

Socialist Organiser

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Labour councils face court ruling

STAND UP TO THATCHER!

EIGHT Labour councils are still standing out against Thatcher's new diktat regime for local government.

As we go to press, Hackney faces a court deadline and its resolve is being put to the test.

The remaining boroughs are likely to face the threat of legal sanctions within the next week or so. Will they stand up to the Tories or surrender?

Some borough leaders, like Ted Knight of Lambeth, have talked long and loud about 'total defiance'.

They have rightly condemned Ken Livingstone for complying with Tory directives. They have talked about Livingstone in a way that seemed to contain a commitment that they themselves will do better — that they will not turn tail and run.

Let them now live up to their words!

A principled stand by even one council would be of immense value to the labour movement. It would dramatise and clarify the issues. It would bring home to millions of people that Thatcher is undermining and stifling local democracy.

Above all it would show workers throughout Britain that the leaders of the local government Left are not all cardboard heroes.

The ball is at your feet, comrades Knight, Hodge, Ritchie, and Hatton!



Go on, drop it on her head...



Liverpool workers demonstrate against Tory attacks on local government. Photo: John Smith, IFL

LCI AGM

Discussing 'troops out'

Martin Thomas reports on last weekend's Labour Committee on Ireland Annual General Meeting.

"THE situation that many of our comrades in Ireland have faced for many years has been brought to the streets of Britain during the miners' strike", said South Wales miners' vice-president Terry Thomas, bringing greetings to the Labour Committee on Ireland conference last Sunday (14th) from the area NUM executive.

Greetings also came in writing from the Campaign Group of left MPs, and individually from 18 Labour MPs. About 100 delegates, members and observers attended.

But the conference was also realistic about the tasks facing the LCI. Trade union officer Hugh McGrillan reported that "we have only scratched the surface of the problem of gaining the support of the trade unions for British withdrawal", and parliamentary officer Des McLernon emphasised the futility of "self-righteous sloganising and simplistic 'Troops Out' rhetoric".

Two distinct responses could be seen to the LCI's problems. Des McLernon and others argued for focusing on partial issues - plastic bullets, strip searches, supergrasses, Prevention of Terrorism Act - on which wider support can be won. (They also argued for the LCI to join the Labour Party's official Register, set up during the witch-



hunt against Militant. This move was defeated by 26 votes to 59).

A panel session on 'Strategy for Withdrawal' came nearer to the basic problem: how, given the rallying of the Protestants to die-hard Orange bigotry, to make 'Troops Out' lead to a united Ireland?

Martin Collins, editor of the LCI magazine 'Labour and Ireland', and a supporter of Socialist Action, tried to define all the difficulties

away. It is a "myth", he said, that "Protestants and Catholics are fighting each other in the North".

The cause of the conflict is the Northern Ireland state, maintained by Britain. If Britain withdraws that problem will collapse. Discrimination against Protestants "could never occur inside a united Ireland", because it would not be useful in keeping the state together.

The only obstacle, Collins said, is that "a free Ireland

would be a threat to the British state". It would be impossible to get into NATO, it would threaten the multinationals, and it would quickly become socialist.

Collins condemned "the myth that we need some sort of guarantees for the Protestants in the North" and specifically rejected ideas of a federal Ireland as "limits imposed by Britain".

Other speakers on the panel tried to grapple more seriously with the problem of

an Ireland where the working class is dominated by green nationalism or Orange bigotry.

Christine Crawley MEP argued that the Protestant backlash is containable: the Protestants are disunited, and deprived of British support would soon see an independent Ulster as unviable. However, she recognised that a lot of blood may be spilled, and noted that her scenario depended on Dublin playing a positive role - which it might not.

Consent

Clare Short MP reported on the approach developed among the Labour Party leadership by Clive Soley: to accept the notion of Irish unity coming only after consent of a majority in Northern Ireland, but to move by Westminster/Dublin initiative to create a uniform social security system, agricultural policy, policing system etc., throughout the island and thus engineer 'consent'.

As one floor speaker commented, this is 'unity by stealth', an attempt to trick the Northern Protestants into unity. It won't work. The Protestants are not stupid.

Clare Short also criticised Martin Collins' simplistic account, and expressed interest in the programme of a federal Ireland, argued by a Socialist Organiser speaker from the floor.

The new 'Socialist Forum' on Ireland, sold briskly at the conference, and the debate will continue in the LCI.

Protest against racist and sexist police

MORE than 100 people from around the country mounted a picket outside Manchester City Magistrates Court on Thursday April 11. They had turned up to support Jackie Berkeley, a 21-year old black woman from Moss Side, Manchester.

On Friday March 11 she was found guilty of charges of making a false complaint of rape and therefore wasting police time, obstruction and assault on three police officers and criminal damage to a police woman's shirt.

The truth of the matter is that on Friday April 19 1984 she was racially abused, stripped naked and raped by police officers in Moss Side police station.

Her trial, which began on February 25 of this year and lasted fourteen days, revealed a massive police cover-up. Police of all ranks lied, contradicted one another and at no time was there an agreement between them as to any of the details of what happened in Moss Side police station.

Expert, professional and circumstantial evidence was brought, which confirmed Jackie's allegations.

The Stipendiary Magistrate, Glynmoor Jones, disregarded all evidence and rubber-stamped the prosecution's case. Last Thursday, Jackie received a three-month suspended sentence for the charge of wasting police time. Mr John said he had suspended sentence because of her previous good character.

Distortion

Throughout the trial the Manchester Evening News consistently distorted, mis-reported or failed to report relevant facts. After sentence was passed, the pickets moved on to the Evening News offices where people demonstrated for about two hours. That evening the late headline read "Rape-claim girl goes free".

This whole case serves to show, yet again, the total lack of public accountability that the police enjoy and how they act time and again against the interests of black people, working class people, women or any other group which poses a threat to capitalism. In addition it highlights the continuing collaboration between the courts and the police in pursuit of these ends and the role the media plays in helping them get away with it.

There will be a national demonstration and picket in support of Jackie Berkeley in Manchester on Friday May 3, assembling at Whitworth Park, Oxford Road, at midday.

No nazis in Harrogate!

By Helen McHale

SOME years ago, students at Harrogate College of Further Education fought a campaign against the National Front and its then Chair, Andrew Brons, a lecturer in British Government and Politics at the College.

Although student activity increased during the campaign, the efforts to get Brons out failed, and the Students Union in Harrogate crumbled.

Andrew Brons still lectures at the College, and although he is no longer Chair of the NF, he is still regarded as a leading fascist in Britain.

Last September, JJ Buford was elected as President of Harrogate Students Union on a wave of apathy - less than 50 votes were cast.

At the time, some members of the union expressed their concern at her connections with the NF, but these objections were dismissed. Now, due to confirmation of the fact that Buford is actually a member of the National Front, the Area NUS, in conjunction with Harrogate Labour Party Young Socialists and the local SWP have launched a major campaign against fascism and racism.

Although the Executive of Harrogate FE Students Union have not expressed support



for the NF, they are tolerant towards the party in so much as they accept Buford's presidency.

She is planning to stand for re-election in the next academic year without renouncing her NF membership and we feel that now is the time to make a stand against the Nazis.

A demonstration has been planned for May Day - Monday May 6 - and we would like as much support as possible

in order to fight the fascists and make this campaign work.

Meet for march at Montpellier Roundabout (opposite the Crown Hotel) at 1.00pm.

There will also be a rally in the evening with speakers yet to be confirmed from the College plus the Black Alliance, the Jewish Society and others.

For details/confirmation please phone Julia on Harrogate (0423) 887562.

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Why Militant and IRSP are twins

Editorial: Dialogue yes, ventriloquism no!

Militant's record on Ireland...

... and ours

James Connolly

For a federal united Ireland!

16 years of conflict

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Out now: Socialist Organiser's discussion supplement, 'Socialist Forum'. This edition focuses on the recent history of Ireland and the political record of Socialist Organiser in comparison to other groups on the Left



The price of careerism

Editorial

PERHAPS THE most striking thing about the shameful collapse over rate-capping of the heroes of Labour's 'far left', like Ken Livingstone, is the naked careerism involved.

Livingstone appeared on Breakfast TV, just before the fiasco at County Hall, and said, more or less plainly, that he wasn't going to have his political career spoiled and destroyed by a little thing like the rate-capping dispute.

To be barred from membership of the House of Commons as well as from other public office for defying the government is, of course, a terrible penalty to threaten someone like Ken Livingstone with. And the Tories have known how to use it.

But surely that's what's wrong here — the fact that people like Livingstone can think it reasonable to 'look after no.1' even if that means eating their words and letting the movement down very badly.

From a purely personal career-prospects point of view it may even be reasonable for a Livingstone to avoid action that he himself would have to pay for very dearly indeed. What is not reasonable or tolerable is that people who put that sort of consideration first should be in a position of leadership, where their actions at key moments of crisis can make the difference between victory and defeat for our side.

It is no accident that the best local council in modern times was that of Clay Cross, in Derbyshire, which back in

1972 defied the Tories and never surrendered.

The difference lay in the fact that the Clay Cross councillors were part of a working class community that was roused and defiant, and to which they felt themselves to be responsible. They felt themselves to be representatives of their community, and not individuals pursuing their own careers. They knew that when they were disqualified (as they were) others would take their place and continue the fight.

They could draw strength from that knowledge, whereas Ken Livingstone could only feel such a prospect as a personal blow, and one which would give his replacement an advantage in the race to the House of Commons.

Careerism did not come into it in Clay Cross; in Ken Livingstone's case it was everything.

If any of the Clay Cross councillors had been so concerned for his career in working-class politics as to propose that the community should not fight, for fear of the personal consequences for its leaders, then words like 'scab', 'Judas' and 'traitor' would have driven him out of working class politics. The future Lord Redken, garrulous and candid about his concern for his career, has not only protected that career by avoiding disqualification: he has furthered it. He is now acceptable to the Kinnock soft-left leadership, and his path to the House of Commons via Brent East has been smoothed rather than made more difficult.

That is one measure of how things stand in the labour movement right now.

The lesson of this episode is this: we need to create a movement in which the cause of the working class is everything and individuals will be judged by their loyalty to it — a principled, clean and serious movement, in which naked careerism will bar anyone who displays it from holding public office on behalf of the labour movement.

Shahidu Ali must stay!

A CAMPAIGN has been set up in the East End of London to prevent yet another racist deportation.

Shahidu Zubair Ali, who has lived in London for 8 years and worked for six of those years, has been told that her work permit will not be renewed. This means that she will be immediately deported.

Shahidu got married in England to a student from Pakistan who was studying engineering at a London college. She has three children, all of whom were born here and are British citizens.

When her husband could not get a job with the qualifications he received, he went to Pakistan to find work. Almost straight

away Shahidu's work permit was refused renewal. If it is not renewed she has to go to Pakistan with her children — where she has no job, nowhere to live and no money.

The campaign to prevent this was set up by the women who work with her, both at a school and at a local multiracial women's centre on her estate.

It is organising meetings, protest action and publicity about Shahidu's case and will be linking up with other anti-deportation campaigns and groups who are fighting the same racist and sexist laws.

All messages of support and donations to 'Shahidu must stay campaign', c/o Berner Women's Centre, Philchurch Place, London E1.

Trade war

PRESSURE is increasing in the US Congress for a trade war with Japan.

In 1984 the US ran a trade deficit with Japan of \$37 billion. The huge size of this deficit can be gauged from the fact that it equals a quarter of the US's total world-wide exports.

The deficit has doubled since 1982, but it began to increase in the 1970s. The US's competitive position has been declining relative to Japan; and the centre of world trade has swung round from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

In 1970, 26% of the US imports came across the Pacific, 29% from Europe. By mid-1984, 35% were coming across the Pacific, and only 23% from Europe.

US capitalists complain that Japan's highly state-regulated and monopolised economy offers them few openings for exports.

