

Socialist Challenge

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IS UP AGAINST

AN ARSONIST burnt down the Rotherham headquarters of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation last Saturday night. It's not difficult to work out why.

It's because the British bosses and their lackeys in the Tory government have been running a campaign to stir up anti-union and anti-working class feeling.

Bill Sirs, the ISTC general secretary, got it right when he said that the government was to blame for the arson attack for 'leading people to believe that we are evil when we are only trying to find a reasonable way to get our just demands'.

The Tories aren't having an easy time of it.

The steelworkers won't lie down and keep quiet — they won't accept Sir Keith Joseph's argument that the best way to save jobs is to sell them; they won't accept Sir Charles Villiers' argument that the best way to get more money is to ask for less.

Arms

And it's not just the steelworkers. Across the country members of every trade union are up in arms against the government's assault on living standards. Women and blacks are determined to defend themselves against the attacks on their rights that the Tories are preparing to unleash.

The working class of this country is on the move, united against the Tories. Working people will not pay the price for the bosses' crisis.

It is this unity that the Tories are out to smash. They aim to stir up feeling against the steel strikers — to set private sector workers against those in the public sector, farm workers against industrial workers, male workers against women.

Fuss

And Prior's proposed laws are part of this offensive. But these proposals will not simply slip through Parliament without anyone making a fuss about it.

The TUC has already called a demonstration for 9 March and a day of

TORY LAW

MARCH AGAINST PRIOR'S LAW

Sunday 9 March

TUC demonstration

Assemble: Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park
10am to 12noon

Move off at 12.30pm
Rally at Trafalgar Square to be addressed by Len Murray and other TUC Economic Department and General Council speakers

strike action for 14 May. The Tories are worried that they won't get things all their own way, so they are trying to divide us.

They want to provoke a reactionary witchhunt and their rallying cry is 'law and order'.

But what kind of law and order does Tory talk unleash? It gives the go-ahead to the anti-union arsonist who poured petrol into the ISTC's Rotherham headquarters and forced a union worker to jump for his life.

It encourages the Freedom Association and friends in Kent who have mounted anti-strike pickets at the gates of Sheerness Steel. Farmers

and commuters — whose 'right to work' is hardly threatened by the steel strike — have turned up to shout abuse at legitimate pickets. Cafe owners will not let strikers in.

Intimidation is the Tory idea of law and order.

Boot

It gives 'Maggie Thatcher's Boot Boys' (as the police were dubbed at Sheerness during the mass picket last week) the go-ahead to lay into pickets, beating up and arresting as they go. It gives the police the right to intimidate pickets whenever there's a strike.

Their law and order means intimidation for the working class and a free rein for the bosses.

And what about the bosses? Aren't they above the law? They can chop jobs, slash pay, carve up industry, invest or not invest where they want, sack workers they don't like (as with Derek Robinson) and the law does not touch them.

Dennis Thatcher, husband of Margaret, is managing director of a company manufacturing the cancer forming chemical 2,4,5-T. Where is the law to stop him?

Prior's law means law and order alright — a fist to punch the working class and a helping hand for the Villiers, Edwardes,

Thatchers and Josephs to do whatever they like.

Prior's mis-named Employment Bill will make secondary picketing illegal and prevent solidarity action from unions not directly involved in a strike. But it's collective action and solidarity which allow the working class to defend itself against the bosses' attacks.

Our reply to the Tory intimidators is quite simple — step up the secondary pickets, build solidarity action with the steel strike, and make 9 March a really enormous show of strength against the Tories' plans.

If the Tories want it hot then we're quite willing to raise the heat.



THIS WEEK

INDUSTRIAL NEWS

THE implications of the miners' ballot in South Wales... What the pickets in Sheerness think about the strike, the police and the Tories... What the National Strike Committee is up to... pages 3 to 5

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BRITISH LEYLAND

'RED Robbo' has been sacked and no one is going to fight. Now BL workers face the long haul to rebuild strong shop floor organisation... page 6

NICARAGUA

KATHY Kirkham has just come back from Nicaragua. Two full pages of eye witness reports on the literacy campaign, the struggle of Nicaraguan women and the growth of the Sandinista Defence Committees... pages 8 and 9

AFGHANISTAN

STEVE Potter concludes a two part article on the situation in Afghanistan... page 12

ZIMBABWE

Who's who in the elections, Britain's disreputable history and what the whites are planning... pages 11 and 16

IMG CONFERENCE

AFTER three months of discussion the British section of the Fourth International has held its conference, decided on a common line of march and emerged ever more enthusiastic to fulfill its tasks... page 13

KICK OUT THE TORIES

OUR POLICIES

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

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

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

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

Such an organisation should be based on the understanding that:

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

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

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

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

4 The Communist parties in Europe are in crisis. Neither the 'Eurocommunist' nor the pro-Moscow wings have any meaningful strategy for the overthrow of the capitalist state. No revolutionary party socialist parties are more necessary than ever before. Conditions today are more favourable than over the preceding three decades. But such parties can only be built by rejecting sectarianism and seeing internal democracy not as a luxury but as a vital necessity. This means the right to organise factions and tendencies.

If you agree with these principles and want to be involved in activities by Socialist Challenge supporters in your area, fill in the form below and send it to us.

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EDITORIAL

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Kabul crisis — rioting against Russian presence

ACCORDING to press reports from Afghanistan, a strike of bazaar merchants has been followed by other sections of the population in demanding an end to the presence of Russian troops in Afghanistan.

The Kabul authorities have responded by declaring martial law and arresting one American and sixteen Pakistanis accused of being secret agents fomenting unrest.

While western sources have been notoriously unreliable, the essential aspects of the situation have been confirmed by the Soviet press. In the absence of any other contenders it is fair to assume that Islamic fundamentalist parties lead the strike.

Their demands are not limited to the removal of the Soviet troops. Their first act would be to bloodily purge the left and establish an Islamic republic which would reverse the reforms instituted in April 1978. These demands are cloaked under the rallying cry for national sovereignty.

If these demands were to be fulfilled it would represent a crushing defeat for the workers and peasants of Afghanistan, turning the clock back in a most brutal and barbaric way. That is why it is not possible to support these demands or the strike action which is backing them up.

The bureaucratic way in which the Karmal government and the Soviet Union have dealt with the whole problem of the rightist resistance to the reforms over the past years is of course to be criticised. They have made no attempt to rally mass action by workers and peasants. But the arrest of the suspected agents in Kabul hints at a reality which has been present for the last two years in Afghanistan — massive infiltration and subversion techniques practised by imperialism devoted to bolstering the forces now apparently leading the strike in Kabul.

*Turn to page 12

Tories still shaky

THATCHER has tried to use three setbacks suffered by the working class to paper over the disarray in her government. The vote by Longbridge workers not to strike for Derek Robinson's reinstatement; the decision of Welsh miners not to go it alone in taking action to defend jobs and the 'back to work' movement among certain sections of workers in the private steel industry do represent a definite set-back in the struggle against the government.

But Thatcher's problems still remain. On the level of foreign policy, the Tories have been distinguished only by the readiness to accommodate fully to the needs of President Carter and the Pentagon.

In Europe the Tories have not managed to secure their demand of £1000m rake-back from the EEC fund. Matters will reach crisis point at the upcoming EEC summit.

In Zimbabwe the much-vaunted Lancaster House settlement has been shaken to its

foundations with the revelations of the 'dirty tricks' perpetrated by the same Rhodesian security forces who are helping Lord Soames' administration. Finally, the other outstanding legacy of Britain's colonial past, Ireland, remains a seemingly insoluble problem for ruling class politicians if the lack of progress at the 'constitutional conference' is anything to go by.

On the home front, things are not going well for the Tories either. The steel strike remains solid among British Steel Corporation workers and its very duration has ensured that the closure plans for many of the plants under the axe will now have to be taken back to the drawing board.

The Tory cabinet is still deeply divided on Prior's industrial relations proposals. The reasons for the divisions being the justifiable fear of some Tory ministers that the labour movement response to the laws could trigger off the sort of struggles which brought down the Heath government.

Sunday 9 March, the date of the TUC-called

demonstration against the proposals, will be a crucial day for all concerned as ministers and militants alike judge the scale of the opposition. Once again the call should be raised for general strike action to be called by the TUC to defeat the Prior proposals and carry through the job by kicking out the Tory government.

The one genuine breakthrough for the Tories has been at British Leyland. But this was not the work of a couple of months. A continuous campaign to break the back-bone of the BL workforce has been waged since the publication of the Ryder Report on participation under the Labour government. This is one sector where the patient work of rebuilding the rank and file leadership, through such bodies as the Leyland Action Committee is the main task for socialists.

But the fundamental problems of the Tories remain, as do the opportunities for the working class to break ITS back.

TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER... LABOUR MP

By Tom Marlowe

JUST how many Labour leaders have, at one time or another, been in the pay of American imperialism?

Recent facts revealed in the *Sunday Times* and *State Research* about Labour's 'NATO moles' give this question a certain topicality. Revealed were the links between the NATO-financed Labour Committee for Transatlantic Understanding (LCTU) and leaders of the Labour right who write for the LCTU's Press Service.

This information backs up previous disclosures that in the early 1960s a number of Labour leaders were paid by various CIA front organisations. A selective list of the US-backed 'entrists' in the labour movement would read something like the following:

DENIS HEALEY, former Chancellor of the Exchequer and favourite to succeed Callaghan as Labour Party leader. In the 1960s Healey was a paid correspondent for *New Leader*, a ferociously anti-communist magazine financed by the CIA.

Talents

Healey now uses his talents to work for the LCTU, whose director, former Labour MP Alan Lee Williams, admits that the bulk of the organisation's funds come from NATO. Healey writes for the LCTU's Press Service on such topics as why pay and productivity should be linked.

ROY MASON, former defence minister and Northern Ireland secretary, now shadow minister for agriculture. Mason is the current chairperson of the LCTU. The first issue of the organisation's Press Service in 1976 carried an article by him entitled 'Is NATO still necessary?' No prizes for guessing Mason's answer.

TERRY DUFFY, president of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, is secretary of the LCTU. Duffy has written articles for the



DENIS HEALEY — paid correspondent for CIA-financed magazine.

Press Service attacking the Labour left, saying it 'wishes to turn Britain into an Eastern European style peoples' democracy'.

DAVID OWEN, former foreign secretary. Owen is a vice-chairperson of the LCTU. Other vice-chairs include former defence minister James Wellbeloved.

ROY HATTERSLEY, shadow environment minister. Former member of the CIA-financed Campaign for Democratic Socialism in the 1960s. Currently another vice-chairperson of the LCTU.

MICHAEL STEWART, now Lord Stewart, foreign secretary in Harold Wilson's government. One-time member of the CDS, now president of the LCTU.

FRANK CHAPPLE, general secretary of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union. Chapple is treasurer of the LCTU-sponsored Press Service. He has also attended a lunch designed to raise cash for Truamid, the right-wing organisation in the unions financed by big business.

BILL RODGERS, one of the current leaders of the Labour right in

Parliament, who recently threatened to split the Labour Party if the left gained control. A former leading light in the CDS, he is now a vice-chairperson of the LCTU, and was quoted in the *Sunday Times* as saying that if NATO was funding the LCTU it would make no difference to his involvement in the organisation. In the current Press Service Rodgers writes of the need to modernise nuclear weapons.

SID WEIGHELL, general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen. Weighell is one of the trade union vice-chairpersons of the LCTU, and has been quoted as saying that receiving money from NATO is 'the same as getting grants from the TUC'.

Vice

Other vice chairpersons of the LCTU on the trade union side include Sid Vincent (Mineworkers), Bill Sims (Steelworkers), and Hector Smith (Blastfurnacemen).

As well as these gentlemen's association with CIA and/or NATO organisations, all of them, as far as one can ascertain, are also opposed to the decisions of the last Labour

Party conference to democratise the Labour Party. Now there's a coincidence.

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SHEERNESS, Kent, on Wednesday of last week. The government's announcement the previous day that the police would crack down on picket 'bullies' is to have its first test outside Sheerness Steel, where hundreds of ISTC members at the private steel firm are disobeying their union's instruction to walk out.

The scabbing operation is well planned. Before the first pickets arrive at dawn, the anti-strike workforce is already in the plant, equipped with sleeping bags and flasks of soup, while police with dogs and walkie-talkies patrol the perimeter fence.

Coaches bringing strikers from the main steel centres, as well as some 300 Kent miners, are stopped by the police on their way to Sheerness — sometimes two and three times. The drivers' documents are scrutinised and their vehicles examined.

By 6.30am, 1,500 police are assembled in the town, most lined up by the steel plant, arms linked. A similar number of pickets arrive and they are allowed to block the main entrance. But with nothing going in or out there is no focus for action, and with no leadership shown by the steel union officials, the pickets spend much of the day moving about aimlessly.

Wives

A large contingent of steel strikers' wives from Yorkshire wear badges declaring 'Steel women's power' and carry a banner with the message 'South Yorks women hate scabs'. They have come to challenge the Sheerness Steel Workers' Wives Association, which joins a 400-strong anti-strike march through the town.

The police isolate the march from the pickets. The local press, the Freedom Association, and Tory

Geoffrey Sheridan reports from Sheerness

farmers all help to sustain the hostility to the pickets in the town, where they are refused admittance to cafes, pubs, and hotels.

The police make occasional forays into the pickets, knocking one woman to the ground and kicking her in the stomach. One picket's leg is broken. A picket organiser describes the police as 'animals'.

The Kent miners are particular targets. When their contingent prepares to leave, it is broken up by the police who attack small sections. Of the 21 arrests during the day, 14 are miners. They are taken straight to court. Their fines total £1,750.

Eight steelworkers from West Germany who have come to support the mass picket say that in their country boycotts and secondary picketing are illegal, and the police behave brutally towards strikers. If James Prior has his way, these measures will shortly be introduced here.

Sheerness Steel holds out against mass picket



Cue for police violence

THURSDAY morning. A token presence on the picket line after yesterday's mass stake-out of Sheerness Steel. The dozen or so strikers who have come from Rotherham wear stickers declaring 'Hadfields massacre. 14.2.80. We were there'.

A cop suggests they should have a sticker reading 'We failed at Sheerness'. The pickets reply that they failed at Hadfields at first. Morale is high.

The police are friendly today, offering to stop every approaching vehicle so that the pickets can speak to the drivers. 'We're on first name terms with the police here,' a striker comments. 'Their idea is to soften us up.'

For half an hour three of us are engaged in a discussion with a middle-aged constable about the strike, the state of the steel industry in the West, police brutality ('I haven't seen any in 17 years in the force', the cop says).

The constable insists he is working class, and that he doesn't like privilege in this society. He acknowledges that in part that is what he is protecting. He is told that's all he's protecting.

'But suppose there are 20 of you here and 200 of the workers come out of the plant and grab you, shouting "Fuck off"? We'll protect you.'

The pickets don't believe the police would do anything of the



STEEL STRIKERS Winton Campbell (left) and David Motloch on the picket line at Sheerness on Thursday.

kind, arguing that the only people they can depend on for their defence are other strikers and their supporters.

'The government has given the police a free hand to lay into us,' says Winton Campbell from ISTC Rotherham. 'And the Tories are trying to win public backing for this, so that we can be isolated.'

'If the picketing laws are passed,' he adds, 'we'll have even more violence from the police. They want to smash flying and secondary pickets, so that effective strikes become impossible.'

David Motloch, also from ISTC Rotherham, says that confronting the laws will mean maintaining all the action necessary to win the steel

and other strikes. 'The TUC can't just sit back and let these laws be implemented. There's got to be a general strike.'

