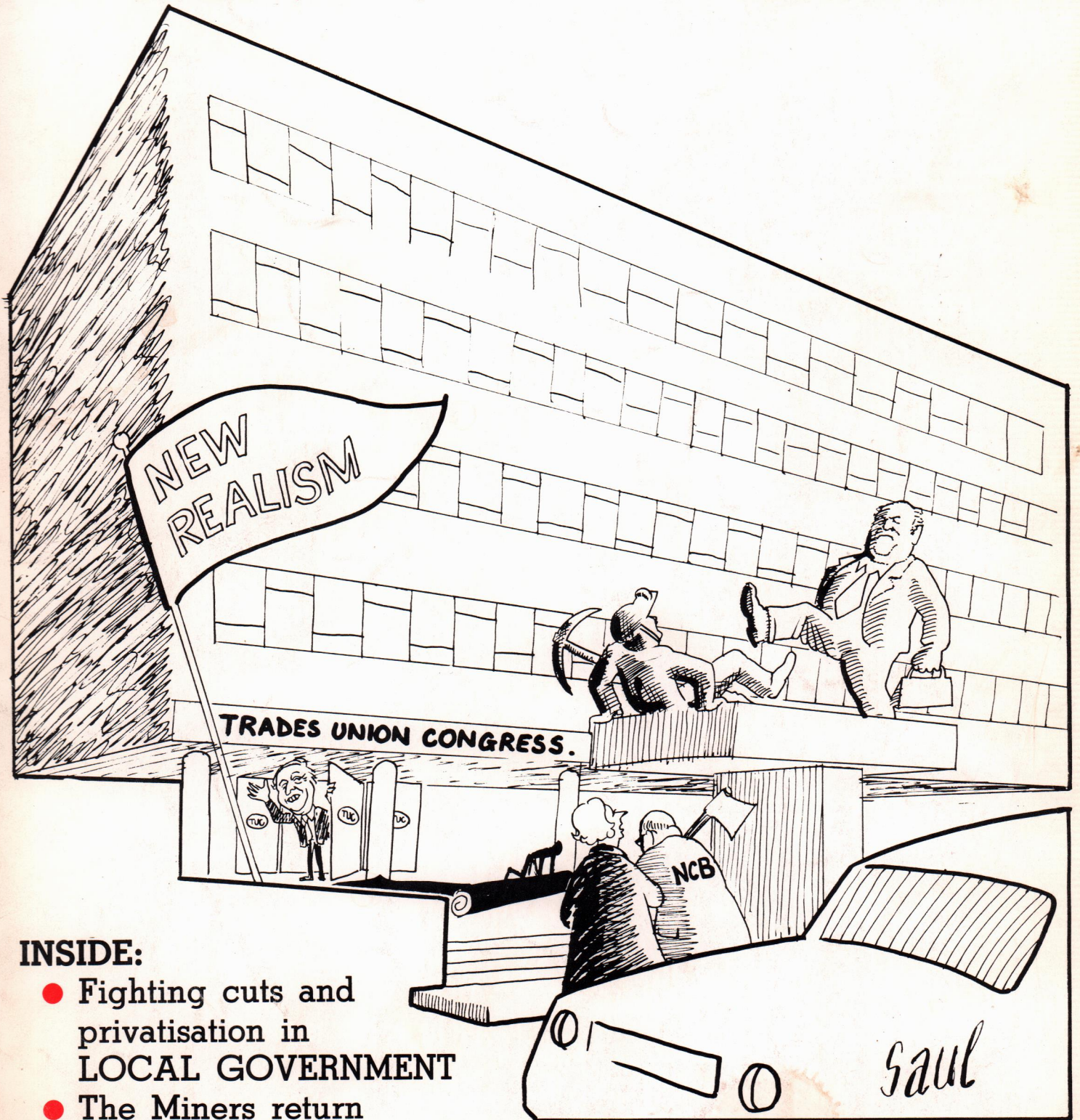


SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

No. 4. March 1985. 70p



INSIDE:

- Fighting cuts and privatisation in LOCAL GOVERNMENT
- The Miners return
- Enoch Powell's Bill explained

Plus: ● Gay Liberation ● Opening the books
● SOUTH AFRICA ● Middle East ● CENTRAL AMERICA

About Socialist Viewpoint

This is the first issue of *SOCIALIST Viewpoint* as a *monthly* magazine, committed to the fight for a principled, class struggle programme at every level of the workers' movement in Britain and internationally. We see the fight for Trotskyist politics taking shape not through introspective sectarian debates in small groups of would-be gurus, nor as simply trailing behind this or that "Left" talking trade union or Labour Party dignitary — but as a patient fight for the independent interests of the working class, and for demands and action which express those interests, in every arena of the class struggle.

Sold and produced by comrades who in many cases have their own political history, often long-standing roots in a range of unions and experience of leading and intervening in disputes, *Socialist Viewpoint* seeks to offer analysis, education and leadership as well as news and comment. We believe that, in the mainstream of the struggles in the labour movement, and in the active struggles for women's rights and against other forms of special oppression, we have a record

of useful work, and a contribution to make.

In our fourth issue, we feature a preliminary assessment of the aftermath of the miners' return to work, and coverage of the struggle against ratecapping and local government cuts across the country and in Scotland.

Among our international articles is a further detailed analysis and explanation of the byzantine manoeuvres behind the latest Middle East "peace Plans", and features on Central America and South Africa.

A valuable article looks at the implications of Enoch Powell's new Bill for women's rights, and we review an important new book on gay liberation. And a background article explains the demand for the "Opening of the Books".

With all too little clarity on offer from the various dogmatic left groupings in Britain, we believe that it is possible and necessary to combine debate with policy and programme. We hope that the positions we put forward and discussion on them will persuade many readers to become *Socialist Viewpoint* supporters in the coming months.

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Beware of "enlightened" Tories!

WHEN the Tory government takes what might apparently be an "enlightened" stand, it is useful to look a little closer at the issues involved. Today, Norman Fowler, axeman of the National Health Service and social security benefits, postures as the opponent of commercial exploitation of childbirth through surrogate mother agencies. While a vital cardiac surgery unit at Guy's Hospital is forced to go begging to an American millionaire for a £272,000 hand-out to keep going for 12 months, Fowler gives top priority to rushing through new legislation to outlaw surrogacy.

Why? Behind the moral rectitude of opposing the cash transaction, the real Tory objection is that this arrangement falls outside their cloistered Victorian view of the "model" family, in which the ideal woman is a submissive child bearer, child rearer, and domestic subordinate to her husband. Children born quite deliberately out of wedlock have no place in such a scheme of things: but neither have abortion rights, adequate sex education or contraception for girls under 16. The Tory "model" family, far from being a focus for emotional support and satisfaction, plays a role as a moral straitjacket, confining the development of millions of women and young people within arbitrary limits and compounding the stress and distress of the 1980s. In fact the Tory Canutes are setting themselves the task of turning back a major tide of social development. The Victorian "model" family with a "breadwinning" husband and wife in the home caring for children is a mere 5% of present households. To reverse this would take more than legislation.

An additional factor in Fowler's haste to push through the anti-surrogate legislation is the continuing Tory compulsion — which we also see in their attempts at anti-abortion laws — to dictate to women how they may or may not use their bodies. While it is seen as a matter of the highest principle for the (male) owner of a money-grabbing private contract cleaning firm to press-gang dozens or hundreds of low-paid women health workers into 40 or 50 per cent cuts in their wages in pursuit of "efficiency" in the NHS, it is regarded as beyond the pale for a woman to decide of her own free will to accept a relatively modest fee for bearing a child for another.

This example of high-falutin' hypocrisy is not unique. Another example is the ultra-right wing's crusade against pornography in its various forms. For the blue-rinse brigade this is simply the thin "respectable" end of a wedge of censorship which they would like to impose far and wide as a means of imposing their archaic and objectionable "morality", political views and reactionary religious prejudices upon the population as a whole.

While socialists oppose pornography as the



degradation of women and of men, we have nothing in common with the Whitehouse book burners, either in our starting points or our long-term objective. Breaking the hold of pornography and smashing it as a multi-million pound industry is integrally linked to the struggle against all forms of women's oppression and anti-gay bigotry: that means fighting against precisely those same self appointed moral censors of the right wing. It requires a fundamental change in the conditioning and education of the male (and female) population: such changes, which we begin wherever we can, can only be completed on a mass scale when the levers of power are taken from the capitalists who exploit sexual and racial divisions in the working class for their own commercial and political advantage.

Fowler's new Bill has no more intention of liberating women than Victoria Gillick's High Court ruling liberated girls under 16. While socialists and feminists must seriously address the new problems raised by the development of science in the field of embryology, and the issues involved in surrogacy, we must ensure that our aims and objectives are clearly distinguished from those of the Tory backwoods and front bench men and women whose only concern is to shackle women more securely to the kitchen sinks.

Betrayed miners defeated but not broken

THE miners strike was the best opportunity the working class have had to turn the tide against the Thatcher Government. Five years of retreat by the trade union leaders and the TUC had wreaked havoc on the trade union movement. Huge closure programmes and the reorganisation of what industry was left had created four million unemployed. Union organisation was under attack at shop floor level and major packages of anti-union legislation were brought in.

The miners were a determined group of workers prepared to challenge that, and with a national leadership prepared to back them all the way.

The Ridley Report showed that they had left the miners until last and had prepared for the battle. But they were vulnerable. Their plan involved keeping the miners isolated from the rest of the trade union movement. They had no plans, resources or capability to take on other major sections of the trade union movement at the same time, far less the trade union movement as a whole.

This proved to be the decisive strategic factor in the whole strike, particularly with the decision of the Nottingham area of the NUM to scab. Time and time again the isolation of the miners could have been broken, but each time instead of hardening their attitude and standing firm leaders of other unions sought compromise. Steel output reached record levels during the strike since every union in the steel industry was determined to compromise when steel production was threatened by the strike. The dock strikes ended with a compromise deal for coal into Ravenscraig. The rail unions blacked the movement of coal but did nothing to organise a struggle in their own industry alongside the miners. The Government were exposed for having intervened in the rail pay negotiations — authorising a shabby deal to prevent a rail strike. The rail unions allowed themselves to be bought off.

The role of the TUC was even worse. They stood back and did nothing when huge attacks were taking place against the NUM, like the

By ALAN THORNETT

sequestration of their funds and later the introduction of an official receiver to take control of their finances. They even intervened when it looked to them as if NACODS would go on strike, advising them not to "escalate the situation".

These are the leaders who have denied the miners and the working class as a whole the victory which should have been theirs. They are the ones who created the situation faced by the NUM last week when the strike against pit closures could no longer be prosecuted. They are the ones who have given Thatcher and McGregor a victory which they now plan to use to great effect both within the coal mining industry and wherever there is resistance to their policies.

Plans have been drawn up for a new management structure for the NCB. Hardliners like the Director of the Scottish coalfield would be brought forward. New people from outside the industry who, know nothing about mining coal but plenty about balance sheets and sacking people, would be brought in. In this way they planned to strip a defeated NUM of its authority and facilities, and re-establish the authority of management in the way MacGregor and Edwardes had been able to do in British Leyland and British Steel. The strike was, after all, more about defeating the NUM as a union than closing pits.

They have looked well on course to push them through.

Then came the proud and dignified march back to the pits with banners flying and bands playing. The miners demonstrated in the most spectacular way that the solidarity developed over the past year in the main areas of the strike was still strong and although the NUM had failed to get agreement to stop pit closures it was far from defeated as a union. Public opinion swung towards the miners as the government was seen trying to humiliate a proud union and proud workforce.

This is not to minimise the defeat which the NUM has suffered in failing

to shift the government on pit closures or the 720 miners sacked during the dispute. The board is clearly in a strong position and MacGregor intends to exploit it to the full if he can get away with it.

In some pits the majority of the branch or lodge leaderships are sacked. In some cases officials at the head of marches back to work had to turn away at the gates because they were sacked and could not go in. One of the delegates who attended the national delegate conference (and voted to return to work) was sacked as soon as he got back to work for "threatening a policeman". Miners in Yorkshire have been sacked since the return to work for "abuse" to scabs who had returned to work earlier. In some cases when officials have gone to negotiate with pit managers over sacked people they have been given lists of new sackings.

Although area negotiations have resulted in a few reinstatements



thousands of miners still face trial and the possible sack if convicted. Peter Walker has made a statement as Minister saying that "acquittal in court does not mean miners will get their jobs back".

In the *Sunday Telegraph* (10.3.85) MacGregor openly gloats about his "victory" and pledges the hardest possible line from the Board. The sacked miners, he says, "are now discovering the price of insubordination and insurrection. And boy, are we going to make it stick." He attacked soft liners on the NCB as "romantics". Of the Kent coalfield one of his executive said, "If they never come back it will be too bloody soon." The board's aim, he said, was to trim the labour force of 25,000 miners "as soon as possible".

Miners strike points the way forward

The validity of the strike, however, was not just its outcome but the fact that it *happend*. The NUM was the first union to reject the economic "viability" argument of the employers and make a *principle* of jobs. The strike was the greatest struggle of the European working class since the general strike in France in 1968, and the movement of workers which overthrew the Portugese dictatorship in 1974. It is the geatest struggle against mass unemployment since austerity programmes became the norm for the European bourgeoisie. It stands as the great example of what can be done and what should be done when faced with ruthless monetarist governments prepared to go to any lengths to break the power of the trade union movement.

In the end it was the TUC who not only isolated the strike but intervened



TUC General Secretary Norman Willis.

over the heads of the NUM leadership and negotiated with Thatcher in the most damaging way. They cooked up a deal which was far worse than the previous offer to the NUM. At the same time they used the "negotiations" to worm their way back into Downing Street.

It was excellent that Willis got physically challenged at the anti-ratcapping rally in Jubilee Gardens on March 6. But it was not just Willis. The shabby deal cooked up with the NCB and which was so damaging to the strike was taken to the NUM by the whole of the TUC team including Moss Evans and Ray Buckton, who have been "supporting" the strike.

The day after the rally, Evans defended Willis's role in the strike and denounced those who had demonstrated against him on March 6.

Mistakes towards the TUC

The mistake the NUM made was to let the TUC off the hook far too much. Not just at the September Congress, but throughout the strike. This weakness did not come out of a lack of resolve to pursue the strike. Scargill led from the front and is undoubtedly the most determined leader the British Trade union movement has produced. But it was a political mistake for which the strike paid dearly.

The final opportunity to force action out of the TUC came at the special delegate conference of the NUM on February 21. By then it was self evident that a decision to continue the strike simply on the basis of appeals for solidarity without a new initiative and a new way forward would quickly run into problems. The back to work drift would rapidly escalate to dangerous proportions. The absence of power cuts during the hard weather in the first two weeks of February had convinced many miners that the strike could not be won whilst they remained isolated from strike support by the rest of the movement.

Arthur Scargill had now recognised this and had been making general calls for the rest of the trade union movement to join the miners. But general calls were not adequate. General calls could not initiate any actual action. Any action of a general nature had to come through the official channels of the movement and that required specific moves and specific proposals to be made first and foremost by the NUM.

The key to it was always a special emergency TUC Congress. There the



Kinnock sits out standing ovation for Scargill — and most of the miners' strike.

NUM would have been in a quite different position to fight for action than at the right wing-dominated General Council to which they had already unsuccessfully appealed for help.

This was an achievable position had the full strength of the miners strike been used to motivate it. Massive demonstrations of miners outside the Congress, and the support of those unions who said they supported the miners, would have been hard to resist.

It would have had a dramatic effect if a special Congress had been called under those conditions. It would have provided a new focus, opened up new possibilities of extending the strike and winning it. It could well have stemmed the back to work drift and brought the strike back on course.

Inside a recall Congress the NUM would have been in a much more powerful position to challenge the right wing directly, spell out the full implications of the situation and force some real action.

Despite resolutions by both South Wales and the Durham areas this demand was never taken up. There was a reluctance by Arthur Scargill, whose position throughout the strike has been to neutralise the TUC rather than fight for them to act, but the most negative force was Mick McGahey, who, as NUM General Council member, repeatedly opposed a recall Congress.

The Back to Work Decision

Ten days after the delegate conference, the drift back had escalated in every area of the country. Several areas of the NUM were beginning to call for a national delegate conference and an "organised return to work" without an agreement.

