

Socialist Challenge

No expulsions!

Lobby the Labour Party NEC
Labour Party headquarters, Walworth Rd.
**9.0am Wednesday
24 November**
Bring Party banners
Called by Labour against the witchhunt.

TWO IN THREE SAY:

**NO CRUISE
NO TRIDENT**



The latest Gallup poll shows that opposition to both Cruise and Trident is growing at a very rapid rate in this country.

The poll, which was commissioned by CND, reports that 58 per cent of the population are against having Cruise missiles here and 56 per cent of the people are against Trident.

Of the Labour voters interviewed, 77 per cent were against Cruise and 73 per cent opposed Trident. This rather puts them out of step with the Labour right wing such as Hattersley and Healey, whose interests obviously lie with the ruling class rather than Labour

voters.

The strongest opposition of all to Cruise and Trident, according to the poll, comes from young people. With a majority of the population and a strong base in youth, the anti-war movement is now in an excellent position to prevent the siting of these dreadful weapons.

But such an opposition must be spearheaded by the labour movement. That is why the attempts by the right-wing union leaders like Chapple and their counterparts in the Labour Party to sabotage the anti-nuclear campaign and play down the Conference decision on unilateralism are so serious.

The actions of these people are not only against the interests of a majority of the population but they are trying to prevent that majority achieving what it wants. This is why the struggle to remove such leaders is in the interests of democracy and is tied up with a rather important issue — the prevention of mass destruction!

It is in this light that we must view the jailing of the women for invading the missile site at Greenham Common. Whether or not we think their type of action will achieve their ends is neither here nor there. What matters is that they have

been jailed by a class-biased judge who speaks for a minority of the population. These brave women who have accepted jail rather than give up their opposition to these weapons, do speak for the majority.

As we redouble our efforts to build the anti-nuclear movement we must make sure that the Home Office is inundated with

protests demanding that these women are released. We must make clear that Thatcher and her judges are not allowed to intimidate us in the fight against the war drive of imperialism.

Cruise and Trident can be stopped. But to do so will involve mighty class battles. It will mean industrial action against their deployment. It will involve scurging the

labour movement of the traitors in its ranks. And it will lead to confrontations with the capitalist courts and judges who will use their laws against us.

But the Gallup poll shows that the unilateralists are winning wider support and now that growing movement must be organised in a massive anti-Cruise anti-Trident campaign.

IN AN important article on *Tribune's* front page Alex Kitson, deputy general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union calls for a new change to the Labour Party's constitution.

'Constituencies and trade unions will be allocated the number of conference votes which is equivalent to the number of individual membership affiliations (£3 in 1982) that they paid to the party,' he says. 'The major result of this would be that voting would then accurately reflect the financial contribution made to the party nationally by constituency parties and unions.' Because trade union affiliated members of the Labour Party pay a political levy considerably less than £3, this would probably increase the Constituency Labour Parties' vote at annual conference to around 20 per cent, instead of the present 9 per cent.

Kitson is disturbed

because many rank and file Party members were bitterly resentful of the influence of trade union leaders at the party conference, where the block vote was used to impose the witch-hunt and saddle the Party with the most right wing National Executive since the 60s. He says the reform will ensure that the Sidney Weighell incident is not used by 'some outside the Party and even some within it' to 'weaken the vital bond between the party and unions.'

The idea will have some influence. Many in the Constituency Parties think that the best way to deal with the undemocratic use of the block vote is to strengthen the in-

fluence of the Constituencies at the expense of the unions. Kitson's suggests a compromise so that this can be done while, in his own words 'the block vote would continue to be cast in exactly the same way as at present,' and 'the balance of votes between the constituency parties and the unions would not be unduly disrupted.'

These constituency activists who believe their influence should be strengthened to deal with the block vote will see such a change as a small, but positive step forward.

Will the proposed change help deal with the undemocratic use of the block vote? Will it cement links between unions and individual activists? Will it take the left forward? Socialist Challenge opens a discussion with an article by ALAN FREEMAN. Further contributions will be welcomed.

Blocking the block vote

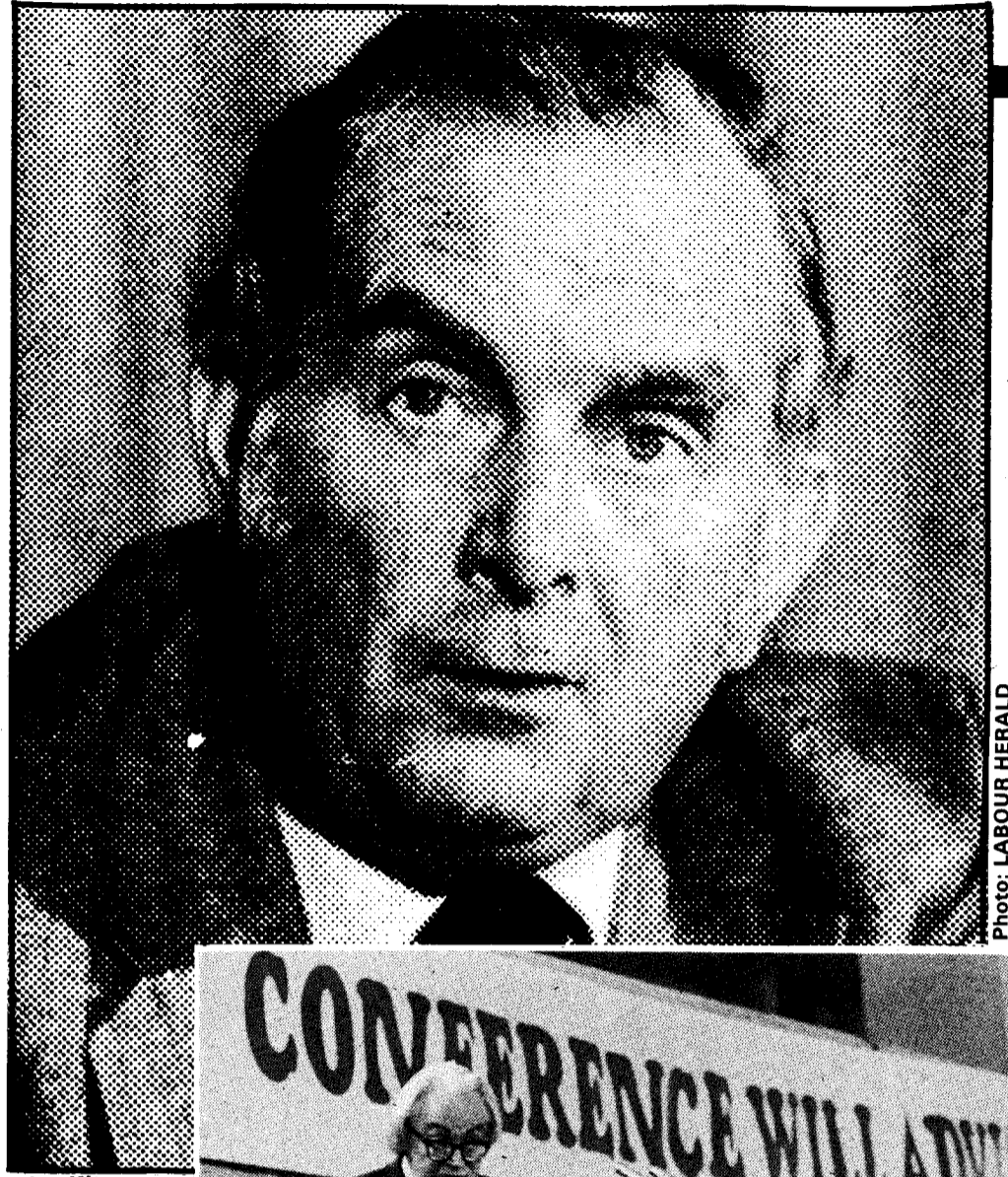


Photo: LABOUR HERALD

Alex Kitson



Photo: CHRIS DAVIES REPORT

IT SEEMS pretty obvious why constitutional reform is in the air again: because the crucial decisions of the last Labour Party conference were not supported by a majority of Labour Party members. After a three year democracy fight, we had a grossly undemocratic conference.

So we can agree that further reforms would be welcome. Where do we begin? Alex Kitson starts from the need to keep Labour Party — union links.

But the democracy campaign set out to secure accountability. We haven't yet got a leadership accountable to the membership. This, not a supposed antagonism between CLPs and unions, is the root of present bitterness.

There are three simple campaigns the T&GWU can back which would dramatically improve its relations with 90 per cent of CLPs: to throw out the register; elect an NEC that support's Labour's policies; and let women have real power in the Labour Party.

If the T&GWU doesn't back these measures I

strongly suspect CLPs will treat the new proposal — quite rightly — as a crumb from the block vote table leaving real power exactly where it was before.

Where is the difficulty? I think Richard Crossman spelt it out in his introduction to Bagehot's *English Constitution*. Real power, he said, is shared between the PLP and the union leaders and safeguarded by the PLP's autonomy and the unaccountability of the block vote.

Effective reform must therefore transfer real power from the PLP to the union leaders to the base of both unions and CLPs. Kitson's idea does neither.

Murky

With this said, is there still a case for some other reform which would allocate power differently between CLPs and unions? Perhaps. For example, if the PLP can have 'sacred territory' which the conference can't intrude on, why shouldn't there be constitutional guarantees of CLP's rights? Why shouldn't they have a veto, for exam-

ple, over any constitutional changes affecting individual membership? The register wouldn't have got past square one in such a situation.

It is however wrong, in my view, to think that changing the voting strengths of CLPs and unions will help.

If the problem is the small size of the CLP vote, why did the left support an electoral college giving 30 per cent of the vote to the CLPs? Why not back the 'moderate centre' proposal for 33-33-33 between CLPs, unions and MPs, which would have given the CLPs the biggest say of all? We need a different relation between unions and CLPs, not a different carve-up of the same relationship.

Three arguments will be put against this. The first is that the constituencies are more left wing than the unions.

This is widely-accepted but very dubious. First, if it were true, the right wing would have a very good case for stronger trade union control. They could claim the constituencies were unrepresentative.

After all, what's the point of winning the fight in the Labour Party if you can't win it at the polls? The strongest part of the left's case is that it does represent trade union opinion which the block vote misrepresents.

Weak

But secondly, is it really true? Of course, the constituencies often pass more left wing motions. But anyone can pass left wing motions; the problem is what you do about them. How many CLPs have actually reselected MPs who actually support all the motions they pass? How many CLPs have been active in supporting the health workers as the thousands of union branches who've come out on the days of action?

Nor can we assume the CLPs will automatically be to the left of the unions even on policy matters. The CLPs were originally set up in the 1920s to counteract the influence of the Communist Party in the unions.

The unions spearheaded the more radical measures in Labour's 1945 programme — particularly the T&GWU. If Golding gets his way, we may well find the right wing launching its own offensive through the constituencies. We should not play with ideas that any particular section of the party is 'more left wing' than any other for all time. After all, look at the NEC.

The second argument, which Kitson puts forward, is that the CLPs pay a higher financial contribution. I also think this is very dangerous.

If the principle of votes for money is accepted, then the way is open for a dramatic increase in the already corrupt process of unions simply paying for the number of votes they want. The right wing unions would just calculate what they need to win a particular vote and pay up the requisite sum.

The third argument is that in some sense CLPs are more 'activist', and that their higher financial contribution reflects this.

There is a point to this argument. One of the principal reasons that unions leaders have been less in CLPD's spotlight than MPs is because CLP activists are more vigilant about what goes on in the Labour Party than rank and file trade unionists. Yet this is what began to change with the Deputy Leadership campaign. Why not carry on along the same road by taking Labour Party issues more vigorously into the unions?

It's easily done: a simple circular from the T&G asking its branches to ensure they take regular reports on the Labour Par-

ty, send delegates to GCs, and support T&G policy there, such as unilateralism and opposition to witch-hunts. How about a few T&G delegates at the next meeting of Spellers' Chislehurst GC to defend Nigel Williamson?

And this shows where the argument about individual members being more 'active' goes astray.

Trade unionists who attend trade union branch meetings, vote for GC delegates and mandate them, are just as active as individual party members who go to ward meetings and do the same. Why draw a distinction between the two forms of activity?

Is canvassing more deserving than organising strikes? Both are part of the foundations of the Labour Party.

The contradiction lies in the different way ward activists and trade union members have their votes counted at national level. Individual members vote through their CLPs, and for that matter so do those trade unionists who send delegates to GC's. But trade unionists also cast an additional vote nationally, which is in practice wielded without consultation by their leaders, and controls the Labour Party. The solution is to seek ways in which trade unionists at local level can play a more

direct role as trade unionists in Labour Party politics — such as factory branches and special conferences — and at the same time make the block vote accountable to the union rank and file by means of a struggle to democratise the unions. More radical measures are conceivable — such a transfer of a part of the block vote to local level.

But swapping votes between branch activists and trade unionists will, in my view, solve nothing, change little, and stand in the way of resuming the campaign which Bishop Stortford interrupted — for an accountable leadership.

