

# A Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM



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## STOP THE ALTON BILL

# FOR A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE

**DAVID ALTON's proposals to radically restrict women's access to abortion have already provoked wide ranging opposition. This includes even from the health spokesperson of his own party and from Liberal women who are organising to campaign against them.**

Alton's key proposal is to cut the time limits for abortion by ten weeks — from 28 to 18 weeks. This would require amendments to the Infant Life Preservation Act of 1929, as well as to the 1967 Abortion Act.

If passed his bill would hit hardest women in some of the weakest and most vulnerable positions. Of the 5,600 women who last year had abortions over 18 weeks many were very young women or were women carrying a handicapped fetus not detected until later in the pregnancy. Alton allows for no exceptions: despite overwhelming public support for the right of choice for women carrying a handicapped fetus, they would be refused an abortion.

In general Alton aims to pave the way

to outlawing all abortion. As he said this week, the 'post-conception child's ... overwhelming right to life must always take precedence over any other claimed rights'.

His 18 week limit is aimed at still further restrictions: allowing for a margin of error, doctors would often refuse abortions to women well below this limit. An immediate attack is posed on the rights of these 16,000 women who, last year for instance, had abortions between 13 and 16 weeks.

Given Alton's extreme proposals, 'compromise' bids may well be proposed. We should be very clear: *any* lowering of time limits from 28 weeks will make it more difficult for *all* women to obtain abortions, as well as inflicting unnecessary misery on that very small number of women who end up needing abortions over 24 weeks.

Alton's proposals would certainly not prevent unwanted pregnancies or abortions. Last year nearly 25,000 women came to Britain for abortions from countries with very restricted or no legal access.

Equally certain would be the return to the unsafe backstreet abortions of the

days before the '67 Act, and the accompanying deaths and injuries to women, — as well the rise in unwanted births, deprived children, unhappiness and despair.

The support secured across the labour movement for the provisions of the '67 Act, including in the policy of the TUC and Labour Party, can stop Alton's attack and must be mobilised now.

Unfortunately Labour Party conference passed a contradictory resolution — opposing Alton's Bill but accepting Labour MPs right to a free vote on the issue. Labour Party members must demand a parliamentary whip is imposed to vote against the Bill.

Coordinated by the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) and other pro-choice organisations the fightback has already begun. Alton's Bill, to be published in parliament on 27 October must meet a flood of opposition. The picket of parliament called for that day should be supported by everyone who defends the safety for women possible under the '67 Act.

David Alton should be sent to join that long list of MPs in obscurity following their defeated anti-abortion bills.

## BRITAIN OUT OF THE GULF! HANDS OFF IRAN!



# Socialist ACTION

## The Gulf

SOCIALIST ACTION is in general a strong supporter of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs. We think the positions they have taken on the miners strike, on Ireland, on democracy in the Labour Party, and on other issues have been important in defending the interests of the working class. Nor are we interested in the nit-picking, or straightforward ultra-left, type of criticism of them that appears in much of the left press.

But that is why, when they are wrong on a big issue, it is necessary to say so clearly. On this, both in the latest issue of *Campaign Group News*, and in the bulletin they issued at Labour Party conference, the Campaign Group called for an arms embargo against Iraq and Iran (see page 4).

But what is the concrete situation in the Gulf today? The US and British fleets, aided to their allies, are massing in order to 'deal with' Iran. There is no 'arms embargo' being applied by them. The demand for an arms embargo today is simply a demand that Iran be disarmed exactly at the moment when the US and British fleets are threatening to attack it.

Socialists rightly reject the anti-working class character of the Khomeini regime — and those that know a little more should equally reject the no less anti-working class character of the Hussein regime in Iraq. But the idea that Britain and the US, of all powers, would introduce anything more progressive in any country in the 'Middle East' is ridiculous. The US and Britain prop up every reactionary regime and group in the world — including apartheid in South Africa and the contras in Central America.

Britain and the US's objection is not to the anti-working class character of the Khomeini regime but that, for its own purposes, it is forced to take some actions which collide with their interests in the region. They would like installed in Iran an equally anti-working class regime which was simply more pliant to US and British demands.

Socialists have to demand the withdrawal of the US and British fleets from the Gulf — as Campaign Group members do. Exactly for that reason they also have to oppose an arms embargo against Iran. Anything else deprives Iran of the ability to defend itself against Britain and the US.

## The LLL

THIS YEAR'S Labour Party conference confirmed very strongly the role which is now played in the party by Labour Left Liaison (LLL).

The first index was simply the size of its fringe meeting. A year ago the LCC fringe meeting at Labour Party conference was attended by 150 people. This year, held on the eve of the NEC elections, 600 people attended its meeting.

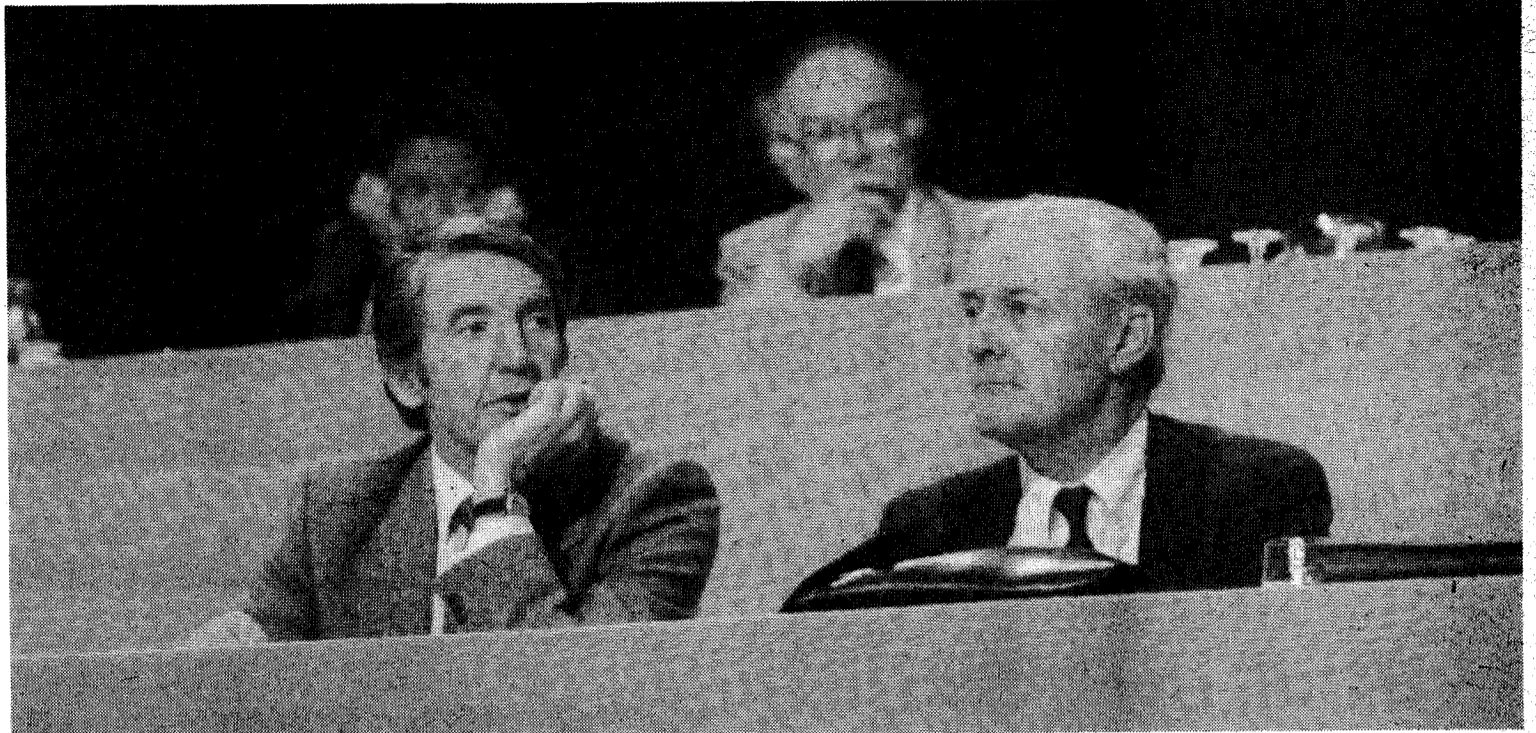
The weight of the campaigns in LLL was also seen on the conference agenda. Well over 100 resolutions and amendments on the agenda came from the campaigns in the LLL.

