

A SOCIALIST ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

WOMEN'S right to decide whether or not to continue with a pregnancy, whether or not to take responsibility for bringing up a child, is an issue of principle. Without this right women can never enter fully and equally into society, instead remaining at the mercy of the biological fact that they are capable of conceiving a child.

Therefore defending the — inadequate — provisions of the 1967 Abortion Act is a matter of principle. It is therefore helpful that only a small minority of the population supports David Alton's proposal to introduce a time limit of 18 weeks for legal abortion.

This is shown in a Marplan opinion poll published in the *Guardian* on 18 January. It found that 77 per cent of all polled, and 80 per cent of women agreed with late abortion where the woman's health is at risk.

In the case of foetal abnormality 67 per cent of those polled and 68 per cent of women were in favour. After a rape, 71 per cent of those polled, and 73 per cent of women were in favour, and in the case of an under age girl, 58 per cent and 57 per cent of women were in favour.

This gives the lie to Alton and his backers in SPUC and Life, who have claimed that their proposal has majority support. In fact the anti-abortion lobby is probably the best organised extremist minority in the country.

It is also one of the best funded. In the first weeks of January anti-abortionists ran double page, full colour advertisements in the *Times* and the *Independent*, at a cost of approaching £100,000. The accompanying signatures indicated a marked absence of support from the medical profession, from disability organisations, from women's organisations or from the labour movement.

Unfortunately this lack of popular support has little impact on the Tory and male majority in the House of Commons. Nor on that handful of Labour MPs who consider that their religious views place them above women's lives and party policy and give them a right to decide to force several thousand women a year to continue with an unwanted pregnancy.

There are two reasons for this insistence on stopping legal abortion — for illegal abortion can never be stopped, it is just that many women will die. Straightforward reactionary religious bigotry is the basis of much of Alton's support. Secondly the greater control that women have over their fertility, the greater control they have over their lives, and they begin to demand more. This creates a very subversive force in society from the point of view of the ruling class, and therefore it has to be reversed if possible.

Since the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act, women and their supporters, have had to fight off no less than 13 separate attacks on its provisions. On each occasion these attempts have been defeated by massive mobilisations of women, and of the labour movement.

The Fight Alton's Bill campaign, together with the TUC, is calling for that kind of mobilisation again, on a national demonstration to be held in London on 19 March. Every trade union and Labour Party branch, women's section, student unions, and women's organisation must be alerted to the threat to abortion rights and brought out onto the streets on 19 March.

Alton's proposal does not have the support of the majority of women, nor of the majority of the population. It can and must be defeated.

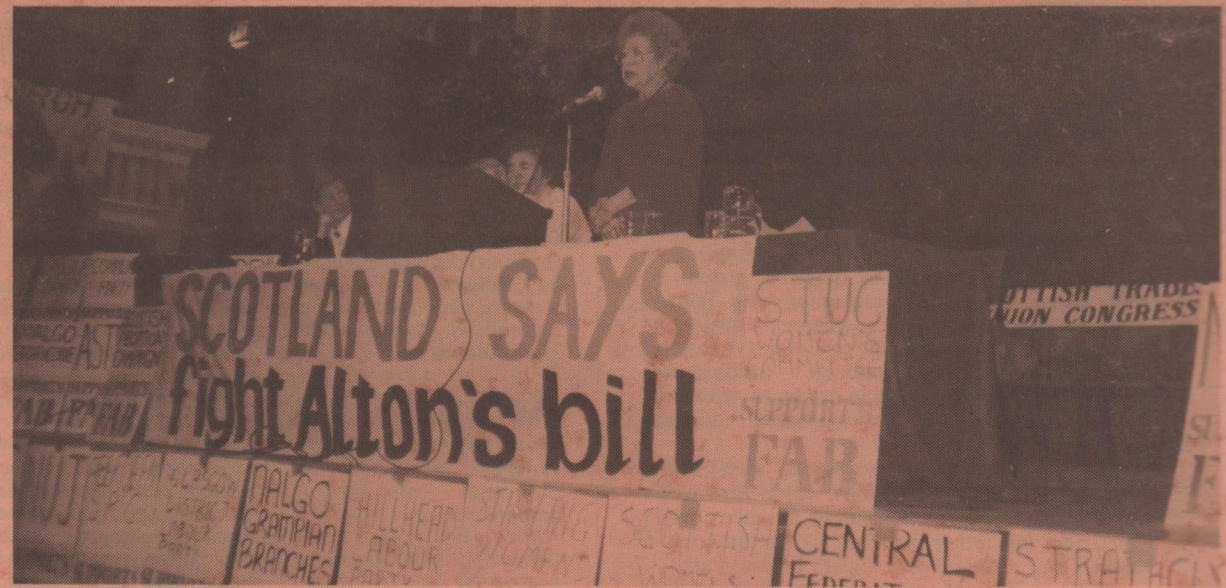
**NATIONAL
DEMONSTRATION
19 March 1988
Assemble: 11.30am
Embankment**

Inside

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Defend abortion rights

NO to Alton



YES to choice

Socialist ACTION

Alliance blunders

NO ONE should be surprised by the events which have surrounded the launching of the new Alliance party — nor taken in by the tactical retreats which followed its mislaunch by Steel and MacLennan.

It was a piece of tactical idiocy for Steel and MacLennan to write down such policies as a commitment to Trident, nuclear power, and VAT on food and children's clothes. To maintain any credibility for its plan to take votes from the Labour Party the Alliance had to repudiate the Steel-MacLennan manifesto. The *Times*, a vitriolically anti-Labour Party paper, said the declaration to put VAT on children's clothes was 'ludicrously inappropriate'.

But this does not mean that Steel and MacLennan have rejected these policies. Former Liberal president Des Wilson claimed on the Monday after the MacLennan/Steel debacle that their document was: 'Dead, finished, torn up, in the dustbin, gone forever, part of history.'

But when MacLennan was challenged by Liberal activists that the position of the previous document was 'a secret manifesto' he replied that: 'It's an open agenda. There is nothing hidden about it at all.' Steel declared of the document after it was withdrawn: 'We tried to go further on issues we will have to address in years ahead.'

Nor should it be believed that the new document is simply anodyne. On the contrary on the vital issues it is totally clear.

The document unequivocally commits Britain to nuclear weapons: 'We are committed to NATO. We said in our 1987 manifesto that we would "maintain, with whatever necessary modernisation, our minimum nuclear deterrent."

The new document also makes clear it is committed to 'targeting' social security payments — which is merely a way of saying it is in favour of a means test.

There is no commitment whatever to eliminate nuclear power. There is no commitment to restore the rights of trade unions.

A good index of the document is that among the supporters of Owen there is a shrewd assessment both of the character of the new document and of the proposed new party.

Peter Jenkins, a strong supporter of the right of the SDP, writing in the *Independent* declared: 'On the key matter of nuclear defence, its position is essentially the one which Dr Owen endorsed at the general election except that the pledge to cancel Trident has been dropped. The firm commitment to maintaining a minimum deterrent would by 1992, in practice, mean continuing with Trident while limiting its firepower to a capacity no greater than Polaris. That may be the sort of heavy handed compromise which conceals fundamental disagreements, but it ought to do; by no stretch of the imagination is it unilateral nuclear disarmament.'

He concluded: 'The new Social and Liberal Democratic Party, if it happens, will in any case be a broad and somewhat motley alliance, pretty much like any other political party, although a distinct improvement over the old Liberal Party.'

William Rees-Mogg, ex-editor of the *Times* and an avid Thatcher supporter, arrived at exactly the same conclusion. 'If such a merged party comes into existence it will be the end of the Liberal Party. Last summer, many short sighted Liberals saw the new party as a Liberal takeover of the SDP. No such thing is going to happen...The Liberals would give up their name, their tradition, their personality, and would have to accept a fudge of every controversial policy. The new (Owenite) SDP, with defined policies and a strong leader, would fight for the centre ground against a merged party with ill-defined policies and a leader yet to be elected. In terms of popular appeal, Dr David Owen's SDP would be at least a match for its rival from the start. We would be back to a two-party centre, but with the Liberal Party killed.'

Actually Owen has no popular support at all, but what Rees-Mogg meant, accurately, was that in any by-election the press will give all out backing to Owen's SDP. Meanwhile the new centralised constitution of the merged party will ensure that whatever 'radical' elements do exist among the Liberals will be marginalised.

The new party does what it has always intended to do. It presents a fake radicalism to take votes from Labour while maintaining a tight grip for capital on its central policies. Steel and MacLennan made a stupid tactical error but their backers, needless to say, have gained their way easily.

Catalogue of shame

The MPs who will vote to support Alton's bill

AS THE second reading of David Alton's anti-abortion bill approaches — Friday 22 January — a number of Labour MPs are once again going on record opposed to the interests and rights of women. As the *Observer* put it on 17 January, 'Labour's rebels to clinch Alton vote'.

MANY of these pro-Alton MPs have said in replies to letters from women constituents, urging them to vote against Alton, that they face a 'difficult' decision. Or the 'dilemma of party or conscience' as the *Observer* again said, of the voting intention of Ronnie Campbell, Labour MP for Blythe Valley and Campaign Group member.

By Anne Kane, FAB

Two things at least are clear about these Labour MPs: they have no respect for party conference decisions nor do they respect the individual right to a position of conscience of women faced with an unwanted pregnancy. Moreover they are entirely unrepresentative of the views of the majority of women. Even the press consistently refers to the anti-abortion lobby as a well organised 'minority'.

The success of the FAB campaign indicates the unpopularity of Alton's proposals. The campaign has experienced an astonishingly rapid and comprehensive growth: local groups stretch from one end of the country to another, and a wide supporters list ranging from Tory MPs like Theresa Gorman, through Liberals for Choice to the TUC and National Union of Students was built within a few weeks of its launch.

Action

Its day of action on 16 January saw tens of thousands of people demonstrating against Alton in every major town. If this opposition could express itself directly Alton's bill would certainly not sur-

vive its second reading.

Instead the fate of thousands of women is at the mercy of the personal opinions and 'consciences' of MPs. The history of previous anti-abortion bills is one of notoriously mixed voting — more than on virtually any other issue.

The 1967 Act was introduced by a Liberal MP, David Steel — now another Liberal is trying to restrict its provisions. Both Tory and Labour MPs have moved previous anti-abortion amendments to the Act.

By mounting huge campaigns demonstrating the opposition to more restrictive legislation — especially against the Corrie bill when the TUC for the first time called a demonstration in support of abortion rights — previous attacks have been defeated.

Shame

But it is to the continuing shame of the Labour Party that these campaigns have also had to be directed against Labour MPs who have supported such restrictive laws. This is especially galling in the context of a majority Tory government, when the support of Labour MPs for women should be unquestioned, especially given that this is party policy.

The 1985 conference decided, by 5,305,000 votes to 611,000, to abandon 'the idea that there can be "conscience clauses" or free votes' in matters relating to a woman's fundamental right to decide whether or not to bear children'. However a phrase sneaked into the statement adopted by the 1987 party conference — reportedly by Neil Kinnock himself — is being used as a basis for saying that MPs do not



Islington's mayoress signs the FAB petition

have any obligation to vote with party policy on the Alton bill.

In a display of contempt for party policy and for women, a number of Labour MPs have announced their intention to vote with Alton on 18 weeks, or some other reduction in the present time limits, to 22 or 24 weeks.

Those who say at the moment they would vote for a reduction include frontbench Labour spokespersons, such as Kevin McNamara and Donald Dewar (who supports a 24 week amendment).

Support

Labour MPs supporting an 18 week limit include Dale Campbell-Savours who has organised the support for Alton on the Labour benches, Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie), Ronnie Campbell (Blythe Valley), Patrick Duffy (Sheffield Attercliffe), George Howarth (Knowsley North), Sean Hughes (Knowsley South), James Lamond (Oldham Central and Royton), Calum MacDonald (Western Isles), William O'Brien (Norman-

ton), George Robertson (Hamilton) and John Reid (Motherwell North).

Among those who have voiced their support for a reduction of between 22 and 26 weeks include Frank Cook (Stockton North), Stan Crowther (Rotherham), Frank Field (Birkenhead), Terry Lewis (Worsley), John Marek (Wrexham), Peter Pike (Burnley), Jack Straw (Blackburn), Alan McKay (Barnsley West) and Ann Taylor (Dewsbury). And then there are those like Joyce Quinn (Gateshead) and John Cunningham (Whitehaven) who have graciously replied to women constituents that they will 'probably' vote against Alton.

A number of MPs, including George Galloway, have simply not bothered to reply to questions from their constituents.

Sharp

While some, like frontbench spokesperson Gerald Kaufman, are reportedly going to cast a principled abstention!

These MPs need to be sharply reminded that the debate has been had and

won in the party and the labour movement.

Support for the right of an individual woman to decide whether or not to bear children is a fundamental socialist principle, and the only 'conscience' involved is that of the women concerned, and not that of, mostly male, MPs.

These anti-women Labour MPs should be brought under pressure by women and the labour movement to change their position.

CLPs should make it clear that they consider this matter to be one of great weight when it comes to reselection — which starts again at the end of this year. Trade unions should indicate to sponsored MPs that this will be taken into account when considering future support.

And all should be reminded of TUC and Labour Party policy — opposition to Alton and support for the FAB campaign.

The so-called 'conscience clause which allows MPs to have a 'free vote' on abortion must be ended, and Labour must start to use the whips to impose policy on the PLP.

Scotland opposes Alton

OVER 3000 people supported the STUC and FAB demonstration in Glasgow. Trade unions were well represented including delegations from NUPE, TGWU, NALGO, CPSA, TASS, USDAW, FBU and the NUR, and a number of trades councils.