A further delegate conference was called on Sunday March 3. It faced a very difficult situation. Any attempt to continue the strike on the basis of pit closures would probably have failed with thousands continuing to go



Sackings of victimised miners: key issue for NUM.

back to work. Having got into this position it was better to have no agreement with the NCB than the shabby deal offered a week earlier by the TUC. This would at least allow the issue of closures to remain disputed, and would provide the basis for a united and defiant return to work.

The call for an "orderly return" was moved by the South Wales delegation. It had a very major problem within it. It said **nothing** about the 720 miners victimised and sacked during the strike. This was a huge issue. How could the NUM return without them?

The resolution from Kent correctly dealt with it, calling for no return until all the victimised miners had been reinstated. Had this been adopted it is likely that the strike could have been sustained for a further period. It would have been very important. It would have taken the issue to a much higher level of prominence, and pro-

ably have saved more miners from victimisation even if it had not been wholly successful. The same option of a united return would have been there once that had been fought as far as possible.

It was tragic that the most solid area of the strike — South Wales — ended up moving the resolution for a return without the victimised people. This did not reflect the membership but elements in the leadership who had been working for a return for some time. Kim Howells, an academic who was spokesperson for the South Wales Area, was the first to call publicly for an "organised return" when it was contrary to the policy of the Area Executive. The Area had a policy of a recall TUC, but Howells never pressed that in the way he pressed an organised return.

This has now been compounded by the decision of South Wales to go into the High Court and purge their contempt in an attempt to get the sequestration of their funds lifted — contrary to a National Executive decision to refuse to do so.

The decision of the Kent Area and pits in other areas to continue the strike on the call for an amnesty in spite of the delegate conference decision was very principled and important. It did raise the issue to a prominence which would otherwise never have been the case. No one had fought for it after the national decision.

The role of the Communist Party in Scotland, however, was very different to that of Kent. There, George Bolton — an executive member of the CP and Scottish NUM Vice President — opposed Scotland staying out and criticised the Kent decision as "a mistake". No wonder there was such hostility to Mick McGahey after the Scottish strike was called off. It was quite different to their attitude to Arthur Scargill who they knew had been



against a return to work without the sacked people.

The *Morning Star* was in any case claiming that the miners had won a victory. They said on March 6 that "the Government's strategy for mass sacking and closing pits in the mining industry lay in tatters yesterday as 85% of miners marched back to work in a fighting mood." Yet the CP has people amongst the sacked and their members in Kent were calling on everyone to stay out.

The Scottish Area NUM has gone on to invite Neil Kinnock — who has opposed the call for a general amnesty — to be "guest of honour" at the Scottish Mines Gala in the spring.

It is true that the fight goes on. The NUM has not been defeated in the pits. It will not be easy for MacGregor to break up their organisation the way he broke up

shop floor organisation in BSC and BL. The trade union movement is not broken anything as much as it was in 1926. Struggles go on. There was a massive TUC demonstration in London on ratecapping the day after the miners went back.

The price the Tories have paid is enormous. Their strategically important tax cuts in the budget are likely to go. The strike has cost them many times more than the Falklands war. But to call it a victory is wrong. That can only disarm miners who are going back under difficult conditions.

Those conditions have to be met by organisation. Tens of thousands of miners have developed as class fighters during the strike. They have to fight to remove the right wingers in the NUM who refused to back the strike. They must ensure there are no compromises with the Nottingham-

shire Area. They must move out into the Trades Councils and into the Labour Party and fight the right wing there who back the treachery of Kinnock throughout the strike.

Equally the women in the pit villages must develop on the huge contribution they have made during the strike and continue the struggle against all aspects of Tory policy.

The support committees should continue. They need to take up the campaign for the reinstatement of the victimised miners. They need to defend those who are in prison and raise money for their families. They need to defend those miners who still await trial and they need to take up the struggle against ratecapping and support the teachers and other struggles which will emerge in the coming period.

Cheers and tears as Mardy marches back

"Don't forget that we've gained more than we've lost..."

By Anne Marie Sweeney

BARBARA Williams, the Secretary of the Mardy Women's Support Committee, had said on TV that when the miners returned to work, they would be marching heads held high from the Miners Institute, men and women under their respective banners — up to the pit and no one would ever say they were defeated.

The press realised that at the end of this powerful and emotional ceremony, one of the most militant pits in South Wales, and in the country, "Scabfree" Mardy, was returning to work.

They could, therefore, in these final hours, afford to be magnanimous, to show the complete community backing for the strike.

Even the police stayed away, as also, despite expectations, did the Kent pickets. The miners appeared to feel divided about the possibility of



Solidarity in return to work



Kent picketting. They were unanimous that there would be no question of crossing the picket line. The militant activists wanted them there so that they wouldn't be going in, so they too could identify strongly with having no return to work without an amnesty.

As one put it, "we've got no one sacked as yet in Mardy, but the golden rule still applies — an injury to one is an injury to all. This strike ins't about just looking after your own."

The lodge, though, hadn't wanted to stick it out further for fear of splitting their pit, solid up to then.

In their view it was better to march back as one, than to have a partial return, risk scabs in Mardy and recriminations and bitterness against the left which could destroy their control of the lodge and any effective future struggles. The lodge had voted overwhelmingly to back the South Wales Delegate Conference decision — to return with no negotiated settlement or amnesty. The left had voted with the majority, dominated by the Communist Party line of unity at all costs and in their eyes a lack of any real alternatives.

Yet they wanted the Kent pickets there, so someone other than themselves could ensure that Mardy wouldn't be working that day, the left from elsewhere preventing the return to work so they wouldn't have to face the comeback.

At 6 o'clock in the morning, the entire community gathered outside the battered miners institute. Everywhere was cast in the bleached glare of the

television floodlights. The mountains and slagheaps were dark, hard and glistening with the night's frost. The lights from the works buses and miners cars from Aberdare worked their way down the mountain road as the banners were brought out from the strike headquarters.

Megan, carrying the women's banner, looked shattered. Privately aside she said, "Good God alive, well I never thought it would be South Wales that got us all back, never. How can we go in leaving those 700 lads out in the cold?"

Then, taking a firm hold on the banner that she had carried on many a more defiant occasion, she shouted: "C'mon girls, up the front where we all belong!" As we walked up the pitroad following their banners, Selwyn, an electrician at the pit, explained the rubbish scattered along the roadside: "People dumped their rubbish here during the NALGO refuse strike, that was a long strike too, too many months." [see elsewhere in this issue - Ed.] He pointed out the site of a previous mine, one of the 57 now closed in the Rhondda. "This coming Christmas," he said, "marks the centenary of an awful accident where over a hundred died in that pit."

The toll that mining has exacted from these communities over the years is carefully written in their personal and local history, the strike is part of that tradition. Its cost, sacrificed in life, punishments and hardships will not be forgotten for generations.

I talked to one of the miners from

Mardy who had been involved in the occupation of the crane at Port Talbot docks. He, along with 121 were awaiting trial, to be the biggest in legal history. Fresh hearings are always being held, and then the trial is put off again for another couple of months to build up the pressure. Each time it is deferred the prosecution seems to add a new charge and the lawyers have said that if found guilty they should prepare themselves to face sentences of up to 5 years.

One young miner, just gone twenty, couldn't take the strain. He stopped eating days before the last date of his trial and then one morning when his mother went into wake him, she found him dead: he had killed himself rather than keep enduring the pressure. The judge just callously said, "Well there were to be 123 here today, but circumstances have reduced the number to 122."

The boy's father had come to court to show his solidarity, even in his grief, with the other miners on trial. He heard his son just dismissed as a number, a figure on the court register. Like the two South Wales miners who lost their lives picketing at the Llanwern steelworks (tragically the same week as the crane occupation) the press remained silent about this young man's death.

The miner telling me all this said, "Everyone, on the crane suffered enough, in high winds, a hundred feet plus above the sea, swaying in the rain on a thin gantry. "Men," he said, "were literally petrified of moving, too scared to go for a piss." For

him — it was not so bad, as he had been in the paratroopers much of his life. "I was a 'king and country' man all my life before this strike, but that was before. Now I've seen another side of things and I'm sick through with the whole set up."

As the march neared the pithead it stopped. The Mardy lodge and its members parted on either side of the road to salute the women with their banner passing between them.

"Let's hear it for the women" was the shout and the men clapped, with tears in their eyes as the women passed through singing "Mardy miners, Mardy miners, we'll support you evermore." The men clapped as one to express something that transcended admiration and a sense of comradeship but reflected a knowledge deep within them that went back in the history of their class: that whatever was sent to oppress them, together, fighting side by side, there would be no limit to the sacrifices they could endure; collectively they

would not be broken.

Misled, betrayed, isolated as individuals, but as a body of men and women united in the community, they were determined to show they would not give in whatever they faced.

The Mardy women's group was followed/joined by women from Rhondda CND. These women had joined most of the Mardy picket lines. Many CND women were arrested on them.

One, Lynn Fortt, was arrested twice and served two sentences locked up in Bristol. Her fines had been paid by the Women's Support Group but she refused to be bound over to keep the peace as one of the conditions was that she was not to attend or participate in any demonstrations.

After the women from CND, the supporters from outside Mardy, from Birmingham (represented by the TGWU Sandwell banner), from Aberystwyth, with its resplendent support group banner, and Oxtord (with its much travelled Trades Coun-

cil banner) joined the women to clap in the miners in their final few yards to work.

The band struck up, the miners clenched their fists high and stamping their feet marched to "Here We Go" in a loose battle formation to the pithead. We all stood back, crying and cheering, knowing it wasn't a broken workforce and our tears weren't those of despair, but knowing it could have been so different.

Different, on one hand, because we could never have clapped them through if there had been sacked men in their midst. Different, on the other hand, if there had been a victory. A thought few would openly state, too painful to consider how jubilant it could have been.

To all of us present it was a couple of minutes charged with intense emotion, which we will never forget... the dawn breaking into misty morning sunshine, the children in the brass-band or carried on men's shoulders, months of painstaking badge collec-





Yorkshire wives' action group: each of the women involved has brought a special quality to the fight.

ting shining on lapels or flat caps carefully tilted. An end of an era. "Well," said one woman, "after all we've gone through, after all we've shared, I suppose it's only fitting that we only had one tissue to share between the lot of us!"

Glynnis Evans spoke on behalf of the women, from the icy roof of the pit's canteen, addressing the impromptu rally and the herds of press which had clambered down the mountainside.

She told them: "We're stronger now than we've ever been" and warned Thatcher "she ain't seen nothing yet."

A letter she sent to me that day ended with "keep fighting... and don't forget we have gained more than we have lost. Friendships and pride, what more could you ask for?"

Glynnis is right to be proud: over the course of the strike she has developed from a near anorexic woman to an accomplished orator capable of moving a massive international peace convention in Belgium to a standing ovation, or telling hundreds in Oxford Town Hall, "What's the point of looking at the TV when the TUC are on — I may as well look at my goldfish going round and round in its bowl, opening and shutting its mouth all the time with nothing to say."

It is difficult to say that any one member of the Mardy Women's Support Group symbolises it, every one of them has their own particular strengths that make up its collective force. Barbara, the secretary, is known everywhere sitting on the frontline in her wheelchair, a power-

ful, compassionate speaker. She has virtually lived in the strike headquarters, enduring great and continuous pressure, despite ill health. She has organised delegations, speakers to all over the country, administered hardship funds and generally acted as the pivot round which the whole group revolved.

She remembers the smallest detail about people, makes a fuss of children and is loved and respected.

It is an extraordinary fact that out of the 10 most active and leading figures in the support group — six had undergone major operations and within weeks of them were on the road again campaigning against pit closures.

Barbara herself was in hospital less than 2 weeks before the return to work. The women's political activities had not stopped when they reached the hospital wards, as they talked to other patients, relatives and staff. It is no coincidence that amongst the demonstration of supporters was a delegation of NUPE hospital staff.

Joan held the other side of the banner; she has opened her house during the strike, constantly putting up the many visitors that had come to visit Mardy. Most importantly her and her neighbour's house had become home for a group of young Nottingham strikers who had been kicked out of their parents' household, where fathers and brothers were scabbing. Now they had new families based on class not blood ties in Mardy.

Jean, a spiritualist, says she has no children, but her family includes her dog "Strongbow", a ghost, and a rubber plant which she looks after. She can

drink most men under the table and is a big woman who means business. When she saw a policeman attacking a less physically stalwart woman — she tapped him on the shoulder and asked him coolly if he would like to pick on "someone his own size". He declined the offer, but let go of the other woman! Any offensive remarks to Jean in the Institute are greeted with a grin and the comment "pick your window, sunshine, you're leaving."

Every member of the support group is unique. When I think of the fierce determination of these women, of the groups' defiant militancy I will always think of Megan. Megan, the first to lobby, to picket, to occupy, stand up to the police and the first to undermine them with her biting wit.

From inside a recent occupation of the furnace plant, she watched the police warming themselves on the pickets' fire. "Well, girls," she shouted, "who's got the eggs? The bacon's frying nicely!"

She exemplifies the courage, compassion and humour that is the hallmark of the Mardy group.

They were all there that morning. There, the first time for most women, to watch the men going into work, sporting their lunch boxes, their nicknames, — Corka, Nippy, Biffo Clutch, Psycho, Pasti — and their pride; all intact, ready to face another fight another day. Then the women went back, down to the village, on the pit buses, to their homes.

As Polish bureaucrats battle Solidarnosc

Will Jaruzelski go for a show-trial?

THE Polish regime is continuing with its 'stick and carrot' methods of attacking the working class. The "carrot" of the amnesty for Solidarnosc activists last year has been shown to be only a tactical move, as wholesale re-arrests have begun. The latest figure as we go to press is 2,000 re-arrested, including top leaders of Solidarnosc.

The Jaruzelski regime is carrying through these measures as a response to the sustained level of opposition to its planned price rises — which in turn flow out of the ruling bureaucracy's chronic inability to plan or develop the Polish economy.

The conditions facing Polish workers have got so bad that the price increases proved the final straw. Shortages, queues and power cuts all over Poland have been driving the working class to desperation.

This in turn has created conditions where Solidarnosc made its first appeal for action — a 15-minute strike on February 28 — since the amnesty.

The police response was immediate and heavy-handed. They raided a strike planning meeting on February 13, and arrested 7 top leaders of Solidarnosc, including

Wladyslaw Frasninch, Bogdan Lis and Adam Michnik. These men are still detained, and with a growing swell of propaganda alleging Solidarnosc "links with the CIA", it seems possible that a show-trial is being prepared.

But even while taking these steps to repress Solidarnosc and any independent working class action, the regime recognised that the strike call would win widespread support. To head off this new challenge, they decided to spread the price rises over a longer period — avoiding a concentration of price rises in March: instead they will be implemented by June.

In a further attempt to undermine Solidarnosc, the bureaucracy resorted to the device of wheeling out the "official" stooge union leaders on February 23, to declare their "opposition" to the price rises a week before implementation (and five days before the strike call!). The subsequent announcement of the phased introduction of the price rises was then timed to appear as a concession to these tame "unions".

It was then that Lech Walesa, who had not been arrested, decided to call off the



Not arrested: Walesa strike for February 28.

These events took place in the aftermath of the well-publicised trial of the secret policemen who murdered Solidarnosc sympathiser Jerzy Popieluszko. The trial itself was a cover-up designed to protect the senior figures who gave the orders. But it could not help but unmask the real attitudes of these police thugs, and the scope of secret police activities. In doing so it clearly confirmed the extent to which the Jaruzelski regime still recognises itself to be fighting a daily battle to crush Solidarnosc as the voice of the Polish working class.

The reality is that despite the repression since December 1981, the regime knows it still has not defeated the Polish workers. They must use desperate measures to stamp out any spark of political independence. Hence the new repression of Solidarnosc leaders.

Prevention of Terrorism Act used to harass Irish Community

OVER the New Year the Special branch launched a major attack on the Irish community, using the Prevention of Terrorism Act to detain half a dozen people apparently selected because of their peaceful activity in support of a British withdrawal from Ireland.

All were held under the PTA for up to a week before being charged with conspiracy to cause explosions: to date no substantive charge has been made against any of the accused. They were then awarded category A status and held on remand.

Among those arrested was Maire O'Shea, a 65 year-old psychiatrist and ASTMS member, who is active in the Irish in Britain Representation Group and the Associated Staffs for a United Ireland, a pressure group within ASTMS. As well as being elderly, Maire

suffers from arthritis, an ulcerated leg and a number of other ailments.

