

Socialist Action

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For a Class Struggle Left Wing in the Labour Movement

December 80

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FIGHT TORIES' WAGE FREEZE

FIREFIGHTERS TAKE LEAD

by GRAHAM WEIGHT

Britain's firefighters have not taken the Tories 6% wage freeze lying down. Their response was immediate. Overtime bans were imposed up and down the country.

Resolutions began flooding central office calling for an "all-out strike". While the Executive has decided to sit on the national strike call - at least for the time being - the rank-and-file pressure has been such that they have been forced to call a number of one-day stoppages.

DEAL

But why have the firefighters acted so promptly? The answer lies in the agreement made with the Labour government back in 1977.

In that year, the FBU went on a 9-week long strike to recoup a drop in wages of 12.5% under Callaghan's 'Social Contract'.

As a result of the strike - which was one of the most bitter of recent years - the FBU was taken out of the pay bargaining arena and guaranteed an average yearly increase of 20%.

RENEGING

This year, however, the employers began to backtrack on the agreement. They announced that the FBU would have to accept less than the 20% and called for between 3,500 and 4,000 redundancies.

Friction was already beginning to develop when the Tories stepped in and let the employers off the hook by imposing the 6% freeze. Such a freeze means, in effect, that the agreement negotiated 3 years ago has been thrown into the rubbish bin.

ANGER

It is not just the question of pay, however, which has angered the rank-and-file so deeply. As Jim Fitzpatrick (union secretary, Battersea) explains, the changes in conditions and redundancies tied to the deal mean that "the whole future of the service is at stake".

It is this which has led to the spontaneous imposition of overtime bans in area after area and the call for a national strike.

SOLIDARITY

As the firefighters prepare for another 'winter of discontent', however, it is vital that they are not allowed to fight alone. Their struggle against the 6% - and for a decently-staffed fire service - is in the interests of all public sector workers.

The TUC has already expressed its support for the firefighters case as have leading public sector trade unionists such as David Basnett and Alan Fisher. Words, however, are not enough. What is needed is action;

What is needed is a united public sector response to the 6% wage freeze which can stop this government in its tracks.

George Hold (Peckham CLP)

The Tories have declared war on public sector workers. Not content with axing thousands of jobs - through social services cuts - they have now imposed a 6% wage freeze.

However Hesaltine might interpret it, the 6% represents a full blown incomes policy. At a time when inflation is raging at around 16%, millions of workers are expected to accept what will amount to a 10% wage cut.

The Tories action against the firefighters represents the shabbiest part of their new policy. They have openly reneged on the earlier deal which guaranteed FBU members an 18.5% increase. Even many local authorities are appalled by the governments action.

JOB

No doubt the Tories hope to ram their policy home by suggesting that - if the 6% pay norm is breached - then this will merely lead to a loss of jobs. They hope that the threat of redundancies will discourage any fight-back.

But they have miscalculated. Public sector workers are not falling for that hoary old argument. In response to strong rank-and-file pressure, the Executive of the firefighters union has already declared a series of one-day stoppages combined with an overtime ban.

As Scottish regional secretary Mike Jones put it, this was "...the most basic response - the smallest form of industrial action we can take".

ACTION

Moreover, militancy is increasing



Firefighter's on strike in 1977

in other public sector unions. On hearing Hesaltine's proposals, Alan Fisher (NUPE leader) declared: "What the government is offering is not a 6% wage increase but a 10% decrease".

Calling a conference of all public

sector unions to work out some form of joint action in the period ahead, Fisher hinted that "industrial action of one kind or another" was probably on the cards.

What is not needed, however, is 'hints'. Nor delaying tactics

which leave the firefighters to go into action alone to 'test the water'. Such an attitude will only allow the government the opportunity to pick off public sector unions one by one and demoralise the others.

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Mass Action to Defend Jobs!



Mike Rodney (NALGO)

Jobs are currently being shed at the staggering rate of 10,000 a week. As industries are cut back and services axed, whole areas of the country are being returned to the industrial deserts of the thirties.

And it's quite deliberate. As Heffer pointed out in the Commons recently, pushing the jobless total to 2½ or 3 million – the Treasury's estimated figure for this time next year – is an integral part of the Tory strategy.

Creating mass unemployment will, they hope, push wages down and profits up, thus making British industry more 'competitive'.

DOLE

Not content with throwing millions on the dole, the Tories have now added insult to injury by launching an attack on the victims of their unemployment strategy.

In her latest 'mini-budget', Thatcher has decided to break the link between unemployment benefits and the inflation rate. What this will mean, in real terms, takes little imagination.

Workers are not only to be deprived of a job – they are to be driven back on to the breadline. Families struggling to make ends meet are to be plunged, once more, into the misery and poverty of the 'thirties'.

STRUGGLE

The Tories jobless strategy has not, however, gone unchallenged. On the contrary, time and again workers have shown their willingness to stand up and fight.

The eight-week long steelworkers strike earlier this year – which threatened to broaden into a general strike – is a case in point. The mass turn-out on March 9th and, later on the TUC's 'Day of Action' on May 14th, shows the willingness of the rank-and-file to fight for jobs.

What has been lacking is not the willingness of the members to fight back but that of the Labour leaders. Chummy talks at Number 10 – combined with rhetoric about the return of a Labour government in four years time – has substituted for any fighting strategy.

CAMPAIGN

This is what makes the mass demonstration planned for November 29th so important. Under mass pressure from the membership, the Labour leaders have finally been forced into taking action.

Moreover, they have been forced into action around demands which can mobilise the whole labour movement in the fight for jobs. The last Labour conference accepted the call – already popular in some unions – for the 35-hour week and for an extension

not reduction, in public services. These demands can become the rallying cry of ever-wider layers faced with the insanity of a system that can only survive by throwing millions on the scrap-heap.

ONGOING

It will take more than a single demonstration, however, to stop the Tory government in its tracks. The Labour leaders mustn't be allowed to view the November 29th rally as just one more 'protest action'.

On the contrary, they must be pressurised into using it as a springboard for an ongoing campaign against the Tories' unemployment strategy. Workers facing redundancies and plant closures mustn't be allowed to battle alone. The full weight of the labour movement should be mobilised behind them.

Labour councils refusing to implement Tory cuts – which will lead to mass lay-offs – mustn't be allowed to face Heseltine's penalties alone. They must be given the full backing of the industrially strong unions.

STRENGTH

It is by mobilising the full weight of the labour movement that the battle for jobs can be won. The leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party must not be allowed to renege on this fight any longer.

* For the 35-hour week! Oppose all redundancies with a call for work-sharing with no loss of pay:

* Open the books! Where firms claim they cannot afford a full workforce, let them open the books to inspection by trade union representatives;

* Nationalise under workers control! If firms are incapable of providing jobs – or are going bankrupt – they should be taken over under the control of the workers in the plant.

* Stop the Cuts! Instead of cutting social services, they should be extended to provide socially useful work for the two million on the dole.

FOOT: PAPERING OVER THE CRACKS?

Michael Foot's election as leader last month was greeted jubilantly by many Labour Party members. It was seen as a clear slap-in-the-face for the Labour 'right' – organised around Healy – and its Tory backers.

Correctly so. Foot's victory reflects the radical mood sweeping the party which led, at Blackpool, recently, to some resounding setbacks for the 'right' on issues as diverse as party democracy to nuclear disarmament.

COMPROMISE

While a clear rebuff to the 'right', however, Foot's 10-vote victory should not be exaggerated. Many MPs voted for him not simply because they felt this grass-roots pressure at their backs.

They also supported him – and not Healy – because they saw Foot as the best person to control and defuse this groundswell of opposition building up against Callaghan's pro-capitalist policies.



GM COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)

In their eyes, Foot represents a 'compromise' figure, one who – by trading off his 'left' image – would be able to direct this growing discontent into channels acceptable to the PLP. As the *Observer* pointed out, his job is that of a 'conciliator'.

CHALLENGE

Callaghan's decision to resign – shortly after the last conference – was clearly a manoeuvre aimed at boosting Healy's chances in the electoral stakes.

