

SOCIALIST ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

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STOP

THATCHER

VOTE

LABOUR

LAST TUESDAY the Tories issued the most reactionary election manifesto put forward by any major party this century. It promised:

- to end council housing by breaking up existing estates and, in practice, prevent councils building new homes;
- to break up the state education system by allowing the best schools to declare UDI from the local system and become private;
- to consolidate existing grammar schools;
- to abolish unemployment benefit for those under 18;
- to sell off the remaining nationalised industries — in par-

ticular electricity and water;

- to replace rates on property by a regressive and reactionary poll tax — a form of taxation last used in the seventeenth century;
- by these and other means to end any effective powers of local government.
- to introduce a scabs charter which will allow people to refuse to participate in a strike even if the majority voted in favour;
- throughout its 77 pages to put forward a programme that would 'eliminate for ever' socialism in this country.

This manifesto sets the agenda for what this election is about. It is not about the manifesto produced by the Labour leadership — which

is more right wing than even the worst expectation of many party members. It is not about the policies of an SDP-Liberal Alliance whose sole real demand is that Thatcherism ceases to put forward so brazenly its brutality — and whose leaders have declared, in advance, their willingness to form a coalition even with Thatcher.

What this election is about is a government which is setting out to demolish every progressive gain the labour movement has made — and which has, in this manifesto, announced this more openly than ever before.

The task of the labour movement in the next three weeks is sim-

ple. It is to stop that government, and its policies, in the only way that can be achieved on 11 June — by voting Labour and electing a Labour government.

That doesn't mean letting up the fight against Neil Kinnock, his policies, and what he has done. It doesn't mean having any illusions about what a Labour government would do. It means one simple thing. Getting out every Labour vote on 11 June. Between now and then in every struggle, on every demonstration, and on every doorstep persuading people that on polling day they have the opportunity to turn out the most reactionary government this century. If you don't understand why then buy the Tory election manifesto and read it.



A Socialist ACTION

The only choice is a Labour vote

IT IS fortunate that ninety per cent of those likely to vote Labour will never read the party's 1987 manifesto. Because if they did so carefully, and think about its implications, it would seem as one of the most incredible documents ever put before the electorate.

It was summed up when campaign coordinator Bryan Gould appeared on the one o'clock radio news on the day the manifesto was launched. It was pointed out that the document was actually now ambiguous on its most famous pledge — to reduce unemployment by one million in two years. It appeared that more than one quarter of the 'reduction' in unemployment would be accounted for by taking people into training schemes — with no guarantee that they would get a job at the end.

Gould had to admit that this was true. That Labour was no longer even pledged to get a million off the dole and into real jobs.

This is the same on each major issue. Retreat has followed retreat.

● As we show on this page Labour's most radical policy, unilateral nuclear disarmament, has been watered down to the point where it has now virtually disappeared. Gould was careful to avoid even using the words 'unilateralism' when interviewed on radio.

● Any commitment to remove nuclear power has been eliminated. Instead the manifesto simply states that Labour will introduce a policy of 'gradually diminishing Britain's dependence upon nuclear energy' — by what time, and to what degree, is never stated.

● No figure whatever is given for what would be the level set for the national minimum wage which Labour would introduce.

● The Ministry for Women, the one radical measure in central government organisation promised by Labour, is tucked away on page 13 of the manifesto — unlike the Alliance which puts forward its policies on women's rights as the second item of its manifesto.

If you were to judge it by its manifesto, you would have to conclude that Labour were a rather right wing party with still — despite the best attempts at concealment — a peculiarly anti-nuclear 'defence' policy. Just why the Tories, and Alliance, are getting so worked up about the 'looney left', and the socialist threat, would be hard to work out.

But the one thing the Labour Party cannot avoid being is itself. What is significant about Labour is not what it is pledged to but what it is based on. Because to carry through their policies the Tories, and the Alliance, would have to break every organisation on which the Labour Party is based. They would have to break the trade unions, to break local government, to break the tradition of voting for a party based on a free and independent labour movement.

And inside those organisations today are concentrated every major force that stands for progress, freedom, and finally socialism, in Britain.

That is what that vote is about on 11 June. It is not about Neil Kinnock. Or the lamentable and right wing manifesto he has produced. It is about the long term development of socialism in Britain. It is because there is no way to socialism in Britain which goes through seeing Labour's vote chopped down by parties to its right. There is no way to socialism in Britain which does not consist in strengthening, rather than weakening, the major organisations of the labour movement.

Thatcher hates Labour not for what it does but for what it is — the one mass party of the working class in Britain today. That is why she wants to defeat it. That is why today every socialist in Britain should be inside it. That is why on 11 June, without equivocation, they should vote for it.

'No unilateralism please — we're British'

WHEN LABOUR's manifesto was published on Tuesday 19 May unconditional nuclear disarmament in the lifetime of a Labour government was definitely *not* among the party's pledges for the 1987 general election. Instead the leadership only undertakes that if the US-Soviet Euromissiles talks break down Labour will 'inform' the USA of its 'wish' to remove cruise missiles from Britain. Whilst reiterating the commitment to scrap Polaris and cancel Trident, the manifesto contains no mention of getting rid of US nuclear bases. In line with the launch of Labour's defence campaign last December, what does remain of nuclear disarmament policy is firmly set in a pro-US, pro-NATO context. But, while Labour is retreating on one of its few remaining progressive policies, Margaret Thatcher is cashing in on the climate created by the Gorbachev proposals, claiming she supports a 'zero-zero option'. CAROL TURNER reports on how the right have sabotaged Labour's nuclear disarmament policies.

AN 'Advice Note' issued by Walworth Road on 11 April warned prospective parliamentary candidates: 'The forthcoming general election campaign will see all kinds of broad non-party political pressure groups attempting to influence or win support for their policies from Labour candidates. It will also see our political opponents, particularly the Conservative and SDP-Liberal Parties attempting to smear the Labour Party by implying that we have no policy of our own, but have simply been "captured" by this or that particular pressure group or campaign.'

'One of the most important issues where there will be considerable pressure group activity and interest will be defence. The most active and largest pressure group here is the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. CND will "attempt to win commitments on particular issues from Labour candidates" Walworth Road warns. 'It is likely that some of these commitments will be contrary to agreed Labour Party policy.'

Support

In conclusion, candidates are offered the stricture: 'It is not CND policy to support or endorse Labour candidates. Nor is it Labour Party policy to seek such endorsement.'

Predictably, the Labour leadership intends to put the maximum distance between itself and the nuclear disarmament movement during the election campaign. But who does the Labour Party leadership imagine it will win votes from if not the hundreds of thousands of nuclear disarmers across the country?

In fact, among the summary of party policies listed in the 'Advice Note', the policy directorate who issued it are forced into a downright lie in order to put across the leadership's new line. The section on US bases in Britain reads: 'Labour will continue to provide bases and communications facilities for US conventional forces to assist in the defence of Europe and our North American allies. We wish to remove nuclear

weapons from the bases. CND wants to close all US bases and communications facilities. This proposal has been consistently defeated at Labour Party conferences.' (original emphasis)

By an overwhelming majority at the 1983 and each subsequent annual conference, Labour's policy has been to 'unconditionally remove all existing nuclear weapons and bases ... within the lifetime of the next Labour government' (composite resolution 40, 1983).

Votes

Issued one month in advance of the Clause V meeting which decided the manifesto, the 'Advice Note' is, however, in line with its contents. With only six votes against, the Clause V meeting of Tuesday 12 May which was jointly held between the Labour NEC and shadow cabinet rejected any mention of removing US nuclear bases.

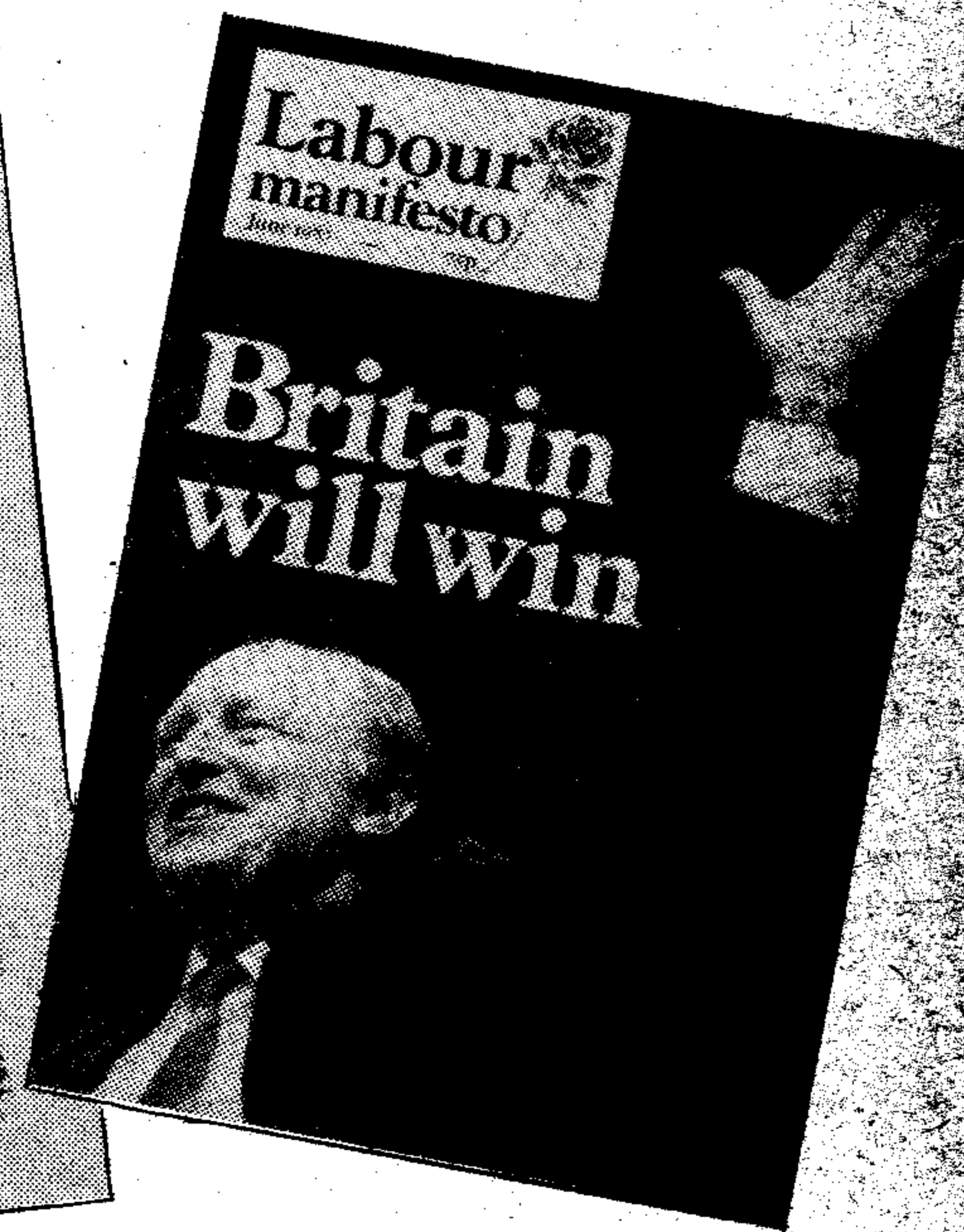
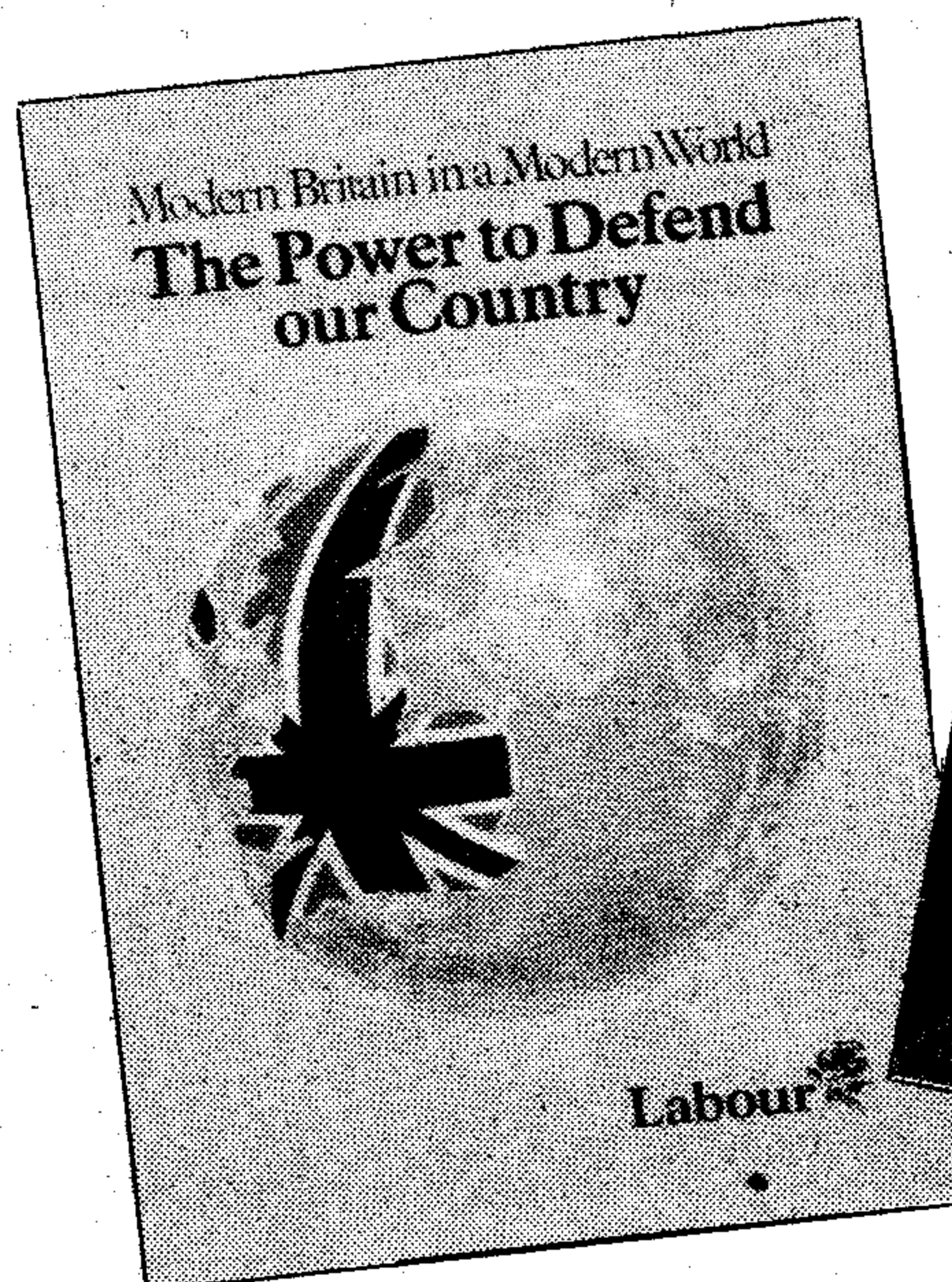
Back-tracking on nuclear bases began in earnest at last year's annual conference. In his Tuesday address to conference, Neil Kinnock listed only four that Labour would close down.

The pre-election rally atmosphere created in Blackpool meant that the majority of delegates were prepared to acquiesce. By the launch of the Labour defence campaign on 10 December 1986, all mention of the nuclear bases had gone from the policy document, *The Power To Defend Our Country*.

The second stage of ditching unilateral nuclear disarmament came more recently, on the eve of Neil Kinnock's ill-fated visit to the USA. In response to the Soviet proposals to get rid of medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe which were then on the table, Kinnock said that Labour would delay returning cruise pending the outcome of such talks.

Created

Thus the Labour leadership has not only dropped removal of US nuclear bases but has also created a deliberate ambiguity on whether or not all nuclear weapons would go in the lifetime of a Labour government. To reinforce the point, im-



mediately after Kinnock's trip to the White House, Denis Healey told the press that claims from Washington 'that Neil Kinnock put forward a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament were completely untrue!'

Since the launch of Labour's Modern Britain in a Modern World campaign at the end of last year, Healey has become the chief Labour spokesperson on the nuclear disarmament issue. His opposition to unilateral nuclear disarmament has been well-known for many years. Choosing him as Labour's spokesperson in the election campaign can only be taken as another sign that the Labour leadership simply isn't serious about unconditional nuclear disarmament.

Right

Healey has already begun the spade work which the right intends to bury unilateralism with. In the first article in the *New Statesman's* recent defence series, 'The dream of world society', Healey explained that the changing situation heralded by the Euromissiles talks meant multilateralism and unilateralism were 'worn-out slogans'. He argued for a 'nuclear freeze buttressed by a comprehensive ban on nuclear tests'.

A *Guardian* article of 4 April further reported that Healey had written for the *USA Foreign Affairs* journal that: 'In seeking the withdrawal of American nuclear weapons from Britain we shall not act unilaterally ... and that withdrawal would have no limit though we would expect to conclude them well within our first term.'

Healey reiterated this line in one of the first major Labour speeches of the election campaign. Speaking in London on Saturday 16 May, he repeated that Labour would set no time scale on discussion with the USA. A Labour government would 'put to the United States a cast-iron case for removing its own nuclear weapons from Britain'.

This is a far cry from the position of 1983 that: 'Conference recognises the need to discuss the implementation of this programme with our allies, but stresses that this will

not weaken our commitment to, or our timetable in, securing a non-nuclear defence strategy for Britain within the lifetime of the next Labour government.'

