

# International VIEWPOINT

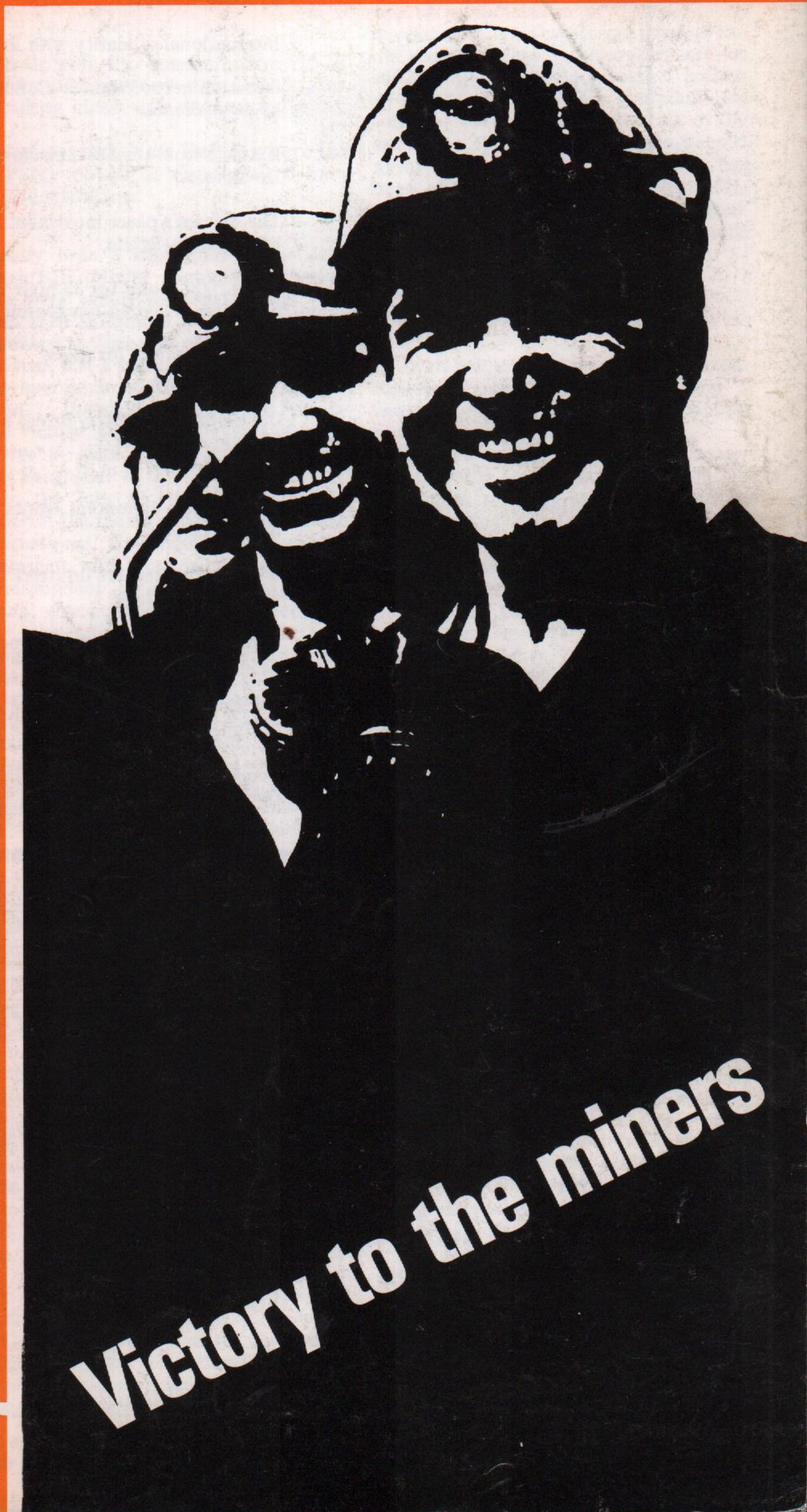
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## Miners strike: turning point in British politics

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# International Viewpoint

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## Descent into communalism

The Hindu communalist pogroms that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi have confirmed the breakdown of bourgeois-democratic Pan-Indian nationalism and the turn of the ruling classes to communalism as the means for maintaining their control.

The worst outrages came precisely in the capital, New Delhi, where the government and the ruling Congress(I) Party could be expected to have the strongest instruments for controlling the situation.

Gerry FOLEY

In an article in the February 27 issue of *International Viewpoint*, M. Navid pointed out that the Congress (I) Party was trying to rebuild its electoral base on a foundation of Hindu communalism.

Navid explained that the Congress Party historically depended for its majorities on the Hindi-speaking heartland but that its vote had been falling steadily in this region since 1967. Thus, in the 1980 general election, Indira Gandhi's party got only 31% of the vote in the Hindi area.

The Congress (I) then became dependent on a big majority in the "upper South," the northern tier of states beginning at the waist of the subcontinent, where the main languages are non-Indo-European, Dravidian. But in the Dravidian areas in general there is a long-term historical trend of growing alienation from North Indian rule. By 1980 ethnic nationalist parties were already dominant in the more southern Dravidian-speaking states.

### *Congress becomes a Hindu party*

In the subsequent state elections in the two states of the "upper South," Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the Congress (I) Party lost badly, in the first case at the hands of an ethnic nationalist party. Furthermore, Navid noted, "Congress (I) can no longer rely on the en bloc support of the Scheduled Castes and the Muslims. Only the Scheduled Tribes continue to back Mrs Gandhi in their overwhelming numbers."

So, "there are now signs of a possible shift in her [Indira Gandhi's] basic electoral strategy from the reliance on the core minorities to wooing the Hindu caste vote...."

"The Delhi municipal and metropolitan council elections in February 1983 were the first indication of a new stirring in the wind. Delhi, a Union territory with a very high proportion of urban traders and petty bourgeoisie, has tradi-

tionally been a stronghold of the Jana Sangh/BJP [Hindu communalist party] who were widely expected to win. Instead they suffered a serious and surprising defeat at the hands of the Congress (I) although just a month before Mrs Gandhi had been dramatically defeated in the south. ...the main reason for this remarkable victory was a sizeable shift of petty bourgeois caste Hindu votes from the Jana Sangh/BJP to the Congress (I)."

In the July 16 *IV*, Vibhuti Patel, a leader of the Indian section of the Fourth International, the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, said in an interview with our correspondent in connection with the spring communalist riots in Bombay:

"...the minorities have lost faith in Congress, because of the increasing experiences — for all of these groups — of social discrimination, riots and growing marginalisation from the Indian mainstream. Now Congress wants to have a different image for capturing votes. That is why it is supporting Hindu revivalist organisations, and that is also why they talk less about secularism. Previously Congress used to talk a lot about secularism. But now it keeps liaison with many rightist forces."

Patel mentioned a concrete basis for communalism in Bombay:

"The construction industry has a big mafia, it also has political patronage from Congress(I) and the latest series of frauds that created a stir in Indian politics were all related to the construction industry, because they are one of the main suppliers of funds to Congress. These business tycoons, these giants in the construction industry, maintain systematic political operations, they have strong connections with the underground, and they are in touch with Shiv Sena [Hindu communalist para-militaries]. They have used this opportunity to get this land, by calling on hooligans from outside, who are very good in butchering, who are very confident butchers."

One of the features of the Congress in decline is a systematic attempt to organize shock troops of declassé youth. This task was assumed by Sanjay, Mrs Gandhi's

first crown prince, during the suspension of the constitution in the mid-1970s. After Sanjay's death, it was taken over by the new heir apparent, now premier, Rajiv Gandhi.

The first convention of the National Students Union of India, the youth wing of the Congress (I), in Nagpur in mid-September led to rampages that terrorized the town and the access routes. (*India Today*, October 15, 1984.)

The fundamental reason for the new rise of communalism is that economic development is active enough to upset the old social relations in the country but not sufficiently dynamic to create a growth of an all-Indian economy that could dissolve the old communal divisions. At the same time, the Indian bourgeoisie, backed up by a powerful central government, has been able to break every major strike since 1974. Thus, the communal organizations appear as the main organizations for community solidarity.

### *Social tension and retrogression*

In an analysis of the new rise of communalism published in the October 1 issue of *IV*, the Indian section pointed out:

"...the changing dynamic of the society has provided certain sections, which are known as backward castes, to have upward mobility in the economic sphere for the last twenty years. Such backward castes fall into the intermediate level of caste structure. These intermediate castes ...are vying for political and cultural status commensurate with their upward economic mobility. Their aspiration is to reach the highest stage within the caste system and they express this by aggressively distinguishing themselves from other sections of the same, as well as other, religions. These feelings, coupled with economic and political factors, are bound to give rise to caste and communal riots."

The document also pointed out the government's and the Congress' interest in stoking the communalist fires.

"Up to the 1960s, so-called Congress socialism was the common ideology which sought to bind the majority of the masses to the ruling class. But once the initial economic boom was over, the conditions of the masses had started to decline, so their faith in the government diminished and this ideology lost its meaning....communalism is an ideology which can be stirred up on a national level amongst a majority of the people, diverting their attention from the real issues and securing the interests of the ruling classes. This is the reason why the ruling party is coming out more and more openly with its communalist bias."

The recent events show that communalism is certainly a two-edged sword, but it appears to be one that a bourgeoisie that cannot achieve dynamic economic development is nonetheless obliged to grasp. The subcontinent thus seems to have entered into a period of very violent and complex social conflicts. ■

## Miners change the face of British politics

As 140,000 British miners enter the eighth month of their strike it is becoming increasingly clear that this is the most important workers' action in Britain since the general strike of 1926.

By its very duration, the strike has dealt a significant blow to the Conservative government. Its defeat or victory will determine whether Thatcher will be able to carry through measures which threaten the very organisational independence of the labour movement in Britain.

As such the miners' action has not only clarified the main trends in British politics, but also has resolved in great part many of the disputes on the British left on the way forward for the workers movement.

For British revolutionary Marxists it has confirmed the necessity of allying themselves as closely as possible with the current in the trade unions which looks for leadership to Arthur Scargill, the president of the miners' union, and to Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone, the most energetic supporters of the miners' dispute in the Labour Party.

Steve ROBERTS

At the time of writing the strike is at its most important point since it started on March 12 this year. The strike began at the most unfavourable part of the year for the miners from the point of view of coal consumption. It was provoked by the action of the National Coal Board (the management of the nationalised industry), which closed the Cortonwood pit in South Yorkshire without consultation with the National Union of Mineworkers. (1)

The shut-down was a foretaste of a closure programme put forward by the NCB that would close twenty pits and mean the loss of 20,000 jobs in the next year. From the beginning of the dispute the miners' union has insisted that the pit

TUC has given official, but inactive, support (DR)

closure programme be withdrawn and that a settlement be drawn up on the basis of the 'Plan for Coal', a joint strategy agreed by the NCB and the NUM after the successful miners' strike of 1974.

That has remained the negotiating stance of the union in a series of talks sponsored by the government industrial conciliation service ACAS since September.

The miners' position has undoubtedly improved since the beginning of the strike. Starting from a position of relative isolation within the labour movement, the NUM has gained successively support for their case from the Trades Union Congress, which represents 10 million British trade unionists, and from the Labour Party congress. The strike is now beginning to bite significantly into industrial

production. The cost of the strike to the government, including that of importing oil to burn in power stations instead of coal, now exceeds the £2 billion mark, more than was spent on the Malvinas war.

Power cuts are now probable before the end of the year. Within government circles, most believe that once the first power cut takes place that the miners will have won.

This explains government support for court action fining the NUM £200,000 and the freezing of its entire funds because of the union's refusal to accept that the strike was illegal as ruled by several high court judges.

The court action is the most determined bid by the government to end the strike on its terms. Previously, Thatcher had hoped that the 'back to work' movement sponsored by the press, paid for by the government and enforced by the police would lead to a majority of miners breaking the strike. The movement turned out to be a fiasco, however, with only a tiny number of miners responding.

The iron contradiction for Thatcher is that the longer the strike continues with the resultant material hardships and suffering endured by the miners' families — two miners killed on the picket lines, 250 miners seriously injured, 7,100 miners arrested by the police — the more determined miners became not to return to work with anything less than a victory.

This was confirmed by an opinion poll amongst miners taken by the right-wing *Sunday Express* newspaper on October 1 designed to embarrass the Labour Party conference. The result was the opposite. Of the miners questioned 68 per cent declared themselves in favour of the strike.

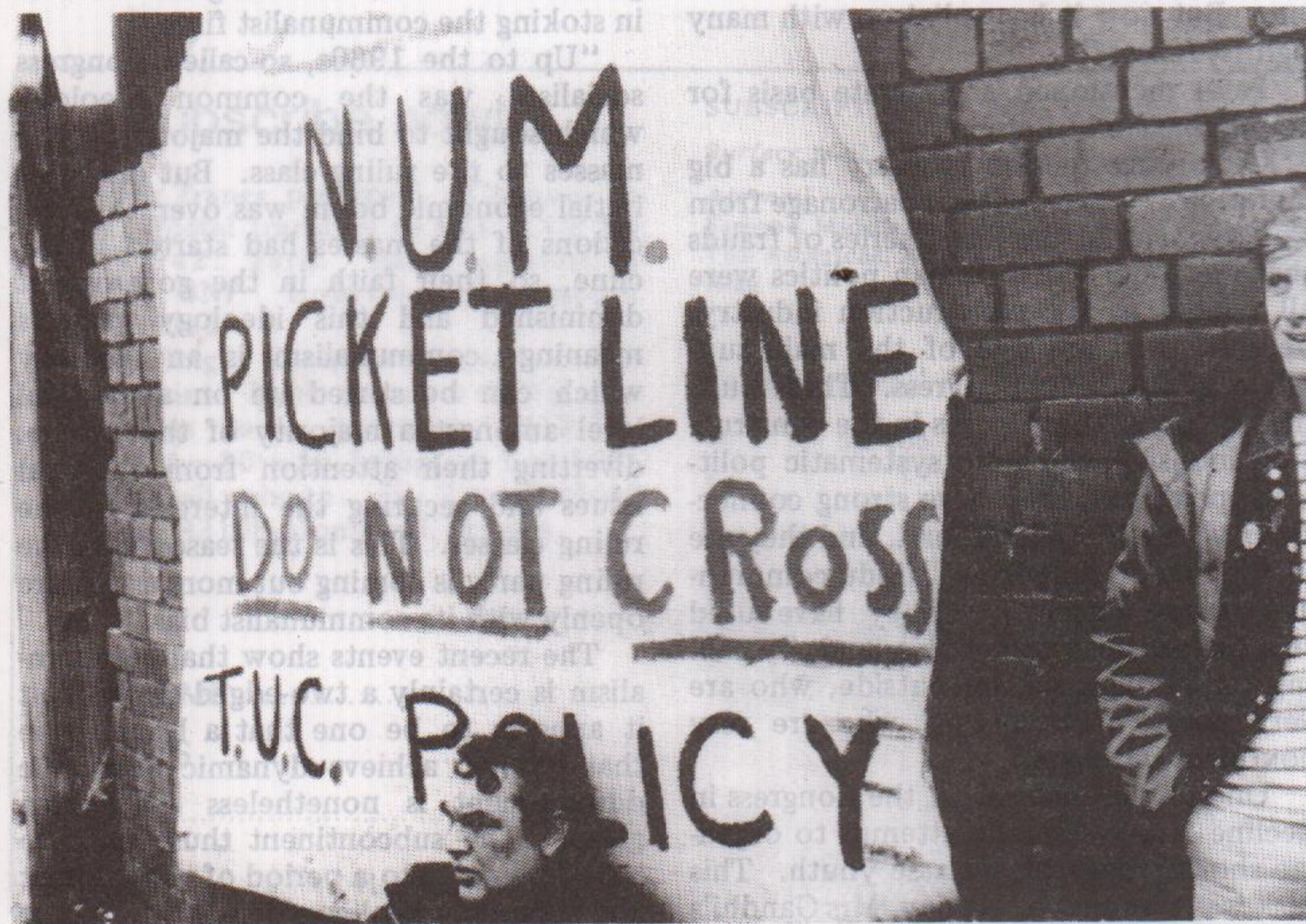
The government rightly fears that if the miners are even *seen* as being successful in the objectives of their strike, it will provoke and encourage a more general wave of militancy from the British working class.

This year strike days will exceed those of 1979, that of the 'winter crisis' strike movement which immediately preceded Thatcher's election to office. The eventual total will probably amount to the largest number of strike days since 1926 — the year of the 9 day general strike called in support of the miners.

Already this year there have been two national dockers' strikes, both called on issues related to the miners' strike, but also in defence of their own jobs. This has been accompanied by strikes among railworkers, carworkers in Vauxhall and British Leyland, teachers and other sectors.

This is in stark contrast to the five years in which Thatcher has been in office. Strike days declined sharply in the years from 1980 to 1983. (2) However, the current phase of mass struggle does not mark an aberration.

1. See *International Viewpoint* 50, April 9, 1984.  
2. See IV, No 47, February 27, 1984.



Rather Thatcher has precisely seen the previous five years of office as preparation for a fundamental confrontation with the organised strength of the British trade-union movement. Her preparations for the strike were the result of ten years reflection by the Tory party since their defeat at the hands of the miners in 1974, a defeat which brought down the Conservative government under Edward Heath. The miners' strike represents this fundamental confrontation. It is a test of the underlying relation of class forces in British society.

It is for this reason that the British establishment is so disquieted by Thatcher's performance in confronting the miners and in its overall economic policy. It is not only figures like the Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of the Church of England, who have condemned the Thatcher government for breeding 'discord and violence'. Within Thatcher's own party, senior figures like Heath and the ex-foreign minister Sir Francis Pym, have called for a reversal in policy, and for the government to take radical measures to reduce unemployment (now standing at an all-time record of almost 13 per cent).

The bomb explosion on October 12 at their Brighton conference did not make a significant difference to this tide of criticism. In fact there was further criticism of Thatcher's speech the next day when she implicitly included both the miners and the Provisional IRA (who claimed responsibility for the bomb) as part of the 'irrational forces' which threatened the fabric of British society.

In fact the Tories have anticipated ruling class unease at the socially explosive consequences of their policies. The Brighton conference of the party was the occasion for a widely signalled alteration in policy changing the priority of 'beating inflation' to 'beating unemployment'.

This change in the presentation of the government's policies marks both an attempt to steer the party towards a new electoral victory in the next elections in 1988, and the determination of the government to hold down wage increases (now running at 9.5 per cent in industry, far above the inflation rate of 5 per cent).

Finance minister Nigel Lawson came back from a trip to the USA praising the type of wage contracts now being concluded in American industry, in a signal that 'beating unemployment' will mean holding down wage costs.

