

Break
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with
Tories

Socialist ORGANISER

Recall
the
TUC

Paper of the Socialist Organiser Alliance No.165 February 9 1984 25p Claimants and strikers 10p

Israeli and imperialist interventions leave

LEBANON IN RUINS

By Clive Bradley

FOLLOWING fierce fighting in Beirut since the beginning of February, US marines in Lebanon are being moved out of the city to be relocated on ships off shore. British troops are also being withdrawn.

The transfer of US forces will not be immediate or simultaneous. According to Reagan, "US military will remain on the ground in Lebanon for retraining and equipping the Lebanese army and protecting our remaining personnel."

But the indications are that the US plans to pull its forces back to its offshore task force, and seek to guarantee the Lebanese state from the sea. Its fleet already has a record of military involvement in Lebanon - notably last September when it was responsible for the bombardment of Druze militias on the mainland.

French President Mitterrand has insisted that French troops will stay, although the Italian government is also withdrawing its contingent to the multinational force.

The crisis was precipitated by an uprising in Beirut, largely organised by the Druze militias of Walid Jumblatt and the Shi'a Muslim fundamentalist 'Amal (Hope) movement of Nabih Berri.

The government of Amin Gemayel, which was installed after the Israeli invasion of 1982, and has been backed by the US, has clearly collapsed. After the fighting broke out, members of the government defected, and then the whole Cabinet resigned.

The Lebanese army - restructured after 1982 so as to be dominated by Gemayel's Falange Party - fell apart during the conflict. According to some reports, 90% of the army surrendered their arms without protest.

The slaughter inflicted on Lebanon by the Israeli invasion, and imperialist intervention since then, were all justified as operations to secure 'peace' in civil war-torn Lebanon.

'Operation Peace in Galilee' as the Israeli invasion was called, led to tens of thousands of dead and wounded, and thousands of refugees. The Falangist government, which was designed to be a stable ally for Israel and imperialism, had to be backed by US military intervention and a war of attrition against the Druze and



French troops in Beirut

other Muslim forces in Beirut and the Shouf mountains.

As we go to press, the US fleet is once again bombarding Syrian positions in Lebanon.

Imperialist-Israeli 'peace' has only worsened the day-to-day tragedy that the Lebanese people have lived through. Whoever they back to replace Gemayel, it will be a government favourable to their interests, not a government wanted by the mass of Lebanese.

The Lebanese civil war of 1975-6 began as a just war against the Christian-dominated sectarian nature of the Lebanese state, and over the right of the Palestinian Resistance to exist in Lebanon. It degenerated into communal slaughter, partly due to the

involvement of Israeli and Arab capitalist states (like Saudi Arabia and Syria), backing sides in the war and changing sides in the war according to their own interests.

What was worse, the Lebanese National Movement - the oppressed Muslims and groups allied to the Palestinians - bowed to and worsened the increasing communal polarisation by dropping its anti-sectarian, secular programme in 1976.

An end to big power interference in Lebanon would help alleviate Lebanon's problems, but the anti-Falangist forces need to renew their commitment to a secular state, and seek to end the community-based sectarian nature of the conflict now if peace is to be secured.

Get Tories on the run!

POLITICAL banana-skins have dominated the Thatcher government's record in the months since it won the most stunning victory of any election since 1945.

And now the stench of financial scandal, of petty personal money-grubbing corruption, creeps up on Margaret Thatcher herself.

First her son was exposed as using Thatcher's prime-minis-

terial position to help his business activities.

Perhaps Mark Thatcher at 30 could be dismissed as 'a stupid boy', Margaret Thatcher's version of President Jimmy Carter's redneck brother Billy. But now Dennis Thatcher, Queen Margaret's consort, is caught at the same financial game.

Like corrosive poison gas, the cloud of scandal and corruption edges closer to the prime minister herself. Mrs Thatcher is slowly being undercut and discredited.

Good — but how ridiculous. Margaret Thatcher's government has made Britain a heaven for spivs and asset-strippers of all kinds, and a capitalist hell for millions of working class people.

The face of Thatcher's Britain is the brutal, ugly, nightmare face of corrupt, socially irresponsible capitalism. What even an Edward Heath denounced as the 'unacceptable face of capitalism' is held up to the British people by Margaret Thatcher as her vision of the beautiful society.

She proclaims it and she fights for it. She glories in the memory of red-in-tooth-and-claw 19th century capitalism and offers it to the British people as a blueprint of the desirable future.

And this Mrs Thatcher is being undermined and mired because of the petty knavery of a doltish son and a husband on the make!

But then, come to think of it, when they finally got the big-time gangster Al Capone, it was for tax evasion.

And the Hitler-scale war criminal and mass murderer Richard Nixon was kicked out of the US presidency for inspiring a small burglary and telling a few lies.

In any case, the magical 'Falklands Factor' which fuelled Margaret Thatcher back to Downing St in June, despite her crimes against the British people, is well and truly dead in British politics. As dead as the Argentine junta and the sailors on the Admiral Belgrano and HMS Sheffield.

If the TUC were not led by well-heeled office boys unfit to run a small works canteen; if the Labour leaders were not Parliament-bound talk-mongers — then we could make it impossible for this government to continue to rule.

We could make it impossible for any government to rule Britain with the Thatcherite politics of social asset-stripping, attacks on democratic rights, and shameless indifference to the plight of the millions of capitalism's victims.

Inside



Centre pages: Smiles fade in schools as Tories step up cuts.

Page 2: Councils and the Tories.

Page 3: GCHQ - whose security?

Pages 6-7: US, Nicaragua, Iraq, Egypt, Hungary.

Pages 14-15: Shipyards, pits, rail, print.

Plus letters, reviews and labour history.

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TRADE UNIONS

BANNED

By Mick Horne and
Stephen Baxter

THE government's announcement, on January 25, that trade unions were to be banned at the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) at Cheltenham, was an unprecedented attack on workers' rights.

By offering a £1000 bribe, the Tories hope to persuade over 5000 members of civil service unions at GCHQ to sell their rights and join tame 'staff associations' - where they will have no power to go on strike, or to have recourse to industrial tribunals.

Those who refuse to take the Judas money will be forced to transfer to other jobs. If they refuse those jobs, they face the sack.

The reasons for the precise timing and form of the Tories' move are unclear. They have chosen to try to ban even individual union membership, rather than just withdrawing union recognition or exploiting the union leaders' evident willingness to sign a no-strike agreement. (A prece-

"We now know that it is only a matter of time before our members in the public and other essential services face the threat of similar action"

Rodney Bickerstaffe,
general secretary, NUPE.

dent already exists at the submarine base at Faslane).

But whatever the details, the move is certainly part of the Tories' overall anti-union drive.

As NUPE general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe has pointed out, the 'national security' argument used against unions in GCHQ can equally well be used against millions of workers in essential services - health, electricity, gas, water...

The Tories have already declared their intention legally to limit industrial action in those services. The GCHQ coup, if it succeeds, will be an important precedent.

Geoffrey Howe has magnanimously proclaimed that the government does not intend to introduce similar measures 'outside the field of security and intelligence...'

But this by no means indicates that the ban will not extend beyond GCHQ. Howe's 'field' could, for example, spread into areas such as the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Office.

Besides, who would believe a Tory promise anyway? Remember the one about 'the National Health Service is safe with us'.

The government announcement was met by protest action from rank and file civil servants across the country.

Spontaneous strikes and walk-outs took place in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, Sheffield, Edinburgh, and elsewhere.

In Nottingham, where four out of the five DHSS offices came out on Friday 27th, one strike told SO. "We can't let the government get away with this. If they win this one, where will they ban unions next? Thatcher talks about trade union freedom in Poland, but over here it's a different story!"

Anger is running high at the grass roots. But the union leaderships have been unstinting, deter-

Strike to save workers' rights!

TUC should stop talks with the Tories

mined, and absolutely resolute... in their efforts to stifle any talk of mass strike action, and their professions of patriotism.

Mr Len ('if it goes on strike, denounce it') Murray was at the head of the fight, pledging full support in trying to talk the Tories into changing their minds. Right behind Murray came the leaders of the civil service unions, notably the smarmy Alistair Graham of CPSA, whose eyes are firmly fixed on one day filling Murray's class-collaborationist boots, and John Sheldon of CSU, a union which represents over 1000 radio officers at Cheltenham.

Sheldon declared that to strike would be "to fall into the trap set by Sir Geoffrey Howe".

JOHN HARRIS (IFL)



"The Government over recent months has clamped down on civil servants' activities, including referring in public to the effect of cuts - or even writing in private about them to their MPs. They have been threatened with disciplinary action for writing about cuts in union journals."

Guardian, January 27.

The leaders of the trade union movement will not put up a fight unless they are given an almighty shove from below. Thatcher won't back down because of insipid interviews with Len Murray on 'Weekend World', or because of 'a mass rally with speakers from all political parties' (another idea being floated). Only industrial action will get the government to retreat.

"Even senior civil servants are not immune... They are now being asked for the first time such questions as: Are you a CND supporter? Do you support the Government's policies on nuclear weapons?"

Financial Times, Jan. 27

"An urgent matter of national security... someone in high places in Government service is untrustworthy..."

A government spokesperson giving evidence for the prosecution in the case of Sarah Tisdall the civil servant hauled into court for leaking a document to the Guardian about the Tories' plans to manipulate the media over the arrival of Cruise.

THE 'Socialist Caucus' group (the 'hard left' within CPSA's Broad Left) is putting out a leaflet calling on branches to flood union National Executives with motions calling for a one-day civil service all-out strike, as the start of a campaign of industrial action.

CPSA has called on members at GCHQ to refuse to sign the Tories' ultimatum. All the civil service unions should make a major public campaign out of this call.

Refusals to sign will probably lead to suspensions and sackings by the Tories' March 1 deadline - and the unions must be ready to respond with strike action both throughout the civil service and at GCHQ itself.

The issue concerns not only civil servants, but all workers. We should demand that the TUC organise not only for a civil service one-day strike, but for a one-day general strike, to defend union rights.

And the TUC's talks with the Tories on new anti-union laws, as well as its collaboration with the Tories on official committees like the NEDC, must be called off.

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Paper of the Socialist Organiser Alliance No. 163 January 26 1984 25p Claimants and strikers 10p

Housing benefit cut by up to £2 a week

TORIES RIP OFF TENANTS!

£2 is about what Norman Fowler earns in five minutes. For millions of pensioners and low income families it's what they have to feed themselves in a day.

£2 a week, average, is what the government intends to claw back from housing benefit claimants. It will affect two million of the worst-off, tipping some over the knife-edge between poverty and destitution.

By Gerry
Byrne

Some low-paid families stand to lose as much as £8 per week in benefits.

And the Tories show no shame. Brazen as ever, Margaret Thatcher accepted the accusation of robbing the poor without a blink.

She agreed that what the government gave with one hand it took back with the other. She did not dispute that it was the worst off who would be hit by these proposals. She blamed high taxes!

The new housing benefit system has been a disaster since its introduction. It was made clear when the system was brought in that no extra money would be made available to set up the new administrative machinery required. Indeed, one of the bonuses of the scheme for the Tories was that it would lose 2,400 Civil Service jobs.

Claimants who previously got money towards their rent and rates from the DHSS would now get rent and rate rebates from their local councils instead.

But no new jobs were to be created in local authorities, who took on responsibility for running the new scheme. The extra work-

load was to be foisted on a workforce already cut to ribbons by the squeeze on local government finance.

The results were predictable. Millions of tenants were wrongly put into rent arrears by the failure to process housing benefit claims quickly enough.

Council tenants didn't fare too well, but at least the result there was usually a problem for different local authority departments to sort out between themselves.

For private and housing association tenants the picture was bleaker. They weren't getting money from the DHSS - nor (because of delays) from the council.

The National Federation of Housing Associations found that the number of their tenants in serious rent arrears (over eight weeks) rose five times over in the last year.

Nobody knows how many tenants, often elderly, have gone hungry and cold because they made it a point of honour not to run up rent arrears.

Another pernicious aspect of the scheme is that it removes a substantial slice of claimants' income from their direct control. When you're on the poverty line, the ability to juggle bills is essential. Suddenly, along comes housing benefit and a third or



a half of your income is taken out of your hands. Instead of getting cash from the DHSS, you just get a reduction in your rent and rates.

The pay-off was supposed to be that the poorest people wouldn't run up huge rent arrears to pay off other bills. What has actually happened is the bills don't get paid and tenants find themselves with huge rent arrears which aren't their fault!

And now, to cap it all, even that money they can't get their hands on is cut. Norman Fowler has said he's prepared to consider other ways the axe can fall - so as not to alienate Tory backbenchers.

But the £230 million cut is not negotiable.

So for five minutes of Mr Fowler's time, two million people can choose whether to

Who needs 1984?

Neil Kinnock made a speech in Parliament against the benefit cuts - but that, it seems, is about the end of the official labour movement fight against them. Labour MPs will continue to be a 'loyal', cooperative opposition in Parliament; the TUC will continue to talk to the Tories.

Socialists should step up the fight to turn the labour movement round for a struggle against the Tories. Recall the TUC to reverse the capitulation to the anti-union laws - and demand the TUC breaks off its talks and collaboration with the Tories.

Labour MPs should obstruct Tory business in Parliament, using Westminster not as a debating chamber but as a platform from which to mobilise action.

January 24: 20,000 marched against the Tories' plans to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan counties, and many more struck.

NALGO, NUT and NUPE had authorised strike action by their members.

Now the campaign has to continue. The unions and the Labour Party should start campaigning for industrial action - the only effective means of fighting for local democracy and local services.

Inside:

Pages 6-7: Why millions are starving in Africa.
Centre pages: Tamil women in Sri Lanka: a double oppression.
Page 3: What the Police Bill means.
Page 14: Hospital occupations call fight-back conference.
Page 15: The NGA's road to defeat.
Page 2: Left unity.
Plus: reports, reviews, letters...

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Paper of the Socialist Organiser Alliance No.162 January 19 1984 25p Claimants and strikers 10p

Two more print unions in the firing line

TORY LAWS SAY: SCAB OR ELSE!

TWO unions in the printing industry could come into sharp collision with the Tory anti-union laws again this week.

SOGAT 82's leaders buckled under pressure before Christmas, and capitulated to a court injunction obtained by the union-busting 'socialist' millionaire Robert Maxwell. This week they have declared their refusal to comply with a further, more draconian, court ruling, which came into force last Wednesday, 11th.

Judges instructed SOGAT members in other plants of Maxwell's company BPCC to do the work of their striking colleagues at the Park Royal plant, by printing an extended run of the Radio Times. They also reiterated the previous injunction against the trade union boycott of Radio Times distribution in London, since in fact it had never been lifted.

SOGAT 82 has received a court order instructing them to scab on members in dispute at Robert Maxwell's BPCC print works at Park Royal, London.

The union has refused to scab. It has refused to withdraw its instruction to members not to print copies of the Radio Times normally produced at Park Royal.

But the Tory law is: Scab — or else. So if the SOGAT leaders stand firm, they will be hauled up within the next few days for 'contempt of court'.

Before Christmas they buckled under pressure and capitulated to another court injunction connected to the same dispute. But this week they have declared their refusal to comply with the further, more draconian, court ruling

By Alan Gordon

obtained by union-busting 'socialist' millionaire Robert Maxwell, which came into force last Wednesday, 11th.

The judges also reiterated the previous injunction against the trade union boycott of Radio Times distribution in London, since in fact the London members of SOGAT have never lifted it.

The next legal stage is punitive fines or damages, like against the NGA. And the next stage in the struggle is an escalation, if SOGAT takes steps to defend itself against Maxwell and the courts by boycotting the printing and distribution of other publications from BPCC.

Meanwhile, on Saturday 21st, a Special Delegate Meeting of the National Union of Journalists will vote on whether to flout an injunction and reinstate the union's principled stand of defying the anti-union legislation. The vote will be on whether to reimpose an official instruction for strike action against Dimpleby Newspapers in Richmond.

The union's six-person Emergency Committee intervened in the dispute on December 15 by voting four to two to reverse an unanimous decision taken a few days earlier by the full National Executive, and to withdraw official support for the Dimpleby chapel members, pending a ruling by the High Court on the union's appeal against an injunction.

This switch of line, which not climbed down to the courts but also stripped the Richmond strikers of £1000 per week in strike benefit and other support, provoked anger among many NUJ activists. And it caught the

union's right wing unawares.

At the National Executive Committee meetings, right wingers — supported by a number on the Left — had carried a proposal for a Special Delegate Meeting. Some evidently hoped that this might offer an escape route from further confrontation with the courts.

But then the emergency committee called off the official strike. The right wing immediately recognised that the SDM could now provide the basis for the rank and file membership to reinstate the action, and began to campaign for the SDM to be called off.

Last Wednesday, 11th, a recalled NEC meeting voted by a majority of one to proceed with the SDM. There is a good chance that the union policy will at the weekend revert once again to defiance and confrontation.

At the centre of the agenda for the SDM is a declaration of principles tabled by the NEC when it was unanimously for defiance: this policy statement will now certainly be opposed by a number of NEC members who originally voted for it.

Amendments range from right wing appeals to remain 'within the law' through to attempts to toughen up the statement, specifying the need to prepare industrial action by the NUJ and other unions in the event of further legal attacks or sequestration of funds, and condemning the TUC's betrayal of the NGA.

Oxford branch has tabled an amendment which calls on 'the full TUC — or those TUC unions prepared to stand in defence of union rights — to lend the NUJ and NGA unqualified political, financial and industrial support in defence of basic union rights'.

Also from Oxford comes a further resolution, committing the NUJ to campaign for a recall TUC congress, to reverse the General Council's decision on the NGA.

A number of branches, together with the Provincial Newspapers Industrial Council, condemn the lifting of the strike instruction at Richmond, and urge that the NEC should give 'full official support and strike pay to our members on Dimpleby Newspapers immediately following the House of Lords decision, irrespective of what that decision may be'.

Despite the confusion created by the right wing manoeuvres in the last month, the NUJ's conference of rank and file delegates gives the best chance of reversing a damaging decision, and re-launching the struggle against the Tebbit Act which the TUC General Council did its best to scuttle last month.

For SOGAT members, the fate of the battle against Maxwell is in the much less safe hands of general secretary Bill Keys.

There is no doubt, however, that if SOGAT does stand its ground and fight back against this attack, it is in a vastly more powerful position to win than was the NGA against Eddie Shah's largely non-union operation in Warrington. Full-scale SOGAT boycotts of Maxwell's publications, and of any alternative printer to Radio Times, could be a powerful lever to force Maxwell to reopen the Park Royal plant and abandon the use of Thatcher's laws.

Keys sat on the fence throughout the NGA struggle at Warrington, and mobilised no significant solidarity action, thus weakening SOGAT's case for industrial support from other unions now.

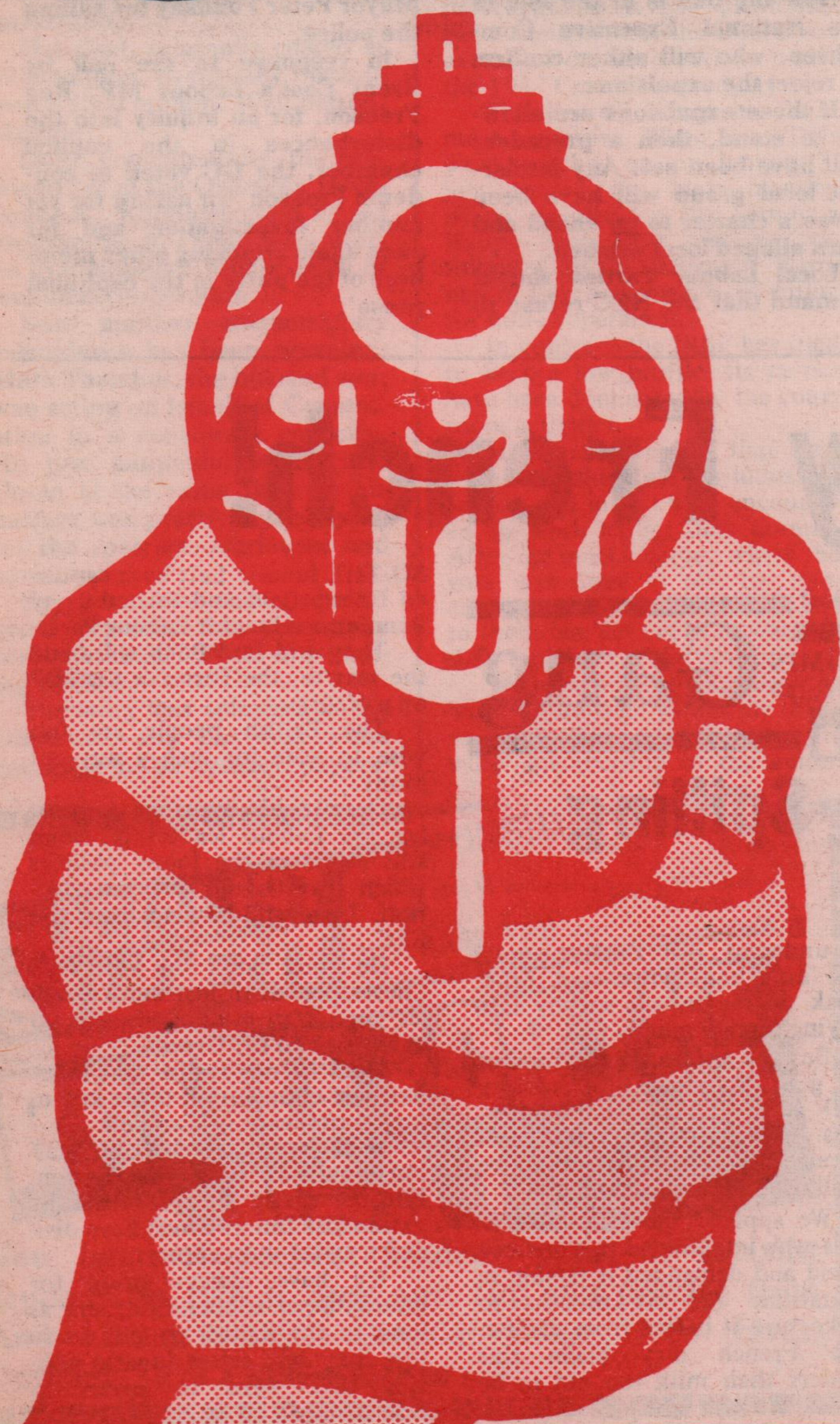
But it's not too late for Keys to come out publicly campaigning against the Tebbit Act, and to withdraw from the backroom talks in which he and Len Murray are engaged with the Tory union-buster Tom King.

The NGA leaders may be quietly moving to ditch their dispute with Eddie Shah: but this is not an issue which can be gracefully dropped.

The courts and injunction-wielding employers are coming after the unions more aggressively than ever. The Tory laws will shred union strength unless they are stopped soon.

By this weekend we will know whether SOGAT and the NUJ will take up the Tory gauntlet and fight back.

The fight can and must be resumed to reverse the General Council's decision to scab on the NGA, and for those unions who voted against capitulation to pledge full industrial and political support to SOGAT and the NUJ in any stand they may take against the courts.

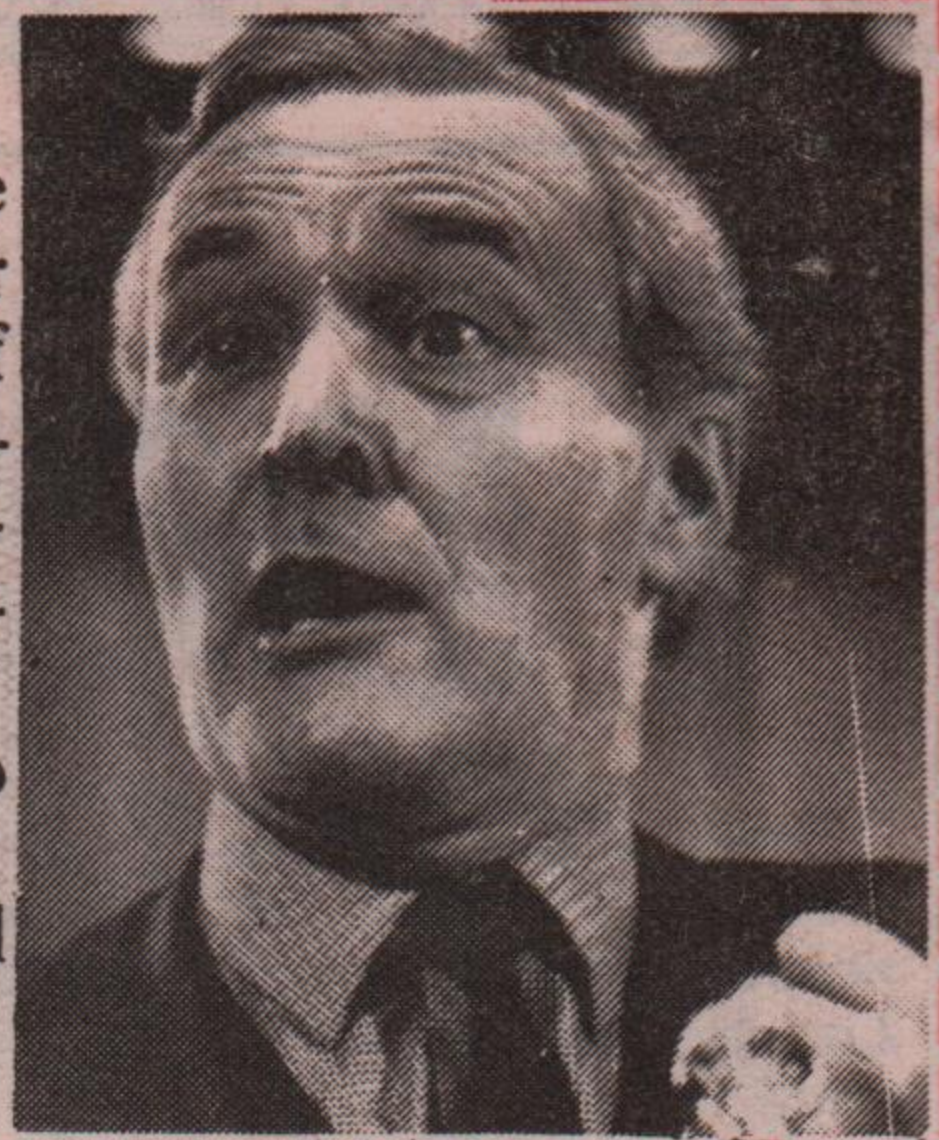


Socialist ORGANISER

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THE ATTEMPT by the Executive Committee of Chesterfield Labour Party to carve Tony Benn out of the running to become the constituency's next MP has been decisively defeated by the Party's General Committee.

