

SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

Coventry & District Bulletin

NUMBER TWO MARCH 1985

A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP !

The NUM vote to return to work did not just take place three days before the anniversary of the strike starting. It took place three days before Democracy Day - when a massive demonstration is to take place against the Tories' rate-capping policies and the abolition of the metropolitan counties. As we go to press it seems to be clear that large-scale industrial action throughout London will take place on that day.

On March 7th, the following day, 16 rate-capped councils plan to meet and declare their refusal to fix a rate. On the very day when the NUM delegate conference was voting to end their strike the London Labour Party Conference was voting unanimously to support the policy of refusing to fix a rate. A PRICELESS OPPORTUNITY TO LINK THE MINERS STRIKE AND THE STRUGGLE TO DEFEND LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES HAS BEEN LOST. The second front has now, in effect, become the front line but in conditions which make the struggle against the Tories more difficult.

The 12-month strike in the coalfields has important lessons for those moving into action now and far from being used as an excuse for rapid retreat should be seen as an inspiration. For it is now clear that widespread popular support can be built and sustained by determined action. If it is also clear that the bureaucrats at the top of the labour and trade union movement prefer defeats even of an historic scale rather than victories which can only be achieved by militant class struggle methods then this fact arms us for the future.

As we argued in our February issue the NUM should have demanded a recall-TUC conference and put down a call for a general strike. Only by precise and clear demands can the TUC bureaucrats be put on the spot and their dangerous and destructive role limited. Kinnock's current conspiracy with top union 'leaders' against industrial action in support of the rate-capped councils must be fought and defeated. The whole movement must demand support for those who take a stand and drown the whinning from champions of capitalist parliamentary and constitutional methods like Kaufman and Hattersley and their mouthpiece who likes to think of himself as their leader.

The fact that the NUM have returned to work without achieving the victory we all so desperately wished and worked for is the clear responsibility of Willis and others who refused to fight for the necessary support and their counterparts in the Labour Party like Kinnock who took every opportunity to distance themselves from the strike.

A warm welcome home to Colin Ward, Nev Bell, Dennis Evans and Billy Jackson. Understandably they are not going to celebrate until Colin's brother Les who was jailed for 6 months is released. Les can be written to at HM Prison Ranby in Yorkshire or letters can be sent via 11, De Compton Close, Keresley.

EDUCATION CUTS-THAT THE COUNCIL ARE PROPOSING.....

In secondary education, the merging of Barr's Hill and Sidney Stringer, Binley Park and Ernsford Grange, and Alderman Callow and Finham. The Barr's Hill, Binley Park and Alderman Callow intakes to stop in 1986. The four single sex schools would be mixed with the present catchment areas split into four.

In primary education closure faces Binley Park Primary and St. Michaels CofE Primary. Pridmore Infants is to be merged with Christopher Cash. In addition they want to merge a number of infant and junior schools with the closure of buildings: Stivichall, closure of junior buildings, Limbrick Wood infant building to close and St. Christopher's Infant Department to close. Allesley School (Nursery Annexe), Cannon Park School Annexe, and Southfield Nursery Annexe to close.

In Special Education the proposals mean the closure of Town Thorns Residential (pupils to Corley Residential), closure of Baginton Fields (pupils to Sherbourne Fields) closure of Robert Burns and Broad Park, to be moved to the Baginton Fields site. The implications mean virtually the end of any special education over the age of 13.

LOBBY THE COUNCIL

Tuesday March 12th.

6.30pm.

NO CUTS

JOIN THE RATE-
CAPPED COUNCILS
AND FIGHT THE TORIES

Coventry NUT takes action

In a general meeting on Feb. 27th. Coventry NUT decided with 248 votes for and 2 abstentions to take a morning's strike action in all schools on Friday March 22nd. Anger over a derisory wage offer was added to by the news of proposed school closures. Even the local NUT leadership were surprised by the size of the vote - even the traditionally less militant primary and special schools voted solidly for the action.

Support has been promised by NUPE - every effort must be made to build a really big march and rally on the day and in particular we must press for a good turn-out from the different school defence campaigns.

Around 80-90 people packed into the Koko Building seminar rooms to take part in the March 2nd. conference of the EDUCATION ALLIANCE. Despite the fact that there were a limited amount of people from the various school campaigns and that a large part of the participants were teachers the conference was a successful contribution to the fight against the cuts.

