

Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

WAPPING

NO



SELL OUT

BRENDA DEAN, leader of the print union SOGAT is to ballot the sacked News International printworkers over Rupert Murdoch's 'final' settlement of the Wapping dispute. Five and a half thousand workers have been on strike for 18 weeks demanding reinstatement and union recognition at the Wapping plant. This latest offer refuses both demands. It has been angrily rejected by the rank and file printworkers.

Murdoch's offer centres on a £50 million payout of the workforce and the 'gift' of the Times old printing premises. This is in comparison with the derisory £15 million which had previously offered and only part of the Times Grays Inn Road buildings. This foremost admirer of Maggie Thatcher has cynically suggested that these old premises and clapped out presses could be used to print a 'Labour Party paper'. Unity Trust, the trade union bank involved in discussions over such a new paper, has valued the freehold at a mere £1 million.

Despite the character of the offer, the SOGAT leadership has refused to reject it. Moreover, Norman Willis, TUC general secretary, was fully involved in the secret negotiations which hammered out the offer. From the beginning Willis has refused to appeal to the trade union movement to mobilise in support of the demands of reinstatement and union

recognition.

Willis and Dean hope that in a secret, individual ballot the sacked printworkers will be baboozled into casting a vote. They bank on the combined pressure of the media and themselves convincing strikers that there is no other alternative to accepting Murdoch's offer.

This is what is so important about the London branches insistence on a workplace ballot where workers can decide collectively which course of action to take. Only in such a context can workers really feel their collective strength. It was through such a workplace ballot that they had decided to strike in the first place.

The planned mass meeting will play the same role. If such a course is adhered to, all the indications are that a majority will reject Murdoch's deal and continue the fight.

Such a rejection is clearly right. Norman Willis is of the opinion

that the trebling of Murdoch's previous 'final' offer was the result of his negotiating skills. Nothing could be further from the truth. Murdoch is more and more feeling the pressure of the mass action mobilised against him. It is clear that Dean's tactic of reliance on a consumer boycott of the News International titles has failed. But the upturn in mass picketing in recent weeks organised against the wishes of Dean and Co has begun to bite.

The regular demonstrations to Wapping have become a focus for the whole labour movement and a symbol of workers determination. They have resulted in the demoralisation of Murdoch's scab workforce, even if they have not yet managed to prevent the titles getting out. But even this objective is getting more realisable.

In addition, the net is tightening around the wholesale distribution centres up and down the country. This is causing Murdoch major headaches. It is because of the success of the actions against Murdoch that he has upped his offer.

But, of course, the printers cannot win alone. They need the active support of the rest of the labour movement.

Printworkers' response:

GARY PYE,
Times Clerical Chapel and SOGAT support group organiser:

THE sell out proposals can be defeated. The overwhelming sentiment is for rejection.

Even at the level of a bribe, the £50 million falls well short. With this, the maximum people can get even after 30 years service is £18,600. The *Express* paid out £40,000 last month to buy peace.

But as against the *Express* workers, we have been at it now for 18 weeks. We have put up with too much to throw in the towel now. We came out for proper recognition and reinstatement. We won't go back till we've won it.

Dean is attempting to put across the story that she 'did all she could'. But this is because she never tried to lead us to victory over our basic demands. This is why the last mass meeting gave her such a roasting. There is to be another mass meeting on Friday 30 May. There we should give the go-ahead to the London district council to take over the leadership of the dispute. We should decide on a workplace ballot if we are going to have one. The fact is

that we will be in a much better position to make the LDC responsible to us in struggle than we have been able to do with Dean and company.

The sell-out deal must be rejected. With the help of the rest of the labour movement we can win a famous victory.

JIM MASON,
Sun and News of the World Deputy FOC, London RIRMA branch

BRENDA's attempt to do a Pontius Pilot on us is typical of the way she has (mis)led this dispute. Refusing to make a recommendation means handing it to the media to influence people's minds.

Insisting on a secret ballot is to copy Murdoch. The forms should be available at the mass meeting and we should fill them out together.

What Dean and Willis are saying by refusing to reject this deal is that you're better off to be a scab. The scabs have got a job and all we've got with Murdoch's measly offer is the money we've lost in over four months of strike.

SOCIALIST ACTION

No expulsions

AT FIRST sight there might seem no obvious connection between the expulsion of Tony Mulhearn, and other members of Liverpool party, by the NEC last week and the wave of racist and other reactionary material which has been coming out in the Kinnockite press since the 8 May local government elections. After all *Militant* is scarcely in the vanguard of the fight for black, women's and gay rights in the party — or in society. In fact it is ironic that on many issues affecting black people, women, and lesbians and gays, *Militant* votes solidly with the very right wing bureaucrats who are expelling them from the party.

But in reality the racist, anti-gay, and anti-women's rights attacks and the witch hunt are deeply connected. *Militant* supporters are not being expelled from the party for what is rotten about their politics — their opposition to black sections, their capitulations to racism, their British chauvinist position on Ireland, their opposition to the demands of the Women's Action Committee. Kinnock, or the EETPU/AEU for that matter, is extremely happy with all those positions. *Militant* supporters are being expelled for building thousands of council houses in Liverpool, and trying to defend services.

This is in fact why the gale of racist, anti-gay material — as well as the attacks on WAC — is coming out of the Kinnockite press. Because what is involved in both the witch hunt and, most dramatically in the black communities' gains in the local government elections is two completely different conceptions, and two completely different roads, for the labour movement.

For the bourgeoisie the role of the labour movement is seen as a police force over the working class, and its allies. The role assigned to the Labour Party is to carry out such tasks as imposing incomes policies, defying conference decisions calling for an end to nuclear power, and all the familiar rigmorole we have seen for decades.

But the working class and oppressed built the labour movement for a quite different purpose. They thought it was an instrument to fight capital — not police themselves. Periodically these two different paths totally clash in the labour movement. Because periodically forces that actually are dedicated to defending the interests of the exploited and oppressed win control of sections of the labour movement.

Arthur Scargill did that when he led the NUM to fight against the attack on jobs in the mining industry. Bernie Grant did it when he used his position to politically defend the black community of Broadwater Farm against the racist onslaught of the police. With all their limits Liverpool were doing it when they built council houses and tried to defend jobs and services.

Representatives of the oppressed also come forward to symbolise a way forward for the communities they represent — and what a superb step forward to see Bernie Grant, or Linda Bellos, elected as council leaders as against the right-wing racists that for so long occupied Labour's 'corridors of power'.

But when someone does win a section of the labour movement and use it for what it was intended for, the capitalist class will go to any length to destroy it. That is why, two years after the strike began, the NUM's funds are still held by the courts. That is why probably the most vicious individual racist campaign of modern years was carried out against Bernie Grant. It is also why the campaign was carried out to expel *Militant*, the real goal is to smash anyone who stands up to capital. Whether your name is Scargill, Bernie Grant, Benn, Hatton, Bellos, or you merely happen to be black, female or gay — that is your belong to one of the groups that make up the overwhelmingly majority of humanity — just expect to get it in the neck from Kinnock.

Tribune's support for the witch hunt is all of a piece with the vicious racist articles that have appeared in its pages, and those of other pro-Kinnock papers, since the local government elections.

The left must defend *Militant*. It must also role back one of the nastiest campaigns of recent years. Those who thought there was something progressive in 'realignment' should think again.

Politics Today

The Kinnockites' racist offensive

THE LOCAL government elections saw a major victory for black Labour candidates. The number of black councillors increased from less than 60 in 1982 to nearly 200. Advances were made in Birmingham, Manchester and other parts of the country as well as London. But these successes have been met by a vicious racist outburst by the newspapers which support Neil Kinnock, and by individual supporters of Kinnock within the Labour Party.

This racist outburst was demonstrably interconnected and co-ordinated. It was accompanied by attacks on women's self-organisation in the party and on lesbians and gay men.

Tribune's 16 May edition set the pattern with an article under the title 'Did anti-black prejudice cost Labour crucial seats.' This stated: 'Labour's strong showing in the last week's local elections may not have been quite enough to ensure a majority at Westminster because of an unexpectedly good Alliance showing in some areas, and some voters' apparent prejudice against black and openly gay Labour candidates in the inner cities.'

The editorial in the same edition of *Tribune* makes the attack even more baldly: 'Several black Labour candidates polled less well than their white colleagues.'

Prejudice

Appropriately enough, the same issue of *Tribune* contains an attack on the campaign of the Labour Women's Action Committee (LWAC) under the title 'Constitutional change will not win women's votes.'

In an individual contribution to the discussion on the election results in Islington South, Phil Kelly a *Tribune* staff journalist, and defeated white male candidate, continues: 'For those who deny the existence of these prejudices, I invite them to examine the election results. Every single black or openly gay candidate, and even those with non-English names, regardless of party, polled fewer votes than white English-named candidates of the same party.'

The 16 May edition of *New Statesman* echoes the same racist theme. It selects the following photo-caption: 'Enley Taylor: attracted 180 fewer votes than his white running mate in Earlsfield

ward, Wandsworth — and 112 fewer than the successful Tory.'

By James Lark

The accompanying *New Statesman* article states: 'Racist and reactionary abstentions could also account for Labour's failure to win control in model Tory Wandsworth where two black and one 'out' gay candidate lost in marginal split wards where white heterosexual candidates were elected — Earlsfield and Furzedown.'

Veneer

New Society of 16 May takes up the same line 'Enley Taylor is also black and given the existence of racism this almost certainly accounts for the fact that he was beaten into fourth place in Earlsfield ward of the London borough of Wandsworth, when his fellow Labour candidates topped the poll.'

This racist rubbish is refuted by the Black Section which has pointed out the advances registered in those areas where the Labour Party went out to fight racism. This was the issue in Haringey where Bernie Grant increased his vote by taking on and defeating a disgraceful racist Tory campaign. In other areas like Wandsworth racism was not tackled and black candidates were put up in small numbers, and in the least winnable seats, then blamed for Labour's defeats. Where Labour fails to fight against racism it is scarcely hard to find 'evidence' it exists!

This pseudo-intellectual justification given to racism and anti-gay pre-



The number of black Labour councillors in London has more than doubled as a result of the Black Section's campaign

judice by the Kinnockite press gives a cover for some of the most reactionary and backward elements in the Labour Party to re-emerge.

Thus, in Islington South — where Phil Kelly states 'People who were not going to vote for us told me that the council had done far too much for blacks and gays' — a new right-wing has emerged demanding that anti-racist, equal opportunities, and internationalist activities be shelved by the local council because they alienate white voters. In Glasgow the Labour group voted 35-14 not to include lesbians and gay men in their equal opportunities policy. To call it by its proper name this is a truly reactionary campaign. It provides a 'respectable' veneer for prejudices whose sole beneficiaries are Labour's most implacable enemies.

Racism

The Labour Party's long tradition of pander-

ing to racism is now being revived by the selective presentation of cases where black candidates are standing in the least winnable seats — and omitting reference to those successes as in Haringey, Brent and Lambeth based on mobilising the black community and fighting racism. It blames black people for the failures, and racism, of the Labour Party itself.

It is ironic, but logical that *Tribune* and *New Statesman*, which as flagships of 'realignment' on the Labour left have tried to clothe themselves in the reflected glory of the campaigns of women, black people and the fighters for lesbian and gay rights, are now playing the role of front runners for Kinnock's backers' futile and repellant attempt to win two or three per cent more votes by pandering to reactionary ideas.

These journals sought to identify themselves as the champions of a 'new style of politics' which put anti-sexism and anti-racism centrally in its perspectives. This was

against forces such as the NUM or their supporters who were allegedly 'macho and old fashioned'.

Now, whilst the NUM stands by the demands of the Labour Women's Action Committee, and the Black Section it is *Tribune* and *New Statesman* which are the flag ships of Kinnock's attempt to silence these campaigns.

Tony Benn has said that the only positive contribution he's seen from 're-alignment' is the witch hunt. We can now add to its 'achievements' pseudo-intellectual apologetics for attacks on the movements of women, blacks and lesbians and gay men in the labour movement.

Platform

This is not the first time such articles have appeared. More than a year ago *Tribune* carried a similar piece by D. Cowling entitled 'A coalition of minorities doesn't make a majority.' But when a journal such as *Tribune* provides a political platform for pseudo-intellectual racism it has reached a quite new depth.