The day after Healey's speech, the *Observer* published an 'exclusive' story on the Tory smear campaign against Labour and against CND in the 1983 general election. The evidence comes from one of the *Secret Society* TV series (which originally included the Zircon film, now banned), the screening of which was suppressed because of the election.

The *Observer* quotes Piers Wooley, a former Tory Party official, who said: 'At the time, nuclear issues were regarded as possibly quite a large problem as far as the election was concerned ... the party was worried that the momentum CND and the Labour Party had gained would accelerate.'

With a manifesto that completely downplays nuclear disarmament, and with Denis Healey as Labour spokesperson on the issue for the duration of the election campaign, there is no fear of the Labour Party harnessing such powerful support in 1987. On the contrary, it is Margaret Thatcher who has so far captured the high ground on the Euromissiles talks, with her fake commitment to a 'zero-zero' option.

Fiasco

Until now the Labour Party has been seen as the only party in Britain capable of forming a government that would scrap nuclear weapons and the rest of the nuclear paraphernalia in this country. The Labour leadership's abject failure to mount an up-front campaign since the fiasco of 1983 has inevitably led the party to the position of today whereby nuclear disarmament commitments have been rendered well and truly ambiguous.

The net effect of this will be a drop in Labour's vote, not an increase.

Within the party, it is those who most trenchantly opposed nuclear disarmament policy who have now captured control of that policy. They have done so not by mounting a frontal attack on what has been an overwhelmingly

popular demand in the Labour Party for unconditional nuclear disarmament in the lifetime of one parliament, but by working behind the scenes to undermine that position.

Whilst that was happening the so-called soft left maintained an agnostic silence which allowed greater and greater 'reinterpretation' of policy. In practice they supported the right wing offensive. By the time the defence campaign was launched last December, the majority of the soft left were prepared to welcome it.

The LCC-sponsored *Chartist* magazine announced that 'on the left we will have to bite our tongues'. Writing in *Tribune* on 2 January, Nigel Williamson went further: 'The campaign itself does not compromise Labour's non-nuclear defence policy in any way whatsoever.'

He concluded: 'So another myth bites the dust. Professional public relations is not about diluting policies. It is purely and simply about packaging and presenting those policies in the way which is going to convince the maximum number of people.'

Commit

Unilateral nuclear disarmament is one of the most important policies ever adopted by a Labour conference. Its implications go further than the question of nuclear weapons, as can be seen from the opposite point of view from Labour's defence campaign in the election.

They are fundamental to all questions of Labour's foreign policy. The Labour leadership has dropped any clear commitment to get rid of a nuclear weapons because has chosen to nail its colours to the NATO mast. Labour's defence campaign is incoherent and lacks credibility among the electorate because simultaneously proposed nuclear disarmament goes along with cold war rhetoric.

Labour Party members have the full authority of conference to fight for unilateral nuclear disarmament in the election campaign, against its abandonment in the manifesto. They should use it.

True blue Alliance

IN THE last months extraordinary attempts have been made to portray the SDP-Liberal Alliance as a progressive anti-Tory force. The May *Marxism Today* announced in one of its key articles: 'The Alliance is seen as untouchable by many on the left. Martin Kettle suggests that, on the contrary, it must be seen as part of the left.'

The *Guardian*, for whom Kettle is a leader writer, has been pursuing a similar line. It declared in its editorial of 19 May that in the manifesto they have put forward for the 1987 election the Alliance: 'fully justify the ... claim, far too glibly dismissed from the left, to be just what it says — a real party of radical reform ... it is absurd to claim that Labour now has any monopoly of radical reforming policies ... the Alliance can fairly claim to be a party of the reforming centre-left.'

A similar line is pushed by Stuart Weir, who was rightly forced to resign as editor of *New Socialist* for promoting tactical voting, and by Frank Field — who has also called for tactical voting.

What is astonishing about such views is that they almost never discuss the Alliance's actual policies — or if they do it is with extreme selectivity. The Kettle piece in *Marxism Today*, for example, did not quote a single policy statement of the Alliance. However, anyone who wants to judge the Alliance now has no excuse not to be informed. The publication of the Alliance's 1987 election manifesto gives ample opportunity to study its policies in detail.

The first striking, and highly publicised, new feature of the manifesto is the strong and unambiguous backing given by the Alliance to privatisation. It states: 'We opposed the privatisation of British Gas and British Telecom — although we would not reverse it ... We supported the privatisation of Rolls Royce ... We welcome the fact that British Steel is now operating profitably. We believe it should be retained as a single entity to withstand international competition and should be considered for privatisation.'

Women

The manifesto goes still further in its detail. Tony Blair, Labour front bench spokesperson has pointed out that the Alliance's programme assumes that £15 billion would be made in the next five years through the sale of state assets. In answer to questions from the *Independent* last Monday, the Alliance admitted that this £15 billion would include revenue raised from council house sales, from the sale of Rolls Royce, from the sale of shares in British Petroleum, and as much as £9 billion from the 'remaining stages' of privatising British Gas and British Telecom. When asked whether this meant the Alliance would sell the remaining 49 per cent government stake in British Telecom it replied: 'That is one option'.

The Alliance also made clear the existing programme of privatisation

would be carried through. Companies in the public sector, and those 'in competitive environments', could become future candidates for privatisation.

Ian Wrigglesworth, Alliance economics spokesperson, repeated the position on privatising British Steel on BBC television's *This Week, Next Week*: 'British Steel ... that's something we should look at for privatisation because it is a highly competitive sphere, and could operate very effectively ... in the private sector ... I see no reason why it shouldn't go into the private sector.'

By Dick Carter

The second key feature of the Alliance manifesto is its position on the trade unions. This is presented very coyly but precisely. The manifesto states that the Alliance have: 'taken the lead in promoting the extension of postal ballots and internal elections and have vigorously opposed pre-entry closed shops ... We will also encourage the establishment of freely negotiated strike-free agreements especially in the provision of essential public services.'

In its conclusion the manifesto rather cryptically attacks Labour and even the Tories, for having: 'voted ... against some of the measures to put trades unions fully under the control of their members.'

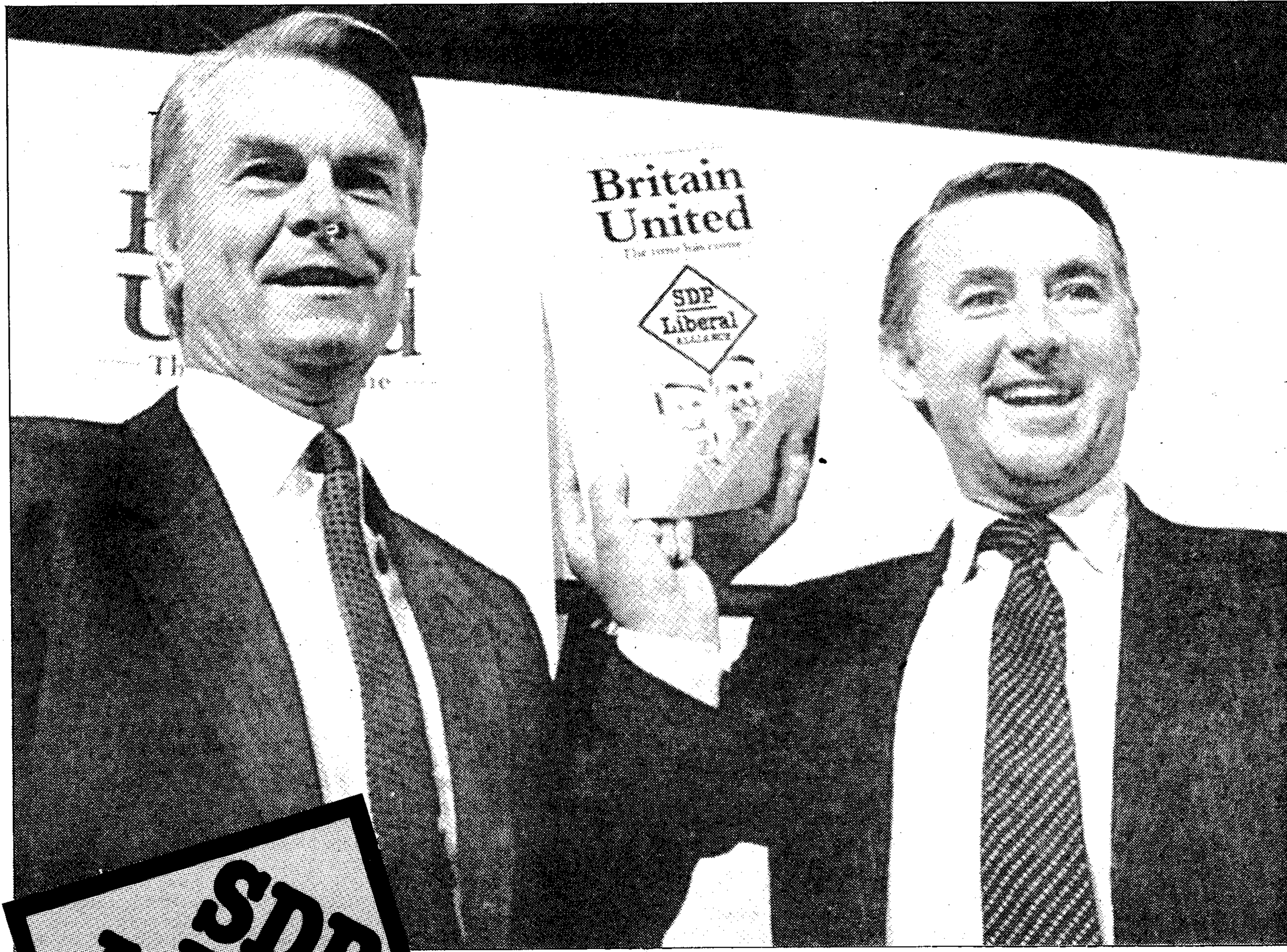
What this means in practice is simple. The Alliance have voted for every single piece of anti-trade union legislation put forward by the Thatcher government. Indeed they have attacked the Tories for not being sufficiently anti-union.

The first 'Green Paper' produced by the SDP on trade unions, in 1982, specifically criticised the Tories for not ending the system of 'contracting out' of the political levy. The SDP demanded the reintroduction of the 'contracting in' system first imposed by the notorious 1927 Trades Disputes Act — and repealed by the 1945 Labour government.

During the miners strike Owen consistently attacked Thatcher for being 'too soft' towards the NUM and the unions. On 8 July 1984, several months before Thatcher resorted to the courts, he declared for example: 'Why should NUM funds which, if civil law had been invoked could now be under severe threat be left untouched?'

The Alliance manifesto makes it clear that every piece of anti-trade union legislation passed by the Thatcher government would remain on the books and, judging by these previous statements, further anti-union laws will be introduced.

If we turn from the core of the Alliance manifesto, which is



carefully tucked away on its middle pages, it is worth looking at how the Alliance wants to project itself.

Here there is no doubt the subjects it wants to be associated with. The first subject the manifesto deals with is its plans for the 'reform' of government — establishing a Scottish Assembly, creating a Welsh Senedd (senate), setting up regional assemblies, passing a Bill of Rights and Freedom of Information Act, and introducing proportional representation. The second area dealt with in depth, given treatment not only in a separate section but throughout the manifesto, is Alliance policies on women.

Assemblies

The party of democratic government and the party who are for women, that is the way the Alliance wants to project itself. But if you examine the small print the real nature of the Alliance policies come out clearly.

The treatment of women in the Alliance manifesto vastly exceeds that in Labour's — to the shame of the Labour Party. It also contains a specific pledge that Labour does not — and

which Labour should immediately adopt. This is the promise that the Alliance will introduce: 'equal representation of women on all appointed bodies within a decade.'

But examine what the manifesto does not say and you find that most, not all, of the Alliance's policies for women are directed towards a narrow layer of higher paid, professional women. The absolutely key demand for women workers, who make up the bulk of the low paid, is the introduction of a national minimum wage. But his, promoted inadequately by Labour, is specifically excluded from the Alliance manifesto. Equally the Alliance refuses to pledge that temporary and part time workers, who are overwhelmingly women, would be given the same rights as full time and permanent workers.

Women would also be drastically hit by the Alliance's support for privatisation. The Alliance refuses to state it would halt the Tory programme of privatisation in local services and health — areas which particularly affect women workers.

But, despite the many other changes in government it proposes, the Alliance does not propose

to establish a ministry for women.

Turning to the other policies it prioritises, the Alliance puts forward proposals for a Scottish Assembly — the establishment of which is to be supported. It also proposes a Welsh assembly and regional assemblies in England, but the real core of the Alliance proposals on local government comes when it explains that the key issue is the introduction of proportional representation into local government. This is argued on such grounds as 'proportional representation for local government would stop unrepresentative extremists from controlling police authorities. More generally, in the very first section of the Alliance manifesto, it is declared that proportional representation in local government: 'is the real answer to the abuse of power by the Town Hall extremists.'

Laws

In short the Alliance is saying 'the Tory way of dealing with left wing Labour local authorities is foolish. We propose to defeat them by other means.'

On proportional representation itself the Alliance adheres strictly to one of the most undemocratic of all systems — the single transferable vote. This means the establishment of vast constituencies, with five or six MPs, in which any democratic control of MPs is impossible. Together with state funding for political parties it is another of the ways that

the Alliance aims to break the trade union links with Labour — as well as smashing any democratic control by Labour Party members over the actions of their MPs in parliament.

Finally the Alliance is pledged to maintain private education and private health care.

The core of the Alliance manifesto is therefore clear. It would maintain and strengthen the laws against the unions and the privatisation of the economy — the key structural changes brought about by Thatcher. It would seek to improve the situation of a small layer

of women while doing nothing for the great majority of women in our society. It would seek to establish a system of government which would attempt to prevent Labour gaining a majority and weaken the control of the labour movement over its elected representatives.



It is, in short, a manifesto for maintaining Thatcherism, not for overturning it.

Anyone who believes that the Alliance is an 'anti-Thatcher' force should simply read the Alliance manifesto. That would end all the hot air coming from the 'tactical voting' lobby.

Campaign Group News
PUBLISHED BY THE CAMPAIGN GROUP OF LABOUR MPS

Tactical voting — A strategy for destroying socialism

Vote Labour in every constituency

New issue of Campaign Group News out. Tony Benn against 'tactical voting'; Linda Bellos on the new witch hunt against the Black Section; Dennis Skinner on MI5. 43p, including postage, from Campaign Group of MPs, c/o Bob Clay MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

In Brief

LLL announces Labour executive slate

LABOUR LEFT Liaison (LLL), the umbrella organisation of the left wing of the Labour Party has announced its slate for the 1987 National Executive Committee of the Labour Party.

The slate is — CLP section: Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, Ken Livingstone, Jo Richardson, Dennis Skinner, Audrey Wise; women's section: Margaret Beckett, Linda Bellos, Joan Maynard, Ann Pettifor, Clare Short; treasurer: Gavin Strang.

The Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC) has also decided its slate for the constituency section: Diane Abbott, David Blunkett, Robin Cook, Ken Livingstone, Michael Meacher, Jo Richardson, Audrey Wise.

The difference between the two slates, therefore, is that the LCC is trying to knock Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner off the NEC and prevent Eric Heffer being re-elected.

Ken Livingstone, who refused to be on the LCC slate despite their nomination, revealed in last week's *Tribune* that LCC members sought to persuade Joan Ruddock to run to take away votes from Benn and Skinner. He quotes LCC executive member Lesley Smith, who attacked him in the previous week's *Tribune*, as arguing that Ruddock should stand because 'that is the best chance of reducing the votes of Benn and Skinner'.

The LCC's slate is

all the more hypocritical given their alleged support for the demands of the Women's Action Committee and Black Section within the Labour Party. Meacher voted for the original March NEC resolution attacking Black Sections and Blunkett and Meacher both voted for the removal of Sharon Atkin as a parliamentary candidate — Blunkett playing a prominent role in the campaign against her.

Robin Cook has an article in last week's *Tribune* putting forward his candidature for the NEC. He doesn't even mention women or Black Sections.

As Livingstone wrote in *Tribune*: 'The LCC should ask itself why it continues to give priority to work on women and black issues while voting for those who do not.'

The reason is that for the LCC supporting the demands of women and black people within the party is just a fig leaf for hiding its real goal — which is to attack the left.

Last year the right wing gave strong support to LCC candidates. The 'Forward Labour' organisation called for votes for Blunkett, Meacher, and Ruddock. This year the right wing will almost certainly endorse Blunkett, Meacher, Cook and Dalyell.

The CLP elections look like being a straightforward battle between a de facto right wing-LCC slate on one side and a left wing endorsed slate on the other.

Labour's problems in the West Midlands

THIS WEEK Neil Kinnock will launch Labour's election campaign at a major rally in Birmingham. The choice of venue is not accidental. In this election, as in every previous one, the fate of the Midlands seats is crucial to the outcome. Labour will be defending four seats where they have majorities of less than 1000; and there are several more that they need to win if they are to form a government.

But all is not well in Birmingham or the West Midlands. In this month's district council elections Labour lost seats in Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton, and Sandwell. In Birmingham, Labour's vote fell by 12,000 while the Tory and Alliance votes increased by 40,000 and 6,000 respectively.

The result was five Labour losses to the Tories, although the Tories lost two seats to the Alliance elsewhere. It was results like these that spurred Thatcher into going for a June poll.

