

A Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

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40p

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Defend the NHS



THE MOST serious opposition Margaret Thatcher's government faces is to its plans to dismantle the NHS. The government is deliberately provoking a crisis in the NHS in order to justify plans to degut it. They have created a cash crisis at a time when the government has no shortage of funds — quite the reverse.

The government is putting a financial squeeze on the NHS and on health workers to create the idea that it is impossible for the NHS to go on and alternatives must be found.

This is entirely false. Even if there were a financial squeeze, which there is not, the great majority of people would support the transfer of funds from nuclear weapons and defence to the health service, not to mention the resources that would be generated by eliminating mass unemployment.

The press have vigorously come to Thatcher's support with souped up coverage of private health care schemes, and promotion of alternatives to the NHS. But none of the alternatives being canvassed by the government would provide anything approaching what is presently provided by the NHS, without an enormous increase in costs. A single national health system is by far the most efficient and cheapest method of providing health care, including for central government.

Thatcher's goal in attacking the health service is not simply

economic, but ideological and political. The NHS remains the main bastion of support for collective social provision of services which Thatcher wants to destroy. The Tories have undermined mass popular support for public housing through the run down of services and the right to buy offensive. They have undermined support for comprehensive public education, which the Baker bill is aimed at.

Now they want to achieve the same thing in the health service. But this is proving the most difficult so far.

Squeezing nurses and other health workers' pay and conditions and creating an inefficient health service, is part of this strategy of trying to make the private sector more attractive to users and workers alike.

Notwithstanding the government's efforts however, the NHS is immensely popular. It has overwhelming majority support. The health workers' protests have highlighted the government's plans and nurses and other health workers' strikes have won further support, despite Thatcher's attempts to use them to alienate health service users.

The popular opposition to its plans for the NHS is the single most important political obstacle that the government faces. Health workers must now start receiving the forthright support that they deserve from Labour's front bench. There must be no more disgraceful statements, like that of Robin Cook warning nurses to 'think long and hard before taking strike action'.

The night nurses' strike in Manchester imposed the first defeat on the government, and kicked off an enormously popular groundswell of support for the health workers' defence of the NHS.

The days of action that followed have been massively supported inside and outside the NHS. Nurses in over 40 London hospitals, as well as other parts of the country, took action on 5 February. The subsequent regional days of action have all been big successes. There were lobbies outside virtually every hospital in the North West on 10 February and thousands marched in Liverpool. More than 6,000 marched in Manchester on 19 February in the biggest local demonstration for ten years.

All of this is building towards a major show of strength against the government in the TUC's national demonstration to defend the health service on 5 March. Trains and coaches from many parts of the country are already fully.

Every single Labour Party and trade union should ensure they are represented so that 5 March is a springboard to build the scale of movement capable of actually imposing a defeat on the government and defending the NHS.

MARCH AND RALLY
Saturday 5 March
Assemble 11am Embankment
March to Hyde Park 12 noon

Socialist Action

Botha's ban on the UDF

AS we go to press the South African government has banned the United Democratic Front and all of the other main anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa. The apartheid regime has also banned the Confederation of South African Trade Unions from all political activity and specifically from calling events like the general strike in commemoration of the Soweto uprising. Apartheid has again shown that it cannot tolerate even the most minimal democratic rights for the black majority in South Africa.

It is the duty of the entire labour movement to mobilise in defence of the anti-apartheid organisations and trade unions of South Africa with emergency meetings, pickets, lobbies and demonstrations.

Black Sections

EVEN BEFORE the recent upturn in industrial struggles started, Kinnock continued to be under pressure on two fronts where the relation of forces was more favourable than other issues — women and black people. What has happened on one of those key issues, black sections, has some important general lessons.

A savage witch hunt was launched by the party leadership against the Labour Party Black Section immediately prior to the general election. A concerted attempt was made to isolate it at, and following, the last Labour Party conference.

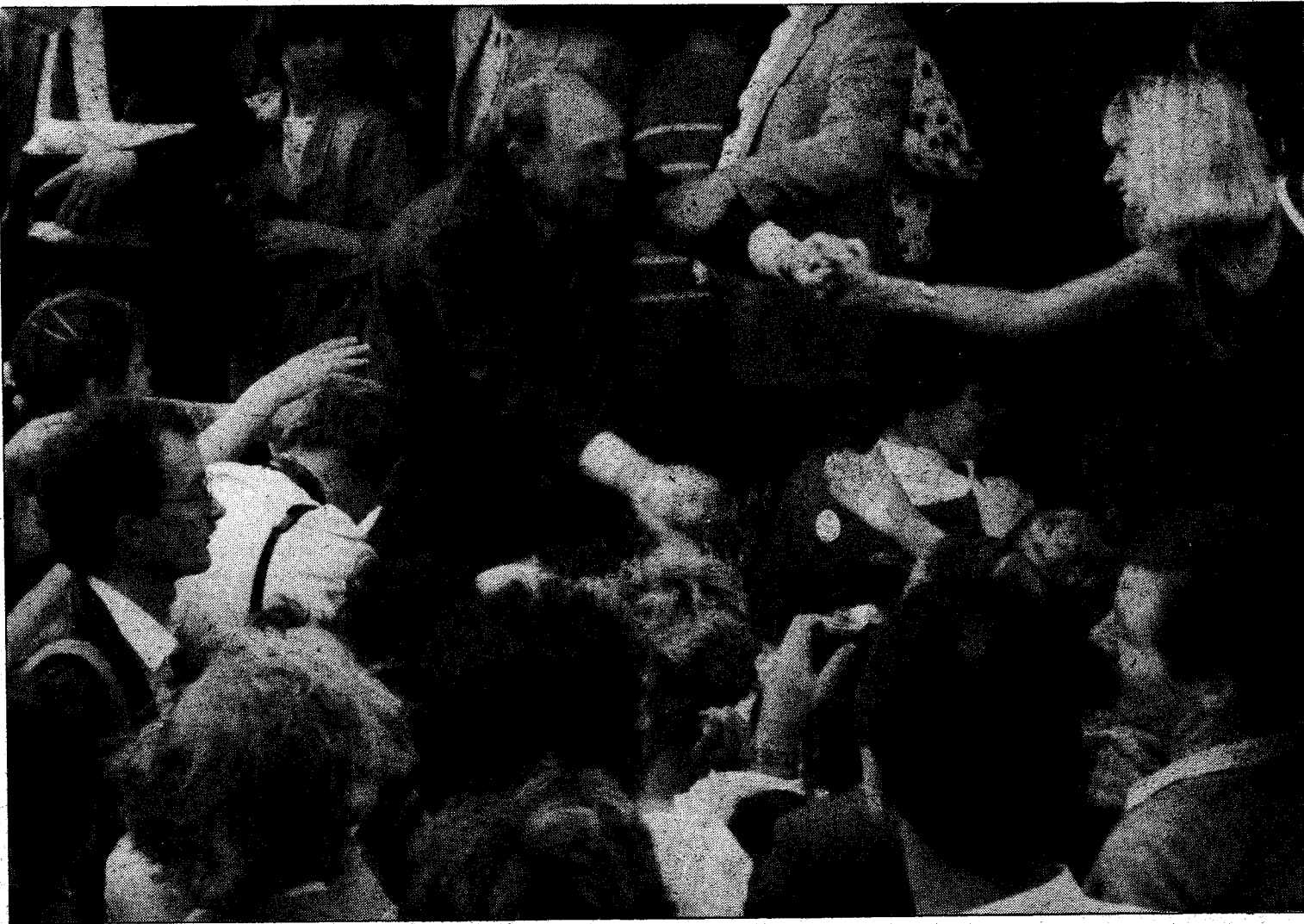
But despite this the pressure of the black community and the growing black working class on the Labour Party continued to mount. Two months ago Bill Morris, deputy general secretary of the TGWU, proposed in *Tribune* the creation of a black socialist society affiliated to the Labour Party. While not granting the Black Section's full demands, this would represent a significant concession to them. Notably, it would secure official black delegates on GCs.

Neil Kinnock almost certainly hoped that this proposal would be turned down by the Black Section. A splitting campaign directed against the Black Section had been opened up by Paul Sharma, its ex-London organiser, in *Tribune* immediately following the election. But while the issue will be decided by the Black Section AGM in March, the public statements by Black Section leaders, such as Narendra Makanji in the *Guardian* indicate that they are not going to fall into Kinnock's trap. While maintaining the campaign for Black Sections Makanji indicated that the Black Section would see an affiliated black socialist society as a concession — which undoubtedly it would be.

As a result, confusion has now broken out amongst the right wing. NEC member John Evans has denounced the black socialist society option as 'black sections under another name' — which it isn't, even though it would strengthen the fight for black sections in some variants. Kinnock himself has launched the ridiculous proposal that an organisation formed under the Morris proposals should be open to white people — which is rather like opening up the women's sections to men, the youth section to pensioners, or pensioners' organisations to those under 20. Meanwhile, the late and unlamented Black and Asian Committee has disappeared from view.

After a difficult period of witch hunt — and the struggle to defend Sharon Atkin is still going on — it is clear that Kinnock's attempt to defeat the Black Section has totally failed. This is a tribute to the strengthening of the campaign in the Labour Party. Most of all it reflects the growing reality of the expanding black working class — which, despite Neil Kinnock's hopes, is not going to go away or bow down to racism.

How to respond to new tactical moves by Kinnock is a question that will have to be decided by those in the Black Section campaign itself. The left has the duty to ensure that the demand for Black Sections is again placed firmly on the agenda at this year's Labour Party conference.



Why Kinnock's position is weakening

THE OUTCOME of the TGWU elections are just the latest in a series of blows to Kinnock. The results are still coming out as we go to press but it is clear that the left has won a significant victory. It appears that all but one of the trade group seats have been one by the left. Most spectacularly of all right wing TGWU chair Brian Nicholson was smashed in Region no 1 — London and the South East.

The votes for the left wing candidates in Region no 1 were 19,800 for Pete Hagger and 17,800 for Steve Riley. Right wing candidate Nicholson and Davis received 11,900 and 8,000 respectively. The only gain made by the right appears to have been on Humberside.

Left

There will now, doubtless, be a series of attempts to legally block the results. But as the *Times* headlined its report of the results 'TGWU ballot blow for Kinnock'. Coupled with the Ford strike and the upsurge of struggle in the NHS all this has halted the long retreat of the left. Thatcher is still on the offensive but she is encountering more significant resistance. As a result Kinnock's hold inside the Labour Party is being weakened.

Unity

That process in fact started after the immediate post-election 'honeymoon' period when contradictions began to appear in the Kinnock camp. The first symptom was an apparently obscure fight between Kinnock and the right wing. The traditional right — represented by Smith, Cun-

ningham, Hattersley and their trade union allies — found themselves in a minority position in the PLP after the 1987 election. This was an historically unprecedented situation. They attempted to reassert themselves through attacking Kinnock's allies.

This period was brought to an end when David Warburton of the GMB, editor of the right wing *Labour Forward* made the tactical mistake of proceeding to an open attack on Kinnock. He was promptly sacked by GMB general secretary John Edmonds for his trouble. Kinnock made clear that he intended to keep his own grip on the party.

Support

Prior to the crushing of Warburton Kinnock had kept John Smith off the key policy review committee on the 'productive and competitive economy' — this was despite the fact that Smith was shadow chancellor of the exchequer. This key position was given to Bryan Gould.

These manoeuvres were aimed at strengthening Kinnock's position against the right. But in reality it created enemies there. Furthermore the right is, finally, Kinnock's only real base of support in the party — the 'soft left' is too weak

and unstable to be a solid base of support. By clashing with the right Kinnock left himself in a more unstable and exposed position with some of the gloss taken off the hype of the election campaign.

Following this the alternative projects of the 'soft left' went nowhere. 'Labour Listens' has turned into a farce with the second meeting at Milton Keynes turning into a brawl. The NEC, with its main immediate project gone, was left primarily dealing with purges — around 20 CLPs are now suspended or under investigation.

Problem

Kinnock then went on to alienate a further part of the soft left by his disgraceful handling of John Prescott. There was considerable opposition to Prescott standing for deputy leader against Hattersley. But Kinnock's public humiliation of Prescott, after a secret deal, showed Kinnock for what he is — not merely right wing but a petty and vindictive individual.

But all these petty annoyances eroded Kinnock's support without breaking it. It has been the policy issues that have really brought matters to a head.

Weakness

The first, and most significant, was over the nurses. The one area where the party leadership had been gaining credit since the election was over the NHS — where most party members considered a relatively effective cam-

paign was being run.

But this generally supportive position turned to anger over the issue of the nurses strikes. At a rough guess 85 per cent of the population support the nurses — and 95 per cent of potential Labour supporters. The working class voters consider: 'if even the nurses are driven to going on strike the situation must be dreadful'.

