communist' Party and the mass trade union federations did everything in their power to divert the workers from a struggle for power attempting to limit the strike to a struggle for economic concessions and reforms. In this way, De Gaulle, having been forced to retreat initially, was able to regain the initiative, consolidate the regime and prepare the way for another period of capitalist rule through right wing presidents and governments.

In Italy, a whole series of general strikes forced big business onto the defensive. Yet again, because the trade union leaders used them to "let off steam" and avoided the question of power, the titanic movement was dissipated, leading to a succession of reactionary governments and opening the way to the growth of fascist organisations. In Argentina, the 48-hour general strike called by the leaders of the 3.5 million-strong CGT in July, 1975, forced President Isabel Peron to grant 150% wage increases even before the end of the strike. However, although the strike gained concessions and temporarily checked the reaction, the failure of the labour leaders to lead a struggle for power paved the way for a disastrous defeat. Only months after this enormous strike, in March 1976, General Videla was able to stage a successful coup d'etat and launch an economic attack and political repression against the labour move-



ment

These developments have important lessons for Britain. 'Commemorating' the General Strike recently, all the serious journals of big business have been forced to conclude that a general strike is not entirely a thing of the past, buried in history and never to be repeated. But they view the prospect of a new general strike with fear and horror, themselves far from confident that it would have the same favourable outcome for them as in 1926. Because of the power of the workers and the experiences of the active layers under the Heath government, a new Tory government or a 'National' government, could well lead rapidly to a general strike which would gain immediate concessions and bring down the government. As in 1974, this might well lead to a Labour government, but, under those conditions, a Labour government pushed far to the left by the tremendous pressure of a working class that had just gone through a general strike. Nevertheless, even a successful general strike could not be a *lasting* success unless the necessary political conclusions were drawn from it. Unless a Labour government elected under such circumstances implemented a programme for the socialist transformation of society, the labour movement could again suffer disastrous defeats in the following period. The degeneration of British capitalism, the determination of the bosses to find a way out at the expense of the workers, and the inevitable trade union resistance to attacks, would pose the question of either the inauguration of a socialist society or the defeat and destruction of the labour movement.

As the example of Argentina has graphically demonstrated, bloody reaction can follow even a successful general strike unless it is carried through to its logical conclusion of workers' power and the reorganisation of production under workers' democracy. Because of the enormous power of the organised workers in

Britain, and the favourable balance of forces, it would undoubtedly require a series of defeats before the workers' strength was broken and the labour movement faced destruction. Even the dissipation of the tremendous strike movement in Italy, while it has opened the way to set-backs for the workers and the growth of fascist organisations, has not decisively undermined the workers' movement and new waves of struggle are inevitable.

In Britain, because of the objective balance of forces, the perspectives for socialism are overwhelmingly favourable—provided that the ideas of Marxism are made the ideas of the whole labour movement. The inevitability with which every general strike challenges the rule of the capitalist class and poses the need for the workers themselves to take power makes clear the inseparable connection between industrial and political struggle. This is even shown at the moment by the joint talks between the TUC and Labour government—though the TUC leaders, in supporting a policy of wage cuts and public spending cuts to restore profitability, have drawn conclusions diametrically opposed to the interests of the workers. To continue to serve the interests of the workers in a period of capitalist decline and crisis, the trade unions must be transformed into organs for the socialist transformation of society. Increasingly, the immediate demands of the workers are becoming incapable of being satisfied within the framework of a diseased economy and therefore even immediate, limited demands must be generalised and linked to a socialist programme. The lessons of the 1926 General Strike, together with recent international experiences under new conditions, is that the whole labour movement, both the trade unions and the Labour Party, must be prepared for the socialist transformation of society, the need for which any future general strike will again pose clearly and sharply.

CRISIS IN THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN SOCIALIST PARTIES

By Roger Silverman

On 24th and 25th January, 1976, in Paris, a Conference was held of Southern European Socialist Parties affiliated to the Socialist International. Called on the initiative of Francois Mitterand (France), it was also attended by delegates from Spain, Portugal, Italy and (for some reason) Belgium, and several observers, notably Andreas Papandreou of the Greek Party PASOK (which is not yet affiliated to the SI).

This marked a new development in the post-war history of the European labour movement. But its participants were anxious to play down its significance. Mitterand summed up the Conference as "a friendly get-together, a comparison of experiences and an ideological discussion," and stressed: "There is no question of putting any geographical barrier between the Social-Democrats of the North and the Socialists of the South...nor to establish a new organisation in juxtaposition to the SI for at least as long as the SI remains faithful to its aims...but this Conference was dictated by the common characteristics of the situation existing in Southern Europe where there are strong Socialist and strong Communist Parties."

But as **Le Monde** commented: "Mitterand...didn't want to raise the subject of a new International. However, isn't there the fear of a split within the heart of the

SI?...For many delegates...the question is quite clear: Social-Democracy=the USA."

Despite the fact that the meeting of the SI itself a few days earlier had been deadlocked on the issue, with Wilson and Schmidt opposing co-operation with the CPs, the meeting resolved "to co-operate with the Communist Parties and other progressive forces and with the trade unions"; to "remain faithful to the building of democratic Socialism and to a break with capitalism" and to "build a European Socialism based...on the struggle against the monopolies and multinational corporations."

These ringing resolutions papered over serious differences on every practical issue. People who in bygone days were happy to apologise for the French colonial wars in Algeria and Indochina, or to participate in capitalist governments in Italy and Greece, have found themselves playing, in these troubled times, with varying degrees of conviction, the role of left-wing demagogues. Others faced with the challenge of a living revolution, have shrunk back in horror. Thus, Mario Soares sent his apologies on the grounds that "he had to be in the USA to meet Dr. Kissinger," together with a message praising the "enormous appeal" of Social-Democracy in Northern Europe. His stand-in Manuel Allegre, spoke of "the violent confrontation between the two conceptions of Socialism" in Portugal, and rejoiced at "the defeat which has befallen the CP." In deference to the mood of his audience, he added that "the Socialists in Portugal always offer a hand towards the Communists"—but, as we see, this does not extend to a proposal for a coalition government on a platform of Socialist democracy.

The Portuguese drew the hostility of other delegates. Claude Estie (France) sharply remarked: "If the Portuguese SP renounces the unity of the people's forces...it is clear that

such a move would not be reconcilable with our orientation and everything that we are fighting for in France." Papandreou told *Le Monde*: "When Soares linked up with America he made a fateful decision. I hope that the PSOE will not follow his example."

De Martino, leader of the Italian Socialists, was absent because of the political crisis at home, but his representative, Zagani, praised Carrillo and Berlinguer as "two Communist leaders who are in favour of pluralism and democracy and reject the principle of the one party state," while regretting the "historic compromise."

Papandreou used crude nationalist arguments to drive a wedge into the gathering. He commented later: "The multinational corporations which are linked with the state and military structure of the West, such as NATO, are imperialist powers which exploit Southern Europe just as they exploit the Third World. France isn't in the Third World, and there are two Italies—the North and the South...Portugal, Spain and Greece belong to a different community from that of Northern Europe."

The discussion centred exclusively on tactical questions. Nowhere was there any attempt at a review of economic perspectives, the divisions within the ruling class, the morale of the workers, the attitude of the middle classes, the meaning of the new twist in CP policy, the lessons of Chile or Portugal, the problem of the armed forces, etc.—only a grudging recognition that history had given them a kick in the pants and they had to sidestep leftwards.

For all the jarring discord, all the Parties participating in the Conference represented different notes along the scale of left reformism and centrism, different stages in a process which is dragging all the parties of the Socialist International towards the left. The geographical limitation only expresses the fact that Southern

European countries—ever since the war the Achilles' heel of the metropolitan capitalist powers—have been thrown into greater pandemonium by the recent world slump. Underlying all the specific anomalies, the crisis has been brought to a head by such manifestations of the recession as the slump in the tourist trade and the unemployment among emigrant workers on whose remittances the economies of Southern Europe have depended. Revolution in Portugal, the impending explosion in Spain, a protracted pre-revolutionary crisis in Italy, turmoil in Greece, the collapse of Gaullism in France...The workers are demanding a solution, are stepping on to the stage in the tens of millions in the effort to shape their own destinies. Some political force has to fill the vacuum.

But put to the test, the Communist Parties, traditionally the principal workers' parties in these countries, have clung like grim death to policies diametrically opposed to the workers' real interests. In France in 1968, the CP's sole concern was to end the revolutionary strike at any price and return to "normality". In Spain and Italy they can dream of no greater glory than entry into a coalition with the capitalist parties. Even in Portugal, it took the fait accompli of the nationalisation of the banks by the Armed Forces Movement under the workers' relentless pressure to shift them from denouncing the slogan of nationalisation as "Fascist provocation." In reply to a question on nationalisation in December 1974, Cunhal had explained: "If it were a question of producing solutions out of a hat, I would answer 'yes'. Objectively it is inevitable and economically necessary. But if that solution is doomed to be impracticable—not having been written into the MFA programme—another will have to be found."

Hence, the military dictatorship itself proved more sensitive to the workers' pressure than did their *own traditional Party!* Since the March 1975 events in Portugal, the CPs have been at even greater pains in Italy, Spain and France, to reassure the capitalists of their dependability—and even more so since the leftward turn of the Socialist Parties.

The CPs can cling for longer to such policies, because in the eyes of the mass of politically inert workers, they are still bathed in the distant glow of October. With their rigid internal regime, their roots in the tradition of the degenerated Russian CP, and their distorted links with the 1917 October Revolution, they have a weighty anchor of authority, a heavy inertia. The Socialist Parties on the contrary lack their discipline and authority. Paradoxically, because their leaders inspire less confidence within the Party ranks, they are more vulnerable to shifts of

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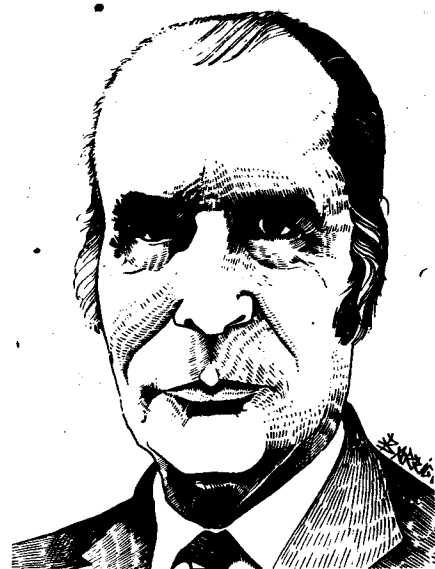
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mood within the working class. Where the current is pulling strongly to the left, and the CP has dropped anchor, the SPs are tossed helplessly into the stormy seas. They either drift along with the tide, or drown.

