

Workers' ACTION

No.5 February 12th-18th 1976

8p

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Don't let the prison system crush Frank Stagg

SPAIN SEES ITS BIGGEST MARCH IN 40 YEARS

THE BIGGEST demonstration Spain has seen since the end of the Civil War took to the streets in Barcelona on Sunday. Wave after wave of marchers chanting and waving the Catalan flag surged through the streets after every attempt by the police to disperse them.

Despite the tear gas, the rubber bullets and the gun-butt clubbings 10,000 demonstrators attempted to assemble outside the former seat of the Catalan parliament. For five hours they chanted their slogans: Amnesty, Liberty and Autonomy, accompanied by the sympathetic honking of motorists. From the balconies, hundreds of people waved white handkerchiefs in support.

Police chased demonstrators into churches, shops, flats and hotels, arresting many, beating both demonstrators and passers by.

Barcelona, Spain's second biggest city, is the chief city of Catalonia and has traditionally been the most militant of the Spanish cities. The confidence of the demonstrators was clear evidence of their sense of massive popular support.

Here the demand for Catalan independence — which existed from 1932 to 1939 — reinforces the hatred for Carlos's continuation of the Franco regime.

Last week the Spanish cabinet repealed the law making the death sentence automatic for anyone found guilty of killing either a policeman or a member of the armed forces. Minister of the Interior Fraga Iribarne has also instructed police to

outlawed 'Workers Commissions' was allowed to take place with several hundred workers' leaders attending.

Last week concert performances of revolutionary songs were being given, and workers' leaders arriving at the performances were cheered by the audience.

The Government is well aware of the growing confidence of the mass movement. But this is not a government that can reform itself now. It is therefore a Government that is inevitably poised for a historic clash with the Spanish masses.

Protest against the visit of Spain's Foreign Minister to Britain on the government's invitation: picket of Downing St., 2pm Sat. 14th Feb. Organised by I-CL, IMG & IS
SPAIN AFTER FRANCO — what course for the Spanish working class? London Workers Action readers' public meeting, 7.45 Sun. 15th February at the Florence pub, Florence St., off Upper Street Islington.

★Week of Action on Spain The Action Group Against Repression in Spain are calling for the week of Feb 8-15 to be a Week of Action in solidarity with the Spanish working class. 'Such solidarity is urgently needed today, as the Spanish regime is trying to build itself an image of seeking democratic reforms. But nothing could be further from the truth, for the vast majority of imprisoned political opponents of the Franco regime remain behind bars and all forms of independent working class action remain illegal.' For details of events during the week, see Diary. The week has been sponsored by two Labour MPs and Emyln Williams (Pres, S Wales Miners).

The Week of Action has been timed to coincide with the labour movement delegate Conference for Solidarity with Workers of Spain on Sat. Feb 14, organised through the NUM for 19 trade union leaders and nine Labour MPs. Speakers will include Michael Foot MP and Jack Jones (Pres, TGWU) 10.00-4.30



Photo by Chris Davies (Report)

Picket protests against TUC's anti-immigrant move

ABOUT a dozen socialists — members of the International Communist League, the Workers Socialist League, and the Portuguese Workers Coordinating Committee, and supporters of Workers Action — mounted a brief picket outside the TUC on Monday 9th February. They handed in a statement protesting against the recommendation to the Government from the TUC's hotel and catering committee that further restrictions and tightening-up should be imposed in relation to work permits for immigrant workers. At the end of the picket they resolved to

policy. Support for the TUC policy was also present, in the shape — significant, and shameful for the TUC — of some half-dozen members of the National Front and the National Party, who stood on the other side of the street, jeering, insulting black passers-by, and waving an Ulster Loyalist flag.

The statement of protest reads as follows: WE DECLARE OUR SUPPORT FOR THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION FROM Transport and General Workers' Union branch 1/696: "This branch condemns the TUC for asking the Home Office to restrict the issuing of work

We see this as an attempt by the TUC leadership to divert attention from the real causes of unemployment, and make one of the most exploited sections of the working class pay for a crisis which they have in no way caused... We further declare our intention to campaign for the broadest possible support within the labour movement for this protest against TUC policy

Workers Action calls on all readers and supporters to push for support for this statement in union branches and Labour Parties. Please send copies of any resolutions passed to Workers Action, 49 Carnac St, London SE27.



BY THE TIME this issue of Workers Action appears, Frank Stagg, the Republican hunger striker in Wakefield jail, may be dead — a victim of Britain's savagely backward penal system.

The high officials of his church have decided to deny him the comfort and moral support of his religion and are trying to crush the spirit within the body which the British state is killing with the slow torture of starvation. They say his imminent death is his own choice. Untrue! His choice is to pit against his jailers the only weapon left to a man in his condition, in an attempt to force a tiny adjustment to the conditions of his imprisonment — removal to a prison in Northern Ireland.

Ordinary "criminals" are so moved; lots of Orange prisoners, including people whose entire "political" business is that of assassinating Catholics, have been moved. Not Stagg.

Prisoners have no rights — better that a man should starve to death than that any concessions should be made.

Stagg, using the traditional weapon of political prisoners the world over against his jailers, has so far resisted.

Stagg was convicted and given ten years under the Conspiracy laws. He shot no one, blew no one up. The Conspiracy law is so vague and arbitrary that it is not unlikely that he was victimised and framed for his opinions alone. Others have been.

But whatever he did previously, this man has become a soldier in jail — and his example will call forth other soldiers in his cause.

Where does the labour movement stand?

Stagg was sentenced to ten years — not to slow death by starvation. Is the situation under which prisoners have little or no rights so important to the labour movement that we accept that the punishment for challenging it is a death like Stagg is dying?

The Shrewsbury pickets were framed up and jailed under the same law as Stagg. Other British trade unionists will be in the future.

The labour movement must speak out against this Middle Ages savagery! It should long ago have spoken out and acted against the prison system in general.

To keep Stagg in the toils of the barbarous penal system, or to grant his demand; to free Warren, or to keep him in jail — these are political decisions. Working class action can change such decisions.

If the movement will not act for Stagg it should at least intercede for him. Send telegrams to the Home Secretary and to Stagg.

BRITAIN's police got a bit more power last week, as an amendment designed to 'toughen up' the Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed by the House of Commons.

Since the Act was passed in November 1974, the police have had sweeping powers of arrest and detention. Equipped with the right to hold 'suspects' (Republican sympathisers, revolutionary socialists, trade unionists who voice opposition to Britain's role in Ireland) in secrecy for up to a week without charge, they have taken in more than 1300 people for questioning.

Others have been snatched from their homes and deported to Ireland without the right to be told why, or the right to be represented by a lawyer if they lodge an appeal. And the appeal itself usually means a month or so in jail while the Home Secretary's 'advisors' mull it over.

Evidently, the police have now asked for, and will probably be given, a much wider range of charges to bring against many of those they pick up.

Vague

The amendment contains a number of vague catch-all offences to add to those already in the Act.

First, though, it raises the penalties for 'supporting proscribed organisations' from a maximum fine of £200 to £400, and from 3 months' jail to six months. ('Support' is not defined: speaking, singing or writing in 'support' of "the IRA", or chalking it on a brick wall, could land you in trouble.)

The amendment then goes on to ban the raising of funds for 'acts of terrorism' in the north of Ireland. Until now it simply banned collecting money explicitly for the IRA — now it's illegal

WIDENING THE 'TERROR' ACT DRAGNET

to accept money even 'suspecting' it will be used 'in connection with' 'acts of terrorism'. This is aimed at the many people who collect money for prisoners' families, for welfare in the republican areas of the North, and for political funds for Sinn Fein (none of which is banned in itself).

But clearly the most dangerous of all is the clause of the amendment which threatens up to 5 years in jail for people failing to pass on their 'suspicions' about "terrorists" to the police.

One of the 24 Labour MPs who voted against it, Tom Litterick, told how one of his Birmingham constituents had already been raided by police after a relative with a grudge "an alcoholic in an advanced state of degeneration" had passed on false information. The amendment would obviously make this kind of thing more common.

Replying to a description of the amendment as "a snoopers' charter", Shirley Summerskill, Home Affairs Under Secretary, smoothly assured the few opposing MPs that before the Bill goes to the Lords, the Government will look at other proposals in search of a 'compromise'. The National Council for Civil Liberties has announced its

intention of lobbying the Lords against the amendment, though it has small chance of success there.

The Government's attitude to 'compromise' was shown when it came to other amendments. Labour MP Ron Thomas of Bristol (where a number of trade union militants from Irish backgrounds — and a large section of the local (and quite legal) Clann na h'Eireann — were harassed, jailed and deported soon after the Act was passed) put a motion to end the Home Secretary's deportation powers. Roy Jenkins replied frankly that "I regard this part of the legislation as being the most effective part." This proposal was thrown out with just 21 votes in favour.

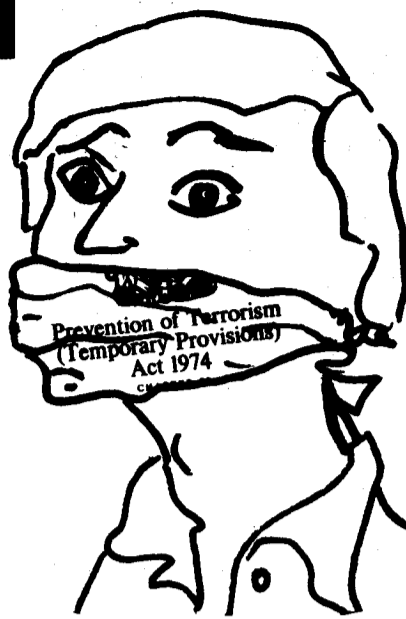
A Liberal amendment with the modest aim of letting deportees know the charges against them was lost. And a left-Labour backbench call to allow those held under the Act the right to see a lawyer also fell.

Bashing

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was rushed through in 1974 on the crest of a wave of anti-Irish hysteria after the Birmingham pub bombings. It headed off calls to 'let the Irish fight it out among themselves' and instead pushed the anger in the direction of more 'Paddy-bashing' operations by the Government and police: much more useful for an imperialist strategy than a general mood of defeatism in relation to Ireland.

In addition, the Act's attacks on certain civil liberties and the way it gave official sanction to covert police practices must have been viewed as a useful way of 'testing the waters' in advance of such measures being needed to control the British working class.

This latest polishing-up operation on the Act has the same aims but goes about them differently. It hasn't been



used to whip up anti-Irish feeling — indeed the measures got little press coverage. The aim is to encourage snooping and sneaking against 'subversives', without in any way emphasising the IRA's strength. And it quietly gives the police a very serious weapon for screwing information out of people under threat of penalties for non-cooperation.

It shouldn't need much thought for socialists to see what a threat this tactic could be in splitting the working class and isolating its most advanced members, at such time as the tactic was used against militant trade union activity.

