

Socialist Action

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For a Class Struggle Left Wing in the Labour Movement

Vol.4 No.1

January 81

Price 15p

DEFEND BLACK RIGHTS

By MIKE RODNEY (Finchley CLP)

The Tories came to power on a clear racist ticket. Talking about the country being "swamped" by an "alien culture", they pledged to tighten up still further the already racist 1971 Immigration Act.

The new curbs — added last year — have meant that the rate of deportations has doubled. Right now, hundreds of Filipino workers are threatened with expulsion on the flimsiest of grounds.

Raids on factories and workplaces, in search of so-called "illegal immigrants", are being stepped up. Two hundred Blacks are being held, on any given day, in detention centres around the country. Police harassment of the Black community is on the increase.

Now the Tories are planning a new stage in their racist campaign. Their nationality proposals — due before the Commons early in the year — seek to deprive millions of Blacks of their right to enter, work and stay in the country.

The proposals divide people into those whose ancestors were born here (mainly white) and those whose ancestors weren't (mainly Black). The introduction of such a colour bar will not only mean the vast majority of Blacks being excluded from Britain. It will also mean that many of these — registered as UK citizens — will be made virtually stateless.

Moreover, those Blacks already in Britain could witness a real curb on their civil rights. Under the proposals, many could be denied the



Growing anti-racist fightback: 500 march in Rochdale in support of Anwar Ditta, November 15.

right to vote, for example, or to hold office in the Civil Service.

SECOND-CLASS

The implications of these proposals — if passed — do not need to be spelt out. Denied entry on grounds of colour — and denied democratic rights in Britain on the same grounds — Black people will effectively be-

come second-class citizens.

The climate of legalised racism created by such proposals will give the police the green light to escalate their harassment and intimidation of the Black community.

Worse still, it will give the racist thugs of the National Front — and other ultra-right groups — an added impetus to step up their assault and

even murder of Black people.

The cause of this racist campaign launched by the Thatcher government is only too clear. As unemployment escalates and living standards fall, the Tories hope to single Black people out as a convenient "scapegoat".

They clearly want to shift the

Continued on Page 3.

HANDS OFF POLAND

By STEVE RANDELL (Lambeth CLP)

Faced with the growing power of Solidarity — Poland's independent union movement — the Soviet bureaucrats are taking steps towards a massive military intervention against the Polish workers.

Recent days have seen a number of news leaks about Soviet and East German troop movements near the Polish border. Reservists have been called up for military service in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and the USSR.

The latest moves followed a December 5 meeting of Warsaw Pact governments which declared that

"...the Polish people can firmly count on the fraternal solidarity and support" of the Warsaw Treaty countries. In the twisted vocabulary of Stalinism, such "solidarity" comes on bayonets.

FEAR

What lies behind the Kremlin leaders' latest moves is clearly alarm at Solidarity's mushroom growth. More and more working people see it as a real tool to combat the corrupt and repressive regime of the Stalinist leaders.

Only recently, for example, over 500,000 small farmers met to discuss means of forcing the government to register them as an

independent union on the lines of Solidarity. Farmers' leaders announced they would be consulting with other union leaders over what action to take.

Moreover, this growing upsurge among Poland's working people has not been limited to demanding basic union rights (such as the right to organise and strike). It has begun to pose demands which point, increasingly, in the direction of taking over the government, and establishing socialist democracy.

PARTY

Solidarity has begun to challenge the privileges of the Stalinist bur-

eaucrats, their arbitrary use of power and repressive techniques. It has used the threat of strike action to remove corrupt Stalinist officials and get union members — such as Jan Narozniak — released from trumped-up charges.

The repressive Stalinist apparatus is coming ever more under fire. Michael Dobbs, reporting in the *Washington Post*, describes the momentum building up in a typical rally organised by Solidarity in Szczecin a month or so ago.

"Practically all the questions were political in tone. Some called for retribution against politi-

Continued on Page 8.



Union leader Lech Walesa

Democracy - a key issue



Michael Foot

by BOB SWART (Streatham CLP)

On January 24, the Labour Party special conference will take place to elect the party leader. The very fact that such a conference is occurring is a sign of the radicalisation among the grass-roots fed up with seeing conference decisions overturned, year after year, by pro-capitalist leaders.

The decision to take the election of party leader out of the hands of the PLP was a major step forward in the fight for democracy and our ability to hold our leaders to account.

While a major step forward, however, the PLP has fought a desperate

rearguard action to sabotage conference decisions to widen the electoral franchise.

Their first tactic, facilitated by Callaghan's resignation, was to hold a rushed election last year in which Foot was the winner. This was clearly an attempt to undercut the candidature of figures like Benn on the 'left' - supported by the CLPs - and foist a compromise leader on the party.

Their second tactic has been to try and ensure that the PLP retains - in any electoral college that is set up - a decisive say in who is elected. They have been backed up in this by right-

wing union leaders like Duffy of the AUEW who has called for 75% of the votes to go to the PLP.

While it is unlikely that Foot will be challenged when he submits himself on January 24th, what is important is that right-wing attempts to undercut conference decisions are.

Socialist Action believes that the most democratic election procedure would be that of conference itself which reflects the real weight of the trade unions in the party.

Socialist Action would urge all delegates - if a motion approaching such a widening of the franchise were posed - to vote for it.

If such a position is not posed, however, we believe that the most effective course would be to support that motion which guarantees the most democratic representation of the union and party rank-and-file and curbs the unrepresentative power of the PLP.

At present, that would appear to be the NEC motion which calls for a one third split of votes - in a future electoral college - between the PLP, unions and constituency parties.

While underweighting rank-and-file control, such a motion represents at this stage the best step forward in democratising the party.

Jobless total soars

by TERRY VINEY (Croydon CLP)

1981 sees the highest jobless total since the war. 800,000 have been added to the dole queues over the past 12 months and - according to forecasts - the future looks even bleaker. The Cambridge Econometrics Group, for example, estimates 4 million out of work by 1985.

As the Tories' monetarist policies bite home, whole areas of the country are being turned into industrial deserts. Particularly hard hit - as Alex Kitson pointed out on the November 29 demonstration - are "...the country's most vulnerable workers - racial minorities, women, unskilled workers, the low-paid and the young".

DELIBERATE

The return of the spectre of the thirties is no accident. It is the deliberate result of Tory policies. Faced with a world slump - in which old-fashioned British industry faces stiff competition in declining markets - the Tories are hell-bent on drastic measures.

Heath government which came into a head-on conflict with the powerful industrial unions and was swept out of office.

STRATEGY

The method of the Thatcher government is different. Its major thrust has been to promote mass unemployment (particularly by its attacks on the welfare state). Creating a pool of mass unemployed will, it is hoped, demoralise the labour movement and force wages down under the threat of redundancy.

This thrust has been backed up by an attack on the rights of the trade union movement. Prior's Bill seeks to destroy those elementary rights which are key to defending jobs and living standards.

The green light has also been given to hard-line managers, such as Edwardes of British Leyland, to begin the process of crushing shop-floor organisation. The victimisation of Derek Robinson, last year, and the sackings

of the Longbridge 9 recently, are clear attempts to ram home this offensive.

That willingness to fight back has been shown in the number of protest actions that the labour leaders have been forced to call over the past year, culminating in the massive 150,000 rally in Liverpool this November.

Such combativity has also been shown in other ways. It has been revealed in the firefighters' recent breaking of the 6% public sector wage norm, the strike called by the Longbridge workers to protest victimisations and the militancy of the Ford workers faced with the management's 9% offer.

LEADERSHIP

What has been lacking to date is not the willingness of the rank-and-file to fight back but the inactivity of the labour leaders. Although pressurised into protest actions, their main thrust has been to call for workers to wait for the return of a Labour government in 3 years' time to solve their problems.

As Michael Foot declared at the massive anti-jobless rally in Liverpool: "Prepare to destroy, at the ballot box, which is the only place they can finally be defeated, the party of unemployment, the government of unemployment".

Such sentiments - while shared by millions - will not help the steelworkers at Port Talbot, the workers in the car component factories in the Midlands, the direct labour force up and down the country who are faced with the dole today.

ACTION

What is needed is not promises for the future but action today around the demands which the November 29 demonstration centrally raised: 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 of the labour movement faced with the insanity of a system that can only survive by throwing millions on the scrap-heap.

The labour leaders must not be allowed to view November 29 as a one-off protest action which can conveniently be forgotten. They have to be forced into putting their call for an ongoing campaign - including regional mobilisations - into action.

