

CHARTIST

LABOUR'S REVOLUTIONARY VOICE No. 5 FEBRUARY 1973 4p

Behind the Economic Crisis

A QUESTION OF POWER



WITH SHARE-PRICES tumbling, investors panicking and the survival of the whole capitalist system in Britain depending on the outcome of the struggle with the unions, the hour of decision for the Tory Government is approaching fast.

December's trade deficit was a massive £93M. The deficit for the coming year is expected to amount to anything up to £1,000M. Despite enormous Government grants, incentives, the so-called "consumer boom", low interest rates and entry into the Common Market, the capitalists are just refusing to invest in British industry. In real terms last year, capital investment actually fell 10 per cent! This means that plant is not being renewed. Workers will continue to operate with antiquated methods and machinery. Costs will continue to soar. And Britain as a capitalist trading nation will continue to sink lower and lower beneath her rivals in the increasingly cut-throat competition of the world market.

This is not "just another economic crisis". What we are witnessing is a unique event of global historic significance—the death-agony of the oldest capitalist system in the world.

ILLEGAL

For the Tories and their class, there is only one way out. Drive our living standards down. If they can raise rents, force up prices, hold down wages and destroy our power to fight back, they might just be able to squeeze out the money from us to invest, to modernize and to survive.

That is why they have brought the Housing Finance Act, the Industrial Relations Act and the new "pay-freeze" law into force. It is not an accident that living costs rose .5 per cent during the first full month of the so-called

prices "standstill" (i.e. an increase bigger than the .3 per cent jump in the last monthly period before the "freeze".) They were meant to. That is the whole point. The same goes for the rent rises under the Housing Finance Act and the "Phase II" law under which it will be illegal (under pain of unlimited fines) to take industrial action for a wage-rise of more than 4 per cent plus £1. The Tories' idea is to enrich themselves by charging us more and paying us less. Already, few housewives can afford beef for their families. They were told to go for chicken. Now chicken is too dear, too. You see, we have all been living above our means. The Tories won't be satisfied until we're all in rags, living on dried biscuits and cabbage soup.

PREPARATIONS

The Tory plan means not "restraining", not "curbing"—but destroying our trade union movement. Ever since they came to office in June 1970, the Tories have been organizing to do just that. Hardly a minute of their time has been wasted. Now—with the Industrial Relations Court established, the BBC and ITV secretly but effectively censored, the Army Command re-orientated along "counter-insurgency" lines and wage-bargaining outlawed by the state—their preparations are nearly complete. They are now manoeuvring for a good position from which to crack down hard on one section of our movement, provoke a General Strike, win it with the use of troops and then establish an authoritarian right-wing regime. With a catastrophic collapse of investors' "confidence" threatening unless they succeed in enforcing "Phase II", they may feel that their hour of decision has already arrived.

In the past few months, the Tories have largely had their way. Thanks to the criminal treachery of Harold Wilson, Vic Feather and their like, the AUEW has been fined with impunity, the Housing Finance Act has been implemented in all but a handful of boroughs and the wage-freeze law has been obeyed. But just now, as the economic crisis is gathering pace, the Government's wage-freeze law is beginning to meet its first real challenge. No amount of "playing down" of news and effective censorship of the press can disguise the fact that a momentous confrontation situation is beginning to develop:

● THE MINERS have rejected as "totally unacceptable" the Coal Board's offer of £2.28 per week, which is the maximum permissible under "Phase Two". The N.U.M.'s claim is for increases of £5.50 to £7 per week, and its National Executive is consulting the membership as to what form of industrial action to take.

● 47,000 FORDS CAR workers are almost certain to strike in support of their £10 per week demand—way above the Government's "norm".

● 230,000 HOSPITAL ancillary workers are still demanding £4 per week from December—they have rejected an offer of £1.84, the "norm" maximum. A NUPE ballot received a majority favouring industrial action.

● THE TRAIN DRIVERS have put in a £9.25 per week claim and are unlikely to be satisfied with an offer within Heath's norm.

● GAS WORKERS throughout the country are acting in anger against British Gas' £2 offer.

And so one could go on, mentioning the farm-workers, civil servants, teachers, actors, dockers, engineers and an army of others who are on a direct collision-course with the Government.

LEADERSHIP

The present struggle could end in a General Strike. So it is important that we understand the issues. Behind the struggle over wages and prices lies a deeper, more serious issue. Whether the standards we have gained since the 'Thirties can be maintained depends on one thing. Which class, in the coming period, is to rule? If the Tories and their class remain in control of the army, the economy and the state, it will be mass unemployment and destitution for the working class. But there is no objective reason why this should be so. The coming General Strike will be an event mightier by far than that of 1926. It will give us the opportunity to take over our factories, take over and administer our housing estates, win the armed forces ranks and take over the government of this country. It will give us the opportunity to freeze rents and prices ourselves, end unemployment once and for all and—with our own labour—build all the houses, new industries and amenities we need. We require only one thing. To get rid of our existing middle-class leaders and form a fighting leadership of our own class. We need a disciplined organization: a party—as part of our Labour, Co-op and trade union movement—to mobilize the mighty machinery at the disposal of the Labour Party and the TUC and carry through the conquest of state power. Help us build the Socialist Charter movement into such a force.

THE CHARTIST

Editor: Chris Knight, 7 Park View, Olive Rd, London NW2. Published by CHARTIST Publications.

Monthly Journal of the Socialist Charter Movement.

