

workers' ACTION

No.80

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10p

FIREMEN —

FIGHTING FOR a claim whose justice was recognised even by a joint union-employers committee under Lord McCarthy, the firemen deserve the support of us all. And support from other workers is even more crucial for the firemen than for other strikes.

It will be an essential counter-weight to the avalanche of press attacks they will face.

The union officials cannot be relied on to do anything. The support will have to be built at rank and file level.

In the West Midlands militant firemen have organised a public meeting from which they hope to organise a support committee, and are also pushing for the union to organise a demonstration in support of the strike.

Donations and collections are expected from Rover Solihull and Lucas BW3, Shaftsmoor Lane. Firemen will be going round to other factories, particularly those local ones where they have been recently to put out fires.

Liverpool firemen report full backing from the local labour movement. The Trades Council premises are being used as the local strike headquarters, and the Labour Party Young Socialists has organised a support meeting.

Mersey tunnel police (T&GWU) and the local Tate and Lyle factory have come forward to offer support, and dustmen in Run-corn brought tea to the picket lines.

In Islington and Lewisham, firemen were pass-

HELP THEM TO WIN

ing round petitions and getting a favourable response.

In every area, socialists should not wait for the firemen to make a request for support.

□ Contact the nearest fire station picket line. Organise a mass meeting in your workplace and invite a fireman to put their case.

□ Organise support on the picket lines. Take a collection in your workplace — the firemen are receiving no strike pay.

□ In any part of your workplace where you know there is a fire risk, insist that work is stopped during the period of the firemen's strike — not only to help them, but also for your own safety. Insist on full pay during this necessary lay-off. At Monsanto Chemicals, Seal Sands, production has been shut down for the period of the strike and the whole workforce redirected to maintenance work.

More on the firemen's strike: pages 4 and 5

Why they had to strike

IN AUGUST this year, a committee of union officials and representatives of the local authorities [who are the firemen's employers], under the chairmanship of Lord McCarthy, reported that firemen should be paid the average wage for adult male manual workers, plus 10%

That 10% covers the skills needed for the job [training school, exams, and four years' experience before being fully qualified], and the exceptional risks. The 'average plus 10%' formula comes to £86 a week.

At present a qualified fireman is paid £65.71 before tax. After tax, a fireman with a wife and

two children under the age of 11 gets the following rates:

On appointment: £39.46
From 6 months to 2 years' service: £40.80
During third year of service: £42.21
During fourth year: £43.75
After qualifying: £46.71.

Since 1973, firemen's pay has increased 62% while prices have gone up 82%.

For this pay, firemen work a 48 hour week, including night shifts. They get no extra pay for night work or for weekends. Only for Christmas and bank holidays are they paid... time and a half.

NUM: stop the carve-up

IF INDIVIDUAL areas of the National Union of Mineworkers conclude area incentive schemes with the National Coal Board, the union could be torn to shreds.

The recent pit-head ballot let the membership as a whole have its say on pit-by-pit productivity dealing — and by a 55-45 majority the miners rejected the scheme that a bare majority of their executive had been pushing.

The people who were fighting to have the incentive scheme go to a ballot, after it had been rejected by the last union conference, now

want to ignore the ballot results. If they go ahead, the big militant areas like Yorkshire and South Wales might refuse to contribute dues to the national organisations.

This would lead to a break up of the NUM and a return to the old situation of area unions.

Among those leading the push for area agreements is Midlands area leader Jack Lally. He is trying to get the national executive to give him the go-ahead for a local settlement, despite the fact

Continued back page

Another victim of suicide...



ON SATURDAY 12th November the Bavarian Minister of Justice announced that another member of the Red Army Faction, Ingrid Schubert, had committed suicide in her cell. Schubert, according to the official account, hanged herself from the bars of her cell in Munich-Stadelheim prison. Before being moved to that prison in August, she occupied a cell near Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Jan-Carl Raspe, and Irmgard Möller in Stammheim gaol.

This is the sixth alleged suicide in prison by members of the Red Army Faction ('Baader-Meinhof group') — and it must deepen suspicion that the supposed suicides are direct assassinations by the West German authorities, or at the very least that the suicides are encouraged by the prison authorities.

Suppose that all the arsenal reported to have been found in the cells of Baader, Ensslin and Raspe (who died on 18th October) did in fact get there through accidental neglect by the prison authorities — the guns, the explosives, the radio sets, the communications syst-

em between the cells. Suppose the prison guards' surveillance just happened to be relaxed at the right time for all three to kill themselves.

Suppose there was no special reason why the post-mortem failed to investigate the times of the three deaths. Suppose even that Baader did indeed shoot himself in the back of the head, with his right hand (he was left handed), using a gun with a 7-inch barrel.

If this official story is true, then there would surely be a major tightening up on surveillance of Schubert. But Schubert still — according to official report — found the means and the opportunity to hang herself.

The West German government is confident it can quell any awkward questions. The terrorist-hunt in West Germany is still in full swing. One of the latest victims is Gudrun Ensslin's father, a clergyman, arrested for having said, 'I'm convinced that Gudrun has been assassinated'. He could be sent to prison for up to three years.

We'll wreck pub, fascists threaten

Threats over the phone to a pub landlord forced the International Communist League to cancel an advertised meeting on 'How to Fight the Fascists' last Sunday, 13th. The landlord of the 'Prince Albert' in Wharfedale Rd was told by an anonymous caller that the pub would be wrecked if the meeting was held.

So he cancelled the booking at the last minute and called the police. A lot of police turned up but no fascists.

The meeting will now be held on Friday 18th November, 7.30pm in Room C101A, Grot Floor, St Clements Build London School of Econon Houghton St, Aldwych [H tube].

FRANCE-DISUNION OF THE LEFT

FOR six weeks now, political life in France has been dominated by the public dispute between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party.

In 1972 the CP and the SP, together with the small Left Radical Movement, adopted a Common Programme. If the trend shown in the municipal elections earlier this year is continued, the CP-SP-Left Radical Alliance should win a majority in the parliamentary elections next March.

But on 23rd September, after many conflicts, the negotiations over updating the Common Programme were broken off. Since then the CP has been denouncing the SP for turning to the right, and the SP has accused the CP of being manipulated by Moscow and being concerned about getting its hands on the top jobs in the ministries and in the firms to be nationalised by a future Left government.

Neither the CP nor the SP, however, has anything better to propose than a Left victory in the elections with a programme similar to 1972's. The dispute is not really about policy differ-

ences but about electoral rivalries. The CP is trying to insure itself against being ditched once it has helped the SP into power: for it is the SP that has gained most from the Left Alliance.

The CP's vote has remained stable since 1972 at about 20%. The SP's vote has gone up from 5% in 1969 to over 30% today. After the elections the SP could be strong enough in Parliament to drop the alliance with the CP and govern on its own or in a coalition with one of the "centre" parties.

The CP's present agitation is designed to make it difficult for the SP to do that.

The policy differences are small. The CP wants to increase the national minimum wage slightly more than the SP. The CP wants extra nationalisations on top of what the SP will accept. The CP prefers a more nationalist defence policy than the SP, and is in favour of nuclear armament for France, while the SP proposes a referendum on the issue.

Neither in what the CP says, nor in what the SP says, is there much mention of these issues.

Instead, each accuses the other of breaking unity! The SP proposes that negotiations on revising the Common Programme be resumed immediately, with no preconditions; the CP replies "Our door is open at any time". But still there is no new start of negotiations.



The Socialist Party's posters proclaim: "The party which keeps its promises and only makes the promises it can keep", and SP leader François Mitterand says "We are ready to update the Common Programme, as long as it is actually a question of updating it and not of making a second Common Programme before having applied the first one."

The CP, on the contrary, accuses the SP of having abandoned the 1972 Common Programme. "With the steady and growing desire for change, the SP bears an even graver responsibility. Lack of faith in the development of the popular movement is a constant feature of reformism. That movement

would clearly be assured of victory if the SP remained true to its commitments."