Many MPs saw, however, that a Healy victory would inflame the party ranks, who would view it as an attempt to bypass the wider electoral franchise agreed by the conference, and alienate sections of the trade unions still smarting from the 5% norm.

They feared this would lead to a strong challenge from the 'left' when Healy submitted himself – in the New Year – to the electoral college. Above all, they feared Healy might be replaced with a figure such as Benn – strongly backed by the CLPs – on a firmer 'left' ticket.

WOING

It was largely to scotch this threat from the grass-roots that Foot was pressed so urgently to

stand. It was felt that his left-wing image – particularly his old association with CND – would gain him wide credibility among union and party ranks.

This would ensure that when he submitted himself to the electoral college – as he had pledged to – the 'left' vote would be split and the forces around Benn marginalised.

LEFT-WING?

Foot's left-wing image on issues such as nuclear disarmament were clearly a problem but – compared with the prospect of a Benn win – a small price to pay.

Moreover, as Hattersley pointed out: "Michael's not so left-wing as he used to be". Only too true. Foot's real position can be seen in his loyal defence of the former Callaghan government – 5% pay freeze and all – in which he acted as deputy leader.

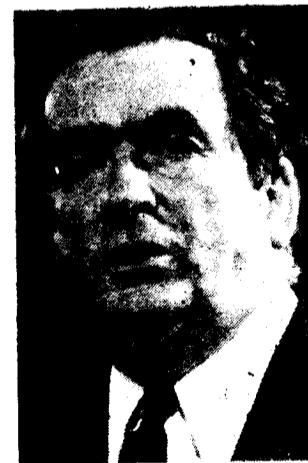
These were sufficient guarantees that Foot, while credible to the party, would not bow too far to its pressure. His defence of the PLP – since his election – and his back-tracking on withdrawal from the EEC and unilateral disarmament, show how correct they were.

CRACKS

Foot's attempts to paper over the cracks in the party, however, are doomed to failure. These divisions have not arisen by chance.

They have arisen because the rank and file – sick and tired at seeing conference decisions overturned by a few unrepresentative MPs – are demanding more democratic control. This is at the root of the differences that have flared up.

They will not disappear by Foot waving a 'unity' wand. On the contrary, as the Tory attacks escalate, they will grow sharper. The party ranks will push even harder for it to implement conference decisions – in the interests of all



working people – and this will bring them into head-on conflict with the Hattersleys and Rodgers of this world.

Carol Rees (Peckham CLP)

SOCIALIST ACTION FORUM ON LABOUR PARTY



By Jamie McLaughlin (EEPTU)

A large audience turned up, last month, to Socialist Action's forum on the Labour Party. The meeting was certainly well-timed. Coming

just after the Blackpool conference – at which major victories were chalked up against the 'right' – the scene was set for a serious discussion on what perspectives socialists in the Labour Party should adopt.

The opening speaker, Terry Viney (Croydon CLP), explained that the present debate could only be grasped by looking at the Labour Party historically. Castigating groups like the SWP, he argued that the formation of the Labour Party was "a major step forward for working people which socialists support and identify with".

It is only by understanding the deep loyalty of workers to the party they built, he went on, that one can understand the present upsurge. "It is because workers are loyal to their party that they are seeking to defend themselves against the Tories through it".

Mike Rodney (Finchley CLP) continued this theme. Concentrating on the growing conflict between the conference and the PLP, he explained that "this split is not an

accidental one. It reflects the attempts by workers to take control of their party out of the hands of a bunch of semi-Liberal MPs who continually ride roughshod over conference decisions".

George Hold (Peckham CLP) ended the meeting by explaining how socialists should intervene in this process. "As workers look more and more to the Labour Party for a lead", he stressed, "the central task of socialists is to try and forge a class-struggle left-wing against the labour bureaucrats".

Such a left-wing, he went on, can't be proclaimed. It can't be artificially set up like 'Militant' or the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory think. It can only be built by uniting thousands together, around clear class-struggle positions, and fighting for them through mass action.

An interesting debate followed the speakers in which other tendencies took part and a real exchange of views was held. A collection towards the *Socialist Action* fund drive brought in £38.40.

FUND DRIVE

Last month's fund drive brought in £1,480 towards our target figure of £10,000 by next April. Particular thanks go to LW (S. London) who kicked off the drive with £500.

While well on our way, we are still short of the £2,500 needed by Xmas if the target figure is to be reached on time. We there-

fore urge all our readers and supporters to rush in donations (however small!) in the next few weeks.

It's the best Xmas present you could give – and we could get. Please make all cheques/postal orders payable to: *Socialist Action*, PO Box 65, London, SW 16 INN.

Thousands Protest Nuclear Missiles



Terry Viney (Croydon CLP)

The 80,000 strong demonstration against nuclear missiles, in October, was a major rebuff to the Tory government.

Called by the CND - and backed by the Labour Party - it showed the growing hostility among British workers to Tory attempts to turn the country into a nuclear 'aircraft-carrier'.

Those who marched through the streets of London were only too aware that the siting of Cruise missiles ties us, hand and foot, to the US's aggressive military strategy. It makes us a number one target in the event of war.

CUTS

It has not just been attempts to import the American Cruise missiles, however, which has led to anti-nuclear groups springing up all over the country. Equally important is the Tories' decision to replace ageing Polaris submarines by Trident at the cost of over £5 billion.

Their priorities couldn't be any clearer. At the very time they are calling for massive cuts in

social services - unemployment benefits and social security being the latest victims - taxpayers' money is being poured into these nuclear time-bombs.

As Tony Benn, speaking at the end of the rally explained, workers are not going to be taken in by these attempts to "... divert attention from injustice at home by conjuring up an alleged enemy abroad".

LABOUR

This is, no doubt, one of the reasons why the campaign has found such a favourable response among sections of the labour movement. The Labour Party, at its last conference, took a clear decision in favour of unilateral disarmament.

Moreover, since that time, the massive T&GWU has decided to affiliate to CND and a major debate on the issue has opened up within the ranks of the AUEW. The Yorkshire area of the NUM, of course, has been opposed to nuclear missiles for some time.

This growing support for the campaign within the labour

movement shows that workers are not prepared to see money - which should be spent on schools, hospitals and housing projects - squandered in the Tories' war drive.

POWER

If CND is to grow in the period ahead - and organise a really mass movement against the Tories' 'nuclear insanity', it is increasingly towards the labour movement that it must turn.

It is only by deepening its roots in the unions - and bringing out onto the streets thousands of union members - that it will develop the power to put an end to the Thatcher government's nuclear gamble.

Its decision to call another mass demonstration - and its support for a labour movement conference against the missiles slightly earlier - shows that it is beginning to recognise the potential that exists.

**NO CRUISE MISSILES!
SCRAP MISSILES - NOT JOBS!
BRITAIN OUT OF NATO!**

Poland: Unions Win Victory

Mike Hopkins

The Polish workers' struggle continues to advance. Despite attempts to block it, the Stalinist leaders were forced last month to legally recognise Solidarity (the independent union federation).

The victory followed hard on the triumphant tour by Lech Walesa and other union leaders of the steel and coal-mining regions of Southern Poland. The reception they met gave the Stalinist leaders little room for manoeuvre. Bernard Guetta, writing for the French daily *Le Monde*, described a typical meeting at Krakow:

"The crowd was immense, so large that it was impossible to estimate the number... It was restrained, it did not chant anything, and no fists were raised. It was a tense and disciplined crowd that was not about to storm anything but was determined not to retreat".

SUPPORT

Solidarity's support among Polish workers is such that it has already topped the eight million mark - over half of the 13 million in the socialised sector of the economy. No doubt this explains why, last month, the 'puppet' Trade Union Council bowed to the inevitable and dissolved itself.

The rapid growth of Solidarity - born out of the strikes earlier this year - is of course no accident. More and more Polish workers see it as a real tool to combat the corrupt and repressive regime of the Stalinist leaders.

This was shown only recently in Czesochowa when Solidarity leaders - representing over 155 factories and plants - threatened strike action to force out Governor Wierbicki, accused of intimidating workers and hampering union freedom.