In the NEC elections it was candidates most identified with key campaigns in the LLL — Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone — who did well in the constituency section. The joint slate for the NEC between CLPD, the LLL and the Campaign Group was also the most effective for several years — and directly responsible for ensuring the left, not Bryan Gould, was really successful in the CLP section. Of 115 CLPs voting for three women candidates in the NEC elections, 110 voted basically for the Campaign Group/CLPD/LLL slate — showing its importance in promoting women candidates.

LLL members were also able to take an important political initiative prior to Labour Party conference in the 'left unity' statement signed jointly with members of the LCC. This had a direct political impact in helping put the lid on talk of coalition in the Labour Party — if only because it created fear of a united left to oppose any such move. The statement also broke down sectarian divisions on the left which the right deliberately foster — and thereby increased the room for manoeuvre of the left inside the party.

In short an extremely powerful political instrument has been created in the LLL. But it is one that has had to be fought for — both against opportunist attacks from the LCC from the outside, which wanted to talk of positive action and other issues but deliver nothing in practice, and from ultra-leftism from *Labour Briefing*, which would have put the left in a ghetto and smashed it.

The LLL now has to use the influence it is creating to help turn around the situation in the party during the next year.



# Brighton '87 — CLPs stay left, unions swing right

LABOUR PARTY conference week in Brighton started on a gloomy note with Kinnock already having the votes to overturn accountability of MPs and Bryan Gould making all the running for Labour to promote itself as the party of share ownership. The week ended on a considerably more optimistic note with the constituencies rejecting the right wing in the NEC elections, a first class row over defence policy, and women and black people defending their rights in the party.

The week started to pick up on Sunday at the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) and Labour Left Liaison (LLL) fringe meetings. More than 500 people attended the CLPD — meeting which briefed delegates on the week's agenda. Six hundred attended the LLL fringe meeting in the evening to hear Diane Abbott, Audrey Wise, Eric Heffer, Jo Richardson, Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Ken Livingstone and other NEC candidates speak. This compares to 150 at the LLL meeting last year.

By John Ross

Later in the week 400 people attended a meeting on the left unity statement signed by members of the LCC and LLL.

In between times 280 people attended the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC) fringe meeting with Bryan Gould and other speakers — and heard Diane Abbott and Robin Cook attack Bryan Gould over his advocacy of share ownership as a socialist policy.

The first day also saw wide circulation of *Labour's Future* — a reply by Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Alan Meale, and Ann Pettifor to the *Moving Ahead* document put forward by the party leadership as the basis for Labour's policy in the next four years. After one day of the 'fringe' the left was clearly regaining its morale.

Monday morning was back to depression. The vote to overturn accountability of MPs to their GC's had already been set up in advance. The vote in principle to overturn accountability was carried by 4.5 million to 1.8 million votes. The only consolation was that CLPD won the debate hands down and a glance at the hall showed the CLP delegates voted

massively to defend accountability. But the leadership's position was carried on the basis of the bloc vote — a pattern that was to be repeated all week. The electoral college system for the election of MPs was introduced by 4.5 million to 1.6 million votes. Pure One Member One Vote, which would have destroyed the union link, was defeated by 4.4 million to 1.8 million.

## Vote

But the really electrifying vote, the turning point in the mood of the week, came with the NEC results announced at the end of Monday's session. The 'intended' outcome in this had already been widely leaked to the press as 'fact' by Kinnock's office. Bryan Gould was to come second in the constituency section poll, behind David Blunkett, and Ken Livingstone, against whom a vicious campaign had been waged in the press, was to be defeated. The *Guardian*, whose political comment on the Labour Party appears to be a daily bulletin for the right wing of the LCC, had already confidently predicted Gould would come second, and the *New Statesman* had predicted Livingstone's defeat. The press, having been briefed on the outcome, was already preparing to leave.

## Right

In the event Livingstone cruised in 41,000 votes ahead of Gould. Equally striking Diane Abbott, the first black woman to stand for the NEC constituency section, gained a 234,000 votes and came ninth. Kinnock supporter Michael Meacher saw his vote fall by 161,000 — falling from third to seventh place in the constituency section, and Tam Dalyell was crushed — his

vote falling by 227,000 votes.

The CLPs had resisted the right wing drive to a surprisingly high degree. David Blunkett was the only member of the 'soft left' to come high up the list of those elected. Bryan Gould's popularity, after gigantic media hype, was falling by the hour and if the vote had been taken at the end of the week he would have been very lucky to have got elected to the NEC.

The one very disturbing result in the constituency section, which it has to be a decisive goal of the left to overcome during this year, was the continuing revelation of deep sexism in the party. Audrey Wise was below Gould and Meacher in the vote and went off the NEC. Jo Richardson, who with her support in the party should be in the top three elected to the NEC, came sixth.

## Left

It was the left wing constituencies that delivered the votes for women candidates. 115 CLPs voted for three women candidates — of which 110 voted either the straight Campaign Group slate or six out of seven Campaign Group candidates. Only three CLPs voting an LCC slate voted for three women candidates — despite the fact that formally the LCC endorsed Diane Abbott, Jo Richardson, and Audrey Wise.

It was the same as last, and every year. The LCC formally endorses women candidates and then in practice delivers no votes.

The right, needless to say, was marked by neanderthal sexism. Gerald Kaufmann, in Manchester Gorton, for example moved an NEC slate that did not contain a single woman.

## Sections

The other sections of the NEC, notably the women's section, confirmed the same pattern as the conference voting. The right wing, basing itself on the block vote, gained all five places in the women's section — removing left wingers

Margaret Beckett and Joan Maynard.

The great political explosion of the week came in the defence debate — dominated by Livingstone's remarks at the *Tribune* rally the night before that any attempt to overturn unilateralism would lead to 'civil war' in the party. This drove the right into a frenzy precisely because they knew it was true — and had been hoping the left would lie down and accept unilateral nuclear disarmament being overturned. Livingstone's speech gave due notice that wasn't going to happen.