VIETNAM 'PEACE' DEAL CRUMBLES

United States imperialism has suffered the greatest military defeat in its history. The withdrawal of its troops from Vietnam represents a milestone in the history of the Vietnamese revolution, and has destroyed the myth of United States omnipotence in the "Third World". Now the Thieu regime faces a grim and ultimately hopeless future, despite the fact that it has received from the Americans ninety times as much military aid as the liberation forces have received from Moscow or Peking, and despite the fact that it is now likely to receive more military hardware than ever before.

Faced, over the past few years, with a war it could not win and with growing mutinies among its own armed forces, the U.S. Government has had to quit—or face catastrophe. In this situation, with proper military aid from the Soviet Union and China, the liberation forces could have won an all-out victory by now. Had Peking and Moscow really wanted to deal a body-blow to world imperialism, their support could have ensured the destruction of the Thieu puppet regime, the expulsion of any American presence whatsoever and the unification of Vietnam under the control of the liberation forces.

But the Russian and Chinese bureaucracies—fearing above all any upset in the global "status quo" from which their privileges derive—have rushed to save the U.S. imperialists in their hour of need. The Paris "peace" deal is an attempted sell-out imposed on Hanoi and the NLF by Moscow and Peking. Under its terms, the liberation forces have agreed to end military operations without any change in the South Vietnamese

regime having been achieved.

Although the post-signing fighting has died down, it is clear that the deal cannot last. To accept its terms would be not only a betrayal but direct suicide for the National Liberation Front. It is no secret that the U.S. Air Force is to continue bombing in Laos and Cambodia to prevent the liberation forces in the South from receiving supplies. It is no secret that at least 10,000 American "military advisors" of one sort or another are to remain in the South even when the last G.I. is safely back home. And—after the experience of the Nixon "Christmas bombing"—it would be stupid to imagine that U.S. air-cover won't still be made available to Thieu's regime in the South on the excuse of "breaches" of the cease-fire by the other side.

The SOCIALIST CHARTER is no less concerned than anyone else at the terrible human suffering which the war has entailed. We are no less indignant that the brave Vietnamese people should have had to endure so much. But it is "big power" deals like the present one—and like the Geneva Agreement of 1954—which prolong the war instead of ending it, leading to much more suffering in the end. The "deal" is already in the process of crumbling. Merely to defend themselves, the liberation forces will have no option but to go over once more onto the offensive. The sooner they do so, and the sooner they destroy the Thieu regime root and branch, American advisors and all—the nearer will the Vietnamese people be to a genuine and lasting peace.

No to the Paris 'Peace' Deal!
Victory to the N.L.F.!

HOLD LINCOLN FOR LABOUR

The by-election at Lincoln is no ordinary one. It is a test case for the fight against the Common Market, and for the fight of Labour's rank-and-file to control their own MPs.

For us in the Labour Party, it is an election we can ill afford to lose. A Taverne victory would lead almost certainly to his re-admission into the Parliamentary Labour Party—a body most of whose members are of a cast of mind similar to his own. It would incite the Jenkinsites to further treachery and make a complete mockery of our Party's democratic procedures.

A Labour victory on the other

hand would represent a major step forward for the working class movement, not only in the immediate fight against the Tories and the Common Market but also in the struggle to conquer and control the machinery of the Labour Party itself.

The Lincoln comrades struck a blow for us all in booting out Taverne. Now they need our help. Canvassing in Lincoln has been under way since January 20th. Anyone who can make it to Lincoln between now and the election should contact the Canvassing Officer, Ron Simmons, at Grafton House, Newland, Lincoln (Tel.: Lincoln 28041).

RENTS

by *Graham Bash*

ALL BUT ELEVEN Labour Councils have now capitulated to the Tories' Housing Finance Act. The blame for this retreat must be placed where it belongs.

● **FIRSTLY**, it lies with the NEC of the Labour Party. The response of the tenants of Clay Cross, Conisborough and the other towns whose Councils are holding out makes it absolutely clear: had the NEC given a national lead in co-ordinating ALL Labour Councils in resistance to the Act, no force on earth could have defeated them. A lead from the top would have galvanized our whole movement into a united force which, combining with the struggle of the trade unions against the Industrial Relations Act, could not only have smashed the Housing Finance Act but brought down the Government too. But from our leaders, no such action. The NEC flew directly in the face of Conference decisions, defying even the instruction of 1972 Conference that it pledge the next Labour Government to re-imburse Councillors surcharged by the Tories.

● **SECONDLY**, the blame lies with the Labour leaders at Regional level. In particular, last year's London Labour Party Conference voted unanimously against implementing the Housing Finance Act. But from the Executive, there was no attempt to put this into effect—no co-ordination of Labour Councils in London, no approach to the trade unions and tenants' organizations to back up the decision. Those Councils which fought were left alone.

● **LASTLY**, the responsibility rests with the Labour Councillors themselves, who—with a few honourable exceptions—either voted to implement or "defied" the Act without seriously preparing for a struggle.

But the fight is not yet over. In a sense it is only just beginning. New rent rises are coming in April. If Clay Cross and the remaining defiant Councils can hold out until

then, they will find themselves backed by a new upsurge of nation-wide support. Moreover, the struggle in the Labour Party on this issue has only just begun. And finally, for the first time since the Housing Finance Act was implemented, the Government is coming up against determined opposition to its pay-freeze laws from the miners and other powerful sections of our movement. In the coming year, the rents struggle will be fought on much more favourable ground than it has been up to now.

Tenants must begin to organize for the new phase of struggle now. To strengthen our associations, every link must be made with the local Labour movement, whether through trade union branches, trades councils, the co-op or the Labour Party. Tenants' organizers should take over the wards of their Labour Parties, make their presence felt on the General Management Committees and make sure their Labour Councillors really represent the tenants' interests or are thrown out. And inside the Labour Party we must insist that decisions of our Conferences are binding, and strengthen the machinery for disciplining those who disagree.