Local NUPE full-timer Ken Barnes told us how he had persuaded his members in Solihull schools to tender successfully for their own jobs at the cost of wages, hours and conditions and dirtier schools; with that kind of leadership who needs the Tories? He was subsequently disowned by Joe Rogers, secretary of Coventry Local Authority NUPE. More effective was a teacher from Sladebrook School who described how Brent teachers had successfully fought off two attempts to run down schools.

The workshop sessions, on special schools, organising school students, inter-union organisation and building school based campaign groups were all felt to be useful by those involved in the discussions. Bell Green showed the need for a joint fight by parents, unions, school students and the Labour Party - this time we are not alone and it is vital that school campaigns do not fall into the trap of thinking that they stand a better chance by themselves. The Education Alliance can play an important part in bringing the different campaigns together.

I HAVE BEEN CRITICIZED FOR MEETING WITH A LEADER OF THE NICARAGUAN EXILES...



BECAUSE HIS FORCES SEEK THE MILITARY OVERTHROW OF THE NICARAGUAN REGIME



I, HOWEVER, FAIL TO SEE ANYTHING IMPROPER IN OUR DISCUSSION



AFTER ALL - HE'S A U.S. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE



Dan Wasserman

The Coventry Latin America Solidarity Campaign is continuing its wide-ranging activities. On Tuesday 19th March Kathy Piper, of the Catholic Institute of International Relations, reports on her recent visit to Guatemala. With video & discussion. 7.30pm, the Arches, Spon End, Coventry.

Arthur to break the whip over Callow?

Westwood Branch Labour Party called a meeting on February 27th to protest at the closure of Alderman Callow Community College in Canley. Over 200 local people attended to hear their 3 Labour Councillors - Arthur Waugh Jnr, Phil Robinson & Joe Thompson.

Before the meeting right-winger Cyril Rodmell had threatened to exclude anybody from the Bell Green Action Committee, particularly Martha Young who, he said, would be turned back at the Ward boundary. Opening the meeting, Cyril insisted that Westwood was only interested in stopping Callow being closed, not any other schools. To add weight to this pledge all contributors were told to give their addresses, "to prevent outsiders from speaking"!

An excellent case was made for keeping Callow open. Then John Seabourne from NUPE asked the 3 councillors which way they would vote in Council on June 8th. Waugh Jnr said he would vote against the closure come what may. The other two waffled uncontrollably and refused to answer the straight question. They talked about everything else - democracy, Labour Groups, whips, 10 years as governors, there when the first sod was cut etc etc. The audience got very restless. As one stalwart put it: "Those two have done more damage to the Labour Party in Canley in that 5 minutes than anybody in the last 10 years." In the end the intervention of 'outsiders' wasn't necessary.

RIGHT-WING ATTEMPT TO DERAIL ANTI-CUTS FIGHT FAILS

Trade union & Labour Party delegates had a shock when they turned up on Sunday lunchtime, February 17th, to discuss setting up an Anti-Cuts Committee in Cov. There was Peter Lister, leader of the City Council, with supporters in force. They succeeded in derailing any serious discussion at the 100+ strong meeting, but the vote went decisively in favour of setting up a Committee.

Let's hope the obvious concern of the Council leaders about the potential of such a Committee is well-justified. A delegate meeting proper is being called for March 28th. For further details contact any 'SV' supporter, or phone Mick Chilvers on Coventry 441604.

SOCIALISTS AND THE FIGHT TO STOP THE CUTS.....

What are the fundamental principles which should underlie the work of socialists in local government today? First and foremost there must be a clear commitment to defend jobs and services regardless of legal constraints. Once the framework of Tory law is accepted there is no prospect of defending jobs and services - the Tories have demonstrated their total refusal to negotiate unless their opponents refuse to back down.

The way forward lies through a refusal to cut, compromise will only lead to defeat. Of course there are exceptions to a no cuts policy eg the Police are massive over-spenders.

There must be every attempt to build united campaigns of Councillors, Labour Parties, trade unions and community organisations. Where socialists are the dominant force on Labour Councils they should provide resources which will help local government workers and those who use the services to develop anti-cuts campaigns on a firm independent basis.

