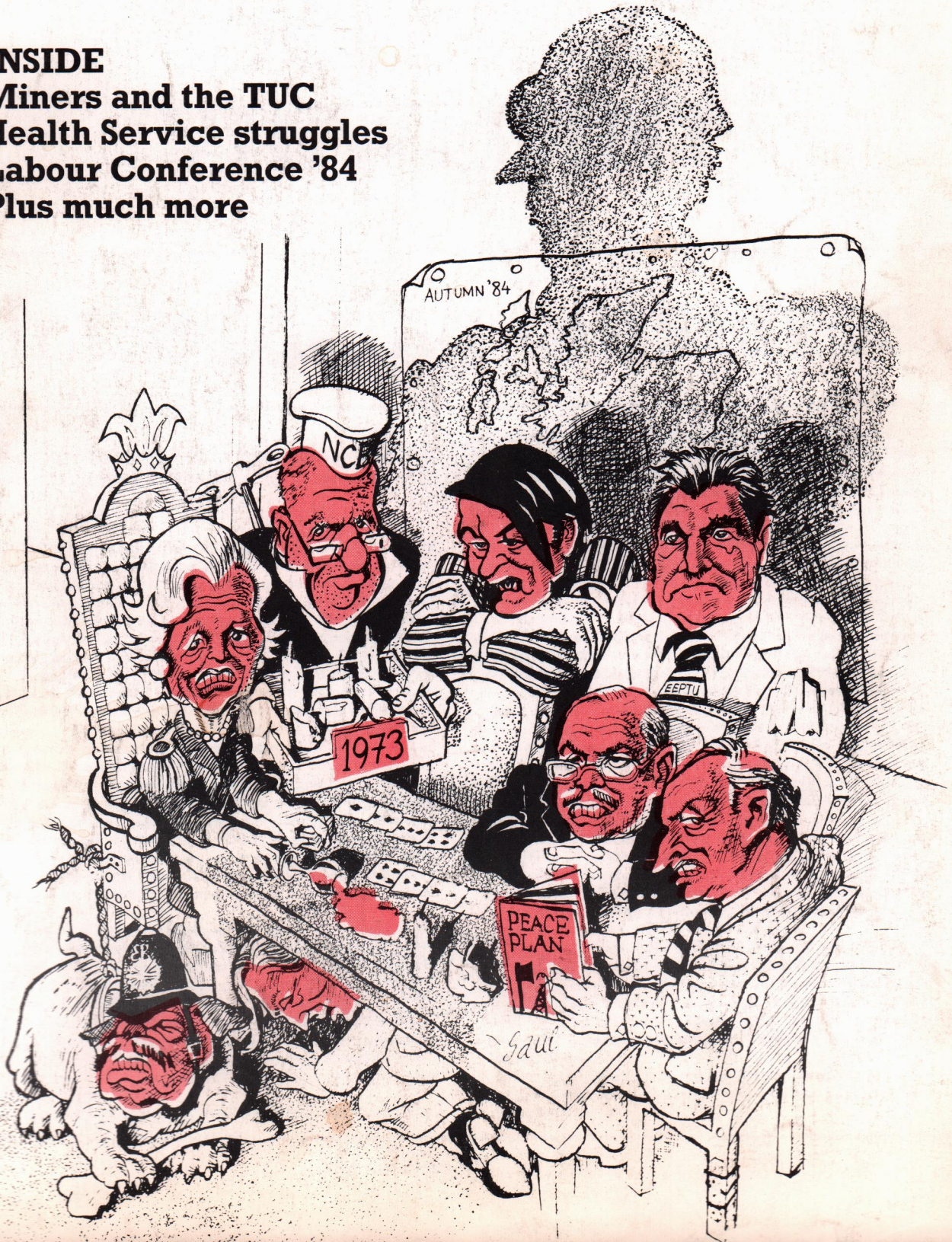


SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

Number 1, Autumn 1984. 70p.

INSIDE
Miners and the TUC
Health Service struggles
Labour Conference '84
Plus much more



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SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

Introducing ourselves

Editor HARRY SLOAN explains the reasons for launching a new left wing magazine.

OUR PRIDE and satisfaction in presenting this, our first issue of *Socialist Viewpoint* is tempered by our knowledge that we are offering a new addition to what many workers already find a baffling array of left wing publications in Britain. It is not enough to offer what we believe to be informative, interesting and useful articles: we must also explain our decision to enter the fray and set up in competition with existing journals and papers.

Firstly, we should say clearly that our decision was not entirely voluntary. Most of those who support, write for and sell this first issue of *Socialist Viewpoint* were until recently supporters and sellers of the paper *Socialist Organiser*. We disagreed with its policy and perspective on certain issues, but felt that these could be argued through in comradely fashion within a single broad organisation. Unfortunately, when we began to argue our positions and use our right to put forward a line opposed to that of *Socialist Organiser*, we found that the much-vaunted openness of its columns as a forum for discussion was swiftly abandoned. "Discussions" swiftly degenerated into insults and abuse; and eventually organisational steps were taken to drive out several dozen SO supporters who held independent views — to the extent of excluding them from the SO Summer School.

This intolerance of legitimate opposition on the part of the *Socialist Organiser* leadership has been matched by a political degeneration visible in the content of the paper itself, particularly since the June 1983 General Election. Since then, SO has failed to put forward any detailed analysis of the new situation, or develop any strategic orientation towards the current stage of the struggle in the Labour Party. From its previous strong point as a political and organisational focal point of the most determined fighters in the Labour Party, SO has become merely a camp follower, occasionally reprinting speeches of left wing Labour MPs.

This turn away from giving leadership to the Labour left has been

matched by a dwindling analysis and a failure to offer direction or policy for industrial disputes. Even the current campaign of energetic fund-raising and support for the striking Notts miners is not linked in SO to any development of a deeper analysis of the stages of the struggle, the manoeuvres of the TUC, or the tasks of the period ahead.

Retreating from concrete analysis and leadership at home, *Socialist Organiser* has also largely withdrawn from active international solidarity work, and from any serious analysis of the class struggle on a world scale. It has become a paper which we could not in all honesty urge workers to buy, or hope, in the absence of any democratic procedures or Editorial Board, to put back on the right lines.

The topics raised in this criticism of *Socialist Organiser* are pointers to the priorities we see for *Socialist Viewpoint* and for any workers' publication aimed at building a Marxist leadership in Britain.

Socialist Organiser has gone to the dogs — but our decision to launch *Socialist Viewpoint* comes not just for negative reasons. We are confident that as comrades with our own political history, our own combination of traditions and strengths, with long-standing roots in a range of unions and experience of leading and intervening in disputes, with an active involvement in struggles for women's rights and other organisations of the oppressed, we have something useful to say to today's workers' movement.

We believe that the political programme and method which we are fighting to develop, and our consistent fight against sectarianism and bureaucratism at every level of the workers' movement are tools that can help build a healthy left wing current in Britain and regroup Trotskyists on a world scale around a principled programme. *Socialist Viewpoint* is the shop window for our politics.

We intend future issues of *Socialist Viewpoint*, like this one, to carry a mixture of news, analysis and international coverage, historical and theoretical material. This issue also carries as a special feature documents from the newly-formed Socialist Group, explaining the recent split in the Workers Socialist League. *Socialist Viewpoint* is open to debate and discussion; we welcome readers' letters and written contributions.

We hope that discussion and the positions we put forward will persuade many of our readers that they should become supporters in the coming months.

TUC 1984: A missed opportunity for the miners

By ALAN THORNETT

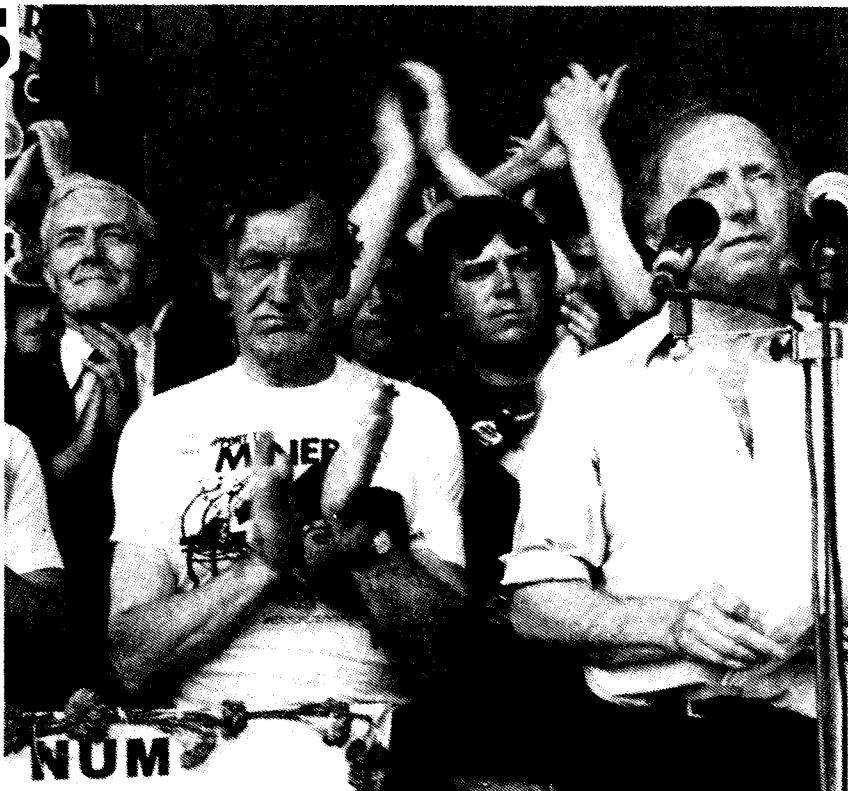
EVENTS since the TUC Congress suggest that miners would be unwise to expect anything tangible to arise from the formal decisions to halt the movement of coal and oil across NUM picket lines, and to refuse to use any which had been carried across picket lines.

The last few days as we go to press have seen the breakdown of a week of NUM/NCB negotiations, followed by the decision of the unions in electricity supply to take no action in support of the miners, but merely to meet NUM leaders "without commitment". The bitter attack on the NUM case delivered by John Lyons of the power engineers, who has been acting as spokesperson for the power unions gives no reason for confidence that this meeting will bring the needed supporting action.

This situation is consistent with the results of the Brighton Congress, where Len Murray's "new realism" — born out of the betrayal of the NGA last December and which resulted in the out-lawing of trade union membership at GCHQ — reemerged after being rendered irrelevant for six months by the miners' strike and the correct policy of the NUM leadership in keeping away from the General Council.

This dangerous development was helped by the mistaken decision of the NUM leaders not to put a resolution for serious action on the Congress agenda, but to restrict themselves to calling for verbal "total" support for the strike and the honouring of NUM picket lines. It must have been clear to them that, given the attitude of the key unions involved, this could never have more than a marginal effect. Yet they knew that the TUC conference is substantially different the General Council and, with the tremendous authority that the strike has generated in the labour movement, it would be very difficult to defeat their resolutions there.

The eve-of-conference compromise, even on this very limited objective, came out of this approach.



Scargill: mistaken decision not to use authority of strike to demand real action.

The TUC leaders were prepared to accept the picket line resolution, providing there was an escape clause built into it. If not they would fight against it and the result would be a serious division within the conference, whichever way the vote went. The NUM leadership decided not to split the conference over such limited objectives.

The escape clause they accepted — "The NUM acknowledges that the practical implementation of these points will need detailed discussions with the General Council and agreement with the unions concerned" — was a serious mistake. It not only gives the General Council a lever for involvement but it was bound to be interpreted to mean that unions inside the establishment will have to agree before the TUC endorses the picket line.

On top of this they agreed, as part of the deal, to request other unions with resolutions calling for various kinds of support for the miners to *withdraw* them in favour of the compromise. This involved the resolution on the day of

action and the 10p levy. Instead they agreed to be pushed into a fresh round of fruitless talks with the NCB, which the TUC leaders desperately hoped would lead to a negotiated settlement.

The compromise resulted in a unity display on the first day of the conference, which, whilst giving a useful propaganda boost to the strike by endorsing the NUM case and calling for general support, contained nothing which could materially strengthen the strike or provide any kind of strategic way forward for it.

The *'Daily Telegraph'* last Saturday, in an editorial which was clearly speaking for a section of the employers, argued that a negotiated settlement is not what is required. The necessity now, they argued, is that the NUM be decisively defeated along with those unions who are supporting them; and more important that they are *seen* to be decisively defeated. The model, they said, was the way that Eddie Shah successively used the law against the NGA.



The strike goes forward — relying on tenacity and solidarity of rank and file miners.

In other words the question for them is a change in the relationship of forces between the trade union movement has been seriously weakened, but unions like the NUM still have a strength which is unacceptable to the Tories. At the end of the negotiations last week Ian MacGregor said he was now ready to face up to a long strike!

This points to the new conditions which the strike will now face, under conditions where generalised support from the TUC will be very difficult indeed to get. Having achieved the 'compromise', the General Council will try to stick to it through thick and thin.

Not that these problems spell the end of the strike; far from it. The strike is strong and goes forward under the new conditions. That is ensured by the remarkable tenacity and solidarity of the rank and file striking miners. Tenacity and solidarity, however, are not enough on their own. What is also needed is an adequate strategy to win the strike, which essentially means breaking the isolation which the miners face in terms of being the only section of the movement out on protracted strike action after six months.

The most effective way to break the isolation remains — as it has been from the outset — for other unions to adopt the same policy as the NUM; put in their claims, defend the jobs of their members, dig in their heels, no compromise, and fight alongside the miners.

Unfortunately even those union leaders who have been supporting the miners have been conspicuously reluctant to do this. The rail unions are the most important example. They have

been cynically using the miners' strike as a negotiating ploy, in order to avoid taking action over the defence of jobs in the rail industry. Twice they have set dates well into the future as a negotiating ploy. Now the London day of action has been put back for a month. Yet if the action had begun on rail it would have changed the situation significantly for the miners, stiffened the dock strike and escalated the situation, creating the best conditions to defend rail jobs.

The other example is the dock strike. It was remarkably strong given the conditions under which it developed and the role of the media. But the settlement was a shabby sell-out on the basis of quotas of coal into Ravenscraig (enough to maintain full production) which is not what the strike was about. BSC has specifically given no assurance over future use of scab labour.

The NUM and militants and activists in other unions cannot settle for this situation. If the miners have to fight for a further extended period alone there is little doubt that they can and will do that; but it is not the best way to ensure the victory of the strike.

