

THE LABOUR AND TRADE UNION GROUP

The Labour and Trade Union Group is an organisation of socialists and trade unionists spread throughout the North. Since our formation in 1974, we have been campaigning consistently for **WORKERS UNITY** and **SOCIALIST POLICIES**. We believe that the trade union movement, with 300,000 members, has the main role to play in achieving these goals.

This pamphlet explains how this can be done - through the building of a mass party of Labour, uniting workers against Toryism, sectarianism and poverty.

There are active Labour Group branches throughout the North. In Ballymena, the branch has carried the fight against Paisley's DUP into his own home ground, fielding Labour candidates in Council by-elections and so providing workers with an alternative to bigotry.

Against hospital closures in Omagh, against factory closures in Derry, against repression in Strabane - and for the rights of working people. That has been part of our record to date.

But the struggle is just beginning. As this pamphlet explains, the opportunities have never been greater for the building of a mass workers' movement, united in the struggle for socialism. **JOIN US**, and ensure that this time these possibilities are realised to the full.

Youth for Socialism

Youth suffer the worst through the present economic crisis. More and more young people leave school to join the dole queues. Others drift into dead end jobs. School students endure humiliating petty rules and an examination system designed to break their spirit.

It is against this, and more, that the Youth For Socialism Campaign is working. We stand for a **SCHOOL STUDENTS UNION**, full pay at 18, a guaranteed job for all and a vast expansion in recreational facilities. We are fighting for socialist measures to make this possible.

In Derry, Strabane, Ballymena, Belfast and other areas Young Socialist branches have either been formed or are in the process of formation. Do you want to fight? Do you want a decent future?

If you are interested in finding out more about the Labour and Trade Union Group or Youth for Socialism, please contact:

LTUG.
18, Donegall St.,
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Northern Ireland



Tory Cuts COMMON MISERY, COMMON STRUGGLE

By Peter Hadden

30p

A 'Labour and Trade Union Group' pamphlet



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NORTHERN IRELAND: COMMON MISERY, COMMON STRUGGLE

By Peter Hadden

- ★ For Workers' Unity against the Tory Cuts.
- ★ For a Mass Party of Labour.

A 'Labour and Trade
Union Group' Pamphlet.

Fight The Tory Cuts

Mrs. Thatcher and her cabinet of millionaires have declared war on the living standards of working people. Undoubtedly, this is the most reactionary government to have come to power this century. It's stated objectives, should they be implemented, would mean, not just a return to the 1930s, but the submerging of the working class in the social conditions of the nineteenth century. Every gain won by organised Labour in the course of the last hundred years is under threat.

For all its inadequacies the achievement of a free National Health Service was one of the most significant advances forced out of the bosses by the struggles of the Labour Movement. In Northern Ireland the National Health Service was achieved against the stubborn opposition and resistance of the then Unionist Government.

Now the very concept of free medical care is threatened. Cuts in Health spending are already imposing intolerable strains on the NHS. Hospitals in England, especially in London, have been forced to close. Waiting lists for major operations have been lengthened. Kidney machines and other essential equipment are being placed beyond the tightening budgets of Health Authorities. Meanwhile, the notion of free health as a service has received another blow, through a 56% increase in prescription charges since the Tories came into office.

In Northern Ireland area hospitals in many parts of the Province are to be closed or run down. In Omagh and Fermanagh the hospital service is to be run down to the point of extinction. The renowned and highly successful cardiac unit in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast could possibly face closure. This unit needs a quarter of a million pounds each year to survive. The Tories have bluntly stated that the money is not available. Also in the RVH, a modern geriatric unit remains unused because the cuts have made it impossible to obtain staff.

Education also is under assault. The principle of state education for all is challenged. Already, the moves towards comprehensive education in NI have been halted. A slice of £6 million already lopped off Education spending will particularly hit the least well off. One standard of education for the wealthy who can afford school fees - but a completely different standard for the children of the working class - this is the Tory answer.

Published by Labour and Trade Union Group
18, Donegall St.,
Belfast.

March 1980.

Printed by Cambridge Heath Press Ltd (TU)
Mentmore Works
1 Mentmore Terrace
London E8 3PN

School meal prices are to be raised. Free school dinners are to be abolished for up to 20,000 children. In Belfast the free school milk supplied to 7-11 year olds is to be cut. In addition, parents may have to pay up to £30 per child for school transport.

It is the working class, above all the least well off sections of the working class, who will feel the effects of such measures. At present one child in three in Northern Ireland is entitled to free school meals. In some of the poorest areas the figure is as high as four out of five!

In the working class schools the problems posed by these cuts will create an educational nightmare for both teachers and students. As the teaching staff struggle to cope with large classes and inadequate resources they will take little comfort in the fact that some 800-900 of their colleagues presently cannot find work, while the jobs of over 100 others are due for the axe.

Unemployment to rise.

Expenditure cuts not only mean the slashing of services, they also add to unemployment. Cuts in manpower in the Civil and Public Service throughout Britain are already closing a door to the career prospects of thousands of young people. They go side by side with the huge numbers of jobs to be axed from government owned or subsidised industries. The Tory medicine for Britain includes the laying off of 25,000 British Leyland workers, the axing of one third of the jobs in British Steel, some 52,000 in number, not to mention the miners, transport workers and others who will find themselves redundant as a result of the decline in industrial activity.

Northern Ireland has continually boasted an unemployment rate twice the UK average. Because of the increased dependence on the public sector for employment, particularly on the Public Service, the cutbacks in jobs will be more severely felt than in Britain. According to the main NI Civil Service union, NIPSA, the initial expenditure cuts have led directly to a loss of over 2,000 Civil Service jobs. Areas of further saving are now under investigation and Government Ministers have proclaimed their intention of even more severely reducing the numbers employed in the public sector.

As a further punishment to those driven onto the dole queues by such policies the Tory Cabinet are now discussing how to lower the value of social security payments. The inflation linking of benefits may be ended. So also might the right of the newly unemployed to claim full tax rebates.

Not alone are the living standards of workers under threat. So also are the most elementary rights which the trade union movement won in the past. This Tory Government represents a threat to the basic rights to organise, to strike and to picket.

Already, an Employment Bill has been introduced. This is simply an attempt to restrict the effectiveness of trade unions in



Royal Victoria Hospital: Cardiac unit may close.

struggle by placing legal restraints on their right to picket workplaces other than their own.

If the Government had their way so-called secondary picketing would become illegal. It is a short step to the legal restriction of sympathetic strike action and to the imposition of restraints on all forms of picketing. Not only picketing, but the so-called 'secondary blacking' of goods is to be illegalised. Again, if Thatcher and her CBI backers could get their way other trade union rights - such as the closed shop - would become targets for attack.

As socialists in Northern Ireland have continually explained, the legal apparatus of the state together with its armed bodies, the army and the police, are, in the last analysis, weapons in the hands of the bosses for use against the working class and their organisations.

For the Tories the cuts made so far are only the beginning. Thatcher has already announced that her cabinet are considering further cuts of anything up to £2 billion in the March Budget. Unchecked, this Government would destroy all the advances made by the working class over the last hundred years.

Health care, Welfare, Education - there in abundance for those who can pay! Virtually non-existent for the rest! State harassment of trade unionists! The arrest and jailing of strikers for offences arising out of picketing! The doubling of unemployment and the reduction of social security payments! These are but some of the prospects offered by the Tories.

Northern Ireland Poverty

All these attacks come on top of succeeding years of wage restraint, falling living standards and rising unemployment. For workers in Northern Ireland they are an unbearable additional blow.

Poverty has become a way of life in Northern Ireland. The entire Province is already a depressed, virtually de-industrialised region. All aspects of the social and public services are on the verge of breakdown. Public transport is chaotic, even in Belfast. Lack of facilities, even of the most basic forms of entertainment, add to the general depression.

Recently the one growth industry seems to have been the compilation and production of surveys and reports. One after another, a series of reports on industrial development, on the economy and on social conditions have been produced. Each has added a fresh deluge of statistical information, all of which underlined heavily the poverty stricken conditions endured by growing numbers of the people.

Even a few statistics are sufficient to demonstrate this beyond refutation. In 1978 a survey on conditions in Belfast revealed that 18% of the heads of households in this city were earning less than £20 per week. 42% earned less than £40. Almost a quarter of the city's housing stock is described as totally unfit for human habitation. 44% of householders were dependent upon some state aid for their survival.

Overall, five times as many people per head of population claim Family Income Supplement in NI as do in Britain as a whole. In the region of 50% of all children in the Province are being brought up in families whose resources leave them below the official needs level.

The average per capita income in 1979 was a meagre £2,100 per annum, 20% lower than the Great Britain average. Yet prices of all basic goods, such as food, clothing and particularly heating, are much higher than in Britain. Recent estimates have put the cost of living in NI as some 4% to 5% higher than in Britain.

A further report issued recently by the Supplementary Benefits Commission drew the conclusion that Northern Ireland was the poorest region of Western Europe. The Commission stated that

wages were an average £20 per week lower than in Britain. It also pointed out that while 9% of the population of the UK as a whole depend on Supplementary Benefits, a horrifying enough statistic, the equivalent NI figure is 14.4%. In reward for their honesty in producing such statistics the Tories have since announced that the Supplementary Benefits Commission, as now constituted, should be abolished!

Whatever else poverty is, it is non-sectarian. It is true that the areas of highest unemployment, along the Border and in West Belfast, are overwhelmingly Catholic. In part this is due to the discrimination inbuilt for fifty years into the fabric of the Unionist state. Also, these areas pay the penalty of any area remote from the major capitalist markets - they are starved of private investment and therefore of jobs.

But generally the problems of low wages, squalid housing and increasingly of unemployment hit both communities alike. In 1976 a Government report on Belfast Areas of Need focussed on areas like the Catholic Falls and the Protestant Shankill districts of East Belfast.

Shankill and Falls - conditions abysmal.

Academics and university statisticians might pore over the figures produced for as long as they like, but they would be unable to find any significant difference in the living conditions, or more accurately in the levels of misery, of the people in these areas. True, in the Falls there were fewer skilled workers and there were more people who depend on state benefits. Yet in the Shankill 59% of heads of household were found to earn less than £25 per week. For the Falls the equivalent figure was 56%. 49% of households in the Shankill and 42% of those in the Falls had a total income of less than £25 per week.

As far as housing conditions are concerned, the same story of dire poverty is repeated - 79% of the houses in the Shankill and 55% of those in the Falls had no inside toilet. In the Shankill 81%, and in the Falls 57%, of houses had no hot water.

A slum is a slum no matter who lives in it! To be out of work, to exist below the poverty line, to depend on a pittance of a state hand-out - the feeling is the same for all workers, irrespective of religion! **Common misery is the basis for common struggle.** Against the present and future cuts, it is the existing unity of workers in misery which provides for unity in action.

Labour Movement Can Stop The Tories

Standing between the declared aims of British capitalism, as expressed through the Tory Cabinet, and the implementation of these objectives are the organisations of the working class. It is one thing to devise ways and means of abolishing the rights of working people. It is one thing to bind the trade unions with parliamentary paper. It is a different thing entirely to carry anti-working class legislation into effect. Social forces, class traditions, class organisations - these are factors which will not dissolve on the production of carefully worded parliamentary texts.

