

workers power

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AGAINST THE ANTI-UNION LAWS

Defend the right to strike!

THOUSANDS OF workers joined the health workers' strike on 14 March. They did so in solidarity with the fight against low pay and lousy conditions. They did so in defence of the NHS.

But thousands of workers who wanted to be on strike could not be. Aslef workers at Kings Cross voted to strike in support of the health workers. So too did Dunlop workers in Leicester. Massey Ferguson in Coventry decided on strike action.

All these workers came across one common problem — the anti-union laws. Their bosses threatened them with immediate court action if they came out. And the trade union leaders worked overtime to stop their members breaching the law — despite the willingness of workers to do just that in defence of the NHS.

Not for the first time this year the seafarers are up against the law as well. The NUS leadership backed down in the face of sequestration last February, and much good has it done them!

Belfast freight ferries sacked 50 workers in the aftermath. P&O did not budge either. They have now sacked 2,000 Dover strikers.

The refusal of both the P&O bosses and the Dover strikers to climb down has forced the NUS leaders' hand. They ordered a ballot for strike action against continuing redundancies and the ship owners' attempts to impose inferior conditions and terms of employment. And a judge decided that even the ballot was illegal.

Justice Michael Davies ruled on behalf of P&O that a sequestration order be hung over the NUS. It will be implemented should a strike go ahead. Quite simply the NUS, a national trade union, is not being allowed to call a national strike over issues which affect every single one of its members. It is not being allowed to organise as an effective



national organisation.

The battery of anti-union laws are meant to cripple the working class. They were designed to outlaw solidarity action as workers found to their cost on 14 March. The basic act of supporting a fellow worker in struggle has been outlawed by the Tories! And, as the seafarers have found, these laws were framed to stop any effective national trade union action against a generalised offensive by the shipping magnates.

The NUS leadership is again running from a confrontation with the courts. They hoped their ballot paper would comply with the law by addressing issues of common concern to all seafarers. Once Justice Davies

made his ruling in solidarity with the common concern of all ship owners they backed down. McCluskie announced that 'at all times the NUS will remain within the law'.

But to remain within the law means to allow the ship owners to have their way. Amongst other things that will mean the danger of more Zeebrugge tragedies as the bosses cut costs to boost profits. To abide by the anti-union laws means every group of workers, however victimised and however tyrannised, must be left to fight alone. We must say goodbye to the kind of action that could grind the ports to a halt and really hit the bosses where it hurts.

The bosses know that today's

struggles on the ferries and in the NHS are a key test for their anti-union laws. They climbed down from implementing them against Thorn EMI workers who backed the health workers in February. They must be forced to back down again. The NUS must defend its right to strike. Every worker must defend the right to take action in support of the health workers.

This means that all unions must defy orders to call off action. And should the courts move to jail their officers or sequester their funds they must be met with a wave of class wide industrial action — a general strike — that smashes their anti-union laws once and for all.■

FREE THE SHARPEVILLE SIX!

ON 17 March a white South African judge granted a four week stay of execution to the Sharpeville Six. This was to give defence lawyers an opportunity to appeal against a 1985 death sentence for a 'murder' even the South African authorities admit the Six did not commit.

On 3 September 1984 Sharpeville residents rose up against rent increases on their slum dwellings imposed by the stooge black 'council'. They surrounded and killed the apartheid-installed mayor of Sharpeville. The 'Six' were among many detained and tortured as the state forces struggled to maintain control.

They are Teresa Ramoshamola, Mojalefa Sefatsa, Malebo Mokoena, Francis Don Mokhesi, Oupa Diniso and Duma Khumalo. They were convicted on a mixture of statements extracted under electric shock torture and the evidence of state witnesses 'Mr X' and 'Mr Y'. These witnesses could not be cross-examined by the defence under South African law.

The police ruled that, despite not being the actual killers, the Six had 'common purpose with the mob'.

The significance of the Six in the fight against apartheid cannot be underestimated. Pressure has been growing inside South Africa against PW Botha's 'reforms' of the apartheid system. Botha's response was to impose new restrictions on virtually all the non-parliamentary opposition to apartheid. The effective banning of 17 dissenting organisations and the application of special restrictions on political acts by COSATU constitute an attempt to halt the slide of support away from the National Party towards the right wing Conservative Party. The Conservatives have been baying for blood for months, and won two recent by-elections with their calls for a return to the first principles of apartheid.

The international appeals for clemency are no more than a cynical attempt to preserve the credibility of international capitalism. What worries the USA, West Germany and Britain is that six martyrs could provide a new focus for anti-apartheid struggles — worldwide as well as inside South Africa. They care nothing for the Six, whose 'crime' was to fight repressive capitalist exploitation in an imperialist heartland.

The Sharpeville Six are class war prisoners. They were sentenced to death to set an example to the rest of the black majority that insurrection would be savagely put down with the utmost force. The relatives' joy at the four week reprieve should not blind us to the fact that they still face execution.

Workers in Britain cannot stand by and allow the Six to die for demonstrating against capitalist oppression, and against sham 'elected' councils. The only way to guarantee an end to that kind of repression is to smash the system that imposes it.

Only four days after the Sharpeville Six reprieve hundreds of thousands of black workers heeded a one day general strike call to commemorate the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, when 69 black demonstrators were butchered by the army.

Here is the force that can and must destroy apartheid and the profit system which underpins it. In Britain it is vital that we step up action to build international links with township groups and anti-apartheid unions in South Africa. International working class solidarity — in the form of direct links and workers' sanctions can be effective in stopping the South African government from butchering class war prisoners.■

John Harris/FL

FUNERAL VIOLENCE - WHO IS TO BLAME?

ONE WEEK in March began and ended with executions. Three active service members of the IRA, gunned down in Gibraltar by the SAS, were avenged by the deaths of two British soldiers in West Belfast, shot with their own weapons. The first was greeted by Tory and Labour front bench alike as a pre-emptive strike against 'terrorism'; the second was condemned as an 'act of savagery'.

Much was made of the manner of the soldiers' deaths. Millions bore silent witness to the first stages of the beatings handed out and have been encouraged to see in that only a sickening spectacle. In reality it is the huge helpings of hypocrisy that one needs a strong stomach to survive.

Consider this difference. Several trained assassins clinically kill three unarmed Irish freedom fighters who have planted no bomb. It is unlikely the SAS men had any emotions as they pulled the trigger. The following Saturday dozens of unarmed youth surround a car, which has run amok in a funeral cortege, and shoot two British soldiers. And the hatred in their hearts, the justified hatred was all the more intense in the aftermath of recent events. The Stalker Affair, the Birmingham Six followed by the renewal of the 'shoot to kill policy' in Gibraltar and the massacre of the mourners at their funeral at Milltown Cemetery have all fuelled the hatred nationalist youth feel towards the army of their oppressors.

The anti-unionist population has suffered for years the effects of an army of occupation which wrecks their homes at will, harasses the youth and dishes out brutal beatings that the cameras never record. How many miners tried to hand out some workers' justice to the police during the Great Strike? How much more justified then is the anger of the nationalist minority in the Six Counties of Ireland, where truncheons are supplemented by guns, and riot police by SAS killers?

But why do the British oppress and why do the nationalists refuse to come to terms with this oppression? In the early 1920s Britain conspired with the loyalist minority in the north east of Ireland to deny the expressed desire of the majority for an end to Britain's rule over the island. Together they carved out a sectarian 'Orange State' in six counties of the north; a 'protestant state for a protestant people'.

For over sixty years this state has deprived the Catholic anti-unionist minority of their share of jobs and decent housing. Not satisfied with this, the unionists who control the state have fixed the boundaries of the voting constituencies in order to give themselves power, even in areas where they are a minority.

On top of all this the minority had to live with the daily fear of the B-Specials—an armed protestant police force—raiding their homes and cracking their skulls. This huge apparatus of discrimination and repression was necessary in order to guarantee the continuation of the economic and social privileges of the protestant community. Despite, or even because, these privileges were so marginal the protestants have always defended them ferociously.

BRUTALLY CRUSHED

When in the late 1960s the Catholic population of the Six Counties tried to protest peacefully, they were brutally crushed by violent repression. But by then the anti-unionists were in no mood to lie down and accept their fate. Out of the burning homes and the pogroms came a new generation of fighters. So determined in their resistance were they that the Labour Government of 1969 sent in troops to 'stabilise' the situation in favour of the loyalists.

They have been there ever since. True, Westminster now rules where Stormont once did and the Anglo-Irish Agreement has further angered the loyalists. But the social and economic situation for the minority has got worse. A whole generation of the catholic community, like those murdered in Gibraltar and those killed when attending their funeral, has known nothing else but mass unemployment and midnight raids.

So what is the solution? For its part the Tories and their backers have no solutions. They admit as much. The Economist said in the aftermath of these events:

'Most political problems have solutions. A few do not. Northern Ireland is one of them certainly now and perhaps for decades.'

All they can envisage is, in the words of the Financial Times, 'containment-plus'. That is, they cannot see a way of breaking the fighting spirit of the anti-unionists but they can stop them winning under the leadership of Sinn Fein/IRA. If they can continue to draw in the government of Haughey in the South to police the border and extradite political refugees then the Tories hope they can keep the upper hand in a war of attrition with the republicans. Meanwhile the misery of the ghettos will continue.

But there is another solution, a progressive one. If socialists and trade unionists in Britain do not wish to be upset by TV scenes of grenades among the gravestones of Belfast or death on Andersontown Road then they can and should add their voice to those in the labour movement who want the troops out of Ireland to enable the whole Irish people, of the 32 Counties, to determine their own future. A truly mass movement in this country would give further confidence to the anti-unionist working class to continue to fight Britain. Such a movement could make the political price of British imperialism staying in the North too high.

Only then, whatever the trials and tribulations that may come in its wake, would the possibility of an end to the strife be opened up.

To build such a movement will mean confronting the treacherous leadership of the Labour Party head on. A leadership that sent the troops in, that rushed through the Prevention of Terrorism Act, that gloated over the deaths of the H-Block hunger strikers must be denounced and overthrown. The task over the next months is to win over the mass of Labour Party supporters and trade unionists who cannot stomach the bipartisan approach of the bulk of the PLP and TUC but who feel that violence from wherever it comes is wrong. They are the millions who have to be convinced that the problem in the north of Ireland is not one of 'law and order'. They must be convinced that there is a war of national liberation. And in a war you must take sides—for the oppressed, against the oppressors.■

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YTURC - LPYS IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

by Saladin Meckled
(Leyton LPYS - in a personal capacity)

THE WITCH-HUNT of the Labour youth organisation (LPYS) by the leadership has caused many on the left in the Labour Party to seek a new youth alternative. Such an alternative should be one where youth can operate free from the restrictions imposed in the new LPYS rules.

For *Militant* this alternative is the Youth Trade Union Rights Campaign (YTURC). YTURC was set up by members of *Militant* in 1985 as an extension of the LPYS. Its purpose was to organise and campaign for trade union rights for unemployed youth who were being forced onto slave labour schemes such as YTS. It was central to the organising of the school student's struggles in 1985. These struggles led the Thatcher government to back down on the issue of compulsory YTS conscription for school leavers.

Unfortunately—but not surprisingly—*Militant* chose to run YTURC in the same way they run all other organisations that they dominate—by bureaucratically excluding other organisations and turning YTURC into a *Militant* front, through which they can recruit new supporters. It has become even more important as a bureaucratically controlled front as a result of the effective demise of the LPYS. It now has membership cards. It will be staging a conference on 1-3 April.

After years of focussing on the LPYS *Militant* have abandoned it,

without a serious fight against the Kinnockites, in favour of turning YTURC into a permanent youth organisation. Only a second rate and passive campaign on the LPYS, in the name of its chair, John Ellen, exists.

These 'Marxists', in their sectarian rush for recruitment at the expense of fighting the right, have 'forgotten' the Marxist tradition of struggle. They ran away from a real fight against the witch-hunt in the Labour Party. They preferred low profile lobbying rather than open opposition up to and including disaffiliation in those local parties being witch-hunted. And they ducked a fight in the LPYS. They are sheep in sheep's clothing! The lessons for YTURC are clear.

YTURC will be more bureaucratic than the LPYS ever was. Though it is oriented to working class youth, it can never, under *Militant*'s stifling leadership, provide the open political discussion necessary to build a

working class, revolutionary youth movement.

Already the bureaucratic nature of YTURC has shown itself by the method of discussion that has been arranged. Statements will be 'released' for conference to discuss. No possibility of being able to put alternatives or amendments is mentioned!

At the YTURC conference Workers Power youth will be demanding that if the YTURC conference is to replace the LPYS for *Militant* it must take up political issues affecting youth, as well as trade union rights. Issues like Alton's bill, Clause 28, racism and solidarity with the Northern Irish and Palestinian youth who are bravely fighting imperialism. It should allow discussion on the defence of the LPYS against the witch-hunt and on the building of a real, revolutionary socialist youth movement.

For Workers Power such a movement can defeat the Tories as well as the witch-hunters. If you really want to help begin building a real mass revolutionary youth movement on Marxist principles—join us.■

The emergency conference called by Leyton LPYS has been postponed. More work to build widespread support for it was felt to be needed by the LPYS branches involved. As a step towards building a conference to defend the LPYS there will be a fringe meeting at the YTURC conference on the theme: Defend the LPYS—Fight the witch-hunters.

NUS

VOTE LIZ WOOD AND SALADIN MECKLED

STUDENTS ARE facing serious attacks in the next year. More cuts in courses, the imposition of loans and erosion of grants, the closure or run-down of colleges and Clause 28 (the threat of which has already been used to close down a lesbian and gay society at Essex University) are all in the offing.

The latest and most serious of these attacks is the proposal in 'Early Day' motion 449 (an amendment to the Education Reform Bill) in parliament. This proposal spells out rules which will effectively abolish the National Union of Students (NUS)—by preventing any local union from affiliating to any 'non-commercial' national body. So students unions can still affiliate to their national stationery suppliers but not NUS.

In the face of these attacks the present NUS has proved that it has no stomach for a fight. It has even been prepared to overturn conference decisions like the one on the poll tax, passed at the last conference, which called for support for working class action.

To beat the Tory offensive on education and the closing down of their union, students need to be mobilised

to take direct action such as rent strikes, demonstrations and occupations. Such action must be under the democratic control of rank and file students.

