

workers' ACTION

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Nurses: Justice not charity

Jennie Long, an auxiliary nurse in NUPE, puts the nurses' case.

⚡ We're always hearing when it comes to a fight on wages that nurses are a special case, 'like the firemen or the police'. That is the worst of all possible arguments for our case.

If nurses are separated off from the rest of the labour movement, then even with a few 'extra concessions' we'll never get a decent wage. The position of groups like the Royal College of Nursing that we are a 'profession' and should never strike robs nurses of any industrial muscle to win their claims.

But nurses all around the country are beginning to make a stand and even the RCN has had to debate whether we should use strike action.

What we are saying is that nursing is not special work and that nurses are not special people. We're exploited in exactly the same way by the government's policy as other workers are, and we've exactly the same prices to pay.

We aren't asking for special treatment, we're just fighting for a decent wage for our work.

The government sees us that way: they've offered us almost exactly the same deal as the other hospital workers, 9% plus comparability. Our 'specialness' adds up to just £1 a week, which they say they'll give before the results of a comparability study are out.

We don't want any action we'd take to hurt patients, that's true. But any harm that could happen if we take action is nothing compared to the permanent, long-term damage to the NHS and its patients by the government's cuts in public spending on health and social services.

It's about time the government was forced to tot up the amount it is paying to the private drug and medical supply companies and on top-heavy administrations, so we could see where the money in the health service is really going to.

Instead of squeezing taxpayers and ratepayers to pay up for the hospitals, the government should be forced to put an end to the profiteers and parasites leeching off the Health Service. If anyone says 'where's the money going to come from to pay the nurses?', it's right there.

NUPE's conference policy of nationalising the drug and medical supply industries should be fought for, not forgotten. The nurses know that they will have to fight or be left behind, despite all the sob-stuff from people saying how special we are.



HEALTH SERVICE WORKERS MUST WIN

THE HEALTH service workers are being sabotaged.

The hospital ancillary workers, the ambulance men and the nurses do jobs which many of us would hesitate to do for any money, let alone for their pittance. It is ten times more difficult for them to strike than for other workers. As a result, their wages remain low, and the service in which they work is pared down by Government spending cuts.

Now they have taken action: the ancillaries and the ambulance men operating work-to-rules and scattered strikes for their pay claim, and many nurses joining in solidarity action. They have been denounced by moneyed hypocrites in Westminster and Fleet Street as heartless and even (by the *Mail* and the *Sun*) as fascists.

Despite it all, they have

voted — 123,498 to 35,149 among the NUPE ancillaries, 7,704 to 1,124 among the NUPE ambulance men — to reject the Government's 9% plus £1 offer, and are bravely sticking out for their rights.

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The Government's answer is 'Not a penny more' — and TUC general secretary Len Murray thinks the government is right. The TGWU and GMWU leaders are in the Government's corner too, and so would Alan Fisher of NUPE be if he hadn't been called to order by his union National Executive, under pressure from the rank and file.

Instead of building on the growing unity in the public sector, the union leaders have been undermining it:

by letting the water workers be split off; by not calling an all-out strike; and now by letting the council workers be separated from the health service workers. (NUPE council workers voted to accept by 222,591 to 150,445).

The sabotage need not succeed. NUPE is by far the biggest union among the health workers. The

nurses are now in revolt against their pay offer — just a repeat of the miserable 9% plus £1. Since January 22, links have been created among militant hospital workers and ambulance men who can see through Alan Fisher's smarmy demagoguery.

The labour movement is recovering from the years of paralysis under the Social Contract. But it

will show we're still pretty paralysed if we don't act now to help the health service workers.

□ Labour movement support committees in every area can collect money for strike funds, distribute leaflets to explain the workers' case, help on picket lines, and mount demonstrations and rallies.

□ Links should be made between the health service workers and the civil service workers now taking action against the same Government wage-squeezing policy.

□ In the early 1960s, and again in 1970, dockers struck to support nurses' pay claims. Industrial workers should follow that example now. That is the way to win the health service decent wages with minimum harm to the patient.

COLIN FOSTER



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IDI AMIN: BRITAIN'S PRIZE PUPIL

IDI AMIN's dictatorship in Uganda is under heavy pressure from the Tanzanian army and rebel Ugandans. Its only remaining solid allies are Morocco and the self-styled 'socialist' regime of Libya.

For the British press, Amin has for seven years been a convenient source of horror stories to suggest that Africans can't run their own countries properly. Now they report the prospect of his overthrow with an air of calm superiority.

The horror stories were true. But the racist overtones of the British press coverage are shown by the fact that equally vile dictators like Portugal's Caetano, Rhodesia's Smith, or the Shah of Iran (at least as much of a pathological case as Amin) never got the same treatment... And the fact that Uganda's Asian population, when they were driven out by Amin, were not welcome to Britain as refugees from dictatorship, but treated like an invasion of the plague.

Amin, in any case, is not a product of independent Uganda. He is a product of British colonialism in Africa. He learned the trade of butchering human beings in the ser-



vice and pay of Britain — in murdering his own people during events like the suppression of the so-called Mau-Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950s. The British Army regarded him as an especially promising officer, worthy of rapid promotion. Britain, again, looked on sympathetically when Amin

ousted Uganda's previous president, Milton Obote, a man whom Britain had regarded as a dangerous radical.

In fighting to throw out Amin, the Ugandan people are continuing black Africa's long and noble struggle to throw out the heritage of British colonialism.

Socialist Worker and the Chinese invasion

LEFT PRESS

EARLY in January the Cambodian government fell to a Vietnamese invasion.

The Socialist Workers' Party paper *Socialist Worker* commented briefly that 'despair makes the poor kill each other — and keeps the world safe for the rich'. Despite the fact that its prediction that the Vietnamese forces would not advance beyond the Mekong river was immediately disproved, *SW* felt no more need be said.

When China invaded Vietnam, in late February, *SW*'s response was equally perfunctory and world-weary. 'The slaughter is for nothing, just the blood tribute to the gods of the system'.

Last week *Socialist Worker* attempted a longer and more political comment on the conflicts. The basic message was, however, the same: the Indochinese events are a battle between rival gangsters, it is a tragedy for the people of the region, and it shows how brutal the world is.

SW drew no conclusion about what could be done politically, except to mention the general idea of workers' international unity to stop war. Even that generality was an improvement on the previous articles, which said absolutely nothing at all in the way of political conclusions.

SW made no call for China to get out of Vietnam. In *SW*'s view, apparently, such a call would be irrelevant, since the Chinese invasion is just one episode in a continuing competitive struggle between Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian 'state capitalism'.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia was 'carried through on Russian instructions... an attempt to create a pincer movement and force China back within its national boundaries'. (Strangely, this insight, stated so confidently by *SW* now, escaped them in January, when they simply put

the invasion down to 'despair') The Chinese invasion aims to pull Vietnam into China's sphere of influence rather than the USSR's.

The wars are also designed to divert Chinese and Vietnamese workers from class struggle: 'As the system contracts in crisis, as real wages sag and the number of those without jobs rises, war is a means of keeping everyone quiet: war between nations, not war between classes'.

For this last explanation, no evidence is offered, and it is not even clear that *SW* takes it at all seriously as anything other than a general platitude.

As for the competitive struggle — it is certainly true that the Russian, Chinese and Vietnamese bureaucracies are strongly nationalist, and willing to sacrifice workers' and peasants' lives for prestige, spheres of influence, and foreign plunder.

But Cambodia often had extremely strained relations with China, and was more of an embarrassment than a great triumph for China's diplomatic policy. And there is absolutely no evidence that China can realistically hope to pull Vietnam into its sphere of influence by invasion of its territory.

SW's contrived analysis has this effect: it whitewashes the role of the USA, which almost certainly gave the green light for China's invasion. General William Westmoreland, former commander of American forces in Vietnam, has openly approved the invasion. The US government, while saying 'for the record' that China should withdraw, has made it clear that it regards the invasion as legitimate retaliation for Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and that there will be no disturbance of Chinese-US diplomatic and trade links.

The tension between China and Vietnam goes back many years, basically fuelled by

China's efforts for rapprochement with imperialism. As for the Cambodian invasion, it absolutely cannot be equated with China's action. It had some popular support — though exactly how much we don't know — from the Cambodian people.

The real question posed by *SW*'s analysis is this: how do they square it with their backing for the Vietnamese against US imperialism? *SW* dissolves the precise Marxist concept of imperialism, defined as the expansionist policy of monopoly and finance capital, into a general notion of imperialism as brutality in international relations. Thus for *SW* Russia and China (defined by Marxists as degenerated and deformed workers' states respectively) are imperialist powers just like the US.

Today *SW* sees in Indochina a war between Russian and Chinese imperialism to carve the area up. Doesn't it follow logically that the war from the 1960s to 1975 was basically a power-battle between Russian, Chinese and US imperialisms — one where the popular revolutionary movement in Vietnam was bound to be unable to avoid the laws of imperialist conflict and an outcome like the present one? If that was the case, then support for the Vietnamese at that time would be just back-handed support for 'Russian imperialism', in the same way that *SW* considers that support for the North in the Korean war of 1950-53 would have amounted to backing 'Russian imperialism'.

The difference is that the power and militancy of the Vietnam solidarity movement in the 1960s pulled *SW* back from the fatalistic, mechanical logic of its 'state capitalist' theory... and there is no similar force to pull them back from that logic today.

RHODRI EVANS

London Labour: not as left as it seemed

by STEPHEN CORBISHLEY

"DON'T PANIC — hang on and wait for North Sea oil to save the Government". That was the message Tribune MP Frank Allaun brought to the London Labour Party conference on March 3rd.

The "don't rock the boat" message was one that sections of the conference were happy to accept, despite a number of left-wing resolutions being passed. The conference decided not to debate the public service workers' struggle.

One emergency motion from Hackney North CLP (which sponsors the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory [SCLV]) called on London Labour councils to settle on the full claim. Another, from Hackney South CLP, called for rejection of comparability and phased agreements, all out strike action, other workers to move their claims forward to join the low-paid, and abolition of Government cash limits on local authorities.

