

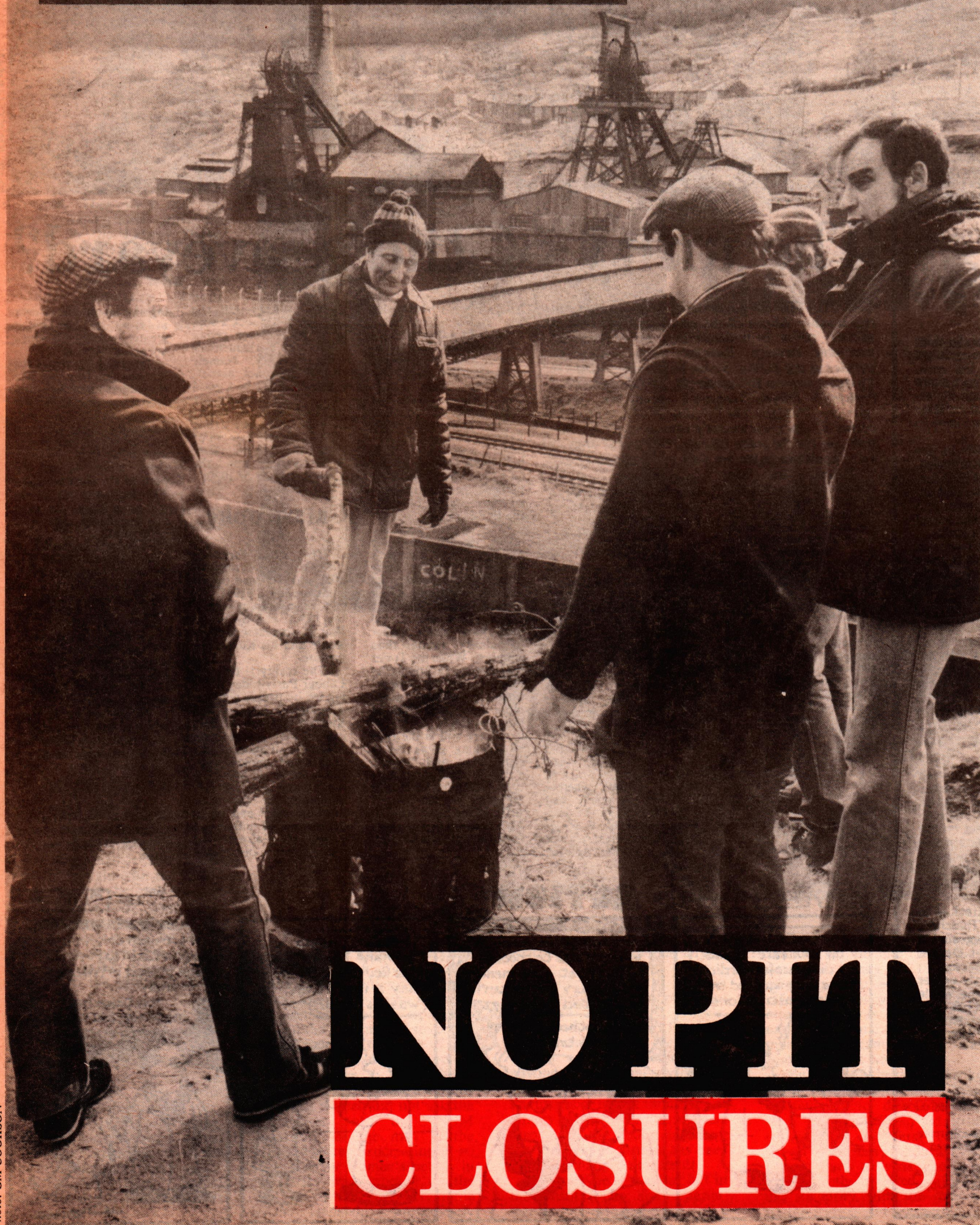
A Socialist ACTION

No. 90 22 February 1985

30p

Demonstrate in support of the Miners
Sunday 24 February
Assemble 11.30 HYDE PARK, SPEAKERS CORNER
(nearest tube Marble Arch)
The main speakers include Betty Heathfield, Peter Heathfield, Tony Benn, Ron Todd, Brenda Dean, Bill Keys, Tony Dubbins, Anne Lilbure, Stan Orme.
Called by LCDTU

The issue is still...



NO PIT CLOSURES

AT HER meeting with the TUC on Monday, Thatcher repeated her demand for a total surrender by the NUM. All Norman Willis's diplomacy of the last week had not caused Thatcher to shift one inch on the essential issue of pit closures.

Willis's sole achievement has been to try to bring pressure to bear on the NUM executive.

Arthur Scargill was completely correct in calling for the NUM executive to throw out the deal Willis brought to the executive. The executive made an error in involving itself in negotiating over what is simply a proposal for a sell out.

The reality of the situation is that Thatcher's continuing hard line over the miners is not able to hide the increasing problems which are hitting her government. With the crisis of the pound, the withdrawal of Nigel Lawson's proposal for a 'giveaway' budget, Thatcher's slide in the opinion polls, and the Ponting verdict the government's position is visibly weaker than it was even a few weeks ago.

The reality is that if the TUC leadership had been campaigning on the policies adopted by last autumn's congress the government would be in deep trouble. But instead Willis has been repeating Murray's miserable performance over GCHQ in the last 'talks' the TUC had with the government.

Exactly as over GCHQ the TUC has not been mobilising forces to defeat Thatcher but instead to negotiate and compromise with her. As this is a government which only understands the language of force the result every time is a sabotage of the struggle.

Fortunately the NUM is a very different kettle of fish to the TUC general council. The return to work has been brought back under control and there is no chance of serious coal production being restarted outside the scab areas. While Norman Willis has been moving to isolate Scargill the ranks of the NUM are not prepared to accept either the pit closures or the victimisations which Thatcher and MacGregor are demanding.

All the TUC's different forms of words are not going to alter the basic issue. Are pits going to close after the strike or not? The government demands the NUM becomes directly complicit in selling out the jobs of its members. The miners continue to fight against it. The task of the labour movement is not working out deals but delivering solidarity to the NUM.

That should start with the maximum turn out for the demonstration on 24 February and turning 6 March, the high point of the TUC's 'democracy week' into a massive show of solidarity between the miners and the defence of local government.

Photo: GM COOKSON

Socialist ACTION

That war again

CLIVE PONTING'S revelations over the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Argentine cruiser, the *General Belgrano*, have given a glimpse of the lying and corruption which are the everyday fare of capitalist government in Britain. Thatcher has been caught with her fingers in the till, yet the Labour leadership have failed to make this her Watergate.

The reasons for this have nothing to do with Labour's pathetic debating techniques as the Tory press would have it. The fact is that the Labour leadership is completely wedded to the same rules of capitalist government as are the Tories; and are guilty of the same malpractices whilst in office as Thatcher. But more fundamentally in this case, Kinnock's offensive is completely stymied because he backed to the hilt the Tories' aggression against Argentina in the Malvinas (Falklands).

Britain went to war with Argentina for one reason only: to defend the British imperialist system. It was seen as a warning to any oppressed country as to what would be in store for them if they attempted to assert their rights against Britain's involvement in the stranglehold of their nation.

Specifically, it was a warning to the Argentine people — who at that time were beginning to stir against the imperialist imposed Galtieri dictatorship — not to oppose the continuing imperialist siphoning of their wealth and the distortion of their economy.

The servicing of Argentina's vast foreign debt is merely the most open way that imperialism sucks the blood of the peoples of the semi-colonial world. British banks have a direct share in this transfer of wealth and are equally implicated in the present 765 per cent inflation which Argentine workers and peasants have to bear.

Understanding this is indispensable to any hope of really hurting the Thatcher government. It may very well have been the case at the time, in the midst of the chauvinist hysteria, that opponents of the war would still have been in a minority even if Labour's front bench had joined us. But even a week is a long time in politics.

Now, three years later, we can see how such a stance then would have been translated into a real challenge to Thatcher's government in the midst of Ponting's recent revelations and his acquittal in the courts.

If Labour's front bench had taken a class stance on this war, it would have been able to link Thatcher's current embarrassment over her imperialist adventure in the Malvinas with her assault on the miners and other working people. Her government would therefore be under threat from all sides at this point. As miners have come to understand in their 12 months of struggle, internationalism is not an added extra, but an indispensable key to victory.

At the time, the Labour leadership and even self-styled marxists like the *Militant* tendency decided opposition to the war as being utopian. We can now see who are the real practical politicians: those who tell the truth and act on the basis of class interest and not temporary popularity. It was those within the labour movement who opposed the war altogether who are in the real position to exploit Thatcher's disarray over Ponting.

The height of Labour's current attack is to suggest that the main problem is 'Thatcher's abrasive style of government' — as suggested in the parliamentary debate by Denzil Davies, Labour's front bench defence spokesperson.

The problem is not Thatcher's style or her particular policies. The problem is the whole British imperialist system. This is what has to be fought. Until it is, Labour will be constantly disarmed even when confronted with the crudest of Thatcher's manoeuvres.



Neil Kinnock greets new Labour general secretary Larry Whitty

Photo: JOHN CHAPMAN

The unity of the graveyard?

THE THATCHER government is now running into real trouble. Above all the length and power of the miners' strike is undermining the government's economic strategy. Reagan's high interest rate policies in the United States have further damaged Thatcher's plans for economic growth and already destroyed Nigel Lawson's proposals for a 'giveaway' budget. The Ponting affair has lifted one corner of the government's squalid suppression of truth on the Belgrano affair. The rate capping and GLC abolition fights are only just beginning.

Thatcher has been calculating on destroying Arthur Scargill and the forces that support him. But the truth is that if the strike keeps going against this background the miners can still deliver a decisive blow to the political strategy and credibility of the Thatcher government.

But what is also absolutely clear is Kinnock's complete inability to exploit any opening against Thatcher. The miners, if supported by the labour movement, would have crushed the government. But Kinnock sabotaged that.

The fight on rate capping could have been a key second front for the fight against the government. But Kinnock, with John Cunningham, has done his best to head off that fight.

Now the situation has

moved from tragedy to near farce with Kinnock's complete failure over the Ponting trial.

By John Ross

Over the Ponting case the government has been clearly exposed as hiding the truth. The trial brought out into the open some of the reality of the Malvinas war. A jury simply ignored one of the most openly and blatantly biased summing up ever given by a judge in such a major case.

Yet Kinnock diverted the entire thing into an absurd argument — which he lost — about whether Thatcher personally had been involved in the decision to prosecute Ponting. As Dennis Healey once said about someone else,

Kinnock's performance was rather 'like being savaged by a dead sheep'.

The only people to emerge seriously strengthened out of the Ponting trial were David Owen, David Steel, and the Alliance. Just compare Arthur Scargill or Tony Benn's defence of the miners, or Ken Livingstone's defence of the GLC, with Neil Kinnock's pathetic mess up on even such favourable ground as the Ponting case.

The opinion polls are giving exactly the same message. Last Thursday's Gallup Poll in the *Daily Telegraph* showed the Alliance only half a per cent behind Labour. Both David Owen and David Steel have much higher 'popularity' ratings than Kinnock. While the Tories are slipping in popularity the Alliance is proportionately gaining much more than Labour out of the situation.

Worse still is the type of thinking going on in right wing and 'centre' circles of the Labour Party. A horrifying example is the piece on the miners' strike in the latest issue of *New Socialist* by *Guardian* leader-writer Martin Kettle.

This article repeats the line which Kinnock's supporters have been giving out in the Parliamentary Labour Party. Namely that it does not matter, and even might be a good thing, if the miners are defeated. Because, according to Kettle, the defeat of 1926 led to a new era of 'creative' trade unionism, and Labour won the general election of 1929.

Catastrophe

The 'small' fact that the electoral victory of 1929 was followed by the catastrophe of 1931, by the mass unemployment of the 1930s, and by World War II somehow escapes Kettle and his Kinnockite mentors.

The reality is that the Labour Party today is being led by people who are irresponsible lunatics. Neil Kinnock and his kitchen cabinet may pretend that politics is all about media images and opinion polls. But what he is in reality really doing is actively collaborating in the mass unemployment and social deprivation of millions of people. He is also playing a direct role in disorganising

the labour movement in front of the much greater attacks on it which are going to come.

In that situation the left has got to think like the leadership of the entire labour movement. There is no possibility of collaborating with Kinnock and his supporters except insofar as they, by accident, bump across the path of the class struggle. The left now has to set about defining its own priorities and its own agenda in politics.