Golding's proposals

IT'S NOT only the left who are talking about constitutional reform. Labour's General Jaruzelski, John Golding, has pitched in with an old idea of Denis Healey's. Viewers of Channel Four's *Week in Politics* heard him arguing for what he calls 'one man, one vote' in the constituencies.

Now every man, and every woman too, has a vote in their constituency already. Individual members vote through their wards, trade unionists through their union branches — who send delegates to the GC.

In fact if you're active in both you get two votes. All you have to do is show up. So what's new?

The thing is that Golding doesn't mean quite what he says. He means one of two things, and probably both. Firstly that crucial decisions

(such as the selection of MPs) should be taken by all Party members individually instead of through their delegates.

Secondly he means postal ballots.

We imagine this will be applied quite selectively. After all, you can't spend £500 on stamps for every point of order, can you? So what issues will there be a ballot on? Well, we can't see Golding balloting his POEU members on whether unilateral nuclear disarmament ought to be in Labour's election manifesto.

Nor can we somehow see union members being consulted over zealously about who's going on Labour's NEC next year. In short, the postal ballot will be a perfect mechanism for putting the local parties in the hands of petty bureaucrats approved by Chapple and Golding,

with ample chance for *The Sun* and the *Express* to get in on the act telling everyone how to vote in the 'privacy' of their own home. This means people will not hear the alternative arguments of those who do not have a millionaire press behind them.

The idea of postal ballots is a *Tory* one. It's at the centre of the anti-union legislation they've been trying to foist on us for the last fifteen years. They like it for one simple reason. It increases the power of the bureaucrats, who they can easily discuss with on port-wine terms, over the membership, who cause them more trouble.

But then, we don't suppose that John Golding is too worried about helping the Tories — he's done so much for them already.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

If you would like to be put in touch with Socialist Challenge supporters in your area or would like more information fill in the form below

Name.....

Address.....

Age.....

Union/CLP (if any).....

Send to: Socialist Challenge, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP.

WITCH-HUNT

Labour's right rethinks

JOHN GOLDING'S new model Organisation Committee has come a cropper at its very first meeting.

On Labour Party Secretary Jim Mortimer's recommendation, it decided on 10 October to postpone any decision on expelling *Militant* supporters until the National Executive meets on 24 November next week.

The immediate reason, according to Mortimer, was the legal problems involved. *Militant* says it has been informed that, in its own words '(1) the register is, in fact, unconstitutional and could be subject to review in the courts; and (2) any individual members expelled under the provisions of the register could challenge his or her expulsion in the courts.'

Militant points out that Clause II(3) of the constitution, which is used to justify the register, only lays down conditions for affiliation to the party. 'The clause does not say, or even imply,' says *Militant*, 'that members of non-affiliated organisations cannot be members of the Labour Party.'

Jim Mortimer and everyone who backed the register now look absolute fools. This need not worry us; truth will out. But the Labour Party as a

whole has to pay a price while these people are in charge of it. If our leaders can't even understand legal technicalities raised by a small socialist newspaper which they themselves claim is 'not of this world', how can they run the country?

The only way out is to drop the whole thing, register, expulsions and all.

But there are no signs the NEC is going to do this. It is to discuss new ways of expelling the *Militant*. And John Golding has now extended his campaign. On Saturday night's television programme *A Week in Politics*, to the whole of CLPD. The Organisation Committee took the extraordinary step of threatening to disband Hornsey Constituency Labour Party unless it kicks out Tariq Ali.

What justification is there

Campaigning priorities

Lobby the NEC on 24 November — bring banners
Send messages and resolutions of support to Hornsey, Bermondsey and letters of protest to the NEC
Ensure your organisation affiliates to LAW and sends a delegate to its national conference on 12 December
Organise local conferences and rallies in defence of socialist policies and against the witch-hunt
Resolutions to regional conference calling for non-acceptance of expulsions.



Labour Party members demonstrate for the right to choose their own candidate — in this instance to replace Reg Prentice in Newham North East.

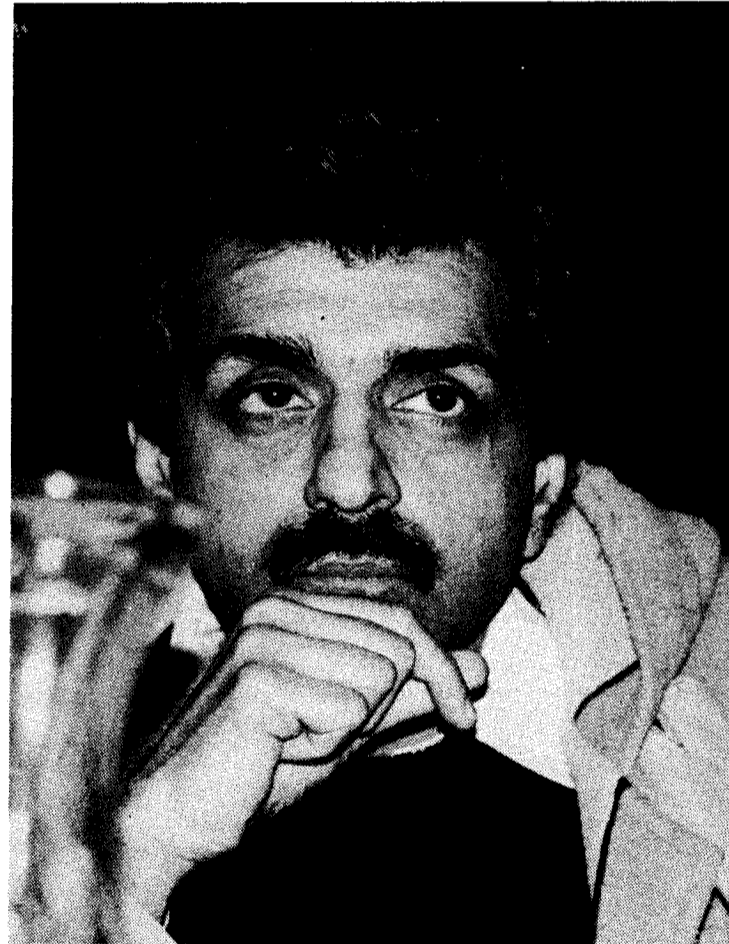
for this? Tariq Ali is not a *Militant* supporter. He is being excluded only for his views.

The decision on Bermondsey is if anything worse. After a year in which the party has made it absolutely plain that they want Peter Tatchell as their candidate, they are not to be told they must accept an NEC-imposed shortlist. This makes complete nonsense of reselection!

So whatever the NEC is going to do, while it may well rethink its tactics, it will not retreat on its goal of carrying out a purge of Labour's left. It is, however, worried that it will provoke too damaging resistance in an election year.

It has two possible tactics: an all-out assault, using its extraordinary powers, to decapitate *Militant* and the YS, demoralising the left before it can respond. Or — probably more likely — salami tactics.

Golding wants to drive the left from power in the constituencies and to create a 'pliable' constituency organisation with the bones taken out, but the flesh left behind. Labour Against the Witch-hunt is now more vital than ever. It is only if CLPs are picked off one by one that Golding can succeed. Hornsey and Bermondsey must not be allowed to go down — or they will only be the first of many.



Tariq Ali

Defend Hornsey, Bermondsey, says LAW

'It is now crystal clear that the register of non-affiliated organisations is unworkable,' said the secretariat of Labour Against the Witch-hunt in response to the Organisation Committee's decision. 'We trust the NEC will now drop its divisive campaign to expel individual members of the Party.'

The secretariat went on to warn, however, that the Organisation Committee's decision to disband Hornsey Party unless it admits Tariq Ali to membership, and to try and prevent Bermondsey CLP standing Peter Tatchell as its candidate, would have to be fought.

'These specific proposals,' said Ernie Roberts MP, the campaign's chair, 'show the urgent need for the Labour Party to stop the witch-hunt now — before it undermines Labour's chances of beating the Tories. We can assure the NEC that a purge will be opposed by LAW and all those in the Party who want to unite to defeat the Tories.'

To affiliate to Labour Against the Witch-hunt or for information contact Keith Lichman, 11 Wilderton Road, London N16.

Bermondsey under threat

PETER TATCHELL interviewed

'We will not go down in history as the ones who buckled and paved the way for a general assault on the left'

BERMONDSEY LABOUR PARTY is to meet David Hughes, Jim Mortimer and Russell Tuck of Labour's NEC on 23 November to discuss what it will be doing in the forthcoming Bye-election provoked by Bob Mellish's resignation. Socialist Challenge spoke to Peter Tatchell who was selected as candidate but not endorsed by the NEC, on Tuesday 16 November.

Do you think you can win Bermondsey for Labour?

Yes. But it will be hard. In the last twelve months the NEC has done more to damage the Labour Party's standing with the Tories, the SDP and the Liberals combined. Their at-

tacks on Bermondsey CLP have given credibility to all our opponents' accusations.

This means we're starting with our authority undermined. But we're determined to stand firm and resist an imposed candidate.

The leadership are sending down three people to a special meeting of our Executive on the 23rd. We think they're going to try and persuade me to stand down and the Party to withdraw its support. If we don't comply, the rumour is that there will be an imposed shortlist of 3 and that I will not be endorsed.

Our mood is to fight. We're defending the right of all CLPs to choose their candidates. If we surrender it will be a betrayal of the right of reselection and of all Labour Party members to choose their own candidates.

We don't want to go down in history as the ones who buckled under pressure, betrayed CLPs and opened the way for a general assault on the left.

But Spellars, for example, claims that the right



Under threat: Bermondsey Labour Party's candidate, Peter Tatchell

wing will increase Labour's chances of victory by restoring a 'traditional Labour Party'. Would this apply in Bermondsey?

It's a travesty to say that Healey and Golding represent the Labour Party's traditions. Its pioneers were radical firebrands who believed in extraparliamentary action and

vigorously propounded it.

It's the dominant post-fifties leadership that broke with this tradition. People like myself have been re-igniting the flames which they want to extinguish.

But how damp is the fuel you want to ignite?

The Tories have been on the ideological offensive since 1979, and our Party is on the defensive because it hasn't mobilised mass opposition and has confined itself to defensive skirmishes. This has perhaps had some effect, and we have to devote ourselves to outward campaigning. We'll be doing this on Wednesday when we protest against the property speculator's carve-up of Surrey Docks and Bermondsey Riverside.

But the problem is that in the face of a sustained media campaign of hate and misrepresentation, we have had a very weak and unpositive leadership spending more time witch-hunting socialist than campaigning for democratically agreed policies like nuclear disarmament.

Do you think this suggests it may have been a mistake to stop campaigning against the right wing after Bishops Stortford? Do you agree with Tony Benn's view that we have to keep the existing leadership?

I don't think we have any option.

Why do you think the witch-hunt began?

It's an attempt to use Clause II to expel the supporters of Clause IV from the Party. I don't think there's any support for it amongst rank and file members. These measures — vetoes on candidates, disbandments and expulsions are the actions of desperate people who've lost the hearts and minds of ordinary Labour Party members.

What can be done to assist you by the left?

We urgently need backing from other CLPs to reject this im-

position. We ask all Labour Party organisations to send letters of protest to the NEC as a matter of urgency, and a copy to us.

At the 30 October conference against the witch-hunt you spoke in favour of resolution 4, which called for an immediate fusion of the campaign with the Labour Steering Committee Against the Witch-hunt. What is your feeling now about the best way to get a united anti-witch-hunt campaign?

Myself and Bermondsey Labour Party supported resolution 4 because we want to see a united campaign. But we didn't interpret this as meaning that the 30 October campaign should dissolve, as others apparently did. We wanted LAW and LSCAW to work together in a united way and co-ordinate action.

Messages of support to Bermondsey are urgently needed. Send to: 133 Lower Road, London SE16.

Miners

In the aftermath of the miners' vote against strike action, a major debate has opened in the pits. Socialist Challenge opens its columns to three views on this.

Miners: what went wrong?

Bill Alder interviews Peter Heathfield, area secretary, North Derbyshire NUM

Why do you think the executive lost the ballot?

We were disappointed with the result of the ballot after a particularly enthusiastic campaign up and down the country and what appeared to be good support from our members. It seems to me that one of the factors in delivering the hostile vote was the kind of propaganda campaign that the tabloids especially conducted.

I can't recall an occasion when papers like the Sun, Mail, Express have devoted pages to persuade miners not to support their trade union. The propaganda war was won by our enemies and hopefully we will bear that in mind for the future.

Some NUM members have argued that the campaign was a bit lop-sided. At the top level it was good — the big rallies did a lot for the morale of those who attended them — but it was very variable at a local level.

I'm not a believer in instant militancy. You have to educate and make members aware over a prolonged period. 1972 and 1974 were slightly different. We were trying to correct an injustice over a declining wage. This time there wasn't only a threat to wages, there was also a threat to jobs.*

There were areas of the

NUM, where some people pronounced their support to the union, but privately expressed their reservations and made some pretty awful statements publicly about the campaign.

