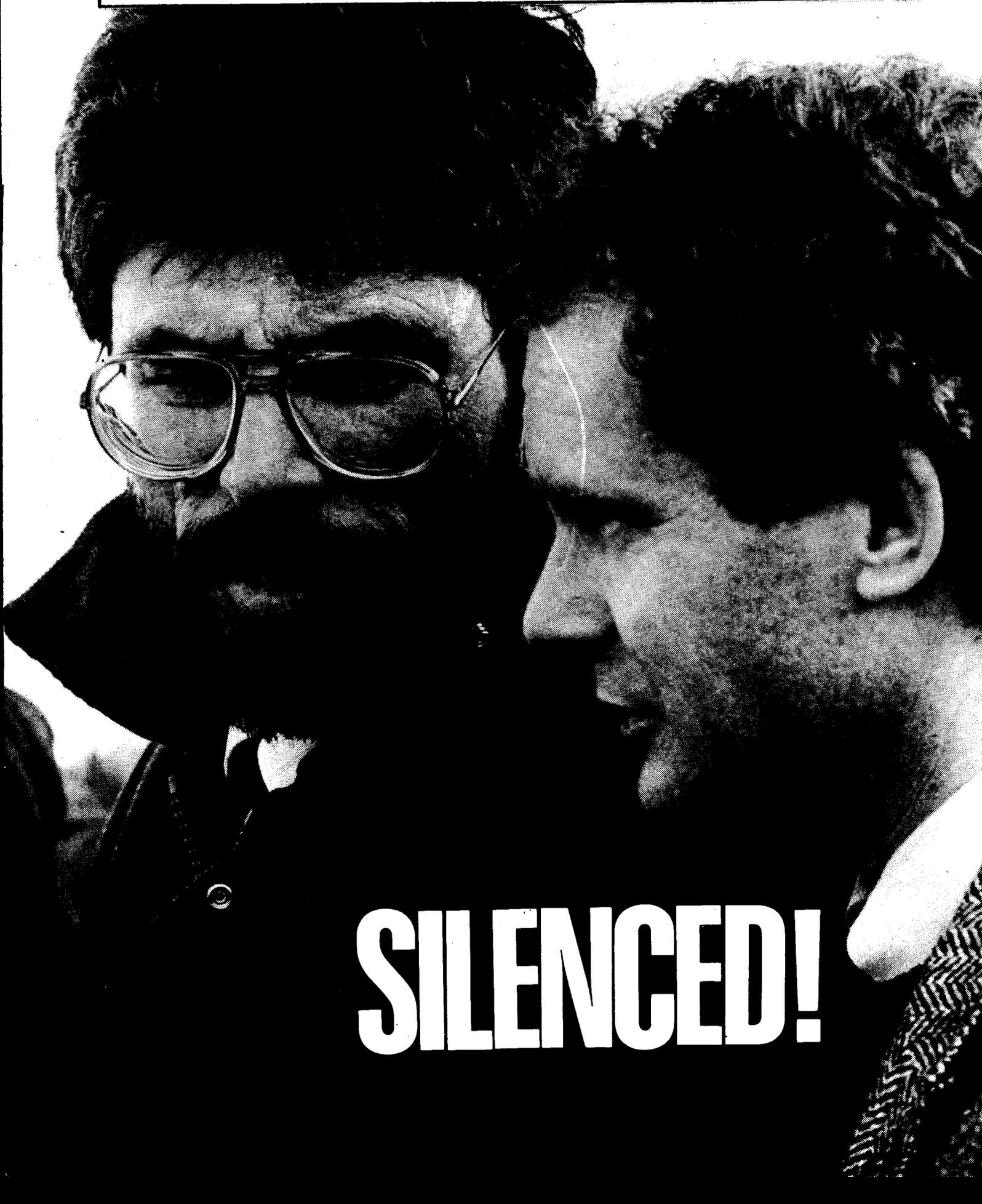


Socialist Newsletter

NUMBER 56

NOVEMBER 1988

50P



SILENCED!

56

Debating and defending the struggle for Irish independence

Contents

2

DEBATING AND DEFENDING
THE STRUGGLE FOR
IRISH INDEPENDENCE
By Sarah Bennett

6

THATCHERISM HITS BRADFORD
By George White

7

OVERCOMING LABOUR'S CRISIS:
CHOICES FOR THE LEFT
By Sam Stacey

10

THE KILLING FIELDS OF COLOMBIA
By Mike Pearse

12

SWANU RALLY
By Mike Pearse

13

THE WORKERS' UNITED FRONT
IN SOUTH AFRICA
By Steve Bush

SOCIALIST NEWSLETTER is published every two months as a journal of Marxist discussion and analysis, which aims to contribute to the development of perspectives for working class independence and a strategy for class power. We welcome letters and articles from readers seeking to encourage and promote discussion on topics of interest to working people.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the whole editorial board.

Please write to Box No 26, 136,
Kingsland High Road, London E8.



THE THATCHER government's policy of criminalising those who oppose the British presence in Ireland has taken on a new turn, with democratic rights implications beyond the Tories' unproclaimed war on the Irish people, whom they label as 'terrorists'. They now want to silence the Irish community in Britain. This latest attack comes in the wake of the failure of the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 appeals, the Gibraltar whitewash and the extension of the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Firstly, the government has ordered the banning of TV and radio interviews with spokespeople for Sinn Fein, Republican Sinn Fein and the Ulster Defence Association. Broadcasters are also asked not to transmit any matter where the words "support or solicit or invite support" for one of the banned organisations. Could that now mean that anyone who called for the withdrawal of British troops from the Six Counties would be silenced on radio and TV? Doubtless, the Tories would favour such a restrictive interpretation of the measure, thereby seeking to remove from the 'legitimate' agenda of debate the argument for a united Ireland.

Whilst the implications of the TV and radio ban were being debated, Tom King used a written answer in Hansard to announce that the government planned to end the 300-year old right of a suspect not to have their silence interpreted as an admission of guilt. In the first instance, this would apply only to suspects in Northern Ireland. This represents an important shift in the British justice system which hitherto placed the onus of proof of guilt on the prosecution. If silence can be interpreted as evidence of guilt, the burden of proof of innocence will now lie with the defendant. Given the revelations in the Birmingham 6 appeal and the conviction of three people accused of conspiring to murder Tom King, Irish people living in Britain can be forgiven for thinking that being Irish is itself incriminatory.

The Tories are also intent on introducing the 'oath of loyalty' renouncing violence for all those seeking election in the Six Counties. This is posed as a direct threat to the political aspirations of Sinn Fein who currently have about 60 elected councillors, with a clear mandate to speak for a significant section of the nationalist community.

Tory confidence in introducing such undemocratic measures has been bolstered by the Irish government's craven acceptance of the Anglo-Irish Accord, signed three years ago this month, and the

Extradition Agreement made with Haughey's Fianna Fail administration a year ago. The most fundamental aspect of the Hillsborough Accord was not the setting up of a joint British-Irish forum, thereby ceding the right of the 26 County state to have a say in the affairs of Northern Ireland, as Loyalist politicians claimed. Rather, it was the direct involvement of the 26 County state institutions in the security and policing of the Six Counties and the maintenance of partition.



Tom King

Whilst Fianna Fail, the traditional constitutional nationalist party in the South, opposed the Agreement in opposition, it has wholeheartedly espoused it in government. Despite all the provocations of the British government - the gagging of the Stalker Inquiry on the 'shoot to kill' policy adopted by the security forces in the North; the release of the only British soldier convicted of manslaughter after serving 18 months; the shooting of Aiden McAnespie at a border checkpoint following months of daily harassment as he crossed the border to work in Dundalk - Haughey continues his collaboration. On each occasion, the Irish government emits its token protestations, threatens a cooling of support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and then quickly draws back into the fold.

Even so, the pro-British stance of the Haughey administration is creating rumblings among the grassroots of Fianna Fail support, with a number of cumanns or constituency parties taking an openly anti-extradition stance.

The British Labour Party too is committed to support for the Hillsborough Accord. The recently

published policy document on Northern Ireland reiterates Labour's acceptance of the Unionist veto on any withdrawal of the British presence from Ireland and the unification of the country. It claims however, that in the process towards disengagement (for which there can be no fixed timetable) involving the development of all-Ireland policies for industry, agriculture, transport, energy, social services and tourism, it will not be deflected from its path by threats of violence from Loyalists. Labour's scenario presents the unity of the country and the ending of partition as something to be negotiated with the 26 County state. It leaves out of account the views of the Irish people as a whole, expressed in a 32 County assembly.

