

Socialist Organiser

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Claimants and strikers 10p

20p

LONGBRIDGE INQUIRY

Bosses change the charges

by Jim Denham, one of the
victimised 'Longbridge 8'

THE NEW management/union inquiry into the Longbridge sackings is likely to finish its hearings just before or just after the weekend of 24th/25th, and report soon after.

We didn't want this inquiry. We never asked for it. We had it foisted on us by our union officials. And we expect no good from it.

The only significant difference between this inquiry and the bosses' previous appeal hearing is that now the bosses have to reveal their evidence. We still don't get any chance to cross-examine, but the simple fact of having to produce some evidence has

caused difficulties that would embarrass anyone less shameless than the BL bosses.

One worker was described in all the evidence against him as having Afro-style hair. He has medium-length straight hair. Another worker had the main witness against him telling the inquiry that it was all mistaken identity.

A third found that all the evidence against him related to incidents in a completely different area from the one mentioned in the charges against him.

Remember, if our brothers in the Metro trim and assembly had not struck,

the sackings would have gone through and been confirmed on appeal without anyone on the union side ever hearing a word of the evidence. It's a warning: the people who sacked us — after examining this 'evidence' twice — are unscrupulous liars who should not be trusted with the management of a wheel stall, let alone with control over the lives and livelihoods of 15,000 workers.

But the BL bosses are unfazed. In one case, they have just changed the charges to a different area.

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LABOUR... WITH THE WORKERS?

THE January 24 Special Conference will be another important battle in the fight to put the Labour party and its Parliamentary leadership under the control of the workers' movement. Whether by threats to quit, or by various gambits inside the Party, the right wing are fighting to defend the 'right' of MPs and Party leaders to dominate and defy the movement — the 'right' to form Labour governments which serve the bosses and bankers.

Socialist Organiser asked VLADIMIR DERER secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, about the Right's manoeuvres.

THE TACTICS adopted by the Right, or, as I would prefer to put it, by the opponents of democratic reforms, consist of the advocacy of several super-

ficially unrelated courses of action.

The underlying aim is clearly to defend the status quo. They are aware, however, that there would be precious little support at Conference if they were to declare their aim openly. Even the AUEW (Engineering Section) and the EETPU — the most outspoken extra-parliamentary opponents of any change — have felt that it would be more wise to submit a proposal for some kind of change.

That's why the supporters of Parliamentary oligarchy are certainly hoping that in the final ballot they will be able to persuade enough trade union leaders to cast their block vote against any proposal that would take the decisive say out of the hands of the Parliamentarians. At the same time, they are putting forward a number of different proposals which, if

adopted, would preserve their privileges behind a smoke-screen of a seemingly more democratic electoral system.

The one-member/one-vote option, pushed by the Campaign for Labour Victory and adopted significantly by the EETPU, is a clear example of this. It is hoped that if the franchise is extended to those whose knowledge of the Party leader's performance is restricted to the information conveyed by the media, they would outnumber those Party members whose knowledge was gained through active involvement in Party activity.

To make sure that this happens, some of the proposals for the one-member/one-vote system insist on a postal ballot. Others want an electoral college entirely separate from Conference

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OR WITH THE BANKERS?

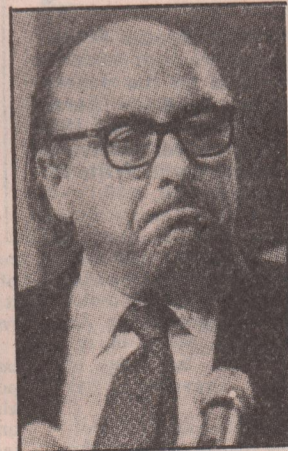
LAURIE SPARHAM (IFL)



Will the Gang of Three [left] join banker Jenkins [right]?

ROY JENKINS, back from Brussels, has fixed himself up with a job in a merchant bank. And his closest allies are nerving themselves for a split with the Labour Party.

TONY BENN spoke to Socialist Organiser about the 'Centre Party' ballyhoo.



No, I don't think there'll be a Centre Party. I don't believe there is a constituency for a Centre Party — outside Fleet Street, Whitehall, and the City.

The Centre Party threat is used in order to try to head the Labour Party off from making the changes it wants to make.

However, there is one other possibility. If Mrs Thatcher gets into very serious difficulties, I don't rule out at all the possibility that this Government could experience a loss of confidence by international capital in this country as a place to invest in. Then you could have pressure for a Government of national reconstruction, the basis of which would be that the Conservative Party would displace Mrs Thatcher.

You would get another member of the Cabinet as Prime Minister. They'd bring Heath in, they'd bring Steel in, they might

invite Jenkins to join... And then, having set up that Government, which would still be firmly based on the Conservative majority in Parliament, they would go to the country in a General Election to get that Centre-Right coalition confirmed.

It would be presented, of course, as a new consensus Government for Britain, to take it out of the crisis. It would in fact be a further shift to the Right of a very threatening kind, where civil liberties would be more at risk, rearmament would play a larger part, integration with Europe would be made closer, the Lords would be strengthened by reform to see that they were never removed, and so on.

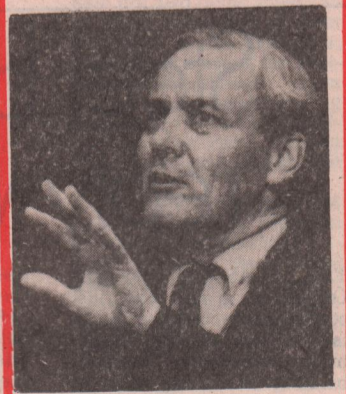
We must alert people to this possibility. Because then they might see what's happening in the Labour Party in a different context. Some Labour MPs who might be contemplating leaving us might be seen in an entirely different context, not as allies of a Centre Party but as people who are on their way along the Prentice route.



The Metro strikers: now they are looking for a lead from the TGWU

JOHN HARRIS

INSIDE



LAURIE SPARHAM (IFL)

Tony Benn talks to Socialist Organiser about Labour democracy; about workers' self-management; about reform and revolution.

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400 delegates debate
the cuts fight

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Polish workers in
action again

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How they soften the blow



UNEMPLOYMENT hits some people hard — with all the force of a slap in the face from a full cheque book.

Take ex-EEC Commissioner, ex-Labour Chancellor, ex-Home Secretary and author of 'Mr Balfour's Poodle', Roy Jenkins. He will get from the EEC £30,000 a year for three years and a pension of £10,000 a year thereafter.

Luckily for redundant Roy hard times are not looming yet, because he has landed a job with Morgan Grenfell, the merchant bankers.

But just look at the two-time tragedy of Derrick Hornby. He was perfectly happy with the £38,000 a year he was getting on the board of Spillers, but when Dalgety took the firm over they gave poor Derrick the shove. £60,000 is no compensation for losing your job.

Soon after, tragedy was to strike again. Only two months after Derrick had got himself off the dole queue and into the director's chair at Carrington Viyella at a salary of £60,000 a year, he had a tiff with his mates and had to leave. All right, he's rumoured to be getting a few grand in severance pay, but

can mere money make up for a double disappointment?

But it's not all gloom for 'Hard Luck' Hornby though: it has just been reported that he will be sharing in the payout of close on £1 million [in the form of a pension fund] for ex-Spillers directors.

So the next time you're offered the going rate for redundancy payments [half a week's money for every year served between the ages of 18 and 21, a week's money for every year for those between 21 and 41, and a week and a half's money for every year up to the age of 61] you'll know that you're not

alone in facing the indignity of the dole.

ANYONE WHO still thinks that the nationalisations carried out by Labour governments were socialist measures ought to read the current issue of 'Management Today'.

Complaining about the rigidity of Thatcher's policy on state industries, the editorial argues: "Cash limits on the nationalised industries must be operated in a more flexible way, so that today's customers do not have to fund the entire cost of investment — for example, these industries, in appropriate cases, should be allowed access to the private capital market".

The thinking is wonderfully clear. State industries provide cheap basic materials and services for the private sector. The loss they thereby make is the capitalists' gain — and the taxpayer has to foot the bill. But the capitalists also want another bite of the cherry. They want to lend the state industries money and make a killing out of the interest payments.

Socialist Organiser EDITORIAL

Better off without them

WILL they or won't they? Will the Gang of Three — William Rodgers, David Owen and Shirley Williams, who have been scheming with Roy Jenkins, leave the Labour Party? And will the Gaggles of Three — Tom Ellis, John Horam and Neville Sandelson, who say they are in political agreement with the Liberals — leave too?

These self-styled 'social democrats' will leave if the Labour Party becomes either more socialist or more democratic.

The Special Conference votes and, perhaps, Foot's way of running the Labour Party in the months immediately after, will be the deciders.

Will they form a Centre Party or not? There isn't even room for the Liberals, let alone for a second 'centre party': the Gang of Three, Jenkins and other right wing Campaign for Labour Victory refugees will certainly end up in the arms of the Liberals.

And some of them will be right-wingers even among the Liberals (or the Tories!).

Take some of the contributors to a new book *The Socialist Agenda: Crossland's Legacy*. One of them, Ian Little, doubts "whether widespread strong organised unions and professional associations are compatible with social democracy at all!" Another, James Meade, is opposed to free collective bargaining and wants wages to be set by compulsory arbitration.

A third, MP Giles Radice, thinks that in a future social contract the MPs

should see to it that the unions get less.

No doubt some — Foot for sure — will appeal to these right-wingers to stay in the Labour Party, invoking the argument that it is a 'broad church'.

But does it make any sense to have these people inside a party whose most important aspect is its link with the trade unions?

Sobbing over the departure of these fifth columnists is an insult to the membership.

No-one is suggesting administrative measures to 'cleanse the Labour Party of right-wingers' in some witch-hunting way. The point is that the Party as a whole has said that it won't put up with the old careerism and elitism of MPs. The Party has made progress. Those who don't want to make that step will have to step in a different direction.

And we won't be short of right-wingers when they've gone: Callaghan, Healey, Hattersley (who shrewdly resigned from the CLV last week) and many smaller fish will stay. But the left is organising, and must organise, to put the party and a future Labour government firmly under the control of the organised working class — so the right-wingers must step down ... or get out.

These departures won't mean reducing the Labour Party to a tiny cabal of co-thinkers of the Left. Every step towards greater Party democracy and towards policies that really answer the needs of the working class will bring more class fighters into the Party.

Labour Conference: with the workers?

From front page

— thus to ensure its unrepresentative character.

Still others are reconciled to a college at Conference but are reserving 50% of all votes for the Parliamentary Labour Party. They provide for a secret ballot so that delegates and MPs cannot be made accountable for the way they cast their vote. And for all practical purposes they abolish the possibility of an annual election when the Party is in office by introducing the requirement of a two-thirds majority at Conference before the election is proceeded with, as well as the holding of an additional conference.

In their endeavour to frustrate the clear wishes of the majority of Labour Party members for a wider franchise in the election of the leader, opponents of reform have been aided by the Conference Arrangements Committee, or more exactly, by the 'office'.

They, for reasons best known to themselves, have devised a conference procedure which unnecessarily complicates even further what is already a complicated problem, namely how to

deal with 206 proposals submitted by 370 organizations.

The most likely result is confusion in the delegates' grouping meetings held on the eve of conference for the purpose of singling out a few options which enjoy most support. In the event, since the CAC insists on bringing together in all three groupings submissions with widely differing weighting proportions providing for the representation of the three main sections of the Party (unions, constituency parties, and MPs), the number of options will be artificially inflated and the Conference Arrangements Committee may be empowered arbitrarily to reduce them.

Plans

Despite all these precautions, the enemies of democracy appear to be in disarray. Many of them seem to be demoralised and to take their defeat at Conference for granted.

Significantly, some of them are not prepared to accept even a college dominated by the PLP.

David Owen and other members of the misnamed

Campaign for Labour Victory are openly discussing their plans to leave the Party even before Conference has decided. Others are reported to be conducting secret negotiations with Roy Jenkins about the prospective formation of a 'Social Democratic Party' (once again a misnomer), and discussing with David Steel about the new party's electoral alliance with the Liberals.

Far

None of this is, of course, likely to enhance the chances of the various schemes allegedly to make the Labour Party more democratic advocated by these ladies and gentlemen.

Unfortunately the nightmares of the CLV are far removed from reality. The approval by Conference of a college which would not be dominated by Parliamentarians is far from certain. Neither the NEC proposal nor the CLPD-sponsored college is assured of anything like a majority.

Victory depends on whether or not the 429,000 votes of the shopworkers'

union USDAW will be cast on the side of reform. Until recently USDAW opposed proposals for any democratic reforms. However, their own latest submission accepts the NEC-sponsored framework and gives 40% of the votes in the college to the affiliated organisations and 30% each to the PLP and the CLPs.

Since USDAW holds the balance it is essential that their support be ensured. The only way to achieve this is for all those favouring real change to withdraw in favour of the USDAW proposal in one of the three groupings called to reduce to manageable proportions the choices to be presented to Conference (Group B: submissions 68-100).

To further ensure that the USDAW option is not lost during the early stages of the eliminating ballot, once again, all those wishing to ensure victory should abandon their first preference and vote for the USDAW proposal right from the start of the eliminating ballot.

The choice that we have is not one between a slightly better or a slightly worse proposal. The choice is between victory and defeat.

Steel ballot: the right reply was boycott

THE GLASGOW Socialist Organiser group has just started producing an industrial bulletin at the Clydebridge Steelworks in Cambuslang. In the first issue of the bulletin, after discussing it in the SO bulletin group which includes workers at the plant, we called for a boycott of the BSC ballot on McGregor's so-called 'survival plan', whereas the issue of SO which appeared the following Friday called for a 'no' vote.

We think we were right to call for a boycott rather than a 'no' vote for the following reasons:

- The choice in the ballot was not presented as: for or against the 20,000 proposed redundancies. McGregor was saying that the alternative was between 20,000 redundancies (if a majority voted 'yes') or shutting down BSC altogether (if a majority voted 'no').
- As SO itself pointed out, McGregor was "trying to by-

pass the unions" by holding the ballot.

- The use of the postal ballot by BSC parallels other attempts by the bosses and their government to introduce postal ballots on a whole range of other issues (e.g. trade-union elections). Surely accepting the use of the postal ballot by McGregor (by advocating participation, albeit in the form of a 'no' vote) weakens our arguments against other cases where postal ballots are being encouraged or legislated for?

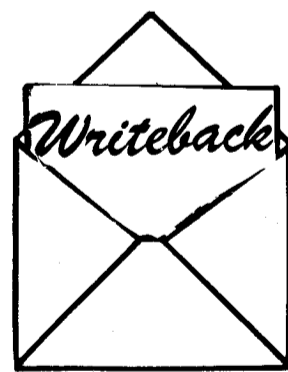
- No-one is going to take any notice of the result anyway. If a majority had voted 'no', McGregor would still obviously press on with some sort of jobs cut-back; and despite the majority of 'yes' votes, socialists and shop-floor militants are certainly not going to throw in the towel now.

