

Socialist Organiser

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NUR/ASLEF picket at Coalville. Photo: John Harris, IFL.

Tories target rail unions

WHO'S NEXT?

IN REVENGE for last week's one-day strike on the railways, British Rail will sue the NUR for half a million pounds, using the anti-union laws. Austin Rover is suing 12 unions for damages from the strike last year.

In last Sunday's 'Telegraph' (January 20), Ian Waller gave an insider's account of the thinking behind the British Rail decision and the tactics of the Tory government which pulls strings in the background.

"Since the start of the miners' strike (British Rail) has handled the rail unions gently, turning a blind eye to illegal blacking, shelving controversial productivity talks and even giving a better than expected pay increase last year. It suited Mrs Thatcher, who desperately wanted to avoid a battle on two fronts. It kept 95% of the trains running".

Now, however, British Rail has decided "to face up to the unions with a blunt warning of large-scale job losses over the whole freight

The railway and car unions are being sued for damages under the Tory anti-union laws. Sheffield railworker Rob Dawber appeals to carworkers and railworkers to combine with the miners for a common response to the Tory attack on the working class.

business and no money for this spring's pay claim.

"The flashpoint that could precipitate a national strike (which the government would feel more sanguine about as the coal strike crumbles) would be when British Rail sues the unions for the losses caused by (last week's) stoppage".

Their attitude has change now because they think the miners' strike is crumbling.

If the miners are smashed, it will be the railworkers' turn. Then the car unions. And then...? 'One at a time', says Mrs Thatcher to the union leaders. 'Don't crowd me. I've got rope enough for every

union in Britain'

But the Tories and British Rail may have miscalculated. The miners are not beaten.

It is still not too late for railworkers and others to link up with the miners and turn the tide against the Tories. If the rail unions do not respond now to the threat from the courts, then the courts will grind them down. If they join the miners, then together they could bring the government to its knees and smash the anti-union laws, as well as defeating the Tory drive to break the NUM.

"THESE are hard times for our people", as Tony Benn said last week. It is easy for militants to get discouraged.

But last week's one-day rail strike showed that there is stomach for a fight in the rail unions. British Rail's attack through the courts leaves us no alternative but to fight — or surrender and bow down before the Tory drive to shackle the labour movement and destroy

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All out for the miners Feb 11

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News

'Bond affair' continues

By Bas Hardy

OVER the past three months, the behaviour of the Militant leadership on Liverpool City Council has created serious divisions within the labour movement and the wider working class community.

Posters have appeared throughout Liverpool 8 — an area with a significant black population — declaring "No to Militant Bondage!" They show Bond holding hands with a policeman.

Other local wits have suggested that Derek Hatton, 'dynamic' Deputy Leader of the City Council, should adopt as his motto 'My Bond is my word'.

By the Asian/Afro-Caribbean community, and even more by Liverpool-born blacks, Bond is regarded as a tame establishment 'House Black'. Such an opinion is unfair towards Bond himself, but it is an understandable gut reaction to the bureaucratic actions of Bond's Militant backers.

The decision to appoint Bond as head of the Council's race relations unit was taken despite the fact that there were at least four good candidates from the local community who had previous experience of the problems facing Liverpool blacks. Bond had no proveable record of work in countering racism even in the area of Brent where he came from.

His only qualification seemed to be his support for the Militant line on race.

It could be said, of course, that opposition to Bond is simply scouse parochialism. This would be fair criticism if Liverpool Labour Party historically had a good record on race. But there are no black councillors, and black membership of the Labour Party is infinitesimal.

In 1981, the Militant imagined they could just appear at the doors of the black community clubs in Toxteth with their 'bold socialist programme' and convert all. They were seen as just another group out to exploit black grievances for their own organisational ends.

The Bond episode has seen an increase in black membership of the Labour Party in order to counteract the Militant line. This has resulted in a number of Militant manoeuvres to exclude

blacks from party activity.

The most serious allegation is the claim that a leading Militant councillor excluded two blacks from a District Labour Party meeting because they could not prove to her their membership of the Labour Party. However, the three white people who accompanied them to the meeting and had the same status as new members were allowed to remain.

This incident has been referred to the Commission for Racial Equality.

We also have the example of Steve French — a leading black activist — being accepted as a member by his ward, but rejected by the Militant-dominated Constituency Labour Party on the grounds that he disagreed with local party policy on race.

Angry black activists have called Hatton a racist. Although this is an over-reaction, Militant to some extent do echo the prejudices of the white working class.

Militant refer to their black opponents as having a 'vested interest' in the 'race relations industry', and to present anti-racist activities, positive discrimination, etc., as essentially a 'diversion' from the class struggle 'against the Tory government'. One of their members went so far recently to suggest that racism originated with the Tory government!

Militant's policy of appointing its own nominees to leading council posts, its attempted gerrymandering of nominations to the local authority candidates lists, and its attempts to 'fix' the vote in the local authority can-joint shop stewards' committee will be extremely damaging to the Labour Party in Liverpool.

It has split the local authority unions down the middle and caused yet another dispute between the unions and the council. It has deeply divided the Labour Party itself and caused many blacks to go out and mistakenly vote Liberal in a recent council by-election.

These divisions are the product of Militant's bureaucratic machinations. In the end it will be the arguments that will win. A socialist policy on race will be developed which will reject such paternalistic attitudes.



London Bridge demonstration, Nov. 7. Photo: Andrew Ward, Report

London Labour resolves to defy rate-capping

By Terry Connolly and Mick O'Sullivan

Last Saturday, January 19, delegates met to debate the London Labour Party's policy statement on the Rates Act and the Tory attack on local government.

Despite the defeat of amendments seeking to strengthen the statement, the conference reflected a real will to fight the Tories, and seems to have set London Labour on a course for confrontation. It set a basis for the rank and file to get into workplaces, council estates, and social services facilities, and build the fight from the bottom.

Much debate focused on tactics. Hackney delegates, led by council leader Hilda Kean, argued forcefully for the 'deficit budget' strategy. Opposition to this came from GLC councillor John McDonnell and Greenwich council leader John Austin-Walker.

The Hackney option was described as a 'cop-out', and the 'not-fixing-a-rate' tactic was clearly carried.

As usual, the union block vote was decisive. NUPE demanded, and got, a card vote to reject support for the London Bridge shop stewards' committee after it had been overwhelmingly carried on a show of hands.

Union bureaucrats and ex-CPers streamed to the rostrum to 'support' London Bridge but oppose the amend-

ment which would officially recognise and involve this successful rank-and-file organisation in the campaign.

The statement as finally adopted calls for London councillors to refuse to co-operate with dismantling the GLC or with rate-capping, and for all negotiations with the Department of Environment to be collective.

Student conference Feb. 16

By Jane Ashworth

Last weekend Labour students elected their slate for National Union of Students (NUS) executive elections.

The Kinnockite leadership of the Labour students held on to their majority and once again decided not to contest some positions — leaving them open for, probably, the Communist Party/Liberal alliance.

Left-wingers argued for standing a full slate, but we were defeated.

As Leeds University student and ex-USDAW branch secretary John Douglas said of the decision, "the Popular Front lives on in NOLS" (National Organisation of Labour Students).

But a sizeable number of Labour student activists all over the country want to see a full Labour slate.

Socialist Students in NOLS will be standing candidates for NUS executive — Alick Bridger, Simon Pottiner and Helen McHale — in the gaps left by NOLS. This will also give students a chance to vote for Labour Party members who oppose Kinnock and all he stands for.

On February 16, at City Poly in London, SSIN is calling a 'Student Fightback 85' conference, which is also sponsored by Manchester Area NUS, Manchester Poly, North East Surrey College of Technology, Central London Poly and Sussex University.

Details from Dave Brennan, 20A Upper Addison Gardens, London W14.

Defeat

By John Bloxam

ON MONDAY and Tuesday (21st and 22nd) the media hordes descended on Kiveton Park in South Yorkshire.

A major breach in the strike, they gleefully shouted. A 'mass movement' back! The beginning of the end!

Only the small print mentioned that 90 per cent of Yorkshire miners are still solidly on strike, even according to the Coal Board's own figures.

Local NUM officials at Kiveton Park strongly reject the NCB and media figures. They say that around 200 are now scabbing, not the 350 being publicly cited. Branch delegate Albert Bowns says that the reason for the inflated figures is that "they are using us as a lynch-pin" for their effort to

But it is true, of course, that many miners at Kiveton Park are scabbing, and that includes some who were active pickets. Despair, rumours and 'panic' are the main causes. And the scabs have started to organise themselves.

The propaganda war is now intense. According to Ashington NUM branch secretary John Smith, the NCB is now sending in fleets of buses — some empty — in an attempt to demoralise the pickets. After the pressures break the back of the strike in Yorkshire.

Last Sunday, 20th, 430 NUM members out of approximately 720 at the pit attended a Kiveton Park branch meeting addressed by Yorkshire NUM president Jack Taylor. At the meeting six indicated that they intended to scab on Monday. Two of them later changed their minds after hearing the argu-

Resistance in North Yorkshire

By John Douglas

IN North Yorkshire the Coal Board has sent out letters to miners calling for next Monday, 28th, to be 'the big push' for a return to work.

Leeds District Labour Party miners' support group has therefore called for a mass picket at Allerton Bywater.

Preparations are well in hand for the Yorkshire and Humberside TUC day of action on February 11. Leeds Trades Council has been allocated three pits in the Castleford area where it will send mass pickets.

We also hope to send similar pickets to local power stations.

CP breaking up

The Communist Party executive expelled the editors of the Morning Star for hijacking the paper out of the control of the CP which founded it 55 years ago.

The CP is in the process of splitting. A complete separation between the warring blocs in the Party is now inevitable. The executive decided to call a special conference for next May where the final lines will be drawn and the split formalised.

Neither of the two blocs is politically homogeneous, both contain many strands and factions or incipient factions. This means that the big split will probably be followed by lots of smaller ones and a scattering of the sub-groupings.

Even though there will probably still be a Communist Party, the CP will be replaced by several fragments, moving in all directions. Some of them will come into the Labour Party to swell the centre or the centre-right.

Neither of the blocs deserves the support of socialists. The Morning Star group is more traditionally worker and labour movement orientated the official Party, some of whose leaders would fit nicely into the Labour Party right or even into the SDP. But the Morning Star group are old style Stalinists who support the USSR's bloody war against the people of Afghanistan.

are hostile to the Polish workers' movement, Solidarnosc, and in general peddle nonsense about the "socialism" of the Stalinist states.

The bad news is that many former CP members will strengthen the Labour Party centre and swell the tide against the serious left in the Labour Party.

The good news is that this Stalinist husk of a once serious working class party is shattering. By breaking up it will help clear a way for the development of the sort of workers movement the founders of the original CP set out to build.

Continued from front page

Who's next?

effective trade unionism.

The ball is now at the feet of the rail and car unions. This is a decisive moment in the history of the British working class movement.

We can either decide to combine now for a common fightback together with the miners; or we can decide to let them pick us off separately and crush the militant spirit out of the labour movement.

There is no way to avoid that choice. If we do not defeat and crush the Tory drive against the unions, then they will cripple the unions.

Railworkers and members of the car industry unions, especially the TGWU, should demand immediate industrial action in response to the attempt to haul them before the courts.

There is room for a massive increase in railworkers' solidarity with the miners.

Demand the recall of the TUC
Pressure a general strike!



Trains cancelled at Kings Cross. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni, IFL

West Midlands Miners' Strike Support Conference
Called by the County Association of Trades Councils
Sponsored by Midlands Area NUM

Speakers include:
National NUM speaker
Malcolm Pitt
Roy Butlin, Coalville NUR

Workshops on all aspects of solidarity and support
Saturday February 2 from 12.45 — 5.00 p.m.
Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham

Registration: £1 waged, 50p unwaged, strikers free
Four delegates per organisation. Observers welcome.

Contact Bill Timmington, c/o 7 Frederick St., Birmingham
B1 3HE, tel: 021-236 1240

National Miners' support demo called by the
Liaison Committee for Defence of Trade Unions
Supported by the Mineworkers' Defence Committee
Sunday February 24

Organise for February 11

NCB scab drive!

of eleven months on strike and the determined efforts by the TUC and Labour Party leadership to keep the miners isolated, such tactics have an effect.

Kiveton Park is not the first Yorkshire pit to see significant scabbing. It appears to be following the pattern of neighbouring Shireoaks and Manton. Like them, Kiveton Park is close to Notts and Derbyshire. 90% at least of the Yorkshire coalfield is still solidly out.

Kellingley in North Yorkshire, the biggest pit in Britain, was spotlighted by the media when the NCB said that 70 crossed the picket line on Monday. By Tuesday the figure had slumped to 11.

The other part of the present propaganda drive is the government's hard-faced refusal to negotiate until the NUM publicly gives in. On Monday they quickly stepped in to cut short informal discussions between Peter Heathfield and Ned Smith, who will soon retire from the NCB. The aim of this hard line is to demoralise the strikers. But the government cannot be nearly as confident as they appear.

Even in those pits where significant scabbing has started to take place, coal production is not possible because most deputies are not crossing picket lines. In Shireoaks, the deputies crossed once when the picket line was small, but only once. Last Sunday a deputies' meeting voted 44 to 18 to abide by NACODS policy of not going through if they 'fear intimidation'.