This is not to say that the TUC compromise came out of any back-sliding on the part of the NUM leaders to continue with the strike and fight for victory. Quite the contrary. They are still making no concessions to the NCB. They still firmly reject the "viability" argument — something unique in the national leadership of a British trade union; and they still defend the miners on the picket line against all the attacks of the government and the media, was a political and tactical mistake which



has left the strike still isolated from any real support from the rest of the trade union movement.

It did, however, hand the initiative pretty decisively to the right wing. The debate on the anti-union laws on the second day of the conference reflected it completely. They actually managed to debate what *should* be done (or not done) in the event of a union falling victim to the laws and at the same time to say nothing about what they were going to do about the NUM which has already had the whole of the funds of one of its areas sequestered under the laws. At the end of it the right-wing got what they wanted, with the conference restating the principle that support for a union which fell victim to the law would not be automatic. In other words it would be subject to the same 'discretion' that Len Murray and the General Council used to sell out the NGA last December. It was effectively a vindication of the role of the General Council in the NGA dispute, since it created the conditions for them to do it again.

After that it was very much business as usual at the TUC conference. They had no problem in reestablishing links with the Tories — through the NEDC — at the precise time when the Tories were strengthening their resolve to impose a major and definitive defeat on the miners. At the same time Neil Kinnock backed up the Murray line with a speech which opposed the removal of

governments by strike action, and contained a swinging attack on NUM pickets.

What was required at the TUC conference was *not* 'unity'. We have had far too much unity at the level of the TUC for the last six years. It has been unity on the terms of the right wing, and it has destroyed virtually every industrial challenge to the Tories since they came to power over five years ago. It has been a major factor in weakening the trade union movement at shop floor level, which now makes an adequate response to the present situation more difficult.

What was needed was a sharp clash over the principled issue of support for the miners. The NUM should have demanded of the TUC *what was required* in order to ensure a victory in the strike; and what was *required* was a general strike in support of the miners and against the use of the anti-union laws. If the NUM had been prepared to ask for that instead of limiting their demands to what they felt they could get it would have split the conference on principled lines.

It would have resulted in either a left majority for a militant resolution, or established a minority who were prepared to support the miners, and the real position would have been made very clear to the miners themselves. It is that kind of situation which is necessary if there is to be any serious challenge to the right-wing and real support for the miners established. It can't be done by fudging the issue or by looking for a false unity.

So how will all this affect the future course of the strike?

The situation facing the miners is going to improve with the end of the summer period and the onset of cold weather. The strike will begin to have more effect and new pressure will be put on the Commonwealth. But increased pressure will come on the miners as well. As the emphasis turns to the power stations and the requirement to move coal from the pitheads, the police and the state will be even more determined to get the scab coal through.

Under these conditions there is no doubt the success of the High Court in South Wales will lead to some injunctions, both against the NUM and the TGWU. If this is the case demands must again be put on the TUC to take action. They have, after all, endorsed the NUM case; and if the NUM comes into conflict with the law whilst pursuing that, the case for TUC support would be very strong indeed.

Monday September 17th, 1984



The national demonstration of miners' wives.

Miners' wives hold Midlands conference

By Julie Redman

AT KERESLEY, a pit village near Coventry, miners' wives have been organised since the beginning of the strike. They run 3 kitchens, make up food parcels, go picketing, fund-raising, and speak at meetings.

Liz Sugrave for example most often chairs the Coventry Miners' Support Group; Mrs Hood makes sandwiches for the pickets as well as collecting food for food parcels. Both are regularly to be found on picket lines, as are many other women.

The women hold their own meetings each week as well as sending delegates to the men's strike committee.

On September 1 a coach-load of women and children from Keresley and women delegates from the Miners Support Group attended a conference in Wolverhampton convened by "Midland Women Against Pit Closures". Delegations came from all over the Midlands — both miners' wives and women from support groups.

The day's discussion was divided into group and plenary sessions and was stimulating and useful.

In my group the wives were asked if the strike had changed their lives at all. One delegate from Staffordshire said that she had been against the strike for the first month, and had argued all the time with her husband. She had thought that if Thatcher

wanted to close pits then she would close them anyway. But after a month she decided to go and find out about the strike for herself, and that had changed everything.

Another wife said "Do you know, we haven't had a good row since the strike started, and I love a good row."

Two wives from another pit in Staffordshire were working. They said that their husbands had much more respect for them now. They thought maybe it helped that they were the breadwinners.

In the final plenary, the miners' wives came forward with a list of demands they wanted conference to carry out. A Midlands Women's Coordinating Committee was elected, with a majority of miners' wives.

This will prepare fact sheets — for example Rights on Arrest; Finance (How to freeze a mortgage, etc) — circulate ideas for fundraising, encourage the involvement of more miners' wives and organise a mass picket of women.

Conference also requested a page in *The Miner*, and called for a national conference of miners' wives groups with representatives from every pit.

It was also decided to maintain the organisation after the strike ends, in order to support other workers in struggle.

I feel sure the other 70 or so women who attended the conference came away, as I did, feeling stronger than before and with the satisfaction of a day well spent.



N. FOWLER, Secretary of State for Health, has ordered the first manpower cuts in the NHS since its foundation.

M. THATCHER, PM, assured the voters during the Election that the NHS was... Safe in our hands.

N. LAWSON, Chancellor of the Exchequer is forcing through a massive squeeze on NHS finances — £140 million lopped off hospital budgets within a month of the Election.

Wanted: A Scargill to lead health service struggles!

ARTHUR Scargill's refusal to compromise on pit closures offers a few basic lessons for other public sector unions, not least NUPE's Rodney Bickerstaffe and COHSE leader David Williams.

For while they publicly praise the miners' battle, they have steadfastly refused to give any real leadership to health workers, who face major attacks on their jobs and conditions, and who should be out fighting alongside the NUM against the government.

Already weakened and ravaged by five years of Tory cuts, health workers are now facing the devastating reality of privatisation in the ancillary services — designed to wreck the union structures, run down the public sector and open up the NHS to profiteers while eroding the welfare state.

At the time of Norman Fowler's deadline for District Health Authorities to submit timetables for putting hospital laundry, catering and cleaning services out to competitive tender, only seven DHAs in the whole of England had failed to comply. Three DHAs which had previously rejected the government instruction — Islington, Haringey and Hampstead — collapsed

By JANE GOSS

in the few weeks prior to the September deadline. Others seem certain to follow suit.

The result is that tens of thousands of ancillary jobs and the wages of hundreds of thousands of mainly women, mostly black ancillary workers are under threat right across the country, as private contractors prepare to move in offering 19th century wages and 17th century conditions, and hospital managements draw up their own "competitive" in-house tenders at the expense of ancillary staff.

Despite the pay defeat of 1979 and the sellout of 1982, health workers are prepared to fight back. During the summer months London alone has had four major battles at the same time. Barking and Hammersmith Hospitals have been the scene of long-running strikes against privatisation, while two hospitals, St Leonards in Hackney and South London Hospital for Women, were occupied to halt their closure.

In Bradford, Thornton View Hospital was celebrating its first anniversary

in occupation, while two hospitals in Hillingdon remained open because in October 1983 they had been occupied by their staff.

But still at the NUPE and COHSE conference this year resolutions calling for action were slammed by the leadership as "unrealistic" because "the membership won't fight".

The lack of enthusiasm from the leadership for any real fight in defence of the NHS can best be seen in their approach to privatisation. COHSE nationally has already virtually given up: its official policy is to encourage union members to submit in-house ten-

SAY NO TO NHS PRIVATISATION!

Conference October 7 10-4pm, COUNTY HALL

Details from London Health Emergency, 01-833-3020 335 Grays Inn Rd, WC1;

Patients, not profits!

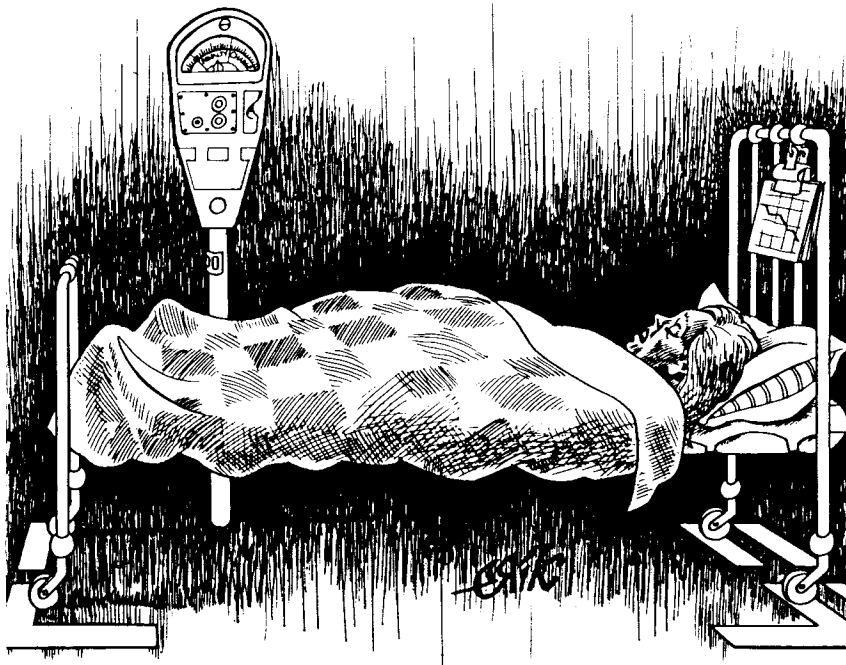
ders — thus effectively doing away voluntarily with jobs and making management's task much simpler. COHSE has spent money on elaborate and largely useless legal advice on the precise status of government instructions to DHAs, and substituted a few glossy posters and stickers for any strong coherent campaign for action to beat back privatisation.

NUPE, as usual, appears on the surface to have a more militant approach; but once the surface is scratched, it is not much more promising than COHSE's position. NUPE is publicly opposed to in-house tendering, but again they give no clear strategic plan to the members on how to fight. Almost everything produced by the unions about privatisation is restricted to explaining what it means and how bad it is: it says nothing about how to oppose it effectively.

The only way to win is through industrial action. Most rank and file workers now recognise this; but neither COHSE nor NUPE leaders are keen to urge their members out on strike.

The incredible strength of the Barking women (on strike since March) and, following their example, the Hammersmith strikers (out in June), puts the union bureaucrats to shame. NUPE's lack of commitment to fight for supporting strike action to back up the Barking strike — despite an overwhelming mandate to do just that from this year's NUPE Conference — is a major scandal; and it will in turn make it more difficult to persuade other health workers to strike against privatisation if it means 7 months isolated on the picket line.

NUPE's feeble excuse is that until more NUPE support is seen in the Redbridge Health District itself, then members in other parts of the country won't



take supporting action. Yet the London Day of Action — mobilised for, mostly by the rank and file — produced as many members on strike as at any time during the 1982 pay dispute: not something that NUPE has publicised.

The officials are more anxious to negotiate a settlement than they are to work for industrial backing to ensure the women win. The position in Hammersmith is much the same. Massive support has been expressed for both struggles up and down the country by health workers who recognise that they are not isolated disputes but the first battles of the war against privatisation. And there can be no negotiated solution to privatisation.

Meanwhile the tactic of occupying hospitals to prevent closure is being increasingly used and discussed. Union officials have always been very hostile to occupations because *they* lose control just as management do. Thornton View is mentioned continuously by Bickerstaffe and Williams — most recently at the TUC — yet it is despite their inaction that the occupation has continued for so long.

However the most cynical betrayal of health workers has been over the occupation at St Leonards Hospital this summer. NUPE, when faced within 2 days of the occupation with legal injunctions, because of the cowardice of the local official, withdrew official support from the occupation on only day 4 — leaving 200 NUPE members stranded. COHSE, never quick off the mark, was spared this embarrassment by simply refusing to back it from the beginning!

Management, quick to respond, seized upon the fears of workers whose union was refusing to back their fight, and began to intimidate and threaten staff. While NUPE bickered internally

about whether or not to fight a blanket injunction denying the whole union the right to picket St Leonards, management struck again, raided the hospital to oust the occupier, and suspended two major union figures in Hackney. The two were charged with "gross misconduct" for "Defying a DHA decision" — (to close the hospital!) and one has already been summarily dismissed.

This — with other harassment of militants in other Districts — marks the start of a 1979-style campaign to victimise NHS activists who lead strikes and occupations.

The Tories, throwing most of their energies into fighting the miners, could be beaten. Their monetarist policies dictate that they must privatise and continue to cut back NHS facilities — just as they must close pits.

This is the very time when unions should be urging health workers to strike, occupy and fight back. Solidarity with the miners is more than just empty rhetoric and donations from central funds: it means making common cause with them against a common enemy. Pit closures hospital closures and privatisation are the issues which link up the two groups of workers.

The next 6 months will be crucial to the future of unions in the NHS. If Fowler and his handpicked lackeys on the DHAs get away with their victimisations and privatisation schemes, and if the union leaders continue to straddle the fence and refuse to extend struggles where they develop the outlook will be bleak.

We should take a leaf out of the NUM's book. They do not negotiate on pit closures: we should not negotiate on privatisation or hospital closures, or participate in management's job-cutting tenders.

Out now!



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A manual for
fighting hospital closures

At last! The manual health campaigners have always wanted! The A-Z of how to occupy a hospital against closure, drafted by experts and veterans, with a view to encourage others 50p including postage from London Health Emergency, 335 Grays Inn RD, WC1.

Violence and the British trade union movement

By Harry Sloan

"Violence, I do not have to tell this Congress — least of all audiences — disgusts union opinion and divides union attitudes. It creates a climate of brutality. It is alien to the temperament and the intelligence of the British trade union movement."

Neil Kinnock, to TUC Congress, 1984

"A strike is inconceivable without propaganda and agitation. It is also inconceivable without pickets who, when they can, use persuasion, but, when obliged, use force . . . He who thinks of renouncing "physical struggle" must renounce all struggle, for the spirit does not live without flesh."

Leon Trotsky, 'Whither France', 1934

NO DELEGATE at the TUC spoke for his views, but the sentiment expressed by Trotsky 50 years ago are plainly far closer to the spirit and the needs of today's miners' strike than Neil Kinnock's public grovelling to the prejudice of bourgeois public opinion. While Trotsky's starting point is a grasp of the irreconcilable conflict of interest between the employers, their state machine, and their armies of scabs on the one hand, and the working class on the other, Kinnock's is the voice of class compromise, and demonstrates a contemptible ignorance of the history of the British labour movement.