They both consider that the steel strike is turning from a pay dispute into a fight over the cutbacks of plants and jobs. The general feeling, they say, is that the government has to go.

And the objective at Sheerness Steel? The pickets aim to cut off essential supplies such as oxygen and oil to bring the plant to a halt. They want Transport Union members to obey Moss Evans' instruction not to cross picket lines.

And they're waiting to see if the strike committees 'up North' organise another mass picket.

Prior's law: the old, old story

IN proposing to curb 'trade union power', Tory employment secretary Jim Prior is trying nothing new.

Ever since working people began to organise, bosses and their governments have tried to stop them. And even since workers have fought back.

In Jan. 1799, Prime Minister Pitt agreed to bring in a bill to amend the Combination Act of 1799 and 1800, came into being.

Defiance

The first outlawed the formation of unions if these aimed to improve wages, hours, or conditions of employment. The second specified that trade union pickets could be prosecuted for obstructing union subscriptions.

Both laws were intended to organise and to ban on trade pickets. Finally, 20 years of campaigning and defiance saw the repeal of the laws in 1824 and 1825. But union members remained liable for prosecution under the common law.

Aside from the common law, other legal means were sought to curb unions. In 1833 six founder members of the Tolpuddle branch of the Grand National Union of Trade Unions were deported for 'taking an illegal oath' — the membership oath of the union.

Tolpuddle

Again tens of thousands of working people showed they were unwilling to accept the law in a demonstration which took place. Then in 1874, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed.

The 1874 Act saw a new dawn in the picketing law. In 1871 the Criminal Law Amendment Act made picketing illegal.

The 1874 Act, which had been established three years earlier, immediately began organising a campaign for the right to picket. Demonstrations were again organised and prospective parliamentary candidates were quizzed by trade unions on their attitude to the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

Ingredients

The pressure was successful, and the Act was repealed in 1875.

So the first hundred odd years of unions and legal attempts to curb them had seen attacks on the right to organise, the right to strike, and the right to picket. The same ingredients, albeit in a lesser form, are in Prior's Bill.

Mass action defended union rights in the 19th century, it can do the same today.



WIVES of steelworkers joined the picket. Their slogan: 'Steel women's power'

Photo: GEOFFREY SHERIDAN (Socialist Challenge)

Prior's law: the old, old story

JIM Prior's proposals to fine trade unionists who take part in picketing are a throwback to the past.

In 1901 a predecessor of Lord Denning ruled in the Taff Vale judgement that unions were liable for damages caused to companies during strikes. In other words, if the bosses suffered a loss of profits during a dispute the union had to cough up.

The Taff Vale case spurred on socialists and trade unionists to organise politically, independently of the Tory and Liberal parties.

In the 1906 general election 29 Labour MPs were elected. The same year Parliament passed the Trades Dispute Bill reversing Taff Vale.

But still the judges tried to interfere in unions' affairs. In 1909 the Law Lords decided that unions could not use their funds for political purposes.

That spell financial ruin for the Labour Party, and again the protests started inside and outside Parliament. The Lords' judgement was reversed in 1913.

Fourteen years later, after the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, the Tory government saw its chance to go on the attack once more. The 1927 Trades Dispute Act ruled that union members had to 'opt in' rather than 'opt out' if they wished to pay the political levy to the Labour Party.

It also declared that 'sympathetic' or 'general' strikes were illegal.

It was not until the post-war Labour government of 1945-51 that this Act was repealed. The depression of the 1930s and Ramsay MacDonald's decision to take part in a coalition government in 1931 severely wounded the ability of trade unionists to fight back.

But that is not the situation today. The unions and the Labour Party are much stronger than they were in the 1930s, which is why even if Prior's law is passed it could be made inoperable within a couple of weeks.

One lesson of the early part of this century is that the Labour Party in Parliament was formed to secure union rights. That's why the Labour Party should declare its commitment to fight the Prior Bill now inside and outside Parliament.

Another reason is that in one aspect at least Prior's proposals really are a case of 'the old, old story'. This involves the section which intends to outlaw a strike taken for 'some extraneous motive'.

That is more or less the same as the ban on sympathetic or general strike action imposed in 1927. This time, don't let's wait 20 years to get that reversed.

After pit ballot failure

RECALL WALES TUC

By Valerie Coultas

PHILIP Weekes, the director of the South Wales Coal Board, must have taken a few tips from Leyland boss Michael Edwardes.

He described the attempt to get the go-ahead for industrial action in the pits last week as 'bloody madness'. Then, threatening a closure of the entire coalfield, he persuaded the South Wales miners to vote by 22,000 to 4,000 not to endorse their executive's call to strike on 25 February.

Previous ballots taken in the South Wales coalfield have endorsed the executive's decision to fight steel and pit closures by industrial action, so this result came as something of a surprise. Why the change of heart?

The British Steel Corporation decided to cut back on its imports of

'The Welsh TUC will not see this town derelicted by the misguided market economics of the Tories.'

George Wright, General Secretary, Welsh TUC.

foreign coking coal the week prior to the ballot. Weekes used this to suggest that the threat to jobs was not so great as in fact it is. Eight thousand miners' jobs are still on the line unless the steel closures are stopped.

Bilston, Corby, Shotton... Port Talbot and Llanwern?

MOTION NO 20. STEEL CLOSURES.

'That this conference calls upon the executive council to oppose any further closures in the steel industry and that BSC be pressed to review its policies regarding the future of steelmaking in the UK.'

Corby No 2

This is how R. Southam (Corby No 2) moved the successful motion on the struggle on jobs at last year's Iron and Steel Trades Confederation conference:

'A great deal of emotion was generated at the conference last year over the Bilston issue culminating in a



Proposer R. Southam

threat of industrial action if the notice was not withdrawn.

'A threat, of course, was then successful, but where are we today? Well, Bilston for all intents and purposes is closed. Corby is next under

The Welsh TUC, and particularly its general secretary George Wright, has not taken a consistent position on jobs and stuck to it.

George Wright has talked a lot about opposing redundancies in steel and coal, although he always agreed that 'some cuts were necessary'. But when the crunch came and the miners asked for a

'The Welsh have called on the British TUC to lead and support us because of the problems we face. If that support is not forthcoming and whatever the consequences we will fight for the jobs and children of Wales after 31 March.'

George Wright, General Secretary, Welsh TUC.

commitment to strike action from the Welsh TUC, Wright backed down and allowed the British TUC to take over.

Despite the massive response to the Welsh TUC's day of action from miners, dockers and railway workers, Wright was not prepared to break with Len Murray and lead a fight in Wales. He allowed talks with the Tories in London to isolate those trade unionists campaigning for action on jobs in Wales.

The leaders of the steel and mining unions nationally also refused to give the South Wales miners any official backing.

But the South Wales miners have a tradition of militancy that could have been used to counter these attempts to isolate them. Only, however, if their executive was prepared to give them a perspective for doing this. It was here that Emlyn Williams and the miners' leaders failed.

They stuck to their traditional approach to organising strikes, calling a meeting of lodge officials and hoping that their members would endorse their call for action.

Fighting against job loss is no easy battle. Already the Leyland workers, along with steelworkers at Corby,

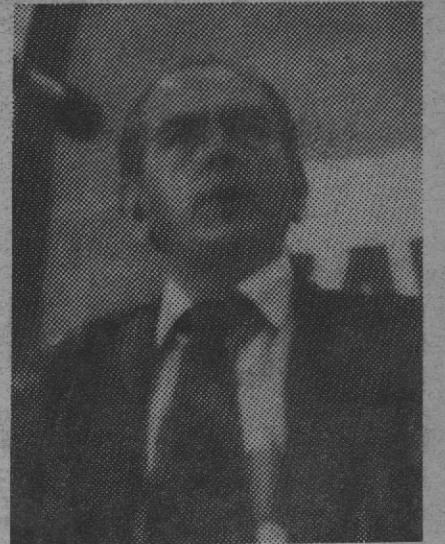
'We want the pay issue settled with dignity. On jobs we will not move one step backward.'

George Wright, General Secretary, Welsh TUC.

Shotton, and East Moors, have experienced the ruthlessness of employers in nationalised industries. The press has left no stone unturned in its attempts to blame union militancy for job loss.

The Welsh miners' leaders should have gone directly to the ranks of the steelworkers, railway workers and dockers in Wales and in England and explained why the fight on jobs was crucial.

If George Wright would not give them the backing they needed they should have formed an alliance of their



MINERS' leader Emlyn Williams

own in Wales between dockers, steelworkers, railway workers and miners.

The ballot on jobs prior to this vote showed that the miners want to fight. But they're wary of going it completely alone.

The Welsh TUC is the body that has the authority to plan out a co-ordinated struggle on jobs. It should be recalled immediately, and miners and steelworkers who see the importance of fighting on jobs should get into the factories, the railways, the docks and the streets in Wales and argue their case for strike action now while the steelworkers are still fighting.



Welsh workers march to save jobs, 28 January

really is sad about Bilston. It's very tragic, especially when you remember all the support that they've had over the last year.

'I believe that this conference must state today that Bilston was the last closure. Now it's time to put an end to BSC's crazy policies starting with the executive committee opposing any further closures.

Talks should then take

place with the BSC in order that a sensible policy for the future of the industry can be determined.

'A policy based not only on economics but social grounds, which to my mind must be the prime consideration. I ask conference to support motion 20.'

The motion was carried overwhelmingly with only 4 against.

The steelworkers at Corby, despite their militant intentions, were left to fight alone. The British Steel Corporation kept on telling them that if they accepted reduced manning levels and didn't press for higher wages the plant would become 'viable'.

Closed

They're about to stop

producing steel at Corby anymore, and Shotton is to be closed completely.

Port Talbot and Llanwern need not suffer the same fate. But unless rank and file steelworkers take the fight into their union nationally, and into every other union in Wales through demanding a recall of the Wales TUC to plan the fight on jobs, their fate will be the same.

SUPPORT THE STEEL STRIKE

STEEL STRIKERS HOLD FIRST NATIONAL MEETING

By Clive Turnbull

A MEETING of representatives of a number of steel strike committees which took place in Sheffield on Monday was the first step to overcoming some of the major problems now facing the steelworkers.

It has been left to local areas to implement the call to stop all movement of steel. Several ports, particularly in the North, are still receiving deliveries and have never been picketed.

Meanwhile at Ford, Dagenham, for example, two or three mini-buses carrying pickets have arrived on a given day from different areas with no clear objectives.

It has been obvious to many militants that national co-ordination is vital to ensure the effectiveness of the strike. This has not been forthcoming.

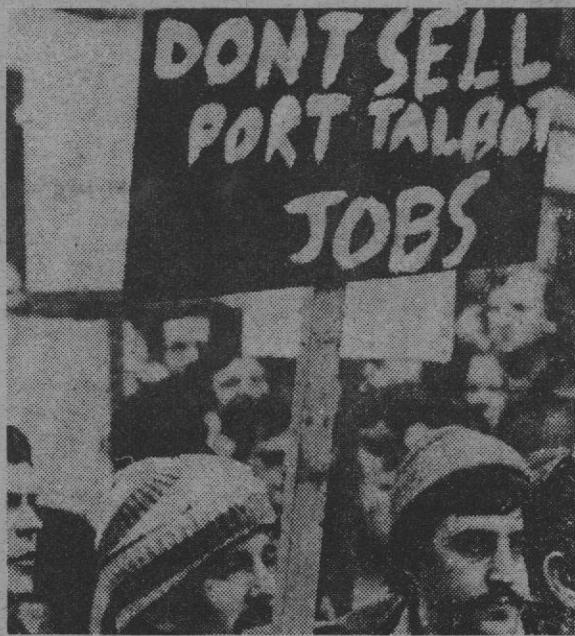
The official national strike committee has only met twice since the strike began.

The problem was highlighted at Sheerness

where a mass picket was organised on Wednesday of last week long after the private sector had been called out. The mass picket had little effect.

Steelworkers' Banner, the official strike bulletin which is produced nationally by ISTC, has not acted as an organiser. It has not carried information on the many lessons that local steelworkers have learned during the strike.

More seriously, the bulletin has not provided a scrap of information to ISTC members on the



various negotiations between the unions, BSC management, and the Tory government. ISTC members only get to hear of what is

happening through the Tory press, or from their executive members if they're lucky.

The union leadership

has only just presented a formal pay claim to management — in the eighth week of the strike — and the membership has had no report on what it is, let alone the opportunity to discuss or vote on it.

In spite of all these handicaps and the division with the private sector, the

strike is as solid as ever among BSC workers.

With the right leadership the strike can be won. The sticker produced by the Warrington steelworkers sums it up: if Bill Sirs won't lead the strike, he should 'do us a favour' and make way for those who can and will lead it.

What the meeting discussed

OFFICIALS of several strike committees throughout England, Scotland and Wales held a two-hour meeting to exchange information on 25 February.

The main emphasis of the meeting was on the movement of steel by stockholders, the private sector, and ports throughout Britain.

A particular concern was expressed about the lack of effective picketing of steel coming in through the docks.

It was agreed that a larger meeting be held next week consisting of strike committee representatives from all the regions and unions involved in the strike.

— Statement by Ted Thorne, secretary, No 3 division ISTC strike committee

Prior's law: the old, old story

JIM Prior's attack on trade union rights is the third such offensive launched in recent years.

The first was in 1969, when Labour's Employment Secretary, Barbara Castle, introduced In Place of Strife.

Castle's proposals included a compulsory 'cooling off' period while ballots were held, the establishment of a Commission of Industrial Relations, and the setting up of a compulsory register of trade unions.

In the forefront of the campaign against In Place of Strife was the Communist Party-led Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. Two strikes called by the LCDTU were supported by 150,000 and then 250,000 workers.

Argued

Leading members of the TUC argued against Castle's proposals and enough Labour MPs said they would vote against the measures to make the government retreat.

A number of Castle's proposals surfaced again in 1971 when the Tory government of Edward Heath passed the Industrial Relations Act. This included compulsory ballots, the establishment of an Industrial Relations Court to rule on disputes, the fining and possible jailing of those who defied the court, and the granting of legal authority to union/company agreements.

In December 1970 half a million workers took part in a strike organised by the LCDTU against the Bill. This was followed by official action early in 1971.

Dockers

The confrontation came to a head in July 1972 when five London dockers were arrested and jailed for being in contempt of the Industrial Relations Court.

An immediate walk-out by London dockers was joined by tens of thousands of workers in other industries. With a general strike looming, the government released the dockers and the Industrial Relations Act fell into disrepute.

To defeat the Industrial Relations Act dozens of local committees were set up — the most authoritative being those established by local trades councils or powerful shop stewards' committees.

Verbal

While the TUC offered strong verbal opposition to the Act, it was the mass movement which secured its demise. Similar movements also defeated In Place of Strife and most other anti-union legislation from the Combination Acts onwards.

If Prior's laws are a familiar story, the way to defeat them can be just as familiar — organise now against Prior's laws.



Workers at the Stone Platt factory after they had taken over the factory against closure.

Occupation challenge to closures

By Martin Collins and Pete Clifford

OFFER us flexibility, the 850 workers at the Platt, Saco, Lowell textile equipment manufacturing plant in Oldham were told by management earlier this month, and there will still be two hundred jobs at the plant by the end of the year.

The workers decided to take a different option. On 18 February — the same day as 4,000 demonstrated a few miles away in Manchester against cuts and unemployment — the Platts workers voted to occupy.