Glasgow Labour group rejects equality for lesbians and gays

GLASGOW District Council's ruling Labour group, on 30 April, voted 35:14 to exclude lesbians and gay men from their equal opportunities policy.

As the Labour group accounts for 59 of Glasgow's 66 district councillors this is a serious blow to the advance of lesbian and gay rights in Glasgow. It puts Glasgow district Labour group on a par with Tory councils like Rugby whose anti-gay prejudice was successfully met by mobilisation of the lesbian and gay community.

It was pointed out by those councillors who support lesbian and gay rights that this decision would contravene party policy, TUC policy and the 1984

district manifesto. These efforts were to no avail.

By Jim Whannel, Pollok Labour Party

Certain councillors expressed deeply offensive and prejudiced views. One stated that this would result in the council employing 'diseased human beings'.

The issue has been remitted to the personnel committee. But unless the Labour group changes its position the issue is now dead.

The next day the leader of the Conservative group applauded the Labour group's decision. They were clearly aware that Tory policies were being implemented by Labour councillors.

Glasgow NUPE local

authority branch has already sent a protest to the Labour group. NALGO is expected to follow suit.

CLPs all over Scotland are likely to send in protests. A group of lesbian and gay activists, as well as supporters, are to picket the Labour group AGM on 28 May.

We urge every possible labour movement organisation and individual to protest as soon as possible. If the Labour group can be forced to see the opposition which exists amongst party members to this kind of prejudice then we may be able to change some of the councillors votes.

● Send letters and resolutions of protest to: Danny Crawford, Secretary of Labour group, City Chambers, George Square, Glasgow.

LCLGR comment

'PREJUDICE AGAINST lesbians and gay men is widespread. It serves to divide the working class and to maintain reactionary ideology. It stands as a major obstacle to progress towards a more just and equal society. But it has been shown many times in recent years that it is possible to challenge prejudice successfully.'

'Where local authorities like the GLC have taken up the challenge massive advances have been made. In many areas in London, and across the country, openly lesbian or gay candidates have stood successfully as Labour candidates, often increasing their majorities. No party which capitulates to prejudice and discrimination for an alleged fear of 'losing votes' is meeting its responsibilities.'

'Lesbians and gays are part of labour movement and we will continue to demand that the labour movement fights openly against our oppression. To do anything else reinforces reaction and is in the interests of no-one except the enemies of the entire labour movement. Peter Purton, Treasurer Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights.'



International student upsurge against imperialism

THE LAST few months have witnessed a sharp increase in campaigning activity by students up and down the country. The Thatcher government's continuing assault on the

By Anne Kane

living standards and rights of the working class, women, black people, lesbians and gay men in Britain and her support, along with Reagan, for the most vicious and repressive regimes in the world — a support backed up if necessary through arbitrary international state terror raids — have provoked widespread student mobilisations. Most notably students have shown a lead in building solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles world-wide.

The overwhelming opposition of students to the British government's support for the apartheid regime in South Africa has been clear in local action and in the turn-out on national demonstrations. Banners from student unions and Labour clubs formed the biggest single contingent on the 2 November AAM demonstration.

Most student unions have banned Barclays bank from using facilities on student union premises, refuse to take Barclays cheques and have banned stocks of foods and goods from companies that deal with South Africa. In the Polytechnic of Wales students with the local council prevented South African linked companies holding interviews and trying to recruit graduates on colleges premises.

Students turned out in coach loads to demonstrations to protest against the US bombing of Libya and demand US bases out of Britain.

The historic shift by NUS Easter conference to commit the union to support for British withdrawal took place in the wake of wide-ranging Sinn Fein college tours.

Solidarity with international struggles has combined with student action against the proposed Fowler attacks. Over 35,000 were on the 26 February London demonstration and occupations in many colleges. Students too have been prominent at the Wapping picket lines and in fundraising, banning sales of New International papers, and spreading support.

These actions are part of a broader upsurge of student protest across Europe and the US. For many the leading role of youth and students in South Africa is a real inspiration.

Students in the US have been involved in wide-ranging political action. Action opposed to apartheid has been the most striking. On 15 campuses students have set up mock shanty towns, mostly in college administration blocks. There have been sit-ins, demos and pickets. College facilities have been renamed in honour of South African revolutionaries. At the University of California at Berkeley continuous student protests against apartheid since 9 April has involved almost daily police clashes, arrests and injuries. Students are demanding that Berkeley's \$2.4 billion invested in companies linked with South Africa are divested.

Fifty thousand students turned out on the 9 and 16 March demonstrations demanding a woman's right to choose abortion. US students have also been organising action against US aggression towards Central America, in support of the American Indian movement and against their forcible eviction from the Big Mountain area in Arizona.

The most notable feature about all this activity is its internationalist character.

The decision of Labour Party Black Section to organise tours and support in the colleges, of the Nicaragua solidarity campaign to organise a student network, and of the LCI to step up their level of organisation among students are big steps forward. They give an organised political lead to the campaigning initiative and sentiment of students. Such political initiatives should be supported and built on as the way to organise those students who want NOLS and NUS to lead rather than trail behind the kind of actions students themselves have been taking.

Black and Asian Advisory Committee

Labour's record of racism and paternalism

KINNOCK LOUDLY proclaims his adherence to 'democratic socialism'. But his opposition to any serious democratic principles is shown by his inveterate hostility to black and women's self-organisation within the Labour Party.

No one would dream of proposing that non-miners should vote in the NUM, or non-engineers should vote in the AEU. But Kinnock proclaims that whites should decide the leadership of black organisation in the Labour Party, and that men should vote in deciding the decisions of women's conference and the women's places on the NEC.

Continuing our series on the 'Black and Asian Advisory Committee' PAUL SHARMA, Midlands Organiser of the Black Section, looks at the colonial models of this committee and the way in which it continues the long, and rotten, record of the Labour Party leadership in refusing to allow black people to control their own organisations.

AFTER the Labour leadership had orchestrated the defeat of Black Sections at the annual party conference last year, they offered the Black and Asian Advisory Committee as an alternative. This sham offer was a watershed in the Labour Party's relationship with its black members and the black community.

Debate

Conference in 1985 debated a report produced by the Positive Discrimination Working Group of the National Executive Committee (NEC). It went on, however, to rubber-stamp the dissenting minority report, produced by two members of the working group. This proposed the Black and Asian Advisory Committee. The working group as a whole was set up after Black Sections had started to take root in the party.

The group began work more than a year earlier. It had previously produced a consultation paper, *The Labour Party and The Black Electorate*. This discussed the issues raised by the debate on Black Sections and invited comments from the whole of the Labour movement.

The consultation was one of the widest ever conducted by the party. The response received was just as impressive. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, including constituency Labour Parties and trade unions favoured fully constituted Black Sections in the Labour Party.

Majority

This majority was arrived at despite strenuous efforts by the Labour leadership to undermine the debate over Black Sections. Attacks on the working group reached such a pitch at one point that its chair, NEC member Jo Richardson MP, personally requested Neil Kinnock to refrain from obstructing the group's inquiry. Nevertheless the Labour leader said on the 23 May 1985 'I am adamantly against Black Sections... I would not give a damn if the whole Labour Party was against me on this.' Indeed two thirds of those consulted were against Mr Kinnock — so much for democracy in our

'democratic socialist party'.

Two months later the NEC rejected its working group's report. Instead it slipped in a recommendation to form the Black and Asian Advisory Committee. The terms of reference of the committee specifically exclude policy formulation — it has purely an advisory role on 'organisational matters'. In other words it is another vote garnering exercise.

The Labour leadership stubbornly refused to follow the NEC working group's central recommendation in support of Black Sections. This tension caused the first reported row with the newly appointed Labour Party general secretary, Larry Whitty. Whitty went on record in the *March New Socialist* saying 'If I were a black member of the party I would be very upset that a party which can accommodate all sorts of specialised interests in its constitution has nothing for Blacks.'

Trust

How can we trust them to listen to the advice of the Black and Asian Advisory Committee? The Labour Party Black Section firmly believes that the advice won't be worth listening to and the Labour leadership will ignore it anyway.

Advisory committees are a well tried and tested ploy to thwart legitimate black aspirations for democratic representation. It has been pointed out before, but is worth repeating, that 'advisory' bodies, with no power, are a technique perfected by the British in periods of colonial rule.

Africa

Urban advisory councils were introduced in Africa 50 years ago. This occurred following the strike by black African mineworkers in Zambia at Mufulira, Nkana and Roan Antelope in 1935. They were the brainchild of a British Commission of Enquiry who saw them as a ploy to strengthen the hand of the trusted black elders who had been appointed earlier by the British. The elders by 1942 were elected and now called 'tribal representatives'. The British Government's response to the

struggle to achieve self-government by Africans was to set up even bigger advisory committees — the African Provisional Councils. These were even greater failures. Major political and social change was not achieved by the advisory committees but by Africans' own organisations.

Much like in Africa, British imperialism in India was characterised by three features: outright oppression, concessions to rally the moderates, and 'divide and rule'. Lord Cross's Indian Councils Act of 1892 enlarged the Indian membership of the Imperial Council — which was a national talking shop. By 1886 the Punjab Government of Lyall had already introduced separate elections for Hindus and Muslims in an attempt to divide in towns like Hoshiapur, Lahore and Multon.

Pressure for self-government in Britain's colonies continued to build up. Acknowledging this Secretary of State Morley wrote to Viceroy Minto in letters in 1906 'cast iron bureaucracy won't go on forever, some more Indians should be allowed in executive and legislative councils... of course (British) officials would retain the majority'.

The Indian Councils Act of 1909 allowed greater discussion on budgets and resolutions but with British officials



overseeing events with a majority. This constitutional experiment was shortlived. It neither rallied the moderates nor prevented unity between Hindus and Muslims.

Anyone who knows it will recognise a striking resemblance to the Labour Party's 'Black and Asian' Advisory Committee which attempts to divide black Labour Party members. The Black Section in contrast has united Africans, Caribbeans, and Asians in constituency Black Sections across the country under their own self definition of Black.

The British Labour Party's whole approach to Black people in Britain has been fashioned by the colonial experience. On the one hand Black people have been denied rights of

representation by the institutional racism which exists in the Labour movement. On the other, advisory committees have been set up which pretended to take seriously the problems of black people. These committees, largely comprising of white 'race experts' have a long history of failure. Their cynical role was clear from the start.

So now we have come full circle. The last 25 years have seen the leadership produce one Bantustan advisory committee after another. All have closely followed the colonial models used in Africa and India. All have come to nothing.

Labour's policy making and management bodies consist of delegates elected by various sections which make up the party. If women, youth and Jewish people, through Poale Zion, can elect members to represent them, why can't black people? Advisory committees to advise white policy makers is not good enough. We don't just want a slice of the cake, we want access to the recipe.

We ask all those who are sympathetic to Black Sections who have accepted membership of this committee to resign immediately. They are unwittingly collaborating in a neo-colonialist structure which history holds in contempt.

How to respond to the 'Black and Asian Advisory Committee.'

AFTER A number of resignations the 'Black and Asian Advisory Committee' is now attempting to involve constituency parties. Virendra Sharma, full time member of the committee, has written to CLPs asking them to invite a member of

the committee to speak.

Several CLPs have been tempted to throw the letter into the waste bin. The Labour Party Black Section however urges CLPs to adopt a different course. It urges all CLPs to invite a representative of the committee and simultaneously invite to

the same meeting a representative of the Labour Party Black Section.

If supporters of the 'Black and Asian Advisory Committee' move resolutions to invite a speaker, CLPs are asked to move an amendment/resolution to also invite a Black Section speaker.