The explanation for all this from Labour's right wing was predictable. Faced with the results on national television John Spellar, PPC for Birmingham Northfield, claimed the real issues had been obscured by rows over the Black Section and gay rights; while Dick Knowles, leader of Birmingham's Labour Group, blamed the poor results on the adverse publicity given to left wing extremists.

These attacks on the Labour left turned out to be more than mere words. At the Birmingham Labour Group AGM on 12 May a frenzied right wing removed everyone even remotely associated with the Summerfield Group from their posts of chairs and vice chairs of council committees.

It then voted to scrap the women's, and race rela-

tions and equal opportunities committees despite opposition from a 300-strong picket outside. The message to the elec-

By Mick Archer

torate was clear: fighting for the rights of women, blacks and gays was not popular with many Labour voters so committees and individuals identified with that fight had to go.

In reality though that explanation simply doesn't hold up. Of course, there are people who consider themselves socialists who can't see what issues like these have to do with 'class' politics — and, of course, Labour in Birmingham has done little or nothing to argue the opposite case. But the issues confronting working class people in Birmingham and the West Midlands are more immediate than that.

Foremost amongst them are unemployment and poverty. Unemployment in Birmingham was 20.8 per cent in October 1986 compared with a national average of 11.7 per cent. The city also boasts the highest proportion of long-term unemployed in Britain with a quarter of its claimants out of work for over three years.

However, even these figures hide the huge differences that exist between



different areas of the city. In the Birmingham Core Area, which covers many inner-city wards, the average rate of unemployment is 34 per cent. Not surprisingly many of these wards have a substantial black population and it is the disproportionate unemployment and deprivation that they suffer which has fueled the struggle inside the local Labour Party for stronger action on issues of race.

This situation is placing enormous pressure on the Labour controlled local authority — particularly its social services, education and housing departments

— in a context of increasing cuts in government grants. Since it took power in 1984 the response of the Labour group has been to maintain the level of provision through massive rate increases (47 per cent in its first year) and creative accounting, while attempting to build up alternative employment opportunities to the crisis ridden manufacturing sector. The bid for the 1992 Olympics and a £120 million convention centre are the fruits of this strategic approach.

Meanwhile in its pleading with central government the council has flaunted its low-spending

record on basic facilities reminding Ridley that: 'Of the 36 metropolitan housing authorities Birmingham has the second highest proportion of population in overcrowded dwellings, the fourth highest proportion in accommodation which is not self-contained, and the seventh highest proportion without a bath/wc.'

It is these conditions, and the failure of the local Labour council to convince people that they have an alternative to them, which are the real roots of Labour's problems in Birmingham and which if not tackled will cost them dear.

Grant is wrong: Black Sections are the issue

ACCORDING TO Bernie Grant, 'Black Sections are not the be-all and end-all as far as I'm concerned. Speaking on an LBC (London Broadcasting Company) radio interview on Monday 18 May, Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate for Tottenham explained that the Labour Party Black Section was a constitutional issue to be put on the back-burner. But he's wrong.

Grant told interviewer Eleanor Curtoise: 'I'm more concerned about making sure that the needs of black people are met in whichever way we can, rather than continue specifically on Black Sections now. What I'm saying is that the time to discuss all these constitutional matters and so on is after the election.'

He went on: 'There are many ways in which you can tackle racism. Black Sections is one way of tackling racism.'

In reply to the question of how essential the Black Section was to fighting racism, Grant said: 'No. I don't think it is an essential way. I think it is just one way of doing it, and I think there are other ways of doing it.'

'We can do it, for example, by having a number of independent black organisations affiliated to the Labour Party. There are a whole number of scenarios that we can construct. I'm saying that I don't want to get bogged down into a one-track way of thinking.'

He also explained that black Labour PPCs had already approached charitable institutions for

funds for a black parliamentary caucus. Black MPs would be 'inundated with calls from all over the place', said Grant, from Britain and abroad. They would have to cope as best they could.

By Carol Turner

Grant's down-playing of the Labour Party Black Section is a complete misestimation of the role it has — and will continue — to play in the fight of black people inside and outside the organisations of the labour movement. The political significance of the Black Section issue extends far beyond the Labour Party and far beyond the election.

First, at the most empirical level, if it weren't for the existence of the Labour Party Black Section Bernie Grant and the other four black Labour PPCs selected for winnable seats wouldn't be where they are today.

The evidence of that is also visible in the number of black local councillors elected over the past year. Black candidates were chosen for Labour seats in the general and in local elections because an organisation fighting for



Grant

black representation exists within the Labour Party. Years of black people throwing themselves on the mercy of a white and racist Labour Party had produced precisely nothing.

The issue of Black Sections is not primarily a 'constitutional matter'. It is the only basis for building the alliances within the labour movement that black people in this country need.

The Black Section is not some optional extra on the anti-racist agenda. There is no way that black people, or women, can fight for their liberation without organisation. Black Sections are therefore not 'one among many' organisations fighting racism within the

labour movement, but are at the very core of the strategic fight which has to be waged against racism.

The Labour Party leadership, for that reason, recognises the significance of the Black Section — and its danger to them. That is why a witch hunt has been launched against it.

Particularly odious to the white bureaucrats who run the labour movement is the thought of black members of parliament resting on an organisation like the Black Section. But, because it can't avoid it, the party leadership is happy to see a few individual black MPs in place after the election. What it cannot bear is the idea that they will be backed up by a democratic organisation of black people.

Individuals can be blown off course, persuaded to compromise with the Labour parliamentary establishment and the party leadership. That is one of the things the unaccountable system of parliament is designed to achieve. But what cannot be bought off is the black community — or a democratic organisation resting on it.

That is why Bernie Grant is quite wrong in his view that the Labour Party Black Section is 'one among many' ways of tackling racism. Black liberation, women's liberation, or any fight against oppression will not

be won by 'enlightened individuals' parachuted in from above via parliament — no matter how good their original aims. That particular road to hell is paved with the souls of thousands of people who entered the door of Westminster with honourable intentions only to be corrupted and, finally, sell out. Only democratic and accountable organisations can keep any individual, and most important those they represent, on the right course.

Every socialist in Britain applauded when Bernie Grant stood up against the police after their riot at Broadwater Farm. Socialists applauded when Haringey council stood firm against the hysterical anti-lesbian and gay attack of the Tory Party. They all want Grant to defeat the reactionary candidates being presented against him by the other parties in Tottenham.

But socialists also have the right to say that the fight for socialism is not about inspired individuals. Socialism can only be achieved by the democratic organisation of millions of people — whether they be of the black community, women, or the working class as a whole.

Bernie Grant's statement on Black Sections is quite wrong and damaging from a Labour Party member of his standing.

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Labour conference deadline change

THE last issue of Socialist Action reported that despite the election the deadline for receipt of conference resolutions remained Friday 3 July.

Walworth Road has since decided this isn't on. The general election campaign means that wards and constituencies, which will not meet in May, are unlikely to have

sufficient time to transact this business for an early July deadline.

The new deadline for receipt of annual conference resolutions to be printed in the preliminary agenda is now **Friday 24 July**. Resolutions must reach Walworth Road by first post on that date.

All CLP secretaries have been mailed with this information. Make sure your party is aware of the new deadline.

The election in the six counties

WHILE THE British parties are carrying on their battle in the run up to 11 June a totally different general election will be going on in the north of Ireland — one of the best indexes that no part of Ireland has any place within the British state. Here the battle by the British government is to defeat Sinn Fein, prepare the ground for future deals with the unionists, and, most immediately, boost support for the pro-Anglo Irish Agreement Social Democratic and Labour Party. REDMOND O'NEILL reports.

WHEREAS in Britain the key question in the election will be how much the Alliance can cut into Labour's vote and secure a third term of government for Thatcher. In the six counties ruled by Britain in the north of Ireland the issues are quite different. For a start, none of the British parties even exist in Ireland, and the unionists will, as always, win. As Hilda MacThomas writes in the 14 May edition of *Republican News*, the paper reflecting the views of Sinn Fein: 'In the gerry-mandered six counties, there won't be any surprise: the inbuilt unionist majority will, as always, get most of the seats.

The elections will focus, as always, on the national question in its present day manifestations: unionists will ask for a massive unionist vote against the Hillsborough (Anglo-Irish) Agreement and against Sinn Fein; the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) will ask for a massive nationalist vote for the Hillsborough Agreement and against Sinn Fein; and Sinn Fein will ask for the vote of all those who want the British to leave and the Irish people to determine their own future as a unit. Sinn Fein will be standing candidates in 14 constituencies in the north of Ireland.

At present 14 of the six counties' 17 seats at Westminster are held by unionists, two are held by the SDLP and one, West Belfast, is held by Sinn Fein's president Gerry Adams. The chief goal of both the British and Dublin governments in the election will be to defeat Sinn Fein and build up the main sup-

porter of the Anglo-Irish Accord — the SDLP. That means the decisive contest will be in West Belfast.

As MacThomas points out: 'Once more West Belfast is poised to be the focus of the media's attention. The unionists, the British government, the SDLP and the Dublin government are all hoping that Gerry Adams will be unseated. On the face of it, it is a distinct possibility: Sinn Fein polled 16,379 votes in 1983, while the combined votes of the SDLP candidate, Joe Hendron, and of the outgoing MP and former SDLP leader, Gerry Fitt, totalled 21,313. The Alliance Party announced last Thursday that, once again, it would not stand in West Belfast so as to give the SDLP a clear run against Sinn Fein. But in 1983 a fraction of Gerry Fitt's vote came from unionists' tactical voting.'

Fitt made himself acceptable to West Belfast unionists in 1983 by his notorious support for Margaret Thatcher against the republican hunger strikers in 1981. In the context of the Anglo-Irish Accord unionist voters today may not be prepared to tactically vote for the SDLP.

MacThomas writes: 'Unionists perceive the Hillsborough Agreement as an attempt to humiliate them and give power to the SDLP over their heads. Sinn Fein's assets include very thorough constituency work, a consistent principled stand on the national question and the stature of Gerry Adams.

'But the SDLP enjoys massive establishment support and is prepared to bribe and lie its way through the campaign.



Recently there has been putting pressure on Dublin to speed up a "West Belfast development programme" through the inter-governmental conference (set up by the Anglo-Irish Agreement).

The programme, which included a speedy demolition of Divis and Unity flats, the creation of a fourth college of further education and an enterprise zone, has been designed with the declared aim of boosting the SDLP's electoral chances for West Belfast.

The main problem for the SDLP is that the credibility of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in the nationalist communities in the six counties is at an all time low. It has delivered no improvement in the lives of the nationalist population. The RUC's disruption of republican funerals, followed by the Loughgall massacre, has outraged nationalists.

Seamus Mallon, deputy

leader of the SDLP, will also have to confront these issues in defending his narrowly held Newry/Armagh seat. Here the main fruit of the Accord is 'cross border security cooperation' — which means in practice increased repression and a line of British army observation posts along the border whose construction has angered local farmers.

The unionist parties, the

Official Unionist Party (OUP) and Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) have agreed an electoral pact. But even so Enoch Powell's 548 vote majority for the Official Unionists in South Down is in danger. According to *Republican News* 4,000 new voters, mainly nationalists, have registered in the constituency since the last election.

The unionists are hoping for a hung parliament in Britain so that they can try to cook up the kind of deal the Callaghan government agreed in 1978 — which increased six county representation at Westminster from 12 to 17 votes. Stuart Bell, a Labour spokesperson has already indicated he would be interested in such a deal — though this has been denied by the party leadership.

The SDP/Liberal Alliance have indicated on a number of occasions that they would consider further concessions to the unionists including 'devolution' for the six counties.

Overall the aims of the British establishment in this election are to defeat Gerry Adams in West Belfast, to maximise the SDLP's vote and, at a later stage, to pull the unionists into discussion with the SDLP aiming at further undermining support for Sinn Fein. The background will be stepped up military operations, and repression, carried on with Dublin's support — policies enshrined in the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

advertisement

ELECTION FUND

SINN FEIN is contesting 14 constituencies in the forthcoming Westminster election on 11 June against the combined forces of the SDLP, the unionist parties (including Alliance and the Workers' Party) and the British government.

Money is urgently needed to enable Sinn Fein to contest this election and funds are low after the 26-County election campaign. We are appealing to friends and supporters of the Republican Movement at home and abroad to help us in this vital campaign.

All donations (which shall be acknowledged) should be sent as soon as possible to the Sinn Fein Election Fund, 44 Parnell Square, Dublin.

Bloody Friday

SOMETIMES A SINGLE event is so stark that it immediately exposes the true character of a society. The massacre of the nine young Irishmen — eight IRA volunteers and one civilian — outside Loughgall RUC barracks on Friday 8 May was just such an event.

It was claimed the civilian was killed in 'crossfire'. But as Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein, pointed out: 'It's obvious that there was a kill-zone around the barracks and everyone, whether IRA volunteer or passing civilian, was to be killed.'

He went on: 'What happened at Loughgall was cleared at the very highest level of the British government's administration. The godfather of the British colonial administration decided that we had to be punished, decided that this struggle had to be ended.'

The IRA was outnumbered and outgunned in a carefully planned SAS ambush. There is no doubt at all that the volunteers could have been arrested.

But there was no intention to take prisoners. From the outset the decision was to organise a massacre.

By Redmond O'Neill

IRA volunteers who escaped the ambush are reported to have seen young men being shot on the ground after capture. All the bodies were riddled with bullets. But, in addition, they had also been carefully shot through the head.

In the aftermath, Fleet Street crowded with delight — and in their glee some were more frank than wise.

Take the *Independent's* editorial: 'It is even implied that it was somehow ungentlemanly to encourage IRA men to

walk into an overwhelmingly effective trap. Such arguments are confused and misplaced and they blur the distinction between methods appropriate for dealing with a sophisticated and ruthless paramilitary terrorist force, and those that are obviously intolerable in a democratic society.'

Perhaps the 'democrats' writing the *Independent's* leaders have not been informed: an election was held on an all-Ireland basis in 1918. In that election the overwhelming majority voted for independence and Irish unity. Nonetheless Britain imposed partition on Ireland without a vote and by force of arms. It has been maintained by force of British arms ever since.

Six years ago this month, in May 1981, Bobby Sands, put the demands of prisoners for political status to the test of the polls. He was elected to Westminster with 10,000

more votes than Margaret Thatcher got in Finchley — but they still let him and nine others like him starve to death, in a vain effort to criminalise a struggle that has gone on for 800 years.

So what was the issue at Loughgall? As Martin McGuinness put it: 'What happened at Loughgall will forever be remembered by those thousands and thousands of Irish people shocked and angered at the wanton murders of nine young Irishmen by the soldiers of a foreign army holding no legal or moral right to bear arms on Irish soil.'

'Our position is quite clear — those young men who were there, with guns in their hands, had every right and every justification to be there. They were there for us the Irish people. And those young people who laid in wait, the people who murdered them, they are the terrorists.'

'There are some people

In Brief

Charter for lesbian and gays rights launch

ON Friday 29 May, lesbians and gays will be lobbying Labour headquarters in Walworth Road between 12.30-1.30pm.

The object of the exercise is to present the Labour Party leadership with a charter for lesbians and gay rights. The charter will be

drawn up this weekend, at a national conference organised by the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Campaign.

The conference takes place on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 May, at the Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, WC1 (opposite St Pancras station). It is an open conference.

New Statesman sacks lesbian and gay journalists

SO much for the idea that the middle classes are more 'enlightened' on the question of minority rights and sexual freedom.

New Statesman editor John Lloyd has recently sacked two journalists, Jane Dibblin and Andrew Lumsden. 'Economy measures' was the reason given. But it just so happens that Dibblin and Lumsden were the only two out lesbian and gay journalists on the *New Statesman's* staff.

Writing in the

Guardian on Monday 18 May, Andrew Lumsden said: 'John Lloyd tells me that an overtly gay journalist cannot be regarded as sufficiently outside the subject to be authoritative on homosexuality-related topics.'

We look forward to the departure of women and black journalists from the pages of the *New Statesman!* After all, if the oppressed are allowed to speak for themselves, white middle class men may cease to be regarded as 'experts' and 'champions' of such causes!

NUPE stands firm on reselection

IN A clear snub to the role of deputy general secretary Tom Sawyer, delegates to NUPE conference rejected any moves away from the automatic reselection of MPs.

Sawyer, a member of the Labour NEC, has supported the attempts of the right wing to overturn 1986 conference decisions and to change the present selection procedure.

Composite resolution 10, passed by NUPE conference on Monday 18 May, 'regrets that efforts are still being made to reduce the

accountability of Labour MPs'. The composite 'strongly supports calls that the controversy not be reopened'.

It also urged all NUPE representatives to 'campaign vigorously for the party's selection procedure.'

NUPE conference remitted to the incoming executive composite resolution 11. This noted the need for selecting more Labour candidates from working class backgrounds. It welcomed the consultation process initiated by the Labour NEC and called on NUPE to fully participate.

TASS conference rejects anti-Black Section moves

MEETING in Bournemouth, delegates to the recent TASS conference rejected discussing resolutions which opposed the Labour Party Black Section.