The party leadership also got its way on rejecting the renationalisation of privatised industries — although only after a shock and a quick demand for a card vote. Strong support was also registered for moves outlawing job discrimination against Catholics in the North of Ireland — although the resolution fell due to opposition by the TGWU. The NEC was defeated over the issue of a national minimum wage — with Michael Meacher being jeered for replying for the platform to oppose

demands for a national minimum wage of £120 a week.

Serious setbacks were the loss of support for Black Sections in the NUM delegation — against the views of Heathfield and Scargill, and a narrow loss of support for Black Sections in the NUR delegation. These votes confirmed the shift to the right in the union delegations.

## Marker

Another marker was laid down on the Friday morning when Hattersley was forced to make a strong speech against proportional representation, and coalition with the Liberals, despite heckling from his own right wing supporters — one frenzied right winger even grabbed the microphone at the end of the session.

Overall the left recovered as the week progressed — after the initial wave of disorientation following the election. The CLPs stood firm. The big fight now is to take that in to the unions — the key strategic task of the next year.

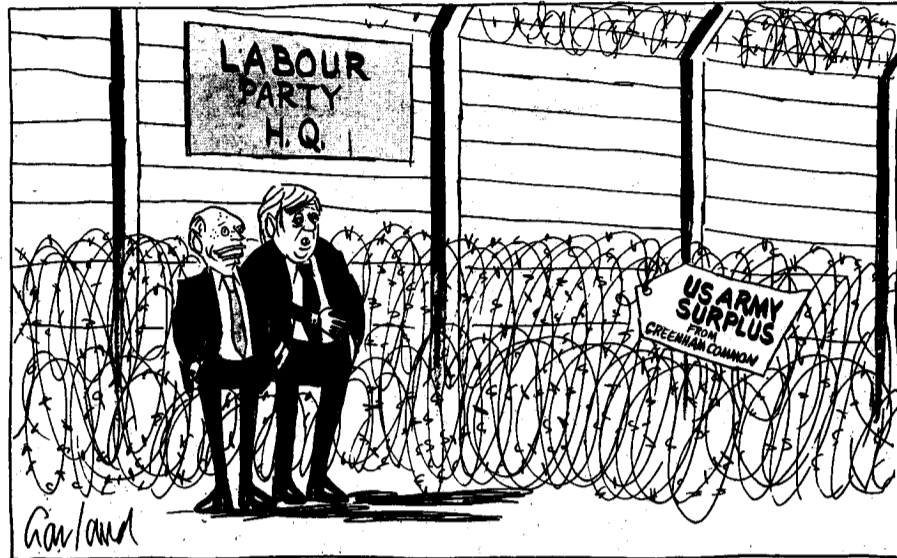
## Votes for the NEC

Constituency Section	Last year	This year	Change
Blunkett*	499,000	466,000	-33,000
Benn*	490,000	439,000	-51,000
Skinner*	430,000	394,000	-36,000
Livingstone*	-	385,000	-
Gould*	-	344,000	-
Richardson*	364,000	326,000	-38,000
Meacher*	482,000	321,000	-161,000
Wise	279,000	238,000	-41,000
Abbott	-	234,000	-
Heffer	251,000	187,000	-64,000
Dalyell	376,000	149,000	-227,000
<b>Women's Section</b>			
Lestor*	1,270,000	5,439,000	+4,169,000
Jeuda*	3,801,000	5,145,000	+1,344,000
Dunwoody*	3,820,000	3,997,000	+177,000
Renee Short*	4,376,000	3,339,000	-1,937,000
Anne Davis*	2,887,000	3,339,000	+387,000
Beckett	3,101,000	3,064,000	-37,000
Clywd	609,000	2,677,000	+2,068,000
Clare Short	2,180,000	2,154,000	26,000
Maynard	3,374,000	1,302,000	-2,072,000
Bellos	-	449,000	-

\*elected

# Defend unilateral nuclear disarmament

'NO TURNING back — we're unilateralist and proud of it,' said Bernadette Hillon, delegate for Lancs West CLP, in the defence debate at 1987 Labour Party annual conference. She was moving Composite 34, 'the only proposition that clearly reaffirms our total commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament'. On a show of hands conference overwhelmingly supported those sentiments. But another composite was also passed which creates ambiguity. And there is equally no room to doubt that unilateralism is again under attack from Labour's right wing. CAROL TURNER reports from Brighton.



ITS FOR WHEN WE DO ACTUALLY REVIEW OUR DEFENCE POLICY.

How the Independent saw Labour's defence debate: 'Ken Livingstone was stating no more than the truth when he warned that an attempt to abandon the policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament would lead to something approaching civil war within the Labour Party,' said its editorial.

## Labour right mounts new attack

'SELF-MUTILATION in the cause of a false deity' was the rather lurid description given to Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament policy by Denis Healey's research assistant in the Wednesday issue of *Fabian Conference News*. Dr Len Scott openly elaborated what others have carefully glossed over: Labour should use the opportunity of a policy review to ditch unilateralism.

He argued: 'to enter the next election pledged to scrap Trident would meet with incredulity. To take the decision to terminate our independent strategic capacity will require substantial reciprocation from the Soviet Union ...'

John Lloyd editorialised in like vein in the pages of the *New Statesman* that appeared at the end of conference. 'In foreign affairs, and crucially in defence, the reviewers must now give pride of place to the world as it is and is likely to become.' Lloyd concluded that: 'the reduced power of the UK means that a grand unilateralist gesture cannot stimulate emulation ...' All these statements are intended to prepare the way for ditching unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Few at present are prepared to go as far in public as Dr Len Scott or John Lloyd. But it is clear where the right wing are heading. In the months to come more and more so-called multilateralist voices will join the chorus against Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament policy.

Scott's boss Denis Healey trod a careful line in Thursday afternoon's 'defence' debate at Brighton. Labour could not hang a 'do not disturb' sign on this part of policy he argued, in a reference to Neil Kinnock's speech of that Tuesday.

Under the guise of describing 'the views of socialist colleagues in Europe', he argued that nuclear weapons were a deterrent. Sheltering under the nuclear umbrella was essential, said Healey, until 'international nuclear disarmament' was achieved.

Despite this, the overwhelming mood of constituency delegates was clear.

In the words of the *Guardian* editorial of the Friday 2 October: 'they are not to be budged on the basics of the unilateral non-nuclear defence policy.'

That clarity was not expressed, however, in the two composites, C30 and C34, that were passed at the end of the debate. The latter was unambiguous, but the former opened the door to a future fudge.

In this light, many other statements were clearly ambiguous. In his leader's speech earlier in the week, Neil Kinnock welcomed the US-USSR nuclear arms talks, especially praising the United States.

He went on: 'we will work to ensure that we have policies that are capable of dealing with the changed conditions of the 1990s in a way that will enhance the prospect of removing reliance on nuclear weapons.' Hardly a clear statement of Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament policies.

The ambiguity of this statement is even more important when one considers the genesis of Composite 30 passed by conference. Moved by TASS and seconded by Chelsea CLP, the latter contributed the call for a working party to review 'timetable and negotiating strategy'.

Chelsea is the constituency party of Charles Clark, Kinnock's advisor. Another part of Chelsea's resolution, not included in composite 30, 'reaffirms the party's determination to scrap the British independent nuclear weapon and supports the adoption of a non-nuclear defence strategy for Britain'. But it made no mention of US nuclear bases — or the commitment to remove all nuclear weapons from British soil and waters — a

clear shift away from unilateralism.