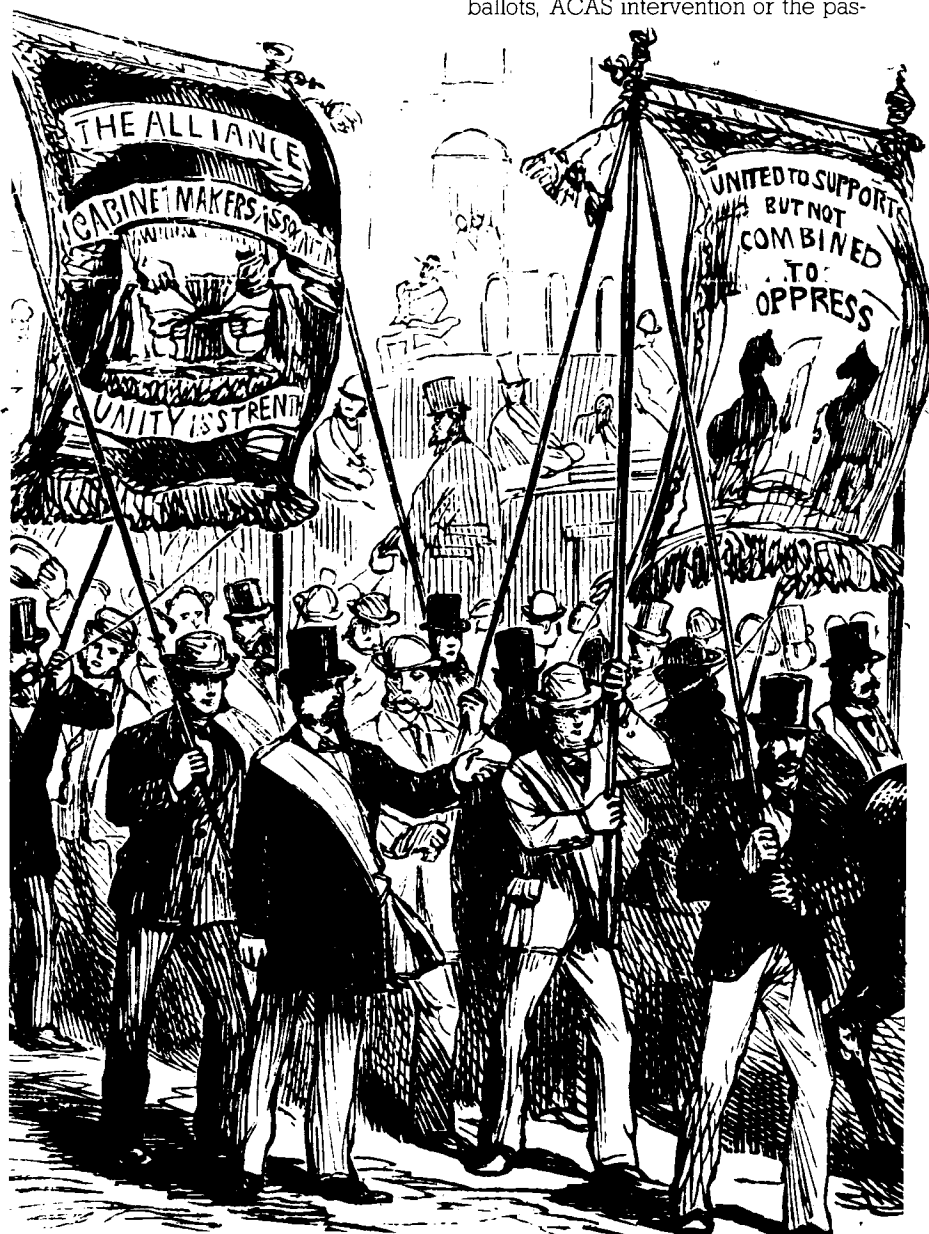
Although he made passing reference to the new intensified policing tactics of the Tory government, there can be no doubt that Kinnock's condemnation of violence is aimed primarily against the striking miners. Yet any real understanding of these struggles shows us that while the violence of the ruling class and its state apparatus of police and military can always be dressed up as "preserving law and order", the self-defence and occasional resort to violent tactics by workers in pursuit of *their* interests is invariably portrayed as unacceptable, anti-social lawlessness.

The truth is that as British capitalism has developed from its violent origins in the English Revolution, and early

small scale workshops and single-owner firms to large-scale factory mass production, conglomerate corporations, trusts and multinationals, the trade union movement has had to fight every inch of the way for its very existence. In times of labour scarcity and economic boom, some limited concessions have been wrung from resistant

employers; in times of recession and economic crisis, those same employers have utilised mass unemployment, the courts and volleys of Parliamentary legislation in their efforts to smash the strength of the unions and increase their exploitation of the working class.

The trade unions were not and could not have been formed by postal ballots, ACAS intervention or the pas-



An 1875 demonstration hails the release from jail of five Cabinet Makers' Association members, sentenced for peaceful picketing.



1831: rioting workers fighting for electoral reform take control of Bristol.

sive acquiescence of the employers. They were built as organisations of class struggle in defiance of repressive legislation, through harsh and bruising battles. If they had listened to Neil Kinnock, or to Len Murray, we would have no trade union movement today.

A look at the question of violence in British labour history involves looking both at the tactics of the workers and at those of the employers. As Friedrich Engels pointed out:

"We shall have single acts of violence and even of brutality to report, but it must always be kept in mind that the social war is avowedly raging in England; and that whereas it is in the interests of the bourgeoisie to conduct this war hypocritically, under the disguise of peace and even of philanthropy, the only help for the working men consists in laying bare the true state of things and destroying this hypocrisy . . ."

(Condition of the Working Class in England)

As far back as 1768 a strike by coalheavers on the Thames struck horror into the hearts of the ruling classes. The strikers boarded several boats and physically removed the scabs; they picketed London streets and Thames wharfs, turning back supplies of coal, flour and wood. Sailors lent their support by unrigging the ships. The strike was successful.

That same year the coalheavers were among the London workers who backed the Movement for Popular Rights led by John Wilkes. As they did so, a mass demonstration in St Georges Fields was fired on by troops — leaving 6 dead and 15 injured.

The French Revolution of 1789 frightened the British ruling classes, who brought in a battery of repressive

legislation to hold down any similar struggle.

The Shipping Offences Act (1793) threatened sentences of up to 14 years for anyone obstructing the loading and unloading, sailing or navigation of any vessel. In 1794 Habeas Corpus was suspended, and radicals from the London Corresponding Society were held in prison without trial for several months.

Strikes, food riots and attacks on machinery continued, though violently repressed by troops, who were transferred to a nationwide network of barracks, separated from the general population.

In 1795 came the Seditious Meetings Act, restricting political agitation,

"As schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled. In them is developed the peculiar courage of the English. It is said on the Continent that the English, and especially the working-men, are cowardly, that they cannot carry out a revolution because, unlike the French, they do not riot at intervals, because they apparently accept the bourgeois regime so quietly. This is a complete mistake. The English working-men are second to none in courage; they are quite as restless as the French, but they fight differently. The French, who are by nature political, struggle against social evils with political weapons; the English, for whom politics exist only as a matter of interest, solely in the interest of bourgeois society, fight, not against the Government, but directly against the bourgeoisie; and for the time, this can be done only in a peaceful manner."

Engels, 'Condition of the Working Class in England, 1844.'

and the Treason Act, outlawing written material against the monarchy. Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore brought the Incitement to Mutiny Act and the Administration of Illegal Oaths Act of 1797: both were to be used against workers in struggle.

In 1799 and 1800 came the Combination Acts, sweeping legislation to outlaw any combination of workers to secure wage increases, shorter hours, a stoppage of work, or objecting to work with anyone else: the penalties were jail sentences of 3 months — or even if "conspiracy" were found.

The trade unions which continued to organise under this draconian repression were forced underground, binding themselves together with (illegal) oaths, staging repeated strikes, and taking violent reprisals against scabs, including the throwing of sulphuric acid. In Glasgow, the Cotton Spinners' Union established a fund to support those who killed or ambushed designated scabs.

In 1818 despite the legislation, a Scottish miners' union staged a general strike. The government was still nervous. Demobilised soldiers from the Napoleonic wars were returning to unemployment and poverty. In 1819 a vast peaceful demonstration in St Peter's Fields, Manchester demanding Parliamentary reform was viciously attacked by troops, killing eleven people.

Only in 1824 were the Combination Acts repealed, to be followed by an explosion of union organisation: but the employers still retained an armoury of repressive laws, including the Illegal Oaths Act, which in 1834 was the pretext for the transportation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. The same period saw in 1830 the violent revolt of agricultural labour, headed by the legendary "Captain Swing"; it also led into the emergence of the Chartist movement as the first mass political expression of the British working class.

Based on a 6-point programme of democratic demands, the Charter united the most advanced sections of workers, but, like every such movement, was increasingly divided between its revolutionary "physical force" wing and their reformist "moral force" opponents — the political ancestors of Kinnock and the TUC right wing.

The "physical force" men did not shrink from calling openly for armed struggle, and in 1839 put forward the idea of a general strike, a "holy month", to secure their political objectives. The impotence of the dominant "moral force" leaders was confirmed in 1839 by Parliament's arrogant rejection of the multi-million signature petition for the Charter that had been so confidently assembled.

But the lack of organisation of the

"A complete battle was waged in Manchester in May, 1843, during my residence there. Pauling & Henfrey, a brick firm, had increased the size of the bricks without raising wages, and sold the bricks, of course, at a higher price. The workers, to whom higher wages were refused, struck work, and the Brickmakers' Union declared war upon the firm. The firm, meanwhile, succeeded with great difficulty in securing hands from the neighbourhood, and among the knobsticks, against whom in the beginning intimidation was used, the proprietors set twelve men to guard the yard, all ex-soldiers and policemen, armed with guns. When intimidation proved unavailing, the brickyard, which lay scarcely a hundred paces from an infantry barracks, was stormed at ten o'clock one night by a crowd of brickmakers, who advanced in military order, the first ranks armed with guns. They forced their way in, fired upon the watchmen as soon as they saw them, stamped out the wet bricks spread out to dry, tore down the piled-up rows of those already dry, demolished everything which came in their way, pressed into a building, where they destroyed the furniture and maltreated the wife of the over-looker who was living there . . ."

"physical force" school was also demonstrated by the courageous, if doomed, uprising led by John Frost in Newport in 1839. The Chartist movement fell back and increasingly under bourgeois domination, though it was also to give rise to revolutionaries including Ernest Jones and George Harney who collaborated with Marx and Engels.

Class battles involving violent tactics by the workers were a constant feature of the mid-19th century, as Engels vividly records. Murder, arson and intimidation were resorted to against the most brutal employers and strike-breakers. Only during the period of economic boom from 1850-1885 were the unions able to achieve more stability, some legal rights, and to reach out beyond the politically conservative ranks of the most skilled workers.

Hostile court rulings in 1866 against the unions played a role in mobilising mass working class action to back up the 1867 Reform Bill, which for the first time included a section of the working class (the most privileged section) in the electorate. In 1871 and 1875 new laws reluctantly conceded the right to picket peacefully and protected unions from claims for damages.

But as economic crisis once more returned to British capitalism, with growing international competition, and



Peterloo Massacre, 1819: sabre-wielding troops attack peaceful demonstrators.

wide new sections of semi-skilled and manual workers were recruited in the 1880s to new, politically radical general unions, these rights came under all-round attack.

A massive demonstration for free speech in London turned into a full-scale riot when broken up by police on "Bloody Sunday" 1887. The scenes would no doubt have horrified Neil Kinnock:

"During the melee, the police freely used their weapons, and the people, who were armed with iron bars, pokers, gaspipes and short sticks, and even knives, resisted them in a most determined manner . . . A similar scene was being enacted in the Strand at the corner of Wellington Street . . ."

(Reynold's Newspaper, Nov. 20, 1887)

Successful strikes by Matchgirls (1888) and dockers (1889) redoubled the employers' determination to prevent the further spread of unionisation. They set up the scab "Shipping Federation" and other agencies for strike-breaking; and once again they resorted to anti-union legislation and

their control of the courts.

The 1890' saw a succession of anti-union rulings restricting picketing, which culminated in the 1901 Taff Vale judgement. This left unions and their officials vulnerable to punitive damages if sued by an employer. It forced even some of the most conservative union leaders to recognise the need for political action to reverse this legislation — and led to the first steps towards forming the Labour Party as a distinct party from the bourgeois Liberals. In a vain effort to head off this movement, the Liberal government passed legislation to negate the Taff Vale judgement; but they were too late to halt a long-overdue political break by the British workers' movement.

Even the foundation of the Labour Party did not — whatever Kinnock may believe — end the violence of the class struggle in Britain. The years 1910-1914 brought an almost unparalleled wave of strikes across basic industries; and time and again police and even military violence was the means employed by the government to attack the workers.



1889 dock strike.

The wave of militancy continued, despite the jingoism of the war period, in the powerful shop stewards' movement on 'Red Clydeside', only to be met by tanks on the streets of Glasgow when the Red Flag was flown from City Hall in 1919.

The employers prepared carefully for the confrontations of the 1920s, and in particular for the General Strike of 1926, in which an orchestrated, state-run scabbing operation was backed up by mounted police and troops in violent action against pickets.

Yet even after the TUC's squalid betrayal of the General Strike; even after the new 1927 anti-union laws which followed on the defeat of the isolated miners; even in the misery of the 1930s depression, the workers repeatedly showed themselves ready to fight back physically against police harassment of the Hunger Marchers, unemployed demonstrations, and those fighting to crush Moseley's fascist movement.

The onset of World War 2 and the coalition of Labour with the Tories with the total collaboration of the TUC (and, after 1941, the Communist Party) was combined with intensified laws against strikes, some of which lasted into the 1950s.

It is only in the period of the post-war "boom", and as a result of the expansion of the working class, the consolidation of its trade unions, the spread of the closed shop and the temporary possibility of obtaining improved conditions through "peaceful" negotiations or industrial action, that it could be argued that violence to a large degree faded — with notable exceptions — from the daily reality of trade union struggle.