So far, the Reagan administration has generally resisted protectionist pressures; and the feverish US boom has weakened those pressures. But now the boom looks like turning into a new slump — US manufacturing production has been stagnant for six months — and in that slump trade wars could escalate.

The victims will be not so much Japanese capitalists, as Third World states heavily dependent on exports to finance their debt payments.

Numeiry's heir

THE new government in Sudan plans to continue the austerity policy imposed by former president Numeiry on the instructions of the IMF.

It may even continue Numeiry's policy of enforcing Islamic law on the only-half-Muslim country. Two members of the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood have been named for the new administration.

But the leaders of the military

coups may not be able to get their way. The middle-class professional associations, which initiated the general strike before the coup, are cooperating. But even they have reservations. And the armed rebels in the south of the country are maintaining their independence.

About 350,000 to 700,000 children — Sudanese and refugees from Ethiopia — are expected to die from famine in Sudan this year.

Shootings in S. Africa

Last weekend 50,000 blacks joined a funeral procession in Uitenhage, South Africa, for the victims of the police shooting in Langa on March 21.

Those 43 victims (though the police say there were only 19) were themselves taking part in a funeral for victims of earlier police attacks.

The same weekend two more blacks were shot and wounded at yet another funeral, at Zwide. The cycle — and the build-up of black anger against the apartheid system — continues.

Meanwhile the South African ambassador to the UK, Dennis

Worrall, was visiting Northern Ireland.

The Official Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party met him to discuss economic links between South Africa and Northern Ireland, and the politics of Northern Ireland.

The constitutional-nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party refused to meet Worrall, and SDLP leader John Hume explained: "How could anyone seriously talk to him about the problems of a divided society, given the regime that he represents?"

Torture in Lebanon

"They tortured me by attaching electrodes to my fingers, with wires linked to a field telephone, the handle of which was then turned. It was agony.

"The torture was carried out by Lahad's men [Israeli-sponsored Lebanese forces], but Israeli intelligence officers were present.

"Apart from the torture, beatings were regular."

According to former prisoners and international relief officials, people are being tortured in cells under a military headquarters established by the Israelis

and Israeli-sponsored forces in south Lebanon, near the Israeli border.

Red Cross workers have tried to see the prisoners, but have been blocked by the Israelis.

Maltreatment of prisoners, and also of the ordinary civilian population, has been a constant feature of Israeli operations in Lebanon since 1982. Revulsion at these atrocities — combined with dismay at the strategic failure of Israel's invasion, and the high cost in Israeli lives — has led to mass opposition within Israel to the war.

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The Labour Left and the break up of the Communist Party

THE BRITISH ROAD TO NOWHERE

Hands off Princess Michael!



Princess Michael in 1945: an early picture

WHY ALL the fuss because the wife of a second-rank royal had a Nazi father?

Princess Michael is being victimised, that's what I think.

Robert Maxwell's Mirror on Tuesday was lathering on about 'disgrace' and 'scandal', as if the British royal family would not know a Nazi from an average royal dimwit. On breakfast television, when it was put to the Daily Mirror journalist who wrote up the story that perhaps the woman could not be held responsible for what her father did before she was born, he spluttered: "Danimit man, she's his daughter".

Well, yes, of course, heredity is rather a big thing in royal circles.

But haven't they ever heard of Queen Frederika, who died not long ago? She was the mother of ex-King Constantine of Greece, a close relative of the Duke of Edinburgh — and a former member of the Hitler Youth movement.

And what about the Queen's uncle, the late Duke of Windsor, the former King Edward

VIII who was forced to abdicate in 1937? He was a friend of Hitler and Goering.

He maintained contact with them early in the war, and the British government was worried lest he fall into their hands and be used in the propaganda war. He was widely tipped as a potential Nazi puppet king if Germany conquered Britain.

So let's not be unfair to Princess Michael. The labour movement should insist on impartial justice and fair play.

If Philip and Elizabeth can get away with it, why shouldn't Princess Michael?

Or on second thoughts — let's be impartial in the opposite direction. Let's hound the whole lot of them — Lizzie for her relationship to Edward, Philip for his relationship to Frederika, Charlie for his relationship to Elizabeth and Philip, Anne... etc.

Let's hold them to the hereditary system, and condemn the whole lot of them

to be scooped up in a big net and dropped in the South Atlantic.



The Herald

WHAT'S going on at Labour Herald? Readers will recall that the two main editors, Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone, have been shooting venom at each other in public for weeks now, with Ted Knight promising 'total defiance of the government' over rate-capping and condemning Ken for throwing in the towel and discrediting the Left.

Ken Livingstone in turn has talked darkly about demagoguery and people 'posturing', and pointed out that Knight has not had a legal deadline threatening to chop off his political career at the neck.

Of course, Knight is still saying the right sort of thing, and Livingstone isn't. Nevertheless it is hard not to sympathise with the future Lord Redken, because Knight is plainly doing a fake-left act.

His ringing speeches usually contain seemingly innocent soliloquies about the personal 'risks' and 'dangers' involved in defiance, total or otherwise: this is Knight putting the wind up those Labour councillors he knows won't go for confrontation, and on whom he is relying to get him off the hook with a sort of left reputation intact.

Over the past five years, Knight has buckled and retreated at every key turning point — he even tried to make cuts in 1979, until a revolt by his Labour Party stopped him.

Knight has control of Labour Herald. The paper has no democratic structures, and its production editor, Steven Miller, is like Knight closely associated with the WRP, which also prints the multi-colour Herald on terms which allow it to survive with a limited sale and no visible network of supporters.

But still Ken Livingstone's name appears on the front of Labour Herald as one of the three editors. Do they hope for reconciliation?

No. When last week's paper carried a very long statement calling for a regroupment of the Left, it was signed, not as usual by the editors, but by Ted Knight, Matthew Warburton, and... John McDonnell.



OK?

SOCIALIST Action is known in some circles as the paper of the 'Euro-trots'.

Its student supporters are part of the so-called 'Democratic Left'. They used to be extremely ultra-left, but age and disappointment is turning them inside out.

But in broad terms they remain part of the revolutionary left. For example, Socialist Action has the same attitude as we do towards recent events at County Hall. Or does it?

The following resolution was moved at a Manchester Labour Party meeting by Duncan Edwards, a prominent local Socialist Action supporter.

"This ward fully supports the stand of those Labour councillors who voted for not passing a rate on March 7th. Ken Livingstone voted the way that wins battles".

It passed unanimously.

Isle

AT long last it seems that the Channel Tunnel may actually get built.

Only super-optimists can hope that this tunnel will finish off Britain's longstanding insularity and national arrogance. But it may help. And for sure being able to get to and from the continent more easily and cheaply can only help international awareness and the possibilities of international working class unity.

Of course the Tories are doing the tunnel their own way. The project will be farmed out to private enterprise to make as much profit as they can.

A lot of people on the Labour Left still oppose the lowering of trade barriers through the EEC, on the basis of a programme of socialism in one country and that one country being Britain. It is logical, then, that they should oppose better transport connections between countries.

No-one has dared spell out the logic that starkly. But the Morning Star reports that some Labour MPs are still ready to be the die-hards of Island Britain. They are opposing the Channel Tunnel project on the grounds that it will increase the shift of economic activity towards the south-east.

Take it to the unions!

IN QUITE a few militant areas, some sacked miners have been reinstated.

In Notts, the number of sacked miners has actually increased since the end of the strike. It's gone up from 21 to 23.

Whereas some areas have got some solidarity and some strength, in Notts, because we were in a minority, a lot of the lads are saying that we have been forgotten by our national union.

The Coal Board is using a heavy hand in Notts, and unfortunately the so-called trade union representatives in Notts are co-operating all down the line.

Lynk and his cronies are attempting to make the national union expel them, and I think that is part and parcel of paving the way towards privatisation.

It's up to the rank and file trade union activists in the Nottinghamshire coalfield to fight that all the way. It's very difficult. We've got not only the government and the Coal Board, but also a bosses' trade union, on our backs.

Lynk has said on television that he has had links with the new scab union in the Durham coalfield. But I think that enterprise in the north east is going to be a nine-day wonder. I can't see it lasting for long.

When the issue was first raised about expelling Lynk, everyone was waiting to see it happen immediately. Like it or not, tactically it wasn't seen to be wise, though frankly I think they ought to have gone ahead with it once they set that rabbit running.

I think the whole thing is going to come to a head now once the other coalfields have had their branch elections, and once the national conference goes ahead — once we're put in a position where expulsion is a must, or else they will break away.

Lynk and his cronies are twisting and turning, but I think sooner or later they are going to have to make their conscious move to break away. Then the whole issue will be exposed. I don't think they're going to take anywhere near the numbers with them that they think they are going to take.

The attitude of people who scabbed throughout the strike has been one of apology when faced with strikers down the pit. Of course every one has got a 'justifiable reason' for doing what he did, but at the end of the day the answer is that they scabbed. They were put to the test and they failed.

In Notts there is a shift back towards the militants in the branches. This is going to continue.

Lynk realises that. That is what was at the back of their decision to make the Notts strikers pay their back subs. All the strikers felt affronted at this, and it was quite natural that many of them said they weren't going to pay. But that's exactly what Roy Lynk wanted, in order to keep them out of the branch meetings.

The argument has prevail-

Paul Whetton is the secretary of the Notts Miners Rank and File Strike Committee, writing in a personal capacity.

ed, and many of them have paid and have gone back into the branches.

This is beginning to worry Lynk, and I don't think we've seen the end of his dirty tricks.

We're in a very weak position now. Scargill and the national executive, or even the area executives, can't go into a room with the Coal Board and start banging the table — because the Coal Board will just say, 'You've got nothing to back it up with'.

We've got to recognise that fact and plan our tactics accordingly.

I think the issue of sacked and jailed miners has got to be raised within the broader circles of the entire trade union movement. The TUC has got to be used for the purpose for which it was set up. We've got to turn the TUC into the spearhead of the fight against the employers and the government.

And the same applies for the political wing of the trade union movement, i.e. the Labour Party.

We've got to say to all the trade unions that what happened in the miners' dispute was not just a one-off. It is what will happen to you, or anyone else that challenges this government. You'll have the apparatus of the state turned against you.

If other trade unionists do not stand up and fight now, they will be the next ones to follow the miners into jail.

We haven't had a chance to discuss the proposed NUM rule changes yet. They will be coming to our branches. I fear very much that in the Notts coalfield there is going to be strong opposition to any rule change; and whatever happens they will fall back on the argument that they have their autonomy and the changes don't apply to them.

On the proposal to have affiliated membership, I think the women's groups have every right to say that they took part in the battle and therefore they should be part and parcel of the machinery to fight the next battle.

I don't accept any of the arguments about the strike having been too militant or having had the wrong tactics. I think that the tactics adopted by the National Executive Committee and the special delegate conferences were 100% correct; I think the fight was correct. The only thing at fault was those people who did not give us the 100% support we looked for and are now trying to find excuses — people like the Communist Party, the Labour Party leadership, and various trade union leaders.

If they had committed themselves, we could have won that battle. We came within a hair's-breadth of winning.

Shah

EDDIE Shah, the union-buster of Warrington, is planning a non-union national paper.

But, according to him, British banks were reluctant to arrange the necessary finance because they feared trade-union opposition.

He needed to find someone even more hostile and insensitive to trade unionism than the upper-crust Tories who run British banks.

So now he has a £6 million loan from...the London subsidiary of the Hungarian state bank.

During the miners' strike the supposedly socialist Polish government sent coal to help Thatcher. Now the supposedly socialist Hungarian government sends money to help Shah.



Back sacked miners!

WHEN THE NUM special delegate conference voted to drop the overtime ban, one of the main arguments was that the NCB had said they would not discuss reinstating sacked miners until 'normality' was

restored.

Last Thursday the national negotiating committee met for the first time since the end of the strike — and, as the Guard-

ian reported, "Mr MacGregor made it clear that full disciplinary action would continue to be taken against offenders".

