

workers' ACTION

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10p

"OUR NAME is only kept in the news by gangs of bully boys who rampage through the East End of London beating up Asians... in default of a statement of condemnation by the party leadership and expulsion of lawless elements, we shall unilaterally turn over a list of trouble-makers to the police".

So reads a National Front internal memorandum from the 'Action Committee of London branch organisers', leaked to the anti-fascist paper CARF.

What are the 'rampages' they refer to?

On Sunday 11th and again on Sunday 25th June, gangs of skinheads roared down Brick Lane shouting racist abuse and looking for a fight.

Local Bengali youth stopped the Brick Lane racists doing much damage. But individual East London Asians have also been attacked.

On Sunday 25th Ishaque Ali was strangled with a shoelace. On May 4th Altab Ali was killed by a stab in the neck. On April 20th, 10 year old Kenneth Singh was beaten to death.

Dozens of other assaults, often with knives, have occurred in recent weeks, especially in early May after the NF's humiliation in the local council elections.

The NF memo lends weight to what many East Londoners are already convinced of: in the East End, racism means murder.

The memo also shows how the violence stems from desperation.

Following the electoral fiasco in May and the increasing success of propaganda put out by the Anti-Nazi League and programmes like last Monday's excellent *World in Action*, the National Front is in the grip of demoralisation.

The memo also speaks of funds going astray and branches disintegrating.

This weekend's Anti-Nazi League conference therefore meets at a crucial time. Yes, the pressure must be kept up, exposing the Front for the Nazi organisation it is.

But the more successful we are in this task, the less 'respectability' they have to lose and the more ready they will be to resort to the bomb and the bullet.

So exposure is not enough.

The tragic lessons of London's East End recently teach us one thing: There can be no reliance on the police. Build defence squads now! Drive the Nazis off the streets! No platform for fascists!

FULL
TEXT
PAGE 6



On Sunday June 25 the Anti-Nazi League offices were set on fire. The arsonists left the message on the wall: "NF Rules OK".

£25,000-worth of damage was done; to make good the damage, the ANL has launched an Emergency Appeal

EMERGENCY APPEAL!

TO: Emergency Appeal, Anti-Nazi League
P.O. Box 151 London WC2.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED NOW

I enclose a donation for the Emergency Appeal (payable to "Anti-Nazi League")

£ _____
Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____

Secret NF memo admits

'EAST END

TERROR IS

OUR WORK'

GPO boss to get £865 a week, but NUPE will have to fight for £60



WITH THE Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory conference coming up next weekend — on 15 July — left wingers in the Labour party are stepping up activity to enrol sponsors and build local SCLV groups. Among the latest sponsors in Joan Maynard MP, and South Wales Miners' President Emlyn Williams has written: "I wish you well... in your campaign, and if at any time I can assist, do not hesitate to ask".

The campaign aims to mobilise for a Labour vote at the general election but against the Labour leaders' policies and for a socialist fightback against the present government and the next government, Tory or Labour.

The news last week underlined the need for the campaign in a dramatic way.

The Labour government announced a pay rise from £475 to £865 a week for Post Office boss Sir William Barlow, and similar increases for top judges, admirals, air commanders and public sector bosses. The same week the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) announced a campaign of rallies in every major city before the general election, to press the Labour government and the TUC to enforce a £60 a week minimum wage.

WOMEN

That sums up this system and the way the Labour government is running it. For people who keep our health service going — or for catering workers, workers in hundreds of sweat shops, and,

especially, millions of women workers, helping to produce all the wealth in society — £60 is too much. You can't have that! the government cries. Don't you know there's a crisis?

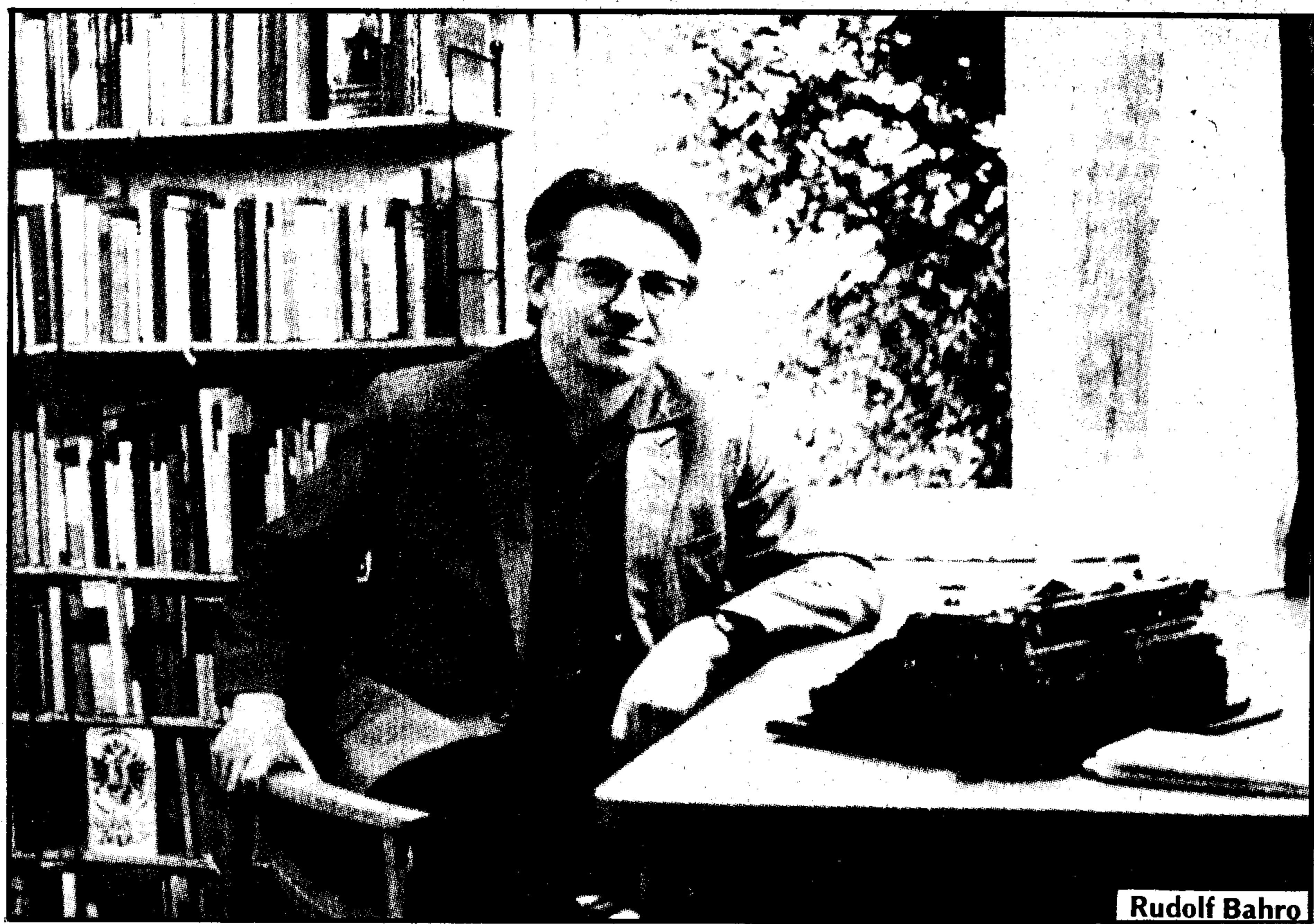
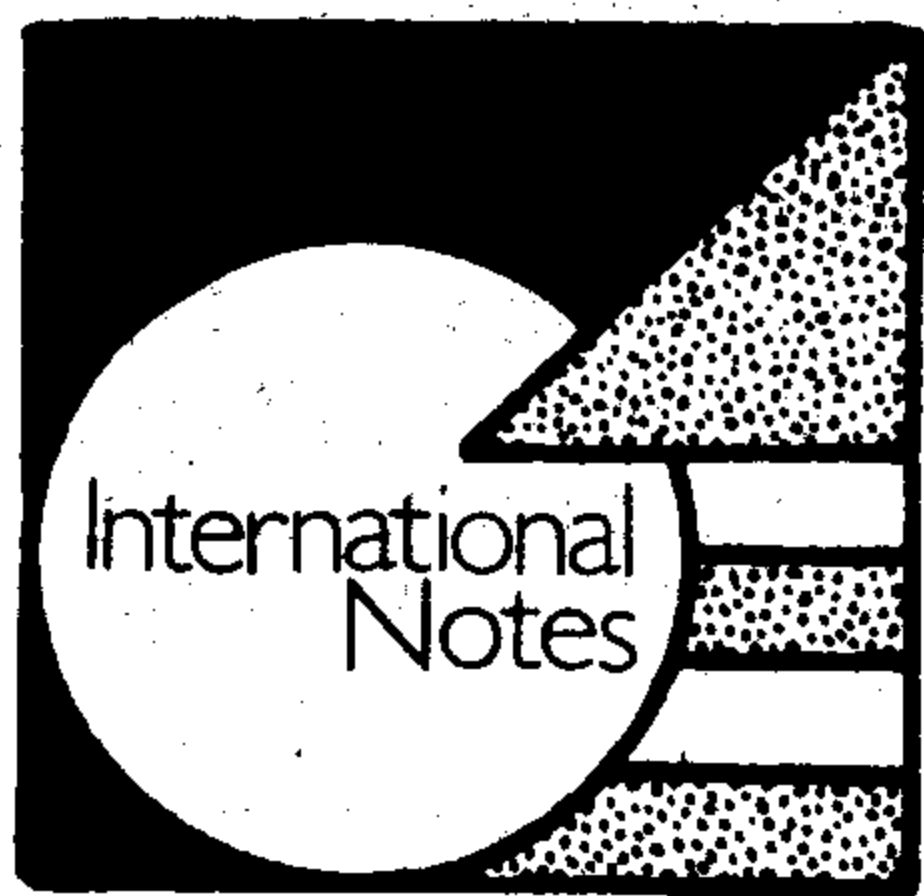
But for the top bosses, the judges, and the admirals, there's always something in the till. They are 'important people' — because instead of working to produce what people need, they have comfortable jobs exploiting workers, sending them to prison, and sending them out to be killed.

Socialism is not about running this system in a 'moderate' way, but turning the whole set-up upside down — and sweeping the right wing Labour leaders away with it, since they continue to cling to it. And socialists have to campaign on that basis at election time as at every other time.

Joan Maynard backs SCLV More campaign news p3 ▶

PAC Demonstration SUNDAY JULY 9 Speakers Corner 2:30
POLITICAL STATUS FOR IRISH PRISONERS OF WAR — BRITAIN OUT OF IRELAND

Revolt against the quota system



Rudolf Bahro

BAHRO GETS 8 YEARS IN JAIL

RUDOLF BAHRO, the dissident East German economist, was sentenced on 30th June to 8 years imprisonment by the GDR authorities, on charges of 'espionage'.