65 members of the GC voted to restore Benn to the short-list. 51 voted against. The final choice will be made next Sunday, 15th.



Union leaders say 'yes' to bosses' plan...but

SHIPYARDS STILL SAY NO!



Last Thursday, top union officials in the Shipbuilding Negotiating Committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions called off the shipyard strike scheduled for January 6.

The strike was for a wage increase and a 35 hour week, in conflict with the bosses' drastic 'survival plan', which will massacre the shipyards.

Repeatedly mass meetings and ballots had shown the workers' willingness to struggle. But the union leaders clearly wanted to avoid a fight.

Lol Duffy, GMBU steward at Cammell Lairds, Merseyside, spoke to Socialist Organiser.

What's the feeling in the yards about the strike being called off?

Most people thought that it was a fix, and that the [union] Shipbuilding Negotiating Committee had intended this all along.

During the three days of talks at [the government conciliation service] ACAS, they only met for about 1½ hours, then reached agreement.

There's a lot of anger in the yards. But shop stewards have not been calling mass meetings.

We should have had report-back meetings straight away. I believe we could have got the shop floor to reject the sell-out and call for the strike to go ahead.

If we had been consulted, we could be on strike now.

From what I've heard, lay delegates present at the talks weren't even consulted about the trade union 'alternative' proposals or asked to vote on them. They were ignored throughout the meeting.

All along the line the union leaders didn't want action. They delayed and delayed until finally they could say that the circumstances had changed. They've just been stalling us.

Actually the union leaders are scared stiff of us. And they believe what British Shipbuilders say — all along the line. In fact they think exactly the same way as British Shipbuilders.

Is the agreement a complete sell-out?

They agreed to withdraw the strike notice, to resume talks about the British Shipbuilders survival plan, and to consider a trade union 'alternative' plan tabled on January 4. This alternative document is basically just as bad as the British Shipbuilders survival plan. Some people think it's even worse!

There is a meeting of the new 'working party' this Wednesday to discuss the phasing in of the survival plan. Really they shouldn't have anything to discuss — British Shipbuilders has turned down the trade union alternative, and mass meetings and ballot votes have rejected British Shipbuilders' plan.

But they'll probably try to ram through some of the plans before the end of the month. They'll try to play off yard against yard. Orders will be held back from yards resisting the survival plan.

It means destroying work conditions and union organisation, and 30,000 redundancies within a year.

But as far as I can see, there is no way that the plan will be implemented in every yard. There will be resistance. At Lairds, we will have a mass meeting next Monday.

What will you be pushing for at this mass meeting?

Total rejection of the deal. We want strike action to fight for the



Talbot Poissy: pages 5 and 16

full claim. There is no alternative.

What's the situation at Scott Lithgow?

Scott Lithgow faces 4,300 redundancies. Next week they will start laying off 1000 workers.

There is supposed to be a meeting of convenors on the Clyde this week, but nothing is decided yet about the lay-offs. Some hope they will only be temporary.

The convenors want the government to restore the Britoil order to Scott Lithgow. But the Clyde is committed to take action against any enforced redundancies.

Inside

Pages 8, 9. Behind the Middle East crisis.

Page 15. Miners' overtime ban.

Page 7. Letter from Long Kesh.

Page 2. The Left and the IRA.

Page 4. Second thoughts on Greenham.

Page 6: Dominic McGlinchey on revolution in Ireland.

January 24

16 unions will be taking strike action to defend the Greater London Council and Inner London Education Authority on January 24. The Democracy for London campaign (which is led by the GLC unions) hope that all the GLC and ILEA workplaces will be closed for the day, leaving only the emergency services at work.

There will be a march from

Hyde Park to the Festival Hall, followed by a rally, a deputation to the Department of the Environment, and a lobby of Parliament. The march leaves at 12, and child-care is provided at the Festival Hall from 10 to 6 (excluding lunch).

London Transport workers are lobbying Parliament on January 17. They have been asked to support the march on the 24th, but it is unlikely that LT will be on strike that day. They have been asked by the Democracy for London Campaign to ensure that buses and tubes are running so that people can get to Hyde Park and home again.

The Labour Left and Ireland

"THAT the sitting be suspended until 2.55pm in order to place on record the deep outrage felt by the Council at the cowardly and unprovoked bombing outside Harrods, as part of the continuing attack upon London and Londoners by the Provisional IRA; the Council's condemnation of the Provisional IRA and their political apologists; the Council's praise for the police and emergency services for their rescue work; and to urge all Londoners to co-operate with the Metropolitan Police in helping to bring the criminals to justice".

This is the resolution passed by the Greater London Council on December 20, three days after the IRA bombed Harrods.

Now it is not really very remarkable that the council of a city subjected to indiscriminate small-scale bombing attacks should pass such a resolution.

True, the Tory smugness is a bit excessive, the sentiments ("cowardly") are thoughtless, conventional and hollow. The level of political ignorance, 13 years into the IRA's war, is startling in women and men charged with running an area whose population is twice that of the whole of Ireland. And they have had time to consider the matter: London has suffered many IRA bomb attacks in the last 11 years.

What is very remarkable is that this resolution was passed 'on the nod', with the support of Labour's left-wing leader of the GLC, Ken Livingstone, and of Labour's GLC majority.

The wife of one of the policemen killed told the press that she found the bombing unforgivable, but insisted on emphasising that there were two sides to the question of Ireland's future. The GLC Labour Group should have had the same ability to disentangle the basic, underlying questions from the immediate horror.

The struggle of the Northern Ireland Catholics is a just struggle. But Socialist Organiser has argued that our approach to Ireland and to that struggle cannot and should not be limited to politically mimicking Sinn Fein.

Our approach to Ireland cannot rest — as Ken Livingstone's seems to have done — on the fantasy that the IRA has ceased or is ceasing to be an armed force fighting the British state and likely to strike at targets in Britain. Or on the demand that it should.

Socialist Organiser condemns the Harrods bombing, and all other attacks directed against or reckless of the effects on civilians, in Britain or in Ireland. But for the GLC to say these attacks are 'unprovoked' is the height of hypocrisy and the worst of double standards.

Partitioned

Britain partitioned Ireland, creating the artificial and unviable Six County state. Britain sustains that state on the basis of beating down the Catholics. Mass terrorisation of the Catholic population, internment without trial, imprisonment by no-jury special courts, a reign of terror in the Catholic areas conducted by the locally-recruited regiment of the British Army, the UDR, which is riddled with Protestant sectarianism — those, comrades of the Labour GLC contingent, are the provocations.

That does not justify indiscriminate slaughter of civilians. It helps to explain it. The GLC's blimpish nonsense can only obscure the explanation.

Until then, most Tory councillors would have included Ken Livingstone in the ranks of the IRA's 'political apologists', whom the resolution condemns. And they would not have been entirely wrong. Like a large part of Labour's Left, Ken Livingstone has approached 'the Irish question' not as a working-class socialist or a Marxist with a distinct viewpoint. He 'went Sinn Fein', uncritically championing and publicising Sinn Fein's brand of Irish nationalism.

He declared that Sinn Fein was the Irish political equivalent of the Labour Left in Britain. Unfortunately there is some truth in this: there is a parallel between the militarist elitism of the Republicans and the council-chamber elitism of much of the Left. But Livingstone's intent-



Carol Ann Kelly in her coffin — one of seven children killed so far by plastic bullets

Livingstone typifies not the worst but the best of the Labour Party left on Ireland, including in his talks with Sinn Fein — the best of a confused, eclectic Left, whose best features are often, as with Livingstone on issues like Ireland and gay rights, composed of left-liberal attitudes rather than any consistent or coherent working-class socialist politics.

But diplomatic relations between sections of the British labour movement and the nationalist populists of Sinn Fein (recognising them as the sovereign power for radical politics in their own area) are no adequate basis to bring the British labour movement into the scales as a force fighting for a just solution to Ireland's British problem.

If they react like this to the Harrods bombing, then who on earth did Ken Livingstone and the GLC Left think they were talking to in the first place? Did they really believe that the IRA — whose militarism is rooted in a long tradition — was ceasing to be itself? Or did they think London would be spared? Or that Gerry Adams could guarantee to control a Republican movement that seems to be going through a crisis of direction?

In fact the circumstances of the bombs — coming so soon after the complete triumph at November's Sinn Fein conference of the more politically-oriented wing who have been conducting the dialogue with the Labour Left — suggests that they were deliberately aimed by dissident Republicans to stop the 'politicking' of Gerry Adams and others.

Last atrocity

"The politics of the last atrocity" is a phrase used in Ireland to describe the way Northern Ireland politics ebb and flow according to which side — British Army, IRA, Protestant paramilitaries — did the last exceptionally horrible deed. It will be shameful if this syndrome is now going to dominate British left wing attempts to tackle the 'Irish problem' head on.

It is all the more unfortunate because the evidence, as we have seen, suggests that the London bombs were not just business as usual for the IRA, but were meant to scare off the British Left and disrupt the dialogue. Writers in Socialist Organiser have argued that the changes in Sinn Fein are so far very limited. The Establishment on both sides of the Irish Sea is nevertheless scared by the idea of a new, political, Sinn Fein.

If they considered — and, for now, rejected — the idea of barnino Sinn Fein, it was not because of IRA bombs, in either London or Belfast. What's new? It was because Sinn Fein is a political threat to the nationalist but manageable SDLP.

If British TV did a thorough 'expose' and hatchet job on Gerry Adams MP just before Christmas, it was not because they were shocked by his past or present links with the IRA, but because of what now distinguishes him from the more exclusively militarist sections of the IRA.

The Labour Left should not peddle Socialist Action style fantasies about where Sinn Fein and the IRA now are in the political spectrum. It should make its own, independent, and, we believe, critical, assessment. But to maintain and develop the contact and dialogue is one of the most vital tasks faced by the Left in Britain right now.

The Six County Catholics were right to revolt against their condition of being second class citizens in the Orange sectarian state of Northern Ireland. They have a right to refuse to settle for anything short of British withdrawal and the ending of Partition. Despite the political differences British socialists may have with the populist nationalists who lead Sinn Fein and the IRA and our condemnation of Harrods and similar bombings, we have a responsibility to help the Northern Ireland Catholics and those who lead them to find a way out of the bloody impasse into which Britain has boxed the people of Northern Ireland, Protestant and Catholic alike.

On the basic question of self-determination and British withdrawal they are entitled to the solidarity of every honest socialist in the British labour movement.

EDITORIAL

ion was to make Irish Republicanism more acceptable in Britain — not by arguing through the fundamental issues, but by painting it in rose colours.

This apparently only-too-enthusiastic support was always liable to flip over into panicky condemnation. For the hidden corollary of the argument: "Support Sinn Fein because they are socialist", is: "Stop supporting them if you find out that they are not".

Livingstone tried to buy off his British critics with the argument that Sinn Fein's talks with the leader of the GLC were the alternative to the IRA bombing London again. Now London has been bombed again. And Livingstone and the Tories pass a joint resolution which seems to take back and deny the most important message in what Livingstone has been saying about Ireland and the — British — cause of many of its problems.

Shah menaces NUJ members

THE BRUTAL back-stabbing it got before Christmas from the General Council of the TUC has led the NGA to decide not to resume mass picketing.

But it has started picketing the Stockport offices of the Messenger Newspapers group again.

Eddie Shah, however, has threatened to sack the nine National Union of Journalists members who have refused to cross the NGA picket line for the last

three months.

Shah and his backers are always ready to step up their fight against trade unionism. Every failure by the trade unions to escalate encourages him. The TUC decision has led directly to the threat to sack the NUJ members.

The General Council of the TUC must be called to order. The minority on the General Council who wanted to back the NGA represent the majority of

the TUC. A special TUC congress could reverse the General Council's cowardly decision.

That's why trade union branches should send resolutions to their national executives, demanding a special TUC congress and insisting that the executive supports the NGA.

The next NGA march in Warrington will take place on January 28 (not 22nd as reported in Socialist Organiser last week).

Rent rise voted down

DEFYING the whip, three left members of the Labour-controlled Nottingham Council were successful in defeating the proposal for a 75p rent increase at the meeting of the Housing Committee on January 5.

The rebel councillors voted in line with the Manifesto on which the 1983 election was fought. The District Party had also unanimously reaffirmed its policy of 'no rent rise in '84' six weeks ago.

The Labour Council has a majority of only one and it now faces the possibility of defeat in full council if it tries to reintroduce its rent-rise in the 84/85 budget.

Despite the stand of the three left councillors on the Housing Committee, supported by three other Labour councillors, the district Party is buckling in face

of the determination of the right wing councillors.

Although there was a clear mood of anger at the Right, the District Party voted by 27 votes to 16 not to take a proposal to endorse the left councillors' stand.

Hopes that the right councillors may back down because they need the left votes are probably naive. The precarious position of the Nottingham Council cuts both ways. The determination of the right creates fears that if the Council falls the left will take the blame.

Only a vigorous and open campaign in the local labour movement, including clear support from the District Party for the six, will ensure that the right will be blamed and will know they will be blamed should they bring the Labour Council down by pursuing rent-rises.

Aiding the enemy

POLICE swooped this week to nip in the bud a plot to give nuclear secrets to a deadly enemy.

A 23 year-old clerk has been charged under the Official Secrets Act after a newspaper editor did his noble duty and shopped her to the police.

Police believe she was leaking secrets to tip off the deadliest enemy the Tory government faces — the British public.

But the wily spy had reckoned without the loyalty of the man she trusted — Peter Preston, editor of the Guardian.

According to police, the clerk photocopied a secret memorandum from Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine to the Prime Minister, saying when cruise missiles were due to arrive in Britain.

The information was of invaluable use to opponents of nuclear weapons and has already been condemned by three High Court judges.

These enemies of the British government are doubly dangerous because there are more of them than there are supporters of these nuclear weapons. It is therefore all the more important that they know nothing whatsoever about these crucial decisions and the movement of these invaluable missiles.

These people are more dangerous than the Russians. They speak perfect English, and are capable of passing themselves off as ordinary citizens of this country. There is only one fatal flaw which allows experts to tell them from the real thing. Under

Daily Mail
EXPRESS
Press FINANCIAL TIMES Gang
The Daily Telegraph
Sun

By Patrick Spilling

pressure they have a thoroughly negative attitude towards a nuclear war — they are opposed to it.

The British Secret Service is a highly sophisticated organisation, well practised in the art of sniffing out spies.

But senior Secret Service men are still shaking in their boots at the thought of the new breed of super-spy. They are used to unveiling those who have sold secrets to the Soviet Union or other foreign governments for money.

They are now faced with a new form of horror, people who give secrets to the British public because they think they ought to know.

One source likened such leakers to the suicide Arab missions who are prepared to die to kill off US troops. "Quite frankly, old boy, we are powerless against it," he said.

In this case, the man who saved the day was the Guardian's editor. For years he had masqueraded as a man of principle who would uphold the right of journalists to protect their sources, at whatever cost.

He continued to refuse to

supply evidence to the police right up to the last minute.

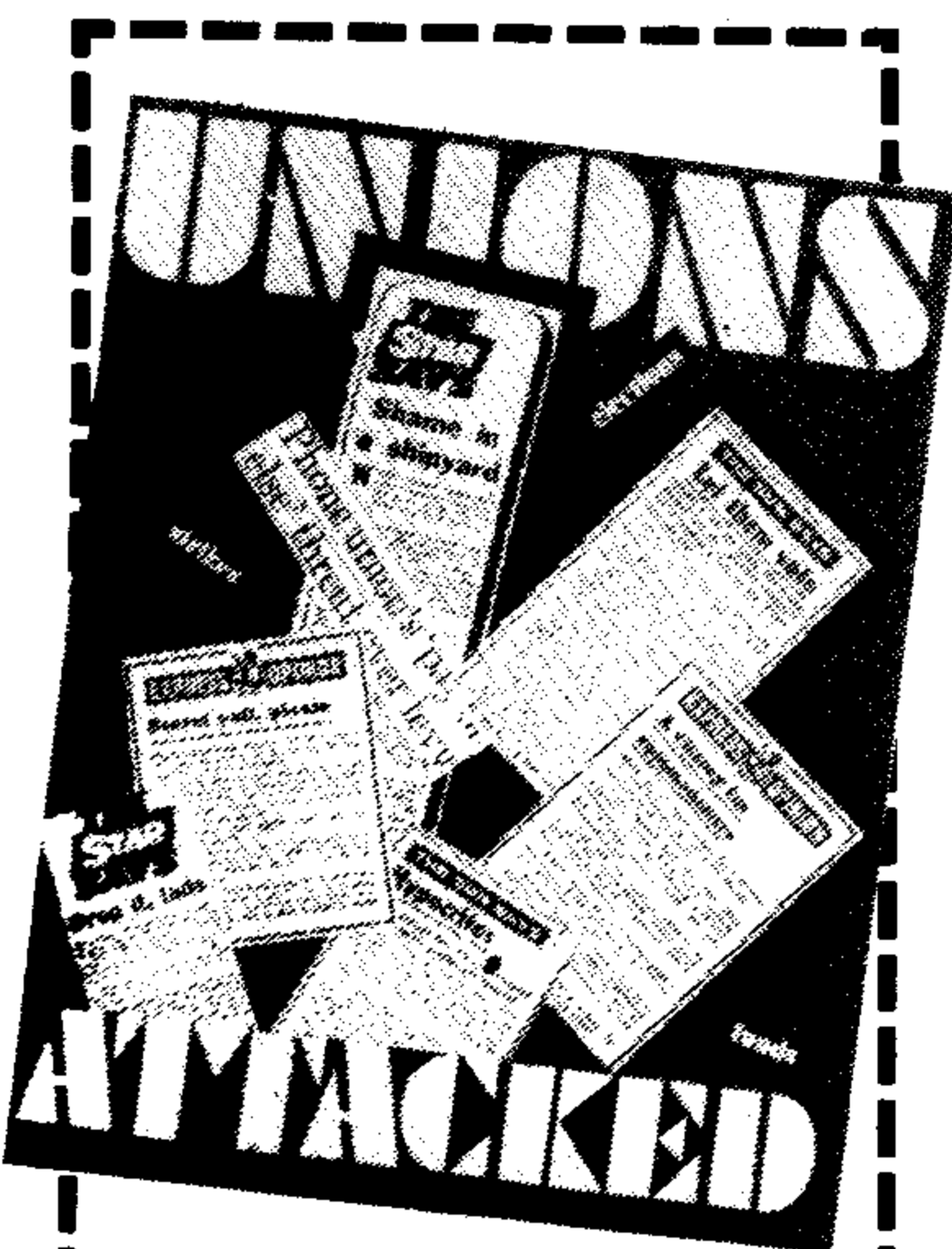
It was then that our wonderful government and police force played their trump card. They produced a man in a wig to order the Guardian editor to return the documents.

Like Superman confronted with Krypton, the editor was rendered as weak as jelly.

Taught from birth to shake and shiver at the very glimpse of a man in a wig, Preston collapsed. "All right, take it," he sobbed. The rest is history.



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UCW leaders lash out

By Alan Fraser

THE campaign taken up by Basingstoke postal workers in condemning the UCW Executive Council's handling of the week-long strike action, taken by the postal workers in their efforts to get myself reinstated has now developed into a full-blooded national campaign to denounce the right wing UCW leadership.

The campaign up til December had resulted in the branch sending a resolution condemning the EC's actions. Also a fact sheet had been produced by the postal workers and distributed to many UCW branches.

The Communication Workers Broad Left had organised a national speaking tour to expose the role of John Taylor, Assistant Secretary, and Gerry Casey, EC member, both national officials who sold out the strike.

However, the UCW bureaucracy have responded by producing an eight-page special branch circular, written by Alan Tuffin, general secretary, criticising the actions of the Basingstoke branch, Socialist Organiser and myself.

This has been distributed to every UCW branch. They have also reproduced the contents of this circular in the union journal which is distributed to all UCW members.

This circular by the UCW bureaucracy contains smears and inaccuracies and an attempt to justify the sell-out by John Taylor and Gerry Casey. They also accuse Socialist Organiser of infiltrating the UCW in an attempt to gain support in the union.

The local SO group in Basingstoke have produced a pamphlet, 'Solidarity Betrayed', denouncing the treacherous role of both national officers and outlining the many lessons which have been learned.

This pamphlet has been circulated to many UCW branches.

The circular is also an attempt by Tuffin to try to isolate and witch-hunt the Basingstoke postal workers, hoping that they will now lie down and stop causing the bureaucracy further embarrassment and exposing their inadequate leadership.

However, the circular has had the opposite effect on the Basingstoke branch. Ron Rodwell, branch secretary, on behalf of the membership has already replied to this ham-fisted document, denouncing the slurs and inaccuracies and pressing that his reply should be distributed to all UCW branches.

The branch has also taken the decision to write to all UCW branches requesting them to invite speakers from Basingstoke to discuss the implications of the strike. They will also publish and circulate their reply themselves if the executive's response is negative.

It is likely that the branch will press a vote of no confidence in the EC at this year's annual conference and recently I was made an honorary member of the Basingstoke UCW Branch, which I am sure will cause the national officials further embarrassment.

Elsewhere the Communication Workers Broad Left will be hoping

to continue the national speaking tour, denouncing the role of the leadership, with myself as one of the speakers.

There can be no doubt that the leadership have been shaken by the response from Basingstoke and the support we have received from many UCW branches. However it is clear that the actions of one branch have not been the only reason why Tuffin has responded. The UCW leadership are in a crisis. The last year has seen many struggles develop where UCW members have taken action only to be betrayed by a leadership who cannot supply the answers for many disgruntled members.

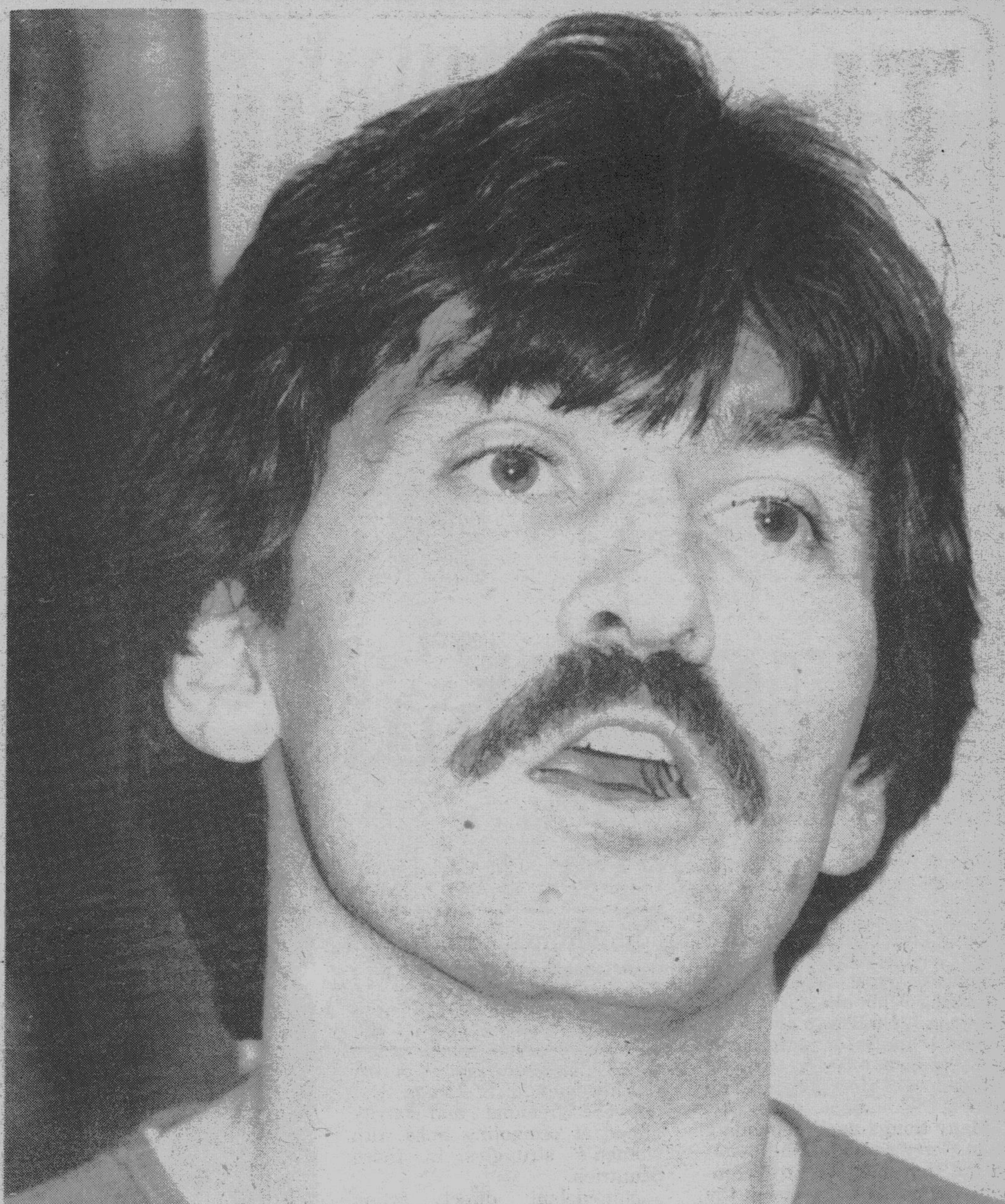
Their inability to fight for even the most basic demands like a shorter working week and a new technology agreement has not been lost on the members.