By John Bloxam

Side by side with the rapid acceleration of pit closures, sackings have continued. Last week six more miners were sacked at Manton, in the South Yorkshire coalfield, bringing the total victimised there to 13. A further two miners from the pit are shortly due in court on similar charges, arising out of the alleged damage at Harworth.

Even the magistrate who sentenced the six showed qualms about the NCB's attitude. The offences, he said, did not deserve the sack. When the men were sacked, he refused to fine them.

At Whitwell pit, North Derbyshire, five miners — including NUM president Terry Butkeraitis — have been taken back. They had been sacked for gross industrial misconduct after occupying the pithead.

But they have been re-employed, not reinstated, and each had to pay a fine of £150. Re-employment means the loss of 72 years' service towards their pension and redundancy rights. And the pit has been threatened with closure!

Similarly, in South Wales, the reinstatement of four lodge officials at the St Johns colliery was rapidly followed by reports that the pit was on the NCB's immediate hit-list for closure.

In South Wales and North Derbyshire, the NCB have taken back some of the victimised strikers, in a deliberately selective manner. In all the other areas, they have continued their hard line.

Scotland still has about 200 sacked, nearly 50% of whom were branch committee members.

Campaigning on the issue is still weak.

In Notts, the 23 sacked strikers are due to hold their first meeting within the next week. But in a number of areas, victimised miners have not yet met, and the push for proper coordination and an organised campaign is falling heavily on small groups of militants and some of the women's groups.

There was a large demonstration in Glasgow on March 16 demanding full reinstatement, and the Scottish TUC has launched a petition for reinstatements in Scotland to the area director — but the focus is on getting signatures from the churches and Chief Constables!

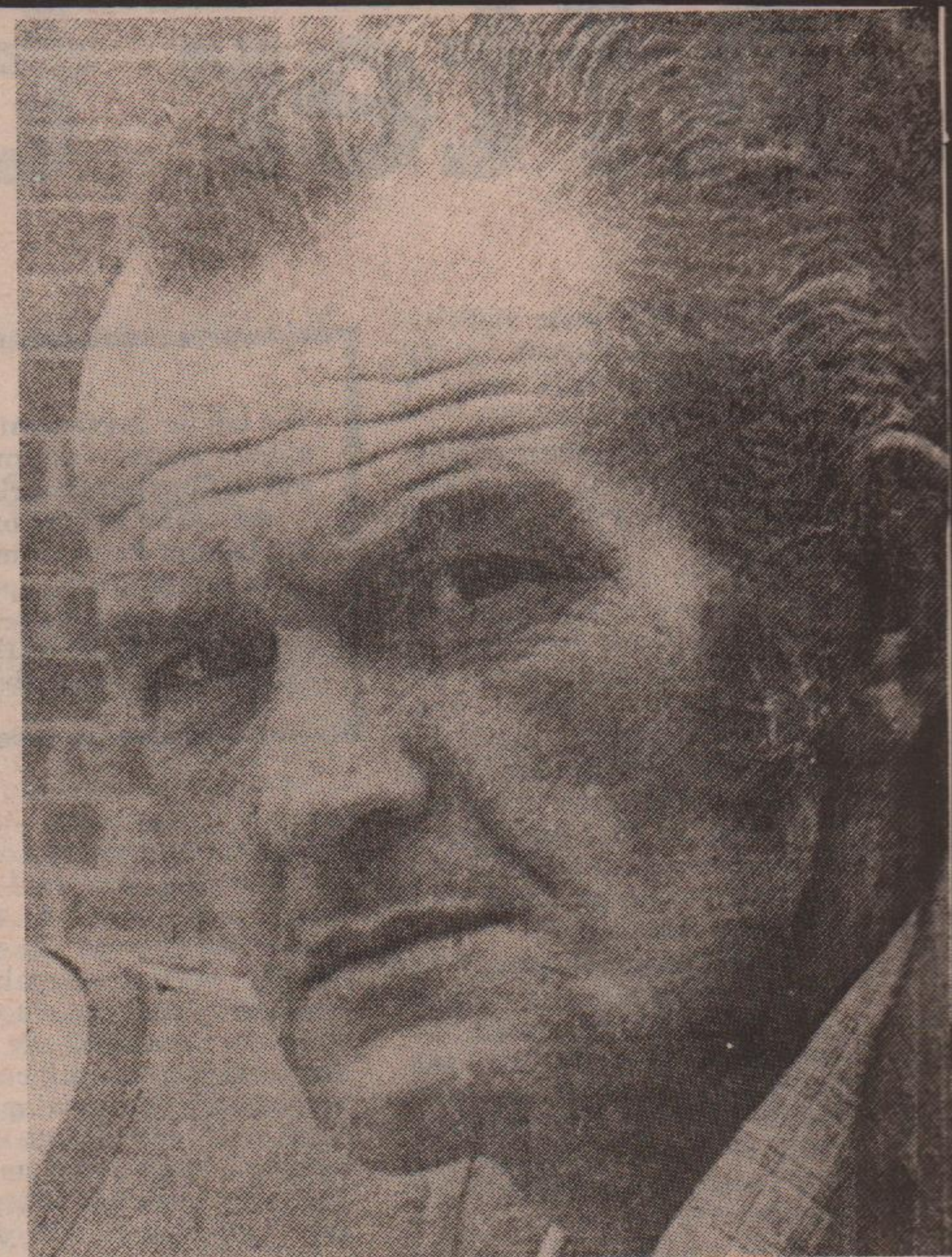
The focus should instead be on the labour movement. Support can be won even from those

who did little to support the strike. The CPSA national executive has tabled a resolution for their conference giving "whole-hearted support to the current campaign being waged by the National Union of Mineworkers to secure reinstatement of those members the NUM feel were unfairly sacked..."

Similar calls need to be tabled at every single union conference. The Labour Party itself must be pushed to play a role — and help organise a national campaign.

The many hundreds of sacked miners should be made into a powerful full-time staff to take the campaign into the factories, communities and branches of the labour movement.

But opportunities will be missed, and the campaign will stay at the level of petitions and conscience money, unless a push comes from an organised campaign in both the Labour Party and trade unions.



George Brookes

Organise the sacked miners

George Brookes and Jimmy Lees, two sacked Notts miners, spoke to John Bloxam

GB: I THINK we've been sold out — sold out not by these lads who've been out on strike right to the end but by the NUM as a whole. Not by the national leadership — the rank and file as a whole.

That's your reaction to the ballot result?

JL: I don't think they campaigned a lot for it. It was just a ballot. Nobody seemed to know what they were balloting about.

GB: In this area we're having a bit of a whip-round anyway, to look after us.

I think the national union should have a big meeting somewhere of all the 700 that's been sacked.

But now they've taken the overtime ban off. That's another stab in the back for us, really. What else have they got to fight with now?

JL: Yes, but I think it was the only way they were ever going to get any talks going.

Do you think the Coal Board now is going to start taking people back?

GB: I don't think I stand a chance. I don't think Jimmy stands a chance.

In Kent, so I've heard, they got 42 sacked, and the Area NUM have organised them into a team to campaign on the issue.

GB: Yes, we should be doing that in every area. There's 20-odd in this area.

What about demanding that the next Labour government reinstates all those sacked?

GB: Yes, but you're talking about waiting three years. It's a long time, you know. And even then there's no guaran-

tee they'll get in.

The thing that sickens us at the moment is, we've been told to sign on the dole, and we've had letters back saying that we can't get anything because we're still in trade dispute.

JL: My wife's getting Supplementary Benefit, and they're stopping £16 a week for strike pay. I wrote them a letter about it last week, and they wrote back saying that until they heard from Regional Office they'd continue as before.

Have the scab leaders in Nottingham — people like Lynk — said anything about your situation?

GB: No. And as far as I'm concerned they can go and get knotted anyway.

The NUM should have expelled them a long time ago. Now Scargill is telling the Durham leaders to go steady on the number of men they expel, because he wants to keep the NUM all together.

I can understand his position. But they should have expelled this area a long time ago.

What would you say to the rank and file in the rest of the labour movement?

GB: Carry on fighting for jobs. And help us financially.

JL: The union movement has got to grow again. It's been knocked back a hell of a lot with this dispute.

And the support groups?

GB: The support groups have been fantastic. Especially the women in the support groups.

I've always been a sexist. Women? Rubbish. But now: fantastic, I think. Honest. I was prejudiced.

The women did a fantastic job. Without them the strike wouldn't have gone twelve months.



Bromley Ten

ON March 2 1985 in Bromley High Street in Kent, ten people were arrested on a charge of 'wilful obstruction' while collecting food and money for the striking miners and their families, as they had done throughout the strike.

There were at least eighteen people on the collection that morning but only ten were arrested. The arresting officers, who appeared to be from an Instant Response Unit, were physically aggressive towards a woman on the collection and were clearly acting on orders from above.

The 'Bromley Ten' were taken to Bromley police station where their names and addresses were taken. Once the formalities were out of the way, the police duped them into going into a tiny cell, designed perhaps for a maximum of four people, and the door was then closed and locked behind them. For a considerable period of time, the ten men and women were

held captive in this one small, badly-ventilated cell which rapidly became claustrophobic. Pleas for assistance from within the cell were met by the response from police officers that they were "busy". Finally, a sympathetic solicitor secured their release in the face of deliberate police indolence in checking the names and addresses of the ten.

On Saturday March 30th, supporters of the 'Bromley Ten', including miners and their wives from the Kent coalfield, marched through Tory Bromley's town centre, led by the 'Bromley Ten' themselves, to demonstrate against political trials, the serious criminalisation of political activity which will result from this case and the increasing danger of a police state.

The case was heard on Wednesday April 3 at Bromley Magistrates Court but the 'Bromley Ten' were not alone in facing the Tory judiciary

and were supported by a 60-strong vociferous lobby of the court. Many of these supporters packed the public gallery to hear the case which was remanded until May 7.

We are now planning a public meeting for the end of April, having secured some local press interest in the case, and are organising for a bigger and noisier lobby of the court on Tuesday May 7 at 9.15 a.m. Ideally, we would like to see at least 200 people protesting about this attack on the right to free speech and political activity.

The right to take political action is at stake in this case. It is fundamentally linked with the issue of the sacked miners who have been victimised because of their support for their union and their class and with the realisation that the police are becoming more potent and more defensive of capitalist interests as the economic crisis, and the position of the working class in that crisis, worsens.

After the miners' strike

THE MINERS were right to fight, but the tragedy of the miners' strike was that it came very late in the day.

Socialist Organiser advocated a full-scale industrial attack on the Tories back in 1980.

If the labour movement had had any sort of coherent leadership and strategy, or any serious perspective for replacing the Tories with something better, then the movement would have taken on the Tories at the beginning of the cycle that has thrown millions of workers out of the factories, creating some four million unemployed.

That did not happen. The showdown came very late in the day, after the slump had weakened the morale and the fibre of the working class, and it took the form of a limited, sectional challenge to the Tories by an NUM which was itself split.

We suffered a serious defeat after 1979. But it was not a defeat in which there were dramatic confrontations. It was a cold, slow, protracted, cumulative defeat. It took the form of a consistent running before the Tory onslaught by the TUC.

The labour movement proved unable to produce any coherent alternative to Thatcherism. And Thatcherism, in its turn, had developed on the basis of the failure of the Labour governments in the 1970s and 1960s – the inability of the old consensus ways to deal with the crisis of British capitalism.

It is in this perspective that we must look at the defeat of the miners. If you compare the miners' defeat with the defeat that the whole labour movement suffered without a decisive battle in 1979-84, then you can see that the miners' defeat is a limited defeat.

If there has to be a defeat, this is the best sort of defeat to suffer – defeat after a fight in which tens of thousands of workers felt their own strength.

This was a battle which

The labour movement and the left are still trying to come to terms with the experience of the miners' strike – attempting to assess both the causes of the defeat and what its consequences will be for the labour movement.

An entire swathe of the so-called Left, including the Communist Party and the soft Left of the Labour Party, is inclined to blame on Arthur Scargill and draw defeatist conclusions.