Moreover, a campaign for a boycott of the ballot would be as effective, if not more

so, in mobilising workers against McGregor's plans as any call for a 'no' vote.

Only one solution can defeat McGregor's plans and prevent a repetition of the BSC ballot: transforming the unions in BSC into fighting organisations, with real leadership, which McGregor dare not ignore. The call for a boycott could help achieve this goal by exposing the ballot as an example of the unions' existing weaknesses.

GLASGOW SOCIALIST ORGANISER GROUP



Next issue: special Writeback feature with readers' comments on the debate between Vladimir Derer and John O'Mahony (SO 32) and on our interview with Tony Benn. Write to: 5 Stamford Hill, N16.

Don't
ballot,
occupy!

Further discussion with seafarers has convinced me that the call for a union ballot with a recommendation for all-out strike action in my article in the last issue of Socialist Organiser was wrong.

It relied too heavily on putting the dispute through the rulebook. The rules state that a ballot of the membership is necessary for all-out action by seamen. But there is also the possibility of the

IRAN'S HOSTAGES: A SQUALID AFFAIR

THE Iranian government is to return the US hostages. The price of this transaction is that America return what it took from Iran in retaliation for the capture of the hostages.

In Iran, the seizure of the hostages boosted the anti-imperialist mood of the masses, but it also gave credibility to the fake anti-imperialism of the mullahs. All in all, the holding of the hostages helped the Iranian right to outflank the left, by using the mostly-

innocent Embassy employees as scapegoats for the crimes of US imperialism.

It also pushed the political climate to the right in the USA.

The US government proved for its part that it preferred to protect a mass murderer, the ex-Shah, than have the hostages returned. And it preferred to let the hostages stay in Iran if the alternative was that the US should reveal its criminal activities in Iran.

rank and file taking control of the dispute and extending it more rapidly and effectively than a ballot could.

Dispute committees have been set up in nearly every port. They are elected, but also include the appointed union officials. The central task must be to develop these committees into a national unofficial structure.

They must not remain isolated.

At present the National

Union of Seamen leadership is still in control of the dispute, but lock-outs by the employers are upping the stakes. The way in which the union moves to oppose these lock-outs is crucial.

Occupation of the ships and extension of the strike action will put the seafarers in a strong position. Anything short of that will cut at the effect of the action being taken at the moment.

GEOFF WILLIAMS

THE PROVISIONAL IRA has claimed responsibility for three bombing attacks in London since December.

Two were attacks on premises used by the Forces — a Territorial Army drill hall and an RAF base in Uxbridge — and the third was on a gas-works at Bromley-by-Bow.

The bombings mark a possible shift in the Provisionals' tactics following the end of the hunger strikes, from a campaign of protest on the streets in Ireland to a military campaign in Britain. Such a campaign would be aimed to show that, despite the recent reduction in the level of military activity in the North, the Provisional IRA can still undertake activity in Britain.

For the Provisionals such

Bombings: the reason why

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

bombings are part of a war against the occupation of Ireland by Britain. It is a war which they are fighting against tremendous odds, against a better-equipped army with all the resources of the British State; and they have therefore chosen to wage a guerilla war.

The war was not, as the British press so often portrays it, created by the Provisionals. The Civil Rights Movement of the late '60s was a peaceful movement —

battered down by the police force of the sectarian Unionist state.

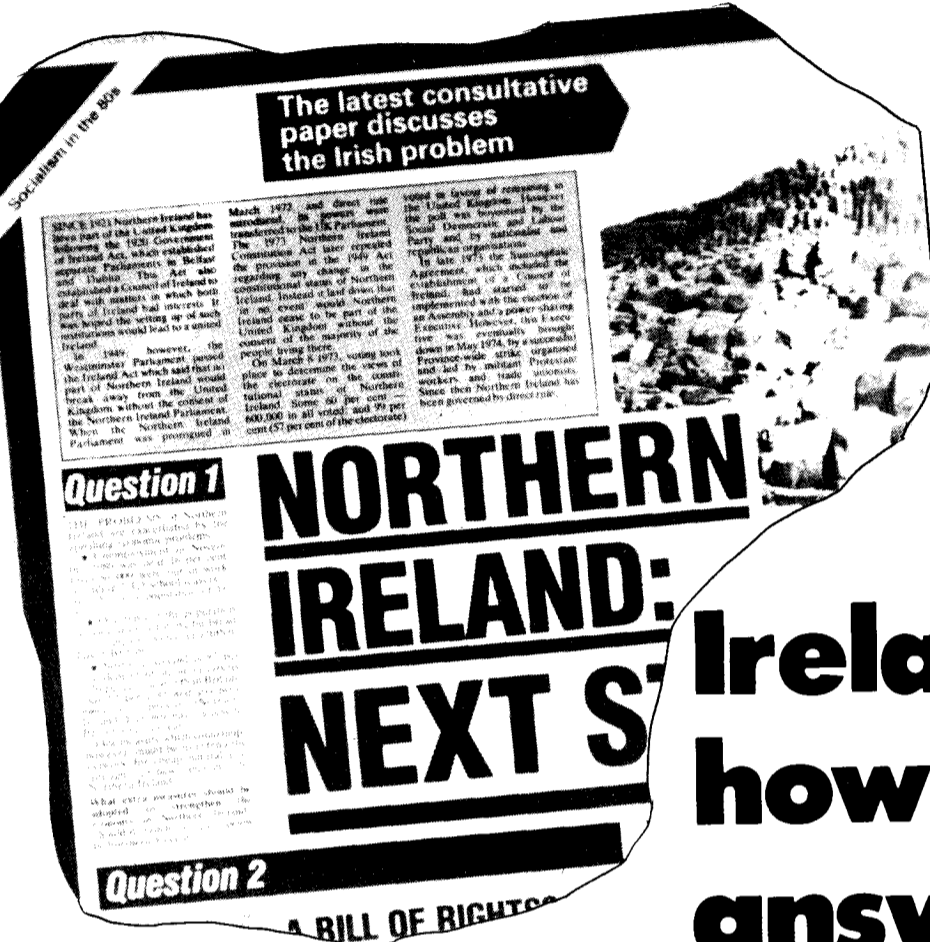
When the Army went into Northern Ireland in 1969, it soon began to beat back the Catholics, in the interests of propping up that same sectarian state. The Provisionals emerged and gained mass support in organising the nationalist opposition to the Army and British rule, and the situation quickly became one of military conflict.

In a war, there can be no serious distinction between attacks on military and economic targets in Ireland and those in Britain. The Provisional attacks have focused on such targets because they feel that by forcing up the economic and military costs of Britain's presence they will force Britain out.

The Provisionals have also, however, bombed some civilian targets. Support for Ireland's right to self-determination must mean support

for the Provisionals' struggle against the British Army (whether we think their tactics are the best ones or not), but such attacks on civilian targets cannot be supported. They flow from a frustration with the British labour movement's inactivity or support for Britain's occupation of Ireland. Yet they wrongly identify the British working class as the enemy, rather than a potential ally.

The first duty of British socialists is still to fight the attitudes of passivity and hostility to the Irish struggle, and to build support for British withdrawal from Ireland. If we fail to do this, then inevitably the war will go on, the bombing campaigns will drag on over years, and we will bear part of the blame.



Ireland: how to answer the NEC's questions

by Richard Chessum

THE LABOUR Party's neglect of Northern Ireland in the last decade has been a scandal, and the last Labour government's record there a disgrace. Past attempts by the NEC to come to some kind of agreed policy in the absence of widespread discussion in the Party have proved abortive.

In one such attempt, a previous working party produced proposals heavily in favour of the integration of the Six Counties with the UK. These proposals were shelved by the NEC.

Now, at last, a Consultative Paper has been circulated to constituency parties and affiliated bodies asking them to set up working parties and make comments on the Paper and submit resolutions. However, this new Consultative Paper is, like previous working party reports and documents, itself part of the problem.

It consists of a series of questions to which it invites answers. 'Background' to the key events and problems of the Six Counties is given in order to provide the 'context' in which the questions are asked. The selection of 'facts' contained in this 'background' guides readers towards certain kinds of answers and away from others.

Take, for example, in Section 1, the Paper refers to the appalling rate of unemployment in the Six Counties and the high price of gas and fuel. No reference whatever is made to the Fair Employment Agency's findings that the unemployment rate for Catholics is 2½ times that for Protestants and that "the median Protestant is a skilled worker, the med-

ian Catholic is a semi-skilled worker".

The Paper can thus relegate problems of discrimination to another section and treat 'the economy' as a separate problem. Significantly, question 1 asks whether Britain should build a gas pipeline to Northern Ireland. It does not ask whether closer links with the Southern economy would be of benefit to the North.

In Section 2, there is passing reference to the Fair Employment Agency and discrimination, but no suggestion that Catholics have suffered more from the latter than Protestants! Such information as background might give readers some insight into the nature of the Six County state under both the old Stormont Parliament and British Direct Rule. Moreover, in this section, headed 'A Bill of Rights', there is some dishonesty.

Suspects

The Amnesty Report on police treatment of suspects at Castlereagh is mentioned. We are then told that following its publication, "the Labour government immediately set up a committee" to investigate. We are not told that the allegation of ill-treatment had been made for a long time and deliberately ignored by Roy Mason, who, when he could withstand the pressure for an investigation no longer, set up the Bennett Committee with very limited terms of reference.

Section 5 deals at length with 'Security', and asks whether the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Diplock Courts should be abolished or replaced,

and also whether Special Category status should be restored. There is however no hint in the background information given that extraordinary legislation has always existed since the Six County state was set up. The Special Powers Act of 1922 is not mentioned, nor, incredibly, does the word 'internment' find its way into the Paper. Again, questions about the nature of the Six County state itself fail to be raised due to these important omissions.

Needless to say, there is no mention of the oppressive role of the British Army in Catholic working class areas — the house raids, the beating, the general harassment, let alone the hit squads of the SAS. The Paper does not tell its readers either that the UDR is 98% Protestant and that many of its members have convictions for sectarian assassinations, or that the RUC itself is 90% Protestant. Instead, Labour's Programme 1976 is quoted in which the Labour Government's aim was stated to be "the primacy of the police".

A question about troop withdrawal is preceded by the results of a 1979 opinion poll of doubtful validity which claimed to show that a majority of Catholics were opposed to "premature withdrawal". Read-



with the most fundamental questions of all: "How should Northern Ireland be governed?" 5 alternatives are considered — devolved government, integration with the UK, unification, shared responsibility for NI by British and Southern Irish governments, and Ulster independence. Here again, the extraordinary bias of the Paper reveals itself in the wording and the sources of wisdom which it taps.

Unification of Ireland is emotively described as "seeking approval for the expulsion from the UK" against the wishes of the Six County majority. It is not suggested that the holding of half a million people hostage in a six county state which the majority of the Irish people have never wanted is the existing reality.

Finally, the New Ulster Political Research Group is quoted as favouring negotiated independence. Not many of the affiliated bodies who read this Paper will realise that this body is, in fact, a front for the UDA, the main Protestant paramilitary organisation. Why is permissible to refer to the proposals of the UDA, but not to the proposals of Sinn Fein, who, in their document 'Eire Nua', propose a new Ireland governed by four regional parliaments, including one for the entire 9 counties of Ulster?

Sinn Fein plausibly claim that this would give the Protestant minority considerable weight in a new united Ireland. Why are affiliated bodies and constituency parties not to be made aware of this alternative.

To sum up, the bias of the Paper is heavily unionist and anti-Republican. It is an appallingly misleading document and deserves to be consigned to oblivion. Let us hope that the future direction of Labour policy on Ireland is not unduly influenced by its omissions and distortions.

Extends

Section 4 asks whether the British Labour Party should extend its organisation to Northern Ireland. This is a panacea being promoted by the so-called "Campaign for Labour Representation in Ulster". To answer 'yes' to this question would imply recognition of Partition as permanent, which, of course, is precisely what this unionist campaign wishes the British Labour movement to commit itself to.

Quite apart from this implication, the experience of the Northern Ireland Labour Party and more recently of the United Labour Party clearly indicates that this proposition is a non-starter and would merely divert the movement from tackling the real problems.

Section 3 however deals

New
Orange
murder
drive
hits
Bernadette
McAliskey

by Bruce Robinson

THE leading socialist and Republican Bernadette McAliskey and her husband Michael were seriously injured on Friday 16th when gunmen forced their way into their home in an isolated village in Co. Tyrone.

The gunmen, believed to be members of a Loyalist paramilitary group, broke down the door of the house with sledge-hammers and then fired on Michael McAliskey, hitting him twice. Bernadette, who was in an upstairs room, was hit seven times.

The attack was not entirely unexpected. A number of prominent Republicans have been shot in the last year. Bernadette McAliskey was a leading member of the National H Blocks Committee and had lived away from home during the recent hunger strikes.

The Army had stationed a patrol nearby "to keep an eye on the house". A patrol from the Parachute Regiment turned up at the house shortly after the attack. They had no radios and had to go over a mile to fetch help, as the phone wires at the house had been cut.

The Army clearly expected an attack but failed to prevent it.

The Army later arrested three men for the shooting. They apparently belong to the Red Hand Commandos, a Loyalist paramilitary group which has been inactive for some years. The Loyalist armed groups overlap considerably, some being little more than flags of convenience used by the Ulster Defence Association, which is still legal.

The three men who were held are also being questioned about a number of other shootings in the last year, particularly those of the Protestant Republican John Turnly and three leading members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, Miriam Daly, Noel Lyttle, and Ronnie Bunting.

These shootings have not been just random sectarian killings, but a conscious attempt to behead the political leadership of the nationalist community. At the same time, Paisley is whipping up the siege mentality of the Loyalists as preparation for an onslaught on the wider Catholic community.

He is talking about the H-Block settlement and the secret talks between Thatcher and Haughey (which he says mean the first steps to a united Ireland) as a 'betrayal' of the Protestants.

Bloody Sunday
Commemoration
demonstration
Sunday 25 January
1.30pm, Fitzalan
Rd, Cardiff.
Called by Sinn
Fein. Coach from
London leaves
Kings X/York Way
9am. £4 return.



Socialist Organiser spoke to Rachel Lever, secretary of Women's Fightback, one of the groups active in organising the May 9 women's festival

■ ■ Why is this Festival being organised? What is its aim?

□ □ We want the message to go through the movement that women are organising for positive demands and are fighting and winning battles.

It will roughly coincide with two years of a Tory government that set out to wipe out the small gains women have made.

A women's festival against the Tories

Yet against the odds, women defeated the Corrie anti-abortion Bill. Thousands of women, many for the first time, have taken part in stop-the-cuts campaigns, marches, rallies, occupations of their workplace, and political actions against the government.

By the time of the Festival, they may be in the vanguard of a fight on council estates against rent rises imposed by Heseltine.