They have also supported a dreadful productivity scheme which has resulted in many jobs being sold for a few pieces of silver.

Last year, when the Post Office made £136 million profit, they recommended that the membership should accept a paltry 5% wage offer.

The membership are now beginning to realise the leadership's willingness to betray. The principled stand taken by the Basingstoke postal workers in exposing the UCW leadership points the way forward for many UCW members. The fight to democratise and build a union under rank and file control must now be top priority.

The Communication Workers Broad Left must see the central importance of this task and begin to mobilise and take the initiative when UCW members are in struggle.



Alan Fraser

Labour workplace branches organise

ON SATURDAY 28 January, a national meeting on 'The Role of Workplace Branches in the Forward March of Labour' is being held at Camden Town Hall, London. Called a 'seminar', the aim is to get Labour Party activists interested and involved in setting up workplace branches to exchange their experiences and discuss campaigning to spread the branches and strengthen their role in the Party.

Already, a model resolution has been circulated by Geoff Dixon, the meeting organiser, to get the NEC to start taking workplace branches seriously and allow an official national conference of those that exist.

"This... Constituency Labour Party, recognising the Tebbit/King proposals to sever the links between the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, requests the National Executive Committee to give urgent attention to the creation and development of Labour Party Workplace Branches as a vehicle for:

- a) Recruitment of new members.
- b) Campaigning for Labour Party policy, in line with the constitutional provision established at the 1981 Conference.

We further urge the NEC to authorise a conference of existing workplace branches to establish a national network to co-ordinate the articulation of party policy and to exchange experiences to improve the effectiveness of workplace branches in their objects."

The initial move to develop coordination between workplace branches was taken at the Socialist Organiser Labour Party Conference fringe meeting. It was from there that Geoff Dixon offered to coordinate further activity. The 'Labour Party Workplace Branches National Newsletter No. 1', circulated with the details of the January 28 meeting, reports what has happened.

There has been an excellent response to the idea of a Nation-

John Bloxam reports on the forthcoming national conference of Labour Party workplace branches

at Conference of Labour Party Workplace Branches. Every single response to the Labour Weekly and Tribune letter is in favour of a National Conference.

There are also two key points brought out of the replies.

- 1) That it is quite easy to recruit new members to the party. The usual experience is that membership is doubled when organised recruiting is undertaken.
- 2) On the negative side most people find that processing applications takes far too long before a new member receives his/her card from the local residential branch.

The Tebbit/King proposals to cut the financial links between trade unions and the Labour Party make it vital that a political campaign to involve more workers in the Labour Party is started now!"

Just before the 1983 Labour Party Conference, and a year after getting the final constitutional go-ahead, Walworth Road reported that a mere 38 workplace branches had got through the bureaucratic maze and officially registered, and "2 or 3 are being processed." The real figure was certainly more than 38 then. In fact the indications are that the number had started

to grow significantly over the second half of 1983. There are now probably more than 100 functioning nationally. A number are obviously just "getting on with it" and have paid little attention to the formality of registering.

The attitude of both the trade union and Labour Party leaders has been, at best, indifference. The case of a main London SOGAT branch aiming to initiate workplace branches in all of Fleet Street is still the exception.

The drive to set up workplace branches is still wholly in the hands of the individual rank and file Labour Party activists. There has already been an attempt to organise this drive on a regional basis, when the Merseyside workplace branches called a conference in November which attracted 50 people.

The significance of the meeting on January 28 is that it is the first attempt to organise on a national basis. As many workplace branch activists as possible should arrange to go to it.

40 years later

HUNGARY'S 200,000 strong German minority are having some of their rights restored after 40 years of oppression.

German-Hungarians are again being allowed to give their children German names. They can marry in a ceremony conducted in the German language. Signs in German are now to be seen in the streets of Hungarian cities and towns.

Forty years after the war, Hungary, which was a German ally, is the first of the East European Stalinist states to restore full rights to a German ethnic group!

Release Nicky Kelly

A COVENTRY Release Nicky Kelly Committee has been set up by representatives of Lower Stoke Labour Party ward, Big Flame, Young Communist League and Troops Out. The broad-based committee is to campaign for Nicky Kelly's release from wrongful imprisonment in southern Ireland.

Nicky Kelly has spent the last three years in gaol, serving a 12 year sentence for a crime he did not commit. The continuing legal wrangles have always missed the central points of the case.

These are, first, that his 'confession' was beaten out of him. The mental and physical effects of his ill-treatment were detailed at trial by two doctors.

Secondly, that the state presented no witnesses or forensic evidence to the court. The only evidence was the 'confession'. In the case of the other two co-defendants confession was ruled inadmissible evidence.

And finally, that the Provisional IRA had issued an unprecedented statement that they were responsible for the Sallins train robbery in 1976, and that the three accused were inno-

Nicky Kelly is an Irish republican socialist who has been in jail for three years for allegedly taking part in Ireland's 1976 'Great Train Robbery'. A campaign is underway for his release.

cent. There is no doubt that Nicky Kelly was framed as a result of his membership of the then newly formed Irish Republican Socialist Party. No doubt, that is, except in the eyes of the Irish Appeal Court which does not wish to challenge the truthfulness of the Gardaí, or to expose the frame-up character of the non-jury Special Criminal Court.

This campaign aims to expose these injustices and to put pressure on the Irish government to see them revoked. The inaugural meeting decided to picket the Allied Irish Bank in Coventry Station Square every alternate Friday and Thursday, beginning Friday 30 December. We will also produce a leaflet for the Irish community in Coventry.

We will hold a public meeting in the New Year and send speakers to groups in the area.

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Second thoughts on Greenham

LAST WEEK Gerry Byrne wrote down for readers of Socialist Organiser what she's been "thinking about Greenham Common." I'd like to add some thoughts on Greenham, partly as a response to Gerry, partly to tell readers of what is happening there at the moment.

Many things need expanding on in Gerry's article. She pointed out that attitudes to Greenham are polarised between the classically sectarian left response and the guerrillaist-feminist response, or as Gerry called it the "spontaneous" position.

She evaluated the Greenham struggle and attempted to identify its politics; the emphasis on fighting male power and the women's attitude to CND, the Labour Party and its leadership.

The sort of politics that come out of Greenham are dictated by a whole variety of factors. The camp is politically very disparate. Decisions on activity at the base and on campaigns work most successfully by consensual agreement.

Often though both inside and outside the camp individual women take their own initiatives and not everyone agrees.

For example, we discovered this on one occasion when we planned an action as a decoy to get women into the base. Not everyone agreed because they thought it too dangerous. We still could have done it but we decided not to — mainly because we were not permanently at the camp and it would not have been us who had to suffer the worst of the likely consequences — further army attacks and extra arrests.

Women tend to take up activity suggested by their own political interests. Hence the political spectrum is wide.

Some women, for example, have decided to link up with the struggles of women in the "third

Judith Bonner takes up some arguments from Gerry Byrne's article, last week.

world". So at one gate in particular, women divide their time between Greenham and activity aimed at promoting links with women's struggles in those countries.

Non-violent direct action (NVDA) has also been a major political orientation at Greenham. Essentially socialists can find no opposition to NVDA.

NVDA has been the women's response to the violence meted out by the police and army. Women at Greenham, far from rejecting traditional ways of organising, are looking to them to help them find alternatives — ways we can use ourselves, our bodies, our creativeness.

Within this, too, even the mysticism and symbolism can serve a function. It goes outside the traditional, usually male-identified ways in which people have organised against the State for specific demands.

The state is usually fully aware of familiar tactics and how best to respond to it. They are not familiar with, for example, three-mile long dragons.

In July the women — lots of women — made a big dragon. That was a ceremony where the dragon was "imbued with the spirit of matriarchy and powers beyond and above men". On encircling the base policemen were warned not to touch her — or be struck down dead. They were visibly scared.

How do you combat a big dragon and lots of women?

Well, while they were thinking about it lots of women entered the base.

The women at Greenham would be the first to admit that the state can contain them. It can, by pulling out more forces,

JOHN HARRIS



"Even the mysticism and symbolism can serve a function. It goes outside traditional ways . . . The state is usually familiar with traditional tactics. They are not familiar with, for example, three-mile long dragons."

completely smash the women's camp at Greenham. But in face of continuing opposition to Cruise is this feasible?

The state has to compete with Greenham for the title of "peace movement". Greenham in this sense has the upper hand. It has forced the state to show its undemocratic face and in Michael Heseltine's House of Commons statement to proclaim its willingness to shoot protesters.

The camp has suffered sustained physical attacks from vigilante groups, including fascists and soldiers. Recently some of the main camp organisers were arrested and suffered abominable intimidation in prison.

Locked in a cell for ten hours with no toilet, the women were given disgusting food which caused one sister to vomit. They were subject to verbal abuse.

Socialists who don't take the Greenham struggle as a serious struggle against the state should consider just how much the women's day-to-day fight against the state has politicised them.

One side of Greenham that I find particularly frustrating is the tendency that perpetuates a sort of isolation. This may be because of the "spontaneists" Gerry refers to.

This comes particularly from political lesbian separatists who refuse to participate in male organisations. Women-only organisations undoubtedly are in practice the only forum where women have any real say or power. That men divert our energy is often also true.

However I think it is utopian to believe that Greenham can succeed using such a strategy. We have to get our hands dirty. At the very least, Greenham should campaign within CND, the Labour Party and the trade unions for unconditional support of the camp. Anything less is letting them off the hook, in fulfilling their obligations to such an important struggle.

This isn't to say that Greenham hasn't attempted to forge such links. It has, and Gerry forgets to mention this. May 24, the tarmac boycott (of suppliers) and lobbying trade union leaders are some examples. Not surprisingly there was little response from the trade union leaders to support boycott action and strikes.

The women didn't fail — the labour movement and CND has failed Greenham. Such militant action was ignored by CND. Greenham has little faith in CND, and especially spokeswomen like Joan Ruddock (who on December 11 was not to be

found hanging onto wire but posing in the press tent).

It isn't that we're caught between the loony left and mystical separatists. The important issue being ignored is how we must forge a link between such feminist movements and Trotskyists. That's the dilemma I find myself in when I'm at Greenham.

Six months of fighting back

July 7: Unions reveal Peugeot plans to cut 10,000 of the 17,000 jobs at Poissy.

July 21: One-day strike in protest.

October: Government accepts 4,500 early retirements but refuses to approve additional sackings.

November 21: Peugeot demands 2,905 sackings.

December 7: Several thousand workers at Poissy strike and occupy the factory.

December 17: The government and Peugeot agree on 1,905 sackings. Sacking letters go out within the next few days. CGT accepts the agreement, CFDT rejects it. Occupation continues.

December 19: Peugeot announces that the factory is shut until January 2. Occupation continues.

December 26: Four CGT delegates, at a press conference, say the workers disagree with their union's attitude and want 200,000 francs (about £17,000) redundancy pay to enable them to return to their own countries.

December 27: Court order granted to evict the occupying workers.

December 28: Peugeot announce that they are 'spinning off' Talbot, legally enabling them to liquidate it without involving the rest of the corporation.

December 31: Government sends in riot police to evict the occupiers.

January 3: Work due to restart — prevented by militant action. Some clashes between workers. Factory briefly reoccupied. CFDT proposes to the management that the 1,905 workers be laid off while negotiations proceed! But it continues the action.

January 5: Attack by members of the fascist 'union' CSL on CFDT pickets. Pickets retreat into factory and use cars as barricades to protect them. 55 people injured, some seriously; 19 hospitalised. Peugeot announces indefinite shutdown of the plant from January 6.

January 6: CGT organises 20,000-strong demonstration in Paris; the CSL, together with the Gaullist local council, a 4,500-strong demonstration in Poissy. The Poissy demonstration is also supported by the right wing union FO, and shopkeepers shut for two hours in support.

January 8: CFDT calls off strike.

Trotsky on Stalinism

The classic Marxist analysis of Stalinism is Leon Trotsky's 'Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?' Available via Socialist Organiser, 28 Middle Lane, London N8: £2.50 plus 50p postage.



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Talbot Poissy: rebellion of the damned



CSL: a fascist 'union'

HOW can a fascist 'union' gain such strength in France's big car factories?

France does have more right-wing activists accustomed to practise their politics on the streets than other European countries. "Many foremen are Algeria veterans (i.e. from France's bloody colonial war in Algeria in 1954-62). That explains a lot", said one CFDT activist at Poissy.

The far right has also grown recently, with the National Front (similar to the organisation of the same name in Britain) getting sizeable scores in elections. But that is not all there is to it.

France's continued strong direct influence and intervention in its former African colonies is another factor. The car companies have the assistance, in particular, of the Moroccan government and its agencies in France in securing a pliant workforce.

And France's trade union laws also play a role. These laws were introduced in 1945, by a government dominated by the Communist Party and the Socialist Party.

Many trade unionists regard them as favourable to the unions — and in some ways they are.

Union recognition, negotiating rights, and facilities for 'delegates' (roughly equivalent

to shop stewards) are all guaranteed by law. All the unions have to do is to establish branches in a workplace, with a tiny minimum of members, and they have a right to elect delegates.

All the workers, union and non-union, vote for the delegates, but only the unions can nominate candidates.

So the unions have a strong legal position. But they have a very small membership (because there is not much incentive for the union officials to recruit above the necessary minimum). Strikes usually involve only a minority of workers.

An outfit like the CSL, once established, is in a strong position to maintain itself through the delegate elections, by keeping the mass of the workers terrorised and cowed. And the system also helps the mainstream union leaders to beat down the Left.

If the union bureaucrats can defeat militant leftists in the narrow arena of the union branch, they can stop them being nominated for delegate, and thus stop them being elected however popular they are with their fellow-workers.

No apparent benefits can compensate for the loss of the independence of the trade unions from the state.

A 'human face'?

THE French car industry is scarcely in a better state than Britain's. Talbot, formerly Chrysler, is particularly slumpridden. Its share of the French market has declined from 10% to 4 1/2%.

As Simca (French Chrysler), the Poissy factory was already notorious for tough management. It is now under the ownership of the Peugeot-Citroen corporation, France's most brutal hard-line bosses. They want to cut the 17,000 Poissy workforce, eventually by half, and put in robots.

For a long time the shop floor at Poissy was dominated by the fascist CSL 'union' (see other article). Part of the background to the recent strike was the success of the unions in breaking the CSL domination. At the last elections for trade union 'delegates' (roughly equivalent to shop stewards), the Communist Party led CGT got 42% of the shop floor votes, the CSL 35%, the Socialist-leaning CFDT 9% and the other union federation, FO, 4%.

This success reflected years of courageous struggle by the CGT — put to waste during the strike because the CGT was tied

by its links to the CP minister of labour, Jack Ralite.

The 1,905 workers sacked were overwhelmingly Africans, and a large proportion of them trade union activists.

Yet the government considered that the agreement on the sackings was a model of how to manage industrial rationalisation with a 'human face'.

It was 1,000 sackings less than Peugeot originally demanded, they said. Also, the sacked workers would not simply be thrown onto the dole. 20,000 francs (about £1,700) would be on offer as a grant to any employer offering them a new job. They would get 20,000 francs discount on a vehicle if they wanted to set up as a truck-driver or taxi-driver. 100 would be given training in car repair by the company. Another 1,300 would enter a government training scheme.

It didn't look so 'human' to the sacked workers who had no faith that these training schemes would bring them a new job. Some of them responded by demanding 200,000 francs (£17,000), to enable them to re-establish themselves in their home countries.

A Moroccan worker explained to a French newspaper:

"All I demand is what's due to me, my rights — the cost of a training, compensation for my ruined life."

But another Moroccan said: "We say, like the CFDT, no sackings. Repatriation allowances bring back bad memories of the Stoleru period. (Stoleru was the minister responsible for immigration in the previous right wing government). But even the CFDT has gone to meet the management and negotiate repatriation allowances for everyone. At the end of the day it's almost FO's (the right wing union's) position, if not the CSL's!"

The 200,000 francs demand reflects the immigrant workers' bitterness against rising racism in France. On January 6 the

Gaullist local council in Poissy, together with the CSL, organised an anti-strike demonstration with obvious racist overtones.

But it's not just the right wing. Both the Socialist Party and the Communist Party argue that there are 'too many' immigrants in France; as well as blocking new immigration from Africa, the left government has also introduced measures to make deportation of 'illegal' immigrants quicker and to deprive them of any right of appeal unless they can pay their fare back from the country they are deported to.

So much for the "human face". In fact the left government is providing polite and benevolent-sounding frontmen and women for a capitalist state which is as barbaric as ever.



THE CFDT union has announced that it is calling a joint meeting this week with the British and Spanish Peugeot-Talbot unions. Moves are also underway to try to get a meeting of the Talbot international combine committee.

Not only the French government, but also the unions, have talked most about defending France's national industry. The fact, however, is that industry is no longer national. It is inter-

national. The bosses recognise that and organise accordingly. It is time the labour movement did likewise.

What alternative was there to the Peugeot-Talbot bosses' plans? The workers from every part of the multinational should get together and demand to see the bosses' plans and accounts.

Thus armed, they should work out their own plan for the industry, based on sharing the work by cutting the hours without loss of pay. They should demand all the plants are nationalised without compensation, and run under workers' control.

From that basis, they could coordinate action with workers in other car firms and in related industries like steel. The only framework for a restructuring of European industry in the interests of the majority is a Socialist United States of Europe.

A strong socialist campaign for the June Euro-elections, free from the taint of nationalist agitation for withdrawal, could link up well with and give a boost to such moves for international workers' unity. So could even a small militant socialist group in the EEC parliament.

'Recall the international combine committee'

The newspapers have reported Pat Fox, the TGWU convenor at the Talbot Ryton plant, as demanding that work be shifted from Poissy to Ryton. Has he been quoted correctly?

Not quite. A feasibility study was done a year ago for the Peugeot 205 model to be brought into the Ryton plant as well as Poissy. The company decided only to put it into Poissy.

What Pat Fox is saying — and I disagree with his approach, I think he's on the wrong lines — is that the Peugeot 205 should now be brought into Ryton.

We have a position as an international combine. At the last meeting, each convenor agreed to press legislation in each country that Peugeot would only be allowed to sell a model in

Dave Edwards, TGWU convenor at the Talbot plant in Stoke, Coventry, spoke to Socialist Organiser

a country if it had been built there. So if Peugeot wanted to sell any model in the UK, France or Spain, they would have to produce the model there.

It's not quite what the papers report: "We'll do the work if they close Poissy down". That's impossible anyway — Ryton depends on body pressings coming from Poissy.

Our stewards' meeting this morning called for the international combine committee to be revived. The multinationals are

planning cutbacks on a big scale. They will try to set worker against worker, in different plants and nations.

To defeat that, the workers internationally need to be aware of the companies' plans and to plan strategy accordingly.

What do you think of the role of the French Socialist Party government?

In view of what the government is doing here, I'm reluctant to criticise the French government. It seems to have had an interventionist role in the matter, stepping in and reducing the redundancies.

Here the government would have smashed us. I'd rather be in France striking than in Britain.

What was worrying, though,

was the government sending in the riot police.

But, as a socialist, I expect a government, unless it is controlled by the people, to act on behalf of the state; and the state represents the ruling class.

I suppose we have a rosy view of the French government from here. To a French worker it probably looks as bad as the last government they had there.

What do you think are Peugeot's plans?

They are paving the way for an introduction of robotisation in the Poissy plant — cutting the workforce to introduce a new model with robotisation. It's Longbridge all over again.

The only way to defend ourselves is to get information, and act on it together.



The socialism of the IRSP

By Paddy Dollard

SOME WEEKS ago we reported the interview with the man believed to be chief of staff of the Irish National Liberation Army, Dominic McGlinchey, published by Magill magazine.

In this he admitted that one of the guns used in the sectarian killings at Darkley Pentecostal Church belonged to the INLA. (The RUC has already established that). We also reported that the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the INLA's parallel political organisation, had denounced the killings.

The new issue of the IRSP's magazine, 'The Starry Plough', carried a front-page condemnation of the Darkley killings and an interview with McGlinchey. For reasons of being fair to the IRSP, whose members sincerely want to fight for socialism, we print excerpts from their editor-

ial statement and from McGlinchey's interview.

However, socialist intentions are not the same as effective socialist politics.

The reader should remember two things. First, that McGlinchey's business is the 'armed struggle', and his political opinions concern the affairs of a different dimension of the movement. What bearing these opinions may have on the business of the INLA is not at all clear. They belong to a different 'stage' of the anti-imperialist struggle.

Second, that the political framework for all the generally good IRSP sentiments about women's rights, socialism, etc., is the 'broad anti-imperialist front' (mentioned by McGlinchey). Socialism is equated with anti-imperialism, and anti-

imperialism with the military struggle in the North. Even though McGlinchey recognises that imperialism in Ireland is as much a matter of US and EEC economic interests as of British troops, the fight against those troops is seen as pivotal.

Sectarianism is identified exclusively as a creation of Britain — and the answer to sectarianism, therefore, is once again the military struggle in the North.

The Protestant workers are seen not in social, class terms, but almost exclusively as a cat-paw of Britain and as the embodiment of sectarianism.

By a process of redefining terms, therefore, non-sectarian socialism is equated (in terms of immediate activity) with a narrow nationalist militarism, incapable of laying any basis for

class unity. Recklessness in relation to the Protestant workers is justified in terms of political intransigence against Loyalism.

Conversely, sections (at least) of the Southern constitutional nationalist party, Fianna Fail (which has been the major party of the Southern Irish bourgeoisie for 50 years) are allies against imperialism. The IRSP called in effect for a vote for Fianna Fail 'anti-imperialists' in the 1982 elections in the South.

Thus the 'socialist' element becomes a matter of sentiments, aspirations, and faith in the nationalist struggle somehow 'growing over' into socialism. The immediate practice is nationalist — or even, by means of defining the Catholics as 'the nationalist community', Catholic communalist.



McGlinchey's view of Irish revolution

How did you become involved in Republican Socialist politics?

My earliest involvement stemmed from witnessing injustice — from seeing the activities of the B Specials. The Civil Rights march from Belfast to Derry — the forced route changing through County Derry and the ambush of the marchers at Burntollet were an early influence. It was through experiences like these that I became aware of the urgent necessity to act to change the situation.

My first contact with socialist politics came from reading while in prison. In this regard, I suppose, I was little different from other Republicans who have gotten their political education in the universities of Curragh, Long Kesh, Crumlin Road, Portlaoise, and now Limerick. I'm an avid reader and devoured books on politics.

My initial reading material was republican — Dan Breen, Tom Barry and the like. It was when I was imprisoned in Portlaoise from 1977 to 1981 that I really became acquainted with the socialist classics — ranging from Connolly to Marx, from Fanon and Cabral to Guevara and Mandel.

How did this reading influence you?

Well, it enabled me to analyse situations, to think problems through and to gain an understanding of the various struggles. I became aware of the link between the Irish struggle and those of other peoples: that a victory in Vietnam or Angola is

An interview with Dominic McGlinchey, from 'Starry Plough'

a victory for us and victory here is a victory for all.

What is your reaction to the media characterisation of you as "the most wanted man in Ireland"?

It's a bit of a joke. I am just an ordinary Irish Republican Socialist who is determined to strive for a free socialist Ireland.

I'm also an internationalist as all true socialists are. But the media building me up is ridiculous. I'm no Che Guevara. I think this building up is part of a ploy. "Build him up to knock him down." And this of course results in further demoralisation.

How do you view the current developments in Sinn Fein?

I welcome them. It can only be to the advantage of all anti-imperialists and the Irish people to have political action on a 32-county basis — political action relating to the issues affecting the Irish people.

Traditionally, republicans have neglected the South — have failed to see the necessity for a broad-based mass movement. It's good to see steps being taken to overcome this.