After Standing Orders proposed that the Hackney South motion be not taken, SCLV supporter Mike Davis challenged this ruling... but got voted down by conference. This head-in-the-sand approach was pushed

through by union delegations and councillors who wanted a quiet life.

The debate on racialism saw a firm call for Labour councils to bar their halls to the National Front. A call for opposition to the 'sus' laws was also passed. However, a hard-hitting resolution from Hornsey CLP [another SCLV sponsoring organisation] calling for positive discrimination was rejected.

On jobs, a resolution moved by *Militant* supporter Eddie McParland (Greenwich) called for the London Labour Party to support a fight for the 35 hour week, a national minimum wage, and nationalisation of firms creating redundancies. McParland pointed out that the Ford workers and the public service strikers have shown that the 5% policy is dead, but the leaders of the labour movement have been out-Torying the Tories.

The platform called for the motion to be remitted, and when the mover quite rightly refused, they recommended rejection. On a show of hands it was a close thing, but the trade union block votes secured a 800-to-400 defeat.

On Sunday morning, a strong resolution opposing school closures, moved by Acton CLP and seconded by Brent East CLP [another SCLV sponsor] was narrowly

defeated. As this showed, the right wing on the Labour-controlled Inner London Education Authority have still got a firm grip. The report from Labour IEA chief Ashley Bramhall condemned "an unfortunate outbreak of school closure by school-keepers". That comment, at least, got roundly condemned by conference delegates.

Two small victories for Labour democracy were won at the conference. A resolution calling for the election of the GLC Labour Group leader by the London Labour Conference was passed, as was a composite calling on Labour's National Executive to open up debate on re-selection at the next national conference. (Unless the NEC makes a special decision, the reselection issue will be banned from the agenda under the rule which forbids re-raising issues within three years).

After this conference, it will be still be the rank and file of the London Labour Parties which must give a lead. A number of victories for left-wingers in the elections for the constituency section of the Regional Executive should help to put the pressure on. There are four SCLV supporters on the new Executive, together with a number of other left-wingers including three from the *Militant* tendency.



Over two thirds of councils' housing revenue, and a half or a third of some London councils' total budget, goes in debt charges to money-lenders.

ORGANISING AGAINST THE BANKERS

The time to start is now

IN Hackney we had a great manifesto. We pledged ourselves to keep rents down. But last Wednesday the Labour council voted to raise the rents — we fell at the first fence. The argument of course was that we have got to live in the real world, but this just means that we act as good managers for capitalism. We need to come to grips with the whole problem of local government financing.

This was part of Hackney councillor John Sweeney's rousing contribution to the debate at the SCLV's fringe meeting at the London Regional Labour Party Conference, on 'The Crisis in Local Government'. With over 70 people attending it was the largest meeting at the conference.

Several councillors spoke at the meeting — Ken Livingstone from the property-rich borough of Camden, Ted Knight from poor and neglected Lambeth, Val Veness of

Islington — each taking a slightly different line on the rates question.

A number of speakers showed how the low-pay strike had posed the issues even more sharply than usually. How could councillors avoid just acting as 'good managers'? How could the councils fight the government's policy of strict cash limits? How could the money be found to pay the council workers a decent wage, when poor boroughs were facing rate rises of up to 50%?

Clay Cross was a great inspiration, but what really are the lessons for us here and now? And what does defiance of the state and default on debt payments mean in practice?

All the speakers were agreed that the left had not faced these questions seriously enough, and there was enthusiasm for a conference which SCLV has undertaken to org-

anise on these questions. But, as one Workers' Action supporter pointed out, it wasn't just discussion that was needed, but also the mounting of a campaign for an organised fightback.

There was general agreement that the mass of people did not understand anything about local government finance, and that the failure to wage a struggle to inform people of what was going on meant that they could not be mobilised to support a defiance of the government by a council 'at the drop of a hat'. This failure was the failure of the councillors themselves, who should look at their own efforts rather than blame the public.

The struggle had to be taken into the factories, the sites and offices. Without the support of the mass of workers it would not be possible to do anything but manage things for the capitalists.

Nurses need to end elitist splits

by JENNIE LONG

WHEN THE Royal College of Nursing (RCN) voted last Tuesday against changing their constitution to include the use of strike action, it came as no surprise. But how disappointing that an organisation purporting to be a union should think itself so separate from other workers that it voluntarily sweeps away as 'unprofessional' one of the hardest-won trade union rights.

For a number of years the RCN has been trying to get into the TUC. Given the elitism of the RCN, it is surprising

that it even bothers, except that by doing so it hopes to prevent the growth of genuine trade unions among nurses.

The RCN's elitism runs as far as excluding auxiliary nurses from membership, because they are 'untrained', despite the fact that auxiliaries come under the same Whitley Council pay scale.

If it were not for NUPE and CoHSE, auxiliaries' wage negotiations would be completely under the control of a body that excludes them from membership. As it is, RCN controls union negotiations for nurses by having eight out of the 16 staff side representatives on the Whitley Council, while NUPE and CoHSE have four each.

The Government's refusal to change the balance of that Council as the two unions have recruited massively among nurses is a straight political decision — it knows that it can rely on the RCN to do less for its members.

Auxiliary nurses suffer most from this domination by the RCN. They are divided from the hospital ancillary workers because of separate negotiations, and from other nurses because of the ideas of 'professionalism' that the RCN promotes.

Yet the reality of the NHS is that auxiliary nurses are vital to the existence of the Health Service, especially in the poorly equipped, understaffed geriatric and psychiatric wards

and hospitals.

The very existence of the auxiliary nurses proves one thing of immediate importance — that the hospital workers in NUPE who have rejected the government's 9%-plus-comparability, and the nurses who are faced with an almost identical offer, have a common cause in fighting against being used as cheap labour to patch up a Health Service that's being murdered by cuts.

The attitude of bodies like the RCN must not stand in the way of a common fight to change that situation. We have to win an adequate minimum for those who do the work of caring for the sick and infirm. Otherwise we will be made to pay for doing that job.

Scotland's still fighting

IN SCOTLAND the opposition to the government's 9% offer for public service workers has been stronger than anywhere else. Scottish council workers in NUPE rejected the offer by 18,000 votes to 12,000, going against the British trend for acceptance; and Scottish NUPE hospital ancillaries kicked the offer out by an eight-to-one margin, rather than the four-to-one margin of rejection which was average over Britain.

Following these votes, the Scottish division of NUPE called for national escalation of the action over pay.

Edinburgh has been one of the centres of action.

The North and South Hospitals branches voted to reject the offer, and so did all Edinburgh's NUPE council workers' branches.

The South Hospitals branch passed a resolution empowering the branch's shop stewards, if the union leaders fail to step up action, to take the lead themselves and collect a levy in order to do so.

Discontent is running high with the puppet-show strategy of the union leaders. The sewage workers were pulled out on strike without so much as a meeting to decide — and yet have stayed solid for five weeks. Now the union is telling them they'll have to go back at the end of the week, even though their NUPE branch voted to reject the deal. As one sewage worker on the picket line put it: "They should have had the hospitals all closed and us picketing them right from the start. We've been set apart".

"Ever since the start they've been telling us they will escalate the action", said another sewage worker, "and then nothing happens".



NHS workers can still win

ACTION IS still continuing in the hospitals. In Edinburgh, all the hospitals are still operating a work-to-rule and there is an unofficial strike at the Sick Children's Hospital. In Coventry, all the hospital catering workers are on strike, and other staff are working to rule.

By voting four-to-one against the Government offer, NUPE hospital workers showed their will to fight. Now they will face a concerted drive by the Government and union bureaucrats to stop the struggles.

* The TGWU, GMWU, and NUPE have all accepted the similar offer for council workers. This will be used in attempts to convince the hospital workers that the fight is all over.

* The TGWU, GMWU, and CoHSE have accepted the offer for hospital ancillary workers. That makes a majority on the union side of the negotiating council... despite the fact that NUPE is by far the biggest union in the National Health Service.

But NUPE ambulance crews, too, have voted decisively against their offer. CoHSE also has rejected the ambulancemen's offer. And now the nurses are joining the fight in earnest.

The battle against low pay in the National Health Service is not finished yet. The NHS ancillaries and the ambulance crews still need all the support we can give them.

EDITORIAL

Labour sags, the City rejoices

'CITY swings back to the Tories', headlined the Financial Times as the devolution referendum results came through last week.

As recently as last September, Jim Callaghan's decision not to go for an early election sent share prices shooting up. City men would undoubtedly have voted Tory if an October election had come — instinctive class loyalties are pretty strong among the bourgeoisie — but their calculation, expressed in the share movements, was that the Labour Government was better for business than a Tory regime or an uncertain election result.

Now the Labour Government is not managing to control wages and workers' militancy in the way the bankers and bosses admired so much between 1975 and 1978. So the best thing, according to the calculations of the millionaire class, is if the Labour Government breaks the momentum of the present industrial struggle, demoralises the labour movement as much as possible, and then rapidly makes way for a Tory government with a thumping majority.

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And Jim Callaghan is setting out to do just that. The devolution referendum results were a big blow to the Government. Callaghan tried to push the labour movement into beating the nationalists at their own game with a campaign for a 'Yes' vote. Result: massive apathy and a big working class 'No' vote.

A majority for Scottish devolution, however narrow, should mean devolution goes through: that's democracy. But Callaghan's Government is saddled with a dilemma: it faces real trouble from the Labour back benches if it tries to push Scottish devolution through Parliament, and real trouble from the Nationalists if it doesn't.

The scene is set for more sordid deals (or attempted deals) with minority parties, and more efforts to get the top TUC leaders to cooperate in proving that Labour can stifle working-class struggle better than the Tories can.

It is because the Labour Government is so obviously heading for a debacle that Wedgwood Benn's backers in the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC) have come out with proposals for a more left-wing Labour election manifesto. Now, they think, is the time to start squaring up for the Labour leadership battle that will follow the probable election defeat.