In the following speech made to the recent Socialist Organiser delegate meeting, John O'Mahony argued that the pessimists and defeatists have got it all wrong. Despite the inevitably depressing effects of the miners' terrible defeat, he argued, the miners' strike was a positive experience for the labour movement.

enthused miners and made the majority feel that they could fight back. It was a battle that showed the working class what it is capable of.

Unlike workers who suffered the earlier defeats, without a fight, the miners can first of all point to specific causes of their defeat – the lack of support from the TUC, for example. They can say "we fought, we stood out, we showed them what we could do, we fought the police to a standstill at Orgreave" and so on.

So if you contrast the two defeats, it answers all the sceptics, all the wise-after-the-event people.

What the working class needed above all at this time was to fight. And it was not a foregone conclusion that it would lose. It was not at all impossible that the conflagration would spread – as it did briefly from the mines to the docks.

morale of the working class has suffered badly since 1979

still, the role of the traitors in the Labour Party and the TUC was massive. It certainly made the difference between an isolated miners' strike and a broader working-class challenge to the government, involving other workers, like for example dockers, at certain key points in the strike.

It probably made the difference between victory and defeat.

These are the immediate lessons of the episodes over the last year.

1974 and 1984

There is an obvious contrast between 1974 and 1984. The miners won in 1974 but the fact that they had to fight again ten years later shows what we have all been saying for a very long time, that even victorious gut syndicalism is not enough.

You need an alternative to the capitalist system, and in 1974 the only alternative to the Tories on offer was Harold Wilson.

Wilson's government demobilised the working class, undercut it, cut real living standards in the mid-'70s, started the cuts in the welfare state, and pioneered monetarist policies.

The experience of the 1974-9 Labour government – which was the product of a great wave of working class militancy – disillusioned many militants, and thus prepared the ground for the passive acceptance of the effects of the slump and the anti-working-class policies of the Tory government after 1979.

Never again

The struggle in the Labour Party, focused on the questions of democracy and accountability, which exploded after the Callaghan government was defeated, was a struggle by the labour movement to remake itself, partly in response to the hopelessness of putting in a Labour or pink Tory government, like Wilson's and Callaghan's.

The slogan 'Never Again' referred to the entire experience of the 'reformist' Wilson/Callaghan governments, which in fact took away from the working class and gave to the rich, instead of taking the profits of the

rich and redistributing wealth to the working class.

The political wing of the labour movement was – gropingly – trying to remake itself. We have not done that.

Instead we now have a political labour movement dominated by the soft left, as bereft of a serious working-class alternative to Toryism as ever Wilson, Callaghan – or Ramsay MacDonald – were.

Kinnock did miserably in the miners' strike. Any of his recent predecessors would have done much worse, but his performance in the miners' strike provides us with a true measure of what Neil Kinnock is. The political labour movement has been improved, perhaps, but it has not been decisively transformed.

We still need to remake our labour movement.

Political crisis

So where do we stand after the defeat of the miners' strike?

In terms of the economy, the Tories are making all sorts of claims. But the level of unemployment is not going to go down. The general economic disruption will continue for the foreseeable future.

The political system is in serious crisis. It is undergoing considerable changes. We have seen the creation of a national police force. They tell us it has been disbanded but in reality a major step has been taken towards creating a much stronger state.

We have seen the development of systematic strike-breaking – a new departure for British industrial struggles over the last forty years.

If the Post Office workers had taken strike action, the government planned to coordinate attempts to break that strike too.

We have witnessed a serious worsening of the entire political atmosphere. We have entered a period of naked class struggle. One of the most important things about the miners' strike was that it was open, naked class struggle.

Violence

The violence of the language – Thatcher comparing the miners to the Argentinians, "the enemy within" in its own way prefigures an intensification of the level of conflict in any future class struggles.

To a serious extent, then,

the political system has been changed into something else. Unless the working class suffers a crushing, disabling defeat, this shift towards more open class struggle will probably continue.

Tory lessons

The ruling class has begun to teach the working class some lessons in class struggle.

We talk about the need for a revolutionary socialist party that would function in the class struggle as the memory of the class. But a revolutionary party does not communicate that memory to the whole of the class. It conveys it in a limited way to some of the advanced sections of the class.

Moreover, such a party, of an adequate size, scope, and implantation in the basic organisations of the working class does not exist. If it had existed in 1979 and after, then recent British history would have gone very differently.

In the absence of a serious revolutionary party, the Tories – who had planned for this strike for 12 years – have forced many miners to relearn some of the key lessons of working-class history. They have given us good lessons in naked class struggle over the last year.

If the British labour movement does not learn those lessons, then the Tories will give us sharper lessons in class struggle – and force us to pay an even higher price than the miners and the working class have paid in 1984 and early 1985.

In no sense can the strike be written off as a generally negative experience, despite the defeat. Tens of thousands of workers have learned from it. Tens of thousands of workers will have been politicised by this strike.

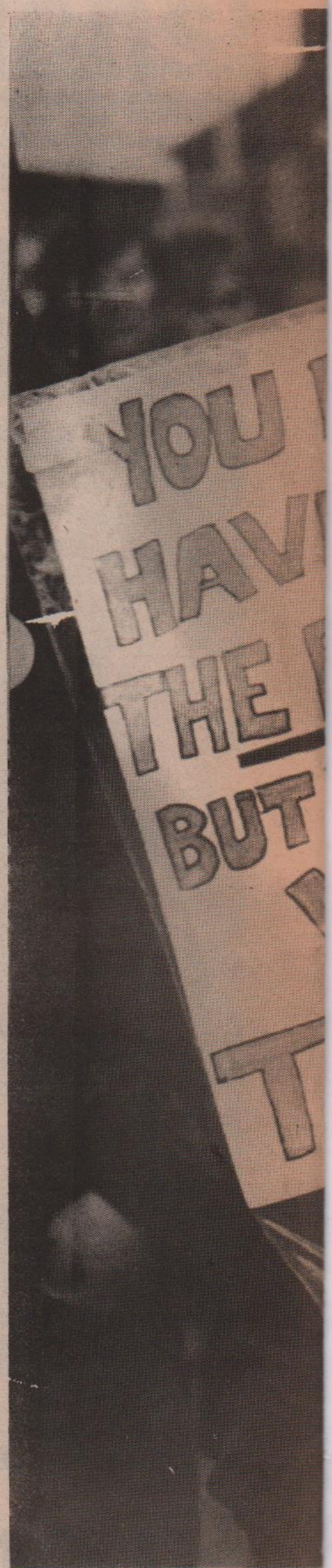
Contrast 1974. There was victory and a Labour government was put into power. But there was a demobilisation in the class, a feeling among militant miners that they could simply relax. As a consequence they had to fight again ten years later, in worse conditions, and they lost.

Class struggle is a school for socialism, and paradoxically, workers can sometimes learn more from defeats than they can from victories, providing they are not unalterable, irreversible defeats.

Defeat? Build!

Victory is preferable to defeat! But we must make the best of things as they are.

For example, it was the lessons of the defeats in the engineering industry in the early '20s that turned mili-



tants, led at that time by the Communist Party, to the work of building the Minority Movement within a few years after the defeat. And the Minority Movement's affiliated strength was soon one quarter of the whole TUC.

So, the whole climate is changing towards one of class struggle, and it is that climate which allows the revolutionary left to grow and develop – so that next time round the working class will have a better chance of winning.

TUs and Labour party

However, the signs are that the trade unions have been seriously softened up.

The Tories' anti-union laws are going to force the

"We have entered a period
The miners' strike was op

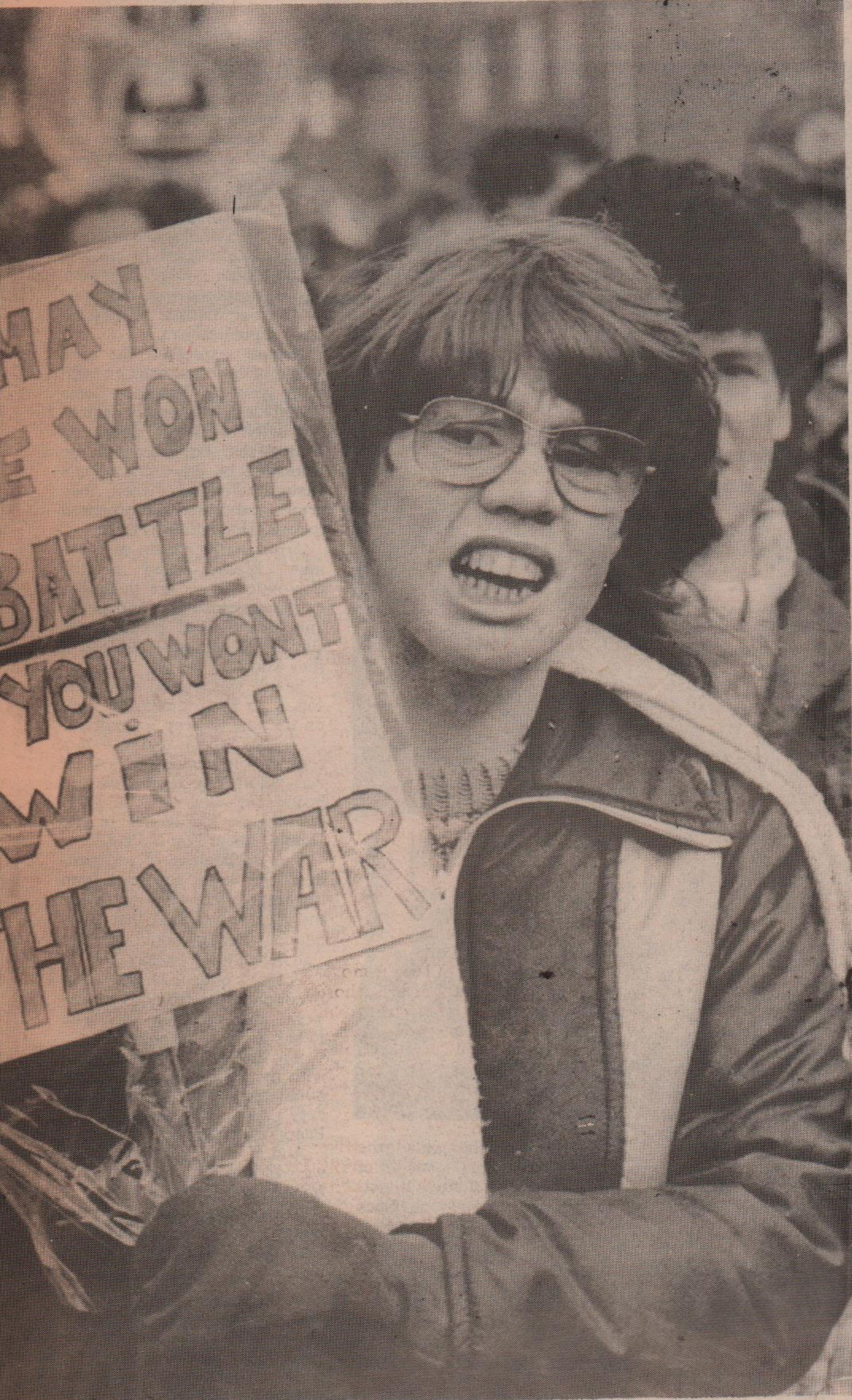
Socialist
Organiser

STARVED,
BATTERED,
DEFIANT

MAGNIFICENT
MINERS

THE 1984-5 STRIKE

e: What next?



unions to transform the way they do things. For example, for decades it has been taken for granted that the unions were affiliated to the Labour Party. For decades — it has changed a little recently — the right wing of the Labour Party could rely the unions as solid rotten boroughs, with millions of block votes, to control the party.

If we lose the plebiscites enforced by the Tories on the political levy, it could be a grievous blow for the movement. We don't have to lose. We must go in there and fight for the Labour Party link.