The GDR bureaucrats grotesquely portray Bahro as an agent in the pay of West Germany. In fact his only crime is that his book *Die Alternative* has attempted a Marxist critique of the so-called "socialist" societies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Bahro has been a member of the East German Communist Party since the age of 18 and firmly places himself in the tradition of the communist movement. His call for political revolution in the Eastern states, to create a true working class

democracy with the right of oppositionists to freely express themselves, is his crime in the eyes of the bureaucratic elite in the GDR.

They have denied him any opportunity to address the East German workers. Since last August they have kept him in solitary confinement, allowing him only a one-hour visit every month.

Secret

With the farcical secret trial and the heavy sentence they hope to silence him and other oppositionists.

As in the case of other dissidents, Wolf Biermann and Klaus Mainz, Bahro's sentence may

be commuted to expulsion from the GDR and loss of citizenship.

In Britain the Bahro Defence Campaign has been circulating an Open Letter to Erich Honecker, Secretary of the ruling party in East Germany, demanding the release of Bahro. So far, several Labour MPs (among them Tom Litterick, Stan Newens and Phillip Whitehead) have signed it, as well as many Communist Party members (Pete Carter of UCATT, Jon Bloomfield, Geoff Roberts and Dave Aaronovitch are some of the CP signatories).

The CPGB has however made no official statement, confining itself in the *Morning Star* to reporting Bahro's sentence without comment.

As for Bakke himself, he does not seem to be inspired in this fight by any racist motives, and he does have genuine grounds for considering himself the victim of the rules of the US educational system. The answer is not either positive discrimination or a chance for individuals like Bakke to enter higher education, but the state increasing its expenditure on education so as to accommodate both sets of demands.

But capitalist states everywhere are presently cutting back on social provision in education, as in other areas such as health, in response to the economic crisis. This is particularly the case in California where recently a so-called "tax revolt" took place.

It was a revolt by middle class professionals who objected to paying what they considered to be excessive local property taxes. Led by Howard Jarvis, who has links with the extreme right wing John Birch Society, this 'revolt' will result in a 57% cut in property taxation: a loss of \$7 billion to local government funds.

Although relieving the middle classes of certain economic burdens (which, in the richest state in the richest country in the world they were well able to bear) this will in the main benefit the large multi-national corporations. And it will severely slash state health, educational, welfare and other facilities.

Needless to say the burden will fall on those least able to bear it, the disadvantaged racial minorities and immigrant communities.

In such a situation, the Bakke ruling will have an even more damaging effect for blacks and other minority groups.

**WORKERS
STAY OUT
DESPITE
THUGGERY**

DESPITE the eventual defeat of the strikes and occupations in the Renault car factories, their action has set off a large strike wave in French industry, challenging the government's wage restrictions.

The strikes in the munitions industries are continuing and now there is total disruption in the factories throughout France manufacturing Moulinex household appliances. On 26th June, after two weeks of strike action, 9 out of 11 Moulinex plants had been affected — seven occupied and two on strike.

According to the Moulinex bosses the workers' demands for a monthly 400 francs (£50) increase for all and a fifth week paid holidays was "unrealistic". Their response was, as in the case of Renault, repression.

Hired scabs and strikebreakers attacked the pickets at the Caen factory on Monday morning (26th). Several workers were injured and one woman worker was hospitalised. That afternoon the CRS riot police evacuated the Alençon plant. In the evening the court at Le Mans ordered the evacuation of the factories at La Fresnay-sur-Sarthe and Mamers.

Despite the thuggery and force, management did not succeed in intimidating the workers back to work. On the contrary, these tactics simply extended the strike movement. On Wednesday 600 workers at the plant at Falaise voted for unlimited strike action. A 100-strong picket was promptly formed at the gates.

Then the bosses offered a 2% increase (about 45F monthly) and no 5th week of paid holidays. On Thursday 29th, management made a new offer, of 100F increase, coming into effect on 1st July, with three more rises of 2% in August, October and December. Money lost during the strike would not be paid, but could be made up in overtime during the rest of the year.

The CGT union was in favour of accepting this offer and for a return to work. The CFDT, the largest union in the Moulinex factories, condemned the offer as "negligible".

By the end of the week even the Saint-Lô factory, which had been unaffected until then; rejected the offer overwhelmingly at a meeting of its 1100 workers, and management decided to shut down the plant.

CG

'Off the boat and into a council flat' — What a lie!

"Mr.Z lives in a multi-occupied house in Kings Cross. There are 12 rooms in the house — shared by a total of 35 people.

"Mr.Z and his wife and three children have one room and share the bathroom with the other 30 tenants. There are two lavatories on the property. There is no kitchen or hot water supply. Mr.Z pays £10 a week to the landlord who lives next door and owns several houses in the street.

"Mr.Z has lived there for 18 years — as long as he has been in England. He has a job in a nearby restaurant where he works from 10am to 3pm and again from 6pm to 1am, 6 days a week."

Mr.Z is one of about four dozen Bengalis living in southern Camden who talked to the Bengali Workers' Action Group (BWAG — not connected with this newspaper) about their job and housing conditions. From the information they gathered, they have produced a "Report on Housing Conditions" which is a shocking indictment of the so-called 'affluent society' and the equally mis-named 'welfare state'.

It took BWAG about a year to gather the information for this report. In the course of doing it, they constantly got involved in helping people to apply for council housing, in local action against racism, and in encouraging Bengali catering workers to unionise themselves.

In order to be of more help to

'Blacks are taking all the houses', say the racists over and over again. But the truth is very much the other way round. The scandal is how LITTLE housing — in quality and quantity — some black families are forced to squeeze into. And even that is hard to get.

A report produced by Bengali workers in north London shows up some of the real facts.

the community, several members of the group took a training course to be better informed about housing and welfare rights. The survey was based on people and houses they got to know about, rather than a random sample. Nevertheless, it is revealing. They say "As this is not a piece of research, generalisations cannot be made from this group to the rest of the Bengali community.

EFFORT

The information merely gives a picture of some housing situations. It is the experience of the group that these situations are roughly representative of the conditions under which many Bengali people are living in this part of the borough."

In another house like Mr.Z's they found 30 tenants. "There is one family consisting of six people living in one small room. The other twenty-four men share eight rooms... In one of the four-person rooms, two men oper-

ate a shift system on one bed."

The nine men who gave BWAG their personal stories had all been in the country for longer than 10 years, and some for as many as 30. On average, they had lived in that house for 6 years.

So much for the myth of immigrants walking 'off the boat and into a council house'! And this is in Camden — the Borough with probably the best record in these matters (it recently decided to make a special effort to make sure black people were not discriminated against in its employment). What can it be like in the worse boroughs?

As well as describing individual situations, the report gives some overall picture of the conditions faced by this community. "Forty of the people questioned (83%) have the use of only one room, which in the absence of other amenities has to be used for sleeping, cooking, eating and washing. 35 people do not have access to a bathroom at all. Only 9 of these households have the use of a kitchen. Lavatories, many of them outside, had to be

shared by as many as 13 people. And 43 of the households do not have the use of running hot water.

For many of these catering workers, the misery is compounded by working outlandish hours. As many as half of them walked to work — though in some cases that was because the distance was not great.

RIGHTS

The report's concluding demands point to the means already at the disposal of the local authorities for alleviating these terrible conditions — means which clearly have not been used so far; and they point to very simple measures such as issuing information in the Bengali language on housing and welfare rights, and the employment of members of the Bengali community as housing interviewers and advisors.

The very modest level of these demands is itself an indication of the utter callousness and negligence that tolerates such conditions for black workers and their families: conditions which must certainly have been known to the local authorities.

★ ★ Copies of the report can be obtained from the Bengali Workers Action Group, c/o Camden Cttee for Community Relations, 1 Roberts Street, London NW1.

The on and off strike to save jobs

WITHIN TWO days the first national steel strike was called and then called off. Just like flicking a light switch on and then off again. With that easy action, Bill Sirs, leader of the ISTC, the steel industry's biggest union, showed what the union leaders really could do to fight redundancy.

The news that Bilston was to shut down two out of its four blast furnaces straight away, and BSC would end steelmaking there altogether by the beginning of August, got a furious reaction from the delegates at the ISTC's national conference, which only two days before had heard the head of BSC explain why he had closed the Shelton works.

This was too much. They demanded the executive save Bilston. The conference was adjourned on Thursday 29th June and the executive went into closed session. When the meeting finished, Bill Sirs emerged to declare: "I will stop steel moving in this country. The International Metal Workers' Federation will

be informed and no steel will be sent here".

The next day the BSC and the government retreated and Sirs called off his threat.

It was as easy as that. National strike and international blacking. The union leaders have the power! So why don't they use it?

Why didn't Sirs use it to save Shelton? Or to save Ebbw Vale and East Moors or any of the other tens of thousands of jobs the British Steel Corporation has hacked out of the industry?

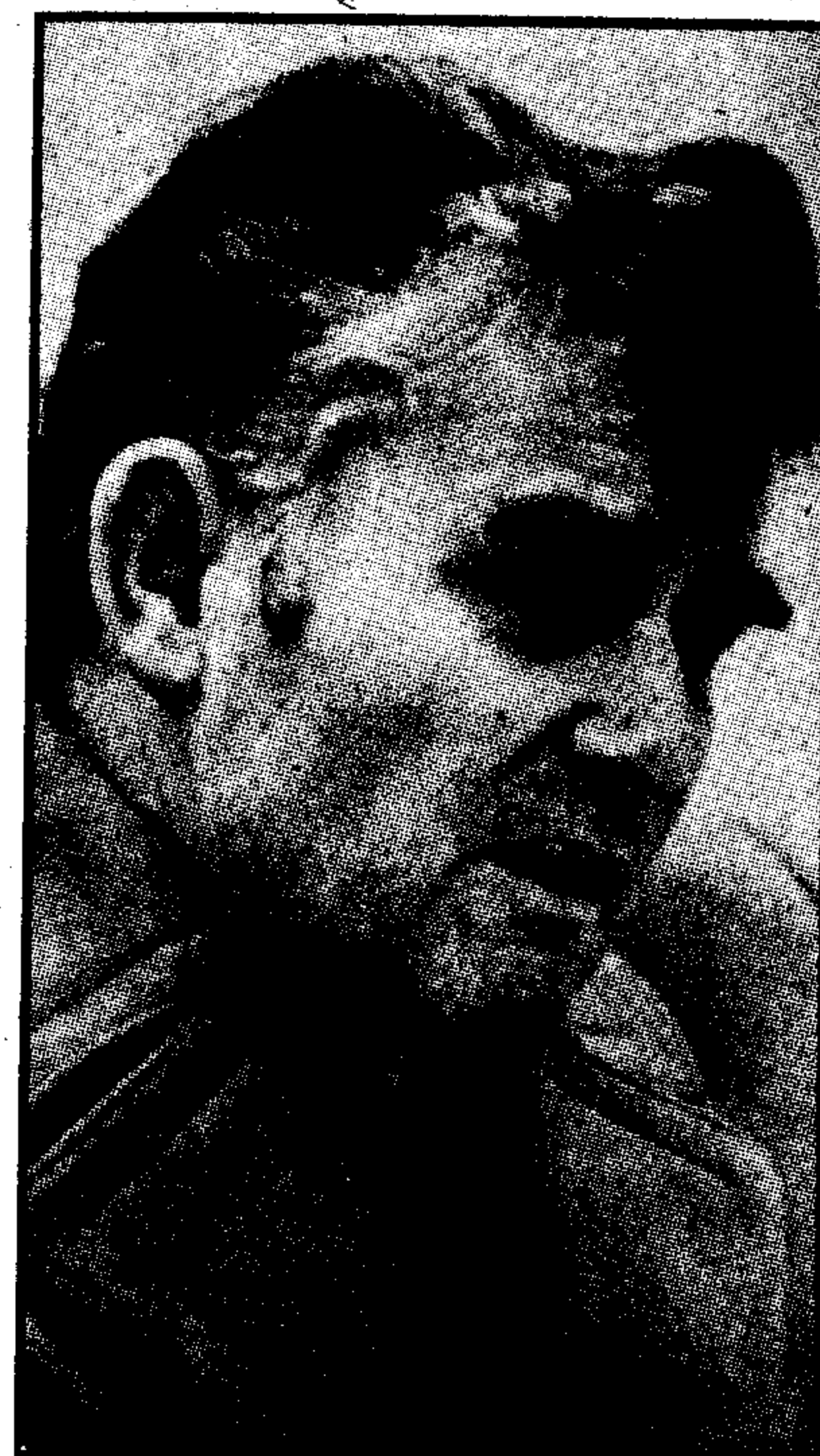
There are two answers. Firstly, the membership rarely have such a direct possibility of putting pressure on the union leadership. (It is only recently that there were national conferences at all in the ISTC!) Secondly, even the most reactionary sit-on-your-arse-and-sell-out-the-members union leadership is willing to invoke strike action when the role of the union bureaucracy is being threatened.