The CP says that the root cause of the disagreement over nationalisations is that the SP is not willing to attack the interests of big business. For the CP, on the contrary, "we must, from the beginning, cross a minimum threshold of nationalisations, for where there is property, there is power."

But even if the nationalisations proposed in the Common Programme meant a shift of power to the working class — which is by no means true — in any case they only cover 15% of the economy. And the nationalisations being disputed between the CP and the SP cover just 0.5% of French workers!

For all its talk of the SP's reformism, the CP itself has said repeatedly that "socialism is not on the order of the day".

Some workers — not surprisingly — simply find the quarrel between the CP and the SP pointless and harmful, and wish for nothing more than unity at any price. But many of the more militant workers, so it seems,

are inclined to say: the CP is right, we can't trust Mitterand.

The CP's paper claims that the party is recruiting rapidly, and one recent opinion poll showed a gain in votes for the CP since the beginning of the hostilities. The SP also may stand to gain from the affair, since it has had a chance to show that it can "stand up to the communists" and win votes on its right.

There are strong reasons, however, for the CP and SP to come to a new agreement before the March elections. Under the French electoral system, unless a candidate gets an absolute majority in the first round, there is a second round of voting between the candidates most successful in the first round. The CP and the SP both need to be sure of getting each other's supporters' votes in the second round contests.

Moreover, the CP has to calculate its manoeuvre carefully. Too much artificial indignation against the SP might lead workers to listen to the revolutionaries who say that they should trust neither the CP nor the SP.

Israeli blitz followed troop build-up

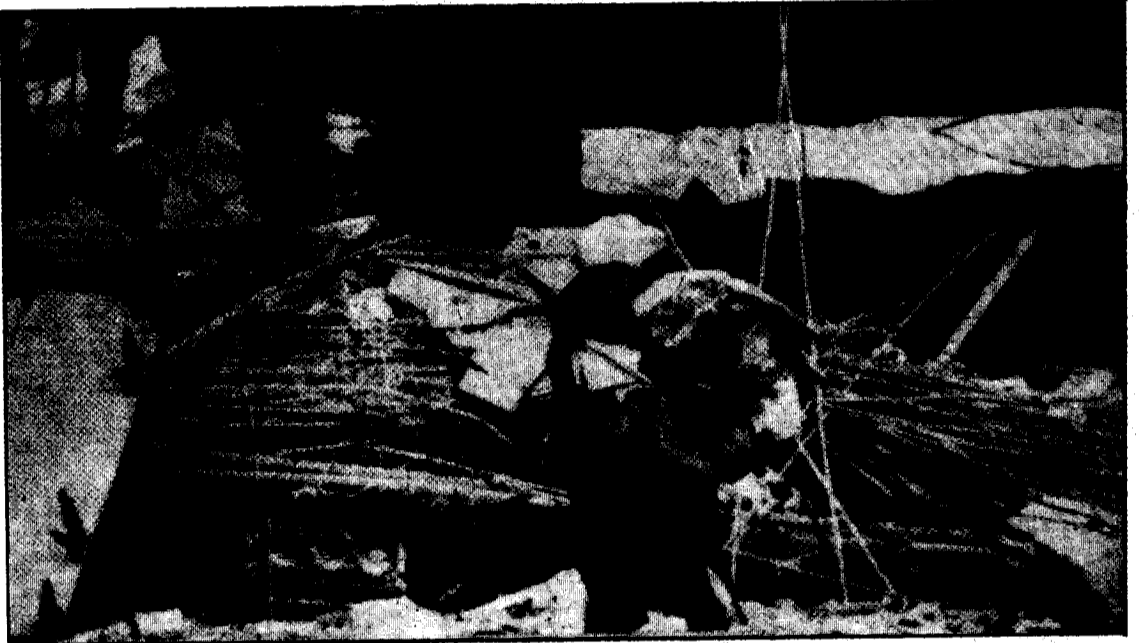
THE DEATH of one Israeli during a rocket attack on the town of Nahariya was used as an excuse for a full-scale bombing raid on Lebanon in which some 100 people were killed.

But Palestinian sources revealed that the rocket attack on Nahariya was itself a retaliation for Israeli shelling of the Tyre region earlier the same day.

The bombing raid, carried out by jet planes supported by warships off the coast inside Lebanese waters, had little to do with retaliation — though this sort of racist overkill response to the death of a single Israeli has long been Israel government practice.

According to reports in Beirut newspapers, a message was conveyed to the Lebanese government via the US Ambassador, demanding that the Palestinians, who control the area together with Lebanese leftists, should be forced to withdraw to the north and west of the Litani river.

Palestinian sources also report a build-up of Israeli troops and armour along the border.



FRENCH TROOPS INVADE WESTERN SAHARA

At the end of October, France sent troops into Mauritania to back up the fight of the Ould Daddah regime against the Polisario Front, on the pretext that they are holding a handful of French technicians hostage.

'Polisario' stands for Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguiet el-Hamra and Rio de Oro, the north and south respectively of what used to be Spanish (or Western) Sahara, and the movement is fighting for self-determination for the Sahara.

The French troops are part of the back-up service France has offered the regimes of both Mauritania (a former French colony) and Morocco (a former Spanish colony) in their fight against the Polisario Front. By means of these troops, France also wishes to signal to Algeria that it had better back off and stop its help to the Front, which includes aid to Saharan refugees in a camp

at Tindouf, just across the Algerian border.

Polisario's struggle is a continuation of the struggle against Spanish imperialism.

In November 1975, King Hassan of Morocco staged a carefully choreographed farce called the 'Green March'. Thousands of Moroccans were mobilised to occupy the Spanish-held territory of Western Sahara.

Even the 'New York Times' had to own up. "The Moroccan marchers were allowed to occupy a symbolic part of the colony. The Spanish military... was allowed to flex its muscles, move some ships around and concentrate some troops. King Hassan then called back his marchers, Spain agreed to negotiate and the bargain was struck by which Morocco and Mauritania will find themselves in control of Spanish Sahara by next February."

But if the Spanish authorities thought they could crush the popular resistance spearheaded by Polis-

ario, they were mistaken. Despite their efforts to herd the population into the towns where they were firmly under Spanish control, the revolt grew.

When the Spanish withdrew in February 1976, the Polisario Front announced the creation of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. The Front, however, had to concede that this announcement was more a diplomatic move than a military reality: they could not hold any significant land area permanently.



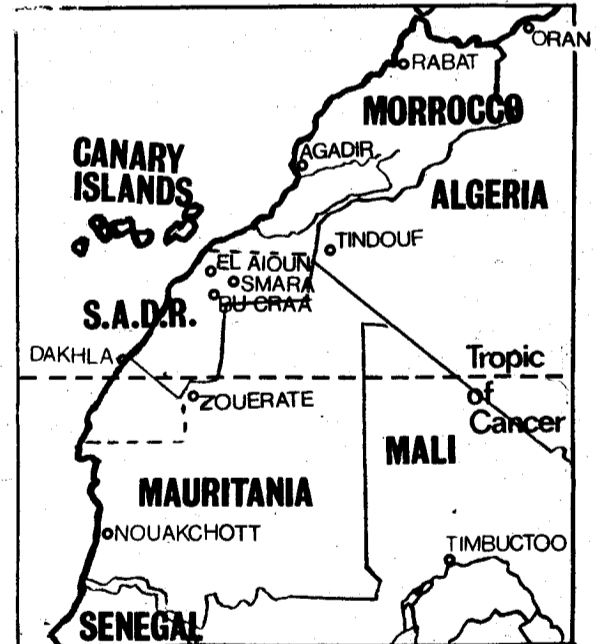
For all its barrenness, this area has considerable importance for imperialism. There is almost certainly a very large oil zone within the territory, whose research and exploitation rights have already been signed away to the Moroccan government, Philips Petroleum, British Petroleum, Getty Oil, and the Italian AGIP company.