We could see moves in future, not only to outlaw occupations and types of picketing through a Criminal Trespass law (see this page) but to extend the dragnet to those who heard about such actions in advance but didn't take part in them. As such it forms an extension of the conspiracy laws — whereas Jenkins has claimed that he wants to limit them!

British workers have every reason to stand beside those in Ireland fighting centuries of British imperialist violence. Not least of these reasons is that we could be next in line for the lash now being wielded against our Irish brothers.



Indira spreads police state powers

THE INDIAN Government led by Indira Gandhi has taken its Emergency Powers one step further in dismissing the elected government of the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

When this was announced in the Indian parliament, all the non-government parties walked out in protest, except, of course, one: the Communist Party, which is the ruling Congress Party's staunchest ally and an enthusiastic supporter of the Gandhi dictatorship.

IMPACT

Until it was dismissed, the government of Tamil Nadu had been in the hands of the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam party (DMK). Because the DMK opposes the central government's ruthless dictates and because it has a policy of seeking independence for the state of Tamil Nadu, it had managed to some extent to insulate the area from the full impact of the Emergency.

It had refused to carry out the heavy press censorship demanded by the central government. It refused to carry out the massive waves of arrests, summary executions and other draconian measures taken by other states' governments at the command of the New Delhi central government.

That is not all. Last October nine trade union organisations, taking advantage of the cover provided by the DMK's opposition to the Congress Party government, united in a token strike against the effects of Mrs. Gandhi's post-Emergency package of wage cuts and attacks on conditions of work. The strike was so effective, being supported by rubber and tobacco workers, workers in textiles, engineering, sugar, cement, plantation, leather, foundry and fertilizer industries, that it closed down the whole state for a day.

Both the main Indian trade union groups (Congress Party's INTUC, and the pro-Moscow, Congress-supporting Communist Party's AITUC) opposed action against the wage-cut package. In other states, the pro-government policies of these trade union federations held back the working class from any protest. But in Tamil Nadu, in the wake of the October token strike, even the right wing leaders of these outfits were forced to support anti-overnment protests.

OFFICIAL

Of course, none of this figures in the official reasons given for the dismissal of the government of Tamil Nadu. The official reasons, while they mention that the DMK has disregarded the Emergency Powers, concentrate on two things: the "illegality" of the DMK's argument for secession of the state from India, and trumped up allegations of "misuse of government finance." Coming from Mrs. Gandhi — herself found guilty of that charge until she could rig the trial, this is really rich!

The crackdown in Tamil Nadu is now starting. Since the introduction of Direct Rule a fortnight ago, more than 800 people have been arrested there. Many of these had sought refuge there from repression in the other states.

Meanwhile the General Election, due in March, has been postponed for a year. The time is required, says the central Government, "to study changes thought necessary in the Constitution"...

Something of special interest to Leyland workers, Chrysler workers, steel workers and others in this country: after the imposition of the dictatorial Emergency Powers, Mrs. Gandhi brought out a "New Deal" document. It was this more than anything else that the Tamil Nadu strikers were up in arms about: it cut their bonus, introduced 7-days a week working in some parts, banned all strikes, and so on. What did the "New Deal" also impose, to the delight of no-one but the bosses and the trade union bureaucracy? Workers' participation! Under the new near-martial law of India, workers-on-the-board is compulsory!

PORTUGAL Solidarity Campaign
NATIONAL CONFERENCE
 Saturday March 13th, Conway Hall, London.
 Details from PWCC, 12 Little Newport Street, London WC2

SIT INS • OCCUPATIONS • SQUATTING • PICKETING • TRESPASSERS WILL BE JAILED

A BIG demonstration is planned for February 28th in London to protest against the proposed Criminal Trespass Act.

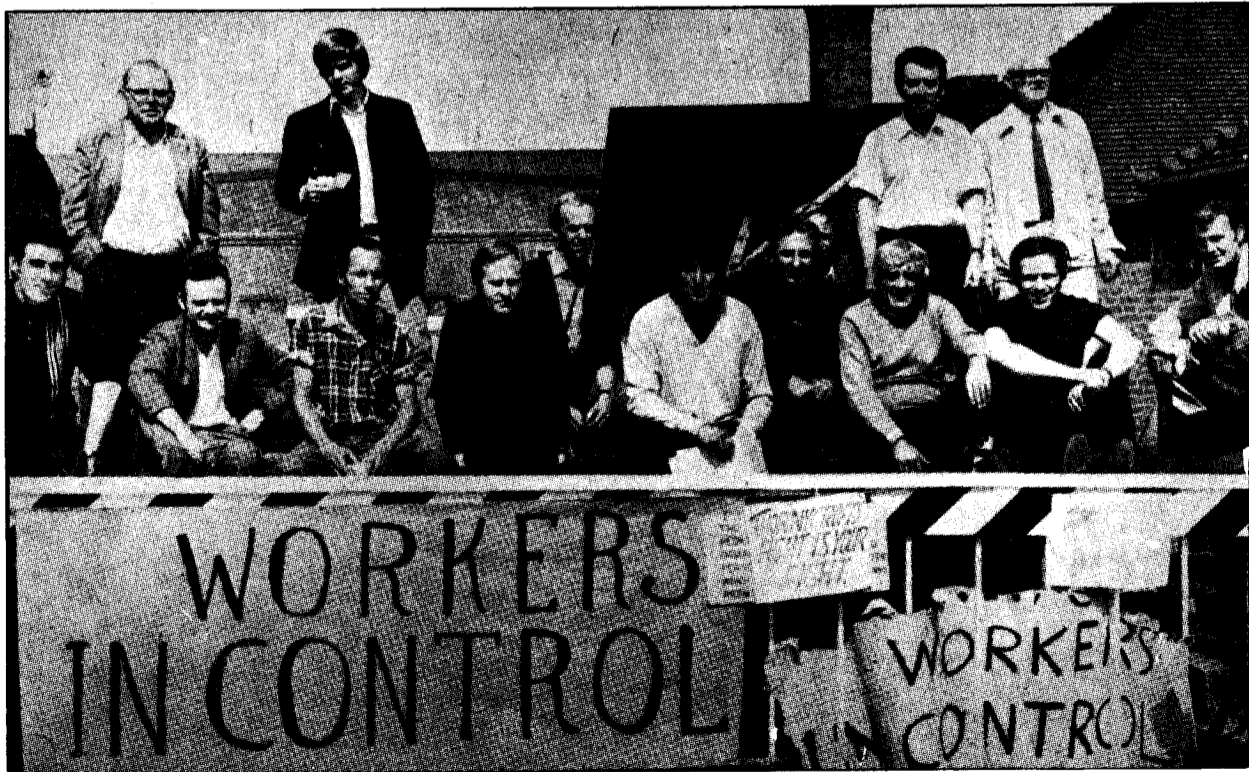
This proposed law will create a whole new class of criminal, by making it a crime for anyone to be on property when the owner doesn't want them there.

This will make illegal the occupation of factories; student sit-ins; demonstrations and pickets on private property; and squatting. The minimum sentence would be six months imprisonment.

As well as restricting activities like these, such a new law could well be used by employers to restrict the right of shop stewards to move about a factory, and to refuse the right to hold union meeting on company premises. Full time union officials could also be kept out of workplaces.

These proposals come out of a report which is to be given shortly to the Government by the Law Commission. The Commission is a group of lawyers who advise the government on changes in the law. In the past, most of their recommendations have been accepted. They are due shortly to present to the government a report on trespass, which will contain the proposed new Bill.

This report comes at a time when the law is tightening up all around on picketing offences and occupations. In the last year there has been an increasing use of High Court orders to remove students or workers from occupations. At Massey Fergusson's Coventry works, Court orders naming hundreds of occupying workers were piled up outside the gates of the occupied works. 21 Iranian students in this country are facing charges after occupying their country's embassy to protest against the killing of political



prisoners in Iran. 19 people were arrested for occupying the office of Iberia Airlines in protest against the garrotting of political prisoners in Spain last summer.

The new Bill will make it much easier for the state to obtain direct convictions for these actions. At present, civil action must be taken by private individuals against those concerned in the 'trespass'. The new law would clear the way for direct prosecution by the police.

This would also mean easier conspiracy charges: in a civil case, a 'conspiracy' has to lead to some action.

But in a 'criminal' case, the planning itself is an offense, even if the plan comes to nothing.

Clearly the introduction of such a law would be a very direct attack on a wide variety of activists, strikers or squatters. And the campaign to make sure that such law never gets to the statute books has received a suitably wide backing.

So far, several MPs including Eric Heffer and Joan Maynard have endorsed the campaign. Fifteen trades councils have affiliated to it. So have many trade union branches, as well as tenants and squatters groups.

The Campaign Against a Criminal Trespass Law (CACTL) is co-ordinating this campaign and has called the demonstration of February 28th, to start from Belvedere Road, London SE1 (Waterloo Station) at 1.30pm.

If you cannot be there — and it is important that this demonstration is very well supported — send messages of support to CACTL through your union branch, at 6 Bowden Street, London SE11. More information, speakers and leaflets can be obtained from that address, or phone 01-289-3877.

Thorpe: What's all the fuss about?

IN ALL the hundreds of column inches about the 'Norman Scott - Jeremy Thorpe scandal', it seems not to have occurred to anyone to ask the simple question — **what does it matter?**

Every paper has assumed that if Thorpe were proved to have had homosexual relations with Scott, then he would have to go as leader of the Liberal Party. But why should Thorpe's sexual preferences be supposed to affect his suitability as a political leader? Why isn't it just his own private matter?

Homosexuality is no more unnatural, unhealthy or perverted than heterosexuality. Attitudes to it have varied widely in different societies, and all research indicates that in a society with a minimum of repression, most people would be to one extent or another bisexual.

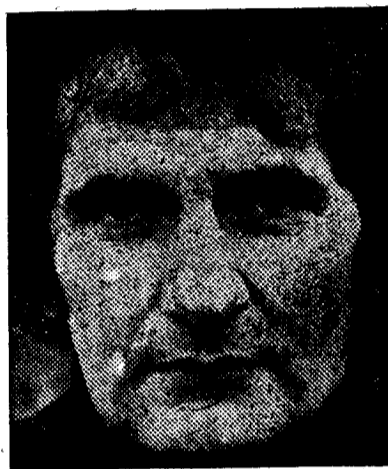
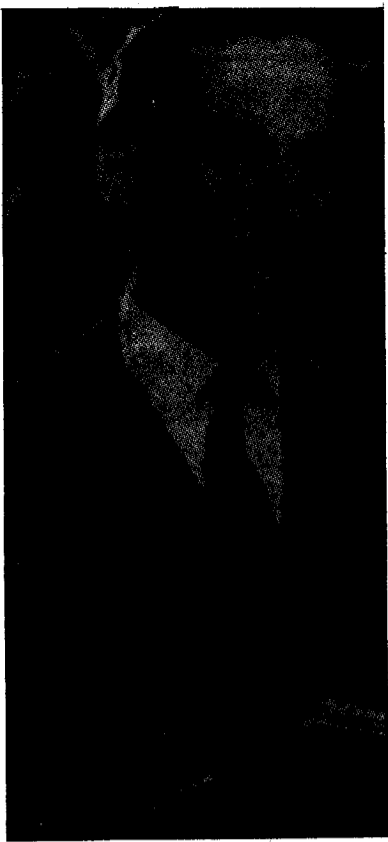
The Kinsey surveys showed that 37% of men and 13% of women had had some homosexual experience going as far as orgasm. If British MPs are typical of the rest of the population, that means that there is a statistical probability that around 200 of them have had such experience. Should they all be hounded out of Parliament?

