

the



15p

Communist

'The workpeople of England have but to will, and they are the masters to carry every reform, social and political, which their situation requires. Then why not make that effort?'

(Engels 1881)

BRITAIN'S

ECONOMIC
CRISIS

and

THE

LEFT'S
SOLUTION

by Bill Warren

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Published by the

British and Irish Communist Organisation

in Britain

JULY 1975 No.88.

PROBLEMS
of
COMMUNISM
summer issue

FASCISM
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25p incl. post.

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WAGES and INFLATION

by CONOR
LYNCH

The new round of pay negotiations is about to begin. More and more workers recognise that some form of bargaining regulations are necessary if inflation is to be slowed down. But there are still those, especially in the higher echelons of the trade union movement, who believe, or pretend to believe, that the level of wage rises in no way contribute to inflation.

These people blame greedy profiteers, Arab sheiks and lack of investment in productive sectors. To some extent all these factors cause inflation - at least within the spiral. But in many cases the lack of investment or the transfer of investment to non-productive speculation are endemic to an inflationary situation.

The increased oil price boosted up most other prices. But this affects all industrial countries, and does not account for Britain's extraordinary inflation.

Greedy profiteers there are. But most haven't been too successful recently. And in the industrial sector the rate of profit has been generally falling. But apart from this the way in which profit is used is just as important as its actual rate. Profits for consumption by entrepreneurs and shareholders form a small proportion of the total. The greater part is necessary for investment.

The fact of life remains that wages are the main contributor to determining the price of a commodity. This being the case, and rise in real wages must come from an increase in productivity, or by eating into consumption profits, and this latter is a rapidly dwindling source. Otherwise prices rise and the wage increase is cancelled out.

These are the facts being driven home by the bourgeoisie, from Healy and Wilson to the CBI. These people do not desire any basic change in the social system and so are demanding that workers restrain their wages - voluntarily if possible, if not, then compulsorily.

Most opponents of the capitalist system have little alternative to offer. They blindly state that wages are not a cause of inflation and so see no need for restraint. They hope that if this is repeated often enough it will be believed.

They understand that no worker wants to reduce the rate of his wage increases and hope by their "policy" to curry favour with the working class.

as I said in the beginning, workers are increasingly understanding that wages do push up prices. At present inflation is still just about tolerable for many workers. Free collective bargaining still allows many - especially the higher paid and key workers - to gain temporary substantial, real wages. The labour market is still able to cope with demands.

When this will not be the case. Then workers - beginning with the lower paid - will start demanding a more rational system of wages distribution. And when pseudo-socialists are still defending an outmoded market free-for-all system, the class they pretend to represent will be demanding its own and social control over the labour market.

At this new attitude is likely to be passive. The only viable alternative to free collective bargaining will be that of the bourgeoisie. Workers will certainly prefer this to the anarchy which the left is aiming for. The system will struggle on, changing only insofar as its own development requires.

Such a situation advances the politics of the working class very little. It shakes off the "leftie" shackles and brings in some reality to working class politics.

Economically it will probably keep the economy from collapsing and maybe even advance it a little. But the major regeneration which the economy requires is most unlikely to materialise.

Any constructive regulation of wages requires at least the active participation of the organised workers. Similarly only the working class can effect the rationalisation of the economy and any substantial increase in productivity.

At present most workers, at least in their own departments or sections, are perfectly capable of organising production and distribution. With a little effort and planning the remaining necessary skills could be acquired. What is lacking is the will to control plus a sense of responsibility for the operation of their firms.

An incomes policy operated by the working class could go a long way towards solving these problems. Such a policy would entail national wage bargaining through the TUC. It would have to be binding on all unions. Then any excessive demands by a union would be seen to be at the cost of the others and would be likely to be bereft of any support.

Problems of differentials could then be solved in terms of who the class saw as more deserving than others. This and other problems would not, of course, be solved overnight. But, such a process of the working class learning how to solve problems would have to go through a fairly long period of trial and error.

If the workers were regulating their own wages then they would ensure that the lion's share of profits would go into investment and not into private consumption and unproductive speculation. Furthermore, workers would strive

FREEDOM of the PRESS

part 1
INTRODUCTION

by JOHN
LLOYD

The future of the press and broadcasting in Britain is in a number of pots. A Royal Commission is sitting on the press (due to report in 1977); a Committee is taking evidence on the broadcasting media under Lord Annan (to report in 1978); the various attempts to exclude editors from the trade union and labour relations bill (i.e., the 'debate' on freedom of the press) still continue; and national newspapers face - for the first time since the war - stringent economies or bankruptcy.

Less dramatically, there is a rumbling argument going on between current affairs editors in television about the role of broadcast journalism: the two media unions (the Association of Cinematographic, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ)) which between them have on their books the vast majority of editorial staff in broadcasting, key technical personnel, have developed sharp left-right divisions in recent months; and the diaries of the late Richard Crossman, Minister of Housing in the Labour Government 1966-70, have been published in an abridged form in the 'Sunday Times', in defiance of an unwritten Cabinet ruling.

These (largely discrete) phenomena will be of widely differing importance to the relationship between state and the media. It is hoped that future issues of "The Communist" will examine the separate arguments more fully. Here, by way of an introduction and as stimulation to other contributions from readers of "The Communist", are presented a few lines of comment on the parameters of the debate.

OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

It is as well to know what we are talking about. The combined sale of the daily press (Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Telegraph, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Sun, The Times, Morning Star) is more than 14 MILLION COPIES EVERY DAY. The combined sale of the Sunday press (News of the World, The Observer, Sunday Express, Sunday Mirror, Sunday People, Sunday Telegraph and The Sunday Times) is more than 20 million. Every week there are three television channels (BBC1/2 and ITV) to which more than 40 million people have access. There are four BBC radio networks (radios 1, 2, 3 and 4), plus the BBC world service, and an independent radio network with a national news service and the BBC 10 radio stations. In general terms, the choice (where choice means 'simultaneous') is high: only the USA, where citizens can't see

from up to 60 radio stations and up to 20 television channels, has significantly greater diversity: it does not, of course, have a national daily/sunday press.