But the phosphates discovered in the area could be

an even bigger source of revenue. By Craa in the Sahara is one of the world's richest deposits and one of the cheapest to exploit. Investments in phosphate extraction come from the French Credit Lyonnais, the Rothschild Bank, Krupps, and Spanish sources.

According to Morocco and Mauritania — and their claims are supported by imperialism — the Saharan people do not exist as an independent entity. They also claim that a separate Sahara would lead to a

'Balkanisation' of the region. The argument are just what might be expected. The resistance of the Polisario Front, however, as well as the previous revolts against Spanish colonialism, show that the people in this area have developed a national consciousness. This national consciousness does not counterpose itself to the idea of a unified Maghreb [Arab North-West Africa]: on the contrary, this is a very popular slogan amongst the Saharan people.



UNEMPLOYED YOUTH

Stop preaching — start organising

ON 16 NOVEMBER, the Youth Campaign against Unemployment is lobbying Parliament.

According to the latest government figures, one and a half million people are still jobless. Of this total, 45% are under 25. For these young people — many of them school leavers — the promises of good jobs and prospects which they heard at school are leaving a bitter taste.

Their anger and frustration should rightly be turned against the system that dishes out unemployment. But that doesn't happen automatically. If socialists fail to direct this anger at the right target, the capitalist system, then these unemployed young people can quite easily be mobilised by fascism against scapegoats like black workers. And any young people recruited to fascism pose a danger to the working class movement.

The YCAU aims to organise unemployed youth on a socialist basis. It was set up at the 1976 Labour Party conference, under the guidance of the LPYS and with the support of a number of prominent Labour MPs and trade unionists. Apart from the lobby, however, the YCAU has organised one National Rally and a few local rallies and meetings — and that's all!

It isn't as if nothing else can be done. Up and down the country there have been fights against productivity deals, speed-up, undermanning and redundancies. An organisation of the unemployed could give vital support to these fights to defend jobs; it could even stimulate and encourage such struggles.

The YCAU spends all its time advising that "socialist policies"

would cure unemployment. But that sort of school-teacher talk doesn't organise young people to do anything. And there is plenty to be done apart from spreading the socialist Gospel.

The central thing to fight for is for the working week to be cut without any loss of pay. There must also be a campaign against overtime — also with no loss of pay.

Struggles for these policies can weld together the employed and the unemployed into a unity that can win. Together, and for a common purpose, they can fight to exercise a form of working class control in society.

Here and now in every area, unemployed youth committees could organise delegations to factories to put forward their arguments for banning overtime with no loss of take-home earnings; for organised workers to adopt the demand for a full intake of apprentices and to fight for all vacancies to be filled, by refusing to cover such vacancies.

In Cardiff the Council decided to axe 200 apprenticeships. Protests by the YCAU to the trades council saved 20 of the apprenticeships. It was a small gain, but it shows what can be done.

Unemployed youth committees must also fight for the immediate interests of the unemployed — for them to get their full rights from the dole, for recreation facilities (many exist that are not made available to them), for training facilities, for the right to trade union membership, against discrimination in employment and so on.

This sort of activity can win unemployed youth into the organised labour movement.

The YCAU has, however, seen its role as offering good advice to the Labour and Trade Union leaders. It does raise slogans like "35-hour week to create 700,000 new jobs" — but proposes nothing except pressure on the Labour leaders to make them act.

There does exist another campaign against unemployment — the Right to Work Campaign, which appears to be rather active and militant. But most of the action is confined to set-piece marches, as the Campaign has failed to sustain any on-going local work. Its pretentiousness and arrogance, combined with a blanket jeer at everything in the labour movement except "the rank and file", has alienated it from the labour movement and left it on the sidelines.

In local YCAUs, where the dead hand of the LPYS leadership is not all-powerful, the beginnings of a real militant campaign can be built: a campaign willing to work alongside all those in the labour movement and the left fighting unemployment; a campaign that will do its utmost to forge unity between the employed and the unemployed, and take the fight into the organised labour movement; a campaign that it open to all who want to fight; a campaign whose policies are democratically debated and decided in the most open manner possible.

STEVE LEHARNE

"No return to the Thirties" is the YCAU slogan — but they could learn a lot from the way the unemployed were organised then



A DAY ON THE BLANKETS



We're not criminals, we're prisoners of war, say the men who won't put on prison uniform.

WE WERE at Mass this morning, the highlight of a lone week. It's the only time that we get together. It's definitely an amazing sight to see one hundred half-naked men, attacking each other in frantic conversation before Mass begins.

I myself am not long sentenced, but I was on remand for almost a year, so I know most of the lads here, or at least I should. But it's very hard to identify those who I haven't seen for some time. Everyone with the exception of the latest arrivals has a beard of sorts. When I first arrived here I noticed that a lot of men's eyes seemed to be sunken and everyone's face was a pale yellowish complexion. I've seen a few men whose eyes looked glassy as if they were drunk.

I suppose being locked in a small 8' x 8' cell for 24 hours a day, every day, with no exercise periods and therefore no fresh air or sunlight, would make anyone look ill.

Of course it doesn't help much when one has nothing to do to pass the time. We have no newspapers, books, games or radio or TV because we are not allowed them. The only things we can get is a Bible or religious material.

There are only a few of us who take visits. You are allowed one visit per month. But you must wear prison uni-

form when you go out to the visiting room. That is why 90% of the lads here don't take visits. A lot of men haven't seen or spoken to their families for almost a year.

We are allowed to receive two letters in per month and send two out. But if you take the monthly visit your quota is cut to one letter.

Receiving a letter from home is a tremendous boost. But more times than enough the letter is mutilated by the censors' pen. Many letters never reach you, as with those going out to families from in here.

Every piece of news is eagerly welcomed as it is a very alien feeling to be cut off from the outside world without knowing what is happening. Sometimes we'll hear a bit of news which might be several weeks old because of the total black-out of news. Rumours are rampant.

It's seven o'clock now and

the supper has arrived: a half cup of lukewarm tea and a small slice of cake. That means no more food until breakfast at 8am tomorrow.

There's a quiz tonight; it helps pass the time. But then again it's like the sing-songs that we hold now and again. You can get sick listening to the same songs and answering the same questions. It's a bit difficult to sing through a quarter inch slit between a steel door and a wall, but it's done.

I suppose that between 8pm and midnight is the liveliest time, with everyone shouting to their neighbours. But it's not the same as talking to the person's face.

I'll be seeing the Governor this week, whereupon I'll be charged with refusing to wear prison clothes and to do prison work. The Governor will rhyme out three or four sentences which he does two hundred times a fortnight. He will

sentence me to three days' confinement to cell, which means my bedding will be taken out for three days. I also will lose two weeks remission and loss of privileges.

Of course there is also the usual harassment. A few days ago a man was given three days on the boards (no bedding) for just lying on his bed.

We don't get any cigarettes here, but the Bears (screws) usually open the doors with a cigarette in their mouths. Sometimes a Bear will say to you, if you put on the uniform you can have cigs, radio, TV etc. It's an inviting idea indeed when you're living in a day-to-day life of depression, boredom and complete nothingness. But it would be a very poor price for selling yourself as a criminal.

We are all Republican Prisoners of War here, and there is nothing that the prison authorities, the Northern Ireland Office or the British Government can say or do to change this. They can keep us incarcerated and naked, they may use every means at their disposal to try to break us. But they have already done this for 13 months and have failed to break us.

There is one thing that we remember always, and those who torment us would do well to listen: "You have nothing in your entire arsenal to break one single man who refuses to be broken."

Profits &

ABOUT 1000 people a year die in fires. It is not many more than die in industrial accidents [some of which, of course, are fires]; it is many less than are driven to kill themselves each year by this filthy society; and it is far less than the death toll inflicted on the working class by capitalism through poverty and unhealthy conditions.