While the Tories are welcoming the prospect of a breakaway company union in the Notts coalfield, they also know it will have very little direct effect on this strike — just a little extra coal produced when the overtime ban is lifted.

On Sunday 20th Peter Walker once again staked the government's credibility on a boast that there will be no power cuts in 1985. He must be praying that the strike finishes soon.



Orgreave, June 1984. Photo: John Harris, IFL

Last Friday's Guardian (18th) carried a detailed report, based on leaks from the Central Electricity Generating Board, which said that the CEBG "is struggling to meet demands for power".

On December 18, the CEBG was barely able to meet peak demand, and "voltage reductions have been part of the power scene since the autumn, and have gone almost unnoticed by the public".

The Guardian concludes: "Sources say that what is described within the CEBG as 'general winter' has only just emerged, and that the strains on the system, even with the huge use of oil, will be extremely heavy in the next few weeks".

In the big Yorkshire coal-fired power stations, the position is critical. Trade union sources say that at Drax 'B' there are stocks for only three weeks'

normal operation. Even in the Trent Valley, where stocks are generally high, there are problems. Cottam, for example, had two million tonnes in stock at the end of November, but that had been reduced to 800,000 by the end of last week. That week, 142,000 tonnes were burned, and only 57,000 tonnes brought in.

Power cuts continue in many different areas, though the CEBG claims that they are not caused by the strike.

Last week's decision by AUEW members at Didcot power station to start moving the 300,000 tonnes of scab coal in the plant, and thus to break the TUC guidelines for the first time, was a blow to the solidarity movement and will give some assistance to the CEBG. But it does not fundamentally change the position in the power stations.

In County Durham last Thursday, Arthur Scargill again made the point that the miners have come too far and suffered too much to turn back now.

"It's not now a time for putting your head down... go on to those picket lines with renewed determination.

"It is a question of keeping our nerve and our determination and retaining our spirit and our will, and saying to ourselves in January 1985 — thank God I'm a picket and not a scab".

In its continuing campaign to rally the strikers and their families, the NUM leadership has also been stressing that the government's insistence on their right to sack miners — not any 'impossibilism' by the NUM — is the obstacle to a settlement.

Solidarity action is still the key. Last Thursday's rail strike gave strikers a boost, and gives the militants in the rail unions an invaluable platform from which to argue for all-out action. The days of action on February 11 and March 6 will also be important.

Within the NUM, there have been significant moves for the union itself to make the call that could trigger a general strike. Last week the Derbyshire Area Council passed a resolution "to instruct the National Executive Committee to name a date for general strike action by all rank and file trade unionists and sympathisers in support of the National Union of Mineworkers".

With the Tories' intent on hammering the NUM into the ground, the response of the cowards and traitors in the TUC is to try once again to pressurise the NUM into making concessions. The movement must demand of them that they stop obstructing solidarity action, and start organising it.

The most effective way to do this, and to give a real boost to the miners, is to turn February 11 into a day of widespread industrial action. Organise for it now!

Whetton's diary

The Tories have big problems

Paul Whetton is secretary of the Notts miners' rank and file strike committee, writing here in a personal capacity.

Yesterday's talks between Peter Heathfield and Ned Smith, as I understand it, were talks about talks. It is obvious that the government has no intention of letting us talk.

The government wants the miners to be seen to be beaten. At the present time with men going back to work, the government thinks it is on a winner. Therefore any attempt at talks will be scuppered.

What they don't realise is that while men are returning to work, there are still a hell of a lot out on strike. The strike may be crumbling around the edges, but I think the hard core will stick it out.

Personally I think the trickle back to work will dry up in the next couple of weeks. Meanwhile, all the economic problems that the government has got cannot be ignored — the state of the pound, the fact that the government will not be able to come up with tax cuts in the Budget, the small businesses going bust both in mining areas and other areas, and so on.

I would imagine that they are pulling out every trick in the book to keep the power stations running. They're trying to prove that there won't be any power cuts — but, of course, there have been power cuts, although not on the scale that we would like.

Last week's rail stoppage picked our lads up a bit, to that someone was actually willing to stand up and fight. We had talks with rank and file railway workers, and they were bitterly disappointed that it wasn't a national stoppage.

We sent carloads of pickets to show solidarity with the railworkers, and the railworkers were quite pleased to see us. Quite strong links were forged.

I see that the February 11 day of action is getting wider support. I'd like to see that roll on right throughout the country. That's just the sort of thing that we require.

I have also heard that North Derbyshire Area of the

Back the miners



NUM has called for the NUM national executive to set a date for a general strike. It's good to see that call coming, though I don't place any great faith in the TUC to do anything.

At our branch meeting it was made quite plain that the Notts executive have no intention whatsoever of pulling back from their plans for a breakaway union. Many of the lads who have gone back to work are saying that they want no part of it and they wish to remain in the NUM.

It's the silent majority who don't turn up at branch meetings who are going to hold the key to the situation, and it's important we get to them.

The issue of how scabs will be recruited to the NUM has still not been clarified. I think some lads tend to see the no.1 priority in Notts as vengeance on the scabs. The message has to be got over to them that that is not the priority.

The priority is to win the dispute. If we've won the dispute, problems about scabs become much smaller. If we contemplate the unthinkable, and suppose we don't win the dispute, then there isn't a problem anyway, because the argument then is what the scabs are going to do to us!

I think Kinnock was wrong in his condemnation of the left Labour, MPs last week. If I'm going to put my faith in any of our parliamentary representatives, it would be Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn rather than the likes of Kinnock.

Kinnock's being true to form and backing the bosses. I think he is going to reap where he has sown. At some time or other, he is going to get the message that he can't take that sort of attitude and still be leader of the Labour Party.

He's going to finish up getting ditched.

And I don't think that the Labour Party NEC can possibly recognise the scab union in Notts. Certainly in my own constituency we don't allow anyone to become a member of the party unless he or she is a member of a bona fide trade union — and we shall be arguing that that is not a bona fide trade union.

Isolate the scab union

By John Bloxam

ONLY 16 miners are still on strike at Pye Hill colliery, in Nottinghamshire, the pit which elects as its delegate Colin Clarke, chairman of the scab 'National Working Miners' Committee'.

Last week, five scabs sent a letter to the Branch Committee complaining that they were being given only one point of view on the breakaway. They suggested inviting Arthur Scargill to put the NUM's case. The Committee ripped up the letter.

Last Saturday night, 19th, the proposal to invite Arthur Scargill to the branch was passed 34 to 17. The Branch Chairman then resigned, and walked out with the rest of the committee, including Colin Clarke.

Many rank and file scabs in Notts are clearly opposed to being dragged out of the NUM by the scab organisers. Some puts have called for a ballot on the issue. Two branches, Linby and Moor Green, are reported to have voted to stay in the NUM.

Overall, however, only a minority of those scabbing are

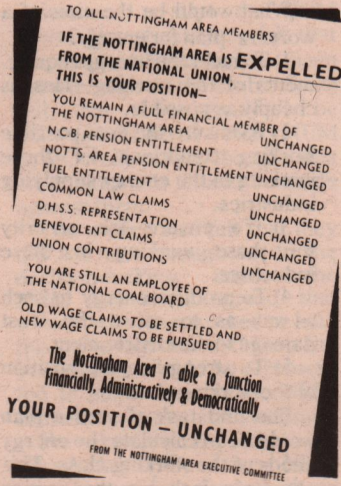
prepared to come out against Lynk and his new company union. Combined with the 'secret' Coal Board promises of sole negotiating rights, this makes it virtually certain that the Nottinghamshire breakaway will get off the ground.

Their prospects outside Notts, however, are not so good.

One of the four Leicester-shire pits, South Leicester, voted against rule changes similar to the one passed in Notts. In South Derbyshire, the same changes which provoked the NUM to expel Notts are being put out to a ballot.

Both area leaderships support the changes, but — unlike the Notts leadership — feel sufficient pressure to agree to meet the national NUM leadership.

Reports from other areas indicate that the breakaway union is getting nowhere. Leading scab Norman Heywood took recruiting forms for the Notts 'company union' around the new wave of scabs at Kiveton Park, and they were ripped up in front of him. Last Thursday, accompanied by a police inspector, he tried to read out a statement in the canteen — and the rest of the scabs walked out. The police inspector then said



that anybody trying to 'intimidate' Heywood would be sacked immediately!

It is virtually certain that the Notts area will be expelled from the NUM at the special conference on January 30. The Yorkshire Area Council voted solidly to recommend supporting expulsion to its branches, with only two pits speaking against. At the Kiveton Park branch meeting on Sunday, the vote was 397 to 6 to support expulsion.

The best blow against the scabs, of course, is to win the strike — which will cut the ground from under their feet. But the rest of the labour movement has an immediate duty to help the NUM isolate and weaken them now.

Contradictory reports have appeared about the TUC and Labour Party leaderships' attitude to Lynk's new company union. Right-wing Labour MP Don Concannon has assured the scabs that Kinnock and Hattersley are against their expulsion from the Labour Party. The latest report, however, is that the Labour leadership is not likely to recognise the breakaway. The TUC is likely to take the same attitude. Both the Labour Party and the TUC will discuss the issue on Wednesday 23rd.

Pressure must be mounted to make sure that the breakaway is not recognised. Non-recognition; Labour Party delegates to be accepted only from the newly reconstituted NUM in the Area; and any individual members of the Labour Party from the new company union to be expelled for not belonging to a bona fide trade union — these measures must be applied immediately.

Mineworkers Defence Committee National Conference

SOLIDARITY WITH THE NUM!

Octagon Centre, Sheffield
Saturday February 9, 11 am — 5 p.m.

Delegates: 2 per trade union organisation
1 per other organisation
£3 per delegate, strikers free

Confirmed speakers include:

Peter Heathfield, Betty Heathfield, Tony Benn,
John Tocher, Phil Holt, Roy Butlin, Paul Whetton

Accommodation, Credentials, Creche:

Ring 01-981 3289 or write to
Mineworkers' Defence Committee, c/o 31,
Cranwich Road, London N16

Sponsors include: Kings X ASLEF, Civil Service Miners' Support Campaign, Feltham Fire Brigade, Fire Brigades Union, CPSA Broad Left, NALGO Group of MPs, Fire Brigades Union, CPSA Broad Left, NALGO National Miners' Support Campaign, National Union of Seamen, Labour Briefing, Socialist Organiser, Willam, Socialist Worker

Back the miners



Striking back on the railways

By Rob Dawber

LAST Thursday's rail strike in Sheffield, Doncaster, Worksop, Derby and Totton BR Area Manager areas was an unqualified success.

It was 100% in South Yorkshire, and BR could only claim 15% going in to work in Derby and Nottingham and even then they were counting TSSA members who weren't called on to strike.

The media has made a great deal, of course, of the single coal train that ran from Coalville, Leicestershire.

This is because Coalville was foremost in pushing the NUR and ASLEF into calling the strike over victimisations.

The facts are that since December 17, management, through various devices, have had three trains a day running and in Shirebrook, 15-20 trains — this was out to seven on the day.

In Shirebrook, some of those handling coal, about four, actually joined the strike against victimisation of those who wouldn't.

Those eight trains were all that ran in the area on that day.

Strengthened

The strike has strengthened those who support the NUM and knocked back management and the scab railworkers.

If it is not followed up then management will regroup its forces and go back on the offensive.

It is the absence of such

strike action, despite repeated calls from victimised branches to the NUR and ASLEF, that has allowed BR to erode support as much as it has.

A 24-hour strike in such a small area of the country is not going to stop management's attacks for good.

But if it provides a lever for more extended and widespread action, they could be the way to victory for both the NUM and rail workers.

BR have said they will consider making a claim on the rail unions for lost revenue, when they have weighed up the cost of the strike. Of course, what will really make up their minds is not the cost but the amount of support for the action and whether they can afford to hold back any longer.

Support

Had support been weak they would have been straight in, but as it is, they might drop it — unless, that is, they have decided that now is the time to go for the rail unions.

Indications are that the government has decided that they can now afford to provoke a dispute in another major nationalised industry as they believe the miners' strike to be crumbling.

BR have given no indication that they will end victimisation — they claim it has never happened, even while meeting some of the rail unions' demands on it! — so NUR and ASLEF have no choice but to make further strike calls.

Mass picket at 11.45 a.m. outside Keresley Colliery entrance and then

Support the Miners Rally

Central Hall, Coventry.

Friday January 25 at 7.30 p.m.

Speakers include Peter Heathfield, Ken Gill, Jim Mortimer, Kath Chaplin, Women's Support Group

Get ORGANISED!



Become a supporter of the Socialist Organiser Alliance — groups are established in most large towns. We ask £5 a month minimum (£1 unwaged) contribution from supporters.

I want to become a Socialist Organiser supporter/I want more information.

Name

Address

Send to: Socialist Organiser, 214 Sickett Court, London N1 2SY.

Energy policy

A workers' answer

By Arthur Bough

The problems of the coal industry stem from the fact that the coal industry operates like any other capitalist industry concerning itself with the needs of the market not of the workers.

From that flow its investment priorities — investing in profitable pits and starving less profitable pits of investment. As a result pits starved of proper investment soon become "uneconomic", and destined for closure.

The result is a reduction in potential coal output, and uncertainty and unemployment for the mining communities. The only solution is for the coal industry to be planned in the interests of the working class.