But this 'change of direction' by the Tories is not the only measure advocated by ruling class circles to avoid any possibility of a Labour victory in a future general election. The Social Democratic Party, led by the ex-Labour foreign secretary, David Owen, was created precisely to take sufficient Labour votes to make sure that the Labour Party would not be able to take power again without first purging itself of its strong left wing.

The split of leading right wingers from the Labour Party in 1980 was at first dismissed by the left of the labour movement as a 'bubble that would burst' —



Boy of 13 arrested by riot police in mining village (DR)

similar in type to many other splinters from the Labour Party in the past.

However, in alliance with the small Liberal Party, the SDP succeeded in winning only 2 per cent less than the Labour Party in the 1983 general elections with 25 per cent of the vote.

While this marked probably the irreducible minimum electoral base of the Labour Party, the results of the 1983 election not only seemed to confirm the correctness of ruling class strategy in promoting the new party, but also suggested to leading figures of the left that the only way forward for the Labour Party to take governmental office again was in coalition with the Alliance.

The leading exponent of this view was Eric Hobsbawm, a leading labour historian, and a member of the Euro-communist wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain. This wing of the party, virtually abandoning the strife-ridden sect of which they are formally members, launched out with their journal *Marxism Today* to convince the left wing of the labour movement to abandon the 'adventurism' represented by the 'infantile' Bennite left and to adopt the 'Euro-socialist' road represented by the electorally successful Socialist Parties of France, Spain and Greece. They found their political vehicle in the Labour Party in the ex-Bennite Labour Coordinating Committee and a candidate to support for the Labour leadership in Neil Kinnock.

Hobsbawm warned against the idea of relying on industrial struggle to get rid of the Tories. Instead he projected Labour's task as winning over the 'middle ground' which he claimed had been abandoned by Labour in its swing to the left, and claimed by the SDP/Liberal Alliance. Labour had to rid itself of 'Bennite' influence and unite around a new leadership and swing to the right to supplant the Alliance. And, to the extent that this was not successful, it had to consider the possibility of an 'anti-Thatcher alliance' to regain governmental

power. This strategy has guided Kinnock's actions in power. However, the analysis was and is faulty.

Firstly, Hobsbawm and his cothinkers of the LCC precisely confused the downturn of the industrial struggle of the working class with the idea that the British labour movement had suffered a decisive reverse. Contrary to Hobsbawm's and Kinnock's view, a victory for the miners is the best chance for the labour movement to critically damage and eventually remove the Thatcher government. The SDP would also be casualties of a miners' victory since, from the beginning of the strike, Owen has called for the full force of the state to be used to smash the miners — criticising Thatcher from the right! The first test of the political impact of the miners' struggle and the struggle to defend local services through breaking the law came in the local and EEC elections in May and June of this year. As against the prediction of the right that the miners' strike was damaging Labour's electoral prospects, the party made sweeping gains in the big cities.

Secondly, while it is true that Labour had lost much of its traditional support amongst skilled workers to Thatcher in the 1979 election and then to Thatcher and the Alliance in the 1983 election, Hobsbawm chose to ignore the conditions under which these workers had originally broken from the Labour Party. These were the years of the Wilson and Callaghan governments of 1974-79 where, as a result of the 'social contract' incomes policy, these workers' real incomes sharply decreased, at a greater rate than the rest of the working class. It was incomes policy, the central policy of the right, not the policies of the left, that caused the rupture.

But above all, the Hobsbawm prescription rested on the idea that the Bennite left, after its heady years of success between 1979-82, was now irrelevant to the needs of the labour movement and was in irreversible decline.

This view was not limited to the right. Amongst the left, too, there was widespread pessimism as to the possibility of the Bennites reviving themselves after the debacle of Labour's vote in the 1983 general election. On the far left, organisations like the Socialist Workers Party wrote a plethora of articles on the 'fall of Tony Benn', thus retrospectively justifying their policy of sectarian abstention from the debates in the Labour Party in the preceding four years.

However, in 1984 the Labour left has witnessed a spectacular revival. The cause of this is not hard to discern. It lies with the miners' strike and the relation of the Labour left to the mass struggle of the working class.

The emergence of the Bennite left has been from its very beginning marked by its connection with the mass struggle. The first development of this current in the Labour Party was made manifest by the support which Benn gave to the work-in at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1972, in the face of the reluctance of the Wilson leadership of the Labour Party to associate itself fully with this struggle and with the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974.

The result of the left's struggle in this period was possibly the most radical manifesto produced by the party since the Second World War, approved by the party congress of 1973.

The second phase of the development of the Bennite current was based on a balance sheet of the collision between the Labour government and the public sector workers' strike of 1978-79. In their determination that there should be no return to the governments of Wilson and Callaghan, the left put forward a programme of institutional reform of the party, to make the parliamentary leadership accountable to the rank and file.

### NUM takes lead in left fight

In this, and in key policies like unilateral disarmament, renationalisation of industries denationalised, the 35-hour week and so on, the left was largely successful.

However, despite the fact that the trade-union bureaucracy was involved in the discussion, the six million rank and file trade unionists affiliated to the Labour Party were not.

This began to change with the struggle of Benn for the leadership of the party at the 1982 Labour Party congress. Support for the Bennite programme was organised in union after union.

While Benn just failed to win the deputy leadership of the party, his support inside the unions revealed a powerful minority current inside the unions themselves, who likewise were beginning to organise themselves to change their leadership.

For 10 years the leadership of the British trade-union movement, and particularly the Trades Union Congress, has been moving to the right. This shift

reached a culminating point at the 1983 TUC Congress where the policy of 'new realism' was proclaimed. (3) This policy essentially consisted of the trade unions breaking their policy of exclusive political representation by the Labour Party, entering into new types of contracts with the bosses (including 'one union-no strike' agreements in the hi-tech industries) and above all accepting the new framework that the Tory government was seeking to impose by its trade-union legislation. This congress capped off a period where the TUC leadership had been instrumental in selling out struggle after struggle, most notably the train drivers and the health workers.

The only serious and consistent opposition at a national level to this policy was Arthur Scargill who demonstratively refused to take a seat on the TUC's leadership bodies.

It was as a direct result of the miners' strike that the right-wing union leaderships suffered their most serious reverse. For the first six months the TUC did not offer any support. Indeed the NUM did not ask for it for fear that the TUC would use support given to exert leverage on the dispute to sell it out. They thus educated their own membership against such a betrayal and to rely on their own struggle.

However, the NUM organised a caucus of all those unions willing to give active support to their strike which included rail, transport and seafarers unions. Action by these unions resulted in a 100 per cent stoppage of the movement of coal by rail, two national docks' strikes and a halt of movement of coal by British ships. Nevertheless, in the power stations and the steelworks right-wing-led unions such as the electricians and the steelworkers not only refused support for their strike, but in the former case openly called for its defeat.

At the 1984 TUC Congress a major battle was expected between the left and right on the question of support for the strike. (4) The right wing had a majority in the conference as was shown by their decision to resume ongoing collaboration with the government and bosses in the tripartite National Economic Development Council from which the TUC had previously withdrawn. Under these conditions the NUM concluded a compromise resolution with the TUC leadership which, nevertheless, promised concrete solidarity action at the power stations. Scargill left the TUC correctly claiming a victory over the right and the necessity to turn the resolution into action.

At the Labour Party conference, in one of the most significant decisions ever taken by the party, full support was given to the miners, and contrary to the even-handed approach of Kinnock, delegates unequivocally condemned the massive police operation against the miners. (5)

However, the Labour Party conference also revealed that the NUM leadership, the most powerful industrial union and the recognised vanguard of the British

working class, was not only leading the labour movement in its battle with the government, but had also moved to become the partisan of some of the most advanced causes within the labour movement.

The NUM delegation present at the conference supported the successful resolutions on Ireland opposing the use of plastic bullets and other aspects of the government's repressive policy against the leadership of the Party. The miners joined forces with public sector unions in voting to defy the government's laws on local government. It likewise supported resolutions encouraging the formation of black caucuses and the greater involvement of women in the decision-making bodies of the party. On gay and lesbian rights, too, where a debate was denied, the NUM executive sent its greetings to a fringe meeting organised by activists.

### Nature and limits of Labour left

The evolution of the miners' union towards these policies has evidently been greatly accelerated by the development of the miners' wives movement, the close alliances made with the Greenham Common women, the championing of the cause of the inner cities by the NUM. (6)

Margaret Thatcher could be forgiven her error when she talked of striking miners and their supporters in the Labour Party constituting a 'revolutionary minority'.

However, it is an error. It is true that the forces constitute a minority within the labour movement today. Both the TUC and the Labour Party, despite giving support to the miners represented certain gains for the right wing in the field of general policy.

But what is the political character of the leadership given by Benn, Scargill and Livingstone? How does one explain the tension between the Labour Party led by Kinnock, on the one hand, and what the *Guardian* newspaper calls the 'newer, restless, impatient Labour Party, the Scargillite Labour Party'?

For some forces on the far left there is no doubt as to the answer to this question. The Socialist Workers Party started its coverage of the miners' strike with warnings of its imminent collapse. This was in part due to their analysis of the 'downturn' of the British class struggle which 'proved' that the miners' strike was an aberration from the general trend of the class struggle and would inevitably lead to speedy defeat. In addition, their belief that the bureaucracy would betray because of its social position as a mediating layer between the workers and bosses and the material privileges they accrue thereby, led them to predict weekly the

3. See IV, No 53, May 21, 1984.

4. See IV, No 59, September 17, 1984.

5. See IV, No 60, October 1, 1984.

6. See IV, No 55, June 18, 1984 and No 60, October 1, 1984.

betrayal of the NUM leadership. As the strike enters its eighth month it is clear that the original analysis was faulty.

Moreover, the argument that 'under pressure from the base' Scargill has resisted any sell-out does not hold up either. That there is pressure is true, but this pressure has been carefully nurtured, built and given leadership by Scargill.

For decades the debate as to whether bureaucrats always betray has been a rather arcane one for the real life of the British workers. 'The 'correct' position that opposed a reductionist view of the bureaucracy seemed to have little relevance as, with monotonous regularity, strikes were sold out one after the other. However, the emergence of the Scargill/Benn/Livingstone leadership signals the emergence of a leadership which does not conform to the pattern of bureaucrats who consistently seek to betray.

This is not to say that this leadership has broken from reformism — on the contrary, all remain committed to the introduction of socialism through parliament by a Labour government.

Benn, Scargill and Livingstone remain on the left wing of the labour bureaucracy. On the extreme left wing it is true, but nevertheless a part of it. This is not an abstract point. It is reflected in real weaknesses of the left in the face of the Tory offensive and the battle with the right wing of the bureaucracy.

In the first place the left lacks a political programme that can come to grips with the severity of the British capitalist crisis. There was a large measure of truth in the right wing's claim that the 'left' policies that the Labour Party fought the last election on lacked credibility in the eyes of even Labour supporters, with their lack of solutions to the problems of resolving Britain's massive social and economic crisis.

The solution of the right is a wholesale retreat from Labour's traditional, but little exercised, policy of public ownership. A retreat which was endorsed by the same Labour Party conference that gave such fulsome support to the miners.

Again on the field of defence and foreign policy Labour's commitment to unilateral disarmament sits uneasily with their simultaneous support for Nato's nuclear umbrella and their commitment to increase spending on conventional weapons. This was another policy position passed by the October conference.

In other words the next years will see a battle over what content will be given to the slogan 'a Labour government committed to socialist policies', with the left in a rather poor position at its start.

For this reason, the policies and positions of the revolutionaries can have an increased relevance and audience among those who support the left.

At the same time the left must overcome its resistance to across-the-board organisation to combat the right. The organisation of a left wing in the labour movement committed to class struggle

rather than class collaboration is starting to become more of a reality.

But the basic steps must be taken to organise the left at every level of the labour movement in order to take the battle home to the right. This is because the political divisions that exist in the labour movement cannot be tackled purely at the level of the bureaucracy. There are deep vertical divisions within the British labour movement today as the strike-breaking miners have shown. Only by this being recognised and the left organising from top to bottom, can the fight against the right be successful.

This applies to the Labour Party, where forces such as *Labour Briefing* (and related tendencies in the Labour Party Young Socialists) have launched a campaign based on this broad perspective entitled 'Target Labour Government'.

It also applies to the trade unions where the left is beginning to be organised into tendencies that start to draw in rank-and-file activists rather than to confine themselves to the middle layers of the bureaucracy, as has previously been the case.

The role of revolutionary Marxists in such developments is to be the best builders of such tendencies, pointing them towards a class struggle perspective, avoiding any organisational barriers that prevent their playing the fullest possible role in developing such organisation.

During the strike supporters of *Socialist Action*, the revolutionary Marxist paper, have played a leading role in the development of strike support committees formed by Labour Party and trade-union members in collaboration with the National Union of Mineworkers. They have avoided the response of sectarian groups whose role has been to decry such committees as a diversion from building a 'revolutionary leadership'.

At the same time, *Socialist Action* sought to clarify the issues in the strike. It has done this both through the pages of its newspaper and through events like a national meeting of miners and British and European trade unionists, where the type of practical solidarity that has been able to be organised by *Socialist Action* and its cothinkers in Western Europe was discussed at the same time as the perspectives for victory for the strike.

This is now the No. 1 task for the development of any revolutionary perspective in Britain. The victory of the miners can place the crippling and eventual defeat of the Tory government on the agenda, thereby confounding all those forces who preached Thatcher's invincibility the better to justify their own class collaboration.

Victory in the strike today means confronting the attempt of the government to smash the National Union of Mineworkers by seizing the assets of the union.

The key line of advance of the left is to fight to turn the support given to the miners at the Labour Party and the TUC Congress into action. That means that immediate all-out strike action should be organised against the seizure of the NUM's assets and that the TUC should call a general strike in defence of the NUM.

The desperation of the government is justified. They must finish the strike quickly or they will lose it as the first power cuts begin to bite. Already the miners' strike has changed the face of British politics. A victory for the miners would transform the prospects for socialist advance. Its defeat, however engineered, would mean an utterly remorseless government moving in to extend that defeat to the entire British working class. ■

## NUM under attack

The British and international press have launched a furious attack against the visit by a British miners' union official to Libya to seek aid for the strike.

The visit was not only denounced by the Thatcher government which ended diplomatic relations with Libya a year ago, but also by Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress officials.

The campaign against the Libyan visit is the latest episode in a campaign against the union which in recent weeks has included the seizure of the union's funds and a campaign by TUC leaders to force an agreement on the NUM leadership.

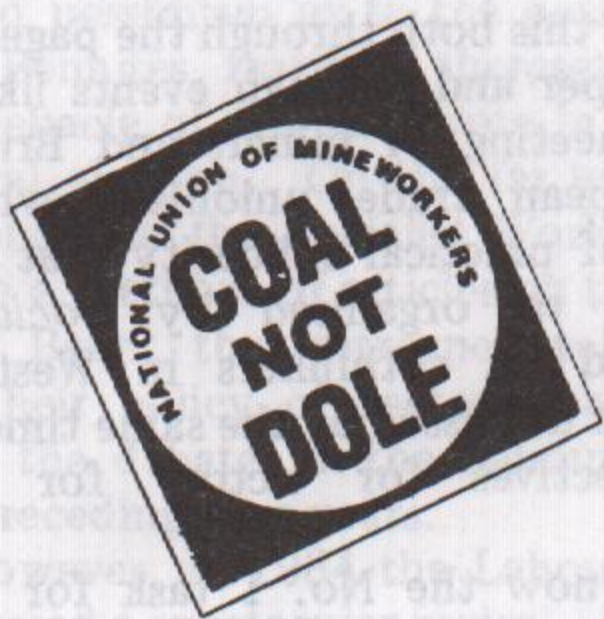
However, allies of the union have hit back. Dennis Skinner, a Labour left MP from a mining area, asked Thatcher in the House of Commons why she was prepared to condemn the NUM visit to seek aid while companies which contribute to Tory Party funds made massive profits from exporting to Libya. (Exports to Libya by British companies have reached a new high in the last year).

Not content with seizing all the unions' funds, the government is still deducting £15 per week from striking miners' social security benefits on the spurious basis that the union is paying miners strike pay. Given the financial sanctions taken against it by the government, the NUM has the right to both solicit and accept money from any source.

Peter Heathfield, the NUM general secretary, stated that the NUM has received support from over 50 countries. Support for the miners' cause from these countries not only helps the miners to victory over Thatcher — a victory for the whole international working class — but also strengthens the position of trade unionists and those fighting for trade-union rights in their own countries.

S.R.

Send donations to the NUM to: Miners' Solidarity Fund, Co-op Bank PLC, West Street, Sheffield. Sorting code 08.90.75; Account No 30000009.



## International solidarity with British miners

In France ...the CGT (the Communist Party-dominated union confederation) has not organised such a strong campaign of international solidarity for a long time, as it has with the British miners. In two weeks they collected 400 tons of food and 700,000 French francs (£60,000). Together they formed a convoy of 22 lorries escorted by several dozen cars, which stretched over one mile.

The convoy was sent on its way from the CGT headquarters near Paris by a meeting on Thursday, October 12, addressed by Malcolm Pitt, president of the Kent area NUM. It was greeted by a delegation at Lens, a town on the way to Calais.

At Calais on Saturday October 14, Pitt addressed the meeting in this way: 'A victory for one section of workers is a victory for the world workers' movement!'

A little incident at the end of the meeting shows just how much those present agreed with this sentiment. The French union leadership tried to get a singing of the 'Marseillaise' going. Several workers piped up instead with the 'International'. Krasucki, the CGT leader, jumped to the microphone and took up their chant.

The convoy finally arrived in Snowdown, Kent where it was welcomed by the miners wives' group, one of whom addressed the delegation.

It is vital that this kind of activity is followed up in consistent support. The LCR, French section of the Fourth International is currently organising a tour for miners and a miner's wife to raise more support all over France and get a real discussion of the issues. After one week on the tour approximately £4,000 has been raised.

In Belgium ...in a tour organised for miners from the Bold NUM lodge by the PSO, Belgian section of the Fourth International, 370,000 Belgian francs (£4,900) was raised. Between October 1 and 6, Dennis Pennington and Susan Gannon (Bold Miners and Miners Wives' Group) went to Liege, Brussels, Louvain, Ghent, Charleroi and Antwerp.

They participated in five meetings, organised by the PSO. They visited a series of factories and met union officials there, mainly from the FGTB (General Federation of Belgian Workers), the socialist-dominated union.

In Liege, they were received by shop stewards' delegations in four Cockerill (steel) plants. In the Brussels region they met trade unionists from the Renault car factory.

They did a series of interviews with the press especially union journals and the feminist press. Susan also gave interviews to some well-known women's magazines with mass circulation such as *Femme d'aujourd'hui* (Today's Woman).