The most significant thing about the Bennite LCC's proposals for the manifesto is what they don't say. They don't say anything about opposition to pay curbs and support for the 35-hour week, the two key points on which the labour movement is in opposition to the Government.

■ ■ ■

What they do say is mostly a rather watery version of the 1974 manifesto. Redistribution of power, wealth and income. More public spending. Exchange controls, import controls, re-industrialisation. Election of the Cabinet by MPs and abolition of the House of Lords.

It is neither a platform for working class mobilisation, nor a programme to overthrow the capitalist system of production for profit. Instead it is a programme for redistributing this and that within the system. It is a nationalist programme, and probably an unworkable one even in its own terms.

Still, abolition of the Lords, election of the Cabinet, and reversal of the social spending cuts would be positive reforms. The biggest question about the LCC proposals is whether the LCC's backers — who include the TGWU at national level — are going to make anything of them except a gesture to give Benn a left-wing image without causing anyone too much inconvenience.

Are they going to fight in the Constituency Labour Parties and the union branches?

Probably the answer is no. But socialists should take up the LCC's initiative, and use it to force discussions

within the labour movement of the different ideas for Labour's election campaign.

Callaghan has his ideas: everyone can see them on the ridiculous 'Keep Britain Labour and it will keep getting better' posters which Transport House officials are now desperately trying to remove from the hoardings.

Benn and his backers have theirs.

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, a movement backed by four left-wing Constituency Labour Parties and by several trade union branches and LPYSs, has its own platform, which includes opposition to wage curbs, a 35-hour week, abolition of immigration controls, and troops out of Ireland.

CLPs and union branches should discuss these alternatives, and demand that the Labour National Executive, (if not a full Conference) decides on the election manifesto, not the Government. But in any case we should make sure that our local labour movement organisations campaign on the policies that they think correspond best to their members' interests... and against the Government when it attacks those interests.

■ ■ ■

And we should take one lesson to heart from the LCC, whose would-be socialism is useless if it is not linked to practical action on the issues where the working class is in struggle. All left wing manifestos will be little better than a pack of lies unless the people putting them forward are doing their utmost to support and generalise the present pay revolt.

Restoration of 1974-5 living standards, automatic cost-of-living protection for wages, and reduction of the work-week with no loss of pay to ensure jobs for all, are the central aims on which we can build a united struggle against both the Labour-TUC Concordat and a future Thatcher government. Around these ideas socialist rank-and-file groups can be built, reviving the active struggle against the bureaucracy which got stifled after 1974-5.

Mosque, merchants, and workers: the struggle hots up

HALF A MILLION people, attended a rally in a remote village on Monday 5th March to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Mohammed Mossadeq, Iran's nationalist prime minister from 1951 to 1953. Mossadeq, a hero for many Iranians, was opposed for some time before his downfall by the leading ayatollah of the day, Kashani.

One aspect of the rally was a protest against the growing Islamic intolerance of the ayatollah Khomeini's agents and supporters. The left-wing Fedayeen guerrillas supported it, as did the more Islamic-oriented Mujahedeen, who have recently backed the Fedayeen call for the breaking up of the Shah's army and for

workers' councils to have a say in running Iran.

The rally, however, was not a specially left-wing event. The Bazargan government supported it, and the message from the speakers was 'unity and moderation'.

Western

The new regime which is trying to halt the revolution in Iran is a coalition — with obvious internal tensions — of the mosque and the merchants.

Khomeini declares: 'We don't use the expression 'democratic', which is a western word'. He wants an 'Islamic' republic, not a democratic one. But most of the ministers in

the Government appointed by Khomeini are decidedly pro-western, regarded approvingly by the Western press as 'prudent' men.

The Government has promised that all foreign investments will be safe. Although the consortium of foreign oil companies has been kicked out of Iran, oil exports are being re-started. And the Government says that banks will not be nationalised and that Iran will meet its financial obligations.

The central bank governor has stressed the distinction between 'the notion of banking interest, prohibited by Islam, and profit deriving from capital investment, which is legitimate'.

Thus labour: the people, while B government perils capitalism

Apart tensions more of the work not will ion stop and offic and disc lot of the army is s disarray.

Kurds fight for freedom in the new Iran

IN IRANIAN Kurdistan the fall of the Shah has brought about a dramatic revival of Kurdish nationalist activity. A military base has been seized by Kurdish nationalists and the central government is obviously worried at the possibility of a renewed outbreak of the freedom struggle.

Clashes between guerilla groups supporting the slogan of secession and those of the Kurdish Democratic Party calling for autonomy and cultural rights have also been reported.

At a recent rally in Mahabad in northern Iran the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran set out its demands to the Khomeini regime.

The party's leader, Abdol Rahman Ghassemlou denounced 'reactionary forces that have spread the rumour that the Kurds are demanding secession from Iran', and reiterated the KDP's own programme for autonomy.

Panic

Ghassemlou's attack was really directed against militants under the influence of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, not against reactionaries — though he may genuinely feel that any talk of secession by the Iranian Kurds could only lead to panic by the central government and provoke a military intervention.

The fall of the Shah has enabled Iran's minority peoples to assert their rights. IAN SHAW looks at the Kurdish struggle

The plan that the KDP leader put forward was for an autonomous Kurdistan within Iran, with its own parliament dealing with everything but those 'tasks relating to the foreign policy, national defence and long-term economic planning of Iran as a whole'.

In this area, Kurdish would be the language of instruction in schools and the official language alongside Persian. Ghassemlou also promised that the national minorities within the

area [notably the Assyrians] will be guaranteed their national rights within Iranian Kurdistan.

Under the Shah's regime Iranian Kurdistan had ceased to be an important centre of struggle for Kurdish rights, despite strong nationalist feeling.

The Shah's secret police, SAVAK, infiltrated the movement, but the central political factor in weakening the movement was the disorientation created by the Shah's brief support for

the struggle of Kurds led by Mustapha Barzani against the Iraqi regime five years ago.

The Kurdish movement was already crippled by the loss of its most militant faction in the late sixties, and Barzani crippled it further by pushing for support for the Shah.

Wage

Ghassemlou is not reported as raising certain key demands of the KDP programme like 'men and women will have the same rights and will receive the same wage for the same work', 'the land belongs to those who work it', and the eight-hour day.

If Ghassemlou hopes that by dropping these demands and branding secessionists as 'reactionaries' he can win the favour of the Khomeini regime, he will be disappointed. Karim Sanjabi, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the present government and the leader of the Sanjabi tribe of Iranian Kurds, insists that they are they are simply Iranians and that their language is Persian. The government has itself referred to the separatists as a 'reactionary threat' and as 'bandits'.

Even with the great upheaval that has shaken Iranian society, the Kurdish minority will not achieve its freedom without a struggle.

KURDISTAN is probably the largest country in the world which still has not won its independence.

It is a mountainous country wedged between Turkey, the Arab countries of the Middle East, and Iran. Located between those three great centres of ancient civilisation, the mountain people still kept their separate identity.

During the 19th century, they fought against the Ottoman Empire. After the First World War, Kurdistan was carved up between five different countries. Today, eight million Kurds live in Turkey, up to five million in Iran, some two million in Iraq, and a few hundred thousand in each of Syria and the USSR.

Since World War One, the Kurds have kept fighting: at first mostly against Turkey, then mainly in Iraq.

In Turkey, the very existence of the Kurdish nation is denied: the government insists that Kurds are really Turks. The Kurdish language, Kurdish costume, Kurdish songs, and even the name Kurdistan are banned. Ruthless military repression, backed up by torture, enforces these laws.

The Shah's regime in Iran insisted on making Persian the only language of Iran. Although the use of Kurdish was not banned, all teaching was done in Persian. Karim Sanjabi, Bazargan's prime minister, who is a Kurdish tribal chief, has declared his support for this policy.

In Iraq, too, the Kurdish language has been discriminated against. A policy of 'Arabisation' has been pushed through. The Iraqi government is specially concerned to keep a grip on the oil-rich parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, and has kept Kurds out of jobs in the oil fields.

In Syria the repression is almost as fierce as in Turkey. In

The rebels of the mountains

the USSR, the Kurds were granted extensive rights in the 1920s; but in the 1930s, Stalin's 'Russification' policy resulted in the deportation of thousands of Kurds to different parts of the USSR. Today, Kurds in the USSR have more national rights than in other countries ... though the USSR has given large-scale military aid to Iraq's wars against the Kurds.

Despite the fragmentation and the decades of repression, the Kurds have maintained a

clear national identity. Unlike the Syrians and Iraqis, they are not Arabs. They have their own language, divided into two main dialect groups.

They also have a distinct religious identity. The vast majority of Kurds are sunni Muslims of the shafite school [as distinct from the shi'ite Muslims of Iran, and the Turks who are mainly sunni following the hanefite doctrine]. They have a strong literary and musical tradition dating from the 7th century, their own

customs and costumes.

In the late Middle Ages, the Kurds were able to gain considerable autonomy from the Ottoman [Turkish] Empire in exchange for helping it keep the Persians at bay. This continued until the beginning of the 19th century, when the Ottoman Sultan's struggle to pull his tottering and splintering empire together brought him to interfere in Kurdish affairs.

The response was a series of revolts, in 1826, 1834, 1853

and 1880.

Modern nationalism first emerged in 1898 with the establishment of a Kurdish press in Egypt, but within Kurdistan there was no real social base for these ideas. After the revolt of the Young Turks in 1908, political clubs sprang up among urban Kurds but soon modern Turkish nationalism lost any of its liberal accents and became the war-cry of anti-Kurdish Turkish chauvinism.

Following World War One, the victorious powers tore apart the carcass of the Ottoman Empire. Britain grabbed Iraq, including the oil-rich Mosul province inhabited by Kurds; France took Syria and the Kurdish areas around Jazirah. The Kurds found themselves a people whose nationality was recognised on paper by the Great Powers, but whose nation was in fact split between five other nations.