Do you see room for cooperation?

Of course. And not just on the national question. I would

welcome unity of action on a broad front basis among all anti-imperialists on other issues as well, e.g. unemployment, anti-repression, neutrality. I think action on these could lead to greater understanding of the direct relationship between these issues and the overall struggle against imperialism.

How do you see the electoral rise of the Workers Party?

They are not revolutionaries but a reformist party full of contradictions. They are reformists — you cannot reform imperialism. They welcome the takeover of the economy by multinationals. They have accommodated themselves with the EEC. They are essentially a Euro-Communist party trapped within bourgeois democracy. Reformists don't make revolutions.

What do you think of the position of women in the Irish struggle?

I think their role needs more emphasis. It is difficult to break down the sexism and stereotyping built up by the capitalist media. We have to break down this hegemony. It will be a struggle with limited gains until revolutionary power is gained. For our part, women play an equal role in our movement.

What do you think of international support for the Irish struggle?

I think it essential. Of course every victory over imperialism strengthens our hand. The victories in Nicaragua are a victory for us.

We must remember too, that it is not in the interests of the US to have a free Ireland. The US is an imperialist power linked with Britain. Britain acts as policeman for imperialism in Ireland.

So anything that weakens imperialism is to the benefit of the Irish people.

Getting back to your personal position. How has it affected you?

Well, I have a wife and two children. Being on the run has affected our family life. We would like to live a normal life but it is impossible to live a normal life in the midst of oppression. I could not stand idly by while imperialism holds sway in Ireland.

On the other hand, I have



'Britain acts as a policeman for imperialism'

existed for a year with both police forces looking for me. That I have been able to do that shows the great support that exists for freedom among the people. It is obvious that support exists.

How do you view Loyalism?

It's founded on the basis of maintaining marginal privileges over nationalists. Its basis is anti-democratic.

Republicans offer equality to all. If Loyalists cannot be content with equal rights in a United Ireland then obviously they'll create a problem.

What do you think of the Darkley killings?

I condemn them. Those people were only hill billy folk who had done no harm to anyone. They were in no way a legitimate target.

These killings are contrary to republican socialism. They cannot be defended.

How do you see the struggle developing in the Six Counties?

Well, I'm no prophet, I see hopeful signs. The Brits have tried nearly everything to defeat the anti-imperialist struggle. They have tried internment, torture, Diplock Courts, criminalisation, shoot-to-kill and now informers. All have failed.

Unbroken

The spirit of the nationalist people remains unbroken. They have shown the capacity to unite behind broad demands on the H Blocks and on informers like the Relatives for Justice.

The anti-imperialist movement cannot be beaten and the signs are that the INLA and IRA are stronger than ever. Together, with the support of the Nationalist population the British will be beaten.

How do you categorise the 26 Counties?

It is a typical neo-colony. Formal political independence was given to the Free State but economic control does not lie with Fitzgerald and Co., it lies elsewhere. Initially it was Britain which held control but that has now passed to the EEC and US imperialism.

Have you any messages that you would like the Starry Plough to convey?

First to thank all who aid the struggle for unity and socialism in Ireland.

Secondly, to salute the prisoners and to remind them to use the time to raise their own consciousness and to develop their political education.

IRSP statement on Darkley

THE Irish Republican Socialist Party totally condemns sectarianism!

Whether at Darkley, Bessbrook, Whitehouse or Lurgan our response is the same — total opposition!

We view sectarianism as a device whereby Britain is enabled — through disunity and strife — to maintain its presence in Ireland.

The shooting at Darkley only benefits Britain and the Loyalists. It gives the Loyalist murder gangs an excuse for their actions and it conceals the source from which most sectarian acts stem.

This is the British Government.

Britain has, through the years, used sectarianism in order to divide Catholic and Protestant.

It is notable that the media has been whipped up into a hysterical campaign following Darkley, but the more numerous victims of Loyalist murder gangs are ignored. This is not to excuse the Darkley killings — for such killings cannot be

excused. But it does expose the hypocrisy of the media and of establishment politicians.

Britain through its attempts to foist the most sectarian force in Europe, the UDR, on the nationalist community, and through the UDR involvement in UVF and UDA murder squads has openly pursued sectarian policies.

These policies are part of its age old policy of 'Divide and Conquer'. By stirring up fear and hatred through its sectarianism . . . Britain seeks to justify its presence as peacemaker and categorise the war of national liberation as a sectarian war.

Republican Socialists have a duty in the struggle against sectarianism. They must continually oppose those who take the emotional and "easy options".

They must expose the British and Loyalists for what they are — the real forces of sectarianism. And they must ensure that Britain's presence on this island is ended. For the ending of imperialist rule in Ireland will put an end to the cause of sectarianism.



TROOPS OUT NOW!

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Inside Long Kesh after the escape

AT THE END of last September 38 prisoners broke out of Long Kesh, and half of them were never recaptured.

In this letter smuggled out of Long Kesh, Republican prisoner of war Eoghan MacCormack describes what happened to the remaining prisoners after the break-out.

Immediately after the escape, the POA (Prison Officers' Association) in the H Blocks seized control of the camp. The authority of the prison governors was ignored, direct orders by the governors and the NIO (Northern Ireland Office) were disobeyed.

Together with the openly sectarian RUC, screws rounded up 19 of the 38 escapers, and began a systematic series of vicious assaults on these men.

They were stripped naked, layed face down on the ground and beaten unconscious. Many were savaged by dogs, had broken bones, lost teeth, had hair pulled from their heads, and all were a mass of cuts and bruises.

The beatings continued on and off for the next week, men were dragged naked from place to place within the camp, being refused proper medical attention, water and sleep for long periods, clothes to wear or bedding at night.

While these barbarities occurred to the recaptured escapers, collective punishment was instituted against all other PoWs in the camp and particularly against the 90 prisoners in H7 who were not involved in the

escape.

These men were forced to run a gauntlet of screws, RUC and guard dogs, from H7 to another block, H8.

They were wearing only trousers or shorts. 47 received injuries from batons or fists and sixteen were bitten by dogs. For the next five days they were given only a towel for a covering, food only occasionally, and were subject to frequent attacks from screws.

Massive searches took place in every block, all handicraft material was removed, personal letters, books, educational and political literature, even spectacle cases and tobacco tins, were confiscated and many articles were destroyed.

In cage 10 and 11, clear glass windows were removed from the huts housing PoWs and opaque glass replaced it.

For five days, visits to the camp were stopped and when they resumed the PoWs in H7, H8 and on the boards, were refused ordinary visits, and instead given closed visits.

These closed visits consisted of two adjoining cubicles, with a glass screen dividing them and preventing any physical contact between them.

The visitors sit on one side with a screw standing behind, and the PoW sits on the other side, accompanied by several screws.

If, on these visits, any word or reference was made concerning the escape or the events which followed the escape, the visit was immediately stopped.

Several men were dragged from the visiting area, and beaten up for attempting to tell their worried families of conditions.

Legal access was refused to those who were assaulted and strict censorship was applied both to the visits, letters and by banning all papers from the camp for a fortnight.

Lock-up lasted 23 hours a day, with the one break being for exercise, and even that was denied on some days. All association was stopped and frequent and intensive searches were implemented.

Control of movements was also increased and this has led to severe tension within the camp. The control of movements is a totally unnecessary restriction purely to harass the PoWs and their families, since it disrupts visits, exercise, meals and use of washing facilities.

The POA claim their actions are to secure the camp against further escapes, but the reality is their association has close links with the Official Unionist Party and by their actions they are hoping to discredit Prior and advance the OUP position.

Apart from this, the screws recently won an overtime pay claim and they see this latest action as an opportunity to strengthen their power, and introduce a highly repressive and sectarian regime into Long Kesh.

The third reason is money. The screws already earn around £320 a week, yet under the new controlled movements, opportunities exist for further gains through overtime, danger money, and more jobs.

Such activity was exposed recently when the POA spokesperson John Howell spoke of their concern for prisoners' rights (during the RUC take-over of Long Kesh in September) —



Long Kesh — site of the 'dirty protest' (above) and the hunger strikes

a concern that has been noticeably absent this month, as report after report tells of screws brutally beating naked and injured PoWs.

The present situation highlights the political nature of the Long Kesh jailors, in fact of all screws in the various jails here.

They play a major part in the repression of republicans and their actions in recent weeks

prove that they have chosen this role, thus making themselves part of the British war machinery. What has also become clear in the wake of the escape, is the vulnerability of PoWs, if the screws seize control of Long Kesh and initiate serious censorship and brutalities.

The POA is a sectarian organisation. Many of the screws involved in the attacks on PoWs

after the escape are already infamous for assaults on prisoners during the five years of the dirty protest.

It must be made clear that so long as POA attempts to intensify oppression in Long Kesh, PoWs will resist, and trouble must surely follow. The solution is to remove that power from bigoted screws.

Argentina: generals in court



New president Alfonsín

FORMER Argentine navy chief Emilio Massera was hauled before a military court last Thursday, 5th, to face charges that he ordered the kidnapping, torture and murder of many people.

Martin Thomas discusses the new regime in Argentina

The other eight members of the various military juntas since 1976 had already been summoned to hear the charges the previous week. They included General Galtieri, Brigadier Lami Dozo, and Admiral Anaya, as well as Generals Videla and Viola.

Galtieri, Lami Dozo, and Anaya have already been charged with mishandling the war with Britain in 1982. Their successor, Reynaldo Bignone, has been charged in a civilian court with 'illegal deprivation of liberty' of a man who disappeared in 1978.

The 'amnesty' law which the military regime passed to protect itself from prosecution for its bloody war against all opposition between 1976 and 1982 has been abolished. 34 out of 49 generals have been purged and 17 out of 25 admirals.

The new civilian government, which took office on December 10, is also considering prosecution of the former military rulers

for their economic policies.

The drive behind these measures is not democratic enthusiasm from the new president, Raul Alfonsín. He is doing the least he can to satisfy the popular cry that the military murderers be brought to account.

Between 1976 and 1982, up to 15,000 people 'disappeared' as victims of the military regime. Special teams of grave-diggers are now uncovering hundreds of corpses.

The president of the 'Mothers of the Place of May' — a group which has campaigned for an investigation into the 'disappeared' — commented on Alfonsín's procedure: 'The military are going to pardon themselves.'

Alfonsín evidently wants to strike a delicate balance: to do enough to be seen to respond to the people's anger, but no so much as to smash up the armed forces.

Together with the measures against the military rulers, he has introduced an 'anti-rebellion law', laying down heavy penalties for anyone who tries 'to alter in a permanent way the system of rights and constitutional guarantees'. Justified as a move against future military coups, this law is likely to be more heavily used against left-wingers.

Alfonsín is also trying to strengthen his links with the big capitalist powers, especially the EEC. He explained to the Paris daily Le Monde: 'We count firmly on the solidarity of the European democracies... I think in fact that, over and above their contradictory interests,

Europe and an intelligent, integrated Latin America can contribute effectively to breaking down this (US/USSR) polarity which once again dominates international relations.'

He expressed views close to the EEC's on Central America, and a hope that the EEC would push Britain into abandoning 'Fortress Falklands'.

Despite all this, Alfonsín has been forced to begin a sweeping purge of the top officer corps which has dominated Argentine politics for 60 years.

In my personal view, this casts some light on the debate there has been in Socialist Organiser over the 1982 war.

There is no guarantee that the Argentine military will not regroup for a return to power. Far from it. No such guarantee is possible short of a socialist revolution which dismantles the whole state machine of the Argentine capitalist class.

But for now the Argentine military is in disarray and its leading ranks are shattered. The terrible weight of repression which has born down on the Argentine working class is eased. What use the working class can make of this opportunity depends on the political struggle within the Argentine labour movement. But the opportunity is there.

And why? Because the military was discredited by its South Atlantic war. Just as a defeat for Thatcher's bloodthirsty buccaneering would have massively improved the situation for the British working class, so the defeat of Galtieri's desperate 'mini-imperialism' has benefited the Argentine workers.



UNITA — South African backed guerrillas

Apartheid state pounds Angola

ON SUNDAY January 6 South Africa announced that its forces were withdrawing from Angola after one of the biggest attacks in the long-running war of harassment.

South African troops had fought battles 160 miles into Angolan territory, and had been backed up by heavy air attacks.

The South Africans' aim is to consolidate their rule over Namibia (South West Africa), and to attack the bases in Angola of the Namibian liberation movement SWAPO.

They are also seeking to destabilise the Angolan government. Both in Angola and in Mozambique, the apartheid state supports and finances right wing guerrilla groups.

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THE BACKGROUND TO THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

WAR OR I

AFTER Grenada it was Lebanon's turn. The US military attack on Syrian positions in Lebanon early in December was the biggest US air strike since the Vietnam war. As an American administration official had put it, "After Grenada, anything is possible".

Or as Reagan himself had put it before the air strikes: "The events in Grenada and Lebanon, though oceans apart, are closely related". Or on another occasion: "Can the United States... stand by and see the Middle East incorporated into the Soviet bloc?"

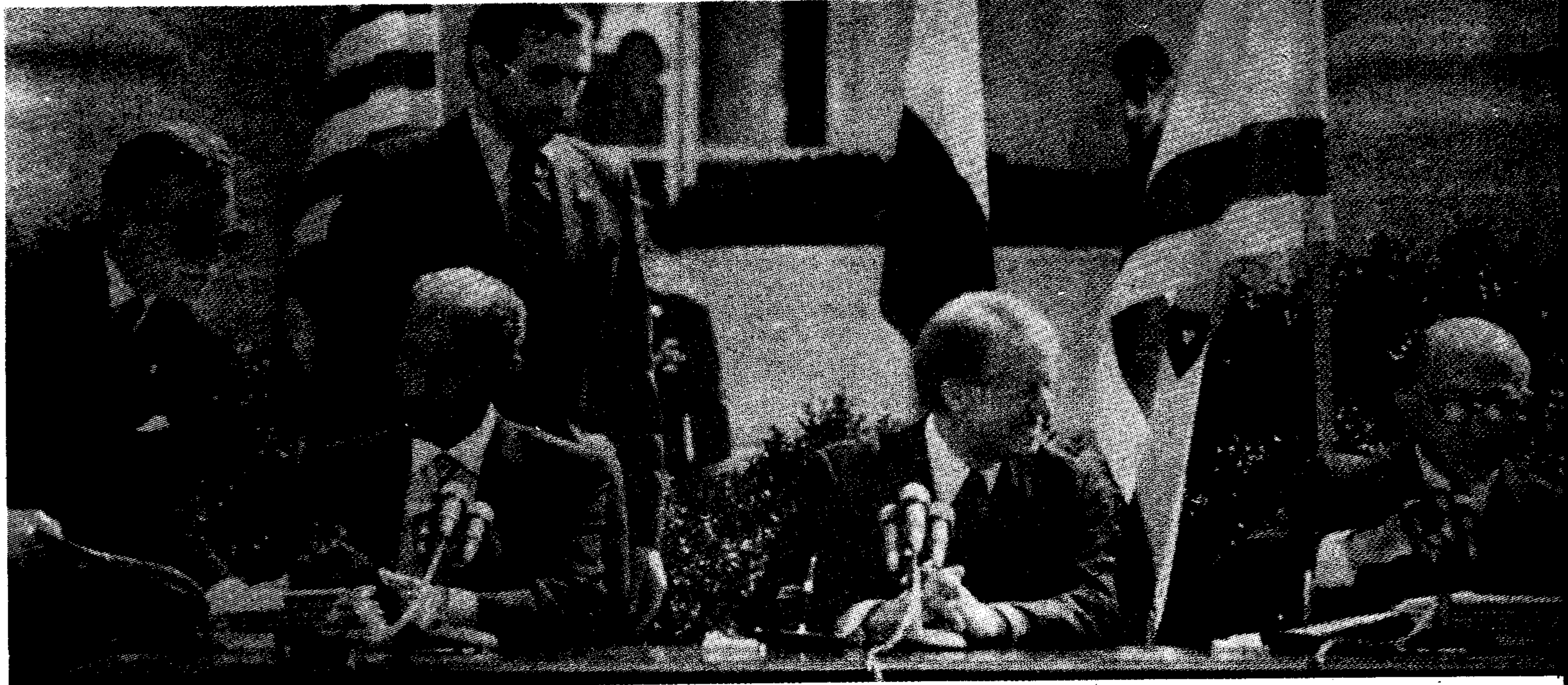
With the siting of Cruise missiles in Britain, the collapse of arms limitation talks and the escalation of the cold war, it is important for the labour movement and the peace movement to recognise the centrality of the Middle East crisis in a world situation increasingly teetering on the brink. The permanence of simmering war in the region is a major threat to world peace.

It is a major arena in which local and superpower conflicts could grow over into nuclear holocaust.

CLIVE BRADLEY spent the second half of 1983 in Egypt. Here he analyses the Middle East crisis and the forces which have generated it.

He examines the record of imperialist intervention into the region and analyses the development of the various Arab nationalist regimes which emerged after the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948.

He assesses the class struggle in the Middle East and the state of the Arab working class movements now, arguing that the working class of the Middle East is the vital force for progress in the region.



Sadat, Carter, Begin at the signing of the Camp David accords

MIDDLE EAST International flashpoint

THE Middle East since the Second World War has seen countless wars, many if not all with superpower intervention of one sort or another.

The 1948 Israeli-Arab war; the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt; the 1958 US intervention into Lebanon; the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; the so-called 'war of attrition' which followed it; the 1973 Arab-Israeli war; the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon; the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

In addition there has been the Jordanian civil war of 1970; the Lebanese civil war since 1975; the Egyptian-Libyan war in 1977; the Ethiopia-Somalia war; the Iran-Iraq war; the Libyan and French intervention into Chad; the ongoing war in the Western Sahara; the Iraqi war against the Kurds; the Anglo-Iranian intervention in Oman, etc., etc.

Arms

The Middle East is, in terms of military spending and superpower arms sales, the most militarised area in the world.

The Middle East accounts for 48% of all major weapons supplied to the Third World. It accounts for 32% of all major weapon imports in the world — more than the 'industrialised countries' (31%) and dwarfing other 'flash point' areas like Central America (1%).

Of the world's top seven countries in terms of per capita military spending, six are in the Middle East. It has the highest percentage of gross national product spent on arms of any region in the world — between 13 and 15 per cent (as against 8.3% for the Warsaw Pact countries, the next highest).

The Middle East now has almost twice the military manpower of the US, and nearly as much as the US plus NATO.

The superpowers have a long history of involvement in conflict in the region.

Britain currently has military advisers in Oman. There are multinational peace-keeping forces in Egypt and Lebanon. The US has directly intervened in Lebanon, and indirectly in Iran (plus of course the pathetic attempt to rescue the US Embassy hostages).

The Soviet Union has had at different times advisers in a number of countries and still has them in Ethiopia and Syria.

Syria, which has had 30,000 troops in Lebanon since 1976, is the Soviet Union's chief regional ally. The US attack on Syrian

positions was, in part, motivated by a desire to 'teach the Soviets a lesson' and limit their recently reviving strength in the region — a desire fed by US 'public opinion' which is obsessed with the Soviet presence in Syria.

In the summer of 1983, the US Sixth Fleet — supposedly backing up its 'peace-keeping' forces in Lebanon, took to bombarding Druze villages to maintain the right-wing Christian and communalist Falangist government in Lebanon.

Rapid Force

And a dominant feature of US foreign policy in the region is the so-called Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) announced in Oct 1979 under the auspices of the 'Carter doctrine'. This states that the US will intervene militarily anywhere in the region to maintain its 'vital strategic interests' and its local allies.

The RDF already has a nuclear capability. There are three carrier battle groups stationed in the Indian Ocean and Eastern Mediterranean loaded with hundreds of nuclear warheads. Anti-submarine patrol aircraft stationed in Diego Garcia and Oman also carry nuclear warheads. And non-nuclear Harrier vertical take-off AV8-A aircraft are being replaced by nuclear-capable AV8-B.

The strategic conception underlying the RDF is quite clear. It has two central aims:

*To protect allies from internal opposition, particularly, but not only, in the Gulf.

*To deter the USSR from regional 'adventures' by the threat of direct confrontation with the US which would lead to the use of US first strike capacity.

Ronald Reagan put it like this:

"If it (the USSR) thinks that this (intervention in a Middle

Eastern country) will cause a confrontation — this is going to give them pause. They're not going to move too swiftly because they don't want the world blown up."

And Caspar Weinberger in his annual report said: "For the region of the Persian Gulf, in particular, our strategy is based on the fact that... the prospect that we might carry the war to other arenas is the most effective deterrent to Soviet aggression."

In 1976, Vice-Admiral Gerald E. Miller explained that "it will become increasingly difficult in the near future to protect US overseas interests with conventional weapons... We just would not have the capability... to take care of the situation with conventional force." And Miller goes on: "I do not assume that all threats we face will come from the Soviet Union or only from nations capable of a nuclear response... We have confrontations with nuclear or non-nuclear nations whose geographical location is such that we have no adequate means of protecting our interests with conventional weapons."

The RDF is also designed to protect US local allies. After the assassination of Sadat in 1981, the US carried out the war games called 'Operation Bright Star' partly as a display of strength against would-be rebels.

The Reagan administration defines any anti-regime activity in one of its allied states as 'Soviet-inspired'.

After Lebanon, it would be Iran. The 'Islamic Republic' threatens to close the Gulf if Iraq takes action against its oilfields. The US has stated that it will intervene to keep the Gulf open.

The prospect of more and more US intervention, escalating to nuclear confrontation, is increasingly a real and dangerous one.



Iran: the US's next target?

THE prime responsibility to end the insane and potentially cataclysmic situation in the Middle East lies with us in the imperialist countries.

But an essential part of the political armoury we need for the fight against imperialism is an understanding of what has happened and is happening in this explosive region.

The left argues that the core of the Middle East crisis is the existence of the state of Israel.

Established in 1948, against the wishes of the Palestinian Arabs, Israel has been armed to the teeth by imperialism. It acts as imperialism's watchdog in the region. Without the destruction of Israel, no solution is possible to the crisis.

This argument is not untrue; it is simply partial. For a deeper understanding of the Middle East situation today, we need to look a lot further and deeper than the Arab-Israeli conflict. We need an analysis of the Arab world and of its component states over the period since Israel was consolidated.

The defeat of the Arab armies in Palestine in 1948 was a disaster for the Palestinian people. And it sent shock waves through the reactionary Arab regimes.

In Syria a series of military coups took place in the late '40s and early '50s that ended the power of the old ruling clique.

Nasser

In 1952 the Egyptian monarchy was overthrown by the army and soon replaced by the regime of Gamal abd al-Nasser. In 1958 the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown and replaced by the regime of General Qassem.

1952 until the mid-1960s was a period dominated by the rhetoric of 'pan-Arabism' and radical nationalism. The Nasser regime in Egypt, after an early flirtation with the US — it identified its prime external enemy as the old colonial power, Britain — developed a far more radical stance.

It moved towards the 'non-aligned movement' and rejected an imperialist scheme to incorporate it into a regional security network called the Baghdad Pact or CENTO. In 1956, Nasser nationalised the Anglo-French-owned Suez Canal — provoking the disastrous Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt of that year.

The USA was emerging as the dominant imperialism in the area. Partly this was due to its

The 35-year to today's c

ostensibly 'neutral' position on the Suez crisis, but it was due to other factors as well — to the fall of Iran's Mossadeq regime (in 1953) which had nationalised Anglo-Iranian Oil and its replacement by the CIA-backed Shah, and to the decline of British power.

'Arab socialism'

The US forged ever-closer links with the Zionist state.

But the process of US overlordship was patchy. Nasser moved 'leftwards'. The Egyptian state moved into closer alliance with the USSR. Nasser nationalised the bulk of manufacturing industry, imposed strict restrictions on exports and imports and proclaimed 'Arab socialism'. In 1958, trumpeting the cause of Arab unity, Egypt united with Syria in the brief 'United Arab Republic'.

But inter-Arab conflicts proved more powerful than pan-Arab nationalist sentiment. The radical Qassem regime in Iraq refused to enter into the UAR. In 1961 Syria seceded. In Syria a radical wing of the Ba'ath (Resurrection) Party seized power. In Iraq Qassem was overthrown by a vehemently reactionary wing of the same party which, although itself overthrown in late 1963, was to regain power in even worse guise in 1968.

By the mid-1960s, the radical nationalist forces were losing momentum. The 'experiment' of Arab unity had been a miserable failure. In Egypt, the economy was grinding to a halt and Nasser's regime was bogged down in a military intervention in Yemen. To calm internal dissent — and, possibly more important at the time, criticism by other Arab regimes — Nasser's rhetorical anti-Zionism became more frenzied. In Syria, too, the regime verbally championed the rights of the Palestinians.

The house of cards collapsed in June 1967 when the Israeli airforce destroyed the Egyptian and Syrian armies in six days,

opening up a whole new situation in the Middle East.

Whilst the humiliated nationalists fumbled for a way out of the impasse they faced, three vital new factors entered the regional equation.

*Firstly, the US-Israeli alliance developed even more strongly. Before that, Israel was strategically important to imperialism. Since then it has been pumped with more arms by the US than any other country in the world.

*Secondly, the Palestinians became an independent force in the conflict.

