

# SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

No. 5. April 1985.

70p



Who  
will be  
the  
next?

- INSIDE:**
- After the miners — a deluge of sell-outs
  - NHS under the axe
  - TGWU ballots
  - USFI

# About Socialist Viewpoint

IN this fifth issue of *Socialist Viewpoint* we have, unfortunately, to start counting the cost to the labour movement of the defeat of the miners strike and the betrayal of their strike by the TUC which created it. We also look back in the light of this recent experience to the 1926 General Strike, and register our disagreement with those who argued against such a call.

General strikes are very much in the air internationally at present, with Denmark undergoing its biggest waive of class struggle since the War; Bolivia convulsed by a 16-day general strike provoked by extremes of economic crisis; and President Numeiri ousted in Sudan by a mass movement culminating in a general strike — only to be replaced by a stooge "civilian" administration. We hope to have a detailed report on Sudan for our next issue: but this month we look briefly at the implications of these powerful movements for those who believed that world politics revolved around Central America.

An on-the-spot background article from Athens explains the current Greek political crisis; and we look at events in El Salvador in the light of President Duarte's recent unexpected victory.

"Home" news includes an up-date on ratecapping and a post-mortem on the GLC's political collapse, as well as insight into the TGWU ballot-rigging scandal.

*Socialist Viewpoint* remains a magazine committed to the fight for a principled, class struggle programme at every level

of the workers' movement in Britain and internationally. We see the fight for Trotskyist politics taking shape not through introspective sectarian debates in small groups of would-be gurus, nor as simply trailing behind this or that "Left" talking trade union or Labour Party dignitary — but as a patient fight for the independent interests of the working class, and for demands and action which express those interests, in every arena of the class struggle.

Sold and produced by comrades who in many cases have their own political history, long-standing roots in a range of unions, and experience of leading and intervening in disputes, *Socialist Viewpoint* seeks to offer analysis, education and leadership as well as news and comment. We believe that, in the mainstream of the struggles in the labour movement, and in the active struggles for women's rights and against other forms of special oppression, we have a record of useful work, and a contribution to make.

With all too little clarity on offer from the various dogmatic left groupings in Britain, we believe that it is possible and necessary to combine debate with policy and programme. Our columns are open for discussion on the issues raised. We urge those with differing assessments to take part in an exchange of views. For our part, obviously, we hope that the positions we put forward and discussion on them will persuade many readers to become *Socialist Viewpoint* supporters in the coming months.

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# After the miners — the sell-outs begin

THE lesson of the miners strike, it must never be forgotten, was that the miners could have won if they had had the support to which they were entitled from the rest of the trade union movement, in particular the TUC.

Now the strike is over there are two distinct interpretations being put on the defeat of the NUM. Those who want to fight the employers and the government point to the unique example of Scargill and the miners in making a principle of jobs, rejecting the "profitability" argument of the employers and mounting the first great challenge to the creation of mass unemployment. On the other hand those who want to avoid a fight ask "If the miners were defeated, who can win?" Maybe, they argue, it is better to compromise. They are the same people who ensured that the miners were defeated.

Those who hold the sway of course are those who seek compromise. The anti-union laws are now being complied with right across the trade union movement. The TUC is preparing by a decision of the General Council to overturn the decisions of the April 1982 Conference of Executives which adopted the policy of opposition to the anti-union laws. Nor is it just a matter of complying with the law. When Tuffin and the UCW leadership ordered the Mount Pleasant workers back to work for a ballot it also involved a decision to capitulate to the Post Office management; Tuffin is now to seek a fundamental policy change at the UCW conference in May on the operation of part time workers.

Nor are the "left" led unions any better. The NUR and ASLEF have accepted a 4.85% wage settlement which is less than the rate of inflation. And the retreat has also been reflected in many of the councils facing rate-capping. The employers of course have learned their lessons well. The management response to the occupation of Yarrow shipbuilders has been immediately to discipline the shop stewards for organising it. The GPO — encouraged by Tuffin's capitulation — now have a completely hard line on new technology. Terry Duffy is doing his bit to help the bosses by organising a new right-wing campaign group in the trade unions.

The Government is moving just as fast. The right-wing campaign for a fresh election for General Secretary of the TGWU, by alleging ballot irregularities has produced statements in Parliament calling for compulsory *postal* ballots for all trade union positions. There has been the budget, with further attacks on youth and the unemployed. We have



*Those miners who argued "our fight is your fight" were more accurate than many workers believed. Their defeat has brought a bosses' offensive against the whole movement.*

seen a range of fresh attacks on the Health Service. Now Thatcher is pushing proposals for new legislation on public order offences, using football violence as an excuse, which would give sentences of up to 10 years for "riotous assembly" and other offences.

Inside the NUM the situation is not much better. The declaration that "the fight will continue" has never got off the ground. NUM members at Furnacite in South Wales were advised back to work by a majority decision of the South Wales Area Executive when they struck over new victimisations at the site.

The National Executive has successfully moved to end the national overtime ban through a delegate conference on the grounds that it was an obstacle to national negotiations over the victimised people. Yet it will not save the jobs of the victimised miners but simply allow the Board to replenish their stocks quicker and bring forwards their closure programme.

No one can deny that the NUM is in a desperate situation. There are between 700 and 800 miners

sacked and over 150 in prison. Their bargaining power is very weak. But retreats will only worsen the situation and strengthen the resolve of NCB management. Arthur Scargill himself clearly sees this, since he fought against calling off the overtime ban and was clearly shaken when the decision was taken.

Ian MacGregor has begun the implementation of both the first stages of his pit closure programme and his reorganisation of NCB management. Hard-line managers "proven" in the strike are being promoted, and already the closure of St. John's Colliery in Bedwas, South Wales, has been announced.

It should be no surprise that NUM members at Bedwas have voted to accept the closure. Miners face a very difficult situation. Since the union has been defeated in a national strike, they see no effective way of confronting the Board on local level. But every retreat made by the NUM makes the situation worse. If a turn is to be made, and opposition to closures revived, then a hard line has to be taken by the NUM wherever that is possible — and maintaining the overtime ban was one example.

In Bedwas, NACODS members have made more fuss than the NUM, although there cannot be the slightest confidence that anything will come of it, given NACODS's past record. Peter McNestry has said that the NCB has now "torn up the agreement they made during the strike" as part of an attempt to pull the NUM into a shabby deal. He now says NACODS was "hoodwinked" by the NCB — very perceptive of him!

Nor is this the only closure in the offing. Well-founded rumours circulate of impending closures in the Scottish Area, and 800 redundancies have already been announced in Kent.

Despite the difficult conditions, the fighting capacity of the NUM has to be rebuilt if the coal industry is to be saved in any recognisable form. Arthur Scargill has to be defended against any moves against him from within the union and a fighting left wing consolidated which can learn the lessons of the strike in order that the obstacles on which this strike foundered can be surmounted in the future.

The role of the Communist Party, one of the most conservative influences in the strike, needs to be analysed in detail. But most importantly, the problems of the role of the rest of the trade union movement and the TUC in particular have to be tackled. What happened in the miners' strike must not be allowed to recur in the future. The TUC has tremendous authority within the trade union movement. If they had wanted to mobilise action in support of the miners, they could have done so. The fact is that they were actually *opposed* to spreading the strike. When NACODS looked as if they might take action, the TUC urged them not to "escalate the situation".

It is true that it is very difficult to press the TUC into action. But the trade union movement belongs to the working class, not to a few more or less self-appointed bureaucrats at the top. They have no right to deprive the movement of united action when it becomes so urgent as it was in the miners strike. The bureaucratic apparatus which protects them from the rank and file has to be broken down and the movement democratised. Even more, the movement must learn how to mobilise effectively *against* the bureaucracy under conditions such as the miners strike. To compromise with the bureaucrats is to hand them the initiative. What is necessary is a fight for control of the movement hi-jacked by them. That is the lesson of the miners strike. That problem was not resolved but the miners strike did expose the problem for all to see. We must ensure it is tackled more effectively in the future.



Scargill: opposed lifting of overtime ban; retreats now will make it harder to defend those victimised.

# Fight on for the class war prisoners!

By ALAN THORNETT

OVER 700 miners have been sacked and over 150 are in prison serving sentences of up to 5 years. These miners have been victimised or imprisoned for supporting the strike, supporting the policy of the NUM and for fighting against pit closures. Every single one of them must be defended and supported by both the NUM and the whole of the movement. Those in prison are political prisoners arising out of a conflict over pit closures which involved massive state repression and the use of the courts in an unprecedented way.

The movement must now respond in their defence. But so far this has not been adequate. The size of the demonstration and rally in Sheffield last Saturday calling for an amnesty was very small even taking into account the poor publicity for it. It is clear that many of the support groups have not yet adequately adjusted to the new situation since the end of the strike.

Yet the matter of the victimised miners, those in prison and the dependents of those miners killed during the strike is now overwhelmingly the major issue facing the Support Groups — both the women's support groups and the general groups. There is a danger that some of them may attempt too soon to broaden themselves away from the miners strike to other struggles. It is necessary to embrace other struggles: but the victimised miners should remain the central issue.

The highlight of the Sheffield Rally were the speeches from Betty Heathfield and the Kent speakers, Jack Collins and John Moyle, the secretary of Betteshanger, who is himself sacked.

They showed that the Kent Area not only took the lead in opposing the return to work without the victimised people and stayed on strike an extra week for them — but are now the most vigorous campaigners on the issue. Forty-four out of the 45 sacked Kent miners are on the road campaigning at the present time.

What the Kent NUM want to see is a national campaign to reinstate the sacked miners. Certain NCB areas such as South Wales and the North East have been much more willing to reinstate than areas such as Kent, Scotland and to some extent Yorkshire. Some of these differences can be accounted for by the different attitudes of NCB management. Some area directors who are close to retirement, or not ambitious to join the MacGregor mafia, have taken a softer line. Others, like Albert Wheeler in Scotland, who want promotion from MacGregor, take the hardest possible line.

Both Jack Collins and John Moyle, however, suggest a connection between the fact that South Wales NUM had promoted the return to work and the immediate reinstatement of most of the sacked people in Wales. They strongly condemned any lifting of the overtime ban, ridiculed NACODS about action over Bedwas and called for a lobby of the NUM



## Don't forget the victimised militants!



National Executive on Thursday.

At the same time it was worrying that there was no NUM national speaker on the platform and that the Yorkshire area speakers failed to turn up. A much sharper response from the NUM as a whole is going to be necessary if the campaign is going to get adequately off the ground.

For this it is important that the victimised miners themselves get organised on a

national level. A conference of all victimised miners would be a good way for them to organise to push things forward in the NUM.

The defeat of the ballot vote to organise an official levy of 50p per week from the miners was no surprise. Even the militants in the NUM were split on the question since many saw it as a move which would take the steam out of the campaign for reinstatement. But it is a problem which has to be confronted. The result places an even greater responsibility on the activists in the labour movement and on the Support Groups. They must now organise to ensure that the hardship is alleviated; that the sacked miners have the resources to travel and campaign; and that neither the victimised or the imprisoned are forgotten, and their cases made public knowledge.

This means *stepping up* the work, not winding it down. It means increasing the pressure for finance; holding public meetings with sacked miners speaking; getting the sacked miners into trade union branches and Labour Party meetings. The strike is over but the job is far from done.

## Scenting an anti-left witch-hunt

# The press "discovers" TGWU ballot rigging

**ALAN THORNETT looks at the current press campaign to unseat Ron Todd as TGWU General Secretary, and explains the long history of TGWU ballot-rigging.**

AS we go to press it looks as if there will be a fresh ballot for the new general secretary of the giant Transport and General Workers Union.

It is a serious error for Evans to have backed down in this way. The current campaign for a rerun of last year's ballot was first motivated by Frank (now Lord) Chapple and pursued by his employer, the Daily Mail. The media has now created the conditions where a fight could overturn the previous result and replace Ron Todd as General Secretary elect.

This situation now has serious implications for the whole of the labour movement. Wright would swing the TGWU to the hard right and line the union up with Terry Duffy or worse — he has been working with Frank Chapple and Eric Hammond on the project. Equally seriously it would give a huge boost to the campaign by the Tories and sections of the trade union hard right for confronting postal ballots in which the media would have a much increased influence over the workplaces. (Although the election of the T&G General Secretary as such would not be affected since it does not carry a vote.)

The whole situation is a creation of the media. It started initially with a proven case of ballot rigging in one of the TGWU's Bristol branches. There a 95% "turnout" figure led to complaints and subsequently an internal union inquiry. Two full time officials were sacked by the union and the branch secretary suspended from office for life.

The media started to float the issue to see what other complaints could be drummed up. That was successful and the issue escalated considerably. Complaints have been made over the conduct of the ballot in another Bristol branch and others in the London Region.



*George Wright*

Most of the publicity recently has centred on the work the media has done in the North of Ireland. Region 11 recorded a 70% poll, clearly very difficult to achieve in that kind of ballot. The Observer has conducted a poll of T&G members there, as has Marplan. They both claim that these show that only 32% in fact participated in the ballot. They have interviewed shop stewards who claim that no ballot at all was conducted in their workplace.

Although none of that constitutes hard evidence the media is now claiming that a question mark is raised over enough votes to alter the outcome of the election if the allegations were proven correct. Ron Todd was elected by 277,662 votes to 228,845 — a margin of 48,817 votes. In Ireland, Ron Todd received 55,000 votes against George Wright's 8,000.

More important, George Wright has now emerged personally into the fray and called for a fresh ballot — which gives the campaign new significance and new impetus. Although he stands as an individual member he is using his position as a full time appointed official to campaign from.

Nothing could be more hypocritical than Wright emerging as the saviour of democracy in the

TGWU. There was a 61% "turnout" in Wales, where the vast majority of votes went to him. He was unknown at the time of the election, how did he get so many votes?

Moss Evans has now abandoned his previously correct response — prove the case and I will call a new election if the votes concerned are enough to affect the result — and cancelled his attendance at the Scottish TUC and intimated that he is about to call an emergency executive which will order a fresh election. It fits in with the shift to the right he appears to have taken in recent months.

The whole right-wing campaign against Ron Todd is sheet hypocrisy. They have known the nature of T&G ballot procedures for years and have sat back while the right wing in various sections of the union kept out left candidates by ballot rigging.

The media campaign is equally dishonest. They have known for years the nature of TGWU ballot procedures and the abuses which have taken place. They have never taken the issue up before because in most cases the left had been the victims of malpractice from the right.

Why all this sudden press interest in TGWU elections? These elections have been dubious for many years and the press have never shown the slightest interest.

In 1975, branch officials in the British Leyland Cowley Body Plant rigged the ballot to stop me getting on the union's Midlands Regional Committee, which at that time represented 350,000 members. The ballot rigging was not only proven but shown to have been on a massive scale.

I stood against Adams, an unknown right-wing candidate from the (now closed) MG car plant in Abingdon. At that time there were 6,500 TGWU members in the plant organised into the 5/60 branch, all the officers of which were magistrates.

Adams won the election with 6,134 votes. We were able to establish that almost all of these came from the Body Plant, and there was no possibility that they were cast legitimately by the members since the balloting had been monitored by militants in the plant.

It was easy to check. There were

# SUSPICIOUS SILENCE

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP SILENT IN FACE OF BALLOT COMPLAINTS

The Region 3 Committee of the TGWU has not even responded to detailed complaints on the recent electoral procedure of the Alan Law Cowley Rules. The Regional Rules Committee has not even responded to detailed complaints on the recent electoral procedure of the Alan Law Cowley Rules.

For a full-time enquiry into these gross frauds of these union elections by the regional officials of the TGWU, the Regional Committee should be asked to set up a full-time enquiry into these gross frauds of these union elections by the regional officials of the TGWU.

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# UNION DEMOCRACY SUPPRESSED



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# NO ENQUIRY INTO 'IMPOSSIBLE' VOTES

Following attempts for an enquiry into the gross frauds of these union elections by the regional officials of the TGWU, the Regional Committee should be asked to set up a full-time enquiry into these gross frauds of these union elections by the regional officials of the TGWU.

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# WITCH HUNTERS COVER UP BALLOT RIGGING!

Guilty official keeps full time position



only two ballot boxes, which were placed in the main canteen for the one-hour lunch break on two consecutive days. Militants sat by the boxes and counted exactly how many voted — which was less than 200. It was in any case impossible for 6,000 people to vote in 2 hours — that would be almost one per second.

When the result was announced the branch secretary refused to reveal the individual voting figures for that individual branch (the election covered a geographical area involving a number of branches).

Complaints were made to the TGWU Midlands Regional Committee, who carried out a "preliminary investigation". The "investigation" found that a "technical infringement of the rules" had taken place, and a fresh election was ordered. The "technical infringement" they were referring to was that the branch of-

icers had destroyed all the ballot papers to avoid scrutiny! Under the rules, the ballot papers must be kept for three months.