Danish supporters picket docks to prevent movement of coal (DR)

In Canada... the solidarity movement is growing apace. Union leaders representing about 2,000 nickel miners and smelter workers at Falconbridge Ltd in Sudbury boycotted a reception for the English queen in September to show their support for the striking miners. The president of the local branch of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union stated that the miners' union in Britain had supported them in the past, and that they owed their solidarity now. Several tours of miners have been organised, and Steve Shukla of the Armthorpe branch of the NUM has been touring since October 13. The official leaders of the trade-union movement are beginning to respond, and the Canadian Labour Congress took an important step in sending 16,000 Canadian dollars (about £10,000) across for miners and their families.

In the Soviet Union... Ukrainian miners donated about £50,000 and paid for a visit by 150 members of mining families to a Black Sea holiday resort. The leader of the Soviet coal miners' union announced an embargo on exports of coal and light crude oil to Britain. Last year, Britain imported 2.7 million tons of oil, and spent £2.1 million on Soviet coal.

In New Zealand...miners Derek France and Kevin Hughes of the Yorkshire Area Executive toured the country at the invitation of the Federation of Labour. By the end of the tour, some 60,700 NZ dollars had been raised for a special FOL fund for the miners. The New Zealand seafarers' union has already sent a container load of lamb plus thousands of dollars. FOL president Jim Knox, summed it all up when he said, 'If the miners go down in Britain it will affect the whole of the trade-union movement in the world.'

In Italy... the October 28 issue of the Communist Party daily *L'Unita* announced the start of a series of indepth eyewitness reports on the strike, and launched an appeal for solidarity. It calls on all its 'readers, comrades, workers, intellectuals, women and youth to join in a solidarity campaign which should be a European-wide one because the Europe that the left wants cannot be built if working people are marginalised.' An official call for help from a party with the Italian CP's influence and resources, and its one-and-a-half million members could really boost support for the miners. This is just a beginning.

In Tasmania ...yes, even far-off Tasmania, the island state of Australia, is the scene of actions in solidarity with the miners' strike. Recently, a group of trade unionists and unemployed activists met and formed a support committee in order to build



financial and moral support for the strikers. Members of the local branches of the Socialist Workers Party, the Australian section of the Fourth International, have been prominent in the campaign.

A public meeting at short notice in the Hobart Town Hall drew an audience of around one hundred people and a substantial amount of money for the strike fund was collected. Further public meetings are planned in the near future for other major population centres and the organisers plan to send speakers and video tapes to workplace meetings of miners, building and maritime workers.

Speakers have already addressed Hobart dockers and received a good response. After the meetings on the waterfront the dockers voted to impose a 20-dollar levy on their membership.

The campaign has received good media coverage with one activist who travelled in the British coalfields being interviewed on radio and in the press and TV.

**In the Spanish state** ...the solidarity campaign with the British miners is just beginning. Relative to the northern European countries, this obviously requires much more of an effort in a country where the standard of living of workers is much lower and where they have suffered severe defeats in recent years in hard-fought struggles.

The following is the description of an initial solidarity tour from the October 19 issue of *Combate*, the paper of the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state:

On October 3-6, Adrian Pirt, a Nottingham miner, visited Euskadi appealing for solidarity for the very long and heroic struggle that 140,000 British coal miners have been waging for more than seven months against the government's decision to cut the number of working pits to less than half in the space of a few years.

The lack of solidarity here so far, for this exemplary resistance struggle, which moreover is so similar to others we have experienced, such as at Sagunto and Aceriales, is eloquent testimony against our trade unions, which have lost their sense of practical proletarian internationalism. We think that through the trade-union left wing, we can make up for this neglect, as the magazine *Nuevo Claridad* helped to do by organising a tour for miner Adrian Pirt.

Rallies in solidarity with the British miners' strike were organised by *Nueva Claridad*, together with the Left Socialist Coordinating Committee [Coordinadora Socialista de Izquierda] and the Ezkerra Marxista [Marxists expelled from Euzkadiko Ezkerra, a group formed by revolutionary nationalists but which later moved to the right] were held in Pamplona and Alava and in the Navarran town of Estella.

Unfortunately, the tour was rather limited in scope, consisting of rallies of vanguard workers and press conferences. Nonetheless, a very clear interest was aroused by this first attempt at mobilising solidarity here with the miners' magnificent struggle against Thatcher.

In Pamplona, with the support of the Workers Commissions and the Plant Committee, Adrian Pirt managed finally to speak to an assembly of 200 miners in a Potasas de Navarra mine, after a first attempt was blocked by the management.

The Potasas miners dug deep into their larders and their pockets to support their British comrades. They collected 140 kilos of food valued at 60,000 pesetas (about 1,200 US dollars) plus 16,000 pesetas to transport it to Britain. There was also another later assembly with 100 miners at a training school in the province of Navarra.

In Vitoria at a rally of 150 persons, the miners collected 40,000 pesetas. And a commitment was made to extend the campaign of economic solidarity to all the factories through the delegations of the UGT-Fourth Congress, that is, the old Vitoria UGT (General Union of Workers, the Social Democratic-dominated union), who were expelled at the end of last year by the rightist bureaucracy of the UGT.

**In Denmark** ...*Klassekampen*, the paper of the Danish section of the Fourth International, reported the following in its October 11 issue: 'Not an ounce of coal should be sent to Britain. That would be international scabbery.'

This was what Frans Mattesen from Aarhus support com-

mittee for the British coal miners said. The support committee with the dockers stopped a new attempt to send coal from Aarhus to Britain at the beginning of October.

With the approach of winter and cold weather and with the dwindling coal stocks, the British National Coal Board is on the verge of desperation. The fall and the winter are good allies for the British miners. The NCB is trying to bring coal in from everywhere, no matter how small the shipments. It all helps.

Internationally, at the moment, the NCB is getting coal mainly from three countries — the Netherlands and Belgium, where it has its own reserves, and Denmark.

Dansk Shell earlier admitted to *Klassekampen* that it has been selling South African coal to Britain through the Aarhus coal terminal.

In this respect, it is the Kul og Foderstof Kompagniet [Coal and Fodder Company] that has gone the furthest. Formerly the Korn og Foderstof Kompagniet, it has become the Kul og Foderstof Kompagniet. 'We sell coal, not politics', a spokesperson for the company said.

'To sell coal to Britain now is precisely engaging in politics,' Frans Mattesen said. 'This is support for Thatcher's government against the miners.'

The ship *Militence* from Rochester with an English crew — but under a Cypriot flag of convenience — arrived in Aarhus on Sunday. On Monday, trucks from Loekke, Gravesten and Faarup company began carrying coal from the KFK to Dock No 114. It was unloaded on the dock. The DSB hired a crane to load the coal on the ship.

The dockers were mustered to load the coal. At a meeting they refused to do the work. At the same time, the support committee went to block the coal at the dock so that the trucks could not unload. On the basis of the blockade, the drivers refused to do any more trips.

The ship had been loaded to one third of capacity when the work stopped. A hundred blockade watchers met in the afternoon afraid that the police would try to guard the loading. They did try to, but had to give up. The sailors on the ship gave the blockade watchers beer and music.

It was the Blaesbjerg Shipping firm in Aarhus that handled the order. And it is quite clear that the NCB at the moment is trying to use ships like the *Militence* to take coal into the small unregistered British harbours.

'Therefore, it is important now in all Danish harbours to keep an eye out to see where the KFP or others are sending coal to Britain,' Frans Mattesen said. 'This could be done from any harbour in Denmark.'

On October 17, the Danish police moved in to break the Aarhus blockade in the same style as attacks they made on a peaceful workers' demonstration during last winter's dockers' strike. In fact, in Denmark the escalation of police repression against the workers' movement has paralleled the trend in Thatcher's Britain.

The October 18 *Klassekampen* described what happened and the response of the solidarity committee.

'Shortly after 8:00 p.m. about seventy cops with dogs swarmed into the harbour area and sealed off Oestre Mole so that the coal trucks would have free access to the ship. A demonstration was quickly organised on the docks with about a hundred participants. It turned out that there were four to five plainclothes cops among the demonstrators who were quickly ejected....'

'The Aarhus support committee thinks that this action means a major escalation.' There has been a lot of talk about it in the press and everyone now knows that there is a support committee, one of the activists, John Jessen told *Klassekampen*.

'This is a good starting point for mobilising more people.... Only a mass blockade and work stoppages can keep coal from being shipped out of Danish harbours under police protection.'

'The KFK has announced that it has lost money in this operation because of the blockade. Therefore it, and perhaps others, will prefer to use the smaller Danish harbours to ship coal. Moreover, it is reported that Holland, Belgium and Denmark have been chosen as way stations for the coal the British coal board is importing now that winter is at the door.'

'Therefore, it is important to keep a watch on all Danish harbours for ships that might be taking coal to Britain.'

## The situation of the Workers Confederation after the sixth congress

The sixth congress of COB (Central Obrera Boliviana — the Bolivian Central Trade Union), took place in Cochabamba from September 3 to 14, with about 1,000 people in attendance (about 600 of whom were full delegates). As the organisers' report by the outgoing leadership pointed out, according to the statutes a COB congress should be held every two years. But the workers' movement in Bolivia has often been forced to work underground, under severe repression. That is why, since its founding in 1952, the COB has only held six national congresses.

The sixth congress of the COB was marked by a change in leadership and in particular the rejection of the slate of the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB).

Livio MAITAN

The Cochabamba congress was marked, more than on previous occasions, by profound internal differences and some stormy sessions. It was formally opened with a speech from the outgoing general secretary, Osvaldo Sanjines, a member of the Bolivian Communist Party who was greeted with howls of abuse.

The business of the congress was held up for four days because of discrepancies in several of the delegations' credentials. The final session to elect a new National Executive Committee (NEC) dragged on without a break for 19 hours.

Throughout the congress there were two opposing factions. One, the majority of the previous executive, was under the hegemony of the PCB, which is now more and more tied by its position in the UDP (Democratic and Popular Union) government of Siles Suazo. The other was made up of various trade-union militants and tendencies grouped together under the umbrella of the DRU (United Revolutionary Leadership), which had been set up a few months previously.

All attempts to put forward positions or form groupings intermediate between these two rival tendencies got nowhere. A clear example of this polarization was Filemon Escobar, one of the chief members of the outgoing executive committee, an ex-Trotskyist, who has abandoned the concept of the Leninist party: in practice, during the congress, he found himself lining up with the PCB. The same thing happened to the so-called 'third alternative' made up of a section of the Socialist Party-1 (SP-1) and of the rank-and-file Trade Union Bloc which was pro-UDP and sponsored by, among others, the leader of the Santa Cruz COB, Felipe Caballero.

The lengthy organisational wrangles over credentials reflected broader differences of orientation that had already appeared in the regional and industrial confederations. According to the rules

established by the NEC, where differences existed special general meetings should have been called to resolve them and to elect delegates to the COB congress itself. This norm was not always adhered to.

The fact that the credentials commission had to spend so long discussing the composition of delegations such as the bank workers, industrial workers, oil workers and other shows the scope of the internal differences.

Once the squabble over credentials was over, the congress went into three sessions: a discussion on the report on activity, a session of commissions and report-backs from them, and the election of the new NEC.

The report on activity summed up the course of the trade-union movement since the last congress in 1979, highlighting the struggle against the military dictatorship of General Garcia Meza. In analysing the change represented by the coming to power of the UDP government, in Octo-

ber 1982, the report underlined the fact that the popular masses had been prepared to make sacrifices because the new government seemed to them to represent a step forward. However, president Siles Suazo and his government quickly adopted measures which went against the interests and aspirations of the poorest sections of the population.

This aggravated both the social and the economic crisis. The COB put forward a programme which aimed to get structural changes at the economic, political and social levels. But the UDP government — which was dominated by the banks, big business and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — did very little to introduce any such changes.

It was in the work of the political commissions that the differences that characterised the whole congress really came out. The discussion was centred on four different documents. The first was presented by Oscar Salas of the PCB. It advocated the 'deepening of the democratic process' which, he said, 'represented a necessary learning stage for mass democracy on the road to national liberation and socialism'.

In other words, the PCB was reaffirming their traditional thesis of revolution by stages, the practical consequence of which has been their participation in the UDP government.

A second contribution, defended by Filemon Escobar, explained, on the one hand, that the COB had to fight for the application of the programme and present itself as an alternative power, even playing the role of the revolutionary party. On the other hand, it explained that the time to replace reformism had not yet arrived and it was necessary to seek an alliance with 'nationalist progressives in the military' in order to defend democracy.

A third position was put forward by Ascencio Cruz in the name of the Lora group (a group which calls itself Trotskyist) that had no delegates at the con-

### Statement adopted by the sixth congress of the COB

— The sixth congress of the COB reaffirms the socialist theses approved by the fourth congress.

— The sixth congress further recognises once again the willingness of the working class and poor peasants to defend and preserve democracy. They will protect their rights and liberties against all attempts, either from parliament or through a fascist coup, to roll them back.

— The economic crisis inherited from the previous fascist military regimes has been aggravated by the economic policy imposed by the IMF and applied during the period of government of the UDP. It has become a factor in the destabilisation of the country favourable to the preparation of a coup. Imperialism and the forces of reaction are behind this. All these features, combined with the dispersal of the popular forces, create an imminent danger of the destruction of the current democratic system.

— Faced with this danger we workers in the mines, the countryside and the towns put forward the COB emergency plan with the aim of uniting our forces, strengthening the workers and peasants organisations and crushing the counter-revolution. This will put us on the road to emancipation.

— COB agrees to launch an appeal to all revolutionary and democratic parties, to all those within the military who are nationalist-inclined to urge them to struggle alongside the people to prevent our country falling once again into the clutches of fascism.

gress. Their view was that the democratic dictatorship and the fascist dictatorship were two sides of the same coin and that the workers' movement should oppose both and fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The fourth position was that of the DRU, put forward by Carlos Borth, a militant in a section of the PS-1. We have published extracts from their document on page 12.

The position of the DRU obtained a narrow majority in the policy commission. Two reports were eventually presented to the plenary session of the congress — one by a representative of the DRU and the other by Filemon Escobar.

The meeting decided to nominate a commission charged with drawing up, not a long document, but a final statement. This was eventually adopted by the congress. It represented, in effect, a compromise between conflicting positions (see box). The representatives of the DRU expressed reservations about the final point of the statement which contained the appeal to the 'progressive nationalists in the military'.

### Economic issues

The debates in the economic commission intersected, in part, with the themes of discussion in the policy commission. The main conflict was over the question of the minimum wage and the sliding scale of wages.

The PCB spokesperson defended the official stance of the government, according to which, in the present context, the introduction of the minimum wage with a sliding scale would provoke inflation and would also threaten the democratic process.

The DRU, however, argued that the struggle for this demand was the only way to fight hunger and destitution amongst the masses. It was the best way to combat the speculators and hold back the raging economic crisis that is engulfing the country.

Moreover, the minimum wage should not be considered separate from the other demands contained in the COB action programme concerning, in particular, the nationalisation of the banks, the monopoly of foreign trade, etc.

On the economic issues, the congress eventually adopted resolutions demanding, among other things, the following: the immediate application of the COB plan; the introduction without delay of a minimum wage with a sliding scale for all workers; a restructuring of wages with books open to the COB; immediate measures to enable the Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL) to overcome its critical financial difficulties; the cancellation of all contracts signed by the National Oil company (YPFB) with the multi-nationals; condemnation of the policy of monetary devaluation being pursued by the government.

The congress also put forward other demands ranging from the expansion of



COB leaders at miners' assembly (DR)

services by the National Transport Company (ENTTA) to the application of the general labor law to categories of workers who do not yet benefit from it. The congress also urged the UDP government to rapidly put the agrarian bill drawn up by the peasant's organisation to the vote at the legislative assembly.

The leaders of the housewives committees that have sprung up in the poor neighbourhoods of La Paz intervened into the discussions to demand that the congress amend the constitution to provide for a women's secretariat of the NEC to deal with women's issues and that one woman should be elected to the NEC itself.

The differences that had marked the entire congress were finally brought to a head in the elections to the incoming NEC of COB by the presentation of two opposing slates. The first, proposed by the DRU, included Juan Lechin, the long-time leader of the COB, as the candidate for executive secretary, once again, and other representatives of the organisations or groups supporting the DRU for the different posts. Among the latter were Eulogio Sanchez, a militant of the POR-U, Bolivian section of the Fourth International, four members of the PCB who disagreed with the line of the party and the secretary of the Peasants Confederation, Genaro Flores.

Juan Lechin came out 91 votes ahead of his direct competitor, with a total of 474 votes cast. Also, because of the application of a traditional norm of functioning in the Bolivian workers' movement, which does not give proportional

representation to the different currents in the leadership of the COB, the majority slate took all 34 seats on the executive.

The DRU greeted the results of the congress as a very dramatic success for the left. The POR-U newspaper, *Bandera Socialista*, gave its assessment under the heading 'Revolutionary Victory'. The bourgeois press and the PCB could not hide their annoyance and their concern at the result.

The leader of the PCB, Marcos Domic, announced that a major confrontation had taken place at the congress, 'between forces who, in the workers' movement, represent...the real positions of the working class and the petty bourgeois ultra-leftists'. In his opinion, Lechin had suffered a 'historic defeat', because he was not re-elected unanimously.

However, the PCB leader did add that an agreement was possible on the basis of the political statement, and he expressed the hope that Lechin would think twice before letting himself be dragged into 'adventurist actions'.

The periodical *De Todos* was quick to point out that within the DRU, two Trotskyist groups (the POR-pie and the POR-U) wield considerable weight and that 'you can see the influence of the POR-U on the DRU text'.

Undoubtedly, the congress of the COB represented a radicalisation of important layers of the Bolivian workers' movement and the PCB did suffer a resounding defeat. Bolivian revolutionaries have gained huge opportunities. But they have also assumed huge responsibilities towards the workers and peasants' movement. ■

## Extracts from the DRU platform

The DRU (United Revolutionary Leadership) was launched at the sixth congress of the COB. It is composed of several organisations and trade-union groups including: the Bolivian Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (PCB-ML); the Tupaj Katari Revolutionary Movement (MRTK); dissident factions within the Socialist Party-1; the workers' section of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR); sections of the Revolutionary Left Front (FIR); the Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left (PRIN) which was established by Juan Lechin, the main leader of the COB itself; the Rank and File Peasants Movement (MCB); the Trade Union Work Group (GTS); the Revolutionary Workers Party, Bolivian section of the Fourth International (POR-U); a small organisation calling itself Trotskyist and named the Revolutionary Workers Party (POR-pie).