Sexual

But it isn't really a matter of minorities and majorities. The establishment of arbitrary sexual norms is no better when applied to a tiny group than when applied to a large group. It is now considered scandalous that people should be hounded out of public life for having extra-marital affairs or getting a divorce. Isn't the Jeremy Thorpe furor just as scandalous?

But it isn't really a matter of minorities and majorities. The establishment of arbitrary sexual norms is no better if applied to a tiny group than to a large one. Most

Jeremy Thorpe



Norman Scott

people now consider it scandalous that certain people should have been driven from public life for having extra-marital affairs (as the 19th century Irish leader Parnell was) or getting a divorce. Isn't the Jeremy Thorpe furor just as scandalous?

The anthropologist Malinowski found that the Trobriand Islanders regarded sexual intercourse with the woman lying flat on her back as rather 'unnatural', because the woman couldn't gain much pleasure. They called it the 'missionary position' because it was chiefly the European missionaries who practised it. Who is to say that our standards of 'normality' and 'naturalness' are any better than theirs?

Irrational prejudice about sexual habits is not confined to the ruling class. In fact, the level of prejudice in the ranks of the working class is probably worse. The stupid and irrelevant chants on demonstrations three or four years ago which said 'Heath is a fairy' are an example. Think of the effect of the chants on homosexual workers taking part in those demonstrations.

Scandal

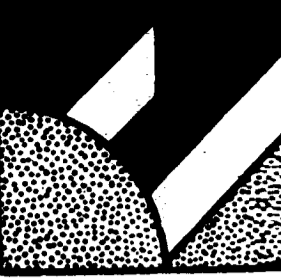
Suppose Thorpe were not a well-heeled, anti-working class bourgeois politician, but a working class militant — a shop steward, or a convenor or union official? Unfortunately he would be in just as much danger of losing his post as a result of the 'scandal' as he is now. It is certainly a fact that thousands of potentially militant workers keep out of union and political activity for fear of bringing to public notice the fact that they are gay.

The ruling class establishment has an interest in upholding the family as an institution, and with it an interest in promoting oppressive forms of personal behaviour, including sexual behaviour, enforced on the pretext of their being 'normal', 'natural' and 'right'. It encourages the most hypocritical and backward prejudices on the question of sex.

The working class has no interest in any such prejudices — even when they are directed against our class enemies.

Northern Ireland The only solution: Troops out now!

Editorial



THE re-convened Northern Ireland Convention is on the verge of complete shipwreck. Its failure to reach agreement on a "power sharing" formula marks the end of the latest attempt at a British 'solution to the Irish situation'.

Why can there be no such solution?

Working class people in Britain will never be able to understand the situation as long as they look at it in terms of Britain's Irish problem. It is in fact Ireland's British problem.

It was Britain which for hundreds of years maintained its dominance over the whole of Ireland by maintaining in power a totally parasitic class of Protestant landowners.

It was Britain which encouraged the rallying of the northern Protestant workers and small farmers into a "loyalist" garrison against the fighters for Irish independence. And it was Britain which, in 1921, faced with the hopeless task of subduing the whole island, settled for cutting away six of the counties of Ulster (leaving three counties in the 'south' as their inclusion would threaten the automatic Protestant majority, and including two counties in which the majority of the population was Catholic and nationalist) — against the wishes of the majority of the Irish people.

For fifty years Britain maintained the Protestant state, in close alliance with the Orange bloc of landlords, small businessmen and workers. But changing circumstances, the growth of investment in the South, the loss of Ireland's strategic importance as a potential threat to Britain's rulers in war, the desire for entry into the Common Market — these things meant that leading sections of the British ruling class decided to attempt a quiet transformation of the northern statelet, a dismantling of the anachronism of inequality and repression which soured their close relations with the Green Tories of the southern ruling class.

But when they tried to do it, they ran into two obstacles largely of their own making.

The Frankenstein monster of Orange sectarianism, armed to the teeth and determined there should be "no surrender" of the Protestant Ascendancy, has proved an immovable obstacle to British plans.

The other obstacle was the rousing of the nationalist population of the north, demanding in the first instance civil rights, one person one vote, and an end to discrimination in jobs, housing and education. This struggle ran straight into the brick wall of the sectarian state and the increasing Protestant mobilisation.

Beating down

The growth of the Provisional Republican movement, in reaction to the pogromist Orange mobs, and their armed struggle, showed the impossibility of a peaceful democratisation of this artificial state. Their slogan "smash Stormont", corresponded to the inevitable logic of any attempt to end the 50 years of oppression suffered by the Catholic working class within the Six Counties.

The British government had to walk a tightrope, balancing uneasily. Every stumble has increased the pile of dead bodies — victims of British imperialism's attempt to maintain the Six-County state, which was and is so artificial that it should never have been created.

British troops were sent into Northern Ireland in 1969 to stop Orange pogroms and maintain clear British control. By July 1970, however, they were already locked in combat with the Catholics. How? Why? Britain was committed to maintain the Six County state. The Catholics oppose its existence. The Protestants support it.

By 1970 Catholics were searched and disarmed, while the Protestants were left in possession of over 200,000 guns. Locked in the politics of divide and rule, the British government — Labour or Tory, alike — has been forced in practice to make the policy of dismantling the Orange sectarian state subordinate to beating down the Catholics.

It was 14 unarmed Catholics who were mown down by British troops on Bloody Sunday, 1972. It was hundreds of Catholic militants who were rounded up and interned in the living hell of concentration camps like Long Kesh. When the Protestants created massive para-military forces, like the Ulster Defence Association, the British Army not only did not outlaw them or disarm them, but openly and covertly maintained a close working relationship. The Ulster Workers' Strike of 1974, not a working class general strike, but a sectarian lock-out, was allowed to proceed under the friendly 'neutrality' of British bayonets.

The British government now finds itself in an impasse. To accept an open and naked return to pre-1969 would arouse the Northern Catholics to further resistance and might seriously endanger the stability of the Southern regime.

On the other hand, attempts to wip a sizeable group of Orange politicians of the Faulkner Craig variety into support for power sharing have proved miserable failures.

For this reason, a prolonged period of attempts to maintain direct rule is likely. The British Government will

try to put pressure on the Orange bloc, and at the same time to drive the Catholic masses into a war-weary acceptance of the 'peace at any price' policies of the SDLP.

Any breaking of the log-jam of repression, sectarian violence, and the threat of civil war cannot come from British interference.

There is no British solution to the problem, except complete and unconditional withdrawal from Northern Ireland. But, say many sincere trade unionists and socialists, wouldn't this lead to civil war? To this we reply where does that threat come from? From armed Orange reaction. Who is the guarantor and protector of Protestant privilege and reaction? The British Army and the British connection. What forces defend and protect the Catholic masses? Only the Republican movement — the IRA.

Certainly only a fool could guarantee that the Protestants will not launch a bloody civil war. But British troops fetter the hands of the Catholics while allowing the Protestants to arm and mobilise. Further, the disappearance of British support would face Protestant workers with the inescapable fact that they are a minority in Ireland as a whole, and that a Northern state without British (or EEC) support is economically, politically, and militarily unviable for any protracted period.

What can workers do in this country to help the Irish solve their British problem? We can and must step up our campaign for the immediate withdrawal of the troops.

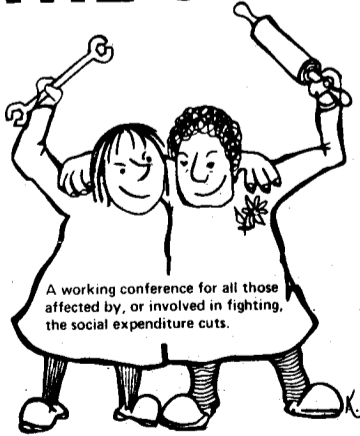
State barbarism

As Karl Marx said a hundred years ago, "A nation that oppresses another cannot itself be free". The repression machine developed to hold down the workers of Belfast and Derry will certainly be used against British workers in struggle. We cannot afford to support that repression machine as "our army". Instead we must unconditionally support those who fight against 'our' ruling class in Ireland, arms in hand.

We may have serious criticisms of the politics and strategy of the Irish Republican forces. They are revolutionary socialists, and they fail to see that only the Irish working class, North and South, can really secure accounts once and for all with imperialism. We have serious criticisms of callous acts like the Birmingham bombings. But we do not equate those acts with deliberate state barbarism of the British army. We recognise that there is a war taking place in Ireland, and that war we are clearly on the side of the oppressed against their oppressors.

The British Army is our enemy. We must get it out of Ireland as soon as possible, leaving the Irish people a whole to settle their affairs as they see fit.

WOMEN AND THE CUTS



Friends House,
Euston Road,
London NW1.
on

Saturday 28 February 1976
10.00 am till 6.00 pm

Called by WORKING WOMEN'S
CHARTER London Co-ordinating
Committee. Details and registration
from Michele Ryan, 39 Parkholme
Road, London E.8 (249-3072)

workers' ACTION supporters' groups are being formed in the following places:

Birmingham, Bolton, Brighton, Bristol,
Cambridge, Cardiff, Chelmsford,
Chester, Coventry, Crawley, Durham,
Edinburgh, Leicester, Liverpool, London,
Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle,
Newtown, Northampton, Nottingham,
Oxford, Reading, Rochdale, Sheffield,
Stafford, Stoke

Write for details of meetings & activities to:
WASG, 49 Carnac Street, London SE27

SPAIN: THE FIRE LAST TIME



Demoralisation set in behind the Republican lines

FRANCO'S DEFEAT of the Spanish workers and peasants ushered in a political ice-age which only now looks like coming to an end.

Forty years ago exactly, the struggles of the oppressed classes of Spain threatened the very existence of capitalist and landlord power. The ruling class's response to this threat was civil war and the imposition of the violent and brutal fascist dictatorship of Franco.

The victory of fascism, however, could only happen because of the betrayals, the errors and the downright political crimes of the Popular Front government — ostensibly Franco's Enemy Number One.

In spite of this, today's Spanish social democrats and Communist Party are driving towards a straightforward repetition of the tactics and strategy of the 'thirties.