The NUM throughout the strike has based its case on the 1977 version of the Plan for Coal. From a propaganda point of view this has obvious advantages — the government and NCB can be seen clearly to be the ones breaking a signed agreement. However, no-one can say that the Plan for Coal is a plan for reorganisation in the workers' interests. And we need to start discussing such a workers' plan.

What is a workers' answer to unemployment? Cut hours, not jobs. Workers themselves should look at what work is available, and decide how many hours, and how many days they should work. In other words, workers begin to demand control over their working lives.

Trotsky called this demand the sliding scale of hours. The idea was that workers would produce a sliding scale by which the number of hours worked fell in accordance with the need to keep all the workers in employment. Of course, such reductions in hours would have to entail no reductions in earnings, or the workers would still be paying for the bosses' crisis.

A more radical demand, but one which follows logically from the demand for a sliding scale of hours, is the demand for workers' control.

It is clear from the experience of the nationalised industries that nationalisation does not equal socialism.

The current nationalised industries run on the same basis as other capitalist firms, have the same capitalists running them, and are ripped off by other capitalist firms.

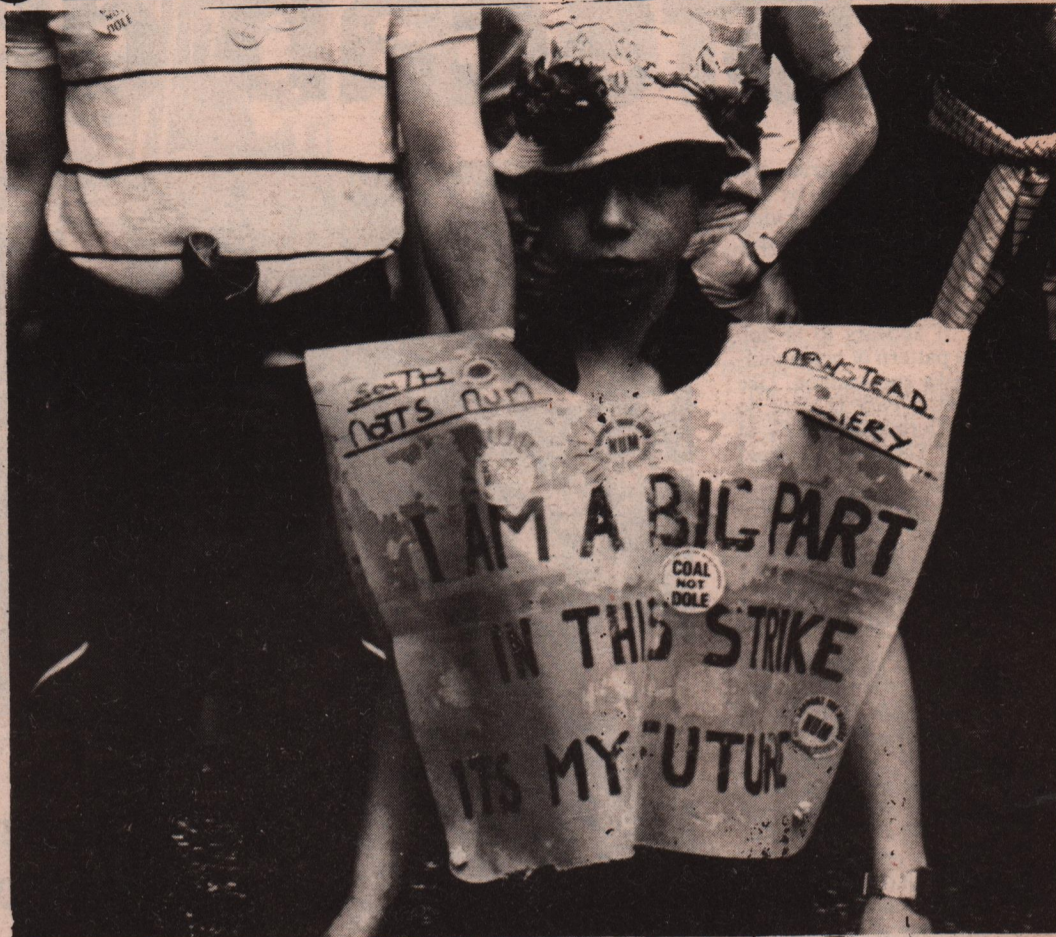
The socialist response is to call for workers' control over these industries.

That would mean the workers in the industry themselves democratically deciding on what, how much, and how to produce. It does not mean workers being fobbed off with a few 'worker-directors' on the board of directors or the management being made up of representatives of the workers, the TUC and the government.

Nor does it mean that the workers should take responsibility for the finances of the industry. It is a demand for the workers to take control of their work, and for the bosses' state to foot the bill.

The demand for workers' control is a vital one in the current dispute, because as long as MacGregor or someone like him is running the coal industry it is only a matter of time until they decide again to take on the workers.

But if the miners were to win workers' control in the coal industry it would pose several questions. Immediately the workers would have to decide how much coal to produce, how many days and hours a week to work, whether to recruit more



We need working-class answers to Tory economic arguments. Photo: John Harris, IFL

workers, what price if any should be charged for supplying coal to old people, schools and hospitals, what relationship would coal have to the other energy supplying industries (gas, electric, oil)?

In addition the capitalist state would do all in its power to ensure that the workers' control did not last very long! The miners would have to spread the struggle to other groups of workers, especially in the energy supply industry, and in preparation we need to discuss a workers' plan for energy — a plan where all workers in the energy supply industries came together to decide how much energy to produce, what proportions should come from coal, how much from gas, how much electric, how much oil, etc.

Such a plan could win wide support; workers in the gas industry have already seen a threat to the jobs via privatisation; workers in the oil industry work under atrocious conditions, and with an uncertain future; and many people concerned about the effects of nuclear power on the environment.

What would be the aims of a workers' plan for energy?

- 1) To meet the energy requirements of the working class as cheaply as possible.
- 2) To ensure the best possible working conditions for those working in the energy supplying industries.
- 3) To ensure job security for those working in these industries.
- 4) To produce energy in such a way as to cause the least damage to the environment.
- 5) To strengthen the position of the working class.

The first task of such a plan would be to calculate the energy needs of the working class. This obviously includes the energy requirements of industry, as our aim is not to stop industry but to bring all of it under workers' control.

We would need to take into consideration how much extra is needed to ensure adequate energy to old folk, and in determining the needs of industry we would talk not to the managements, but to the workers in the respective industries. We would demand the opening of the books of all industry to facilitate drawing up the plan.

As a result all workers would

begin to see the links between the various companies, and begin to see how the system exploits them.

Similarly, we would begin negotiations with the workers in those industries which provide inputs into the energy supply industries. A massive programme of investment would be needed to make coal mining safer and healthier, to stop sulphur emissions from power stations which cause acid rain, etc.

We would want to talk to the workers who make the equipment — to discuss with them quality, specifications, new ideas, etc.

The plan would remain very limited as long as future demand for energy was unpredictable — which in capitalism's cycle of booms and slumps it is.

So we would have to turn to workers in the energy-consuming industries, and start discussions on planning those industries in the interest of the working class.

A plan worked out in this way could fulfil a number of important functions. Workers in industry would be confident in their future, and able to plan their lives better.

Once the amounts of energy to be produced for the next five, ten or twenty years had been agreed, attention could then be paid to the most efficient ways of providing energy.

What about combined heat and power stations which use the heat from the electricity-generating process to heat

nearby homes and other buildings? We would definitely want to encourage more research into renewable sources of energy like solar, wind and wave power.

And certainly a workers' plan for energy would have to reach out to build links with workers in other countries. Even more than other modern industries, the energy industry is international. And any attempt to bring the North Sea oilfields under workers' control would meet with resistance not just from the British bosses, but from the multinational oil companies as well. We would need support from all the workers in those multinationals to beat back that offensive.

Of course, the need for energy to be brought under international workers' control must not prevent us from starting the fight here! Someone has to start the ball rolling.

For the last five years the bosses have been on the offensive. The working class has been fighting defensive battles against closure, privatisation, etc: At the same time socialists have been on the defensive ideologically, leaving themselves countering the Tories' ideas rather than fighting for socialist ideas and making the Tories have to counter them.

The miners' strike has shown that the working class is still strong, and prepared to fight.

We should now begin to put forward our alternative to the chaos of capitalism and give the working class a vision worth fighting for.

Letter

'Little Moscow' error

I AM writing to you regarding a photograph in your paper of January 9 on page 5. I can't understand why you have printed a picture of Chopwell Lodge Banner with strikers below it saying "The strike is still solid" when Chopwell Colliery closed in 1966/7.

I am a native of Chopwell now living in Ollerton, Notts., and find it distressing that you have unearthed Chopwell's banner when you could have had your pick of present day ones on strike. Did you do this because Chopwell was known as "Little

Moscow". I am a striking miner's wife and I hope you will contradict this photo in your next issue.

Yours sincerely,
MJ OWEN

Editor's comment: Sorry! The photograph was one of several given to us by Channel 4 to accompany the review of Ken Loach's 'Which side are you on?' on page 9. It's a scene from the film, obviously, at a miners' gala where old banners are brought out.

Discussion

Back the miners



Organising NUM in Notts

GB. The state of the strike is that it is still as solid as it was nine months ago.

SC. They thought the return to work would take place in the New Year but what they didn't realise was that the Christmas period was the hardest to get over, and once people got through that they felt that there was nothing else that could hurt them.

There's also this initiative by the national union to expel the Notts area. It's given a new focal point to the strike in this area and thoughts of a return to work have been pushed to the back a bit.

JB: It has had a good effect, but I think it will have a good effect in other areas, too. Firstly, they can see that something is being done about the Notts area, and also, those thinking about

George Brookes and Stan Crawford, both striking miners from Bevercotes NUM (Notts), spoke to John Bloxam and Pete Radcliff

going back to work may now think twice. But do you think they should have done it earlier?

GB. Yes, but the union's hands were tied by the courts.

Delay

SC. For ten months we've said expel them, and it has taken ten months for them to do it. I don't know the reason for the delay, but in Notts the strike is going to take a turn one way or the other. Either men will come back out on strike because they don't want to be dis-

associated from the NUM or the drift back will continue.

JB: The argument, as I understand it, about not taking action against Notts earlier on, was that you would push the scabs into the hands of the right wing organisers, the likes of Blessington, Lynk, Prenderghast.

SC: The argument against that is that if you made an example of the ones you've mentioned, and then said to the rank and file, look you've got a decision to make for yourselves, either you

stick with the NUM or you get the same treatment as these have got then that gives them the conscious decision which way they are going to go. But they aren't going to do that, they're going to expel the lot.

GB. I think they should expel the lot.

SC. The trouble now, is that with the Tories today there is no such thing as a closed shop and the mining industry has always been a closed shop I can see there being an NUM and a Spencer-type union and men who don't belong to any union.

JB: What should the attitude be to the rank and file who are currently working?

GB: In my opinion, there's no way they should be allowed to join.

SC. I think there are two

arguments. The first is that if you cross the picket line you're not in, if you don't cross the picket line you're in.

After the dispute is over, obviously you are going to have to try and build up the NUM and the only people you can do that with is the scabs.

Action

GB. You've got to take some sort of action. After all, some of these scabs have been working for the last ten months, while we've been suffering hardship.

The only thing I can think of is not to give them as much voting power as we have got, because there is a danger, when the strike is over that if the scabs move back into the NUM and take it over in Notts, we'll still have a scab union in the area.

Ashamed

JB. Those who do join are not going to be the leading scabs, they are going to be the rank and file scabs who are ashamed of what they've done, want to stick with the NUM because they recognise the need to be in the union, but who are going to keep pretty quiet.

But isn't the initial problem going to be that if the new NUM starts off with 2,000 members you are going to be very weak in the area.

GB. Weak in the area, but strong nationally.

Difficulty

SC. I still think the stumbling block is going to be the fact that strikers who've been out for ten months are not going to like the idea of recruiting scabs to the new NUM.

JB: You've got to find some way of bringing them in, though, or come the next strike, they'll be scabbing again, making it more difficult to win the dispute.

GB. Well, I know what I'd do, if there was a dispute involving those who have scabbed and the management, I'd scab on them, an eye for an eye.

PR: I know from my own experience in the steel industry, where we had the National Union of Blast-furancemen scab on a strike, which you get all the time in multi-union organisations. The trouble is that it just continues indefinitely.

POEU

JB: A good example of the problem is the 1971 strike by Post Office workers. When the POEU comes out on strike, the reaction in some offices is to say, to hell with them, they scabbed on us in 1971, I'm going to walk through their picket line.

The best people in the union say, well the 1971 strike is past history, we've got to join together with the POEU to make sure that it never happens again. You can only do that by breaking the chain.

Anyway, I can't see you really scabbing on these scabs when it actually came to it.

GB: I suppose not but that's the way I feel at the moment.

PR: What you have to try and do is continue promoting the morale of this dispute while preparing the ground for a more united struggle in any future dispute. To talk at this stage of allowing scabs

into the new NUM as if everything was forgotten would destroy the morale of this dispute. But if you are thinking in terms of future disputes, you've got to think in terms of getting them organised behind you.

SC. If you turn round now and say to a lad who has been scabbing, be it for ten months or two months, that he can reaffiliate to the NUM, the lads on strike are going to turn round and say 'I might as well have been at work all the time'. But if you don't say that, the rank and file inside the scabs, like those at Ollerton who signed a petition to stay in the NUM, are going to turn round and say 'Well, they won't let us into the NUM, so we might as well join Lynk and his mob.' So you are faced with a very difficult situation.