The National Union of Students were also well represented — many young women are involved in the campaign against Alton in Scotland. The Scottish Labour Party also supported the demonstration.

By Ann Henderson

The rally in the City Hall heard Maria Fyfe MP



call for a woman's right to choose and urge the male MPs to listen to those who will actually be directly affected by restrictive legislation. Jo Richardson MP attacked the Alton Bill as 'the thin end of the wedge' highlighting the breadth of medical and political opposition to it. As she said

'to criminalise abortion as Alton wants to do is a criminal act in itself'.

Scotland has produced two of the previous attacks on the 1967 abortion act — James White and John Corrie. In 1979 only seven Scottish Labour MPs opposed John Corrie — today 30 out of the 50 Labour

MPs in Scotland have stated their opposition to Alton so far.

This is a reflection of the work that has been done in building the campaign and winning the arguments — and in some areas, of course, selecting different MPs.

Prior to 22 January seven Scottish MPs openly state their support for Alton, and the others have not declared their position — 'waiting to hear the argument' has been a common response.

Labour MPs do not need to wait any longer — there is no doubt that public opinion in Scotland is against the Alton Bill, and the 1987 STUC women's conference and Scottish Labour women's conferences unanimously showed their opposition.

The 1988 Scottish Labour Party conference in Perth on 11-13 March has a number of resolutions before it on abortion — not simply opposing Alton but also calling for an extension of facilities on the NHS; and for safer and earlier provisions for abortion, and for better family planning provisions with more education.

Anti-abortion organisations such as SPUC and Life have traditionally found a lot of support in Scotland, especially in the west of Scotland. But the Fight Alton's Bill campaign has shown that to be a minority view — and the Scottish Labour MPs who tie themselves to the positions of SPUC will also find themselves in a minority in the Scottish labour movement.

Why a 24 week limit is not acceptable

WHILE David Alton's bill to limit legal abortion to 18 weeks is meeting considerable opposition, there is a strong lobby urging support for an amended version of the bill introducing a 24 week limit.

Those supporting a 24 week limit include many individuals and organisations which consider themselves 'pro-choice'. They suggest that a reduction to 24 weeks is in line with advances in medical technology, inevitable, and will make virtually no difference to the present real, as opposed to technical, availability of legal abortion.

JUDE WOODWARD argues that any reduction in the time limit will make a real impact on women's present rights to fertility control, and should be opposed.

MANY of those who will support a 24 week limit will do so for purely tactical reasons, that is those people who are actually opposed to all abortion and will support any measure to limit its availability.

However, it cannot be denied that a substantial proportion of those supporting the 24 week proposal do in fact consider themselves to be pro-choice. They have been convinced to support the 24 week time limit by a number of factors. Among these overwhelmingly the most important has been the view of the medical profession.

Choice

Both the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have indicated their support for a 24 week time limit. Both the BMA and the RCOG have supported the 1967 Abortion Act, and while they maintain their 'professional' right to be the final arbiters of whether a woman should have an abortion or not rather than supporting a woman's right to choose, neither of these can be held to be anti-abortion organisations.

These doctors present a number of arguments in support of this position. The most common is that by around 26 weeks the foetus's lungs have developed, it is theoretically capable of breathing air and therefore of living independently of the womb, and should therefore be considered a human being in its own right.

The development of the lungs is in fact just as

arbitrary a point at which to say that a foetus has separate rights as any other sign of physical development. In fact it is ludicrous to discuss the matter in these terms. A potential independent human life evidently exists from the moment of conception.

This is not the issue, the real issue it whether or not a woman has to accept that this potential human life should develop inside her body, and then be forced to take on all the emotional and physical responsibility for bringing a new human being into the world.

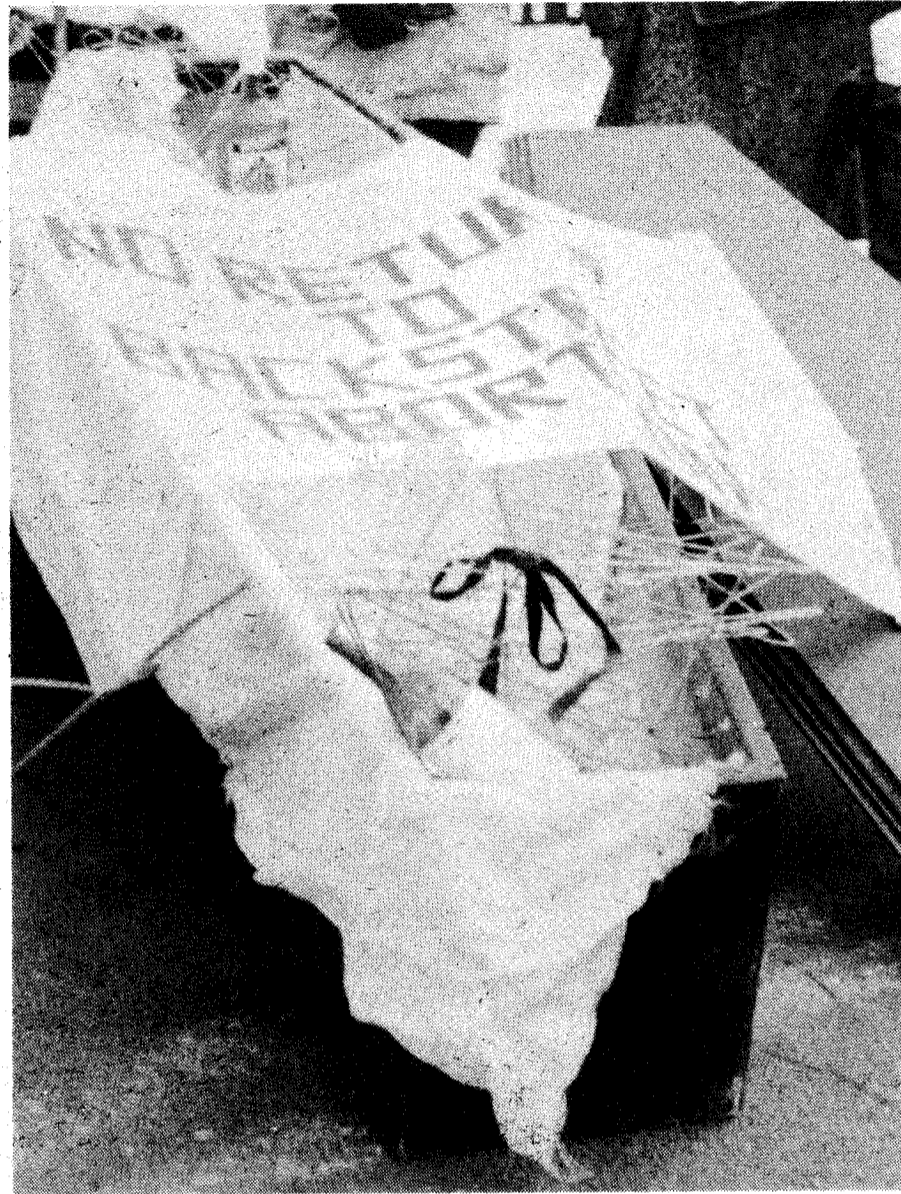
It doesn't matter at what point in the pregnancy it occurs, if a woman decides that she no longer wishes a foetus to inhabit her body then the decision to end the pregnancy should be hers and no one else's.

Advances

Doctors also argue that since advances in medical technology have allowed the survival of a proportion of 26 week premature births, it places an unreasonable strain upon nursing and medical staff to be involved both in the struggle to maintain a life at 26 weeks, and 26 week terminations.

The conscience clause for the medical profession means that no nurse or doctor has to be involved in abortion at any point if they object to it. However this does not entirely deal with the problem, but greater funding for the NHS to allow clinics dealing with abortion to be completely separated out from other functions would deal with this completely.

Many women who have



had even early abortion on the NHS have found themselves in wards shared with woman desperately seeking a cure to their infertility, or cases of early miscarriage. This is distressing for all the women concerned and must be for the nursing staff as well, but is no argument against abortion rights.

Finally, once we allow the argument for a lowering of the upper limit for abortion on the basis of technological progress, then evidently each step forward in such medical technology would lead to further limits — until all abortion were illegal?

The argument that a reduction in time limits to 24 weeks is inevitable and correct has also gained ground because of the results of two opinion polls which showed a high proportion of women in favour of a reduction in the time limit for legal abortion.

Two issues have to be taken into account when assessing the results of these opinion polls.

Firstly similar polls which have asked women whether they support the 1967 Abortion Act have received an incredibly high proportion of 'yes' responses. Equally polls which have asked whether

women are dissatisfied with the terms of the law have received a very high 'no' response.

Secondly, while there is a certain emotional response which can be elicited from women and men by the pictures circulated by SPUC and Life of a much magnified 19 week foetus, which the responses in opinion polls reflect, when women are asked about specific cases of late abortion their responses tend to be that each abortion should be allowed.

There is also extreme hostility to the idea of criminalising either women or doctors for abortion at

virtually any point. When the French courts tried to prosecute a 14 year old girl, who had been raped, for a very late abortion — well beyond the present British legal limit — she was acquitted amid public outcry against prosecution.

The final argument for a reduction in the time limit to 24 weeks has been that it will make no real difference. In 1986, it is pointed out, only 27 women had abortions carried out after the 24th week, and in virtually every one of these cases the operation could go ahead even under a changed law, due to the exceptions for foetal abnormality.

But this is not the whole story. A reduction in the time limit for legal abortion to 24 weeks, especially in the form of an amendment to the 1967 Abortion Act rather than to the Infant Life Preservation Act, would affect virtually all abortions performed after 22 weeks, and many of those performed after 20 weeks.

In the 20 years since the passing of the Abortion Act there have been a series of attempts by anti-abortionists to prosecute doctors for carrying out abortion outside the framework of the 1967 Act. All these attempted prosecutions have failed, however doctors performing abortion are keenly aware of a powerful anti-abortion lobby, well-organised in the medical profession at all levels, and quite willing to spy on doctors and exploit any opening to use the courts to stop abortions.

Threat

Under the terms of the present Infant Life Preservation Act abortion effectively becomes illegal when it is considered that the foetus is capable of sustaining independent life, unless the life of the mother is threatened.

However in the case of a doctor carrying out an abortion later than the 28th week — for example if an error had been made as to the date of conception — the onus would be on the courts to prove that a criminal abortion had taken place.

David Alton's amendment, because it would introduce a time limit into the Abortion Act itself, would make all abortion carried out after the legal time limit automatically a criminal offence unless the doctor — and woman herself — could prove otherwise.

In order to be safe from prosecution doctors would have to take even more precautions than they do now to ensure they did not accidentally place themselves in breach of the law.

Even under the present law doctors will not generally carry out abortion after the estimated 26th week of pregnancy. With a 24 week limit written into the Abortion Act itself doctors would protect themselves by imposing an actual limit of 20 to 22 weeks.

Help

Rather than 27 women, this would affect 2/3000 women who presently have legal abortions each year. Of these a high proportion will be women in areas where the local consultants are anti-abortion, therefore forcing women to eventually seek help in other parts of the country. Other women most affected will be young women who do not know or admit to themselves that they are pregnant, older women who mistake the signs of pregnancy for the menopause and women from Ireland who are forced to travel to Britain because abortion is still illegal north and south.

No woman wants to have a late abortion. While the anti-abortionists' cant about post-abortion trauma in the first four months is so much rubbish, abortion after 16 weeks is an unpleasant and distressing operation.

Women have late abortions because they are in real need, because it is the only reasonable choice they can make, and they have the right to make that choice. Any reduction in the present legal time limit for abortion will seriously affect many thousands of women's lives over the coming years. It must be resisted and there can be no complacency.

Thousands oppose Alton

TENS of thousands of women demonstrated their opposition to David Alton's attempt to further restrict abortion rights in events up and down the country as part of the Fight Alton's Bill Campaign's day of action on 16 January.

MANCHESTER

2000 marched from the Polytechnic Student union to a rally in the City Hall addressed by Audrey Wise and speakers from the North West TUC, FAB and LCLGR.

BIRMINGHAM

1000 people marched through the city centre to a

rally addressed by Christine Crawley MEP, Dave Nellist MP, Sid Platt, West Midlands TUC and Charlotte Kane, Liberals for Choice and speakers from FAB and local trade unions.

GLASGOW

3000 participated in a demonstration organised by the STUC and the Scottish Campaign Against Alton. Speakers included Jo Richardson MP, Maria Fyfe MP and Yvonne Strachan for the STUC women's committee.

SHEFFIELD

800 demonstrated, including local MPs, and

attended a rally addressed by a local doctor and speakers from the regional TUC and the NUM.

BRISTOL

Over 600 women demonstrated and attended a rally in the city organised by FAB with support from a number of trade unions, including the TGWU locally. Speakers included Dawn Primarolo MP.

LEICESTER

300 people representing local FAB groups, the Labour party and trade unions marched through the city centre to a rally addressed by FAB, Doctors for a Woman's Choice on Abortion, and Sharon Atkin.

CARDIFF

400 demonstrated and attended a rally addressed by Ann Clwyd MP, Helen McCarthy a midwife and NUPE steward and others.

LEEDS

1500 demonstrated bringing banners from a wide range of women's campaigns, trade unions and colleges.

LIVERPOOL

300 women demonstrated and sent a smaller group to present their case to Alton's surgery.

LONDON

At least 12 different ac-

tions were held during the day including a march of 400 in Hackney and a rally addressed by Brian Sedgemore MP, and speakers from NALGO, FAB and the CHC.

600 in Brixton, organised by Lambeth Against Alton, marched to a rally addressed by speakers from the South East TUC, Women Against Pit Closures and FAB. A rally in Islington was addressed by both local MPs, Chris Smith and Jeremy Corbyn.