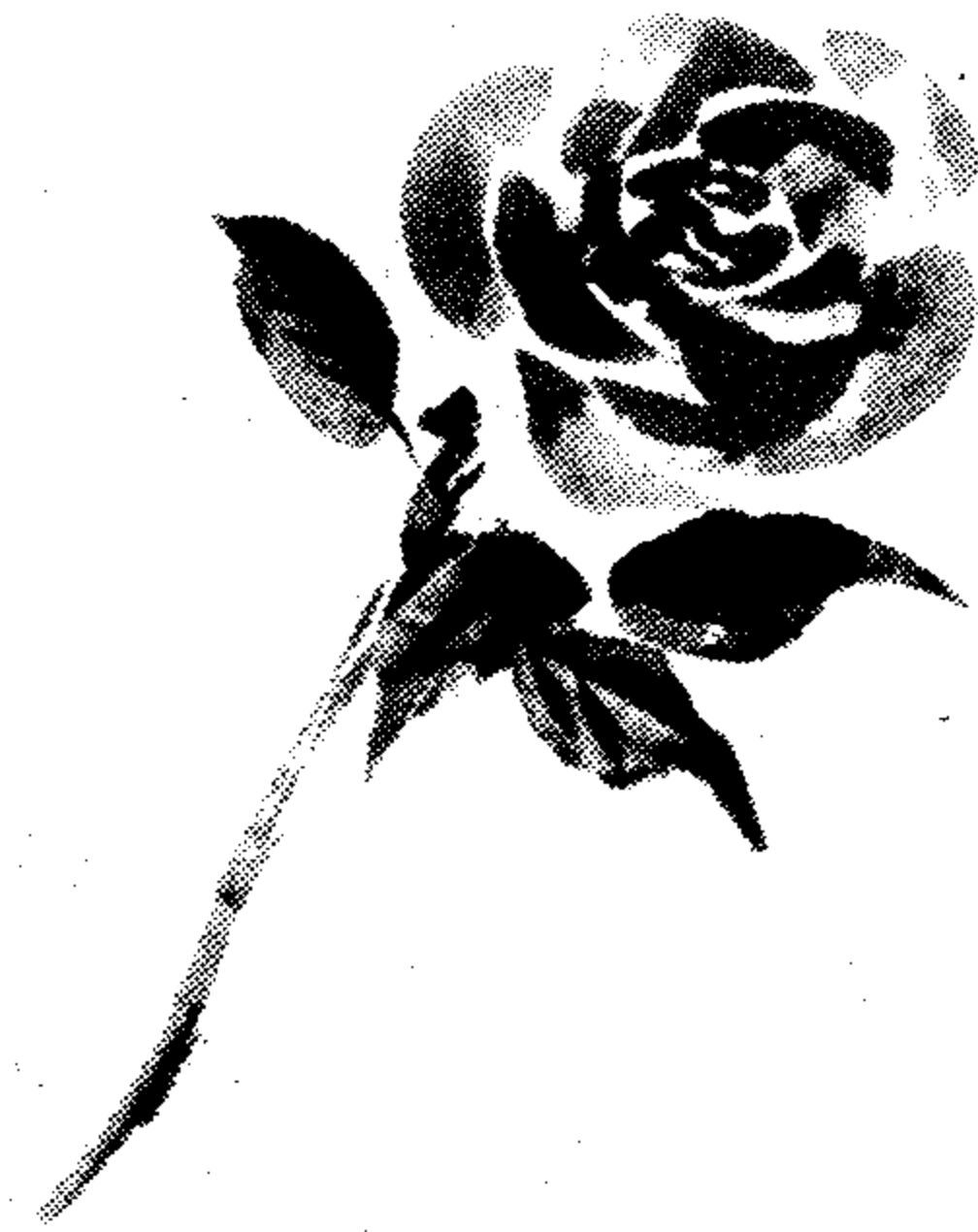
that establishing Black Sections leads to 'segregation' within the party. The resolution also attacked Black Sections as 'divisive' — a familiar theme for those who have debated *Militant* on this and other issues of self-organisation.

The South Wales resolution was backed by at least some of the *Morning Star* wing of the union's Broad Left. TASS No 12 division also submitted a similar resolution for debate at the West Midlands regional Labour Party conference earlier this year.

Under pressure from the rank and file, resolutions against the Black Section were remitted.

In February, Socialist Action reported that a conference resolution from the South Wales area of TASS argued

HOW KINNOCK WEAKENED LABOUR



LABOUR IS entering the election fighting a deeply unpopular government. Contrary to claims of widespread support Thatcher in 1983 won only 42 per cent of the poll — the lowest vote for a government with a safe majority in parliament in British history. This time Tory support is likely to be still lower.

But Labour has been unable to exploit this. The party is entering the election trailing the Tories by 10 per cent in the polls.

Labour's standing is lower than when the election was announced in 1983 — and it faces an uphill battle. This is despite the fact the right and centre, which

lead the party, have justified every policy since 1983 by its supposed role in winning the election. JOHN ROSS looks at how the right has sabotaged Labour's run-up to the election — and at Kinnock's four wasted years. Most importantly he looks at what the left must do about it.

AFTER eight years of the most anti-working class government this century, how can there even be a doubt that Labour can win the election? Even more so given that Thatcher's government, contrary to its claims, is not popular? Thatcher, even if she were to win, may get a lower vote than when the Tories were defeated in 1945.

Yet the record of Labour's popularity faced with that government is clear. After the disastrous defeat of 1983 Labour's support recovered to 39 per cent in the polls by April 1984. It still stood at 39 per cent in November 1986 — that is no gains were made in more than two and a half years. Since then, after the 1986 conference, Labour's support has fallen to around 30 per cent. Labour stands at a lower position in the polls at the start of the election campaign today than it did in 1983.

In that time each policy advocated by Neil Kinnock and the right wing has been justified by its supposed role in winning this election. How then could the Labour leadership's policies lead to a situation where Labour entered the campaign with its support at such a low level?

To understand look at the policies clearly pursued during the last four years. During that time a bloc of the right wing and the majority of the 'soft left' has led the party. To examine the problems facing Labour today, look at the policies pursued by that bloc.

When he was elected Kinnock was known on the left as the person who, in 1981, ensured the defeat of Tony Benn in the deputy leadership election. Kinnock secured the re-election of Dennis Healey as deputy leader to Michael Foot. It was of course the policies pursued by the Foot-Healey team which led into the disastrous defeat of 1983.

What was involved was more than just individuals or one campaign. Kinnock showed by his actions that he was against the left leading the party — which would have been the effect of a Foot-Benn leadership team. Kinnock was determined that the Labour Party should be led by a bloc of the centre and right — with the left excluded from effective power.

Kinnock applied the same formula to his own leadership campaign two years later. In the 1983 leadership contest it was clear Kinnock was going to win the election within two weeks of its start. Kin-

nock set about ensuring that his deputy would be Roy Hattersley, the candidate of the right, rather than Michael Meacher, then the left's candidate for deputy leader.

When it appeared Meacher was gaining ground Kinnock gave an interview to the *Mail on Sunday*, in September 1983, describing Meacher as 'weak as hell'. The reasoning which led to the assault on Meacher was summed up by one of Kinnock's aides: 'Meacher as deputy leader could have been a problem... We were concerned about Hattersley's failure to act.'

In addition to knifing Meacher Kinnock's team also worked with Moss Evans and Alex Kitson of the transport workers to ensure the TGWU's vote was delivered to Hattersley.

Kinnock fought to ensure that the Foot-Healey centre-right team which had presided over the disastrous defeat of 1983 would be recreated in the new team of Kinnock and Hattersley. At all costs Kinnock was determined that there should not be a 'left' bloc leading the party. This decision dictated the course of the four years that followed.

The decision of Kinnock that a bloc of the right and centre must lead the party was in line with his whole political career. When he was still part of the 'left', during the 1974-79 Labour government, Kinnock was in favour of left protests. He was never in favour of the left, or the rank and file, possessing power in the party.

While presenting himself as a 'democratic socialist', and attacking his opponents for not being 'democrats', Kinnock has consistently shown himself to be an elitist centralist — opposed to democracy both in the party and society. This, given the political blocs he supports, is logical — as the extension of democracy strengthens the left and weakens the right.

While building himself a left reputation in the 1970s Kinnock always did so from positions which left the real centres of power untouched. He joined the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) soon after its formation in 1973. But he opposed CLPD's central demand, mandatory reselection of MPs, until 1977 — and then adopted it only when support for this demand had become universal on the left. Kinnock felt that reselection was an attack on the autonomy of the Parliamentary Labour Party — and defended MPs against criticism by those

outside parliament.

Also symptomatic was the one issue on which Kinnock made a vigorous public campaign during the 1974-79 Labour government — opposing devolution for Wales. Kinnock defended the centralist power of the British state.

On every major issue Kinnock was to take the party to the right. This was the inevitable consequence of the decision to lead the party in alliance with the right.

THE FIRST consequences of Kinnock's policy, and in purely electoral terms the most decisive was that not to undertake any campaign against Labour's most threatening rival for votes — the Alliance. This was despite the fact the Alliance came within a million votes of Labour in 1983, and is Labour's main rival in working class seats.

In last week's *Tribune* Robin Cook, Kinnock's campaign manager in the leadership contest, and Labour's campaign manager up to 1986, clearly explained the choice not to campaign against the Alliance and the results that followed: 'Back in 1983 I urged that the only relationship we should contemplate with the Liberals and the SDP was war to knife... Instead for most of this parliament we have refrained from campaigning against them lest we boost their credibility, which speaks volumes for our confidence in making telling criticisms.'

'It was even possible last autumn to hear some members lamenting that the Liberals and SDP were not doing better, in the eccentric hope that it would help us overhaul the Tory lead in the polls... The Liberals/SDP have not repaid the compliment by refraining from criticising Labour for fear of enhancing our credibility. They put the boot in at every opportunity.'

'Time after time documents leaked from the Liberals, or the odd unguarded remark by their leaders, have frankly stated their objective, which is not to put Mrs Thatcher out of office, but to smash Labour as her Opposition — a major reason that any Labour figure who urges our supporters to cast a tactical vote for the Liberals/SDP is naive beyond belief.'

Cook is wrong in explaining why no campaign was carried on against the Alliance. It is because a serious campaign against the Alliance is precluded by a bloc with the right in the Labour Party — for the Labour right is increasingly in favour of an agreement with the Alliance.

It is trade union leaders such as Laird, Hammond, and Grantham who

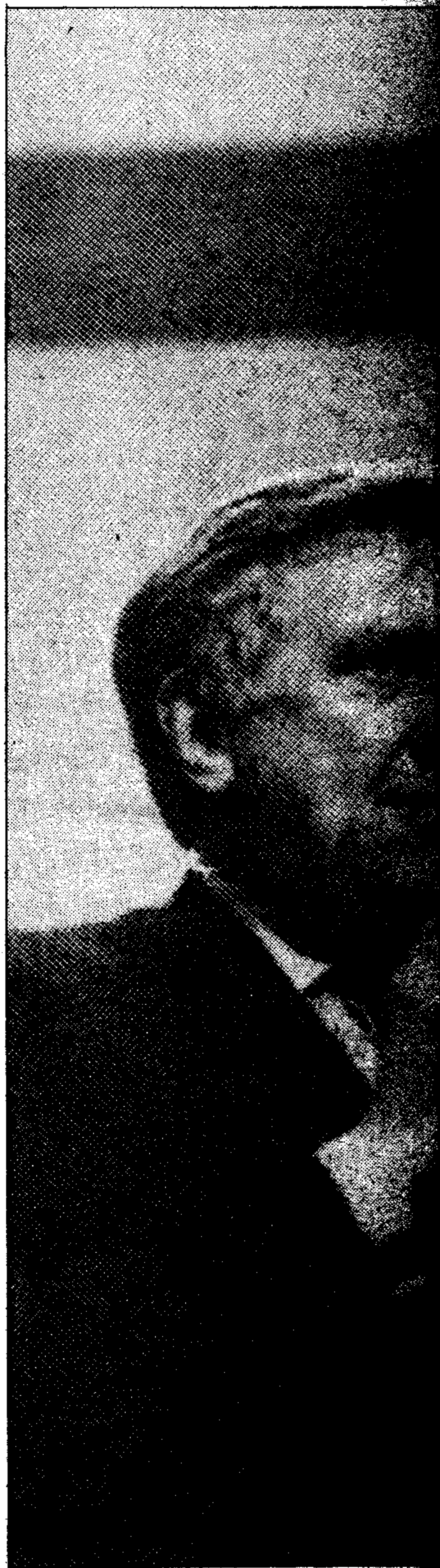
have envisaged a deal with the Alliance. It is journals such as the *New Statesman* which favours tactical voting. It is the right wing that have policies which make possible a coalition with the Alliance — in fact on policy there is little difference between the Labour right and the SDP.

To fight the Alliance it is necessary to unite the left in the party against the right — exactly the formula Kinnock and Cook have always rejected. Kinnock, by basing his political line on a bloc with the right, prevented the possibility of any effective campaign against the Alliance. Labour reaped the whirlwind of this at Knowsley North, Greenwich, and in the threat the Alliance poses to Labour's vote. It is anti-Tory votes going to the Alliance, and not to Labour, that threatens to keep Thatcher in power in this election.

If the first consequence of Kinnock's policy was a refusal to fight the Alliance, the second, and most important, was setting the Labour leadership's policy against every mass struggle which developed against Thatcher. It is in the workplaces, in trade union struggles, in demonstrations, in the movement against the missiles, in anti-apartheid struggles, in every type of mass campaign and movement, that the real motor of the relation of forces between the classes exists.

Good policies are vital if the potential of struggles which develop are to be tapped. But without struggle nothing whatever will be achieved — including achieving the relation of forces to elect a Labour government. The most disastrous of all Kinnock's policies was failure of the Labour leadership to support the mass struggles that erupted against Thatcher. The Labour leadership thereby aided Thatcher in defeating these struggles, set back the working class, and shifted the relation of forces against Labour.

This policy started immediately Kinnock was elected leader with the attack launched on the NGA by Eddie Shah at Warrington. No support was given by the Labour leadership to the NGA and supposed 'violence' by the strikers was condemned. The same policy was continued with the lack of practical support given to the Wapping dispute. It reached its culmination in Giles Radice's appeal to call off their strike during the election. Simultaneously with failing to back these struggles the Labour front bench put for-



ward their own proposals that limited the right of the trade unions.

Dwarfing all other struggles against Thatcher was the miners strike. Not only was this the greatest struggle against the government but it was a deeply popular struggle inside the working class. This was clear from the involvement of hundreds of thousands of working class activists in solidarity with the miners, and in the more passive response measured by the opinion polls.

As regards the solidarity the *Financial Times* called the miners strike 'the greatest civilian mobilisation since World War II'. As regards the polls, by the end of the strike 70 per cent of Labour Party supporters backed the miners. Even more extraordinary, given the barrage of media hate and hostility, was that at the end of the strike polls showed 47 per cent of the population believed the miners had been justified in striking — with 46 per cent disagreeing.

Forty seven per cent of the entire population supporting the miners means there was an easy majority in their support inside the working class. It is worth noting that not once in the last four years has Labour itself enjoyed 47 per cent support! So much for the 'unpopularity' of the miners strike.

The Labour front bench's record on the strike was disgraceful. It was clear from the outset the government had provoked the strike and was central to organising the attack on it. The government had prepared the strike when opposition.

Tony Benn, in the House of Commons on 7 June, showed clearly the intentions of the government: 'There has been a great deal of hypocrisy about the government not intervening. They are deeply involved.'

'The police are preventing peaceful picketing. They have set up road blocks introduced curfews in the villages and provoked on the picket lines.'

'There have been cavalry charges against unarmed pickets. They'



racist. Every black newspaper in the country, many very far from radical, has denounced the deselection of Sharon Atkin and the attack on the Labour Party Black Section. It takes no intelligence to know what is involved when an MP like Frank Field, who directly calls for a vote against Labour, has no action taken against him but when a black PPC, such as Sharon Atkin, is removed. It is pandering to racism.

In terms of the simplest electoral calculation the most extreme refusal of the Labour right to take up what is necessary comes with women. Labour's own opinion polls show that women aged 25-45 are the key group for winning votes. The opinion polls done for *Weekend World* on 10 May show that women, together with young people in general, are the key voters who can be persuaded to change their mind. The *Independent* of 15 May noted: 'Two opinion polls conducted by MORI last month show ... among women voters, particularly in the 25-34 age group, ... allegiances are weakening. When support for the Conservatives has dropped, it has dropped fastest in this group.'

But, apart from Jo Richardson's heroic struggle to get the policy of a Ministry for Women with Cabinet status accepted, Labour has rejected every reform that would have produced a powerful Labour women's organisation. The energies of Labour women to go out and win women voters to Labour have been totally thwarted.

It is these policies which explain why Labour is facing an uphill battle in the election. The Labour leadership has assaulted almost every single group that could possibly be won to support Labour.

It has also attacked, or deserted, Labour's potential international allies and key international struggles. It has backpedalled on unilateral nuclear disarmament, it has refused to give an unequivocal pledge to break all links with apartheid, it has refused to promise real aid to Nicaragua, it has refused to take the decision to withdraw from Ireland.

This determines what has to be the key task of the left during the campaign, and after. It has to support all the mass struggles taking place during the election — starting with the civil servants who are so correctly continuing their strike action during the election. It has to be able to put together the coalition of forces that can rebuild the mass support of the labour movement — which means understanding that the decisive relation of forces between the classes is not generated in elections, and still less in the House of Commons, but in the mass struggles that take place between elections and outside parliament. It means understanding that Labour can win support only by itself supporting, and not repudiating, those who form the base of the labour movement — and defending all the organisations, above all the trade unions, that form the base of the Labour Party. It means understanding that Labour must put together a great alliance of forces which it supports — the traditional working class, the unemployed, the population of Wales and Scotland, women, the black community and its international allies.