CENTRAL

Workers facing redundancies and plant closures must not be allowed to struggle alone. The full weight of the labour movement must be mobilised behind them.

The victory at Gardners - where the workforce defeated management's 590 redundancy threat by occupying the plant and winning wide labour movement support - shows the way forward.

Equally, Labour councils refusing to implement the cuts mustn't be allowed to face Hesaltine's penalties alone. They have to be given full backing.

It is only by forcing the labour leaders to build a mass campaign against the Tories that jobs can be protected and the basis laid for the return of a Labour government that will defend workers' interests.

150,000 say: 'Thatcher Out!'

by ANN WESTCOTT (Salford CLP)

Despite the bitter cold, between 100,000 and 150,000 turned out in Liverpool, Nov 29, to protest the Tories' jobless strategy. It was a suitable setting. Liverpool has been in the front line of the Tory assault and unemployment now stands at 15%.

Thousands of Liverpool workers turned out on the day to express their anger at government policies. They were joined by thousands more - particularly from the hard-hit industrial areas of Scotland and the North East - who had travelled there in special buses and trains.

The most noticeable thing about the demonstration was that it was made up of thousands of ordinary people who had probably never been on a demonstration before.

ANGER

The second most noticeable thing about the march - called by the Labour Party NEC - was its militancy. As the contingents of carworkers, steelworkers and firefighters moved along, slogans such as 'Save jobs - Sack the Tories!' and 'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie - Out, out, out!' rang along the columns.

The militancy was also reflected in the reaction of the marchers to the speeches at the rally. When Labour right-winger Denis Healy approached the microphone, he was booed. Workers no doubt remembered the fact that - when in office - he had presided over a sharp increase in the jobless total and had rammed home an incomes policy in the public sector.

A similar reception was reserved for union leaders such as Alan Fisher (NUPE) who called for a general election to get rid of the Tories. The crowd responded with a chant for a general strike.

MOBILISE

Other speakers were more militant. Eric Heffer stated that the next Labour government "must not go down as another one that tried to administer capitalism" but one that "began the rebuilding of British industry on socialist lines".

Recently-elected Labour leader Michael Foot was even more outspoken. "We're going to carry this campaign from one end of the country to the other", he cried, "to mobilise the power and the strength of the people to destroy this Thatcher government and build a real socialism".

It was sentiments such as this which found a favourable reaction among workers who wanted action now and not just pledges for the future. Promises to mobilise regional demonstrations against the jobless total were greeted with

cheers.

One group of workers on the march who had given a concrete example of how Thatcher's offensive could be defeated was that from Gardners (a diesel factory in Birmingham).

Faced with 590 redundancies, the two and a half thousand workforce occupied the plant for seven weeks and won widescale support from the labour movement. It was the determination of their action - and the backing they received - which



The November 29 March.

forced the managers to back down and postpone any redundancies for at least three years.

The confidence of the Gardners' workers was reflected in the banners they carried on the march: "Gardners sacked us, the nation backed us, and WE WON!"

CAMPAIGN

It is clearly actions like that at Gardners that will be needed in the period ahead if the Tory offensive is to be stopped. Key to achieving this will be mobilising general labour movement support for any group of workers faced with redundancies or plant closures.

This is why it is vital that the Nov 29 demonstration not remain as a one-off protest action. The labour leaders have to be forced to see it as the beginning of an ongoing campaign against the Tory unemployment offensive.

Regional demonstrations can begin to create a real groundswell of opinion that can break down the isolation of groups of workers facing lay-offs or closures and present the Tories with a united labour movement stance.



What Tories have in store for millions of workers: the dole queue

Central to their strategy is cutting away the "dead wood" of the economy and creating a new, streamlined industry able to hold its own on the World market. This means increasing profit rates - at the expense of wages - so that the necessary modernisation can occur.

The Thatcher government knows, however, that profits cannot be raised simply by imposing a wage freeze. It has learned the lesson of the previous

of the Longbridge 9 recently, are clear attempts to ram home this offensive.

FIGHT-BACK

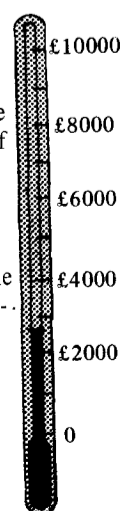
Although the Tory leaders have scored some successes, there is little sign, however, of demoralisation setting in. The steelworkers' strike last year - and the support it won from other industrial unions - shows the wide-spread willingness to fight back that exists.

FUND DRIVE

Last month's fund drive brought in £680.00 - pushing the total collected so far up to £2,060.00. While slightly short of the hoped-for Xmas figure, it is a major step towards the £10,000 Easter target.

While well on our way, however, we still need to make an all-out effort if we are to reach the target on time. Unlike the big business press, SA can only survive on the sales and contributions which you - our readers - make.

We would therefore urge you all to put at the top of your New Year Resolutions making a donation to SA. A regular donation - however small - would be even better. (Please make all cheques/postal orders payable to *Socialist Action*, PO Box 65, London SW 16 1NN.



LP anti-racists meet



Carol Rees/Socialist Action

Discussing how to increase Labour involvement in anti-racist fight.

By GARY ERLISKER

Labour Party activists from a number of branches throughout London met on December 17 to discuss organising opposition to the Tories' new racist nationality proposals.

The meeting was called by Labour members involved in the Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL), which has been spearheading action against racist immigration controls over the past year.

The letter which went out to London Labour Party branches advertising the meeting, was also signed by Black and other party members involved in anti-racist activity.

FIGHT-BACK

Barnes South CLP member and CARL activist Charlotte Atkins chaired the meeting. CARL acting secretary and Finchley CLP member Mike Rodney explained the development of immigration controls designed to keep Blacks out of the

country. The new proposals, he said, will affect millions of Blacks both here and abroad.

Bob Swart, secretary of South London CARL and a member of Streatham CLP, pointed to the fight-back going on against racist attacks. The highpoint of this was on November 25, 1979, when 20,000 people - mainly Black workers - took to the streets in a CARL march against attempts to tighten immigration curbs.

While this demonstration had succeeded in mobilising Blacks, however, Swart went on, the labour movement as a whole had not taken up the struggle. Without such involvement, the attacks cannot be defeated nor the labour movement organised itself.

UNITY

The meeting discussed specific means by which the Labour Party could be turned outwards and mobilise its supporters against the nationality proposals. Circulating

CARL's newsletter "Here to Stay" and putting out a Labour newsletter explaining the issues at stake were some of the ways proposed.

Most importantly, the meeting adopted a statement outlining the way forward. The statement went through examples of the increasing attacks on Black people and the growing resistance that is developing. It went on to explain that "there has been a lack of involvement in this crucial area by much of the labour movement. . . This situation needs to be changed. . ."

It argued that "if the Labour Party cannot defend the most disadvantaged sections of working people, it will not be able to defend any working people from the Tories' attacks on our democratic and human rights, wages and living conditions.

"Racist sentiments would continue to be fostered and wreck the ability of the labour movement to organise the strongest possible fight-back against all attacks on working people. We cannot allow any section of our class to be picked off."

PROPOSALS

Calling on the Labour Party to fight the nationality proposals, the statement indicated how this can be done: inviting speakers from CARL and other groups campaigning against racist immigration controls to party meetings; affiliating and sending representatives to CARL; passing resolutions against the new proposals and supporting the national demonstration later this year.

A committee set up from the meeting will help co-ordinate action along these lines and discuss holding a national meeting of Labour activists around the struggle against the proposals.

All those interested in supporting such aims should contact Bob Swart, c/o Lansbury House, 41 Camberwell Grove, London SE 5.

... defend black rights

Continued from Page 1.

anger and resentment building up away from themselves and the system they defend onto an easily identifiable minority.

This is the reason behind the deliberately provocative statements by leading Tory front-benchers such as Keith Joseph who, only a few months ago, stated that the high jobless figure in certain areas of the country was due to "cheap immigrant labour".

FIGHT-BACK

The Tory racist campaign has not, however, gone unchallenged. Growing opposition is mounting in the Black community against these racist attacks. More recently, in November last year, over 500 demonstrated in London against Tory attempts to deport the Filipino workers.

The same month, in Rochdale, another 500 took to the streets to protest the Home Office's attempt to prevent the children of Anwar Ditta being allowed into the country.

Meetings have taken place up and down the country to protest the new Nationality Proposals. In Brixton (London), for example, over 100 turned out to hear Labour MP John Tilley and Black leader Rudy Narayan speak on the need to fight the Tory curbs.