Even in countries where the social crisis is less immediate, so shaky are the political foundations of the Socialist, Labour and Social Democratic Parties, that molecular changes have long been at work undermining the position of the right wing. Feeling the ground beginning to shake beneath their feet, the right wing have split way in Italy, Denmark, Holland, Australia, Luxembourg and Japan, and there have been important individual defections in Britain, Germany etc. Radical ideas have swept through the youth of these parties, crystallising in some cases in Marxist tendencies. There have been impatient splits to the left in the Scandinavian countries and in France and Italy there were break-away groupings which took on a

centrist colouration.

The impressionability of the Socialist Parties is greatest of all where they are essentially new, or at least newly-revived. This is the case with most of the parties represented at the Conference. The French SP in its present form is five years old, the Portuguese two years, the Greek even younger. They are not 'experimental' and they did not drop from the skies—they are in the oldest tradition of the working class, commanding deep loyalties. But in their structure they are untested, in their composition they are young. Without a stable bedrock of support and without an apparatus of experienced cadres, they have no option but to fight for support, to strain to articulate the workers' unspoken aspirations, to appeal above all to the young and previously uncommitted. It is this that makes them volatile parties, lurching sharply from right to left and back again, as the waters of revolution swirl around them.



François Mitterrand, leader of the French Socialist Party.

federation, but already swept into a radical position. Taken over by the flood of 1968 militants, it became the biggest trade union. Following the post-1968 lull, it was the CFDT which stood at the forefront of the new wave of strikes.

In the summer of 1971, the relics of the Socialist tradition came together "to build a single Socialist Party," and it soon issued invitations to other parties to begin negotiations for a Common Programme. The CP eventually accepted. The PSU (Unified Socialist Party)—a breakaway group of intellectuals which split away in 1965 and occupied a centrist position in 1968, later to be swallowed up in the revived SP—boycotted the talks. The pro-capitalist Radical Party split on the issue, creating the 'Left Radicals' which commanded negligible support but served as a Trojan Horse inside the Popular Union bloc of workers' parties.

Recognising the need for a political voice, CFDT militants joined the new SP and pushed it into a radical stance. The majority of the PSU also seized the opportunity to join the new party. Driven by the need to adopt a distinct identity and whip up a political base and under the concerted pressure of a young membership consciously working to bend the party to its will, Mitterrand—formerly a Minister knee-deep in the blood of Algerian freedom fighters—found himself cast in the unlikely role of a rabble-rouser.

"We must marvel, dear comrades," he said in October 1974, "with joy in our hearts and with certitude dans l'esprit that only the Socialists gave an answer to the industrial world 150 years ago... We know that so long as Socialism has not been won war and the class struggle will exist... Nothing is possible so long as we have not done with the tyrannies of money, monopoly

FRANCE

The first tear in the veil of Western European capitalism for more than twenty years came in France in 1968. Throughout the turmoil of the Fourth Republic, the Algerian war and De Gaulle's putsch, the leaders of the labour movement remained passive. But in 1968 the storm broke. Ten million workers struck and occupied their factories. Power lay in their hands. The ruling class hid in the shadow of a general, a senile caricature of the first Bonaparte. The labour movement summoned up the power of a workforce three times the existing trade union membership. While the revolution was in full flow, the middle class refused to support the old order and its most volatile stratum, the students, demonstrated in bizarre forms their primitive revolt against the establishment. De Gaulle told the new American Ambassador Sargent Shriver: "The game's up." All that was needed was a party which could link the factory committees and draw on the energies of the working population to create a new society. Only the treachery of the Communist Party prevented a peaceful transfer of power.

It is this that lies at the root of the

spectacular resurrection of the Socialist Party.

The old Socialist Party, the SFIO, was tarnished with the corruption and inefficiency associated with national and local government under the ramshackle Fourth Republic. The advent of Gaullism, under which the role of the National Assembly was eclipsed by the power of Presidential decree, severely curtailed the SFIO's scope for parliamentary manoeuvre, and their trade union base (Force Ouvrière) atrophied. By 1968 the SFIO had crumbled into obscurity under an ageing and feckless bureaucracy.

How did the right-wing rump that refused to go with the rank and file into the Third International in 1921, the Party of Blum and of Mollet, become the strongest party in France in the mid-1970s?

History finds its way around all obstacles, though sometimes by the most circuitous routes. Disgusted at the strike-breaking role of the CGT (the CP trade union) many militants left its ranks. Dismissing Force Ouvrière as an even more rotten carcase, they poured into the CFDT—formerly the Catholic trade union



A mass demonstration in Paris in 1972, called jointly by the CP-controlled General Confederation of Labour [CGT] and the Socialist-orientated Democratic-Labour Federation [CFDT] to demand a 1,000-Franc guaranteed minimum monthly wage and retirement at 60.

power and super capitalism."

Secure in the knowledge that the CP will provide him with a permanent alibi, he can indulge in the luxury of such lyrical speeches. But the rank and file eagerly seized on his words and pressed home the need for deeds.

The 1975 Party Congress stated: "The crisis of world capitalism is the occasion for an accentuation and broadening of the class struggle. It creates the conditions to rally the majority for a break with the system of monopoly capitalism. The basis for this is constituted by a class front resting above all on the working class which is the hardest and most directly exploited, and the big majority of salaried staff—employees in the private and public sectors, technicians and engineers. Small and middle farmers, manual labourers and direct producers, who are equally victims of capitalist exploitation, also have their place in this class front...The conquest of power requires the adherence and conscious support of the majority of the people. More concretely, the socialist transformation of society will not be achieved only within the framework of the existing institutions, but by the mobilisation of the masses in every field."

Fine words—but when it came to the 1974 Presidential Election, Mitterand was running around soothing the anxieties of the business community, assuring them that "France is part of a free market economic system, which cannot be altered by the present generation...My econ-

omic policy will be based on what is possible."

The ease with which the SP has outflanked the CP in the last five



George Marchais, General Secretary of the French Communist [PCF]

years—during which the SP membership has doubled while that of the CP fell, and the SP is now winning over a quarter of the votes in its own right—has provoked the CP into the

most neurotic behaviour.

First the CP welcomed the Socialists as allies and joined forces in the 1974 election alliance which won 13 million votes and 49.3% of the poll. Then, alarmed at finding itself outstripped politically and electorally, it mounted a furious campaign against them. CP leader Marchais warned: "Let us always remember that the SP is a Social-Democratic party and has always tended towards big business...The SP and the CP are different. We Communists, we are the implacable enemies of big business, the faithful servants of the working class."

Finally the CP apparently reconciled itself to leaving the Socialists to their newly-conquered territory to its left and instead threw all its energies into a nauseating appeal to the ruling class to acknowledge its greater reliability. That is the meaning of the sudden decision to renounce the last trappings of Marxism, and replace the goal of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with the "union of the French People". This latest twist prompted Mitterand to pour withering scorn on the new slogan, and comment ironically on the apparent "misunderstanding" that caused the split of 1921!

In the context of the revolutionary upheavals impending on France's Southern borders, to say nothing of France itself, the present line of the CP can only lead to further degeneration and a renewed activity within the Socialist Party.

PORTUGAL

In the convulsions of the revolution, the Portuguese Socialist Party has lurched drunkenly from one position to another. Up to 25th April, 1974, it was a clique of emigrés on the right wing of the SI, with no underground apparatus inside Portugal. When Caetano took office in 1968, Soares collected signatures for a petition stressing that "they are not violent revolutionaries, but moderates," humbly beseeching the new dictator to grant at least a few token reforms, "acknowledging the danger of extreme right wing reaction if reforms are made too rapidly, but promising our full support to Caetano if he presses ahead with a policy of amelioration," and warning prophetically of "an uncontrollable explosion of discontent" if their views went unheeded.

Greeted with an undeserved hero's welcome on arrival in revolutionary Portugal, Soares spoke in glowing terms of joining "a front of national unity, an alliance of many forces... conservatives, Catholics, liberals, Socialists and Communists, all working together in the new civilian administration."

But from the first day of the revolution, every step forward was forced by the unyielding pressure of the working people. Hungrily devouring the fruits of liberty, raising red flags, chasing out fascist managers and informers, striking and occupying their workplaces in a magnificent struggle to raise their families above starvation level, the workers came up against a brick wall. The CP, with its traditional industrial base, denounced these spontaneous manifestations of the revolution as "the provocations of fascists and ultra-left extremists trying to break the unity of the people with the armed forces." To develop a mass base, the SP was forced to outbid the CP and to express at least guarded sympathy with the strikers. The SP rapidly snowballed into the biggest party. The new militants pouring into its ranks tore it out of the grooves of an alien emigre mentality. Within a month of the coup, the SP was talking in terms like the following

extract from a report of its trade union and labour commission, which exposed the deceitful prattle of Spínola and his CP allies:

"If the Portuguese economic situation is grave, we would ask: the situation of which class? Of the working class? Of the petty bourgeoisie? Of the capitalist bourgeoisie? We need to make Marxist, objective and concrete analyses of the situation of the classes in conflict, and of the conditions for the development of the class struggle, leading to a Socialist society... We consider that the fundamental obstacles in the way of the working class are the big capitalist monopolies."



Alvaro Cunhal leader of the Portuguese Communist Party [PCP]

The first Provisional government collapsed within three months, largely due to the "irresponsible demagoguery" of precisely those Socialist statesmen who had been deliberately built up by the capitalists in order to weaken the CP. The *Financial Times* (9/7/74) reported that "the Socialist Ministers... have raised objections to much of the proposed legislation on the economy, thus adding a new dimension to their unhappiness about the ruling military junta's cautious approach to decolonisation and

its tough attitude towards press freedom... Not surprisingly, the Communists are said to have adopted a much more pragmatic approach towards working with their military masters of the Junta of National Salvation."