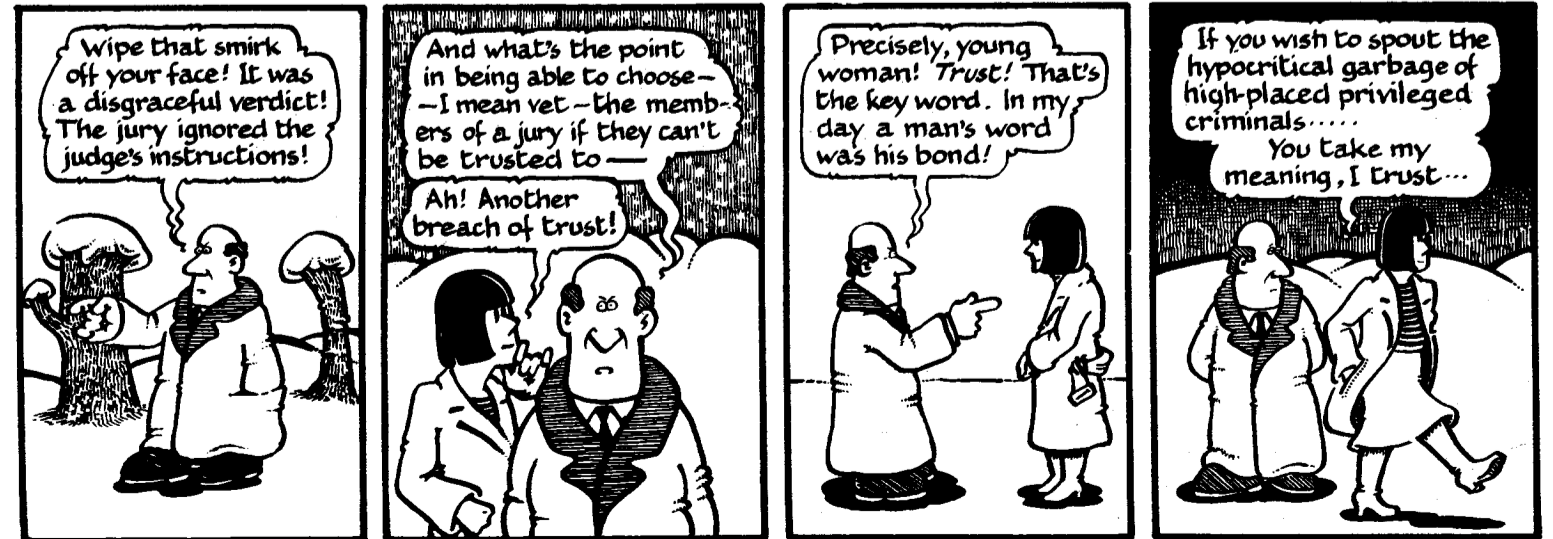
The best examples of this, apart from the miners' struggle itself, were the way the Campaign group forced a debate in Parliament around the strike. The black section has set a fine example in independent campaigning inside the Labour Party. It is more of this type of initiative which is required.

Neil Kinnock is now trying to get three years of unity behind his leadership before he leads us all to disaster at the next election. That really would be the unity of the graveyard.

The left today not merely has the right to act independently and oppose Kinnock. It has the duty to do so.

A PIECE of the ACTION

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Scargillise the labour movement

THE MINERS' strike has seen the emergence of the first mass class struggle leadership in the British labour movement for 60 years. What has developed with Arthur Scargill and his base in the NUM is the sharpest turn in the political development of the left wing of the labour movement in Britain since 1968. The biggest opening for Marxists in Britain since the stalinisation of the Communist Party in the 1920s.

For all the militancy of the working class struggles that developed in Britain from 1968 to 1975, they still took place, in important measure, within a traditional framework. They were above all militant trade union struggles. They were only indirectly interrelated with the struggle in the Labour Party. They ran largely parallel to, and not clearly in tandem with, the rise of powerful social and political movements among women, blacks, in Ireland, gays, students and many other layers.

By James Marshall

The miners' strike of 1972 did see important physical solidarity with the miners from different layers of the population but there was no ongoing political and organisational framework for that to be continued. After 1975 serious setbacks were suffered by the labour movement at the hands of Wilson and Callaghan's incomes policies.

The explosion of struggle in the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79 later had a huge effect in feeding the rise of demands for democratic reform inside the Labour Party but again it did not directly feed into the development of policy or organisation inside the Labour left.

What is decisive about the miners' strike at that political level is that it has brought into being a quite new, and qualitatively different relation between the different forces in the labour movement.

The British labour movement has historically had, as Trotsky put it, an 'aristocratic' character. It has never had to face a true show down fight with the British ruling class of the type that has taken place in other West European countries. Even after 1926 the economic strength of British imperialism allowed it to opt for a 'reformist' rather than a fascist solution to the problems which confronted it.

Under these conditions the labour movement as a whole, and not just its leadership, was deeply ingrained with a fixation on parliament, with national chauvinism, with sexism, with racism, with sectionalism of every sort. Even in 1926, for example, nothing on the scale and dynamic of women's involvement in the miners' strike seen today occurred. The ideology of empire penetrated deeply into the labour movement.

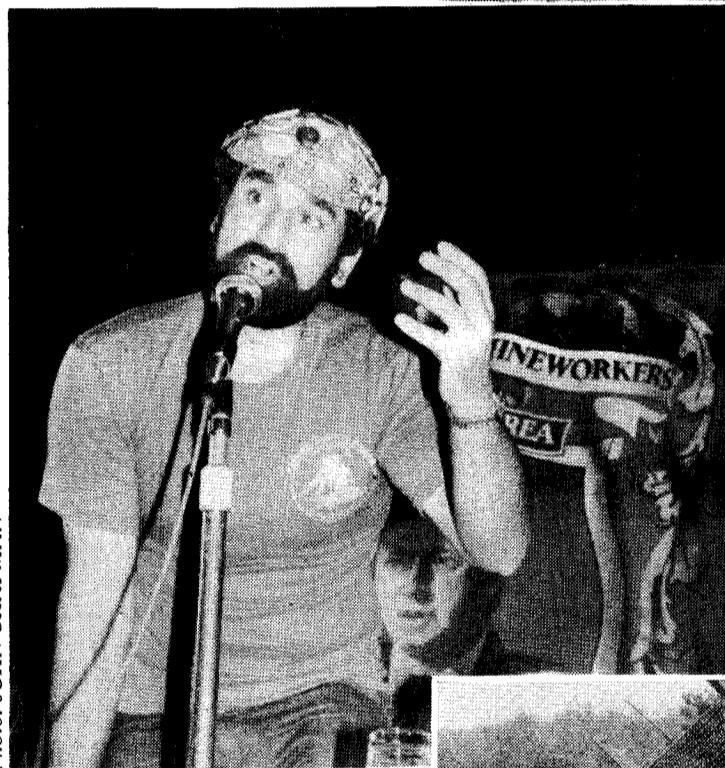


Photo: JOHN CHAPMAN

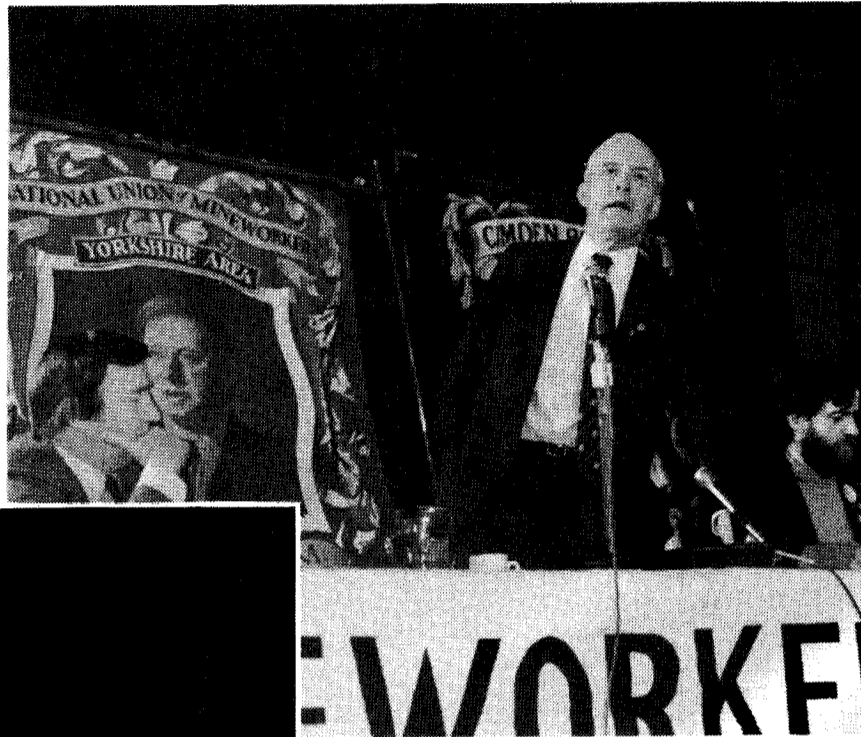


Photo: JEFF BIGGIN



Photo: ED BARKER

Within the Labour Party the left developed chiefly fixated on elections and conference resolutions. The 'trade union struggle' was seen as something separate.

But the 1984 miners' strike has left no room for that type of luxury. If women had not played the role they have in the strike it would have been defeated months ago. But women did not ask the permission of the NUM leadership, or the men in the strike, before participating in it. The massive women's action in the strike was imposed on the NUM — although to its credit the NUM leadership immediately

welcomed the enormous ally of women.

Similarly blacks, lesbians, gays, young people, supporters of the Irish Republican struggle, fighters for colonial freedom, threw themselves into the struggle without asking permission from anyone. And not merely has the strike strengthened the consciousness of tens of thousands of miners and their supporters throughout the labour movement but their consciousness has been radically changed as a result.

A new type of Labour left in the constituencies, and in parliament, has also emerged as a

result. The 'Bennite' left which developed during the 1970s was originally focussed on internal reform and policy issues such as attempts to draw up the 'Alternative Economic Strategy'. The main mass campaign it was associated with was CND.

But through the miners' strike that entire left has been catapulted into direct involvement with the greatest industrial struggle for 60 years. This is shown by the tens of thousands of Labour Party activists who have been directly involved in building solidarity with the miners. At the level of the leadership of

the Labour left it is seen in the massive involvement of the Campaign Group of MPs in the strike.

In short what has happened out of the miners' strike is a real class struggle left in the labour movement. One that has a base in a powerful industrial union. One that takes in the most oppressed sections of the population. One that extends from top to bottom of the labour movement and across all its structures.

The single most urgent task which exists in the labour movement today is to begin to organise that left wing. For, contrary to views in some sections of the left, Britain is not passing through some sort of equivalent defeat to 1926. On the contrary the radicalisation in society is only just beginning. Whatever the immediate outcome of the miners' strike the curve of struggles of all types in British society is moving upwards and not down.

Left

The left which emerged in the miners' strike came the only way it could — out of a vast explosion in the class struggle. It could not have been pre-planned or pre-organised because it differed from the previous left precisely in being based on *action* in the class struggle and not just resolutions on internal party affairs.

But now the task is to spread what has been generated through the entire labour movement. So that 'Scargillism' is not a phenomenon confined to one union. And so that in the next struggles which develop that left wing is, at least in outline, organised in advance.

The miners' strike is the greatest turning point in British working class politics since 1926. Organising the left wing with clear demands and structures is the key step in building on the full potential of what has been created.

The first step of that left wing which needs to be built is to continue to fight for the miners' victory.

We're moving!

Socialist Action is moving its offices this week.

That will mean big improvements in our paper over time but, we're afraid, the maximum of chaos for the next few days.

Next week's issue of the paper will therefore be a special one which will have to be prepared in advance and lack much of our up to the minute coverage. After that we'll be back to normal.

Which way for Target Labour Government?

'TARGET LABOUR Government is about getting a Labour government into power as fast as possible,' said Jeremy Corbyn MP, opening the first TLG conference held last Saturday in Birmingham. And the 150-odd Labour activists who attended were all agreed that it wasn't just any old Labour government we wanted, but one committed to campaigning for — and implementing when in office — a programme of socialist policies.

A Labour government of the Wilson, Callaghan or Kinnock type will not do. To be a credible and effective opposition to the Tories, as well as implementing any socialist course, the Labour party must be representative of the people for whom Labour claims to speak and on whose behalf Labour governments claim to act.

That means a policy of positive action to get more women and black people into parliament. Dianne Abbott struck a chord when she described the Parliamentary Labour Party as 'a white male club, remote from the party and the country and always inward looking'.

Tony Benn described TLG as being about 'how we win, what we do when we win, and what sort of party we want'. He spoke of the need for a 'refounding of the Labour Party', based on affiliation by those groups within society — women, black, lesbian and gay, and every other oppressed group — for whom Labour claims to speak.