Within hours of her arrest ASUI supporters in Liverpool had mounted a vigil outside the Bridewell Prison where she was being held, and a phone-in campaign had been organised to enquire after her welfare. ASUI supporters met shortly after and planned a campaign of support for Maire within the union. The union leadership was lobbied, as a result of which Doug Hoyle, the union's vice-president, took up the case with the Home Office. The issue was also taken into the union structure and to date 6 of the 16 Divisional Councils have expressed support for Maire, at least to a degree.

The authorities evidently decided they were pushing their luck a bit on this occasion as a campaign on behalf of the prisoners began to take off in the Irish community and in the labour movement. Early in February, Maire was released on bail (though on £40,000

sureties) and a number of the others were taken off category A status. However, they are reported to be in poor health and the campaign for their release is continuing.

Likewise the campaign in ASTMS on behalf of Maire O'Shea continues. Predictably, most opposition to her has come from the union hierarchy who first tried to hide behind the sub judice procedures. When this cover was blown, they then argued that no union funds could be spent in her support. This is a very doubtful position and an appeal fund will be launched for Maire to cover her trial expenses which will be enormous. In addition, a campaign against the PTA will be taken up in the union as well as the general agitation in support of British withdrawal.

Unpleasant though it is that it should happen in this fashion, the arrest of Maire O'Shea has given a boost to Irish work in ASTMS.

Ratecapping threat to 300,000 jobs

COUNCIL WORKERS MUST TAKE ACTION TO FIGHT CUTS!

By JENNY FISHER

WHEN the Tories chose March 1985 to confront local councils over ratecapping, little did they think the run up to the confrontation would be a twelve-month miners' strike. The strike has cost the government more than twice the cost of the Falklands war: the economy is stretched to the limit, and the Tories' need to keep down local authority spending is even more urgent now. But also the courage and determination of the miners, their families, and the groups of women in the mining communities are an example for all working class communities to fight the Tory attack they now face.

Since they came to power in 1979 the Tories have been waiting for a chance to take on the NUM, recognising that if they could smash the strength of the NUM, they would weaken the whole trade union movement. Labour Councils are on the same Tory hit-list.

The Tories have cut public expenditure where they have direct control. What hasn't been cut from the NHS is being privatised; spending on education has plummeted: the only exceptions are the military forces and the police, who have to be preserved to kick the hell out of any resistance that breaks out!

But local authority spending, despite cuts, targets and financial penalties, overshoot by £2 billion last year: no way can Tory economic policy let that continue. To cut that back, they have to override local democracy. No longer can local Councils — elected as democratically as central government — decide how to spend money. If any item of expenditure is not sanctioned by central government, the Council won't be allowed to make it. Either the Council doesn't force the issue, by accepting a cuts budget in line with government targets. Or, if the Council won't make the cuts (which could mean halving the workforce, cheerfully ignoring slabs of concrete falling off tower blocks, and spreading road resurfacing programmes over 700 years): then they have no alternative but to fight. They won't get central funding; they can't raise rates; and they can't borrow more than the permitted amount on the open market.

There is a stark choice for Councillors: accept the Tories' politics, and you decide that you will surrender your power as an elected Councillor to them without consulting those who elected you on your programme, not the Tories'; and content yourself with the role of operating Tory economic policy. The alternative is to defy the government, and to fight. And that



fight means breaking Tory law. Manoeuvres or clever sums may delay a decision; but the same choice will be there at the end of the day. Manoeuvring around will just cloud the issue, lose time, and lessen the chances of building a successful fight.

The nonsense of Neil Kinnock's position is clear. "Better," he says, "the dented shield of a Labour Council, making humane cuts, than no shield at all." *There*

are no such things as humane cuts; especially after 5 years of Thatcher (except possibly cuts in police overtime, etc., which will at least protect a few of us from assault). A shield of any sort, if it's dented, buckled or battered, should at least still provide some protection. How can obedience to the Tories, changing from doing what we want, to doing exactly what they want, be any kind of protection from the Tory cuts? We'd be making them! In reality, many Councillors won't have a choice of whether to "break the law" or not: either they break the law on ratecapping, or they break the law on the minimum services a Council must legally provide. The judges have made it clear that in their view obedience to the ratecapping law comes first, before other laws. What more proof do you need that ratecapping law is class law?

The first step in fighting ratecapping has been decided: the majority of the Councils which have decided to fight intend to refuse to fix a rate at their March meetings. They will still need to be lobbied and pressed to make that decision. After that decision is taken, Councillors will quite quickly have to start making decisions to back up that policy. As the money runs out, Councillors will come under pressure from different sources: the banks demanding their interest payments; the police; voluntary organisations; the Council workforce.

We cannot leave Councillors isolated: votes in the Council Chambers — however radical — will not make an effective campaign against ratecapping. From the start, Councillors must fight hand in hand with the labour movement. The Tories will shrink back from imprisoning Councillors; they do not believe in "creating martyrs", who will be defended by the working class. They didn't jail Arthur Scargill last autumn, they sequestered NUM funds; and union leaders who'd pledged strike action if Scargill was jailed let the sequestration go by, with a few radical murmurs. Unions must make it clear they will call clearly for strike action if commissioners are called in, or if Councillors are surcharged: the rank and file must press them to do this.

We must realise, above all, that we cannot win ratecapping on the strength of having a "good case". NHS workers had a "good case" in 1982 for a 12% wage increase. They won popular support, and solidarity action from other unions. The Tories ignored the arguments, and were let off the hook as union leaders defused the strike action. Council workers must be prepared to take strike action in defence of jobs and services: we cannot see the Tories as "independent arbitrators" over good cases.

Individual Councils must work closely

with the workforce at rank and file level. Mass meetings must be called to discuss strike action. Unions must work together, through joint shop stewards committees (as in London, with "London Bridge"). But these organisations must turn the pressure on the union leaders and the TUC. The TUC have called for a Day of Action on March 6; and NALGO — alone among the public sector unions — have sanctioned strike action. It will be much more difficult to argue for effective strike action if unions are not clearly backing it nationally, or if union leaders are not calling for strike action to defeat ratecapping.

To some extent, local Councils have been able to soften the blow of Tory economic policy. As unemployment soars, as part time jobs replace full time work and the real value of benefits falls, the working class relies on Council housing, cheap transport, and social services; and it can be united to defend them. Public sector workers have fared better than industrial workers in the recession. Now, their jobs are seriously under threat, not only from ratecapping, but also from privatisation. The National Health Service was a rehearsal, not the only target: Councils will be next. Unless the ratecapping battle is won, Councils and Council workforces will be faced with a massive privatisation programme, which would mean a loss of jobs, and loss of pay and conditions for every worker who still had a job to go to. It would also significantly reduce the strength of public sector unions — an added attraction for the Tories.

The Tories have been preparing to take on the NUM since 1979. Whatever the cost, they were prepared to sit out the strike. The NUM have fought to defend jobs; perhaps as many as 70,000. *Nationally ratecapping, if successful, will do away with some 300,000 jobs completely*; and — by clearing the path for privatisation — will lead to part-time working, speed up, loss of basic conditions in countless more jobs. No single Council worker is safe.

Where was NUPE when the miners were fighting for their jobs? Where was the "left" Bickerstaffe? Bickerstaffe was being a "wise man" for the TUC, arguing the NUM should go back to work for less than the NCB had already offered. Bickerstaffe hasn't even been able to follow NUPE Conference policy and organise solidarity action for 92 domestic workers at Barking Hospital: March sees the first anniversary of that strike too.

Where was the T&G when the miners were leading the fight for jobs? Defying the Tory law on balloting members the bosses' way before car workers' strikes at British Leyland: but then surrendering £200,000 of members' money with nothing more radical than a whimper. Where was their solidarity action with the NUM?

Councillors may be in the front line; subject to surcharge and disqualification. But the standard of living of every low paid worker and unemployed person is under threat. We've let the Tories reduce us to this: will we let them extract more from us to line the pockets of the bankers, the international businessmen, the wealthy? The job, and future of every Council worker is at stake. We must fight the Tories with the only weapon left to us: **strike action to defend jobs and services**. Union leaderships stood by and let the NUM fight alone, while it was in their power to call official action in solidarity with the miners. They knew the ratecapping battle was coming up; and how much stronger a united front between the miners and public sector workers would be for both of them. Where the working class realises what's at stake, all pressure must be turned on the union leaderships now. Don't let them off the hook again.



The Labour Party

* Nationally

— The Labour Party must adopt a policy of non-compliance with and defiance of the law. The NEC must adopt this policy now, and argue for it publicly, including the Party leader.

— As well as giving full backing to Councils which are fighting, the Labour Party must pledge to indemnify Councillors who are penalised.

* Locally

— Labour Parties have a key role to play in helping organise campaigns with tenants and community groups; they should also make a special approach to black and ethnic minority organisations to organise a joint struggle.

— Labour Parties should affiliate to rank and file shop stewards organisations (like "London Bridge" in London); or, if these do not exist, work to set them up.

The Unions.

* Strike to defend democracy and services.

— We need a commitment now from unions to call all out strike action against any surcharges, removal of councillors, or cuts in jobs and services.

* Organise Council Workers

— Mass meetings of Council workers must be called; stewards campaigns to be built in rate-capped and hit list authorities.

— Prepare for strike action locally; and turn the pressure on the union leaderships to fight for their members. Start organising for solidarity strike action.

Councils and Councillors.

* The Budget: No cuts in jobs or services.

— Councillors must vote "no" to budgets including any cuts in jobs or services provided for local people. Only anti-working class organisations — such as the police — are possible areas where funds can be withheld.

— No compromise by using cheap labour schemes: YTS trainees only on topped-up rates with a guaranteed job. No to privatisation.

— No passing the burden of paying back onto the working class: no rent increases, no rate increases. No selling off of public assets.

* Non-compliance with Tory laws

— Councillors are accountable to those who elected them: they have no mandate to carry out Tory economic policy at the expense of local people. The Tories pledged to abolish the rating system, not local democracy!

— Councillors must be prepared to break Tory law to defend the working class. Not breaking the law on ratecapping will generally mean breaking the law on minimum services which Coun-

cils must provide.

— No fudges or compromises: so no negotiations with Jenkins, or any other Tory minister. The Tories aren't independent arbitrators of "good cases": we need a united fight. In particular, no Council should break ranks and plead their own case. Separate negotiations would play into the Tories' hands, by dividing us.

* Stand firm!

— While we work for a united fight now; we should be ready to back Councils which stick to their principles, even if it means fighting alone.

— No compromise from Labour Councillors: individuals must be prepared to break the whip if Labour Groups renege on the fight. Councillors should see themselves as defenders of the interests of trade unionists, tenants and community groups.

* Working with the unions

— If we're to have a united fight, Labour Groups must work closely with Council trade unions. Group meetings should be open to trade unions to attend and participate.

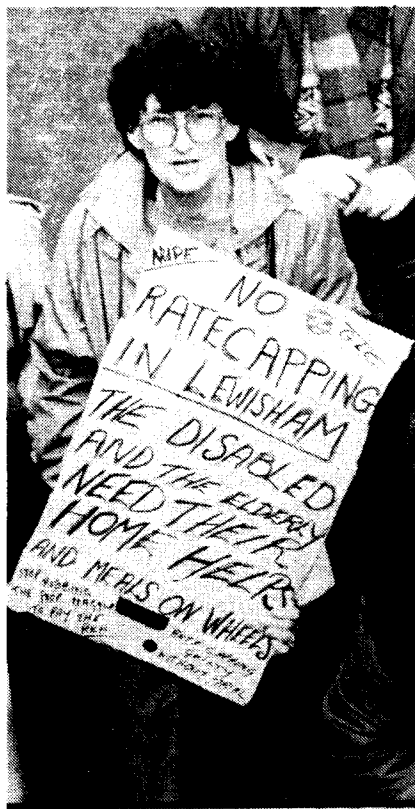
— Groups must support trade union action: no victimisation of workers taking action to defend jobs and services.

Build local campaigns

One development we've seen as a result of the miners strike has been the establishment of miners support groups. The labour movement has been able, locally, to work together, in the common cause of raising funds for the strike, holding public meetings, etc., to win support, and discussing aspects of the strike.

To fight ratecapping, we need to build broad-based campaigns, which can unite support for Councils taking a stand. Such campaigns must include Council workers; Labour Parties, tenants associations and community groups. It must have adequate representation for women, and ethnic minorities. How they are set up will vary from area to area. Some places have "anti-cuts" campaigns or committees already. In other areas, the Miners Support Groups themselves might be the best vehicles. Miners Support Groups should continue meeting regardless of the return to work call by the NUM: money will still be needed for hardship funds and defence funds in the mining communities. But turning the Miners Support Groups towards the fight against cuts might be one of the best ways of keeping the momentum going. Miners Support Groups have the links with the mining communities: to keep up the links, miners and women from Women's Support Groups should be invited to speak at meetings against cuts and against ratecapping.

Councils must be prepared to fund broad campaigns, and provide resources for them to use. As well as organising publicity on the effects of ratecapping, committees must organise now for strike action against surcharges or removal of councillors. If councillors are to expect such support from anti-ratecapping campaigns, they must allow such campaigns to participate in policy-making as the fight develops.



Green Paper could signal Council jobs holocaust

JANE GOSS sounds the alarm over a little-noticed plan for privatisation of local government jobs.

THE miners strike is over. After twelve months of fighting — in isolation — they are back at work with no settlement. But the struggle which the miners took up — to defend jobs and services — is a long way from over. It has to continue every day in the pits, in the counties, and in the inner city areas where the Tories will now feel confident enough to try to demolish local government services through privatisation and rate capping.

The alternative to fighting — as the miners knew in March '84 — was to watch the wholesale destruction of their industry. That same stark choice is now facing millions of public sector workers.

At the end of February, Patrick Jenkin published a Green Paper entitled "Competition in the Provision of Local Authority Services". In the midst of the media's mania to report the drift back to work and with the rest of the Fleet St. newsprint being used on reporting the plunging pound not much space was given to Jenkin's proposals. He is no doubt keen to keep them as quiet and unknown as possible, because their implications are far-ranging and frightening. If the spirit behind his proposals is achieved, we will be facing a jobs holocaust which will make the loss of jobs in the mining industry paltry by comparison.

The issue however goes beyond jobs and reaches to the centre of the previous political consensus that there are certain services which the state, through local government, has a responsibility to provide. Coupled with rate-capping and the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties, this Green Paper marks a significant step towards abolition of all but the most skeletal of council services.

The Thatcher government is now preparing — and will pass — legislation which will make it possible to implement policies for social services which were put forward in the Omega series of reports produced by the Adam Smith Institute. Only a few years ago the Adam Smith gang was looked upon even by many Tories as crackpot right wingers who should not be taken too seriously. Now they are constructing the framework for services which affect all of us — and that framework is based purely on profit and economics. It has nothing to do with social needs or responsibilities.

As the Tories' economic policies continue to be unworkable, and British capital continues to decline, they are forced to find ways previously unavailable for making profits for their big business friends. Privatising council and health services is their current target.

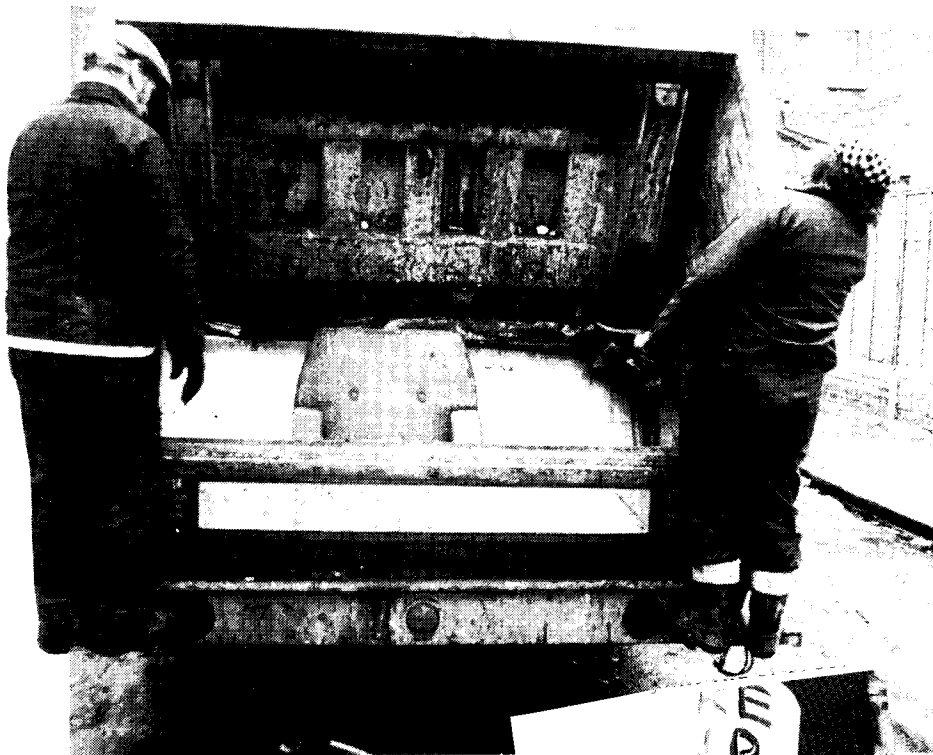
The contracting out of ancillary services in the National Health Service is now well underway and has been reported previously in *Socialist Viewpoint*. Jenkins is using the same blueprint which they applied to health for contracting out council services.