Total Opposition

We are now approaching London Labour Party Conference, 1973. The Executive of the Greater London Regional Council must be called to account for its defiance of last year's decisions.

In particular the Composite on the Housing Finance Act must be passed. It instructs the Executive:

1. To approach the Federation of London Trades Councils to organise a Conference of London trade unionists to ensure that any rent strikes are backed by industrial action.
2. To write into the G.L.C. election manifesto a commitment not to implement the Act.

Islington:

Council workers defend tenants.

THE MUNICIPAL employees of the borough of Islington are defying the Housing Finance Act—even though the Council itself caved in long ago. At a specially-convened meeting in December, the white-collar workers of NALGO—who do all the clerical work for the authority—advised that they would not operate any part of the Act not in the interests of the tenants, would not co-operate in writing out eviction orders and would take industrial action in support of any member or tenant victimized because of this.

Then in January my own union branch of the General and Municipal

Workers (which represents the dustmen, road-sweepers and caretakers) passed a resolution supporting the stand of the NALGO members, and threatening strike action if any tenant or NALGO member was victimized.

We are now waiting to see what the Council will do. So far it has not commented on this stand by its employees.

by a *G&MWU*
shop steward

(whose name cannot be given owing to the policies of this union).

RETREAT BUT CLAY CROSS FIGHTS ON



ABOVE: Despite this demonstration of 2,000 last month, Camden Council caved in to the Tories and put up the rents.

"NOTHING CAN BE SOLVED while this Tory Government remains in office", says Arthur Wellon, leader of the defiant Labour Council at Clay Cross, whose eleven members have each been given a bill for £635 for refusing to implement the rent-rises under the Housing Finance Act. The Councillors made an election pledge not to put up the rents—and their words have been matched with deeds. 1,500 tenants have paid no rent increases since the Tories ordered them in October.

For their stand, the Councillors have won widespread popular support. They were enthusiastically backed by a demonstration in December, when 3,000 tenants marched through the streets of Clay Cross.

But at this rally, where leading "left-wing" MP Frank Allaun spoke, tenants were to be seriously disappointed if they expected any lead from higher up in the Labour Party. Allaun's contribution was to advise the tenants to send a deputation to Downing Street, to plead with Heath not to insist on the rises. This contrasts dramatically with the perspectives of the councillors, whose task in their eyes is not to plead with the Tory Government but to lead the fight to bring it down. Their determination has been backed up by the North-East Derbyshire Labour Party, which voted to remove Councillors who had voted for rent increases in nearby towns and by local tenants who turned out on a Thursday morning to greet the arrival of the district auditor with a few choice words.

But although the Local Labour Party is fighting, and has been promised support from the miners and other unions in the area, it is clear that nation-wide support is needed if the Government is to be defeated. The job of acting rests first and foremost with the Labour Party NEC. But this body has so far played a doubly treacherous role. Not content with simply failing to support the Councillors, it has actively tried to cut the ground from under their feet by announcing that, contrary to last year's Labour Party Conference decision, the next Labour Government could not reimburse Councillors surcharged as they have been.

It is actions like these, on the part of an N.E.C. which talked so "left wing" at Conference, which show the need for an alternative leadership—so that the Party as a whole could stand as firm as the comrades on Clay Cross council.

WELSH MINERS SUPPORT TENANTS

PLEDGE OF STRIKE ACTION TO STOP EVICTIONS

AS WE GO TO PRESS, eleven councils are still refusing to carry out the Housing Finance Act. They include Clay Cross (Derbyshire) and Conisborough (Yorkshire); and Merthyr Tydfil and Bedwas and Machen in Wales. In both Welsh areas, a commissioner has been appointed to take over their powers and put up the rents.

Scotland—despite the capitulation of Midlothian—still has the highest number of rebels: Clydebank, Saltcoats, Alloa, Barrhead, Denny Cowdenbeath and Cumbernauld. Default orders are being issued

against these by the Scottish Secretary of State. The council at Clydebank has already said it intends to ignore the order.

Tenants Warned

In Wales, the Bedwas and Machen Urban Council has been presented with a commissioner, a retired National Coal Board official. He's sent out letters to all the council's 1,700 houses, demanding an 85p rent increase and warning tenants to pay

up or face eviction.

"The council's circulated a petition to find out how many people intend to pay", says Labour MP for Bedwelty, Neil Kinnock. "95 per cent say they will not."

If there are any evictions—and they seem inevitable, since the tenants aren't in a mood to give way—miners in all the local pit villages have said they will strike immediately. "After the miners' strike", says Neil Kinnock, "I don't doubt they will do this. The tenants have my 100 per cent support."

HEALTH SERVICE FOR SALE?

PRIVATE MEDICINE is booming. Up and down the country, more private hospitals are being built for those who can afford to pay for treatment, while National Health hospitals struggle on in old buildings and in poor conditions. Backing up this boom come a number of new insurance schemes taking up advertisement space in the press, which guarantee large sums of money if you fall ill—money you could use to pay for a bed in a modern private hospital.

This attempt to introduce an "American" system came into the news recently when "Public Service", the NALGO journal, reported that a "take-over" of parts of N.H.S. hospitals had been discussed with regional hospital boards and doctors.

The Department of Health confirmed this in an announcement that it was "considering possible forms of co-operation between the public and private sectors of medicine".

The reason that hospital boards might find this attractive is simple—money: the entire health service suffers as it has always done from a chronic lack of funds, which means shortage of staff...and of almost everything else. A letter in the Evening Standard (12.1.73) complained of a "chaotic state of affairs". In one ward of 18 women patients there were only 2 nurses, one only state-enrolled (i.e. not qualified state-registered), the other a first year student. Patients who were acutely ill and should have been resting had to make their own

beds; urine samples were thrown away (because the nurses knew no better); patients were left in their ward when they should have been sent to clinics. Influenza had kept away more nurses than usual, but the Royal College of Nursing said the situation was the latest example of difficulties faced for years in many hospitals.

