

# IT'S THEIR PROFITS OR OUR HEALTH!

**EVERY WORKER in Britain should feel outrage at what the Tories are doing to the NHS.**

In a week when hole-in-the-heart baby David Barber could not get the operation he needed, and when workers in hospitals targeted for closure worked through the night to save victims of the Kings Cross fire, a new onslaught on the NHS was announced. Their plans are a measure of how sick capitalist society really is.

Tory minister for Health, Anthony Newton, unveiled a white paper called *Promoting Better Health*. A better title would have been 'Health and Wealth'—how to make a fast buck exploiting sick people. The plan is to extend the scope for commercial contractors to those areas of the NHS that have been or are earmarked for privatisation.

The document recommends that hospitals employ a manager to make money by, for example, running profitable hospital shops, hairdressing services and even health shops where people could pop in to see how fit they were, for a small fee. The cost of meals for underpaid staff could be raised, and the caterers could offer frozen meals for sale to staff to take home with them.

The paper even suggests charging a more competitive rate to local authorities for space in mortuaries. It favours charging undertakers up to £10,000 a year—a sort of advertising fee—for a free phone service in the hospitals that bereaved relatives could use. The undertaker that pays the fee would be likely to get the business. The dead, as well as the sick, are to be pressed into service by the Tories. Charging relatives for overnight accommodation when they have to be near sick patients would also be a money spinner—perhaps Trust House Forte might like

to make the profits on that one!

The document is quite clear on the purpose of such plans. It states: 'the scope for introducing commercial enterprise into the NHS is truly enormous.' To complement this bargain-basement hospital service the Tories have put forward their plans for 'improving preventative medicine and primary health care'.

They announced that the two most widely used screening services—dental checks and sight checks—will now cost £3 and £10 respectively. Dental charges will go up again. Community dental and community clinic services will be wound down.

GPs will be given financial incentives to do a few more cervical cancer smears. The justification for this by the Tories is that the GPs will get more money to improve their service. In the context of overall cuts this will not mean any improvement at all.

The current crisis in the NHS is the result of deliberate policies by Thatcher and her class. They were determined from the start to create a profitable private health service for themselves as investors and users. They aimed to make money out of all sectors of the NHS which could be privatised or commercialised.

They wanted to leave the rest of the NHS as a chaotic, second class service for those who cannot pay.

The NHS needs to expand its provision to keep up with the needs of an ageing community. The Tory claims to be providing more money and more doctors and nurses mean nothing when compared with the real needs of the service.

For those who either work in or use the NHS it is obvious that it is severely underfunded and getting worse. The plight of David Barber shows this clearly. His operation was postponed five times. Why? Because the Birmingham hospital could not get enough qualified nurses to cope with the scale of care needed to care for and cure David and the other 5,000 babies born every year with similar illnesses.

Indeed while David waited for an intensive care bed to become available, other newly born babies were turned away from the specialist unit and at least one of those babies has since died. The Tories were quick to express sympathy for David. Crocodile tears were being shed in front of every available TV camera and press photographer. Yet the Tories rejected a meeting with heart surgeons prior to this case on the grounds that it was 'unnecessary'—no crisis ex-

isted according to them.

Thatcher promised to look at the question of special pay supplements for these nurses. Over half of the country's District Health Authorities (DHAs) are already looking for cuts in order to balance their budgets. They will be forced to pay for any wage increases that are made, out of yet further cuts. Given this the Tories' sympathy stinks.

DHA's all over the country are closing wards, preventing operations happening and slashing the number of beds. They simply do not have the money to last out until April—the end of their financial year. At St Thomas' in London they are planning to close over 140 beds within one month. At St Mary's in Paddington heart operations, cancer treatments and hip replacements are being delayed in order to try and save money as the hospital faces a £3 million deficit this year. In the South East Thames Region waiting lists have risen by 19% in the last nine months.

Tory Health Minister Newton insisted to the House of Commons last week: 'Do not let anybody tell me that is a record of cuts'. What a liar! But cuts are not the only problem. The Birmingham events highlighted the chronic lack of trained nurses in the NHS.

## COVENTRY SHOWS THE WAY

ON 19 NOVEMBER in Coventry a half day strike against cuts from the District Health Authority was called by the Joint Union Committee of health service workers. The response from the labour movement was tremendous. A march and lobby of the DHA was staged by 2,000 workers. Kerseley miners gave up their £150 a month bonus to strike (whilst the scabs of the UDM worked on).

The AEU was represented by workers from Rolls-Royce and Massey-Ferguson. Council workers from NALGO and ASTMS also struck.

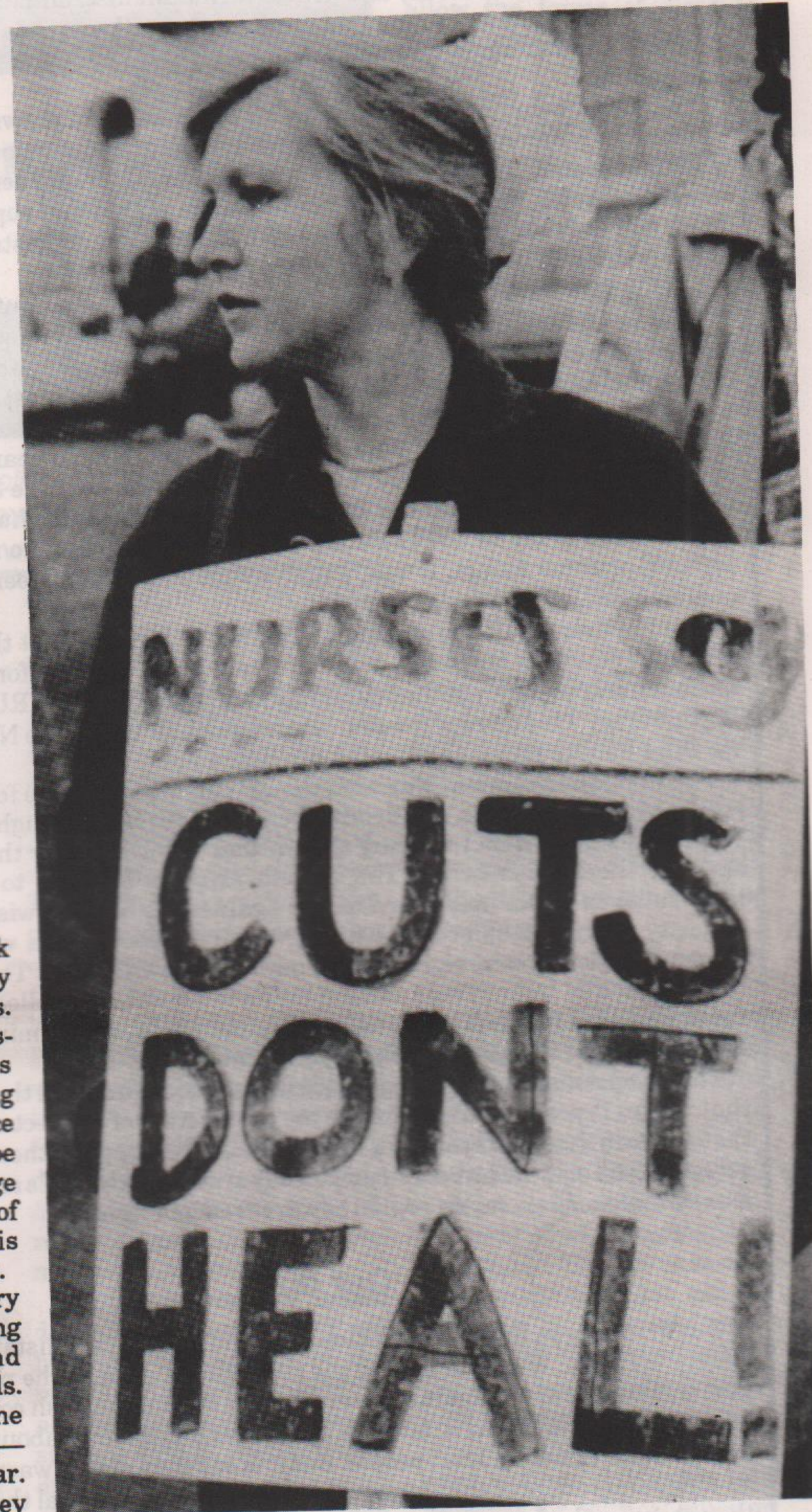
The action was taken in opposition to the closure of Whitley and Paybody hospitals, and the subsequent sale of the former to the Church Housing Association. This will mean a cut of at least 82 beds to start with. At Whitley

half of Ward 3 has already been closed and the women patients moved to Walsgrave.

What should we do now? The JUC has met and argued that if the DHA give notice of any further cuts then there will be all-out strike action. But health workers must act now. The threatened sites must be occupied immediately. This action must then be extended to other hospi-

tals. Occupations alone however, cannot win. Other workers have shown that they are prepared to fight. In Coventry indefinite all out strike action alongside the occupations must be argued for. The RCN nurses must be picketed out and broken from that scab outfit. A fighting alliance of all workers committed to taking such action must be forged if the cuts are to be defeated. ■

by Andy Cleminson



Every year over 30,000 nurses leave the NHS. Last year 1,770 switched to the private sector. Most of these are precisely the specialist trained nurses needed so desperately in the NHS. All reports of why these nurses leave point to two basic factors—pay and conditions.

The nurses needed to look after babies in intensive care earn between £7,300 and £8,600 a year. Sisters on such wards, responsible for the running of highly technical units earn £9,000. Many nurses have to top up their

wages by working for private nursing agencies in addition to their NHS shifts. Working in rundown hospitals, with too few nurses and a shortage of beds, knowing that the patients are getting an inadequate service is totally demoralising.

And the Tories now plan to cut wages still further. The new proposal to standardise extra payments for 'unsocial hours' will mean most nurses facing a wage cut of up to £37 a week according to Nupe figures. The scheme would give all grades a mere £1.20 per hour on top of basic pay for any hours after 8pm, including night shifts, and for weekends and bank holidays.

More nurses will leave if these plans go through. Still more will leave as beds are axed and services decline. To resist Tory plans the issue of pay and conditions must be taken up and linked to that of cuts and the new proposals for fees. That way a fighting unity between the working class users in the NHS and the workers of the NHS can be built into a mighty movement that must use mass strike action to scupper the Tories' plans. ■



# FOR THE IRA AGAINST THE BRITISH ARMY

THE ENNISKILLEN bombing is, more than anything else, a reminder that Britain's eighteen years of direct military rule have failed to restore imperialist and loyalist order in the Six Counties. For as long as Britain clings on to its oldest colony and polices its inbuilt discrimination against the Catholic minority, young men and women will continue to sacrifice their all in the struggle against their oppression. The fight to free Ireland will continue.

Yet, as her own highly publicised visit to Enniskillen shows, Thatcher and her government are hell bent on grinding into the dust those who take up arms against British rule. They will increase their murderous operations against the IRA and the nationalist communities that support them. They will step up their surveillance of Irish political activists. They are actively canvassing a ban on Sinn Fein itself.

In this they have the backing of the Green Tories in the Southern State who have increased their co-operation with Whitehall in its war against the republicans. And of course the Tories know that the leaders of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will utter not one word of protest.

The Government and its media mouthpieces protest about the 'violence' and 'terror' of Enniskillen. What sickening hypocrisy. To hear Thatcher attacking 'the men of violence' when it was her who sent the 368 sailors of the Belgrano to their deaths with no warning, is stomach churning. She left ten men to die in the H-blocks who were demanding no more than political prisoner status. It was British troops who shot thirteen unarmed civilians on Bloody Sunday in 1972.

The Provisional IRA is waging a genuine struggle against the squalor and oppression of Britain's rule. It grew as a defence force in the nationalist areas against the brutal raids and searches of the RUC and the British army. One third of the anti-unionist population in the North voted for Sinn Fein to represent it as its political voice.

The Republicans are at war with the British army and the forces of the repressive Orange state, artificially created by Britain through partition. We have no hesitation in saying that in that war we are for the IRA and against, the British army. The British army is fighting to maintain imperialism's direct hold over Ireland against the historic wishes of the majority of Irish people. It is denying the Irish people as a whole their elementary democratic right to determine their own future. That is what the partition of Ireland means. And for nationalists, compelled to live in the partitioned North it has meant over sixty years of discrimination and intimidation at the hands of the loyalist thugs.

The Provisionals are fighting to end Britain's rule and end the partition that makes it possible. They are for the destruction of the sectarian state that Britain has fostered. We unconditionally support them in that struggle. To Tory and Labour lies that they are mere criminals and twisted men of violence, we say in reply they are freedom fighters.

## Our duty

Our first duty as British revolutionaries and internationalists is to state clearly this fact. We must defend the republicans against the repression that will be meted out against them. We will defend the Irish community here from all attacks on it, such as the move by Camden Labour Council to repatriate London's Irish people. But it is our duty also to warn that the strategy and tactics of the republicans cannot secure the goal that we and they so ardently desire.

The reality and the tragedy is, that the republicans do not have the military means nor the political strategy capable of defeating the British army. They can score spectacular successes and doubtless keep alive the hopes of those in the beleaguered ghettos. But they cannot drive the British out. In turn this increases the tendency of the republicans to seek out the spectacular military coup in retaliation against army and RUC operations. One such attempt was Enniskillen. It went badly wrong. In all probability it was intended for military and state personnel in line with the Provo operational policy. Whether that was the case or not Enniskillen underlines that the Provisionals are wrong if they think such methods will drive Britain from Ireland.

At the political level the immediate effect of Eniskillen will have served to confuse and demoralise the nationalist population. The long term impact of the Provos campaign has been to leave the mass of the Northern nationalist population as passive and unorganised bystanders in the war. It has necessarily dissipated the potential support of the Southern working class that was shown so clearly around the H-block struggle in 1981. It has handed to Thatcher and Haughey an opportunity to destroy the electoral credibility Sinn Fein had built up at the expense of the constitutional nationalists. They will use Enniskillen for all its worth to revive the flagging fortunes of the middle class catholic collaborators in the SDLP.

Only by mobilising the mass of the nationalist population in the North and the workers in the South can we paralyse Britain's puppet state and its lackeys in Dublin. Such a mobilisation is only possible around the interwoven anti-imperialist and class issues that unite workers in crisis wracked Ireland. The working class is the only force the can end British rule in Ireland. And because the Provos are not revolutionary Marxists they remain incapable of realising it.

We defend the right of the Provisionals to struggle by any means to end Britain's rule. We are for the revolutionary nationalists against the British imperialists unconditionally. But Enniskillen only underscores our criticisms of the blind alley the republicans are tragically trapped in. ■

# Building solidarity now

THE BRITISH labour movement and its left wing has a dismal record of solidarity with the Irish struggle for self-determination. This was borne out graphically by the Trade Union Conference on Employment Discrimination held on 28 November.

Having for years refused to take work in the unions seriously, some Labourite lefts have belatedly made a turn to the unions. Not out of a recognition of the need for anti-imperialist agitation and propaganda, but through the recognition that the unions hold the key to Labour Party policy making.

The launch of the MacBride Principles in November 1984 and their enthusiastic adoption by several American states, signalled the opportunity for the latest populist campaign on Ireland. It follows in the same vein as previous humanitarian campaigns around plastic bullets and the PTA, which aim to build around demands minimalist enough to attract the sponsorship of prominent 'liberals' and 'lefts' in the Labour Party and trade unions.