Benn described 'the anti-Tory alliance' that Labour should become. Not that advocated by Eric

Hobsbawm and the Euro-communists, but one which creates an 'issue-based' campaigning party. That means a complete rethink about the manifesto.

By Carol Turner

Labour's manifesto should be 'the demands the labour movement makes on every labour government, not a list of parliamentary promises.' Benn described the present strategy of the PLP as 'Saatchi and Saatchi socialism', part of which was to attack the left in the party.

We have to get rid of the pollster policies and replace them with a concept of Labour supporting struggles of the working class. 'We must,' said Tony Benn, 'restate the meaning of exploitation'.

The key issues today — the miners' strike, the peace campaign, racism and sexism in society — are precisely the awkward ones for 'consensus' policies. The issue now facing the party is how to build on the tremendous

gains of the miners' strike, how to consolidate the energy generated by the strike and in the support committees up and down the country.

It was on this very problem — which way forward for Labour — that the Target Labour Government conference stumbled — and one that was reflected in a disappointing turnout. Morning workshops discussed papers on various aspects of policy: social, international, the state, the economy. Afternoon workshops discussed positive action policies.

Nowhere did these discussions gell. This will continue to be the case while TLG remains without a clear project — and unfortunately this conference did not give it one.

Not

Target Labour Government is not in the business of organising the selection of parliamentary candidates in particular constituencies, nor should it be. That can only be done locally. What it can do however, is identify key aspects of policy — as it has already identified positive action against sexist and racist discrimination — which will bring together exactly the sort of new alliance that was described by Tony Benn.

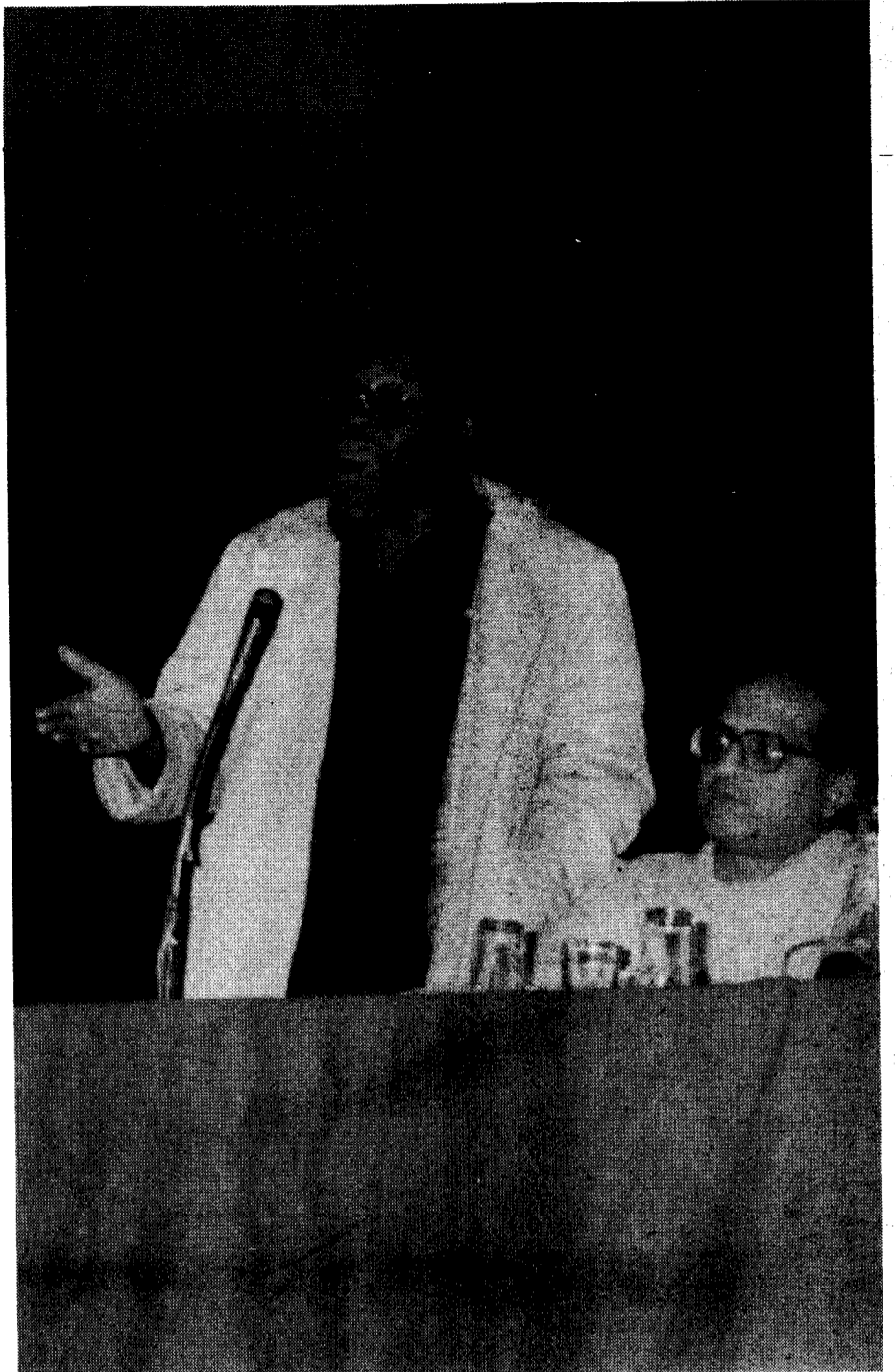
Target Labour

Government can begin to identify those sections of society with whom Labour must make alliances and in so doing can begin to map out the key issues of policy on which the party must fight. Many speakers pointed out the embryo of such an alliance, one which has become visible during the miners' strike.

Democracy

The actions of the NUM at last year's party conference — when it supported the demands of women, the demands of blacks, the demands of peace campaigners, the demands of Irish people, and the demands for more democracy within the party to ensure that all such policies and carried through by the leadership of the party — point the way forward for TLG and for the Labour Party.

Only if it takes such a direction will TLG continue to maintain the support it has the potential to achieve from women, from black people, from gays and lesbians. That is the way for Target Labour Government to move forward to become a real force within the party campaigning for an alliance of all the oppressed and exploited. But this first conference was only a very partial first step in that process. TLG must now take some hard political choices if it is to go forward.



Bernie Grant, Haringey Councillor, addresses the Target Labour Government conference

Speaking at the Target Labour Government conference Sharon Aitkins, a Southall councillor, said:

WE WANT a better society, one in which gay people, black people, women won't be invisible.

Gerald Kaufman claims there are no black people to stand for parliament. The Black Section Steering Committee produced a list of black candidates of all types: women and men, Asian and West Indian, left and right. We didn't endorse them, but we produced that list to show the party that we're here and we're going to stay.



In my constituency Syd Bidwell has been our MP for the last 19 years. He's well past retirement, but he says he won't go. He says that these Asians in Southall aren't ready to speak for themselves.

I've been in the party for many years, and it's only recently that I've been on this sort of platform. White men must stand aside for black and women candidates who have all the odds stacked against them.

At Blackpool last year the NUM were the only union to support the demand of the black section. A defeat for the miners is a defeat for all. That's what Target Labour Government is about.

We're campaigning for bold socialist policies because we need them. Why should black people or women sell out? We're in this for change.

Next time round is too late. We must ensure that black people and women are selected as parliamentary candidates on socialist policies this time round.

International Women's Day 1985

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S day was first celebrated in Chicago in 1909 when working women, on strike over low pay and bad conditions, marched on the streets to protest over the general conditions of working women.

With the rise of the modern women's liberation movement demonstrations took place in Britain starting from 1971 focusing around the demands of the modern women's liberation movement for equal pay, job opportunity, free contraception and abortion on demand and free 24 hour nurseries under community control.

Since that time the women's movement has not only broadened its demands to include issues of anti-racism, against lesbian discrimination and demands condemning male violence but it has also broadened its scope and reached out to ever broader layers of women.

This year will see women from the mining communities leading demonstrations and celebrating all over Britain to highlight the significance of the rise of the Women Against Pit Closures movement.

On 8 March in Hackney the Women's Forum for Peace and Jobs is planning an evening celebration for women from the mining communities.

They have invited speakers from the Barking hospital dispute, the machinists from Fords Dagenham, a woman coal miner from the USA.

By Valerie Coultas

Entertainment is being provided by the Hampstead Women's League and the Dalston Asian women's group.

The next day in Chatterfield sees a rally in Saltergate Football ground with streetbands, stalls, exhibitions and street theatre organised by the Women Against Pit Closures movement nationally.

Many international visitors are expected to attend this event and the national leaflet urges as many women's groups as possible to support it and to raise funds to enable women from the pit communities to attend.

On that same day in Kent women in Aylesham intend to have their own International Women's Day celebration and they are also planning to organise a national march

in Coalville on 23 March, the anniversary of the strike.

Coalville was chosen by the women from Kent and Barnsley for their first march on 18 March 1984 because they were angry that press attention was being focussed on the statements of the wives of scabs in Nottingham and Leicester against the NUM leadership.

The 10 March will see a second 'Here We Go' concert organised by London Labour Party women at the Picadilly Theatre.

On 23 March the Richmond and Twickenham Miners Support Group women's group plan an all woman forum with Anne Scargill, women from CND, Asian women speakers.

All these events reveal women have made links with the battles against the Tories over the last year that they do not intend to give up.

Women have led the fightback against cruise at Greenham and played a crucial role in the battle to defend the mining communities over the last 11 months.

Women have taken their struggle and demands into the heart of the labour movement and consequently this year's International Women's Day celebrations will reflect

HERE WE GO... Again!
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY + ONE YEAR ON STRIKE!
RANKING ANN
BEVERLEY BELL
FRANK CHICKENS
BRIG KEENAN
UNIQUE PATROL
PEGGY SEEGER
MAGGIE STEED
MARIA TOLLY
WANDSWORTH WARMERS
BENEFIT CONCERT FOR WOMEN IN THE MINING COMMUNITIES AT PICCADILLY THEATRE
 DENMAN ST. LONDON W1. BOX OFFICE 437 4504. TICKETS £5 CONCESSIONS £2
 BRING MONEY FOR COLLECTION + NEW CHILDREN'S SHOES OR GIFT VOUCHERS FROM CHAIN STORES (MARKS + SPENCER, BOOTS, CO-OP ETC.)
 ORGANISED BY LONDON LABOUR WOMEN. SPONSORED BY SPARE RIB
SUNDAY 10 MARCH 7PM

that fact. The Midlands Coordinating Committee, set up by the miners' wives in the Midlands, is planning a national Women's Solidarity conference to give expression to this new stage of development that the women's movement has reached. These International Women's Day celebra-

tions will be crucial events in the consolidation of a new stage of women's organisation inside the labour movement. Make sure that you are involved in building them. The next meeting of the Mineworkers Defence Committee Womens Group is on Monday 25 February at 7pm, County Hall.



Kay Sutcliffe, from Kent, Anne Jones, from Hirwaun, Nigel Bevan, from Penrhawceiber, joined with International guests from the USA, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, France, Holland, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Luxemburg and miners from all over the country at the second Socialist Action miners meeting.

**Socialist
Action**

South Wales meeting

420 PEOPLE piled into Penrhawceiber's Miners' Institute in the Cynon Valley, South Wales last Saturday for the second SOCIALIST ACTION Miners' International Solidarity meeting.

Representatives from most of the coalfields were present — from Kent, Lancashire, Yorkshire and South Wales and striking miners and women from North Staffs, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, where 11 of the Dirty 30 were also in attendance.

Among the international visitors were representatives from the USA, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France, Holland, Sri Lanka and Ireland.

VALERIE COULTAS reports.

Mary Davies, from the Penrhawceiber Women's Support Group, opened the proceedings welcoming everyone to the village and stressing that the community as a whole was committed to the miners' fight to defend jobs.

Commenting on other important occasions she said that this meeting was a unique event in the life of the village and that she could never remember anything to equal it.

The crucial message coming out of this meeting in 'Fortress South Wales' was that the miners in this area contrary to press reports were standing firm behind the national union leadership.

Dai Davies, South Wales NUM executive, explained that for every miner sacked there would be four other workers in related industries vulnerable to losing their jobs because of the dependence of the steel and rail industries on the mining industry.

He pointed out that although 12,000 miners had been arrested in this dispute and five had died not one policeman had been charged.

The penalties being imposed on miners were the maximum possible for

trivial sentences by judges, 80 per cent of whom came from public school and supported the Tory party.

South Wales had no intention of returning to work while 600 lads dismissed during the strike would not be allowed back to work.