In an interview published in *Em Tempo*, a revolutionary Marxist journal in Brazil, on October 11, a leader of the POR-U defined the main objectives of the DRU as being, 'to respond to the bankruptcy of the UDP, to its discrediting within the workers' movement and to the break of the workers with the UDP government identified as it is with the IMF and with policies to suit the bourgeoisies'. In response to attempts to stage a coup from the right, they declared that, 'the DRU was created in this context in order to respond to the need for a real alternative among workers in the struggle for their historic objectives which are clearly expressed in the fourth congress of the COB in 1970'.

We publish below major excerpts from the DRU document which was reproduced in *Bandera Socialista*, the paper of the POR-U, in September 1984.

We gave ample proof of our commitment to the democratic process on June 30 this year at the time of the abortive coup by a group of fascist narcotics dealers. We suspended the general strike [which had been called previously for economic demands] and closed ranks behind the COB. But what interests us is not the formal existence of bourgeois democracy or the preservation of this system as an end in itself, but the extent to which it allows us to advance on a sure footing toward our long-term goals.

The intermediate groups between the Executive Committee (CEN) and the base of COB (confederations, federations, etc.) have not functioned effectively. They were not able to explain to the workers the significance of the struggles and their scope. A particularly dismal example was the failure to explain to the rank and file the new policy of the Emergency Plan.

There is a further negative balance sheet to be drawn especially in the recent period. Workers' democracy has been distorted in practice. Sectarianism has put the unity of the workers' movement in jeopardy. All the internal problems of the federations and confederations, especially those concerning the election of delegates to the congress, had one main cause, and that was lack of respect for workers' democracy.

This democracy must be preserved at all costs. It is one of the major strengths of the Bolivian workers' movement and one of its most striking characteristics compared to other workers' movements.

It is therefore necessary that the workers' movement rearm itself ideologically along the lines of the strategic objectives of the 1970 political thesis (fourth congress of the COB), resume with renewed vigour its role as an alternative power by adopting policies that take account of the experiences of the last few years and open up a transitional period by means of a programme for national liberation and beyond....

We of the Bolivian workers' movement reaffirm the thesis of the fourth congress of the COB. We declare as our ultimate objective the introduction of a socialist society. The proletariat is the revolutionary class in society both because of its place in the production process and the creative aspects of its ideology and political consciousness. As workers we represent the true goals of the national struggle and at the same time assume the leading role in the revolution. We are ever aware of the fact that only an alliance of workers, peasants and impoverished middle layers in the towns can assure final victory.

Bolivia is a backward dependent country, dominated by imperialism. As a result, the national liberation struggle is part of the historic mission of the Bolivian working class. The anti-national character of the ruling class means that the exploited will have to complete the tasks that will open the way for truly independent social and economic development....

The government that was formed in October 1982 is bourgeois in its methods and in its programme. It is therefore not surprising that the UDP regime, whilst pretending to tackle the economic crisis in an even-handed manner, ultimately comes down in favour of the bourgeoisie.

There are only really two alternatives: either to advance the objective of social and national liberation through transforming the process into a revolutionary one, or to perish under imperialism and fascism. Unity of the workers and peasants movement is vital, and dispersal of our forces would be suicide. Unity will take us forward. Just as fascism represents the destruction of all aspects of workers' democracy within bourgeois society, so the only way to fight back is to strengthen the workers' organisations by going forward on the road to workers' control and preparing the workers to fight fascism and imperialism wherever they rear their heads.

As workers we have fought to become involved at all levels of political and economic decision-making to guarantee the democratic process and find the means to confront the political and economic crisis of our country....

The fulfillment of the desire to participate in political and economic decision-making, in the long run, involves the conquest of power. That was why, whilst pushing for such involvement in decision making, we also understood that it would not be sufficient in itself. We recognised that the achievement of a degree of democracy should not mean renegeing on our historic objectives. Only those who have abandoned the fight for a society without exploiters or exploited retain the illusion that the bourgeoisie will give up their power bit by bit....

The period from November 1982 to August 1984 has revealed a trend of growing social conflict. This is determined by two main factors. The first is the increasingly acute nature of the crisis, combined with the persistent orientation of the government, which is trying to solve that crisis by taking anti-national and anti-working class measures. The second is the fact that the mobilisations, because of their defensive character, led to the signing of agreements that the government never respected.

The defense of the democratic process is one of the fundamental preoccupations of the workers' movement. It represents a gain for the workers against the military dictatorships. We defend democracy against our long-time enemies — the coup-d'etat-happy bosses and their allies in the army. We even defend the government. In reality, the destabilisation of the country is largely the result of conspiracies by the right wing. But it is also brought about by the government itself insofar as successive economic packages have adversely affected certain layers of workers, demoralised them and made them lose confidence in democracy. ■



The women's camp has existed since 1981 (DR)

## PEACE MOVEMENT

# The women's peace movement . . . a history of the Greenham Common women

The peace movement is not dead. At the end of October tens of thousands of people all over Europe demonstrated against their government's policies on nuclear weapons and Nato, proving that the peace movement is very much alive and kicking.

In Great Britain, 30,000 people assembled in Barrow-in-Furness to protest at the construction of Trident submarines there.

In September, 40,000 women had turned up at Greenham Common to protest against the 16 Cruise missiles stationed there and also against the Tory government's decision to send thousands of territorial army troops to West Germany as part of Nato's operation Lionheart.

The security forces were taken aback at the numbers on this protest. Paratroopers were pulled out of bed in their pyjamas to try and stop women removing the fence and climbing into the base.

Once again, 'the spirit of Greenham' is helping to keep the peace movement alive. To understand the continuing strength of the Greenham protest and the support it has inspired it is necessary to look at how it evolved. Only then is it possible to appreciate how these women have helped keep the peace movement as a whole alive and built a national and international women's peace movement.

Janine INGLEFIELD

It all started in the spring of 1981 when European women organised a peace march from Copenhagen to Paris. It was a mixed march and the organisers were very restrictive in what they would allow in terms of direct action. The women began to think of organising their own actions.

In Britain, some women had the idea of marching from Wales to Greenham

Common in Berkshire, where the first Cruise missiles were to be sited.

On August 27, 1981, forty women, plus children and a few men set out on their 'Women for Life on Earth March' to Newbury (the nearest town to Greenham Common). On September 4, at Newbury, scouts were sent ahead to locate the airbase. The next day there was a demonstration to the base supported by local CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarm-

ament) members.

So far, the women had been ignored by the press. Angered by the silence, they decided to try something new: forty of them chained themselves to the main gate of the airbase. The base commander arrived and made his, now famous, statement that as far as he was concerned the women could stay there as long as they liked!

Altogether 39 people took him up on his offer. Sleeping bags and blankets were provided by local CND supporters. The warm September night meant that no tents were yet necessary. The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp had been established.

Of course, at the beginning the camp was not women only. The decision to make it so was taken in February 1982. It was not a question that men were not welcome. It was just that women were more effective on their own.

This was demonstrated by the experience of the second women's action at Greenham on March 21, 22, 1982. Then 250 women blockaded the main gate for 24 hours and 34 arrests took place.

The Greenham protest was now beginning to attract national attention. Keeping it women-only gave women their own space for creative actions within the peace movement, but it also made it much more difficult for the authorities to handle the protest.

From mid-August 1982 to summer 1983, some extremely imaginative actions were developed, including the occupation of a sentry box, the disruption of the laying of sewage pipes to the base, etc.

Then the arrests started. The women turned their arrests into political trials where the case against the government's deliberate and conscious escalation of the arms race was brought to the attention of the national and international press.

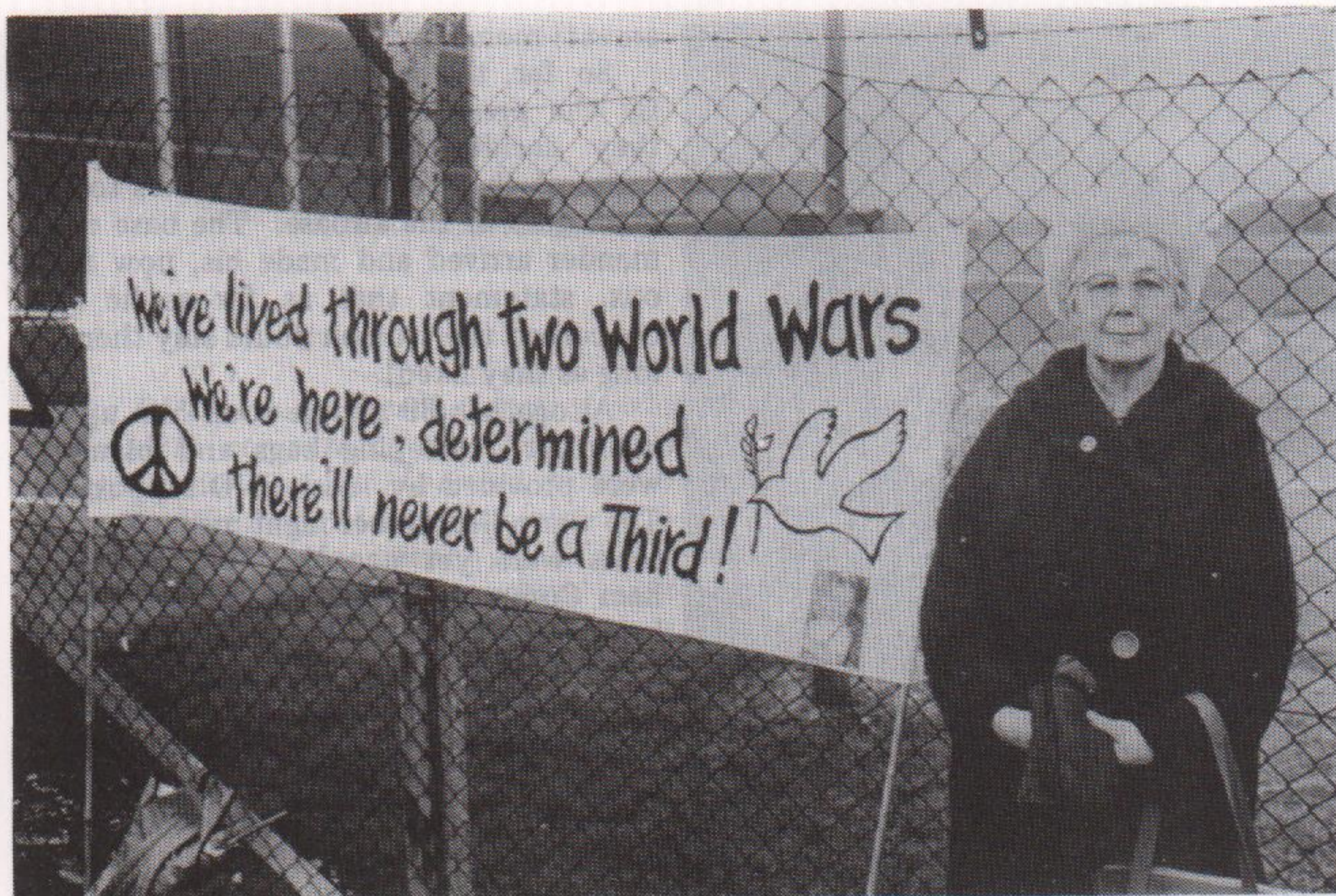
Outside the trials, mass protests took place with women singing and weaving webs, sporting their woolly hats, short hair and suffragette colours (Green, White and Violet — Give Women Votes).

### Women organising

The cause of the Greenham women had captured the public imagination. The case against Cruise missiles was persuasive, and opinion polls began to reflect majority opposition, particularly among women. Margaret Thatcher had to change her defence minister.

This explains the huge mobilisation that took place on Sunday, December 11, when 30,000 women joined hands to encircle the base. On the Monday many women stayed to participate in the blockade. On January 1, 1983, the women scaled the barbed wire fence late at night, and by morning were to be seen holding hands, dancing on the silos.

The women's peace movement was not built simply through actions at the camp, however. The camp itself also stimulated the self activity of women all over the country in their own towns and villages.



Women of all ages are united in opposition to Cruise (DR)

What was so attractive about the Greenham movement was, in fact, the notion that anyone who put the case for peace could be a 'Greenham woman'.

Greenham support groups were mushrooming. These were a more formalised version of the 'affinity group' in which women who took action together at the camp stayed in contact to prepare for future actions. Many of the women were completely new to political activity and came from a variety of backgrounds and ages. The movement became unstoppable.

The links made with the trade unions and the Labour Party at the time of International Women's Day for Disarmament on May 24, 1984, is a further example of what the women were able to achieve beyond the camp.

Consistent lobbying of trade-union conferences, the Women's TUC and the TUC (Trades Union Congress) itself produced the first ever strike action against the installation of Cruise missiles in Britain. The action was concentrated primarily in the local government unions, and in some cases was backed by sympathetic municipal Labour councillors. Also UCATT (the building trade union) members have been refusing to work at the airbase for some time, and later Rolls Royce workers in Scotland decided to boycott Trident.

If CND had adopted as bold a trade-union orientation, at this point, as the women of Greenham, more rank-and-file action could have been achieved. CND has always had an ambiguous relationship to the Greenham women.

The women's peace movement was much more dynamic than CND itself and had resources enough of its own to mobilise independently. However, there are many women active at the base of CND, and, under pressure from this base, CND publicised and built actions called by Greenham women. But the women's peace movement was autonomous from CND, and this threatened the latter's respectable, pressure-group-oriented leaders.

The most successful mobilisation that CND itself built at Greenham was at Easter 1983. Burfield, Aldermaston (1) and Greenham were linked in a human chain. The blockading at Greenham, after a lot of debate with CND, was women-only. One hundred thousand people were mobilised that day. It was a big success for CND.

The Greenham women have inspired widespread international support from the beginning. The Thatcher government, with its special relationship with the US, made it the target for peace campaigners throughout Europe.

The first missiles were to be sited in Britain and Comiso, Italy. Women from as far away as Australia sent messages of support to the Greenham women within the first few days of the camp being established. In December 1981, two women from Greenham participated in the second of the Women's Pentagon Action peace initiatives in the USA. (2)

### Perugia conference

Greenham women travelled to Holland and Germany that year to address demonstrations. The women's peace march from Copenhagen to Paris was followed up in 1982 with a march from Stockholm to Moscow, and in 1983 from Oslo, Norway to New York.

Women's peace organisations like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (3) found a new lease on life by connecting up with this feminist peace movement. It was in the Copenhagen to Paris march that women decided they should have their own day for disarmament and May 24 was chosen. International Women's Day itself was still a focus and on March 8, 1983, for example, women from all over Europe led a mass protest in Brussels outside the Nato headquarters.

At the END (campaign for European Nuclear Disarmament) conference in

Perugia in summer 1984, the strength, confidence and left-wing character of the women's peace movement asserted itself in an international forum.

Not only did women lead the demonstration in Assisi, Italy at the end of the meeting but they began to assert themselves in the conference itself. The affinity group discussions produced two highly controversial reports at the end of the conference.

One was delivered by a Spanish woman from the Movimiento Comunista de España (MCE) (4) which criticised the diplomatic, male-dominated orientation of the events and argued that if more women were involved, the conference would be more representative of the grassroots of the movement. In Britain, Germany and Holland women make up at least half of the peace movement, she pointed out. Highlighting the creativity and energy that women had brought to the struggle against nuclear war and the way women had made the movement such a popular one, she urged the leaders of the peace movement not to get diverted from their original aims into high-flown negotiations.

The focus against Cruise and Pershing missiles had to be continued, she added to loud applause. The women are now planning to organise their own international conference toward this end and to strengthen their voice inside the peace movement. The MCE woman's speech

1. Aldermaston is the location of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment. It was the scene of many protest marches in the early days of the peace movement. Burghfield is the site of the Trident factory.
2. The Women's Pentagon Action is a network of women who originally got together to plan a specific action — encircling the Pentagon.
3. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was founded in April 1915. Its headquarters are now in Geneva, Switzerland.
4. The MCE is a revolutionary organisation in Spain which works closely with the LCR (Liga Comunista Revolucionaria, section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state), on many questions.

'What we're saying is women are powerful' (DR)



was followed by that of a woman in exile from East Germany who had previously been imprisoned for her 'unofficial' peace activities. Here the bold internationalism and consistent commitment of the women's peace movement to fighting for a new kind of international peace movement, outside the constraints of the Soviet bureaucracy and against the Western imperialist governments, was dramatically revealed.

Women from Greenham had had previous experience of the problems of the independent peace activists in Eastern Europe. Some of them went to the Soviet Union to talk to official and unofficial peace activists. One, Anne Petit, was thrown out of the country for taking unofficial peace activists into the official headquarters. Women from the Greens were not even allowed into East Germany because of their commitment to peace.

All these activists exposed the hypocrisy of the policy of peaceful co-existence of the Soviet bureaucracy and their presence at arms control. How could the Soviets be seen as serious about peace if they imprisoned those in their country who campaigned for it? That was the question asked by women and many other peace activists at Perugia.

On November 14, 1983, Cruise missiles were deployed at Greenham Common. The Greenham women announced that they would continue their protest and make it impossible for Cruise missiles to come out on the roads surrounding the common.

It was not until the following March that the authorities dared to give the go-ahead for the missiles to come out of the base. When it did come it was assisted by a huge police escort. It was a full-scale military operation, and the Greenham women were there, ready to oppose it. One woman lay down in front of the convoy and stopped it but only, alas, temporarily.

The reasons for the rise of the women's peace movement lie in women's soc-



Outside Newbury court where hundreds of women have been tried (DR)

ial position today. Opposition to the warmongering policies of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations is high among women. (5) It is tearing women away from the traditional backing they have given to conservative politicians.

This is because the social and economic crisis is hitting women and other specifically oppressed groups, in such a sharp way. Women can see the senselessness of closing schools, hospitals and old people's facilities down when billions of pounds and dollars are spent on weapons of mutual destruction. The nuclear arms race is crazy, and women are daring to say so loud and clear.

In Britain, women are also turning to the labour movement for answers on how to stop these warmongering governments. The links that have been built between Greenham women and the labour movement and Greenham women and the miners' wives in particular show the interconnections. When women move, they are often quicker to learn from their experience than men because they have to confront so many problems to be able to organise. Their opposition to the Thatcher government is very practical. Women are stuck in low-paid-jobs, sometimes forced to, or choosing to, bring up children alone. They are more and more often the only breadwinner in the house because, in some areas, public-sector employment for women has survived where traditional areas of male employment (in industry) have perished. When their opposition becomes articulated, it is devastating in its militancy.

CND has had difficulty in coming to terms with the Greenham women. The women-only issue, especially when women's actions were so much in the forefront, put many people's (mostly men's) backs up.

On the left, the Socialist Workers Party, the Militant tendency and others continue to be hostile to the Greenham women whom they falsely categorise as separatist, pacifist and middle class. But

as the camp has continued, the women have won more and more respect in the labour and peace movements. They have proved themselves time and time again the most consistent, active fighters against Cruise and the most willing to withstand the repression that the police and soldiers mete out to them.