Labour can still do well in these elections. Hatred of the Thatcher government is so deep, and the Alliance are so much more clearly becoming seen as second class Tories, that despite Kinnock's record of the last four years the working class may turn out to vote Labour. But it will be despite, not because of, what has been done under Neil Kinnock's leadership.

If Labour is ever to be rebuilt as a truly mass force, above all if we are ever to have a Labour government again, a totally different policy to that of the last four years must be pursued.

magistrates have come in and introduced bail conditions that amount to a sentence — a sort of exclusion zone — for those who have been convicted of nothing ... the government have turned off every source of funds, including social security, to starve the miners back to work.' Yet the Labour front bench did not spend its time exposing the preparations and operations of the government but denouncing 'violence' by miners. Kinnock refused to speak at the rallies supporting the miners called by the NUM.

Even within parliament the Labour leadership was pathetic. It forced virtually no debates in the House of Commons on the strike. It moved no vote of 'no confidence' in the government. While Campaign Group MPs spoke at over a thousand meetings in support of the miners, the Labour front bench tried to say as little as possible — and what was said was almost always directly damaging.

Despite Labour front bench sabotage the impact of the strike on the popularity of the government was clear. Tory popularity began to plummet rapidly in late 1984 as the impact of the strike was felt. Tory support fell from 44 per cent in September 1984 to 36 per cent at the end of the strike. In the aftermath of the strike it plunged to a low of 30 per cent by September 1985.

By the end of the strike, in March 1985, Labour led the Tories by four per cent in the polls. By September 1985 the Tories were in third place. With Labour leading the Tories in the polls and by the end of the strike more people supporting the miners than opposing them, the miners strike had shifted the entire political situation in Labour's favour.

What smashed that lead was Kinnock's speech to the 1985 Labour Party conference attacking Liverpool council and launching the witch hunt. This established the drastically right wing tone of the 1985 conference, and set the scene for the two years run in to the general election. As this speech, and its impact,

is one of the central myths peddled by the Labour right it is worth looking at the facts of what happened.

ACCORDING to right wing myths Labour's popularity soared after Kinnock's speech to the 1985 party conference. The reality is that the speech, and the right wing 1985 conference as a whole, was followed by a rapid deterioration in Labour's position.

In September, the month prior to the 1985 conference, Labour led the Tories by five per cent in the polls. Conservative support was at a low of 30 per cent. In addition to Labour's lead, the Tories had lost support to the Alliance since the summer the miners strike started.

Immediately after the 1985 conference, and Kinnock's speech, Labour's position began to worsen rapidly. By December, two months after the conference, the Tories and Labour were neck and neck — a worsening of Labour's position, compared to the Tories, of five per cent in two months. Only the Westland crisis, breaking out in January 1986, led to Labour pulling ahead of the Tories again.

The same pattern occurred after the 1986 Labour conference. This was probably the most stage managed in the party's history. Hysterical support was given to Kinnock. A systematic campaign to weaken the left prior to, and at, the conference saw Eric Heffer and Margaret Beckett removed from the NEC.

As Labour went into the conference it led the Tories by four per cent. Within a month every opinion poll showed the Tories overtaking Labour. By a month later Labour was three per cent behind the Tories — a seven per cent worsening of Labour's position compared to the Tories in two months. The right wing conferences of 1985 and 1986 were not simply politically but electorally disastrous.

What made these Labour own goals even more ridiculous was that Liverpool council had never lacked popular support in the city. Despite hysterical press campaigns against Labour the council consistently won the local government elections.

Even this year, after the Liverpool councillors were disqualified — and despite a policy of blatant bribery by the interim administration of Sir Trevor Jones — Labour won again. The *Economist* last week was forced to comment: 'The three point rise in Labour's share of the votes since last year suggests that most of Liverpool's working class voters have accepted *Militant's* explanation of Liverpool's financial crisis. The continuing collapse of the Tory vote — only 9½ per cent of Liverpoolians now vote Tory — shows that the government's version has been rejected by Liverpool's middle class too.' However what the voters of Liverpool could see the Labour leadership could not!

Where Labour did devastatingly badly this year was not in Liverpool but where Labour's right wing policies hit home — once again made worse by the witch hunt. As Ken Livingstone summarised in last week's *Tribune*: 'In the light of particularly bad (local government) results in the Midlands they (the right) should be honest and accept that the publicity generated by Roy Hattersley's letter warning Linda Bellos and Bernie Grant to stay out of "his" city backfired, producing the collapse of the Labour vote in Birmingham. Also the Tory capture of Nottingham would not have happened without the National Executive Committee's disgraceful removal of Sharon Atkin.'

The hysterical publicity generated by the witch hunt against the Labour Party Black Section following its meeting in Birmingham undoubtedly backfired and damaged Labour electorally in the Midlands.

The Alliance, Labour's main electoral rival, are in fact quite clear that it

is corrupt right wing Labour administrations which provide them with their easiest targets. Tony Greaves, organiser of Liberal councillors, noted in *Liberal News in March*: 'where the hard left is most entrenched — Lambeth, Camden, Haringey and Brent — the Liberal and Alliance presence is sparse. Where we have made substantial and lasting breakthroughs, the hard left has not been well entrenched. In Tower Hamlets (where the Alliance made spectacular gains) all the advances were made while the rotten old right, white, middle aged and male, still ran the council.'

Taking these policies into account it is clear why Labour trails in the polls as it goes into the election. With its policies Labour has assaulted its core supporters. The trade unions, the deprived cities such as Liverpool and Inner London, are the bedrock of Labour's support. How far they are successful in their struggle against Thatcher determines whether the relation of forces exists to elect a Labour government. The Labour leadership has systematically failed to support, and in many cases directly assaulted, the core of Labour's potential support.

In these circumstances Labour's standing in the polls is scarcely to be wondered at. It is as suicidal a course as when Wilson introduced incomes policy in 1966 — which delivered Labour's popularity a blow from which it has never recovered, or when Wilson and Callaghan introduced the incomes policy and IMF cuts in 1975-76 — which created the conditions for Thatcher to be elected in 1979. No party ever gained support by openly attacking those who form its potential voters.

Furthermore it is not just Labour's long term supporters that have been attacked. Any new group which it is important to win to Labour, or maintain its loyalty, has been systematically assaulted.

The most brutal has been the assault on the black community. Here the party's policy has been simply, and bluntly,

Elections and the state

ON 11 JUNE supposedly the highest democratic authority in British society, a general election, will take place. But on that day, while 635 MPs, and a government, will be elected, no elections will take place either in the great institutions of the state or in the companies that control the economy. They will remain as unelected, and as little accessible to democracy, as before. COLIN ROBERTSON looks at the elections that won't take place on 11 June — and at the difference between the government and the state, and at some of the classic Marxist writings on elections.

When Margaret Thatcher dissolved Parliament and called for the 11 June general election, *The Guardian*, that bland section of the capitalist media, reported the event with a short, almost unnoticeable article headlined 'Civil servants take reins in poll run-up' (11 May 1987). The gist of the report explained that 'Mrs Thatcher's decision to call a general election means that for the next month the day-to-day running of the country will be left to what has been called the 'permanent government' — the senior civil servants, under Sir Robert Armstrong, the Cabinet Secretary'.

The Guardian was right. Top civil servants are the 'permanent government', more exactly they are one of the bourgeois state institutions that are permanent. No top civil servant will be elected, re-elected or lose his/her post next 11 June. In fact no top civil servant is ever elected. They are all appointed.

The operations of bourgeois democracy are structured in such a way that those institutions which are essential for the rule of capital (civil service, armed forces, the judiciary, police, secret services, etc — not parliament) are never exposed to the 'vagaries' of popular opinion expressed through the ballot box. Furthermore, the selection of people at the top of the 'permanent' institutions of the bourgeois state is carefully carried on through special and carefully monitored apparatuses — public schools, military academies, exclusive clubs and such like. The heavy bourgeois class bias, arrogant elitism, and strong *esprit de corps* displayed by these apparatuses is inherent in their ruling class nature. Anyone familiar with the selection process for a military academy or a public school, will readily concur with this assertion.

Viewing the state in this light there is a characteristic deviation of reformism/Labourism. It is not simply that they stand for reform — nor simply the fact that they are for elections — and have a cherished belief that substantial socialist reform of the capitalist system is possible through the existing state machinery. In a nutshell reformism has an unwitting or deliberate confusion of the state and the government which remains the single most dangerous piece of petty-bourgeois ideological revisionism inside the workers' movements. It is the source of innumerable legalist, constitutional and bourgeois democratic prejudices.

It was Eduard Bernstein, the reformist German socialist at the beginning of this century, who popularised the possibility of utilising the existing state machinery to transform society. Since the debates that followed the difference over the possibility of peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism, using the existing state, has been the line of divide between reformists and revolutionaries.

Marxists do not conclude that elections do not matter from the fact they do not believe the existing state can be used to achieve socialism. Or that what defines Marxism is an anti-electoralist stance, or, to paraphrase the German

'left' Communists, that Marxists reject categorically 'any return to parliamentary methods of struggle, which have become obsolete historically and politically'. (Lenin, *Left-wing Communism, an infantile disorder*).

Lenin's famous pamphlet on ultra-leftism is a harsh polemic against the German Communist brand of ultimatism. In it Lenin takes them to task for their anti-parliamentary cretinism: 'how can it be said that parliamentarism has become politically obsolete if millions and legions of proletarians are still not only supporters of parliamentarism in general, but even frankly "counter-revolutionaries"?' Lenin put the finger on the contradictions of the ultra-lefts and accuses them of wishful thinking. If the masses continued to have deep illusions in parliament and the existing state, it is not possible to destroy these illusions simply by propaganda or denunciations. It is necessary to show in practice that these institutions cannot achieve socialism — and, indeed, that the bourgeoisie will overturn democracy if it ever threatens capitalism.

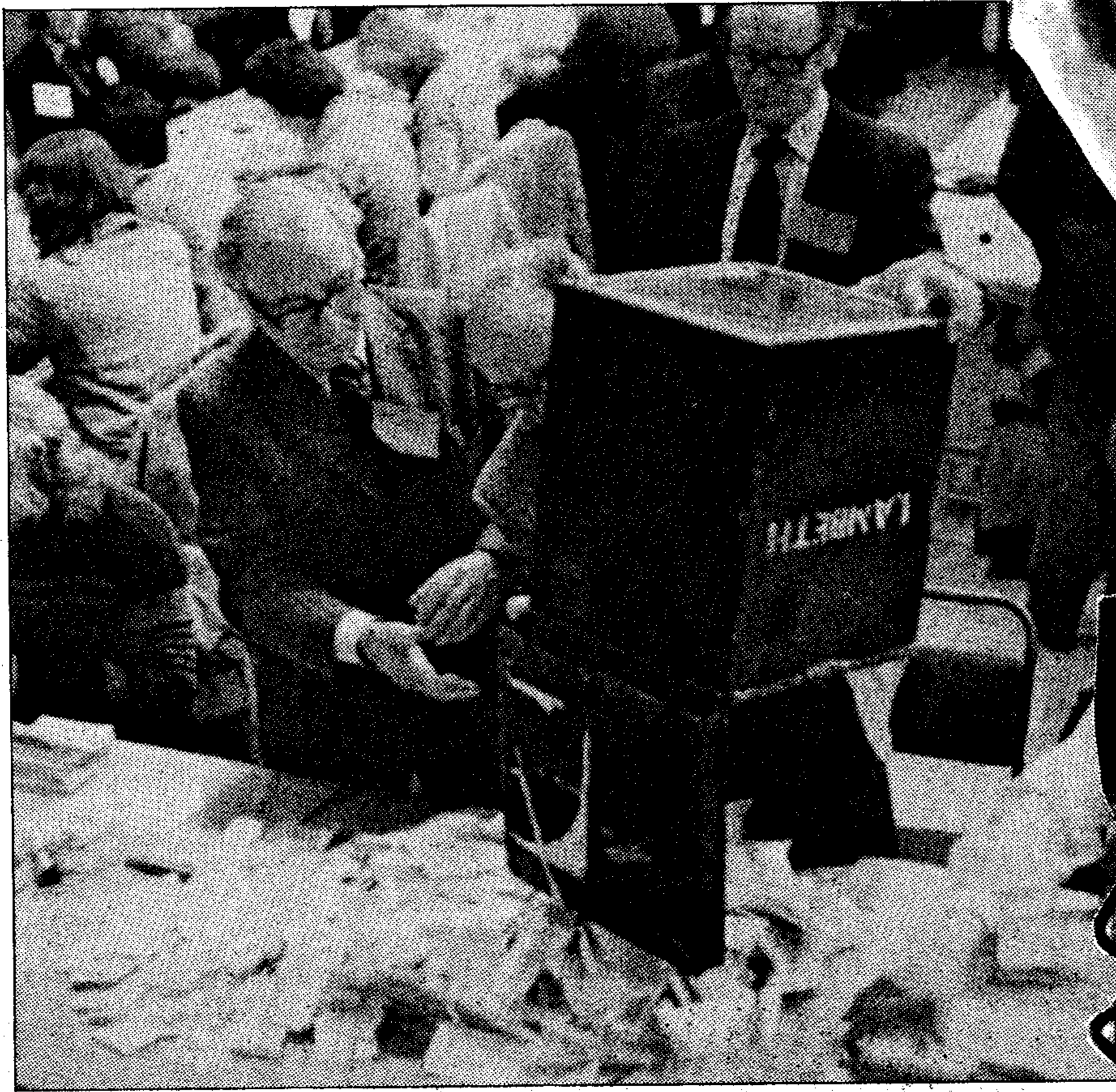
Another well known brand of 'left' communists were the Bordigists, a faction of the Italian Communist Party, who argued against standing for, and participating in, Parliament, because it corrupts. That parliament corrupts is indeed true — it is one of its functions. However, Lenin pointed out that the Bordigists argument was absurd. The logic of the Bordigists' argument meant telling the working class not to trust them either — for if parliament corrupts then power, which the Bordigists wanted to capture as against participating in parliament would corrupt them even more. As Lenin put it: 'To express one's "revolutionary spirit" only by shouting abuse at parliamentarian opportunism, only condemning participation in parliament, is very easy; but because it is very easy it is not the solution to a difficult problem, a very difficult problem'.

To have a Leninist position on the elections has nothing to do with concluding that the question is to capture a majority in Parliament and implement an 'enabling act' in order to change the socio-economic basis of the existing system into a socialist one. It means that elections are one of the many forms which the class struggle takes in countries dominated by bourgeois democracy — that is 'where legalist, constitutional and bourgeois-democratic prejudices are particularly firmly rooted'.

Universal franchise and elections are not in themselves part and parcel of the bourgeois democratic prejudices Lenin talked about. It took hard and mighty struggles by the Chartists first, and the Suffragettes later, to win the democratic right to vote.

On the contrary the Marxist critique of bourgeois democracy is that there are not enough elections — not that there are too many. In particular that elections are not extended into the state apparatus, which is completely not elective, or into the economy — where the 'dictatorship of capital' reigns. The illusion lie in the conception that counterposes legality to force and in not understanding the nature of the bourgeois state itself.

Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*, regarding the Paris Commune, that 'The Commune, therefore, appears to have released the smashed state machine "only" by fuller demo-



cracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall.

'But as a matter of fact this "only" signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of 'quantity being transformed into quality': democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy.'

Lenin noted that the nature of capitalist society itself, the private ownership of capital, sets limits on democracy: 'In capitalist society ... democracy is always hemmed in by the narrow limits set by capitalist exploitation and consequently always remains, in effect, a democracy for the minority.'

Marxists stand for the defence and extension of democratic rights. If, as is very often the case, existing legality either stifles or suppresses people's democratic rights we call on people to break with existing legality.

This does not mean that elections which take place under bourgeois democracy substantially alter, or have the potential to alter, the fundamental class character of the existing state. Such elections leave the fundamental structures of the state intact. The existing institutions of the state are excluded from the elections.

No decisive, long-lasting advance towards socialism is possible without the destruction of the state machinery — because the state apparatus is dedicated to serving capital. The destruction of the machinery of coercion in the hands of the bourgeoisie is the fundamental strategic line of march of the working class.

Does this mean that democracy is in contradiction with socialism? Not in the least. The much talked of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is the substitution of bourgeois (i.e. highly limited) democracy by the most complete extension of democracy to all fields. The first

historic example, the Paris Commune of 1871, was characterised by the total accountability and recallability of all functionaries at any moment, including the judiciary and the police. No material privilege was accorded to them: 'the reduction of the wages of state functionaries to the level of a worker's wage', as Marx put it, was the fundamental weapon against bureaucracy. Furthermore the Communards first decree was the suppression of the standing army and the integration of armed force into society.

Such steps ensured the democratic participation of all the people in the running of the affairs that concern their lives at all times — not only during elections, nor indirectly by simply voting for somebody who will run their lives on behalf of them. This is in contrast to bourgeois democracy which ensures that people participate as little as possible in the running of their own lives — at best are able to vote once every five years to elect a small group of people to parliament who are not even directly accountable to those who elected them in the first place.

True democracy makes every political institution accountable to the people. Bourgeois democracy does not, and cannot, even expose the essential bodies that guarantee bourgeois rule to democratic scrutiny, let alone make them elective. It confines elections — by its nature and in order to protect the private ownership of capital — to parliamentary bodies and local government. No elections will take place on 11 June for the civil service, the army, or the boards of the companies that control the economy. The elections on 11 June will decide the MPs in parliament. It will not alter who holds state power in Britain. On the contrary the elections on 11 June, touching only a tiny part of the capitalist state, are designed to ensure that state power remains exactly in the hands of those who held it before.