While British imperialism continues its political and military offensive against the Republican Movement, the latter too has been engulfed in a far-reaching debate on the way forward towards a united Ireland. Among the prisoners in the North, a group calling themselves Congress 86 has emerged. In a document entitled 'Critique of the Propaganda War', they raise important problems about the conduct of the military campaign pursued by the IRA:

"What is the strategy underlying the campaign of force? It quite obviously is not designed to deny the opposition territorial control. If it were, no energy would be wasted on irrelevant targets. It patently isn't designed to support the authority of an alternative administration: there isn't one...

"It is a strategy based on a theory crudely summed up in the often repeated phrase of 'send them home in boxes and they'll scream to bring their troops home.' The logic being that public opinion in Britain will force their leaders to work for withdrawal. The target therefore is British public opinion more than actual British armed might... It is this strategy of attempting to undermine the 'will' of the enemy rather than his physical ability which makes this struggle a propaganda war."

The author goes on to argue that in his view a British government cannot afford to be forced to withdraw from Ireland by such a tactic. Instead, he outlines a different strategy:

"a strategy based on breaking Britain's physical ability to remain in Ireland. This will come about when the Westminster parliament is unable militarily to make its writ run in Ireland. When in place of a foreign writ, that of the Irish people is physically capable of being enforced... that is nothing else than a peoples popular war."

Silence now means guilt for the Irish

Although it is not developed here, there was one occasion, during the hunger strike campaign in 1980-1, when the potential existed throughout Ireland for the development of such a 'popular war'. But with hundreds of thousands of people mobilised North and South, many involved in industrial action, Sinn Fein pulled back and placed its emphasis on pressurising the 26 County government of Haughey to force concessions from Thatcher, rather than on the activity of the people themselves.

Besides the military policy of the Republican Movement, its political perspective is also giving rise to serious discussion. In recent years, Sinn Fein, under the leadership of Gerry Adams has adopted a left profile, utilising socialist imagery in their description of a united Ireland. Thus at the annual Wolf Tone commemoration at Bodenstown this year, the oration delivered by Pat Doherty included the following:

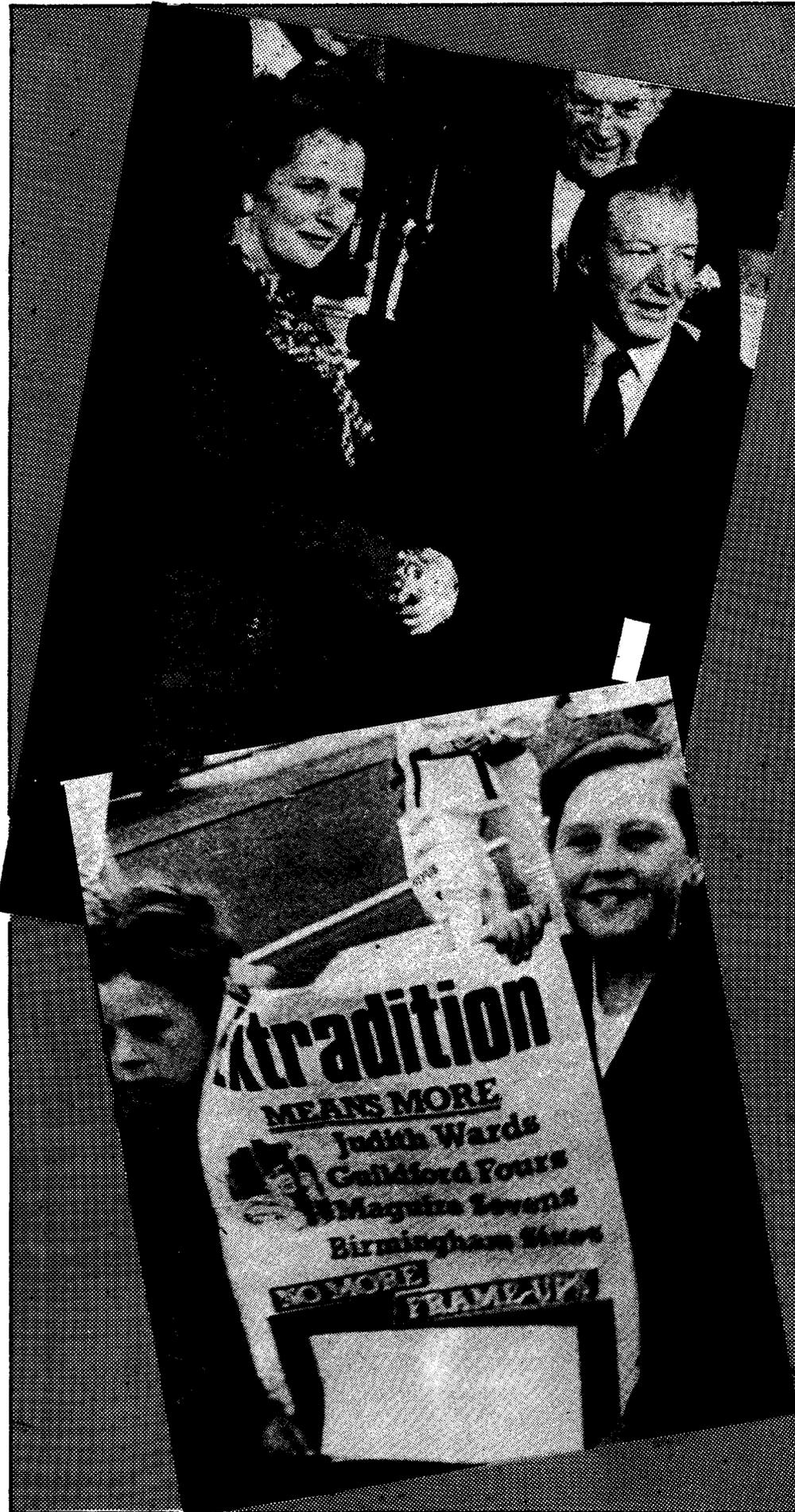
"We are a socialist republican movement... We are out to establish a society in which no-one is oppressed or exploited, where women are freed from their traditional oppression, where young people have hope... We want a society free from multinational profiteering... a society that is truly non-aligned... Socialist Ireland is a threat to Britain only insofar as our success may spur radicals in England, Scotland and Wales to press more actively for political and social changes in their own countries."

This radical stance of Sinn Fein is not surprising given that its main base is amongst the poorest and most deprived sections of the working class and unemployed in the North. There too it is translated into political action, where Sinn Fein councillors provide a political leadership for the nationalist community around the social and economic issues which affect them - unemployment, harassment and housing.

But the left in Britain has paid rather less attention to the increasing ambiguity of Sinn Fein's position on the 26 County state institutions.

Three fundamental principles have characterised the revolutionary nationalist position since 1921, when Liam Mellows and his comrades took up arms against the partition settlement and the Free State arising from it.

The first is that the 26 County state and its institutions are a main bastion in the maintenance of imperialist rule over the whole of Ireland. The second claims the right to oppose by force of arms British occupation of the Six Counties. The third demands free elections to a 32



County assembly, representing the sovereign will of the whole of the Irish people, in opposition to both partitionist states North and South of the border. From de Valera in the 1920s to Official Sinn Fein (later the Workers Party) in 1969, every component of the Republican Movement which accepted the legitimacy of the Six County state and institutions, ended up defending these institutions and condemning Republicans.

Up until the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis (annual conference) in November 1986, the republican position enshrined in the constitution of the party was clear and unambiguous. Clause Six states that:

"Candidates selected by Sinn Fein for election as parliamentary representatives shall on selection and before nomination publicly and solemnly pledge themselves as follows" -there follows five conditions, including - "that if elected I will not sit in nor take part in the proceedings of any parliament legislating or purporting to legislate for the people of Ireland other than the parliament of the Irish Republic, representative of the entire 32 Counties of Ireland."

Amendment

An amendment from the Ard Comhairle (National Executive) proposed dropping the abstentionist position as regards elections to Leinster House. Significantly, the above clause was replaced by one which stated "that if elected, I

will not sit in nor take part in the proceedings of the Westminster or partitionist Six County Parliaments." By this amendment, the Sinn Fein constitution allows itself to play a role in the partitionist parliament at Leinster House in Dublin, attaching no conditions to this whatsoever. The decision to drop abstentionism in relation to Dublin provoked the walk-out of a number of delegates, led by Ruairi O Bradaigh, former Sinn Fein President, who then formed Republican Sinn Fein.