The end of that boom, however was once again accompanied — under both Labour and Tory governments — by new anti-union laws, escalating police measures against picketing, and the cultivation of scab firms and agencies. It is sheer hypocrisy for Kinnock, as leader of the same Labour Party



Armed police escort a traction engine during the 1911 rail strike.

which fostered the picket-busting Special Patrol Group and unleashed it upon the mass pickets outside the scab Grunwick photographic plant in 1977-78 to complain now of violence by workers subjected to cavalry charges and beatings from such baton-wielding thugs.

Today's labour movement could not have been built if workers had not long ago rejected Kinnock's attitude and recognised the need to beat back the scabs and enforce a united class line against the employers.

To suggest that today's working class can survive without facing violent struggle is to brush aside the experience of every current industrial dispute — in which police intervention and organised scabbing are almost the rule rather than the exception — and the brutal facts of life facing workers in the black communities, up against racist attacks and police harassment.

Kinnock's speeches complain of Tory policies, yet he has yet to grasp that Thatcher's cuts, mass unemployment and anti-union laws are seeking to turn back the clock to the mid-19th century. Faced with this, does he seriously expect us to believe workers should fight back with class-

collaborationist policies when the employers show quite clearly that they have no interest in collaboration?

Of course we do not, as Marxists, argue for workers to adopt a strategy of vitriol-throwing and official union "hit squads" carrying out assassinations; the task is to break the isolation of the miners' strike and mobilise the strength of the working class as a whole to defeat and bring down this Tory government.

For those of us who look to such a perspective, the question is not denouncing the "violence" of the striking miners, but preparing the workers' movement to confront the intensified violence that can be expected from the police and armed forces in the course of the struggle.

It is for that reason that workers should be looking to the sound analysis and advice offered by Leon Trotsky, based on his experience as a leader in 1917 of the world's only successful working class revolution.

And an opponent of the bureaucratic caste under Stalin which subsequently turned that revolution in a conservative, reactionary direction. Look to Trotsky, and reject the empty and useless moralising of Roy Hattersley's sidekick Neil Kinnock.

The stuff that dreams are made on?

HARRY SLOAN looks at the policies on offer at this year's Blackpool Labour Conference.

A YEAR after the gleeful scenes of the election of the self-styled "dream ticket" leadership of Kinnock-Hattersley, there will be little for Labour's left wing to cheer for at this year's Party Conference.

At a speed which must have caught many constituency activists gasping, the Kinnockersley twins have presided over a consistent rightward turn in Party policy, succumbing to the witch-hunting pressures of last year's Election press coverage.

The latest Party defence statement is the clearest example of this. While still curtsying in the direction of the Party's "non-nuclear" defence policy, it emphasises its support for NATO, and stresses the need to expand conventional forces.

Even this vigorous commitment to the defence of imperialist Britain and the NATO bloc against a mythical external "threat" is insufficient to satisfy the Party's neanderthal right wing. Kinnock's shadow cabinet colleague Peter Shore has made no bones about publicly attacking the policy, claiming that a non-nuclear strategy is incompatible with NATO membership. And former strikebreaking Prime Minister Callaghan is one of the tactical weapons to be rolled out into a reactionary fringe meeting in Blackpool aimed at opposing the policy and offering the media yet another helping of "defence policy confusion" stories.

Meanwhile Hattersley himself has proudly unveiled the NEC's new, explicitly non-socialist economic policy document, epitomising the defeatist right wing "new realism" even in its laughable title "A Policy That Works" (for whom?). Worse than previous illusory "alternative strategy" texts, the document makes no mention of nationalisation or of renationalisation of assets stripped by Thatcher, with the sole exception of British Telecom. Even the pretence of socialism is supplanted completely by a mixture of Keynesianism and wishful thinking. It represents a total capitulation to Thatcher.

These significant shifts to the right on formal policy are linked to the abject refusal of Kinnock or his shadow cabinet colleagues to take any categorical stand in support of the NGA last winter, of Liverpool City Council in its defiance of the Tory government, or



Hattersley: economic "new realism".

of the miners' strike. This reticence of the "dream ticket" pair, and of Kinnock in particular, has even proved to be an embarrassment to some of his own "kitchen cabinet" supporters. Two staunch Kinnockites, Jean McCrindle and Peter Hain have openly stated their criticisms in the new issue of *New Socialist*, correctly accusing him of being "obsessed" with the question of violence:

"To many striking miners and party activists, he has appeared to view the strike as an irritating diversion from the "real" task of winning electoral support."

Indeed: electoral support may be growing again — it could scarcely drop lower than June 1983. But what type of government do Labour voters want? Do they want one which would support or attack workers' struggles?

Kinnock's capitulation to Tory pressure and propaganda, and to the pressures of his right wing PLP colleagues is also reflected in his support for the attempt to neutralise reselection, and his vigorous opposition to the formation of autonomous Black sections within the Party. Though many black



Burying left wing policies?

members and numerous constituency activists have lobbied and battled strongly for this vital step to beat down the racist obstacles to a fuller recruitment and involvement of black workers — 80% of whom voted Labour in 1983 — it seems certain to be defeated. Similarly with the democratic reforms demanded by the Women's section — which have been a major sector of growth and a continued radical voice within the Party. Their demands have each time been blocked by the union bureaucracy.

16 months after Thatcher scored a nightmare victory over a feeble and divided Labour leadership, exposing in the process the disarray and confusion of the Party's left wing, the political movement has been backward rather than forward. The left has yet to take back up the cudgels in the way that brought the famous victories of 1980-81. It's time to wake up to the dangers.

Reselection: defend it, and USE it!



By Peter Firmin

MANDATORY reselection of Labour MPs, as an elementary form of accountability, was one of the major democratic reforms achieved in the wake of the experience of the Wilson/Callaghan governments.

Instead of a Constituency Labour Party having to pass a motion of no-confidence in its sitting MP, with all that involved, before being able to choose a new candidate, the sitting MP is now in an (at least formally) equal position to other nominees. It has also ensured that MPs have been much less willing to ignore their CLPs than in the past.

Of the democratic changes, however, reselection was also the most likely to come under attack. Whilst election of the Leader and Deputy Leader by conference, and NEC control over the manifesto are both reforms that they would rather see abolished, the party establishment recognise that they can generally rely on their friends in the trade union bureaucracy to deliver the block votes the right way in these nationally-decided issues.

Reselection is different. Here decisions rest not with well-paid time-servers but with the rank-and-file of the party and the unions who do not share the same identity of interests.

During the last (and, so far, only) round of reselections this meant that, at the end of the day, the NEC had to endorse Parliamentary candidates who were abhorrent to them. This was by any means without a fight; they did their utmost to prevent 'undesirables' from entering the select Westminster clubs — accepting the most petty of appeals, 'overseeing' CLPs, endorsing 'shortlists of one' (against their own guidelines) and making some strange arrangements under boundary changes — the 'Shore amendment'.

With the able assistance of the media, they managed to limit the damage. Only the most rabid of right-wingers, such as Ford in Bradford and Lewis in Newham, were 'de-selected', with other left-wingers taking the place of SDP-defectors.

Yet even this success is not enough

for the right wing. This time around boundary changes won't come to anyone's rescue, and having been through the experience once, the rank-and-file are that much wiser. The bureaucracy are not willing to leave things to chance; for them their ability to drop policies they don't like and to keep their underworked and overpaid positions are sacrosanct, and not to be endangered by 'loonies' who naively feel that a candidate is chosen to carry out policies and should be accountable to those who choose her or him.

While they can't do away with reselection altogether, (not even the 'softest' of lefts would accept that) they have to move quickly to save the skins of those most in danger — reselection can begin this December (18 months after the General Election).

Hence the hastily drawn-up constitutional amendment to be put to conference by the NEC (the haste itself of course works in the right wing's favour — there has been little time for the left to campaign against the change, particularly in the unions).

The claim is made that the change is "more democratic", that it means 'one member, one vote', and with the help of the media, always willing to rush to the side of the labour movement, the left are pushed into a corner where they are forced to defend what everyone has now been told is an undemocratic procedure, and, of course, it is said that the left 'don't trust the membership'.

The truth is very different. The major change that would come from the new rule is that *several million* trade unionists who pay the political levy would no longer have the opportunity of a say in the selection of candidates; only the quarter of a million full

members would do so. (A cynic might even say that defeat by the Tories on the political levy is being conceded already, and this is merely a tidying-up operation to take account of it).

No-one need be surprised that only two members of the Trade Union section of the NEC opposed the change; nothing plucks at the heart-strings of one bureaucrat more than the plight of another who might be having problems with the membership — the views of the members themselves are irrelevant.

The other crucial element is that under the rule changes selection would be taken away from the one body in the party able to hold an MP accountable — the General Committee of the CLP. As the only policy-making body of a CLP, and the only one in a position to regularly monitor the work of an MP, the GMC is the obvious body to elect the candidate. Instead, under the proposed change, selection would be carried out by a procedure which exists solely for that purpose (whether it be by postal ballot, at one mass meeting or at branch meetings) leaving the MP able to ignore the GC for 5 years.

The charge of the left 'not trusting the members' must be shown up for the hypocrisy it is. Those in favour of the rule change 'trust' the membership only to turn up to one meeting every 5 years; the left (those who believe in fighting issues through, not the manoeuvres) encourage members to attend and participate in *regular* meetings, in policy-making, in active campaigning and in electing delegates who reflect the views of that membership. One member, one vote exists already.

What really shows the purpose of the proposed change is that it would

only apply where a CLP has a sitting Labour MP. So this wonderful democratic advance is not available to those whose MP is standing down, or who are unfortunate enough to have a Tory or Alliance MP. Nothing could show more crudely the real intention.

If the rank-and-file won't knuckle under and do the right thing, then the help of the media has to be enlisted. Members who never go to meetings to hear the arguments will be bombarded with progaganda by the reactionary local and national press. They will be told how undemocratic the left are

(particularly if the GC should choose to retain the present method of selection, which would be its right even under the rule change); and how wonderful the MP is (except in the few cases where the MP is on the left, when, of course the press campaign will be even more vicious).

The media gave great assistance to the bureaucracy in the past over candidates (remember the job they did on Peter Tatchell, encouraged by Michael Foot's outburst); now they will have a field day and the chances of getting across the views of alternative candi-

dates will almost disappear.

If, as seems probable, the constitutional change is passed at conference, the left must fight in the CLPs for the retention of selection by GCs, by a campaign throughout the party showing that the change, far from being about democracy, is designed to roll back democratic reforms already won.

Above all, the left must ensure that this time reselection is used more thoroughly: to root out those MPs more concerned with their sinecures than campaigning for socialism or backing actual struggles like the miners' strike.

Labour women: token concessions not enough

By JENNY FISHER

AT THE 1984 Labour Women's Conference, Jo Richardson MP, told a public meeting that women had been in the background of the Labour Party for too long: like it or not, women were going to come forward and take their share of political power in the Party.

Following this, Neil Kinnock congratulated Jo on her work as Labour spokesperson on Women. Women had been vocal in the Party, and had shown how they were affected by issues like Social Security. Thanks to this campaigning, the Party would now take these issues more seriously.

The Party? The Men!

As ever, Neil has missed the point. Women are not just another pressure group, campaigning to push their particular concern that bit higher up the agenda. The Labour Party, like the trade unions, is not immune to the discrimination that's so blatant in the rest of society.

Sexism is rife in the Labour Party; in fact, the Labour Party depends on it!

Oh yes, we've made some progress. We had a lot more women standing for Parliament in '83. But barely a dozen of them were allowed to stand in safe seats: the majority were safely "serving their apprenticeships", out of the way in marginals and hopeless seats, so the sex balance in the nearly all-male Parliamentary Labour Party was never in danger.

Some local Parties now have babysitting rotas. But when a seedy looking 35-year-old man introduces himself on your doorstep as your babysitter for the night, are mothers really supposed to go off happily, and leave him to look after their 8-year-old daughter? And we still have Party members who go down a wow at meetings and then go home and beat up their wives.

Women are fighting oppression like this throughout society. But we're not going to be conned by the Labour Party promising to act on our behalf,

when that's the situation within the Party too.

Our task in the Party is to stamp out the barriers in the way of our participation, and take on equal shares in the power and decision making.

And that's why, this year, the "women's resolutions" concentrate on "women's organisation" (resolutions 8 to 32). Demanding access to decision-making (5 resolutions from women's conference); accountability of representatives (direct elections); and to define our own rules instead of blindly following the men's rules; and a woman on every shortlist, are not small measures to create artificial or privileged access to the Party. They are small measures to go some way to counteracting the barriers put in the way of our equal participation.

We don't just want the men in the Party to take up the issue of Social Security because the women make enough noise about it. We're going to be there, taking it up ourselves.

We're not just challenging the right of white, straight men to those 600 plus places as Parliamentary candidates; we're challenging the rights of those 200 plus white, straight men to automatic membership of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

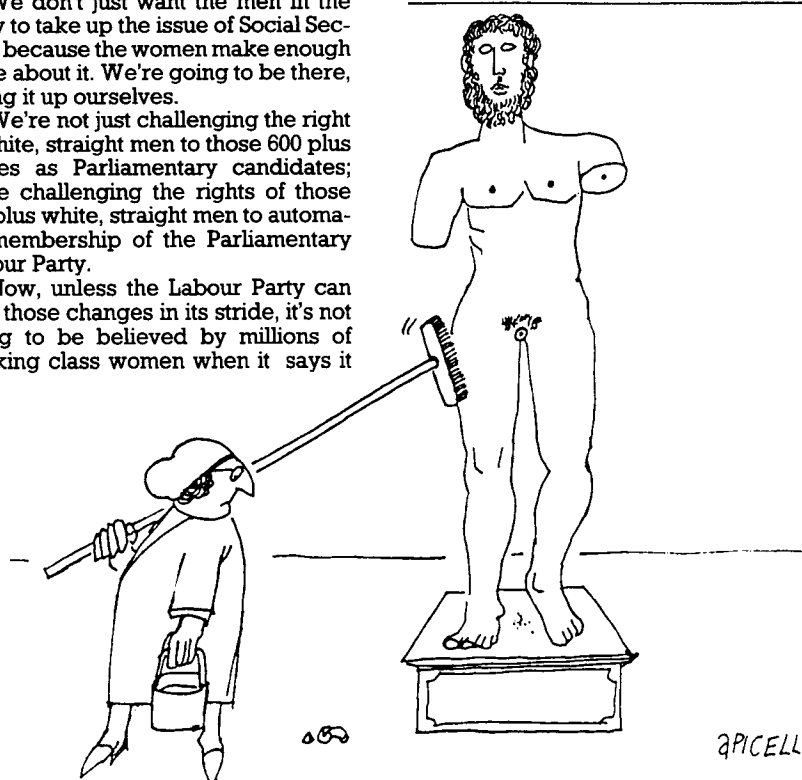
Now, unless the Labour Party can take those changes in its stride, it's not going to be believed by millions of working class women when it says it

can carry through changes which will cause a similar upheaval in society as a whole.