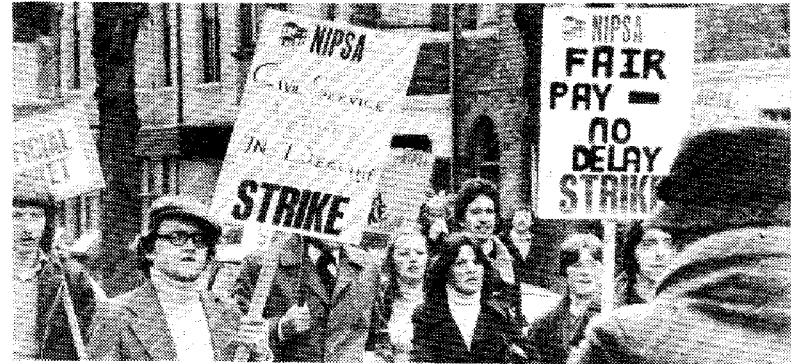
In the path of the Tories in Britain stands the might of organised Labour - above all, the force of the twelve and a half million members of the TUC. The British working class will not stand idly by while their rights are legislated away. Already, the forces of organised Labour have moved into action. Engineering workers and steel workers have conducted prolonged struggles in defence of their living standards.

On a regional basis mass demonstrations and even one day strikes have already been organised. In Wales, the working class have answered the attempts to deindustrialise this entire region with a completely successful one day General Strike. The Welsh TUC has even threatened an all out General Strike if the steel closures are not averted. Even the TUC itself, faced with a determined and fighting mood in its ranks, has threatened national action, both on the run down of industry and also on the attacks on trade union rights contained in the Tory Employment Bill.

From local battles the momentum is decisively building towards National Action. It is possible that a one-day General Strike will be organised in 1980. Also, within the situation are all the explosive ingredients which could even spark off an all out General Strike. Such has been the scale of the opposition already shown by workers that an understanding of the mighty power of the working class has already permeated the thick skulls of the Tory Cabinet.

Fear of the impending movement of the working class has already caused splits among the Tories on every single major policy issue. On the question of the steel industry they are split. On the issue of the scale of the cuts to be made in public spending they are split. And on the extent of the legal restrictions it would be possible to impose on the unions they also are divided.

But whatever the outcome of the quarrels between different sections of the ruling class and their spokesmen one thing remains certain. British society is on a collision course. On the basis of a capitalist economy the relative peace and stability of the decades following the Second World War are now things of the past. Social turmoil, class upheaval, a swing of the working class and their organisations to the left - this is what the future has in store.



Public service workers resist attacks on living standards.

Northern Ireland has been made no exception to the Tory attacks. It is, in fact, the area which will be worst affected by these measures. Workers here already have one foot in the conditions of the 1930s. A further driving down of living standards, further attacks on the basic democratic rights to organise, strike, picket, and demonstrate threaten to turn the clock back to the conditions of the last century.

As in Britain it is only the organisations of the Labour Movement which are capable of defending the living standards of the working class. 300,000 workers belong to trade unions in Northern Ireland. Despite the troubles, despite the deepening sectarian division, despite the intimidation and the fear and despite the rising unemployment the percentage of the workforce organised within the unions has actually risen over the last decade. All remaining vestiges of sectarianism could be pushed to the side were the trade union movement to draw its members into action. From a latent power the unions could develop into the most decisive force in society.

Independent action by the organisations of the working class - in no other manner can the Tory attacks be resisted.

Even a few months of experience of the Tory measures has so increased the volume of the demands from trade unionists for organised resistance that the trade union leaders have had no alternative but to respond. A Day of Action, with mass demonstrations in a number of areas, has been called for April 2nd.

If this demonstration is properly organised and prepared for it could be a virtual one day or half-day General Strike. Such a step would be truly historic. It could be a turning point in the Northern Irish situation. It would push the class issues to the forefront and relegate sectarianism and sectarian political groups to the shadows.

All workers should seize this opportunity to demonstrate their organised power with both hands. But they should do so as part of an overall campaign of action of which April 2nd is only the opening volley.

Purpose of Pamphlet.

Only reluctantly have the union leaders been forced to organise resistance. This pamphlet is written as a call for ongoing mass action - for Days of Action throughout the North, for meetings and demonstrations, at local level, for Conferences of rank and file trade union representatives to hammer out both policy and action, for the door to be opened to the possibility of calling a one day General Strike and, above all, for the objective of this activity to be clearly and boldly presented - to remove from office this bosses' government.

Posed by such a campaign is the need for the trade unions to shape a political alternative of their own. If we are to bring down the Tories with what are we to replace them? This will be the question asked by workers. For the working class in Britain the alternative already exists of the return of a Labour Government and the forcing of this Government to implement socialist policies. In Northern Ireland the working class have no political expression of their own. There is no Labour Party which the trade union movement can influence and control. **An integral part of the campaign against Thatcher, Joseph and their millionaire friends is the struggle by the unions to create a political expression of their own - a trade union based party of Labour committed to socialist policies.**

This pamphlet has been produced, in part, as a reply to the policies and strategy outlined by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in their most recent policy document 'Jobs - An Action Programme.' It sets out to explain in detail the need for mass action and socialist policies - above all, to raise high and loud the call for the creation of a party of Labour. First and foremost, it is addressed to the ranks of the Labour Movement in Northern Ireland as well as to the leaders of this movement.

Why The Cuts?

The Tory Government are the open and direct representatives of Big Business. Their parliamentary utterances, their savage cuts, their threats to trade union rights are all received and echoed to a background of enthusiastic applause by the CBI and in the exclusive clubs of London where the real rulers of society mix.

It has been the crisis of world capitalism, and within it the particular crisis of British capitalism, which has driven the Government to take these measures. On a world scale capitalist economies not only find themselves in a crisis, they find themselves ensnared in an epoch of crisis, stagnation and decline. From the general upward swing of all these economies in the boom years following the Second World War there has begun a period of general downswing.

1974-75 brought to the capitalist world the first ever simultaneous world recession. In the OECD countries there was an actual fall in production of about ½%. Since 1975 most economies have experienced a rickety and fragile boom. Growth rates of 2% or 3% have been common. Yet unemployment has refused to fall decisively. Spare capacity in industry has remained a problem. And inflation worldwide has welded itself into the capitalist economies as a visible scar, denoting the internal disease and decay of the system.

This brief interlude of shaky growth has already given way to recession. Capitalist economists are agreed for 1980 that there will be **at least** a fall in the rate of growth internationally, with probably an actual fall in production in America and Britain.

Short lived, half hearted booms, followed by downturn and recession in an ever tightening cycle - these are the characteristics of the new period of general decline of world capitalism. For the capitalists the 8%, 9% and 10% growth rates experienced by some countries in the decades following the war stand faint in their minds like distant pleasant memories. By the early 1970s, the capitalists themselves were giving their verdict of no confidence in the future of their system. Throughout most European countries and even in Japan the rate of investment had fallen to a little more than half the rate of the early 1960s.

Under the conditions of the post war boom limited reforms and an increase in the living standards of the working class of the advanced capitalist nations had been possible. Not so today! The search for lasting concessions and lasting reforms is now as futile as the search for flesh on an ancient skeleton.

Yet the resources exist, if they could be utilised, to solve the basic material problems of mankind. While chronic need exists throughout the globe the machinery which could be used to

help satisfy this need lies idle. In the major capitalist economies a staggering £170 billion worth of productive capacity is not used. Northern Ireland's entire annual budget is £2 billion. Expenditure on all services could be doubled if a little over 1% of spare capacity were used - in other words, if we had a system which could simply switch on the existing machinery. Its inability to utilise present capacity, let alone expand and develop the productive forces, is a damning indication of the profound crisis of capitalism.

Amid this world crisis, with its contraction of markets and of trade, there is the especially aggravated crisis of the British economy.

British capitalism was the forerunner of capitalism throughout the world. One hundred and fifty years ago British industry accounted for four fifths of world production. The frail and decrepit shadow of this former position of dominance today accounts for a mere 2½% of world production. Even as late as the 1950s, the pound accounted for one third of the world's currency reserves. Now the figure is little more than 1%.

Capitalism in crisis.

From an ability to penetrate and even dominate the markets of her rivals the British capitalists have even lost their own domestic market to foreign competition. In the production of motor bikes British domination of the world has turned into total domination even of the British market by countries like Japan. With the motor car industry the same process is well underway, ably assisted by the campaign being waged by the Thatcher luddites to lay off up to half of the workforce of British Leyland and devastate its productive capacity.

This relative decline of British capitalism was cushioned and disguised by the period of boom which followed the war. She was able to retain a relatively smaller share of an expanding market. The contracting of the world market has fully exposed her weakness.

In terms of living standards British workers also experienced a drastic relative decline during the boom years. During the late 1950s, income per head in Britain was about 25% higher than in West Germany and five times as high as in Japan. Now the income of Germans is two times higher than the British, while the Japanese incomes are 50% higher.

In vain will the bosses attempt to blame the falling behind of their industries on the British workers. The truth is that the British working class work longer hours, have fewer holidays and are less well off than almost all their European counterparts. It is not that the workers in Britain do not work as hard as, for example, the Germans or Japanese, but that their capacity to produce is not as great. The machinery which the British worker has at hand does not permit him to compete.

In other words, it has been the failure of the bosses over the years to reinvest their profits in manufacturing industry which has led to the particular crisis of British capitalism. Each individual capitalist places his money where he will obtain the best return, should this be through speculation in gold or silver, in houses, in land, in art treasures, overseas or wherever. Given the tendency to a decline in the rate of profit, basically the return on investment in industry, to now about 3% in Britain, the capitalists have preferred to place their fortunes elsewhere.

For the individual capitalist the turn from investment in industry to more lucrative fields may produce temporary financial rewards. For the system it produces only fools gold. Less money invested in manufacturing industry means older and less competitive machinery, a lower productivity of labour, less for research and development and so on.

The wealth produced from manufacturing industry is the basis of all wealth. Yet this sector of the British economy has been in a process of contraction since the early 1960s at least. In the two so-called 'growth years' of 1975-77 British manufacturing industry actually shed over 140,000 jobs. The country has increasingly been forced to rely on the service sector and on public administration to provide jobs.

To douse the flames of the catastrophe facing the economy the Tories are adding petrol. Steel production is a key indicator of the health of an industrial economy. A viable steel industry is an indication of and also an assistance to growth in manufacture generally. Yet the Tories are preparing for what they promise will be an industrial revival by slicing the main arteries of the British steel industry. Their projected figure for steel production is 15 million tons by 1980. This only a little more than half the actual figure for 1970!

These accumulated weaknesses leave British capitalism especially vulnerable to even the slightest hiccups in the world economy. What to stronger economies is a mild coastal breaker can in British conditions be magnified to a tidal wave of destruction.

The downturn of 1974-75 severely dislocated the British economy. But more worrying for the capitalists has been her subsequent inability to recover. Even as the trough of a new recession approaches the British capitalists are caught still trying to escape from the pit of the previous one. In 1978 industrial production was still 4% lower than in 1973. Industry was still racked by over capacity, today standing at about 20%, and further reducing any incentive to invest in more productive machinery. The Treasury themselves have estimated that industrial production could fall by as much as 2% in 1980.

This is the reason for the Tory onslaught. Not merely some long nurtured hatred felt by Mrs Thatcher for the working class! Not

simply Sir Keith Joseph's contempt for the Welfare State! But the fact that the crisis of British capitalism makes it necessary for the bosses to reduce living standards in order to boost profitability.

So long as the rate of return on investment is low the bosses will not invest. The Tory solution is to bolster profits to such an extent that investment will become an attractive proposition. Karl Marx once explained that profits are the unpaid labour of the working class. Profits can be increased by reducing the share of the wealth of society which goes to the workers. This is the motivation behind the declaration of class war by this government.

No Capitalist Solutions

Cut living standards to increase profits! Restrain inflation by cutting spending on such 'luxuries' as state health and state education! Restore profitability and we **might** invest! These are the demands of the capitalists. Obediently, the Tory Cabinet are obeying the bidding of their masters. Their policy is one of severe and undiluted monetarism. Their economic solution, formulated out of the decrees of the guru of monetarist policies, Friedman, is the same solution as has been imposed by the Chilean Junta on the masses in that country.