Unfortunately, the expansion of the private sector won't help ease the situation. The private hospitals will simply attract staff fed up with low pay and bad conditions away from the National Health. And so for the working class patient, and the staff who remain with the N.H.S., the situation will get even worse.

The National Health Service, even in its poor condition, was a

great gain for the working class, set up by the Labour Government after the war under pressure from below, and its weakening and destruction would be a vicious attack on our living standards. But a large share of the blame for the vulnerability must lie with successive Labour Governments, who were forced, in line with their capitulation to the employers on other fronts, to deny the service the money it needed. Wilson's dedication to free medicine was much proclaimed before he came to office—but it wasn't long before prescription charges were re-introduced and the Health Service was being dismantled faster than under the Tories!

Paul Moore

CHARTISM: FINEST TRADITION OF THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS

The professional liars who tell us today that Parliament is the guardian of democracy avoid the subject of Chartism like the plague. The reason is not far to seek. For the whole history of this period shows the tenacity of Parliament in resisting democracy, conceding nothing unless faced with the threat of civil war. Before 1832, rich men were able to enter Parliament simply by buying a seat either from a great landlord or from a corrupt municipal body. The July revolution of 1830 in France coincided with a mounting revolutionary fervour in Britain to pose a threat which finally induced Parliament to do away with the more obvious examples of corruption of this kind and to open its doors a little wider through the Reform Act of 1832. This increased the representation of the middle class, while doing nothing for the working class at all. The property-qualification still meant that five out of every six adult males was without the vote.

CHARTER

The class-character of the "reformed" Parliament was brutally demonstrated in attacks immediately launched on the infant trade union movement. Attack provoked response. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, founded in October 1833, mushroomed within weeks from nothing into a force of half a million. Its members looked with total contempt on the House of Commons, rightly considering their own Congress an infinitely more democratic form of "Parliament". Inspired by the ideas of the Utopian Socialist, Robert Owen, they believed that the trade unions were about to "supplant" Parliament and to run the economy as a giant Co-operative. But ruthless lock-outs and Government-backed sentences—culminating in the transportation of the six "Tolpuddle Martyrs"—smashed this movement completely. The middle class followed up their success with the vicious "New Poor Law", condemning to almost indescribable suffering the thousands of workers made unemployed by the economic depression of 1836-1842.

It was now that the Chartist movement developed—as political movements invariably do succeed the purely trade union struggles of the working class. Its beginnings were small—the foundation in 1836 of a "London Workingmen's Association". Led by one William Lovett, this was a propaganda society of well-to-do artisans whose object was merely "to seek by every legal means to place all classes of society in the possession of equal social and political rights". It put forward six demands for the democratization of Parliament:

1. Universal Male Suffrage
2. Equal Electoral Districts

3. Removal of the Property Qualification for MPs
4. Secret Ballot
5. Payment of MPs
6. Annual General Elections.

The "Six Points" were not meant to be revolutionary. Far from championing the overthrow of Parliament, their authors' sole purpose was to lead the working class to find a place inside it. But the agitation around these demands so infuriated the Establishment and exposed the Parliamentary dung-heap for what it was, that an extra-parliamentary and even insurrectionary movement quickly developed.

Support for the demands spread like wildfire. A group called the Birmingham Political Union took them up, and called for a National Petition to Parliament. The idea rapidly caught on and the massive meetings and huge demonstrations held to collect signatures soon threatened to spill over into riots. An even more threatening movement now developed in the North. Led by the Irish landowner Feargus O'Connor, it quickly inspired the downtrodden and hungry masses of the industrial cities with the blunt slogan "Peaceably if we may—forcibly if we must!" By whatever means, they were determined to gain power.

INSURRECTION

Now Lovett and the London authors of the Charter became frightened at the forces they had unleashed. But they found themselves sucked into the revolutionary vortex, unable as yet to draw back. The Birmingham Union committed them to the plan of a "Convention of the Industrious Classes", which met on February 4 1839 in Westminster Palace Yard (perilously close—so many felt—to the Houses of Parliament!) By now a monster petition had been collected, to be presented as an ultimatum to Parliament. Demands grew for "ulterior measures"—including a General Strike (or "Grand National Holiday") to be taken in the event of the petition's being refused.

As the Parliamentary debate on the petition was delayed, the Convention dragged on through the year, both its members and the Government preparing for a conflict. With his cry "To Arms! To Arms!", the orator G.J. Harney became increasingly popular with the most oppressed and desperate sections of the working class, and throughout the Chartist movement the advocates of "moral force" found their support slipping away to their "physical force" opponents. Chartists defeated the police in riots in the Bull Ring in Birmingham (to which the Convention had moved) and troops were brought in to secure the city. A tang of civil war was in the air.



ABOVE: The Newport Rising, 1839.

At last—on July 12—Parliament debated the Petition, which by now had gathered 1,280,000 signatures. It was rejected by 235 to 46 votes. The Convention called a General Strike to commence on August 12.

Meanwhile, however, the Government had responded to rumours that Chartist hordes were drilling and training in the use of the pike and other weapons. Troops had been stationed at Nottingham, Leeds, York, Newcastle and Manchester. The Commander of the Northern district, Sir Charles Napier, gave an intimidating demonstration of artillery fire to a number of Chartist leaders, with the aim of convincing them of the futility of insurrection. The leaders were impressed. The result was that by July 12, the Convention was split as to whether to proceed with the General Strike, which, it was by now realized, could only succeed as a general insurrection. Having voted for the strike on that day, the delegates reversed their decision a few days later and dissolved the Convention.