LABOUR

While Black people have shown their determination to fight the racist threat, however, there has been a serious lack of involvement by the labour movement.

The last Labour government, for example, not only failed to repeal the racist 1971 Act, but actually launched its own attacks on Black people. Merlyn Rees introduced new curbs to the Act and a Green Paper on Nationality was drafted on which the Tories have modelled their present proposals.

Such pandering to racist views by the Labour leaders is not new. It has led them, over the years, to try and out-compete the Tories in introducing anti-Black legislation. Callaghan's comment in 1968 that he had done "more to keep Blacks out than anything by Enoch Powell" sums up the infamous record.

UNITY

It is a record that has to be changed. The limited support that has begun to develop in the Labour Party and unions for Black rights has to be extended in the months ahead.

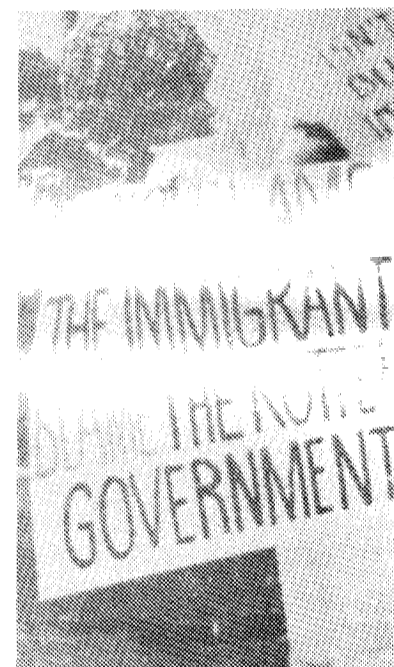
If the labour movement cannot mobilise to defend the most oppressed layers of working people, it will not be able to defend any working people against the Tory attacks on living standards and democratic rights.

Moreover, it will lead to serious divisions being created in the

Nationality Bill

If passed, the Tories' Nationality Act could mean that:

- * People in countries presently ruled by Britain would not be able to enter the UK as of right;
- * Many Black people who opted for British passports could become stateless;
- * Previously stateless people, to whom British citizenship was given by the 1948 and 1964 Acts, could have that citizenship taken away;
- * Residence of 5 years would no longer entitle people to citizenship. It would become a matter of Home Office discretion. Black people who speak out and organise against racism or who are active in union and wider social struggles could be victimised;
- * Black people born in Britain would not be able to adopt children from abroad. Parents would also have to prove they are legally entitled to settle here before their children are accepted as British;
- * Black women will not gain citizenship by being married to citizens;
- * It is likely that the civic rights of Black people - such as the right to vote - could be restricted.



movement which the Tories will play upon, in the years ahead, in order to ram home their anti-labour offensive.

CARL

On January 10, the Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL) will be mapping out plans for a mass campaign against the Tory proposals. It already has the backing of most Black organisations and a number of anti-racist groups.

What is central in the period ahead, however, is that the Labour Party and unions seriously move behind that campaign and give it mass support. If passed, the Nationality Act will be a set-back not only for Black people but for all workers in Britain.

A fighting alliance of the Black community and labour movement - mobilised on the streets - could stop it. It could deal a real defeat to the Tories and weaken their ability to attack any of our rights.

Filipinos protest deportations

By PHILIP LINDSAY (T&GWU)

"What do we want - justice for Filipino workers! How do we get it - no deportations!" This was the chant that rang out through the streets of central London on November 23 as 500 Filipino workers and supporters marched from London Bridge to Malet Street.

The march was called by the Migrant Action Group and supported by the Transport and General Workers Union, the General and Municipal Workers Union and the National Union of Public Employees.



Bob Swart/Socialist Action

500 Filipino workers protest deportations

DEPORTATION

The demonstrators were protesting the deportation orders hanging over the heads of several hundred Filipino workers, mainly women domestics. The means by which these women are being attacked could be applied to tens of thousands of other migrant workers.

The domestics, who have been doing some of the most menial and lowest-paid work in Britain

for years, are accused of the "crime" of not declaring they had children when they were being interviewed for work permits.

The fact that they were never asked in the first place is of no concern to the racist immigration authorities. Nor is the suffering that would result for these women and their children if they were deported.

Many of the workers send much of their wages back to the Phil-

ippines to provide for the welfare and education of their children. Without this, many of the children would stand little chance in life.

The immigration authorities, however, are now classifying the Filipino workers as 'illegal entrants' and saying that they must leave Britain.

AMNESTY

After the march, hundreds of people crammed into the University of London Union. Speakers from the Filipino community and several unions explained the domestics' case and blasted the attack upon their rights.

A motion put by the Migrants Action Group was passed, calling for an amnesty for the workers involved and an end to the threat of deportations.

SOCIALIST ACTION PUBLIC FORUM Fight Thatcher's Racist Laws!

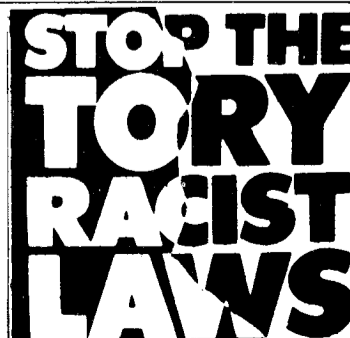
Speakers: Mike Rodney (CARL St. Cttee)
Bob Swart (LP CARL Group)

on WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21st (8.00 pm) at THE ROEBUCK,
Tottenham Court Rd, London W1.

CARL CONFERENCE

on
January 10th 1981, from 1.00-6.00
at
Digbeth Civic Hall, Digbeth, Birmingham, 12

(Delegate credentials are available from: Mike Rodney, c/o Lansbury Hse, 41 Camberwell Grove, London SE 5).



Fourth International Statement :

The following statement was issued on December 5 by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, the world revolutionary movement founded by Leon Trotsky. The statement has been slightly abridged for space reasons.

The military junta and its counter-revolutionary gangs, with the support of American imperialism, are committing more and more crimes against the Salvadoran people. The repression has claimed 10,000 victims since the beginning of 1980. . . .

There have been savage reprisals against the peasants with the destruction of villages and harvested produce. The most elementary democratic rights have been suppressed totally and brutal intimidation is carried out against all those who do not line up on the side of the assassins. . . .

The arrival of Reagan as president of the United States, who scarcely bothers even with the demagoguery of his predecessor on human rights, is encouraging the unleashing of reactionary violence rarely equalled by the worst dictatorships.

STRUGGLE GROWING

However, the very painful losses suffered by the Salvadoran people and the increasingly open threat of intervention from imperialism and its lackeys, have not obtained the hoped-for results. On the contrary, the struggle of the worker and peasant masses, of the students and

strategic positions in a crucial region, already seriously weakened by the Nicaraguan insurrection of July 19, 1979, will crumble.

It is precisely because they have estimated the importance of the present events and their possible dynamic that Washington and its allies have clearly increased their financial and military aid to the junta. They are going to do everything they can to avoid a defeat which would be even more catastrophic than the one they suffered with the Cuban revolution.

They still dispose of very considerable resources and it would be an error to underestimate them. If all the measures taken so far have proved insufficient, they could launch a military intervention, through an intermediary or even directly. The ensuing conflict could lead to a major international confrontation.

DUTIES

The international workers movement must become conscious of all the implications of the crisis in Central America. It must fulfil its internationalist duty by mobilising to aid the Salvadoran people and their revolutionary organisations.

An international campaign must be put at the top of the agenda. Trade union organisations, particularly in Latin America, Western Europe and the United States, must commit themselves in the front ranks. The systematic massacre of

One of the first things that strikes you about revolutionary Nicaragua is the role of the police and army. There are young Sandinista soldiers and police everywhere, rifles slung over their shoulders.

But no-one is scared of them. Here the police and army are on your side. Their role is to protect the people from armed counter-revolutionaries who are still a threat in some parts of the country, and ensure that laws like the right to be in a union are respected by employers.

This was brought home to me when I went to a rally in downtown Managua (Nicaragua's capital) to celebrate the execution of the former Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza, in Paraguay. Somoza was responsible for the killing of at least 100,000 Nicaraguans during his brutal rule.

The rally was organised by the army as part of a national celebration. The soldiers provided a band to entertain the crowd and there were a number of speakers whose central theme was "Long live international solidarity among the workers!" Soldiers and police were dancing with the crowd.