That is why the question of consultation was key as far as Sirs was concerned. If there's no consultation there's no role for the bureaucrats to play. Sirs admitted this in a roundabout way when he called for a moratorium on Bilston so that the workers could cool off.

'Consultation' should be important only so that it gives the workers more time and more information to organise their fight-back. Sirs, the typical bureaucrat, is interested in the consultation, not in the fight-back.

The small victory gained last week in delaying the decision to close Bilston is a demonstration to every worker that it is possible to fight redundancies. It also showed that the union bureaucracy is not prepared to do more than safeguard its own role.

And it showed how crucial it is to build a militant movement in the rank and file which can challenge and replace the right wing bureaucrats.



Bill Sirs

PHIL HADDON, secretary of Moss Side Ward of Moss Side Constituency Labour Party, talked to WORKERS ACTION about the Moss Side by-election and the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory.

MOSS SIDE has the smallest majority of all the Labour seats in Manchester. On the evidence of recent by-election swings it is clearly a marginal seat.

Recently in the Moss Side and Hulme wards, the main opposition to Labour has come from tenant-based 'People's Candidates', who have run campaigns based on the considerable discontent over housing conditions. They ran Labour close in the local elections.

Lately, activists in the tenants' campaigns have been drawn into the Labour Party, though a few have been attracted to the Liberals around Peter Thompson, their by-election candidate, who has been active in tenants' campaigns.

Those joining or re-joining the Labour Party have been drawn in mainly because of the Labour Party's statements against racialism and a belief that fighting inside the Labour Party can be more successful than fighting outside it.

The problems of Moss Side and Hulme are very severe. Most striking are the official statistics which show that 60% of people in the area live at

Moss Side by-election

Indicting the government's record

or below the poverty line, and that 16% are unemployed. **Could there be a more damning indictment of the government's record?**

While all the old slum property in the area has been cleared, housing is still a key issue. The monstrosities put up in the place of the old slums cause real hardship to the people who have to live in them. Damp, cockroaches, poor heating systems, bad plumbing, dirty and sordid stairs and passage-ways, all combine to make for a very angry mood among council tenants.

Moss Side Ward Labour party has tried to take an active role in fighting alongside the tenants' groups and against the government's policies, which hit hard in an

area like ours. For example, we've been opposed to all immigration controls because we have no doubt that they are part of the racism the state uses to divide the working class and prevent us fighting back.

We have run anti-racist campaigns — Moss Side has a large black community — and the only way the Labour Party can win support and fight alongside black people is to oppose the government's racist laws. We've managed to swing the whole constituency round to that position now.

The Ward party also opposed the City Party policy that was put forward in the local elections in May. We were sure that the complacency of their platform, which praised the way Labour had 'coped with difficult times', had to be opposed.

It would have been impossible to go along with the government's record in front of the very people who had suffered the most.

We tried to offer a way to fight back. Although large scale amendments to the local government policy proposed by our ward were defeated at the GMC and at the City Party conference, many ward members still canvassed on the basis of our policies.

Of course it is difficult to give adequate answers in arguments dealing with local issues, but we managed to use the local elections to get across ideas about the wider issues too. We gained new members because we argued the need for a fight back against the Government's policies.

The support of the majority of the ward for the SCLV is based on those experiences. It would be a tragedy for the labour movement if Labour

were to win an election on the basis of the government's record. It would be a tragedy for the working class, for the black and Asian communities, and for the electorate of Moss Side.

It's really necessary for us to have an opposition to the record of the Labour government in our current by-election campaign, while still arguing for a Labour vote.

At present the official campaign is being imposed from above by the National Executive through their regional agent. Though the constituency party decided to support a 'right centre' candidate, many ward members in Moss Side and other wards are going to be actively opposing the government's record on the doorsteps. That's why the ward is sponsoring the SCLV and will be sending a delegate to the conference on July 15th.

CARDIFF WEST

Right wing says: better parliamentary honours than a Labour campaign

AT the monthly GMC meeting of Cardiff West Constituency Labour Party, held on Friday 23rd June, it was announced that a non-party committee would be formed for the re-election of George Thomas.

Thomas, MP for Cardiff West, is also the Speaker in the Commons, and, following the tradition of the Speaker's 'impartiality', he is no longer a member of the Labour Party. So Cardiff West CLP, in the grand style of matching tradition for tradition, has decided that for the coming general election campaign politics should be suspended in the constituency!

The non-party committee, far from putting forward policies, will confine itself to calling for a vote of confidence in Thomas as the Speaker.

The Tories are not putting up a candidate, but the National Front are, hoping to collect would-be Tory votes as well as votes cast out of sympathy for their racist poison.

So what about those working class voters who are worried about falling living standards, bad housing, and the proposed closure of the local hospital, St Davids? Many of them look to the elections as a way of expressing their concerns.

Labour's message is simple: forget them for the greater

glory of George Thomas, or else move to another constituency! Local activists were told if they wanted to campaign for Labour policies they should campaign in either Cardiff North or Cardiff North West.

And what's Labour's answer to the fascist threat? The election in Cardiff West should be above politics: vote Thomas because he's a good chairperson. And besides, as the right wing of the CLP say, "George has the highest honour in the land".

The episode reveals a lot about mainstream Labour Party ideas, their lickspittle attitude towards Parliament and as a consequence their disregard for working class interests; their counterposition of sacred Parliamentary traditions to the menace of fascism.

However, the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory will not let them off so lightly. A fight will have to be launched, campaigning for policies which meet working class needs and for a serious Labour candidate in the election.

If Thomas, because of his parliamentary cretinism, wishes to remain outside the Labour Party and trust in being re-elected on the strength of being a good chairperson, let him. But we see no reason why the CLP should follow.

STEVE LEHARNE

Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory
Conference
Sat 15th
July, 1pm
Essex Rd
Library,
London.

SCLV begins to organise in North London

THE Islington North branch of the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory had its inaugural meeting on Sunday 2nd.

Members of five of the constituency's seven wards, including two councillors, discussed the need for a national and local organisation of Labour Party socialists to fight the Government's record, combining a campaign to defeat the Tories with the battle to defeat the Party's own right wing.

Islington North is controlled by a group round MP Michael O'Halloran. Known locally as the 'Murphia', this clique maintains its position by means of expulsions, gerry-mandering and physical violence; at the same time it has undeniable support among sections of the working class in Islington, especially the Irish Catholic population.

To date the opposition has been unable to break O'Halloran's stranglehold in any of the wards — despite, for example, mobilising more than 300 people at this year's ward AGMs. Battles in the wards

have often resulted in the left simply fighting a blind power struggle, rather than arguing politically.

Sunday's meeting resolved to change this state of affairs by taking up a fight on clear political issues, both inside and outside the party.

The first activity will be a public meeting towards the end of the month on immigration controls. Ted Knight, prospective Parliamentary candidate for neighbouring Hornsey and a sponsor of the SCLV, is being invited to speak, alongside local black activists and SCLV members.

We hope that as the Campaign develops, linking national political issues with local conditions, many more workers and socialists (including those not currently members of the Labour Party) will be drawn into activity around the demands of the Campaign. A steering committee of five was elected, to coordinate activity, visit potential supporters, and mobilise for the national conference.

JAMES RYAN

Eleanor Marx and the first British Marxist

The top officials of the General and Municipal Workers' Union today would be horrified to know it, but Karl Marx's daughter, a dedicated revolutionary like her father, played a major leading role in the early history of their movement. She was an active strike organiser and a member of the executive of the Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union, one of a number of unions which later fused to form the GMWU.

FRAN BRODIE describes the life of Eleanor Marx and the early days of Marxist organisation in the British labour movement.

ELEANOR MARX WAS born into the workshop and armoury of scientific socialism on the 16th January 1855.

Her father Karl Marx was immersed in the economic research for his great work *Capital*. Volume 1 of *Capital*, which eventually appeared in 1867, was to be decisive in transforming socialism from a moral ideal to a theory based on the most exact analysis of capitalist society and the contradictions driving towards its overthrow.

Meanwhile, the Marx family was plagued by illness and abject poverty. They had been forced into exile in Britain after Karl Marx's active participation in the German revolution of 1848, and Marx was keeping his family through journalistic work supplemented by help from his friend and comrade Friedrich Engels.

Eleanor was the Marxes' sixth child. They had already lost two sons and a daughter, and were left with three girls, Jenny, Laura and now Eleanor.

Eleanor Marx, more notably than either of her sisters, was to grow into a dedicated fighter for socialism. She organised and led the unskilled workers of the East End of London, and was for decades the foremost fighter in the British labour movement for the cause of internationalism.

THE MANCHESTER MARTYRS

One of the first international issues which engaged her attention was Ireland. She was twelve years old at the time.

Two Fenians, Thomas Kelly and Timothy Deasey, had been arrested for their part in the March uprising of 1867 against British rule in Ireland. They were rescued from a prison van in Manchester, and in the incident a policeman was accidentally shot. Kelly and Deasey escaped, but a manhunt was begun which ended in the arrest of over 30 Irishmen.

Three of these men — William Allen, Michael O'Brien and Michael Larkin — were publicly hanged on 23rd November. They became known as the Manchester Martyrs.