FELIX MORROW's book "Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain", first published in 1938 and republished only recently, is a brilliant analysis of the course of the struggle against fascism and against the Popular Front, and a bitter warning for today.

In the thirties, as now, social democrats and the Communist Party represent the Civil War as essentially a battle between the 'forces of democracy' and fascism. They say that only the most reactionary capitalists and landlords supported Franco; that he was opposed by a broad, popular front made up of workers, peasants and 'progressive' capitalists.

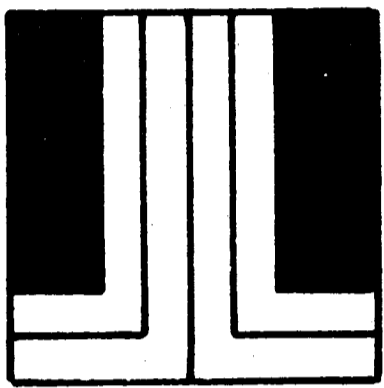
CAUSE

The defeat in 1939 is therefore presented as being the result of the armed superiority of Franco (and his German and Italian allies); and it is also said it happened because some 'ultra -left' parties frightened 'progressive' capitalists from supporting the Republican anti-fascist cause.

Such a view distorts the facts and misses all the key political lessons — lessons once again rammed home by the Chilean catastrophe. Morrow's book clearly refutes these dangerous myths.

In February 1936 a moderate, liberal government was elected in Spain. Its election was a reflection of the popular resentment against the right wing governments endured by workers and peasants in the previous years. But it was more than this.

Because it was a weak capitalist government it gave the workers' movement a chance to develop openly — which it did apace. All over Spain



REVIEW

by **ARNIE PROUT**

political prisoners were released by mass pressure, peasants seized the land and workers struck for a decent standard of living.

Spanish landowners and capitalists were under tremendous pressure; straining under it, they moved further to the right. Some of them saw that their only salvation lay in yet another right wing dictatorship.

When Franco made his attempted coup later that year, they supported him almost universally. Of the capitalist class, only a few isolated liberals remained to 'defend democracy'; and even they would have capitulated had it not been for the swift response of the Barcelona workers. Morrow documents radio broadcasts from the Madrid government denying "rumours" of Franco's army revolt.

The bourgeois democratic could bring no actual forces to the anti-fascist struggle.

The working class response, on the other hand, was unequivocal. In hundreds of towns, factories were occupied, barracks surrounded and seized — initially by unarmed workers who appealed to the soldiers to join them. A workers' militia was set up. A wave of land occupations swept through the countryside.

This massive response brought the Franco forces to a grinding halt. They had expected a quick victory — now they faced a long war.

The capitalist state machine, although

it still existed, was devoid of any authority. Real, effective power lay in the hands of workers' revolutionary committees and workers' militias, and these immediately began to organise the struggle against Franco.

Despite their lack of co-ordination, they scored some impressive first victories. Had they been properly coordinated and equipped, they could undoubtedly have won — for they were armed not only with guns but with a political approach which promised the workers and peasants living in the fascist-held areas liberation not just from Franco but from the unremitting exploitation of capitalism and landlordism.

The liberals of the Republican government could not cope with this situation; crisis after crisis beset them. Eventually they decided that their only hope lay in involving the left wing socialists and the Communist Party in the government. Only in this way could they hope to mobilise the workers behind support for 'democratic' capitalism. Thus the Popular Front government was formed.

The Socialists and Communists who joined this government were not insincere; they simply believed that to fight fascism they must link themselves up with liberal and democratic capitalists — despite the fact that this particular political animal was virtually extinct in Spain!

The implications of this were dreadful. In plain speaking it meant class collaboration and the subordination of independent working class action to the sensitivities of liberals.

LOGIC

The logic was simple but disastrous. The alliance with bourgeois liberals must be maintained at all costs. The liberals stand for private property and respect for the capitalist state. Therefore the factories and land must be returned to the bosses; the workers' militia must be disbanded and replaced by a conventional army; the revolutionary committees must hand back power to the capitalist state...

In other words, the socialist offensive must cease, be turned back, and wait until after the war.

The problem was that such a strategy guaranteed defeat. For example, the best arms and equipment were put into the hands of the police and army behind the main lines — so that they could oversee the return of factories and land to the bosses. When the fascists were threatening a town, the bourgeois

democrats insisted that no destruction of property took place. They valued property more than liberty, and their 'respect for property' (including their own) overwhelmed their opposition to fascism.

In this way, the fascists took San Sebastian, Bilbao, Santander... and many other towns, while demoralisation in the Republican camp grew. Franco's base in Morocco remained intact because the Popular Front government refused to offer it independence — which would have won the Moroccan masses into active opposition to Franco.

Worst of all, militant workers and leftists were harassed, finally to the point of physical liquidation.

POUM

Coinciding with Stalin's desire for a diplomatic alliance with France and Britain above all else, the Spanish Communist Party implemented a policy of complete kow-towing to this less and less 'democratic' bourgeoisie. It pursued this policy as fervently as it had the previous policy of the Comintern which labelled these same bourgeois leaders "the worst fascists".

But it was not only the Communist Party which adopted this line. It was accepted without question by the social democrats and even the Spanish anarchists (who had spent the previous fifty years proclaiming the 'abolition of the state!')

Only the POUM put forward the view that the civil war could only be won by social revolution. But their deeds never matched their words. At the crucial moment they vacillated. When insurgent workers took over Barcelona in July 1937, the POUM at first supported the action — and then backed down.

The workers, left leaderless and demoralised, were crushed. The POUM was thanked for this generously — by the imprisonment and murder of their members by Stalinist agents.

From this point onwards the morale of anti-fascist workers began to slump and the way for Franco's victory was prepared.

What then are the real lessons of Spain? Firstly, that fascism cannot be defeated by shady alliances between liberal capitalists and the working class. Fascism represents itself as the last attempt of the bosses to protect their wealth and power. Liberals who oppose the seizure of power by fascists are individuals who are out of step with the vast majority of their class.

Secondly, that class collaboration in periods of intense capitalist crisis leads to catastrophic defeats for workers. (Chile is our modern Spain.)

Thirdly that fascism can be beaten back by a united working class front in defence of key democratic rights. But that the struggle for democracy must take the form of mass, independent working class action which paves the way not for democratic capitalism but for workers' democracy and socialism.

HAMMER

Tragically, neither the Spanish Socialist or Communist Parties have learnt a single one of these lessons. As the Spanish ruling class totters further into crisis, not one but two popular fronts have emerged — the CP 'Democratic Junta' and the SP 'Democratic Convergence'. Neither has attracted even marginal support from any important Spanish capitalists — and instead have had to cast around amongst discredited monarchists and the like.

Once again we have to hammer home the point: 'democratic' sections of capital are hesitant and cowardly in their opposition to fascism; they fear the potential of a mass upsurge of working class struggle far more than right wing dictatorship. Alliance with them will once again lead to the subordination of the interests of our class.

POVE IS TH KILLI NOT

Mr. A was 73 and living on a supplementary pension of £10.40 a week, exclusive of rent. He received an electricity bill of £42 which, on his pension, he just couldn't pay. So he went to the Social Security for help, and they persuaded the electricity board not to disconnect him because of his age and because the flat was all-electric.

But the bills still mounted up and three months later he got another bill, for £90. This time his supply was disconnected.

by Neal Smith

What is hypo- thermia?

Hypothermia is a cooling of the body so that deep body temperature falls below 96 deg.F. This on its own can kill old people who are in poor health. But more commonly it makes them more likely to get killer diseases such as bronchitis and pneumonia. About 10% of all old people suffer from some degree of hypothermia. In addition, about another 10% naturally have body temperatures close to the hypothermia level. Such people are at risk from fatal hypothermia if, say, they fall in a cold room and can't get up.

'It is absurd

PERCY Hammon is 65, and his wife is 68. Both are unlikely to see the summer. They owe the Electricity Board £80 — which means that they are among the thousands of old people living under sentence of death from hypothermia, the fatal lowering of the body temperature.

Percy Hammond says 'I've done my best on my pension to pay them what I owe, but there isn't a hope in hell of clearing the debt before they disconnect me'. An Electricity Board spokesman admitted "we are cutting people off at the rate of thousands a month".

The "hell" Percy Hammond speaks of is a very appropriate expression to describe a society where old people and young children are deliberately deprived of warmth, and die from this deprivation. Even the caveman in his primitive state had a fire! But in 1976, in this age of modern civilisation, human beings are dying for want of the bare necessities of human existence.

These things went on right through the 'good times'. Now they are worse. Cuts in services, petty economies in fuel allowances and massive meanness on pensions — backed up by hard faced officials 'doing their duty' — wreak death and misery among the weak and the old.

The glowing shop-front of capitalism is crumbling too. We are once again seeing children on the streets with holes in their shoes, the dole queues, and — a real sign of the times — the growth of second hand shops and pawn shops, and long queues at jumble sales. Once again we see the careworn expressions on the faces of women of our class, women who take all the blows in times of crisis, even going without food to ensure that the