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Rail strike deepens

'COSATU is indestructible'

A MASSIVE stay away by 2½ million workers students and youth rocked the sham whites-only election in apartheid South Africa. They joined the 26,000 rail workers who have been out on strike for eight weeks and striking postal and telecom workers who have been out for over a month.

Immediately following the stay away, in the early hours of Thursday 7 May, two powerful bombs were exploded in COSATU House, the Johannesburg headquarters of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions.

The bombs caused extensive damage, ripping away the ground floor and leaving the building in a state of near collapse.

The attack was not isolated event. It was the third attack on the COSATU offices within a fortnight, and is part of a wider crackdown on the unions by the apartheid state.

In addition to causing injury to two people in the building at the time and generally disrupting the unions, the attack was a particular blow to the rail strike, depriving the rail union SARHWU of its strike centre.

Within 48 hours of the bombing, four other trade union offices had been attacked across the country. COSATU's offices in East

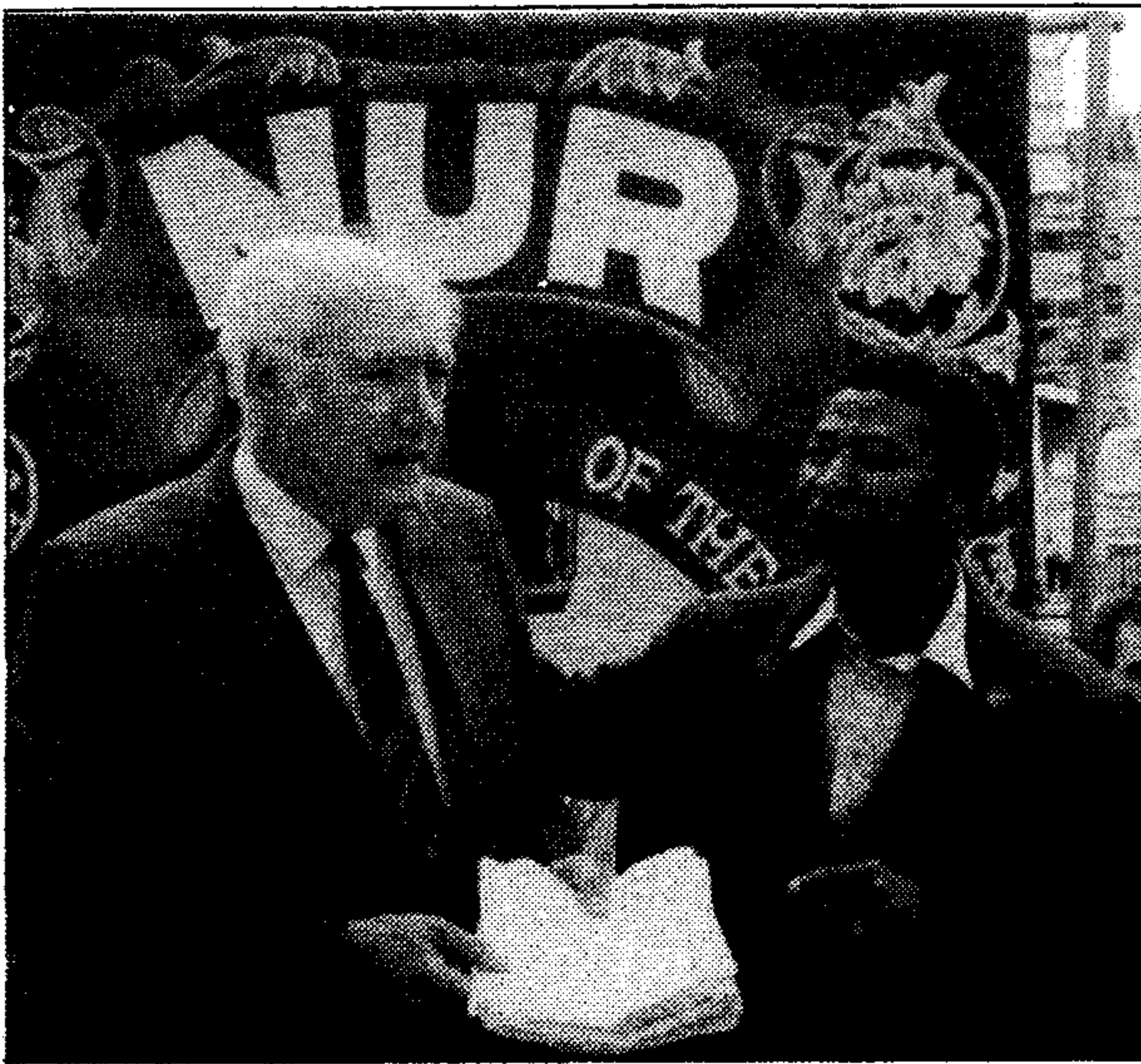
London were burnt down, in Germiston they were smashed up and the catering and commercial workers union, CCAWUSA's offices in Pietersburg were ransacked.

By Mike Colley

The rail union's entire negotiating team have been detained by the security forces. Themba Nxumalo, general secretary of MWUSA, the municipal workers union, has also been detained under the emergency laws which permit imprisonment without trial.

Apartheid prime minister, PW Botha, has declared that it is time 'to take a strong stand on extra-parliamentary actions — as well as the financing of organisations from outside the country'.

COSATU has responded to the bombings by emphasising that the unions will not be intimidated. 'COSATU's strength does not lie in offices and



Jimmy Knapp and SACTU's Zola Zembe with rail petitions.

resources, but in our democratically elected shop stewards and the thousands of rank and file members who have built COSATU as an effective voice of the working class.

'In this sense COSATU is indestructible and will continue to articulate the aspirations of the oppressed and exploited. We are an important force that will shape the new democratic South Africa, free of oppression and exploitation'.

COSATU affiliates have been giving major

assistance to the eight-week rail strike which has developed into a major confrontation between black workers organised in their trade unions and the apartheid state.

The workers say 'COSATU has united us — it is the workers' shield against the bosses'.

The rail workers have also received powerful support from other unions, notably the miners (NUM), the postal and telecom workers (POTWA), the municipal workers (MWUSA), and

the catering workers (CCAWUSA).

The strike began on 13 March when Andrew Nendzanda was sacked for handing in late a £12 fee he collected for delivering a container. But the roots of the strike go much deeper — to the very nature of the apartheid system, the insufferable living and working conditions and poverty wages of black workers, and the whole history of attacks on SARHWU, South African Rail and Harbour Workers Union.

The sacking of Andrew Nendzanda was identified as an attack on every rail worker and provoked a growing movement of solidarity. As Mbengeni Muhangeni, a labourer on the railways and a shop steward at one of the Germiston public work yards, said: 'The Boers beat us up, and complaints are not tolerated. If we complain, the options are made clear — continue working or leave.'

'That is what the strike is all about — it is about being beaten, being called "kaffirs", being dismissed without representation and being paid starvation wages.'

The strike spread

rapidly from depot to depot initially in the Witwatersrand area and now nationwide, showing the level of organisation achieved by SARHWU, despite their operating in conditions of heavy repression. In fact their organisation has extended during the strike. They summarise this in their slogan — 'organisation through struggle'.

The entire 50-year old history of the union has been one of a struggle to survive. Today their membership is 26,000 and is growing at the rate of 200 a day. Their current strike is the longest public sector strike ever.

Meetings of up to 3000 rail workers have taken place despite the present state of emergency. Collective action has involved many different sections of workers throughout the industry — truck drivers, public works, conductors, station attendants — adding to the realisation of their growing strength and ability to grind the railway system to a halt.

Having no legal right to strike or picket, the strikers have shown audacious acts to disrupt the movement of goods — refusing to hand over truck keys, organising

'sleep-ins' at container depots, and dumping containers to block access to depots.

The workers are forced to live in large compounds like the ones at City Deep and Kazerne in Johannesburg which house 3000 workers each; at Delmore in Germiston with 4000; and Central Rand in Beroni with another 3000. This concentration of workers — where pamphlets are circulated and union issues can be openly discussed — has helped to aid the organisation of the union and the strike. As a result, the workers now must face not only cramped single sex accommodation but in addition the military occupation of these compounds by the state-owned company's security police.

The military occupation of the compounds is an indication of the stakes involved in the rail workers struggle. Mobilising solidarity for the rail strike is a vital task. NUR general secretary, Jimmy Knapp, has made a special appeal for solidarity, calling on all rail workers in this country and the labour movement in general to redouble their efforts in a campaign of support.

Engineers campaign

Save the life of Moses Mayekiso

AFTER BEING held in jail by the apartheid regime for seven months Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), and four other community leaders from Alexandra — Mzwanele Mayekiso, Paul Tshabalala, Richard Mdakane and Obed Bapela — have been committed for trial on 3 August at the Rand Supreme Court. They are charged with high treason — a charge that carries a possible death sentence.

The 160-page indictment against the five asserts that they tried to 'overthrow, usurp or endanger the authority of the state with seditious attempt to defy or subvert the authority of the state'. They are accused of plotting to seize control of Alexandra and render the area ungovernable by the state by establishing what the state itself calls 'organs of people's power'.

These organs of people's power are said to be people's courts, and street, block and area committees. Other accusations include that they campaigned against the security forces, the Alexandra town council, and 'so-called col-

laborators'; and that they organised a rent boycott and changed street names.

By Rich Palser

This is the first time the charge of treason has been brought against activists involved in building organisations of people's power. The fact that one of those on trial is the general secretary of a major union within COSATU, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions, also symbolises the strong and ever-growing links between the trade union movement and the community-based people's committees.

Messages of protest from the labour movement

in this country can play an important role in influencing the outcome of this political show-trial, for show-trial is what it will be. Not five individuals but every trade union and community activist organising rent strikes, or campaigning against apartheid's thugs will be on trial.

One small step in mounting effective solidarity was taken in Sheffield last week when the district committee of the AEU, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, decided to take up the case of Moses Mayekiso, as part of forging an alliance between the AEU in Sheffield and MAWU in South Africa. The district committee decided to work to build such an alliance after organising a special meeting to hear a representative of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).

At the meeting, the SACTU representative explained the repression being meted out against trade unions in South Africa.

Other aspects of this alliance will include taking up solidarity with strikes led by MAWU, taking up the cases of other detainees who are MAWU members, offering to host MAWU representatives visiting Britain, campaigning to educate AEU members on the situation in South Africa, and trying to provide material assistance to MAWU.

The district committee is planning to maintain an ongoing contact with the London office of SACTU to follow the alliance through.

Messages of protest calling for the dropping of all charges and the release of the five should be sent to PW Botha, Union Buildings, Pretoria 0001, South Africa, and to the South African ambassador, South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, London, WC2. Copies should be sent to SACTU, 8, Flowers Mews, off Archway Close, Upper Holloway, London N19 3TB.

White election results mean more repression

THERE'S one thing that's certain following the South African whites-only election. There's not going to be any move by Botha towards reform.

The fact that seats were gained by Botha's National Party — going up from 126 to 133 doesn't disguise the fact that the NP's share of the vote declined from 56 to 52.4 per cent.

The aspirations of the Progressive Federal Party, the New Republican Party

and the Independents were dashed by the loss of more than one-third of their combined seats, and their vote nearly being halved.

By Ray Sirotkin

Their plans aimed at reforms, backed by the business community and imperialism, have disintegrated.

The real beneficiaries have been the Conservative Party who have increased their support and have become the chief opposi-

tion party in the whites-only parliament. The fascist Herstigte Nasionale Party have been marginalised.

Botha played on white fear which, combined with the state of emergency, forced the political climate among whites away from any thought of reform. The election reflected this. Any notion that the main political option that the Pretoria regime would take up would be negotiation with the ANC is proved nonsensical.

It may well be that a certain section of the business

community does want reform, but the Afrikaaner verdict, particularly in the rural areas remains clear.

Equally, the election took place as the regime killed six railway workers, arrested leaders of the rail union, SARHWU, and attacked the headquarters of COSATU.

The intentions of Botha's regime are clear and the fuel will come from his right, as they organise against any concessions being made to the black majority and demand increased repression.

Strike solidarity

● SIXTY rail workers including over half the national executive of the NUR picketed the South African embassy on Wednesday 13 May.

They were there to hand in a petition signed by more than 4000 rail workers expressing solidarity with the South African rail strike and protesting the killing by the Pretoria regime of six strikers. The embassy refused to accept the petition.

NUR general secretary Jimmy Knapp said that rail workers 'were shocked to hear about the killings in South Africa. They have now been on strike for eight weeks and are still prepared to show guts and courage for what you and I take for granted.'

Knapp called for 'solidarity to sustain the struggle in South Africa' and explained that in handing in the petition, the NUR leadership was demonstrating its 100 per cent support for SARHWU.

'The NUR call for the release of the leaders of the black South African railway workers union who have been imprisoned as a consequence of their fight for basic human rights for their members. We protest strongly at the general brutal oppression of our black South African comrades' he said.

● An emergency international campaign has been launched for the release of Themba Nxumalo with representatives from

public service unions in Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and Canada sending protests to the South African government.

● In Britain, trade union leaders including Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield (NUM), Ron Todd (TGWU), Rodney Bickerstaffe (NUPE), John Daly (NALGO), Clive Jenkins (ASTMS), John Edmunds (GMBATU) and others signed a letter condemning 'the persistent attacks of your government authorities on COSATU and its affiliates ... We call on you to lift the restrictions on all trade union activity and to release all trade union detainees.'

● In the NUR, Rail Against Apartheid has deepened its solidarity work with its sister union, SARHWU. Collection sheets for the SARHWU strike fund and information on the strike is being circulated to all NUR branches.

Over the next few weeks, hundreds of NUR activists will assemble at national conferences of the various 'grades' covered by the union. They will be addressed by RAA speakers and collections will be held as well as other solidarity action initiated.

● Up and down the country NUR members, often alongside activists of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, have been out on the streets with buckets and leaflets



raising money for SARHWU. In Nottingham, £500 was collected during May Day activities, a series of leaflets have been produced and a social held.

● In Doncaster, leaflets on the strike are being continually updated. The SARHWU strike was a central theme of the May Day activities and £70 was collected, a further £80 raised through the production of a special SARHWU poster.

Throughout South Yorks, solidarity with the striking rail workers is fitting in closely with work being done by the NUM and Women Against Pit Closures.

● In London, RAA is organising a collection at Ford, Dagenham with the local stewards. TGWU convenors in the PTA and Body Plant enthusiastically responded to a RAA approach. The plants will be leafleted before the collection and RAA activists will be turning up at the plant gates with banners and leaflets in an effort to boost the strike fund.

Youth against apartheid

THE LAUNCH of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) in April, bringing together around 500,000 young people organised in 150 regional youth congresses is an important step in strengthening the struggle against the South African regime. Launched in conditions of elaborate secrecy, SAYCO's slogan is 'Freedom or death, victory is certain'.

EPHRAIM NKOE and **SIMON NTOMBELA**, representatives of the national leadership of SAYCO are visiting Britain to appeal for solidarity with their struggle.

'The youth of South Africa is charging the youth of Britain with the task of mobilising to support our struggle — politically, materially, and morally. The struggle to eliminate apartheid is not only the responsibility of the South African people, it is also the responsibility of the entire world community opposed to racism and oppression.'

Their intention is to help mobilise that solidarity by 'portraying the real situation in South Africa and counter the millions of rands spent annually by the regime in disinforming and confusing the international community.'

SAYCO's emergence has filled the gap created by the banning of the student organisation COSAS, by the regime in 1985. This absence has coincided with tremendous repression aimed at halting the leading role of young people in the struggle against apartheid in this period — 8000 young people over ten years old have been held in detention in the last five months alone, and the bulk of the 25,000 detain-

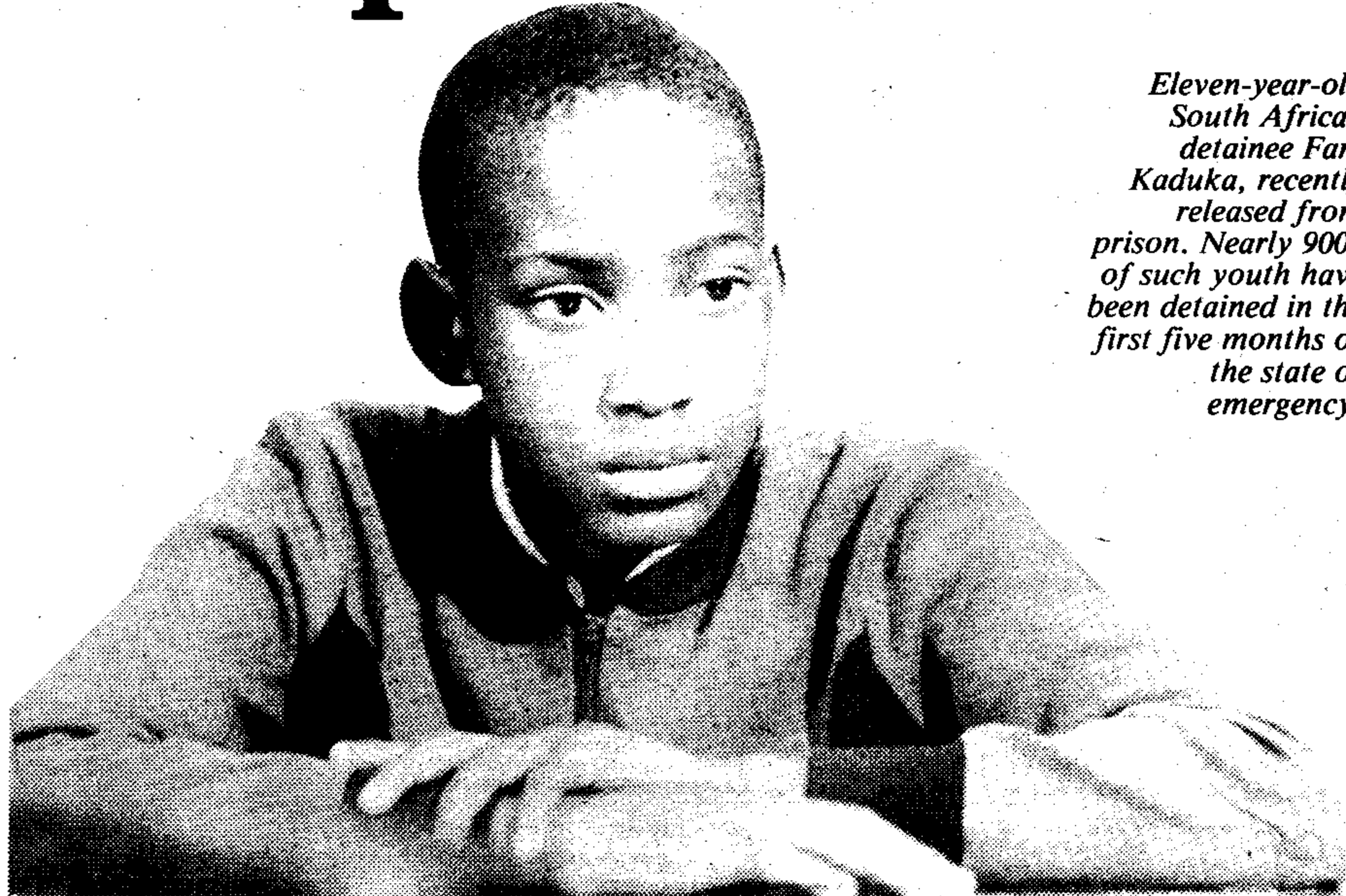
ed in the last year are under 25.

