

# Socialist Challenge

## Steelworkers must win

# STOP THE SCABS

THIS is the ugly, threatening face of Tory Britain — a scab lorry driver for the private steel giant of Hadfields in Sheffield outside the factory gates last week.

He is threatening pickets with an iron bar. The same day this picture was taken, on 12 March, Margaret Thatcher's cops arrested — not the trash in this lorry — but over 90 steel pickets outside Hadfields. That is what the Tories mean by 'law and order'.

And this is why the steel strikers must win. The unofficial national strike committee is already recommending that steelworkers step up their action.

Committee member Brian Connolly told Socialist Challenge that a resolution was passed at last Friday's strike committee meeting saying negotiations with the steel bosses must stop 'immediately'.

The union leadership was told to 'direct its energies towards obtaining fullest support from the TUC'. Connolly added: 'We also recommended that safety cover be removed, that steel users are now picketed, and that further pressure be put on the docks.'

The fact is that the strikers have been drowned in sympathy. Now they need support from the rest of the trade union movement. Action such as

\*The Engineering Union declaring that all steel be boycotted in all engineering plants.

\*The leadership of the Transport and General Workers Union working overtime to make sure no TGWU lorry drivers cross picket lines.

\*The TUC calling solidarity strikes of engineering and transport workers.

Already rank and file engineering workers have shown their solidarity. In Sheffield at GKN Shadlow, GEC Traction and Davey Loewy production has been halted.

This is the kind of action which can win the steel strike and make sure that no scabs — with or without iron bars — pass the picket lines.



Photo: CLIVE TURNBULL (Socialist Challenge)

## NUR CALL: General Strike 14 May

THE 180,000-strong National Union of Railwaymen has called for a general strike on 14 May.

This date had already been chosen by the TUC as 'a day of action' — a phrase which can mean all things to all people.

Now the NUR has demanded that the TUC 'general council calls upon all trade unions to instruct their members not to report for duty on 14 May in order to demonstrate the depth of feeling in the movement against government policy.'

Speaking earlier this week, NUR general secretary Sid Weighell said that the union executive felt that 'it was not sufficient to wave banners in Trafalgar Square'.

Added Weighell: 'This government is not listening. The only way we can influence them is to stop Britain for 24 hours.'

The NUR call should be backed by every trade unionist.

Every day a new Tory attack is promised or launched — whether it be on union rights, on the welfare state, or on the living standards of working people. More cuts are promised in next week's budget. In this context Wednesday, 14 May should not be seen as 'influencing' the Tory government, but as a pointer to the way the government's whole offensive can be defeated. And that does mean a general strike.



## OUR POLICIES

Capitalism is in crisis. The leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions offer solutions that are in the interests not of the workers but of the capitalist class.

Socialist Challenge believes that the two vital tasks confronting revolutionary socialists are:

- To build broad-based class struggle tendencies in opposition to class-collaborationism in the labour movement. These should be non-exclusive in character, grouping together militants holding a wide range of political views.

- To begin to fight for the creation of a unified and democratic revolutionary socialist organisation which can, through an application of united front tactics, begin to be seen as an alternative by thousands of workers engaged in struggles.

Such an organisation should be based on the understanding that:

**1** The struggle for socialism seeks to unite the fight of workers against the bosses with that of other oppressed layers of society — women, black people, gays — struggling for their liberation. This socialism can only be achieved by creating new organs of power and defeating with all necessary means the power of the capitalist state.

**2** Our socialism will be infinitely more democratic than what exists in Britain today, with full rights for all political parties and currents that do not take up arms against the socialist state. The Stalinist models of 'socialism' in the USSR and Eastern Europe have discredited socialism in the eyes of millions of workers throughout the world. We are opposed to them and will offer full support to all those fighting for socialist democracy.

**3** The interests of workers and capitalists are irreconcilable on a world scale. Capitalism has not only created a world market, it has created world politics. Thus we fight for working class unity on an international scale. This unity will in the long run be decisive in defeating both the imperialist regimes in the West and the brutal dictatorships they sustain in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

In Britain it implies demanding the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and letting the Irish people determine their own future.

**4** The Communist parties in Europe are in crisis. Neither the 'Eurocommunist' nor the pro-Moscow wings have any meaningful strategy for the overthrow of the capitalist state. New revolutionary socialist parties are more necessary than ever before. Conditions today are more favourable than over the preceding three decades. But such parties can only be built by rejecting sectarianism and seeing internal democracy not as a luxury but as a vital necessity. This means the right to organise factions and tendencies.

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## EDITORIAL

# Actions not words

THE massive 13 per cent swing against the Tories in the Southend by-election demonstrates the increasing resentment among working people against the savage policies of the Thatcher government. An opinion poll published just before the Southend election revealed that a general election today would result in a Labour government with a majority of over 100.

Later this month Howe's budget is likely to include huge increases in VAT and taxation on consumer goods. Only nine months after the Iron Lady came to power, a tidal wave of working class resentment and opposition is building up. But the response of the TUC and Labour leadership has been pathetic. Callaghan can't even bring himself to support the steelworkers who have been in the forefront of the anti-Tory offensive. Murray has been little better.

At the 9 March demonstration, faced with hecklers who demanded *action*, Murray pleaded for more time for 'talks' with the government. But talks will change nothing. Thatcher and Joseph are

determined to smash the steel strikers. Prior has 'staked his political future' on pushing through the anti-union laws. And no amount of 'talk' will deter Howe from pushing up taxes. What is needed is *action*.

## General Strike

In order to throw out the Tories it is necessary to mobilise the strength of the *whole* working class. Instead of begging the Tories to 'change course', the TUC should prepare a general strike; the alternative is the dismantling of the welfare state, the destruction of trade union rights, mass unemployment, and the impoverishment of millions in the name of profit.

The 'day of action' called by the TUC for 14 May is fragile beginning. Typically, the TUC has given no firm guidance about what kind of action should be taken by affiliated unions. The TUC General Council should make 14 May a *one day general strike*, as the beginning of the preparations

for a total stoppage to bring the Tories down. Militants should follow the example of the NUPE London Divisional Council who have unanimously called for all-out strike action that day. Resolutions should be put in every union branch calling for all-out strike action.

## Building in the localities

The struggle against the Tories is at a turning point. Militants must prepare to ram home the offensive opened up by the steelworkers. What was evident on the 9 March demonstration was the absence of any organised left alternative to the TUC leaders. The first step towards such an alternative would be a joint campaign by the LCDTU and Defend Our Unions Conference, at a local and national level, to force the TUC to take general strike action to kick out the Tories. This campaign would aim to build local committees based in the workplace.

Such a programme of action can finish off the Tories. No amount of 'talk' will do it.

# Olympic hysteria

WHILE the government is doing its best to prevent British athletes from going to the Moscow Olympics, Rugby Union selectors are drawing up lists of players for this summer's tour of racist South Africa.

South Africa has been in illegal occupation of Namibia since 1966. Its troops have invaded Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe — in every case to fight the forces that now make up the governments of these countries. The Angolan government has recently sent in an official complaint against the forty-four attacks on Angolan territory launched from Namibia in January of this year alone.

The South African government holds the whole black population of the country — the vast majority — in a state of universally condemned

subjection. The British government has issued one statement, before the decision to tour was made, stating that it thought it inadvisable. The statement was as lukewarm as it could be, given that the government is signatory to an international agreement opposing sporting relations with South Africa.

Will we now hear the mass Tory ranks baying for a boycott? No. Will we see Thatcher threatening British players with the sack, cutting off their money, and crusading for the moral pressure of the nation to be hurled against them? No. If there are demonstrations against the tour, what will she do? Probably arrest the demonstrators.

Meanwhile, Britain's highly profitable trade,

investment and business links with both Namibia and South Africa — through which rich Tories grow fat while African workers suffer abominable conditions — will continue. That is why the Olympic boycott campaign has nothing to do with the right of self-determination, nothing to do with the defence of democracy, and nothing to do with human rights.

Like the clarion call to 'defend small nations' with which the imperialists launched the First World War — during which they trampled over every small nation in Europe — the call for the 'right of self-determination' by the imperialists is not worth the paper it is written on. It is a straightforward, naked and totally hypocritical codeword for *anti-communist war hysteria*.

# Labour's new left meets

By Geoff Bell

AFTER organising the spectacularly successful 'Debate of the Decade' on Monday, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee meets in Birmingham this weekend.

On the Saturday there will be a conference on the 'alternative economic strategy'. The next day LCC members will discuss the future strategy of the organisation.

The LCC was established in 1978 by a group of Labour Party members, including a number of MPs. It defines its objectives as:

*'To co-ordinate action in the constituencies and trade union branches to facilitate the defence, clarification and extension of Labour's programme.*

*'To work closely with other campaigns and pressure groups that work alongside the Labour Party so to harness their unique expertise and experience in the work of activists and our party.*

## Vague

All this is rather vague, but through a number of conferences and publications the LCC has attempted during the past year to give flesh to these aims.

Some of its leading members, in particular Stuart Holland MP, have been associated with the alternative economy strategy, the core of which is the promotion of planning agreements aimed at giving trade unionists a greater say in the running of the industries in which they work.

Other suggestions coming from the LCC include the involvement of constituency Labour Parties in mass campaigns, such as the Anti Nazi League and the anti-nuclear



movement, and the 'reform of the media', in particular 'the break up of the big press monopolies'.

The latest proposal, advocated by leading LCC member Peter Hain, is for the organisation to call a rank-and-file trade union conference.

These and other issues will be thrashed out at the LCC's 'strategy' discussion on Sunday. Debate will take place around a document prepared by the LCC secretary, Nigel Stanley, in which four priorities are suggested.

First, the fight against unemployment; second, 'to make this country genuinely democratic'; third, reform of the media; and lastly, 'to re-assert political and economic sovereignty vis-a-vis the EEC'.

Taken as a whole, there is no doubt that these proposals and the general history of the LCC over the past year mark the organisation out as one of the most serious left-wing currents to have emerged within the Labour Party for a long time.

That its members include Stuart Holland, Michael Meacher MP, and a

number of individuals associated politically with Tony Benn also gives the LCC the potential to influence many Labour Party and trade union activists.

The question is, how will that influence be used?

In answering this, Nigel Stanley's document has both pluses and minuses.

On the plus side, Stanley says: 'We do not believe it is sufficient to rely on electoral policies alone to win socialist advance.' He goes on to list a number of areas, such as the women's movement and the black community, in which Labour Party members need to be involved.

Stanley also suggests that the LCC should call a 'local government conference, inviting Labour councillors from all over the country...to denounce the cuts...and seek support for a positive policy of planned growth of public expenditure.'

Such a conference would be an excellent starting point, but unless it organises action against the cuts and reaches out to establish links with

public sector workers, it would remain something of a talk shop.

This is one of the more general problems the LCC face; it retains the flavour of a discussion group, rather than an organisation going out to the working class and placing itself in the forefront of the struggle against the Tory Government.

Ideas and 'strategy' are all very well, but what the LCC now needs to do is translate these ideas into action.

## Woolly

There is also the problem that some of the ideas offered are, to say the least, somewhat woolly. The section in Stanley's document on internationalism concentrates on 'disengagement' from the EEC, but he does not spell out what type of internationalist strategy the Labour Party should follow.

There is the rather peculiar assertion that Britain is a 'former imperial power', and while Stanley argues Britain 'must respect the right of all nations...to control their own future', there is the glaring omission of how this principle should be applied to Ireland.

Similarly, while it is argued that Britain should support 'liberation movements' it is not specified whether this would include southern African freedom fighters.

## Confusions

Hopefully these and other confusions will be sorted out at Birmingham this weekend. If not, the LCC could remain what it is — with a membership of only two hundred; an organisation with plenty of chiefs but not enough indians.

# 'Debate of the decade' Taking power or sharing power?



Photos: G M COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)

**PAUL FOOT** talks to **TARIQ ALI** just before the debate begins. Both the Socialist Workers Party and the International Marxist Group put the case for revolutionary change in Britain today. Inset: **HILARY WAINWRIGHT**, one of the authors of *Beyond the Fragments*; and **TONY BENN**, main speaker on the Labour Party side.

By Valerie Coultas

**DESPITE** a spirited defence of reformism from Tony Benn, the 2,500 strong audience in Central Hall, London, at the 'Debate of the Decade' on Monday night, saved their loudest applause for the revolutionaries.

**TARIQ ALI**, speaking for the International Marxist Group, received a massive ovation for saying that, after a decade which had spawned the most right-wing Labour government since the war:

**'Labourism is a sickly, weak and pathetic ideology. We want to dislodge it.'**

Audrey Wise, chairperson of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, got caught up in a net of her own making. Trying to reply to Tariq Ali, and rejecting a revolutionary perspective, she asked:

**'What are these people who acquiesce in repression if not ordinary working people who have to be won to our side?'**

**'The state, you fool!'** came the reply from some wit in the audience.

The debate was interrupted on several occasions.

During the speeches of both Paul Foot and Tony Benn, the disruption tactics of a gang of anarchists — calling themselves the 'autonomi' — infuriated the vast majority of the audience who had come to listen to the debate.

A steelworker from Sheffield expressed the feelings of the bulk of the crowded hall when he said:

**'The steelworkers in**

**Sheffield could teach you lot a great deal about solidarity. You can shout now but if we don't win this strike, you won't be shouting later on.'**

Sheila Rowbotham, one of the authors of *Beyond the Fragments*, pointed out that it was sectarianism and intimidation like that of the 'autonomi', which had made the women's movement so wary of far left politics. The anarchists finally completely failed in destroying the meeting and filed out.

## Applause

Tony Benn put forward the case for socialists to join the Labour Party. The problem was not that Labour's reforms had failed, he claimed, **'but that Labour has not reformed enough'**. He wanted to see a new, reforming Labour government.

His attempt to defend Labour's record in office from 1974-79 did not cut much ice, particularly following Paul Foot's bold indictment of Benn himself for remaining in the cabinet of such a right-wing Labour government.