G R E A T E R L O N D O N L A B O U R P A R T Y

PUBLIC MEETING

LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS A LABOUR MOVEMENT ISSUE



Disabled access

Tuesday 3rd June 1986
7.30pm
Lambeth Town Hall (room 119)
Acre Lane/Brixton Hill

Nearest Brixton

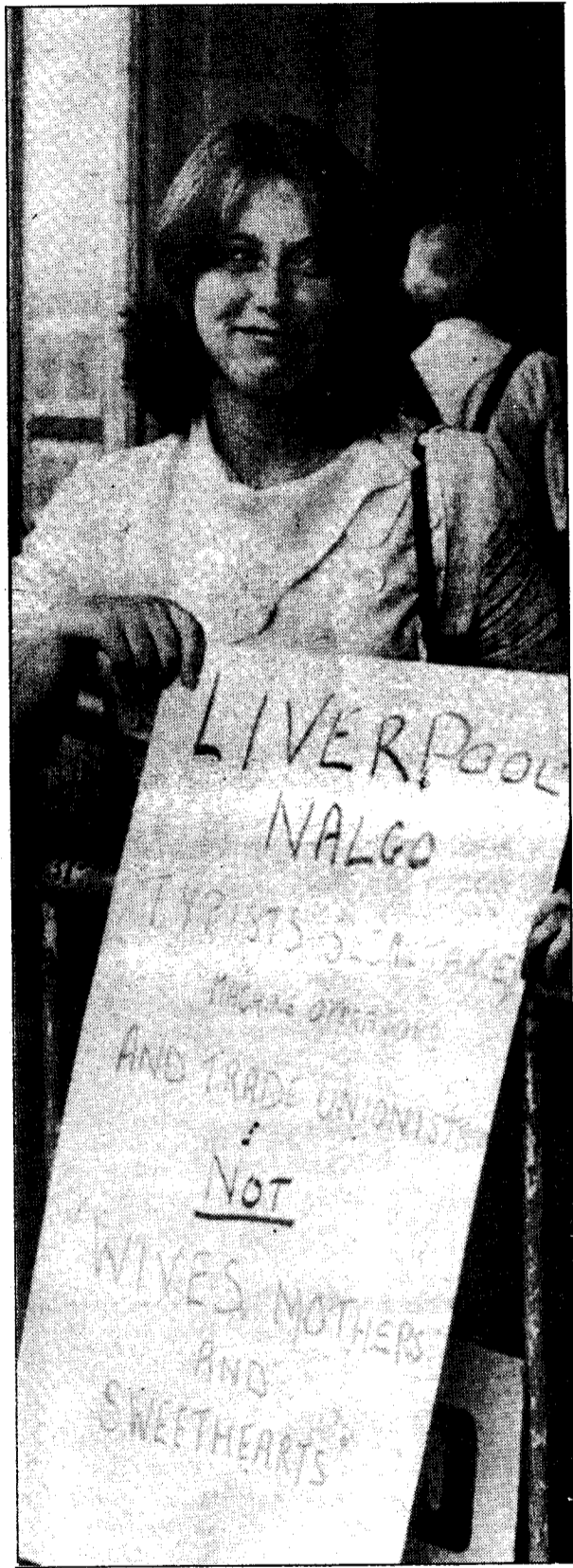
Speakers

MARGARET MICHIE ● NUJ Equality Council
FEMI OTIJOJU ● Haringey Lesbian and Gay Unit
LINDA SEMPLE ● Gays the Word Defence Campaign
VINCE GILLESPIE ● Haringey Councillor
KAREN BRISCOE ● Civil and Public Servants Association
CHAIR: **SARAH ROELOFS** ● London Regional Executive

News

Women, the Labour Party and the unions

THE DEBATE around NUPE's resolution to women's conference last week — which proposed the introduction of a trade union bloc vote based on female membership, but without any mechanism for women's control over this vote — opened up a long overdue discussion on the next steps in building Labour's Women's Organisation. What was at stake in this debate was not some formalities about the constitution of the women's section, but how to take women in the labour movement as a whole forward.



Over the last two decades the massive entry of women into the workforce has dramatically changed the sexual composition of many of the major trade unions, with a significant number of unions now having a more than 50 per cent female membership. Unions like NUPE, NALGO, USDAW, COHSE, the NUT and CPSA all have a female membership ranging between 52 and 80 per cent.

By Jude Woodward

This substantially increased presence of women in the trade unions has fuelled the moves towards the self-organisation and representation of women across the labour movement. The development of the Labour Women's Action Committee (LWAC), although it grew out of the movement for increased democracy inside the Labour Party, was in fact propelled by these social changes affecting the position of women in the labour movement.

WAC

The campaign of the Labour Women's Action Committee has its equivalents inside the trade unions themselves, although in a less centralised and less organised form. For many years women at the TUC Women's Conference have argued for that conference to have more say in the TUC as a whole. A number of unions have established women's advisory committees, women's conferences and women's training programmes as a direct response to the increasing pressure from women in the base of those unions.

Pressure

The pressure from women in these unions has also found a reflection in an increasing presence of women in their national executives — although none of the unions, except the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers, yet has a majority of women on its executive. In 1985 NUPE and the CPSA did next best with 42 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. A number of unions, including NUPE, NATFHE and GMBATU have adopted or are proposing to adopt reserved places for women on their

executive.

When it comes to the number of women full time national officers the CPSA again does best, with 21 per cent — which in itself is disgraceful for a union with 69 per cent of its members women. Unions like USDAW, NALGO, COHSE and the NUT are appalling with between 10 and 13 per cent of their officials women. The other unions have an even worse record.

Over the last few years nearly all these unions have been forced to speed up steps towards ensuring that women are present in the leaderships of these unions at national and regional level. Women are increasingly using the structures established for women in the unions to step up the pressure and demand more action from their executives.

WAPC

These structures were often set up in the first instance with little more in mind than a way of taking the pressure off the male-dominated union leaderships. But in many cases these structures have served to increase the focus and pressure of the demands of women in those unions.

This high level of activity by women in the trade unions, coupled with the activity of the LWAC, the growth of the Labour Women's Organisation, and the development of an organisation like Women Against Pit Closures poses the possibility of their finding a common expression in joint struggle to build a really representative national mass organisation of women across the labour movement. It is this possibility that is posed by the question of the increased representation and role of women from the trade unions in Labour Women's conference. And it was this question that NUPE's resolution was aimed at confronting.

Hostile

Powerful objective forces, rooted in the changed social position of women, are propelling forward a convergence of women organising throughout the labour movement. Such steps are tremendously progressive for women, and for the working class as a whole.

However each step in this direction is beset by contradictions and problems, which forces hostile to the increased organisation and power of women are only too keen to exploit.

Male

In particular the different experiences of women's self-organisation within the Labour Party and in the trade unions are exploited to create divisions. The NUPE resolution inserted itself into this particular contradiction, aiming to exploit it to head off the movement towards strengthening the women's organisation. This is why it became the rallying point for all the most right-wing trade union delegations, and for the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC). Simply introducing a trade union bloc vote into the women's conference, as NUPE proposed, would not create a more powerful women's organisation, unless that bloc vote was controlled by women in the trade unions. The right of Ron Todd to cast a quarter of a million votes on behalf of 'his' female members has nothing to do with a strong women's organisation. It has everything to do with bringing the women's organisation under the control of the same male bureaucracies that presently control the TUC and the Labour Party as a whole.

However a proposal that would genuinely increase the weight and representation of women in the trade unions in the women's conference would tremendously strengthen the Labour Women's Organisation, and its usefulness to all women.

Such proposals cannot be dreamt up by the Women's Action Committee, of the Women's Advisory Committee of any individual union, they would have to arise out of serious discussion among women in all parts of the labour movement.

A special consultative conference of the women's organisation could provide a framework for such a discussion, and be a stimulus for a debate on women's self-organisation throughout the labour movement.

IRELAND UNFREE

NUR delegation to Ireland

AN NUR London Transport District Council delegation has just concluded a visit to the North of Ireland. This initiative flowed out of a decision by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union to make overtures to unions in Britain, and the British Labour Party, to discuss a common approach in 1981. The TUC had urged unions to send delegations to Ireland following the NUR's decision last year to support the reunification of Ireland. The delegation was the result. A member of the NUR delegation reports on the delegation and its findings.

NATIONAL unity is a hot potato for Irish trades union leaders. They fear this issue could split the movement, leading to mass defections or split-offs in the North. Written and unwritten agreements that the division of Ireland cannot be discussed means a de facto loyalist veto exists inside the labour movement. This obstacle came up time and again in the course of our visit.

The delegation met an impressive array of trade unionists, including the general secretaries of the biggest unions, but one of our first experiences was the evasion of any meeting by officials of the Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. This represents the concern to keep partition off the agenda at all costs — a backdoor method of supporting the loyalists. Whether or not it is discussed, the reality of partition affects the working lives of the Irish people. The loyalist ascendancy, which rests on partition ensures massive discrimination in jobs and housing.

The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act has been about as successful in removing discrimination against Catholics in the six counties as equal rights legislation has been in removing discrimination against women workers in Britain! The problem does not just affect notoriously big-got firms such as Shorts and Harland and Wolff — who between them make up about a third of the industrial workforce in the North. 'Modern' employers, who are unable to use old traditions as an excuse, carry on discriminating. A survey published a few weeks ago revealed that only 17 per cent of building society employees were Catholics. The so-called 'Progressive' Building Society employs only 2 per cent of Catholics!

Of course, we should keep a sense of balance. 'I wouldn't want you to think the building societies were totally discriminatory — they still take our money!' we were told by a Falls Road Community worker.

If blatant discrimination in jobs and housing is not a trade union issue, then nothing is. The refusal of the British and Irish based trade unions to take up these issues amounts to covert support for partition.

Schemes such as 'A Better Life For All' which have been supported are doomed to failure. Official studies into the economy of the six counties have concluded that social unrest, high transport costs and a small consumer market lie behind the stagnant economy. In other words the artificial division of Ireland is to blame.

A principled trade union leadership could not avoid a clash with loyalist sectarianism. Our delegation met rank and file trade union activists, as well as top leaders, who presented a variety of justifications for not taking on the loyalist veto within the unions. On the other hand they applauded the position of the NUR for Irish unity — and looked for an initiative from the British unions and Labour Party which would isolate loyalism inside the unions and/or lead to a Labour Government naming the date for withdrawal. So long as the British labour bureaucracy is able to point to their members in the North of Ireland and the effective support of the status quo by the Irish trade union movement such an initiative will be unlikely.

The fact that the NUR pulled out of Ireland in 1952 so that, as Jimmy Knapp puts it 'in the Irish Association you can get on with your business of uniting the Irish working class' has meant that the basis was laid for the NUR itself supporting Irish unity. Over thirty years later we should call for other unions to follow this example instead of being content to take the 'benefits' from discrimination and sectarianism in the name of supporting the unity of the Irish working class.

Labour women's policy gains

LABOUR women's conference registered many policy gains.

An emergency resolution opposing nuclear power and calling for the replacement of Labour's shadow environment spokesperson John Cunningham was overwhelmingly carried. So was another emergency resolution condemning the US attack on Libya and calling for the removal of all US bases and withdrawal from NATO.

Conference also passed two resolutions condemning the witch-hunt and supporting the seven national executive members who stopped the March NEC meeting planned to carry out the expulsions of Liverpool members. The

composite passed called on the leadership to 'cease its witch-hunting activities forthwith and concentrate its energies instead on defeating Thatcher's vicious government'.

Conference also opposed the Anglo-Irish Accords by a substantial majority. By a smaller majority, conference called for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland.

Policy in support of Labour Party Black Sections was confirmed by a successful amendment to an anti-racist resolution supported by *Militant*. The original opposed Black Sections. Labour women must ensure that they work closely with Black Section to ensure that stronger resolutions

are put forward and carried next year.

Two fringe meetings, one organised by SWAPO and the other by Labour CND were especially well attended. Two women from SWAPO and El Salvador, both of whom addressed conference, received standing ovations.

The daily briefing bulletin circulated by WAC campaigned for the shadow elections and took up many issues at conference, including opposition to the NUPE resolution. The bulletin carried material opposing the Anglo-Irish Accords, calling for British withdrawal from Ireland, supporting Black Sections and opposing the witch-hunt.

Labour Women's Action Committee pamphlet, price £1, plus 18p p&p, from Other Books, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP (cheques payable to Other Books).



WHY BRITAIN MUST GET OUT OF IRELAND

THE LABOUR Party NEC is taking submissions on Labour's policy on Ireland. The most important of these is by the Labour Committee on Ireland. This argues the case for total British withdrawal from Ireland — and outlines in detail why no other solution will solve the situation in that country.

We are printing here the entire first section of that submission, on why Britain must withdraw from Ireland. We ask our readers to buy copies of this submission and give it the widest possible circulation in the labour movement.

Copies of the Labour Committee on Ireland Submission to Labour Party NEC working Group are available price 40p plus 20p postage from LCI, BM Box 5355, London WC1N 3XX.