OTHER AREAS

Actions also took place in Nottingham, Cambridge, Oxford, Reading and many towns and villages up and down the country.



New left alliance in the student movement

BAKER'S 'Great Education Reform Bill', or Gerbill, is the fiercest attack in recent history on the provision of education and students' rights. In the last issue, we reported the decision of NUS national conference in December to launch a mass campaign against the bill, in conjunction with the labour movement.

PARTICULARLY important was the call for a national demonstration, for which there had not been

**By Polly Vittorini
SOAS student union**

until that point a majority on the NOLS-controlled NUS executive.

Since then, some sterling work has been done by Pat Younge, NUS vice-president education, and Labour Party Black Sections supporter, elected to the NUS executive last Easter. In the face of continuing opposition to a national demonstration on the NUS executive, even after the conference decision, he has organised for a national demonstration to take place on 27 February, which is being supported by the TUC.

On 1 March, for the first time ever, an education lobby against the Gerbill will be called jointly by the TUC and NUS. A national day of college shut-downs has been called for 11 February, which will be the lynchpin of mobilisation of students for the national demonstration, and is intended to be the focus for a wave of occupations.

Other events include an 'Art Attack' day of action on 18 February, an NUT rally for education in the Albert Hall on 26 February, which is being built in London colleges, and a 'Forum for Education' conference at the Friends Meeting House on 19 February, supported by a wide range of forces from the student and labour movement.

Such a timetable is guaranteed to produce a highly enthusiastic response from student unions around the country. These initiatives, in particular that of winning active support and participation of the TUC, are

the best thing to have come out of NUS officially, in terms of a strategy for fighting the Tory education cuts, for years.

Such an alliance in practice with the trade union movement is absolutely necessary in order to defend the interests of students in the present political climate. A vital task remaining is to win the explicit support of the Labour Party for this campaign. 'Labour listening' is no substitute for a fight to defend the education system against privatisation, reduction of facilities and access, and central government control of teaching.

Left

It is to the shame of the National Organisation of Labour Students that NUS as a whole, in their leadership, has not undertaken to win this support. Significantly, the initiatives outlined above, like Pat Younge himself, are quite isolated from the usual practice of the NUS executive.

The 'Democratic Left' leadership of NOLS, in an alliance with the student wing of the Communist Party, have organised openly at NUS conference against mass national mobilisation, and SSIN's strategy for a mass student campaign against education cuts does not recognise the central importance of an alliance with the labour movement, despite all of their rhetoric about the student mobilisations in France.

Support

Clearly there is an urgent need for NUS to be led by forces which consistently and wholeheartedly support and campaign for initiatives like these. If NUS is to defend the interests of students in Britain effectively, it must work in alliance with all forces in struggle against the Tories and their international allies.



These alliances in practice are in the self-interest of students, and are the only route to any successful opposition to the Tories.

At NUS conference in Easter of this year, students will be presented with the choice for the first time in years of electing a platform that is committed to these principles. Campaign Student will be participating in this platform, alongside members of student solidarity organisations. Although the supporters of the platform are

not exclusively Labour students, they will not be standing in elections against official Labour candidates and will be calling for a vote for them (in NUS NOLS do not stand for every national executive position).

NOLS

In NOLS itself, the defence of the policy of unconditional political and military British withdrawal from Ireland, and NOLS' affiliation to the Labour Committee on Ireland, is an urgent priority.

This policy lapses at NOLS conference in March, and its re-adoption is threatened by the recent rejection of this policy by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee conference, and by a concerted campaign by SSIN to use the period of reaction in the aftermath of the Enniskillen bombing to argue against British withdrawal.

Ireland

The loss of this policy in NOLS could have a seriously damaging effect on the LCI's fight in the Labour Party for a policy of British withdrawal in the lifetime of one parliament — more is at stake than simply a debate. The practical non-existence of NUS's 'Students Against Repression in Ireland' (SARI) campaign also contributes to endangering this policy, which can only be safeguarded in reality by practical campaigning in students unions.

A total of eight motions in favour of British withdrawal and exposing British repression in Ireland have now been submitted for discussion at NOLS conference. This makes it very likely that the issue will be debated.

Labour students are urged to mobilise support for the LCI in the run-up to this conference, and to participate in the formation of active SARI groups with a view to transforming this policy into actual solidarity.



NCU joins the fight against the Alton bill

ABORTION is once more a burning issue within the National Communications Union.

In June 1986 the main conference of the union voted to affiliate to the Na-

**By Marion Brain,
NCU (C) member**

tional Abortion Campaign. When David Alton launched his vicious assault on women's right to abortion the women's support group, with other members of the union, sounded the alarm and immediately started to build support for the FAB campaign.

The clerical section newspaper *Link* threw its whole weight behind the campaign. On the front page of the November/December issue it has reproduced the leaflet for the national lobby of parliament on 21 January 1988 and highlighted the national demonstration on 19 March 1988.

Inside the same issue there are four articles on the campaign, across two pages. An editorial is entitled 'Fight the Alton Bill — defend a woman's right to choose'.

A major article by a member of the clerical group executive explains why she will be on the 21 January lobby. A short article also explains some of the things that individuals can do, and a further article explains what the National Abortion Campaign is, why

it was founded and what it stands for.

An article in the *Journal*, the paper of the NCU as a whole, explains why abortion is a trade union issue.

A letter has been issued to branches on the campaign, which explains that, consistent with the decision of the 1986 main conference of the union, the NCU will support the Fight Alton's Bill campaign. A donation of £200 will be made nationally and branches can donate up to £50 from branch funds.

Apart from this financial support branches and individuals are urged to write to their MPs opposing the Alton bill on the grounds that it restricts women's choice, is a risk to their health and opens the door to further attacks on the 1967 Abortion Act.

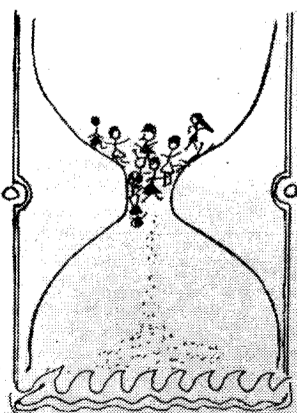
The NCU Broad Left has issued a broadsheet outlining why members of the union should oppose the Alton bill, and calls for support for the 21 January rally and the national demonstration on 19 March.

This type of campaigning, if followed through in all the other major trade unions, can build the largest demonstration seen on this issue to defeat this blatant attack on women.

The call must go out that every trade union and trade unionist must support the lobby and rally on 21 January and the 19 March demonstration.

RUNNING OUT OF TIME

LATE ABORTIONS & TIME LIMITS



75p

Third edition

a national abortion campaign pamphlet

Pamphlet available from the National Abortion Campaign, Wesley Hse, 4 Wild Court, London WC2, 75p plus 25p p&p

Students for Palestine

IN RESPONSE to the Palestinian uprisings and the terrible brutality of the Israeli military regime in the occupied

By Polly Vittorini

territories, the International Union of Students and the General Union of Palestine Students have organised a European speaker tour with Palestinian students, visiting colleges in Britain, Ireland, France, Belgium, Finland and Sweden.

In Britain the tour is being hosted by NUS and sponsored by Students for Palestine. It will run for ten days, visiting students unions all over the country — schedules are available from NUS and Students

for Palestine.

On Wednesday 20 January, students all over the world will be striking in response to a call from GUPS to voice their opposition to Israeli brutality in the occupied territories.

A fact-finding delegation to the occupied territories is also being organised. It will be composed of representatives from European student organisations, in which NUS is hoped to participate.

The latest news is that all three intended speakers have been arrested before being able to leave. Please send letters of protest in to NUS for use in securing their release.

It is likely, given the urgency of the situation in the occupied territories, and the fact that NUS conference failed to adopt any policy on Palestine when it was discussed in



December, that Palestine will be discussed again at Easter conference.

GUPS have issued a model motion calling for an end to the killings, detention and deportations, and for self-determination for the Palestinians. Copies of this motion,

and other motions, are available from GUPS c/o 4 Clareville Grove, London SW7 5AR, and from Students for Palestine, c/o World University Service, 20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN. Students are urged to attend the national demonstration in support

of Palestinian self-determination, supported by the PLO and GUPS, on Saturday 23 January (the march leaves Hyde Park corner at 12.30pm).

Students for Palestine conference takes place on 30 January 1988 in University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1. Speakers will include the PLO, GUPS, Israeli anti-Zionists, and liberation movements, and there will be workshops on various aspects of Israeli society, military rule and solidarity initiatives. Please register in advance to Students for Palestine.

A Campaign Student pamphlet, 'Solidarity with the Palestinians: For a Democratic, Secular Palestine' will soon be available, price 50p. Order from Campaign Student, c/o SOAS Students Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HP.

Black section - the way forward

OVER the last eight years parliament has adopted a number of anti-working class laws, and there is more to come — on housing, education, immigration, poll tax, local government finance, contract compliance, privatisation to name just a few.

All of these laws affect the black communities. The inner cities have been targeted for special treatment. The black communities are under pressure like at no other time since World War II.

Black unemployment has more than doubled over the last eight years. Thatcherism has massively eroded the manufacturing base of the economy, removing any chance of long term job creation in the inner cities. The proposed poll tax will lead to further harassment of the black communities.

The attempt to prevent local authorities enforcing contract compliance, would

The task ahead for Labour Party Black Sections is an enormous one. The national Black Section AGM to be held in Manchester on 26-27 March will be discussing major policy papers on education, immigration, and the inner cities. Once adopted these, and other policies, will be presented to Labour's policy review.

The Black Sections organisation has led the way in bringing the anti-racist socialist campaign to the heart of Britain's political life. This work has even been acknowledged by Bill Morris (who isn't a black section supporter), deputy general secretary of the TGWU.

In a *Tribune* article of 8 January he had this to say: 'After all, the debate on black representation in the Labour Party has helped to give us four black MPs, and to raise the party's — and nation's — consciousness of racism and discrimination. The debate on Black Sections has been described as "establishment tree shaking" — which of course has a value.'

In his proposal to end the 'trench warfare' between black sections and the Labour leadership Bill has called for the setting up of a 'black socialist society', affiliated to the Labour Party



like the Fabian Society. This society would then have to fight with the SEA, Labour Clubs, socialist lawyers, NOLS etc for one seat on Labour's NEC — hardly giving a guaranteed voice to black people at all levels of the party.

Our response has been to welcome Bill's contribution to such an important debate that we started five years ago. Our conference in March will discuss Bill's proposal in detail. The important issue is who would such an organisation be answerable to — the black grassroots or the leadership?

We should remember that Eric Heffer first suggested the 'affiliation option' with the establishment of a new division on the NEC the same as for

women and youth. He argued that 'Afro-Caribbean, Asian and African peoples domiciled in Britain and eligible for membership of the Labour Party, should form appropriate groups, parties or organisations and affiliate to the Labour Party at all levels similar to Paole Zion, the Jewish Labour Party. Such groups, parties or organisations should then have a separate division and one or more seats on the NEC, regional councils, district Labour Parties and GMCs according to agreed affiliated numbers.' He proposed the NEC should draft an appropriate constitutional amendment for party conference.

This proposal was defeated at the NEC by 16 votes to 8 on 13 June 1985.

Who is to say that the NEC will even look at Bill Morris's proposal this time round?

The Black Section is still fully committed to black self-organisation within the labour movement. We continue to seek a change in Labour's constitution which would guarantee black representation at all levels of the party. We will continue to campaign for anti-racist socialist policies that are in tune with the black communities.

We see our immediate task as one of building on our 1987 AGM which set the black political agenda by adopting policy positions on many key issues including policing, jobs, education and immigration.

Don't implement the poll tax

SCOTTISH Labour Party conference this year, Perth 11-13 March, will be dominated by the debate on strategy for opposing the poll tax which is scheduled for implementation in Scotland in April 1989.

DESPITE much talk of organising opposition to this unpopular tax, the regional councils in Scotland (mainly Labour controlled) have begun arranging for the collection

Scottish Labour Party campaign — 'Stop it' — was launched in October 1987.

The strategy now being advanced by the LCC, which will be debated at Scottish Labour Party conference, is that of preparing for a massive campaign of non-payment of the poll tax as a last resort. National Union of Students (Scotland) have already backed this policy.

But this tactic is totally insufficient. There will, of course, be widespread non-payment, and thousands will refuse to even register. But this tactic passes the responsibility from the Labour controlled local authorities to each individual — and it will be Labour controlled authorities which then try to recover the debt from that individual.

LCC

On the one hand, the LCC have argued against tactics involving illegality, but they propose instead individual illegal action.

The position is not consistent and, in a sense, it is dishonest, because supporters of the LCC within the regional council Labour Groups went along with proposals to implement the poll tax legislation in September 1987.

The introduction of the poll tax was always intended to further weaken local government and whichever form of opposition is mounted local authority services will be threatened. But the position would be clearer, with better prospects for trade union and popular unity, if the regional councils simply refused to implement the poll tax.

Stop it

Donald Dewar, on behalf of the Scottish parliamentary Labour group (known as 'the feeble fifty' by the SNP and others) have gone to some lengths to explain that breaking the law was never an option, and there is really no alternative but to implement the poll tax whilst protesting about it.

However, the Scottish executive of the Labour Party has issued Labour Groups with a set of guidelines for obstructing the poll tax. The official

Non-compliance at local authority level, and through the trade unions, would have widespread public support in Scotland. It would provide a lead and a focus around which every other form of popular opposition to the poll tax could be brought together. It would also lay a much better basis for effective labour movement opposition in England and Wales.