Likewise, Joan Ruddock's much quoted contribution to the defence debate was clearly designed to open up a way for a shift in policy. It must be made clear that we will scrap Trident, she said. 'But that does not stop Labour using Trident politically' concluded Ruddock.

This speech was described by the *Guardian* leader as: 'the rather dismal attempts of some of the realigned centre to try to make two and two make five, exemplified in Mrs Joan Ruddock's speech and in the optimistic construction put by Labour officials on the meaning of the motions which were passed.'

It was in this context that Ken Livingstone's remarks that any attempt to abandon unilateral nuclear disarmament would lead to civil war within the party were greeted with outrage by the Labour establishment. Denis Healey appeared at conference especially to make his contribution in the defence debate, most of which was devoted to attacking 'the Brent representative'. Tony Clarke, summing up for the platform, also turned his fire on Livingstone.

But as much of the press pointed out the following day, Livingstone's remarks caused such anger precisely because they were true. That was clear from the CLP delegates who took the rostrum during the defence debate to demand that any review must leave the principles of unilateral nuclear disarmament alone.

In the next period the rank and file not just of the CLPs but also of the trade unions must reassert its determination to defend Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament policy. No turning back! Unilateralist and proud of it!



## Review presentation not policy says Todd

TGWU leader Ron Todd has called on the Labour Party to stand firm on its nuclear disarmament policy.

Speaking at the South East TUC conference on the weekend after Labour met in Brighton, Todd said Labour's defence policy couldn't be blamed for the party's general election defeat.

How can we believe that people who live in the south found defence a decisive issue while those in the north did not, he asked? Todd went on: 'What we have got to look at is the way we present the policy.'

Ron Todd's statement is a welcome reaffirmation of the TGWU's commitment to the policies which that union has been in the forefront of pioneering in the party. After the transport workers contribution to the defence debate at Labour Party conference it is doubly welcome.

TGWU delegate Jack Dromey was the first on his feet after the movers and seconders of the composites. He came to the rostrum to reaffirm the TGWU's commitment to Labour's non-nuclear

defence policy, said Dromey, by supporting Composite 30.

He devoted his speech to the need to strengthen Britain's conventional defences, stressing the redundancies facing defence workers at Enfield and Davenport. Dromey's failure to take up any other aspect of Labour's unilateralist policy did not go unremarked by conference.

Neither did his silence on Composite 34. This resolution was the only one which unambiguously reaffirmed the party's commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament.

1987 was the first time for many years that general secretary Ron Todd did not take to the Labour conference rostrum to confirm the TGWU's support for unilateral nuclear disarmament. His weekend speech, however, makes clear his position.

After Brighton the attack on nuclear disarmament from Labour's right wing is out in the open. It is more important that ever that trade union members make clear once again their commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament.

## Behind the scenes at Brighton

RESOLUTIONS FOR the 'defence' section of the 1987 Labour Party annual conference were the subject of intense behind-the-scenes lobbying before the debate ever reached the floor. If Walworth Road's policy directorate could have had its way, no resolution clearly and unambiguously reaffirming Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament policy would ever have made it to the rostrum.

FIVE composites comprised the Thursday afternoon 'defence' debate at Labour Party conference in Brighton. Two of them, Composites 30 and 34, formally reaffirmed existing policy — but their content was substantially different.

In the unambiguous words of Composite (C)34: 'Conference reaffirms its commitment to Labour's non-nuclear defence and unilateral nuclear disarmament policies including the removal from British soil and waters of all nuclear weapons and nuclear bases within the lifetime of the next Labour government.'

According to C30, the statement that 'conference reaffirms its commitment to Labour's non-nuclear defence policy' remains unspecified. Only Polaris is mentioned by name — the Tory government is condemned for upgrading it to the detriment of conventional capability.

In C34, both the strategy and timetable of Labour's non-nuclear defence policy is clear. All nuclear weapons and nuclear bases will go, and they will go in the lifetime of a single parliament. This is exactly the area that C30 leaves unclear, for an NEC working party to 'review'.

This unclarity is no accident. Of the 47 resolutions and amendments on the final agenda, 24 reaffirmed unilateralism. Nonetheless, the policy directorate office of Walworth Road produced a draft composite which excluded the phrase 'unilateral nuclear disarmament.'

## Unclear

The nearest the draft came was: 'Conference urges the party to continue to oppose the possession by this country of nuclear weapons and the stationing of such weapons within this country...'

Only Polaris and Trident were specifically referred to in the Walworth Road draft.

In the event this draft bit the dust. It was superseded by C30 supported by TASS and Chelsea CLP. Unfortunately TASS was more concerned with welcoming the arms talks than with defending nuclear disarmament by Britain.

However C30 contains



ed a sentence that proved an embarrassment to TASS. The composite reaffirmed Labour's commitment to NATO membership despite TASS's policy to the contrary. Throughout the conference, TASS were lobbying to have C30 withdrawn.

This is probably the main reason for a remarkable decision by the conference arrangements committee (CAC) on the day before the defence debate. The CAC decided that time permitted only three of the five defence composites to be debated by conference, and that C30, with the least supporting organisations, would be one of the two resolutions dropped.

No sooner had this decision been taken — with the full support of CAC chair Derek Gladwin — than the party leadership set up its own lobby to get C30 reinstated on the agenda. It was for this reason that the local government debate on Thursday morning was foreshortened and all five defence composites were debated by delegates.

## Mood

On a show of hands conference overwhelmingly carried both C30 and C34. There was no room to doubt the mood of delegates — unilateral nuclear disarmament had been reaffirmed. What the delegates didn't realise was that by ensuring Composite 30 was unambiguously reaffirmed and debated the party leadership had set about trying to abandon Labour's unilateralist policy.



## The fair-weather LCC

**THE Labour Coordinating Committee's right wing has consistently refused to support Livingstone, regardless of the fact that he was on the LCC slate for the national executive elections.**

In Scotland, where the LCC can deliver votes, and where its right wing is strong, only 15 constituency parties out of 72 voted for Livingstone in the NEC ballot at Labour Party conference.

On the Tuesday of party conference, *Labour Activist*, which is also controlled by the right wing of the LCC, claimed that Ken Livingstone standing for the NEC has knocked off Audrey Wise. They ignored the fact that Livingstone had called

for a vote for Wise and Gould had not.

*Labour Activist* also disregarded the fact that Livingstone ranked fourth and Wise eighth in the NEC vote. Bryan Gould and Michael Meacher were both on the LCC slate and were both placed between Livingstone and Wise in the ballot.

By the following day however, *Labour Activist* had adjusted its line. 'Contrary to some views,' it pompously intoned, 'we expect that Ken Livingstone will not abuse his new position by following the easy oppositionist option that would marginalise him on the NEC. We urge him to play a constructive role, bringing to the NEC his experience, sense of humour and the popular politics pioneered at the GLC.'

## New Statesman gets it wrong

**ON the Friday before Labour Party conference, *New Statesman* readers were treated to the following tit-bit:**

'The constituency division, which elects seven of the 26 ordinary members of the national executive is, for once, quite open and will be an indicator of how far the party at large is moving away from the hard left. The Dagenham superstar, Bryan Gould, is bound to win a place and Ken Livingstone, who has clearly caught Doctor Death's disease of a desire to self-immolate since being elevated to parliament, is almost as certain not.'