JB. Perhaps the only way you can do it is to say to the scabs that if they want to join the union now then they've got to come out on strike, otherwise they can't join the union until the dispute is over, when they will not be allowed to hold office. So you are establishing a link with them.

Democracy

SC. Talk about democracy! If the scab organisers had a ballot over the rule change which is leading to their expulsion from the NUM, it wouldn't be so clear-cut as the division between working and striking miners. But they won't do it. They demanded a national ballot on the strike, but they won't have one on the rule change.

If they balloted every miner in the Notts area, I think you'd see a different result. And even if we lost the vote, we'd see more than the 2,000 striking miners voting to stay with the NUM.

It would expose the hypocrisy of the scab leaders and make a lot of people think again.

JB. At today's Ollerton branch meeting, a majority voted against leav-chair ruled the vote out of order, claiming that it needed a two-thirds majority.

SC. The vote was 117 to 94 and when the meeting was told it had to be a two-thirds majority, some of the scabs got up with the strikers and walked out.

But the way it's coming over is that the Notts miners want to break with the union. A ballot would demonstrate that this isn't true, both to the lads on strike and to the scabs who want to stay in the NUM.

JB: When the union is reorganised in Notts is there any chance that the structure of the two rank and file strike committees will serve as a basis for that reorganised area, and make it more democratic than union structures usually are?

SC. Possibly. But one thing I would love to see is total recall so that anybody who is elected into any position in Notts would be subject to instant recall by the rank and file if they decided that what the official was doing was wrong.

Women's fightback dayschool

Many more battles to be won

OVER 100 women, including women from eight different miners' women's action groups, attended a Women's Fightback day school in Stoke-on-Trent last Saturday, January 19.

Women from Notts, South Yorks, North Staffs, Keresley and Bedworth were there, as well as women from Greenham Common, from local Labour Parties and two women from Kurdistan.

Theme

The main theme of the day school was the problem of how to link up working class women into a national working class women's movement. There were workshops on many different aspects of the women's struggle including Women Against Pit Closures, women in the Labour Party, women in Ireland (and particularly the women in Armagh prison), women fighting the cuts and rate-capping and the women at Greenham Common women.

There were video films including Framed Youth — a film made by and about gays and lesbians, Carry Greenham Home and videos made during the miners' strike.

Jean Lane reports on the highly successful Women's Fightback day school held in Stoke last weekend

Brenda Proctor, a miner's wife from North Staffs women's action group, talked about the need for the women's struggle to continue after the miners' strike is over. There are many more battles to be won, she said, and we are all fighting the same enemy.

Detailed

A detailed discussion about how we could organise to continue was carried over into the Women Against Pit Closures workshop where we discussed how to link up with other working class women in struggle. Most of the women there felt that the existing national Women Against Pit Closures group should be widened out to more women's groups and be run more democratically.

At the moment only one delegate per area can go to the meetings and that one woman may be representing up to 30 pits and as many food centres or women's action groups. A lot of the information doesn't filter

down to the women doing the work in the villages.

Many also felt that the way the national organisation is working at the moment doesn't hold out any perspective of continuing after the strike. Some of the women present in the discussion, particularly those from North Staffs, have been fighting on the national committee to get it widened out to more pit areas but also to other support groups.

Sanctions

The workshop also discussed the decision to expel the Notts union and re-start the NUM there. Almost everyone felt that the national NUM had not been hard enough on the scabs. Some felt that they shouldn't be allowed into the new Notts NUM at all, while others thought that other sanctions should be made against them.

The women also felt that they did not have enough say in the decision-making inside the NUM and most agreed that women who have worked to hold the strike together and keep the battle going should be represented in some way on the NUM committees and union meetings.

For example, the idea was raised that while a new NUM branch was being formed, there existed the possibility of making sure that it was democratically constituted by electing officials every year rather than every five years — but also of forming a women's section of the union to which miners' wives could belong.

Everybody felt that the discussion had been useful. Not just a talking shop but with positive suggestions as to where to go from here.

One idea raised was that the strikers' wives could form Labour Party women's sections

in their areas, not just to organise support for the strike in the Labour Party, but also to fight for better representation of women in the Labour Party and to have a go at the careerists in the Party.

One woman was so pleased with the way the school had gone so far that she suggested organising one every month!

The discussions in the other workshops went just as well with everyone taking part and in all of them the need to link up the different struggles came across clearly.

The school heard a speech from Neda of the Kurdistan solidarity movement who told us of the oppression by the Iranian Islamic system and how this was particularly oppressive to women. But she also told of how the struggle there, including the armed struggle of women, had raised people's political consciousness — just as political consciousness here had been raised by the miners' strike. She showed how the struggle for women's liberation and for socialism is an international one.

Socialism

The day rounded up with Kath Crosby from Women's Fightback drawing the conclusions from the day school, talking of the need to kick the Tories out and to democratise the labour movement as part of the struggle for socialism and calling on women to join the Labour Party and to join Women's Fightback. Many did.

A collection raised £80 and as eight pits were represented, £10 was taken back to each one.

The success of the day has made us all the more determined to fight for the linking up of working class women into a movement and we plan to follow up with more schools and meetings soon.

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

New issue, no.37, out now. 20p plus postage from 8 Aubyn Square, London SW15.



Riot police during the 1968 French general strike — a familiar scene now in many of Britain's mining areas

I don't agree with the whole of John McIlroy's analysis ("The new Realism...", SO205), or with the main thrust of his conclusions. But on one point McIlroy is absolutely right: "To call for a general strike as an immediate demand is pissing in the wind".

The crucial need at the moment is to stop the movement of coal and substitutes, and to prevent it being used in the power stations. So far, success on both these fronts has been very patchy, and of course, the blame for that lies to a large extent at the feet of the union leaders.

But it is also a reflection of the demoralisation that still permeates the rank and file of the unions, due to years of defeats and sell-outs.

Rosa Luxemburg, writing in 1902, outlined two preconditions for what she called the "political issue" general strike: "popular political demand and a favourable balance of forces materially". At the moment, quite clearly, neither of these preconditions exist.

To demand of the TUC leadership that they call a general strike (the only meaning that can be attached to the headline in SO209, "Demand a General Strike") not only seems ludi-

crously unrealistic to most miners and rank and file activists, but actually lets the leaders off the hook.

Like Kinnoch, they can plausibly (if hypocritically) dismiss such a call as being beyond their power to deliver. Much more effective, therefore, is the demand for the union leaders to implement their own TUC Congress policy: to stop all movement of coal and substitutes and to prevent the use of coal and oil to generate electricity.

This more limited demand, combined with a vigorous campaign amongst the rank and file for mass picketing of the power stations, corresponds much more powerfully to the requirements of the present struggle, than do grandiose calls for a general strike.

Of course, the situation could change very rapidly. The use of troops to move coal from the pit-heads, the jailing of an NUM leader or another major section of workers coming into struggle alongside the miners, could give the general strike slogan an immediate resonance. That is why we should continue to discuss the issue in our propaganda, explaining its implications, how it can lead to the creation of a network of working

class organisations that can challenge the whole capitalist state and pose the question of which class rules.



Rosa Luxemburg

The paper should continue to look at the historical experiences of general strikes, the role of the trade union bureaucracy, the possible responses of the ruling class, etc.

But simply to incant truisms (as Colin Foster does in SO209) like: "A minority of workers could initiate a mass strike movement in support of the miners", "despair and cynicism can turn rapidly into hope and confidence", and (best of all) "it is possible", is not good enough. All this leaves aside any serious analysis of the relevance of the general strike slogan as an agitational demand at the moment.

If we followed the logic of comrade Foster's argument through to its conclusion, then we would always raise the general strike slogan, regardless of the particular situation facing the working class.

That would make as much sense as continually calling for socialist revolution on the basis that we live in the "epoch of imperialism", and that "the objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ripened; they have begun to get somewhat rotten".

The continued use of the general strike slogan in our headlines, apparently as an immediate, agitational demand (and I take Colin Foster's point that "SO's slogan has generally been 'organise for a general strike') can only discredit what could be a very valuable slogan.

It could also lead us into lining up with posturing ninnyes like the Workers Power group, who would divert the next Mine-workers Defence Committee conference away from organising solidarity and into a fruitless wrangle over the general strike slogan.

As Rosa Luxemburg wrote in the 1902 article referred to above, "one only has to cast one's eye over the variety of experiences of this form of struggle (the general strike) and one will see how mindless is any stereotyping, summary dismissal or glorification of this weapon."

GENERAL STRIKE

Utopian talk, or a need call for full mobilisation

IF THE labour movement lets the miners go down to defeat, then we will have to pay dearly for it: miners, the Tories and the bosses would go on an industrial rampage. Strikes would become bitter and scab-herding would become a regular part of the British industrial scene.

The situation cries out for a general strike — a great rallying of the battalions of Labour to back a general strike possible? In the slump-weakened state of the labour movement, is a general strike possible?

This week we continue the discussion on the general strike. Jackie McDonough argues that to call for a general strike is nonsense, and Gerry Bates replies on behalf of the Socialist Organiser editorial board.

THE fundamental case for a general strike is that it is a logical conclusion from what we say about the stakes involved in the miners' strike.

We say that it is not just a dispute about conditions in one industry. It is a watershed confrontation between Capital and Labour. It is a crucial battle in the Tories' drive to cripple the unions.

That's what Socialist Organiser says, and that's what most people on the Left say. But then what follows? Either this assessment is wild scaremongering, or we have to campaign for the labour movement to throw its full forces into this battle.

Is a general strike possible? I think so. Jackie McDonough complains that Colin Foster cites only general "truisms" in favour of the possibility of a general strike. But in a situation like the present — where the labour movement is involved in a decisive battle, but the majority even of the militants think that full mobilisation of our forces is "unrealistic" — those "truisms" about the explosive potentialities of working class action are the most important thing to argue.

Moreover, it is not just a matter of "truisms". I accept that the working-class self-confidence for a general strike does not exist at present: but there is recent evidence to indicate that a campaign by top trade union leaders could generate that confidence, and that even a spontaneous explosion from the rank and file is possible.

Look at the one-day strikes called by regional TUCs and, last week, by the rail unions.

The regional TUCs are weak bodies anyway. They campaigned very feebly. Their campaigns were openly opposed by the central TUC leadership. They didn't have the same possibility that a national all-out general strike would have, of combining a wide range of demands and discontents into a single mobilisation.

Nevertheless, there was a good turnout. There is a solid core of tens or hundreds of thousands of militants who could be the backbone of a general strike.



Tony Benn

Already in the course of the miners' strike there have been several flashpoints where we came close to dramatic extension of the action: two docks strikes, the Austin Rover strike, the possible NACODS strike, the possible industrial action on the railways.

Until recently Tony Benn habitually rejected calls for a general strike on the grounds that it would be an illegitimate "industrial short-cut" around parliamentary politics. After the receiver was sent in to take over the NUM's funds, he called for a general strike. So did Dennis Skinner, Audrey Wise, and seafarers' leader Jim Slater.

Why? Are they all ultra-left windbags? Or were they pushed into such calls by the logic of the situation?

What about the defeats and demoralisation that the working class has suffered since 1979? Those are real factors. But they should be kept in perspective.

In relating working-class history we always lay stress on the high points, the aspects and the incidents which show what the working class can achieve once stirred to action.

But this can lead to an "optical illusion" — a mistaken picture of a golden age when every worker was militant

and class-conscious. It was never like that.

Read, for example, the story of the Belfast and Glasgow general strikes of 1919, currently serialised in SO. Even in 'Red Clydeside' there were plenty of scabs and sell-out leaders.

Take another example. The material conditions for a general strike were not demonstrably better in 1926 than they are today.

In the engineers' lock-out of 1921-22 the trade union movement had suffered a blow greater than any we have had since 1979. The engineering industry had been the backbone of the shop stewards' movement. The great majority of the militants were sacked; the stewards' movement was crushed.

Up to 1925, railworkers had freely moved coal during every miners' strike. The general level of unionisation throughout the working class was only half of what it is today. The right wing had just consolidated its hold on the Labour Party, decisively excluding the Communists.

And yet the general strike happened, and was still growing on the day that the TUC leaders sold it out.

Jackie McDonough could still reply that a general strike depends on initiative from the TUC leaders. They won't take that initiative; and so, whatever the generalities, the call for a general strike is empty words.

There is the other possibility, of a general strike spontaneously exploding from below, as in France in 1968. But in any case the behaviour of the TUC leaders is not so cut-and-dried. After their spectacular sell-out of the NGA at the end of 1983, who would have thought that they would call a 'day of action' over GCHQ in February 1984. Yet they did.

At present there is very little pressure from below on the TUC leaders to take an initiative. So they don't. But the question for us is whether we become part of that problem, or part of the solution to it.

Even if all our arguments



Troops escort scab convoy through the East End of London 1926

AL

essary on?

Having beaten the heroic
and prolonged; strike-breaking

up the miners. But is a
nceivable?
all for a general strike now is



Stefano Cannoni (1FL)

for a general strike should fail
to produce action, they will
still have fulfilled a purpose:
to convince a minority of
militants about the potential
power and strength of our
class, and how it could be
used, and thus to make sure
that there is more pressure
from below on the TUC lead-
ers next time.