In an area that has seen a wave of closures of engineering plants, with over 7,000 jobs disappearing in the last few months, the Platts workers are the first to show militant resistance to closure and what they regard as the government's policy of de-industrialisation.

Support

Their plant is part of the Stone Platts Industries multi-national, and they are now seeking support from other engineering workers in order to extend the action to the companies' plants in Bolton and Accrington.

Eddie Holland, the convenor at Oldham, says: 'We have co-operated all along the line to ensure viability, and the sack is the price we're expected to pay.'

Diversity

Before Christmas management had promised new electrical products that would diversify production at the Oldham site in order to ensure its future. But then it announced that it couldn't afford the £1.3m necessary to purchase the equipment, and that the plant would have to close.

The Platts workers regard these moves with cynicism. The firm has received a government grant of £1.8m, but the workers have no idea where this money went.

'We'd like to see the credit and debit side of the books,' says Ted Brennan, the representative of TASS, the Engineering Union's white-collar section, at Platts. 'Morally the plant is ours. We have the right to know what is going on.'

With cheap textiles coming from abroad, the chauvinist demand for import controls has been widely taken up by textile workers — and the employers.

When engineers recently took industrial action on pay, the Stone Platts company chairperson, E G Smalley, told his workforce: 'This kind of action can

only benefit our foreign competitors.'

A similar theme has been taken up in the House of Lords — against Platt, Saco, Lowell. 'This firm,' said Lord Rhodes, a Labour peer, 'used to be criticised because it sold textile machinery abroad for other people to use. This meant British manufacturers were suffering great competition.'

'Now the people who were criticised have folded up.'

Textile manufacturers have mounted a campaign to 'save British jobs', by which they mean profits for British firms.

Platts itself has shown how the employers put such ideas into practice. In spite of an average return on its capital investment in Britain of 17 per cent a year, it is now negotiating to invest £4m in a new plant in South Korea.

'It's the kind of state,' Ted Brennan comments, 'where if you try to organise they send you for a three-week holiday. When you come back you can't walk.'

Revolution

'We are in the middle of a technological revolution,' he adds, 'with machines replacing people. We could be on a 25-hour week, but instead capital goes elsewhere.'

The occupation committee is well

STRIKE NEWS

Now that Robbo has gone, it's...

The long haul for BL workers

By Paul Smith and Jude Woodward

DEREK Robinson, Engineering Union convenor at Longbridge, BL's largest car plant, is out of a job. He was victimised by Michael Edwardes, BL boss, whose hard man style of management is fast becoming mythical, and not supported by a workforce that voted nine to one against any action to defend him.

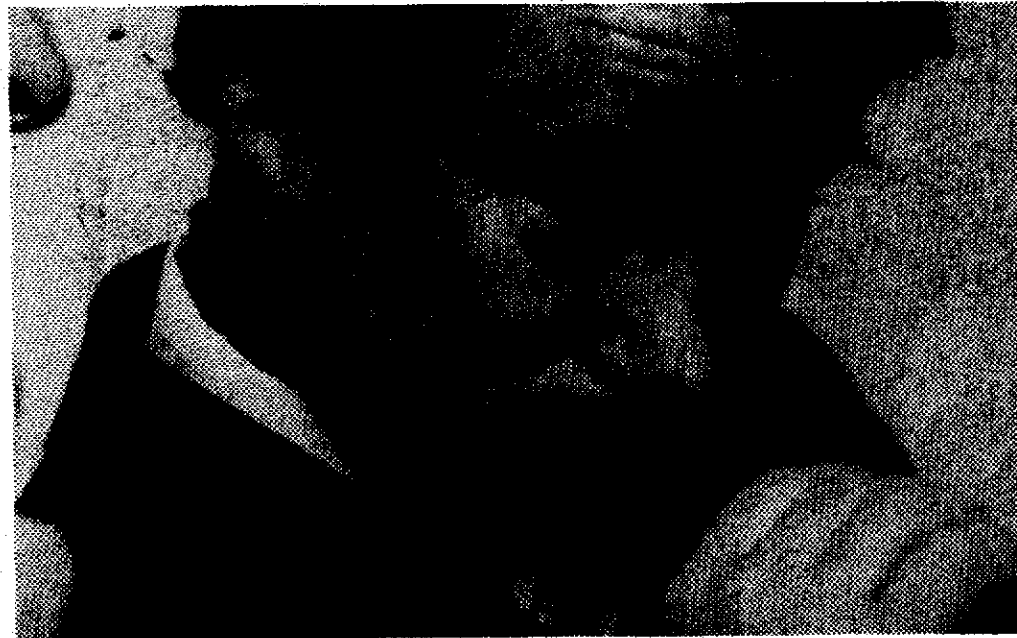
Before he was sacked Robinson was jokingly known as one of the most powerful people in British industry — but Edwardes showed him who runs BL.

But it won't be just Robinson who suffers as a result of the sacking — the whole BL workforce stands to lose out. A few days before the Longbridge workforce voted against action for Robinson, Edwardes announced that 50,000 BL workers could expect to be laid off indefinitely due to bad sales figures on BL cars. They also face a pay offer of between 5 and 10 per cent coupled with stringent measures aimed at dramatically stepping up productivity by attacking union rights in BL. The offer was overwhelmingly rejected by a full ballot of employees, but Edwardes explained last week that he might just have to go ahead anyway.

This is what the successful sacking of Robinson really means — a tough management offensive against a demoralised and disorganised workforce. The sacking of Robinson is a real blow for rank and file organisation within the plants. How did Edwardes get away with it?

It is questions of viability, profits and jobs that underlie the whole situation at BL. Edwardes, and other BL bosses before him, threaten closure and redundancy at every turn. It is the inadequacy of the unions' response to this that has got the BL workforce on the run.

In *Comment*, a theoretical journal of the Communist Party, of which he is a member, Robinson explained his approach to the problem of BL — make it the most prosperous



MICHAEL EDWARDES — unions no alternative to his threats

car firm in the world. An aim that can't be far from Michael Edwardes' own heart.

To achieve this, Robinson, and other senior stewards on the BL Combine, went along with management propaganda against 'wild-cat' strikes, defended union participation in management via the Ryder plan, and applauded Edwardes when he addressed the Coventry shop stewards conference after his appointment explaining how hardline management and redundancy would 'save' BL.

For years the works committee and convenors' office at Longbridge had defended participation, quashed unofficial action and sat on grievances. When it came to his own sacking Robinson, and the rest, did just what they had done before — nothing. Having put himself at the head of a campaign to show that

Longbridge had a disciplined and productive workforce it is not surprising that workers were confused when it came to Robinson's own fate. Wouldn't he have argued against an unofficial walk-out?

In the circumstances it is surprising that the majority of the plant did walk out when the news of his sacking filtered through. The day after his sacking Longbridge was completely closed; Canley, Castle Bromwich, Browns Lane and Radford had walk-outs; and mass meetings were held in many plants.

But the stewards let the initiative slip away. They did not issue a call for generalised strike action throughout BL; they did not organise flying pickets; there was little effort to organise or enthuse those who were on strike.

Management, on the other hand, was hard at work against the strike. On Thursday 22 November, three days after the sacking, Longbridge workers were forced to queue in the rain for hours to get paid. At the head of the queue they were grilled by management before being handed a pay cheque — they were offered safe conduct through the gates; they were told BL would close if they didn't return to work.

Uncertainty about the AUEW's attitude began to affect the action; and by Tuesday union president Duffy called off the strike. In justification for this Duffy used Robinson's own time-worn argument: strike action would permanently close Longbridge.

The union commission of inquiry reported its findings at the beginning of February. This shameful document said Robinson had been bad, but that his dismissal was unjustified. Duffy went to painful lengths to exonerate any workers who did not want to join the proposed strike for reinstatement.

The mass meeting at Longbridge to decide on strike action was postponed twice and eventually voted to ditch Robinson, while he kept silent. As one shop steward leaving the meeting told *Socialist Challenge*: 'Robinson dug his own grave, but the trouble is we could all go down with him.'

Robinson's successor as union boss at Longbridge looks like being a man after his own heart. Jack Adams is a fellow CP member and advocate of participation.

Adams will have a heavy load to bear. If Robinson's sacking is to be just bad, and not a disaster, for BL workers then the independent political and organisational strength of the BL shop stewards' Combine has to be rebuilt as rapidly as possible. If Edwardes can impose a lousy pay deal and enforce job mobility on the workforce then there will be even more ground to be made up.

Robinson has gone, it looks like for good. Shop stewards throughout BL have a long haul to make sure the same thing can't happen again.

Manchester fights racism

By Pete Clifford

THE successful Oldham based campaign to prevent the deportation of Abdul Azad, a local Bengali youth, has boosted the confidence of the Asian community. Defence committees for black people facing deportation have mushroomed in the Manchester area — there is a real willingness to fight.

In *South Manchester* the Nasira Begum Defence Committee was the first campaign to link anti-racists and black organisations in fighting harassment in the communities.

Nasira Begum had been divorced from her British passport-bearing husband and hence was judged an undesirable person in the eyes of the immigration authorities, who threatened her with deportation. The campaign in her defence built a 200-strong demonstration and won support in the local trade union movement.

In *Oldham*, Shukar Mohammed faces deportation. A resident in Britain since 1961, with an uninterrupted work record until the diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease in 1971, he was given only a 6 months visa when he returned from holidaying with his family in Pakistan.

The campaign to keep Shukar Mohammed in Britain is being organised by the Oldham Campaign Against Racist Laws and is supported by all the major black organisations, by Oldham Trades Council and by the district Labour Party.

In *Rochdale* the campaign to reunite the family of Anwar Ditta is gathering momentum. Anwar left her three children in Pakistan when she

and her husband returned to Britain, where she was born, to find work and a home. The immigration authorities now say that she has not proved the children are really hers and will not let them join her in this country.

The Anwar Ditta Defence Committee has organised a demonstration for Saturday 1 March, assembling at 12 noon at Church Stile, Rochdale.

It is clear that although these campaigns centre on individual cases a victory in any one would be a victory for all black people.

But if the campaigns are to be successful anti-racists and the black community will have to stand firm. James Anderton, Manchester's top cop, has made it clear that he intends

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE IMMIGRATION LAWS
Annual General Meeting
Saturday 15 March, 10am-5pm
Waterloo Action Centre,
Bayliss Rd, SE1

to root out those 'attempting to subvert the black community' (from a speech in Newcastle).

At the end of last year Dave Hallsworth, CRE executive member and secretary of the Tameside Trades Council, was fined £650 for organising a street meeting in defence of Glas Uddin, a local Bengali facing deportation. The site was a traditional one for political campaigners of all shades.

The Tories are pressing ahead with their iniquitous changes to the



ANWAR DITTA petitioning for her children to be allowed to join her

Photo: WOMEN'S VOICE

Immigration Act, which include preventing all but EEC and British born women from bringing their husbands into this country. There will be a vote on these proposals within 40 days.

The Campaign Against Racist Laws will be mounting vigils outside Parliament every Tuesday and Thursday until the vote. The vigils will begin at 2pm opposite St Stephen's entrance.

The Campaign Against Racist Laws recall conference will be on 22 March; all local anti-racist organisations, trade unions and so on should send delegates. Contact CARL, PO Box 353, London NW5 or phone 01-485 2872 for details.

NO NAZIS IN SOUTHWARK

ON Sunday 2 March the National Front will be taking to the streets of Southwark, South London. This march is the first of a series aimed at reestablishing their fortunes after their failure in the May general election.

The theme of the march will be 'deport the muggers'. Both the National Front and the British Movement have been 'active' in Southwark for some time — doing regular paper sales, attacking individual anti-fascists, attempting to bomb a local community resource centre and breaking up meetings!

All anti-fascists need to respond to this new NF initiative. The massive impact of the anti-fascist marches in '78 and '79 and of the ANL Carnivals needs to be drive home again in Southwark and wherever else the Front decides to show its face.

The Southwark Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and the ANL have organised a counter demonstration. It will assemble at 10am at Elephant and Castle. The Front may appear to be finished but it is up to the anti-fascist movement to make sure that it is.

Parliament has double standards for women

By Valerie Coultas

CASUALTY wards in hospitals will receive more visits from women suffering from septic abortions if any part of John Corrie's abortion Bill gets passed in the House of Commons.

If the 24-week time limit becomes law women will either face unwanted pregnancies or exploitation from private abortion clinics.

No woman likes the idea of having an abortion, particularly one late on in pregnancy. The one per cent of women who do have to have late abortions are young women too scared to reveal that they are pregnant or older women who associate missed periods with the menopause.

These women are unlikely to accept their fate. Unwanted pregnancies can become a nightmare not only for the mother but also for the child when it is born. Women will turn to the backstreet butchers rather than face the total disruption of their lives.

As Jo Richardson explained in the House of Commons on 15 February, the real time limit will not be 24 weeks. Doctors will work to a 22-week or 20-week limit in practice. So why have Labour MPs like Stan Orme colluded with Liberals like David Steel and Tories like Gerald Vaughan and accepted the view that abortion should be restricted to 24 weeks?

Conceded

They have done so because they have conceded the argument of the anti-abortionists that abortion should not be allowed if the foetus is viable, capable of surviving outside the womb; that women have no absolute right to destroy a foetus after this time.

For 2,000 years moral arguments like these have been used to stop women controlling their own bodies. But women are human beings, not simply wombs that produce babies. The life of a foetus is a potential life. The life of the woman is one that exists in the real world. Whether a woman can work in the job she

chooses, live with whom she chooses, how she chooses — these are the issues at stake in the abortion debate.

And it's because the anti-abortionists oppose the idea that women should have their own identity that they only see women as baby producers and not as people. They reject the idea that women should have a choice about how they live their lives.

Facilities

Anti-abortionists, like SPUC, have nothing to say about nursery facilities, nothing to say about educational and job opportunities for women. They have nothing to say about how to free women from oppression in our society. Their main concern is to reinforce women's oppression, to reinforce domestic drudgery and keep women in the home.

Once you defend any time limit on abortion you fall into the trap set by the anti-abortionists. If foetal survival is accepted as the criterion for deciding the upper limit on abortions, then what happens when it becomes possible for a ten week foetus to survive in a test tube? Is a ten week limit then necessary, Mr Orme?

Pro-abortion campaigners should stand up to the compulsory motherhood arguments whether they come from SPUC, the Tories or Labour MPs. You can only concede to the arguments of the anti-abortionists if you view women as the 'irresponsible sex', incapable of making decisions about their own lives, incapable of deciding themselves when they should terminate a pregnancy.

But when women are taught from birth to care for others, to be good wives and mothers, and above all to value children, it is hardly likely that they are going to make decisions like this lightheartedly. Men have never had to be responsible about their sexual activity. Why should Parliament be allowed to apply double standards to women?



A dream image of women not so far from many a modern man's heart?

WOMEN FIGHT PRIOR

By Penny Duggan

THE South East Region of the TUC has called for a special women's rights contingent of the national TUC demonstration against the Prior proposals called for 9 March.

The contingent will highlight the effects Prior's anti-proposals would have on women.

The Employment Bill will take away the automatic right that presently exists for women to maternity leave and to reinstatement in their jobs.

Not only does the Bill exempt firms with five or fewer employees, but also all firms who do not find it 'reasonably practicable' to make such provision, and those where the woman is offered an alternative and 'unreasonably' refuses.

This goes along with the introduction of more bureaucratic red tape surrounding the procedures by which women can claim this right.