It could be argued that only a constitutional nicety is involved here, particularly as Sinn Fein won no seats in the subsequent election to the Dail. However, there are clear ramifications for the conduct of their political struggles in the 26 Counties. Thus, in the face of an unprecedented policy of economic austerity by the Haughey government and a level of emigration exceeding that of the big waves of the 1940s and 1950s, Sinn Fein has failed to organise any

coordinated campaign involving the impoverished, unemployed and working people generally, against the 26 County government. Indeed, former Vice-President of Sinn Fein, Philip Flynn, now the General Secretary of the Local Government Workers Union (LGSPU), was one of the main architects of the 'National Plan for Economic Recovery', overseeing a wage freeze, service cuts and massive redundancies in the public sector.

Significant too is an IRA statement, published at the end of 1987 and reproduced in 'A Strategy for Peace' which was sent by Sinn Fein to the SDLP:

"The IRA, it should be noted, has consistently pointed out that its

government only can effect the desired objective of achieving the exercise of Irish national self-determination.

"Such a conference might prove useful in concocting steps for alleviating some of the abuses suffered by Northern nationalists and for obtaining international support toward that end. Furthermore, a reaffirmation of a pan-nationalist consensus on Irish reunification would prove particularly constructive if there was a follow-through in the form of seeking international support for that objective."

It is worth remembering that the 26-County state government is currently collaborating wholeheartedly with Britain in the policing of Northern Ireland and extraditing for trial in the Diplock Courts those engaged in political action for a united Ireland.

The signs are that these discussions on strategy within the Republican Movement are

likely to develop in the next months. In the face of the Thatcher government's media ban on Irish nationalists the task of revolutionaries in Britain is clear: to publicise the views of the Republican Movement and to step up the fight for troops out and self-determination. This will mean fighting the exclusion of Irish nationalists from platforms and ensuring that all strands within the Republican Movement gain an audience.



**Our day
will come!**

actions are aimed at the Six County state and not at the 26 County state.

"All IRA activities are geared towards the successful completion of the struggle for independence which was thwarted by Britain foisting partition on the Irish people and setting up a sectarian state in the Six Counties.

"All IRA volunteers are under strict instructions not to come into conflict with the armed forces of the 26 Counties. They are not the enemy..."

"There is no campaign or armed conspiracy against institutions of the 26 County state, nor will there be."

It is in the context of the above developments that we need to understand the meaning of the discussions opened up between Sinn Fein and the SDLP. To the proposal from the SDLP for a round-table conference convened by the Irish government, Sinn Fein replied:

"We do not believe that a conference called by the Dublin



THATCHERISM HITS BRADFORD

THE LONDON borough of Wandsworth was for many years Labour controlled. When Thatcherite Tories took control it was turned into a testing ground for privatisation and for confronting local government unions in Greater London. Despite much paper and rhetorical protest union leaders such as Rodney Bickerstaffe were found wanting. Services were privatised, jobs cut. Then a huge programme of selling housing stock to yuppies began. That process continues.

Wandsworth has been used as a pressure point on all the Labour boroughs in London. It is set to continue that role when the Inner London Education Authority empire is broken up and schools handed over to borough control.

During the time when Wandsworth was being geared up to probe the weakness of the London Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy in fighting Tory attacks on local government, the North of England was galvanised into a different struggle, of which Liverpool became the focal point.

Left councils, utilising a sort of inverted 'two nations' argument, sounded off against Thatcherite politics, held onto services such as housing and subsidised transport, and called rallies and demonstrations. Generally speaking, in the North local government unions were not immediately in the firing line.

That period has now ended. The new focal point is Bradford.

Time and again the Tories, in the true tradition of the British bourgeoisie, have avoided all-out battles with the whole working class, instead pursuing fundamental changes by provoking opposition section by section. The leaders of the Labour Party and unions have no answer to this, shying away from the types of political confrontation which could put them in the dock or jail, sequester their 'assets' or destabilise the very political system which now pushes them further and further from power. Their paralysis has brought about defeats which create a paralysis of the class as a whole, locked into the mentality of retreat - a retreat for which it is being made to pay a high price.

Bradford, a working class city, newly under Tory control, is being used to pressurise all Labour

controlled councils in the North of England, Scotland and Wales. Thatcherism, which cannot gain parliamentary control in these areas, has switched its offensive to the political content of local government as well as overall spending.

In this early stage, the local government unions and the Labour Party are making all the appropriate protest noises: a verbal refusal to comply with a huge cuts and privatisation programme. This opposition indeed rests on the wishes of the vast majority of council employees and the people of Bradford. But past experience shows that an offensive backed by Thatcher nationally cannot be defeated at the local level.

It will not be enough for NALGO, NUPE and the other unions to stage marches around Bradford, even if attended by workers from other areas. It will not be sufficient to lobby Kinnock and the Labour Parliamentary Party, who will give verbal support but are powerless in the House of Commons. Piecemeal strikes will fail.

This is not an ideological stance, that of 'professional' class struggle mongers calling for yet another battle. It is the crystal clear lesson of every battle with Thatcher. This enemy cannot be beaten section by section.

The Bradford confrontation is set to run alongside another testing ground: that of Poll Tax in Scotland. We cannot expect any serious linking up of these crucial issues by the Labour leadership, which maintains its stranglehold in the structures of the Labour Party. In this situation, the acid test for the Chesterfield movement is to step into the breach and offer a framework at national level for workers to fight together. If Chesterfield cannot do this, it is surely destined to sink into a decline. Whether Tony Benn and other key leaders actually want to take responsibility for leading in this way remains open to question. That only they can lead is indisputable at this point.

Speech-making about 'refounding the Labour Party' on a socialist basis will have a hollow ring if Bradford workers are defeated and if Poll Tax is imposed in Scotland.



The Tories have taken another initiative. We must respond. If Thatcher is not to take away yet more aspects of what we have gained over years then Bradford must become a national issue, without delay, and before the cuts actually begin.

Overcoming Labour's crisis: Choices for the Left

THE LABOUR PARTY Conference was not quite as uneventful as Tribune and others forecast. Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley won the leadership contest by a substantial margin and the apparatus went on to press through a number of constitutional changes - including the requirement that future leadership challengers must have the backing of 20% of the Parliamentary Party. The only reversal for the leadership on organisational matters was the Conference's approval for a woman on every shortlist for prospective MPs.

On the policy front, nothing fundamental appeared possible because of the ongoing Policy Review. But the least expected intervention was TGWU leader Ron Todd's linking of his union's refusal to compromise on unilateral nuclear disarmament to a criticism of how the leadership is neglecting its trade union base and working class roots in its quest for electoral popularity.

THE RESONSE to Ron Todd's criticisms was instructive. After all, he had secured unanimous support for Kinnock and Hattersley in the leadership election, and voted for the Aims and Values document which extols the virtues of the market. Why then did he have to ruin this theatrically executed media event, staged to prove that Labour was electable and moderate? Apparently Kinnock requires not just votes but obedience.

This isn't simply a product of Kinnock's authoritarian style. In order to 'modernise' the party he must not only defeat the left but silence it. In fact, his 'modernism' is a tired old recipe: "social justice through economic efficiency", or more bluntly, managing capitalism "better than the Tories." Taking his ideal as capitalist Germany, Japan,

France and Sweden, he said that all these countries "had long ago recognised that public and private sectors, government and market had to work in combination if the strength of the economy was to be developed." The party would have to embrace such concepts as the market economy, competitiveness and individualism.

But what has been the record of managing the market in the 1980s? In France, Spain and Greece, the Socialist Parties came to power speaking of social justice. The reality has been open attacks on jobs, working conditions and all the post-war gains of the working class. In Australia, 'modernising socialism' has been supported by big business. In New Zealand the Labour government of Lange has introduced a series of privatisation measures similar to Thatcher's. Making their

economies competitive has meant driving up productivity and increased exploitation for the working class. This is the road indicated by Kinnock.