In the great industrial centres, the masses were now leaderless and confused. Here and there, riots broke out. Finally, on the night of November 3-4, a mass of four thousand poorly-armed Chartist miners—believing that an outbreak in Wales would be supported by revolution in Lancashire and Yorkshire—attempted to seize the town of Newport. They hoped then to equip themselves with arms from the ironworks and powder magazines in the district and to release from Monmouth prison Henry Vincent, whose influence as a Chartist was enormous throughout South Wales. The whole area was poorly defended, and the plan in some ways made strategic sense. But the authorities had been warned. Although only thirty soldiers were on hand to defend Newport, their training, their equipment and their positioning (in ambush behind the shutters of the Westgate hotel on the main town square) told heavily in their favour. A volley of hot lead met the Chartists as they filled the square. Fourteen were killed instantly and ten died later of wounds. After some brave attempts to storm the hotel, the rebel forces broke and fled. The leaders of the "Newport Insurrection" were sentenced to transportation for life, and every known Chartist leader in the country was gaoled.

By now, the very name "Chartism" sent shivers down the spines of the middle class, for whom it had come to stand for proletarian in-

surection pure and simple. Marches, demonstrations and petitions in the name of Chartism continued to be staged for over a decade. But behind the name, the movement itself—as a revolutionary threat—had spent its force. Over the decades, the class-struggle re-emerged in new forms. Cautiously the ruling class made Parliamentary adjustments, conceding many of the Chartist demands—and with them the forms and illusions of power—to the working class. Today by this process, a vast Labour bureaucracy has been built, which takes seats in Parliament and periodically pretends to govern the country for the sole purpose of confusing the working class. By giving us the illusion that we have power already, the Labour Party in Parliament functions to blind us of the necessity of really conquering state power. But the spirit of Chartism is by no means dead. On the contrary, it is more alive today than it has ever been before.

OVERTURE

In his brilliant work, "Where is Britain Going?", Leon Trotsky wrote that Chartism was an early historical overture "immortal by reason of the fact that for a space of ten years it gave us in a compressed and diagrammatic form apparently the whole gamut of proletarian struggle—from petitions in Parliament to armed insurrection."

He added: "As the Chartists threw overboard the sentimental preachers of "moral force", rallying the masses under the standard of revolution, so the British proletariat will be confronted with the task of thrusting out from its midst the reformists, democrats and pacifists and of mobilizing under the standard of revolutionary change."

In this way "the British proletariat must see in Chartism not only its past, but also its future".

For a period of ten years, the name "Chartism" stood for all that was revolutionary in the British working class. We CHARTISTS today have a right to take over this name. For we have taken over the same struggle—the struggle of the working class for state power. Alone of all tendencies in the working class today, we place this aim before us as the purpose of all our work. In doing so we are returning to the finest tradition in the history of the British working class.

**John Quirk
and Chris Knight**

FRENCH ELECTIONS

PRELUDE TO EXPLOSION?

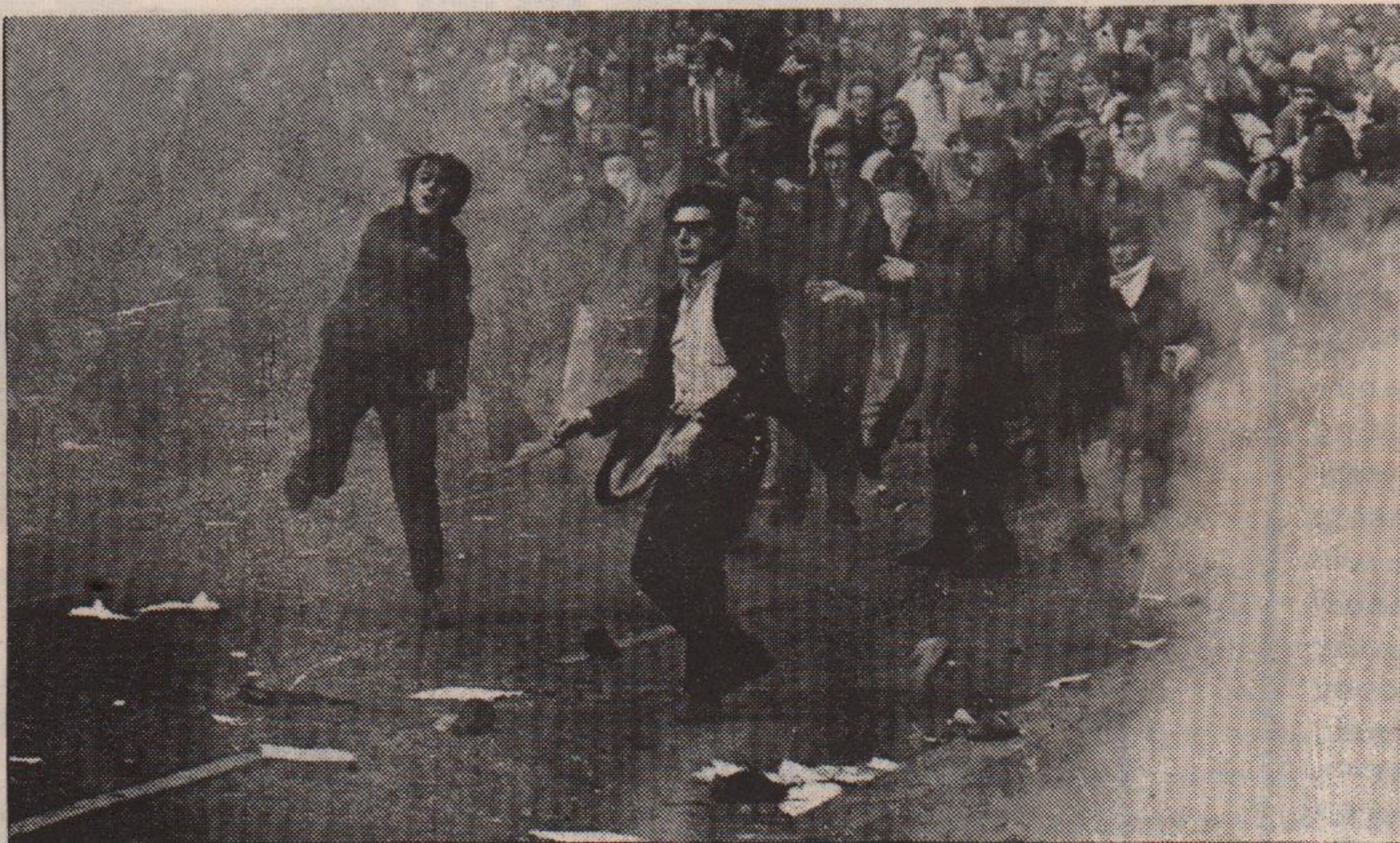
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO—in May 1958—an army coup d'etat placed General de Gaulle in power in France. The weak governments of the 'Fourth Republic' had not only been unable to win the Algerian war, but had also failed to bring French industry up to date so that it could compete in the modern world. De Gaulle's "strong state" set out to discipline the working class, refusing compromise with the trade unions. It managed to keep wages low enough to secure massive investment in ultra-modern industries such as chemicals and electronics. Productivity rose 84 per cent in ten years. But this very "streamlining" process itself constantly undercut the Gaullists' own electoral basis of support. France's 800,000 small businessmen and the inefficient peasant farmers were forced out of business at the rate of 50,000 a year. Grievances over pensions, social services and education mounted. Even sections of the industrial middle class began to oppose De Gaulle on the grounds that he was interested in economic strength only as a means to further his romantic daydreams of a France "glorious" once again and independent both of the United States and of her E.E.C. partners. To them and to many others, the rigid and archaic "strong state" apparatus bolstered to bludgeon the youth and the working class into conformity was itself an expensive burden on French industry and an obstacle to capitalist progress.