Because we're not going to stop at changing the Labour Party, we're changing the Labour Party because right now it's our main political vehicle for social change; and our fight is carried out alongside the Labour Party in the Trade Unions.

We support the miners' fight for jobs. And we're pleased when union and Labour Party leaders notice the "magnificent work of the Women's support Groups".

But when we hear them demanding, alongside the slogans about jobs for miners, "A Women's Right To Work", then we'll know we're on the road to victory.



Arguments for Socialism

Our "Alternative Strategy": the class struggle

Angus Phillips argues for an alternative to Labour's "alternative strategy".

THROUGHOUT the miners' strike a constant theme of Labour's front bench has been to deplore "the divisive actions of the government". Apparently Thatcher's other main crime is that she is "non-interventionist". Labour luminaries who secretly oppose the strike or have no guts to defend it against Tory press witch-hunts, bleat about the need for an "honourable solution" — and call on Thatcher to "intervene" and arrange one!

That Kinnock is the main exponent of this line is a telling indication of the kind of government we should expect if Labour win the next election. Yet Kinnock is also an advocate of Labour's "Alternative Strategy" for the economy, in which the same approach is the basic starting point.

For Marxists, the starting point of analysis and strategy must be the recognition of the class struggle. The rules of that struggle, simply stated, are "get them before they get us". Thatcher has operated on that principle for the ruling class since May 1979: Kinnock complains that she is not playing fair, and himself preaches class collaboration, social harmony and respect for the capitalist state's forces of "law and order". At most, where there are criticisms of the police, he may call timidly for "improvements" or "reforms".

So it is with "solutions" to the crisis which seek to reform rather than overturn the existing system of class society. They avoid, downplay and skirt round — or oppose entirely — the mobilisation of the working class against the existing order. They avoid or positively deny the necessary all-out assault on and defeat of capitalist power, as vested in ownership of capital and control of the state.

Marxists on the other hand seek to encourage the mobilisation of the working class as a class, to mount the struggle for a new, socialist order. We do not see workers' mobilisation as simply an auxiliary to a Parliamentary



Labour government: rather the mass organisations of the working class must fight tooth and nail to force their demands upon their representatives in parliament.

The programme and policies of a socialist, workers' government must be developed in the course of the class struggle. For us it is not a case of seeking legislation giving workers the right to "a say in running their firms . . . to influence in economic planning . . . (to) information, consultation and representation within their companies." (1983 Labour Manifesto), Each of these phrases expressly leaves control, decision-making and ownership in the hands of the present capitalist class, whose drive for increased profits is the root cause of mass unemployment and every other facet of Thatcherism.

We need actively to promote the independent organisation of workers at the point of production, rejecting spurious "joint committees". We must fight every attempt to con the workforce into thinking they have any common interests on which they can cooperate with management without cutting their own — or some other workers' throats.

Absolute independence of the working class is vital. This means we must also campaign to demystify the worlds of "business", "finance" and management. Just look at the way gov-

ernment and NCB have cooked the books of the coal industry to portray it as a vast loss-maker, when the whole "deficit" is attributable to interest payments and deliberate government policies. Rather than sitting down alongside management to study the future of a company, workers' representatives must demand independent access to the whole of the company's books, and train themselves, with the aid of sympathetic experts, to understand them.

As managements seek still further to increase profitability, we can expect more redundancies, closures and cuts in public services. To learn the workings of capitalism, the operation of government finance, and the tricks of accounting, workers must fight for the opening of the books, and use the information further to educate workers against the employers' propaganda.

On the basis of this knowledge, work can begin on an independent workers' plan for jobs and for regenerating industry and society in their the interests of the working class. The first moves for such a plan can be taken by shop stewards' committees, trade unions, women's organisations, community groups and bodies of the unemployed. Tenants on estates could prioritise repairs and improvements and cost them out. They should look at plans for production, allocation of scarce resources, vital investments for the future and so on.

This would be a far cry from the present Labour Party policy, centred as it is upon notions of "controlled reflation" and narrow nationalist horizons. It would call for an entirely new form of state power to carry it through; a workers' state, based on mass organisations of workers' democracy.

The 1983 Labour Manifesto described the necessity for a "national economic assessment":

"This will set out the likely growth in the national output and how it could be shared. It will cover the allocation of resources, and the distribution of income between profits, earnings from employment, rents, social benefits and other incomes."

The Manifesto stressed that this is part of a process aimed at achieving "a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in

favour of working people and their families". Clearly this aim — precisely the *opposite* of the result achieved under the last Labour government with its brutal years of wages controls — is likely to be opposed by those who seek to shift the balance of power and wealth towards the capitalist class and their families through boosting profits. Yet the Manifesto pledges Labour to "share" national output with the capitalist class: profits are the first category mentioned in the national cake.

Throughout the 1983 Manifesto which listed many laudable objectives, there was no discussion at all as to the likely response from the employers to any far-reaching shift of power and wealth.

Yet the employers, who have been given increased powers to trample over their workforce, are not going lightly to give that up and embark on a socialist road. They will insist, as always, on profits first, with social benefits maybe sometime in the future.

They will work with a Labour government only while it acts in their interests; and when it ceases to do so they will obstruct it.

This is why from the outset we must make it clear that the major industrial and financial monopolies must be taken out of the ownership and control of the capitalist class. To accomplish such a takeover in the face of the inevitable bleating reluctance of the Labour leadership requires preparation of mass action at workplace level by the working class, which is more than capable of taking over and running factories and banks and driving out senior management and the employers. Only when industry is controlled by workers and collectively owned can we hope to carry through a socialist plan that will set the millions back to work. Only workers' active struggle can defend such gains and prevent the employers moving back in.

A working class Alternative Strategy, in short, counterposes to Kinnock's laments over "divisive policies" a vigorous prosecution of the class struggle, and raises the question of building a political leadership to take it forward.

Eleven years ago this month, Salvador Allende's reformist government was brutally destroyed by the Pinochet coup. The lessons of Chile tell us that we have two alternatives: we either leave things well alone and allow capital to run riot over the jobs, wages and living conditions of working people; or we organise to expropriate the capitalists, destroy their state machinery of police, judiciary and army, etc, and replace it with our own. We in *Socialist Viewpoint* are committed to the second course, and invite readers to join with us in fighting for it.



Bloody Sunday finds Labour silent

By Basil Hinton, Vice Chair, Labour Committee on Ireland.

THE HIDEOUS scenes, amazingly broadcast on television, of the RUC riot against a peaceful republican demonstration on Sunday August 12 must have rung some bells for miners and workers horrified by police brutality against NUM pickets. But it also highlights the continuing war on the six counties of Northern Ireland.

Since 1969 we have seen British troops sent by Wilson's Labour government attempting to beat down the nationalist population; in January 1972 we saw the Parachute Regiment's Bloody Sunday slaughter in Derry, followed by endless repressive measures denying the most basic democratic rights to nationalist opponents of British rule.

Liberal leader David Steel — no anti-imperialist — has openly condemned the Belfast RUC riot and the murder of Sean Downes. Yet from Neil Kinnock and Irish spokespersons Peter Archer and Clive Soley there has been the silence of the graveyard — despite Labour Party policy of opposing plastic bullets.

The Labour leadership's continued support for British occupation of Ireland puts them in a slavish position of support for Tory policy. They dare not utter a word of criticism of the gerrymandered imposition of the border in 1922.

The majority of people in both Britain and Ireland now support a British withdrawal: but still the Labour leaders cringe before the most backward sections of opinion in the labour bureaucracy and the propaganda of the Tory press.

There is no improvement for the Catholic minority. An eye witness recently touring the six counties has told *Socialist Viewpoint* that the RUC and UDR are still venting their fury over the failure to capture Martin Galvin during the Bloody Sunday

events. They are mounting a massive campaign of harassment and intimidation against the nationalist people.

The Labour Committee on Ireland is maintaining its policy of promoting a dialogue between the British labour movement and Sinn Fein and the nationalists. Nationalist speakers have featured on the platforms of LCI-organised meetings in towns up and down the country. MPs who support LCI policy have been speaking out, and Ken Livingstone's stand has been exemplary on this issue.

The LCI also welcomes Tony Benn's draft Bill for a British withdrawal as an excellent initiative to raise the debate in the labour movement.

The formation of a trade union sub committee in the LCI, to make links between trade unionists in Britain and their counterparts in Ireland must focus on the rank and file level, and aim at changing the present positions of most union leaders in Britain.

Unconditional withdrawal of troops has been the key LCI slogan since its formation, and it must not be watered down into "Declarations of Intent" or vague calls for a federalist Ireland.

The LCI Women's Group has also been actively promoting links with women in the nationalist community, sending women's delegations to Ireland, supporting campaigns for abortion rights and against strip-searches. It is open to all Labour women interested in building links between feminism and anti-imperialism.

This year's Labour Party conference agenda has 18 resolutions on Ireland, 16 of which support various LCI positions. Under "Party Organisation", however there are four resolutions which mistakenly call for Labour organisation in the North of Ireland; we consider this to be a soft option, avoiding a stand on the central issues of the troops and the border.

Some of these resolutions will be composed, but we urge delegates to support those which primarily call for British withdrawal, and on returning from the conference to join the struggle to build the LCI.

END: life in the fringe events

Dave Spencer attended the European Nuclear Disarmament conference this year in Perugia Italy. He brought back armfuls of information on campaigns around the world. We will carry more of this material in the next Socialist Viewpoint.

APPARENTLY the town of Perugia in Italy was chosen as the venue for this convention because the City Council is run by a coalition of the Communist and Socialist Parties, and nearby is Assisi to please the Christian element of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement (END). This symptomised the official structures which tried to dominate the Convention. They had already cut down the number of delegates from the 3,000 plus of Berlin in 1983 to 1,200 this year. And to make matters worse, delegates of the Official (government-run) Peace Movements of Eastern Europe were present for the first time. The independent peace movements on the contrary were refused visas to attend.

Nevertheless the urgency and enthusiasm of rank and file delegates still broke through attempts to impose notions of "non-alignment" and "dialogue". The traditional parties' approach of discussions at State, town-twinning or trade union bureaucrat-level was listened to politely, but the overwhelming feeling was for immediate solidarity and for direct action.

This seemed to be the case even among the ordinary members of the mass parties, who have clearly been influenced by the dynamism of the European peace movement.

There were of course Jim Mortimer and Ron Todd from the British labour movement,

New Zealand

THE ANNUAL conference of the New Zealand Labour Party, held early in September, voted to pull the country out of the ANZUS military alliance (an equivalent of NATO).

They have also called upon the newly-elected Labour government to shut down the US airforce base at Christchurch which serves the Antarctic Deep Freeze Programme, and to conduct a full public enquiry into other defence interests in New Zealand which might be aiding US nuclear strategy.

The Labour Prime Minister David Lange spoke *against* these resolutions in debate, but they were still passed by huge majorities. The fight is now on to



One of the plenary meetings at the Convention

along with their equivalents from other European countries; but there were also young grassroots members in the cafes rubbing shoulders, swapping information and addresses in a most non-sectarian way. This has always been the case with END Conventions since the Greenham women first made their presence felt at the Brussels Convention of 1982. The whole five days were full of workshops and fringe meetings; the plenaries run by the traditional structures were not so important.

The seriousness and mass actions of the European peace movement has shaken up the mass working class parties. It's time Trotskyists took note of this in our struggle for a new leadership in the labour movement.

force the Labour government to implement these decisions. Already the new government has banned all nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed ships from New Zealand ports — a policy which the US has said makes the ANZUS alliance unworkable.

The delegates however want more action. In addition to the above resolutions, they also demanded the withdrawal of the NZ infantry battalion from Singapore within a year, and withdrawal from all military exercises and alliance with nuclear powers. They also strongly condemned the US invasion of Grenada and the US financing of the Contras in Nicaragua.

Turkey

ON THE very day the Cruise missiles arrived at Greenham Common, a martial law tribunal in Istanbul imposed savage prison sentences on 23 members of the Turkish Peace Movement (TPA). They had been on trial for 17 months. Sentences ranged from 5 to 8 years in jail followed by long periods of internal exile.

Perhaps the best-known peace activist is former ambassador Mahmut Dikerdem (68), president of the TPA. Suffering from cancer diagnosed during his arrest in 1982, Mahmut is now serving an 8-year sentence to be followed by 2½ years internal exile: virtually a death sentence.

The TPA were charged under articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish Penal Code. These are known as the "Mussolini Laws" because they were adopted in 1936 from the "Special Laws for the Protection of the State" passed by the Italian Fascist regime. The military judges argued that the TPA's anti-nuclear campaigns and criticisms of NATO and military pacts "weakened the resistance of the Turkish state and nation", and that this benefitted "subversives" and "the enemies of Turkey".

Turkey, whose civilian government was overthrown by a military coup in 1980, is a member of NATO, the Council of Europe, and an associate of the EEC. Turkey has also signed the European Convention of Human Rights and the UN Declaration; but its ruling junta is never criticised on human rights by the Thatcher or Reagan governments.

Peace movements world-wide Pacific

IT IS NOT widely understood in Europe that US imperialism is deploying Cruise missiles in the Pacific area in the same numbers as in Europe.

The main difference is that the missiles in the Pacific will be sea-launched and not land-based. However US ships and submarines have to call in at harbours and ports throughout the area, making many places very vulnerable to attack.

At the same time, US, Soviet and Chinese governments have used the Pacific area for missile testing. The US and Japanese governments also have plans to dump nuclear waste in the Pacific.

All this has meant that whole groups of islands are still exploited as colonies and denied self-determination, while military dictatorships are propped up by the US presence.

