1984

WORKERS PLAYTIME

MARCH/APRIL 20p

The Council of Civil Service Unions Says :

« We believe that the right to belong to a union is a mark of a free society. We are appalled that the Government seems to think that British people could be induced to surrender this right in return for money. »

THE CHELTENHAM MARTYRS

we say: quite right,

SHOOT THE BUGGERS

The T.U.C's derisory 'Day of Action' in support of the white-collar secret service auxiliaries at Cheltenham provides a gloomy illustration of the current level of working class militancy.

The event seemed almost deliberately structured around an interlocking series of ironies. The unexpected display of 'protest' was the usual mixture of "conspicuous militancy" on the part of union leaderships, while called at sufficiently short notice that nothing "untoward" could occur. The instigators however were not the usual leftist bureaucrats but the right wing 'moderates'. Duffy, Basnett, Graham, Tuffin, Losinska – the unfamiliar expressions of militancy poured from lips still stained brown from their overtures to the Government. For them Cheltenham represented not just a significant block of (largely right wing) votes and several hundred thousand pounds in lost dues, but a slap in the face from Thatcher. Having made considerable concessions in the attempt to gain readmission to the national economic conference chamber, this unilateral, unannounced action came as a low blow and Len Murray's public gasps of outrage were quite genuine.

Wounded pride combined itself with a sense of the importance of these particular workers. As the traditionally strong sections of the 'labour movement' have been defeated or restructured into quiescence over the last six years, the strategic importance of the public service membership has grown.

But behind this was a more general awareness by the TUC of the importance of its white collar members. As Len Murray put it in a recent radio interview: "I suppose our average member, our typical member, a generation ago probably did wear a cap and was a man who stood at a lathe, a woodworking lathe or a metalworking lathe or something like that, or dug coal out of the ground etcetera. But I suspect that our typical member these days is someone who's sitting at a keyboard, whether it's a woman typing out letters or whether it's a a man operating a computer or whatever have you. So ones seen a change in the occupational pattern of trade unionism."

For the T.U.C right-wingers the day of action thus had a serious purpose – its overriding effect was merely to emphasise their impotence. There can be no sudden conjuring up of the rank and file militancy of the late sixties and early seventies even if it was wanted. The 'action' had gone as far as they dared as it was. A serious call for a one day general strike as opposed to unspecified 'protest action' would only have emphasised the feebleness of the response.

TAP DANCE

The Left bureaucrats consoled themselves by denouncing the inadequate time for preperation the T.U.C had allowed. UCATT for example, one of the first two unions to declare its support for the 'action' managed to get a communique to Fleet St., but was unable to get instructions down to site level. In reality this bluff would also have been called if enough notice had been given. And where a union – the SCPS – did call a strike, they promptly agreed with the other civil service unions that they could cross picket lines.

On the Government side Thatcher had set out to appease the American paymasters for the Sigint system, in which Britain is 'senior partner', and maintain GCHQ's secrecy. This secrecy was regarded as essential not from any need to conceal operations from the Russians, but to prevent discussion of GCHQ's activities – directed at British citizens, foreign allies and largely in defiance of international law – and of Britains role as American imperialisms number one son. Her achievement was to do more lasting damage to morale and continuity of staffing in GCHQ, than the most militant union could have. And to expose it to more discussion than a hundred articles by Duncan Campbell.

The unions, the opposition parties and the Cheltenham workers themselves promptly set about competing to demonstrate the greatest patriotism in the face of this 'sabotage', and the implied insult to our brave secret service technicians.

What more appropriate in 1984 than to see big 'brothers' Murray and Kinnock stretching out the hand of brotherhood to the humble instruments of state surveillance. What more appropriate than the sight of the dishevelled ranks of leftists – who only a year ago were 'exposing' GCHQ – rushing about to give this gesture some public credibility.

What's depressing is the number of militants who responded positively to the idea of showing solidarity to the GCHQ staff. The argument being that the majority are white collar workers like any others. The GCHQ staff themselves would deny that, happily embracing the importance of their work for national security. Would the same solidarity be given to a strike by white collar auxilieries at New Scotland Yard ? Sadly we must assume so.

As we have said before, the nature of capitalism is that all workers are forced to compete with one another and perform activities which in part, if not solely, harm other workers. If it's illogical to single out groups of workers for attack simply because their activities harm other workers, its equally illogical for those workers to seek solidarity on the grounds of defending the system.

True, at the immediate level the only common interest of workers is in seeing that wherever bosses and workers are in dispute the workers win, and in refusing to take the divisions imposed by the system out on each other, by turning them back on the bosses. But beyond this level our common interest is in seizing control of our lives and activity. In overthrowing those things which prevent us from creating a world based on our needs and desires – wage labour, commodity production, exchange economy & state, together with the social relations they structure. Genuine solidarity can only emerge when our solidarity with one anothers defensive struggles against capitalist attack turns to the offensive in common struggle to destroy capitalism itself. A struggle aimed at ending class society and abolishing ourselves as functionaries of the system along with the system itself.

That is why there can be no response to calls for solidarity of the kind from GCHQ. Not merely because of what they are and do – though for many that will be enough. But because genuine solidarity commences at the point at which workers are ready to confront and subvert their own function. Not only are the GCHQ workers doing exactly the opposite, they are doing so in the name of defending a function which is explicitly aimed at maintaining the exploitation of us and our fellow proletarians throughout the world.

ANGER

It is this aspect of the affair that leaves us with an overriding feeling, not of contempt or derision at the T.U.C actions as has become customary, but of anger. For despite this display by the unions and Socialist parties, of their complicity in a system which rests on our exploitation and misery, working class reaction to it remains for the most part a passive and brittle cynicism. A sense of pointlessness which can still, however briefly, be moved by calls to defend the institutions that perpetuate and feed off our submission. Royalty, the Nation, Parliamentary Democracy, Unionism : Left and Right are still able to play on sentimental attachment to these images as a means of filling the social vacuum thats left as capitalism penetrates and destroys all forms of community. A vacuum which leaves us isolated from our activities, from one another and from the world we live in. At the end of the day, the need to rebuild community through common struggle against capitalist society remains unexpressed.

SPY-NELESS UNIONISM

The recent ministerial and bureaucratic to-ings and fro-ings over the de-unionisation of Cheltenham GCHQ don't tell us much about our capacity to fight back. But they say plenty about the ruling class and its methods for dealing with us. As soon as the moves were announced there was the predictable torrent of rhetoric from Labour MP's and trade union leaders. They all stressed the moderation and patriotism of the GCHQ staff involved and of the 'labour movement' in general.

Dennis Skinner, the 'Beast of Bolsover', was at pains to point out that "more traitors come from Eton and Harrow than from the Trade Unions", but did not say whether this was meant to be taken as an argument for greater equality of opportunity.

John Sheldon, General secretary of the Civil Service Union, with 3000 out of the 7000 staff at Cheltenham, also praised the patriotism of the staff. He argued that the government's measures were designed to destroy the Trade Unions' 'civil liberties' campaign against the introduction of lie-detector tests for GCHQ staff. Taking up a familiar left-nationalist refrain, he says the tests are being imposed on the government by the United States.

Alastair Graham, the celebrated moderate General Secretary of the CPSA, spoke about democracy and compared Maggie Thatcher to General Jaruzelski. Not, as you might suppose, another would-be Lech Walesa, but Graham does have connections with the 'Polish Government in Exile' –a group of nationalist worthies assembled by the western allies in 1945.

Five days later, and the Brothers were still talking tough. At a meeting between the TUC and the civil service unions negotiating body (CCSU), Len Murray emerged to condemn an "unprincipled onslaught on basic trade union rights", whilst the civil service leaders stressed that they were not contempiating a 'no-strikes' offer.

On the same day, the Shadow Home Secretary, Gerald Kaufmann said that the government's attitude showed that Maggie wants to impose "thought control" and a "ban on free speech". Yet the special provisions used by Sir Geoffrey Howe to justify the measures had also been invoked by the last Labour government. And Gerald Kaufmann has not been noted as an ardent campaigner for the abolition of the Official Secrets Act or for an end to MI5 investigations of civil servants' political affiliations.