In the aftermath of Enniskillen we were presented with the spectacle of a platform which included Kevin McNamara and Ken Livingstone along with the international celebrity Sean MacBride SC, Winner of the Nobel and Lenin Peace Prizes, former Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs and founder of Amnesty International. The 'highlight' of the day was Livingstone's congratulatory overtures to McNamara for having 'stood up to the pressure from the press by turning up to the conference at all'. (The fact that McNamara spoke first and left after 30 minutes, long before Livingstone arrived was incidental.)

The organisers were determined that there should be no unpleasantness or recriminations over such peripheral issues as Troops Out Now, Self Determination and support for all those fighting Britain's army in Ireland.

They ensured that no resolutions

or proposals were debated. There was approximately 40 minutes for debate from the floor. There was one hour for workshops where we were presented with the established fact that the organisers of the conference were setting up a liaison body 'with several leading trade unions and experts in the field of discrimination'.

Workers Power supporters sought to address conference with the question of 'who is going to enforce these anti-discriminatory measures?' We argued that the fight against discrimination cannot be separated from the fight to get the Troops Out of Ireland. For this we were accused of 'jeopardising the positive support already gained by the Campaign' and of being ultimatumist.

The organisers' suggested model resolution (which they withdrew to avoid them having to debate a solidarity resolution proposed by Workers Power and passed by Birmingham 4 AEU) exposed the real orientation of the campaign. The trade unions are again to be relegated to voting fodder in an effort to get Labour to support the campaign against employment discrimination. There will be no attempt to challenge the trade union leaders and mobilise the rank and file in an active fight to tackle the root cause of discrimination in Northern Ireland.

Instead, the union leaders who want it will be given a new coat of varnish for their leftist reputation. This is the case with the 26 members of the NUR executive who sponsored the conference—while not one of them even turned up on the day.

They will not be obliged to mobilise their members behind them. This would be the only political justification for organising united front ac-

tion specifically around discrimination. The proposed orientation is not a step, as some claim, towards winning support for withdrawal. All the other single issue, humanitarian campaigns have shown this. The support for the conference is not an indication of a new groundswell on the question of Ireland. In fact we are further than ever away from building the type of campaign we need.

What is needed is a militant anti-imperialist movement built from the ground up, based in the trade unions. It must fight to force the British to withdraw. The experience of the last 18 years has proven that there are no short-cuts or half-way houses. The demand for Troops Out Now only seems impossible because the left in Britain refuses to prioritise its political resources in this direction.

We must take up the fight in the working class to win it to militant opposition to the British state's rule in Ireland.

This means that in the coming months we must:

- Defend free speech on Ireland against the witch-hunting of anyone in the Labour Party who dares to speak out against the Thatcher/Kinnock line
- Oppose all legal restrictions against Sinn Fein
- Fight the racist policies of Camden Council who seek to repatriate homeless Irish families and in the process fuel anti-Irish chauvinism in the British working class
- Take up anew the fight in the unions to win support for Troops Out Now and Self Determination for the Irish people as a whole

by Breda Concannon

# RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF LIVINGSTONE

Ken Livingstone dared to state that the real problem in Ireland was Britain. He was vilified by the press, the Tories and labour leadership for doing so. Here we look at the issues behind the furore.



Livingstone—confused scenario

THE BOMBING in Enniskillen has been cynically manipulated by the Tory government and press. The response of the Labour Party has been equally hypocritical.

Kinnock and company have sought to outdo the Tories in their cries of outrage and their condemnation of Livingstone for daring to call for the 'withdrawal' of British Troops. Against Kinnock the Labour Left as an organised grouping have raised the weakest of voices. The Campaign Group of MPs has raised a call for Britain to announce its decision to terminate its jurisdiction in the Province and to withdraw all

troops within the lifetime of this parliament'.

But they remain silent as to how this is going to come about and who will make it happen. It is Ken Livingstone who has been the 'bete noir' of the press. With Benn he has rightly argued that it is Britain's presence that generates the conflict. He argues that 'as with all colonial situations we have been involved in, Britain will eventually go', and that we should learn the lessons of Cyprus and Aden by negotiating a 'peaceful settlement'.

Of course it is right to defend Livingstone against the attempts of the Labour Party shadow cabinet to isolate him. But it is also necessary to criticise his scenario of the 'eventuality of British withdrawal'. Unlike Cyprus or Aden, Britain is integrally linked, both economically and politically, to the North of Ireland. Nor in those two countries was there a pro-imperialist majority resisting withdrawal.

Britain may pull out but only on the basis of having crushed and defeated the republican movement. If Livingstone wants the troops to leave behind a progressive and anti-imperialist settlement then that sort of withdrawal has to be prevented. How? Troops Out Now! ■

# SUBSCRIBE

Subscription rates for 10 issues

Britain	£5.00
Europe	£7.00
Outside Europe	£9.00

Name .....

Address .....

Make cheques payable to  
Workers Power and send to:  
BCM 7750  
LONDON WC1N 3XX

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



AT THE Easter Conference of the NUS, Socialist Students in NOLS (SSiN) won election to the executive for their candidate, Simon Pottinger. They did so against the official candidate of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS).

At that conference SSiN made it a point of honour to brand all opponents of the Zionist state of Israel as anti-Semitic. The Zionist vote secured their election.

At this winter's conference SSiN will be staking their claim as the right opposition in NOLS by championing a couple of new reactionary causes.

Under the guidance of the editors of *Socialist Organiser* (the grouping around this paper dominates SSiN) SSiN will be buying for the blood of all those who unconditionally support the Irish republican struggle and who call for British troop withdrawal; and the defence of the USSR against imperialism.

### Accommodation

As part and parcel of their long term accommodation to social-democracy yet more 'old Trotskyism' is to be unceremoniously junked. It will be replaced by supposedly new thinking. In fact this new thinking is as old as the hills and revolutionaries have a name for it—imperialist economic.

This can take the form of traitorous neutrality in the conflicts between national liberation movements, or the USSR and imperialism, or even the open espousal of imperialist solutions to such conflicts.

*Socialist Organiser* has moved a long way fast in breaking with defense of the republicans against the British Army. Back in issue 113, editor O'Mahoney declared:

'We defend the right of the republican movement to opt for armed struggle. We find ourselves, living in Britain, obliged to combat the pressures around us and to champion and defend the Republicans.'

The paper called for 'Troops

out now' as one means of focusing the issue in Britain, and getting across the message that Britain has no rights in Ireland.'

Such days are long gone as the paper's response to Enniskillen shows. For *Socialist Organiser* nowadays Britain's presence in Ireland is not the problem. As Lynn Ferguson recently put it:

'The fundamental problem in Northern Ireland is not "British rule", but a deeply divided working class.'

As a result *Socialist Organiser* now devotes its time to fathoming how to lure the protestant workers into a united Ireland and actually opposes the withdrawal of British troops until the protestant workers have been successfully accommodated to.

*Socialist Organiser*, as a consequence, backed Kinnock against Livingstone after Enniskillen. Livingstone called for British withdrawal and brought down the wrath of Neil Kinnock upon himself. Kinnock repeated the standard right wing argument that troop withdrawal would lead to increased violence. All this was good enough for O'Mahoney;

'Nevertheless, much of what Kinnock said against Livingstone is true! That is the measure of the Labour left's confusion on Ireland.'

Troops out without a political settlement would not lead to a united Ireland, but to sectarian civil war and a new partition. Kinnock is right about that and Livingstone is wrong.'

### Charitable operation

For O'Mahoney today Britain's presence in Ireland is a charitable operation. Imperialism is keeping the peace between the two divided communities. Ferguson talks of how over the last few years:

'The British state clearly draws no profit or strategic advantage from Northern Ireland.'

What she refuses to see is that Britain polices Ireland, as a whole, in the interests of imperialism. Its northern state remains an important



RUC terror—daily reality in the sectarian state

# PROUD TO BE RIGHT

The softening up of the British left is epitomised by *Socialist Organiser*—the driving force behind Socialist Students in NOLS (SSiN). Nothing exemplifies this more so than their positions on Ireland and the USSR which we examine here

means of doing this. In order to destroy that grip the British workers must fight to get British troops out of the North of Ireland where they prop up an artificial and undemocratic statelet. This state was constructed with an inbuilt protestant majority which has been used by imperialism to buttress its control since partition.

To the extent that British workers refuse to support the continued existence of that state and, more importantly, Irish communists intervene with a clear class programme for a workers' republic the likelihood increases that sections of Protestant workers will be won away from their bosses and from their objectively pro-imperialist stance.

The more the 'British connection' is severed the more the Orange bloc will fragment and crack. That has been the lesson of every partial rift between the British government and the Orange state.

*Socialist Organiser*, however, now we things the others

way round. Their diet is one of rabid denunciation of the republicans. They explicitly support Kinnock's declaration of opposition to troop withdrawal. They merely state that he will not be able to come up with a political solution. After Enniskillen this line will earn them fewer enemies at the NUS conference and in the Labour Party. And after all that's what their courting of Kinnock is all about!

### Cause célèbre

The other *Socialist Organiser* cause célèbre these days is their solidarity campaign with workers in the eastern bloc. In combat with the Stalinist nurtured and grossly ill named Democratic Left in the NUS they have been indulging in an increasingly frenzied Stalinophobic binge against the Soviet 'evil empire'.

Of course revolutionary communists defend workers in the USSR and Eastern Europe against the ugly bureaucratic repression that is a

daily fact of life. But we do this without conceding an inch programmatically to Labourite anti-communism or to pacifist 'neutralism' in the real conflict between imperialism and the USSR.

Not so the *Socialist Organiser*. Their November jamboree in solidarity with East European workers saw them trying to stitch together a bloc of themselves with Robin Cook, the END (European Nuclear Disarmament), with Polish Social Democrats as well as east European oppositionists striving for western European parliamentary democracy. Its a good thing *Socialist Organiser* had already cleared the programmatic decks in advance.

Right wingers and social democrats the world over are hymning the praises of the market and the failures of the planned economies. They are striving with all their might to dismantle the planning mechanisms and end the food and welfare subsidies on the road to restoring capitalism in

the bureaucratically degenerate workers' states. While defending the working class from every form of bureaucratic despotism we must do so while fighting for real democratically centralised planning as opposed to the reintroduction of the market.

*Socialist Organiser* sees things differently. The latest *Workers Liberty* argues that:

'Even wasteful and anti-socialist market experiments may be a necessary detour, weakening the central state's power to stifle society, and thus "progressive" in that they allow the forces of working class socialism space to gather.'

Really? How does *Workers Liberty* think that market experiments like ending food subsidies, ending job security can somehow prove historically progressive? Only those made blind by their Stalinophobic rage could so lightly discard a fundamental tenet of revolutionary Marxism today—its commitment to extend and develop democratic planning and curb the anarchic and wasteful forces of the market.

### Stalinophobes

There was no shortage of such Stalinophobes at the Solidarity Conference. *Socialist Organiser* speakers repeatedly argued they would rather see capitalism restored than the workers held down. As if capitalism could be restored without holding the working class down!

Indeed the only time capitalism was temporarily restored in the USSR it had to be done under the auspices of Hitler. Or perhaps full blown capitalism itself might be the best thing 'to allow the forces of working class socialism space to gather' doubtless in the form of a Labour Party?

At the NUS conference militant students must not be taken in by *Socialist Organiser*/SSiN. They must not allow themselves to be dragged into the swamp of opportunism as *Socialist Organiser* ever more desperately searches for political allies on the ever less hard 'left' of the Labour Party. ■

# STUDENTS SHATTER SOCIAL PEACE

A massive student strike in Austria has shattered decades of social peace. This report from *Arbeiter Standpunkt*, the Austrian section of the MRCI, looks at the development of the strike.

SINCE THE formation one year ago of the coalition government between the Austrian Socialist Party (SPO) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) the attacks on the working class have increased. The nationalised industries are being prepared for privatisation by mass redundancies. Social services are being cut.

The coalition recently launched its latest attack in the form of the 'Lacina Bill'. This programme of cuts included measures which would mean that students could have to pay up to £5,000 for their courses. This is, quite obviously an attack on working class students whose parents cannot possibly pay such fees.

The government also wants to ensure greater political control over courses. They want to introduce business sponsorship so that private capital can have the final say in what is taught.

On 19 October students at a departmental meeting of the University of Vienna discussed these proposals after hearing of the government's new plans. They decided—against the opposition of the student organisation of the Austrian CP (the KSV)—to call for an immediate occupation of the University. Within two days an all out strike of students had paralysed all institutions of higher education in Austria.

The part of Vienna University which was occupied became the or-

ganising centre of the strike. A committee was formed on the basis of two delegates per striking faculty. These delegates were responsible to, and recallable by, their daily faculty meetings. The official representation of the students, the Austrian High School Students (OH) is an institutionalised body, not a union. But even it could not openly oppose the strike. Instead it proposed suspending the strike during negotiations with the government.

This was successfully opposed by the student movement which turned against the whole Lacina Bill and against privatisation. This was a very good start for the movement and a promising basis for political development. Unfortunately, the left was

not strong enough to develop this into a clear class approach. A lot of effort was wasted in trying to win over the right wing students and the OH to fully supporting the action when it was more important to fight for an orientation to, and support from, the threatened workers in the nationalised industries. As a bulletin issued by *Arbeiter Standpunkt* pointed out, the most important lesson of the French students' victory against Chirac was the link between the students and the French workers.

The activism of the first week of the strike, however, did result in the massive national demonstration of 24 October. With some 50,000 workers, students and school students this was the biggest demo on social issues for decades in Austria. Over the same weekend a national coordinating committee was established and this called for a continuation of the strike. Nonetheless, there were signs that the movement had reached the limit of spontaneous mobilisation.

Some faculties had already called off the strike, others decided on 'alternative' actions during the week. Even in Vienna, the centre of the movement, the strike committee was

losing direction and dynamism as it struggled for unanimous agreement on everything in its daily 10-15 hour sessions. The stagnation might have led to the end of the strike but for a new lease of life offered by a two day strike by lower grade lecturers. This helped the strike to survive the second week. It was during that week that links, made the week before at one of the threatened nationalised plants, were developed and students leafleted the plant twice. The result was a one hour 'warning strike'.

Without a major reorientation to such work the student strike lost direction and began to collapse in the third week. Nobody dared to pronounce it over, but it ended all the same.

In as much as the Lacina Bill was not stopped the movement was not victorious, even though some minor concessions were made. However, it must not be forgotten that student political consciousness took a real leap forward in those weeks. Out of the movement political 'workshops' have developed and it is in these that revolutionaries must now organise to draw out the lessons of the strike and, in particular, the need for an orientation towards the working class. ■



**THATCHER'S THIRD term has got off to a flying start where making the lives of women more miserable is concerned.**

Child benefit, one of the few benefits which is always paid directly to the woman, is likely to be abolished. The Social Security Act will come into full force in April 1988 which makes means testing central to claims for support. It will be women who face balancing household budgets when the poll tax is introduced, a charge which will double the rate payment of most working class families. In addition women face an attack on their already limited access to legal abortions. The health service, where women are the main users and workers, is in such 'safe hands' that patients are being advised by their doctors to sue the health authority if they want treatment.

Women looking for a lead in fighting these attacks may be encouraged to hear that some women at the recent Socialist Conference in Chesterfield decided to launch a national organisation called 'Women for Socialism' (WFS). They may be even more impressed by calls from women in Women Against Pit Closures for a National Union for Women in Britain. The instigators of WFS promise that both these suggestions are to be discussed at a conference to be called in the next few months.

The question to be addressed by women at any such conference, and indeed by any women who want to fight Thatcher's plans, is what kind of organisation would represent and lead the struggle in a way that avoids the errors of past women's movements.