While there is no such thing in Britain as a written guarantee of press freedom (as there is in the USA), in practice governmental restrictions on newspapers are light: there is no ministry for the media. The closest any department comes to a supervisory role is that of the Postmaster General, though the Home Office can also exercise certain powers.

This state of almost liberatarian licence is less the case in the broadcasting media. The government raises the revenue (the licence fee) which funds the BBC: a government-appointed body (the Independent Broadcasting Authority) sets the editorial, advertising and technical standards for independent television and radio, and more crucially, owns the transmitters. However, editorial control day-to-day is as little affected by formal government intervention as in newspapers.

Press and broadcasting present a complex picture of control.. The national newspapers tend to be run as part of a larger commercial conglomerate (very often a loss-making part of it). And while there are still enough (usually second generation) 'press barons' in existence to fuel the indignation of sections of the left, they no longer are able to wield the direct, personal power they were used to. The comment attributed to Lord Thomson (owner of "The Times", "The Sunday Times", Scottish Television and many provincial papers) that 'all I require of my papers is that they make money' is more apt, or would be if they actually did make money.

Radio and television is still dominated by the BBC, which is a corporation controlled by a Board of Governors appointed, but not controlled by, the government. The fifteen independent television companies, each covering a greater or smaller region, are commercial organisations, run for profit (until recently, large ones) under the terms of the Television Act and the overall guidance of the IBA.

THE ISSUES

1. Ownership and control are central issues to the nature of the relationship between the media and the state, and to that between the media and its readers/viewers/listeners. Nevertheless, they are not the only elements, and it will be argued, not (in many cases) the most important elements. It is the left which has often - and does still - regard them as paramount, and has thus tended to construct a strategy which assumes that a redistribution of the ownership of the means of producing words and images will inevitably usher in an era of progressive media, together with full employment for media personnel. With one recent exception, there has as yet not emerged from the left a coherent strategy which includes the retention of the technological innovations which have enabled the dissemination of information rapidly (thus presupposing the continued existence of organisations with enough capital to invest in expensive equipment) together with the extension of democratic control of the media, a control which is exercised both from outside (by 'the public') and from inside (by media workers).

The one programme which has emerged in recent times has been the Labour Party pamphlet, 'The People and the Media', produced in late 1973 by a group of leftwing MPs and trade unionists under the chairmanship of Tony Benn. (It is also the only exception. It has the status only of a discussion document, however, and is not, nor is likely to be, government policy). While little that was original was advanced in this document (and little has been heard of it since its publication) it did grapple or attempt to grapple with the financial realities which confront press and broadcasting, and showed an acute sensitivity to the problem of state-media relations (while not proposing any essential alteration in them). A future article in "The Communist" will be devoted to this pamphlet, which is available from the Labour Party.

2. We shall also wish to deal with the Freedom of the Press (capitalised here because it is an issue of our times, something which is a matter of public debate - and no bad thing). Here the role of a communist journal should be to clarify and to extend the debate. The left - or the organised left minority within the NUJ - has tended to play down the argument, holding that those who shout loudest about freedom are those who are busiest curtailing it (the newspaper proprietors, the editors and their allies): the latter argue that if union membership became in effect compulsory for editors (as it would under the terms of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Bill presently before Parliament) the union could control editors, and through them editorial policy. Many arguments lie behind these positions which have as yet only been half-stated: others which hinge on the issue have not been used.

3. The one element here which is broadly common to all industries in some form is that of technological innovation: but it is here that newspapers show the problem in a particularly acute degree. Built up in a period of boom for newspaper sales (the '50s and '60s), the modern daily and Sunday press shows an estimated overmanning in editorial, printing and distribution departments of one third (in a labour force of 30,000) for present production techniques. If new techniques were applied to the industry (techniques which are neither expensive nor over-complex), the overmanning may be as high as two thirds, that is, the labour force could be cut down to 10,000. The unions have by and large (though there are recent signs of change in the print unions) responded with restrictive practices and refusal to contemplate redundancies. We should examine these responses more closely.

4. Finally in this checklist of issues, the 'techniques' of new presentation should be discussed. What matrix is used into which the various elements which go to make up social reality must be fitted and selected? What impact has 'investigative' reporting - championed earnestly by some sections of the left - had upon the press? What is the nature of the journalistic ethic against which characters and events presented by the media are implicitly judged?

The formulation of these issues and their examination is critical for the working class and for the labour movement, which has - at least officially - leaned towards a distant disapproval of the press and broadcasting media, usually on the grounds that they are 'unbalanced' in their coverage of strikes and industrial disputes. The implication arising from the sum of left criticism is that the media are no more than (i.e. quite simply)

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

the left's 'solution'

by BILL
WARREN

I.
With large and growing numbers of unemployed, stagnant national output, huge foreign debts, together with a perpetual balance of payments deficit which is not growing only because the economy has ground to a standstill, and a domestically-generated rate of inflation several times that of nearly every other advanced capitalist country, it clear that the interests of the working class and the credibility of the Left depend on the relevance of its policies to deal with this situation.

II.
The most fundamental elements of the Left's economic program are on the one hand to raise wages and on the other to promote widespread nationalisation of large areas of the economy. The raising of wages is postulated to raise demand and therefore use up the slack in the economy (reduce unemployment and raise capacity utilisation) while at the same time reducing unit costs by spreading overhead costs over a greater volume of output. The nationalisation of industry is advocated both as a means of promoting a more efficient use of resources and as a means of providing the investment funds needed to put British industry on a par with its competitors.