If Social Democracy could be described as the party of reform in the post-war years, it was because the post-war boom made reforms possible. Social-democratic governments have always accepted 'the logic of the market'. But the consequences of its pro-capitalist policy were not so dire as today. The Wilson government followed a policy of 'rationalising' industry, which meant hundreds of thousands of jobs slashed on the railways and in the mines. But a social explosion was prevented, not only through the efforts of the reactionary union leaders, but because in general the redundant workers could find jobs elsewhere.

But the end of the post-war boom created different conditions. We should remember that monetarism was first introduced by Healey under the dictates of the IMF, when cuts were made in Health and Education.

The depth of the crisis of world capitalism since then has meant that Social Democracy has been forced to take on a more anti-working class role. This is not to hark back to a glorious age of reform, for in the case of Britain, the reforming government of Attlee followed a slavishly pro-imperialist policy of support for the Cold War, and secretly developed a British atomic weapon.

But today the contradiction, described by Lenin's famous formula, that Social Democracy is a 'bourgeois workers party' (bourgeois in its programme and leadership, with a working class base of support) has reached a new stage with elements beginning to drop out of active politics.

In Spain, the union leader Redondo has broken with the government and resigned his seat as a PSOE MP, over its anti-working class policy. Behind his action is the ferment against the Gonzalez government. In Greece a split in the unions has taken place over Papandreou's attacks on the working class, and largescale expulsions of the left in PASOK have been carried out. In Australia the unions have threatened a general strike against the Hawke government. In New Zealand the Labour leaders have threatened to break with the unions for opposing privatisation. The anger of the working class was recently expressed in an attack by trade unionists on Lange's car.

There is a generalised crisis rooted in the pro-capitalist policy of the Labour apparatuses which clashes with the aspirations and material interests of the working class.

Today in the Labour Party many activists are questioning how long they can go on in a party taking the

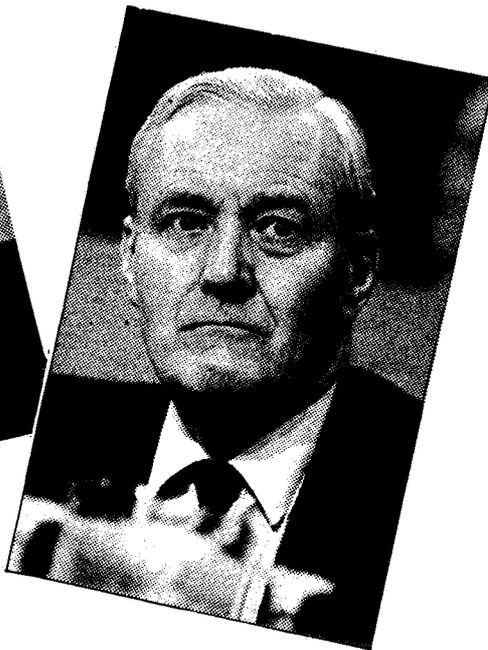
An anti-working class role

The battle is not

Is the Labour Party a potential vehicle



for socialism?



direction it is. Can it be a vehicle for socialism? Doesn't the working class need a new party? Such questions are being raised, even if tentatively, in and around the Chesterfield movement.

Revolutionaries, however, must take account of all the contradictions. Whilst developing the perspectives and activities of the Socialist Conference, it would be wrong to mechanically demand that it play the role of a new party. This is not simply because Chesterfield is still in its early stages, but because of its relation to developments within the Labour Party. The latter's links to the unions remain fundamental to its character, even if these are more and more bureaucratized. The fight for a government that expresses the interests of the working class continues for the foreseeable future to be centred on a perspective of work within the unions and the Labour Party.

The crisis of Social Democracy will be long and drawn out, rather than consisting of straightforward splits in which the left forms a new party. The task of revolutionaries today, in Chesterfield and elsewhere, is not therefore, in the manner of the SWP, just to propagandise on the revolutionary versus reformist road, nor to raise as an imminent practical issue a new workers' party.

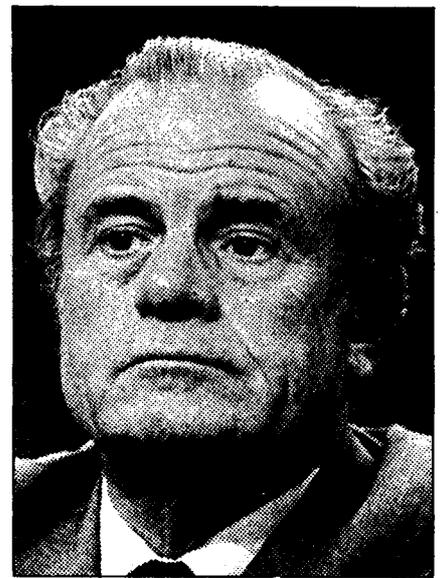
The key question is how to create a unity in struggle of all those opposed to the present course of the Labour and union leaders, alongside those fighting the attacks of the

government.

At the Socialist Conference organising committee meeting on September 17th, a resolution was passed, which talked of a "twin-track approach to socialism". That is, an approach based on the Socialist Conference network "working towards the development of policy, and campaigning for the acceptance of socialist ideas"; and secondly, an approach based on "the need for socialists to organise within the Labour Party in order to assure the adoption of socialist policies, the election of a socialist Labour government." To this end, it calls on the Campaign Group to continue working with the Socialist Conference and to promote joint work between local Campaign Groups and Socialist Conference groupings.

The fact that the Socialist Conference brings together the left inside and outside the Labour Party indicates the need to resist the rightward drift of the entire apparatus of the labour movement. True, there are those involved who view it as a sort of left-wing think tank. But it also needs a more practical direction. Whatever the differences of the forces involved, there are immediate campaigning issues which should be on its agenda.

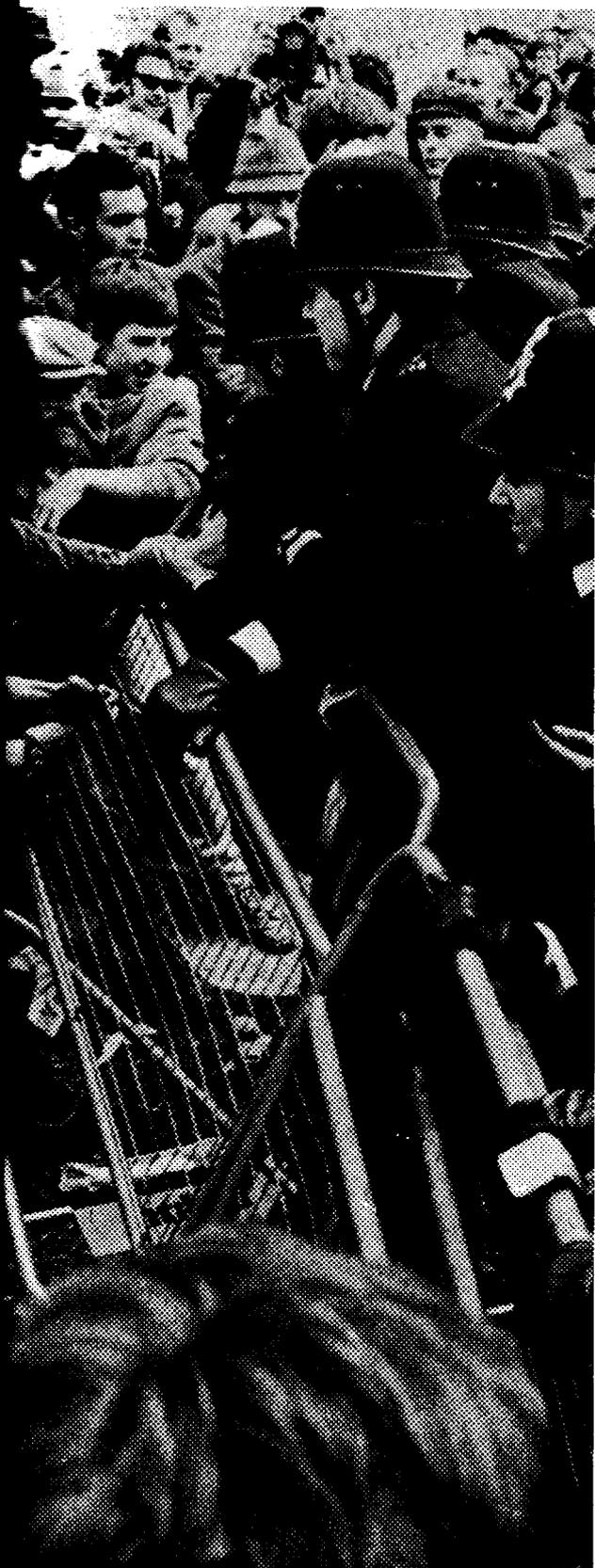
For instance, there is an urgent need for a campaign against the EETPU throughout the labour movement. The apparently emboldened union leaders who voted for expulsion at the TUC, discovered there was no reason to



Behind the rhetoric

RESPONSES TO Neil Kinnock's Party Conference speech from trade union leaders were a lot less ambiguous than those of many Labour MPs. Eric Hammond claimed that Kinnock had stolen his clothes. Arthur Scargill called the speech "disgraceful." Ron Todd's refusal to join Tony Benn and other left MPs in a standing ovation for Kinnock, and his remarks at the Tribune rally, reflect an important divergence of interests from the Labour leadership. Even from the bureaucratic standpoint of a union leader whose power-base is being squeezed by a massive offensive from the employers, Todd recognises that Kinnock is offering little that can challenge the adverse conditions of management dictatorship and take-it-or-leave-it single union deals. He also knows, however, that to have gone further - and not supported the leadership or the policy review - could create a wave of destabilisation that would quickly affect the apparatuses of unions like his own.