From 1924, Turkey forbade the teaching of Kurdish in schools and the next year designated the Kurdish areas a closed 'military region'. Kurdish parties were outlawed, the press banned, it became a crime to use the name 'Kurd', and deportations were started.

In the twenties Turkey was the main area of Kurdish resistance and struggle for national rights. By the early thirties, the main focus of this struggle had shifted to Iraq, where it was the British army and airforce that was the Kurds' main enemy.

In Iran at the end of World War Two [1945-8], the Kurds

and Azerbaidjanis both founded republics with tacit Soviet support. The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad lasted a little over a year.

In July 1958, General Kassem took power in Iraq, ousting the imperialist stooge Nuri Said. He declared Iraq to be a state where 'the Arab and Kurdish nations exist in free association'. Kurdish leader Barzani was invited to return.

In 1960, the right-wing dictator Menderes was overthrown in Turkey, leading to a period of limited liberalisation.

But soon Kassem went back on his promises, and the Iraqi Kurds had to resume their long war of liberation. The Aref coup in Iraq in late 1963 brought another short period favourable to Kurdish aspirations, but soon that regime too was attacking the Kurds as fiercely as ever.

Kurdish guerilla actions in Iran started in the late 1960s, and after 1968 there was also a revival of military action in Iraq. In March 1970 the Iraqi government made an agreement with the Kurds that their areas [in fact, only a portion of their areas] could have considerable local autonomy. A plebiscite was to take place to establish the boundaries of Kurdish majority. The agreement was to last four years.

After four years of 'no peace, no war' — and no plebiscite either — the Iraqi government tried to impose an agreement that fell far short of Kurdish aspirations. The war began again.

The Shah of Iran, who had his own reasons for wanting to create trouble for the Iraqi regime, gave some backing to the Kurds. But this came to a sudden end in 1975, when the hard-pressed Iraqi regime signed a pact with the Shah: in exchange for settling a border dispute in the Gulf in Iran's favour, Iraq got the Shah's agreement to crush the Kurds.



Kurdish guerilla

HOW TR

MUSTAPHA most famous Kurdish nationalist died in the U Thursday Ma spokesman of Democratic which Barzani in 1945, 'mou by declaring: traitor'.

Why this de Barzani, a tr Iraqi Kurdist important figu al struggle in 1946, when a was set up Iran; Barzani ed a sizeable f ed men) was defence.

After the fal in February 15 his followers f Union. For th he was the tar attack from th until in 1958 stalled Genera ed him to retur The attacks

There is a division of Khomeini mobilises le, in the name of gainst communism, argan and his govtry to reassure im- and set Iranian a going again.

The revolution has not been halted yet.

Workers' committees and genuine trade unions are gaining strength in the factories and workplaces. An example is the banks: when they reopened, only every other day was given over to banking business, and the alternate days were used for political discussions among the workers.

Workers' control of production, and nationalisation without compensation, are the most immediate demands. The Fedayeen's call for workers' councils points the way to extending workers' control to a society-wide level — but the workers' councils must set themselves clearly socialist aims, rather than trying to get

a share of the power in Khomeini's Islamic Council, as the Fedayeen demand.

The undemocratic referendum — 'Yes or No to an Islamic Republic' — must be opposed, and countered with the call for speedy convocation of the Constituent Assembly.

Land

The fight for democracy must also be taken up around the issues of women's rights, press freedom, land to the tillers, and the national rights of Iran's minorities.

The fight for freedom can be won only as a working class fight for socialism.

COLIN FOSTER



Time

from its internal this strategy faces a ndamental obstacle: ng people of Iran are g to see the revolut- here. In the factories es, political meetings sions: still take up a time, and the Iranian ill in a almost complete



la fighters

THE SHAH KICKED THE KURDS

BARZANI, the leader of the Kurdish struggle, was killed in 1975. He had led the Kurds in their fight against the Shah's army for 11 years. He was a nationalist and a socialist.



Barzani was a nationalist and a socialist. He led the Kurds in their fight against the Shah's army for 11 years. He was a nationalist and a socialist.

conservative faction in both. His military prowess guaranteed his continued popularity.

After the outbreak of the war between Iraq and the Kurds in 1974, Barzani (who had already established links with the Shah and the CIA at an earlier date) led the fight with Iranian and United States backing. Iran and the US hoped to weaken Iraq, an ally of the USSR, though they never really supported Kurdish claims.

In March 1975 the Shah withdrew his support. From near-victory, the Kurds crashed to their biggest defeat in decades, due to reliance on the Shah and the USA. In 1976, the New York newspaper Village Voice published the secret Pike Report, which revealed Barzani's connections with the United States, the CIA, and in particular with Henry Kissinger.

Denunciations of Barzani followed... though often from those who knew all along what was happening.

STILL BATTLING AGAINST THE ODDS

At the end of your account of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq, you state that 'prospects for continuing resistance were bleak' after March 1975. What has happened since then?

Well, about 200,000 Kurds fled to Iran as the Iraqis launched their onslaught against the Pesh Merga guerillas. About half of these returned after a year because of the amnesty that was declared by the Iraqi government, but they were forced to go to the south and made to live in camps.

This was a terrible blow. The Kurds are a mountain people for whom the geography and climate of the south appear like a strange continent.

In the same year the Iraqi government tried to consolidate its hold on Kurdistan. The chief means of doing this was by stepping up the deportations. These deportations of Kurds had three aims: to break up the national entity, to 'Arabise' the border and oil-rich areas, and to isolate the guerillas.

Cleared

The Baghdad government settled Iraq and even Egyptian Arabs on the land they had cleared the Kurds out of. This policy was first reported in the Kirkuk area as long ago as 1973, but recently it has been on a much bigger scale: by the end of 1976, for instance, 300,000 (out of the roughly two million Kurds living in Iraqi Kurdistan) were deported to the south.

The government has started to give rewards for Arab men who marry Kurdish women, because they are helping to 'Arabise' Iraq.

When guerrilla activity began again in 1977, Iraq went further. Its government tried to prevent contact between Iraqi and Turkish Kurds, remembering that in 1974 Iraqi guerillas got food supplies through Turkey, and in 1976 guerillas were entering Iraq from Turkey.

In fact, their policies have deepened the guerillas' base because for the first time the guerillas have been involved with the villagers' problems, when they helped to resist the deportations.

But I think things are still bleak. The Barzani group has a permanent base along the Turkish border, and the Talabani group (the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) has a base in Syria, but they cannot pose a threat to the Iraqi regime.

It is not easy to see what their strategy is. It seems that they are simply trying to keep the spirit of resistance alive and to show the army they are not beaten.

MARTIN VAN BRUINEN is a Dutch Marxist who has travelled widely in Kurdistan and has recently published a book on the social and political

life of Kurdistan. He talked to Workers' Action about recent developments in the struggle against the repression of the Kurdish nation.



What impact do you think the present developments in Iran, and the growing Iraqi-Syrian cooperation, will have on the Kurdish struggle?

In the area around Mahabad in Iran, where the Kurds established a short-lived republic in 1946, people have been demanding full independence. Others have been calling for autonomy. A military base has been stormed by those calling for independence.

This represents a certain departure from custom. Kurds have usually called for cultural rights and autonomy because a large part of the Kurdish people live in urban centres outside Kurdistan and because an independent Kurdistan, being landlocked, wouldn't be very independent.

Areas

Clearly for a while Iranian control of the Kurdish areas within Iran's borders will not be very strong, and this will give Iraqi Kurds the possibility of operating against Iraq from Iran — something that is particularly important in the light of the recent agreement between Ecevit of Turkey and the Iraqi regime.

The Syria-Iraq cooperation will probably mean an end of Syrian support for Talabani's PUK. It is now in the inter-

ests of both the Syrians and the Iraqis to crush the Kurds.

What are the politics of the Kurdish movement?

There are no genuine socialist trends in the liberation movement. Everybody says they are Marxist-Leninist, but this doesn't really mean anything.

Class

The reason is that there is no real working class in Kurdistan, and so you can't expect a mass socialist movement. Some individuals have of course been strongly influenced by socialism.

Many areas are only capitalist in a limited sense. There is private property in land and so on, but the workers on the land do not simply have a wage relation with the landowners. Their tribe or family have always lived there.

Many landlords have a patron-client relationship to the workers on the land — rather like you see in the film *The Godfather*. The landlord or tribal chieftain is a kind of intermediary, owing his position to state protection but interceding with the state on behalf of others — getting people out of jail, for instance.

Hasn't there been a change with the increase in capitalist farming methods

and with emigration to the west?

You must first make a distinction between the highland and the lowland people. In the highlands the population is not so concentrated and there is less capital. This means that there are fewer objective contradictions that could erode traditional loyalties.

Migration acts as a safety valve. If it weren't for migration there would be greater land-hunger.

In the lowlands there are entrepreneurs farming areas with machinery and employing mainly town workers. They employ very few of the rural poor. In fact, many of these entrepreneurs are people who rent land in the Mediterranean area, then when the harvest is over do the same further east and then, after that harvest, they come to Kurdistan.

Private property in land is quite new. In the plains those with political power registered land in their own names: tribal chiefs, urban merchants, sheikhs and state officials.

How much effect have returning migrant workers had in shaking up this traditional structure?

Recession in the West came at the same time as the slow-down in investment in many eastern countries. Turkey, with its heavy dependence on the West, is a good example. The combination of a slow-down in migration and a further squeeze imposed by central governments has had a certain limited political impact.

The migrant Kurds are not a big factor. The Kurdish proletariat living in Europe tends to be from a middle peasant background. Although they may be active trade unionists in Europe, even in nominally communist unions, when they return (and very few actually return to Kurdistan) they do not function as proletarians. They operate as petty entrepreneurs, living off the rent of a house, using a car as a taxi, running a shop or engaging in small-scale transportation.

There is of course a big Kurdish population in the urban centres of Turkey — in Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara — and in Baghdad, and these urban Kurds have relatives in Kurdistan with whom contact is maintained. It is via these urban Kurds that there is some influence of modern thinking. This is the route of socialist ideas.