There are supplementary dimensions to this basic approach to which we shall turn shortly but first let us consider how rational is the fundamental strategy. First, the policy of raising wages could not possibly achieve its object of boosting employment by raising effective demand because in the short run it would lead to such a decline in competitiveness as to cause large scale unemployment as a result of foreign competition and an increased balance of payments deficit and in the longer run it would unless cancelled out by compensating price increases so reduce profits for investment, probably keep the growth of investment below that necessary to keep pace with the growth of the labour force. The slowing up of investment would also have a long-run effect in reducing competitiveness. The argument that a decrease in unit costs as a result of increased capacity utilisation would offset the effect of the rise in money wages in raising costs does not hold water since no conceivable reduction in unit costs from this source would, on the basis of historical experience, be likely to come anywhere near even a quarter of the present rate of money wage increase.

Nor could this competitive threat to employment (and incidentally the general growth of the economy and therefore of living standards) be warded off by import controls or allowing the exchange rate of the £ to decline not at least without heavy costs. Depreciation of the exchange rate, while restoring competitiveness, would do so only at the cost of rising import prices and therefore declining real wages so that the whole basis of the Left's policy of increasing wages would be undermined. If wages were raised even faster

to offset the rise in import prices then the problem of competitiveness would be snarling at the door again. Import controls might well be useful as a temporary measure while more fundamental policy changes to improve the functioning of the economy were implemented, but their immediate effect would be to reduce living standards because we would lose the general advantages of international economic specialisation and, specifically, find our wages and salaries being spent on the relatively high-cost British products only. Moreover, import controls on the scale required would almost certainly bring retaliation from our trading partners which would certainly have a disastrous effect on a trading nation such as ours and would be a return to the kind of trade policies which were so important a reason for the depth, spread and longevity of the world slump of the 1930s.

As for the long term, the physical economic resources available in the economy for investment and therefore for the future increase in real living standards depends on what is left over after current consumption, both public and private, the bulk of which is accounted for by working class consumption (although the bourgeoisie control a large part of value added in industry as profits, the bulk of it goes to investment as a result of the logic of competitive accumulation within capitalism). If the working class push up money wages and the capitalist class owing to a slack market, foreign competition and government controls cannot put the rise in costs wholly onto prices then a maintenance of an increase in real wages is achieved which is at best extremely short-lived and destructive of investment for the future if sufficiently in excess of any rise in productivity. The process of continuous wage-induced inflation halting or reducing the rate of accumulation has been characterised as "the inflation barrier" (to investment) by Joan Robinson. In sum, a policy of unrestrained money wage increase can only cause further deterioration in our balance of payments, acceleration of our rate of inflation even gloomier employment prospects and an even graver threat to our living standards.

III.
If the enquiring worker has some doubts about this policy, and a good deal of evidence suggests he has, he is told that nationalisation is the necessary complement to raising wages since it both provides the funds for investment to counter the capitalist reluctance to invest and improves productivity generally. A moment's thought will show this to be a chimera. The magic wand of nationalisation cannot provide real resources (equipment, factory buildings, fuel, spare parts, semi-processed inputs, raw materials, skilled labour etc.) where there were none before. The problem is not one of funds, which are merely, in this context, the means of purchasing real resources. If it were, the Government could simply print more money and give it to industry or lend it at low interest rates, without going to the immense trouble, administrative and otherwise, of nationalisation. The result of course - and the same applies to investment by nationalised industries not matched by real resources made available by profits, taxation or borrowing, - would simply be given the supply limitations of real resources and the high cost of their output, to accelerate inflation and increase the balance of payments deficit as firms competed for the resources to carry out their investment. The "inflation barrier" to investment would set in again. Nor is the current problem one of the uncertainties of the market holding back investment by private industry which would go ahead if industry were nationalised and not therefore subject

these market uncertainties. Investment now in nationalised industries is constrained, as it is in the private sector not by uncertainties (which might be true for the private sector in other situations at other times) but by supply factors, i.e. the availability and cost of inputs. The fact that currently real resources are lying idle in the British economy does not mean that pumping more money into investment in newly nationalised industries could mobilise these idle resources for production without balance of payments problems or accelerated inflation because the British economic problem is not just the overall lack of resources for investment but also the high (relatively to foreign competition) cost of British output. The problems of high cost and restricted supply of total resources interact - lack of resources reducing investment which reduces productivity which raises costs and reduces competitiveness and causes trade deficits. Governments deflate the economy to eliminate trade deficits which causes resources to lie idle, thus reducing investment and so on.

The logic appears crazy - solve a balance of payments problem which arises partly from lack of sufficient resources for investment by putting people out of work who might be providing these resources if employed. But the rub is - at what cost? And here the responsibility lies to no small extent with the left who insist on the very policies which by making our industry uncompetitive prevent the high-demand-full employment policies which would enable us to utilise our resources to the maximum. Since the left opposes the policies of controlling wages and raising productivity (especially by reducing over-manning) which are absolutely essential elements in solving the balance of payments problem in the least wasteful way, the Government is forced to solve it in the only way open to it, deflation and therefore unemployment. The Left then says that unemployment is a solution to our economic problems is intolerable. The only conclusion one can draw therefore is that the Left intends to maintain the living standards of the British working class by borrowing more and more from the wealthier capitalist countries thus making us more dependent on them - a strange socialist policy.

IV.