THREAT

The Stalinist leaders in Poland - and their backers in the Kremlin - are clearly rattled by this movement which points toward taking command of the government and establishing a democratic socialist regime.

Veiled threats are already being made. On November 6th, CP boss Stanislaw Kania went on TV to attack "... people who build on maintaining and fanning workers' dissatisfaction. These are people who clearly aim at socialism and our alliances".

While issuing threats, however, the Polish leaders fear a head-on confrontation with the powerful working class and the impact such a confrontation could have on other Eastern European countries.

DIVIDE AND RULE

For this reason they have - at least for the time being - decided on a different course. This involves trying to wear down the new union, whittling away its gains and looking for opportunities to divide and weaken it.

A clear example of this was their attitude towards the Charter of demands Solidarity put forward. While legally recognising the new union, Polish courts tried to rewrite the Charter and omit some of its basic rights.

The Courts claimed the Charter was illegal because it did not contain a clause recognising the "leading role" of the Polish Communist Party. They also, for example, struck out sections that dealt with procedures for calling strikes.

BACK-DOWN

The Stalinist leaders have had little success, however, with these harrising tactics. Solidarity's response was sharp. They declared that unless the Courts accepted the

demands of the original Charter - and started operating other reforms 'guaranteed' before - mass strikes would be called for mid-November.

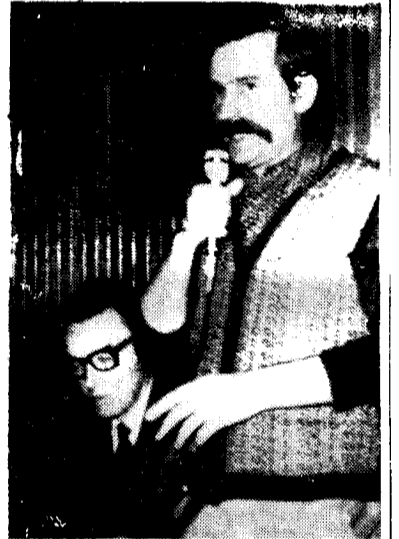
Once more the Polish Stalinists were forced to backtrack. CP boss Kania agreed that the union would be allowed to print its own paper and have access to the mass media. He also accepted the idea of meat rationing (to ensure fair distribution) and improvement in the supply of consumer goods.

FEAR

While Walesa and other union leaders were formally ready to accept the "leading role" of the CP, it is clear that the demands raised by Solidarity undermine the CP's repressive rule at every step.

This is what sends shivers of fear up and down the backs of the Polish CP leaders and their allies in the Kremlin and elsewhere. They know only too well that the fight for democracy and equality by the Polish workers threatens the very core of their repressive rule.

The East German leaders have virtually sealed up their borders to Polish citizens to prevent the spread of the 'upsurge'. They have - moreover - openly threatened to support the Soviet Union in action against the 'enemies of socialism'.



Workers' leader Lech Walesa

EXAMPLE

Fear of the Polish workers' struggle is not confined to Stalinist leaders in the East, however. Despite the hypocritical 'support' from figures such as Reagan or Thatcher, they know only too well that a victory for workers there would be an inspiring example to workers here fighting against austerity plans and attempts to erode democratic rights.

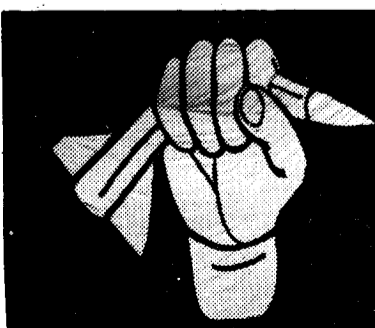
This is why criticism of the Polish workers leaders - such as Lech Walesa - is already beginning to find its way into the Western press. Only recently, the *New York Times* attacked Walesa for being "surrounded by the accoutrements of power".

Both the Western rulers and Polish bureaucrats have a vested interest in defeating the Polish workers struggle. That is why it is becoming more and more important for the workers' movement everywhere to be aware of what is at stake and mobilise support for their comrades in struggle.

REVOLUTIONARY DYNAMICS OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

What are the roots of women's oppression and how best can they fight for their rights? These are the questions 'Revolutionary Dynamics' answers. It is a 'must' for all women - and men - in the labour movement aware of the importance of the question of women's rights in the anti-Tory struggle.

CND Conference charts future



by Mark Challen (Peckham YS)

Over 300 delegates and members of CND met, on November 15th, to discuss out the perspectives of the movement in the light of the mass October demonstration.

Flushed with their earlier success - and the growing interest of sections of the labour movement - the conference decided to move boldly forward and passed a motion calling for a mass rally next May "three, four or even five times this number".

The conference also decided to endorse the call from the Manchester against the Missiles for a labour movement conference in March as a stepping-stone to the national mobilisation.

The fact that such motions were passed is a clear sign of the enthusiasm building up and the awareness that real opportunities now exist

for mobilising mass opposition to the Tories.

The perspectives of building a mass-action campaign, rooted in the labour movement, did not go unopposed, however. Some delegates, notably those from the Communist Party, rejected such a course in favour of pressurising MPs, Bishops and other public figures.

Despite this opposition, however - and despite the fact that the motions passed at conference have to be approved by the CND national council the consensus seemed firmly in favour of a mass, labour-movement based, action

What We Stand For

Socialist Action sees as its central aim building, within the labour movement, a class-struggle left-wing fighting for socialist policies against those which lost Labour the last election and disillusioned thousands of Labour supporters.

Such a left-wing should support not only policies in the interests of working people but also their allies among the youth, Blacks, women and oppressed national minorities. It is only by showing that Labour champions the rights of all the oppressed and exploited that a really united offensive can be organised against the Tories (and their right-wing allies in the labour movement).

Socialist Action believes that a fighting left wing should be built around the following demands:

- * Hands off the unions! No curbs on the right to strike or picket!
- * For the 35-hour week! End unemployment by work-sharing (with no loss of pay) and introduce a mass public works programme for those already on the dole.
- * Oppose all wage curbs. For wage increases tied to the cost of living to offset inflation.
- * Open the books of all companies claiming inability to pay a decent living wage or threatening redundancies. Nationalise those that put profit before people.
- * Tax the rich not the poor. No cuts in the social services — for social spending to be tied to increases in the cost of living.
- * For women's rights. For the right of all women to abortion on demand, free nurseries, equal pay and opportunity. Support NAC.
- * Fight racism. Repeal all racist immigration laws. Defend the right of Black people to organise as they see fit in the community & labour movement.
- * For the right of all oppressed nations to determine their own future — Get the troops out of Ireland now!
- * For a safe environment. End nuclear reactors and base an energy strategy on coal. Explore alternative energy resources.

Socialist Action supporters, while fighting for the above demands, seek the widest possible unity of all forces in the labour movement around concrete issues. They also seek to encourage the widest democracy in the labour movement to allow all currents to argue for their point of view and for decisions to be mandatory on Labour leaders.

If you would like to know more about Socialist Action — or contribute to it — write to: Socialist Action, PO Box No 65, London SW16 1NN.

RIGHT TO WORK?

During the last week of the Tory Party conference, some 200 unemployed youth marched 300 miles from North Wales to Brighton in order to demonstrate their plight.

There can be no doubting their seriousness of these young people, eager to draw attention to the hardship facing growing numbers. Why then, it must be asked, — when there are over two million on the dole — did not the campaign gain wider support?

If the Socialist Workers Party, who were the campaign's key backers, are correct in their strategy, why was the road to Brighton not over-flowing with tens of thousands opposing the Tory 'dole' policies?

SIDELINES

The answer is not difficult to discover. The SWP's Right to Work march was *not organised in the labour movement*. It did not stem out of a real fight — in union and Labour Party branches — to launch a mass opposition to the Tory government.

On the contrary, it was a 'stunt' organised by the SWP outside of the labour movement with the aim of getting publicity for itself. Such a sectarian position of 'going it alone' didn't attract many workers who don't see it — or its sideline campaigns — as the answer to Thatcherism.