The Tory government is not only threatening women's maternity rights. Women are suffering a huge burden of the cuts in social spending in terms of jobs and facilities. Foreign women are being denied the right to marry the husbands they choose. Abortion rights are under attack.

Freedom

Women who have enjoyed a taste of freedom through their increased participation in the workforce are being forced back into the home — back into financial dependence on men.

Women have shown in the steel



Prior's law attacks women's rights too

strikes and in the abortion campaign that they are a vital and growing force within the trade union movement. That they will not lie down and be trodden on by the Tories or anyone else.

The Tories wish to exploit every division, every weak point in the armoury of the trade union movement. Unity is crucial to success in the battles ahead.

The South East Region TUC took a positive stand in support of women when it helped to organise the mass lobby of Parliament against the Corrie Bill on 5 February — a lobby that drew 20,000 people.

Now it has produced 5,000 leaflets to ensure that women's needs are brought to the attention of every trade unionist who turns out to demonstrate against Jim Prior's anti-trade union laws on 9 March.

FIGHTBACK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A working conference to pool information and experience, to discuss the coming struggles and to stimulate the growth of dialogue between women in the labour movement and the women's movement.

Women delegates preferably, but men not excluded.

Saturday 22 March, 11am-5pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square WC1

Registration £2, payable to Fightback for Women's Rights. Creche available. Contact address: 41 Ellington St, London N7.

THE Committee on Safety of Medicines has refused Upjohn Ltd, manufacturers of the controversial contraceptive Depo-Provera, an extended licence for its general use in Britain.

The committee is particularly worried about the effect of Depo-Provera on babies when it reaches them in their mother's milk.

Labour MP Lewis Carter Jones, questioning the safety of Depo-Provera in the House of Commons last week, pointed out that while oral contraceptives were not used on nursing mothers, Depo-Provera, which contains a far greater dose of synthetic hormones than the pill, was.

Depo-Provera injections can last from three to six months. Unlike the pill you can't stop taking it even if you want to.

The women who first experienced the use of this drug were women in the 'Third World'. Depo-Provera was designed to be used on a large scale as a cheap solution to the problems of 'over-population' — so much simpler than the more expensive one of tackling poverty and scarce resources head-on.

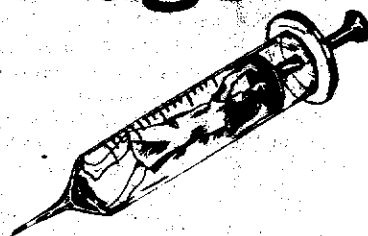
Depo-Provera has many unpleasant side effects. It is known to cause irregular bleeding. It has been linked to cancer of the cervix and may have harmful effects on fertility.

Hair loss, acne, change in skin colour, migraines, nausea, and loss of sex drive have also been reported as effects of this drug.

Now even Upjohn admit that large doses of this drug have had a masculinising effect on women. 'Some instances of female foetal masculinisation, enlargement of the clitoris have been observed on large doses, but these have reverted to normal within a few weeks.'

The Campaign Against Depo-

Would you use this drug?



Provera seems to have been successful in beginning to raise awareness about the needs of women in controlling their own fertility. It can be contacted at 372 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

DEMONSTRATION 'Women will defy the law'. 6pm, 29 February. Assemble Bull Ring, north of Waterloo Station, York Road. Disperse at Brunswick Square.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CORRIE one day meeting. 1 March, Marble Arch Intensive English School, 21 Star St, W2 — to discuss the future of the campaign.

NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN Planning Meeting. 15 March, Leicester.

NAC BENEFIT Women only. Holborn Assembly Rooms, Johns Circus, Northampton St, WC1. 29 February, following demo.

EYEWITNESS REPORT BY KATHY KIRKHAM BUILDING A NEW NICARAGUA

'WE HAVE WON the battle for political freedom, but we have yet to win economic independence.' The words of planning minister Henry Ruiz sum up the crisis threatening the future of Nicaragua's revolution.

With the final overthrow of the brutal Somoza dictatorship last July, the Sandinista-led government inherited a country in ruins. Yet the Nicaraguans are pressing ahead with a long list of radical measures. Already they have:

- **confiscated** the vast wealth of Somoza and his supporters,
- **nationalised** all Nicaraguan banks, all insurance companies, mines and fisheries,
- **expropriated** 55 per cent of cultivable land, leaving 25 per cent in the hands of small proprietors and only 20 per cent with big capitalist landowners,
- **taken control** of the export of all major cash crops,
- **brought in** price controls, rent cuts and food subsidies to increase workers' real wages,
- **mounted** a nation-wide literacy campaign,
- **earmarked** 62 per cent of the government budget for health, education and housing (compared

with Somoza's 17 per cent),

■ **launched** a new economic plan to raise production, reduce inflation and create 94,000 extra jobs.

But starved of foreign aid and hampered by growing resistance from bourgeois farmers and factory owners, Nicaragua still faces formidable odds. International solidarity counts more than ever.

Says FSLN Europe Secretary Sylvia MacKewan: 'It's very important for us to have this support now — much more than when we were fighting.' She emphasises moral as well as material solidarity. 'In countries where our aims are being distorted we need people to defend our revolution and explain to workers what we are doing.'

Nicaragua's three priority projects — the literacy campaign, medical supplies, and a litre of milk a day for every child — provide a useful jumping off point for fund-raising events and street collections. Early efforts by IMG branches, including a film tour in Scotland, have brought an enthusiastic public response. But more action is needed.



CRUZADA NACIONAL DE ALFABETIZACION Ministerio de Educación

'LITERACY IS LIBERATION'

TO SEE school students cheerfully drilling in the scorching sun is no unusual sight in Managua these days. It is part of their training for a particularly tough assignment. In March they leave their classrooms to spend five months in the remote rural areas. There, in the fields, under trees, in village homes, they will teach their country's poorest communities to read and write.

This is Nicaragua's new literacy crusade. A massive \$20 million venture, it has successfully mobilised 180,000 student and adult volunteers into literacy brigades for work on farms and in factories throughout the country. Explains the campaign's national co-ordinator, Fernando Cardenal: 'We don't want to create super-schools and we can't wait for specialist teachers. We're taking anyone who has reached the third grade...'

'Literacy is liberation' proclaim the street hoardings. By the end of 1980 the crusade aims to 'liberate' 900,000 Nicaraguans over 10 years old.

It's an expensive operation when resources for re-floating the economy are in such desperately short supply. Then again there's a great deal at stake. The Sandinistas face the task of consolidating a revolution in a country where over half the population is

illiterate and where on the isolated Atlantic coast some peasants still don't know the inscription has happened!

People's expectations are high after the victory against Somoza. But with 43 years of neglect to put right, changes may be painfully slow in some places. So the literacy drive is above all a political project — a way of discussing the government's response to the country's problems and of urging everyone to step up production. 'Somoza couldn't survive without the support of the masses', says Cardenal, 'and we can't do anything without them.'

To help devise the campaign the government called in Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Opening up a dialogue between students and peasants is what interests him most. 'The young people will learn much more than they will teach', he says.

Once in the villages, the literacy volunteers will be expected to put in several hours' work a day in the fields to maintain production. Distributing nutrition advice and collecting stories, songs and poems from the different regions is also part of their brief.

The workers' organisations — associations of women, peasants, youth and

the Sandinista Defence Committees — are busy gearing many of their activities to the literacy effort. Through the campaign the government hopes to draw more and more workers into these base groups, which in turn will help to push forward a long-term adult education programme for the country.

In the meantime, as Paulo Freire says, '\$20 million won't solve the economic problems of Nicaragua but it can awaken, motivate and mobilise the country, and this is what the crusade really means.'

Hugo Blanco

speaks at London rally
Friday 21 March

7.30pm, Friends House,
Euston Rd, NW1

Organised by IMG

'Now we feel important'

ALTAGRACIA is fairly typical of the popular quarters of Managua. Single-storey houses are squashed together on narrow streets.

The 50,000 people who live here are not well-off, but not as poor as some. They want the same improvements for their barrio as anyone else in Nicaragua — street lights, pavements, a postal service, public telephone and sanitation in their homes.

And through their network of Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS) — base organisations of 'people's power' in every neighbourhood — they are mobilising to make it happen...

I talk to a group of CDS members in one district of Altagracia. Among them are Isidro Donaire, a worker with IBM and secretary of his local union branch; 17-year-old student Jose Cornavaca; Rina de Taboada, a doctor on the barrio's health sub-committee; Gabriel Celis, a broadcasting technician; and the minister of the local Baptist church, Noel Garcia.

Tunnels

They tell me how 300 out of 7,000 died in this part of Altagracia during the insurrection. Isidro remembers: 'In the Somoza period we organised ourselves into a civil defence committee. During the war we made tunnels from house to house, working secretly to get food and medicines and to send weapons to the Sandinistas.'

The women fought alongside the men from the beginning. Says Rina: 'Once the National Guard took all our young men from one street, lined them up outside their houses and mowed them down with machine guns. What women could stay at home after that?'

Thirty Altagracia women have just joined the newly formed Sandinista police force. Many others continue to give the lead as the barrio leaves the dark years behind and attempts to

build a very different kind of society.

What the struggle has meant for people's lives shows in multitude of ways, not least how they see themselves. 'Before we couldn't express ourselves give an opinion. Now we're integrated into society — we feel important.'

Health

In Isidro's factory, where trade unions used to be illegal, 10 per cent of the workers are now unionised. In Jose's college, students ask questions, criticise, give their own ideas. Rina, a doctor, notices that parents are more conscientious about their children's health and keep their houses clean.

Noel sees the biggest change in everyone's efforts to take responsibility for the community. 'The lesson we have to learn', he says, 'was that we can only achieve something by organising ourselves.'

Regular after-work CDS meetings are now a permanent feature of life in Altagracia. Here, as in many towns and villages throughout Nicaragua, the CDSs have become Sandinistas' power base, putting government policies into practice locally and relaying the needs of the people back to the different ministries.

Each block elects its own five-person CDS, which in turn chooses someone to represent at district level. Then the Sandinista districts elect representatives for the whole barrio who liaise directly with government officials.

A regional and national structure of CDSs has yet to be fully worked out. 'We're developing as we go along', Isidro explains. 'We want to have our government so they will trust us and our hope is to have CDS representatives on any future Council of State.'

Polio

In the space of just a few months since the insurrection the people of Altagracia have in motion an impressive number



The Erlinda Lopez Women's Centre in Managua. The independent (AMN) has a foothold in 14 regions of the country.



A visit to Managua's AMN headquarters — welcoming, bustling with activity — reveals something of what these aims mean on a day-to-day level.

Some women are sorting clothes made by one of their new work collectives, and books and satchels for the literacy campaign. Health volunteers are studying new nutrition leaflets. A meeting is in progress to discuss how to handle sex education and work with prostitutes...

Mothers

Co-operation with the government and other mass organisations to alleviate poverty, illiteracy and ill health is seen as fundamental for carrying forward the revolution. But the AMN is clear where its particular priorities lie.

'Our main task', says Sylvia Reyes, 'is to educate women politically, to eliminate discrimination in employment and under the law, and to help create child-care centres, laundries and public canteens to free women from domestic slavery.'

The education and care of children, says the AMN, should be the business of the whole society, not a burden on individual mothers. They argue that Nicaragua should work towards building a material base for the collectivisation of housework.

With the ministry of social welfare — headed by a woman, Lea Guido de Lopez — they have already helped to set up several child-care centres in the main towns, and more are planned.

Macho

Sylvia Reyes is the first to acknowledge that the obstacles Nicaraguan women have to contend with are ideological as well as material. 'The macho mentality is a product of an oppressive ideology — it won't be overcome right away. But the revolution means change and that change is going to happen...'

One sign that change may not be too far away was a recent article in the FSLN daily newspaper, *Barricada*: 'In the society we are building, discriminatory relationships have no place. It is fundamentally women themselves who must carry (their) struggle forward...and this struggle...must be supported by all *compañeros* so that we can emerge victorious against ideological backwardness.'

of changes with the minimum of resources from outside.

Poverty and unemployment won't disappear overnight. Medicines and nourishing foods are still very scarce. But a special depot distributes food at controlled prices, and children and pregnant women receive extra free rations.

A vaccination campaign is under way to fight polio. Doctors give their services free in

a government-backed health centre. Fiestas raise funds to stock a dispensary, provide beds for the sick, buy books for those learning to read and write.

There's a strong identification with the rural areas, totally neglected in Somoza's day. Many Altagracia school students are joining the literacy crusade. And brigades of volunteers are standing by to help harvest the coffee, cotton and sugar cane crops needed to tide over the economy during the next critical period.

Lukewarm

Co-operation in certain quarters, the group admits, can be lukewarm at times. 'We've encountered some resistance from those who earned fat salaries or held more than one job under Somoza. We invite them to meetings where we try to discuss why we think everyone should build the revolution.'

Noel's church is a frequent, if unlikely venue for CDS meetings. Members of his congregation fought in the insurrection and are among the barrio's leading militants. 'The revolution goes with our beliefs', he says.

While no-one in Altagracia glosses over Nicaragua's problems they have great confidence in its future. 'We need all the international solidarity we can get. With that, plus the contribution everyone's making, we can consolidate our revolution. Nicaragua is going to be great!'

And if old enemies should start reforming ranks? 'If the direction of the revolution changes in favour of the bourgeoisie and against the interests of the people we will fight again.'

Freeing women from domestic slavery

TALES of heroism are common currency in Nicaragua. 35,000 died in the revolution and 100,000 were injured. The unusual thing is that there are as many stories about women as men.

...About Luisa Espinoza, raped by some of the National Guard, who joined the Sandinistas and died fighting...

...the young woman who enticed one of Somoza's generals into her bedroom where Sandinista soldiers were waiting...

...the 70-year-old woman who carried messages in her hair through the Somoza lines to the Sandinistas...

In a matter of a few years the women of Nicaragua have moved from a position of entrenched subservience to playing an unprecedented part in the revolution and forming a mass women's movement to fight for their liberation.

Cocktails

During the war those women who didn't join the Sandinista army took up the struggle in their barrios. Through the Association of Women Concerned with the National Problem (AMPRONAC) they set up clandestine clinics, collected medicines and gathered materials to make Molotov cocktails and contact bombs.

Today women make up 20 to

30 per cent of the army, police and militia. Women cadres of the FSLN hold leadership posts in important bodies such as the rural workers association (ACT), the national institute of agrarian reform (INRA), the Sandinista Workers Confederation (CST), and the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS).

Foothold

'Before, women didn't participate in the political and economic spheres of life', says Sylvia Reyes of the Luisa Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMN). 'Now we're still dependent but we're not marginalised.'

The AMN is a new independent women's organisation which grew out of AMPRONAC and now has an important foothold in 14 regions of the country. Its 25,000 members are mainly, but not exclusively, working class ('we're peasants, workers, students, militants and housewives').

They are spread right across different age groups and are gathering support rapidly — in rural areas as well as in the towns. Not all belong to the FSLN, but support for the Sandinistas is strong, and FSLN militants like Sylvia Reyes occupy places in the front ranks.

Says the AMN: 'We realise that we will only become fully integrated into society with equal rights once the revolution has

been consolidated. So we are working to build the revolution at the same time as creating the conditions which will enable us to win our liberation.'

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10am — 6pm

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...ation of Nicaraguan Women

THE GUARDIAN DISCOVERS IRELAND

By Geoff Bell

A FEW years ago some bright spark produced a sticker proclaiming, 'Ireland has changed the *Guardian* from pale pink to bright Orange'.