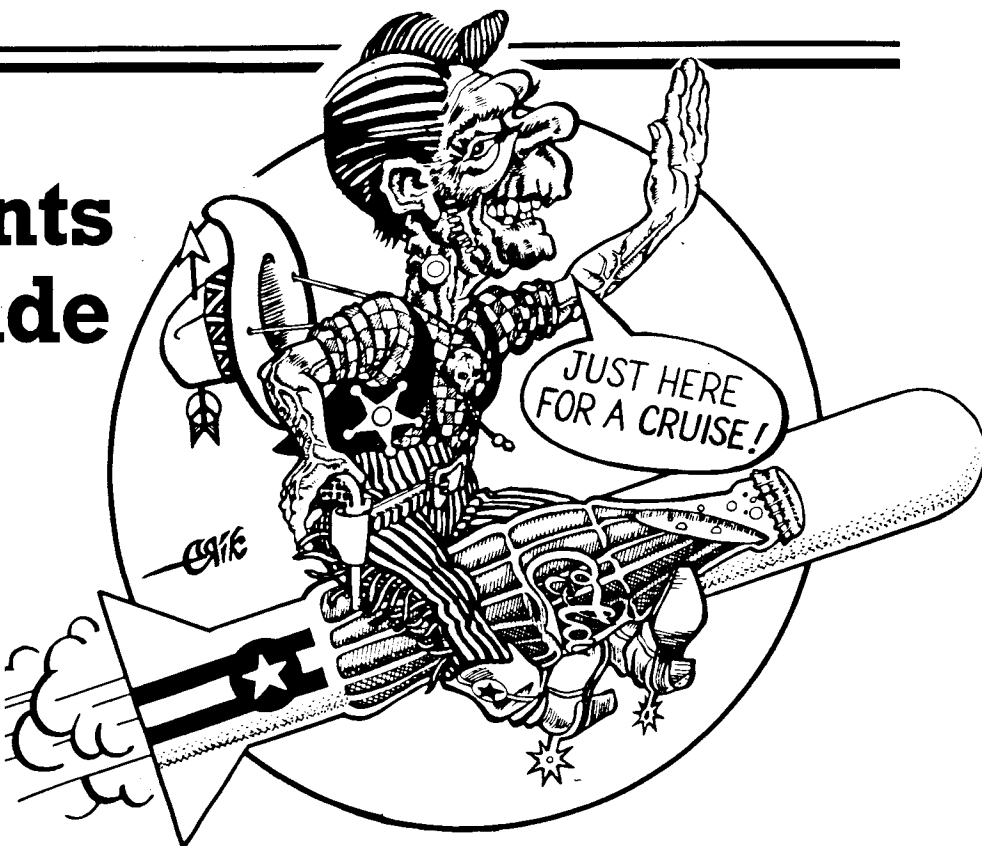
Representatives of peace movements from the Pacific Ocean area urged European activists to see solidarity with national struggles as part of the overall struggle for world peace. A 6-point Appeal was approved by the workshop discussing this issue, as follows:

(1) Solidarity with the New Zealand Labour government over its ban on US

Japan

IN JAPAN there are well-organised peace movements linked to the Japanese political parties — Gensuikyo for the GP and Gensuiki for the SP. Attempts have been made to unite these two through the mediation of a host of independent grass roots organisations. There is also a strong tradition of academic peace studies in Japan, based clearly on the national experience of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The grass-roots organisations tend to target specific things to accomplish, and there are many local actions going on in Japan.

Officially the country is a nuclear-free zone. However there is a Japan-USA security treaty allowing US armed forces to build air bases and use Japanese harbours for military and logistical purposes. Does the US



warships and submarines in its ports.

(2) Support for independence movements in French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Micronesia and their campaign for a non-nuclear and non-aligned Pacific area.

(3) Support for FRETILIN, the East Timor independence movement in its struggle against the Indonesian dictatorship.

(4) A campaign against French atomic tests and US, Soviet and Chinese missile testing.

(5) Pressure for information on UK nuclear testing in Australia and what happened at Maralinga and Montinella.

(6) NO to uranium mining in Australia.

respect Japan's nuclear-free status? Few people think it does.

As a result there are a number of peace actions organising boycotts of US warships coming in to harbours. Local councils in the harbour areas are encouraged to declare themselves nuclear-free to highlight the fact that a US presence there would in itself invite a Soviet attack in the event of war.

Current deployment of Tomahawk cruise missiles on US warships and submarines and the Soviet SS20 intermediate and Backfire bombers each amount to more than a simple "modernisation" of weapons. They are bound to escalate the arms race and the danger of nuclear war in the Far East. The present right wing government of Yasuhiro Nakasone is of course hand in glove with Ronald Reagan and the US warmongers; the Japanese peace movement faces a stiff fight.

Philippines

THE TWO main US military bases in the Philippines, Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base, are probably the largest overseas US facilities in the whole world. They are crucial to the deployment of US forces throughout the Western Pacific and into the Indian Ocean.

Subic is the major naval storage point for tactical nuclear weapons in the Western Pacific. In June 1983, dictator Ferdinand Marcos signed a new agreement with the Reagan administration giving US imperialism "continued unhampered military operations" in the Philippines.

As a reward, Marcos received \$900m of economic and military aid over the next five years, an 80% increase over previous levels of assistance.

This has gone some way towards the \$4 billion bailout being sought by Marcos from the IMF and other assorted friends to offset the worst economic crisis in the country's history.

Only a few weeks before his assassination a year ago, Senator Benigno Aquino stated: "These US bases not only serve as a magnet for a nuclear attack — they have come to guarantee the repression of the democratic rights of the Filipino people."

Contact: Philippines Support Group (affiliation £6), BM Box 758, London WC1N 3XX.

Contact: Turkey Solidarity Campaign, BM Box 5965, London WC1N 3XX.

Women central to Comiso struggle

THE PEACE Camp at Comiso in Southern Sicily is still alive and flourishing despite the arrival of Cruise missiles on March 31 and despite harassment from the police and from the Mafia.

A number of mass demonstrations, human chains and conferences have been held. Comrades from Comiso have spoken at rallies and meetings throughout Europe to make people aware of the growing militarisation of Sicily.

The Comiso base itself is the largest missile base in Europe, with 112 Cruise missiles. Its siting has less to do with defence against Warsaw Pact countries than it has as a NATO outpost covering the whole of the Middle East and North Africa. A Cruise missile has a range of 2,500 kilometres, carries a nuclear warhead with a yield of 100 to 200 kilotons and travels at about 850 kilometres an hour. Clearly there it poses a threat to the whole Mediterranean region.

To back up the Comiso base, NATO has increased its presence in Sicily. The island of Pantelleria off the coast of



The example of the Greenham Women has been echoed in peace struggles elsewhere.

India

AN INDIAN Peace Movement has recently been formed (GROUND), based in Bombay. Their first major activity was a week of action beginning on August 6, "Hiroshima Day". The plan is to build a mass movement against the growing lobby for nuclear weapons for India.

Although Indira Gandhi signed the "22 May Four Continent Peace Initiative", India in fact exploded a nuclear device in Pokharan in 1974 and in 1982 voted against a UN resolution to establish a nuclear-free zone in South Asia. Recently the Indian Defence Minister, R. Venkataraman, stated that India would match Pakistan's military powers in every respect. It is assumed by most observers that Islamabad has already embarked on a nuclear weapons programme. It is vital that the masses in the sub-continent stop this nuclear madness before it escalates further, while poverty disease and hunger plague the working classes.

(GROUND can be contacted c/o 4 Habib Court, Causeway, Bombay 400039, India).

Sicily and only 70 kilometres from Tunisia has become a NATO superfortress. A new NATO base is at Lampedusa, with a radar station working 24 hours a day covering 4,000 miles.

Trapani is now an extremely well-equipped military airfield with secret underground entrances — the F-104 fighters which patrol the Mediterranean are stationed there. Missile testing and shooting ranges have been established at Agrigento.

The worst example of the rape of the countryside is at Mistretta in the forests of the Nebrodi mountains, where the largest NATO firing range in Europe (22,000 hectares) is scheduled to be built. This is slap in the middle of a National Park.

The port of Sigonella is now a well-equipped base for the Rapid Deployment Force. It has become a fortified American city divided into 3 parts — a base for anti-submarine warfare aircraft, for support for the Sixth Fleet, for interceptor aircraft, for heavyweight helicopters, and for the giant Lockheed C54 Galaxy transport aircraft. Under separate command at Sigonella are divisions of Italian infantry with armoured vehicles and navy anti-submarine warfare units.

It is no wonder that Italian General Brancaleoni stated that this NATO military equipment had made Sicily "an



unsinkable nuclear battleship" which must serve to "destabilise power in the whole region and encourage our neighbours to build up their own arsenals in defence".

The main reason why Sicily has been chosen by NATO for such overkill is the lack of working class in the area, together with the dominance of the Mafia. The Mafia of course are delighted at the influx of American military personnel, and hate peace activists. Their latest victim is Giuseppe Fara, a radical journalist and a founder of the magazine 'I Siciliani'. He joins the ranks of those assassinated by the Mafia for speaking out against injustice and oppression in Sicily.

Italian police tactics at Comiso are similar to those used against the British miners' strike. At the mass blockade of the base last September they laid siege to the town, strictly controlling all roads into the city, and sending coaches back. They used plain clothes police in the crowds as informers and pro-



vocateurs. They attacked demonstrators using riot gear and water cannon. Several foreign demonstrators were deported on trumped-up charges, and many Italian activists from the mainland were banned from the province altogether.

One of the most encouraging developments has been the work of the women of Comiso CUDIP (Italian equivalent of CND), who have been working for support in the local Sicilian communities. Their method has been to go patiently from door to door, linking the question of Cruise missiles to local problems. They then form small groups of women in the same neighbourhood who meet regularly to discuss issues and plan action. They were particularly encouraged by the 68% of women who voted in the Italian referendum for divorce and for abortion against the heavy pressure of the Catholic Church. One woman activist, Giovanna Cagnes, explained:

"The idea of small groups based in the community is to overcome the fatalism many women feel because they think they can do nothing about their situation.

Once they are in a group, they gain confidence and a creative force comes forth. It started when we were talking to an elderly woman in the street who asked what she could do to help our struggle. She said she would arrange a meeting in her house.

Two days later we were faced with 20 women in her house from the neighbourhood. Our film projector broke down so we had a discussion — about everything — it was incredible. In every street we find there is someone like this woman. We are revealing the will and the ability of ordinary people to act. This is our great work. It is very exciting."

★ Come to Comiso: Contact CUDIP, Viale della Resistenza 13 97013 Comiso. The women's camp at Comiso has just been reestablished after being closed by police last Spring.

Bad news for Botha

A MISERABLE 20–30% claimed participation in the first elections for Indians and Coloureds under the new Constitution (with many areas much lower than that); a return to mass defiance and riots in the streets comparable to the Soweto events of 1976; a new upsurge of the black armed struggle, with bombs placed in sensitive state targets; and the first-ever legal strike in the vital mining industry, involving a newly-organised and brutally exploited section of black workers. The catalogue of recent events is by no means encouraging for the white South African bourgeoisie, which appeared only a few months ago to have hit on a winning streak following diplomatic deals enforced on neighbouring Angola and Mozambique and Botha's much-publicised foreign travels.

One of the triggers to the new wave of militancy of black workers and youth in the townships has been the massive increases in rents as a part of the soaring cost of living. Another is that after a wave of strikes in 1980–82, the black working class ran into a succession of defeats and setbacks in industrial conflicts from early 1982 through 1983; the level of strikes declined, but the unions nevertheless continued to grow.

Now, a new regroupment of black unions has given workers added confidence. A new black political organisation, the United Democratic Front, however limited its policies, structure and leadership, has raised the tempo of political opposition to the regime, staging mass rallies during the campaign against the new Constitution.

Now workers are being driven by economic pressures and by repression once more into struggle for survival against the vicious apartheid state. The efforts of liberals and of class collaborators within the black organisations and communities are unlikely to prevent further explosions of militancy on the streets and in the workplaces.

"Workers Party" without workers

By Harry Sloan



AMID scenes as grotesque as many of the ceremonies of the Los Angeles Olympics, President Mengistu Haile Mariam, bloodstained dictatorial ruler of Ethiopia since 1977, has launched a new "Ethiopian Party" which, in the inglorious traditions of Stalinist ruling parties in Eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba, will have no decision-making role whatever.

Just as in post-war Eastern Europe Stalin's agents created large bureaucratised "Communist Parties" by forcibly merging and purging the tiny Communist Parties proper with the larger, careerist social democratic parties; just as Fidel Castro in 1961–64 merged the remnants of his July 26 Movement with the Stalinist "Popular Socialist Party" to form the rubber-stamp Cuban Communist Party (which held no Congress for its first ten years); so Mengistu's new showpiece party is the outcome not of workers' struggles and self-organisation (to which he is ruthlessly opposed) but of bureaucratic manoeuvre and top-level manipulation.

A big increase in literacy and land-reform are the most tangible benefits the Ethiopian masses have derived from the Revolution of 1974 which toppled the Emperor Haile Selassie. But with the reactionary (\$500,000 per day) war continuing to repress the Eritrean people and other national minorities; with famine rampant, and the lowest per capita income in Africa, there is still a long way to go.

Mengistu and his new "Workers Party" are merely another obstacle in the path to workers' power in Ethiopia.

Behind the split in the Workers Socialist League

"PAINFULLY, and after a long illness: mourned by few". That might be the most fitting obituary to the demise of the fusion which in 1981 united two British Trotskyist organisations, the Workers Socialist League and the International Communist League, and which died under the knife three years later.

The brutal, bureaucratic expulsion of a minority Faction of 35 mainly old-WSL members from the fused Workers Socialist League put an end to any hopes of a healthy or tolerant regime. And it set the dominant ex-ICL majority firmly on a sectarian trajectory on a national and international level.

While cynics and sceptics will no doubt greet this news as more evidence for their view that a mass Marxist party will never be built, serious militants will be concerned to learn the lessons from this sorry end to the biggest effort at revolutionary regroupment in Britain since World War 2.

It is for this reason that we are reprinting for readers' information the full texts of the public statements on the split issued by those expelled from or resigning from the Workers Socialist League.

The first, shorter document, is from the minority Democratic Centralist Faction, comprising members from both wings of the fused group, which fought against the expulsions within the WSL, but resigned after its June conference ratified the expulsions.

The second, more extended document represents the political positions of the expelled 35 members, and their general view on the failure of the fusion.

Both groupings, together with a number of additional supporters have since jointly conducted a wide-ranging summer school, and agreed to discuss a common framework for a new organisation, which has adopted the interim name of the Socialist Group.

In mid-August a preconference of the Socialist Group formally opened a 3-month period of discussion preparatory to a November founding conference of a new, democratic centralist organisation.

The Socialist Group is committed to focus centrally on work in and around the mass organisations of the working class and the oppressed, and to make a priority of solidarity work and forging international links.