On trial in Barcelona: Julian Gomez Gorkin, editor of POUM paper Batalla

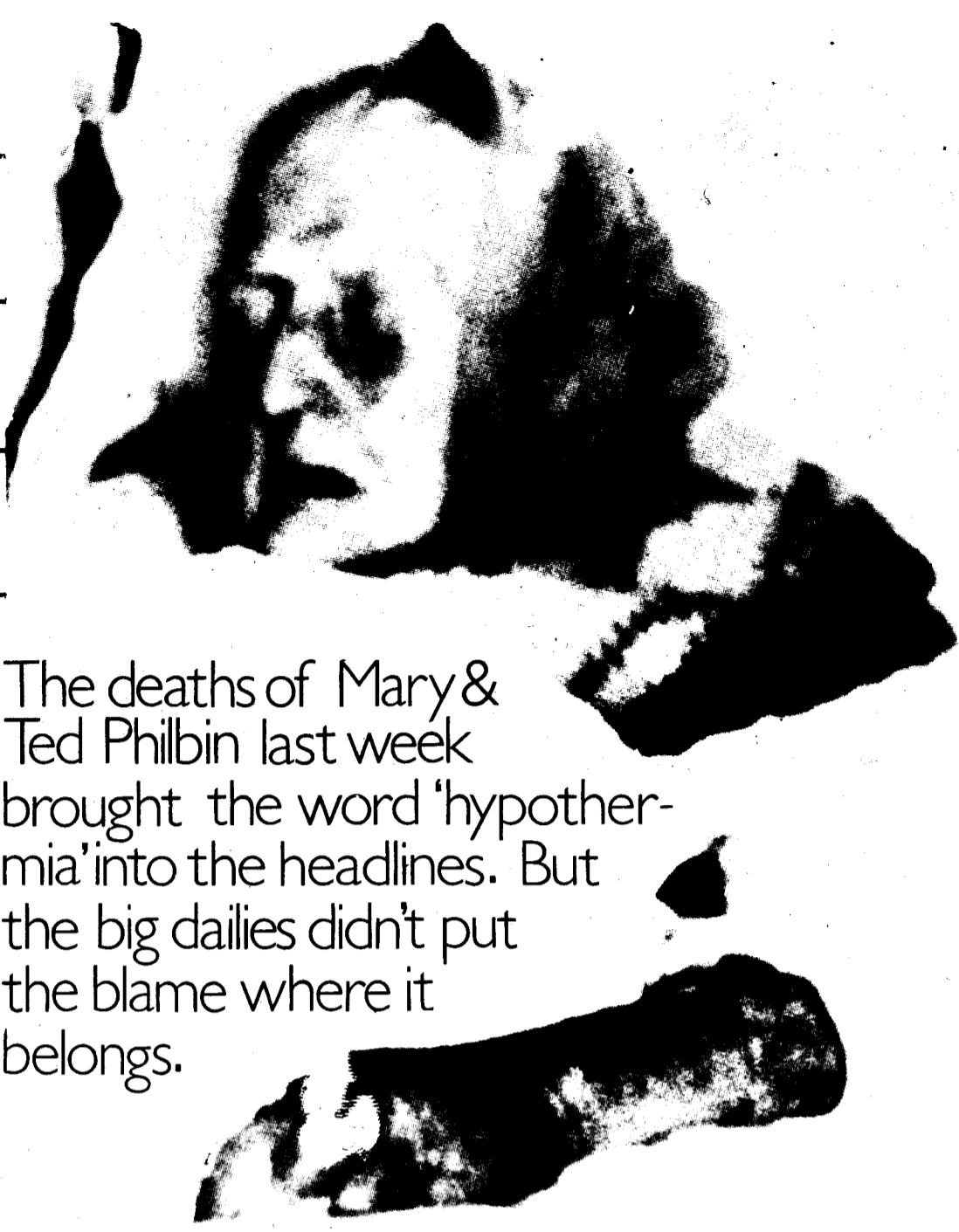


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THE COLD



The deaths of Mary & Ted Philbin last week brought the word 'hypothermia' into the headlines. But the big dailies didn't put the blame where it belongs.

After going to the SS again for assistance, he managed to get re-connected on condition that he paid £2 a week of his pension directly to the electricity board. After sorting this out and being reconnected two weeks later, Mr. A might have been forgiven for thinking that at last things were cleared up... But three months later he got another bill for £55, and while he was discussing this with the SS, he was cut off again. On top of that the Board sent him a demand for £92. Although he was re-connected after lengthy negotiations, he still lives under the seemingly permanent threat of yet again being cut off.

The major cause of these deaths is simply cold living conditions. Unlike many of the other afflictions of old age, this one can be easily remedied: it doesn't take years of research to conclude that decent housing and enough money could solve the 'problem' overnight. Yet pensioners have to spend a higher proportion of their income to get less than those with a living wage — and they need it more. Their houses also tend to use more fuel less economically.

Houses

In fact, the vast majority of houses — and that includes many new ones — do not come up to anywhere near acceptable standards of heating and insulation. The DHSS standard of acceptable heating for houses says that the temperature inside should be 70 degrees (F) when it is 30F outside. **Nearly 9 out of 10 of all houses fall below this standard!**

The victims of hypothermia and Government callousness are increase with every rise in the price of fuel. The price of gas and electricity have more than doubled in the last 5 years. The cost of running, for example, a one-bar electric fire for a week at 8 hours a day comes out at around £5. Which doesn't leave much left of one week's state pension.

In Britain the state is quite phenomenally stingy to pensioners. Despite all the fine talk about the virtues of the British 'Welfare state', pensioners in Britain get far lower pensions than their counterparts on the Continent. British pensioners are expected to live on just 21% of what they used to earn (on average), whereas in Italy the pension is 80% of previous earnings, and in Germany it is 60%.

Most pensioners would like to

spend more on heating. They simply can't afford to.

If your income is very low, the Social Security are supposed to help out with fuel bills. But many pensioners, like most other people, find the procedures for getting assistance to be humiliating and difficult. Either from pride, in the face of an indifferent and patronising society, or from sheer confusion, a high proportion don't claim what they are entitled to.

In fact, less than a quarter of pensioners manage to negotiate the hurdles and get some form of Social Security assistance. But as is clear from the case of Mr. A., that doesn't solve the problems. And most claimants, especially pensioners, don't know exactly what they are

entitled to. It isn't much: **the maximum amount they can get for heating is 55p a week — just about enough to run a one-bar fire for 4 hours...**

This combination of indifference and deliberate deprivation will ensure that this year, as every year, the lives of old working class people will be at best more miserable than they need be, and at worst a lot shorter. Campaigns such as that mounted by the Daily Express and the Mirror offer nothing: they haven't even demanded an adequate pension, but merely asked people to play the 'good neighbour' and keep an eye on the elderly. A few weeks of pious concern, a few stickers in windows, a few cases milked of their publicity value — then nothing for the rest of the year.

Hypothermia isn't a problem of age. It's a problem of class. It is suffering inflicted by the ruling class on retired and old working people. A real working class campaign is what is needed to support the pensioners.

Grace

The recent appeal by the Child Poverty Action Group to power workers asking them not to cut off supplies to the elderly and people with children should get the utmost support. Pressure by groups of social workers and trade unionists has impelled Wedgwood Benn, the Energy Secretary, to make some sort of response. He has circulated a directive to fuel authorities telling them not to cut off power supplies to people at risk, and instead to give them two weeks' grace to sort something out!

The best thing is for power workers to refuse point blank to cut off supplies to old people.

This is a stop-gap measure, but it is a direct measure of help and solidarity, something workers themselves can do. Beyond that we should demand that the nationalised power industries could supply fuel at cheaper rates to pensioners, or, better still, make it free. They already have cheaper rates for industry, which owes far more than all the pensioners put together. Yet they are never cut off. Instead, they get special concessionary rates and services...

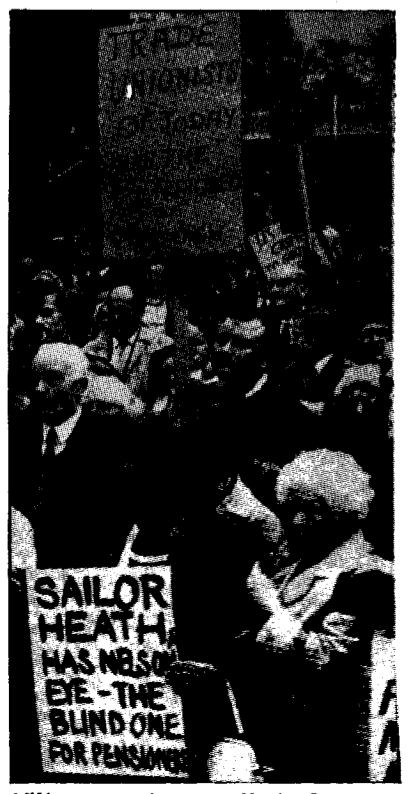
One thing the papers' 'good neighbour' campaign chose to ignore

was that old people themselves are now beginning to fight for their rights. After all, these are people who have been trade unionists, perhaps militants or shop stewards — not the helpless old dears of Fleet Street's imagination.

Federations of old age pensioners have sprung up all over the country, mobilising for higher pensions and better facilities. One example of the sort of activity they are involved in was the protest last week by the National Federation of Old Age Pensioners against the charges levied by the electricity board for emptying meters. **At a time when pensioners need every last penny for extra fuel, these charges have just been raised to £5!**

Support and solidarity action from trade unionists would give a terrific boost to these pensioners' campaigns.

Pensioners should not have to fight for a few extra pennies to keep warm. The disgraceful treatment they receive is just the ultimate end-product of a system which exploits them when they are fit enough to work, and then tosses them aside to live out the rest of their lives in poverty and fear.



Militant pensioners rally in Coventry

Brutal

This sort of hardship and harassment affects thousands of old people every year. Out of the 140,000 households disconnected every year, those who are old are particularly hard hit: old people need good heating to survive even a mild winter. Those that do not have good heating do not survive. It's as simple and brutal as that.

In the last couple of weeks the national press has made outraged noises about the desperate plight of the elderly during winter. But the few examples publicised are just the tip of an enormous iceberg, and even the figures given don't show the extent of the scandal.

Every winter about 10% of all old people suffer from some form of hypothermia. About 500,000 to 700,000 pensioners are at risk for most of the time in the winter months. The sheer scale of the effects of hypothermia is revealed in one figure from the Registrar General's Annual Returns for England and Wales: in an average year, 55,000 more old people die during winter than summer.

to think that this madhouse is for all time'



Sign of the times — eager queues for second hand clothes

children eat. When we look into the decaying face of capitalism — which finds its expression in the careworn faces of working class women — we can see the barbaric system we live under. Atomic power pumped into the National Grid... and old age pensioners dying from cold. Primitive man never knew such degradation!

If present day society cannot provide the basic needs of human existence then it deserves to be destroyed. Capitalism must give way to progress. Surely it isn't utopian to picture a

more difficult to visualise one that is based on human solidarity.

A communist society would inscribe on its banner the central principle: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. But such a society is so removed from the present day dungheap we 'live' in, with its ethic 'from each whatever you can get out of him, to each whatever he can grab', that workers view it as utopian. Yet, as the American socialist James P. Cannon said "don't ever make the mistake of thinking that anything contrary to the rules and ethics of capitalism is utopian, or visionary, or absurd. NO. What is absurd is to think that this madhouse is permanent and for all time."

We are living in filth and degradation, and when we are up to our necks in filth, it becomes difficult to see the stars!

A step towards a society based on human solidarity is for the labour movement to refuse to allow any of its members to disconnect the electricity supply of anyone, young or old. This seems such a small thing to demand, but it would be a giant leap forward for the working class in this country. It would also help educate workers in the spirit of communism. For workers to combine together even in the smallest way is the basis of human solidarity, the basis of communism.

The present division of society into classes, under which the few have all the privileges and the majority are condemned to poverty, is barbaric, decadent and dying — but it needs one hell of a push into its grave.

Fran Brodie

society in which no-one dies from lack of warmth and food. In fact it would be rather dull witted to believe that such a modest want couldn't be satisfied. Yet even this modest want would demand the revolutionary reorganisation of present day society. To ensure even our basic needs, workers will have to take control of society.

We don't have a model for a communist society (and even the name of communism has been sullied and degraded by Stalinism). The dying system we live under makes it difficult to find a prototype for a future society even

AXED! GPO losses bring sackings and cuts

Plessey
bosses
wade
into
divided
work-
force

large number of the 12,000 still under threat.

Where the redundancies will hit is not yet clear. For Plessey, an 'acrossthe-board' attack hitting each plant evenly threatens to unite the Plessey combine into a co-ordinated fight-back. But at the moment, combine unity is in shambles, and short-time working has undoubtedly affected the morale and confidence of many workers. A Joint Union Group set up last September which was intended to unite all unions and all plants in the combine was effectively sabotaged by the national leaderships of the unions it was trying to involve.