And it's been a time of tremendous progress in self-organisation of women in the labour movement — we want the Festival to reflect and celebrate that.

■ ■ There was some hesitation in the women's movement about supporting the Festival. Why was this?

□ □ The issues seemed to be that it was anti-Tory rather than anti-men (though only a small minority opposed it on these grounds) and that it would not be women-only.

But really the difference with this festival is that the organisers don't want it to be another 'WLM event' attracting the same faces and speaking to the converted.

This was our yardstick, and while we very much want the Festival to be seen as part of the women's movement, those who would have wanted a traditional WLM event were bound to be doubtful.

Again, when we discussed whether to make it women-only (and many of us were in two minds about it) it wasn't from the point of view of principle, but set against the question of whether it would or would not put off the 'uninitiated' women.

Of course the impulse to get together with other women, and away from men, is very strong among working class women: that's probably why Bingo and the dreadfully named 'hen night' are so popular. But women like these are

also very suspicious of what they see as 'women's lib', and in the interests of reducing any possibility of exclusiveness we opted not to keep out men (let alone male children!).

■ ■ What about the political focus?

□ □ We were all adamant about that — it's the whole point of the Festival.

Not that politics as such will be the major ingredient — far from it. There'll be music and theatre, displays and workshops, all sorts of fun: it's not meant to be a straight-faced day.

But the focus will be there in the background.

We thought at one stage of joining forces with the Fawcett Society's Women's Action Day, but that was too bland and non-political, and as it turned out was a totally bourgeois effort.

This Festival could strengthen those in the women's movement who want more positive links with the unions and working class movement. And it could be a big boost for those women in the labour movement who have been struggling to organise as women and push the ideas of the women's movement.



and get a better deal for women.

I think these are the issues behind what may seem a very simple 'anti-Tory' focus.

■ ■ What can women do now for the Festival?

□ □ At this stage, we are looking for sponsorships — we hope sponsoring organ-

isations will both help financially and actively encourage their members to attend and participate — with stall, displays or whatever.

So raise it in your branch or group or Labour Party and get them to sponsor us.

In some areas, women have undertaken already to work for the Festival locally, publicise it, arrange transport, get sponsorships, and so on.

We'd like more women to come to the planning meetings, too, and take on work for the Festival. The next meeting is on February 2nd at 374 Grays Inn Road, near Kings Cross station at 7.30.

And come to the Benefit on February 14th — 8pm at University of London Union Gower Street, WC2. Bands include Jam Today. Entrance £2 (£1 for unwaged/students).

SAINSBURY: THE UNBORN BILL

BY Mandy Williams

IN A back-handed compliment to the National Abortion Campaign and sympathetic organisations, Mr Timothy Sainsbury MP last week declared that he was discouraged from using his top place in the private members' ballot to attack abortion rights by 'fanatics' who 'defend the '67 Act at all costs'.

This is the first time that an attempt to limit abortion rights has been stopped at such an early stage.

Sainsbury also made it clear that he had dropped his proposed Bill very reluctantly, and that legal advisors

(from 'Lawyers in Defence of the Unborn Child') felt that at present an attack on time limits through the courts would be more successful than through Parliament.

Meanwhile, although none of the other MPs introducing private members' Bills are attempting further limits on abortion rights, doctors are becoming increasingly cautious over late abortions.

The National Abortion Campaign is working hard towards two major events. The first is a women-only forum on the politics of abortion, to try to work on some of the controversies which arose during the recent campaign

— working through Parliament; with the labour movement; with men; what sort of laws we want; and so on. The forum will be held on 21 February in London, and that evening the National Union of Students women's committee has called a 'Reclaim the Night' demonstration.

The second event, jointly sponsored by the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign, is a labour movement conference on abortion and positive legislation. It will be held on 14 March.

Both events at Starcross School, Risinghill St, London N1.



Latest issue: 10p plus 10p postage from 41 Ellington St, London N7.

US: hands off El Salvador!

by Bas Hardy

Guerilla forces in El Salvador have been continuing their final offensive without apparent let-up since New Year. They are short of their aim of total victory before Reagan's inauguration, but the old order is cracking up so much that the guerillas may well be in power before the US government can respond with more than its recent decision to resume military aid to the regime.

There have been large scale mutinies in the army in most major towns. In Santa Ana, in particular,

the troops went over to the rebels, burned down their barracks and took the town.

Other populated centres have changed hands during the past week. The government is losing control of the country. Politicians, officers and diplomats are defecting from the regime like rats from a sinking ship.

The rightist terrorists are in clear control of what remains of the state. They favour a policy of genocide similar to that carried out by the Reaction in El Salvador in 1932, when 30,000 peasants were murdered. The recent murder

of 3 CIA agents by the right wing is a clear indication that even the pretence of land reform and other 'liberal' trappings are being thrown away by the junta in the clear-out for the final showdown.

Victory for the liberation movement is therefore imminent. The only hope for the '14' — the rich capitalist families who have run the country for nearly two centuries — is a US military intervention. This danger is clearly recognised by the Left. The US rulers find it difficult to stomach two popular revolutions in Central America in such a short

space of time. The roll-out effect in El Salvador will endanger capitalism in Guatemala and Honduras in particular.

The labour movement in Britain must therefore be on its guard against possible US military intervention and all the dangers to the world working class that this entails.

Labour Parties and trade union branches must be prepared to organise support to the Salvadorean liberation fighters and for an international campaign against US imperialist repression.

by Cheung Siu Ming

THE PEKING trials are over, and the world awaits the verdict on the ten accused: the 'Gang of 4'; Chen Boda, Mao's political secretary until '71; and five accomplices of Lin Biao's alleged attempt to oust Mao.

But sentence has already been passed on two absentees — Hua Guofeng, who suddenly resigned as Party Chairman three months after resigning as premier, and the Great Helmsman Mao himself.

The present Chinese CP leaders round Deng Xiaoping have been debating the rewriting of history. How to write off the Cultural Revolution without damaging the reputation of Chou En-lai China's premier throughout the period and Deng's declared mentor? How to rehabilitate the reputation of old cadres purged by Mao (Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai and Deng himself) without attacking Mao like Khrushchev and

BEHIND CHINA'S SHOW TRIAL

acked Stalin? For the CCP's historical legitimacy is linked inextricably with Mao's leadership, before and after the 1949 revolution.

How to blame one faction in the CCP for bureaucratic misrule, without admitting that such responsibility falls squarely on the entire bureaucratic caste, the Stalinist CCP itself?

The CCP leaders have made a poor job of squaring such circles. And years of harassment and pressure have failed to extract the nec-

essary 'confession' from the most stubborn members of the Gang of 4.

Zhang Chunqiao defied the whole proceedings by refusing to answer any questions, while Jiang Qing conducted her defence vigorously, to the embarrassment of the ruling group.

She had the courage to assert that she was right and that the Dengists are 'capitalist roaders'. She had not only Mao's consent, but Chou En-lai's knowledge and, later on, Hua's active

collaboration in what she did. The suppression of the 1976 riots in Peking's Tiananmen Square, where ½ million mourned Chou En-lai's death in order to vent their feelings against bureaucratic misrule, was carried out when Hua was still Minister in charge of Public Security.

The trials took place because Deng reckons that, with pressing economic problems, he has now got to settle accounts with the 'middle cadre' in the CCP,

who came in during the Cultural Revolution. These middle cadre have been obstructing Deng's economic plans with partial success. Many, wary of a counter-purge, have supported Deng's policies with lukewarm hesitancy.

Jiang Qing and the others can in no way be supported because they did carry out many monstrous atrocities. On the other hand, socialists

should have no illusions that the trial is not political, motivated by Deng's ambition to consolidate his control.

Anyone with illusions in China's new legal code should remember that numerous unofficial journals which flourished after 1976 Tiananmen, have now been systematically suppressed, along with the removal of 'Democracy Wall', since they have served Deng's purpose of weakening his opposition within the bureaucracy. Hundreds of strikers' leaders and activists have been hounded and jailed. It was the same in China under Mao, beginning with the Chinese Trotskyists in 1952.

Ironically, Party historians have had to consult with the Trotskyists about the CCP's history — there have been so many purges and systematic lies and cover-ups in the CCP's history since 1921 that the Trotskyists are the only ones who can actually remember the truth.

AGAIN and again the Polish bureaucracy has backtracked and reneged on the agreements it signed in the Gdansk shipyards on August 31st last year.

But the workers have moved to impose the agreements by direct action — most recently, the agreement to make Saturday a free day.

As previously, the workers have been greeted with a barrage of abuse and threats from the official mouthpieces of the Stalinists in Warsaw and Moscow. The Soviet Union has threatened, bluffed, blustered, circulated rumours of troop movements on Poland's frontiers. It has repeatedly called the Polish leadership to top-level discussions and thundered against the 'subversives' and the so-called 'anti-socialist' elements.

The demand for a working week which will begin to approximate to the 40 hour week in the West is too much for the bureaucrats to swallow. All they have offered is one Satur-

They're OUR Saturdays say Polish workers

day off in two with the promise [yet again!] of a review of the situation, and a possible move to the implementation of totally free weekends several years hence.

What the Polish workers thought of this can be gauged by the overwhelming success of their stay-away protest on Saturday 12th January.

The dire warnings of the bureaucrats, as well as their rather foolish prophecies of the failure of the stay-away action, seemed somewhat hollow as they echoed through the empty factories, offices and streets of Poland's cities that Saturday.

The action is a striking parallel with the struggle for the eight hour day during the 1905 revolution in Tsarist Russia. The revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky described it like this:

"The Soviet adopted a decision of tremendous importance: it called on all factories and plants to introduce the eight hour day by takeover means on their own initiative. This decision was adopted almost without debate as though it were a completely natural step. The Soviet gave the workers twenty-four hours for preparatory measures. And the workers found this long enough."

And the paper of the Soviets reported that "all factory workers in our district, in accordance with the Soviet's decision, having completed eight hours work, left their workshops and went marching out into the streets carrying red banners and singing the Marseillaise. On their way the demonstrators 'swept up' several smaller enterprises which were still continuing to work."

In Poland again today, the enforcement by the working class [a working class vastly more numerous than in Trotsky's time] of a shorter working week seems equally natural for millions of workers.

Equally predictable and 'natural' has been the response of the Polish and Russian bureaucracies who echo almost word for word the cry of Russia's bourgeoisie.

"When the campaign for the eight hour day was opened, the capitalist press naturally screamed that the Soviet was out to ruin the country's industry."

Names and circumstances have changed, but what remains unaltered is the courageous desire of the oppressed, of the workers, now under the tutelage of another vicious master, "to win back for themselves a part of their own lives ... to enforce

the most elementary demand that "their muscles, their nerves and their brains should be safeguarded."

The Solidarnosc leaders, battered by threats from the Warsaw and Moscow bureaucrats, are cautious. Walesa has stressed his willingness to compromise with the government on this issue.

And at the Vatican, the reverent silence of Walesa's joint communion with the Pontiff must surely have been periodically

broken by the very secular and irreverent whisperings of western bankers anxious about their loans to a crumbling Polish economy, urging Walesa not to go 'too far'.

But the rank and file of Solidarnosc are determined to use their new-won strength and organisation. The logic is clear: so long as real workers' unions exist in Poland, their struggles and demands will strike more and more sharply at the bureaucrats' power.

by Alexis Carras



CP backs Tory policy on immigration - for France

by John O'Mahony

THIS WAS the fine front page of the Morning Star on 15th January. It goes straight to the target.

The Nationality Bill is a racist Bill. The report makes it clear why immigrant groups are vigorously opposing it, and why the broad labour movement must fight it too.

The front page might dispose one who doesn't think much of the so-called Communist Party (which publishes the Morning Star) to wish the Star well in its struggle to get through its current financial crisis.

But now turn to page 2, where there is a report on the policy of the French Communist Party on immigration to France, and an attempt to explain the recent incident at Vitry, a suburb of Paris. There, just before Christmas, the CP mayor of Vitry, Paul Mercieca, led a gang of 60 men, reportedly CP members and supporters, in a 'direct action' to stop 300 immigrants from Mali being rehoused in Vitry.

The gang turned off water, gas and electricity, and used a bulldozer to smash up the hostel. Later the CPF, which is now already campaigning for the presidential election in April in which Georges Marchais, its general secretary, will be the Party's candidate, made it clear that Mercieca's gang acted according

to Party policy.

On the weekend of 10/11 January, a big anti-immigration (which, in the real world of tensions and scapegoating, means anti-immigrants) demonstration was organised in Vitry to support the mayor's action and Party immigration policy. Over 10,000 people attended, and Georges Marchais was one of them.

According to the Guardian, the Vitry policy is now being generalised. The 'Communist' town council at Rennes in Brittany has cancelled a building permit for an Islamic centre. And "... other Communist councils have said that they will resist attempts to settle more immigrants" (Guardian, 15.1.81).

What does the Morning Star (and the CP) have to say about the scandalous antics of its French comrades? It excuses them, covers for them, and thereby supports them.

The article, by one Harry Samson, 'reporting from Paris', denounces the comments in the press as a 'smear' on the French CP. His version of what happened more or less admits the facts — but presents the actions of the mayor of Vitry and his gang as acceptable and reasonable.

He describes attempts to move immigrant workers into 'Communist'-controlled municipalities as 'a dumping

operation'. He implies that the Vitry mayor's vigilante operation was a valid means of defending the interests of the workers in Vitry, a proper communist response to an action by the middle-class, conservative-controlled St. Naur municipality, which was trying to 'get rid of the immigrants and at the same time whip up feeling against a Communist [sic] municipality'.

Vitry, you see, 'already has two 500-bed immigrant hostels, a 17 per cent immigrant population (twice the national average), and a 3,500 long waiting list. The town council wants decent conditions for all the town's inhabitants — French and immigrant...'

It seems that justified action against the immigrants.

Racist

But Henry Samson doesn't want you to run away with the idea that the 'Communist' mayor of Vitry has the reflexes of a fascist thug, or that the first thing he did was to send for the bulldozer and the thugs. Not at all. First he talked to the Mali workers. He cut up rough only when he couldn't persuade these bewildered strangers in a strange and obviously hostile country to leave the hostel peacefully and go back to St. Naur: that is, to abandon the

accommodation they had been allotted and put themselves on the streets.

They wouldn't listen to reason: they were too unsophisticated to understand that the mayor was a 'Communist', and not an ordinary racist gangster.

It was only then, says Samson, that "some local inhabitants took it upon themselves to destroy symbolically the gates leading to the premises and to turn off the water, gas and electricity". So it was only 'symbolic'. Or perhaps the writer — or his subconscious — is trying to say that they should be grateful that the 60 thugs didn't Klu-Klux it properly and kill a few of the black intruders?

Samson's account implies that, contrary to the reports in the serious bourgeois press, the mayor and the CP had nothing to do with it. It was only "some local inhabitants".