In addition we must be prepared for a complete disruption of all educational institutions as soon as the Early Day motion 449 is proposed for its first reading in parliament.

And in these struggles concrete links with the working class must be built. As well as giving support to strikes, such as those in the car industry or NHS, students must unite with campus workers who face cuts and redundancies. Support for their strike action must be won amongst students.

Obviously this sort of action has to be built for in the colleges but the NUS needs a leadership that is prepared to fight. A leadership in the NUS is needed to campaign amongst students for support for all the struggles of the exploited and the oppressed in Britain and internationally.

Delegates to the NUS this Easter have a chance to vote for such a leadership, a revolutionary communist leadership. A leadership that offers a strategy of taking the defensive struggles of today towards a

struggle for socialism and an education system under workers' and students' control.

Delegates at Easter NUS conference should vote for a fighting NUS to beat the Baker Bill and defend our sovereignty.

Vote for Liz Wood for President and Ordinary Executive Member, and for Saladin Meckled for Treasurer.

- Tories—Hands off NUS!
- For an NUS leadership that stands and fights!
- Direct action against the attacks on grants the imposition of loans and cuts!
- Non-implementation of Clause 28!
- No platform for fascists. Fight racism. No immigration controls, quotas for overseas students or discriminating fees!
- Support for all national liberation struggles against imperialism!
- Education under the control of workers' and students!
- Support all the struggles of the working class against the Tories and the bosses!
- Vote for Workers Power!

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Fund Appeal

This month we have had donations from: Birmingham — £107; South London — £105; Reading — £103.46; Central London — £74; Coventry — £25; North London — £10; Wolverhampton — £5. This takes our total to £1,734.46, leaving us £3,261.54 to raise between now and June. Time is pressing so please rush donations to Workers Power, BCM Box 7150, London WC1N 3XX.

Ford's decision to pull out of Dundee sparked a wave of hysteria from the Tories and press against trade unionism. Rather than stand up for hard won union rights the TUC chiefs threw in the towel. Dave Hughes examines the leaders' response.

GROVELLING TO THE BOSSES



THE FORD Motor Company pulled out of their Dundee deal because it suited their economic interests. They did not intend to go ahead with the plant. The 'obstruction' of the unions—which every boss, Tory MP and many Labour MPs too have raved about—had very little to do with the final decision.

True, the TUC was unable to fashion a role for itself as broker between unions in cases of single union deals quick enough. But its subsequent efforts should have been enough to impress Ford if that is what had been at stake. Undeterred by such facts the union-bashing generated by this fiasco has gone unanswered by the union leaders. They cannot answer the catcalls of the Tories because, in essence, their new realism means that Willis and co agree with much that the bosses and Tories are saying.

The whole saga revealed that a range of talents are needed from those who wanted to keep ahead in the world of the trade union leadership. And they've all been on display in the TUC's response to the Ford Motor Company.

Norman Willis may be a bumbling fool at times but when it comes to grovelling before the bosses he is an accomplished performer. Gavin Laird's skills in treachery and deceit were there for all to see as he used his position on the Scottish Development Agency to help stitch up a secret deal for the AEU at Dundee. And the blatant cowardice of the deal's bureaucratic opponents was well demonstrated by Ron Todd's refusal to recommend that his members accept the deal while, at the same time, refusing to organise to stop it.

Strength

What a time to cave in to Fords! The rank and file have just shown their strength by stopping the management's package of flexible working proposals. They have shown the potential power of the organised shop floor. And the TUC leaders have connived with Ford management to undermine that power.

Ford's plans were very clear. They wanted to use a single union stitch up with the AEU to allow them to pay Dundee workers less than other Ford workers and to grant those workers fewer trade union rights and impose worse working conditions. They wanted to spearhead an attack on trade union rights in the car and component industry. They planned to impose flexible working practices Ford workers have rejected elsewhere.

More employers have the confidence to present the trade



AEU arch 'dealer' Laird

union leaders with demands that they accept the bosses' terms or see their traditional customs and practices trampled on. Chief Executive of the Scottish Development Agency put it that bluntly:

'If the unions are going to survive they must learn to meet the business and industrial needs of today.'

And that is precisely what the AEU were more than prepared to do. Jimmy Airlie, Stalinist architect of the Dundee deal, confessed that this is how he sees his job:

'I do not support the policies of the Thatcher government. But we must accept that it is there and will not go away quickly. It is the environment in which we have to live and operate.'

Powerless

And Airlie lives and operates by selling conditions, wages and the right to take industrial action.

Such actions are increasingly par for the course from the hard right leaders of the EETPU and AEU. And every time they stab other workers in the back the 'new realist' leaders of the TUC show they are powerless to resist them. Willis begged and pleaded with the TUC General Council:

'to go again to Detroit able to give the company the assurance that there will be no interference with or dislocation with the AEU agreement.'

The General Council duly dispatched him to Detroit with the white flag of surrender.

The attitude of the T&G leaders is cause for alarm for all Ford workers. Rod Todd has blathered about opposing the Dundee deal. But he's made it plain that what he opposes is the T&G leadership having their nose put out of joint by Ford and the AEU ignoring their customary negotiating procedures. What he opposed was that Dundee would not be governed by the Blue book provisions of other Ford plants which the T&G helps to negotiate.

At no stage has the T&G been prepared to lead a real fight against the Dundee conditions of employment. Todd and co have explicitly undertaken not to mount effective resistance. T&G convenors' chair Johnny Davies has said that the union would not boycott components from the Dundee plant. The Dagenham T&G stewards panel has voted the same way.

Bolder

The bosses and their most brazen agents in the labour movement are becoming bolder with every retreat of the TUC. As the miserable spectacle over Dundee was in process the EETPU were again reprieved from any disciplinary action for their scabbing at Wapping. Hammond's EETPU is threatening to ballot on disaffiliation from the TUC should it be subject to the three months' suspension the TUC leaders have dreamt up for them. Together with the AEU they are prepared to contemplate a rival TUC to Congress House. That is what Hammond meant when he said after the reprieve:

'I'm quite pleased, if only temporarily, still to be in the organisation.'

And rather than fight these scab

herders the TUC climbs down time and time again.

Blackmail

The employers have to the measure of the likes of Willis. They will step up the blackmail in the aftermath of Dundee. The pressure for single union deals that sign away conditions and the right to take action will be stepped up. That is

why the rank and file must act now to defend and extend effective trade union organisation.

The employers must be prevented from ripping up national agreements hand in hand with Jordan and Hammond. But this must mean more than simply defending existing agreements and practices. Those agreements, like the Blue book, reflect divisions of craft and trade that sap the organ-

ised power of the workers. While we must oppose Jordan's single union deals we need to do so with more than a defence of traditional bargaining procedures for the T&G bureaucracy. We need democratic, fighting industrial unions, organising all workers in the given industry. That is the alternative to the prison house unions of Jordan and Hammond and to the treachery and retreats of Willis and Todd. ■



Todd and Willis in happier times

WE CAN STILL BEAT ALTON!

LAST MONTH 20,000 people marched through the streets of London in opposition to David Alton's anti-abortion bill. This included contingents from 40 trade union and 14 Labour Party branches. While it was good to see so many working class women mobilised in defence of their abortion rights it could not disguise the weak state of the Fight Alton's Bill (FAB) campaign.

stage there is a real danger that the campaign is losing momentum just at the time when activity should be at its height.

Local FAB groups are desperately looking for a new focus. Many groups are collapsing or on the verge of doing so. Yet the national steering committee remains aloof from these concerns. It remains tied to the disastrous strategy of relying on parliamentary lobbying and wooing Liberal and Conservative pro-abortionists. Yet Alton is presently so confident that he can get his Bill through parliament that he has even reneged on his earlier promises to make concessions on the time limit. He is now saying he will only accept an amendment exempting raped women from his 18 week time limit if they are under 18 years old.

The refusal of the leading FAB organisers to change course reflects the fact that many of them have already accepted that some variant of Alton's Bill will become law. This is evidenced by the

growing debate, led by Labour MP Jo Richardson, about the 'benefits' of bringing British practice into line with European law which in theory imposes only limited restrictions on early abortions. This is a dangerous argument. It promotes the myth that Continental abortion laws offer a liberal alternative. It plays into the hands of those who want to criminalise women who have late abortions. Once we concede to our enemies that some abortions should not be tolerated then we will have prepared the ground for further attacks. Whether the law allows termination at 10, 12, 18 or 28 weeks its effect is the same. It criminalises women who need abortions.

Nor do such debates reflect the real needs of working class women. The attacks on the NHS are making access to abortion, even under the present 28 week limit, increasingly difficult. More late abortions are having to take place. In some hospitals you now have to wait four to five weeks for an outpatient appointment for an NHS abortion. This is putting even more pressure on the private abortion agencies where the waiting list is now two and a half weeks, as opposed to two to three days, a year ago.

Workers Power has constantly argued for the need to build a campaign which fights for the extension of abortion rights and for the facilities that can make that a reality for all women. This fight

must be renewed at the national FAB meeting on 16 April. This meeting must seize the opportunity to re-orient the campaign and to take up the issue of choice and availability. To do so will mean fighting the complacency of the FAB leadership.

We must push aside those who will stand in the way of a campaign based on the needs and demands of working class women. We must fight to base the campaign in the trade unions. Such trade union support must not be left merely at the level of local and national affiliation. It must be mobilised at rank and file level. This means building for effective demonstrations and lobbies as the Bill approaches its final reading.

It means arguing for strike action in order that workers can attend such demonstrations. It means linking up with the fight to defend the NHS. It means renewing the pressure through the Labour Party and the trade unions to force the Labour Party leadership to call for a three line whip against Alton. Abortion is a class issue, not a matter of individual conscience.

It is still not too late to defeat Alton. But if we are to succeed we must push aside the 'realists' and 'parliamentary lobbyists' and turn to building working class action for *Free abortion on demand*, a woman's right to choose and for the facilities that can make that a reality for working class women. ■

IN AN eight page supplement produced for last year's NUS Winter Conference, *Socialist Organiser* (SO) set out the clearest exposition yet of its position on the question of Zionism and the Palestinian struggle. Under the heading 'Democracy, not Revenge' SO argued that the right of nations to self-determination in the Middle East should extend to the Israeli Jews. As a logical consequence of this they argued that the student movement together with the whole working class should support the continued existence of a Jewish state in Palestine. The Palestinian Arabs should, they argued, be granted the right to self-determination, meaning a state of their own alongside the Israeli Jewish state. But all talk of creating a secular state for Jews and Arabs in the region should be dropped as at best utopian, and at worst a plot to 'dissolve Israel into an Arab state'.

SO repeats the well-worn argument of the Zionist movement that:

'The demand that the Jewish state should cease to exist, and that the Jewish nation should instead dissolve into an Arab state, is inescapably anti-Semitic. It implies hostility to the Israeli Jews, and hostility to all those Jews worldwide—"Zionists"—who instinctively identify with the Israeli Jews.'

This position has won a great deal of support in the student movement and has allowed many Jewish students the opportunity to reconcile often deeply held socialist views with support for the existence of Israel. We in Workers Power however believe that SO's argument is both a travesty of Marxism on the national question and an outright denial of the elementary democratic rights of an oppressed nationality—the Palestinians. Such a denial is for us doubly unforgivable in socialists of an imperialist country and the country primarily responsible for the national oppression of the Palestinians at that.

We believe that SO's rationale starts from their false claim to hold to the Marxist and Leninist position on self-determination. Firstly we must be clear that the demand is a bourgeois democratic one. Like all bourgeois democratic slogans the working class cannot espouse it in an absolute, unconditional fashion. Why? Because every bourgeois democratic demand has to be judged from the standpoint of the exploited and oppressed. Does it advance and assist their struggle against capitalism, imperialism and all the forces of reaction? Generally it may be said that freedom of speech, assembly etc. are democratic rights we defend. But for fascists who seek to persecute national minorities and destroy the labour movement we do not. More, we seek to actively deny the fascists their democratic rights to march, meet etc. Likewise with scabs during a strike. It is elementary that we do not recognise their 'right to work'. The dictatorship of the proletariat itself is a denial of democratic rights to the overthrown ruling class and their supporters.

SO likes to quote Lenin's dictum that socialists are 'consistent democrats'. But this means only that, as compared with the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie, because Marxists represent the interests of the majority classes, we really and concretely defend the democratic rights of this vast majority. It does not mean that we grant each and every democratic slogan the force of a categorical imperative.

Thus on the national question the right to self-determination is meaningless if applied to oppressor nations, i.e. to nations that not only already have 'their own' state but which use that state to brutally oppress another people both within and beyond their own borders. This is to convert the slogan from a defence of the rights of the oppressed into an alibi for the privileges of the oppressor.

In his article 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', Lenin explained that the meaning of self-determination of nations is to be grasped 'not by juggling with legal definitions, or "inventing" abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements...'. What does a concrete analysis of the history of Israel tell us about the claim for its self-determination?

The fact is that since 1948 Israeli Jews have possessed their own state fundamentally antagonistic to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. For in order to establish a Jewish state in this geographical area the Zionists had to set about the task of transforming a settler minority into a national majority. This was accomplished through mass expulsions, and the creation of an exodus by use of systematic terror such as the genocide at Deir Yassin.

Discriminatory laws ensured the transfer of vast amounts of land from Arab to Jewish

The legitimacy of the Zionist state looks set to be a major issue once again at the National Union of Students' Easter Conference.

David Green examines the arguments of the *Socialist Organiser* newspaper, whose supporters in the Socialist Students in NOLS grouping have attempted to reconcile support for the right of the Israeli state to exist with a Marxist 'orthodoxy'.



APOLOGISTS FOR ZIONISM

ownership and codified discrimination in employment and housing. Ultimately nationality laws made citizenship available to Jews from all over the world (The Law of Return) whilst denying it to Arab refugees now excluded from Israel's borders. It was the exercise of this mockery of 'self-determination' by the Jewish minority in Palestine that led directly to the brutal violation and denial of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination in their own land.

Prior to 1948 British and later US imperialism gave full backing to this policy of colonial settlement, seeing in the Zionists a potential bulwark against the developing Arab national movements which increasingly threatened their interests in the Middle East. Jewish settlement engendered resistance from the Palestinians throughout the 1920s and 1930s. SO clearly regard this resistance as misguided:

'From 1919 onwards there were regular clashes between Jews and Arabs. The Arabs attacked for a mixture of reasons—resentment, fear, bigotry.'