Document of the Democratic Centralist Faction

WORKERS SOCIALIST LEAGUE: The Death of a Fusion

ON MARCH 31, 1984, 35 members of the Workers Socialist League were summarily and collectively suspended without advance notice by a vote of 14 to 8 on the WSL's National Committee.

They were charged, vaguely and collectively, with "disruption"; no specific breaches of discipline or the WSL's Constitution were cited. Thirty-one of the thirty-five were not even told of their impending suspension until after the event. Two weeks later on April 14, the same 35 members, the non-NC members of whom had no chance of a hearing, were expelled on the same vague charge.

Attempts to invoke the WSL's Constitution and convene a Special Conference to discuss the expulsions (backed up in each case by the signatures of the necessary percentage of the membership as required by the Constitution) were twice overruled; instead the NC majority opted to call a "normal" annual conference of the League for June 30, at which the appeals of the 35 expelled

members would be heard.

In the event, the appeals were rejected by a majority of 45 with 4 abstentions at the Conference, and the demands for a fundamental change in the WSL's heavily bureaucratized internal regime, argued strongly by the minority Democratic Centralist Faction (DCF) were voted down by a similar margin.

These expulsions were in fact not for any breach of the WSL constitution or for any disruptive activity but because the 35 members had *political* disagreement with the majority and had formed a faction to fight for their ideas. This has been clearly admitted on several occasions by supporters of the majority.

With these unseemly events, carried through by the WSL leadership to split the organisation in the midst of the miners' strike, the final nails were hammered into the coffin of the 1981 fusion between the old Workers Socialist League and the International-Communist League.

That fusion has been hailed on both sides as a historic stride forward for British Trotskyism, because it represented both a substantial break from the two "traditions"

of Trotskyism (of either standing aside from serious work in the mass organisations of the labour movement or of watering down the programme to adapt to the labour movement), and a major break from the sectarianism characterising so many of post-war Trotskyist organisations in Britain.

Among the 35 expelled, most were former members of the old WSL, including its group of carworker militants from BL's Cowley factories, as well as other prominent trade union and labour movement activists.

But the Democratic Centralist Faction which fought on against the expulsions continued to reflect the fusion; it brought together virtually all the other surviving ex-WSL members with a sizable number of longstanding members of the old I-CL — trade unionists and labour movement activists of some prominence — who were moved into opposition by the bureaucratic actions of their old leadership.

In the course of the three years since the fusion, the core leaders of the I-CL succeeded in winning over only two isolated individuals from the old WSL to support their methods, while at the same time losing

an important layer of experienced members of their own organisation.

The DCF — which did not necessarily share the political disagreements of the expelled comrades — sharply attacked the expulsions as symptomatic of a sectarian abandonment of the longstanding commitment to political regroupment of the revolutionary left that had been a prominent part of the public platform of the old I-CL. They linked this with other symptoms of sectarian degeneration:

- ★ The present WSL leaders' sectarian and dismissive stance towards other currents of the world Trotskyist movement;

- ★ Their lack of commitment to international solidarity work, and failure to analyse developments in the world class struggle;

- ★ Their failure to develop any strategic orientation towards the current stage of the struggle in the Labour Party;

- ★ Their lack of co-ordinated involvement in trade union and industrial struggles;

- ★ The failure to educate the WSL's membership and develop a healthy internal climate of collective discussion and the political development of new layers of leadership. Instead came the selection by the leadership of members to be promoted, which has more in common with a system of personal patronage than any normally accepted Bolshevik method;

- ★ And the rejection of collective decision-making, as epitomised by the lack of any functioning Editorial Board for the movement's press.

It was obvious from the behaviour of the leadership before and during the Conference that they were no more willing to tolerate our Faction as a loyal, organised opposition than they were prepared to tolerate the expelled comrades.

Throughout the pre-conference period we were subjected to vicious campaigns of slander and character assassination. Of course, these methods of intimidation and abuse are not new or exceptional for the leadership; they have previously been used against individuals at the Centre. But they show quite clearly that the newly re-elected WSL leadership is incapable of viewing any serious opposition as anything other than a hostile, opponent organisation.

Further evidence of the sectarian degeneration and declining political level of

the WSL was given in the sessions of the Conference which followed the expulsions. Although notionally a "normal" annual conference, it had not been prepared and preceded by any proper discussion on perspectives, on documents or resolutions. Every nerve had been strained simply to whip members up to vote for the expulsions. Nearly half the Conference was composed of members recruited since the fusion, with a significant number brought in only in the last few months, who had never met or worked with the 35 members they were being cynically used to expel from the movement.

In the event the main line of work in Britain (the sketchy Tasks and Perspectives document) was moved, amended, "discussed" and voted upon inside 45 minutes — surely something approaching a world record in the Trotskyist movement.

The "Organisation Report", supposedly assessing the state of the WSL and its work over the last year, laid virtually all blame for any failures on the expelled comrades, and the praise for the least success on the majority. This was clearly nonsense, and DCF comrades moved the reference back of this document. The cynicism of the majority to a clear assessment and accounting was shown by the fact that this reference was passed by a majority, including the author of the document.

A new resolution on Afghanistan, never previously discussed in the WSL, was "discussed" and voted on in 45 minutes flat. A threadbare and piecemeal "International report" served chiefly to underline the near total absence of serious solidarity work in the purged WSL; much of what had been done previously had been done by those now expelled or by DCF members.

Meanwhile the elections to the National Committee reinforced the majority of the old ICL core leaders, who repeatedly insisted that Conference should give the new NC a "free hand" to decide policy and perspective for the movement in the next period. The DCF took up its allocation of seats on the NC in proportion to its strength at Conference.

Meeting a week later to assess the experience of the Conference and the implications of the expulsions, the DCF drew the conclusion that it would be unprin-

ciplined and would achieve nothing to remain any longer in an organisation which had so radically departed from the Leninist norms of Democratic Centralism, embraced methods of personalised slander and vilification as noxious as any of the degenerated former Trotskyist sects, and firmly embarked on a sectarian course.

There was no sign of serious independent forces outside of the DCF willing to fight the leadership, which had explicitly turned its back on the fusion and on any perspective of struggle for Trotskyist regroupment in Britain or internationally.

Twenty-three members of the DCF put their names to a 4-page resignation statement declaring their intention to open discussions with the 35 expelled members and with other forces, and in any event to continue to fight for a genuine regroupment of Trotskyist forces on a principled programmatic basis.

The split in the WSL now seems complete. But with the cancer of sectarianism established at the very heart of the core leadership, further decline and degeneration must be the immediate prospects facing the rump, purged WSL.

This latest tragic episode in the post war history of Trotskyism is no exception: rather it is a continuity of the pattern of fragmentation and political disorientation, opportunist and sectarian confusion, that has characterised every one of the various Trotskyist currents in recent years.

Many militants will be horrified at the thought that yet another left group is being formed, moreover with apparently similar politics to the WSL (although we believe that the lack of internal democracy in the WSL will inevitably lead to further political degeneration). However, the responsibility for this rests entirely with the leadership of the WSL.

In struggling to go forward and develop an organisational and programmatic basis for regroupment and build the kind of militant, coherent Marxist vanguard parties the working class so desperately needs in its struggles worldwide, the forces recently split from the WSL will be fighting to reverse the trend towards unprincipled splits and confusion, and to play a useful role in the development of the world movement.

Document of the 35 expelled members

THE SPLIT which is now completed in the Workers Socialist League (WSL) is another damaging and discrediting episode in the post-war crisis-ridden Trotskyist movement. It contains all the features with which we have become so familiar in our movement over the past 30 years — bone-headed sectarianism, bureaucratic and manipulative practices, and a complete disregard for all norms of communist democracy.

The International Communist League (ICL), in the shape of Sean Matgamna and Chris Reynolds approached the WSL for fusion discussions in the autumn of 1980, and the result was a fusion which lasted for three years — from July 1981 until the confirmation

of our expulsions in June 1984. The two groups were of almost identical size at the point of fusion, creating a fused group of about 300 members.

It was hailed at the time by both organisations as the most important fusion of British Trotskyists since the unification during World War II.

For our part in the old WSL, we saw it as a blow against the fragmentation the movement has suffered in the post-war years. We regarded it as a principled fusion between two groups which were striving towards a common method of work in the labour movement, and between which there were no programmatic nor theoretical differ-

ences which could not be contained in a single organisation, providing a healthy democratic regime could be established. We knew, however, that this would require a development on both sides if it was to be achieved, since the new group would inevitably contain a higher level of differences than existed in either pre-fusion organisation.

In hindsight there were two problems with this approach. Firstly, it was *not* shared by the ICL leadership. It soon emerged that far from seeing it as a principled fusion, they saw it as a cynical manoeuvre designed to outsmart a rival group and to gain an advantage for themselves. They saw three possi-

ble outcomes of the exercise, each of which they would find acceptable: we could be absorbed into their political tradition (the best option); they could split us and take those who could be absorbed; or they could fragment us and destroy a rival organisation.

Secondly, the political differences proved to be more profound than we had understood. We soon found that not only was our knowledge of important aspects of ICL politics inadequate, but this has been compounded by their approach to the fusion discussions — which was to play down differences or even give the impression that they had been evolving in our direction in order to get the fusion agreed at all costs.

The South Atlantic war came nine months after the fusion, and triggered the first major political clash over a central political issue. (Clashes had already developed over more apparently minor issues.) The ICL leadership defended a position of "self-determination for the Falklanders". Behind it was a serious difference on the nature and role of world imperialism. Although it never came out in the fusion discussion it emerged that they held (in our opinion) a variant of a 'post-imperialism' position, which saw the decolonisations of the post-war period not as continuing imperialist domination in a new form, but as genuine political independence — or, as they put it, as "the highest level of political independence which could be achieved under capitalism". According to them what existed now was simply big and small, strong and weak capitalist countries — not imperialist and imperialist-dominated ones. The National question has been resolved and the question of the permanent revolution no longer applied in these countries.



The WSL National Committee majority adopted the ICL position, and we called for a special conference. This, by a narrow majority, reversed the National Committee position and adopted our position of support for Argentina in the war. Then came a problem of democracy, since that decision was never in reality accepted by the ICL leadership, who conspired to ensure that the new position never appeared in the paper.

By the summer of 1983, the full spectrum of differences had emerged. "Federalism" in Ireland and neutrality (at best) on Common Market membership were clearly both connected to their position on imperialism. Their view of the Soviet Union came up both over Poland and the Korean Jet incident where they accused and retailed the most rabid anti-communist statements coming out of the USA. It became increasingly clear that despite their claim to stand for the defence of the Soviet Union against imperialism, this was so heavily qualified that it had very little meaning. They said, for example, that all that could be defended was the "potentially progressive nature of the property relations", that the imperialist countries were more socialist than the deformed workers' states, since they had "democratic rights".

One of the most serious disagreements which came out was over our conception of the world Trotskyist movement. They saw everyone outside their own tradition as being "absolutely useless" and that they were the nucleus from which the Fourth

International would be rebuilt. This led directly to a "national Trotskyist" position, and was expressed through the view that it was necessary to build a group in Britain first, and think about some international links later when clones of the British group could be established (in the traditions of Healey and Grant).

In addition it became clear that there was a difference over orientation to the labour movement, not just on issues like the general strike (where they oppose the call for a general strike to bring down a government), but they appeared to us to see a strategic road through the Labour left and to play down work in the trade unions as a less political sphere.



All these differences, however, did not of themselves imply a split. What it did imply was that they would have to be discussed out over an extended period, and that a democratic regime would be necessary in order to do it and build the group at the same time.

What happened was quite the reverse. Our experiences of the first and second legs of last year's three-stage first annual conference of the WSL told us that the regime was being consolidated in the hands of the ICL leadership and that administrative measures would be increasingly used against us. After the second stage of the conference in April — which was the main stage where the main documents were adopted and the leadership elected — we decided to form a faction. There were two reasons for it: to argue for our politics, and to protect ourselves against the ICL leadership which had come out of the conference as the majority on the main documents. They were now acting effectively as an undeclared faction, and we knew we were in a vulnerable situation.

It was obvious to us that a decision was taken soon after that conference to speed up the process and force us in the medium term to either agree with their politics, or submit to their politics and stop arguing for our own, or to get out of the organisation.

The most obvious sign of this was the replacement of Chris Reynolds by Sean Matgamna as the ICL side's joint editor of the paper. The other editor was from the old WSL, which had been the arrangement since the fusion. The change from the ICL side was apparently because Chris Reynolds had in Matgamna's view been letting our comrade have too much political input into the paper, and Matgamna decided that this must now come to an end. From then on, Matgamna did tighten the grip. Increasing political control was developed, and we began to be marginalised in the pages of the paper.

By December, this had reached the stage where the WSC co-editor (who was not a member of the faction) was not prepared to continue working on the paper. He wrote to the Executive Committee saying that unless things changed, and in particular unless there was a proper editorial board established for the paper, he would not be prepared to continue working on it from the first edition in the new year. It quickly became clear that the majority had no intention whatever of conceding to this, and he left the paper. This clearly moved the expulsion procedure into a higher gear.

A decision was taken (probably over Christmas) to create the conditions for a split in the short term by the sudden application of stringent organisational norms. When we protested on the Executive Committee that this was deliberate harrassment for a political objective, Sean Matgamna replied by saying, "Yes, you are being harrassed," but that we would be harrassed "within the constitution". Further, we were subjected to repeated and vicious campaigns of lies, slander and character assassination, similar to the one unleashed against the Internationalist Faction prior to their expulsion in Spring 1983.

Not that was new from the ICL leadership, who had long used methods of personal abuse and pressure on individuals or groups of individuals who threatened their political control. What was new was its intensity and the way it was used directly to split the organisation.

In fact we were not harrassed "within the constitution". The harrassment increased but it was clearly outside the constitution. Fines were imposed contrary to the constitution; lapsings were threatened outside the constitution, not only for dues arrears but for paper money, one-year-old paper debts, old National Committee pooled fare payments, and failure to pay money in by standing order rather than in cash.

We proposed that the 1984 WSL annual conference be held in April — one year after the election of the existing Executive, in order to discuss the worsening situation, but we were refused by the National Committee majority. At the same time we were told on the Executive Committee that the open access to the paper which had been established at the time of the fusion would now be ended. The 'majority' would now control every thing which went into the paper. They would decide the extent to which we would have access to it, it would be the 'majority' political line which would now be carried on *all* issues, whether the group had an established position on it or not. They would determine the line, for example, on assessment of the industrial situation at any one time.