Two days later, on Wednesday, 1st February, the unions offered not merely a no-strike, but a 'no-disruption' agreement.

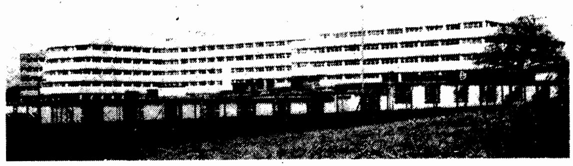
For workers, the message from the 'labour movement' was loud and clear. "The right to strike is sacred, providing strikes are ineffective."

This was the cue for a display of toadying and arse-licking that was despicable even by the Left's standards. Neil Kinnock set the ball rolling in a speech which condemned "petty Tory prejudices", but called for "a negotiated agreement to ensure continuity of cover for essential work". When the Tories became openly provocative by suggesting that there was a long history of union disruption at GCHQ, labour leaders all cried as one that they had done their best to make any actions as ineffective as possible. And Merlyn Rees attempted to resurrect the 'Falklands Spirit' by challenging the PM to prove that war operations had been interrupted.

A trade union presence at GCHQ may, in the government's view, serve as a focus for 'troublemakers'.

But what the government wants is to be able to remove any such troublemakers with the minimum of fuss. Thus whilst it was prepared to reconsider deunionisation, and meet the TUC delegation again on February 23, the government made it clear that the removal of GCHQ employees' rights of access to protection under employment legislation was non-negotiable. The union negotiators ditched these rights straight away, of course, and concentrated on defending their right to pay exhorbitant union dues. ■

QUIT BUGGING ME MAN !



In the course of the ABC trial at the Old Bailey in 1978 it was officially confirmed that two large buildings in Cheltenham were the offices of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and that the work of this organisation involved 'Signals Intelligence', usually referred to as Sigint.

Every one of the tens of thousands of military and civilian personnel who work in British Sigint work is subject to intensive "indoctrination" (their word) every time they move to a new post. As they leave, they must be "de-indoctrinated" and reminded of an obligation never to disclose any information whatsoever to "anyone not currently indoctrinated".

GCHQ is a "senior partner" in a multinational, hierarchically organised "Sigint Pact" which is headed by the US National Security Agency (NSA). The second parties are Canada, Australia & N.Zealand (the politically reliable, white parts of the Commonwealth), and 'third parties' include Germany and Norway. Within this set-up GCHQ has a definite territory to monitor, namely Africa and a large part of Eastern Europe, although it monitors goings-on all over the world on behalf of the British Government.

As you might expect, there is no honour among thieves – NSA and GCHQ regularly monitor the activities of NATO allies, including Britain. For example, during the early stages of the Common Market negotiations GCHQ monitored diplomatic messages between the European countries involved. The Government has justified its 'concern' over GCHQ by pointing to its work in Diplomatic and Military espionage. In fact though it does monitor satellite communications and troop movements, more of its time is taken up with the surveillance of 'internal enemies', and the bulk of its work is economic and commercial intelligence (eg. Commodity prices).

Technically, most international monitoring activity is illegal under the International Telecommunications Convention, ratified by the British Government. But this doesn't stop GCHQ having a general Home Office warrent allowing all overseas telegram and phone cables to be intercepted at will.

Although GCHQ is formally seperate from the Secret Police proper, the organisational links are very close indeed. For example, GCHQ staff designed the equipment at the national phone-tapping centre in Ebury Bridge Road, London and GCHQ runs a civilian monitoring agency called the Composite Signals Organisation. The CSO has a station in Earls Court (high in an MOD tower block at the back of the exhibition hall) which monitors radio and telephone traffic in the London area.

So now you know . . . .

About Us

As we're some weeks late with this issue its become a March/April issue - the next will be a May/June one. Deadline for contributions is April 19th.

The editorial group of Workers Playtime are mostly members of the London Workers Group (see box below). Playtime is not the public face or theoretical journal of the LWG.

Playtime is intended as a forum for discussing the reality of class struggle. If you have something to contribute – news, feedback, accounts of class struggle, articles, illustrations, whatever, we'd like to hear from you. There is no editorial line – but that doesn't mean we don't know what we disagree with. Individual articles reflect the thoughts, fantasies and inadequacies of their authors (in no particular order).

We especially welcome accounts of class struggle by participants, or people with a closer perspective than we have. We won't change things without consulting you but we may add an introduction to fill in background. We'd obviously prefer to do that with you so means of contacting you easily would be useful.

The content of Playtime has largely been accounts of workplace class struggle, and commentary on capitalist politics. That relects the interests and knowledge of the people who write for it. We do not see the workplace as the only site of class struggle, or as more important than its appearance elsewhere. We'd particularly welcome accounts or correspondence from people who have experience of other areas of struggle.

Contrary to the impression we might give its not necessary that articles be very long and stuffed with quotes, facts and so on. Short punchy stuff is equally welcome.

If you do want to write a full article, get in touch. Playtime is collectively edited, and articles are discussed at Playtime meetings before a decision is made to publish. Disagreements are discussed and stuff is frequently rewritten. So its best to contact us as soon as possible with an outline of what you want to write.

We don't guarantee to publish stuff sent to us but we wont change things (Beyond adding or subtracting spelling mistakes, subheads and illustrations) without consulting you. (We may cut letters but we will indicate we have done so). If we disagree we may publish a response alongside it.

If letters are intended for publication please make it clear what you're arguing about so people aren't obliged to read back issues they may well not have, to fully appreciate your genius. In any competition for space short snappy letters will win !

If you fancy helping to produce Playtime get in touch. If you just want to see what sort of idiots produce it, or have a discussion about it then meet those of us at the London Workers meetings every Tuesday.

UK Annual Subscriptions £2. Back issues and single copies 20p from : Box Playtime c/o C1 Metropolitan Wharf, Wapping Wall, London, E1.

The LONDON WORKERS GROUP is an open discussion group involving autonomists, councillists, anarchists and anyone else interested in workplace class struggle from a revolutionary point of view. It meets every Tuesday at 8.15, upstairs at the Metropolitan Pub, 95 Farringdon Road, EC1 (2 mins Farringdon Tube). Anyone is welcome to join in, except party recruiters. If you want to know more but can't face meeting us, or if you want a copy of our free bulletin (a stamp would be nice), write to the address above.

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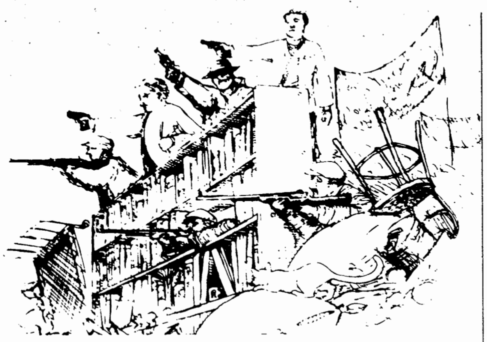


Dear Comrades,
One of the best features of WP is its attack on the unions as anti-working class organisations. The exposure of the nature of the unions, on the theoretical and everyday levels, is one of the tasks of revolutionaries today.

The article 'Knowing your Onions' (Playtime Dec 1983) hints at the theory which underlies it by referring to the concept of the distinction between the formal and the real domination of capital over labour. I hope in future issues you will make explicit this theory, and debate with revolutionaries who defend alternative theories of the present stage of capitalism's development.

This response makes no apologies for being an 'orthodox' left-communist defense of the political reason for the present role of the trade unions as outright defenders of the capitalist system against the proletariat. My argument for this is based on the theory of 'Decadence'. Briefly, unions were formed to defend workers within capitalism whilst it was still an historically progressive mode of production, whilst it was still able to grant meaningful and lasting reforms to the class. Unions and the left-wing parties were built to secure gains within the system – today, they can only defend that system against the workers. Revolutionaries began to grasp this fundamental change in the nature of capitalism and reformism in the twenties – as Sylvia Pankhurst put it in 1921 – "The trade unions are, moreover, opposed to revolutionary action: their object is to secure palliations of the capitalist system, not to abolish it". *(Communism and its Tactics).*

Trade unions are reactionary because they aim to 'palliate' the capitalist system – there are simply no more palliations to be made. This can be graphically understood by asking the question, 'on balance, did the German working class gain between 1920 and 1970?' Any 'gains' made by a minority of workers in the West this century have been totally outweighed by casualties in war. In my view, this argument should be made clear and explicit in any text on the unions.