PRIMITIVE LIVING CONDITIONS

Another thing that hits you very strongly is the extent of the poverty.

This is the legacy of 50 years of robbery and destruction by the Somoza family, and of the civil war that overthrew the dictator in 1979, during which Somoza bombed his own cities.

Driving into Managua from the airport, for instance, you see many bombed-out shells that were once factories.

The downtown area of Managua has only a handful of buildings left standing. It was reduced to rubble by a massive earthquake in 1972 and has never been rebuilt - Somoza pocketed the international funds donated for this.

Tens if not hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans have to live in the most primitive living quarters, especially in some country districts. This is leading to all sorts of health problems. For example, I met one German volunteer health worker who had caught leprosy while working and living under these conditions.

The underdeveloped and shattered economy is the single biggest problem for the revolutionary government here in their commitment to radically improve the lot of the ordinary people.

Socialism, the only economic system that can meet the needs of the Nicaraguan people, is a system that grows out of a highly developed industrial economy like that in Britain or the United States. But that is exactly what Nicaragua does not have. Thus the government is forced to call on the Nicaraguan workers to continue to make sacrifices in order to rebuild the economy.

But this is not 'tightening our belts' Tory government style, to line the pockets of the bosses. This is to enable the revolution to accumulate the social funds to build a new Nicaragua that puts the needs of the workers and poor first.

NATURAL RESOURCES

That is not to say that Nicaragua is poor in natural resources - just the opposite. Nicaragua is rich in the resources of soil and sea. There is tremendous potential for the development of farming, fishing and forestry.

NICARAGUA



Rally in Managua's Revolution Square in July celebrates literacy campaign.

Eye-witness

Nicaragua is a small country in Central America. Until July 1979, the country was ruled by a brutal dictator, Anastasio Somoza, who kept the people in grinding poverty. He had a private army of thugs, the National Guard, to keep the masses down. Somoza was put in power by the United States rulers and was supported by them.

The people of Nicaragua fought heroically for many years against Somoza and in July 1979 managed to overthrow him. They were led

to victory by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Before Somoza left, much damage was done to the country as the dictator bombed cities in a desperate attempt to stay in power. Many lives were lost.

Today, the people of Nicaragua are setting about rebuilding their country and improving the living conditions of the vast majority. One year since the revolution, their achievements are many. For

There are gold and silver mines, and mountains and rivers ideal for the development of hydro-electricity.

If the wealthy Western countries would give adequate technical and economic assistance to Nicaragua, the country could, in the not too distant future, more than meet its people's needs. After all, it was the United States and the other imperialist governments that stood behind Somoza through all the years he plundered the country. American marines even installed the dictatorship back in the 1920s.

But that is exactly what is not happening. In fact, rather more aid is going to neighbouring military dictatorships like Honduras and El Salvador, mainly in the form of guns.

IMPACT OF REVOLUTION

While in Nicaragua I had the opportunity to travel around the country. One place I visited was Leon, a stronghold of the anti-Somoza struggle, where I visited a family I had met earlier in Managua. Their story will help give a picture of the impact of the revolution on

people here.

The family, who have a small shop, used to live near the local headquarters of Somoza's National Guard (his personal army of thugs). They told us that often the children would be unable to sleep at night because of the screams of prisoners being tortured there.

Eventually they had to move - their house was destroyed during the insurrection in the fight to capture the Guard's headquarters. Not many prisoners were taken when it fell, I was told.

One of those killed in the fighting was the family's only son. But his 17-year old sister has taken up the revolutionary banner in his place.

She became a brigadista - one of the tens of thousands of young students who travelled to the most remote areas of the country in 1980 to teach poor farming families to read and write.

Her sister's husband, still a high school student, is also an ardent supporter of the revolution. He proudly told me that he had two brothers who were leading activists in the FSLN in Leon.



other oppressed layers, has continued to grow. . . .

The number of liberation fighters now reaches into the dozens of thousands and whole areas, such as Morazan, are under their control. New offensives against the regime are now being planned. The revolutionary forces are striking harder and harder blows against the junta and its imperialist masters. The setting up of a revolutionary government in the liberated zones is already on the agenda.

The leaders of American imperialism and their allies in Europe and Latin America are perfectly conscious of the gravity of the situation from their point of view. They know that the Salvadoran masses could win a historic victory in the relatively near future.

POWDER KEG

The stakes are high for imperialism. If the Salvadoran revolutionary organisations are victorious, there is a risk that its

a whole people must not be accepted, without reaction.

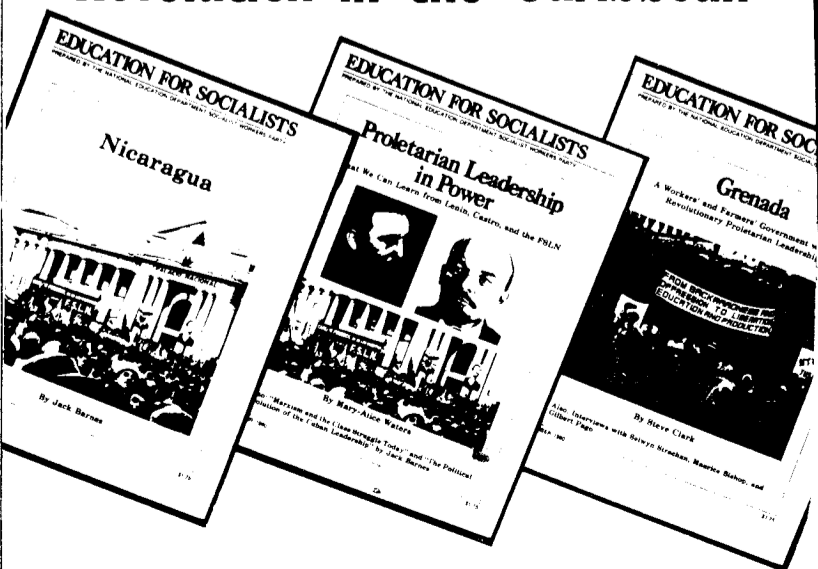
Actions should be organised calling for repression to be stopped immediately, democratic rights to be respected, the freeing of political prisoners, the punishment of those guilty of crimes, and the breaking by all countries of diplomatic relations with the assassins' junta.

Solidarity can be expressed at the same time by concrete financial and medical aid to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and its organisations. World opinion must be alerted to the real danger of an imperialist intervention. The strongest possible opposition to such an intervention needs to be expressed.

Down with the junta! International solidarity with the Salvadoran people and their fighting organisations!

Support the FMLN!
Against any imperialist intervention in Central America!

Revolution in the Caribbean



Available from: Socialist Action PO Box 65 London SW 16 1NN

GUA



Report

example, they recently completed a successful literacy campaign to ensure that the majority of the people can read and write.

Russell Johnson, national secretary of the Socialist Action League of New Zealand, recently visited Nicaragua to find out what is happening in other countries that can give to the revolution. This is an abridged form of his eye-witness account from Nicaragua.

Politics at every turn. This is the overwhelming impression of Nicaragua today, as the mass of the population, emerging from 50 years of dictatorship, soaks up political ideas.

The radio, the television, the daily newspapers - all are devoted in the first instance to the discussion and debate of politics, both national and international. Television especially is used by the government to explain its policies to people up and down the country.

POLITICAL MEETINGS

While there have been no big demonstrations in Managua while I have been there, there are always political meetings of one kind or another.

There are meetings on trade union unity, women's meetings, meetings with doctors and journalists on their role in the revolution.

Many meetings have an international flavour - the most popular themes being solidarity with the developing revolution in neighbouring El Salvador, and with the Chilean people under the boot of the ruthless dictator, Pinochet.

This open and democratic discussion about how Nicaragua can move forward is one of the main achievements of the revolution. For the first time in most people's lives they can organise and speak out in their own interests without fear of reprisal. Even being able to have a party and dance into the night without fear of police brutalisation is a new and popular experience for most. Beer consumption, I am told, is way up.

There has been a tremendous growth of democratic organisation and participation in politics on the part of the people. Unions, for example, scarcely existed prior to the revolution. Now, just about everyone belongs to one.

Many of these new organisations are represented in the Council of State - the government body which discusses new policy for the country.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

A particularly impressive aspect of this democratic organisation is the extent of the participation of women. This despite the fact that Nicaragua is a very poor country with few resources available to spend on providing public facilities like child care to ease the burden of being a wife and mother.

Women were nearly a third of the anti-Somoza guerrilla forces and today are a visible component of the Sandinista army and police. In the unions, in the student organisations, and in the government, women seemed to play a prominent role. Women's full participation in society is consciously encouraged by the leadership of the revolution.