Majority

Yet Labour's front bench spokesperson, Robin Cook, went on television declaring that the nurses should 'think carefully' before going on strike and *de facto* criticised them. A wave of anger swept through the party on this which went far wider than traditional left wing circles.

This was coupled with other criticism — for example that in the north west support given to the day of action in the NHS by the leadership was totally inadequate.

Choice

Following on from that, touching narrower circles of party activists but involving fundamental issues, was the presentation of the document *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values* to the NEC by Hattersley and Kinnock. This aimed to commit Labour both to markets, and, behind the scenes, to achieve what Gaitskell had failed in trying to remove Clause 4 by stating that Labour was: 'a party committed in practice to the mixed economy'.

This document was attacked not simply by the

hard left but by *Tribune*, Robin Cook, and sections of the Labour right wing. Despite that Kinnock appears determined to press ahead with a vote on it at this year's party conference — which will meet fierce opposition from the left and, in the CLPs, also from much of the centre ground of the party.

The net result of all this is that Kinnock's forces are more tattered on the ground in the CLPs, and loyalty is more strained even in some unions, than for many years.

Advances

This situation gives new openings for the left. The real priorities are rebuilding the left through relating to the struggles taking place outside parliament, mobilising against the Kinnock/Hattersley document — and presenting an alternative to it, winning the fight to defend unilateralism — which is made far more possible by the TGWU elections, carrying through the fight for the demands of Black Sections and women in the party, and, again aided by the situation in the TGWU, helping lay the basis for support for a new economic policy for the left.

Solidarity

On the internal electoral front the possibility exists this year to knock Bryan Gould and Michael Meacher off the constituency section of the NEC and replace them with left wingers.

Democracy and socialism



DEMOCRATIC Socialist Aims and Values should not only be rejected for its content, which is most important, but because it is also almost an act of political insanity to press ahead with it. As I wrote in *Tribune*: 'The first half of the document was largely uncontroversial. But on the economy it represented a shift in policy as dramatic as Gaitskell's campaign in 1960 to remove Clause Four from the party constitution.' To press ahead with this document means to open up a political argument in the party that will run for years. The document will finally be thrown out by the party rank and file whatever block vote might be turned out for a loyalty vote at this year's conference.

The widespread public criticism of the document has largely centred on its attempt to irrevocably commit Labour to support of the market as the fundamental economic mechanism. In a now famous phrase, which may well disappear from the revised version, it argues: 'the operation of demand and supply and the price mechanism is a generally satisfactory means of determining provision and consumption.'

Market

On that I agree with Robin Cook in the *New Statesman*: 'If you are serious about liberating market forces, you must also truss up the victims who will otherwise upset the grand design by protesting.'

The real product of the market is private monopoly and oppression. Those who support 'markets' as the basis of socialism confuse their role in distributing goods, which is necessary and inevitable in a whole series of fields, with their quite different role in investment and labour. Here, again, I agree with Robin Cook: 'to criticise the market mechanism for its inefficiencies in allocating investment, and its inequities in allocating rewards, is not to deny that it can be satisfactory in distributing goods.'

But simply to concentrate on the aspect of markets in the document is superficial — after all the extent, or limitation, of markets is a legitimate subject for discussion in a socialist society. The issues raised by *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values* go far further — to the core of socialism. *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values* breaks up the fundamental democratic, and therefore socialist, character of the Labour party.

Struggle

First it ignores that it is not 'markets' but a long history of struggle which has won whatever fundamental democratic rights and social advances exist. If it were left to markets we would still be in the age of the anti-union laws of the 1770s, and the deportation of trade unionists to Australia.

More *Tribune* was right when it wrote: 'Only if the document were setting out social arrangements for a new civilisation on a hitherto uninhabited desert island, would it be possible to overlook its lack of historical perspective.'

But what does one make of a document which makes no mention of the least idea of how it happened. Our society both shaped and was shaped by the labour movement's struggle to establish people's rights against employers and the state... But the document ignores this in the *Statesman*.

But most important of all the document undermines what should be the central organising principle of Labour's philosophy — the values it presents and around which it organises its policies and programme.

This principle must be the extension of democracy — democracy as the essential principle without which individual liberty cannot be realised and on which alone individual liberty can

AT A joint meeting of Labour's National Executive Committee and Shadow Cabinet on 5 February Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley presented a document, *Statement of Democratic Socialist Aims and Values*, to form the basis for Labour's policies over the next years. It was badly received. *Tribune* attacked it in an editorial entitled 'Withdraw this unworthy statement'. Robin Cook produced a strong criticism of it in the *New*

Statesman. Ken Livingstone in *Tribune* noted that at the NEC/shadow cabinet meeting even 'John Smith and John Cunningham...moved in to demolish it'.

But despite this it seems clear that the party leadership is going to push ahead with the document. Nigel Williamson, editor of *Labour Party News*, wrote defending it in the 19 February issue of *Tribune* — simply saying that the document

needed 'fine tuning'. In an introduction to a pamphlet by the leader of the Labour group in the European parliament, David Martin, Neil Kinnock simultaneously strongly reaffirmed British support of the Common Market and attempted some 'fine tuning'. Socialist Action asked KEN LIVINGSTONE to explain his position on the document. We think it is an important statement and will reply to it in our next issue.

be based, and their inseparable connections with socialism.

Democracy

It is the extension of democracy, not the market, which is the essential progressive content of the last three hundred years in Britain. This democracy has frequently, indeed usually, collided with the market — and, more fundamentally, with the capitalist market. That market first imposed private property on a subservient rural population, as Edward Thompson magnificently reminded us in *Whigs and Hunters*, and then was used to impose the 'market', private property, on labour.

The real progress in the last three hundred years has been the extension of democracy to wider and wider layers of the population and wider and wider areas of society and life. It is this, not markets, which provides the powerhouse of social advance.

The 'market' exists in societies which are deeply repressive and dic-

tatorial — Hitler's Germany or Chile to take two examples. But there are no societies in which there are no free trade unions, or no democracy, but where there is freedom.

Labour should not hesitate to state that under any conditions where the market and democracy conflict we stand for democracy. Labour should be pre-eminently the party of democracy. We may leave being the party of capitalism, with its inherently anti-democratic structure, to the Tories.

It is argued by some that socialism somehow counterposed to democracy, should be our principle. But I consider there is no contradiction between the two in principle — and to allow any counterposition to creep in in our practice would be fatal.

Rights

If we consider the progress of democracy it commenced with the extension of the franchise from a small privileged group of men to universal male franchise. Then, in this century, it

was extended to the majority of society, to women.

Democracy was extended through the creation of a network of local government. More substantially it was expanded by the extension of collective trade union rights to limit the arbitrary power of capital. In a more limited way it has been developed by health and safety and other rights at work.

Liberation

Internationally democratic progress has seen the movement of liberation from Empire — what step forward in democracy in the last forty years is more fundamental than the freeing of over a hundred millions from colonial rule? In my lifetime that extension of democracy will reach its apex in the British process from beyond and securing self-determination for the whole of the country.

Official Labour policy has been to extend democracy over the world's peoples — who can forget the record on Agee and Hosenball? The entire

Liberal revival of the 1950s and 1960s was based on exploiting the failure of Labour to defend democratic rights. We still see it with issues such as the initial response on Clause 28 or on Zionism.

But, beyond these issues, Labour has not been the party of democracy because it has failed to extend it into the two most anti-democratic bulwarks of our society — the state and the capitalist control of the economy. In these spheres socialism and democracy are directly linked.

It is control of the state and economy which capital demands. In these spheres no democracy whatever is practiced. They are the essential instrument by which capitalism maintains privilege and arbitrary power — all other spheres of democratic rights are subordinate to these. It is extending democracy into these spheres, and by this means safeguarding and extending democratic rights in general, that the advance of democracy becomes indissolubly linked to the success of socialism.

State

The first of these areas is the state. Democracy remains limited to simply the 'summit' of the state — and because of this limitation democratic control is limited and frequently nullified.

The only sphere in which a democratic principle is applied in our present state is parliament and local government — the former, in reality, constrained by a non-elective state which surrounds it and the latter increasingly hamstrung by arbitrary power of central government.

Secrecy, patronage, and lack of democracy dominate the current state — the British state is archaic even by international standards.

Colin Leys has rightly put it in an excellent book *Politics in Britain*: 'There were, and are, no elections for the Upper House of parliament, or for judges, or for magistrates, public utility commissioners... No popular voice is heard in the election of the board of any nationalised industry, the board of governors or the BBC or the Independent Television Authority, or of any regional or district health authority, the Arts Council, University Grants Commission or the Science Research Council...'

Economy

'Parliament remained the apparent focus of political life, and necessarily so, since it was — apart from local government — the only democratic element in the state' The state remains an arena of bureaucracy and secrecy. Labour must open up, and break down, that anti-democratic character of the state.

The second decisive issue is the exclusion of democracy from the economy. While apparently enjoying sovereignty through parliament all the decisions most deeply affecting the lives of people in reality are excluded from democratic control — they can be sacked, crippled at work, their jobs and prospects overturned with no democratic rights whatever.

Here the fundamentally anti-democratic character of capital shows itself. It is a 'dictatorship of capital'. There is no democracy when it comes to rising profits versus mass unemployment.

Labour must assert the contrary. That the democratic rights of labour, of the community, take precedence over those of capital. That those who contribute their lives, their labour, have a bigger stake, and a far bigger right to decide, than those who simply contribute money.

These issues, which go to the heart of socialism and democracy, are all more fundamental than those of nationalisation, internationalism, and so forth. They are the issues of working class democracy. The *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values* must be rejected.

Fighting clause 28

TEN THOUSAND demonstrate in London in January; fifteen thousand march in Manchester in February. The task now for the campaign against clause 28 of the Local Government Bill is to turn the national demonstration on 30 April into an even vaster mobilisation and to draw the labour movement massively into the struggle.

Since the confusion around the introduction of the 'queer bashing amendment' by Tory backbenchers Wilshire and Knight in December, much has now become clear. The stakes involved in this battle have been revealed to be even more serious than seemed possible at the outset.

In the first place the government has shown by the mobilisation against any amendment in the House of Lords that it regards the proposal as its own. That means that any likelihood of removing the worst features of the legislation by parliamentary lobbying has effectively vanished. The Tory majorities were substantial. In fact the only amendments that were made at that stage, which added the question of 'intention' to the ban on 'promotion of homosexuality', actually made the clause sharper and more vicious.

Secondly the debate on clause 28 - a debate which has probably attracted more national publicity than any other 'amendment' to a bill - has made it quite clear that the sponsors of the clause had every bit as reactionary and wide ranging interpretation as we most feared.

They have happily clarified that they do mean to outlaw, in effect, any effort to counter discrimination. They have shown that they have every intention of driving lesbian and gay rights off the agenda.

We may reasonably see clause 28 not as the end, but as the start of a reactionary counteroffensive against lesbians and gay men. It is an offensive which will have inevitably violent consequences, as it will bring into play all the reserves of bigotry stored up by a whole history of suppres-

**By Peter Purton,
LCLGR National
Committee Member
(personal capacity)**

sion of alternatives to 'normal heterosexuality' in all levels of society. It will play on the unfounded fears and thoughtless loathing of homosexuality which lies behind so much of the violence lesbians and gays already suffer. It will exploit the terrifying backwardness of the labour movement and the left on this question, to divide the movement and to derail the resistance.



Fortunately the resistance has begun with a campaign of inspiring vigour, courage and militancy. Virtually every organisation of the lesbian and gay movements has banded together to demonstrate an astonishing campaigning ability. Tens of thousands of previously unpolitical lesbians and gays have taken to the streets this

time. The demonstrations - both the big national marches and the smaller rallies - have exuded militancy, strength and determination. Lesbians and gay men have made it clear already, we are not going quietly or voluntarily back into the world of terror, deceit, blackmail, invisibility from which we have only recently begun to emerge.

It was a problem that the media attention concentrated on the arts lobby campaign against clause 28, and that the arts lobby concentrated on the important but narrow question of censorship. The struggle was thereby diverted, even trivialised. It is not the intention of most of the Tory bigots to ban Marlowe or Shakespeare. It is their in-

tention to legislate ignorance into schools, persecute and drive out lesbian and gay teachers and council workers, outlaw equal opportunities work, and restore the 'fulsome normality' of heterosexual family life - the world of child abuse, domestic violence, rape and incest and the general suppression of women. It is this aspect, and this hypocrisy, which must be highlighted at each stage of the campaign.

The campaign will next turn to building for the national demonstration in London on 30 April. The links already established with other campaigns like FAB must be deepened and strengthened in practical solidarity at every level. Lesbians and gay men must demonstrate their support for all those who are fighting back against the Tories: the teachers, health workers, car workers.

While much valuable work has already been done on this front, the battle to win the lesbian and gay movement to consider the labour movement as their natural allies suffers from one considerable obstacle. That is that there is very little evidence that the labour movement is a supporter of lesbian and gay rights.