The Regional Committee ordered a fresh ballot of the whole electoral division, which they saw as meeting their responsibility and avoiding the possibility of legal action. But nothing was done to improve the system even in the re-run ballot, except that far more ballot boxes were used and the militants could not check them.

Although this was all public knowledge and it involved a huge car plant often in the news, the media only carried it as minimal local coverage.

In 1977 Alan Law, TGWU fulltime official in the Midlands Region dealing with the road haulage industry was caught red-handed casting the

whole of the votes from the huge 5/35 branch, of which he was secretary, for candidates of his own choice. Law was asked to resign by the Midland Regional Committee after an inquiry found him guilty. Although the Sunday Times took the matter up there was no media campaign and no calls to change the balloting procedures in the TGWU which make such things so easy.

The reality is that TGWU leaders have supported and defended the existing ballot procedures over many years under conditions where they have always been open to the kind of campaign now being mounted. In fact there are no procedures in the TGWU which inhibit ballot-rigging in any significant way. In fact the procedures are so loose as to constitute an open invitation. In most cases unnumbered ballot papers are sent in bulk to branch officers who send back a return sheet with the results on it. The General Secretary's election is a slight exception to this, where cardboard ballot boxes are provided which are returned to Region. But there is nothing to ensure that it is the members who vote.

The right-wing have known this for years. So why all the campaigning now? It is true they are taking a lead from the Government, but the Tories were already active on the ballot issue in 1977 since they were preparing to make it a part of their election campaign.

There is an additional reason for their attitude this time. Now it is a matter of the right wing campaigning against the left. Today's moves, if they were successful, could significantly alter the balance in the trade union movement to the advantage of the right wing. In Cowley in 1975 it was the left battling against ballotrigging conducted by the right. Alan Law got a bit more attention since he had been portrayed as a "militant" element, although they knew that he was a part of the TGWU Midlands establishment.

Today the TGWU leadership has acted decisively in Bristol where there was hard evidence of corruption. Since the Bristol branch votes could not alter the overall vote, they have cleaned up this obvious abuse.

T&G members must reject media interference into their union. They must campaign to return Ron Todd as General Secretary if there are fresh elections.

More than this, however, ballot procedures must be changed to prevent this kind of intervention in the future and provide a democratic election procedure within the union.

There have been attempts in the past to do this. The Cowley 5/293 branch campaigned for changes at the last TGWU Rules Revision Conference in 1980 (TGWU Rules Conferences are held every 6 years). The branch produced a leaflet advocating

and explaining the changes it called for. It was handed to delegates at the door, and is reprinted here.

#### 1. **BALLOT VOTING** Rule 13, motions 270 & 271.

It must be obvious to all that ballot voting procedures within the TGWU are in urgent need of tightening up. The union received adverse publicity over the Alan Law case in Region 5. He personally cast all 13,000 votes allocated to his branch to candidates of his own choice. He afterwards stated publicly that he had not had time to organise a ballot and declared quite openly that he would do the same again. Although Alan Law was dealt with by the Regional Committee, the basic problem was never tackled – the procedures which allowed him to do it so easily.

A similar case occurred in the elections for Regional Committee, National Committee and General Executive Committee in Region 5 in 1975. Evidence was produced by members of a large branch that whilst only 250 members actually voted, it became obvious that the scrutineers had returned votes of around 6,000. A Regional investigation concluded that they could not fully investigate because the ballot papers had been destroyed, contrary to rules, and they ordered fresh elections. But again the ballot procedures were never questioned.

The inescapable fact is that such cases are just the tip of a very large iceberg. Block voting, or officers voting

on behalf of the members for candidates of their own choice, is far more wide-spread than the cases highlighted by the Regional scrutineers. More important, it is clear that present ballot procedures lend themselves so completely to such practices as to almost encourage them. Alan Law appeared to see nothing wrong with casting someone else's vote.

Under the present system, ballot papers, often in very imprecise quantities, are sent to branches who are simply required to send a return sheet to Region stating the votes cast for each candidate. No ballot papers or unused papers are required by Region. The ballot papers are unmarked and unidentifiable. All that is required is a stamp on the member's card which provides no serious check particularly in large branches with a high turnover. Regional scrutineers have therefore very little in front of them, and no way of knowing if or how a ballot was carried out.

In the recent ballot for General Secretary, there was some improvement in the system. Ballot papers were printed in book form with stubs, and the ballot papers required to be sent to Regional level for scrutiny. But this still fell far short of real safeguards. The papers and the stubs were unnumbered and there could still be no reliable check on who had filled them in.

We have developed a system of ballot voting for the position of convenor in our factory which safeguards to a very high degree the democratic rights of the

members. The proposals we make in our motions are modelled on similar principles. The key to it would be consecutively numbered ballot papers attached to un-numbered stubs. The members would be required to put his or her membership number and signature on the stub and then cast a vote with the numbered ballot paper. The member's card would also be stamped. Scrutinising is then easy and complete. The numbers of votes cast must correspond to the numbers of signed stubs produced, and when added to the number of unused papers, correspond to the total block of numbered papers issued to the branch.

After the count, all ballot papers, stubs and unused papers should be sent to Regional office and retained for one month after the announcement of the result. This is important because under the current rule they should be retained for one month after the branch posts the results to the Region. This is likely to mean that by the time the results are announced – which is the most likely time for queries to be raised – the papers can be already destroyed. In declaring the result, details of all branch results should be included as a further safeguard, since it is very difficult to question results, even if there are apparent irregularities, unless branch results are known.

We very strongly urge conference delegates to support these motions.

## Solidarity with Armagh Women



*INTERNATIONAL Women's Day 1985 featured demonstrations in London, Glasgow, Oxford Leicester and Dublin in solidarity with the women republican prisoners in Armagh jail who are subjected to the degrading ordeal of strip searches.*

*Outside Armagh prison itself over 100 women from Britain joined a rally, at which speech after speech underlined the solidarity of women worldwide with the fight to end the British occupation of the six counties and the repression meted out to the nationalist population.*

*Among the British contingent were several representatives of black women's groups, and from*

*miners' support groups. A statement from the women prisoners inside, which was read to the rally, emphasised that:*

*"Strip searching is, to date, the most dehumanising and repugnant tactic used against us by the British prison authorities. Your demonstration of solidarity with us today is encouraging to us all and an incentive to struggle resolutely on until this immoral practice is stopped."*

*That fight, led in the British labour movement by Labour Women for Ireland and the Labour Committee on Ireland, must be stepped up at the union conferences this summer.*



# What next after Duarte's surprise victory?

By HARRY SLOAN

**IN A country where opinion polls seem ludicrously inappropriate, and voting procedures themselves have been highly questionable, perhaps it is no surprise that so many pundits guessed wrong on the outcome of the Salvadorean elections.**

President Duarte's Christian Democratic Party, widely regarded as no-hope losers to a coalition of extreme right wing parties, scraped a narrow victory, winning 33 of the 60 seats for the country's largely toothless Constituent Assembly.

Among those surprised at this outcome will be the Reagan administration, which gave tacit support to the hard right. This position itself is a clear turnabout from Reagan's stance in the 1984 elections, where he required a victory by the ostensibly "moderate", allegedly "reformist" Duarte in order to persuade the US Congress to endorse continued US military and economic aid to the regime. He also wanted to avoid a series of embarrassing right wing excesses in the run-up to the US Presidential elections in November. Shrewd adjustments to the machinery ensured that that "election" went according to plan.

But with his own second and final term safely under his belt, Reagan no longer faces the same domestic electoral pressures: and the administration is confident of pushing a massive \$430 million package of military aid through Congress. Now Reagan is concerned to prevent any fragmentation of the reactionary forces. This means trying to preserve Duarte's dependence upon the ultra right, and curtail any possible tendency towards serious negotiations with the guerrilla forces of the FMLN and their political leadership, the FDR.

Duarte's two rounds of exploratory talks with the FDR leaders last year — though publicly welcomed by the White House — sent a shudder of horror through the hard right, and, coupled with his rhetorical promises of social reforms, were sufficient to produce the new coalition of parties around the objective of holding on to and even increasing their combined majority in the Assembly. The failure



Duarte

of the right wing — even with US support — to achieve this has been met with angry claims from ultra-right leader Roberto D'Aubuisson that the armed forces "intervened" in the election to ensure a victory for Duarte and the Christian Democrats, and that the election result should be annulled. His protests have been significantly rebuffed by top army chiefs.

Duarte on regaining office has promised a third round of talks with the guerrillas and a programme of "social reforms". These could only be achieved at the expense of the tight-knit Salvadorean oligarchy — the handful of ruling families whose system of exploitation is upheld by the brutal officer corps of the armed forces, the death squads and the ultra right wing Parties with the economic and military backing of the USA.

Should Duarte attempt to move in practice along the road of "reform", he will be in for a very rough ride in-

deed. For if he antagonises the ultra-right and the oligarchy to the extent of alienating the Reagan administration, then he could rapidly lose his "protected" status as Washington's anointed recipient of aid: and once this was thrown into question, Duarte would lose any hope of controlling the army chiefs, many of whom are already hostile to his talks with the FDR.

However, it is likely that these latest pledges from Duarte are as much window dressing as his previous promises. He promised land reform: it was predictably blocked by the far right in the Assembly. He talked of taming the death squads — yet their murder toll against the left and oppositionists is rising once again (from 14 in January to 22 in February) and responsibility for these killings plainly includes leading members of today's military hierarchy.

Duarte's pledge to pursue and punish officers implicated in political murder has been quietly detached. And despite the fanfares and frenzied right wing opposition, the elaborately stage-managed "talks" with guerrilla leaders last year were tokenistic in the extreme — offering nothing new, but effectively going through the motions in public in order simultaneously to placate the hardliners who oppose the slightest concession, and those substantial sections of Salvadorean society who are sick and tired of the repression and civil war, and have looked to Duarte as the man least unlikely to negotiate some kind of settlement.

So far, Duarte has skilfully maintained his balancing act between the various intersecting and mutually exclusive pressures: but the political evolution of the far right after their bruising defeat at the polls is unpredictable, and Reagan's stance ambiguous. Duarte will be well pleased that 15 senior army officers and the country's Defence Minister rallied behind him to repudiate D'Aubuisson's challenge to the election result: at present his is the strongest hand in this struggle for control within the camp of Salvadorean reaction.

His victory has underlined a substantial problem for the liberation forces of the FMLN-FDR, who have

come under increasingly heavy military pressure in the rural areas. The geography and limited size of El Salvador make it unsuitable terrain for holding "liberated areas" for any length of time — while US military aid and equipment has facilitated a marked strengthening of the state forces. The guerillas have taken a steady toll of army casualties, sapping army morale, but no longer talk in terms of a "final offensive", and have begun to look for alternative tactics to pursue the struggle other than an escalating rural war.

Despite the continued problem of the death squads, it appears that numbers of guerilla fighters are now moving into urban areas to participate in the reorganisation of trade unions and student organisations. The extent to which this has occurred makes it doubly obvious that they retain wide popular support. US military leaders assess that up to 75% of the guerilla forces — as many as 7,000 fighters — have dispersed in this way into the towns and the capital itself — working to widen their own popular base, and possibly preparing to strike in later guerilla raids on urban targets.

Work in the unions is important, since they are in the main dominated by supporters of Duarte and, with sections of peasants, appear to have provided his most decisive electoral support. But mass struggles in 1979 and 1980 showed the potential to rally the working class behind political and economic demands which bring them into conflict with the oligarchy and US imperialism.

However, it is far from certain that the present FMLN-FDR political line is adequate to develop the maximum potential of this resistance. Since the spring of 1984, the FMLN-FDR have put forward a programme which focusses on the call for a cross-class "government of national consensus" or "government of broad participation" (GAP), and for the merger of the FMLN forces with the existing army, purged of its hardline untra-right officers.

This demand, coupled with the increasing FDR concentration upon talks with Duarte, seems almost calculated to cause maximum confusion amongst El Salvador's workers and peasants. After all, Duarte himself has proposed and participated in two rounds of "talks", and has urged the guerillas to set down their arms and enter the "political process". If the guerillas themselves propose a joint *government* and a joint *army*, what, many will wonder, is the real difference?

In practice, of course, any move by the guerillas to disarm or disband and engage in ballot-box politics would be met by an immediate offensive by the hard right aimed at wiping out the militant opposition. The economic survival of the oligarchy depends upon its savage exploitation of El Salvador's working class and poor peasantry: this in turn requires

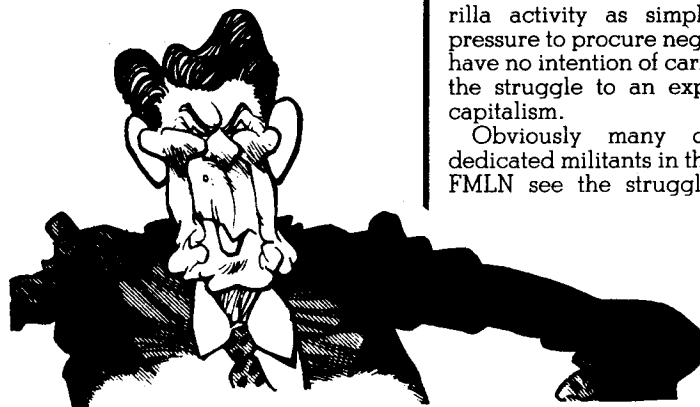


that any political movements which seek to mobilise these forces in mass struggle must be ruthlessly repressed.

But this same situation is precisely why the FMLN-FDR's own programmatic demands for a joint popular front government and a joint army are a reactionary utopia. They are reactionary because they could only possibly be achieved in similar fashion to the merger of Mugabe's guerrillas with Smith's armed forces in Zimbabwe — at the expense of sacrificing the independent struggles and revolutionary aspirations of the masses, and of the guerillas themselves. (In Zimbabwe, Mugabe obtained even more than the FMLN-FDR are asking for: he took control of the government. But his programme of cross class alliance meant that the fused armed forces have consistently repressed the black working class..

They are utopian because, unlike the Smith regime who knew that neither Britain nor the USA could or wished to intervene, the Duarte regime is no free agent, but a highly dependent government with the US government breathing down its neck, actively intervening to direct the armed struggle, and determined to rule out any compromise which might further encourage revolutionary or democratic struggles elsewhere in Central America.

How, then, has the FMLN-FDR adopted this line? The answer must be seen both in the political leadership of the FDR itself, headed up by two bourgeois politicians — social democrat Guillermo Ungo, and



in the Salvadorean Communist Party (PCS).

In this environment, under the combined pressure of the reformist "Socialist International"; the Latin American bourgeois governments of the "Contadora" group seeking to procure a "negotiated" stabilisation of the region to avoid a possibly contagious all-out civil war, and the Castro leadership (as the most tangible expression of Kremlin policy), the left-talking "popular front" politics of the Communist Party have become increasingly influential. In the aftermath of the Grenada invasion, the threat of an outright US intervention lent added pressure to uphold the Stalinist search for a negotiated, "popular front" solution.