Not only does nationalisation not provide a magical increase in resources for investment (if funds for investment in nationalised industry come from increased taxation then the real resources are made available by reducing working class consumption - exactly the same as if we had had wage control in the first place) but it provides no solution in itself for low productivity and high unit costs. Marxism does not identify the inefficiencies of late capitalism as resisting in the functioning of the individual firm or industry, but in the overall relations BETWEEN firms, i.e. whether these relations are consciously planned or dictated by the market. Nationalisation is perfectly compatible with efficient or inefficient management as compared to the private sector and has no necessary connection at all with whether or not the economy is adequately co-ordinated by conscious planning as illustrated by the notorious lack of coherent fuel or transport policies in this country. Economies with far less nationalisation than ours are able to achieve far greater overall economic co-ordination without nationalisation by means of indicative planning and government financial control. The fact of the matter is this - that the Left's current advocacy of nationalisation acts as a fig leaf to conceal from the workers that the fundamental economic strategy of the Left of promoting sectional wage struggles without limit, freezing prices and

reducing profits can only overthrow capitalism by causing economic disruption such that the British road to socialism will wend its way through the ruins of the working class's living standards.*

Since the Left cannot admit this either to itself (except when it is in two minds about it) or to the working class it produces an economic program which is devoid of all reality and the truly destructive aspects of which are plastered over with the slogan of nationalisation. This is equally the case as regards the Left's supplementary policies. The much-publicised halving of our defence expenditure would, for example, in 1974, have covered only about half the balance of payments current account deficit in that year even assuming the resources released had been easily convertible into foreign exchange - and even assuming that a socialist Britain had no serious interest in its defence capability. Limiting foreign investment by British firms abroad would not necessarily stimulate investment at home given the likely unprofitability of that investment and would in any case only relieve the balance of payments immediately by a drastic worsening of it in the future as the returns from foreign investment ceased to flow in as foreign exchange. Greater taxation of the rich, although important symbolically, would not produce a substantially increased volume of resources for investment since the rich account for only a relatively small proportion of total consumption.

V.

Thus the working class, facing the most serious threat to its livelihood since the Second World War is advised by the orthodox Left (left labour, communist, Trotskyist) to turn that threat into reality by following economic policies leading to economic chaos which it is hoped will lead to socialism. Leaving aside the possibility that it may well lead to fascism instead of socialism, this strategy relies on establishing working class support for socialism by lies and deception. But the British working class are too sophisticated to be deceived by these "socialist" panaceas to deeply rooted problems which do demand genuine working class sacrifices and will have to be won for socialism on the basis of a CONSTRUCTIVE policy based on realistic solutions to their current problems which creates new bases for further advance to socialism. The period we are now in will see a developing struggle between realistic rightists in the Labour movement and Utopian leftists since the gravity of the economic situation makes a resolution of economic policy issues in the movement inevitable. The working class will be asked to choose between defending their living standards by accepting the logic of capitalism or opting for a Utopian and ruinous socialism. The case for a solution through developing a working class incomes policy in conjunction with workers' control cannot be made here but it is essential to realise that it is the only way out of the dilemma of accepting either bourgeois realism or socialist Utopianism. In the meantime, taking the situation as it is, communists cannot honestly pretend, that the consequences of persistent violation of the

* This characterisation of the current ideological role of nationalisation propaganda does not deny that in certain circumstances nationalisation may have a positive role; at present any positive role it may have is entirely secondary.

THE POLITICS OF FAIRYLAND

by JOE
KEENAN

By and large the British Trotskyite left is well aware of the implications of their support for Catholic Nationalism. It fits in well with their general reactionary perspective. The Labour Party Young Socialist campaign on Ireland is an exception. Peter Hunt and his colleagues in the Militant group who are responsible for the document 'Ireland & the British Labour Movement' are aware of hardly anything. These gentlemen seem to take their excursion into fairyland seriously as having something to do with socialism. While they are clearly operating in the heroic trotskyite tradition of 'historical analysis = if you can't deal with it obscure it; if you can't obscure it falsify it; and if you can't falsify it, forget it.'

They have confused the issue so thoroughly as to have lost all sense of reality. The politics of fairyland seem to have triumphed over the common or garden opportunism we've come to know and love.

One is left wondering to whom the Militant group owes most for its political orientation; Trotsky, Madame Blavatsky, or Hans Christian Anderson: or is there any difference.

In its innocence the LPYS campaign on Ireland demands the following:
1) End the Bipartisan approach. For Socialist policies and support for the Irish Organisations of Labour."

While it must be perfectly obvious to the Trots at the bottom of Harold's garden just what these socialist policies are which the bourgeois reactionary imperialist Labour Government is spitefully refusing to implement and which would end the war in Northern Ireland at a stroke enabling Catholic and Protestant both to live happy ever after, NOBODY ELSE KNOWS.

Thankfully the LPYS enumerates these in what is presumably the order in which they should be implemented. And so following the end of the Bipartisan approach we have

"(2) For a Trade Union Defence Force to defend all areas, Catholic and Protestant, from sectarian attack and to defend workers while going to and whilst at work."

Presumably the magic which creates this force deals with all the problems it would encounter in the real world. For instance, since the vast majority of trade unionists in Northern Ireland are Protestants the vast majority of the defence force will also be Protestant and what makes the LPYS think the

Catholics are going to take kindly to all these armed prods roaming the streets. Also since the TU defence force is going to have its hands full allowing itself to be blown up and shot by the Provisionals (retaliation would of course equal sectarianism) it'll be hard pushed to do much defending. This is all the more true after the LPYS secure demand number 3:

"Withdraw the troops".

At this point we bid a fond farewell to the mundane world of Isaac Newton and Karl Marx. Here the LPYS enter Ter-na-nog on a one way ticket. From here on in things get more and more complicated.

So far we have a civil war in which a Trade Union defence force is either simultaneously attacking and defending provisional strongholds or is demonstrating true proletarian solidarity by allowing itself to be massacred. Demands 4,5 and 6 do little to alter this basic situation being designed merely to stir things up by releasing as many murderers, psychos and loonies onto the streets as possible.

Demand number seven is obviously the crux of the matter

"Trade Union Rights for the Armed Forces".

Presumably the British Army now enrolls to a man in the TGWU. The LPYS (which has in the meantime led the working class to victory in Britain) realises that a terrible mistake has been made. The Trade Union defence force is a bunch of Protestant imposters; orange fascists every one. The real Trade Union defence force (i.e. the ex-imperialist British Army) is discovered lurking in the corridors of Transport House.