Benn did win applause for his attachment to the democracy of the ballot box,

and for his view that the labour movement can use parliamentary democracy.

He said that many workers feared that if the far left groups came to power then such democracy would be ended.

The anti-authoritarian critique of the far left made by the authors of *Beyond the Fragments* lent weight to Benn's view. The Communist Party's interventions from the floor also endorsed this view. They argued that the 'British road to socialism' had to be through winning a parliamentary majority.

Hilary Wainwright, a platform speaker and one of the authors of *Beyond the Fragments*, made it clear that she rejected the strategy of both the reformist left and of the revolutionary left.

She explained how Stuart Holland, the first speaker for the LCC, had intervened into the struggle against closure at Vickers, Scotswood, and had been responsible for diverting it into parliamentary channels while he became MP for Vauxhall.

But she thought that the far left had also failed to take a creative approach to 'extra-parliamentary' activity. It did not act as a 'catalyst' for struggle, instead trying to impose itself on existing struggles.

Hilary urged the pursuit of a third way, drawing together shop stewards committees, women's groups and so on, and not trying to impose a political line.

Paul Foot echoed Hilary's semi-syndicalist theme of **'going to where the power lies — on the shopfloor'** and of the need to win the argument for socialism in the **'foundations of the labour movement'**.

But he won applause for exposé of the left in the Labour party — he quoted from Benn and other Labour lefts saying that cuts, prescription charges and so on, were 'regrettable' when Labour was in office.

## Vanguardist

When he asked the audience whether the lack of demand for steel was due to the fact that 'India is stuffed with steel' or because they 'have a glut of steel in Latin America', there was a roar of cynical laughter.

It was left to Tariq Ali to give a full reply to the reformist left. Benn had accused the far left of seeking a 'vanguardist coup d'etat', but Tariq Ali pointed out that Chile showed it was not the far left which was inclined to lead coup d'etats. **'We should not forever exclude the possibility of a British Pinochet,'** he stated.

As to the Labour Party never having actually tried out a reformist road to socialism, Tariq Ali listed the social democratic governments in Sweden, West Germany, Australia and Austria, and said that none of them had legislated for socialism either.

Tony Benn's critique of the revolutionary left on democracy was roundly answered. Tariq argued that the democracy of popular power, popular control and

workers' councils is a far higher level of democracy than that of bourgeois democracy, which never goes beyond the right to vote once every five years.

He also suggested that if the Labour Party was really the truly democratic 'socialist federation' described by Benn, then it ought to allow far left groups, like the IMG and the SWP, to affiliate.

Audrey Wise, who spoke last from the LCC side of the debate, failed to answer the jibes at Labour Party democracy. But she did manage to underline a weakness in the far left's armoury that evening.

The speakers, particularly Paul Foot and Hilary Wainwright, had failed to explain that the debate is not about whether to use Parliament but how to use it. Audrey Wise caricatured their anti-Parliamentarianism and explained that the working class should use the House of Commons as an arena for struggle.

She cited the Corrie Bill as an example of where Parliament had been of some use.

In fact revolutionaries are quite willing to stand for Parliament, and will argue for revolutionary ideas if they get elected. Hugo Blanco, in Peru, has shown that this can be an important part of revolutionary tactics.

But revolutionaries, unlike Audrey Wise, do not subordinate the needs of the mass struggle to the needs of the constitutional process —

which is exactly what the Labour lefts did during the last five years of power.

The dilemma of the Labour lefts — the constitutional road or the revolutionary road — became clear when some members of the audience held up a banner which read: **'Are you with Benn or the H-block men?'**

Tony Benn, the true democrat, said that he had been brought up to believe that partition was a crime against the Irish people, but he was not in favour of the immediate withdrawal of British troops. He had nothing to say about when, if indeed ever, the troops should be withdrawn.

The problem for the Labour Party today as in the past is not whether to reform enough, but whether to reform at all. This is particularly clear with an issue like Ireland.

Such a vision cannot be allowed to represent socialism in the '80s.

As Tariq Ali said, revolutionaries will enter into united action with anyone prepared to fight to turn back the offensive of this Tory government and to defend working class rights.

They will fight for joint action with Benn and the rest of the Labour lefts. But they will not subordinate the task of building the revolutionary party to building such united action.

It is in this way, with maximum united action and maximum political debate, that socialists can build for socialism in the '80s.

## Youth march for jobs

# Welsh workers won't go to the wall

IN the 1930s there were men and women in the Rhondda in South Wales who were unemployed for five or even ten years.

They experienced hunger, poverty, and the humiliation that flows from them. Even in Jarrow, where the famous '30s hunger marches started, conditions were not nearly so bad.

Older people in South Wales still weep at their memories of those days of devastation.

Now the conditions of the '30s threaten to return to South Wales. As the crisis hits British industry all sections of the working class suffer, but in South Wales they stand to suffer more than most.

By Jude Woodward

THE efforts of the Tory government, which is determined that those workers least able to defend themselves will pay most for the economic crisis, combined with those of the British Steel Corporation, which wants to make a quick buck rather than save jobs, are driving Welsh workers to the wall.

Twelve thousand steel jobs were due to go in South Wales by 31 March, but the angry response from Welsh workers has won a short stay of execution until August.

### Related

But it doesn't stop at 12,000 steel jobs. Every job lost in steel will probably mean two or three other jobs lost in related industry in South Wales. Even officials in the government's Welsh Office reckon that the steel cuts will lead to the loss of 50,000 jobs.

There are already 92,000 unemployed in Wales, and this could easily be swollen to 125,000 by the end of the year.

Unemployment on this scale means death for the communities of South Wales. The twin steel towns, fifty miles apart, of Port Talbot and Llanwern, are particularly threatened.

Llanwern is a real steel town — it is only there because the steel plant is there. Like many of the steel towns in England —

Corby, for example — it was built as a direct answer to the unemployment of the '30s.

Many workers moved to Llanwern with the promise that at last there was stable employment and prosperity.

But the Tories and BSC don't care what people think about their lives.

### Quiet

Port Talbot has been a steel or iron town for three hundred years, but now it too faces the slow death imposed by the crisis.

The people of these towns are not prepared to just sit quiet and let it happen. The move towards a Welsh general strike earlier this year reveals the militancy with which the people of South Wales are meeting the threat of unemployment.

The weak-kneed leadership of Len Murray and the TUC ensured that this militancy came to nothing. But Welsh workers have not given up.

### People

Now the youth have been drawn into the struggle to save jobs. Miners and steelworkers are joining with young people to launch a protest against the bosses' plans for South Wales.

In *The Times* on 17 March, Bill Sirs said: 'We have no objection to streamlining. We have always done it on the basis of natural wastage year after

year.' But each job lost through 'natural wastage' means one more youth without a future.

From 4 to 9 April the youth of South Wales will be marching through the valleys to demand that they are not deprived of a future.

They will be asking older workers not to sell jobs that the next generation of workers will need. They will be lending their energy and willingness to fight to the struggle to save the communities of South Wales.

They will demand joint union action now to stop closures and redundancies.

The march is being officially backed by the South Wales Mineworkers' Union executive, by the Welsh National Union of Students and by the Port Talbot strike committee. The numbers on the march will be swelled by apprentice miners and steelworkers, young workers who stand to suffer on the basis of 'last in first out', students and school students who want jobs when they finish their education.

### Alliance

This link between the unions and young people in South Wales is a step to the fighting alliance that can turn back the Tories' offensive and demand a workers' solution to the crisis.

An alliance of this scope is vital, otherwise the closures will destroy just about every aspect of life for the people of industrial South Wales.

### Agony

But protest alone is insufficient — the death agony of the Speke car plant in Liverpool revealed that. Only direct action by the trade unions can turn the growing sense of outrage at the Tories' policies for South Wales into a mass movement to stop them.

The South Wales youth march is a small step towards this.

## 'Closures would mean a mass exodus of youth'

**MARTIN** comes from Liverpool. He is 17 and unemployed. Recently he has been staying in South Wales to help build support for the youth march.

He talked to *Socialist Challenge* about why it's important that youth join the fight to defend jobs.

**What impact will the closures have on Port Talbot?**

The closure of the steel works here will mean certain death for the town. It'll not just affect the steelworkers, miners and others linked directly to the steel works, but the whole community. There will be the same chronic long term unemployment as in Liverpool where I come from.

**What part have the youth played in the strike so far?**

The closures will hit the young people especially hard. They'll be the first to be laid off because of the 'last in first out' principle. Most of the apprentice

opportunities will go.

There will be no job opportunities for most school leavers in this area and the inevitable result will be a mass exodus by young people from this area.

The union leaders are always saying that the steel strike is not just about those working now but is a fight about whether there will be jobs for future generations in Wales. It's about whether those at school now will have jobs to go to when they are older.

They say the strike is about the future of the area, but before now they have done little to organise the youth into the strike. Now with this march coming up youth in South Wales have a chance to play a part in the winning of this strike.

**Why have you involved the NUM and the Port Talbot strike committee?**

Well it's obvious that the youth themselves could not possibly fight against the closure plan effectively. For this reason we approached the

NUM and the strike committee. The unions are obviously the key to defending jobs, but they also have to mobilise and support the actions of other sections of the community against the Tory attacks.

**What are the aims of the march?**

Two things really. To draw attention to the situation of South Wales youth under the Tories and to begin the process of getting the youth organised to fight for their rights alongside the steelworkers.

**Is this a one-off march?**

I don't see this march as the beginning of an 'on-going' campaign like the Right to Work or the Campaign Against Youth Unemployment.

This march is just one of the sort of united fronts we need in order to fight unemployment.

It will be a long term struggle, for which we will need to build an alliance of the employed and the unemployed. This is just a start.

## 'I'll be redundant within three months'

**BOB TAYLOR** is a weighman at BSC Port Talbot.

Pat Sikorski was in South Wales and spoke to him about the youth march against unemployment.

**Why are you going on the march?**

With the redundancies here and in Llanwern there'll be nothing left in South Wales, especially for the young people — that's if the closures go through, of course.

**How do you think the closures should be fought?**

The jobs issue is a big thing down here in everybody's minds, but the union leaders have not put it up alongside the pay fight in this strike.

The Wales TUC started to propose action under pressure from the miners, but this was called off because of the actions of Len Murray, general secretary of the TUC, and the other leaders of the British trade unions.

We've now got a long way to go in convincing people to fight nationally against the jobs losses.

**What are your job prospects?**

If the closures go through I'll be out straight away.

I work on the quality control end of the process. We were told last September or October that there will be job losses on our section due to a modernisation programme.

### Section

There are three jobs on my section: weighman, furnace recorder and mill recorder plus one floating spare. I was the last floating spare to be appointed with no meal-time relief. The union has not fought to replace the jobs.

An arrangement was reached with the management before the strike, under which the jobs on our section would be taken over by a computer system leaving only the manual jobs.

### Manual

Before the new redundancies were announced we were offered transfers to the manual section, but now unless there is a fight over the jobs I'll be redundant within three months of going back to work.



**'Like a blood bath'**

# Thatcher's hit squad

**MARGARET** Thatcher's hit squad swooped on pickets outside Hadfields private steel works in Sheffield on Wednesday of last week.

Socialist Challenge reporter **CLIVE TURNBULL** was among the 90 pickets arrested. He was charged with obstruction and using foul language.

**MARGARET** Thatcher doesn't like workers. She has made that plain, very plain. Most of all she doesn't like them because they have refused to lie down and accept her wage-cutting, job-slashing philosophy.

So what does she do? Outside Hadfields last week she gave one answer — send in her thugs in blue uniforms to arrest and beat up pickets.

There were about 800 of us there on 12 March. As well as from Sheffield, pickets had come from Rotherham, Stocksbridge and Warrington.

We assembled at 1pm, in time for the afternoon shift.

The aim of the picket was not to close Hadfields. It was a demonstration aimed at showing the steel union leadership, the Tories, the British Steel Corporation and all the rest that steelworkers are fighting on as hard as ever and would not be sold out.

Five coach loads of cops were waiting when the pickets arrived. George Burgess, chairperson of Warrington Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, later described what happened:

'There was a body of police outside Hadfields' gate. They were standing across the road with their arms linked.

'We stood ten yards away, shouting for Hadfields to come out and join the strike. Without warning the police made a rush. We stood our ground, thinking the police would stop.

'The next we knew the



Hadfields 12 March: 'There was one lad who just stood there. Two police dragged him along the floor by his hair, kicking and thumping him... they charged at us like a troop of soldiers. It was like a bloodbath.'

police were coming in kicking, thumping and punching. There was one lad who just stood there, completely terrified. Two police dragged him along the floor by his hair, kicking and thumping him.

'There were 50 of us who got through the police line, only to find another body of cops. They charged at us like a troop of soldiers. It was like a blood bath.

'They sealed us off. Police at the front, police at the back. An inspector came down and said we were all under arrest.

Then the cops found they hadn't enough room in their vans to take us all, so they forced us to walk back, one at a time like school children, through their lines.'

Many militants were handcuffed after being arrested. Some spent up to four hours at West Bank police station with their arms 'cuffed behind their backs. The arresting officers were still down at Hadfields with the keys. Some of the pickets were 'cuffed with plastic straps.

When they finally got round to booking us the charges ranged from threatening behaviour, obscene language to, in most cases, assault.

The scab lorry driver who threatened pickets with an iron bar was not arrested.

And yet no way was the picket a failure or defeat. The pickets had shown their determination to keep up their struggle. That Thatcher and her cops needed to be as vicious as they were at Hadfields was a sign of their fears and their anger at the pickets strength.

So whether it's inside or outside police cells; at Hadfields or at other picket lines, the morale of the steelworkers from South Yorkshire remains high. That's the message from Sheffield.