In May 1968, the accumulated discontent of the workers, of much of the middle class and of students hit by the "rationalization" of higher education erupted in the historic three-week General Strike of ten million people, which threatened the very existence not only of Gaullism but of capitalist class-rule itself.

Thanks to the treachery of the Communist leadership of the C.G.T. (the main trade union federation) the social system survived. The strike was called off in return for huge wage-hikes which were almost immediately eroded by inflation. With massive abstentions from a demoralized working class, the Gaullist UDR gained a record majority in the June 1968 elections, as did Georges Pompidou in the Presidential elections of 1969.

THE PROGRAMME OF THE 'LEFT'

But French capitalism's problems were not over. Today—although the economy is healthier than that of many of its competitors—inflation and unemployment have become rampant. No more than Britain has France been able to escape the effects of the world trade and currency crisis of the last two years. To attack the unions and keep down wages, the Government cynically manipulates immigrant labour (from Portugal, North Africa and Italy especially): foreign workers can be deported immediately without any reason given! But having felt cheated and unsure after 1968, the working class is now beginning to fight back, partly in militant sectors like Renault and the railways, but particularly in small firms, chain stores and country areas with little tradition of unionization. They have re-discovered tactics such as factory occupations, unlimited (instead of one-day "protest") strikes and other methods used in 1968. The Government has retaliated with the liberal use of the C.R.S. (riot police who make the Mafia look like pacifists) and is strong-arming workers of the Berliet



ABOVE LEFT: Georges Marchais.
ABOVE AND BELOW: Scenes from the "May Events" of 1968.

plant (Lyons) under a riot act, charging that they occupied a factory.

Meanwhile, the Gaullists, riven by faction fights since the departure of the General, seem to have run out of steam. President Pompidou has turned against the old guard Gaullists like Michel Debre and is backing the realist whizz-kid technocratic wing represented by finance minister Valery Giscard d'Estaing. This means moving away from the Gaullists' petty-bourgeois social base towards open representation of finance capital, being less blatantly offensive to Washington and more conciliatory to the other capitalist powers of Western Europe. But with its lower middle-class power-base slipping away, the Government is being exposed as politically bankrupt. Buffeted from all sides, the regime appears increasingly alienated from French society as a whole, lacking even the pretence of a plan to meet the growing demands for more "participation" in decision-making or for implementing the long-delayed reforms in French society. Its "image"—in terms of "public opinion"—has taken a further nose-dive since the series of revelations implicating Gaullist politicians in prostitution, Poulson-style graft, tax-evasion and the dope-running "French connection".

The result has been to make even the bankrupt programme adopted last June by the Communist-

Socialist-Radical "Union of the Left" seem credible as an answer to French society's ills. Under its new leader Georges Marchais, the Communist Party (PCF) has been working overtime to build up a super-respectable image: holding back strikes via the CGT and smearing left-wing activists as police-provocateurs. Marchais is quite happy for France to stay in NATO and the Common Market (institutions to be "reformed"), and quite willing to maintain intact the authoritarian set-up of the 5th Republic—under which Pompidou can appoint whom he likes to the Cabinet and maintain effective control over all Government action no matter what the result of the elections. Consequently, the Gaullists' attempts to smear the "Left's" programme as a Communist take-over bid have been less than convincing. The industries proposed for nationalization are for the most part either foreign-owned or unprofitable (so that their share-prices have remained constant despite this threat). Along with such policies as help for small farmers, education improvements, re-training and investment to reduce unemployment and so on and so forth, the nationalization plans are part of a programme of liberal reforms on the Harold Wilson/Willy Brandt model, aimed at strengthening the capitalist economy.