Not only has it taken from December to February for the Labour front bench to move from a position of not opposing the amendment to one of standing by

its twice reaffirmed party policy and finally making a stand, the visible presence of the labour movement on the two national demonstrations has also been extremely small. There were a few trade union banners (including national ones from the NUJ and NUCPS), and fewer still Labour Party banners on the Manchester march. It is no exaggeration to say that the stock of the movement, and in particular of the party, is extremely low among activists.

The fight now must be to win trade unions and Labour parties both to understanding the nature of the attack, and the urgent need to become involved in the struggle. It will involve tackling deep rooted prejudice. But the victories of the last few years and the clear policies adopted by the TUC, many national unions, and the Labour party, should make the work easier.

The argument must be won also on the need for councils not merely not to cave in in advance of the bill becoming law but also to strengthen their commitment to equal rights. In this battle, the role of the teaching and local government unions is crucial.

Lesbians and gay men are not going back. We are going to resist the Tory onslaught. It is in the interests of the whole working class that we do not face it alone.

Women's Action Committee

Deselect MPs who vote for Alton

THE Women's Action Committee (WAC) AGM meeting in Manchester on 6 February decided to launch a campaign for the deselection of all those Labour MPs who either voted for Alton's anti-abortion Bill or abstained at the second reading.

A dossier of material has already been sent to every CLP involved, and contact has been made with supporters of WAC in a number of constituencies in order to raise the issue.

The campaign is obviously already causing concern to the party leadership. Apart from being picked up by the national press, with articles in the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian*, it has also been noted by Walworth Rd, and some of the MPs involved have felt stung into responding.

By Jude Woodward

The press in Scotland has been particularly quick to pick up the implications of WAC's campaign, and Scottish male MPs have been rushing to defend themselves.

WAC is realistic about the slim chances of success in actually deselection MPs, but the campaign will bring home the seriousness of the issues involved.

It has already been reported that the threat of deselection provoked George Galloway into abstaining rather than voting for the Alton Bill. Hopefully WAC's campaign will have a similar effect in forcing other MPs to consider their voting position.

WAC's main concern is to contribute to ensuring the defeat of Alton's Bill at its third reading. However the opportunity is also being taken to point out that none of the women Labour MPs voted for Alton, and that selecting more women for safe seats is the surest way to ensure the party policy on abortion rights is carried out.

Perhaps not surprisingly, considering the vested interests of anti-abortion Labour MPs, WAC and supporters of the FAB campaign in the Labour Party have found themselves accused of 'intolerance' for campaigning to ensure that party policy is implemented by the entire PLP.

However what is perhaps shocking to some is that this accusation has not been confined to the ranks of the right wing. Even on the left there are those who have not yet understood that abortion rights are as fundamental to women, as a picket line is to a strike, or as solidarity is to a trade union.

The accusation of 'intolerance' is raised because women are told that what we are dealing with is a matter of 'conscience' for the MPs who vote with Alton.



But if religious belief is an excuse for denying women their rights, then presumably by the same token it is excusable that there is discrimination against Catholics in the North of Ireland by fundamentalist protestants who believe the Pope is the anti-Christ, or by the state of Israel against Palestinians, as the 'right of return' is justified on religious grounds, or support for Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill by those who believe homosexuality is a perversion. Or indeed perhaps those who have argued that nurses have no right to go on strike are justified as it 'might endanger life' and this is an issue of 'conscience'.

Individuals are indeed entitled to hold such views, we can be very tolerant of a very broad range of views held by individuals. But if

someone is elected to parliament, and then claims that this gives them a right to impose these views on everyone else, to ignore the rights of women and the decisions of Labour Party conference, then it is clear who is 'intolerant'. If religious belief means that an MP is not prepared to defend women's rights, then clearly they should not be an MP.

However the majority of those who voted with Alton, or abstained, did not do so even on the basis of profound and consistent religious belief and do not even have a fig leaf to cover their attack on women's rights.

The Women's Action Committee campaign will also tie into the deselection process which was supposed to begin in June of this year - although no details of the electoral college

agreed at last year's conference have been circulated. WAC will be campaigning for more women to be selected for safe Labour seats, particularly targeting those MPs who refuse to defend abortion rights.

This campaign will obviously have to focus on Scotland where Labour's good results have only produced one woman Labour MP, with a very high proportion of Scottish male Labour MPs voting against abortion rights.

WAC will continue to make a high priority of involvement not only in calling for deselection but in all aspects of the FAB campaign. WAC members have played a leading role in establishing FAB nationally from the outset.

The long drawn out consultation on the women's organisation is

also due to end this year, with constitutional amendments being tabled at annual conference.

Margaret Prosser, a TGWU national official, recently reported to the Greater London women's conference that she favoured a division of the votes at national women's conference on a 45:45:10 basis (45 per cent for the unions, 45 per cent for the constituency women's organisations and 10 per cent for the socialist societies) and the creation of one national Labour women's body rather than the present cumbersome NEC women's committee and National Labour Women's Committee.

While these proposals do not include the key one of women's conference electing the women's places on the NEC, they are far from the 90 per cent trade union bloc vote that some feared was being prepared by the right, and reflect the pressure of women, on the party.

Creating a clear and consistent constitution for the women's organisation, from its national committees and representation at national conference, down to its structure at a CLP level, is, in WAC's view, a precondition for a really powerful organisation of women in the Labour Party.

Margaret Prosser's proposals would not go far enough, but would be a step

towards setting the women's organisation on a more solid foundation to conduct the argument.

The Women's Action Committee had a difficult year, finding itself the subject of sustained attack from both right and left.

The right and the LCC have tried to break WAC away from its alliances with the Labour Left Liaison and the Campaign Group - while the LCC itself failed to deliver anything significant for women in the party, frequently even failing to vote for the women's slate for the NEC in the CLPs that it influences.

On the left *Labour Briefing* opposed the review of the women's organisation, accused WAC of selling out to the LCC, and has implicitly opposed the relationship between WAC and the LLL.

But the last year has in fact proved that the course taken by WAC has been correct.

Over the last year it has maintained a high profile campaign to strengthen the Labour women's organisation, had a major presence in the Fight Alton's Bill campaign, organised a conference on 'Winning the Majority' on Labour's policies for women, and continued to campaign for unity on the left on the principled basis of support for the demands of women in the labour movement. It remains easily the most powerful women's campaign in the Labour Party.

Why Haughey crawls to Thatcher

Family and friends carry
McAnespie's coffin
past the checkpoint
from which
he was shot

THE Stalker affair made it clear that the British government cannot tolerate even a tiny part of the truth about its actions in Ireland. That's why Stalker was framed, why the Birmingham Six remain in prison, why RUC murderers and their protectors are immune from prosecution and so on. The government is trying to keep the lid on a veritable pan-

dora's box of murders, frame-ups and lies reaching to the highest levels of government.

But what is even more remarkable is how, faced with each fresh insult and humiliation, the Dublin government has meekly capitulated. REDMOND O'NEILL looks at why.



AIDEN McAnespie was murdered by a British soldier as he walked to a game of gaelic football on Sunday 21 February. The army said it was an accident. But McAnespie's family and the local priest reported that Aiden had specifically been threatened with death by the army and had been regularly insulted and harassed over a period of five years.

McAnespie's family can be sure that the support they have been promised from Charles Haughey's government in Dublin will be as ineffective as that government's support for other Irish victims of British injustice.

The British government has heaped more injustice and indignity upon the Irish in the weeks since 25 January than at any time since 1981. In doing so it has also shown its complete contempt for its 'partners' in the Anglo-Irish Agreement — the Dublin government.

Dublin's response has been pathetic.

At the end of 1987 Charles Haughey's government submitted completely to British demands for extradition, cross-border security co-operation and the biggest military operation against Republicans south of the border for 25 years.

Britain gave nothing in return — not even a few minor cosmetic reforms to help Haughey save face.

Then, on top of this, starting on 25 January, the British government orchestrated an extraordinary series of demonstrations of complete disregard for justice towards the Irish.

The events are well known. On 25 January it

was announced that RUC officers who had taken part in the cover up of the murder of six victims of the RUC's shoot-to-kill policy in 1982 would not be prosecuted and the Sampson/Stalker report would not even be published. Dublin was given no warning of this announcement — even though it involved RUC incursions into the 26 counties.

Three days later, on 26 January, the appeal court in London rejected the overwhelming evidence of a police frame-up of the Birmingham Six and sent them back to the prisons where they have spent the last 14 years.

On 15 February, the government announced that the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) is to be made permanent. Hundreds of thousands of Irish people have been harassed under this law.

Extradition

On 17 February, the Northern Ireland secretary, Tom King made clear that the Dublin government's objections had been dismissed. There would be no criminal prosecutions of the RUC. Just an inquiry to consider whether murder and 'conspiracy to pervert the course of justice' merit disciplinary action! His only 'concession' to Dublin was that Britain would in future do the paper work asked for by Dublin for extraditing Irish people from the 26 counties!

The same day, in a special debate on Anglo-Irish relations, in Leinster House, the Dublin parliament, Haughey regretted the timing of London's decisions and their contempt for 'Irish sensitivities'. But all parties agreed that the priority remained to 'do everything in our power to defeat the men of violence'. Previous in-

dications that extradition and cross border security co-operation might be jeopardised were withdrawn by Haughey.

In case the rhetoric went to anyone's head, Tomás MacGiolla, the leader of the Workers' Party, spelt out the basic line, warning: 'We should not fall into the temptation of a ritual knee jerk anti-British reaction ... We should also remember that those who have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of murders and destruction in Northern Ireland has been the Provisional IRA!'

Unfortunately the only knee jerk reaction in Dublin was prostration before the British government.

Even Seamus Mallon, deputy leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), had to differ. He explained in *Tribune* that the killings investigated by Stalker were by no means exceptional:

Between January 1969 and December 1986, 166 civilians who were not involved in any paramilitary activity were killed by the security forces — the Army, the RUC and the UDR. The impact of these harrowing statistics is compounded by the startling fact that in only two instances were convictions obtained — 98.8 per cent non-conviction rate... People in Britain should be able to understand the shock, bitterness and anger at the Mayhew decision!

Corner

Mallon is in a tight corner because he has spent the last two years selling the idea that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would bring justice to the Six Counties and end the 'nationalist nightmare'. It manifestly hasn't.

Haughey declared, before he was elected, his opposition to the Anglo-

Irish Agreement, to the PTA and to extradition. Yet his government has accepted all of them. The humiliation of the past four weeks is just the logical result of this course.

Having treated Dublin with the utmost contempt Thatcher will just keep coming back for more. And if Haughey's party reaches a point where it can go no further, then Thatcher will be quite happy to see Haughey replaced by the other major parties in the south — all of whom regard even Haughey's mildest protests as dangerously provocative towards Thatcher.

As it is the Fianna Fail government is a minority administration which only hangs on to power by the grace of these parties and because its economic programme of massive austerity, like its actions on partition, is identical to their own.

Dublin

There is nothing new about Haughey's role. At every point since 1921 the government in Dublin has been key to securing British interests in Ireland.

Partition was not, and could not be, imposed simply by force of British and Unionist arms in the Six Counties. The Free State Dublin government waged an even more brutal and bloody war to crush nationalist opposition to partition in the south. On a more minor scale the IRA campaigns against the border during the second world war and at the end of the fifties were defeated by a combination of repression south, as well as north, of the border, including mass internment.

It is a matter of the historical record that the main parties and the governments in the south have preferred this option to the alternative of a fight

to end the British presence in Ireland. The Irish capitalist class has never been economically independent of Britain which still, today, takes nearly half of southern Ireland's trade and has a major stake in the Irish domestic economy.

The horrible 800 year history of Britain's role in Ireland means, however, that simple support for British repression is not, and never has been, a policy capable of maintaining popular support in Ireland.

Majority

A large majority of the Irish people have always wanted Irish unity and independence. And, between 70 and 80 per cent of people in the south continue to want a united Ireland. Opposition to a united Ireland has declined since the present crisis began — down to 10 per cent in 1984 (Polls conducted by IMS, MRBI and MORI 1970, 1974, 1983 and 1984).

Irish unity remains written into the constitution of the southern Irish state.

Even popular admiration for the 'ideals of the IRA, though not its methods' rose in the south to 32 per cent in 1978, 41 per cent in 1980 and 39 per cent in 1984.

A hard core minority actually approved 'the IRA's aims and methods' — two per cent in 1978, rising to five per cent in 1980 and 1984 (Polls conducted by IMS/Gallup, IMS and MORI 1978, 1980 and 1984).

So Dublin's role in policing partition has had to be dressed up in nationalist rhetoric. Charles Haughey made the political function of his party's lip service to national unity quite clear when he said in the Dail in 1985: 'We are the moral barrier against a violent and abhorrent form

of nationalism. It would be quite irresponsible of us to abandon the cause of Irish nationalism, the ideal of a united Ireland and to hand it over as the exclusive property of those prepared to pursue it by violent means.'