By Kingsley Abrams Secretary Labour Party Black Section

result in further discrimination against the black communities in employment. Local authorities will also be unable to monitor contracts, most of which will be in the hands of private companies.

Kenneth Baker's 'radical' education 'reforms' has completely ignored anti-racism, including the different community languages. This assault on anti-racist education is clearly linked to the government's repressive measures of 'looking after' the inner cities.

This parliament also saw the passing of another immigration act. This will mean further suffering and separation of black families.

Defeat clause 28

'A queerbashers's charter'

TEN thousand angry supporters of lesbian and gay rights took to the streets of London on 9 January in a massive protest against clause 29 of the Local Government bill, which is now going through parliament.

The stated goal of the Tory right wingers who added the clause is to prevent

By Peter Purton, LCLGR

vent Labour councils from 'promoting homosexuality' in any way.

Leaving aside the fact that no council anywhere 'promotes' any sexuality, the Tories aim to negate the relatively progressive lesbian and gay rights policies of councils like Haringey, Ealing, Brent, Lambeth and Manchester.

The Tory right has for a long time seethed with rage at the efforts of lesbian and gay rights campaigners and their supporters in the labour movement to bring about genuine equal opportunities in council employment and services.

But the final straw has been the efforts of a handful of councils to combat anti-gay prejudice in schools by daring to reveal to schoolchildren that homosexuality does exist and that there isn't anything wrong with being lesbian or gay.

The effects of the legislation will go much,



much further than banning local council funding of lesbian and gay organisations, serious although that will be.

The bill is a bigot's charter, giving the green light to every queerbasher to wage a war against lesbians and gay men. Tory MPs in parliament refuse to condemn the firebombing of London paper *Capital Gay*, so we know what to expect if it is actually legislated that anything 'promoting homosexuality' is both immoral and illegal.

The response among lesbians and gays has been dramatic. A powerful unity has been forged across the spectrum in opposition to the measure, and campaigns have sprung up spontaneously across the country.

Unhappily, the response of the labour movement has been less admirable. The initial response of the Labour front bench was to welcome the proposal, and only after a massive wave of protest, much of it pointing out the clear pro-lesbian and gay

rights policy adopted by the party conference, did they oppose it in parliament.

But their response is still largely to try to amend this or that phrase or wording, rather than to fight the whole vicious package.

Public defence by the parliamentary party of the party's policy, and of Labour councils which try to carry through that policy, have been noticeably lacking.

Lesbians and gay men have no choice but to fight

this measure every step of the way, because the alternative is a stepping up of pro-gay discrimination and a remaining vote to the queerbashers.

Such an attack is another step in the right general offensive against the Labour movement and all sections of society which threaten their control of the 'peace' game. The Labour movement must be encouraged to register and vigorously defend lesbians and gay men.

SOME years are so associated with specific events that merely naming them conjures up a definite content. 1929 is the year of the great crash. 1939 the outbreak of World War II. 1914 the commencement of World War I. 1933 the year Hitler came to power.

The year 1968 is indissolubly associated with revolution and struggle. Every serious paper, even the most right wing, started this year with a summary of 1968 — most, of course, to attack its events. Why is 1968 such a crucial year in modern history?

One aspect is simply the sheer scale of the individual events. The Tet offensive in Vietnam in January 1968, the largest general strike in history in France in May 1968, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 were all, individually, events on an historic scale. To have all three of them in the same year was extraordinary. But most significant of all, and certainly the feature which has left the deepest imprint, was the way 1968 brought them together in a way that gave a new shape to world politics.

By John Ross

To understand that change it is necessary to go back to the world as it developed from World War II to 1968 — and then see the lasting imprint that year left in creating a new structure of world politics.

The first feature which existed in 1968 was the capitalist economic boom. From 1940 in the United States, and from 1947 in Europe, capitalism underwent one of the greatest periods of expansion in its history. Almost uninterrupted economic growth took place in Western Europe and the US. In Asia a new capitalist power, Japan, developed with a rate of growth never seen before in any capitalist state. Capitalism also penetrated more deeply than ever before into a series of semi-colonial countries — preparing a spectacular capitalist development in the 1970s in the Pacific rim of Asia and, to a lesser degree, in Latin America.

Boom

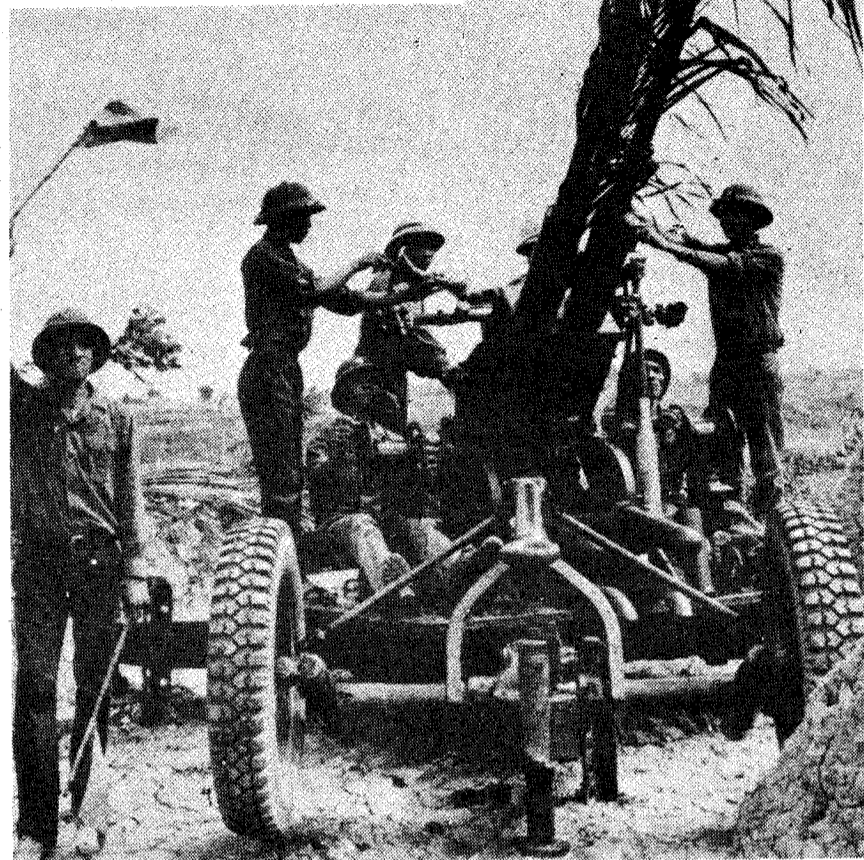
In 1968 the major problems which confronted capitalism all appeared to be 'on its periphery'. Capitalism had failed to destroy the USSR in World War II. In 1942-45 it lost the main states in Eastern Europe to the Soviet army — and, in Yugoslavia, to popular revolution. Capitalism was overturned in North Korea at the end of World War II. In 1945-49 capitalism was overthrown in China. In 1945-54 French imperialism was defeated in North Vietnam. In 1959 the Cuban revolution overthrew Batista. The old European colonial empires were largely abandoned, or the ruling powers driven out, in the 1950s and 1960s. Permanent instability marked the colonial world throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In contrast, inside the imperialist countries themselves, the huge economic boom 'bought off' the working class and secured social peace. The number of unemployed in Britain at the end of 1967 stood at under 600,000 — and that was considered a high figure. The main discussions which took place in the Labour Party assumed endless prosperity and the 'disappearance of the working class'. Anthony Crosland, the main right wing social democratic theorist of the 1950s and 1960s, stated openly that capitalism had solved its problems of crisis, of unemployment, and of generating wealth and that the job of socialists was simply to secure a more just distribution of the wealth capitalism produced. The most popular revolutionary theory in the world at that time was that of 'the countryside of the world surrounding the cities' of Mao Tse-tung and Lin Piao — the idea that revolution would proceed in the third world while the heartlands of capitalism remained relatively stable for a prolonged period. In fact, in the main developed countries, the working class had undergone an immense social strengthening in the post-war period. This represented a new stage in the advanced capitalist societies.

First, in the United States and Western Europe, vast numbers of the peasant/farming population had been

sucked into industry and wage labour. In France the proportion of the population employed in agriculture fell from 36 per cent in 1946 to 16 per cent in 1968. In Italy the fall was from 42 per cent in 1951 to 16 per cent in 1971. In West Germany the fall was from 27 per cent in 1946 to 7 per cent in 1971.

Second millions of women had moved from doing only unpaid work in the home into waged capitalist work. In Britain, for example, the proportion of



women in the workforce increased from 31 per cent in 1951 to 35 per cent in 1968 — and rose to 40 per cent by the end of the 1970s.

Third capitalism had begun to penetrate out of its traditional industrial base into the service sector of the economy — the huge expansion of the public sector was the most striking expression of this but large parts of the private service sector also began to undergo a process of proletarianisation.

Fourth, accompanying this, a process of proletarianisation of white collar labour began. Today's rise in militancy among teachers, civil servants and other layers had its origins in the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s.

From every social point of view the working class in the imperialist countries in 1968 was stronger than ever before in history. Yet this huge working class seemed totally passive and its huge weight scarcely played an active role in politics. The most advanced social struggle in the imperialist countries in the 1950s and 1960s, the rise of the black struggle and movement in the United States, was itself linked to the rise of the colonial revolution.

Vietnam

Imperialism in the 1950s and early 1960s seemed to be confronting a gradual collapse 'from the periphery' — with peace and tranquility reigning in the imperialist centres and with the colonial world in turmoil.

Confronted with this situation US imperialism, concerned by the rising instability in the colonial world, decided on a massive and conscious counter revolution. It launched from the early 1960s, under first Kennedy and then Johnson, a tremendous military build up and determined counter-offensive against the colonial revolution. For the first time since World War II the US scored real successes in this.

In 1960 the intervention of United Nation forces, backed by the United States, ensured the overthrow of the left wing government of Lumumba in what is now Zaire. In 1964 the United States succeeded in installing a military dictatorship in Brazil. In April 1965 US troops intervened in the Dominican Republic. In October 1965 a military coup in Indonesia slaughtered half a million communists. The left wing government of Nkrumah was overthrown in Ghana in February 1966. In Algeria the government of Ben Bella

which had succeeded French rule, was overthrown by a right wing coup. In the 'six day war' of 1967 Israel attacked and defeated the left wing nationalist governments of Syria and Egypt. The same year the US backed forces in Bolivia killed Che Guevara. It was the greatest period of success imperialism had enjoyed against the colonial revolution since World War II.

But in one country, Vietnam, imperialism's position continued to deteriorate. By the beginning of 1964 it was clear that the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) was on the verge of overthrowing the American backed government of the South. The United States, flushed with its other victories, decided to intervene to prevent an NLF victory and to teach a lesson to every progressive force in the world. The scene was set for an event that changed world history — the Vietnam war.

The military power which the United States deployed in Vietnam was awesome — it was the greatest US military effort in history apart from the two world wars. At the peak of the Korean war the United States deployed 407,000 troops. At its peak United States forces in Vietnam were over 600,000. By 1966 the United States was already dropping bombs at three times the rate of the Korean war. By 1971 more bombs had been dropped on Vietnam than in all previous wars in history put together. The United States resorted to chemical warfare on a scale which has still left large parts of the country devastated.

Throughout 1967 the United States claimed to be winning the war. General Westmoreland, the US commander in Vietnam, submitted an end of year report on 1 January 1968 stating that war gains in 1967 would be 'increased manifold in 1968'. There appeared some evidence for this. The US claimed the 'kill ratio' had increased to 10 to 1 in their favour. It claimed it was capturing NLF equipment at twice the rate it was being replaced. In the second half of 1967 NLF attacks in Vietnam declined and US confidence increased.

And then in one devastating blow, on 30 January 1968, the entire world situation changed. Radio listeners throughout the world turned on that morning to hear heavy fighting taking place in the US embassy in Saigon. An insurrection in every major city in South Vietnam. Twenty six provincial capitals were attacked as well as numerous smaller towns. Saigon itself

1968

— a year that changed world history



was the scene of heavy fighting. Hue, the largest city in the north of South Vietnam, fell to the NLF.

In the space of 24 hours the entire situation in Vietnam and the world changed. As Beverly Deepe, the *Christian Science Monitor's* correspondent in Saigon, wrote the NLF had inflicted: "a political-psychological setback of unprecedented magnitude for the American supported South Vietnamese regime. The initial assessment of the political damage is of such an order of magnitude that it has changed the complex and character of...the war in the South."

It was not simply the scale of the NLF's military operation that was decisive. It was what it revealed about the political situation in Vietnam. The *New York Times* noted: 'the facts of life about the war have finally been made unmistakably clear to everyone in the United States, from President Johnson on down. Swept away in last week's hurricane of fire were the rising piles of glowing reports of progress in pacification, retraining of the South Vietnamese army, and destruction of the enemy's political and military forces.'

New York Times associate editor James Reston noted in the same paper: 'Something has happened here in the last few days, some conflict between logic and events. How could the Vietcong launch such an offensive against the American embassy and the American bases all over South Vietnam? How could the Vietcong launch

such an offensive against the Vietcong, who were supposed to be getting weaker, like the Vietcong, gather a force large enough to challenge the US marines at the demilitarised zone?'

Capitalist politicians rapidly began to read the tea leaves. Robert Kennedy, who until Tet had pledged support to the war, and president Johnson in the 1968 presidential election, announced on 8 February that the Tet offensive had: 'finally shattered the mask of official illusion with which we have obscured our true circumstances... part or person of South Vietnam is safe from their (the NLF's) attacks: neither district capitals nor American bases, neither the peasant in his paddy field nor the commanding general of our own great forces...'