The real temper of the rank and file was shown at the Socialist Party Congress in December 1974. Here is a selection of the delegates' demands:

"We want Socialism, not Social Democracy, a society without classes. Social Democracy means a compromise with capitalism. It stabilises capitalism, puts the working class to sleep... Only revolutionary action can implement Socialism... The working class want left wing deeds, not reformism... Attempts are made to blame the workers for the economic crisis. Who is responsible? Not the workers. The economy is being sabotaged. The old capitalists still control the enterprises; they must go. The SP must live up to the aspirations of the working class. The working class is the backbone of democracy. Workers' assemblies are the key to the action of the working class... The rank and file want the complete elimination of capitalism... The Marxist basis of the Party must be clearly and explicitly stated in the Party programme... We must transform society, end capitalism, begin a classless society. Only Socialism can guarantee democracy... The workers in the Party must always fight to ensure that a Socialist path is adopted, not reformism or retreats... It is necessary to control the leadership and guard against careerists... The monopolies have not yet been taken over: that is the real key to economic progress... Portugal must really belong to those who produce."

Manuel Serra, leader of the left, said: "We must leave this congress as a great Socialist Party capable of carrying through the revolution of 25th April, capable of leading the working class, the only revolutionary class, to a Socialist society."

In the heat of the Congress, Soares had to appease the Party with earnest assurances that the SP was "clearly based on Marxism". In a frightened and defensive reply to the debate, he hedged with assertions like: "We want to achieve Socialism quickly. But as members of the government we must not let slip imprudent words which may endanger the revolution!"

Out of 740 votes cast, the Foreign Minister with all his prestige won a majority of only 94 for his slate for the National Committee. The aspirations of the rank and file were unmistakable. Here were the human raw materials out of which a great revolutionary party could have been built. A Marxist tendency could have won the overwhelming mass to



Demonstrating workers demand Socialist Revolution

its banner, thus determining the victory of the revolution. But Manuel Serra, former guerilla hero, "Christian Marxist" and flowery demagogue, walked out of the Party in a fit of pique three weeks later, abandoning the rank and file to the tender mercies of the reformist Soares. Serra's tiny fan club, the FSP (Popular Socialist Front) became an impotent satellite of the CP, and later an even more impotent sect passively whining from the sidelines.

Without any adversary with the authority to challenge him, Soares exploited the vices of the CP. As the CP used its hardened underground apparatus to worm its way into influential positions, insinuating its cadres into the Intersindical, the municipalities, the Press and the Armed Forces Movement itself, the mass of workers grew suspicious and wary of falling prey to a Stalinist dictatorship.

On this basis, loudly swearing allegiance to the new programme of nationalisation, Soares sailed home to a 38% victory in the Constituent

Assembly elections. A campaign of provocations by the CP was launched. Transmitting its dictates through the Socialist International and above all the German SPD leadership, which had showered money on the Portuguese SP, world reaction has tried to bend the SP to its will. So at a certain stage in Russia when reaction was impotent, the counter-revolution sheltered behind the

screen of a centrist, nominally Marxist, party—the Mensheviks. But it was demonstrated at the recent elections which still gave the PSP 35% of the votes that a sizeable section of the workers still, for want of an attractive alternative, support the SP. A tendency in the traditions of the Bolsheviks could unite the CP and SP workers. The revolution remains undefeated.

His head further swelled by his party's electoral successes, Soares has convinced himself that he has a future as a Portuguese Wilson! As he put it: "The tactics and strategy of the Socialist Parties of Southern Europe are necessarily different from those of the Social-Democratic Parties of Northern Europe. But the peculiarity of the Portuguese case is that we are heading for a situation whose political characteristics approach those existing in the North." With such delusions, Soares is squirming his way back to his natural habitat, while the revolution is becalmed in a temporary lull. The new squalls that are coming will open up a crescendo of criticism from the Party rank and file.

SPAIN

As Spain trembles on the brink of the greatest revolutionary upheaval since Russia in 1917, world reaction has nervously pinned faint hopes on the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), hoping that like the Portuguese Socialist Party, it may prove malleable. But in Spain the Socialist Party has swelled into the biggest party, under the impact of a young and radical rank and file, even in advance of the downfall of the old régime. Unlike in Portugal or Greece, where the police state fell to pieces at the first tremor—the captains' plot, the invasion of Cyprus—in Spain the dying régime, steeped in the blood of a million workers, clung on right to the bitter end. The revolution has matured over years of struggle, germinating through factory walkouts, local barricade fighting, to entire regional general strikes involving hundreds of thousands, the workers' consciousness becoming enriched at every stage. In Portugal and Greece the Labour Movement was caught unawares by the downfall

of the dictatorships at the first flexing of its muscles. In Spain, like in Russia in the years before 1917, the workers have had ample opportunity to turn over perspectives in their minds, to thrash out their strategy and tactics. The fragmentation of the innumerable sects, the turmoil within the CP, its authority weakened by countless splits, and above all the sharp leftward swing in the PSOE, all bear witness to the long process of molecular change that is now accelerating throughout the underground Labour Movement.

The Socialist Party was smashed after the Civil War. In a few pockets here and there—but mainly in exile—a few ageing and isolated UGT (General Workers Union) militants survived. Today it is estimated that under free elections the PSOE would win half the votes, and together with the CP, two-thirds. It has matured over years of internal debate. Because of its relatively loose structure, this has resulted in a violently fluctuating political line.



Mario Soares, leader of the Portuguese Socialist Party.

During the 1960s a trickle of youth began into the Party and the UGT in its former strongholds, in Andalusia, the Asturias, the Basque country. Socialism began to be fashionable in the universities, too. An academic circle grew up around Professor Tierno Galván, who scorned the party's Marxist traditions and the awkward postures of the emigré leaders, and he split away in 1968 to form a small Social-Democratic clique.

This defection gave a welcome impetus to the confidence of the worker activists in the interior, who themselves came into increasing conflict with the old emigré leadership based in Toulouse. The revival of PSOE as a genuine underground party culminated in the expulsion of the emigré leader Llopió from the party at the 1972 Congress. A new leadership was elected, based in the interior and more sensitive to the feelings of the activists in the localities, who were more and more immersed in the rising tide of strikes. By the time of the 1974 Congress, the morale of the delegates boosted by the Portuguese revolution, the fall of the Greek junta, the rise of the French Socialist Party and the Italian divorce referendum, to say nothing of the spectacular fissures opening up in the Franco régime, the PSOE was by now a fully fledged national party. It took a further lurch to the left by electing in place of the new leader Castellano a 32-year-old lawyer who had attracted attention at the 1972 Congress as a "Marxist" and leader of the left wing, Felipe Gonzalez.

These successive Congresses marked a genuine shift in the direction of independent class action, a first groping by the rank and file towards Marxism—a mood which has been partially reflected by their leaders.

Their statement to the Conference



Felipe Gonzalez, leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).



Striking workers hold a mass meeting in the streets of Barcelona, February 1976.

of Southern Europe SPs "renounced the easy short-term policies of class collaboration and the management of capitalism in crisis" and spelt out the need for a "break with capitalism". Unfortunately, they are failing to live up to this promise in deeds.

In securing for itself a social mooring which could rival the base of the CP, the PSOE had to fill the vacuum left by that party's strike breaking activities. The workers and youth who were attracted to the PSOE in their turn further reinforced this trend.

The UGT correctly denounced the opportunism of the CP-dominated Workers' Commissions in working exclusively through the Fascist sindicatos and upheld the principle of independent trade unions. Fearful of a repeat of the Portuguese CP's policy in imposing a tame and regimented "Intersindical" federation, under the cover of the slogan for trade union unity, PSOE has fallen into a trap and reacted defensively by insisting on a multiplicity of rival unions. Instead of turning the UGT into a model of workers' democracy and appealing for voluntary unity on the basis of delegate conferences, the right of recall, no privileges for officials, and freedom of tendency, the PSOE has been manoeuvred into protecting its right to a trade union "all its own", a bureaucratic appendage.

On the key issue of the Popular Front, under the pressure of the rank and file, who instinctively hate their liberal fairweather friends, the PSOE denounced the CP's strategy of a "Liberty Pact" as class collaboration. But it was a different matter once the CP began putting it into effect by forming the "Democratic Junta" in tandem with Galván, the Carlists and other mavericks from the ruling class like the monarchist Calvo Serer and Franco's former Chief of Staff, General Diez Alegria. Suddenly the PSOE leaders panicked at the prospect of an agreement being sealed over their heads, leaving them "out in the cold". They denounced

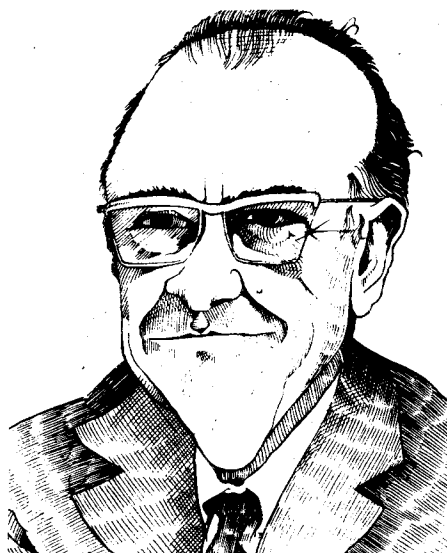
the Junta as a "CP front", promptly set up a rival alliance, the "Platform of the Democratic Convergence", and found themselves rubbing shoulders with equally unsavoury characters, like Ruiz Jimenez, formerly a Fascist Minister of Education, Don Ridruejo, author of the words of the Falangist anthem, and Gil Robles the ageing "clerical Fascist" against whose entry into the Government the Socialists staged an armed uprising in 1934! The Platform easily lured away from their tenuous alliance with the CP tentative liberals like the Carlists and various Christian Democratic factions, who felt naturally uneasy and distrustful of the CP (especially after the left turn in Portugal), and who, grateful and relieved, grasped the PSOE's extended hand. It gave the most farsighted strategists of capitalism a glimmer of hope that all the ringing resolutions of PSOE congress might not matter so much after all, that perhaps they could still keep the Socialist card up their sleeves.