A force acceptable to the Catholics having at last been found, Jack Jones and his members descend on the bogus Trade Union defence force like the wrath of God. The Protestant working class is wiped off the face of the map and the way is clear for the implementation of demand number eight:

"For a conference of workers organisations to forge a unity of action against the common enemy of capitalism".

While a mistake in the wording of this demand leads to some confusion, a meeting is eventually arranged between Brigadier Frank Kitson (Northern Organiser, TGWU), Cardinal Saint David O'Connell (Spiritual adviser to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions) and Peter Hunt (chairman of the Central Committee of the LPYS(B) and Queen of the Faeries).

Naturally they all live happily ever after. Unfortunately there's little hope of happiness for the working people of Ulster; certainly not in the near future. Before real working class politics can make any headway in Ulster (or Ireland for that matter) the reactionary nationalist campaign must be defeated. Socialist politics will only become practical when the IRA has been militarily defeated. Then those Communists who have maintained their credibility by agitating throughout the war for the democratic programme of the B&ICO and the Workers Association can begin the long haul towards socialism.

The LPYS Irish Campaign (insofar as it exists) not only gives sustenance to the nationalist campaign by approving its aims (for a Socialist United Ireland) it prejudices the hopes of post-war reconstruction by encouraging the Catholic minority to persist in its opposition to the state even following the annihilation of the Provos.

It just goes to show that given its head, Trotskyism would turn even fairyland into hell.

WAGES & INFLATION continued from page 2.

More and more the bourgeoisie would become redundant and be seen to be so. Direct control of the economy and its individual components would be the logical follow up to this.

Next month some of the problems involved in developing a working class incomes policy will be discussed.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS continued from page 5.

the tools of capitalism and/or reaction. Their popularity is to be explained by reference to the vast resources which they command, to the use of sensational or pornographic editorial and pictorial matter and to the prevailing ideological climate which they both help to create and which reinforces their position. It is time these assumptions were examined.

THE LEFT'S SOLUTION TO BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS continued from page 9.

Social Contract can be anything but disastrous for the working class. Accordingly it is our duty to mobilise working class support for it, while at the same time insisting on making it stricter, making it the basis for a working class policy on (reduced) income and differentials and linking it firmly with increased working class influence over investment decisions.

COALITION continued from page 13.

It is however, undeniable that the formation of some kind of coalition would mean that workers would bear the brunt of any emergency economic measures and for a while democratic politics would suffer. Ideally the labour movement should be developing its own strategy for dealing with the crisis. Ideally this work should be spearheaded by its leftwing. But it's been many a long day since the British left has been able to objectively analyse a situation, not to mention develop progressive political or economic policies.

All the left can do is say "coalitions are bad"; "Labour must stick by its Manifesto", "Labour must implement socialist policies". No question of the Manifesto being examined or changed; no socialist policies; no analysis of
(CONTINUED ON PAGE 14)

COALITION MANIA

by CONOR
LYNCH

Britain is facing one of the severest economic crises of her history. Only one thing is certain. A solution will be found. How this will happen or who will benefit or suffer are the open questions.

One idea receiving a lot of attention these days is the formation of a coalition government. This could take several forms. Firstly a coalition between the Labour and Conservative parties could be formed to put into effect a strictly limited economic policy. Secondly a coalition could mean the dominance of one party with a less limited programme supported for a while by its coalition partner. Thirdly, and most likely of the three, a Labour government could adopt a more conservative programme with the tacit support of the Tories.

The entire left has, over the last few months, been working itself into a state of hysteria over the prospect of any form of coalition. These people see the result being the slashing of living standards, permanent rightwing government, a split in the Labour Party, and ultimately the rise of a rightwing dictatorship.

Workers may well agree to some temporary freezing of living standards if they see that the only alternative to economic collapse (theirs as well as the bourgeoisie's) coming from the anti-coalitionists is vague promises of a socialist utopia in the far distant future.

Given their economic power and their history of unremitting struggle they could not conceivably tolerate greater cuts than are absolutely necessary, and these only for a very short time, (not to mention accepting rightwing dictatorship.)

But, we are told, there is always the 'state machine' to enforce the government's wishes. The willingness or ability of the army to defeat the organised working class is extremely doubtful - and this was simply shown in last year's General Strike in Northern Ireland.

Even if repressive measures were introduced they could not be effected over any length of time. There is no great peasant reserve in Britain from which to recruit a large anti-working class army. In any case soldiers would make very poor pit deputies or power engineers.

The only probable result would be the Labour Party split. If the coalition was against the wishes of the great majority of Party members (and not just certain militants) then a setback similar to that of the Macdonald era may well occur and no more. Otherwise it may simply be just a "left" fringe which is hived off. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 12.)

Theatre Review

by HELENA
STEVENS

"ECHOES FROM A CONCRETE CANYON" by Wilson John Haire.
Theatre Upstairs. Royal Court, Sloane Square, London.

Wilson John Haire's new stage play "Echoes From a Concrete Canyon" opened 22nd May for a month's run at the Theatre Upstairs.

The words throughout are as poetic as the title itself. The images are poetic, the London dialect has not been caught richly enough. The characters are not outstanding and the actors do not create nor have they been encouraged by the director to create on the written material.

Rachel, a schizophrenic wife and mother of three shows us by description rather than dramatisation in confrontation her deterioration. Her husband leaves her to live with a 'bourgeois dilettante'; the Communist Party which had once been so important in their lives as a young couple has deteriorated leaving them little hope in the concrete canyons of council flat living. She becomes more nationalistic in her Jewishness because there is nothing else to cling to. She laughs at the murder of an old tenant who might have a Labour councillor walk a few minutes beside her body at the funeral, but who had once been a strong Communist leader.

The weight of making a living or going to the queue for Social Security proved too much in the long run for the husband, John. Guilt or the need of a place to live brings the husband back from his poncing, but it is no use. The children are in council homes. The deterioration of a working class family is complete.

There is no one in the play who represents The Establishment, no one who represents the Communist Party which to the playwright are the basic cause of the couple's deterioration.