Photo: CLIVE TURNBULL (Socialist Challenge)

## ARGUMENTS FOR SOCIALISM

# Why capitalism means crisis

By Roy Alexander

**DURING** the two decades of spectacular economic growth that followed the Second World War a vast array of reformist 'theoreticians', such as Crosland and Douglas Jay, discovered a new 'truth' — capitalism as a system had fundamentally changed its nature; the days of capitalist crisis had gone forever.

According to this view, years of patient work by the right-wing of Labour had accomplished what Marx had believed would require a social revolution. Now such violent and unseemly ideas could be set aside and the benefits of 'full employment' and the 'welfare state' reaped for the indefinite future.

In the '80s, after ten years of capitalist stagnation, with growing dole queues and a steady erosion of state benefits this superficial forecast has been discredited. But the political and economic viewpoint that gave rise to it lingers on.

Despite all this the same kind of social

democrat argues that the problems of capitalist society are due only to having the wrong government in office with the wrong policies. A few points off the interest rate, a few more billions of state expenditure, a dash of import controls — and back on course for the social democratic millennium.

In reality, however, the crisis-ridden character of the capitalist economic system remains identical to Marx's day. All the 'demand management' and 'neo-Keynesian' economics in the world will do nothing to change the nature of capitalist production.

Under capitalism, production is in the hands of private capital. Private capital has only one master — that is profit. The constant attempt to expand profits means that private capitalists have to compete with one another. This is even the case, in a restrained form, for the big monopolies.

To gain advantages they constantly revamp the productive process, substituting new, more complex and more expensive machinery for the living labour of the worker. As a result the mass of capital invested in production constantly grows. Production and productivity also grow, but the

competition between capitalists and the struggle of the working class to benefit from the increased productivity of their labour (which, at a time of expansion, is likely to succeed), means that profits do not grow as rapidly as capital: in other words, the rate of profit falls.

In an effort to counter this, capitalists will slow down their rate of capital accumulation, seeking other and more remunerative outlets for their funds (speculation, foreign investment, investment in labour-intensive service industries). The effect will be a decline in the demand for investment goods, just at a time when productive capacity is expanding.

The resulting cutbacks, closures of less competitive firms, and so on transmit the slump throughout the economy.

Capitalist governments can tinker with this process: by adopting various steps to boost demand, investment subsidies, and so on. But they can't fundamentally alter its cause, which lies in the structure of production.

Indeed, by stimulating spending at a time when capitalists are cutting back production due to the fall in the rate of profit, governments have introduced a new dimension to capitalist crisis —

chronic (and often acute) inflation.

All that the social democrats have succeeded in doing is altering the shape of the crisis. The following table compares what happened in the decade of the 'great depression' — the 1930s — and over the past years:

**British economic growth, 1930s and 1970s**

'Worst' year		'Best' year		Decade as a whole	
'30s	'70s	'30s	'70s	'30s	'70s
-6.7%	-1.4%	+8.8%	+8.2%	+21%	+23%
(1931)	(1974)	(1934)			

In other words, the economy grew in the 1970s by little more than it did in the '30s — but the 'slump-and-boom' cycle was evened out into a pattern of steady stagnation.

Trotsky once compared the methods of frank bourgeois politicians and reformists by saying that whereas the former wanted to attack the working class with a knife in the back the latter employ small but regular doses of arsenic. That is true of their economic policies as well as their political methods.

# Asian youth march for Black Freedom

JUDGE Irven Sunderland ruled last week that it was all right for a teacher, to call his pupil a 'sambo' and a 'nig nog'.

Even if the expressions had been used, 'they could not by any stretch of the imagination be described as discriminatory'.

Once again, the Commission for Racial Equality has lost its case.

Asian youth in Bradford, aware that the race relations legislation is useless in combatting racism in Britain today, have decided to organize a black freedom march from Bradford to London.

They aim to make it clear to racists like Sunderland and Graham Bramble, the teacher concerned, that they are 'here to stay, here to fight', whatever the courts may say.

In Bradford, where the main industry, textiles, is in a state of virtual collapse, black youth are finding it harder and harder to obtain work.



Photo: CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS  
for your rights too loudly you'll be stopped!

Harassment of West Indian youth is a regular feature of daily life in Brixton. The notorious 'sus' laws virtually make it a 'crime' to be black and unemployed.

Now, following the tightening of the 1971 Immigration Act to restrict the entry of immigrants, the Tories plan a new Nationalities Bill which will attempt to reduce the status of nearly every black man and woman in Britain to that of a second class citizen.

The Asian youth movement is aware of the meaning of these attacks. White workers facing more hardship through unemployment will be encouraged to turn on black

people as scapegoats.

'Black freedom', which refers not just to equal rights but to the 'whole concept of our dignity as black people', according to the Asian youth in Bradford, has to be fought for by building a united black movement. The march they are organising is the first step to building such a movement.

## Adequate

'Isolated demonstrations have not proved adequate weapons as means of fighting back. We feel it necessary that an action takes place which focuses the attention of the black community nationally.'

The immigration laws will be a

particular focus: 'We feel that these laws are of overriding importance to us as they threaten the whole basis of our existence in this country.'

The marchers are asking supporters to set up Black Freedom support committees in the towns they are passing through on the way to London. These committees should collect money, arrange food and accommodation and advertise the issues the marchers are raising.

The march will culminate in a rally and demonstration in London on 19 July. If you can help and wish to participate or want further information, contact: Asian Youth Movement, Bradford, 266 Lumb Lane, Bradford 8. Tel: Bradford 49931.

## DETAILS OF THE MARCH

THE march will leave Bradford on 28 June and culminate in London on 19 July with a demonstration and rally.

- The provisional route so far:
- Day 1: Sat 28 June — Bradford-Huddersfield
  - Day 2: Sun 29 June — Huddersfield-Rochdale
  - Day 3: Mon 30 June — Rochdale-Oldham-Manchester
  - Day 4: Tues 1 July — Manchester-Sheffield
  - Day 5: Wed 2 July — Sheffield-Alfreton
  - Day 6: Thurs 3 July — Alfreton-Derby-Burton-on-Trent
  - Day 7: Fri 4 July — Burton-on-Trent-Walsall
  - Day 8: Sat 5 July — Walsall-Birmingham
  - Day 9: Sun 6 July — Birmingham-Coventry
  - Day 10: Mon 7 July — Coventry-Leicester
  - Day 11: Tues 8 July — Rest Day
  - Day 12 & 13: Wed & Thurs 9 and 10 July — Leicester-Market Harborough-Northampton
  - Day 14: Fri 11 July — Northampton-Bedford
  - Day 15: Sat 12 July — Bedford-Luton
- The rest of the route is being finalised.

ANTI-RACISTS across the country are coming to the recall conference of the Campaign Against Racist Laws next Saturday in London. Black people are being hit hard under the Tories.

New restrictions on immigration were brought in by the Tories from 1 March and a further tightening up is planned, along with a new Nationality Bill.

In the courts Judge Sunderland and his ilk sanction the use of racist abuse against blacks. CARL mobilised some 20,000 people against the Tory proposals on immigration last November.

With the relative demise of the ANL anti-racists should concentrate their efforts on building CARL into a mass anti-racist campaign centring on the question of immigration.

## NATIONAL RECALL CARL CONFERENCE

Saturday 22 March  
12 noon to 5pm  
Friends Meeting House, Euston Rd (opp. Euston Station)  
Contact: PO Box 353, London NW5 or ring 01-485 2872

## Unemployment

If unemployment reaches 2.5 million next year, as predicted, it will be even easier for employers to refuse black people a job.

Not only the courts but the police in Britain abuse black people if they protest about discrimination. The Southall Asian community was punished for daring to oppose racist bigots like the National Front, which deliberately provoked their community.

Rather than the National Front being stopped from holding an election meeting in Southall last April, the whole community was brutally attacked by the police. The heavy fines and prison sentences that followed were meant to teach Southall Asians a lesson — if you ask

# Corrie goes down

JOHN Corrie's anti-abortion Bill will not become law. Last Friday it fell after running out of parliamentary time.

That the Bill has fallen is a tribute to all the anti-Corrie campaigners in Britain, and particularly women. It shows that women, organised in a powerful movement which looks to the working class for support, are a force to be reckoned with by the Church, the state and this reactionary Tory government.

Now pro-abortion campaigners should go on the offensive and fight for a law that really does give women the right to choose.

JILL KENT, who has been sitting in the House of Commons following the debate, explains how near John Corrie came to victory.

When the Tories won the 1979 election it was inevitable that sooner or later we would be facing another threat to our half-way liberal abortion law.

Once the results of the Private Members' Ballot were announced, SPUC, the anti-abortion lobby group, and Life, the anti-abortion grass-roots organisation, turned their attention to John Corrie MP, who had drawn first place.

## Delayed

Corrie delayed until the last moment before publishing the full contents of his Bill. The Bill was finally published only three days before its second reading on 13 July, and many of the MPs who voted that day had little idea of what it contained.

But SPUC and Life's carefully orchestrated campaign of foetus scare stories, all of which have since been shown to be false, had clearly worried many of them.

They were urged by Corrie, backed by the Minister of Health Dr

Gerard Vaughan, to ignore the Bill's many obvious failings and vote for it in order to solve this distressing problem of the foetuses. Drafting mistakes could be ironed out later and areas of concern fully discussed. Some compromise, it was suggested, could be found.

## Debate

When a vote was taken after 4½ hours of debate, 242 MPs voted for the Bill and only 98 against. This majority was the highest yet for the second reading of an anti-abortion Bill.

None of the previous Bills had managed to reach a third reading, but Corrie had an unusually long parliamentary session ahead of him. Things looked bleak as his Bill was sent into standing committee.

The committee held one meeting before the summer recess and from 24 October began to sit in earnest for 2½ hours every Wednesday morning. It was constituted in proportion to the vote on the Bill, including only five MPs opposed to Corrie.



JOHN CORRIE MP — he came near to victory

Known supporters of the anti-abortion lobby held the majority, and it soon became obvious that this was a full-scale assault on the 1967 Abortion Act.

As the committee went through each clause of the Bill in turn, Corrie's supporters used their majority to push through changes which, while looking liberal enough to appeal to MPs in the next debate at the report stage, in fact considerably tightened up Corrie's proposals.

## Power

It was at this stage that an entirely new section was added giving the Secretary of State the power to lower (but not to raise) the time limit at his own discretion, by means of a 'statutory instrument' which could pass through Parliament with the

minimum of debate.

The Bill emerged from committee before Christmas more damaging and more confusingly drafted than ever. As its parliamentary slot on 8 February approached it began to look as if the anti-abortionists had sabotaged their own Bill by making it too long and complicated to pass the report stage in the short time available to it.

They began asking for extra time, and filibustered the committee stage of the Seat Belts Bill in order to keep 15 February clear.

As the Bill dragged on through February Corrie resorted to desperate tactics: he tried to withdraw all those parts of the Bill which had yet to be discussed and would prevent it reaching the third reading vote.

## Majority

By this point a 24-week time limit had been imposed by the majority vote and the grounds had been marginally improved. But the removal of subsequent clauses meant that no provision was left to allow doctors to save a woman's life between 24 and 28 weeks of pregnancy, and abortion of a foetus on the grounds that it would be severely handicapped became illegal altogether.

Many MPs who had voted for the Bill at its second reading were appalled by Corrie's tactics, however. The Bill had been butchered by its own sponsor in a vain attempt to bulldoze it through and onto the statute book with his name attached. Many hardened anti-abortionists now felt it would be better to withdraw the Bill altogether and rally their forces for another, more effective Bill in the next parliamentary session.

Attendance at the debates fell off

rapidly, and on the first closure vote of the 14 March debate Corrie was defeated 147 votes to 140. This meant that MPs were not willing to push on for a third reading and the Bill finally ran out of time on that Friday, with several voting divisions left and two amendments which had not yet been discussed.

The anti-abortionists had met with defeat once again.

## Imposed

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# Job-killer squad moves on Meccano

By Geoff Carroll and Bernie Kavanagh

MERSEYSIDE'S fight for jobs suffered a blow last week when 140 High Court bailiffs successfully stormed the Meccano factory in Liverpool. The factory has been under occupation since mid-December when the owners, Airfix, sacked the 940 employees at 40 minutes' notice.

Squads of bailiffs, armed with axes and iron bars, supported by the Merseyside police force, surrounded the factory in a pre-dawn swoop and smashed their way in to the plant.

The handful of workers guarding the plant overnight were frogmarched out. By the time angry pickets arrived at the plant, management security teams had the place sewn up.

The Meccano occupation was a militant high point in the struggle for the right to work in an area which has suffered closure after closure. It showed that some Liverpool workers had learned the lesson of Standard Triumph and Dunlops, and were not willing to face the dole without a fight.

Bernard Riley, the Engineering Union convenor at Meccano, was in no doubt where the blame lay for this setback: 'People will be very bitter after this. We've been

crapped on from all sides; first by management, but not least by our own national executives.'

Despite widespread local support, the national leaders of the AUEW and GMWU have offered no financial aid; they have consistently refused to make the dispute official or call for a countrywide boycott of Airfix goods.

## Foil

Negotiations to find a new buyer for the factory continue. Meanwhile a hard core of workers, many of whom are women, who played an extremely active role in the occupation, are determined to continue the struggle.

Plans are now afoot to foil management plans to move some £2m worth of stock out of the factory. National efforts to get the dispute made official should be stepped up and the movement of Airfix products stopped.

The financial plight of the workers has worsened, despite being officially unemployed, no one has yet received proper benefits. Donations and messages of support to: Meccano Hardship Fund, Liverpool Trades Council, 1 Victoria St, Liverpool 1.



By Pete Clifford

NOW in their fifth week of occupation, workers at the Stone Platt textile machinery factory in Oldham are stepping up their action to resist closure.

At a meeting held at the Engineering Employers' Federation headquarters, the company withdrew the 170 immediate redundancies and offered 'meaningful negotiations' on the closure.

Harold Robinson, chairperson of the strike

committee, commented: 'As far as we're concerned meaningful negotiations are meaningless until management tell us they're not closing the plant.'