Although there have been several councils who have eagerly privatised, still only a fraction of the available services are in the hands of private contractors — and with millions of pounds being spent on providing services only a tiny amount of the available "profit" is being siphoned off to private companies. Jenkin is moving rapidly to put this right.

His proposals were put forward only in mid-January — but the closing date for comments is April. This means that the Tories are working for a very tight timetable in order to get the Bill through Parliament as quickly as possible.

Jenkin is justifying the proposals by saying that:

"at a time when it remains of paramount importance to restrain public expenditure, local



authorities' resources must be used so as to secure the maximum possible value for money.

...it is the Government's declared ... intention to promote the extension of free competition in the provision of local services."

He then goes on to propose a whole series of criteria for what would be privatised and how it should be accomplished. For anyone who takes comfort from reading the paper and thinking that at least it does not propose privatisation of *everything*, there is a sobering reminder of the wide scope of Tory plans:

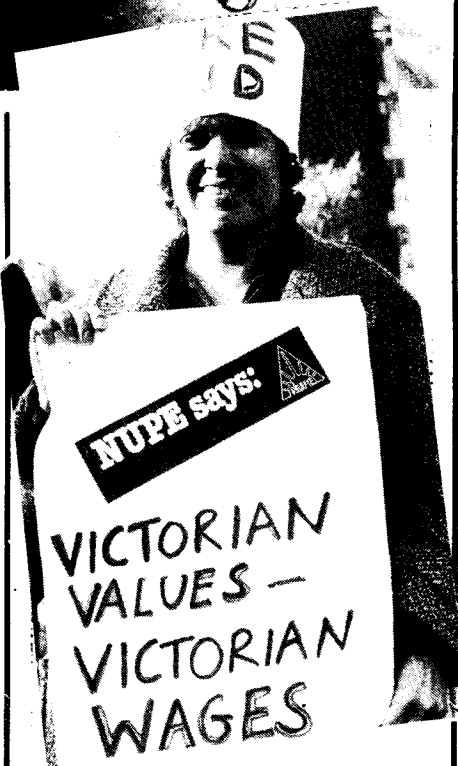
"The proposals in this paper should not therefore be taken as limiting, in any way, the government's wish to encourage the widest possible application of the principle of competition."

Jenkin then goes on to propose what should be privatised in this round. Justification for this further erosion of our services, according to the Minister, comes from the "good system" which is now working in Local Authorities for building and maintenance contracts, which were the subject of the same kind of legislation in 1980.

As anyone who has had dealings with private firms knows, the problems which show up as soon as the contractor takes over are *always* put down to "teething problems", and even the Minister is citing this. He says of the 1980 Act which decimated council building departments and put the real costs of maintenance sky high:

"there have indeed been some teething problems but in general the Act's objectives have been successfully achieved."

Local residents in Merton, one of the first boroughs to wipe out its



direct labour force, would argue fireceely with Jenkin. They have recorded a frightening catalogue of inadequate and incompetent firms brought in to do work. The waiting time for repairs has shot up, many of the jobs have to be redone, and the prices charged are much higher than the cost of direct labour would be. Merton is not an exception. Private contractors have time and time again been exposed as less reliable and more expensive than direct labour — but they are rarely given the sack by councils.

The chaos and corruption which now permeates Council maintenance under private contractors will be extended under the new legislation to five other areas. It will not be optional

for councils to put the services out to contract. Like the NHS this year, Councils will be required to invite bids for the services, whether they want privatisation or not. The targeted areas for "competition" are: refuse collection and street cleansing, cleaning of buildings, ground maintenance, vehicle maintenance and catering services. This will involve thousands of jobs. A lot of the workers, particularly in office cleaning and catering, will be women, employed part-time and not well unionised.

The restrictions put into the Green paper make it virtually impossible for in-house tendering to be competitive, particularly in areas such as refuse collection and street cleansing where the added burden of requiring at least a 5% return on capital costs must be built into the tender of the in-house bid. Having revoked the "fair wages" clause and then passed special legislation waiving VAT to make privatisation more attractive for the huge companies, Jenkin then has the effrontery to write:

"It is of the essence of the Government's policy that competition between local authority direct employees and outside contractors should be fair. There should be no built in bias in favour of either side."

In-house bids *cannot* be artificially low, as the "loss-leaders" of the multinationals can be. In-house bids will not be based on wages and conditions being cut below nationally agreed levels. The government have deliberately legislated a built-in bias in favour of private companies and in order to savage the welfare state.

The only way that council labour can compete with the private companies is by revoking the rights of workers to decent wages, conditions and trade union rights. This option is not acceptable for us.

The scandal of privatisation is that the Tories have given plenty of notice and have clearly spelled out their intentions. The union bosses have stood by, watching workers trying to oppose it bit by bit. All the TUC has done is organised a few courses (run by people who know very little about really fighting); provided some glossy brochures; and talked about its opposition to privatisation in the usual vague way.

The public sector unions still have no firm strategy for fighting. A NUPE national officer recently said that in the health service privatisation could not be fought nationally and had to be fought on a District to District basis! So much for solidarity.

We are now facing an unprecedented attack on council services and public sector jobs. The only way to beat Jenkin's plans is by organising joint action in boroughs and involving health workers as well. With the miners going back without a victory it will be difficult to motivate other sections of the working class to strike. Councils are particularly dif-

difficult because many of the threatened jobs are not unionised and there is a tangled web of different unions often organising the same sections of workers. The union bureaucrats will not be anxious to encourage strike action. They will be looking for a get-out proposal — opting for in-house tenders and biding their time until the hoped-for "next Labour government". But, at the rate the Tories are progressing, there will be very little left for a Labour government to defend when it does come to power.

We cannot wait until then. We cannot just let the Tories reverse 40 years of the build-up of the welfare state. It will not be an easy fight. We are struggling under a vicious govern-

ment which is trampling on workers with the collaboration and complacency of the TUC, Labour leaders and union bureaucrats. The work must be done now to convince workers to confront their councils and refuse to accept the right of private contractors to take over public services.

Every joint shop stewards committee should discuss the Green Paper proposals and make sure the members know now what is in store. They should then draw up a plan for fighting it. Trades councils have to campaign *actively* against privatisation, linking the public sector and private sector unions. They should also be setting up sub committees to

work on linking the workers with the community who will bear the brunt of privatising, especially women in those communities, who will be expected to pick up the shortfall in service which the privateers cannot provide. Union branches should pass resolutions now and force the unions nationally to back them if they take strike action and to argue for supporting action from other workers.

The miners have lost a lot but they have stood up for their industry and have refused to go down on their knees to the Tories. Other workers did not given them the solidarity they deserved; but the least we can do is to have the guts to fight for our own industries and follow the magnificent lead that they gave us.

Learn the lessons of Lothian's 1981 fiasco!

By John MacDonald

LABOUR'S victories in the local government elections last May gave rise to considerable optimism. Many activists on the labour left saw this as a chance to defeat the government's policy which has decimated local services over recent years. However the optimism was not founded on any particular strategy or realistic appraisal of the forces needed to defeat the government. This was particularly apparent in Edinburgh where a landslide victory left Labour in complete control of the city by a larger majority than that which the Tories had enjoyed over their long period of neglect.

Socialists in Edinburgh and the Lothians are very aware of the problems involved when a local Council takes on the government. Lothian Region did it in '81... and failed. The Labour group who were at the time in control of the Council, refused the demand by George Younger, the Secretary of State for Scotland, that the Council revise their budget by making cuts and repaying rates. Lothian's refusal to comply with the government on this occasion was by no means tokenistic, and it is useful to examine the positive and the negative aspects of this fight.

John Mulvey, Jimmy Burnett and the other Councillors of the Lothian Left were by no means in the majority in the Labour group but they were the main influence in the formation of Regional Labour Party policy. Through their willingness to confront a new situation and explain their thinking to traditional Labour Councillors, they had taken the lead in the group when the crisis occurred in summer '81. It was agreed that a campaign would be launched embracing the Council workers through their unions, people who used the services through community and tenants groups, Labour Parties, etc.

Many of us argued at the time that the campaign would have been much stronger if it had not been based on the rates-rise position which made it comparatively simple for the Tories and ratepayers associations to turn sections of the working class and middle class against the fight for better services. Options such as deficit



budgeting were at one stage considered by the Regional party. They opted for rates rises as a "realistic" approach. In fact only a powerful mobilisation against the government could possibly have won the day, whatever strategy was adopted.

In some respects the tactics employed by the leading lights in the Labour Group in the early days were exemplary. Far from confining their fight to the Council chambers, they combined their public statements with extensive speaking tours of the Council unions and workplaces. They spoke of the need for the Council employees to take strike action.

This lead coincided with moves from the rank and file groups in NALGO and the Teachers union, EIS, who successfully won a one day strike in June '81. The strike was extremely successful in bringing out many workers who had never believed in strike action but saw the crucial need to defend services. An even larger one day strike followed a few weeks later. Thirty thousand people marched through Edinburgh on a weekday, one of the largest demonstrations for years.

However within the day of triumph lay the roots of the complete fiasco which was to follow. As nursery worker in the Lothian Region I experienced the willingness of workers with very little union experience to go on strike when they felt it could make a difference. However the day of action offered not one iota of a direction. At the rally, Scottish union leaders waxed lyrical and committed themselves to nothing. It is not surprising that we went back to work wondering what would happen next.

It was the next few weeks that defined the sell-out which followed, a sell out which resulted from the traditional conservatism of the local union leaderships, undoubtedly under pressure from their national leaderships to stop any moves to extend the militancy. In NALGO almost a thousand workers debated the strategy and the left's options for all out strike action failed to get more than a large minority behind them, whilst the branch officers assured us there were "other ways".

There were also two large meetings of Lothian shop stewards, the second of

which was pushed for strongly by the rank and file groups. Here a motion from a NALGO shop stewards Committee for all-out strike action was ruled out of order by Alistair Macrae, the NUPE official convening the meeting. The left's argument was that this was the only way to achieve the needed solidarity from other unions.

Of course we have no way of telling whether all-out strike action would have resulted from a strong lead. I believe a lot more assurance of national support from the unions concerned would have been necessary as well. What is certain is that the policy as it was pursued was thoroughly demoralising for those trade unionists who did get involved, and that they were treated as counters in a war of words between the Lothian Councillors and the government.

Another depressing aspect of the Lothian fiasco was a body called the Lothian Action Group which was meant to be an umbrella campaigning organisation embracing unions, Labour Parties, tenants

and consumer groups, etc. In practice this body did little apart from issuing a couple of leaflets and press statements. Moves to involve Labour Parties at branch level were resisted not only by the union officials but also by the Regional Party officials.

In practice the union officials operated a caucus and made it clear to other delegates that anything they objected to wouldn't get anywhere. This situation hardened and it was soon clear that the direction the dispute would follow was defined by the joint trade union committee, which was entirely made up of branch officers from local Council unions. Even the Labour Group's influence became secondary.

Thus when the Council finally collapsed, it was not as result of a genuine attempt to mobilise the workforce and create a campaign. The involvement of union and Labour Party members was marginal. What is significant is that Alan Fisher of NUPE and Geoffry Drain of NALGO only

came down to Lothian when the campaign had collapsed in order to prevent the Labour Group resigning the administration — along the lines of Regional Party policy. Similar moves came from the Scottish Council of the Labour Party. The collapse of the campaign led to widespread disillusion throughout the unions and Labour Parties. However, the early days of the campaign showed that an alliance could be built and that workers would fight for their services.

If Edinburgh and other Labour Groups are to resist the government's next clawbacks, a national campaign must be formed — but any alliance with the public sector unions that does not lead to all-out strike action is unlikely to achieve anything. Further developments can also be made in the involvement of those who use the services and their link with rank and file trade unionists and Labour Party members.

How we fought Labour cuts — and won!

OUR seven-week strike began when a plan was drawn up by the Management Team of Rhondda Borough Council to cut 25 jobs and demote some NALGO members. The union had agreed in September 1984 to an exercise to restructure the Council's white collar workforce — but had seen this as a way to tackle the problems of unfilled vacancies, temporary posts and secondments. The NALGO branch rejected as unacceptable a Council pledge of no compulsory redundancies and opposed any cut in jobs.

After a General Meeting, the branch called a half-day strike of all members, followed the next week by a selective strike of 26 supervisors — effectively halting refuse collection and housing repairs, and closing the Council's sports Centre and theatre.

The strikers were paid through a levy on all branch members. We explained our action to the public in a mass leaflet:

The Council response to our action was a letter sent individually to all members on December 13 threatening:

"unless this action is withdrawn forthwith and normal working resumed by 9.00a.m. Friday the 14th December, 1984, there will be no work for NALGO members and you will not be paid."

This resulted in an immediate Emergency branch meeting which voted *unanimously* to demand that the letter was withdrawn. The Management Team agreed and following a meeting with three members of the Labour Group an agreement was reached to withdraw the "Document". This was immediately taken to the Labour Group and then full Council (where the Labour Group has a majority) where it was *rejected* and the threatening letter was re-instated.

At 11.00am on Monday December 17 an Emergency Branch Meeting voted for an all-out indefinite strike. The vote was by show of hands and followed a vote to ignore the Government's balloting laws. Shortly afterwards members of MATSA who were also covered in the "Document" voted to take action alongside us.

A NALGO shop steward from Rhondda Borough Council looks back on a successful 7-week struggle in defence of jobs.

NALGO's action had effectively closed all Council services, since the manual workers were "locked-out". Negotiations with the employers continued after Christmas and on December 30 an agreement was reached, this time with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council's Personnel Committee.

Full council met on January 4. Sixty branch members lobbied the meeting, and a delegation sat in the public gallery — only to witness the Labour Group leader moving a motion to reaffirm that the "Document" produced by the Management Team would not be withdrawn!

That Sunday — January 6 — outside contractors and police arrived at the local authority refuse tip to clear refuse that had built up there during the strike. Within a matter of minutes a picket line of 30 NALGO members had assembled and succeeded in persuading the (unionised) contractors to turn back.

A further attempt was made — this time with non-unionised scab contractors — at 11.00pm the next day. After a tip-off from a local resident a picket line was quickly assembled and these contractors were also turned back. The battle lines were effectively drawn.

The following day 24 hour picket lines were established at the two refuse tips and the Council's waste disposal incinerators (where no NALGO members worked) and a rota of pickets organised for many depots, day centres and smaller workplaces up and down the valley. We also hired and equipped some rooms as a strike headquarters. General meetings had been held weekly and a weekly strike bulletin distributed. When called upon

virtually all branch members reported for picket duties, routinely involving between twenty and fifty members at any one time of the day or night. Caravans or "portacabins", braziers, and colour gas heaters were quickly organised as the sub-zero temperatures and driving snow made the first few days and nights picketing very uncomfortable. The realities of picket duty soon swept away paternalistic attitudes about "women on picket lines": at least half our membership are women as are nearly half the NALGO stewards.

Matters came to a head on Monday January 21 when a scab contractor Bailey Plant Hire of Caerphilly arrived at 8.30am to remove refuse from a now half-mile long pile of refuse outside the Council's refuse incinerator. Within minutes 50 pickets ran the length of the picket line only to be barged by a bulldozer and forced back by police. The bulldozer began to load the refuse onto lorries (along with sections of pavement and a nearby wall). NALGO members from the local highways authority recorded the damage done whilst union members in neighbouring local authorities were contacted to prevent the refuse being brought onto their tips.