It is a study, it isn't a drama. It is the basis for a film, but still needs far more exploration in terms of the individual confronting society.

COALITION continued from page 12.

coalitions; no alternative.

If anything is going to bring about a coalition in Britain it's the sterile oppositionism of the "left". Once more they bring up the rear guard of British politics as they did with their liberal free tradism in the '20s and their pacificism in the '30s.

THE SHOP-STEWARDS' MOVEMENT

early
development

by JOE
KEENAN

1. THE NEW UNIONISM

Prior to the establishment of the 'new' unions in the 1880s and 90s only a small percentage of the working class was organised. These were the skilled men of the 'labour aristocracy' organised along rigid craft lines in unions like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, membership of which was limited by apprenticeship and strictly controlled. These unions were operated to a large extent as friendly societies and actively discouraged strikes. Between 1851 and 1889 the ASE paid out £2,987,993 on sick, funeral, unemployment benefits etc. as against only £87,614 for strikes.

By the end of the 1880s it was clear that the strategy and tactics of the craft unions (which had been evolved in the necessarily cautious period of advance between the repeal of the combination laws and the trade union legislation of the 1870s and which were valid in that period) no longer held any potential to advance the interest of the working class.

When the Great Depression began in 1873 the craft unions were established in bourgeois society and their leaders had developed attitudes of 'class collaboration' the 'Harmony of Labour and Capital' which rendered them incapable of taking account of the great changes which occurred over the next two decades.

The economic strength of the skilled workers on which the power of the craft unions was based derived from the imperfections of machine production, which were soon to be overcome and from the practice of sub-contracting by which skilled men undertook jobs at a fixed price from which they themselves paid their unskilled helpers. This allotted the skilled workers a position in the production process between the employers and the mass of the work force. Often they were closest to the employers. In Lancashire most mill managers came from the ranks of the Spinners Union.

The main concern of the craft unions was to consolidate this position. They saw their function as being to control the demand for labour, by limiting its supply and where possible reducing hours. Often they encouraged their unemployed members to emigrate.

Developments during the Great Depression of 1873-96 undermined the conditions which facilitated this strategy. In this period, during which British capitalism adapted to the loss of its world monopoly:

"The economy of many small, bitterly competitive firms each run by an individual or a few partners was being destroyed by the growth of large corporations, of monopolies, of modern large-scale finance, of concen-

trated production. The technique of industry was changing too, with the transition from iron to steel, the introduction of new sources of power, such as electricity, new machines, and above all, new methods of mass production." (E.J. Hobsbawm, Labour's Turning Point)

From the '70s on the systems of sub-contracting began to be replaced by piecework and the increasing use of automatic machines led to a growth in the numbers of semi-skilled workers employed. The growth of the mining, transport, chemical, food, drink and tobacco industries led to a shift in the composition of the organised working class. At first this meant little more than

"...the formation of an enlarged and diluted labour aristocracy, embracing the whole upper half of the working class." (Morton and Tate: The British Labour Movement)

As the growing concentration of production and the rapid development of mechanisation drew the working class together in the established industries the expansion in transport, distribution and the services trades tended to stabilise the employment of unskilled workers and opened up the, previously unthinkable, prospect of organising them.

While the organisational base of the working class widened and the relative significance of the skilled workers declined the craft unions found themselves unable to deal with the consequent weakening of their bargaining position. Although their strategy of limiting the labour supply was no longer tenable they were incapable of breaking with the past and taking the necessary steps to widen their organisations. Ultimately the break had to be made for them. It took the form of the new unionism of 1888-91.

In three years, under the leadership of Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, John Burns and Will Thorne the mass of the unskilled workers were organised around demands for the 8 hour day and a statutory minimum wage. The Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union (now the TGWU) was formed out of the 1889 dock strike led by Mann and Tillett. Also in 1889 the Gasworkers and General Labourers Union (now the General and Municipal Workers Union - GMWU) was formed. The Miners Federation of Great Britain was formed, the Agricultural Workers Union was revived and in 1892 the ASE changed its rules to admit new classes of engineering workers. It relaxed age and apprenticeship standards and admitted semi-skilled men. Five years later its membership had increased by over 20,000.

So, by the 1890s the character of British trade unionism had changed to take account of the shift in composition of the working class which due to the development of the productive forces and relations of production was now more uniform and consequently had greater capacity to act in a coherent united fashion.

The British working class emerged from the 19th century stronger than ever before. New Unionism forced the development of organisation capable of directing that strength. Logically two tasks confronted the working class at that point; the creation of an independent working class party and the consolidation

and extension of its strength on the shopfloor. It fulfilled the first with the establishment of the Labour Party. In pursuing the second it gave rise to the shop stewards movement.

2. SYNDICALISM

The impetus of 'new unionism' continued until 1914. Between 1893 and 1909 trade union membership increased from $1\frac{1}{2}$ m. to $2\frac{1}{2}$ m. During the 'great unrest' of 1910-14 it increased again to 4 m.

The growth of trade unionism was paralleled by an increase in political activity; most notably the rise of the Labour Party but also the emergence of a strong left on the fringe of party politics. Trade unionism was the most evident fact of working class life and inevitably the left based its strategy on an extension of trade union methods of organisation and struggle. It was predominantly syndicalist; organised in the Amalgamation Committees (the main influence on which was Tom Mann) and the Socialist Labour Party.

That syndicalism in this period was primarily a reflection of the growing strength of trade unionism was made clear by Mann when he wrote:

"Socialists and labour men in Parliament can only do effective work there in proportion to the intelligence and economic organisation of the rank and file...The strong right arm of the Labour Movement is direct economic organisation whereby the workers may be enabled to decide the conditions under which production shall be carried on."
(Industrial Syndicalist, September 1910)

Mann was the only one of the syndicalists who had a clear appreciation of the objective conditions within which he was working. Consequently he was the only syndicalist to achieve anything concrete on his own terms (the formation along industrial lines of the National Transport Worker's Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen).