MOBILIS



expel them from the Labour Party. Norman Willis obligingly sent a letter to the NEC of the Labour Party, explaining that the EETPU was still a 'bona fide union'. Clearly there will be no fight against the EETPU from the union leaders, unless of course Hammond encroaches on their territory.

The meaning of business unionism must be explained at every level, as well as why the new realists cannot fight it - because they share its views about 'outdated class war' and collaboration with the bosses.

The proposed amalgamation of the EETPU and AEU must also be fought as this would present a formidable reactionary bloc inside the labour movement.

The Socialist Conference requires above all a policy for today's struggles against the Housing Bill and the Poll Tax. The conference it is sponsoring on the Poll Tax is an important initiative in this respect.

The struggle in the unions needs to be a central concern of Chesterfield. But this is a more fundamental question than the election of a few left leaders. The current state of Broad Lefts needs discussing - they are still too much electoral machines for the standing of left candidates. Even where left leaders are elected, or there is a left majority on an NEC, as was the case in the CPSA, nothing fundamental is changed whilst the bureaucratic apparatus remains intact. The unions cannot be turned into fighting units expressing the interests of the working class by the traditional methods of Broad Leftism.

A perspective of work within the Labour Party is equally critical. In a paper presented by Vladimir Derer for Labour Left Liaison to a recent Campaign Group meeting it is argued that the election of a "radical reforming Labour government" is the over-riding priority of the Labour left. This means winning majority support for the programme of such a government by appealing to the existing Labour Party membership - and presumably the controlling union block vote. Hence demands must not be pursued that "go beyond what is acceptable to the majority", and they must be pursued in ways which are acceptable to them, namely "through the normal routine Labour Party channels and structures."

The traditional base of the Labour left has been the General Committees and Local Government Committees. Today these bodies have been drained of life, especially given the ignominious death of 'municipal socialism'. Even where the left has a majority on a GC, it is powerless to change the situation - where for instance a Labour Council is imposing cuts against its wishes. The key to the current situation lies in building bases of support in the workplace and in working class communities faced with the Poll Tax, Housing and Education Acts. The left will need to mobilise outside the Labour Party against its public office-holders in order to defend the interests of the working class.

This isn't an argument for pulling out of the GCs, which would be tantamount to capitulating to the Kinnockites, leaving them an open field. But to succumb to the routinism of Labour Party structures when battle lines are already firmly drawn in the localities is no way forward. In any case, in a situation where trade union activists do not generally come to Labour Party meetings, and workers in general are not joining it, new forces to change the balance in local Parties will only be found in the struggles of the working class, in the workplaces and on the estates.

At a recent meeting of the Benn-Heffer campaign, it was decided that it was necessary to hold together the organisation built up in the areas during the campaign. Regular coordinating meetings will be held, starting in November. That is half a step forward. But why is it that the Campaign Group even now involves only a handful of regional coordinators who weren't even elected by the rank and file? Jon Lansman's report to that meeting states that as the Campaign Group is simply a parliamentary group, it is necessary to involve people outside it in practical tasks. For this to happen, rank and file activists will require an input into the political direction of the Campaign Group's work. Isn't a meeting which calls together representatives of the activists in every locality for a genuine discussion on the way forward after the conference long overdue?

The Benn-Heffer campaign played a positive role in reorganising the left, whatever its limitations. But rallies at which the good word is passed down by leading figures is no substitute for open discussion on the way to organise against Kinnock's new realism. The battle is not a parliamentary, or even internal Party one.

THE OUTSIDE LABOUR

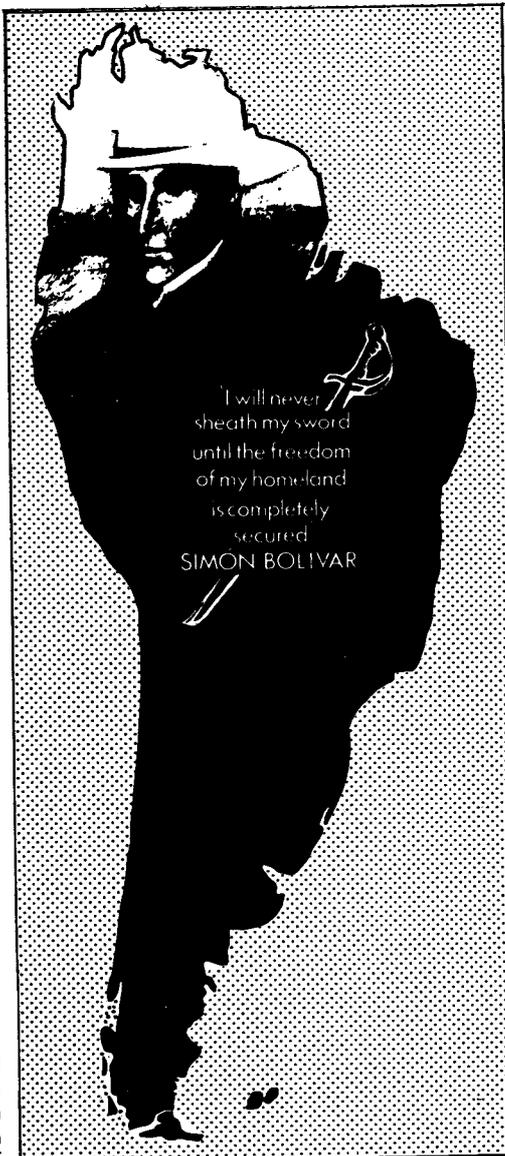
THE KILLING FIELDS OF COLOMBIA

IN LATIN America appearances are deceptive. Colombia is one of only three countries not to have suffered a military dictatorship in the past 30 years. Yet, its civilian homicide rate has made other Latin American states look like peace communes and Colombia now has the highest rate of deaths from violence of any country not at war.

Colombia's social statistics reflect the problems of the region. The country is rich in natural resources, containing 50% of Latin America's coal and large deposits of other minerals, including 95% of the world's emeralds. The exploitation of these resources is controlled by a handful of multinationals, and wealth is similarly managed in other parts of the economy. 10% of the population receive 40% of the national income and two-thirds of all land is held by 12% of landowners.

The country has been ruled for decades by the alternating apparatuses of the corrupt Liberal and Conservative Parties. Partisan civil war over the spoils of administration in the 1930s and 1950s - La Violencia - was prolonged and bloody, claiming 500,000 victims. Today's violence has different roots and is systematically directed against the workers' and democratic movements. 140 well-armed death squads are now in operation, with the backing of the armed forces and police, with the left-wing oppositional coalition, the Union Patriótica and the main trade union federation, the CUT, as their chief targets. The entire CUT national executive have received death threats.

Much of the murder has centred on the city of Medellín, the centre of Colombia's billion-dollar cocaine trade. It was here, in August 1987, that Dr. Hector Abad Gomez, president of a human rights grouping, was gunned down. His



death triggered the setting-up of a broad united front of workers, peasants, ethnic and community organizations, as well as political groups and prominent individuals, against the illegal death squads and for the right to life.