Another main achievement of the revolution has been the progress made in reactivating and reconstructing the economy in the interests of working people, despite inadequate aid from other countries. Unemployment has been slashed through the creation of 90,000 jobs in one year.

SOCIAL WELFARE

Health care, education and social welfare are being constantly expanded and improved, despite the poverty of the country. Much help in doing this has come from socialist Cuba. It has provided 2,000 teachers and hundreds of doctors to help establish education and health facilities in the most remote parts of the country.

In the countryside the amount of crops that have been planted has exceeded the government's hopes. The big problem they face now is finding sufficient labour to harvest them.

And even in the cities, where the destruction was the greatest, the factories, the houses and the roads are being slowly rebuilt and the economy is moving forward again.

But this is no thanks to the Nicaraguan capitalists. Those who didn't flee with their friend Somoza are dragging their feet about putting their money back into business to provide jobs and goods for the country's reconstruction because it is no longer profitable enough for them. Many businesses have had to be taken over by the workers for this reason, with the support of the government.

DESTABILISE

And these same capitalists are on a systematic campaign to destabilise the economy and undermine public confidence in the FSLN-led government. Key commodities are kept from the market, forcing up prices. Fake rumours are circulated about economic conditions in the country. For instance, there has been a sugar shortage while I have been staying here.

One of the most inspiring meetings I have been to in Nicaragua was the First National Assembly of the July 19 Sandinista Youth Movement. About 1,000 delegates had gathered to, as a banner put it, "Stop to reflect so as to advance more strongly". And to project new tasks for the nation's revolutionary youth who have been the backbone of a recent literacy campaign.

CONTINUE REVOLUTION

The assembly had been in honour of Pedro Arazul Palacio, a young martyr of the struggle to overthrow Somoza. His mother was brought onto the stage as part of the rally.

When she spoke, she simply said: "Keep my son's example in mind. Don't let his sacrifice be in vain. Continue to take the revolution forward".

And that is the attitude of the overwhelming mass of the Nicaraguans today. So many people, especially the young, sacrificed their lives to overthrow the dictator, that they feel there can be no turning back now.

They want to build a new Nicaragua, one in which their children can have a secure and happy future. They want Nicaragua to develop so that it can be a strong example and firm base of support to the other oppressed peoples of Central and South America in their liberation struggles against imperialism.

And they feel that in Nicaragua today this road is being guaranteed by the increasing participation of the workers and poor farmers in the running of the country, led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

As a popular slogan here goes: "Only the workers and farmers will go all the way!" And that means building a socialist Nicaragua without bosses.

Nicaragua Co-ordinating Committee

The Nicaragua Co-ordinating Committee was set up in November 1978, following a tour of Britain by representatives of the FSLN.

Shortly afterwards, in December, the Labour Party NEC passed a resolution supporting the FSLN in its struggle against the Somoza regime and agreed to sponsor the committee.

The two main demands of the committee are:

- * Freedom and self-determination for the people of Nicaragua;
- * Solidarity and support for the FSLN in the reconstruction of a free Nicaragua.

Up to the present, the co-ordinating committee has concentrated on publicising the situation in Nicaragua - within the labour movement - and winning material support for its people.

If you would like to affiliate to the committee, please write to: Nicaragua Co-ordinating Committee, c/o 20 Compton Terrace, London W1.

Child Care Conference Charts Future



NCCC members lobby TUC.

by CAROL REES (NCCC St. Cttee)

On January 24, hundreds of women will be attending the second National Child-Care Conference. The aim of the conference is to work out the aims of the campaign and to launch action around them.

The need for such action was never more urgent than today. One of the major victims of the Tories' cuts programme has been nursery provision for the under 5's. Up and down the country councils have begun to axe the (already inadequate) facilities that exist.

RIGHTS

The result of this attack is becoming only too clear. Thousands of working mothers around the country are being forced either to find untrained baby-minders (at a cost they can ill afford) or leave their jobs to care for their children.

This attack upon women's rights fits in with the general thrust of the Thatcher government to drive women out of the workforce back into the home. It fits into the general cuts in social services which attempt to place on women the care of the young, sick and the disabled.

ACTION

The last child-care conference, in July, was an important step forward in beginning a fight-back against Tory policies. It brought together activists from a whole number of local child-care campaigns (from Bristol to Glasgow), began to discuss out the issues and elected a national ad-hoc committee.

Over the past 6 months or so, the ad-hoc committee has helped issue propaganda and initiate a number of activities, such as the lobby of the TUC in September, which won a sympathetic hearing from delegates.

What is needed - at this conference - is a clear national focus which can unite all the various groups fighting local cut-backs in child-care. It is only by placing responsibility where it belongs - on the government - that we can unite and make a woman's right to a job a national issue.

SUPPORT

As with the National Abortion Campaign, a key element of building such a mass action campaign must be a struggle inside the unions and Labour Party to convince them that women's rights is an issue they cannot ignore or walk away from.

Such a thrust is vital because it is only by gaining the support of the powerful unions - as did the Campaign Against Corrie - that the government's attacks can be stopped in their tracks.

A central thrust of this will be fighting for the TUC - which already has its 'Charter for the Under 5s' - to begin its fighting for, and not just talking about it. A useful step forward here might be calling a national one-day trade union conference around the issue.

LABOUR

Such a fight has also to be taken into the Labour Party. The ad-hoc committee (set up at the last conference) recently established a Labour Party sub-group to work through the Labour Party nationally.

This was a major step forward and should be built upon in the coming period. Child-care rights should be promoted within the branches of the Labour Party with the aim of getting them to take up the issue both locally and at a national level.

The aim of such an offensive should be to get the next Labour government to pledge to reverse all cuts on child-care as a pre-requisite to establishing a comprehensive child-care service.

BOLD

If the coming NCCC conference can adopt bold policies such as these - and take them into the labour movement - there is no reason why it cannot draw thousands into the fight for a women's right to work.

If you would like to affiliate your local LP/trade union branch to the NCCC - or would like to attend the conference - please write to: NCCC, c/o Surrey Docks Child Care Project, Dockland Settlement, Redriff Rd., London SE16.

Intercontinental Press

Frankly, *Intercontinental Press* carries far more articles, documents and special features than *Socialist Action* has room for.

If you would like to read on-the-spot reports of * the Polish workers struggle; * the fight for socialism in Nicaragua; * the meaning of the Iran-Iraq conflict; * the fight against austerity in Western Europe, why not take out a sub now?

Regular copies can be obtained from: *Socialist Action*, PO Box 65, London SW 16 1NN



Defend Longbridge 8

by GRAHAM WEIGHT (POEU)

Despite the strike by 1500 workers at the Mini-Metro plant, Longbridge, the Edwardes' management has still refused to re-instate the 8 workers sacked for alleged "gross industrial misconduct".

Far from seeking a compromise, the Edwardes' management has shown it intends brooking no opposition to its plans to ram home speed-up and job loss in the period ahead. Edwardes arrogantly declared that — unless the workers reported to the plant on January 5 — they would all be sacked.

Clearly, management was looking for a confrontation it thought it could win. Their policy has partly paid off. In the absence of any firm stance by the union leaders, the workers decided to drop strike action pending an 'independent enquiry' into the sackings.

SPARK

The atmosphere at Longbridge, after continual attacks on working conditions, mounting speed-up and arbitrary lay-offs, was already tense. The spark that set off the tinder-box was management's attempt to introduce speed-up in the Trentham seat-build shop.

Workers refused to carry out a management call for 25 sets of seats per man per shift and — when seats were brought in from outside — refused to handle them. Management responded by laying off all the workers on the Metro chain and blaming the action on the men in dispute.

This attempt to split the workforce cut little ice, however, with Longbridge workers. 500 in the CABI Metro trim shop held an angry meeting and voted to march to management offices to tell the bosses how they felt.

VICTIMS

On December 3, 12 workers were



BL workers on the march last year.

summoned to an "enquiry" into the protest march that had occurred a few weeks earlier. The company, it seems, already had statements from unnamed "witnesses" accusing the 12 of being the "ring-leaders" in the dispute.

When they arrived, they were called in one by one, the charges were laid against them and — after the hearing — they were given one hour to prepare their "defence". This is democracy at British Leyland. They were called in individually to hear the company's final verdict: 9 were sacked (including 4 stewards), 2 suspended for two weeks and 1 suspended "pending further enquiries".