'We must, first of all, rid ourselves of the illusion that the events of the past two weeks represent some sort of victory (as claimed by Johnson). That is not so. It is said that the Vietcong will not be able to hold the cities. That is probably true. But they have demonstrated despite all our reports of progress, of government strength and enemy weakness, that half a million American soldiers with 700,000 Vietnamese allies, with total command of the air, total command of the sea, backed by huge resources and the most modern weapons, are unable to secure even a single city.'

On 25 February the *Wall Street Journal* the most authoritative business and financial paper in the United States, stated: 'The Vietcong have shown that they are now capable of launching a major offensive against the US military...'

1968

changed history



logic of the battlefield'. It stated: 'We think the American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven't already, the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed; it may be falling apart beneath our feet. The actual military situation may be making academic the philosophical arguments for intervention in the first place...

'Should such be the upshot, that the US abandons the effort not because it "should" do so but because its purposes have become irrelevant in the light of events on the battlefield and of Vietnamese politics, let no one blink at the fact that it will be a disaster. It will be a stunning blow to the US and the West.'

In March a relatively obscure senator, George McGovern, stood against US Johnson, on a demagogic anti-Vietnam war position, in the New Hampshire Democratic primary and almost defeated Johnson — who in 1964 had won one of the largest landslides in US history. On 31 March 1968 Johnson simultaneously announced the end to the bombing of North Vietnam and his withdrawal from the 1968 presidential race. By now the world knew the US had lost the war in Vietnam. That summer the United States was rent by the greatest wave of black uprisings in its history.

Tet was a turning point in world history — with ramifications which affected every part of the world. But

within the third world it commenced a period of rise of the colonial revolution which continued for more than a decade. In the years that followed Tet US imperialism was defeated in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau achieved independence, Haile Selassie was overthrown in Ethiopia, the Shah's regime was destroyed in Iran, the racist regime of Smith fell in 'Rhodesia', the FSLN came to power in Nicaragua, and a huge new upsurge of struggle started in South Africa.

The second great crisis of 1968 started within Eastern Europe at almost the same time as Tet. In January 1968 the most hardline Stalinist ruler in Eastern Europe, Novotny in Czechoslovakia, was replaced by a new 'reforming' general secretary Dubcek. It was the beginning of the 'Prague spring'.

Dubcek's reforms were essentially an antecedent of those of Gorbachev in the USSR today. In an interview in January this year, his first since 1968, Dubcek wholeheartedly welcomed the Gorbachev reforms in the Soviet Union. In Czechoslovakia a market reform of the economy was accompanied with a political liberalisation which did not question the centres of bureaucratic power. The most radical measure was lifting censorship and allowing a certain real freedom of political expression.

But at this time the changes in

Czechoslovakia were too much for a USSR near the height of its immobility under Brezhnev. In August 1968 the Warsaw pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia and snuffed out the dream of 'self-reform' of Stalinism.

But once more, as with Tet, things did not 'return to normal' after the Prague spring. The Hungarian revolution of 1956 had been a vast outburst which had been followed by a return to immobility in Eastern Europe. But the 'Prague spring' was followed not by a return to normal but by increasing instability in Eastern Europe.

In Czechoslovakia itself currents of opposition continued to exist — most notably in the rise of the Charter 77 movement. Only two years later mass demonstrations against price rises in Poland began the political process that led, a decade later, to the rise of Solidarnosc. Twenty years later many of the same political processes inaugurated by Dubcek in Czechoslovakia, now renamed Glasnost and Perestroika, are being followed in the USSR under Gorbachev. In Eastern Europe, as much as the third world, 1968 was a turning point.

The third great event of 1968 was linked to Vietnam by a multitude of ties. This was the general strike of May-June 1968 in France.

The process of collapse of capitalism 'from the edges' had by the early 1960s begun to make inroads into the imperialist countries themselves. Since the rise of the civil rights movement in the United States in the mid-1950s the black population of the US had been the most advanced outpost of the struggle inside the imperialist countries. A strengthening of the position of women within the workforce had already taken place — although the real explosion of the women's liberation movement came after 1968. From the mid-1960s, widespread dissent had been rising among students.

Vietnam helped bring these developments together both directly and indirectly. *Politically* Vietnam produced a huge crisis which particularly affected student youth. The ideological cement of the Cold War had been that 'the West' was defending democracy and freedom against the 'totalitarian' East. But in Vietnam 'the West' was self-evidently waging a brutal rapacious war. Demonstrations, and student actions, against the Vietnam war swept the United States and Western Europe.

But Vietnam was also an enormous economic crisis for capitalism. The

United States was unable to finance the war by taxing its own population. On the contrary Johnson, in order to maintain support for the war, had to carry through a series of major domestic reforms under the title of the 'Great Society'.

Unable to finance the war entirely at the expense of its own working class, US capitalism began to look for others to take the burden. It sought to transfer a large part of the burden of the war to its West European allies.

The mechanism was simple. Throughout the Vietnam war the United States balance of payments deteriorated. The US paid for imports it could not export goods to cover by pumping out billions of dollars for imports from Japan and Western Europe.

In Western Europe the net result was growing economic instability. Demand for exports to the United States led to rapid growth in the West European economies. At the same time the endless flow of dollars into Western Europe produced inflation. The West European working class found itself facing full employment and rapid expansion of production but at the same time with its real wages under pressure from inflation. This was an explosive combination.

Period

It was also logical the explosion came first in France. France, under de Gaulle, had been taken through a forced march of industrialisation and withdrawal from its colonial empire. In order to maintain a political consensus for this de Gaulle had adopted a theme of demagogic anti-Americanism. Autocratic political structures imposed by the Fifth Republic, rapid industrial growth and rapid expansion of the working class, a rapidly expanding and under financed education sector, came together with generalised opposition to the Vietnam war.

Student actions which had started around Vietnam had in France, by 1968, turned into a serious crisis of the entire French education system. Student riots, which culminated in the great 'night of the barricades' of 10 May 1969 in Paris, ignited a general strike and factory occupations. For almost a month France was paralysed in the largest general strike in history. The long period of stability of the working class in the imperialist countries had been decisively broken.

Once more, as in the third world and Eastern Europe, there was no 'return to normal' in Western Europe after 1968.

For seven years the working class in Western Europe was uninterruptedly on the offensive — the May-June French general strike was followed by a massive strike wave in Italy in the autumn of 1969, the bringing down of the Heath government by the miners in Britain in 1974, a rising wave of struggle against Franco's dictatorship in Spain and then, most dramatically of all, the downfall of the Portuguese dictatorship and the revolutionary wave of struggles which swept that country in 1974-75.

It is true that, after 1975, the West European working class was forced on to the defensive. Successive defeats and setbacks were suffered in Britain, Portugal, Italy, Spain and France. But these were relative. In no country was social peace restored in the way that it had existed in the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1970s, starting with the anti-missiles movement and then the economic crisis, a decisive new factor developed — the movement into political action of the West German working class, the most powerful in Western Europe, which alone had not really moved in the immediate post-1968 events. 1968 in Western Europe, as in the third world and Eastern Europe was an irreversible turning point.

There is no doubt that 1968 generated many misunderstandings. Many Marxists mistook what was the beginning of the break up of stability in the main centres of imperialism with the imminent onset of revolution. The crisis of Stalinism turned out to be far longer and more tortuous than many had imagined. Imperialism imposed terrible suffering on Indochina before it withdrew and the murderous aberration of the Pol Pot regime developed in Kampuchea before it too was overthrown.

But these, finally are the byways of history. 1968 inaugurated three decisive facts: a crushing defeat of US imperialism in the third world whose consequences continue to the present, a crisis of Stalinism which has not been halted since 1968, and the definitive break up of prosperity and social peace in the imperialist centres. Even if the developments which followed it had a different timescale, and took a more winding course than anyone had foreseen, history since 1968 only confirmed the fundamental trends which it unleashed.

Both the bourgeoisie and the working class have every right to celebrate 1968. It is truly the founding year of modern political history. A year which is rightly a symbol of revolution throughout the world.



PALESTINE

FOR nearly two months the area referred to in Britain as Gaza and the West Bank has been swept by a Palestinian uprising against Zionist occupation. Less reported by the press, but equally significant, that uprising has spread into the territory of the Israeli state itself. The result has been the gravest crisis for Zionism since its invasion of Lebanon in 1982 — and one with deeper implications even than the crisis of that time. The Palestinian uprising has produced political crisis in Israel, solidarity in the Arab world, and the necessity of Britain and the United States seeking to cover over their unstinting support for the Zionist state. The international prestige of Zionism probably stands at an all time low and more people in Britain are beginning to question its true nature. To understand the events appearing daily on our television screens, RASHID ASHRAF and PAM COLES look at the roots of the Zionist state of Israel. CHRIS JAMES looks at the new wave of Palestinian resistance.



The roots of the Zionist State

CRITICS of the Israeli state and its policies are often labeled as anti-semites by Zionists. Zionism is presented as being virtually synonymous with Judaism and that, many left Zionists claim, it is nothing less than the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. In fact Zionism represented a historic accommodation to anti-semitism, one that could only grow to the extent that socialist, working class currents within the Jewish communities were defeated. Its offspring, the Zionist state, today concretises the reactionary origins of Zionism in its racist laws, its oppression of the Palestinians, its cosy relationships with every reactionary current in the world from the South African regime to the contras and its symbiotic relationship with imperialism.

Modern political Zionism is less than 150 years old. It began in the late nineteenth century as a reaction of the Jewish petit-bourgeoisie to economic crisis. The Jewish population of Eastern Europe at that time was predominantly concentrated in the middle layers of society — merchants and money lenders existing between the aristocracy and the peasants. With the late development of capitalism in Eastern Europe this economic role was increasingly squeezed and Jews found themselves, in the words of Abram Leon*, 'wedged between the anvil of decaying feudalism and hammer of rotting capitalism'.

However Zionism was just one amongst many responses to this crisis and the accompanying persecution. At the same time those Jews driven down into the ranks of the working class were organising themselves into the Bund — a socialist and nationalist party spanning Russia, Poland and Lithuania. The Bund fought for solidarity with non-Jewish workers against the reactionary regimes of Eastern Europe and was violently anti-Zionist.

Zionism based itself on the dominant ideas of the time, incorporating the theories of social Darwinism and eugenics to explain the 'fundamental differences' between races. Assimilation was impossible, according to Herzl the father of modern Zionism, because Jews were a race and anti-semitism was a natural phenomenon amongst non-Jews. Zionists argued that the struggle against anti-semitism was therefore futile. Zionism tore anti-semitism out of its social and economic context and posed it as an eternal, ahistorical mystification.

Zionism was therefore an accommodation to anti-semitism. Both Zionists and anti-semites agreed that Jews constituted a race and that racial assimilation was impossible. In fact, as Leon noted, Jews were a 'people-class' and their separate identity survived as long as their economic role persisted. As this disappeared so the tendency towards assimilation increased.

Zionists argued that the only solution to anti-semitism was for Jews to have a separate homeland and, again copying the ideas of the ruling classes of the time, this could be achieved only by the colonisation of land. Argentina and Uganda were considered at various times as the possible targets. The problem was that, as Zionism did not hold state power, an imperialist power would have to be found to sponsor the colonisation. The theoretical accommodation to anti-semitism therefore led to attempts at practical collaboration with imperialist anti-semites. Herzl approached anti-semites from Count Von Phelpe, organiser of the pogroms in Russia, to the Ottoman Sultan offering to rid their lands of the Jews in return for support for the Zionist project.

Audience

With the rise of Nazism in the 1930s Zionists found a new anti-semitic audience for their ideas. The Nazis recognised the coincidence of interest that existed with the Zionists. Heinrich Class, President of the Pan German League, 'rejoiced' at the growth of Zionism and noted that 'the Zionists confirm what the enemies of the Jews ... have always asserted'.

Along with their agreement on the racial questions, Zionists found themselves arguing, like the Nazis, for Jews to leave Germany. However, unlike the socialist organisations, such as the sections of the Trotskyist Fourth International which launched campaigns to open the borders of Europe and the USA to the fleeing refugees, Zionists were compromised by the fear that if Jews around the world had to choose between helping the refugees or supporting Zionist colonisation, then, as Ben Gurion warned, '... we are risking the existence of Zionism'.

Leading Zionist organisations in the USA, for example, adopted a policy of collaboration with the criminal immigration policies of the US government. Rabbi Wise, the leading Zionist spokesperson told a congressional hearing in 1939 that there was 'no intention' of opposing the US immigration laws and Max Kohler testified, on behalf of B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee, that he opposed special legislation for German refugees' benefit.

Zionism, by counterposing the fight against Nazism to the colonisation of Palestine, sabotaged the united front that was needed to defeat Nazism. The rise of Zionism to become the dominant ideological current within the Jewish diaspora was rooted in the physical liquidation of workers' organisations — and particularly those of the Jewish working class. It gained its strength from the despair following the holocaust and from the forcible emigration of refugees to Palestine.

Within Palestine, Zionists had, at best, ignored the existing Arab inhabitants. A popular Zionist slogan referred to Palestine as a 'land without a people looking for a people without a land'. At worst the Zionist organisations reproduced the racist attitudes of the imperialists. In fact, Herzl, in attempting to sell the idea of Israel to the imperialist powers, had explained that the state would be 'an outpost of civilisation against barbarism'. The imperialists too, understood the importance of 'a little loyal Jewish Ulster' in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism' as Storrs, Jerusalem's first British civilian governor, put it. Between 1922 and 1943 the Jewish population had risen from 11 to 31.5 per cent of the total population of Palestine.

Under the British mandate after World War I, Jewish immigration to Palestine was encouraged to act as a counterweight to the Arab population's desire for independence. In return the Zionists supported British colonial rule.