Councillors who are taking a stand must see themselves as being responsible to the organisations of the working class. Socialists start from the interests of their class not the petty rules of bureaucratically led Labour groups. Indeed a major task of socialists in the Labour Party is to open up these Labour groups to the scrutiny of the workers they claim to represent. No more meeting behind closed doors with a strong-arm squad of police to keep out their opponents.

Trade unions must be prepared to support to the hilt those councillors who are threatened with surcharge, they must be opposed to deals which protect jobs while services are cut and that must oppose with industrial action any attempt to carry out cuts whatever the Party label of the Council concerned.

Local cross-union rank and file organisations, such as London Bridge, should be built to strengthen the hand of those arguing for joint action and minimise the risk of divisive deals.

Labour Parties should ensure their councillors put up a fight and replace them if they do not. Socialists should be in the forefront of the fight to organise and support resistance on the ground. In particular common cause must be made with black/ethnic minority groups. Womens' Sections have a key strategic role to play in that the mobilisation of women is one of the most important weapons in the armory of the workers movement today.

While every effort should be made to build a unified campaign, councils which go into struggle with the government should continue their stand even if they are alone. A stand by one council would provide a beacon showing the way forward, a focus for action, a rallying point against the Tory government. Of course councillors would be much more likely to take a stand which went all the way if the Labour movement stated in advance that anyone surcharged would be indemnified.

Clearly we must start today from the need to defend what we have from the ravages of the Tories but for socialists things do not end there. In future issues of this bulletin and in our magazine SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT we shall be examining the question 'What is a socialist policy for local government?' If you think you have something to say on this please let us know - we would be interested in your views.

Keith White.

KINNOCK MUST GO.

SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT supporters did not vote for Kinnock in the Labour leadership elections. We argued that he would rapidly prove himself indistinguishable from the right-wing. Our prediction has come true.

He has consistently lined up with the right-wing witch-hunt campaign on the NEC, he has attempted to undermine reselection, he has consistently opposed support for those such as Liverpool Council who have threatened to defy Tory law and has sought to weaken the current stand of the rate-capped councils by colluding with the top leaders of public sector unions to prevent confrontation with the Thatcher government.

It is, however, the miners strike which has thrown his total subservience to capitalist law into sharp relief for all to see. He has fallen in with every vile and despicable attack on rank and file miners made by the right-wing.

- * It took him 10 months to join a picket line...
- * At a crucial point in the strike when he was invited onto NUM platforms for a special series of meetings he refused to attend. The Tory press howled with glee.....
- * More recently as the movement in favour of a general strike began to emerge he almost fell over himself in the rush to dismiss it as an option....and he did it not in a positive way, as part of a serious discussion on the way forward for the strike, he did it with a sneering dismissive wave of his hand....
- * When the Campaign group of MP's held up the genteel and hypocritical processes of the House of Commons for 20 minutes he launched a vicious attack on them.....
- * On Friday March 1st the TV news reported that he favoured an amnesty for those miners who had been convicted of no offence or who had not been involved in acts of violence. This report has not been confirmed at the time we went to press - but it is wholly consistent with his systematic slanders against those miners literally fighting for their jobs.

Enough is enough...the sooner the left gets itself together to rid the party of this embarrassment the better.

SUNDAY MARCH 31st

Jeremy Corbyn MP (Campaign Group member) will speak at the Barras Green Social Club - 7.30pm. Meeting organised by District Labour Party Broad Left.

CARRY ON THE COLLECTIONS

Even if as seems likely the miners strike is to end on Tuesday March 5th, we should continue to collect as much money as we can. Not only is there the men who have been sacked (11 locally) there are also those who languish in jail for trying to defend their jobs and the future for us all. We have a responsibility to them and their families. More details next month of a proposed national organisation to support prisoners and their families.

New from LEFT VIEW BOOKS....

'CUBA: RADICAL FACE OF STALINISM'

by John Lister

An assessment of the Cuban Revolution..

Chapters on the Cuban CP, Cuban foreign policy, Trotskyism and the Cuban Revolution. Contains a detailed Chronology of the events of the Revolution.

168 pages - only £4.95. Available from SV supporters or from the Wedge Bookshop.