The diversionary nature of the SWP stunt can be seen most clearly if it is contrasted with the mass demonstration against unemployment launched, in Liverpool on November 29th, by the Labour Party.

INADEQUATE

Not only was the SWP campaign a diversion away from the

mass anti-Tory struggles but the focus of its demands was equally inadequate. The march concentrated around the call for the 'right to work'.

While this is correct, it didn't offer any other demands which would give workers a perspective as to how it could be achieved. It ignored, for example, two of the key slogans passed at the last Labour Party conference: for 'A35-hour week' and for an extension — not a cut-back — in social services.

These two demands offer workers practical — and reliable — solutions to the threat of the dole. Why not share out the amount of work available among the existing workforce without loss of pay? And why not 'soak up' those already on the dole in socially useful tasks — like building hospitals — which are in short supply?

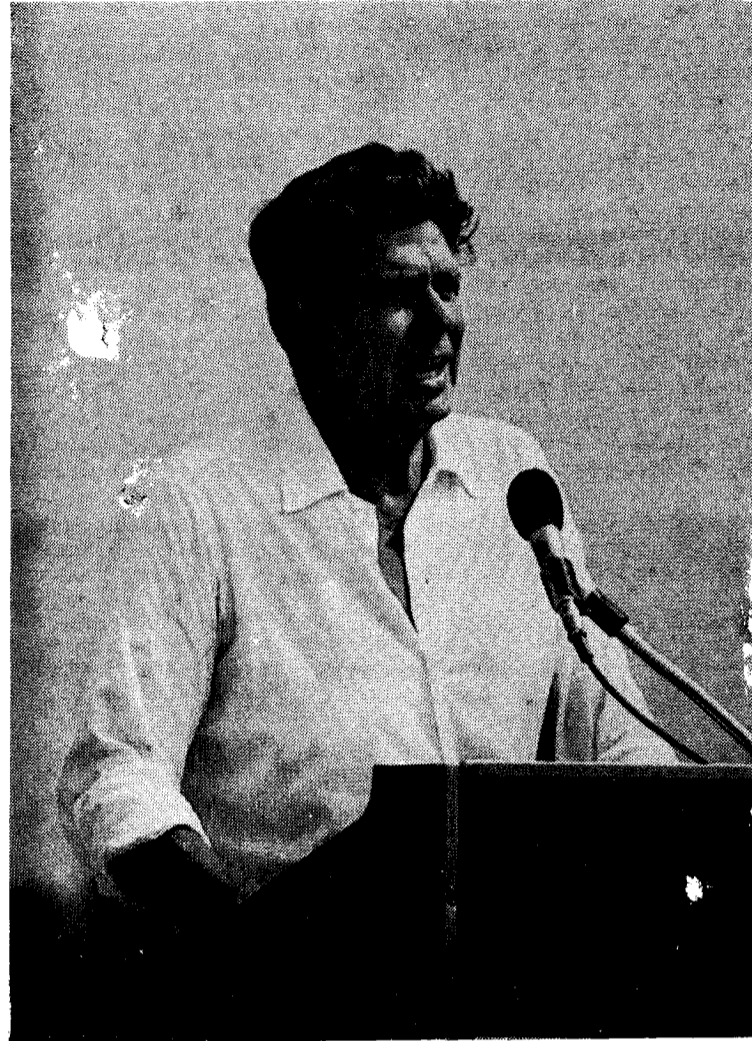
ON THE SPOT

Finally, another basic weakness of the Right to Work campaign was that it put the onus for fighting unemployment upon those who are already out of work. Drawing together the largely disorganised ranks of the unemployed is not only difficult. It is incorrect.

If the fight against unemployment is to be successful, it can only be won by mobilising the mass power of the trade unions and the Labour Party. Only their collective weight can draw the unemployed behind them and show the government we mean business.

Mobilising the trade unions and Labour Party, however, — as happened on November 29th — means that you have, first of all, to be part of them. And for the SWP, busy on the sidelines of the labour movement, this is a difficult task.

US Elections: Is America Mo



Reagan's 'landslide victory' in the US presidential election is being boosted in newspapers everywhere as a major swing to the right by the American people. As when Thatcher was elected, America is being portrayed as entering an 'era of conservatism'.

Such a picture is a fraud. While the American ruling class may be shifting right, that is certainly not true of US workers. The major result stemming from the election was not a landslide victory for Reagan but a landslide against both candidates of big business.

Although the press play it down, the 1980 election saw the lowest turn-out in over 30 years, continuing the decline since the 1948 poll. Reagan won on a lower percentage vote — 26.5% — than Nixon in '72, Johnson in '64 or Eisenhower in '56.

ANGER

What this low turn-out reveals, above all, is the growing frustration among US workers and their distrust of the two-party system. This fact was partially recognised by the more

astute big business commentators.

The editors of the *New York Times*, for example, supporting Anderson's independent campaign, cynically observed: "A large body of voters is dissatisfied with a Reagan-Carter choice in November. To deny them an independent alternative risks harming something larger than the two-party system: confidence in the whole political process".

Only too true. What growing numbers of US workers realised was that — whoever got into the White House — the drive towards war and the attacks on their living standards would continue.

HAWK

Carter, of course, tried to play on US workers anti-war sentiments by painting Reagan as a 'hawk' and himself as a peace candidate. Reagan's hawkish tendencies were clearly evident in his call for a blockade of Cuba and his pledge to boost arms spending.

But Carter's attempt to play the 'dove' cut little ice with US workers. They clearly remembered his attempted coup in Iran, his threat to intervene in the Persian Gulf and his decision to pump over \$100 billion into the MX missiles system.

As correspondent Ellen Goodman wryly observed: "It's easy enough to think of Reagan as a hawk. But it is hard to think of Carter as a dove when he harbours rifle-toting Brzezinski under one wing and the draft registration plans under the other".

ANTI-LABOUR

Similarly, Reagan's open support for anti-union laws at home — and his pledge to fund tax cuts for the rich at the expense of social services — clearly alienated many US workers.

US Socialists Cal

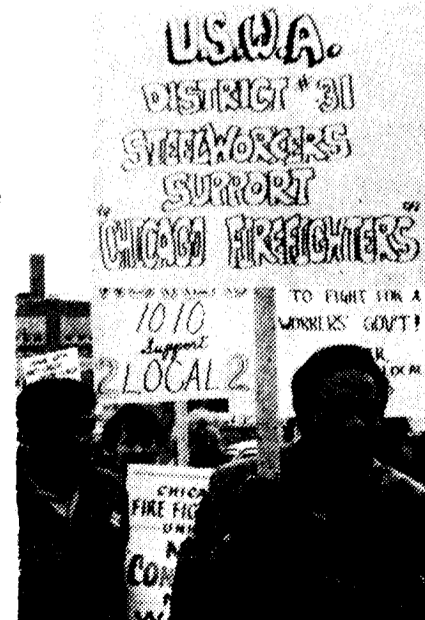
The following statement was released on October 18 by Andrew Pulley, Socialist Workers candidate for president, as he concluded a tour of Detroit.

Detroit today is the epitome of the inhumanity and irrationality of the capitalist system. Many auto workers still on the line are working 58 hours or more a week, some of them doing jobs that used to be done by a combination of two or even three workers. Yet hundreds of thousands of those who used to work beside them are on the streets looking for work and standing in unemployment lines.

Matilde Zimmermann (the SWP vice-presidential candidate — SA) and I have been campaigning with simple and straightforward proposals to put an end to this madness.

JOBS

Like shortening the work-week with no cut in pay to create more jobs. Everyone now working would put in thirty hours weekly instead of forty or more. This would create



jobs for the unemployed.

Like organising a massive programme of building new schools, housing, child-care centres, hospitals and recreation facilities. We'd put millions to work on this project from coast to coast.

Like opening the account books of the big corporations to public investigation. Nationalisation of

those corporations that shut down and throw workers on the streets.

And like eliminating the massive war budget and using that \$175 billion for human needs instead of private profits.

Carter, Reagan and Anderson have been stumping the country with a united proposal: that working people sacrifice to solve capitalism's economic and political problems. The parties of big business that they represent are united in their assault on the working class and the rights of the American people.