Labour's choice

THE 1981 NEC statement to party conference showed many advances from previous policy. It indicated Ireland was to be a signifi-

cant part of Labour's programme and recognised Labour's goal as encouraging the reunification of Ireland.

It documented the systematic use of emergency legislation as an abuse of civil liberties and implied a criticism of successive governments which had renewed such legislation: in that sense it broke with bi-partisanship. It described the discrimination and sectarianism which is inherent in the Six County state created through partition and ruled out various unviable options such as an 'Independent Ulster' or 'Confederation of the British Isles'.

The prominence of the issue of H-block prisoners, political status and the Diplock no jury courts showed the background to the 1981 report — the death of ten hunger strikers and the strongest resurgence of nationalism since the twenties. But by recommending prison reform throughout the United Kingdom, the NEC report sidestepped the central issue at the time — that nationalist struggle cannot be equated to criminal activity. Although the demands of the hunger strike were not all won, five years later republican prisoners' 'special' status — having been convicted of 'special' (scheduled) offences in 'special' (Diplock) courts — is now more widely understood and supported.

Since 1981, the Labour Party has, through successive conferences deepened its commitment to defend fundamental civil liberties. It has reaffirmed its commitment to abolish the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It has called for the end to use, manufacture and storage of rubber or plastic baton rounds. It has called for the end of sex-

ual harassment of women prisoners by means of strip searching, and for the abolition of the 'Diplock' no jury courts.

The Labour Committee on Ireland since its foundation campaigned in defence of civil liberties and welcomes these positive gains. We hope the Working Party will make detailed proposals on how the whole Party might explain the issues to a wider audience and step up campaigns against the government which refuses to concede to public pressure.

Weakness

The essential weakness of the 1981 Statement which needs to be resolved in 1986 is in its presentation of the central theme of Labour's policy which has become known as 'unity by consent'. The statement argues for the reunification of Ireland and a democratic political settlement. It recognises that Unionists cannot be allowed to stand in the way of political progress. But it also endorses the 1973 Northern Ireland Constitution Act, which gives those same parties the absolute right of veto over changes in Constitutional provision. This Unionist veto is incompatible with a policy for reunification.

Once the more fanciful options like an independent Ulster have been ruled out, Labour's policy options are threefold:

- to maintain partition and direct rule.
- to attempt to modify partition and direct rule.
- to adopt a withdrawal policy.

Labour's policy up to 1981 plumped for the first option. We will show the disastrous consequences of this policy for the people of both the North and South of Ireland and Britain.

Direct Rule

Labour's policy since 1981 has been that a future government, whilst maintaining direct rule would seek to modify the form of rule in co-operation with the Dublin government in order to prepare for more wide-ranging change at some unspecified point in the future. We argue that the state of Northern Ireland established by partition is fundamentally incapable of reform, and that a future Labour government committed to maintaining direct rule will be unable to defend basic human rights and liberties, let alone introduce far-reaching reform.

We believe the only policy option for a Labour Party committed to support Irish unity and independence, is for a complete military and political withdrawal. We believe this policy is in the best interest of the overwhelming majority of Irish and British people, regardless of religion or present allegiances.

The case for withdrawal

IT IS now widely acknowledged that the Labour government which sent British troops to Northern Ireland in 1969 was not acting upon a considered long term policy approach, but saw itself as taking measures to 'keep the lid' on the situation. It was a policy of 'containment' or 'crisis management'.

From that point on, and with the institution of direct rule in 1972, successive governments have lurched from crisis to crisis, whilst maintaining a bi-partisan approach for most of the period. It is clear that unless it adopts a clear strategy, a future Labour government would find itself maintaining the status quo, ie partition of Ireland guaranteed by direct rule and enforced by the security apparatus.

Since partition was imposed upon the Irish people against their wishes expressed in the 1918 elections when 70

per cent voted to break from the United Kingdom; we can find no advantage that has been gained by working people in either island. The only exception to this being a section of the Irish working class in the north east whose loyalty to the British crown has been purchased under the impression that their lot has been improved by virtue of social, economic and political discrimination against Catholics.

The phrase 'tuppence ha'penny looking down on tuppence' has often been used to describe this spurious 'privilege'. The elevation of this minority to a majority in the Six County state through partition; the continuing support given it through the connection with Britain and the constitutional guarantee, prevents northern protestants looking toward the future of Ireland and have created a siege mentality.

The disadvantages of partition for

the social, economic and political life of Ireland have been well documented. We should record at this point that these disadvantages have not diminished with the imposition of direct rule — to the contrary, they have become more profound.

Since 1969, the failure of British policy in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland has cost more than 2,300 lives and 24,000 serious injuries. To this must be added the misery and grief of friends and relatives, the deterioration of the quality of life of all citizens and the special distress of the nationalist communities living under foreign military occupation. Political violence in the Six Counties has spilt over into the 26 Counties and Britain.

Attempting to solve the problems in Northern Ireland through increased policing has led to the growth of a massive military apparatus. In addition to the units of the British army and the Ulster Defence Regiment; the police force of the Royal Ulster Constabulary now consists of one officer per 204 population, compared to one per 450 in England and Wales or one per 510 on the east coast of the United States.

Agencies

Secret service agencies operate in the North, and the 'anti-terrorist' or Special Branch units of police forces in both the 26 Counties and Britain continue to grow. Northern Ireland also has the largest per capita prison population in Western Europe.

The National Council for Civil Liberties has documented how the use and abuse of emergency legislation to back up this military apparatus has led to an unacceptable deterioration of democratic rights in both Britain and Northern Ireland.

Labour Party conference has recorded its opposition to the use of plastic bullets, to no-jury Diplock courts and the use of the uncorroborated 'supergrass' informer evidence, and to the strip searching of women prisoners as a further incursion into civil liberties.

The arbitrary use of police powers in nationalist areas which range from intimidatory stop and search routines to assassination of suspects ('shoot to kill' policy) can only be viewed as an attempt to break the resistance of the nationalist people to British rule.

Security

In the 26 Counties, co-operation with British security policies has led to the introduction of Special (no jury) Courts, the Criminal Justice Act and the Offences Against the State Act. Between 1980 and 1984, 11,000 people were arrested under this legislation. Few were charged.

Further infringements of civil liberties result from the illegal operations of British security forces south of the border. An extreme example is the use of *agents provocateurs* understood to have caused explosions in Dublin to influence proceedings in the Irish parliament.

Although reforms introduced in the sixties alleviated some of the worst exclusion of Catholics from public sector employment and lower levels of the civil service, discrimination is still widespread. Reports of Northern Ireland's Fair Employment Agency (FEA) have pointed to unabated discrimination in the private sector and complaints have been made over discrimination in the Fire Service, Ambulance Service, Gas Service and Telecommunications.

The December 1985 FEA report showed that the discrepancy between Catholic and Protestant rates of unemployment had increased since 1971. Average unemployment amongst Catholics (25.2 per cent) is almost two and a half times greater than that amongst Protestants (10.2 per cent). Irrespective of cosmetic changes, institutional discrimination is *fundamental* to the Northern Ireland State.

In the last two years new evidence has been brought to light about the ex-



tent of discrimination against Irish people resident in Britain. Aside from the discriminatory application of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, reports indicate significant discrimination in the fields of housing, education and employment.

The censorship and subsequent doctoring of the 1985 BBC 'Real Lives' documentary also highlighted political control of media coverage of Northern Ireland. The political protest strike of NUJ members recalls similar industrial action taken fifteen years ago by ACTT members when political pressure from the Independent Broadcasting Authority was used to censor television comment on allegations of British torture.

Liz Curtis in her book 'Ireland, the Propaganda War' explains and documents how political pressure is brought to bear at all levels of the media to reinforce the government's interpretation of events.

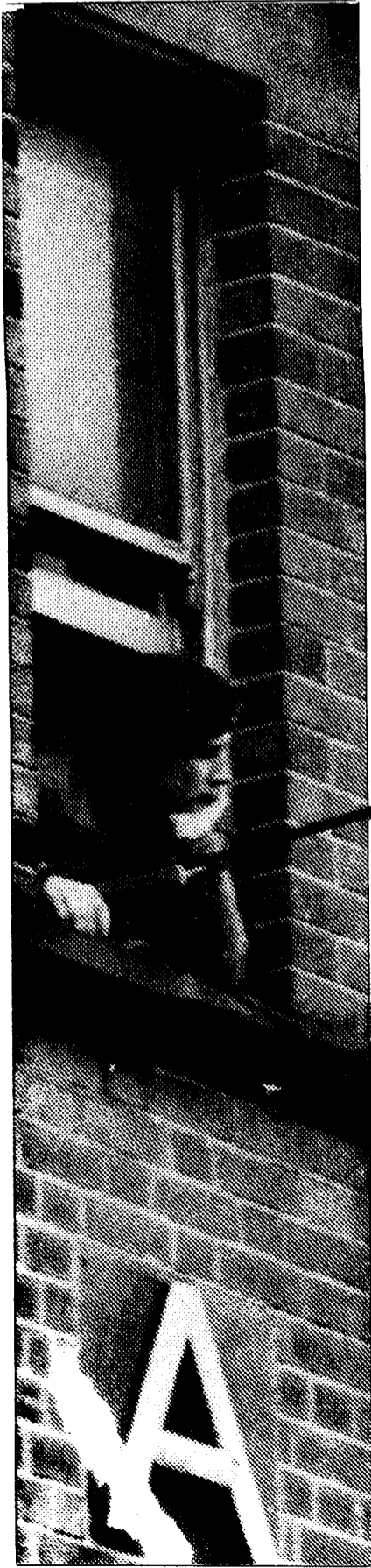
In the 26 Counties, similar censorship has been institutionalised through Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act which prohibits members of a legal political party (Sinn Fein) from making statements or appearing on the RTE radio and television network.

Bias

Slanted or biased news coverage; the stereotyped 'Irish character' and anti-Irish 'humour' denigrates the democratic and national aspirations of Irish people and has an adverse effect upon the Irish in Britain. Irish people have expressed insecurity about stating their political views, unwilling to become on the one hand an object of ridicule, on the other a 'terrorist' suspect.

The report of the New Ireland Forum identified 'alienation' as a key area of concern in the North. The reason is half million nationalists in the North find themselves not as part of a majority in the Irish nation, but as the minority in a state imposed upon them by force and characterised by the majority as disloyal.

Since the Six County state was established to frustrate their political



WORLD IN ACTION

Sri Lanka

Government forces have been bombing Jaffna, Sri Lanka's fourth largest city, and other targets in Tamil areas. Over 50 people are so far reported wounded with at least 12 dead. A further 60 people died in the previous three days of fighting during which ground forces failed to take Jaffna from Tamil rebels who had held it for over a year.

Then two planes bombed the city centre, hitting the hospital among other buildings, while helicopters strafed the area. But ground forces still made no headway and came under heavy attack. Bombing had been suspended in March when the government was accused of attempted genocide. Peace talks are still in progress. The new military offensive is one of the heaviest yet.

China

Leading Chinese Communist Party cadres have partially rehabilitated Trotsky and attacked Stalin in recent writings. Li Xianrong's book, *A critical biography of Trotsky*, has not yet reached the West. But a review of this work in the journal *Shijie Lisha* (World History) by Zhu Tinguan, has now appeared in the West and is printed in the journal *International Viewpoint* with a commentary by Ernest Mandel. Both writers say Trotsky was one of the chief leaders of the Russian Revolution and the creator of the Red Army, and condemn Stalin's expulsion and assassination of Trotsky. But they maintain that after 1928 Trotsky became anti-Soviet.

West Germany

Over 20,000 people have protested at Wackersdorf, the country's first and only nuclear reprocessing plant. They clashed violently with police. Up to 700 suffered severe eye injuries from CS gas and 200 needed medical treatment. Meanwhile, the Green Party in Hesse, where it is in a coalition with the socialists, has threatened to pull out unless the state government agrees to close down all its nuclear reactors.

France

France's new prime minister Jacques Chirac has given unqualified support to Star Wars, reversing previous French government policy. It would be irresponsible, he said, for France, which is the world's third nation in space technology, to be 'left by the side of the road'.

Belgium

On Thursday 22 May Brussels was paralysed for the third time in 17 days by a spreading civil service strike against government cuts. Schools, transport and postal services came to a halt and employees in many supermarkets and factories walked out in support.