If we content ourselves
with proposing only such
action as the militant rank
and file can carry out within
the limits of the TUC leaders'
lack of initiative, then we will
never even begin to challenge
and replace those leaders. We
need to propose a policy for
the whole labour movement.

It does not follow that we
call for a general strike all the
time, or for an immediate
socialist revolution now.
Leon Trotsky formulated a
good rule: "to base one's
programme on the logic of
the class struggle".



Leon Trotsky

Because of the watershed
character of the miners'
strike, the call for a general
strike follows from the "logic
of the class struggle" specifi-
cally now. It is the logical
next step. It follows from the
assessment that we — and
thousands of others — make
of the miners' strike.

That is why we can
rationally hope that what is
today a minority slogan could
within a relatively short time
become a mass call to action;
and why we have a duty to
'blaze a trail' for it as a
minority slogan today.



Andrew Moore

Differing responses from the TUC to the NGA Stockport Messenger dispute (top) and the GCHQ trade union ban (Below).

Left Press

Unrealistic?

MOST of the revolutionary left
does not call for a general strike.

Socialist Worker carried a
major editorial on January 12
with their proposals for the
miners' strike. Quite rightly
they stressed the need to re-
launch mass picketing, especial-
ly at the power stations. But not
once in the editorial did they
mention industrial action by
other workers.

It is not just a matter of that
one editorial: for example,
SW's advertisement for the TUC
lobby on January 23 called by
the Broad Left Organising Com-
mittee mentions only the
slogans, "Stop the power
stations! Implement Congress
policy!" and omits BLOC's
appeal for a 24 hour general
strike to "link every struggle
with the miners".

Socialist Action summarised
their view of "the four key steps
to winning the dispute" on Jan-
uary 18. Curiously they omit all
reference to mass picketing,
which leaves their "four steps"
somewhat up in the air. But in
any case the most radical of
those "four steps" is "a nation-
al day of industrial action in
support of the miners".

When trade union leaders call
"days of action", the left
usually criticises them for being
mealy-mouthed and demands
the more clear-cut formula of a
"24 hour general strike". But
Socialist Action makes a "day
of action" its own proposal.

And it proposes that day's
action not as preparation for a
full mobilisation, but as the
sufficient climax of "steps to
winning the dispute". Such an
approach blatantly contradicts
what SA — like Socialist Organ-
iser — has been saying about

the high stakes in the miners'
strike. If the stakes are that
high, a one-day strike will cer-
tainly not be sufficient to rout the
Tories.

Neither SW nor SA spell out
why they don't call for a general
strike. Probably they would say
that this call is "unrealistic",
and add that there is a danger of
slogans about improbable
general strikes substituting for
more limited but concrete
action.

It is indeed possible for the
call for a general strike to
become phrasemongering. If
the editors of Socialist Action
look through the files of its pre-
decessor Red Weekly for 1973-4,
they will find a good example.

But the decisive argument
against SW and SA comes from
what they themselves say about
the pivotal nature of the miners'
strike for the whole labour
movement. Unless the labour
movement is absolutely
shattered and broken — which it
isn't — then it should respond
with a full mobilisation.

In 1938 Leon Trotsky had a
discussion with some US co-
thinkers about the slogan of
workers' defence groups against
fascism, which they thought
unrealistic.

He replied: "Naturally if I
close my eyes I can write a good
rosy programme that everybody
will accept. But it will not cor-
respond to the situation... We must
tell the workers the truth, then
we will win the best elements..."

"The mentality of the working
class is backward, but the men-
tality is not such a substance as
the factories, the mines, the rail-
roads. It is more mobile and
under the blows of the objective
crisis, the millions of unem-
ployed, it can change rapidly."

Review

Improper conduct

Edward Ellis reviews 'Improper Conduct', a film by Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez Leal (Spanish and French with English subtitles) ICA Cinema, London.

THE American 'Militant', which — nominally at least — is associated with 'Socialist Action' in Britain, said of this film that it was "designed to promote the imperialist war drive against Cuba". It is, they say, "a counter-revolutionary propaganda tract."

The film consists of a series of interviews with Cuban exiles and an interview with American writer Susan Sontag. It is intended to be a blistering attack on the Cuban regime's treatment of intellectuals, artists and — most notoriously — homosexuals.

Some of the personal stories are poignant. A young gay man describes his many arrests in Cuba before he finally managed to emigrate. An ex-prisoner recalls how a 12-year old boy was thrown into jail, raped, classified as homosexual: he cried for his mother all day in the next cell.

Jean-Paul Sartre is quoted as having said: "In Cuba there are no Jews but there are homosexuals". And this sums up the message of the film — that lesbians and gay men suffer the brunt of oppression in Cuba; and — in many respects a more dominant theme of the film — that the charge of homosexual is a stigma to be used against all dissidents.

Although the film has generally been treated as a 'gay film', it is in fact an indictment of Castro's Cuba altogether — it sees the Cuban Revolution as having betrayed its promise, and Castro as having sold Cuba into a new slavery.

Consequently, it has proved extremely controversial. Many — including the Cuban Communist Party itself — have denounced the film as consisting simply of lies.

Camps

Victims speak of their time in 'UMAP' camps — little better than concentration camps, where many gay people were sent in the 1960s. These no longer exist; and the film's critics object to its claim that similar places continue under a new name.

An ex-courier describes the absurd deception practiced by official tours of Cuba. The film's critics protest that any visit to the country would disprove his claims. And so on.

It is certainly true that some of the claims made do seem a little improbable. The idea that Raul Castro would need detailed advice from the Bulgarian Communist Party on how to set up camps for homosexuals, is silly, for example: if the Cuban authorities are that bad, presumably they could work it out by themselves.

But the argument that the film is "designed to promote the imperialist war drive" is far more unconvincing than even the wildest assertions made in the film.

Some of those interviewed are bourgeois exiles, for whom it is difficult to feel much sympathy. Others are not. Expanding artistic figures, writers, journalists, who had supported — indeed been part of — the Revolution, speak out. What about them? Why should they all be liars?

A young woman intellectual, whose aim had been to radicalise the Revolution (which she regarded as 'petty bourgeois'), not turn against it, speaks of her shock at discovering the extent of hidden persecution. She was arrested for associating with 'individualists'.

One young exile in the US makes a telling point: "We [the exiles] are all supposed to be delinquents. If we are — who made us delinquents? Cuban society made us delinquents."

Equally telling is a scene of a huge Congress — a unanimous vote for; no abstentions; no votes against.

And even the film's fiercest critics, like the American 'Militant', cannot deny that lesbians and gay men do suffer oppression and persecution in Cuba. The most that they can claim is that it's a legacy of capitalism.

But it is a fact that homosexuality is illegal in Cuba. And whether things are better than in the 1960s or not, the persecution gay people face is still notorious. There can be no doubt that a large part of this film deals with the truth.

Clearly, the makers of the film do not consider themselves 'friendly critics' of Castro's Cuba. They are extremely hostile.

Pro-imperialist?

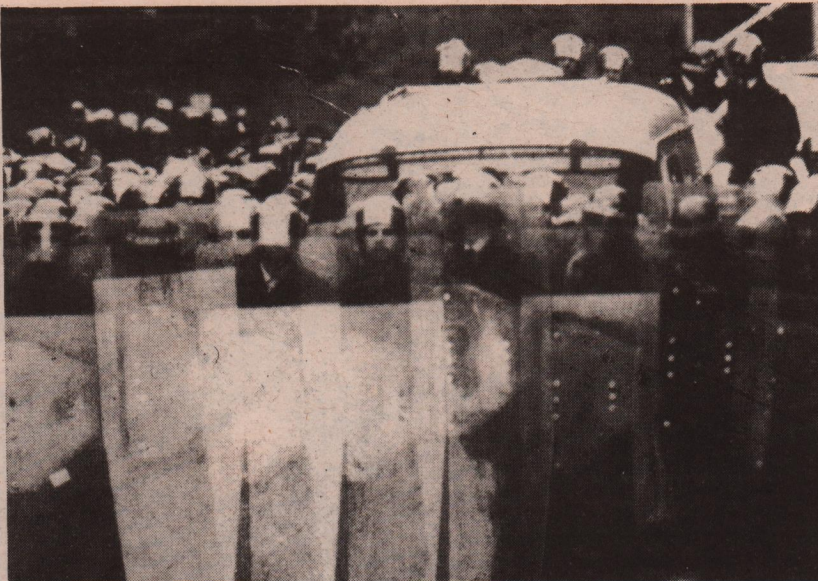
But why "pro-imperialists" should choose to hang their attack on Cuba around a defence of oppressed gays is a mystery.

There is nothing in this film to suggest that Cuba was better before the Revolution, that other countries are better or anything like that. Its message is simply that the Cuban Revolution has gone off the rails. Those who have heaped abuse on the film in the name of 'defending the revolution' are like the 'friends of the USSR' in the 1930s, who denied the existence of repression and joined the Stalinists to accuse those who told the truth of being 'counter-revolutionaries' and 'fascists'.

They are equally sycophantic and pathetic. Like Stalin's apologists they prove to be very bad friends of the Cuban Revolution, and the people who suffer under Stalinist tyranny. To tell the truth is a revolutionary act.



Castro



(Left) police prepare to charge at pickets. Photo, John Harris. (Right) victims of police violence in Northern Ireland. Photo: I.D. Swindale.



Violence and hypocrisy Irish lessons

THE distortion, hypocrisy and straightforward lies published by all the papers and reproduced daily on TV during the miners' strike have been well prepared for over the last 16 years in Ireland.

In the six occupied counties of the north-east of Ireland, a vicious and bloodthirsty police force has been portrayed as the protector of law and order, and Catholic victims of Republican violence have been used by the media to justify British rule which has callously murdered and systematically intimidated many more Catholic victims.

Paisley

While the more extreme Loyalist leaders, like Ian Paisley and George Seawright (who called for Catholics to be incarcerated!) are either playfully ridiculed or ignored, the protected bigotry of their supporters is used as the clinching argument against all those who suggest any progressive changes in Ireland.

At a time when the Tories, their media and right wing Labour politicians use the catch-phrases of democracy, the rule of law, non-violence and justice against the miners, Northern Ireland gives us a measure of how serious they are about these principles.

Undemocratic

The state of Northern Ireland is a more undemocratic unit than any trade union. It is a more uneconomic, subsidised pit than any British coal mine. And it has been willing to dispense with British legal norms long before the most militant labour leader.

But those who have tried to bring attention to this have been beaten off the streets, first by Northern Ireland's B Specials in 1968 and ever since by the RUC and the British Army.

Those who protest about the blatant discrimination in the legal system, the non-Jury courts and the endless periods on remand, often find themselves called up before the same Loyalist judges to face the same trumped-up charges after the same painful experience on remand. If the miners are now experiencing "supermarket justice" which will be used against all trade unionists in the future, it's about time we began to impose sanctions on the parent company and supplier of this supermarket, Northern Ireland.

Obviously Northern Ireland is an uneconomic unit which the Tory government supports. Mrs Thatcher is especially keen to state her personal commitment to the most undemocratic union of all, the union between Britain and Northern Ireland. The British Army, the Ulster

Defence Regiment and the RUC are deployed at fantastic expense to ensure the continuing life of this particular uneconomic pit.

Those who argue that this state is unviable and uneconomic are branded as supporters of terrorism. The Republican movement claims that all of Ireland's people have the right to determine their own future.

This government and previous Tory and Labour governments in Britain have denied that right.

As a matter of fact, successive British governments have been acting in total contempt of a national ballot held in 1918. The last national ballot permitted in Ireland returned a massive majority of candidates, 78%, committed to the independence of Ireland from Britain. Two years later, the British Liberal government led by Lloyd George ignored that ballot and partitioned Ireland, creating a Catholic state in the south and a Loyalist Orange siege state in the north-east.

Why? Home Rule had overwhelming electoral support in Ireland — and a sympathetic Liberal government in Britain. The Liberal government had even put a Home Rule Bill through Westminster in 1914 — all entirely legal, parliamentary and constitutional.

Violence

But the Liberals retreated in the face of threats of violence from Loyalists in Ulster, supported by influential sections of the Tory Party. Andrew Bonar Law, then leader of the Tory party, summed up their attitude when he threatened the Liberal and Nationalist Home Rulers, saying: "There are things stronger than Parliamentary majorities".

He encouraged Ulster Loyalists to take up arms. The Tories also applauded a mutiny by British Army officers in Ireland when those officers told the government they would not enforce Home Rule.

A national ballot overruled by the intimidation of a small minority supported by political extremists? As Mrs Thatcher so eloquently put it, it just isn't British. And I suppose she's right, it isn't British.

Colonialist

It's partly American, partly French, Portuguese, Spanish and partly British. It's imperialist, it's colonialist, it's good old-fashioned class warfare and the subjugation of small nations by the "bully-boy" tactics of the

powerful capitalist states. Those who defend capitalism defend a system which inevitably produces and even encourages violence against and among the poor and the working class. If this violence is used to fight wars against the poor and working class of other countries, it is 'patriotic'.

If it is used amongst ourselves, at football matches, against old people, in the home, it is a scandal for the press to be indignant about (and seek scapegoats for), but nothing is done to tackle its causes.

And if working class violence is organised and used against the state and for our own defence, then it is "just not British" and it is ruthlessly and efficiently crushed.