"Agha, Shelkh, and State: on the social and political organisation of Kurdistan".

JOHN BELL looks at the background to the new builders' pay claim.

AT A press conference on Friday 2nd March the new general secretary of the builders' union UCATT, Les Wood, outlined this year's claim: a 'substantial' wage rise, 35-hour week, and better overtime, sick pay and pension rates.

The present wage agreement for workers in the building and civil engineering industries ends in June. With basic rates in the industry almost 25 per cent down on 1974 levels in real terms, and 172,000 building workers on the dole, a fight is long overdue. But there are many problems.

At the best of times union strength in the industry is weak outside major cities, and rivalry between UCATT and TGWU has increased during the last couple of years. Another complication is a split in the employers, with the Federation of Master Builders (mostly the smaller employers) breaking away from the National Joint Council for the Building Industry to set up a new negotiating body. The TGWU and GMWU have recognised it but UCATT and a small union, FIAT, have refused to.

Third

This is an industry with less than a third of the workers in a union at all, let alone properly organised. Firm militant leadership in UCATT, the biggest union in the industry, could get over these obstacles. But it doesn't look as if that leadership will be coming from the top officials.

George Smith, the previous general secretary, was due to retire this year, but died at the end of last year. His place has been taken by Les Wood.

To call Wood a shadowy figure is perhaps a little overdramatic; but apart from a couple of articles in the *Morning Star* and *Contract Journal*, building workers are unlikely to be able to find out anything about him.

The Communist Party, although it has some strength in the building industry, always gave its backing to Smith despite his right-wing record. And it looks as if their attitude to Wood will be the same.

Sharty before Hugh Scan-

lon accepted Her Majesty's kind offer to sit in the House of Lords, the *Morning Star* sighted another 'left' star in the trade union sky. Just after Christmas, readers were told of a *Broad Left* 'success in UCATT': 'Mr. Les Wood had a landslide victory polling 12,393 votes to 1,077 for his nearest right-wing rival, Mr. Tom Graves, to become general secretary of UCATT.'

Several points were not mentioned in this glowing write-up. Less than 5% of the membership voted. Whilst Graves could well be described as right wing, he was certainly not the right-wing candidate: Les Wood was!

Most puzzling of all is the claim that the election of Wood is a 'victory for the broad left'. True, the Communist Party canvassed and voted for Wood, but so did the right wing. But more important is Wood's record in the union.

For 17 years Wood was assistant general secretary to Sir George Smith. He distinguished himself mainly by complete silence and compliance with Smith's policies.

He said nothing when the right wing carried out a series of vicious attacks on the membership and on the relatively democratic structures of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (and after the 1971 amalgamation, UCATT).



Les Wood, 17 years a yes-man

A NEW LEADERSHIP IN THE BUILDERS' UNION

The fight must still come from the ranks

He was silent in 1969 when the membership of the ASW were balloted on a change of rules to abolish elections for district secretaries and appoint them for life instead. (This was prompted by the 'disgraceful' habit of the membership voting for 'the wrong sort' of secretary, in particular CP member Jack Rusca, the district secretary in London. Rusca had been removed from office for helping the strikers on the Barbican and Horseferry Road disputes, but he was later reinstated and then elected unopposed at the next election.)

The membership rejected the proposals but the EC ignored the ballot result, claiming that as the Painters (ASPD) were about to amalgamate with the ASW, it was unfair to their membership not to consult them as well.

So the vote was taken again with the ASPD taking part, and this time the vote went the EC's way. All CP district secretaries were removed from office and right wingers were appointed to take their places.

Les Wood had nothing to say against all this.

Confident after this piece of gangsterism, the EC went on to rig elections for organisers. In early 1970, for example, a vacancy occurred in London. Five candidates accepted nomination, including Terry Heath, a CP member who looked likely to win. The EC declared four out of the five candidates 'unsuitable' and a right winger, Chilton, was declared 'elected'.

In 1973 the Tory Government, egged on by the building trade employers, started the 'Shrewsbury' prosecution against 24 workers charged with 'conspiracy' offences on a flying picket during the 1972 national building strike.

Trial

Although UCATT was finally forced by its members to set up a fund for the building workers on trial, when the first prosecutions were announced Smith and the EC refused to help the defendants. In a circular sent to all branches they said: 'The concern of some members as to the attitude of the union in regard to this subject is a reflection of the campaign of criticism of UCATT carried out in familiar pattern by the usual dreary people who by misrepresentation abuse the sympathetic solidarity for workers in trouble existing in trade union branches and trades councils. ... The union as such, by reason of its rules, could not be seen to

offer indirect encouragement to acts alleged as criminal by making legal aid available.'

Les Wood was a party to this, too.

At the UCATT conference in 1976, delegates passed 'Composite Three', which opposed all wage restraint and in particular the 4½% limit which the EC were supporting. Smith and the EC refused to accept that decision, and balloted the membership to reject the delegates' position.

industry. In the July 1976 issue of the employers' magazine *National Builder*, Smith called for a crusade by the employers and non-communist trade unionists to 'clean the Communists out'. He went on to tell the employers that 'Marxist theory attracts people with a measure of paranoia which they are unable to overcome'.

Smith himself was a member of the Communist Party when he was elected assistant general secretary of the ASW in 1949. He left the CP in 1954, two years before becoming ASW general secretary. Since then he has combined calls to 'clean the Communists out' with ... writing for the Communist Party's press.

The *Morning Star* published articles by George Smith in August 1972, September '73, December '75 and June '77, and *Labour Monthly* had an article by him in January 1977. These articles were made up of a series of platitudes which could have come straight out of the union journal.

The Communist Party was quite happy to give space in its publications to a trade union leader who victimised and hounded its members when they fought the employers for better wages and conditions. Why? What sort of political theory attracts people with schizophrenia?

The CP desperately wants to appear respectable by having members of the TUC General Council (which

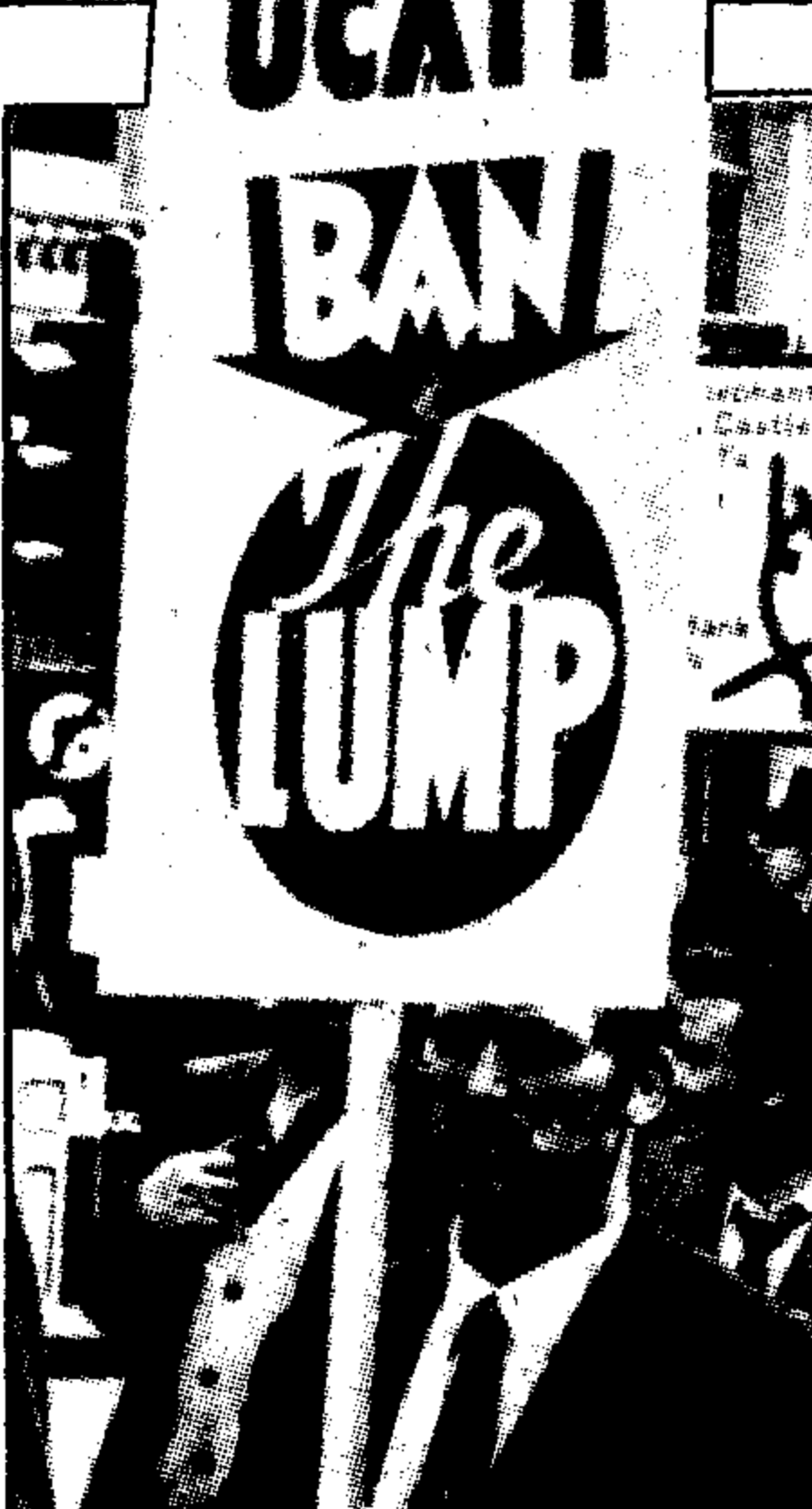
quiet-spoken man' ... 'married with two daughters and three grandchildren and for relaxation enjoys a good swim and also plays a little golf'.

Nothing about Les Wood suggests anything other than at best a middle of the road trade unionist. Although he is quoted as being against the 5% pay limit (what trade union leader isn't, at least for his own members?) he isn't against incomes policy.