Conveniently left out of this list is 'justified resistance' to having their land taken over by European settlers aided by the armed forces of British imperialism. What this distorted view of history conveniently overlooks is that the actions of the Zionist settlers and their paramilitary organisations such as the Haganah and Irgun created a violent response from the Arab population—self-defence is a notion clearly missing from SO's analysis.

Far from being the victims of irrational and backward Islamic anti-Semites the Zionist colonial settlers constituted themselves as a block to the national independence struggle of the Palestinians and freedom from imperialist domination of the region. Of course major elements of the Palestinian landlord class encouraged methods and tactics which Marxists would neither advocate nor defend. But the major acts of resistance including the uprising of 1936-9 were defended by Trotskyists at the time and subsequently. At every point where imperialism's interests were threatened the Zionists supported it arms in hand.

The existing Zionist state in Palestine is not some idealised expression of Jewish self-determination floating in the clouds above this sinful world. It is located in Palestine—the homeland of another people who were not consulted in the slightest as to its establishment. No abstract 'democratic right' either compels or

should have compelled the Palestinians to accept such settlement.

The Zionists offer as their 'right', firstly the historical claim that because of the existence of the Hebrew Kingdoms and the Judaeen statelet nearly two millenia ago they have a prior claim to Palestine. Secondly they offer the claim that anti-Semitism from the pogroms of 1881 to the holocaust again gives them the right to Palestine as a refuge. The first claim no democrat, let alone a Marxist, could take seriously. The same principle would give the Bretons and the Welsh the right to the whole of Britain or France even if one could be sure that they were 'truly' descendants of the ancient Britons.

The second claim is more serious but it is not a justified claim upon the Palestinian people. The Jewish refugees did have the right to refuge from anti-Semitism but the states most capable of giving it—Britain and the USA—gave it in the most restricted form imaginable. And the Zionists were completely opposed to other states giving refuge throughout this period.

Thirdly, and most cynically, they offer the accomplished fact of their own seizure and settlement of Palestine. It is this claim that SO is most susceptible to. But Marxists are not worshippers of the accomplished fact. The Palestinians have not disappeared; 750,000 live within the borders of the Israeli state proper and within the borders now occupied by Israel there are over two million. In the Arab states contiguous with Israel there are 1,860,000 and the estimated total of Palestinians is approaching five million. In contrast there are 3.5 million Jewish Israeli citizens. It is clear that at no stage has the Israeli Jewish population been an actual majority of the population of Palestine as a whole. Thus at no time have the Jewish settlers had the right to seize, control or dispose of Palestine against the wishes of the majority of its people.

Even if they had been they would not have had the slightest right to treat the Palestinians in the way that they have and do. For this reason we clearly support the destruction of the state that excludes one third of Palestinians from their own homeland and denies the most elementary democracy to two thirds of them. SO, borrowing the Zionists' arguments, identify this with the destruction of the Israeli nationality or even with the annihilation of the Jews in Palestine.

Editor John O'Mahoney argues ('Democracy not Revenge' p3):

"Smash the settler state" in South Africa or colonial Algeria means: abolish the monopoly of power and the caste privileges of the white minority: let the majority rule.'

But what does "smash the settler state" mean for Israel? It is a state which is extremely democratic for its Jewish majority.'

The point here is of course that Israel is highly undemocratic for the Palestinian Arabs. South Africa, too, is 'extremely democratic' for its white settler population. The difference with Israel is that instead of denying Israeli Arabs the vote, the majority of them are denied citizenship and residency rights.

Sidestepping this point, O'Mahoney goes on to deliberately confuse the concepts of state and nation, so as to suggest that the smashing of the Zionist state would automatically mean the annihilation of the Israeli Jewish nation itself:

'For an external [our emphasis] force to "smash the state" is not a matter of destroying a repressive apparatus, or defeating it in war, but of over-running Israel and forcibly destroying the Jewish nation.'

This red herring is carefully selected to obscure the real issue. As SO is aware, a considerable number of anti-Zionist organisations, including ourselves and much of the PLO. see the force that can smash the Zionist state as being internal. For us this means the Arab working class and peasantry in alliance with those sections of the Jewish proletariat that can be broken from support for the Israeli state. To present the only possibility as conquest from without enables O'Mahoney to identify the Jewish state with the Israeli Jewish nation—its survival equals the survival of the Jews.

In fact the Zionists are themselves acutely conscious of the problem they face in preserving the Jewishness of the Israeli state. Facing a demographic trend that will leave Arabs a clear majority within the next two decades, solutions have been proposed ranging from increasing the tempo of settlement, through to mass 'transfers' and even the outright denial of voting rights to Arabs as proposed by the fascist Kach Party.

SO's editors have had to face up to this reality. As they regard the continued existence of the Jewish state as vital for Jewish 'self-determination' they have to find their own arguments for the preservation of the Jewish character of that state. For Jews to have to live as equals with their Arab neighbours is for them an unacceptable solution. The proposal for any bi-national form of state would involve the 'forced dissolution' of the Jewish national community(!) and 'is in fact a proposal to destroy the existing Jewish nation and at best to grant equal citizenship rights to those Jews.'

Since what our 'consistent democrat' is after is not 'equality' but privileges necessary to preserve the 'Jewish nation' obviously it is outrageous to demand that the Arab refugees be allowed a right of return to Palestine. Obviously if every one of the 4.5 million Palestinians sought to return the 3.5 million Israeli Jews would be outnumbered:

'Mass Palestinian Arab "return" to Israel would mean the surrender of the Jewish nation of its desire to be a nation, a compact mass of people with a common identity.'

This scandalous argument has nothing in common with Marx and Lenin's position. Lenin sums up the Marxist position clearly in 'Critical Remarks on the National Question':

'The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism; hence the exclusiveness of bourgeois nationalism, hence the endless national bickering. The proletariat, however, far from undertaking to uphold the national development of every nation, on the contrary, warns the masses against such illusions, stands for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation of nations except that which is founded on force or privilege.'

If the Israeli nation cannot survive the loss of its privilege or its ability to oppress the Palestinian people then so be it. If the Jewish population either will not stay in Palestine on the basis of complete political, social, linguistic and cultural equality or if they do and thereafter assimilate into a common Palestinian national identity this simply shows that there was no democratic or progressive basis for the creation of the Israeli nation in the first place. In any case to defend the Zionist state and to urge the Palestinians to accept an impoverished Bantustan is the mark not of a Marxist and Leninist but of a nationalist bourgeois philistine. ■



CIVIL SERVICE TORY AXE SET TO FALL

by Jeremy Dewar

IN FEBRUARY this year the Tories announced a radical restructuring of the civil service, the *Ibbs Report*. This will immediately take 70,000 workers out of the national bargaining structure and threatens to break up 95% of the civil service.

This latest attack comes on top of their success in slashing the number of civil servants by nearly 20%, from 734,000 in 1979 to 597,000 in 1987. In addition, civil servants' wages have fallen by 30% in comparison with the private sector over the same period.

These job and pay cuts have gone alongside the devolution of budgetary control down to local management, the Financial Management Initiative (FMI). The purpose of the FMI is to increase productivity by setting high output targets which are to be met with a small budget. Performance and promotion is now vigorously based on individual productivity rates rather than quality of work.

The effect of these cuts and the

tightening up of resources has been an inevitable deterioration of services. Staff cuts in the Department of Employment (DoE) have led to closures and reduced opening hours of job centres, which in turn have led to long queues. Each interviewer has to meet a target of 45 interviews a week, resulting in a rushed and shallow service. In addition, the pressure is to fill places on the 'workfare' Adult Training Programme. Staff are encouraged to use the Restart scheme as a policing mechanism by hounding claimants onto programmes or blowing the whistle on them to the DHSS. All other results are regarded as wasted interviews.

The picture in the DHSS offices is even worse. Job cuts and the rise in the number of claimants have meant that in many DHSS offices the number of claimants to staff has nearly doubled. The zoo-like atmosphere of these offices has led to more and more attacks on DHSS workers. The Tories' latest response to the increasing violence is to erect floor-to-ceiling smash-proof screens in London offices in preparation for the introduction of income support and the social fund.

The appalling conditions also mean a huge turnover of staff, especially in the inner cities, resulting in a chronically untrained workforce. However, the Tories are far from satisfied. The *Ibbs Report* complains of 'the slow rate of progress'. Along with the NHS and local government services, the civil service represents for them a huge drain on profits. Its running costs amounts to £12.6 billion, 70% of which goes on wages. The Tories' preferred method of privatisation whilst useful in relation to British Telecom and Amersham International for example, is problematic for most departments. Extensive contracting out of cleaning and catering still leaves the bulk of the civil service intact. They now plan to destroy the nationally won agreements on pay and conditions. In the process they also hope to divide, and break the back of the national unions. The *Ibbs Report* is their key weapon in this attack.

Demarcation

Over the past 15 months the government has divided the unions by selling long term pay deals to the IRSF, the IPCS and the CSU, which break down demarcation and introduce productivity based pay scales and regional pay. The latter has been aided by the unions' collaboration in relocating offices out of London over the past few years.

Last October the next stage was revealed in the shape of the 'Alternative Working Patterns' document. This insidious document argues that while the government has successfully slashed civil service workers' pay, it has lagged behind in smashing hard won rights and conditions. It proposes a small core of permanent full-time workers and a whole range of temporary, part-time, short-term contract, casual, piece-work, self-employed and even home workers.

The *Ibbs report* proposes to break up the civil service into small and medium sized manageable units, or autonomous 'agencies'. These agen-

cies will be run by hard line managers and chief executives, who will be given a negotiated budget and told to produce results with total freedom from national civil service labour agreements. In particular they must be able 'to take and defend unpopular decisions'. To help these mini-McGregors 'negotiations with the national trade unions will be progressively and substantially reduced ... as rapidly as possible'.

And what has been the response of the national trade unions to this co-ordinated plan of attack? The right wing, like CPSA general secretary John Ellis, have dismissed it as a 'damp squib' because it doesn't mention privatisation. Others, like the Stalinist influenced NUCPS, talk glibly about 'fighting privatisation on an ideological level' as an alternative to organising direct action in resistance. Meanwhile the Broad Left CPSA NEC has remained criminally silent.

But ignoring this attack plays into the government's hands. Up to now, each office, department or region has been left to fight the Tories' attack on their own. The current wave of strikes in the DoE (over YTS and the UBO-Job Centre mergers in London) is one of the most militant examples.

Isolated

At best, such isolated disputes can only win partial and temporary respite from the cuts, often at the expense of other less organised sections (as in the case of Sheffield MSC where management moved the YTS trainees a few doors down the road!) Only a united cross-departmental national campaign can open the road to a complete and lasting victory.

The *Ibbs Report* can provide that generalising factor. The breadth and depth of its attack must be brought home to all civil service workers whether directly and immediately affected or not. Resistance to it should be the basis of arguments for the official and unofficial spreading of isolated disputes. The 1988 pay campaign would also include demands for its immediate and total withdrawal.

Unfortunately, the union leaders—including the so called Trotskyists of Militant on the CPSA NEC—have proved themselves incapable or unwilling to lead such a fight. Rank and file militants must take the initiative in organising the resistance. Each office should hold a cross-union, cross-departmental mass meeting and elect a strike committee. A plan of action—including non-cooperation with all cuts and the agency proposals, and indefinite all out strike action against victimisation or implementation of cuts—should be fought for. Town committees, linking up all offices in a district, are already being formed in many areas in preparation for the pay campaign. These should become organising centres for action drawing in delegates from the strike committees and preparing for united action as soon as the first office is under attack.

Direct links need to be forged in the process with other workers. Claimants' organisations in particular should be sought out and won to a campaign for DoE and DHSS services and resources benefit levels, as well as staffing levels, designed to meet our class needs, not the state's 'ability' to provide. NHS and local government workers are also under similar attacks and a fighting, democratic public sector united front should be forged.

Workers Power argues for civil servants to adopt all the best traditions of trade union militancy as a matter of urgency. We also believe that in the process we can forge an anti-capitalist rank and file movement and a revolutionary party which can transcend even the most militant trade unionism.■

LABOUR'S CUTS MUST BE FOUGHT

Ann Wackett argues that strike action can defend jobs and services

THROUGHOUT MARCH Labour Councils up and down the country have been passing budgets and setting rates. All have one thing in common—they aim to pass on to the working class in the boroughs as a whole and amongst their own workforces the cuts imposed by central government.

Between 1979 and 1986 the Tories have taken £17 billion from local authorities through reductions in the Rate Support Grant. A further cut of £1.5 billion is proposed for 1988/9.

Yet despite the growing attacks (all to be stepped up through the Housing Bill, the Local Government Bill and the Poll Tax) not a single rate-capped borough has indicated its willingness to defy the rate-capping legislation. Liverpool and Lambeth, the 'heroes' of the 1984/5 campaign, have now set legal budgets. While Liverpool is still claiming that there will be no 'overall' job losses and no rent rises the deficit is being filled by the sale of council assets. Lambeth, under the leadership of Linda Bellos, has voted cuts totalling £60 million.

The picture is the same elsewhere. Manchester has cut £110 million from a budget of £400 million with 3,750 jobs to go over the next year. Sheffield has

agreed to cut £80 million from its budget over the next three years. Cuts in other boroughs include 18% in Camden and 15% in Hackney.

In addition many councils are choosing to pass the burden of the cuts directly onto the local working class. In Greenwich rents are due to rise by 18% whilst Brent has passed a rates rise of 9.9% on top of a £3 per week rent rise.

This goes hand in hand with the imposition of compulsory 'restructuring' within local council departments and the deletion of thousands of filled and unfilled posts. The result is the decimation of staffing levels with services to the public being reduced to near breaking point in many areas.

In the face of this onslaught the Labour and trade union leaders are urging retreat. At a recent Local Government Conference in Edinburgh, Labour luminaries such as Kinnock, Donald Dewar, Jack Cunningham, Roy Hattersley and David Blunkett all made it crystal clear that local Labour authorities should do absolutely nothing which meant defying any of the Tories' anti-local government laws and acting illegally.