This piece was just one small part of a campaign to rubbish Livingstone in the run-up to the NEC elections. We have combed the



post-conference issue of *New Statesman* carefully. There is not even a mention in passing that Christian Wolmar got it wrong.

## NAC conference

**TWENTY years of the Abortion Act is the theme of NAC's twelfth annual conference to be held on the weekend of Saturday 31 October-Sunday 1 November in London.**

With the threatened attack of David Alton's Bill looming, NAC's conference is a must.

## Strip-search conference

**'BAN strip-searching' say the London Strategic Policy Unit (LSPU) and the Association of London Authorities (ALA).**

These two organisations are holding a conference against strip-searching in December.

An LSPU report details growing concern over the number of women subjected to strip searching, especially

Irish and black women. It also lists mounting opposition among health service trade unions, professional bodies and medical experts.

The conference will investigate the ways in which groups can work together to expose strip searching for what it is and thus build up pressure to stop it. More information is available from Jaqui Kelly on 01-630 5729 or Nina Hutchinson on 01-633 3908.

# Why Labour is right to say no to PR

**DELEGATES TO Labour's annual conference overwhelmingly voted down an appeal for proportional representation (PR) on the last day at Brighton. This came in the guise of a resolution calling on the NEC to set up a working party to examine 'all aspects' of electoral reform. They were right to do so.**

Whatever the injustices of the electoral system may be — and there are many — there is no doubt whatsoever about the purpose of proportional representation at present — it would *only* be introduced to prevent Labour forming a majority government. Its subsidiary purpose would be to introduce a 'list' system of parliamentary candidates, in gigantic constituencies, and thereby smash any accountability of Labour MPs.

Delegates to the Brighton conference had the good sense to appreciate the PR con that's going on. Unfortunately some of the groups on the left didn't.

*Socialist Organiser* actually advocated voting for

the resolution to consider introducing PR. 'It is not a straight left-right issue,' we were told in their Friday bulletin to conference. And: 'Many of the opposing arguments are unconvincing.' *Socialist Organiser* lectured us that: 'Coalitionism is a threat under the present electoral system; it comes from politics, not how votes are counted.'

*Labour Briefing* couldn't make up its mind on the issue. It carried a centre-spread on PR prior to the conference — with positions for and against carried without comment. The *Labour Briefing* conference bulletin likewise sat on the fence.

These positions are typical of Socialist



*Organiser* and *Briefing*. Ultra-left on issues of tactics and profoundly rightest on the most important issues of the class struggle.

The whole issue of PR is one of *politics* — not abstract voting systems. The bourgeoisie would

doubtless like the Tory Party to be in power for ever — and certainly it is bending all its energies at present to ensure that there will be a fourth Thatcher term. But, being a practical class, it knows that uninterrupted Tory government is not going to happen. It must

organise not simply to have an acceptable government but to have an acceptable opposition as well.

The first goal of PR is to ensure that there will not be a majority Labour government. Its second, via the mechanism of coalition, is to give the Labour leadership an excuse for their right wing policies — 'well of course we would have liked bold socialist policies but unfortunately we were constrained by the Liberals.'

The only conditions under which the bourgeoisie will introduce PR in Britain in the late 1980s are where it believes the Tories are likely to lose the next election.

Being 'for' or 'against' proportional representation is not a matter of abstract democracy. The issue of PR is a concrete one — and everyone with an interest in the advancement of socialism in Britain should oppose it.

## No arms embargo against Iran

**AT LABOUR Party conference *Campaign Briefing* was a daily bulletin produced by the Campaign Group of MPs, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, the Labour Party Black Section, the Labour Women's Action Committee and Socialist Action. Its editorial line is decided by majority vote but with the right of those who have a minority opinion to express their point of view.**

At this year's Labour Party conference the editorial board of *Campaign Briefing* decided to support Composite resolution 48 to the conference — which included a call for an arms embargo against Iran and Iraq. *Socialist Action*, in line with its editorial policy, called for a vote against that resolution. We print below the exchange which took place on Iran.

THE war in the Gulf has cost one million lives in eight years and the killing has been done with weapons from all over Western Europe, the USA and China, who have fuelled both war machines by loans and credits, oil purchase and allowing the fiefdom movement of arms buying agents.

The US designs on the Gulf have always been to ensure pro-US govern-

ments in Iran and Iraq. They first supported Iran, then Iraq. One million people died and now the threat to US shipping is so serious that the fleet has had to be sent in!

Today, we decide our policy. Composite 48 from CRS quite rightly condemns the fascist intention of both the Khomeini regime in Iran and the regime of Saddam Al Hussein and points out the

denial of human rights implicit in their policies. It also calls for the Labour Party to call for an effective arms embargo.

Composite 49 makes quite valid and correct criticism of the Iranian regime, but fails to mention the Iraqi regime. Implicitly it takes the side of Iraq and calls for action against Iran. It also allows us only to support the Mujahadin and ignores the left and the trade unionists working and facing repression in Iran and Iraq.

We ought to be an internationalist party building international links with the opposition left in both countries. We can only do this effectively from a position of stopping arms and trade deals with both repressive regimes. We must also support asylum seekers from the area who manage to reach Britain.

The British Labour Party must not give succour to the imperialism of the US in supporting the

Iraqi counter offensive, nor must our reaction to that imperialism be to support Khomeini against the US.

Only support for 48 and an effective arms embargo can give any hope for the future for the people of Iran and Iraq being slaughtered in the war and for the left facing daily repression in both countries.

**Jeremy Corbyn MP**

THE first priority of Labour in relation to the Gulf conflict must be to campaign for the withdrawal of all American, British and allied forces from the Gulf. Notwithstanding the thoroughly anti-working class nature of both the Iranian and Iraqi regimes, any solution imposed by Reagan and Thatcher would be less, not more, progressive.

It is a typical piece of imperialist hypocrisy to

demand an arms embargo against Iran when the most powerful military force on earth — the USA — is preparing to attack it.

The Iran-Iraq war was started by Iraq in invading Iran. When this attack was defeated, the war was maintained by the Khomeini regime in order to bolster its grip over Iranian society.

It is in the interests of the working classes of Iran and Iraq to end the war. But, the American and British policy in the Gulf is designed to secure, not peace, but their own domination in the area.

Reagan and Thatcher's campaign for an arms embargo aims simply to disarm Iran whilst the US and Britain marshal colossal military forces against it. It is for the peoples of Iran and Iraq, not Reagan and Thatcher, to settle accounts with Khomeini and Saddam Hussein.

**Socialist Action**

## 'Fight the Alton Bill' campaign

**THE strength of the opposition David Alton's proposals to severely limit women's access to abortion was shown by the attendance at an initial meeting convened by the National Abortion Campaign on Monday 6 October in London.**

**By Anne Kane**

The meeting, called to discuss establishing a campaign against the Alton proposals, was attended by representatives of all the pro-choice campaigns, including the National Abortion Campaign, the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign and the Abortion Law Reform Association, as well as by women from the Labour Party, the Communist Party and the Liberals, and by labour movement campaigns like the Labour Women's Action Commit-

tee.