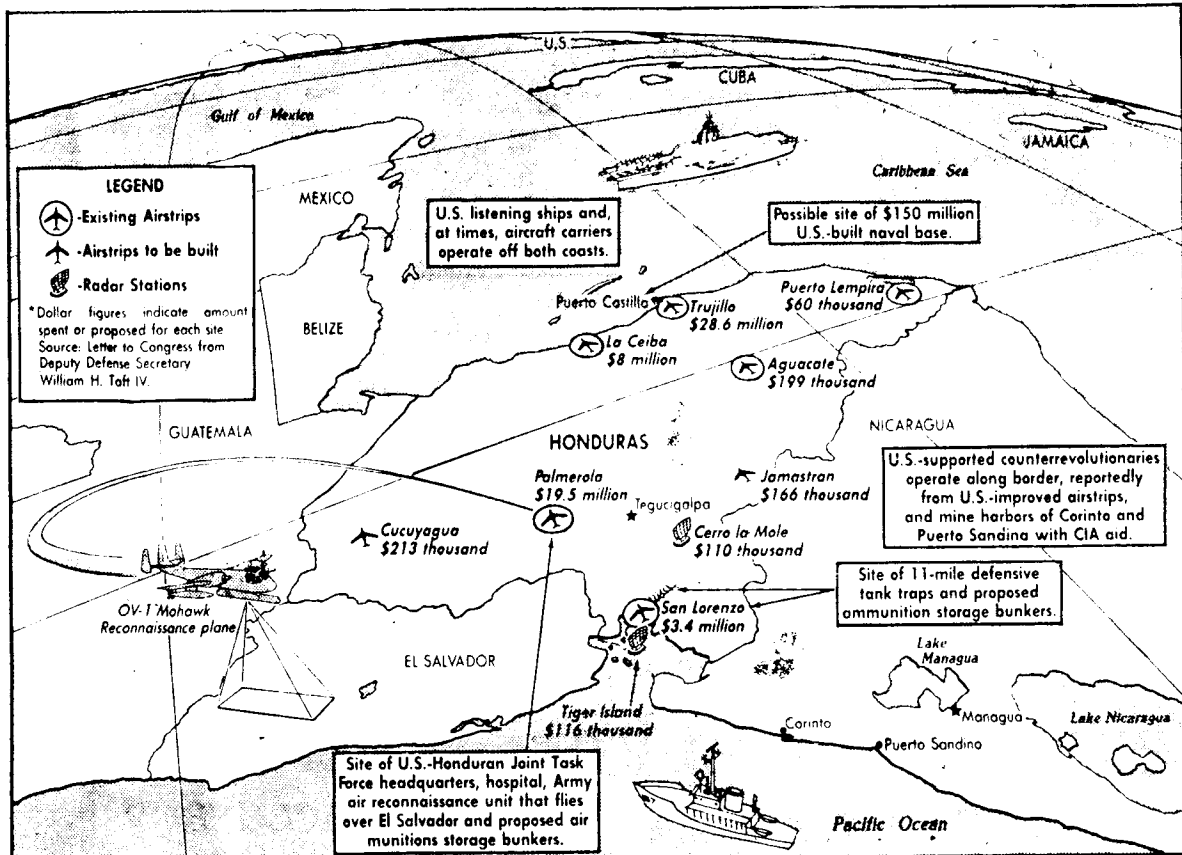
In February 1984 the FMLN-FDR *dropped* its call for a "revolutionary democratic government" and adopted instead the proposal for a "government of broad participation" (GAP), incorporating businessmen ("private property owners") and army chiefs ("the reconstructed armed forces"). The proposal underlined that:

"No single force will dominate this government; all the social and political forces in favour of the overthrow of the oligarchy's regime, of the re-establishment of national sovereignty and independence, and of private property and foreign investment not contradicting society's interests, will be represented in it."

The fact that El Salvador contains no significant equivalent to the anti-Somoza sections of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie who might be enticed into such a "popular front" does not prevent this being a dangerously misleading policy. Having (belatedly) joined the common guerilla front in January 1980 to avoid being totally isolated and discredited on the left for its line of class collaboration, the PCS has clearly emerged as a major leading political force.

By June 1984, in the hands of FDR leader Guillermo Ungo, this policy had been translated into a line of "give Duarte a chance" after his election as President. And in December the reconvened talks once again featured the "GAP" proposals as the central line of FMLN-FDR intervention. While the armed struggle continues, it is obvious that Ungo, Zamora and the Stalinists see guerilla activity as simply a type of pressure to procure negotiations, and have no intention of carrying through the struggle to an expropriation of capitalism.

Obviously many of the most dedicated militants in the ranks of the FMLN see the struggle differently:



US forces deployed to intimidate Central American liberation struggle.

many see the GAP purely as a tactic, and look forward — more or less clearly — to completion of the democratic revolution with the establishment of a genuinely revolutionary government reflecting the needs and demands of the masses.

Anyone serious about the struggle for socialist revolution in El Salvador will be fighting in and with the FMLN-FDR; but there is a real need for a Marxist critique of the policy of the GAP if the agitational work in the unions and student movement is to achieve its full potential and exploit the weaknesses of the Duarte regime, and if the Stalinist reformist influence in the FMLN-FDR is not to gain a complete stranglehold.

While campaigning in the imperialist countries for "US hands off El Salvador" and maximum solidarity with the FMLN-FDR in its struggle, Marxists should argue against the current popular frontists policy.

It must not be forgotten that one key reason why the Nicaraguan leadership has been able to sustain itself despite the continuation of capitalist property relations since 1979 is that the old Somocista armed forces were completely smashed and disbanded and a new body of armed people, committed to the Sandinista revolution was constructed. FMLN-FDR policy renounces this road in advance. To defend both the Sandinista regime and the GAP in El Salvador — as some Marxists do — is a contradiction in terms.

In any case, to seek to head off the threat of a US intervention by aban-

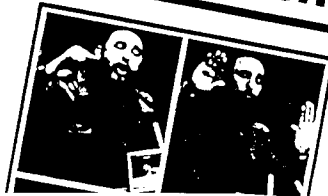
doning the fight for socialism rather than by seeking international allies in the anti-imperialist struggle is not a tactical retreat but a political capitulation.

Marxists must insist that the fight in El Salvador is not simply a question of national liberation, but part of a region-wide struggle for independence from imperialism: the perspective must be for socialism in El Salvador and Nicaragua as part of

the fight for a socialist United States of Central America. And in such a fight, the question must be raised of links with the powerful working class in the biggest Central American country — Mexico — not just from the standpoint of solidarity, but in pursuit of a common struggle for the overthrow of capitalist rule, unity against any US intervention, and a jointly planned socialist economy for the region.

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# Greece plunged into crisis

## IS THIS THE END FOR KARAMANLIS?

**A special report explaining the background to recent events, from SISSI VOVOY in Athens.**

IN A abrupt political turn which was shocking as well as sudden, the Greek Prime Minister and president of PASOK, Papandreou, on March 9 put an end to his collaboration with the president of the republic Konstantin Karamanlis, introducing a new chapter in the politics of his party.

Many readers of the foreign left-wing press are, we suppose, aware of the above fact. What perhaps they do not know is: Why Papandreou should make such an abrupt turn, literally at the last moment? What did the collaboration between Papandreou and Karamanlis mean? And, finally, what will the impact of the new policy of PASOK be on the political situation?

### Why the surprise?

1985 is an election year for Greece. According to the formal time limits, there was going to be an election of the president of the Republic on March 15, chosen from *Parliament* according to the reactionary rules of the 1975 constitution followed by national parliamentary elections in October, where PASOK would contest for the majority of the popular vote for a new four year term.

The surface of political reality, mirrored every day in a press systematically striving to form public opinion, was characterised by the most unprecedented class collaboration and social consent that ever existed in Greece. PASOK, a party "socialist" in name only, had managed to betray all its electoral promises to the people, most important of them being to throw out the American bases and to pull the country out of NATO and the EEC, not to mention its domestic policy. But, more importantly, PASOK had maintained excellent relations with the president of the Republic and cultivated systematically among the people the



*Karamanlis*

conception that it could and should not clash with him. The "change" (ALLAGI — the main slogan of PASOK) had to proceed with "careful" steps, they argued, because socialism could not come about overnight. PASOK had also insisted on its refusal to proceed with the revision of the 1975 constitution, abandoning another one of its electoral promises.

Let us note here in passing that

the 1975 constitution is not simply a bourgeois constitution. It contains certain articles giving extraordinary powers to the President, allowing him:

- to suspend all the articles related to democratic liberties "if there is an external or an internal danger;
- to declare the country in a "state of siege" without the consent of parliament;
- to dismiss the elected government if he considers there is a "disharmony" between the parliamentary majority and the popular will;
- to appoint anyone he likes as prime minister, from within or without Parliament, for the carrying out of elections;
- to refuse to sign laws or decrees that are not to his liking; and so on.

Therefore, not only had PASOK abandoned its promise to the people for a revision of the constitution but, more than that, it had declared its support for the deeply hated person of Karamanlis.

The right-wing party, New Democracy, was delighted at the arrival of the electoral year 1985, for two reasons. First, it had won a small part of the support PASOK had lost in the Euroelections, around 2%. This loss was mainly due to the fact that PASOK has taken the economic crisis of capitalism on its shoulders and is trying to administer the economy, to the obvious displeasure of the popular masses. The most conservative sector of the working masses, who had moved from New Democracy to PASOK in 1981, are tending to return back to it now.

The second reason for right wing delight was due to the anticipated reelection of Karamanlis, who was the guarantor of bourgeois power and the essential political leader and founder of this party in 1974. His reelection as President would mean that on the one hand the right wing party would continue to hold — in the last analysis — the bridle; and on the other that after the 1985 elections in which the right wing would certainly not win a majority, there would be some moment, some turning point, after one or two years, when Karamanlis would use his Presidential extraordinary powers to the

benefit of New Democracy.

The pro-Moscow Communist Party had put forward the demand for a constitutional revision half-heartedly about 8 months ago, and of course had declared its intention not to vote for Karamanlis. But it did not proceed to take up a struggle on this question because at no time did it want seriously to disturb the various balances which PASOK was creating with the right wing. The CP did not undertake any campaign on the burning question of the presidency, thus contributing greatly to the cultivation of a passive stand amongst the people, a stand of accepting decisions made at the top.

The (Eurocommunist) Communist Party (Interior), despite declaring its negative stand towards the presidency of Karmanlis, had been very much reduced to the role of guardian of the existing equilibrium. Characteristic is the fact that it had presented in the pages of its daily paper articles from its members and cadres advocating that the Party accept Karamanlis's candidature in the name of "normality".

This is only a little political map of the surface of the reality existing before March 9.

But what was happening under this surface? First of all, the most militant section of the popular masses in general and the working class in particular was disgusted by the ever growing, all-sided integration of PASOK to the establishment. The main domestic problems are those of unemployment, at about 10%, inflation (over 20%) and the relative lowering of wages. The total of wage-earned income has fallen considerably, mainly through the factor of unemployment, without any prospect of a reversal. The income of farmers is also falling. The rest of the oppressed masses are also dissatisfied.

The greatest factor, though, in the dissatisfaction, mainly of the political vanguard of the masses, was PASOK's betrayal of its anti-imperialist electoral promises.

Let us return again to Karamanlis, emphasising the fact that he personifies both bourgeois power and dependence upon imperialism. Furthermore there is a very deeply rooted political hatred against him individually because he was the architect of the post civil-war police state, which suppressed the workers movement and democratic rights, and conducted state and para-state persecutions, against a background of the continued imprisonment and exile of thousands of militants after the civil war and the torture of left-wingers. He was the Prime Minister during the 8 year period 1955-63, which has been named the "black 8 year period". He was also the inspiration of the reactionary constitution of 1975 and Prime Minister from 1974-80. In other words, Karmanlis was the enemy of the whole of the



Left wingers lobby PASOK's Central Committee to urge against endorsing Karamanlis.

workers' and peasants' movement.

As the day of March 9 was approaching, there was a growing reaction by the militant wing of PASOK against the leadership's support for the re-election of Karamanlis. And this happened within the framework of a more general popular opposition to this policy which, while it did not take an active character of concrete political action, was nevertheless being expressed very widely. Papandreou, who didn't hesitate to depose the whole local leadership of a provincial organisation for resisting the then official line, two weeks before his decision; and who had not hesitated to carry out countless expulsions of militant dissidents and even MPs during the years of PASOK's existence, apparently started to think more seriously about this matter a short time before March 9. Thus, since he was continuously receiving messages about the reactions within his party and amongst the people up to the last moment, he suddenly changed his course.

During the night of March 8-9 he deliberated with his closest collaborators, and on the morning of March 9, when he entered the conference room of the Central Committee meeting, he dropped the bombshell.

Up to then the whole of Greece had been absolutely certain that the CC would decide on Karamanlis. So while the pro-PASOK newspapers were putting the last soap into the brainwashing in favour of

Karamanlis, and the right wing papers were celebrating the certain re-election of their leader as President, the whole country was shaken by the unexpected news released at noon.

Papandreou proposed that the Central Committee endorse the High Court Judge Christos Sarfzetakis — very well known since 1964 for the crucial role he played as Judicial Interrogator in the exposure of the murderers of Lambrakis — as candidate President of the republic. He also proposed revision of the articles of the constitution concerning the extraordinary powers of the President. His proposals were unanimously and enthusiastically accepted with a protracted standing ovation by the same people — the CC members, who, with two exceptions, were ready to accept the candidacy of Karamanlis. And while the acceptance of this abrupt turn reconfirmed the personified power of Papandreou, the content of the proposal reconfirms the immediate influence the movement has on the leadership of PASOK and in the last analysis on the development of the whole political situation. "We rediscovered our militancy," Papandreou said a little

\*Lambrakis was a left-wing MP, assassinated in public in 1963 by para-state thugs. His assassination was followed by a very big rise in the movement, which toppled Karamanlis a few months later. The film "Z" is based on this event. The role of Sarfzetakis is also strongly presented in the film.

later to the Press.

### What was the meaning of collaboration?

One of the most crucial strategic questions for Papandreu since 1981, in relation to the handling of governmental power, was his relation with the President. By skillfully reminding the people and PASOK members of the existence of the President he played hide-and-peek with his socialist promises. He constantly implied that "we cannot proceed radically because He exists", while every now and then Papandreu would surpass himself in his praises to "Him" for the "impeccable" execution of his duties. He underlined that "He is the guarantor of political normality", and implied that if we do not vote for him, socialism cannot last.

Whenever Karamanlis made a clear political intervention in favour of the right wing, Papandreu put his tail between his legs and maniacally expelled all those denouncing Karamanlis. He had created, at the level of superficial appearance, a movement of masochistic Karamanlis-adoring cadres and had made forgetting the past — since it was inseparably linked to Him — an official policy.

Of course Papandreu did bear in mind the possibility that Karamanlis could neutralise or even depose the government of PASOK when its majority became meagre and this is why he was consumed by some uneasiness. Based on this consideration, some people believe his turn at the last moment did not arise from the above described reasons, but from a premeditated tactic of Papandreu to mislead his opponent and take him by surprise. But such an analysis is most probably not valid for a question of such importance. Only blind forces at work can cause abrupt changes of this scope.

For as long as Karamanlis maintained his position, the right wing was relatively quiet, for its power was guaranteed. The political conflict — although hard — was being maintained within the given legal and constitutional framework. Most importantly, the people saw this as an obstacle and considered that the rest of the problems could not be resolved unless this one was got out of the way. But despite all this, as said above, the people's resistance was passive.

Karamanlis was at the same time an important guarantee for the regime as far as our transatlantic "protectors" were concerned. It is not simply the question of one person. It is the question of PASOK's policy of collaboration with the existing political power, which kept the Americans quite assured over the meaning of its "socialist" statements, for as long as it continued.

In order to underline the importance of this collaboration, and of its termination, let us also note:

- In 1967 a military dictatorship against the workers and popular mass

movement was installed in Greece by the Americans.

- PASOK is a popular movement founded in 1974, with a very radical programme — far more radical than that of any other social-democratic party of Europe. It grew on the basis of a militant opposition to the right wing in general and Karamanlis in particular, under conditions of an eruptive rise of the movement. Karamanlis says characteristically about this period: "I made a state out of the chaos that I found." And this is true. (Let us clarify here that when we say "radical" and "militant", we are comparing PASOK with social-democratic parties or formations.)

- PASOK has at its disposal an organised party mechanism throughout the country, such as no other social democratic party of Europe has.

- The unresolved democratic problems and those of imperialist dependence which exist in Greece, mainly because of its economic and strategic position and also because of the betrayed revolution of 1944-49 have made the movement very eruptive in every serious phase it has gone through.

- The Communist Party had a very big strength, which is now partly absorbed by PASOK, but can be revived in abrupt shifts of alignment, which can take place, with unpredictable consequences for capitalism, since such new forces would certainly not be easily accommodated inside the moulds of the CP's class conciliator leadership.

These factors and so many others made the collaboration of PASOK with Karamanlis a necessary guarantee for the bourgeoisie.

The rupture that took place on March 9 is firstly a great and clear victory of the movement against the bourgeoisie and its historically established institutions; and it is secondly a development with possibly very unpleasant consequences for the bourgeoisie in the long run.

### What does the future hold?

Let us now come to the third question: what impact is the new policy of PASOK likely to have on the political situation?

The answer to this question is really difficult. We will first summarise the aims of the basic political forces involved.

- The right wing seeks to achieve two goals through the present crisis: to increase its strength in the coming elections by proving that PASOK is an unreliable, catastrophic movement and that socialism (as they like to see it) is a strange fruit for the country. It also seeks to maintain the present constitution and to achieve the return of Karamanlis — which is not impossible.