The fact that whole layers of Labour Party people are going to have to turn to a fight in the unions is going to force Labour Party members in the unions to become a political force, such as they

have not been for decades.

Every blow the Tories strike at us should be resisted. But everything they are doing to us — the whole Tory school of class struggle — does in fact have another aspect to it. It forces the working class to turn to class struggle too.

There is a long way to go before we arrive at the situation where we have leaders on our side of the calibre and combativity that the Thatcher's have for their side.

The Labour party

The situation in the Labour Party is more complicated. In themselves — and we pointed this out repeatedly at the time — the various proposals for democracy and

accountability fought for after 1979 were not revolutionary. Most of them are the norm in continental social-democratic parties. They have not made those parties other than social-democratic parties, in many cases worse than the Labour Party.

But at the time they were a direct challenge to the status quo.

The limits of that whole movement lay in this: that to a large extent the democracy struggle was separated from political questions. The energy that led people to fight around democratising the Labour Party was political energy, but the fight remained one-dimensional, organisational.

So the demands could be co-opted by the soft left and even by the right wing. In the last period we have seen a quite serious retreat of the Left in the Labour Party.

As I argued above, the struggle in the Labour Party was really part of a process in which the working class movement was trying to renew itself. We were faced

with the impasse of the old reformism. But the rebellion was on a very primitive level. And thus the setbacks.

So there are problems for the Left in the Labour Party. But there too whole layers of people have been made militant by the miners' strike. They've also had it shown to them how central industrial struggle is.

Many of these people — particularly under the school-mastership of the Communist Party and the Labour Coordinating Committee and so on — are likely now to draw the conclusion that we shouldn't have fought. But I think there is going to be tremendous scope in the Labour Party for us to draw out the lessons. Many will draw the proper lessons from the experience, and we must help them to do that.

We must point out that one of the great lessons of the previous period of struggle in the Labour Party is that the Labour Party and the trade unions are inseparable — the fact that the setbacks for the Labour Left were organised by the trade union barons.

We must talk to the new layers of militants about the need to link the struggles for democracy in the Labour Party and in the unions, and the need above all to have a political alternative to Toryism — which Kinnock does not have.

Within the overall framework of setbacks for the Left, I think there are prospects for seriously regrouping quite large layers of the Labour Left.

The local government Lefts

One aspect of this is what has happened with the local government Left.

Six years ago Socialist Organiser had the hope that we could be quite close to the centre of a broad organised Labour left wing based on a roughly adequate class-struggle programme. That was not an unreasonable perspective. There were masses of people reacting against the last Labour government.

What happened to them? That left wing split, and we were left relatively isolated. It split along the lines of attitudes to local government.

The major forces, and the major public figures, turned towards becoming administrators of the local state, with policies like high rate rises which were fundamentally untenable, even in the medium term, as an answer to the Tory attacks.

Instead of preparing to confront the government, they chose to weave and duck and evade the conflict.

We should fight for the lessons of this fiasco in local government to be brought home. We can point out, and we should point out, that it was not just a matter of John McDonnell not consulting Ken Livingstone, or Ken Livingstone losing his nerve at the end — the whole trajectory for five or six years

pointed straight to the sort of fiasco we have had.

Kinnock

So, there have been setbacks for the Left in the Labour Party. I can't see the prospect of overturning the leadership at the moment. If Labour wins the next election it most certainly will not be a workers' government in even the most minimal sense. They have already largely (though not quite entirely) drawn the teeth of reselection. A Kinnock government will be like the last Labour government, but worse.

But all these developments will not be just a repetition of last time round. There are lots and lots of militants now inside the Labour Party who will fight like the devil against a Kinnock government. They have learned lessons that the militants in the '70s had not learned, and they are more numerous.

So here again I do not draw pessimistic conclusions.

I also do not expect a full-scale witch-hunt. If Labour's leaders want to win the next election, then they cannot have a full-scale purge against Militant. If they have a full-scale purge against Militant, they will wreck the party and lose the election. All the signs are that they know this and they are not going to do it.

Of course there will be people picked off locally, but that's not the same.

What is the state of the Left?

The broad left of the labour movement has been going to school for five or six years to local government politics — reformist politics.

People like Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight have educated layers of the movement into reformism. And the arguments they use to make people toe the line within local government options also apply, every one of them, to a future Kinnockite government operating within capitalist options.

Livingstone

Livingstone talks far left — but actually Livingstone has been doing the sort of alliance-building across the classes, all the way to Edward Heath, that the right wing of 'Marxism Today' want.

But that is only one part of the Left.

The Communist Party is visibly breaking up. That is bad news for us because it is going to strengthen the right wing of the 'Left' in the Labour Party. But maybe, in the medium term, after we have dealt with that problem, Marxists will reap the advantages of having a clearer field on the Left.

Revolutionary left

The revolutionary Left? Over the past 15 or 20 years the revolutionary Left has grown. Its ideas have become

common property of many tens of thousands of people. But that has not been crystallised into a coherent revolutionary party.

The inadequacies of the organised groups — like Militant, the SWP, etc — are increasingly clear.

The broad view

Finally, I want to take a broader view.

25 years ago, the TUC general secretary of the time, George Woodcock, boasted that the TUC had come in off the streets and moved into the corridors of power. The labour movement was co-opted by the system. It was neutered, made incapable of providing any alternative to the system even when it could bring down governments, as it did in 1974.

So now, side by side with the decline in TUC membership, there are advances. A class-struggle atmosphere has been developed.

There is no guarantee that the Tory blows will not drive the labour movement down and backwards, that basic damage won't be done. It's our job to fight back. But the Tory attacks open up a great Pandora's Box for the ruling class.

The movement, despite weaknesses, despite blows, is in a far better state than 25 years ago — if we see it not as a stable, corporate partner in British capitalism, but as a force which must remake society.

The Hobsbawmites, echoed on the left by the SWP, talk about the labour movement being in terrible decline. Something very like that was said after the 1959 general election. Mark Abrams and others argued that the working class had become bourgeoisified. The right wing of the Labour Party argued against class politics in very much the same terms as used by Marxism Today and Hobsbawm now.

Then, too, if you look at the press of the SWP (then IS), you will see that they reflected it, for example in articles by the well-known academic Alistair McIntyre, who was a central figure in the SWP at that time.

Obviously things are not exactly the same now as then. But the notion that setbacks should lead us to abandon the programme of the movement being able to recreate itself as a revolutionary socialist movement is as invalid now as then.

Socialist Organiser

For ourselves, what conclusions follow from all this?

In the next period we have to tighten ourselves up.

winning new supporters for Socialist Organiser.

After all, for 62 years Trotskyism has been right at all the major turning points. But it is not enough to be right. You have to have a force to intervene, a lever to move things.

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en, naked class struggle".

Pearse and Irish nationalism

PATRICK PEARSE, together with the revolutionary socialist James Connolly, led the Republican insurrection that broke out in Dublin on Easter Monday 1916.

Pearse was the president of the Irish Republic that they proclaimed, and it was he who read the declaration of Irish independence from the steps of the General Post Office.

A week later, with much of Dublin's centre burning or battered to ruins by British Army guns, they surrendered, and Pearse was shot almost immediately.

For many decades thereafter Patrick Pearse was the secular saint of nationalist and Catholic Ireland — until the Catholic revolt in the Six Counties made the Irish bourgeoisie think of him as a dangerous source of militant nationalist infection.

His style was stamped alike on official Fianna Fail nationalism and on the marginalised and sometimes outlawed physical-force Republican movement. Pearse fused Catholic mysticism with nationalist politics. In Pearse religious and nationalist feeling are mixed, entwined and overlapped inextricably.

The self-sacrifice of the political rebel was identical with the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The political leader — and Pearse himself — was a saviour of the people.

Together with his friend, the much better poet Thomas MacDonagh — who was also shot after Easter Week — Pearse developed the notion of the redeeming political blood sacrifice, paralleling Christ's. This gave Pearse's political movement the power to draw on the tremendous strength of religious emotion in Catholic Ireland, underpinning nationalism with a potent national liberation theology.

Inevitably it was also to constrict and limit that nationalism. Pearse's work was part of a process in which the secular Republicanism of Wolfe Tone and Thomas Davis, with which the



whole people of Ireland, settler and Celt, Protestant and Catholic, could in principle identify, was narrowed down and replaced by a self-limiting Catholic and Celtic Irish nationalism.

That narrowing process had

been going on throughout the 19th-century — as a result of the withdrawal of the Protestants from nationalist politics and their militant commitment to the Union, together with the sectarian Catholic character

often assumed by the constitutional Home Rule movement. The Gaelic-revivalist, Celtic, Catholic militant nationalism that emerged early in the 20th century was a consequence and by-product, rather than a cause, of the political separation of Catholic and Protestant.

But it then became itself a cause of further and deeper division. Embodied in the 26-County state — in its outlook and institutions — it has done very great damage to secular Irish Republicanism.

Nobody expressed the new strain of Irish nationalism with such verve as Pearse — who nonetheless so fervently desired the unity of all the people of Ireland that he welcomed the formation of Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteers when they armed and drilled and proposed to resist Home Rule by force.

Arms in the hands of Irishmen! Pearse called on the Carsonites to declare themselves the government of independent Ireland, and pledged the support of nationalist Ireland if they would.

Pearse was a good man. The son of an Englishman, he gave up the law to keep a progressive school outside Dublin — in a country whose education system was notoriously repressive and brutal. He sided with the workers against the bosses in the Dublin Labour War of 1913.

The declaration of independence he wrote and read from the steps of the GPO contained the then radical idea that independent Ireland would care for "all her children equally".

Pearse's outlook on the world is not ours; the religious framework and emotions of 'The Rebel' are not ours either.

But the fervent identification with the oppressed and the indomitable resolve to resist and defy the oppressors which Pearse expresses here is ours.

And if it is not ours, then we will never be good for anything in socialist politics.

Patrick Pearse was a revolutionary, and he has much to teach the British labour movement.

GERRY BYRNE'S TV WATCH



Where have all the bios gone?

CERTAIN perennial questions have troubled thinkers from time immemorial: where do all the bios go? Why, when you want to watch television, is there either nothing worth watching on any channel or something good on all four?

Douglas Adams revealed the answer to the first. (Bios wriggle through little worm-like black holes in space and migrate back to their home planet). I hoped to obtain a similar revelation from Channel 4's "Television" series "Chewing Gum for the Eyes" on light entertainment.

I should have known better. From the first moments solemnly intoning "The function of television was originally conceived as to inform, enlighten and entertain" and the sorrowful conclusion that entertainment has ousted the other two, it was clear that the programme was more concerned with its makers' masochistic self-gratification than engaging the audience. The message was: It's all pretty awful and getting worse. On its own criteria, it scored badly — moderately informative but unenlightening and only patchily entertaining.

Its tone betrayed its basic premise: the vulgar masses ought to want to be uplifted and if they insist on demanding entertainment, it serves them right that it is rubbish. The problem with starting out from the belief that light entertainment is bad per se is that it's critically disarming: if it's all bad how can you say some of it is worse?

One of the entertaining punches was the clips from television's infancy — Noel Coward, Edith Piaf. Noel Coward had his own show. As did Alfred Hitchcock. Now the thing about these people is they're dead. And therefore deserving of reverence. While alive, they were all entertaining with no pretensions to moral uplift.

But television, more than any other medium, relies on its performers being living. You don't stop reading books because the author is dead, but there's a limit to the number of posthumous TV appearances that can be tolerated. Even Eric Morecambe palls when you know the jokes by heart.

Unless you can admit of the possibility of entertainment being good (preferably while its practitioners are still with us) then you lose any element of quality control. The punters will still watch their Dallasties, game shows, soaps, sit-coms, chat-shows, etc. They/we, after all, have paid out good money for a TV licence and equipment and

may not take kindly to missionaries from Channel 4 informing them of their unenlightened state. If the programme-makers so despise and patronise their audience, then what chance is there of them making better light entertainment?