Originally, the PSOE leadership pledged itself against participation in any future Provisional Government. Then it modified its stand and promised to call a Special Congress after the "democratic break" (that is the euphemism by which the beginning of the revolution is designated) to resolve the issue. That was already a shamefaced method of seeking a mandate to renege on its previous commitments from the mass of raw, naive recruits flooding into the Party under those conditions, their ears ringing with euphoric cries for "popular unity", swamping the steeled cadres of the underground.

The alliance was supposed to last only up to the day of the "democratic break". Following the fall of the dictatorship, an implacable struggle would be launched against yesterday's "progressive" allies. Always an implausible argument, it has apparently been forgotten as the PSOE leaders become intoxicated by the flattering attention they are suddenly receiving from emissaries of the

ruling class, nationally and internationally. After months of bickering, the two alliances have fused into a single "Democratic Co-ordination" which calls for a provisional government composed of "all democratic forces."

So lightly does the class enemy dismiss the speeches and documents of the PSOE leaders, that one faction of the dying regime is toying with the idea of legalising the PSOE along with the liberal parties, while maintaining the ban on the CP and "extremist" groups, in a futile attempt to steer the Socialists back to the precarious arrangement of the seven years of the Primo de Rivera regime.



Santiago Carrillo, leader of the Spanish Communist Party [PCE].

The retreat of the PSOE leaders is partly the effect of international pressure. The strongest sections of the Socialist International have used considerable resources in the attempt to tame and bridle the PSOE before it grows into a rampaging revolutionary monster. Hence the concerted effort—supported in Britain by 'Labour Weekly' and 'Tribune'—to belittle PSOE and inflate the authority of reactionary cliques like that of Galvan, Llopis, García López and even the Carlists.

Bowing to the campaign, the PSOE National Committee, in January, passed a resolution proposing unification with Llopis' faction, which was vomited out in 1972, and even held out an olive branch to the renegade Galvan.

Assured that the Trojan Horse would gain entrance into its upper councils, the SI within days of this decision, solemnly promised PSOE its support. They realise that, inevitably, without a Marxist programme, the PSOE will be forced to play the same role as did the Portuguese SP across the border. They will enter a Provisional Government. But among



Filipe Gonzales, leader of PSOE, attending a meeting of the "Platajunta" [the Democratic Junta and the Democratic Convergence].

its members are many who have braved bullets and built revolutionary assemblies. When Gonzalez enters a government alongside former fascists, they will be at least as eager to support an alternative Marxist programme, provided it is offered, as were the rank and file of the Portuguese SP. On that basis, they will remember the role that Spínola played across the border. They will hark back, not to the shame of Socialist collaboration with de Rivera, but to the finest traditions of Pablo Iglesias (who, for all his shortcomings, denounced as a crime all collaboration with any capitalist parties), of the Asturian commune, of Largo Caballero (nicknamed the "Spanish Lenin"), of the Young

Socialists' attempted turn towards Marxism in 1935, of the initial refusal of the Socialists to join the Popular Front Government in February, 1936, and the recent declarations of PSOE. Already the JSE (Young Socialists) have stated that "the struggle against Fascist reaction is none other than the struggle for socialist revolution," called for "a revolutionary General Strike," and "nationalisation of the banks, monopolies and multinational subsidiaries under workers' control and without compensation." Although arbitrary punitive action has been taken against the JSE, its radicalisation is a good omen for the future of PSOE.

GREECE

The fall of the Greek junta in July, 1974, open the floodgates of mass activity. As the strategists of the ruling class had warned, by their adventurism the colonels had only pushed all Greece to the brink of revolution. In the last two years, Greece has been in the throes of a social crisis as deep as that of Italy. Long and bitter strikes have rocked the economy, involving as many as one fifth of the labour force in the first three months of 1976 alone. The peasants are in violent revolt. To cope with the masses' mood Karamanlis, the arch-reactionary of the 1950s, has dressed himself in the garb of "social-democrat"—only to

be attacked by the industrialists for allowing a plague of "socialmania" to infect Greece! Having tricked the electorate into allowing him to impose a Gaullist constitution, he dare not try to implement its powers. He cannot even assume his designated office as President for fear of the governmental crisis that would follow his departure as Premier. The ruling class cannot decide which way to turn. Playing for time, it is beating the drum of Greek chauvinism to divert popular feeling against the external enemy. Looming ahead is the prospect of a Popular Front, brought to power on the crest of a wave of strikes and occupations,

in which given the absence of a stable trade union apparatus new organs of struggle can be thrown up. As in Spain, a situation of dual power could materialise.

The fall of the junta also marked a turning point with regard to the Labour Movement. It found the traditional opposition fragmented. The liberal Centre Union was discredited and the EDA (formerly the front of the banned CP) hopelessly compromised by their treacherous vacillations before the coup. The underground CP split after the 1967 defeat into a reformist wing trying to reach an accommodation with the Centre Union in the style of Berlinguer and Carrillo and an orthodox wing which retains a certain industrial base but which is distrusted for its Stalinist record and its ties with Eastern Europe.

Into the vacuum stepped Andreas Papandreou, who on 3rd September 1974, proclaimed the foundation of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). Papandreou before was not even a Social-Democrat but a radical demagogue from the Centre Union, a liberal and a Harvard economist. But the irresistible pressures of the approaching revolution have forced him into the position where he presides over a mass centrist party. The new party was greeted warmly by a working class and especially the youth, looking for a party untainted with the betrayals of the past, capable of articulating their interests. Once again, this was no random experiment: during the great constitutional crisis of 1963-67 it was the CP which had built up Papandreou's popularity among the workers.

PASOK's subsequent history shows the explosive development of a new Socialist Party in the ferment of a pre-revolutionary crisis. The original Declaration of 3rd September was a fairly modest statement placing emphasis on the fight for national independence. But the militants who flocked into PASOK from the beginning tore ever more sweeping demagoguery from its leaders' lips, creating PASOK as a magnetic pole of attraction to ever wider strata. Although the active party membership is still relatively small, without doubt, PASOK commands the support of the majority of workers. Four months after PASOK's foundation, Papandreou was already talking a new language.

"We are not Social Democrats... The difference between Social-Democracy and Socialism is a qualitative and not a quantitative one. It is like black and white... Social-Democracy must be judged not by its proclamations. It must be judged by its actions... It has supported... monopoly capitalism in Western Europe... Our Socialist movement, in contrast, is based on the principle that we

must pass beyond capitalism to a socialist transformation... Capitalism today has entered a phase of decline... Without doubt, the working class... will come to realise in the period which approaches that their economic demands are not going to be satisfied if they do not become politicised and join the course... towards social liberation... The foundation of PASOK coincides with a period of great change in the West... The fact that we have chosen a democratic path does not mean that we are historically naive... We put the burden on the shoulders of the opponent... When the hour of majority comes, as it will come, for the majority to rule, and they refuse it to us, they will have abolished the political order... PASOK aspires... to create such an organisation at the base to act as a counterweight to the schemes of the foreign and domestic establishment."

Unfortunately, these stirring words, spoken in the cloisters of a Central Committee meeting, are not matched by a public call to action. Papandreou responded to the threat of a war with Turkey, not with an internationalist class appeal to the workers of Turkey and Cyprus, but in words that could have come from Karamanlis: "We are ready, regardless of the policy of our party, to shout 'present!' in every national struggle. The Greeks will defend their right to national independence, our territorial integrity, whatever the price might be... The time has come for the nation to find its soul and the people their course."

The grotesque political contra-

dictions within PASOK are reflected in a saga of organisational convulsions. PASOK still has no Constitution. There are no horizontal links between branches and regional committees are being appointed from above—in some cases including non-party members! Three times the National Conference has been postponed; now a new date has been fixed... for May 1977! Arbitrary expulsions have abounded, against the Right, Left and Stalinist wings. Now the Organisational Committee has itself been disbanded.

This internal chaos reflects the instability of a mass centrist party, and the panic of being called to account by a rank and file thirsting for deeds, for a consolidation of PASOK as a revolutionary party. But the dead hand of bureaucratism has provoked a counter movement from the local branches. They are appealing for PASOK to live up to its original promises of internal democracy. Papandreou said in January 1975: "It is imperative that differences and tendencies exist. If they did not exist—if somehow we had managed either with brainwashing or with policing—these are the only two methods I can imagine—to agree unanimously, then we would end up with a bureaucratic type arrangement, something which our movement condemns explicitly. For then we would have found a home in some Communist Party of Greece." But increasingly the rank and file are drawing the conclusions from PASOK's lack of democracy and are pressing for Marxist policies.



PASOK gained an immediate response from the youth and workers: now it needs Marxist ideas to give them a way forward.

ITALY

The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) is the latest to embark on a leftward course. During its long history it has many times spawned left currents, in 1914, 1920, 1948 and most recently in 1965 when the centrist PSIUP was formed after a split provoked by a short-lived reunification with the ultra-right Social Democrats. But for most of the last decade the PSI, in contrast to its counterparts in Southern Europe, has shared the fruits of office with the Christian Democrats in recurrent 'centre-left' coalitions—in a country where office is synonymous with corruption and bureaucratism. The ageing leadership is unchanged since the war. The party's 85-year-old President, Nenni, has been a leader since becoming General Secretary at the age of 25. The PSI seemed out of step with its neighbours.

But the pre-revolutionary crisis of the last eight years has seen wave upon wave of strikes, token general strikes involving 12, 15, or even 20 million workers, demonstrations of hundreds of thousands, the ugly activities of the MSI fascist gangsters, quixotic military conspiracies, a popular rebuff to the Christian Democrats in the divorce referendum, strong advances by the Communist Party (PCI) and PSI, and now the collapse of the 38th postwar government and the opening of an era of Popular Frontism. The PSI like every institution, has been shaken to its roots. Riddled with inner faction fights which have even broken out into fist fights at Party Congress, the social tensions have torn apart its uneasy alliance with the Christian Democrats.

In sudden outbursts of bureaucratic petulance, the PSI withdrew its support to the CD minority government in January 1976, complaining that the government was consulting more with the CP opposition than with its PSI allies. The PSI leaders were no longer prepared to keep silent and bear odium for CD policies, enjoying the benefits neither of government nor opposition, while the CP could indulge the luxuries of both! This reflected their impatience at being squeezed out of a responsible role.