But that is only one side of the

picture. Reflected in the "Left's" programme are not only the pressures of the modernizers within the capitalist class, but also the demands of the working class. The promises of full employment, a 1,000 franc minimum monthly wage, retirement at 60, a 40-hour week (it is now on average 44 hours), the abolition of private hospitals and the nationalization of certain profitable industries such as chemicals, electronics and the banks—would, IF KEPT, represent a substantial step forward for French labour. Since the programme no-where explains how such proposals are to be implemented given the crisis of capitalism and the inevitable resistance of the French ruling class, they are clearly not seriously meant. They will be abandoned—even in the event of a massive electoral victory—as the international trade war develops. But the workers will not abandon even these minimum demands lightly. The Communist and Socialist Party bureaucrats shudder at the memory of what their rank and file got up to in the "events" of May-June 1968. But even that explosion could look trifling compared with the earthquake threatening them in the months ahead.

Meanwhile, opinion polls consistently show the Left to be leading the Gaullist majority parties by about 46 per cent to 38 per cent, with 15 per cent going to the liberal "Reformist" group. But this perhaps gives an over-optimistic picture. Many Socialist voters may not support a Communist candidate in the second round run-off in the elections (which take place early in March). Further, the distribution of seats is rigged against the big concentrations of workers in the towns, so that it takes 27,000 people to elect each Gaullist deputy but 130,000 each Communist! Finally, under the Constitution—as has been

(Continued on page 6).

young socialist NEWS

Your YS Branch

NORTH WEST CROYDON
YS meets every Thursday
at 124, Whitehorse Road,
Croydon at 8 pm.

BRENT EAST YS meets
every other Wednesday at
7 Park View, Olive Rd.,
NW2 at 8 pm.

STREATHAM YS meets
every Tuesday at 298
Streatham High Rd., (be-
hind photo studio near St.
Leonard's Church) at 8pm.

VAUXHALL YS meets
every Wednesday at 179
Kennington Road at 8 pm.

NORWOOD YS meets every
Thursday at 264,
Rosendale Rd., S.E.24

COME TO THE LABOUR PARTY YOUNG SOCIALISTS CONFERENCE, SKEGNESS, EASTER 1973

- BUILD a movement to clear out the traitors in the trade union and labour movement who refuse to fight the Tories!
- BUILD a movement which will prepare for the seizure of state power, in order to carry out the Labour Party programme of nationalizing the monopolies!

TIMETABLE

CRUISE up the motorway to Skegness on Friday afternoon April 20th.

ENJOY three days full board with all facilities at Derbyshire Miners' Holiday Camp.

CONFERENCE opens Saturday morning and continues over Sunday and Monday morning.

DANCE on Saturday night.

FOOTBALL matches being arranged.

RETURN on Monday afternoon, April 23rd.

FULL BOARD / CONFERENCE / DANCE : £8.25.

RETURN COACH FARE £3-00.

NORWOOD CRUSH WANDSWORTH

THE RETURN Wandsworth Y.S. versus Lambeth Y.S. match was a one-sided event. The final score of 18-1 was an even more crushing defeat for Wandsworth than the first match, which took place at the end of last year's season.

The Wandsworth team, assisted by players transferred from as far afield as Newcastle, just could not keep up the pace set by their opponents. After a short opening burst

of energy they gradually fell back until goals were being scored within two minutes of each other.

Wandsworth have promised that they will assemble a team which can beat Lambeth, however—even if they have to get the players from every area in the country. The match will be one of the added attractions of the YS Conference at Skegness this Easter.

A THREAT TO VAUXHALL Y.S.

Last month's CHARTIST carried a report on the successful public meeting organized by the Y.S. in Vauxhall. The reaction of the officials of Vauxhall Labour Party was to propose changing the standing orders of the party, forbidding the Y.S. from holding public meetings except under the Chairmanship of the Party Chairman. This will be debated at this month's Annual General Meeting. If it is agreed, the YS will of course have to obey the ruling until it can be reversed. But according to Bryndley Heaven, the Y.S. Secretary, "The real issue in the discussion was the conduct of the Y.S. in publicly demanding the resignation of prominent Vauxhall Labour Councillors who had voted to put the rents up". He told the Chartist that his branch was not going to be intimidated: "The struggle against the Labour traitors will go on."

Football match against "TRIBUNE"

Feb. 11, 2.30 P.M.

Meet 2pm

at 264 Rosendale Rd.

London SE24

Smash Reformism!