If you like this bulletin then buy the magazine too....

SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT No 3 is available now from SV supporters and the Wedge Bookshop. Price 70p. Number 4 which will include articles on the end of the miners strike and the fight against cuts in local government services, will be available in the middle of March.

The next issue of this bulletin will be out on the weekend of march 30/31. Articles, letters, poems, cartoons, threats of legal action, jokes(?) must be in by Wednesday March 27th.

Prevention of Terrorism Act arrests.

Colin Lynch and Moira O'Shea are both charged with conspiracy to cause explosions. Next month we will carry information on the case of Colin Lynch - this month we cover details of the campaign to defend Moira O'Shea.

Re-instate Moira O'Shea! Drop the Charges!

Dr Moira O'Shea is a 65 year old psychiatrist who, until her arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in early January, was practicing psychotherapy at the Rubery Hill Hospital in Birmingham. A member of ASTMS No 3 Divisional Council, Birmingham Trades Council and Selly Oak Labour Party, she was active in Troops Out and the Labour Committee on Ireland as well as a leading member of the Irish in Britain Representation Group. Significantly her arrest, and eventual charge of 'conspiracy to cause explosions', came just a few weeks after tentative steps had been taken by Irish activists to investigate the dubious circumstances surrounding the conviction of those accused of the Birmingham bombings. One victory has been achieved in Moira's defence already in getting her out on bail (the police changed her from a Category A to Category B prisoner at the very last minute when it appeared their opposition to bail might be overruled). But the charges remain, and she has lost her job. Support is required urgently from the labour movement. On March 16th an ad hoc Defence Committee is calling a Conference in support of Moira O'Shea in Birmingham. Credentials for delegates are available from the supporters of this Bulletin.

Godfrey Webster
Chairperson, West Midlands Labour Committee on Ireland

BRINGING LABOUR INTO DISREPUTE: MORE RIGHT-WING TRICKS
IN COVENTRY NORTH-EAST

Longford Ward AGM was held in January. The left swept the board, although those supporters of the City Council who did go took a full part in the meeting. The left, far from being secretive as the NEC would have us believe, handed out their slate at the door. Phil Dixon, until recently Chair of the North-East Constituency, objected but was assured he could vote which way he pleased.

Subsequently Mr Dixon and the infamously incompetent NE Secretary Dot Dalton dragged out a copy of something entitled "Standing Orders of Longford Ward" which gave the AGM as being in February. Long-standing Ward members recognised this as one of several draft sets of S.O.s which Longford had considered some years ago but never actually passed! Nonetheless on the basis of this & the Left slate Dalton & Dixon obtained a ruling from the ever-obliging Regional Organiser Freda Westwood nullifying the AGM! Needless to say the Ward itself has heard nothing from Westwood either written or otherwise.

Are we being overly suspicious in thinking this is another attempt to hold up the Coventry North-East AGM and prolong the already overlong political lives of these self-same right-wingers?