The union leaders are singing a similar tune. NALGO's General Secretary, John Daley, has proposed co-operation with in-house tenders, contrary to annual con-

ference policy, whilst the union leadership have sat on their hands and failed to mobilise national industrial action against the thousands of job losses now facing the Nalگو membership. THE GMB and Nupe leadership are backing a local agreement with Leeds City Council to reorganise services to make them 'fit' for being tendered out which will involve some 7,500 job losses.

Despite this backstabbing rank and file workers have fought back—members of the AEU in Lambeth, the GMB in Liverpool, Nupe in Camden and Nalگو in London and Bristol have all staged strikes against the cuts. It is vital that this action is built on. Strikes must be spread and co-ordinated. Councils of action based on delegates from the trade unions, working class users of the services, striking workers and other public and private sector workers committed to mobilising industrial action to fight against the cuts, need to be built now. We should demand that all Labour councils reverse their cuts budgets and draw up deficit growth budgets in consultation with the users and providers of the services. Those councillors who refuse should be forced to resign, to make way for those who will put the working class and the services they need first.■

LEADERSHIP CRISIS THE SWP

THE Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is a relatively prominent force in the strike committees that have been built in the course of the NHS dispute. It is in a position to influence the course of events in that dispute.

Yet its actions have generated hostility and confusion amongst healthworkers. In particular, in the run-up to the 26 March health stewards' conference it made clear that it opposed the conference even taking place. Its paper, *Socialist Worker*, did not carry a single advertisement, let alone an article, calling on stewards and health militants to attend that conference. Despite continuing pressure from the strike committees for a co-ordinated national campaign to win the unions to calling an all-out strike, the SWP sabotaged the best opportunity available to achieve that co-ordination.

This behaviour accounts for some of the hostility many militants feel towards the SWP. As for the confusion the SWP is causing, this is not restricted to the non-aligned. There is clear evidence of confusion, disquiet and even dissent within the ranks of the SWP. Members were thrown by the SWP's acrobatics over the call for both a one day strike around the budget and an all out strike in the NHS. The SWP's position was a case of now you see it, now you don't. *Socialist Worker* warned against the 'disastrous tactics of selective strikes, overtime bans and work-to-rules', (6.2.88) yet at the same time opposed resolutions explicitly calling for all out action when they came up at the strike committees.

A week later they urged militants to use 'action on budget day to build for an all-out strike'. Yet nowhere did they raise or agitate for the call, all out on 14 March, stay out to win.

Their confusion reached its high point on the TUC demonstration on 5 March. Hundreds of SWP members joined angry nurses and other NHS workers in the call for a general strike on 14 March, despite *Socialist Worker's* careful refusal, from 3 February on, to raise the call for such a general strike (indeed the paper and SWP members themselves remained confused as to which day they were calling for action, right up to 14 March itself).

Written Off

And now, after 14 March and budget day, the SWP has written off the idea of an all out strike altogether. They speak of the NHS dispute in the past tense. Having made the budget the be all and end all of their agitation they now conclude:

'No one knows what lies in the months ahead. Since the budget has provided such a focus for action, it's possible that its passage might bring a temporary lull.' (19.3.88)

And this explains their hostility to the stewards' conference. They do not believe an all out strike is possible. They will not, therefore, lift a finger to support an initiative aimed at fighting for one.

To confused SWP members, to health workers who feel angry about the SWP's sabotage of the stewards' conference, we say these examples are no isolated mistakes. They are not the product of the SWP's temporary disorientation. They flow from the SWP's whole political method and perspective for the present period.

Their method is based on the view that revolutionary leadership consists solely of raising demands that have already been spontaneously raised by trade union militants. Generalisation of the struggle means, for the SWP, simply getting different sections of workers, fighting on their own demands, striking simultaneously. This method is tailism—tailing the existing struggles, instead of seeking to take these struggles beyond their limited goals towards a struggle against capitalism itself.

It is also economism. This does not mean being preoccupied with the economic struggle of workers, as the Eurostatinists and feminists suggest. We too recognise the vital importance of the workers' economic struggle as a starting point for anti-capitalist action. The real reason the SWP is guilty of economism is because it does not recognise the need to transform the economic struggle into a conscious political struggle through the use of transitional demands.

Transitional demands are necessary to generalise the class struggle. Sectional battles are not generalised simply by occurring all at the same time. They must also transcend their sectional limits, by taking up the fight for class wide and not just sectional interests.

Transitional demands generalise the struggle in this political sense because they start with the immediate needs of the working class—in this case defence of the NHS—but link the fulfillment of those needs to goals which threaten capitalism itself. Our call for emergency cover only under the control of the strikers is a good example. It starts from the immediate need to prevent scabbing, but by posing an elementary form of workers' control it presses the struggle forward towards a challenge to the management's right to manage.

We use the same method with regard to the call for an all out strike too. We begin from the fact that it is necessary for specific reasons, reasons all too clear to NHS workers. It is an immediate solution to the Tory attack on NHS funding and the way to link the sectional claims of NHS workers with the defence of the NHS as a whole.

Also the all out strike is part of a programme of action for the current period which not only meets the immediate needs of the struggle, but provides a concrete answer to the question of how we get from a health strike to a socialist revolution. By fighting for defiance of the anti-union laws, building councils of action to link up different sections of workers in struggle, organising the physical defence of picket lines, fighting for workers' control over emergency cover, staffing levels, and the allocation of funding, for nationalisation of the drug and supply industry etc we can build a bridge from today's struggle to the struggle for power. Because in such methods and organisations lie the seeds of the future organisations that workers can use to transform society.

In other words revolutionaries believe that the economic struggle can only be transformed, can only become a revolutionary struggle, by a conscious revolutionary leadership, by militants armed with a programme and organised in a party. The SWP on the other hand, believes that, provided they cheer on the economic struggle, it will, in and of itself, become a revolutionary political struggle. This is why they are guilty of economism. It

leads them to view the party not as an organisation that can, through its programme, lead struggles forward towards revolution, but as a mere mechanical device that co-ordinates existing struggles. The recent positions of the SWP illustrate this method of tailing the spontaneous struggle and this economism very clearly.

In the latest *Socialist Worker Review*, the SWP leader, Tony Cliff, argues:

'If the basic structure of the working class was damaged, if the employers broke through our ranks, there would not be volatility, there would simply be retreat. If workers were fighting with a generalised shop stewards organisation there would not be volatility either, workers would simply win.' (Interview with Cliff, SWR 107, p20)

How does the last part of this statement fit in with the SWP in practice vigorously opposing the formation of a 'generalised shop stewards organisation' in the NHS? To understand this we need to grasp what is wrong with the statement itself.

Cliff argues that if a generalised shop stewards movement existed now, as it did before 1974, we would be winning the current spate of industrial struggle.

But the layer of stewards who led the working class offensive of the early 1970s did not disappear by accident. It was demobilised by Labour's participation schemes of 1979. It was demobilised because, despite its strength, it had not broken politically from reformism. And after being demobilised, its power in the workplace was severely weakened by the bosses' offensive after 1979. Not just victimisations, plant closures and un-

employment led to the setbacks of militant rank and file unionism.

The shop stewards' failure to go beyond the limits of the trade union militancy nurtured during the capitalist boom was at the root of the defeats they suffered. In the shape of Thatcherism the ruling class abandoned the politics of consensus and class collaboration that flourished in the post-war boom. They armed themselves with new weapons: the anti-union laws, the militarised police etc, which were able to defeat the steel, car, health, print and mine workers. These defeats were not inevitable, but the result of workers' inability to arm themselves similarly with new politics, new methods of struggle and to break from the treacherous leaders who betrayed these struggles. So if the old shop stewards' organisations could be resurrected by magic tomorrow, they would not 'simply win', they would still risk losing again unless they developed revolutionary political answers to the bosses' offensive, unless they were broken from reformism. Cliff's tailism and economism blinds him to this.

Vacuum

This blindness is sharply revealed in the SWP's notion of the 'vacuum' of leadership. Cliff refers to it in his interview. In a misnamed article called 'Which Way to Victory?' Chris Harman explains what it means:

'There can be a vacuum of leadership, in which the actions of a few activists can influence how very many workers fight... But the union leaders are soon back in the fray, trying to reassert their control.' (*Socialist Worker* 13.2.88)

This is wrong and dangerous and

The health strike has shone a spotlight on the politics of the Socialist Workers Party. Paul Mason explains why these politics cannot answer any of the problems posed in that strike. And Workers Power health workers explain what needs to be done now, in the aftermath of the days of action.



CANNOT ANSWER

ght to resolve the crisis of leadership.

The 'vacuum' theory is very much based on economism. Lenin was the original Marxist to define and attack economism. Against the economists' belief in 'lending the economic struggle itself a political character' he insisted that this was little more 'than the struggle for economic reforms' (What is to be Done?). He did not discount the struggle for such reforms but he recognised that it could not spontaneously become a revolutionary struggle.

Lenin argued that while it is true that 'workers learn in struggle', the trade union struggle does not spontaneously teach the revolutionary politics. Where trade unionism spontaneously becomes political, the politics it produces are reformist. Reformism is a reflection at a general political level of the struggle over the amount of profit between the worker and employer. Like trade unionism, political reformism aims at getting a better deal from capitalism not destroying it. The strength of reformism today, at all layers of the working class, will not be eliminated simply through the militant struggle for economic reforms. and while that strength remains intact, the crisis of leadership remains a pivotal question.

Recognising this crisis of leadership—workers willing to fight, a strong reformist bureaucracy, a weak revolutionary alternative—does not mean that we favour a simple replacement of the trade union or Labour tops as are Militant or the CP. It means that we have to develop a practical series of demands and forms of action that pit workers, in struggle, against their leaders. The idea of a

'vacuum of leadership' is in reality a means of running away from a struggle against the existing leadership. It implies that when they go away we simply jump in and fill the vacuum. Thus instead of offering a political strategy for the health workers now the SWP reduces its strategy to simply preparing for the day when it can fill the vacuum. Harman explains:

'We need to put more emphasis on the sales of *Socialist Worker* and ensure we have a routine intervention in every struggle. Only then will we be able to seize opportunities which are suddenly thrown up as militancy escapes, temporarily, from the control of the new realist union officials.'

In the immediate aftermath of 3 February Harman says nothing on how to build for an all out strike. The vacuum has been filled by the bureaucrats and we'll all have to wait until the bureaucracy go on holiday or fall asleep or something so we can enjoy a few weeks' militancy, which we can tail in the hope of it spontaneously becoming generalised.

Not surprisingly, since the budget the SWP have begun to argue that the only answer for militants is to join the SWP. Now we don't object to parties fighting for recruits. We will aim to win many ourselves. But an individual joining a party is not a strategy for securing the victory of a still continuing vital dispute. The key thing is what a party fights for. That is how it should be judged.

All of this brings us back to the SWP's fundamental method. In boom and recession, offensive or retreat, from the glory days of Pentonville and Saltley, to Orgreave and Wapping the SWP's politics have been based on tailing

trade union militancy.

Instead of arguing for what is necessary the SWP constantly tailors its politics to what it thinks are possible. This solves the mystery of the SWP in one breath bemoaning the absence of a collective stewards organisations and in the next breath condemning those who are trying to build one. Because stewards organisation is weak in the NHS, because no 'collective, generalised' layer exists spontaneously, it becomes for the SWP 'irrelevant', 'sectarian', 'too early' to attempt to organise a national stewards' conference in the weeks after Nupe and Cohse's sabotage of the 14/15 March strikes.

Miseducated

Likewise the fight for an all out strike, though necessary cannot be practically fought for because the majority of workers at present don't think it is possible.

Many SWP members have been miseducated into answering us by saying 'of course an all out strike is necessary, so is a general strike, so is a revolution, but they are not on today'. Their belief that what is possible is only what workers are saying or fighting for today means that the SWP runs away from a struggle for what is necessary. It means they fail to try and turn what is necessary into a possibility.

Indeed had the workers followed the SWP's advice over the last eight years no action would have been possible, or rather worthwhile, because of the 'downturn'. The 'downturn perspective' (during which the greatest mass strike in British history took place) refers to the downturn in spontaneous economic militancy that occurred, particularly in engineering, as a

result of the capitalist recession. The SWP conclude from this that it is impossible to organise anti-bureaucratic rank and file movements even where a gap opens up between the leaders and the members. The unstated premise of this conclusion is that only an upturn in the fortunes of the capitalist economy can revive spontaneous economic militancy to the level where the SWP can intervene again to generalise it (i.e. not challenge its limitations) and, perhaps, revive the tactic of the rank and file movement.

This amounts to saying that the capitalist crisis, which creates a deep crisis of leadership at every level of the workers' movement, is the wrong time to utilise the rank and file movement tactic. This is a confession of bankruptcy.

The 'downturn' perspective treats the class struggle as though it were like the weather—independent of human will. It breeds pessimism about the possibility, posed in every struggle against Thatcher in the 1980s, of transforming the last period of retreat and defensive struggles into an offensive against

the bosses. Indeed, in every struggle the SWP, including that of the NUM, the SWP have denied such a possibility, because of the 'downturn'. As Tony Cliff put it in the miners' strike:

'The miners' strike is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers Party have called the 'downturn' in the movement.'

And that. Tony Cliff, is an example of what we in Workers Power call head banging pessimism and defeatism!

Without a coherent answer to the crisis of leadership the most acute moments of struggle inevitably create confusion and disorientation in the SWP.

This systematic confusion has a name: centrism. Any member of the SWP who dares utter it, along with Marxist terms like 'programme' and 'economism', is almost certainly assured of a swift departure from the ranks of the SWP, courtesy of Cliff-style democratic centralism. Such comrades will find that joining Workers Power is the only alternative to the road of demoralisation and non-party activism. ■



trying for a hearing on March 5

WHERE NOW FOR HEALTH WORKERS?

THE TUC and leaders of the health service unions have begun to build for the next big event in the campaign to defend the NHS. They plan to turn 5 July—the 40th anniversary of the founding of the NHS—into a 'family fun day', bonfires, fireworks, flotillas on the Thames. For families who depend on the meagre wage of a health worker, or others who have sick relatives unable to get treatment because of NHS cuts, waiting for a day of fun in July is both stupid and insulting.

The NHS cash crisis, low pay, privatisation and closures are the realities of today. And the actions of health workers in February and March showed that they want to fight the Tory attacks now. Other sections of workers demonstrated their support in solidarity strikes, often in the face of opposition from the law and their union leaders.