As Ephraim Nkoe explained: 'youth are at the forefront of every struggle against the regime — SAYCO itself was an important element in the success of the recent two day stayaway.'

By Anne Kane

Every attempt to organise and lead this action has been squashed by the regime: the ANC Youth League, established in 1944 was banned in 1960; the South African Students Movement and the Soweto Students Representative Council, which led the students revolt against racist 'Bantu' education, were banned in 1977; and COSAS, formed in 1979, was banned in 1985.

In addition to direct repression the regime has tried to weaken the youth's action by supporting organisations like the Inkatha Youth Brigade and coercing youth into the ranks of the vigilantes. As Simon Ntombela ex-



Eleven-year-old South African detainee Fani Kaduka, recently released from prison. Nearly 9000 of such youth have been detained in the first five months of the state of emergency.

plained: 'high levels of unemployment and repression are used to get the support of youth as vigilantes.'

'Whereas in the past we could concentrate our efforts on the regime, now we have to beware of the vigilantes and the infiltrators. In the process we have lost some of our people, our leadership and organisers.'

More than simply overcoming the efforts of the regime to sabotage the organisations of youth and students, SAYCO's formation has attempted to take account of the widening composition and political focus of those youth in struggle. Since the banning of COSAS continuing economic crisis has seen more unemployed and township youth drawn into action.

An age limit has been imposed on schools in a situation where, even in Soweto, over fifty per cent of youth have no means of income. This has encouraged a loose alliance between the youth and the trade unions, which SAYCO is aiming to strengthen. Prior to being banned, COSAS helped support the 5 and 6 November, 1985, stayaway in Witwatersrand.

SAYCO's three central aims are: to promote and deepen the outlook of the most progressive class, the working class; to mobilise and organise unemployed youth; and to encourage working youth to join progressive trade unions. In addition to affiliating to the UDF, SAYCO is directly exploring a working relationship with

COSATU.

Simon Ntombela explained that solidarity, the main reason for visiting Britain, is now more crucial than ever. Although the run up to the white only elections showed that 'the racist political monolith is beginning to crack' having got his mandate from the whites Botha is now launching a head on confrontation with the movement.

Aware

What is needed in Britain is straightforward. 'Firstly we are calling on the youth and students in Britain through their organisations to keep youth and the entire population aware of the atrocities committed by apartheid.'

'Secondly we are calling for action to put

pressure on business and the government to break all links and isolate the racist regime. All youth in Britain must be mobilised to ask why Margaret Thatcher is not cutting links with this monster'.

As the turn out on all recent protests have shown, enormous potential exists to organise young people and students in Britain opposed to apartheid, at present only being touched on.

This was recognised by the last Anti-Apartheid Movement AGM which agreed to take steps to establish a youth section — by calling a youth conference and organising a national youth action to mark 16 June, South African Youth Day.

The failure to do either of these, combined with the NC's recommendation that any youth section should have an age limit of 21, rather than 26, is greatly limiting the solidarity which could be organised. Where youth groups do exist, such as in Birmingham and Manchester the most effective solidarity work by youth is being done.

The lesson of SAYCO's visit is clear — help build an AAM national youth section, in solidarity with SAYCO, now!

● While in Britain, Simon Ntombela and Ephraim Nkoe are available to speak at labour movement meetings and can be contacted via Karen Talbot at the AAM office on 01-387 7966.

'New realism'

THE TGWU has been hitting the headlines recently. Britain's largest union has traditionally played a left-of-centre role in the labour movement. But reports in national and local newspapers indicate sharp differences within the union about its future policies.

By Bill Andrews, TGWU

Ron Todd's election as general secretary was hotly contested by George Wright, Welsh regional secretary. Allegations of ballot rigging led to a re-vote in which Todd was re-elected. Yet at the 1985 biennial delegate conference (BDC) shortly afterwards, a concerted right-wing challenge was mounted over acceptance of Tory trade union laws, witch-hunts of socialists, and other issues.

A series of public disagreements and media leaks since then point to continuing disagreements between Todd and other members of the executive. Long-running wrangles over delays in appointing a regional secretary in the south-west; over the dismissal and subsequent reinstatement of left-winger, Alan Quinn, from the executive; and the recent publicity for 'Londoners for Labour' show disagreements spilling over into areas of general concern in the labour movement.

'New realism' — modifying the role of the unions to render them more compliant to the pressures of the employers and capitalist politicians — is clearly gaining ground in the union.

'Londoners for Labour', led by TGWU chairperson Brian Nicholson, is openly critical of the left-wing London Labour Party, reinforcing the anti-Labour Party propaganda of Norman Tebbit and the like. It is launched at a time when the TGWU as a whole is ploughing resources and effort into

Behind the coup in Fiji

LAST THURSDAY, 14 May, the newly elected government of Fiji was overthrown in a CIA-backed military coup. Despite reported concern by Buckingham Palace — the Queen is still the constitutional 'head of state' in this former British colony — the ruling class in this country is hoping that the government of coup leader Lt Col Sitiveni Rabuka is able to survive. Machinations orchestrated by the Queen's representative in Fiji, the governor general, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, are aimed at protecting the gains of the coup against a background of a rising tide of opposition.

Mobilisations started in the northern part of Vita Levu, the largest of Fiji's 300 islands, Indians closed their shops and a strike disrupted the airport on Saturday 16 May to protest the coup. Shop and transport worker strikes were reported to be continuing on Monday 18 May. There is strong support for the ousted government, a coalition led by the Fiji Labour Party, which was elected into office on 11 April.

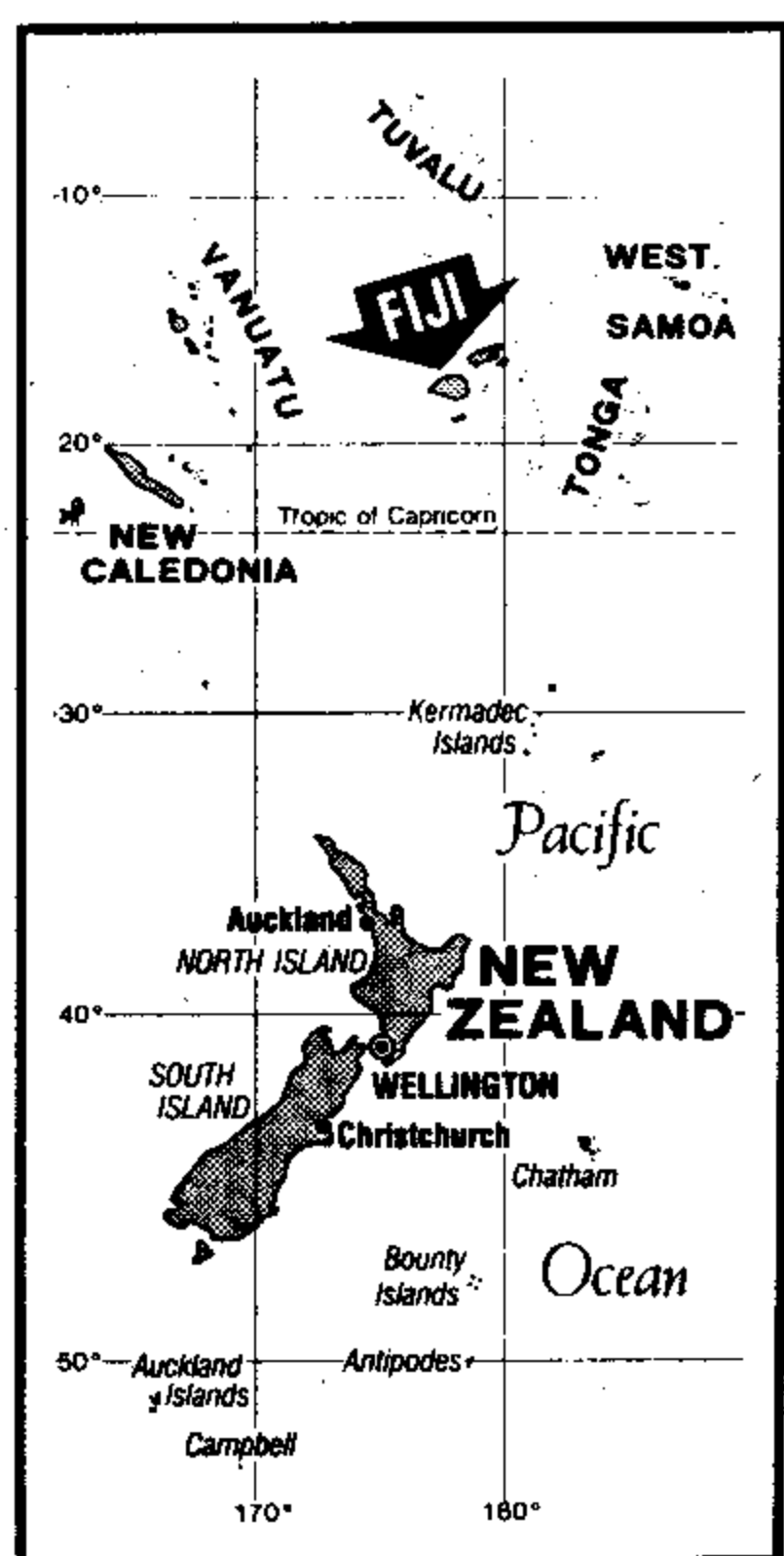
This was the first time since gaining independence in 1970 that Fiji has had a new government. Labour Party president Timoci Bavadra was the newly-elected prime minister. In the following article 'Fiji elects non-racial government', from the New Zealand paper, *Socialist Action*, JOAN PHILLIPS reports on the Fiji election.

The coalition won 28 seats in the Fijian House of Representatives, compared to 24 held by former Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamiseva Mara's Alliance Party.

This election victory marks a step forward for Fiji. It is the first time since independence that an election has not been exclusively determined by voting along racial lines. As well, it opens up the possibility of a series of democratic reforms in the country.

The defeat of Ratu Mara has aroused concern among the imperialist powers. Located at the hub of the Pacific and the most economically developed of the independent island countries, Fiji is an important area of capitalist investment.

Australia and New Zealand, in particular, economically dominate Fiji. In 1982, for example, the terms of trade with Fiji ran over eight-to-one in Australia's favour and over three-to-one in New



Zealand's favour.

The imperialist powers in the Pacific are especially worried about the new government's declared intention to ban visits to Fijian ports by nuclear-armed and powered warships. Members of the ruling coalition have also raised the possibility of Fiji joining Vanuatu as a member of the Movement of Non-aligned Countries.

Media

The news media in this country has portrayed the election of the Labour Party-National Federation Party coalition as a victory of Fijian Indians — the largest population group — over indigenous Fijians, who are 46 per cent of the population.

The real significance of the coalition's victory is quite different, however. For the first time, a significant number of both Indians and indigenous Fijians did not vote along racial lines.

Instead, they voted for a coalition that stood on a platform of multiracialism, an anti-nuclear foreign policy, and increased emphasis on health, education, and social welfare programmes.

Fiji's 1970 constitution — drawn up with the help of Britain, the country's former colonial master — contains a racially-segregated system of voting.

Until now, Ratu Mara's Alliance Party has captured all the indigenous Fijian seats. The National Federation Party, on the other hand, was supported by the majority of Indian voters.

The Alliance Party did not govern in the interests of the majority of Fijians, however. Instead, it represented the most powerful local capitalists, who are largely of European and Asian origin, ruling through the hereditary Fijian chiefs.

Similarly, the National Federation Party is dominated by businessmen and lawyers, rather than the Indian workers and tenant farmers who have been its electoral base.

The Fiji Labour Party

was formed in 1985, during a wage freeze imposed by the Ratu Mara government, at a meeting attended by representatives of more than 35 unions affiliated to the Fiji Trade Union Congress.

The new party won its main allegiance from urban workers and unemployed (the official unemployment rate is 12.2 per cent). As well, it drew support from rural workers and farmers suffering the effects of drought, cyclones, and rock-bottom world prices for sugar and copra.

Contest

Labour's formation of an electoral coalition with the National Federation Party to contest the elections has been pointed to as evidence of 'Indian' domination of the new government.

In fact, however, Labour was the dominant force in the coalition — a fact that led a section of the National Federation Party to split away and run independently in the elections. This split group did not succeed in winning the allegiance of Indian workers and farmers, however.

Nine of the 14 members of prime minister Bavadra's cabinet are Labour Party members — both Indian and indigenous Fijian.

The response of Fiji's ruling elite to the election

results has been to launch a reactionary campaign of destabilisation. According to the 27 April *New Zealand Herald*, this had already been planned even before the election results were confirmed.

Led by the hereditary chiefs, the campaign has focused on mobilising indigenous Fijians in the villages and outer islands to demand the resignation of the government and a constitutional amendment to ensure that only indigenous Fijians can govern.

The main argument used by the leaders of this movement to win support is that the Bavadra government will dispossess indigenous Fijians of their land. Traditional communal ownership of land is formally guaranteed in the constitution. In practice, this places control over land allotment and leasing in the hands of the hereditary chiefs. Fijian Indians are denied the right to own land.

Protest demonstrations have been held throughout Fiji, and a petitioning campaign launched. A national rally is planned for May 7, the date for the start of the new parliamentary session.

Prime Minister Bavadra, who is himself an indigenous Fijian, has called on Fijians not to be 'misguided by a few who are bent on destroying democracy and stability'.

Senior Colman

FOUR months into their dispute in defence of union organisation and the 100 striking engineers at Senior Colman in Sale, near Manchester, are still going strong.

Latest solidarity moves include meetings at Manchester airport to ensure a boycott of scab air distribution products by the transport firms and to stop installation of an air distribution system at the airport itself.

Other equipment destined for use in a North Sea oil rig is bottled up at East Anglian ports where dockers have imposed blacking. Senior Colman's convener, Graham Wyatt was touring Gt Yarmouth and Lowestoft last

— which way will the TGWU jump?

'Trade Unionists for Labour'.

Meanwhile, anonymous propaganda circulating in the union warns members of the danger of 'the hard left making monkeys of us all', in calling for a new enquiry into ballot results.

All this public activity in a union which, officially at least, frowns on organised political debate, reveals that the climate within the union has shifted further to the right than for many years.

Further developments can be expected at this year's BDC in July. The 1985 conference passed a strong resolution against any government interference in union rules on balloting etc, yet the Labour Party/TUC policy, *New rights, new responsibilities*, would also certainly compel the TGWU to alter its rule book, undermining the principle of independence and tying the hands of union members in industrial disputes.

It seems that the executive has swallowed this line just as in the field of economic policy, where the executive resolution leaves out any reference to nationalisation or renationalisation. The economic policy proposals, which are limited to Keynesian reflationary measures, will not tackle the roots of the crisis.