But nationally it was a pretty extensive campaign. Whether it could have been intensified, I don't know. I don't really think so. I think more realistically we would have to look at a prolonged campaign, giving officials the opportunity to meet smaller groups of men in localities, rather than at the mass rallies. So at the end of the day, we probably met through this medium one in five of the members. It isn't enough.

Returning to the future and the Board's attitude. I think it's going to be a particularly difficult period, mostly because of our knowledge of the likelihood of a substantial number of pit closures. There will continue to be campaigns against pit closures. The vote did not give the NCB leave to discuss pit closures ad nauseum. We will resist and fight every closure as it arises.

The most likely pits the NCB will try to close in the short term are Snowdown (Kent), Kinneil (Scotland) and Brittonia (South Wales). Has the union got an immediate plan of resistance on these cases?

At the moment the NUM is waiting for NCB

response on Snowdown. Our own mining engineers have conducted a very detailed survey with some positive results. This has been submitted to the Board. We're waiting for a response. Kinneil is another difficult one that has not yet been resolved. The NUM in Scotland will be pursuing that initially. I think it's necessary to add more to the list.

The terms of reference of the NCB have been determined mainly by the Government who will seek to reduce capacity of the mining industry. By the normal capitalist yardstick we are producing considerably more than they are consuming.

So you don't think the new pits at Vale of Belvoir or Selby will increase coal producing capacity and be the 'promised land' for miners?

Certainly not. Selby will be manned by labour from pits that will be closed in neighbouring coalfields. Vale of Belvoir is a long way away. I've always maintained that Heseltine's delay in announcing the development at Belvoir was based on their intentions to privatise it.

This is a threat and certainly if there's another Tory Government, God forbid, they will talk about privatisation of important sections of the coal industry. That means those where the capitalists can make a profit, like the Vale of Belvoir and Selby.

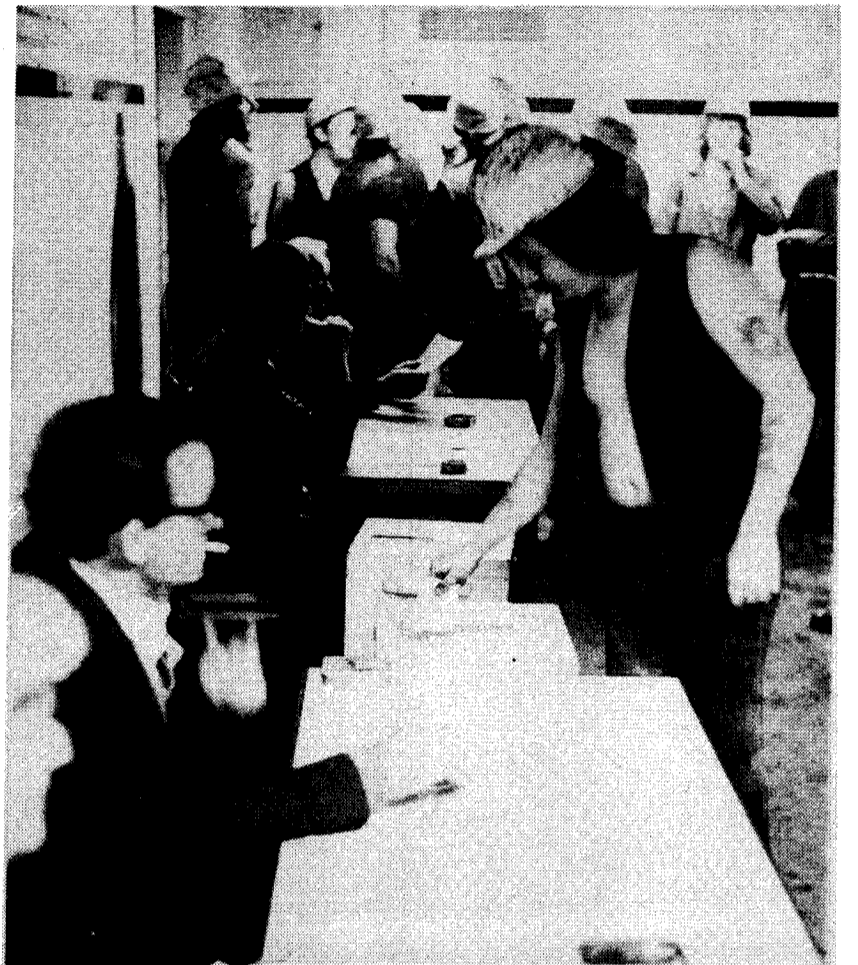
they can hand that back to private interests, I don't think they will hesitate unless we as a trade union and labour movement as a whole are able to raise a realistic campaign against it.

On privatisation, the NUM Conference has issued a call for a national trade union conference of unions threatened by privatisation. British Telecom looks like being the first for the axe. What are your thoughts on that?

Although the TUC has declared its opposition to privatisation, I don't know of any individual trade union in the public sector that has done anything about it. Our attempts in coal, rail and steel to launch a rebirth of the Triple Alliance, has not really taken off.

A Triple Alliance is not really going to succeed if it's about trade union leaders pontificating in London. A Triple Alliance will succeed when trade unionists at grass roots level decide to act collectively to defend their industry and their jobs.

I think Scotland is perhaps an example where it has worked. The threat to Ravensraig has drawn miners and steel workers together. There's a fear, too, that in the railway industry there are going to be cutbacks and loss of jobs. So, in Scotland, at least, there seems to be a development of a Triple Alliance that is capable of actually doing things. Regrettably in England that is not the case.



Pat Hickey (Socialist Challenge)

THE LETTER (12 November) from Dick Hall and Mark Hunger is a little hard on Socialist Challenge. The article 'Miners can defeat the Tories' was no doubt over optimistic, but not so dramatically incorrect as comrades suggest. It was intended to take sides in the ballot, not merely to comment on it. It therefore pointed to the potential of a miners' strike in turning the situation round against the Tories.

The articles inside, 'Scargill's Barnstorming Campaign' by Celia Pugh and 'Ballot Result in the Balance' written in collaboration with comrades in the mines and mining areas showed an equal degree of optimism.

The former, in particular, spoke of 'For the first time since 1935 a united (my emphasis) NUM Executive' touring the coalfields and referred enthusiastically to standing ovations, etc., for Arthur Scargill.

Our eagerness for a fight-back against the Tories no doubt clouded our judgement a little. But then you predicted a 61 to 39 rejection? The general assessment was that it would be a close vote, A-levels in hindsight notwithstanding.

We cannot accept the comrades assessment of the reasons for the miners vote. To confine the question simply to the situation in the NUM is a wrong and sectoralist approach. We think that the campaign run by the NUM leadership was the best campaign run by any section of the trade union bureaucracy for many years. Every miner knew the issues.

No doubt there could have been many improvements. But we do not believe that more leaflets, more copies of The Miner, or even more pit meetings would have substantially altered the vote. The fact of the matter is that miners were not prepared to take the offensive against the Tories in a situation of general downturn in the class struggle. The sell-outs of the ASLEF strike, the NUR strike, the undermining of the health strike, and the right-wing offensive on the witch-hunt all contributed to this.

Clearly, miners felt that the trade union leadership would actively sabotage the kind of class-wide support that would be needed.

In 1972 and 1974 the miners went into action under a right-wing leadership, whose attitudes to the actions was, to say the least, lukewarm. The decisive factor was that the class as a whole were fighting the then Tory Government. There had

been a whole series of actions against the Industrial Relations Act, over 200 occupations and so on.

Moreover, the dominant figures in the TUC were the 'left' leaders, Jones and Scanlon. Then, as now, it was the overall situation in the class that was the decisive factor. Failure to take this into account leads to a sectarian attitude to Scargill, similar to that taken by the SWP.

While the points made about the need for a campaigning union are well taken, they are not sufficient. On their own they amount to an administrative solution to a political problem.

The political problem is the leadership of the labour movement as a whole. This leadership has consistently refused to fight the Tories, and has actively sabotaged every struggle that has emerged. They are the main obstacle to a fight against the Tories.

Scargill's failure was not mainly that he did not lead the fight in the NUM, but that he did not fight the right wing across the labour movement. This failure is common to the left bureaucracy at present. Within the working class there is strong minority which does want to fight the Tories, and who see the right wing as the main obstacle.

Scargill, Buckton and Benn have so far failed to organise these forces at the base to settle accounts with the right wing. Instead they confine themselves to sectoral actions (ASLEF, NUM), or to fighting within the bureaucracy.

The existence of an organised left across the unions fighting the right would be an enormous boost in confidence to workers facing the Tories' attacks. And such organisation is essential to dealing with the betrayals of the right.

The adage, 'Don't Mourn — Organise' applies across the movement. For this, such issues as the witch-hunt will be of central importance. The left trade union leaders and the left leaders in the Labour Party must be pushed into developing cross sectoral campaigns against this. We must support every step that takes us towards such cross-sectoral organisation.

It is by linking up with the left across the unions and the LP that we can begin the fight to turn the NUM and other unions into the campaigning unions that we need.

In the fight to prepare the NUM for the battles on pit closures these questions will play a vital role. The sectoral approach is dead. It is a thing of the past.

We now need to face up to new challenges. Understanding that the right wing leadership of the movement is a problem affecting every sector is a precondition for advance.



Ken Capstick, Parkhill NUM delegate to the Yorks Area Council spoke to Socialist Challenge

THE LADS voted on the wages issue. They were prepared to accept the Board's offer rather than go into what they believed would be a long strike. This is where the campaign by the press and the media did have its effect.

The Board was saying all along that jobs and pay were 'not connected' — which is just playing with words because they never denied there was a threat of pit closures. But they were trying to fool people into thinking, 'they've invented the pit closure issue'.

This does not mean miners won't fight over pit closure. They didn't think that pit closures were on the cards at this moment. We've got to remember that 18 months ago, Yorkshire miners voted 86 per cent in favour of action to save pits.

For instance, it's significant that after the ballot

miners interviewed on TV were all saying that the Board mustn't think they can now start closing pits. That's a battle still to be fought — a battle miners are always going to be fighting.

We had one of the best campaigns carried out before a union ballot in trade union history. Maybe the negative response was because of the TV and the rest of the media throwing up a smokescreen and personalising the issue with attacks on Scargill.

But the present political climate has a lot to do with it. Mass unemployment has produced a climate of fear. Miners are just the same as everyone else. Compared with other settlements, eight per cent appeared reasonable.

I think the miners could sense that the trade union movement is in retreat. When they see Derek Robinson sacked and what happened at

British Leyland since; when they see people like Sid Weighell accepting job losses on British Rail with no struggle; when they see the TUC putting up no fight against Thatcher — this affects miners too.

Take the traindrivers dispute. They'd got their members out, the railways were at a standstill and they'd won the support of a lot of people. But we all knew that when they were defeated by the TUC leadership — not the Tories — the miners would be the next target.

That was a turning point. Many expected a fight and it didn't come. 'If the TUC didn't back the traindrivers, would they back us?' must have been in the minds of many miners. We failed to convince them of their obvious ability to win.

There are some lessons for the left in the NUM. We have

to think about how important simple wages militancy is. We have to raise the political consciousness of miners. Miners feel strongly about a lot of other things — like a four day week, early retirement, a rate protection scheme, pit closures and technological job losses.

Then, as Scargill said in his campaign speeches, we have to make the Triple Alliance something rooted in the pits, steelplants and rail depots. It's no good having an alliance with those whose main interest is a seat in the House of Lords.

If we got to the point when workers in all three industries were prepared to strike together on jobs, we would also be building a wider movement which really threatens the government.

Challenge to Weighellism in NUR

By Celia Pugh

Geoff Hensby, secretary of the Paddington No 1 branch of the National Union of Railwaymen and of the influential national Guards and Shunters Grades conference has declared his candidature for general secretary of the NUR. His decision provides a major opportunity for the left in the union to get rid of Weighellism and not just Sidney Weighell in the conduct of union affairs.

When Sidney Weighell fell from grace as general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, he declared that the National Executive Committee had become a battleground. Too right. Thousands of railway workers prepared for strike action this year against job slashing productivity deals, one driver operation and closure of workshops — all part of the Rail Board's corporate plan for 38,000 job losses.

Support

Their determination to resist these Tory attacks heaped pressure on the National Executive to lead a fightback. This was spurned by Weighell and his right wing cronies in Unity House, but the ranks have had their revenge.

In the election campaign for the new General Secretary they will now look for a voice to express their opposition to Tory assaults on the union and for left policies to protest jobs to tackle issues like unilateral disarmament and for an accountable leadership that will cham-

When Sidney Weighell fell from grace as general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, he declared that the National Executive Committee had become a battleground. Too right. Thousands of railway workers prepared for strike action this year against job slashing productivity deals, one driver operation and closure of workshops — all part of the Rail Board's corporate plan for 38,000 job losses.

The candidacy of Geoff Hensby provides such a voice. In his 22 years of NUR membership he has been associated with a fight against the Board and the treachery of the right wing leaders. Recently he has outlined fighting policies against productivity, one-driver operation, for the rights of women and black workers in the industry and for the union to throw its weight into a campaigning Triple Alliance with steel and mining unions and a national campaign against privatisation.