The urgent need for such a project is underlined by the increasingly brazen actions of the

paramilitaries. 'Hit lists' of doctors, musicians, artists, journalists, teachers and lawyers are circulating in the country. In February of this year a death squad broke up a meeting of peasants in Meta, read out a list of names, herded the people out and shot 12 to death. A month later, in the most notorious incident so far, 21 banana workers, all members of SINTAGRO, their trade union, were rounded up and killed on two farms in the Uraba region.

Behind the Uraba assassinations lay an intense battle by the developing union against the inhuman conditions of work imposed by the banana plantation owners. The stakes are high: Uraba's exports were valued at \$188 million last year, equal to 10% of the world's traded bananas. Around 20,000 workers are employed in the banana trade in Uraba, at an average wage well below the legal minimum and working a week 20 hours above the legal maximum.

Trade union organisation has grown rapidly among such workers in the 1980s, putting class action on the agenda. Many believe that the real objective of the death squad's attack on March 14th 1988 was to force the cancellation of local elections. In the event, they went ahead, and the left-wing Union Patriótica won easily. The following day Colombia's three banana marketing companies claimed that "national sovereignty is being lost in Uraba" and compared it to El Salvador.

The link between the banana companies and the death squads and between the squads and the military is proven by a large body of evidence. Also implicated is the government of Virgilio Barco, which has refused to take action and whose state of siege provides cover for the paramilitary murders.

The organization of the National Council for Convergence (Junta Nacional por la Convergencia) on a

good united front basis is an important political step. But it also carries dangers for the signatories of its declarations, who go into the front line facing the death squads. In this context, its efforts to defend democratic and trade union rights in Colombia urgently needs an international dimension.

Amnesty International has begun to publicise the situation in Colombia and the Solidarity Committee in Britain has called for a boycott of Colombian products. The left, however, has unfortunately been almost totally silent on Colombia, a country where the principal cause of death for men between 15 and 44 is murder! Other parts of the world are today more newsworthy and may have more visible liberation movements, but British socialists have the chance to campaign on and publicise the situation of workers and peasants in Colombia. It is our duty to use that chance for our sisters and brothers.

Imperialism is watching events in Colombia closely to see if a successful crushing of human rights there might not tip the balance in other countries in the region. Already a wave of 'death squad' killings has begun in Peru. It would be a tragedy indeed if the long-awaited crumbling of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, begun by the recent referendum, were to be shadowed by the spread of the Colombian 'sickness' into Peru, Brazil and Bolivia and the return of a military regime in Argentina.

'DEBATE'

THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION 'Unity for Life, Democracy and Peace', from the Junta Nacional por la Convergencia, was published in the July 1988 edition of Debate, a socialist magazine produced in Bogota.

Debate reveals the scope of the movement for democratic and civil rights in Colombia. Besides public appeals and coverage of human rights activity, it carries discussion articles by people and currents active in the fight for life and democracy. It discusses the problem of perspectives and alliances and that of an approach to the constitution and the institutions of government.

The huge threat to basic liberties in Colombia present the question of the united front in a variety of forms. Whilst electoral fronts and blocs within the trade union movement might require a higher level of strategic agreement between organisations, the comrades believe that initiatives based on the very defence of the right to life can draw on the widest possible democratic forces, creating a united movement.



IN OUR situation as Colombians of diverse political outlooks and philosophies, worried by the chaotic situation in the country, we have resolved to united our efforts in the search for ways to bring about conditions that can end the crisis we are enduring.

In this situation of truly historic emergency, it is vital to bring the country together, to set on foot work to bring about a Convergence for life, democracy, sovereignty and peace with social justice.

The Democratic National Convergence is more necessary today than it was a year ago when the idea was proposed by different sectors. In recent months things have got worse: on the economic and social front the situation is one

Into the
frontline
facing the
deathsquads



of inflation, with an increased level of unemployment, falling real wages and continuous rises in fares and prices. The foreign debt is reaching suffocating limits. National resources are being plundered and the agricultural position is a disaster due to the absence of incentives and agrarian reform.

The political environment has deteriorated in its turn: paramilitary groups have doubled their criminal work and have moved on from selective assassination to massacres, escalating the dirty war, expressions of which justifiably provoke the unanimous rejection of Colombians.

Whilst the country is being led to disaster, the traditional political apparatuses increasingly distance themselves from national interests and, blind to current concerns, devote themselves to bureaucratic machinations. The government, with neither a political compass nor a real will to serve the majority, has, in less than four months, leapt from announcing measures such as calling a plebiscite, to maintaining the state of siege more rigorously.

The official line is now clear - to treat matters of public order or social mobilisation by means of militarization, instead of dealing in depth with the problems which require urgent economic, social and institutional transformations.

The scene we outline, incomplete as it is in terms of listing all social grievances, must not give rise to despair. We believe that the nation can save itself and then take power for itself. This means uniting all Colombians, friends of life, peace and social justice, democracy and national sovereignty in a powerful movement, without exclusions or sectarianism. This is the unity we want and for which we are appealing. In order to achieve it we have decided to establish the Junta Nacional por la Convergencia and we call on the Colombian people to agree on the following immediate tasks:

1. Advance the campaign of the plebiscite by creating a national constituent body representing the economic, social and political groupings interested in social change.
2. Support, at a national level, the movement for the right to life and general respect for human rights.
3. Seek the support of the broadest social layers to demand the disbanding of the paramilitary groups, punishment for those responsible for human rights

violations and the appearance alive of the disappeared.

4. Endorse the legitimate demands of the workers' unions and other social organisations (town, regional, peasants, ethnic and student movements); endorse the combined efforts that they make to achieve their aims, such as the National Stoppage which has been announced.

For the right to life

5. Promote the holding of forums and discussions in all areas to spread these proposals, as well as the organisation of local or regional groups of Convergence.

6. Insist on the need for the national government to find a political solution to the armed conflict which is going on in the country.

Bogota, May 24th 1988.

Gerardo Molina, Carlos Jimenez Gomez, Francisco J. de Roux S.J., Clara Lopez Obregon, Gilberto Vieira, Diego Montana Cuellar, Marino Jaramillo, Orlando Fals Borda, Antonio Lopez, Victor Mojica, Jaime Gomez, Alberto Mendoza Morales, Hector Torres, Jose Gutierrez, Jorge Regueros Peralta, Otto Nanez, Jose Antequera, Freddy Gomez, Cesar Torres, Javier Munera, Camilo Gonzalez Posso, National Ethnic Organisation of Colombia (ONIC), National Peasants' Consumers' Organisation (ANUC), National Coordination of Civic Movements (CNMC), New Independent Liberals, Movimiento Socialista Firmes, Patriotic Union, Colombian Communist Party, Struggle, Popular Front, United People's Movement, Popular Integration Current.

SWANU RALLY

SWANU, the Southwest African National Union of Namibia, launched a series of meetings around the country with a stirring rally for the liberation of southern Africa in London on October 22nd.

70 people came to commemorate over two decades of war for independence, and the comrades who fell taking part in that struggle.

The treatment of SWANU by the official solidarity movement in Britain has been shameful. The Anti-Apartheid leadership has systematically excluded any mention from its publications of SWANU's struggle. Attempts by activists to assert SWANU's legitimate place in the liberation movement have been met with slander.