Thus the 'nationalism' of Fianna Fail, and of every Dublin government, has had the function simply of preventing the emergence of any force genuinely committed to carrying the struggle for Irish freedom through to the very end. Such a force has arisen in the current struggle in the north of Ireland and what has united Dublin, the Church hierarchy and the British government is the determination to prevent it building up popular support in the south.

Hence, since the hunger strikes in 1981, the shared understanding of the need for a political strategy to stop the national movement in the north, and specifically its leadership Sinn Féin, becoming a 32 county political force.

Repression

One element of such a strategy has always been and remains, straightforward repression in the south as well as the north. Dublin has its own no-jury courts and one of the most comprehensive systems of media censorship in the world. Security co-operation is, of course, the core of the Hillsborough agreement.

The second element was the idea that Dublin would guarantee and uphold the rights of the nationalist community in the Six Counties more effectively than the cycle of repression since 1969. This was, of course, the basis of which the agreement was sold to the Irish people.

This idea has been discredited by the events since 25 January this year.

Instead they have helped expose the anti-nationalist character of the Haughey government.

This is further shown by its economic policy. This involves a programme of the most drastic cuts in social expenditure, jobs and living standards for 30 years, whilst 12 per cent of Ireland's GDP, and 20 per cent of export earnings, leave the country each year as interest repayments, profits, dividends and royalties.

Finally, and in some respects, most repugnantly of all, the Dublin government is allowing Ireland once again to be literally depopulated by mass emigration, at a rate of 30,000 leaving annually. Two per cent of Ireland's population has left the country since 1981. The continuing depopulation of Ireland remains perhaps the starkest of all the indictments of British domination of Ireland historically — and the Dublin governments which play their part in upholding it.

The favourite speculation in the Irish media today is that the openly anti-nationalist Popular Democrat Party and Workers' Party herald the by-passing of the national question as the dominant question of Irish politics.

But, on the contrary, the most likely result of Dublin's crawling to Thatcher in recent weeks is to aid a modest, but significant, advance of Sinn Féin in the 26 counties. Precisely the opposite of what Thatcher, Haughey and the SDLP have all been working for since 1981.

In Britain, one result is already clear, broader support for withdrawal from Ireland. The *Irish Post*, the main newspaper of the Irish in Britain, has already responded by demanding British withdrawal. This is only the beginning.

Crisis in the

THE NHS is now the central battleground in the fight against Thatcher. JOHN ROSS looks at Thatcher's plans for privatising the NHS. GEOFF RYAN looks at the crisis as it hits nurses.

THE NHS is now a central battleground not just for the defence of a vital interest of the working class but for the whole ideology and economic/political objectives of the Thatcher government.

This confrontation has been deliberately chosen by the government. The evidence is overwhelming that while there is a long term problem of funding the NHS on Tory priorities there is no short term problem at all. The decision to provoke confrontation in the NHS now, at the beginning of the Tories third term, is a deliberate one. What is the evidence for this conclusion and how does it fit in to the Tories overall strategy?

First, as regards the reality that there is no short term crisis for funding the NHS, this is made clear in the government's own January 1988 public spending white paper. Due to higher than expected receipts from council and new town house sales, treated in Treasury accounts as negative expenditure, the government has been underspending on its own plans in 1987-88 by £1.3 billion. Furthermore there was in January still £600 billion left in 1988's reserves. On the income side the chancellor is, as the *Financial Times* put it, 'awash with revenues' due to 1987's rapid economic growth.

Resources

The demands made for extra funding of the NHS are modest compared with available resources. For example the National Association of Health Authorities is asking for only £231 million for next year above government projections. Phillip Hunt, director of the National Association of Health Authorities, noted: 'People are talking as though the health service has to be financed in some other way, yet for the moment all we are asking for is another £230 million that would provide authorities with the stability they need for the coming year...That would work wonders for morale and allow some expansion! Yet the government refused to meet even such a minimal demand.'

Many of the demands which are being pressed on the government are tiny compared to the underspending and reserves of £1.9 billion — let alone the revenues available for tax cuts. Even the

call of the Labour Party and medical organisations that £11.3 billion be spent on the NHS, could be met without a serious problem at present. Furthermore, given the figures, it is clear the government could make both tax cuts and increase spending on the NHS. The decision in the public spending white paper, and in the government's projections for the budget, not to give extra funds for the NHS is therefore primarily a political, not an economic, decision. Why, therefore, is the government choosing to make this attack on the NHS at the present time?

First, over the long term, the Tories clearly force low growth in the economy and a crisis of funding of the NHS — which requires a two per cent increase a year to maintain its present level of service. However, as the figures shows, this is not the main factor in its present refusal to fund the NHS.

The decisive factor is an understanding that the NHS is a battlefield for the politics and ideology of Thatcherism.

The *Sunday Times*, a paper pushing for a radical attack on the NHS, explained on 31 January the shift in government strategy signalled by the decision to hold a policy review on the NHS: 'For weeks past, the prime minister had struggled to overcome mounting public concern about the NHS and its failure to cope with demand for hospital beds...'

'All her efforts to get the story of a growing crisis out of the headlines were being smothered by the increasing cries of chaos from within the NHS. She had thought that by constantly repeating the figures of increased spending and the extra-NHS staff since she came to power, she could win through.'

'Last weekend, she changed her mind, not by opening the Treasury coffers to the NHS cash-seekers but by deciding to be more daring that she has ever been before in domestic policy...The idea took hold that this was an opportunity not to be missed and that the public was ready for a fundamental review.'

Consultants

Indeed it has been not just Labour or the nurses that has opened up fire on the government. The development of groups such as 'Birmingham Consultants for the Rescue of the NHS', supported by around 90 consultants in the Birmingham area, showed developments

which worried the government.

The *Times* political editor Robin Oakley noted on 19 January: 'The government has never been more on the defensive over its handling of the National Health Service. The time bought by its injection of an extra £100 million funding before Christmas has already run out, and it joins debates with Labour today in a bad state of jitters.'

Thatcher therefore decided to cut the gordian knot of the political crisis she was facing by announcing, on *Panorama* on 25 January, a review of the NHS totally controlled by the government. It will be carried through by an ad hoc group of ministers and advisers and is supposed to report before the summer.

Tax relief

Announcing the review Thatcher made her intentions clear. She repeated her belief in expanding private medicine. When the question of tax relief on private health insurance was raised she stated, 'ministers were considering all of these things'. She stated that with health as an education: 'we will hold our own inquiries and our own consultations.'

As Peter Riddell, political correspondent of the *Financial Times*, put it 'Like the debate of the past two years leading up to the current Education Reform Bill Mrs Thatcher is having no truck with time-consuming royal commissions or the semi-public Fowler social security inquiries. She wants full control of the discussions.'

The nature of proposals being floated within the Tory party on the health service is clear. The most extreme mooted publicly is that by ex-government minister Rhodes Boyson — who has called for the privatisation of the NHS and the substitution of a state voucher of £300 a year which could be cashed with a private insurance firm. Hospitals would be transferred to private ownership.

Boyson's proposals are too blatant and too electorally unpopular to have any chance of being adopted. But others are trying to get similar results by different means. Madsen Pirie, president of the right wing Adam Smith Institute, for example has concentrated on promoting private health insurance. 'A part of the answer is to encourage people to take out private health insurance...A very small start was made in 1981 when the then Chancellor made private health insurance a tax free bonus for those earn-



ing below £8,500 per year and entered by their employer. This group could be expanded by granting a tax rebate for those undertaking private medical insurance'

A second tack was shown in the report on the NHS by the Carlton Club/Conservative Medical Society. One of the principal authors of this was Sir Gerard

Vaughan. This report called for replacement of the NHS with a national health insurance scheme, for tax relief on health care premiums, and, in particular, steps to destroy the health service unions.

In preparation for far-reaching changes in the NHS the Tories have taken steps to prepare the legal ground —

e NHS



Photo: GRAEME COOKSON

popular as was achieved, over a decade, with public housing.

The 1988 public spending white paper shows that gross NHS spending is planned to rise by 2 per cent after next year allowing for inflation — just on the limit of the 1.5-2 per cent annual rise required to meet the growth in the number of people aged over 75 and medical advances. But it does not include any allowance for real rises in NHS staff pay.

The government's projected figures show that the real rise in gross NHS spending is planned to slow to 1.3 per cent in 1989-90 and to 1.7 per cent in 1990-91. Capital spending on English hospitals is shown as increasing by only 1 per cent. These figures take the NHS down to the level where the service will begin to deteriorate further. Clearly the aim is to make the NHS unpopular and inefficient.

These figures have been denounced not just by the health unions and the Labour Party but by every health organisation.

The British Medical Association (BMA) announced following the white paper that: 'Politicians of all parties must intervene in the debate on the white paper to ensure that additional funding is provided.'

Uneconomic

But if one side of the Tory coin is running down the NHS the other is building up private medicine — largely at the taxpayers expense. The truth is that private medicine is uneconomic and can only be sustained by deliberate government policy. The facts of the last nine years show this.

As soon as it came to office in 1979 the Thatcher government set about trying to increase the weight of private medicine in Britain. The number of those taking out private health insurance schemes jumped by 20 per cent in 1980.

But since then the increase in private health insurance has slowed down dramatically. Since 1981 growth has been three per cent a year.

A key reason is soaring costs. For four successive years after 1983 private health insurance premiums rose faster than inflation — with a 15 per cent increase in 1986.

Chronic

This is despite the fact that private insurance schemes are, of course, careful to turn down those who have greatest need of health care and concentrate on the profitable. Kidney failure for example is not covered by the British United Provident Association (BUPA) and Private Patients Plan (PPP) — the two groups which together account for ninety per cent of private health insurance. BUPA restricts chronic coverage to 180 days in hospital a year. PPP does not cover psychiatric care, pregnancy complications, or drug and alcohol dependency.

Their schemes are also particularly biased against the elderly. A BUPA spokesperson admitted: 'The elderly have both heavier use of hospital care and once in hospital tend to stay longer, pushing premiums up... We only have about 300,000 people past retirement age. They are at present subsidised to some extent by our younger subscribers. But even so, premiums for them are expensive. If they got tax relief, many more thousands would continue their cover.'

Despite these restrictions a Bupacare plan providing coverage for a married

couple aged between 30 and 49 with a family costs £952 a year for the use of London hospitals, £614 for large centres outside London and £513 in rural areas. With such prices, while private health insurance has been rising it still only covers around 10 per cent of the population.

It is for this reason that the private medical companies, and the Tory right wing, led by Social Services secretary John Moore, are so strongly pressing for tax relief on private medical insurance. This has already been introduced for anyone with private health insurance earning under £8,500 a year but virtually all the two million plus policy holders, which cover 5.4 million people, are earning over this figure.

The result is that the number of private individuals taking out private health insurance is still very low. Only about one quarter (586,000) of those with private health insurance take it out individually. More than a half (1,160,000) are covered by company schemes. The rest (391,000) are in some form of group scheme.

Private

The government is therefore concerned to try to bring about a dramatic increase in the proportion of the population using private medicine. Last year the proportion of the population covered by private health insurance went above 10 per cent for the first time since the creation of the NHS. Running down the NHS is seen as one way of increasing this figure. As *The Independent* reported: 'right wing Conservatives are advising the government that private health insurance will grow naturally if the squeeze on the NHS is maintained'. The other crucial measure is introducing tax relief on private health insurance schemes.

Far from 'aiding the NHS', as an official Tory ideology private medicine is supposed to do, such tax relief would immediately strike a major blow against the public health service. As Malcolm Dean noted in the *Guardian*: 'Extending tax relief to all, even if it was restricted to the basic rate... would mean an immediate bill of over £150 million for the government without any extra help to the NHS — tax relief at 27 per cent on the estimated £650 million spent last year on health insurance premiums last year. Tax relief would undoubtedly increase the number of people taking out insurance because it would cut the cost by 27 per cent (or 25 per cent if the basic rate is reduced). Just how many extra is difficult to predict! It is precisely because it strikes such a direct blow at the NHS that tax relief on private health insurance schemes is a political hot potato.'

Battlefield

While the government has so far had limited success there is no doubt that it is beginning to shift the balance in health care. For example the number of NHS beds fell by 41,000 between 1979 and 1985 while the number of beds for acute cases in the private sector rose by 3,600.

The government has decided to take the opportunity of the crisis in the NHS to take a step forward in its plans for degutting the health service and setting in place an economically and socially inefficient and irrational, but privatised, health service. That is why even when it has every economic means to increase spending on the NHS it refuses to do so. Its political goals take priority.

This is why the entire the entire NHS has become a battlefield.

THE NURSES strikes have brought to public attention the crisis in the nursing profession. But this crisis is not new. Already at the beginning of last year *Nursing Times* ran an article 'When the tap runs dry', showing a likely shortage of some 10,000 trained nurses by the year 2004.