I therefore think that the argument "The usual objection to this view of trade unions is that, whatever their shortcomings, they form a focal point for working class community. They are 'where the working class is organised' " (WP p.12) is somewhat tangential. A more common leftist myth is the view that unions actually defend workers in struggle: a myth which is commonly believed by workers themselves.

The *central* reason why unions have become anti-working class bodies is that capitalism is no longer objectively progressive. Marx describes in the *Preface to a Contribution to a Critique* modes of production (slavery, feudalism, capitalism) in ascendance and decadence. The rise and fall of exploitative modes of production was no tea party, but was inevitable. But capitalism is no longer inevitable, the creation of a classless mode of production is possible, so capitalism is decadent. In its decadent epoch it has nothing to offer the exploited class, therefore those organs whose political programme is negotiating gains, can only negotiate losses. They only suppress the form of class struggle necessary to win even temporary gains – that is struggle which refuses to negotiate with the class enemy.

The article does not say what workers need instead of unions. We need autonomous workers' groups, against the unions, for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not mass bodies based on *negotiation* and *compromise* like Solidarnosc, but nuclei of future instruments of class dictatorship: workers' councils. I think revolutionaries need to work *now* to create a much wider revolutonary base within the working class, and we need at least to begin to work out what that base will be made of.

These differences aside, congratulations on a well-argued text, and a well-produced revolutionary paper. Keep up the good work. **E.Mav.**

AUTHORMATE'S REPLY :

Thank you for your letter.

'Orthodox' left-communism shares a common fault with other Marxist orthodoxies. All claim to be defenders of an 'invariant' tradition running through Marx, Engels, Kautsky (before his fall from grace) and Lenin. After that, the dynastic claims are open to dispute. For other Marxists, past reformist practice 'justifies' their present involvement in bourgeois politics. But left-communists have to explain the contradiction between the revolutionary tradition they profess, and the opportunistic practice of Marx and his followers.

The 'decadence' theory answers this problem nicely, by dividing capitalism rigidly into two distinct phases, first up to 1914, when capitalism could yield material benefits to workers, and from 1914 on, when it could not. The theory is based on Marx's observation that "No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and the superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. (Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy).

Now, I agree that the material conditions for communism already exist. This is evident from the contradiction between peoples' needs and desires, and capitalism's inability to satisfy them, despite the productive capacity of the technology it has developed.

What is more, the irrationality of the capitalist system – its wars and disasters – offers us the choice between either "a revolutionary reconstruction of society, or the common ruin of the contending classes" (Marx and Engels). Communism is both possible and necessary – in this sense capitalism is decadent.

But you cannot proceed from this to the assertion that in capitalism's "decadent epoch it has nothing to offer the exploited class" (in sharp contrast to its 'ascendant' epoch), without a grotesque distortion of reality.

In capitalism's 'heyday' of progress – the late eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century in Britain – the working class was ABSOLUTELY much poorer than now. For at that stage of development, capitalist accumulation still relied to a considerable extent on keeping wages at or below the necessary minimum, and pushing working hours to the limits of human endurance.

The function of trade unions was to meet this force with the force of workers' combinations, and win gains in the face of bitter opposition from the ruling class.

With the development of capitalist technology, it became progressively more possible for surplus value to be increased without extending working hours or reducing wages. Therefore, the role of the unions became not simply one of 'negotiating' losses, as you argue, but of negotiaing 'gains' too – 'gains' and 'losses' in line with capitalism's needs, as opposed to our desires. In this respect, the unions are wedded to the aims of national capital, and that is why they are reactionary.

The 'decadence theory' seems to project the current recession back to 1914. But it is ridiculous to try to argue that 'on balance' the European working class has made no material gains since the 1920s. How else could capitalism have survived the last seventy years, if not by fulfilling at least some of its promises? (We must remember that all this shows a Eurocentric perspective. We should add that much of the world is kept in a state more akin to pre- or early capitalist conditions by the imperialist metropoles.)

'Decadence theory' tells us nothing about the evolution of capitalism since 1914, for example, the manner in which capitalistic relationships have been extended to 'non-productive' spheres of activity (e.g. education, health care, social management.)

Communists are united in their understanding that organisations within capitalism cannot prefigure the organisation of a revolutionary proletariat – and this must include present groupings of revolutionaries.

To say that such groups, whether organised geographically or in the workplace, are "the nuclei of future class dictatorship" comes close to partyism and substitutionism. The underlying assumption seems to be that the working class only needs to organise to take over the means of production and turn them over to 'direct production for use'. But this does not take into account the extent to which economic and social relations are shaped in capitalism's image, or, consequently, the profundity of the social transformation which will be necessary to establish communism.

Shortage of space made it necessary to slightly edit both letter and reply – our apologies to both comrades.

PLAYTIME'S STATE OF THE UNIONS ADDRESS.

Two strikes came to the forefront of industrial disputes at the beginning of the year. The Talbot strike in France resulted in a violent confrontation between strikers and non-strikers. In Britain the coal industry was the scene for a series of unofficial strikes and counter strikes as a response to a union overtime ban. Although separate and distinct, the two disputes have features in common. Both took place against a background of restructuring of the industry concerned. Both involved small craft groups being central to the escalation of bad feeling and division within the workforce. Whilst the structure of trade unionism is different in the two countries, the role of the unions in both instances was to create demoralisation and frustration, which fed the antagonism and mistrust between different groups of workers.

The recession makes old forms of industrial struggle redundant. Capital is quite prepared to close workplaces at the first sign of trouble or disruption when it is suffering as a result of overproduction and is looking for ways to run down production and save costs. Strikes and go-slows can in many cases be a gift to the bosses, having the added bonus that 'union militancy' can be blamed for lay-offs and low pay. The result is disillusionment and fatalism amongst workers, who accept the union role of negotiating the 'best possible terms' for redundancy as at Talbot or demanding more democratic consultation, as in the British coalfields.

The unions are quite happy to fulfil this role, since they have no answer to the restructuration of industry. In the modern era the function of the unions is to sell the workers the best possible deal which *capitalism* has to offer, and in a recession the best possible deal is redundancy or harder work for less pay. In other words, their present function is to keep struggles by the workforce in check in the hope that a small proportion will get some benefit from their realism. The unions are still the best salesmen for what the left laughingly calls 'Thatcherism' but is in reality capitalism's universal response to its crisis – getting the workers to make sacrifices in order to make their labour more 'competitive'. This has sometimes brought workers into conflict with their unions – but not because they have seen the union as a repressive agent of capitalism. On the contrary, it has been because they have felt that the union has failed, in a particular instance, to fulfil its 'true' function of defending their interests.

Trade unions are very adept at using strikes as a means of controlling their members, for example by making wildcat strikes official and then imposing restrictions on the strikers' actions. But workers have by and large been willing accomplices to this. And seeing the uselessness of the union strategy, some groups of workers are now using unofficial actions in order to hasten the return to 'normal' working.

The failure of the unions to deliver the goods has bred in-fighting and confusion, especially when some workers clearly have more to lose from the union strategy than others.