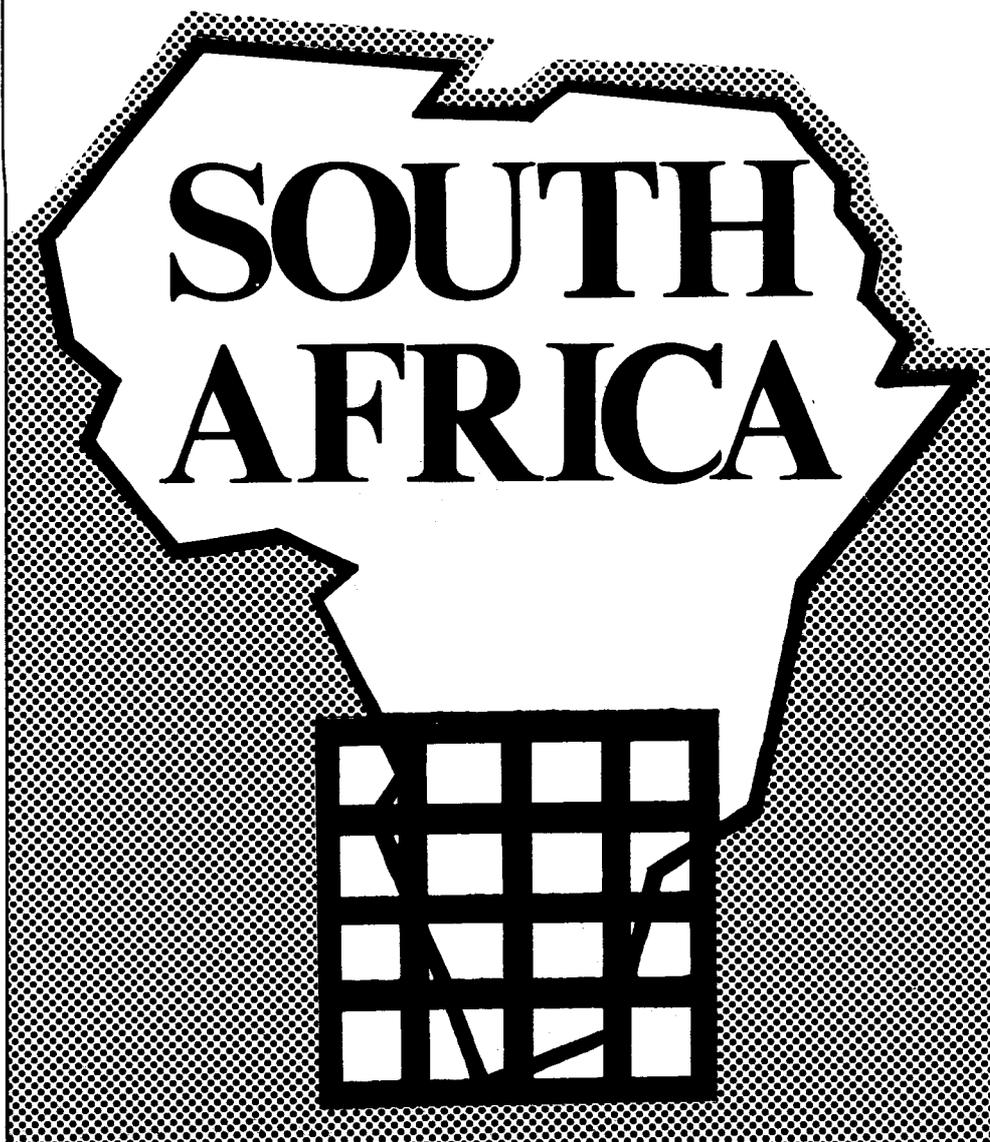
Despite this, a leading SWANU speaker exhorted his comrades to go forward with their heads high and not to beg for a hearing. It was not the support of people in London, New York or Moscow that would be decisive, he said, but that of the people of Namibia itself.

A leader of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania gave solidarity greetings and a Black Consciousness speaker said that the BCM and SWANU were twin sisters who would fall or rise together.

A speaker from City Group AA pledged continuing support, and speakers from the Socialist Labour Group and Azania-Namibia Forum declared that they would continue the fight within the British labour movement for socialist pluralism and a platform for SWANU.

The meeting, which included tributes to Steve Biko and freedom fighters in Ireland and the Caribbean and was interspersed with revolutionary songs, was in the best spirit of internationalism. Now efforts must be redoubled within the solidarity movement to develop as wide an audience as possible for the revolutionary ideas of SWANU and their co-thinkers in Azania.

THE UNITED FRONT IN



SOUTH AFRICA

DURING THE course of this year, the Apartheid regime has intensified its repression of political oppositionists. The successive states of emergency, largescale arrests, detentions of activists and the banning in March of 17 organisations including AZAPO and the UDF have combined to have a profound impact on open political activity against Botha.

The Black working class, however, has hit back strongly. Black Consciousness forces quickly formed the Azanian Coordinating Committee (AZACCO) to provide an organisational and political lead.

The shift of focus in resistance and political discussion to the trade unions is also apparent. Some 1.25 million workers are now organised in unions, grouped principally in the federations COSATU (800,000 members) and NACTU (400,000 members). Questions of political programme, alliances and organisation are currently being discussed in the Azanian working class.

From their rebirth in the 1973 strike wave, the unions have undergone a spectacular growth. Over the past 15 years, the unions have developed to the point where they can seriously challenge the multinationals and the apartheid economy, securing significant reforms in pay and working conditions. Beyond this the unions are seen by many socialists as the basis of a future political grouping capable of smashing the racist state. In this context we can understand why Botha did not ban COSATU outright in March but imposed restrictions on its links outside of the workplace. The debate on the future direction of the unions has begun.

In many ways the South African revolution itself depends on the outcome of this political struggle. Within the liberation movement there are contending forces with different programmes. Similarly, within the ranks of the ruling white layers there are different proposals for the best means of dealing with the unions, from those who seek to confront and destroy them to those want an accommodation, leaving capitalism intact.

A campaign is being carried out within COSATU for its affiliates to adopt the ANC's Freedom Charter. Up to the formation of COSATU, the ANC had always displayed a suspicion of independent unions developing in South Africa, at one time accusing FOSATU, one of the founding components of COSATU, of attempting to undermine its position as the main liberation organisation. It also defended SACTU, its defunct and Stalinised trade union wing, against criticism that it had become irrelevant.

The fact that it later modified its position grew out of a realisation that it might be marginalised by events when COSATU was formed in December 1985, regrouping 363,000 workers. The exclusion from the final unity talks of the Black Consciousness unions (AZACTU) by the Charterists was a worrying portent of things to come within COSATU.

At the 1987 COSATU Congress, attempts by the metalworkers union, NUMSA, to persuade the Confederation to adopt socialism as its aim were roundly defeated by supporters of the Freedom Charter. From its founding conference, the majority of the leadership of COSATU unions had gone back on the slogans of earlier times. 'Socialism means Freedom' had been abandoned as a statement of intent in favour of rigid acceptance of the old-style Stalinist two-stage theory, expressed in the Freedom Charter. COSATU's aim was now 'democratic struggle' - in the abstract.

The Freedom Charter was adopted by many unions on the basis of little or no discussion. The Charter itself, and its most fervent supporters, identify no distinct political role for the unions to play in the struggle. For the Charterists, adoption of the Charter was then used as a block on open political debate within the unions on their future direction and in particular on the role that their members should play in the broader political struggle.

Unions where discussion on a Workers Charter was most open and thorough were, not surprisingly, the ones where the Freedom Charter did not go through without discussion. In NUMSA, for example, Moses Mayekiso before his arrest had outlined the then MAWU's conception of the struggle, explaining the need to mobilise the working class on its own demands independently from other class forces.

Mayekiso spoke of a Workers Charter going beyond the general democratic demands of the Freedom Charter. That such a Workers Charter has not appeared is due largely to the impact of state repression, but also to the grip of Charterists on political discussion inside the unions.

The main conflict on the Freedom Charter debate has taken place in CCAWUSA (Commerical, Catering and Allied Workers Union) who rejected the Charter at their national conference. CCAWUSA is COSATU's third largest affiliate and is one of South Africa's more militant unions, leading important strikes such as those at OK Bazaars, 'Pick and Pay' and Ellerines. Using the pretext of a proposed merger between CCAWUSA and other much smaller catering unions, Charterists formed a minority breakaway, called themselves CCAWUSA, adopted the Freedom Charter and sought recognition from COSATU's executive - which incredibly they

received. Despite subsequent court orders and a COSATU commission of investigation into the dispute, the CCAWUSA majority remain outside the federation against their wishes, and the union is divided. In the words of a CCAWUSA document, representatives have been "evicted from COSATU meetings." Their 'crime' appears to be that the same conference that rejected the Freedom Charter decided to work towards "a socialist programme of action."

These problems have to be related to the strong influence which the new international detente politics of Gorbachev have within the ANC and its trade union allies. The Kremlin's line on how to progress in South Africa is now mixed up with deals on Angola and Mozambique. Gorbachev would no doubt talk of a democratic, mixed economy state. For the ANC, this is coming to mean openly advocating an alliance with sections of the liberal white bourgeoisie and the Bantustan leaders, with the working class as foot soldiers in the revolution. ANC meetings with 'progressive bosses' such as Gavin Relly and Tony Bloom have been well documented. Bloom, Chairman of the Premier Group has been described by Thabo Mbeki of the ANC as "an outstanding businessman who will play a very important role in the future economy." Bloom apparently did not agree as he has recently emigrated to Britain!