The American rulers' preparations for wars against the peoples of other countries are the other side of the same battle they're carrying out against American workers. They would send Detroit auto workers to fight and kill Iranian auto workers, oil workers and farmers in a war to defend the profits of the US oil corporations.

More and more American workers are beginning to realise that the fight for peace and security in the world, for a decent standard of living, and for social justice requires not only their support, but their active participation.

...ing Right?

Sabina Roberts (Streatham CLP)

Carter's attempt to benefit from this fact — and secure his base in the industrial centres — got short shrift however. Workers were only too aware that, under his administration, the jobless total had soared to 8.2 million and inflation was running at 12%.

As leading trade unionist Jerry Wurf remarked: "There's such bitterness against Carter in our union, and concern that he's cut back on services to the needy and he's using unemployment as an economic policy, that our members want to lash out at the betrayal they feel". Nowhere was this sense of betrayal stronger than among Blacks and women.

ALTERNATIVE?

Reagan, as usual, didn't try to hide his credentials. He stood on an openly anti-woman, anti-Black rights ticket. He rallied behind his opposition to abortion — and thinly-veiled support for segregation in the South — the most reactionary sectors of US society.

But Carter, while picking up a greater share of the woman and Black vote, had no alternative. Hadn't he cut off government funds for abortion services? Hadn't he refused to lift a finger to support the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (even though professing to support it)?

Moreover, hadn't there been a growing attack on Black rights under his presidency? Although the murder of Black youth — as at Miami — is a daily occurrence, Carter's Justice Department had regularly resisted demands to intervene in such cases.

CHARADE

In this sense, it is quite wrong to portray the Reagan victory as a

'shift right' by the US working people. On the contrary, what it represented was a shift right by the US ruling class as they sought to whip up support for their war drive abroad and austerity measures at home.

What it also represented was a rejection of these prospects by growing numbers of US workers who refused to take part in the charade of choosing one capitalist candidate against another.

LACKING

What was clearly lacking in the 1980 elections was a real alternative which could channel the anger and frustration of US workers against the war drive, against unemployment, cuts in social services and racist attacks. What was lacking was a labour party.

Because of the trade union bureaucracy's ties with the Democratic Party, most workers had to express their opposition to attacks upon them either by non-voting or registering a protest vote against Carter. There are signs, however, that sections of the union movement are re-thinking this position.

The most dramatic example of this was when the one million-strong IAM (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers) refused to back Carter's nomination for president. Despite pleas, the union conference voted overwhelmingly to explore the chance of building "an independent pro-labour party dedicated to the principles of Social-Democracy".

LABOUR PARTY

The decision by the IAM to take their distance from the two-party system is a sign that growing numbers of workers are looking for a party that represents the interests of work-

ing people and not big business.

This was precisely the ticket that the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP) ran on during the elections. Putting forward its own presidential candidate — Chicago Black steelworker Andrew Pulley — the SWP made its main thrust the need of workers to break from the two-party system and organise their own party.

POLARISATION

Ronald Reagan may have won the 1980 election. His platform — which was hardly different, in essence, from Carter's — may represent a rightward shift by US ruling circles as they



seek to make working people pay for the growing crisis.

But working people are not moving that way. The growing frustration with the two-party system — and the growing interest in a labour party that Pulley met with on his campaign — shows that US workers are moving in the opposite direction. They are beginning to organise for the big battles ahead.

Conference says "NO!" to Tory Cuts

Tim Robinson (NALGO)

Over 700 delegates — and 300 visitors — crammed into the anti-cuts conference called, last month, by Lambeth Labour council. Of those attending, 450 were from public sector unions (NALGO, NUPE etc) and over 200 from Constituency Labour Parties.

The main focus of the conference was on how to organise a fight-back against Hesaltine's latest round of cuts. As Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth Council, pointed out, Hesaltine's most recent cash limit faces Labour councils with a dilemma.

Either they stand firm and organise resistance or else — if they accept the limits — they butcher services and throw hundreds of local government employees on the dole. In Lambeth alone, for example, acceptance of the Tory cuts would lead to the loss of some 200 jobs.



Vanessa Wiseman

A first step would be for local councils to refuse to implement any Tory cuts. As Vanessa Wiseman for the Trades Council explained: "We have to start by taking a stand now. No-one should be selling council houses or planning cuts. We have to build a movement that can save our services".

SUPPORT

Such a perspective won the support of many of the delegates present, particularly from the union sector, who openly opposed the defeatism of Keating's amendment.

They showed, in no uncertain terms, the willingness of many public sector workers to take action in defence of jobs and services. Largely as a result of this mood, it was agreed by a large majority that Labour councillors should refuse both to introduce cuts or increase rates (at least in this financial year).

This position was strengthened by an amendment from Lambeth NUT that a steering committee should be elected ready to organise support for "councils or councillors penalised by the Tories".

FUTURE

Whether or not Labour councils will be prepared to abide by these decisions remains, of course, to be seen.

The important thing is that the conference drew together a wide spectrum of union and Labour Party activists who do want to fight the cuts and who are not prepared to see social services axed while tax cuts are made to the rich.

It is up to them to ensure that these decisions are carried out and that — if not — a real struggle is begun in the labour movement to force Labour councils to implement policies in the interests of the workers they were voted in to represent.

STRIKE?

Knight argued, however, that the only way Labour councils could stand up to the Tories was if the public sector unions led the way. He therefore proposed that Labour councils refuse to implement the cuts provided that the unions agreed to organise a general strike on January 1.

Knight's attempt to pass the buck to the unions was sharply rebuffed, however, by Ron Keating (assistant Gen. Sec. NUPE). Pessimistic about any fightback, he stressed: "There is absolutely no indication that the public sector unions will lead their people into mass industrial action".

Claiming that rank-and-file workers were not ready for strike action, Keating tried to throw the buck back to Labour councillors by calling on them to "up the rates" and then blame it all on Tory central government.

STRUGGLE

What both Knight's utopian call for a general strike — and Keating's equally utopian call for yet more rate increases — showed was an unwillingness by either to lead a real struggle against the Tory government.

A third — and more realistic position was put forward in an amendment by Lambeth Trades Council. The amendment called on both councillors and unions to begin organising now a serious campaign to stop the cuts.

WAGE FREEZE from page 1

UNITY

What is needed is a joint public sector response to the Tory attack. As Al Walker, chairperson of Liverpool NALGO put it: "The Tories have declared war on the public sector with the 6%."

"To fight it, we need an alliance of all public sector workers. The manual workers' claim is in but as yet no reply has been made. The water workers also have their claim in. What's needed is a joint fight by all these groups rather than taking on the government one by one".

What is also needed is the support of the TUC. The labour leaders must be willing to swing their support — material as well as moral — behind any action that gets underway.

BREAK-THROUGH

United action of this kind would not only break through the Tories' attempts to destroy workers' living standards. It could also be a major break-through in the fight against cuts in the social services, drawing behind it Labour councils up and down the country.

By challenging the Tories' axing of schools, hospitals, old people's homes and other social services, it also has the potential of gaining the support of wide sectors of the labour movement.

The public sector workers seriously rocked the Callaghan government in 1979 when they broke through his 5% norm. There is no reason — when the stakes are that much more important — that they can't do it again.

For Labour Party



Working people are learning that we can't look to the rich and their politicians to solve our problems for us.

We need a labour party to lead the fight to put our class in power. Working people have to run the government if it is going to be run in the interest of the majority of Americans. Until we take up this task, the fate of all humanity remains in the hands of the war-mongering agents of the big corporations.

Breaking the monopoly held by their political parties and building a labour party is necessary for our very survival.

WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

Only a party of workers can lead the fight to establish a workers' government — to put working men and women at the helm of running this country and take political power out

of the hands of the private profiteers.

A workers' government would mean our representatives in the White House and Congress. It would launch a campaign to end joblessness, hunger and illiteracy. It would re-open the shut-down plants in Youngstown, Detroit and around the country.