- PASOK seeks to gain parliamentary majority plus the presidency of Sarfzetakis, together with the revision of the constitution, in order to con-

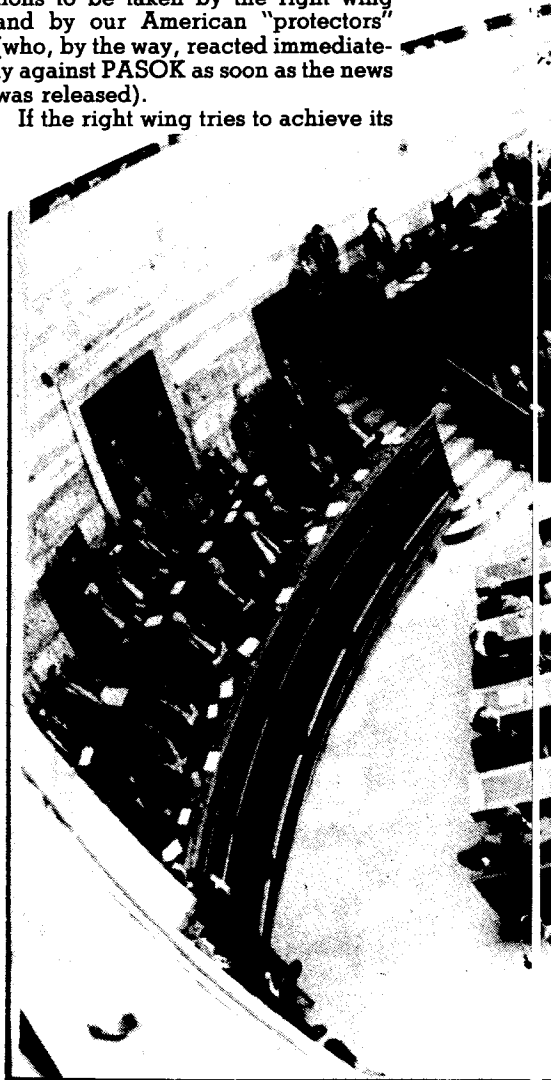
tinue unimpeded with the other sides of its policy, that is the administering of the capitalist crisis.

- The Communist Party supports the presidency of Sarfzetakis and seeks — something impossible — a guaranteed parliamentary representation, which they hope would force Papandreu to include the CP in the government with some ministerial posts. It has declared its willingness to participate in government.

- There is of course the other, the essential factor: the workers and popular movement. This has been put aside by its leaderships, which strive to solve the problems at top level, and even then — as always — with absolutely antidemocratic manoeuvres. To the extent that this major political crisis was provoked by this movement, it is obvious that workers' combativity is increased. Which is, of course, an essential factor for the destabilisation of "normality" and for change in the existing balance of forces. But, in the framework of a dialectical analysis, we should not overlook the possibility that the masses may go through a period of relative satisfaction, followed by a political confidence in the leaderships.

This will depend mainly on the options to be taken by the right wing and by our American "protectors" (who, by the way, reacted immediately against PASOK as soon as the news was released).

If the right wing tries to achieve its



aims with the "unorthodox" methods of political destabilisation and economic sabotage they have used in the past, then we are going to have not simply a reaction of the masses, but a new quality in the movement. If it chooses to let time solve the problem through the unavoidable weakening of PASOK, then such developments will be postponed for a little later.

We cannot risk new predictions, since Papandreou's latest turn has torn to pieces all previous forecasts. The whole of the left had fallen into the trap of the collaboration between PASOK and Karamanlis, apparently underestimating the forces at work under the ground.

There is, however, something certain. The political turn of March 9 closes one chapter in the history of PASOK and in our political life. This was the chapter of PASOK sharing political power with the right wing through Karamanlis. One prop of the

right wing within the policy of PASOK is being removed as well as one pretext PASOK had for the non materialisation of its programme. Thus the opposites become more clear and so the unavoidable conflict comes closer.

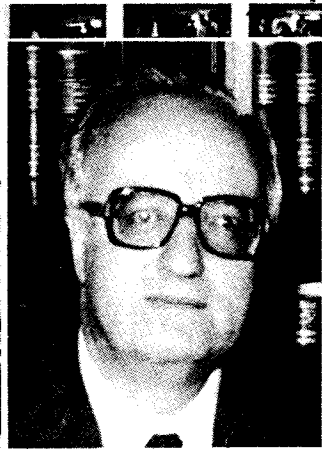
Certain "Marxist" analyses, saying that PASOK is a new party of the bourgeoisie, which in one form or another will administer political power, from now on, forget an important "detail": that today, in a period of crisis, the bourgeoisie cannot afford to govern through formations of a social-democratic type. It needs leaderships of the Reagan and Thatcher type. Ad the sole reason it has tolerated PASOK to date, was to try and wear it out and place the crisis on its shoulders.

The workers and popular movement which, as we explained, lie behind the political scene, will unfortunately not be able in the near future to express themselves directly with a

revolutionary political presence on a mass scale. But, through all these developments, many things are going to change at a fast pace.

The existing broad extraparlimentary left, together with some of the Trotskyist groupings, stood just as wrongly after PASOK's political turn as they did before it. Whilst they were preparing a campaign against Karmanlis's re-election, they had no concrete transitional proposal on the question of the Presidency. Whilst they were explaining how much the collaboration between PASOK and Karamanlis was an inseparable part of the policies of compromise, they explained afterwards with the same facility how the same policies are being served by the opposite move. They consider the main element of the new situation to be that Papandreou made a manoeuvre in order to follow a more reactionary policy.

Such a result is certainly possible; but it will be decided in the struggle of living forces taking place today. Those who prejudge it fatalistically are condemning only themselves.



View of the Greek parliament (inset) Sarfetzakis.

# Soaring cost of sickness in Thatcher's Britain

By JOHN LISTER

**SOARING** charges and private services represent the changing face of our National Health Service under the Tories. Since Thatcher took office, prescription charges alone have been increased *tenfold* — from 20p in 1979 to £2 as of April 1. But the increases won't stop now: prescriptions are expected to rise in price again over the next two years at around *double* the rate of inflation.

Already, though the average prescription cost is now £4.50, it is substantially cheaper to buy many drugs at retail prices than to pay for an NHS prescription.

Meanwhile dental charges have skyrocketed, to a minimum charge of £17 this year, with a ceiling of around £135 for more complex treatment. Government plans include further increases in these charges, too.

Tightfisted Tory policies mean that only the poorest among those needing spectacles now qualify for NHS frames — and these are available only from private companies. The DHSS is issuing vouchers entitling children under 16; students under 19; social security claimants and the means-tested poor to a pair of the cheapest spectacles available. For others who previously used NHS lenses or contact lenses there are massive increases in charges. Special contact lenses will in one leap increase nearly *threefold* in price, from £18.80 to a staggering £50. Complex spectacle lenses go up from £11.75 to £29.

The price increases and axeing of NHS spectacles are part of the government plan completely to privatise the whole optical service.

But the notion of vouchers exchangeable for health services is being looked at much more widely by the Tory leaders (who, in the words of Health Minister Kenneth Clarke at last year's Conservative Conference, have "stopped feeling quite so guilty about charging policy").

Last year a detailed "Think Tank" report from the reactionary Adam Smith Institute floated the idea of a credit card-style "medicard" which would be issued free to claimants and the means-tested poor, but which could be "topped up" by private insurance or cash payments, and would introduce the concept of cost and payment to the full range of medical and hospital services. Anyone other than the utterly destitute would need to pay for private medical insurance.

More recently there has been talk of "paying" for GP services with vouchers,



with GPs in turn being encouraged to "shop around" for the cheapest available hospital care for their patients. Kenneth Clarke, in denying that a voucher scheme is about to be brought forward, recently told a *Financial Times* conference on Private Health that he sees private GP services as one way of cutting some of the £4 billion NHS bill for family medical services. Clarke also spoke approvingly of what he sees as the "benefits to the consumer" of a "healthy private hospital sector".

Even for those who disapprove of private medicine and choose to remain within the NHS, the constraints of cash limits on health authorities are raising the menace of increasing charges. The hard-pressed Croydon District Health Authority is no doubt only the first of many to discuss schemes for raising extra money which include charging in-patients for their meals, and renting out hospital clinics and facilities to the private sector in the evenings and at weekends. A redecoration of the tatty wards in Croydon's NHS hospitals is also seen as a way to lure in fee-paying private patients.

If we are not to wave goodbye for ever to the National Health Service, it is essential

that the broader labour movement as well as health workers and health unions is mobilised in opposition to the Tory attacks. The failure of NHS unions to take action to support the miners can now be seen as a vital missed opportunity.

To make a fightback credible, health union leaders must be forced to give serious practical support to those workers — like the cleaners at Barking and Addenbrookes — who take strike action against cuts in NHS standards of patient care. And Shadow social services secretary Michael Meacher must be brought into line, and told by the labour movement to stop claiming — to the delight of the mass media — that it is "impossible" to abolish private medicine or to scrap prescription charges. If the labour movement leadership was half as committed to defence of the NHS as the Tories are to carving it up for maximum private profit, we would at least have sizable mass campaigns on the issue across the country.

The huge potential support for a serious campaign in defence of the NHS, and its power as a rallying point of opposition to Tory attacks underlines the need for urgent action.



(With a cheque from Kinnock)

# Tories head for "flag day" NHS

By JOHN LISTER

WITH many health authorities desperately strapped for cash as a result of rigid Tory cash limits, private charity funding even of basic services is gaining increased prominence.

February saw a major national outcry over the proposed closure of Guy's Hospital heart unit, which was £272,000 overspent after exceeding its quota for operations. A shutdown would have threatened the lives of up to 100 patients on the waiting list.

After appeals to District and Regional health authorities and to the DHSS had failed to produce any extra funding an American millionaire (and supporter of NHS cutbacks) finally dipped into his wallet and made a donation of £272,000 to keep the unit open. The terms of the donation however meant that the operations it financed were conducted outside the NHS: the heart unit itself remains overspent, and may yet have to close for up to four months in the next financial year in order to balance its books - with fearful consequences to heart patients in the London area.

As the surgeon in charge of the Guy's heart unit said: "It is humiliating that charity should be necessary." But the Guy's case is far from unique.

Another embarrassing example is at Northwick Park hospital, built and equipped in the early 1970s, where cardiac equipment is becoming clapped out and obsolete, with no NHS money available to replace it. The cardiac unit has now turned to the charitable efforts of the Brent and Harrow British Heart Foundation to raise funds for new machines: the unit treats more than 1,500 each year.

And London's Tory evening Standard newspaper - a diehard defender of Fowler's every cut - has been quick to make cheap capital out of promoting a £1 million appeal for a body scanner at King's College Hospital. The Standard took up the campaign after a badly injured policeman was sent to the private Cromwell hospital for an emergency body-scan. In fact some 350 patients a year have for some time been referred for body scans from King's to other London hospitals, NHS and private. Most of them didn't get police escorts to cross London quickly, as were provided for the policeman, but had to endure long

journeys in rush-hour traffic, and long waits on arrival for the scan. But until a cop was inconvenienced, the Standard was happy to keep quiet.

Among the "big names" roped in to the Standard campaign was reactionary "Miss World" organiser Eric Morley, who sits on Camberwell Health Authority, and declared that:

"Without such an appeal, King's has

as much chance of getting a scanner in the next 10 years as I have of climbing Mount Everest."

The "Standard" campaign directs attention deliberately away from the question of whether such vital equipment should be provided and funded by the National Health Service, as it is by health services in many other countries. But many have been drawn - albeit



with a slightly critical concern – into the “do-gooding” hysteria, including Opposition leader Neil Kinnock, who sent in his own cheque to the Standard appeal.

A few years ago, as newly promoted Shadow minister, Neil Kinnock himself was warning of the danger of a “flag day National Health Service” if Tory policies continued. Unless he changes track on donations to such appeals, Kinnock is likely to find himself busy writing cheques as his prophecies are fulfilled.

The government is keen to encourage charity funding, which no doubt gives the well-to-do a buzz of quiet satisfaction, while covering over some of the more glaring gaps in NHS provision.

The latest Budget announced the lifting of VAT on computers donated for medical use. It seems that health in Thatcher’s Britain is headed once more for the dark ages of meagre charity provision for the poor, alongside expensive private schemes which ensure that the wealthy and the privileged who make the policies and impose the cuts do not suffer any indignity or discomfort as a result of inadequate state facilities.



“Dear Mr. President: now that you’ve spent so much on defense to protect our way of life, maybe you could do something to make our way of life worth protecting. . . .”

# Cervical cancer hits the headlines

By MARY LEWIS

CERVICAL cancer is in the news for all the wrong reasons. About 2,000 women die a year of cervical cancer and about 1,000 could be saved. The scandal of the recent deaths have highlighted the inadequacies of the health service and unfortunately will not be isolated exceptions.

The medical profession is secretive and very careful about what information they give out and to whom – information is power. But suddenly it’s our fault for not asking for the results of our smear tests!

Women all over Britain are now being told to contact their doctors to check the results of the last smear test they had. But doing this is highlighting the problems facing the health service and some of the mistakes that have been made – some doctors have no record of the result being returned from the laboratory; some labs have refused to process the smear because they only have facilities to do one test per woman every 5 years, unless the medical need is specified.

At the moment doctors and laboratories are being helpful but the basic problem is the system cannot cope with the demand.

Frank Dobson MP (the Shadow Health Minister) has produced a paper which points out that it would only cost £16.2 million to set up a national computerised call and recall system, and £2.4 million per year to run thereafter. This would ensure that every woman would be called to be screened regularly. The cost in terms of the NHS budget is a pittance and when set against the lives it would save, such spending is essential. If we assume the Tories don’t actually

want to kill about 1,000 women a year, why don’t they sort out this tiny bit of expenditure?

The real answer is not the problem of recall but the state of the pathology laboratories. They have been cut back and run down for a long time now and they would not cope if the women eligible for cervical smears started to ask for them regularly.

All this is not taking into account the fact that the present recommended age to start having smears (30 years), and the time gap between smears (5 years), are both totally inadequate to combat cervical cancer. There is a lot of evidence that more and more younger

women are getting cervical cancer and that some “strains” of the cancer are taking a hold that is beyond help within the present 5 year time gap. Women should have cervical smears every 2 years from the time they become sexually active (on average 19-20 years old).

If the Path. labs can’t cope with the present inadequate recommendations just imagine how hopeless it would prove if faced with the demand that is actually required.

The rundown, cut back and “natural wastage” of Pathology laboratories means they could not provide the service demanded by the recall system Frank Dobson wants. To put the path. labs back on their feet would cost a lot more than £16.2 million – and that is why about 1,000 women a year will die needlessly. The cuts do kill.

- ↖ Cuts
- ↖ Worse pay
- ↖ Poor service
- ↖ More central control
- ↖ Job insecurity
- ↖ Redundancies
- Cuts →
- Closures →
- More central control →
- Poor service →



**HERE COME THE PROFITEERS**

Down go NHS standards!

Free newspaper against NHS cuts and privatisation – from London Health Emergency, 335, Grays Inn Rd., London WC1.

# Crises are bursting out all over, but many Marxists are caught napping

## POP GOES THE SCHEMA!

FOR many Western bankers and imperialist chiefs, it must seem that the whole world is erupting into an uncontrollable rash of crises. The last month has seen three massive general strikes paralyse the economies of Bolivia, Denmark and Sudan, along with a new peak in the mass resistance of the black working class to apartheid rule in South Africa. In addition there has been a substantial escalation of the Iran/Iraq war, and a continuing failure of Zionist strong-arm tactics to control the Arab masses of Lebanon.

In *Bolivia* ten thousand defiant dynamite-toting miners converged on the capital La Paz at the vanguard of a 16-day general strike, demanding index-linking of wages to protect against the country's 3,400% inflation. Eventually the strike was called off by union leaders after a 500% pay settlement was accepted. But the popular front government of President Siles still looks extremely shaky, with the grim prospect that former military dictator Hugo Banzer could win the now-postponed coming elections.

*Denmark's* official national strike by 300,000 private sector workers, supported by increasing numbers of

**Recent major events in Bolivia, Sudan and Denmark have emerged in a way not expected by the largest international grouping of Marxists. HARRY SLOAN looks at the implications.**

public sector employees, began in opposition to the imposition of a wage-cutting 2% pay increase by the right wing government. The strike continued in defiance of emergency legislation, and was backed up by a 100,000-strong demonstration in Copenhagen. Though union leaders have done their best to hold back the action, this colossal show of strength, paralysing much of the country, is a further reminder of the potential power of the working class (and a stark contrast to the British TUC's miserable betrayal of the miners' strike).

In *Sudan*, growing mass opposition to the corrupt and reactionary Numeiri regime culminated in a 3-day general strike in Khartoum in

which police and armed forces refused to mount their usual campaign of brutal repression. Instead army chiefs moved to depose Numeiri — throwing a new level of uncertainty into the affairs of a country bogged down with a staggering £9 billion foreign debts, mass starvation, and facing a popular secessionary movement in the south of the country. Sudan has been utilised by US imperialism as a strategic foothold in northern Africa; but as with the Shah of Iran, US military aid has done little in the last analysis to buttress Numeiri against a genuine upsurge of mass opposition.

None of these very different but major political developments come out of a clear sky. Each was the product of a process of class struggle which created the basis for a sudden explosion of militant mass action. Similarly, the new escalation of brute repression by the apartheid regime in South Africa, gunning down black protestors in a grotesque replay on the very anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, flowed out of the sharpening polarisation between the black working class and the white capitalists.