Today the Irish republican movement is trying to force democracy on an unwilling British administration. The majority of the Irish people are trying to enforce the results of their 'national ballot' and free themselves of British rule.

Their methods are not always what ours would be, and certainly the conditions in which they operate are much worse. Their politics are nationalist, but not nearly so narrowly nationalist and patriotic as the loyal British labour movement.

We cannot proceed by trying to establish exactly what kind of Ireland is being fought for or is most likely — a capitalist or socialist Ireland — and decide whether to support them on that basis. What those people who fight against partition and against British rule in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland by whatever means want, is the right of the Irish people as a whole to decide their own future.

So when the battle is between the army and government of Britain and the organised, desperate working class of the Catholic ghettos in Northern Ireland we wholly and unashamedly stand with the Catholic community.

There is nothing whatever undemocratic, unprincipled, "terrorist" or extremist about supporting the republican movement.

Forget the hypocritical rantings of "concerned" politicians and remember instead our own experiences of the media's biased reporting, of the police 'keeping the peace', the judges enforcing the law with justice, and the feeling of anger and militancy that grows in communities constantly under attack.

Then decide, independently, whether it is outrageous and extreme for working class people to fight back for their own survival.

.....
BLOODY SUNDAY
commemoration

Sunday February 3. Assemble 12 noon at Spinney Hill Park, Leicester. March to Leicester Prison.
.....

International

Bolivia: a disaster area for capitalism

The Bolivian workers' movement has a long and militant history. In the revolution of 1952 it came close to seizing power. It has fought bitter struggles against several dictatorships; and now it is fighting a floundering and corrupt capitalist government. Clive Bradley looks at the two general strikes at the end of last year.

TWO GENERAL STRIKES ROCKED Bolivia at the end of 1984. For a total of two weeks, with a brief break, the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) — a sort of Bolivian TUC — organised massive and militant national strike action against government economic austerity measures.

The increasingly unpopular and isolated government of Hernan Siles Zuazo faces a terrible economic crisis — possibly the most chaotic in the world. Inflation has rocketed to nearly 1500% and the Bolivian peso has declined 7000% in value in the two years since Siles came to power. As one observer commented: "To change \$100 dollars into pesos you need to take a shoebox with you."

The government is now facing a squeeze between its international creditors and the well-organised and militant workers movement.

Standards

Workers' living standards have suffered terribly from the crisis. Wages have gone up 300% since 1982 — but real wages have fallen 20-30%. According to some reports, in the capital of La Paz it is currently impossible to buy bread, meat or milk.

Bolivia is an extremely poor country: Gross Domestic Product per head is some nine times less than in Britain, for example. It is consequently very vulnerable to fluctuations in the world economy: if the world sneezes, Bolivia gets pneumonia.

High US interest rates have taken their toll on Bolivia. The growth of an inefficient, bureaucratic and corrupt service sector under previous regimes has exacerbated basic problems. Agriculture, mining, hydrocarbons and manufacturing taken together have declined from 55% before Siles' election to a mere 40% of GDP.

Droughts and floods have cut agricultural production by 25%.

Massive armies of middlemen worsen the problems for ordinary people: for example, market-garden produce could increase ten times in price by the time it is finally sold after going through all the middlemen.

Argentina still owes \$210 million for Bolivian natural gas — which does not help. And, most serious for export earnings, the price of tin — upon which the Bolivian economy is heavily reliant — has



Juan Lechin, COB leader



Guillermo Lora, long-time Trotskyist leader of Bolivian miners

declined rapidly over recent years.

Siles' government was forced to declare a moratorium on payments of \$780 million in commercial and foreign debts last May. As its economic problems deepened, threats from left and right increased: in June there was an abortive coup attempt; the COB threatened fiercely to resist any anti-working class austerity programme.

Resignations

In October, the cabinet resigned en masse. By the end of the year, two crucial 'balancing' components of the Popular Democratic Union (UDP) government — the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party — had withdrawn their support.

Siles' government, from being almost universally welcomed when it replaced the military in 1982, had become widely hated. The COB organised hunger marches under the slogan 'Orange is starving us' — orange being the UDP colour. By autumn 1984, workers and

peasants had begun to take the law decisively into their own hands. To force the government to build a road or bridge, peasants would take hostages. Oil workers took hostages to win a pay increase. Bank workers ignored government currency devaluations which had a bad effect on the poor.

To win a pay increase, water workers cut off supplies to the presidential palace.

COB leader Juan Lechin described the Siles government as "the most incompetent in Bolivian history". But in late October, accusations of incompetence were supplemented by a scandal.

Possibly the largest single earner of foreign exchange in Bolivia is its illegal cocaine industry. And it turned out that the president had been secretly negotiating with "Cocaine King" Roberto Suarez for a \$2 billion loan!

The so-called Otazo affair threatened to develop into a Bolivian Watergate: Congress censured Siles.

Siles regained some popular-

ity by embarking on a six-day hunger strike (a tactic for which he is famous). Eventually the Church intervened to arrange a compromise.

In response to criticisms, Siles Zuazo commented laconically: "Disorder prevails, it's true." And he argued that chaos is better than the method of previous Bolivian governments: massacre.

Indeed, for many Bolivian workers, the President had a point. One-time Trotskyist Filoman Escobar proclaimed that the slogan "Down with Siles!" was tantamount to "Up with Banzer!" (Bolivia's vicious dictator between 1971 and 1978).

Lechin — a member of a front in the COB called the Unified Revolutionary Leadership (DRU), which includes a small sister-group to Socialist Action — put it differently: "The present government is a lesser evil because the only alternative to Siles Zuazo is another Siles Zuazo... Any government... would do exactly what this one intends to do."

COB declaration

The COB adopted a declaration to stand by the democratic regime. In the statement put out when the general strike was launched, its fifth point declared that in the event of a coup, the strike would be transformed into an indefinite strike and road blockade. Big strikes had begun in La Paz and several important mining districts on November 10.

In the event, the first general strike in mid-November was called off because of fears of a coup (see Socialist Organiser no. 207). But the COB rejected the government offer of a 330% across-the-board pay rise, and called for a new strike.

The second strike was launched on November 28. As the COB organised a national walk-out with broad support, the Peasants' Confederation organised a national road blockade — a basic method of struggle in the countryside — in support.

On the night of the 28th, the Federation of Radio and Television workers halted all scheduled broadcasts. Instead they established a network of "union and popular stations" to report on the strike.

Co-management with worker majorities — a briefly-held gain of the 1952 revolution — was re-established in the state-owned tin mines.

The strike was called off on December 5, following 750% wage increases, and a government pledge to freeze indefinitely the prices of basic foods.

It was not an unqualified victory — its achievements are quite limited — but it was more successful than the earlier strike. After November 23, the government had increased food prices 300%, devalued the peso by 70% and increased fuel prices by up to 1000%.

The fact that the strike wave did not die down indicates the continuing explosiveness of the situation. A recent book on Bolivia concluded that the prospects for socialist revolution there may be greater than anywhere else in the world.

Brazil: army steps back



BRAZIL is joining the growing list of Latin American countries returning to civilian rule. The electoral college responsible for the transition chose the new civilian president on Thursday January 15.

Tancredo Neves, the opposition candidate, beat the government party candidate, Paulo Maluf, by a big margin.

Neves, who will take over from the army in March, represents the recently formed Democratic Alliance — the main force within which is the bourgeois Brazilian Democratic Movement party (PMDB), and to a lesser extent the Communist Party (CP).

Transition

The Democratic Alliance are celebrating the successful and peaceful transition. A Brazilian news magazine, *Veja*, revealed a military plot to mount a coup should Neves — who in their eyes is a communist pawn — win the election. Steps were taken to organise resistance. So far, Neves' victory has not met with any threats of military intervention.

Neves, for his part, has been attempting to conciliate every class in Brazilian society. He has promised direct elections in the future, and "urgent and courageous political, social and economic reforms indispensable to the wellbeing of the people".

Neves is a long-standing figure in liberal bourgeois

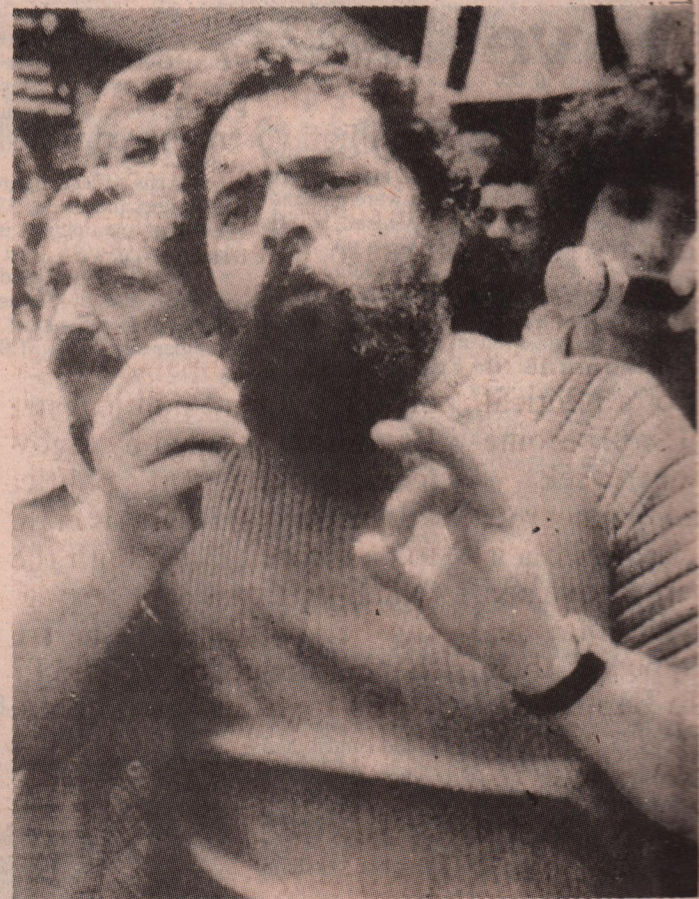
politics in Brazil. He was Prime minister in the populist administration of Joao Goulart, overthrown in 1964 by the army. Before that he was a protege of Juscelino Kubitschek, the 'modernising dictator' of the 1950s.

The new and in many respects remarkable Workers' Party (PT) has been discussing for some time the issue of a 'sole candidate of the opposition', urged by the PMDB and the CP. The official position of the PT has been to boycott the electoral college as an unrepresentative sham, and not to support bourgeois candidates. In the event, PT representatives in the National Assembly broke the line and voted for Neves. It remains to be seen how the PT will develop with the PMDB effectively in power.

Mess

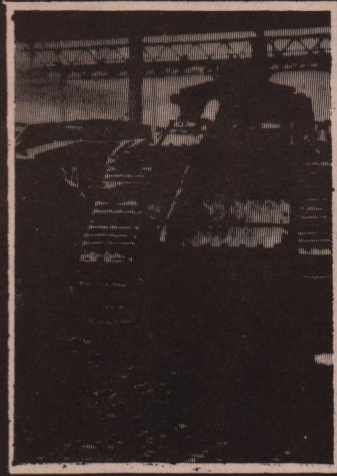
Brazil's economy is in a mess. At \$96 billion, its foreign debt is the largest in the world; and Brazil goes through periodic crises with the IMF. Inflation stands at 200% and continues to rise. And in the north-east there is a terrible famine, threatening the lives of millions of people.

Undoubtedly the passing away of the dictatorship — in power since 1964 — will have a profound effect on Brazil's increasingly powerful workers' movement. Expectations will be high; and Neves may well have a fight on his hands.



Lula — militant metalworkers' leader and leader of the Workers' Party

Stop Deportations!
Muhammed Idrish must stay!
NALGO National Day of Action against
Deportations
January 30
Assemble 12 noon at Booth Street Recreation
Ground, Handsworth, Birmingham
March to Central Hall, City Centre, for rally



Revolt on the Clyde

In the last three SOs Michael Farrell told the story of the great Belfast shipyard workers' strike of 1919. This week we begin serialising an account by Stan Croke of that strike in Glasgow.

SIXTY-FIVE years ago Glasgow was in the grip of a general strike. Although the strike began with the limited demand of a cut in the working week, it raised — as general strikes do by their very nature — the question of power in society. The strike leaders saw the strike purely in terms of a fight for the 40 hour week, but the press treated it as a threat to the capitalist order of society itself. And for once the press was right.

The strike was a continuation of struggles which had rocked Glasgow throughout the war. Elsewhere, the combativity of the working class had been diminished by the ruling classes' propaganda about the need not to let down "the boys at the front" during the war.

But in Glasgow this line didn't work. "By November 1914", wrote Willie Gallacher, one of the leaders of the 1919 strike, "the campaign against the war, against high prices and rents, and for increased wages was in full blast. Housewives as well as factory workers were being brought into political activity".

Engineers

In February 1915, 9,000 engineers struck for a tuppence an hour increase; a few months later the shipyards were shut down by a strike against measures contained in the new "Munitions of War Act"; then the engineers were out on strike again, in opposition to the victimisation of the convenor at Farkhead orge.

Internlinked with these struggles on the industrial front, a bitter campaign was being waged against massive rent increases which landlords were demanding. Rent strikes were organised, bailiffs coming to evict tenants were physically driven off, and when over 10,000 workers struck against the eviction of 18 munitions workers for non-payment of rent, the government was forced to back down and rush the Rent Restriction Act through Parliament.