One PSI leader, Cassola, claimed: "In practice, the PCI (Communist Party) has been in the Government since 1969, but without paying the price." Certainly, the PSI has paid the price for its willingness over the last decade to become enmeshed in the corruption and nepotism of a Christian Democrat-dominated regime. When the Christian Democracy suffered its shock 60-40 defeat in the 1974 divorce referendum, the PSI found it prudent to withdraw from participation in the Government. By January 1976 the PSI could no longer agree to prop up the minority Christian Democratic government from outside.



Nenni, old leader of the PSI

The PSI leaders hoped that one gesture would be enough to restore their credit. But the PSI is as discredited as the old French SFIO. It cannot follow the meteoric path of Mitterand's Socialist Party without going through a metamorphosis. It needs to be shaken from top to bottom into a new party, first. The feminist ginger-group, the Radicals, unsuccessfully asked for inclusion on the PSI lists. The PSI ex-mayor of Milan, Aniasi, has ambitions to play the role of an Italian Mitterand. The reverses sustained by the PSI in the General Election in comparison with

last year's regional elections are its old leaders' just deserts, and the rank and file know it. In anticipation of pressure from the ranks, the leaders have begun to inch slowly leftwards.

So the PSI has discovered "la alternativa socialista." Considerations of prestige here too combine with the mute pressure of the workers' interests to force the Socialists left. That is the only territory that the CP has left vacant. With the biggest CP in Western Europe, in Italy above all the Socialists' policies are dependent on it. The Italian CP has gone furthest of all in breaking the umbilical cord with the Kremlin and occupying the classic position of reformism. The only role left to the PSI is to fill the vacuum to the CP's left.

The PSI began by demanding that the CP be invited into a "grand coalition," taking its share of responsibility for the appeal for "Sacrifice" from the workers. But obviously the PSI requires more justification for existence than simply calling for greater responsibilities for its rival party. Hence a road has been opened up to the left.

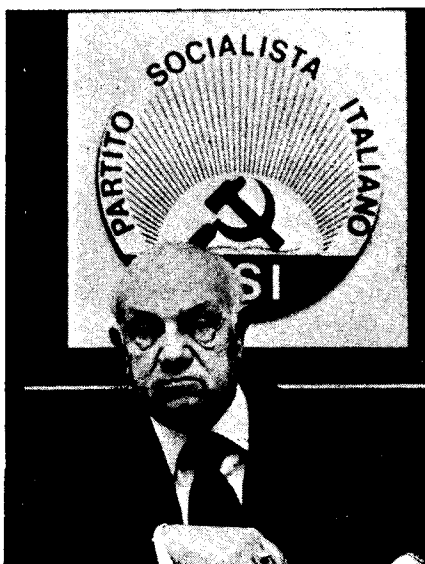
The PSI has a long way to go before it reaches the radicalism of even the French Socialists. That was revealed at the 1976 Party Congress, where the jangle of conflicting ideas was deafening. The official resolution stated: "The old policy is finished forever. The centre-left is buried." But De Martino amply expressed its confusion: "It seems impossible to us to look for a transition to socialism through the vision of the historic compromise... The PSI places itself in that complex of civil and human values called 'the West', while rejecting however the capitalist system... Liberty and socialism are indissoluble terms... Our position must be elastic. Even the hypothesis of a Christian Democrat-PSI government could be good or bad, according to conditions."

Lombardi, leader of the left faction within the leadership, judged more shrewdly the mood of the rank and file, with a contribution greeted by a 3-minute ovation and rapturous chants of "al-ter-na-ti-va!" Socialism must be put forward as the cure for the problems of society... Let us immediately open up a discussion with the PCI on socialist perspectives."

But even Mansholt, Vice-President of the Socialist International, expressed disappointment at the leadership's vacillations: "I was expecting more clarity on general political perspectives and more courage on the so-called moral questions (i.e. corruption)... Only after hearing Nenni did I understand that the Italian Socialists really are looking for a left alternative... The historic compromise is contrary to the alter-

native. In any case, in one way or another the Communists must be made to participate in the government of the country and De Martino didn't say it clearly enough."

It was left to the French fraternal delegate Dominique Taddei to denounce the historic compromise: "We are absolutely opposed to it. We think it is illusory and dangerous to ally oneself with the most conservative forces in the country."



Francesco de Martino, leader of the Italian Socialist Party [PSI].

However, the distinct positions of the two mass workers' parties were shown when both sent fraternal delegates to the Congress of the PDUP—a fusion of the relics of two earlier centrist formations, the PSIUP and the Manifesto group, both of which have been largely swallowed up by the PCI. Tortorella from the PCI turned up, pale and awkward, with a written speech full of warnings of the "danger of reaction", and apologised for wasting time. The PSI was evidently keener to make an impression and perhaps absorb the PDUP, as the French Socialists absorbed most of the PSU. Their delegate, Landolfi, described the PSI as "radical—revolutionary rather than reformist" and called for "workers' control and expropriation of the means of production". As the PDUP paper commented wryly: "He wants to outflank us on the left."

That is the only possible future for the PSI. De Martino harks back to a cosy alliance with the Christian Democrats. Bonacina, formerly a PSI executive member, has defected to the PCI, pointing to the attack on the lira as confirmation of the need for the historic compromise. The old chameleon Nenni, in the 1920s a right winger who opposed a United Front with the PCI against fascism, in the 1940s a Popular Frontist and more recently a "centre-leftist," has inched leftwards again. Four factions are vying for control. The old

right wing still controls the party machine. Lombardi's "alternative" is still only a pale pink reformism.

In the wake of the recent PSI electoral disaster, its deputy secretary Mosca, has resigned and later the entire leadership followed suit—opening up the first crack in the ageing Old Guard. Younger and more slippery operators will come to

the fore, voicing of necessity a more distinct and thus inevitably more radical, line.

But within this morass, inexorable pressures will push the rank and file towards Marxist conclusions. A Marxist current within the PSI could have a powerful influence on thinking members of the CP during the shocks of the new era opening up.

CENTRIST TRENDS

All these Parties have been obliged to take their first timid, tentative steps away from orthodox reformism. While the CPs are breaking the stranglehold of the Kremlin and trying to play the traditional role of reformism—hence the muted attacks from the Russian CP which is anxious to retain the services of its unpaid diplomats abroad—the Socialist Parties are moving in a centrist direction. The process is like the period 1916-21, when mass currents and even whole parties of the Socialist International moved from reformism to centrism.

Centrism represents all the gradations in the huge gap separating reformism from Marxism. Trotsky pointed out that it is not enough to characterise a party as centrist—it is necessary to put an arrow above it to indicate in which direction it is

moving. While a little pseudo-Marxist centrist sect can last almost forever, by its very nature centrism as a mass phenomenon lacks a stable base. Reformism is based on the privileges of the labour bureaucracy; Stalinism on those of the Russian bureaucracy; Marxism on the historical mission of the working class. But centrism is a transition, either of formerly Marxist parties sliding towards reaction, like the Social Democracy before 1914 or the Communist Parties up to the mid-1930s, or (as in the present case) of reformist parties dragged by the impetus of a rank and file straining towards Marxism. And despite the fact that so far none of the Southern European SPs has advanced beyond a very mild form of centrism and some are still only hovering on the border between left reformism and

THE 1926 GENERAL STRIKE

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Leon Trotsky,
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& Peter Taaffe

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centrism, they have embarked on a course which will create historic opportunities for Marxism.

A mass centrist party, like an unstable radioactive element, can only change. If it is not transformed into a steeled revolutionary vanguard, then it can only disintegrate, get swallowed up by the CP, or if conditions permit, decay back into reformism. It can lurch from ultra-leftism to opportunism from day to day.

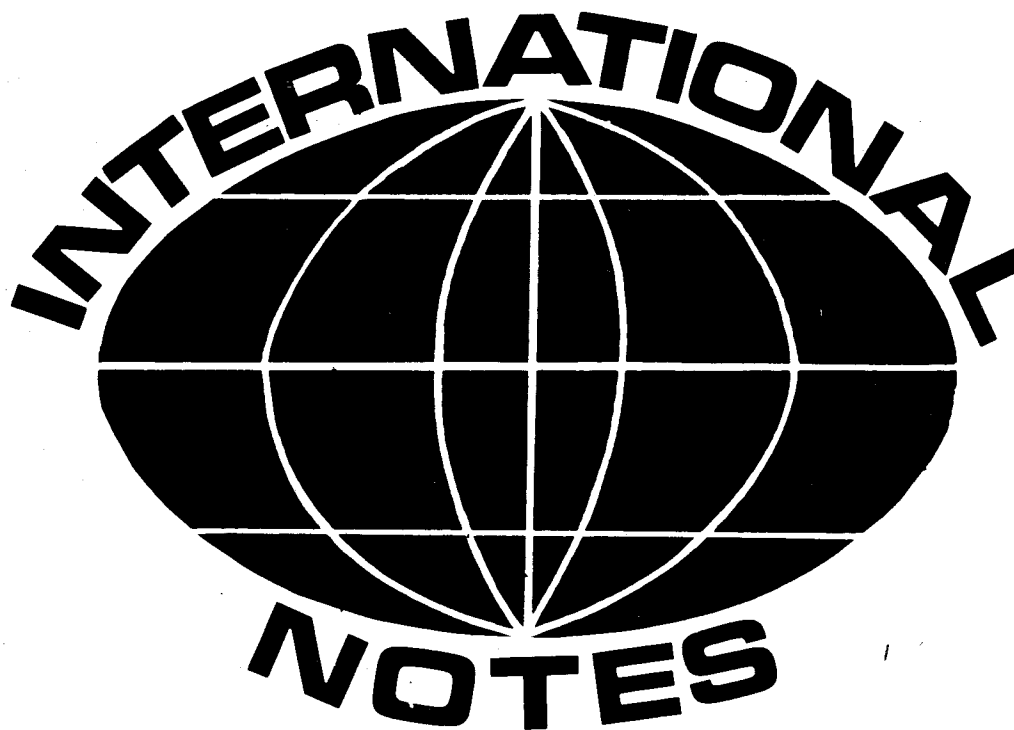
The most determined and conscious elements within its ranks can win the mass of its active layers to Marxism, as was the case with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, the German Social Democracy, the French and Italian Socialists, etc. Without such forces, a centrist party can enjoy spectacular freak growth, only to disintegrate, if it fails to make the last inches to Marxism. The British ILP had the support of 100,000 workers in 1931. Five years later it was already a tiny irrelevant sect. The Spanish POUM in 1937 grew from a few hundred to 75,000 within weeks, only to fade into obscurity just as quickly after entering the Catalan Popular Front. The Spanish Young Socialists in 1935 were gobbled up by the CP giving it a mass base with fatal consequences, due to the failure of the Marxists to give them the lead

they were thirsting for. More recently in France the PSU and in Italy the PSIUP and Manifesto group became prominent centrist parties, only later to be absorbed into the French Socialist and Italian Communist Parties. In Chile the SP split into five factions and the majority of the activists took the lead in building the "cordones industriales" and stocking the factories with arms. At the same time the centrist MIR won thousands to its banner, serving tragically to divert the SP militants from reaching genuine revolutionary conclusions. An organised Marxist tendency in the SP with clear perspectives could have saved the revolution. But without Marxism as a guide and a compass, such parties face destruction. Like fireworks they can light the heavens and make a big bang, but a moment later they are burnt-out scraps of paper.