So what was the mayor doing while it was happening? What is the CPF doing calling an anti-immigrant demonstration in Vitry (or anywhere)? Samson shows that he is a calculating liar when he explains why "some local inhabitants" made the hostel uninhabitable. They did it, he says, to "prevent [the premises] from being occupied so as not to play into the hands of the St. Naur council".

Better to 'play into the hands of' the racists, fascists and chauvinists. Better to abandon the only policy that undercuts attempts to divide the working class by blaming immigrants for the social problems capitalism creates — united working class action and opposition to all scapegoating. Better to trample the ideals of communism, socialism, and even decent liberalism in the mud churned up by the bulldozer (and in the noxious waste matter of people like Henry Samson who now take on the job of rationalising what the CPF is doing).

This display of rancid chauvinism lines up the CPF with the French racists. It must encourage them and make their poison more palatable to sections of the French working class who would be ashamed to find themselves consciously

adopting racist attitudes.

In Britain in 1968 the Labour Government's racist measures to stop British passport-holding Kenya Asians entering Britain, followed by Enoch Powell's speech predicting and threatening "rivers of blood" unless immigration was stopped, led to an enormous shift of 'mainstream' British politics towards that open racism which has unashamedly been expressed in all immigration legislation and immigration-control practice since. Racist definitions, concerns, and obsessions were moved from the crank right wing fringe of politics to centre stage.

Nothing less than this can be the result of what the CPF is doing now, and the racism will probably be more virulent and explosive because of the widespread unemployment.

How many of the 10,000 demonstrators who turned out to march behind Georges Marchais in support of the 'Communist' heroes of Vitry can be assumed to be free from the taint of racism?

Dignity

And finally, this must be seen in the context of the eruption of anti-Semitism in France, which has taken the form of terrorist attacks on Jews. In Paris right now a heavily-armed CRS man carrying a sub-machine gun stands guard outside each synagogue.

The CPF calls for a halt to all immigration. The Morning Star justifies this too. Samson explains that many of the four million south European and north African immigrants live in "overpopulated, badly adapted, unhygienic hostels, and are subjected to racism, police harassment and insecurity". Many of them had known unemployment in their own countries and are experiencing it again in France.

The CPF opposes racial discrimination, says Samson, and in a recent document "condemns all threats to the dignity of these men and women living far from home and reaffirms its solidarity with them as it has always done in the past". And so?

He then goes on: 'It is for this reason that in the present economic crisis and to avoid adding to the two million French and immigrant workers already unemployed that the PCF is calling for a halt to immigration in the mutual interests of all workers in France, irrespective of their origin'!

Tory

Apart from the reference to the working class, you could travel far rightwards across the ranks of the Tory Party — as far as the repatriationists in fact — and get more or less exactly the same sort of reasoning to justify this policy in Britain. It is the declared policy of the Tory Party!

And that is the ground onto which their justification of the CPF now takes the Morning Star and the CP. The Morning Star and the CP of course have long refused to oppose all immigration controls. Refusing to accept that all immigration controls are intrinsically racist, they only oppose the 1971 Act and its later refinements. But this is a new departure.

For if the Tory policy is correct for France when pursued by the CPF, then in principle it must be correct for Britain too. How can the front page of the Morning Star carry conviction when page 2 champions stringent and inevitably racist immigration laws, for France, and justifies and excuses racist violence and gangsterism?

On this basis, the weaseling of the right wing and soft-left Labour politicians must appear as good working-class politics to defend the workers, black and white, already here. At any rate, those who smear themselves publicly with the racist filth of Marchais' party won't carry much conviction with themselves or anyone else when they try to fight these policies.

The Morning Star should pause for breath and tell first itself and then the Left to which it is appealing for a financial rescue, just where it stands on immigration controls.

INTERVIEW WITH

FIRST I asked Tony Benn about his views on the most urgent questions facing the movement.

THE MOST important task now is the mobilisation of opinion in the country against the Government's policies, and support for the campaigns locally and industrially against them.

It sometimes looks as if the trade union movement is in full-scale retreat. When you see what Edwardes is able to get away with in Leyland, and what McGregor is apparently trying at British Steel, and some areas where the health service and the education service are being dismantled, it shows the job there is to be done.

'If we have trade unions affiliated, why can't we have the Indian Workers' Association or women's movements...'

Organisationally, it must mean that we've got to try and develop organic links with those who are sympathetic to the Labour Party's objectives. I personally would like to see the opening-up of affiliations for this purpose.

If we have trade unions affiliated, why can't we have the Indian Workers' Association or some women's movements or black groups who might affiliate? I'm not talking about a Popular Front or anything of that kind, I'm not discussing other political parties, I'm talking about groups whose objectives are compatible with the Labour Party.

The other side is how far the democratic reforms need to be carried. I think there are some areas still to be explored. One is the application of the general principles of Party democracy to local Labour Groups.

We also need to look at the interconnection between the trade union movement and the Labour Party. There are certain tendencies which are appearing to centralise political power in the Labour Party. Trade union influence now tends to be exercised more through agreements between trade union general secretaries before you get to Conference.

That's why I favour the reform that Eric [Heffer] and I suggested 18 months ago, that it might be better if the trade union general secretaries stood for the National Executive Committee, and you had an integration of the trade union influence through the NEC, instead of being external to it.

Another priority is the development of more democracy within the Parliamentary Labour Party, by which I mean an elected Cabinet, recorded votes in the Parliamentary Labour Party, etc.

In undertaking all these tasks the role of the Rank and File Mobilising Committee is of great importance. It shows how the SCLV and other groups can work together to educate the movement, and those who initiated it should be congratulated on their work, which must go on.

■ **In a fringe meeting at the Special Conference last year, you talked about the present movement for Labour Party democracy as being like a re-founding of the Labour Representation Committee.**

The Labour Party exists, and existed first, outside Parliament. The theory which is advanced by some revolutionists, that the whole Parliamentary process is inappropriate for social change, forgets the fact that the Labour Party was founded outside Parliament and it fought its way in, by election.

The original idea of the LRC was the right of working people to be represented in Parliament. Despite this, some of the tendencies have developed in the last 30 years of revisionism have moved towards Edmund Burke's idea that when an MP gets there, he or she then represents everybody, and the Labour Party is seen as just another pressure group. That is not acceptable. The Party is entitled to determine policy and see that those views are put forward in the House of Commons.

That is not to say that the only instrument of social change is the House of Commons, because the House of Commons is inevitably the last place which pressure for reform reaches.

■ **At the annual conference you mentioned the House of Lords. Now Lord Denning has taken it upon**

himself to say that if a thousand peers were created then the courts should step in.

There is a need for a serious response to Lord Denning, to analyse the implications of what he is saying. He said an appointed judge should have the right to determine whether the views of the British public, expressed in an election, are acceptable or not. That, of course, is a fundamentally undemocratic idea.

'In the last 30 years of revisionism, we've moved towards Edmund Burke's idea that an MP represents everyone, and the Labour Party is just another pressure group...'

We must bring this out in such a way as to persuade lawyers who may have some admiration for Lord Denning that, if they were to hitch their wagon to his star, it would take us back into medieval politics.

In the guise of maintaining standards, Lord Denning is arguing in defence of the interests of those who own the land and the capital.

■ **The House of Lords is an unelected body which acts in parallel to the House**

of Commons, formally more or less subordinate to it, but with a lot of power to impede it. But the judges are in fact such another body. So are the higher ranks of the civil service.

We need an enlargement of the democratic process. There are various ways we can do it. As far as the civil service is concerned, we've got to have far greater political control, by which I mean more Ministerial control accountable to Parliament, and a Freedom of Information Act.

As far as the law is concerned, I think we've got to be absolutely clear that the instrument for change is the democratic process and the statute book, not judge-made law.

If you go beyond that to the question of how, when Labour is in power, you really establish a commanding position over the Establishment which you have democratically won the right to control, then we must strengthen the role of Ministers. It may be it would be better if we put committees of MPs into Departments.

You would have 15 or 20 Labour MPs in each department to keep an eye on what was going on and to maintain contact with the trade union movement, with the Parliamentary Labour Party, and with the Party outside.

A Freedom of Information Act would also tip the balance very substantially in favour of democratic control.

In the nationalised industries, you can't have elected chairmen. But I think the appointment of Ministers over nationalised industries has got merit. Because what happened to the nationalised industries under the Herbert Morrison scheme was that when they were set up, the chairman — Edwardes or Rob-

ens or Marsh or McGregor — had absolutely dictatorial powers.

The Treasury insists that they follow the economic criteria appropriate to a private enterprise, and the result is that public ownership has become in many ways an instrument for restructuring capitalism on capitalist criteria.

■ **Another of these undemocratic power-hierarchies is industrial management. At Longbridge eight workers have been sacked. They've been subjected to a punishment which in present social conditions is equivalent to some of the more severe penalties that can be imposed by a court of law, without any of the formalities that they would have in a court of law. This set-up seems to call for urgent action.**

Of course, there is the ACAS, which is intended to do something about that. But I am an absolutely committed believer in workers' self-management. It has always seemed to me strange that we should accept as normal that the electorate can hire and fire a Prime Minister but that workers can't hire and fire their management. The right of the workforce to control management would be one of the most significant ways of dealing with that situation.

As a minister for nationalised industries over many years, I found that the most successful scheme of all was in the mining industry. We had a tripartite committee, of which, as the Minister, I was chairman, and round the table were Derek Ezra, as the Coal Board's professional management; the NUM, NACODS, and colliery managers; and other ministers.

These three elements planned the overall strategy for the mining industry, and then, when the tripartite committee had signed an agreement containing this strategy, the management went away and implemented it and the unions went away and bargained with them without having become collaborationist as a result.

'Public ownership has become an instrument for restructuring capitalism on capitalist criteria'.

That, I think, has got considerable potential. But it does mean you have got to put a Minister as the chairman. The chief executive, or managing director, would be the no.2 and not the no.1. It would also be dependent on changing the criteria so that the nationalised industries were no longer just publicly-owned private corporations.

■ **If Labour Party democracy does allow pressures to reach Parliament more quickly, and if reforms go ahead, won't the people with the wealth and power try to obstruct them?**

'Capitalism function n with strong unions and democrati Labour mu the initiati

Interview by MARTIN T

You have talked about creating a thousand peers. But last time there was talk of a mass creation of peers, there was great doubt about whether the King [as it was then] would veto it.

coup d'etats you're going to changes that a templated — a radical change you've got to support. And means people know what you do.

What inter about the react House of Lor (apart from the was mentioned the Tory party — which indi

took it serious recognition that somebody argu time you do it.

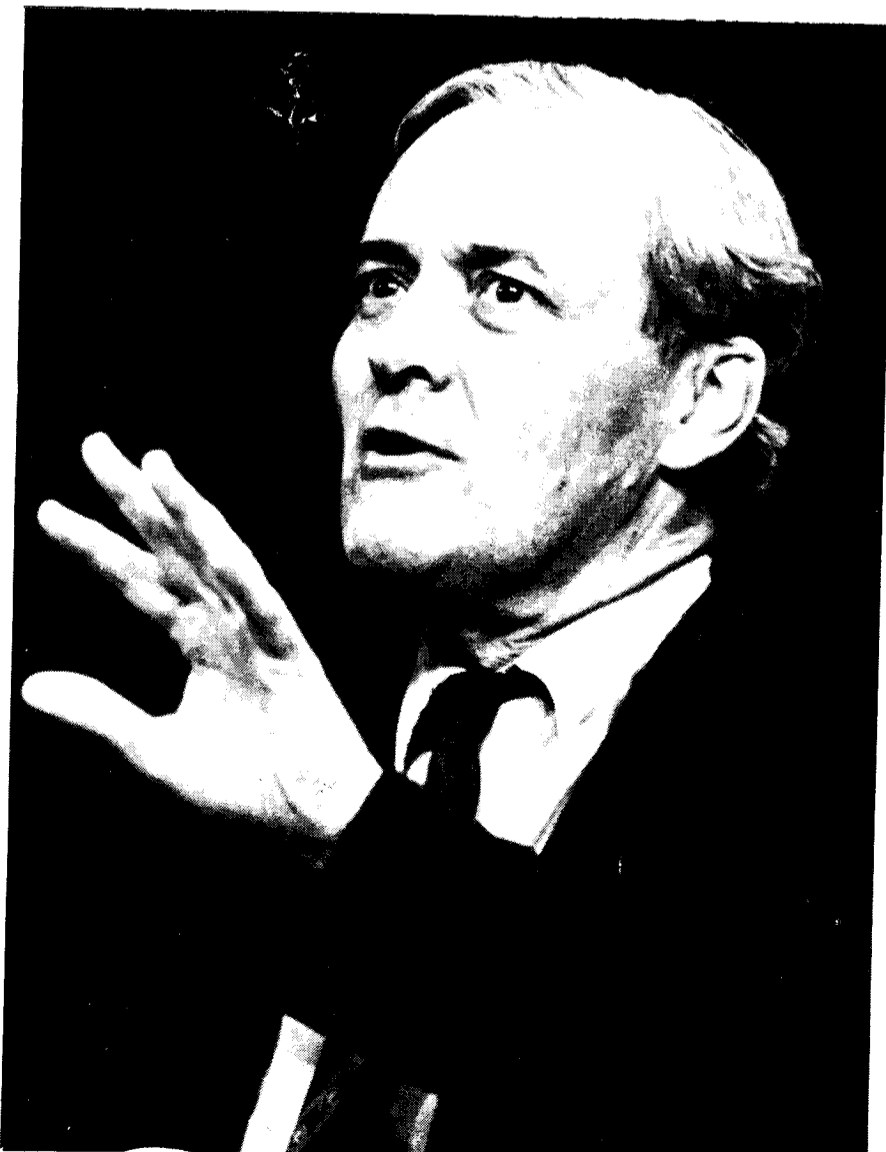
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Laurie Sparham (IFL)

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In March 1974, when we were elected, the financial and business establishment was really totally demoralised by their defeat. One of the tragedies of the last Labour Government was that 18 months later, after the referendum, the morale of the Establishment had been completely re-established. But it didn't have to be re-established.

They were in a position then, even when the Labour Government had a small majority, of having to go along with whatever we asked. The trouble was, we didn't ask enough. Indeed, we not only didn't ask enough — in the end, as you know, it became a retreat. That Government almost ended up in an alliance with the Establishment.

Although there would be difficulty, I don't believe that the British people would accept an act of sabotage by the Establishment against a clear mandate given to a Labour Government by the electors. It would be a tussle, but a tussle to be won by consent — provided, and always provided, that you have said clearly before you start what you intend to do.

'The last Labour Government retreated and almost ended up in an alliance with the Establishment...'

■ ■ *What about the experience on Irish Home Rule before the First World War? It was put to the electorate again and again. It was very well known that that was the Liberals' programme. And yet the Tory Party and the Army were able to veto it.*

I don't believe that parallels of that kind are necessarily valid. If a Labour Government was elected committed to the unity and independence of Ireland, as I hope it would be, I don't think now it would present such a problem.