This atrocity awakened in Eleanor a passionate interest in the "Irish Question", and from then on her political sympathies were strongly with the Fenians.

When she was sixteen she went to France. It was the time of the heroic rising of the Paris

Commune, the first proletarians to seize power.

During the rising, despite the weakness of conscious socialist organisation in Paris, the Communards carried out policies of a socialist nature: they abolished rents, confiscated the means of production, abolished the standing army and state bureaucracy, and had all social affairs managed directly by workers and their elected representatives.

The Commune lasted from 18th March to 28th May, when it was drowned in the blood of the workers of Paris.

The Communards, Marx wrote, "had been starved for six months into submission by internal treachery rather than by the external enemy. History has no like example of a like greatness. The first proletarians to seize power, they were storming heaven: the most glorious deed of our party."



Gasworkers' leader Will Thorne. Above, Hyndman

This period of revolution was to have a great effect on Eleanor both personally and politically. Refugees flooded into London from Paris to escape the slaughter there: Paris lost 120,000 of its workers at this time. But there was not much support for them. "The saddest of all is the fact that in England the workers, with a few exceptions, were as bitterly hostile to the Commune as the ruling class," she recalled later. "While all the world was against the Commune, one great organisation stood by the revolution, holding aloft the red flag: the International Working Men's Association. The Communards bore hunger and misery and privation, disappointment and the agony of hope deferred without faltering or falling. All honour to their memory."

Among the refugees, Eleanor Marx met Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray. She was 'engaged' to him for nine years (despite her father's resolute disapproval) and translated his *History of the Commune* into English.

A GROWING LABOUR MOVEMENT

Eleanor's political work began in earnest in 1881.

During the thirty years to 1879, British capitalism had monopolised the world market. Britain was known as the workshop of the world; and the British working class movement settled down to seeking minor reforms, losing the revolutionary edge that had marked its struggles in the thirties and forties.

In these decades reformism entrenched itself, growing on the crumbs tossed from the tables of the ruling class, at the expense of workers in other countries and primarily in Britain's vast colonial empire.

But in 1879 there was a severe trade depression, with repercussions which reverberated throughout the working class. The next decade saw a growth in communist ideas.

Not many people at this time in Britain had thought about independent working class politics, and there was no socialist movement to speak of, unlike in Germany and France. The ideas of socialism were kept alive in a few Working Men's Clubs. And German Social Democratic exiles were in touch with some of the old revolutionaries of the 1840s who had kept their socialist ideas.

But after 1879 the labour movement was on the upturn; the major organisation in the revival of socialism in Britain was the **Democratic Federation**.

The DF was founded by Henry Hyndman in 1881. Within three years it evolved from being a Radical movement to adopting generally Marxist positions. In 1883 it adopted the name Social Democratic Federation, following the German Social Democratic Party.

THE S.D.F. AND MARXISM

Soon after it was founded, Eleanor Marx joined the DF. At that time the organisation was concerned mainly with the Irish question, campaigning vigorously in defence of the oppressed nation.

It was also at this time that Eleanor's path crossed with that of Edward Aveling. She lived and worked with him until her death in 1898.

Engels, who became Eleanor's chief political guide after her father's death in 1883, was very wary in his assessment of the SDF. He welcomed it, but was concerned that the people who turned towards Marxism were of bour-

geois origin. They needed, Engels said, to turn themselves outwards, to implant themselves into the working class, if they were not to remain a sect.

To understand Engels' and Eleanor's perspective, we must look at the historical development of socialist ideas.

Since the French revolution of 1789-99 socialist sects had existed, especially in France. At their best they embodied a fiery revolutionary courage and hostility to capitalism. All of them, however, failed to see a link between the daily organisation and struggle of the working class within capitalism and the realisation of the future socialist society based on their ideals.

As industry and the working class expanded, these sects took on a more and more negative role. They were usually indifferent or even hostile to trade union struggle. Instead

In the 1880s the unskilled workers began to unionise on a large scale for the first time. For Eleanor, the touchstone was always this mass movement of the working class. Groups like the SDF would be valuable educating influences, or mere sects, depending on how they related to that movement.

The SDF was, despite everything, the first avowedly Marxist organisation in Britain, and in its time it contributed to the education of thousands of socialists. Later, having changed its name to the **British Socialist Party** and having disposed of its old leader Hyndman, it was the major component of the British Communist Party when it was formed.

But in the 1880s and '90s Eleanor Marx had to wage a constant struggle against Hyndman. A barrister and company director, he regarded the



1865 — Eleanor with older sisters Laura and Jenny, her father, and Friedrich Engels

they confined themselves to endless discussion on the details of the future socialist society, or conspiratorial organisation for armed uprisings.

From 1850 onwards, the guiding idea of Marx' and Engels' politics was the liquidation of the era of sects and the building of a broad class movement. That perspective did not mean indifference to theory; on the contrary, Marx and Engels laboured for the utmost theoretical precision. But they wanted their theory to be "not a dogma but a guide to action". The theory would be assimilated by the workers as a result of their experience, not as a result of incessant lecturing by an 'enlightened' few.

In Germany, socialist organisation developed as the working class developed, from the 1860s onwards. The trade union movement in Germany was a direct product of the socialist movement. In Britain, the working class had developed from the end of the 18th century, long before scientific socialism. Its early, more or less confused, rebellion was defeated.

By the 1880s a sizeable trade union movement had developed, but it was a bourgeois-minded, non-socialist movement, confined mostly to skilled workers.

SDF as his personal property. In the case of the SDF's newspaper, that was literally true: Hyndman had bought it up so as to be sure of personal control!

He poisoned the internal life of the organisation with petty intrigues, leading Engels to describe him as "a pretty unscrupulous careerist" and to comment: "In every sect everything turns to scandal-mongering".

SECTARIANISM AND NATIONALISM

The SDF's policy towards the working class was sectarian too. In its manifesto it declared that the trade union movement was a diversion from the class struggle. One of the many able workers who joined the SDF and quickly left it, Tom Mann, said that "the SDF antagonised the trade unionists without drawing any considerable percentage to socialism".

But the first big clash between Eleanor and Hyndman came over internationalism. In spite of his support for some colonial struggles, Hyndman had strong nationalist tendencies (he ended up as an all-out

Marxists

chauvinist during the first world war).

When Eleanor proposed sending a SDF delegation to the Roubaix Congress of the French Workers' Party, Hyndman spread malicious gossip and slander against her and dismissed the proposal as a 'family manoeuvre'. Eleanor's sister Laura, and her brother-in-law Paul Lafargue, were prominent members of the French Workers' Party.

In December 1884 it came to the point of a break. There was a 10 to 8 vote of no confidence in Hyndman on the executive of the SDF. But because Hyndman personally owned the SDF's paper, he was able to keep control of the organisation, and it was the executive majority who left the SDF with 500 of the SDF's 1500 members.

The breakaway organisation, the Socialist League, never expanded outside London.

In its first manifesto the Socialist League took a stand on the bloody war being waged by British colonialism in the Sudan. Its paper, the *Commonweal*, carried a series by Eleanor under the title "Record of the Revolutionary International Movement".

But the Socialist League never progressed very far. Its membership was drawn mainly from clerical workers and the lumpen-proletariat. Its very loose internal organisation — a reaction against Hyndman's ultra-centralisation around himself — opened the doors of the organisation to all kinds of political influences. A group of anarchists entered, and it wasn't long before the SL was caught up in internal strife.

Eleanor, arguing strongly against the anarchists, was on the losing side.

More and more, she extended her activity to the broad labour movement. Her next big battle was for free speech.

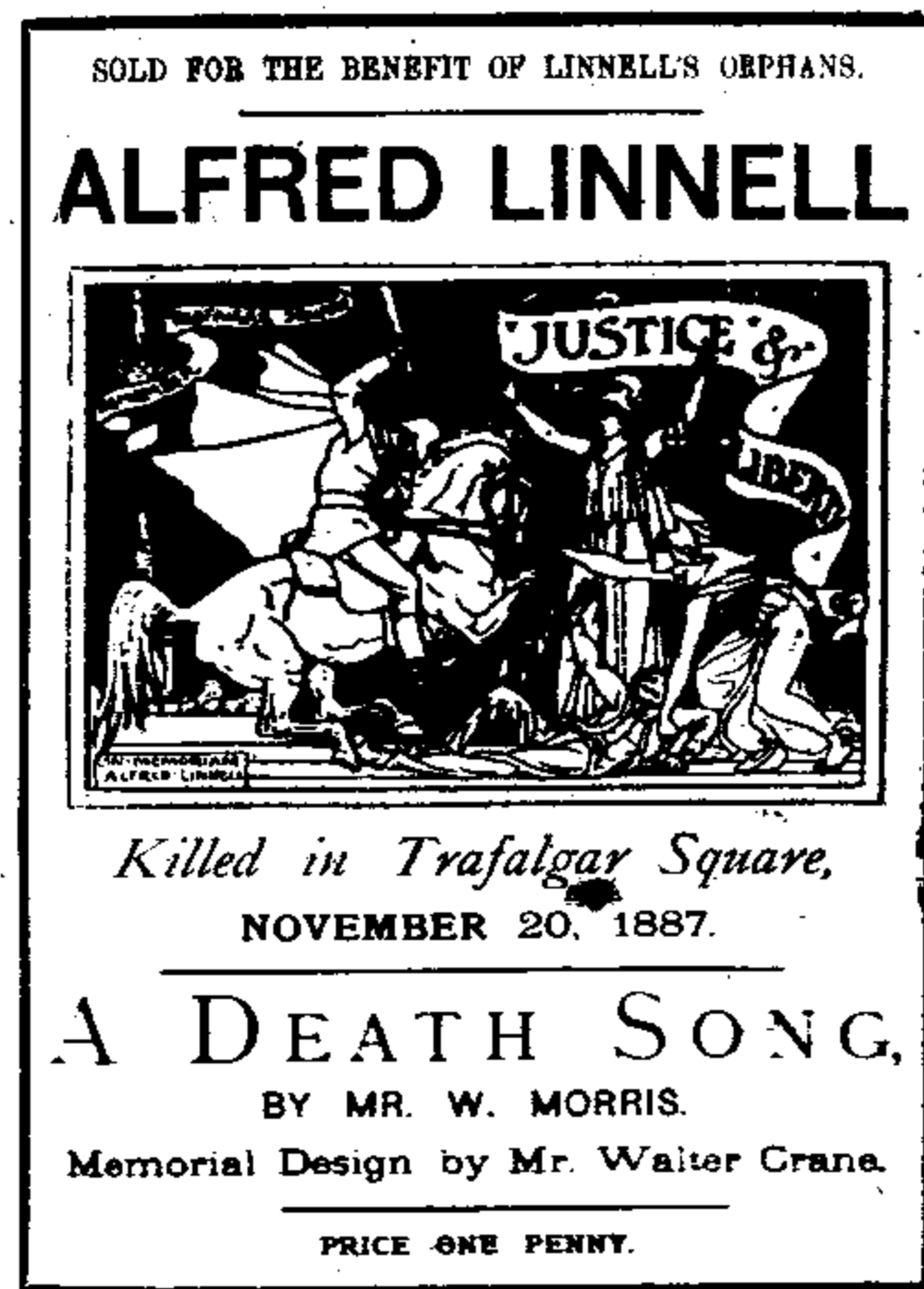
Socialists in the East End used to hold regular outdoor meetings; regularly, these were harassed by the police. When Eleanor spoke to a crowd of 7,000 at Dod Street, Poplar, the police charged the crowd and arrested many people.