Mandy Moore, one of the leading women behind the WFS initiative, says that it has a number of aims. These are:

'To promote socialist-feminist policies in the labour movement, debate and develop such policies and campaigning initiatives, develop links with the whole range of women's organisations, including lesbian and black women's groups and others challenging racism and imperialism in our society, link up with organised trade union women, provide an international perspective for women, offer a forum where women can exchange ideas and share experiences.'

Links between women in different unions, community groups, etc are essential, but on their own, building links and developing policies will not prevent hospital closures or the slashing of benefit. Links need to build on solidarity action which can really shift the government and the bosses who are carrying out the at-

tacks on working class women and men.

It is the building of the action needed to defeat Thatcher which tells us the kind of organisation we need. It has to be one based on women in their workplaces and unions, linked to tenants' associations and other estate groups. It is no good having a perfect policy on benefits for women if you do not organise for action to achieve it. The only power we have to take on the bosses who want to take away money and services from us is to hit them in the same way, the only way that they really feel and understand—in their pockets. By taking strike action we hit their profits, and by refusing to pay rents, rates or poll taxes, working class people can hit the bosses hard. They can be forced to retreat.

The socialist feminists now embedded in the Labour Party tend to denounce such talk as 'economistic'. This is rubbish! Women workers, linked to the working class as a whole, have the social power to effect real change, but they need to be organised to exercise it. Enlightened 'socialist feminism', raising progressive policies in local government, has not and cannot effect such change. To recognise this is not economist. It is to recognise the reality of the class struggle under capitalism.

The only kind of organisation which can really turn the tide and fight for women is a working class women's movement which draws together women in different parts of the labour movement but unites them around a common action programme. Mass co-ordinated action is what we need—against all health service cuts, building and arguing for strikes and occupations where any redundancies or closures are planned, refusal to cooperate with the sell off of council estates and local schools, refusal to pay the poll tax, etc. We need a movement which seeks to win the working class as a whole to such a programme.

If WFS is to become this, then it should drop the idea of being just an organisation of 'socialist' and 'feminist' women. For a start, this would exclude many working class women who may not yet consider themselves socialists, and have certainly no reason to identify with middle class feminism. Yet these same women are ready and willing to fight in their workplaces and communities against the Tory attacks. What the title really indicates is a concentra-

**At the Chesterfield conference there were calls for a new organisation for women activists. Helen Ward looks at the proposals**

tion on 'policies' for women rather than action immediately. A group which simply led women into the Labour Party, constructing pious policies for a future Labour Government, would not help those women who face poverty and deprivation today.

Even if a Labour government were elected with radical policies for women, there is little chance of them being carried out by a Party clearly committed to reforming capitalism. Local councils that have been elected with radical pro-women policies have signally failed to tackle the real, rather than peripheral, effects of women's oppression at all. Their own workforces include some of the lowest paid women workers around, and they cannot keep essential services open to women who need housing repairs, nursery places and the like. Whilst we should certainly try and force the Labour leaders to carry out their promises, we should have no illusions that they will defend or extend our interests successfully.

Would a Women's union be a better

answer then? The women in WAPC who have raised this explain it in terms of the need for women who do not work to be active in a general sense, and for women in hopelessly male dominated unions to have a union that represented them. It is not surprising that women are looking for an alternative to the bureaucratic unions which exist today. Even where women are the majority of members in a union they are usually only a tiny minority of the executive committee, and when it comes to taking up equal pay, maternity benefits or unionising women the union leaders, male and female, have been sluggish or obstructive.

Would a women-only union be different? The debate over separate sex unions has been going on for as long as unions have organised any women workers. Initially in the mid to late 19th century in Britain and elsewhere women were excluded from craft based unions who kept their membership a select and privileged group of men. Women's unions occurred through necessity when women were denied access to the men's union. But they were never in the interests of the class as a whole. They weaken the ability of workers to take collective action, and that is their key function.

Precisely because unions are there

to represent workers in their disputes with their bosses, any separation weakens the class. This is true of existing separations between craft unions and general unions, and where more than one union claims to represent workers in the same industry. If one union is out on strike and the other unions refuse to give solidarity then the struggle is weakened. This applies particularly to women who are often poorly unionised. As with any such section they will depend crucially on solidarity from well organised sectors if they are to win the dispute. Separating ourselves off from men will not make the bureaucrats of the 'male' unions any better. Our allies will be rank and file male workers who want to take on the union leaders when they refuse to fight.

The best solution to the kind of organisation needed by working women is one that bases itself on those women themselves. Not by separating off into women's unions or women's political policy-making groups, but by linking up women in the unions, in the workplaces and communities and supporting the struggle to transform the unions as a whole into fighting organisations for men and women. Women will need to organise themselves in order to take on the union leaders, the Labour Party betrayers and the Tories. But a working class women's movement committed to building action in defence of class interests would be a force for uniting the class on the basis of successful struggle. ■



Andrew Ward (Report)

**THE CENTRIST left in Britain have been, by and large, part of a great-moving-right show over the last few years. Reactions to David Alton's anti-abortion bill reveal this yet again.**

*Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Action* are determined that the campaign should simply be a defensive one. Although recognising the limitations of the 1967 Act they believe the Fight Alton's Bill (FAB) groups should only support the status quo. Anything beyond this, they argue, would threaten the broad support they hope for from all political parties — including the Liberals and Tories.

In the FAB steering committee and local groups *Socialist Action* and *Outlook* have argued for a campaign which concentrates all its attention on MPs, the press and 'personalities'. *Socialist Action* (20 Nov 87) calls on activists to write letters to MPs, write to the local press and collect signatures on petitions. No mention is made in the article of raising the issue and winning support amongst the working class with a view to

## THE LEFT & ABORTION

winning action against Alton.

Of course lobbying and petitioning should be part of the campaign. But to centre on them more or less exclusively is dangerous in the extreme. It promotes the illusion that working class women can rely on parliament to defend their rights. Many attempts have been made to restrict the 1967 Abortion Act. None of these have been defeated by a parliamentary vote, only through lack of time or filibustering tactics of the pro-choice MPs. With Thatcher having now stated her support for a time limit of 24 weeks, such tactics may well prove useless.

These lobbying tactics also imply that abortion is an issue which affects all women equally. This has led supporters of *Socialist Action* and *Outlook* to defend an invitation to Harvey Proctor's racist successor, Tory MP Teresa Gorman to speak at

a press conference organised by FAB. Racist Tories have nothing in common with working class women. Like Liberal women they are rabidly anti-working class. That the two British tendencies that align themselves politically with the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) espouse an alliance with such boss-class women is a measure of their (and the USFI's) degeneration.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) also argue for a campaign which, though oriented to the working class, restricts itself to defence of the 1967 Act. Yet the Act is actually discriminatory against working class women! It does not ensure NHS provision, only allowing those who can afford private abortions much 'choice'. The Act gives doctors, not women, the right to choose, a power which has led to some women being told they don't need abortions, whilst

others, especially black women, are encouraged to have abortions and sterilizations they do not want.

Whilst we must defend the '67 Act against attacks such as Alton's, which try to further restrict access to abortions, we in no way support the existing legislation. Unlike the SWP, we argue that the best way to win the support of working class women is to fight for their right to choose. To do this we must link the struggle against Alton with one to achieve qualitatively improved abortion and contraception facilities, improved sex education and better provision for those who choose to have children.

The other group taking its arguments into FAB is the Revolutionary Communist Party. Unlike the others, they refuse to even defend the 1967 Act. In keeping with their laughable maxim that nothing pro-

vided by the capitalist state is in the interests of the working class, they argue that the 1967 Act, like the IHS itself, is a means of imposing a form of social control on the working class! Quite why they then join in anti-cuts campaigns and indeed the FAB campaign itself is not at all clear. Such a position is absurd. Limited as it is, the 1967 Act at least allows some women to obtain abortion without fear of ending up in prison or even dead as a result of illegal abortions.

Workers Power argues that the campaign to defeat Alton must be based in the working class. We are for industrial action to defend the existing rights and to prevent hospital and clinic closures. We are for extension of abortion rights and facilities. Lobbies and demonstrations must be backed by the TUC and Labour Party, with large contingents of workers mobilised to attend. Only by these forms of struggle, not reliance on class enemies in the Liberal or Tory Parties, will we secure better rights for women. ■

by Kate Ford



IN NINE months of struggle with the bourgeoisie and its agents within the workers' movement the Bolsheviks had won the majority in the soviets to support and carry through the seizure of power. In late October and throughout November in city after city in towns and in villages all over the country the soviets took power into their own hands. But the fate of this power would depend in the short run on whether it could make headway on the very issues that had won the Bolsheviks the confidence of the masses: Bread, Peace and Land.

On 26 October the decrees on peace and on the land were issued. The former called for 'immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace'. It called for the renunciation of all annexations and of demands for indemnities. It renounced secret diplomacy and announced the impending publication of the Tsarist regime's secret treaties and war agreements to divide up the Ottoman Empire and to establish 'protectorates' over Poland and other central European countries. On the land question the soviet decree peremptorily announced 'Landlord ownership of land is abolished forthwith without any compensation'. The landed estates of the nobility, the Tsar and the church with all their livestock, implements and buildings were transferred to the township land committees and the peasant soviets 'pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly'.

On 2 November a further decree—a *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* announced 'The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state' and the 'abolition of any and all national and national-religious principles and disabilities'. The linguistic and religious oppression of the erstwhile 'prisonhouse of nationalities' was lifted by the Soviet government's decrees. On 14 November a momentous decree on workers' control was issued. Workers' control of production and exchange was recognised through the means of the factory and shop committees. Every large city, province or industrial area was to organise a soviet of Workers' Control. Commercial secrecy was abolished and managements were obliged to 'open all their books and records to the organs of workers' control'.

### Internationalism

In all the declarations of the first Soviet government Lenin made it clear that the task of the new regime was to link up with victorious proletarian revolutions across Europe. Ten days after the seizure of power he stated:

'We shall march firmly and unswervingly to the victory of socialism which will be sealed by the leading workers of the most civilised countries and give to the peoples solid peace and deliverance from all oppression and all exploitation.'

This reliance on and commitment to the international proletarian revolution was an absolute bedrock of Lenin's, Trotsky's and the Bolshevik's strategy in October.

However, the divisions which had marked the history of the party between February and October did not disappear after 25 October. The right wing of the party of Kamenev, Rykov, Lunacharsky, Zinoviev and many others, still bitterly opposed Lenin's strategy. They kept up their insistence that a 'socialist coalition' be formed to include the Mensheviks and SRs. They maintained that the present government was merely provisional until the Constituent Assembly was summoned. Above all they opposed Lenin's repeated references to the *socialist* nature of the government and to the socialist nature of the tasks that lay ahead of it.

The question of the summoning and election of the Constituent Assembly was to prove the last and most decisive battle over the nature of the power established in the October Revolution. If the revolution was merely the fulfillment of a bourgeois-democratic revolution then the Constituent Assembly's sovereignty could not be in question. After all, the right-wing argued, had not the Bolsheviks throughout 1917 demanded its speedy convocation? Did not this tie them to accepting its decisions as final?

One of the last acts of the Provisional Government, terrified by the impending Bolshevik uprising, had been to fix the date of the elections to the Constituent Assembly for 12 November. This sudden about face after nine months of delay is instructive. Whilst the bourgeoisie and its 'democratic' hangers-on

In this article in the series on the October revolution, Dave Stocking examines the controversy surrounding the Constituent Assembly and the struggle between the new workers' democracy and the old bourgeois parliamentarianism.

# SOVIETS OR PARLIAMENT

had hoped to hold onto power and indeed to disarm the revolutionary workers and soldiers there had been no question of democratic elections to an all-Russian assembly. Here the awkward questions of the land, the continuing imperialist war and the very nature of the constitutional order would have to be faced.

### Constituent Assembly

The Russian bourgeoisie, tied inextricably to the landowners had no wish to see their land seized. At best constitutional-monarchist, it had no wish for a democratic republic. Desperate to strike the jackpot of annexations and reparations when the Allied western powers finally crushed Austria, Germany and Turkey, they loathed the thought either of a general peace or a separate one which would 'rob' them of their plunder. For all these reasons they and their politicians postponed and delayed for all they were worth. For this reason—and because the demand had since the second congress of the RSDLP been the pinnacle of the party's democratic demands—the Bolsheviks demanded the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly. To this slogan they linked, inextricably, their demands for an immediate peace and for the expropriation of the big landowners. They also demanded democratic rights in the villages and a freely available press—especially the working class press. This was vital for if the peasants were deceived and coerced the Assembly would be a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Thus after the seizure of power—whilst Lenin himself had serious misgivings—the Council of People's Commissars allowed the Electoral Commission to go ahead with the

*'For the transition from the bourgeois to the socialist system, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of Soviets—is not only a higher type of democratic institution—but is the only form capable of securing the most painless transition to socialism.'*

elections. There would of course be serious problems with the elections. The electoral registers were out of date and discriminated against the illiterate rural poor. The backwardness and isolation of hundreds of thousands of Russia's villages meant that the events in the cities were less well known there. For example the split during the Autumn between the pro-bourgeois right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries and the Left SRs was hardly known about. Local dignitaries of the old party were returned and turned out to be fierce reactionaries. The effects of the decrees on peace and land had had no time to be felt. The returning troops had only just begun to make the Bolshevik's programme known in the remote areas of the countryside.

Lenin sensed that elections in these conditions would not favour a pro-Soviet power majority. He was keen to amend the electoral law to give the vote to the young by lowering the voting age to 18 years, to legalise the recall of candidates and delegates and to bar the open counter-revolutionaries like the Cadet Party from standing or voting. Above all he wanted to postpone the elections till the effects of the October decrees could be felt. But the overwhelming majority of the leadership in the Party felt that the elections could not now be delayed. Lenin considered this an

error but vowed 'this error shall not cost us the revolution.'

Lenin began a relentless struggle against 'parliamentary illusions', against any attempt to fetishise the Constituent Assembly and against any tendency to elevate the sovereignty of the Assembly above that of the soviets.

What Lenin was arguing can be seen most clearly in his *Theses on the Constituent Assembly* written on 11/12 December and published in *Pravda* at the end of the month. He shows that the Constituent Assembly was long a part of the Russian Marxist's programme, 'because in a bourgeois republic the Constituent Assembly represents the highest form of democracy'. But whilst continuing to call for its convocation against Kerensky and company's various rigged parliaments and councils the Bolsheviks had, since the Spring, 'repeatedly emphasised that a Republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than the usual bourgeois republic with a constituent assembly.' Not only that but since October the Russian proletariat had set itself a new task. Lenin emphasises this:

'For the transition from the bourgeois to the socialist system, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of Soviets—is not only a higher type of democratic institution—but is the only form capable of securing the most painless transition to socialism.'

Compared with this the Constituent Assembly is infinitely less democratic in the sense of being less responsive to the wishes of the workers, the poorer peasants and the rank and file soldiers. Lenin concluded that the change of class forces meant that now the slogan 'All power to the Constituent Assembly'—'which disregards soviet power'—has

changed its nature and is becoming the slogan of the Cadets and the Kaledinites.'

He concluded that if the Constituent Assembly parted ways with Soviet power it would 'inevitably be doomed to political extinction.'

### Anti-Soviet majority

By the end of November the elections were over, though it took a month to collect all the results in. On 30 December the official announcement confirmed Lenin's forebodings. Of the 707 deputies elected, 175 were Bolsheviks, 410 SRs, 17 Cadets and 16 Mensheviks. The national minorities were represented by 86 deputies. Of the SRs only 40 belonged to the Left. It was clear that the Assembly would have a large majority against soviet power. This majority represented the revolution's pre-October past and not its present or its socialist future. What were the Bolsheviks to do faced with this manifestation of the counter-revolution?