The strike committee's response has been to step up their action, without waiting for the Engineering Union executive to make the strike and occupation of the plant official.

British Aerospace workers in Oldham have promised a £1,000 donation, and strikers are now touring the

Manchester area to build support.

Pickets have been sent to the other Stone Platt plants in Crawley, Bolton, and Accrington, as well as to the Scraggs subsidiary of Stone Platt in Oldham.

Supplies have been turned away, and the pickets are arguing for a strike throughout the company on the basis of opposition to any job loss.

Donations and messages of support to: Eddie Holland, Stone Platt Dispute Fund, c/o 70 Lord St, Oldham.

## Penguin boycott

A BOYCOTT of books at Penguin has again been imposed by National Union of Journalists members following the failure of management to negotiate over its proposed redundancies.

With 22 editorial jobs to be axed, management's only move was to say that if the NUJ chapel made out a case for any of these jobs to be retained, it would have to cut others instead.

The list of books being boycotted includes all the main titles in the Penguin, Allen Lane, Puffin, and Kestrel programmes. Also boycotted are all Pelican and other 'serious' non-fiction titles, added to the list because management's reorganisation plans for the Pelican area threaten NUJ jobs.

The chapel's action is in defence of jobs, and to persuade management to negotiate meaningfully.

## Swindon sit-in

By Mark Wooster

A SUCCESSION of redundancies in the so-called boom town of Swindon has at last met resistance.

On Monday of last week 150 garment workers at Compton Sons & Webb occupied the factory to prevent its closure.

The workers, mostly women, had at first accepted minimal redundancy pay, but when they learned of Compton's £2m profits last year they threw management out and bolted the doors.

Blockaded inside the factory are uniforms for the Metropolitan Police and the Beefeaters. A local Post Office supplies depot is being picketed to stop the movement of fabrics for postal workers' uniforms.

So far 'support' from the district officials of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers has consisted of limiting the number of pickets and barring outside supporters from the occupation.

Donations and messages of support to: Compton Strike Committee, c/o 5 Farmsby St, Swindon.

## Support your local teachers in Bristol

By Mike Eade

A DEMONSTRATION called by the National Union of Teachers in Avon has gained the backing of public sector unions, parents groups, and Bristol Trades Council.

The demonstration, to be held in Bristol on 27 March, is to show solidarity with teachers who are fighting attempts by Avon county council to push through cuts in education by revising timetables.

For the past six weeks there have been three-day strikes at schools in the area.



## ... and Ealing

SCHOOLS in Ealing, West London, came to a halt on Tuesday of last week when members of the National Union of Teachers staged a half-day strike against the cuts. A demonstration led by the union was joined by 1,500 people.

Ealing council, controlled by the Tories, is proposing to cut its education budget by £3.8m. Teachers say that allowing for inflation this amounts to a drop of 20 per cent, which will leave some students without any school books.

Among the groups supporting the demonstration was the Ealing 3-5 Action Group, which is fighting the council's decision to delay admittance to school until children have passed their fifth birthday. The majority of the protestors were mothers and school students, who were the most vociferous in their attacks on the Tories.

Speaking on behalf of Ealing Trades Council at a rally after the march, Peter Grant said that the Tories were cutting all areas of public expenditure, and drew attention to the trades council's campaign against the closure of Perivale maternity hospital.

## TUC blocks discussion on Ireland

By Chris Murray

TAMESIDE trades council has come up against a concerted effort by the TUC and sections of the local labour movement to prevent any discussion on Ireland.

It had planned a labour movement conference on Ireland for 1 March. It had to be called off when the TUC threatened to disaffiliate Tameside.

This followed a ban on the use of council premises for the meeting, imposed by the Labour council. There was also a similar campaign in the press, a call by Thatcher for a Home Office inquiry, and an NF counter-demonstration.

On 4 March a meeting of the trades council decided to reconvene the conference. Then, last week, the trades council was reported to the TUC by Communist Party members and again threatened with disaffiliation.

Tameside is fighting the witch-hunt. Statements of support to: Tameside Trades Council, 186 Kings Rd, Ashton-Under-Lyne, Greater Manchester.

## POLICE CURFEW FOR BLACKS

JUNIOR ARCHER is the latest black victim of police violence in Hornsey, North London, where five members of the Earlington family were assaulted and arrested in their home last April.

Junior, aged 18, was stopped near his home by the police in the early hours of 7 March. Within minutes seven other police officers arrived. They threw Junior against their van, and jumped on top of him. He was struck on the head with a truncheon, leaving a deep gash over his right eye.

After being kicked and punched, a second truncheon blow left the right side of his face badly swollen.

At Holloway police station Junior was subjected to racist abuse. The station sergeant called him a 'black bastard', and he was again punched in the face. By this time his face and clothing were covered in blood. He was charged with the theft of a vehicle and punched until he agreed to sign a statement written by the police.

Junior is pleading not guilty to the charge and has filed a complaint against the police. His case has been



taken up by the Earlington Family Defence Committee.

Trevor Earlington says: 'If you live where we live you're scared to go out at night in case you're picked up by the coppers. Every night last summer they were around beating up blacks just for a laugh. If you got away you were just lucky.'

It seems that the police in

the area are making renewed attempts to impose a night-time curfew on black people.

Highbury Corner Magistrates' court is to be picketed on 21 April when the Earlingtons come up for trial. Donations to the Earlington Defence Committee, c/o 49 Railton Road, London SE24.

# Stop collecting rates and rents!

NEARLY three-quarters of a million local government white-collar workers have been instructed to impose sanctions in pursuit of their 14 per cent pay claim, after talks between unions and employers broke down on 5 March with an 8 per cent offer.

With a possible ban on handling council rents and rates, town halls could be severely disrupted.

The action could also lead to the closure of Luton Airport and the disruption of services at Heathrow and Gatwick over the Easter holiday.

The instruction from the National and Local Government Officers' executive calls on all air traffic controllers to take strike action. It also advises members not to handle rate claims, and urges members not to co-operate with 'consultants, contractors and outside agencies who work with local government'.

## Instruction

The latter instruction has yet to be clarified, but it could mean total strike action for some local government workers and not for others.

Tower Hamlets branch of NALGO has decided to refuse to handle both rates and rent.

Trina Shane, a member of the branch, says: 'Tower Hamlets' main source of income is through council house rents inclusive of rates. It will be the same for other large inner-city boroughs. To make the sanctions effective we will have to stop handling rents as well as rates.'

If other areas follow Tower Hamlets' example the effects of the sanctions on local government expenditure will be dramatic. But NALGO nationally seems reluctant to pursue a clear policy.

The executive has called for a day of national strike action 'some time in April'.

Rank and file activities in NALGO should push locally for firm action on rents and rates as the first step to a nationwide strike in pursuit of the 14 per cent claim.

## Anti-holocaust marches

By Dick Wiles

OVER 1,500 people marched in Cambridge on Saturday against the siting of Cruise missiles, and almost as many joined a demonstration in Oxford with the same objective.

The marches were the start of a campaign to counter the Cold War mentality now being fed by the mass media. We don't want this country to be used as the Pentagon's unsinkable aircraft carrier, or to be dragged into a nuclear holocaust to 'defend' freedoms we have not got.

Oxford and Cambridge were chosen as the location for Saturday's marches because they are near to the largest US Air Force establishments in Britain, Upper Heyford and Latwinton. A large demonstration is planned to be held at Upper Heyford on 17 May.

Details from: Dick Wiles, Campaign Against The Oxfordshire Missiles (Campaign ATOM), 99 Woodstock Rd, Oxford. Tel 0865 54701.

Photo: GEOFFREY SHERIDAN (Socialist Challenge)

Photo: P M GRANT



# In place of capitalism's anarchy

## Fashioning a workers' plan for steel



Photo: LARRY HERMAN

**THE British Steel Corporation has embarked on a policy of drastic surgery in pursuit of profitability.**

**'We are bust,' says BSC chief Sir Charles Villiers, as he falls into line with Keith Joseph's philosophy of laissez-faire economics, and threatens 52,000 steelworkers with the sack.**

**The Tories' plan is that the Steel Corporation's £300m losses must be born by the workers through redundancies**

THE over-production of steel in the West, where nearly all the industrialised countries are cutting steel output, dramatically reveals the depths of the international capitalist crisis.

The shrinking markets and increased competition from the new steel producers in the 'third world' have resulted in a sharpening of inter-imperialist competition and a drift towards 'protectionism'.

Steel consumption in the United States is expected to drop from 99m to 90m tonnes this year. The US government has been forced to intervene to protect home producers against the 'dumping' of subsidised foreign steel.

This move towards protectionism has its parallel in West Europe with the Common Market's Davignon plan. The EEC now expects annual steel production to be below 140m tonnes, compared with a previous planning prediction of 228m tonnes for 1980.

In Britain, the plan is for an annual production of 15m tonnes (over 10m tonnes below the 1970-71 figure!) despite a massive, and nearly completed, programme of modernisation which originally had a production target of 30m tonnes a year.

These figures have implications far beyond the steel industry. As a primary industry, the production of steel is one of the main barometers for measuring industrial performance.

Any starting point for a workers' plan for steel has to be put in the context of deepening world recession and anarchic market forces. However, the policy for steel promoted by Bill Sirs and the rest of the ISTC union leadership has as its starting point the ability of the Steel Corporation to compete 'on equal terms' with its main competitors in the world market.

This approach has more in common with that of a capitalist business consultant to BSC management than a socialist strategy.

It is a totally inadequate response to argue — as Bill Sirs did in an article in the *Guardian* on 14 January entitled 'A salesman's key to production' — that the productivity of British steelworkers is equal to any, and that the main problem is the lack of an aggressive export drive on the part of BSC's management.

Even if it were true it would not solve the problem of declining markets. This approach is entirely within the framework of ISTC policy, which focuses on two main issues: the need to eliminate bad management, and the necessity of increased government subsidy.

It is true that bureaucratic management is bad management. In both the public and private sectors it will breed inefficiency — only workers' control of production by an informed workforce, and within the framework of a workers' plan for the whole industry, can eliminate inefficiency in large-scale production.

### Waste

The waste involved in the £250m Anchor plant in Scunthorpe, which is capable of producing the lowest cost steel in the UK at the rate of 108,000 tonnes a week — now cut to 45,000 tonnes, is just one example of the millions spent on plant and buildings which are under-used or have never been used.

But this is not merely the result of incompetent mismanagement. The colossal waste of resources arises from a wrong planning prediction due to the chaos of the capitalist market.

In relation to government subsidy and the Tory 'cash limits', the union leadership reasons that BSC is unfairly treated in comparison to its overseas competitors. 'Will the Tories...stand up for steel and allow us (sic) to

and reduced living standards.

With the catastrophe of mass unemployment facing the working class in some regions, the question of an alternative workers' solution has become urgent.

Here DAVE HUDSON takes a critical look at the steel unions' long-term policy, and argues that a socialist strategy for steel has to break with the anarchy of the capitalist market.



compete on equal terms?' asks an article in *Steel Workers Banner* entitled 'Tory slackers not helping BSC'.

While we can say that the demand for the abolition of cash limits is in the short-term interest of defending jobs — and has to be fully supported — it is not a substitute for a socialist strategy for steel, as the ISTC seems to think.

In the context of intense competition for a declining demand, it offers no long-term solution. Worse still, it does not tackle the problem of a spiralling trade war, and the possibility of economic collapse.

Within the capitalist framework of Bill Sirs, the next most logical step is the Labour left's policy of import controls.

To date the ISTC appears to have an ambivalent attitude to this policy.

Import controls are entirely inimical to the interests of the working class, as is illustrated by the present situation. The international solidarity of steelworkers and their attempt to block the export of steel to the US would be undermined by a nationalist response.

The struggle for jobs is international. Protectionism not only undermines workers' solidarity, but other reformist policies it is of maintaining the productivity of the British industry.

The much vaunted collaboration between unions and management under BSC's modernisation and rationalisation plans in the 1970s was a product of this approach of accepting the market and of profit.

It has resulted in the loss of jobs since the partial nationalisation of the industry in 1967. Under the economic conditions of the 1970s, this would be disastrous.

The growth of mass unemployment affecting all industries and regions requires different policies to those promoted by the ISTC leadership.

The national steel strike campaign provided a focus for a struggle for the defence of jobs, and the launching of an alternative workers' plan for the industry. In this strike the policies of the Sirs' leadership have been brought into sharp relief.

Despite this the steel industry has shaken the Thatcher government. From the beginning the dispute has been a confrontation with government policy.

### Challenge

Sections of the workforce have recognised this at the start of the strike. It is understood that the most effective way to win was to extend the action of workers in order to challenge the government head on.

A clear focus is needed to counter the growing anti-Tory sentiment, around which a general movement could develop.

The defence of jobs — facing all sections of the working class movement today — can act as a focus. It immediately unites the interests of miners, dockers, and the rest of the working class with the steelworkers.

The failure of the ISTC leadership to take a clear stand on jobs was the element in the setback reported by the defeat of the Welsh ballot on all-out strike action.

Defending jobs requires a programme centring on: no plant closures; abolition of the Tory cash limits; defence of the guaranteed



# Saturate the South with pickets!



Photo: GM COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)

**COLIN HERD is the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation convenor at Warrington, Cheshire.**

**Workers from the Warrington steel plant have been some of the most active flying pickets in the dispute. Their militancy has won them the nickname of the 'Warrington Brick Brigade'.**

By Colin Herd

**DESPITE** the massive support for the TUC march on 9 March, the union leaders have still failed in their duty to back the steel unions. Individual unions — with the exception of the docks, rail and in some areas, the miners — have completely ignored our official picket lines.

**This must stop or it will open up a divide within the trade union movement. And this is exactly what the Tories have been hoping and planning for.**

The reopening of talks with no money on the table, and the disgusting remarks by Bill Sirs in the last issue of *Steel Workers Banner*, are no way to alter the situation.