The Southern European SPs share common features with classical centrist parties. They have an active and largely youthful rank and file, concentrating all their energies into building the party. They have a narrow leadership, nervous at the consequences of its own reckless demagoguery and conscious that without a broad entrenched apparatus it rests on quicksand and prone therefore to arbitrary but ineffectual administrative measures. And bet-

ween these poles is a shifting mass of jostling, colliding adventurers, careerists looking for a niche, reformists there by accident, lawyers, actresses, cranks and eccentrics, which the leadership try to play off against the workers. The leaders lack conviction and are anxious for a stake in the established political scene. But they are sitting on a volcano. Goaded by the intolerable pressures of capitalism, the rank and file will fight to transform each of these parties from a wordy, amorphous shambles camouflaging their opportunist manoeuvres under a cover of flowery speeches, into united bold parties capable of arousing the workers with fighting demands.

Some at least of these Socialist Parties hold the key to the creation of a mass Marxist tendency. With raging polemics and sharp polarisations in prospect, they can become like hothouses forcing a rapid flowering of ideas. Armed with clear perspectives, the best activists and Party militants can burst open the pale bud of centrism, revealing the brilliant colours of Marxism so far hidden within.



WORLD PROFITS

Profits provide the finance and the incentive for investment which in turn is the driving force in capitalist economies. Yet information on profitability is extraordinarily hard to come by, for figures given in the annual accounts of companies are hopelessly distorted by inflation.

For the USA and UK there are the following relatively reliable series for the *rate of profit*—the mass profits in relation to the total amount of capital laid out in the form of buildings machinery, stocks of materials etc.

Rates of Profit, Industrial and Commercial companies %

	1964	1970	1973	1974
UK—Pre-tax	11.8	7.3	6.6	4.0
Post-tax	7.6	3.7	3.9	0.2 [3.5]*
USA—Pre-tax	15.0	9.1	10.5	
Post-tax	9.1	5.3	5.4	

*Figure in brackets is after Healey's tax concessions

Sources: UK—Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin March 1976.
USA—Brookings Papers 1974 No.1.

The Bank of England's figures for the UK actually show that without Healey's tax concessions, the rate of profit after tax in 1974 would have been negligible—that is the companies would have had to borrow the money to pay the shareholders their dividends, as well as to finance investment.

More recent evidence is only available for the *share of profits*—the ratio of profits to value added (wages paid plus profits)—which is a rough indicator of what Marx called the rate of exploitation. For the UK profits as a share of national income fell from about 7% in 1974 to 6% in the first half of 1975. The most recent figures—for the last quarter of 1975—show a slight recovery to 6½%, reflecting in part the first effects of the £6 per week wages policy. What the capitalist class hopes for is a sharp rise in production and productivity, while wages are held down and competitiveness is improved by the depreciation of the pound. But the size of the task of restoring profits is shown by the fact that the rate of profit, after tax, is still well under half the level of the early 1960's, despite the fact that the tax concessions and extra investment incentives have virtually eliminated company taxation. In the USA, where the share of profits in company output fell from 18% in 1973 to 16% in the first quarter of 1975, the beginnings of recovery from the recession in the third quarter pushed the profit share back to 19%. But this still leaves the post-tax rate of profit not much

more than half the level at the height of the boom of the 1960's.

For the major countries we only have figures for the share of the profits.

	Manufacturing Profits		Profits Income		
	% of Value Added		% of National Income		
	1960	1970	1970	1973	1974
Italy	16.5	10.9	13½	12½	11½
Germany	29.3	23.5	19.7	17.5	15.1
Japan	39.2	34.4	16.0	12.7	8.1

Source: National Income Statistics of each country.

The figures for manufacturing profitability show a distinct downward trend over the 1960's, even in these "miracle" countries. Since 1970, the much cruder national income figures, which for technical reasons cannot be used for comparisons between countries, show that the trend has continued, and intensified especially in Germany and Japan. The very large falls in output during 1975 (see March 1975 MIR) will certainly have decreased profitability still further in all these countries, and in France as well which up till then seems to have been relatively immune from the slide in profits.

A vital aspect of the decline in profitability is its implications for renewed capital accumulation. The volume of fixed investment in buildings (other than houses) and machinery shows the following pattern in the various countries.

	Investment: index of real volume		
	1970	Peak of Boom	Latest figures
Japan	100	136 [1973, Q4]	105 [1975, Q3]
U.S.A.	100	125 [1974, Q2]	104 [1975, Q3]
France	100	122 [1974, Q2]	112 [1975, Q2]
Italy [Total Investment]	100	114 [1974, Q2]	100 [1975, Q2]
Germany [" "]	100	109 [1973]	94 [1975-forecast]
U.K.	100	108 [1970, Q4]	99 [1975, Q4]

Source: OECD Quarterly National Income Statistics

So after rises in investment which were quite small, in a number of countries, during the short-lived boom of 1972-73, by the middle of 1975 the rate of accumulation had generally fallen back to around the 1970 level. If the recovery from the world recession is to be sustained for any length of time a renewed burst of investment would be necessary. This looks extremely improbable given massive excess capacity and very low profitability described above. A 'Keynesian' reflation, through tax cuts and credit expansion could help moderate the excess capacity, but the capitalists fear that substantial falls in unemployment would make their task of holding down living standards and improving profitability even harder. This is the basis for anticipating only a very limited boom in the world economy.

SOUTH AFRICA

"We decided to stop work because two supervisors treated us badly. There was no point in reporting the matter to top management because in the workers' view the white men always stick together. The owner of the firm and the police were called. It was our chance to speak to the owner: we decided there and then to snatch the opportunity by incorporating wage demands in our dispute."

The owner appealed to us to return to work. We refused because that would only mean delaying sorting things out. There were no outsiders among us. How would they know about the bad treatment we received from the supervisors."

Black Striker, quoted in the 'Financial Mail' [Johannesburg] 29/8/75.

For reasons that should be obvious by now the black workers are in the forefront of the struggle in South Africa at the present stage and not only in the forefront, but crowding the second and third ranks as well.

Officially, all strikes are illegal, except under conditions which practically never occur. For workers to lay down their tools, therefore, means taking on the entire armed might of the state. We have seen, however, that worsening economic conditions coupled with great political developments in the sub-continent have driven black workers to a point where this struggle can no longer be avoided. It is a long and bitter struggle, with neither the workers nor the employers throwing in anything like their full resources at this stage and the final outcome depending to a great extent on the





Afrikaanders, trying to preserve the "Great Trek" mentality, set their faces against the march of history. Now they are confronted by an African working class rapidly becoming conscious of its strength and potential power.

unfolding of events on a world scale. While future developments cannot be predicted in detail, under present conditions time is undoubtedly on the workers' side.

Traditionally, the struggle of black workers in South Africa has been mass struggle as opposed to action organised by specific unions. Two forms of struggle have recurred again and again—illegal strikes and boycotts of public transport. These forms of struggle continued in 1975.

Strikes: Preceded by the Namibian strikes, the great strike movement found its momentum among the Natal textile workers in late 1972. Since then it has spread to every industry and to all parts of the country. As battle was joined on a hundred factory fronts, as employer resistance hardened and workers gained in experience, the struggle took on a more definite character and with rising unemployment inhibiting the workers, the appearance became deceptively subdued. Beneath this appearance, both the struggle and its causes continued with unabated bitterness.

Despite the concessions won by workers since 1973, a Durban survey reveals that 75% of African workers are still dissatisfied. 70% would strike again if matters came to a head. The considerable participation of Indian workers in the strike was also indicated. Most Indian workers are in favour of joint trade unions with their African fellow workers.

Some 300 strikes took place between January 1973 and June 1974. In July 1974, strikes were reported on the Witwatersrand sometimes at the rate of 13 on one day. Officially, 135 strikes involving black workers were recorded in the second half of 1974. 125 of these were wage disputes. From July 1974 to March 1975 there were officially 68 strikes in Natal alone, involving 12,051 black workers. The statistics for 1974 are:

	Transvaal	Cape	Natal	Free State	Total
Strikes	203	50	96	25	374
Workers involved	22,552	13,725	18,993	2,386	57,656

(From figures provided by the Minister of Labour in Parliament, 1975)

During 1975 there were at least 123 illegal strikes.

A strike at the Natal Cotton and woollen Mills at Durban in November 1975 was typical of many others. 600 relatively skilled workers, the entire workforce, struck work in protest against the dismissal of 20 of their comrades. They demanded that, instead, the personnel manager be sacked. Managing director, Victor Daitz, of course found the workers' complaints groundless. All those who did not return to work would be replaced by new men. Management responded with the usual tactic. Dismissing all 600 men, it invited them to re-apply for their jobs the next week.

For men faced with imprisonment, hunger and deportation to the Bantustans, such an ultimatum is unanswerable except with almost superhuman courage. Yet two days after the management deadline, only 200 men had gone back. 400 remained solid.