This year he was rewarded for this stand by the left and the right in turn. He received over 20,000 votes for delegation to Labour Party conference and was witch-hunted and fined for distributing literature critical of Weighell's leadership.

Hensby will address NUR branches in the next 3 months to seek the required 10 nominations and, if successful, will follow this with three months of campaigning before the election itself. The debate his campaign



Railworkers demonstrating on Triple Alliance demonstration in Glasgow

throws up in every NUR branch in the country can only strengthen the confidence of the left to move forward against the Tories and the union's right wing.

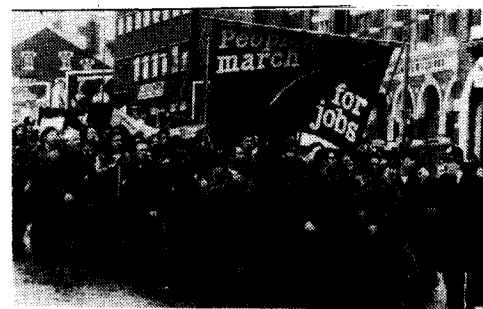
This is particularly important as the only other candidate with a left label, Jimmy Knapp, has not come clear on his policies against job loss, one-driver operation, privatisation and industrial action against Tory attacks on the union.

Hensby's campaign will put pressure on Knapp to put his cards on the table.

Knapp's supporters will try to argue that Hensby's campaign will split the left vote. This argument holds no water because the union rules outline a procedure of transferable votes, where members state an order of preference. Left votes can be transferred through a second preference vote. NUR members will feel

more confident in casting such a vote for Knapp if he is forced to stand out for a clear left alternative instead of his present attempt to walk the line of least resistance and court the middle ground.

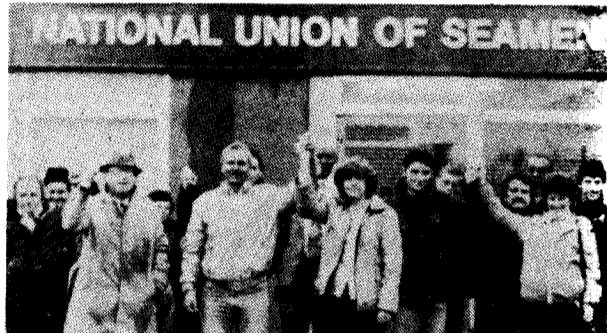
Hensby's campaign provides an ideal opportunity for the union's left to stir up the troops in the NUR battleground that petrifies rightwingers like Sidney Weighell and causes their downfall.



New 'People's March'

A MARCH against unemployment from Scotland to London has been proposed by the South East and North West regions of the TUC. The original idea was to link the march with the elections. It has been suggested that seige of London be laid at the end of the march with the construction of a 'tent city'.

The first People's March in May '81 received major backing in the trade unions. But its potential was dissipated by the TUC leadership's emphasis on involving the Confederation of British Industries and the churches. As such it failed to play any role in offering a national fightback against redundancies.



Seafarers fight victimisation

SEVENTEEN seafarers have been sacked by their employer, the National Environmental Research Council, in October and threatened with legal action after giving magnificent solidarity to the healthworkers. The seafarers, mainly from South Wales, were working on the research vessel *Discovery*. Their elected convenor, MUSA NOGAN, spoke to BARRY WILKINS about the significance of the dispute.

We had a five day stoppage in early September to coincide with the TUC conference while the ship was in dock at St John's, Newfoundland. At first we decided on a 24-hour stoppage, but extended it after anti-trade union harassment from the officers. The purpose was to send a message to the TUC, and to the healthworkers under siege from the Tory government, that there were other workers supporting them, even thousands of miles away.

This was the longest period of industrial action any workers took in solidarity with the healthworkers, and therefore has national significance.

Before sailing we had a promise in writing from the employer that there would be no victimisation for any industrial solidarity action with the healthworkers. But our five day stoppage made the captain mad at us.

After a problem had arisen on watch, the captain accused me of refusing to obey an order. But the boss explained that this was a misunderstanding. The captain had to accept it. No disciplinary charges were made.

But the crew saw the danger of victimisation, and imposed an overtime ban for two days as a defensive action — a warning against any further attempts. Since we were at sea, all essential services, especially safety, were maintained.

No disciplinary action or charges were made at the time. But when we returned to Britain on leave, we were told that we were sacked, and charges have been made against us under the Merchant Shipping Act about discipline for out two-day overtime ban.

They are using this Act as a loophole to try to screw us. To prosecute under the Employment Act would be too explosive. Because of the national significance of our action, it would blow wide open.

We have full backing from our union demanding reinstatement and the dropping of all charges. The *Discovery* will not move until this happens, and other NERC vessels are also being halted. The NERC must be hit by trade union action to win this dispute.

The NERC has offices in Barry Docks. We have picketed these offices three times now with tremendous support from healthworkers and miners from all over South Wales. We have set up a broad campaign with healthworkers and also 16 lodges of the South Wales miners in support.

Workers in two Cardiff hospitals have taken 24-hour stoppages. We are planning further action, and winning support from trade union leaders like Arthur Scargill, Rodney Bickerstaffe, and Emlyn Williams of the South Wales NUM.

It is this kind of trade union solidarity in action which is the solution not only to our problem but also to the problems faced by other workers.

The NERC cannot get us for our industrial action in solidarity with healthworkers, so they are trying to get us for 'indiscipline' in defending ourselves against the threat of victimisation.

They must not be allowed to succeed. We will fight them all the way, with the growing support of many other workers in South Wales.

Thornett sacked by BL

By Pat Hickey

BRITISH LEYLAND management struck another blow against the unions last week with the dismissal of Alan Thornett, a senior steward at the Cowley Assembly Plant. Alan has been a consistent opponent of management's attacks on the workforce for many years. He is widely recognised as the leading left trade unionist in BL, and has been pilloried by the press as 'The Mole' for his activities. As more inappropriate name would be difficult to dream up. His activities have always been openly fought for amongst the members.

The excuse for his dismissal was that his HGV license had lapsed — but this does not explain the severity of management's action. Other drivers have had their licenses taken away as a result of driving offences, and been transferred to other work.

Alan was taken off HGV driving 4 years ago, and has been driving a van. The company's propaganda is trying to imply that he has been driving HGV's for this time. In fact, it was only recently that he was put back on HGVs.

This dismissal is a clear case of victimisation, using the license as an ex-

cuse. Cowley assembly has been a big problem for BL. It was the only major plant to vote for action in the recent pay deal. It has stubbornly resisted the productivity drives. And it has recently had a spate of strikes against the hard line approach of the plant director, a hatchet man called Tom Gray.

The transport union, the T&GWU, has put in notice of industrial action, and the matter is to go to a mass meeting when the notice is up. A defeat for BL on this will be a big step forward for the unions, and a setback for the company's plans to destroy the unions as an effective force in BL.



Cowley only major plant to reject last pay deal

LEONID BREZHNEV was an apparatchnik par excellence. His rise to power was the rise of the supreme faceless bureaucrat. As an individual he has little interest except as the embodiment of the bureaucratic system which he oversaw. — patient, cautious and craving stability. Contrary to the claims of the Soviet press and its international acolytes, Brezhnev was anything but a world-historic figure. He was the least independent and least dominating leader which the Soviet bureaucracy has thrown up.

Since the overthrow of Khrushchev in 1964 the Soviet Union has been through arguably its most stable period since it came into existence — which is exactly why many commentators, both friendly and hostile to the Soviet Union, will judge Brezhnev's period of office to be a period of 'progress' for the Soviet Union.

But in reality Brezhnev oversaw the gradual unfolding of the crisis of Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union, the contradictions of which are accumulating in a gradual but nonetheless severe way. The sum total of these contradictions is the accelerated crisis of bureaucratic rule.

The first and most fundamental aspect of this crisis is the emerging crisis of the Soviet economy. Without doubt, judged overall, the period 1964-1980 saw a substantial increase in the economic strength of the Soviet Union, and this marks off the Soviet Union from the advanced capitalist countries, for whom the period from 1967 was a long period of economic decline.

For most of this period the Soviet Union has managed to remain relatively insulated from the crisis of world capitalism, thanks to its relative self-sufficiency in raw materials and centralised national planning.

Over the last 15 years the gross social product has increased by about two and a half times. Industrial output has increased 2.7 fold. In many industrial fields the Soviet Union has become the world's leading producer — in terms of quantity. The Soviet priority has remained heavy industry.

But the structural problem of agriculture has not been solved — there has only been one good harvest in the last five years — and although the quantity and variety of consumer goods has increased, many goods remain in short supply. The Soviet Union is far behind the leading capitalist countries in its technology and hence the quality of its goods.

The targets of the last three five-year plans were not reached. And over the last ten years the rate of economic growth of the Soviet economy declined markedly. Over a very extended period of time, despite the state monopoly of foreign trade, the Soviet Union and the economic bloc in general are not able to isolate themselves from the crisis of world capitalism.

The need to import Western technology, despite the Soviet advantage as a producer of raw materials and of course gold, inevitably means that price increases are reflected inside the Soviet Union; and a general decline in world trade inevitably affects the Soviet Union.

But above all the Soviet Union, like the other economies of Eastern Europe, is still plagued by waste, irrational use of materials, poor quality, pilfering on a massive scale and above all a low productivity of labour. In a period when economic growth is slowing down, these factors become even more debilitating. They are essentially the product of bureaucratic mismanagement of the economy.

The lack of political democracy, the lack of democratic centralist planning inevitably results in the bureaucratic errors and absurdities which are legendary — the over-production of some commodities and under-production of others and a failure to match production with consumer needs.

The failure of Brezhnevism

By Phil Hearse



Without workers participation in economic planning, the lumbering centralised planning authorities impose the national plan without flexibility, without local initiative and with unerring inefficiency. Nor have the successive attempts to decentralise planning the hands of the local managers been successful.

There is no doubt that the dissatisfaction of the working class with shortages of goods above all food and the emergence of significant dissident movements will cause the Soviet bureaucrats many problems in the years ahead.

While the Soviet working class remained relatively quiescent during Brezhnev's period in office, the same cannot of course be said of the working class of the rest of Eastern Europe.

Brezhnev oversaw the destruction of the Prague Spring, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The full implications of the thuggery involved in Soviet rule of Eastern Europe were exposed for all to see in this episode. Dubcek and the Czech political committee were flown to Moscow for their denigrating confrontation with Brezhnev, Kosygin and the whole Soviet politbureau, in which

Brezhnev told Ducek that Czechoslovakia would never escape from Soviet domination 'even if it means the third world war'.

Even if Brezhnev never actually presided over the sending of Soviet tanks into Poland, it was the hand of the Soviet Union which struck together with the Polish bureaucracy on 13 December 1981 when martial law was introduced. The repression of the peoples of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union remains the achilles heel of their whole system of rule.

For in Eastern Europe what is involved is not just the usual paraphernalia of Stalinist dictatorship,

but also the brutal suppression of the national rights of 100 million people.

Thus the national question will inevitably come to the fore in the developing political revolution. The Soviet Union has not made its rule of Eastern Europe stronger during Brezhnev's rule, but the workers have made it immeasurably weaker.

In international affairs, the Brezhnev period will be remembered as the epoch of the flourishing — and eventual failure — of 'detente'. Detente was merely a systematisation of the persistent policy of the Soviet leadership of 'peaceful co-existence' with the capitalist powers. It contained many elements which were perfectly principled from a socialist point of view — in particular a partial and halting attempt to limit and rationalise the arms race.

But it also included the more seamy side of 'peaceful co-existence' — the fear of real revolutionary change. During the late '60s and early '70s the Soviet Union sat on its hands while the United States pulverised Vietnam — doling out aid to the Vietnamese with an eye-dropper.

In the Middle East the Soviet Union saw its influence destroyed in the early '70s, thanks to its policy of attempting to 'win friends and influence people' via political support for bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes. In country after country the Soviet Union turned a blind eye to the brutal repression of the local communist parties, in return for 'influence'. Egypt vividly demonstrated the bankruptcy of such a policy when Sadat quickly turned away from the USSR towards the United States.

But peaceful co-existence does not mean immobility. In Africa the Soviet Union rapidly saw the possibility of new allies, and in co-operation with the Cubans, intervened to support the nationalist regimes in Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia. Without doubt these were among the boldest moves of Brezhnev.

The destruction of detente was the work of the United States. However ill-judged the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the prime reason for the breakup of detente was the war-drive launched under Carter and deepened by Reagan. Thus the Brezhnev leadership came up against the fundamental character of the imperialist powers.

In the world communist movement, Brezhnev's period of office marked the lowest point of prestige of the Soviet Union in the world communist movement since 1917. 1968 marks the crucial point of divide in this process.

The intervention in Czechoslovakia, together with the role of the French Communist Party in the May-June events in France, began a whole process of re-evaluation on the left, including in the Communist Parties themselves. The rise of Eurocommunism strained the link between the Italian and Spanish Communist Parties to the limit.