Tyrone O'Sullivan, from Tower Lodge, also stressed the necessity of not giving up the fight at this stage however hard it might be to continue.

Panic

He told miners they shouldn't panic because of the media campaign about the back to work movement.

That the truth was that out of 200,000 miners two thirds were still out on strike.

With only 300 scabs in South Wales the miners here were not prepared to return until victory had been achieved he said.

Miners are not gladiators in the Roman Empire who would be given a pardon by Margaret Thatcher for having put up a good fight for 11 months.

This battle could only be won by staying out and not panicking.

But Kay Sutcliffe's speech will probably be the most remembered speech of the day, touching as it did on all the themes of radicalisation that have taken place in the mining communities throughout the strike.

Kay explained that her father was a Welsh miner and that during the 1930's her father, like other miners from Durham, Scotland and Wales, he had been forced to march South to create mining communities in Kent to find work.

Kent

The Kent coalfield was created out of men literally having to march looking for work, she said.

Why should we have to do it again?

We have a right to our communities, just like other people who have homes and families and we'll fight to keep them.

It's no good saying there's work elsewhere, she continued, because there isn't any.

If the rest of the trade union and labour movement had a leadership like that of the NUM we would have won this strike.

We don't need Norman Willis to negotiate on our behalf.

We need the TUC and the Labour Party to give us support.

Pin-pointing the need for an alliance between the organised labour movement and the oppressed she asked how long have we in the mining communities sat back while the blacks, the Irish, the lesbian and gay community in this country have been

repressed and done nothing?

Now we know how the police behave towards us we have to give our continuing support to these groups.

The miners deserve to win, she finished. They must win.

Frank Elvy for the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights continued Kay's theme in the afternoon session about the alliance of the oppressed.

Reporting on the anti-gay prejudice expressed by a right-wing Labour Party member in his branch he took head on the submerged prejudice of many people against gays and lesbians.

Gays, like the miners, haven't chosen to be political.

Police

The police and the state makes them so by repressing them for their sexual activities, he told the audience.

What should be private wasn't allowed to be if you were gay, he added.

Just like the miners the press makes the victim of repression the monster, he continued.

Referring to the AIDS controversy he explained that sufferers from this disease were not all gay and people were isolated, not because they would infect others, but to protect themselves from any germs.

Explaining his anger at gay people being called 'pooftas' he said that he rounded on the man in the Labour Party saying 'I'm a pooftas and I'm going to contaminate you'.

The hall erupted in ap-

plause at such a brave and provoking speech.

Anne Jones, from Hirwaun, ended the session with an announcement urging the participants in the rally not to use the men-only bar at the Legion club in the village.

Women have stood shoulder to shoulder with the men in this dispute. Let's ensure that women and men can stand shoulder to shoulder drinking together tonight.

Victory

The International speakers reporting on how crucial a miners' victory was for the labour movement worldwide rounded off the days events. Fergus O'Hare, from People's Democracy, was undoubtedly the best received drawing analogies from the miners' own experience at the hands of the police over the last 11 months.

In the North of Ireland we've had it for 16 years. Only the names and the places are different he pointed out.

The meeting, in contrast to the Bold meeting in October, was set in the background of the TUC and Labour leaders refusing to do anything to implement conference decisions, leaving the miners to fight on alone.

But the meeting revealed that the miners and women from the pit villages remain unbowed, determined to continue this battle in their vast majority despite all the hardship and repression they have endured in fighting for the right to work.

South Wales stands firm

DAI DAVIES, as a member of the South Wales Executive of the NUM, gave this report to SOCIALIST ACTION about the attitude of the executive to the continuation of the strike.

As the statement makes clear the press reports over the last week about South Wales calling for a return to work are nothing but mischief making attempts to drive divisions between the most militant areas of the NUM.

THE news presented by the press was that our executive had discussed three options for ending the strike.

They said the first was a unilateral return to work. It wasn't even discussed and I still don't know where this particular rumour came from.

Our area executive and the area conference have consistently rejected such a proposal.

The second 'option' was apparently to accept the coalboard's proposal to get the NUM to sign a written declaration agreeing to the closure of 'uneconomic pits'. It wasn't discussed.

The coalboard has put forward that option because they want total capitulation. They want us to sign our own death warrant.

The third option was to stand firm. Of course people in South Wales are looking for a settlement.

It's the 50th week of the strike next week. The financial hardship is great.

There are 6,000 people on strike in this area alone and there's very little other industry around here so the poverty is great.

That is why we have to stand firm and that's what we decided. Not what the press reported.

I am in favour of a national delegate conference and any other form of

meeting to inform our membership of what is going on.

Any information that is valuable should be immediately communicated to the membership.

I'm not happy with Mr Willis negotiating on behalf of our union. I'm very dubious about his ability to negotiate anything on our behalf.

He knows very little about the industry. We have got the best negotiators of any union in the country — the three national officials, particularly our President Arthur Scargill.

Historically, there's a lot of reason for us to doubt the TUC's ability to deliver for the mineworkers.

The press is out to sow confusion between South Wales and Yorkshire where the strike is most solid. The strike's at a very crucial stage but we can still win if we stand firm.

We've got no alternative but to continue. The Tories are not simply out for Arthur Scargill's head, they want our organisation.

That's why they are prepared to spend such huge amounts of money on policing this strike, importing coal and oil at any cost.

They want the union. They want the roots of the movement.



103 miners on trial

ATTEMPTS TO BREAK the strike through the courts, by imprisoning rank and file leaders and generally branding miners as criminals, are being stepped up. The charges against the 103 miners who occupied the coal and ore cranes at Port Talbot in October '84 are particularly dangerous.

The original charges brought by the Department of Public Prosecution were criminal trespass and criminal damage.

By Brendan Young

These charges would have been dealt with at a magistrates court. The crane operators and maintenance workers said that there was no damage to speak of, and no basis for charges.

They have an undertaking to the NUM that they would defend the miners in court. An inspection and report by an NUM safety engineer was refused by the prosecution.

These charges have now been shelved. Charges of unlawful assembly are being brought instead, and

the case has been referred to the Crown Court.

The new charges carry heavy prison sentences and conviction could be made on the basis of circumstantial evidence. The way investigations are going indicate that the police are trying to isolate rank and file leaders within the NUM and from the rest of the trade union movement.

That these charges can be made, with virtually no protest from the labour movement, shows the effect of the scabbing done by the leaders of the labour movement in the fight to defend miners against the courts.

Socialists will need to take up the defence of miners against Tory courts, and ensure that the labour movement rallies to their defence.

REAGAN has presented his 'Star Wars' space weapons programme as preparing a defensive system for the United States against nuclear attack. But the truth is that Star Wars is the lynchpin of the United States plans for fighting an offensive nuclear war. STUART OZER looks at the reality of the most dangerous weapons development since the Second World War.

THE REAGAN administration's 'Star Wars' scheme may be on the table at the coming US-Soviet nuclear arms talks, but there's no indication it is negotiable. Although Washington and Moscow have agreed to discuss 'preventing an arms race in space', US officials continue to maintain that the so-called strategic defence initiative (SDI) is not a 'bargaining chip'.

A few days after his Geneva meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko warned that any progress on limiting strategic weapons at the new talks had to be linked to a ban on Star Wars research.

In response, Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger stated flatly that the US would not let the talks 'derail' star wars, and that anti-satellite weapons (ASATs) testing would continue. A White House official asserted that it was 'premature' to negotiate about what is purely a 'research' programme.

The dangers, uncertainties and expense inherent in space weapons systems have been effectively demonstrated by critics ever since President Reagan's original melodramatic speech proposing it in March 1983. Reagan described Star Wars as a benign programme to develop the technology to protect US population centres against a massive Soviet nuclear attack and to make nuclear weapons obsolete.

Critics, and most recently the administration itself, have exposed the proposals as a thinly veiled cover for resurrecting and improving conventional anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems. The more technologically outlandish Star Wars schemes that would be necessary to protect population centres — such as laser weapons and particle beam defence systems — have been described by scientists and defence analysts as either technologically impossible, extraordinarily costly, or easily defeated by counter-measures.

The most plausible outcome of a Star Wars effort in the short run (the next 25 years) would be a system to protect US missile silos, not population centres. And in both the long and short run, SDI systems would be effective primarily against a Soviet retaliatory



Star Wars — the lynchpin of the United States plan for fighting an offensive nuclear war, designed to protect US missile systems not population centres

strike, not as a meaningful defence against a full-scale incoming attack.

Thus, Star Wars plays a central part in the Pentagon's effort to achieve first-strike capability against the USSR. Unless checked as a result of the upcoming talks, Washington's latest effort to achieve unquestioned nuclear superiority is bound to lead to an accelerated Soviet build-up of strategic weapons in an effort to blunt the effectiveness of 'defensive' systems.

And Moscow will undoubtedly embark on a space defence programme of its own, adding a new dimension to the arms race. The Pentagon may be banking on its superiority in high-technology computers and tracking systems — hoping to turn the Star Wars race into the 'final conflict' that devastates the Soviet economy as Moscow tries to catch up.

But with estimates of space defence system costs reaching into the trillions of dollars, there's no guarantee the US economy will survive this unprecedented proposal. Two related initiatives are considered part of the SDI: the development of weapons to destroy satellites, and systems to eliminate Soviet missiles and warheads while they're in flight.

Balance

Both the US and USSR make extensive use of satellites for the early detection of nuclear missile launches and for military communications. In the current strategic balance, satellites play an important role in deterring a nuclear attack by assuring the other side an ability to detect a launch and respond before being destroyed.

Weapons designed to destroy satellites can be used for offensive purposes if they prevent an opponent from learning of an attack and coordinating a response. The US and USSR have both demonstrated ASATs, but in this aspect of the arms race the US has a clear and growing advantage. One reason is a crucial technical difference in the way the US and Soviets deploy their satellites.

Most of Moscow's early-warning and communication satellites are in orbits that pass relatively close to Earth — within 1000 miles or so of the ground. In contrast, their US counterparts are deployed in very high orbits — some 20,000 miles up, outside the range of current anti-satellite weapons.

The current state of the ASAT race is described in a June 1983 report by the Union of Concerned Scientists and a June 1984 article in *Scientific American*

by Richard Garwin, Kurt Gottfried and Donald Haffner.

Garwin et al point out that it is unlikely the USSR will be able to replace its low altitude satellites with high-orbit versions in the near future. The relatively large expense involved in launching a high-altitude satellite requires that the equipment be very reliable. The substantial US lead in micro-electronics technology gives Pentagon satellites longevity that the Soviets can't yet approach.

The current generation of Soviet ASATs consist of heavy interceptors that must be launched from the ground by massive booster rockets — visible at only a few sites in the USSR. They can only hit satellites in orbits lower than 2000 miles which pass directly above the interceptors' launch sites.

The *Scientific American* article's authors calculate that on the average, the Soviets would have to wait six hours to attack any particular satellite. It would take about one week to destroy all US satellites in the system's reach, and the most strategically important US satellites would be out of range.

Even US Air Force Chief of Staff, General Lew Allen, acknowledged in Senate testimony on July 11, 1979, 'We give (Soviet ASATs) a very questionable operational capability for a few launches. In other words, it is a threat we are worried about, but they have not had a test program that would cause us to believe it is a very credible threat.' There have been no Soviet ASAT tests since that testimony.

In fact the Soviet ASAT program is most likely directed at the Chinese, whose satellites are in low orbit to Soviet launch sites.

The ASAT system that the US has tested and scheduled for deployment in

1987 consists of lightweight homing missiles fired from F-18 jets. It overcomes most of the limitations plaguing the satellites.

Garwin estimates that if such a system was stationed at a number of US bases by the end of the decade, it would be able to destroy all low-orbit Soviet satellites within a matter of hours.

But this is only the beginning of the US anti-satellite. In keeping with the spirit of Reagan's 'Star Wars' scheme, Presidential Science Advisor George Keyworth has proposed developing a new generation of ASATs: Space-based high-powered lasers aimed at Soviet satellites.

US invulnerability to Soviet ASATs, coupled with the Pentagon's clear technological superiority and successful current ASAT programme, has led Washington to ignore two draft treaties proposed by the USSR in 1981 and 1983 calling for a ban on anti-satellite weapons development and deployment.

Another possible reason Washington is cool to an ASAT ban is that anti-satellite weapons technology is remarkably close to that required by anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems. The ASAT program provides a serious loophole to the 1972 treaty on anti-ballistic missile systems.