In Chile, following the Pinochet coup of 1973, and with the ability of the working class to resist smashed alongside their organisations, monetarist policies have been put into effect. The result has not been a revival of the economy but has been horror, without end for the working class and the peasants, whose standard of living has been reduced to unimaginable levels.

As in Chile the monetarism of Thatcher, even if implemented in full, would not resolve the problems of the economy. The dilemma for the bosses is that every economic answer they produce turns out to be a dangerous and double edged weapon. Monetarism, aimed at reducing inflation by slashing state spending, can only do so at the expense of living standards. By Taking money out of the hands of the workers, by cutting state spending, it pushes down demand, deflates the economy and therefore actually reduces the willingness of the bosses to invest, albeit launching its attack on investment from a new angle.

1974-79 were years of Labour Government. Ironically, this government of Wilson and then Callaghan pursued a form of monetarist policy. Labour in office was faced with a simple choice - either carry out the dictates of Capital or else sweep away this system. Labour's right wing leaders decided to become managers of the capitalist economy and, as such, were forced to carry out measures not significantly different, if not quite so severe, as those of the Tories.

At the behest of the International Monetary Fund they held down wages and declared war on state spending in order, they hoped, to control inflation and stimulate investment. During their years in office this Government chopped £8,000 million each year off state expenditure. The 'Social Contract' in all its various guises succeeded in lowering real wages.

So successful from a capitalist point of view were Labour's monetarist measures that they managed to reduce the living standards of workers by some 9%! According to figures produced by the Society of Civil and Public Servants, Labour's cuts led to a minimum loss of 500,000 jobs. Meanwhile, at the other end of the social scale, company profits rose by 113% between 1975 and 1978!

Yet lo and behold the real objective - to stimulate investment - was not achieved. No significant revival of the economy took place. Incentives for investment achieved by measures on the one side were more than compensated for by the growing disincentive of depressed demand and declining rate of profit.

Today the effect of monetarism of the Tories promises to be even more catastrophic. In economic terms, even in the strictest terms of capitalist economics, their strategy of slashing expenditure during a recession is insane. It has even terrified many of the capitalists themselves and has opened up divisions in the Tory Cabinet.

The Economist, right wing mouthpiece of Big Business, has predicted that there would be a fall in manufacturing output of 5½% by the end of 1980, if the Chancellor was to succeed in his declared objective of driving down the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement to £8½ billion. In addition, it projects, on the same basis, an actual decline in levels of investment to 85% of those of 1978.

Among opponents of the Tory policies, including among sections of the Labour Party in Britain, including the Tribune lefts, and also among sections of the Trade Union Movement in Northern Ireland, there still exists and is put forward the belief that an alternative method exists of managing the capitalist economy than that of the Tories and of monetarism.

What is often proposed, and this is the basis of the alternative put forward by ICTU in Northern Ireland, is that state spending should be increased. This, it is argued, will stimulate demand,

revive business confidence and thereby induce the industrialist to invest.

This alternative, 'Keynesianism' to give it its name, is no alternative at all. Milton Keynes was the capitalist economist who argued that Governments could spend their way out of crisis, inflating artificially the economy for a period. Supporters of Keynes have been mystified into silence in recent years by the phenomena of runaway inflation during periods of stagnation - impossible, according to his arguments. 'Stagflation' is the new catchword summoned into existence to describe this phenomena which has committed the sin of defying the force of the hundreds of thousands of words of Keynesian argument.

Keynesianism, albeit from an opposite point of view, falters for exactly the same reason as do the doctrines of Friedman. For the capitalists, the many sided nature of their problems means that the solution to one thing is, at the same time, fuel to some opposite difficulty.

Vast increases in state spending, on the basis of capitalism, at a time when manufacturing output is low or declining, is merely the creation of artificial wealth. Money not backed up by increased production of goods from the factories is really debased. More money in circulation but the same amount of goods to buy means the devaluation of money. State spending on this basis merely fuels inflation. Far from artificially stimulating a recovery it can more readily lead to a collapse with the incentives given to investment on the one side by increased spending more than offset on the other by the soaring of inflation.

In 1973, under the Tory Government, this 'priming of the pump' was attempted. Tory Chancellor Barber pumped huge sums into the economy. The 1973 'mini-boom,' stimulated partly in this manner, only led to the greater collapse of the following years and to the rocketing inflation of 1974-75 which forced the capitalists to demand a change of policy.

Supporters of Keynesian policies within the Labour Movement in Britain and Ireland often add a further twist to their proposed remedy. They suggest that the British and Northern Irish market should be protected behind import barriers with strict controls on foreign imports.

Such a remedy is no less a 'quack' solution than every other capitalist answer. Again, by tackling one wound in the economy, it opens up many others. Import controls are no part of the programme of socialism. Their effect would be to create barriers between the workers of different countries. But even on a purely capitalist basis they would solve nothing. What British industry might gain in the form of a protected home market it would more than lose through retaliation by its rivals and the loss of its export field. Import controls would not lead to more investment - but

quite the opposite. With a guaranteed home market there would be less incentive to invest. Prices would rise as the monopoly position of the capitalists within their domestic market would allow them to charge what they wished. Jobs saved in one sector of the economy would be as nothing compared to the overall loss of jobs suffered by Britain in a trade war.

For the working class of Britain and Northern Ireland all the remedies of capitalism amount to the same thing - a fall in living standards. The choice between Monetarism and Keynesianism is no choice whatsoever. If the real virtues, or the lack of them, were placed before a worker he would wonder why some trade union leaders spend so much time weighing up their relative merits.

If a worker was asked to take his pick between a 20% cut in wages or no change in his wages but a 20% rise in prices he would not waste much time considering which was better. Instead of choosing he would reject what was on offer and seek something better.

Yet this is precisely the choice offered by capitalism. Either mass unemployment and depressed wages or else rampant inflation, eventually leading to more unemployment also. And still between these 'choices' there are those within the Labour Movement, even some on the left, who claim they can find a difference.

There comes a time when an infection takes such a hold on a part of the body that the alternatives of a pill or an injection do nothing to help. That is the time for something more drastic - the surgeon's knife. The crisis of capitalism has passed the point of soothing by anaesthetic. There are no capitalist solutions to the problems of world capitalism, let alone to the acute difficulties facing the British capitalists.

Only the taking over of the economy and the implementation of a socialist plan of production can show a way out. The British economy is dominated by a mere 200 large companies. If these, together with the banks and insurance companies, were nationalised and placed under the democratic management of the working class, through the unions and through a socialist government, it would be possible to develop production, to increase spending on services and to raise living standards - all to previously undreamed of levels.

This is the conclusion which the ranks of the British Labour Movement are increasingly being forced to draw. Their experience of past Labour Governments has led to a re-examination of every aspect of the programme and role of these Governments. There is now a growing demand from trade unionists and members of the Labour Party that a future Labour Government introduce socialist measures. This is a demand which becomes perceptibly more audible with every passing day of the life of this Tory Government.

An Industrial Wasteland

Every conclusion which holds for Britain can also be drawn and a thousand times so for Northern Ireland.

Economists talk of the possibility of the British economy becoming non-industrialised. They even now refer to a future 'post-industrial' Britain. In Northern Ireland we have a society which has already been largely de-industrialised by the ravages of capitalism. In terms of industrial decay, of poverty and also of state repression, it exists as a reminder to the British working class of what the Tories have in store for them.

In many senses Northern Ireland is an industrial wasteland, an arena of mass and permanent unemployment, of rundown, uncompetitive industries and of increasing poverty. Any thought entertained by anyone of a possibility of any major or sustained revival of the NI economy on the basis of capitalism would be a childish, fantastic and utterly utopian delusion.

The Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU) have recognised that it is necessary to put forward some alternative to the policies of the Tories. Their document - 'Jobs - An Action Programme' - contains their strategy for economic revival. It is an expression of the alternatives which have formulated in the minds of the trade union leaders. As an opening of discussion within the trade union movement this or any such document can only be welcomed. Nothing but benefit can be gained from a free discussion of ideas.

But as a programme to deal with the catastrophic position in which the NI working class finds itself it is sheer fantasy. There is no delight in making such a charge but, unfortunately, it is impossible to find anything more charitable to say about ICTU's proposals.

'Jobs - An Action Programme' calls for more state spending, for a continuation of the policy of aid to industry, for more job creation schemes and for more incentives to foreign investors. Its central and key proposal is that there should be established a State Development Consortium to co-ordinate industrial development. At local level it proposes that Trades Councils should join with local businessmen and bankers in joint co-operative ventures.

In other words, what NIC/ICTU suggest is that past policies of state support to industry be stepped up and that the unions develop a strategy of cooperation with the employers in a Development Consortium and at local level in Trade Union Development Companies.

Job creation schemes and attempts to co-ordinate development may appear laudable. However, in the context of the economic crisis, these and the other proposals of this document are absolutely utopian. They would not so much as scratch the surface of the unemployment problem.

When the basic facts of life of the Northern Ireland economy are considered ICTU's 'solutions' must disintegrate into absurdities in people's minds. The notion of a developing economy of local co-operatives and healthy state aided industry is no more real than the wonderland visited by Alice.

It only needs the slightest examination of the NI economy to bear this out. In the first place most of the economy is not locally owned. 45% of industry is in British hands, 21% is American and only a declining and mostly unviable 22% is owned by local manufacturers. This makes it particularly susceptible to the ill fortunes of capitalism internationally and renders any attempt to study its future prospects outside the context of the crisis of the world economy quite useless.

In addition, the manufacturing base of the economy, so long as it remains in capitalist hands, is in a process of irreversible decline. During the last eight years 20% of the jobs in manufacturing industry have been lost. Between 1971-76, 734 factories closed their doors for good. Even during the so-called 'boom' of 1973 there were 128 factory closures. As a portent of what the future holds the first two weeks of the new decade in 1980 have brought the announcement of a total of 2,764 job losses.

Before 1960 the NI economy depended largely upon the old heavy engineering, ship-building and textile industries. Together with agriculture these sectors provided the 'bulk' of job opportunities. Throughout the years of the boom these industries became increasingly uncompetitive and suffered a steady decline.

In the 1960s and into the early 1970s this decline was offset and partially disguised by the attraction of significant foreign investment, lured by lucrative grants and incentives and by the existence of a large pool of cheap labour. In 1961 just over 170,000 people were employed in manufacturing industry. In 1971 the figure was approximately the same.

Between 1971 and 1975 there was an even more drastic decline in the traditional industries, and by this time the areas of new investment had begun to dry up. Thus, there was an actual fall in the numbers engaged in manufacturing, the figure being reduced to 167,000 by 1974.

World recession in 1974-75 resulted in a pruning of their



An urban wasteland: The price of capitalism in decline.

operations by the major multinationals. These companies began to rationalise their production and branch factories in places like Northern Ireland were subjected to cutbacks. Northern Ireland was particularly vulnerable being remote from the major European markets. Since 1974 there has been a simultaneous and rapid contraction of both the older industries and the companies attracted in recent decades. By 1978 numbers employed in manufacturing had fallen to 140,000.

Even the relative upturn of the last three to four years has not cut across this process. In the first quarter of 1979 industrial output was lower than the same period in 1973. Production levels in manufacturing in 1978 were about the same as in 1971 - given a reduced workforce, this signifies a greater exploitation of labour. The new recession already opening up must have even more catastrophic consequences for all sectors of the economy.

A study of any of the major sectors of the economy reaffirms the conclusion that there is not a glimmer of hope of achieving any prolonged capitalist revival.