List

Most revealing of all is his attitude to the blacklist, which is of major importance to trade unionists in the industry. He believes that Section 11 of the Employment Protection Act can break the blacklist. After 17 years at George Smith's elbow, Les Wood seems to have learnt all the wrong lessons. *Section 11 is solely for trade unionists who have employment. But if you're blacklisted, you can't get a job in the first place.*

The Working Rule Agreement in the building industry quite clearly states (Rule 13) 'There shall be no victimisation, boycotting or blacklisting by any of the parties to this agreement'. Although regional committees have sometimes attempted to fight the blacklist, the national leadership of UCATT and TGWU have never made the employers honour this agreement. It looks as if Wood will be following



With low basic wages and poor organisation, abuses like the 'Lump' flourish in the building industry.

If the vote had been put in a straightforward way, there is no doubt that the members would have supported the delegate conference. But as Smith told *Construction News*, 'The EC would carefully choose its wording on the ballot to prevent a further defeat of the union's ruling body'.

At that time workers in the industry were due for a £6-a-week increase. Voting took place from 21st June to 5th July, and the increase was payable from 28th June.

The EC did indeed 'carefully choose its wording', making it appear that if the members voted against the EC recommendation they would not get their £6. Even the employers pointed out that they could not stop the rise, let alone pick out UCATT members from their workforce and stop their money. Unhappily, the trick worked for Smith, and the EC won by a narrow margin.

During his seventeen years as assistant to George Smith, Les Wood must have been aware of, or himself helped to engineer, dozens of examples of trickery and undemocratic actions against the membership of UCATT. He was always the obedient yes-man.

During his reign as general secretary, Smith constantly attacked 'militants' in the

custom and practice. The blacklists have nothing to fear from the 'landslide victory of the Broad Left'.

The CP is all set to continue its behaviour with Jack Jones, George Smith and Hugh Scanlon: that is, to give completely uncritical support to union leaders who were allegedly elected on a left ticket — although to be fair to Wood, he has never made the least claim to be left.

What do the CP members in the building industry think? There is still a considerable number of principled militants in the industry who remain in the CP.

Since the *Building Workers' Charter* was stopped by King Street because of its attacks on George Smith and Jack Jones, only the *Building Charter* paper exists to put forward a socialist view for the building industry. It first appeared in October 1976, and issue No.12 will shortly be out.

Although differences of opinion have been considerable in the past, every effort should be made to work with CP militants in the industry who are prepared to reject the grovelling antics of the *Morning Star*.

★ ★ *Building Worker* can be obtained from 17B Studholme Road, London SE15.

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WHY NOT A GENERAL STRIKE?

Comrades,
Can you explain please, why Workers' Action does not call for or adopt the slogan 'General Strike' in the present period? Surely what is needed at the moment is a call for action which brings together all those scattered elements of the working class in struggle or about to enter struggles, around unifying slogans like the cost-of-living indexation and the 35-hour week.

While personally I am unclear on the question it is something which is being discussed on the left and one organisation [the Spartacist League] has already raised it.

Could it point the way out of the present sectional morass, unlike the repetitive [but necessary] basic calls for solidarity which do not tend to lift the struggle out of the realm of militant trade unionism.

Your views on these questions would, I'm sure, be appreciated by many of your readers.

JOHN CUNNINGHAM
Sheffield

REPLY: In our view a general strike is unfortunately far beyond the possibilities of the present situation.

There has been a tremendous revival of industrial militancy. Politically, it opens great opportunities for revolutionaries to get a hearing among

workers angry at Labour's policies. But on the whole the struggle has been focused round sectional wage demands rather than generalised class demands.

The council workers and the health workers have been protesting against their exceptionally low pay; so did the bakers. The Ford workers demanded a slice out of the company's huge profits.

The demand for a sliding scale of wages (automatic cost of living increases) gets a sympathetic hearing in the labour movement. But none of the big strikes have yet fought for this demand. And the shorter work-week demand is still the first part of most claims to be dumped in negotiations.

There are tens of thousands of workers involved in the current and recent struggles who see matters in a more political and class-conscious way; and we have to link up with them through such means as support committees. But there is neither the general pre-revolutionary social upheaval, nor the sharp issue focusing the militancy of the working class as an entire class, which could lead to a general strike.

A general strike call at the present time would just be empty militant words, diverting attention from what is actually possible and necessary.

Canley: it could be another set-up job

THREE hundred and fifty workers at the Standard Triumph plant at Canley, Coventry, have been on strike since Monday 26th February. The plant, part of British Leyland, now produces the TR7 which was transferred from the closed down Speke No.2 plant.

Workers at Canley fear they could be next in line for closure. On Monday 5th March DAVE SPENCER talked to pickets outside the plant about how the strike started and their feelings about the plant.

'The ones who came out are machinists. We came out to support 32 of us who refused to be transferred from the engine shops to the TR7 assembly line. The company had told them to transfer, just like that, although there is a plant agreement for union consent before anyone can be transferred.'

'I can't understand it. A few weeks ago they had 14 blokes off the track for a week for re-training as machinists. Now they want the machinists back on the assembly line.'

So far, 3,000 are laid off and supplies of parts and fuel have run out. 'We've had a lot of cooperation from the lorry drivers. Even the milk vans for the canteen have turned back.'

'Then the company threatened to sack all of us if we didn't go back to work today. Apparently there was a 'peace formula' worked out by the unions and local management on Saturday when a telephone call came from Head Office — if not from Edwardes, then from somebody near him — making the sacking threat.'

'It could be another Speke set-up. They're try-

ing to shut the place down, it's a shambles. Even the gaffers are worried about the future and the union officials, as usual, have come in too late. Nobody has got a good word to say for Eddie McGarry (the TGWU Convenor and vice-chairman of the Leyland Shop Stewards combine) and even Health and Safety blokes are in the management's pocket. Nobody seems to listen to the shop floor.'

'This bloke Edwardes comes from South Africa and he's trying to treat us like they treat the blacks there. That's the way things are going in this country — it seems like anyone coming out on strike is going to be shot. Even last week a labourer who brought out some scrap wood to us was sacked.'

Another picket explained the background to the dispute: 'The place is a shambles, even the supervisors don't know what's going on. I started at Standard when I finished school, and I had a good job. My mates thought I was rolling in it. Now I've got a job to make ends meet. The blokes can't wait to get out.'

'You want to go in there, you'd laugh your duck off. We stand around at nights for ten hours doing nothing. You smoke forty fags, can't get to sleep in the morning, and then they wonder why you're ill all the time.'

'There's not enough bits, there's TR7s going down the line with no steering columns and no bumpers. They bring the blokes in on overtime at the weekend to put on the missing bits, and then there's not enough left for the blokes working during the week.'

'On my job there are metric bolts but no metric spanners. They expect you to be the bionic man — screwing them up with your fingers. Last week one foreman sent a set of engines through without any gaskets.'

'They keep on making up foremen. Now there's one to every ten of us. The gaffers take advantage, their cars are always in the yard to be mended. The supervisors bring a few labourers in at the weekend just to get themselves the overtime.'

'Edwardes came here the other week to have a look round and the gaffers brought in two lots of contractors to do the place up — there were sparks flying off their paintbrushes.'

'Normally there are four labourers in No.10 shop. There were 200 the day before Edwardes came, putting down white lines, cleaning lightbulbs, the lot. They reckon it cost £10,000.'

'At the same time the rest of us are up to our knees in shit, you can never get a labourer there normally.'

'We talked about BL's future. I reckon the Labour government's the best Tory government we've ever had. On the other hand if Maggie Thatcher got in you can say goodbye to British Leyland altogether. There's not much else but Labour. But the fact of the matter is that no one listens to the shop floor workers.'

'We've had the TV and the papers down here and they never print the truth. The journalists in Coventry were on strike themselves last week and they've had to admit no-one listens to them either when they're on strike...'

'Things need to be a lot different.'

LP says: sack NF member

AN ASIAN shopkeeper in Manchester was fined £50 for being in breach of the Shops Act, in a prosecution brought by Manchester Council. The official who brought the shopkeeper to court was one Anthony D. Jones, local organiser for Manchester National Front.

Manchester City Labour Party voted 24-20 that Jones be sacked, but this is not binding on the city councillors. And 'Council workers Against the Nazis' in Nalگو are trying to have Jones expelled from the union.

In the Moss Side by-election Jones was election agent for the fascists. He has also stood himself as NF parliamentary candidate for Ashton.

As long as Jones is employed by the City Council and a member of Nalگو he will have full authority to visit and inspect premises owned by minority groups, familiarise himself with their layout ... and continue to deny in letters to the local press that NF members carry out attacks on Jewish and black property.



Jones on a day out

Chile conference must back workplace militants

DELEGATES to the forthcoming Trade Union conference on Chile (24th March at Unity House, Euston Road, London NW1) should note the absence from the agenda of the international campaign on the disappearance of 1,500 prisoners since 1973.

The Pinochet junta is making a big effort on human rights to placate world opinion. That's what they say. But only last November, 50km from Santiago, 25 corpses were found in an abandoned mine.

The families of disappeared prisoners staged hunger strikes last year to publicise the disappearances and the torturing of their relatives by the CNDI (formerly the DINA).

The families call for the adoption of disappeared prisoners by trade unionists at their workplaces in Britain.

Many of the struggles taking place now in Chile are being organised by rank and file workplace committees. Militants from MAPU, MIR and the Socialist Party are active in these committees but they are not, it is claimed, actively supported by the Chilean CP.

Delegates to the conference should raise the possibility of support for these committees and their activities.

JOHN DOUGLAS

LETTERS

AN UNCRITICAL BOOST FOR THE FAKE LEFT?

Comrades,

I was surprised at the failure of Workers' Action to make any criticism of the statement by Norman Atkinson and Ted Knight published in last week's issue (135).

Firstly, it is completely wrong to claim the government is carrying out anti-working class policies because it 'yielded to enormous pressure by big business, international finance etc'. The Government intended to carry out such policies from the beginning and never had any intention of implementing the promises of the election manifesto.