Majority

However, it had always been recognised by the Zionist leaders that to create a safe Jewish majority the Arabs would have to be forced out. Joseph Weitz, head of the Jewish Agency's Colonisation Department, had already concluded in 1940 that there would be no alternative but to 'transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries ... not one village, not one tribe should be left'.

This is how the state of Israel was created in 1948. Through a combination of terror, threats and murder 750,000 Palestinians were driven out of their homeland, creating an instant Jewish majority, and the Zionist dream became a reality.

Far from Israel being the democracy its apologists like to paint it as, the Israeli state's foundations are racist to the core. It is based on the permanent exclusion of the Palestinians from their homeland whilst bestowing the automatic right of

citizenship on any Jew from anywhere in the world. Although Palestinians have to pay taxes, their entitlement to welfare benefits is dependent upon military service, from which the vast majority of Palestinians are excluded. Workers from the occupied territories are allowed into the Israeli state to work, but they do not have the right to stay, even overnight. Their situation is in essence identical to that of black workers from the bantustans in South Africa. Within the occupied territories the Zionist state exercises its 'right' to continually expropriate Palestinian land, in contravention of international law.

Internationally, the Zionist state helps to arm and sustain some of the most bloodthirsty regimes in the world. It is a close collaborator with South Africa. It continued to support the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua when even the USA was unwilling to do so.

Reality

Those on the British left, such as *Socialist Organiser*, who strive to find a progressive content within Zionism, have to do so by ignoring the reality even of internal Israeli politics. Zionism ties the Israeli working class into an alliance with the Jewish bosses to defend the 'national interest' against a mythical 'Arab threat'. From the beginning the development of class politics was distorted by Zionism.

The General Federation of Hebrew workers, the Histadrut, campaigned for Jewish, not workers, control over land, labour and the means of production. It organised boycotts of Arab labour and physically attacked Arab producers in public markets. Small wonder that Golda Meir called it 'a great colonising agency'.

Similarly, the Kibbutzim, presented as an oasis of socialism in the Middle East, specifically exclude Arabs, and in fact, are often large industrial enterprises, built on expropriated Arab land, which exploit cheap Arab labour to provide comfortable lifestyles for their Jewish inhabitants.

Any unity of Jewish and Arab workers can only be based on winning the Jewish working class to break with Zionism — just as in South Africa black and white unity can only be based on opposition to apartheid.

From its birth the new Israeli state was faced with problems which determined its international policy. A tiny enclave cut off economically from the rest of the Middle East, it was not a viable entity. From its inception it had to rely on imperialist support in return

for its services in policing the Middle East. By 1982 it was receiving a staggering \$6 million per day in military and economic aid from the USA — a subsidy of one third of the Israeli national budget.

The drive to create a viable economic entity, and to secure its military position, gives the Zionist state its continual expansionist dynamic. However each expansionist thrust creates its own contradictions. The 1967 war against Egypt, Syria and Jordan resulted in the Israeli state seizing control of the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula, with the new markets thus opened up creating a mini boom in the economy. But it also incorporated more Palestinians into the Israeli sphere.

By 1982, two million Palestinians were living in Israeli occupied territories and there is now a net Jewish emigration from the Israeli state. It is only a matter of time before the Jewish population once again becomes a minority within the territory it controls. The fascist Israeli MP, Kahane, simply expresses the deadly logic of Zionism when he calls for the expulsion of more Palestinians. Such a move, even if it were possible, would simply repeat Israel's problems on a more gigantic scale.

Indeed these contradictions now touch Israel itself. The invasion of Lebanon brought 400,000 people onto the streets in protest — the largest demonstration in the history of the Israeli state — and led to the growth of organisations such as Peace Now. Such military adventures risk loosening the stranglehold of Zionism over the Israeli population — and are in any case more and more difficult. The Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza has further complicated Israel's contradiction.

There is an unbroken continuity from the earliest Zionist writings, through Zionism's criminal response to the threat of Nazism, to its present day policies towards the Palestinian people. Shed of its religious and ideological mystifications the Israeli state stands out more clearly than ever before for what it is — a settler colonial state, a heavily armed outpost of imperialism in the Middle East — an anachronism in the late 20th century. Along with its international twin, South Africa, it is one of the states in the world that today face the greatest internal contradictions.

*Leon, a Belgian Trotskyist, was the first to develop a systematic Marxist critique of Zionism. He was murdered by the Nazis during World War II.

ERUPTS

IT ALL began on Tuesday, 8 December 1987, when, in the Gaza Strip, an Israeli lorry plowed into a line of Arab taxis that were carrying day labourers to jobs within the pre-1967 borders of the Zionist state. Four Palestinians were killed. The 'accident' was widely considered to be an act of revenge for the fatal knifing of a Zionist businessman a few days before. The Palestinian camps exploded.

There is nothing surprising about the Palestinian uprising. Since the 1967 annexation not a year has gone by without the residents of occupied Palestine demonstrating their refusal to submit to the occupying forces. But the depth of Palestinian unity and militancy, combined with the crumbling both of the unity of Zionism's own ranks in face of this onslaught and of the monolithic imperialist international support for Zionism's claims in the area, has begun to alter the whole balance of forces in the Middle East today.

MORE than 36 Palestinians have 'officially' been killed to date, yet the true number of 'martyrs', as the Palestinians refer to the victims of the Zionists, is probably much higher as the occupying forces are reported to be following a policy of seizing control of the dead in order to bury them secretly at night, keeping the official death toll artificially low. Among those killed are 13 and 15 year old boys, as well as people as old as 70.

By Chris James

According to the *Observer* of 10 January, 'there is increasing evidence that the army had been using exploding dum-dum bullets to fire on rioters'. As a hospital spokesperson was quoted as saying, 'Sometimes we find one bullet with 10 pieces of shrapnel, and I can assure you these are not rubber bullets'.

Jabaliya camp, which has become the centre of the uprising, and has now been renamed 'Revolution' camp by the exiled PLO leadership, (and the 'PLO' camp by the Zionist regime!), has also become a testing ground for the use of gas. The same *Observer* article notes that 'the most unpleasant comes in green metal barrels... that soldiers roll off the backs of jeeps before blowing off the covers by remote control... The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which looks after the welfare of the refugees, does not know what this gas is. It leaves victims with intense headaches'.

Curfews

The Zionists have placed curfews on 15 Palestinian refugee camps recently in a futile attempt to quell the 'disturbances'. In addition they've banned newspapers; increased the troop presence and size of patrols; used light aircraft and helicopters to drop tear gas on demonstrators; taken hostages from among the wounded in hospitals in the occupied territories; have arrested at least 1200 people and ordered the deportation of nine to date, of which four have already been transported to southern Lebanon. Torture and abuse of prisoners, as

seems to be Israeli policy in any case, has been reported. Telephone service and any form of contact with the camps has been disrupted. Even a United Nations representative was initially denied access to the camps!

And all of these attempts at repression have been in vain.

The occupying forces have been confronted constantly by the Palestinian people. Their weapons, which have seemed so effective in the past, have proven insufficient in dealing with the current wave of struggle. The bottles, rocks, slogans and posters — including sliced watermelon, since it contains the Palestinian's national colours of red, green and black — have continued to be used to good effect. Some areas of the camps have even become virtual 'no go' areas for troops according to accounts in the press.

Solidarity

In the second week of the uprising, Palestinians in Israel called a general strike in solidarity with their sisters and brothers in the occupied territories. This event sent shock waves through the Zionist world, long accustomed to seeing the Arab 'minority' as complacent and relatively content with the status quo. Named 'Peace Day' by those who called it, it brought out 170,000 Palestinians within Israel alone, nearly crippling the Israeli economy for that day.

The one day action was accompanied by confrontations, barricade building, stone throwing and demonstrations within the Zionist state, which provoked renewed calls for the 'transfer' of Palestinians, as well as a return of the military law which was lifted in 1966.

It has also resulted in a number of arrests and people being held without trial, including Hanna Siniora of the East Jerusalem Arab daily *Al-Fajr*, a prominent nationalist figure.

The Palestinians have displayed a renewed unity in action within this context. The different PLO factions, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the pro-Moscow



Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the mainstream Fatah organisation of Yasser Arafat, were apparently working together as was reflected in leaflets and slogans on walls signed by the PLO in its own right rather than by the individual factions.

The Islamic movement is playing an increasingly important role as well. In fact a new Islamic organisation, Islamic Jihad, successfully called a strike that paralysed the activity of workers in the occupied territories (this was in addition to the Day of Peace itself). And increasingly the Islamic movement itself, the Jihad and the older Muslim Brotherhood, have been changing their orientation towards nationalist Palestinians, such as the PLO, working more in unity with them than before.

Unity

This increased unity in two crucial areas, in the liberation movement and among the Palestinian people in the whole of Palestine, constitutes one of the three important breakthroughs in the last period. The other two deal with the breakdown of the consensus within the Zionist state, and the virtual collapse of the pro-Zionist front internationally, including in the United States, long Zionism's staunchest and

most unquestioning supporter.

The ferocity of the Zionists' actions in the occupied territories seems to have forced through something of a polarisation in world public opinion concerning the Palestinian cause. The UN has passed three resolutions since the uprisings began, the first condemning Zionist policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the second and third deploring the planned deportations, and their actual carrying out, as being illegal under the Geneva Convention. (The Zionist regime, ironically enough, justify their actions under laws passed during the British Mandate).

Weakness

In the past the US has attempted vetoing such resolutions of condemnation in the Security Council. Significantly, at this point their representative has abstained from casting a vote, and the government has condemned Israeli action, both the deportations and the other occupation policies of the Zionist regime, at the highest levels. The British delegate has even gone so far as to urge the use of stronger language in UN resolutions!

The unrest among Zionism's collaborators is not limited to governmental bodies, however. The *Independent* of 6 January reports that sections of

Israel's longtime staunchest ally, the American Jewish population, are beginning to have second thoughts about the policies of the 'Jewish state'.

This is reflected in the diehard pro-Zionist *New Republic* which is reported as being extremely critical of Shamir's excessive use of terrorist labels when dealing with the Palestinian situation. 'A Palestinian youth crossing his own street to throw a rock or even a Molotov cocktail at a soldier is not a terrorist. And neither, for that matter is the cleric who exhorts the boy from the minaret'.

Provisions

Clearly the US is not about to cut off all arms provisions to Israel; nor is the American Jewish community going to stop raising funds and providing propaganda backing for the Zionist state. But the signs of dissent internationally over Zionist policy in the occupied territories is the first crack in an edifice that has often, in the past, seemed all too impervious to any sort of pressure whatsoever.

As for the Zionist state itself, the rifts are much more evident. More and more elements in the government are calling for 'dialogue' with the Arab states for a solution to the problem, and even more fundamentally, for a complete Zionist withdrawal from the occupied territories — excluding East Jerusalem — themselves.

Problem

The *Observer* of 17 January cites an amazing development in this area — Shlomo Lahat, a 'senior member of the right-wing Likud party', has called for Zionism to detach itself from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. 'Holding on to the occupied territories is a burden for Israel, from the human aspect and the national aspect... He is quoted as saying that the time has come for 'drastic measures', including Zionist withdrawal and negotiation with the neighboring Arab states.

This is unheard of in a settler-colonialist state that not only insists on its right to exist, but on its right to expand — seemingly without any barriers — at the expense of its neighbours.

What does the immediate future hold for the Palestinians and their struggle for national self-determination? There has, among other things, been a call for a protracted campaign of non-cooperation with the Zionist regime. If recent weeks are any indication, we can expect pressure on Zionism to mount, with an escalation of the rifts both internally and internationally, and the all-too-frail facade of democracy crumbling even more.

And the struggle, the Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, will continue.

World in action

Argentina

■ Aldo Rico's coup attempt in Argentina is simply the latest in a series of attempts by important right-wing sections of the armed forces to assert their control in the country, and to oppose the prosecutions of military torturers.

Aldo Rico was also at the centre of the coup attempt last year which was resolved by a compromise from president Alfonsín which ended the prosecutions of all junior officers for human rights abuses, torture and so on. As might be expected, as the regime compromised, the officers simply came back for more.

The deepening military opposition confronting the Alfonsín regime is trouble of its own making. It failed to take advantage of the opportunity it had after the overthrow of the junta, following the defeat in the Malvinas war, to carry through a thorough purge of the armed forces.

At each sign of opposition it backed off, and has satisfied itself with purely token actions. The armed forces maintain an effective veto over the actions of the government. The government has even failed to back more liberal forces within the army which favour limited reform.

Rico's coup has been defeated, but far more powerful forces are poised to carry on as soon as an opportunity presents itself. There is mass popular support for decisive action against the thugs in the Argentinian army, but Alfonsín is more terrified of that than of the military.

Haiti

■ There are often fraudulent elections, but there are rarely such openly fraudulent elections as those conducted in Haiti on 17 January. The poll was reportedly less than 20 per cent, due to an effective opposition boycott, and despite reports of attempts by the army to force people to vote in some areas.

Attempts by the regime to present the poll as a legitimate election were undermined by the wave of pre-election arrests carried out by the army, focussing on those involved in the boycott campaign.



In a number of areas of the country the polling stations did not open, and it is reported that in some areas there were no ballot boxes anyway. And it was hardly a secret ballot! Each candidate had to produce their own ballot papers, the voter surrendered a ballot paper for the candidate of their choice for inspection by a scrutineer, who then placed in in the ballot box appropriate to the candidate.

Given the withdrawal of the four most popular candidates in the previous elections, violently disrupted by the military until they had to be abandoned, it is not surprising that this time the army did not have to use force to ensure the election of the candidate of its choice.