Small firms are especially vulnerable to any recession. NI's economy, above all the engineering sector, is largely dependent on small companies. There are only three engineering companies which now employ over 3,000 people. Over 70% of manufacturing firms employ fewer than 100 people.

Traditionally, the shipyards have been the major single employer. The once massive Harland and Wolfe yard is being reduced to a fraction of its former self. Its very existence is now threatened. Since the 1950s there has been a loss of some 25,000 shipbuilding jobs. Currently, the Harland and Wolfe management have persuaded the unions to accept a little under 2,000 redundancies and few people are foolish enough to believe that

these losses will close the chapter of contraction. Harland and Wolfe is now losing about £½ million per week and all the time the Tories are insisting that the concern be made viable.

The Shorts factory since the war the other pillar of NI industry, has not escaped its share of problems. No immediate threats of redundancies exist but the fact of a £10 million loss in its operations in 1979 serves as a warning for the future.

Aside from engineering, the textiles, food, drink and tobacco industries are the major industrial employers. Approximately 22% of the manufacturing workforce are employed in the textiles industry. Here the traditional linen industry faces virtual extinction. Meanwhile, the manufacturers of synthetic fibres, all branches of huge multinationals, are now in a precarious position indeed.

Courtaulds, for example, are in the process of trimming their workforce in NI with job losses in the region of 650. ICI are threatening to introduce drastic cuts in their workforce which has not been increased since 1973.

According to estimates produced by the **Financial Times** the 1970s saw the loss of one million jobs in the European man made fibre industry. Worse still, especially for Northern Ireland, is their projection of a further two million losses during the 1980s.

For those employed in the food, drink and tobacco industries the prospects are no better. Employers in the meat industry claim that without the subsidies of the Meat Employment Scheme, which amounts to some £40 million per year, the industry would immediately shed 3,500 jobs.

Prospects of jobs grim.

Even in cases with new investment this has more often than not been at the expense of jobs. Such has been the case with Carreras Tobacco plant, where a scheme for projected investment of £12 million was only on the basis of a 28% reduction in the labour force. Carreras began 1980 by giving their workers the choice of 400 redundancies or total closure. In the Gallagher's factory investment has again meant a loss of jobs.

Not alone is the manufacturing sector in decline. Currently, some 13.5% of the workforce are employed in agriculture or associated industries. In 1979 a **Financial Times** survey estimated that rationalisation of agriculture currently leads to a job loss of between 2,000 and 3,000 jobs each year. It predicted that, in total, there will be an eventual loss of 40,000 jobs through displacement of people from the land.

The same **Financial Times** survey offered a no less gloomy prospect for construction. It predicted that those employed in the industry would fall from the 1977 figure of 38,000 to below 32,000 by 1981.

Added to these problems is a population growth of 0.6% per annum, ten times the figure of the rest of the UK as a whole. Equally, the traditional safety valve of emigration is no longer as effective as in past decades. Young people might wish to emigrate to escape the dole queues, but as the economic crisis takes root internationally work prospects overseas must rapidly diminish. During the worst period of the recent troubles in NI, about 16,000 people left the province each year. Now the number is down to 7,000.

It has been estimated that to offset the job losses in traditional industries an additional 4,000 jobs per year must be created. In addition, the problems caused by the birthrate, the decline in emigration etc., make it necessary to create an additional 7,000 jobs each year.

1979 was an extremely successful year, relatively speaking, for job creation. Yet even if the fullest realisations of the various new projects announced were to take place less than 7,000 jobs would be created.

The total unviability of the economy is further revealed in the huge overdependence on the state sector. In 1973 over 50% of those in work were employed in service industries, most especially in public administration. By 1979 this figure had risen to an incredible 71%. Cuts in expenditure now threatens even the jobs in this sector, even those in the civil service which were in the past considered 'safe.'

Capitalist commentators, civil service planners, those in the NI region of the CBI, these people and others may dream of a distant economic revival. They may even succeed in persuading some trade union leaders to share their delusions. Facts speak for themselves. In truth, the notion of a vibrant private enterprise economy is a thing of the past. The faintly detectable heartbeat of the NI economy only manages the occasional beat on the basis of the massive stimulants it receives from the state in the form of grants, aid and investment. Even a future upswing in the world economy during the early 1980s will have little effect in Northern Ireland and most certainly will not offset the loss of jobs now an inherent feature of the collapse of existing industry. Nor will the possibility of aid from the EEC provide the 'salvation' hoped for in some quarters. If aid is given even the highest figures now being discussed would represent only a drop in the ocean of poverty.

One group of management consultants have summarised the gloom of capitalist commentators. Coopers and Lybrand, in a survey of the NI economy, project the possibility of an actual drop of 4% in the output of manufacturing industry in 1980. The social effects of this forecast would be unemployment in the region of 90,000 by the end of this year.

ICTU'S Economic Strategy

This is the background against which ICTU present their alternatives. Their doctrine of more state handouts to Big Business and of more grants and incentives, alongside co-operation with the employers in a State Development Consortium, is really a plea for larger doses of traditional medicine. State aid to industry is no new idea. It is the tried, tested and failed method of successive governments in achieving growth in NI..

In 1976 a major report on the economy was published by the Government. It was produced by a senior civil servant, Dr. Quigley. This 'Quigley Report' analysed openly the problems of the economy and explained the enormity of the task confronting strategists of economic growth. For example, and given a constant growth rate of some 3% which has not and will not be achieved, Quigley worked out that to reduce unemployment even to 7% by 1980 would require the creation of 40,000 new jobs. It is now 1980 and unemployment is 11% and could possibly rise to 17%!

Quigley's strategy was simple. There should, he said, be 'a heavily subsidised NI economy with the state playing a much greater role both direct and supportive.'

Through their 'Jobs - An Action Programme' ICTU have seized upon this strategy as their own. Yet a greater 'supportive role' for the state than that which already exists would be hard to imagine. At present, one third of the £100 million invested each year in domestic industry is provided by the Government. 45% of all manufacturing industry receives Government support. Unemployment is kept down to levels of 10%-11% only by extensive state schemes to subsidise wages etc. Some 76,000 jobs are dependent on the existence of the various job support schemes. For example, the Temporary Employment Subsidy, abolished by the Tories in their June 1979 budget, in the years 1977-78 and 1978-79, according to trade figures, maintained

over 37,000 jobs. In 1978-79 the combined cost of such schemes was in the region of £230 million.

And what was the result? The overall decline in employment was not even offset. Giles Shaw, Tory Industry Minister and himself an ex-director of Rowntree Mackintosh, summed up this wonderful record by stating during 1979: 'I'm bound to say that, over the years, we've lost more jobs than we've created by new investment,' and adding this hopeful rider, 'but the ultimate potential of this investment has yet to be reached.'

ICTU propose that the policy of luring new investment through grants and state subsidies be continued. Quite simply, this means the handing over of state money to international Big Business, as bribes to attract them to NI. Some trade union leaders have even allowed themselves to be paraded around the world along with industrialists and government representatives to tell the heads of the international monopolies of the 'disciplined and co-operative workforce' they will find in NI. Or put in the language which these capitalists will understand, that here is a province where they can get away with paying low wages without suffering the problem of strikes.

In the words of the Department of Commerce the grants offered to foreign investment are purposely made to be 'too good to refuse.' Under what they term the Negotiated Assistance Plan (NAP) assistance is given to the tune of 40%-50% of building and plant costs or an advance factory, rent free for five years, or a purpose built factory, free training facilities, £30 per week labour training subsidies on wages, up to 100% of the cost of transferring machinery, loans at concessionary rates of interest, Research and Development grants covering between 40%-50% of the cost of going from design to production. In addition, there are Energy Conservation Grants, offers to pay 75% of the wages of security staff, relocation grants - and so it goes on!

Santa Claus could not have devised a more generous means of giving state money to Big Business. Yet the Department of Commerce does not leave the matter there! Beyond the NAP grants they have a list of special companies for whom they reverse the tables. Instead of offering grants they hand the cheque-book over to these companies and ask them to fill in what additional assistance would they need to make it worth their while to invest in Northern Ireland!

The net result is that the tax payer provides the factory, helps develop and market the product, trains the labour, and even pays a portion of the wages of the workers. To the owners of the company is left the arduous task of walking away with the profit.

But it is not on grounds of moral indignation that these schemes should be chiefly opposed. The plain truth is that they do not work. Under capitalism, it is impossible to develop a region such as Northern Ireland. As testimony to this is the fact that despite the

accumulated attractions of state handouts, again according to figures given by ICTU, there are approximately 100 empty factories in the province.

Most especially during a period of recession all the grants in the world will not stimulate growth in a region like NI. Dangle a carrot in front of a tired donkey and you may persuade it to move. Increase the size and improve the flavour of the carrot and you increase your chances. But if the donkey is dead not even the largest and sweetest smelling of carrots will tempt it!

If in a period of economic expansion, as in the 1960s, a few companies did offer new investment, the result would be the construction of a paper thin fabric of economic development which would collapse at every new turn of the wheel of recession. To date, the incentive schemes have drawn a string of fly-by-night profiteers who have come forward with outstretched and open hands to accept the grants and then fled with high kicked heels when the incentives began to run out or when other economic factors made their stay unfavourable. There is already a Rogues Gallery of those who have come and gone in such a manner - Regna, BSR, Scan Candles, Donaghade Carpets, Ballantines, to name but some.

In almost every other case where handouts have been given there is a tale of scandal to be told - the full facts of which will only be known when all the books, records etc. of these companies are opened to the Trade Union Movement for its scrutiny. Below are a few examples based on what has so far come to light.

In 1973 Courtaulds announced the establishment of a factory in Derry. Of the projected £29 million to be invested the state was to supply £14.9 million. The cost per job to the state was to be £9,500. Yet even this generosity proved insufficient. By 1979 capital costs had so risen that the state was paying almost £22 million and the cost per job had risen to £14,500. All this was done in the name of job creation. Yet since 1978 Courtaulds have reduced their NI workforce by nearly 1,000.

Last year Hughes tools in Belfast announced the installation of new steel lathes at a cost of £80,000 each. Every worker knows that this concern is part of the multinational empire of the late millionaire Howard Hughes, and thus not exactly short of money. Yet a large part of this new investment was given by the Government. It has since been revealed that the result will be a loss of jobs in the plant.

ICTU's 'State Development Consortium' is not so novel an idea. It is simply a development of various industrial development bodies which have existed for some time and which have a record of failure which is exactly as long as their record of existence. Presently there is the Northern Ireland Development Agency

(NIDA).

NIDA has been given an annual sum of £50 million to use in the creation of new jobs. Almost half of its funds have gone to the much discussed De Lorean venture. It is worth quoting a few figures about this project because nothing could better illustrate the craven fawning of the State with its considerable gifts before every capitalist entrepreneur who comes within range.

John De Lorean has been offered a mere £52.5 million of Government funds as a 'small' incentive to persuade him to build his car factory at Dunmurry on the edge of West Belfast. The factory will produce a luxury sports car chiefly designed to compete on the American market. It is true that the Government will get a return on their gift to De Lorean. At £165 per car for the first 90,000 produced and then at £45 per car they will break even when Mr. De Lorean produces about 900,000 cars, were it not for such considerations as the rate of inflation over the next thirty years.

There are various estimates as to the cost to the state of providing each job in this factory. The most conservative estimates put this at about £25,000 per job.

What the Government did not mention when the De Lorean deal was announced was that the project had been rejected by a number of other countries and was no-where considered a financial proposition. The magazine 'Investors Chronicle,' with a gift for understatement, has commented: 'Whatever else the De Lorean project is, it is certainly not a commercial venture in the normally accepted sense of the word.'