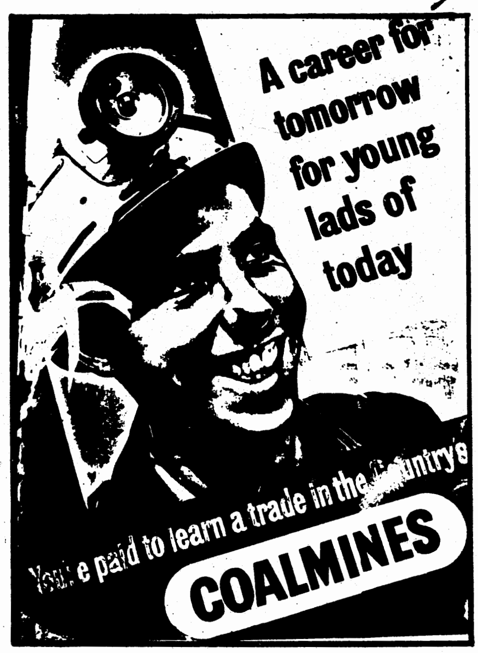
The events at Talbot and in the British coalfields show that whilst they hide behind their old slogan of 'unity is strength', the trade unions are actually promoting the maximum disunity and disharmony within the working class.

Miners wound up

In October 1983 the executive of the National Union of Mineworkers ordered an overtime ban as a tactic to pressure the National Coal Board into increasing a pay offer of 5.2%. There was no direct consultation with the membership. The executive argued that they were mandated by the annual national conference to call this and any other action short of a strike (which is subject to a national ballot). In response to the ineffectiveness of the overtime ban and personal loss of earnings, a group of winders took to wildcat action in defiance of the union. Whilst the media took up the usual "right to work" theme, the national officials spoke of civil war within the union.

The winders' strike followed a series of local actions – an unofficial protest rally in Leicester, stoppages in Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire coal fields – over the loss of overtime pay and bonuses. In the eleventh week of the overtime ban, 42 winders from 5 collieries in North Staffs. threatened to strike the following Monday if not allowed to carry out weekend overtime working. Winders get guaranteed overtime, since they are required to operate cages moving men and machinery when weekend maintenance work is carried out.

The winders, members of Power Group No. 2, claimed that they had each lost over £100 a week and were making a bigger sacrifice than most NUM members. They were prevented from entering the pits by pickets when they turned up for work at the weekend and responded by carrying out their threat. Unable to get down to work, 8000 miners were laid off, the majority for two days, since maintenance work then had to be carried out on the Tuesday. The Power Group temporarily suspended the winders from union membership; their branch was disbanded and individuals lost the right to hold office, attend meetings and draw benefit. But they were not prevented from returning to work.



It was this that escalated the dispute. Winders are not a well liked section of the mining community, earning a high wage for their craft status – which originates from their operation and maintenance of steam engines in the last century. (Cages are now electrically operated but the higher wages are justified in terms of responsibility, whilst it is the underground workers who take the risks). At the North Staffs. Silverdale colliery, the 300-strong afternoon shift walked out, refusing to work with the winders who had been on strike. Ironically, the winders' strike had been ineffective at Silverdale – being a drift mine, the miners could walk to the coal face without having to rely on the cages. The following day 900 miners from the pit struck over the management's refusal to move a winder who had crossed picket lines. It was not an all out strike – they stated that they were prepared to work but would black the cages and the winders i.e. were prepared to walk the one mile to the coal face. The 45 minute loss of production this entailed was unacceptable to the management.

TAKE YOUR PICK

The North Staffs. winders became the focus of discontent within the industry for other groups threatening to resume normal working unless the NUM executive called a national ballot to endorse the overtime ban. It was this 'democratic' demand that became the centre of attention. Trevor Bell, leader of the white collar section COSA stated, "The whole overtime ban was designed to unite the membership with regard to the proposals for the industry. Now certain important sections are calling the strategy into question and the executive has got to re-establish its control. We have got to consult the members." A show of democracy would be of benefit to both left and right on the executive, hopefully putting an end to the wildcat actions. But the right could not be seen to advocate it after MacGregor, head of the NCB, had already supported it. For its part, the left did not dare carry through a ballot in case of rejection – which would be Scargill's third consecutive defeat in a national ballot.

The NUM claim that only a small number benefit from overtime – those who do weekend maintenance work are mainly craftsmen and management. But increasingly the non-maintenance of equipment and workfaces have led to delays on Mondays before normal work can begin. Miners are affected through being sent home without pay whilst maintenance is done, or by a reduction in their bonus as production is lost. This has particularly hit pits with geological problems, such as flooding, where working conditions are already bad, and production, and therefore bonus payments, are lower. While output has dropped in some areas, it has remained unaffected in others; in some areas, e.g. Nottinghamshire, miners are working harder during the week in order to offset any losses in overtime pay with higher bonus payments. Many workers are taking care to safeguard unhindered production – a tremendous boon for the NCB.

LOSS OF FACE.

The overtime ban has had definite benefits for the NCB and hardly any for the workers. It has gone some way to solving the problem of overproduction. In the three months to January, 3.25 million tonnes of coal were lost, the NUM claiming that this had cost £150-200m. But the NCB seem quite happy to save £33.5m in wages, plus the cost of storing coal (£7 per tonne per year). Lost production is a small fraction of the 30 million tonnes stockpiled at power stations – enough to generate 6 months' electricity – and the 24 million tonnes stockpiled at pit heads. In addition the action has demoralised the workforce, and has accelerated the decline of a number of 'uneconomic' pits, providing an excuse to close one colliery down completely.

The majority of miners gave their passive support to the ban, mainly out of union loyalty. The winders' strike and subsequent unofficial actions show that that loyalty is coming under strain. It is becoming clear that the ban is hurting the miners rather than the NCB, with the NUM executive standing aloof from it all. The illusion that the industrial supremacy of the miners could enable them to win their claim with a mere overtime ban (or originally, the mere threat of it) has been exposed. Not even protracted national strikes could win the steel and water workers' disputes, and the miners, standing alone, have proved to be no different.

Already a united industry-wide response to the pay offer has broken down. One of the three unions, the British Association of Colliery Management (BACM) with 16,000 members accepted the 5.2% on the table at the beginning of February. The National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shot Firers (Nacods) have also begun separate pay negotiations with the NCB. The NUM is attempting to placate the membership with talk of blacking Polish coal imports. Scargill claims that his "historic" negotiations with leaders of other unions – seamen, rail workers, dockers and lorry drivers – is a general workers response to the "attempt by the government to smash the spectacularly successful action of the unions". Behind this nationalist rhetoric – intended to cover up the failure of the overtime ban – is the overproduction of coal worldwide. Macgregor claims to be "on the same side" as Scargill on the issue of "unfair" competition from subsidised foreign coal.

Widespread dissatisfaction with the NUM's tactics and its refusal to take any action other than negotiate was soon demonstrated in Scotland, where six pits have been closed in the last eighteen months. The latest casualty was Bogside, closed when flooding occurred after the NUM had refused to carry out overtime maintenance, and the NCB decided not to call in management to carry out emergency repairs. Also announced was the closure of Polmaise colliery near Stirling, due to geological problems. The pit has been losing money hand over fist, in spite of huge investments.

The closure was confronted by strong resistance from the workers, but not from the NUM. Over 100 miners forced their way into a delegate conference which had put off for one week a call for an immediate strike. Mick McGahey, leader of the Scottish NUM, argued that this was to build up support at other collieries, but it was simply to buy time. This is a tried and tested tactic for the NUM executive to demoralise struggles they have little interest in sup orting. The wave of unofficial strikes to save the Lewis Merthyr pit in South Wales last February was scuppered by a delay to make the strike official with . . . .a national ballot ! (See Playtime Apr. 83).

In both the Scottish and Welsh disputes a left leadership sacrificed the closure of pits for the sake of "maintaining unity" within the union. The reconvened delegate conference would not back an all out strike in the Scottish area, merely agreeing to an official indefinite strike at a pit that was definitely to be closed. The NCB is taking advantage of the NUM's repeated demonstrations of its inability to oppose pit closures.

KING ARTHUR'S ACID REIGN

Scargill is claiming that 70 pits are to close, putting 70,000 jobs at risk. (And during the winders strike he emphasised that 50% of craftsmen would lose their jobs.)