Nevertheless, it is three human deaths a day. There will probably be at least that many during the firemen's strike. And — whether the deaths were avoidable or not — the press will cry that the striking firemen are murderers.

The murderers are the Government. By their obstinacy in refusing the firemen's wage claim, they are to blame for any casualties.

The firemen are claiming no more than what an official inquiry, in August, said they should have. There were

Would you go in there for 97p an hour?



RANK AND FILE MUST CONTROL THE STRIKE

THE RESOLUTION passed by an overwhelming majority at the firemen's special conference expresses a healthy mistrust of their Union executive. The Union executive is not authorised to end the strike unless the firemen's demands are granted in full or a recall special conference decides to go back to work.

That mistrust was no more than was necessary. The Union executive had voted 10-3 to accept a 10% offer, and general secretary Terry Parry took it on himself to start the public campaign against the strike, denouncing it as a "bloody chaotic situation".

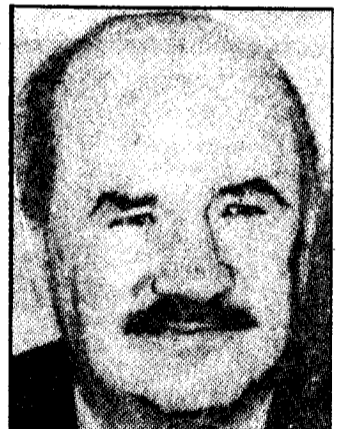
Only a few weeks ago at a Fire Brigades Union school, Parry was asked by a fireman, "Our claim is 30%. What will you do if the employers offer only 20%?" Parry, a stalwart of the TUC General Council left wing, replied: "I'd get out of the room quickly, before they changed their minds".

As the strike began against Parry's wishes, union officials at national level (and even at local level in the West Midlands) had done nothing in the way of preparing leaflets to explain the firemen's case to other workers, or collection sheets.

Rank and file firemen must therefore make sure that *they themselves* control this strike. That means:

□ Making sure the strikers are kept together, either on the picket line or inside the fire stations, and are consulted on all decisions about the running of the strike. Using the fire stations as organising centres for gaining support from other workers.

□ Electing local strike committees, with delegates from every station, and a national strike committee with delegates from the local committees.



Terry Parry

'If it was just squirting water anyone could do the job'

THE TROOPS are being used to try to stop the firemen getting their pay rise. But that doesn't mean they can do the firemen's job.

In the 1973 Glasgow firemen's strike, 2000 troops covered for 800 firemen and after 11 days were "physically and emotionally exhausted". In this strike, to cover for the whole Strathclyde district (1800 firemen) there are 480 troops. A London sector army fire HQ was described by *The Times* correspondent as "a setting for an Ealing comedy".

London District GOC General Swinton described the "Green Goddesses" as "rather unsophisticated, old Civil Defence vehicles, unsuitable for London". And the men in them are green too.

They know nothing of rescue techniques and couldn't use breathing apparatus if they had it. They can't deal with chemical fires, and aren't equipped to reach higher than second floors.

The Government should stop this gambling with human lives and pay the firemen in full — now!



WHY IT HAS TO BE AN ALL-OUT STRIKE

SEVERAL FIREMEN - readers have taken issue with the last sentence of our front-page article last week. And on reflection we believe their objections are justified.

The article said strikers should occupy the fire stations so as to be "able, in certain extreme circumstances, to take a decision to fight a fire without in general breaking or harming their strike". It was the same idea as striking miners supplying coal to old people but not to power stations, or striking power workers supplying electricity to hospitals but not to factories.

The fire station premises can very well be used as strike and picketing centres. In practice, however — as has been pointed out — firemen could not make the same selection as miners or power workers. The only way "selective fire-fighting" could be done was the way it was done during a dispute in Northern Ireland.

The firemen turned out to every call, did what was necessary to save life and stop the fire spreading too much, and waited for part time firemen to arrive and finish the job.

A similar tactic in the present dispute would mean turning out to every call (or, at least, every major call), doing the main work, and waiting for the Army to finish it off. Since the Army is using its own equipment anyway, taking control of Fire Brigade equipment would make no difference anyway in terms of preventing scabbing.

For firemen to work at all, then, even under their own democratic control, would mean a major retreat from their strike. Such partial actions have got them nowhere in the past.

Of course, if there is a fire or a road accident near where firemen are picketing or occupying a fire station, they will probably go to help — as private individuals, not as firemen.

If we don't win this strike we've all got other jobs earmarked. Lots of men have gone already. On the newspapers you can get £100 as a fire officer, and you sit around all day.

We like doing this job — but it's a luxury being a fireman. We just can't afford it any more.

All we're asking is average pay and 10%. Quite apart from the skills, the shifts and the danger, we do 48 hours basic: so that's already 16% more than the 40 hours the national average is based on.

If we get our full claim, that's still less than the police get — and look what a fuss there was about *their* pay being low.

In the last six months on this station, two men had to retire because of back injuries. Another had to leave after he'd been blown through a shop window. I've had two of my friends killed in the fire service over the last ten years.

We're picketing round the clock. We turn up on our work shifts for the picket. No-one

goes in except the cook: she makes herself a cup of tea and then goes home.

If the part-timers come down here there'll be real violence, I can tell you. I don't think they'll be able to use the part timers at all, they don't want the aggravation.

I hope the government pays up soon. The troops just don't know what they're doing. They're just clowning around with the equipment.

They went out yesterday to a fire in a basement. Of course the smoke was going up the house, so they were aiming the water at the second floor. But there was no fire there at all.

We've had lots of support. I reckon the papers have blown up the amount of hostility there is to the strike. Nearly everyone going past has signed our petition. They know we didn't want to strike. But if we didn't, there would just be no fire service left at all.

Islington fireman

A FULLY QUALIFIED FIREMAN WORKS -

48 Hrs

FOR TAKE-HOME PAY OF

£46.7

NO OVERTIME - NO BOI

before life — every time

other official inquiries, in 1966, 1970, and 1971. None of them have been implemented. The firemen have waited patiently for eleven years. They have never had a national strike before. But now they have no other way of securing decent wages and conditions for themselves and for a properly manned fire service.

That's what the firemen are standing up for. In the name of what cause is the Government standing firm? In the name of saving the 10% limit on wage increases — that is, in the name of making sure that the working class pays the cost of the bosses' crisis. That's the cause to which the Government and the ruling class are willing to sacrifice possible deaths and injuries through fire.

It's not a new policy for the British ruling class. They were willing to sacrifice millions of lives in world wars

and colonial wars in order to safeguard their overseas profits. They have no hesitation in putting life and health at risk through the cuts in the health services.

They call on the firemen, the power workers, the miners, the dockers to show more 'social responsibility' — and at the same time they proclaim that money-getting is the highest aim of human life!

For the British millionaires who profit from the exploitation and oppression of the black workers of South Africa, apartheid's bloody toll in human life is shrugged off with the comment "business is business" — but when workers go on strike they suddenly discover a moral sense.

More 'social responsibility'? Yes — when the working class controls the way society is run, and when social responsibility is for everyone. In this dog-eat-

dog society, the firemen finally had no choice but to strike.

The firemen know the risks better than anyone. Last year five firemen died on duty, and 500 were injured so severely that they had to leave the fire service. A fireman joining the service faces a 50% chance that he will have to leave it because of illness or injury caused by the job before retiring age. With an increased risk of heart and respiratory diseases, firemen's life expectancy averages out at 58 years.

"Working to rule" by firemen only cuts out non-urgent work, and experience has shown that it doesn't force any concessions. The Glasgow firemen's strike in 1973, however, won increases of up to £8 a week at a time when the Tory government said the limit was £1 plus 4%. That's why the firemen had to strike.

The firemen's strike can be a breakthrough for us all



OVER THE last three years, Government wage controls have imposed the biggest drop in working class living standards this century.