The only combine-wide body is that of the shop stewards — which has refused to invite representatives of any of the staff unions at present fighting redundancies, even as observers.

It seems likely, therefore, that Plessey will try and use this combine chaos to get through their next batch of redundancies, at the same time damaging the credibility of the existing combine to carry out any sort of struggle at all.

Brunt

Union circulars quite commonly refer to a cut-back in manning levels of about 40% in the next three years. When the axe begins to fall on the shop floor workers — who, after the initial attack on the staff, will undoubtedly be bearing the brunt of the cuts — it could kindle the solidarity needed to save these jobs.

But the first necessity will be a common policy, running through all the plants, against redundancies compulsory or voluntary. The policy must start by defending jobs where they exist now, by opposing the closure of any plant, by opposing the loss of any job.

Seeming concessions such as short time working and redeployment are merely attempts to ease workers out of the struggle to defend the jobs. If we accept them, we are trading off the right to a living wage and the right to live where we have chosen to live in return for a 'right to work' which is in any case dubious: once we have let them move us around and cut our pay, what state will we be in to fight to guarantee that 'right to work'?

Throughout the combine, we must demand work sharing with no loss of pay, to be organised and supervised by the workers themselves. Management must not be allowed to prepare a sacrificial lamb by running down any one plant and transferring work, machinery or men.

At plant level, opposition to voluntary redundancies goes together with opposing speed-up, overtime and cut-backs in manning.

Odds

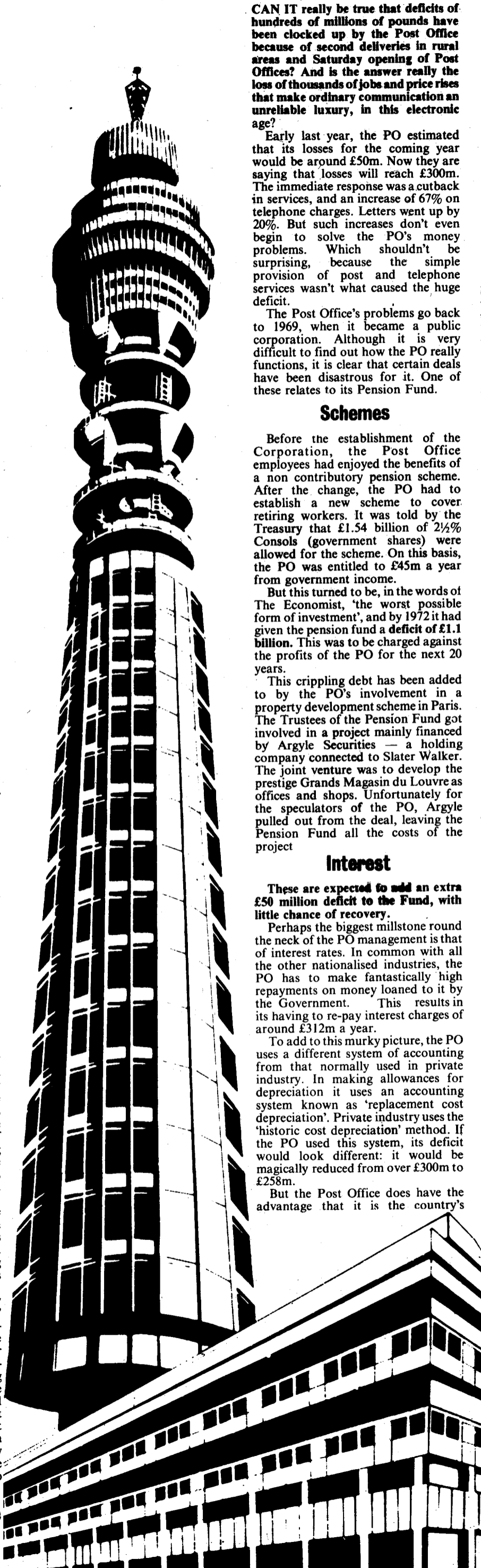
Nationalisation, in itself, does nothing to guarantee jobs. All the same, there are a number of important reasons why telecommunications workers should demand it.

First, why should government money for Post Office equipment be creamed off by private companies? Little wonder nationalised concerns make such losses when they pay through the nose for privately made equipment. The Health Service has been milked by the drug companies; the railways and mines have a mass of leech-like companies making a killing on supplies and equipment; and the once prosperous Post Office has beggared itself on equipment bought from STC, GEC and Plessey.

More important in relation to the fight for jobs is to end the situation where telecommunications workers can't get to grips with the situation as a whole and are not only divided among themselves but are also placed at odds with Post Office workers.

Thus POEU leader Bryan Stanley has defended the GPO's 'viability' exercise of cutting orders of telecommunications equipment. And the unions representing the private sector workers have been used by the telecommunications bosses as a bargaining counter with the Government, and have seen fit to defend the bosses' profits and take up their demands for import controls and for the Post Office to cut down on manning instead of on equipment. A nationalised industry would at least bring together the private and public sector workers and open up the possibility of a united fight.

Pete Radcliffe



CAN IT really be true that deficits of hundreds of millions of pounds have been clocked up by the Post Office because of second deliveries in rural areas and Saturday opening of Post Offices? And is the answer really the loss of thousands of jobs and price rises that make ordinary communication an unreliable luxury, in this electronic age?

Early last year, the PO estimated that its losses for the coming year would be around £50m. Now they are saying that losses will reach £300m. The immediate response was a cutback in services, and an increase of 67% on telephone charges. Letters went up by 20%. But such increases don't even begin to solve the PO's money problems. Which shouldn't be surprising, because the simple provision of post and telephone services wasn't what caused the huge deficit.

The Post Office's problems go back to 1969, when it became a public corporation. Although it is very difficult to find out how the PO really functions, it is clear that certain deals have been disastrous for it. One of these relates to its Pension Fund.

Schemes

Before the establishment of the Corporation, the Post Office employees had enjoyed the benefits of a non contributory pension scheme. After the change, the PO had to establish a new scheme to cover retiring workers. It was told by the Treasury that £1.54 billion of 2½% Consols (government shares) were allowed for the scheme. On this basis, the PO was entitled to £45m a year from government income.

But this turned out to be, in the words of The Economist, 'the worst possible form of investment', and by 1972 it had given the pension fund a deficit of £1.1 billion. This was to be charged against the profits of the PO for the next 20 years.

This crippling debt has been added to by the PO's involvement in a property development scheme in Paris. The Trustees of the Pension Fund got involved in a project mainly financed by Argyle Securities — a holding company connected to Slater Walker. The joint venture was to develop the prestige Grands Magasin du Louvre as offices and shops. Unfortunately for the speculators of the PO, Argyle pulled out from the deal, leaving the Pension Fund all the costs of the project.

Interest

These are expected to add an extra £50 million deficit to the Fund, with little chance of recovery.

Perhaps the biggest millstone round the neck of the PO management is that of interest rates. In common with all the other nationalised industries, the PO has to make fantastically high repayments on money loaned to it by the Government. This results in its having to re-pay interest charges of around £312m a year.

To add to this murky picture, the PO uses a different system of accounting from that normally used in private industry. In making allowances for depreciation it uses an accounting system known as 'replacement cost depreciation'. Private industry uses the 'historic cost depreciation' method. If the PO used this system, its deficit would look different: it would be magically reduced from over £300m to £258m.

But the Post Office does have the advantage that it is the country's

Debts & bad deals crippling services

biggest employer, and as such, it has a vast army of workers to turn on and get to pay for its crisis. They have of course been paying for a long time in low wages. Now their jobs are under attack.

Already, PO workers have been 'persuaded' to lift their ban on mechanised sorting. The man who did the persuading was not PO boss William Rylands, but Tom Jackson, leader of the Union of Post Office Workers. He argued that the lifting of this four-year ban would mean that there would be no redundancies. Instead... several thousand jobs will be lost over the next few years by natural wastage!

On top of the thousands of jobs lost in the PO itself, many more thousands are at risk in the telecommunications industry.

The Post Office crisis threatens to plunge it into a general downward spiral. Sections of business are now trying to reduce their communications costs by either cutting back on them or turning to private services.

Private

In October last year a special conference of the communications managers of the top 150 British companies met to discuss how their costs could be reduced. There is now talk of a rival private 'pirate' postal service being set up. Although the PO has a legal monopoly on postal services, various loopholes in the law have led some firms to believe that they can deliver their mail more cheaply in a private association with other firms.

The recently established Mail Users Association has as its aim the pressuring of government to introduce special cheaper rates — and to explore the possibilities of a private mail service. One of the leading lights is Robin Fairlie — a director of Readers Digest, the biggest user of PO services.

Quite clearly the PO management is casting round in some desperation in search of the elixir of profitability. On top of the drastic economies in spending and the attack on their employees, PO chiefs are apparently now contemplating the dismantling of large parts of the existing PO structure. The PO Board is preparing a report to be submitted to a new government enquiry on the running of the PO. The report will almost certainly contain the proposal that the two sides of the industry — posts and telecommunications — be separated.

Open

The reason given for wanting the split is that the two enterprises are too large to be run by one board. Privately, though, there appear to be signs that Rylands wants to introduce private capital into the profitable telecommunications sector.

Instead of drawing into the public sector those telecommunications firms which in the past have made enormous profits out of the PO, the PO board want to do the reverse!

One thing is clear. The real plans of the PO and its financial state are hidden from the very workers who are having to pay for its crisis. They are not told just what is the real state of the PO finances, nor of all the shady deals of the corporation. Workers in the industry have every right to demand that the accounts and plans of the PO and all the telecommunications industry are open to them so that they can see what wheeling and dealing is going on behind their backs.

Dave Ward

POEU

TGWU ballot is declared invalid—press silent now!

The no.5 Regional Committee of the TGWU has declared invalid elections held in its area for the General Executive, Regional Committee, and National Committee. A second ballot is now being organised.

Two TGWU branches in the area — the 5/55 and the 5/293 — have called for a full enquiry into the ballot. Individual members of the union have been prevented from making public statements on the case under threat from the TGWU regional office of disciplinary action for "bringing the union into disrepute".

The regional committee has refused to conduct an enquiry. They argue, using the rule book, that in the case of "irregularity", they are only obliged to declare the election invalid and conduct a new one.

Now none of us can have missed the employers' press campaign for 'democracy' and 'moderation' in the Trade Unions. Their hired scribblers have never missed an opportunity to use so-called 'irregularities' of procedure to attack trade union militants. But the muckrakers have not printed so much as one word of comment on these elections in Oxford. They have remained absolutely silent.

The facts of the ballot immediately explain the press blackout. Right wing stars of the screen and press witch-hunt against the left are clearly implicated in the ballot 'irregularities'.