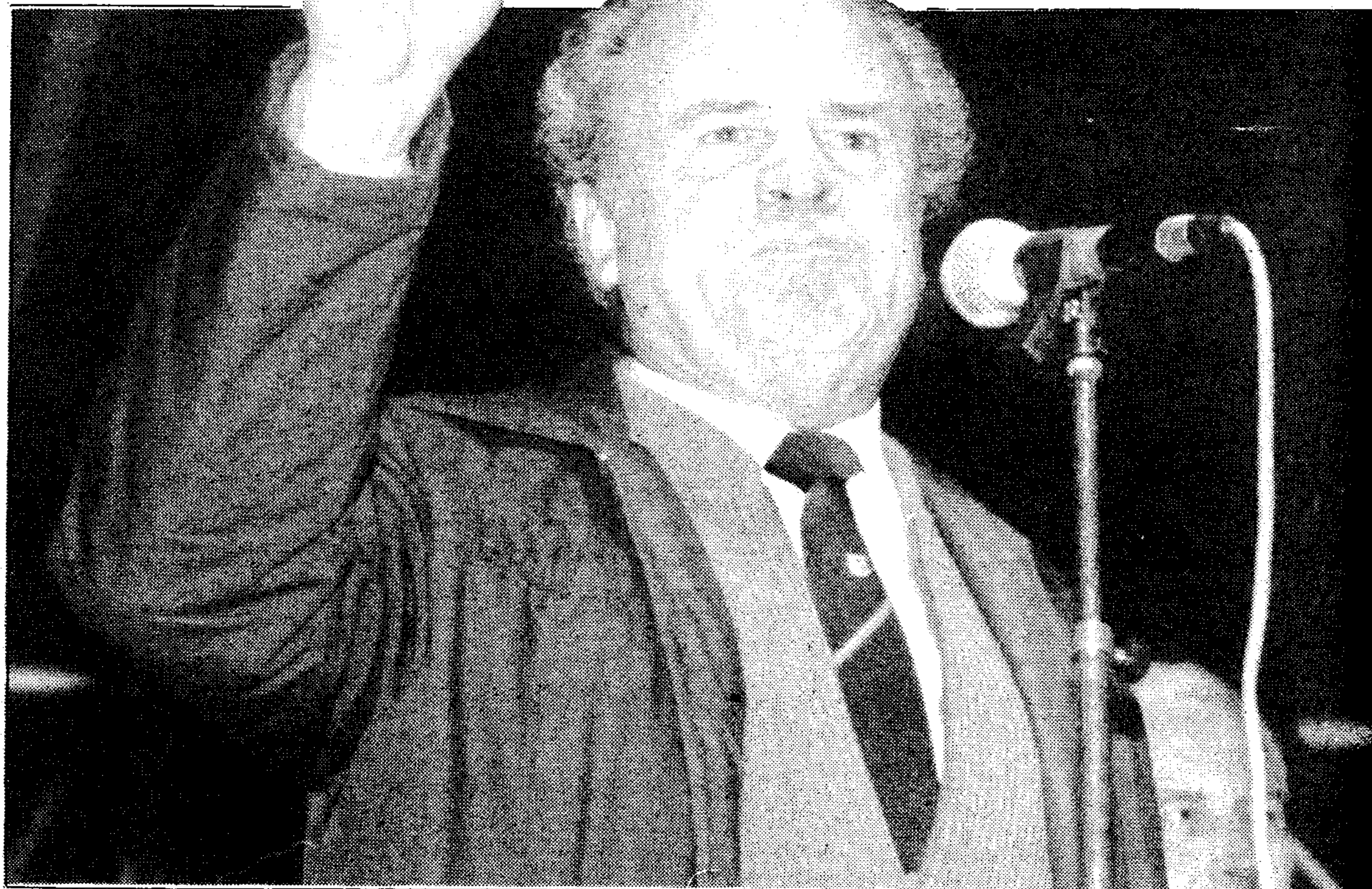
The dangers of a new round of incomes control under the guise of a 'national economic assessment' will also be debated. Region 9's resolution, for example, would commit the union to 'total support for the Labour Party, for their work of reconstruction' given that 'there will have to be a language of priorities'.

Where this would leave the union under another Callaghan-type government is not spelt out. A reversal of policy on reselection of Labour MPs; full support for Labour's plans to build up the military and its commitment to NATO; con-

tinued efforts to gain union backing for the witch-hunt against socialists — resolutions along these lines are all on the agenda.

Another key area of debate will be over the accountability of the general executive council (GEC). The new 'Link up' campaign, overturning policy on agency labour, could and should have been determined by the BDC. Yet the decision to launch it at a rally before the BDC may well be condoned rather than criticised. There are also resolutions on the agenda that would approve more power for the GEC.

In the years ahead TGWU members will need a union that will back them fully in conflicts with the employers and their government. Independence from the state, democracy, accountability and socialist policies must not be surrendered on the altar of so-called 'new realism'.



Ron Todd

London busworkers fight 'competitive tendering'



THE STRIKE by 20,000 London busworkers on 11 May was to be the start of a campaign of protest by the transport union, TGWU, against the effects of the competitive tendering of routes and services. Now the TGWU has decided to pursue the issue in the courts. **ROB JONES**, a conductor at Stamford Hill bus garage, argues that the basis exists for a powerful campaign of industrial action.

UNDER Tory government legislation in 1984, London Regional Transport took over the functions of the old GLC-controlled London Transport Authority and set about splitting it up into various companies — London Buses Ltd (LBL), London Underground Ltd, and separate engineering, building works, catering, lift and escalator businesses, with others to follow.

The aim has been to force these newly created companies to compete with outside firms for the work they were originally doing. On the buses this has meant parcelling up the routes into

districts and networks which are then put out to competitive tender.

The effects on busworkers have been devastating. Four thousand jobs were lost in 1986 and LBL plans to axe another 3000 this year. In the last three years, eight garages have been closed and four more are threatened. Conductors have been particularly hard-hit as more and more routes are converted to one-person operation (OPO) in preparation for them to be put out to tender.

In an industry where rest-day and overtime working has boosted wages to a

passable level, the sudden drop top basic wages has caused hardship for many — a direct wage cut of £10 to £15 per week.

Now, with the drive to OPO covering 82 per cent of the fleet and virtually completed, LBL bosses are targetting driver operators for wage cuts and harsh productivity deals. On two occasions LBL bosses have tendered for, and won back, routes on wages and conditions different from those agreed with the union.

At Potters Bar garage most of the staff took redundancy or transferred. In order to overcome staff loss LBL presented busworkers at Norbiton with the option of taking a £30 per week wage cut, transfer to another garage perhaps miles away, or face the sack. With this kind of management, no wonder LBL are understaffed by 1000 drivers.

Dissatisfaction with the

job is now so widespread that LBL has had to resort to near-lying advertisements in the national press at exorbitant rates to recruit staff to replace those who prefer to take their chance amongst the four million unemployed.

By pressing ahead with OPO concessions, management have created a single status fleet and almost eliminated the old divisions between conductors/crew and OPO drivers. The new-found unity amongst the workforce was reflected in the solidarity of the strike action, the first for over 30 years.

London bus committee chair Peter Gibson said that the success of the action would guide the committee on the next stage of the campaign.

Busworkers will be looking for a campaign to escalate the action and to forge a fighting unity with especially London under-



ground and railworkers who have also been affected by the break-up of the old authority.

The one-day and selective strikes being aired have already pointed in the minds of many to such a united campaign of industrial action. A tube guard at Finsbury Park, Larry Herman, said 'We voted by five to one for industrial action against the same problems faced by busworkers. Many underground workers are saying that we should fight together with the TGWU.'

week. A Greater Manchester support committee has been established for the strike. Much needed finance continues to come in especially from miners in the north-east.

Secretary of the strike committee, Tony Lowe, explained how the solidarity move had put the strikers on a new 'high'.

Boosting support are new exposures concerning the company's chairman, Professor Roland Smith. Smith was deeply involved in the Silentnight strike, in the House of Fraser, and has now been appointed chair of British Aerospace to take effect 31 August.

It's also rumoured that his union-busting activities are making him a prime candidate to take over at British Rail.

Ford

THE 1/1107 TGWU branch at Ford Dagenham has organised a rally for its members on 'Why you should vote Labour'. Speakers at the 27 May meeting will be local Labour candidates Diane Abbott, Tony Banks, Bryan Gould and Jo Richardson.

A special leaflet has been issued for mass distribution. The leaflet calls on workers to say 'no' to the eight years of Tory attacks.

It goes on 'All the great freedoms and social reforms achieved in this country — the vote, trade union rights, universal education, the national health service and many more — were won by the struggles and sacrifices of working people. Nothing has ever been given to us.

The Labour Party

itself was set up to give our class a voice against the bosses' parties, the Tories and the Liberals. Our rulers would like nothing better than to turn the clock back 80 years: which is why their papers back the Tories, back the Alliance as a fall back or call for tactical voting (meaning vote Alliance).

'Anything to knock the Labour Party in order to knock us. They know a failure to vote Labour on our part is an open invitation to attack jobs, wages and working conditions.'

Teachers

THE NUT and the NAS/UWT have decided to continue with their campaign of strike action during the election period.

NUT deputy general secretary Doug McAvoy

said that if the action were called off 'our members would not understand and the public would think that the issue had gone away.

'It is wholly appropriate for us to take action on basic rights during the democratic process of an election'.

The NUT's inner London division, ILTA is proposing an escalation of its own campaign against moves by ILEA to compulsorily redeploy 1300 teachers. They are calling for national union backing for a strike on 4 June. The national union officially backs the call for reopening of negotiations on the redeployment issue but when ILTA met ILEA on 12 May, the Labour-controlled education authority refused to discuss the issue.

The defence campaign for the victimised ILTA officers — suspended and expelled by the NUT leadership for unofficially organising industrial action in line with union policy — is holding a rally 18 June. Dennis Skinner will be one of the speakers.

NUM

RETIRING vice-president of the NUM, Mick McGahey, and the union's South Wales Area President, Des Dutfield, took the occasion of the area conference to launch an attack on Arthur Scargill.

McGahey gave his support to six-day working at Margam. He told the South Wales delegates 'many areas would welcome your problem' of the opportunity to work six days.

Dutfield, whose support for six-day coaling is well-known, pitched in against Scargill for failing to find a replacement for the national conciliation machinery, and not being 'honest, realistic or consistent' in accepting new technology and its implications.

But for the first time, Dutfield did speak of the six-day coaling project being scrapped. After denouncing as 'hysterical and misguided' criticism of six-day coaling, Dutfield opposed the idea of a breakaway if the union rejected the project nationally.

Telecom

A SECOND striker has been sacked by BT within the space of a fortnight. First John Treadway was victimised for

alleged abuse during the strike itself.

Now, another union activist, John Deason, has been given his cards. Deason was called up to a management interview to discuss alleged irregularities on his job application form. When he asked for the questions to be put in writing, he was summarily dismissed.

Both Deason and Treadway are members of the London City branch of the NCU which has been the target of a succession of lesser victimisations and an associated press witch-hunt. Six branch officers resigned in the midst of these attacks, weakening the union at a crucial time.

A branch meeting has been called to hear calls for withdrawal of their resignations and a campaign in defence of the victimised activists.

A Socialist ACTION

Support our election fund!

SOCIALIST ACTION can guarantee that one event is going to dominate British politics above all others for the next four weeks: and that is the general election. If the Thatcher government is sent back to Westminster for a third term of office it will mean a defeat for millions and millions of working class people in this country.

The Tory manifesto promises a bleak future for the majority. More attacks on the trade unions, a further decline in the health service, cuts in dole and social security, deteriorating standards of education for our children.

Another Thatcher government means a rotten deal for women and black people, for the sick and disabled, for youth and the unemployed. For everyone, in fact, except a few very rich in this society, who own and really run the country.

Despite the massive media campaign to the contrary, the Alliance are no different. As the article on page three of this issue explains, the SDP-Liberals are a true blue Alliance.

With the publication of their election manifesto the myth that the Alliance is a party of the left, has been well and truly exploded. Owen has already made clear that the Alliance is prepared to form a government with Thatcher and the Tories.

The only alternative to Thatcher is a Labour

government. For the next four weeks, the message Socialist Action will be pumping out will be to vote Labour in every single constituency. To vote Labour not because of, but *despite*, the policies of Neil Kinnock and the Labour leadership.

That is the message that Socialist Action will be carrying across the country for the duration of the general election campaign. And to help get that message across the Socialist Action editorial board decided to go weekly during the election campaign.

It is why we have also decided to launch a £3000 election fund, which will pay for that and other expenses Socialist Action is likely to incur during the election period.

This week sees the start of our election period coverage, with articles and news on all three manifestos, and still more important, coverage of the vital teachers and civil servants battles that will be going on during the election campaign.

We will be continuing this sort of election coverage throughout the campaign including taking a look at Labour in the regions — analysing events as they happen and pointing to their real significance for the working class communities in Britain.

Socialist Action will be working flat out for a Labour victory — and in the North of Ireland supporting Sinn Fein. Not because we believe Labour's programme is any solution to the problems facing people in this country, or because we believe that the party leadership is running the sort of campaign that is needed to put the labour movement on the offensive. But because what happens on 11 June will affect every struggle that takes place.

To help defeat Thatcher on 11 June; to help get out the socialist message please send donations to Socialist Action, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP.

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Bristol	96
Cardiff	144
Coventry	48
Glasgow	132
Huddersfield	120
Leeds	144
Leicester	72
Liverpool	84
Manchester	276
Newport	108
Nottingham	168
S Yorks	240
E London	360
NW London	156
SW London	108
OW London	228
SE London	132
N London	144
Nationally	124

Total £3,100

Strikes in election week

Civil servants escalate pay action

TWO HUNDRED and fifty thousand civil servants will be called on to strike on 8 and 9 June. On the eve of the general election, their action will be a powerful rejection of the Tory government's low pay policies.

The decision to ballot for strike action was taken at last week's national conferences of the two largest civil servants' unions — the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) and the Society of Civil and Public Servants (SCPS).

The policy adopted would mean that London members of the two unions will be out on strike for two days every fortnight, part of a strategy of regional and selective action. The two unions, along with the Northern Ireland Public Services Association have been involved in action for seven weeks.

Union leaders have commented that membership support for the industrial action campaign has surpassed all expectations. When they took action in London and the south-east at the beginning of the month, 90 per cent of their members in the 53 DHSS offices and 63 Department of Employment offices chosen for action on strike. All government departments, including the Cabinet office, the Treasury and Ministry of Defence, were affected as the unions targeted all civil service offices on 7 and 8 May.

At the Aldermaston atomic weapons research establishment 98 per cent

of CPSA and SCPS members walked out.

By Jon Silberman

Seven thousand strikers marched through London and rallied in Kennington Park. They chanted 'low pay — no way' showing their determination to reject the government's derisory 4½ per cent offer.

One placard asked: 'What have 4½ per cent and M15 got in common? — They are both a scandal!'

This rejection of the government's overall policies has been reflected in the support won by the strikers. Marching on the London demonstration were Inland Revenue workers from a number of different offices and branches. Their union, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF) was originally involved in the pay campaign but has settled separately.

SCPS general secretary Leslie Christie said that the



unions had also won support from claimants and the unemployed. 'Claimants' unions and unemployed workers' centres have sent people to our rallies and demonstrations and shown they recognise that we are more concerned about unemployment than the unselected Lord Young' he said.

The strength of feeling over the claim for £20 or 15 per cent, which ever is the higher, and for a 35 hour week was reflected at the conferences of the two unions. Three hundred delegates at the CPSA conference voted for a resolution calling for a new ballot over all-out strike action, despite the opposition of their general secretary, John Ellis. Ellis had branded such a proposal as 'barmy'.

Despite solid support for the motion from the DHSS section, it was defeated with 531 delegates voting against, though the final resolution leaves the door open to all-out action if the government fails to respond to the new wave of selective and regional strikes.

The conference also seized the political gauntlet — calling on their members to vote Labour at the election and deciding, against the advice of John Ellis, to ballot their members on affiliation to the Labour

Party. The idea of so-called 'non-political trade unionism' has traditionally been very strong within the civil service. The CPSA used not even to have a political fund, though a three-to-one ballot vote last year had decided to establish one.

The Labour leadership failed to welcome the affiliation moves. Front-bench spokesperson, Oonagh McDonald had previously argued that the election week strike action would not adversely affect Labour's election chances on the grounds that the unions were not affiliated! Nor would she pledge that a future Labour government would honour the union's claim, saying instead that the 4.5 per cent offer would be referred to arbitration.

The industrial action campaign is also pushing the civil service unions towards closer unity. For some time the SCPS has been discussing a merger with the Civil Service Union (CSU), which traditionally recruits amongst similar grades. Both unions voted massively to go ahead with the merger, with Leslie Christie reflecting the views of many when, alongside John Ellis, he expressed hope that the merger will lead to fresh amalgamations in the civil service.

Socialist ACTION
BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

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NUPE demands decent minimum wage

THE NATIONAL Union of Public Employees (NUPE) has given overwhelming support to a conference resolution backing a national minimum wage based on two-thirds of national average earnings.

In a powerful speech to the conference, general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe called on the Labour Party to adopt the union's minimum wage target.

In backing the return of a Labour government, Bickerstaffe called for an end to 'this demeaning nightmare of poverty and low pay'. He stressed that



the Labour Party was not committed to the TUC's significantly lower figure of £80 — which the conference resolution viewed with 'alarm and dismay'.

Bickerstaffe made a strong defence of the union's fight against low pay during the 'winter of discontent' in 1979. Then the Labour government's 'social contract' incomes policy policed the low wages of a million public service workers, and NUPE led a campaign of industrial action against low pay.

Bickerstaffe told conference delegates that Tory election propaganda always features television footage of striking NUPE members at this time.

'We are not going to run away from what we did in 1979' he said. 'Let the Tories remind people that this country cannot go on exploiting low-paid workers'.

He made no excuses for the public service workers' action during the winter of discontent. 'We shall not forget it and if the last Labour government had done what it should have done to look after the low paid, it would not have happened.'

The union also boosted the struggle for women's rights by electing a new executive council with a majority of women members. Thirteen of the 26 seats open to both men and women are held by women; additionally, there are special reserved seats for women.

Two-thirds of the union's 660,000 members are women.