Events in Ireland and Russia also contributed to the build-up of militancy.

"War waged by the oppressed nationalities against the oppressors and the class war of the proletariat against capital... is the swiftest, safest and most peaceful form of constructive work the socialist can engage in," James Connolly told the May Day rally in Glasgow in 1915.

The murder of Connolly a year later by the British state for his part in the Easter Uprising in Dublin, unleashed a wave of anger in Glasgow, especially in sections of the Irish community, and contributed to the general bitterness against a government which was not only attacking living standards and sending millions of youth to their deaths at the front, but now also brutally crushing Ireland.

And the revolutions in Russia in February and October 1917 led to euphoria on the Clydeside, with massive meetings and demonstrations being held in support of the overthrow of Tsarism and then of capitalism.

"Here we were in the earliest months of 1917 with the greatest masses of Glasgow aroused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm... How is it possible to describe those hectic days and the never-ending stream of activity that was carried on?" writes Gallacher, describing the reaction to the February revolution.

Harry McShane describes the political impact on Glasgow made by the Bolshevik seizure of power: "We had only known working class revolt; now we could talk about working class power."

Material conditions for working class families were grim by the end of 1918.

Wages had failed to keep up with wartime inflation; Glasgow had always suffered from slums; during the war however, housebuilding and repairs had practically ceased, leading to a shortage of accommodation and worse slums than ever.

Before 1914 the working week had been 54 hours, which meant starting at 6 a.m. and finishing at 5.30 p.m. and working till noon on Saturdays. During the war this was extended to a 12 hour day, plus Saturday and Sunday working.

How many were unemployed in Glas-

"... The year 1919 ... The entire structure of European imperialism tottered under the blows of the greatest mass struggles of the proletariat in history and ... we daily expected the news of the proclamation of the soviet Republic in Germany, France, England (and) in Italy ... The bourgeoisie was at its wits' end. The year 1919 was the most critical year in the history of the European bourgeoisie ...

"... Lacking was an organisation at the head of the proletariat, capable of utilising the situation for nothing else but the direct organisational and technical preparation of an uprising, of the overturn, the seizure of power and so forth — this is what was lacking."

gow at this time is impossible to estimate since even fewer of the real unemployed were registered as such than now: benefit was only paid out for six weeks and after that there was little point in continuing to register.

But the official figures for the period do reflect the trend: 17,000 were registered as unemployed in Glasgow in the last week of 1918. Just a week later the number had increased nearly 50% to 25,000. And by January 24 1919, the Friday before the start of the strike, the number was nearly 31,000. In four weeks



Bolshevik demonstration 1917. The seizure of power by the Russian working class was a great inspiration to militants elsewhere

unemployment had virtually doubled.

An edition of the Strike Bulletin, the daily broadsheet produced during the strike, describes what unemployment meant: "The workers dread unemployment as worse than epidemic of fever. We know what it means — low wages, hunger, soup kitchens, doles, evictions,

the revolutions in Russia, fused with the spontaneous revolt of the workers condemned by capitalism to slum housing and either mass unemployment or long hours of work at rock-bottom wages.

Clyde Workers

On Saturday, January 18, 500 delegates attended a meeting jointly organised by the Clyde Workers Committee, which had played a leading role in organising the war-time struggles, the Glasgow Trades Council (which at that time had delegates from both union and Labour Party branches) the Scottish TUC, and the district committee of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. The following motion was overwhelmingly passed:

"The Joint Committee... hereby resolves to demand a 40 hour working week for all workers as an experiment with the object of absorbing the unemployed. If a 40 hour week fails to give the desired result a more drastic reduction of hours will be demanded. A general strike has been declared to take place on Monday January 27 and all workers are expected to respond."

In the following week, workplace meetings were held throughout Glasgow to organise support for the strike, and in some places the workforce had to be persuaded to wait until January, 27

Trotsky, The first five years of the Communist International, vol 2, p.193.

fireless grates, ragged clothes, weeping children, frantic women, desperate men... Unemployment is the Workers' Hell, and it is into that Hell those who oppose the 40 hours' week want to drive us."

In January 1919 the Glasgow labour movement rose up in revolt against such intolerable burdens. The wartime tradition of militancy, which neither government legislation nor the hysterical jingoism of the yellow press had succeeded in breaking, boosted by the war against the British state in Ireland and



I.L.P. leader John Wheatley addresses a May Day rally in Glasgow

before coming out. On the Monday the response was overwhelming: all the main factories were shut down and a mass meeting of the strikers in St Andrews Hall passed a motion pledging no return to work until a 40 hour week with no loss of pay had been won.

After the meeting, a demonstration (30,000 strong according to Gallacher, 10,000 strong according to the Glasgow Evening Times) marched through the city centre to a rally in George Square. The Evening Times report describes what happened: "A few enthusiasts, who had a red flag in their possession, hoisted it to the top of the flag pole in front of the Municipal Buildings. The raising of the flag was greeted with loud outbursts of cheering".

The hoisting of the workers' flag over the buildings of the local authorities was an unconsciously symbolic act. The "few enthusiasts" little realised that they were giving expression to the internal logic of the general strike beginning that day: the strike was a challenge to the capitalist authorities which could result either in utter defeat or the overthrow of bourgeois rule. The tragic thing is that the leaders of the strike did not realise this either.

Right from the outset the strike challenged and denied the agents of bourgeois rule their "right" to administer and control society. In everyday capitalist society, for example, production and distribution of goods, the maintenance of "law and order", the circulation of traffic, etc., are in the hands of agents of the ruling classes. But in Glasgow 1919 the strike movement established its own rule and administration, challenging and replacing those of the bourgeoisie.

This was most obvious in the sphere of production. By definition a strike and in particular a general strike, brings production to a halt and thereby disrupts the normal functioning of capitalist society. But at the same time vital services, such as medical facilities or food supplies, have to be maintained and the working class establishes its own organisation and authorities to do this.

Glasgow 1919 and the simultaneous solidarity strike in Belfast, were clear examples of this.

Most of industry, in particular engineering and shipbuilding, were shut down by the strike and by the third day of the strike over 40,000 workers were on strike in Glasgow. But at the same time the strike movement established certain categories of exemption: all workers in "infirmaries, hospitals and similar institutions" were instructed to remain at work, and "maimed and disabled ex-soldiers" were given the option of doing so as well, if they wanted to.

Exemptions

Other categories of exemption established by the strike movement included all workers "employed in the manufacture of artificial limbs" and drivers conveying fuel for schools. A report from a trade-unionist in Belfast describing the strike there, published in the Strike Bulletin, brings out the power of a general strike, even when confined to one area:

"The Strike Committee decides which cramen are to work at the unloading of coal-boats; gives permission, under stipulations, for the taking of ships out of dry-dock; receives applications for electric current and refuses some, but allows hospitals to take current for X-ray purposes and for light at night... In short, the Strike Committee is master of the situation in Belfast and is exercising its power with firmness and moderation."

And nor was it "just" the sphere of production that was re-organised under the rule of the general strike. The whole concept of the private ownership of land and property was challenged by the rent strike which was organised in parallel with, and inseparably from, the industrial strike.

At the St Andrews Hall meeting the following motion had been passed without opposition: "that no rent or income tax shall be paid until a satisfactory settlement of the demand for a 40 hour week has been come to", and the motion was widely publicised through the Strike Bulletin to help ensure its implementation.

The same methods were used during the strike as during the war to prevent evictions. Appeals against the eviction were made to the courts to slow up the procedure and gain time to organise, so that when the bailiffs turned up to carry out the evictions, they could be physically prevented from doing so: "Mass pickets don't like evictions, and sheriff officers don't like mass pickets. Sit tight".

SCIENCE

Treating haemophilia

By Les Hearn

Haemophilia, a genetic disease in which bleeding continues for hours, is caused by a mutation in the genetic code for a single protein, Factor 8, (F8), rendering it useless and halting the process of blood clotting.

This disease, affecting males almost exclusively, would formerly have meant a fairly sickly and miserable existence, with death by about 20.

However, since 1950 it has been possible to extract F8 from donated blood and inject it into haemophiliacs.

Unfortunately, this carries the risk of infection by viruses carried by donors, such as hepatitis, or more sensationally but rarely, AIDS.

So far, two haemophiliacs in Britain have died from AIDS, out of some five to ten thousand sufferers.

Stopping imports of American blood and improved screening here may help, but now genetic engineers may be able to offer hope of safer F8.

In one of the most impressive projects to date, small amounts of F8 have been produced in San Francisco and Boston from an engineered gene. Here's how it was done:

In order to identify the gene for F8, scientists made a small piece of matching DNA after

working out the code for a known part of the F8 protein (see accompanying article). They found out which part of the human DNA this piece stuck to.

They ended up with a gigantic gene — far bigger than necessary to code for F8. Many genes contain long stretches of "non-sense" that get left out in the normal process of making messenger RNA (MNRA). But there was no guarantee that the artificial system would do this, so the researchers had to make an artificial gene with no non-sense.

To do this, they first needed some F8 MNRA. They found that just one of about 80 different lines of cells commonly grown in laboratories was making F8 MNRA. This was a cancerous white blood cell line.

They extracted the MRNA and made a matching piece of DNA. This artificial gene turned out to be one-twentieth of the size of the natural gene.

The researchers inserted the gene into an immortal line of hamster kidney cells and found the cells to be making F8.

Before it can be used to treat haemophiliacs, this F8 must be shown to be identical to the natural stuff and to be free of infection. But genetically engineered F8 could be available in just three years.

What is DNA?

The Double Helix — What is DNA?

A fertilised egg consists of many types of chemical molecule. Some of these fulfil the function of a code that carries the information to enable the egg to make all the proteins necessary to feed, grow, protect and reproduce itself.

The information-containing molecules are known as deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and human cells usually contain 46 such molecules, called chromosomes.

DNA is constructed like a spiralling ladder or double helix. The code is in the rungs, while the sides merely support these rungs and keep them in the right order.

The rungs are in two parts. One half may be one of four chemical sub-units or bases: A, T, G or C. Each base has its

own shape and properties so it can be recognised.

The code is read in groups of three bases, or codons, like three-letter words. There are 64 possible codons, each corresponding to one of the 20 sub-units (amino-acids) of proteins.

A gene is a series of codons that corresponds to a complete protein. To make a protein, a copy of the gene is made out of a related chemical, RNA. This "messenger" RNA (mRNA) is translated into protein.

I haven't mentioned the other half of the rungs, because they contain no further information.

If you have an A, the other half has to be a T; a G goes with a C; and vice versa.

The purpose of the other half is probably to make the DNA more robust. Try climbing a one-sided ladder and you will find it quite easy to damage or "mutate"!

NALGO stand on Tory plans

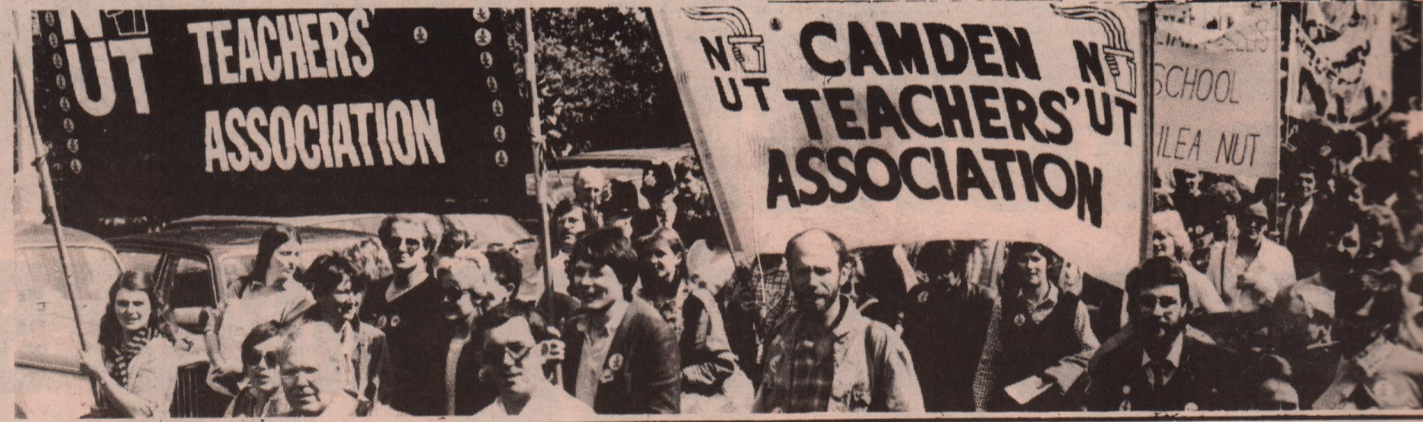
Greater Manchester NALGO's policy of not co-operating with abolition in any way at all was recently reaffirmed by NALGO members at Greater Manchester Council. NALGO therefore instructed its members not to comply with a request for information from Trafford Council, risking legal action.

Trafford Council didn't push it and has promised not to take legal action against its members who are refusing to provide Trafford with information which would help them abolish the Greater Manchester Council.

Mike Ash-Ewards, NALGO's Campaign Chair said "Our members will not give this information to Trafford and Bury. The majority of District Councils in Greater Manchester believe that abolition will damage the provision of services in Greater Manchester. We believe that Trafford and Bury should be protecting the interests of the people they represent by urging the government not to pursue this legislation which will cause great damage to services in Greater Manchester. If they do not, they will have to share the blame for the chaos and expense which will inevitably result in 1986."