The right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries saw the Assembly as the means of ousting the Bolshevik 'usurpers'. They legally and openly set up a committee for the defence of the Constituent Assembly. Their party's military organisation had the support of two regiments in the Petrograd garrison plus an

armoured car division. They were prepared for an armed assault on Smolny. But so obsessed with parliamentary legalism were their leaders, Chernov and others of his ilk, that they actually did very little to co-ordinate and mobilise this force. Their constant theme was 'the Bolsheviks will not dare'. Lenin and the Bolsheviks however were preparing.

The most that the Menshevik and SR leaders would do was to organise a demonstration on 5 January. It was made up mainly of petit-bourgeois elements and a few rifle shots from over-enthusiastic sailors scattered them like sheep.

Politically the Bolsheviks had prepared for the Assembly by issuing a *Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited Peoples*. This pointedly declared Russia to be a Republic of Soviets and maintained that all power belonged to the Soviets. It repeated all the key proposals of the Soviet government and clearly subordinated the Assembly to the Soviet power. The Bolsheviks thus presented the assembly of parliamentarians with an ultimatum—recognise the measures and authority of the October Revolution or get out!

And they were right to do so for the soviets were not merely more representative of the masses, by virtue of the directness of their elections, they were also made up of accountable delegates. Compared with this the 'democracy' of the Constituent Assembly was indirect and not at all based on the principles of accountability and recallability. Most importantly it was, like all parliamentary forms of democracy, bourgeois in its class content. Soviet democracy, on the other hand, was the democracy of the toiling masses.

Sverdlov for the Bolsheviks mounted the rostrum at the opening session and demanded that the Assembly pass the Declaration, endorsed as it was by the All-Russian Soviet Executive. The Assembly noisily dissented and insisted on elections for the chair. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs proposed Maria Spiridonova—the leader of the latter party. The majority proposed Chernov who was easily elected by 244 votes to 153. Then the speech-making began. It went on until four in the morning.

The bourgeois windbags were fearful that if the sitting were abandoned the Bolsheviks would not allow it to re-assemble. Chernov was still in full flow reading the draft agrarian law when an anarchist sailor, in charge of the guard, leapt onto the platform and announced to Chernov, 'The guards are tired, please leave the hall!' To make the point more forcefully the lights in the Tauride Palace were unceremoniously switched off.

### Incompatible

So ended the Constituent Assembly. The Central Executive Committee of the Soviets declared that since it would not recognise the Soviet Congress' decrees or indeed the power of the Soviets it was dissolved forthwith. Its decree drew a vital lesson from the whole experience of the Russian Revolution:

'The toiling masses have become convinced by their experience that bourgeois parliamentarianism is outdated; that it is completely incompatible with the construction of socialism; for only class institutions, not national institutions, can break the resistance of the propertied classes and lay the foundations for the socialist society.'

Victor Serge was later to comment:

'The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly made a great sensation abroad. In Russia, it passed almost unnoticed.'

It passed unnoticed because the issue of the day was peace. Attention shifted to Brest-Litovsk where the Soviet delegates led by Trotsky were opening negotiations with the Germans. Attention shifted to the armed forces of counter-revolution massing in the most backward regions of the country. Civil war was about to begin. In this civil war the Constituent Assembly and its professional parliamentary cretins counted for less than nothing. The Whites were out to restore the land to landowners and the factories to the capitalists. They would do this under the banner not of 'pure democracy' but of Black Hundred Tsarism or a military dictatorship.

The task now facing Russia's workers was to defend their own dictatorship against counter-revolution. Lenin expressed the Bolshevik's determination when he addressed the Central Executive Committee on 6 January:

'The Constituent Assembly is dissolved. The Soviet revolutionary republic will triumph no matter what the cost.'



The sacking of Yeltsin shows the real limits of Gorbachev's 'openness' and 'democratisation'. John Hunt looks at the implications for Gorbachev and the Soviet working class.

# THE FIRST CASUALTY



MIKHAIL GORBACHEV'S plans for the bureaucratic reconstruction (*perestroika*) of the Soviet economy and of Soviet politics have suffered a serious set back. He has been forced to sacrifice Boris Yeltsin—Moscow Party chief and long time Gorbachev ally—to the conservative sections of the bureaucracy who were clamouring for his blood.

Gorbachev is in a tight political squeeze. On the one hand there are millions of state managers and ministerial functionaries who are resisting any challenge to their featherbedded and privileged existence. To the marrow of their bones they loath any prospect of greater democracy and the need for change.

On the other hand the mass of Soviet workers are growing daily more impatient with a regime that talks so much of change while all around them things stay the same. They grow more cynical about a regime where the material goods' shortage grows greater, where food supplies diminish, but where the leadership daily hymn the praises of change, progress and improvement.

Boris Yeltsin was an expression of this mounting contradiction. In a decaying capital city policed by some of the most corrupt mafias of the Brezhnev era he promised a crackdown on privilege and graft. To a citizenry grown weary of queues and shortages he promised action and results. No wonder he fell foul of the conservative cabals of the Moscow and Soviet bureaucracy. He broke the rules of the game by promising improvement and by challenging entrenched bureaucratic conservatism.

Yeltsin unleashed more than he intended to and more than he could control. True he harangued conservatism and purged the old guard in the Moscow committees. But for the mass of workers reconstruction brought no tangible gain. While the masses remained cynical, the most conservative bureaucrats were sharpening their knives for Boris Yeltsin's throat.

Squeezed between the two Yeltsin let loose his attack on conservatives obstructing the process of change. And fearful of what this would signal to the masses the inner ranks of the Soviet bureaucracy meshed together to hurl Yeltsin into the political wilderness.

This was a victory for the most conservative and immediately repressive wing of the bureaucracy. They have dealt an important blow to Gorbachev. Yet it will have a profoundly educative effect on those Soviet workers who have looked to Gorbachev to ease the burden of material shortages and the bureaucratic straitjacket that they are daily subject to. The mass of workers were already deeply sceptical about the reformist bureaucracy's ability to deliver the goods. Gorbachev has proved them right by ditching the most vocal scourge of the old guard conservatives.

Many bureaucrats have been keeping their heads low while repeating ritual phrases about the need for democratisation and openness. They will feel that much bolder now that Gorbachev has ditched Yeltsin. Their hand has been strengthened against the destabilising changes that Gorbachev remains committed to.

To those who were taken in by the Soviet bureaucracy's recent conversion to openness and democratisation this episode must be revelation of how little has really changed. In the new dawn of *glasnost* Yeltsin's Central Committee speech, for which he has been pilloried, has never been published. In the fresh air of 'democratisation' Yeltsin has been attacked with a venom reminiscent of the Stalin days. Yeltsin has been denounced as an ultra-left. And for why? Because he attacked the city's network of special shops

for functionaries and sacked scores of party officials. Many workers will doubtless conclude that they too are 'ultra-left' like Yeltsin. In words reserved normally for Leon Trotsky, Yeltsin was attacked for 'excessive conceit and desire to be always on the front stage' at the trial meeting where the Politburo were prosecutor, judge and jury.

There is evidence that the Yeltsin affair has angered many supporters of reform. At Moscow University an unofficial student meeting demanded that Yeltsin's speech be published so that they could judge who was right and wrong. In the face of increased police harassment independent political clubs have tried to hold protest meetings in factories. There are reports of a two day protest general strike in Sverdlovsk—the town where Yeltsin was previously Party Secretary. This will all be portrayed by the most conservative wing of the bureaucracy as the noxious effects of too much change and bureaucratic self-criticism.

Gorbachev comes out of this affair with his own base severely weakened. The forces against reconstruction, that Gorbachev himself has warned about, will step up their campaign against those aspects of the *perestroika* they most object to. They will feel encouraged to step up police harassment of independent political activity, to clampdown on criticisms of privilege and graft and to slow down the tempo of turnover amongst the party and state functionaries. They will call the shots to Gorbachev. With the economy growing less rapidly than last year Gorbachev has little to show for his years in power and his reforming talk. The immediate period ahead, with enterprises having to become self financing or go bust and with large price increases looming, will put his authority to the sharpest of tests.

In his search for allies to boost his authority within the bureaucracy Gorbachev is looking to enlist the key political figures in the imperialist camp to his support. Summit politics with them can not only ease the arms burden on the Soviet economy. It can help stabilise Gorbachev's leadership within the USSR by seeming to provide definite fruits in foreign policy even if his domestic policies are in a mess.

That is why Gorbachev will milk the December summit for all its worth. Photo sessions with Thatcher, fire-side talks with Reagan and initialling ceremonies on arms' reduction are meant to buttress Gorbachev against those who oppose him. And, at present, Reagan and Thatcher are prepared to lend him a helping hand. They will do so as long as his 'reconstruction' in the USSR is coupled with Soviet concessions to imperialism globally—most importantly in Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

From its inception the *perestroika* had within it the potential of stimulating political life in the Soviet working class once again after years of repression, apathy and cynicism. To the extent that it did so and to the extent that it destabilised political rule it was bound to meet a massive bureaucratic rearguard action.

Now that the conservatives have struck back Soviet workers must heed the warnings. They must organise their forces to defend and extend any opening for independent political action. But most vitally they must organise to overthrow the entire monstrous bureaucratic caste that is strangling Soviet society and squandering the fruits of its labour. The planned economy of the USSR can only be overhauled to meet human needs, and the Soviet workers can only have their own democracy when they have destroyed the bureaucracy and taken political power directly into their own hands. ■

EIGHT YEARS ago this month Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. Eight years on Gorbachev and the Soviet military chiefs are still desperately trying to stabilise the situation in that country. They are still trying to find a means of disentangling themselves from a war that has proved more costly in material and human terms than the Kremlin originally expected.

The immediate reason for the Soviet invasion was the likely collapse of the Afghan government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). It had come to power in 1978 committed to a programme of democratic reforms such as land reform and women's literacy rights. Its seizure of power foiled the plans of the Shah of Iran and the CIA to pull Afghanistan into the camp of western imperialism. The PDPA regime pursued a pro-Soviet foreign policy and strengthened economic relations with the USSR.

By late 1979 the base of the PDPA had been severely weakened. Its base had traditionally been amongst state administrators, teachers and army officers committed to a modernised and more democratic Afghanistan. This made it extremely difficult for it to push through its reform programme in the countryside. Attempts to do so invariably fanned the flames of Islamic reaction.

The PDPA's own 'top down' bureaucratic approach to the reform programme did little to pacify the reactionaries in the countryside and the regime was soon faced with a civil war. Its writ often did not run beyond the major towns and transport lines. Imperialism openly aided the reactionary forces hoping to destroy the PDPA regime and establish a pro-western, anti-Soviet regime in Afghanistan.

Internal factional strife further weakened the PDPA. The more rural based, *Pushtun Khalqi* faction of Amin openly feuded with the preponderantly urban *Dari* speaking *Parcham* faction of Babrak Karmal. As head of government in 1979 Amin was committed to an increased use of repression in order to push the reform programme through. Meting out repression against opposition inside the PDPA, Amin further narrowed the base of the regime within the Afghan civil war.

The Soviet Armed Forces (SAF) intervened in December 1979. They executed Amin and his closest associates who were now discovered to have been imperialist agents! The *Parchamite* Karmal was installed in office as Moscow's favourite son. His job was to defuse the civil war crisis by dampening down the pace of the reforms that were provoking reactionary resistance. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was to back him in this endeavour.

## Contradictory character

The Soviet invasion of 1979 had a profoundly contradictory character. The Kremlin bureaucracy intervened in order to defend their own security interests against imperialist backed reaction in the Afghan Civil War. The Soviet bureaucracy did not wish to see the PDPA regime replaced by one that would turn Afghanistan into an imperialist base for observation and listening posts right on the border of Soviet Central Asia. They were also worried that an imperialist backed Islamic client state would bring intolerable pressure to bear on the Asian Soviet Republics. To that extent they had to forestall a victory of the reactionary forces.

However, the deeply conservative Soviet bureaucracy had no use for the reform policies of the 'Afghan revolution'. Those policies were serving to endanger its own security in having provoked reactionary opposition and opened a door to imperialist influence over that opposition. From 1979 until today the SAF have attempted to undo even the most modest measures of the

# AFGHA

reform programme of the PDPA. This highlights the absurdity of the claims by those, like the Spartacists and sections of the Stalinist movement, that the Soviet army were invading as defenders of the 'Afghan revolution' and should be hailed. The Soviet bureaucracy invaded Afghanistan for its own reactionary purposes. For this reason it was necessary for revolutionaries to make clear their opposition to that invasion. However, once the USSR was inside Afghanistan the question was, would the withdrawal of the SAF aid or hinder the struggle for victory over reaction in the civil war? Thanks to the stupidity of the Kremlin and the bureaucratism of the PDPA the forces of progress on their own could not, and still yet cannot, defeat the reactionary rebels. For this reason, and notwithstanding our opposition to the invasion, we have consistently argued against the call for an immediate and total withdrawal of the SAF.

The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan served to physically defend the progressive forces in Afghan society, grouped around the PDPA, from destruction at the hands of reaction. However, the military and security apparatus of the USSR and its most loyal Afghan agents were also deployed to destroy any independent initiative by any section of those progressive forces on behalf of their own democratic reform programme.

Karmal was instructed to backpedal on all of the PDPA's reforms. Land ownership limits were raised. In reality the land reform programme had already been hampered by an absence of material and physical support to the rural poor to exercise their new rights. Under Karmal the larger landowners were to be under less challenge

## Reconciliation

The regime searched desperately for a reconciliation with the mosque. Increasingly the women's literacy campaign, which so outraged Islamic reaction, was restricted to the urban areas. At the same time Soviet and PDPA representatives tried to lure King Mohammed Zahir Shah back from his Italian exile to head the government. The overall direction of Soviet policy was to attempt to cobble together an agreement with the tribal chiefs, the mosque and the monarchy that would protect the Soviet bureaucracy's security interests.

As it became clear that the Soviet Armed Forces and the PDPA Afghan Army were unable to secure a rapid military victory (imperialist backing for the rebels saw to that) Soviet tactics towards the opposition changed. Where possible they made their own private deals with the oppositional and tribal chiefs to leave them alone in return for a military truce. In 1983 they made a ceasefire treaty with Ahmad Shah Massud—the 'Lion of the Panjshir'. Such deals recognised the rights of the particular chief to determine the political and social practices in their given zone and further diminished the PDPA's authority. In the case of Massud the deal gave the opposition a breathing space within which it was able to reorganise and regroup. The truce with Massud broke down in 1984.

Where such tactics failed the SAF were prepared to devastate whole areas. Local populations were faced with the choice of submission or of joining the mass exodus from the countryside into the cities, or to exile in Pakistan or Iran. Approximately four million refugees have left Afghanistan in the last seven years. The population of the capital city, Kabul, has swollen four-fold to two million.

Yet these methods failed to stem the



# AFGHANISTAN EIGHT YEARS ON

December 1979 saw the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But after eight years the civil war still rages. Yet the Soviet leadership are keen to pull their troops out of a war that has proved costly and increasingly unpopular at home. John Hunt examines the problems raised by this for progressives in Afghanistan and Trotskyists internationally.



A women's literacy class—now threatened by concessions to the mosque

activities of the opposition forces. The western media is ever ready to broadcast stories by dewy-eyed journalists like the aptly named Sandy Gall about how the fine, upstanding, freedom loving Afghan rebels are opposing communist aggression. In reality the opposition is deeply reactionary and extremely barbaric. It is riven not only by tribal and national rivalries but also by a division between Islamic fundamentalists and monarchists. In no sense is it a coherent nationalist movement. In no sense are its goals those of real national liberation.