The response of Longbridge workers was sharp. Angered by what was a clear case of victimisation, over 1500 downed tools and the stoppage began.

WEAK-KNEED

For the Edwardes' management, of course, the victimisation of the Longbridge 9 is merely another step in their strategy of breaking

shop-floor organisation at BL.

What made management so confident in its stance, however, is the weak-kneed attitude of the union leaders. Over the past year, the leaders of the AUEW and T&GWU have allowed Edwardes to walk rough-shod over them.

They accepted the Edwardes' plan — a recipe for speed-up and lay-offs — and they bulldozed the workforce more recently to accept the company offer of a 6.8% pay increase at a time when inflation is raging at over 15%. To do this, they had to over-rule a 2 to 1 vote by workers in BL in favour of strike action.

BACKDOWN

The reason for this cowardly attitude is crystal-clear. They are frightened by Edwardes' threat that — if they don't play ball with attempts to "streamline" the company — the government will refuse further cash injections and sections will be forced to close down.

This fear has meant that they have gone meekly along with

almost everything the management has served up, including late last year the open victimisation of convenor Derek Robinson, whose sole crime was criticism of the management plans.

Such an attitude has determined their approach to the present dispute. Instead of calling for an immediate official strike, the union leaders have done everything possible to avoid the issue.

ENQUIRY

First of all, they suspended any action pending the outcome of the appeals of those dismissed. This resulted merely in the reduction of the number sacked from 9 to 8.

Secondly, when Edwardes threatened to sack all workers who didn't turn up for work on January 5, the spineless AUEW leaders urged their members to turn up. The T&GWU leaders called for an "independent" enquiry which would involve ACAS.

No section of the leadership attempted to defend the victimised members by calling for immediate solidarity action — and threatening to extend it through BL unless the management backed down.

ENQUIRY

It was this cowardly attitude by union leaders which has given Edwardes the green light to press ahead with attempts to destroy shop-floor organisation. It is also this attitude which, offering no perspective of struggle to the Longbridge workers, resulted in the return to work.

The struggle is not yet over, however. Longbridge workers will be angrily awaiting the result of the "enquiry". If the 8 are not reinstated, the rank-and-file must organise to call Edwardes' bluff.

If his arbitrary power is not challenged — and the 8 victims are allowed to remain sacked — no one will be safe.

Heseltine Axes Housing

by JANE ANSELL (Finchley CLP)

Since coming to power 18 months ago, the Tories have made the social services a number one target. Heseltine's latest decision to slash the rate support grant — announced on December 16 — will add yet another nail to the coffin.

Cutting the rate support grant will mean compulsory teacher redundancies, larger classes and fewer college places. It will mean — as applied to the health service — further hospital closures.

The cutbacks planned in housing, however, are even worse. Over the next four years, housing is to suffer no less than 75% of total government cuts in social spending.

PRIORITY

The priority of the government couldn't be clearer when we compare the projected cut-backs with defence spending. At the very time when an extra £200 million is to be poured into revamping Britain's so-called "nuclear deterrent", housing is to be slashed to the bone.

Five years ago, for every £1 spent on defence, 96p was spent on housing. Soon, if the Tories get their way, for every £1 spent on defence that on housing will have shrunk to a miserable 33p.

The price of such neglect is only too clear. It will mean a return to a

massive sium problem and a housing shortage of post-war proportions. As Gerald Kauffman (Labour's Environment spokesperson) put it, Heseltine's policy is "contemptible in its dishonesty and disgraceful in its contents".

IMPACT

The Tories' latest attack, of course, comes on top of already serious inroads into local government housing projects. The government "moratorium" — in force at least until this April — has meant that councils have already been forbidden to build any new houses or make major repairs on existing stock.

Moreover, instructions from central government that they have to sell council homes means that the housing stock that exists is already being seriously depleted.

As a result of the Tories' axe-job to date, over 274,000 building workers have been put out of a job and obliged to join the dole queues. At a time when millions are desperately seeking homes, building workers are being thrown on the scrap-heap.

DISASTER

The latest cut-back announced by Heseltine will mean a virtual end to public housing programmes as we know them. Already, it is estimated that:

* 2 million people do not have a place to live in;



Heseltine: laughing while millions suffer as a result of his policies.

- * 1 million households are officially overcrowded;
- * 1 million households live in homes "unfit for human habitation";
- * 1 million homes in England need

major repairs.

In such a situation — when over two million are queuing to get a council home — the Tories have decided to virtually bring building to a halt.

If the proposals are enforced, any person on a council housing list would have to wait 21 years before being housed. In the meantime, of course, they will be expected to go on living in sub-human conditions — that is, if they have a roof over their heads in the first place.

FIGHT-BACK

It is clear that the Tories are not content with axing education and health. They are trying to take away the very roofs over our heads. That is why it is imperative that a fight-back begins now.

The first step would be for all Labour councils to refuse to sell off council housing or make any part of their direct labour force redundant. This was one of the major demands passed by the Lambeth conference against the Cuts last December.

A recall conference is being planned for January 17. Such a conference has to prioritise the fight against the housing disaster the Tories are creating. It is only by Labour councils and public sector unions uniting — and drawing in wider support from the labour movement — that the present policies can be reversed.

NUS under attack

by KELVIN BAYNTON (LSE SU)

Students are finding out just what a Tory government means. Last year, even the formerly privileged higher-education students had their grants cut in real terms by 10%.

This year, the government has turned its attention to student unions. In an attempt to destroy what autonomy they have had, Rhodes Boyson (Minister for Higher Education) has announced sweeping changes in the way student unions are to be financed.

CONTROL

Previously, unions would negotiate with their parent institution (university etc) to decide a per capita fee for that college for the following year. That figure would then be charged to the fee-paying body by the college and passed on (as a legal right) to the student union concerned.

Under the new proposals, likely to be implemented this autumn, the government would add a nominal figure to the amount it pays (either directly or through a local authority) to each college. It will then be up to the college as to whether that money is passed on.

Although in the past governments have annually issued guidelines as to what the increase in student union fees should be, this new system gives the government a far tighter control over the amount of money student unions have.



CHILLING

More chilling than that, though, is the enormous dependence that student unions will now have upon their college authorities.

At the LSE, for example, the student union is currently organising a rent strike against increases of 24% in hall rents. At the same time, the union runs its own accommodation service (costing £800 in advertising alone). Under the new system, the LSE authorities could simply refuse to pay the grant (hence no accommodation service) if the rent strike continued.

RESPONSE

The Tories, of course, have tried to cloak the fact that they are directly cutting income. They have followed their usual tactic of relying on "market forces". By putting student unions among all the other public sector groups competing for ever-scarcer resources (libraries, teaching resources etc), they hope they will fight it out among themselves instead of uniting in opposition to all cuts.

The NUS leadership's response to the Tory attack plays into their hands. They have tended to concentrate around how much money will go to the student unions. Not only does this neglect the important issue of student union freedom to spend the money as they wish.

It also cuts students off from the other sectors facing cut-backs. Such a policy can only lead to students defending themselves against other workers for a larger slice of a diminishing cake instead of uniting with them in a common fight-back against the Tory offensive.

Abortion Rights Threat

by SABINA ROBERTS (Streatham CLP)

A year or so after the defeat of the Corrie Bill – by mass TUC action – it looks as if women's abortion rights are once more in danger.

Cut-backs in the NHS have already led to an erosion of the 1967 Act. Less women today are having abortions because of the shortage of hospital beds, shelving of day-care centre plans etc, than for some years.

SAINSBURY

Now, on top of this, Timothy Sainsbury (Tory MP for Hove, who came top in the private members' ballot) has said he may introduce a Bill to lower abortion time limits and tighten up the conscience clause.

If Sainsbury's Bill goes ahead, it will mean that thousands of women will, once again, be faced with the age-old dilemma: to have a child they do not want or return to the backstreets.

THREAT

Faced with this new threat, the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) has already begun to swing into action. It has called on all its supporters to start a massive letter-writing campaign to Sainsbury to show the extent of the opposition he faces.

NAC's national planning meeting this January will be discussing the next steps in the campaign. Clearly, a key priority will be working out ways of mobilising support in the labour movement. It was, after all, the mass turn-out on the TUC spon-



Mass demonstration against first anti-abortion bill by James White.

sored demonstration in 1979 that threw the Corrie Bill in the dustbin where it belongs.

It will only be by tapping this support again that any further erosion of the 1967 Act can be stopped. The fact that the TUC recently passed a resolution deploring continued attacks on abortion facilities shows the potential that exists.