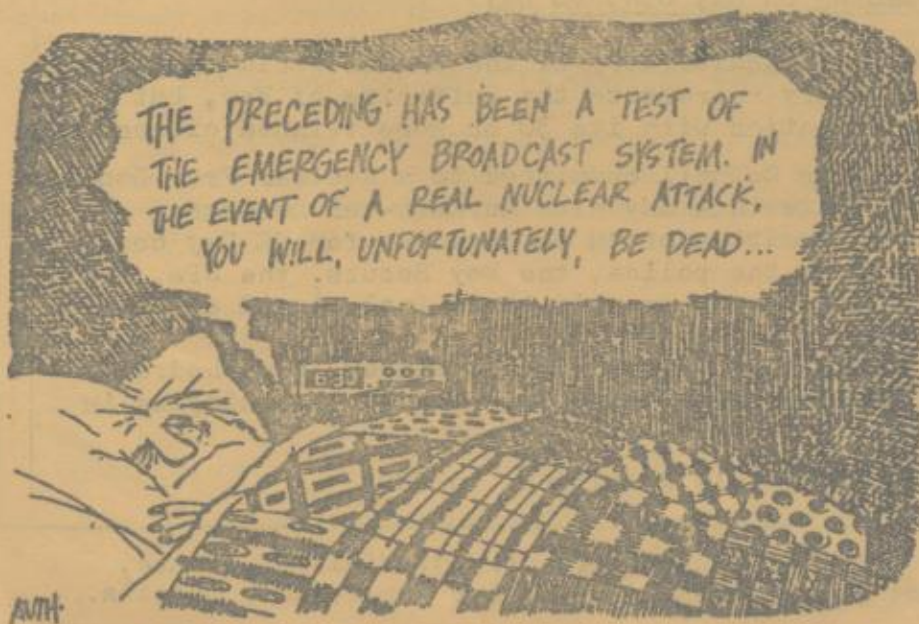
Matthew Jones

**JOBS NOT BOMBS
MINES NOT MISSILES!**

March organised by Coventry North-West Labour Party Young Socialists; sponsored by Coventry NUM Strike Cttee, TGWU 5/920 Branch, YCND

Assemble 1pm Saturday March 16th at Foleshill Park, Holbrook Lane (by Dunlop). March through Radford to a rally in Keresley. More information from Cov NW LPYS, 4 Gloucester Street, or Coventry 22041.

**YOUTH - HERE WE GO!
TURN OUT ON MARCH 16TH!**



The only thing the 'Coventry Evening Telegraph' failed to report about the February meeting of the West Midlands County Council was the major item on the Agenda - the lengthy statement by Ed Shore, Chair of the Police Cttee, on the cost of the Miners' Strike.

From March 1984 to January 1985 £11 million has been spent in overtime for just the West Midlands police on the miners' picket lines. This of course was not in the Council's budget and doesn't feature in accusations of over-spending. We can clearly see that to the Tory government money is no object when it comes to defeating the miners. Remember that there are no coal mines in the West Midlands County area - this overtime has been spent elsewhere under centralised police direction with no control whatsoever over operations or pursestrings by the County, the paying body. Extraordinary isn't it?

Remember too the fuss over the closure of schools and other cuts in Coventry by the Labour Council. This is to save £7 million over 4 years. Yet the Tories rip the County Council off for £11 million in police overtime in just 9 months! And not an eyebrow is raised, and no mention of course in the local paper.

There is worse to come! The County Council Labour Group has just decided by a 2 to 1 majority to put the bus fares up by 5%. This will raise the princely sum of £3.5 million in one year, assuming the same number of people keep using the buses. Get out your calculator to work out how much the bus fares could have been cut using the £11 million over 9 months. I make it about 20% - a nice bonus for the needy.

Actually, we were told, the 5% increase in fares isn't needed to balance the County's budget. It's being introduced because Solihull Tory District Council might take the County Council to court for over-subsidising the fares. But only Tyne and Wear of the other Met Counties are putting their fares up - and the ones who aren't includes Merseyside & South Yorkshire both of whom are rate-capped. Why are West Midlands so scared of the courts - yet again - and run before the first shot is fired?

Or is it, as has been rather cynically suggested, that some of the right-wing leaders of the Labour Group are positioning themselves to join the Joint Boards which will take over when the County Council is abolished. Chair of Transport, Phil Bateman, has just got himself a seat on Wolverhampton Council; Chair of Economic Development, Geoff Edge, is now on Walsall Council; Chair of Fire, J.T. Wilson, is on Dudley, and so on and so on - all nicely planned thankyou. It would not suit them to freeze the bus fares now, leaving the Joint Board under government instruction but nominal Labour control to hoist them by a large percentage next year.

Dave Spencer

West Midlands County Councillor, Coventry South-East

What's happening on May 8th, VE Day?

May 8th this year is the 40th anniversary of the end of World War 2 in Europe. To the world Coventry represents the suffering of War, but also international reconciliation with its 30 or more twinned cities.

You would think that a Labour Council committed to a Nuclear Free Zone policy would want to celebrate this day with an anti-war message. Not so. The Lord Mayor's Committee of 19 to organise for VE Day consists of representatives from the police, the Boy Scouts, the JPs, and overwhelmingly from ex-servicemen's organisations including 2 colonels. The peace movement is not represented at all!

Ideas so far discussed include:- parades on the Sunday, a cathedral service on the day with a military content, and Ann Shelton singing in the Central Hall.

What happened to the Labour Party's commitment to CND?