Eleanor went to court as a witness, where she annoyed the magistrate by refusing to keep

away from future meetings. The police in the courtroom manhandled her, and there was a violent scene when William Morris of the Socialist League went to her aid.

The next time the 'fight for free speech' mounted a demonstration there was a crowd of 60,000 — with no arrests!

Then the Law and Liberty League, who had organised these free speech demonstrations, defied a police ban by calling a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square under the slogan "Home Rule for Ireland — and for London". This was a different affair: police and soldiers charged the crowd, and a by-stander, Alfred Linnell, was trampled by the cavalry and killed.



Edward Aveling



A 120 000 strong procession followed his coffin to Tower Hamlets cemetery, bearing the green flag in solidarity with the Irish struggle.

The Trafalgar Square experience scared off some of the 'big names'. George Bernard Shaw became convinced that the workers could not take on the state; Ernest Rhys, editor of the *Everyman* series of books, wrote the next day: "The Fabians for me!"

But Eleanor Marx remained a leader of the most militant wing of the movement.

In 1888 the Socialist League split, and in 1889 it ceased to exist altogether.

Meanwhile the workers on strike at the Gas, Light & Coke

Co. in East Ham were celebrating victory.

The gas workers had tried in the past to organise themselves and failed; 1889 was the first decisive victory, with the establishment of the Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union.

Eleanor had helped and led the strike, and was centrally involved in the new union, which was one of the most important of the growing unskilled workers' organisations. She drew up the founding Address and rules of the union, working closely with Will Thorne, a major leader of the union, whom she taught to read and write.

As a member of the union executive, Eleanor took special responsibility for two of its branches which were composed entirely of women workers. She was also mainly responsible (as she had been in the Socialist League) for the movement's international connections. In 1889 she had been deeply involved in organising the first congress of the 'Second International' of socialist parties and workers' organisations.

The life of a union official in those days, especially in the new, unskilled unions, was very different from today. Eleanor was ceaselessly active, building the union and helping strikes; meanwhile she scraped a living as a typist.

The Gas Workers' union fought for an eight hour day. While Eleanor was heavily involved in strikes for this de-

mand, she, and more so her companion Edward Aveling, also tried to create a general class movement for an eight hour day by law. The *Legal Eight Hours and International Labour League* organised huge demonstrations around this demand.

Eleanor's main work was in the East End, then the main working class area of London and the centre of the new movement of unskilled trade unionism. Racialism existed in East London in those days, too — mainly directed against Jewish immigrants. Eleanor campaigned against anti-semitism, openly proclaiming her own Jewish ancestry, and learning Yiddish to help her organise



among the Jewish working women of Whitechapel.

She and Aveling also spoke and worked among the Radical clubs of East London — which, though tied to the Liberal Party, included a large proportion of the most politically conscious workers.

Their aim was always to establish a theoretically and politically trained grouping of people within the mass movement capable of ensuring that the movement took a socialist direction. After the collapse of the Socialist League they did not give up on the project of building a socialist party.

When the *Independent Labour Party* was formed in 1893 Eleanor was at the founding conference as an observer. Aveling attended as a delegate.

In contrast to earlier socialist movements, the ILP had its main base in the industrial north and in Scotland. Engels found this especially encouraging and wanted the SDF to fuse with the ILP. He was fed up with the self-contained sect-like approach of the SDF, and believed that the duty of Marxists was to assist every step forward in the 'real labour movement'. He did not mean by this that Marxists should lose themselves within movements like the ILP, but that they should integrate themselves into it, helping it forward to revolutionary conclusions.

MARXISTS AND THE ILP

The SDF, however, resolved to "preserve an attitude of benevolent neutrality towards the ILP". Aveling and a few other Marxists got positions in the leading committee of the ILP, but they were left as a small minority by the SDF's aloofness. The ILP remained dominated by attitudes like those of its main leader, Keir Hardie, closer to Christian Socialism than to Marxism.

Once again, as with the rise of trade unionism among unskilled workers, Hyndman's group proclaimed itself to be the only custodian of the real interests of the working class, abstained from the actual struggle, isolated itself from the working class, and thus left the field clear for anti-Marxist forces, who were able to establish themselves as the leadership of the labour movement. Eleanor, Aveling, and their few comrades were not strong enough to stop this.

This sectarianism was a recurrent pattern, to be repeated by the SDF at the time of the formation of the Labour Party; by the early Communist Party in its attitude to the Labour Party; and most recently by the Socialist Labour League (WRP) and the Socialist Workers' Party (IS). It set up a specifically British 'Marxist' tradition of sectarianism, against which both Karl and Eleanor Marx fought unrelentingly.

A BLEAK OUTLOOK

After the mid-1890s the political outlook became bleaker for Marxists. The long depression ended and there was a new boom for British imperialism. Reformism became well established throughout the unions and in the ILP. The Eight Hours League faded away.

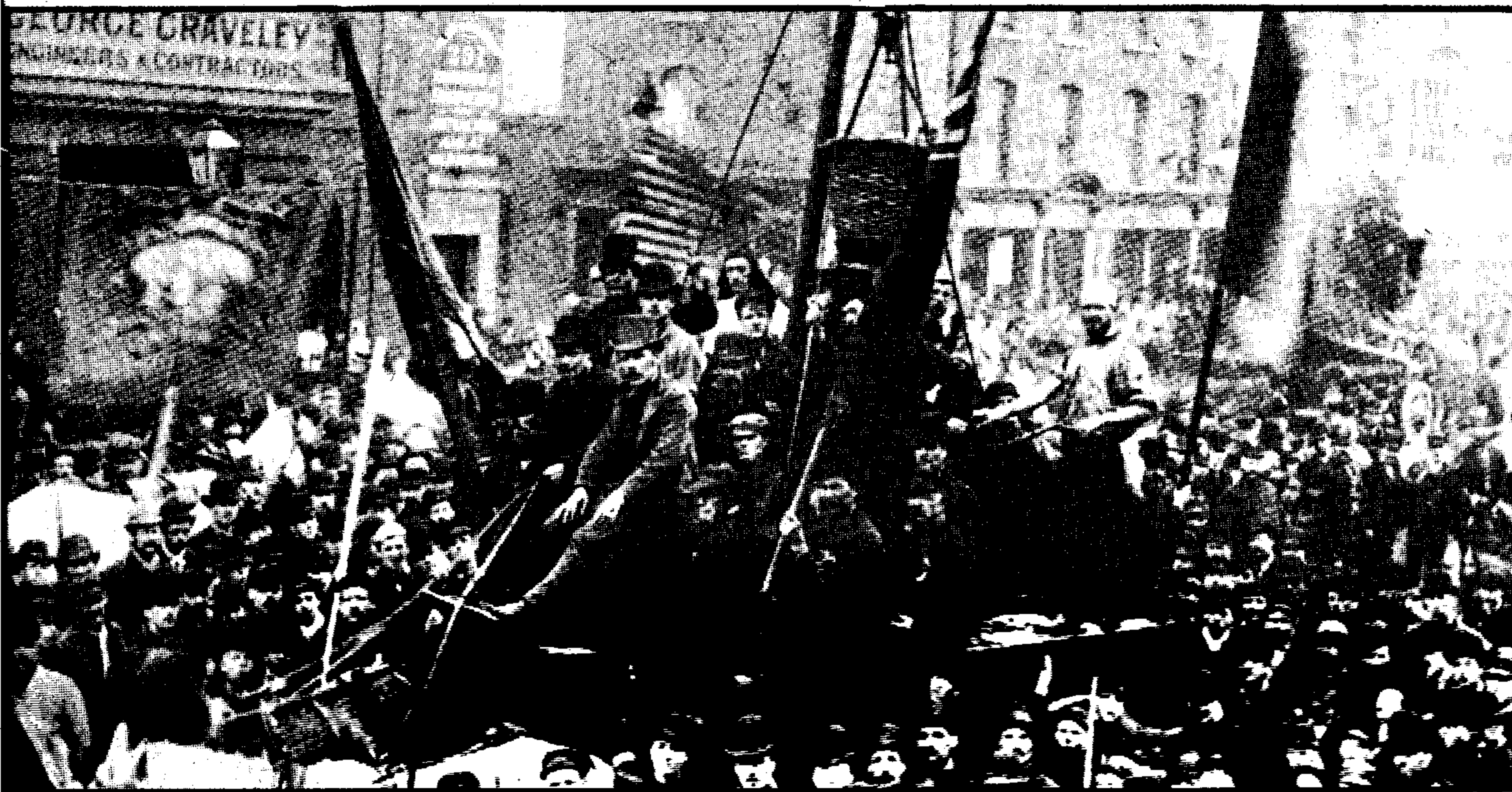
For Eleanor there was a special blow when Engels died in 1895. The Marxists lost a wealth of experience going back to the revolutions of 1848.

Eleanor and Aveling rejoined the SDF in 1897. As revolutionaries they saw the need to be inside a socialist organisation. But Hyndman's sectarian despotism was as bad as ever, and they faced a constant struggle to change the SDF from its course.

Then with the death of Eleanor in 1898 and of Aveling a few months later the British labour movement lost its best Marxist leaders. Eleanor committed suicide. No-one knows the real reason: the movement's drift away from Marxism must have had a terrible effect on her, while her personal life seems to have been wretched as a result of Aveling's conduct.

Aveling was an unpopular figure, and widely blamed for Eleanor's suicide. Nevertheless, for the fourteen years that they were together they did dedicate themselves utterly and whole-heartedly to the working class.

Throughout, they understood that a conscious Marxist leadership does not fall from the sky ready-made, nor is it a spontaneous product of the labour movement. Scientific class consciousness is not automatically reflected in the minds of workers in struggle; Marxists have to take their ideas into the labour movement and relate them to the struggles and experience of the working class.



Dockers' strike of 1889 — major step for new unions

Brutality, bully boys, funds going astray - fed-up Nazis spill the beans

THE FOLLOWING is the text of a document which recently came into the possession of the anti-fascist paper *CARF*. We believe it is genuine for two reasons: firstly, it was leaked by a man known to be a National Front branch organiser, and, secondly, its contents correspond with what we already know to be going on inside the Front.

Since the May local election results stalled the NF hand-wagon, the fascists' wilder elements have no longer felt restrained by the need to present a respectable image. For them, electoralism is a dead end: far better to begin implementing the 'final solution' right away.