Derry Trades Council, in their excellent document on unemployment 'Mass Unemployment Or the Right To Work,' quote a more explicit comment from the *Irish Times* (20/1/78): 'The car to be made in Belfast was designed in 1975 for the 1978 market and it may well be outdated by the time it is launched in 1980.' This document also quotes the many times more explicit advice given to investors by a Wall Street Auto analyst: '... that rather than invest in Mr. De Lorean's venture I tell my clients to put their money into wine, women and song. They'll get the same return and have more fun.'

If the pessimistic predictions for this plant are borne out the state will have handed out well over £50 million. Unemployment in West Belfast will not have been dented. And Mr. De Lorean will probably move his machinery and retire to the pleasures of his 25 private cars, his two ranches in Idaho and his avocado farm in California. Then, at his leisure, he can dream up some new money making scheme.

Aside from an extension of this 'supportive' role of the state ICTU, echoing the Quigley Report, favour direct state intervention. Both the experience of NIDA and of its predecessor, the NI Finance Corporation, should be enough to reveal the impossibility of building a tiny 'socialist' economy alongside

private enterprise.

Both these state bodies were and are undemocratic structures, devised from the first instance to act as props to private enterprise. Their every attempt to establish any separate state enterprise has been handicapped and sabotaged by the capitalists outside these bodies and by the hand picked servants of capitalism within them.

The Finance Corporation's attempt to create an entirely state owned company to manufacture hi-fi equipment, Strathearn Audio, collapsed in dismal failure. Its history is one of incompetence and, worse, of sabotage by the profiteers inside and outside the Finance Corporation who would have been alarmed at any successful state enterprise.

It is ironic that a deal has recently been concluded with a new company to fill the now empty Strathearn Audio factory building. The American Monitor Corporation, which in 1979 made an overall loss on its operations, has been induced to occupy this plant in order to produce medical equipment. 100% of the investment for this venture is to be provided by the Government. 250 jobs are to be created at a cost of £25,000 per job **at least**. If the enterprise is successful the American Monitor Corporation will pocket the profit. If it fails the loss will entirely be on the shoulders of the Government. As the Department of Commerce says of their incentives, 'too good to refuse.'

One other NIDA venture which has managed to sustain itself is the Viking Bicycle factory in Derry. An indication of the outlook of the people who have been appointed by the Government to such bodies as NIDA is given by recent changes in management level in this company. Its managing director is now a Mr. Henderson, the same Mr. Henderson who until accepting this post was the Chief Executive of NIDA!

No secret deals.

An elementary demand which trade unionists should now raise is an end to the secret negotiations with multi-national companies. All the wheeling and dealing of NIDA and its predecessors would be revealed. Let the trade union movement inspect all the correspondence, all the details of negotiations, with people like De Lorean. Then we would be guaranteed a true image of the corruption and the mismanagement of the resources of the state which is inevitable on the basis of capitalism.

To ask for a State Development Consortium, as ICTU are doing, is merely to request that a cosmetic covering of cream be added to the old foul mixture. A State Development Consortium would be nothing more than an expanded and perhaps rationalised NIDA. Even as proposed by ICTU it would be dominated by Tories and businessmen. Their document suggests that its board be one third appointed by the Government, one third by the CBI with the final third coming from the trade unions.

With capitalism sinking into crisis it could play no greater role than either NIDA or the NIEC. Even if it were to have powers to develop state industry it would meet with no greater success than did the Strathearn Audio idea. If it was given powers and moved in the direction of taking over private companies it would soon find itself ensnared and manacled by the opposition of the bosses. The fate of the British National Enterprise Board, which has been shrunk to a toothless wonder, is an illustration of the future of any such venture under capitalism.

If the Tories were to consider ICTU's proposals it would only be with the objective of drawing the trade union leaders closer to themselves and their intentions. ICTU's 'Jobs - An Action Programme' argues that the Development Consortium would work within the Government unit and would have 'overall responsibility for achievement of jobs target.'

In other words, the union tops are arguing for co-operation in such a body with the industrial saboteurs of the Tory Cabinet. Thatcher's 'job target' for NI in accord with her policies is 100,000 unemployed by the end of 1980! ICTU's time would be better and more instructively spent working out ways and means of fighting the Tories, not devising intricate schemes for economic co-operation. The one achievement of the State Development Consortium, or any such body in a capitalist context, would be to turn the trade union leaders into accomplices of Thatcher and her gang of axemen.

To the CBI and the Tories, trade union leaders who do a good job are those who most effectively act as policemen of their membership, patrolling the ranks to keep down unrest and avert strikes. It is time the trade union leaders made themselves aware of how their opponents like to use them. Hugh Kernohan, spokesman for the NI region of the CBI, has plainly spelt out his attitude to the role of union officials:

'The greatest single contribution that could be made towards creating employment in NI would be to raise our level of productivity, to bring about an improvement in our industrial relations, and to ensure that the trade union officials and the trade union agreements are respected by the workpeople.' Belfast Telegraph, March 18th 1977.

When the trade union leaders act determinedly in the interests of their members the bosses will not be so keen to have the workforce follow them!!

ICTU's second major proposal, the establishment of Trade Union Development Companies at local level, is more absurd than the Development Corporation. As an idea to solve the unemployment problem this is on the level of an attempt to drill a 20 foot tunnel through rock with a matchstick!

Again the strategy is for industrial co-operation. Trades Councils are urged to turn their energies to discussion with

Government Agencies, local businessmen and bankers. Joint enterprises set up by the unions and such people are proposed. They are asked to call meetings of local trade unionists, tenants' associations, small businessmen, shopkeepers and others, to begin the discussion on the formation of local companies. It is even envisaged that the unions should provide some of the initial capital for these ventures.

Trade Unions must fight.

One answer can be given to shatter such proposals - this is not what trade unions are for! Workers did not put their pennies into the building of separate organisations because they wanted to band together to offer suggestions to the capitalists for new industrial developments or because they wanted to become shareholders in local industry.

It is a utopian fallacy to think that the problems of capitalism can be resolved or even relieved by the building of local co-operatives. When such primitive ideas were experimented with over 100 years ago by figures such as Robert Owen in Britain, they invariably ended in collapse. During the 1960s the hippies thought that they could build their own alternative society and culture by opting out of the system. Their very rebellion was a reflection of the crisis of the system from which they could not possibly find an escape.

ICTU have become modern day economic 'hippies,' fooling themselves into the belief that havens of local co-operation can be created in local areas, where the storms of recession and of class struggle will not blow. It is a sorry delusion to imagine that an alternative economy of co-operatives can be lovingly formed by trade unionists and businessmen clasping each other's hands for the purpose.

Trades Councils have got limited resources which are already over-stretched in the fight to maintain the interests of their members against their enemies, locally, nationally and internationally. In face of the most vicious attack on living standards for decades they can ill afford the luxury of attempts to convert themselves into centres of local business.

They must organise to fight unemployment, to resist poverty, to campaign on questions of housing amenities and services, to fight against sectarianism, to oppose repression. Put plainly, they have better and more important things to do.

Overall, the time and the energy spent by trade unionists on such proposals as a State Development Consortium or Local Trade Union Development Companies would be far better saved and instead put into a campaign of mass action against the Government. Not co-operation with the Tories, but action to throw them out and their system along with them!

Mass Action And Socialist Policies

A fighting lead against the Tories is now required. All the energies of the Trade Unions should now be aimed at mobilising the full strength of the trade union movement to action. The unions cannot be in two different places, saying two different things at the same time. They cannot be leading an all out struggle against the Tories and against Big Business, and at the same time be sitting in the offices of Government ministers, bankers and industrialists polishing their doctrines of economic co-operation.

The Movement will be forced to make its choice. From the trade union ranks there must be raised the call for no co-operation with this bosses' Government and for the immediate launching of a campaign of action.

With the call for a Day of Action on April 2nd ICTU have made an important start. It is true that this call has only been issued hesitatingly and reluctantly by the Northern Ireland Committee, and only after repeated calls from their ranks. Nonetheless, this call marks an important step forward.

If it were organised properly, around a fighting class programme, prepared for by local meetings of shop stewards, of tenants' associations and mass meetings on the shop floor, April 2nd could be turned into a virtual half day General Strike. As such it would demonstrate beyond refutation the tremendous power of the organised working class. Huge marches of trade unionists in Belfast and elsewhere would do more in the space of a couple of hours to overcome religious division than all the calls for peace and unity issued during the last decade. One minute of the actual physical experience of workers' unity in action would far outweigh a year of the total propaganda of those who uphold this objective.

But one Day of Action, even if successfully organised, in itself will not be sufficient. It must be part of an ongoing campaign of meetings and demonstrations, of other forms of mass activity and, alongside the British Trade Unions, of a **ONE DAY GENERAL STRIKE**. Only the organised power of the trade unions, and only if mobilised in this manner, is capable of stopping the Tories in their tracks.

Under such a campaign Trades Councils and Action Committees could be established in all areas. The ranks of the unions would

be swelled with new and fresh blood. Working class unity would be established as a fact, just as it was during the class battles in the early decades of this century. 1980 could be made to tower over even the tremendous united struggles of the unemployed in Belfast in 1932 as a period of united class action. From such a position the trade unions would be able to use their strength to deal ruthlessly with each and every sectarian outrage and with every attempt to sow sectarian division into their ranks. A genuine struggle against all forms of state repression could also, for the first time, be conducted.

April 2nd could be a decisive turning point in the history of the working class - primarily because of the pressure of the trade union rank and file. Four years ago rank and file pressure was also responsible for a major initiative from the NIC. Strikes and demonstrations by Trades Councils pressurised them into launching what they called the 'Better Life For All Campaign.'

Beginning as a spontaneous expression of the anger felt by working people at repeated sectarian atrocities this campaign quickly broadened to encompass the problems of poverty and unemployment among its targets. For the first few months of 1976 it enjoyed enthusiastic support. An escalating campaign of mass action, most especially directed at the factories and workplaces and at the estates, would have drawn the support of tens of thousands of workers. The opportunity then, as now, existed to untie the ropes of sectarianism and to transform the character of the troubles.

This was not achieved. Instead of a bold programme of action the NIC leaders dithered and delayed. Over the course of months of discussions about action they managed to convince themselves that inactivity was the wisest course. Mass enthusiasm and support does not last forever. It requires something to grasp onto. Eventually, it waned and the Better Life For All Campaign withered into little more than a title.

Such a disaster must never be repeated. Sustained pressure from the organs of the trade unions, especially the Trades Councils, can this time ensure that the April 2nd demonstration is only the beginning of an escalating campaign, not an end.

Despite its title the 'Jobs - An Action Programme,' which has been adopted as the basis of the ICTU strategy, contains no reference to any action. Even on the issue of redundancies its advice to unions is, if anything, vague and half-hearted.

On the one hand it sternly warns: 'Trade union representatives, including full time officers and shop stewards, have a prime responsibility in any potential redundancy situation, to fight for the jobs.'

And then in the space of one line this roar of defiance becomes a squeak of submission through the qualification: 'Only if an employer insists on doing away with a job should the union be

prepared to discuss redundancy and severance pay.'

And what employer is not going to insist! January 1980 brought the announcement of 400 redundancies at the Carrerras factory. These jobs were lost as a result of new investment. Workers were offered 6% in payment for the improved productivity which would result from the new machinery. The AUEW members in the plant refused to accept this and were prepared to struggle to save the jobs.

At this stage the union full-time official, Jimmy Graham of the AUEW, also a leading figure in the Communist Party, intervened. Presumably the company must have 'insisted' on the redundancies because Graham cajoled the workers to accept management's offer. When the company said that either the redundancies must be accepted or the firm would close, Graham offered no other alternative to his members, organised a ballot and attained a narrow majority in favour of acceptance.