The Orange in question referred to the colour of Northern Irish Loyalism, of which the *Guardian* had become an unrepentant supporter in terms of backing and advocating the link between Britain and the Six Counties. Since most news from the North of Ireland was accordingly bad news, little news appeared at all.

Last week the *Guardian* attempted to break from that history. In a special 'Ulster 80' series a score of articles attempted to tell contemporary North of Ireland as it really was.

There were limitations, mistakes, wrong political notions in the series, but it was the first serious attempt by any Fleet Street newspaper to try to explain, describe and come to terms with the North of Ireland for many years.

Dramatic

As such it was difficult to hide the truth. The two most dramatic articles were by Jill Tweedie on the 'acceptable face of terrorism' and by Hugh Hebert on British Army thinking.

Tweedie outlined how the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British Army were an 'alien occupying force' in the Catholic ghettos, and how subsequently the IRA has administered social order — from punishing rapists to running creches. Tweedie accepted that some of the punishments handed out by the IRA to ordinary criminals were 'rough justice', but asked 'what other options are there when, for whatever reason, official justice has been rejected?'

Complementing this, Hebert's article contained plenty of evidence as to why the RUC and Army had been rejected. The headline told it all: 'Why the weary major believes in selective assassination'.

Lawless

But as well as quoting the lawless views of Army personnel, Hebert also testified to their demoralisation. He argued against giving the Army more powers and concluded: 'The one thing nobody (in the Army) talks about is getting the troops out. The one thing everyone talks about is the end of his tour.'

Most surprising of all, the



BRITISH soldiers: The question they ask most — 'When will my tour end?'

Guardian's 'Agenda' page on the first day of the series gave Sinn Fein president Ruairi O Bradaigh space to air the views of the Provisionals. Enoch Powell, John Hume, Ian Paisley and the Ulster Defence Association had similar space, but even with this 'balance' it was the first time a leading Provisional has been allowed to write in a Fleet Street newspaper.

Of the score of others who contributed to the series, only one or two sought to pretend that the North of Ireland was just like anywhere else. Even the article on cookery emphasised the special and un-English nature of the local diet.

The exceptional nature, by British standards, of the North of Ireland, was pointed out most strongly by

Richard Gott:

'Anyone accustomed to wandering round the countries of the Third World would find little in Ulster that is unfamiliar. Guerrillas, suspended democracy, armies and gunmen on the streets, unthinkable behaviour in prisons, questionable and questioned frontiers, squalid housing, grinding poverty, indifferent multinationals, once vibrant economies in visible decline — these are the essential characteristics of much of the contemporary world.'

The uniqueness of Northern Ireland is that it lies, not south of the equator, but just off the shores of Britain.

Promise

Gott went on to argue that Britain's promise to stay in the North of Ireland as long as the majority of the population wished was 'not worth more than the paper it was written on', and tentatively advocated Northern Irish independence.

The *Guardian's* political correspondent, Peter Jenkins, objected to this idea and the other 'fancy notion' of immediate withdrawal. Jenkins, who spends much of his time in the Houses of Parliament, advocated the patching up of some shady deal between Paisley and Hume.

What Jenkins seems not to realise is that it might be easy enough in Britain for politicians to forget their promises and sell out their constituents, but no such easy option exists in the North of Ireland. Because of the obsession with politics, those

who betray tend to get kicked out.

Leaving Jenkins aside, the dominant tone of the articles was bewilderment as to what Britain should do. But because the majority of writers stressed the different character of the North of Ireland, the impression given was that, by and large, it would do Britain no harm and Ireland some good if some way was found to implement British withdrawal.

Milestone

In many ways the series was a milestone — not just because it appeared, but because it also avoided the usual British clichés. Perhaps that was because it is always easier for a visiting journalist to write the truth about the North when they are not dependent on establishing good relations with army and government sources.

But whatever the reason, the 'wall of silence' which closed in opinions and news from the North of Ireland for so long has been well and truly breached. Political debate about the 'solution' began some time ago, but it is now gathering pace more quickly than many imagined.

As the liberal bourgeoisie of the *Guardian* scratch their heads in bewilderment as to what should happen next, the argument for immediate and unconditional British withdrawal shines out with a brightness and clarity possessed by no other option. The arguments are there — all they need now is to be argued.

NUS scab on PTA demo

By Mick Archer

THE decision of the national executive of the National Union of Students to 'postpone indefinitely' the demonstration that it had called against the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has produced an immediate response from some of the national student organisations.

On the original date of the demonstration on 20 February, representatives of the Socialist Students Alliance, the Socialist Worker Student Organisation and the National Organisation of Labour Students met to discuss the possibility of organising action against the PTA independently of the executive.

Campaign

The SSA and SWSO agreed to launch an 'End The PTA Campaign' in the NUS. The representative of NOLS undertook to report on the meeting to the NOLS national leadership so that it could consider whether or not to support specific initiatives.

This decision is an important step forward in taking up the question of the PTA at a national level. The campaign's first action will be a national picket on 17 March. The likely venue will be either Paddington Green or Rochester Row police station — both of which were used to detain 'suspects' arrested in the last series of raids just before Xmas.

This will be the first step in building for a national demonstration in the summer term preceded by a joint speaking tour.

Overturn

This initiative is also important because it challenges the right of the national executive to overturn the democratic decisions of NUS national conference, and in so doing to contribute to the wall of silence about the war in Northern Ireland.

The projected demonstration against the PTA was to be the first concrete action taken by the NUS around any aspect of this issue. It had been supported overwhelmingly at the last NUS conference.

That the executive decided to retreat from taking such a step can come as no surprise given their strategy over the last five years. Unity in action by all forces on the left of the union can bring that drift to a halt and ensure that the NUS plays a central role in taking up issues like the PTA in the future.

THE OTHER BOOKSHOP

Black Youth, Rastafarianism, and the Identity Crisis in Britain, by Len Garrison — ACER Project Publications, £1.50

Black Jamaicans' Struggle Against Slavery, by Richard Hart — Community Education Trust, 95p

Abortion: Our Struggle for Control, by National Abortion Campaign, 25p

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On the eve of the elections: Who's who in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is scheduled to go to the polls this week. Ian Smith and Bishop Muzorewa, backed by the British Governor Lord Soames, face the parties of the liberation movement, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo.

Because the British government and the multinational interests have a big stake in the outcome of these elections, the British media, owned by these same

interests, has presented a false picture of the issues involved. Behind the mask of impartiality, Britain has been trying to tip the scales against ZANU and its leader Robert Mugabe.

The elections by themselves won't resolve the problems of the masses of Zimbabwe, and the ceasefire itself still hangs in the balance.

What do the different forces really represent? Socialist Challenge here presents a short guide to the elections.

THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT

TODAY the liberation movement consists of the two wings of the Patriotic Front, ZAPU and ZANU. ZAPU, led by Nkomo, was first formed in 1959 out of several black nationalist groupings that were based mainly on intellectuals and middle class layers.

ZANU was formed in 1963 out of a split from ZAPU led by Sithole, Mugabe and Zuobogo. Along with ZAPU it was banned and many of its leading cadre were jailed.

The split was primarily due to distrust in Nkomo's leadership, following the major concessions he made at the 1961 Lancaster House Constitutional Conference. The membership of the party forced him to withdraw these concessions. It was also due to his failure to pursue an adequate guerilla war policy.

Although ZAPU is essentially a cross tribal party, and has been from its beginnings, the vast majority of its membership is Matabele, from the west of Zimbabwe, although many Shona (the largest tribal group) are also members.

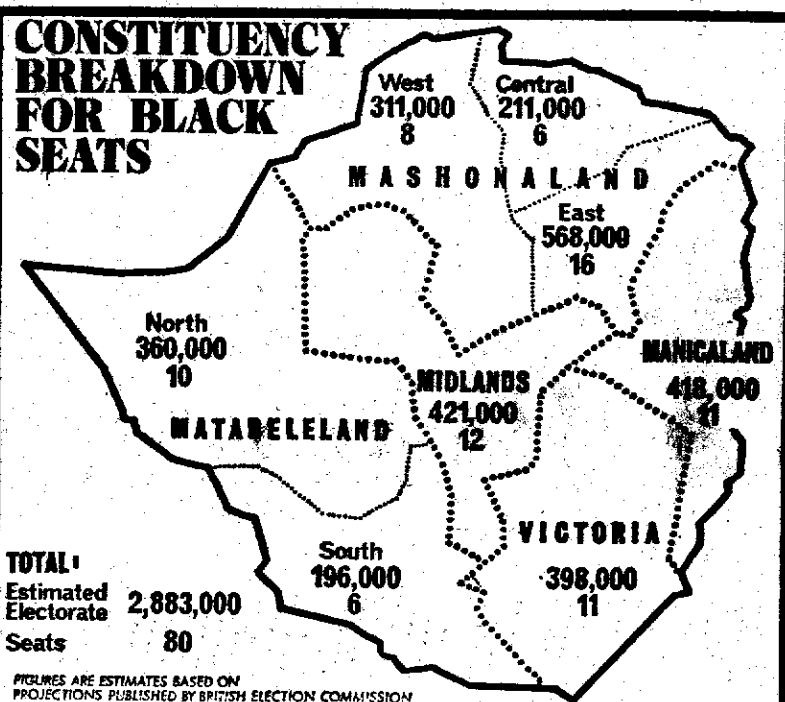
ZANU, originally based in the Salisbury area, has an essentially Shona leadership and membership. However, at a recent rally in Bulawayo (an almost exclusively Matabele city) Mugabe attracted about 30,000 people. Despite these ethnic divisions, tribalism has been a negligible factor so far.

ZAPU has been called 'Moscow oriented'; it has received arms and training from the USSR, East Germany and so on, but Moscow's influence should not be exaggerated. Its programme is essentially bourgeois democratic, with a very vague policy on the crucial land question (50 per cent of the land is owned by the small white minority).

Under the Lancaster House Agreement the large white farms and the multinational agri-business will not be touched. ZAPU policy is to appropriate only unused and under-used white land.

ZANU has recently cooled its historical links with Peking, and has actively sought alliances and aid from the Moscow camp, especially Cuba. Nevertheless, a Maoist-type ideology is dominant among its political cadre. ZANU pays more attention to the land question than ZAPU — although proposals for large-scale redistribution are rather vague.

ZANU's programme has always played second fiddle to its guerilla tactics, which it has pursued more consistently than ZAPU.



THE VOTE

THERE are about 0.25m whites in Zimbabwe and 6.8m blacks. Of the 100 seats in the new parliament 20 are 'white reserved'. The remaining 80 seats will be divided into 8 electoral districts with an estimated 2.8m electors.

There is no voters roll, so there will be ample opportunity for electoral fraud by the authorities.

Although there are several parties standing in the election, the overwhelming majority of the 80 seats will be divided between the three main parties — ZANU (Patriotic Front), ZAPU (standing as the Patriotic Front) and Muzorewa's UANC (United African National Council).

This electoral system means that a black party or coalition must win 51 out of 80 seats to have a majority. The only party capable of this is ZANU(PF).

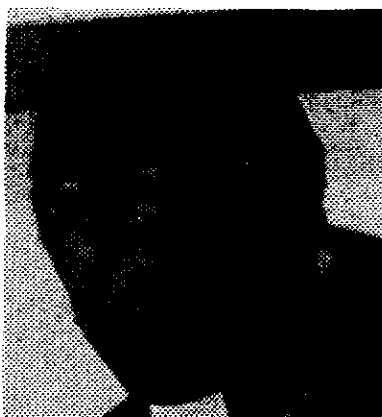
A coalition with ZAPU would certainly result in a large majority — which is why Britain is attempting to deepen the rift between the two wings of the liberation movement.

THE COLLABORATORS

THE UNITED African National Council (UANC), led by Bishop Muzorewa, has become the main prop of the Smith regime. It was formed in 1972 as a 'front' for the banned ZAPU/ZANU parties in the campaign against the Tory government's Pearce Commission. It was the only legal focus for opposition.

UANC commanded considerable support until the ban on ZAPU/ZANU was lifted, and the imprisoned cadre released in 1975.

Since Muzorewa collaborated with Smith in the fraudulent 'internal settlement', support for UANC has slid dramatically, and is now negligible compared to ZAPU/ZANU. However, it has a



well-oiled and well heeled apparatus financed by South African money.

Chronology

1888 Cecil Rhodes secures a concession from Lobengula granting exclusive mineral rights in Matabeleland and Mashonaland soon after they are declared British spheres of influence.

1890 Rhodes' British South Africa Company secures a British Charter to colonise and promote commerce in Matabeleland and Mashonaland. In the same year the BSAC occupies Mashonaland.

1898 After several years of fierce resistance to the BSAC, the Shona and Ndebele tribes are finally subdued.

1953 Southern Rhodesia enters the Central African Federation with two British Protectorates, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Nyasaland (now Malawi), despite black African objections to white domination of the Federation.

1961 The rising tide of African nationalism throughout the continent spells out doom for the Federation. A constitutional conference is convened in Salisbury to contain the situation. Britain enacts the Southern Rhodesia (Constitution) Bill despite African opposition. Joshua Nkomo rejects the proposals as 'an evil attempt by the Southern Rhodesian and British governments to entrench settler minority rule'.

1963 The Victoria Falls Conference paves the way for the independence of Zambia and Malawi. The conference also agrees that the armed forces of the Federation should be inherited by Southern Rhodesia. The United Nations Security Council votes unanimously against the transfer of the Federation's forces, thus compelling Britain to resort to use of the veto.

1965 Against a background of increasing political repression (ZAPU and its predecessors had all been banned) and a marked swing to the right in white politics, the UN calls upon the new Labour Government in Britain to stop the impending elections in Rhodesia and 'negotiate new constitutional provisions acceptable to the majority of people of Rhodesia'. Britain abstains.

On 11 November the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, declares Rhodesia to be an independent nation. Britain immediately suspends Smith and his ministers from office, and the UN Security Council approves a resolution calling for international voluntary sanctions against Rhodesia.

1966 Smith and Wilson meet on board HMS Tiger. Despite major concessions — Wilson states quite clearly after the negotiations have broken down that he was not aiming to bring about majority rule — Smith rejects the proposals to bring Rhodesia back to legality. Subsequently the UN Security Council votes for mandatory selective sanctions.

1968 The UN imposes comprehensive mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia, a full thirty months after UDI. Until this point, Britain had adamantly refused to back such measures for fear of precipitating the collapse of the regime. Wilson's stated aim was to negotiate a compromise; his proposals at the talks on HMS Fearless would have meant no majority rule before 1979.

1969 The Smith regime introduces a new constitution based on separate racial development: it institutionalises Rhodesia's progress towards an apartheid society.

1973 The Labour Party conference votes to support the Zimbabwean liberation movements.

1974 The victories of the liberation forces in Mozambique and Angola over Portuguese colonialism tilt the balance of power significantly in favour of the Zimbabwean nationalists. These 'new realities', as Callaghan calls them, lead to the release of nationalist leaders Mugabe, Sithole and Nkomo under the Lusaka Agreement.

1975 Nkomo and Smith announce a 'declaration of intent' to negotiate a settlement.

1976 Mozambique closes its border with Rhodesia as the guerilla war intensifies. In October Nkomo and Mugabe join forces to form the Patriotic Front at the Geneva Conference. The PF receives the support of the front-line states and the Organisation of African Unity.

1977 Smith's forces make frequent raids into Zambia, Botswana and Mozambique. Smith rejects the Anglo-American settlement proposals and announces an agreement with Muzorewa and Sithole to negotiate an 'internal settlement' — allegedly based on majority rule but qualified by provisions for the retention of 'white confidence' and 'standards'.