Another wing in the party, represented by the authors of this

document, blames the electoral setback on the 'troublemakers' and their protectors in the NF leadership.

As NF leader John Tyndal realised in the mid-sixties, a significant fascist party can only develop in Britain by holding together these two potentially contradictory strains. But he may well now face the choice either of losing an important part of his 'respectable' membership, in a split parallel with that of the National Party in 1975-6, or of watching his hard core defect to the openly Nazi British Movement.

Anti-fascists have every interest in exploding the alliance of these two wings of the fascist movement. As a contribution to

that process, *Workers' Action*, along with *Socialist Challenge* and *Socialist Worker*, is printing this document.

In no way do we imply that the authors are 'better' than the 'bully boys' they criticise: it is significant that they have no quarrel with the Front's anti-semitism and Nazi ideology (any more than the National Party did) — their disagreements are purely tactical. Nor should we believe that merely exposing the NF for what it is will rid us of them.

More than ever, the conditions that prompted the authors to write this document dictate to us the need to build black and white defence squads capable of wiping out the fascists in open confrontation.

searching inquiry needs to be undertaken. Confidence in such an inquiry would be greatly enhanced if the National Activities Organiser were excluded from all stages of the proceedings.

Our overall conclusion is that unless authority is restored at national level, the National Front will cease to exist by the end of the year. Organisation has all but disappeared and anarchy reigns at all levels. In many areas, party structure exists only on paper and many of the membership lists contain the names of people who have long since lapsed.

Our name is only kept in the news by gangs of bully boys who rampage through the East End of London beating up Asians. Despite our hatred of multi-racialism, such disgraceful acts of illegality and brutality cannot be tolerated. The mindless morons must be brought to book and in default of a statement of condemnation by the party leadership and expulsion of lawless elements, we shall unilaterally turn over a list of troublemakers to the police and inform the newspapers of our intention.

any movement'. His words are being proved tragically true today.

We do not as branch officials seek to absolve ourselves from blame for what has happened to our party, but we feel it only right to remind you of the statements you made on regaining control of the party in 1976. You said that the success of a movement such as ours derived mainly from the leadership of the few and that the chairman of a political party must expect to carry the can if things go wrong.

We believe we must hold you to your word and request that you convene, at the earliest possible opportunity following the summer holiday, a special party conference to discuss the future of the party and its leadership...



MEMO

TO: Chairman of the National Front
FROM: Action Committee of London Branch Organisers.

We represent a growing section of the National Front rank and file who are becoming seriously concerned at the lack of leadership prevailing at the top of the party this year.

As organisers, ordinary party members look to us for explanations for the poor performance in the local council elections in May. We believe that the factors which led to a disastrous drop in public support for us were many and varied but it is our conviction that they could have been overcome if a positive lead had been given during the campaign by the National Directorate.

It is true that we went into the election with a greater degree of opposition ranged against us than at any time in our ten year history but it was a challenge we should have taken on successfully given the widespread public antipathy to coloured immigration in London.

BLAME

However, a dearth of election material, an appalling breakdown in communications between headquarters and the grassroots and abysmal relations with the Press for which we must take the lion's share of the blame meant that we were not equal to the task. We were quite simply driven on to the defensive and that is a poor position from which to fight any battle.

Many local newspapers did not have lists of candidates until five

days before the poll and this deficiency can be put down to bureaucratic bumbledom at HQ. Then there were problems in hiring halls. To some extent this was due to a more hardline attitude on the part of Labour-controlled local authorities. But this has been a constant obstacle which we have surmounted on previous occasions and we should not have let it defeat us this time.

BOGUS

Conflicting statements to newspapers from local officials and national spokesmen certainly did not assist matters.

Although we were barred by law from marching in Greater London for the greater part of the campaign, it should have been possible to organise a public meeting in the capital at some stage to keep the National Front at the centre of the political stage. This never happened despite earlier promises from head office that a major activity would be organised. Why not?

No attempt was made centrally to produce literature replying to the smears made against us by our opponents. Instead this was left to individual branches with disastrous consequences as different members contradicted each other in public print. This merely left the public with the impression of a divided, warring party: an impression not too far removed from the truth.

An additional factor was the behaviour of certain party members who were quite honestly a disgrace to the cause of British Nationalism. Press reports of bogus election

nominees and loutish attacks by yobs on our opponents' meetings dragged us, in the public's estimation, down to the level of the Left and probably prompted voters to cry: "A Plague on Both Your Houses". Again, none of this need have happened had there been firm direction from the top.

An even more serious development concerns the management of party funds. Only a fraction of the money originally promised to underfunded branches from HQ ever materialised. In view of the rumours that are rife within the ranks over financial mismanagement and subscriptions going astray, a full and

LOUTS

The late A K Chesterton who led our party with such distinction in the difficult years of the 1960s once said: "... let us face it, we have an attraction for certain kinds of louts who, unless kept in check, can and almost certainly will wreck

FORDS - EGG ON THEIR FACES

Well done and congratulations on your exclusive on the behind the scenes activity of Fords. The Plant is stunned. (Mind you, some are saying that it's just something you trumped up, but they are only a very few.)

Of course, the document was no great secret, thanks to the information published by the *Workers' Action Bulletin* ever since you started up. But it does prove you right, and even your critics will be forced to sit up and take notice after this story.

Fords have been left with plenty of egg on their faces over these revelations, believe you me — and now it's up to the Convenor and his cronies to finish off the job, now that you've given them the ammunition.

LAST LAUGH FOR DHSS?

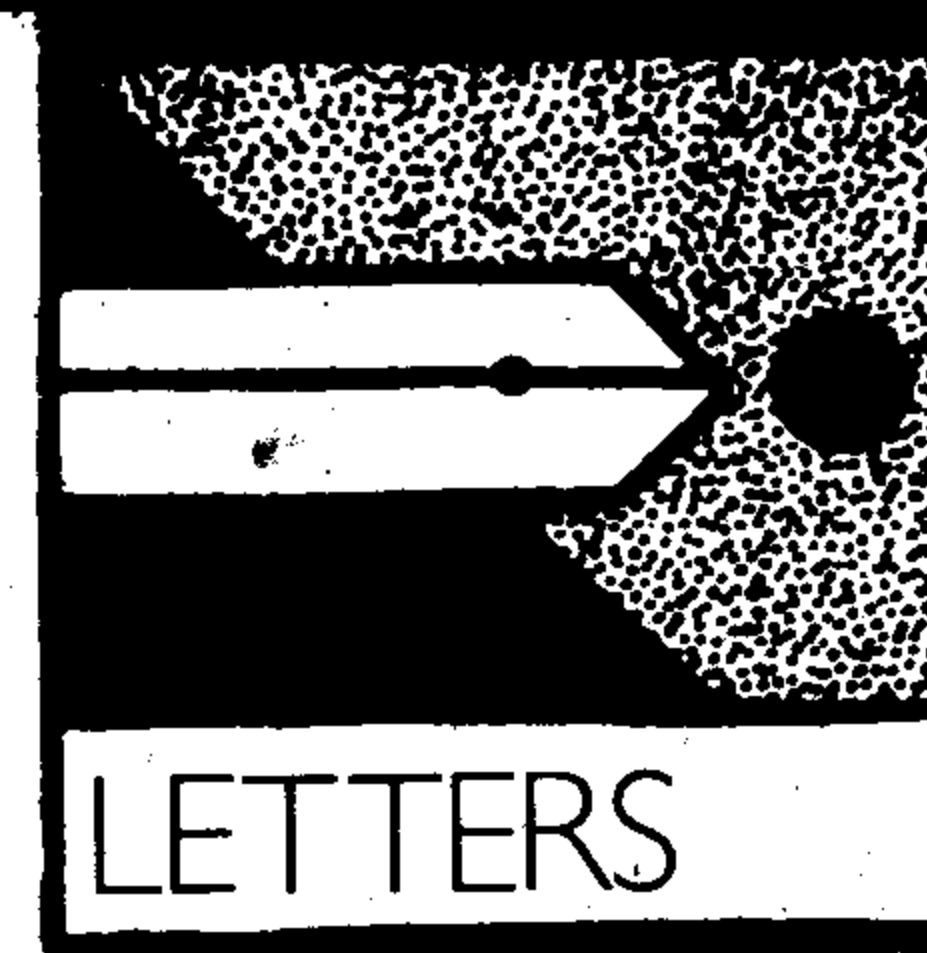
Comrades,

There is an ironic twist to the ending of my tale which you told in last week's paper. ["My Only Benefit..."] This week my fourth appeal against the DHSS was heard. This time they came down on my side, and thus admitted I had been right in my claim for benefit all along.

But there are two snags. First, having just finished my exams I could have legitimately claimed benefit anyway, without the Tribunal's decision. Second, I'm told I can't get back-payment of the lost benefit I should have had since October.

So — is this a moral victory, or is the last laugh with the DHSS?

KEVIN MUNDY



FOREMEN'S DISPUTES

Dear Comrade Editors,

The article by John Bloxam in WA108 on the foremen's strike at Fords gave a good report and analysis of the dispute. This marks a change from a previous article (in WA100) on another foremen's strike, this time at Rover, Solihull.

In that case you said "What is more surprising is that revolutionary socialist militants in the plant supported the idea of working through the strike with superintendents doing the foremen's job. Pat Hickey of the International Marxist Group, who is a steward at Solihull, told *Workers' Action* that he was against any support for the foremen."

But in the case of this latest strike at Fords you say: "Given that the strike was against them — it was demanding sackings — the shop floor workers were right to keep working."

So what was the difference? At Solihull the foremen wanted night shifts and the end of continuous running. Since the workers at Solihull had decisively rejected night shifts, this strike was against them too. The only difference seems to be that over Solihull you could make a cheap attack on Pat Hickey and the IMG which now rebounds on you.

Casual readers of your paper might not notice such inconsistencies. Some of us do notice — because we want to clear the air of all the fog, and debate the real points of difference.

Communist greetings,
MARK TURNBULL
Toxieth LP/T&GWU

JOHN BLOXAM REPLIES: Far from seizing on the Solihull dispute as a chance to hammer the IMG, we were very cautious in our assessment. "As far as we understand the circumstances", we wrote, having no firsthand information "this attitude seems doubtful to us".

We are still open to being corrected on that issue. But comrade Turnbull's letter doesn't convince us.

The Fords foremen's strike was directly demanding the sacking of a worker. At Solihull, the foremen were striking essentially for better pay, in a way that promised to rebound on the workers. At Solihull, shop stewards worked with superintendents to do the foremen's jobs. At Fords, shop stewards ran the lines as the workers wanted, not as the bosses wanted.

Those seem to us to be important differences.

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SEND TO WA, Box 1960, 182 Upper St, London N1.

BENN STOPS TO CHAT WITH HIS ATTACKERS

AS A MORALE-booster after their recent setbacks, the National Front in South Wales decided to picket a Tony Benn meeting held in the small town of Dinas Powis on Saturday 24 June.