As the results of the vote were announced, he enthusiastically commented:

'While we are not satisfied with the terms which the company has offered, the union officials are pleased that the members have accepted their advice in this instance and did not throw the baby out with the bath water. We are delighted that the investment has been secured because it is investment that is the problem in Northern Ireland.'

Jimmy Graham's delight is hardly likely to be shared by the 400 men who, presumably, are the 'bathwater' whose jobs have been sacrificed.

If this were the full measure of the resistance which the union leaders were prepared to muster the Tories would have little to fear. Fortunately, the ranks of the movement already have, and increasingly will have, their say.

The Better Life For All Campaign was run from above by an unelected campaign council responsible only to themselves. No conferences were organised to work out the programme of the campaign. So at present there have been no representative meetings of the Trade Union Movement to discuss either the policies contained in the 'Jobs - An Action Programme' document or to hammer out a programme of action. Several meetings have been held, some of which have been called conferences. In reality, they have been no such thing. Delegations have been carefully arranged in most cases to involve only a section of the top layer of the unions. No resolutions or amendments have been permitted. Criticisms raised from the floor have been ignored.

This is not trade union democracy. Democratic discussion only exists if it is a means to the hammering out of agreed policies. What is now required is a genuine conference of elected delegates representing the rank and file of the Trade Union Movement, with the right to submit resolutions and amendments. From such a



Newry 1976: Workers protest against sectarian killings.

conference a programme of action could be worked out. Also, a set of demands to set before the workers of NI and an alternative programme to that of the Tories could be agreed.

Because it provides no answer to the problems of the economy, because it outlines no form of action for the movement to take, and because it has not been the subject of any democratic discussion, the 'Jobs - An Action Programme' document should be rejected. Trade Union branches, Trades Councils and other sections of the movement should pass resolutions, rejecting it and demanding a conference of the entire movement following rank and file conferences and meetings at local level, through which an alternative socialist programme could be adopted.

A fighting programme, with clear demands and bold mass action - these are the two sides of the answer which the unions must present to the Tories. One without the other is insufficient. A programme in the briefcase of the trade union officials means little. Similarly action without clear objectives is insufficient. To the sturdy blade of mass agitation must be added the cutting edge of socialist demands.

Already, successive ICTU conferences have passed resolutions which could become the kernel of a programme for a campaign against the Tories. The unions are already committed by policy decision to a **35-hour week** with no loss in pay, **and to a minimum wage tied to the cost of living.**

Such demands could be linked to calls for a **crash house building programme, a freeze on rents, work or full pay, work sharing with no loss in pay instead of redundancies, a programme of useful**

public works, a restoration of all the cuts and increased state expenditure on health, education, social services based on need, for an end to sectarianism, for the removal of all repressive legislation and end to repression.

This programme, if tied to the need for socialist planning on the basis of state ownership of industry, would offer an immediate attraction to workers. It would demonstrate the need for Catholics and Protestants to stand together against sectarianism. It would also show the need to oppose repression as, in the final analysis, a weapon in the hands of the bosses for use against the Labour Movement both in Britain and in Ireland.

Not one of the basic objectives of workers - for shorter hours, decent wages or decent housing - can be met under capitalism. The analysis of Northern Ireland's economy allows only one conclusion - that private enterprise is not capable of developing the economy. A capitalist future means poverty and unemployment. It means that for a large section of the generation now being educated in the schools and colleges the future choice is between the dole, dead end work or emigration.

Sometimes a conclusion is so clear it comes difficult for some people to see. As regards the economy, ICTU have drawn almost every other conclusion except that which most clearly presents itself. Still they argue in terms of discovering ways of developing capitalism, of state subsidies, incentives and even of co-operatives.

This package of economic suggestions should be returned to the NIC unopened and a different answer demanded - socialist policies. Private enterprise has failed. Northern Ireland's handicaps of geographical isolation, lack of raw materials, high and soaring energy costs, outweigh the counterweight of government hand outs.

Instead of co-operation with Big Business, ICTU's programme should be for the nationalisation of the key industries, of the banks and of the insurance companies. Thus, the total resources of state could be in the hands of the state. Investment and growth could be planned - on the basis of need, not profitability. Genuine planning and genuine industrial development would become possible.

Instead of proposing state enterprises dominated by Tories and businessmen nationalised industries and planning bodies should be placed under the democratic management of the working class. The boards of the various industries should be one third filled by representatives of the trade unions within the industries concerned, one third coming from the Trade Union Movement as a whole, with the Government being allocated the final third of the seats. In this way, and with representatives subject to recall by those who elect them, industry could be democratically managed. Both the need for central planning and also the specific interests of workers in a particular industry would be catered for.

For A Labour Party

A socialist programme merely to be shouted at the institutions of political power by the massed ranks of the trade unions assembled outside is not enough. Socialist demands themselves express the need for a political organisation which can carry them into the intentions of government.

For a decade the trade unions in Northern Ireland have presented themselves as non-party political. Trade Union leaders have stubbornly defended their contention that their movement is somehow 'above politics!' With the unions forced to retreat in the face of sectarianism, with little activity in most of the Trade Union branches, this aloof stance has been maintained with great difficulty.

This rejection of political action by many sections of the union ranks has been understandable. Seeing their movement in retreat, fearing for the unity even of the unions themselves, and witnessing politics reduced to the conflict of bigots many activists have consciously turned their backs on political action wishing to dig in and preserve trade union unity.

A mistake, which is understandable, is no less a mistake. The trade union movement is political. Every form of industrial action has as its shadow a form of political action. A man who attempted to erase his shadow with a rubber would find that even the shadow would mock his efforts. It is no more possible for the unions to dissolve the political side of their activity.

Only the relative inactivity of the past few years has partially disguised this fact in Northern Ireland. With a renewed campaign of mass agitation the need for political action must become so clear as to penetrate even the eyes of the blind. The more successful the campaign against the Tories, the larger the demonstrations, the broader the support, in the end, will make political activity all the more inevitable. It will even stalk into the offices and meetings of the NIC.

Mass demonstrations against cuts in expenditure, against unemployment etc., are demonstrations against the policies of the Government. They are political demonstrations. No matter whether or not they are labelled so by their organisers they are political.

To ask the Tories to increase living standards, improve social services, provide jobs, nationalise industry is to ask the lion to become a lamb. The Tories can only act as the representatives of

the bosses. A campaign against the policies of this Government is also a campaign against the Government itself. Days of Action, one day General Strikes must have the objective of unseating the Government.

If on the one hand the trade union leaders in Northern Ireland argue that 'no - we are only campaigning to persuade Thatcher to change her mind' we can only reply that they are worse than naive. If, on the other hand, they say the Tories must be removed from office they must also answer a straightforward question - 'who or what should replace them?'

To this question the pretence of being 'non-political' is no defence. If thousands of workers are asked to struggle to oust a government they will not accept a mute shrug of the shoulders in response to the question: 'Who should we vote for as an alternative?' The question will be asked and it will demand an answer.

In Britain the trade union movement have the alternative of fighting for the return of a Labour Government and they have the opportunity within the Labour Party to continue the fight to force this party and Government to adopt and implement socialist policies. In Northern Ireland trade unionists have no such choice. During elections they can take their pick from a variety of Orange Tories under different labels, a choice of Green Tories between the SDLP and the IIP, or else the non-sectarian, almost literally colourless Tories of the Alliance Party.

At Westminster the Unionist MPS sit on the Tory benches. Most have been loud and vocal in their support for Thatcher's policies. Enoch Powell, Unionist MP for South Down, has, for example, spoken at great length and with great enthusiasm in favour of public expenditure cuts. Offering his 'support and encouragement to the Government' for their policy which he waited for 20 years to hear so 'firmly and clearly outlined,' Powell in supporting the cuts of December 1979, offered a prospect of years of restraint:

'The Government has undertaken a policy which requires to be persevered with over a series of years. It will levy its costs - which the whole nation has to bear for what has been ill done, before the benefits are visible or are reaped.'

At the end of this debate on the White Paper of cuts all the Official Unionist MPs - Powell, Mc Cusker, Ross, Bradford, and Molyneaux - stomped into the Tory lobby.

This is not to say that the other MPs voted with the opposition. Paisley, Robinson, McQuade (DUP) and Independents Fitt and Maguire did not even find the issue of sufficient importance to bother even turning up!

All the major political parties in Northern Ireland are either sectarian or conservative and in most cases they are both. In the final analysis these parties will take the side of reaction. They are the enemies of the trade union movement. Mostly,

their political existence depends on the continued division of the working class into sectarian voting blocs. Thus, they have a vested interest in the preservation and development of bigotry.

A campaign against the Tories could be nothing other than a campaign against these parties and their representatives. It must be a fight for the unity of the working class, which must entail the political unity of workers. It would be nothing short of irresponsible to draw thousands of workers into industrial battle against the Tories and then withdraw from the political contest, leaving these same workers as prey for the sharks of political bigotry and right wing reaction.

If the trade unions can achieve the industrial unity of the working class they can also forge political unity. A party of Labour, basing itself on the demands and programme of the unions in struggle, could quickly develop in Northern Ireland. It is only the natural political extension of the everyday struggles of workers.

Like the need for socialist solutions the arguments in favour of political action are unanswerable. Yet the NIC, to date, have managed to escape this conclusion.

Fight sectarianism.

Just as in terms of economic solutions they strive here and there in search of anything to put forward instead of socialism, so on the question of political action they are raising any alternative no matter how bizarre in order to obscure from their sight the only course which is really open.

Their 'Jobs - An Action Programme' rather than proposing independent trade union action argues for the inclusion of state bodies, District Councillors, MPs and other such 'dignitaries.'

With such people they suggest joint action! Ballymena Council is controlled by the DUP. The last major controversy raised by these human relics of a past age was their proposal that the 'atheistic' theories of Darwin be banned from school curriculums. And ICTU propose discussions with such people!

A meeting of trade unionists was held in January 1980 in Belfast. Its purpose was to further discuss the Jobs document. To this gathering, apart from tenants and community groups who undoubtedly have a contribution to make, were invited all the local Councillors in NI, all NI representatives at Westminster and in the European Parliament, and representatives from a host of state and semi-state bodies.

The Labour and Trade Union Group placed a successful picket outside this meeting in protest at the inviting of such people. Inside, Labour and Trade Union Group speakers were warmly received when they severely criticised the presence and role of the existing political parties.

In reality, the political parties showed their real contempt for the trade union movement by their non-attendance. In all, two

MPs turned up. Apart from this, a tiny handful of District Councillors presented themselves. Had the effort spent by ICTU in attempting to attract such individuals been turned to circulating propaganda about the meeting among the broad membership of the unions, it would have been used to better purpose.

To sit down with your enemies and discuss how you can fight against these same enemies is not much of a strategy! No school boy would propose it! Workers on a strike committee would scarcely consider inviting the management and bosses to help advise them during their meetings. It would be regarded as a ludicrous proposition to suggest that the British TUC invite the Tory Cabinet to help them draw up plans to resist the Tory policies.

Ludicrous it may be - but that is precisely what ICTU have done in the equivalent circumstances of Northern Ireland. They invited the MPS who voted for the cuts to help them devise a strategy to oppose the cuts! They are prepared to sit down with all those political figures who in 1977 led the abortive sectarian UUAC stoppage and thereby attempted physically to smash the unity of the trade union movement!!

To make a mistake once is bad. But, provided it is corrected, it is forgivable. To compound the mistake and enshrine it as a strategy is unforgivable. Recent indications are that sections of the trade union leadership have learnt nothing and corrected nothing from the experience of their January meeting. Some spokesmen for the NIC have continued to discuss in terms of 'broad action' and of 'joint discussions with other groups!'