It's a mistake to attribute too much real power and capacity to undermine an elected Labour Government to those who now, because no-one questions their power, do have power.

Let me give you an example. During the 'winter of discontent' I was responsible for the oil supplies. I had an opportunity of studying at first hand just how effective the Army would be if it were asked to take on responsibility for the supply of oil. It simply couldn't do the job. The Transport and General Workers' Union could. In fact the TGWU could offer a better emergency service during a dispute against a Labour Government than the Army.

This is a perfectly manageable problem, but only provided that before we start we know where the power now resides and how to mobilise popular opposition to that power and pop-

ular commitment to change. When you've won the argument, which is 90% of it, and you win the election, which is the remaining 10%, then the majority's there to do it.

'Without a broad socialist perspective, inevitably you are drawn in to be a management team of a system whose criteria you don't accept...'

Of course, the transformation towards socialism by democratic means will involve changes in institutions, and I've mentioned some of them: the possibility of sending committees of MPs into ministries, the possibility of having Ministers in charge of certain operations with respect to nationalised industries, and so on.

This does lead you to the need to analyse, in greater detail than the Labour Party has done for a very long time, what are the necessary steps for the democratic transformation of society. I don't think you would win without having a broad socialist perspective. If you did, then inevitably you would be drawn in to be a management team of a system whose criteria you didn't accept and end up with another confrontation with the people who put you there, which is what's happened time and again: 1970, 1979, and so on.

We have got to the point where capitalism cannot function with strong trade unions and the democratic process. We are stuck in this impasse. Unless Labour is prepared to take the initiative and move towards a transformational strategy, it will be destined to get elected on the disappointment of people with the injustices of capitalism, on the rhetoric of change — and then get driven back again when in office.

'It's strange that we should accept as normal that the electorate can hire and fire a Prime Minister but that workers can't hire and fire their management.'

Labour and the ballot box are sufficiently strong now to dislocate the market economy. And because they are so strong that they can dislocate it, unless you're prepared to change the framework of the market economy and the frame-

In the next Socialist Organiser: Tony Benn on positive discrimination and on the block vote.

Also in the next issue: a special 'Writeback' feature with readers' views and comments on Tony Benn's arguments.

On workers' self-management; on how to beat Establishment resistance; on the 'industrial short-cut' and Stalinism... write back to Socialist Organiser, 5 Stamford Hill, London N16. Please make sure your letters arrive by February 7th for inclusion in the next issue.

work of power that it supports you're going to end up in the same cul-de-sac every time.

But I think it's a manageable proposition. I can't see any other strategy that is any easier. A revolutionist solution to these problems would mean that you would end up in power but without public support, up against exactly the same forces.

'The revolutionist solution ... an industrial short-cut to socialism... the high road to Stalinism'

That is, in effect, an attempt at an industrial short-cut to socialism, or a short-cut by industrial action. It would work much less effectively and leave you with a situation where you could not get rid of the Government you had got by that route, anyway. That is the high road to Stalinism.

And of course the other difficulty about doing it by the revolutionist route is that then the institutions you were fighting would have the constitution on their side. With what I'm saying, they would not have that moral cover. They would be facing a very big majority in the House of Commons.

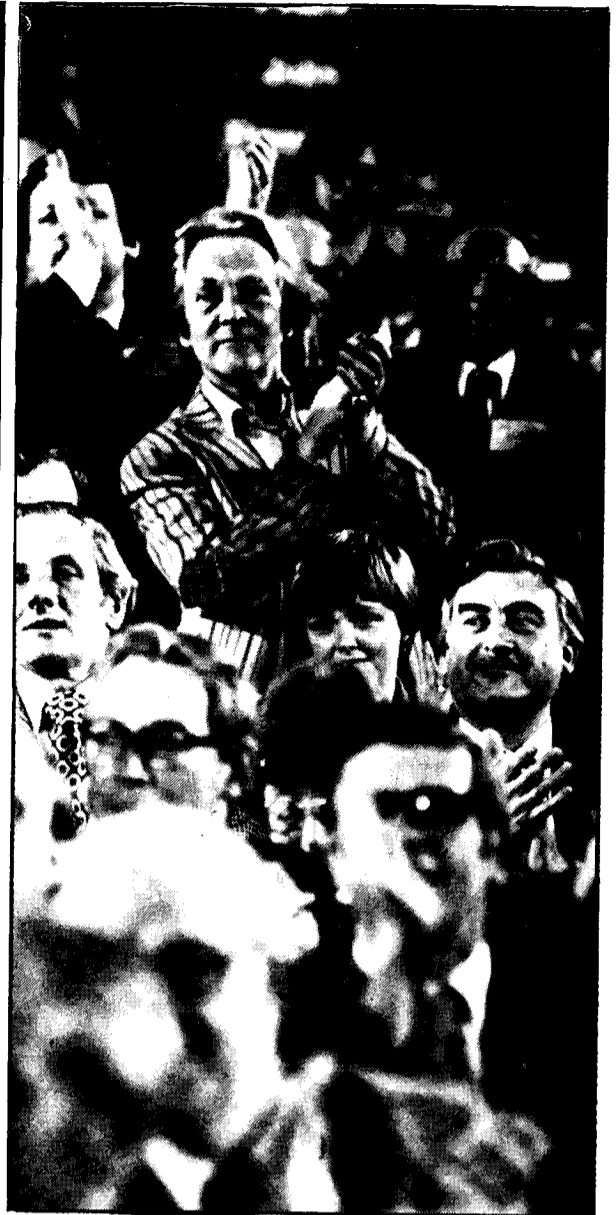
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ANDREW WIARD (REPORT)

If January 24 at Wembley is to be a victory like October in Blackpool (above), careful tactics are vital.

BRIEFING on January 24

by JON LANSMAN [secretary of the Rank and File Mobilising Committee]

THERE ARE two ways in which the Left could be defeated at the Special Conference.

There could be no decision at all, or an electoral college could be agreed which gave 50% of the votes to MPs.

The former would be more of a victory for the 'hard Right', since only then could David Owen and others reconsider their intention to leave the Party. However, in that case the issue would remain very open, since the NEC itself would bring the whole matter back to Conference in October.

The latter would reinforce the hand of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the mainstream Right, given the widespread determination among even sympathetic trade union leaders to close the matter. However, the Left would have won some ground and could make further progress in future. Neither of these is desirable, but, as I explained in the last issue (SO 32), a Left victory will almost certainly depend on retaining support from the right-wing union USDAW. It will be essential, both at the group meetings on Friday and at the conference itself, to maximise the chances of retaining USDAW support.

There is still procedural uncertainty. There may be a group meeting on Friday for delegates from all organisations which have proposed electoral colleges at conference. If this materialises, delegates should demand to be sub-divided on the basis of proportion options rather than the wording of their proposals. If that succeeds then the following should emerge from the sub-groups:

(Agenda pp. 5-6), to cover all proposals for 3-way parity.

- The USDAW submission (Agenda no.76), or failing that the almost identical no.69, for 30-30-40 (also covering CLPD's 30-30-38-2).

- The CoHSE submission for 40-30-30.

If the groups meet on the basis of wording, then the following should emerge:

- The NEC submission, from those with the NEC wording and with a separate section for Socialist Societies.

- The USDAW submission or no.69 from those with the NEC wording but no separate section for Socialist Societies.

- The CLPD/RFMC resolution no.112 from our own group.

**Campaign for Labour Party Democracy
Special Conference Briefing Meeting**

1pm-2pm, Saturday 24 January, in the Severn Suite, Wembley Conference Centre.

Speakers: Tony Benn, Andy Harris. Chair: Joan Maynard.

Admission 50p.

In the Conference itself, maximum support from the very first ballot must be given to USDAW's resolution, or failing that to some formula giving 40% of the votes to the trade unions. If USDAW reneges on its submission, we may ultimately be forced to swing behind the NEC proposal, but with much less chance of success.

Shlock horror-it's Flash Gordon

The happy hunk is Flash Gordon, football star. The nervous beauty at the window is Dale Arden, travel agent (not so exciting, but then the girl can't steal the show). Beefcake meets cheesecake and, of course, it's love at first bite.

Soon as you say 'sexism', the woo-some two-some are in a rocketship with a mad scientist, soaring into space. He's some Central European psycho (no wonder Freud cleaned up in Vienna), but lucky for you and me, fellow earthlings, the prof's got more brains than a schnitzel's got breadcrumbs. He alone knows the earth is under attack.

Before long, brains, brawn and beauty have landed and been captured on Mongo, the centre of an interplanetary police state headed by Ming the merciless. The place is run by armed extras left over from Star Wars and inscrutable bald-headed controllers straight out of a second-rate spy film. The tribal population have fled to this place from the film lots of Intolerance, Horse Feathers and Tarzan. These are the people who are attacking Earth, and Earth has only got 14 hours to live.

Sex

Ming has this hypnotic ring (on his finger, stupid, not his telephone) and some other very sophisticated technology, yet morally Mongo is a galactic Gomorrah where evil reigns supreme. He rules over a court which he has filched from the Wizard of Oz — right down to the dwarfs — and he is all bad. After starring in too many Ingmar Bergman films, this evil genius who dresses like Fu Manchu is a sex fiend who — horrors! — has designs on the delectable Dale.

Flash, of course, does his best to protect Dale in true manly style. "Hands off, Ming! She's mine.", he warns. But to no avail.

Apparently the whole family is sex-crazed because within seconds of seeing him the seductive Princess Aura is frantic for Flash. Superman without briefs, Batman without Brylcreem — he's irresistible.

Thighs

"Let me have him, father," she pleads with Ming. But the answer is no. Flash is sentenced to death for trying to protect Dale. But the Princess rescues him so that she can have him to herself. She craves his company on a

moon, I want to rescue my friends and save the earth".

Impressive, but can he do it? And can Dale get away from the cracked Ming? Meanwhile, General Jala, who appears to be Darth Vader's grandfather and runs the police on the planet, has ordered Professor Zarkov's brains to be reduced to matzo meal. Will the prof be able to forget Fiddler on the Roof and start life over again? Why does Jala's vinyl-clad girlfriend disobey his orders?

Four hundred Mongo miles east of this frightful scene, Ming's daughter asks her lover, Prince Barin, to look after Flash.

Robin Hood. He is also insanely jealous of Flash: he knows that Aura sighs for his thighs and so decides to kill our hero. But Flash is too smart for him. Suddenly both Barin and Flash are captured by the Hawkmen, a tribe of vandals in sandals, with wings on their backs. These flying barbarians have in the meantime also captured Dale and Zarkov, whose memory of Shakespeare, the Beatles' songs and the Talmud have made him immune to brainwashing (they can't take those things away from you!)

Flash and Dale meet for one muscle and emotion-packed moment. Dale: "Have I got some crazy

when Ming recaptures her, or will love conquer all? How many more minutes can earth survive? How much longer can the audience stand it?

Will Prince Barin in the green tights kill Flash, or will Flash's own red tights kill him first?

Are the Hawkmen all chicken or do they only run away from Ming's attack because without Kirk Douglas they don't know what to do? Is this the crisis of leadership or is there more? What has happened to Aura since her capture by General Jala? Did the bore-worms do their job? What is a bore-worm's job? Is the director of this film trying to get one? Will

humanity, teamwork and tears, keeping your word and the tactic of the popular front. But is there time to unite the warring tribes ruled over by Mongo against the tyrant Ming? Can the earth be saved? Is there time to save Dale who has been recaptured by Ming? Will the Merciless Master find the ring for her finger or must the best man die?

What can the unemployed extras from Battleship Galactica and Captain Blood do to earn a living?

Will the empire strike back? Is this the revenge it is taking? If this is the best we can do, should earth be saved?

All these questions (except the last one) can be answered by going to see Flash Gordon. But just in case this account has whetted your appetite, let me suggest some questions that this fun-film doesn't answer.

Isn't it really pernicious to repeat (in however camp a context) the ideological crap served up by this kind of strip cartoon? Sure, the kids who see this know it's all crazy, but does that stop the dust from the ideological debris settling on their minds? Or does the outrageous self-mocking quality really work to *undermine* sexism, racism, the cult of violence and cold war anti-communism? I doubt it, but what do you think?

Oz

Take the scene where Flash is in the prison waiting for the carrying out of the death sentence. Dale rushes in to see Flash for, she thinks, the last time. She is dressed with robes out of Cleopatra's props cupboard. Flash's first words: "You look great!"

Does it reinforce or does it undermine?

Of course, it's for kids. But then so was the Wizard of Oz (from which all the best bits were copied) and there wasn't too much sex or violence in that. There were no tyrannical controllers trying to sound like Hollywood Russians and it lacked the national stereotypes of Central European professors and merciless Mongols.

Andrew Horning



neighbouring moon, but our Herculean hero is too clean for that. (Believe the ads, lady, there's nothing cleaner than Flash!) Quick comes the reply: "I don't want to go to the

But Barin thinks Flash is dead. Angrily he quips, "I knew you were up to something, Princess, but I didn't think it was necrophilia."

This guy thinks he is

stories to tell you?" Flash: "Save them for our children". Dale: "I accept."

He's obviously a fast mover off the field as well as on. Be will it be bigamy

Ming's Mongols destroy the rest of the housing project at the far end of the Yellow Brick Road?

Suddenly Aura's leafy lover twigs to earthly values: handshakes and

Tories attack the disabled

by Nigel Williamson

THE SACKING of Reg Prentice as Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled will, for obvious reasons, delight all socialists. However, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that this is the signal for any change of policy away from the vicious attacks on the disabled conducted by Prentice over the last 18 months.

This was the man, remember, who after observing the very moving sight of hundreds of disabled people being pushed, carried and wheeled past the DHSS headquarters at the Elephant and Castle last June in protest against Tory policies towards the disabled, described the demonstration as "phony". His sacking may have been a public relations exercise, as his unpalatable views would have been particularly embarrassing in 1981, the Inter-

national Year of Disabled People. It is certainly not an indication of Thatcher's desire to improve the level of services to the disabled — indeed, she replied to a Commons question on 13 January, requesting that more government cash be found for the disabled, "most of us think it more laudable to do things for oneself than to get up and take a public stance on an issue and try to persuade the Government to do it".

This answer was actually given to Jack Ashley, a man who has overcome the disability of deafness to become an active MP.

Under Prentice, the Tories prepared themselves for the IYDP by introducing a Social Security Act which hits disabled people hardest and which reduced the real value of invalidity benefit, and by urging local authorities to implement cuts which make a mockery of the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act. This piece of legis-

lation obliged local authorities to provide those services essential to an independent life for disabled people within the community, including home-helps, meals-on-wheels, home adaptations, telephones and many other items. These are all now being whittled away, and this section of the Act (Section 2) may be abolished completely.

