

VIRAJ MENDIS

LIFE OR DEATH?

On 10th May Viraj Mendis had his final appeal. After more than 500 days in sanctuary in the Church of Ascension in Hulme, the Home Office might now send the police into the church to arrest Viraj and deport him to his possible death in Sri Lanka. Everything possible now has to be done to save Viraj Mendis' life!

The result of the appeal on the 10th May can be announced any day now. So it is literally a matter of days and weeks to build up the maximum pressure on the Home Office. So what can be done? Quite a lot actually.

The best is of course to get directly involved in the Viraj Mendis' Defence Campaign. There are hundreds of things to be done in the campaign, in which everyone can participate. The campaign meets every Sunday 7,30 pm in the Church of Ascension. But you can go to the church at any time and offer your help. You can also phone the VMDC on 234-3168.

You can also help Viraj Mendis in other ways. Every Friday at 5,30pm from Piccadilly Gardens the VMDC has a march to the Church of Ascension. Particularly the coming Fridays these marches should be as big as possible.

On Saturday 28th May the VMDC has called for a national anti-deportation march in Manchester, starting 12 noon from Albert Square. All Labour Party wards and constituencies, all trade unions, youth organisations, Black organisations, churches etc. should mobilise for the 28th May and bring their banners.

The VMDC has launched a day-and-night vigil outside the Church of Ascension from 10th May to 10th June. All groups, organisations and individuals are urged to commit themselves to a regular time on the vigil during those 30 days.

The Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign can send speakers out to any meeting. Just ring them. But the VMDC also needs money. So have a collection at your meeting.



SAVE VIRAJ MENDIS' LIFE !
MOBILISE FOR THE 28TH MAY DEMONSTRATION

TONTON WON AGAIN

President Mitterrand, nicknamed 'Tonton' because of his calculated air of calm superiority, won with a very comfortable margin of 54 % over his right-wing opponent, Jacques Chirac, who tried hard during the week leading to the second round to score points by manoeuvres, securing the release of French hostages in Lebanon, then of the officer responsible for sinking the Rainbow Warrior, and eventually attacking and murdering 19 Kanaks who held hostages in New-Caledonia as part of a struggle in France's colony.

With voting in two rounds, the French presidential elections give a clear idea of the political scene and reveal the depth of the present crisis particularly for the right-wing. The most dramatic feature of this crisis is the rise of the National Front. If only 190,000 people voted for Jean-Marie le Pen in 1974, about 4.3 million did so in the first round, i.e. 14.38 % of the electorate, more than twice the Communist vote or the equivalent of all votes on the left of the Socialist Party! The rise of the National Front comes from a combination of factors: the crisis of the right-wing which does not seem able to oppose the socialist government and therefore is not a satisfactory alternative for many, the absence of charismatic leaders apart from le Pen himself, the resentment of many workers who suffered under the austerity policies imposed by the Mitterrand government, the impact of the economic crisis affecting entire regions or industries and the racist ideology that has remained underlying in French society since the days of the Algerian war and which becomes a convenient tool to justify problems caused by capitalist management even under social-democratic disguise. This means that the National Front is there to stay and even grow if nothing is done to counter its growth.

The right-wing parties suffer from bitter divisions: the ambitious Chirac, who claims to represent the Gaullist

tradition has failed to achieve a consensus behind him and is now facing a split in his own party. His leanings towards the National Front alienated him support from the more moderate multi-party union, the UDF, led by Raymond Barre and founded by the ex-president Giscard d'Estaing, said to want a comeback on the French political scene with a united right-wing capable of defeating the Socialist Party.



François Mitterrand played the most astute game by forcing the right-wing into this crisis, by moving towards the centre in an attempt to win over those on the centre-right and forge a huge party across the middle ground, attracting particularly the UDF supporters and clearly positioned against Le Pen. At present Mitterrand can rule without difficulty since its most embarrassing rival from 1981, the French Communist Party, is fading as a political force and registered its lowest vote with 6.76 %. The ongoing crisis inside the FCP, one of the most Stalinist in Europe, has led to the expulsion of the "rénovateurs", a dissident current which stood Pierre Juquin as their candidate to offer an alternative on the left (he received 2.1 % of the votes).

The left itself has to come to terms with social-democracy which will be even more watered down than before and should not lead to any complacency. The left also has to fight against growing racism: a huge task considering the weaknesses of the unions and the political bankruptcy of the CP. But France needs to fight back as Tonton will not.