Talks were then reconvened by the Council on Friday January 25 when the Council agreed to rewrite the original document to incorporate the original staffing levels. The terms of a satisfactory return to work agreement were also agreed. This was ratified by full Council the following Monday and on Wednesday January 30 the Branch voted to return to work the following day.

During nearly seven weeks of strike action a sense of unity and commitment developed amongst the membership of our branch that before the strike would have been thought impossible. Every move by our so called "socialist" employers merely served to strengthen the membership's resolve.

Every NALGO member realises that the threat of redundancies will return next year, or the year after, along with the threat of "rate capping". By then we hope to have some "political muscle" too!

West Midlands right wingers hedge their bets

Up with the fares: all aboard for the Joint Boards?

By Dave Spencer

THIS year there should have been the usual County Council elections in the Metropolitan areas in May – but there will be none. This is because of the Thatcher government's plan to scrap the GLC and the 6 Metropolitan Counties from May 1986.

All of these Councils are Labour controlled. They represent nearly half the population of England and cover the major cities. They all have some progressive policies of sorts – like South Yorkshire's cheap bus fares policy, like Nuclear Free Zones, like campaigns for oppressed sections in the inner cities. If organised properly, they could represent a focus for a direct challenge to the government.

This is the reason why they are being scrapped, part of the process of breaking the labour movement and any means of democratic expression the working class may have.

Of course many of the criticisms of the GLC and Mets are true, and as socialists we need to develop alternative ideas like perhaps Regional Government including functions like the NHS, Water, gas and electricity. In other words we need to find ways to extend democracy, accountability and community involvement. But this is certainly not the Tory plan. The functions of the present Met Counties, for examples Buses, Fire, Police, will become more like the present Water and Gas Boards – more remote, more bureaucratic, more expensive and privatised where possible.

The response from the right wing Labour leadership on the West Midlands County Council has been toothless. They have relied on parliamentary lobbyists and the House of Lords. There has been no real mobilisation even of their own workforce, let alone of wider sections of the labour movement. The reason for this became quite clear on the discussion over this year's rates precept. Firstly they are frightened just by the threat of court action; secondly they are getting ready to climb aboard the Joint Boards to be set up after abolition.

We were told at the Labour Group meeting by Brian Smith, Chair of Finance and Secretary of the Labour Group that money would really be no problem this next year because of abolition! Many staff are leaving, services will be run down, balances and

reserves could be spent. Nevertheless he proposed a 5% increase in the bus fares to bring in £3.5 million in one year. The only reason he gave for this was that Solihull Tory District Council might take us to court for oversubsidising the bus fares. After all, haven't Solihull just taken the teachers to court? It was pointed out that only Tyne and Wear of the other Mets are planning to raise the bus fares – and Merseyside and South Yorkshire are rate capped after all – but this made no difference.

The arguments were used that we would be hitting the poorest sections of the community – the unemployed, women, the low paid, also that our 1981 Manifesto entitled ironically "Travel Our Way" stated on the first page that there would be no fare increases in the lifetime of the Labour Council. To no avail. The threats were "Do you want to be surcharged? Do you want the fares to go up by 25% when we lose the court case?"

But there is more to it of course. An increase in bus fares will make it easier for the Joint Transport Board to operate next year. Many rightwingers were arguing at the meeting about "being responsible", that is doing exactly what the Tories want and exactly the opposite of official Labour Party policy – by leaving everything shipshape for Labour councillors off the Districts to take over next year.

Many of these rightwingers have already got themselves seats on the District Councils as well as the County Council and others plan to do so – contrary to W.M. County Labour Party



policy. Chair of Transport, Phil Bateman, is now on Wolverhampton District, Chair of Fire J.T. Wilson is on Dudley District, Chair of Economic Development Geoff Edge is on Walsall District and there are at least 10 others of the 74 strong Labour Group.

On the Joint Boards of course they will not have the irritant of a Labour Group or CLPs to chivvy them and to be accountable to – perfect for right wing manoeuvring and patronage. They cannot stand opposition even within the present overwhelmingly right wing Group (which virtually nodded through Brain Smith's recommendations which were given verbally on the night not even in the normal form of a written resolution in advance). So much for consultation and democracy. "It's the same half a dozen complainers every year," muttered Chief Whip Len Clarke when several councillors asked questions or objected to raising the bus fares.

The date for setting the rate is March 7 – supposedly a day of solidarity with the rate capped Authorities. In the West Midlands County Council, the only solidarity will come from those councillors voting against the increase in bus fares.





Apartheid rulers wrestle with mass movement of workers

THE heavy repression that has fallen upon the opponents of apartheid rule in South Africa since the end of 1984 is a response to a growing tide of militant and increasingly political opposition. 1984 brought the highest-ever total of days lost through strike action in South Africa — double the figure for 1983.

Significantly, all of the reported strikes were by already unionised black workers, focussing mainly on the issue of wages in the face of a rapidly rising cost of living. These strikes have often arisen almost spontaneously, and ended quickly — mostly in defeat. But they are a clear indication of the growing mood of resistance amongst South Africa's black working class.

1984 was a year of declining fortunes for the South African economy after a period in which the world-wide crisis had made relatively little

By **HARRY SLOAN**

impact. With a huge balance of payments deficit, the value of the rand falling against the dollar from \$1.30 to \$0.60 by November, the country still dogged by the runaway costs of the war in Namibia, and heavily dependent upon manufactured imports, it could only be a matter of time before the world crisis began to bite in the form of inflation (now over 12%) and intensified competition.

There have been major moves to restructure South Africa's car industry and the engineering industry as a whole, bringing upwards of 70,000 redundancies while car output has actually increased. In addition the lengthy drought has had a severe impact on the agricultural sector, with many farmworkers, particularly in the rural Bantustan areas, facing starvation. The sacking of thousands of factory workers — sent back to the

barren "homelands" with nothing, while food prices have risen — has only compounded the problem.

1984 began with a wave of strikes in the chemical and car industries and also saw a significant "first" — the development of coordinated strike action at 3 different plants of the same employer — Autoplastics — as workers adopted more sophisticated tactics in the fight for higher wages. A similar indication of the growing confidence of the black workers' movement was the celebration of May Day 1984 followed by a wave of disputes over pay in the metal industry.

The development of the black trade unions has not been without problems, however, and the early summer of 1984 also saw a damaging split in MAWU, the engineering union affiliated to the largest of the black union confederations, FOSATU.

This same period also saw the start of some big school boycotts, demanding recognition of school students'

representative councils, abolition of corporal punishment and lifting age limits for school education. These boycotts were to be resumed and intensified later in the year, linking in with other grievances and campaigns, and mobilising as many as 650,000 school youth.

August saw strike action by hotel workers in Johannesburg, followed by a succession of struggles which confirmed the scope and the militancy of opposition to the government's new Constitution.

The August elections of parliamentary representatives for Indians and Coloureds had been the subject of a sustained boycott campaign, which in turn produced a mushrooming growth of the anti-apartheid United Democratic Front (UDF) and the smaller, more hard-line National Forum (NF). While both organisations agreed in campaigning for a boycott, the UDF very much represents the type of cross-class "popular front" line that has become the hallmark of the banned African National Congress and the South African Communist Party. Its orientation has not been so much towards the black working class — though it has been able to rally working class support for its initiatives — as to the black middle classes, white liberals and the churches. Despite this, the UDF's ability to make use of the period running up to the elections for mass rallies, demonstrations and protests undoubtedly played a role in radicalising the working class and strengthening the boycott in August, which was massively successful.

Weakness

The chief organisational weakness of the UDF flows from its cross-class political line: it has only weak links with the black trade unions and working class movement. Though unions issued their own statements and held mass meetings supporting the boycott, the demonstrations and protests were in the main organised by the UDF — showing that it now has sufficient mass support to mobilise nationwide action.

August 1984 therefore saw the radicalisation of opposition to the new Constitution merge with the first community struggles against steep rises in rents and electricity charges. Struggles spread through the townships around Johannesburg during September, and were met by rapidly escalating state repression. At least 100 were killed and over 1,000 arrested.

The failure of these heavy handed tactics to crush the militancy of the black working class was confirmed by a spontaneous "stay-away" movement which erupted in four townships in the "Vaal triangle". Militant youth took over a meeting protesting at rent increases, and raised the call for a general strike. Next day they turned workers back from buses and trains to work — and more than half the



workers stayed away.

Despite a further wave of repression, this success spurred on renewed school boycotts and a rent boycott. When the authorities, seeking to defuse the confrontation, temporarily withdrew the rent increases, some militants began to press the demand for a cut in rents, a release of those detained and the recognition of Students Representative Councils.

Miners strike

A stayaway in Soweto on September 17 called by the UDF without any link with the unions was markedly less successful than that in the Vaal. That same day saw the first-ever legal strike in South Africa's gold mines by the newly-formed National Union of Miners. In one day of dispute, amid savage police repression, ten miners were killed and hundreds wounded.

By October, the regime was becoming increasingly anxious to quell the tide of resistance. New tactics were adopted, and on October 23 police operations were supplemented by a full-scale army invasion of the township of Sebokeng, in the Vaal Triangle, by more than 7,000 troops. Every one of Sebokeng's 25,000 houses was searched. Three weeks later police backed by an undisclosed number of troops moved in force into the 250,000-strong township of Tembisa and embarked on a wave of brutal searches and arrests. These raids stopped short of a full-scale "sweep" of militants: rather they were an attempt at intimidating the mass movement.

The Sebokeng repression was no more successful than previous tactics. And that same month had witnessed another important development — Dunlop workers had not only maintained a solid strike for a month, but had won their demands in a major victory.

In the first week of November came the biggest generalised stoppage since the 1950s, jointly called by students' organisations and the trade unions in Transvaal. A joint meeting of students and union officials had seen student demands supplemented by calls for the army and police to be withdrawn from the townships; for an end to the rent increases and to

redundancies; and for the reinstatement of sacked workers.

Unlike previous more or less spontaneous stay-away movements, the Transvaal action was called with ten days' notice as a 2-day strike, with unions actively involved from the outset. Half a million leaflets were distributed. Estimates of the level of support range from 300,000 to 1 million, with the stoppage strongest (over 95%) in the industrial East Rand area, with over 90% supporting the action in Sebokeng. Strongly unionised plants were 100% solid.

Despite massive state repression (the official death toll was well over 20) the movement could not be crushed: indeed there were few subsequent reprisals by management who had underestimated the scope of the action. Only in the state-owned SASOL plant were there extensive victimisations, with 90% of the 6,500 workforce sacked.

Police were not so restrained as management, however, and the stayaway was followed by a wave of detentions beginning with virtually the whole Transvaal stayaway committee and then other black leaders.

So sweeping were the arrests that even some South African employers' associations — the Association of Chambers of Commerce, the Federated Chamber of Industries, and the Afrikaans Handelsinstituit felt moved to issue a joint statement declaring the arrests to be a "precipitous step":

"The private sector is deeply concerned about the detention of certain trade union leaders at a sensitive time like the present."

Among those arrested was the President of FOSATU, Chris Dhlamini; the leader of the Council of Unions of South Africa, Phirosaw Camay; Moses Mayekiso, leader of MAWU in the Transvaal; Kate Philip, president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and other prominent union activists. Many of those detained were released (some charged however with subversion or treason); significantly the charges have been aimed not just at UDF political activists but also at a key leader of MAWU.

While British news coverage of





7,000 South African Troops invade the township of Sebokeng.

South Africa towards the end of the year was dominated by reports on the occupation of the British embassy in Durban by UDF leaders, the UDF itself did little to build mass support for the fugitives beyond Durban itself. Two of them now face trial on charges of sedition. Since the New Year the repression has continued, with a total of 16 leading anti-apartheid and trade union activists now facing treason charges later this month. It seems that the apartheid regime is determined to mount a major show-trial or series of show trials in a new bid to intimidate its opponents.

Meanwhile the repression in the townships has continued, linked with a renewed state offensive against the illegal "Crossroads" squatter camp near Cape Town, where 65,000 black families have lived for years in defiance of apartheid laws. Dozens of youth were injured and at least nine killed in fighting to prevent police moving into Crossroads last month.

With the baton of repression always in evidence, however, the Botha regime has also been sounding out the possibility of using a carrot of class collaboration to lure leaders of the banned ANC into talks.

Mandela

Possibly encouraged by the way in which deals struck with the regimes of Angola and Mozambique have weakened the ANC's ability to bring in guerrilla forces from their training camps and sustain a military cam-

paign, the regime has made two offers in recent months to release jailed ANC leader Nelson Mandela — if he and the ANC will repudiate violence.

Mandela, recognising that his widespread political influence as a courageous martyr to apartheid would collapse instantly if he were seen to accept such a deal, understandably rejected these blandishments: indeed the ANC is now talking of a resumed military campaign — trading on their massive popular support as the traditional focus for opposition to apartheid.

But in today's South Africa, where the predominant struggle is between a vast black working class and a white racist bourgeoisie, a tactic of armed guerrilla struggle is by no means either appropriate or even particularly radical — particularly if coupled to the ANC's popular front political positions, seeking alliances with white liberals, the black middle classes and church dignitaries.

With the unions still growing despite the recession, and gathering strength in key strategic industries, the key question is the development of demands and a political leadership that can unite the black trade union movement and link the many and varied democratic demands of the black, Indian and Coloured populations with the anti-capitalist programme needed to solve the problems of the working class. The Stalinist-influenced ANC, with its utopian illusions of a democratic "stage" in the South African revolution, can offer no such perspective. It

is a movement in which a more politically radical rank and file runs increasingly into conflict with a conservative old guard leadership.

As for the UDF, its weakness lies in the shallow roots of many of its 600 affiliated organisations in the day to day mass movement, and its lack of links with the unions — some of which actually cite the UDF's alliances with white liberals and coloured and Indian businessmen as reasons for not affiliating.

However, the very rapid growth of the UDF, its role as a centre of attraction for wide, militant forces of youth and workers prepared to fight the regime, mean that in some important areas it is not an ossified or tightly controlled organisation. It can serve under these conditions as a forum for discussion on the next steps in the struggles of the working class — and the affiliation of trade union organisations can serve further to marginalise the conservative influence of the white liberals and the middle classes.

For socialists in Britain and elsewhere, the task of mobilising full solidarity with the UDF and trade union defendants in the coming show trials is extremely urgent. We must demand the unconditional release of these prisoners of apartheid, and of the longest-serving political prisoner of them all — Nelson Mandela. The feeling against the South African regime that was shown in last summer's mobilisation against Botha's visit to Britain must be developed into a serious solidarity movement in the British labour movement.

Powell Bill aimed against women



THE true meaning and aims of the Unborn Child (Protection) Bill were summed up by Powell himself when he introduced the Bill in the House of Commons. He said it was about the "sanctity of *man*". I don't intend to spend this article discussing the sexism of the English language; and I know many socialists (supported, in this case, by Mr. Powell) would defend the use of "man" to imply women; but Enoch Powell is very precise in his use of the language, and would have been very aware, too, of why he used the term "man" when introducing a Bill to restrict women's control over their fertility.

While most people have severe reservations about scientific research and are filled with ideas of Auschwitz when anyone mentions research on human embryos, to link control of scientific research with fertility control offers very little control over the majority of scientists but threatens massive control over women who have fertility problems.

The scientists will continue various forms of research — some useful, some "because it's there" — as long as they can get funding. Scientists will find ways around restrictions — eventually. The main long term effects of the "Powell" Bill will be on women.

Any woman having problems conceiving, having already gone through the many procedures to find out why she has problems and if in vitro fertilisation (IVF) is appropriate, will have to apply to the *Secretary of State* for permission for IVF.

Then — if the *Secretary of State* gives permission — she has four months to conceive through IVF before the permission runs out (it can be extended by a further 10 periods of 2 months; but the permission has to be granted by the *Secretary of State* each time, which will put up costs, be very time consuming and worrying). If research on human embryos had always been illegal there would be no IVF. It is not an easy procedure, and the success rate is not very good; so stopping research now will prevent improvements in techniques and the women who get pregnant by IVF within the 4 months will be the very lucky ones.

MARY LEWIS looks at the real content of Enoch Powell's controversial Unborn Child (Protection) Bill, now being pushed hastily through Parliament with eager support from anti-abortion campaigners.

Not everyone is happy with the concept of IVF. In our society too much emphasis is put on a woman's sole role being motherhood and if women cannot have children they are classed and class themselves as failures. Our biology traps us as child bearers, and if that biology does not function as it is expected to, we are blamed.