In December, the Tories dismissed, and tried to suppress, the findings of the Short Report which said that 5,000 preventable handicaps amongst new babies occurred every year because insufficient intensive-care cots were available. The first aim of the United Nations Charter for the Disabled in the IYDP is "to save as many people as possible from becoming disabled by maximising the prevention of disability." The sum necessary to prevent these 5,000 babies being born disabled every year is roughly equivalent

to what Britain spends on the arms race in one day. Yet the Tories refuse to fund that sum.

Apart from being probably the only country in the world to recognise the IYDP by cutting their living standards, the Tories may further mark the IYDP by reorganising special education to increase segregation of disabled children, and abolishing the quota system which ensures the disabled people are, as one journalist put it, "only as unemployed as anyone else, instead of twice as unemployed or more."

One in every four families in Britain includes a disabled person, and disability is clearly a political issue. Dennis Skinner has tabled a number of parliamentary questions demanding something more than 'empty rhetoric' from the Tories over the IYDP. Amongst his proposals are

free transport for the disabled (something Bill Rodgers refused to do as Minister of Transport), an increase in the number of training centres for young disabled people and doubled spending on kidney machines and heart pacemakers.

To that we would add positive discrimination legislation on behalf of disabled people in the field of employment and a comprehensive disablement allowance that bore some close relationship to the average industrial wage.

Prentice may have gone, but the policies which discriminate against disabled people remain, and are becoming more discriminatory. If, as many had claimed, disability was not a political issue, the Tories have certainly made it one now. It is up to the labour movement to mount a convincing, fighting campaign around it.

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Ford: unions' weak lead gives bosses go-ahead

by Stephen Corbishley

EVEN BEFORE the last narrow mass-meeting vote at the Halewood plant, Ron Todd of the TGWU was all set to sign a deal on the Ford offer of a 9.5% pay increase backdated to November — well below the rate of inflation.

Tame

This tame acceptance of the Ford bosses' cut in real wages gives the bosses the upper hand to tighten the screws of their draconian

new disciplinary code. Any workers taking action to resist new management measures face immediate suspension for the rest of their shift and for the following full shift, all without pay.

While Todd and the other union leaders were undercutting workers' resistance to the 9.5 per cent by making clear they would give no determined leadership to a fight, Ford bosses provoked a dispute in the Halewood paint shop and forced suspensions. After two other disputes, also followed by suspensions, 4,000 out of

the 10,000 Halewood workers were laid off without pay.

Clearly

Clearly management had two purposes: to show Ford workers that they mean business with the new 'disciplinary' code; and to intimidate the militant Halewood workers into accepting the pay offer.

Management moved at a time when the votes recorded from most of the Ford plants, including Dagenham, had shown a strong

majority for acceptance, and so Halewood was isolated.

The lack of an official lead against the 9.5 per cent pay deal shows that the official leadership cannot be trusted to lead a fight against more 'disciplinary' moves, against speed-ups, or against any Edwardes-style purges of militants and shop stewards.

In fact Todd wanted to give trade union endorsement to the new disputes code in return for concessions on hours (which Ford would not give).

The full-time officials' refusal to organise a fight on the basis of the previous mass meetings' rejection of the identical 9.5 per cent offer gave Ford bosses the new disciplinary code without even any concessions in return.

Strong

Now Ford workers need to build a strong organisation, based on the shop floor, capable of challenging and if necessary leading independently from the half-hearted bureaucrats.

Vauxhall: let's have the facts

Ellesmere Port carworker **TONY CASHMAN** reports on the Vauxhall job cuts.

THE announcement which was expected by the 29,000 Vauxhall workforce was made on 14th January: the loss of 5,700 jobs.

Unlike some newspapers who saw the announcement as a shock, the workforce have been on short time working since August and knew it was coming. The only shock for them was that the company finally told them something.

The company calls the 5,700 redundancies voluntary cuts, but at the same time says it must get the full 5,700: 3,000 at Ellesmere Port, 1,800 at Luton, and 900 at Dunstable. As the Financial Times reported: "There seems little doubt the company would not shrink from making forced

redundancies if necessary".

This was announced after a five-hour meeting with the unions by Ferdinand Beickler, president and managing director of Vauxhall. He also announced that the new 'J-Car' would go to the Luton plant, and kit assembly of the German-built Astra to Ellesmere Port, by the end of the year.

What a lot of the papers that printed this failed to say was that Vauxhall are talking in terms of one Astra an hour at the end of 1981, and only 15 an hour by 1982.

Unions at Ellesmere Port are totally opposed to redundancies, and at meeting they have spelled out the stupidity of taking the money. You lose all benefits for eight to twelve weeks. Anyone who gets over £2,000 would not get any dole money until every penny was spent. And, last but not most importantly,

there is no chance of getting another job on Merseyside.

The unions have said they will do everything they can to fight the redundancies. The message that came over loud and clear at the meetings was that no worker has the right to condemn another to years on the dole, and if the company try to enforce any redundancies, we will fight them with any action necessary. But union leaders said that, being realistic about it, there was nothing they could do if people took the money.

In finishing this article, I would just like to say that there is a hell of a lot of information that the company still won't tell us. And if the past is anything to go by, they won't comment until the Vauxhall workers get off their backsides and start fighting back.

Manchester LP: Change the policies, change the people!

by John Rimington

MANCHESTER City Labour Party has been in sharp conflict with the ruling Labour group on the council for a considerable time.

The Labour group has made little attempt to fight the Tory onslaught. It has cut services whilst pretending otherwise. It is allowing council houses to be sold. And its management policies have left the workforce disillusioned and demoralised.

The City Labour Party, on which the Labour Left has a majority, has been consistent in its opposition to the ruling majority, and many councillors face disciplinary

proceedings for their public opposition to the leadership. Yet the left has too often been indecisive and satisfied with token gestures.

This was highlighted at the January meeting of the City Party GMC. Withington constituency presented a resolution highly critical of Cllr. Morris [the Leader of the Group] and his supporters, and called for their immediate resignation.

This came at a time when the Right-wing were on the counter-offensive and the local press and radio were hovering like flies, looking for further 'militants vs moderates' trash to publicise.

So instead of using this resolution as an opportunity

to make a firm political stand dissociating themselves from the Labour Council's actions, most of the Left quietly swept the affair under the threadbare carpet of 'party unity'.

Foremost in this were 'Militant' comrades, who proposed a 'delete all and insert' wrecking amendment. This was finally rejected, yet a successful amendment [from ASTMS] was passed which seriously weakened the original. Instead of calling for resignation, it said: "This GMC cannot have the fullest confidence in the Labour group and the Leadership while they consistently ignore party policy."

Faced with the prospect of open political conflict, the Left retreated, wailing about the dispute being "too personalised" because the resolution actually named the Group Leader. Some comrades have yet to realise that policies are formulated and operated by people. People represent policies, and if the policies are to change, so must the persons concerned.

by Dave Lunts

BRITISH Rail management began 1980 by commissioning a report into the effects of the huge line closures of the 1960s. The report was scathing. It concluded that for those served by the branch lines that once covered the country, the Beeching closures were a disaster.

Replacement bus services, guaranteed under Beeching, were a poor alternative, and many were soon withdrawn as "unprofitable". For rural communities especially, public transport became a thing of the past.

Now, at the start of 1981, BR bosses are talking about a second round of Beeching scale closures, involving up to 3½ thousand miles of track (around a quarter of what remains). Two other reports out last year were equally bleak. One condemned BR management for the atrocious wages and long hours worked by most railway staff, and the Armitage Report on freight transport backed the moving of freight by juggernaut instead of by rail.

Obsolete

But what's really worried BR bosses into forecasting the first wholesale closures for 10 years is the publication, just before Christmas, of the railway Chief Inspector's Annual Report. He concluded that spending cuts were beginning to seriously undermine railway maintenance, and hence safety.

For the first time in 10 years, the most dangerous types of accidents (collisions and derailments), showed an increase, from 220 to 243. Of these, 17 derailments were "wholly attributable" to faulty track, an increase of 4 in 1979. Altogether 9 derailments "occurred at locations where a deliberate decision has been made to

End of the line for British Rail?

defer attention to the track." How many others were the direct result of overworked and tired drivers, signalmen or maintenance staff, he doesn't mention.

The other side of the cuts is, of course, slashing of services. The recent cut-backs in trains and closure of stations on Southern Region is just the latest in an avalanche of similar cuts. Delays and cancellations are running at an all-time high. Large sections of track now have permanent speed restrictions caused by worn and out-dated rail. At Aberystwyth, for example, there is a restriction of 10 mph caused by rotten sleepers which aren't being replaced.

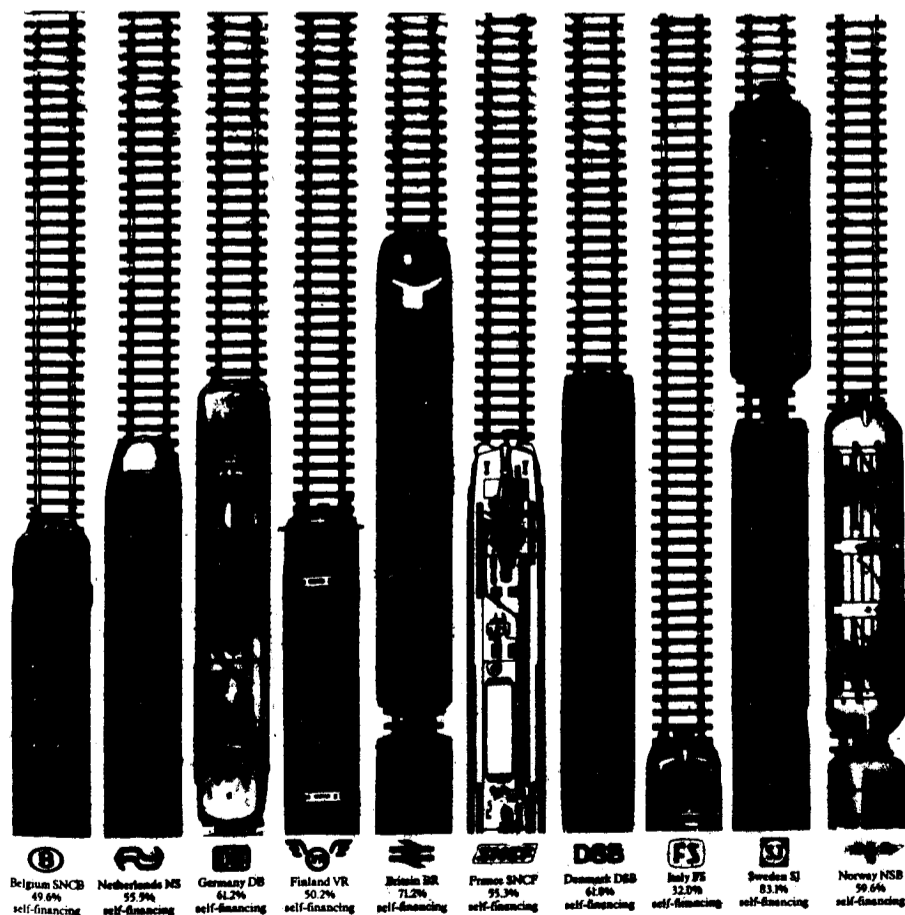
So the trains which are running are often late and unreliable. Obsolete locomotives are still being used (only 12 new engines were built on the whole of BR last year) and ancient rolling stock makes journeys cold, dirty and uncomfortable. The decrepit diesel units which clatter up and down most suburban and rural lines, all too often breaking down in mid-journey, are a testament to the ingenuity of BR fitters and mechanics. Designed for a working life of 10 years, most are now around three times that age.

Even the 150 mph 'Advanced Passenger Train', the one jewel in BR's rusty crown, is suffering. Eleven months after it was scheduled to be in service, there is still no sign of it, outside of glossy 'Age of the Train' posters.

Railway workers are faced with massive redundancies unless they can organise an effective fight to save jobs and improve

services. Already jobs are going. 6000 redundancies have been announced with the winding up of the collect and deliver parcels service, and line closures will massively add to this figure. Both the Epping-Ongar London Transport line and the Manchester-Sheffield Woodhead lines are due for closure this

year. Despite a vacancy list of over 20,000 jobs, management has declared its intention to axe around 50,000 jobs over the next 6 years and for the past year they have unofficially frozen recruitment. Low basic wages on the railway aggravate the situation. Most railway workers are forced to work overtime to make up their wages, and so cover for unfilled vacancies.



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ties. The scale of the crisis on the railways is well known by the unions (ASLEF, NUR and TSSA), but absolutely no fight has been staged by any of the leaderships. A few pathetic whippers and an agreement with the management not to rock the boat is all we've seen. All three unions are now pleading with the Tory government for more money (an initia-

that fight must be to save jobs and improve wages and conditions. The struggle for a 35 hour week is essential on the railways, where the entire industry relies on overtime.

But a real alternative to the present crisis must involve a fight for an integrated transport system, involving rail, bus, air and shipping services for both passengers and freight. Such a planned, rational network of transport would end the idiocy of capitalist competition where profitable rates and services are maintained, but others (the vast majority), are run down and eventually closed altogether.

Control

That fight is beginning, albeit in a very embryonic stage, in the various campaigns for public transport being set up in different parts of the country. What is needed now is unity between the unions concerned and mass involvement.

Already the NUR has made a 'Triple Alliance' with the NUM and the ISTC, supposedly to defend jobs in each industry and save what's left of the rail freight business. At present that Alliance is controlled by, and involves only the three union leaderships, similar to Alan Fisher's public sector alliance. But if broadened, and brought under the control of the rank and file of the unions concerned, then the struggle to defend jobs, improve wages and conditions and extend and improve the transport system could really take off.

A campaign along these lines could gain mass support and is the only safeguard for jobs in the industry. It is something worth all transport workers fighting for.



**BL shop steward
ALAN THORNETT's
speech at the July 17th
national Cuts recall
Conference.**

Can I ask delegates to cast their minds back to the very important report earlier this afternoon on the Longworth hospital occupation.

I know, as someone involved in supporting their action, that it was a difficult occupation to organise and that it got off to a shaky start. After the first week, the Divisional Officer of

THE 400 delegates to the 'Local Government in Crisis' second conference had a very simple question to answer: do you want to be part of a fight now or not?

Those who didn't mapped out their road: raise rates and rents now and make small cuts, avoid confrontation and 'gain time'. Some emphasised gaining time until we get a Labour Government, while others said they wanted to gain time for a bigger anti-Tory fight later.

This option was nailed fairly and squarely by Stephen Corbishley (CPSA, British Library), who pointed out that "gaining time means only this — it means retreating to be clobbered time and time again".

Spirit

That spirit dominated this conference, just as it had dominated the earlier conference last November. And the militant resolutions passed again this time reflected that spirit.

But there was a difference, and a crucial one. In the three months since the first conference, several councils — including Lambeth, the council so many looked to for a lead, including people who were present at the November conference — have raised rates and declared that they will go on raising them.

The central problem for

by Sean Matgamna

SOMETHING strange and nasty happened at the 'Local Government in Crisis' conference. Gerry Healy's so-called Workers' Revolutionary Party turned up to support Ted Knight and rent and rate rises.