From the meeting came the decision to set up a Fight the Alton Bill (FAB) campaign, and an initial plan of action for the coming months. There was general optimism about the support this should achieve, given the very broad range of organisations and the majority public opinion for a defence of the provisions of the 1967 Abortion Act.

Both the TUC and the Labour Party have this policy and have successfully mobilised to defeat every other attack on the 67 Abortion Act. Organisations like the National Union of Students, with 1¼ million members and representing mainly young people, also have this policy. NUS will be a crucial component in the campaign, given that any restriction in access to abortion would affect young women most.

Alton's Bill will be published in parliament on 27 October, when there will be a press conference

and a picket of parliament by the FAB campaign.

This activity will be supported by well-known labour movement, media and other personalities. Further action is planned to follow the course of Alton's Bill through parliament.

Coordinating meetings of the campaign are taking place weekly at the moment, at 6.30pm on Mondays in the London Women's Centre, Wesley House. Individuals and organisations who want to help the campaign are urged to attend.

Around the country, NAC and other pro-choice campaigns are already convening similar meetings to organise the campaign on a thorough national basis.

● *The campaign will soon have its own address and bank account. In the meantime for more information and donations contact: NAC, Wesley House, Wilde Court, Holborn, London, EC1 (01-405 4801).*

## WINNING THE MAJORITY

Labour's policies for women

A conference organised by the Labour Women's Action Committee

**Saturday 21 November**

Speakers include:

Diane Abbott MP,  
Diana Jeuda NEC/USDAW,  
Rose Lambie TUC/COHSE,  
Ann Pettifor, Jo Richardson MP,  
Audrey Wise MP

Lambeth Town Hall  
Brixton Hill  
London SW4

10.30am-5.30pm  
Registration: £3 and £1.50



# Row brewing over Anglo-Irish Agreement

IN THE words of *The Economist* 'A nasty row is brewing over the Anglo-Irish agreement'. This centres on the failure of the agreement to deliver significant reforms of the administration of justice in Northern Ireland, to eliminate discrimination against Catholics in employment and the treatment of the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 — the innocent victims of anti-Irish frame-ups who remain in jail after 13 years.

As a result, it will be more difficult for the Dublin government to get away with its promised ratification of the extradition treaty with Britain which is scheduled for 1 December this year. All in all, as its second anniversary approaches, the Anglo-Irish agreement is running into serious problems.

By Redmond O'Neill

The most public failure has been in the field of employment discrimination. This has become an international 'cause célèbre' — especially in the United States where there is growing support for measures to compel US firms to implement the anti-discrimination code known as the MacBride principles.

The extent of British government alarm at this is shown by its despatch of Northern Ireland secretary Tom King on an 11 day tour of the USA to campaign against the adoption of the MacBride principles by state and city legis-

latures. However King has not been well received.

Mayor Ray Flynn of Boston said: 'We see that the British government is content to stick with words not action insofar as discrimination in employment is concerned. The latest British government document amounts to nothing but the latest British government propaganda.'

He went on: 'The British government must take full responsibility for the society of inequality that Northern Ireland represents.'

## Policy

Congressman Joe Kennedy, nephew of Senator Edward Kennedy, said of Tom King: 'He's here with a slick brochure on fair employment which has no force in law. It does a disservice to the thousands of Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland who are discriminated against because of their religion.'

Even the *Independent* newspaper concluded that the result of King's visit is

that 'The MacBride bandwagon is set to keep on rolling.'

In the field of administration of justice the government is also facing significant political problems. These centre on the no-jury Diplock court system.

The British government has refused to carry out even the cosmetic reforms of the Diplock court system that have been politely requested by Dublin.

## Escalate

The National Council for Civil Liberties has called for the return of trial by jury in Northern Ireland and rejected both the present system and that proposed by the Dublin government as fundamentally undemocratic.

Now Amnesty International, in its 1987 report, has once again condemned abuses of human rights by the British government against Irish people — highlighting Diplock courts, strip searching, 'shoot-to-kill' operations by Crown forces and the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4.

The fact that the Birmingham 6 and the Guildford 4 continue to rot in jail, despite almost universal belief in their innocence, shows the extent of the anti-Irish bias in political trials in Britain itself. On top of all this, on 16

September the European Commission of Human Rights ruled that Britain had violated the European Convention on Human Rights by holding two Irish men for more than five days under the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act.

## Pressure

These elements, taken together, will make it difficult for the Dublin government to ratify the Extradition Act which Britain sees as a vital weapon in its security arsenal against the republican movement in Ireland.

The Act drops the traditional exemption of political offenders and does not require a 'prima facie' case to be made before extradition. The Act is retrogressive and would make thousands of political refugees from the six counties liable to be handed over to Britain.

## Aim

An Irish Anti-Extradition Committee has been launched. In Britain the Labour Committee on Ireland and Labour Party Irish Sections are planning a rally in London on 17 November, with Ken Livingstone and Michael Farrell to oppose extradition and highlight the denial of civil rights and justice by Britain to Irish people.

This programme is attainable — as previous British governments have demonstrated when terminating the colonial presence throughout the world. We applauded Zimbabwe's independence struggle which led to a negotiated settlement at the Lancaster House conference when Britain ended its interfering colonial rule.

The constitutional conference process will enable the Irish people themselves, and rightly so, to determine their own future. It is a policy proposal which is rapidly gaining ground within all sections of our movement, demonstrated by the historic decision of the National Union of Railwaymen, in supporting withdrawal from Ireland within the lifetime of the next Labour government.

## Forward

I appeal to conference, particularly to the representatives of the trade unions, to take this debate forward, beyond the outcome of today's vote, so that our draft manifesto for the next election will contain a firm commitment for the next Labour government to withdraw from Ireland.

Our community here in Britain appeals to the Labour Party: take this historic decision to withdraw, assist us in achieving peace and reconciliation in Ireland, and in ending the centuries old enmity between these two nations, that they can live in peace and harmony together.



1800 people attended the spectacularly successful Irish Social and Rally for Civil Rights and Justice organised by the Labour Committee on Ireland and the Irish sections at party conference. Billy Bragg topped the bill and was preceded by speakers including: Clare Short, Bernie Grant, Ken Livingstone, Frea Hoare, Annie Maguire, and Chris Mullin.

## Advances on Ireland at Labour Party conference

LABOUR PARTY conference debated two composites on Northern Ireland. The first asked the NEC to prepare a report on employment discrimination in Northern Ireland. The second proposed a policy to achieve 'Irish self-determination by negotiation with all interested parties and British withdrawal from Northern Ireland' in the lifetime of one parliament.

Both resolutions were defeated. Nonetheless this year's party conference did mark something of a breakthrough on the Irish question.

The week started with the new shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Kevin McNamara, claiming that 'bi-partisanship' with the Tories had ended with the vote of the 1981 party conference for a policy of Irish unity 'by consent'. He said: 'The logic of our commitment to Irish reunification and our recognition that the people of the north of Ireland, whatever their traditions, are Irish first and foremost, is that they should run their lives not us.'

He attacked the Tory government for 'fruitless lobbying in the US against MacBride principles'. 'The only way for it to defeat them would be to make them irrelevant by introducing strong effective policies with teeth to eliminate job discrimination.'

McNamara went out of his way to contrast Labour's commitments on specific civil liberties such as opposing renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act to the increasing reliance of successive Tory governments on coercion. His overall intention was to distance Labour from Tory government on Ireland.