A workers' government would make the Equal Rights Amendment law and enforce affirmative action on the job to end race and sex discrimination. It would put the unemployed to work meeting the needs of society. It would tax the rich, not the incomes of working people. It would draw up an economic plan based on producing for the needs of the country, not the profits of a few.

Workers would be the masters of the factories and the administrators of the social programmes. Those who work to produce the wealth of this country would make the decisions on how to use and distribute it.

Aren't these the kind of goals that the majority of working people favour?

These are the goals of the Socialist Workers Party.

Abortion Rights Attack L.P. Anti-Racists Meet

By Jane Ansell (Finchley CLP)

John Corrie's Bill was defeated last November. Mainly through the support of the TUC, the Campaign Against Corrie mobilised such wide forces that the government was forced to back down and Corrie's Bill was thrown in the rubbish bin — where it belongs.

While Corrie's Bill has been defeated, however, the Tories' attack on women's abortion rights has not abated. On the contrary, the erosion of the 1967 Act continues as before.

CUT-BACK

Under the Tories, according to latest statistics, the number of abortions in Britain has declined sharply, from 49.8% to just over 45%. This reduction is not because less women are having unwanted pregnancies or because less women wish their pregnancies terminated.

On the contrary, it is because cut-backs in the NHS mean that promised day-care centres are being shelved, family planning clinics restricted and waiting lists growing longer and longer.

As the Brook Street Advisory Centre comments in their Annual Report, the increasing shortage of hospital beds is making it ever more difficult for women to be referred for abortions on the NHS.

BACK-STREETS

Cut-backs in facilities are compounded by cut-backs in staff. When doctors — or nurses — refuse to undertake recommended abortions, no alternative staffing can be found.

Perhaps it is these facts which explain why, when the number of abortions per year is increasing, the



percentage of them performed on the National Health is actually decreasing.

Many of these are, of course, soaked up by charitable institutions. But it is worth wondering — when finance becomes a problem — how many of these women are actually being forced, once again, back to the horrors of the back-streets?

FIGHT-BACK

It is clear that if the National Abortion Campaign is to oppose this increasing restriction of abortion rights, it will need to win support within the general struggle — in the labour movement — against the cuts.

The fact that, last year, the TUC was mobilised into supporting women's right to abortion shows that the potential certainly exists. This was shown again, at this year's TUC, when a resolution deploring the effects of the government's cut-backs on women was passed:

"Congress notes the reduction in public spending is leading to a reduction in health services that women

need, such as day-care abortion centres. . . and therefore it calls for these provisions to be properly funded and for the TUC movement to continue campaigning to this end".

CAMPAIGN

It is important to build on this growing understanding both to oppose the slow erosion of women's abortion rights and — even more significant — to begin the campaign for positive legislation which NAC is at present drawing up.

The aim of this campaign must be to commit the TUC and the Labour Party to include the right of women to abortion — and the funding of facilities necessary to exercise this right — in their election manifesto, and to stick to it when elected.

This will mean carrying the fight into the trade union and Labour Party branches in the period ahead and winning real support. A first step will be gaining support for the Trade Union conference on abortion rights being planned by NAC for the new year.

On December 17th, a major one-day conference of CARL supporters in the Labour Party is being called. The aim of the conference — already sponsored by a wide number of activists — is to organise activity in the party against the Tories' racist offensive.

Since coming to power, the Tories have dramatically stepped up their attacks on the rights of Black people in this country. The Anwar Ditta case, the 'fishing raids' at workplaces, the escalating number of deportations are all cases in point.

Most serious of all is their proposed Nationality Act. If passed, this will give the police the green light to increase their attacks on the Black community and cut across the ability of the labour movement to organise a united response to Thatcher.

BACK-DOWN

Unfortunately, the Labour leaders — far from challenging the Tory racist offensive — have backed down before it. Over the years, they have been only too willing to implement racist laws, like the 1971 Immigration Act.

Figures such as Callaghan actually competed with the Tories in drawing up ever more draconian measures to keep Blacks out and turn the few who did get in into second-class citizens.

The Nationality Bill that the Tories intend introducing in the next session is modelled on a Labour government Green Paper that would have become law if they had remained in power.

FIGHT-BACK

It is to change this situation that the meeting on Decemb-



Bob Swart (Streatham CLP)

er 17th has been called. Its aim is to bring together the widest number of Labour Party activists who can begin, now, a struggle to involve the party in a campaign against the Tory proposals.

Early next year, CARL (the Campaign against Racist Laws) is planning a mass demonstration against the Nationality Act and other racist laws. Thousands of Black people will turn out to oppose the offensive directed against them.

It is up to us to ensure that the Labour Party is fully behind that demonstration and organises massively on the day to halt the Tory racist attack in its tracks.

If you would like to attend the meeting — or find out more about CARL — please contact: CARL, c/o Lansbury Hse, 45 Camberwell Grove, SE 5.

Sponsors of the meeting include:

Alf Dubbs MP (Battersea)
John Tilley MP (Lambeth Central)
Peter Hain (Putney)
Rudy Nurayan (Streatham)
Jane Ansell (Finchley)
Charlotte Atkins (Battersea)
Liz Atkins (Battersea)
Paul Boeteng (Norwood)
Terry Viney (Croydon)
Mike Rodney (Finchley)
George Hold (Peckham)

Let Anwar's Children In



By Ann Westcott (Salford YS)

Over 300 people marched through Rochdale last month — in the pouring rain — to protest Anwar Ditta's continued victimisation by the immigration authorities.

Supporters included Black organisations, Labour Party activists and others mobilised by the Anwar Ditta Defence Campaign (which is Rochdale based).

ENTRY

Anwar Ditta was born in Birmingham and brought up in Rochdale.

She went to Pakistan as a child where she grew up and had three children. In 1974, together with her husband, she returned to Rochdale — leaving her children abroad until she found work and a home.

When she later sent for her children, they were refused entry on the grounds that it could not be proven that she was, in fact, the mother.

EVIDENCE

The fact that Anwar has clear evidence — birth certificates, medical records and photos — to

show that they are her children cuts no ice with the Home Office.

The reason is clear. Anwar's children are Black. While white immigrants can come and go as they please, the Tory government is prepared to use every trick in the book — even tearing families apart — to keep Black people out.

CAMPAIGN

Anwar's heartless treatment has, however, spurred a growing campaign against the Home Office decision. Since last February — when a mass petition was handed in — a series of actions have taken place.

The demonstration in Rochdale last month was merely the latest of these actions and shows that Anwar has no intention of giving up. The campaign will continue until her children are allowed into the country.

ISOLATED

Anwar's case is not, of course, unique. She is just one victim of the racist 1971 Immigration Act which the Tories have recently been tightening.

Fighting for Anwar's children to be allowed in is a key priority for anti-racists. Fighting to repeal the 1971 Act — and the Tories' planned Nationality Bill — is even more key if thousands of Black people are not to be victimised in this way.

Aust: Pro-Labour swing

By Len Wagstaff (Sydney)

Last month's election in Australia resulted in a big pro-Labour swing. Although Fraser's Liberal National Country Party coalition retained its majority, Labour picked up an extra 6% to give it roughly the same share of the popular vote as the bosses' party.

The only reason Fraser is back in office is because of electoral gerry-mandering which under-represents Australia's urban working class.

As *Direct Action* (paper of the Socialist Workers Party) points out: "A majority of Australians voted against Fraser and the coalition parties. That means they rejected the austerity plans of the past five years together with Fraser's war-mongering".

REBUFF

This pro-Labour swing, *Direct Action* continues, will make it difficult for Fraser to lead "another three years of hard-line, anti-union, anti-worker confrontation.

The biggest swing against Fraser, it notes, was in those states where confrontations between workers and bosses have been sharpest. One example is Western Australia which has been involved in several big battles (including a fight to defend Aborigine land rights). There the shift to Labour was 10.2%.

In Victoria, where there has been growing ferment around

issues such as the 35-hour week among workers in car plants and petrochemical works, the pro-Labour swing was 8.8%.