1978 Smith signs an 'internal settlement' with Muzorewa, designed to entrench white supremacy and frustrate the liberation movements. The 'settlement' is immediately condemned by the Patriotic Front, the front-line states and the OAU, and later by Britain, the EEC, and the UN. In September, the Bingham Report reveals that the British government knew of Shell and BP's sanctions-busting operations as early as 1968-9.

1979 Rhodesia's 'internal elections' take place in April against a background of full-scale mobilization by all reservists, 85 per cent of the country under martial law, and South African logistic support. Independent observers report mass intimidation of voters by the regime. The 'elections' and the 'government of national unity' that result are condemned internationally — with the exception of South Africa — and the Muzorewa/Smith coalition remains unrecognised. In August, the Commonwealth Conference formulates a 'nine-point peace plan' which leads to the Lancaster House talks.

INTERNATIONAL

By Steve Potter

(In part one of this article we explained that a civil war was inevitable in Afghanistan after radical reforms were pursued by the Peoples Democratic Party government that came to power in April 1978.)

THE AID given to the rightist guerillas fighting the reforms steeply increased in 1979. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan acted for the United States in bolstering opposition to the potentially revolutionary dynamic that the reforms might spark off. This imperialist intervention, combined with the faction fights within the government, meant that there was an immediate danger of the PDPA being toppled and a reactionary 'Islamic' government coming to power.

Moscow decided to commit itself more deeply. It was not prepared to see the construction of an imperialist staging post on one of its most sensitive borders — particularly a state which might appeal to the aspirations for religious and cultural freedom of the Islamic minorities in the Soviet Union.

Troops

Starting on 24 December, tens of thousands of Soviet troops poured into Afghanistan. Hafizullah Amin, the premier, was liquidated a few days later. Babrak Karmal, the leader of an opposing faction in the PDPA, was appointed in his place.

From the beginning the invasion was a disaster. Its motive was not any desire to export revolution but, on the contrary, to stabilise a country in the throes of civil war by enforcing a pro-capitalist government friendly to the Soviet Union in its diplomatic relations. If indeed there was a direct threat to the Soviet Union it could have been countered by the encouragement of mass mobilisations of workers and peasants in favour of the reforms to smash the conservative alliance of the landowners, tribal chiefs and mullahs in the countryside. The Soviet Union could have provided both the encouragement and the material aid necessary to sustain the PDPA in that period — including military aid to help counter imperialist support for the guerillas.

But that is not the method of the Soviet bureaucrats. Revolutionary mass activity threatens their position. They prefer military and repressive methods in order to keep all developments under their control.

Cynicism

The justification for their action in Afghanistan plumbed the depths of cynicism. They claimed that they had been invited in by Amin — the man they had proceeded to liquidate. Such methods and such justifications introduced massive confusions in the minds of workers everywhere. It was a clear demonstration of the fact that the invasion had been conducted with little or no thought for the interests and feelings of the working class internationally, let alone the national feelings of the Afghan people.

The imperialists used the negative impact of



A Russian soldier stands guard over the Kabul highway

THE CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN Part 2: The Soviet Union intervenes

the Soviet action skilfully. Since arriving in the White House, President Carter had ceaselessly tried to reverse the defeat suffered by the American ruling class in Vietnam. The aim was to prepare public opinion both domestically and internationally for new US interventions against such revolutionary developments as those in Iran and Nicaragua.

At the same time, in a stealthy way, the US military establishment started to build up the necessary technical prerequisites to resume its role as world cop. Massive increases in arms spending, the formation of a rapid deployment force, the siting of medium range missiles in Europe, letting the CIA off the leash, and the statement of the Carter doctrine (that the USA would intervene militarily to defend its interests in the Persian Gulf) were all part of a package devoted to this end.

None of these measures were occasioned by the Soviet invasion. All were well underway

beforehand, apart from the reintroduction of the first steps towards conscription. But the fact that Carter could make electoral mileage out of these preparations showed the extent to which the bureaucratic methods of the Soviet Union had repelled working class opinion in the United States and internationally.

This imperialist war-drive has to be exposed and fought by all socialists. That is why we cannot extend any support to the Soviet invasion, since the methods of the Soviet bureaucrats have made the task of blocking the imperialist war drive more difficult, not less.

But while the Soviet bureaucracy would not hesitate to crush any revolutionary movement which threatened the doctrine of peaceful co-existence with the imperialists, their support for the Afghan army's fight to crush the rightist guerillas temporarily coincides with the interests of the workers and peasants of Afghanistan.

The retreat of Soviet troops under these circumstances would not be a victory for the self-determination of the Afghan people. On the contrary, it would leave the field open for the establishment of a reactionary regime which would halt the process of reform, liquidate the tiny left, and set back the prospects for any socialist advance for decades.

Counter - revolution

The Italian and Spanish Communist parties have fallen in behind their governments and ruling classes in demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops. And of course these parties in no way call for an independent revolutionary path for the workers and peasants of Afghanistan. They argue that the establishment of a rightist regime in Kabul would be better than the prolonged stay of Soviet troops — essentially calling for the victory of the imperialist-backed counter-revolution.

Other Communist parties — the French and Portuguese in particular — have given uncritical support to the Soviet bureaucracy, in line with their general support for the methods of Stalinism. In the event of workers and peasants who support the April 1978 reforms coming into conflict with the Soviet troops, these parties will have no hesitation in backing the Soviet bureaucracy.

The contempt which the imperialists themselves have for the democratic rights of the Afghan people has been made manifest by the attitude of the European Economic Community. The EEC's first action after condemning the Soviet invasion was to suspend all food aid to Afghanistan. This was followed by the advancement of a plan for the neutralisation of Afghanistan.

Third camp

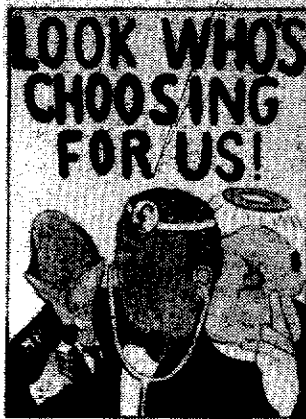
Hence socialists cannot take a position of neutrality in the war in Afghanistan, or wish for a third new revolutionary camp opposing both the imperialist-backed guerillas and the Soviet bureaucrats — for no such camp exists. Instead, insofar as the Red Army is ranged against the enemies of the Afghanistan revolution, we should be in favour of it inflicting a defeat on those forces.

But our major task must be to start the process of throwing back the imperialist war-drive. That means demanding that measures like the suspension of grain supplies to the USSR and of EEC food aid to Afghanistan are ended; that the arms policy of the British government — and in particular Thatcher's support for the siting of Cruise missiles in Britain — is opposed. The naval base of Diego Garcia which has been offered to the US Navy for operations in the Indian Ocean should be handed back to its original occupants and the British military presence there terminated; we should oppose the campaign to boycott the Moscow Olympics initiated by Carter and Thatcher.

In this way we can begin to prepare the conditions where not only the fate of the Afghan revolution, is put into a more favourable context, but also we can defend the gains of other revolutions which are threatened by the imperialists' campaign.

WHAT'S LEFT

**Abortion:
Our struggle
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New pamphlet from the National Abortion Campaign, 25p not including postage, from NAC, 374 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1.

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

'PALESTINIAN Workers and Trade Unions' — pamphlet from UKPC, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1.

SOCIALIST Students Alliance National Conference: 12 March, Sat. 10-5pm Manchester University Students Union, Oxford Rd. MCR 15. Evening Disco. Sunday — UMIST Students Union 11-5pm for publicity and further info tel: 061-273 5947.

NEW issue of Revolution — the best youth paper on the left — out now! Copies from Red, Jude or Mick on 01-359 8371.

UNION ADMINISTRATOR (part time) needed for London branch of ACTSS. Typing, duplicating, aptitude for figures and ability to work on own initiative required. Minimum £113 per month for 43 hours. Four weeks annual holiday. Job description and application form available from Ann Creighton, 8 Ridgmount Road, London SW18, or phone 870 3259 4-6pm. Closing date: 17 March. Interviews: 24 March.

AFGHANISTAN: Hail the Red Army! Articles from Workers Vanguard and Spartacist/Britain. 30p from Spartacist Publications, Box 185, London WC1.

RUDOLF BAHRO will deliver the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture at the London School of Economics, New Theatre, on 3 March, 7.15pm.

KILBURN Troops Out Movement are holding a march on the fourth anniversary of withdrawal of political status. Assemble Galtymore, Crickwood, 1 March, 2pm. March to Kilburn Sq for a street meeting. Troops Out Now. Political Status for political prisoners.

SOCIALIST CHALLENGE EVENTS

CAMBRIDGE: SC sales Newport Town Centre outside Westwards 11-12.30. Cardiff British Home Stores 11-12.30. Also available from JMS Banks, Salford Road, Cardiff.
ALDERMOUTH: SC sold Sainsbury outside CBAs — for more info ring phone: Celia, 574088.

BATH: SC on sale at 1985 Books, London Road, and Saturdays 2pm-3pm outside the Roman Baths. Phone 20296 for more details.

BRADFORD: SC available from Fourth Idea Bookshop, 14 Southgate.

BIRMINGHAM: SC on sale at The Ramp, Fri 4.30-5.30, Sat. 10-4. For more info phone 643 9209.

BRIGHTON: SC on sale 11-1, 'Hole in Ground', Haymarket. For more info contact Box 2, c/o Fulmarks, 110 Cheltenham Road, Montpellier, Bristol 6.

COVENTRY: SC available from Wedge Bookshop. For more info about local activities phone 461138.

DUNDEE: SC available from Dundee City Square outside Boots, every Thursday 4.5-30pm, Friday 4.5-30pm, Saturday 11-4pm.

HUDDERSFIELD: SC supporters sell papers every Saturday 11am-1pm. The Piazza. SC also available at Peaceworks.

LAMBETH: SC now available at kiosk Brixton tube, Oval tube, Herne Hill British Rail and Tetric Books Clapham.

SWINDON: SC on sale 11-1 every Sat., Regent St (Brunel Centre).

TEESIDE: SC sales: at Newsfairs shops in Cleveland Centre and on Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough, and at Greens Bookstall, upstairs in Spencer Market, Stockton High Street.

TOWER HAMLETS: SC supporters sell papers every Friday 5-6pm Watney Mkt. Sat. 11-12.30pm Whitechapel tube, Sunday 10.30-12.00 Brick Lane.

OLDHAM SC sold every Saturday outside Yorkshire Bank, High Street. For more information about local activities. Tel. 061-682 5151.

OLDHAM SC Public Meeting: 'The Socialist Alternative to the Tories'. Speakers include rep from IMG CC. Thurs 21 Feb, 7.30pm at Grange Arts Centre (Room A2), Rochdale Rd.

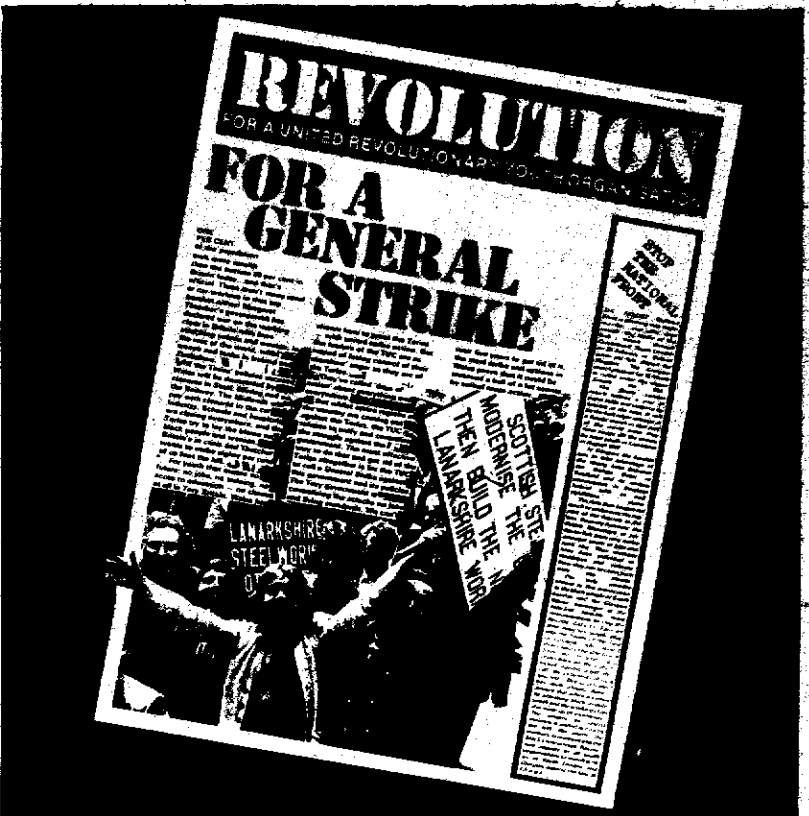
STOCKPORT SC sold every Saturday 1pm Mersey Square. Tel. 061-236 4905 for more information.

PUBLIC MEETING: 'Fight the Tories', social with live Irish and folk music. Fri 22 Feb, 8pm at the Gardeners Arms, Middleton Road.

OXFORD SC supporters sell every Fri 12-2pm outside Kings Arms and every Sat 10.30-12.30pm in Cornmarket.

BARINGEY SC Public Meeting: 'Afghanistan and South Asia in Turmoil', speaker Tariq Ali, 7.30pm Thurs 21 Feb. Highgate Wood Lower School (corner of Park Rd and Wolsey Rd N8).

BRENT SC supporters sell every Sat Morning at the Brent Collective Bookstall in the Trades Hall, Willesden High Rd NW10.



The latest issue of Revolution has features on Afghanistan, the Olympics, the General Strike, Abortion. Order copies now from Revolution PO Box 50, London N1.

By Redmond O'Neill and Valerie Coultas

BUILDING the revolutionary party in the 1980s was the theme running through all of the discussions at the International Marxist Group's national conference held on 16-19 February in London.

The point was hammered home by the large number of youth delegates and observers. Their enthusiasm about launching the youth organisation Revolution in May towered over every other debate.

The political framework for all the debates was that the class struggle in Britain and the world is very definitely on the rise. Despite political setbacks under Labour, the decisive struggles are yet to come.

Possibilities

The IMG's discussions therefore centred on how to build a party capable of grasping the possibilities opened up by the deepest crisis of capitalism since the end of World War Two.

The first session of conference dealt with what kind of a party needs to be built today. Many British Marxists have either adapted themselves to the economism of the British labour movement or maintained their purity at the expense of building a party rooted in the working class.

The IMG conference voted in favour of building a party which avoided this Hobson's choice. A revolutionary party in Britain must be proletarian in composition and take up all aspects of oppression and exploitation both at home and worldwide.

The large majority (78.3 per cent) in favour of taking special measures to win a solid base inside the industrial and manual working class was gained because the delegates could see that this was part of an overall plan to build a revolutionary internationalist party — a plan that would not reduce the work of the IMG to issues 'raised in the workplace', but one that took politics and campaigns into the heart of the British labour movement.

The IMG will fight to build a party that places at the forefront of its work issues where many British socialists have been weakest — anti-imperialism, women's liberation and black liberation, for example. The vote for the strategy document put forward in this session was 71.3 per cent in favour.

Tactics

The second session of conference dealt with the precise tactics the IMG should adopt over the coming period. Four different tactics documents were put forward and discussed in the course of the three month pre-conference discussion (for details see Socialist Challenge, 24 January 1980).