The recently reelected Martens government has launched a Thatcher-style attack on public spending. It proposes to start with cuts totalling £2.8 million in 1987, principally on social services and industrial subsidies in low employment areas. It also wants to privatise telecommunications. The government is already embroiled in a bitter struggle with miners in Limburg over attempts to close down the Belgian coal industry.

Greece

The 'Euro' Communist Party of the Interior is to rename itself the New Hellenic Left Party, dropping the word communist from its programme to attract voters disillusioned with the governing socialist party, Pasok. In the June 1985 elections the Eurocommunist party won only 1.84 per cent and a single member of parliament. The pro-Moscow Greek Communist Party got 9.89 per cent and 12 members of parliament.

Thatcher's trip to occupied Palestine

THATCHER'S TRIP to the Israeli state is the first ever by a British prime minister. That is ironic as it was a statement by Britain, the 'Balfour declaration' of 1917, that first gave away the Palestinian Arab's land to the Zionist state. But for a long time Britain had its own axe to grind in the Middle East which meant maintaining a certain diplomatic distance from the Israeli government. That included, notably maintaining British oil interests and propping up client regimes such as that in Jordan and, until the 1958 revolution, Iraq.



The reasons why Thatcher is now prepared to risk a more open identification with the Israeli state are twofold.

First within the United States the most openly fanatical pro-Israeli lobby has gained the upper hand over the last year. During the 1970s, following the oil price increases in 1973, the US found it necessary to adopt at least a more conciliatory public position to the Arab states. But with a fall in the price of oil, and Egypt safely neutralised by the Camp David Agreement, the US has been progressively adopting a more and more openly hard line in the Middle East.

The American attack on Libya was itself a warning to all progressive Arab regimes not to fall foul of US interests in the area.

The US Congress has blocked arms sales to even such a moderate Arab regime as Saudi Arabia during the last month.

The United States also launched in April a campaign to extend the smear of 'terrorism' from Libya to Syria. Tensions between Israeli government and Syria were deliberately whipped up during April and early May. But these ran up against the problem that Syria is a much tougher nut to attack than Libya.

First Syria's armed forces number over 400,000 — increased from 245,000 since the Israeli state's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Syria has 660 combat aircraft and 3,800 tanks — including more than 1,000 advanced Soviet T-72s. It is also protected by a military agreement with the Soviet Union.

For these reasons the Israeli leadership appears to have done a rethink about a military clash with Syria during the course of Reagan's 'terrorism' campaign. It is not that the Israeli state would not win a war with Syria — it



Rolling into Syria?

would. But such a war would be a bloody affair. After the debacle of the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the enforced withdrawal that followed it, the Israeli government does not want a second major war rapidly afterwards.

The Israeli state's diplomacy today is therefore trying to seek an agreement with King Hussein of Jordan along the lines of the Camp David agreement with Egypt. To achieve this Hussein spent nearly two years attempting to involve the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the negotiations. But the Israeli government has no

intention of offering the PLO anything, and these talks broke down.

The aim of the Zionist state today is to try to draw Hussein into talks by himself — and use his alliance with 'responsible', that is non-PLO, Palestinian 'representatives' on the West Bank to give a veneer of respectability to such a deal. Britain, which traditionally has strong client links with the Jordanian monarchy, is an ideal intermediary to put pressure on Hussein to involve himself in this process. If Jordan were 'neutralised' then Israel would be more able to carry through a later war on Syria.

The 'negotiations' promised to Hussein, therefore, are just the other side of the coin of the new US hard line in the Middle East. They aim to isolate Arab governments opposed to the Israeli state. Ever prepared to do Ronnie's bidding, Thatcher therefore set off to visit the state of Israel.

Whether it is supplying airbases to attack Libya, or serving as a messenger to pressure Jordan, every step British imperialism takes in the Middle East spells trouble for the Palestinians and Arab peoples who are under attack by Britain's 'allies' — the Israeli and United States terrorist regimes.

Reorganising Nicaragua's economy

1985 AND 1986 saw severe military defeats inflicted by Nicaragua's government on the US backed contras. It is also a major reorganisation of Nicaragua's economy.

The first step in this economic shift was a deepening of the agrarian reform — with emphasis on distributing land to individual peasants. The second step was a reorganisation of the economy as a whole. MARIA MERRI looks at that second shift, and the economic goals being set by the FSLN.

ON 9 March, the Nicaraguan government announced increases in prices and wages. The papers that day did not make very pleasant reading. Everyone was calculating what these steps would mean for them. But it cannot be said that this came as a surprise.

Since the national currency was devalued on 1 February, with the cordoba going from 28 to 70 against the dollar, everyone had been wondering when the rises would come and how big they would be.

Wages were raised by 50 per cent on 2 March, after having already been increased by an average of 89 per cent on 1 January. Prices, on the other hand, went up between 50 per cent and 150 per cent, depending on the product, and even by 200 per cent for 'high class' restaurants. All prices and charges went up in the food industry, transport, services, electricity, and so on.

These measures were a continuation of the line represented by the steps taken in February 1985, when the government removed the subsidies on necessities. The prices of such products had been kept at an artificially low level since the revolution.

Officially, the inflation rate was 238 per cent in 1985. But this figure does not take into account the great disparities in price rises. What is clear is that the standard of living went down in 1985 and that the drop was relatively steep.

The Sandinista government has made no secret of the fact that 1985 was one of the most difficult years since the triumph of the revolution in 1979. The war is unbalancing the whole economic system, which, in a dependent country and in the midst of the world economic crisis, was already vulnerable enough.

It is estimated that defence is absorbing about 50 per cent of the state budget annually. There is the army of 50,000 that has to be fed, clothed and transported to the war zones. Moreover, it represents 11 per cent of the country's agricultural and industrial labour force.

For 1985 alone, the total cost of the material damage caused by the contras is calculated at \$120 million.

In addition to maintaining the economic blockade, Washington has vetoed certain lines of credit extended to Nicaragua by the international financial institu-



Defence: 50 per cent of the budget

tions.

In total, in 1985, the cost of US aggression in all its forms (military, commercial and financial) was estimated to have reached the level of \$608 million, or 26 per cent of the gross domestic product.

As if this were not enough, in the past year agricultural production was hit by a series of natural disasters, a drought followed by catastrophic floods.

The volume of industrial production fell by 6.5 per cent, while exports dropped by 11 per cent. The value of the latter totalled only \$300 million and covered only 36.2 per cent of imports. The trade deficit has risen to \$531 million dollars, the biggest ever seen in Nicaragua.

Moreover, despite drastic cutbacks, the deficit in the state budget amounted to 23 per cent of

the gross national product.

Even to be able to produce, Nicaragua has first to import. Just the production of cooking oil and soap — two of the five necessities whose prices are guaranteed by the state — last year required importing \$42 million worth of raw materials.

Here again, the war is blocking greater utilisation of the country's own resources, which could, at least in part, reduce this dependence. For example, the whole forestry development project, which was to provide the basis for increasing nontraditional exports and to lay the foundations for a lumber industry, has been thrown into disarray by the contras. That means that \$14 million in investment have gone up in smoke.

'We can't divide up what we don't have.' This

phrase by Commandante Cabrales, the minister of internal trade, sums up perfectly the facts about the population's number-one problem, supply. Any shortage feeds speculation and the black market. Nicaragua is no exception to this rule.

Through the Workers Supply Centres (CAT) and the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS), the government provides a monthly quota of basic food products, hygienic necessities and clothing.

However, while food products are distributed in accordance with the number of persons living in the same household, other products, in particular hygienic necessities, are distributed according to a quota allotted to each wage earner individually. In other words a single wage earner would get the same amount as one with a wife and five children.

Moreover, since the CAT and CDS often do not have sufficient stocks to meet the demand, it is necessary to resort to the free market, where the prices are very elastic.

In an attempt to improve this situation, the Sandinista government has launched a twofold battle. Its first objective is to eliminate, or at least try to eliminate, the 'informal' sector, which is an enormous cancer eating away at Managua. The second is to increase, at any cost, production and agricultural and industrial productivity. That is the goal of the new economic reforms which we will look at next week.

Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

NATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS
UNION



SPECIAL NCU CONFERENCE SUPPLEMENT

Produced by Socialist Action supporters in the NCU

IN FEBRUARY, John Golding MP was elected general secretary of the National Communications Union in a ballot of the union's 158,000 members. The job carries an automatic seat on the General Council of the TUC. Golding's election threatens to move the NCU closer to the right-wing alliance in the trade union movement.

At a time when the union's membership face escalating attacks on their jobs, the right-wing look sure to win another victory in the ballot for the NCU's Executive Committee.

These results will bring to an end three years of Broad Left control of the NCU.

In the first of a series of special trade union supplements, Socialist Action readers in the NCU report on the situation currently facing the union as it goes into its annual conference.

Fight for jobs

'THERE IS no plan to cut jobs.' It's only four short years since Bryan Stanley, the right wing general secretary of the Post Office Engineering Union of (POEU), penned these famous words in the pages of the union's *Journal*. It was virtually the last occasion on which the leadership of what has now become the National Communications Union (NCU), even attempted to persuade its members that all would be well in a private, but 'caring', British Telecom (BT).

The private BT has sold or given away shares to 96 per cent of its employees, whilst at the same time surpassing its own ambitions by shedding more than 15,000 jobs in the last three years.

The industry is currently poised on the brink of radical modernisation of its customer services set-up through computerisation, and of the telephone network through the introduction of 'chip' based exchanges.

The defeats and setbacks which the union has suffered, coupled with the steady advance on anti-union legislation, the failure of the TUC to lead any opposition to it, and the defeat of the year long miners' strike have taken their toll on the confidence of the NCU membership. In addition the failure of the left executive to galvanise resistance to BT's attacks has resulted in a resurgence of the union's discredited right wing.

At the moment when Telecom workers are to face the most serious

onslaught ever from management they are likely to be led by an executive whose most radical aim is to haggle over the price of redundancy pay.

By Ian Grant,
Met NW branch

The employers have been careful to ensure that their job cutting activities have taken place in a piecemeal and localised fashion. Utilising the uneven strength of the NCU branches, and the double edged 'Job Security Agreement' — a procedure by which the union enters into negotiations with management in situations of management identifying 'job surpluses' — they have ensured a steady erosion of jobs, at the same time avoiding any national confrontations which might provide a focus for a national struggle. Even so a growing number of local disputes involving overtime bans, work to rules, and strike action have been breaking out around the country.



So far these disputes have only involved a minority of the union's members. And their extent has been limited by their isolation. However these struggles represent the way forward for the entire NCU.

As BT pushes ahead in its drive to maximise profits, it inevitably has to take on and defeat larger and larger sections of the union's membership. Total job cuts are aimed to be 100,000. George Jefferson, chair of the BT board, has claimed the industry is 'one third fats' while documents leaked to NCU members employed at the Post Office admit 'compulsory redundancies will be inevitable.'

When John Golding was elected general secretary, one of his first statements to the press outlined his intention, contrary to current NCU policy, to reach an agreement on redundancy with

management. Winning such a strategy in the NCU would be a green light to management to speed up redundancies and drastically set back the possibilities of seriously fighting to defend jobs.

On the other hand members of the NCU in the West of Scotland, in postal engineering, in motor transport, and in a number of other parts of the union are beginning to learn the lessons of just how such a fight can be waged. These lessons must be drawn right across the union — by the building of the strongest possible links of solidarity and support with those sections taking action.

Although the experience of the NCU in waging the fight against job cuts and redundancy is still limited, there are wider examples to draw on. The Telecom unions anti-privatisation struggle, the twelve month miners strike which followed it, and currently the printworkers battle against Murdoch, all show in different ways that only a full and unreserved commitment from the union to organise and lead the whole strength of its membership can hope to win. Without this commitment it is impossible to win the backing of other sections of the trade union and labour movement.

Unfortunately the NCU's lead-in to the fight to be waged has not prepared it well. The Broad Left leadership of the union have put all their eggs in the basket of the 'Broad Strategy'. This is a

well worked out manifesto for the renationalisation of British Telecom, its expansion into new job creating areas, and the introduction of a 32 hour four day week. But its credibility lies solely on the re-election of a sympathetic Labour Government.

If more and more jobs are simply allowed to slip away, the ability of the NCU to mount its defence against compulsory redundancy will decline. An agreement with BT on voluntary redundancy terms will further undermine fights being waged by local branches against arbitrary job cuts.