The Islamic fundamentalists are to be found in such groups as *Jamiat-i-Islami* and the Islamic Alliance for the Liberation of Afghanistan. They favour the creation of an Islamic Republic where the mosque would rule and where women will not only have their hopes of literacy dashed but also where *pardah* (the ritualised separation of women from men) would be re-introduced. They fight the PDPA as the enemies of Islam and the agents of Satan.

Resistance forces in the Shi'ite Hazara region have had increased support from Iran. They too are committed to an Islamic Republic but one likely to be at odds with that favoured by the rest of the predominantly Sunni Afghan Islamic fundamentalists.

The other major axis in the opposition is comprised of a collection of monarchist groups. These are more openly favourable to western imperialism. They favour never allowing a communist party to exist in Afghanistan and are tied to the old traditional ruling class of the country.

Intensely divided the opposition was, and remains, incapable of military victory, even less of a unified political solution. To the extent that they advance political solutions they are all variants of a reactionary drive to block those who want to modernise and democratise Afghanistan. They wish to wipe away every trace of a secular Afghan state that tries, in however limited and bureaucratic way, to break with the backwardness and oppression of the past, particularly as far as women are concerned.

However, the scale of military and

financial backing for the rebels allows them to cause continued military headaches for the SAF. The US has spent over \$1 billion in military aid. The *Washington Post* has reported that in 1985 alone the US Congress allocated \$250 million to the Afghan contras. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan are all backing various resistance groups. So too does China. That the Afghan fundamentalists were passing on Stingers to Iran shows both how well armed they are and also the all-pervasive freebooting in their ranks.

It is little wonder then that Babrak Karmal's regime failed to restore order despite the presence of Soviet troops. Increasingly the urban and gas and oil producing areas have become Soviet-ringed encampments patrolled internally by the Afghan army and PDPA militia. To that extent the SAF still affords the progressive forces in the Afghan civil war a degree of immediate physical defence from the barbaric 'justice' intended for them by reaction. However, at the same time the Moscow bureaucrats through the agency of the SAF have increasingly ensured their own political control of the Afghan regime's policies.

### Karmal replaced

In 1985 Babrak Karmal was removed from office. He was replaced by the Soviet trained head of the security police (KHAD) Najibullah. Under Najibullah, doubtless with the complete backing of the USSR, the regime has attempted to ditch every remaining commitment to democratic reforms. The last woman in the Politburo—Anhita Ratebzad—has been removed from office. Overtures to the King have been increased under Najibullah who has said the monarch 'could play a big role in unifying the country'.

Najibullah committed the regime to a process of 'national reconciliation'. This is explicitly linked to creating the conditions for a Soviet withdrawal. In order to make that possible local reconciliation agreements are being sought with rebel chiefs.

If such reconciliation is possible it will be bought at the price of finally jettisoning all that was progressive (in

a purely democratic sense since none of the PDPA's objectives were ever socialist) in the PDPA's programme. There is no mention of the emancipation of women or women's literacy in the reconciliation programme. The regime is at pains now to stress its Islamic nature. Najibullah recently declared:

'It is claimed that power in Kabul is in the hands of infidels. But you can see for yourselves that the government is protecting Islam.'

In order to enforce that message state TV has been bedecked with Islamic symbols. In addition Najibullah has declared his intention of convoking a grand assembly of tribal chiefs—the traditional *Loyah Jirga*. In fact the Afghan interim constitution instituted after the Soviet invasion calls that body 'the highest organ of state power.'

All this shows that Najibullah's Soviet advisors would desperately like to strike a deal with reaction that would enable it to end the occupation. They want guarantees that Afghanistan will not become an anti-Soviet base. And in return they would ditch the reform programme completely and even leave many of the PDPA's 150,000 members to face the 'wrath of Allah' at the hands of the bloodthirsty rebels.

At present world imperialism is not that willing to let the Soviet bureaucracy off the hook. The deal Gorbachev is seeking may well continue to elude him. But for those behind the Soviet lines the danger signals are all too clear to see. They may well prove the ultimate victims of the Soviet Union's reactionary policies. At present we still think it would be historic suicide for them to turn their guns on the SAF in their own drive to force a Soviet troop withdrawal. This would open the door to the reactionaries and lead to the slaughter of the most progressive sections of Afghan society. But those very forces must not pay the price the SAF and Najibullah are asking for withdrawal. They must fight to maintain the campaign for women's rights. Against the *Loyah Jirga* they must fight for democratic rights for the masses. Against Najibullah's born again Islam they

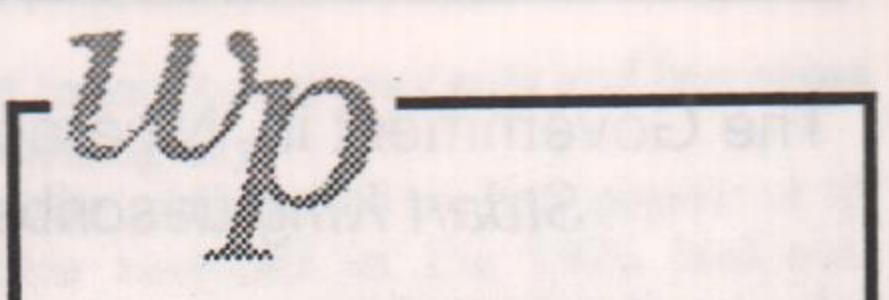
must fight for the complete separation of mosque and state.

Afghan society is desperately impoverished and devastated by civil war and the Soviet invasion. To make reform projects meaningful, to raise the material and cultural level of the masses Afghanistan needs a massive injection of aid for irrigation, mechanisation and transport. Those who want to forestall a deal that will see power handed back to the traditional chiefs must demand that the USSR provide that aid with no strings. It likes to profess to its 'internationalist duty to Afghanistan'. Let it show it by providing the armaments, the troops and the aid Afghan progressive forces need to secure victory in the civil war. But let it do so without intervening in the political affairs of those defending themselves in that civil war. Real aid, and not political repression, can defeat reaction.

### Forces of progress

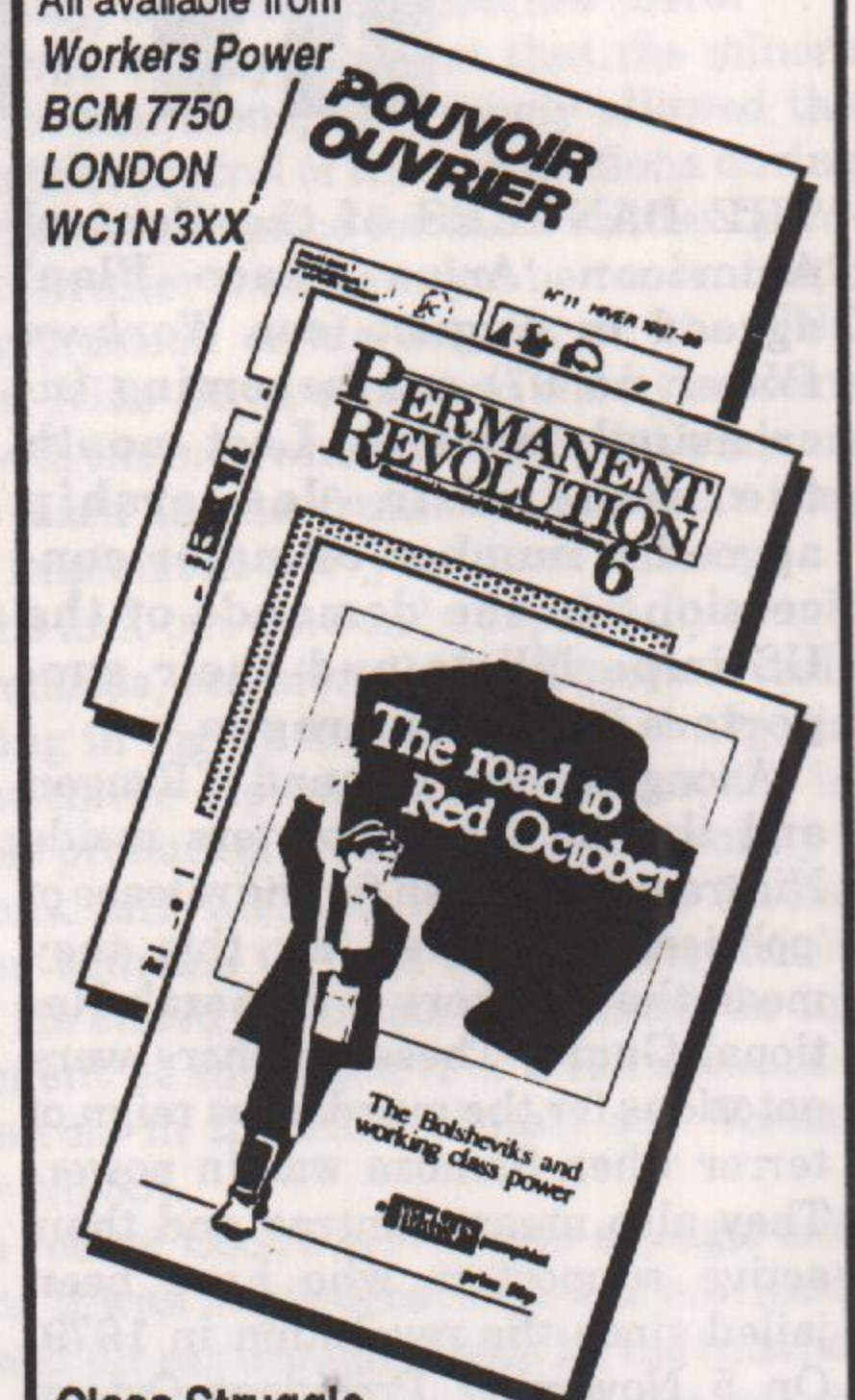
Such demands, it must be recognised, can only be wrung out of the USSR if the forces of progress in Afghanistan organise to fight for them independently. Our suspension of a call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops does not mean that we entrust them with the fate of Afghanistan. On the contrary, the forces of progress in Afghanistan need to use the physical protection afforded by the presence of the SAF to build independent organisations—urban councils, workers' councils, independent militias etc. Such bodies alone can guard and extend all democratic and progressive social gains in Afghanistan. And the progressive forces themselves need to be broken from the PDPA's Stalinist inspired bureaucratic reform programme and won to a programme of real socialist revolution. Such a programme would have, as its point of departure, the recognition that, not least because of its terrible backwardness, Afghanistan's fate is inextricably bound up with the fate of the entire region within which it exists.

Afghanistan is a patchwork of peoples, a residue of imperialism's wars in the region. Its Pushtun people straddle the border with Pakistan. The northern Kirghiz, Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen peoples all have a majority of their population in the USSR. The Baluchis in the south west straddle the territory of Iran and Pakistan. The problems of the impoverishment and backwardness of the Afghan peoples can only be solved in the context of ending their Balkanisation in a revolutionary socialist federation of South West and Central Asia that will be won against the Afghan rebels, against Khomeini's Iran and against the reactionary regime in Pakistan. And it will have to be won against the plans of the Soviet bureaucracy to settle their Afghan problem hand in hand with those butchers.



OUT NOW

**Permanent Revolution 6**  
Feature - Gorbachev and the soviet working class £2.50 (inc p&p).  
**The Road to Red October**  
A New Pamphlet by Workers Power. £0.75 (inc p&p)  
**Pouvoir Ouvrier**  
The MRC's French section publication £2.00 (inc p&p)  
All available from  
**Workers Power**  
BCM 7750  
LONDON  
WC1N 3XX



**Class Struggle**  
Monthly paper of the Irish Workers Group  
£8.00 for 10 copies (inc p&p)  
Available from  
**Class Struggle**  
12 Langrishe Place  
Dublin 1  
Ireland

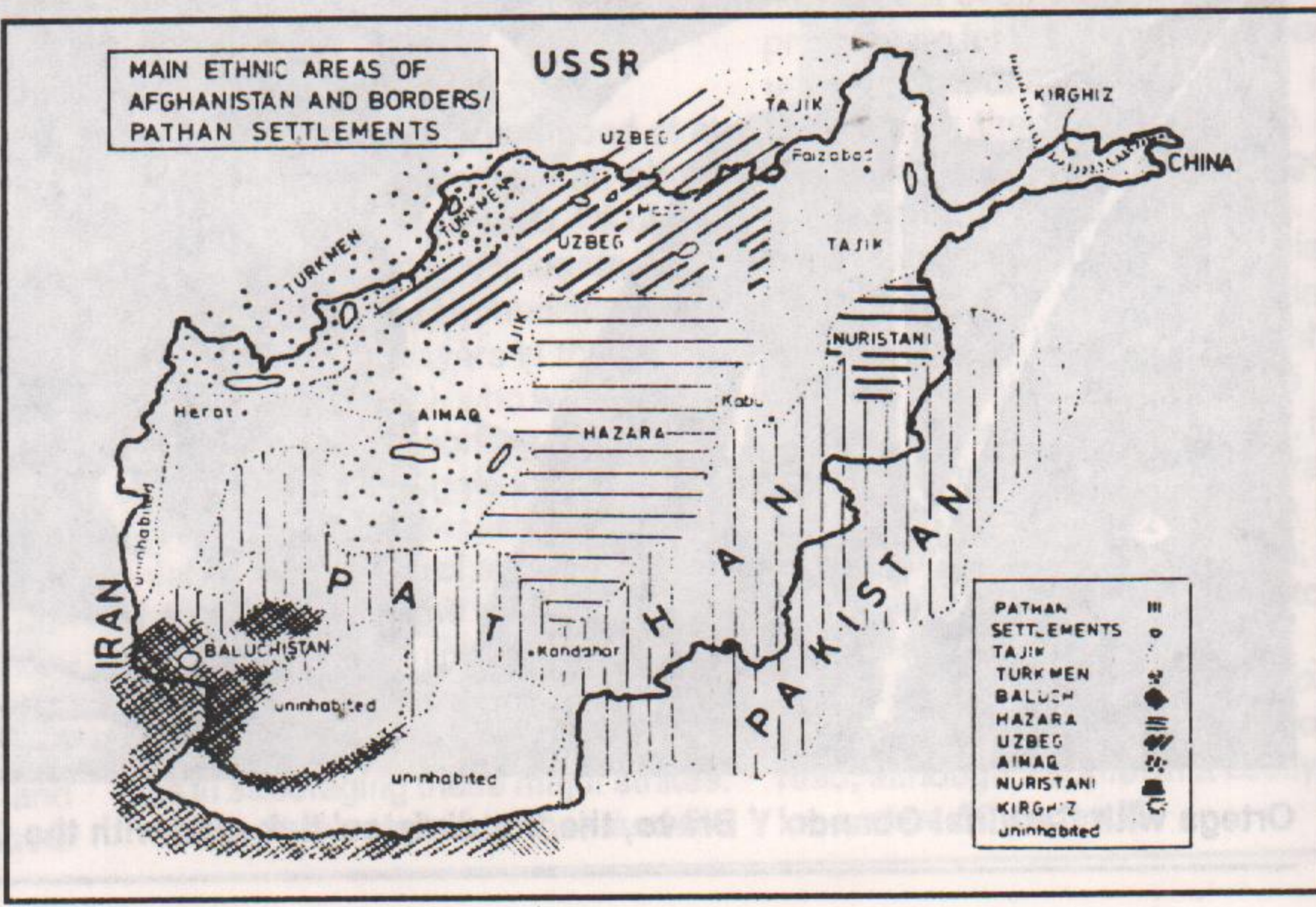


### PUBLIC MEETINGS

**Birmingham: The Eniskillen Bombing — The Socialist Response**  
Carrs Lane Church Centre, Carrs Lane,  
Wednesday 16 December, 7.30 pm.  
**Leicester: Crisis in the Health Service**  
Wednesday 16 December, 7.30 pm.  
(See *Workers Power* sellers for venue).  
**South London: Dialectical Materialism**  
Londor Hotel, Londor Road, SW9 (Clapham North Tube),  
Wednesday 16 December 7.30 pm.