The answer to the original question, according to "Television" is it's all because of the ratings — i.e. blame the audience. This is frustratingly like the response you get in shops: "No, we don't stock that, there's no call for it". It's also question-begging: what is it about certain programmes that draws millions of viewers?

On the original sin theory of entertainment, it's humiliation, avarice and sexual exploitation that draw the crowds. "Housewife Strip" tops the bill — the reward for answering a question correctly is the removal of an article of clothing. Or that old favourite "Endurance" from Japan where, for the chance of winning enormous sums, contestants submit to veritable torture — being buried up to the neck in sand, hurtled through rings of fire or mauled by dangerous animals. (It's only light-hearted Game for A Laugh with its sleeves rolled up).

Clive James did it much better with his light-hearted series on television round the world — the high spot of each week being the aforementioned "Endurance". It combined all the thrills and titillation of the programmes with that agreeable sense of superiority that comes from knowing that it was foreigners doing these things. We wouldn't watch anything like that (except of course that we did, lapping up all the excruciating punishments dished out to the hapless, but apparently willing, Japanese every week via CJ).

Rather than sighing over the awfulness of it all and direly predicting the end of the slippery slope where only real live rape and murder will satisfy the blood-thirsty audiences, wouldn't we be better engaged in analysing what it is in other people's discomfiture and embarrassment that makes such hilarious and rivetting viewing? After all, most people don't fall about laughing at the shots of dismembered bodies on the News. It's the fantasy, the willing participation and the harmlessness that's fun. (Even in "Endurance" they don't let the contestants die!)

To conclude, TV programme-makers should cut down on all this self-indulgent self-flagellation and apply their mind to producing a better class of custard pie, a "Mad dogs and Englishmen" for the 1980s.



Songs of liberty and rebellion

The Rebel

I am come of the seed of the people, the people that sorrow,
That have no treasure but hope,
No riches laid up but a memory
Of an Ancient glory.
My mother bore me in bondage, in bondage my mother was born,
I am of the blood of serfs;
The children with whom I have played, the men and women with
whom I have eaten,
Have had masters over them, have been under the lash of masters,
And, though gentle, have served churls;
The hands that have touched mine, the dear hands whose touch is
familiar to me,
Have worn shameful manacles, have been bitten at the wrist by
manacles,
Have grown hard with the manacles and the task-work of strangers,
I am flesh of the flesh of these lowly, I am bone of their bone,
I that have never submitted;



I have that have a soul greater than the souls of my people's masters,
I that have vision and prophecy and the gift of fiery speech,
I that have spoken with God on the top of His holy hill.

And because I am of the people, I understand the people,
I am sorrowful with their sorrow, I am hungry with their desire:
My heart has been heavy with the grief of mothers,
My eyes have been wet with the tears of children,
I have yearned with old wistful men,
And laughed or cursed with young men;
Their shame is my shame, and I have reddened for it,
Reddened for that they have served, they who should be free,
Reddened for that they have gone in want, while others have been
full,

Reddened for that they have walked in fear of lawyers and their
jailers,
With their writs of summons and their handcuffs,
Men mean and cruel!
I could have borne stripes on my body rather than this shame of my
people.

And now I speak, being full of vision;
I speak to my people, and I speak in my people's name to the masters
of my people.

I say to my people that they are holy, that they are august, despite
their chains,
That they are greater than those that hold them, and stronger and
purer,
That they have but need of courage, and to call on the name of their
God,

God the unforgetting, the dear God that loves the peoples
For whom He died naked, suffering shame.
And I say to my people's masters: Beware,
Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people,
Who shall take what ye would not give. Did ye think to conquer the
people,
Or that Law is stronger than life and than men's desire to be free?
We will try it out with you, ye that have harried and held,
Ye that have bullied and bribed, tyrants, hypocrites, liars!

Peter Tatchell's latest book

A defence

policy for labour?

Martin Thomas reviews
'Democratic Defence' by
Peter Tatchell (GMP/
Heretic, £3.95)

PETER Tatchell has written a patchy book about an important subject.

The Labour leadership, and increasingly CND too, are going for a heavy 'conventional' arms drive within NATO as an alternative to nuclear weapons. At the other end of the debate, many on the Left think that even to talk about "alternative defence" is a sell-out: we should simply denounce all and every military project of imperialist Britain.

Yet as long as nation-states exist, so also will national armed forces. Not even the socialist revolution will immediately do away with them. And in the meantime it cannot be a matter of indifference to us what sort of armed forces Britain (or other countries) have.

The Marxist Left needs a policy which does more than argue with the Tories about the techniques of weaponry, but which also can rally the vast majority of working class people who can be convinced about the horrors of nuclear war and the crimes of British imperialism but do not want to see their country defenceless.

The earlier chapters of Peter Tatchell's book contain quite a lot that is encouraging. He documents the horrors of nuclear war; the fact that the British army has been *continuously* at war ever since 1945, trying to uphold imperialist interests overseas; the use of the armed forces as instruments of class war inside Britain, and the plans of the military top brass for their more drastic use; and the regime of brutality and mindless obedience cultivated in the armed forces.

He cites Marx, Engels, Blanqui, Bebel and Jaures on people's militias as an alternative to standing armies; and an interesting chapter chronicles mutinies and soldiers' rights movements in the British armed forces.

Swings

Then he swings off, through appreciative descriptions of the Swedish, Swiss and Yugoslav armed forces, to a blueprint for 'democratic defence' which actually has a bigger UK-based regular army than now! He concludes by praising the 1984 Labour Party conference document — the document in which the Kinnock leadership cut loose from Labour's previous commitment drastically to reduce military spending — as "the most imaginative and radical defence policy adopted by any party since the war".

He discussed 'defensive' as



Conventional or nuclear, we must ask: who do these weapons defend?

opposed to 'aggressive' weaponry. I think this distinction is a real one.

Anti-tank missiles, anti-aircraft guns, short-range interceptor fighter-planes, etc., are not very useful for invading other countries. At the other end of the spectrum, nuclear bombs can 'defend' a country only by wiping out the population of its opponent (and, very probably, through the subsequent disturbances to the atmosphere and climate, of the world).

The main problem with the book, I think, is that its arguments do not develop logically, but rather according to classic Labour Party methods. A general (good) sentiment is expressed, and then every proposal or argument tending in that broad direction is indiscriminately supported, regardless of logical incoherence.

The Swedish and Swiss systems (non-nuclear, with a much higher territorial/militia element than Britain, and in Sweden's case with extensive trade union and democratic rights for soldiers) are undoubtedly, all else being equal, lesser evils than Britain's.

But by this point in the book Peter Tatchell is abstracting his discussion of military systems completely from class relation-

ships (which he does mention in earlier chapters). He makes no attempt to analyse why Sweden or Switzerland have different systems from Britain: he writes as if this were a matter of political choice as simple as different patterns for national flags or tunes for national anthems.

Capital

In fact Sweden and Switzerland are among the world's foremost imperialist powers in respect of export of capital. Only they are able to rely on US military might to underpin the world system which permits their huge and profitable exploitation of foreign labour.

In return for renouncing any aspirations to an independent role in world diplomacy and power-politics, and accepting a framework set by such powers as the US, these smaller advanced capitalist countries are able to economise on military expenditure.

But such military renunciation is not an option for the system as a whole. To advocate naively that the major capitalist states follow the example of Sweden or Switzerland is to obscure the basic reasons for capitalist militarism.

Another example. In the

earlier chapters Peter Tatchell explains well enough why we cannot think of 'defence' only in terms of one country against another. The people of each country also, and indeed especially, need defence against their own ruling class!

By the later chapters it is as if he has forgotten this. Peter Tatchell's blueprint for 'democratic defence' includes, for example, the SAS remaining intact, on the grounds that it would be "especially valuable for guerrilla-style operations behind enemy lines"!

Peter Tatchell finds a valuable "precedent for popular defence" in the Home Guard formed during World War 2. I'm not sure, but I think his vision here is clouded by his notion that World War 2 was "a just war of self-defence" on Britain's part.

The usual justification for World War 2 — that it was a war of "democracy against fascism" — is thin enough. The British ruling class were not fighting for democracy, but for their Empire.

The argument that it was about self-defence is even thinner. Britain was not threatened with invasion when it went to war in 1939, nor after 1940; even in those months of 1940 when a German invasion of

Britain was a real possibility, primarily Britain was trying to stop Germany acquiring predominance in continental Europe and threatening the Middle East, then the lynchpin of the British Empire.

Peter Tatchell describes World War 2 as a "momentary aberration" by the British ruling class! Would it not be more reasonable to conclude that the British ruling class during World War 2 were exactly what they had been for centuries before and have been for decades since — in Peter Tatchell's own phrase, "paper-thin patriots who would rather defend their wealth than defend their country, its people and its liberties"?

Yes, it was necessary to fight Hitler. But that did not have to mean, and should not have meant, suspending the fight against British imperialism.

Proletarian

The Trotskyist movement, in the run-up to and during World War 2, developed what it called "the proletarian military policy" — nationalisation without compensation and under workers' control of the war industries; trade-union control

over military training and especially officers' training; a people's militia, based on workplaces and communities, in place of the standing army.

Such a policy would be a better starting point for discussing 'democratic defence' than the Swedish armed forces. Still — Peter Tatchell's book opens an important debate. Read it, and try to get your Labour Party and trade union to discuss it.

Democratic Defence, by Peter Tatchell, GMP/Heretic, £3.95

Defend Peter Lynch

PETER Lynch was arrested on New Year's Eve under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He has been held in custody since that time on a conspiracy charge, despite the fact that the prosecution has not put forward one shred of evidence.

Peter has never been involved in any terrorist activities. He has taken part in legitimate political activities as a member of the Irish in Britain Representation Group and has fought for the rights of the unemployed as a voluntary worker for the Trades Council Centre for the Unemployed.

After much pressure, it has now been agreed that the committal hearing will take place on May 10th. However, this will have meant that Peter will have spent over four months in prison without one word of evidence

being heard.

Already many organisations and individuals have protested against this state of affairs. We ask your organisation to add its name to this list. Send a letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions, 4-12 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 9AZ, asking why it has taken so long to bring a case against Peter and asking that bail be granted, so that he can once again be united with his family. Would you please send us a copy of any letter.

Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact us at the above address.

Yours fraternally,
Peter Lynch Support Committee

Peter Lynch Support Committee, c/o 448 Stratford Rd, Birmingham B11 4AE, tel: 021-771 0871.

A deal with Kinnock?

Dear Socialist Organiser,

Curious rumours circulating around the Labour Party suggest that there is rather more to the collapse of Ken Livingstone in the rate-capping crisis at the GLC than has yet been realised. According to these rumours the key to understanding the situation is to be found first, in Livingstone's urgent need to get himself selected as parliamentary candidate in Brent East, in view of the almost certain demise of the present GLC in 1986, and secondly, in the growing dissatisfaction throughout the movement with the leadership of Neil Kinnock. To save himself Kinnock needs to divide and isolate the left and the obvious way to achieve this is by buying off the left-wing careerists.

Over the last few weeks there have been a number of interesting coincidences.

1. Kinnock has frequently urged Labour councillors not to go illegal in their struggle against Tory rate-capping laws.

2. There are reports that Kinnock and Livingstone have had a meeting, accompanied by further rumours of a deal between them.

3. Reg Freeson announces that he does not intend to stand for re-selection in Brent East.

4. Livingstone, having accepted a legal GLC budget, publicly urges the boroughs to stay within the law.

5. Livingstone is rumoured to have resigned from the editorship of Labour Herald, after a public quarrel with his fellow editor, Ted Knight.

6. Reg Freeson looks remarkably untroubled for someone facing redundancy.

If I were an historian commenting on these events from

some vantage point in the future, I think I might say that, although more research was needed before coming to any firm conclusions, it is possible that Kinnock and Livingstone did reach an understanding. Kinnock agreed to smooth Livingstone's path in Brent East by encouraging Freeson to stand down, possibly with the promise of a peerage or job on a quango. In return, Livingstone, who, according to his deputy, John McDonnell, had never intended to break the law over the GLC budget, agreed to endorse publicly the no illegality line. Kinnock used Livingstone, a supposedly hard left figure, to sabotage the Party's policy on rate-capping.