But what are the facts? With worldwide overproduction the market price of coal is around £40 per tonne. The cost of production in Britain varies between £25 in Notts or Yorkshire and £120 in Scotland. With pressure to reduce costs and the loss of government subsidies the NCB is planning investment in the profitable areas only. In particular, the NCB wants to introduce computer-linked technology which will mean completely automated coal faces not just in individual pits, but in whole fields. MINOS (Mine Operating System) has the technical capacity to halve employment. This sytem is now fully developed and ready to be put into operation just as soon as the NCB and the NUM can cook up a deal which is 'acceptable' to the miners.

Scargill is in virtually the same position as Joe Wade and the NGA. Two unions with the strongest industrial muscle are on the defensive against new technology and the restructuring of their industries. They are responding with a rearguard action which is not so much to fight redundancies, but to quibble over payoffs and the time-scale of job losses. The reason for this is the ineffectiveness of all traditional trade union responses. The present overtime ban fits in with the NCB's plan to grind the 'uneconomic' pits to a halt and increase the intensity of labour at the pits with a future. 'Radical' demands for a national strike are just naive with the current level of stocks – it is a recipe for demoralisation and division on the scale of the 1980 steel strike. If miners are to resist job losses and defend living standards, they will have to be prepared to take immediate action and spread it as widely and rapidly as possible, and not just to other miners. Their resistance to pit closures last year was broken by the NUM's bogus calls for unity. It is becoming clear to many that even in the mining industry, with its traditions of labour organisation and struggle, trade unionism is bankrupt.

TALBOT: Unions hound dogged strikers

This winter's strike, occupation and riots at the Talbot car plant in Poissy, near Paris, was provoked by the management's proposed 3000 redundancies, part of the 8000 announced by the parent company, Peugeot, in July. The ensuing turmoil represented an early challenge to the socialist government's plans to restructure French industry. Further rationalisation is planned for steel, coal and shipbuilding, as well as the rest of car manufacturing. French workers face this on top of 18 months of financial austerity (see Playtime, August 1983).

Talbot was to be the blueprint for the government's 'redundancies with a human face'. The government would only agree to 2000 redundancies, not the 3000 demanded by Talbot management. Those made redundant were to be saved from the dole, with the government offering local firms £1,700 to take on ex-Talbot employees where they would be retrained at government expense. Alternatively, workers made redundant could receive a £1,700 grant to set themselves up as self-employed mechanics. This allowance would be payable abroad – a thinly disguised inducement to voluntary repatriation, helping France export its unemployment. Socialist and Communist government ministers agreed that these proposals were the way to deal with the 200,000 redundancies deemed necessary throughout heavy industry.

The response to the announced redundancies was a ten day strike by two or three thousand of the 17,000-strong workforce. Talbot decided to close down the plant for the two weeks before christmas, using the dispute to cover low sales and a trading loss of around £200m. A symbolic occupation of the empty plant followed, with some 200-300 workers taking part. They were able to turn away maintenance workers trying to repair plant for the new year. Management responded by declaring the closure of the plant and laying off the entire workforce.

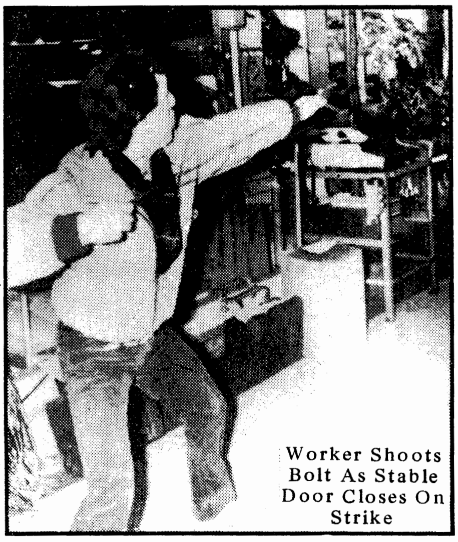
The strikers were evicted on Saturday, 31st December.

Five hundred riot police stormed the factory in this graphic display of what socialists mean by state intervention in industry. The fire brigade had to be called in as strikers started fires in two areas of the plant, in order to halt production, with or without an occupation. An official of the Communist Party-controlled CGT was quoted as being "shocked that a left wing government could send in anti-riot police against workers who were asking for negotiations". But the strikers were not after negotiations. It was the CGT that was proposing the eviction of the workers, by negotiation rather than force, having already conceded the need for redundancies.

SLINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS

On a local level, the pro-socialist CFDT claimed to be opposing the redundancies and supporting the occupation. The leadership declared 'your demands are our demands' – as a means of holding on to the rank and file militants abandoned by the CGT. This is a familiar game played by the two unions – next time it will be the CGT's turn to appear the more militant.

(This is exactly what has happened. Embarrassed by the events at Talbot, the CP – the CGT's effective bosses – have adopted a hard line. Georges Marchais its Gen.Secretary has warned his Socialist partners in the governing coalition "Not one more redundancy from now on". "Technical progress does not necessarily mean fewer jobs. It can be used to increase production, thereby providing more jobs". The solution for him isn't closures or redundancy but reconquering the domestic market. That this is no more than an attempt to publicly distance themselves from a strategy they will in practise help implement has been made clear since. The CP declared a state of "critical participation" – supposed to be more extreme than the state of "participation without support" they maintained



Worker Shoots Bolt As Stable Door Closes On Strike until last December. Now following the lorry drivers strike – in which one of their ministers bore the brunt of the criticism – they are talking about pulling out of the coalition completely. Whether they are talking about it 'critically' or merely 'unsupportively' remains to be seen.)

CUR PRODUCTION

Picket lines in France are crossed without problem under a 'right to work' law, and working resumed. After a mass meeting outside the factory on Tuesday 3rd. January, 6–700 strikers re-occupied parts of the factory, arguing and fighting with non-strikers in an attempt to stop work on the lines. The next day saw the first of the violent clashes.

Management and foremen tried to prevent a repeat performance, and were attacked inside the plant by strikers. They responded with tear-gas. On Thursday 5th., a full-scale battle raged up and down the assembly lines, with components, tools and machinery used as weapons and cars as barricades. Fifty members of the CSL, a right wing union, began a commando raid on the CFDT strike headquarters in the factory, laying seige to the strikers in one section of the plant. After 3½ hours, the CFDT called in the riot police to clear the non-strikers and allow those occupying to leave the factory ! There were 55 casualties – mainly strikers.

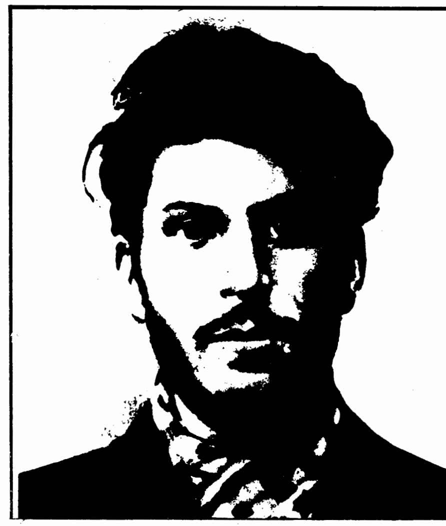
Talbot announced another lock-out, without pay, threatening to close the plant for good. Again, closure had been pre-empted by those in occupation. Their damage to the assembly lines, though not as serious as the earlier fires, would have halted production anyway. Their actions demonstrated once again the 'nothing to lose' character of the strike.

In the forefront of those demanding a return to work was the CSL. Before the recognition of the CFDT and CGT at Talbot, just one year ago, the CSL was the only union recognised by the company. One of its functions was to keep the immigrant workforce in its place. It collaborated closely with management, as it still does, being dominated by white skilled workers and foremen. The Algerian and Moroccan workforce have since been recruited by the CGT and CFDT.

While the CSL was orchestrating the physical attacks on the strikers, allowing work to continue, the role of the CGT was to attack the strikers verbally for not accepting the redundancies. "We have to go back to work to avoid the redundancy of the remaining 15000 workers". The CGT played on fears of a right-wing backlash, which they said would follow the closure of Talbot, with immigrant workers taking the blame for redundancies. This fear-mongering came in the context of the electoral successes of the (French) National Front, which has called for the expulsion of 4.5 million immigrants. In particular, they blamed the 800,000 Algerians for rises in crime and unemployment. At the same time, the government introduced decrees allowing illegal immigrants to be expelled without appeal. The Communist Party is calling for stronger immigration controls.