Majority

What are the facts? An overwhelming majority was announced for right wing candidates in the election. Bill Roche received 11,442 votes for the General Executive. Jack Adams from the tiny MG Abingdon factory (with less than 100 TGWU members) polled 6,134 votes for the Regional Committee. Reg Parsons, Assembly Plant convenor, later to be the star of a witchhunt campaign against the left, received 6,781 votes for the National Committee.

EVENTS

Working Womens Charter national conference: 10th/11th April, Lanchester Poly, Coventry. Two delegates each from all labour movement organisations. Credentials from H'Gurdon, Flat 4, 39 New Bold Terrace East, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire.

Solidarity with the Portuguese working class: Conference 10am 13th March, at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. All labour movement organisations may send delegates. Details from PWCC, 12 Little Newport St, London WC2.

Young Socialists day school on Portugal: 11am to 6pm, Saturday 14th February, at North London Poly Students Union Film Theatre, Holloway Rd, London N7. Sponsored by PWCC, Angola Solidarity Campaign, and Hornsey, Norwood, and Vauxhall YSS. Admission 20p, all welcome.

Week of action in solidarity with Spain: Thursday 12th February, Public meeting with trade union and Labour Party speakers, 7.30pm, Friends House, Euston Rd, London NW1. Saturday 14th February, Trade union delegate conference; 2pm, picket of Downing Street to protest against visit of Spanish foreign minister to Britain — organised by I-CL, IMG, and IS.

Demonstrate against the Criminal Trespass Proposals: 1.30pm, Saturday 28th February, at Belvedere Rd, London SE1.

Women and the Cuts conference: 10 am to 6pm, Saturday 28th February, at Friends House, Euston Rd, London NW1. Details from Michele Ryan, 39 Parkholme Rd, London E8.

Cambridge Portugal Solidarity Campaign showing of film 'Viva Portugal', with speaker. Monday 23rd February, 8pm, Alex Wood Hall, Norfolk St.

Spain: Free all political prisoners! 7.30pm, Tuesday 10th February, at Battersea District Library, Lavender Hill: speaker plus slide show. Organised by S.W.London IMG.

Northampton Trades Council conference on unemployment: 2pm to 5pm, Saturday 14th February, at the Town Hall. Speakers include Maureen Colquhoun MP and Colin Lindsay (President, Coventry Trades Council).

Cardiff Workers Action readers' meeting 'Labour and the crisis': Speaker, Pete Keenlyside (Cardiff North CLP). 7.30pm, Wednesday February 18th, at the Rhymney Hotel, Adams St, Cardiff.

North London Workers' Action readers' meeting: 'Socialists and the Labour Party': 7.30pm, Wednesday 25th February, at 'Centerprise', 136-8 Kingsland High Rd, London E8.

'What is the International-Communist League': public meeting at South Bank Polytechnic, 12.30pm Friday 13th February, in the TV room, Students Union.

And where did those votes come from? The Oxford 5/55 branch did not vote at all. In the 5/293 branch (with 3769 members) Roche polled 399 votes, Parsons 289 votes (in his own plant!), and Adams 167. This vote was double-checked.

It is unlikely that the thousands of missing votes were cast in Coventry. The massive 5290 branch did not vote at all. The rest of Coventry's votes are mainly accounted for as going to Coventry candidates. Most of the votes must have come from the 5/60 branch in Oxford.

The ballot there was conducted in two boxes in the canteens. The very size of these containers is enough to rouse suspicion! The vote is reported as small, but the ballot papers were destroyed after one month, not three months as stipulated by union rule. The Branch leadership has never divulged the figures for the ballot. It destroyed the ballot papers after the call for an enquiry had been registered.

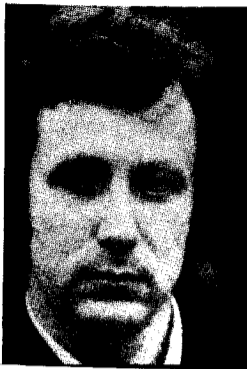
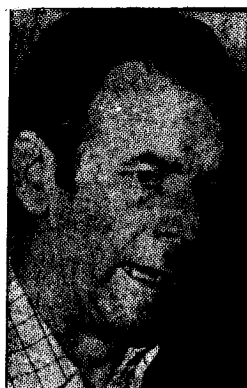
Avoided

Now this branch leadership, including four JPs, has been the backbone of the Right Wing in Oxford. Bill Roche, himself a candidate, is a branch officer. Two scrutineers for the branch were appointed by the branch committee from amongst their own number, not democratically elected by the membership of the branch.

After interviewing these two scrutineers at Regional Office, the Regional Committee decided a 'minor technical infringement' had in fact taken place — the destruction of the ballot papers. By announcing a new election, they have avoided, by rule, a fuller enquiry into the proceedings of the 5/60 branch.

Issues of importance to all trade unionists are raised by these events. It is not just a matter of nasty behaviour by right wingers and regional officials in Oxford. The history of this election makes clear the need for specific rule changes in the TGWU. It also underlines the case that must be made by all militants against secret ballot voting and

The press gloated when witchhunter Reg Parsons (above) defeated Alan Thomett in stewards' elections at Cowley body plant. But they've been silent about the 'irregular' ballot there for regional and national T&G positions, now that Parsons' election in that ballot has been declared invalid



for worktime mass meeting elections. The election clearly shows that by the present rules of the TGWU, the full time officials and Regional Committee can ignore calls from the rank and file in the branches for an enquiry into ballot irregularities. The Regional Committee was only obliged to hold another ballot.

The practice of appointing scrutineers from the branch committees serves only to prevent active inspection and supervision by rank and file members of the union.

It is for this reason that we support the call from TGWU branches for a full enquiry into this affair. It is for this reason that we ask our supporters to join in the campaign for an enquiry, and for changes to rule, enabling rank and file members to inspect ballot procedures and to demand a full enquiry into any irregularities.

But we see this as just part of the campaign to abolish secret ballot voting in the unions. It is clearly the method of voting which enables the employers to campaign for their candidates using the press and TV. It isolates workers from each other, under the pressure of press propaganda and publicity. Only open elections at mass meetings in work time, where the candidates must state their positions and answer questions from the membership, can ensure a leadership that represents the views of rank and file members.

TYNE SHOP STEWARDS SAY BUILD COMBINE COMMITTEES

At the meeting of the Tyne conference of shop stewards in Newcastle on Saturday 31st January, Mike Cooley, chairman of the Lucas Aerospace Combine shop stewards committee, explained how and why the Lucas workers built their combine committee.

Opening the meeting, Jim Murray (convenor of Vickers Elswick works) had said that the Tyne conference of shop stewards was set up about 12 months ago in response to the government's proposals in the Industry Bill.

It is, he said, an attempt to get things moving on the shop floor. Over the last year a number of meetings have been held in Newcastle so that shop stewards can thrash out some of the issues relating to the Industry Bill, such as planning agreements, the National Enterprise Board, and nationalisation.

He argued that one of the most important aspects of workers' organisation is to build combine committees. "We need combines to develop a central strategy to combat that of the multinational companies". To date, of the 180 biggest companies operating in Britain, only 14 have combine committees.

Jimmy Connolly, shop steward at Charles Churchills (part of Tube Investments) dealt with some of the problems in building combine committees. "TI is divided into 11 divisions, 80 companies, 120 plants, and employs over 40,000 workers". So far the combine has linked up 24 countries.

This represents the majority of the workers and includes all the largest companies. But it is more difficult to bring together workers at the smaller companies, especially because you cannot rely on the company to pass on information sent to shop stewards, and because of lack of support from trade union officials.

Mike Cooley said that before you build a combine you have to analyse the company you work for. Lucas, for example, employs 80,000 workers (70,000 in Britain) and manufactures goods from batteries to complex aerospace equipment. The stewards had found that it was best to start organising round product ranges in the first place.

"The Lucas combine was born out of a struggle for the right to work", said Cooley. He also stressed that an effective combine needs to unite both staff and



THE UNIONS



shop-floor sections. "It provides a powerful new combination, in a sense".

The combine committee should produce a newspaper to counter company propaganda, and ensure independence from the company; securing finance from regular subscriptions from members.

Cooley argued that the union attitude to combines was "at best indifferent, at worst hostile.... Off see it as a challenge to their leadership, they see leadership as telling members what to do, not as developing initiative of the rank and file".

Finally, he stressed the need to international workers' links in opposition to the multinational corporations.

In April or May of this year, under auspices of the Institute for Workers Control, 12 regional conferences will be organised on combine committees. These conferences must be used to build combine committees as fighting organisations capable of taking on multinationals. JOHN FOSBERG

Abortion: New Select Committee threat

In the last few weeks, the battle lines have been drawn again on the issue of abortion rights. There are two immediate reasons for this.

Firstly, on Thursday January 29th, it was announced publicly that the BPAS (British Pregnancy Advisory Service — Britain's largest non-profit-making

abortion charity) had been given permission to perform day-care abortion operations.

Although this has, in fact, been the policy of the Department of Health and Social Security regarding NHS abortions for some time, the announcement by the BPAS has caused a hysterical outburst from the anti-abortionists, above all from SPUC, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child. Many provincial newspapers' headlines have taken up the SPUC reaction: "Abortion racket under new legislation", or "It is murder".

In fact, the new permission says nothing radically new. It just points the finger in the right direction — towards free abortion on demand on the National Health Service.

From February 1st, 1976, for a two years' trial period, women who are less than 12 weeks pregnant and who live within 50 miles of a BPAS clinic can be discharged from the clinic not less than three hours after an abortion operation.

Even before this announcement, many women discharged themselves a few hours after the operation and didn't stay the night. In the first week after the announcement, six women were admitted to the BPAS Leamington Spa clinic on a day-care basis.

The BPAS themselves have stated clearly that their aim is to be put out of business by the NHS when the facilities are made freely available by the DHSS.

They have also stated that if the numbers of women having abortions increase as a result of day-care, then they will be able to reduce the costs substantially. The new measure demonstrates to women that the operation is simple, quick, and nothing to be nervous or ashamed about, and also encourages women to have earlier terminations rather than leaving the decision until later or being delayed by a long waiting list.

The next step is to force the National Health Service to set up day-care outpatient clinics in order to supersede

private abortion care on the BPAS. Many local groups of the National Abortion Campaign have already started pressuring local hospitals to set up these clinics. They are following up precedent already established by other hospitals, such as St Marys Paddington, where there is a successful outpatient abortion clinic.

But the vote in Parliament on February could greatly affect the chances of such progress. The Select Committee set up from the now-defunct Justice White Abortion (Amendment) Bill will be re-convened. Some seven of the members are firm anti-abortionists. Many of the other eight are very far from being consistent champions of women's rights. In its last report, the Select Committee made a series of regretful proposals on availability of abortion of which were accepted by the Government.

Next week's Workers Action will carry a more detailed article on the Select Committee. JULIET A...