CONSERVATIVE

The only reason the pro-Labour vote wasn't higher, *Direct Action* argues, was because of the conservative policies of Labour leaders who offered no clear answers to workers faced with the bosses' offensive.

Even though inflation is running at 11% and the jobless total nearing 500,000, the Labour leaders refused to back the popular call for a cost-of-living increase or the 35-hour week.

Calling for a clear vote Labour, one of the main thrusts of the SWP was to campaign precisely around those demands which Labour should adopt. Under the slogan 'A Labour government with socialist policies', the SWP called on the Labour leaders to fight for a government 'that really defends the interests of working people'.

PROBLEM

Even though Labour didn't win the election, *Direct Action* concludes, "the strong swing against Fraser means that the workers fight — which had begun to develop momentum in 1980 — will be given a new impetus in 1981".

How US Ousted Manley



Jamaican troops. Sectors of army aided Seaga's campaign of terror

Steve Randell (Lambeth CLP)

The collapse of Michael Manley's People's National Party government last month was warmly greeted in Western capitals. A Reagan advisor, hearing of Edward Seaga's election in what was called a "landslide victory", termed it a "real opportunity".

The reaction was not unexpected. Ever since Manley assumed power in 1972, Washington had been gunning for him. The PNP had brought in a series of reforms to benefit Jamaica's workers and small farmers and had begun to hit out at imperialist domination of Jamaica.

CUBA

These reforms included partial nationalisation of foreign-owned bauxite companies, increased taxation on foreign businesses and a programme to cut unemployment and boost the social services.

These inroads into the super-profits extracted by the US monopolies were bad enough. What really rattled Washington, however, was the PNP's decision to break away from the domination of the International Monetary Fund and to seek friendly ties with Cuba.

Ties between the two islands began to grow as Cuba — asking nothing in return — began to provide much-needed aid for Jamaica's flagging economy and hard-hit social services.

CAMPAIGN

It was at this point that Washington's campaign against the PNP really began to take off. Acting

through Seaga's Jamaican Labour Party and the Jamaican police and armed forces, they openly moved to oust Manley from power. Their campaign took two forms.

First, they sought to break the Jamaican economy. Foreign and locally-owned companies were persuaded to cut production or shut down operations altogether. Other manufacturers and merchants were urged to hold back consumer items — such as soap, dairy produce and rice — that were staple items on the market shelves.

Such a campaign of economic disruption meant rising unemployment and erosion of the already low Jamaican workers' standard of living. Seaga's JLP used this economic chaos to blame the Manley regime.

VIOLENCE

Secondly, on top of this economic disruption, the JLP were encouraged to set up gun-toting gangs of thugs and unleash them onto PNP supporters in the ghettos. The security forces basically turned a blind eye to this or helped brutalise PNP activists who sought to defend their communities.

This collaboration between the JLP hoodlums and security forces became totally blatant on the election day and its aftermath. The PNP has documented innumerable cases of JLP intimidation of voters at polling booths where the security forces — who were supposed to be guarding the stations — turned a blind eye.

Since Seaga's election, this collaboration has resulted in the burning down of PNP constituency headquarters and violent attacks on PNP activists. Gunfire is a regular event in Kingston, the capital.

POPULAR

There can be no doubt that Washington views the defeat of the Manley government as a much-needed boost for its waning influence in the Caribbean. They clearly hope to use it to reverse the revolutionary process that has spread from Nicaragua to Grenada.

While a set-back, however, the October election results do not give a full picture of Jamaica. While support for the PNP certainly waned — as a result of Washington's terror campaign — the Seaga opposition gained only 53% of the popular vote.

Moreover, the PNP retained the support of the most militant workers and youth. This became evident at PNP rallies where wild applause greeted speakers who emphasised the PNP's stand against imperialism.

WEAKNESS

The real problem rests with the Manley leadership. While putting forward some important reforms, it did not advocate a clear programme of social change that could have inspired the Jamaican masses and mobilised them to meet the reactionary offensive.

Failure to really challenge imperialism — and to call on PNP activists to organise to defend their communities — confused and demoralised many who had no confidence in Manley's ability to beat back the reactionary offensive.

This is in marked contrast with the revolutionary governments of Grenada and Nicaragua who were faced with similar attacks. They reacted by mobilising, organising and arming the working masses to defeat the Washington-backed thugs.

FUTURE

Despite Manley's inadequacy, however, there are many young PNP members who have been influenced by the examples of Nicaragua and Grenada.

As the JLP enforces its anti-labour programme in the months ahead, it is they who will have to work out a clear class-struggle strategy for uniting working people in the fights ahead.

POST BAG

Dear Cde,
Cde Freeman, defending the SWP attitude towards the Labour Party, dismisses it as a 'bourgeois' party no different (in essentials) from the Tories.

Such a position has long been held by sectarians who divorce the Labour Party from its social origins. It is a position which Marxists — from Engels onwards — have had to fight against. I would like to ask Cde Freeman a question in this respect.

Up to the end of the last century, most British unions tagged behind the Liberals in much the same way as, today, most unions in the USA support the Democratic Party.

Does or does not Cde Freeman think that the decision of the unions to break from the Liberals — and to form a party of labour — was a step forward? Would Cde Freeman, if he had lived at the time have supported the break from capitalist parties and helped build the Labour Party — or would he have written off the whole thing as a 'waste of time'?

Cde Freeman and others in the SWP should think carefully before they write off 80 years of workers' history.

Jason Hill,
Stoke-on-Trent

Dear Cde,
The last issue of your paper wrote off the Beyond the Fragments conference as a retreat into "personal, life-style politics". Like many other left papers, you also sneeringly refer to the fact it achieved nothing.

It may be true the conference didn't establish the many many of us had hoped for. The point is, however, that it was at least an attempt by many socialists — fed up with the in-fighting on the left — to get together and discuss what we have in common rather than what separates us.

Criticism based on dogma is easy. Attempts to really work out a clear way forward — that can unite the left — is more difficult. And more fruitful.

David Biers,
N. London

Dear *Socialist Action*,
Cde Freeman will rue the day he wrote off the current debate in the Labour Party as 'irrelevant'.

This might be the position of the SWP leaders — desperately trying to justify their sectarian stance — but it is not the position of many SWP members.

In South London, for example, many SWPers are voting on Cde Freeman's position with their feet. They are walking towards the Labour Party.

Tim Robinson,
S. London

Dear *Socialist Action*,
Please send me a one-year sub to SA. I recently bought a copy of it on the anti-nuclear demonstration and was impressed by its coverage of issues many Labour Party papers ignore. Its articles on the racist offensive launched by the Thatcher government was spot-on.

Could you also send me any more information about SA and where I can get in touch with some of your supporters?

Bob Hilton,
Northampton

Dear *Socialist Action*,
A North London Campaign Against Racist Laws group has recently been set up. It has already won the support of a number of Labour Party and anti-racist activists. If anyone would like to find out more about it — or get involved in its activity — please contact CARL, c/o Lansbury House, 41 Camberwell Grove, SE 5.

Mike Rodney,
Finchley

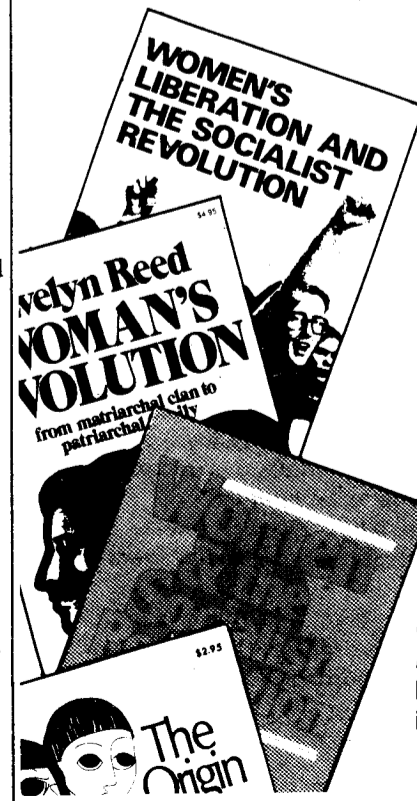
Dear Cde,
I would like to echo Frank Viney's point (SA, September '80) that the call for unilateral disarmament still doesn't feature in the statement of aims.