The Soviet leadership was powerless to respond to this process, precisely because the criticisms of the Eurocommunists — however right wing — touched at the very heart of the Stalinist system of rule. Official Soviet ideology had less and less attractiveness for a new generation on the left, increasingly concerned with the questions of socialism and democracy. The events in Poland and the repression of the dissident movement inside the Soviet Union itself ensured that Brezhnevism would be incapable of winning back lost ground.

Brezhnevism was a failure because it could not tackle the fundamental contradictions of the Stalinist system — inevitably because it was committed to the continued rule of the bureaucracy which it represented. Since 1964 those contradictions have deepened. Brezhnev himself personified the caution and inflexibility of the Soviet bureaucrats which will make them incapable of responding to the workers' demands. There will be no 'self-reform' of the Soviet bureaucracy. Only the Soviet workers will be able to deal with them — by removing all the Brezhnevs and the system of brutal bureaucratic rule which they defend.

Just before the second anniversary of Solidarnosc's recognition on 10 November **CLAUDE SEVRAC** visited Poland on behalf of *Rouge*, a French revolutionary socialist newspaper and a sister publication of Socialist Challenge.

We reprint an extensive interview where he describes the mood and organisation of Polish workers in the days before the demonstrations of that day.

You were in Poland when the shipyards struck. Can you say what it was like the day after Solidarnosc was banned?

I would say people didn't recognise the validity of the new law. I was struck by the workers' determination. The decision to boycott the new unions was a gut reaction. Everyone I met expressed the same feeling — in big or small firms, teachers, intellectuals or workers.

It was hard to find anyone who backed the new unions: in Silesia, where a mine employing 8000 needed to assemble 31 people in order to set up the new union, only 18 came to the first meeting. In another factory the director called the founding meeting himself and threatened anyone who didn't come with the sack. The meeting was huge, but the workers just used the discussion to obstruct the bureaucrats and nothing was done.

In other factories they didn't dare call meetings for fear of the result.

Nevertheless, many workers who saw the boycott as an important political test of opposition to the regime doubted if they could keep it up for a very long time. They felt the tactics would have to be rediscussed after four or six months passed.

The new unions promise to resolve a series of social problems — such as lodging, holidays, help to people in trouble, and food — which aren't at all secondary in the present crisis, and which no-one else deals with.

What difficulties do workers face in their daily lives? What changed from your last visit a year ago?

Things aren't exactly rosy, above all for low-paid workers. A year ago I was struck by the endless queues for elementary things like bread and milk, and the anguish of finding nothing for the day if one was too far back in the queue. The shops were empty from seven in the morning.

Things are different now. It looks pretty clear that last winter's shortages were provoked by the authorities. Many goods are now on sale with 1978 or 1979 date stamps. Today there are queues, like everywhere in the East, but the shelves are far from empty.

But this isn't the problem. The problem is that one has to be a financial acrobat to buy the food. The official average monthly wage is 9,000-10,000 zlotys. I've found more than one worker — many of them skilled — who get 6,000-8,000. The minimum wage is even lower.

Now, an egg costs 20-25 zlotys depending on whether you get it on the free or official market, and a kilo of boneless meat costs 3-400. It's as if you had to pay £1 for an egg and £15 for a kilo of meat.

There are many goods one cannot obtain — for example vital medicines, which in some towns can only be bought for dollars. And you often get ration tickets for goods that aren't available, and no ration tickets for what is available.

It looks as if the military are having some trouble controlling the situation. What is

Report from Poland



known about the internal battles going on in their ranks?

This isn't an easy question to answer because we only hear rumours. But I don't think we should underestimate the bureaucracy's ability to impose its 'law'. You must never forget that it controls the repressive forces.

It's true that workers have noted a 'neutral' attitude from troops. But this doesn't mean the soldiers are ready to pass actively onto the workers' side. Many Polish observers even think the Junta feels strong enough to lift the state of siege before Christmas — after, of course, making sure Parliament passes all the repressive laws needed to make this meaningless.

As for the internal disputes in the apparatus, and particularly between the military and the administration, one can only speculate. There is talk that the Kremlin and the bureaucracy's hard wing, led by Grabski, want to give Jaruzelski an honorific post such as president while

putting two pro-Soviets at the head of the Communist Party and the parliament.

How is the 10 November strike being prepared?

I think it was uneven. It must be said that many workers were very disoriented when the shipyard strike took place in Gdansk at the beginning of October. When they heard what happened, even though the TKK (Solidarnosc clandestine leadership) called a general strike for 10 November, they simply waited for the leadership to tell them what to do. But no instructions came.

Support strikes and demonstrations were isolated and repression was very severe. When Zbigniew Bujak appealed for unlimited abstention strikes in Warsaw it was already too late.

The news that the shipyards had gone back to work left a bitter taste after seeing workers returning, rage in

their hearts, on Wednesday morning. The scene was relayed in great detail and recounted in a tone of obvious satisfaction by the TV commentator.

This explained why I heard so many people wondering whether the movement would really be able to coordinate its actions and prepare the 10 November action efficiently.

But I think the appeal which the clandestine movement launched later on 24 October, to spell out what should be done on 10 November and on the 13-17 December for the anniversary of the state of siege, may have mobilised workers who were sceptical.

Nevertheless I must stress that the movement's capacity for co-ordination, both locally and nationally, was less advanced than I thought it would be. There is a disparity between the rather loose links between regions and the scale of mobilisations we have seen since the Spring.

How do you explain this?

There's no doubt that the policy of systematic repression has paid off. Apart from the 600 who have not yet been freed despite all Jaruzelski's promises there are more than 3000 carrying out sentences of up to 10 years, and 2000 awaiting trial.

Many militants try to keep their heads down, particularly when the secret police infiltrate everywhere, poisoning the atmosphere and catching a number of key militants.

But is this enough to explain the lack of co-ordination? Before 13 December, I had the impression — at least in some regions — that there was a minimum of preparation to deal with this kind of situation, and resist a heavy attack.

Undoubtedly, but this preparation was very uneven. Otherwise one cannot explain how the military were able to take the Solidarity leadership by surprise on 13 December.

But also TKK's lack of clarity on its overall objectives has caused a certain dispersion of forces. Some impatient currents, who could be right on many questions, but who in my opinion do not understand how important the movement's unity is, have tended to translate their disagreements into splitting actions.

This is the case with the Wroclaw 'combative Solidarity' group which asserts the need to prepare for an inevitable confrontation with the state — one cannot disagree. But it draws wrong conclusions about methods of struggle, counterposing generalised street demonstrations to patient factory organisation.

The problem is that the TKK's hesitation in preparing a general strike, which many of its members had been calling for since summer, was strongly resented by many militants I spoke to, who were quite hostile to the leadership.

But do you think this reaction is any different to the reactions of many Solidarity members before 13 December?

No, you're right. One of the characteristics of the union was always a very open criticism of elected leaders.

But right now the leadership's vacillation on the goals and forms of action of the resistance is affecting the determination of the mass movement. And you would expect this. Many workers find they are paying too high a price for ill-prepared street demonstrations or isolated strikes which let the bureaucracy carry out mass arrests or strike down the worker activists one by one after militarising the factories.

Moreover I found the most combative and conscious workers the most reserved when TKK's proposals for action appeared cut off from reality. The mining and engineering workers I spoke to were the most critical about the idea of a national agreement. Those most determined to carry the struggle through to its conclusion were often the most prudent in their analysis of the rhythms and stages needed to prepare the working class for a centralised confrontation with the bureaucracy.

If I understand you correctly, you see the situation rather differently from the articles we have published in the last few months.

This is true. This view of the workers' movement might seem rather pessimistic than one culled from a reading of the underground press and from the comrades who went on street demonstrations.

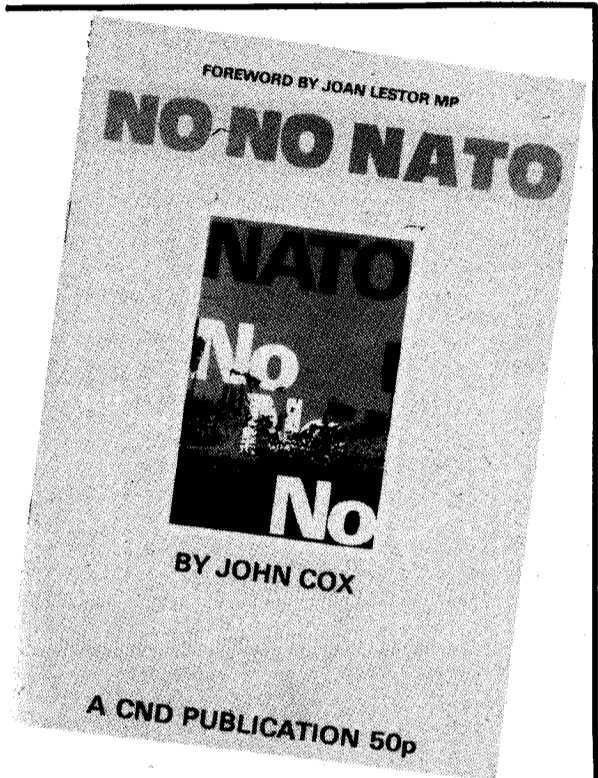
But I want to get things clear by stressing that the working class is very combative. My reservations about the degree of organisation of the workers' movement are only personal impressions. And of course it changes nothing in the importance of solidarity with Solidarnosc, or the nature of our tasks here.

Peace in Sheffield?

By Brian Heron

'A SPECTACULAR CITY OF PANORAMIC VISTAS.' That is what will greet CND activists as they gather for annual conference on 26 November. 'Sheffield has been transformed into one of the showpiece cities of Europe' according to the blurb accompanying delegates' kits. Must be all that real ale.

But a quick flick through the conference agenda will be enough to convince the most eager tourist, or even 'the connoisseur of good food' that they will have to give 'the multi purpose centres, like the Top Rank suite' and 'the many types of eating houses ... and historic banquets' a miss!



No to NATO!

By Toni Gorton

IN A rather odd little foreword to CND's latest pamphlet 'No No NATO' Joan Lester MP fails to actually take a position on whether or not the next Labour government should withdraw from NATO. While rejoicing that a call for unilateral nuclear disarmament was passed by a two thirds majority at the most recent Labour Party conference she deliberately fudges the very serious questions posed.

Fortunately CND is not ambiguous and restates its position: '... the unilateral abandonment by Britain of nuclear weapons, nuclear bases and nuclear alliances as a prerequisite for a British foreign policy which has the worldwide abolition of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons leading to general and complete disarmament as its prime objective.'

While firmly in an evenhanded framework on the fundamental questions of war and peace, John Cox the author, debunks many myths that surround the nature of NATO.

That the vote for unilateral disarmament at Labour Party conference is in conflict with the vote against withdrawal from NATO is overwhelmingly illustrated.

That the vote for unilateral disarmament at Labour Party conference is in conflict with the vote against withdrawal from NATO is overwhelmingly illustrated.

NATO is first and

foremost a nuclear alliance, there is no such thing as a non-nuclear NATO. Cox points out that NATO have stockpiled several thousand nuclear warheads for short-range missiles, artillery and aircraft, that these weapons go beyond what can be 'justified as a retaliatory deterrent' and indeed NATO has refused to pledge a no-first-use of nuclear weapons.

Its policies are summed up by Morton Halperin, a former top Pentagon official: 'The NATO doctrine is that we will fight with conventional weapons until we are losing, then we will fight with tactical nuclear weapons until we are losing, and then we will blow up the world.'

The detailed criticisms Cox makes of NATO, he believes will 'shock' supporters of CND who believe that NATO was created to counter a Soviet threat. He categorically states — and proves — that NATO from its inception has been the pace-maker in the European arms race.

This new pamphlet will be a useful aid in the debate now arising as to the policies of a future Labour government, it takes up most of the main questions in a popular readable way and is reasonably priced.

'No No NATO' is 50p a copy plus postage from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 11 Goodwin Street, London N4. Tel 01-236 0977.

The Rally and Benefit on Friday evening will be followed on Saturday with a morning session on constitution and an afternoon on workshops. Social events will keep us up until 2am. On Sunday all the general policy and action resolutions are to be debated.

And here is the first problem. Major discussions concerning the action of the campaign in the most important year of its existence, are crammed into slots lasting less than an hour each.

Policy

We will have one debate on policy, an hour of which will be taken by the platform, and then we have to discuss eight resolutions and thirty-one amendments! Out of this bureaucratic tangle, the movement must pull itself together with a policy for the year of Cruise.

There are three proposals for action by the campaign in 1983. The first is 'that non-violent direction action (NVDA) and civil disobedience tactics should be seriously considered with respect to Cruise Missile sites ...' (Resolution 9). There are nine amendments to the 'NVDA' motion. The most substantial issue raised by the amendments is the removal of the 'NV' (amendment from Rhonda Fawr CND).