Faced with these organisational moves, and having been rejected by both the Executive Committee majorities whenever we raised any of these issues, we decided to take the issues to the Control Commission. It was self-evidently the right place to go, faced with the existing conditions on the Executive and National Committees. (The Control Commission is an essential component of a *democratic* centralist regime, one of its key functions is to hear the complaints of any member who may feel that he or she has been abused by a leading committee, discriminated against or had his or her democratic rights infringed upon.)

The Control Commission is an *independent* body, elected directly from the membership, and ultimately responsible to it.

At first, Sean Matgamna and Chris Reynolds accepted that access to the Control Commission was a basic democratic right which could not be qualified or denied in any way. But by the time we were ready to lay complaints in front of the Control Commission, things have changed dramatically. Matgamna and Reynolds now tried to pre-

vent free access to the Control Commission. A resolution was adopted by the Executive Committee to the effect that we were out of order in laying our complaints in front of the Control Commission, and that we were required to go to the Executive Committee and National Committee before we could go to the Control Commission. In other words, we must first complain to those who were responsible for infringing our democratic rights before we could go to those who we were asking to defend us.

The astonishing grounds given by Chris Reynolds and the Executive Committee majority for this undemocratic pressure was Rule 12.iii of the WSL constitution which requires members of leading committees to raise political differences on those committees first before taking them to the membership. Political differences are a very different matter to allegations of infringements of democratic rights. Of course it is right for an Executive Committee member to take political differences to the Executive and discuss them there first. The Control Commission in any case is not concerned with political differences as such — its job is to "independently investigate disputes of facts relating to disciplinary cases, disputes between comrades or complaints against leading committees or functionaries which are referred to it by any of the parties in dispute, the Executive Committee or the National Committee."

The section of the mandate which was relevant in our case was "complaints against leading committees or functionaries". We raised complaints against the National Committee and the Executive Committee, and we had a clear, unambiguous right to do so under the constitution of the WSL, and this was now being interfered with.

For these reasons we told the Executive that we could not accept their ruling and would take our complaint to the Control Commission irrespective. But they did not stop there. They took a decision to ban the Control Commission from meeting, although they backed off this when it unnerved some of their supporters. They *did* however outrageously interfere with the working of the Commission by trying to alter the constitution by a bizarre interpretation of the punctuation: "Reynolds also gave us considerable advice both previous to the meeting and in his submission to the meeting about the function of the Control Commission and its competence to investigate and report on the charges. He laid particular stress on trying to interpret the punctuation of the constitution in such a way as to limit the power of the Control Commission to investigate only the facts of the dispute. We do not accept his reading of the constitution, and I am yet to meet an ordinary member of the organisation who does. It seems quite clear to us that we are charged to investigate whether or not we think members' rights have been infringed by a leading committee. Questions of facts are central, but so also are the constitution and its interpretation and the established norms and practices in this and other bolshevik organisations." (Control Commission Report).

Thus the Control Commission upheld all our complaints except one. They *upheld* the view that we had a basic right to take com-

plaints straight to them. They *upheld* the right of open access to the paper. They *upheld* our complaint that the proposed lapsing for all the different reasons were unconstitutional, and they decided to further investigate whether debt collection was being carried out in an unconstitutional way. They *upheld* our complaint about the unconstitutional imposition of fines.

That meant that all the substantial complaints we made to the Control Commission which were connected with the organisational moves to split the organisation were *upheld* by the Control Commission. Nor can it be said that the Control Commission came to these conclusions because they were supporters of the Faction. Far from it. As they say themselves in the report, they were two supporters of the majority and one of the Faction, and were therefore representative of the rank and file members. We believe that any three rank and file members not rendered irrational by factional heat would have come to the same conclusions.

What happened to the Control Commission report after it was submitted to the National Committee is also important. The National Committee *rejected* all those parts of the report which upheld our complaints. Then they avoided circulating the report, despite a National Committee decision to do so.

The Control Commission report was however successful in stopping the organisational moves against us. They stopped as soon as the Commission met. It did not end the matter though; far from it. The decision was then taken to openly expel us *politically*. They told us this quite openly at the Executive Committee explaining that the organisational moves were far too confusing and they needed a cleaner method.

The irony was that this process was initiated at the same National Committee meeting which discussed and rejected the Control Commission report.

The form this took (and Sean Matgamna said at the Executive Committee that there were many ways it could be done) was a resolution to the National Committee *demanding that we cease to be federalist and cease disruptive agitation*. We were told that if we did not give a satisfactory answer to this, we would be expelled. It was a Catch-22 situation — in order to give the answer that Matgamna wanted, we had to admit guilt. There was no way we could do it. In any case, we had no constitutional obligation to answer this question; our only obligation was to uphold the constitution of the WSL, and to build the group on the basis of the agreed policies. At a meeting of the West London branch, we asked Chris Reynolds what would be acceptable as an answer to the question "Would it be acceptable, for example, to reaffirm that we would uphold the constitution and build the group?" "No", he said, "You will have to specifically state that you will cease to be disruptive".

We also asked Chris Reynolds at that meeting to give some examples of our "disruption". The only one he could give was that we had argued a different position from the majority on the role of the TUC in the NGA dispute. So our disruption was to argue our politics.

At the next National Committee meeting,

we duly replied saying that we would uphold the constitution of the group. It was inevitably rejected, and 35 of us were expelled without being afforded any of the democratic rights contained within the Constitution, which is absolutely clear on the point.

"Any member has the right to defend himself or herself before a decision on disciplinary action is taken against him or her, except in the case of fines for absence or suspensions where the WSL's security and integrity is at risk. Any member subject to discipline must have written notice of the charges against him or her, and the time and venue of the meeting." This was excused on the basis that the majority had the right to *interpret* the constitution, under certain conditions.

Despite the fact that the constitution is so specific and unambiguous on the matter, no charges were ever produced, and 34 of the 35 had no opportunity at all to defend themselves.

Some majority supporters vainly argued that it was all within the constitution. Others like Matgamna himself agreed that it was against the constitution but said it was *necessary*. He even argued that it was legitimate because of the *miners stike!* Clearly once you say that, you don't have a constitution or a democratic centralist organisation.

As soon as we were expelled, we lodged our appeals against it. A further faction formed inside the organisation (the Democratic Centralist Faction) to fight for the expulsion to be reversed. They petitioned the membership for a special conference, and, just as we had done before, obtained more than 25% of the organisation to call for it. Again, just as in our case, they were refused. A decision was taken instead to call the WSL annual conference for the use of June, and our appeals would be held at that.

In order to answer some of the growing criticism inside the WSL as to the way expulsions had been carried out, we were allowed to make a half-hour presentation to each of the area aggregates held to discuss the expulsions.

During the course of the preconference discussions, a very important factor emerged — the real political characterisation which Sean Matgamna and Chris Reynolds had had of the old WSL prior to the fusion. It emerged that they regarded us as *non-Marxists*. This is a very important definition. It means in other words that we were *centrists*. It is true that Reynolds says that we did not have fully hardened positions, and therefore we could be educated into Marxism by him and Matgamna, but we were centrists just the same.

This position is fundamental to any analysis of the process of fusion, since it means that the fusion, from the ICL side, was entirely dishonest and unprincipled. It means that the stated position — by Matgamna and Reynolds — at the time of fusion, that the old WSL was revolutionary Marxist, was nothing than a cynical lie. Equally cynical were all the statements that there were no fundamental differences between us (except that they were Marxists and we were centrists!). All the talk about "building the new group on the strengths of both groups" were equally cynical tactical statements.

It was as sick and dishonest as all the talk about the most "important fusion of Trotskyist groups since the war" — a fusion with a centrist group? With a centrist group, you don't have a principled fusion, but a tactical reorientation. They are a centrist roadblock to revolution. You may decide to enter them, split them, break them up or whatever — but you do not have a principled fusion with them on the basis of "drawing on the strengths of both groups".

This essential point was stated in this way at every aggregate meeting in this discussion. Chris Reynolds was present at most of them and never challenged the point — under conditions where he challenged everything that he wanted to challenge.

This is not to say that the whole ICL were party to that. Far from it. They were taken along with the very reasonable things that Matgamna and Reynolds started saying about the old WSL once they had decided on the fusion project and began preparing the ground. But this was the approach of Matgamna and Reynolds, and they ultimately determined the line of the group.



All this raises the matter of what kind of internal party regime existed within the ICL, and what they had established inside the WSL after the fusion. At the time of the fusion it was difficult for us to judge — we probably expected (although not in a very conscious way) that the turn of the ICL towards a less sectarian approach to the labour movement would be reflected in their internal regime. We quickly found that it very definitely was *not*. We found a thoroughly rigid and sectarian internal regime built up around two or three people, and tailored to build a group in their own image. We also found that this was compounded rather than improved by the pressure of the fusion. As the fusion went on, they became more sectarian and more clearly bureaucratic centralist.

It is of course by no means the first time that the Workers Fight/ICL core members have been involved in this kind of intervention into another group. It is a method which is very central both to their method of party building and to the kind of party they want to build.

Essentially, the Workers Fight/ICL leaders have never set out to be a party of any kind, or even a League. They had always been a faction or a tendency before we "fused". They were a faction during the "fusion" and they see themselves as a tendency in the future. In other words, they want, and intend to have, a highly centralised group, sterilised of all significant political differences which take on any organisational form or mount any kind of challenge to the leadership.

This attitude is absolutely basic to their politics and fundamentally affects everything they do — not least in the kind of regime they want in any group they build. It comes out as the kind of "one-person management" they have fought for in the "fused" group; it came out in differences over the constitution just before the fusion (which were mostly concerned with minority or individual rights, or the extent to which the organisation should be vertically controlled).

It comes out in Matgamna's view that the leadership should be comprised of what he

calls "professionals". But this he does not mean comrades who dedicate their lives to the movement as many comrades do, but people who are paid for working full time for the group — people without other jobs. It is amazing. It excludes workers by definition.

It is an attitude which affects not just the nature of the group, but also the politics it projects, of course, like the question of the reconstruction of the Fourth International. This attitude has led Matgamna and Reynolds into a totally sectarian blind alley in relationship to the general Trotskyist movement — both in Britain and internationally. "Yes, they are really all absolutely useless," says Reynolds when challenged. The implication is pretty obvious: the only healthy Trotskyist forces in the world are in the ICL — and in the ICL there are only two people who provide the theoretical positions of the group — therefore the reconstruction of the Fourth International (or its theoretical regeneration) is down to them. Matgamna and Reynolds are going to construct the Trotskyist movement single-handed. It is as crude and sectarian as that.

It comes directly out of the kind of "purity" they want. Ultimately, Matgamna and Reynolds are the only "Marxists"; anyone who disagrees with them is by definition "non-Marxist" and therefore "absolutely useless".

It leads to national Trotskyism, since everything in the Trotskyist movement outside Britain is "absolutely useless", where do you start? If the sole source of useful theoretical knowledge amounts to two people in one country, where do you go from there? The answer is obvious first build a group in Britain. (Theoretically this does not rule out international work, but in practical terms it does, since there is no drive for international work. It ends up with a few diplomatic encounters between Matgamna and Reynolds and the occasional leader of another group).



Far from providing the starting point for the "theoretical regeneration of the Fourth International", this attitude seriously distorts any theoretical contribution that Matgamna and Reynolds might make. Any serious attempt to tackle the theoretical degeneration of the Fourth International must at least draw upon the efforts and experiences of the best elements within the world movement. It must be done as a part of the mainstream debate within the world movement as a whole. It certainly cannot be done whilst cut off from those debates and whilst isolated to a national Trotskyist situation in Britain. How can a programme be re-elaborated and redeveloped for the working class of the world from such a situation? It is ridiculous.

The attitude further distorts the theoretical positions they develop, since they reject any contribution made by anyone considering themselves Trotskyist, and are attracted instead (at best) to the more peripheral strands of the movement. It is a process which takes them ever further from the Trotskyist tradition. This has been the basic political position of the Workers Fight/ICL and where it has been taking the group.

These expulsions, however, bring something new into it. What we are witnessing now is a *sectarian degeneration* of the group which comes out of the past attitudes, but going far beyond it. This means the group

that Matgamna is going to establish after these expulsions are completed is something more sectarian, more overcentralised and undemocratic than has been established in the "fused" group. A glimpse of this can be seen already, since Matgamna proposes to "reorganise" the Control Commission following its role in these events. Presumably it will not have the "independence" it is supposed to have under the existing WSL constitution, and will be tailored to the requirements of life inside a faction and designed to protect the leadership against dissidents.

There are other things which show what the regime will be like. The justification for suspending the constitution of the WSL in order to carry out these expulsions was that the continuation of the old Workers Fight/ICL tradition stands higher than the constitution of the group. It is an incredible cynical thing to do — enter a fusion on the basis of a democratic centralist constitution, knowing that you will only honour that constitution as long as it serves your political ends. As soon as it doesn't, suspend it and do as you like. Since the "Workers Fight/ICL tradition" equals the views of Matgamna and Reynolds, it means that any group they form cannot have any kind of constitution which means a thing. As soon as it conflicts with the requirements of their views, it will be pushed aside as fast as the constitution of the WSL was pushed aside.



Some comrades were persuaded to stay with Sean Matgamna on the basis of the argument, "Where do you stand on the political questions?" (such as Afghanistan or the EEC). They were told to decide their position on the basis of these "political questions", and not on the questions of regime, or democratic centralism — which presumably are non-political questions.

The problem is that some of these "non-political" questions are some of the most difficult political questions facing the Trotskyist movement. How does democratic centralism operate in small Trotskyist groups in today's conditions? What kind of regime is necessary to recruit members of the working class into it? How does such a group tackle the problems of the reconstruction of the Fourth International? How does it relate to the crisis-ridden Fourth International as it is today?

If there is no answer to all these questions, then there is not much value in having the same opinions as Matgamna on Afghanistan.

In our opinion, the sectarian line of Matgamna and Reynolds on all these issues excludes the possibility of them building anything serious, whatever views they project on anything else. Matgamna, in one of his statements says for example, that "splits are the small change of the Trotskyist movement". How sectarian can you get? As we said in the debates inside the WSL — if splits are the "small change" of the Trotskyist movement, let's hope we never get on to the main problems. What is needed is a break from the blind sectarianism represented by the Matgamna clique and a new effort made to tackle the problems of the movement.





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