LAW

Winning such support will not only be key in preventing any further curbs to the 1967 Act. It will also be important in gaining mass support for the positive legislation

NAC decided to pioneer at its last conference.

NAC agreed to prioritise three key issues: first, the need to fight for adequate abortion facilities, second to amend the existing laws to "decriminalise" abortion and third, to fight for a woman's right to choose.

Mass backing has to be won for such aims in the unions and Labour Party to ensure that when the next Labour government is elected, it actually begins to implement them. The NAC labour movement conference this March will be an important step towards gaining such support

EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS

The hunger-strikers of the Northern Ireland H-Block prisoners had a major impact in Britain and Ireland. The prisoners were desperately protesting inhuman treatment.

The torture and humiliation they were subjected to by the Tory government merely continues, however, a centuries-old policy of repression.

Since the time of Marx and Engels, revolutionary socialists have been deeply involved in support of the Irish struggle for self-determination.

In November 1872 – 108 years ago – Marx, Engels and other members of the International Working Men's Association helped organise a demonstration of over 30,000 in London to demand an amnesty for the Irish political prisoners of the time.

These were the prisoners from the 1867 Fenian Rebellion. That uprising for Irish independence failed, and 169 participants were brought to trial. Half of them were sentenced to hard labour.

A mass movement developed to demand amnesty for the prisoners. Engels wrote a report about how the November 3rd 1872 demonstration to support the Irish political prisoners was built.

Written for an Italian workers' paper – *La Plebe* – it is reprinted in *Ireland and the Irish Question: A Collection of Writings* by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels. It is well worth reading by those socialist currents, such as *Militant*, whose policy on Ireland is so far removed from that of the founders of Marxism.

Below are excerpts from Engels' article.

by JASON HILL (Stoke-on-Trent)

London, November 14, 1872.

The Liberal English Government has at the moment no less than 42 Irish political prisoners in its prisons and treats them with quite exceptional cruelty, far worse than thieves and murderers.

The Irish members of the International in London decided to

Engels on Ireland



Fred Engels

The Irish, who represent the most revolutionary element of the population, were not men to display such weakness. The committee unanimously decided to act as if it did not know of the existence of this regulation and to hold their meeting in defiance of the government's decree.

ENORMOUS

Last Sunday, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, two enormous processions with bands and banners marched towards Hyde Park. The bands played Irish songs and the *Marseillaise*; almost all of the banners were Irish (green with a gold harp in the middle) or red. There were only a few police agents at the entrances to the park and the columns of demonstrators marched in without meeting any resistance. They assembled at the appointed place and the speeches began.

The spectators numbered at least thirty thousand and at least half had a green ribbon or a green leaf in their buttonhole to show they were Irish; the rest were English, German and French.

UNITY

This is the first time an Irish demonstration has been held in Hyde Park; it was very successful and even the London bourgeois press cannot deny this. It is also the first time the English and Irish sections of our population have united in friendship. These two elements of the working class, whose enmity towards each other was so much in the interest of the government and the wealthy classes, are now offering one another the hand of friendship; this gratifying fact is due principally to the influence of the last General Council meeting of the International, which has always directed all its efforts to unite the workers of both peoples on a basis of complete equality. This meeting of the 3rd November will usher in a new era in the history of London's working-class movement.

organise a *giant* demonstration in Hyde Park (the largest public park in London, where all the big popular meetings take place during political campaigns) to demand a general amnesty. They contacted all London's democratic organisations and formed a committee which included MacDonnell (an Irishman), Murray (an Englishman) and Lessner (a German) – all members of the last General Council of the International.

RIGHT

A difficulty arose: at the last session of parliament the government passed a law which gave it the right to regulate public meetings in London's parks. It made use of this and had the regulations posted up to warn those who wanted to hold such a public meeting that they must give written notification to the police two days prior to calling it, indicating the names of the speakers. This regulation carefully kept hidden from the London press destroyed with one stroke of the pen one of the most precious rights of London's working people – the right to hold meetings in parks when and how they please. To submit to this regulation would be to sacrifice one of the peoples' rights.

POST BAG

Dear Cde,

The march and public meeting in defence of the Filipino domestic workers (see p.2 –Ed) were important first steps in organising against the deportations. As a participant, I was impressed by the turnout of Filipino workers, particularly given the social and political pressure they are under.

Several union banners were also in welcome evidence, although the unions will have to do a lot more if the fight is going to be won. Because a victory on this issue would be a setback for the Tories and a gain for all workers, hopefully the labour movement will swing more into action.

But what was noticeably absent was the major British socialist groups. The *League for Socialist Action (LSA)* and several small anti-racist groups were represented with banners, but there was no sign of the *Militant* tendency or of the *Socialist Workers' Party*. The *International Marxist Group* also declined to support the march.

The complete lack of support for the struggles of migrant workers by the (very British) British left reflects real national chauvinism on their part. Just what will it take for such groups to begin living up to their responsibilities? I hope many of their members will be asking this question too.

Philip Lindsay
(London)

Dear Cde,

Please find enclosed a sub for one year's supply of *Socialist Action*. I recently bought a copy on the November unemployment march and was impressed by its coverage, particularly of international issues. Keep up the good work.

Martin Bell
(S. London)

Dear Socialist Action,

While I agree with your call for a Labour Party in the United States, your interpretation of the recent presidential elections struck me as wishful thinking. Three points stand out.

First: you emphasise the fact that there was little difference between Carter and Reagan. Really? While it is true that Carter was no 'dove', are you seriously suggesting that Reagan's politics do not mark a real shift to the right? Workers in the USA (and in neighbouring Nicaragua) will, I am sure, disagree.

Second: you stress the fact that the low poll indicates there was a real shift among working people away from the two big business parties. This is playing with figures. The fact is that the poll was only 2% lower than last time and that many workers did vote Reagan.

Third: you play up the move towards a labour party. While I agree such a party was necessary – to pose an alternative on class lines – it is quite incorrect to give the impression there was a mass sentiment for one. Hopes should not be interpreted as reality.

Jane Whitmore
(Bolton)

Cde Whitmore should read the article more closely. SA did not say there wasn't a shift right in US ruling class opinion. What it did say was that, whether Carter or Reagan was elected, both would have been forced to abide by the needs of the ruling class and, in this sense, there was no real difference between them.

Secondly, the facts are that this was the lowest poll for 30 years, with only 2 out of 4 workers bothering to vote and only 1 out of 4 voting for Reagan (26.5%). Even those few workers who did vote Reagan didn't so much vote for his policies as against Carter's.

Finally, SA didn't say that a labour party was "on the cards". What we said was that there are trends for growing numbers of US workers to look for an alternative to the two big business parties. –Ed.

Dear Cde,

As I read the last edition of your paper, I was glad to see a British paper condemning the British H-Block and Special Air Services (SAS) atrocities carried out against H-Block campaigners by British murder squads.

As I send this letter the H-Block issue seems to be solved, but it isn't. The British government has not brought in its reforms to take the men off the blanket. The rumour is another hunger strike. If this occurs the men's demands will be clear: political status and nothing less.

We do not blame the British people, we blame their government. They protect a minority in this island who refuse to call themselves Irish and who keep the Irish Catholics and Protestants apart.

To anyone who thinks that the republican cause is beaten, I say it is not and will not be as long as an armed British soldier is on Irish soil.

Tony Harker
(Armagh, Ireland)

Dear Cde,

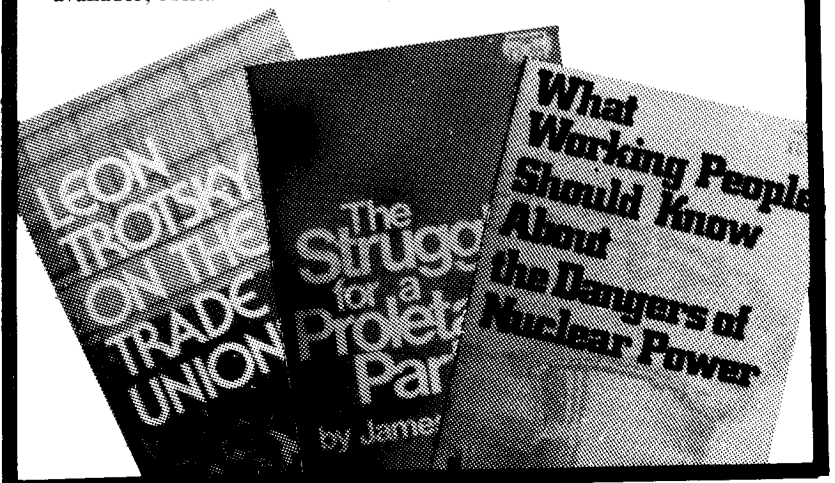
The column by Liz Easton in the last *Socialist Action* about the freedom fighters in the H-Block was very informed about the hardships to those freedom fighters and about the Irish working people's cause.