How long can one go on ignoring the importance of the mass movement building up?

Jane Whitmore,
Wolverhampton

Socialist Action Pamphlets

Socialist Action has a wide range of pamphlets/books on the labour movement, the fight for women's rights, anti-racism and the struggle against Imperialism. If you would like a full list of works available, which make excellent Xmas presents, why not drop us a line at: *Socialist Action Books, PO Box 65, London SW 16 INN.*



Women's Liberation and the Socialist Revolution
edited by Nita Keig

Woman's Evolution
by Evelyn Reed

Women & the Socialist Revolution
by Mary-Alice Waters

Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State
by Frederick Engels,
introduction by Evelyn Reed

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Socialist Action

Support the

Hunger Strikers!



By Liz Easton (Hackney CLP)

The 7 hunger-strikers of H-Block are now in the sixth week of their 'fast until death'. According to the Tory government, of course, they are nothing more than 'common criminals' whose suffering is 'self-inflicted'.

Such comments reveal - with startling clarity - the Tory hatred of these Irish freedom fighters whose sole crime has been to fight against the military occupation of their country.

They - like the hundreds of other prisoners languishing in N. Ireland's goals - were seized by British troops, taken to 'interrogation centres' where they can be held incommunicado for seven days, and then convicted of terrorism by juryless courts on the basis of statements extracted out of them by force.

HUNGER STRIKE

Their decision to launch a hunger strike on October 10 was an act of final desperation. Having rounded them up and imprisoned them for fighting against the occupation of their country, they were then deprived of political status and treated as convicts.

For refusal to wear the 'convict uniforms', they were allowed no other clothes except a blanket. As violators of the rules, they were then locked up constantly in special 'isolation cells' without toilets.

SENTENCES DOUBLED

Their furniture was taken away, all but a piece of foam rubber lying on the floor to serve as a mattress. They were denied any reading material, a chance even to study or play chess, and deprived of almost all contact with relatives or friends. Every day that they refused to accept convict status, their sentences were doubled.

They were given only a few minutes to wash and empty their chamber pots in the morning. They were beaten on the way & had excrement and urine dumped over them. So, they had to refuse to go to the toilets.

The guards would not empty the chamber pots. They pushed the filth back into the cells when the pots overflowed. They threw it back when the prisoners dumped it out of the windows. Finally the only way the prisoners could get it off the floor of their tiny cells was to smear it on the walls.

BEATINGS

Most vicious of all, however, they were systematically beaten & humiliated. As one H-Block prisoner describes it: "One man at a time was taken from his cell and the warders ran him from the B-wing to the circle. Each man was pulled about by the hair & beard and a thorough search was made of his mouth with a flash lamp.

The victim was then forcibly

spread-eagled over the usual mirror, placed on the ground, and beaten by six baton-wielding warders until he fell. Each victim was then subjected to the latest obscene search and, while a flash lamp was shone up his back passage, a thin metal detector or another probe was inserted up his back passage..

When the search procedure was finished, each man was run into the C wing through a gauntlet of 12 warders who punched him on the head and beat him on his back and his shoulders with batons. Anyone who fell was kicked and dragged by the hair, ankles & testicles to his new cell".

STRIKE

Unable to bear such physical and psychological torment any longer, on October 10 they decided to launch a hunger-strike. 7 prisoners took the initiative on the understanding that, as any of them dies, another will take his place.

The Tories call these men 'common criminals' but they - and the thousands of Irish people who have mobilised in their support over the past weeks - know the truth.

They know who the real 'criminals' are. The British government which has occupied their country, harassed their communities and killed those who dare to respond in cold blood. The recent murder of four leaders of the campaign in solidarity with the hunger-strikers, by SAS assassins, leaves a bitter taste in the mouth.

SOLIDARITY

The Tory government may be determined to crush the hunger-strikers but the mass mobilisations of the Irish people show that they will not allow their comrades to struggle alone.

Already, over the past weeks, mass demonstrations have swept the 6 Counties and protest actions have begun to extend into the South.

In Britain too, Charter 80 has begun to mobilise support against the Tory butchers. That support has to be extended and built on in the coming weeks. The widest possible layers in the labour movement must be mobilised to stop the Thatcher government committing murder.

Eyewitness Report

of Blocks

"Having spent the whole of Sunday in the prison, I was shocked by the inhuman conditions prevailing in H Blocks 3, 4 and 5, where over 300 prisoners are incarcerated. One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being.

The nearest approach to it I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in the slums of Calcutta. The stench and filth of the cells, with the remains of rotten food and human excreta scattered around the walls, was almost unbearable. In two of them I was unable to speak for fear of vomiting.



Cardinal O'Faich

ise, association with his fellow prisoners, or contact with the outside world. These are basic human needs for physical and mental health, not privileges to be granted or withheld as rewards or punishments.

BLANKETS

The prisoners' cells are without beds, chairs or tables. They sleep on mattresses on the floor and in some cases I have noticed that these were quite wet. They have no covering except a towel or blanket, no books, newspapers or reading material except the Bible, no pens or writing material, no TV or radio, no hobbies or handicrafts, no exercises or recreation.

They are locked in their cells for almost the whole of every day and some of them have been in this condition for more than half a year.

The fact that a man refuses to wear prison uniform or do prison work should not entail the loss of physical exerc-

DIGNITY

The human dignity of every prisoner must be respected regardless of his creed, colour or political viewpoint, and regardless of what crimes he has been charged with....

Several prisoners complained to me of beatings, of verbal abuse, additional punishments for making complaints, and of degrading searches carried out on the most intimate parts of their naked bodies. Of course, I have no way of verifying these allegations, but they were numerous."

Protests Sweep Northern Ireland



Support for the demands of the 7 hunger-strikers in H-Block is sweeping through the North of Ireland.

On October 26th - the day before the 'fast until death' began - over 25,000 marched through Belfast in solidarity with the prisoners. Organised by the National H-Block Cttee, it underlined the popular feeling building up behind their courageous stand.

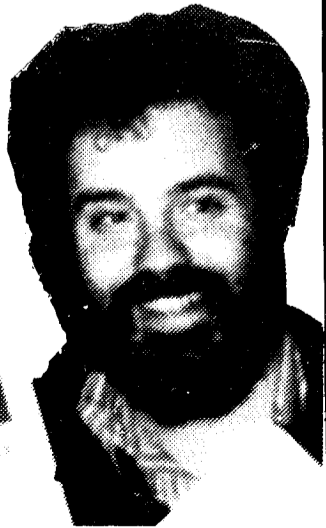
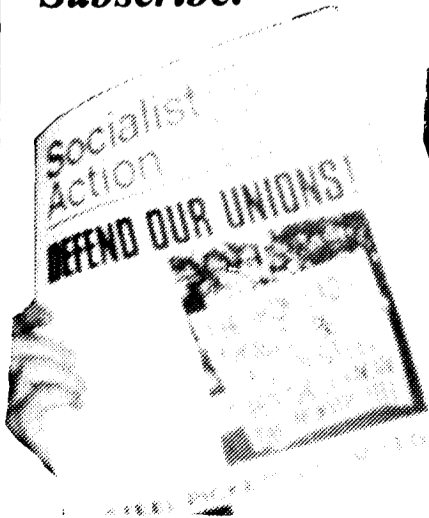
Similar demonstrations have occurred in other parts of the 6 Counties. 1,000 marched in Dungiven, County Derry, and a similar number marched through Derry itself the following day. In County Tyrone, 600 protested through the town of Coalisland.

What is equally significant, the protest actions have begun to extend into the South. On October 25th - the day before the hunger strike was due to begin - several hundred took part in a public meeting in Dublin and a torchlight procession the following day.

Over the past few weeks - as in the North - a series of vigils and meetings have been held in such towns as Drogheda, Monaghan and Dulkalk.

On November 22nd, over 10,000 took to the streets again in Dublin and handed in a letter to the Irish Parliament demanding Premier Charles Haughey take action to force Britain to concede political prisoner status.

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