DON'T LET THEM SINK THE NUS

THE NUS STRIKE

By Tony Benn, MP for Chesterfield and chair of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

What makes this dispute different is the derecognition of the National Union of Seamen (NUS). The company P&O no longer wants to negotiate with the union. This is therefore the first major attempt to obliterate the trade unions. With the miners, the Ford workers the bosses wanted to beat the unions. But now they want to obliterate them. And it has produced a tremendous response. P&O has put £100,000 into the Conservative Party. The manager of P&O was a key adviser to Tebbit (the former chair of the Conservative Party).

The courts will of course implement the anti-trade union laws. We are witnessing similar attacks to those in the last century when peasants and workers were deported to Australia in order to destroy the movement. We therefore have to mobilise the maximum support for the seafarers and their trade union. In Chesterfield f.ex. we will have a seafarers speaking at our May Day rally. Every Labour Party member and trade unionist should come out in support of the seafarers.

THE LESSONS OF THE MINORITY MOVEMENT

The Benn-Heffer campaign is about building a new leadership in the Labour movement. Not only in the Labour Party, but also in the trade unions, in the women's movement, in the Black movement, etc. Benn and Heffer's programme for such a new leadership is far from sufficient. But basing itself on the struggles of the oppressed it is miles ahead of Kinnock's and Willis' new realism.

In order to build a new leadership in the Labour movement the leadership of the trade unions is a crucial battle ground. In the 1920s in Britain revolutionaries built the Minority Movement to challenge the Kinnockites and the Willisites of the time. In the June issue of this bulletin we will have a centre-spread on the Minority Movement

THE NUS STRIKE

By Tony Lowe, former secretary of the Senior Colman strike committee.

The seafarers' strike, initially confined to Dover but now spreading throughout Britain, has seen a situation reached whereby if the National Union of Seamen (NUS) are not successful, it is feasible that the union could be finished.

Once again we have seen how quickly employers are prepared to revert to the 'law'. Another interesting 'theme' of this strike is the leadership of Sam McIuskie (who is also the treasurer of the Labour Party). He has surprised many trade unionists with his uncompromising stance.

The NEC of the Labour Party has given unequivocal support for the seamen and women. When was the last time the Labour Party gave support to striking workers? It might well be that Neil Kinnock makes a rare visit to a picket line.

Meanwhile it is important that the labour and trade union movement rally around the strikers. It is frightening to know that the P&O employers have attempted to enforce longer working hours with fewer staff just over a year after the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster.

The Guardian newspaper acknowledged recently that the deaths on the Enterprise would probably have been far higher if P&O's working practices were in force at that time.

An initiative has been taken to get some NUS members to Manchester in the near future, to visit factories and speak at meetings. P&O sank the Enterprise, don't let them sink the NUS.

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* Rally with Tony Benn *
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* Friday 10th June 7,30 pm *
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* Mcr. Town Hall *
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* Audrey Wise and Dianne Abbott invited *
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Interview with Tony Benn:

WE ARE INJECTING SOCIALISM
INTO BRITISH POLITICS

Tony Benn is a busy man. Apart from running as candidate for the Labour Party leadership he is out supporting workers in struggle. The day before this interview was made (29/4) Tony Benn and Eric Heffer were on the picket line with the striking seafarers in Dover. For Tony Benn the two actions have the same aim: the fight for socialism. - Tony Benn gave this interview to Finn Jensen in his constituency in Chesterfield.

Question: Why are you and Eric Heffer standing for leader and deputy leader in the Labour Party? It seems widely accepted that you are not going to win, mainly because of the trade union block vote.

Answer: I have been nominated for the leadership post in the Labour Party for the last five years. But at the time we wanted to do everything to defeat Margaret Thatcher. Therefore about a year ago - just before the general elections in June - some of us who had been meeting regularly thought that the best thing to do would be to have a conference on socialism, starting just after the elections.

We had this amazing conference in Chesterfield last year in October. We had expected 500 people. There was 2,000! And the second conference in June this year might be even bigger, because of the leadership contest. This movement gives people a lot of hope. Then in January '88 the Campaign Group discussed whether to put forward a candidate for the position of leader of the Labour Party. Everyone thought it was wrong to do it so shortly after the general elections.

But the pressure to stand against Neil Kinnock began to build up again. I personally had many doubts about it because I feared it would divert the attention from the Chesterfield conferences, that it could lead to a major defeat that would be damaging to the left, etc. But we consulted the movement. We sent letters to every constituency and got a very encouraging response. And on the 21st March at a meeting I did not attend they decided to nominate me and Eric. So I did not seek



the leadership nomination, but when it was put to me I accepted it.