Perhaps as many as forty delegates were members or sympathisers of the WRP, which had obviously made a big effort to mobilise for the conference. It has been many a long year since the WRP concerned itself with a mainstream labour movement event like this, and the labour movement has been the cleaner for their absence.

At the conference the WRP formed a bloc in support of rent and rate rises with the right wing, the supporters of Ted Knight, and the Communist Party. They also moved resolutions advocating their current universal cure-all, 'Community Councils'.

Essentially these are non labour movement bodies designed to by-pass existing bodies like Trades Councils. Newsline, the WRP's glossy daily, has outlined the participants it has in mind for its alternative to the labour

The only way to build a movement

COHSE addressed the workers and gave them some advice: "End the occupation and go back to work". He told them "Don't make kamikaze pilots of yourselves".

Now, I don't know if anyone asked him if he was a member of the WRP, if he had come hot-foot from the nearest community council — but I do know that he stood far to the right of those workers who rejected his advice unanimously and are stronger now seven weeks later than they were then.

It reminded me of the November Lambeth conference when Ron Keating, moving the right wing motion from the NUPE Executive justified it by saying he would "not make kamikaze pilots of his membership".

"It also reminded me of Moss Evans at TGWU Biennial Delegate Conference, who when debating motions on fighting the Tory government, said "We have got to be tactical, we must not bring all our troops out of the trenches at the same time" and "we're not having any Charge of the Light Brigade."

These of course are the standard arguments of the right wing, they say it all the time. The issues being debated here today are the same as those debated at the previous conference and most of the arguments supporting them are the same.

But there have been some musical chairs: the people voicing the arguments have changed. At the last conference it was Ron Keating putting the right wing position,

this time it's the WRP and those supporting community councils!

The community councils supporters tell us that opposition to Lambeth's supplementary rate rise is "conscious sabotage of the struggle in Lambeth". "Conscious sabotage"! — yet it was the very policy adopted overwhelmingly at the November conference! The WRP voted for it as well. Now, eight weeks later, it is "conscious sabotage".

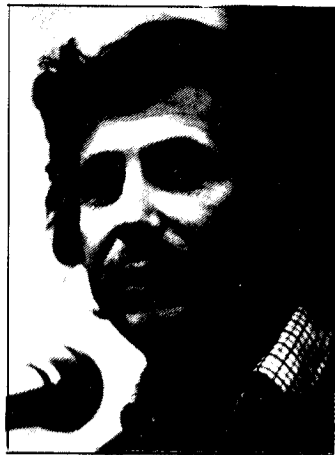
So what has changed in the meantime? What has changed, of course, is that the chips are down in Lambeth. The cut in the rate support grant forced a decision to be made — either impose the cuts, put up the rates or go into political confrontation with the government. Ted Knight capitulated and put

up the rates.

The crucial thing in today's situation is to mobilise the working class round a political confrontation with the government. It is argued, a Labour council can't confront the government till it has a mass movement behind it. But how do you get a mass movement behind you? No one ever built a mass movement that way.

The only way to build a mass movement is to stand and fight — to give leadership. There is no other way to mobilise a movement behind you.

And what about the next rate rises in April? Will capitulation now build a mass movement ready for April? No: it will make it more difficult. Nothing serious can be done until a stand is made.



Alan Thornett

TESSA HOWLAND (FL)

At the last conference Ted Knight said, "We don't want any more defeats like Clay Cross." In that lies the seeds of the problem. More Clay Crosses are exactly what we do need today. That was an important stand against the Tories. Today we don't just want one Clay Cross. We want 2,3,4,5,6 Clay Crosses — but that won't happen until someone is prepared to stand and fight and give a lead.



NATIONAL CUTS CONFERENCE

THE CRUNCH THIS TIME

THE HAMMER blows of Heseltine's policies are falling thick and fast on Labour local authorities, forcing them to do the Tories' dirty work. But still they are not leading a fightback.

When Lambeth Council helped to call a 'Local Government in Crisis' conference last November, it made a big step towards inspiring and organising a working-class counter-attack.

The recall conference on January 17 was supposed to take the fight further. But it was a mixed success.

Cheung Siu Ming, Ros Nash, and Andrew Hornung report.

this conference, then, was that last November's victories in debate had proved hollow in practice. The basis was laid for changing that, for giving some organisational muscle to the policy, by a resolution from TGWU 5/287 (Leicester), mandating the newly-elected Steering Committee to organise regional labour movement conferences, it was passed by 147 votes to 110.

But the relatively narrow

vote was a sign of problems. So was the poor attendance, though that was mainly due to short notice. And so was the fact that the main conference debate was given over to defending the November policy against backsliding.

But against a novel alliance of Ted Knight and his ilk, the right wing, the Communist Party and the "Workers' Revolutionary Party", the Left held the line for its conviction that

the fight must be organised now and that implementing Tory measures only demoralises and demobilises the very forces we are trying to build up.

Against those speakers who could see nothing but the movement's weakness, several delegates described struggles they were involved in. Dave Simmons (Wandsworth NALGO) told the conference, "We're taking industrial action and we're going to win".

"We knew how far the Tories would go, so the first thing we did was to get through a compulsory levy 18 months ago for a strike fund. We've now entered a prolonged period of selective strikes. The housing sales team is out, stopping council house sales.

"Housing cashiers are out — no rent is collected. Petrol attendants are out — so there's no petrol for council vehicles".

Anne-Marie Sweeney's account of the Longworth

Hospital occupation also showed the kind of fight that can be mounted against the Tories. She emphasised above all the inactivity of the trade union leaders, even after the occupation had been made official.

The same fury at betrayal by the labour movement's leaders came from councillor Ray Davies, a member of the Llanwern Steel Action Group, who is under threat of being expelled by his local Labour group for opposing cuts.

Waste

"If you accept leadership", he insisted, "you must accept the responsibilities that go with it — you must fight".

He pointed out that the Labour and trade union leaders had wasted the crucial period between October and December. "I told my Labour Party that they could expect a campaign by

the NEC, because that's what was promised. But nothing happened. Neither the NEC nor Regional Labour Parties have done anything."

One of the most important actions that the Conference was to consider was the week-long protest strike organised by Lambeth manual workers (with the support of the council) against the Tory government. A forceful speech from Peter Cole (TGWU 1/763), a Lambeth dustman, put the case for trying to spread the industrial action and other actions timed to coincide with what the Lambeth workers were doing.

This proposal was countered by a motion from UCATT London Region which described the Lambeth workers' move as "a tactical error". This position gained very little support in the conference, though



GADDAFI'S FOREIGN LEGION TO KNIGHT'S RESCUE

movement: "Labour groups and constituency Parties, action committees, immigrant organisations, ratepayers (!) and tenants' groups, small business organisations (!), civil rights, child rights and women's rights groups".

Quite a few delegates ridiculed this nonsense before throwing it out decisively. But the WRP is no laughing matter. It is a pseudo-Marxist gobbledygook-spouting cross between the Moonies, the Scientologists, and the Jones Cult which committed mass suicide in the Guyana jungle three years ago.

It recruits and exploits mainly raw, inexperienced, politically, socially and psychologically defenceless young people. It employs psychological terror and physical violence against its own members (and occasionally against others).

It is very widely believed to be in receipt of subsidies

from one or more Arab governments, from Gaddafi's Libya at least. Of course there is no public proof of this. But for years, during which its membership has not been more than four or five hundred, it has published a very glossy daily paper, Newsline, which has survived despite having only a tiny circulation.

Its relationship to Gaddafi was and is that of a mercenary Hollywood publicity-agent to his client (and when it was a political organisation the WRP — then the SLL — was marked by bitter hostility to real third-world revolutionaries such as Fidel Castro). It also supports and shamelessly justifies the widespread murder of Communist Party members by the Hussein dictatorship in Iraq.

It supports the repression of women, gays and socialist activists by Khomeini of Iran, whose reactionary Mus-

lim regime it also supports.

Its vehement campaign against Israel and much-publicised support for the Palestinians has nothing in common with socialist or working-class politics when it is coupled with crawling, uncritical, cap-in-hand support for the Arab bourgeois regimes who have in the past betrayed the Palestinian masses (& will in the future).

The WRP has spent the last 5 years or so in a paranoid spy-hunting campaign in which it has traduced and slandered as spies and 'agents' long-standing Marxists like George Novack and the late Joseph Hansen.

It now sees the political world in terms of 'spies', 'agents', and as a comic-book-fantasy-level cops and robbers story. For example Monday's (19th) Newsline carried a raving page-long editorial on the Conference.

"Those who preach such a solution [i.e. opposition to

rate rises and confrontation with the government] are really 'Thatcher's people' [Newsline quotes] because they are speaking 'her language' [Newsline quotes]. The revisionists want [Newsline emphasis] the Tory commissioners in Lambeth. They are now calling for rent and rate strikes in the borough with the aim of deliberately destabilising the council and hoping to force it into bankruptcy... In other words, behind their fake 'left' words and their talk of a 'militant stand' against the Tories, they are in fact hellbent on getting Labour out of Lambeth and the Tories in".

The motive for this revisionist plot is that we "hope to see the working people of Lambeth punished with cuts, unemployment, and dreadful collapse of living standards. Then, say the revisionists, when they have suffered enough, they will be ready to fight".

Soon now Newsline will tell its readers which of us work for the CIA, which for the KGB, and also who among the critics of Ted Knight are the double agents working for both.

Today the WRP — the sycophant of Gaddafi and other bloody anti working class dictators — is no longer a part of the labour movement. Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter, Michael Banda, etc. long ago betrayed Trotskyism, socialism and the working class itself. (And, as a matter of fact, they betrayed themselves too. But that's their business).

Yet Ted Knight and his friends accepted without protest or comment or visible embarrassment the public support of this crew. The Lambeth Left should ask Ted Knight and his friends exactly where they stand on this poisonous, disruptive, anti-socialist sect, with its undisguised ties to Arab bourgeois dictators. The question should be asked forcefully and in public.

* For an account of its internal life, see *The Battle for Trotskyism* published by the Workers Socialist League.



Alf Sherwood, a Lambeth convenor, later told SO that he was disappointed at the lack of positive discussion around the Lambeth workers' initiative.

The worst aspect of the conference debates was the way the current pet slogan of the Workers' Revolutionary Party — for 'community councils' — was allowed to divert discussion. Behind the rhetoric of setting up soviets, the WRP are pulling out all the stops to defend Knight and his approach.

Charlie Sarell (NUPE hospitals branch, Leicester), however, hit the nail on the head when he said, "The community council idea is just a cop-out, because it is avoiding facing the difficult arguments about rent and rate rises."

"The fact that the NUPE leadership pulled out after the November conference pinpoints the area of struggle — we've got a leadership which is backing down, not fighting. The community council slogan won't help drag them into the fight or call local Labour Parties and councils to account".

Neil Turner, a Lambeth councillor delegated from Vauxhall CLP, commented on the argument that the rate rises are "just a tactic". "Try and explain that to people complaining about the £5 or £6 a week extra they have to pay for the supplementary rate in Lambeth. A temporary manoeuvre? These rate rises have been going on for three years in Lambeth... You can't mobilise the working class by cutting their living standards".

A more representative conference would have been able to brush the 'community councils' nonsense aside without wasting much time. Another effect of the narrower base of the conference was the way the very good motion from the Labour Party Young Socialists National Committee was defeated. Because it called for a campaign to force a general election and return a Labour Government, the SWP and others withdrew their support, and that was enough to defeat it.

But we held the line, at a time when the choices are posed more starkly than in November. And we've got the basis to start organising.

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Longworth workers demand union backing

by John Lister

DESPITE the wave of cut-backs throughout the health service nationally, the only action currently taking place to stop hospital closures is the 8-week old work-in at Longworth Hospital in rural Oxfordshire. Yet though the union concerned, COHSE, is officially pledged to a policy of occupations to stop the cuts, it took the COHSE executive three whole weeks to declare the Longworth work-in official — and the 250,000 strong union have yet to provide even the most rudimentary material support.

After two months not so

much as one COHSE badge or poster has been produced to back the occupation; not one executive member has even visited the picket; no campaign has been mounted to publicise the struggle on a national basis; and repeated calls for a union pledge to guarantee full strike pay for any members who took strike action to defend the occupation have fallen on deaf ears.

Far from building up the Longworth struggle as an example of how to fight the Tory cuts, the COHSE leaders plainly regard the work-in as an embarrassment — flying in the face of their own inactivity on the cuts. It

is the inactivity which created the conditions for the brutal raids by police and scabs that ended the work-in at St. Benedict's, Tooting, as well as earlier struggles at Ettwall Hospital, Derbyshire and Hounslow Hospital.

The Longworth occupation has received a lot of advice from St. Benedict's workers who remain very bitter at the way that they were let down by the union leaders at local and national levels.

But it is not only the union leaders who recognise it as an embarrassment. AHA Chairman, Lady McCarthy, is the foremost advocate of closure of Longworth. Mc

Carthy has vocally attacked the occupation, blaming the action for preventing the opening of a new community hospital at Witney. But McCarthy is also a leading member of Oxford City Labour Party, sitting on its GC.

Oxford CLP has supported the occupation. A resolution on the agenda of the Oxford GC on January 19th attacks McCarthy's role in implementing the cuts. It is vital that Health Service unions, the wider trade union movement and Labour Party members take up the fight to extend the Longworth struggle — a fight that the COHSE officials have refused to take up.

sed to take up.

Health service unions should be called upon to pledge full scale supporting strike action should any attempt be made to stage a raid on Longworth. LP wards and GMCs should send resolutions, both to Oxford GC, demanding that McCarthy is removed, and to the NEC, demanding that the Labour Party on a national level carries out the mandate of last October's conference and throws its full weight behind workers in struggle against the cuts, in order to mobilise the mass action needed to defeat the Thatcher offensive.



A phoney mandate for McGregor

by Pete Radcliff

BY 63,237 to 17,900, in a 65% poll, BSC got approval for chairman Ian McGregor's so-called survival plan.

This vote (with just 50% of all steelworkers voting in favour) can hardly be regarded as a total success for the steel bosses. The main substance of the BSC plan is a cutback of 22,000 jobs and a freeze on all pay rises for 6 months followed by a 7% increase.

For a month BSC workers have been subjected to a barrage of propaganda from the bosses to win support for this plan. Personal letters and videotaped appeals, "man to man" talk about "being in the same boat", have come from works directors, divisional managers and McGregor himself.

As with BL they threatened to liquidate BSC if the vote didn't go their way. With the Tory government behind them they hoped to play on the steelworkers' fears that they could carry out this threat.

But despite all this they only succeeded in getting just 1/2 of the steelworkers to vote for their

cuts rather than doom. This and the results of the parallel ISTC ballot (which showed area-by-area voting figures) indicated that McGregor may find it harder than he thought to implement his job slashing union-bashing plan.