Secondly, the statement talks about 'the only solution to Britain's economic difficulties'. As revolutionary socialists we are not concerned with solving the problems of British capitalism, but with razing the system to the ground; the policies we fight for (higher wages, shorter hours etc) will worsen the condition of British capitalism, not solve its 'difficulties' (which stem from the fact that it cannot exploit workers as well as other capitalist economies can).

Thirdly, the statement says it is vital to answer the attacks being made 'by the press and by our traditional opponents in the Tory Party', but fails to point out the need to answer the attacks being made by other traditional enemies of the working class: the Labour Government, the trade union bureaucracy, and MPs like Atkinson himself, who may make vaguely left-wing statements but do not back them up with action.

It is not the job of Workers' Action to give uncritical platforms to fake left-wingers and thereby help perpetuate the illusions which workers have in them. (The Militant tendency can do this perfectly well by itself.) It is our job to expose them as the fakes and hypocrites they in fact are.

STAN CROOKE
Leicester

REPLY: To describe maladroit tactics, Lenin and Trotsky frequently used the image of a man giving cheery greetings at a funeral and singing dirges at a wedding. Stan Crooke's letter is rather like that.

He seems to have read the appeal by Atkinson, Knight and Race with his mind mainly focused on finding sentences which can serve as texts for a lecture on the wrongness of reformist ideology. It's no surprise that he finds them: Norman Atkinson is hardly likely to sign a revolutionary appeal.

Lectures on the wrongness of reformist ideology are useful and essential. Serious readers of Workers' Action will have seen plenty of articles which explain clearly enough why we don't share the politics expressed in the passages comrade Crooke quotes from the Atkinson/Race/Knight appeal.

But a real struggle is worth ten lectures. And that was what the appeal was actually about. It was very important in launching a support committee which has enabled Workers' Action supporters and other socialists in Haringey to mobilise a lot of active backing for the low-pay strike.

We were involved in getting Atkinson, Knight and Race to put out that appeal. We approached them to back the support committee knowing that their politics are not ours. To take their support for our initiative as the signal for a special attack on their general politics — which are the same as they ever were — would really be to condemn ourselves as sectarians, more interested in blue-pencilling texts than in the real working class struggle.

It's an upside-down view of the world to suppose that the point of the appeal was that Workers' Action was lending our prestige to a statement by Atkinson, Knight and Race of their political views. On the contrary: Atkinson, Knight and Race were putting their prestige behind a practical initiative from us and other left wingers in Haringey.

Revolutionary politics is not just about expounding our principled criticisms of reformism. It is also about developing class struggle activity in the labour movement as it really exists, proving our ideas in action, without being so nervous that we have to stop every five minutes to assure censorious onlookers that we are not being tainted with reformism.

JOURNALISTS WIN STRIKE TO DEFEND JOBS

THIRTY four journalists working for the Stratford Express group of newspapers in East London have won their seven-week strike in defence of jobs.

The paper's staff, all members of the National Union of Journalists, walked out on official strike on January 12th after management had refused to implement a national pay award unless seven journalists' jobs were lost. A week later management gave in on the seven jobs, only to turn round and announce their intention to close the Thurrock Express, one of the four papers in the group.

Workers' Action spoke to AIDAN WHITE, member of the NUJ National Executive and one of the journalists involved, about the progress of the strike.

Every Tuesday and Wednesday we went up to Milton Keynes to picket the print works where the management's scab editions, consisting solely of adverts, were being printed. Then we

came back down to London and picketed the Leytonstone distribution depot in the evenings.

At Leytonstone there were five arrests, three in the last week of the dispute. The police made a completely unprovoked attack between half past midnight and 1am, after the picketing had finished.

We produced one copy of our own newspaper during the dispute — the East End News.

We had a fantastic response — we produced 800 copies and as far as I know they were all sold. We covered ourselves financially within a few days.

We also tried to link up with the council workers' strike.

We got as far as holding a formal meeting between ourselves, the local council workers' strike committee, and local union officials from the TGWU and NUPE. This meeting was held primarily to see if we could launch a joint strike paper. Unfortunately, because of quite understandable suspicions (we do, after all, work for the bourgeois press) the council workers held back from

cooperation until we had produced a pilot issue of our paper.

We finally reached a settlement last Thursday [1st]. We had demanded a manning level of 36, that the Thurrock paper should be produced in tandem with its sister paper the Romford Express, and that the future of the Romford Express should be guaranteed. [Management had been making noises about converting the Romford Express into a free newspaper.]

What we got was a manning level of 35, a guarantee that Thurrock news will be included in a new Romford paper which will circulate in the Thurrock area and, most importantly, guarantees on the future of the Romford Express which will include important concessions on the question of union organisation in the editorial departments of free newspapers.

As a result of our victory Pat O'Connor, editor of the newspaper group, has resigned.

Steel: Sirs starts a fake fight

STEELWORKERS' pay talks began in January. Apart from an initial offer of 5% raised to 8%, the talks have produced nothing but the dropping by the ISTC leaders of the demand for a 35-hour week. They are now trying to cover their tracks with some militant talk about the closure of the BSC Bilston plant. The closure of the West Midlands plant would 'break forever the trust and sincerity that still exists' between the ISTC leaders and the BSC bosses, writes union boss Bill Sirs in a letter to BSC. 'I cannot see my Executive accepting... knowing full well that your step by step process... is the domino theory in which one works after another will ultimately

fall'. It's about time Sirs noticed: so far, he has passively stood by while 40,000 jobs have been axed in the past three years. The ISTC leaders don't want to fight on wages, but they aren't accept the 8% offer. Instead Sirs has asked for arbitration, and is trying to make a show of opposition to the planned Bilston and Corby closures, pinning his hopes on the closures being deferred until the wages issue blows over. If BSC refuse to back down from the announcement expected on March 8th of the closure of steel-making at Bilston, and of Corby later, what will happen?

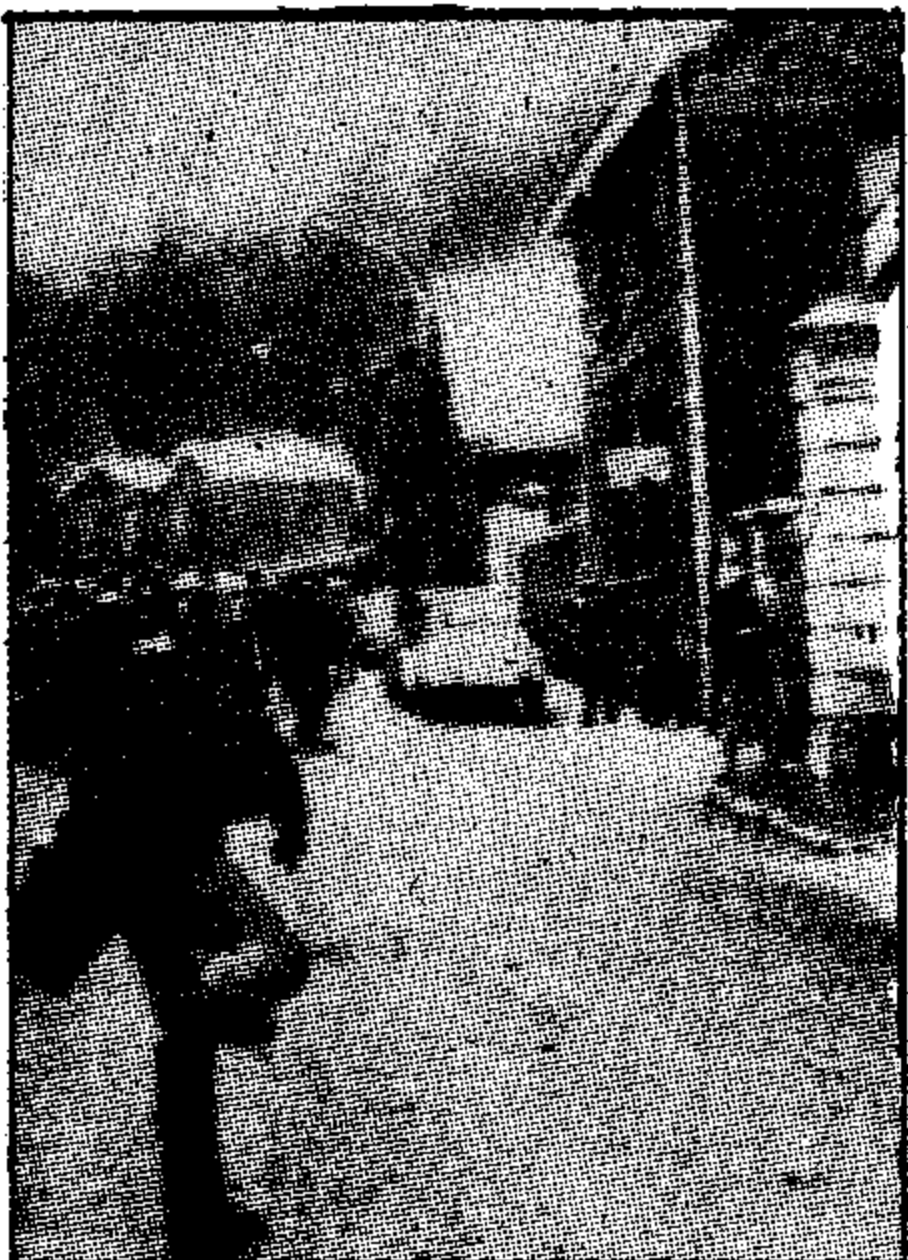
Steelworkers will have to start a real fight-back against closures in British Steel. If BSC can get Sirs to show some bony knuckles under his velvet gloves, then steel workers must be prepared to do the same — but for real! A campaign must now be started to organise the rank and file around the 35-hour demand and to defend all steel jobs. Without that, there may be a short, un-coordinated confrontation, organised to least effect by the ISTC leaders. It probably won't even produce a temporary deferment of one or two plants.