Even the Communist Party, which would claim to stand on the left of the movement, but which in practice generally merely echoes the policies of the NIC, offer excuse after excuse for union inaction, and is prepared to grovel and prostrate itself ever more openly in front of Northern Ireland's array of political bigots.

Arguing for a Day of Action and demonstrations 'within the next few months' the CP's Deputy General Secretary in its Northern newspaper, **Unity** (19/1/1980) argues: 'Such meetings and the demonstration itself should be aimed at mobilising support from tenants bodies, community organisations, small farmers associations, small businessmen's bodies, local councillors, MPs, students organisations and political parties.'

The attitude should be: 'If you are not against us, then we will work to gain your active support.'

By the beginning of this century the trade union movement in Britain and Ireland had rejected the possibility of depending on capitalist parties. The formation of the Labour Representation Committee and the Taff Vale decision in Britain opened the way to the development of Labour as an independent force.

In 1912 the Congress of the Irish Trade Union Movement at Clonmel passed a resolution moved by James Connolly which called for the establishment of a Trade Union based Labour Party

in Ireland.

These steps were only taken by the trade unions after the experience of bitter struggles. Today, the NIC leaders, and even the Communist Party, prefer to forget the lessons of such struggles. By erasing the experiences of the movement over almost 100 years they are turning the clock back to the pre-history of trade unionism.

Even in the last century in Britain, and during the 'dark days' of 'lib-labism' at the beginning of this century, few trade unionists would seriously have advocated the disbandment of 'Labour' as a separate identity in favour of joint action between the unions, the Liberals and the Tories. Then the more backward and timid ideas which existed within the movement were reflections of, and found their justification in, the relatively weak position of the working class within society. Yet today, when the working class have emerged as the single strongest force in society, the policies of the union leaders have retreated back even beyond those of Labour's most formative years. Even the so-called Communist Party are advocating that political parties, and this must include the ultra-bigoted and reactionary DUP and IIP, be invited to participate in trade union demonstrations.

'If you are not against us, you are with us.' This cringing motto is the CP's justification for their policy. But how often have bigots like Paisley made noises about redundancies and about unemployment generally - only in order to foster the pretence that he represents the interests of workers. **The Labour Movement is capable of deciding for itself who its enemies are.** And in their number stand people like Paisley and the entire brood of Tories and bigots who make up the major parties.

How ironical it is that only two and a half years ago, during the UUAC Stoppage of May 1977, the union leaders, including the Communist Party, were busy denouncing the 'Fascist minded people' organising that abortive stoppage. Correctly, they then urged workers to stand firm and fight such people. Trade unionists responded magnificently. They suffered the threats of the thugs. They even suffered the death of one of their number, busman Harry Bradshaw, murdered by bigots at the wheel of his bus.

Now these 'Fascist minded people' are to be offered right of place in Trade Union meetings and demonstrations. If a doctor were to prescribe arsenic as a cure for the cold only a very foolish patient would take the advice. Similarly, the political arsenic prescribed by the union leaders only deserves to be vomited aside.

The Tories are attempting to turn the clock back to the last century. Their efforts will not be resisted by the use of forms of struggle which the early pioneers of the trade union movement, on the basis of their experience, learned to reject. At this point in time the single greatest challenge facing the trade unions in Northern Ireland is the need to build independent political

representation and to reject the strategy of unity with the enemies of the Labour Movement.

Not once, but repeatedly, the working class of Northern Ireland have moved towards the building of a political party of their own. Their fight to do so has been waged since before the establishment and throughout the existence of the Northern Ireland state.

Even before the turn of this century the most advanced sections of the working class understood that they could not rely on the capitalist parties. In 1898 Belfast Trades Council contested the local elections in the city and won no less than six seats. This, at a time when internationally the idea of independent workers representation was at a formative stage. Yet, in the most recent local election held in Belfast in May 1977, not one candidate standing as a representative of Labour was elected!

Again in 1920, in the wake of the huge convulsions of the 1919 Engineering Strike, Labour candidates swept forward at the polls. No less than 13 Labour Councillors were returned. Among them were the most prominent of the leaders of the 1919 strike. Protestant and Catholic working class areas, alike, voted for Labour.

By the 1950s and 1960s the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) had developed as the most likely potential mass party of the working class. It had active trade union affiliation and had become the second major party in the state. Able to return four MPs to Stormont, it was poised to present a class challenge to Unionists and Nationalists. For example, in the Westminster election of 1970, after a period of decline for the NILP, it still managed to attract a total of 100,000 votes.

Yet only a matter of nine years later, in the 1979 General Election, the total vote of all the candidates of what remains of this party was 4,411.

Labour in Northern Ireland has continually striven to break through the restraints of political bigotry. Time after time it has come to within a few breaths of accomplishing this - but each time, only to fall back into retreat for a period.

Generally, it has been the failure of the leaders of Labour, and with them most of the trade union leaders, which has been responsible for this. In its formative years Labour politics was handicapped by its youth, immaturity and the relatively under-developed independent strength of the working class. In recent decades these have not been the factors providing obstacles to its growth. The crisis of Labour in Northern Ireland has more and more distilled itself to a crisis of the leadership of Labour.

Between 1968-70 the then Northern Ireland Labour Party was looked to enthusiastically by many thousands of workers, especially the youth. At the time of the first mass agitation for Civil Rights, Labour's supporters and also the mass of the trade union ranks looked expectantly to the Labour chiefs and the union

tops. From these people there came nothing - no independent class lead, no socialist demands, no clear calls for class unity, no advice on action on the issue of civil rights itself.

By this action, or more accurately inaction, a tremendous opportunity was lost. Workers were left to the eager clutches of bigots, Orange and Green. The advanced sections of the working class were disorientated. Quickly, this reflected itself in a falling away of support from Labour and a decline in Trade Union activity.

There followed the blackest period in the history of the working class in Northern Ireland. Against a background of mass poverty and unemployment the workers had to endure the problems of sectarian violence. For almost a decade a mood of despair was hung over the organisations of the working class. Meanwhile, bigots, religious zealots and paramilitary thugs were able to dominate political life and also exert a vice like control of fear on many working class areas.

During these years the NILP did not correct its mistake of 1968-70. Rather, they swung from one disastrous policy to another, compounding folly with even greater folly. Instead of a class lead against sectarianism, against poverty and against repression, they came out in support of the repressive measures of the state - even giving passive support, through acquiescence, to internment. Politically their call, rather than for the emergence of a strong Labour Movement, was for a coalition of the centre or, as they put it, a Community Government.

Effectively, their stand during the early 1970s was to back the actions of the Tory Heath administration at Westminster. A further falling away of support and the disintegration of sections of the party apparatus was the result. Having got the tips of their fingers burnt in the amber of 'Community Government' they thrust their whole fist into the roaring flames of sectarianism.

During 1974, and for a period thereafter, the policy of the NILP was one of open, unashamed bigotry.

Lacking any faith in the ability of workers to stand together they decided that they would seek their support among the Protestant working class. Rather than challenge sectarianism they embraced it, discarding all pretence of socialism in favour of outright 'loyalist' propaganda. They became an echo of loyalist politicians, and even of the loyalist paramilitaries.

In May 1974 the reactionary and sectarian Ulster Workers Council toppled the power-sharing Government. They did so from a viciously reactionary position, and in such a manner that it seriously challenged the unity of the working class and the ability of the trade unions to maintain their support and membership. The NILP, to their perpetual disgrace, gave enthusiastic support to the UWC bigots.

This action, more than any other, removed the NILP from the traditions of Labour. After 1974 this Party, by then a tiny rump,

could not have been said to represent a carrying forward of the traditions of Labour in Northern Ireland. Following the UWC stoppage those genuine socialists still within the NILP ranks, along with a section of the trade union leadership, formed the organisation now known as the Labour and Trade Union Group. (LTUG).

Over the recent years the basis of the LTUG's propaganda has been the call for the trade unions to build a Labour Party in Northern Ireland. No Labour Party today exists. Nor is there any single group which could be developed into a genuine mass party of the working class.

The NILP is virtually extinct. Of the other smaller parties which claim to stand on the left there are none which could develop into a political expression of the unions. The Republican Clubs, now with the words 'The Workers Party' added to their title, are no such thing. Politically, this group has moved more and more to the right in recent years. From a genuine organisation with support in the Catholic ghettos it has shrunk in both size and influence. But the key obstacle to its growth is the fact that it has always been, and remains, a party with support only on one side of the sectarian divide. There is not the remotest chance that the Republican Clubs could develop as a force with influence among Protestant workers.

Conference of Labour needed.

Other even smaller groups have recently pronounced themselves to be 'the new Labour Party.' But they are only committing a grand self-delusion. Groups of a few dozen individuals who describe themselves as a Labour Party create nothing but a lavish title. Even the Labour and Trade Union Group, with its network of extremely active branches throughout the North, with its support among trade unionists and with its highly successful Youth For Socialism Campaign, could not, at this stage, form a Labour Party.

A Labour Party is the political wing of the Trade Union Movement. It is another weapon which workers can wield, alongside their trade union power, in the fight against capitalism. It must be created by the working class themselves, through their trade union organisations. Above all, it must be able to attain the active support and affiliation of the mass of unions.

For these reasons the Labour and Trade Union Group have raised the call for a **Conference of Labour** in order to form a Labour Party. This demand has been levelled at the leaders of ICTU. It is the most critical demand of the present period.

A Conference of all trade unions, of Trades Councils, of union branches, of shop stewards' committees, of tenants and community groups and of those Labour organisations who base themselves on the trade union movement, if it were preceded by a

full discussion within the ranks of the Labour Movement, could succeed in the establishment of a trade union based party of Labour.

The opportunities for the growth and development of such a party are immense. The trade unions are united, the scars of defeat inflicted by the UWC in 1974 are largely healed. On the other hand, all the paramilitary organisations who have held sway in the ghettos for years are in crisis and decline.

Crisis also afflicts all the major political parties. 'Unionism,' from the rock like monolith of the first fifty years of the NI State, now only exists in a seemingly perpetual process of split, fusion and redivision. The Catholic based Social Democratic and Labour Party has begun to break apart. Those of its original leaders who could lay claim to some element of a Labour tradition, Paddy Devlin and to a slight extent Gerry Fitt, have broken with this grouping of 'Green Tories.'

Without doubt, the most general attitude of people to all these parties is one of scepticism, disillusionment and opposition. Above all, the youth have no respect for the old parties. Without exception the ranks of these organisations are completely empty of young people, who are seeking a more radical alternative.

Yet the paradox is that these remains of political organisations, these electoral machines comprised of out-dated politicians still manage to dominate political life. Despite all, the European election was turned into a sectarian headcount between Paisley on the one side and Hume of the SDLP on the other.

The explanation for this lies simply in the fact that for workers there exists no political alternative for which to vote. If the election is a contest simply between one or other breed of Tories, workers will not break from their traditional voting patterns. When the alternative to a vote for a Protestant bigot is an increase in the likelihood of a Catholic bigot being elected, Protestant workers will remain inclined to vote for 'their side.' As James Connolly once explained in relation to the refusal of Protestants to support the middle class nationalists and their preference for Unionists, it is a case of 'Better the devil you know...' Precisely the same applies to the outlook of Catholic voters as well.

The creation of a Labour Party would break this deadlock. It would provide a class alternative which would split asunder both the Unionist and the various Catholic based parties. Among the active sections of the trade union movement there is a growing thirst for such a development.

Were a Labour Party formed it would not be a question of a handful of trade unionists coming together. In every area of the Province there are dozens, even hundreds, of workers who would be prepared not only to join but be active in such an organisation. There are thousands more who would be prepared to join.