His belief that given effective industrial organisation, parliamentary action would be superfluous was modified by his awareness of the relationship between industrial and political activity and by his basic pragmatism which led him to advocate industrial unionism on the basis of amalgamation and federation.

Mann stated the basic fact that the industrial organisation of the working class is primary, that political power derives from economic power, and went on from there to stress the need for the most effective organisation possible. Objectively, while their attitudes to leadership and political activity were more extreme, the majority of the amalgamation committees and the miners reform committees had the same validity; that they served to increase the organisational strength of the working class.

The dual-unionists in the Socialist Labour Party on the other hand advocated industrial unionism from a purely theoretical anti-parliamentary (as opposed to non-parliamentary) position. Where Mann's Syndicalist Education League and the Amalgamation Committees stressed the need for existing unions to

come together, the SLP stated that they had become part and parcel of the capitalist system and would have to be superseded. They set up the Industrial Workers of Great Britain, or the wobblies' 'one big union' principle. It was an experiment which failed to get off the ground never attracting more than 10,000 workers.

3. THE MINERS NEXT STEP

While Mann himself never developed a consistent critique of leadership as such it was always implied in the amalgamationist strategy that the main obstacle to industrial unionism was the influence of reactionary union leaders. Ablett, Mainwaring, Rees and Hay (of the Miners Unofficial Reform Committee) who were closely associated with the Syndicalist Education League gave the most coherent expression to this negative side of industrial unionism in 'The Miners Next Step'.

That the 'Next Step' was the most complete elaboration of the anti-official rank and file philosophy which subsequently came to dominate the shop stewards movement was due to the absolute mishandling of the Cambrian Combine dispute by the leaders of the South Wales Miners. The strike which began with rioting in Tonypandy and Aberdare in November 1910 lasted eleven months and gave rise to a level of bitterness and frustration with the official leadership unique in Labour History.

The 'Next Step' required that

"...all initiative for new proposals, policies and tactics (must) remain with the Lodge. Nothing becomes law in the organisation unless it receives the sanction of the Lodges or a ballot of the coal-field."

The entire position is crystallised in the second principle of the proposed South Wales Miners Industrial Organisation:

"Democracy becomes impossible when officials or leaders dominate. For this reason they are excluded from all power on the executive, which becomes a purely administrative body..."

Rules 11-15 of the constitution, which sought to circumscribe the role of miners' MPs, are accounted for by the fact that the President, Vice President and General Secretary of the South Wales Miners Federation were all MPs (involved in the Lib-Lab machinations of the TUC's Parliamentary Committee at the time of the Cambrian Combine dispute.

The extent to which the philosophy embodied in 'The Miners Next Step' influenced the shop stewards movement is shown by the fact that when J.T. Murphy, the movement's leading theoretician (who had previously been on the executive of the SLP and went on to become a leading member of the CPGB and Comintern) reassessed its value he criticised the 'Next Step' rather than his own pamphlet 'The Workers' Committee'.

In 'Preparing for Power' Murphy said:

"It (The Miners Next Step) represents a complete abandonment of all responsibility for leaders to lead. Arising out of distrust of

existing leaders, it fostered still further distrust and at the same time gave them a first class excuse for not leading. The theory permeated all the 'left' sections of the movement, amalgamation committees, the shop stewards movement of a later date, as well as the reform committees. It created an anti-official outlook of a character which stultified any real organised effort to replace reactionary leaders by revolutionary leaders. It diffused the energies of the revolutionaries and made their movement into a ferment rather than an organised force fighting for a new leadership."

4. THE SHOP STEWARDS MOVEMENT

The shop stewards movement continued the momentum of new unionism towards the consolidation and extension of shopfloor controls. Its ideology was based on the anti-officialism of the reform committees and the syndicalism of the amalgamation committees and the SLP. Its leaders came mainly from those groups. But the conditions for its growth were created by the decision of the official trade union leadership and the Labour Party to participate actively in the conduct of the first world war.

On August 24, 1914 the joint board of the TUC, the General Federation of Trade Unions and the Labour Party passed the following resolution:

"That an immediate effort be made to terminate all existing disputes, whether strikes or lock-outs and wherever new points of difficulty arise during the War a serious attempt should be made by all concerned to reach an amicable settlement before resorting to strikes or lock-outs."

This amounted to throwing in the towel on the class struggle at a time when the exigencies of war required increased production and also increased manpower. In the engineering industry these led to struggles over dilution and conscription. It was the shop stewards who took the lead in these struggles.

The shop stewards initially emerged as a force during a wage dispute in the engineering industry on the Clyde. The district committee of the ASE demanded an increase of 2d per hour to bring local rates into line with other districts (and more particularly into line with the rates paid to American workers at J&G Weirs on the Clyde itself). After negotiation the union executive backed down and recommended "that the membership accept the employers' offer of 1d per hour. This the men refused to do. On February 6th they walked out led by their shop stewards.

Willie Gallacher summed up the terms on which support for the strike was forthcoming:

"The strike was, and still is, wrongly referred to as an 'unofficial' strike. Such a term is entirely misleading. Branch officials, district officials and in some cases, executive officials (like myself) were involved. The more correct term for such a strike is 'spontaneous strike'. Such strikes have played an important part in the development of the trade union movement and are often recognised and supported

ed by the national officials. Such a strike is necessary when something occurs, leaving only the option of submitting or fighting... If ever there was a 'spontaneous' strike that called for the support of the national officials, this was the one. We had no objections to American engineers or any others getting jobs... but we certainly did object, as trade unionists ought to object, to working ourselves at same job for lower wages". (Revolt on the Clyde)

In other words the leadership of the ASE abdicated its responsibility of the war situation as an excuse (according to Gallacher one executive member claimed that the executive was afraid it would be imprisoned if it failed to secure a return to work). The workers refused to accept this and took the lead offered them by their shop stewards.