This has the double advantage for Kinnock of reducing the chance of any borough successfully defying the government and this, together with the end of the miners' strike, which he had also helped to undermine, would, he hoped, weaken or even destroy the Left's case for militancy and extra-parliamentary activity and isolate the real left in the Party, which he could then pick off at his leisure. Moreover, Livingstone and his County Hall minions, at last exposed as fakes, have nowhere else to go but into the Kinnock camp.

Of course all this could be the merest fantasy, but the juxtaposition of events and pronouncements is suggestive. Documentary evidence probably does not exist. But all the participants are still with us and perhaps some of them would care to comment, or will it be left to some future Ph.D student?

PAULA WATSON,
(Westminster S. CLP)



Notts East CLP backs black section

Last Sunday, 14th, representatives from two dozen constituency Labour Parties decided to defy the Labour Party national executive's ban on black sections. The NEC has said that if delegates from black sections take part in reselection conferences, then they will automatically declare the conference null and void.

The Labour Party now seems set for a head-on clash with a sizeable section of its black activists. It is a bad sign that some of the activists are cited in the press threatening to organise the defection of votes from the Labour Party: that way lies discredit for their cause in the eyes of the organised labour movement.

Below, Liam Conway reports on what the dispute over black sections has meant in Nottingham East CLP.

ON Wednesday April 3, Nottingham East Constituency Labour Party voted overwhelmingly to support black section delegates with full voting rights on the General Committee, thereby directly confronting a 1984 Labour Party conference resolution.

Conference

Like others, Nottingham East CLP can be accused of ignoring conference resolutions, but if these resolutions are unjust, like possible moves to expel Militant might be, then they must be confronted now. We therefore call for a united front in publicising the arguments to persuade conference that its decision on black sections was a disastrous mistake. Further, we call upon conference, the NEC and particularly the Parliamentary Labour Party to shake loose from bureaucratic subservience to capitalism and remember that socialism is about struggle at grass roots level.

In the meantime Nottingham East will stand by its black comrades by putting the long term principles of socialism before the short-sighted rules of the party as they now stand.

By Liam Conway

The following resolution was passed as part of the constituency's broad strategy in concert with other CLPs to educate the wider party on the need for black sections.

"This CLP recognises that the absence of provision for black sections within the party is part of the institutionalised racism that black people have to fight against.

"It therefore resolves that having recognised its black section, a parliamentary selection can only go ahead with the full involvement of its black section delegates.

"We instruct the officers of the CLP not to cooperate with any selection that disenfranchises the black section and other bodies and delegates sympathetic to it.

"We also resolve that we will join in a campaign by other CLPs for full voting rights for black sections".

The 1985 conference must reverse the 1984 decision. It is undemocratic, unprincipled and unsocialist for white male trade union leaders, white male MPs and a predominantly white male NEC and white constituency

delegates to deny the democratic right of black people to organise separately within their own constituencies.

Throughout the country right wing groups like the National Front are perpetrating increasingly vicious attacks on the black communities. Who do they turn to? How can blacks know that the Labour Party is their party if the Labour leaders hide the issues instead of highlighting them?

The Labour Party has existed since 1900, so why are many of the working class overtly racist?

With East Lewisham, Vauxhall, Streatham, Deptford, and several other CLPs facing a similar situation to East Nottingham there is a strong basis for a united national campaign to get black sections off the ground.

The black section in this constituency was formed in November last year. In five short months, they have activated the party with their energy. Black support groups were formed to give voice to the plight of the mining communities by organising fund-raising discos and joining in on picket lines.

The miners, too, learnt that there was more to the class struggle than the case

for coal, as they experienced attacks that the black community takes for granted.

Such attacks include the racism in Nottingham's schools, where black pupils are six times more likely to face suspension than whites.

The black section exposed this by helping to organise pickets at Wilford Meadows and Forest schools to confront the authority with their racist policies.

They are taking the struggle to county hall itself with a demonstration planned for April 16. Sadly, the council trying to hide the truth about suspensions and other problems facing the black community, is a Labour council.

Canvassing

Despite this, the black section is actively canvassing to return Labour councillors on May 2, giving particular support to white Labour candidates in areas with a high level of black voters.

In Radford ward, they have organised public meetings to support the white Labour candidate against a black Tory.

Finally the black section is organising a black women's awareness conference in Nottingham on May 19.

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Industrial

POLITICAL LEVY

Continued from p.12

to put the issues which head office pays for.

This is a far cry from the days of ex-secretary Sid Weighell when rules were used to clamp down on any independent activity among the membership in an attempt to crush the Broad Left.

A problem still unresolved is which of the various balloting methods to go for. A postal ballot is very much out of favour. But the alternative, a full workplace ballot is made very difficult by the very strict rules the Tories have imposed (at least three scrutineers to be present at all times, every member to be handed a paper and the ballot to be kept open so that no member under any circumstances can claim he/she could not get).

Part of the problem is in the nature of the job where members are spread out far and wide. The procedure the NUR is likely to adopt is the semi-postal ballot, where ballot papers are handed out (maintaining contact with the members) but the GPO is used to get them in.

The NUR has the highest take-up rate on the political fund - 97%. It could be that the NUR will be encouraged to go early, and, hopefully, set the right precedent.

ASDA VICTORY

By A. McGuinness

TGWU members have united with unemployed activists from all four Wirral unemployed centres to support comrades at Asda who had taken strike action over wages and conditions, job security, and all the other features of working for contract cleaning companies.

For three days (March 26-28) pickets ensured that customers were informed and deliveries were stopped.

After negotiations, a deal was made which conceded all the demands, thus securing recognition of the right of the cleaners to be employed directly by Asda and have the benefits and terms of other employees of Asda in Birkenhead.

SCOTS SACKINGS

SACKED for taking part in a sit-in to save a pit from being flooded. Sacked for trespassing on NCB property when the bus on which they were travelling refused to stop at a picket line to let them off.

Sacked for trespassing on NCB property when they walked over a white line painted by management on the public roadway at the pit entrance. Sacked for stealing coal from the NCB when the coal did not belong to the NCB anyway.

These were just a few examples of the trumped-up pretexts cited by Bert Smith, treasurer of the 'Ayrshire in Action' NUM relief fund for sacked miners at a Glasgow Mineworkers' Defence Committee (MDC) public meeting last week.

Of the 22 sacked miners in his own area, seven have never been charged with anything, and another six have not yet even appeared in court.

The public meeting was held at the end of a speaking tour organised by the MDC for David Hopper, a member of the Durham Area NUM executive, whose son is currently in prison for the 'crime' of fighting for his job.

Jailed miners are facing harassment in prison. "They were victimised during the strike", David Hopper said, "and now, even in prison,

NUT KEEPS PAY FIGHT LOW-KEY

By Cheung Siu Ming

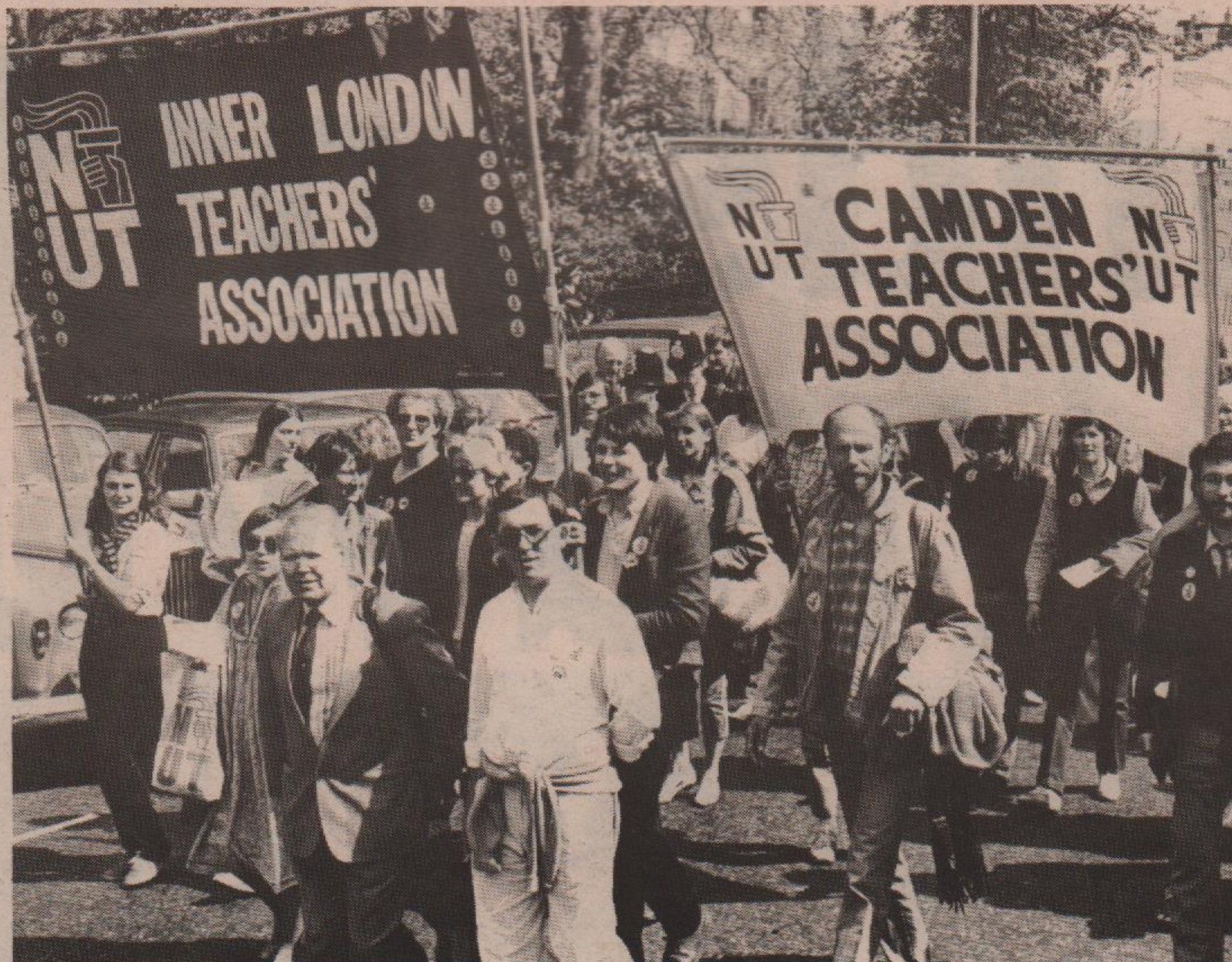
LAST week's NUT conference supported the Executive on this year's salary claim. The conference motion calls on all NUT members to donate a day's pay to the strike fund, and gives the Executive powers to decide how to escalate the action beyond the present level of three-day strikes in selected areas.

Strengthening amendments calling for non-supervision of public exams, a levy instead of a donation, for a national one-day strike with the Scottish EIS and with NATFHE, and for sanctioning absolute no cover, were all opposed by the platform and defeated. The main motion was put before other amendments calling for monthly levy, reduction of strike pay, indefinite strikes in selected areas and reaffirmation of opposition to arbitration.

Left delegates had to concede that although many NUT members in militant areas were impatient for more intensive action, the National Executive's victory at conference reflected the attitude of most members, who are not yet ready to take action beyond what the National Executive is recommending.

Divisional officers were given their allotted number of strike days and were asked to submit plans for strike action before the end of the conference. Because the rate of strike pay remained at full pay, and because conference decided only to appeal to members for a donation instead of a monthly levy, the scope for any escalation remains restricted.