To understand and be ready to res-



Tanks called on the streets of Bolivia's capital, La Paz, by the popular front government during the 16-day general strike.

pond with clear policies and analysis in such rapid developments is the key reason for the development of Marxist analysis and the building of Marxist parties.

But at least one international Marxist current has been caught wrong-footed by the recent spate of explosive struggles. The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (whose British co-thinkers support the paper *Socialist Action*) has for the past few years seen the world class struggle through the narrow focus of events in Central America. This USFI focus on Central America is not simply an over-enthusiastic response to the courage and tenacity of the Sandinistas and the FMLN fighters: it is also an inverted reflection of the political counteroffensive being waged by the Reagan administration. Though motivated from largely healthy "anti-imperialist" instincts, this method of response is a major weakness.

Concentration of attention and energy appeared to have reached its peak with the uncritical support for the politics and leadership of the Castro bureaucracy in Cuba extended in recent years by the USFI's main American sympathising organisation, the SWP: but more recently the USFI's European leadership have become equally slavish adherents of the Sandinista leadership in Nicaragua.

The result of this fixation with Central America has been to distract the USFI from any serious analysis or discussion on other major arenas of the class struggle internationally. At the recent World Congress of the USFI, the only detailed resolutions tabled for debate were on Poland and Central America. There were no documents or debate on South America, Africa, Asia or Western Europe.

To arrive at a world view and priorities for action on the basis of simply reacting *against* imperialist priorities can be seriously misleading. At worst it can lead — as in the case of the American SWP — into the same type of crass division of the world into "camps" not dissimilar from the assessment of Castro or the Kremlin leaders. The SWP still includes the brutal Khomeini regime in the "anti-imperialist" camp. Yet from essentially the same starting point, General Jaruzelski or Gorbachev could be said to be in "our" camp because they "oppose Reagan" — irrespective of their brutal opposition to any independent organisations of the working class in Poland or the USSR!

In opposition to such crude "camp" analysis, Marxism must start from the independent needs and struggles of the working class in the international fight against imperialist exploitation and Stalinist bureaucracy.

The other danger of a world-view based simply on "anti-imperialist" gut response is that it means that Marxists in the imperialist countries



Gorbachev — "opposed" to Reagan, but a ruthless enemy of independent workers' struggles.

tend to draw up schemas and perspectives which follow the public actions and attention of the imperialists themselves. Yet as the recent months have shown it can be the more peripheral countries less subject to the immediate plans and involvement of imperialism which can produce the most explosive events. Alternatively — as in Denmark — there can be a sudden escalation of class struggle in countries where the workers' movement has long been presumed — by employers and by many Marxists — to be both placid and tightly controlled by the labour bureaucracy.

One more disadvantage of the USFI's impressionist and subjective view of the world is that in tending to follow the lines of the most direct imperialist involvement it tends also — like imperialism — to neglect whole regions or even continents — like much of Africa and Asia. A failure of Marxists to discuss and analyse the particular forms of struggle and political problems in these countries produces a lasting weakness of programme and perspective which in turn makes it less likely that militants from Africa or Asia find sufficient to attract them to the banner of Marxism. The problem therefore feeds on itself.

Despite the acreage of print in the USFI sections' publications devoted to coverage on Nicaragua and El Salvador much of this has been reprints of official handouts from the FSLN and FMLN; little has been done to analyse the situation or present an independent Marxist point of view. While the USFI has declared its un-

critical support for the Salvadorean FMLN/FDR liberation front, for example, there has been virtually no systematic political examination of the various extremely heterogeneous groupings which comprise the Front, and no critical evaluation of the decisive role now being played within it by the Salvadorean Communist Party.

It also heavily underplays the involvement in the FDR of international social democracy, and fails to examine the far-from healthy motives of the Mexican bourgeoisie and other forces promoting the "Contadora" peace talks — which the USFI supports.

So while throwing extensive emphasis upon Central America, the USFI approach fails to shed much Marxist light on events, and largely relegates itself to the role of international cheer-leaders for the guerrilla struggle in El Salvador and the reconstruction work of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

The obsessive focus on Nicaragua and El Salvador (two countries where, ironically, the USFI is *opposed* to building Marxist parties) meant that the Congress offered effectively no preparation for the main struggles that have erupted since: the schema of Nicaragua and its leadership as some kind of "model", and of events revolving around the "high point" of Central America has shown itself to be thoroughly disorientating for this, the largest international current of Marxists.

Finally, if the attention of Marxists in the advanced imperialist countries is focussed so heavily on expected events in one particular part of the world — such as Central America — they can find themselves politically and organisationally unprepared to act decisively over sharp turns in events in their "own" countries.

Nobody would expect a relatively small world-wide organisation of Marxists correctly to predict every coming event or accurately to foresee the sequences of events. But to anyone not dazzled by ecstatic accounts of events in Nicaragua, the upheavals in Bolivia, Sudan and South Africa were more or less predictable. Even the capitalist press predicted them — and had been giving background coverage.

Potential eruptions continue to simmer in Peru (where there have been powerful strikes), the Philippines, and of course the Middle East and the Gulf.

Less dramatic, but equally significant tests for the left are on the horizon in France, with the crisis of the Mitterand government and the rise of the extreme right wing.

The longer the USFI clings to its inappropriate schema of development and fails to recognise that Central America is simply one (admittedly sharp) expression of the unstable balance of class forces internationally, the more confused its supporters will become.

# The Great GLC Debacle



Ken Livingstone

## Or how not to build a fight against Tory attacks

**ALONE** of all the London Labour Authorities the GLC collapsed immediately without a fight and passed a ratecapped budget at less than even the maximum allowed by the government. This abject surrender was the worst possible start to the campaign against the Tory Rates Act and doubly destructive because of the "left credentials" of the GLC.

### The Line-up

Why did this debacle occur? A leaflet circulating around County Hall from a few NUPE members in industry and employment in the aftermath of the budget making gives a simplistic but illuminating insight into the GLC Labour Group. It divides it three ways:

### By MICK WOODS

- *The McDonnell Faction* — those serious about implementing Labour Party policy and raising rates to pay for services. This was attacked in the leaflet.

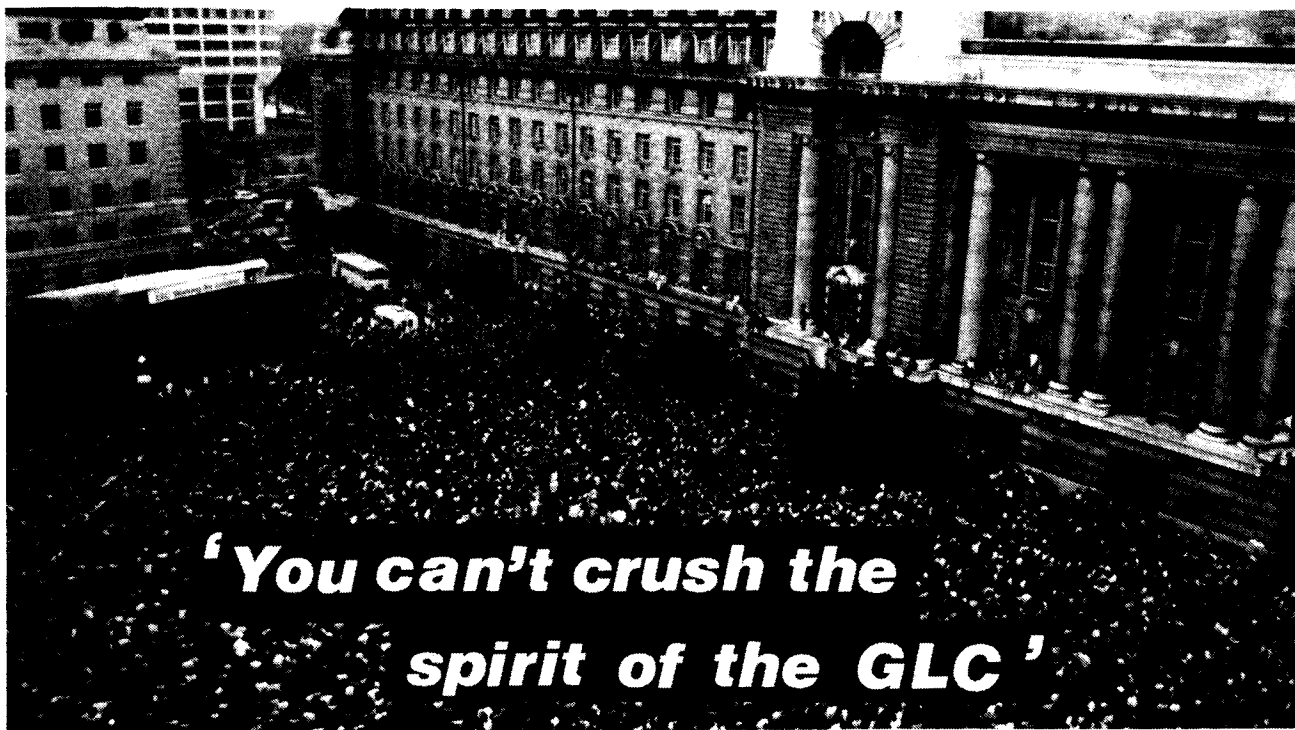
- *The Livingstone Faction* — those serious about being MPs and getting out of local government.

- *The Rabble* — the detritus of the labour movement who in happier and more stable times had been put into County Hall if they were clearly incapable of holding responsible office in Local Government or becoming MPs.

Although simplistic and ultra left in parts this is a good point of departure for investigating the mechanics of what happened.

### Who leads the GLC?

The present GLC Labour Group is not a left group but has been a group where the right have been leaderless and the centre acquiescent to the leadership of Ken Livingstone. Coming to power as he did by managing to convince the centre that their candidate couldn't beat Andrew McIntosh, the incumbent right-winger, he has carved out a position as not only leader of the GLC but until recently the standard bearer of the Labour left in London. The earlier period of the GLC saw him pilloried in the press for his correct and principled positions on Ireland, Gay Rights, Women's Liberation and Racism. This constant and frantic press attack has turned into its opposite and ended up creating Ken as LBC's Man of the Year. Many see him as a replacement for the craven Kinnock.



**'You can't crush the  
spirit of the GLC'**

A rather overoptimistic view from London Labour Briefing last year!

GLC policy has reflected these progressive "liberal" policies and allied to the warmed up AES policies of the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB) given an uncharacteristically radical glow to the GLC.

This, however, has not carried over into defiance of the law to defend Londoners.

### Fares Fair — a preview of disaster

In 1982 the GLC's cheap fares policy was declared illegal by Lord Denning after challenge from the London Borough of Bromley. Instead of refusing to comply with this obviously political judgement the GLC leadership played a double-game.

In an acrimonious battle in the Labour Group the decision to defy the government was taken 24 to 22. No whip was put on the 22 votes who later, with Tory assistance, defeated Fares Fair. While a small number of councillors allied themselves with those attempting further resistance by not paying the increase, Livingstone made a point of going on television and paying the new fare.

The GLC succeeded in carrying through a partial fares reform later that year. At no time, however, did it give leadership to those LT workers who were prepared to go further than their union leaderships to improve and protect jobs and services.

### The present debacle — a run-up

While on the surface the GLC was 110% opposed to ratecapping it quickly became evident that the Group was unprepared to go all the way. John McDonnell wrote in December "Labour Briefing", urging the movement to enforce socialist discipline on their councillors.

"For those CLPs which are represented by a Labour GLC Councillor it is vital that CLPs mandate their GLC member to support non-compliance and not fixing a rate. If the GLC councillor is not willing to stand firm he or she should be asked to stand down to allow the CLP to replace him/her with a comrade who will adhere to party policy."

The article went on to name those unprepared to follow party policy. For this McDonnell was attacked for uncomradely behaviour and... (wait for it) "witch-hunting", not only by the right but also by the leadership of the Group.

At the same time, Ken Livingstone was making the following speeches for public consumption, "in line with the rest of the Labour Boroughs we shall not make a rate or levy a precept under the rate-capped system." Fine, but how do we deliver?

### Strategy and Fakery

It seemed evident that the strategy of the leadership was to tub-thump, win the vote on the Group and then blame a handful of right-wing



The GLC capitulated on Fares Fair without attempting to mobilise London Transport workforce.

renegades who would inevitably break ranks. That way nearly everybody's hands stayed clean and nobody got hurt. What ruined this was the legal opinion obtained by John McDonnell during the week preceding London Labour Party Conference that the Tories need not legally vote for a legal Labour Budget if their own budget was defeated, i.e., that they could abstain and put the Labour Group on the hook. From there on in it became necessary for those who would not fight to undermine any shred of socialist principle in the Labour Group by whatever means necessary.

### March 3 and 4

The local government debate at London Labour Party Conference was interesting for two things.

1. John McDonnell exposed the package which was eventually passed by Labour Group — a complicated bit of creative accounting plus raiding the capital fund to create a "growth budget". This was overwhelmingly rejected by Conference.

2. A leftist attack on the boroughs by Ken Livingstone for adopting an equivocal stance on illegality. Many of us wondered why this was raised there and then — we didn't have long to wait.

The Labour Group decision to set a legal rate on March 4 was a forgone conclusion. Accusations of "dishonesty" and "deception" were thrown at John McDonnell and the boroughs by Ken Livingstone who then hypocritically voted for the illegal budget he had worked so hard to undermine.

### The final debacle

The rest is history to an extent — 10 members of the Labour Group (Tony

Banks, Paul Boateng, Bryn Davies, Jenni Fletcher, Lesley Hammond, John McDonnell, Paul Moore, Charlie Rossi, Dave Wetzel and Deirdre Wood) refused to vote for the ratecapped budget in full council and necessitated an eleventh hour piece of diplomacy by the leadership to smooth the way for 15 members of the Group to vote with the Tories and Alliance for a rate 3p below the ratecapped levels.

### Costs and principles

Jenkin deliberately set the ratecap at a high level this year to allow councils to engage in these kind of manoeuvres to set legal no-cuts budgets or at least to muddle through for another year. While the fight is still in balance now, the GLC debacle has seriously undermined the fight.

The GLC, while coming first into the front line for illegality, was fighting not only on this front but also on the front of abolition. To comply this year and juggle figures, use balances and, with open or tacit government compliance, raid the capital fund demonstrates pretty conclusively an acceptance of abolition from the Labour Group Majority. The boroughs cannot be confronted with a removal of responsibility next year, and this explains the surprising resistance from many right-wing Groups around London.

If the Rates Act was to be confronted, it had to be this year. Solidarity was the issue: but for most of the GLC Labour Group, the threats of bankruptcy and — even worse — being debarred from public office loomed larger.

Margaret Hodge, the leader of Islington Council, speaking at a Labour Party Workplace Branch meeting at

County Hall on Tuesday March 26, made the point that for Ken Livingstone the allure of a parliamentary seat in Brent East seemed to push any notion of support for the boroughs to the side. That seemed to say it all. Indeed, Livingstone's appearance on the London Programme, rubbishing the whole no rate tactic, seemed to many to go beyond personal political skin-saving and into the realm of incitement to break party policy and shoulder Kinnock's famous "dented shield".

#### The way forward?

At the end of these articles one feels obliged to raise a few snappy slogans to chart the advance of the movement. In this case the lessons we have learnt are largely negative. We have learnt that accountability in our movement cannot mean passing resolutions but an uncompromising fight for a socialist leadership on the Councils. Those who broke party policy and their apologists must be treated as political lepers and we should demand a full accounting of the GLC debacle in the movement to dispel the confusion in our ranks.

The rightwing is now rampant in County Hall in the current atmosphere of skinsaving and they even have a majority on the new Policy and Resources "super-committee". The GLC has shifted from a centre-left to a centre right alignment.

Full support must therefore be given not only to those councils and

**74%**  
**of the GLC labour group**  
**are scabs**

*One ad not getting full page GLC press treatment.*

unions still in the fight but the movement must demand and ensure that those in County Hall who held the line are not subjected to a witch-hunt.

#### The Notts Area of Ratecapping

It is appropriate to end on the prophetic words of John McDonnell in a letter to Ken Livingstone dated October 1, 1984.

"The effect of a defeated, acquiescent GLC on the morale of the Left in the long term is also an important consideration for me. Though obviously the sight of a left GLC victorious over a Tory govern-

ment would be a tremendous boost for the movement, comrades will understand with strong sympathetic support if we take a firm stand and are beaten. However, we will undermine the confidence placed in us by hundreds of thousands of socialists throughout the country if we are seen to be capitulating to a Thatcherite government or even breaking ranks with other socialist councils and ducking the fight with the government by cooking our books. It is the difference between our GLC being remembered as George Lansbury and Poplar or Marshall Petain and the Vichy Government."

## RATECAPPING

# Escalate the action!

THE miners were on strike for a year to defend their jobs and communities. The ratecapping confrontation has been with us for barely two months, yet already the action is crumbling.