Research

In fact, research and testings of systems that would be banned by treaty can be performed under the guise of developing new anti-satellite systems. For example, the US ASAT homing missiles uses the same technology required for intercepting intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in mid-flight. A dramatic demonstration of this ABM

STAR W





STAR WARS

● **Boost-phase interception.** This refers to a space-based technology that could successfully detect Soviet missile launches by watching for rocket exhaust from ICBM 'boosters'. The system would then aim and fire a weapon to destroy the ICBM rocket shortly after take-off. Since ICMBs cannot be effectively tracked from space after their booster rocket burns out, the system would have to be capable of detecting, tracking, aiming and firing at multiple targets within 100 seconds of an ICBM's launch.

● **Mid-course defence.** Those missiles that survived the boost-phase defence could pack a surprise — such as hundreds of lightweight aluminium-coated balloons — that would be released as decoys indistinguishable from real warheads.

Unless the first line of space defence successfully destroyed most of the boosters, mid-course defence systems would have to track and destroy thousands of flying objects in what are known as 'threat clouds' — a task beyond the capabilities of even super-computers expected within the next decade.

The interceptor weapon tested at Kwajalein last year was a mid-course weapon that was able to hit single warhead in flight, but its effectiveness against a 'threat cloud' has never been tested.

● **Terminal-phase defence.** Only when the warheads approach their target and re-enter the atmosphere would the decoys in the 'threat cloud' burn up from the friction with air, exposing the real warhead for its last few minutes in flight. A last layer of defence against such warheads could only protect some missile silos against direct hits. It would provide no protection to population centres since incoming warheads could be designed to detonate upon interception. Even at high altitude, such a detonation would destroy people and cities.

For these reasons, any scheme to protect the population from nuclear attack hinges on a successful boost-phase defence. According to Bethe, such interception can be done only from space. The most plausible weapons under discussion include ultraviolet lasers, x-ray lasers and particle-beam weapons.

An ultra-violet laser system, known as an eximer laser, would probably consist of a ground-based master laser, which would send its beam up to 'fighting mirrors' in space. The mirrors would aim and concentrate the beam on booster rockets and after launch, destroying them.

Energy

The electrical energy required by the master laser would be enormous. To shoot at the current 1400 Soviet ballistic missiles would require 60 per cent of the total present electrical generating capacity of the US, according to Bethe.

The cost to construct the required power plant alone would exceed \$100 billion, only part of the total outlay. The technologies for constructing the 'orbiting mirrors', the laser and the tracking system have yet to be developed. The cost would be further compounded and feasibility stretched to the limit if Moscow were to increase the number of targets by building more missiles or launching decoy rockets.

Meanwhile the US is conducting highly-classified research into x-ray lasers. These would most likely be launched into space after detecting a Soviet ICBM launch. The laser itself would be powered by a nuclear explosion and would damage the boosters' skins with a powerful x-ray pulse.

Countermeasures that would make the scheme untenable include design improvements in booster rocket 'skin' and shortening the booster's firing time. Beams of neutral atomic or subatomic particles have also been proposed for a space-based missile defence system.

When such beams strike a missile, they burn out the semiconductor 'chips' in the ICBM's guidance system. But like the x-ray laser, the beams cannot penetrate the atmosphere. So a new generation of short-firing boosters also would, once they were in range, be undetectable by this weapon's tracking

system. In addition, a new generation of chips based on crystal gallium arsenide would be 1000 times more resistant to particle beams than currently used silicon chips.

Technology

Other proposed systems for boost-phase defence are plagued by similar problems of technology, cost and readily available countermeasures.

Perhaps recognising these profound problems, some members of the Reagan administration have backed away from the initial claims that Star Wars weapons would provide blanket protection. Secret testimony to the Senate armed services committee by undersecretary of defence Fred Ikle last year was revealed in the New York Times late last December:

'It stands to reason that as you move toward deployment of the full system, there are some intermediate steps which have intermediate utility,' Ikle testified. In a subsequent written report to the committee, Ikle was more specific: 'Such intermediate versions of a ballistic missile defence, while unable to provide the protection available from a completed multi-tiered system, may nevertheless offer useful capabilities.'

What are the intermediate versions available? The Pentagon itself admits, in an April 1984 pamphlet, that the only technology that will be available before the year 2000 is the 'third tier' or terminal-phase defence — in other words anti-ballistic missile defence systems for missiles installations.

Even a study done for Congress by former Defence Department analyst Ashton Carter, characterised exotic Star Wars systems as 'remote'. It did, however, describe a silo defence system as 'within reach of present technology.'

If a full, multi-tiered missile defence program may be incapable of ever providing blanket protection to the US population, why does the administration continue to insist that the full programme of space-based defence technology holds promise? A possible answer may be that the system is intended for offensive, rather than defensive purposes, as a component of a US first-strike capability with the goal of

'winning' a nuclear war. One of the main reasons the exotic space weapons are so costly and unfeasible is that they are charged with the mammoth task of countering a full-scale Soviet strike of 1400 or more ICBMs.

But consider the consequences if Soviet ground-based missiles were to be devastated by a surprise, first-strike US attack from submarine — and European — based missiles minutes away from their target, and if this were coupled with destruction of Soviet early-warning and communications satellites. The US would then be faced with a far smaller ballistic missile threat from relatively few Soviet submarines and whatever remained of the USSR's land-based missiles.

Washington would seek to preserve its ground-based missiles as a 'second strike' force for future use. Under such circumstances, 'Star Wars' weapons to defend against a Soviet retaliatory strike would require smaller costs and fewer technological breakthroughs.

Even an intermediate system of ABM silo defence is more plausibly viewed as a part of a first-strike strategy rather than as defence against a Soviet attack. For in the event of a Soviet attack, the US would likely use its vulnerable ground-based missile force before it could be hit, reserving its massive submarine force for retaliation. What would be the use of interceptors to protect empty missile silos?

Soviet

It may be perversely fortunate that in the two years since Star Wars was first proposed by President Reagan, the spectre of a 'naturally assured destruction' has been raised by both Soviet and US scientists. It may replace the 'mutually assured destruction' scenario Reagan is so eager to discard.

Now we know that the likely outcome of even a small or one-sided nuclear exchange will be a devastating climate disruption. The world will be waiting to see whether Reagan's cold war posturing can be overcome to prevent this 'nuclear winter' from becoming a reality.

(From *The Guardian New York*)

capability was made last year when a homing missile was launched from Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific and destroyed a dummy ICBM warhead in flight.

Similarly, a laser-based ASAT proposal would require the same technology necessary for proposed laser-stations that could 'burn up' incoming Soviet missiles in space.

The anti-ballistic missile treaty resulted from the recognition by both the US and Soviet Union that any comprehensive ability by one power to defend against incoming missiles would allow that power to attack with fear of successful retaliation. The treaty avoided a costly, destabilising and complex 'defensive' arms race and maintained a 'balance of terror' that had prevented a nuclear war for decades.

Reagan's Star Wars plan suggests the US is committed not only to a resurrection of anti-ballistic missile strategies, but also to a historic repudiation of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction — ie the ability of both the US and the USSR to destroy each other in war.

In a statement on the eve of the latest Geneva talks, Reagan said, 'We must seek another means of deterring war. It is both militarily and morally necessary ... to move away from a future that relies so heavily on the prospect of massive nuclear retaliation and toward greater reliance on defensive systems which threaten no one ... the SDI research programme will provide ... the technical knowledge required to support a decision on whether to develop and later deploy advanced defensive system.'

The more grandiose projects suggested under the Star Wars programmes involves massive, space-based anti-ballistic missile systems using high-

powered lasers or beams of atomic particles to destroy Soviet missiles in flight. The technology of such systems has yet to be developed, and by some estimates would cost in the trillions of dollars.

Already, scientists have described relatively simple and inexpensive countermeasures that the USSR could take to render such systems ineffective. For these reasons, many analysts dismiss these space-based anti-ballistic missile schemes as completely unfeasible.

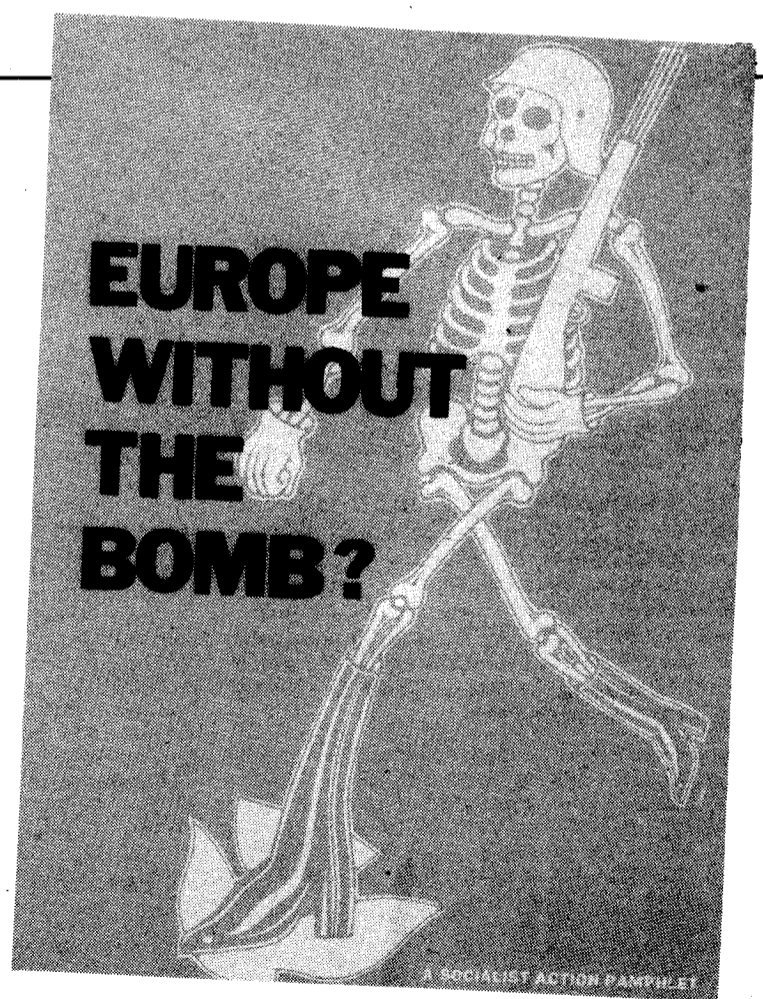
But even if the more exotic weapons under discussion can never be developed, the broad scope of the Star Wars programme paves the way for a major escalation of more conventional technologically available ABM projects.

Promise

And if the promise of protecting the population from a massive attack is nothing more than pie-in-the-sky public relations, the prospect of developing new weapons to defend US silos or cities against a retaliatory strike faces fewer technological limitations than a 'purely defensive' system. In either case, Star Wars fits more comfortably as a part of the US effort to gain 'first-strike' capability.

Several scientists who were active participants in the ABM debates of the late 1960s have undertaken a comprehensive survey of space-based missile defence systems. Their analysis is presented in another *Scientific American* article, this time from October 1984, and by physicists Hans Bethem, Richard Garwin, Kurt Gottfried and Henry Kendall.

Their study points out that a successful system would require several tiers of defence:



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THE ROW between the United States and New Zealand over the annual naval exercises of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand and the United States) in the Pacific is a major boost for the peace movement world wide. The refusal by New Zealand to allow the USS Buchanan to use its port facilities is a product of the pressure of the anti-nuclear movement in the region. The American reaction, withdrawal from the exercises and the threat of military and economic sanctions, is an indication of the seriousness with which America takes the threat of similar developments elsewhere.

It is designed to strengthen the hand of governments which are under pressure from the anti-nuclear movement, while at the same time forcing them to take a firmer role in defence of their alliances with the US.

The ANZUS alliance was established in 1951, in the wake of the victory of the Chinese revolution, and during the Korean war. Its primary axis was the containment of the Chinese revolution.

This is not the major consideration today. The Beijing regime is firmly committed to establishing good relations with the United States and with the capitalist powers in the region. The recent agreement with Britain over Hong Kong demonstrates the lengths to which China is prepared to go in pursuit of this policy, which is aimed against the Soviet Union. The politics of the region however, cannot easily be determined by either China or the United States.

Vietnam

The victory of the Vietnamese revolution was a serious blow to US imperialism in South East Asia, from which the US is determined to recover. The problems faced by US-backed regimes in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and South Korea threaten this. An imperialist united front is demanded, which the New Zealand stand undermines. The danger for America lies in the strong anti-nuclear movement in the region.

In 1983 Bob Hawke's Australian Labour Party was elected with a strong commitment to ban nuclear warships. Hawke's

failure to carry out this pledge has led to a phenomenal growth of the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP) in Australia, which, although formed only a few months before the elections last December, won more than seven per cent of the vote. New Zealand's stand on nuclear weapons therefore puts Hawke under severe pressure.