What is happening in the national leadership of the Labour Party is that the party is drawn not even toward centrism but toward the Thatcher consensus: on NATO, the Common Market, single European Act, market forces etc. And the build up of opposition is very strong. There was a public opinion poll in the Observer last Sunday saying (although I might be a bit sceptical) that 39% wanted to vote Labour and 14% out of the whole population wanted me to win as leader of the Labour Party. 14% of the population represents over 6 million people, which is bigger than David Steel's party and is more than twice as big as David Owen's support.

The AEU (the engineer's union) had its national committee last weekend and 35% of the delegates voted for me. The constituency support is coming in. It is not that we calculated beforehand that we would win. But what we are doing is injecting into British politics the case for socialism in a way that has not occurred for many, many years. And with the growing militancy of the seafarers, miners, teachers, printers, health service workers, transport workers etc there is now a mood for a stronger opposition to Mrs Thatcher, for a clearer opposition in the future, for the parliamentarians to be out in the struggles as I was last night in Dover.

I think myself that the arguments for socialism are very powerful arguments at this particular moment. And it is of course a foundation for whatever happens later. Whether we should stand for election every year (as leader) is a tactical choice we can make later. But it is clear that while the party is being shifted to the right this argument has an impact, and may even have an impact on the leadership. e.g. the leadership actually agreed to a resolution supporting the seafarers. I don't know if they would have done that if there had not been a leadership contest. The leadership did not support the miners nor the health workers but they supported the seafarers on Wednesday. - I have had 2-3,000 letters, running 12-1 in favour of standing as leader.

Q: How do you see your and Eric Heffer's campaign relating to the class struggle outside the Labour Party?

A: I have always related the struggle in the Labour Party to the class struggle in general. During the miners strike I did 211 meetings for the miners. I went on the picket line at five pits in Chesterfield every week. So it is not a new thing. But one of the arguments of our campaign is that we think all the MPs should support people in struggle, not just be limited to the parliamentary arena, fight their case in Parliament, present a clear alternative and campaign for it. It should be internationalist, socialist and democratic in character. And I think that among the individual members of the Labour Party that is what they want.

It might be that the trade union votes will go against us at the Labour Party conference because of the way the trade union votes work. But if the constituency parties give support to our campaign that would be a tremendous step if we got anywhere near half of their votes. And it would make it difficult for the leadership to dismiss socialism as just a product of a handful of hands, which is what has happened recently.

Q: But your campaign has caused some problems in the Campaign Group of Labour MPs. Some women have left the Group and you were not able to get a woman candidate for deputy leader.

A: It is not that it was not tried. I would have liked one of the two candidates to be a woman. We tried to persuade the obvious person, Audrey Wise, but she was not ready to do it.

About the people who have left the Campaign Group - I am sorry that they have left (some of them have only left temporarily). One of those who left now supports Prescott's campaign for deputy leader. So there is some confusion to where some of their policies really lie. The Tribune Group which is supposed to be a left wing group has now come out in support of Hattersley. There will be some clarification. Some of the people who left the Campaign Group voted recently for the expulsion of Mr Brown. So it is a bit more than an argument about the leadership contest. It represents a different political position to some extent.

Q: Your campaign seems to be stronger in the constituencies and weaker in the trade unions. Why is this so?

A: It depends how the trade unions do it. I have put out a letter to the trade unions saying: "Will you please consult all your members", because one of the main purposes of the campaign is to get a discussion. If the decision is taken at the top, there is no discussion. If there is no discussion, then the campaign is frustrated. So we firstly have an interest in the widest discussion. And every constituency with 5-10 wards having a discussion will make 8-12,000 discussions on socialism. Secondly if you have a concentration of members (in the AEU e.g. we discovered we had 35% support) and you add all those minorities together you have an idea of the strength of the argument. And the purpose of it is to re-establish the legitimacy of socialism in British politics.

Q: Will the Chesterfield conference in June be centred around the Benn-Heffer campaign?

A: No. It is broader. It is a movement for socialism, not a political party. It is partly because of the success of this movement that the leadership campaign has come about. But we also hope that socialist ideas will spread into the feminist movement, the green movement, the peace movement, the black movement, and the Labour Party. So the Benn Heffer campaign is not a part of the conference, although the two are politically related. The Chesterfield conference is open to all socialists, not only for the Labour Party members, where the Benn-Heffer campaign is a matter for Labour party and affiliated trade union members.

* MANDELA FREEDOM MARCH *
1st/2nd JULY IN MCR.