The main stumbling block in the way of councillors standing firm has been the issue of "illegality". Individual councillors have declared that they won't subject themselves to the threat of surcharge, removal and disqualification from public office. They don't seem to have learned the lessons of history: that the best way of changing the law is to break it, shown by trade unionists from the Tolpuddle Martyrs to the defeat of the Industrial Relations Act in the early 70s; from the suffragettes to the Greenham women.

Thousands of miners, women and labour movement activists broke laws on secondary picketing, and guidelines on picket numbers (enforced as the law) routinely

#### By JENNY FISHER

during the miners strike, so that the struggle could be carried out effectively. They were not all arrested. The Tories are selective about when they use the law; they don't want to create martyrs which the labour movement would be inspired to defend. As the numbers of Councils defying the law dwindle, it will be easier for them to be picked off. It would have been an impossible situation for the government if hundreds of councillors had defied the law together: that was the reasoning behind a joint fight this year. Those who are protecting themselves by ending the defiance of their own Councils are sabotaging the chances of other Councils in the fight.

Councillors have known for a long time that confrontation over ratecapping was coming up; and that Labour Party policy was not to set a rate. Those who were *really* against cuts had plenty of time to resign with some measure of dignity if they

weren't prepared to break the law — which some did. The implication of staying in office and refusing to fight must be lack of seriousness over defending the working class in the face of Tory cuts.

What could, of course, have forced the issue would have been strong support from the trade unions and the Labour Party. Many Councils voted for a "no rate" position with mass lobbies packed into the Council chamber and surrounding the Town Hall. The votes would probably have gone that way anyway; but many councillors have since spoken about the vital part the lobbies played in supporting them in voting for "no rate" and giving them a confidence in the fight which endured after the meeting.

But large lobbies by activists are not enough. Councillors need the backing of local trade unions: that they will strike in defence of jobs and services if councillors are surcharged or removed. But we also need the weight of the public sector unions nationally behind pledges for local action.

Local strike action will not be enough to



Labour councillors with Jenkins head on a platter

shift the Tories: those who say that Thatcher won't care if Camden residents don't have their bins emptied, or if the streets aren't swept in Islington, are right. But the public sector unions *have* got the power to shift the government; especially after the massive blow to the economy inflicted by the miners strike.

The trade union silence on *how* they're going to fight ratecapping — having stated their position that "it's a bad thing" — is shameful. The rank and file cannot let union leaders get away with refusing to fight massive attacks on jobs, or on the services workers need.

Rank and file groups — such as shop stewards committees of particular unions, and wider groupings, such as the London Shop Stewards Committee "London Bridge" — must turn the pressure on the leaders of the public sector unions to back workers in this fight. It's clear that the leadership of Scargill, in unequivocally arguing the miners' case, made a difference to the miners strike; as opposed to the feeble attitude of Tuffin in the Post Office, where workers were just as prepared as the miners to fight attacks on jobs. The leaders of national unions could make a huge difference to the strength of this battle: without pressure from the rank and file for action, they will be content to leave local workers isolated.

The role of the Labour Party leadership is important in any anti-cuts struggle; but it's crucial in a local government fight conducted in accordance with Labour Party policy. With the Labour Party leadership not prepared to come out and defend the necessary "illegal" measures, it's not surprising individual councillors are hesitant.

The left won the day at the Labour Party local government conference; when the policy of "no rate" was won — with all its consequences — against Kinnock's "dented shield approach" of "if the Tories make cuts, it's nasty and you can mention it in the House of Commons; if the Tories get Labour Councils to make cuts on the Tories' behalf, it's more humane."

The problem is that the Kinnock leadership has ignored party policy; and by doing that, it has subverted not only an anti-government struggle, but a policy which the Party had decided on as a whole. This is, of course, nothing new; but the lessons need to be drawn by all Labour Party activists. Many campaigns are working to change — or keep gains made in — Party policy. But unless we can call our leaders and representatives to account, policy changes will be useless.

But the leadership are not only subverting party policy by refusing to speak out; they have also succeeded in pressuring the Local Government Information Unit (the former Local Government Campaign Unit) and the Association of London Authorities to water down their policies, and to hold back from escalating the struggle now it's underway. In this way, the right wing of the Party have been able, as a minority, to exercise a veto over the best way of implementing Party policy.

The pressure they have put on the LGIU and ALA must be countered by pressure from Labour Groups and local authority unions, in favour of concrete steps to escalate the action. Councils, with LGIU and ALA support, must stop making payments to the state and its backers; payments of National Insurance, tax, police precepts, loan repayments. With the capitulation of ILEA and the GLC, the financial impact on the government and the City will be less than it could have been; but it will be a positive step for Councils to take to step up the confrontation.

The Kinnock leadership are not the only ones to prefer the "dented shield" approach. As they look for excuses to avoid the fight, councillors are working on the GLC model of the "fallback budget". Council officers are helping them; or in some cases — such as Hackney — preempting them, by working out their own fallback budgets and leaking details to the press.

There are three main problems about fallback budgets. First, not every Council can make use of reserves and/or creative

accounting to lessen the cuts. Councils which resort to fallback budgets are therefore isolating other Councils; leaving them to fight alone.

Promises that "we'll keep going this year, and fight next year" are just feeble excuses. The response next year to a call for a fight against cuts will be: "you said there would be cuts last year, then you found a way to manage: now you're crying wolf again." And Councils may not have the luxury of waiting till next year, depending on the speed with which the Tories institute privatisation. If a joint fight can't be waged now to defend a direct works department from the effects of ratecapping, what will it be like defending that department in six months time from the effects of compulsory privatisation?

Secondly, fallback budgets are not harmless, "standstill" budgets, which won't lead to cuts. Most Councils are producing fallback budgets to give *less* cuts than government limits would mean; but cuts are still there. No fallback budget provides for filling vacancies, etc., and restoring past cuts. Fallback budgets are also linked to rent and rate increases: so the working class is now expected to pay for the privilege of having less cuts!

Thirdly, ratecapping is not just about money, but also about local democracy. Fallback budgets accept the principle that central government can veto the decisions of the "local ballot box" and dictate how much Councils spend, and what they spend it on. Councils seem to have forgotten that the Bill includes that power — dressed up as an "appeals procedure".

Some of the fallback budgets are being referred to as "deficit budgets". When the Labour Party originally considered "deficit budgets" as a tactic, the strategy was for a massive deficit, which would provoke a crisis very quickly, and lead to the same confrontation situation to defend jobs and services that we have now. The right cannot get away with dressing up their cuts as "deficit budgets", as if they were sticking to a lost Labour Party strategy, and were still fighting. They cannot be allowed to imply that the strategy the Labour Party chose was at fault. Their version of "deficit budgets" is to find a way to get by for the majority of the year — by selling Council property and leasing it back to create artificial injections of capital, etc. — and have a minor crisis some time in the future. That would not be strong enough to lead an individual fight against cuts in 10 months time or so. It is not the strategy which the Labour Party chose that's at fault: but how it's been carried out, with the right wing veto on effective implementation.

Councillors, Labour Parties and trade unions must stick out for a "no rate" position. None of them should be associated with implementing cuts. If workers and the community are prepared to fight the cuts implied by Tory spending limits, they will fight Labour-imposed cuts too; especially if a lead is given. Labour Councillors can keep the momentum for a fight going by voting against *all* cuts budgets, and exposing a fallback budget for what it is. Even if a vote for a "no rate" position lets a Tory budget through, councillors should not associate themselves with the "dented shield" approach of the right wing and the officers; but should explain how the effects will be the same.

Mrs. Thatcher has explained on her Asian tour that she has "taught the British trade unions the facts of life": a polite way of reassuring Asian businessmen that the organisations of the working class are smashed, and the ruling class triumphant. Kinnock has indicated he's insulted by that; now it's up to all of us to show the error of Thatcher's assessment.



BETRAYAL  
1926 THE MINERS  
1983 THE PRINTERS



*Demonstrators support Warrington strikers.*

Trial of strength for NGA

# Retreats and compromises that paved the road to Warrington

**PETER MCINTYRE** reviews *To Break a Union - The Messenger, the State and the NGA* by Mark Dickinson. Published by Booklist Ltd. at £2.95.

IN March 1984 as the miners' strike was about to start in earnest, newspaper proprietor Eddie Shah was awarded £73,653 damages against the NGA over its picketing of the Messenger group printing firm at Warrington.

In May that year while sun tanned miners were beginning to feel the full might of the police operations the NGA called off its picket.

Two months later Mr Justice



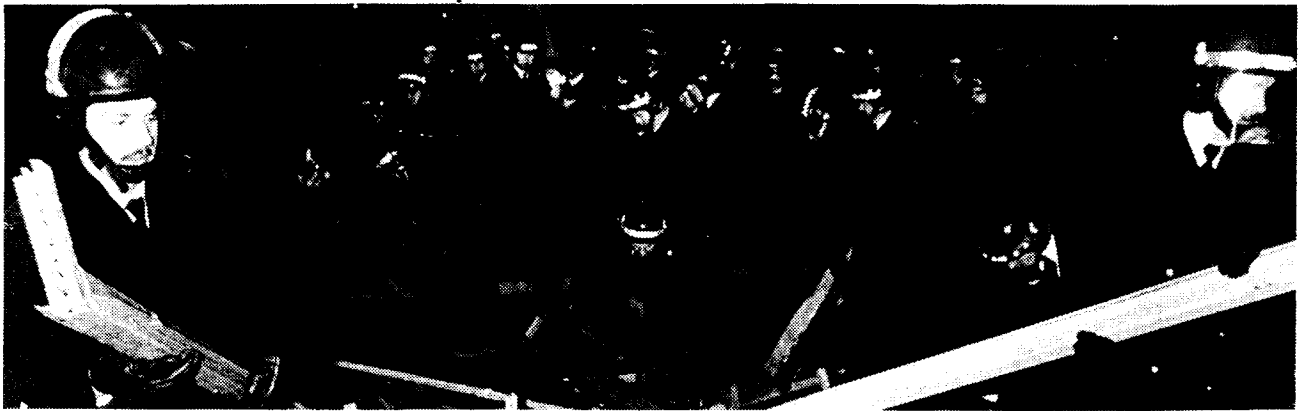
Caulfield at Manchester High Court raised the total of fines and damages against the National Graphical Association under the Employment Act to £800,000.

Mr Caulfield who complained of an open conspiracy between the NGA, the NUJ and SOGAT, said about Shah: "Historically he could well become the most hated and despised enemy of the defendant union in par-

ticular and associated trade unions in general. In the eyes of the defendants, I have no doubt, Shah is a monster."

The role of chief monster in the eyes of the print unions tends to get handed from palm to palm. Christopher Pole Carew, late of the Nottingham Evening Post, Sir Richard Storey at Portsmouth and Sunderland Newspapers and Rupert Murdoch of Fleet Street would all have their supporters for the title of King Rat. For the present, few would argue with the learned judge.

It is easy to see why this is so. The Shah dispute was significant in two directions. It provided a prologue to the miners strike in the use of the law and the courts, the use of police powers more draconian than anything seen in 50 years, and the use of the Fleet Street and TV publici-



Riot police at Warrington — a dress rehearsal for the miners.

ty machine in casting militant trade unionism in the role of a cancer.

It also had a profound impact inside the printing industry, bouncing the NGA into a sharp change of tack on the new technology front and creating turmoil in relations between the print unions.

It is ironic that a little over a year since the NUJ was cast as a co-conspirator with the NGA over Stockport and Warrington, the two unions are at the time of writing almost at war. That is one outcome of the defeat for the printing industry unions at Warrington.

Yet Eddie Shah has little as a person to mark him out for this demonic role. He is little different from a hundred other small time entrepreneurs. His is not even a thought-out opposition to trade unions. He was happy dealing and wheeling with the NGA and only turned to warfare with the union when his deals began to break down.



Like Grunwick's George Ward before him, Eddie Shah's significance lay in the timing of his intervention and the way in which the stakes were raised when the court and the law were used to curb the union's attempt to stop trade unionism being stamped out.

There is no doubt that once the battle was joined the NGA fought courageously, and the mass pickets at Warrington were a testimony to the awakening anger inside a deeply conservative layer of the workers' movement.

But by that time Shah was almost an irrelevance to the dispute. The shots were being called by Chief Constables, by the Home Secretary and the Cabinet. The collapse of the TUC at the first real test of its opposition to the Employment laws was not down to Eddie Shah, but to Margaret That-

cher and the years of cutting and running, by Len Murray and his "new realism" supporters.

This book by Mark Dickinson, NUJ Manchester branch secretary, falls between several stools in its attempt to chronicle events and place them in a political context. The detailed build-up to the mass pickets at Warrington towards the end of 1983 is difficult to follow even for someone who knows the outline.

Despite its faults, it provides a framework for understanding several key points about the dispute and the interviews that Dickinson conducted after the dispute with several of the key participants are revealing in what they show of the build-up to the major battles with Shah, and the abandoning of that fight.

Folk tales rapidly dictate the way that disputes are remembered, and this book puts on record some of the ways in which the union was duped by Shah, almost willingly duped, in the months leading up to the strike.

Shah started his first free newspaper in 1973; and in 1979 when he wanted to expand he was still entering into agreements with the NGA and even applied for an NGA card in case he wanted to do paste-up work himself.

Shah agreed to the closed shop when he set up Fineward Ltd at Stockport to provide the origination work for his newspapers. He was also tempting the local NGA branch with talk of providing a press in Stockport which would provide more NGA jobs.

Staff were recruited with the help of the local NGA office, and Shah signed a deal which excluded him from Newspaper Society and British Printing Industry Federation agreements, by paying over the odds and promising his staff all sorts of local benefits, including company cars and profit schemes.

However, those who transferred to Shah's outfit, and found they were typesetting and doing the artwork for four newspapers, soon found that they were working to the limits of their capacity and in conditions that one of them described as chaotic.

For some time chapel members had been disturbed at the amount of advertising work which arrived in the

office without a stamp showing it had come from an NGA recognised source.

Some strict enforcement of existing NGA rules at this stage might have clarified Shah's role more quickly, but when the chapel took the matter to Arthur Scott, Stockport branch secretary, Scott advised a soft pedal, since he was still hoping for the promised new press.



Shah set up the Messenger company in 1981, and he even signed an agreement to operate a press at Stockport.

In autumn 1981 Shah said he was bringing new technology to Stockport, but when the chapel — mildly — said they wanted more money to work it and an end to excessive hours, Shah blew up and said that no expansion would take place at Stockport.

Subsequently it became clear that this had been Shah's intention all along. The long period of playing it soft with Shah had not gained the NGA any advantage.

The press went into an enterprise zone estate at Warrington and the man chosen to act as overseer was a press operator who had turned his back on the NGA after a dispute at Swale press in 1981.

Shah had installed VDTs at Bury and the press at Warrington, but he still chose soft soap with the NGA, assuring them that the new press would take months of running in before it could be used.

In 1982 Shah threatened redundancies at Stockport if he did not conclude a rapid end to pay negotiations. John Ibbotson, then national officer for provincial newspapers for the NGA, again compromised, cutting the claim down from £45 to £6 to get an agreement.

He told Dickinson: "We struck a house agreement and I thought that by the moderation that I had shown in

the negotiations and the way we had attempted to negotiate the terms, that I had really set the scene for him to be able to co-operate with us and for him to develop his Bury and Warrington plants without any fear of the kind of blackmail that he had been accusing us of."

Critically, Ibbotson did not secure a specific commitment to transferring work to recognised sources.

Setting was almost immediately put out to other offices and suspicions grew that it was being done under non-union conditions at Bury. The NGA leadership however advised caution. It was not until November that they pinned Shah down to admit that papers were already being printed at Warrington.

It could have come as little surprise when Shah eventually admitted that his plan was to allow non union members to set type at Bury, and that when the NGA officials arrived for a recruitment meeting they found the staff primed with clearly hostile and detailed anti-union questions.

Still, amazingly, the Stockport chapel was told to accept work from the non union sources at Bury, and it was not until July 4, 1983, that the staff at Stockport, goaded beyond endurance, were finally called out.

The mass picketing at Warrington is a more familiar part of the story. It was predominantly NGA members that made up the ranks of the pickets and it was the outgoing general secretary, Joe Wade, who authorised the mass pickets in the first place as the NGA leadership finally began to fight for its organisation.

The book recounts the abortive talks at ACAS, the increasing role of the Government in the dispute and the bloody scenes in November 1983, culminating in the police charges of November 29/30 and the hounding of pickets across open land, and the breaking up of the NGA mobile dispute caravan.

It recounts vividly the impact that had on NGA members who had always regarded the police as being society's protectors and the rapid awakening in their ranks.

The action in Fleet Street which stopped the national newspapers, and the subsequent collapse of the employers' stand against the NGA showed the immense power that the union still possesses and makes all the more tragic the collapse of the TUC and the subsequent retreat of the NGA leadership.