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), originally created as an Egyptian stooge, was taken over and transformed by radical guerrilla forces of a qualitatively different character to the old-style Nasserite and Ba'athist nationalists. Chief among these was Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat.

*Thirdly, the conservative monarchies of the oil states took on more significance as economically-ravaged Egypt was forced to drop its revolutionary rhetoric and look to them — and especially Saudi Arabia — for financial support.

Under the impact of the 1967 defeat and in face of the growing political weight of the oil states, the Arab regimes shifted right.



"The working classes of the Middle East

REVOLUTION?

Arab workers and 'Arab Socialism'

HOW have events in the region shaped working class politics?

One of the Nasser regime's first actions was the crushing of independent working class action. Strike leaders were executed.

Then the Nasserite state set out to develop Egyptian capitalism by centralising capital in the hands of the state, and ultimately by relying quite heavily on the Soviet Union.

It nationalised Egyptian industry and started to talk about 'Arab socialism'.

As did the radical regimes in Syria and Iraq, the Egyptian state also introduced a land reform that broke the power of

the big landowners and, potentially at least, cleared the way for the development of capitalist agriculture.

Perhaps inevitably, the Nasser regime, the longest-lasting of the 'radical', 'socialist' regimes in the Arab world, thus generated confusion in the small but militant Egyptian workers' movement and in the left.

A somewhat fractious communist movement reacted to Nasserism with confusion. Initially, for the most part, supportive of the regime, it moved to condemnation of it as 'fascist'. Finally it suffered a total ideological collapse when

Nasser embarked upon his state capitalist 'Arab socialist' path. The mainstream of the Stalinists disbanded to join the Nasserite 'party', the Arab Socialist Union in 1965.

At only one point did the Nasserite state capitalist regime constitute a particularly serious threat to imperialism — in 1956. But on that occasion its opponents were the declining imperialisms in the region.

Internally, the regime combined its heavy-handed repression of all opposition with attempts to gain mass support for the state by various means.

The working class had been rendered politically and indus-

trially docile. The state granted the workers fairly important reforms until a severe economic crisis undermined the basis for this state patronage.

After 1967 the working class (along with other social forces — the urban poor generally, and the students) increasingly moved into open opposition in factory strikes and on the streets.

In Iraq, the regime of Qassem relied heavily for support upon an extremely powerful workers' movement, led by the Communist Party which was included in the government.

Between March and July 1959, a clearly revolutionary situation had developed, in which the CP, had it been prepared to break with the capitalist elements represented by Qassem, could well have seized power. It was not prepared to do so and the opportunity was lost. The CP even agreed to Qassem's war against the Kurds living in Iraq. It demobilised the working class. In February 1963 the Ba'athist coup drowned the communists and workers movement in blood.

In Syria, a truly appalling Communist Party led by a despotic Stalinist called Khaled Bakdash, has never been anything other than a junior partner to the Ba'ath.

The only organised political voice that the bulk of the workers in the region have had,

has been the CP's. But, partly as a result of Stalinist ideology and partly as a result of specific experiences in the region, these CPs have long-since been reduced to being a tame 'left' wing of the bourgeois nationalist movements.

Consequently, even where the working class has broken in practice with the populist state structures — for example, Nasser's — the only political alternative on offer has been some other grossly inadequate and sometimes almost identical nationalist alternative, Ba'athist or Stalinist.

Independent working class politics has been weak, even where working class action has not.

Much of what has happened in the Middle East over the last twenty-five or thirty years has to be measured against the **weakness of the working class.**

What is often seen as the regime's 'instability' is in fact an expression of the failure of the working class at various crucial moments to impose its will upon society and the simultaneous political and economic crisis of the bourgeoisie. Whilst the Arab capitalist classes and their states have slipped from one crisis to the next, the workers' movement has been politically disarmed and therefore unable to fundamentally change the situation.

countdown crisis

Nasser accepted a 'peace plan' proposed by US Secretary of State Rogers that entailed a de facto recognition of the Israeli state.

Late in 1970 the Jordanian monarchy launched an attack on the Palestinian guerrillas based in Jordan — a civil war in which, during Black September, Jordanian troops massacred Palestinians and Jordanians allied with them — and drove the PLO out of Jordan into its only remaining base in Lebanon.

In 1972, Sadat, Nasser's successor, unceremoniously kicked Soviet economic and military advisers out of Egypt, in an effort to attract greater US support.

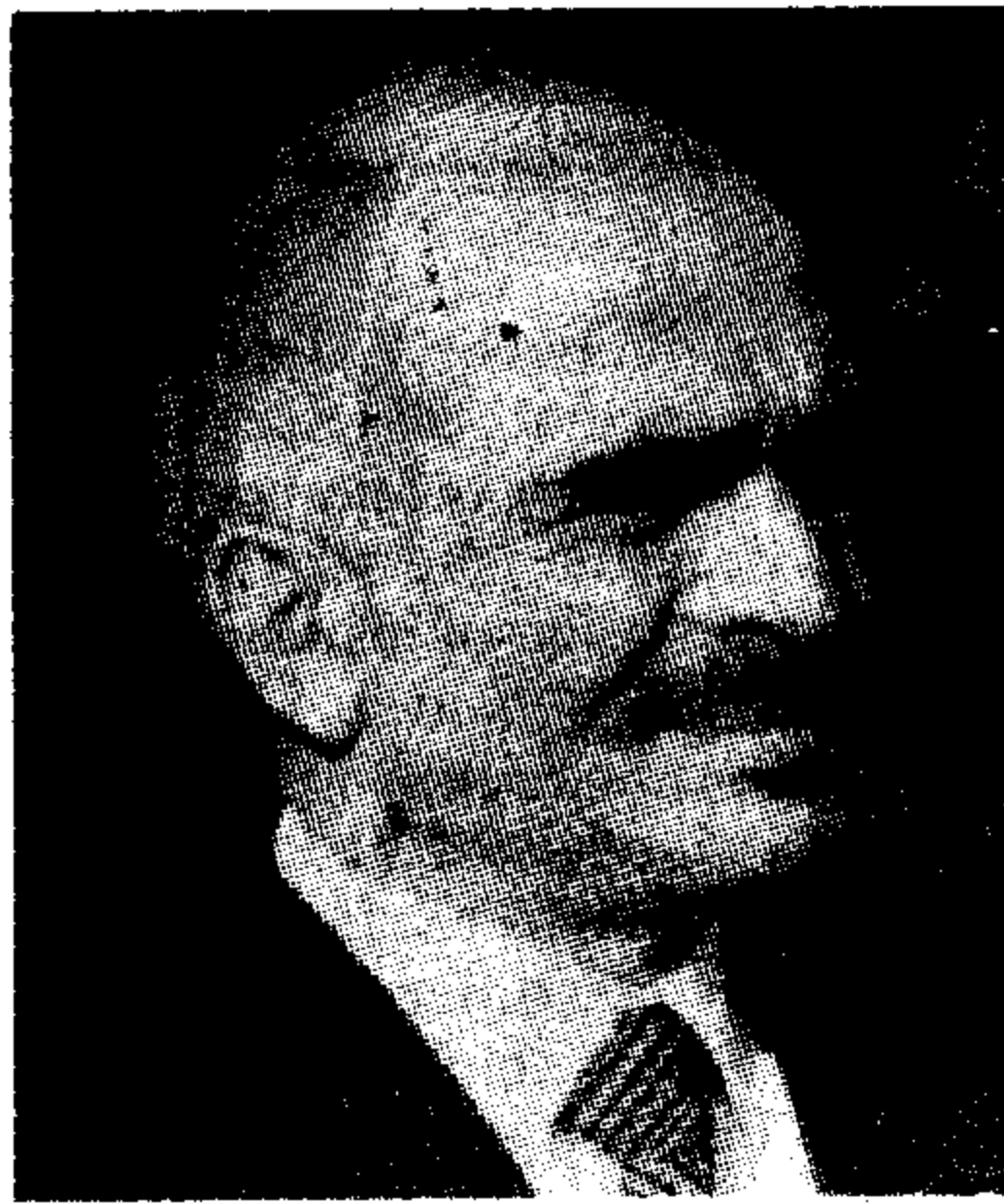
ence of vast monetary surpluses in these countries has been a major factor in the deep social changes that have taken place in the Middle East over the last decade.

As the 1970s wore on, the storm centre of the Middle East shifted. Forced into Lebanon after the Jordanian disaster, the Palestinians became embroiled in a bloody and largely communal civil war in which, between mid-1975 and mid-1976 50,000 people died.

Various international forces played a role in Lebanon — not least the Israeli state, which backed the reactionary Falange militia and has a vested interest in 'neutralising' Lebanon as a potential enemy by seeing it divided between its warring Christian and Moslem communities. Prefiguring its murderous invasion of 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978 in an effort to destroy PLO bases.

In Iran, the Shah was overthrown in February 1979, a significant step in the making of the current 'cold war'. The US recognised the precariousness of its 'strategic interests' — principally its investments (notably in oil) and the oil supplies.

The Egyptian state under Sadat opened up the Egyptian economy to foreign investments and moved towards a new politi-



Jordan's King Hussein



Iraq's Saddam Hussein

ical alliance with the US.

Israel — despite near disaster in the October war — developed increasing military strength. In 'special relationship' with the US as its major ally in the region was secure. Colonisation of the occupied territories and their effective annexation proceeded apace.

Conservative Arab states have become increasingly significant for imperialism due to their oil (or in the case of Egypt due to its strategic position and military weight). But Israel had remained their number one ally.

Then, suddenly, in 1977, president Sadat did the unthinkable and visited Israel. By 1979 Israel and Egypt had signed a 'separate peace', agreed upon in joint talks with the US at Camp David. Universally condemned in the Arab world, the Camp David Agreement has been a vital factor in the Middle Eastern situation since then.

In a region so plagued by wars, the peace treaty seemed to many in the West to be eminently desirable. It is, however, a sham. Sold to the Egyptian people with the claim that it would enable prosperity to be built with resources no longer diverted to war, it has done nothing of the sort.

In fact, Egyptian military spending has increased since the signing of the peace treaty, and an indigenous arms industry is slowly but surely thriving. Israeli military spending has also increased.

The Camp David Agreement was supposed to solve the Palestinian question. It did not. Nothing has been done of any significance by the Israeli state under the terms of the agreement even to move towards the limited autonomy for the West Bank that was proposed for the Palestinians.

In fact, it was precisely because Egypt was militarily neutralised, that Israel was able

to invade Lebanon in 1982 without fear of serious resistance.

Sadat's trips to Jerusalem and Camp David were in reality a response by the Egyptian state to mounting internal opposition, an attempt to offer 'peace' as a supposed solution to buy time.

Mass strikes, culminating in two days of national rioting against increases in the cost of basic goods in January 1977 rocked the regime several times in the mid-'70s.

One wing of the opposition — the Islamic fundamentalist one — was to claim Sadat's life in October 1981, bringing home to the Egyptian regime and to its international allies the continuing instability — the crisis of the capitalist states, in this instance — of the region.

Israel

So overall, the period since the 1960s can be seen to be one of the decline of radical Arab nationalism and the rise of conservative regimes. Within that process, the US has become the dominant foreign power. Syria, far from being evidence of the Soviet Union's creeping influence, is its last foothold in a region it was once extremely powerful in.

Since the Lebanon war, the Soviet influence in the Middle East has grown — but the US is dominant there. One of its problems is that its dominance rests in part on its 'special relationship' with Israel — which is a somewhat wayward ally, but vital all the same. The growing strength of Israel vis-a-vis the Arab states is also a feature of the period since 1967. The October 1973 war was only a very partial break in this pattern. Today the Israeli army is the third or fourth most powerful in the world.

The hope for the future

WHAT forces can offer a way out of the Middle East minefield where various flashpoints — the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, Lebanon, the Gulf, Afghanistan — threaten world peace?

First, from the tribal resistance in Afghanistan through to the New Holy War group that killed Sadat, there are the Islamic fundamentalists. They led the Iranian revolution and hold power there.

Drawing inspiration from Khomeini, these represent powerful forces in, especially, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and to an extent Iraq.

In Syria a whole town, Hama, was laid siege by the Syrian army in February 1982 when an 'Islamic revolt' broke out. In Lebanon, various Islamic fundamentalist organisations fill out the complex picture of the country's competing groups.

In Egypt there are large networks of Islamic underground organisation, and in Sudan the Moslem Brotherhood — from which the Egyptian and Syrian organisations derive — are a mass movement (currently collaborating with the Numeiri regime).

In Saudi Arabia the Mecca mosque was besieged by Islamic fundamentalists in 1979.

These groups are fundamentally regressive. Opposed to women's liberation, opposed to communism, they are backward-looking and reactionary. The Khomeini regime is an object lesson in this respect.

In Egypt they are also largely middle class. One Egyptian organisation openly looks forward to a nuclear war that will destroy both the US and the USSR.

Although to a greater or lesser extent a reflection of a profound social crisis and an attempt to find a solution, they represent

no acceptable alternative.

The Palestinian resistance has suffered a long series of defeats. The recent defeat of the PLO in Tripoli at the hands of Syria and Syrian-backed rebels amounts to a near-completion by bourgeois Arabs of something Israel failed to do in Lebanon.

Arafat, since 1974, has looked for a 'diplomatic solution' that has not materialised. The PLO remains an important political force, of course, but a successful revolutionary struggle is going to need to outgrow it.

Especially in Egypt, the working class has emerged as a vital political force. Huge factories group together vast numbers of workers who since 1971 (and especially from 1975-77) have come into violent conflict with the state. It is here, and with other working classes in the region — such as on the West Bank, in Syria, Iraq and Iran, and including in Israel — that the social power necessary to break the back of imperialism and its local capitalist allies — Arab and Jew alike — will lie.

As the Middle East grows more militarised, as the threat of nuclear war builds up — Israel already possesses a nuclear capacity — the urgency of a socialist solution increases.

Part of a struggle against war must be a fight for solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the Middle East — not just against Israel and for the Palestinians, although that is, of course crucial, but against all the repressive regimes of the area, and for working class action against them.

*Note: Much of the information in the first part of this article is based on MERIP Reports Nos. 111 and 112 and the Middle East Review 1983.

le East can break the back of imperialism"



Nasser: the spearhead of radical Arab nationalism

In the Eastern bloc,

Don't back disarmers

I WANT to deal with the way that Stalinism has been dealt with in some recent articles in Socialist Organiser.

The Trotskyist movement was formed out of a struggle against Stalinism and so to be confused or wrong on Stalinism negates the very basis of our existence.

This is not to say that the reason for our existence is to fight Stalinism. We are here to overthrow capitalism. But only by understanding reformism and fighting it was it possible for the Bolsheviks to overthrow capitalism. Today, we have also to understand and fight Stalinism, the product of a later degeneration of the workers' movement.

Stan Crooke's articles in SO 149 and 150 on the peace movements in Eastern Europe show the wrong way to approach Stalinism. In fact they show the wrong way to approach any question — to deal with it as an abstraction.

Historical

He separates it out from the overall world situation and from its historical context.

You cannot look at the peace movements in any country without first trying to understand the driving forces towards war.

The first and second world wars were imperialist wars. They were not fought because 'militarists' took control of society but because capitalists came into conflict over the control of world markets and set their armies to fight over them.

Where do Russia and East Europe fit into this?

The Russian Revolution was a great material gain for the working class and remains a great material gain, despite its later degeneration. It took Russia out of the control of the capitalist class. The drive for profit was ended and with it the drive to imperialist war.

Russia and later Eastern Europe do not have the same drive to control the world economy as do the imperialist states.

In their drive to rectify the falling rate of profit, the imperialists are driven to attempt to retake control over such countries as China.

The aggressive force, on a world scale, are the imperialist powers.

As Marxists we defend the gains workers have made and so we defend the nationalised property in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from imperialist aggression.

By Tony Richardson

This, of course, does not mean we support the bureaucratic clique in power. Quite the opposite. We say that they are always endangering the property relations by their actions and specifically by the fact that they have usurped the power from the working class and have initiated their own dictatorship.

Through their actions they strengthen reaction internally and externally. By refusing to fight for world revolution they disconnect the Russian working class from the only force that can really assist them against the imperialists, that is the working class in the imperialist countries.

Because they wish to defend their own privileges the Eastern bureaucracies have their own methods of defending the nationalised property relations in those countries.

Their usual method is by diplomacy. Part of "diplomacy" is to use world developments to defend the status quo.

They sell arms to all kinds of reactionary regimes in order to curry favour with them and play them off against the major imperialist powers.

They provide arms and "advisers" to "progressive" nationalist forces who by the fact that they are fighting imperialism are attracted towards Russia.

The Russian bureaucracy only does this as a counterweight to the imperialists and thus to only a limited extent. They also drop allied regimes or forces for example, Arafat has been dropped because of their relationship with Syria.

This is why you often find the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and now Cuba backing "progressive" anti-imperialist forces and this, of course, makes for a complex world situation.

How does this bring us to where we are today?

There are often changes taking place between the Eastern bloc and the imperialist powers. It is not always just straight Cold War. Even the imperialist powers would prefer things to stay the same at particular times.

But the real contradictions within the world, based on the contradictions within the capitalist system keep breaking through.

In the early and mid-'70s, there was a period of detente.

But under the surface the struggles continued and a major change took place with the victory of the Vietnamese revolution in May 1975.



The USSR's tanks in Czechoslovakia

lution in May 1975.

This strengthened mass anti-imperialist struggles all over the world. It was followed by the victory in Angola against the Portuguese, that sparked the overthrow of the fascists in Portugal. Imperialism was reeling and received a whole series of defeats, culminating in Iran.

Reversing

Of course imperialism has not given up and so they set about reversing this process. This included moves to play off China against the Soviet Union and to try to set about isolating Russia again through the renewal of the Cold War. Through this process the US government planned to rebuild its internal strength to the point where the imperialists could start using their forces throughout the world again.

This Cold War led to the bureaucracy defending itself in the only way it knows how. The securing of its borders, the invasion of Afghanistan and the crushing of the Polish mass movement.

I have gone through this in order to show that despite what appears sometimes to be the case, the aggressive forces are the imperialists.

They have now reversed the mid-'70s position to the extent that they can use their forces — Britain in the Falklands, Israel in Lebanon, France in Chad and the USA in Lebanon, Grenada and now threatening Iran.

When seen in this light, Stan Crooke's attitude, not just to the peace movements but to peace itself is reactionary.

Russia and Eastern Europe need to defend themselves.

Unilateral nuclear disarmament in Russia would lay it open to imperialist attack. (Before Russia had the Bomb, Truman seriously considered a nuclear attack on China at the time of the Korean War).

Stan Crooke's arguments can only be read as supporting unilateralism in Russia.

But more than this he backs up the unofficial peace movements' demands that in opposition to military service there be "community peace service". He attacks the East German government because they "have not responded to such a proposal."

This means disarming East Germany altogether. He even opposes war toys.

What is more, he argues that we must show these independent peace movements that their real allies "are not warmongering right wingers but the left and the working class as a whole."

But there are two issues here. One is the demands, the other is the movement itself.

Their demands do fit in with the "warmongering right wingers" in the multilateral disarmament position at best, and at worst disarm the East alone.

To campaign for unilateral disarmament in East Germany can only mean that you think Russia and the USA are the same, that there is no specific imperialist war drive and that wars are caused by nasty rulers in abstraction.

So the demands of the unofficial peace movement are reactionary. But what about their organisations?

Here we have a different position. Precisely because of bureaucratic repression of all oppositional voices (this suppression is their method of

existence) we defend these movements' rights to exist and express their opinions.

Obviously many people will have been driven to support their ideas by bureaucratic actions such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and because of attempts to destroy Solidarnosc in Poland.

In this, solidarity with their right to exist we would hope to influence them to the view that the task is the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Our attitude to Solidarnosc is something quite different. It has a progressive direction and a mass base. Despite the confused ideas of some of its leaders, it was on the verge of overthrowing the bureaucracy.

The real attitude of the right to Solidarnosc was that they tried to make anti-communist

propaganda out of it while at the same time they called on the banks to bail out the regime. The church stifled the movement.

In our attitudes to opposition movements we have to push them in the direction of overthrowing the bureaucracy and defence of the nationalised property relations.

Stan Crooke pushes them in the opposite direction.

In his classic work, "Revolution Betrayed", written after he called for a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy, Trotsky argues what kind of army, i.e. one based on a militia, was necessary. I could understand it Stan Crooke was arguing against the bureaucratic control of the army, but not disarmament.

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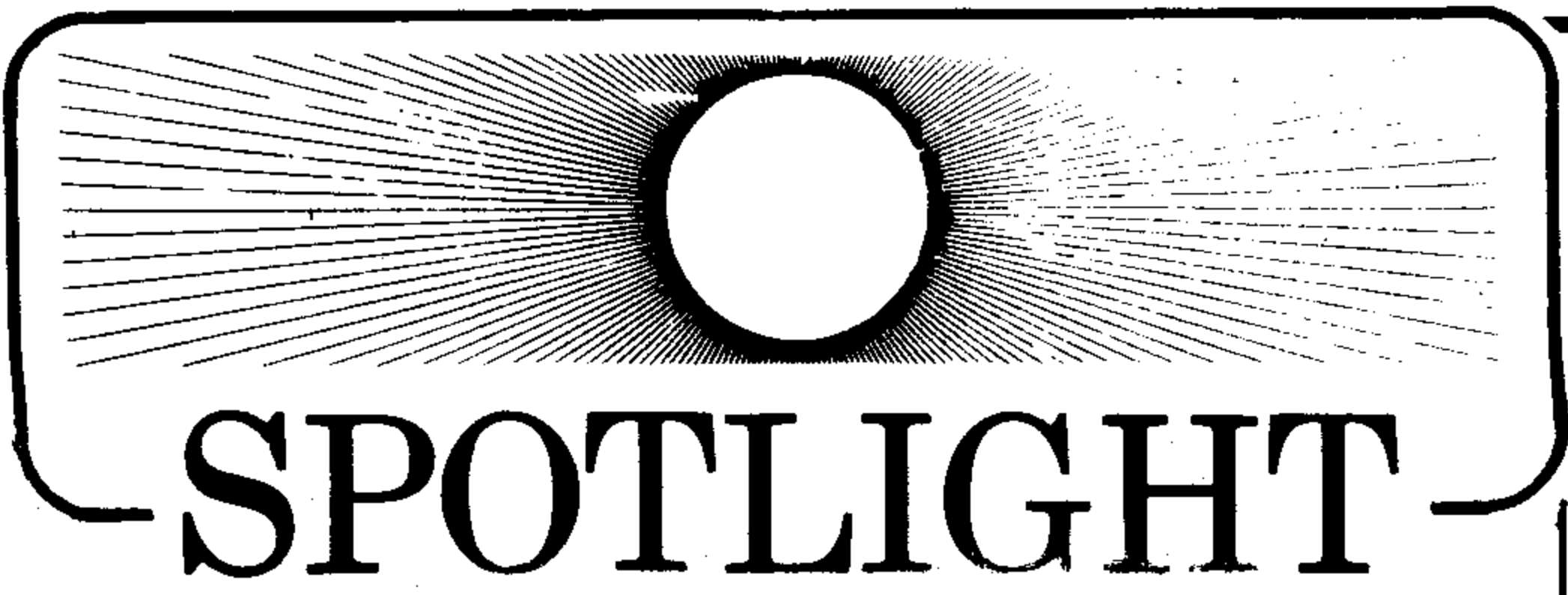
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Another legacy of the war

By Frank Higgins

LAST Monday's Panorama Special was called after its subject, the children who are known in Vietnam as the 'Children of the Dust', the 'Dust of Life', or 'Dust of the Road'.

They — between 15 and 17 thousand of them, mainly teenagers — are the offspring of American men and Vietnamese women, a by-product of the Vietnam war.

Rejected in Vietnam and, according to all accounts, treated very badly, they are belatedly, nearly a decade after the war ended, being offered entry visas to the USA.

They said they had been outcasts in Vietnam, deprived of food, housing and even education. One woman told of being forced to labour beyond her capacity and then being taunted: get your American son to work for you.

The cameras accompanied a well-off London-based American, Jim Carroll, to retrieve his 16-year old son John (who had not been to school for eight years...).



The Saigon 'bar girls' knew how to avoid pregnancy. The American-Vietnamese children were born to less mercenary collaborators.



Americans get no further than the airport at Ho Chi Minh City, where a big crowd of youths accompanied by mothers and occasionally grandmothers had gathered. Though denying that there is any official discrimination against the children, the Vietnamese Stalinist government is plainly eager to get rid of them. It is helping to round them up — including those whose mothers also have abandoned them. (Their appearance tells other Vietnamese the story of their origin).

The programme balanced well-off, concerned Jim Carroll, who whisked his son off to the stockbroker belt of London, with John Hitt. Hitt is a deep-south redneck, married, fat, mid-50s, speech-impaired. He doesn't want

to know his son Kuan. Hitt's wife is vindictive towards the boy's mother — a lady with an anxious smile who has left another child behind (temporarily, perhaps) in Vietnam.

Only a few dozen fathers have shown any interest in their children. Most of the thousands of Asian-Americans will go to orphanages or foster homes in the USA.

Is it just 'anti-Vietnamese propaganda'? If the stories of

discrimination are not true, then why would the government collaborate in exporting children who are culturally and linguistically Vietnamese? Snatches of a half-remembered bitter Irish nationalist song kept going through my head — 'Patrick Sheehan', about an Irish soldier blinded fighting for Britain in the Crimean war and forced to beg to stay alive.