In the run-up to the picket, the Front was, as usual, full of bluster, boasting a turnout of 600. On the day no more than 15 turned up, while the Anti Nazi League counter-picket in defence of the meeting mobilised about 100.

The arrival of Benn was the signal for the Front to chant their anti-working class slogans, which were soon drowned by cries of "Fascists out! Immigration controls out!" Benn, however, true to his parliamentary style of politics, demonstrated his ideas on how to combat fascism by trying to have a chat with the NF.

Once the meeting started, the Front pulled off, to be chased by anti-fascists and young people from a local café who decided after watching the picket to have a go at the Front. It was only the "thin blue line" of cops that saved the fascists from a beating.

The local Labour Party had drafted in ' heavies ' from other CLPs, and, reportedly, from the Communist Party, to defend Benn and the meeting. The labour movement elsewhere should be following this example by creating defence squads to protect our meetings and marches from fascist attack.

STEVE LEHARNE

Watering down the anti-racist struggle

A dispute raging within the Basingstoke Anti-Fascist Committee shows how the Anti-Nazi League's rejection of clear anti-fascist and anti-racist policies can serve to hold militants back rather than drawing in new people.

Basingstoke AFC has existed for many years, and has fought for policies including 'No platform for Fascists', 'No to immigration controls', and 'Fascists out of the labour movement'.

When the ANL began activity, Workers' Action supporters in the AFC wanted the Committee to get involved in the ANL, but at the same time to retain its policies. They helped to mobilise on a large scale for the ANL Carnival, and applied for the AFC to be recognised by the ANL as its Basingstoke branch.

Eventually recognition was granted. But now International Marxist Group and Socialist Workers' Party members in the AFC want the Committee to drop its policies and instead take up the platform of the ANL: opposition to the NF, no more.

They also want to alter the AFC's structure so that the decision-making body is a public meeting rather than an activists' committee.

The debate began at the AFC meeting on 30th June, but reached no conclusion. It will continue on 7th July.

World's biggest bog wall

HULME 5 tenants' group has called a picket of an honorary degree ceremony at Manchester University for John Womersley, the architect who designed Hulme 5.

Womersley is also the architect of the Manchester Arndale Centre, which has become widely known in the city as 'The biggest bog-wall in the world'.

John Womersley lives in a luxury house in the Lake District. He doesn't have to put up with the conditions in Hulme that have earned it national fame as one of the first-ever purpose-built slums.

The picket call is being supported by the Moss Side Neighbourhood Council and the Moss Side and Hulme Ward Labour Parties.

The picket will be on Wednesday 12th July at 10am.

MICK WOODS

SOCIALIST CHALLENGE UNION CONFERENCE

NO DEBATE ON KEY ISSUES

"OUR problem is not to organise the rank and file. That is the job of the shop stewards. We have to organise the left in the unions". These thoughts, from IMG [International Marxist Group] member Dominic Costa, summed up the trend of the Trade Union Conference organised last Saturday [July 1st] by SOCIALIST CHALLENGE, the paper of the IMG.

The focus was not on organising with adequate policies at the

point of production, but on 'rebuilding the left' in the unions.

The conference equally condemned both "broad leftism" (meaning the approach of the Communist Party, focused on getting more left wing union officials) and "rank-and-file-ism" (meaning the approach of the Socialist Workers Party, focused on narrow-minded preaching of more militancy on the economic front).

But, as one teacher from

Scotland pointed out, it was wrong to put these two on the same level; moreover, by calling the SWP's approach "rank-and-file-ism", the correct orientation towards the rank and file was thrown out.

The precise aim of the conference was unclear. It was originally called as an open forum for militants who saw the need for socialist policies and a united front approach within the unions. But when Workers' Action offered to co-sponsor it on that basis, we were refused and the conference came to be described as one of "Socialist Challenge supporters".

It was indeed a conference of Socialist Challenge supporters; more precisely, IMG members. There were about 200, mostly white collar trade unionists. They heard a few reports from struggles, but little political debate, despite SC's insistence in the weeks before the conference on the importance of that debate.

The speeches denouncing the 'frontism' of the SWP-sponsored "Rank and File" movement and the CP-controlled "Liaison Committee" were, to say the least, ironic.

Workers' Action put forward some amendments dealing with vital issues that the original platform resolution skipped: nationalisation and workers' control, the State, Ireland. (There was a late platform

amendment on Ireland, bracketing its right to self-determination with Scotland and Wales). We were allowed one speaker to propose these (the only floor amendments there were) early in the Conference, but in the following hour-and-a-half's discussion no-one mentioned the political issues involved!

Another WA speaker got in at the end of that session to denounce the lack of debate, and there was more discussion in the next session on "Fighting Racism in the Unions". A WA amendment called for a firm policy of expelling proven fascists from the unions, and a fight to win the ANL to definite anti-fascist and anti-racist policies.

The IMG replied that the call to expel fascists was likely to strengthen the bureaucracy.

It could have been a useful conference if the IMG had organised it in a more open way. But it appears their main concern was to drag in the trade union base of Big Flame and the International Socialist Alliance behind Socialist Challenge. Even in that they apparently failed; and the result was neither a broad conference organising real activity nor a conference which made up for its narrow base by a rich and thorough political debate.

JOHN BLOXAM

RANK AND FILE TEACHER Breaking out of the isolation

SINCE THE heady days of the Interim Pay Rise campaign and the London Allowance campaign, the NUT bureaucracy has managed to contain militant action by teachers with draconian rule changes to deprive Local Associations of their autonomy.

This curb has been strengthened by the general lack of militant struggles against the Labour government's wage freeze and cuts.

It was in this defensive atmosphere that 80 delegates attended the Rank & File Teacher annual conference in London on July 1st/2nd.

Though the conference was little bigger than last year's, Rank & File Teacher is showing signs of beginning to break out of its recent isolation. Much of Rank & File's earlier decline was due to the ultra-left attitude of the Socialist Workers' Party, with its panacea of unofficial action coupled with its use of a majority in Rank & File to bureaucratically exclude other political tendencies. This year, at last, the triumphalism that "We are the left in the NUT" has gone, replaced by a more sober assessment of Rank & File's strengths and weaknesses, and the need to take united action with the Socialist Teachers' Alliance against the Union right wing.

Rank & File rightly rejected the STA's call for joint election platforms (which would in practice blur over key differences), but agreed to the idea that there should not be more left wing candidates standing than the number of posts up for election, as a measure of protection against the right wing.

Another hopeful sign is that Rank & File groups outside the traditionally most militant area, London, are getting established on the basis of consistent grassroots work at school level.

This work is being done, with bulletins and caucuses etc, despite the fact that Rank & File has been swung into one big campaign after another by the SWP — first the Right to Work campaigns, and now Teachers Against the Nazis.

These shifts happened without enough serious debate about how best to combat either unemployment or racialism, or on how to relate Rank & File's existing policies to these campaigns.

For example, Rank & File has had a consistent policy against immigration controls, of supporting black self-defence, and for mass mobilisations against the fascists (as opposed to relying on state bans or the police). But it is doubtful whether Rank & File will fight for these positions to be adopted as the platform for the TAN conference in September.

If the work done by Rank & File groups such as that in Oldham can be sustained, there is every chance that Rank & File will grow again and draw in a new generation of militant teachers. It was particularly encouraging that there was a significant number of primary teachers, women, young teachers in their first 2-3 years of teaching, and delegates from Rank & File groups in Scotland. This growth is in marked contrast to the reverses suffered by the older, London-based groups, as a result of political mistakes by SWP members in the leadership of Rank & File Teacher.

CHEUNG SIU MING

★★★ Pressure from Scottish rank and file teachers has resulted in a ban on all "composite classes" of over 25 north of the border.

Composite classes are a pernicious way of amalgamating classes when they are getting smaller because of a drop in the birth rate. The process is rife in Scottish primary and secondary schools. Top class juniors get combined with pupils a year below in the primary schools, while 'O' level and 'higher' [A level] students get lumped together in secondary schools.

Local authorities were trying to economise on teachers by setting up composite classes using the maximum class size criterion [33] for single classes as laid down in the Scottish teachers' contract. Militant teachers from the Scottish Rank & File group were successful at the AGM of the Educational Institute of Scotland [Scotland's largest teaching union] in getting conference to adopt maximum composite class sizes of 25 — against the wishes of the union Executive. IH

ANYTHING THE SWP CAN DO, WE CAN DO WORSE

IN THE weeks before the Socialist Challenge Trade Union conference, and especially in its 29th June issue, Socialist Challenge discussed the SWP-sponsored Rank and File movement at length. But thereby hang several tales...

"The Rank and File organisation held its first conference in 1974... It promised to be one of the most serious oppositions to the policies of the Labour government". But the problem was, says SC, that the Rank & File movement had its political life too much stifled by SWP control, and it did not take up transitional demands.

A promising initiative, but marked by political weaknesses... surely it was important for Marxists to intervene there. And indeed, as SC reported in a previous feature on Rank & File, there was a debate at that first, 1974, conference: "An important disagreement... was on racism and women's oppression. An amendment which insisted that these two areas — as well as workers' control — be added to the resolution was defeated (89 for, 182 against)..." (SC 29.9.77).

89-182? So it seems the IMG really had some impact with their intervent-

ion then! But in fact the amendment was put by a Workers' Fight supporter from the GMWU at BSC Stanton. There was no IMG intervention. None at all.

If the IMG have corrected their attitude to Rank & File, well and good; but it would be better to say so openly.

There's another twist to the tale. Some of the Workers' Action amendments at last weekend's Socialist Challenge Trade Union conference were very similar in political content to the Stanton amendment at the 1974 Rank & File conference. And how did the two conferences compare in terms of open political debate and willingness to take up transitional demands, such as "workers' control demands (which) are more necessary than ever before" (SC 29.6.78)?

At the Rank & File conference there was at least a debate, which obviously influenced the vote. At the SC conference, no-one bothered to reply politically; they just relied on IMG discipline to vote down the amendments.

Anything the SWP can do, we can do worse, seems to be the IMG's motto now.

CPSA — Action stifled by 'left' leaders

AT the same time as the left won a victory on the National Executive (NEC) of the Civil and Public Services Association by 22 seats to 6 earlier this year, the CPSA conference delegates passed a call for action. With hardly any opposition, an emergency resolution supported industrial action by members in the Department of Employment against the proposal for 'Fortnightly Attendance Payments'.

The DE's plan would have meant the loss of 1,000 jobs as a result of the unemployed only having to sign on once a fortnight.

On the basis of this, the elected union leadership in the DE prepared a campaign in the 'pilot' offices where the experiment in fortnightly payments was being

carried out. Around the country leaflets were given to claimants explaining the CPSA's stand. A deadline of 9th July was set to start industrial action.

Just a week before that date, the NEC met the National Disputes Committee and called off the action. They moved that the NEC be left to decide — because the bureaucrats and the leader of the 'Labour lefts' on the CPSA's leading body feared that not only would the action be 100% successful but that it would spread into DHSS offices linked to the employment offices.