NAC lobby of parliament on Feb. 9th, but anti-abortionists won the vote. Photo by Angela Phillips (IFL)

'Equal rights a dead letter unless there's a fight'

ON SUNDAY 1st February, the Working Womens Charter group in Rochdale held a teach-in on the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts.

Examining the Sex Discrimination Act, the teach-in showed that the Act — while important as far as it goes — left the most important roots of sex discrimination untouched. Women are still stuck in the role of mothers first and foremost, coping with the problems of running a home, no nursery facilities, picking up the kids from school etc. Until this is changed, it will be rare for many women even to have the same qualifications as men, and so be able to claim discrimination solely on the grounds of sex under the new Act.

In law, women are still regarded as dependents, for tax, pension, and social security purposes. Even the new pension scheme, to be introduced in 1978, leaves these aspects untouched. Although giving a statutory right to maternity

leave (all of six weeks!) it excludes the possibility of paternity leave.

On the Equal Pay Act, the teach-in heard how the Engineering Employers Federation had spent the last five years carefully advising its members on how to get out of giving equal pay. Women's difficulties in working shifts, or overtime, or during school holidays, can be used to evaluate their jobs differently from men's, and thus evade comparison under the Act.

The EEF has also advised bosses to separate men's jobs rigidly from women's, to avoid comparison, and to employ women as contract workers from another firm. Their finest recommendation was this: the easiest way to avoid Equal Pay is to sack women.

Have the unions done their homework as thoroughly in organising their women members to withstand these dirty tricks? Apparently not, at least locally.

One member spoke of her experience with the GMWU recently in a local engineering firm. The union agreed to accept a female rate of 65p compared with a male rate of £1, without even putting the membership.

The women are so insecure in their jobs that they are unwilling to fight if the Union backed them, which it would. Since the firm doesn't specify the rate as "female", merely as "unskilled", the Act can't be used directly, though a meeting was advised that the women should apply for promotion to a higher grade and take a refusal to the Equal Opportunities Commission.

But the case shows clearly enough that unless the labour movement throws its full resources, nationally, into a concerted fight for women's rights, even the most minimal guarantees of equality will be a dead letter.

Sue Arnall

WORKERS IN ACTION

CHRYSLER PUTS ITS WORKFORCE ON 'PROBATION' BY DAVE HUGHES

The first round of compulsory redundancy notices have been accepted in the Chrysler plants. More redundancies are due before the end of June.

The Government and Chrysler corporation have made it clear that in the meantime track speeds will be pushed up and accepted procedures cramped on. The strike at Linwood last week stopped management's first attempt to assert themselves. Despite the threats of the press and Harold Wilson — "The government is not in the business of subsidising industrial disruption" — the Linwood workers forced the Chrysler corporation to climb down.

But management attacks will continue. The Coventry ASTMS work to rule against redundancy has been called off. These foremen and supervisors were not organised well enough. But they also had no support from shop floor trade unionists.

The company have used this weakness to press on with their attacks. Last week, Pat Burke, ASTMS Branch Chairman working at Ryton, was given the sack. This is deliberate provocation. He was not given the same notice as the other workers. The company were engineering a deliberate dispute with the ASTMS.

Under pressure Chrysler offered to reinstate Pat Burke. But they are insisting that if he stays, somebody else will have to go. It is against this kind of attempt to demoralise the workforce that a united front of Chrysler workers is vital to defend conditions and trade union rights.



Chrysler management have also been giving ASTMS members in some areas "temporary contracts". If they can establish, as they have already established in their US car factories, that workers are only hired for short periods, they will have won a major victory. They will have established their right to put workers on "probation" for good behaviour. They will be able to sack workers without recourse to recognised

procedure and negotiation. It will make a united fight against redundancies even more difficult.

The combine committee must be recalled to lead a fight to resist these attacks. It must develop a clear policy against covering for workers made redundant. It must give a lead to defend conditions and trade union rights. Only on this basis will Chrysler workers be armed to face the next round of redundancies.

Blackmans out to destroy the union — says strike leader

The 350 locked out trade unionists at the GEC owned Keith Blackman factory in Tottenham, North London, have been joined by twenty members of ASTMS. This latest development in the five week dispute stems, like the dispute itself, from management provocation and intimidation.

The ASTMS members, who work as supervisors and foremen, naturally had little work to do when the production workers were locked out. Management, ever eager for its pound of flesh, tried to intimidate the supervisors into doing jobs normally done by members of other unions, including production work. The district ASTMS organiser, Dave Ingram, was called in and as a result his members are out on official strike.

The strike at Blackmans was provoked by management in an attempt to break the trade union organisation which had been greatly strengthened by the occupation of the plant last year. A TASS steward was sacked for carrying out his union duties. Nineteen other TASS members struck in his support, and management replied by locking out the rest of the manual workers.

Strike leader Tom Eastwood, TASS, told WORKERS ACTION "the dispute has broadened out from the original victimisation issue. Management are trying to destroy the trade union organisation we've built here."

Several things point to this. A sales drive in Germany, America and Africa has produced enough orders to keep the place busy. Management is obviously more interested in union bashing than production. A trade union initiative for a meeting late in January to try to settle the dispute was rebuffed. Management refused to even discuss the reinstatement of the victimised steward.

Broke down

As the strike committee's recent leaflet put it, "Needless to say, talks broke down." Not only would they not consider re-instatement; they also expect the workers to accept a restriction of shop stewards' rights and mobility.

Despite manning the picket line throughout the recent bad weather, the workers' morale couldn't be higher. Support for them has poured in from local factories. Gestetner, for example, had a shop floor collection which raised over £100. All the major local firms have sent donations to the dispute committee. Local teachers and the Labour Party are also backing the men.

Keith Blackmans is owned by the GEC group and workers throughout the combine have been quick to show their support. Teams of speakers from Tottenham have toured the country explaining the issues behind the strike. GEC plants in Liverpool, Stafford, Rugby, Manchester, Preston, Coventry and many other places are collecting money on a weekly basis to keep their brothers going.

This dispute is a blatant attempt to break the union organisation in the factory. Financial support and messages should be sent to Jim Pickering, AUEW, Suite 3 (2nd Floor), 128/136 High Street, Edgware, Middlesex.

300 mostly young people responded to the call by Birmingham Trades Council's Youth Advisory Cttee for a demonstration against youth unemployment. There could have been many more, but the trade union District organisations failed to press the issue — with the notable exception of AUEW East District and the Society for Metal Mechanics.

The demonstration against cuts and unemployment being organised by the Regional TUC on 21st Feb. will hopefully gain much wider support. (Photo John Sturrock, Report)

Notts. NUM may challenge £6 limit

The voting in the Nottingham area of the National Union of Mineworkers on resolutions to national conference gives some indication of a potential for challenging the £6 limit.

The procedure for these resolutions is that each branch sends one in, then a meeting of the officials and committee men of the 33 branches votes to

recommend an order of preference. All the resolutions then go back to the branches, and the branches vote an order of preference. The top three resolutions then go forward.

A composite resolution calling for a £100 wage claim came fourth in the voting at the meeting this year. The resolutions above it included one calling

for no loss of pay when older workers are moved from underground to surface work, and one instructing the NEC to ballot for industrial action on reducing the retirement age to 55.

It is still possible in the branch voting for the £100 wage claim resolution to be placed in the top three, and thus go forward to national conference.

THE PUB WITH NO BEER

54 of the 80 staff from the Sheffield nightclub 'Fiesta', who joined the T&GWU three months ago to protect their jobs, are out on strike a second time for union recognition. Keith Liphthorpe, one of the owners, in Sheffield personally to oversee the club, picked a fight he can't handle when he sacked 3 stewards and two other workers.

The workers, 75% women, are picketing 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for the reinstatement of the five. They have the solid support of the brewery drivers.

One of the women said, "We've never done anything like this before, but you soon learn. Two of us went round to the local firms that use the club for works dos, and asked to see the steward. The support was fantastic. They gave us lists of other stewards who would give us support, and advice on running the strike." Through the union and the strikers' own efforts, they have wide local support, from the T&GWU, AUEW, steelworkers, and even the Derbyshire miners. Bus loads of trade unionists coming to the club have refused to cross the picket line.

Women paid £19.50 for a 44 hour week, including unsocial hours, said they would rather see the club close than give in. Picket rotas are arranged so that the married women can use the babysitting arrangements they use when at work. Husbands and wives of pickets are helping with food preparation.

The strikers have been out since 24th January. What they need to win is the active support of more trade unionists on the picket line and confirmation of promised support from the musicians'

A NEAT NOTE IN THE MORNING SAYS 'YOU'RE ALL OUT OF WORK'

WHEN the 500 workers of a North London factory turned up for work on Wednesday morning last week, all they found was a neatly typed note pinned to the fence outside the factory. The note was from Mr T W Allen, the officially appointed receiver and manager, and it informed them that the firm, Spreckley Sage Ltd of South Tottenham, had been wound up overnight. There was no money either to pay the wages that were due or the redundancy money that the closure made necessary.

The previous weekend workers at the factory had been working overtime. And while the owners had asked the stock market to suspend dealings in their shares on Monday, none of the workers had been told that a closure was likely.

The wind-up operation has been dictated by the debenture holder, the National Westminster Bank, which despite its huge profits can't even find the money for the workers' wages.

"It was pandemonium at the Labour Exchange this morning", recalled one worker. Not surprising, for the Exchange had been kept as much in the dark as had the workers. With the number of unemployed in the area already over 3,000, most of these workers will be on the dole for the foreseeable future.

The Haringey Trades Council, which discussed the unemployment situation in the area on the following day, has agreed to set up an unemployment sub-committee.

POCHINS' WORKERS STRIKE TO DEFEND JOBS AND ORGANISATION

IN CONTRAST to other sites in the area, the Pochins Polytechnic site in Manchester is well organised. Now this organisation is under attack. In January 1975 the company tried to fire 14 men. The men struck and occupied the site. Five men were reinstated; others finding alternative jobs obtained the severance pay due to them.

Over the past year Pochins have run down the labour force. As the strikers state in their leaflet: "Like all building employers at the present time, they feel in a strong position with a large pool of building workers on the dole, plus the fact that they have jobs finishing all over the North West. They have a large pool of labour they would like to replace us

Pochins are trying to weaken the site organisation. Fifty men are now working on the site, and the site is undermanned. The last straw came this January. Fourteen joiners were given notices. Pochins refused even to postpone the notices for discussion.

In fact, the redundancies are a fabrication. This attack on the Pochins workers' organisation would leave only 6 joiners to complete all the interior fittings on the site!

The men have been out now for two weeks. As the men on picket duty put it, "It is a strike to defend our jobs and organisation. We will not give up our only chance of employment for a very long time. We have nowhere else to go."

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Published by Workers Action, 49 Carnac St, London SE27. Printed by Prestagate of Reading (TU).