The health union leaders and the TUC will do all in their power to channel this anger into a drawn out 'protest' campaign. A clear example of their hatred for effective militant action was the 5 March demonstration. they refused to allow health workers to speak from the platform, preferring to put forward clerics and agony aunts. The angry demonstration by militant health workers forced the TUC to abandon their platform, being unable to hear themselves speak!

The question for militants is, where now after the 14/15 March events? First, we still need to

campaign for an all out indefinite strike. Two months of protests and one day strikes have not budged Thatcher one inch. Nor will another six months of the same.

Does this mean militants should regard the dispute as over and wait for next year? Does it mean, as the SWP and many non-aligned activists argue, that an all-out strike is totally unrealistic? Not at all. This would be, effectively, to give up the fight before serious battle has been joined. What we need is a clear strategy for a campaign to get an all out strike.

We know that a militant minority of health workers are prepared to strike. So are other sections of workers who want to show solidarity. How to turn this minority into a majority capable of taking such all out action. Here we face the divisive tactics of the union leaders, locally and nationally, who want to avoid a strike, or indeed any unity, preferring to poach members off each other through petty manoeuvring. Overcoming their stranglehold means organising those who are prepared to fight into an effective campaign for all-out strike.

This is why Workers Power, along with many other health workers, have argued for strike co-ordinating committees at hospital, area and national levels.

The experience of London, which has been repeated elsewhere, shows how effective such co-ordination can be. An all-London strike co-ordinating commit-

tee was established with militant stewards from several major hospitals. Its avowed aim was to build for 3 February and then 14 March. Activists came from hospital strike committees and shop stewards committees to discuss how to make those days of action successful.

Solidarity

The committee was united in building for the same goal—strike action in the hospitals and solidarity action from other workers. The existence of that co-ordinating committee enabled those days of action to go beyond the protests, the hearts and the 'I love the NHS' stickers of the TUC. Effective and widespread strikes were staged. Although not all of the London hospitals are represented on the committee and initially many activists did not represent the majority of unionised workers in their hospitals, the agreement to go for common action gave the stewards the confidence and support necessary to win the arguments back in their individual workplaces. It also organised an effective speaking campaign amongst non-NHS unions and workplaces that was vital in winning solidarity action from, for example, London bus workers. Now, many hospitals have much stronger strike committees or stewards committees.

The example of London shows how area co-ordination can take the action forward and result in

better workplace organisation. It also shows that we can, as militant health workers, challenge the do-nothing leaders of our unions.

The next task was to try and co-ordinate the work of these committees nationally.

On 26 March there was a national conference in Sheffield which had the potential to establish a national strike committee to take the struggle for action and leadership to a higher level. Several strike committees had called for such a conference whilst building support for the actions round budget day. In the event the conference itself was badly organised (none of the sponsoring bodies were consulted) and very poorly publicised.

The conference was small, and an important opportunity was very nearly completely squandered, largely due to the activities of the SWP. Although BLOC were involved in organising the conference, Militant supporters saw it mainly as an opportunity for launching a Broad Left type of body. They proposed the grand title of the National Health Shop Stewards Combine, with a complex regional structure whose purpose would be not to organise to win this dispute, but to win leading positions in the unions for left talkers. This is not what we need, and their proposals were quite rightly thrown out.

The SWP on the other hand spent the day preventing any serious discussion about the way forward in the dispute, arguing

teach them to be socialists, and finally that all out action was 'pie in the sky'.

Whilst their 'no strategy but join the SWP' perspective was also defeated, they succeeded in preventing the conference seriously addressing the problems of 'where next?'

The conference also rejected the resolution from the London and Leicester strike committees which was supported by Workers Power. That resolution argued for a perspective of a national strike committee committed to building for all-out action.

The only resolution which was passed came from the Islington Joint Shop Stewards Committee. Although inadequate in its strategy for winning the dispute, it contained a commitment to a recalled conference on 14 May. A steering committee with area representatives was elected to build this conference, circulate model resolutions for the union and plan a national bulletin.

This steering committee must be clear that the next stage of the campaign involves two tasks. First it must take the fight for action to the bureaucracy. Resolutions must be got to national union conferences, lobbies of the executive meetings and the TUC must be organised. At the key national conferences (Cohse and Nupe) the demand that the leaders that national co-ordination was unrealistic that we cannot tackle

Continued on page 8

After seven years as President Mitterrand is set to stand for office once again. In this article *Emile Gallet* looks at the impact of Mitterrand's years in office on the French working class.

AT THE end of March President Mitterrand finally said 'Oui' to the question 'Are you going to stand again for the Presidency?'. The scene seemed set for a repeat of the 1981 election result. But the circumstances facing the French left and the working class could not be more different from 1981.

In that year Mitterrand became the first socialist president of the Fifth Republic. The huge dancing crowds at the Bastille showed the massive illusions that existed amongst the French working class. Mitterrand had not only crushed the hated bourgeois, Giscard d'Estaing, at the presidential polls, he was also to oversee a government composed of Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PCF) ministers.

Having immediately dissolved the assembly, the Socialist Party, in tactical alliance with the communists, won a thumping majority. The realisation of the 'Union of the Left' in government was many militants' dream. The next few months were to show just how misplaced these illusions were.

Reflecting the demands of the workers after many years of right wing governments, the PS/CP government and Mitterrand declared for a programme of 'socialist expansion'. It was to provide new jobs, revitalise old industries and be sympathetic to 'just' wage demands.

Within a year the capitalists had shown just what they thought of such a programme. Rising inflation, of up to 14%, a growing balance of payments crisis and pressure from the international banks brought this 'socialist' experiment to a swift halt. Between 1982 and 1984 the PS/CP government presided over a very different strategy.

A massive austerity campaign was introduced, focusing on limiting inflation at the expense of workers' living standards and jobs. This policy has been faithfully followed for the last six years and, from the bosses' point of view, it has been successful.

Many of the policies pursued under Chirac's government were in fact developed in embryo during this period of PS/CP government. Plans were laid to slash coal production and decimate the workforce. Education 'reforms', later pursued by Chirac, were put in train. Attacks on the social security system were begun. And of course 'socialist' foreign policy turned out to be rapacious French imperialism with a less than human face in the South Pacific, Africa, etc.

The 'Union of the Left' played the same role for the French ruling class that the Callaghan/Healey government played in Britain between 1974-1979. It came in on a rising tide of working class struggle, demobilised it and proceeded to weaken the trade union and labour movement. It paved the way for the offensive

under Chirac.

The PCF played a crucial role in this, clinging to office until 1984. While 'communist' Fiterman remained Minister of Transport, for instance, barely a single strike disturbed the calm of his period of office, courtesy of the communist linked CGT union federation.

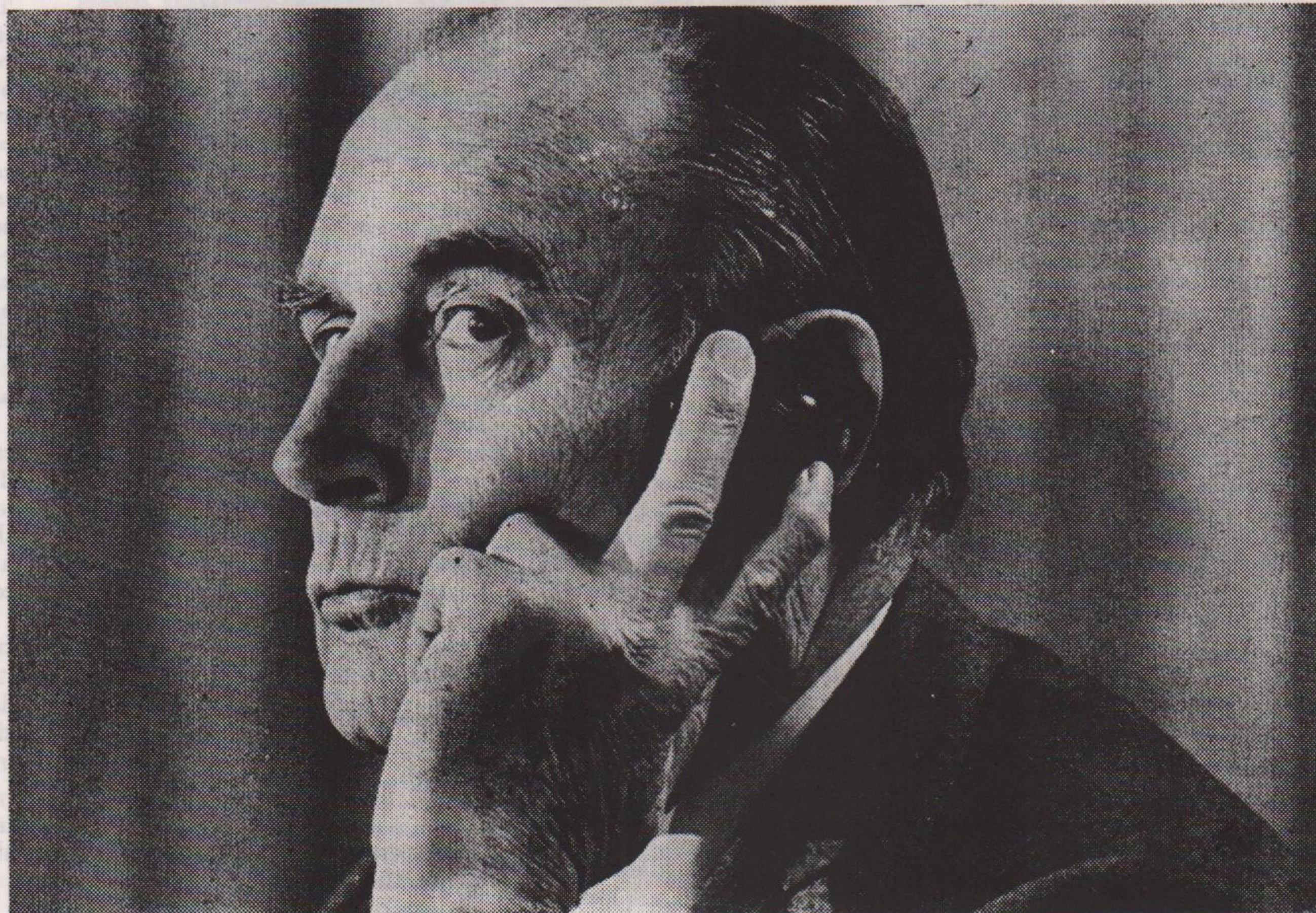
The Socialist Party and the PCF received their deserts in the 1986 Assembly elections where the RPR/UDF right wing coalition under Chirac was victorious. The PCF, despite its attempts to distance itself from its record in government and occasional attempts to put itself at the head of militant struggles, has gone into a serious electoral decline. Despite the role of the PS in government it had continued to build itself as the main bourgeois workers' party at the expense of the Communist Party. In March 1978 the PCF had 86 MPs. By March 1986 it had only 35.

The first round of the presidential election, 24 April, will show this change in the balance of forces only too clearly. The PCF candidate, the hapless André Lajoinie, will be lucky if he gets 8% of the vote (twenty years ago they were getting 25%). He says his 'ambition' is to reach the dizzy heights of the 9.8% the PCF got in the March 1986 parliamentary elections! Mitterrand will get between 35 and 40%. Wary of being caught in the fall-out of an electoral disaster, PCF General Secretary Georges Marchais made sure that he wouldn't be the candidate. Lajoinie is the fall guy.

The PCF's electoral decline first became apparent at the Euro-elections in June 1984. Its vote slumped to its lowest level for over fifty years. PCF voters, critical of their party's complicity in the government's attacks on the working class, abstained

The PCF, unable to justify its anti-working class actions in government, reasoned that attack was the best form of defence and simply tried to brazen it out. Their line since has been one of ignoring their three years in government and attacking the Socialists. Given that they have done virtually nothing to actually organise workers, the electoral haemorrhage has continued. Workers who voted PCF in the past increasingly see the PS as the only viable electoral force, hence the apparently unstoppable decline in the PCF's vote.

However it would be very wrong to write off the PCF. Although its electoral base has shrunk enormously, its working class base is still important (far more so than that of the PS). More importantly, the bulk of CGT members are members or supporters of the PCF. The CGT is the most militant of the union federations. The PCF retains its influence in the organised working class through the CGT—every sizeable strike shows this only too clearly. Although Mitterrand may have been able to reduce the PCF's influence in electoral terms, it will take more than the apparently irresistible rise of the PS



MITTERRAND AND THE WORKING CLASS

to break the PCF's hold over important section of workers at the point of production. It is for this reason that Pouvoir Ouvrier, the French section of the MRCI, will be calling for a vote for the PCF in the first round of the Presidential elections.

The ruling class offensive that Mitterrand has presided over since 1982, whether it was in the PS/CP form of 'socialist austerity' or the more open attacks of Chirac's RPR/UDF, has cost the French workers dear. Between 1981 and 1987 the number of workers in French industry decreased by 13%. Over the same period productivity increased by 19%! Between 1982 and 1986 profits increased by 83.5%—hardly surprising, given that there are fewer workers and they are working harder!

For the unemployed in France things are particularly difficult. There is no supplementary benefit scheme, so once unemployment benefit has finished (after about a year) unemployed workers get *nothing!* By July 1987, over 1.4 million unemployed were not receiving a penny from the state. They are dependent on their families and on charitable handouts. No wonder Thatcher refers to Mitterrand as 'my favourite socialist'!

These attacks are also reflected in decline in the combativity of the working class and the growth of the extreme right. The number of strikes in 1987 was only 15% of its 1981 level! Unionisation levels have continued to drop, with only around 13% of workers in a genuine union. Between 1983 and 1985 the CGT admitted to losing 250,000 members; the CFDT, loosely connected with the PS, lost 50,000 members in 1983 alone.

The growth of the neo-fascist Front National (FN) is another symptom of the weakness of the traditional parties of the left. In 1981, Le Pen couldn't even get enough

support to get on the Presidential ballot sheet. He now has over 30 MPs and will get over 10% of the vote, more than the Communist Party candidate. The growth of the FN has been fostered by the growth of state instituted racism.

During Mitterrand's term of office over 100 racist murders have taken place, over 50% of them by the police or the army. The culprits normally go free. The killers of Malik Oussekkine, the student murdered by the police in December 1986, have still not been bought to 'justice'. At the same time, 'security' has become a mania of right and left.