After Phase 2 ended on July 31st, many big claims were put in. But the settlements so far have at most stretched the 10% and 12 month limits — they have not broken the limits.

Now the firemen's strike and the miners' £135 demand put a breakthrough on the agenda. If they succeed, there are many workers who will follow them in fighting for increases over 10% — first of all, one million local government manual workers, who are claiming £50 minimum wage.

And, indeed, it is about time that we broke the hold of the idea that workers should help the system to get itself straight and then wait for the rewards.

What the capitalist system runs on is profits. And what profits come from is the fact that the value of what workers produce each week is more than their wages — and the bosses pocket the difference.

Getting the system straight means pushing profits up — and that means driving down wages and speeding up work rates. No rewards for the working class from that!

To win what we need we have to fight against the system, to make workers' control prevail over the control of the laws of profit. That is a struggle that can only be won for good by the revolutionary overthrow of the system. But we can start the struggle now, by fighting to fix wages according to our needs rather than the needs of capitalism.

That means a fight for:

■ 'Catching-up' wage increases, to restore living standards to 1974-75 levels.

■ A clause in every agreement which guarantees monthly revision of pay levels to keep pace with price increases. £1 wage increase is needed for every 1% rise in the cost of living. And pensions and benefits should receive the same protection against inflation.

■ An adequate national minimum wage, likewise protected against inflation.

■ Working class monitoring of the cost of living, to provide a check on the unreliable official figures.

The best way, now, to defend our living standards is to support the firemen and the miners. And the best way to support the firemen and the miners is to start the fight for our own wage demands — on at least the basis outlined above.

Witch hunt spreads to Austria

The letter below suggests a connection between the RAF and the workers' movement that Workers' Action disagrees with. Our comments will follow

COMRADES,

The murders in Stammheim [of Baader, Ensslin & Raspe] and the Mogadishu affair have started a lively discussion in the Viennese left, which has produced a quite clear separation of views.

Neither the Maoists nor the GRM (Austrian section of the USFI), VSSTÖ (Socialist Party Student organisation) or the FÖJ (Eurocommunists who split from the CP in 1968) were prepared to practice active solidarity with the RAF comrades in Germany.

At the United Front meeting, which was called to organise a meeting and demonstration on the murder of the Stammheim comrades, the whole of the left (apart from Stalinists of both kinds who didn't turn up) showed itself incapable of resisting public pressure and, like the West German left, was concerned to distance itself as much as possible from the RAF.

For them the criticism of the political line and methods of the RAF took first place, at a time when it is necessary to show who the repression in W. Germany is really aimed at — that the repression of the RAF is only the start of a massive global attack on the left and the whole workers' movement.

Seen this way, the criticism of the politics of the RAF (important and necessary as it is) cannot lead to the conclusion which large sections of the German and Austrian left have arrived at: namely that the comrades of the RAF can no longer be seen as part of the workers' movement, in that they objectively harm it by providing a cover for the forward march of reaction.

Apart from the fact that, so far, no useful criterion could be given which would allow a clear line to be drawn separating those who count as part of the workers' movement and those who don't (those who do it objective harm include all reformists, for instance), they derive from their principally wrong estimation of the RAF the conclusion that isolated terrorists, who are not understood by the "masses", do not merit support. Here it is completely overlooked that the isolation of the urban guerrillas is not self-chosen but is a necessary consequence of their political method. The drive to become ever more conspiratorial continually narrows their propaganda activity.

It is precisely for that reason that the RAF's conception is wrong.

The German and Austrian left, which was on the side of the terrorists when Spanish Francoist Admiral Carrero Blanco was killed, using the same methods as the comrades of the RAF, is no longer prepared today to actively defend the rights of those being repressed in their own country — given the pressure from the bourgeois state, the reformist parties and the mood of the working class in West Germany and Austria. They are much more concerned with credibly documenting their

distance from the RAF, as if the main thing was to prove that the RAF no longer belong to the working class; as if we should resist even the attack on liberal authors like Heinrich Böll.

For a long time in Austria it seemed that, given the lack of a radicalisation of youth and students as in Germany in 1968, repression would not surface in the foreseeable future. However, it is the IKL (in Austria) and not the Spartacusbund (a group it has been associated with in Germany) which is being prosecuted on suspicion of having contact with sympathisers of the RAF.

On Saturday 22nd October, the state police searched various flats. The reason according to the warrant is that "Special no. 2 of 'Permanente Revolution', central organ of the Internationale Kommunistische Liga, of October 1977, contains various points (pages 13, 14, and 15) which, in connection with the murder of the German State Prosecutor Buback, infringe conditions of paragraph 282, Section 2 of the STGB [Austrian law]. On the basis of this publication the suspicion arises that contact exists with sympathisers in West Germany, and that further statements of this kind can be expected".

The pages named contain firstly a statement from the RAF and secondly a commentary by the Spartacusbund ('Buback is Dead', p.15) in which the killing of Buback is criticised politically. This commentary by the Spartacusbund was published in 'Permanente Revolution' in June 77 without any reaction by the state prosecutor.

If prosecution is started because of publication of the RAF's statement, then dozens of papers, not only of the left, are also open to prosecution. In Germany RAF statements have been printed in the press countless times.

Paragraph 282 forbids "incitement to a punishable offense". It says further:

"(1) Anyone who, in a printed publication, radio or any other way which is accessible to a broad public incites to an offense which is punishable, if he is not liable to heavier punishment as participant in this offense, is liable to up to 2 years' imprisonment.

(2) Punishable is anyone who, in the way described in Section 1, welcomes an offense which has already been committed which is liable to more than one year's imprisonment in such a way as to outrage the general sense of justice or encourage the perpetration of such an offense".

As well as the search and the threatened prosecution of the IKL, other events illustrate the new state attack on the left.

■ At a spontaneous meeting about the Stammheim events, three people were arrested and fined for "disturbing the public peace", "provocation of public anger", and other such crimes.

■ A comrade, Horst Balzar, active in solidarity with the political prisoners in Germany, was arrested as an "alien without means", and has been given 3 weeks to leave Austria.

On the excuse of the hunt for 'terrorists', the international offensive against the European left is being strengthened massively under the leadership of the German government.

Objective reporting of repression in Germany, demands for better prison conditions for the prisoners there, are not enough; the international left must keep up an open resistance against the attacks of reaction.

We must criticise the fact that Workers' Action has not taken a clear position on this question either in WA73 or in WA76. We agree entirely with you in your general analysis of terrorism, such as your contrasting of the PLO and IRA on one hand and the RAF on the other. However, your criticism of the political methods of the RAF doesn't go as far as to point to concrete consequences and tactical steps at the present time.

We call on the comrades of Workers' Action to discuss again their understanding of international solidarity, which we think should initiate some more practical actions.

Internationale
Kommunistische Liga



Applause for Big Brother

Communist Party debate

Second fiddle to Labour — with no bow and no strings

SINCE ITS last Congress, the Communist Party has continued to decline. Membership has fallen from 28,519 to 25,130, and many of those hold a card but are not active. The circulation of the Morning Star has fallen by 2,035 in the first six months of 1977, and the Young Communist League has a membership of a few hundred. Some of the CP's most prominent trade unionists [Jimmy Reid, Bernard Panter, John Tocher] have left the party for greener pastures.

The Executive Committee denies that all this has anything to do with the party's politics: "We should reject at the outset the view that there is an answer to the fall in membership in a reversal of the major policies and strategy of the party in recent years". Instead they say, vaguely: "There are inadequacies in our political work, party life, and organisation, which are in some measure responsible for the drop in membership" (Comment, 23 July).