### FREE ELEUTERIO GUTIERREZ CAMPAIGN

**Telegram:**  
12th November 1987  
  
Penallta Lodge NUM, South Wales, demands the immediate release of Eleuterio Gutierrez Marcani from Oruro





The Government in Nicaragua has agreed to open negotiations with the Contras. Here, Stuart King describes the situation in the light of the 'Arias Peace Plan'.

# SANDINISTAS IN RETREAT

**THE DANGERS** of the Central American 'Arias Peace Plan' agreed in August (see *Workers Power* no 97) are becoming increasingly obvious. Last month the Sandinista leadership agreed a number of major concessions to the demands of the US imperialists and their supporters inside Nicaragua.

A longstanding demand of Reagan and the Contra supporters inside Nicaragua has been for the release of 'political prisoners'. By this they mean the members of Somoza's National Guard. These butchers were notorious for the murderous reign of terror when Somoza was in power. They also mean Contras and their active supporters who have been jailed since the revolution in 1979. On 5 November President Ortega announced an amnesty for a thousand such prisoners, 200 of whom were ex-National Guardsmen. This was part of the agreed peace plan. He went on to announce that the government had agreed to open negotiations with the Contras. The following day Cardinal Obando Y Bravo was appointed as the official intermediary in talks with the Contra leaders.

Obando has long been one of the Sandinista's most virulent critics, using his position as head of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church to organise against the government. He was the Contra's first choice as intermediary and only last July Ortega described him as 'an accomplice to the whims of Reagan' and as being in the pay of the CIA! Another of Reagan's mouthpieces, the bourgeois paper *La Prensa*, was also allowed to start republishing. Within a fortnight it was announcing that the US Senate had voted \$250,000 to ensure the survival of democratic institutions in Nicaragua including *La Prensa* and democratic political parties of the opposition!

This sudden about face on the part of the government was decided in the usual 'democratic' manner. Debate and discussion was limited to the 'Nine Commandantes' of the revolution who announced the new measures to the 'mass organisations'. So dramatic was the turn about that even the *Economist* commented on the 'baffled silence' that greeted Ortega's announcements at a rally in Managua on 5 November. Active opposition to these concessions appears to be limited to the 'mothers of heroes and martyrs' who have demonstrated against the amnesty and clashed with pro-Contra organisations like the '22 January mothers' movement!

There is no doubt that the agreement to the August accords and the latest concessions that flow from it are the result of the desperate economic situation facing the regime. The US economic blockade combined with the US funded Contra war (the fighting of which now takes up almost all the Nicaraguan government's budget) have led the Sandinistas to desperately seek a deal with the US government. The US administration is busy claiming that the Contra attacks combined with dwindling soviet support is forcing the Sandinistas to compromise. There is no doubt that Gorbachev's search for detente has led to clear signals that the FSLN must make its peace with Washington for the best price it can get.

All of these factors have led the Sandinistas to place their hopes more and more in a diplomatic, rather than a military solution to the war with the Contras. It has meant placing the fate of the Nicaraguan revolution, the gains of the workers and peasants, in the hands of the Catholic church and the US Democrats. Ortega's trip to Washington ended with negotiations taking place

between himself, Obando and Jim Wright, Speaker of the House of Representatives, at the Vatican Embassy!

While the Reagan administration has been forced to promise 'a meeting' with the FSLN government if 'serious' talks with the Contras get under way, it is clear they still want a lot more compromises from the Sandinistas. Despite the supposed running out of aid to the Contras, US reporters have all pointed out that arms shipments have been massively increased recently. Now deliveries of Redeye missiles have allowed a serious offensive to be launched in the provinces of Chontales and Celaya Central. The Sandinistas estimate that the CIA makes three flights a day from Honduras to supply Contras inside Nicaragua. (Honduras is one of the signatories to the 'Peace Accord!') In the week the National Assembly approved an amnesty for prisoners, Contras killed six children in a creche in San Juan de Sur, in a dawn raid.

The real defence of the workers' and peasants' interest in Nicaragua lies not in the good offices of the church or the Democrats, but in an intransigent struggle against the counter-revolution and its agents inside Nicaragua—the capitalists, big farmers and church hierarchy. It means not relying on diplomacy but fighting to spread the revolution throughout Central America; not relying on the Democrats but attempting to rally the US labour movement against the murderous wars being pursued against Nicaragua by the US government.

- Down with the Arias 'Peace Plan'!
- For a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government in Nicaragua!
- For a socialist federation of Central America!



Ortega with Cardinal Obando Y Bravo, the Sandinistas' link man with the Contras.

# RACISM AND ECONOMISM

ACCORDING TO the author, a leading member of the British Socialist Workers Party:

Laura Williams reviews  
*Racism, Resistance and Revolution*  
by Peter Alexander  
(Bookmarks £3.95)

'The problem which this book addresses is how we are to understand the nature of racism in order the better to struggle against it.'

In racist days like these, such a claim merits serious attention, particularly since many militants still view the SWP-sponsored Anti-Nazi League of the late 1970s (of which Alexander was national organiser) as the model of an anti-racist, anti-fascist campaign.

Alexander's opening chapters show that racism is not an omnipresent feature of history, but that it arose with the development of capitalism itself. Briefly put, he defines three successive phases of racism under capitalism; the racism of slavery, the racism of Empire and anti-immigrant racism.

Now, while it is true that racism has changed in form since its birth in the 16th century, Alexander palpably fails to understand the role and development of imperialism in determining the nature of racism today.

Imperialism is equated with the 'Empire' racism stage—are we to deduce from this the end of the imperialist phase? Implied here is a notion of imperialism as the land grabbing of the 18th and 19th centuries, rather than the export of capital, increasing monopolisations, etc. Imperialism is never seen as a specific and continuing stage of capitalism.

Alexander explains that in the building of empires 'racism... was consolidated in order to justify western domination of the rest of the world' (true) but it 'flourishes today as a means of dividing the world working class between insiders and outsiders.' We are led to believe that the original use of racism by imperialism has outlived itself. The form may well have changed but domination of the world economy by a small number of imperialist nations still retains its racist essence and racist ideology.

Moreover, a central feature of imperialism has always been the utilization of colonies and semi-colonies as reservoirs of cheap labour to be pumped into the imperialist heartlands upon demand.

Racism is all too alive and kicking in the imperialist countries because the bourgeoisie uses this cheap immigrant labour to undermine the conditions of the indigenous workers. Thus there arise real material divisions between the immigrant and indigenous proletarians. Upon these divisions the bosses' racist ideology adheres itself, growing like a cancer amongst the indigenous workers—unless it is stopped.

Which leads us to the politics which Alexander advances to combat racism. And it is here that the SWP's economic method is clearly shown.

Alexander devotes some useful pages to outlining the pitfalls of black nationalism in the USA—but then crudely deduces from this that the struggle of blacks, as organised in caucuses in the trade unions, are doomed to fail.

To attack black workers' caucuses in the labour movement on the basis of destroying workers' unity, as Alexander does, completely misses the reasons for their existence. Black

workers' groups have emerged in response to specific oppression—racism. Insofar as they fight that oppression they de-

serve the support of all workers. For it is when white workers fail to fight this oppression that they weaken workers' organisations. With the failure of the labour movement to take on racism, black workers cannot be expected to wait for working class unity before they begin to move.

Alexander then moves on to quite rightly trash the Labour Party's rotten record in combatting racism. He also spills much ink in attacking the role of Black Sections, which he condemns as ineffective and useless. But surely we should fight alongside Black Sections, insofar as it is a struggle against racism in the Labour Party, and win them to a perspective of breaking from Labour's reformist policies as a whole and towards revolution? Revolutionaries should not abstain from battles with Labour's reformist and racist policies even in the belly of the reformist beast itself. To do so can only let the Labour leaders off the hook!

So, apart from advocating a policy of non-intervention in existing black workers' organisations, what does Alexander offer anti-racists?

Two things. First he gives a laudatory account of the Anti-Nazi League—implying that it may be necessary to resurrect it in some form one day—claiming that it 'crippled the National Front'. What hypocrisy! The ANL was never an anti-racist organisation (it refused, for example to oppose immigration controls) and was thus incapable of challenging the racist atmosphere off which the Front was feeding in the late 1970s. And, to boot, the ANL leaders (including the SWP), scared of offending the bourgeois forces within the organisation, refused on more than one occasion to physically obstruct Front marches through London.

Second, while Alexander formally poses black and white workers' unity in the struggle for socialist revolution as the means of destroying racism and the capitalist society which underpins it, he has not got the faintest idea how to achieve these things. Instead, he leaves it all to the spontaneous struggle of the workers themselves:

'Even the smallest strike quickly demonstrates the need for unity among workers. In the process, the old ideas of racist division becomes an encumbrance, and workers may reject them entirely.'

Yes, mass strikes are the key arenas in which workers can learn through struggle why racism is their mortal enemy. But strikes do no necessarily or automatically lead to anti-racist outcomes—witness the Imperial Typewriters dispute of 1974—unless revolutionaries politically intervene within them, armed with a revolutionary programme, strategy and tactics.

Equally necessary is the mobilisation of black workers in struggle over the specific oppression they face now. The leadership involvement of revolutionaries in those struggles demanding that white workers take action to fight deportations, racist laws and support black self defence against fascists and state racism, is crucial. But, as Alexander's book unintentionally demonstrates nothing of the sort is to be found in the SWP's theory and practice. ■



Mark Hoskisson reviews  
A J Cook  
by Paul Davies  
(Manchester University Press)

WITH ARTHUR Scargill standing for re-election as NUM President, pundits of the left and right are reviving comparisons between him and the miners' leader of the 1920s, Arthur James Cook.

Scargill himself has often referred to Cook as his model. He doubtlessly has in mind Cook's personal sincerity and his fierce loyalty to the cause of the miners. Like Cook he rejects the polite negotiations that are the stock-in-trade of servile trade union officials.

The right-wing, the CPGB and characters like Des Dufield, will make the same comparison between the two Arthurs. They will heap upon Scargill the same old insults that Cook had to face from every quarter. They will say that he doesn't know how to negotiate. They will argue that he doesn't understand the need for compromise and that he is an unthinking extremist. Indeed Scargill's re-election will likely get the same response from Willis and Dufield as that of Fred Bramley, Secretary of the TUC in 1924 to Cook's election. When he heard Cook had been elected Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) he blurted:

'Have you seen who has been elected Secretary of the Miners' Federation? Cook, a raving, tearing communist. Now the miners are in for a bad time.'

The right, and those who are clutching at their coattails, will remind us that Cook's period of leadership witnessed a split between the MFGB and a company union in Nottinghamshire (the Spencer Union). They will remind us of the loss of thousands of jobs in the aftermath of the defeat of a protracted struggle. Scargill's policies, they will insist, have caused an almost exact repetition of history.

The right-wing are not merely treating history dishonestly by posing the comparison this way. They are also obstinately refusing to learn its lessons. The light that Paul Davies' book sheds on the life of A J Cook demonstrates this quite clearly.

A J Cook was a syndicalist. Moving from non-conformism through the ILP he eventually got involved in the Unofficial Reform Committee (URC) in South Wales, along with leading syndicalists like Noah Ablett, when it was set up in 1911. The main document of the URC was *The Miners' Next Step*. Although Cook did not write it, it encapsulated many of the ideas he was to hold until his untimely death in 1931. The key phrase in that pamphlet that Davies shows Cook used again and again was:

'The suggested organisation [i.e. the class struggle union—WP] is constructed to fight rather than to negotiate. It is based on the principle that we can only get what we are strong enough to win and retain.'

The essence of Cook's syndicalism is expressed here, for the struggle being talked about is the bargaining strength of a trade union. In the period up to 1921 the demand for coal was so great that the miners' bargaining strength was considerable. Cook, and the syndicalists in the URC were able to win important positions of leadership in the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF, which Cook became a full-time agent for in 1920). They confi-



A J Cook

## THE LIMITS OF SYNDICALISM

dently believed that the struggles of their union could secure, not merely decent wages and conditions, but also workers' control of the industry. The union—not a political party—was to be the instrument for socialist transformation.

It was thus before, during and immediately after the war that the positive aspects of Cook's syndicalism were most evident. His loyalty to the union overcame his initial confusion on the war and drew him into opposition to it. In 1916 he wrote:

'Daily I see signs amongst the working class with whom I move and work of a mighty awakening. The chloroforming pill of patriotism is failing in its power to drug the mind and consciousness of the worker... Comrades I appeal to you to rouse your union to protect the liberties of its members. An industrial truce was entered into by our leaders behind our backs... Away with the industrial truce!'

In the same period he led a host of disputes against government attempts to recruit miners into the army and force up the rate of exploitation in the pits.

However, there were fatal limitations in Cook's syndicalism. In a situation where trade union bargaining strength declined Cook had no strategy or tactics to offer, other than compromise in the name of preserving the union. Trade union militancy alone simply could not deal with the problems posed to the working class in a period of acute economic and political crisis. This was shown by Black Friday in 1921 (when the demand for coal plummeted) when the transport and rail unions (members of the Triple Alliance) refused to support the miners' resistance to the coal-owners' attack on the national wages agreement. Cook was compelled to urge retreat after ten weeks of the lock-out. Then in an amazing about face he argued for conciliation with the bosses, follow-

ing the eventual defeat of the miners' struggle. At the beginning of the dispute he urged:

'Trust simply and solely in your economic power, in the wholehearted support of your comrades of the Triple Alliance and of other trade unions.'

Faith in Thomas—the arch-reactionary at the head of the railwaymen—was not only misplaced, it was stupid. It reflected Cook's syndicalist view that the Triple Alliance in and of itself was a triumph of militant trade unionism. Cook downplayed the role and power of the bureaucracy. When this faith resulted in defeat, Cook, believing the economic power of the workers was vanquished, ended up conducting conciliatory meetings with pit-managers and, according to Davies, 'was prepared to promise them improved productivity if they kept operating'. This was the grim logic of relying exclusively on trade union bargaining strength as against a political, revolutionary communist outlook.

Indeed Cook's retreat in 1921 led to his break with the CPGB, of which he had briefly been a member. He accused them of 'interference' in the lock-out in a classic syndicalist (and indeed, bureaucratic) manner. This 'interference' was from men like Cook's close friend, Arthur Horner, a CP miner. Once the CPGB raised political questions that clashed with Cook's trade union—and essentially sectionalist—strategy, a parting of the ways was inevitable.

However, Cook did return to the offensive when economic conditions improved in 1923. He joined the Miners' Minority Movement—seeing it as a useful industrial organisation—and became its candidate for National Secretary in 1924. In an energetic campaign Cook emerged a clear victor and was thrust onto the national stage at a time when, once again, the price of coal was falling and the coalowners

were out to implement pay cuts and increases in the working day.

The same weaknesses as had appeared in 1921 were revealed in the 1926 lock-out. Buoyed by the recovery in coal prices, in the world market in 1922-23 and then by the victory of Red Friday in 1925, when the government retreated under the threat of a general strike, Cook entered the struggle with confidence. On the eve of the strike he was less dewy-eyed about the nature of Thomas. He wrote in the *Sunday Worker* in reply to attacks on him by Thomas and Ben Tillet (TGWU):

'It is true I do not possess a dress suit, and I do not attend dinners and banquets given by enemies of the working classes and make alleged witty, after-dinner speeches there.'