The PS government began a wave of expulsions of Basque militants, refugees from the Spanish police. Under Chirac, harassment of immigrants has increased as the police have been given the power to stop anybody in the street, without any reason, and demand their papers.

However the ruling class have not had it all their own way. A number of important strikes took place under the PS dominated government—Talbot-Poissey 1983, Longwy steel works 1984, the Renault strike of October 1985. But none managed to develop into a generalised offensive due to the influence of the trade unions linked to the PS and CP. Similarly Chirac's plans took a severe knock with the upsurge of struggle starting with the student strikes of December 1987.

These mass actions forced Chirac to abandon plans to 'rationalise' the education system. The following national railway strike which followed in December/January again showed that the working class was far from beaten. Despite the inability of this rank and file led strike to gain all its demands it did force Mitterrand to intervene to push Chirac into making concessions. This remains a problem for the French ruling class. Chirac, unlike

the other major candidate of the right, Raymond Barr, who leans towards traditional state interventionist methods of rule, is an out and out Thatcherite. His programme of massive denationalisations, legal attacks on the trade unions and increased unemployment has not as yet found unanimity amongst major sections of the French ruling class, because of its accompanying risks of provoking major class struggles. The memories of 1968 still haunt the French bourgeoisie!

'Cohabitation' with a 'socialist' president has proved a useful method of testing the water for the new policies of the radical right, and of shifting the political terrain in their direction. Mitterrand has already declared himself to be the candidate of 'social peace'. Mitterrand will be reluctant to risk dissolving the Assembly if he is victorious in case this leads to increasing the forces of the PS and CP in the Assembly to the point where a coalition with the right is difficult to construct. In the past few months feelers have been put out to various 'centrist' bourgeois deputies to see if they would support a new Socialist-led government, probably under the ex-'left' Michel Rocard. The price of their support would be ministerial positions in a coalition with the Socialist Party.

For the workers of France the key task is to obstruct these plans. To demand immediate new elections if Mitterrand is victorious and demand that the trade union and CP/PS leaders abandon their collaborationist policies and adopt a fighting programme against the employers' austerity offensive. Revolutionaries need to direct these demands at the rank and file of the CP and PS, and at the workers in and out of the trade unions, in order to build a movement that can break with class collaboration and take the offensive against the French capitalists. ■

➡➡➡ **Continued from page 7**
the bureaucracy. Resolutions must be got to national union conferences, lobbies of the executive meetings and the TUC must be organised. At the key national conferences (Cohse and Nupe) the demand that the leaders call for all out action must be made loud and clear. The steering committee must organise pro-strike delegates into a co-ordinated force that ensures the conferences do properly and democratically debate the issue.

But we must not only address the leadership with demands, important as that is. If the steering committee is to build itself into a real rank and file fighting force it must build itself in struggle. Activists must continue to build strike committees in every hospital and area. They must organise action over local issues (closures, cuts, privatisation, London weighting—the opportunities will

be forced upon us by our health authorities!). They must organise support for any section of health workers who take action and seek to spread that action. And, if the leaders do call days of protest they must be turned into days of strike action.

Health workers must use the next month to build for the recall stewards conference and make it a serious place for addressing all of the issues in the campaign for indefinite action. Stewards and activists from as many areas and hospitals as possible should be approached, urged to attend and to bring resolutions on the way forward. If there are large numbers of serious rank and file activists present then the negative do-nothing brigade from the Socialist Workers Party and the aspiring petty bureaucrats of the *Militant* will be relegated to their rightful place—a pessimistic minority within a militant forward-looking movement. ■

DOWN WITH PINOCHET'S PLEBISCITE

by Diego Mocar

THE CAMPAIGN for Pinochet's fraudulent plebiscite is now well underway. The dictator has thrown himself into the struggle to achieve a popular endorsement for a continuation of his draconian rule.

The plebiscite is a continuation of his internal war for the preservation of 'national security' and of his military-Bonapartist conception of the role of politics. The masses should occasionally be dragged into 'approving' of his rule.

In carrying through this policy he has always acted as the servile agent of North American big business and the White House—notwithstanding their formal complaints about the need for a return to democracy. The plebiscite will take place in the absence of the most elementary guarantees that would enable the masses to express their opinion without fear. Despite the registration of voters every day sees more and more signs of the masses' distrust in this gigantic fraud. The people know that the military will never accept as binding the verdict of this plebiscite.

The generals have shown beyond any doubt for fourteen years their contempt for the most basic democratic rights. Their aim is to make their power perpetual and there is no limit to the violence and savagery they will unleash to do so—no limit that is except the will and ability of the masses themselves to resist. For throughout the long night of the dictatorship repeated struggles against it have erupted.

The organised workers, the relatives of the 'disappeared', the students and the population of the shanty towns have all done battle with Pinochet's regime. For fourteen years not a day has passed when a young boy or girl has not been murdered by the police, the army or the death squads, not a day when a workers' home has not been smashed up and a worker militant or shanty town activist hauled off to the torture chambers of the secret police. For the working class family living on a wage of \$80 a month or for a pensioner receiving less than half that the 'boom' of the last years has meant only intensified exploitation. Consequently the popular masses have little belief that the plebiscite is anything other than a trap. They fear that like the referendum of 1980 it will prolong the dictatorship and confirm it in power. Their whole class instinct is to reject it outright.

Unfortunately this is not the attitude of the majority of the leaders of the opposition. They have not achieved the minimum conditions that they previously set for participating. Yet despite this they are caught up in a bizarre election fever. Richard Largos, President of the Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy—an *ad hoc* body set up for the plebiscite) explained the role of his party thus:

'This party has no ideological frontiers; it has only two positions. Opposition to the institutional basis of Pinochet's regime because it is not leading to democracy and also a de-

sire to defeat it by political means. We are made up of men of the right, the centre and the Chilean left participating as citizens with the sole purpose of gaining democracy.'

Citizen Largos is in reality a prominent member of the Chilean Socialist Party (Nunez) the right wing of the old party but which is now in negotiations with the Almedia wing to re-unify the party. Largos has frankly explained his methods for fighting Pinochet:

'We are going to beat him at his own game, by the very means he is obliged to use to keep himself in power.'

Jorge Tapia, another Socialist Party leader and former minister in Allende's government goes even further:

'We are going to conquer political power even within his [Pinochet's] own schema.'

Clearly these electoral cretins have fallen head over heels into Pinochet's carefully prepared trap, deluding themselves that they can win power within the framework of his institutions. It is obvious that even if the referendum was to return a massive No to Pinochet's request for another long term as President the Christian



Democrats, the Social Democrats and the two factions of the Socialist Party would see this not as a starting point for a mass mobilisation to oust Pinochet but as the start of negotiations with the military. The objective would be to find an alternative, more democratic, general to begin a slow process of normalisation. Ricardo Largos said this very clearly in a recent document:

'Some people think it is indispensable to negotiate away out with the armed forces. We know very well that every conflict ends in negotiation but at the same time every negotiation needs a force behind it and this force is represented by the majority of the Chilean people behind the Party for Democracy.'

The bourgeois opposition in collaboration with reformism has embarked on a new course of betrayal which involves a complete adaptation to the manoeuvres of the regime. Its programme is one of a wretched and limited 'advance to democracy' with the needs of the working class thrust unceremoniously into the rubbish bin.

The other wing of Chilean reformism—the Communist Party—has also adopted a policy of adaptation, but of adaptation to 'events'. This serves only to confuse and demoralise the working class and the urban poor amongst whom they have the deepest roots. Thus in July 1987 their public statement said stridently:

'No to the Plebiscite! Free and democratic elections now!'

But only three months later they were more circumspect:

'The question of voter registration was a secondary problem. In these circumstances the party should be able and was able to change its position.'

By February 1988 Julieta Campusano, a CP leader, had shifted the position even further towards that of the Socialists:

'If the plebiscite takes place in the middle of a decisive struggle against the regime on all fronts and at all levels it could transform itself into a favourable political conjunction for the people.'

In short the CP is trimming its demands in order to get closer to the Party for Democracy.

Luis Corvalan the General Secretary of the CP is still hawking his party for inclusion in a popular front. he argues for:

'The combined action, especially at the base and intermediate level of all those opposition forces of the centre and even the right that are in favour of social mobilisation and a democratic understanding without exclusion.'

What this Stalinist double talk means is not simply the non-exclusion of the parties of the bourgeoisie.

No, Corvalan is after bigger fish. He is for:

'... including those within the armed forces and the police who understand more clearly with every passing day that fascism is leading them over a precipice.'

In other words Corvalan envisages a popular front with those generals and officers who can be persuaded to dump Pinochet in the interests of preserving their own hides. All the CP's empty demagogy about the need for a 'popular rebellion of the masses' is no more than a disguise for another squalid popular front with the right and indeed with the army. Just as they pressed this cause in 1973 and it led to the coup so today it will lead not to the dictatorship's overthrow but to its preservation.

To defeat the government and the reformist parties' manoeuvres is the central task confronting the Chilean proletariat today. To defeat the fraudulent plebiscite is fully possible. The workers' movement has proved many times its capacity for re-organising and re-launching the struggle. The main obstacle is the treacherous policy of the leaders. There is no road to democratic freedom within the framework of the dictatorship's institutions. They must be smashed and the masses mobilised to do this. Our slogans should be *Boycott the Plebiscite Fraud! Down with Pinochet's Dictatorship! For a sovereign Constituent Assembly!*

The working class must give a clear answer to the dead end of an 'election' controlled by the dictatorship and with only one candidate! It must stymie the manoeuvres of the reformist leaders for negotiations. It must launch a direct mass action based struggle for political democracy and for a constituent assembly. By taking the lead in this struggle and drawing around it all the urban poor and the rural masses the working class can pose the necessity of a proletarian revolution.

The vanguard can show to the masses on the basis of their own experience the need for their own dictatorship. The working class can, in struggle for democratic liberties, re-organise itself as an independent force and must pose as a governmental solution the workers' and peasants' government. The programme of this government must meet the needs of the toilers of the countryside for an agrarian revolution aimed at the latifundia owners and agribusiness bosses. It must end imperialist exploitation by the multinationals and renounce the external debt. It must tackle the questions of low wages, unemployment, appalling health care and education and link all of them to the tasks of genuine national liberation and socialist revolution. ■

ERSHAD'S FAKE ELECTIONS

by Andy Bannister

BANGLADESH IS one of the poorest countries in the world. A recent World Bank report noted that economic growth had come to a virtual standstill. 80% of the 105 million population live below the subsistence poverty line, not able to afford food containing the necessary 1500 calories a day. Little wonder then, that from the end of last year the country has been riven with massive demonstrations, strikes and protests aimed at ousting General Hossain Ershad's regime.

These protests have been called and led by the two main opposition parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). The latest was a week long programme of demonstrations aimed at disrupting the planned general election of 3 March. The high point of the protests was an *hartal* (general strike) to make the elections unworkable, and reinforce the national boycott call. In this situation how long can Ershad remain at the head of the semi-dictatorship? The last round of uprisings forced him to dissolve parliament and call the elections.

Despite the liberal use of police and troops against the opposition, combined with massive ballot rigging, the 'victory' of his Jatiya Party—250 seats out of 300—has turned out to be a hollow one. The

call for a boycott meant that as little as 10% of the population voted. Ershad's parliament is even less credible than before.

Having 'won' the elections Ershad may try to bring about some sort of constitutional change to encourage the opposition back into the political system, or the army might try to do it for him. The latter looks more likely at the moment. The army distanced itself from Ershad somewhat during the elections by refusing to intervene unless led into action under its own, rather than government, figures. At the same time Ershad is desperately trying to maintain his 'policy' of giving plots of land and plum retirement jobs for those at the head of the armed forces.

Since the election Ershad has been trying to bolster his popularity by playing the Islamic fundamentalist card. Stealing the clothes of the opposition Jamaat-i-Islami (Party of Islamic Fundamentalists), he has declared his intention of abandoning Bangladesh's secular constitution and declaring Islam the state religion, despite the large minorities of Hindus and Buddhists in the country. If strictly applied this would have the added bonus of preventing the two leaders of the AL and BNP standing in elections as they are both women!

The tactics of the bourgeois opposition parties of courting army figures and turning on and off protest actions, have failed to shift Ershad's regime. Right from the foundation of Bangladesh in 1971 workers and peasants have shown a willingness to fight repression. With the main opposition parties increasingly in crisis, they must seize the opportunity to re-institute the *hartal* with the assistance of those small merchants and shopkeepers won to their side. This is the action that has already rocked Ershad.

The *hartal* must be spread throughout Bangladesh to force the calling of fresh elections, not to Ershad's puppet parliament, but to a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage, defended by and accountable to workers and peasants not the army. The mobilisations to do this could open the road to the construction of a workers' and peasants' government which would sweep away the corrupt armed forces and Ershad's regime and set about satisfying the masses' demands for land and freedom from hunger. To achieve this the masses must be broken from their illusions in the AL and other opposition parties and won to a genuine revolutionary, Trotskyist party. ■

The USA has been having problems in its 'backyard'. As it steps up its interventions in Central America *Stuart King* looks at the crisis in Panama and recent developments in Nicaragua

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT

HAVING DECIDED that General Noriega of Panama had to go, the US administration has quickly shown the power it can exert in this particular part of its 'backyard'. Masses of money immediately fled out of Panama's banks by computer transfer. All Panamanian funds in US banks were frozen—some \$800 million. The Federal Reserve stopped supplying the US dollar used by Panama as its currency.

Tightening the economic blockade still further the US refused to hand over the \$6.5 million a month due to the Panamanian government for use of the canal. All this was designed to make General Noriega leave the country and above all leave it in the hands of another, more trusted, US stooge.

What led the US State Department to fall out with their longtime Panamanian ally? Despite his newly found nationalist and anti-US rhetoric there is nothing radical about Noriega. He was working for the CIA as long ago as the 1950s, supplying information on suspected leftists at cadet school in Peru. As he moved up in the Panamanian Defence Forces (PDF) he became an ever more favoured and highly paid CIA man. Up until a few years ago he was on a 'stipend', from the CIA, equivalent to the US President's salary of \$200,000 a year! For this the US government received many favours.