Recent events in South Africa clearly indicate that the picture the western media has tried to paint during the last year of Botha getting back into the driving seat is absolutely false.

On 24th February the South African regime banned 17 anti-apartheid organisations and 18 of their leaders. The main aim was to end the activities of the three million-strong United Democratic Front (UDF) and the township organisations affiliated to it. AZAPO and the detainees committees were also banned. All of these, while still being allowed to formally exist, are forbidden from carrying out any activity whatsoever.

COSATU, the million-strong trade union federation is now restricted to purely trade union activities. The fact that COSATU had brought the core of the black South African working class into the freedom struggle by adopting the ANC's Freedom Charter and affiliating to the UDF was without doubt a massive threat to the apartheid regime, as were the major strikes COSATU led last year. These included the historic mineworkers strike of last autumn and the railworkers famous victory of last summer.

Along with the repression new ground is being broken in judicial murder. The decision to hang the Sharpeville Six for 'having common purpose' with a crowd that killed a township councillor, though the judge himself admitted that the six were not themselves involved in the killing, is naked State terrorism.

The crackdown in South Africa can be directly linked to the illegal and clandestine operations by South African agents in Western Europe. The murder in Paris of Dulcie September, the ANC's chief representative in France, Switzerland and Luxembourg, and the attempted assassination of the ANC's leading representative in Brussels are the most serious of the recent activities of the agents of the apartheid state. These attempts by the South African State terror machine to physically eliminate leaders of the liberation struggle are also designed to frighten and intimidate those engaged in

solidarity work with them.

What we are witnessing is the growing weakness and insecurity of the Botha regime in the face of a freedom struggle which it cannot wipe out. Despite the bannings, the mass detentions, and the brutal murders, the assessment of the ANC is that the mass movement of opposition to apartheid is too deeply rooted to suffer a long term defeat. Many of the organisations affected by the 24th February ban were already operating underground due to the South African army's occupation of the townships. They will by now have been joined by thousands more activists. Mass boycott of the coming elections to the town councils, - bodies set up by the regime in the townships and run by collaborators, - are extremely likely.

The sign that Botha's clampdown did not prevent the National Party's base shifting rightwards towards the Conservative and the fascist AWB is proof enough that the white racists are starting to lose confidence in the regime. The scene is now set for further repression, and though it will be more difficult to organise, mass resistance looks certain to grow.

The Thatcher government and the British ruling class remain apartheid's most loyal ally. The well-known dismissal of all demands for sanctions by the British government and its repeated refusal to respond to attacks against ANC representatives and the Anti-Apartheid Movement by South Africa's agents here in Britain, despite dossiers of evidence compiled by the AAM, are of great encouragement to the apartheid rulers. It is in the interests of the British multinationals, which are making massive profits out of the suffering of black people in south Africa, to prop up the apartheid system. Thatcher will therefore fight tooth and nail to ensure that it is guaranteed a long-term future.

It is not difficult to conclude, then, that it should be a major priority for all socialists here to campaign in solidarity with the liberation struggle in South Africa, and to end Britain's



role as the major defender of the Apartheid state.

There is no shortage of activity in which to get involved. The Anti-Apartheid Movement's recently launched national 'Nelson Mandela: Freedom at 70' looks set to be the biggest event in the history of the movement.

Greater Manchester AA is organising many events here in the Manchester area throughout June and July. On 1st/2nd July when the 'Mandela Freedom March' reaches the area on the way to London there will be a civic reception at the Town Hall, followed by a fundraising social, and a district demonstration, to see the marchers on their way, on the morning of Saturday 2nd July. There is likely to be a train organised to the national demonstration which concludes the march on Sunday 17th July, the day before Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday.

GMAA also has an active and growing youth section which is planning a public meeting on the subject of Mandela's life and work, with speakers from the youth sections of the ANC and SWAPO, on Friday 15th July at Moss Side West Indian Centre. It will be followed by a fundraising social.

Following the stay of execution, the need to sustain and develop the campaign to free the Sharpeville Six is an urgent priority. GMAA organises weekly petitioning and leafleting outside Marks and Spencer (Corner of Corporation St.), between 2.30 and 4.30 every Saturday afternoon. It is important to remember that it is mass pressure around the world which has helped save the lives of the six so far.

The campaign to isolate South Africa and smash apartheid must be taken deep into the labour movement. GMAA can provide speakers to Trade Union and Labour Party branches and is planning a speaking tour with Cath O'Reilly, a leader of the Dunnes Stores strike in Dublin against the sale of South African goods.