However, rightly insisting that the miners could not win alone, he wrongly allowed the TUC to take control of the negotiations during the strike as the price for their solidarity action. Even after their betrayal he consented to the suppression of his attacks on the TUC leaders, *Nine Days*, and concluded the 'June Pact' with the men who had stabbed the miners in the back in the fruitless hope that they would implement a levy and coal embargo.

As the lock-out wore on he repeatedly sought compromises, occasionally, as Davies reveals, engaging in highly dubious personal negotiations with the capitalists. His actions, the inevitable product of his lack of accountability to the rank and file, inevitably led to further clashes with the CP and the Minority Movement. He ended the dispute desperate for any settlement he could get. (For a full account of Cook's role in the 1926 dispute see *Workers Power* No 55).

The rest of Cook's career was a tragic anticlimax. It was tragic because it was marred by pain and illness brought about by his indefatigable campaigning on behalf of the miners during 1926. Despite his vacillations he was throughout a tireless, eloquent and emotional advocate of the miners' cause.

It was anti-climactic because the struggles he took up were all of a revolutionary nature. He fought the class-collaborationist turn by the TUC in the Mond-Turner talks. He opposed MacDonald's reneging on the Coal Mines Act that Cook had pinned all his hopes on. He supported the then Labour MP Oswald Mosley's radical programme against unemployment. Direct action—the heart of Cook's early syndicalism—was a thing of the past, a thing he feared might destroy the MFGB if it were again undertaken.

There is a real lesson of history that needs to be learnt from Cook, and indeed from Scargill's own period as NUM president. It is that militant trade unionism is not enough to defend the economic conditions of workers, let alone act as a means of overthrowing capitalism. But the defeats both men suffered were products not simply of the limitations of their own politics, but also of the gross betrayals by the lieutenants of capital inside the labour movement.

Davies himself does not draw these lessons. He bemoans Cook's attacks on Thomas. He puzzles over Cook's agitational fervour. He argues that Cook's vacillations should be regarded as positive aspects of his career. This is all way off the mark. But the detail concerning Cook's life that Davies has marshalled makes for a riveting read. One gripe. The typographical errors in this book are legion. They make our own pretty poor track-record of proof-reading look almost professional. ■

THIS PAMPHLET is the third in a series sponsored by the Campaign Group and the first clear statement in recent years of a left reformist approach toward the unions in Britain. Author John Kelly, one of the few socialist academics left at the London School of Economics, puts a cogent case against the 'new social contract' cobbled together by Neil Kinnock's supporters on the Labour Party NEC and leading bureaucrats from Congress House.

Kelly highlights the utter inadequacy of the national minimum wage proposals in the Party's general election Manifesto and rejects the Labour leadership's tacit approval of state interference in trade union affairs. He also throws into sharp relief the vague, mealy-mouthed references to enhancing the collective powers of the unions, noting:

'... that the rights vs immunities

G R McColl reviews  
*Labour and the unions*  
by John Kelly  
(Verso £2.95)

debate is a red herring because whatever the language used to frame new laws, the judges will be called upon to interpret those laws.'

Of course, trade union militants who have declared their distrust of Labour's policies past and present were told by Kinnock's supporters and apologists that, regardless of their defects, the documents from the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee were a small but necessary price to pay for the election of a Labour government. According to these people, a Labour victory was the best hope for an enfeebled trade union movement still reeling under the blows of Thatcherism.

## THE STATE OF THE UNIONS

Kelly devotes a useful chapter to countering this line of argument, giving a realistic assessment of the 'state of the unions' which makes it plain that, in spite of some major defeats and a sharp decline in union membership (largely due to the massive destruction of jobs in highly organised manufacturing sectors), the bulk of TUC-affiliated unions are in a far healthier condition than during the capitalist crises of the inter-war years. Admittedly, trade unions lost 14% of their membership between 1979 and 1982 but Kelly compares this favourable with a decline of 35% witnessed between 1920 and 1923. He also notes that the no-strike

deals beloved by Eric Hammond et al 'probably cover no more than about 20,000 workers, less than 0.4% of the British manufacturing workforce.'

All this is valuable ammunition to use against the doomsayers in the labour movement and those who wish to relegate the organised working class to the backseat in the struggle for socialism.

Yet a glaring weakness of the pamphlet is the absence of any explanation of the causes of the defeats of key sections, like the miners and printers. Kelly singularly fails to identify and attack the role of the union bureaucracies in sabotaging these major strikes.

While Kelly applauds rank-and-file

initiatives and laments their decline in recent years, he does not show why it is necessary to build an alternative leadership from the base up. Nor does he suggest even the bare bones of a programme for the democratisation of union structures, never mind a perspective for their transformation into combat organisations that could go on the offensive against the bosses.

But these, and other, deficiencies in Kelly's analysis are not surprising while he makes occasional and sharp criticisms of the Kinnockites, the 'Euros' and the right-wing union tops, he is unable to mount a root-and-branch critique of them, or propose a real course of action against them, because he is wedded, ultimately, to the same reformist tradition.

That said, *Labour and the Unions* is an informative and thought-provoking read, although a somewhat costly one for a mere 60 pages. ■



**RECENT WEEKS** have seen widespread action by Britain's car workers as they attempt to roll-back the bosses' latest offensive in the industry.

At Cowley, Austin Rover management decided to withdraw its contribution to the joint pension fund for three years—although the workers will still have to pay up. This provoked a strike by 3,600 T&G members, with another 3,000 workers laid-off.

At Vauxhall the company has reneged on bonus agreements and are offering a paltry 4% wage increase. The unions want a 10% rise and a reduction in the working week to 35 hours. This has been backed up by a two week strike at the Luton plant, with 24-hour strike action at Ellesmere Port.

But it is Ford UK that is in the van of the bosses' offensive. In October Ford offered its manual workers a 4.25% increase index linked to inflation over the next two years.

As part of the package Ford want changes in working practices towards the 'Japanese' style. The use of temporary workers, quality circles to check on productivity and the introduction of team leaders, a grade of shop floor supervisor, would result in heightened divisions on the shop floor. Where such measures have already been introduced, in Vauxhall, they have led to an erosion of the stew-

ards' power.

As a result of this offer, in the last six weeks Ford UK has seen a national one day strike, plus spontaneous strikes, walk-outs and overtime bans by its 35,000 workers.

The white-collar workers at Fords have also been taking action. Tass and Astms members have struck against the proposed changes and for their 10% pay claim.

Under pressure Ford has upped its pay offer to manual workers by a mere 1%. The company, like Vauxhall and Austin Rover, is pleading poverty. What a joke! Ford can afford to give its parasitic directors a whacking 74.5% increase, but only 5.25% to its production workers.

In the last few years sales, profits and production are all up in the car industry with workers being taken on at some plants. This has created the present climate of confidence and combativity amongst the industry's workers.

The problem is how to turn this new militancy into real and lasting victories?

All car workers are on the receiving end of the same offensive. If one of the companies can inflict a defeat on its own workers this will be used to depress the conditions of workers in the other companies. The fights at Vauxhall, Ford and Austin Rover need to be linked up into one combined counter-offensive.

Dangers also lurk in the widely different types of action. Only an indefinite national strike can make the hard-nosed car bosses do a U-turn. Nothing less will do.

The union officials representing workers at Austin Rover, Vauxhall and Ford are all running scared, trying to 'delay' (read derail) strike action.

Some of the officials are talking about organising a ballot—who knows when—in the hope that by the time this happens the dispute will have been solved! Stuff the ballot! Militants in all car industry unions and in every company must organise mass meetings and win them to a national all-out strike. It must be demanded of the union tops that they lead this action. To force them, and to organise the action in the likely event of the officials refusing to act, the rank and file must organise now.

No trust must be placed in the officials, rank and file car workers will need to keep control of the action in their own hands. Moreover, out of the present dispute a rank and file car workers movement can and must be built, committing itself to building one class struggle union for all car workers.

- Link the claims!
- Build a rank and file movement in the car industry!
- For a national car workers' strike now!

Car workers are on the move again. John Lewis looks argues the need to link the claims

# UNITE THE STRUGGLES



John Sturrock (Network)

Car workers need a-rank and file movement to keep control in their hands



## BUILD ON VICTORY

By an AEU member

**BILL JORDAN** and the other hard right leaders in the Confed unions have received a setback in their plans to reach a deal on flexible working with the Engineering Employers (EEF). The vote to reject their draft agreement—urged by the T&G and Tass—is a victory for those militants who have been fighting Jordan. Now the problem is to win a cut in working hours without any concessions to the bosses.

If the bosses have their way the engineers' victory will turn out to be only a temporary reprieve. The EEF speaks for a dwindling number of bosses. And long drawn-out national negotiations like the EEF/Confed talks are not the style in Thatcher's Britain. Their line is to encourage plant by plant negotiations so as to sow disunity in the engineers' ranks.

In order to compete with the likes of Nissan companies are forcing through changes at plant level. They feel doubly confident now that union leaders from the right-wing Jordan to the left-wing Gill have given them the green light to do so. There are already firms, in and out of the EEF, who have introduced flexible work and shift patterns and are taking on multi-skilled trainees for that purpose.

The T&G and Tass opposed the draft document because they are worried that the AEU is growing at their expense in multi-union plants. There is increasing bitterness in the

running battles for representation as evidenced by the T&G's complaints about the AEU poaching their negotiating rights at Ford's new plant in Dundee. But it is the same T&G who have signalled they would do a deal to work the Margam super-pit every day and hour God sends. That sure would mean flexible working.

Militants in the T&G and Tass must not be lulled into thinking that their leaders will lead a fight for a no-strings cut in hours. Neither should AEU militants look to those leaders to champion their cause. In fact they are already making excuses for not initiating such a campaign. And they have got the gall to blame the members for not being prepared for it.

The unity that has built up at rank and file level across the Confed unions must be sustained. It must be spread to embrace engineers outside the EEF, for example at Ford and Vauxhall. AEU members must demand that the National Committee is reconvened and that the EC campaign for strike action to win the 35 hour week with no strings.

Stewards and militants cannot wait for Jordan however. They must take up the fight for a national engineering stewards meeting to launch a coordinated fight. Against the do-nothing electoralism of the Broad Left, engineering militants must fight to build a rank and file movement across the unions that is prepared to take on the bosses' attacks.■

A new union is being born. The proposed merger of Astms (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs) and Tass (Technical and Allied Salaried staffs) will create the MSF (Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union). With a combined membership in excess of 600,000 the MSF will be an important player in the TUC numbers game.

But what will be in it for the members? Dick Pratt looks at the issues

## FOR A DEMOCRATIC MERGER



Kitson found when he turned away from the official Anti-Apartheid movement towards the City AA group. Tass immediately reneged on a promise of financial support made to him during his years in South African gaols. Nor is this bureaucracy mitigated by any fighting record. Dozens of disputes, from Hangers in London to Borderways in Birmingham have been led to defeat.

Astms also has a none too proud record of struggle. It has repeatedly failed to fight for the interests of its lower paid members, preferring instead to concentrate (in the words of its own rule book) on 'enhancing their status'. It does boast a formally more democratic structure, branch based and with a delegate conference which allows its members greater leeway than their brothers and sisters in Tass.

And while 'unofficial' rank and file groupings are moved against by the bureaucracy some groups, such as Associated Staffs for a United Ireland (ASUI), still survive within it. In contrast to the Kitson affair, ASUI was able to mobilise support for Dr Maire O'Shea when she was framed under the PTA. The drive towards fusion has come from the respective bureaucrats, each anxious

to build themselves a base in a growing sector of the workforce. Whilst Ken Gill and his Communist Campaign Current cronies hope to bolster the 'left' bloc in the TUC, Jenkins' crew hope to achieve an MSF rule book much closer to Tass's than their own, and consequently less 'trouble' from the membership. What is being proposed is not an industrial union but a 'left' bureaucratic one.

Both Tass and Astms members must take up the fight now for an anti-bureaucratic rule book that retains and extends the democratic rights of its members and branches, incorporating the best elements of both existing rule books and discarding the rest. Delegates to the forthcoming-rules revision conference should be selected on their commitment to fight for this and not merely to rubber stamp a regime aimed at making the bureaucrats' lives easier.

Against a bureaucracy spear-headed by Joint Secretary Generals-for-life Gill and Jenkins the argument must be won for a rank and file movement in the MSF. The fight for a rank and file movement in the MSF that opposes every bureaucratic manoeuvre, every sell out and every left faker starts with the fight now for a democratic rule book - and ends with a class struggle union committed to overthrowing capitalism itself.■



# THE DOLLAR AND THE CRASH

AFTER A LONG delay the Reagan administration has at last unveiled a package of cuts to decrease its budget deficit. In itself the delay reflected the conflicts within Reagan's administration and Congress over how to respond to the Stock Market crash and fears of recession. It also reflected very real tensions between the major capitalist economies.

To the leaders of the capitalist world the structural imbalance in the world economy can be corrected in one of two ways. The first is to cut the US deficit (deflation). The second is to get the other major capitalist countries to increase their deficits (reflation). The former will hurt the US economy, the latter will help it.

Unfortunately for Reagan, Germany and Japan (less so) are reluctant to increase their government spending. They have seen what it has done for the US. Under pressure the US administration has produced a schedule of cuts but one vague and open enough to keep up the pressure

on Germany and Japan to reflate. While its deficit may weaken it, US capitalism still has several weapons in its armoury to pressure its capitalist rivals.

It is one-sided to put the responsibility for the crash on the US deficit's impact on interest rates. Interest rates had been rising since January. They were rising even faster in countries outside the US. For example in Japan by 39%, in Germany by 25% while in the US the rise was only 20%.

This rising trend in interest rates is more consistent with the latter stage of the business cycle and its attendant fall in sales, rise in inflation, growth of indebtedness and exhaustion of the credit system.

This was quite apparent in the US before the crash. Retail sales had stagnated this year and begun to fall. In particular in the months leading up to October car sales fell by 15% and house sales by 13%.

Behind the argument about deficits lies an argument about markets. Reagan is trying to force Japan and

Germany to open and expand their markets in order to compensate for the contracting US market.

At the moment the main weapon of competition used so far has been exchange rates and not so much import controls. The main lever the US has to impose its will on Japan and Germany is the dollar. The dollar remains the world's currency. Most of world trade is still conducted in dollars despite the emergence of Japan as the world's leading banker.

US capital has used the weakening dollar to offload its problems onto the rest of the world. The Reagan administration had only paid lip service to agreements like the Louvre Accord which was signed earlier this year to stabilize currency rates. The Reagan administration wants to see

a weaker dollar. His only concern is that this decline is orderly and controlled and does not induce panic and thereby precipitate a further crash.

For their part the rest of the major capitalist nations have recognised the competitive threat posed to them by a weakening dollar. They have tried to shore up the dollar by buying up over \$100 billion so far this year. They have had little success.

In the meantime they have blown the cover on their claim that 'we do not interfere in the market as governments do not know what is good for markets'.

The dillying and dallying with the budget deficit, which creates uncertainty, served to weaken the dollar. This was exactly what the Reagan administration wants.

It needs to see the dollar fall even further. Most commentators on the dollar are unaware that it has only fallen back to where it was in 1982 before its unbelievable 73% climb to its highpoint in mid-1985.

But it is not only the weakening dollar that has improved US competitiveness. Reagan's defeats of workers have resulted in sharp productivity gains. In the 1970s Japanese manufacturing productivity rose 300% faster than the US. Between 1980 and 1985 the gap narrowed to 30%. From 1985 US productivity growth actually overtook Japan. At present it is growing at 4.5% per annum second only to Britain amongst the major capitalist economies.