In the past the NHS has just managed to replace the 30,000 nurses who leave annually with new students and some qualified staff returning to nursing. However, the number of young women with between five 'O' levels and two 'A' levels leaving school is falling due to population changes. At present nursing recruits about 25 per cent of this group but by the mid-1990s it will, if nothing else is done, have to increase this to over 50 per cent.

By Geoff Ryan, nurse, Manchester Royal Infirmary

This would by itself create a major staffing problem, even if everything else was fine. Everything else is far from fine.

Of course, compared to many of the low paid ancillary workers in the NHS nurses are very well paid. However in comparison with other 'professions' nurses rewards are very poor.

A nurse earns £7,300-£8,600 a year compared to £7,600-£14,300 for a teacher, £7,700-£12,800 for a social worker, and £8,400-£14,000 for a police constable. Further up the scale the picture is the same. Senior teachers, principal social workers and police sergeants

tion in overlap can mean an increased risk of violence for nurses, the vast majority of whom are women, as many hospitals are built in badly lit run down areas.

Low staffing levels normally attract headlines in such cases as the west Midlands children unable to have heart surgery because of lack of specialist nurses. However, low levels of staff are a constant feature of work in the NHS. It is far from unusual for only one qualified nurse to be on a ward. Low levels of staffing means that nurses are unable to give the standard of care they would like and have to work hard simply to ensure patients receive the most basic care. Staffing levels have to be maintained by the use of bank nurses or agency nurses who, whatever their individual abilities, are not as aware of the needs of the individual patients as full time staff.

This constant struggle to provide basic care leads to demoralisation amongst staff — expressed through increasing levels of sickness which in turn put greater stress on those who carry on working. In order to maintain staffing levels some 60 per cent of nurses work overtime, often without pay or time off.

Under the Tory government the health authorities have also been selling off accommodation. This has led to a major crisis, particularly in London. Whilst it is possible for nurses in some areas to buy houses or flats the explosion of house prices in London and the south east puts even the cheapest property outside the range of most nurses. Not surprisingly the greatest nursing shortage is in the four Thames health authorities.

Crisis for nurses

starting salaries are all higher than the maximum pay of a ward sister/charge nurse.

Nurses fare worse in London weighting allowances, rent allowances and so on, and, unlike the police, do not receive free prescriptions, dental treatment etc.

Any extra pay for 'unsocial hours' is therefore a necessary part of a nurse's pay. But nurses have one of the worst shift payments systems in Britain.

'Unsocial hours' payments only begin at 8pm and the payment for week ends was reduced two years ago from 33 per cent to 30 per cent for Saturdays (same rate for early and late shifts) and from 66 per cent to 60 per cent for Sunday working and bank holidays.

Most nurses work shifts — although traditionally there has been a separate night shift. However in many areas health authorities are now trying to change existing shift systems.

Some authorities have now abandoned a separate night shift and all staff have to work nights on rotation. At the government's instigation health authorities are also trying to reduce the amount of overlap between the morning and afternoon shifts.

All this has effects on both patients and staff. For staff it has meant that those on late shift work later in order to allow the night shift to begin work later, while those on early shift have to start sooner in order to further reduce the night shift. The biggest losers are those working nights who now have to work an extra night per month for the same pay.

Overlap

Patients suffer because the afternoon overlap is often the only time when many jobs can get done — when nurses may have some time to sit and talk to patients. In psychiatry the afternoon is often the only time when it is possible to take patients off the ward (whether for treatment for specific problems such as agoraphobia which cannot possibly be dealt with other than off the ward, or for outings, which are a necessary part of life for the elderly mentally ill spending the rest of their days in hospital).

Student nurses suffer from any reduction in the shift overlap as this is often the only time when qualified nurses are available to teach them. The reduc-

Despite the view amongst nurses for the need for more NHS accommodation little is done to rectify this situation. Moreover there is a need for accommodation for all grades of staff in the NHS, not just nurses. The problem of accommodation will combine with the problem of low pay even more when the poll tax is introduced, further exacerbating the problems of staffing levels.

Discharging

To make matters worse there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people being treated in hospital. But this increased treatment has only been achieved by discharging patients much more quickly. Therefore nurses both in hospital and in community services are having to deal with patients who are usually more ill than in the past. The pace of the work is quickened for nursing staff and the level of stress is increased.

Finally the role of the nurse is now expanding.

Whilst such steps benefit both nurses and patients they clearly increase the level of stress under which nurses work. The nurse takes on extremely skilled tasks, acts as a counsellor, defends the rights of patients and has a continually expanding role in the teaching of nurses (and often of medical staff, though they would perhaps be reluctant to admit this).

Nursing itself developed with an exceptionally strong and reactionary regime, basing itself on the twin traditions of religion and the military, fostering the notions of 'vocation' in which the nurse was expected to devote her entire life to the care of the sick (on marriage women were no longer allowed to continue nursing).

Today much of that ideology is under attack from within nursing. Women are questioning why male nurses achieve promotion at a much faster rate than women. There is an increased awareness of the importance of assertiveness and training courses have been established. Traditional attitudes of medical staff to women, whether as nurses or as patients are being questioned.

In short the growth of the women's movement is having a marked impact inside nursing, particularly amongst student nurses who have often been at the forefront of the current wave of protests inside the NHS.

notably removing the legal definition of a private patient from its Health and Medicines Bill.

But even before it gets to fundamental structural changes it is clear that the government is planning cuts in the real effectiveness of the NHS. It is planning to run the NHS down and make it un-



Uprising in Gaza

THE uprising in the Israeli occupied territories has continued, and unmasked Israeli repression increased. The crisis confronting the Israeli state is perhaps deeper than it was at the time of the invasion of Lebanon. Fractures are beginning to appear within the pro-Zionist forces, not just internationally but in the Israeli state itself.

In this context Neil Kinnock's antics on his recent visit to the region are disgraceful. Kinnock began with some reasonably strong statements against Israeli military violence. But before long, in true subservient form, he was in rapid retreat referring to 'violence on both sides'.

He then proceeded to assert that Israel should retain the Golan Heights, annexed from Syria; warn Palestinians against holding out for full sovereignty even in a 'homeland' — never mentioning the

possibility of a Palestinian state; and float support for the Hussein/Peres option of substituting Jordanian for Israeli rule in parts of the occupied territories.

The *Observer* on 21 February described Kinnock's meeting with the Israeli foreign minister, Peres, as a 'love-in', where, according to Kinnock's aides, the two had found 'almost total identity of views'.

Support for the Hussein/Peres option places Kinnock to the right even of forces in the US government who are favouring an 'international peace conference' to establish a Palestinian 'homeland' in the occupied territories.

On these pages RASHID ASHRAF looks at current developments in the Palestinian movement and in the state of Israel and an article by RALPH SCHOENMAN takes apart 'two states' proposals.



The Palestinian uprising and the PLO

THE UPRISINGS within the occupied territories and the resonance they have struck within the Israeli state itself poses serious challenges to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leadership's present orientation.

The PLO has traditionally seen liberation as coming from outside the Israeli state, whether this is in the form of action by the Arab regimes, guerilla warfare or international diplomatic manoeuvres. Since 1974, Fatah, the bourgeois nationalist faction headed by Yassar Arafat, has oriented the PLO towards reaching an accommodation with imperialism and the Arab states around the project of a Palestinian mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This 'realistic' goal in practice replaced the officially declared objective of destroying the Zionist state through a protracted 'people's war'.

As a transitional demand the call for a Palesti-

nian state could create the conditions for mobilising the Palestinian masses within the occupied territories and even the possibility of winning a section of the Israeli working class. However, the independence of such a state would be illusory unless it was coupled with a struggle to overthrow the reac-

By Rashid Ashraf

tionary Hashmetite monarch in Jordan — which rates second only to Zionism in its crimes against the Palestinians. This course would be anathema to the Fatah leadership.

For Fatah, the adoption of its new demand provided a cover for a turn to the right, while main-



taining a formal commitment to the destruction of the Israeli state. Instead of leading an anti-imperialist struggle based on the oppressed masses in Jordan and Palestine, Arafat sought a negotiated settlement with the Israeli state with the help of imperialism, the reactionary Arab regimes, and even moderate Zionists.

This policy, based on the forlorn hope that the Zionists would negotiate a withdrawal from the oc-

cupied territories was doomed to failure. Moreover the left factions within the PLO, and even the radical nationalists within Fatah, were a potential threat to Arafat's plans.

Following the Zionist invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the siege of Beirut, Arafat entered negotiations with the US for the evacuation of the PLO fighters from Lebanon. The evacuation removed the last remain-

ing autonomous base of Palestinian fighters and strengthened Arafat's hand within the PLO.

The plan for an independent state in the occupied territories now gave way to a demand for a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation — the option favoured by Reagan. Presently this takes the form of Arafat calling for an international peace conference.

The uprising in the occupied territories has for the first time shifted the axis of the liberation struggle into Palestine itself. The uprisings are a response to the anger and frustration that has built up under 20 years of Zionist oppression. The waves of demonstrations, strikes and other acts of resistance have united young and old, camp and city dwellers, and cut across all classes.

The initially spontaneous actions soon led to

attempts by activists to coordinate the resistance.

Popular committees have sprung up, especially in Gaza, led by militants from several PLO factions, including the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) as well as Fatah.

The more reactionary currents, notably the pro-Jordanians, have been absent from the action and this will deal a serious blow to their attempts to gain support within the territories.

The Communists and the Islamic fundamentalists have also been participating, although the influence of the fundamentalists has been greatly exaggerated by Zionists propagandists. There has been a sort of 'cease fire' between the nationalist and fundamentalist forces in the Palestinian camps as

their efforts have been directed against the Zionist troops.

The uprising now poses sharp questions for the Palestinian liberation movement. The diplomatic manoeuvres of the Arafat leadership have led the movement into a dead end. The leftist factions, themselves compromised by the alliances with various regimes, have failed to challenge Fatah and develop an alternative based on the independent interests of the oppressed masses of the region.

The PLO can go forward if it rejects the policies of Fatah, bases itself on the thousands of new activists drawn into struggle in the occupied territories and within the Israeli state, and reorganises itself in accordance with the new reality — that the struggle has now shifted decisively into the heart of Palestine itself.

Israel: the monolith cracks

THE DIVISIONS among the supporters of the Israeli state which have opened up at an international level as a result of the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories have also found a reflection within the Zionist state itself. Although these divisions represent tactical disagreements within the framework of Zionism, the centrifugal forces unleashed present new opportunities for anti-Zionists in the Israeli state.

Polarisation has been growing within the Israeli state for a long time. The break-up of the national consensus has been speeded by the traumatic experience of the invasion of Lebanon — the first time that Zionism had been unable to hold together its forces during war — and by the depth and length of the present Palestinian uprising.

The Israeli national unity government (it is the perverse logic of Zionism that allows the ultra-right Likud and the Labour Party to unite) is coming

under increasing strain as the uprising continues and international condemnation rises.

By Rashid Ashraf

For the Likud the uprising presents an opportunity to move further to the right. They advocate unconditional defence of, and indeed stepped-up, Zionist expropriation of the occupied territories — Zionists have already expropriated nearly 40 per

cent of the land in the territories occupied in 1967. Continued support for apartheid policies, and casting about for methods of 'encouraging' a transfer of more Palestinians into neighbouring states, are the cornerstones of the Likud's response to the uprising.

For the Labour Party the uprisings are an incentive to pursue more vigorously its aim of reaching an understanding with Jordan. It aims to contain the Palestinians by turning the West Bank and Gaza into bantustans policed either by Jordan alone or in collaboration with the Israeli state. This plan also fits in neatly with the objectives set by Arafat for the PLO — except that he sees himself, rather than the Zionists, administering the 'liberated' territories with Jordan.

The Communist Party, and the Democratic Front

which it controls, had been campaigning for an international peace conference. The uprisings took it by surprise. After initially sidelining the uprisings the Communist Party was forced by mass pressure into calling a Palestinian general strike in the Israeli state in solidarity with the struggle. This momentum is being carried through local branches although nationally the party remains passive.

The 'Progressive List', which united left Israelis and left Zionists with various Palestinian currents, has undergone a series of splits with several Palestinians withdrawing in protest at the lack of democracy and over-representation of Israelis in its leadership.

These divergences within the political parties have also found an echo in Israeli society generally.

Peace Now, a Jewish-only pressure group allied to the Labour Party, sprang up in opposition to the war in Lebanon. At that time it was able to mobilise 400,000 people on the streets to demand the return of the Zionist troops.

However because it could not break out of the Zionist straitjacket, it has been almost paralysed by the present uprising. It has failed to call for the withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories — a demand which has far more serious implications for the Israeli state than withdrawal from Lebanon.

Several weeks into the uprising, Peace Now called a number of demonstrations. But the slogans raised were for a 'political solution' — along the lines of a joint administration with Jordan over the occupied ter-

ritories, as proposed by the Labour Party.