Their actions have inspired other women. The miners' wives in particular point out that their decision to have women's marches against pit closures was influenced by the Greenham women's campaign. As Kay Sutcliffe from the Kent region put it, 'We want all women marching with women's banners, like a women's peace march.' The desire of many miners' wives to be politically active in the strike shows how far the ideas of the women's liberation movement have spread in Britain today.

When women turn to the peace movement and the labour movement today, they turn a critical eye towards these organisations. They want organisations that speak for, and involve, women. They are no longer content to play the 'supportive role' they have traditionally played in the labour movement, because it no longer accords with social and economic reality.

The capitalist recession is radicalising women. They have higher expectations and have won gains from the period of the boom, and they are not going to allow these gains to be easily wrenched from them — especially for the sake of the arms race. Women can and will be won to the left wing of the labour movement in Britain and internationally if the left wing is prepared to listen to their cause and fight for the changes that women want to see. ■

5. According to a survey in 1983, Reagan's support is 17 per cent higher among men than women. In the Congressional elections in 1983, 47 per cent of women voted Democrat and 55 per cent of men voted Republican. In the June 1983 elections in Britain 54 per cent of men compared with 56 per cent of women voted against the Tories.



## Another major fight for 35-hour week looms

Denmark's conservative-led bourgeois coalition government under Premier Poul Schlueter was able to celebrate its second birthday September 10 in a relatively quiet political atmosphere. But there are storm clouds on the horizon. Most economists, including the government's own experts, and leading business people expect the situation of the balance of payments and government debt to grow worse and to threaten the economic upturn.

Moreover, the leaders of the country's biggest trade unions have said, with varying degrees of definiteness, that they are going to demand a shorter workweek in the spring, when the contracts covering most of the labor force run out. A large-scale strike for shorter worktime, along the lines of the one conducted in West Germany, is becoming more and more probable.

Joergen COLDING-JOERGENSEN

Despite the indecisive result of the January 10, 1984, parliamentary election, (1) the Schlueter government has gradually been able to consolidate a stable, if very narrow, majority. It took Schlueter until April 1984 to conclude an agreement with the small liberal party, the Radikale Venstre, which did not want to be held responsible for the government's cutbacks in health, education and social security. On the other hand, the only immediate possibility for a majority, a deal between the government parties and the right-wing populist Fremskridtspartiet, was not very palatable for the more respectable Conservatives.

However, on April 25, Schlueter finally managed to make an agreement with the Radikale Venstre. Also, the government was reinforced by the defection of one deputy from the Fremskridtspartiet, who announced that he would support the government if it were in danger, without posing any political conditions.

In order to stabilize its position in parliament, the government had to pay a price. The budget cuts have been painful enough, especially for the unemployed. But they have still not been anywhere near deep enough to solve the government's financial problems, which are the worst of any OECD country. The balance-of-payments deficit has also worsened sharply, despite the economic upturn in the capitalist world. Thus, Schlueter has in no way succeeded in taking advantage of the upturn to stabilize the ailing Danish economy.

The government has also not been able to deal any significant blows to the trade unions. Owing to very strong official and unofficial closed-shop agreements and a tight connection between unemployment insurance and trade-union membership, the membership figures of trade unions in Denmark, unlike in many

other OECD countries, have risen during the crisis.

The government got an excellent opening for launching an offensive against the unions in fact just before Easter. A group of bus drivers headed by a member of the coalition party Venstre — Per Brandt — refused to be members of the recognized union, the Specialarbejderforbundet in

Denmark (SiD). The SiD is the country's largest union, organizing unskilled workers, some drivers, and semi-skilled workers in most industries, transport and government services.

This assault on the closed shop was answered by 3,000 organized bus drivers in Copenhagen, first with short strikes and demonstrations, and later in the spring with full-scale strikes and even blocking of the roads. These actions created chaos on the roads and local trains in the Copenhagen area, where about 2 million people live and where a substantial part of the country's industry, trade and public-sector services is concentrated.

The first round of this fight was won by the bus drivers, when the Social Democrats on the board of the public transport company Hovedstadens Trafikskelskab (HT) were forced to vote for firing the nonunion workers.

In this conflict, the Schlueter government chose to keep out of the direct line of fire. At first, it limited itself to verbal attacks on the unions, the strikers and the Social Democrats. Then, it turned the whole matter over to the legal system, leaving it to the courts to decide whether the firing of nonunion workers was legal, whether the fired workers have a right to financial compensation, and, if so, who is to pay. Some time will probably pass before the judges come to a conclusion on all this.

Following the victory of the union

### Thousands strike for peace in Denmark

It was five minutes to noon on October 24. Suddenly buses stopped, young people walked out in the street and blocked the traffic. In lots of factories and offices work stopped. And at noon, when the civil defence air alarm sounded as usual, the symbolic strike was over, and the traffic started up again.

This was the second short strike in Denmark against nuclear rearmament. It was supported by the Danish Trade Union Federation (LO) which organises over 90% of all workers in the private sector. The social democratic-led trade-union federations in the public sector which organise over 90% of the public workforce, had not said whether they supported the symbolic strike or not. But in fact many of their members stopped work.

The strike was only a very modest success, and just a fraction of the two million organised wage earners participated. In most places workers had not made banners or organised street demonstrations. People just stopped working and talked with each other for five minutes.

The big state-run hospital, Rigshospitalet, in Copenhagen with 5,000 employees was one of the more active workplaces. About two hundred workers, that is 10% of the day-shift, walked out in an organised group with light-blue peace balloons and a big banner in the street and stopped the traffic.

The reasons for the modest turnout are several. The Danish Trade Union Federation had felt it necessary to 'show the flag' alongside the peace movement. So it decided to call the strike and wrote to all the trade unions to organise it. It came unstuck within the social-democratic bureaucracy, which is not used to this sort of activity and had no idea what to do.

Also the idea of a five minute-long general strike is rather ridiculous. Either you are serious about the danger of nuclear holocaust, or you are not. It is obvious to everyone that five minutes is far too short, and is, therefore, not meant as a really serious strike against the warmongers. So it was not surprising that a large section of the Danish working class regarded the strike as somewhat superfluous.

However, it is obvious that thousands of ordinary people did participate in some way in the strike. People who seldom go on peace movement demonstrations, and usually only follow them on TV and radio, came out. So the strike gave many people a chance to show what they think about nuclear arms and in this way it demonstrated what could have been achieved and could still be achieved in the future.

Soren BECH



bus drivers, workers in many other workplaces have successfully resisted attempts to crack the union shop. And Per Brandt has, by the way, found it very difficult to get a job. In a front-page story September 8, *Politiken*, Copenhagen's biggest daily, told the heart-breaking tale of how this valiant fighter for freedom against union power only managed to stay on his last job three days before his workmates in a small electrical installation firm got him fired again.

In late May, as striking bus drivers blocked several approach roads to Copenhagen, another important strike came to a successful conclusion. Three thousand unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the Danfoss factories got a wage raise of 4.8 percent after a two-month-long strike. The government had been trying to impose a 4 percent ceiling on wage increases, and the partial victory of the Danfoss workers showed that a lot of workers and other employees in the private sector were not going to accept that. In fact, in 1984, a lot of working people have taken advantage of the upturn in the economy to take back something of what they lost during the crisis year of 1982.

Like the bus drivers, the Danfoss workers appealed for — and got — widespread solidarity from other workplaces and also unofficial economic support from trade unions. This was exceptional, because unions are forbidden to support strikes during the life of contracts (normally lasting for two years) under threat of heavy fines.

The Danfoss strike was seen as important by many workers, not only because it broke the Schlueter wage ceiling but also because the Danfoss company had tried to split the skilled from the unskilled workers, giving the former a substantial raise and refusing any increase for the latter.

### Toward confrontation

The Danish national employers association, the Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening (DA) recognized very clearly the danger that the development at Danfoss represented for the bosses' interests. It is pressing very hard for sanctions against the SiD for the union's support to the strikes. In late September, the special court for labor disputes began its proceedings on the HT bus strike, and the DA demanded that the tribunal impose a fine of 26 million Danish crowns (nearly 2.5 million US dollars) on the SiD.

The upturn in the world capitalist economy has given a considerable boost to the Schlueter government, which took over in the winter of 1982-1983, just as times were beginning to get a bit better. By clever timing and a little help from the stocks and bonds dealers, who were no great fans of the previous Social Democratic government, the conservatives managed to take the credit for the drop in interest rates and the growth in investment and employment that got underway and accelerated during 1983.



'5 minutes for peace' (DR)

But the upturn has also given a boost to workers demanding higher wages and defending their trade-union rights. As so many times before in history, a limited upturn in the capitalist economy has restored a bit of self-confidence to many workers after years of rising unemployment and falling real wages. It is no coincidence that these strikes occurred just as the upturn was taking off.

The reaction from the working class and his precarious position in parliament in the first year of the coalition kept Schlueter from using the upturn and his January 1984 election victory as a springboard for a decisive campaign to restore capitalist "order" to the Danish economy through drastic cutbacks and a full-scale assault on the unions. On the other hand, the fightback from the workers has not been strong enough to seriously challenge the government's position.

As the business cycle in Denmark, like that of the US and other OECD countries, goes from boom to stagnation and probably later in 1985 into decline, the economic problems that led the Social Democrats to withdraw from the government will reemerge with a vengeance.

— The balance-of-payments deficit is increasing, and will probably reach 16 to 29 billion Danish crowns for 1984. The foreign debt is expected to exceed 200 billion crowns.

— The government deficit will be about 60 billion crowns, about the same level as when the Social Democrats left office.

In comparison with the Danish GNP, which will be around 500 to 600 billion crowns for 1984, these deficits are among the highest in the OECD. In particular, the balance-of-payments deficit is worrying the capitalist establishment because it is chronic and growing, regardless of the ups and downs of the economic cycle.

The worsening economic situation can be expected to increase the pressure on the government for more drastic attacks on real wages, social benefits and the unions — attacks that might again collide with the expectations of better times created by the upturn and fostered by the Conservatives' propaganda itself.

In addition to immediate economic and social problems the government faces, the antimissiles movement remains very strong in Denmark, despite the beginning deployment of the new Nato missiles in Western Europe. The nation-

wide 5-minute protest strike against the missiles on October 24 will be a key test of this movement. At the same time, the Social Democratic Party may try to improve its image among the majority of the population who oppose the missiles pushing the Radikale Venstre in a position where it will have to vote against the government on some motion involving this issue.

This is a cup the Radikale Venstre will be extremely reluctant to drink from, since it decided to back this government for the sake of mounting an attack on the unions. But it could be forced to swallow the bitter draught because of its historical antimilitarist program and the antimilitarist attitudes of a large part of its traditional voters.

In the short run, however, the focus for fightback against the capitalists and the government for the workers and other broad sections of the population will probably be the struggle for the 35-hour week. In the spring, the contracts covering almost all Danish workers will run out, and the national labor confederation, the LO, will bargain in a centralized way for more than a million workers.

So far, there has been agreement in most of LO's member unions — not only at the rank-and-file level but in most of the leaderships — that the highest priority has to be given to reducing the workweek. And the employers federation and the government are dead set against this, even if the workers were to accept wage cuts in return for shorter hours. The Social Democrats have sided with the LO and are going to campaign for a shorter workweek in the months leading up to the conclusion of negotiations.

Although the LO leaders have undermined the basis for a wholehearted struggle by the working class by announcing that they are prepared to accept zero wage increases for all but the lowest paid sectors in return for a shorter workweek, the situation here is looking more and more like the one that preceded the launching of the strikes for the 35-hour week in West Germany in the spring of this year.

It is looking more and more as if there will be a full-scale strike for a shorter workweek in Denmark some time in the spring of 1985. This may very well present the Schlueter government with its first real challenge. ■

# Crisis of the sugar industry brings political upheavals and communal tensions

'One generation has to suffer for the next.' These were the terms in which the Mauritian finance minister presented his recent proposals to reduce the country's foreign debts. (1) Like his counterparts throughout the world, the Mauritian minister is trying to present the international crisis as a very simple question of the almost supernatural effect of monetary mechanisms and, for the time being, is proposing only the 'stepping up of the national effort'.

The function of this sort of bland speechifying is to obscure the real social and political factors that contribute to the present economic crisis. Mauritius is a good example of these interlocking problems. Over the last ten years it has been the scene of big structural upheavals, caused by internal as well as external factors.

The mechanisms of dependence affecting the crisis of the sugar industry and the development of a 'free zone' have produced a strong acceleration in political and social changes. The Mauritian case, despite its specificities, thus makes it possible, in many regards, to understand the scope of the damage that the imperialist crisis and the chaos caused by the old ruling classes can do to a neo-colonial country.

Claude GABRIEL

The Mauritian economy is first and foremost sugar cane. Some 70 per cent of the foreign currency earned by Mauritius comes from its export. Of an annual production of 616,000 tons of sugar in the last six years, 527,000 could be sold at a preferential price. An agreement guaranteed the sale of 500,000 tons to the European Economic Community (EEC), and the United States bought 27,000 tons at a price above that of the world market. (2)

These arrangements have, after a certain fashion, 'protected' the Mauritian economy, or at least guaranteed political stability there for more than ten years. But this protection was a dangerous gift. It also made it possible for the big sugar-producing bourgeoisie to largely keep up its profits, without having to make big investments, thus encouraging substantial transfers of capital out of the sugar industry.

This price guarantee is in fact glossy wrapping to hide a peculiar system of forced dependence. One of the primary elements of this system is the fact that the multinational Tate and Lyle has a monopoly on the purchase and refining, in Britain, of the 500,000 tons sold to the EEC. This firm, one of the giants of international commerce, manipulates the sugar market, and in so doing hides the essentials of the affair. (3)

Unlike the Mauritius government, it does not decide its policy for the four or five years to come, but for the next quarter-century. At the moment, it is looking for a substitute for sugar cane and beet based on saccharine, and also, primarily, on new products such as Thau-

matin, extract of a plant growing in West Africa that is said to be between 6,000 and 100,000 times sweeter than natural sugar. At the same time as Tate and Lyle is offering its services to Mauritius, its laboratories are preparing a veritable sabotage of the country's economy, and of several others at the same time that are also based on cane sugar exports. (4)

Another element of the constraint that weighs on the Mauritian economy is linked to the world sugar prices. In July 1984, sugar dropped to its lowest price for thirteen years on the free market. This obviously has an effect on the export income that Mauritius can expect to earn from the approximately 100,000 remaining tons of sugar that it sells on the free market. But the essential point is the consequences that this drop will have in the medium term on the sugar agreement with the EEC, and the sales agreement with the USA.

The drop in world price is not only a result of international trading speculation. The speculators never have an interest in maintaining a downward trend towards prices for too long a time. (5) The length of this depression in world prices is linked to the chronic overproduction of sugar in the world, that is increasing from year to year. World sugar reserves presently stand at 37 million tonnes, 40 per cent of annual world consumption. Thus, the market is saturated.

In this context, cane and beet sugar are in strong competition. Between 1969 and 1980, the EEC increased sugar beet production by 50 per cent, through an increase in the area cultivated and a rise in productivity. The cost of production has thus dropped sharply. At first, this development just exerted pressure to-

wards a fall in prices on the world market. But, in a second phase, because of the chronic surplus that this brought about, it pushed towards the reduction of American and European imports of cane sugar, and thus to the renegotiation of preferential agreements that they had made with certain countries in this field.

The agreement between the EEC and Mauritius is under discussion. The European beet growers would like very much to cut the cord, but for the moment France is playing a moderating role insofar as it can, given that it has to defend its big beet producers and, at least partially, protect cane sugar production in its colonies (Antilles and Reunion) because this is a factor of stability in the colonial order.

## The sugar tyranny

Thus, Mauritius is at a crossroads in sugar production. That is to say, in other terms, that Mauritian society as a whole is now coming under pressure from the big contradictions related to the crisis of the sugar industry. Sugar cane mobilises the labour force of thousands of workers on the plantations and in the factories, which in general belong to a few families of 'big whites'. Sugar cane provides the income for thousands of families of small and medium planters who own their own land. It guarantees work for the dockers, and justifies thousands of jobs in industry and the service sector.

Thus, in the last analysis, the majority of the population in Mauritius depend on the export of cane sugar. A crisis in this production thus provokes an increase in social tensions. Antagonistic social groups who live on the sugar economy have an increasing tendency to propose contradictory solutions to this crisis.

The big independent planters, organised in the Mauritian Planters Association, and the big white bourgeoisie from the plantations do not have the same resources, and do not make the same proposals for overcoming the crisis. The small planters, subject to the aspirations of the big within the MPA, and the agricultural proletariat could well, in the future, put forward their own demands.

1. *Week End*, Port-Louis, July 5, 1984.
2. On the Lome Convention, which links Mauritius with the EEC, see *International Viewpoint*, No 51, April 23, 1984.
3. For more information see *Tate and Lyle géant du sucre*, Philippe Chalmin, Editions Economica, Paris 1984.
4. 'Sucre en danger', Swaley Kasenally, *le Mauricien*, Port-Louis, July 19, 1984.
5. In accordance with a well-known mechanism of capitalism, a long-term depression in selling prices brings about, little by little, shutting down of the least profitable production capacity. A reduction in supply then follows, establishing a reequilibrium with demand which brings about an improvement in prices. The trading establishments that speculate on this evolution in prices sometimes have an interest in stimulating these rises, in order to maintain productive capacity as far as possible, or for other reasons to do with the manipulation of the market. But other factors can come to interfere with the reproduction of these 'natural' cycles. This is particularly the case for sugar today, given the permanent structural overproduction.

A major cause of the political crisis is rooted in these contradictions. An official commission of enquiry into the sugar industry was set up in 1983, the Avramovic commission. Its work cost two million rupees but produced only a banal report and contradictory conclusions, without any serious proposals about work conditions, the organisation of investments or nationalisation. (6)

In reality, the Mauritian government and all the main traditional political parties are trying to hide the direct link that exists between political conflicts and the sugar crisis. If this were publicly discussed, it would show that the interests of the property-owning classes, and the solutions put forward, are divided along racial and communalist lines. (7)

For example, the MPA of the big and medium planters is one of the main bastions of Hindu communalism, while the big industrial plantations retain their white colonialist character. It is undoubtedly the case that the big Hindu haulage contractors do not envisage the same solutions as the big Muslim traders, insofar as each group is capable of defending its own interests.

The big political parties, which are all up to their necks in communalist alliances, have every reason to try to conceal the material and economic base of communalism by attributing it to subjective, religious and moral reasons. They have every reason to try to get the workers to play the role of a pawn in these inter-bourgeois struggles.