Sirs' concessions are shameful. He accepts the principle of locally negotiated productivity deals — but 70 per cent of all his membership are in no position to increase productivity, they can only sell jobs.

## Deals

He also accepts that these productivity deals will form the major proportion of the national award, while other unions are turning down 19 and 20 per cent straight cash deals.

Sirs agrees on co-operation with the management to reduce absenteeism, abolish overtime and reduce industrial disputes. He wants us to be paid by bank transfer, rather than cash — in other words Bill Sirs wants union officials to do management's dirty work.

Sirs also agrees with adjustments in the guaranteed week. This is something we will not tolerate. The loss of the guaranteed week would be suicidal for 75 per cent of steelworkers, as they would then not get a full weeks pay.

With this type of leadership it's not surprising that BSC was able to pull off its so called 'ballot about a ballot'.

Warrington strike committee would like to express our complete disgust with the media cover-up of the rigging of this ballot. Literally hundreds of people who have never worked for BSC received these unregistered ballot forms. No enquiry has been made and no action has been taken by our union.

## Sickening

However, even more sickening, were the disgraceful scenes that took place at Corby, where narrow minded workers (or should I say mice) decided to call a 'return to work' meeting, no matter what.

Corby's strike committee must take the blame. There is an alternative to the Sirs kind of leadership — in the national strike committee meetings which have been taking place. But despite constant invitations, Corby has failed to attend any of the meetings, even though both regional and national officers are free to attend.

The national strike committee could have provided the answers to ensure that this minor rebellion was easily crushed.

From the national strike committee moves are being made to decisively step up the picketing of major industry. The results will clearly be seen in the next couple of weeks.

In the meantime, we are faced with full-time officials covering up their complete blunders and mistakes. Through the South, South-east and South-west there has been little effective picketing. These massive loopholes were confirmed on the national news last week.

The Warrington strike committee

feels that the South of England should now be saturated with hardened effective pickets instead of the deal-making, dispensation-giving moderates that fellow trade unionists in the South are having to put up with.

The message from Warrington is quite simple: 20 per cent, no strings. No productivity deals. No sell-out.

in the steel industry; and the national implementation of a 35-hour week — without loss of pay, and with no productivity strings attached. The latter would be a first step to implementing a full sliding scale of hours.

A perspective of mass action to defend jobs on the basis of such policies is the best possible way in which to build a mass current committed to the fight for a workers' plan for the steel industry and eventually for the whole economy.

Drawing up such a plan would require a thorough-going discussion at every level in the labour movement. The demand for the opening of BSC's and the government's books and free access to information will be crucial for this task.



Policies of this kind would directly challenge the so-called 'rights' of private property. They would challenge the bosses' control over the economy.

Work-sharing and related slogans can only be seen as an interim measure, however, particularly if they are only achieved in a single industry.

A workers' solution to the capitalist crisis requires a complete 're-tooling' of the whole economic system — a task which can only be implemented by a workers' government, a government which would have nothing in common with the last Callaghan administration.

## Control

A real workers' government would have to wrest control of the economy from the ruling class. To implement a workers' plan for the economy, it would have to expropriate the core sectors of industry and the finance institutions, and organise a regime of workers' control over production.

To soak up unemployment and stimulate production — including the demand for steel — it would need to embark on a crash programme of useful public works, building homes, schools, hospitals and much else besides. The idea of 'over-production' is a sick joke in the context of the needs of working people in Britain and the rest of the world.

Such a government, if it was to move towards a planned economy, would have to impose a complete monopoly of foreign trade (quite different in its aims from a policy of import controls) to check the effects of market forces.

## Power

This policy of **taking power** is in sharp contrast to the failed strategy of **sharing power** peddled by timid reformists like Bill Sirs.

The first steps in the fight for a workers' plan in the steel industry and for a workers' government require the construction of a new and militant organised left-wing throughout the labour movement, consisting of all those who are for a class-struggle line against the Tories.

Revolutionary socialists, who will be in the forefront of the fight to construct this new 'minority movement', are convinced that a militant policy which is clearly in the interests of working people will not only reveal the total inadequacy of the reformist leaders, but the total inadequacy of the Labour Party itself as an instrument of struggle and socialist advance.

# Steel blockade at Leyland plan

By Martin Hill

**FLYING** steel pickets from South Yorkshire have been at British Leyland's Pressed Steel plant at Cowley in Oxford aiming to make the strike bite by closing down BSC's main customer. The pickets aim to shut down the plant by stopping the movement of essential supplies — oil,

oxygen and so on — as well as steel.

Local Transport and General Workers' Union officials have tried to 'interpret' the union's national instructions, that drivers respect steelworkers' picket lines, so that steel and other goods are not actually stopped from getting into the plant. Transport Union members, sympathetic to the steelworkers,

lobbed their union's district committee meeting, and it was confirmed that ISTC picket lines should not be crossed.

At a meeting of 60 people on Tuesday night a Steel Strike Support Committee was set up in Oxford. It aims to provide practical assistance for the strikers — accommodation, food and so on — and to publicise their case

in the local labour movement.

Several union, LP and student meetings have already been addressed by steelworkers, and several hundred pounds have been raised for the strike fund.

The pickets plan to intensify their efforts; they are bringing down more pickets this week, and are contacting Corby for reinforcements.



# TURKEY —

## The crisis on NATO's southern flank

ON 8 February the Turkish army moved against the workers of the agri-industrial complex of Izmir, south of Istanbul. Attacks on the workers' districts over several days left 50 people dead and thousands under arrest.

Terrorism in Turkey, notably by the extreme right, has already accounted for 700 lives since the Demirel government took office last October.

**CHRISTIAN PIQUET** reports on the repression and the resistance.

A SITUATION of economic chaos hangs over Turkey. The country's debts mount daily, and have now reached \$25m. Between 1975 and 1979 inflation increased by 319 per cent. The Turkish pound has been devalued three times since 1978.

The peasantry, who make up three-quarters of the population, and the working class have been hardest hit by the economic crisis.

For several years Turkey has been the scene of violent class struggles, but in spite of the repression and fascist terror, the workers' movement

has shown great combativity.

The ruling class, which is subservient to American and West German imperialism, has attempted to stabilise the country, but both the Ecevit and Demirel governments have failed in this objective.

In 1978 the People's Republican Party of Bulent Ecevit formed the government and aimed to restore stability through control over the working class and holding down terrorism. The Turkish bourgeoisie backed these measures and was prepared to pay dearly in long-term economic measures.

The Ecevit government began negotiations with the International



Monetary Fund which culminated in an 'economic stabilisation' programme accompanied by a 43.6 per cent devaluation in the Turkish pound.

Political violence rose considerably, much of it initiated by the Party of Nationalist Action which had been part of the preceding coalition government.

This extreme right-wing organisation, whose leader, Colonel Turkes, does not hide his admiration for Hitler, had made a breakthrough in the 1977 elections when it gained an important base among the unemployed. The militias of the Party of Nationalist Action then stepped up their assaults and assassinations.

### Emergency

Steadily losing the confidence of the bourgeoisie, Ecevit proclaimed a state of emergency in 19 provinces in 1979, in the hope of heading off an army intervention. This came after the Kahramanmaraş killings, a fascist provocation that brought the start of hostilities between the Alevite and Sunnite communities. Three thousand died during this period.

The workers' movement, including the Communist Party, which had critically supported the government, now feebly challenged Ecevit's policies.

Unable to stem the tide of terrorism and faced with a worsening economic crisis, Ecevit's modernising solution collapsed.

Meanwhile, the proclamation of the state of emergency, the repression against the May Day demonstration last year, the arrest of militants in the Confederation of Progressive Workers Unions (DISK), the Turkish Workers Party and other organisations, lost Ecevit the support of sections of the working class. He fell from office last October.

The Justice Party of Suleiman Demirel, which had led the previous coalition government, returned to office and launched a programme of economic recovery. The private sector was granted every facility. Foreign investment was favoured by the removal of 'bureaucratic impediments', especially in agriculture, mining and electronics. Sectors such as the mines were denationalised.

The Turkish pound was again devalued, by 48 per cent. By the end of 1979 prices had risen dramatically. Butter, for example, went up by 70 per cent and rents by 75 per cent. These moves found favour with

### Kurds in the firing line

THE position of minorities is particularly important in Turkey, which only achieved unity after the First World War. Prior to that the country was divided between Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Kurds.

There are 8 million Kurds, mainly concentrated in South-east Anatolia. Since the formation of the republic, in 1923, they have been heavily oppressed.

In recent years national consciousness among the Kurdish minority has grown, and cultural, trade unions, and political organisations have developed. The Kurdish struggle in Iran has strengthened these developments.

Independent Kurdish candidates gained victories in recent elections. The ruling class has responded with increased repression.

The state of emergency in 1979 brought the six Kurdish provinces under attack. Hundreds of people were arrested and accused of separatism and terrorism.

the IMF, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and with the World Bank, and Demirel opened negotiations with these organisations for the postponement of Turkey's debts.

In order to solve the crisis, the government undertook a policy of brutal confrontation with the working class. An 'anti-terrorist' law was passed, supported by the deputies of the People's Republican Party.

Repression became systematic. Left-wing teachers were witch-hunted; the Association of Progressive Policemen was banned; and leaders of the steel, building workers' and bank workers' unions were arrested. The DISK newspaper, *Politika*, was banned.

The fascists continued their assassinations without fear of arrest. The workers' combativity remains strong, however. Their fightback against Demirel's policies began in December, the anniversary of the Kahramanmaraş massacres. There were 4,000 arrests and six people were killed when school and university students went on strike.

The strike of 20,000 Istanbul tobacco workers, following the murder of one of their representatives and the stubborn resistance of the textile workers in Izmir show that Demirel has not yet fulfilled his aim of breaking the popular struggles. After the Izmir clashes in

February, when 50 people were killed, the army general staff declared that they would restore the authority of the state 'one way or another'.

Turkey's strategic position on NATO's southern flank accounts for the concern of the imperialists about developments in the area.

A month ago France's council of ministers declared that Turkey was 'an ally whose stability is essential to the region's equilibrium', and it paid tribute to the 'courageous efforts of the Turkish government in the face of the difficulties they encounter'.

The West German finance minister has stated: 'We cannot let Turkey disintegrate economically and lose its capacity to resist Russian attacks.' He will be touring the West European capitals to raise \$2.5 billions to save Turkey from bankruptcy. The OECD's secretary general is proposing to postpone repayment of the Turkish debt.

At the same time, attempts are being made to strengthen and modernise Turkish military potential.

For the Turkish ruling class it is a race to re-establish stable mechanisms of domination. For imperialism, restoration of order in the country would help secure a strong NATO bastion in the midst of an agitated Middle East.

For the working class in Turkey, the success of these measures would mean even deeper cuts in their living standards, widescale unemployment, and a critical weakening of their organisations — quite apart from further massacres.



ECEVIT (left) and DEMIREL (right). Chaos hangs over Turkey

### WHO'S WHO IN TURKEY

**Justice Party:** reactionary party of the current prime minister, Suleiman Demirel. It was pushed from office in 1971, but returned in 1975-78, and again in October 1979.

**People's Republican Party:** created under Mustapha Kemal, it is led by Bulent Ecevit and is linked to the Socialist International. It formed the government in 1978-79.

**Party of Nationalist Action ('The grey wolves'):** fascist organisation led by Alpaslan Turkes, who was prime minister in the previous Demirel government. In the partial senatorial elections of last October it gained 6.7 per cent of the votes. They have large finances and control a Union as well as a police organisation.

**Turkish Workers Party:** small reformist party.

**Turkish Communist Party:** clandestine. For a long time it has advocated a 'democratic, national front' with the PRP. It gave critical support to the Ecevit government.

NE YAPMALI ('What is to be done?'), journal of Turkish supporters of the Fourth International. Available from The Other Bookshop, 328 Upper St, London N1. 40p plus 20p p&p.



# Mugabe's cabinet The masters now?

By Tom Marlowe

FOLLOWING the landslide election victory of his ZANU party, Robert Mugabe last week announced his cabinet members. Included are two whites — one a member of Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front — four members of the defeated ZAPU wing of the Patriotic Front, led by Joshua Nkomo, 14 members of the ZANU central committee and three women.

As well the post of prime minister, Mugabe has reserved the crucial defence ministry for himself. This means it will be largely up to the ZANU leader to decide what will happen to the armed forces, in particular whether the white officers in the former Rhodesian Army remain in control.

Among others in the cabinet are:

\***Simon Mzenda**, deputy prime minister, minister for foreign affairs. A one time carpenter Mzenda has a trade union history and has also been involved in the liberation struggle longer than most and is a strong Catholic. In the past he has helped to hold ZANU together in times of internal wrangles.

Mzenda is on record as criticising the Soviet Union for not giving more help to ZANU. As foreign affairs minister Mzenda's history suggests he could favour friendly relations with Romania and China. In December 1978 he proclaimed, 'the enemy of the Zimbabwean people is colonialism, capitalism, imperialism and their agents.'

\***Bernard Chidzero**, minister of economic planning and development. Not attached to any party Chidzero has in the past advised both Nkomo and Ian Smith's puppet in the last government, Bishop Muzorewa. An economist and civil servant he has spent 15 years with various United Nations agencies. Chidzero can be expected to be on the right wing of the Mugabe cabinet.

\***Edgar Tekere**, minister of manpower and planning. Son of an Anglican priest Tekere is presently the secretary general of ZANU. He spent the years 1965-74 in prison. Tekere is thought to be both personally and politically close to Mugabe. Now a member of the inner-policy making group in the cabinet.

\***David Smith**, minister of commerce and industry. One of the two whites in the cabinet, Smith was a member of both the Muzorewa and Ian Smith governments. Although now letting it be known he was critical 'in private' of some of Ian Smith's policies, he has said he will retain his membership of the Rhodesian Front.