NATO strategy

■ A clear insight into NATO policy after the INF treaty has come with the publication of a report by the US Federal Commission on Long Term Strategy chaired by Fred Ikle, US Under Secretary of Defence. Also on the Commission were the National Security Advisers to Nixon and Carter, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The report notes that economic problems in the US make it less able to bear the full 'burden' of 'defending' Western Europe. It therefore calls for greater emphasis to be given to British and French nuclear weapons.

Alongside this the Commission emphasises the build up of high technology conventional weapons. This would require a build up of conventional weapons spending in Europe.

The report refers to a growing movement of 'military appeasers' in West Germany and Scandinavia.

The withdrawal movement after Enniskillen

THE Enniskillen bombing evidently weakened the fight to get Britain out of Ireland. But two months later it is now clear that the government's cynical efforts to exploit Enniskillen, to discredit the growing view that Britain has no progressive role to play in Ireland have failed.

IT was an attempt to reverse the entire political process which began in 1981, in Ireland with the electoral breakthrough of Sinn Fein during the hunger strikes, and in Britain with the election of Ken Livingstone as leader of the GLC. The goals of the British government ever since have been to isolate and destroy Sinn Fein, in Ireland, and to reverse the growth of the withdrawal current in Britain.

The Enniskillen bombing provided the ideal pretext for Britain's propaganda machine to be swung into action for these ends. In southern Ireland this was effective: extradition was enacted, a massive security operation to 'search for arms', involving 7,000 police and troops, was launched and the cross border security co-operation stepped up. In the longer term the submission of Dublin to British demands with no reforms at all in Northern Ireland will create major political problems for the Fianna Fail government.

But, as SDLP leader John Hume's meeting with Gerry Adams in January

showed, the attempt to outlaw all contacts with Sinn Fein has failed. The *Irish Post*, the main

By Redmond O'Neill

newspaper of the Irish in Britain commented: 'The two hours of private talks on Monday in Belfast between John Hume and Gerry Adams are to be welcomed. Their respective parties, the SDLP and Sinn Fein, represent the views of the vast majority of nationalists in Northern Ireland. Nothing but good can come of such exchanges and hopefully there will be more of them... Almost 40 per cent of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland supports Sinn Fein. That is a sufficiently large section of the population to entitle Sinn Fein to a say in an ultimate settlement — and in the shaping of events which precede such a settlement'.

Nationalist

The *Irish Post* is right — whilst a substantial proportion of the nationalist population of the six counties supports Sinn Fein it is virtually impossible to ban all contact with them.

In Britain the post Enniskillen witch hunt focused on Ken Livingstone simply because he is the most public advocate of the view that Britain should leave Ireland. The aim was to establish an all-party consensus that such views were illegitimate in British society.

This is precisely what was achieved after the Birmingham pub bombing in 1974. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was rushed through parliament by a Labour government. The Irish community was silenced by the draconian provisions of the PTA and the arbitrary judicial frame-ups of Irish people in the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and Maguire family cases.

The withdrawal movement was completely marginalised. It was not until the hunger strikes and the electoral breakthrough of Sinn Fein with Bobby Sands' election to parliament in 1981 that the tide began to turn.

After Enniskillen the situation was quite different. Instead of being isolated Livingstone was supported by a significant minority of Labour MPs and the Campaign Group for the first time adopted a policy of British withdrawal from Ireland.

Instead of media calls for disciplinary action being met the Parliamentary

Labour Party (PLP) was forced to hold its first full discussion on Ireland for many years. At the PLP discussion it was the left which was on the offensive and which effectively highlighted the key flaw in Labour's policy — its acceptance of a unionist veto over Irish unity.

Committed

The withdrawal current is now a firmly rooted minority in the labour movement and opposition to aspects of British policy in Ireland is growing.

Since 1981 Labour has been committed to the goal of Irish unity — albeit contradicted by acceptance of a unionist veto on unity. Labour is also committed to opposing strip searching, plastic bullets, the PTA and other abuses of civil liberties.

A number of trade unions, most recently the NUR, have adopted policy for withdrawal. The National Union of Students for the first time adopted policy for British withdrawal in 1985.

Progressive

Some Labour councils have adopted progressive policies on Ireland and political activity on Ireland has revived in a major way, including in the Irish community — and fuelled campaigns for the release of the Birm-

ingham Six and Guildford Four.

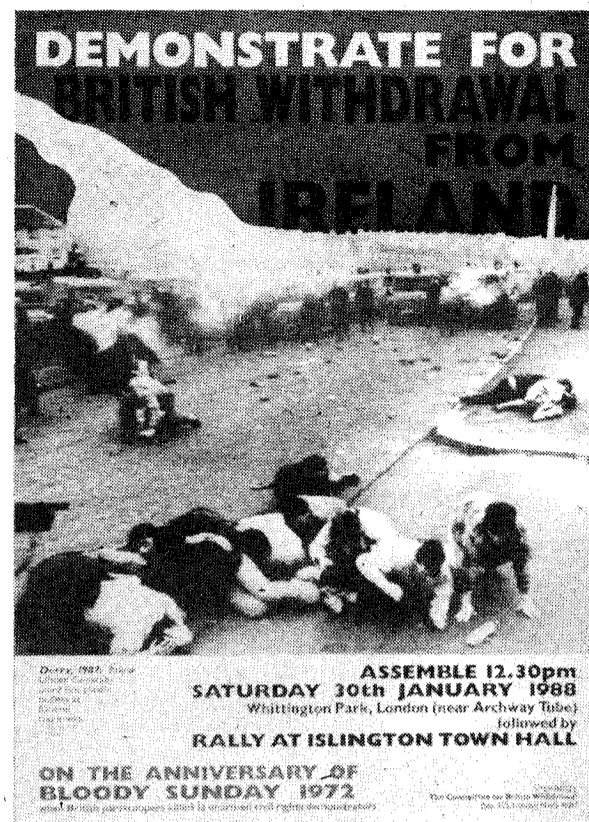
Notwithstanding Neil Kinnock's ridiculous statements setting himself up as an expert on Irish history and explaining that the population of Northern Ireland is British, the Labour Party is no longer able to defend an explicitly unionist position. On the contrary it now hangs its position on the 'unity by consent' line of the Dublin government and the SDLP.

Sectarian

This makes it impossible for Labour to defend the overtly sectarian character of unionism and the failure to make even minimal progress in the elimination of the discrimination against Catholics in employment and other fields.

The post-Enniskillen propaganda operation by the government did not succeed in derailing the growing demands for action against employment discrimination in the United States either. There have already been two delegations led by US senators to Ireland this year — and, incidentally, they both had talks with Gerry Adams.

This all adds to the pressure within the British trade union movement. The rather mild resolution to last year's Labour party conference opposing discrimination in jobs was



defeated by the votes of unions which organise in Northern Ireland and cover up discrimination. This is not a tenable position as the facts of the situation in the north of Ireland are got into the open.

The first meeting of the Labour Committee on Ireland in 1988 has set itself the goals of winning a majority against employment discrimination at this year's party conference and is planning a year of action culminating in a national march and festival for British withdrawal from Ireland in August

1989 on the twentieth anniversary of British troops being sent to the six counties. It believes that this will register a qualitative expansion of the withdrawal movement in Britain.

Backfired

Overall, whilst, of course the bombing at Enniskillen damaged the movement to get Britain out of Ireland it didn't derail it and the Thatcher government's attempts to use it to discredit the withdrawal position, seem even to have backfired.

Fight the cuts

RIGHT across London Labour controlled councils are pushing through major cuts which will have a massive impact on jobs and the provision of services. Whereas before the general election major cuts were avoided by creative accounting and other devices, the cuts now being prepared are real and will be deeply unpopular.

In Camden, for example, the Labour group have agreed cuts of between 20 and 40 per cent across all departments. More than 1500 jobs are to be lost over the next year and there will be compulsory redeployment of staff.

By Pat Murphy

In Haringey, £46 million cuts are proposed. £26 million have already been agreed and the Labour group is trying to get a further £20 million through the council.

Alongside cuts in jobs and services equal opportunities policies are also coming under attack. The most notorious example is Camden, and other councils', policy of repatriating homeless Irish families instead of housing them.

No trade union could accept the sorts of reductions in jobs and services being pushed through councils. There have been mass lobbies of council meetings and in Haringey and Manchester the police were called in to remove protesters.

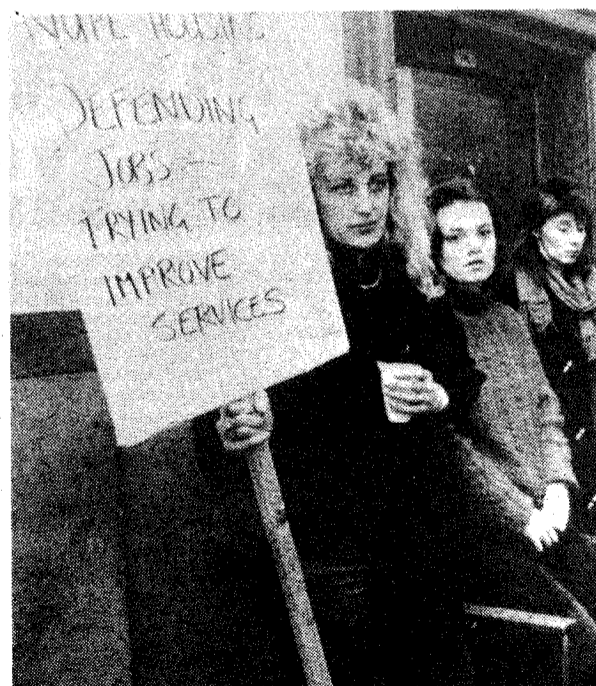
In London, led by Islington leader Margaret

Hodge, council leaders have adopted the approach of making the main burden fall on the white collar unions not affiliated to the Labour Party — notably the NUT and NALGO. This divide and rule tactic has had some success. But given the scale of the cuts it will be impossible to avoid eventually also confronting the affiliated manual unions.

Repatriation

In addition to attacking the unions Labour groups pursuing these policies are also trying to silence their opponents in the party. There is now a threat to remove the whip from 11 councillors who have voted against Labour group policy on cuts and repatriation in Camden. In Manchester, Graham Stringer has written to *Tribune* calling for supporters of *Militant*, alleged to have shouted at him at a party, to be expelled.

What is not being organised is any campaign to mobilise the trade unions, Labour Party and communities against the deeply unpopular policies



of the government like the poll tax. This is because the course of passing really massive cuts onto the working class necessarily is forcing councils to instead focus their energies on defeating their own trade unions and the left.

The net result is Labour councils pursuing policies which break up Labour's bastions of support in the inner cities.

The cuts in jobs and services have to be fought through every possible channel. Councillors who stand out against the cuts

have to be defended. Trade union action to defend jobs and services has to be given support by local Labour Parties.

A campaign has to be launched to reverse the disastrous course of doing the government's work for it. Instead Labour and the trade unions should nationally launch a campaign including national industrial action and demonstrations against the poll tax and the other government attacks on local government.

Manchester council gets rid of 3,750 jobs

MANCHESTER city council's December meeting decided to make £110 million cuts, which is about 25 per cent of the budget! 3,750 council jobs will go and the council services will decline drastically. On top of that the right wing of the Labour group along with the Tories voted down some of the progressive equal opportunities policies of the Graham Stringer administration.

HOW can a so-called left wing council end up in such a mess? The Stringer administration took power in 1984 with the promise to improve jobs and services. Until the June 1987 general election many new council jobs were created — about the same amount that now will disappear because of the cuts.

By Finn Jensen

Because the Tory government has stolen over £500 million in grants from Manchester since 1979 the council paid for the improved services through creative accountancy. This can of course only go on for a certain period. But the council pinned its hope on the formation of a Labour government. After the general election the Stringer administration saw no alternative but to make massive cuts.

Graham Stringer was able to win support for the cuts solution in Manchester City Labour Party

and in most of the council unions.

A general feeling of being politically trapped emerged among Labour Party members. At the one hand the chances of winning a head-on confrontation with the government look bleak. On the other hand Labour Party supporters will blame the council for the cuts. A Catch 22 situation! And new cuts will have to be implemented in the coming years!

On top of that the Stringer leadership is not even willing to organise any major campaigns against the Tory attacks: education, privatisation, poll tax etc. The effects of the cuts make it more difficult to mobilise campaigns — even in the next local May election.

Jobs

A resistance to the cuts began to develop when it became clear to what extent the services would be damaged. In education for example over 1,000 teaching jobs, over 500

manual jobs and another 260 administrative and clerical jobs are to go.

In order to organise the resistance to the cuts Manchester Fightback was organised.

The aims of Manchester Fightback are to get the City Labour Party and the council to reverse its policies on cuts and to support all groups that fight against the cuts.

Support

In order to achieve these aims Manchester Fightback will have to present a political alternative to the policies of the Stringer administration. It has to be explained that it is possible to mobilise the working class in Manchester for more money from the government. And if the labour movement in Manchester takes the lead that will be an inspiration and an example for other inner cities which all have similar financial problems.

If such a campaign is raised the labour movement will also be in a much better position to fight the poll tax, privatisation and other attacks by the government. There is, of course, no guarantee that the labour movement will win in the end — although it is far from impossible. But not to take the fight will guarantee a defeat.

Right plan new offensive after NUM election

AS we go to press polling is taking place in the NUM presidential election. But every indication is that Arthur Scargill is going to win. This will be a victory for every miner, a setback for British Coal, and a setback for the right wing in the NUM. But it will only be the beginning of the fight against British Coal and the government's plans.

IT'S clear that it is the government's plan to smash the NUM and that it is prepared to sacrifice the livelihood of everyone in the country to do so. This is showing up most vividly in the plans for the privatisation of the electricity industry.