The CGT's nationalism and opportunism was no less sickening at Talbot, where it competed with the CSL for support from the non-strikers. 'The immigrant strikers must be opposed by reasonable French workers – align yourself with the CSL to do it by force, with the CGT to do it by persuasion.'

Immigrants represent 80% of the workforce at Talbot, concentrated in semi- and unskilled jobs. They were prominent in strikes a year ago which ended in management sacking the most militant workers with union support. Those who remained in the CGT were now striking in defiance of 'their' union, which insisted that redundancies be accepted and strikers return to work (or 'their' country). But there was a sense of fatalism in the strikers demands. They realised they had no chance of another job, so the strategy was to demand extra allowances to leave France. The figure



The CGT : looking for a more youthful image

most often quoted was £17,000, ten times the government offer, but many were seeking £30,000 in recognition of 20-30 years' service, with pension rights, resettlement allowances etcetera. It was this aspect that put older workers as well as young militants in the forefront of the strike and occupations. For compared to the paltry £1700 on offer, this was something to fight for with nothing to lose, everything to gain.

With the unions already negotiating away jobs, the direction of the Talbot strike was towards cutting losses and getting as good a pay-off as possible. This may set the pattern of resistance throughout French industry.

BROUGHT TO HEEL

The 'militant' CFDT's central demand was for a say in the implementation of redundancies. They wanted negotiations over a shorter working week, early retirement, and better repatriation allowances. In short, the CFDT wanted the traditional trade union role of bargaining over the size of, and price of, the workforce. A bargain struck on the basis of capital's current needs. All along they were aware that Talbot's planned £100m. investment would involve a further 5000 job losses. But they welcomed the investment whatever the price, so long as it kept the plant open.

Many of the government's supporters were critical of the failure to include the unions in negotiations over redundancies. They realised that alienating the CFDT was counter-productive, for union support would be vital to implement the 200,000 job losses in the 'industrial austerity' plan.

The governments handling of the affair was in turn a product of its internal divisions over how to handle the restructuring all see as necessary. Mitterand and Industry Minister Fabius favour a blitzkrieg

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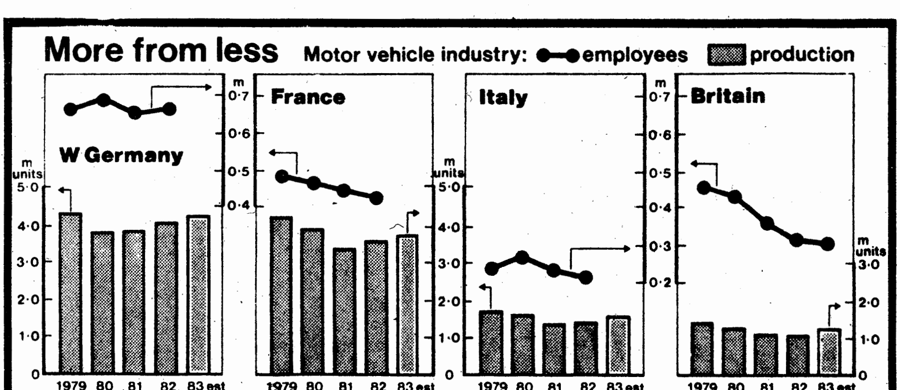

Cuts in jobs are the recipe for 'recovery' in the car industry. Europe's car companies plan to invest a further $85 billion over five years, mainly in labour-saving technology.

Central America: Solidarity with what?

Whilst it may be very satisfying that American imperialism appears to be taking a hiding in Central America, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that there is any permanent progress on offer from the various "revolutionary" armies of opposition. Even in the short-run, the price which the peoples of the region must pay in terms of violence and starvation offers no cause for celebration. As usual, it is the workers and peasants who are suffering most from this "extension of politics by other means", whether at the hands of the death squads, or simply in the crossfire between guerrillas and government forces.

NICARAGUA

The success of the Nicaraguan "revolution" in 1979 has given impetus to the guerrilla campaigns in other Central American states. There is little doubt that in social terms, large sections of Nicaragua's 2.7 million population have benefited. The Sandinistas have made significant gains against illiteracy and disease. But the militarisation of the country and its continuing poor economic performance in the face of relative isolation are forcing the regime to look for ways to negotiate itself back into America's "backyard" sphere of influence. The US itself is continuing to support the contras in the north of the country, and the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance forces in the south, which are led by the ex-Sandinist commander Eden Pastora. Meanwhile, 5000 US troops exercise menacingly in neighbouring Honduras. The US hopes this pressure will force the Sandinistas back into line on the best possible terms for American interests in the area. Already the Nicaraguan government has accepted the 21 point plan for peace proposed by the pro-American Contadora group of mediating countries – Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Colombia, and has offered to negotiate all outstanding differences with the United States.

Clearly, the Sandinistas are responding to the bait being dangled before them – a share of the 8.4 billion dollar aid programme oulined in the Kissinger Report. The Russians and Cubans will not be able to match such sums. The money is sorely needed. For, whilst Nicaragua has sustained a better growth rate than its neighbours, it shares their problems of falling prices for the main exports (coffee, cotton, meat and sugar), high import costs and the disruption or collapse of local markets. The Sandinistas inherited 2 billion dollars in damage from the civil war, whilst the national debt, standing at 2.6 billion dollars at the start of 1982, continues to rise.

However from the point of view of the Nicaraguan peasant, life has taken a slight turn for the better since the overthrow of Somoza – even those sources one would expect to be hostile seem to admit this much. The government has moved away from export-dependence and towards subsistence agriculture in an attempt to feed the rural population. What is in question is the ability of the regime to sustain these gains, especially with a rising national debt and a war to finance. Some land was turned over to the peasants in the aftermath of the seizure of power, but in the absence of sufficient state funds for more nationalisations, expropriation has been limited to cases of corruption or gross inefficiency and under-capitalisation. With the euphoria of the "revolution" at an end, the Sandinistas are relying on nationalistic "siege" rhetoric to maintain control, whilst courting the opposition, which controls the bulk of the country's economic resources, and seeking a rapprochement with Uncle Sam.

This will mean the toning down of the socialist rhetoric which has accompanied the voice of rabid nationalism since mid-1982, when Nicaragua's isolation was at its greatest and the regime was forced to move closer to Russia in spite of its professed non-alignment. (This corresponded to the Cuban experience. Castro only became a convert to "communism" because Russia stepped in to replace the Americans as a customer for Cuban sugar and a supplier of aid, thus getting a strategically vital client state.)

In the long-run, whether Nicaragua continues to strengthen its ties to Russia, or as seems increasingly likely, returns as the prodigal son to the fatted calf of American aid, capitalist order will be strengthened by the Sandinist revolution. The days of Somoza's corrupt, inefficient and narrowly based regime are not likely to return. The mass organisations and "popular democracy" – which have helped establish interest groups loyal to the regime – will, as elsewhere, become the institutions that guarantee the effectiveness and "legitimacy" of the state's authority throughout society, and the continuity of capitalist accumulation in a pluralist economy.

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"After 20 years of struggle we swear to defend our victory." Nicaragua is ruled by a broad coalition of nationalists, liberals and priests. The economic system remains mainly private-capitalist, with social welfarism and the eradication of disease forming the basis of the regime's popularity.

EL SALVADOR

The fighting which the world is witnessing in Central America is in no respects evidence of a social revolution: It is not the case that one "reactionary" army is defending an antiquated mode of production against another which heralds new social relations.

The form of the struggle underway in El Salvador demonstrates the nature of its content. What is at stake is the political control of *territory*, which is to say the territorial control of the circulation of commodities, of capitalist relations.