Born in Scotland, David Smith emigrated to Zimbabwe in 1946. He is a large scale farmer. He has been given the important 'business' post in the cabinet but Smith is not a member of the inner cabinet policy making group.

\***Maurice Nyagumbo**, minister of mines. Nyagumbo can be expected to be one of the leading left wingers in the cabinet. As he is now responsible for the white-controlled mining industry he could prove one of the major thorns in the flesh of the white settlers. A former member of the South African Communist Party, Nyagumbo has spent 19 of the last 21 years in jail. He was released just before the arrival in Zimbabwe of Lord Soames. A long standing member of ZANU.

\***Nathan Shamuyarira**, minister of information. One of the few ZANU members in the cabinet who is not on the party's central committee. This is probably because of his involvement in a splinter movement in the early 1970s. Shamuyarira has an academic and journalist background. He is a former correspondent for the *Guardian*. Politically he has said that his ideal government would be 'a synthesis of the best of both capitalism and socialism'.

\***Denis Norman**, agriculture. The second white in the cabinet, Norman has no party political experience. A large scale maize and cattle farmer he was elected president of the Rhodesian National Farmers Union in 1978. He emigrated from Oxfordshire in 1953.

Although he is not a member of the inner-cabinet policy group, Norman heads a major ministry — over 80 per cent of the Zimbabwean population earn their livings off the land. Norman does not seem likely to favour large scale re-distribution of farming land.



PHOTOS: from top to bottom, Simon Mzenda, Bernard Chidzero, and Edgar Tekere

\***Richard Hove**, public services. Formerly in charge of establishing ZANU's international links, Hove could find himself among the left wing of the cabinet. He has already stated that in order to increase the pay of black civil servants the salaries of the whites in government administration may have to be reduced.

\***Teurai Ropa Nhongo**, youth and sport minister. Nhongo is one of the three women cabinet members and one of the two women in the inner policy making group. She is a member of the ZANU central committee and has been the party's secretary for women's affairs.

## SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF NICARAGUA

One-day conference  
Saturday 29 March,  
10am — 6pm

University of London Union,  
Malet St, London WC1

Sponsored by the Labour Party and the  
Nicaragua Coordinating Committee

Delegate's credentials £2 from: Jane Mackintosh,  
c/o Third World First, 232 Cowley Road, Oxford (tel 0865 45678)

Funds to aid reconstruction in Nicaragua can be  
sent to: Account 5014079050, Cooperative Bank  
(Ealing branch), London W5 2XL.

## Nicaragua solidarity conference for 29 March

THE FIRST national conference in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua is now little more than a week away. Sponsored by the Labour Party and the Nicaraguan Co-ordinating Committee, the conference will be held in London on Saturday 29 March.

It aims:

to build a mass campaign of material and political solidarity with the reconstruction of Nicaragua;

to plug into local campaigns already underway;

to launch major appeals for Nicaragua's priority projects — the Literacy Crusade and Medical Aid.

With eye-witness reports from recent visitors to Nicaragua, the conference will give participants a chance to learn what has been happening in the country since the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship eight months ago, and to hear the thinking behind the policies of the new

Sandinista-led government.

The Nicaraguan Coordinating Committee (NCC), which is recognised by the Nicaraguan government, will present proposals for developing a dynamic network of local and regional action committees based in the labour movement. And workshops will discuss the different components of this national solidarity campaign such as work with trade unions and local labour parties, links with the women's movement, and support for the literacy crusade.

The future of Nicaraguan solidarity efforts in Britain largely depends on the success of this conference. Every IMG branch is urged to send a representative, especially branches in Coventry, Oxford, Newcastle and Sheffield where local campaigns have already moved into action. Branches should also get delegates to the conference from local Labour Party and trade union branches. The conference is open to all organisations and interested individuals.

## HUGO BLANCO IN LONDON

HUGO BLANCO

Speaks at London rally  
FRIDAY 21 MARCH

7.30pm, Friends House,  
Euston Rd, NW1

Tickets (£1 and 50p wageless) in advance from  
The Other Bookshop, 328 Upper St, London N1.



# Who is Brynmor John?

By Geoff Bell

**HANDS up all who know what a Mr Brynmor John does? Don't know? Well here's a clue, in May 1977 Mr John said:**

*'I join the right honourable gentleman... in paying tribute to the security forces in Northern Ireland. Their campaign against terrorism in the last year met with considerable success.'*

*'I believe it greatly undermined the strength of the terrorist organisations. I would also add a tribute to the extremely valuable contribution which the Ulster Defence Regiment played in that campaign.'*

That's a fairly generous clue — someone who backs the British Army, likes to say the IRA is about to be beaten, praises the almost paramilitary band of Loyalist killers known as the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Still not guessed who Mr John is? Here's a final clue. Last October he said: *'Roy Mason did well in Northern Ireland'*.

Solved the riddle now? That's right, Brynmor John is the Labour Party's official Parliamentary spokesperson on Northern Ireland.

He's not actually in Labour's shadow cabinet, or anything like that; after all the Labour Party doesn't pay too much attention to Ireland and doesn't think it should be talked about. So why should the party's spokesperson on this non-issue be granted cabinet status?

That also explains why Callaghan appointed such a non-entity as Brynmor John to the North of Ireland post. In fact it's a further example of the bipartisan policy so lovingly pursued by Westminster politicians.

Nobody had heard of Humphrey Atkins when Thatcher appointed him as her North of Ireland secretary of state, so the Labour 'shadow' had to be equally obscure.

## Effort

John hasn't made much effort to make himself famous since he took up his post ten months ago. Nevertheless it is at least of passing interest to record some details about the politics of the Labour Party's official number one on the issue of Ireland.

First, Brynmor John possesses the first important qualification for his job — close links and support for the military establishment.

Between 1974-6 he was under-secretary of state for Defence in the

Wilson government. His chief task, not surprisingly considering what he does now, was Army recruitment.

In all, John used seven advertising agencies to try and entice public school chappies to be officers and the unemployed to be squaddies. He explained what he saw as his role in January 1975:

*'My object will be to ensure that the young man who is placing his future at the disposal of the armed services will know what he is doing and will be appreciated and valued.'*

## Career

In the same speech John went on to say: *'There will be an extremely fine career for suitably qualified men and women in the forces'*, a statement which the friends and relatives of the 300 plus British soldiers who have been killed in the North of Ireland might find some difficulty agreeing with.

But John's enthusiasm for the British Army and the importance of 'defence' in general is not qualified by worries about dead soldiers; nor has he proved overly concerned about the vast amounts of money spent on defence.

Said John in 1977: *'Too little expenditure on defence is dangerous'*,

and *'I believe undue weight on social programmes while disregarding military considerations could disturb the overall balance of what we are trying to achieve'*.

As far as the North of Ireland goes, John has said little. But in an interview in the *Irish Times* at the end of last year he did offer a number of views which suggest he may even be to the right of Humphrey Atkins.

## Firm

John criticised the Tory minister for not being firm enough with those American politicians who demanded that Britain do something about the North of Ireland. He added that the North of Ireland should *'always be regarded as a United Kingdom matter'*.

As to 'solutions', John has said little. He did suggest to the *Irish Times* that the *'troops out campaign could cause violence in Britain and that the movement only aggravates the situation'*.

The one positive suggestion he did make was that the Southern Irish Special Branch *'should be strengthened'*.

All in all Brynmor John seems fairly representative of the Parliamentary Labour Party and its views on Ireland.



THE mystery man

# Armagh women — Communist Party double standards

By Valerie Coultas

**Last Saturday, on International Women's Day, the Morning Star carried a report of the brutal treatment Republican women prisoners are receiving in Armagh jail.**

It was a fitting tribute to the women who are suffering beating and punching from male wardens because of their request for political status. Slopping out of their cells has also ceased. They are facing similar treatment to the men in the H Block.

The Morning Star article points out that the women in Armagh are being persecuted not only for their Republicanism but because they are women:

## Mocking

One woman, Rosemary Callaghan, had her breasts exposed to the mocking, jeering eyes of the wardens, including the Governor. Women have been refused adequate sanitary towels. Pregnant women have been subjected to harassment. 'This is the extreme violence and repression women in Northern Ireland are suffering today at the hands of British Imperialism' said the Star. 'It has been women who have staged the most intimidating demonstrations against the British presence'.

The Star went on to explain that women would again be demonstrating that day — International Women's Day — outside Armagh jail in protest at the conditions of the prisoners and in solidarity with the 11 women arrested by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in a similar demonstration a year ago.

One thing you would not know from reading the article is that the members of the Communist Party on the executive of the National Union of Students have done everything they can to stop students in Britain learning about the plight of the women in Armagh jail, let alone protesting about it.

## Blocked

Pauline Roe, an IMG member of NUS executive, has been blocked all the way along the line by the Left Alliance, a Labour and Communist Party block, from bringing the attention of women students to this issue.

Jamie Glenn, a CP member on the Women's Committee of the NUS, went over for the last court hearing of the Armagh 11 in January this year. When she returned she suggested that a resolution should be put to the national executive calling for support for the Armagh protest and to send a representative to Armagh on International Women's Day.

'I put the resolution forward but everyone except the far left voted against,' Pauline explained. The reason given for this was that the issue was *'irrelevant to women students in Britain'*!

The Women's Committee did not agree. It had already decided to have a session at the forthcoming women's conference on the 29 and 30 March on violence against women in the North of Ireland. But when they took the agenda to the executive they refused to ratify it.

The Women's Committee decided, in the



**PAULINE ROE, International Marxist Group member on the NUS executive, has had her mailings censored because the Communist Party argues that the torture of women in Armagh jail is 'irrelevant to women students in Britain'.**

face of such bureaucratic manoeuvres, to plough ahead regardless. The mailing was prepared advertising the session.

'But when I went to Belfast on 24 February they interrupted the mailing and took out all the information about Armagh — including an interview with a woman student whose relatives were in Armagh jail.

## Censorship

Pauline was furious about this censorship: 'They had not consulted anyone on the women's committee.' She believes the executive 'are afraid of being identified with the anti-imperialist struggle. They're political cowardice is becoming a scandal. They've sat back and done nothing about the Irish issue for years. Now they're even trying to sabotage a campaign highlighting the torture of Irish

women in British jails'.

When Pauline first visited Belfast she was taking the women's campaign into the colleges in Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland in line with NUS policy.

She made contact with the Belfast Women's Collective and with the women on the executive of the Irish Union of Students. 'The NUS Women's Campaign has to work with the women in the North of Ireland. As British feminists, it's not up to us to tell women in Ireland what their needs are. We will campaign on all issues of Irish women's rights.'

## Perturbed

But one issue that women in the North of Ireland, as in other parts of Europe, are quite clearly perturbed by is the treatment of Republican prisoners as the successful picket of 500 women on International Women's Day showed.

'Their plight as women who suffer from not only physical but sexual degradation because of their commitment to fight for the freedom of their country cannot be ignored — as the NUS seems to wish.

'As English feminists it's our government, our army and our responsibility to challenge and break the barriers of silence in Britain

about Ireland.'

It's no wonder when the *Morning Star* phoned up the NUS about the women in Armagh they said 'No comment!'

If you are interested in helping break down the barriers of silence about Armagh jail in Britain there are the following four ways in which you can help:

\*Contact Pauline Roe, Flat 32, Hamstead Court, Hamstead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham for a speaker.

\*If you are a student write to the NUS executive urging them to reconsider their attitude to the women in Armagh jail. If possible get your student union to back you in this.

\*Women Against Imperialism in Belfast are organising a tribunal to investigate the case for political status in jails in Ireland and to hear the evidence about the maltreatment of women prisoners. Pat Arrowsmith and Jill Tweedie have agreed to act as judges. The Armagh 11 have decided to boycott their court hearing and attend the tribunal instead on 9 April.

\*A delegation is planned to visit Armagh jail and demand to see the conditions in which the prisoners are kept. If you or your union is interested contact Women Against Imperialism, c/o 52 Broadway, Belfast 12 or phone Sue on 0232 40465.



**BERNADETTE Devlin-McAliskey speaking at a rally of three thousand people in Bilbao in the Basque country, held a fortnight ago to support the election campaign of the LCR-LKI (Spanish section of the Fourth International).**

The LKI stood candidates on a common slate with two other revolutionary organisations, the MCE and PTE.



**1980 IMG Summer School**

**Putting a premium on Marxist ideas**

**SUMMER SCHOOL MAIN COURSE**

- Session 1: The German revolution 1918-23
  - Session 2: Revolution and counterrevolution in Spain 1933-39
  - Session 3: Stalinism
  - Session 4: Hungary 1956 — political revolution in action
  - Session 5: Social overturns in Eastern Europe 1945-9
  - Session 6: Permanent revolution
  - Session 7: The Cuban revolution
  - Session 8: Revolutionary events in Nicaragua
  - Session 9: Bourgeois democracy and revolution — Portugal 1974-6
- Closing session of the school: A Programme for Britain

**SUBSIDIARY COURSES:**

- 1. An introduction to Marxist economics
- 2. Issues in Marxist economic theory



CONFERENCE centre where IMG Summer School will be held

TWO major decisions of the recent IMG national conference were to launch a campaign to get a large proportion of its supporters into industry and to help the foundation of a revolutionary youth organisation. These two tasks put a premium on the ability of revolutionaries to explain Marxist ideas.

As part of a campaign to step up the level of Marxist education in the IMG, we are organising a summer

school for 150 of our supporters from 12 to 18 July. The school will concentrate on discussing the experience of revolutions in the twentieth century and the fundamentals of Marxist economic theory.

The school will be held at a conference centre about 30 miles outside London; the all-in cost of the school, including accommodation and meals, will be £47.50.

Apart from the political education

and discussion, there will be a number of films and social events. The conference centre is situated in the countryside and has facilities for a wide variety of sporting activities.

Attendance at the school is open to all member of the IMG and sympathisers by invitation from local branches. A deposit of £10 secures your place. Send a cheque or postal order made out to 'The Week', PO Box 50, London N1.