While this attitude must be combated, and women have to be allowed and encouraged to be fulfilled by an active role in society and not only as mothers, we also have to fight for society to give motherhood the respect it deserves — it is also an active and important role in bringing up the next generation.

The whole question of "a woman's right to choose" has to include the right to choose to have children, as well as when to have children, or not to have children.

Now it is possible to aid some women who were previously classed as infertile to have the children they want, no *Secretary of State* should be given control or a veto over that help, or put a time limit on it.

The other major implication is the right of the state to decide who should be a parent. The recommendations of the Warnock Report linked with the "Powell" Bill gives the state the right to decide who can have a baby if it is not conceived through heterosexual sex.

Warnock Recommendations not only opposed surrogate mother agencies, but queried whether anyone (or two!) other than heterosexual married couples should be allowed babies using the new techniques.

These prejudices in the minds of the Warnock Committee may well become a Government Bill. The restrictions on IVF will start with financial constraints (because it costs!); then the doctors' own controls (and we know how some doctors feel about the "quality of life"); then we will have to pass the scrutiny of the *Secretary of State* — in other words — white, rich, heterosexual, married couples only need apply!!

The link with abortion legislation may not appear immediately obvious, except through the involvement of Enoch Powell and the lobbying by "Life" in support of his Bill. Once the current of opinion is harnessed to feelings about the unborn child, it is a very simple step drastically to reduce the time allowed in which abortion can be carried out. While everyone would agree that the earlier an abortion the better for all concerned, — it is not always possible for many, many reasons — not least the present cuts and delays in the NHS. Whichever way you look at this Bill it restricts women's control over their own fertility.

At a conference organised by the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign in February called "The New Reproductive Technology — Threat or Benefit to Women?" the following statement was agreed:

"We oppose the Powell Unborn Children (Protection) Bill on the grounds that it attempts to further restrict women's control over their fertility and limit their choices. Together with the Gillick judgement it represents a restriction on women's access to contraception, abortion and infertility treatment. Some women are already forced into unwanted abortion and sterilisation and others cannot get these services when they want them. This Bill does nothing to improve women's choice.

We urge all individuals and organisations to actively oppose this proposed legislation and to lobby their MPs to vote against this Bill. We would like to express our concern about lack of adequate and informed debate concerning this important and controversial issue."

Socialist Viewpoint readers must be part of this campaign.

Demands to liberate ALL of us!

JEAN PHILLIPS reviews
*Gay Liberation in the
Eighties* by Jamie Gough
and Mike Macnair
published by Pluto Press
1985, £4.95.

GAY liberation in the eighties?
Most people nowadays talk
about "Gay rights". The word
"Liberation" seems somehow to
belong to the late sixties and
early seventies.

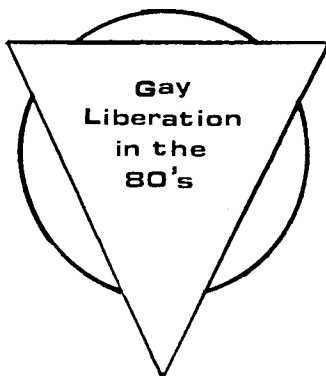
Isn't it a bit unrealistic to talk about
"liberation" just now? After all, gay
people are under attack on all sides:
gay bookshops raided and massive
hysterical witch-hunts because a
disease called AIDS, endemic in
West Africa and Haiti, found its way
into the gay community on the West
Coast, U.S.A., and has been largely
contained within the gay community
ever since for obvious social reasons.

This welcome book goes boldly on-
to the offensive, broaching thorny
theoretical questions, attempting to
provide a programme for change.

Chapter one describes the position
of gay people in British society in the
eighties. Chapter two tries to analyse
the origins of the oppression of gay
people and shows how neither
heterosexuality nor homosexuality
are "natural", biologically deter-
mined phenomena. There is no
biological reason for every sex act to
produce children, any more than for
every act of creativity to produce
food.

This chapter also shows how the ex-
istence of specific groups of gay peo-
ple — and their oppression — is the
product specifically of capitalist
society, because of the tension in that
society between its character as a
class society in which the family
system is perpetuated; and its
character as a market society in
which all social life is increasingly
organised by "the market" and
market relationships. The chapter
describes the development of a con-
sumerist attitude to sex, and an in-
creasing focus on sex, coupled with
the growing crisis of the family.

Chapter three explains the incom-
patibility of the family system with
socialism (though the prevalence of
Stalinist ideology has made this view
seem "extreme"). It argues that
movement towards socialism will
result in the withering away of the
family and with it the comparatively



recent rigid division between
heterosexual and homosexual as
forms of obsessive sexual behaviour.
The abolition of the family is not in
question: it is a question of setting
free our multiplicity of sexual capaci-
ty and removing the obstacles (laws,
housing policies, economic ar-
rangements, etc.) which confine us at
the moment.

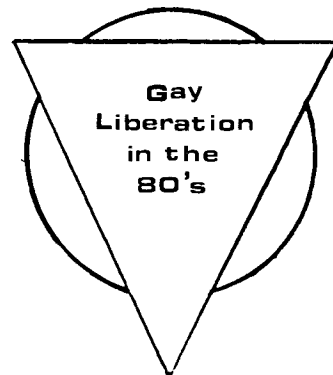
Chapter four responds to the
criticism that "It isn't like that in the
'socialist' countries", by explaining
the non-socialist nature of these
countries. This chapter contains cer-
tain weaknesses of analysis, in my
view. The authors allude in passing to
Trotsky, touch on the fragility of the
bureaucratic regimes as against class
societies and briefly mention the
material advantages of state
economic planning, however ineffi-
cient and corrupt, as against com-
parable capitalist countries... without
ever characterising the stalinised
workers' states. This enables them to
slide in, without much evidence, a
claim for Cuba as being qualitatively
better than Russia, etc., and to lump
together Cuba and Nicaragua as
though these regimes were exactly
the same.

The final chapter tries to develop a
programme and strategy for gay
liberation using the method of the
transitional programme. This is an in-
comparable strength. The authors
tackle all the ways in which gay peo-
ple are oppressed — though, as they
acknowledge, there must be grave
weaknesses in any perspective for
lesbian liberation drawn up by two
gay men. They tackle thorny issues
like the age of consent, and
polemicize against reformism in rela-
tion to the police or the press. They
attack "lifestylism" and advocate
alliance with and reliance on the
workers' movement as a whole.

Paradoxically, I found this conclu-
sion somewhat negative. Of course
changing workmates' consciousness
is important, but the book doesn't
take us much further than this.
Because the authors don't explain
how change is likely to take place, it
almost seems as if the task ahead is to
convert all the Sun-readers we work
with, one by one. There is no ex-
planation of the dialectical nature of
change, of leaps of consciousness in
a revolutionary situation; and above
all, most seriously, there is no men-
tion of the need to build a revolu-
tionary party, of the role and impor-
tance of the party and its relationship
with the working class. The authors
touch on the fact that it is alliances
with the left that have won gains in
the union, but don't take this to its
logical conclusion.

Constraints of space imposed by
the publisher make the book very
condensed. It is packed with useful
starting points and food for thought.
It fills an important vacuum in cur-
rent ideas on the left, not just in Bri-
tain, but worldwide. What is needed
now is a corresponding work on les-
bian liberation.

Finally, why is this book important
for those in the labour movement and
on the left who don't see themselves
as gay? The Thatcherites clearly
understand the link between attacks
on the working class and attacks on
freedom of sexual expression. For
them it is clear that tensions between
gay and straight are an important
aspect of divide and rule. Lesbians
and gays have understood this in giv-
ing their support to the miners. Yet
the left has been slower to understand
it, greeting anti-gay hysteria and
persecution with a deafening em-
barassed silence. Nearly every one of
the demands in chapter five of *Gay
Liberation in the Eighties* is a de-
mand for the liberation of all of us.



Facts behind the AIDS hysteria

GAY people, who have been vilified in the popular press hysteria over the spread of the AIDS virus, are the main victims, not the cause of the disease.

AIDS has been called the Gay Plague, linking it with the Black Death, the great bubonic plague and other horrendous epidemics of the past — even, biblically, the plague of locusts and the wrath of God. It is none of these.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is a collection of signs and symptoms. These develop about 6 months to 4 years after contact in about 10% of people exposed to a virus which, for the time being, has been labelled HTLV III (Human Tumorlike Virus III).

The remaining 90% of those who show signs of contact with the virus (i.e. have antibodies specific to HTLV III) may develop no illness at all. They may develop enlarged glands (lymphadenopathy) and a virus-like illness or what has been variously described as extended or persistent lymphadenopathy syndrome. A very few of these develop to "AIDS related complex" (ARC) which is equivalent to having more of the symptoms and signs without becoming ill and deteriorating. There is growing evidence to suggest that some may have been able to develop immunity as if they had been "vaccinated" against HTLV III.

The virus, which is one of a group of lente, or slow, viruses, is related to those found in other animals (horses) and is thought to have been present for a long time in Central Africa. There it affects men and women but its presence has only been recognised since the blood test for HTLV III antibodies has been available.

It seems to have been taken from Central Africa, via Haiti to US cities, chiefly to New York and San Francisco where, in a totally new environment, the virus did very well and became more virulent. The chief factor in American cities, enabling its spread, has been gay clubs; those who have, since 1978/9, suffered most are gay men who had receptive anal intercourse and large numbers of partners (some as many as 1,500 per year).

The method of spread is now thought to be mainly by blood via minor damage during intercourse (the lining of the rectum being much more liable to damage during sex than for example the vaginal lining which is stronger and more like skin: hence the lower risk for women).

Semen may still be implicated but is no longer thought to be of such prime importance as the transmission route. Other body fluids have been found to have an-

AMID the press frenzy over AIDS and wild scare stories from people (FBU spokespersons, ambulance unions, the Royal College of Nursing) who ought to know better, one thing stands out — the lack of any concerted campaign to force the government to fund adequate research into curing and preventing it.

While hospital ancillary and laboratory staff are subjected to the full media hysteria over AIDS, they are not supplied with any serious factual information by management or by their union leaders. Instead, lab staff find specimens from suspected AIDS sufferers mixed up with routine work. Even the simplest steps towards education have not been taken, encouraging panic and confusion in the gay community, among health workers, and on a wide level across society as a whole.

A miserable £250,000 has been allocated to research: only recently has the Health Education Council got round to issuing a pamphlet on AIDS. Those of us who oppose this disease being used as a stick to beat the gay community must campaign for the fullest information, and for a crash programme of research to conquer this pernicious disease.

tibodies but not the virus itself.

There is no evidence of spread by means that occur with other viruses, e.g. sneezing, coughing or in saliva, urine or faeces. In fact it seems to have the same low order of infectivity as hepatitis B and to be spread in the same way. Being in a room with a victim, drinking from the same glass or kissing them is not sufficient. The very few cases where medical or nursing personnel have become HTLV III antibody positive have shown a definite history of accidental exposure to *blood*.

The blood-borne virus puts other groups at risk, in particular, recipients of blood transfusions or blood products such as

haemophiliacs; or drug abusers who use needles (e.g. those addicted to heroin) or anyone who accidentally, ritually, or otherwise is exposed to *blood* infected with HTLV II virus particles.

Once in the blood stream, the virus attacks a certain kind of white blood cell which is responsible for recognising foreign material and switching on the immune mechanism to develop an effective defence.

These white cells are called T Helper cells and are one type of lymphocyte. Once they have been destroyed, the body is then prey to so called opportunistic infections by organisms which normally are dealt with easily by the defence mechanisms and do not pose any threat. Typical examples are pneumocytis carinii (which causes pneumonia), cryptococci (which cause diarrhoea), thrush (*Candida albicans*) and Herpes simplex. Another common feature is the development of a cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma, affecting the skin in such a way as to produce an intense purplish/brownish staining.

The victim may experience difficulty in swallowing, persistent diarrhoea accompanied by profound fatigue, malaise and night sweats, and suffer sudden unexplained weight loss. The spots of Kaposi's sarcoma may have appeared and lymph glands, liver and spleen become tender and enlarged. Condition deteriorates, with a final overwhelming infection.

Since 1978/9 about 8,500 cases have been reported from the USA. No reliable figures are available for the situation in Africa yet but Kaposi's sarcoma is widespread and its appearance is now firmly linked to HTLV III. About 500 cases, during the same period, have been reported in Europe, 120 of them in the UK. Of all cases 40-50% have died. Since 1979 the rise of new cases and deaths has been doubling every 6 months to 1 year with a possible reduction in the rate of rise only very recently.

70% of those affected in the US and Europe have been gay men, making them the highest risk as *victims* rather than the chief cause of AIDS as implied consistently in the editorial line of the Tory press. About 15% of men in *all* groups are gay. Fleet Street editors and Tory politicians not excepted.

There are sensible precautions to be taken. Gays can reduce risks of infection by restricting the numbers of partners they have; and restricting forms of intercourse except with their regular partner. They would be well advised to restrict their contacts geographically. They should not be blood or organ donors; and in general should have the same precautions taken with their blood specimens as Hepatitis B (serum hepatitis) sufferers.

Future forecasts vary, but there will probably be a large increase in the numbers of cases and deaths before either an effective means of intervention is found or there is an absolute fall due to effective prevention.

	USA		Britain	
	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths
pre 1979	8	4		
1979	10	8	1	0
1980	46	42	0	0
1981	252	211	4	3
1982	980	696	18	13
1983	2,643	1,594	35	16
1984	4,293	1,456	50	14
1985	(to mid Feb)		(Jan only) 10	5
Totals:	263	66	118	51
	8,495	4,077		

Peace campaign round-up

By Dave Spencer



WEST GERMANY

LIKE Cruise to Britain, Pershing II came to West Germany over one year ago. And like Greenham Common in Britain, there is a permanent peace camp at Mutlangen, West Germany — the first deployment site. Over the year about 1,000 people have been arrested at the site and their trials take place every day. The accused are fined or, if they refuse to pay, spend 20 to 150 days in prison.

At the moment there are 54 Pershing II missiles in West Germany, 36 at Mutlangen and 18 at Heilbronn. Eventually it is planned to have 36 missiles at each of 3 sites, Mutlangen, Heilbronn, and Neu Ulm. Camp members have not succeeded in preventing these missiles but they have followed all 26 exercises to date and have monitored all environmental destruction and accidents on these exercises. They have alerted and mobilised the local population about the dangers. They would appreciate contacts with groups and individuals from abroad.

Contact: Presshütte, Mutlange, Forststrasse 3, 7075 Mutlangen, F.R.G.

CANADA

MANY Canadians are watching with interest the performance of David Lange, the New Zealand P.M. whose government has refused to allow nuclear powered or arsenalled ships to dock in New Zealand ports (see SV3). Not only do American nuclear submarines dock in Canadian ports but recently US contingency plans were exposed concerning the shipment of 32 B-57 nuclear depth bombs to Canada in the case of war. These weapons are 10 kiloton anti-submarine bombs and would be kept at bases in Camox British Columbia and in Greenwood, Nova Scotia — probably for the use of US P3 Orion planes.

True to embarrassing form, the Canadian government were not consulted or even informed about the matter. This has made the opposition to these bombs even more widespread than usual. Former chief of Canada's Defence Staff, Admiral Robert Falls commented "I think it's a lousy weapon. You have to make sure none of your own ships are nearby. And once you've used it, you've muddied the waters for a long time!" Other destinations for these US nuclear depth bombs apparently include Spain, the Azores,

Bermuda, Iceland, Puerto Rica, the Philippines and Diego Garcia.

To add insult to injury, the second Cruise missile tests have recently been carried out over Canadian airspace. Four unarmed missiles strapped to a US B62 bomber flew over Canada for over 4 hours to test Cruise's navigation system. Two more tests are planned for March when the missiles will be released to fly free.

Meanwhile plans have been made for a National Peace Conference in Canada to bring all the various protest groups into one movement to campaign more effectively.