The situation can only keep on getting worse. The international economic crisis will, in any case, force a reshaping of this type of single-crop farming. No bourgeois government will be able to resolve these problems in a lasting way without facing social explosions, at least not unless it resorts to the most extreme violence. Only a real agrarian reform organised by a government supported by all the toiling classes could introduce a long-term reform at the cost of the property-owning classes, starting with the big sugar capitalists. Only a solution of this type, as the product of a revolutionary victory, could loosen the tyrannical grip of the sugar industry.

As well as these structural difficulties in increasing export income, there is the question of foreign debts. As in most other dominated countries, the Mauritian debts are the result of a combination of various factors:

— The cost of oil, proportionally very high for a country that produces practically no energy and has, moreover, followed a policy of industrialisation whose financial results have not covered the cost of the new energy needs thereby created.

— The rise of the dollar, which is now the main factor of increase in the debt. Although 51 per cent of imports have to be paid for in dollars, only 21 per cent of exports are billed in this currency. At least 60 per cent of debt repayments are made in dollars, and the major part of the inputs for the main



Loading up sugar before mechanisation (DR)

productive sectors (fertilisers, cement, raw materials for the free zone) are imported and paid for in dollars. (8) One US dollar was worth 5.19 rupees at the beginning of 1979. In July 1984 it cost over 14 rupees!

— The rise in interest rates on the international financial market, combined with the rise in the dollar. Like many other countries, Mauritius finds more and more difficulty in getting loans from public institutions. Thus it has to apply to the banks for loans in eurodollars, usually under stricter conditions.

The amount owed by Mauritius is obviously quite modest in comparison to the debts of the big Latin American countries for example. But the impact of servicing this debt is far from being negligible on the Mauritian economy. Between the 1981-82 budget and that for 1983-84, debt servicing rose from an equivalent of 14.7 per cent of export income to 23.6 per cent. According to the finance minister, in 1984 more than two-thirds of sugar income will go on debt repayments.

However, confronted with this arrogant squeeze by the imperialists, the Mauritian leaders have responded only by glorifying their dependence: 'We are', declared the finance minister, 'in an exceptional situation, where we find ourselves one of the few countries of the third world who pay their debts with a regularity and seriousness that fascinates international institutions.' (9)

6. On the cost of the Avramovic commission, see *L'Express*, Port-Louis, July 25, 1983. On the contradictory conclusions see 'Reports of the Commission of Inquiry into the Sugar Industry' and 'Report of J. Manrakhan and R. Sithanen' of October 26, 1983.

7. The term 'communalism' describes groupings and forms of mutual aid that rest on a religious or ethnic basis. It is also used to denounce the political clientelism based on the specific interests of these groupings. It is directly inspired by the Indian example, insofar as the population of Mauritius is composed approximately as follows: 51.8% Hindus (including Tamils and Telegus), 16.53% Mus-

Faced with these difficulties and this propaganda, the mass of the people are quite simply invited to remain spectators. The press reports the debates between the government and the opposition, but the latter places itself on exactly the same terrain as the present government. The debate between the finance minister and Paul Berenger, leader of the opposition and of the Militant Mauritian Movement (MMM), is over the best option for rescheduling the debt, or how to appeal to the eurodollar market. Such a discussion, deliberately kept in a purely technical framework, consciously leaves aside all the political and social aspects of the problem. (10)

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have thus not had, up till now, any difficulty in getting their policies accepted. All the major parties, whether in power or in the opposition, have, during the last three years, tried to outbid each other to offer the most accommodating agreement with these two imperialist institutions.

The reduction of social spending, pushing down imports by increasing customs tariffs, inviting foreign investment in the export-oriented branches, etc — these, in Mauritius as elsewhere, are major aspects of the policy recommended by the World Bank and the IMF in return for opening up access to credit for the debtor countries. Zealously applied by the Mauritius government, this course has led to a severe drop in the standard

lims, 2.91% Chinese, and 28.66% 'general population', a category including the white French Mauritians and Creoles. There are about 50,000 whites out of a general population of 236,867 people. The statistics are from the official census. Communalism is also sometimes combined with rivalry between different Hindu castes.

8. *L'Express*, Port-Louis, July 26, 1984.

9. *Le Mauricien*, July 28, 1984.

10. As Paul Berenger of the MMM declared, it has to be shown to be 'competent' so that Mauritius will 'merit' having its debt rescheduled by the IMF. (*Week End*, July 15, 1984).

of living for the Mauritian masses.

In the space of a few weeks, at the time when a new round of negotiations with the World Bank was opening, the government reduced the subsidies for primary foodstuffs, (flour and rice), decided to raise prices by 20 per cent for the principal medicaments and 21 per cent for cement. In 1984, the health budget was reduced by 8.2 per cent, the housing budget by 49 per cent, and the education budget by 11.2 per cent. There is more and more talk of putting into question the notion of free education.

The budget for unemployment insurance, already very small, has been reduced by 40 per cent, but, at the same time, the government has injected almost 100 million rupees into investment aid for the private sector. While the rate of interest has been reduced by one per cent, the amount of credit given has risen by 15 per cent in one year.

Price rises such as those for cement offer a good opportunity for the big merchant speculators to overvalue their stocks, but that does not stop the government turning a deaf ear to the workers' demands for wage raises. To add insult to injury, they have just cut taxes for those who employ house servants. But to 'help the small people' they are content to simply create a fund of several thousand rupees for...Mauritian centenarians!

To help the masses swallow this, the regime claims to be intending to create the conditions for an increase in jobs. Officially, there are 72,000 unemployed, but the real figure is probably over 100,000. In a country of 950,000 inhabitants this is obviously considerable.

Even more than inflation, unemployment is a national curse that affects all families of the mass of the people, particularly young people. However, this does not stop the representatives of the World Bank and the IMF, the inspiration behind these policies, from putting about the most stupid optimism.

The real guides for Mauritius, alongside the representatives of French and British imperialist interests, these imperialist officials act shamelessly as the real masters of the country, passing out good and bad marks to the government's policies, to the workers and to the employers.

This whole panoply of measures proposed by imperialist bodies and applied by successive governments, has done nothing to resolve the structural crisis of the Mauritian economy. The IMF and the World Bank are in fact content to simply propose actions after the event, incapable of resolving the deep-going causes of the crisis.

One sees the same bluff applied on the famous industrial 'free zone' of Port Louis. Created ten years ago, this zone should, in principle, reduce unemployment and encourage technological advances. Although several thousand jobs have in fact been created, this has not at all resolved the problems of the labour mar-

ket, even if only because of the pressure of the growing population.

Moreover, this form of industrialisation has begun to be criticised at an international level, and a recent study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has begun to make a critical balance sheet of the installation of these free zones.

Having stated that the balance sheet of industrial development from these zones is disappointing, the report concludes that 'developing countries should take care not to give their free zones for export manufacture too important a place in their manufacturing industry. The free zones should be considered as a complement to other forms of industrial and export growth.' (11)

Unfortunately, this is quite contrary to the practice of the Mauritius government. The free zone has become a veritable philosopher's stone for transforming the country, eliminating unemployment, reducing dependence on sugar sales, etc. Thus, the government is planning on a considerable increase in the free zone, and intends to attract, by any means possible, all the foreign employers, big or small, who want to come and set up there.

### Crisis provokes social upheavals

The workers there, a majority of whom are women, are already terribly exploited. But the employers have been systematically putting on pressure of all sorts to ensure that the conditions get even worse. The labour code is, in effect, different by definition in the free zone from the rest of the country.

Attracting mainly industries edged out of the imperialist centres because of their outdatedness, this free zone guarantees such concerns a maximum rate of profit through the use of a semi-servile labour force as well as the preferential tax concessions, subsidies and free export of profits allowed to them. The Mauritius government therefore will have to attack the workers in this sector more and more if it wishes to compete with the free zones in the Asian countries. Its problem is that the Mauritius working class remains very far from tame. Even in the free zone, there is presently one strike a week.

Finally, the other measure proposed by the government to reduce unemployment is encouraging immigration and negotiating with other countries on the export of Mauritian labour. This scheme was nothing more than a makeshift solution, and has proved a dud. Since France and Britain have closed their borders to immigrants, the government has had to turn to countries like Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia and, now, Gabon.

In fact, it has been possible to send only a few dozen people abroad. However, the promoter of this policy, Gaetan Duval of the Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD), did not hesitate a few months ago to promise an end to unem-

ployment through this means. What a keen mind!

There has been a continual political crisis in Mauritius for three years. In the legislative elections in June 1982, the left crushed the reactionary parties in government by a score of sixty to nil elected representatives. However, a few weeks later, the new government was wracked by a crisis that divided it into two blocs.

In August 1983, special legislative elections put the country's affairs back into the hands of the old reactionaries who were defeated the previous year. Hardly had they taken up the reins of power, but this bloc split once more, and the Labour Party (PT), a bourgeois Hindu communalist formation, left the government, although not avoiding a split in its own ranks.

Thus, there has been total political instability for three years, affecting the institutions as well as parties. However, from independence in 1968 to 1982, Mauritius has enjoyed a relative political stability, if only by the retention of power all through those years of a majority around the Labour Party.

Another indicator of the new situation is that while the last rise of communalism was in 1973, now there is a sharp new rise in racial tension, even if it has not achieved the degree of confrontation that exists in India or Sri Lanka. On this terrain of communalist politics, everything has been completely turned upside down in a few years, an additional proof of the major upheavals in Mauritian society.

The Labour Party, traditional representative of Hindu communalism, had already experienced a split, which gave rise to the Mauritian Socialist Party (PSM) a few years ago. And the latter has recently itself undergone a new split. The party that symbolises Muslim communalism, the Mauritian Islamic Party (PIM) has disappeared from the political scene, and now it is the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) that portrays itself as the great defender of Muslims. The PMSD of Gaetan Duval, which claims to be the traditional party of Creoles, has lost a good part of its base, etc.

There is no way to explain such an upheaval of the political-communalist scene by mere subjective factors or the vicissitudes of the political game. It is the economic crisis and what is at stake there that has speeded up the confrontation between the different cliques of the bourgeoisie. Because, when the piece of the cake left to them by the imperialists gets smaller, then the fight over the remaining crumbs becomes a pitched battle between the different factions of the bourgeoisie. The quasi-unanimity on a national scale represented by the electoral landslide in June 1982 was the result of special circumstances. It very quickly gave way to a pitched battle between former allies.

11. UNCTAD bulletin, No 200, March 1984.



Dockers at Port Louis (DR)

In the present period, it is divisions within the bourgeoisie, a crisis of the state and neo-colonial institutions, and governmental instability that constitute the continuing elements in the situation.

During the legislative elections of August 1983, the two sides confronted each other on the question of the sugar industry. Moreover, it was during this period that the Avramovic commission was working. The coalition between the Mauritian Socialist Movement (MSM) the PT and the PMSD proposed some nationalisations in the big sugar industry traditionally controlled by the French Mauricians — big white families descended from colonialists and slave owners — and the constitution of a type of state-private comanagement body called the Sugar Authority.

The MMM wanted to keep the credit that Berenger had won with the big sugar firms when he was finance minister a few months previously, and only proposed a body for dialogue and big financial support from the state for the private sector to carry out modernisation. Of course, there was nothing revolutionary in all this.

What the coalition wanted was to promote the interests of the big planters and the Hindu haulage contractors, by reducing the relative weight of the big white employers. On the other hand, what the MMM wanted was to maintain a course of 'realism' and 'national reconciliation' with the big property owners who had directed the actions of minister Berenger. The two bourgeois camps knew exactly where their interests lay. The Hindu capitalists gave substantial aid to the MSM-PT-PMSD coalition, and the big whites discreetly supported the MMM. From that point, this electoral campaign could only take the form of a communalist competition insofar as the respective interests of the Tamil, Hindu and Creole bourgeoisies became integrated into this polemic.

In the absence of a unification of the toiling masses, all the political parties have been able, up till now, to get the

people to judge their conflicts on the basis of their racial group. (12) For this reason, if the working class cannot retake the offensive and rediscover the strength that it had in 1979-82, this economic and social crisis could accelerate the process of social decomposition to the point where it would take years to recreate elementary class consciousness in the toiling classes. In the period to come, governments of 'national unity' could certainly see the light of day, but, as anachronistic intermediaries, they could only give rise once more to new communalist divisions and tensions.

### Imperialist hegemony

But, beyond these events of parliamentary politics, it is useful to ask who really decides the future of Mauritius, and what share of real responsibility the imperialists have left to the Mauritius government. Leaving apart the IMF and the World Bank, who, as we have seen, act behind the scenes as representatives of imperialist interests in general, France and Britain are the main preceptors of the Mauritian bourgeoisie, and thus the real rulers of the country.

Thanks mainly to the sales of sugar to Tate and Lyle, 50.9 per cent of exports from Mauritius go to Britain, thus making it the main customer. As for suppliers, after Bahrein, the main exporter of oil to Mauritius, France comes in second, mainly through sales of manufactured goods and equipment. Britain comes third, just above South Africa.

For historical reasons, Mauritius is still prey over which the British and French imperialists are fighting. (13) Over and above the economic competition between London and Paris, which is partially sorted out within the European institutions, such as the Lome Convention for example, the two imperialist capitals use all the mechanisms possible to improve their respective positions.

At the time of independence, Britain left institutions modelled on its tradi-

tions, and English is the main language of the administration, judiciary and legislature. The Hindu majority, which forms the bulk of the ranks of the civil service, is a decisive factor in maintaining the daily use of English there. (14) Constitutionally, candidates for the National Assembly must be able to speak English.

French-speaking Mauricians, on the other hand, derive their benefits from the fact that the big sugar bourgeoisie is of French origin, and they supported the PMSD which, for a whole period, wanted to become a Creole-based party. The French imperialists therefore try to give the Creole petty bourgeoisie a Franco-phone culture. The Alliance Francaise and the Mauritius British Cultural Association have a quiet but deep rivalry on the cultural and linguistic front.

This produces cultural chaos and a major identity crisis, while increasing the obstacles to strengthening the position of Creole and Bhojpuri as national languages. Education is one of the main areas of this confrontation between the two imperialist camps, and Mauritian teachers juggle as they can with French, Creole and English, to get the school curriculum over to their pupils.

The French imperialists have been able to regain ground on Mauritius since independence. The dominant economic and military force in the Greater Mascarene Islands region, they have used their colony on the neighbouring island of Reunion as the organising centre for their policy of investment and trading, as well as their information network. Accepted as a state 'bordering on the Indian ocean' by all the governments in the region, even the most 'anti-imperialist', colonial France is included in all the commercial agreements in the zone, and carries the bourgeoisie of Reunion in its pocket.

The Republic of South Africa has an important influence in the Mauritian economy. In 1983, Mauritius sold 32 million rupees worth of goods to the RSA but bought from it goods valued at 449 million rupees. Tea-growing in Mauritius is linked to the good will of South Africa, which buys a substantial share at a price higher than that of the world market. De luxe tourism has become an industry in which South Africans are more or less dominant. More than 20,000 South African tourists visit Mauritius each year. Little by little, Mauricians have got used to seeing South Africans around. Their presence has thus become an accepted feature of everyday life.

While it is still difficult in a country such as Mauritius to justify these com-

12. See 'Communalisme, structures sociales et dependance economique a l'Ile Maurice', C. Gabriel, *Politique Africaine*, No 10, Paris, June 1983.

13. A former French colony then named Ile de France, it became a British colony in 1814. Mauritius is still not an independent republic. A member of the Commonwealth, the Queen as head of state is represented on the island by a Governor General.

14. Two languages are really the national languages of the country. In first place Creole, based on French, and Bhojpuri, based on Hindi. The overwhelming majority of the population speak and understand Creole.

mercial relations with the racist regime, the government has been able to use the recent South Africa-Mozambique agreement to back up its position. A journalist summarised this approach with this candid explanation: 'At the time when Samora Machel and Kenneth Kaunda have resigned themselves to shaking hands with the South African prime minister; at the moment when Pieter Botha has been able to get invitations and receptions in six European capitals; at the time when he has asked for and got an audience with Pope John Paul II, you could say that it is not the end of the world if there is [Mauritian] commercial representation in South Africa.' (15)



The Mauritian prime minister in the family photo of Franco-African summit (DR)

## The record of the MMM

The MMM represented all the hopes of the mass of workers. A mass movement of the people, at certain periods it even expressed the unity of the toiling classes and ordinary people. This was particularly the case in June 1982, when the electoral victory was deeply felt by the workers as 'their' victory. But this unity of the masses was never really achieved in practice in organisation and daily struggles.

For the last ten years, the MMM leadership has been evolving continuously towards the right. The first important turn was made in 1976, when the MMM was able to create a considerable parliamentary group. The pressure of the institutions, and the new role thus given to this opposition speeded up the crisis in the party, and its social-democratisation. But it is mainly in the last few years that the changes in the MMM have been confirmed.

Unprepared to provide a materialist analysis of communalism and Mauritian society, despite its claims to Marxism, obsessed by the search for a respectable and technocratic image, the MMM leadership brought about, in 1982, a break with the militant traditions of the party's past.

The MMM leadership, reduced to an apparatus that manipulates an unorganised base, first adopted the role of proselytiser for the ideas of the French government minister, Michel Rocard; and then ended up by aping in words and in practice the Mitterrandist policy being applied in France at that time.

Paul Berenger's MMM is once again in the opposition. Its leadership has, therefore, for its present needs, adopted a rather populist language. But this is far from being a return to the 1970s, when it exonerated imperialism and capitalism. The present course of the MMM in the opposition proves that the policy of defence of bourgeois interests that it practised when in power was neither a passing tactic, nor an orientation imposed on it. Its present attitude, marked by political manoeuvres and communalist alliances, confirms that the last few years have set the seal on its final degeneration.

After its electoral defeat in 1983, the MMM could not retain its friendship with the big sugar bourgeoisie. Once the latter had won from the new government a renunciation of nationalisations and a commitment that the Sugar Authority project would be stripped of its content, it found it more worthwhile to reestablish relations with the parties in power than to support the MMM in opposition. Thus the MMM has to carry out a two-fold policy: on the one hand, it has to present itself as the most 'expert' and competent of parties, while waiting for a new governmental crisis, and to then appear as the bourgeoisie's last hope; on the other hand, it has to appear as the party that defends the workers, so as to be able to rebuild its electoral base in the short term.

The workers' vanguard has thus a lot of difficulty in grasping the present reality of the MMM. Placing any hopes in it is particularly illusory as it does not, in the end, offer any real alternative to the government's policy, neither on the question of the foreign debt, on which it would like to be the most respectful of the imperialists' wishes, nor on the sugar industry, for which it has not changed the technocratic positions that distinguished it in 1983. On the question of unemployment, the MMM claims that when it was in government it was the best promoter of the free zone, and it glories in having sent more Mauritians to work abroad than the present government.