A common theme in this discussion was the need to build the broadest possible united action

IMG Conference decides — to the youth, industry and revolutionary unity



against the Tories in the steel strike, in the cuts campaigns, in the pro-abortion movement.

Everyone also saw the vital importance of taking up the debates in the Labour Party and encouraging Socialist Challenge supporters to turn those debates outwards to be part of a mass movement that can overthrow this Tory government.

Crucial

A crucial project was also identified in the unions as building a class struggle current, a new Minority Movement that would organise militant trade unionists on a consistent basis to challenge the betrayals of the bureaucracy.

Delegates had different views about how this objective could be fought for at the present time.

Tendency 1 stressed the necessity of building a national cross-sectoral organisation of all those trade unionists prepared to fight the Tories. Within this framework it argued for work with the Rank and File groupings within the unions wherever possible.

Tendency 2 argued against prioritising Rank & File and stressed the importance of fighting for a 'third way' in the unions between the SWP and the CP.

Far left regroupment, particularly with the Socialist Workers Party, was not seen as a top priority by this grouping given developments in the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Tendency 3 thought that united action between the Labour Party and

the trade unions was key to defeating the Tories and opposed the idea of sending a large number of IMG members into industrial and manual jobs.

Delegates who supported the fourth grouping of six comrades from the outgoing Central Committee urged a turn away from fighting for regroupment on the far left; the IMG should instead concentrate all its attention on the Labour Party and 'getting a majority of members into industry'.

The grouping which won the greatest support among the delegates was Tendency 1 which argued for a three-pronged approach to party building — turning to the industrial and manual working class, building the revolutionary youth organisation, and fighting for far left regroupment — particularly with the largest revolutionary organisation in Britain, the Socialist Workers Party.

Majority

Tendency 1 gained 50 per cent of the vote and was given a majority on the Central Committee. Tendency 2 had 28.3 per cent; Tendency 3 14.1 per cent; and the fourth grouping had 6.6 per cent of the total votes.

The whole conference was inspired by the debate on Revolution. The large number of youth delegates and their political confidence in debate showed that through Revolution a whole new generation of young leaders are being won to Marxism.

Young women, encouraged by the success of Revolution supporters in mobilising young people against John Corrie's anti-abortion Bill, dominated the debate.

IMG members were asked to pull out all the stops to get youth to attend the May conference that will launch Revolution as an independent national organisation, run and controlled by youth themselves.

Emphasis

Delegates discussed whether or not Revolution should at this stage put major resources into work in the LPYS. This was rejected as an overall emphasis given the domination of the Militant group in that area.

The result of this discussion was 55.5 per cent for the Central Committee document, which argued for united action with the LPYS, but building Revolution as an independent organisation and fighting for its founding conference to express political solidarity with the IMG and the Fourth International.

The conference rejected the view put by some delegates that Revolution should play down its attempts to win Rebel (the SWP's school students organisation) and the Socialist Youth League (the youth group of the Workers Socialist League) to the project of building a united revolutionary youth organisation.

The last discussion of the conference, on black liberation, also pointed to a new and fresh approach to party building. Delegates explained the vital importance of building a black movement in Britain,

independent of the state and run by black people themselves, if racism is to be confronted among white workers.

Asian workers and Asian youth were noted as being among the most militant and politicised sections of the labour movement today.

This document received the overwhelming support of the delegates — 95.5 per cent voting in favour.

Solidarity

Messages of solidarity were delivered to the conference from the Dutch, French and Irish sections of the Fourth International and also from its cothinkers in the American SWP.

Pete Goodwin, of the British SWP also spoke to the delegates. His contribution made it clear that the SWP is reluctant to receive the IMG's advances, and that their minds will have to be changed on the question of fusion.

Pete Goodwin raised particular objections to the IMG's 'federation of tendencies'. But such an objection hardly stands up when all the comrades who had organised themselves to fight for their particular

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orientation for the IMG agreed to go out and build the IMG after the conference along the line decided and expressed their desire for the early dissolution of their tendencies.

The IMG persists in its belief that it is necessary to have out the arguments fully before the conference and then unite in action to test the decisions taken at the conference in the class struggle itself. We think this is what Leninist democracy is all about.

From this conference the IMG will turn outwards, build the revolutionary youth organisation, centre its work in the industrial and manual unions, and launch a public campaign to unite the forces of the IMG with those of the SWP.

Send us a fiver to fight the Tories

STEEL workers, miners, anti-Corrie campaigners, youth have shown their willingness to fight the policies of this Tory government.

A strong revolutionary party, based in the centres of industrial power in Britain, can offer a socialist alternative to thousands of militants who are discontented with their trade union and labour leaders and see the need for a radical solution to the ills of capitalism.

The IMG intends to build such a

party. But to do this we need your money, your energy and your support.

Our thanks this week to:

Sharon	£15.00
Outer West London	5.00
E Mahood	15.00
D Ballard	.40
J Reitze	1.00
Islington IMG	5.00
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p&p Jackson	10.00
Anon	10.00
G Stewart	5.00
Lambeth IMG	105.00
W Ng	5.50
Cardiff IMG	30.00
Weekly Total	285.90

Fund Drive Target £2,500

Total so far £1,759

Sales Drive Target 5,000

Total so far 4,500

Invest in the future — kick out the Tories

A lesson to champion

IT MAY be difficult for those working on the paper in London to believe it, but over 1,000 (one thousand) people plodded through the snowy streets of Newcastle on 2 February to protest Corrie's Bill. Not 100 as your caption to my photo said.

What's more, the demo received front page coverage in both Newcastle and Sunderland evening papers that evening and coverage on two local radio stations.

The rally following the meeting was addressed by representatives of the Northern TUC, NUPE, the NAC steering committee, as well as Sunderland's MP, Gordon Bagier. It raised more than £150. Lessons like this should be championed!
JOHN LASZLO, West London
Sorry about that. We did know it was 1,000 not 100 — it was an uncorrected misprint.

More detente, not boycott

IN 1976 the left's slogan was 'Love football, hate torture' as the World Cup was held in fascist Argentina. It was pointed out that the dictatorship had 'cleansed' the city and was using the World Cup to whitewash its image. A boycott would have been an effective way to isolate Argentina from the international community.

The Bernard Levins of the media will doubtless be saying that the case of the Soviet Union is the same. The bureaucracy is using the Games to bolster its image and so — because of repression, Sakharov and, of course, Afghanistan — the Olympics should be boycotted.

If the left does not join the Cold Warriors then this is proof of double standards and subservience to Moscow.

However socialists and human rights activists have to consider the effectiveness of solidarity campaigns and not superficial appearances.

In the case of imperialist backed dictatorships like Argentina, Chile and South Africa the aim of our campaigns is to link up with progressive forces in those countries and work to isolate and ostracise these nations.

However, in the case of the non-capitalist nations of the Soviet bloc, those who campaign to isolate those countries want and need a return to the Cold War. They want to boost armaments, use national unity to cover their domestic policies, and to boost a witch-hunt atmosphere in the West.

So human rights activists have to campaign for more detente. In the USSR detente helps show up the repressive character of the bureaucracy as the country is opened to influence from the progressive forces of the West.

This presents more hope for an end to the passivity of the Soviet working class, a flowering of the intelligentsia and the use of the less backward part of the bureaucracy.

The effect of detente is contradictory — it is needed by the Soviet bureaucracy and threatens its dominance. Sometimes detente has led to increased repression, but this is far outweighed by the longer term positive effects. Ken Coates presents more detailed arguments in *Detente and Socialist Democracy*.

The left must reject the call for a boycott of the Olympics and instead demand more detente. This is not double standards but a more effective way of helping the Soviet workers win their liberation.
GARY KENT, Paris

No excuses for Trotsky

THERE might have been some excuse for Trotsky, in 1940, believing that the property relations established by an advancing Red Army would be 'in and of themselves progressive', but there is



no justification for Ted Coxhead (Letters 7 February) echoing the same misjudgement in 1980.

In the last forty years the property relations of the USSR have revealed themselves to be as oppressive, exploitative and as alienating as those of capitalism; worse, they are not even as efficient.

The Soviet economic system involves a staggering degree of waste, bureaucratic centralisation and insensitivity to human needs. The dynamic of the Czechoslovakian reforms of the sixties was provided by the desire of the Dubcek leadership to break down the bureaucratic forms imposed on them by Stalinism and liberate the productive potential of their people through political as well as economic democratisation.

The Warsaw Pact invasion made it clear that the Soviet leadership is not only incapable of developing the 'social content' of its own property relations but is determined to prevent any such developments within its sphere of influence. That now includes Afghanistan.

Ted advises the Afghan masses to 'build workers, peasants, soldiers committees, conduct revolutionary propaganda against the Kremlin oligarchy...'. If wishes were horses... those things the Soviet troops are carrying are not billiard cues, Ted.

The Red Army invaded Afghanistan to stifle a threat from the right — they will as readily crush any attempt to outflank them on the left.

We do not know yet what property forms the Soviet leadership will impose on Afghanistan, but if they turn it into a carbon copy of the Soviet economy, as they have done elsewhere, that will not have the slightest 'progressive social content' for the Afghan masses, or for the prospects of socialism anywhere else.
BOB PURDIE, Glasgow

Wishy-washy line

RE YOUR wishy-washy editorial on Afghanistan. First there was a 'civil war' before the Russian invasion. Secondly the present war is turning into a jihad against foreign control that happens to be 'communist'. The Afghan army still under Karmal's control is disarmed and under constant surveillance by Russian troops.

Right! We have to say which side we're on. We're on the side of the Afghan left and are in favour of all aid given to them by the Soviet Union. But we cannot favour the presence of the Red Army.

Those comrades who accept the Red Army's presence should be consistent and call for an invasion of Iran and Pakistan to throw out the reactionary regimes and install progressive developments by proxy. And why stop there?

Comrades are in danger of tail-ending Brezhnev's accomplished facts. Yes, the Red Army invasion does probably mean that the rightists will win the war. The alternative is the complete crushing of the right of the Afghan people to rule themselves and live their own lives.

No amount of sophistry can conceal the fact that the British were smashed every time they invaded and the US never had much of an influence. We're in favour of socialism in Afghanistan as and

when the Afghan masses decide they want it and will fight for it.

It is a somewhat distasteful spectacle to read letters in SC from comrades in London pontificating that because the Afghans are backward and tribal then their rights don't count for much and they have to be forcibly industrialised, militarised and dominated by the USSR if they're to be fit for socialism. That is appalling white racism, a 'Marxist' version of the white man's burden and a denial of our commitment to a free socialism.
PAUL TERRY, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Saddled with 'defencism'?

FRIENDS of Socialist Challenge can only be alarmed by your increasingly equivocal stand on the issues raised by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The article 'Why we defend the Soviet Union' was appallingly confused and hamfisted, and ran totally counter to the warnings from Trotsky printed underneath it.

For there is no conceivable sense in which the nationalised property relations of the USSR (and how valuable they are, in the context of rule by a totalitarian bureaucracy, is anyway doubtful) can be said to be threatened at the present time. Nor did this article say how this was possible.

I see that your latest editorial asserts, however, that the more united front of the West over Afghanistan 'represents a threat to the existence of the Soviet Union, and the gains made by the revolution'. The USSR threatened — by an Olympic boycott? by the cancellation of worn-out trade agreements? by a temporary interruption in US grain supplies?

It only seems that you are saddled by history with a doctrine of 'defence of the Soviet Union' which you feel obliged to trot out in moments like this, but which you do not understand how and when to use.

You ought to be very clear that the crucial proposals you make, for opposition to Western rearmament, for withdrawal from NATO, against the Cruise missiles, are fatally compromised so long as they go hand in hand with the general defence of Soviet militarism.

Against NATO, but for the Warsaw Pact? This is a recipe for political suicide in the coming struggle against militarism in Europe. You should read Edward Thompson's article, 'For a Bomb-free Europe', in the *Guardian* the other week, for a better starting point. Why has this not been discussed in the paper?

Until there is a radical rethink of these issues, I for one — and I did raise the underlying issues during the discussions over revolutionary unity — will feel some relief that those discussions were not consummated in political union.
MARTIN SHAW Hull

Trotsky would demand a rethink

CAN TROTSKY be held responsible for the views of those who today claim to be his disciples? Ken Tarbuck charges him with being 'the source of confusion' (Socialist

Challenge 14 February) while Ted Coxhead quotes Trotsky's views on the Soviet occupation of Poland in 1939 (Socialist Challenge 7 February) as relevant to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1980. What is confusing and irrelevant in fact are arguments based on a selective use of quotations — a method adopted by Coxhead and others and tolerated by Tarbuck.

Trotsky's views on the tactics to be adopted in territories overrun by the Red Army in 1939 cannot be separated from his diagnosis of the Soviet social regime. The main characteristic of this diagnosis was Trotsky's conception of that regime as a transitional one. In Trotsky's view Soviet society could not escape the consequences of the contradiction between a material base totally inadequate for socialism and property relations (established as the result of the October revolution) which corresponded to a much higher stage of development of the productive forces.

Because of this contradiction Trotsky did not expect this transitional regime to survive for long: the Soviet working class was to be either rescued by proletarian revolutions in advanced capitalist countries or lose what was still left of the conquests of October.

In the case of the latter eventuality Trotsky did not exclude the possibility of the Soviet social regime becoming the forerunner of a new class society. He wrote:

'If it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat... Then it would be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its fundamental traits the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploitative regime...' (In *Defence of Marxism, 'The USSR in War'*).

There is no mistaking about the time-scale Trotsky was thinking of. He wrote: 'Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?' (Ibid)

Trotsky always paid close attention to developments in the real world and did not hesitate to discard formulae which ceased to reflect this reality. The fact that the 'transitional regime' has continued to exist, despite the absence of proletarian revolutions in the West, for another 40 years makes a re-appraisal of the Soviet society's class character a long overdue task — that is, if Trotsky's diagnosis is at all taken seriously.

If Trotsky's alleged disciples have failed to make such a re-appraisal this cannot be put down to Trotsky's position being confusing. It is because they have chosen to ignore it. It is the reasons for this choice which prevent them from giving unconditional support to the Afghan masses in their struggle against foreign domination and foreign military occupation.
VLADIMIR DERER, London NW11

For mass mobilisation

FOR MARXISTS the principle of self-determination is not some bourgeois abstraction which is used when convenient for 'world revolution'. It is a practical truth flowing out of our understanding of

the world revolutionary process.

Yet your editorial (17 January) rejected the right of the Afghan masses to decide on the issue of Soviet occupation, instead offering them a choice: either fight alongside imperialism or support the Soviet occupation. Why? Because the editorialist seems to have no faith in the capacity of the Afghan masses to destroy a ruling class funded and armed by the CIA.

Then there is our programmatic understanding of Stalinism. Anyone would think the Soviet bureaucracy could bring socialism to Afghanistan. Actually, many comrades do. After all, they say, look what happened in Eastern Europe.

What has happened in Eastern Europe? There is a planned economy (in itself progressive) and there is also a mighty popular hatred of the Soviet Union. In the 1940s the workers of Poland or Czechoslovakia were a thousand times more committed to the struggle for socialism than they are today. Today millions of working class Poles hail the Pope. The working class is demoralised, disorganised. In the 1940s, the Czechoslovak workers were a powerful buffer against any imperialist manoeuvres. And today? You must be joking.

That's why we say the Soviet bureaucracy is counter-revolutionary: it systematically destroys the workers' basic resources for constructing socialism — their creative initiative, their class consciousness and self-organisation, even while overturning capitalist relations.