True. Violence is rarely decided by those taking action. It will arise here from those who won't worry too much about cracking a few skulls to stop any action. But, violence or non-violence, can a few thousand worthy souls stop the missiles? Of course not. The government is prepared to stop nurses having a 12 per cent rise despite 'public opinion' being on the side of the nurses. Missiles are even

dearer to their hearts. Only the most bitter and massive struggle will stop the missiles. And that will mean mobilising all the resources we have got — and more besides!

Ballot

The second action proposal, in Resolution 8, calls for 'a national Ballot For Survival'. You would be forgiven for hearing echoes of the World Disarmament Campaign, whose petition was put up last year as a Fail Safe in case the UN special session on disarmament did not turn out to be all that we wanted ... Whatever happened to it?

The same thing that will happen to the ballot for survival. Nobody opposes a petition. And that's the problem. It is precisely the sort of meaningless political action aimed at everybody which will affect nobody.

Something to do for those of us that cannot camp for three months in East Anglia.

The penultimate resolution on the agenda, Resolution 14, is a comprehensive proposal for a labour movement campaign in 1983, topped off by the following proposal: 'campaigning actively for a TUC/LP industrial and political Day of Action in 1983, including a national demonstration in London, co-ordinated if possible with an International Day of Action in other European cities.'

Teeth

The seven amendments to this resolution pull in different directions. The last, from Battersea, strengthens the commitment to labour movement action by calling for campaigns for national strike action against the missiles. These proposals fill out the resolution already passed at Labour Party Conference, and are of the type needed to meet the challenge the movement faces in '83.

But the first two amendments, from West Hampstead and Coventry,

try to take the teeth out of resolution 14. They (amongst other things) propose either the deletion of the action proposals, or in the case of Coventry, call 'for the largest possible involvement of the TUC, political parties etc.' in the demonstration for '83.

Fight

Both of these amendments should be thrown out. It is vital to use the action commitment of the organised labour movement as our platform. We are not for 'the greatest possible involvement ...'. We are for these organisations being forced to meet their formal commitments.

These formal commitments represent the views of hundreds of thousands, even millions of trade unionists and Labour Party supporters, that their own organisations must take up the fight against nuclear weapons.

We should be the last, in CND, to get the leaders of these mass workers' organisations off the hook. Anything else is just playing around.



Photo: G COOKSON

The FMLN's new offensive

By Jean Pierre Beauvais

DURING OCTOBER, the revolutionaries of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched a new offensive against the dictatorship. From 10 October, FMLN units of up to 700 fighters launched a series of coordinated attacks against military targets in different parts of the country. According to Radio Venceremos which is transmitted from territory under the control of the revolutionaries some important successes had been reported.

Three important localities have been occupied in the Eastern Province of Morazan and two in the Northern Province of Chatalango. For the first time in months, several actions were launched simultaneously in the capital: small uniformed guerrilla units succeeded in temporarily occupying the northern suburbs of San Salvador, only retreating after having destroyed electricity and telecommunication installations used by the army.

The elite units — whose officer corps has recently been bolstered by training in the United States and 'advised' by a growing number of American officers — were despatched to the eastern and northern zones most

threatened by the FMLN offensive.

After a week of hard fighting — the 'heaviest for a long time' declared a colonel to the special envoy of the American press — the result was catastrophic for the regime which pretended 'to exercise authority over the quasi-totality of the country'.

In the province of Morazan, all telephone links were broken and the town of Perquin, San Fernando and Torola remained under the control of FMLN fighters. All attempts by government troops to retake them failed. On the outskirts of Perquin, an entire company was decimated, 124 soldiers were either killed or taken prisoner.



FMLN guerrillas make their own weapons

In regions where the guerrilla forces have been traditionally weak, some import and operations have also been launched. In the Cabanas province, between Chatalanga and Morazan, two military posts have fallen into the

hands of the FMLN, meanwhile, in Usulután, in the south, the port of El Triunfo was blockaded and taken over.

The scope of the operations, their coordination over a large part of Salvadoran territory, the

depth of popular support they enjoyed, are the best response the revolutionary Salvadorans could make to those who speculated on their isolation, their weakness and their 'incapacity henceforth to launch major military actions' — as a high Washington State Department official recently announced. As for the dictatorship, the political advantages that it had hoped to draw from the 28 March 'elections' are finally revealed to be extremely limited.

This is the context in which he places the new offer of negotiations made by the FMLN as it began its October offensive. The call for negotiations without preconditions has been rejected out of hand by the genocidal military in San Salvador, whose principle objective continues to be the military crushing of the revolutionary forces. This objective is shared by the American ambassador even at the price of the martyrdom of the people of El Salvador.

An interview with Francisca da Silva Workers Party (PT) candidate in Brazilian election

Workers Party candidate speaks

FRANCISCA DA SILVA, an ex-agricultural worker, an ex-metalworker and a literacy teacher, lives in one of Sao Paulo's many shantytowns. She is one of the PT's candidates for the State Assembly. What follows is a shortened version of an interview with her which appeared in *Em Tempo*, a revolutionary marxist paper which supports the PT.

Tell us a bit about your own story and struggles.

In 1972 I helped to found the agricultural workers' union in my home town back in the north-east of Brazil, together with my brother. We became the regional delegates and worked to build up the agricultural workers' confidence and knowledge of their rights.

In 1976 my husband came down to Sao Paulo, because of the drought back home. Two months later he got run over, so I came after him. I left my

six children with my parents and got a job in a rubber factory.

I rented a house and in six months managed to get together enough money to go back and get the children. After another year I couldn't afford the rent any longer. I sold my little place back in the North-east, bought some wood, and built a shack which I'm still living in today.

My political activity began with a religious mass. I said a prayer for the workers. The priest

called me up for a chat and I've never looked back since. In 1975 and '76 there was a fight for buses in the neighbourhood. That was the first one I got involved in here.

Then I took part in getting the big Cost of Living Movement off the ground, in '77-78. From 1977 I was working as a metal worker at the Brasimet factory, and got involved in the wages campaign in 1978.

The following year I helped to prepare the first strikes, but didn't take part myself because my brother was murdered back home and I had to go there.

He was president of the local agricultural workers' union and had been threatened by a big landowner. We never found the man who killed him,

but we know he was sent by this boss.

What about the shantytown movement?

In 1979 we were already preparing a Sao Paulo-wide meeting of shantytown organisations and were getting up to 74 people each week to our local meetings.

That's still going. I'm also involved in the workers organisation of the Catholic Church, and I'm a delegate to ANAM-POS, the co-ordination of grass-roots community groups.

Together with the other shantytown dwellers, we realised the importance of being able to read and write, and organised a literacy campaign where the instructors are chosen by the shantytown dwellers

themselves.

Has being a woman brought special difficulties?

When I was an agricultural workers' delegate back home, I often couldn't find anyone to go into town with me. I travelled 12 miles home on horseback, sometimes with a child.

People criticised me a lot. Mostly the men. They said I wasn't a responsible woman — that women didn't do that sort of work. The other women only ever went out at their husbands' sides.

It's a bit better in the countryside now, but then a woman couldn't even keep herself clean and put on a change of clothes but they'd say she was chasing men.



Striking metal workers in Brazil: 'the workers united will never be defeated.'

ding for election?

I agreed to stand because I saw it as a chance to turn this space opened up by the election campaign into a space for mobilising around struggles that are already going on. Of course we will fight with the aim of winning, but I've got no interest in being elected. What I'm interested in is helping to strengthen the organisation of the Party.

Are the women mobilising around your campaign?

Wherever I go to meetings, the majority there are always women. I can feel their pleasure at a woman standing. They're coming out much more since I began my campaign, feeling more confident and taking a more active part.

At the factories here in Sao Paulo, like all the new young women that get taken on, I had a lot of pestering from the boss or his sons or one of the managers. But I soon told them where to get off.

Some people in the Sao Paulo women's movement say that working-class women, women in the shantytowns, aren't interested in a fight for equal rights. All that they're interested in is just wages, conditions, housing and so on. What do you think of this?

Just imagine! Women in the shanties are even more discriminated against and disrespected. To say they're only interested in conditions and creches is a lie. They want to be respected as women.

What about your stan-

Prerevolutionary crisis looms in Bolivia

FACING a nationwide general strike, the Bolivian military junta agreed on 17 September to withdraw from power. It announced that the congress dispersed by the military coup of July 1980 would be reconvened.

Early in October, the congress met and elected a civilian president and vice-president, Hernan Siles Suazo and Victor Paz Zamorra. Both represented major components of the Union Democratica Popular (UDP).

Siles Suazo is the leader of the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario de Izquierda (MNR-I, the Left Revolutionary Nationalist Movement); Paz Zamorra of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR - Movement of the Revolutionary Left, originally a guerrilla organisation).

The key economic ministries of labour and mines were given to Communist Party representatives. The 1980 coup was staged expressly to prevent the UDP from assuming office. That is the extent of the turnaround.

During the military takeover, the headquarters of the national labour confederation, the COB (Central Obrera Bolivia — Bolivian Workers Federation) was destroyed by fire from tanks. The leadership of the COB was arrested, and violent military assaults were launched against the working-class neighbourhoods.

A large number of workers were killed, it is still impossible to say how many. Hundreds were sent to concentration camps. The COB was outlawed, and broken.

In fact, the July 1980 coup was an attempt to repeat the Argentine military takeover of March 1976 in Bolivia. It

was on the section of the bourgeoisie that controls the cocaine business that the 1980 coup was essentially based. Its most direct foreign ally was the murderous military regime in Argentina.

This, to a considerable extent, explains the stand-offish attitude taken by Washington, which refused to recognise the regime.

The political failure of the junta is symbolised by the fact that two years after the coup. It had to call the UDP back to government to rescue bourgeois rule. That reflects the deterioration in the relationship of forces for the bourgeoisie vis-a-vis the workers movement and the masses of the poor. And in this situation, the bitterness of the workers and the poor toward the military is very sharp.

In his inaugural address, Siles Suazo called for 'a war economy, discipline on the job, productivity'. At the same time, he promised workers a share in the management of the state owned enterprises, which dominate the mining industry. Before taking office, the new president had pledged to reform the armed forces and punish those officers involved in the cocaine trade; at the same time he



Banner of the Bolivian Trotskyists on May Day Demonstration

promised that his government would not attempt to 'take vengeance against the military'.

In short, the UDP government assumed the mediating role that the military expected of it. It was not the UDP leadership that forced the cocaine generals to relinquish formal control of the government. The coalition leadership, as

well as the union tops had opposed the unlimited general strike of 16 September. It was the ranks and the leaders closest to them, especially in the miners' union, that forced it.

This development at the same time reflected the pressure of an upsurge expressed in many protests and actions, which forced the restoration of the legal

status of the COB in May.

The fact is that a new coup is being prepared now; that is obvious. And it would be a far more murderous one than the last, because it would face rebuilt and stronger workers and mass organisations, and more determined opposition.

At the same time, neither the military nor any bourgeois government can offer the masses any economic concessions whatever. The next

military government will have to force the population to accept the results of an economic disaster unprecedented even in the dreary history of Bolivian economic development.

The incoming government, including two Communist party ministers, has met the military's expectations, as the UDP attitude to the general strike and the miners' strike before demonstrated that it would. Now it faces one of the world's worst economic situations.

What happens now depends on the political struggle that is opening up in the left, including the UDP, which holds the government.

The coalition in office is far from homogeneous. Ironically the most right-wing component of it is the MIR, which calls for a government of national unity including representatives of the armed forces. The Communist Party, which follows the usual line of seeking an alliance with bourgeois forces, does not go so far. It represents the biggest working-class component of the coalition.

Siles Suazo's party, the MNR-I is divided into a number of wings. The right wing wants to rebuild the old MNR as the typical bourgeois nationalist party it was. But the youth in particular look to socialist solutions.

Thus, the UDP is vulnerable to pressure from the left, if a clear and determined left pole can be built.

The Bolivian section of the Fourth International, the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR — Revolutionary Workers Party) is trying to build a pole of revolutionary regroupment in order to be able to intervene forcefully in the political process that has opened up.

The strategic objective of the POR is to begin to prepare the masses for the continuation of their struggle under the UDP government and for a confrontation in the not very distant future with the military. At present that does not involve all-out opposition to the government, but a strategy of pressuring it and exposing the capitulationist leadership.

Bolivia Fund

Socialist Challenge is opening a fund to assist the work of the Bolivian Trotskyists, the POR (Combate). The workers and peasants of that country, who have in the past shown immense courage in the fight for socialism and made great sacrifices, now have an historic opportunity. But as the article on this page shows, they also face the danger of another military coup. All donations will be acknowledged and sent direct to the POR. We appeal to our readers to give as much as possible as they can for a socialist movement whose resources are very limited compared to socialist movements in Europe. Send cheques made out to Socialist Challenge to D Biggs. Bolivia Fund, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP.