Subscribe to the
Chartist (monthly)
60p Per Year

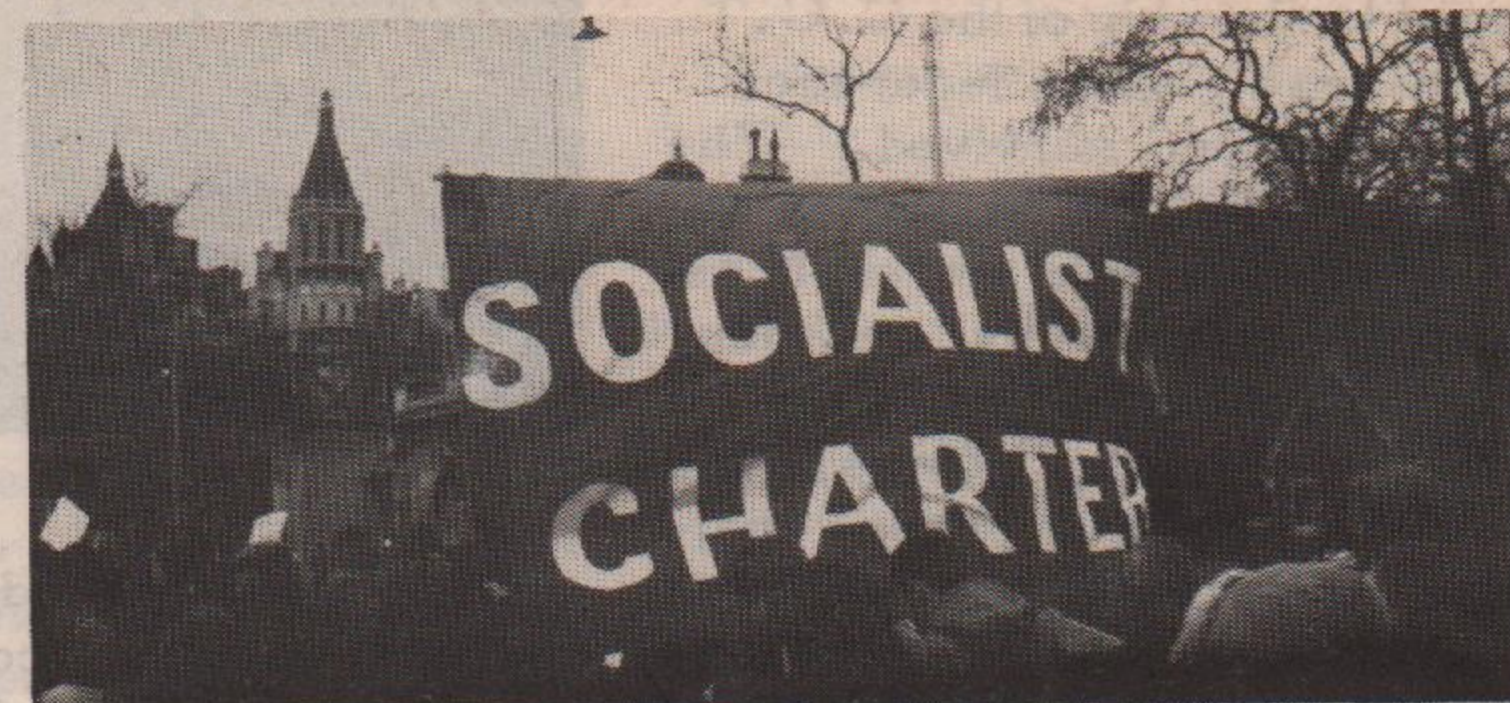
Send cheque or
Postal Order payable to:

CHARTIST Publications,

7 Park View, Olive Rd., London NW2.

name _____

address _____



ABOVE: "Moscow, Peking: No to the Paris Peace Sell-out!" Labour Party Young Socialists and Chartist supporters on last month's big Vietnam demonstration in London.

FRENCH ELECTIONS (from page 5)

said—President Pompidou would not have to appoint a Cabinet of the Left even if they won the election. The most likely result would then be a Gaullist-Reformist coalition, with a slightly more "liberal" approach than that of the present team. But this situation simply could not last. Almost immediately, no matter how "moderate" the intentions of the Communist leaders, the anger of the working class at being robbed of its election victory would push them to the head of a force objectively challenging the state. Vast demonstrations, strikes and factory occupations would culminate swiftly in the appearance of a full-blown pre-revolutionary situation in which the question of state power would be posed point blank.

For us revolutionaries in Britain, events in France are very much our own concern. There can be no French working class victory

International—which is both willing and able at the decisive moment to carry through the armed conquest of state power. The construction of such a party must begin now, and the attitude taken by our French comrades to the coming elections will in important respects determine their ability to do so.

In our view our French comrades should not be diverted by the self-styled trotskysts of Lutte Ouvriere and the Ligue Communiste, who are running over 300 candidates against the main left slate. This would be like standing as "revolutionary" candidates against the Labour Party in Britain. It is nothing more than an irresponsible, counterrevolutionary publicity stunt aimed not at winning the confidence of the Communist-Socialist Party rank-and-file but only at gaining T.V. and Press exposure for these

In contrast, the OCI (Organisation Communiste Internationaliste)

comrades are calling and working for a Communist Party-Socialist Party Government, demanding the removal from the Common Front of the "left Radical" party—a group of historical left-overs whose only function is to help block the working class road to power. The OCI place no "conditions" on their electoral support to the Communist and Socialist Parties, and in this they are absolutely correct. But while correct as far as it goes, this strategy is totally inadequate in itself. A revolutionary party can only build its forces and define itself against centrism and reformism on one issue as central to the solution of all others—the issue of state power. Not only must the CP-SP forces break with the "Radicals" and with all forms of middle-class politics. They must break with the bourgeoisie and take the power. It must be made quite clear that the working-class demands in their programme cannot be implemented unless they

are prepared to mobilize their industrial power-base and machinery as an alternative state apparatus to that of the ruling class. The demand must be made that ALL ARMS, ALL INDUSTRY and ALL POWER—in opposition to the Radicals, the Gaullists, the industrialists, the "Constitution" and the whole state machinery of the Fifth Republic—be concentrated in the hands of the CP-SP Government and the class organizations on which these parties are based. Only from this starting point can the need for elected workers' councils (as an alternative state machine) be explained, understood and acted on. And only on the basis of a United Front struggle for such councils and for the seizure of power through them, can a genuinely REVOLUTIONARY party of the French working class be built.

Martin Cook