Most importantly Noriega protected their position in the Panama Canal. The canal is still vital for US imperialism. 40% of US trade with Asia and the Pacific passes through the canal. US warships can move from the Atlantic into the Pacific Ocean within eight hours using this route. Despite the 1977 canal treaty which stipulated that the US should only have the right to 'defence forces' to protect the canal, the Noriega government turned a blind eye to the string of military bases containing upwards of 10,000 troops on the canal.

Here was the headquarters of the Southern Command which would if necessary direct forces against 'subversion' in Central and South America. Noriega also facilitated the operation of a sophisticated CIA electronic 'listening post' which is vital for its espionage and Contra backing



Noriega at an anti-US rally

activities in Central America.

Noriega had connections to every Contra backing operation carried out around Irangate and before. Colonel Oliver North arranged Contra training in Panama and Major General Richard Secord set up three dummy corporations in Panama to funnel money to the Contras. William Casey, CIA director, personally intervened to prevent charges of drug running being pursued against the General. Indeed there is a wealth of evidence that the CIA was happy to use this trade to bolster its finances to the Contras via Noriega's drug contacts.

From every one of these deals Noriega, along with the rest of the officer corps, took a rake off.

Noriega's personal fortune today is estimated to be somewhere in the region of \$800 million to \$1 billion!

But this cosy and mutually advantageous relationship was to end abruptly for a number of reasons. Noriega was too greedy. He was not averse to selling the odd shipment of arms to the FSLN (before they came to power) and even to the FMLN. According to the US State Department he even started selling high technology to the Russians! Worse, he allowed Aeroflot to run a regular service into Panama City.

Noriega was also becoming a political embarrassment, not only because of his massive drug running activities, but because of growing opposition at home. Last summer saw

massive demonstrations and strikes against his government. They came after a fellow officer revealed that Noriega was not only a major drug runner, but that he had personally ordered the murder of an ex-Minister of Health, Hugo Spadafora, who had campaigned against him because of it. Spadafora, a leading opposition figure, was brutally tortured, decapitated and dumped in a mail bag in Costa Rica in 1985.

The US government clearly decided that if they failed to clean up the military and introduce a democratic façade in Panama, there was a real possibility of a mass struggle against Noriega. However, when Noriega refused to go quietly, the USA was pushed into increasingly

sharp measures to ensure his removal. This led to the go ahead for his indictment on drugs charges and the series of events which led to the USA putting up President Delvalle to dismiss him. This move led the armed forces to dismiss Delvalle and put in a more pliable figure, Manuel Solis Palma, and one with a somewhat tarnished 'left' reputation.

Where should revolutionaries stand in this dispute? True to form the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) has fallen in behind Noriega! The fact that both the Cuban government and the Sandinistas have declared that this blood soaked dictator should stay is enough to have the USFI declaring Noriega to be a 'nationalist leader' and his government one that 'reflects the radicalisation that is taking place in Panama!' (*International Viewpoint* 21.3.88)

There is no doubt that the intervention of the US imperialists is designed not just to be rid of Noriega but to install another pro-Washington government. It is no accident that the major organisers of the general strikes against Noriega, the 'civic crusade', are business leaders. Unlike the mass mobilisations of summer 1987 the working class has stood back. It is rightly reluctant to throw its weight behind a US engineered ousting of the government. Although public sector workers have demonstrated against non-payment of wages and against the government, the cause of the economic crisis is clear to see, it is the US imperialists.

Panamanian workers must strike an independent course. They must use the current divisions within the ruling class, and with US imperialism, to strike a blow at both. They must mobilise against the US imperialists, to remove US troops from Panamanian soil, and take full control of the canal.

They must demand immediate political and military support from the rest of Latin America and launch a general strike to break the power of the generals for good. Only in this way can the Panamanian masses settle accounts both with the US imperialists and the 'General Noriega' past and future.

- Down with the Noriega regime!
- US hands off Panama!

REAGAN'S CONTRAS HUMBLLED

THE US intervention into the Honduras was a last ditch attempt to salvage the Contra strategy in Nicaragua. With little prospect of resumption of military aid the morale of the Contra leadership has reached an all time low. When a force of 600 Contras was located in Nicaragua it fled in disorder into Honduras. To the horror of both the Contras and the US administration a Sandinista force pursued them across the border and appeared within a whisker of over-running the Contras' main supply base in the area. If this had happened it would have destroyed the Contras' ability to continue to mount armed incursions into Nicaragua for a considerable period.

The sending of over 3,000 US troops in battle readiness to Honduras had three purposes. Firstly it was playing to the grandstand of the American 'public', to show that the Contras were in danger of being 'wiped out' due to the ob-

struction of military aid by the Democrats. It aimed to force the Democrats in Congress to release more aid or appear as the 'ones who lost Nicaragua' in election year. Secondly it was designed to put some backbone into the Honduran military who had no desire to pit their corrupt and incompetent armed forces against the Sandinistas. The White House, having made the decision to send in the troops, sent the US ambassador to see the Honduran President, Jose Azcona, to get him to request the troops because of the 'invasion'—this of course Azcona did, obligingly putting the previous day's date on the request! Despite the large US

troop presence the best that Reagan could get the Hondurans to do was to drop a few bombs on deserted hillsides and order their troops into action so that they would arrive after the Sandinistas had left Honduran territory! The third reason for the exercise was to resupply the Contras with lethal hardware. It has always been a method of circumventing Congress decisions by leaving masses of military hardware behind in the Contra areas after each US exercise in the Honduras.

None of this, however, altered the fundamental crisis of the Contra opposition. The Sandinista pull back under the US pressure merely under-

lined the ineffectiveness of the Contra forces. Within days the main Contra leaders had negotiated a preliminary ceasefire with the Sandinistas at a meeting in Sapoá. The reasons were simple. The majority of the bourgeois opposition led by La Prensa and Cardinal Obando y Bravo believe they have forced sufficient concessions out of the FSLN government to try and oust the Sandinistas 'democratically' or at least neutralise what they see as their most dangerous policies. This, combined with Reagan being a fading force in the White House, pushed the Contra leadership into a humiliating climbdown.

None of their major de-

mands—the separation of army from FSLN party, dismantling of the Sandinista Defence Committees, release of all Contra and National Guard prisoners and for immediate elections, have been met immediately, although they still remain tabled for discussion.

The Sandinistas on the other hand have made further concessions as well, including allowing the Contras to assemble in areas inside Nicaragua with their arms and to receive 'non-lethal' aid from the USA funnelled through third parties. They have also agreed in principle to release all the so-called 'political prisoners' if the peace process is finalised. The Sandinistas clearly hope

that these concessions, along with a series of 'liberalising' economic reforms introduced last month freeing many areas of the economy from state control, will lead to a resumption of economic aid from the USA and from the international agencies it dominates—the IMF, World Bank etc.

This policy of concession remains a risky one. The CIA and the Reaganites will continue their attempts to sabotage the peace plan. Already one of the Contra commanders closest to the CIA, ex-National Guard leader Enrique Bermudez, has denounced the agreement as a 'betrayal'.

The bourgeoisie will also want to keep the armed threat in existence until it has extracted maximum concessions from the FSLN government, concessions designed to strengthen the capitalists in Nicaragua and whittle away the gains made by workers and peasants in the 1979 revolution. ■

HEALTH AMERICAN STYLE

YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE

FROM ITS formation in 1948, the NHS has furnished the bosses of the drug and supply monopolies with huge profits. And in the words of Nye Bevan the opposition of the consultants to the NHS was stifled with 'pieces of gold'. Forty years on leading Tories have made plain their intention of introducing a US-style system where medicine and health care is turned almost wholly into a 'business' geared towards profit making. *G R McColl* details the nightmarish reality of American health care behind the glossy brochures of the private insurance companies and hospital corporations.

The USA shares with South Africa the dubious distinction among advanced capitalist countries of having neither a national health service nor a national programme of medical insurance. Instead medical care is dispersed through a complex private insurance system where the so-called free market has yielded lucrative profits for the capitalists with the help of state and federal tax revenues.

While the health care sector accounts for nearly 11.55 of the country's GDP (more than twice the comparable figure for Britain) and rapid technical innovation continues, most of the working class and increasingly large sections of the middle class cannot afford access to basic medical treatment. More than 35 million US citizens have no health insurance coverage at all and few of these could possibly pay premiums that average £60 per month for individuals and can exceed £420 per month for something like a comprehensive policy for the proverbial family of four. The result is either needless pain and suffering or crippling debts piled up by families paying for health care.

The vast majority of the US population finds itself financially naked in the face of 'catastrophic' illnesses. Few insurance companies offer more than a small fraction of the costs charged to treat victims of cancer, debilitating muscle and nerve diseases and serious industrial illnesses such as the black and brown lung conditions. If you are known to be a member of a high risk group for the AIDS virus, no insurance company will touch you at any premium. Indeed, major insurance corporations are spearheading a lobby for mandatory HIV testing.

The most recent statistics for infant mortality in the USA are a grim indictment of the system of privatised health care provision and expose the real impact of the Reagan cuts in social welfare expenditure. In 1985 more than 40,000 infants died before their first birthday, marking the first real increase in childhood mortality in twenty years. Not only is the rate of 11 deaths for

every 1,000 new-borns worse than Britain's but US standards are now worse than those of such semi-colonies as Singapore and Ireland.

The immediate cause of the underlying rise in infant mortality is the virtual absence of freely available pre-natal care which means that poor, and especially poor black, working class women cannot obtain advice and assistance until their pregnancies are well advanced. Although infant mortality in Britain also appears to be on the rise again, average life expectancy is marginally higher than in the USA despite per capita incomes in America being 35% higher.

Inequalities

For much of the post war period, the USA's bosses have fended off an open revolt by organised workers against the gross inequalities of the health care system by the widespread use of a privatised 'social contract'. Agreements negotiated between the largest industrial unions such as the United Auto Workers and the country's biggest corporations have long included substantial medical and dental care provisions. The coverage offered, especially to male workers, was extensive by US standards, and often allowed for choice of doctor and hospital. To a large extent, of course, it was simply a transfer of profits from the giant motor manufacturing corporations but it did shield about a third of the industrial working class from the threat of bankruptcy when faced with illness.

The past decade of 'give-back' contracts, with union bureaucrats making concessions to big capital, has meant an enormous erosion of many existing benefit packages. Combined with cuts and the restructuring of state sector programmes—such as Medicaid—the inadequacies of the health care system have become more and more apparent to workers in general.

The crisis in the health care system threatens to become a hot electoral issue in the populist hands of Jesse Jackson, but the US ruling class as a whole still finds medicine for profit sufficient to reproduce a working

class 'healthy enough' to meet capital's demands. More importantly, the health care sector has proved a site of very profitable accumulation, with more than a little help from federal government subsidies.

The Hill-Burton programme of funding for hospital construction (named after its congressional sponsors) lavished resources on suburban areas, with up to 60% of an annual \$1.45 billion federal expenditure on medicine going to private sector institutions as early as 1960. In the meantime municipal hospitals were increasingly left to decay, being used as a dumping ground for the urban poor.

At the height of the civil rights movement, and with urban uprisings on the boil in the black ghettos, the Johnson administration introduced Medicare and Medicaid bills which in theory assured access to medical care for the poorest of the poor.

In reality despite the initial opposition of the American Medical Association (AMA), the Medicaid programme soon proved a lucrative gravy train for corrupt physicians and surgeons who performed needless operations and submitted claims for patients never treated. Means tested from its inception, the administration of Medicaid at the level of individual states soon became another subsidy to corporations as governments contracted out to major insurance companies or to one time manufacturing giants desperate to diversify away from declining sectors.

Profit

At the start of the Reagan years more than 1,000 US hospitals were operating on a private and explicitly 'for profit' basis. Of these nearly 90% were part of 38 hospital chains. A mere six giants own more than half of all of these facilities and held management contracts for another 250 'non-profit' hospitals. These multinational outfits, such as the Hospital Corporation of America, American Medical International, National

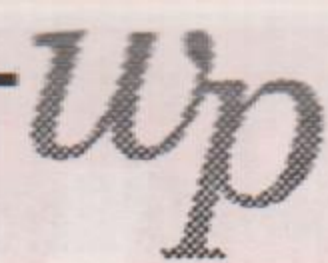
Medical Enterprises, and Humana Inc, have all developed significant interests in Britain, generally through acquisition of existing facilities concentrated in the south east of England. For the moment the big US based predators have beaten a temporary retreat from plans for further expansion in Britain in the face of competition from BUPA and until the fate of the NHS is resolved.

In the USA the average rate of return on investments in the hospital industry has soared from 10.3% in 1971 to 20.4% in the early 1980s. The extraordinary expansion of the private sector and concentration of hospital ownership has been accompanied by galloping inflation and, ironically, mounting state expenditure despite the closure of dozens of municipally owned medical centres since the early 1970s. The ever rising cost of health care has fuelled the rhetoric of 'cost containment'. This new found concern with efficient spending has been a cloak for public sector cuts over the past decade and a widespread attack on the pay and conditions of health workers, especially in the public sector.

The US medical industry has also emerged as a huge employer with more than seven million workers nationwide. Of these more than 70% work in hospitals or nursing homes. While barely 10% of all US health workers are currently organised in a trade union, there has been significant growth of union organisation in the past fifteen years, especially in the public sector but also against the might of the big hospital chains. The strongest union organisation has been established in the public sector hospitals of the North East and the cities of the once heavily industrialised cities of the Midwest.

In particular, the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees (Local 1199) has won a master contract agreement for 36 hospitals in the New York City area and was engaged in a three week strike in 1984 which resulted in a partial victory. Indeed, American health-workers including nurses have not hesitated to take industrial action to pursue improved pay and conditions, but union organisation has not scored any major gains against the 'for profit' chains concentrated in the South and California.