PETE RADCLIFF



A new blind alley for the jobs fight: price rises

SENIOR stewards at the Sheffield steel group of Dunford Elliott were recently summoned to a meeting with management to discuss the bad situation in the steel industry... and to hear a strange proposition. The Dunford Elliott group, taken over by the Lorrho empire about two years ago,



French steelworkers protest against job cuts by storming their town hall... while in Britain PRICE RISES are put forward as the answer!

has been making heavy losses recently, and management had come up with a plan which went something like this: management and union would form a joint committee to lobby MPs (stewards to lobby Labour MPs and management to lobby Conservative MPs). And this was to be a lobby with a difference. It would press for the British Steel Corporation to raise its prices by 20%! There is a rather bizarre logic to this. Dunford Elliott steel costs some 20% more than the nationalised BSC's steel, so if BSC was to put up their prices then the group has a chance of competing on an equal footing! Obviously the whole scheme is crazy, quite apart from being a complete diversion for the workers. The stewards clearly thought so and showed it by promptly walking out of the meeting. Even the right wing leadership of the major plant in the group, Dunford Hadfield, couldn't stomach this one and walked out with the more militant Brown Bayley stewards.

JOHN CUNNINGHAM

Dunlop: international bosses, an international fightback



French Dunlop workers' convenor Michel Faye told a mass meeting at the Dunlop Speke (Merseyside) plant on February 22nd that the French workers would give full backing to Speke's fight against job cuts. The fight has also won support from international trade union organisations and from Dunlop/Pirelli workers in Italy and Germany. Demonstrations are to be held by European Dunlop/Pirelli workers on March 7th, the same day that British Dunlop workers strike against the loss of 2,400 jobs in tyre manufacture at Speke and 700 at Inchinnan and

Birmingham. West German Dunlop/Pirelli workers also face big job cuts, amounting to 20% of the workers in three plants. The Dunlop/Pirelli combine pioneered international trade union action in June 1972, with a joint one-day strike in Italy and Britain. And continental Dunlop/Pirelli plants, together with Inchinnan and Birmingham, have pledged to accept no transfers of work from Speke. The 90 days' notice of the Speke sackings is due to expire on April 18th.

Photo: Newline

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, Rising Free, 182 Upper St, London N1, to arrive by Friday for inclusion in the following week's paper.

Thursday 8 March. Haringey Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory meeting: 'The Trade Unions and Wage Control'. Speakers: Andrew Hornung (Workers' Action EB) and Norman Jacobs (CPSA National Exec., in personal capacity). 7.30pm, Tottenham Community Project, 628 High Rd, N17.

Friday 9 March. Spartacist League public meeting: 'Reforge the Fourth International'. Speaker: James Robertson, International Executive Committee, international Spartacist tendency. 7.30pm at Con-

way Hall, Red Lion Sq. (Holborn tube).

Saturday 10 March. SCLV social, from 8pm at Caxton House, St Johns Way, London N19. Tickets £1.

Monday 12 March. Debate: 'Why vote Labour?'. Speakers: Keith Veness (SCLV), Les Burt (CP), and Roger Cox (SWP). 7.30pm, Kent Room, Anson Hall, Anson Rd/Chichele Rd, NW2.

Monday 12 March. Hackney SCLV meeting: 'What Labour needs to do now: The Low Pay revolt'. Speakers: Richard Shield (Hackney NUPE), Cllr John Sweeney, Mike Ward. 7.30pm, Hackney Labour and Trades Union Hall, 96 Dalston Lane, E8.

Monday 12 March. 'Immigration Controls: Labour's answer?' 7.30pm, Small Hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1. Speakers: Ken Livingstone and a speaker from the JCWI. Organised by Campaign Against the Immigration Laws.

Friday 16 March. 'Repression in the North of Ireland'. South London UTOM meeting with speaker from the Belfast

branch of the Trade Union Campaign Against Repression. 7.30pm at Leander Hall, off Tanners Hill, Deptford, London SE8.

Thursday 22 March. Norwood Labour Party public meeting: 'Support the public service workers'. Speakers: Ted Knight (Lambeth Council), Chris Sutton (NUPE and Secretary of Lambeth TC), and Stuart Holland (PPC Vauxhall). 7.45pm, Lambeth Town Hall.

Friday-Sunday 23-25 March. Socialist feminist national conference, at City University, London. Registration: 39 Parkholme Rd, E8.

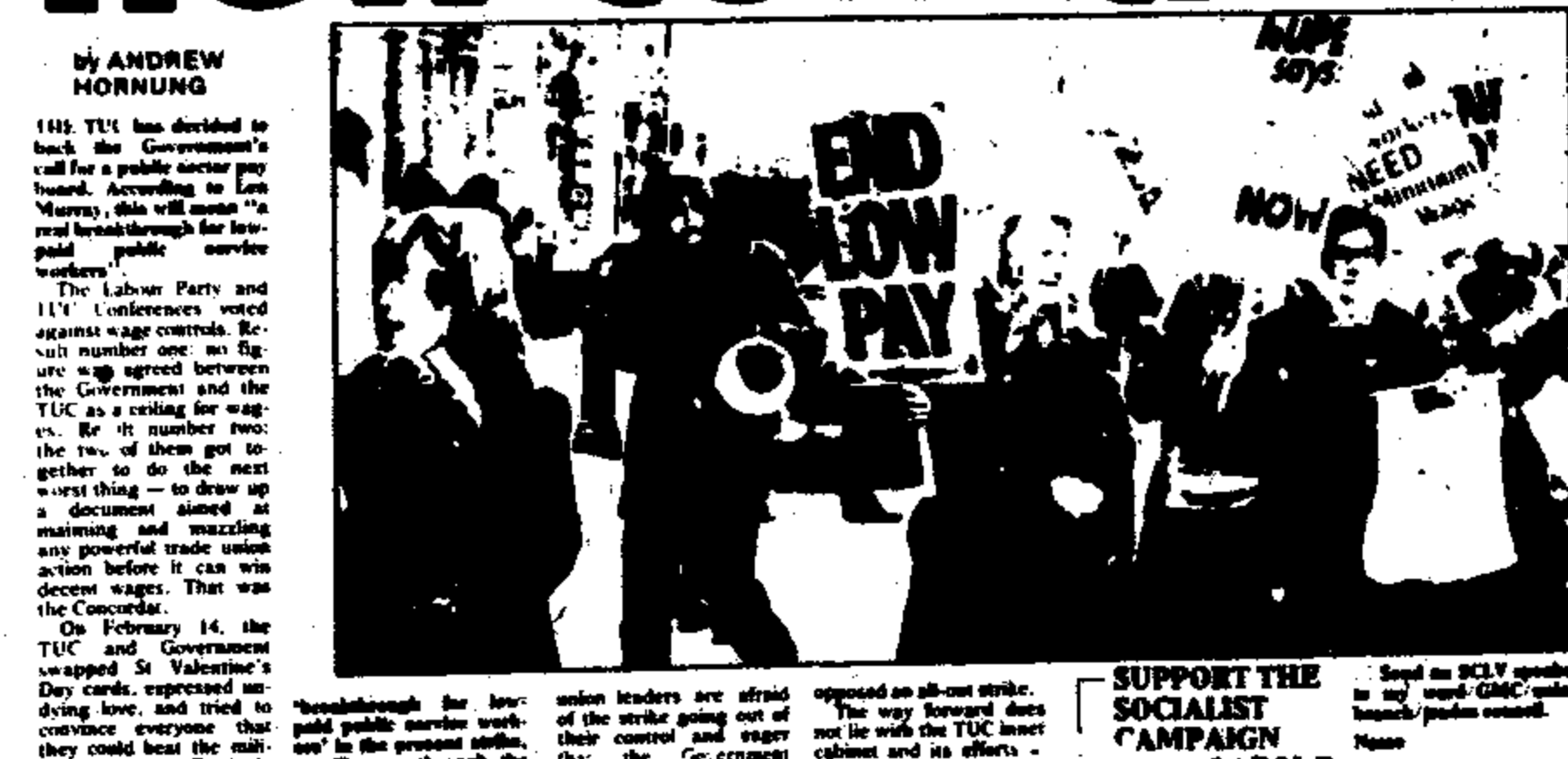
Saturday 31 March. Committee against Repression in Iran conference. 11am at University College, Gower St, London WC1. Credentials for labour movement delegates and observers from CARI, Box 4, Rising Free, 182 Upper St, London N1.

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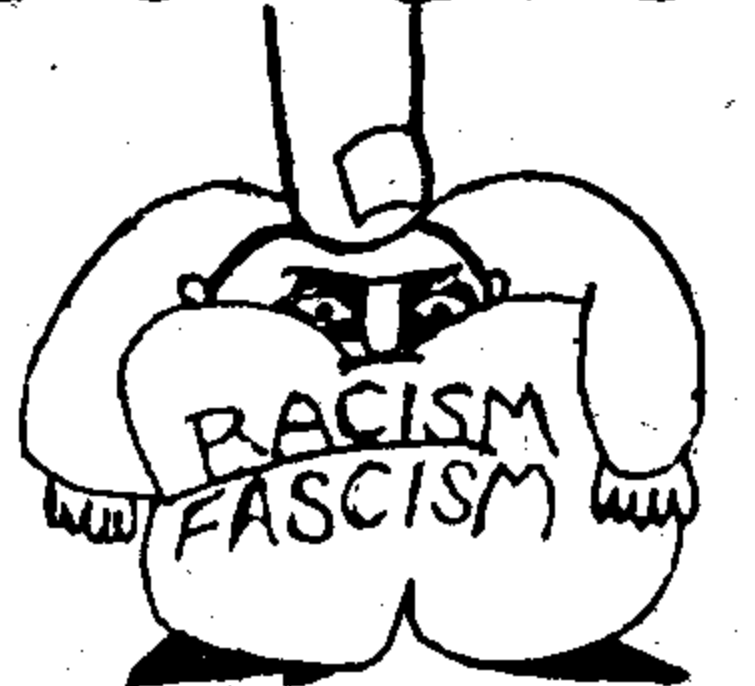
Paper of the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory

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