All reference to anti-imperialist struggles has been abandoned, and the MMM's time in power allowed it to place a number of its agents in the administrations and big enterprises. This happened in the port administration, where the position of these MMM-backed officials led increasingly to conflict with the party's traditional base among the dockers.

Advanced workers have thus found it difficult to maintain their faith in this party. It is this crisis of confidence in the leadership of the workers' movement that is the primary cause of the clear decline in workers' combativity over the last year and the demoralisation which has begun to set in.

The trade-union movement, the reflection of the political parties, is even more divided and weakened, as much because of corporatist divisions as because

of its inability to stabilise its implantation in the workplaces. The MMM failed in its task of unifying the Mauritian proletariat. By proving incapable of maintaining a real influence in certain rural zones, the party showed that it was not really capable of overcoming the communal divisions that exist in the working class. (16)

The MMM, in order to make up the gap, has just entered into another political manoeuvre. It is now preparing to form a bloc with the PT, which is just out of the government. At first, the MMM leadership took care to camouflage what it was doing by trying to place this operation in the context of a broad unitary discussion open to all the parties of the opposition, including the far left. However, this convinced nobody, particularly as there has been an increasing number of articles in *Nouveau Militant*, the MMM's newspaper, that are simply apologies for the PT. There is no longer any doubt that the agreement has already been sealed by Berenger behind the scenes, even though the MMM central committee was opposed to it. For many rank-and-file militants, this will be hard to swallow because the PT is quite rightly perceived as 'the symbol of the country's neo-colonial and repressive history'. (17)

The left wing in the workers' movement still capable of taking initiatives to alter the course of affairs is, at the moment, reduced to very small organised forces. There is a combative fringe which remains sympathetic to the MMM, although more and more critical of Berenger. This layer of militants would not break definitively with the MMM unless it found a real alternative leadership. Outside the MMM there are only two small far left organisations, both of which came out of the MMM, Lalit (The Strug-

15. *Mauritius Today*, Port-Louis, July 13-19, 1984.

16. The MMM controls one of the trade-union federations on the island, the General Workers Federation (GWF). This federation has two unions in the sugar industry, the SILU for cane cutters, and the UASI for factory workers, both of them very much minority unions. In Mauritius the cutters are mainly Hindus while the workers are mainly Creole. The task of workers' unionism in this sector is to unify the working class against the communalist unions.

17. Open letter to the MMM from the OMT, published in *le Nouveau Militant*, July 20, 1984.

gle, in Creole) and the Militant Organisation of Workers (OMT), which leads the National Front Against Poverty (FNAS). (18) The latter organisation has just taken the initiative of confronting the MMM publicly on the question of unity with the PT, counterposing a proposal for forming a united front among only the working-class organisations.

As one of the OMT leaders declared, 'The leadership of the MMM is misleading the workers about its present opposition to the government. There are lots of forums for discussion on the press or democratic freedoms, but no action. The workers are simply invited to be spectators in these forums. If the MMM returned to government, it would have a policy still more to the right than in 1982.'

Thus, the OMT considers that it is necessary to get the working-class base of the MMM to make one last effort to make a balance sheet of the leadership's policies, and to break with it. A new workers' party with a serious mass implantation could not emerge unless these hundreds of activists and sympathisers are won definitively to such a project.

But, over and above these conjunctural political battles, the resurgence of the Mauritian workers' movement will depend on much more daring initiatives. This is in part what the OMT is trying to do with its mass front, the FNAS. In Mauritius, where the industrial working class is a minority and the trade unions are very weak, a unifying framework for struggle has to be offered. There has to be some central arena for organising the young unemployed, women, the small planters and fisherfolk, as well as for the free zone workers and the workers in the sugar industry. The failure of the MMM also stems from its inability to provide this sort of broad organisation to the thousands of Mauritians who want to fight the bosses and the rich without being full members of a revolutionary organisation. The FNAS is aiming to provide this unifying framework, even if for the moment it is still a modest force. Through offering a framework for the struggle above the trade-union, professional or communalist divisions in the neighbourhoods, and in the future in the villages and factories, the FNAS could succeed in its objective.

For the OMT-FNAS, as for the rest of the Mauritian left, this is a decisive period. Given the upheavals going on in economic life, as well as social life and in the political parties, now is the time to grasp the significance of what is going on in order to go forward to rebuild the workers' and popular movement. ■

18. Lalit and the OMT derive from the MMM. These two organisations formed an opposition current which split in 1980. The tendency which formed Lalit left the MMM in 1982. That which gave rise to the OMT was excluded from the MMM in 1983. This latter organisation considers itself revolutionary Marxist. See *International Viewpoint*, No 49, March 26, 1984.

## ICELAND

# Wage earners' discontent erupts

For more than a month, economic and political life in this tiny island nation was convulsed by a general strike of public and printing workers. There were no newspapers, no TV, no radio. In a country where almost everything but fish is imported, the flow of goods off ships was blocked.

Virtually the only press appearing was the daily sheet of the public workers. In order to keep up a propaganda campaign against the strikers, the bourgeois groups had to set up pirate radio stations, and directly defy the police, who were obliged by law to shut them down. The strike ended November 1 in a partial victory for the workers, who got a 20% raise. The following articles were written before the strike ended.

Gerry FOLEY

In fact, the bourgeoisie's violation of its own laws has widened the breach between the government and the police who, while prohibited from striking, support the demands of the other public workers. Kevin Done, correspondent for the British business daily the *Financial Times*, which advocates using the repressive forces in Britain to defeat the miners, pointed up this aspect in an October 16 dispatch:

"Police searching for the transmitter were refused entry to the party's [the right-wing Independence Party] headquarters by party officials backed by Mr Gudmundsson [the minister of finance], on the grounds that they had no search warrant....

"Meanwhile the police, who are also members of the striking public sector union but are forced by law to stay at their jobs, had to hear government ministers being interviewed by the illegal radio stations. They demonstrated their solidarity with the strikers by a march in full uniform through Reykjavik with placards reading: 'We are policemen not slaves.'"

The combination of a fragile economy and a highly organized and militant workers' movement is an explosive one. In May 1983, the country had an inflation rate of 130 to 150 percent, the right-wing government claims that it has been reduced to about 15% by its austerity measures, which have drastically cut the workers' standard of living, especially that of public workers.

Real wages of public workers have dropped by a third in less than two years. And this year the government offered only a 3 percent raise from September 1 and another 2 percent increase in January, coupled with vague promises of tax cuts.

Moreover, the premier himself, Streingrimer Hermansson, has predicted a new drop of 5% in the standard of living for the coming year. The system for providing cost-of-living increases was scrapped

in May 1983. In these conditions, the public workers revolted, voting in September by 80 percent to reject the government's offer.

The confrontation is extremely sharp in particular because the Icelandic bourgeoisie has little maneuvering room. The fishing industry accounts for about 20 percent of the GNP and about 70 percent of export earnings. It has entered into a deep crisis, with the take of cod, the most important part of the fish harvest, having fallen from 461,000 tons in 1981 to 250,000 tons this year. Thus, the GNP has fallen by about 10 percent over the last three years. Since the basic causes of this are long-term overinvestment in the industry and the exhaustion of fish stocks through overfishing, there is no solution in sight.

After Israel, Iceland is the world's most indebted country per capita, with a foreign debt amounting to 60% of the GNP and 20-22% of annual export income going to service it.

On the other hand, the Icelandic bourgeoisie faces a working class that has more strike experience than virtually any other in the world and a very high level of gains. For example, in Iceland it is illegal for anyone to take a striker's job. In fact, this has led to a battle between pro-working class and pro-bourgeois students at the university over the question of whether the janitor has the right to let the chancellor unlock the doors. That is the former's job, but the latter holds the keys.

Because of the strength of the workers' movement, the bourgeois parties have, with rare exceptions, tried to keep the reformist working-class parties in the government. The present offensive was prepared for by rejecting them as coalition partners and setting up a bourgeois "class-war" government.

The Icelandic section of the Fourth International, the Fylkingin, pointed out in the resolution of its congress this summer:

"The formation of the coalition government of the Progressive and the In-

dependence Party on May 26, 1983, and the economic measures that followed signalled the beginning of a new period in Icelandic politics."

It continued: "The period from the end of the Second World War and until sometime just before 1974 was characterized internationally and in this country by economic expansion. This expansionary period made certain real reforms possible without leading to a fall in the profit rate. This laid the objective basis for class collaborationism and for coalition governments between bourgeois parties and workers parties in a twofold way. Firstly, the same need for capital to attack living standards with the ferocity that almost makes it impossible for work-

ers parties to take part, did not exist as it does now. Secondly, it was possible for the workers parties to enter into coalition governments with the bourgeois parties and to get some real reforms to show to their supporters."

On the level of the economic struggle, the hold of the reformist bureaucrats has weakened. The present struggles were foreshadowed by the overwhelming rejection in February by the Dagsbrun, the unskilled workers' union, of the contract negotiated by the National Labor Confederation. The motion for rejection was put by a Fylkingin member and it won by 800 votes to 17, with even the leadership being forced to vote for it. ■

"I am totally against that," Hanna Kristin Stefansdottir said. "That will only mean bigger cutbacks in the public sector."

Along with the public workers, the printing workers are also on strike. But the rest of the Icelandic workers are still at work as usual. "What support are you getting from the other unions?" I asked.

"First, I have to say a few words about the sort of propaganda that is being used against us to cut down our support among private-sector workers. In recent years, the right-wing papers, which are the biggest ones, have harped on the theme of how much the taxpayers have to pay out for our wages and how poorly the public sector functions.

"Now the papers aren't coming out because of the conflict and radio and TV broadcasting has also stopped. But the right has the resources to continue its propaganda.

"It is the right that has kept two pirate radio stations on the air for the past two weeks. To combat that, we have only leaflets."

It was on October 11 that these pirate radio broadcasts were stopped. Previous attempts to halt the right's propaganda broadcasts were blocked by ministers who were involved in this propaganda activity. The right wing paper, *DV*, which supports one of the government parties, had sponsored one station for ex-

At the time of writing, the situation was quiet. The shutdowns were continuing and all the workplaces were waiting to see what would happen. I asked Hanna Kristin Stefansdottir what she expected.

"The strike is becoming long and drawn out. For nearly two months now the unions have tried in vain to get an offer from the government. This silence on the part of the authorities also reflects

## Why the teachers are on strike

Janne AKERLUND

REYKJAVIK—"The background to our strike is that people's buying power has been cut by at least 30 percent over the last year and a half!"

That was what Hanna Kristin Stefansdottir said. She has been a teacher for fifteen years and is the editor of the teachers' paper in Iceland. She is also one of the leaders of the public workers' union, the BSRB (Bandalag Starfsmanna Ríkis og Baeja, the Association of National and Local Government Workers), which has been on strike since October 4.

"A lot of people in other countries might think that our demand for a 30 percent wage increase seems too high. But we have seen our living standard drop very quickly. Most people here have to do extra work in order to make ends meet.

"There is a danger now of a mass exodus from the public sector since you can earn a lot more in the private one.

"I myself was offered a job as a secretary for a lawyer that would have paid me two and a half times what my present one does.

"The private sector, which is quite buoyant right now, is luring away a lot of workers from public employment. In the public sector, the situation is very bad. In the summer for the first time a lot of wards were closed at the hospital.

"But not everyone in the private sector is highly paid by comparison with us," Hanna Kristin Stefansdottir continued.

"Workers in the fishing industry, especially women, are as badly paid. They are trying to raise their standard of living by working overtime, and they also have a piece-work system that makes it possible for them to earn a bit more."

I asked: "Has the question of privatization of the public sector been discussed by the government and the bosses? That's what's happening in other parts of Europe."

"Some people have been talking about reprivatization, the minister of finance among others. But, so far, there are no concrete plans for this. The public sector has been subjected to very severe austerity, and it is obvious that many of these measures could lead to demands arising for private schools, day-care centers and hospitals.

"In September, for example, all instruction in the school libraries was stopped in order to hold costs down. Medicine and medical care are a lot more expensive today. Before we paid about as much as you do in Sweden, but today we are paying twice as much."

The government's answer to the conflict so far has been to talk about lower taxes instead of higher wages.

### On the picket line at the docks

The public workers' strike has run up against a series of strike-breaking operations. This has involved not just the right setting up an illegal radio station but also more direct actions.

That is why there were a couple of hundred strike pickets stationed in Reykjavik to stop such attempts.

I met one of them down at the harbor where the customs officials are on strike but where a ship was being unloaded. This time the pickets were able to stop the discharging of cargo without any problems. But a couple of days later, there were reports of a battle on the docks when another vessel was being unloaded.

"The strike is the last step you take, but now we have to do it because economic conditions are so bad for us," said Einar Oskarson. He works in the Icelandic post and telegraph service. But today he is doing picket duty for the public workers down here in the harbor.

"We have to work thirty to forty hours extra a week to make ends meet. A lot of us work two jobs instead of one. And for what? Look at the prices and compare. I've been in Sweden myself, and I earn less than Swedish workers in the same job. But here in Iceland, milk costs more than twice as much."

I asked: "Do you think you are going to win the strike?"

Einar responded: "We may get a raise of 10% to 15%, because these are hard times. The fishing industry is doing poorly, and we always get the worst of it when the economy is doing badly. But the strike is so strong and we are so united that we are going to get a better contract than the one we renounced."

Here on the docks, the pickets had been able to stop strikebreaking without a ruckus, since there was strong solidarity among the harbor workers. I wondered what sort of support the strikers had gotten from other unions.

"We have got very good backing," Einar said. "We have not had any trouble. On Wednesday, we had a demonstration, and there was no trouble whatsoever."

J.A.



big conflicts within the government. The most conservative forces are ready to pass a law against the strike and call new elections.

But when the finance minister stopped the paychecks for public workers in October, the premier was furious. I think that they are not talking to each other any more than the government is talking to us.

"We have very strong support for our struggle. Out of the country's 800 teachers, 400 come here every day to work for our union in the strike.

"The same is true for other unions of public workers.

"We have got statements of support from other unions in Iceland that are still in negotiations. We have also got statements of support and economic contributions from public workers in other Scandinavian countries. Our strike fund is quite empty and needs contributions from outside. It's empty because we got the right to strike for the first time in 1975 and so we have had only ten years to build it up."

I asked: "Do you have any message for *Internationalen* [Fourth International paper] and public workers in Sweden?"

"Yes, be on your guard about the public sector. All talk about reprivatization is dangerous. Public workers in Scandin-

avia have to defend the public sector. Sick-pay funds, education, health and medical insurance benefit everyone. And for such a tiny country as Iceland that is very important.

"It is also very important to get out information about our demands, about how our buying power has been cut, and how high the cost of living has gone in Iceland, because the conflict can widen very quickly. We are hoping for a positive proposal from the government next week, but the strike can escalate very quickly.

"For our part, we are preparing for a resignation en masse. We have asked teachers to sign up on a list that they are ready to resign immediately, and some 80 percent have done so. They pledge also not to take another teaching job in Iceland until everyone is reinstated.

"This form of struggle was used by the doctors three or four years ago, and we will see if we have to carry out this threat in fact. But the comment on this demand from the other side is not encouraging. The finance minister has said: 'It's all the same to us, let them twiddle their thumbs at home.'

"We are going to go on fighting, because what is at stake is the future of our people and a decent life in Iceland." ■

negotiating while we public workers are on strike is getting under a lot of people's skin. Dockers come up to us and tell us that they are ashamed that their union is negotiating while we are out on strike.

"That is the most dangerous thing in the conflict. The bosses are exploiting the workers movement's weakness and trying to split us.

"The main question for us today is the question of bargaining rights. This question is also going to have to be discussed before the Icelandic National Labor Confederation congress in the winter. We have to have the right to win our own contract and not have to depend on what the National Confederation gets in negotiations."

Despite the fatigue after many weeks on strike, he spoke fluently and energetically. We were constantly being interrupted by telephone calls. But Magnus Einar Sigurdsson always started again right where he left off.

"We have got support from the other unions in the strike, but there has been no adequate discussion about future coordination and solidarity. We have faced strike breaking, although not on the same scale as the public workers. Our relations with the public workers are getting closer, and we help them put out their strike paper. The more time passes, the stronger the coordination is between us.

The conflict on the Icelandic labor market today is more over the general conditions for the labor movement in the country. The wage demand that the strike started over is receding into the background.

"For us, what is at stake is the justification for our existence as a union, and in the public workers' union the main thing they are talking about is what sort of a political answer to the government the workers' movement can come up with."

At the time, most people were talking about what the future might hold since there was a lull in the conflict at the moment. Everyone was waiting to see what would happen. I asked Einar what he expected for the future, what he thought was going to happen.

"There are two kinds of future today," he said. "One is what is going to happen next week. The other is what is going to happen as regards solidarity and the coordination and political role of the workers' movement.

"I think that the workers' movement is going to take the steps needed to win this conflict. Right now there is a lull, but soon things are going to start happening again. Then, after the conflict, we will face important discussion in the workers' movement before the National Confederation about what should be done to strengthen the Icelandic workers' movement.

"As for the near future, there are three possibilities. The government and the bosses may make an acceptable offer, they may try to outlaw the strike and call new elections, or there may be a general strike." ■

## Printing workers in the forefront

Janne AKERLUND

REYKJAVIK—The printing workers were the first to go on strike. I met one of their leaders, Einar Magnus Sigurdsson. After we walked through all the rooms in the printing-workers' headquarters, met the members of the strike committee, and got the latest information from all the pickets, he began explaining what led up to the strike.

"We printing workers are not in the Icelandic National Labor Confederation, and so we have always had to fight by ourselves. We had a referendum on joining the National Confederation, but the proposal failed to get enough support. We signed a contract in March that we could renounce if buying power declined too much.

"Like all the other unions, we renounced our contract on September 1. We issued a strike warning. In so doing, we were refusing to accept a 3% raise on September 1 and another 3% increase next January 1.

"We want to get a contract as soon as possible. But despite the fact that we gave ten days notice for the strike, as compared to the usual six, we got no answer from the employers."

The printing workers have been on strike now since September 10, when

there was a vote for a walkout. The public workers started their strike on October 4.

"What worries us most today is that the National Confederation is continuing to negotiate," Sigurdsson said.

"We know very little about how that is going. They are talking about negotiations with the government on tax relief. This is a question on which there are divided opinions in the Icelandic workers' movement. I don't think that we can strengthen buying power by that means. We have low taxes here in Iceland. And the unions are not going to be the ones to take responsibility for further cuts in social spending by pushing through lower taxes.

"There was unanimity on the decision to strike and we have maintained our unity since then despite the bosses' attempt to split us. On Thursday, we had the biggest union rally yet and a new expression of this unity. There was a proposal at the rally that we should not stick rigidly to our demands, but a huge majority rejected that, and then everybody united behind the union leadership in the strike.