**Is your branch slacking?**

**Oursalesdrive**

Socialist Challenge sales reached a record level last week. 4,586 were distributed through IMG branches which was 75 up on the week before. But an extra 1,775 were sent out for the TUC demonstration on 9 March for the protest against the Tory government's Employment Bill, making a total of 6,246 distributed altogether, the highest total over the last year.

However there are still some branches that are not reaching their targets. These branches, given that so many others are working hard to build up new sales, are letting everyone else down:

**BRIGHTON, HULL, NEWCASTLE, BRENT, CAMDEN, HACKNEY, ISLINGTON, NEWHAM.**

We're aiming at six sales per member, 5,000 distributed to branches every week. If the branches who are not selling their full quota would pull their socks up and sell the extra 414 papers we would reach our target.

If you're in a branch that's slacking **PULL YOUR SOCKS UP!**

**Fiver to Fight the Tories Campaign**

Just two weeks to go to reach our £2,500 target. Who would have thought when we launched our fund drive that the steelworkers would still be out on strike at the end of the appeal? Their determination hardened as the strike progressed and the cynical role of the Tories was exposed. But to stay out that long with no pay has meant a tremendous sacrifice, sustained by determination to call the Tories' bluff and show them that the steelworkers are not the easy target they thought they were.

We're not asking our other readers to make such a massive sacrifice. All we're asking is that you enable us to keep getting across the steelworkers' case with the best reportage on the left. To do that we want your *Fivers to Fight the Tories*. That's not much to ask. Exactly 250 supporters have sent us a fiver, making £1,250 of our overall total so far.

Just as the steelworkers are making a last sustained effort to win their struggle let's make a final push over the next two weeks to reach our fund drive target of £2,500. We still have hundreds, indeed a few thousand readers who have not sent us a fiver. We could smash right through our target if just a small proportion respond to this last appeal. How about it comrades?

**Restricted debate at 'Rebel' conference**

BETWEEN 60 and 70 youth attended the national conference of Rebel, youth wing of the Socialist Workers Party, over the weekend of 8 and 9 March. The organisation and content of the conference revealed some of the differences within the left on what a youth organisation should be.

It was made very clear that Rebel is under the control of the SWP. In fact in a letter to the newspaper *Revolution*, Simon Turner, national secretary of the SWP, spelt it out:

*'We do not share your view of the need for an autonomous youth organisation. We reject the anti-party notion that independent organisation is necessary so that youth will somehow drift to revolutionary politics. We believe that such an organisation would not lead to greater unity but rather to sectarian squabbling.'*

**Debate**

Following the logic of this view, the Rebel conference did not take motions from branches and no documents were distributed beforehand. On the contrary nearly every session was introduced by an old guard of the SWP — Tony Cliff, John Deason and Simon Turner were examples. No votes were taken. As a result many of the Rebel branches who had sent in resolutions went away more than a little disillusioned.

Revolution members argued that a youth organisation cannot be built in this way — under the strict tutelage and organisational control of the adult party. But this does not mean that we see Revolution as some sort of loose youth movement. On the contrary Revolution has a Marxist programme and at its founding conference will take its own decisions on building a revolutionary party. IMG members will argue for political solidarity with the IMG and the Fourth International within the youth organisation.

**Party**

The difference with the SWP is not over whether a party is necessary; of course we think that it is. But we do disagree over the best form of revolutionary organisation to win youth to Marxism and to aid youth in training themselves as revolutionaries. In fact, contrary to Simon Turner's assertions, it has always been the Marxist, revolutionary wing of the workers' movement that has argued for the organisational independence of the youth organisation — an approach that goes back through Trotsky to Luxemburg and Lenin.

On the other side it has always been the social democratic and Stalinist organisations that have stifled the development of their own youth groups by stifling their independent development. In the case of the British Labour Party, it repeatedly resorted to bureaucratic expulsions when the youth got out of hand. The long standing stability of the Militant tendency within the LPYS is more testimony to the Militant's alignment with the bureaucracy than any liberalisation in this regard.

The Revolution founding conference in May will mark a new step in re-establishing the Leninist approach to relations between the youth and the party — based on the right of the youth to decide things for themselves, collaboration and voluntary political solidarity. An important part of building for that conference is to convince other revolutionary youth of the necessity of such a revolutionary youth organisation.

For the IMG this will be an important step on the road to a single unified revolutionary party in Britain.

# LETTERS

## Enormous cultural differences

I WOULD like to take up one of the points in your article on black liberation (21 February), which stated the need to 'unite black peoples as a whole in action'.

While it is perfectly true, of course, that there are objective factors leading to unity between the various black minorities, the article seems to ignore the very much stronger forces at present pushing them apart.

State racism oppresses all black people, but it does so in a selective way. Asians are not normally picked up in the street for 'Sus' and West Indian houses are not normally raided by police searching for illegal immigrants.

Furthermore, the media exploit state racism in a divisive way. Many Asians are convinced that all West Indians are thieves and muggers. Many West Indians believe the Asians are 'spoiling things for black people by continuing to come to Britain.'

Although there are individual friendships between West Indians and Asians in multi-ethnic schools, there is considerable tension between the two groups. Many African Asian children arrived in Britain with a deep loathing and contempt for black Africans, which was then often transferred to the West Indians.

We should not underestimate the enormous cultural differences between the two groups.

While many West Indians are deeply cynical of a social and educational system which they correctly perceive as having little to offer them, Asians have tended to arrive in Britain full of hope (otherwise why come?), and many still believe that hard work, thrift, and conformity to the values of bourgeois society will bring rewards. (There are signs of revolt, of course — like the Bradford Asian Youth — but these are as yet few.)

And, we should not forget that apart from the very politicised, most Asians do not define themselves as black — when they speak of black people they mean West Indians or Africans.

Obviously socialists would like to see a united black movement, but it cannot be wished into existence. A lack of understanding of the forces militating against it can only make solidarity work with racial minorities more difficult.

**JENNY FLINTOFT, Campaign Against the Immigration Laws (in a personal capacity)**

## Avoid religious sectarianism

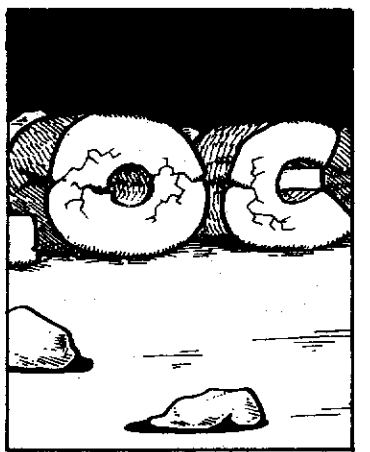
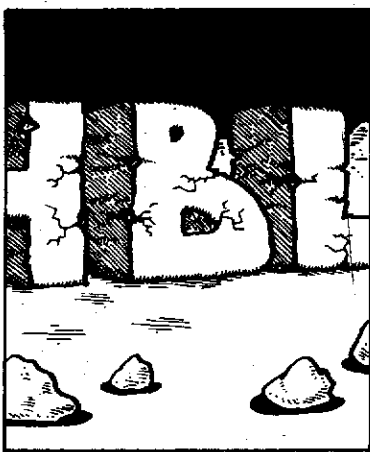
THE picket of Armagh jail which was supported by the women who travelled to Ireland from various parts of Britain was a hopeful sign that at last the WLM here will take up the struggle of their sisters in Ireland.

It was great that Socialist Challenge had half a page to tell everyone what is going on, but the actual reporting reflects some of the most vicious sectarianism which all revolutionaries involved in building a solidarity campaign with the Irish struggle must avoid.

Descriptions like 'the Protestant population', 'a few Protestants hanging around' and 'a Protestant socialist feminist' reflect a crass ignorance of the way in which the British state has used religion to divide and rule.

But the repetition of the conversation about Protestant women not supporting the Armagh pickets because they are terrorists is the most serious. All Protestant women?

Have Valerie Coultas and Pauline Roe never sat in a women's liberation group in Britain where it has been almost impossible to talk about the Irish struggle because 'what has women's liberation to do



with terrorism?'. The picket is the first step, but it has taken ten years.

You are on very dangerous ground to dismiss 'them' as the 'Protestant population'. (How do you spot them, are their eyes too close together?)

The struggle is one against capitalism and imperialism; the struggle is the class struggle. The religious divide was fostered by the British state; the enemy is the British state, the pro-imperialists in Ireland and in Britain, the Loyalist paramilitaries and the Loyalist population. (Please note that Loyalist and Protestant are not interchangeable.)

If I might end with a small story. In Glasgow we had a mass leafleting and petitioning last Saturday against the NF's 'Smash the IRA' demo. Several Rangers football fans, who are 99 per cent likely to be Protestants, offered to sign. Should we have said 'Sorry, you're a Protestant and you can't sign...'

**MARIAN KEOGH, socialist feminist, religion undefined, Glasgow.**

## A disgraceful article?

WHAT a disgraceful article you published last week on the magnificent working class demonstration against the Tory government on 9 March.

This demonstration, of at least 100,000, was the largest since the 1971 marches against Heath and — together with the opinion polls, which show that an election would return Labour with a 100-seat majority — it revealed the willingness of workers to fight this government. Instead of pointing this out Socialist Challenge busied itself with spreading despondency and confusion.

First, in an even-handed manner you split the difference between the police and TUC estimates of numbers — arriving at the ridiculously low figure of 60,000. Instead you should have pointed out that the police estimate was a politically motivated attack on the march, and linked that to the attacks on paper sellers and collectors.

Secondly, the article bemoaned that despite the 'valiant efforts' of some, the 'atmosphere' of the march was not up to that of an ANL carnival. That might be of interest to revolutionary tourists, comrades, but we assure you it's not the main concern of the hundreds of thousands of workers who want to bring down this government.

Were they to look to us for a lead in doing that, all they would find in the article is 'general strike plus rank and file organisation'. The problem of dealing with the Len Murrays and Moss Evanses of the labour movement is thus ignored. But, as the steelworkers are finding with Bill Sims, you can't do that.

**JOHN SEXTON, MARK TURNBULL, Liverpool**

THREE Socialist Challenge supporters made separate counts of the 9 March demonstration. Their figures varied between 55,000 and 60,000.

## MARTIN METEYARD MOVES ON

He sought the facts without despair From information stored with care: His empty desk is still enshrined In stacks of papers left behind.

© N. Racine-Jaques, 1980

(Martin Meteyard and 'Socialist Challenge' have parted company on good terms. We all wish him well in his future activities.)

## The real problem

CELIA Pugh ('The Labour left in the Eighties 1', 14 March) rather simplifies the role of the Socialist League in the 1930s when she says that 'it saw no need to link up with mass struggles against the National Government', and 'therefore subordinated mass struggle to inner-party manoeuvres'.

On the contrary, the Socialist League went to the point of joining forces with the Communist Party and Independent Labour Party in January 1937 to launch the National Unity Campaign. At its first public meeting in Manchester, Socialist League speaker Stafford Cripps declared:

'Let it be clear that the object of this demonstration is to show our unflinching determination to defeat the National Government and all that it stands for, and to urge the vital necessity, at this critical moment in our political history, for presenting a united front within the labour movement...'

'There have in the last year or so sprung up all over the country irregular unions of working class organisations created out of the necessities of events by the demand of the workers themselves. The time has arrived, we are convinced, when these attempts at united action should be crystallised into an orderly and concerted union of forces within the labour movement.'

It is equally one-sided to say that 'Cripps and friends thought their role was to give Labour a left-wing manifesto for the day it came to office'. In fact, the manifesto of the Unity Campaign declared, 'Let the Movement not wait for General Elections, but now by active demonstration win and organise support' for a series of demands.

The problem wasn't that the Socialist League saw no need to link

up with mass struggles, but that it had no idea what to do with them. A marked feature of the Manchester speeches of Cripps, Maxton (ILP), and Pollitt (CP) was that none of them mentioned the need to challenge the right wing for leadership of the movement as a whole. Cripps summed up their approach perfectly when replying to criticisms of the campaign 'as... designed to create splits or disunity'. His answer was: 'It takes two to make a quarrel and we do not intend to be one of the two!'

In other words, the Unity Campaign was not prepared to 'quarrel' with those practising class collaboration in the name of the labour movement, just as it was not prepared to break with the capitalist state institutions in which they operated. This is the same test facing the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.

But equally vital is the test facing the revolutionary left outside the Labour Party: not to retrace the sorry role of the Communist Party in 1937, but to pose within the framework of joint action a clear and unified alternative to the vacillations of left social-democracy. Are we up to it?

**TOM MARTIN, London E5**

## Where were you?

YOUR article 'Manchester fights racism' (28 February) mentioned three cases of Asian people fighting back against the racism of the British state and its immigration laws.

The article said: 'Although these campaigns centre on individual cases a victory in any one would be a victory for all black people.' It added: 'If the campaigns are to be successful, anti-racists and the black community will have to stand firm.'

The article publicised the demonstration organised by the Anwar Ditta Defence Committee, which was held in Rochdale on 1 March.

This was the opportunity for Socialist Challenge supporters in the North-west and Yorkshire to show that they were standing firm. But there were only a few Socialist Challenge sellers on the demonstration. There was no organised contingent, or Socialist Challenge or International Marxist Group banner — even from

Manchester, which is a few miles down the road.

Black people have to stand firm just to survive the day-to-day harassment meted out by the British state. And they stood firm in support of the Anwar Ditta demonstration, with a large contingent from the Bradford Asian Youth Movement, and black organisations from Bolton and London.

Socialist Challenge has to realise that it's practical support which sorts out anti-racists from liberal do-gooders.

The Anwar Ditta Defence Committee is holding another demonstration in Manchester on 26 April, two days before Anwar's appeal hearing. A large demonstration is vital for the success of his appeal.

This should be the time for a full-scale mobilisation in the North; a time to show that Socialist Challenge is committed to fighting racism not only in Manchester but in the whole of Britain.