However, for McNamara the framework of Labour's policy remained the Anglo-Irish agreement, and as the *Irish Times* pointed out in its editorial on his speech: 'he ignores the fact that, if ever the British government and opposition displayed virtual unanimity on Irish affairs during the past decade, it was after the signing of the agreement at Hillsborough in 1985.'

On the conference floor McNamara spelt out the massive scale of discrimination in employment against Catholics. 'The MacBride principles embody sentiments with which no person committed to equality could disagree.'

Nonetheless, when the

into the light of the fact that should be made a major issue at trade union conferences with the aim of winning the vote at next year's Labour Party conference.

The debate on British withdrawal was raised to a higher level than before in the party, by the Tottenham delegate's explanation of a practical plan to carry through a British withdrawal in the lifetime of one parliament.

Finally, the spectacular success of the Irish social and rally organised by the Labour Committee on Ireland and the Labour Party Irish Sections, with 1800 people attending, was a landmark showing that at long last the fight for self-determination for Ireland is being recognised as an indispensable part of the agenda of the Labour left.

In the coming year the aim will be to win a clear majority for action against such consequences of partition as employment discrimination and at the same time, to build up and consolidate a clear minority committed to the longer term fight to commit Labour to 'British withdrawal in the lifetime of one parliament'.

## Britain out in one parliament

SIOBHAN CROZIER, a delegate from Tottenham CLP and secretary of the Labour Party Irish Section, moved the resolution to Labour Party conference calling for British withdrawal from Ireland within the lifetime of a Labour government. We reproduce her speech.

AS an Irish woman from a northern Protestant background, I want to emphasise the importance to the Irish community of the resolution of the British problem in Northern Ireland.

There are over three million people of Irish extraction in Britain: three million votes of tremendous importance to Labour. In 1979, the Irish vote for Labour was the lowest ever, reflecting past Labour governments' shameful record on Ireland.

## Moves

Since 1981, Labour's more positive moves to end bi-partisanship have started to reverse the tide. The Labour Party has been evolving a policy on Ireland which has begun to win back its credibility within the Irish community.

My experience in the general election, working with the newly formed Labour Party Irish Sections, was one of attempting to persuade the Irish community to vote Labour, join the party and contribute to the development of socialism in this country. The Irish community in Tottenham played a role, along with the black community, in the historic election of Bernie Grant.

But the message on the

doorsteps from the Irish community was clear: Labour's commitment to Ireland's re-unification has to be delivered — our vote can no longer be taken for granted. Labour's existing policy of unity by consent is fatally flawed: it's not achievable because in practice it maintains the Unionist veto.

The time is now for the Labour Party to embrace a radically new policy proposal — namely British withdrawal from Ireland within the lifetime of the next Labour government. We must accept that the partition of Ireland was unjust, undemocratic and remains the kernel of the problem. By imposing partition, the British government rejected the all-Ireland general election of 1918, dismissing the aspiration of 75 per cent of the Irish people to a free and independent nation.

## Statelet

The Northern Ireland statelet established by Britain was inherently sectarian, ruled, through gerrymander and discrimination, by a one-party monolith. It has manifestly proved to be irrefragable: the border must go and with it the British presence — that central obstacle to a lasting solution.



Siobhan Crozier

Until Britain withdraws, neither community will be freed from the suffocating traditions which pass for politics in the North. The Loyalists will always play the Orange card, refusing to concede the reality that they have to co-exist peacefully and equitably with the rest of the Irish people.

The question of how this will be achieved must be addressed. A serious and practical policy programme must be instigated. The incoming Labour government would declare its firm intention to withdraw in its first term of office. It would then convene a constitutional conference with elected representatives from North and South to agree structures for a new Ireland and procedures for transferring sovereignty.

This constitutional conference would be empowered to make majority decisions to prevent a veto being exercised, and would agree the appropriate structure for a new Ireland. The British government would lay down guarantees for civil and religious liberties and rights to dual citizenship with Britain.

## IRELAND: CAUSE OF LABOUR?

The Origins

The Facts

The Future

Employment Discrimination in Northern Ireland:

A conference for trade unionists on

28 November 1987

The Camden Centre

Bildborough Street

London NW1

(opp St Pancras Station)

For delegates pack and further information,

contact 'Ireland: The Cause of

Labour?', BM Box 5335, London WC1N 3XX





**KEN LIVINGSTONE'S election to the NEC, beating Bryan Gould by more than 40,000 votes, was the single most striking vote of the Labour Party conference. His speech to the Tribune rally the night before the defence debate dominated that discussion. Socialist Action asked Ken Livingstone for his assessment of Labour Party conference and his own plans.**

# AFTER BRIGHTON

**We must understand the mood of the Party, and the needs of the situation, after Brighton. The Labour movement wants, above all, to win the next election. It wants to do it because it wants to demolish Thatcherism. Anything which cuts across that goal, from either right or left, will be ruthlessly condemned by the Party membership.**

Take the response to John Edmonds, general secretary of the GMB, on the first day of conference. He was cheered, including by CLP delegates, when he made clear he was prepared to use the GMB's leverage in the Party.

I don't believe he was cheered because people wanted right wing policies. When Deakin of the TGWU, or Carron of the AEU — who I'm not comparing Edmonds to — threatened or used the block vote in the 1950s they were jeered, not cheered. They used it directly to push through right wing policies regardless of their effect. Edmonds was cheered because he was stressing something else — that without unity and discipline Labour could not win. The delegates know that is true.

## Left

I don't believe the left has anything to fear from this particular development. The left wants Labour to win more than anyone else in the Party. They will win over the centre ground of the party membership, the 'party loyalists', because the left does have the greatest will, and the clearest strategy, to win.

Nor will the Party membership, including most importantly the trade union

membership, condemn any arguments in the party which are about *how* to win. What they are not interested in, and bluntly I have sympathy with them, is a fight in the Party for its own sake. They are not interested in posturing, or protesting. They want power in order to destroy what Thatcherism has done.

This is why the right will have a far rougher time than they think. Because the type of policy they want *won't* destroy Thatcherism. They are discussing ways to 'build on' Thatcherism, not how to destroy it.

## Mass

Labour party members are not so demoralised, or so opportunist, that they want the party to have office for its own sake — that might be the ambition of a few hangers on, or careerists, but it is not the spirit of the mass Labour Party membership. Everything we do must be in the spirit of winning the next election for Labour.

Where, therefore, will the difference between the right and the left develop — because, of course, they will?

First because the events that will determine whether Labour wins the next election won't be the elections that will take place in the next four years — although obviously we have got to devote the greatest attention to winning these. It will be what happens outside parliament that will determine the outcome of the next election.

## International

If the trade unions are defeated, if the fight in local government is defeated, if Labour doesn't aid the international

struggles, if the fight against the poll tax isn't carried through, then we can kiss goodbye to winning the next election and getting rid of Thatcher. The left understands that and the right doesn't.

This is why, among other reasons, the policy carried out towards the miners was so misguided. If the miners had won Thatcher would have lost the election. *Because* the miners lost Labour lost.

It is impossible to tell what will be the key struggles outside parliament in the next four years, but it will be these which will, more than anything else, determine the outcome of the next election.

Second, the right doesn't aim to demolish Thatcherism. We have to have policies which eliminate it.