He responded by writing to the New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange demanding that New Zealand should adopt the same policy as Australia. This was done

By Pat Hickey

without consulting the cabinet, or the ALP parliamentary caucus, and has provoked strong opposition within the ALP and in the trade unions. As a result, Australia has withdrawn from cooperation in the MX tests and Hawke has declared his opposition to Star Wars.

Hawke's position has been backed up by Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who has his own reasons for disagreeing with New Zealand. Nakasone claims that the security of the western Pacific is at stake, and that ANZUS provides protection against a growing Soviet military presence.

New Zealand's example is a threat to the Japanese government's role in the imperialist alliances in the Pacific. Japan's policy is, in theory, based on three principles: not to make, possess or allow nuclear weapons on Japanese soil. The reality is that there are a large number of US nuclear-armed warships based at Yokosuka at the

mouth of Tokyo Bay.

There is a strong movement against the docking of nuclear-armed ships in Japan. The New Zealand example is therefore an extremely dangerous one. It is a real threat to the growing militarisation of the Pacific. In the Philippines there is a growing movement of opposition to US bases, while in New Caledonia French plans for a huge military base there are under threat.

The US move is intended to provoke a showdown on the issue. Previous ANZUS exercises have been carried on without New Zealand facilities for US warships. This is the first time in three years that the request for facilities has been pressed.

Reagan

The White House threat of sanctions is aimed not just at New Zealand. It is aimed at US allies worldwide, and expresses Reagan's concern over the anti-nuclear movement.

White House spokesperson Larry Speakes, stated 'Some western countries have anti-nuclear and other movements which seek to diminish defence co-operation among allies states. We would hope that our response to New Zealand would signal that the course these advocate would not be cost-free in terms of security relations with the United States.'

This is intended as a warning to European governments to harden up their stand against the peace movement. 'General' Heseltine's appearance at Molesworth after the attack on the peace camp there was Thatcher's way of reassuring Reagan of her loyalty. It clearly signals a harder stand against the peace movement, and against governments such as Greece, Sweden, Norway and Denmark which do not go all the way with US nuclear policy. The peace movements response must be to step up the mass campaigns against US weapons, and for unilateralism.



New Zealand

US waves the big stick

'Butcher's apron' victory

LAST WEEK Belfast city council voted in favour of a resolution aimed at preventing Sinn Fein and 'like-minded organisations' from standing in the local government elections this May, or in any future elections to the Stormont assembly or Westminster. They hope to achieve this by making all would-be candidates for election in the North of Ireland sign a declaration opposing violence and swearing allegiance to the British monarch.

This move is the latest in a series of attacks on the democratic rights of Sinn Fein and People's Democracy (PD) elected representatives in the North of Ireland, and comes in the wake of a significant victory by PD councillor John McNulty against attempts by Belfast council to 'unelect' him.

The PD victory in what became known as the 'Butcher's Apron row' has demonstrated both the possibility and necessity of opposing the increasing attacks on democratic rights.

The row broke out last December with attempts by unionists to close down a leisure centre in a nationalist area on the grounds that the people had erected an

Irish tricolour over it. During the debate unionists heaped abused on the tricolour.

In his response, McNulty made an allusion to the Scottish highland clearances of the eighteenth century, stating that some of his constituents would regard the union jack as a 'butcher's apron'. A flurry of hysteria erupted from the unionist benches. McNulty was suspended indefinitely from the council chamber, thereby effectively disenfranchising the people who elected him.

The action of Belfast council is seen all the more clearly when you consider that in the past unionist councillors have shouted death threats at PD and Sinn Fein councillors, call-

ed for the incineration of the Catholic population and physically assaulted PD councillor Fergus O'Hare in the council chamber — without any culprits being suspended.

McNulty has refused to accept the right of the council to suspend him indefinitely and determinedly turned up at every council meeting since, only to be forcibly ejected by the RUC.

By Fergus O'Hare

These actions have been accompanied by strong protests from all other Belfast anti-unionist councillors, the suspension of PD Councillor O'Hare, walk-outs from council meetings by both Sinn Fein and SDLP councillors, and noisy scenes in the public gallery as police have been called in to clear McNulty's protesting constituents.

The affair has attracted much publicity in Ireland, and PD have launched a campaign to highlight the case in the

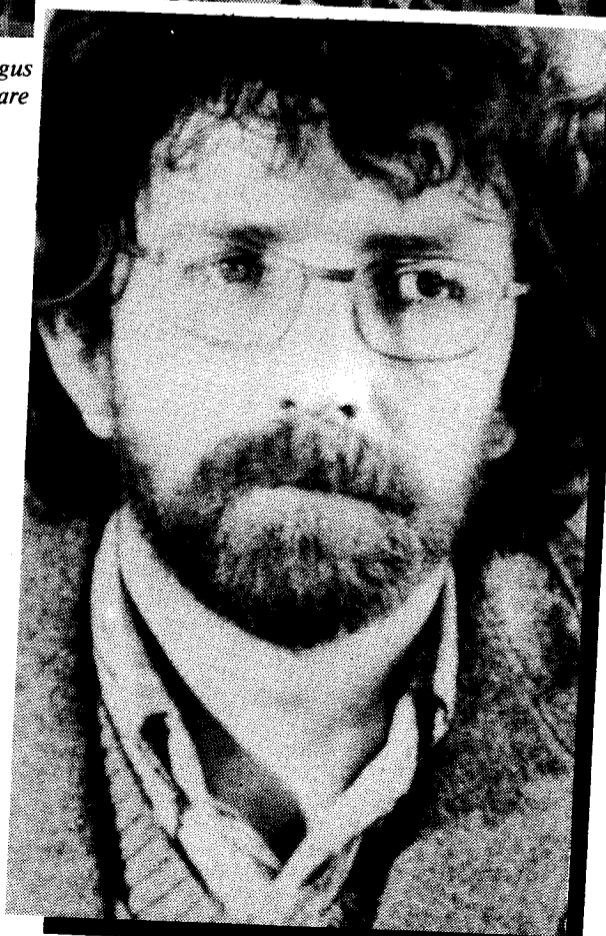
labour movement in Britain. The unionist establishment in Belfast has been forced to back down. When McNulty took his case to Belfast High Court, they found in his favour, declaring his indefinite expulsion illegal.

Smarting from their humiliating defeat, the unionists vindictively introduced severe restrictions on the right of the public to attend council meetings and set about trying to ensure that Sinn Fein and PD are prevented from standing in the forthcoming elections.

The 'butcher's apron' episode was the first attempt to fight back against the ongoing attack on the rights of elected anti-imperialists in the Six Counties, particularly Sinn Fein. It marks an important departure.

With the electoral advances of Sinn Fein since the hunger strikes, both the British and Irish governments have adopted a policy of trying to marginalise them by refusing to allow them the

Fergus O'Hare



rights normally accorded to elected representatives. For example restrictions on the right of Sinn Fein travel to Britain, banning

of Gerry Adams from visiting prisons, the refusal of ministers in Belfast and Dublin to meet Sinn Fein councillors, and the exclu-

sion of Sinn Fein from the All Ireland Forum.

Sinn Fein has made little attempt to mount a political defence against these attacks, taking instead a stance: 'Well, what else do you expect from these people?'. Their non-recognition of the courts and the Dail (Irish parliament) also proves an obstacle to some of the steps likely to be involved in any defence campaign.

The SDLP leadership, far from defending Sinn Fein, actively collaborated in the attack; for example through agreeing to exclude Sinn Fein from the All Ireland Forum.

It is within this context that the importance of the PD fight must be seen. They have called for a meeting of all anti-unionist elected representatives in the Six Counties to discuss the situation should the latest Belfast city council motion be acted on.

The whole question of decreasing democratic rights for anti-imperialist elected representatives in the North of Ireland is something which activists in Britain should be raising within both the trade union movement and the Labour Party.

NAC

Ten years of fighting for abortion rights

ON 7 FEBRUARY 1975, a Labour MP from Pollok Glasgow, James White, presented his Abortion (Amendment) Bill for a second reading. It passed on a 'free' vote.

Every MP had received a copy of a now discredited book *Babies for Burning* which purported to uncover all sorts of abuses. The Bill was presented as necessary to 'protect women'.

Despite the fact that the Bill was only available seven days prior to the vote, women's organisations managed to mount a rally on the day: over 1000 people turned up. That meeting agreed on a campaign to fight the Bill. On 13 March, 800 people met at the House of Commons to launch the National Abortion Campaign.

That same month, the Women's TUC passed a resolution condemning the White Bill and the National Union of Students affiliated to NAC. By June, when NAC held its first demonstration, 20,000 marched against the Bill, with a further 500 on a march in Scotland, and a petition of 150,000 signatures was presented to parliament.

NAC's first conference, held in October, attracted 1000 people and established that simply fighting attacks on the 1967 Abortion Act did not go far enough. It was clear that the Act was inadequate. The aim of the campaign became 'Free Abortion on Demand'. The Labour Party conference the same month opposed moves to restrict abortion.

Although it started as an umbrella group defending the '67 Act, NAC went well beyond that. A new group was set up, with NAC's support, the Coordinating Committee in Defence of the '67 Abortion Act (Co-ord) with an initial 20 pro-choice groups involved. There are now over 70. In April, 1976, NAC held its second national demonstration, with 10,000 marching. In December the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign was set up to campaign within the Labour Party.

Restrictions

The third report of the select committee on the White Bill was presented in the summer of 1975. In October health minister Barbara Castle accepted its recommendations. They included: approving referral agencies, registers of foreign women using private clinics, and restrictions on where abortions after 20 weeks could be done. The White Bill itself fell at the end of October 1975, but in December 1976, William Benyon, a Tory MP, announced another restrictive private member's bill, based on the select committee report.

January 1977 saw the setting up of 'Doctors for a Woman's Choice on Abortion' and a Tribunal on Abortion Rights organised by NAC and attended by over 2000 women. The second reading of Benyon's Bill in February was marked by a demonstration in London followed by a national demonstration in May of over 10,000.

That same month, an international women's conference in Paris called for an International Day of Action on Fertility Control. It was attended by 6000 women from all over Europe and elsewhere.

In July, women occupied Westminster Cathedral in protest at Benyon's Bill, which fell the same day for lack of time. That year's Labour Party's conference called for legislation to ensure women's right of choice in law. The TUC *Aims for Women at Work* was rewritten to include 'free abortion to be readily available'. A year later NAC held its first trade union conference, attended by 500 delegates.

The following year, 1978, saw yet another attempt to restrict the '67 Act, with a 10 minute bill from Bernard Braine. In April, the tenth anniversary of the '67 Act was marked with a week of action, while the third



Leonora Lloyd

NAC conference decided to focus on abortion facilities and oppose NHS cuts.

In May, the case of Joan Paton hit the headlines. Mrs Paton wanted an abortion. Her husband, who had walked out on her, did not want 'his baby' aborted, and tried to get an injunction to stop her. Women sat down in Fleet Street to protest. In Liverpool more women went to court to support Joan. He failed.

Internationalism

An International Campaign for Abortion Rights was formed following a meeting in London that June. NAC became the first co-ordinator and it was agreed to have an International Day of Action. It took place in March 1979, supported by 25 countries. In England, 5000 came on a demonstration and the following month the campaign became the International Contraception, Abortion and Sterilisation Campaign — Women Decide! (ICASC).

In May John Corrie, who had drawn first place in the private members' ballot, announced that he would be taking up abortion. The second reading of his Bill was in July. NAC set up a Campaign Against Corrie (CAC) with branches all over the country.

TUC support

At the previous year's TUC, a resolution had been passed pledging to organise against any further attacks on abortion rights. October saw a massive demonstration of 50,000 people, called by the TUC — the first time in the world that a national trade union organisation had called a demonstration on such an issue.

MPs were under big pressure from both sides. Jo Richardson introduced an amendment which would have allowed abortion on demand up to six weeks — it fell. The Corrie Bill fell, partly because of the heroic opposition led by Jo Richardson. The tremendous campaign outside parlia-

ment, which gave heart to the pro-choice MPs and others a very hard time, was a major factor.

In the last week of the Bill, the Campaign Against Corrie, together with the South East Region of the TUC, organised a rally and a lobby of MPs. Central Hall, Westminster, filled up; so did an overflow meeting in the second largest hall. Still the queue of those waiting to lobby stretched over Westminster Bridge! Various unions including the CPSA, had supported CAC's call for strike action to support the rally.

Arrests

On the day of the Third Reading itself, the Friday, NAC had a women's assembly in the Central Hall, followed by a torchlight procession through Fleet Street. Women who demonstrated were arrested.