**LEROY SMITH (Bury)**

## 'Maggie' sexist?

WHEN Heath was Prime Minister was the chant 'Teddie, Teddie, Teddie — out, out, out!?' Are Callaghan or Wilson colloquially referred to as Jimmy or Harry?

Yet Thatcher is referred to as Maggie. We believe this use of the first name for slogan purposes when the person is a woman is sexist. It is disheartening enough to have to listen to it on a demonstration, without Socialist Challenge screaming it in a banner headline (last week's article on the 9 March TUC demonstration).

Would you not have criticised the use of racist slogans? It not only adds to our humiliation to have Socialist Challenge ignore working class sexism, but is a disservice to the working class itself. We believe that Socialist Challenge has a responsibility to explain how militants should confront and fight sexism wherever it occurs.

**SARA ROELOFS, JUDY WATSON, London**

## SCEVENTS

**PADDINGTON:** 'Tory immigration controls — a new wave in state racism'. Speaker: Bisi Williams. 8pm, Tues 15 April, Labour Party Rooms, 92 Ladbrooke Grove W11.

**CAMDEN:** 'Afghanistan'. Speaker: Phil Hearse. Camden Labour Rooms, Thurs 27 March, 7.30pm.

**GRAND JUMBL SALE:** 2pm Saturday 22 March, Camden Labour Rooms, Corner of Bayham St and Camden Rd, NW1. Tombola, children's clothes, kitchen equipment. All welcome.

**HEMEL HEMPSTEAD:** 'Afghanistan and the New Cold War'. 8pm 28 March at the Oddfellows Arms, 113 London Rd, Apsley. Regular meetings will be taking place on alternate Fridays following this meeting.

**BOLSOVER:** 'How to kick out the Tories'. Speaker: Tariq Ali. Thurs 27 March 7.30pm at White Swan, Market Place, Bolsover, Derbyshire.

**STOCKPORT:** 'Ireland — can the Provisionals bring socialism?' 7.30pm, Magnet Inn, Wellington Rd North, Stockport.

## WHAT'S LEFT

ENTRIES are 5p a word; semi-display £2 a column inch. Deadline: 5pm Friday before publication. All payments in advance.

**BUILDING WORKER** group — second national conference. 29-30 March at Digbeth Civil Hall, Birmingham. Discussion on the wage claim, defending direct work, the newspaper, building the Building Worker Group. For details, credentials, etc. contact: 30 Houghton House, South Lambeth Estate, Meadow Rd, London SW8.

**FIGHT THE CUTS AT NORTH EAST LONDON POLYTECHNIC** Friday 21 March, 4pm. Mass meeting. At NELP, Waltham Forest precinct, Forest Rd, London E17. Lobby of the governors at 5.30pm. Waltham Forest Town Hall.

Give us your support. Organised by NELP joint unions.

**GAY** rights at work conference. Sat 29 March, 10am. City of London Polytechnic, student union, Fairholt House, 102 Whitechapel High St, E1. Next to Aldgate East tube. Speakers and workshops. Registration £2, 50p unwaged.

**FIGHTBACK**, the national campaign against cuts in the NHS, is looking for a new co-ordinator to work in our London office. Previous trade union or campaign experience. Must have commitment to fighting cuts. For further details contact Fightback at 30 Camden Rd, London NW1. Phone 01 485 8610.

**SPECIAL OFFER TO SOCIALIST CHALLENGE READERS:** 'Russia's invasion of Afghanistan and the Trotskyist movement'.

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THE REPORT of the IMG conference in the 28 February issue of Socialist Challenge contained characterisations of the positions of the minorities in the conference debate.

This was a departure from normal practice in the IMG where comrades in minorities either put forward their own positions or in the case of a public debate are given the right of reply.

Those who wish to remind themselves of the positions of the tendencies should therefore refer to the 24 January issue of Socialist Challenge.



ACCORDING to Cathy Porter: 'The struggles which Alexandra Kollontai lived through and wrote about continue, and we can constantly draw new strength from a greater understanding of their historical origins.'

Kollontai, as a Marxist, held that women's position in society is directly dependent on the historical stage of economic development. But she also insisted that women have particular problems relating to their sex, some of which often make them more politically backward than men. She saw that socialist parties must make a special effort to organise and educate working women, and combat the appeal of bourgeois feminism.

She stressed that women's emancipation was a vital factor of the class struggle. Working-class morality had to be worked out in the struggle against capitalism, and not left until after capitalism was defeated.

For Cathy Porter, Kollontai is an exceptional woman, 'a feminist of enormous historical and inspirational value and extraordinary originality'. Unfortunately this view is a trap for biographers.

### Uncritically

A danger of biography is to uncritically sympathise with the subject, and, in my view, Cathy Porter tends to shape the historical context around Kollontai, rather than place her within it. At times, important ideas and events are lost in a mass of detail, even of trivia.

However, the more serious lack in Cathy Porter's book is the absence of a critical framework. For example, she implies that Kollontai did not become a terrorist because it would entail chastity if she was to avoid unwanted pregnancies!

Kollontai herself did not have a theory of contraception; she thought women's solution to this problem could only be personal — a matter of individual conscience, not legislation. Kollontai's view is described as 'tantalisingly inadequate'. Inadequate, certainly. Cathy Porter suggests that Kollontai realised, and deplored the backwardness of Russia without the liberating effects of universally available birth-control. But she was also unwilling to take on the more conservative Party members who might want to inhibit women's sexual independence, and emphasised increasing the birth-rate!

### Ambivalent

Porter describes Kollontai's position on this as 'ambivalent'. On the contrary, it seems only too clear.

## Kollontai: a sentimental view



ALEXANDRA Kollontai was a Bolshevik, a commissar in the first Soviet government in 1917, a member of the Workers' Opposition from 1920 and a Soviet diplomat from 1923.

The rise of the modern women's

movement reawakened interest in her, mainly because of her role as a pioneering feminist. *Alexandra Kollontai. A Biography by Cathy Porter, recently published by Virago, is here reviewed by JANE McDERMID.*

Many Bolsheviks thought the only assurance of Russia's future lay in the future generation — the socialist equivalent of capitalist accumulation. This is the reason for Kollontai's stress on the social duty of having children, explains Cathy Porter.

Where is the ambivalence in this? Social function has already become social duty.

On abortion, Porter claims that Kollontai, like most Party leaders, regarded it as a liberating and long-overdue measure. But these leaders in fact supported the abortion law as a necessary, but temporary, evil — as the wording of the law itself reveals. Kollontai often attacked the

sexual hypocrisy of bourgeois culture, yet frequently reiterated traditional sexual attitudes. Her theories were concerned only with heterosexual, and generally with monogamous relationships. The implication is that she thought any other form of sexual attraction to be 'unnatural'.

It's true that Kollontai wrote that there were a whole range of possible 'erotic friendships' between the sexes, but she did not elaborate. Whatever the forms of relationship, all presupposed the sanctity of motherhood.

Kollontai wrote, at great length, on the need for relationships to be freely entered into, for women to be

equal and independent. And yet, once she is pregnant, Kollontai holds that a woman is subject to the collective, possessing no individual identity, simply carrying future labour resources within her.

Cathy Porter does not adequately explain the ambiguities and contradictions in Kollontai's views.

In her anxiety Cathy Porter makes mistakes, and unsubstantiated assertions.

Thus she claims that the Bolsheviks thought that the Leninist Party would be formed of 'people outside the sphere of relations between employers and producers'. Apparently, Lenin said that the

experience of history had shown that the dictatorship of individuals was very often the vehicle for the dictatorship of the revolutionary class (no source is given). She holds that Stalin was already secure in power in 1922!

Finally Cathy Porter claims that the first attempt to take up the working conditions of Russian women, and give political direction to them, appeared at the end of 1900. In fact, from at least as early as 1891 there had been a network of women's circles, based mainly on textile workers, which were linked to the Brusnev organisation. This organisation claimed to be Marxist and was anti-intelligentsia.

Cathy Porter has put much effort and dedication into her subject, hence it is a shame that she makes silly mistakes: neither the ILP nor Keir Hardie (by implication) are English!

In spite of her good intentions, Kollontai herself is undermined. Is it necessary, or useful, to describe how attractive Kollontai was, how young she looked for her age; to record when she 'fell in love with' her husband; to call her relationships 'affairs'? If Kollontai had to find a new vocabulary to discuss ideas of sexual relations and the new women, should we not also try?

Porter claims for Kollontai a 'pure revolutionary consciousness', yet she implies that her politics were often heavily influenced by her emotions. Why did she refuse to join the Left Opposition? Apparently Kollontai distrusted Trotsky's 'authoritarian temper'.

### Purges

She sees Kollontai as an individual woman fighting on two fronts. How did she survive the purges? Porter writes that Stalin had 'a peculiar old-fashioned resistance to subjecting (women) to harsh punishment'. Indeed!

What is necessary is a critical analysis of Kollontai's work. We do not need to erect authorities, as Kollontai herself would agree. Despite her immense effort, Cathy Porter fails to achieve what she set out to do — to cast light on some of the unexplored experiences of the Russian Revolution.

Ultimately, the criticism she levels at an earlier biographer of Kollontai, Isabel Palencia, is only too apt; her book is marred by a certain sentimental over-reverence for its subject.

*Socialist Challenge will be interviewing Cathy Porter in a future issue where she will respond to these criticisms.*

## Coward of the macho county



By Bridget Elton

I'VE long since ceased paying attention to those 90 per cent of pop songs which daily inform me that women are angels to be worshipped or cockteasers who lie and cheat, and if I'm not one I must be the other. But when someone leaves the body of his thrice raped wife, and goes off to prove himself to his dead father, I turn cold.

Although Becky in Kenny Rogers' song 'Coward of the County' is not dead as a result of the rapes, she is nevertheless only a body. She doesn't exist. Having been brought into the song for Rogers and others to exercise their manhood on, she doesn't get another mention. She is a vehicle on which an old male fantasy is played out.

The singer was taught by his father that 'You don't have to fight to be a man'. An admirable sentiment, except of course, the song proves it to be a wrong one. This man spent his youth not fighting back. Despite the taunts, despite everything that happened to him, his dead father dominated him.

Then he fell in love (with one of the aforementioned angels), and married her. One day while he was out 'the gambling boys came calling; they took turns at Becky and there was three of them'.

He got home and found her, not surprisingly, crying. The torn dress, the shattered look, was more than he could stand, He reached above the fireplace, took down his

daddy's picture — this time it was too much. He realised that 'Sometimes you have to fight when you're a man'.

Leaving her, crying, shattered, and probably bleeding and pregnant as well, he went off and beat all three of them up single-handed, exorcising his father's ghost into the bargain. Honour (his honour, that is) is restored at last.

After all those years of being called a coward, he fought back. Note that: he fought back. Because it is he who has been attacked; his manhood assaulted. 'Twenty years of crawling was bottled up inside him, he wasn't holding nothing back, he let them have it all' — it wasn't Becky he was fighting for, but himself.

The gambling boys respect him now, having proved himself, because what were they doing while raping Becky, apart from showing themselves to be real men? You prove yourself a man either by raping women, preferably ones 'belonging' to other men, or by choosing one woman 'your own' and persecuting other men having something to do with her whether she wants it or not.

The song is not about avenging the violation of a woman on her behalf (a questionable act in any case), but avenging a trespass on a man's property rights. The fact that Becky was raped is irrelevant — the singer would have done exactly the same thing had she had sex with a man of her own volition. Except he would have beaten her up as well.

# Socialist Challenge

## WANTED for murdering Blair Peach

?	?	?
Inspector Alan Murray	SPG constable White	SPG constable Freestone
?	?	?
SPG constable Lake	SPG constable Richardson	SPG constable Scottow

IT'S OFFICIAL. Blair Peach was killed by a team of Special Patrol Group officers, led by Inspector Alan Murray. This is the conclusion of the investigation by the police's own investigation department, CIB 2.

The report of the police investigation, details of which have been published in the Sunday Times, reveals that Murray led the charge from the Special Patrol Group van in Orchard Avenue, Southall, where Blair Peach was killed late in the evening of 23 April last year.

Murray's team — including constables White, Freestone, Lake, Richardson, and Scottow — was a marauding band attacking Asians, West Indians, and other anti-fascist demonstrators as they made their way home from protesting against a National Front meeting.

Despite the conclusions of the police report and the fact that 'unauthorised weapons', including lead and rubber coshes, were found in SPG lockers in Barnes, the Director of Public Prosecutions decided to take no action.

The circumstances surrounding the report made by police commander John Cass reveal a major cover-up mounted by senior police officers to protect the SPG murderers. With the collusion of senior Scotland Yard officers, members of the SPG who were on duty in Southall refused to answer questions about what happened when Blair was killed.

When the police investigators searched SPG lockers, they were called from the room and some of the lethal weapons had disappeared when they returned.

Members of the police investigation team felt that affray charges should be made against the SPG officers involved. This has been quashed by the DPP, under pressure from senior Scotland Yard officers.

The police confirmation of the accounts given by Southall residents of the events surrounding the murder of Blair Peach comes at a time when a 're-organisation' of the SPG has just been announced.

The re-organisation — giving the SPG more senior officers and re-structuring the group into four rather than seven groups — amounts to no more than a cosmetic operation. Both the police and the government are determined to maintain the SPG as an élite force to use against demonstrators and strikers.

The treatment of the police murderers is in stark contrast to the ordeal of the 350 Asians arrested in Southall on 23 April. For them, there have been huge fines and imprisonment following their conviction on crudely invented evidence.

For the SPG murderers, there have been apologies, lies, a cover-up, and protection. The latest revelations underline the need to step up the campaign to disband the SPG and for an amnesty for the Southall defendants.

They spotlight the importance of the Black Freedom march being organised by Bradford Asian Youth in June, and the national demonstration being organised by the Blair Peach Committee for 27 April.

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