Ruins

The CP is doomed to be marginal because it has no policies really different from the Labour Left. The Draft says: "The Communist Party does not seek to replace the Labour Party as a federal party of the working class. Rather we see a much more influential mass Communist Party as crucial to the future of the Labour Party itself". Dave Priscott puts it even more strongly in an article in Marxism Today (October):

"Communist strategy rejects ... the view that the Communist Party can advance to socialism over the ruins of the Labour Party..." Priscott continues, however:

"We sometimes seem caught in a Catch 22 situation. In periods when our strategy is succeeding and as a result of that strategy the left in the Labour Party is making advances, there are people who conclude that there is, after all, a future for the Labour Party, and for them as lefts in the Labour Party, so while they may be friendly to the Communist Party they do not join it. Then when the situation hits a downturn and the left suffers setbacks, some of them become disillusioned, conclude there is no hope for the Labour Party after all, leave it — and do not join the Communist Party either because they have now no confidence in our perspective of a changed Labour Party".

Even in the unions, where the CP gains over the Labour Left by being more organised, the CP runs up against the fact that its second-string reformist politics are redundant.

While CP members are often accepted as good industrial militants, they can rarely win

Second of three articles
by BRUCE ROBINSON

political support for the CP. Jimmy Airlie, one of the leaders of the UCS workers, writes: "In spite of the leading role, that was widely recognised, of members of the Communist Party, the mass of workers voted for Labour candidates as the alternative to the Tories in the constituencies where the Communist Party had candidates.

"This took place where the lads agreed that our candidates were more able and experienced on all the issues facing the workers, but saw the dangers of a split working class vote" (Morning Star, 16 September).

For anyone accepting the Draft's "road to socialism", in fact, a Labour vote makes more sense than a CP vote. "The next stage", says the Draft, "is to expand and unify all aspects of the working class and democratic struggle and raise its aims to the winning of a Labour Government carrying out a left policy". The CP's immediate programme "should be pressed on whatever Labour Government is in office. But big changes in the composition of the government would be essential to its full implementation".

Helping

This leaves the CP with no perspective except pressuring Labour Governments, cheering on the Labour Left — and blaming the failure of this policy on the Labour Right, even when 'Left'-wingers like Wilson, Foot, Benn, Jones, and Scanlon are clearly re-

sponsible. It defines reformism as being only the Labour Right. The Draft reads: "... the Labour Party... [has been] from the outset a battleground between a right-wing trend, composed of the most consistent exponents of reformist politics, and a left-wing trend which to one degree or another has challenged either the basic ideas of reformism or the practical policies which reformism has led to".

For some contributors to the discussion, the question is inescapable: is the CP really necessary?

"Throughout the draft the desirability of a Communist Party is not questioned. Yet the general strategy proposed does not necessarily require its existence: the Communist Party must establish that on balance it has a positive contribution to make... It has done so only to a very limited degree" (Morning Star, 19 August). Or: "... the casual non-party reader might be excused for wondering why the Communist Party is needed at all. Careful reading, however, reveals that the Communist Party... is assigned the role of 'helping to unite the labour movement and democratic movements'. An important role, no doubt, but hardly worth a vote in the elections when so much is expected of the Labour Party. Ironically, a genuine left in the Labour Party capable of carrying out this leading role seems almost as far removed from political reality as does a mass Communist Party capable of doing so" (Luckett, Comment, 3 September).

Attempting to solve this problem, some CP members raise the idea of dissolving the CP into the Labour Party, while others propose that the CP should be 'harder' against the Labour Party.

Willie Thompson argues for affiliation to the Labour Party: "We could not hope and would not wish to detach large sections of the labour movement from its allegiance to the Labour Party... The only place for a mass Marxist party in Britain is within the Labour Party as part of its federal structure and our Congress should amend the draft and take decisions to make the removal of bans and proscriptions, followed by the affiliation of the Communist Party as an affiliated section of the Labour Party, our overriding priority" (Comment, 6 August).

For Ted Bramley: "now the greatest fundamental differences have been removed, i.e. the single party state system

and civil war prospect, progress towards a united working class party is possible".

But the CP in its present state, if it should ever win affiliation to the Labour Party, would dissolve without trace into the Labour Left, rather than forming a distinct and militant revolutionary wing, as the Communist International envisaged in the 1920s when urging the CP to seek affiliation. Conscious of this, the opposite wing in the CP argues:

"The draft dooms the party to be a second class ginger group indefinitely... the Labour left will never take over the party, the only way open for them is for an open split with the right wing and to join a party that formulates a real Marxist-Leninist tradition" (Harry Bradfield, Comment, 9 July).

The leadership straddles this dispute. Affiliation might be a good idea, but is not tactically possible; unity presupposes a mass CP. General secretary Gordon McLennan writes: "A bigger and more effective Communist Party... will make more possible a strengthening of the Left in the Labour Party... and assist in the fight to break the paralysing, dead-hand grip of the Right Wing, which is the obstacle to the present and future development of the Labour Party... there is plenty of scope and need for both [CP and Labour Left] to grow".

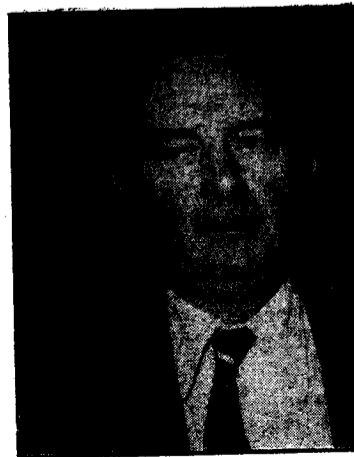
Slavish

The Moscow loyalists have a different answer. They denounce "social democracy", and contrast it with "Marxism-Leninism" — identified with slavish praise for the Stalinist states. This "Marxism-Leninism" does not mean any different programme from reformism — nor does it have any chance of breaking the CP's impasse.

Charlie Doyle, in his pamphlet, 'The British Road to Socialism Draft — Revolutionary Path or Diversion', puts it like this:

"... we surrender by default our main strength and what should distinguish us from all other parties, as a party of social revolution. That is, that we are a contingent together with the socialist countries, the liberation movements, the international working class and peace forces..." (our emphasis).

One of the more realistic discoveries of the 'Eurocommunists' is that this sort of politics would condemn them to isolation indefinitely. But Britain's 'Eurocommunists' find their path towards social democracy blocked by the fact that a social democratic party with overwhelming working class support already exists.



ALEX KITSON — a left-wing member of the Labour Party NEC and a supporter of the USSR. The CP can offer no alternative to the Labour Left.

Taking a holiday from civil war

"The Long Holidays of 1936", directed by Jaime Camino, deals with the Spanish Civil War from a Republican point of view. Completed at the time of Franco's death, it was until recently banned in Spain (where it was in any case not permitted to show on the screen the Republican flag). It is now showing in London.

The action is set in Catalonia, in a village where a number of middle class families are caught by the outbreak of war as they holiday in their summer villas. The village is safer than Barcelona, so the families stay on.

Because they are separated from the field of war, we see the struggle almost entirely indirectly: through the changing conditions in the village, the changing moods and hopes of the families.

The proletariat, the peasants, the political parties and the armies are almost completely reduced to the realm of "noises off".

The central characters are the Cortina family: Mercedes and her husband Jorge, a biologist, and Quique their teenage nephew whose father Paco is a Republican officer who helps put down the fascist coup in Catalonia and shortly after is killed at the front.

The family are taken by surprise by the 5-minute skirmish in the village that announces the "revolution" to them: the local clergy, guardia civil and big bourgeois are captured. They are shocked by the egalitarianism of their maid, Encarna, who embraces communism, the Soviet Union and free love with immediate enthusiasm. And they are disconcerted by the self confidence of the new authorities, the Revolutionary Workers' Militia.

Gradually, however, they seem to understand Paco's last words: "Who but they, the militia, will defend the Republic?"

In this situation Quique matures, sexually and politically; he sees through the double standards and the spinelessness of the adults around him. His decision — a futile one since the workers and the Republic have



already been defeated and Franco's total victory is only days away — is to enlist. Confident that he will be well trained and armed he is one of the many untrained, miserably armed victims of the last battles of the war.