MOSES MAYEKISO

**Mobilise
the
workers
on their
demands**



That these 'summits' take place in Lusaka and Dakar will not have obscured their meaning for many workers. During the OK Bazaars strike of 1986, demonstrators held placards proclaiming "Anti-Apartheid' bosses are not our friends", signalling that the everyday experiences of workers sometimes runs counter to the projects of the ANC.

The ANC, with support from Western Socialist Parties and the Eastern bloc, and a virtual monopoly in the solidarity movements, has a powerful apparatus. This poses the question of what tactics and methods can be adopted to express the independence and leading role of the working class.

A united front of workers' organisations in South Africa is an immediate necessity. The cooperation between COSATU and NACTU in the recent three-day general strike against the bannings and Labour Law Amendment Bill shows the potency of the Black working class when it is united.

The strike and the decision of the special COSATU congress in May to convene a conference of all anti-apartheid forces can be the basis of such a united front, providing that the COSATU leadership carries out the mandate on a basis that allows NACTU and groupings like AZACO and AZANYU (Pan-Africanist) to take part. For their part, NACTU and Black Consciousness organisations should spare no efforts in order to engage in the fullest debate with the ranks of COSATU unions, despite all obstacles.

The regime's banning of the first conference of this kind in Cape Town is not surprising and indicates that open legal channels are becoming more limited. In fact, current conditions dictate that any political step forward will have to find ways to circumvent the legal restrictions of the Botha regime.

If the March bannings hardly affected the day-to-day workplace functioning of the unions, then this is because the Botha regime's central plan for the unions concentrates on the provisions of the Labour Law Amendment Act, as opposed to an outright banning. Step by step repression is the order of the day.

In brief, the Amendment places further restrictions on the right to strike, including making sympathy and secondary strikes illegal. Secondly, a strike will be deemed illegal if it is "the same or virtually the same as any dispute between the same employer and employees which gave rise to a strike or lockout in the last 12 months." Provisions are also intended to shift power more to trade union centres and making leaders more

'responsible' for the actions of their rank and file.

This strategy, undoubtedly learned from Thatcher and blessed by the multinational bosses, aims to emasculate the unions as legal entities able to coordinate actions even on a workplace level. The approach reflects the influence of the multinationals who recognise that total repression could threaten production of gold, diamonds, coal and other essential export goods, thus endangering the survival of capitalism itself. For them, deals are only possible if the unions are allowed some form of existence.

The Bill again raises the question of what, if any, political expression the unions should seek. From 1982, leading FOSATU, and later NACTU and COSATU, figures have made tentative suggestions for a working class based political organisation linked to the unions. The problem has been left at the call for a so far unwritten Workers Charter, which unions representing some hundreds of thousands of workers at least formally support.

Faced with an increase in repressive measures by the state, do the unions retreat or advance? As the legal avenues are closed down, alternatives such as pacifist protest from Church figures and a promised increase in the level of the guerrilla struggle by the ANC's armed wing aimed at forcing Botha to the negotiating table, will not in themselves answer day-to-day problems in the townships and workplaces.

Not all unions would support the formation of a Workers Party. The NUM for example, COSATU's largest affiliate, whose leaders are probably the closest to the UDF, is implacably linked to the Freedom Charter. The NUM called for a multi-class opposition at the May special COSATU congress, opposing a resolution from NUMSA and the Chemical Workers which proposed "a broad front of all working class organisations."

The NUM's alternative programme of action "unifying the broadest possible section of the South Africa population" is unclear on its ultimate aim. It calls for an action programme - but to what end?

The idea of a Workers Party remains pregnant as the struggle against the regime in the next period flows back into political channels from the unions. It can serve as the outline form in which the class independence of workers' organisations is maintained, even during broad alliances against oppression, which are not without their place, but cannot be ends in themselves.

Slovo calls for mixed economy

IN A RECENT interview, Joe Slovo a leading cadre of the ANC and South African Communist Party insisted that all that was needed for negotiations to begin between Botha and the ANC was the acceptance by the whites of the 'principle' of majority rule in a unitary democratic state. If accepted then: "There is much that can be tossed around including constitutional mechanisms for safeguarding the rights of the individual, the relationship between private and social property."

While Slovo retains the achievement of socialism as an "ultimate" goal ("and I emphasise the word 'ultimate'") he believes: "that there will be a mixed economy in the post-liberation period, in which in particular the black middle class and small black bourgeois will come into their own."

From CCAWUSA Branch Secretaries

What is the consequence of this position in CCAWUSA?

The dispute, if it had been handled correctly by the COSATU leadership, may have been resolved by now. The federation lost an important opportunity to perform one of its main tasks, viz to build worker unity. Today CCAWUSA still remains divided, with the large majority of members finding themselves not recognised by the COSATU leadership.

Recently CCAWUSA has been evicted like common criminals from numerous COSATU meetings. CCAWUSA, as an organisation, was prevented from attending the COSATU Women's Congress although it has made many advances in fighting for women's rights and establishing women's committees.

So long as this state of affairs continues, the more there is likelihood of a split in CCAWUSA. With a urgent reassessment by COSATU of its position such a consequence may just be averted.

The South African working class is now facing massive state repression, regardless of which organisation they belong to. Recent state legislation will harm all organisations of the left irrespective of political preference, whether workers find themselves in AZAPO, UDF, COSATU or NACTU.

A meeting between the ANC and NACTU came to similar conclusions. It was agreed that the adoption or the non-adoption of the Freedom Charter should not be a prerequisite for unity or a stumbling block towards unity. We in CCAWUSA have consistently argued for the same position, but unfortunately, have been the victim of many smears that are anti-COSATU and pro-NACTU. It is our sincere hope that the COSATU leadership would heed these calls coming from Zimbabwe.

Without a clear strategy for political unity the state and the bosses will continue the offensive. A united front of all fighting forces, under a working class leadership and committed to socialist politics will go a long way towards defeating that offensive and opening the path towards a socialist future.

May 7 1988

From a NACTU educational seminar

Let's say we reach a point in our history where there is no more racism but the capitalist system has not changed. There would be blacks who are bosses. The workers, though, are still forced to sell their labour-power. The workers are still as unfree as before even though they can go and vote every 5 years. Let's take the example of Zambia, where there are many more black bosses and the whites to a large extent have left, although there are still many multinational corporations. What is the position of the black workers in the copper mines? Not better, and for many it is worse. In Zambia and Lesotho, where people are free in the sense they can vote and live where they want to, the workers are still not free.

I have seen from the lists of demands from you in the workplaces that many of the demands you are raising are similar to those I am suggesting. I am starting with political demands. First, there is no doubt that our first demand is universal suffrage. Without this almost anything else will not work. It is a question of workers' control of political power. It is not that workers will sit in the present

Parliament, but that they have the right to determine their leaders and representatives. The second demand is equal rights for people in all respects. The third demand is for the right of immediate recall of all delegates to representative bodies. This is what you are already doing in your union, where any person who is not carrying out the mandate of the workers can be recalled. This right is not part of any of our existing documents. In a WC (Workers Charter) the right of immediate recall of all delegates to representative bodies must be underlined. (Another right is the right to bear arms. In any democratic country the workers have the right to bear arms and to form workers' militias. Otherwise you are at the mercy of the state or the enemy army. This also, probably for legal reasons, is not in any of the documents.)

On the economic front the right to work is one of the most important demands. The 35 hour week has become possible in SA. Today it is quite possible to produce what we need in a 35 hour week so that we have more leisure time. We also need a minimum wage which is a living wage. The right to form trade unions is very important today as the government is trying to push back the rights we have already won.

On the social and cultural front we should, in my view, have a

statement that no-one should receive wages without giving labour. Maternity and paternity benefits and all aspects of social security must be spelled out. Other demands include the right to learn and free education for all up to Standard 10 and the prohibition of child labour under the age of 16. Education should be linked up with production for social needs where labour is something for which you are educated. Productive work must become a pleasure not a burden. There should be state provision of free legal representation for all workers, as well as health care and housing and recreation for all. These must be free; no-one should have to pay for these things. They must be at the centre of a workers' charter.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by mentioning how a workers' charter can be formed. The EAWU can't draw up such a charter on its own but they can contribute to this process. All trade unions and the working class as a whole must be involved. A WC must be drawn up in a democratic, participatory manner. It must be worked out from below rather than drawn up by union officials. It must be discussed at all union conferences. The EAWU has an important role to play in raising the issue at the workplace.

The workers themselves must take part