Another organisation which sprang up in response to the Lebanese invasion, Yesh Gvul ('Enough' or 'There is a Frontier') is a movement of reserve soldiers which has moved further than Peace Now. Even before the uprising there was a debate developing within Yesh Gvul about refusing to serve in the occupied territories.

The uprising gave a strong impetus to those opposed to serving in the occupied territories and helped to regenerate the movement and broaden its appeal. It organised a demonstration of several hundred people at a roadblock on the border of the Israeli state and the Gaza Strip. The demonstration was in opposition to the atrocities being committed in the occupied territories and called on

soldiers not to obey the orders to beat up people.

If the uprising continues for a protracted period with rising Zionist casualties and more information about the repression seeping through the Israeli censorship, we can expect this movement to grow strongly.

● For a description of the political evolution of the PLO see *International Marxist Review*, spring 1987.

International Viewpoint carries regular interviews and reports from the occupied territories and inside the Israeli state. See particularly issues 133 and 134 for interviews with Israeli anti-Zionists on which these articles are based.

Both publications are available from OTHER BOOKS, PO Box 50, London N21 2XP.

and the West Bank



A Palestinian 'bantustan' in the West Bank and Gaza

ON 10 January *Al-Fajr*, a Jerusalem Palestinian weekly, published an ad signed by prominent Jews and Arabs living in the United States which called for an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In an interview with the Reuters press service on 18 January, Hanna Siniora, editor of *Al-Fajr*, specified how Israeli and Palestinian 'national rights' might be ensured at an international peace conference.

Siniora called for 'an association among Israel, Jordan, and a Palestinian state like that of the Benelux countries — with a demilitarised West Bank as the Luxemburg.'

'Palestinians, including Arafat, would accept autonomy as an interim step toward independence,' Siniora said. 'Autonomy is a step that would lead eventually to negotiations between the state of Israel and the PLO ending in a Palestinian state emerging as a result of those negotiations.'

Siniora met with US Secretary of State George Schultz in Washington on 28 January to discuss this proposal.

The strategy of the United States and Israel has always had one core objective: the eradication of the Palestinian resistance.

In the aftermath of the recent Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza, a growing wing of the US ruling class has joined the call for the establishment of a Palestinian 'mini-state' in the West Bank as a means toward accomplishing this objective and preventing the 'destabilisation' of the entire Arab East.

George Ball, who served as under secretary of state under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, recently spelled out how the United States and Israel should approach an international peace conference. 'Israel's security worries could be largely met by writing stringent, enforceable safeguards into a formal treaty, denying the new (Palestinian) state any armed force of its own and limiting the numbers and kinds of weapons available

to its police.

'As a further safeguard, the settlement could require installation of surveillance posts' larger, more numerous and more effective than those now functioning in the Sinai under Israel's peace agreement with Egypt' (*Los Angeles Times*, 17 January).

Ball explains that the establishing of what he openly admits would be a

By Ralph Schoenman

'rump Palestinian state in the West Bank' is a matter of urgency. 'If the United States does not seriously seek to bring the parties together,' Ball warns, 'the ... warfare in the Holyland will spread and intensify; sooner or later, the neighbouring Arab states — even Egypt — will be dragged into the maelstrom.'

The 'maelstrom' that this imperialist spokesperson so strongly fears is the emancipation of the Arab masses of the region from the Israeli colonial-settler state; from the feudal sheiks of the Gulf and Arabian peninsula; and from the Egyptian regime, which has reduced the workers and peasants of Egypt to a level of poverty unknown even under King Farouk.

The appeal for mutual recognition and for a peace conference to set up a Palestinian 'rump state' will do no service to the Palesti-

nian people.

Those who call for mutual recognition argue that there are two peoples and that each should be entitled to national rights — that is, a state. The Palestinians, it is implied, should close the book on pre-1967 Israel and settle for a statelet on the West Bank and Gaza.

Others who hold this position have argued on the basis of 'realism' that only by accepting the fact of the Israeli state can the Jews be induced to support the idea of Palestinian statehood.

These views are based upon a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the conflict and of the dangerous consequences of such advocacy.

Peace is inconceivable between a racist Israeli enclave — where even the 'socialist' Mapam Party excludes Palestinians from full membership in its kibbutzim — and the Arab peoples of the region.

No Palestinian could recognise Israel in good faith. Some 90 per cent of the land in Israel is administered by the Jewish National Fund under rules which require that those who lease or settle land prove that they descend from a Jewish mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

If, in the United States, we had to prove the absence of Jewish maternal ancestry to enjoy elementary rights no one would doubt the racist character of such a state.

Not one Zionist grouping supports even a 'separate but equal' Palestinian state. Even the best of them insist that Israel maintain its full military might while the Palestinians are disarmed.

The Labor Alignment and Likud reject even this. To advance the view that a Palestinian state would be permitted by any Zionist government is to succumb

to what C Wright Mills called 'crackpot realism'.

As to the illusion that the recognition of the state of Israel would remove a weapon from Zionism, quite the opposite would occur. The Zionist politicians would then be able to say that even the 'terrorists' have been forced to accept Israel.

They would say that 40 years of 'irrational intransigence' were responsible for the conflict and that at last it is clear that the only Palestinians with whom Israel can deal are the ones who all along accepted the Israeli state.

Were South Africans to advocate an international conference predicated upon the preservation of the South African regime, the guarantee of its security, and the policing of a black entity by the apartheid regime itself, no one would fail to see the social and political meaning of such a proposition.

An international conference designed to legitimise the security interests of apartheid Israel in exchange for a Palestinian 'Bantustan' can never be viable except if a Palestinian leadership were to provide this plan with protective colouration.

Such an outcome will merely hand to the PLO the unenviable task of policing the Palestinian people and of converting self-determination into another sad replica of the country-selling regimes which plague the Arab masses — from Jordan to Syria and from Egypt to the Gulf.

It was but a few years ago that no Palestinian nationalist would dare associate him or herself with so blatant an effort to betray the long years of struggle for Palestinian self-determination and emancipation, let alone translate the Palestinian cause into a plea for a role in preserving the status quo in the region

— with its grinding poverty and relentless exploitation and subordination to US imperialist control.

The rights of the Palestinian people can never be advanced in this way.

The alternative is before us in the upsurge of the Palestinian masses. The struggle awaits a political strategy which poses the need to dismantle the Zionist state of Israel and to establish a democratic and secular Palestine.

Such a programme was first advanced by Arafat's Fatah organisation in 1968 — though it has since been shunted aside in favour of the 'mini-state' proposal. The democratic Palestine of Fatah's vision was one in which Jews and Palestinians would live as equals and without discrimination.

Arafat described his proposal as follows:

'We were saying "no" to the Zionist state, but we were saying "yes" to the Jewish people of Palestine. To them we were saying, "You are welcome to live in our land, but on one condition — You must be prepared to live among us as equals, not as dominators."

We must not advocate a peace based on acquiescence, a peace based on a 'Bantustan' policed by Israel and its agents.

We must link our demands for the release of all the political prisoners in the West Bank and Gaza and for an end to the deportations of Palestinian activists to demands which address the root of the conflict in the Middle East — that is, the very existence of the state of Israel.

Ralph Schoenman is the former general secretary of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. This article first appeared in the US paper *Socialist Action* in a longer version.

Gorbachev signals rapprochement with Israel

ON 13 May last year Vasilyev, assistant director of the Institute of Africa of the USSR Academy of Sciences, wrote an article in the Moscow daily *Izvestia* in support of the idea of an international conference on the Middle East. Vasilyev's article is revealing:

By Ralph Schoenman

'To put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Soviet Union favours an international peace conference ... A close examination of our proposals will show that they do not encroach on the rights and security of Israel ... The existence of the state of Israel cannot be debated at an international conference.'

Vasilyev's support to Israel and his concern for its security — the rationale the Zionist state has always used to crush the Palestinian people — should come as no surprise. The Soviet Union, along with the United States, was one of the first to recognise the

Zionist state in 1948.

It is nonetheless somewhat surprising that on 19 January this year, at the very moment the Israeli government was imposing a policy of collective punishment upon the insurgent people of the West Bank and Gaza, the Soviet Union announced that an Israeli delegation would be welcomed in Moscow to discuss the resumption of diplomatic relations.

The Soviet bureaucracy broke off time with Israel following the 1967 Middle East war. But within the last year the Soviet Union has established a consulate in Israel.

Moreover, according to the *Washington Post* (20 January): 'Moscow has said that ties (with Israel) could be resumed in the course of a Middle East settlement process, dropping its insistence that Israel first retreat from territories occupied in 1967.'

This is just one more example of what Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev meant when he promised Ronald Reagan that he would help promote 'regional stability' in key areas of the world.



Peres and Shamir: Left and Right united against the Palestinians.



Key elections for NUS

THE RESPONSE of the National Union of Students to the current climate of vicious Tory attack lies in the balance as we approach Easter NUS (elections) conference. The response from the colleges around the country is clear - mass opposition to the Education Reform Bill, to the Alton Bill, to Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, and massive support for the healthworkers and for Palestinian uprisings against Israeli state brutality. But what direction is NUS itself going to take? A key indicator will be elections to NUS's national executive.

The national executive of NUS is 21 places strong. Last year's Easter NUS conference elected a majority of Labour candidates to the NEC of NUS, through a combination of eight 'official' Labour candidates (for which read Democratic Left), three Socialist Students in NOLS (SSiN) candidates, and one Further Education Labour Students candidate (for which read *Militant*).

In a situation where the majority of students are clearly looking to Labour students for the leadership of NUS, the response of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) is crucial in determining the future direction of NUS. For some years now, NOLS, which is controlled by the Democratic Left co-thinkers of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, has not stood a full slate for the national leadership of NUS.

This has recently led to places being filled by other Labour candidates, notably Pat Younge - Labour Party Black Sections supporter - and SSiN, and by Communist Students, Liberals and, until last year, Tories.

This year, NOLS have taken the extraordinary steps of voting to stand a reduced minority slate of eight for the NUS executive,

and of condemning Labour candidates who stand against or in addition to official Labour candidates. This puts NOLS in the dubious political position of being able on paper to support a Tory candidate, but not an unofficial Labour candidate such as Pat Younge.

By Polly Vittorini

Its political role is to ensure that Labour elects Tories/SDP/Liberals to NUS executive - and potentially even secures them a majority. A witch hunt is then launched against any Labour candidates who attempts to deprive Tories, Liberals or SDP candidates of winning places on NUS executive.

By standing a reduced slate the Democratic Left remove the possibility of official Labour Party candidates winning a majority on NUS executive. By calling Labour candidates who contend seats for which they are not standing 'scabs' they map out for themselves a political alliance with Eurocommunists, Liberals, SDP and Tory students! For who do the Democratic Left (DL) expect to fill the majority of places on the NUS executive if Labour doesn't run a full slate?

Having declared as scabs all other Labour

candidates, only Socialist Worker-Students (SWSS) and parties to the right of Labour remain. SWSS, who do not believe in taking up 'bureaucratic posts', do not stand in any seriousness for the leadership of NUS, and could not be expected to gain more than one part-time post on the NUS executive at most.

Communist Students are standing a slate of only three candidates. A supposedly independent alliance, called Students for Students, is standing a full slate. A major component of this alliance is a well-known SDP student from Manchester University, a fact the DL might well remember if they hope to give support to these candidates.

All this is carried out against the democratic vote of NUS members. NUS is one of the more democratic organisations in Britain. The Tories have a negligible level of support at NUS conference. The idea, generally put forward in the name of 'pluralism', that in order to be a representative union, NUS has to have all political parties on its executive, is tantamount to NOLS creating space for right-wing parties that lack any real political support in the membership of NUS.

Such a trajectory can bring nothing but disaster in NUS. Time after time students are demonstrating a call for mass mobilisation, on the basis of support for the rights of all students, of the oppressed, campaigning in conjunction with the labour movement, and of a clear anti-imperialist commitment to solidarity with oppressed peoples in struggle internationally.

An alliance with openly bourgeois and reactionary forces for the leadership of

NUS is clearly not a satisfactory answer to this call. Nor will it in any way allow NUS as a national union to defend the interests of its members against attacks on living standards, or on civil and political rights. It removes the possibility of any meaningful or effective solidarity with international struggles against imperialism, making a mockery of, for instance, NUS's policy of support for British withdrawal from Ireland and self-determination of the Irish people.

Nor can this line of march for the Democratic Left be in any sense justified as a way of ensuring the participation in NUS elections of women, black and lesbian and gay students. At the meeting that decided to stand a slate of eight, the proposal put by *Campaign Student* that NOLS stand a majority slate and campaign for candidates to come forward from the NUS women's campaign, the NUS lesbian and gay campaign, and from the National Black Students Alliance, was voted down overwhelmingly.