Given the new pitch of class struggle which is signalled by the



Training in NI for the future industrial battles in Britain.

April 2nd strike, given the attacks of the Tories, given the aroused rage of the working class, a party of Labour fighting on socialist policies could not fail to immediately develop and extend a huge periphery of support. From a Conference of Labour, following a full discussion throughout the unions, it would be an immediate step to the setting up of a network of branches throughout the North.

In the absence of such a party the Labour and Trade Union Group have been campaigning in working class areas and among the youth, attempting to attract people to socialist ideas. In 1979 the group launched its highly successful 'Youth For Socialism' Campaign. Leafletting factories, schools, dole queues, GTCs, rock concerts etc., the ideas of the Campaign were spread, and they received an overwhelming response. Not a hint of sectarianism was to be found in the reaction of young people to this socialist propaganda. Within the space of a few weeks the campaign, in Belfast alone, had received inquiries from about 100 young workers.

This is only a tiny indication of the response which a Labour Party, with the greater resources of the unions at its disposal, would receive. Were it to campaign boldly, through a Youth Section, it could win the majority of this entire generation of youth. In so doing it would be performing the greatest possible service to the cause of class unity. The youth have always provided the recruits for the paramilitaries. Labour could mop up this reservoir of support by offering young people an organisation through which to direct their struggles.

The Border

Many workers accept the need for a Labour Party and also acknowledge the potential support it would have. But one nagging uncertainty remains in their minds. 'Labour has always collapsed when the bogey of the Border is raised.' This is a genuine and also a common doubt which restrains workers from fighting all out on this issue. Especially it is a doubt held by older activists who have participated in the building of Labour in the past, only to see political bigots trample on their efforts.

Without a doubt, bigotry would be used as a weapon to divert workers from supporting a socialist party. Obviously, a Labour Party threatening their influence would be treated to the venom of Paisley and of his Green Tory counterparts. Also, the role of British Imperialism would be coloured by such a development.

When the working class has been united and has engaged in a struggle to change society the British ruling class has traditionally resorted to the tactic of 'Divide and Rule.' They partitioned the country primarily to divide the working class in Ireland along religious lines and also to drive a wedge between the workers of Britain and the Irish Labour Movement.

British Imperialism created and fostered religious division in order to prevent a common struggle in this century, a struggle of the working class against capitalism. Over the past ten years Imperialism has been at pains to reduce the influence of sectarianism. They would have preferred to scrap the border and allow a capitalist united Ireland to emerge. Such a strategy proved impossible and the very weapon of bigotry actually grew to proportions which became almost unmanageable. In order to prevent a civil war in the North the British ruling class was forced to intervene and for ten years have spent their main effort in an attempt to 'stabilise' the situation.

Massive class upheavals, and especially the growth of a powerful political arm of the unions which proved capable of uniting workers around socialist policies, would cause the British ruling class to rethink their position.

Once again, they would cultivate the division between workers in order to derail the forces of Labour. Alongside this policy of division would undoubtedly go an increase in the uses of state repression against the working class. These methods, which are today directed almost exclusively against the paramilitary organisations, would be used against the Labour Movement.

It is quite true that the forces of Labour have never fully

managed to overcome sectarianism in Northern Ireland. In this sense the doubts expressed by some activists are not difficult to understand. But it is not true that past failures have been mainly due to the activities of the bigots! **There are no solid grounds for the fear that a new movement to class politics would be smashed on the issue of the Border.**

Despite all the difficulties posed by sectarianism over the past sixty, and particularly the past ten, years the all-Ireland unity of the trade union movement has been maintained. Even in 1974, when the UWC attempted to mount a campaign for the splitting of the unions and the creation of an Ulster TUC, their efforts met with miserable failure. The preservation and the strengthening of the unity of ICTU has been a magnificent achievement.

In general the failure of Labour in Northern Ireland has been far more due to the mistakes made by Labour leaders than to handicaps placed in its path by bigots or by the state. Above all, this has been the case in the period from the 1940s until the present time.

The Northern Ireland Labour Party could have overcome political sectarianism. They failed, not primarily because of the weight of the forces opposing them, but because their leaders refused to challenge these forces. When, during the 1940s, the issue of the constitution was raised the Labour leaders entirely abandoned their independent class position and joined the camp of Unionism. By so doing they actually split their party in 1949. At a party conference held that year they pressed through a resolution affirming their loyalty to the NI State. For this craven submission to the Unionists they were rewarded with a drastic fall in their support.

Similarly, the entire history of the collapse of the NILP during the 1970s tells the same story. As the leaders of this party discarded all pretence of socialism and joined the camp of Unionism they succumbed to the pressures of sectarianism and suffered annihilation at the polls as a result.

The history of Labour in Ireland from its earliest development holds one lesson above all others: when Labour stands firm on its ideas and offers a clear socialist alternative it can develop. Thus it was that Labour swept ahead at the polls during the industrial upheavels of 1906-7 and 1919-20, when class issues were to the forefront. But when it attempts to water down its independent class programme only its opponents stand to gain. If Labour becomes a mild version of Nationalism the Nationalist groups are the ones to gain. Likewise, when Labour attempts to out-Unionist the Unionists workers react by simply choosing the real Unionists.

The best answer to the cry which will come from various bigots about the border would be a stepping up of the fight for the basic demands of the trade union movement and the working class - a 35-hour week, a minimum wage, socialist policies, an end to

sectarianism and repression and so on. By refusing to budge from such policies it would be possible to demonstrate to workers the real reasons why the bosses and their political parrots attempt to whip up religious divisions.

From a class stance on such issues a socialist position on the border could be adopted. On a capitalist basis, Ireland will never be united. To the cost of those people who gave them support the experience of the Provisionals helps demonstrate this fact. Unification with a capitalist Republic could never be an attractive proposition to the Protestants in the North.

On the other hand the NILP's position of embracing the border with both arms has only had the effect of placing Labour in the camp of the reactionaries and has, in fact, left it in the position of assisting sectarianism.

In reality, the struggle for socialism in Ireland, North and South, is one struggle. It would be impossible to conceive of a socialist Northern Ireland divided from a socialist Southern Ireland by a frail and artificial line on a map.

The reunification of the country on a socialist basis would only be an extension of the unity in struggle of the working class, North and South. Put in this manner, not posed as a sectarian and divisive issue, the question of the border can be faced by Labour, North and South.

A Conference of Labour in NI, and from it the development of a Labour Party, would be the first significant step towards the reunification of Labour in Ireland for decades. When, after 1912, the unions accepted the need for a political voice there technically existed one Labour Party throughout Ireland. Partition, while it did not succeed in dividing the trade unions, did manage to separate the forces of Labour, North and South.

During the coming months and years the struggles of the working class in the North will not only develop in tune with similar struggles in Britain, they will also draw closer together with the class battles taking place in the South.

Already the Southern workers have moved into action. The disastrous policy of the Labour Party leaders of Coalition with Fine Gael has been broken for the time being. Labour has been set on an independent course and from within the Labour Party the demand for socialist policies is gaining support. Linked to the explosive mood of the working class the possibility of Labour becoming the dominant force in society is now opening up. Were there a majority Labour Government committed to socialist policies in office in the South, the entire question of partition and the attitude of all workers in the North, Protestant and Catholic, would be very different indeed.

Also, the tremendous General Strikes held on the issue of PAYE have demonstrated the power and also the fighting spirit of the working class. Already in Dublin and on this issue ICTU has

organised the biggest demonstration of organised Labour ever held in Ireland. The January 22nd General Strike marks a new era of Irish politics - an era of unprecedented class warfare.

It will be the task of socialists, North and South, to draw together the common struggle against capitalism in both parts of the country. Concretely, the socialist re-unification of the country means firstly the unity in struggle of Catholic and Protestant workers in the North and then of the working class, North and South. Joint action behind socialist policies alone could overcome the scar of division which has been cemented by partition.

From the outset a Labour Party in the North would need to develop the closest ties with the Southern Labour Party. A Council of Labour in Ireland, with representatives from both organisations and from the trade unions, would need to be established. Over the course of the coming class upheavals this council would have the task of organising joint action, North and South, physically bonding workers together and thereby preparing for the unification of Labour in Ireland through the creation of an all-Ireland Labour Party.

An all-Ireland Labour Party, based on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, would be an historic blow to the bigots in the North and their Southern counterparts. By maintaining and strengthening the special links with the British Trade Unions and the British Labour Party it would be able to forge a unity in common struggle such as has never before been seen. For very good reason all the various shades of Toryism - Orange, Green, Blue and also those with a Tartan complexion in Scotland - would look with fear to such a development.

The responsibility to begin this struggle lies now with ICTU. April 2nd is a first step. But it must be followed by further action. This mass campaign must be sharpened by a clear programme of socialist demands. Above all, a political voice for the Trade Unions must be created.

As the struggle against the Tories intensifies the issue of an election will more clearly be posed. It would be a disaster for the working class of Northern Ireland if they rose in their thousands to unseat this government but then had no party representing their interests for which to vote. While it is unlikely that any agreement will be reached between the Tories and the political parties during the present discussions at the so-called Atkins initiative, the possibility of an election to some watered down regional assembly being held cannot be ruled out. In addition, the next Local Government elections are due to be held in 1981. **For the development of a Labour Party, time is not, therefore, unlimited.**

Leaders of the NIC have many times responded to demands from Labour and Trade Union Group members for political action by stating that the issue is 'under discussion.' In 1976 it was said to be 'under discussion' and once again this is the case. But during

these years the 'discussion' has not progressed to action.

Trade unionists cannot be expected to wait forever. If and when elections, both local and national, are held they have a right to demand action. If the NIC as a whole do not respond in the immediate period there would be nothing to stop an individual trade union, a major Trades Council or Trades Councils or even a large union branch from itself convening a Conference of the movement to discuss political action. Equally, in the absence of a lead from ICTU, there are no restraints on individual Trades Councils preventing them contesting elections in their areas and forming local Labour Parties for this purpose. Such actions would be a spur, perhaps a necessary spur, to the Northern Ireland Committee to move on the issue.

At the end of the 1960s the Labour Movement in Northern Ireland had an opportunity to develop into the key force within society. The opportunity was missed - with disastrous consequences.

Today, a fresh and much greater opportunity has opened up. It is up to the ranks of the trade unions to ensure that this time it is not missed.

For the working people of Northern Ireland there are only two alternatives. A movement can be developed, industrial and political, which can successfully offer a socialist challenge to capitalism and to sectarianism. Or, if this is not achieved, there will be a drastic driving down of living standards, the destruction of the Welfare State and the increased use of state repression to bind and shackle the organisations of the working class.

Either the youth of today will be won to the fight to overthrow this rotten society - or else over a period sections of this youth will be demoralised and the basis for a resurgence of sectarianism, encouraged by the bosses, will be laid. Almost every factor in the situation weighs in the favour of united action by the Labour Movement. But not for ever will this be the case. If opportunity after opportunity for class action continues to be tossed aside the working class of Northern Ireland will be made to pay a terrible price.

The greater opportunity presented today also carried in its tail the sting of even more horrific retribution if not accepted. Peace and stability are no longer reconcilable with the existence of capitalism. In Northern Ireland, in the South of Ireland, in Britain and internationally the present epoch presents before humanity, and specifically before the organisations of the working class, the stark choice - either a successful struggle to change society or else untold disaster. Given the power of the workers' movement in Ireland, as elsewhere, if it can be given a bold leadership and a socialist programme, it will become invincible.

Title: Tory Cuts: Common Misery, Common Struggle

Organisation: Labour Trade Union Group

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Date: 1980

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