Some have criticised the NGA for backing off when the TUC failed to support it. It is difficult to see how a Communist Party member could be so naive as to believe that the NGA leadership would be able to negotiate with the employers on their own terms. The NGA's position is a result of the heterogenous composition of the FMLN bloc itself, which comprises a number of organisations which have broken away from but are still coloured by the politics of Stalinism, well epitomised by the view of one of the organisers of the Six, Alan Royston, about the role

the TUC is indicative of what effect these policies have on the rank and file.

"When it comes to it, as a body it seems a waste of time.

"They seemed to react to me, the TUC, like our leadership reacted at the start of this dispute. They were frightened of taking the steps, they would go so far and that's how they seemed to be, hesitant; not saying, well this is the one we've got to fight, when grass roots are telling them that."

The attitude of the NUM leadership

to the TUC was heavily coloured by what happened to the NGA when it appealed for help. But it is not clear how far the print unions have learned lessons from Warrington. There is a "trophy" in the general secretary's office of the NGA at Bedford depicting Eddie Shah as a big game head, inscribed something like "We got him in the end".

A new "realism" which can put forward a plan of campaign for rolling back the attacks on the unions cannot afford the luxury of such myths.



## NUJ extend an olive branch

By HARRY SLOAN

**THIS year's conference of the National Union of Journalists firmly rejected any move towards open warfare with the NGA over the representation of sub-editing staff under new technology agreements.**

Discussion at the NUJ's Bristol Annual Delegate Meeting took place under the cloud of inter-union clashes at Portsmouth (where NGA members had scabbed on striking NUJ members for four months, and NGA leaders colluded with employers) and Wolverhampton (where NUJ members have similarly been crossing NGA picket lines). Despite this the resolution which was carried offered an olive branch to the NGA as part of a firm statement of principle.

While calling for talks with the NGA, a common fight against the employers to defend all jobs in the industry, and an arrangement for joint union

membership where NGA members transfer to sub-editing departments, the resolution spells out that if the talks with the NGA break down, the NUJ would have no alternative but to seek to negotiate its own deals with management — on the basis of a defence of all jobs.

The final resolution, promoted by the NUJ's Provincial Newspapers Industrial Council, offers a principled basis for negotiations with the NGA — though all the signs are that despite an early welcome for the resolution from General Secretary Dubbins, the NGA leadership are sharpening their knives in preparation for a war over membership and representation.

That war should rightly be fought jointly with the NUJ against the employers — but not at the expense of sacrificing the NUJ's hard-won rights to represent editorial staff. In the months ahead those in both unions with an understanding of union bureaucracy and union principle are going to need to fight hard to make their voices heard.

# A discussion with Sergei Batovrin

## 1. Could you tell us something of the history of your Group?

Our group was formed in February 1982 and publicly announced in June of that year. There were only 11 of us in our Group at first — 10 scientists and me, an artist — and we were based in Moscow. We came under constant harassment and surveillance of course, but now we have Groups in 16 cities with over 2,000 supporters. It is difficult to say exactly because it would be a mistake to keep membership records, as you can understand! The more supporters and activities, the more difficult it is for the KGB to control, and the more confident people become to join in.

## 2. What are your main policies?

We call ourselves the Group for Establishing Trust. We believe in starting detente from below among ordinary people. Only in this way will the decision makers take note. The people of the world cannot trust Chernenko or Reagan to establish detente or peace. We look to the International Peace Movement to create links, dialogue and trust, to humanise relations among rank and file citizens. At the public announcement of our group, we asked people to send us ideas for any project of establishing trust. We received all sorts of proposals like the exchange of non-governmental bodies, of children during the holidays, of workers in various jobs, of improving the learning of languages, etc., etc. Straight away we were harassed non-stop by the authorities — just for these ideas.

## 3. What form does this harassment take?

I myself was put in a Psychiatric hospital for a period. I had my 88 paintings confiscated, my exhibition for Hiroshima Day destroyed. I was under house arrest 14 times with my telephone disconnected. This is of course entirely illegal in the Soviet Union for the police, but it happens every day. It is nothing to find your front door locked or as many as 50 KGB men waiting outside. If you go to visit a friend or even take the dog for a walk in the park, it is a good idea to take a carrier bag with a warm jumper, toothbrush, and a towel in case you get arrested. When I was expelled to Vienna, it took me a whole week to be able to speak normally — I was so used to whispering in rooms and writing notes to my friends across the table. That is everyday life for our supporters in the Soviet Union — personal intimidation and harassment at the very least, labour camps and Psychiatric hospitals at the worst. There are at the moment over 10,000 political prisoners in the USSR that we know of.

## 4. Don't you think that if the European Peace Movement

**SERGEI Batovrin was one of the founder members of the Soviet Independent Peace Group — For the Establishment of Trust.**

**In the Autumn of 1982 the West Midlands County Council sent a protest, along with other groups, concerning Sergei's incarceration in a Soviet Psychiatric hospital. In May 1983, Sergei, his wife Natalia, and their daughter were expelled from the USSR after years of harassment.**

**The KGB will still not let him rest. They have taken hostage his mother-in-law, Mrs. B. Faibisher, threatened her with dismissal from work, subjected her to constant surveillance and interrogation. She has been refused an exit visa despite having no relatives left in the USSR.**

**Sergei has continued his peace activities from exile in New York by making links with other groups, writing articles, giving lecture tours, and so on. He was recently in the UK, and I was part of a discussion with him organised by Birmingham University CND.**

**publicises this sort of treatment, it could be accused of being anti-Soviet and contributing to Cold War propaganda?**

No I do not. The fact is that much of Western Cold War propaganda against the Soviet Union is true. It is a closed society; there are no human rights in the Soviet Union. It is the duty of peace activists to speak out on these matters and not to leave it to the Cold War warriors. Unless the Soviet government is encouraged to open their society, to allow a free exchange of opinion, to grant human rights — there will never be peace in the world. The two questions of Peace and human rights are inevitably linked. It is not a question of being anti-Soviet but of telling the truth as it is and drawing the right conclusions — that is not of Cold War but of Peace and trust between ordinary people.

But there can be no trust if we do not say things as they are.

**5. Do you argue for unilateral nuclear disarmament of the USSR or do you think Russia should keep the bomb while America has it?**

That is not really a practical question for us. If we were to blockade an SS20 base, we would be shot on the spot. To even criticise SS20s is a treasonable offence. We are concerned only with making positive steps for detente from below; we make no criticism of any body or of any government. We do not even protest about violations of human rights since we are trying to practise human rights through our Peace activities.

**6. Do you have any connections with other Eastern European Peace Movements?**

We know of their existence and their activities of course and this increases our determination and confidence. But there are no formal links as such. Now I am in exile, I have met members of these groups and we can exchange ideas and send information home. Events in Poland were a great inspiration to us and in fact our Group was formed in response to Solidarnosc.

**7. Has your Group influenced the Soviet Official Peace Movement in any way?**

Well it is interesting that the official Peace Movement has become active recently. It has never made a peace proposal or done anything much since it was founded in 1949 by Stalin. But now it is organising rallies all over the Soviet Union. These rallies however are poor affairs. You never see a home-made poster or any unauthorised enthusiasm. All the slogans are painted in advance and say things like "We will carry out the Decisions of the Party" or "Shame on the American Warmongers".

**8. What about the future?**

Our movement is growing as I have said. For it to succeed, however, we need the help and support of the International Peace Movement. The Soviet government is very sensitive to criticism and to bad publicity. It is very important that the Peace Movement speaks out loudly on human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It is not just a matter of elementary justice, it is the only way Peace can be obtained in the world in the long run. The questions of Peace and human rights are inextricably linked.

Sergei Batovrin edits a new bi-monthly magazine *Return Address* — Moscow, available from: 1793 Riverside Drive = SB, New York N.Y. 10034, USA.

# 1926 General Strike: The Lessons for Today.

**Bolivia, Sudan and Denmark have brought General Strikes back into the news: but let's not forget our own 1926 General Strike. Its lessons are by no means a matter of history, as TONY RICHARDSON explains.**

1926 is most identified in the minds of most workers with defeat. For the most politically educated and class conscious workers it is recognised as a sell-out by the TUC of the day, who called off the General Strike.

Both of these points are valid. But there are more lessons from 1926 which are useful today. Unfortunately few currents in the present-day labour movement are willing to learn from this past experience. The Communist Party in some embarrassment regard it as simply a bygone historic event. The Socialist Workers Party see it as a radically different period, from which in any event they draw wrongheaded conclusions. Many on the left, indeed, hold a position on 1926 which fits in perfectly — if unwittingly — with the position of the right wing. For the right wing, the General Strike is seen (correctly) as a challenge to the power of the capitalist state in Britain. Their response, with a shudder, is "never again"! But many on the left, recognising the General Strike as a challenge to the state, argue that it should not take place without a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions: and since we are still a long way from any such situation, these same left wingers joined the right wing in opposing calls for general strike action to support the miners in 1984-85. It does not seem to have occurred to these left wingers that a defeat for the miners was inevitable without generalised supporting action — or that political development can flow from such a high level of mass action in a way impossible in more "normal" times.

So there is generally a lot of opposition in the workers' movement to any serious study of the developments in and around the 1926 General Strike and the miners' strike which continued after the General Strike had been called off. This is a



*Miners locked out at the start of the General Strike and (insert) their militant leader A.J. Cook, who failed to press home the fight against the TUC traitors.*



tragedy, because though we are now in a different period, there are many lessons to be learned both on the tactics and methods of the employers and the state, and on the mistakes of the "left" leaderships within the labour movement.

## Differences

Obviously the size of the trade unions today is dramatically different from 1926. There were 4 million trade unionists then — around 10-11 million in the TUC today. And industry looks very different. In 1926 there were a million miners — there are less than a quarter of that number today. Today's unions are stronger and more firmly established — though often at the price of being more bureaucratised and right wing dominated. These differences are important if we are to understand the scale of the defeat of the miners in 1926 compared to 1985.

Even though this year's defeat of the NUM was a historic defeat, the employers and the Tory government have not established a strong enough

position to enforce a setback on the whole working class on anything like the scale of 1926.

Certainly Thatcher's gang have used the miners' defeat to strengthen and enforce their anti-union legislation — as the Tories did with the Trades Disputes Act of 1927. But in 1926 every single section of the working class was defeated. A year after the strike, 50,000 railwaymen still had not got their jobs back, for example. On the railways, and throughout most of industry, the unions signed agreements as the basis for a return to work which allowed the employers to victimise and blacklist militants. The whole class was physically defeated; all kinds of militants were imprisoned, and many sacked. *Wage cuts* took place in *all* industries. In the aftermath of the 1926 defeat, events such as today's escalating teachers' struggle, and the threat of action by civil servants and others would have been unthinkable. The scale of the defeat is quite different.

Much of this is clearly because of the changed strength of the unions



*Stalin, Rykov and Kamenev: the new Moscow bureaucracy which misled the British CP into the Anglo Russian Committee.*

and the relative strength of today's working class: but it also flows from the determination and vigorous campaigning across the country which characterised the 1984-5 miners' strike.

The 1926 strike was shorter — from May to November — and had little economic effect. Though today's mining industry and its workforce are smaller than 60 years ago, the 1984-5 strike had a huge impact on the economy. Although the Tories won the strike they did so at the expense of a much bigger economic crisis.

### Similarities

The most obvious similarity with 1926 was that the miners then and now have been seen as an example for the whole working class. But in both cases the employers had recognised and prepared for this.

The year before the General Strike, on "Red Friday" 1925, the government had been forced to back down to the miners by the threat of a strike by the "Triple Alliance". The government had tried to cut miners' pay: after retreating, they were obliged to subsidise the coalowners for a 9-month period — during which they engaged in full-scale preparations to confront the miners. They established the nationwide scabbing operation known as the "Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies"; and they fuelled a press witch-hunt and imprisoned leading Communist Party members for "subversion".

The Tory party was also defeated by the miners in 1972 and 1974. Tory strategists and the state machinery spent the next 10 years preparing for the return match. From the Tories came the scheme of the Ridley Report, which looked at a sequence of confrontation with various sections

to crack trade union strength, culminating with the miners, including revised union-busting legislation to replace the failed Industrial Relations Act, and the development of scab lorry firms. The Labour government in office from 1974-79 made its own contribution, bringing in the divisive bonus scheme, supervised the early stages of development and first use of the Special Patrol Groups with their brutal picket-busting tactics during the Grunwick dispute of 1977-78. Labour policies also boosted unemployment through rationalisation and their attempts to "manage" capitalism — and unemployment has helped to undermine solidarity and increase the pressure on union militancy.

The Tories, returned to office after 5 years of Labour betrayal in 1979, began systematically implementing the strategy mapped out in the Ridley Report, taking on the steelworkers, British Leyland workers, forcing through anti-union laws and raising unemployment to unprecedented post-war levels.

But as in 1926, the TUC made no preparations whatever to combat these attacks. They sat back hoping the battle could be avoided. Only the NUM leadership warned clearly and consistently of the preparations being made by employers and government. So when it came to a showdown, both 1926 and 1984-5 were one-sided confrontations.

### Lessons of Leadership

Prepared or not, both situations arose out of a decision by the employers and the government to take on the working class. In each case the whole state machinery was used to smash down workers' resistance.

To such a challenge, the only adequate response is the fullest power of the working class — whether or not it is equipped with a revolutionary leadership. Only a General Strike — aimed at taking on the *government*, challenging the state machine and thus capitalism itself — can beat back the attack. But in 1926 the TUC leaders — frightened by the scale of the confrontation they had embarked upon — retreated from the General Strike after 10 days, handing victory on a plate to the employers while workers were still joining the fight. But in 1984-5 the present-day TUC continued that same retreat by not even calling any form of national action. In each case the TUC must carry responsibility for a major betrayal of the working class.

But just as there were "lefts" on the General Council which threw in the towel in 1926, so there are "lefts" on the General Council which chickened out of a fight in 1984-5. They were supported by the Communist Party, and by others to the left of the CP who opposed any call for a General Strike on the grounds that the working class was "not ready".

Unfortunately it was on this same "political" problem that the NUM's own leadership was at its weakest.

### The Communist Party

In his articles on the General Strike, Trotsky analysed the betrayal by the Communist Party. He traces it back to Stalin's leadership in Moscow pressurising the British CP into endorsing the policy of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee involving the "left" wing of the TUC in an alliance with the Russian trade unions. Having spent so much time praising and defending the TUC "lefts", the CP was drawn into a support for them during the General Strike, even though they did make some criticism of the TUC. Indeed the CP slogan during the Strike was "All power to the General Council".

Yet the General Council had no right to such power. The General Strike had been called by a conference of trade union Executives. Despite this it was the General Council which called the Strike off without returning to that conference — or consulting the miners who opposed the sell-out. Not only was the CP compromised by the treachery of the General Council "lefts" it had applauded in the Anglo Russian Committee, but its political line acquired mass influence through the rank and file "Minority Movement", which also contained the main miners' leaders. The CP helped the TUC betray in 1926.

Trotsky argued that after the General Strike had been called off by the General Council, the only way forward for the miners was to struggle for it to be re-opened. But the Communist Party fought for only for cash support to the miners and "blacking" action. Trotsky showed how this played into the hands of the General



*Troops escort a food convoy through London during the General Strike.*

Council, and further betrayed the miners.

Just as the only way forward in 1926 was to re-open the General Strike, so the only way for the miners to win in 1984-5 was to force the TUC to call a General Strike. It was obvious from early summer 1984 if not before that cash support and "blacking" action was not enough to win a confrontation with a prepared Thatcher government and the state machine.

### **Scargill and Cook**

A. J. Cook was leader of the miners in 1926 — and a very similar leader to Scargill: He was a left winger with mass support and very militant. Both were determined leaders and should be recognised as fighters for their class. The problem with both men is political. Cook was, and Scargill is, a left wing reformist. Neither man fully understood the political requirements of the situation. While both men criticised the TUC leaders, neither would go the whole way to a break and fight against that leadership to force them into action or expose them before the most conscious sections of workers.

In 1926 the miners — backed by others — campaigned for a reconvening of the Conference of Executives after the General Strike was called off. It took them 3 months to get this agreed. Then the TUC colared the miners' leadership, and said that if the Conference took place the TUC would attack the miners' leaders. Cook and the others agreed to the conference being called off. In this way they gave up the only chance of the General Strike being reimposed. Three months after, the miners' strike collapsed.

In 1984-5, rather than confront the TUC General Council in front of the full September Congress, Scargill agreed to a meaningless "joint" resolution, so bland it was supported even by people like Gavin Laird of the AUEW. Even after it became clear to everyone that the resolution was meaningless, Scargill did not campaign for a recall TUC to activate the only policy that could have broken the Tory stranglehold on the strike — a General Strike.