The truth of this was recently underlined by the statements made by commander Roberto Roca of the General Command of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), published in the journal of the "El Salvador Solidarity Campaign". He says,

"This allows us to conclude that the process towards a victory does not involve the creation of conditions in preparation for a massive popular insurrection. Instead our victory is being formed in a process in which our growing political and military control of the Republic's territory is accompanied by the broadening and deepening deterioration of the enemy army's offensive and defensive capabilities, as well as its morale, placing the enemy in a situation from which it cannot avoid losing political and military control over greater areas of the country. In the eastern zone of the country, out of a total of 80 population centres of medium importance, the enemy has lost 55 of which 30 are 'disputed' and 25 are fully controlled by the FMLN and they continue life as urban centres with production and commerce functioning, which in turn assures sustenance to the revolutionary forces and broadens the scope for multilateral security, with the enemy powerless to prevent this. We can conclude then that the FMLN has advanced in a systematic manner, free from precipitation, within a strategy of political and military control of the popular masses, which necessarily affects control of broad regions of the national territory."

The struggle then is to establish a regime which will have sufficiently broad support to guarantee the stability and political control in which production and commerce can flourish. The US is belatedly recognising that the old formula cannot achieve this. The Central American dictatorships may have been absolute in their opposition to an extension of Soviet and Cuban influence in the region, but rested on social strata which were far too narrowly based to guarantee permanent national cohesion. Data published

The graffiti reads, "long live the progressive clergy". Many priests, who for years conferred legitimacy on the established oligarchy, have crossed the divide of bourgeois politics in the region, feeling the Church will have a more secure future with the liberals and social-nationalists.

by the Inter-Institutional Technical Commission of the Central Reserve Bank and the Ministry of Planning on prices and salaries show that out of El Salvador's economically active population of 1,336,525 in 1980, "90% did not receive sufficient income to buy the necessities of daily life. For 1983, since the introduction of Decree 544, (that froze wages) this percentage has increased to 96%". The economic crisis (according to the Kissinger Report, the Salvadorean economy has shrunk 20% because of the war and the recession) also means that open unemployment is now more than 36.9%, whilst inflation is going through the roof.

AID

The main thrust of the Kissinger Report's "human rights" and developmental proposals is therefore to set about creating more affluent middle strata on which all pluralist democracies depend for support. This will involve, for example, the creation of a body of Central American teachers by the US Peace Corps, and the establishment of 10,000 government-sponsored scholarships to bring Central American students to US educational institutions. On the economic front, the 8.4 billion dollars aid programme, spread over five years, doubles the 1983 level of spending and aims to finance capital projects and export promotion.

Chucking huge sums of cash at the problem will not make it go away, of course. For one thing, there is no economic infrastructure to respond to it. The domination of West Europe and other areas by the US capital since the second world war was based on the injections of colossal amounts of finance (particularly through the Marshall Plan), but in these areas it was simply a question of reconstructing a complex capitalist economy which had been disrupted by war. The post-war reconstruction was based on the regeneration of markets after six years of destruction which itself followed a protracted slump. In Central America, by contrast, the United States will be attempting to stimulate production in a world which is deep in recession and glutted by the sort of products which the region could offer. Already protectionist lobbies in the United States itself are lining up to oppose Kissinger's proposals to remove non-tariff barriers to goods from Central America.

In addition to this is the problem of the unsavoury bunch of people the Americans have to deal with to implement their development programmes.

The problem for the United States is not so much the phantom of Russian or Cuban intervention. The weakness of the rival imperialism is amply demonstrated by the inability of the Red Army to deal with the Afghan tribesmen and the Cubans' own lack of success in eliminating opposition to the regime in Angola. The monster is of their own making. Having defended narrow and self-serving cliques, it is hardly surprising that these entrenched, cossetted men get upset when the US starts attaching strings to further goodies. The new promotion of liberals, trade union leaders etc. is rightly seen as being as great a threat as the "communist" advance; indeed the two are often equated. The advantage which the rightists share with the guerrillas is the appeal to nationalist anti-yankee feeling. One of the main death squads,

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the secret anti-communist army (ESA) said in response to the recent purge of right wingers from the Salvadorean army, "We are not allowing the gringos to come and take decisions on changes of military posts:..The gringos are only matching the aims of international communism". (Times 6/1/84)

GUATEMALA

If the US is getting its come-uppance in El Salvador, this is nothing as to the trouble that could be brewing in Guatemala. Because Guatemala borders on Mexico, the extension of the war to this wretched country would almost certainly force a massive American intervention, tying down thousands of US troops. Such an escalation of the conflict would also mean millions of refugees, who would be somewhat less than welcome in opulent Southern California and Texas.

With a brief period of reform in the forties and fifties, Guatemala has been ruled by the same criollo oligarchy since independence from Spain in 1820. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their Liberal governments introduced legislation making private property the only legal form of land ownership – in other words, they robbed the Indians of their communal lands, in line with capitalist development elsewhere, in order to produce coffee for export. The Indians represent about 55% of Guatemala's 7.26 million population. The rest is composed mainly of ladinos – of Spanish or mixed origin – most of whom also live in dire poverty but get what paid employment is going and are encouraged to regard themselves as privileged by virtue of the fact that they are not Indian.

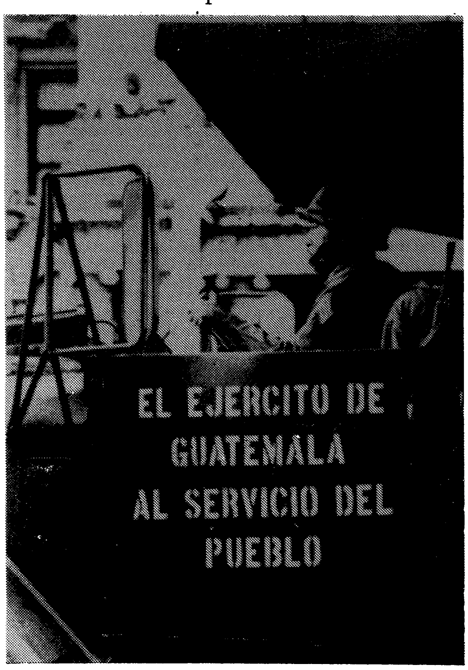
The presence of a cheap labour force kept docile by racial division has naturally attracted US capital, which has forged a powerful alliance with the oligarchy. For example, the United Fruit Company came to own half a million acres of Guatemala's most fertile land on which it produced bananas for export.

Since it was reinstalled in power by the CIA in 1954, the oligarchy has enjoyed thirty years of unrestrained pillage. Its insatiable greed has been supported by the unreserved commitment of the Americans who used their experience gained in Vietnam to crush all opposition. (This included the extensive use of death squads, of the same type the US now denounces in El Salvador, and the napalm bombing of villages controlled by guerrillas).

After the 1954 coup, American capital poured in to colonise this country ripe for exploitation at high rates of profit. This has resulted in Guatemala becoming the most industrialised country in the region, and has created a significant working class; by 1976 13.5% of the economically active population of 1.9 million were employed in manufacturing industry.

However, industrialisation has been insufficient to absorb the growing rural proletariat created by agricultural diversification and modernisation encouraged by American know-how and government grants to landowners. More and more land has been turned over to the cultivation of crops for export, and the peasantry pushed off their subsistence plots.

But the rich pickings enjoyed by the ruling class has only bred internal division as a result of jealousies and lust for power. Since 1954 there has been a succession of coups, each bringing to power a regime seemingly more barbarous than the last. In March 1982 the urgency of the guerrilla war brought to power General Efrain Rios Montt, to replace the squabbling clique that surrounded President Lucas Garcia – whose government, according to Amnesty International, had the worst human rights record in Latin America. Rios Montt set about regaining international legitimacy, and, with the assistance of the US State Department, was able to convince the world that the human rights situation had improved. This bought the government time to carry out a policy of militarising the population, with the support of Rios Montt's fanatical fundamentalist sects. Villages offering resistance were often liquidated, whilst the government drafted free labour to build roads for the army, on the model of Moshavs – the Palestinian refugee/forced labour camps in Israel.



"The Guatamalan Army at the service of the people."