It is not too late to halt the slide of the NCU into the policy of selling members jobs. Every effort must be made to link up the struggles breaking out now, to pull them out of their isolation, and to build on the foundations being laid for a national strike in defence of jobs, and a leadership prepared to fight for this goal.

What distinguishes the right from the left in the NCU on jobs is that the right stands for accepting job cuts and the left for fighting them. But the fight against BT's redundancy plans also means having a strategy to do so.

It means understanding that in the end only a national strike against BT's job cuts can defend our jobs. Fighting to win the membership to that means building a Broad Left which is not just an electoralist machine but is based on the real rank and file involvement.

Lessons of the Broad Left

IN 1983 the Post Office Engineering Union now amalgamated with the Civil and Public Servants Association's Post and Telegraphs Group to form the NCU, elected an Executive Council with majority Broad Left control. It was the first time in 40 years that the union had been wrested from the hold of the right wing. Three years later the NCU looks certain to fall back into the control of the right.

Socialist Action looks at the background to the left's 1983 victory — and at the events leading to the likely reversal of that success.

The rise in the Broad Left's fortunes in the NCU began in a significant way in 1978. An expansion in what was then Post Office Telecommunications led to a large influx of young workers into the industry — and the average age of NCU members is still under 30.

At the same time advances in new technology fuelled a campaign for shorter hours. This campaign was led by the most organised and militant sections of the union — the central London branches — and broke out into industrial action.

The strategy used by the union was to target selective areas — the bank of England, Stock Exchange, etc. — which were sensitive to disruptive action carried out by only small numbers of engineers. This tactic proved extremely effective, and City interests were soon clamouring for the Labour Government to concede.

Nevertheless the union's right-wing dominated NEC settled for only half what it's members were demanding — and agreed that the costs of the shorter hours agreement would be born by increased productivity.

This deal was a big set back to the unions right-

wing leaders credibility. The Broad Left gained from the sense of combativity this victory in the 35 hour week campaign generated in the rank and file. It increased the Broad Left's stature as an alternative leadership.

Bryan Stanley, then general secretary of the POEU, made his famous statement in support of management assurances that 'there is no plan to cut jobs'. But before long statements emerged from BT that between 45,000 and 100,000 jobs would have to go.

Once again the fight against de-nationalisation, and the attendant threat to jobs which it posed, was led by the strong London branches. Industrial action was launched against Mercury — the company set up to undercut BT's monopoly — by union members impatient with the executive's failure to follow up the one day protest strike against privatisation in October 1982.

On the crest of this wave of industrial action Broad Left candidates formed the majority of those elected to the NEC at the POEU's June 1983 conference.

Adopting the same 'selective' strategy that had proved so successful in the 35 hour week cam-



Healey and Golding

paign, the new executive moved to extend the scope and effectiveness of the unions action against de-nationalisation. But things had changed since 1978!

Management responded to the selective actions with suspensions and mass lockouts in the international exchanges — key targets for the 'selective' action strategy.

One of the component parts of this strategy of selective action was payment of average take home pay to members disciplined by BT for their part in the action. BT bussed in telecom workers from all over the country and suspended anyone who refused to cross the picket lines. The loyalty to the union shown by the total refusal to cross picket lines became a financial embarrassment to the union, rather than a weapon, as payments to those suspended drained the union's funds. But the Broad Left leadership refused to break from the selective action strategy or prepare for a national strike.

A court injunction by Mercury against the POEU's secondary action — one of the first taken under the new Tory legislation — spelled the end for the union's campaign. At a special conference in November 1983 the left on the NEC split over whether to obey the injunction and recommended compliance with the court's decisions. The Mercury action was abandoned, and within weeks the rest of the industrial action was called off. The return to work, especially at the international exchanges was the excuse for widespread victimisation.

The failure of the anti-privatisation campaign also marked the failure of the BL executive to capitalise on the mandate it had won for a serious fight.

The right have stepped up their campaign for a 'realistic voluntary redundancy agreement', and recent moves by the NEC to run a ballot on a national overtime ban are unlikely to rally the necessary rank and file support to stop the right wing take over in this months ballot for the NCU's executive committees.

The election of John Goulding, and an executive committed to voluntary redundancy, will turn the union away from any perspective of defending jobs, fighting for the implementation of shorter hours, or any of the other demands of the 'Broad Strategy' put forward by the previous executive.

To counter this threat a united opposition to collaboration with BT is selling jobs is indispensable. Accommodation to the wily chancers in the union will undermine the building of a leadership for the fight against job loss and redundancy. This fight has already begun.

One place it has started is in the West of Scotland — where BT are introducing arbitrary job cuts. It has started in the Post Office with the fight against 50 per cent job cuts and the prospect of compulsory redundancies.

The future of the Broad Left in the NCU is inseparably linked with the fight to make these isolated battles part of a national fight back against BT.

Postal engineers face 'certain redundancies'

AT THE end of April, a ballot on industrial action against job cuts among engineers in the Post Office was narrowly won. NCU members employed by the Post Office are threatened with between 30 per cent and 50 per cent job losses as a result of 'scrutinies' carried out by private manpower consultants. This struggle is now at the sharp end of the NCU's fight to defend jobs.

Attempts to buy time through the use of the unions 'Job Security Agreement' with management had failed when Socialist Action spoke to the secretary of the London Postal Region Power Branch, JAMES HARGIS.

POST Office management are working hard to try and persuade individuals that whatever happens their job will be safe. Everyone is very frightened about losing their jobs, and that fear is something we must overcome if we're going to fight back. People must feel they can win. Only then will they put up a real fight. I think most of our members are convinced we can win.

When we held our mass meeting in London prior to the ballot to take industrial action we made things very clear. We said

a 'yes' vote would mean taking strike action. No doubt about it. If they weren't prepared to go on strike then they should vote 'no'.

In this respect it was a realistic vote we got in the ballot, even if our approach meant we got a lower 'yes' vote. People knew what they were voting for.

The PO is trying to undermine that support. One of their tactics is to take on the smaller isolated offices first, where the effects don't appear to be so drastic. But that's one thing our members are strong on. They don't want to be split up and picked off, they'd rather act together. We're all in the same boat.

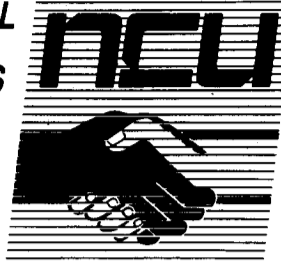
It worries me that in negotiations the union may have given away too much already. We are fighting now to obtain safeguards for individual's security of employment rather than against the principle of the arbitrary job cuts. Although this means that the individual members who are threatened will feel a strong commitment to fight, it makes it harder to win wider support for our action.

A victory for us against the Post Office will show the rest of the NCU that it is also possible to fight and win against British Telecom's plans for job cuts and redundancies. We need all the moral, physical, and financial support from other NCU members in BT we can get.

Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

NATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS
UNION



SPECIAL NCU CONFERENCE SUPPLEMENT

Boycott South Africa

FOREIGN INVESTMENT and trade provide a crucial prop for minority rule in South Africa. The South African economy is heavily dependant on imported capital to maintain production. Transnational oil companies work hand in glove with the regime get round the OPEC boycott of oil-less South Africa.

In order to offset the fact that the regime's supporters are heavily outnumbered the government needs a highly mechanised army, for which it relies on imported advanced electronics, communications and transport equipment.

The campaign for sanctions is gaining momentum despite baseless claims from those opposed to sanctions that they will hurt black people more than white.

It is undoubtedly true that some black people can be found in South Africa who oppose sanctions. It is not in the interests of those who occupy positions as puppets of the regime — bantustan chiefs and so on — to rock the apartheid boat. But the majority have shown, both in opinion polls and by their actions, that they want sanctions. South Africa's growing non-racial trade union movement has called for sanctions. The United Democratic Front (UDF), without question the most representative expression of black South African opinion, also supports sanctions.

The real opposition to sanctions comes from those transnational companies which profit from apartheid. The argument that disinvestment will cause unemployment among blacks has little foundation. The fact is that a third or more of black people in South Africa are already unemployed or underemployed. Indeed the South African economy relies on having a huge and permanent black reserve army of labour.

In any case direct

foreign investment is concentrated in the most capital intensive sectors of the economy, and of those it does employ a disproportionate number are white.

The reason for apartheid, and the reason for opposition to sanctions, is profit. That is why foreign capital is so deeply involved in South Africa.

Getting the NCU's pension funds to disinvest from companies with South African interests is only a start — but it would be a pretty good start. Of the top 30 companies which the two funds invest in, at least 18 have large South African interests. Our pension funds are amongst the biggest investors in Britain.

Sanctions against South Africa are not a moral question — 'We don't like the regime so we won't trade with them'. It is a practical question. Because of the particular relation of South African to world capitalism, and because of the claims of western governments to oppose apartheid, sanctions are the most effective support we can give to the black majority fighting for freedom in South Africa.

● Conference fringe meeting: 'Break all links with South Africa.' Speakers from COSATU and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Wednesday 4 June, 7.30pm. Blackpool Trades Club, Chadwick St.

Fighting racism

THE NCU lags behind other unions in having no provision for its black members at all and no serious policy for fighting racism. It has taken no steps to implement the 1984 TUC congress resolution calling on affiliated unions 'to set up appropriate structures, eg Race Equality Committees and Black Members Groups to coordinate union work on racism.' This is a major issue facing the union. So far no serious steps have been taken in the fight against racism.

John Golding, now general secretary, put out an appeal in February for union members to support the Labour Party 'Black and Asian Advisory Committee'. This is a wrong step in the fight against racism. This committee is not elected by black members of the Labour Party. No support should be given to this committee by union members.

The real task is for the NCU to adopt a policy for fighting racism. The old POEU did not even bother to reply to the GLC study *Racism Within Trade Unions* and has taken no

steps in line with TUC policy.

A start is being made to turn that situation around on 11 June when Marc Wadsworth, national chairperson of the Labour Party Black Section, is

speaking at a meeting of the London political committee, Tuesday June 10. Committee Room A, 6pm, Central Hall, Westminster.

We urge all London NCU members to attend.

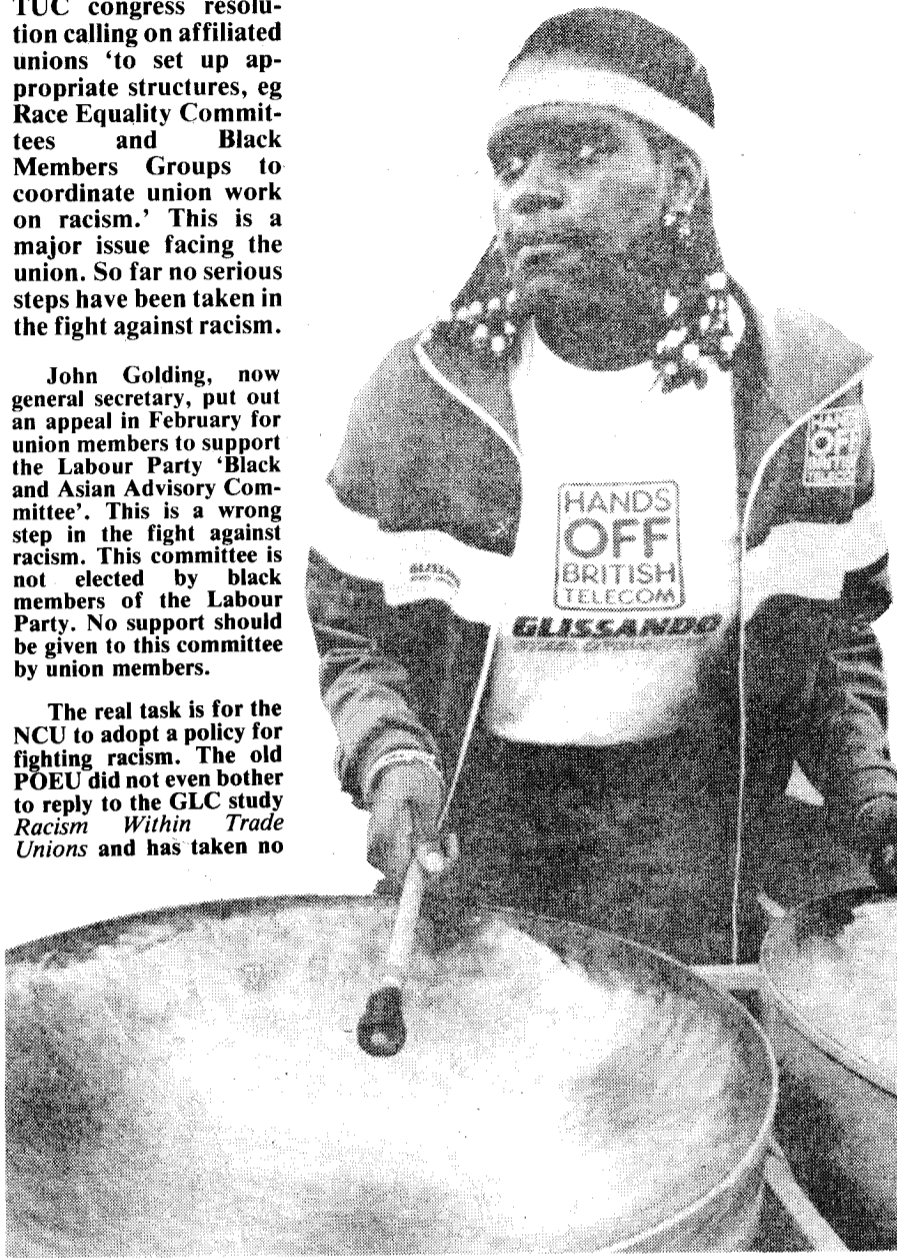


Photo: POEW Journal

Support Justice for Mineworkers Campaign

ANTI-UNION LAWS, the creation of the so-called 'Union of Democratic Mineworkers' (UDM), the banning of unions at GCHQ, and the arbitrary sacking of print workers are part of the Tories' project to severely curtail the power of the unions and remove the democratic rights of workers.