When the matter of NUS elections was raised at the Labour Party NEC, a resolution was put by Skinner and Livingstone that, as in local government, Labour should stand a full slate for the NUS executive. This resolution was defeated by 14 votes to 4.

Thus every bureaucratic method should be expected in the DL's fight against 'unofficial' Labour candidates for NUS executive. This is symptomatic of the inability on the part of the DL to win this fight politically, both inside NOLS and in NUS. This is the explanation of the continuing bureaucratic exclu-

sion of other political currents from full participation in NOLS.

A particularly clear example of this political inability was seen during the debate on Palestine at NUS conference in December 1987. The DL tried to defeat a 'two-states' position on Palestine, safeguarding the right of a sectarian and expansionist state in Israel, being put forward by SSiN, by putting forward a toned-down version of the same argument. As a result they succeeded in losing a vote which had been won the previous day, when it had been argued that Israel's Law of Return was racist. In the end NUS, after 11 years of ignorance, failed to adopt any policy on Palestine, and is now without mandate to respond to the uprisings in the occupied territories.

The response of SSiN to this crisis of the NOLS leadership is to stand a slate of 12 for the NUS executive. Despite its increasingly pro-imperialist and chauvinist politics, and its complete lack of any strategy for winning the support of the labour movement SSiN is likely to win a substantial number of seats on the NUS executive, if only because of their vocal criticism of the DL.

This year, for the first time, *Campaign Student* is running for the leadership of NUS. The *Campaign Student* slate is not standing in opposition to official Labour candidates, and calls for a vote for them. *Campaign Student's* participation in this year's elections is on the basis of increasing Labour's presence on the incoming leadership of NUS, putting forward socialist policies, and drawing together a campaigning majority on the new executive.

NUS must discuss Palestine

THE RESPONSE of students to the Palestinian uprisings in the territories occupied by Israel has been magnificent. Despite a huge Zionist lobby organising to stop resolutions going to NUS conference, last week NUS received the largest recorded number of motions on any single subject in its history in support of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.

More motions have

been submitted to this conference on this issue than have been submitted at any one time on education cuts. Despite this historic achievement, and despite NUS's refusal to discuss Palestine for 11 years, the standing orders of NUS conference do not allow the subject to be discussed because the official total of motions

received does not reach the required 50 necessary for a discussion at two consecutive conferences. This number has never been achieved on any subject.

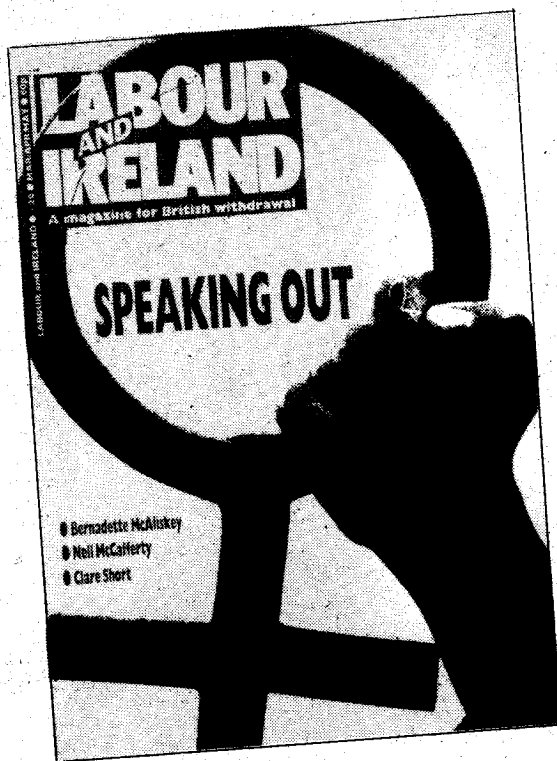
While this procedural device is used to block debate Israeli soldiers continue to beat and kill Palestinians every day and townships in the occupied ter-

ritories remain under total curfew and military occupation. Despite this the issue cannot be discussed according to the standing orders.

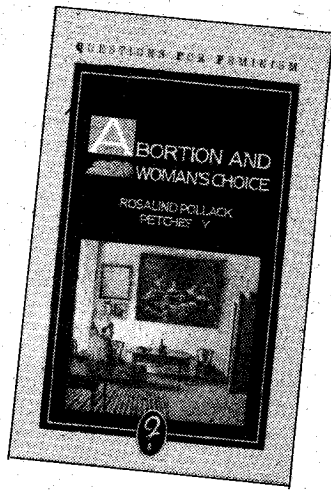
A call has gone out from Palestinian students, and from Students for Palestine, for colleges to send in amendments, and to prioritise Palestine for discussion, thereby mak-

ing it possible to overturn this ridiculous standing order at Easter conference, and to win NUS to organise solidarity with the Palestinians nationally.

Students for Palestine, which is helping organise this campaign, can be contacted c/o the World University service, 20 Compton Terrace, London N5 2UN, 01 226 3369. GUPS can be contacted c/o 4 Clareville Grove, London SW7, 01 370 3244.



Clare Short, Bernadette McAliskey, Nell McCafferty, Inez McCormack and other women have contributed to the first women's edition of *Labour and Ireland* which is now available. Order copies from: *Labour and Ireland*, BM Box 5355, London WC1N 3XX.



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Veronica Beechey

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The Ford settlement

The Ford strike was the most significant private sector dispute for many years. It has resulted in an undoubted victory — although the Dagenham and Halewood shop stewards were correct to judge that more could have been exacted from a worried Ford management if the deal had been rejected.

The wage settlement of 14 per cent over two years is likely to set the pace for wage settlements throughout private industry — despite government attempts to prevent this. It is also likely to promote struggle in the public sector — where the Ford workers success will make Thatcher even more determined to hold down wages.

By Mary Tripp

The final deal was accepted by all Ford plants except the Dagenham assembly plant which voted against by 53 per cent to 47 per cent. The union officials, led by the AEU's Jimmy Airlie, who had recommended earlier support of the company's three year deal, rejected in a ballot, rushed to claim credit for a victory which, left to them, would never have been won. As the *Guardian* delicately put it: 'Mr Airlie did not say that, like the management, the national union leadership had failed to understand the depth of hostility to a three year pay deal an imposed changes in working practices.'

The knock on effect of the victory on the Land Rover dispute is obvious.

But despite the victory at Fords there is no sign of either the employers or the government falling into a panic. They rightly judge that Ford's reflected the substantial increase in profitability and productivity across much of British manufacturing industry over the last 18 months.

Ford's recently reported annual results showing record profits of \$4.6 billion — to which Ford Europe contributed \$1.07 billion or an increase of 93 per cent. In these circumstances, unlike Land Rover, the Ford company could afford the settlement — even if it didn't want to pay it.

But the dispute did show the increased vulnerability of Ford, and almost certainly other manufacturers, to strike action. Ford's increased profitability, especially in

Europe, is based on new production methods, learned from Japan. These involve holding down stocks at low levels, to cut overheads, and cutting out duplicate sources of supply. Both these methods can be used by manufacturers in Japan — where the possibility of industrial action is low. However the speed with which the strike hit reveals the problems faced by manufacturers in introducing such methods into Europe — where unions are far stronger.

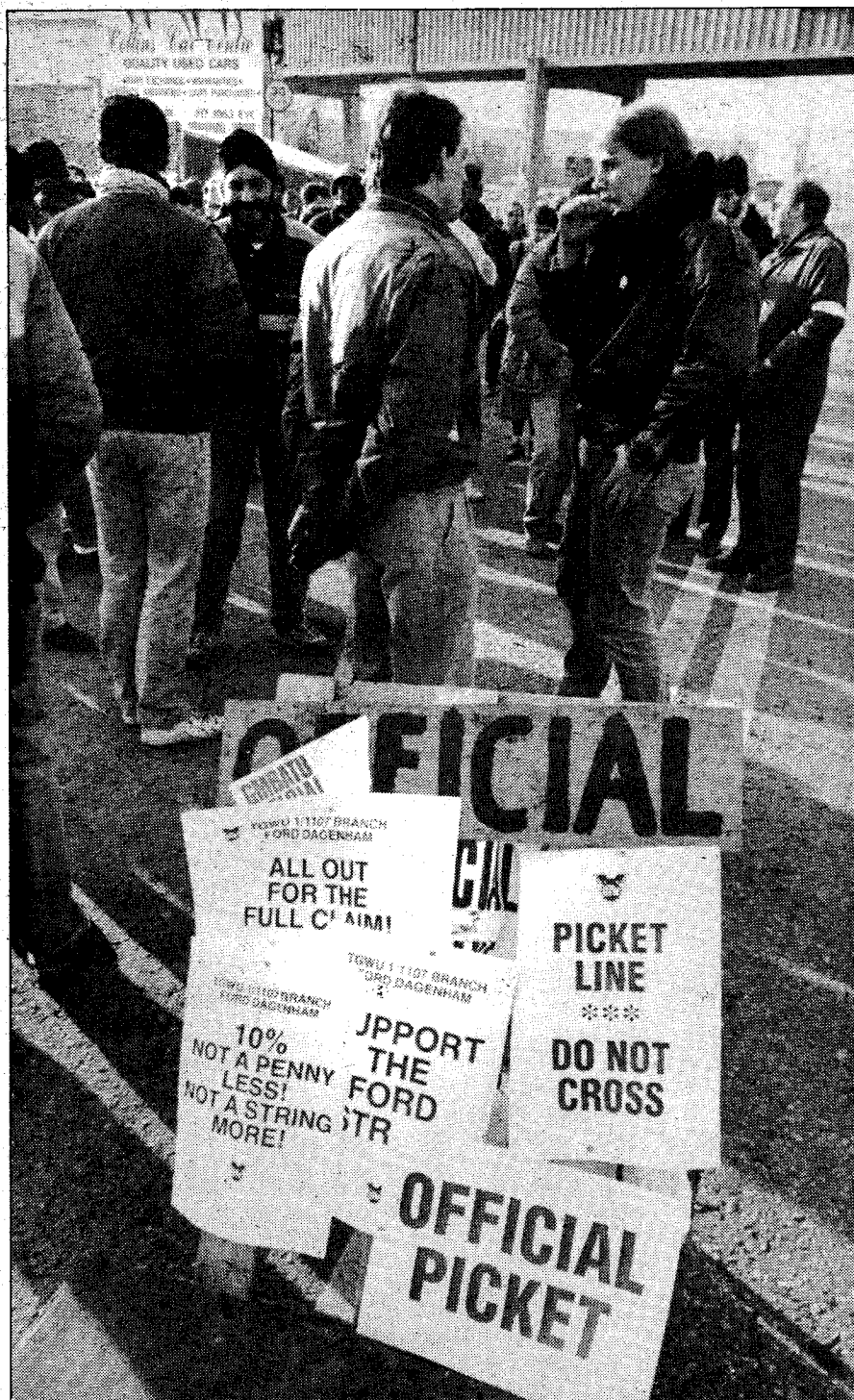
Lowering overhead costs by cutting back on stocks, and streamlining through instituting a single source for each component, led to an immediate knock on effect throughout Ford Europe of a strike in a single country or even plant — a far cry from the 1970's when Ford, as a matter of policy, had a duplicate production line in another country for every component.

The high profits, and the knock on effect, almost certainly motivated Ford's parent company in Detroit to step in and insist on a rapid settlement. But the vulnerability shown to the strike is a major boost to Ford workers confidence for future struggles. And it is certain that the new vulnerability seen is not confined to Ford.

The successful stoppage caused by the strike leaves Ford workers in a better position to resist the next round of the company's offensive — the drive to force through flexible working.

Ford is already making great play of its claim that while the Nissan plant in Tyne and Wear produces cars at a labour cost of £315 per car, a Ford car out of Halewood costs £500 in labour.

Both the willingness of AEU and TGWU officials to accept the original company offer, and Airlie's statements during the dispute that they were concerned to maintain a profitable Ford's shows that no help can be expected from national union officials in blocking the company's of-



fensive on flexibility and job conditions.

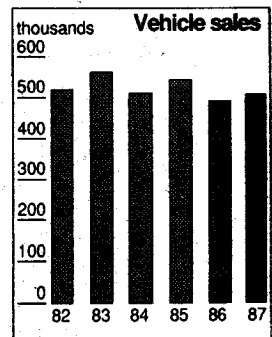
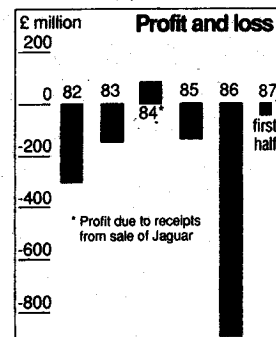
The strike secured a victory on this in forcing Ford to negotiate local agreements with the unions on flexible working but the company clearly sees this as a problem to be overcome as rapidly as possible.

Ford is already gearing up for the battle to come by reviewing its policy of producing components from

only one source. Senior management in Ford Europe have indicated that some duplication of production will probably be reintroduced to guard against the devastating effect of even a short term stoppage. But this expensive step will just make the company more anxious to increase its profitability through a flexibility offensive.