The ISTC ballot shows that in the major steel union that fought most last year — and in the areas that fought best — the will to fight remains. South Yorkshire had 72% against the plan...

Although these figures won't be welcomed by McGregor, he cannot now back down from a confrontation. Claiming the ballot gives him a mandate, as vehemently as he would have denied it had he lost

Sirs' surrender

THE RESULTS of the separate ballot organised by the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation were announced on Monday 19th. They showed a clear majority against the pay freeze and the 7% pay deal, and a big rejection of the BSC plan (by 18,000 to 8,000 votes).

This should be a mandate for the ISTC leaders to org-

anise action to save their members' livelihoods. But general secretary Bill Sirs commented:

"We are not contemplating industrial action over the survival plan. We recognise that [McGregor] will be putting it through regardless... We will make them pay for it at some stage..."

call off any fight this year.

In response to this, the call must now go out to all steel union bodies, from the ISTC Executive down, to ignore the ballot results and organise to defy McGregor's plans.

Steelworkers will have to draw up their own survival plans for their jobs, their living standards and their union organisation. The set-back of the bosses' ballot must be countered by mass meetings exposing the lies and evasions of BSC in the run up to the ballot and demonstrate to the rank and file their collective strength.

In response to the bosses' demands for automatic cutbacks, workers must fight for reductions in the working week with no loss of pay and automatic cost of living increases. In response to the bosses threats that they will only run the industry if they have their way on closures, workers must organise to block that way and prepare to take control of the industry.

The attacks by BSC will continue till one side breaks. Steelworkers must make sure it's not their side.

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OUR RALLY IS MARCH 21st

AFTER consulting the local Socialist Organiser groups, the SO delegate meeting last November decided that our first national rally should be organised for early 1981.

March 21st has now been fixed as the date, and Central Library, Islington has been booked.

After six and a half months of the fortnightly Socialist Organiser and the new SO groups, it'll be a chance to meet, exchange experiences, organise for the struggle to come. The theme will be 'Labour democracy and the fight for a Workers'

Government'; the day's programme will include workshops, displays, films, debates, invited speakers, and a social in the evening.

Organising the rally will cost money. And, as we reported last week, SO's funds are very low indeed. We've asked SO group members, if they can, to give us an extra fiver each. And we need to get AT LEAST £500 a month coming in regularly through supporters' contributions and extra fund-raising.

We've had £287.60 so far this month, including what's come in so far

LISTINGS

Socialist Organiser offers free listings for labour movement events. Send copy to **Socialist Organiser**, 5 Stamford Hill, London N16, to arrive by the Saturday one week before the publication date.

CENTRAL LONDON POLYTECHNIC Students' Union. Civil Liberties Society. Thursday 22 January. Chris Beer on 'Police and community in Lambeth'. Thursday 29 January: Martin Kettle on 'Police powers and law & order'.

Labour Club. Tuesday 27 January: Bob Wright on 'Trade unions and the struggle for Socialism'. Thursday 12 February: Reg Race MP on 'The Alternative Economic Strategy'.

All these meetings: 5pm in the Student Common Room, PCL, 32-38 Wells St, W1.

SHEFFIELD Socialist Organiser meeting. Jim Denham, sacked TGWU shop steward, on 'Victimisation at Longbridge — Defend the Eight!' 7.30pm Monday 2nd February, Station Hotel, The Wicker, Sheffield.

SHEFFIELD Rank and File Mobilising Committee. 'What next after the special conference'. 7pm, Wednesday 4 February, at the Station Hotel, The Wicker.

EDINBURGH CND demonstration for unilateral nuclear disarmament. 9.30am, Saturday 31 January. Assemble at Waverley Bridge, march to Usher Hall.

SCOTTISH Convention for Peace and Disarmament. 10.30am Saturday 31 January at Usher Hall, Lothian Rd, Edinburgh.

LOTHIAN Against the War Drive/Edinburgh CND conference. 10.30am-5pm, Sunday 1 February, at Boroughmuir High School, Viewforth, Edinburgh.

**Socialist
Organiser
NEWS**

(only a trickle as yet) of your fivers. Recent fund income includes £43 from a social in Cardiff, £10 from Manchester, £4 from Sheffield and £7.60 from Cambridge.

We need more — and we need it faster! Send to SO, 5 Stamford Hill, London N16.

Socialist Organiser

BL's new plan: search and sack!

LEYLAND bosses are planning to bring in new stop-and-search tactics. They also want to change the disciplinary procedures, making it easier to sack workers instantly.

These new measures are contained in a secret management document entitled 'Disciplinary Policy'. The document came into the hands of *Socialist Challenge*, who have passed it on to us.

It is supposed to be about 'acts of theft and gross misconduct', but the measures it proposes could easily be applied to other cases.

If the bosses get their way, no longer will workers be considered innocent unless convicted in a court. They will be dismissed instantly 'on the balance of probability' — with the company being the judge of the issue.

This is to apply in cases of theft and gross misconduct, but the document doesn't define what 'gross misconduct' is supposed to mean. As part of the plan to step up personal searches, the company is going so far as to 'rebuild plant exits and entrances where neces-

sary to permit searches to be carried out'.

Then the document instructs managers to 'ensure that security forces are (adequate to) carry out and record regular searches of male and female persons and belongings, and of employees' visitors, company and production vehicles.'

The recent record of the company tells us that it will stop at nothing to frame militants. The increase in non-personal search (planned as a thin end of the wedge, leading to increased personal searches) gives the employers plenty of opportunity to plant things on workers.

Concluding, the document warns managers that 'implementation of the new policy will generate conflict ... The possibility of industrial action ... cannot be discounted.' Let's make sure the fears are realised!

BL trade unions should demand the immediate withdrawal of this document — and the opening of the company's files to workers' inspection, to nail any other similar documents circulating among the management.

THE AVERAGE seafarer works up to 70 hours a week for about £112, the wage received by the average factory worker for about 45 hours. This fact alone more than justifies the National Union of Seamen claim for a 'substantial' increase on the basic pay of £64 a week ('substantial' meaning, originally at least, 20 or 25% and increased overtime rates.

But when you consider that seafarers may spend months away from home, tied 24 hours a day to their workplace, working long hours on a dangerous job, then the claim seems modest indeed. Many other workers suffering similar conditions, like oil rig workers for example, have won much better rates.

Given the large amount of overtime worked, an important element of the claim is the demand for overtime pay to be upped from time-and-a-fifth (!) to time-and-a-half (double-time on Sunday), a demand which has been outstanding for 12 years and in fact still falls short of union policy of double-time for all week-end working.

It is especially important this time round, since employers have been cutting overtime worked. The union is not against a reduction in overtime, but it feels that at the same time earnings should be

SUPPORT THE SEA STRIKE!

protected.

The employers' response to the claim was the initial offer of 10.5% on the basic with time-and-a-quarter for overtime (time-and-a-half for Sundays). The amended offer (rejected and subsequently withdrawn) of 12% was not in fact much different from the original offer, being based on juggling with figures. On overtime rates it offered 4p an hour less than previously offered.

The problems that seafarers face in this struggle are:

- The weakness of the claim itself, which does not go for a living basic wage,

- The massive growth in the use of flags of convenience since the last major dispute in 1966, meaning that even with an all-out strike, unless picketing was effective, many British cargoes would continue to be carried on foreign-registered ships, often crewed by poorly-paid non-union seafarers.

- That the guerilla action may not be biting enough to make the employers give in. The recent decision to step this up will aid the situation, but there is still the problem of preventing a

transfer of cargoes to supposedly non-British ships.

• That the union leaders have been back-peddling on the claim, lowering their sights to no more than 16% and saying they would accept arbitration.

The employers claim that British shipping is 'non-competitive', even with wage rates substantially below those of many European countries. If this is so, then the problem lies with the low rates of invest-

ment typical of all British industry, and the general downturn in world trade. And seafarers certainly should not sacrifice their living standards to make their bosses 'competitive'.

And the union points out that British shipping is as profitable as the rest of British industry, if not more so. For instance, Trafalgar House, owners of the QE2, increased their profits from £43.7 million to £49.1 million last year.

Dispute committees must lead the fight

by Geoff Williams

'I AM just amazed at the response', said seafarers' general secretary Jim Slater on Friday 16th. 'The problem is going to be to get them back at the end'.

And militant seafarers who spoke to me are increasingly convinced that it is just how the union leaders see it. Wary of a big confrontation with the bosses and the Tories, they are deliberately holding back the fight.

Slater says the union will call off the action if the bosses agree to go to arbitration at ACAS. But a National Union of Seamen branch meeting in Cardiff on Monday 19th told the union leaders that the rank and file wanted no reliance at all on ACAS.

As of Monday 19th, 39 ships were stopped by the NUS action in foreign ports, and 83 in British ports. 145 foreign-going vessels, and 52 in home waters, were affected by overtime bans and other limited actions.

A national meeting of branch officials on the 19th decided to continue the dispute with lightning 24 or 48 hour stoppages on ferries.

But the ferry workers, the biggest section of the NUS's 30,000 membership, are not being brought out on all-out strike. Foreign-going seafarers are not striking at all, but only refusing to sail once their ships dock.

The guerilla action has halted the sailings of Brit-

ish-flag vessels, but other flags are still operating.

The bosses have stepped up the conflict from their side. The Western Shipping Company used scabs to sail two ships from Cardiff. In Hull, 14 crew of the Baltic Valiant have been sacked.

The union has called on all trade unionists to refuse to handle all ships belonging to the Baltic Valiant's owners, the United Baltic Corporation. And Leith seamen have stopped three of Western Shipping's ships from sailing.

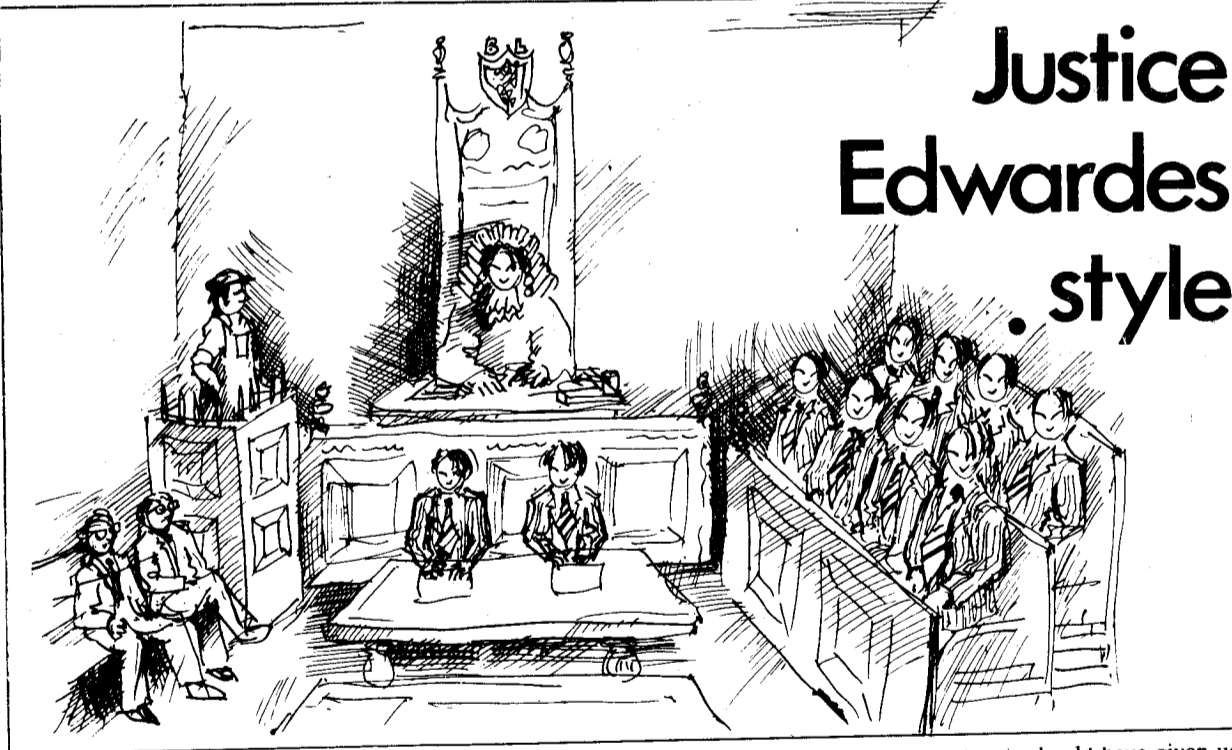
But NUS branches in many ports have elected disputes committees to organise the action locally, and some of these are linking up. A national framework is needed to coordinate the dispute committees and make sure that the branch officials — who are appointed full-timers — don't dominate the running of the dispute.

Nationally-organised, the dispute committees can stop every port in the country. And that's the way to win the claim for 25% more on the £64 basic rate and better overtime pay.

Pickets to stop anything going in or out of ports would hit the bosses hard and quickly. Support could be won from dockers and lorry-drivers.

That way, the shipowners could rapidly be brought to their knees. And we could make a breakthrough for the whole labour movement on the wages front.

Justice Edwardes style



IVAN WELLS

From front page

In another case, presumably thinking that the evidence for their original charges is too thin, they have added a load of extra charges.

The inquiry commits the BL bosses to nothing. They can always veto its findings. And remember the 'independent' chairman from ACAS which the TGWU officials made so much fuss about? Well, Pat Lowry, formerly a top BL boss, has just taken over as head of ACAS. That's how 'independent' they are.

The inquiry could even set us back — by giving the union officials a chance to dump some of the sacked

workers. It should never have taken place.

- It's inquiring into the wrong thing. Why isn't the company's vindictive lay-off policy, which provoked the protest on which the charges are based, being inquired into? Why aren't the BL managers up before an inquiry on charges of sacking men without the elementary justice of a chance to hear, cross-examine, and answer the evidence against us?

- Some damage was done during the 21st November protest. The shop stewards on the protest tried to prevent it. We thought it was foolish. But at the end of the day it was a pretty mild come-back for

all the damage BL has done to our living standards and our work conditions and our lives.

Even if charges of damage were 100% proved against a worker — and some of us aren't even charged with damage, only with vaguely being 'ring-leaders' — no proper trade union should accept that justified the worker losing his livelihood.

- The unions should have insisted that we were reinstated before any inquiry. As it is, every day of the inquiry is another day with the eight of us outside the gates, another day gained by the bosses.

We hardly expected much justice from the bosses. But our unions, at

least, should have given us the benefit of 'innocent until proven guilty'!

Since we were sacked on December 3rd, we have had one area of solid, honest support — our fellow-workers in the Metro trim and assembly. They have struck twice to support us, and each time they have been pressured back to work by the Works Committee and/or the union officials.

Now they, and we, are looking for some solid backing from the union officials. The call must be clear: if — or rather when — the inquiry fails to reinstate all eight, the unions and the Works Committee must give full backing to a strike of the whole Long-bridge plant.