The fight of the mineworkers against the Tory onslaught since the end of the strike has exposed the UDM as a 'company union'. Even in the UDM's stronghold of Nottingham the NUM is steadily recruiting miners.

But the Tories' defeat of the miners strike has left a number of the most active miners sacked or imprisoned.

The need for a campaign to defend the victimised miners becomes clearer as more and more evidence of the way the coal board is deliberately refusing to reinstate sacked miners. Events since the strike have also shown the way the state has criminalised the class fighters of the NUM.

The establishment of the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign is a great gain for the labour movement.

The responsibility of the NCU to carry out resolutions adopted at the 1985 TUC and Labour Party conferences and actively fight for the reinstatement of the miners is vital to build the confidence of our own membership for the fight it faces in the future.

Adopt the resolution from LNCI in support for the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign.

Women in the NCU

SINCE THE UNIFICATION of the POEU and the CPSA post and telegraphs group, we have over 30,000 women members in the NCU. Issues of concern to women are coming to the fore in the union's affairs as the number of resolutions on sexual harassment, abortion rights, BTs pornography, womens health and other issues demonstrate.

Yet women are vastly under represented in the NCU at all levels. In the clerical group all but two of the national executive are male, although the membership is overwhelmingly female. In the engineering group there has never been a woman on the executive, even from the factories where women are a majority.

The establishment of the Womens Advisory Committee (WAC) over the last year has been a great step forward for the NCU and has begun to bring us into line with the many other unions which have a Womens Advisory Committee at national level.

It has meant that issues such as equal opportunities, BTs pornography, and cervical cancer are being discussed nationally for the first time.

Within the union, now, we need to look at what the role of the Womens Advisory Committee should be. And how it should relate to women members at all levels of the union — what structures we need to establish at regional and local level, how to involve women members actively, and how to make the WAC representative of, and accountable to, women members.

This process is much further advanced in other unions where they have had women's structures for some time. For exam-

ple in the AEU where they have had a Womens Conference for the last 48 years.

In 1979 the TUC adopted the 10 point charter 'Equality for Women Within Trades Unions' which was the culmination of a struggle by women in many unions to break down the barriers to womens involvement in union affairs. Since then many unions have examined their own structures and taken steps to encourage and promote women as activists and leaders in the union.

In the TGWU they have found that 'women only' educational courses in work time, paid by the union, have drawn many new women into union activity. In the GMBATU there are womens committees at local, regional and national level. In NUPE they have taken positive action in the form of reserved seats for women on the executive and have since found even more women coming forward to stand — so that now 50 per cent of the executive are women.

It will be important for us to look at the experience of these and other unions in developing proposals for how to build on the good beginning of the WAC.

● NCU Women's Support Group meeting, Tuesday 3 June, 7.30pm, Blackpool Library.

Support Nicaragua

WHILE THE United States has steadfastly refused to implement sanctions against the barbaric apartheid regime in South Africa it has imposed a total trade embargo against Nicaragua. This embargo is part of a strategy of increasing US terrorism against that country.

The transition from capitalism is deliberately slow in Nicaragua. In a country where until five years ago illiteracy was over 50 per cent technical expertise is at a premium and the revolution is still dependent on those who have it. Reagan's policy is to create conditions where the internal capitalist opposition in Nicaragua enters into open alliance with the armed counter-revolution.

The embargo is part of a strategy for laying the basis for an eventual US invasion in Nicaragua.

It is because of what the Nicaraguan revolution represents that US imperialism is obliged to wage war against it. The threat which the revolution presents to capitalism is the threat of a good example.

overthrow the revolution today — all attempts to mobilise a significant sector of the Nicaraguan population in support of the contras have failed. Reagan's opponents are not prepared to pay the political price necessary for an invasion at the moment.

It is the job of the working class around the world to ensure that the price remains too great for the US ruling class to be prepared to rush an invasion.

The NCU took an important step at last year's conference in affiliating to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. Now let's make that solidarity real by responding to the appeal from the Nicaraguan telecommunication workers for help to fund their union education centre.

A number of branches have already voted to give money to this appeal, but so far the National Executive Committee has not responded. Pressure must be put on the NEC to open a bank account for the appeal, and to send out a *Letter to Branches* encouraging them to donate.

● Conference fringe meeting: 'Nicaragua must survive.' Thursday 5 June 12.30 pm in the Winter Garden. Organised by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. Supported by the NEC.

Political vettings — emergency

SEVERAL NCU branches, and the NEC itself, are putting up emergency resolutions to conference following the sacking of two ex-members of the NCU by Fords UK. This has further exposed the role of British Telecom (BT) in industrial victimisations and political vetting.

The *Observer* newspaper announced in October 1985: 'British Telecom is compiling a political blacklist of employees it regards as subversive.' It exposed a confidential form used in this practice by BT.

Question seven on this form asks managers to in-

dicating 'any known interests/activities outside his/her normal duties which might have a bearing on attitudes towards security matters.'

In an explanatory letter managers are asked to solicit, without the subjects knowledge, detailed information about political affiliations.

BT says that these lists are kept for 'reasons of national security.'

BBC journalists were the first group of workers to demand the end of political victimisation lists. British Telecom engineers are now joining them. Both groups of workers understand that 'national security' is a euphemism for 'national control'.

It was the campaign taken up by the TGWU 1/1107 branch at Fords that exposed the real reasons for the sackings.

Ironically it was the *Daily Mail* that spilled the beans admitting that 'a secret memo from the women's previous employers alerted Ford bosses.'

Unequivocal support for the fight against victimisation is essential if our members are to be protected. BT is involved in a national vetting operation. Its effects are, and will be, to permanently exclude from employment BT employees who have been active trade unionists or whose political views are

suspect in the opinion of their bosses.

Correctly the NCU executive has already called on the National Council for Civil Liberties and the TUC to take up the fight. The aim of the emergency resolutions to conference is to expose the extent of the victimisations, to challenge its legality, and gain the right of workers to be active trade unionists, free from exclusion lists and victimisation for their political beliefs.

Shipbuilding: a whole industry at stake



TWO WEEKS ago the government announced 3,500 redundancies in British merchant shipbuilding. It was no great surprise. Shipbuilding communities have been warning that if the total indifference of the British government towards merchant shipbuilding continued, sooner rather than later the whole industry was going to go under.

The three yards that were announced to be closed were Smith's Dock in Teesside. (already Teesside has the highest unemployment in Britain), Ferguson-Ailfa in Scotland, and the Clark-Kincade engine works on the Tyne.

At a national level the shipyard negotiating com-

mittee, a sub-committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and

By Bob Clay MP

Engineering Unions, has totally opposed any further contraction of the industry. It opposes these closures and redundancies, and supported the demonstration at the



ment was that Smith's Dock will close, there are to be 925 redundancies in the two yards on the Wear, and 475 at Govan in Scotland. Already in Sunderland we've lost half our workforce since 1979.

The government's position is this. There is the most terrible world recession, together with a huge over-capacity; no one's going to buy any new ships because they can buy second-hand ones easily enough. Basically they hope the industry survives, but we just have to wait and see.

Labour

Labour recognises that times are very hard, but South Korean and Japanese industries are still expanding.

We object to the expansion of South Korean shipbuilding on the backs of exploited workers there. Effectively South Korea operates slave labour conditions. Strikes are illegal, there is no free trade union and the fatal accident rate, for example, is 1000 times higher than Britain.

There are public sector orders in Britain for ships likely to be ordered in the next two or three years. The government could bring these forward and place the orders now. There are other orders available, particularly from developing countries who would order from Britain if generous credit terms were available.

Any decent and humane government would see this as a matter of aid. For instance, why not build ships for Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Bangladesh and Vietnam on generous terms?

70,000

Labour is also saying that a scrap and build policy should be introduced, where ship owners would be offered grants towards the cost of new ships in exchange for scrapping old ones. One way to ensure this would be to introduce a MOT on ships so that old ones would have to be scrapped.

Outside the shipbuilding communities people don't understand what's at stake. The key thing is to keep the issue as a national one.

It must be taken outside the shipbuilding areas. People must be made to understand that an entire industry is at stake, and that thousands of jobs will go. For every shipbuilding job at stake, there are six dependent jobs threatened.

We're talking about something like 70,000 jobs being at stake. They could all be gone in less than a year from now. We must treat the government announcement as an issue which the whole labour movement has to take up.

House of Commons that was held last week. A demonstration of over 2000 in London may not be particularly unusual, but when you consider that's nearly a quarter of the total workforce in the industry — who came from Scotland, the North East and Devon, all organised at about six days notice — that tells you a lot about the spirit of resistance that there is amongst the workforce.

There is a clear purpose from the national officials through to the workforces in the yards. They are fighting for their very lives.

Many of the shop stewards committees have already taken practical decisions which indicate the lines of the fight. Part of the repercussions of the closure plans by British shipbuilders is the implication that if any orders are achieved they're not going to go into the yards marked for closure.

Shop stewards in some of the other yards are saying they're not going to take orders from yards that are marked for closure. An important line of resistance is going to be the solidarity of shipyard workers in refusing to be bought off by a year or two's more work while they watch their mates go under.

Recession

The government announcement affects my constituency directly. Until the announcement there were four large merchant yards left in Britain: Govan in Scotland, Smith's Docks on Teesside and two yards on the River Wear in my constituency, Austin and Pickersgill and Sunderland Shipbuilders. As far as those yards were concerned, the announce-

Union of Communication Workers swings to the left

THIS YEAR'S Union of Communication Workers (UCW) conference saw a major swing to the left. A fierce assault has taken place against postal and Telecom workers over the past year. The 1500 delegates to this year's conference reflected the rising anger amongst the union's 190,000 members, particularly within the postal group.

In debate after debate on political questions the executive council recommendations were heavily defeated.

Whereas at the 1985 TUC and Labour Party conferences the UCW voted for the EETPU's candidates, this year's conference voted, overwhelmingly to campaign for the expulsion of the EETPU from the TUC. The union's delegation to the Labour Party conference this year is mandated to vote in favour of any motion seeking to rid this country of all nuclear weapons and nuclear power plants. It now supports the NUM's position on reimbursement of union funds by a future Labour government. It will now support the imposition of the Labour Party whip in parliamentary votes on abortion rights.

Racism

The move to the left was incomplete. The traditional opposition of the UCW to positive action for women and black people was maintained with conference voting against the demands of the Labour Women's Action Committee and no debate at all on black sections. Conference voted to accept government finance for postal ballots.

Racism in the union was openly revealed in a leaflet circulated attacking black executive member Frank Osie-tutu and

claiming black people were 'over-represented' in the union executive. This was denounced both by the left and by the platform.