"Since I joined my country's tyrants, my face I can never

show/ 'Midst the good old friends I used to know in the glen of Aherlow'.

But vengeance on the children? This, of course, is the regime that created the 'boat people', mainly persecuted ethnic Chinese.

It is another bitter footnote to the Vietnam war, which, for all its justice against the USA, resulted, to the misfortune of the people of Vietnam, in the establishment of a totalitarian Stalinist regime throughout Vietnam.

Decadent brilliance

AT LEAST my son liked it, especially the tall, one-eyed cyclops. (Until the cyclops got killed. Then he announced that the regular hero, Prince Colwyn, was his favourite).

But Thomas is 5½. For me, Krull was crud. I loathed it, but maybe, since Thomas didn't, I shouldn't have.

It's a mixture of fairy tale and science fiction in which fairy tale magic merges imperceptibly into sci-fi marvels and silly words to create an overall effect of the mystical and the supernatural. The hard-souled, calculating mysticism of 'Star Wars'.

But the Force isn't really with this one, it seems, because Krull has not done too well at the box office. The great rich seam opened by Star Wars in 1977 may be petering out.

Mick Ackersley reviews 'Krull' (on general release)

What's unpleasant about Krull is that it's a tongue-in-cheek pastiche put together with commercial-minded cynicism. Such concoctions come cynical-nasty (like TV's vile Blake's 7), cynical-funny (Star Trek) and cynical-nice.

This is cynical-nice, but with a nasty pervasive undertaste, generated by its component parts.

The language of the deep-voiced narrator: "This it was given to me to know. The princess shall choose a prince and together they will rule the kingdom and their descendants rule the galaxy". The trading in archetypes — the enemy is "the beast" and his army are "the Slayers".

The wholesale pillaging and inorganic amalgamation of stories and images from fairy tale and myths. King Arthur's sword in the stone becomes the five-bladed boomerang-like magic 'glave' (I think!) plucked out of volcanic water by Prince Colwyn, guided by the Merlyn-like "Old one" who has "come down from the grand mountain". The high-winged Wagnerian helmets of the Slayers — who may be robots... "The Widow of the Web", the cyclops. Bits of Jason and

the Argonauts such as the Phineas-like blind seer, etc.

Now of course the stories pillaged here themselves pillaged and amalgamated other stories and characters. But not like this, in an undigested mess made bearable only by the marvellous special effects.

The Space Gothic hybrid of fairy tale and sci-fi combines knights in armour with 'slayers' in armour who ride horses but have ray guns on the hilts of their swords.

The Beast lives in the Black Fortress, but the Fortress flies to a new site every day. The 'slayers' carry flaming torches to give them light, but their swords give off electric sparks. We have space ships and the superstitions of the 'dark forests'.

I think what provokes my strong animosity to Krull, as to Star Wars, which on one level are harmless and enjoyable entertainments, is their 'scientific' mysticism.

Technical brilliance creates a decadent collage of images which packages a synthetic superstition cynically manufactured and sold like spiritual glue-sniffing kits to children and others.

Predatory on better films, too: the scene in which the "old one" perilously seeks the widow inside a giant spider's web is a rip-off from Michael Powell's wonderful 1940 version of "The Thief of Baghdad". (But then so is Darth Vader modelled on the tall, veiled, black-cloaked Conrad Veidt villain of that movie).

Cancer is political too!

SCIENCE

By Les Hearn

CANCER IS quite rightly regarded as a scourge of the Western world, but the recently-published book "Cancer in Britain" seeks to show that cancer is not an "act of god" or a purely medical question. There is a significant political aspect to it.

Further the problem is not just (or even) a matter of discovering a cure. 30 years of intensive research have not raised survival rates beyond 20% at five years after diagnosis. Many of these "survivors" subsequently succumb after years of misery-making drug and radiation treatment.

So Lesley Doyal and her co-authors argue for a strategy of prevention.

This brings us right up against the politics of cancer.

Recently, there has been a heated debate in the science press between "establishment" and "radical" views on the origins of cancer.

It is agreed that harmful chemicals and radiation can cause cancer. Hereditary factors and psychological stress also seem to play a part. Scientists agree that many carcinogens reach us through our diet and through cigarette smoke. But "establishment" experts Professors Doll and Peto believe that the majority of cancers are caused by our lifestyle while 5% or less are caused by chemicals from industry.

"Radical" scientists such as Samuel Epstein (a co-author of this book) believe that 20-40% of cancers are caused through working with carcinogens, while pollution and additives to consumer products are also significant causes of cancers.

Predictably, the Chemical Industries Association (CIA) favour the establishment view, though even on these figures, the CIA's response is inadequate.

Cancer affects all of us. With 22% of deaths caused by cancer, there can be few of us with no personal experience of its effects.

Class issue

It is a class issue, as Doyal et al amply show. The most well-off get less, and the poorest more cancers.

It is a sex issue, though less is made of this in the book. Revelations about the "Pill" and cancer came too late for inclusion.

It is also a race issue, though the book does not deal with this. Figures from the US show that whites have a 40% higher chance of surviving ten years after diagnosis than blacks.

After a look at how carcinogens are controlled (not very well) Doyal et al present some case studies which taught me a few things. For instance:

*Even though mesothelioma is officially recognised as being caused only by asbestos, only about a quarter of its victims get compensation. Overall, compensation for industrially-caused diseases is at an even lower rate.

*Not only do PVC workers risk getting liver cancer from vinyl

Chloride (VC) but so do the rest of us, as unreacted VC can be released from PVC (used for clothing and food packaging).

*Controls on a potent carcinogen — bis chloro-methyl ether (BCME) — in Britain were delayed ten years despite conclusive evidence from the US.

This was partly due to a bizarre research method used by a British doctor. Instead of comparing the cancer rate in a BCME factory with the rest of the country, he compared the rate for the four wards around the factory with the rest of Britain. He found no significant difference. Nine years later, a twenty-five times higher level of cancer was found amongst workers exposed to higher levels of BCME.

*Evidence on the addition of carcinogenic colourings, preservatives, sweeteners and hormones to food was very thought-provoking.

Doyal et al show how industry resists control of carcinogens by:

- 1) Playing down risks.
- 2) Controlling information.
- 3) Lobbying the government.
- 4) Public propaganda (e.g. adverts from the Asbestos Information Committee or Octel, who put lead in petrol).
- 5) Transferring production overseas, etc., etc.

Strategy

Finally, Doyal et al outline a personal strategy for limiting exposure to carcinogens (most effectively, give up smoking!) as well as a political strategy for fighting in the workplace and in society at large.

A quarter of the book is made up of appendices with extra information: a useful critique of Threshold Limit Values; and some of the articles by Epstein and Peto debating the causes of cancer. The language is about as calm as the average political debate!

Unfortunately, the index is not as useful as it could be.

Finally, a moan! Why have Pluto Press decided to charge £6 for a 230-page book? Why have they not brought it out as one of their cheaper "workers Handbook" series? It is a readable and useful book and deserves a wider audience.

*"Cancer in Britain — The Politics of Prevention" by Lesley Doyal and others. Pluto Press, £5.95.

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*Organise the left to beat back the Tories' attacks! No to attacks on union rights; defend the picket line; no state interference in our unions! No to any wage curbs. Labour must support all struggles for better living standards and conditions.

*Wage rises should at the very least keep up with price increases. For a price index calculated by working class organisations, as the basis for clauses in all wage agreements to provide automatic monthly rises in line with the true cost of living for the working class. The same inflation-proofing should apply to state benefits, grants and pensions.

*Fight for improvements in the social services, and against cuts. Protection for those services against inflation by automatic inflation-proofing of expenditure. For occupations and supporting strike action to defend jobs and services.

*End unemployment. Cut hours, not jobs. Fight for a 35 hour week and an end to overtime. Demand work-sharing without loss of pay. Organise the unemployed - campaign for a programme of useful public works to create new jobs for the unemployed.

*Defend all jobs! Open the books of those firms that threaten closure or redundancies, along with those of their suppliers and bankers, to elected trade union committees. For occupation and blacking action to halt the closures. For nationalisation without compensation under workers' management.

*Make the bosses pay, not the working class. Millions for hospitals, not a penny for 'defence'! Nationalise the banks and financial institutions, without compensation. End the interest burden on council housing and other public services.

*Freeze rent and rates.

*Scrap all immigration controls. Race is not a problem: racism is. The labour movement must mobilise to drive the fascists off the streets. Purge racists from positions in the labour movement. Organise full support for black self-defence. Build workers' defence squads.

*The capitalist police are an enemy for the working class. Support all demands to weaken them as a 'bosses' striking force: dissolution of special squads (SPG, Special Branch, MI5, etc), public accountability, etc.

*Free abortion on demand. Women's equal right to work and full equality for women. Defend and extend free state nursery and childcare provision.

*Against attacks on gays by the state: abolish all laws which discriminate against lesbians and gay men; for the right of the gay community to organise and affirm their stand publicly.

*The Irish people - as a whole - should have the right to determine their own future. Get the British troops out now! Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Political status for Irish Republican prisoners as a matter of urgency.

*The black working people of South Africa should get full support from the British labour movement for their strikes, struggles and armed combat against the white supremacist regime. South African goods and services should be blacked.

*It is essential to achieve the fullest democracy in the labour movement. Automatic reselection of MPs during each Parliament and the election by annual conference of party leaders. Annual election of all trade union officials, who should be paid the average for the trade.

*The chaos, waste, human suffering and misery of capitalism now - in Britain and throughout the world - show the urgent need to establish rational, democratic, human control over the economy, to make the decisive sectors of industry social property, under workers' control. The strength of the labour movement lies in the rank and file. Our perspective must be working class action to raze the capitalist system down to its foundations, and to put a working class socialist alternative in its place - rather than having our representatives run the system and waiting for crumbs from the tables of the bankers and bosses.

Socialist Organiser delegate meeting

Saturday January 14, 11.30 to 4.30 at Manchester University Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester. Agenda: Local government and council work, Middle East, reports; and discussion on our work with Briefing.

Let the voice of Labour's rank and file be heard!

Constituency Labour Parties are where:

- ★ All the active individual Party members are organised.
- ★ All the hard graft of local and general elections is done; where Labour's fight-back will be lost or won.
- ★ In addition to the recorded contribution to Party funds, uncounted millions are raised every year for local (mostly election) funds.
- ★ Regular, intensive policy discussions take place on local government, national and international issues.
- ★ Party women, and increasingly black members, are organised.

BUT:

- ☆ CLPs have no regular forum to exchange ideas on local campaigning and organisation.
- ☆ CLPs have no lobby to further their needs and rights.
- ☆ CLPs get only 9% of votes at Annual Conference.

ISLINGTON SOUTH LABOUR PARTY will host a National Conference for CLP delegates

on February 25th and 26th 1984 at County Hall, Waterloo, London SE1

Delegates as for Labour Party annual conference: one delegate per CLP (male or female); second delegate who must be female. Fees: first delegate £3, second delegate £2, visitors £3. CLPs are invited to sponsor the conference for a fee of £2 minimum.

CLPs Conference, c/o Islington South Labour Party, 295 Upper Street, London N1.

LABOUR Committee on Ireland day school. Saturday January 28, 10.30 to 5 at County Hall, London SE1. Send £1 for ticket and papers to LCI, Box 42, 136 Kingswood High Road, London E8. Creche should be booked in advance.

MANCHESTER Socialist Organiser day school: 'Questions of Leadership'. Sat. Jan 15, 11 to 5 at UMIST Student Union, Barnes Wallis building. Registration £1.50 (75p unwaged) from Tony Dale.

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh. Contact: Dave, 229,4591. SO is sold at Muirhouse (Sat. 10.30-12.30) and at the First-of-May bookshop, Candlemaker Row.
Glasgow. Contact Stan Crooke, 63 Dixon Ave, G42. Paper sales: Friday lunchtime. Springburn shopping arcade; Saturday morning, Coatbridge shopping arcade; Tuesday morning, Maryhill unemployment benefit office. Also West End bookshop.

NORTH WEST

Hyndburn. Contact: Accrington 395753
Liverpool. Contact: 733 6663. SO is sold at News-from-Nowhere, Whitechapel and at Progressive Books, Berry St.
Manchester. Contact: Tony, 273 5691. SO is sold at Grass Roots Books, Newton St., Piccadilly.
Rochdale. Contact: c/o 28 Middle Lane, London N8.
Stoke. Contact: Paul Barnett, 328198.
Stockport. Contact: 40 Fox St, Edgley. Phone 061-429 6359.

Agenda

60 Acomb St, Manchester M15 6FQ.

BASINGSTOKE Socialist Organiser day school: Saturday January 21, 10 to 4.45 at Chute House. Registration £1 (50p unwaged) from 75 Freemantle

Wirral. Contact: Lol Duffy, 3 St. James Court, Victoria Rd., New Brighton, Merseyside.

YORKSHIRE AND NORTH EAST
Durham. Contact: Andy, 64088. SO is sold at Community Co-op, New Elvet.

Halifax? Contact: 52156. SO is sold at Hebden Bridge Books.
Harrogate Contact: Dan, 69640. SO is sold at Harrogate Market (Wednesday, Friday, Saturday lunchtimes).
Huddersfield. Contact: Alan Brooke, 59 Magdale, Honley, HD7 2LX
Hull. Contact: c/o 28 Middle Lane, London N8.
Leeds Contact: Garth, 623322. SO is sold at Books and Corner Books, Woodhouse Lane.
Sheffield. Contact Rob, 589307. SO is sold at Boots in Fargate (Saturday, 12 to 1) and at Independent Bookshop,

Birmingham. Contact: Godfrey Webster, 169 Barclay Rd., Bearswood, Smethwick. SO is sold at the Other Bookshop. Coventry. Contact: Keith, 75623. SO is sold at the Wedge Bookshop.
Leicester. Contact: Phil, 857908. SO is sold at Blackthorne

Close, Basingstoke.

BROAD Left Organising Committee conference: Octagon Centre, Western Bank, Sheffield 10, Saturday March 24, from 10am. up to 5 delegates per trade union body: credentials £2

Glossop Rd. Sunderland. Contact: c/o Durham. York.

Contact: 414118. SO is sold at the University (Friday mornings), Coney St. (Saturday mornings), the dole office (most mornings) and at Community Bookshop.

WALES AND WEST

Bristol. Contact: c/o 28 Middle Lane, London N8.
Cardiff. Contact: 492988.
Taunton. Contact: c/o 28 Middle Lane, London N8.

MIDLANDS

Birmingham. Contact: Godfrey Webster, 169 Barclay Rd., Bearswood, Smethwick. SO is sold at the Other Bookshop. Coventry. Contact: Keith, 75623. SO is sold at the Wedge Bookshop.
Leicester. Contact: Phil, 857908. SO is sold at Blackthorne

HARRY SELBY

HARRY Selby has died at the age of 70. He was Labour MP for Govan from 1974 to 1979 and a Trotskyist for many decades.

Most Marxists of Selby's persuasion have zig-zagged inconsistently in their attitude to the Labour Party over the decades, but not Harry Selby.

He belonged to the Labour Party oriented Revolutionary Socialist League, which was the British Section of the Fourth International when the FI was set up by Trotsky in 1938. In 1944 the RSL fused with the larger Workers International League, to form the Revolutionary Communist Party.

Led by Ted Grant of Militant and others, the RCP had many merits, but its majority was sectarian towards the Labour Party. Selby belonged to the 'Left Faction' of the RSL, and this group separated from the RCP in the mid '40s. It still existed in the 1960s, as an organised but highly clandestine group in the Labour Party.

They published a duplicated paper, 'Politics', and had highly distinctive positions, especially on the Labour Party. They insisted on a standard of Labour Party discipline practised by no-one else in the Party - for example, they would not sell their paper to non-Labour Party members.

Britain, they thought, had been in a state of 'dual power', shared between the bourgeoisie

By John O'Mahony



Harry Selby

and the working class, from the '40s to the '60s.

I remember an impassioned debate in perhaps 1964 in Liverpool between Selby and his comrades on one side, and the Liverpool supporters of Militant on the other, about whether or not Marxists should become councillors. Militant said yes, or the Marxists would be discredited. Selby said no, no way.

After he became an MP he told me there was no contradiction. Perhaps, but I never understood, anyway...

By the time Selby got to the House of Commons he was too old and tired to do very much. He was very critical and contemptuous of the Left there. Disillusioned, he chose to retire from Parliament in 1979.

information. Lambeth Lesbian & Gay Action meets at the Tate Library, Brixton Oval.

BRITISH Justice on trial: public meeting called by the Troops Out Movement. Thursday January 12, 8pm at the Trades Club, Savile Mount, Leeds 7.

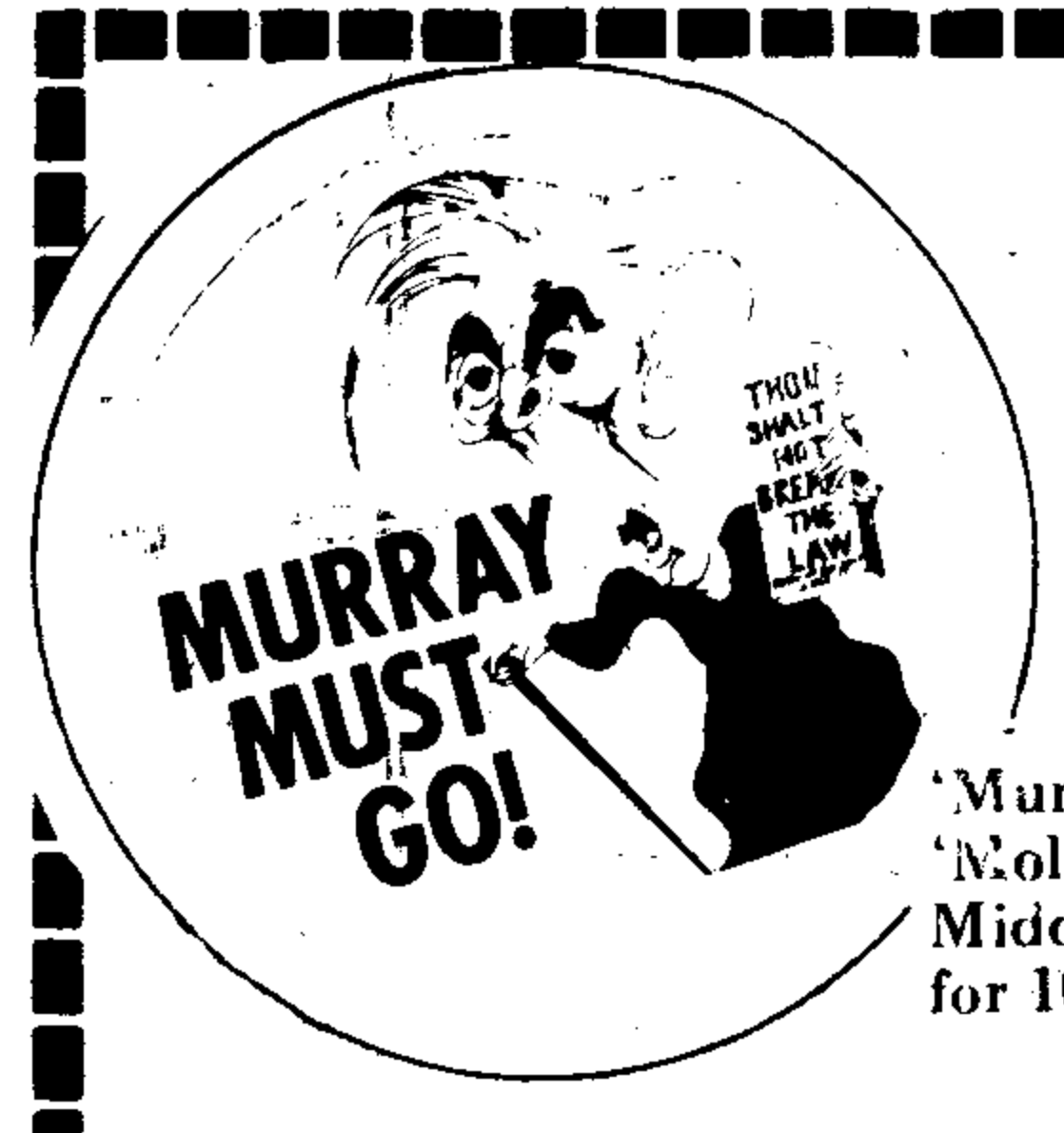
LONDON Region Labour Committee on Ireland: AGM. Saturday February 11, County Hall, London SE1. Open to all paid-up supporters of the LCI.

Hounslow. Contact: Chris, 898 6961.
Islington. Contact: Nik, 278 1341.
Orpington. Contact: Siu Ming, 691 1141
Putney. Contact: Tom, 789 7587.
Richmond. Contact: Nick, 876 6715.
SE London. Contact: Siu Ming, 691 1141
Southwark Lambeth. Contact: Jeff, 635 8468.
Tower Hamlets. Contact: Susan, 377 1328.

London Educationals: State and Revolution; The Russian Revolution; The USSR and Stalinism; Ireland; Why is the Left divided? The above are a series taking place on Fridays, 7pm at the LSE, East Building, first floor, room E196.

Discussions on 'imperialism': Thursdays, 7pm, at 211 Sickert Court, London N1.

SO is sold at the following bookshops: Central Books, Colletts, The Other Bookshop, Bookmarks, Bookplace, [Peckham Rd., SE15] Kilburn Books and Reading Matters [Wood Green Shopping Centre].



'Murray Must Go' - from 'Nole Badges' c/o 28 Middle Lane, 25p each, £2 for 10, plus 16p post.



JOHN HARRIS

Block voting at Labour Party conference

Reform the block vote!

WITH THE drop in individual membership and the rise in union affiliation to the Labour Party the weighting towards the block vote has worsened. The TGWU, for example, does not affiliate all its membership. The Executive could, at the stroke of a pen, increase its voting power by as much as the entire individual membership of the Labour Party in CLPs.

To simply argue to constituency members that they need to democratise the block vote is a hopeless task, or at best one for many years in the future.

But a more important principle is at stake. An individual Labour Party member is not the same as someone who has not contracted out of paying the political levy from their union dues. We are against Tory moves to legalise contracting-in as it is a move towards breaking the historic link between the trade unions and the Labour

Party by attempting to stop money for the Labour Party.

But the fact is that the affiliated membership does include large numbers of Tories. Even to democratise the block vote would give the active members in the trade unions the control of a vote that is not real compared to the individual constituency membership.

We are told that people wanting to limit the trade union vote are against the links with the trade unions. Or that such moves would antagonise the trade unions. Or that people in the constituencies would see this move as the solution, as long as it dropped the trade union vote enough, as opposed to the fight to democratise the trade unions.

That such hostilities or illusions exist is irrelevant to whether the issue itself is right or wrong. To reduce a person who actually joins the Labour

Party to the same status as an individual who does not take active steps to stop a tiny fraction of their union dues from going to the Labour Party is wrong.

We now have an even greater opportunity to argue our case, with even Alex Kitson arguing for a better proportion for the CLPs. This position is, I believe, the historic position of Marxism. I am in favour of a two-pronged policy.

1) Democratization of the union block vote.

2) A greater proportion to the constituencies.

The second point I leave vague although I personally do not think it should be based on what finances the CLPs pay, I do think that one-third is about right. I want to commit us to the principle and support moves in that direction.

TONY RICHARDS

Their closed shop

RIGHT ON John McIlroy! (Socialist Organiser December 8).

Such a barrage of hypocrisy as from the gaffers over the NGA/Shah dispute has not been heard for many a long year. Anyone would think the top nobs themselves didn't operate the closed shop. But just try buying a house and the solicitor's bill will soon get your grey matter spinning.

What's this, then, £450 for filling out a few forms? I know, I've just tried.