Throughout the film, the children are contrasted in their eagerness and commitment with the adults' inability to commit themselves. Jorge, for instance, will not enlist; he chooses to stay on in the village with his guinea pigs and guilt complex. Their next door neighbour Ernesto Andreu only wants quiet; he alleges mild sympathy for the Republic yet at the same time hides away in his house his fascist relation and his wife — who spend their time sitting in their elegant sports car fantasising about the balmy summer tours they used to make to Nice and Cannes.

The film does not document the class struggle in Spain, nor the course of political or military developments. Accordingly it will disappoint those who are looking for a film "about the Spanish Civil War". It will also disappoint those looking for "a political film from a revolutionary point of view" as distinct from a Republican one.

But its depiction of the petty bourgeoisie's sympathies, their self centredness and failure to commit themselves is ingenious and intelligent.



Mercedes Cortina, pregnant at the outbreak of the war

KEY QUESTIONS FOR RANK AND FILE CONFERENCE

AFTER A GAP of a year, the Socialist Workers' Party-dominated 'Rank and File Organising Committee' has reconvened the Rank and File Conference for November 26th, in Manchester.

It is timely, with the firemen and miners challenging the 10% limit despite the open opposition of their union leaderships. The Communist Party has, for now, dropped even feeble gestures towards rank and file organisation of the type of the April 4th Leyland stewards' conference. And the SWP has become better known in the labour movement as a result of its anti-fascist activity. So the Rank and File Conference is likely to attract more than the SWP's sympathisers.

For this support to be turned to good account, the conference must be made a genuine forum for debate and discussion, run openly and democratically. The Conference cannot hope to be broad enough to play a major role in organising the fight on wages and unemployment. It can, however, provide an opportunity for some hundreds of militants to thrash out a clear policy to organise round.

The indications to date, however, are that the SWP intends to organise the Conference like they have organised the ones in the past — bureaucratically. Already, the Organising Committee, made up of sponsors for the Conference, has apparently 'chosen' Mickey Fenn as secretary — but the meeting at which this was done was never advertised. The way the Organising Committee itself was selected is also shadowy. Some trade union

bodies, on the initiative of International Marxist Group militants, wrote in asking to sponsor the Conference, and have received no reply.

The SWP have published a list of four demands as the basis of the Conference.

★ **Smash the 12 month rule — £15 a week minimum pay rises now.**

★ **For the right to work — no productivity deal.**

★ **For rank and file unity — against racialism.**

★ **For a rank and file movement.**

Support for the firemen will also, undoubtedly, be a theme of the conference. But the SWP gives no real basis for militants to organise on the wages issue (what use is the arbitrary figure of £15? — why not £10, as the SWP originally proposed, or £20, as they proposed in Leyland?), no answer to the political problem of the Labour Government, no policy on workers' control and nationalisation, no policy for women's rights, no definition of what a rank and file movement should be.

All these issues should be discussed and debated. Workers' Action urges all its readers and supporters to propose their trade union branches send delegates, along with resolutions seeking a democratic running of the conference and proposing policy on the questions the SWP leaves unanswered.

JOHN BLOXAM

Credentials for trade union delegates, 50p from the Rank and File Centre, 265a Seven Sisters Rd, London N4.

Marriner rebuffed

LAST WEEK the Borough Arms in Newcastle-under-Lyme was to have been the venue for a meeting by the Nazi League of St George. Speakers included Peter Marriner and an un-named ex-Gestapo member.

The Nazis used a cover name, ['Phoenix Club'] and publicised the meeting only to local fascists, but North Staffordshire Campaign against Racism and Fascism still managed to find out about it.

After a flood of protests by telephone from various members of the campaign, the meeting was cancelled at the last minute by the fascists. In later discussion, however, it was agreed that the best response would have been to organise a picket of the meeting, if possible to prevent it. This would have done far more to alert the local Labour Movement to the fascist danger than a phone-in which probably only succeeded in warning the fascists and allowing them to change their venue.

Just good friends

Basingstoke Anti-fascists decided to check out the boast of local fascist leader that he would be taking several coaches of supporters to the Front's annual patriotic spree at the

Cenotaph. After discreet enquiries at local coach firms, it was clear that not one coach would be going up to London last Sunday.

With the idea of photographing the most zealous local fascists, some of the committee therefore went along to the public coach station at the appropriate time. And within seconds of their arrival, a number of police cars drew up!

The police chatted for a time with a few individuals that were travelling on the London bus. They joked together in a familiar way, and then, when the police had seen them onto the bus, they got back into their cars and drove off.

Leicester NF picketed

IN Leicester last Saturday, 50 anti-fascists came together in the city centre for the sixth week running to prevent the National Front selling papers. Some weeks, the picket has mobilised up to 150.

The picket countered police charges of obstruction by moving the picket around the fascists, which effectively isolated the fascist paper-sellers from potential buyers.

However, this week two of the picket were arrested and fined £50 each for "threatening behaviour". (And one of the fascists was arrested for assaulting a passer-by mistaken for one of the pickets.)

A letter signed by a number of local trade union organisations and Labour Parties is presently circulating asking unions to take action against members who stood as NF candidates in this year's local elections. And an East Midlands ASTMS conference on racism, a call went out to members to organise to expel fascists from the union.

70 HOURS A WEEK FOR £21 AT THE SAFARI PARK

QUESTION: who does Trident Television employ from 8am till dusk, 6 days a week, for as little as £21?

ANSWER: Keepers at Windsor Safari Park, which Trident bought last June.

The pay and conditions of the Safari Park workers are quite unbelievable. They often work Sundays as well — at the flat rate. In the Summer, working "til dusk" means a 70-hour week. On top of that the keepers are on 24-hour call and are obliged to live on site.

Accommodation for the human Safari Park inmates consists of damp, fungus-grown converted stables. There is one cooker and two toilets for 24 people to share.

On top of that the workers are bound by a weighty list of Standing Orders.

When Trident took over, the keepers asked Managing Director Vass (late of Tyne Tees Television) if conditions might now improve, and if they might please be paid for Bank Holidays. They got a flat No to both requests.

The keepers had put up with these conditions because they cared for their work. But then the new bosses, to boost their profits, started to cut down on the animal feeds; and hoped-for improvements in the Dolphinarium didn't materialise.

Four of the dolphin keepers joined the T&G, and recruited 28 workers by the end of October. But Vass wouldn't even talk to T&G Reading District Officer Brian Revell. ACAS came in, but failed to persuade the management to recognise the Union.

After all, if George Ward can get away with, why shouldn't Trident Television do the same?

Now the four dolphin keepers have been sacked, and Vass has managed to intimidate other workers who had joined the TGWU. The four are picketing the gate and leafleting customers to tell them of the dreadful conditions inside. Brian Revell suggests going to an Industrial Tribunal — but such Tribunals (even when they do find for the workers) cannot force reinstatement, merely order a few pounds' compensation.

Other trade unionists may not share the keepers' amazement that their bosses can put "profits before animals" — especially, it seems, the human animal. But the trade union movement as a whole has to take a share in any and every fight for union recognition. Send messages and cash care of Reading District TGWU, 36 Kings Road, Reading, Berks. And if you work for Trident (it has interests in Anglia, Yorkshire and Tyne Tees Television) or for their suppliers, discuss what action you can take to let them know that four dolphin keepers at Windsor aren't on their own!

PETER HAWKER

WORKERS IN ACTION

No more than 7%, say steel bosses

1,000 WORKERS are now on strike at the Stanton Iron-works of the British Steel Corporation.

The strike began after management sent home workers at the 18' spun plant on 7th November because they were operating a go-slow decided by the GMWU Spun Plants branch meeting the Sunday before, in pursuit of a pay claim of £15 plus 40p for each 1% rise in the cost of living.