The activities around the 'Mandela Freedom March' and the July 17th national demo must be built among labour movement activists. It is of vital importance that with a government so committed to the defence of racist South Africa, the leaders of the labour movement are forced to speak out and act with more commitment and energy than they have shown so far.

To contact your local AA group/ GMAA/ GMAA Youth/ or obtain information about the above events write to: GMAA, PO BOX 21 (NDO), Manchester M8 6TA.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Socialist Action is a monthly paper, produced in London. This Socialist Action - Manchester Bulletin is produced by Socialist Action supporters in Greater Manchester and it is a local supplement to the national paper.

Socialist Action - Manchester Bulletin will once a month cover some of the campaigns, struggles and political events in Greater Manchester and the North West.

Socialist Action - Manchester Bulletin will look at the class struggle from a Marxist point of view. We think that the "new realism" in the trade unions will only lead the working class to more defeats. The leadership of the Labour Party supports these "new realist" ideas and are not willing to mobilise or support workers, youth, Blacks or women in struggles. We therefore have to change these leaderships through the struggles. - At the same time we have to support the self organisation of women, Blacks, youth, gay and lesbians and other oppressed groups.

Fighting capitalism is an international task which takes many forms. The overthrow of the South African apartheid regime or a united Ireland will be a big blow for British imperialism and the British ruling class, but also a big step towards socialism. Victories for the revolutions in Central America, Palestine and elsewhere will in the same way weaken capitalism.

Socialist Action also supports the struggles of workers, youth and national minorities in Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe etc. when they demand political freedom, trade union rights, human rights, ie a socialist democracy. The ruling bureaucracy in these countries have to be overthrown by mass mobilisations of the workers.

If you want to know more about the British and international class struggle from a Marxist point of view you are welcome to our public meetings. - We also organise Marxist educationals. Contact us for details.

Socialist Action - Manchester Bulletin
c/o Bernard Gibbons, Flat 1, 173 Slade Lane, Levenshulme, Manchester, M19 2AE.

THE BURNAGE HIGH SCHOOL REPORT

The report into the murder of Ahmed Ullah by a white pupil at Burnage High School has been used as an excuse to attack anti-racist policies in schools. Yet the report actually states the opposite - it criticises the way in which anti-racist policies were carried out at Burnage. Far from opposing anti-racist policies the authors of the report remain firmly in favour of the need for policies to combat racism in schools.

Unfortunately at Burnage, it appears, very little was actually done to tackle racism. Racial harassment and bullying went on unchecked despite the anti-racist policies that existed in theory. In fact the way in which policies were implemented at Burnage may well have exacerbated racism.

In fact the assumptions behind the way in which the anti-racist policies at Burnage were carried out were in themselves racist. The school managers identified the Black students as the problem - and therefore, all the policies were geared towards the students of Afro-Caribbean and Asian origins.

The effect of such a policy was to increase racism amongst the white pupils and their parents as Blacks were seen to be receiving privileged treatment.

The anti-racist policies failed to involve the whole of the Community in combatting racism but were imposed in a paternalistic manner on both the Black and White pupils and parents.

Socialist Action supports the right of Black people to organise separately if they so choose. We have been in the fore-front of fighting for Black Sections within the Labour Party for example. But what happened at Burnage had nothing to do with Black people organising themselves. On the contrary, there was no real effort to find out what Black people themselves wanted.

Moreover, by focussing on Black people as 'a problem' the need to oppose racism in the White community was avoided. All white people were simply written off as hopelessly racist and thereby excluded from any involvement in discussions on the need for anti-racist policies.

Any successful anti-racist policy has to challenge the racism that exists in the White community. But that cannot be done by imposing - however well intentioned - policies on them. They have to be involved in discussing the need for policies to combat racism. Otherwise their racism is simply increased.

Manchester City Council has, so far, refused to publish the Report. Yet the issues raised at Burnage are of fundamental importance for all working people, Black and White. The failure by the Council to open up a discussion on the issues raised is playing into the hands of those who are totally opposed to any anti-racist policies.

We need to build a campaign in the Labour Party and in the teaching unions in particular to discuss the lessons of Burnage and to work out effective ways of combatting racism.

* Day school on Ireland in Mcr. *

* Sunday 5th June - 10 am to 5 pm *

* Speakers: John McGahee,
* Peoples Democracy, Belfast *

* Redmond O'Neil,
* Socialist Action, London. *

* Registration fee: £2 for waged, £ 1 for
* unwaged and students. *

* For venue, reading material, registration
* contact:

* Bernard Gibbons, Flat 1, 173 Slade Lane,
* Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2AE. *