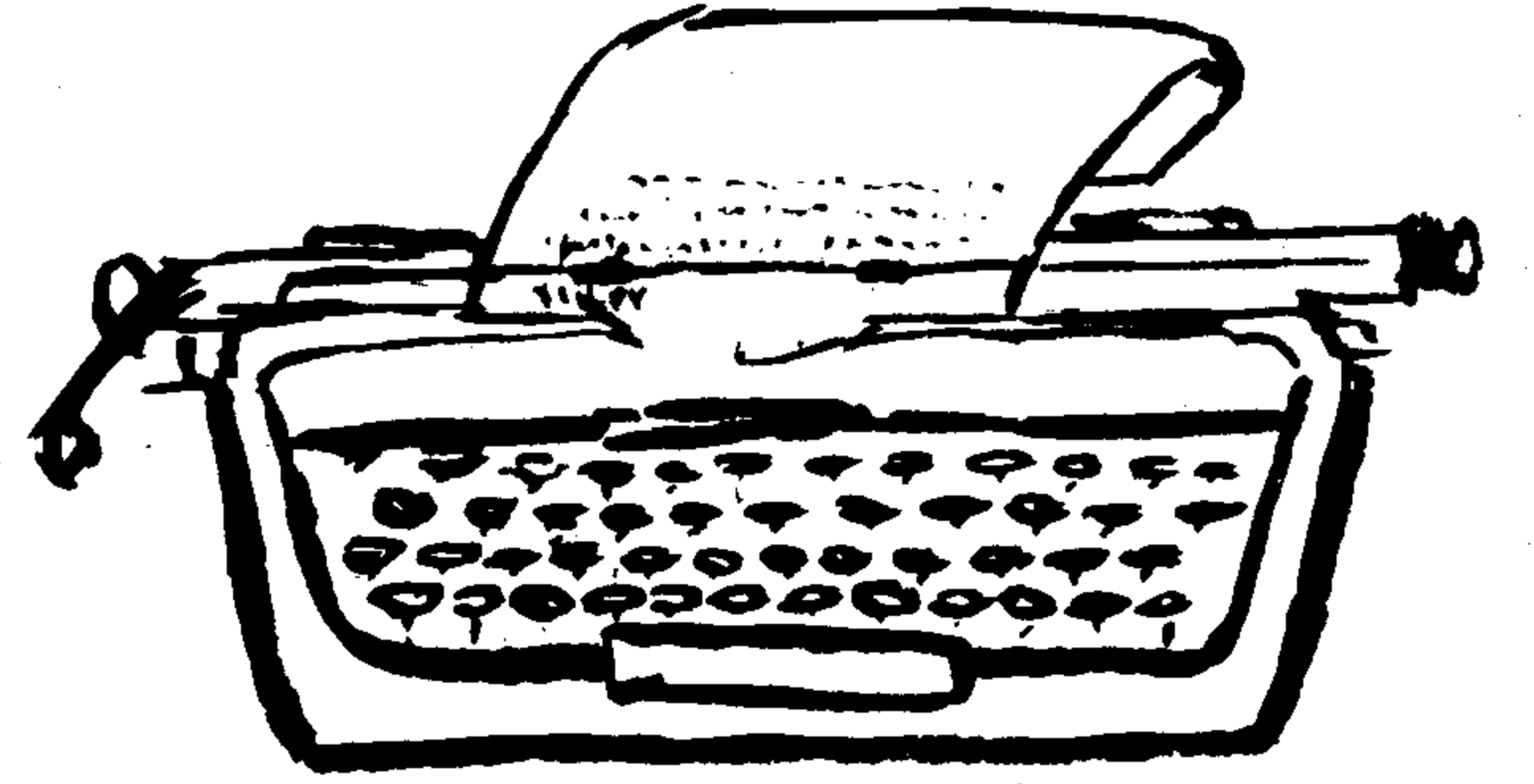
Well, you've got to understand solicitors are highly trained people, and in order to secure the highest standards every solicitor must be a certified member of the Law Society. I was told recently. You wouldn't think the majority of solicitors were Tory voters now, would you?

But what about free competition between solicitors, the man in the street, and conveyancing companies? Surely this would reduce the cost to the public drastically, said I naively.

No, no, no, it would simply lead to free riders moving in and doing a poor job. The average salary of a solicitor is about £17,000 a year.

It's the same story with the British Medical Association, of

Writeback



Send letters to Socialist Organiser, 28 Middle Lane, London N8. No longer than 400 words please: longer letters are liable to be cut.

course. Try practising as a doctor without BMA membership, and you'll be bounced around more courts than Bjorn Borg's ball.

And let's not forget the most lucrative closed shop of all — the big cartels run by our major companies. A recent US Congress investigation of the International Electrical Association disclosed that 50 major electrical companies in Western Europe (including GEC, Ferranti, David Browns) were defrauding Third World governments of £250 million a year through overpricing and, to paraphrase Judge Eastham, "disrupting the legitimate trading activity of companies" by taking a panoply of punitive measures against those non-

cartel members who try undercutting the 'conspiratorial' tendering of the cartel.

So are we likely to see Dr Owen, Lord Weinstock and Judge Eastham brought to the dock with charges of conspiracy laid against them? Not on your nelly, mate!

But what about freedom of the individual? What, when there's ackers at stake? You must be joking.

So what's the difference between their closed shop and a workers' closed shop?

Simple. They own the country and we don't. If you want a living wage, you've got to get organised, like the gaffers. We need a closed shop to live, they need one to get fat on.

GUS DORAZIO, Crawley, Sussex.

Organising for the NGA

THE NGA dispute has brought an interesting response from the labour movement in Nottingham.

The day after the mass picket at Warrington I proposed to the Trades Council Executive that we call an emergency open meeting to discuss and plan a campaign in support of the NGA.

Advice

The Executive decided not to back this idea on the advice of the Communist Party Secre-

tary who warned that it would be difficult to organise and that nobody would come along.

Two days later, and after the NGA decision for a one-week truce, a proposal was put to the executive of Nottingham South Labour Party that if the NGA carried on with the dispute we call an emergency meeting for the same objectives. This was carried unanimously. The NGA resumed their action and the meeting was called at two days notice. 35 trade unionists and Labour Party members turned up.

From this meeting Notts

NALGO executive went on to call upon the TUC to call a one-day general strike.

Meeting

The Labour Party has now gone on to organise a public meeting on January 17 on Fighting Union Laws which the full Trades Council has agreed to jointly sponsor.

This shows that the Labour Party can be used to organise around trade union struggles and enhance the class struggle.

STEVE BATTLEMUCH Nottingham

A figleaf for 'scabs'?

A FOOTNOTE to the dispute between Socialist Organiser and Socialist Action over Palestinian solidarity work.

Readers will recall that last year the Workers Revolutionary Party packed the conference of the Labour Committee on Palestine with a majority of non-members of the LCP and of the Labour Party itself, to give Ted Knight a rubber-stamp majority there.

Most of the genuine members then walked out to set up the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine. Except, that is, the supporters of Socialist Action.

Socialist Action stayed behind in deference to the 'great men' Ted Knight and his mate Ken Livingstone (who was sitting up in the gallery).

Socialist Action have since served as a figleaf — the main one — to hide the fact that the LCP is a front for the Arab bourgeois forces who retain its services. (Readers of Socialist Organiser will know, of course, that there is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that the WRP takes money from Arab bourgeois regimes).

Ingratiate

To ingratiate themselves with Knight and Livingstone, Socialist Action covered for the WRP takeover by publishing lying accounts of what had happened. They blamed Socialist Organiser and others for walking out, not Ted Knight and the WRP for organising an undemocratic coup.

Socialist Organiser was

wrong, they said, to insist that the WRP, which has publicly justified the Iraqi regime's execution of members of the Communist Party of Iraq, had no place in such a campaign, and could no longer be regarded as part of the labour movement.

Socialist Action is still the WRP's figleaf in the LCP. But its view of the WRP has 'developed'.

This is what a recent Socialist Action editorial said about the WRP, after it had helped whip up a hypocritical campaign in the press against Arthur Scargill for his views on Solidarnosc: "Such behaviour is the equivalent of strikebreaking and scabbing. Its perpetrators have no place within the ranks of the labour movement".

Strong words, and true ones. But does Socialist Action take them seriously? It seems not, for its supporters still serve as the WRP's main figleaf in the LCP.

Why? That's the question we should be asking Socialist Action supporters.

Perhaps the explanation for the contradiction is that they wrote that editorial in deference to Arthur Scargill, an even greater man than the great men Livingstone and Knight! And if you derive your line day by day from the need to keep in with some 'great' person or other, you're bound to contradict yourself and trip over your own feet.

Thus Socialist Action continues — out of deference to Knight and Livingstone — to cover for the WRP, which (out of deference to Arthur Scargill) it rightly denounces as a

body of strikebreakers who "have no place within the ranks of the labour movement".

FERGUS ENNIS, Islington.

Oppressed class?

JIM DENHAM implies that Argentina is some kind of imperialist nation in his letter in Socialist Organiser of 1 December 1983 when he says "This sort of pseudo-internationalism has nothing to do with Lenin and Trotsky, who started from a world overview, but invariably focussed on the class struggle within both imperialist nations."

I am sure that on reflection he will not defend this position but it does have a certain logic for those who deny the right of nationalist governments to struggle against imperialism.

Imperialism is finance capital, i.e. the big banks and their allies in the multinational corporations. The HQs and centres of these organisations are in the USA, UK, Western Europe and Japan. None of them operate out of South America. The whole of Argentina, both capitalists and workers, are the victims of the big banks. The only "Marxist theoretician" of any note who has argued the opposite is the late Bill Warren of the British-Irish Communist Organisation.

GARTH FRANKLAND

Black isn't bad!

LAST WEEK, we managed, while sub-editing Mary Corbishley's article on NALGO, to add to it an expression of which she disapproves — "Black Wednesday".

This coinage has appeared in other left wing papers, too, (Tribune, for example).

It is supported by the long-established practice of referring to days of defeat, setback or betrayal as "Black" days — Black Friday, 1925, for example.

Objection

The objection is that it is offensive to black people because it equates black with what is bad, evil, harmful.

Some would say such usage is a direct product of deeply ingrained racial prejudice.

Now that sort of objection could be argued against — such usage is much older than anti-black racial prejudices, images and stereotypes, and probably has deeper psychological roots. But the objection is beside the point. Whatever the roots of such expressions, they are used

now in an atmosphere saturated with racial prejudice and where part of the fight to eradicate racism and make the labour movement conscious of its own tacit, or sub-conscious racism is the fight against equating black, the colour of a section of the labour movement and of humanity itself, with bad.

Therefore we agree that it is best to avoid expressions which give offense and which pander to sub-conscious racism. We regret that we may have offended some of our readers.

EDITOR

WHOOOPS!

LAST week's photograph of Rosa Luxemburg showed her speaking from a pre-World War One Social Democratic Party platform. So of course the caption which dated it as 1918 was in error. Sorry!

New!

Solidarity betrayed

LESSONS OF THE BASINGSTOKE POST OFFICE WORKERS STRIKE

This new pamphlet tells the story of the victimisation of Socialist Organiser supporter Alan Fraser and how the fight to defend him was sold out by the union officials. 25p plus postage from 75 Freemantle Close, Basingstoke.

Defend the unions!

If the TUC won't lead, then a determined campaign against the Tory anti-union laws must be developed from the rank and file.

By S.T. Ruggle

ORGANISED workers all over the country and in every aspect of industrial life must now be prepared to re-examine their commitment to their movement in the light of the latest anti-labour legislation.

Anti-labour law is a permanent feature of this society. There has never been a single day free of such law since the introduction of the Combination Acts in the eighteenth century.

In January 1983, the 108 year old Conspiracy Act was used to arrest and charge eleven hospital workers at the Victoria Hospital, Kirkcaldy, Fife, for taking part in a work-in.

Not until May 1981 were two other anti-labour laws finally repealed, the Unlawful Oaths Act of 1791 and a subsequent amendment of 1812 which carried the death penalty on conviction.

Worse to come

The significance of the date of repeal is that the Tory government were already well into the introduction of new anti-labour law, the results of which we are now witnessing. The message is loud and clear, we are never to be free of these laws, they merely become up-dated and once established as a fact, then more and worse is added. This is the history of all anti-labour law.

The present one is based, as was the Heath government's, on the 1927 Trades Disputes Act, that which became immediately known by all sections of the labour movement as either the Blacklegs Charter or the Revenge Act. Obvious parallels



Trade unionists (lobbying National Industrial Relations Court, above) smashed the Industrial Relations Act in the early '70s. We can smash the new anti-unions laws, too.

can be drawn by simply stating the main clauses in the 1927 Act.

Sympathetic strikes were made illegal; anyone leading or participating in an 'illegal' strike was liable to fine or imprisonment, up to two years on indictment; trade union funds were made liable for civil damages; mass picketing was made illegal and ordinary picketing hamstrung by a blanket definition of 'intimidation'; blacklegs were protected; certain unions were forbidden to affiliate to the TUC or to the Labour Party; the method of political funding was altered.

That anti-labour law lasted for 18 years before repeal by the 1945 Labour government, yet it is this 56 year old anti-labour

law to which the modern Tories have turned and no wonder as it was the most repressive and discriminatory law of modern times. The idea behind it was to reduce the organised working class to the level of the then German and Italian fascist Labour Front organisations.

State unions

Today we can compare the idea of the new anti-labour law as the beginnings of a drive to emulate the Russian and Eastern block type regimented Production Committee 'unions', stripped of rights and freedoms, suitable only as advisers on the introduction of the most advantageous productive processes in the interests of maximising profits and controlling wages.

Faced with such laws that single out a section of society for 'special treatment', we have no alternative. Force must be met by force, discriminatory laws must, in the final analysis, be broken in order that they be removed.

Workers must recognise the dire threat to the very existence of their right to form and use organisations of their own choice for their own reasons. Resolutions of condemnation are not enough, that period has passed.

Covenant

The TUC, after the Tory government passed the 1927 anti-labour law, issued a covenant through which every trade unionist was invited to join in the opposition to its implementation.

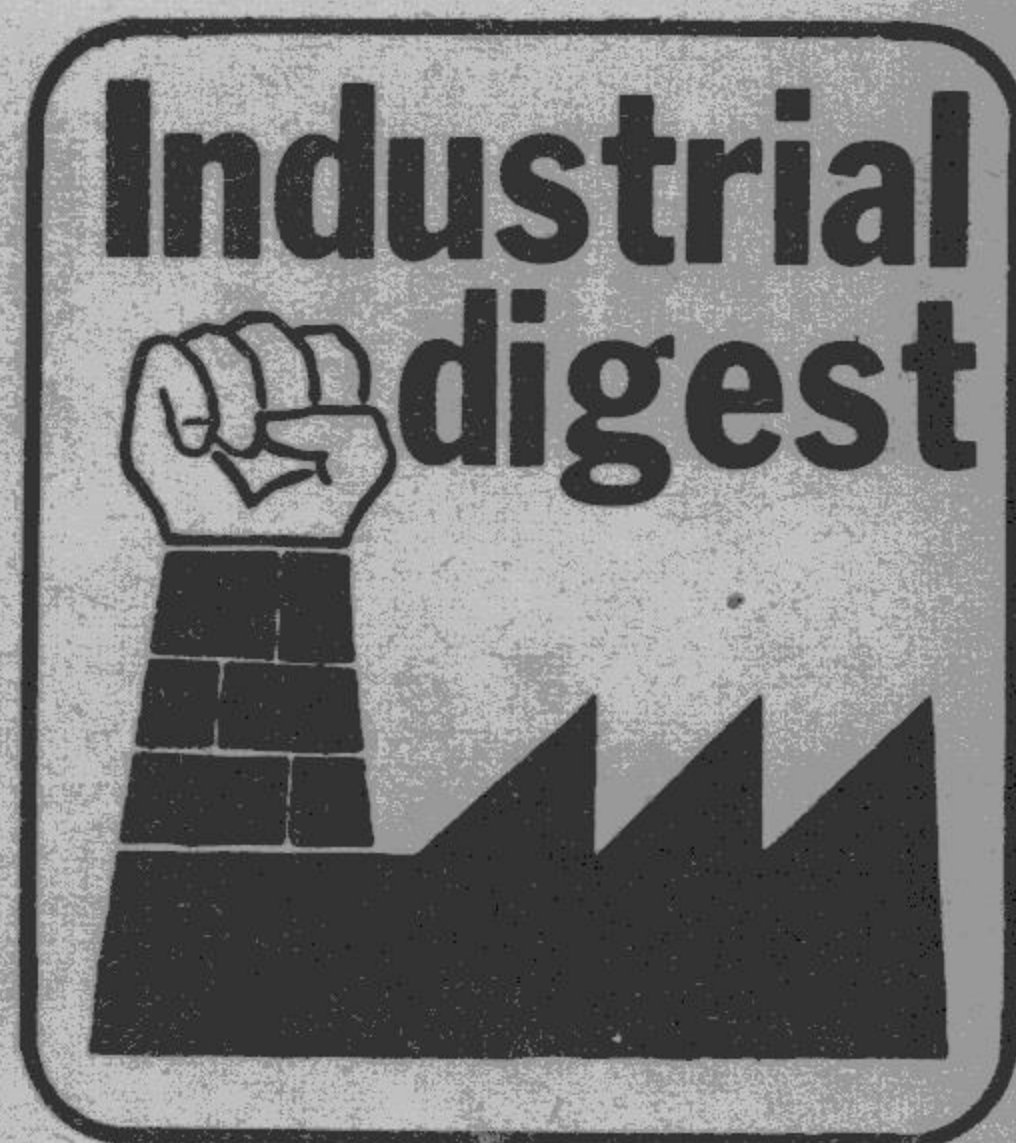
Part of that Covenant was in the form of a pledge and read: "We trade unionists and members of the working class, custodians of the heritage of Freedom and Right of Association and of Organisation won by our forefathers, the Pioneers of Trade Unionism, thousands of whom underwent transportation, imprisonment, victimisation and punishments of all kinds to win that freedom, here and now pledge ourselves to safeguard that Heritage, no matter what the consequences to ourselves, with all our strength and to the utmost limit of our power."

No change

Nothing has changed to alter the deep and fundamental meaning behind that Pledge. We stand on the brink of a dark age where the drive for profits once again demands the removal of freedoms and rights, pointing us directly in the path of a totalitarian state.

Should the central organisation of the trade union movement prove incapable of leading the fight, then we must take up that fight and form an organisation comprising all sections of the labour movement.

Certainly we must begin right now to demand the removal of the anti-labour law, that alone demands a broadly based movement from every union and from the Labour Party, but it is of crucial importance that the NGA and the NUJ who are the first in the front line, must be supported at all costs, both with numbers on the picket lines and with finance.



IN AN action thought to be without legal precedent government employees at the Inland Revenue — members of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation — have taken out a writ of summons against the Board of Inland Revenue.

This is in response to the suspension of 90 staff in Solihull — one of the seven tax officers involved in a pilot scheme — for refusing to work new equipment which fully computerises the Pay-As-You-Earn tax collection system.

The action came to a head when about 450 members of the IRSF in Wolverhampton voted by a three-to-one majority in a secret ballot last week to 'work normally' — defined by the union as not operating the newly-installed computers due to commence formally on the first working day of the New Year — January 3.

The basic issue in dispute over the introduction of the £200 million system is the board's refusal to conclude a new technology agreement which includes a no-redundancy clause — savings of £50 million are expected but at the cost of 4,000 Revenue jobs.

The writ is due to be heard on Wednesday (January 11) in the High Court and could become an important test case of laws governing contracts of employment and on the introduction of computer-based technology.

Shelter, the homeless persons pressure group for more and better housing, announced last week that a further 170,000 households — equivalent to a population the size of Bradford — face homelessness during 1984. Government moves imposing huge cuts in housing expenditure combined with the high level of council house sales — justified by a plea of economic necessity yet contradicted by simultaneous increases in tax-relief to owner-occupiers, particularly the wealthiest — mean that local authorities already hard-pressed will have even greater difficulty in trying to cope with this worsening problem.

In a circular this week to the 14 English health regions the DHSS is instructing health authorities to make "better use" of their capital spending in 1984-85 by integrating the co-ordination and control of the three areas of planning, staff levels, current expenditure, and capital expenditure — a warning of further reductions to come in NHS staffing levels!

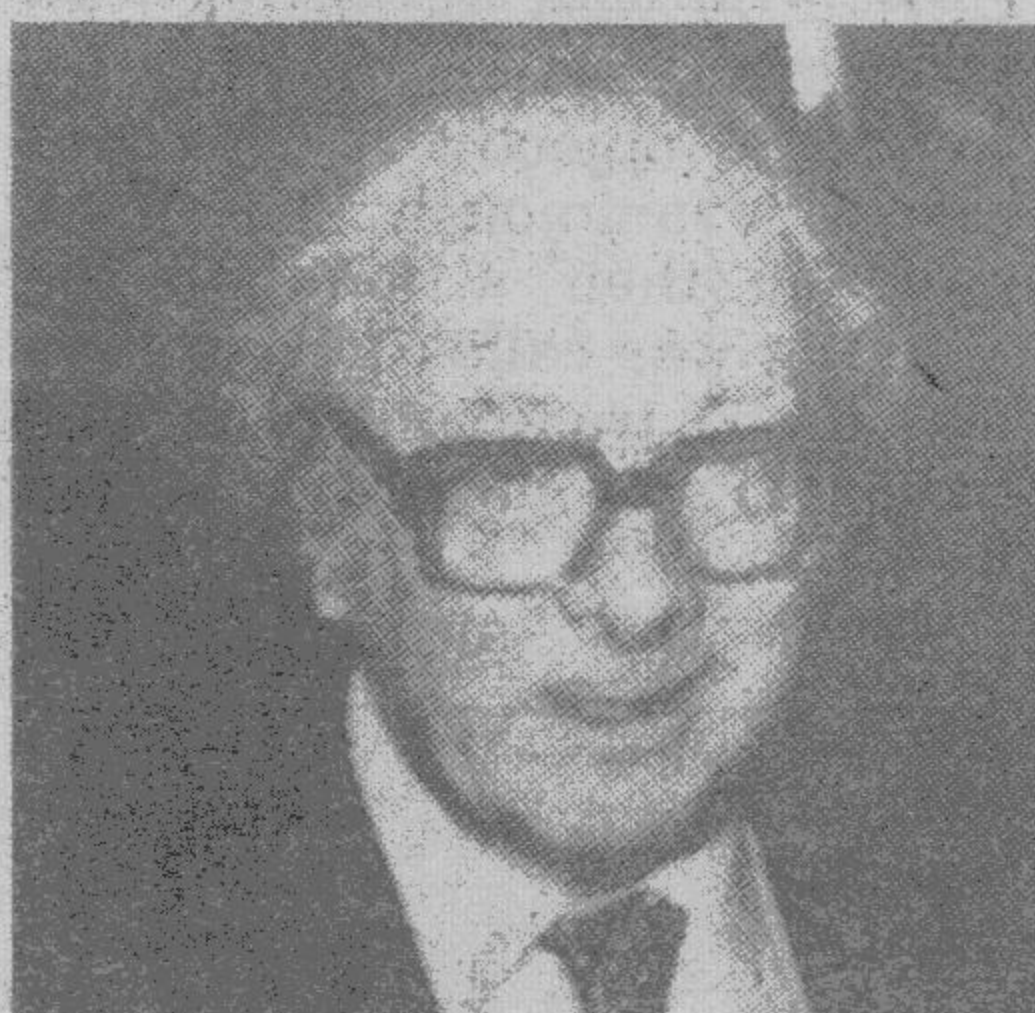
Two civil service unions, the Civil and Public Services Association, and the Society of Civil and Public Servants, last week urged their members in unemployment benefit offices not to co-operate with special investigation teams starting work this month.

They have given the go-ahead for strike action and pickets to be mounted outside offices from which snooper-squads are operating.

The government announced this new initiative last August as a further move against what they call fraudulent benefit claims. The union described it as a "cheap political gimmick" to be used to intimidate innocent claimants.

Why the NGA knew it was time to fight

By John McIlroy



Joe Wade

THE NGA is a large craft union whose politics are in many ways right-wing.

In 1971 the union refused to come off the register of unions drawn up by the Heath government under the Industrial Relations Act, on the grounds that de-registration would cause it financial problems. The union was expelled from the TUC, and the experience has left a lasting mark on the NGA.

Since their readmission they have been extremely loyal to TUC policy.

But this was not the main reason why the NGA was more militant than other unions against the Tory anti-union laws.

(It tried to tighten up the Wembley conference platform, and its own formal policy and practical action went way beyond the Wembley eight points).

As general secretary Joe Wade said well before the present dispute: "If new technology comes uncontrolled, if it comes because we did not get the right terms for its introduction, make no mistake about it, it will decimate this union..."

The NGA often quotes the experience of its US counterpart, the International Typographical Union, which has watched its membership collapse from 110,000 in 1967 to 38,000 today — because it lost the struggle over new technology.

Today, most type is set by photo-composition, using a typewriter-style keyboard and not the old hot-metal system. Direct use of this by journalists and tele-ad personnel could cut out the middle person and lose thousands of NGA jobs.

The availability and efficiency of new techniques has also led to

million, and should reach £200 million by 1985.

All this with tiny workforces and small overheads.

Provincial newspaper owners have had to respond. Unrestrained competition from free-sheets could cause them to fold.

They have replied in two ways. They have bought into the new sectors — Westminster Press, United Newspapers and Thomson have all invested heavily. And they have stepped up the fight to introduce new technology and weaken the NGA in their own firms.

Direct input

More than 20 provincial newspaper groups have agreement for direct input into a computer by journalists or tele-ad workers — though NGA members still do the final keyboarding into the typesetter. Eighteen months ago the employers' organisation, the Newspaper Society, set mid-1984 as their deadline for eliminating NGA control on the final typesetting.

Richard Storey, chairman of Portsmouth and Sunderland Newspapers, has already declared that if there is no agreement by that deadline 15 newspapers are prepared to move unilaterally and print with non-union labour.

In response, the NGA has tried to 'follow the job' and recruit 'white collar' workers. It has sought amalgamation with the NUJ. But most of all it has depended on its still considerable industrial strength and its tradition of centralised discipline.

For the NGA the Tory laws come at the worst of all possible times. Faced with the employers' attempt to de-skill their members and break their organiza-

tion, they depended more than ever on the closed shop as an instrument of discipline and as a control over the supply of labour. They depend more than ever on the power to boycott work codified in Rule 43 of their constitution: "A member shall not perform any work that has either been received from or is going to an unrecognised office except by permission of the National Council."