By Steve Bell

There was no change in the composition of the executive council, but the delegations to the Labour and TUC conferences moved significantly to the left.

Generally the conference was like a dam bursting with the union's previously right-wing stance in the wider labour movement being overturned by a new determination by the membership.

On the economic questions the conference voted overwhelmingly for a series of regional and national 24-hour strikes against the Post Office management's attempts to unilaterally impose job cuts through time and motion studies and the introduction of casual labour. The first step in this will be ballots for industrial action in ten of the key sorting offices. Collections are already taking place at workplaces for the national fighting funds.

On wages the postal delegates overturned the EC recommendation by voting for a three hour reduction in the working week from 43 to 40 hours. The EC indicated that a ballot for action on wages in the postal section would take place unless management's current offer of 4.8 per cent and no reduction in hours was im-

proved. In British Telecoms moves to prioritise a reduction in hours were narrowly defeated. The Telecoms membership composed of around 30,000 telephonists, catering and labouring grades have been badly disorientated by BT management and showed less militancy than the postal workers.

A resolution supporting amalgamation with the NCU was carried. The resolution called for a report — based on one rule book, one general conference with autonomous group conferences, the election of all full-time officials every five years, and discussion of these points with the NCU — to be brought to the 1987 UCW conference.

Fringe

There was a growth of fringe activity at conference. Fifty delegates attended a meeting of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, which featured Frank Osie-tutu, a black EC member speaking in support of black sections. Seventy five delegates attended a Justice for Mineworkers fringe meeting, with Bill Etherington of the NUM executive speaking. This raised £190 for the campaign.

Thirty delegates attended the broad left meeting. The broad left has been inactive for some time. Silentnight, SOGAT, the Justice for the Mineworkers campaign and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign all had stalls.

Overall the conference showed that a new layer of activists, based on the growing impatience of the membership, is coming forward in the UCW.

Court ruling on teachers no-cover policy



AT A recent NUT training course Doug McAvoy, NUT assistant general secretary, told a meeting of local secretaries that the recent interim pay deal would not mean a retreat on conditions of service. Teachers couldn't be forced to cover for absent colleagues, he said. But at the same time the union leadership thinks it reasonable to cover on the first day of absence.

A few days later a test case court ruling established that a local authority need not return money deducted from four teachers who refused to cover during the dispute. This court ruling confirmed many fears held by teachers since the sell out.

It means that the courts have been used once again against trade unionists. In this case it was predictable, given that the government has calculated on there being a lull in the dispute.

The confusion of the NUT executive with the Department of Education and Science has enabled the government through the courts to hit back at teachers action. It is now

likely that there will be an increased reluctance by teachers to refuse to cover for absent colleagues.

By Ray Sirotkin

There are certainly a few Tory-led authorities (and some Alliance and Labour ones) which will quite happily deduct money at will from pay packets of their employees. For what? For refusing to do extra work for nothing!

There is no doubt that a return to 'peace and calm' has been resisted by large sections of teachers. The significance of this ruling is that it will frighten many teachers back into covering if threatened with

disciplinary action or loss of pay, while the national leadership of the NUT will merely sit back and say that they tried the courts but it didn't work.

There will be locally organised resistance to this offensive. But this should not be seen as a substitute for national leadership.

Another loss to education by this court ruling may well be supply teachers, that is teachers who stand in for absent teachers. Local Education Authorities wishing to make savings will opt for using the time-tabled staff in secondary schools and merging classes in primary and special schools. In effect this will mean increasing unemployment.

Therefore one important demand to be raised in Labour Parties in relation to education is that Labour groups (particularly where in control) maintain and improve the existing level of supply provision.

FUND DRIVE

Another £1000 needed now

WE HAVE not yet been able to collate the final score for our £15,000 fund drive. Full details in next weeks issue.

However, from preliminary figures, it looks as if we will be just under £1,000 short. It would be nice if our supporters were to rush in emergency donations before the final tally is recorded.

As our regular readers will know, we need to make the full £15,000 if we are to avoid having to miss issues of the paper leading up to the summer break.

Thanks last week go to our supporters on the railways who are attempting to emulate our Telecoms supporters. At the last count Telecoms supporters had donated

£450. There was also a magnificent effort from our supporters at the Labour women's conference who donated £120.

Thanks, too, to Alex Warner who although unemployed for the past five years, sent us £2.

And last but not least, thanks to those who decided to take out a supporters subscription in the course of the fund drive, thereby donating us a regular sum each month, including this month. Bankers orders to the value of £85 per month have been made out to us.

From next week, we will be starting a regular fighting fund. So, if you didn't have time to get around to making a donation to keep us publishing, now is your chance.

A Socialist ACTION

MARCH

FOR FREEDOM
IN NAMIBIA & SOUTH AFRICA!

LONDON SATURDAY JUNE 28



ANTI APARTHEID MOVEMENT IS MANDELA ST. LONDON NW1 0J-387 7966

PREPARATIONS are in high gear for the Anti Apartheid Movement march and rally in London on 28 June.

Last year over 100,000 people in Britain marched to show their solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa. This year there is every indication that the numbers will be even bigger.

The AAM nationally has already printed 350,000 leaflets. Groups across the country are organising to ensure the largest possible turnout on the day.

In South Africa, beginning on 16 June, there will be a three-day stayaway general strike call over the country, to mark the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprisings.

Throughout the decades South African and Namibian people have shown their desire for freedom and their willingness to fight for it. The AAM has put

By Larry Herman

out a call for everyone in solidarity with the South African and Namibian revolutions to assemble at 11.00am in Hyde Park. The event will begin with a rally at which the main speakers will be from the African National Congress and SWAPO.

The march will leave Hyde Park at noon for Clapham Common, South London. African and British bands will play there through the evening. There will be also a wide range of

political and cultural stalls, as well as AAM material.

The Anti Apartheid Movement is appealing for funds for this event. The campaign has set targets of £200 from each AAM group and £50 from each affiliated women's group, Labour Party and trade union branch. All donations towards making 28 June a success are welcome.

All groups and labour movement organisations should start now — and plan to make the 28 June demonstration in solidarity with the peoples of southern Africa a huge success.

• Further information and literature is available from: AAM, 13 Mandela Street, London NW1.

Divisions deepen among South African racists

IT IS an indication of the depth of the crisis of the South African state when the police stand by and allow the Foreign Minister to have his public meeting broken up by armed white thugs. But that is exactly what happened last week when the ruling Nationalist Party ordered the police to protect Pik Botha's meeting at Pietersburg. The meeting was instead smashed up by Eugene Terre Blanche's Afrikaaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB). The police stood by as thugs carrying swastika 'look alike' flags prevented the meeting taking place.

But police collusion with the AWB's openly fascist thugs is hardly surprising given the role assigned to the 'security services' by the apartheid state itself. South Africa is not a fascist state. But the chief fascists are undoubtedly in the government.

Botha himself was an organiser of gangs attacking meetings of other white parties in the thirties.

Today it is the apartheid state which organises the terror, torture, murder, and suppression of the most elementary bourgeois democratic rights for the black majority, which is the sole means whereby the apartheid state can be maintained in power against South Africa's black majority.

This state is also increasingly organising Latin American style 'death squads' which go out to murder anti-apartheid activists in the black townships. It is hardly to be wondered at then when such armed forces are riddled with support for the most openly fascist and white supremacist organisation. It gives some idea of what they do in the black townships.

The stories carried in British newspapers last week to the effect that Botha's government is now threatened by 'fascist reaction' because of its reformist stance, and

Botha must therefore be supported, are ludicrous. It is this regime itself which is the organiser of the colossal scale of terror necessary to hold back the black rebellion against apartheid. Compared to the Nationalist regime organisations like the AWB are just a joke. To claim otherwise, and present Botha as threatened by 'the right' is to cover up for the inhuman crimes of this regime itself.

The most vivid proof of the intention of the Botha government came this week with the announcement by the South African regime that it intends to railroad through still more repressive legislations. This will give the Minister of Law and Order powers which are equivalent to martial law in any part of the country he deems to be an 'unrest area'.

Such powers are deemed to include: for the police to take whatever action they considered necessary, and to prohibit any activity they deemed a threat to security; only if a person were held for more than 30 days in prison would the police have to release their name to parliament; no court of law would be competent to give judgement on the validity of proclamations and regulations decided by the Minister for such

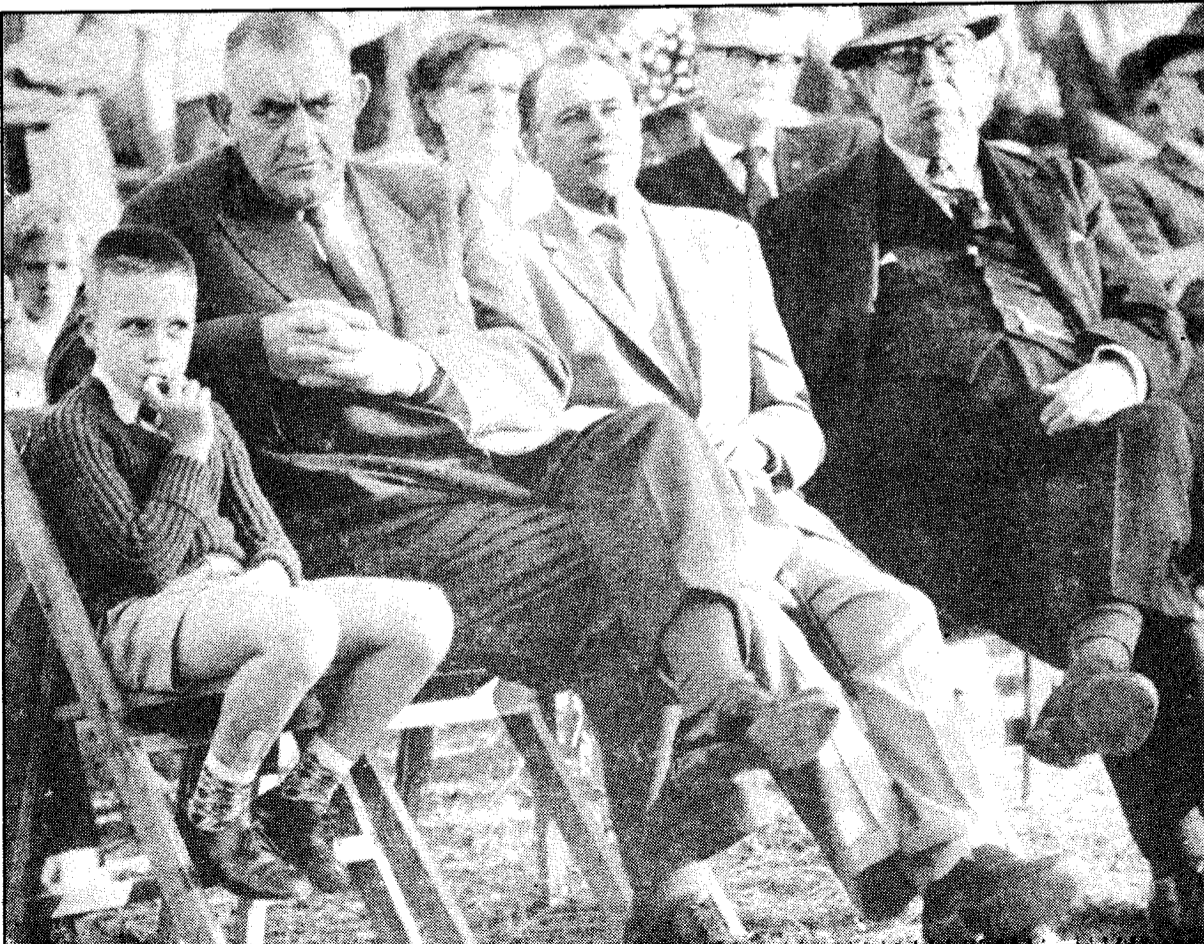


'unrest areas'; the proclamation of an unrest area would last three months.

In other words the purpose of the law is to allow the apartheid state's police to have the equivalent of the powers they exercised under a state of emergency without having the political embarrassment of

actually declaring one.

Splits among the white racists are excellent. They weaken them all. But the divisions between the ex-fascist Botha, and the open fascist Terre Blanche, should not detain the labour movement for one instance. Botha, not Terre Blanche, heads the most powerful death squads in South Africa.



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