Over the next period, NAC organised day schools and debated such subjects as positive legislation —

a draft 'right to choose' bill was drawn up.

In December 1980 the Appeal Court ruled that it was illegal for nurses to take part in abortions performed by the prostaglandin method. Timothy Sainsbury MP announced that he was thinking of introducing yet another restrictive bill. He was so overwhelmed with protests (not to mention threats of picketing his family stores) that he dropped the idea — we all breathed again.

However, 1981 did see a new battle — and one that was much harder to fight, because the attack was more subtle. In the autumn of 1980 Minister of Health Gerard Vaughan had announced changes in the 'buff' notification form filled in by the 'operating doctor'. Doctors had to give medical reasons for the operation. Objections were made by MPs, doctors and ourselves to the new form.

Eventually Dr Peter Huntingford was considered for public prosecution. The charges were dropped after a national campaign.

In June 1981 Jo Richardson tabled a 10 minute Bill, calling for facilities to be available for all women needing them on the NHS. It got a lot of publicity and a fairly good vote. However, the anti-abortionists ensured that most reports in the local papers were hostile to the Bill.

Over the next period, NAC to some extent turned inwards. Without any obvious battles to fight, internal stresses led to disputes about the direction of the campaign: should it take up wider issues than abortion, how much emphasis should there be on our work in the unions, and should NAC become women only?

These stresses led to a split, in October 1983. From what happened after the split, it was clear that groups of women on both sides were able to get on doing what they wanted productively.

After an initial drop in membership NAC is growing again.

That is not to say that there are no problems. There is a continuing debate around racism — the problem of making the campaign relevant and accessible for black women. And, as NAC gets no grants, money continues to restrict what the campaign can do. As NAC gets no grants, money continues to restrict what the campaign can do.

Gillick

A major issue for us is how to go on the offensive. The reaction to the Victoria Gillick case illustrates yet again the sad truth that people are much more enthused by opposition than positive campaigning.

Throughout our 10 years, we have faced attacks from anti-abortionists. Attacks on abortion clinics in America are now in the news, but patient harassment exists in this country too. The anti-abortionists have the money to run national advertising campaigns — notoriously the 'one million babies have been killed since the '67 Act' and 'if women had glass tummies' campaigns. They are much more efficient lobbyists than us.

Another important factor throughout the 10 years has been the importance to NAC of the international campaign. In particular, NAC has always believed that foreign women should have the right to come here for abortion as long as their own countries have laws against abortion, and the question of Ireland — North and South — is important to us. We support the Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign's fight to extend the Act to the Six Counties.

These are the issues we will be taking up in the coming year, but it means more members and more money. We would like our tenth anniversary to be the year we double our membership and make some real steps forward in our objectives — to ensure that all women have the right to choose whether or not to continue a pregnancy.

LIVERPOOL REVISITED

TWELVE MONTHS ago Liverpool city council took a courageous stand against the Tory attacks on local government. It stood alone. This year many, many other councils are facing the Tory axe. Liverpool Labour group has adopted the same tactic as other councils, that of refusing to fix a rate.

A recent meeting of Liverpool Labour Party members took a report from the Labour group on the council's finances this year — which are now worse than last — and overwhelmingly supported the no-rate tactic. The council is supported too by the local government unions.

Five of the seven Labour scabs from last year's council are still in office, who are still intent on voting against the Labour group. But since the elections last May, Labour has an overall majority.

The council's campaign to date has been in lower-key than 1984. Their much-publicised difficulties over the appointment of *Militant* supporter Sam Bond as the head of the race relations unit, against the wishes of the black community, has been a severe set back for their united fight.

The council's financial fight in the coming year is likely to reach record levels. City council leader John Hamilton recently commented: 'We have been left with no option but to take the course of action we have — and the blame must lie squarely with the government. The Labour Party in Liverpool are doing what we think is best for the people of the city.'

PETE CRESSWELL is secretary of Liverpool NALGO and the joint shop stewards committee. Last year the city council unions he represents were in the forefront of the first fight back against the Tory attacks on local government. He told **SOCIALIST ACTION** about the situation this year.

The Liverpool city council is meeting to fix its budget for the coming year on 5 March. That meeting will be following the strategy adopted by the national campaign and refusing to set a rate. That is now the policy of the Liverpool Labour group.

This is a positive development as far as the unions are concerned. On that day the joint stewards' committee has called for a one-day stoppage.

Not that we necessarily favour not making a rate, but we do think there should be a national strategy. Not fixing a rate is one tactic among many. We also support a deficit budget.

The Labour group have changed their tactics because of the national situation. In practice what happened last year — and that happened by accident — was that they didn't make a rate.

The financial situation for Liverpool is worse this year, but we can get the support of other authorities, because they aim to take action themselves. This time Liverpool could be up a deficit of £96 million, which is far greater than the deficit they had to deal with last year.

The union's response is the same as last year. We've called a strike to demonstrate our opposition to any cuts in jobs or services on 7 March, the

This year 'balancing the books' would, according to a recently-published NALGO report, require a rate increase of 200 per cent or 6000 council workers sacked. Since 1979 the city has lost £130 million in rate support grant, £96 million from its housing investment programme, and a further £67 million in housing subsidy.

By Carol Turner

Last year's budget victory was in fact a short-term resolution of a crisis that still persists. The big difference this year is that Liverpool is not alone. It will be entering the fight alongside many other Labour authorities.

Liverpool city council still has the support of every town hall union and of the black caucus in the fight to protect jobs and services. As NALGO secretary Pete Cresswell explains, that is despite the policies of the *Militant*-controlled party and not because of them.



Rally before Liverpool council set illegal 1984 budget

have gone from there, why the problem exists this year, and what we should do about it.

The dispute over Sam Bond's appointment has affected NALGO's relationship with the council. It isn't what it was last year. However, that doesn't actually affect whether we campaign with the council on the budget issue.

On the other hand the fact that the council project it as a question of supporting them does make it more difficult. We say it's

not a matter of supporting the council, it's whether they will support us, in a fight to save our jobs.

NALGO is sticking to its position that the Sam Bond post has to be readvertised. The city council does not have the confidence of the black community.

Supporters of the *Militant* newspaper just resort to a series of lies to try and prove that the council does. But the only support they have is from the District Labour Party and

some council branches of GMBATU. Everyone else is opposed to them.

The main point is that the community opposes them over the issue. It displays their degree of arrogance that they're not prepared to back down.

They say to the unions that we should have unity. But the way they see of resolving a dispute is for us to pack in.

Whatever NALGO said, this dispute would not go away. The black community will not accept



Photo: TIM RIGBY

a *Militant* nominee to preside over race relations within the city. At least 11 ward parties out of 33, and two constituencies out of five, support the position of the black caucus and NALGO.

The position of the black caucus is that they still support the council's fight to protect jobs and services. But whereas last year they played a very active part and appeared on

platforms with the Labour group (contrary to some of the lies that have been spread about them), this year the enthusiasm will not be the same.

It's all very well defending jobs and services, but the figures prove that black people don't get those jobs and don't get those services. There's nothing to be had for them.



John O'Brien, chair of London Bridge, speaks

London Bridge plans national conference

LIVERPOOL city council's joint shop stewards' committee is hosting a national London Bridge meeting in Liverpool on Saturday 23 February, which will discuss the proposed abolition of the GLC and metropolitan counties, as well as rate-capping and the vicious targets and penalties imposed on councils by the Tory government.

This conference aims to be the planning body for a national conference, provisionally called for 30 March, from which it is hoped that some sort of permanent national organisation of joint unions will emerge.

Each local authority is eligible to send three delegates to Saturday's meeting, the provisional agenda of which includes: an introduction by London Bridge chairperson Jim O'Brien; a report

from the councillors meeting with Patrick Jenkin, and arrangements for the 30 March conference.

The meeting will discuss the resolution reproduced below, and will elect a steering committee for the March conference.

• More info from: Pete Cresswell, Liverpool JSSC secretary, on 051-236 1944; or Ed Hall, London Bridge secretary, on 01-674 9844 ext 180.

London Bridge resolution:

As part of the campaign against rate-capping and the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan authorities, we call on the joint trade unions at branch, district and national levels to finalise plans for coordinated and effective industrial action in defence of services and jobs, to be put simultaneously to branch meetings of all the unions in the rate-capped and penalised authorities, recommending immediate action if and when:

- compulsory redundancies are threatened
- a council service is to be privatised
- a member of any union is disciplined or faced with legal action for non-cooperation with rate-capping or abolition or refusing to implement cuts or cover vacant posts
- commissioners or other agencies are appointed to run an authority or part of an authority
- legal or other punitive action (eg disqualification or surcharge) is taken against any councillor for supporting a collective councils and unions policy against rate-capping and abolition, including the strategy of not setting a rate.

We thereby pledge our determination to respond through industrial action in support of workers in our or any other branch who are themselves taking action in defence of a 'no cuts in jobs and services' policy. In those circumstances we call on the joint unions to convene an urgent meeting of all branch officers and stewards to recommend coordinated action to the branches.

In the coming period — before any of the above takes place — we call on the joint unions to organise activities designed to publicise and advance the campaign, including a programme of selective action involving a number of authorities to be put into effect if the government persists in its present uncompromising course. We call for a national conference for local authority trade unionists to be held on 30 March to discuss the above policy and a national organisation to help implement it.

Photo: JOHN CHAPMAN

Teachers' union faces legal attack

FROM 26 FEBRUARY some members of the National Union of Teachers will begin three-day selective strike action on their pay claim. Ballot returns so far indicate support for action ranging from 70 to 90 per cent. This picture reflects the deep-seated anger amongst teachers at the employers derisory four per cent offer.

The teachers are claiming a pay rise in line with restoring the 35 per cent decline in the value of their pay since 1974. As a first step, the NUT is seeking a minimum increase of £1200 for all teachers.

On 28 January the employers made clear that they had no more to offer and contemptuously proposed arbitration — a move the NUT is totally opposed to.

From 6 February the NUT began a campaign based on refusing to cover for absent teachers and withdrawing from all meetings outside normal school hours. The union considers that these actions are non-contractual, there was therefore no ballot of the membership before they began.

Some local authorities, Tory and Labour, consider however that the action is in breach of contract and one of them, Solihull, has threatened to

take out an injunction to stop the action and force the NUT to ballot its members. If they succeed this could pose serious threats to the union campaign.

By Bernard Regan, NUT executive (personal capacity)

Despite the *Daily Express* describing the NUT as 'left wing' this is far from the truth. In the event of a legal challenge the right wing leadership will be inclined to buckle.

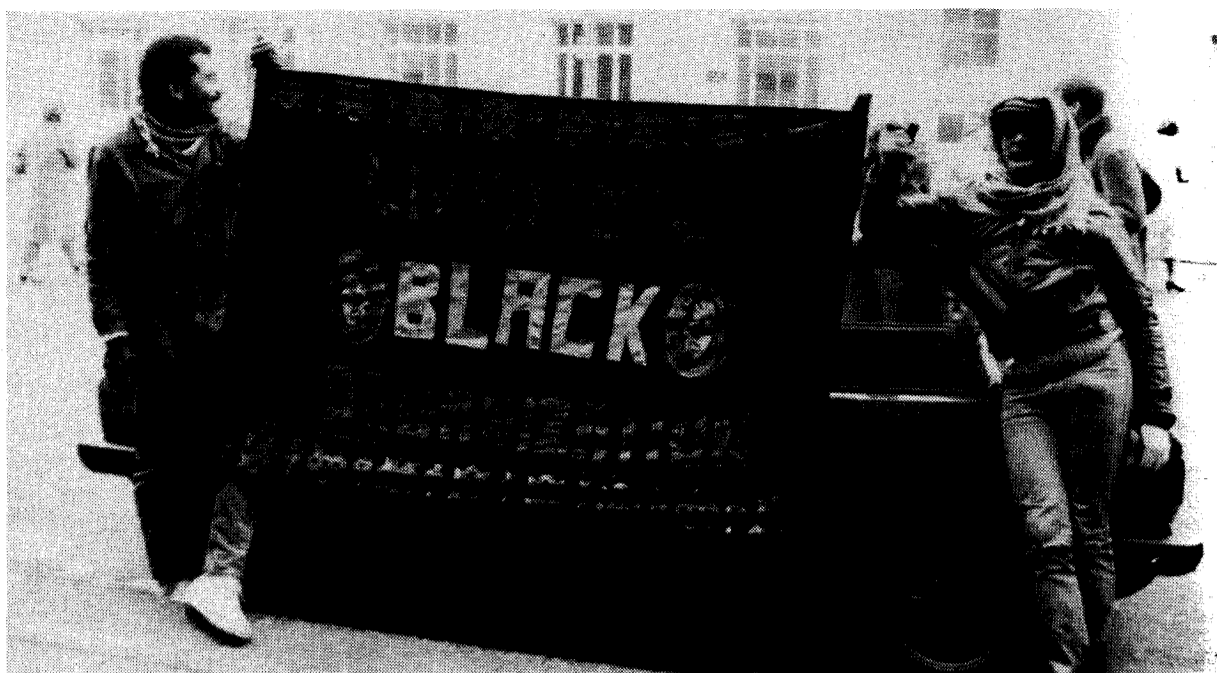
It would pose a double threat: it would disrupt the first phase of the campaign, but it would also establish in law that teachers are bound by contract to cover. If this happened local authorities throughout the country would go onto the offensive and start docking teachers' pay.