Obviously Thatcher and co, see much that is desirable in the nakedly profiteering US medical system. Already the Tories have granted major tax breaks to hospital corporations and have used tax incentives to encourage workers to abandon the NHS and take out private insurance. Despite its woeful inadequacies, the NHS remains a significant gain for the working class as a whole in Britain, a gain which becomes more apparent when measured against the profit driven US medical care system. More and more, therefore, the battle in and over the NHS is becoming one in which it is our health versus their profits. ■



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PUBLIC MEETINGS

COVENTRY

Ireland—the face of British Justice
The Elastic Inn, Pool Meadow
Tuesday 26 April 7.30

LEICESTER

Anarcho-syndicalism
Unemployed workers centre
Thursday 14 April 7.30

READING

Ireland—the Face of British justice
RISC, London Street
Friday 8 April 8.00

CENTRAL LONDON

Smash Clause 28
St Clements Building, LSE,
off The Aldwych, nr Holborn Tube
Wednesday 13 April 7.30pm

EAST LONDON

Smash Clause 28
Durning Hall, Earlham Grove, E7
Thursday 21 April 8.00pm

MARXIST DISCUSSION GROUPS

BIRMINGHAM

Nicaragua
Tuesday 14 April 7.30

CARDIFF

The British working class and the state of the unions
Tuesday 26 April 7.30pm

CHESTERFIELD

The Benn campaign and the class struggle
Wednesday 13 April 7.30

COVENTRY

Women's oppression and Marxism
Wednesday 20 April 7.30

NORTH LONDON

The NHS in crisis
Thursday 21 April 7.30pm

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CONFUSION AND THE CRASH

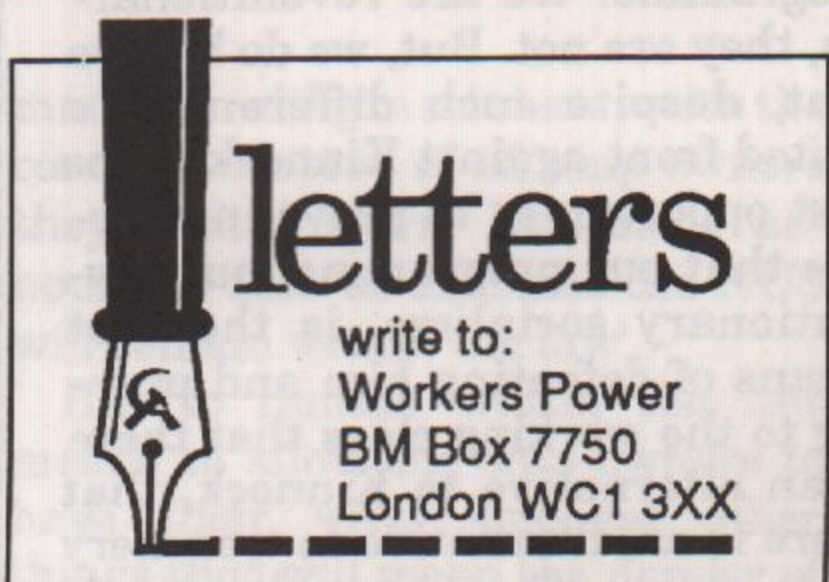
Dear Comrades,
Concerning the article entitled 'Catastrophism and the Crash' (WP 102), the first question I was left with was what was the intended point of the article? There seemed to be a rather reluctant mixture here between criticisms of the centrists understanding of the economic developments leading to the Crash, and a serious economic critique of the Crash.
The confusion continued as the

article criticised the rest of the left for their 'catastrophism' and pointed out that productivity in Britain is growing at an historically high 7%; but then a few paragraphs later went on to say that the world capitalist economy is not in good health without adequately explaining these two apparently contradictory statements.

It was disappointing that the vital points this article was trying to make were obscured by the general organisation of it.

Yours, J Edwards

☛ The article was not intended as a detailed explanation of our view of the Crash or the state of the British econ-



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omy. Apologies if it gave that impression. It was aimed at showing the false and mechanical way in which the centrists pose the connection between politics and economics. As for the apparent contradiction, the point we wished to make is that in the short term Britain's economy is likely to continue to enjoy the effects of the

'mini-boom'. But its integral connection with the world economy means that international factors will play a key role in determining the scope and tempo of the inevitable recession.

LAW '86 and the witch-hunt

Dear Comrades,
LAW '86 is calling on all supporters to step up the fight against the witch-hunt. The threat to Sharon Atkin, to Labour Briefing supporter Mandy Mudd and the suspension of Bradford North and Bermondsey Constituency Labour Parties all make it clear that no socialist in the party can feel 'safe' in

the future.

It is very important, therefore, that a united national campaign is built to defend every socialist threatened with expulsion. This can only be achieved if the whole left decides to make it a priority. Sharon Atkin, Mandy Mudd and many other socialists would not be in the firing line now if the left had built such a campaign. By taking up individual cases and building a national campaign the left can begin to turn the tide on this issue. We urge all labour movement bodies to support the fight to defend all socialists in the party and to affiliate or re-affiliate to LAW '86, c/o 1 Gorefield House, Canterbury Road, London NW6 5TA.

Linda Blane

Workers power

FOR A CLASS CAMPAIGN AGAINST KINNOCK

THE CAMPAIGN Group of MPs' long awaited decision to stand candidates for the leadership of the Labour Party is a welcome development. The campaign will be an opportunity for militants within the party to shatter the class peace that has been imposed from on high.

Kinnock and Hattersley are naturally less than delighted with this prospect. They are the architects of the say nothing and do less policy that they hope will endear them to the yuppie voters, the bosses and the judges.

They introduced the 'Labour Listens' campaign and the 'one member, one vote' principle to silence the voice of the left. They refused to side with striking health workers or to countenance an extra-parliamentary campaign against the poll tax. Particularly since the 1987 election defeat their every move has been aimed at increasing the distance between the Labour Party and workers organised in trade unions. They want to break that link while keeping the trade union funds flowing into Labour's coffers.

All this is in the hope of scratching together a few more votes in 1992, with no 'diversions' in the here and now. As Hattersley pointedly remarked in Skegness on 26 March:

'One distraction is this nonsense that we can beat Thatcher now instead of waiting for polling day.'

On the contrary, far from being nonsense, that spirit, that determination to take on Thatcher now and win is exactly what the working class needs.

It is that spirit that Benn and Heffer's campaign for leader and deputy leader must seek to kindle and to mobilise around if it is to serve a useful purpose for the working class. The question facing Benn and his supporters is whether they will seize this opportunity—or let it slip through their fingers.

The danger is that Benn and Heffer will not really direct their campaign against the 'personalities', i.e. Kinnock and Hattersley, who have masterminded the policies of the last year. They won't really fight the 'candidate', Kinnock, who refused to stand by the union that sponsored him when it was being hounded in the press for not backing the Dundee treachery. That is what is so alarming about Benn's proposal for a campaign that is 'much more about winning support for ideas, than seeking votes for candidates'.

That Benn wants to avoid an all out confrontation was made abundantly clear when he told the Guardian:

'I have a lot of things arranged, but I think it will be low key. I have no desire to hot it up.'

This approach would lead the campaign to be one fought simply at the level of ideas—Benn's left reformist Arguments for Socialism versus Kinnock's 'Aims and Objectives of Democratic Socialism'. And the dangers of this are all too clear in the light of Kinnock's veiled threat that 'election contests have

by Julian Scholefield and Chris Ramsey



Laurie Spatham/IFL

results, and results mean mandates'. This really means that if Kinnock and Hattersley win this election (and they will) Benn and the left had better shut up in the future.

This is exactly what happened last time round. Benn lost the deputy leadership to Healey by the narrowest of margins (0.85%) in 1981. He was then party to the 'truce' negotiated at Bishops Stortford in 1982. He was voluntarily and very effectively muzzled by this until after the election in 1983. The Bishops Stortford agreement marked the start of the retreat and decline of the left in the Labour Party.

We cannot afford a re-run of that campaign or that consequence this time round. An appeal 'not to fight on personalities' is a way of avoiding naming the traitors responsible for the present state of the party and the unions. A 'battle of ideologies' does nothing to give aid to workers struggling now against Thatcher and the bosses. 'Winning support for ideas' does nothing to stop the witch-hunts of socialists within the Labour Party nor of lesbians and gays inside and outside of it.

What is needed is a campaign that goes much further than being a restatement of Benn's ideas on prime ministerial patronage and parliamentary reform. It must blow open the debate in the labour movement about the programme the working class needs. It must start by articulating the demands of workers in struggle now.

Support for striking workers everywhere, whether in the NHS, in the NUS or TVam, opposition to all witch-hunts, non-compliance with Clause 28, for the recognition of black sections, opposition to all cuts in education, the NHS and local government, non-compliance with the poll tax, and so on.

But this is only a start. Benn and Heffer cannot content themselves with just 'supporting' all these struggles. The campaign must be taken into the unions themselves to stop Kinnock and Hattersley

finally severing the party's ties with them. This must be a fight against the trade union leaders who have, in general, proved willing accomplices of Kinnock. Benn and Heffer must actively intervene to give heart and support to that struggle.

For revolutionaries breaking the unions from the Labour Party is necessary for the building of a new, genuinely working class, revolutionary party. But such a strategic victory in the unions against reformism will be set back, not aided, by a victory of the right-wing's plans. That is why we say, against the plan to destroy the influence of the unions, democratise that influence, democratise the block votes of the unions so that they can represent the militant voice of the rank and file inside the Labour Party.

Benn and Heffer are officially candidates of the Campaign Group of MPs. But many of these and a host of other forces on the 'left' have distanced themselves from even this challenge to Kinnock. Now is the time to draw the lines between those who will fight and those who won't. It is the time to take the class struggle into the Labour Party.

Of course, in this contest our support for Benn and Heffer is critical. We do not support their programme. We are revolutionaries, they are not. But, we do believe that, despite such differences, a united front against Kinnock is the best opportunity to prove in practice that our programme, our revolutionary socialism, is the best means of defeating him and proving to the working class that there is an alternative to Kinnock, that there is an alternative to treachery and retreat. To that end we will fight for the setting up of a campaign, based in every union and area, to defeat the Kinnock leadership and deliver votes for the Benn/Heffer candidacy.

- Vote Benn and Heffer!
- Bring the class war into the Labour Party!

Smash the Clause

National day of action 8 April

Smash Clause 28 Demonstration

- Saturday April 30th
- Assemble London, Embankment Tube 12.00pm
- Rally and Festival, Kennington Park 3.00pm

No compliance conference

May 1st – details to be confirmed

AS A GAY teacher in Bradford is sacked for simply admitting he's gay, (and only reinstated after the threat of strike action by the NUT branch) the Stop the Clause Campaign finally takes a position on non-compliance. Chris Brind and Ian Hassell look at the current Tory offensive and argue for the need to build the links between the struggle against the Clause and the general struggle against the Tories.

Class action can smash Clause 28

ON 25 April Haringey Council is to debate a Tory motion welcoming Clause 28 of the new Local Government Bill and calling for the immediate closure of the Lesbian and Gay Unit.

In a situation where the new leadership of the Labour group has given up any pretence of defending jobs and services it is unlikely that they could, even if they wanted to, mobilise the trade unions and community to oppose Clause 28 and defy the Government.

In recent months Labour council after Labour council have slung out their dented shields and hoisted the white flag. Massive cuts in jobs and services, even in Lambeth where Labour leader Linda Bellos is committed to complete opposition to Clause 28, and the already imposed cuts (with more on the way) mean that the equal opportunities programme has in reality been smashed and any possibility of meaningful progressive policies towards lesbians and gay men has already been removed before Clause 28 is law.

In these circumstances the strategy that has been adopted by Haringey and others, to 'fight' Clause 28 is one of capitulation. It is based on an attempt to win a narrow definition of 'promotion' through court action. This is to concede defeat before the fight has begun. To rely on Tory judges to rule favourably is utopian. We know from case after case of lesbian mothers having their children taken from them that the courts are not on our side and that any definition these 'moral guardians' arrive at will be hostile to us. Even if a definition was arrived at that did not completely negate any possibility of progressive policies then time after time any new initiative will be subjected to yet more legal action. We need to build the campaign against the Clause in the unions and working class communities not in the courts.

It is an urgent necessity to begin to lay the basis for a massive campaign of defiance of Clause 28 by the front line unions in local government and education. The 'No Compliance' conference being called by Trades Unionists Against Clause 28 for public sector workers on 30 April (after the demonstration) must be built for as widely as possible. It must become the launching pad for winning as many unions as possible, nationally and locally, to a definite commitment to no compliance and defence of any individuals victimised as a result of operating this policy, up to and including strike action.

The main obstacle to overcome is the isolation of the lesbian and gay communities from the organised labour movement. We must see Clause 28 as part of a class wide offensive by the Tories. This is not the view of many in the leadership of 'Stop The Clause'.

This leadership is dominated by feminist-separatists who write off the working class as anti-gay, liberals

who run a mile at the very mention of working class action and reformists who believe that one day a Labour government will repeal the Clause. It is a leadership that the likes of the International Socialist Group and Socialist Action steadfastly refuse to challenge on a class basis.

The result is that the marvelous militancy displayed by thousands of lesbians and gay men on demos in London and Manchester is being squandered. Under the existing leadership the campaign is being directed into lobbies of their Lordships, publicity stunts and the enlisting of support from the 'respectable' Arts lobby. Only such a campaign—one that does not involve a fight for working class action—is acceptable to the middle class and even liberal bourgeois elements in the Clause campaign. In other words to preserve a cross-class alliance effective action is ruled out! This is the real meaning the popular front campaign against the Clause.

Against this we are arguing for a working class based campaign and seek to win the best elements in the 'Stop the Clause' campaign to this perspective. This means making the links with other struggles.

The Alton Bill and Clause 28 come at a time when the Tories are slashing social and health care provision, through systematically starving the NHS of funds, the introduction of the Social Security Act and by ratecapping local authorities. All these attacks mean that the family, and particularly women, will have an increased burden to cope with as the young, the sick and elderly and the unemployed turn to it for support. The Tories' campaign to reinforce 'traditional' family values and its offensive against any manifestation that threatens the concept of 'normality', is integral to this strategy. It is precisely because we understand the nature of these attacks that we understand the futility of appealing to liberals and Lords to defeat the Clause.

We also understand that it is only workers in the trade unions that have the organised power to smash the Clause and all the other attacks that the Tories are currently reigning down on workers. The dispute in the NHS, the struggles of car workers and seafarers, present militants with a ready made opportunity to make the links with these workers on the issue of Clause 28. Gay workers in particular have much to lose from the dismantling of the NHS as the number of AIDS patients grows but not the resources to match. At the same time we should raise the issue of the Clause and win those workers to defending lesbians and gays who are victimised as a result of it.

It is only through this method, of building bridges in struggle, of making the common links, that we can win other workers to help us smash the Clause and as a class, go forward and smash the ruling class' offensive.■