When, after government intervention, an increase of 1d per hour was won the position of the shop stewards, who had proved their ability to lead the economic struggle successfully, was enhanced.

The shop stewards of the Labour Withholding Committee then turned their attention to the formation of workshop committees in which workers were organised on a class rather than a craft basis. The name was changed to the CWC Workers' Committee.

The decline of the shop stewards movement on the Clyde dates from this point which marked a change from economic to political activity. John Maclean (whose real claim to fame is that of all British socialists he alone recognised and welcomed the racialism implicit in his old friend Connolly's 'Celtic' communism), Maxton, Gallacher, MacDougal et al turned the Clyde Workers' Committee into a specifically anti-war body.

Following the success of the rent strike in which the CWC was prominent Lloyd George ventured North to treat with the tartan terror. He met the CWC which threatened him with revolution. The absurdity of this was soon made clear.

In rapid succession the CWC backed down on the use of the munitions Act to prosecute workers who 'sat in' at Dalmuirs, they refused to follow through a strike over the arrest of Muir, Gallacher and Bell and allowed the deportation of six leading shop stewards at Parkhead Forge. When the deportation was raised at a CWC meeting, they limited themselves to deputing some members to go and see the deportees off at the station.

The CWC had overreached itself. It lacked the support it needed to back up its political claims and within a short while Gallacher, Muir, Bell, McLean, Maxton and MacDougal were in gaol and the movement was broken.

"The centre of the struggle was now moved to Sheffield. Here, as in other engineering towns, there were shop stewards, but few in number. The great influx of unskilled and semi-skilled workers under the dilution schemes roused the skilled workers to great activity. Every trade union branch meeting saw scores of complaints brought forward to the district committee of the unions. These were literally over-whelmed

with complaints". (J.T. Murphy. Preparing for Power.)

Murphy recognised that the introduction of dilution on a large scale caused the need both to protect the interests of the skilled men and to reconcile those with the interests of the unskilled. He advocated workshop committees and the election of greater numbers of shop stewards responsible to the shop floor as the most effective means of fulfilling those functions. The shop stewards ensured that dilution proceeded by negotiation while all workers, skilled and unskilled, were represented in the workshop committee.

The Sheffield engineers extended this form of organisation nationally following a successful struggle to secure the release from the army of a skilled worker named Hargreaves.

Immediately the shop stewards began to think in terms of a co-ordinated national movement along lines first mooted at the National Conference of Workers Committees in 1916. This attempt at coherent organisation was a failure from the beginning.

In March 1917 6000 engineers at Barrow-in-Furness struck against the cutting of bonus rates. Before support for the strike could be organised in Sheffield (10 days later) they were back at work.

In May a strike began at Tweedale and Smulleys in Rochdale which spread to Coventry, Birmingham, London, Woolwich, Leicester, Rugby, Derby, Liverpool, Birkenhead, Leeds and Newcastle; at its height it involved 250,000 workers. The strike collapsed within 3 weeks due to lack of effective leadership. Neither the national conference of shop stewards (called on May 5th just before the strike began) nor the national conference of delegates from the strike committees (held in London on May 15th) were able to effect this outcome in any way.

It was not until August (after two false starts) that a fully representative national conference of shop stewards finally got under way. This conference, at which the rank and file philosophy of 'The Miners Next Step' was a dominant feature, barely managed to elect a National Committee. Only after assurances were given that the committee would be purely administrative and would have no executive powers was this elementary step taken.

The 'National Administrative Council of the Shop Stewards and Workers Committees' failed utterly to make any national impact. It confined itself to making threatening noises about strike action against the war. One instance mentioned by Murphy illustrates its impotence:

"The Council then initiated a grandiose scheme for mobilising the whole working class through the joint effort of the workshop committees, the trades unions, trades councils and Labour Parties, on the basis of a democratic programme of 'peace without annexations and indemnities' and in favour of Labour taking a decisive part in the making of the peace. Although this scheme was discussed at a subsequent conference... little came of it." (Preparing for Power)

A final example of the movement's incoherence and impotence; of the absurdity of its 'national' pretensions came in 1919. The Clyde Workers Committee was prominent on the movement on the Clyde for the 40 hour week. But although it was represented on the National Committee of the Shop Stewards it made no attempt to involve that body in organising a national stoppage and never even informed it of its own strike plans.

5. CONCLUSION

The shop stewards movement as such emerged only because the official trade union leadership by and large abandoned the economic struggle for the duration of the war. The working class did not, and turned to the shop stewards for leadership in the continuing struggle to defend its material interest. Where the shop stewards were involved in defending the class's position against attacks on its living standards, against the arbitrary introduction of dilution and against the effects of the Munitions Act, they were given the wholehearted support of the class.

When, on the other hand, the shop stewards engaged in political activity, and the attempt to develop a national movement was a political act based on syndicalist theories of industrial organisation for the seizure of power, the working class by and large ignored them. To the extent that the participation of the Labour Party in coalition government meant the subordination of class politics to the national interest and created a vacuum of political discussion the class listened to the stewards' ideas but never once did they act on them.

The working class was much more impressed by the proof given during the war of Labour Minister's ability to act effectively in government than by any amount of syndicalist propaganda.

Consequently when the Labour Party reaffirmed its commitment to the working class's political interest the shop stewards lost what little political influence they had gained.

When the trade unions suspended their agreement with the government that 'there shall be in no case a stoppage of work upon munitions and equipment of war or other work required for satisfactory completion of the war' and once again took up the economic struggle whole-heartedly the shop stewards lost the other base of their support.

What was left was the shop floor organisation based on shop stewards which had been widely extended during the war but which was essentially distinct from the movement as such. This marked the consolidation of the movement towards coherent class organisation which began with the New Unionism of the 1880s.

Title: The Communist, No. 88

Organisation: British and Irish Communist Organisation

Date: 1975

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