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 Conference fee: £2 (unwaged 50p)
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Further information from: The Secretary LCP, 28 Carlton Mansions
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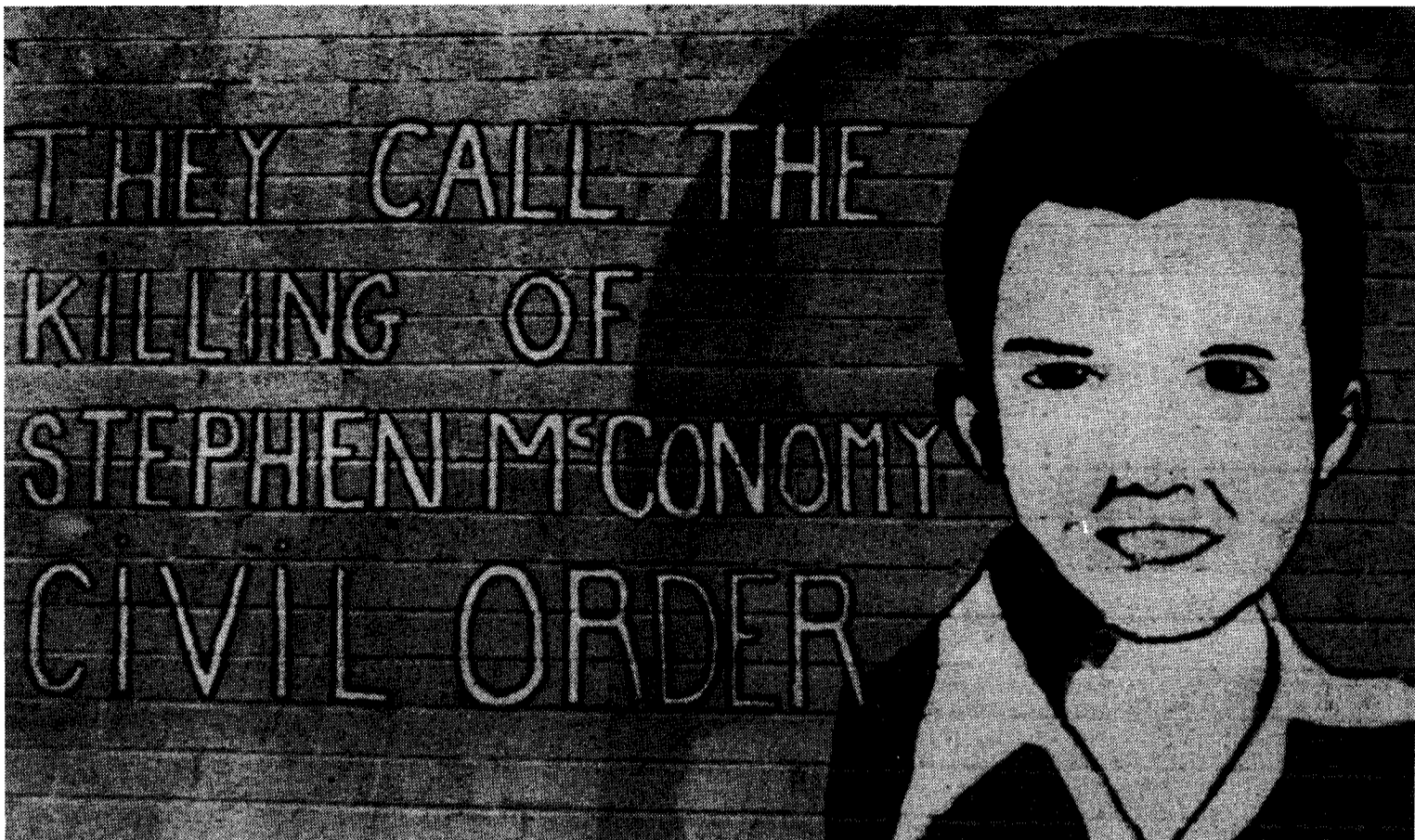


Photo: REPUBLICAN NEWS

Plastic bullets



By Martin Collins

DON CONCANNON — Labour's shadow spokesperson on Ireland claims that the Plastic Bullet is a humane weapon. He says if 'we' didn't use Plastic Bullets then 'we' would have to use lead ones.

There is a simple answer to this. The last time the Paras used lead bullets for the purposes of crowd control was on Bloody Sunday. Thirteen demonstrators were murdered. Within a week, there had been a General Strike called in Ireland, industrial sympathy actions on building sites in London, the burning of the British Embassy in Dublin, scores of riots and an international exposure of the true role of Britain's 'peace keeping' tactics.

The fact is, that if your aim is to terrorise the local population, to keep them off the streets and to suppress the mass expression of political discontent, you have to choose your weapons carefully. Lead bullets and indiscriminate murder as practised on Bloody Sunday are only appropriate in a Civil War situation.

The aim of the British Government is certainly not to provoke a Civil War type confrontation which would overcome in a week the division of the Irish working class created by the border and maintained for 60 years.

If they scrapped the Plastic Bullet it would be difficult to find something to replace it. Tear gas has a tendency to drift back into the faces of those who fire it. A well prepared demonstration will take precautions against it, and there are even those like Bernadette McAliskey

who are thought to be immune to its effects.

Water cannons, despite the danger of falling masonry propelled by its blast are little better. Once a demonstrator is thoroughly soaked, a further soaking offers no deterrent. It just makes you a whole lot more determined. The other problem is that they are heavy lumbering machines and quickly run out of water. The army then has to stand round defending it in case someone should decide to set it on fire.

The Plastic Bullet is the most effective weapon the British Army has to enforce its rule in Ireland. But it is no soft option. Fourteen people have been killed by them, including seven children. There have been scores of injuries and mutilations. That we focus on this aspect annoys some friends on the left of the party. They think that our campaign is 'liberal' and

doesn't deal with the 'real' issues.

I'm amazed at their contempt for the lives of these youngsters, which must be a real issue for any socialist. Our critics miss the point. Things like plastic bullets make many thousands of people see for the first time the truth that lies behind the mask and myth of British peace-keeping.

The Conference on Plastic Bullets being organised by the Labour Committee on Ireland will achieve a number of goals. Firstly it will get the facts about Plastic Bullets over not just to the 600 or so delegates expected, but to the tens of thousands of members of organisations that sent them.

Ban

Secondly, it will go to some length to look at the way the army is trained, its attitude to the people who are the recipients of its 'instant justice' and at the way Northern Ireland is used as a training ground for repressive techniques to be used against people in Britain — especially the black youth.

We will also be organising a discussion on the background of Northern Ireland where all points of view will be expressed. To fight for a ban on Plastic Bullets, the movement has to be clear on every issue involved —

especially this. In line with Conference policy that the Party's spokesperson should campaign against Plastic Bullets, we are going to ask the NEC to send Concannon!

Already the Conference has got wide support in the unions and the Party. Women's sections and YS's are already writing in for details and speakers. We want to make sure that at the end of the day the left has got something to say about Ireland and Plastic Bullets that doesn't just echo the Tories like Concannon does.

Any pressure that can be drummed up to stop the string of deaths by Plastic Bullets can only weaken the repressive power of the British Army and only strengthen the hands of those in Ireland and Britain who have only one piece of advice to offer the British army for its tactics — pack up and get out!

Martin Collins

Labour Committee on Ireland
National Council Organiser
Plastic Bullets Conference.

Release Sri Lankan Political Prisoners

Stop the hanging of Kuttinawi and Jegan

Public meeting
Friday 26 November 6pm
Friends Meeting House
Euston Rd, London (opp Euston Station)

Speakers
Councillor Patrick Kodikara
Bernard Reagan, National Union of Teachers executive

K Balasekeran

Campaign for the release of Eelam Political Prisoners in Sri Lanka, c/o 9 Grays Inn Building, Rosebery Ave, London EC1

Prostitution—what attitude for socialists?

The recent ITV documentary on the rise of prostitution in the Kings Cross caused shock horror stories in the gutter press. Socialist Challenge spoke to JUDI WATSON, who works for Camden Council, about the real problems affecting the lives of women in the area and how the council proposes to campaign to defend the rights of prostitutes and the residents in the area.

Prostitution in the area is on the increase because there are more and more women coming down to the area from the north of England mainly because of unemployment and low standards of living generally but also because of all the events around the Yorkshire Ripper and what the women felt.

Of the prostitutes I've talked to many have young kids — they want a better life than what they've had for their kids and they want the financial security for them. Many of these women are under thirty years old and some are only fifteen to sixteen years old.

They all point out that

there are certain things they will not do in the job and that more often than not intercourse is not even required — that's why for them it's easy money because they have to do very little and they get more money than most women could earn elsewhere.

So what were the residents objecting to in Kings Cross?

Well, a variety of things — some said that the increase in prostitution in the area undermined the moral standards in the area, increased violence and noise in the streets, attracted pimps and kerb crawlers into the area, making other women's lives harder

and such like.

They were worried about their children and the flats which were taken over by the prostitutes and their pimps. The prostitution working group of the Women's Committee of the Camden Council saw their point on many issues but also seeks to defend the rights of prostitutes and to take the woman's point of view.

For example, the residents put forward a whole series of demands through their organisations to the council asking for increased police presence, more money into housing, playspaces, jobs in the area, a law against kerb crawlers and the redirection of traffic.

The council agreed on redirection of traffic because it's very noisy there anyway and agreed to put £9 million into improving the area but on the other issues the working group took a different approach.

They were concerned

for example that a law against kerb crawling could be used as a kind of 'Sus'-law and abused by the police. Already a black guy in the area was arrested and questioned about being a pimp because he had too much money in his pocket!

Problem

What the Women's Committee wants is for the police to respond more immediately to calls either from residents who are being hassled or from the prostitutes themselves who more often than not are the victims of the noise and violence as well from pimps and clients.

But this means that councils have to demand more control over the police in general — not just on long term policy but operational control as well to really challenge their role — because they've never seemed too interested in the past in what hap-

pens to women, whether prostitutes or residents.

This is why the work of the new Police Committee to monitor the police will be so important — and the Women's Committee will be working through it. The working group's view is not to bring more repression onto the prostitute, which is what the residents demands would have meant. Similarly the council does not want to evict any women because she is a prostitute — if she is not living in the flat but merely using it for business when it could be housing a family then that's different but you cannot evict someone because they are a prostitute.

In Germany and Holland aren't there state

run 'red light' areas and brothels?

Yes, but in Germany over 80 per cent of the prostitutes won't register! State control of this kind is not what's needed — in fact the less state control the better. I'm in favour of decriminalisation — that is of doing away with all laws because the current framework of the law is to punish the women, whereas decriminalisation will get prostitutes out of the ghetto and also out of the vicious circle which exists for many who may want to come off the game but find themselves with fines to pay off or thrown into prison so they have to go back on the game.

This is not just a local issue — it's a national issue and it's an issue of

women's role in society as a whole. It could be good to see Camden Council spreading the campaign on a national level as well.

The prostitution working group is just beginning to tackle all these issues and are working out more detailed proposals on policing; dealing with kerb crawlers; evictions and decriminalisation. The Women's Committee is organising discussions with residents too and we're hoping to eventually have joint discussions to get a 'women's point of view' which all women in the area can agree on.

Next meeting of the Prostitution Working Group in Camden at 71 Tonbridge St WC1, 23 November 7.30pm.

Job losses hit women in Telecoms

By D. Fitzpatrick

THE DEPARTMENT of Industry has told British Telecoms that it must shed 45,000 jobs by 1985. And there is little doubt that women telecom workers will be the ones who suffer the most if this is done as privatisation sweeps through the industry.

Out of a total labour force of around 243,000, BT employs 176,093 women, who are mainly working as telephonists, in traffic, as clerical workers, and in catering and cleaning. These are the so-called non-essential areas, which means they do not make a profit, so they are top of the agenda for cuts.

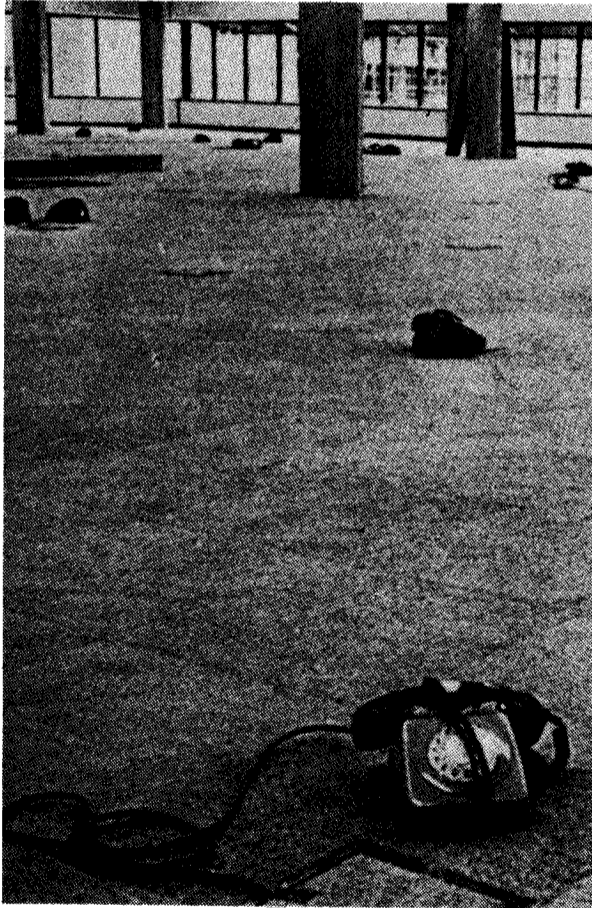
In 1971, 81 per cent of the operators were women and this is the section which ever since STD was introduced in 1958 has undergone the biggest decline in staff levels. In a five year period from 1973-78 alone the employment of operators fell by 32 per cent.