For example, the Inner London Division was called



out in the three weeks leading up to conference to the tune of 4500 strike days - three sets of three-day strikes, each involving 500 members. Its allotted strike days for the coming five weeks is only marginally increased, not enough to call all its 13,000 members out for even a one-day strike.

This is an indication of the gap between the "escalating" action and what is needed to win this claim, with or without the opening of other fronts by other public sector workers.

East London and Lambeth Associations called a packed fringe meeting on salaries, which formulated most of the amendments put to conference. They will be organising a second recall salary conference of militant associations and Divisions in June, to keep up the pressure on the leadership.

Apart from the salary campaign, NUT conference debated rate-capping. The original motion called for support to councils refusing to comply with the Rates Act. An Executive amend-

ment trying to water this down was defeated, but the original motion did not get passed either. Such a narrow vote on a clear issue of defying the Tory laws indicated that the NUT has moved to the left during the last year as a result of its pay fight last year and also because of the miners' strike.

This was reflected in the conference debate on the miners' strike, on pensions, equal opportunities, class size sanctions and teacher assessment, when the Executive

more often than not failed to win the key votes. Furthermore, conference passed an emergency motion unanimously opposing Devon Education Authority's ban on teachers wearing CND and other "political" badges and stickers such as the NUT slogan "Education Cuts Don't Heal".

On the question of racism, however, the conference failed to support a motion calling for time to be given to debate the deportation of Shahida Ali, who teaches in East London and has three children born in the UK. Not only is her teaching qualification not recognised by the DES, making her ineligible for a mainstream post and salary (and NUT membership!), but her work permit renewal has been refused by the Home Office. East London delegates however managed to get the Union President to intervene against her deportation. Despite a well-attended fringe meeting on anti-racist education, the Racism debate never took place in conference because it did not receive a sufficiently high voting priority.

The NUT faces a crucial period ahead, not only over pay, but also on rate-capping and local government cuts with thousands of teaching jobs at stake. Furthermore Keith Joseph's White Paper "Better Schools" (sic) will be seeking to enforce by law assessment of teachers and further central government control of education. Although the union has begun to mobilise and respond to these challenges, its traditionally timid leadership has yet to show signs of leading a determined fightback.

they're still being victimised. They are class prisoners, in jail because they fought for our class".

In the course of the tour he met shop stewards and members of the FBU, NALGO, ASLEF and the NUR, as well as speaking at a meeting of Glasgow Central Constituency Labour Party and the international 'Has Socialism a Future?' conference.

NUM LEADERS

MORE MINERS have been sacked in Scotland than in any other region, relative to the total number of members employed there.

And yet, in spite of the urgency of the situation, the Scottish NUM leadership is failing to mount an effective campaign in support of victimised miners.

The Scottish NUM leadership refuses to put forward the straightforward demand for reinstatement of all sacked miners. Instead it is "of the view that all cases should be discussed individually with the mining unions. Their reinstatement would help ensure a substantial improvement in the present poor industrial relations... Such an improvement is necessary for the future success of the industry".

The Scottish NUM has also ignored completely the question of imprisoned miners. It

says that there are none in Scotland. But a support group in Edinburgh has reported that Brian Miller from the Sols-girth pit is serving a four-month prison sentence (no.986, Hall A2-26, HM Prison Saughton, Edinburgh).

TRADES COUNCILS

"I DON'T SEE why people who have not been punished once for alleged offences by the courts should be punished twice by losing their job. That is why I'm sticking out for full - not selective - reinstatement of sacked miners".

This was Dennis Canavan MP's message for a 50-strong shop stewards' conference held by the Scottish Central Region Trades Councils on Saturday March 30.

The main decisions of the meeting were:

- To campaign for reinstatement of all sacked miners,
- To arrange a joint meeting between representatives from Polmaise, the Central Region Federation of Trades Councils, and the Central Region Regional Council to discuss the continuing campaign to prevent closure of Polmaise;
- To maintain the Central Region Miners' Support Group and its monthly bulletin;
- To organise workplace visits by sacked miners to help get levies in their support.

Scots rail strike

AFTER THE breakdown of talks between British Rail and the rail union NUR last Monday, NUR members in Scotland will strike on Wednesday April 17.

BR has threatened legal action against the NUR, on the grounds that the strike was called without a ballot and thus breaches the Tories' anti-union laws.

The strike is in opposition to the threat of 1250 job losses at the Springburn British Rail Engineering Ltd workshops in Glasgow.

Springburn has already lost a lot of jobs, most recently last summer. If the currently-threatened cuts are implemented, then complete closure can only be a question of time.

Broad Left

The initiative for the April 17 strike came from a meeting of the NUR Broad Left in Glasgow at the start of February. It adopted a model resolution for circulation round NUR branches, including the demand for a 24 hour all-Scottish strike, establishment of an officially-recognised emergency coordinating committee, and a boycott of all work diverted from Springburn.

The aim was to start a campaign against all job losses in the Scottish railway system.

In one form or another, the resolution was passed by some 20 NUR branches in Scotland.

On jobs, the choice is to fight now or not at all. If the 1250 jobs are lost at Springburn, then it will be much easier to axe jobs elsewhere, and on a larger scale.

BR's legal moves raise another question. Will the NUR pay any resulting fine, and thereby contribute to an acceptance of the anti-union laws by the trade union movement? Or will it refuse to pay, and head for a major conflict with the Tories and their courts?

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Socialist Organiser

Keep our unions Labour

Hands off the TGWU!

WITHOUT doubt, much of the outcry over allegations of ballot-rigging in the TGWU is pure hypocrisy. Fleet Street is not so much concerned with democratic principles (they happily ignore the way right wing union leaders trample on the rights of their members) as with discrediting trade unionism in general and internal union decision-making processes in particular.

It fits in very nicely with Tebbit's laws forcing secret ballots before strikes and for the election of union officers. It also comes just prior to the period of balloting on the political levy.

It would be wrong to dismiss the whole business as just another exercise in Tory anti-union propaganda. Ballot rigging (euphemistically referred to within the union as "block voting") is rife within the TGWU and rank and file members are quite right to be angry about it.

The current crop of allegations happen to involve supporters of the left wing general secretary-elect Ron Todd.

But in the past the right wing have shown themselves quite willing to engage in "block voting", and there is no reason to believe that in the general secretary election the practice was confined to supporters of Todd.

Quite simply, what "block voting" means is that instead of distributing ballot papers to the members, branch secretaries and other members find it more convenient to fill them in themselves - "on behalf of" the members, so to speak.

Alone

The TGWU's election procedures are wide open to abuse. Ballot forms and stubs are not numbered. Ballot boxes are flimsy cardboard affairs. Officials are left alone with the ballot boxes for long periods of time, during and after the vote.

An inquiry by the TGWU Region 3 committee into ballot-rigging in the 3/174 Bristol branch has already led to two expulsions (of a Regional Committee member and of a full-time official) and to the branch secretary being banned from office for life.

The focus of attention has now shifted to Northern Ireland (Region 11) where an unusually high turn-out in the election was recorded. Officially



Photo. John Harris

The Tories' hue and cry over ballot-rigging in the TGWU is part of a calculated drive to unseat Ron Todd, the union's general-secretary-elect. More than that, it is a new front in the continued Tory war on the trade unions and on trade unionism.

The TGWU itself investigated ballot-rigging incidents months ago, and took action against those found guilty. One of them was a full-time official. He has been expelled and sacked.

It is well-known in the labour movement that trade union democracy leaves a great deal to be desired. The Left has long campaigned for the democratisation of the trade unions. We want democracy to strengthen the unions and put the rank and file in control. The Tories and their press want to use their hue and cry about violations of democracy to weaken, cripple and divide the unions.

The TGWU is continuing to investigate the allegations and Ron Todd says he will support a new election if the TGWU executive decides that that is the best thing to do. That is the TGWU's business.

To the Tories and their press the labour movement must say. hands off the TGWU!

ially over 72% of the members in the Region are supposed to have taken part in the election, with 40,411 votes going to Ron Todd and 8022 to right-winger George Wright.

As Todd's majority nationally was just 45,000, the Region 11 result is obviously very significant.

Members and shop stewards from a number of Region 11 branches are claiming that they never saw a ballot box and in many cases weren't even aware that an election was taking place. When a BBC Newsnight

programme commissioned a poll of three large branches in Belfast, only 32% of those questioned had voted.

A shop steward from Harland and Wolff, William Smith, denounced the conduct of the ballot as an affront to working class democracy: "It's the ordinary members who were hit flat in the face by their own union not allowing them to vote".

He, himself, would have voted for Ron Todd.

Patrick McArdle, a senior steward at the Falls Road Ulsterbus depot said, "I can tell you there was no ballot

box there. It was just that when I realised I was done out of my vote that I lost my rag."

Both men appear to be sincere rank and file trade unionists, reluctant to criticise the union in public and not out to make a fast buck by fuelling any anti-union campaign.

This is by no means the first time that allegations of this kind have been made within the TGWU, although up till now, scandals have been fairly successfully hushed up by the union bureaucracy. In November

1977 Alan Law, full time officer for road haulage drivers in the Midlands, and secretary of the 5/35 Birmingham branch, was caught ballot-rigging. He had personally filled in almost all the 4,500 ballot papers issued to the branch for three elections: national trade group committee, regional committee and general executive council.

When this was revealed the branch returns were disqualified but no further action was taken at that time against Law. Indeed, the Region 5 secretary, Brian Mathers, (who is still in office) systematically covered up for Law and the Regional Committee refused rank and file demands for an inquiry.

It was only when two angry but misguided left-wingers made a formal complaint to the police that the Regional Committee decided to remove Law as branch secretary and persuaded him to retire at 60 a year or so later.

Deafness

Even then, the official reason was given as being Law's deafness (!).

At the time of the Alan Law scandal it was the far left that campaigned to expose ballot-rigging and it has been the far left who have fought for years to democratise the union by tightening up voting procedures, opposing block voting and introducing regular elections for all full-time officials.

Our distaste for the way the media is using the present "scandal" as an excuse for union-bashing, and our suspicions about the real motives of those within the union who are demanding a re-run of the election should not lead us into making excuses for "block voting" or into letting up in the fight for democratic reforms.

If the left does not champion the cause of trade union democracy, then the right wing will have a clear run to capitalise on the justified outrage of the membership.

The end result of that could well be the TGWU following the EETPU and the AUEW and accepting government money for secret ballots. If we are to defend active democracy based upon mass meetings and workplace ballots, then the left must take the lead in rooting out the ballot-rigging.

THE Tory-imposed plebiscites on whether or not the unions should have political funds must be held within a year.

The most important task the labour movement faces in the next year is to win a yes vote in these ballots. A no vote in any major union would throw the labour movement backwards and badly weaken the Labour Party.

The chance of defeat is a real one in some unions. Therefore we must organise a powerful campaign in every union to explain the advantages of a political fund and the need for a politically active labour movement.

The tragic NUM vote not to levy 50p for sacked and jailed miners was in part a result of the failure of the area NUM leaderships to campaign for a yes vote.

Every section and every level of the labour movement must campaign vigorously in favour of the political levy. The NUR is setting a good example to the labour movement here.

Rob Dawber reports on how the NUR is gearing itself up for the ballot.

THE campaign in the NUR for a yes vote in the Tory-imposed ballot on whether or not the union should have a political fund is being pursued quite energetically and with a clear determination to win.

Weekend schools and day schools have been and are being organised, both locally and nationally. Lost wages are paid by the union, to encourage participation. The schools are meant to train a network of 'activists' in the basic arguments for a political fund. The intention is to have an 'activist' in every workplace who can persuade their workmates to vote 'yes'.

A network of 'activists' who are in direct contact with the campaign unit at the NUR's head office will give vigour to the campaign and ensure that it is not just something extra piled onto the branch secretaries. This in itself allows the campaign to tap energies rather than be just pushed to one side.

A regular newsletter goes out to all activists giving information and seeking ideas. Those who are heading the campaign are encouraging members to send in ideas for posters, leaflets and so on and also encouraging local leaflets

Continued on p.11



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