ITALY

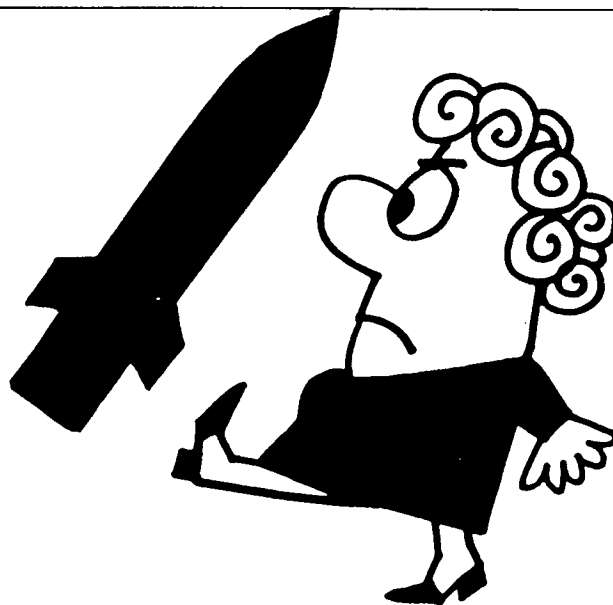
THE Peace Camp of Comiso, Sicily (see SV1) began a march through Italy on January 20, starting from Assisi, travelling through Rome and Naples to arrive in Comiso at Easter — a total

distance of 1,300 kms. Comiso is the first NATO base in Italy to receive Cruise missiles and there are 16 deployed there at the moment.

The aim is to link together all the anti-Cruise protests, to build new support groups on the way, to stress the destructive and costly nature of Cruise, when 50 million people starve to death in the world each year.

Contact: International Peace Camp Verde Vigna, Tury Vaccaro, Via San Guiseppe 1, 99013 Comiso, Italy.

THE Russian Trust Group organised rallies, speeches, seminars and a march leading up to Nagasaki Day on August 8 last year. However, the 36 key organisers were arrested as they arrived for a meeting at the home of founder members Vladimir and Maria Fleishgacker. On August 8 nearly 50 Group members were arrested at a seminar and ordered to sign a pledge never again to commemorate Hiroshima Day. They all refused to sign.



**GEEN NIEUWE
KERNWAPENS
IN EUROPA**

Nicaragua: How far can Reagan go?

By HARRY SLOAN

"HE really hates those bastards. It won't be easy to change that."

This blunt summary of President Reagan's attitude to the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, given by a Western diplomat in Managua to *Newsweek* magazine, represents one of the few uncontested facts of the present struggle in Central America.

Reagan and his vicious team of cold-war advisors certainly do hate the Sandinista revolution like poison. They would dearly love to overturn the elected Nicaraguan government with its 54% majority support in the population as a whole, and replace it with a renewed right wing military dictatorship like the regimes which the USA supported upto the overthrow of Somoza in 1979. But how far are they prepared to go to secure this objective? How far can they go, given the scepticism of the US Congress, and the overwhelming (70%) public opposition to any US involvement in ousting the Sandinistas?

These questions are less easy to answer. Though Reagan has funnelled no less than \$80 million in covert aid since 1980 to the gangs of "contra" gunmen currently fighting to overthrow the Sandinistas, it is far from certain that the administration's latest request for a further \$14 million in aid will be endorsed by Congress. But with Reagan stepping up the cold war of rhetoric against the Sandinistas in a desperate ploy to win over Congressional support, it would be foolish indeed to rule out any prospect that this aid will be forthcoming.

Reagan has demanded total capitulation by the Sandinistas — that they "say uncle" and negotiate with and cede a "share" of governmental power to the contras, whose central military commander Colonel Enrique Bermudez was one of Somoza's chief henchmen commanding the hated National Guard. He has described the mercenary gangs of CIA-organised contras, whose campaign of wanton terrorism, murder and economic sabotage has become notorious, as the "moral" equal of our Founding Fathers". Secretary of State George Schultz, too, has gone "over the top" with a hard-hitting endorsement of the contra "freedom fighters":

"The bottom line is this. Those who would cut off these freedom fighters from the rest of the democratic world are in effect consigning Nicaragua to the endless



darkness of communist tyranny. And they are leading the United States down a path of great danger."

The notion of tiny Nicaragua, with its 3 million population, as a "great danger" to the United States with its vast arsenal and imperialist armies based across most of the world's key centres is so laughable that even some of the hard-bitten anti-communists of the US Congress have been ridiculing these latest attempts by the administration to drum up a war fever. Schultz himself has been accused of "McCarthyism" and arbitrary "redbaiting" in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. And when challenged to produce proof of Nicaragua's alleged aggressive or subversive intentions and actions, the administration has been hard put to offer anything tangible. A lengthened runway at an airfield near Mangua, and a large number of age-

ing Soviet T-54 tanks have been cited — but in the absence of any serious Nicaraguan air force and in the maountainous conditions of Central America, both lack any real credibility.

Conspicuously, no evidence has been produced of Sandinista arms or aid to the FMLN guerrillas fighting for the liberation of El Salvador. Indeed Reagan has been forced to abandon his original claims that the chief purpose of the "contras" was to block arms traffic from Nicaragua to the FMLN — and now admit that his sole objective is to overrun the Sandinistas. His problem in switching to this new line is that the contra forces themselves are neither united nor plausible as an alternative government. They lack sufficient popular support within Nicaragua to enable them to capture even a token border town which they could turn into a propaganda "provisional capital" —



and they have suffered heavily under an intensified Sandinista military counter-offensive.

An attempt at the beginning of March to bring together the feuding contra factions at a meeting in Costa Rica and present a united front to the Sandinistas resulted in ignominious failure. One key figure in the contra forces to the south of Nicaragua, renegade Sandinista Eden Pastora, has repeatedly refused to join or collaborate with the ex-Somoza forces of the largest military gangs to the north, the ludicrously-titled "Nicaraguan Democratic Force" (FDN). The Costa Rica summit also failed to enlist the support of Brooklyn Rivera, leader of a guerrilla grouping of Miskito Indians on the Atlantic coast. The disarray of the contra forces and their sinking morale has been exploited by the Sandinistas who have offered an amnesty to those who surrender.

While Reagan has gone onto a desperate offensive to rally his support, however, the Sandinistas have made further concessions in what they see as a move diplomatically to isolate the USA and win back some of the international support (which had ebbed to a dangerously low level, to judge from the poor turn-out to President Ortega's inauguration in January).

Using the focus of the inauguration of the newly elected Uruguayan president Sanguinetti, Ortega declared a unilateral decision to send home 100 Cuban military advisors

and to abandon plans to acquire "new weapons systems" including MiG fighters. These concessions — plainly discussed in advance with the Castro leadership — successfully removed the USSR from any potential confrontation with the Reagan administration over the supply of jet fighters: but it also absolves the USSR of any responsibility for the defence of Nicaragua. In any event the Kremlin leaders made it painfully obvious last summer that they will do nothing to defend Nicaragua against "contra" sabotage or US attacks.

It was quite predictable that the concessions would also fail to produce any relaxation from the US warmongers: but they do appear to have given a new lease of life to the seemingly deadlocked "Contadora" process of negotiations in search of a regional peace plan, spearheaded by Mexico, Columbia, Venezuela and Panama — which will reconvene in May.

It is unfortunate in this situation that the Sandinista leadership have so consistently sought to answer US



military aggression by making political concessions. The Contadora process is designed by the four leading countries concerned and by the social democratic "Socialist International" as a means of procuring "peace" within a stabilised Central America: this can only mean **renouncing** revolutionary struggle in Honduras, Guatemala and most significantly El Salvador, and its replacement by vague utopian hopes of liberalisation ad some kind parliamentary democracy.

While Nicaragua, after the defeat of Somoza and with the Sandinistas firmly in the driving seat, has been able to organise the most democratic elections ever held on that continent, to imagine that a negotiated settlement with the regimes of El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras could produce comparable results — or produce governments that could in any way answer the problems of their crudely-exploited workers and poor farmers — is pure self-deception.

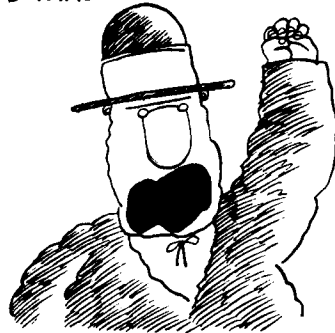
This does not preclude a tactical use of the Contadora process by the Sandinistas: but it does mean that each one of the Sandinistas' tactical retreats and concessions, and its general stance, should be clearly and publicly explained to the revolutionary fighters elsewhere in Central America.

The failure of the Sandinistas to adopt such a clear position is only surprising if we forget their origins and the enormous pressures upon them. Despite the highly publicised issue of stamps bearing the head of Karl Marx, the Sandinistas are not a Marxist or even explicitly socialist leadership, but revolutionary nationalists with strong popular support, committed to a "mixed" (capitalist) economy and to defence of their country against imperialism. They find themselves under ruthless imperialist attack but denied substantial military, economic or political support from the USSR or Cuba which have no wish to conflict directly with the USA in the American "sphere of influence". The Sandinistas have been courted instead by international social democrats eager to restrict any possible socialist developments in Nicaragua, and by alarmed sections of the Latin American bourgeoisie desperate to confine the struggle to Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Yet the best defence of the revolution — and one of the main external factors inhibiting an even more unbridled attack by the Reagan administration — is precisely its character as part of a regional struggle against imperialism. The advance of revolution in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and into Mexico, the major country of Central America, is a key both to the defence and the completion of the Nicaraguan revolution. The many supporters of the Sandinistas' struggle who downplay this vital aspect of the fight do no favours to the masses of Central America.

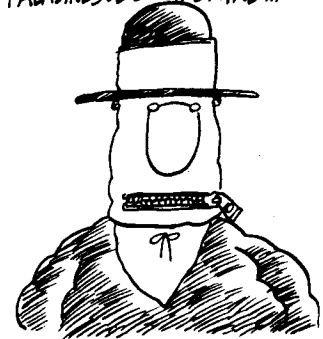
Cartoon from a recent issue of the Managua newspaper, Barricada.

ANTES... CUANDO EL FSLN ESTABA EN MONTAÑAADO, LA BURGUESIA Y LOS POLITICOS DECIAN QUE ERAN TERRORISTAS



BEFORE . . . when the Sandinistas were in the mountains, the bourgeois and the politicians called them terrorists.

AHORA... PARA LOS EX-GUARDIAS NO TIENEN UNA SOLA PALABRA DE CENSURA, Y APLAUDEN A REAGAN CUANDO LOS LLAMA "PALADINES DE LA LIBERTAD"...



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CUBA

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Hussein with Egyptian leader Mubarak.



King Fahd gives his blessing to new line-up.

Line-up of Mubarak, King Fahd, and Hussein-Arafat

New triumvirate weaves deadly web for Palestinians

JACK GOLDBERG and LUCY MATTHEWS explain the latest succession of events since the meeting of the Palestinian National Council last November. (For further background, see the article in *Socialist Viewpoint* No. 2.)

"POSITIVELY buoyed up by the significant development within the PLO, in Mr. Peres's Israel, in Egypt and in Iraq." This enthusiastic welcome by senior US officials summed up the elated reaction of American imperialism to the fast moving series of peace plays in the region.

One year after the ignominious ejection of the US from Lebanon, the new triple alliance consisting of President Mubarak

of Egypt, Arab reaction headed by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, and the new-found tandem of Hussein-Arafat, are clearing away all the hurdles to enable US strategists to dictate the destinies of the Palestinian and Arab masses.

Compromise and Capitulation

It was clear last November in Amman that Arafat's pernicious and shadowy manoeuvres to procure a "quorate" Palestine National Council, largely boycotted by most PLO organisations (PFLP, DFLT, PCP, PLF, PFLP-GC, ALF and PSF) was not merely an organisational coup but an event of major historical importance. With a single stroke, his supporters in the PLO took advantage of the absence of any notable opposition to bring to a close a whole historical era. Many policies that have for decades provided the cornerstone of the Palestinian Revolution were simply put into abeyance.

Instead, the old right-wing guard gave a warm welcome to butcher King Hussein, who candidly assured them of the "purity of his devotion to the Palestinian cause", further to be endorsed by Arafat in the name of the Palestinian people — an outrageous insult to the thousands of

Palestinians slaughtered by the King's troops in Jordan in 1970. The PNC, while rejecting the Camp David agreement, went a long way to meet the King's proposals and sealed an emphatic alliance with the Jordanian monarch, signalling a new course towards compromise and capitulation.

The terms endorsed several months earlier by FATAH Central Committee* after a long and laborious dialogue between all the organisations of the PLO and seen by many as the first step to heal the political rift within the PLO, were simply thrown to the wind, and Arafat was able to proceed towards the logical conclusion of the new course.

Hussein-Arafat Agreement

Egypt, unsurprisingly, was the next major partner to be brought into the alliance and the feverish shuttle quickly established is now known as the "peace overtures". This flurry of activity finally culminated in the signing on February 11 of the "Amman Agreement" between Hussein and Arafat.

*Fatah is the largest single organisation within the PLO led by Yasser Arafat, who is also Chair of the PLO.

The accord calls for "total withdrawal" of Israel from the "territories occupied since the 1967 war, and for a comprehensive peace as established in United Nations and Security Council resolutions." It also calls for the "right of self-determination" for the Palestinian people within the context of a confederation of "Arab states" of Jordan and Palestine. And finally, the agreement sees an International Conference — comprising the main protagonists and members of the UN Security Council including the Soviet Union — as the sole and appropriate forum to finalise the new peace process (the PLO participating within "a joint delegation [joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation]).

The agreement in itself received a mixed response from all parties. While sections of the Israeli coalition government rejected it as hogwash, Prime Minister Peres expressed some mild interest. The Israelis' paymasters in the US felt that it did not go far enough and at this stage did not merit their involvement. But privately it was seen as "encouraging in the sense that it shows the Arab side moving toward developing a negotiating position which is realistic."

The PLO Central Committee, while cursing Hussein for having blown the whistle too soon by releasing the document which had remained secret until then, took some time to swallow the bitter pill but finally bowed under pressure from Arafat, and endorsed the Agreement. This diplomatic gambit was soon to be overtaken by another event of surpassing importance.

Peace Overtures

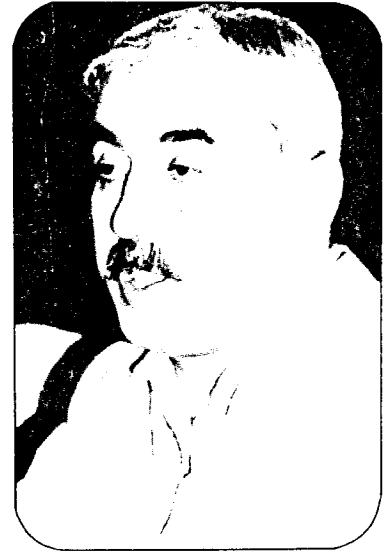
President Mubarak, having obtained a written document, launched a peace initiative aimed partly at Israel but predominantly to involve US imperialism. In a well-timed series of trial balloons, Mubarak floated a three-phase plan: (1) a negotiating stage involving the US and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation; (2) an enlarged phase where Israel would be brought into the negotiations which will end in a peace settlement and (3) an international conference to endorse the settlement.

Peres promptly reacted to this call saying "the plan deserves a careful and positive study" and viewed it as a sign of progress towards a peace settlement.

Headline-grabbing shuttles were soon on the move again. Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's sidekick, flew to Peres's house in Jerusalem for more tangible discussions — the first high-level meeting between the two countries since the invasion of Lebanon. The exact outcome of these intensive contacts is still shrouded in a whirl of confusion but it already seems that the Israelis have shown willingness to accept part of the Mubarak Plan. The sticky points remain a difficult but not insuperable hurdle. While Mubarak is proposing three-stage negotiations beginning with direct talks between the US and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, Peres is still insisting on open direct negotiations with Jordan. As for the rest, it is simply a matter of time before the vague and often murky formulations contained in numerous statements are clarified.

UN Resolution 242

Mubarak for his part, has already started putting flesh on his proposals. In a press conference on February 27, he went a long way to allay Israel's reticence on the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation by claiming that it would not necessarily include official representatives of the PLO and emphasized that they would represent the "moderates". As for the absence of an



Habash and Hawatmeh: leaders of the Democratic Alliance

explicit reference to UN resolution 242 in the Amman Agreement, Mubarak explained that the sole fact that such an accord has been reached implies categorical acceptance by Arafat of this resolution, which calls for recognition of the state of Israel in exchange for territories. It remains to be seen whether Mubarak is saying in public what Arafat is still concealing in flights of rhetoric. What is certain is that the play is in full stream and that "the icy situation has turned into a dialogue situation". The whole imbroglio is slowly taking some shape but all parties will be looking to the visit by Mubarak to Washington on March 11 as an important litmus test.