Teachers' one-day strike, May 1984.



After the pound crisis, a dollar slump?

By Chris Reynolds

WHY has the pound been sliding downwards, and why the panic last week?

The decline of the pound reflects the relative decline of British capitalism. £1 bought \$4 or more until August 1949; about \$2.80 until November 1967; then \$2.40; and it now buys about \$1.11.

In the early years of the Thatcher government, the pound bucked this long-term trend with a sharp rise, reaching \$2.42 in October 1980. That was caused by the Tories' tight monetary policy and high interest rates: they kept pounds in short supply and thus upped the pound's "price" in terms of other currencies.

Since the end of 1980 the pound has been falling. Factors behind this are the enormous outflow of capital from Britain since the Tories abolished exchange controls; the decline of the dollar price of oil; and the accelerated decline of British manufacturing.

Oil accounts for some 20% of Britain's exports and 6% of gross domestic product. It is especially important, however, because it is about the only dynamic sector of Britain's exports. As recently as the early '60s, Britain exported twice as many manufactured goods as it imported: in the first nine months of 1984 Britain had a

deficit of £5.4 billion on trade in manufactures.

Despite all that, the decline of the pound did not worry the Tories. Rather the contrary. Its inflationary effects (through raised pound prices of imports) were limited. It made British exports more competitive — and thus slowed their decline — because foreigners buying British goods could buy the British money to pay for them at cut rates — e.g. the Americans get more pounds for a dollar.

And it increased oil revenue. World oil prices are set in dollars. While they have been going down in dollars, they have been going up quite smartly in pounds.

What happened last week — it seems — is that the decline snowballed because of speculation. If speculators think that a currency is going down, then they will sell it — and thus make it go down even faster. The Tories were happy with a slow decline of the pound, but not with a snowballing collapse. So they intervened.

The miners' strike was a factor: it has pushed the balance of payments into deficit, and messed up the Tories' plans on public spending and the money supply. And, to be sure, the conditions are being prepared for a tremendous crisis when oil production decreases (as it will start to do, probably, from 1986). But that crisis is not with us yet.

NUT strategy

By Cheung Siu Ming

A strategy of action on teachers' pay was mapped out at the conference on January 19 called by East London and Lambeth NUT Associations. Other Associations who sent delegates included Barking, Harrow, Hull, North Tyneside, Leicester (City), Wandsworth, Southwark and Westminster. Delegates will be going back to their branches to put pressure on the NUT leadership to start a real fight over this year's pay claim.

The conference began with a discussion of the miners' strike led by South Wales miners based at the Lambeth Miners' Support Committee. Delegates recognised that the outcome of this year's pay fight will be heavily shaped by the outcome of the miners' strike and the struggle over rate-capping.

A model resolution to take back to Associations and Divisions of the union was drawn up. It calls for strong opposition to Keith Joseph's plans of teacher assessment and the employers' attempt to force teachers to accept worsened working conditions as part of a pay deal involving restructuring salary scales.

The teachers' claim drawn up by the two main unions, the NUT and the NAS/UWT seeks a new basic scale from £7250 to £15,250 to replace the existing four scales, with every teacher receiving at least a £1200 increase on assimilating to the new scale. But neither union has started action over this claim. The NUT leadership has refused to implement the timetable of

action agreed to at the special salaries conference back in September.

The conference called for a common approach between the two traditionally rival union leaderships. It called on the NUT leaders to organise action, starting with a national one-day strike, if no progress is made at the next round of pay talks in the Burnham Committee on January 28; to organise a levy at once to build up the strike fund; to authorise no cover action immediately and to seek maximum unity with other public sector unions on pay. Delegates agreed that the union will have to escalate its action to a national extended strike, but that this will mean winning the argument in the union to reduce the level of strike pay which at present is 100%!

The conference also agreed to mobilise members and to seek national union backing for strike action on February 11 called by regional TUCs in support of the miners.

Finally, plans were made to mobilise for the regional union meetings to be held in early February after the next pay talks, and to organise a recall conference on March 10. For the first time in many years, just as there has been some potential of a united stand by the two unions, so there has been the prospect of a united left campaign in the NUT. Already sections of the NUT left have joined forces in support of the miners; after this conference the impact of a united left on all levels of the NUT will be much greater than in previous years.

Review

SWP's turn

OVER the last few years the Socialist Workers Party has presented itself as the hard, dour, orthodox Marxist party in the labour movement — the opposite pole to what it disdainfully called the "swamp" of the Labour left and the trade union Broad Lefts.

A sudden U-turn in recent months has seen it earnestly seeking a "united front" with that "swamp".

The SWP, once proud of their "splendid isolation", are now the loudest partisans of broad left unity.

Stan Croke's pamphlet looks at this turn in the perspective of the SWP's history. Many SWPers may be surprised to know that in the early '60s the IS group (forerunner of the SWP) was in the Labour Party and presented itself very differently — as flexible, modest, relaxed, hostile to orthodoxy, and less abrasive than the "Trotskyists" and "Leninists". Until 1968 they were explicitly anti-Leninist.

With great polemical gusto, Stan Croke traces and explains the common threads which run through and regulate the IS/SWP's twists and turns.

"Socialist Workers Party 1985 — One Bad Turn Deserves Another".

Pamphlet produced by Glasgow Socialist Organiser. Price (including postage): 1 copy 45p; 2 copies 80p; 5 copies £2.00.

Cheques/postal orders payable to Socialist Organiser Available from Stan Croke, 63 Dixon Ave., Glasgow G42

Socialist Organiser

GCHQ one year on

By Steve Battlemuch

FRIDAY January 25 sees the first anniversary of the government ban on trade unionism at GCHQ Cheltenham.

The day will see major rallies in most towns and cities.

The Nottingham rally will have the pleasure of Alistair Graham, CPSA's infamous general secretary, flanked by a miner and miner's wife!

The CPSA Notts Area Committee have decided to put out a leaflet explaining CPSA policy, just in case Alistair forgets.

The following day, Saturday 26th, will see a massive march and rally headed by Norman Willis and Neil Kinnock through Cheltenham. There is also a march and rally in Scotland.

This is obviously a safe issue — banning of unions — compared to the miners' strike. What civil service trade union activists will be looking for will be a speech from Willis calling for a general strike if any union member is sacked for refusing to give up their union membership and Kinnock to pledge that Labour will not only reinstate trade unions but also reinstate the right to strike.

A commitment to unconditionally support the miners would also be welcomed as we cannot have much faith in action about GCHQ if we

judge them by their support for the miners.

The official campaign, spearheaded by the Council of Civil Service Unions — a club of civil service union general secretaries — has been totally useless. It was run by Lord Len Murray, Alistair Graham and Co and proved to the trade union movement that "New Realism" doesn't beat the government.

They started by discouraging industrial action, attacking the CPSA branch secretary at GCHQ, and taking out any controversial demands, i.e. the right to strike.

They offered the government everything but wanted to keep the right to collect membership subs from the members. Still Thatcher kicked them in the teeth. New Realism certainly proved its worth to the movement.

'No strike'

Later in the year, the CPSA and SCPS conferences threw out 'no strike' deals but this has been lost on the bureaucracy whose only answer has been to use every court in the land to try and beat Thatcher. Will they ever learn? The judicial system is no friend of the labour movement. To restore trade union rights, industrial action is needed. The leaders must be forced to act if any member is sacked.



Picket at Monktonhall. Photo: Rick Matthews, IFL.

Kinnock and the miners

IF THE attempt by left wing Labour MPs to get the House of Commons to debate the miners' strike had damaged the Labour Party, said Eric Heffer last week, then the responsibility lay with "those who have turned the event into an internal Labour Party squabble".

It was Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley who did that. Instead of joining Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner and 13 other MPs in demanding the right to put the miners' case in the Commons, the Party's leaders turned on the 15, accusing them of being 'unruly' and disruptive.

Heffer hit the nail right on the

It was big news last week when Neil Kinnock denounced 15 Labour MPs for protesting in the House of Commons at the Tories' refusal to debate the miners' strike. Jack Cleary reports

head. The truth is that Kinnock and the right wing are more sensitive to even the pettiest rules of the establishment than to the needs of the striking miners and their families.

What did the 15 do? They refused to sit down when the Speaker told them to, and he adjourned the Commons for 20 minutes! A major threat to democracy and to the good name of the Labour Party!

Jail sentences

Terry French, a Kent miner, has been sent to prison for five years for so-called Grievous

FUND

A better fund total this week, but a smaller number of contributions. Thanks to: Jean Lane, £100; Sarah Bryant, £5; Les Hearn, £5; Cheung Siu Ming, £5.

We still need £136 this month to balance our regular budget: so a good final week in January is vital to allow us to put money aside for new premises.

Send money to: SO, 214 Sickert Court, London N1 2SY.

Bodily Harm.

It is just one example of the absurdly high sentences being meted out to striking miners by the courts. Many of those recently convicted were arrested during the police rampage at Orgreave last June.

According to the Public Order Research Group (quoted in the New Statesman, January 18), 50 miners have so far been imprisoned. Other estimates have put it at over 100.

Nine miners from Shirebrook colliery and a farmworker were jailed at Derby Crown Court on January 7. Seven defendants from Fitzwilliam were jailed, as the police riot there was given judicial approval.

Meanwhile, the Home Office has admitted that the police operation so far has cost over £100 million. Who's uneconomic?

This seems to be the crunch period for the miners' strike. Isolation, deprivation and hardship for 11 months, and the intransigence of a Tory government determined to hammer the NUM into the ground, have begun to take their toll of the strikers.

Anybody who does or says anything now to hinder the miners or help their enemies is a disgrace to the labour movement.

Worse than that. This week the NUM's attempt to get negotiations re-started forced the government to reveal itself as utterly inflexible and determined to grind the miners down and smash the NUM. Kinnock's attacks on the Left have helped deflect attention from this fact, which could swing many now lukewarm or hostile behind the miners.

As Dennis Skinner said, if Kinnock's belief were true that the Tories would win any debate on the miners' strike and use the issue to harm Labour, then "the government would have been holding a debate on the miners every week".

Neil Kinnock is too destructively factional towards the Left to understand this and use Parliament to take advantage of it.

And Neil Kinnock fears to debate the Tories on the miners' strike, because he is not prepared to stand four-square with the striking miners. He prefers to make propaganda for the ten year old 'Plan for Coal' and to evade the life and death issue of the strike.

Last Saturday, at the end of the week which saw a savage five year sentence imposed on a striking miner, Dennis Skinner said this in Chesterfield at the end of a march by miners' wives:

"This strike is now about those in jail. If you are thinking about going back to work remember you can only be on one side or the other. You are either on the side of those in jail, or on the side of the judges who put them there".

He wasn't talking to Neil Kinnock, but he might have been. The basic trouble with Kinnock and his allies is that they don't seem to know which side they are on in the most important working class battle since the General Strike.

In fact it is the 15 MPs who represent the rank and file of the Labour Party, not Neil Kinnock. Instead of building Labour Party unity in support of the miners, Kinnock and Hattersley once more divide the Party in what looks like the beginning of a new wave of witch-hunting.

As Skinner also said: "We don't need any lectures from people who can't get on a picket line until the strike has been in existence for ten months... We will win without them".

Cowley stewards recommend strike

TGWU stewards at Austin Rover's Cowley Assembly Plant voted on Monday, 21st, to recommend to a meeting of trim shop workers next Monday, 28th, that they take strike action in defence of victimised senior shop steward Bob Cullen.

Cullen was sacked at the end of November last year in the most blatant of a long line of victimisations of union militants by BL. Previous victims include Longbridge convenor Derek Robinson and Cowley senior shop steward Alan Thornett.

Cullen was sacked after a foreman alleged that he had damaged the windscreen wiper on his car during a token picket to enforce an overtime ban, shortly before the two-week pay strike last autumn.

Management have not been able to produce any other witnesses to the incident, Bob Cullen, on the other hand, has a dozen pickets as well as company foremen and a company gate security man as witnesses to the fact that he was picketing on gate 10 at the time the incident was taking place on gate 16.

The union claimed that it was a case of mistaken identity, a claim later supported by a statement sent to management by two pickets naming the individual responsible for the incident.

Management have refused to accept all this evidence, claiming that when they interviewed the individual named, he denied being involved. The company further claims to have carried out a detailed internal inquiry,

but none of the pickets were interviewed by the company, nor was Bob Cullen himself.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that following the collapse of the pay strike last November, Austin Rover management decided to take the opportunity to victimise Bob Cullen, regardless of the facts of the case.

The union has been slow to respond to this challenge. First of all they conducted their own inquiry into the incident and it was not until January 14 that Ron Todd was given the details of the case. He has contacted Austin Rover management, asking for an urgent meeting to discuss the case but two weeks later, this meeting had still not taken place.

Monday's trim shop vote will therefore be crucial. Two months is a long time to wait before going to the membership for strike action in support of a victimised colleague. But a strong response is essential not only if the reinstatement of Bob Cullen is to be won, but also to make it clear to Austin Rover management that victimisations of trade union militants will no longer be accepted by workers in BL.

The struggle to rebuild the stewards' movement in BL — decimated at the hands of Michael Edwardes in the late 1970s and early 1980s — is inevitably an uphill struggle. The protection of elected stewards and senior stewards is essential if that struggle is to be successful.