The Brooke Report produced for BT on the future of operator services which now employs 29,000 people, predicts 'a steady decline in requirements over the next decade and a half...' and expects requirements to stabilise '... at about 4,000 some time around 2005-6'.

In the BT owned factories three quarters of the work involves repairs of telephones and exchanges. Now the ending of BT's monopoly spells job loss there, as private firms undercut their prices. As the shift takes place to electronic exchanges the new technology which can do things like test faults by computer will eliminate jobs.

The introduction of the disposable telephone could, and in fact, almost certainly will mean the loss of 800 women workers' jobs at the Cwncarn factory. Nearly all the work there is the servicing and repair of electromechanical telephones. With the new digital phones costing as little as £8, it will be cheaper to throw them away and buy a new one rather than have it repaired, so down the drain go the workers' jobs!

Sir George Jefferson has already told the BT employees that



offices are overstaffed. The message here is clear. This is another area where jobs have to go, and in the

secretarial grade whose staff is 99 per cent women, you don't get a prize for guessing who will suffer

the most.

New technology, when it is geared to profit making, is used for one purpose only, and that is to get more work done at less cost, which means people's jobs have to be wiped out.

Nor does this new technology benefit the consumer. Costs will climb and the service will get worse — one of the Brooke proposals is to close down all services from 6pm to 8pm to slash costs by 37 per cent. They won't do this of course until the private business sector is equipped with data banks so the shut down won't affect them. As far as the rest of you go, your convenience comes a lousy second to the god of profit.

Faced with such big job losses and seeing how privatisation will cause a service to decline and prices to rise *Women in Telecoms* which is a group of women militants in the industry have produced a leaflet explaining what is happening in BT.

Quite correctly they call for a joint campaign of all the unions involved, and are urging both men and women to be active and united in the fight to save jobs and services.

New Attacks on Abortion rights

By Ann Potter

LAST WEEK saw the renewal of parliamentary attacks on abortion rights. John Corrie, who many had thought had disappeared forever after the defeat of his anti-abortion bill in 1980, amazingly topped the Private Members' ballot again this year.

Immediately rumours circulated in parliament that he intended to introduce either another anti-abortion Bill — presumably a more limited Bill which would be easier to get through than the last one.

However, last Friday's *Guardian* reported that Corrie 'would definitely not introduce a bill to tighten up the abortion law'. He explained that this was because he would be 'very loathe indeed to put my family through the anguish which they had to go through when I introduced an abortion bill'. Presumably he remembered the enormously successful campaign which defeated his last attempt.

Unhappily, even if Corrie does not eventually introduce another anti-abortion bill there is no shortage of anti-abortionists in parliament. A very serious threat has come from the House of Lords.

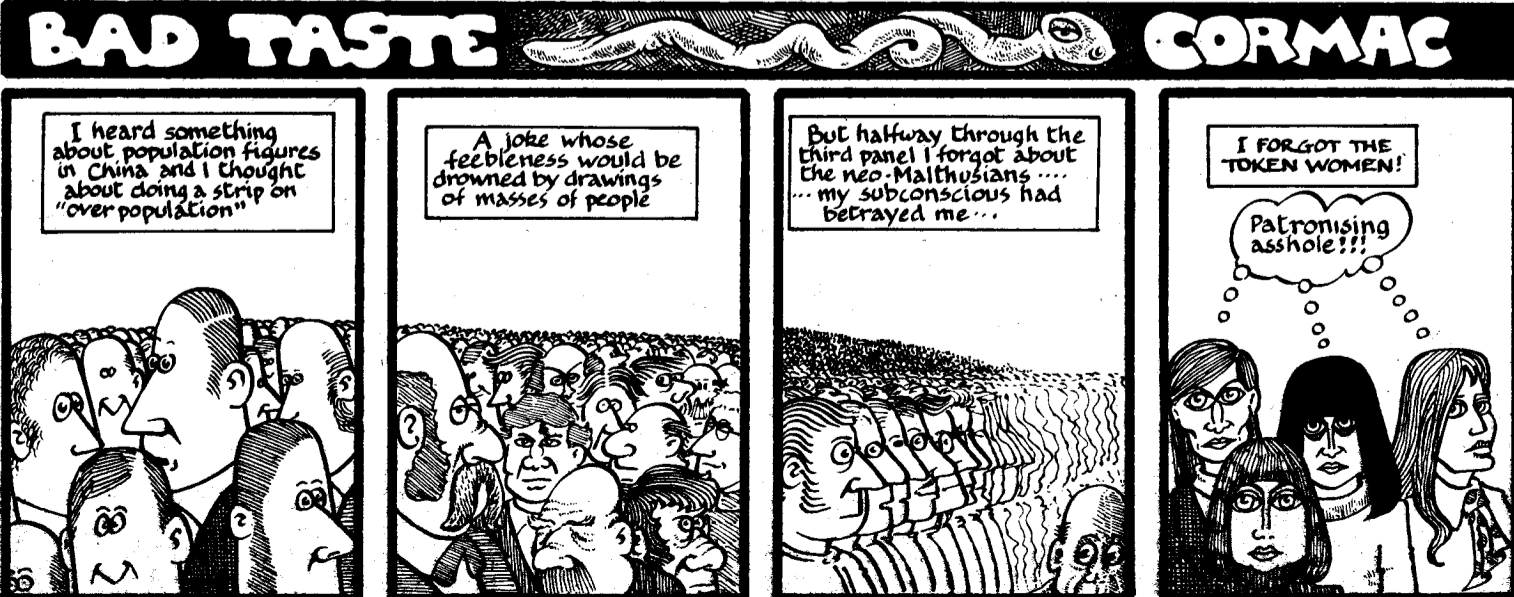
A Bill introduced by Lord Robertson of Oakridge had its first reading. If passed it would mean that there would have to be a 'serious' risk to the life of the mother before an abortion could be performed — at the moment the '67 Act states that there has to be a 'risk'.

The effect of this amendment would be to seriously restrict the number of abortions. The threat is all the more serious because it has been introduced in the Lords and not into the House of Commons. A Bill's passage is usually easier in the Lords because it is supposed to be used only for changing the law on 'non controversial' issues.

As we know, abortion is one of the most controversial issues in Britain. So here we have yet another undemocratic manoeuvre to restrict the rights of women.

The pro-choice campaign have been organising against this bill. But once more this attack underlines the fact that even the limited 1967 act will always be under threat — and that what is needed is a bill which ensures a woman's right to choose.

NAC/LARC Trade Union Liaison Committee open meeting on 'Which way forward for abortion'. Monday 22 November 7.30pm, County Hall, SE1.



Socialist Challenge

POLAND

The carrot and the stick

LECH WALESA is free and martial law seems likely to be lifted. That's the news which has been headlined throughout the West over the last few days. But these things are not, as some commentators would have us believe, the result of any decision by the authorities to go for 'liberalisation'. They are part of an overall strategy by Jaruzelski and the Polish bureaucrats to combine repression with a tactic of dividing and demoralising the Polish workers.

Central to the plans of the Polish leaders is the treacherous role of the Catholic Church. Last week Jaruzelski met with Archbishop Glemp. The Church has accepted that there can be no return to any legal status for Solidarnosc.

Glemp has become more and more bold in his warnings to the Polish workers not to participate in demonstrations or protests against martial law.

In order to ensure the visit of the Pope to Poland, the Church is going to step up its demands that the workers refrain from any social disturbance and work diligently.

The strike called by the Solidarnosc underground leaders for 10 November was only a very limited success. Although crowds of several thousand people gathered in some towns, the strike by and large was not a success. Massive

repression against strikers has made it particularly difficult for actions of anything other than a large majority to go by without militants being opened up to victimisation.

There are still 3,000 people in jail who have been sentenced to up to 10 years in prison, and 2,000 people held without trial. In this situation, with an agreement with the Church under its belt, the Jaruzelski team feels increasingly confident.

The release of Walesa is in this context an utterly cynical move. Walesa is in an impossible position. He cannot make contact with the leaders of the Solidarnosc underground, nor play any active part in the union. In this context his statement that the leaders of the Solidarnosc are 'acting according to their

consciences' and that it is 'not my position to judge' their actions will be seen by many Poles as tacit approval of their actions.

The next actions by Solidarnosc are called for December 13-17 to coincide with the anniversary of the introduction of martial law. To defuse this, Jaruzelski has called a

meeting of the Polish parliament for 13 December which will formally repeal martial law.

But this will be more show than reality. New laws on 'public security' will be introduced which will allow the authorities to do exactly what they do under martial law.

The difficult situation currently confronting the Solidarnosc leaders should not however be interpreted as any slackening of support from the workers. There is no doubt that the lack of mobilisation on 10 November represented solely a feeling that the situation was not ripe for an all-out confrontation.

The workers are waiting for an opportunity to show their strength again. Jaruzelski's 'carrot' of releasing Walesa and suspending martial law is utterly transparent.

It is still the wielding of the big stick which is decisive for the Polish bureaucrats.



Make the health union leaders fight

By Bob Pennington

THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS towards the health workers are obvious. Firstly they intend to keep health workers' wages to a bare minimum. Their latest offer would give ancillaries 31p a week more. First-year students would get 51p — both before stoppages!

Such an offer is intended to rub the health workers' noses in the dirt and to teach them who is boss.

Secondly it is intended to show the workforce, and the union leaders, that they cannot hope to defeat

the government so they may as well get into line.

Thirdly, they hope this will prepare the way for a real onslaught on the NHS, as they reckon a demoralised workforce and a union leadership with no guts for a fight, will not be able to resist the Tory carve-up of the health service.

That such a carve up is on the agenda was again made clear by last weekend's report in the *Sunday Telegraph* that Kenneth Clarke plans for further staff cuts, with compulsory staffing levels, for all health authorities to be introduced next April.

Even Albert Spanswick, COHSE general secretary, and chairperson of the TUC health committee, insisted his members would not 'submit to blackmail in this blatant way'. Unfortunately, Spanswick then still insisted that the

unions wait until their recall conference on 14 December, which is about one month away.

This is no way to win a pay claim. The Tories might be using blackmail, they might be uttering dire threats against the NHS, but they are certainly not bluffing. They mean business. They intended to break the power of the unions so that they can begin dismantling the health service.

This onslaught can only be resisted by stepping up the fight for the 12 per cent both inside and out-

side the NHS. The health workers must demand an immediate recalling of a special union delegate conference to prepare spreading the dispute, so that every single hospital in Britain is operating an emergency cover and accident service only.

A campaign must be restarted among the other unions which spells out exactly what the Tory cuts and plans for privatisation means. In other words the passivity and inactivity that the union bureaucrats have imposed on the dispute must be broken and replaced by a vigorous

fight to win the 12 per cent and save the NHS from the piracy of the Tory cabinet.

The 22 September day-of-action with its massive show of trade union support and solidarity, showed how to win this dispute. It's no easy task recreating that mood and spirit but if the NHS is to be saved it has to be done.

The shop stewards and activists at the base must rise up and demand that action replaces the cowardly conciliations of the bureaucrats and thus snatch victory from the jaws of the defeat they have almost led it to.

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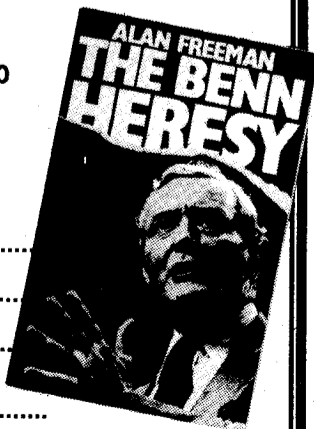
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Involuntary anorexia strikes SC

THE PRESS this week was full of scare stories about the dreadful possibility that our dear Princess Di was suffering from anorexia. It's true, then one thing's for certain — she's not under-eating for lack of cash.

When Di got fed up with week upon turgid week sitting around at Sandringham doing nothing, she came back to London and bought 200 new dresses and suits.

Those who produce Socialist Challenge, however, are generally short of a bob or two, and so is the paper they produce. Last year we said 'Christmas is coming and our geese are dying of starvation'.

This year's no different. So if you've put a few thousand aside for Christmas presents this year, why not send us a bit? And if you've put nothing aside, well why not send us a few

bob anyway — don't fritter it away, send it to a good cause.

Fund drive	
Wakefield	75.00
Liverpool	50.00
Blanco White	40.00
Bath	22.50
Leamington	10.00
Rally IOU's	30.00
Leeds	69.00
Burnley	40.00
JH, Lambeth	3.50
Aberdeen	70.00
Total	410.00
Total so far	6136.21

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