"But the strike has demonstrated problems in the Icelandic workers' movement. The fact that the other unions are



## Socialist miners and wives discuss their strike

Steve ROBERTS

Miners and miners' wives from all over the British coalfield gathered for an international solidarity meeting in Lancashire, north-west England on October 20.

Among the 300 people who attended the meeting, organised by *Socialist Action* newspaper, were trade unionists and socialists from Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Ireland, France and the USA.

Eighty miners registered for the meeting and thirty members of miners wives' support committees. They came from all the major coalfields including Scotland, South Wales, Lancashire, Kent, South Nottingham, South Yorkshire, South Staffordshire and Leicester.

In addition there was a contingent of miners and wives from Bold colliery who were hosting the meeting in their miners' institute. Colin Lenton, a member of the Bold NUM committee explained why the branch had extended its facilities for the meeting in his welcoming speech to those present:

'We feel that it's the least we can do. Without *Socialist Action* and the organisations in France, Belgium, Holland and other countries we wouldn't have come through the strike in the way we have.'

The meeting opened with a discussion on the development of the miners wives' movement. Valerie Coultas, chairing the session for *Socialist Action*, said that the British labour movement was witnessing the rise of a new women's movement centred on the miners' wives and the fight of the Greenham Common women against the placing of Cruise missiles. The action of the miners' wives was not only changing the consciousness of men in the miners' union, but throughout the whole labour movement.

Sue Bence from the Kent Miners' Wives Action Committee of Aylesham explained how her group had been formed.

'We formed a group before in the 1972 and 1974 strikes. But at that time it was mainly to collect and distribute food.'

'But this time, on day two of the strike, eighty women met and decided we would organise a peaceful demonstration to Nottingham, because we were incensed by the media-supported 'back-to-work' campaign being organised by the so-called 'petticoat pickets'.

Lorraine Johnson from Bold said that the miners' wives had proved more effective in gaining support than the male members of the NUM. Ann Jones from South Wales said the miners wives' movement had shown that 'there was more than one determined woman in this country!'

Judith Woodward, of the Women's Action Committee in the Labour Party, spoke of the way in which miners' wives were joining the Labour Party and the role of the NUM in backing increased women's representation in the Labour Party.

There was loud applause for the speech of Anita Grey, a supporter of the Greenham Common peace women. She said that the Greenham women were fully behind the women and men in the dispute. In particular she saw the fight against nuclear power as a strong link between the peace movement and the miners.

The final speech was that of Kip Dawson, a woman member of the United Mine Workers of America and of the Socialist Workers Party (USA).

She said that militant workers in the USA were increasingly looking to two places for inspiration. The first was to the miners' strike in Britain. The second was the struggle of the Nicaraguan people.

'If and when intervention [in Nicaragua] comes, we will not stand idly by. Like the sisters of Greenham Common we will fight to oppose our government.'

The session ended with Ann Jones explaining that the miners' wives were now organised nationally with a conference in November.

The second session of the meeting was on perspectives for winning the strike. Pat Hickey, the industrial correspondent for *Socialist Action*, opened the discussion by drawing attention to the desperate measures that the Thatcher government were preparing against the miners through the courts.

Phillip Sutcliffe, a member of the Kent miners' executive, received laughter and applause when he introduced himself as 'Kay Sutcliffe's husband'. (Kay is a leading member of the miners wives' movement.)

He explained that the £200,000 fine against the union and the threatened sequestration of the NUM's assets was

part of a move by the state to crush working people, 'which in the first place means the miners'.

Among the other trade unionists attending the meeting who spoke in the session was Roy Butlin of the National Union of Railwaymen from the Coalville Freight Depot in Leicestershire. He explained that in Coalville, the main mining town of the area, out of 2,500 miners only 30 were on strike. The rest were producing 135,000 tonnes of coal which was not being moved by the 150 members of his union branch to power stations.

As a result, British Rail management had sacked three of his members on spurious charges. He finished with an appeal to the miners present. 'I know that 330 miners have been sacked in the dispute so far and that you will not go back until they have been reinstated. But I want you to add three railworkers to that number — sacked for solidarity with the miners.'

Three striking miners from Leicestershire, South Staffordshire and Nottingham then spoke to thunderous applause from the delegates. In all these areas striking miners are in a small minority. All spoke of the daily harassment and violence suffered by the strikers which goes unreported in the press.

Many miners called for Neil Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party, to get off the fence, and start supporting the miners and for the TUC to start delivering on its promises at the 1984 congress.

John Ross, the editor of *Socialist Action*, spoke of the political developments in the strike, particularly how the miners had moved to support other groups under attack from the Tories including women, blacks and gay people on the principle that 'an injury to one is an injury to all'.

He said that this was also the principle being used by the underground members of Solidarnosc in the mines in Poland, who had sent messages of support to the British miners and condemned the strike-breaking role played by the Jaruzelski regime.

This growing internationalist consciousness was reflected in the final session on international solidarity. Dennis Pennington, from Bold NUM, spoke of the way in which his ideas had changed during the strike. He had toured abroad to raise support for the strike as the guest of the GIM, German section of the Fourth International, and POS/SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International.

'Before I used to think of myself as a miner — and a Lancashire miner at that, not even a British miner. But now I see myself as a worker, part of the interna-

tional working class.'

Finn Jensen, a member of the miners' solidarity movement in Denmark spoke next explaining that not only had they raised nearly £100,000 for the miners, but they had been able, through dockers' action, to stop the shipment of Polish coal from the port of Aarhus.

Anneka Meijssan, an electro-mechanical worker and shop steward from the Rotterdam support committee, spoke of the work of her committee and of her party, the SAP (Dutch section of the Fourth International). She saw the main job of her committee as countering the lies put out by the pro-government media in the Netherlands. The miners' strike was very important because of the way in which the Lubbers' government identified with the Thatcher project.

They were also exploring all possible ways of preventing the shipment of coal from Rotterdam to Britain and said that she would be discussing with the miners present the best way of going about it.

A pledge to stop the coal from Antwerp in Belgium came from a carworker active in the miners' solidarity campaign and a member of the POS/SAP, 'even if we have to shovel it into the water' he said. He was one of the three Belgian trade unionists present at the meeting.

Brian Phelan of the Irish organisation, People's Democracy spoke from the platform to describe the solidarity activities and sentiments for the NUM strike that existed throughout Ireland. He finished his speech by telling miners that the only thing Irish workers wanted in return was for the NUM to demand British withdrawal.

One miner who already supported the troops-out position was Wayne Frost, a miner from Armthorpe colliery, who had been present at the Belfast demonstration where Sean Downes was killed as a result of being hit with a plastic bullet. Wayne said the way in which police were being used in the miners' strike was more and more similar to the way they were used in the north.

Nigel Bevan, a young South Wales miner, said that he had joined *Socialist Action's* fight in the Labour Party, because through the strike he saw the need for internationalism in practice.

The session finished with a rousing speech from Alain Krivine of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International). Krivine said that the miners' strike was of central importance to all European workers. It was the highest point so far of the new wave of workers' struggles that had developed against the austerity and militarist policies of Western European governments in 1980-81. The miners' victory would be a victory for all workers like those in West Germany who had fought for the 35-hour week and the Italian workers who had fought for defence of the sliding scale of wages.

In France, too, it would be considered as a victory by workers who are fighting against the betrayal of the left parties since 1981. The LCR had already organ-

ised one tour for British miners and had supported the solidarity campaign of the CGT (CP-dominated trade-union federation) in France. Now they were organising a second tour.

The meeting finished with the singing of the Internationale. All the participants were then invited to a special social organised by the miners of Bold. Over 900 people attended the social and £1,000 was raised through collection and auctions. ■

## Defense of Basque national movement

*The first extraditions of Basque nationalist refugees from France on September 26 were part of a combined offensive against the Basque liberation movement by the Social Democratic governments in Paris and Madrid.*

*In response to this general offensive, aimed at rolling back the gains the Basque people have made since the death of Franco, a very broad united front has developed, representing a full spectrum of nationalist and principled socialist opinion in the Basque country.*

*The Basque resistance is focused around an Open Letter to the Peoples and Nations of the World (for the text and list of signers, see IV, No 61, October 15, 1984). On October 11, a rally for the Open Letter campaign was held in Madrid. Miguel Romero described it as follows in the October 19 issue of *Combate*, the paper of the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state:*

"More than 300 persons filled a hall of the Eurobuilding Hotel in Madrid for the presentation of the 'Letter to the Peoples and Nations of the World' and to take part in a rally to discuss and denounce the repression to which the Basque country is being subjected.

"It was a modest rally by comparison with what we want and need to do. But it was a useful one, a fraternal assembly marked by friendship for Euskadi and the determination to do something.

"We raised the Ikurrina [the Basque flag] in 'enemy territory,' over this sinister luxury hotel...where we were obliged to meet at a big expense because the associations that should have given us a place, if they lived up to their name, barred us from their facilities.

"There was every sort of person in the hall...young people, old people, party activists, independents, intellectuals, professionals, trade unionists, priests—people who have different ideas about the statute of autonomy [for the Basque country], the KAS Alternative [the minimum program of the radical nationalists], or a negotiated solution to the Basque question but agreed about the need for waging a struggle here in Madrid for democratic rights in solidarity with the Basque people against the repression be-

ing directed against them.

"All the participants shared the feeling of disillusion and indignation with respect to the policy of the Socialist Party government. The "Open Letter" represents a stimulus, an example of something that we want to do in the special and difficult conditions here in Madrid."

Joseba Goni explained the campaign for the "Open Letter."

"Goni described the work that was necessary to collect a quarter of a million signatures for the 'Open Letter' from all parts of the Basque country [the total population of the Basque area in the Spanish state is only about 3 million]....

"The short discussion that followed demonstrated that there is a real determination on the part of a still relatively small but growing number of people to respond to this assault on democratic rights. It was shown already a few weeks ago in the Days of Protest Against Torture....

"The important thing is to keep up the action. For this immediate proposals were made:

"To send a bus from Madrid to the October 20 demonstration in Bilbao.

"To organize protests on all levels against the 'antiterrorist' bill.

"To remain on the alert against any threat of new expulsions or extraditions so that we can respond immediately without the delay there was in September.

"To organize a new rally in a bigger and more appropriate place. In fact, we are convinced that there are many hundreds of people in Madrid ready to stand by Euskadi, even if it means opposing Felipe Gonzalez [the Social Democratic premier]."

## Trotsky still banned in Hungary

The last issue of the Hungarian review *Mozgo Vilag* (The World in Movement) was seized on September 15. The 15,000 copies printed were destroyed. Reason: the review had published a historical article on Leon Trotsky's role in the formation of the Red Army and during the Civil War. It is thought, in Budapest, that this repressive measure was taken as a result of a direct intervention by the Soviet embassy.

The review *Mozgo Vilag* already had a brush with the authorities a year ago. At that time its editor was dismissed and replaced by two journalists, one from the CP daily paper, the other from its theoretical journal. This was an attempt by the party apparatus to reassert 'ideological' control over a journal that is very influential among students and intellectuals, and supposedly directed by the Young Communists. ■

## Demands of the FMLN-FDR in meeting with Duarte

On October 15, in the small village of La Palma, in the department of Chalatenango, a meeting took place between Salvadoran president Napoleon Duarte, and a representative of the armed forces, and delegates from the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), in the presence of members of the Catholic Church. This meeting followed a proposal by Duarte, who, several weeks before, had stated before the General Assembly of the United Nations, that it 'was the time to put an end to the struggle that covers our country with blood'.

On the same occasion, Duarte recognised that 'there was a justification for the guerrilla forces launching the armed struggle in 1979, given that the medieval agricultural system, the financial system at the service of the bankers, and the army which oppressed the people had made a peaceful change impossible', adding however that 'this situation no longer exists'. The demagogy of Duarte's operation is summed up in these words. His proposal also received the blessing of the reactionary Salvadoran military — aside from Major d'Aubuisson, leader of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) — and, in the end, that of the USA.

For its part, 'taking account of the intensification of the war and the worsening situation in the region, the FMLN-FDR expressed its intention to attend [this meeting] to discuss the Salvadoran crisis as a whole and present proposals for a solution'. (1) We publish below a list of the demands put forward by the FMLN-FDR during this meeting.

1. All the quotations are taken from *Inforpress Centroamericana*, Guatemala, October 11, 1984.

Our people will never attain peace until the following demands are met:

- Our people demand the exposure and trial of the culprits in the assassinations of Monsignor Romero, the four US churchwomen, the *companero* members of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) Executive Committee; exposure of the assassination of the advisers from the Agrarian Transformation Institute (ISTA), and of the four Dutch journalists. Exposure and trial of the culprits of all political crimes committed in recent years.

- There will be peace when freedom for all political prisoners is obtained and the situation of the disappeared is clarified.

- To stop the bombing of the civilian population and the policy of economic strangulation of inhabitants in zones controlled by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN).

- Full respect for the right of organization and mobilization of urban and rural workers. Full respect for the right to strike; demilitarization of workplaces; free mobilization and organization of government workers.

- Payment of salaries to teachers and solutions to their most important demands; to set the harvest wage this year at 18 colones per one hundred pounds, and a daily wage for cotton and coffee; a 10 percent general salary increase for bank, trade and industrial workers.

- Price reduction in articles of popular consumption.

- Deepening and continuation of the agrarian reform in all its stages.

- Reestablishment of decree 207 [Phase III of the agrarian reform law].

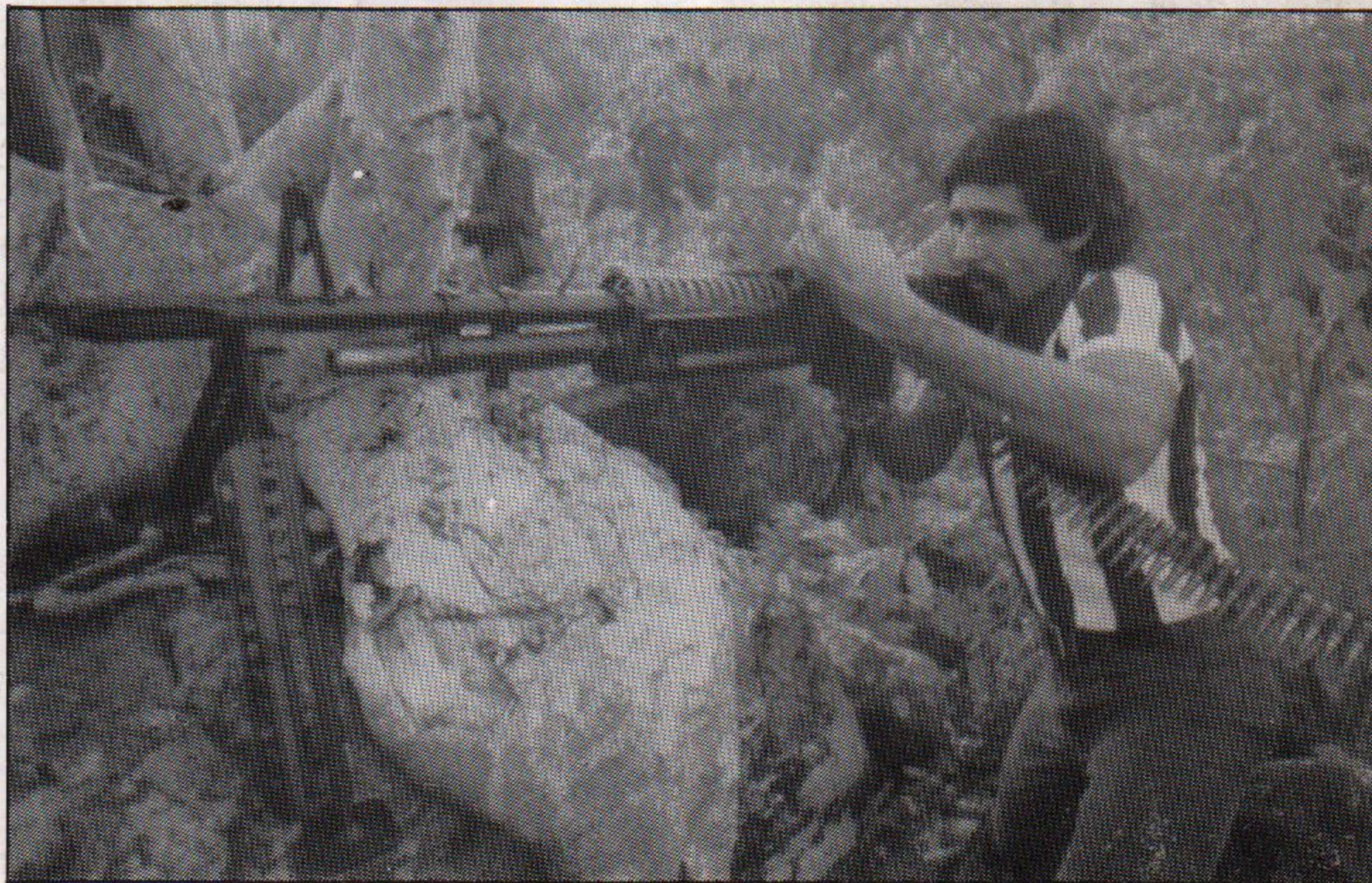
- Total suspension of forced recruitment [into the army].

- Scholarship funding programs for the children of workers.

- Increase of the National University budget.

- In accordance with the austerity

*The FMLN are continuing to fight (DR) \**



policy, a reduction in the salary of the President of the Republic, the ministers, the Legislative Assembly members and all high-ranking government officials. Likewise, a reduction in the salaries of colonels, lieutenant colonels, generals and majors of the Army. Increase in the salaries of army soldiers and a stop to the policy of mistreatment of soldiers in garrisons, as well as physical mistreatment, threats to family members, etc.

- The withdrawal of all US military advisers; suspension of US military aid.

- Ending of repression and persecution of the women vendors from the central markets; development of a plan that will allow them to earn a living.

- An end to the forced payment to the civil defense in small villages and hamlets. This payment has been taken from the population.

- To make available all radio, written and television media to all guild organizations.

- To establish special legal measures, aimed at providing protection to the national and international press, to guarantee full freedom of information.

- Reduction of water and electric power bills for households.

- Reestablishment of state subsidies to achieve the reduction in the price of fuel, spare parts, and other materials to transportation workers.

- Suspension of school tuition fees at all public schools, and the regulation — based on a limiting chart — of tuition fees at private schools.

- To give preferential treatment and reduction of loans to small and medium-sized farmers.

- To give preferential treatment and reduction of the interest rates within the credit policy for the small enterprise.

- Increase of 100 percent in taxes on all profits and activities of large enterprises.

These are the paramount aspirations of the Salvadoran people. ■