The employers have been trying to force

teachers to negotiate a package which would link pay and conditions, such as making cover compulsory. The NUT has resolutely refused to agree to any such proposal, but will come under increasingly pressure from the employers and the other more right wing teachers' unions which are prepared to do a deal.

There is only one route for teachers to take. The Socialist Teachers' Alliance has been arguing for an immediate escalation of the action, non-compliance with any court injunctions and urgent steps to link up with other public sector unions in a fight against the government's cash limits.

On 9 March the East London and Lambeth Teachers' Associations are reconvening their salary conference at Sir William Collins School, London, with the object of organising the left on the pay fight. A positive response to this initiative from other left currents augurs well for this important conference. Socialist Action supporters in the NUT should make every effort to attend.



Milestone for Black sections

THE NATIONAL conference of the Labour Party Black Sections taking place on Saturday 23 February marks another milestone in the short but stormy history of black people's struggle for self organisation in the Labour Party. This is because the press ballyhoo which accompanied its inception last year, and which lasted up to and beyond Labour Party conference in October has subsided. The Black Sections must now decide on policy and future direction.

Although Saturday's conference is mainly for rules revision, there will also be a discussion around organisation, and election of the incoming national committee. Up until now there has been a certain amount of unclarity about organisational questions, and hopefully delegates and observers will come out of Saturday's conference with much more idea about

what the movement is and where it is going.

By Mike Wonsang, Black Sections Steering Committee

The overriding issue for the incoming national committee however will be the 5½ million votes cast against constitutional change which would provide representation for black people at various

levels of the party. Since the incoming national committee will be more of a presiding body than the outgoing steering committee it must not forget that black people are still not recognised in the party, and therefore a campaign must continue to be waged.

The proposal is that the national committee will be a delegate body based on local black sections, and will better reflect the concerns of black people in the party. It is therefore of paramount importance that a definite campaign be established in order to conduct the struggle in the party, and now very importantly, in the trade

unions, intervening at coming trade union and regional party conferences with national coordination.

Appeal

It must be emphasised that in the absence of extensive press coverage this struggle can only be conducted through a concentrated campaigning work which is different from the function of a presiding body. The establishment of a campaign committee is therefore one of the first priorities of the incoming national committee.

● The meeting is in the Council Chamber, County Hall, London, at 10 a.m.

Women workers ensure NUPE victory

FREEZING ROOMS and corridors, rubbish and filth piled up, over a hundred schools and colleges closed, 40,000 pupils and students sent home. This was the price Wirral's back-woods Tories paid for taking on NUPE.

Unlike Liverpool's Labour council, a mile across the Mersey, Wirral Tories are going along with rate-capping and cuts in services. Unwilling to take on the teachers or NALGO white collar workers, the Tories tried to make £3½ million cuts in the pay and conditions of 4000 low-paid — mainly women — workers.

Cleaners and canteen workers were to be sacked and rehired on 11-month contracts, with less than 15-hours work per week and no bonus payments. This would have given them no holiday pay, no employers' national insurance liability, and would have reduced their already low pay to dole levels.

Caretakers' overtime payments were to be cancelled and their work loads increased to include painting, repairs and cleaning, thus putting other workers on the dole.

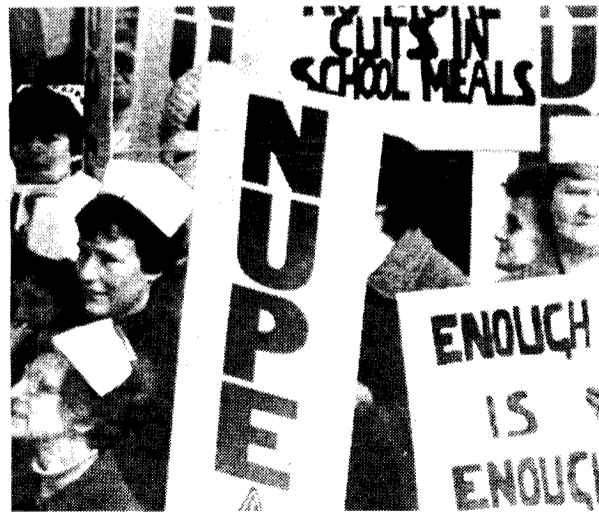
Assistant caretakers were to be sacked and replaced by 'volunteer' pensioners paid a pittance out of petty cash.

By John Nolan

A mass meeting of NUPE members voted overwhelmingly to strike, with 2000 education workers coming out on 28 January. Within a few days schools were closed and the pupils sent home. Typically the Tories thought that low-paid women workers would not stay out on strike. But there was hardly any scabbing — the strike remained solid.

Ninety-five per cent of the pickets, at every school and college, were women.

As the picketing women gained in confidence, a typical comment was: 'Up until a few days ago, striking and fighting for your job was some-



thing I read about in the papers. Now I know what it really means to be a trade unionist.

'But it's still different for us. We're expected to be on the picket line and still get the tea ready for the family. There's something wrong with this. Men don't have to do it!'

By the end of the first week, the Tory council collapsed and withdrew all the attacks on NUPE members. But the Tories will not stand up to the

government as Labour councils are doing: they will try to make cuts elsewhere.

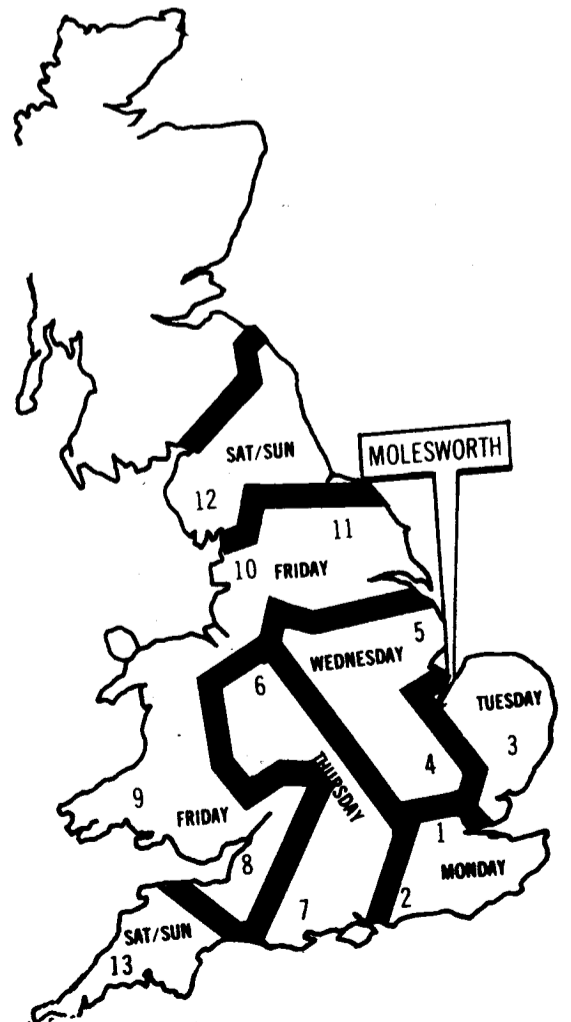
So NUPE are calling on the other council manual, white collar and teaching unions to join in a joint shop stewards' committee of the sort that successfully defended council workers in Liverpool before Labour came to power there. If the Tories come back for more cuts they could be facing a united trade union front.

Join the pledge campaign

SINCE THE pledge campaign to defend Molesworth was put into operation last week, 150-200 people have been present at the base every day, maintaining a round-the-clock protest against the siting of cruise there.

Police harassment of the protestors has been constant, with every effort being made to obstruct the action. CND has been prohibited from siting the information on the A604 — it is to be replaced by a mini-bus! The campaign has got off to a good start after 'General Heseltine's surprise attack on the peace camp, and is expected to build up over the next few weeks. There will be a constant presence at the base from now until the 2-pronged march on the base on Easter Sunday.

CND is asking supporters from all over the country to join the pledge campaign. The constant presence at Molesworth will be a key part of the build-up to Easter weekend events. Regions are being grouped together to cover each day of the week, and supporters are being asked to contact the regional addresses.



Socialist ACTION

Powell's Bill

An attack on women

ON FRIDAY 15 February the Powell 'Unborn Children Protection' bill was overwhelmingly passed at its second reading in Parliament.

On Saturday 16 February, supporters of the National Abortion Campaign gathered in Glasgow to celebrate our tenth anniversary.

Support for the Powell bill served as a timely reminder that we have a long way to go in achieving the aims of the NAC.

All those well known abortionists, from the likes of White, SPUC and the FE to the Catholic Church joined forces as Powell put forward the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists describe as 'artificial' restrictions, 'prevalent in the field of medicine.'

This includes the banning of all human embryo research and the transfer of embryos to the Secretary of State.

The rights of women to control their own fertility and destiny are completely negated by those who have agreed to support the Powell Bill.

Since the 1967 Abortion Act became law it has been attacked from all directions.

Already this year we have seen the court's decision on Victoria Gillick, banning contraceptive advice and provision to girls under 16 years old.

Dr Sheila Abdulla of the Doctors for a Woman's Right to Choose is speaking in Glasgow at the weekend to condemn the Gillick decision and spoke of the threat of a street abortion for young women.

Mary Harrison, of the NAC Women's Advisory Committee, paid tribute to the determination of the National Abortion Campaign in continuing to fight for women over the years.

All too often the fight for women's rights is not

seen as the responsibility of the labour movement.

Forty four Labour MPs voted for the Powell Bill on Friday including Donald Dewar, Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland.

Women's fertility and right to choice is not a matter of conscience.

Jo Richardson, who sent a message of support to the rally, has written to every Labour MP explaining why they should vote against the Powell bill.

By Ann Henderson

Rosina Macrae, speaking for the Scottish labour women's committee, reminded us that women in the Labour Party fought long and hard for the adoption of a pro-choice policy.

The rally recognised the particularly oppressive situation for women in the South of Ireland following the passing of the 'right-to-life' amendment to the Constitution in September '83.

Irish women speakers from the North and the South stressed the importance of strengthening the links between British and Irish women to defend the 67 Act despite its limitations.

The message from the NAC rally was clear — Our bodies, our lives, our right to decide. We will defend the 67 Act and fight for its extension.

Gillick and Powell represent the latest attacks. They will not go unchallenged.



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WASHINGTON has dramatically escalated its military threats against revolutionary Nicaragua in the last week. The Sandinistas have appealed to world opinion to help stay Washington's hand. They have also called up into the military forces all youths between the ages of 18 and 22.

Alarm has been raised by a series of recent events. Last weekend US President Reagan launched a hysterical attack on the Sandinista government — accusing it of being 'creators of a fortress Nicaragua that intends to export Communism beyond its borders'. This came in the wake of a US engineered break down of the 'Contadora' peace talks on Central America. Most ominous of all

was the announcement this week that leaders of the counter-revolutionary armed bands — the so called 'contras' — have decided

By Brian Grogan

to set up a 'provisional government'. Despite several years of armed attacks, backed by the CIA with huge funds and equipment, these contras have failed to establish themselves on Nicaraguan

territory. The announcement at this time of such a fake 'provisional government' is clearly intended as a fig leaf cover for an invasion by US forces, if the opportunity presents itself.

The seriousness of the threat is underlined by the decision of major capitalist politicians to associate themselves with the initiative. These include Arturo Cruz — who was the presidential candidate of the three main capitalist parties, until they decided to boycott the recent elections. In addition, Pedro Joaquin Chamorra, self exiled editor of *La Prensa*, the main popular capitalist

daily in Nicaragua, has also decided to throw in his lot with this 'provisional government'. They know full well the only way that such a government could be established is through the invasion by US ground troops.

At present, the US has 30,000 ground troops at its disposal in the region as a result of its 'Big Pine 3' joint military exercises with Honduras. The exercise includes M60 tanks and large naval contingents. The United States is clearly stepping up its preparations for any military action it considers necessary against Nicaragua.