Those interested in tendering to run a privately owned electricity industry have made it clear that nuclear power is completely uneconomic. On

economic grounds the nuclear power programme would be halted.

But the government is insisting that nuclear power go ahead and that it will subsidise it. So much for the claim by the government that its pit closure programme was because it was concerned with 'economic' forms of energy production. The government is concerned to develop nuclear power solely because that is a way

to weaken the miners.

In calling the presidential election when he did Arthur Scargill outwitted the government, and the NUM right. But that has not stopped their plans.

The right and Kinnockite left in the NUM had planned to participate in a presidential election called under the government's new trade union act and stand a Kinnockite candidate who would have split the left's vote.

That is what they had tried to do, unsuccessfully, with Eric Clarke in the vice-presidential election. But because of Scargill's timing in calling the election the Kinnockites were unable to come up with a candidate — leaving the

only runner in the field against Scargill as right winger John Walsh. The Kinnockites were outmanoeuvred. But that does not mean that they have abandoned their policy of aiming towards cooperation with British Coal.

British Coal has made its own plans more and more explicit. The South Wales coalfield has seen 15 out of 28 pits closed since the strike and 11,000 jobs have been cut. Yet the policies advocated by Walsh and the South Wales leadership would mean participating in further massive job loss.

Walsh has made it clear during the election that he is prepared to discuss with

British Coal about flexible working — as the South Wales leadership was over Margam. As Arthur Scargill has pointed out this would lead to the closure of 20 per cent of pits and the loss of a further 40,000 jobs. This makes British Coal's 'promise' of 830 jobs at Margam appear small beer. Far more jobs will be lost as a result of flexible working than would be gained even on British Coal's promises.

This is why a policy of cooperation with British Coal is literally suicidal. There is no deal on offer from British Coal by being 'reasonable'. They want to slim down the industry and prepare it for

privatisation. A victory for Walsh, and for flexible working, would have been the encouragement of job losses. A similar danger could be faced in the vote for general secretary when Peter Heathfield retires.

The South Wales leadership is already threatening disciplinary action against Tyrone O'Sullivan from Tower, Phil Cullen from Cynheidre, and Terry Davies secretary of Marine — organisers of the Scargill campaign in South Wales.

The defeat in South Wales, by 69 per cent to 31 per cent, of the ballot for strengthening the overtime ban is undoubtedly a set-



back. But a victory for Arthur Scargill in the presidential poll will be a boost for the vital special NUM delegate conference on 2 February. That must be the starting point for a fight against the area leaderships, such as South Wales, which opposed Scargill and orientate to collaboration with British coal.

Needless to say Des Duffield and co will not be presenting themselves for reelection.

Crucial TGWU elections

VOTING for a new general executive council of the TGWU (in both trade groups and territorial divisions) closes on 5 February. The result of these elections will have enormous significance for the future of Britain's largest union.

THE union's massive vote in both the Labour Party and TUC, at a regional and national level, means the ballot result will have a knock on effect throughout the labour movement. If the right is successful we will see further steps to bring together the 'centre' and right in the labour movement, on industrial and political questions.

By a TGWU member

If the left wins then the attempts by the EETPU to get its 'new realist' policies accepted by the TUC and Labour Party, will be set back, with renewed possibilities for the left to take the initiative on in-

dustrial strategy and a series of policy questions.

The outcome of the Labour Party's policy review, whether unilateral nuclear disarmament is firmly defended, what weight is given to equal opportunities policies, the national minimum wage and so on, will be greatly influenced by the outcome of these elections.

The media and the tacticians of the Tory Party, have undoubtedly targeted the TGWU. A head on industrial show down — as with the NUM — isn't possible given the union's spread of membership. But the 'new realist' element in the TGWU plays up to the trend for a more 'subtle' attack.

There have been numerous knife edge decisions on major political questions, such as changes in the structure of the Labour Party to weaken the CLPs; and equally on internal union questions, as with the expulsion and subsequent reinstatement of region 6 representative Alan Quinn, on what were clearly trumped up charges.

New realism

Candidates 'acceptable' to the new realist wing have been successfully imposed on the union's powerful regional organisations, most recently in the South-west and now London/South-east. Alongside this there have been retreats, such as the record of the Welsh regional leadership in encouraging EETPU type no strike deals with various employers.

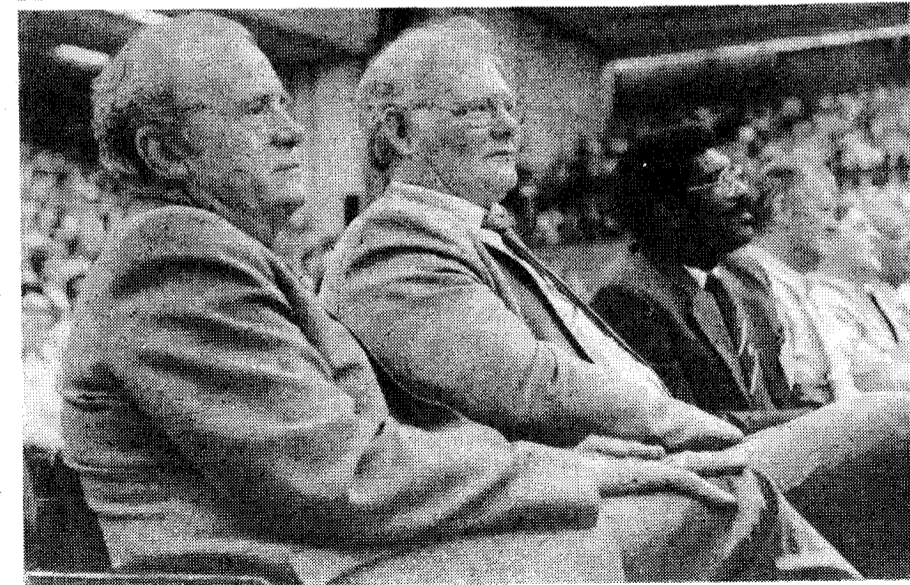
TGWU members must get the message — new realism means the union will stand back and allow employers to impose worse working conditions and terms of employment. That is why it is vital they do not get the upper hand in the present round of elections.

Link-Up

The Link-Up campaign involves a pledge to put power and resources in the hands of the union membership, through revamping our organisation, reaching out to organise the 'new' workers who are particularly exploited — part-timers, short term contracts, YTS etc.

If the new realists win, Link-Up's real value will be reduced to a bureaucratic exercise in bolstering falling membership, while the leadership concedes argument after argument to the Tories, on industrial and political issues.

We have already had a taste of that in the South-



east. It has been reported in the press that union chair and out-going territorial rep for the London area, Brian Nicholson, has already helped the media brand the socialist left in London and the South-east as 'loony'.

The so-called 'London effect' that Nicholson and the Labour right talk

about is the steps that have been taken to try to defend the interests of the inner city working class which depends upon local government services, to defend black people, women, and lesbians and gays. The 'problem' creating the 'London effect' includes bus workers who want to fight wage

cuts, nurses who want to defend the NHS.

For all these reasons every TGWU member should scrutinise the candidates who are standing for election/re-election. Ignore the lies of the media, and the union right wing. Vote for candidates who will defend us against the Tories and the bosses.

Senior Colman — 12 months on strike

THE first anniversary of the strike of the Senior Colman engineering factory in Sale, Manchester, was marked by a rally on Saturday 16 January attended by 250-300 people.

Important themes included the need to fight against new realism which was highlighted by Dennis Skinner, Senior Colman convenor, Graham Whyatt and Betty Heathfield.

By Jan Whitehead

Betty Heathfield was vehement on the need to involve women pointing to the miners' strike. She also spoke out against the Alton Bill — as did Dennis Skinner.

Sacked miner Dennis Pennington spoke of his experiences. His presence along with Betty Heathfield, highlighted the link which had been built with the mining communities.

Stan Orme, of the Labour Party front bench gave his backing to the union of strike action, and pointed to the nurses as an example of what can be achieved.

The most important theme was one of determination and defiance. There has already been one victory in that one of the original victimised workers has been reinstated by an Industrial Tribunal.

The fight goes on to reinstate the 30 who are still on strike — sacked supporting victimised colleagues.

Messages of support and donations should be sent to: Senior Colman Strike Committee c/o 43 The Crescent, Salford, M5 4PE. Cheques payable to 'Senior Colman Strike Fund'

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A Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

Israel out of the Occupied Territories 23 January

National demonstration
Assemble: 12 noon Hyde Park Corner
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Defend the National Health Service

Dennis Skinner calls for demonstration in defence of NHS

To the TUC
31 December 1987

Dear Norman,

I think it is very important that the labour and trade union movement mark the 40th anniversary of the National Health Service by organising a massive demonstration early in 1988.

You may have read in today's newspapers that patients in a Wolverhampton hospital ward threatened with closure tied themselves to their beds with their bandages to stop the management closing the ward.

One of the union officials involved got it just right when he said, 'Someone has to have the bottle to act, otherwise the NHS will not survive.'

This kind of spirit and resistance must become a feature of the whole labour and trade union movement and I urge the general council of the TUC at its next meeting to formulate plans for a massive national demonstration in defence of the NHS.

I am absolutely confident that there are thousands of people in every community who are yearning for action to be taken.

I look forward to a positive reply.

Yours sincerely,
Dennis Skinner MP



Support nurses and health workers

THE year has begun with two successful actions by health service workers which have forced the Tory government to back down on cuts in the pay of nurses and of blood transfusion service workers.

THE anger now felt by health service workers is best demonstrated in the strike by 37 nurses, all NUPE members, at North Manchester General Hospital. While this was not the first time nurses have taken strike action — some nurses went on strike in Britain in 1982, and there have been nurses strikes in Ireland, Israel, Africa and the USA in the recent past — 7 January was the first time nurses in Britain have

taken strike action independently of other health service workers.

By Geoff Ryan
NUPE Central
Manchester Health
Authority

The North Manchester strike was called against the government's threat to cut special duty payments for night duties, weekends and Bank holidays, replac-

ing them with a flat rate payment of £1.20 per hour. This would have meant wage cuts for many nursing staff.

Following the Manchester strike, health minister Tony Newton has been forced to say these proposals will be referred to the nurses' pay review body. While the proposals have not yet been totally dropped it is unlikely in the present climate that the pay review body will support them.

Alongside this, blood transfusion service management claimed 'special circumstances' allowed them to restore allowances to previous levels, following

nationwide strikes and work to rule.

The government retreat was brought about by the threat of further strikes by nurses in NUPE, the possibility that the Confederation of Health Service Employees would join further action and the massive public support for the Manchester strike. In fact, apart from the government the only opposition to the strike has come from the Royal College of Nurses and the journal *Nursing Times*. And whatever the views of the RCN leadership there was support for the strike from RCN members at North Manchester hospital.

Scotland

If the immediate cause of the strike at Manchester was special duty payments, the root of this and other actions is the massive crisis of the NHS as a whole.

Before Christmas consultants (including former Tory supporter Nigel Harris, orthopaedic surgeon at St Mary's Hospital London) presented a petition signed by 1000 medical staff demanding extra funding for the NHS.

Since the North Manchester strike health workers have demonstrated against threatened cuts in Burnley and Salford, and on 14 January health workers, including nurses called a 24 hour strike in Lothian region of Scotland

against government attempts to impose privatisation. There is a possibility that if the government continues its plans to privatise services health workers in Scotland will escalate strike action up to an indefinite strike.

In Hill End psychiatric hospital St Albans, 30 workers, including 15 nurses are striking over the suspension of two COHSE branch officials.

Cuts

Despite the extra £100 million the government was forced to come up with following the consultants' protest and opposition to government policy from the Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists the financial crisis of the NHS continues to escalate.

Just the latest casualties of government cuts in one week in the North-west demonstrate the scale of the problems. The casualty unit at Manchester Royal Infirmary was forced to turn away all cases requiring hospitalisation as no beds were available, and now has announced it is bankrupt and jobs are under threat. Hope hospital, Salford Royal and Pendlebury Children's hospital, all in Salford, are threatened with ward closures. Altrincham General has closed its

surgical unit and the entire hospital is under threat.

North Manchester General has been forced to cut 55 beds and privatise services to prevent the loss of £487,000 of promised government money. The Royal Victoria Hospital in Morecambe has closed its casualty department.

Even the most enthusiastic Thatcherite health authorities, which have made every cut they can, privatised all possible services, face a massive budget deficit at the end of the financial year.

Charges

Despite Thatcher's claims that the NHS is safe in her hands, it is clear that the entire National Health Service is under threat. While a frontal attack is not possible due to the enormous popular support for the health service, the Tories have eroded the standard of care, introduced charges bit by bit, allowed waiting lists to get longer and longer — for serious as well as routine surgery — and privatised substantial components of the service.

Labour

Quite aside from the impact on health service users, with shocking figures on avoidable death being released virtually every day, this is causing large scale demoralisation among staff

who feel they can no longer provide the level of care they feel they should.

Individual Tories, like Nicholas Winterton, may make some protest, but the government is clearly set on a course of further cutting back funds to the NHS and imposing more charges. They are now considering charging for visits to a GP and 'hotel' charges when admitted to hospital.

Labour's front bench has outlined a five point plan for the health service which includes full funding of the new pay structure for nurses, restoration of maintenance programmes for hospital buildings and equipment and a reduction in waiting lists. But we cannot afford to simply wait for a Labour government to implement this plan.

Strike

In the past engineering workers, dockers, miners and other workers have taken action in support of health workers and against cuts. Health workers are clearly prepared to take action to defend the NHS.

The nurses of North Manchester and Edinburgh have shown a tremendous example — now the Labour Party and TUC should organise a campaign throughout the labour movement including strike action in defence of the National Health Service and against further erosion of pay, jobs and services.

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