Management's last offer before the strike began was for a 5% increase with a further 2% in the form of an increase in holiday pay. This overall 7% figure appears to be the norm which the BSC is trying to enforce throughout the industry.

The archaic structure of the Unions in the steel industry is a major hindrance in the fight for higher wages.

The absence of a shop

stewards' committee has already created problems. The Spun and concrete linings plants are out, but the overlap between the various union branches and the various negotiating committees has created many problems over "who is bound by what decision".

The Central Melting plant GMWU did not consider themselves bound by the strike decision of their own branch, as they are in a sep-

arate bargaining group with the National Union of Blast-furnacemen. And one shift in the concrete lining plant initially said that they weren't bound by the strike decision. They are in the same bargaining group, but in a different union branch!

Strike action was planned to start on the 22nd November anyway, and should by then include all the workers involved. If a strike committee is established representing all those out on strike, then the Stanton workers will have established a fighting unity unknown in their history.

Meanwhile, however, the strike remains unofficial, and it is not certain that the Executive Council of the GMWU will support it even from the 22nd. Support is urgently needed. Messages and donations to B. McGinley 29 Glendon Road, Kirk Hallam, Derbyshire.

PETE RADCLIFF

GRUNWICK STRIKERS TO CALL ANOTHER MASS PICKET

AFTER THE mass picket on Monday 7th, when the police decided to use the opportunity to 'teach the pickets a lesson' in the use of violence, the Grunwick strike committee have been planning the next step in the attempt to win the strike.

A hunger strike by Asian women strikers is planned outside Congress House to bring home the fact that for all their fine words, the trade union bureaucrats have not lifted a finger to help win the strike — in fact they have sabotaged it by refusing to support the picket and get blacking started.

The strikers are also planning to call for another mass picket in December (5th or 12th, probably) and for stoppages in support on that day.

Every effort must be made now to bring home in the labour movement the need to give maximum possible support to the strike through blacking and help on the picket line. Financial support is also important, since the chance of APEX withholding strike pay becomes greater the more the strikers are prepared to fight to win the strike and not to rely on APEX general secretary Roy Grantham's moderate tactics.

The importance of the strike, both in terms of basic trade union rights and for the unionisation of immigrant workers, needs to be hammered home, as well as the need to mobilise sufficiently to prevent the police having their own way again.

PETE FIRMIN

Shorter work week is the only way to save steel jobs

UNCERTAINTY is a way of life for British steelworkers. Investment plans are made and re-made faster than hotel beds — and with each new investment plan, with each new output target, there is a new manpower estimate. Last week the British Steel Corporation announced that this year's investment in new plant was to be cut from £647 million to a minuscule £40 million, and that about 15,000 jobs in "unprofitable plants" would have to go.

Back in 1973 British Steel published a £3 billion investment plan. This plan was said to mean a loss of 22,000 jobs. It was based on an output target of 30 to 40 million tonnes for 1977.

As one commentator put it, these plans ought to have been "filed under fiction". A prolonged global recession in the steel industry has combined with a drop in domestic demand and in-

creased Third World output to plunge the British steel industry into a deep crisis.

The reaction of the trade union leaders to this latest threat was predictable: they wanted about six months to consider British Steel's closure plans. In the meantime representatives from different plants have been lobbying MPs.



Many of the solutions being suggested by plant representatives are pie in the sky, some are reactionary. For instance, some are calling for a ban on imported steel and an increase in capacity to 43 million tonnes — the target advocated by the TUC. The most important of the demands, however, and the most progressive of them, is the demand for a shorter working week.

Most of the discussions

about the figures of profit and loss in the steel industry are completely meaningless. They begin by seeing the nationalised sector as an independent financial unit, while in reality its connection with the big steel users (like the car industry) is such that the steel industry is milked by the private sector. A loss in steel is often only the other side of the coin to a profit in motors.

In any case, it should not be for steelworkers to bear the cost of the crisis of capitalist industry.

Rather than get involved in a pointless debate about viability and profitability, steelworkers must reconvene the national action committee to decide on a united strategy for defence. The BSC's suggestion of a "preferential loading scheme" is obviously meant to divide the workforce, to the disadvantage in the short term of those in the older plants and in

the long term of all steel workers.

Instead of arguing about the rival claims of this or that plant, steelworkers must reject the whole system of being black-jacked by threats of redundancy and pressures against decent wages every time there is a downturn in the market for steel. Shorter hours, with new rotas worked out by the workers themselves, are the answer.

MINERS

Continued from p.1

that the August area council meeting rejected the idea of an area incentive scheme.

Other areas whose delegates are pushing for local bargains are Leicester and Derby. These areas are, of course, very small, and the national executive is unlikely to risk the unity of the union for their sake alone. But gambling on the probability that the union will not fall

apart, the right wing may well encourage larger areas like Durham to break with the majority decision.

Even if this drive for local bargains doesn't break up the union, it certainly threatens the possibility of a united fight for the miners' £135 claim.

And right-wingers are doing their best to undermine the claim in other ways. Len Clarke, one of the Nottingham miners' leaders, was defeated on the executive in his attempt to have the members balloted now on an immediate strike for the £135. He was banking on the

well-known reluctance of workers to strike close to Christmas if they think the action may take a while. But NUM President Joe Gormley appears to have it in mind to drag out the negotiations so as to be able to argue in a few months, "It's spring now, we're too late for action".

Coal stocks are running down now, helped by the cold weather. Overtime bans must be introduced as soon as possible to put the miners in a strong position for a strike early in the New Year.

EVENTS

Small ads are free for labour movement events. Paid ads (including ads for publications) 8p per word, £5 per column inch — payment in advance. Send copy to *Events*, 49 Carnac St, London SE27, to arrive by Friday for inclusion in the following week's paper.

WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER. Birmingham Workers' Action meeting: "The Firemen's Case". Speaker Doug Mackay (FBU branch secretary, in personal capacity). 7.30pm at the 'Dog and Partridge', Selly Oak.

WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER - TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER. Revolutionary Communist Group public meetings on "Which Way Forward for Communists — the Crisis and the Labour Movement". Speaker David Yaffe.

... Wed. 16th. 7.30pm, Room A127, Teesside Polytechnic, Borough Rd, MIDDLESBROUGH.

... Thursday 17th. 7.30pm, Trades Council, Picardy Place, EDINBURGH.

... Friday 18th. 1pm, Room 2A9, Stirling University, STIRLING.

... Friday 18th. 7.30pm, Partick Burgh Hall, Burgh Hall Street, GLASGOW.

... Tuesday 22nd. 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, LONDON WC1. Admission 20p.

SATURDAY 19 NOVEMBER. Labour movement conference: "Brit-

ain out of Ireland, how and when?" 10am, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1.

SUNDAY 20 NOVEMBER. Birmingham Workers Action readers' meeting: "Bolshevism, the Russian Revolution, and Stalinism". 4pm at 721A Pershore Rd, Birmingham 29.

FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER. "British trade unionists and the fight against apartheid". 7pm, Friends House, Euston Rd. Organised by AAM and SACTU.

SATURDAY 26 NOVEMBER. Working Women's Charter day school on women and the trade unions. From 10.30am at Friends Meeting House, Church St, Reading. Details from Anita Turnbull, Flat 2, 3 Coleridge Rd, London N8.

SATURDAY 26 NOVEMBER. 'Rank and File' delegate conference. 11.30am at the New Century Hall, Corporation St, Manchester. Credentials for delegates from trade union bodies, 50p from the Rank and File Centre, 28a Seven Sisters Rd, London N4.

TUESDAY 29 NOVEMBER. Cardiff Workers' Action readers' meeting: "Rank and file movements". 7.30pm, VCS, St Mary Street.

SUNDAY 11 DECEMBER. International-Communist League public meeting: "Marxism and Terrorism". 7.45pm at the 'Roebuck', 108a Tottenham Court Rd. (Warren St underground).

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