But the workers of one factory, however courageous, cannot hold out against an entire social system. Not only does the Bantustan system place whole armies of unemployed at the disposal of the bosses; spreading recession has thrown growing numbers of spinners and weavers on the streets to take the strikers' place. It was this system, and the absence of organisation binding employed and unemployed together as a single fighting force, that defeated the strike at Natal Cotton Mills.

Management used the opportunity to purge the workforce of workers' spokesmen. Even liaison committee members were weeded out: 14 out of 15 were not taken back. Nor were two of the three shop stewards of the (Indian) National Union of Textile Workers.

Bus boycotts: A fare increase by the privately-owned East London bus company in November 1974 sparked off an 8 week boycott that ended in victory for the workers. "So ugly had the situation grown," it is reported, "that there seems no alternative but for the government to step in through the Xhosa Development Corporation."

The basis for the conflict was the large-scale unemployment in the township concerned, Mdantsane. Since the township officially forms part of the Ciskei 'homeland', the unemployed cannot be 'endorsed out' (or deported) as is the standard policy. The conflict over bus fares thus threatened to touch off a more widespread struggle.

The XDC bought up the bus lines for R7.4 million.

The owners, Tollgate Holdings, found the transaction "satisfactory." The fares were reduced again "temporarily."

In September and October, struggle erupted in the Newcastle township of Madadeni and Osizweni after the (state-owned) bus line put up its fares. 180 buses were driven off the road. A thousand workers carrying sticks could not be kept from demonstrating through the streets of Newcastle. Most significant of all, a highly effective system of 'flying pickets' was set up.

Buses attempting to break the boycott were stoned by detachments of workers. Some women who broke the boycott arrived at the factory where they worked—only to find their way barred by pickets. They had to walk back home. A certain shopkeeper called Gatsha, who gave two workers a lift to Newcastle, did not escape the pickets. He was stopped and reprimanded. Later he claimed they had robbed him of R1,350!

By 3rd October, 200 policemen were on guard around the townships. Four policemen entered the Iscor township to arrest a man who had hurled a stone at a bus. Instead, the workers arrested the police and severely beat them—an ironical reversal of the corporal punishment so freely meted out by South African courts.

A white inhabitant of Newcastle summed up both the result of the boycott and the mentality prevailing in his own circles. Telling a British journalist that the boycott has "just petered out," he added at the same time that fares had been reduced to their former level! And if the workers thus emerged the victors, the Kwazulu Administration are probably the losers, to whom the government has now turned over the bus line.

Prospects: With capitalism in South Africa built up on the basis of the merciless exploitation of the mass of workers, the struggle cannot be resolved until the stranglehold of the present owners of the factories, the mines and the land is broken. Implicit in the entire struggle, therefore, is the demand for public ownership of production under the democratic control of those who do the work.

This has grown evident even to government servants like Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, who sees the need (in Zululand at least) to "avoid the evils of capitalism." As a remedy, he wants the Kwazulu Development Corporation to own a 50% stake in all companies operating there.

Even this moderate proposal is enough to raise the hackles of the South African businessmen. From as far afield as Salisbury the reaction reveals its true attitude



Soweto: Two students carry away a friend shot by the police during an unarmed demonstration of schoolchildren. Years of terrible oppression produced the desperate courage shown by the demonstrators.

towards African independence. "The examples of African socialism in neighbouring states," writes a certain P. J. Henderson, "can hardly inspire capitalists to invest in Kwazulu."

In Lesotho, Commerce Minister Joel Moitse was moved to tell the local 'Chamber of Nabobs' (Chamber of Commerce) to "sell out or be nationalised." Chief Jonathan, seen by businessmen as being "basically sympathetic to private enterprise," came to the rescue by firing Moitse.

As one Lesotho born white businessman modestly explained: "We do not want to tell the Lesotho government what to do, but we would like it to consult with us to ensure its proposals are feasible in the first place."

But big business and even the state itself can no longer claim sole hegemony over the future of South Africa. As the *Financial Mail* admits, "the unorganised proletariat has demonstrated a force to be reckoned with." It is "one of the forces that really count today" (1/8/75).

BOOK REVIEWS

ABENDROTH'S TOUR

A Short History of European Labour

By Wolfgang Abendroth

New Left Books (Paperback £2)

To give a comprehensive history of over 200 years of the European labour movement in 200 pages is no easy task. But Wolfgang Abendroth in his book, 'A Short History of the European Working Class' (written in 1965, updated in 1971), has achieved this, and so performed a valuable service to all socialists. His aim was to produce "a readable analysis and not a text-book," a "summary" and not "original" material. For socialists after more detailed histories, he refers to Julius Braunthal's 'History of the International', and also provides a good bibliography at the end of the book.

From the time of the Industrial Revolution until today, Abendroth shows the progressive force of the European labour movement championing democracy and universal suffrage, fighting for improvements in education and social services, in working conditions and for a living wage. He describes the even greater potential of the labour movement to transform and develop society along socialist lines, so that co-operation and planned industrial growth can lead to the eradication of poverty and misery and war.

However, it needs to be said—as a warning—that at times, in attempting to concentrate too much information into so small a space, that the book becomes like an encyclopedia of the history of different national labour movements, a sort of socialist 'Cook's tour', with the unifying threads getting lost in the detail.

But this does not distract from the great value of the book, although as a historian, he covers some topics better than others.

Abendroth shows how in the early labour struggles up to 1848 the working class movements of Europe were forced to see that the 'democracy' of the capitalists was only democracy for the controllers of capital and property. In France after 1789 and Britain after 1800 (the Combination Act) the new class of capitalists attacked and outlawed the infant working class organisations and denied the workers electoral rights. With the further betrayal of the workers in the 1832 Reform Act, the first independent working class party was formed in Britain in the Chartists during the 1840s. In Europe, it was the workers that spearheaded the democratic revolutions of 1848.

Abendroth traces the development of the 1st and 2nd Internationals. In particular, his analysis of the German SPD, its Marxist origins and then its bureaucratisation and drift to reformism, is worth reading. "Organisationally the party had generated a whole category of

parliamentarians, working class bureaucrats and functionaries in the trade unions, the co-ops, the party secretariats, the editorial offices of the party press and as parliamentary delegates. Such people no longer lived for but also off the working class movement." Here were rooted the "feet of clay" of the SPD that led its parliamentarians to vote for subsidies for the imperialist war in August 1914. There are lessons here for us today in the Labour Party and trade unions.

But undoubtedly the most educational section of the book is that dealing with the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, through its isolation and the rise of the bureaucracy; and the abandonment of Marxist policies for the emancipation of labour, by the 'Communist' Parties of Europe and their subjection to become the tools of the foreign policy of the Russian bureaucracy. Abendroth shows how "socialism in one country" came effectively to mean "socialism nowhere else." He traces the disastrous 'Third Period' policies of the Communist Parties, 1928



The Amsterdam Congress of the Socialist International 1904

to 1934, which, by attacking the Social Democratic organisations as "social fascist", hid the real danger of fascism and in Germany handed over the country to the Nazis on a plate "without a pane of glass being broken." Even when Hitler started to systematically eliminate all Communist Party members, along with the Socialists, the Communist Party refused to unite with the SPD workers to defend themselves.

Abendroth shows the quick "about turn" in Stalin's policies when he realised the war Hitler was planning against Russia, the order to the European Communist Parties to form Popular Fronts with "democratic" capitalist parties against fascists, so that Stalin could win allies amongst the capitalist powers of West Europe. This led to the attack on shorter hours and higher wages won by the French workers in 1934 and to the betrayal of the Spanish workers during the civil war, 1936-39. Following the Munich agreement of late 1938, Stalin did the "unthinkable" in 1939—signed a pact with Hitler. The Communist Parties found this difficult to explain.

During the war that followed, Abendroth shows how the organisational superiority of the CPs over the Social Democratic organisations often made them into mass forces in occupied Europe. In Greece, it was the CP-led ELAS which liberated the country before the British arrived and could have transformed Greece into a workers' democracy. But, maintaining his policy of "unity" with the Western capitalist countries, in whose "sphere of influence" Greece lay, Stalin ordered ELAS to hand over its arms to the British Army and to the King (safe in Cairo). The successive manoeuvring of the King and the British led to the breaking of the working class movement.

So the CPs came out of the war much stronger. Their status was also increased by the sacrifices borne in Russia itself and the carrying of the revolution to East Europe, albeit "on the bayonets of the Red Army." But the continued policies of Popular Frontism (in Britain after the war, the CP supported the continuation of the war time coalition under Churchill) acted as a break on the workers' movement. This allowed the United States to consolidate its position in Western Europe through arms and credit (Marshall aid) and so put back the workers' movement for decades. Indeed, in tracing the struggles of Hungarian workers in 1956 (who were opposed to Stalinist bureaucracy but not to socialist ownership) the

Czech workers in 1968 and the Polish in 1969, Abendroth shows that the policies of the Soviet Union have served more to drive the workers of Western Europe in the arms of the right wing social democratic leaders than any other issue.

However, Abendroth's descriptions are not so good for all countries at all times. In particular his analysis of the British labour movement is not that accurate and tends to be over-simplistic. For example, he claims that the British trade unions in the late 19th century (much stronger than the German) supported the Liberals out of weakness. Rather, it was because—except for the most advanced workmen—that they had not yet seen the need for an independent working class party. Abendroth makes no mention of the two great movements in support of the Russian revolutions in Britain and their significance—the Leeds Convention of 1917, which called for the creation of Soviets, and Councils of Action created at the call of the TUC and Labour Party to stop intervention in Russia in 1920. He also consistently has a poor understanding of the changing mood of workers and after the General Strike blames the workers for accepting defeat. Nevertheless, his account of the growth of 'Mondism of workers' councils and the belief in development of "planned capitalism" after the General Strike is an accurate one.

The last chapter, a postscript dealing with the 1965-71 period, tends to overstate the role and potential of the "new left"—the students in particular—and their ability to lead or stimulate working class struggle. But Abendroth does recognise that it is the labour movements of the developed capitalist states who are and will be, the locomotive for change in society. The growing battles of the late 1960s and early 1970s showed the labour movement as a force moving back into action under the threats to their living standards from the developing recession. "The knot of history is being retied," after the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s. This book should help socialists in the task of assimilating the experiences of past struggles so that we can bring about socialism.