A glance at the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts shows (and the last few weeks have ruthlessly confirmed) that almost all forms of secondary action and trade union boycotts are unlawful. Rule 43 itself is an incitement to break the law!

The 1980 Act makes all closed shops agreed after August that year unlawful unless 80% of those to be covered by the arrangement vote for it in a secret ballot. Provisions of the 1982 Act which will become law this November (if not earlier) will apply this to all closed shops.

This is the background to the firm stand that the NGA took over Eddie Shah.

Warrington

If he was allowed to get away with opening new premises at Bury and Warrington, ripping up union agreements, ignoring the NGA, recruiting non-union labour, training them in two weeks, and paying them between £40 and £70 below union rates, then he would act as a burning beacon for capitalist emulation.

If Eddie Shah could show two fingers to the NGA, then why shouldn't the Newspaper Society follow his example? And not just the Newspaper Society.

Union-free technology, managerial control of labour, lower wage levels, are a glittering prize for the Richard Storeys and the David Dimplebeys. And they are also the long-pursued but elusive Eldorado for the Fleet Street Barons — for Matthews and Murdoch.

Outlawed

Appreciating the importance of a fight, the NGA also understood that the legislation outlawed the use of their most effective weapons. If they fought legally then they were backing a loser. As Tony Dubbins pointed out with regard to one aspect of this: "The company can transfer the work of the six NGA members on strike from Stockport to Bury, but the NGA cannot transfer its pickets. In effect it means that for the NGA to obey the law it may have in time to be content with picketing an empty factory at Stockport."



Tony Dubbins

Moreover, new laws were coming over the hill which would hit the NGA more than most unions. The NGA chose the right time to stand and fight. But for the TUC leaders no time would ever be right to fight.

Land Rover: unite for wages and jobs

By Jim
Denham

WORKERS in BL's Land Rover/Freight Rover subsidiary have voted by 2-1 for strike action in pursuit of their pay claim of £12 on the basic rate plus £7.50 bonus consolidation.

The action is due to commence on Friday 13, and there is no doubting the militancy of the workers at the two largest plants, Solihull and Common Lane (Birmingham).

Richard Gould, the Common Lane convenor, summed up the feeling in his plant where the vote was 785 to 315 for action:

"It was a simple decision for our people. We have taken meagre pay rises for the past five or six years and people are frankly sick of it. It is time to make a stand."

At Solihull the vote was even more decisive with only 200 of the 3,000-strong workforce against the strike.

However, the votes at the smaller plants (eight in the Birmingham area plus Pengham in Cardiff) generally went against

strike action. This was clearly not because of any satisfaction with the Company's miserable offer, (amounting to only 3% in new money) but because all nine plants are scheduled for complete or partial closure over the next two years, as Land Rover concentrates production on Solihull.

It is vital that no split is allowed to develop between Solihull and Common Lane on the one hand and the smaller plants on the other.

Land Rover managing director Tony Gilroy has attempted to exploit the fears of redundancy and closure in the small plants by sending out a letter to employees warning of more job losses if the strike goes ahead.

But the opposite is the truth. The only way of defending Land Rover jobs is on the basis of a successful, united fight over the pay claim. That is the message that delegations of stewards from Solihull and Common Lane should be taking out to the other plants this week.



Pickets explaining to winders why they should obey the overtime-ban decision

Pickets confront overtime scabs

WINDERS in the North Staffs pit who have been scabbing on the overtime ban have been suspended from the union and their branch disbanded.

Trouble started a few weeks ago when the winders, who earn more money than other miners, decided that they were going to break the overtime ban unless a ballot was held.

Last Saturday, winders in

North Staffs pits turned up and were met with mass pickets at all the pits in the area.

Trouble flared at Wolfstanton when one winder insisted on crossing the picket line at the 2 o'clock shift changeover. One picket was arrested for assaulting a copper and will appear in court at Newcastle-under-Lyme on February 9. Another picket was taken to hospital.

Altogether, winders were

turned away at three of the five pits.

On Sunday, winders seemed to have got the message and at one colliery two winders, turning up for work, were turned away after a 20 minute discussion, and agreed to go back to their branch to argue for a reversal of their policy.

On Monday, however, winders called a one-day strike in protest at being turned away by pickets.

Later that day, the winder branch, which belongs to the right-wing dominated NUM Power Group, was disbanded.

The next confrontation will be at the 6 a.m. shift changeover next Saturday. Pickets at Wolfstanton told us that if the winder tried to go in there, they would call a mass picket and were expecting support from Yorkshire and South Wales.

Scott Lithgow in danger

SCOTTISH TUC general secretary Jimmy Milne reacted to the announcement of Britoil's decision with his standard indictment of the government for its "lack of responsibility" and yet another trip down to London to plead with Secretary of State for Scotland George Younger.

Predictably, Younger gave him the brush-off yet again. Undeterred, Milne left Younger vowing to continue with his pointless endeavours: "It simply means we have to mobilise opinion in Scotland to put the Secretary of State in a situation where he has to face up to his responsibility."

SO readers who can speak STUCese will know how "mobilise opinion in Scotland" is translated into reality. It means sending begging letters to Tories, vicars, chambers of commerce and the CBI, asking them to

utter a few words of protest about the closure. It does not mean working class action.

The stage is set at Scott Lithgow for a repeat of previous tragedies. The "lead" given by the heads of the Scottish labour movement is one of a search for compromise, a pleading for the Tory government to intervene, not an attempt to build support for strike action and occupation.

This "strategy" owes much to the pernicious influence of the Communist Party in the Scottish labour and trade union movement. Their attempts to gloss over the class divide in society, dressed up in the name of the "broad democratic alliance",

has already cost thousands of workers their jobs.

If the STUC does nothing but throw itself at the feet of the Tories and local industrialists, the situation within the trade union organisation at Scott Lithgow is not much better.

Trade unionism at the yard is stagnant. Mass meetings are rare. There is no track record of militancy. Disputes at the yard have generally been unofficial, without even the support of the bulk of the shop stewards' committee. There has been little or no opposition to the slashing of the workforce by two-thirds in the last 20 years.

Shop stewards' convenor is Duncan McNeill. He is singularly ill-suited to the task of leading the fightback against the threat now facing his members. He has "countered" previous invective against the "workshy" workforce by pledging that it would work flat out to disprove such allegations.

When British Shipbuilders offered a £7 payment in exchange for gross deterioration of working conditions, McNeill's initial reaction was to argue for acceptance. Only when the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions came out against it did McNeill change his line.

The Boilermakers Broad left does not have any presence in the yards. Nor does the Communist Party, which has members in the yards on the Upper Clyde — though this is not necessarily a bad thing. The Socialist Workers Party has some supporters in the yard, but its leading figure at Scott Lithgow was victimised last year.

A non-aligned "Hammer and Tongs" rank and file bulletin used to appear irregularly, but that too has now fallen by the wayside.

Four days after the announcement of Britoil's decision, the

media reported that the workforce voted overwhelmingly to back the Confed call for a national strike from 6 January. But what actually happened was more complicated.

At the mass meeting, McNeill came under attack for his record as convenor. McNeill skillfully twinned together a vote of confidence in himself and the rest of the shop stewards' committee, with a vote in support of the national strike.

So the workforce voted to fight the war under the politically crippling generalship of McNeill and the rest of the shop stewards' committee.

McNeill spelt this out after the meeting: "It was not intended to have a vote (!). About 24 people from the shop floor presented conflicting views, including the left who wanted to remove us from office. There was a call for the position to be voted on and the only way we could do this — bearing in mind the workers had already decided to back the strike — was for a vote of confidence in the shop stewards. This was overwhelmingly carried."

So, with 4,200 jobs threatened directly by the closure of Scott Lithgow and another 5,000 threatened indirectly, the STUC still shuns any idea of confrontation, and McNeill and his co-thinkers at the yard follow the same low-key approach.

The key question is: where is the nucleus in the shipyard that can take the lead in making up for lost time, challenge the self-defeating "strategy" of the STUC and McNeill and campaign for support for a strategy of strike action and occupation?

Only if the small number of militants in the yard organise themselves into such a nucleus and then proceed to campaign for a strategy of job defence through militancy is there any prospect of Scott Lithgow being saved from closure.

Stop the TGWU ditching strike

Stan Crooke explains why the Carousel strikers in Glasgow face a grave danger from their own union leaders.

1984 opened with the West of Scotland TGWU bureaucracy all set to ditch the 5½ month old dispute at Carousel Wafers (Glasgow) for union recognition, reinstatement and better working conditions.

The officials' attitude of indifference to the strike has now degenerated into one of opposition to its continuation. At one recent TGWU meeting, the Scottish Regional Organiser, Willy Queen went even further by claiming that the strike should never have been started in the first place since it was impossible to win.

A number of local TGWU branches have already passed resolutions in response to the Carousel strikers' appeal for a TGWU-convened West of Scotland stewards conference, but the resolutions have been ignored by TGWU full-timer and well-known Communist Party member Hugh Wyper, who shares the view that the strikers cannot win.

On the day following the mass picket at the end of last year (which the TGWU officials failed to support) Wyper invited the strikers to meet him sometime in the New Year. The odds are that Wyper will attempt to get them to call off the strike at this meeting.

If that fails, then the TGWU Scottish Regional Committee on 23/24 January will withdraw official support from the dispute in an attempt to end it.

The crucial task now, therefore, is to prevent the Scottish Regional Committee withdrawing support from the strikers.

The strikers support commit-

tee is drawing up a documentary history of the dispute, arguing the case for continuing support. This is to be circulated to lay delegates before the Regional Committee meets. A lobby of the meeting has also been proposed.

Such work is only hampered by the apolitical antics of the Socialist Workers Party who argue that the strike has already been lost and to pressurise the Regional Committee to pay the fines.

Their alternative is a series of lectures on the perfidy of union officials.

All possible pressure must be brought to bear in the next week and a half to persuade the TGWU to continue backing the strikers. Ways of doing this include:

*Passing resolutions demanding the Regional Committee reaffirm support for the strike.

*Lobbying local lay delegates to the Regional Committee.

*Continuing to demand a West of Scotland shop stewards' conference.

*Supporting a lobby of the Regional Committee meeting.

*Getting local convenors and shop stewards etc to put their names to the document being prepared by the strikers.

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Socialist ORGANISER

Railworkers set to take on Mercury

BRITISH Rail management plans to run a cable-laying train from Chesterfield to Sheffield in the early hours of Monday morning, 16th.

The cable is the first part of the fibre optic cables planned to make up the Mercury communications network, the first private competitor to British Telecom.

It is NUR policy to oppose Mercury and logically, therefore, to prevent the train

By Rob Dawber

running.

All well and good — but not as well as it might appear. Opposition is not because Mercury represents privatisation. Not because it threatens the jobs of British Telecom workers. Not because it is an attack on the public sector.

Opposition is because it is to be installed and maintained by private contractors and run by a firm with which the NUR has no negotiating rights.

The Signal and Telecoms (S&T) department of BR is to use 10% of the capacity of these cables and this will also threaten

its members' jobs which rely on present conventional methods.

This is not the basis for building any generalised opposition to Tory attacks on our jobs and services but without that generalised opposition we have little hope of taking on multi-million pound enterprises backed to the hilt by this government.

Despite union policy the NUR leaders will not officially call for action. Frightened and cowed by the High Court declarations that the POEU's action against Mercury was political, and therefore illegal, the NUR is giving no official lead.

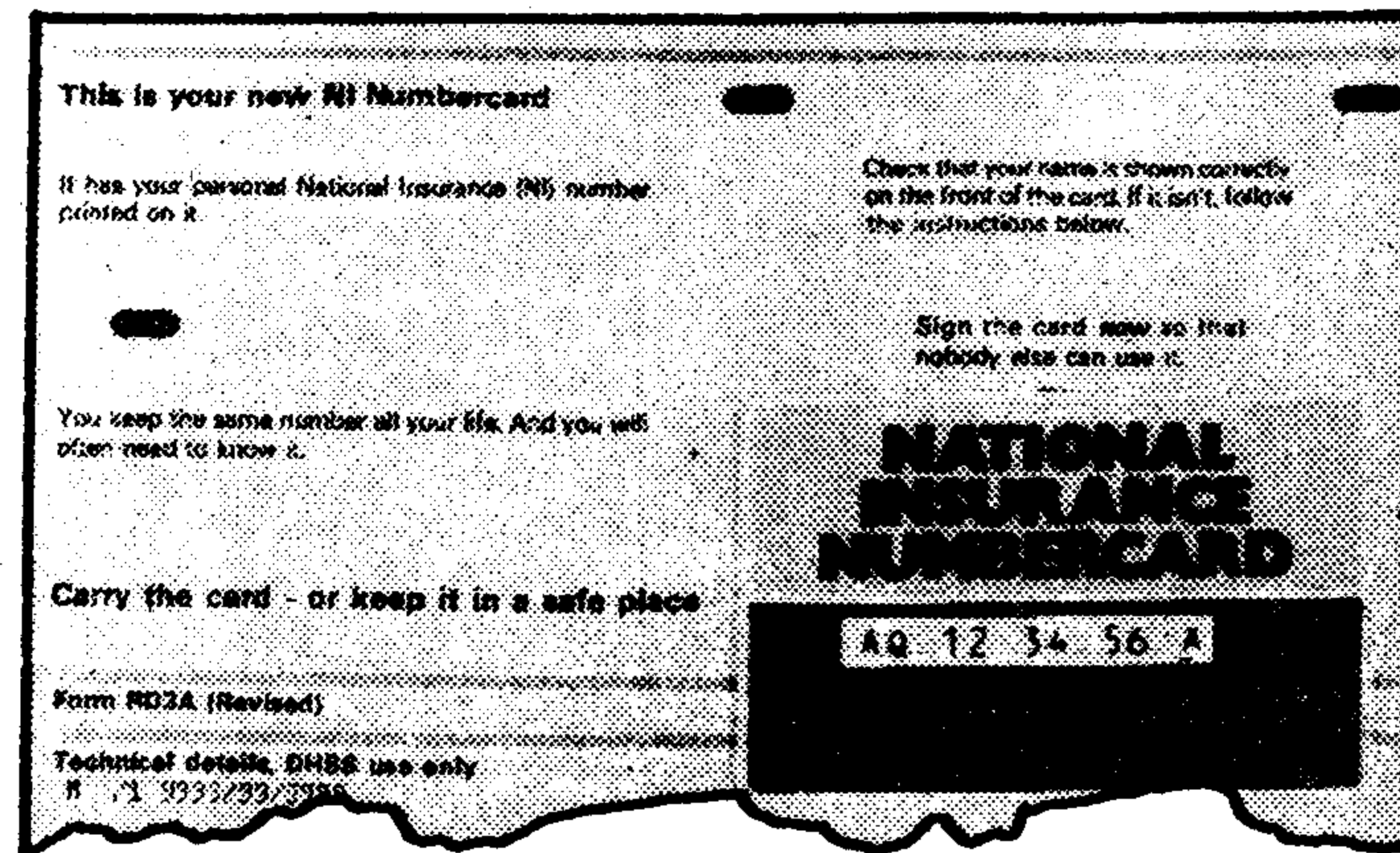
The train is at present stabled in Tinsley marshalling yard, just

on the edge of Sheffield.

Tinsley NUR branch have informed management that any guard rostered for that train will refuse to work it. Every indication is that that is understood and accepted by all members.

So management have a choice. They either back down (but with the losses that Mercury already claims to have sustained because of delays as a result of POEU action that's not very likely) or they send the guard home.

In that case, Tinsley Yard will be shut down and extension of picketing could soon bring the rest of Sheffield area railworkers out.



IS IT 1984?

THE Government has taken the first big step towards forcing everyone in Britain to carry an identity card.

At present national insurance numbers are issued to everyone in the country by a card given to each school leaver and to each person entering the country permanently. This information is only useful for employers and the DHSS.

But from the beginning of this week the information will be issued on new computerised plastic cards. On the back of each card there is a magnetic strip which can store information about the holder — invisibly.

Opposition and civil rights groups believe that this is the start of a national identity card system. Forms given out with the new cards instruct the bearer: 'Sign the card immediately so that no-one else can use it, and to carry the card or keep it safely.'

The Government denies that this is the start of an identity card system. The cards, it claims, will be more durable and convenient, and fewer people will lose them. (But surely plast-

By Helen Johnston

ic cards can be lost as easily as paper cards!)

The DHSS employers are quite content with the old system, and have not asked the government to change or update it. The Government says the new system will speed up benefit payments...

In fact such cards can and will be used for identity purposes — right now, for Asian people seeking benefits or health treatment, for example.

In France, which already has a well-established identity card system, people are constantly stopped by the police on the streets or in the metro and asked to produce their cards. If they can't, they are liable to be hauled off.

The Government plans to issue cards immediately to all new school leavers, to all new immigrants, and to people who change their name. 2½ million cards are to be issued this year. Data Card UK, the manufacturers, have confirmed that eventually all UK citizens will hold a card.

This new move therefore needs to be regarded with great suspicion.

FUND

THIS week's fund donations total £82.53, bringing our Xmas/New Year fund drive to £827.10 — still a long way from the £3,000 target.

Fifteen groups are now established in the target, while we wait for Xmas donations from: Basingstoke, Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Huddersfield, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Northampton, Oxford, Rochdale, Stockport, Stoke, Wirral, York, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow and Richmond. (Some of these groups have sent donations but are still clearing previous targets).

Saturday's Socialist Organiser delegate meeting is well timed to discuss fund-raising; swap ideas and discuss progress.

With £2172.90 left to raise, each group should make sure their delegate brings some money along to the meeting, to boost the target now.

And all groups should see that they send a donation this week to: 214, Sickert Court, London N1.

Thanks this week for donations to: Dai Stephens, £48.03; Brent supporters, £10; Leeds, £5; Paul Clift, (Camden) £1; Tom Cashman, £1; and for groups who made a profit on their 1983 paper accounts: Edinburgh £8; Liverpool, £3.75; Middlesbrough, £5.75.

Revolt of the damned

By Colin Foster

SINCE the Socialist Party government came to power in France in May 1981, the wheels of capitalist crisis have continued to grind down the working class.

But the most oppressed and exploited workers are fighting back. The strike just ended at the Talbot Poissy car factory is the latest and most spectacular battle, following struggles also led by immigrant workers at Citroen Aulnay and Renault Flins.

From December 7 to December 31 the workers occupied the factory. On January 3 they stopped the bosses restarting work. On January 5 the pickets were attacked by thugs from the CSL fascist 'union'. 55 people were injured, some seriously, and 19 hospitalised; but even then the bosses could not restart production.

Only on January 8 did the most militant union, the CFDT, call off the strike. The factory is due to reopen on January 11.

The mainly African workers at Poissy fought this tremendous class battle:

DESPITE the majority union at Poissy, the Communist Party led CGT, which approved a government/management agreement for 1905 sackings and repeatedly denounced the more militant CFDT as guilty of 'maximalist acts' which 'played into the hands of management';

DESPITE the national leadership of the CFDT, which has consistently supported the government's calls for capitalist austerity. On January 3 the CFDT leaders at Poissy proposed as a compromise that the 1,905 sacked workers be laid off pending negotiations.

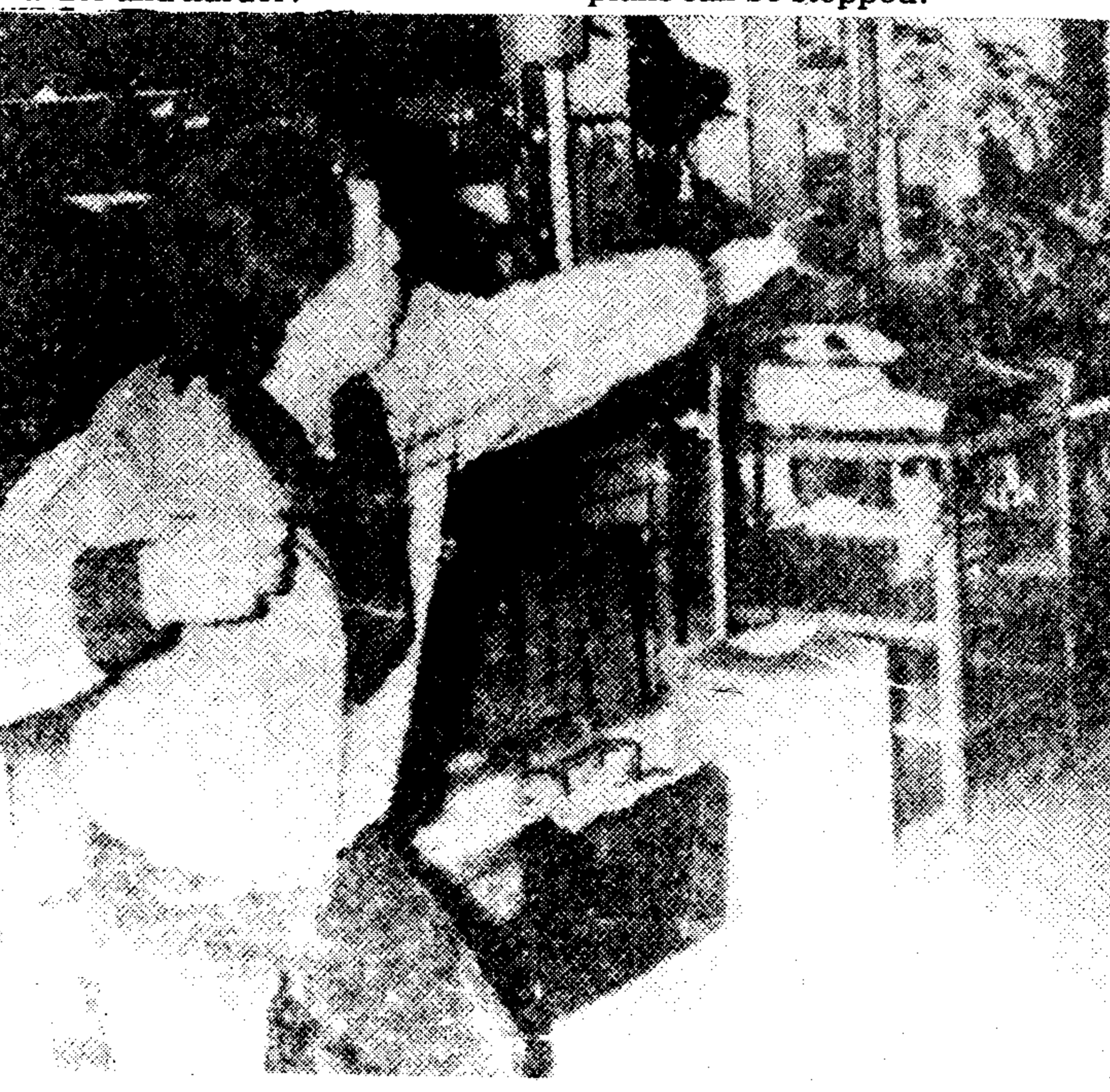
AND DESPITE the Socialist party/Communist Party government. The government — and specifically Jack Ralite, the CP minister of labour — made an agreement with the bosses for

1,905 sackings, and then helped to enforce it by sending in riot police on December 31 to evict workers occupying the factory.

The biggest single group of workers in the Poissy factory are Moroccans — recruited by the company, with the aid of Moroccan government agencies, directly from the most remote villages; brought on the boat and train to a company hostel in Poissy for a life of super-exploitation.

Three-quarters of the Moroccan workers in Poissy have been in the factory over ten years.

'I have been working here 14 years', one told a French newspaper, 'and I've seen all the changes in the factory. Each time the bosses make profits, and for us the work always gets harder and harder.'



A striker fights back against the CSL. More: page 5.

Nurseries occupied

By Cllr. Garth Frankland

TWO NURSERIES in Wakefield have been occupied since 22 December by parents protesting over a Labour Council's proposal to close them down. If they are closed there will be no day-care nurseries in the Wakefield area.

32 Labour councillors, led by Jack Smart, the right wing Chair of the Association of Metropolitan Councils voted in favour of closing Sandal Day Care Nursery and Langthwaite Grange Day Nursery.

Eleven Labour councillors broke the whip to vote against the closures in open council. They were subsequently suspended from the Group.

The eleven suspended councillors support the nursery occupation and some are taking part in the 24-hour a day vigil.

Councillor Smart's position is that the Tories in Westminster say that cuts have to be made. He makes the cuts and then the blame rests with the Tories.

Labour councillors have no other responsibility in the matter! They are administrators, not militants.

The closures are part of a packet of cuts which add up to £4½ million and involve dozens

of compulsory redundancies.

Although local union officials, particularly in NUPE, have opposed the cuts and supported the occupations they have failed to organise supporting strike action to protect the union members' jobs and local services.

The local District Labour Party meets on Wednesday 11 January to discuss the suspensions. This body has been gradually swinging to the left over the last three years and may well demand that Councillor Smart reopens the nurseries.

Already the Wakefield Trades Council and local NUM branches support the occupations. The Regional Labour Party has condemned the closures and the Labour Party Regional Council has called for the reinstatement of the eleven suspended councillors.

Representatives from the Thornton View Hospital occupation have come to the occupation to express their support.

This linking of the two campaigns is an important joining together of two parts of the anti-cuts campaign. Ways of extending this link to an effective rank and file controlled campaign against the government's cuts must now be sought.