However Rios Montt's policies only exacerbated the faction-fighting. Guerrilla action increased, the industrial sector reacted against the policies imposed under pressure from the IMF, and the General's bizarre fundamentalism upset the Roman Catholic population. A new military regime was installed in August 1983, which intends to realign Guatemala in the Reagan plan for the region.

Congressional opposition has temporarily put a block on US military aid to the present Mejia Victores regime, which is taking a hammering from guerrillas in the northern mountain ranges. This does not stop US personnel from training Guatemalan troops at bases in Honduras.. nor does it prevent the regime from obtaining assistance from other client states of American imperialism – notably Israel, which currently supplies arms to Guatemala and is preparing to establish an arms factory in the country which will be able to supply all members of the regional military alliance, CONDECA.

TRAGEDY

The whole Central American tragedy is but one spectacular example of capitalism's permanent inability to resolve the world's problems. The solution does not lie with the nationalist guerrilla armies of opposition, as the Nicaraguan experience is beginning to make clear. Ever since the Spanish Civil War, it has been evident that when the working class takes sides in a capitalist civil war, it has already accepted defeat. "National liberation" is the standard raised by these armies, but what does it mean? Today, its only meaning can be opting for dependence on a different imperialist centre or the barbarism of autarchy. When capitalism was at an earlier stage of development, and the objective conditions for an international seizure of power by the proletariat were not present, it could be argued that the working class had an interest in the emergence of a national state in which to organise and fight for reforms on a class basis. Now only the autonomous struggle of the international proletariat can serve its long-term interests. This does not mean that the numerically weak working class of Central America must wait for revolution in the capitalist metropoles. It means that sooner or later it will have to develop its struggle against all the capitalist factions in the region and the imperialist powers which stand behind them. We owe it to them to avoid being seduced either by the easy sentimentality which is bolstering the capitalist faction in charge of Nicaragua and its allies, or by the pious expressions of good intent offered by apologists for American imperialism■

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approach, taking on all the areas to be restructured – steel, coal, shipbuilding, construction, engineering, chemicals and cars – simultaneously, and thrashing out a national cross-industry deal with the unions over the 'price' in social policies for the jobs lost. They hope this will clear the decks of the problem by next year in time to start rebuilding support for the 1986 elections. Others including Prime Minister Mauroy believe the unions and Communist Party are unlikely to play ball and favour a softly softly approach, region by region and industry by industry. They fear a head on approach could provoke mass resistance, and clearly have little faith in the ability of their coalition partners and the unions to contain it.

For its part, the CFDT wanted to call off the strike. The riots had shown that the strike had escaped union control. Respectability, not effective activity, is the name of the game. The Talbot strike was 'suspended' by the union once it had secured a seat at the negotiating table. Work was resumed at Poissy on 11th. January. Management and security staff backed up by the police, ushered workers into the factory through cages where they were stopped, searched and questioned by the CSL supervisors who a week earlier had led the attack on the strikers.

Edmond Maire, CFDT boss, said of the Communist Party and CGT, "the party and the union it controls have become a transmission belt between authority and the workers". It is a role that the CFDT itself loves to play, and in the end did. They claimed to be the independent union at the plant, representing only the interests of the workers, but all the time they urged 'reason' – in other words, submission. The government praised the CGT for going one step further in actively opposing those workers resisting the government's terms. The unions have set the pattern for their role in the rationalisation of French industry. It is the response of the workers themselves to the unions and their radical posturing which will determine whether they get away with it. ■

Since writing these two articles, there have been new developments in France and the British coal industry. The class war doesn't run to our deadlines. While the situations are still developing they show little sign of challenging the dead hand of unionism.

Most notably in France, though overshadowed in the British media by the lorry drivers' protest, was a two day national strike and mass demonstration in Paris by miners, in response to the 28,000 redundancies proposed for the next four years. (The Socialists election promise was to nearly double production). The unions supported the strike "so that the basic problems can be clarified" - ie. a symbolic show of strength before they start negotiating the redundancies.

Meanwhile public sector workers – civil servants, teachers, power, health, rail & local transport workers – are protesting at the decrease in their standard of living. These workers have been condemned by the CFDT leader Maire for striking whilst enjoying greater job security than other workers who will suffer from their actions.

Two weeks after the black and ban fantasy was played out at Ellington colliery, where Macgregor was felled by a mass demonstration, he announced 20-25,000 job losses and the closure of 28 or more pits. The industry's first compulsory redundancies now seem likely. So far they have taken the form of early retirement on good pensions, and relocation allowances of £1000 for those redeployed to other pits, and this has accounted for the lack of resistance to pit closures. Not surprisingly the government followed up Macgregor's announcement by declaring on 7th March that more money would be available for redundancy payments.

The timing of Macgregor's announcement has coincided with an escalation of industrial action, so far desperate and uncoordinated, mainly arising from local grievances. Despite the rejection of strike action in Scotland, the traditionally moderate Lanc.'s area has called for an area strike ballot over the closure of Cranton colliery. More recently, 14,000 have been on strike in Yorkshire over the closure of 2 pits, redeployment of workers and disputes over management carrying out maintenance. The York.'s area NUM has called for an all out official strike over closures.

This would allow Scargill to have a near national strike without a ballot. With the prospects of victory bleak, given the coal stocks and Macgregors request to the Govt. for £290m. extra to cover present losses, Scargill wants a "show of strength" which means exhausting the miners' patience and energies for a few more weeks. He can then intervene and negotiate the best possible deal "in the circumstances".

DAILY MAIL Torvill & Dean **GOLDEN SOUVENIR**

Even closer than lovers!

When Denis Healey told a Chesterfield by-election rally that he and Tony Benn were inseperable "Tony without Denis is like Torvill without Dean", the audience roared appreciatively – and not merely because as he said it a banner collapsed on the stage. With characteristic bluntness he'd put his finger on the most significant indicator of the changes in the Labour Party : the change in the sexual chemistry of its star performers. Its only necessary to look back at the equally famous Bermondsey by-election. There the trial seperation, reconciliation and final public marriage of Micheal Foot and Peter Tatchell dominated the media, in so extraordinary a parallel with the storyline of Coronation Street, that the two of them were dubbed " Deirdre and Ken" by cartoonist Jak.

The difference in styles is total. With Foot/Tatchell, the spectacle of political passion, the awkwardness and obstinacy, the ever present possibility of misunderstanding and conflict, the admission of fear and jealousy, coloured the relationship with the simulated hues of real life.

This was their fatal mistake. The 'public' may enjoy carefully retextured representations of real misery and passion on television. Its reassurance that the difficulties they have in forcing their real emotions into the iron corset of capitalist social relations is after all inevitable – "Thats Life". In such presentations they look for people "like us" – one dimensional 'characters' who can adjust without tension to the demands of the 'market-place'. A world of TV-AM presenters.

In the political 'arena' however they want the representation of professionalism – reassurance that a public domain of seamless, sexless competence exists, where the mask never slips and the smiles remain fixed even when the marks for creative interpretation are low.

Tatchell's brave but foolish attempt to challenge the homophobia of Bermondsey Labour voters in the political arena did not help him. But the destructive factor was the spectacle of him and Foot in an unstable embrace rooted in a mutually destructive passion for leftism. The 'public' gazed in horrified fascination, left speculating on who had given who the kiss of death.

For Benn and Healey this has never been a problem. Benn and Tatchell may both have insisted that their election was about policies not personalities. Only Benn realised that this meant never discussing policy during the campaign, and always presenting the right profile at the photo call. Politics may make strange bedfellows – the only way to ensure success is to keep holding the same clean – even blank – sheet up for inspection.

The parallel with Torvill and Dean is exact.

"For the secret of their enigmatic relationship is that it is a means to an end. They are dedicated, first to being the greatest ice-dancers in the world and only secondly to each other."

"It's elementary psychology that a drive gains in power as it is frustrated. But it doesn't follow that Chris and Jayne are making a painful sacrifice." (Daily Mail) No indeed – it is always us who will be expected to do that for them – offer our own misery and inadequacy, the visible signs of our exploitation, as a 'proof' of 'their' superiority, of our permanent need for them.