In this regard it should be added that the Communist Party of 1926 was quite different from that of 1984-5.

Despite echoing Stalin's Moscow's line and misleading many of the best militants, the CP was campaigning on class struggle lines, advocating such militant demands as councils of action and workers' defence squads — and even demanding the continuation of the strike.

In stark contrast the CP of 1984-5 — after nearly 50 years more Stalinist political development — lacked even this class instinct, and became a major factor in holding back militancy in the NUM, letting the TUC and union "lefts" off the hook, and fighting for every compromise, including finally the return to work. In their retrospective analysis of the strike today's CP leadership accuse Scargill of pursuing too hard a line — singling out for special criticism his principled refusal to condemn "violence" by NUM pickets, and his support for mass picketing!

If the lessons of 1926 and the lessons of 1984-5 are to be learned in schooling a new leadership for the workers' movement, a firm and principled break with the politics of Stalinism must be a basic starting point.

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## Middle East

# Palestinian fightback begins against Amman agreement

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IN SV2 last November, we provided an extensive analysis of the events in the Middle East since the invasion of Lebanon by Israel. We argued that the convulsions within the ranks of the PLO have triggered off major shifts in the balance of forces which will favour an imperialist-dictated settlement. As we largely predicted, Arafat proceeded with a PNC, boycotted by most PLO organisations, signalling a new course towards compromise and capitulation.

In SV4, last month, we reviewed the renewed "peace overtures" culminating in the Amman agreement of February 11, signed between Arafat and King Hussein, and the Mubarak plan for peace. The Amman agreement, later endorsed by the PLO Central Committee, calls for an international conference comprising the main protagonists and members of the UN Security Council

including the Soviet Union at which the PLO would participate in a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, in order to reach "a comprehensive peace as established in the UN Security Council resolutions."

We argued that "only a powerful mobilisation of the Palestinian masses can now stop Arafat in his tracks and gut all moves towards compromise with Israel"; and "it is the Left in the PLO regrouped in a commanding, powerful organisation which must be the spearhead of such a mobilisation."

Here we publish proceedings of a press conference held on February 14 by George Habash (leading member of the Democratic Alliance\* and General Secretary of the PFLP) which launched the PFLP campaign to defeat the Amman agreement.



Yasser Arafat

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## Press conference interview with PFLP leader George Habash

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**What did the PFLP and the Democratic Alliance do to stop the agreement between Arafat and King Hussein?**

*George Habash:* Stopping this agreement was practically impossible in the present circumstances, because Arafat, and Fatah's Central Committee generally, had already decided to become involved in the US settlement plans. Actually, since the departure of the Palestinian fighters from

\*An alliance formed by the PFLP, DFLP, PLF and PCP in response to the outbreak of fighting in Tripoli in September 1983, for the purpose of struggling to reunite the PLO around its traditional platform.

Beirut, Arafat and this upper stratum of the Palestinian bourgeoisie have continuously signalled their readiness to be involved in the US plans. The PFLP, together with all the democratic forces, did all possible to prevent this involvement. Yet although we have worked patiently and persistently, they had made their decision.

Now, in order to abort the agreement, the PFLP will take the initiative to confront this involvement through mass mobilisation, political activities and a broad information campaign against the agreement. In this, we will rely primarily on our masses, but also on the Arab national liberation movement to which this involvement and its dangers are very clear. We will also rely on our international allies, the socialist countries and all

democratic forces that understand the difference between our line and this rightist trend.

I would like to add that we are following developments minute by minute. We have heard the statement made by Farouk Quaddoumi (head of the PLO's political department, and member of Fatah's Central Committee). Its contents indicate rejection of many elements of such an agreement. There are also meetings to be convened, like of Fatah's revolutionary Council. If it were a matter of wishing, any serious Palestinian leader would wish the agreement to be cancelled, but scientifically speaking, we don't expect this. The only way we can be convinced that the Revolutionary Council opposes the agreement is if they issue a clear-cut statement cancelling the agreement outright. Then it



is up to such leading bodies to take measures against those responsible for signing the agreement. We call on Fatah bases and cadres to confront this agreement as strongly as possible in order to save the PLO's national line.

**You have called for a broad front to confront deviation. What are the obstacles to its establishment?**

*George Habash:* We were very serious about our call. Such a front is the main way to confront deviation from the national political line, because it is necessary to mobilise and organise all nationalist political forces against deviation. We have now called for this front to be established as soon as possible. The signing of the agreement in Amman should to a great extent remove the obstacles and contradictions that have previously prevented its establishment. The establishment of such a national front is motivated by the need for a national leadership for all the Palestinian people to struggle against involvement in the US settlement plans, in order to restore the PLO's national line and unity. This will never be achieved unless the deviating line and involvement in US settlements, as represented in this agreement, are completely dropped and aborted. Those responsible for the deviation should be tried and removed from the PLO's leadership.

There may be some contradictions remaining before we establish the national front, but we will place all our efforts to realise this.

**What will you do if Arafat and King Hussein travel to Egypt and sign an agreement with Mubarak?**

*George Habash:* This would mark a further involvement in the US liquidationist solutions. Scientifically speaking, after this agreement in Amman, it can be expected that the official PLO leadership will take further steps. Of course, we would oppose this and regard it as further proof that this leadership doesn't represent the Palestinian people, their goals, their sacrifices or their martyrs.

**After Hussein's visit to Algeria, did you contact the Algerians so that they won't give any cover for such an agreement?**

*George Habash:* The Algerian leadership is quite aware of the dangers of the Amman agreement and of what is happening in the Palestinian arena, but it is also our duty to point out the implications of this agreement to all our friends. This press conference, as decided by the PFLP's Politbureau, is the start of a qualitative, new series of political and mass activities to confront the agreement and the line of thinking that led to it, in order to save the PLO and return it to the national line charted through our long struggle.

The PFLP will begin broad, serious contacts with the Arab national liberation movement and the Arab national regimes and our international allies to explain the dangers of the agreement and elicit their support for its confrontation. This is a duty for us, based on our loyalty to our people and national cause. There have been other dangerous junctures threatening the liquidation of our revolution: Jordan 1970, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut, but none of these paralleled the dangers of the present moment caused by the signing of this agreement. Our sense of duty towards our martyrs compels us to wage a campaign as broad as possible to bury this agreement. It is rare to find a Palestinian family that has not given a martyr in the course of the revolution. We trust in our people's patriotism and political awareness and that



*Habash: "Bury this deviation."*

they will mobilise to bury the deviation along with the factors that led to it, and continue the armed struggle until the liberation of Palestine.

We are highly aware of the difference between making statements and implementing them, but at the same time we draw hope from the experience in Lebanon, that when there is a decision to fight, the people will be victorious.

**Was the signing of the Arafat-Hussein agreement timed to coincide with Fahd's visit to Washington?**

*George Habash:* Yes, but not only with this. It also coincides with preparations for a number of Arab leaders to visit Washington: Mubarak, Hussein and then King Hassan [of Morocco]. Also, early next month, there will be talks between the US and Soviet Union on the Middle East. We expect that the signing of this agreement was hastened in order to precede this. One can expect the following scenario: Murphy will ask the Soviets what they want to discuss about the Middle East after King Fahd, other Arab leaders, and now even Arafat, have conveyed their wishes that the US put all efforts to solve the conflict. The US will emphasise that the Soviet Union has no role to play, that it is the US that will resolve the Middle East conflict. Murphy may also put on the agenda a discussion of the "dangers" of providing Syria with advanced weaponry.

This is why the agreement was hastened, and this is why all our masses and allies are expected to condemn this agreement. This is why we say that Arafat no longer represents the Palestinian people and cause.

**You call on Fatah's base to confront the agreement. Is this an invitation for**



*Egyptian President Mubarak.*

**them to split from Fatah or its leadership?**

*George Habash:* This is up to them. Our experience of the past two years, and all the difficulties caused by this leadership, show that the deviation cannot be ended unless the leadership responsible for this line is removed. This is one of our aims, and we will struggle for it through democratic means.

**The statement says this agreement will only bring destruction to the two parties that signed it. What do you mean by this?**

*George Habash:* This is especially true regarding the Palestinian side, for Arafat will achieve nothing in this way. The thinking of the US and Peres government is as follows: they demand concessions from Arafat. At each compromising step taken on the Palestinian side, they will say this is not enough. They will demand further concessions; this will repeat itself over and over. Thus nothing will be gained except the deterioration of the Palestinian revolution. This is what we are trying to prevent, and we will succeed.

**How far can co-ordination between the National and Democratic Alliances go towards stopping Arafat?**

*George Habash:* We have called for the establishment of a national front to include all national organisations, forces and prominent nationalist personalities, whether in the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria or the Gulf, wherever there are Palestinian communities. These people have the respect of the masses because of their role in the struggle. Thus they can give this front broad influence among our people.

All the organisations confronting deviation are in the National or Democratic Alliance, and all efforts must be exerted to removing any obstacles to establishing this front. The central question for all is finding the best way to confront the deviation. We believe that the broad national front is the best, and we must find the way to put this into practice, in order to restore the PLO's national line and independent decision-making. The PLO should not be involved in US solutions, or in the pocket of any regime, but clearly aligned with the Arab national liberation movement, nationalist regimes and socialist community, the Soviet Union in particular, and all forces of progress and democracy.

**Has there been increased struggle in the West Bank?**

*George Habash:* Thank you for this question as it gives me the opportunity to say that in spite of the complicated political situation, we do not forget our people in Palestine. We do not forget, nor do they, that the main enemy is Zionism and US imperialism. We are obliged to deal with the political problems in the PLO, but we will not be completely preoccupied with this. We are also thinking how we can increase the struggle, especially armed struggle, against the Zionist enemy in occupied Palestine, for this is our main task.

Israeli statistics have recently been released concerning resistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that in the course of a month, there were 200 "terrorist acts" against the occupation. This is in addition to the mass and political struggle.

Since we refuse Arafat's policy, we must give the alternative which is continuing the struggle to change the balance of forces by increasing armed struggle, having a correct political line and strengthen relations with our real friends on the Arab and international levels.

# Class War in Coventry

by Matthew Jones

**COVENTRY'S Labour Council have proposed a huge package of cuts in education using the excuse of falling roles.**

According to the Labour Group leadership and the council officers the council has to close schools to maintain educational standards! In reality they are trying to save millions of pounds to avoid confrontation with the Tory Government. However, the Labour Group were badly burned by the reaction to the last school closure they carried out at Bell Green Primary School.

At Bell Green they went for a quick quiet closure, giving parents only eight days notice of a closure minute being put before the education committee on July 1, 1983. The reaction from parents, the NUT and the Labour Party forced the council to grant at least a semblance of consultation, setting back the decision by five months to the December Council meeting.

The issue decisively split the Labour Party and the Labour Group between those fighting the cuts and those implementing cuts or allowing them to be carried out. After the December council meeting four councillors were expelled from the Labour Group for abstaining (!) in protest at the decision.

The campaign reached its peak with two occupations of the school in June and July 1984 by the parents, the Labour left and local striking miners. Finally the council evicted the occupiers by force in a four hour operation involving thirty police and half a dozen bailiffs. The final rearguard action included camping in a tent in the school grounds, successfully demanding that the building be properly secured.

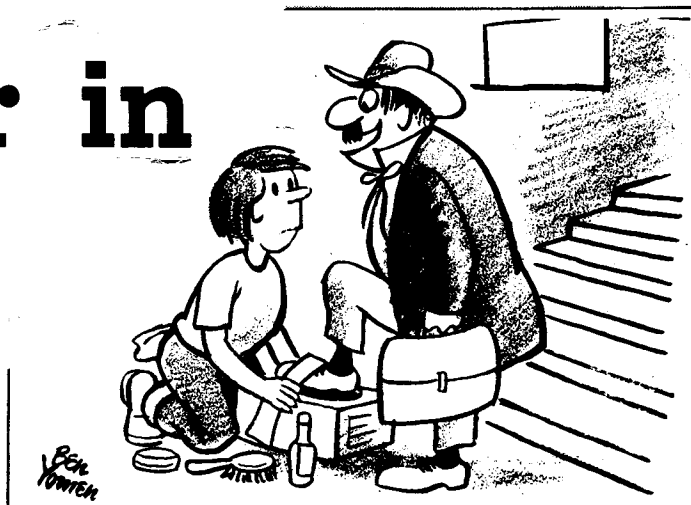
The fifteen month campaign left the council with its feeble excuses stripped away. The rubbish about falling rolls has been exposed as a cover for creating a precedent for future closures and — as a profitable sideline — selling the site.

This time round the council have been more cautious in their approach. In October 1984 they issued a "consultative" document "Future Choices" listing three choices:

- Do nothing and allow educational standards to fall;
- Seek more money;
- Find money within our budget by taking out surplus pupil places..

No mention of fighting the government: just a meek acceptance of Tory cuts and waffle about the wonders of closing schools. Or as one local rag put it: "No Future; No Choice!" As it was a "consultative" document the council awaited the replies. They came flooding in, with all but a handful strongly against closing schools. The council issued them in the huge "Responses to Future Choices" and ignored all of them.

The council bided their time, the whole



"See how much better you can do without going to college? You've got a job, you're working in the great outdoors... what more could you ask?"

thing being an exercise in keeping parents, teachers and the Labour Party guessing until February 1985. Then a "working party" consisting of eight of the worst traitors in the Coventry labour movement and one Tory issued the cuts document "Future Choices — Meeting the Challenges".

Surprise was expressed by some in the Labour Party at this particular Tory putting his signature on the same sheet of paper as these types; but no matter. The proposals are drastic, with the closure of: three comprehensives (including the two newest schools in the city); two primary schools; one infant school; and, worst of all, four special schools.

In addition, three infant and junior schools are to be merged with the closure of buildings; two nursery annexes are to close and the four single sex schools are to go mixed with present catchment areas split into four.

In primary schools the effect will be overcrowding; already 41 out of 117 city primary schools have average class sizes of over thirty and by the council's own figures, numbers in primary education are rising now!

The proposed redrawing of secondary school catchment areas has created havoc, with parents shuffling their kids about, trying to grab a place at the "best" schools. For the first time secondary schools' catchment areas could be set not geographically, but by groups of primary schools.

In secondary schools, the proposal will create three grammar schools out of the remaining thirteen LEA schools. Of the other ten, the closure of Barr's Hill and Birley Park would concentrate the city's black school students in two "ghetto" schools. By looking at the proposed catchment areas it is also clear which schools the council want to close in the next round of cuts.

By the time they've finished the Tories' dirty work, LEA schools are going to have over 1,500 pupils each.

The unkindest cut of all comes in special education, with the closure of four schools and the virtual ending of provision for children over 13. In accordance with the Tories 1981 Education Act the council intend turling children with special needs out into the mainstream system, which is already unable to cope with current conditions.

The reaction to the document has been immediate and massive. Action Groups

have sprung up around all the threatened schools, as well as parents and teachers: these have also involved secondary school students organising themselves. The council of course is playing it clever; the plan is still in the "consultative" stage, they can look for weak points and try to play off one school against the other until the crucial votes in June.

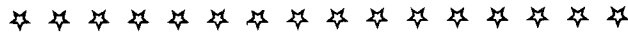
So far, thousands of parents, staff and pupils have been to meetings to hear the councillors' and officers' stock answers, their insistence that the decisions have been made on "educational" grounds, and their refusal to give any further information on the schools. The Action Group have prepared their own detailed cases in defence of their schools, demolishing the council's arguments as the Bell Green Education Action Group did. Particularly in the case of the secondary schools this has been highlighted by stunts in their own areas and in the centre of town, involving staff, parents and pupils.

The NUT held a general meeting on February 27, shortly after the production of the working party document and the 250 teachers present voted unanimously to ballot on a ½ day strike against closures on March 22, an unprecedented result. The ballot was 75% in favour, with even the special schools returning a majority for the action, again, an unprecedented result.

The NUT managed to get support from NUPE, who took a day's strike, NATFHE and NAS/UWT locally. However, NAS/UWT were instructed by their national leadership not to strike so as not to be seen following in the NUT's footsteps!

In the run up to the strike, the NUT and the Bell Green Education Action Group organised a joint meeting of the Action Groups to form a co-ordinating committee. On March 22 itself, there was a good turnout from schools, despite bad weather, with banners and contingents from schools all over the city, including many not under direct threat. The union turnout was poor, with none of the council manual workers represented and only two delegations from the private sector: GEC APEX and Massey Ferguson Joint Shop Stewards.

The Action Groups Co-ordinating Committee has endorsed a move for a city wide strike on June 11, the day of the Council vote. The pressure must be put on the Trade Unions not to abandon the schools under threat as they did at Bell Green.



## BOOKS

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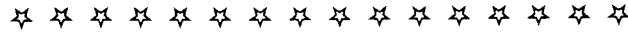
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