Please send some more copies of *Socialist Action*.

Jimmy McLaughlin
(Dublin)

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HUNGER STRIKERS WIN MAJOR VICTORY!



Supporters of strikers mobilised by the thousands

By LIZ EASTON (Hackney CLP)

The 53-day hunger strike by H-Block prisoners has led to one of the biggest victories yet by anti-imperialist forces in Northern Ireland. By the time it ended, it had centred world attention on the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and the Tory government's brutal suppression of human rights.

It had, moreover, begun to spark off a massive upsurge among the Irish people with demonstrations and protest actions sweeping every part of Ireland, from Belfast to Dublin

Finally, it succeeded — despite the lies of the British press — in forcing the Tory government to back down and concede the demands of the prisoners. The statement made by Humphrey Atkins (Secretary for Northern Ireland) granted all the prisoners' demands.

DEMANDS

The fundamental issue of the prison protest was the attempt by the Tories to force prisoners to wear convict uniforms. Convicted on forced "confessions" by jury-less courts, the prisoners protested their treatment as common criminals.

Because of their protest, they were forced to live naked in their cells.

They were put in punishment wings (H-Blocks) and subjected to inhuman treatment and constant harassment.

The prisoners' decision (two months ago) to launch a hunger strike was a desperate attempt to protest this inhuman treatment dished out to men whose only crime was fighting to free their country of brutal oppression. They demanded:

- * the right to wear their own clothes;
- * the right to refrain from prison work;
- * the right to free association among political prisoners;
- * the right to organise their own educational/recreational facilities;
- * the right to full remission of sentences (i.e. time off for good behaviour).

CONCESSIONS

Although the government has insisted it made no concessions to the prisoners, Atkins' statement — read out on December 17 — clearly concedes every demand.

The statement declares: "Within a few days, clothing provided by their families will be given to any prisoner giving up their protest so that they can wear it during recreation, asso-

ciation and visits. . ."

This concession on clothing is backed up by others. The statement continues that "Prisoners who end their protest will be able to associate within each wing of the prison blocks in the evenings and at weekends".

It continues that "We want to work out for every prisoner the kinds of available activity which we think suit him best — work (including, of course, the work of servicing the prison itself), vocational training and educational training".

Finally, the statement adds: "On the question of remission — and this will be of special importance to the prisoners' families — provision already exists for lost remission to be restored after subsequent good behaviour".

PROTEST

The reason for the Tory government's back-down is not, of course, hard to fathom. Despite the barrage of lies put out by the British press, the Tories' brutal policy in Northern Ireland was receiving international condemnation. Messages of solidarity with the hunger strikers were coming from sources as diverse as the French trade union movement and US senators.

Even more worrying, from the Tory government's point of view however, was the mass movement that was developing in Ireland against their inhuman treatment. The campaign that was developing represented a resumption of the mass movement that had begun 10 years ago with the civil rights marches of 1968-69.

MASS ACTION

In the weeks preceding the end of the fast, mass demonstrations and protests swept through Ireland. The mobilisations in Northern Ireland began to overflow into the South where — on December 6 for example — an angry crowd of 40,000 marched on the British Embassy.

Moreover, the protests developing against Tory policy began to find roots in the trade union movement. On December 10, workers went on strike throughout the country. In Catholic West Belfast, all major businesses halted.

The size of the protest building up clearly terrified the Thatcher government. They realised that the death of any of the prisoners could lead to a mass explosion which would present a direct challenge to their rule. It could bring masses into struggle and fuel the fight for a united Ireland free of British rule.

LESSONS

The fact that the Tories have been forced to back down will not be lost on many of those leading the struggle in support of the H-Block prisoners. They will clearly realise that mobilising thousands — particularly the powerful industrial workers — in united action is the most effective way of carrying forward the fight against British oppression.

The resurgence of such mass action in Ireland, and the renewal of struggle against British oppression, places a real responsibility on the shoulders of the British labour movement. This means building a mass Troops Out movement which will be an invaluable aid in helping the Irish people win national freedom.

Hands off Poland

Continued from Page 1.

cians responsible for the crisis ('Sentence them to death', an elderly woman cried). Others asked when the independent union federation. . . would set itself up as a political party to rival the CP."

SPREAD

It is clearly this growing threat to the very core of their repressive rule which sends shivers up and down the backs of the Kremlin leaders. They realise, of course, that military intervention into Poland would meet fierce resistance and that a "victory" would only be won after a long and bitter fight.

Confronted with the growth of Solidarity, however, their room for manoeuvre is limited. Brutally crushing the fight for socialist democracy may become for them a life-and-death matter.

They are only too aware that a victory for the Polish workers would find many imitators in Eastern Europe and the USSR. If a similar movement did erupt in the USSR, the bureaucratic leaders would find themselves in a free fall with little chance of regaining their footing.

PROPAGANDA

This explains the growing attack on "anti-socialist elements" that has recently been issuing forth from Kremlin press releases. As with the propaganda preceding the Soviet invasion of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, such words are nothing more than double-talk.

The Polish workers are not seeking to overturn the major gains of the Polish revolution of over 30 years ago — the ousting of the capitalists and the creation of a planned, nationalised economy. On the contrary, as Lech Walesa, the prominent Polish union leader, has spelled out, they are their foremost defenders.

What the Polish workers are fighting against is that bureaucratic layer which is the worst enemy of socialism in Eastern Europe: that layer which stands for privilege, inequality and repression and which seeks to turn workers into unthinking tools at the service of high-living managers.

SET-BACK

If the Kremlin does intervene in Poland — to defend its repressive regime — this will not only be a set-

back in the struggle for socialist democracy in Eastern Europe. It will be an attack on working people around the world.

It will give the Thatchers and Reagans of this world a priceless propaganda weapon in their drive to step up the arms race. The sight of Soviet tanks rumbling into Poland will allow them to justify their hawkish ambitions by posing the USSR as a "threat" to world peace.

Moreover, they will use it as a convenient cover for stepping up their intervention against working people in countries such as El Salvador or Nicaragua.

HANDS OFF!

This is why it is important that working people everywhere are



Fighting for socialist democracy

aware of the high stakes in the Polish situation, and express their solidarity with the Polish workers. The rallying cry should be "Hands off Poland".

Such a call has nothing in common with the hypocritical support offered by Western leaders to Solidarity. Reagan or Thatcher have to interest in the victory of the Polish workers, which could serve as an inspiring example to workers here fighting austerity plans and curbs on democratic rights.

On the contrary, while secretly supporting the crushing of the Polish workers, they would merely use the Soviet intervention as a propaganda weapon to justify their own repression at home and abroad.

Firefighters show way

By GEORGE HOLD (Peckham CLP)

Last month, when the Tories announced their 6 percent wage freeze in the public sector, the response of the firefighters was immediate. Overtime bans were imposed up and down the country and resolutions poured in calling for an "all-out stoppage".

It was under this mounting pressure that the local authorities were forced into upping their offer to 18.8% — 13% now (backdated to September) and the remaining 5.8% in April.

MIXED

While a set-back for the government, however, the reception the offer got at the delegate conference was mixed. Many brigades, such as London and Strathclyde, were campaigning for a "no" vote.

They clearly felt that the settlement represented a retreat from the guaranteed 18 percent the firefighters were due to receive under the agreement with the Callaghan government some years back.

Moreover, there was clearly anxiety about the "strings" that were attached to the agreement. The local authorities have hinted that the deal will have to be paid for by greater job losses and manning rearrangements.

STRUGGLE

The firefighters are already under great stress and are being stretched almost to the limit because of recent cut-backs in the fire service. Any more cuts or job losses will, as Jim Fitzpatrick (union secretary, Battersea) explained, put "the whole future of the service at stake".

This is why they will have to be fought. The FBU has already stated that it will vigorously oppose any redundancies made by local authorities and the rank-and-file members will have to be vigilant in this respect.

Such a struggle — for a decently-staffed fire service — is in the interests of all workers and this is why support will have to be won from the other public sector unions and the TUC.



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