Nic Boulter

ITALY 1911-1921: THE RED YEARS

*Proletarian Order. Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils
and the Origins of Italian Communism*

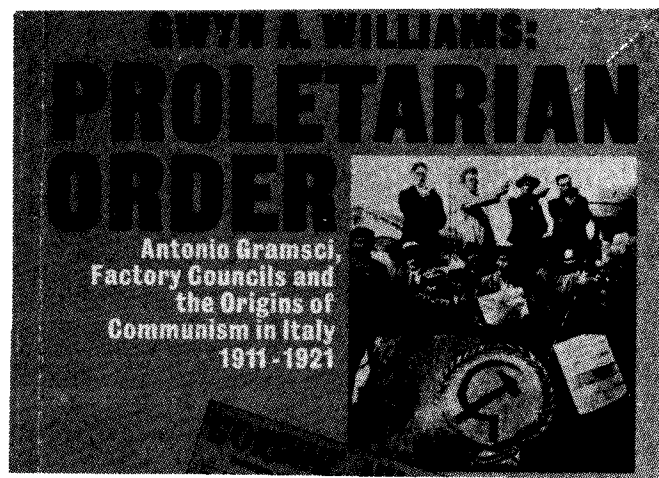
By Gwyn A Williams
Pluto Press (paperback £2.70)

Gwyn Williams begins: "I have written this book in the hope that it will be of service to the British working-class and marxist movements." Such a modest but bold hope encourages the reader to expect something rather different from the usual piece of research, laboriously detailed and cautiously argued, providing mainly food for further pieces of research. You expect a book that not only tells the story vividly, but also explains it, allowing you to use it. Williams book does neither of these.

The Italian Communist Party developed out of the impact of the Russian Revolution on a working class seething with revolutionary energy. "In September 1920 the working class of Italy had, in effect, gained control of the state, of society, of factories, plants and enterprises... In essence the working class had already conquered or virtually conquered, but there was no organization capable of definitively consolidating this victory and so the working class found itself hurled back", Trotsky told the 4th Congress of the Communist International. The organization—the Communist Party—grew out of that defeat, but too late—already the star of fascism was rising.

The story is set mainly in Turin. Turin in the early 20th century was not only Italy's industrial centre but the home of some of the most advanced and fast-growing industries in Europe—cars, typewriters, chemicals, rubber, electricity. Massive enterprises owned by the families that still dominate Italian capitalism—Agnelli (Fiat), Olivetti etc—and "from birth enmeshed in banks and insurance consortia, finance capital, and the state" created a proletarian city. In 1918, with the working population doubled since 1914, 150,000 out of 185,587 wage earners were factory workers, most of them skilled, in a city of half a million. Meanwhile in parts of the South there was 90% illiteracy and the people "locked into the traditional and immobile society of the vast estates, the latifundia, with their big villages full of wretched tenants and clusters of landless labourers trapped in under-employment and insecurity."

The Socialist Party (PSI) had its headquarters not in Turin but in Milan, the commercial and financial capital where the working class was more fragmented. With the help of Gramsci's often blistering attacks on the Party, Williams conveys a clear picture of the PSI. It emerged, during the slump and repression of the 1890's out of struggles of industrial and rural workers, mainly in the North. Its membership, around 1914, was 70% working class but the leadership was overwhelmingly middle class. This contradiction is reflected in the political history of the Party. By 1914 the collaborationist leadership of Turati and Treves had been replaced by the "maximalists" who, Marxist in words, reformist in action, were to betray the revolutionary movements of April and September 1920. Gramsci rightly accused the PSI of joining Zimmerwald and the Third International without understanding what it was doing.



The bulk of the book is taken up with the factory council movement that began in Turin in the summer of 1919 and led the April and September actions. The councils had almost the effects on Italian communism of the Paris Commune on Marx and Engels. Directly stimulated by Gramsci and his journal *L'Ordine Nuovo* the old internal commissions (shop stewards' committees) were transformed into miniature soviets, mobilising the unorganised, educating and training the workers towards the control of production and from there society. Engineering factories in Turin began it, but within a few months there were councils in most large plants in the area and most of the North was seizing the idea.

By April 1920 the employers had had enough. At the first meeting of the reorganised Italian CBI (Confindustria), Olivetti attacked 'dual power' and showed himself fully aware of the revolutionary potential of the factory councils. A lock-out of Turin engineering workers followed. The whole of the Turin working class came out on strike in response: "For 11 days the life of the city and province remained completely paralysed.... There were absolutely no blacklegs" wrote Mario Montagnana, an engineering worker. At its height, 500,000 workers were out, 4 million people involved. Sympathy action was taken in Florence, Pisa, Genoa, etc. And while the Milan *Avanti*, the PSI newspaper, refused to print the Turin strike bulletin, Gramsci and the "ordinovisti" took the lead, built links with the rural workers and through their control of the Turin section of the PSI and of the trades council strove to extend the strike and get the PSI to call a national general strike. The factory councils' leaders declared: "at stake is a revolutionary institution, the workshop commissars and the factory councils, the interest not only of a local category but of the whole communist proletariat of Italy." Only too aware of the revolutionary implications of a general strike, the PSI's national council passed a resolution which, rich in maximalist rhetoric, called for more time to instil communist principle and prepare a "proletarian armed

force". The strike ended not in total defeat but with a weakening of the council movement: the trade union confederation (CGL)—to the right of the PSI, and fiercely hostile to the councils—negotiated the settlement which reduced the councils to shadow organisations.

The occupation of the factories in September can be seen as a more desperate effort, in which the Turin workers showed a more revolutionary consciousness but were *more isolated* and more decisively defeated by reformism. A second lock-out by the engineering bosses over a 40% wage increase sparked off immediate occupations (work-ins), this time following the example of Milan. "Between 1st and 4th September, the occupations rolled forward through Italy, not only in the industrial heartland around Milan, Turin and Genoa, but in Rome, Florence, Naples, Palermo, in a forest of red black flags and a fanfare of workers' bands". Elsewhere it was mostly syndicalists who led the occupations but in Turin the factory councils rose up and "co-ordinated through the 'camera' (trades council) committees and directed by the electionist communists (Togliatti) PSI section were moving rapidly towards Gramsci's 'urban soviet' in an atmosphere of high communist purpose." At Fiat Centro the council created special commissariats to handle defence, transport and raw materials; it appointed and armed red guards. Arms were being manufactured in almost every engineering factory. Other industries followed suit and from the South came news of takeovers of estates by peasants.

Industrialists and the press screamed in hysterical panic especially when the PSI and CGL leaders resolved, if the dispute was not settled, to direct the struggle towards "collective management and the socialization of the means of production." Meanwhile Giolitti (the prime minister)—like DeGaulle in May 1968—sat tight. When Agnelli demanded that troops be sent in, Giolitti "blandly offered to bombard Fiat with artillery and a spavined Agnelli collapsed". The Government would not move, biding its time, the bosses were impotent, the reformists were left to wreck the movement.

"You don't make a revolution by first calling a convention to decide whether there is going to be a revolution or not," said a delegate at the meeting which did precisely that. But beforehand, the CGL and PSI leaders had met again, in Milan on 10th September; the CGL handed over all responsibility for the revolution to the socialists and submitted their resignations. As the Comintern was later told, "When the comrades who led the CGL submitted their resignations, the party could neither replace them nor hope to replace them". "We could not accept so grave responsibility, said Gennari to the socialist congress"—"Because you were afraid" cried a voice. The national council of the CGL then voted for an economic struggle. A victory over the bosses—wage increases, paid holidays, and a workers' participation scheme blessed by Giolitti. In Turin the occupations continued till more concessions were squeezed out of the bosses. Agnelli was so demoralised that he offered to turn Fiat into a workers' co-operative. But the revolutionary movement was defeated, the militants isolated, the reformist strengthened. The bosses poured money into the fascist gangs whose offensive boomed

from November, kicking out socialist town councils, wrecking union buildings, murdering militants. Unemployment soared. In January 1921 the long-awaited split between Communists and reformists took place at the PSI's congress, but the new Communist Party of Italy took only 40,000, leaving the reformists with a large majority, while nearly half the members of the "old PSI failed to renew their membership of either party in 1921". Williams does not draw the conclusion but it is inescapable: the failure to translate the occupations into a national movement, to challenge the state, to defeat the bosses politically as well as economically paved the way for Mussolini.

How then does "*Proletarian Order*" fail? First—this is a warning—it is very difficult to read. Williams' style is dry, abstract and academic, sometimes over-rich and occasionally incomprehensible. But this style comes out of the approach and method of the book. Williams has attempted, in only 308 pages, to describe the working class movement of the "red two years", 1919–1920, to analyse Gramsci's writings and to chart the formation of the Communist Party. But far too much of the book is spent on the development of Gramsci's thought, with only the odd glance at what the working class was doing. A book that can only be of use to the British labour movement should convey precisely the development of the conditions, the mood, level of consciousness of the workers, so that the movements they started, the ideas they took up can be understood in their proper context. All sorts of questions are unanswered—How did the factory councils operate in particular factories? What exactly was the relationship between the intellectuals of *L'Ordine Nuovo* and workers? How did the communists intervene from day to day, politically, in the Occupation? How did the militants of the Occupation respond to the new CP? The organisation of the book also reflects an empirical, academic, non-Marxist approach. Every new development is dealt with first through Gramsci's articles then polemics and developments in the PSI and finally he deals with the economic situation and the workers' actions. Thus we are told that unemployment rose sixfold that the fascist gangs were becoming a mass movement, that the socialists made huge gains in the November elections after a detailed account of preparations within the PSI congress at which the Communists split. Economic and, even more important, international developments are never more than sketchy.

If you use the index carefully a lot of information and some good analyses of the labour movement in Italy then can be gleaned, but as a whole it is disappointing. On the eve of the elections in Italy when Italy's present-day reformists, the CP may be forced into office if not power, it is more important than ever for us to gain an understanding of the revolutionary opportunity of the red two years and why it was defeated. Williams' remark, "the precise temper of the insurrectionary masses remains elusive..." avoids the whole issue.

Also published by Pluto Press: *The occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920* by Paolo Spriano (£2.00)

Catherine Burns

Front Cover
The Glynneath Soviet Level [open-cast mine]
during the 1926 Miners' Lockout.
[photograph: South Wales Miners' Library]

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