In the last twelve months this rising productivity and falling dollar has begun to alter the direction of trade. It has increased US exports. It has come none too soon. As the home market has stagnated and latterly shrunk, so US companies have been able to redirect their rising produc-

tion towards the export market. This year production has grown by 4.7%. Of this over 60% has gone into increased exports. Little wonder that in the last 6 months US exports have jumped by 24%.

This reversal in trade has profound consequences for the world capitalist economy. As the world market contracts and US companies become more aggressive, Germany and Japan will be pressured hard. Already Japan's trade surplus has shrunk 13% and the trend is accelerating.

In addition the crash of 1987 will intensify inter-imperialist rivalries. It has caused an accelerated contraction of the world market—investors have less money to spend. In its wake we see a reversal of the trend towards the internationalisation of capital.

One of the most significant developments since October has been the flight of foreign investment from the stock exchanges of the world. The London Stock Exchange used to be one of the most international exchanges with 35.5% of its shares held by foreign financiers. The rapid sale of shares by these financiers after the crash was one of the reasons London fell more heavily than other major exchanges. Bourgeois commentators no longer talk of the globalization of world markets but their fracturing into national components.

This retreat behind national borders combined with the intensification of international competition has made the world a much more dangerous place. Once again the need to build a revolutionary workers' International grows more urgent. In order to fight amongst themselves the capitalists must first defeat their own workers. We must not let this happen again. ■



Panic in the city



## Disability and abortion

Comrades, *Workers Power* 99 features a back page article on abortion and the Alton Bill. Let me be clear that I endorse its political content entirely—we need a working class campaign to defend abortion rights and to go further and make the right of women to choose a reality. However, the article contains a formulation that is at least inept and is potentially hurtful and oppressive to a generally disregarded minority to which I belong, that of people with disabilities. The article argues:

... that the only real force that can decisively defeat Alton and any other attacks on women's rights is the working class, the women and men whose lives will be affected by more unwanted children, more disabled dependents and the horrors of illegal abortions.'

Comrades, this will not do! I object in the strongest possible terms to being inserted—albeit implicitly—somewhere between unwanted children and 'the horrors of illegal abortions'.

This sloppy use of language has potential dangers that go well beyond offending disabled people. Ellen Wilkie, co-presenter of Channel Four's *Same Difference* and confined to a wheelchair by muscular dystrophy, has written an article in *Disability Now*

supporting Alton. The central point of her argument repeats Alton's assertion that everyone would oppose abortion on the basis of sex or colour, but abortion on the basis that the potential child could be disabled is accepted.

Now in the mouth of a moral and political reactionary who is motivated more by concern at his shrinking base amongst a Catholic electorate than by the welfare of disabled people, this argument could be disposed of rather quickly. When it is forwarded by a disabled woman it takes on a powerful emotional force.

Implying that disabled people are nothing more than inconveniences lends credence to the idea that it is the anti-abortionists who really care about our welfare. It is passing a weapon into the enemies hands. We need to assert that it is we in the revolutionary left that genuinely care about the needs and rights of disabled people generally, as well as of women, and we who are in favour of the allocation of the material resources necessary for our comfort and security.

Disabled people are only just beginning to assert themselves as adult human beings. For too long we have put up with being treated as children. Certainly it would be grotesque if disabled people's concern over their rights to bodily integrity were used to limit the rights of all women to control over their bodies. But reactionaries like Wilkie and Alton are helped in their posing as supporters of disabled people's rights by the thoughtless use of the kind of language found in this article.

In comradeship,  
J. Tandy

## We reply:

We agree with the comrade that revolutionary communists should be, and must be seen to be, the best fighters for the rights of disabled people. And, as the comrade implies, to set the rights of one section of the working class against another is only to perpetuate a state of affairs that weakens the working class as a whole and aids our enemies.

Where we must take issue with the comrade is in the inference drawn from the formulation cited. There is no sliding scale of 'horrors', ranging from unwanted children to backstreet abortion, with disabled dependents slotted somewhere in the middle. We are against women being forced to have children they do not want. Foetal abnormality is one reason why a woman might not want to take a pregnancy to full term. Simple inability to provide for another hungry mouth is another.

The enormous effect that any dependent—disabled or not—can have on a woman's independence is another. All such reasons are valid. In every case the right of the woman to choose how to live her own life is threatened by her pregnancy. Not by a human being, but by a part of herself, her foetus.

Our concern to stop women being forced, through lack of legal, safe abortion facilities, to care for dependents—disabled or not—is not the same as denying the rights or interests of dependents, let alone all disabled people (who are by no means all dependent). It is the effects of dependency we seek to eliminate, not the dependents themselves.

But dependents are fully formed human beings, foetuses are not. And in

the article we were talking about a decision being made about a foetus.

Similarly our attitude to disabled people and their struggles cannot be confused with our attitude to disability itself. We neither imply nor believe that disabled people are 'nothing more than inconveniences'.

But disability itself is not a good thing. We are against it. We want to eradicate it as far as possible—because of the restrictions it places on both people with disabilities and those who care for disabled dependents. Thus we are in favour of the right of a woman to choose to have an abortion simply on the grounds of foetal abnormality.

## Tamil Tigers

Comrades, The article on Sri Lanka in *Workers Power* 99 gives an essentially correct analysis of the causes and current state of the civil war taking place between the Tamils and the Indian and Sri Lankan armies. Unfortunately this was marred by the concluding section of the article.

The penultimate paragraph begins: 'As Marxists we do not share the Tigers' goal of a separate Tamil state.' The truth of this statement is weakened by its position within the article. Before Marxists voice criticisms of the goals and tactics of mass revolutionary nationalist movements, like the Tigers, they should make clear that they unconditionally support the struggle for self-determination, up to and including separation. In the article this had to wait until the last sentence.

Worse, the article appears to take the word of bourgeois commentators

on acts of Tiger 'terror' as good coin, despite having adduced no proof whatsoever.

Even if all the reports were true, such isolated attacks would certainly not justify including the demand to 'halt all attacks on Sinhalese civilians' in our programme. Comrades, there is a civil war going on! yours in comradeship  
Bill Clarke  
Manchester

## We reply:

We accept the comrade's contention that the argument at the end of the article was wrongly posed. The critical but unconditional support we offer all petit-bourgeois nationalists fighting imperialism or its agents places a duty on us - in an imperialist heartland - to put support before criticism in our propaganda.

On the question of Tiger attacks on Sinhalese civilians the comrade is correct to point out that the demand to halt all attacks on Sinhalese civilians perhaps implies that we are not giving the Tigers unconditional support in the military struggle. To set the record straight we do give them such support. However, in instances where the Tamils do carry out attacks on Sinhalese civilians such as those that Jayawardene has cynically located and given land to in Tamil areas we do argue that they are wrong.

Such attacks do not advance the cause of the Tamils. Worse, they can be counter-productive in that they leave the Tamil plantation workers in the central highland region open to pogroms that neither they, nor the Tigers, are in a position to physically resist.



# workers power

## VOTE SCARGILL ORGANISE THE RANK & FILE

Arthur Scargill's decision to stand for re-election in the NUM presents an opportunity to rebuff the claims from every quarter that the NUM now favours 'new realism'. John Walsh, Scargill's opponent is a thorough-going new realist. No miner should vote for him. But nor should miners vote for Arthur Scargill in the belief that his re-election in and of itself will solve the problems facing them.

Walsh's campaigning slogan is 'negotiation not confrontation'. Anyone who looks at his record will realise that his slogan should really be 'sell-out not struggle'. One of the leading Yorkshire officials to oppose the stand of the Cortonwood miners which started the Great Strike, he has done nothing since the end of the strike to fight pit closures in North Yorkshire.

Without a doubt Walsh is, in this election, the candidate of Haslam, Lynk and Thatcher.

However, as any miner knows, the main opponents of Scargill on the Executive, and the leaders of the retreat in the NUM, have not been the right wing but Scargill's old allies in the Broad Left.

Des Dutfield and the South Wales

leadership have been leading the campaign to introduce six day working in the coalfields. George Bolton, Eric Clarke and the Scottish leadership have presided over the massacre of jobs in their area to the level where there are now less than 3,500 miners north of the border.

The response of these gentlemen has shown exactly how cowardly and treacherous they really are. Dutfield has gone running to the same courts that stole the NUM's money, in an attempt to get the election called off, while George Bolton has led the Scottish area into publicly refusing to back Scargill in the election. So far the soft left hasn't dared to come out and publicly support Walsh. They know that Walsh, if he can split the Yorkshire vote, has the best chance of beating Scargill, and that is the real reason for them refusing to take up Scargill's challenge by standing a candidate. They want Walsh to do their dirty work for them, and privately they want him to win.

But a real danger for militants is that they will rely on Scargill to see off the right and soft-left single-handedly. He may believe he can do this. But the past period shows he quite definitely cannot. He has confined himself to a bureaucratic strategy that has contributed to his isolation

on the Executive. His decision to stand does not signal a break with this strategy.

Since the end of the Great Strike, rank and file miners have shown a willingness to take up the fight against the Board. In 1986/87 only 15 pits were not involved in industrial action of some sort and only last week, miners at Deep Navigation in South Wales struck in defence of conditions. The national and area leaderships have spent the last two years trying to keep the lid on the explosion of anger in the pits.

This summer's strike in South Yorkshire over the implementation of the disciplinary code at Frickley had, with its likelihood of spreading to the rest of Yorkshire, the best chance since the strike of turning back the Board's offensive. These few weeks saw Sammy Thompson, Jack Taylor and the Yorkshire Executive working overtime to get miners back to work in return for a completely useless national overtime ban. Throughout those two weeks Scargill was silent.

The weekend after Scargill announced his resignation, Peter Heathfield, at a meeting in Yorkshire, said that 'Arthur Scargill is a loyal servant of the National Executive'. And that is the major flaw in



John Harris (FL)

Scargill's politics. He has refused to break with the Executive, appeal over their heads to the membership, and actively organise those militants who want to fight. Even his resignation, while obviously giving him the chance to campaign for his policies amongst the membership, remains a bureaucratic manoeuvre to safeguard his position on the Executive.

At the recent S O Davies memorial lecture in South Wales, Scargill made one of his most left wing speeches for many months. He denounced trade union leaders who during the Great Strike 'betrayed the miners by accepting deliveries of foreign coal and oil, and actively encouraged their members to break our picket lines'. He attacked the 'new realism' of Des Dutfield as 'absolute nonsense' and stated that 'only direct action—including industrial action—can halt the utter destruction of those basic institutions such as the NHS or, indeed, the coal industry'.

We certainly agree with many of the things Scargill has said over the last months in favour of industrial action. But the question we ask of Scargill is this: how do you propose to get industrial action when the union leadership is stuffed full of 'new realists'? The National Executive meeting where Scargill announced his resignation refused to even call a special delegate conference to discuss the situation in the pits. Only the rank and file miners organised in a rank and file movement can halt the Board and the right in the NUM.

Arthur Scargill himself was once in favour of organising the rank and file. He played a key role in the old Barnsley Miners' Forum and the old Broad Left. But the political objective of these organisations was to

gain control of the union machine—not to fight for genuine socialist policies and rank and file control of the union. Having got Scargill elected, the rank and file organisations withered away and the Broad Left became a semi secret bloc on the Area and National Executives. This 'Broad Left' is now leading the retreat.

Militants must use the opportunities offered by the election campaign to build a rank and file movement that can begin a campaign for the national strike that is necessary to hurl back British Coals's offensive. Otherwise the re-election of Scargill will change nothing.

If Scargill refuses to break with the union machine and to actively organise the rank and file then rank and file miners must organise without him. Taking inspiration from the Miners' Minority Movement of the 1920s a new rank and file movement can mobilise thousands of miners around: resistance to all pit closures, against six day working and for a four day week, no to the disciplinary code, and for workers' control in the pits. In addition, the rank and file need to control the NUM. Five-yearly elections do not represent genuine democracy. The NEC should be elected by, and accountable to, a delegate conference composed of representatives elected directly from each pit. The president, vice president and secretary should be elected at pit-head meetings, after a full debate, and for one year only.

Only if these issues are taken up in the election campaign can the tide be turned and 'new realism' defeated in the ranks of the NUM.

- Vote Arthur Scargill!
- Build a rank and file movement!

# UCW

## ALL OUT NOW

POSTAL WORKERS have voted overwhelmingly in favour of action to secure a three hour reduction in the working week. This is a clear indication of the discontent of Union of Communication Workers (UCW) members at their lousy work conditions and wage levels.

UCW leader Tuffin has no intention of using the vote to launch an attack on the Post Office management. As the votes were still being cast he told *The Guardian*:

'The union is not demanding that its members vote for industrial action; and it is not demanding that they vote for a strike. It is asking its members, in an individual secret ballot, to give their executive council the authority to take industrial action if necessary.'

He hopes to wring a few measly concessions from the bosses on the strength of the vote. Tuffin hailed as the 'Deal of the Century', the 1985 'Safeguarding Jobs and the Mails Services Agreement' which has led to compulsory productivity and work measurement schemes.

The current dispute is not just about a couple of hours off the working week. It is about a generalised offensive on the pay and conditions of Post Office workers and the status of the industry itself. The Tories have split the various sections of the Postal industry into separate 'businesses' each with their own relative financial autonomy.

When Thatcher says she's not selling off the Royal Mail what she means is that counter services and Giro-bank are up for grabs because they are profitable. Letters only make a profit in the business sectors of the major cities. That is where the Royal Mail's monopoly will be broken if Thatcher gets her way.

Having done their utmost to lose the vote the 'wise men' of the UCW executive are now trying to use the blind alley of arbitration to head off militancy. UCW

militants must have no truck with this betrayal.

- Militants must demand all out strike action now. We must spike the guns of Tiffin and co who, at most, will call for demoralising and self-defeating selective action.
- The executive committee have neither the will nor the ability to run an all out strike. In every sorting office strike committees must be formed accountable to regular mass meeting.
- While backing strike action for the official 40 hour week demand with no strings, militants must fight for workers' control of the new technology and for a sliding scale of hours.
- Thatcher will try to use TNT and other strike breaking agencies to undermine the action. All trade unionists must be won to support UCW picket lines and to black all scab firms. In order to stop the scabs and defend the letter monopoly UCW members must give the lead in creating delegate based trade union action councils in every locality.
- Roll back the bosses' offensive. Tear up the 1985 agreement. Conditions must meet workers' needs not the needs of pre-privatisation profitability.

Even if Tuffin and co reach a compromise the matter will not end there. Postal workers are angry. So far this year there have been 100 unofficial strikes in the Post Office. That accounts for one in six of all strikes in Britain. One way or another postal workers are heading for a showdown, and the UCW leadership are hell bent on avoiding it. That is why the fight for shorter hours must go hand in hand with a rank and file struggle to boot out Tuffin and co and replace them with representatives who will fight. ■

by Doug Buchanan

THIRTY ONE people have now died as a result of the Kings Cross fire. The bosses of London Regional Transport knew their stations were death traps. So did the workers who have called for better safety, only to be threatened with the sack for telling passengers the truth about fire risks.

At LRT 3,000 jobs have gone in the last five years. The Building Department which checked

sprinkler systems has been closed down. At Kings Cross the number of full time cleaners has been cut from fourteen to two. The penny-pinching LRT bosses cut spending on fire barriers in August this year.

Workers must not be fooled by Thatcher and Ridley's displays of grief. The Tories know their policies kill. They don't care. They just want better profits, at any price. ■