At the NEC, an amendment was put to the bureaucrats' motion which was proposing that only 4 Employment and DHSS offices be urged to take action. The amendment urged action be

taken in all the 'pilot' offices and linked DHSS offices — a policy that would effectively challenge the government's plans to introduce fortnightly signings. The amendment was defeated with only 5 votes in favour and one abstention.

CPSA members in the DE trying to protect their jobs have been left isolated.

Already "Redder Tape" supporters and other militants are organising support for those offices coming out and plans are being made to get others out. The isolated action proposed by the NEC is simply incapable of bringing a victory, and can only act to further demoralise a militant section of the CPSA's membership and give the government an easy win.

S.CORBISHLEY

WORKERS IN ACTION

EGA 'We stay open'

WORKERS AT the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson women's hospital in North London are determined to resist the latest scheme for the closure of their hospital.

In response to a Government ultimatum setting the closure for July 21st, the EGA Action Committee decided in May to step up their picket line. At a special meeting called on 5th June by the London Division branch secretaries of NUPE (the main hospital workers' union) it was decided to call strike action in all London hospitals in support of the EGA.

Health Minister Ennals then proposed another stay of execution — the fifth so far. A 'working party' should be set up.

The last 'working party' Ennals set up decided to remove the patients from the EGA to the Whittington hospital! The only representation on it from the EGA workers was two doctors. Ennals refused to allow union members to be represented on the grounds that it would be "too cumbersome".

EGA shop steward Arthur Churchley told *Workers' Action*: "This time the EGA want at least 50% representation on this new working party". But, he said, "we will not take part in the working party unless the disciplinary action that has been imposed on five ambulance men from the Emergency Beds Service is withdrawn". Five workers were disciplined for taking patients to the EGA against health authority instruction. "Ennals promised that the action would be withdrawn. It wasn't, and the workers received formal warnings". If any of the five receives two more warnings, he will be dismissed.

On 4th July there is to be a mass picket outside the EGA by EGA workers, going on to march to the Houses of Parliament. They will be joined by hospital workers from Hemel Hempstead who are demanding new premises in place of their present post-war 2 Nissen huts.

At nine o'clock the same evening there will be a torchlight vigil in memory of the birth of the NHS in 1948. The EGA will carry a coffin, and there will be torchlight vigils at eight other London hospitals, and in Manchester, Oxford, and Cardiff.

As Arthur Churchley says, "No matter what happens, no matter what the decision of the working party, this hospital stays open".

FRAN BRODIE

Hospital workers strike to stop a closure

ON 30th JUNE, hospitals all over East London came to a standstill when workers staged a walk-out and demonstration over the decision to close Bethnal Green hospital and turn it into a geriatric unit.

On Tuesday 27th, Tower Hamlets Community Health Council decided to suspend any change of use until a meeting with Health Minister David Ennals. But Acting District Administrator David Pashley decided to go ahead with plans to shut down the casualty department on the Saturday, despite the decision of the CHC.

A spokesman for the CHC told *Workers' Action* that "The



CHC has always been opposed to the changeover. This is just the beginning. If we lose this, we lose St Leonards Hospital". He went on to say, "We have 100% support from the Association of London Housing Estates, which is made up of all London tenants associations".

Etta 'Scottie' Cox, NUPE shop steward at the hospital, told *WA* that "David Pashley came into casualty and said that the padlocks would go on the gates of the casualty department on the Saturday". At a meeting called on the Saturday the workers decided to have a one day stoppage.

A committee has been form-

ed, made up of NUPE, CoHSE, and NALGO members plus representatives of each department. They have now set up a 24 hour picket to fight against any attempt at closure or removal of patients.

'Scottie' said: "We have to prevent the domino effect. If this hospital goes, then so will others. This is our hospital, and it is going to remain a general hospital, no matter what the decision is with Ennals. We have the support of 102 GPs, the ambulance service, and the Emergency Beds Service".

She went on to say that "East London is a deprived area.

They have taken away jobs and closed the docks. Now they want to take our hospital. Well, it's not on".

On Wednesday 5th there will be a 'celebration' for 30 years of the National Health Service, which will also hear the decision from the meeting with the Minister. On Thursday 6th the workers are asking for an extra heavy picket to guard the casualty department all day and night.

Bethnal Green hospital is working as usual. The workers have made sure of that. The casualty department is open 24 hours a day.

FRAN BRODIE

'WE HIT THEM WHERE IT HURTS'

IAN MORAN, USDAW shop steward at a 'Quicksave' store in Bell Green, Coventry, told *Workers' Action* how they won a fight to get extra workers taken on at the store.

LAST WEEK we eventually went out on strike after a four month dispute with management over payment for cleaning up the shop. It is standard that storemen do some cleaning, but we were also expected to clean toilets, paint the walls, and clean windows. The girls on the tills had to clean out the canteen. So earlier this year we demanded cleaners be taken on.

We got regional union support for the first time. We have been out five or six times before, mainly when non-union staff were hired, but none of these strikes were made official. Despite this we still have a 100% union shop.

When we demanded the cleaners, management offered an extra payment of £4 per week. The re-

gional officials advised us to accept. We wanted to go all out for the extra staff. However, we did accept.

The full time did not even get it in writing, so over a month later we still hadn't been paid. Then the full timers met with Quicksave regional management and drafted an agreement. But we still didn't get the back pay.

Eventually the management changed their mind. They wouldn't pay the money but they would take on a cleaner.

When the official told us that, we unanimously voted to walk out then and there, at 11am on Tuesday 28th. Immediately we got help on the picket line from the local Labour Party, the LPYS, and Trades Council members.

This scared management, and they asked us to go back until there was a meeting on Wednesday with one of the national directors. We refused point blank, but they still met us on Wednesday.

Management conceded everything. We will only have to mop up normal spillages, and probably two cleaners will be taken on. Some painting must be done for health and safety reasons, and it will be done by the company's painters.

If a few more stores take the same line as us, it will mean more painters there, too.

We also got the back money, but I'm not happy about the methods used. It amounted to £50, about £30 after tax, so they gave us £27 in cash out of the back of the hand. We lost £3 each, and the tax man about £20 per worker.

It just shows you what a bunch of shysters the people who run large chains like this are. If anyone from the Inland Revenue reads this, we don't mind. We'll make sure Quicksave pay!

We are still in dispute over the number of people on the tills, and we will probably have to go out again to get a closed shop. ACAS have recommended a closed shop, but Quicksave haven't taken any notice.

The only language they understand is profit, and they will continue to swindle us out of every penny they can, until we hit them where it hurts, in the pocket.

GEC strikers need union backing to break pay curbs

SEVENTEEN computer operators at GEC Telecommunications, Stoke, Coventry, who have been on strike for 17 weeks, have all been threatened with the sack. Six contract engineers also on strike in the same works, together with nearly 100 others who have applied mild sanctions, have been threatened with suspension without pay until they withdraw sanctions.

Both disputes, for a £600 a year parity increase, are official.

The contract engineers have been paying a levy of £4.50 a week to keep their striking workmates on full pay; the computer operators have been solid and determined. But lack of support from their ASTMS union branch is putting them gravely at risk.

The ASTMS branch refused backing at the start of the computer room dispute, and it was the district who made it official. Financial aid from a branch of 1200 has been pitiful. Only one part of the branch (the technicians' group) paid a full levy to the strike, and then only four weeks ago.

Since GEC bosses made their threat to sack the strikers, even the technicians have refused to black the scab labour on the computer or to black work that should be done by the contract engineers.

At a union meeting, one office representative objected to any solidarity action: "What if a similar threat resulted and 200 went out of the door? We don't know the full details of the contract engineers' requested blacking — refer it back".

At a meeting on 4th July, the branch decided on a token strike and ban on overtime and night shift work; but all-out strike action was rejected.

As for ASTMS national office, they have finally sent someone

down to look into the dispute — after it went into the union's record book as its second longest strike! The strike pay is only £15 a week.

The strikers' courageous stand, if supported, could cripple GEC Telecommunications, win the dispute, and smash through present pay curbs, to the benefit not only of GEC technicians but all workers. The branch's short sightedness could be disastrous.

ROB MCGONIGLE

PO engineers are fighting for 35 hours

ON FRIDAY 30th June the Post Office Engineering Union began a national overtime ban.

It was called to support the Post Office engineers' claim for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay. Small scale industrial action has been going on since last October. Last month the POEU conference empowered the union executive to call overtime bans and selective strikes.

Action in many areas has already gone beyond the overtime ban. The North East London area last week demanded the start of strike action, while in Nottingham the POEU branch committee has proposed that union members should walk out if a worker is sent home or suspended by management, that the maintenance rotas should only cover Monday-Friday (not weekends), and that shift work and travelling time payments be refused and time taken off in lieu.

EVENTS

Small ads are free for labour movement events. Paid ads (including ads for publications) 8p per word, £5 per column inch — payment in advance. Send copy to *Events*, Box 1960, 182 Upper Street, London N1, to arrive by Friday for inclusion in the following week's paper.

SATURDAY 15 JULY. Cardiff Carnival Against Racism. Assemble 11.30am, Loudoun Sq., Docks. Rally 1pm; festival 2pm to 7pm; Rock against Racism concert 7pm to 11pm at Sophia Gardens.

FRIDAY-MONDAY 14-17 JULY. Conference of Socialist Economists 1978 on *The Crisis of Capitalism and working class strategies in the 1970s*. In Bradford. Booking details from Teddy Brett, School of Social Science, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9QN.

SATURDAY 15 JULY. Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory conference. 1pm, Essex Road Library, London. Tickets 75p from SCLV, Box 127, 182 Upper St, London N1.

TUESDAY 18 JULY. A.Sivanandan speaks on 'From Immigration Control to Repatriation', 6.30pm at the Institute of Race Relations, 247 Pentonville Road, London N1. The meeting will launch *Race & Class* pamphlet no.5: price 20p plus 10p postage.

PICKET GARNERS: Main pickets every day, noon to 3pm and 5.30 to 11 pm at 399 Oxford St, 243 Oxford St, 40-41 Haymarket, and 56 Whitcombe St. Mass picket every Saturday at noon, 399 Oxford St. Donations to Garners Strike Fund, c/o TGWU, room 84, 12-13 Henrietta St, WC2.

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Divide and rule ploy thrown out

AT I.T.T. CANNON, Basingstoke, the workers have successfully resisted an attempt by management to change the terms and conditions of work.

The bosses offered staff status for some of the skilled manual workers in the factory. The staff status would depend on a study by two Supervisors on the work of each individual, and could be withdrawn if the supervisors felt the worker was falling below standard.

Thus two workers doing exactly the same job could find themselves on different levels of pay and covered by different agreements!

The local District Committee of the AUEW (the major union in Cannons) refused to allow this proposal. The bosses' "divide and rule" tactic was also denounced in a rank and file bulletin, which urged total rejection of the staff status proposals as a ploy to have workers fighting among themselves and thus to weaken the fight for better pay and conditions.

Support for the staff status proposals is now minimal, limited to the toolroom, which represents about 20 out of 300 workers.