Elated Optimism

US imperialism has kept a calculated distance, waiting for the outcome of this diplomatic gallop. With the ball firmly in their camp, their caveats and cautions hardly conceal an elated optimism. The situation is rapidly moving to their advantage: firstly their efforts in bolstering Peres have started paying some useful dividends. In fact they are in the process of strengthening their political positions by offering emergency economic aid to Israel on top of the \$1.2 billion regular assistance. This would put them in a stronger position to demand more flexibility from Israel.

Secondly the emergence of Mubarak as a force for peace is also a major trump card. Not only a dependable and pliable servant, he is already emerging from his period of isolation and will soon start playing a significant role in the Arab world.

Finally the US realise that the major tussle would remain between Hussein and Arafat, and within the Palestinian organisations. For them the question of the "Arab dynamics" needs to be cleared before negotiations can begin, and this the US are leaving to the Arabs to do themselves. Secretary of State Shultz has already indicated their readiness for an increasingly active role "we are prepared to work in a helpful and direct way whenever we see the timing of it as appropriate... and it may be that that would occur sometime soon."

Positive Dialogue

Even the involvement of the Soviet Union in the International Conference is not perceived as a threat any more. The bilateral talks on February 19 in Vienna between American and Soviet officials seem to have opened "a positive dialogue" on the issues involved. This tentative ex-

change of views has already achieved one tangible result: relations between the US and Syria took a turn for the better. While vigorously condemning the Amman agreement as a "US conspiracy", Syria, which a year ago was on the verge of a military confrontation with the US, warmly welcomed the US statement that "no peace treaty will take place without taking into account Syria's rights on the Golan Heights."

Reagan did not waste such an opportunity and promptly telephoned President Assad to congratulate him for his reelection as Head of State. The combination of the ongoing thaw between Washington and Damascus and the US-Soviet dialogue will undoubtedly sap and disorientate any Palestinian opposition to Arafat that may take shape.

Contradictions

The quickly developing diplomatic moves are not without problems. In Israel, Peres is walking a tightrope. He decided to proceed with the consultations with Egypt while Shamir, the current foreign minister, in a tour of EEC capitals, unequivocally rejected the peace proposals, sowing confusion to the point where observers remarked on "the two diplomacies of Israel".

It is quite possible that as a result the stress on the coalition may end up in its rupture. Peres, with US help and mirroring the prospects of a peaceful settlement with Israel's neighbours, will be in a strong position to call an election.

As for the Arab side, the quick pace imposed by Mubarak seems to have created controversies within the PLO Central Committee itself. In a bid to avoid a political earthquake, the Central Committee without condemning the proposals, concentrated its fire on refining and amending the details of the Hussein-Arafat Agreement. Two representatives, Abu Iyad and Abu Mazen, flew to Amman to negotiate two important amendments: (1) that the Palestinians would exercise their right to self-determination "after the withdrawal of the Israelis from the occupied territories" and (2) that the PLO would be part of an "Arab delegation" with equal status to other participants. It is still uncertain to what extent these amendments have been agreed and if agreed, whether they would be sufficient to quell any opposition within the Central Committee. In fact, while the emissaries sounded confident and satisfied that all is in order, King Hussein referred to the



amendments as "minor details with no bearing on the substance of the documents".

The rift between the Central Committee and Hussein on the precise interpretation of the accord is further complicated by a fundamental difference over the Mubarak Plan. While Mubarak propounds the International Conference as the ultimate stage in the peace process, Jordanians and Palestinians see the conference as the only forum where the Palestinian problem may be resolved.

These last convulsions are predictable. What the US calls the "Arab dynamics" is a necessary process of clarification and fine tuning. But more important will be the fightback by Arafat's opponents in the PLO. The Democratic Alliance, (PFLP, DFLP, PCF and PLF), having placed their faith in the Aden-Algiers agreement as the right panacea to unite the PLO, to control Arafat and to retrieve the traditional historical positions of the PLO, found themselves overtaken by events as Arafat gave them the cold shoulder and took the lead in calling for a PNC. The resultant PNC has been declared non-legitimate, by the Democratic Alliance, on the grounds that it was boycotted by the majority of

organisations in the PLO. In its wake, George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP stated that "the de facto which the Central Committee of Fatah is trying to force on the rest of the Palestinian organisations will not last long" (!) and he announced yet another plan of action "to strengthen the Democratic Alliance, to continue the dialogue with the Nationalist Alliance (Fatah dissidents, Saiqua, PFLP-General Command, and PSF) and to prepare for a unifying PNC.

These measures again proved too little and too late. Arafat confidently proceeded with his plans and outflanked them once again, with the signing of the Amman agreement and the launch of the Mubarak plan. The left reacted to this with a rallying call for a united front of all forces to beat back the agreement, and while it is likely that most organisations will respond, it is almost certain that such a move — in essence correct and necessary — has already become a cry in the wilderness. The course toward liquidation has gone too far too fast, to be reversed simply by forging tactical alliances. Only a powerful mobilisation of the Palestinian masses can now stop Arafat in his tracks and gut all moves towards compromise with Israel, and it is the Left which must be the

spearhead of such a mobilisation.

Turn to the Masses

If holding a unifying PNC on the basis of the policies contained within the Aden-Algiers agreement was once a possibility, it is so no longer. The Democratic Alliance, which has always remained determinedly against the establishment of a parallel organisation to the PLO, now finds itself politically marginalised inside an organisation which is on the verge of doing a deal with imperialism and recognising the state of Israel. It is certain that the Palestinian masses will never accept a pro-imperialist settlement and would look up to the Left for leadership were it to provide a credible alternative; this leadership would be the more authoritative if it came from the principled elements regrouped in a commanding, powerful organisation. With the future of the Palestinian revolution now seriously in question it is the responsibility of the Left to initiate the building of such an organisation. If the Left fails to take up this responsibility, it will leave the future of the Palestinian people in the hands of the grave-diggers of the Palestinian revolution.

Prise out the facts to strengthen the fight!

SUE OWEN explains why an end to business secrets is vital in the fight for jobs and for workers' control.

THE NCB's claims about "uneconomic" pits have now been attacked three times by specialists: by a group of accountants, by a report by Andrew Glyn commissioned by the NUM, and now by the "Aberystwyth report". Each time the Coal Board's response has been the same: "You've missed the point; the arguments you attack aren't the basis on which we decide which pits are uneconomic."

The reason is clear enough: the NCB and the Tory government are not concerned with the short-term economic costs of pit closures — far less the long term social costs for the mining communities. They have shown themselves ready to invest upwards of £3.5 billion to achieve the twin objectives of defeating the NUM and restructuring the coal industry to suit the long-term needs of capitalism. This type of "balance book" approach — like that of Edwardes in his period in British Leyland — can appear at any given moment to be economic nonsense: only by assessing their long-term plans can we understand why they are prepared to shoulder such heavy short-term costs.

But the answer from the workers' movement — as embodied in the miners' challenge to the argument for keeping open only "profitable" pits — must be to fight for policies of full employment and decent living standards, regardless of the requirements of capitalism. As the early Communist International declared, in uncompromising terms in 1921:

"The Communist Parties should be concerned not with the viability and competitive capacity of capitalist industry or the stability of the capitalist economy, but with proletarian poverty, which cannot and must not be endured any longer. If the demands put forward by the Communists correspond to the immediate needs of the broad proletarian masses, if the masses are convinced that they cannot go on living unless their demands are met, then the struggle around these issues becomes the starting point of the struggle for power. In place of the minimum programme of the centrists and reformists, the Communist International offers a struggle for the concrete demands of the proletariat which, in their totality, challenge the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat and mark out the different

OPEN THE BOOKS!



Bolshevik factory committees: challenged capitalists' control over industry.

stages of the struggle for its dictatorship. Even before the broad masses consciously understand the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, they can respond to each of the individual demands. ..."

* This comes from the "Theses on Tactics" adopted at the Communist International's Third Congress, and is published in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, Ink Links, London, 1980, (TRM) pp270-1.

Trotsky, discussing with American revolutionaries in 1938, elaborated a similar approach as the basis for the 1938 Transitional Programme:

"Lundberg writes a book about the sixty families [the handful of capitalists who then (and now!) dominated the US economy]. The *Annalist* says that his statistics are exaggerated. We must ask for the abolition of commercial secrets — that the workers have the right to look into the bookkeeping — as a

premise for workers' control of industry. ..."

(Discussion between Trotsky, Cannon and Schachtman, in the Pathfinder [New York, 1977] edition of the *Transitional Programme* [Path.TP] p.76).

In the same discussions, Trotsky answers the same type of objection to this demand that is raised today by organisations like the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. Leading Teamster militant Vincent Dunne raised the problem:

"I wanted to ask one question about the slogan of workers' access to the secrets of industry. It seems to me that needs to be well thought out and carefully applied or it may lead to difficulties which we have already experienced. As a matter of fact one of the ways of reducing the militancy of the workers is for employers — we had one such case — to offer to show us the books and prove that they are standing a loss (whether honestly or not is not the question). We have fought against that, saying it is up to you to organise your business; we demand decent working conditions. I wonder what then would be the effect of our slogan of workers' access to the secrets of industry."

Trotsky replied:

"Yes, the capitalists do [open their books] in two instances: when the situation of the factory is really bad, or if they can deceive the workers. But the question must be put from a more general point of view. In the first place, you have million or so unemployed, and the government claims it cannot pay more, and the capitalists say they cannot make more contributions — we want to have access to the book-keeping of this society. ... Workers will say: We want our own statisticians who are devoted to the working class. If a branch of industry shows that it is really ruined, then we answer: We propose to expropriate you. We will direct better than you. Why have you no profit? Because of the chaotic condition of capitalist society. ..."

(Path.TP pp. 85-6)

Trotsky was not inventing this approach from scratch: it had been developed in the early Comintern before the emergence of Stalin and the conservative bureaucracy in Russia.

The Communist International was founded on the perspective of the open and immediate struggle for workers' state power in the midst of the wave of revolutionary crises which followed the First World War, in 1918-19. Everywhere except in Russia, however, this wave ended in defeats for the working class and a temporary restabilisation of capitalism in a brief period of prosperity in 1919-20. The Comintern's Third World Congress in 1921 was, therefore, forced to confront the fact that:

"the world revolution is develop-



Lenin and Trotsky: turn to win over "majority of the working class".

ing even more slowly than was expected..."

(TRM p.275)

and:

"Although the present economic and political situation is objectively revolutionary and a revolutionary crisis could develop without warning as a result of a major strike, a colonial uprising, a new war or a serious parliamentary crisis, the majority of the working class is nevertheless outside the Communist sphere of influence."

(TRM p.277)

To combat this was the aim of the *Theses on Tactics* from which many of the passages quoted here are taken. In this situation:

"... the most important task for the Communist International is to win a dominant influence over the majority of the working class and involve the more active workers in direct struggle."

(TRM p.277)

Now, the starting point for this struggle is not some schema of the transition to socialism, a utopian "maximum" or reformist minimum programme; but rather the immediate needs and struggle of the workers:

"The Communists' main aim is to destroy the capitalists system. But in order to achieve their aim the Communist Parties must put forward demands expressing the im-

mediate needs of the working class. The Communists must organise mass campaigns to fight for these demands regardless of whether they are compatible with the capitalist system."

The *Theses on Tactics*, however, did not elaborate a programme of such demands. The nearest approach is the *Programme of Action* put forward in the *Theses on the Communist International and the RILU*. It is in this *Programme of Action* that the demand for the opening of the books is put forward, along with the use of methods of direct action, industrial unionism, the formation of factory committees, redundancy pay, organizing the unemployed, factory occupations, co-ordination in the wages struggle, workers' defence squads, etc.

The context of these demands was very clearly one of closures and recession: the Comintern sought to put forward answers that offered workers an independent road of struggle.

"The unions must fight the closure of factories and demand that the workers have the right to investigate the reasons behind the closure. Special control commissions to deal with raw materials, fuel and orders must be established to carry out on-the-spot checks of the raw materials in stock, the materials essential to production and the bank balance of the factory

or institution. Specially elected control committees must undertake a thorough investigation of financial relations between the concern in question and other concerns — this raises in a practical way the need to open the books [of industrial monopolies].”

(From *The Communist International & The Red International of Labour Unions*, adopted by the Third Congress of the Communist International, July 1921.)

What can we draw out of the demand for “opening the books”? In the first place it’s a weapon against the lies and the economic arguments of the employers. It helps to win over workers who are influenced by these arguments. In this way it is directed at forestalling the sort of divisions that the government has been able to create in the ranks of the NUM, and the isolation of the “unrealistic” miners from other sections of workers that the TUC leadership has helped to develop. In this context, the demand for “opening the books” is a defensive demand, one that conforms to a situation of defensive struggles and strengthens those struggles.

A good example of how this can help, albeit on a very small scale, was provided by the work of the Open the Books committee of the British Leyland Cowley Joint Shop Stewards Committee in the 1970s. Management launched an offensive on “quality” and productivity; by publishing to the workforce leaked documents which showed that the cause of the problems was mismanagement and bad quality parts, the Committee was able to completely undercut this offensive. It is a demand that plays a role in fighting for united action of the workers.

But the demand also has an *offensive* content. There are two sides to this: strengthening the working class and weakening the capitalists.

For the capitalist class, information is property (and a growing area of law and legal remedies exist to protect this property) and secrecy is power. The jealous protection of this property right is behind the determination of this government to prosecute Ponting and Tisdall, and a few years ago Harriet Harman and the “British Steel mole”, who revealed how the 1980 steel strike was provoked. Unwillingness to expropriate this property right makes the “planning agreements” cooked up by Labour governments come to nothing, as Trotsky pointed out in the *Transitional Programme*:

“The actual relationship existing between the exploiters and the democratic ‘controllers’ is best characterised by the fact that the gentlemen reformers’ stop short in pious trepidation before the threshold of the trusts and their business ‘secrets’. Here the principle of ‘non-interference’ with business dominates. The accounts kept between the individual capitalist and society remain the secret of the capitalist: they are not



Lenin addresses 3rd Congress of Comintern.

the concern of society. The motivation offered for the principle of business ‘secrets’ is ostensibly, as in the epoch of liberal capitalism, that of free ‘competition’. In reality, the trusts keep no secrets from one another. The business secrets of the present epoch are part of a persistent plot of monopoly capitalism against the interests of society. Projects for limiting the autocracy of ‘economic royalists’ will continue to be pathetic farces as long as private owners of the social means of production can hide from producers and consumers the machinations of exploitation, robbery and fraud. ...”

(Path TP, p.120)

For the working class, information is essential in order to establish workers’ control of production. But the *means of getting the information* are also steps to establishing that control. The same organisational methods, the same “specialists” subordinated to the workers, which will serve to find out the information, will also later serve to establish control over the practical process of production. And through organising to take and use the information, the workers learn the details of the *management* of production:

“workers’ control becomes a school of planned economy.”

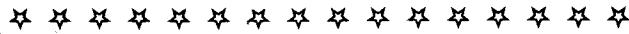
(Path. TP, p.121)

This is essential if we see the fight for socialism as a real fight for workers’ management of the economy once the capitalist class has been expropriated.

The immediate political situation is precisely the sort of situation for which the demand, for the abolition of business secrecy/open the books,

and the other demands of the Comintern’s trade union action programme, and the Trotskyist Transitional Programme of 1938 were designed. The working class is on the defensive, and the bourgeoisie counts on dividing one section from another. What is essential is to find the way to overcome these divisions, and through this to turn the defensive struggles, first into a victorious defence, and then into a new offensive against bourgeois class rule.

The slogan of opening the books is, in this context, not by any means only relevant to the miners. Equally in the struggle in defence of jobs in every industry, or the public services provided by local government, the question of information is of great importance. Labour Councils are asking their workers, and local inhabitants to take action to defend... *the councillors’* right to impose taxes (rates). And in the midst of this struggle the councillors want to control what information the workers and the Labour movement gets. At the same time there is great ignorance as to how much local government finance winds up in the coffers of the big banks and private industrial suppliers. The demand for openness in the making of the budget, openness in all Council proceedings, and generally the opening of the Councils’ books is essential for an effective united fight-back against the Tories’ cuts. It can also provide the beginning of subordination of the Councils, not to the bourgeois Parliamentary State, but to the local working class, forming Council workers into workers’ councils that will challenge the power and privilege of capitalism.



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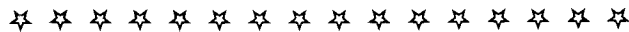
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