The Afghan masses face two enemies: imperialism and feudal reaction on one hand and the Kremlin on the other. Both seek to prevent the Afghan masses from deciding their own fate. Both must be opposed. The tactical question is *how* — not *whether* — these two struggles are linked.

A definite answer to this tactical problem of the forms of the dual struggle requires knowledge that we don't have: for example, the attitude of the workers and peasants to the Kremlin-Karmal regime, the programme of this regime, the masses' relation to the overthrown Amin regime.

Some comrades fatuously pretend to know that the Afghan masses welcomed the Soviet army as liberator. This doesn't seem to be the view of the Kremlin or Karmal. Why no government-organised mass demonstrations in support of the Soviet 'liberators'? Why have Soviet troops kept a 'low profile' even in Kabul?

But we don't know for sure. We cannot lay down the key agitational slogan for Marxists in Afghanistan. But we must be clear about the principle that the Afghan masses must decide on the issue of Soviet troops. And our own programmatic stand must be clear: not the Soviet high command but mass mobilisation aided by the world working class is the only road to socialism in Afghanistan.

And we shouldn't be panicked by our own failure to wage a serious struggle against NATO and against the Anglo-American aggressive drive in the third world into telling the Afghan people to do what the Kremlin wants.
OLIVER MACDONALD, London N16

A film about the telling of history

By Carl Gardner

MOST films reviewed in Socialist Challenge are commercial films for a 'mass audience' of passive, isolated consumers. These are films which resolve 'problems', restore harmony, suppress ambiguity, stifle contradiction — films with one dominant, often crudely-sketched meaning. In short, they are commodities which rule out any degree of democracy or productive participation — surely an important part of any socialist strategy, in political, social or cultural struggle?

Song of the Shirt is not that kind of film. It is part of another film-making practice in British independent cinema, which sees film as part of a political process rather than as a finished product.

Critical

Made by the Film & History Project over the space of three years for £18,000 (one-third the cost of a TV commercial), it is a film which is critical in every sense, challenging all the common film-going assumptions about the role of the audience, about the distinction between documentary and fiction, about history, about authenticity, about the tradition of narrative in the cinema. It is not designed to be immediately popular; it does look and sound radically different; its 135 minutes to demand attention and involvement on the part of the audience.

Based in part on research done by members of Ruskin History Workshop, *Song of the Shirt* is ostensibly about women garment-workers in London in the 1840s and the radical background of Owenism and Chartism in which they found themselves. It also concerns itself with the bourgeois response to their plight: the beginnings of philanthropic and charitable institutions to alleviate the worst poverty (and rebellious resentment) of the working class.

History

But beyond this it is a film about the telling of history, about the social construction of these sewing-women both by their contemporaries and historians today. For how were they seen? How do we 'know' them? Everything we learn about them is through the eyes and pens of (mainly male) observers, commenting from particular class positions, from within competing ideologies. There are not even any 'authentic' voices, first-hand

accounts of their conditions, their feelings, their aspirations or their culture. And even if there were, would they be any more 'truthful'?

Denying the audience any such privileged, essential 'truth', the film evokes the complex and shifting elements which went to create their historical representation: the romantic, titillating stories in the Chartist press; vast legal and medical investigations by the state; reports by the bourgeois philanthropists; and the debates of the political establishment, to whom they were a dangerous source of physical and political 'disease'.

Prostitutes

For example, they were reputed to double as prostitutes in the slack season. How much of this reputation was the production of repressive male fantasy and voyeuristic imagination is impossible to say. 'Truth', history, fantasy and ideology, the film suggests, are closer than we think.

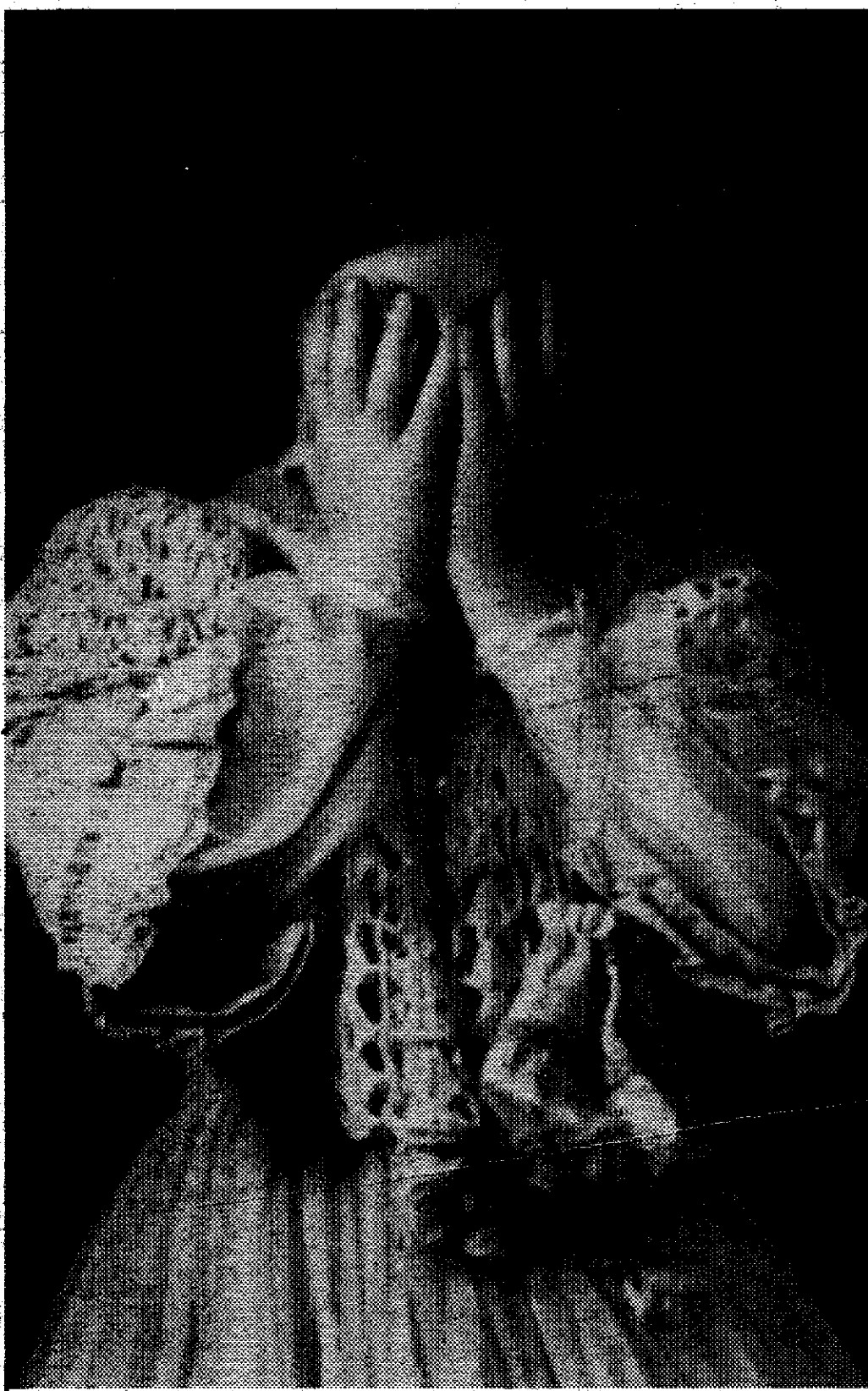
Song of the Shirt equally denies its audience a cosy niche in some accepted style and form, slipping episodically from written and spoken texts to naturalistic reconstructions of the day; from improvised modern-dress sequences to formalised essays using still photographs and graphics. One fascinating device is the use of filmed video sequences on monitors, which constantly work to break up the illusion of naturalised authenticity. On the sound-track, too, feminist musician Lindsay Cooper has taken 19th century songs and sounds and reworked them so that they are firmly part of the present's retelling of that past — the present with all its own partial and historically specific concerns.

Challenging

This is an important and challenging film. See it, discuss it, criticise it, work on it. You may never see cinema and history in quite the same light again.

Song of the Shirt is currently showing nightly at the ICA cinema in London until Thursday 6 March in a season of films concerned with the representation of the working class (01-930 3647 for details). Future bookings include Sheffield, Oxford, Coventry, Colchester, Bath, Darlington, Skegness, Bolton, Dublin.

It can be rented for showings from The Other Cinema, 12/13 Little Newport Street, London W1 (01-735 8508/9). Further information and requests for accompanying speakers to Film & History Project, 68 Montague Mansions, Crawford Street, W1 (01-935 2719).



'You may never see cinema and history in quite the same light again.'

'My Brilliant Career'

By Jenny Flintoft

DESCRIBED as 'nostalgic romance' by the London magazine *Time Out*, this film of Miles Frankland's autobiographical novel is actually about women's oppression, class and poverty in turn-of-the-century Australia.

Unromantic Sybylla, a spot clearly visible on her unmade-up cheek, lives in dreary poverty. Her once-beautiful mother, oppressed by an unsatisfactory marriage to a man 'beneath her', considers Sybylla 'plain and useless'.

Her sudden unexpected move to her rich grandmother's house merely substitutes one set of restrictions for another. Now Sybylla is expected to conform to her grandmother's expectations of how a young lady should behave.

Beautiful

Helen, her aunt — perfectly beautiful, totally controlled, anxious never to offend (and leading a desperately empty life) — is the only model she is offered. Trapped

between the two worlds of her native poverty and the stifling opulence of her grandmother's house, Sybylla struggles to realise her potential.

Independence

Her irreverent assertions of independence, coupled with apparent conformity to her grandmother's standards — she wears pretty dresses, a servant brushes her hair a hundred times a day, etc. — make the film very funny. She tricks the rich young heir to a neighbouring property into thinking her a servant, and then rejoices in his discomfiture when he realises his behaviour has been inappropriate for a woman of her social class (or, at any rate, her grandmother's).

After receiving a patronising marriage proposal from the fatuous English jackaroo, she ditches him in the middle of the bush, leaving him with four miles to walk in tight boots. Funniest of all is when, as she sits demurely under a tree in a flowing dress, the same jackaroo advances bearing flowers. She receives them graciously, simpering affectedly — only to chuck them contemptuously in the lake as he disappears.

But if the jackaroo arouses only



'You would have to be exceptionally perverse not to enjoy it.'

contempt, friendship with the highly 'eligible' her awakens her sexual feelings — and a desire in him to possess her legally. However Sybylla, though aroused, is unwilling to be hemmed in by marriage, isolated out in the bush.

Further dramatic changes in her circumstances ensue, quite out of her control. The end of the film sees her struggling to gain some command of her own life. Giving the rich young heir his final rejection, she seeks freedom through writing.

My Brilliant Career is far from being a socialist film. It illustrates the problems of poverty and underlines the class distinctions in supposedly 'classless' Australia, but the conclusions it draws are that the individual, acting in isolation, must make her/his own escape by controlling personal destiny.

Nevertheless, it brilliantly highlights some of the problems of women's oppression, and no feminist could fail to find it fascinating. You would have to be exceptionally perverse not to enjoy it.

My Brilliant Career is showing nightly at the Screen on the Hill, 203 Haverstock Hill, London NW3 (tel 435 3366) (Beehive Park tube).

Socialist Challenge

THREAT OF WHITE COUP IF MUGABE WINS

By John Hunt

THE BLACK people of Zimbabwe have been fighting a Chimurenga — a war of national liberation — against the whites who occupied their country and have kept them in virtual slavery.

The first Chimurenga was in 1896, shortly after British imperialism had conquered the country, and it so happens that the British general who crushed the uprising was called Carrington.

A contemporary noted: 'It is in his physical accomplishments that Carrington principally shines, and in comparison to them his mental development is very small.'

This time imperialism stands to be defeated in Zimbabwe, but the Carrington who is the chief enemy of the black people today — in the shape of Lord Carrington, the British foreign secretary — is a far more skilful opponent than his namesake.

Settlement

Zimbabweans are presently going to the polls, under terms which Carrington persuaded the nationalist fighters to agree to in the Lancaster House settlement.

Carrington's intentions were plain enough. He wanted to head off the revolutionary implications of the war in Zimbabwe.

The days of the Muzorewa regime were numbered, and the increasing radicalisation of the nationalist militants could have led to the formation of a government prepared to expropriate British economic interests.

Hence the plan for a British-organised election. There is no doubt that the Lancaster House settlement represents a considerable setback for the Zimbabwe people.

The elections are being 'observed' by armed British and Rhodesian racist troops. A fifth of the seats in the new parliament have been reserved for whites, and these have already been won by Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front.

Fraud

The election is largely being conducted by the existing civil service of the racist state. There is no voters' roll, so there is a strong possibility of fraud by the Muzorewa regime.

While the Rhodesian army and police are fully mobilised and able to

Help!

YOU know that annoying experience when you have to search around to find a scrap of paper when you want to note something down.

That's been us for the past week. We've run out of the paper supplies donated by readers. Any kind of paper will do, so long as it's blank on one side. Many thanks.



ZANU contingent on last Saturday's mass picket of the Foreign Office to demand an end to imperialist interference in Zimbabwe.

roam the country at will, the Patriotic Front guerrillas remain at assembly points, under the supervision of British troops. And just to help out, 450 British police officers — well experienced at dealing with black people — have been sent over.

The British governor, Lord Soames, has done his best to disrupt the campaign of one of the parties standing in the election: ZANU.

Since it played a greater role than ZAPU in the military struggle, its members would not so easily be persuaded to accept a neo-colonial solution which serves the interests of the whites. That's why ZANU has been Soames' main target.

The governor has allowed the Rhodesian army to kill ZANU guerrillas who have refused to go to the assembly points. He has not lifted a finger to stop the shooting and bomb attacks on ZANU leaders, which are almost certainly the work of the racist army.

Elite

A car which blew up prematurely in Salisbury earlier this month carried two members of the Selous Scouts, the elite of the Rhodesian army, on their way to plant a bomb.

Last Sunday two people were

killed when they planted a bomb in the offices of the Mambo Press in Gwelo. The production manager, a Catholic missionary, said it was most probably the work of the Rhodesian security forces.

Meanwhile Soames has been banning ZANU candidates and election campaigns. The party's treasurer, Justin Nyaka, has been detained for using ZANU's traditional slogan, 'Pamberi ne Chimurenga' — 'Forward with the war of national liberation'.

Even one of the British election supervisors, responsible for the Mount Darwin area, has said that Soames is lying when the latter claimed that ZANU is carrying out intimidation in that area. And the *Daily Telegraph* reporter, no friend of the nationalist forces, said that none of the main political parties has been prevented from campaigning in the area.

The imperialists' hope principally lies with a coalition government dominated by Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU. Nkomo has links with the multi-national Lonrho and has shown his willingness to go along with Soames' plans.

But Robert Mugabe's ZANU is likely to poll the largest vote, and although Mugabe has stated that his

party does not plan any nationalisation of industry and would compensate white farmers for any land takeover, the whites are certainly alarmed at the prospect of a ZANU government.

Whatever the outcome of the election, the black workers, peasants, and urban unemployed will be demanding the satisfaction of their basic needs. The drift of events is towards massive social struggles and civil war.

It is British imperialism which built the racist state in Zimbabwe. It exploited and massacred Zimbabwe's people. And it is now attempting by any means possible to maintain its interests.

That's why it is our responsibility to demand that Britain gets out of Zimbabwe at once.

*Who's who in the elections, and British imperialism's record in Zimbabwe, page 11.

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