Ford's was significant as the most substantial victory gained for some time against the employers of flexible. It will give every section of workers more confidence. But that will only make Thatcher more determined to ensure that there are the minimum of knock on effects to other sectors. In particular she will be determined to hold the line in the public sector.

ROVER GROUP PERFORMANCE



Land rover strike solid

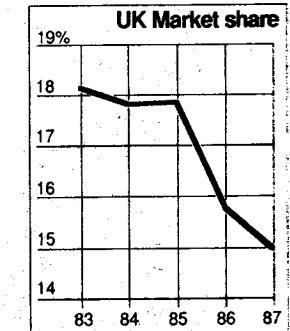
THE strike of 6000 workers at Land Rover is facing much tougher opposition than the strike at Ford. Indeed, following the setback at Ford, the government is stepping up its efforts to force Land Rover management to stand up to the strike.

On Tuesday 23 January, day two of the dispute, Thatcher weighed in with a clear threat directed at Land Rover management — give in to the workforce and the government will cut off financial support to the company.

Her aim is to take revenge on Land Rover workers for the successful strike at Ford.

The employers are clearly worried by the fact that average earnings rose by 8.5 per cent in the year to last December. A year ago the annual rate of growth was 7.5 per cent, and the last time that earnings growth was at its current level was in 1982.

At Land Rover the pressure from the government is felt particularly sharply — management of Land Rover are totally dependent on government



SINCE 1982

support to maintain profitability and develop new models.

Unlike Ford, Land Rover has been experiencing deep financial difficulties over the last few years, with a falling share of the British market and low profit rates.

But despite that, Thatcher's threat to withdraw financial support is a bluff. As was made clear when the government was forced to back down over plans for an American takeover of Land Rover, British capital, and finally even the government, is not prepared to see Land Rover pass into foreign hands — let alone close.

The company claim that their current pay offer amounts to 14 per cent over two years, approximately the level of the Ford settlement. But in fact, with the consolidation of bonuses into the basic pay it amounts to no more than 8 per cent.

The determination of the workforce was indicated by the solid response to the strike call, with mass pickets assembling at all the company's main gates. That determination will be needed in what looks like it will be a tough fight.

AB Micro strike against single union deal

MEMBERS of the newly formed Manufacturing, Science, Finance union and APEX at AB Micro in the Rhondda Valley, Wales, held a 24 hour strike on 23 January, against managements attempts to impose a single union agreement.

At the beginning of February management informed the three unions in the plant that they planned to institute a single union agreement and existing recognition was to be terminated.

The AEU went ahead and negotiated a single union agreement. Management are now waiting for the AEU to sign the agreement.

The agreement would mean recognition would be withdrawn from the MSF

and APEX. New terms and conditions are being negotiated without the staff unions being consulted.

The staff unions were so outraged that they balloted for action. The vote was 89:3 in favour of action. For two weeks shop stewards and fulltime officials of the two unions tried to persuade management to withdraw. But to no avail, so it was decided to strike for one day. The strike was completely solid and production was severely affected.

Staff unions are still hoping management will withdraw the single union agreement.

The TUC nationally has been informed and has written to the AEU telling them to take no precipitate action. MSF has referred the whole matter to the TUC's disputes committee.

Education — escalate the action

KENNETH Bakers education reform bill poses the greatest threat to state education since 1945. To defeat it the widest mobilisation of the labour movement is necessary, but this is not the course of the present NUT leadership.

By Ray Sirotkin Lambeth NUT

Prior to the extremely successful strike action in London on 9 February, Neil Fletcher, ILEA leader, wrote to Fred Jarvis, general secretary of the NUT, pleading with him to call off the action.

This pathetic call from the leader of ILEA, who is clearly incapable of fighting the Tories, was rightly ignored by the NUT leadership at that time.

A rally of over 4000 teachers heard from health workers on the common fight against the Tories, this was followed by lobbying of London Labour MPs for support to those in struggle as well as parliamentary opposition to Baker.

A springboard for action has been built, yet instead of accelerating this the NUT leadership has not to date sanctioned strike action on 8 March, the day of action called involving other ILEA trade unions fighting for their own

survival.

This refusal is partly explained by the NUT leadership's total opposition to the leadership of the NUT in Inner London. The ILTA leadership is the most left wing leadership in the union and has led militant action in defence of London teachers jobs, living standards and level of service provision.

Alongside this the NUT takes pride in being a 'non-affiliated' union which is 'non-political'. The union cannot avoid involving itself in politics, and the real interpretation of this 'non-political' status is that it has a strategy of allying with what it sees as 'progressive' forces from all parties, in-



cluding the Liberal Party. Thus it supported a day conference with Paddy Ashdown speaking, and gave him a full page in *The Teacher* (the NUT's newspaper). Not surprising-

ly, Ashdown used the space given to attack any notion of industrial action by teachers, rather than attacking Baker.

As always with such 'popular frontist' strategies, real possibilities of mass action are abandoned in order to hold together an alliance with the bourgeoisie.

This is why the NUT has so far refused to call for strike action along with other trade unions on 8 March.

Only mass action, not an alliance with the Liberal Party and Paddy Ashdown, is needed to defeat Baker. That is what should be prepared on a London-wide basis for 8 March.

A Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

£8000 Fund drive

THE socialist press has never been able to survive solely on the income from sales, and Socialist Action is no exception. In order to meet our production costs we need to raise a definite amount over and above our regular income.

Many of our readers and subscribers already send us money because they know that we depend upon their support to survive. We have recently looked into our budget for the coming year, and in order to break

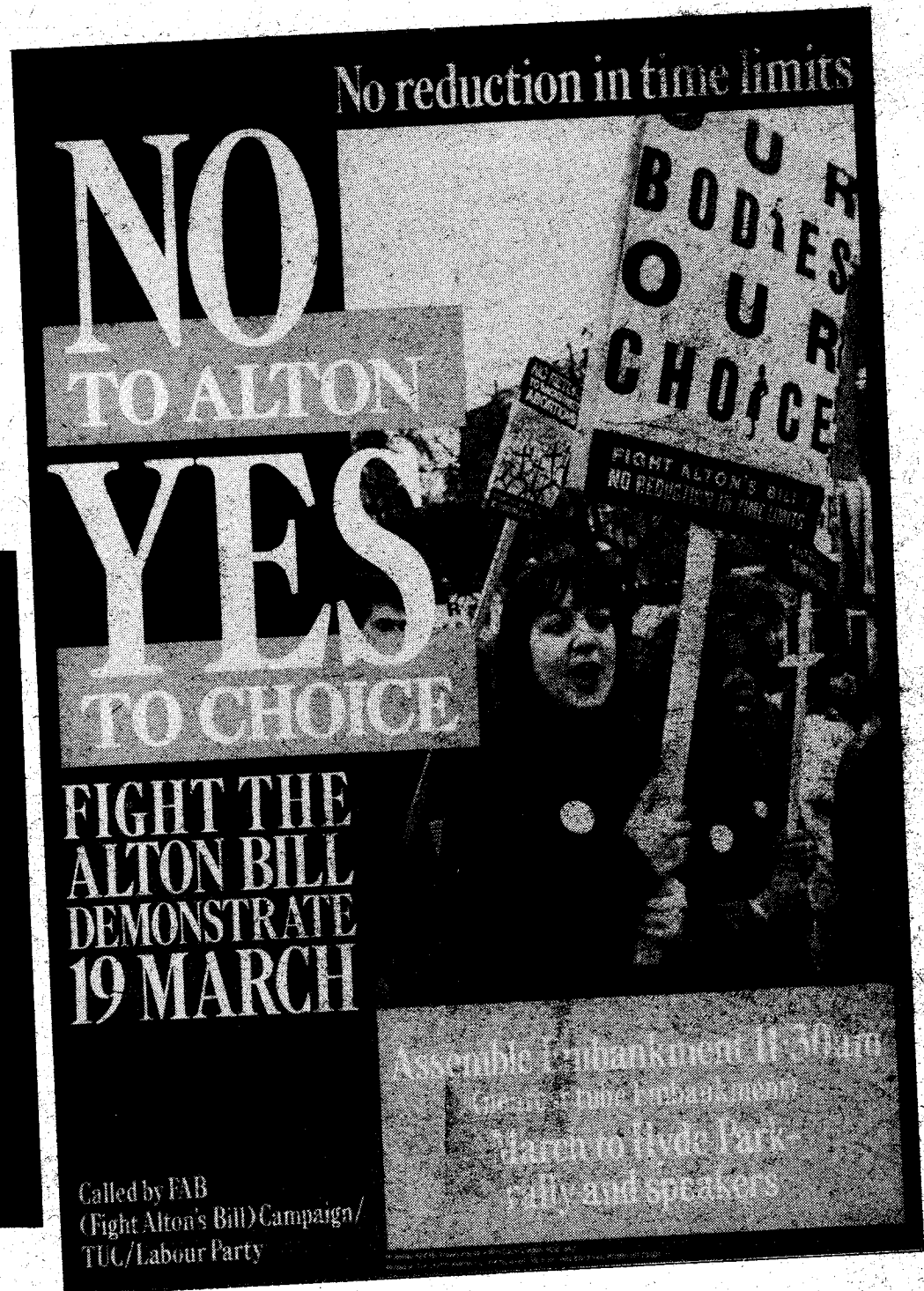
even on our production costs we need to raise £8000 over the year. We are therefore launching an £8000 Publications Fund to underwrite the paper.

We hope that you will organise fund-raising activities as well as simply digging into your pockets. In each issue of the paper we will bring you up to date on how we are doing in meeting our targets.

Send your cheques or cash to Socialist Action Fund Drive, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP. Cheques should be made payable to Socialist Action (publication fund).

All out on 19 March!

NO to Alton YES to choice



Defend abortion rights

THE 19 March demonstration against David Alton's anti-abortion bill is now jointly sponsored by the Labour Party as well as the Fight Alton's Bill campaign and the TUC.

This support from the entire labour movement has to be turned into banners and people marching through London on 19 March. The Scottish TUC and the North-west TUC have booked trains and fleets of coaches have been hired from other areas. All this transport must be filled for the day to be a success.

The January meeting of the Labour Party NEC agreed to jointly sponsor the demonstration, and is circulating all women's sections and CLPs with material about the march.

The TUC is producing its own leaflets advertising the march which can be ordered from the TUC through individual unions. Other unions, like NUPE and NALGO, are producing their own material for circulation to branches.

Other unions, including the TGWU and the NCU, have played an active role in the meetings with the TUC to plan the march.

However local activity, contacting union branches and workplaces, ensuring every Labour Party ward is covered, and that student unions are mobilising, will be necessary to turn this formal support into a mass demonstration.

A successful demonstration is central to the next stage of fighting



against the Alton bill. The parliamentary committee established after the second reading to examine the bill has not yet begun to meet, though it will do so very shortly.

The membership of the committee is composed of straightforward anti-

abortionists on Alton's side, and clear pro-choice members on the other side. On Alton's side Ann Winterton MP has withdrawn, to be replaced by Nicholas Bennett MP, a member of the SPUC executive. However, despite this make up of the

committee it may well be amended in committee stage, by Alton's supporters, to a 22 or 24 week limit, instead of the existing 18 weeks.

If the bill is amended in this way it will be even more difficult to ensure its defeat at the third and final reading, unless, at a minimum, all Labour MPs are committed to vote against it.

The largest possible showing on the streets on 19 March will help step up the pressure on MPs to vote in line with women's abortion rights. The rally will be addressed by representatives of the labour movement and pro-choice movement, doctors and representatives of health service workers.

While the task of FAB is to defeat the attempt by Alton to amend the 1967 Abortion Act, women's abortion rights are being

undermined every day by the cuts in the NHS. A smaller and smaller proportion of women are able to get free abortion on the NHS, and most have to pay for abortion at private clinics.

Alton would do a hundred times more to make late abortion unnecessary by joining the campaign for the defence of the NHS and the extension of early abortion facilities in NHS clinics, than by introducing legislation to criminalise women and doctors.

It is indicative of the sheer hypocrisy of the arguments of Alton and his supporters on the subject of late abortion that they are not seen in the vanguard of the struggle for the NHS. Most of those Tory MPs who will be supporting Alton's bill, will also vote against allocating more funding to the NHS, and

would probably also vote against women having access to free abortion on the NHS at all, unless they were at death's door.

Yet it is by adequate funding for a network of outpatient abortion clinics, with a self-referral system, that late abortion can really be reduced. Late abortion will always be necessary for women who develop problems during pregnancy, or who do not find out they are pregnant until later on, but it is through safe and easy access to early abortion that such cases can be reduced to a minimum.

Late abortion is not a pleasant or easy choice for any woman, but precisely those women who need late abortion are those who are the most desperate, the most in need of abortion rights.

The march on 19 March is to defend the rights of those women.