People have underestimated how much Labour gained at the last election by defeating the Alliance and pushing it into third place. In the last twenty years Labour has lost 45 votes to the Alliance for every vote it has lost to the Tories. The destruction of the Alliance increases dramatically Labour's chance to win — if we are prepared to use the opportunity.

## Damaging

This is why it is doubly damaging that just at the moment when the Alliance was plunged into crisis the right wing in the Party, such as John Lloyd of the *New Statesman*, Austin Mitchell of the Fabians, Eric Hammond or Bill Jordan, comes forward to give the Alliance a lifeline by proposing coalition, proportional representation, or prettifying the politics of Owen and Steel. Our attitude to the Alliance crisis should have been 'It couldn't happen to a "nicer" group of people'. Our policy to the Alliance should be to demolish it and its support.

This issue also shows up the

hollowness of right's claim to want to win. The right wing constantly goes on about how it wants to win and the left doesn't. In fact it is the right which advocates policies, coalition, which would make it certain Labour would not win and that there would not be a Labour government. By explaining this we will make it clear to the vital rank and file middle ground in the party that it is the right, not the left, that is the obstacle to winning the next election.

## Unions

It is the same in the unions. The rank and file, and the entire middle ground in the trade unions, don't want anything to do with no strike deals, which unfortunately some in the party leadership are playing with, and we have to bring that issue out openly.

We also have to point out that it is fetishes of the right which harm Labour's chances of winning. Take, for example, the witch hunt. This has now been seen not only to be anti-democratic but a complete waste of time. The swing to Labour in Liverpool was the second highest in the country after Scotland. Terry Fields had a huge swing in his direction in Broadgreen.

## Vote

I don't believe that this is because people are supporting *Militant's* politics — right wingers on Merseyside got just as big a vote as leftwingers, and the party in Scotland got even greater support. But it does show people are completely uninterested in the whole issue of *Militant*. However the right ensured we spent two years with the NEC totally introverted and obsessed by this witch

hunt. It was a complete and total waste of time, positively damaging, and this has to be explained to the Party. I believe this is getting through to the Party membership.

Take the right's activities in Birmingham prior to the election. The 'keep out of Birmingham' letter sent to Black Section members by Roy Hattersley and other Birmingham MPs — which has been rightly condemned by Bill Morris — focussed national attention on a routine Black Section meeting and stirred up a racist backlash that damaged us both in the local and general elections — all the polls show that during the election, even at the height of the campaign, Labour didn't make the slightest advance in the West Midlands.

## Coalition

I think we could do with a little investigating of Frank Field — whose attacks on Labour Party candidates undoubtedly helped us lose Wallasey in the general election.

The discipline that is needed if Labour is to win doesn't just apply to the left. Indeed the left has never sabotaged Labour's chances — unlike the right. We have to point out, for example, the difference between the discipline of the left in the last election and the wrecking activities of Callaghan in the 1983 election.

If the left is going to win it must carry the centre ground of the rank and file with it. This can only be done by making clear that the left is not pursuing some goal of its own, but is seeking the general goal of the labour movement of destroying Thatcherism.

Finally I think we have to spend much more effort on international issues. Obviously the outcome of the struggle

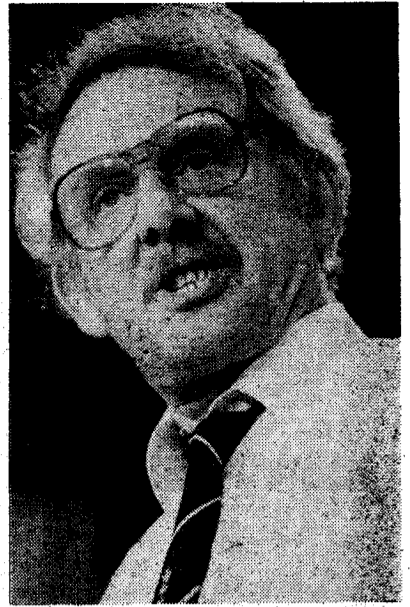


# Ban all imports of South African coal

**THERE** are just two weeks left for ensuring the most massive demonstration for sanctions against the apartheid regime on 24 October. The Labour Party conference unanimously backed the demonstration. Union after union have added their support. Students and youth are mobilising in their thousands.

The National Union of Mineworkers has been at the

centre of mobilising solidarity with the liberation struggle of the South African people. At a meeting during the TUC, NUM general secretary Peter Heathfield, spoke alongside representatives of the ANC, SWAPO, and the South African trade union organisations, COSATU and SACTU. The following are major extracts from his speech, explaining the case for sanctions.



IT IS WITH mixed emotions that I make my contribution to today's meeting on behalf of the National Union of Mineworkers, in the aftermath of recent events in South Africa and in particular the events of such magnitude that have recently taken place in the South African mining industry.

Those emotions include pride — pride at the tremendous heroism and sacrifices demonstrated by the black miners of South Africa as they united in a force of 300,000 in the South African NUM and squared up to the mining giants and their partners in apartheid. Pride at the way they resolutely stood up to the teargas and plastic bullets and the attempts to starve them or sack them into submission.

We all know that the mineworkers and the black trade union movement did not lose in the dispute and will be better placed to mobilise their power in the struggles of the future.

## Sadness

But there is also a sadness to think of those 50 South African mineworkers who perished in the explosion at the St Helena goldmine when their cage crashed to the bottom of a 4,600 feet shaft. The bitterness expressed by Cyril Ramaphosa (Secretary of the South African NUM) towards Gencor, which also owns the Kinross mine where 177 miners died last year, is one which we also feel. And with that bitterness there is also anger at the carnage which continues in the South African mining industry, which leads to 800 miners' deaths every year and which has led to 48,000 miners killed in accidents in the industry this century.

But out of all of those feelings we know that if we are to express solidarity with the black mineworkers in their struggle — with those in the townships under racist military occupation, with those children and youth who face the army and the police in the streets, with militant workers and those who are landless, with women who continue to fight even as they bury their dead, with the many thousands of all ages who have been imprisoned and tortured but remain resolute, with the people's army, engaged in their armed offensive against apartheid — our best way to channel our feelings of solidarity for all these is to fight for sanctions.

We fight for sanctions against South Africa because our brother mineworkers in the South African NUM have called for them — because our brothers and sisters in the African National Congress have called for them — and because all those people who genuinely want to see democracy and freedom throughout the world have called for them.

We fight for sanctions because we recognise that the apartheid system constitutes the greatest institution of injustice and inhumanity of these times in which we live. We say that because the degradation of human beings is the very foundation of that system and its continued existence holds back the development of Africa — of all the international working class — and indeed of all humanity.

We also recognise that that murderous institution needs the lifeline of international economic support in order to continue. The miners and COSATU and the Mandelas and the ANC and the people of South Africa have called for sanctions because they know that in the struggle to bring down that rotten system, the degree of sacrifices and suffering they will have

to face will depend upon how much strength the apartheid system can draw from those international backers who presently ensure its continued survival.

Just what those sacrifices and sufferings are, and precisely what apartheid's continued survival means, couldn't have been more clearly outlined than by the events of the last year:

- Railway workers striking for union recognition shot dead;
- The headquarters of the Congress of South African Trade Unions ransacked by the security forces then blown up;
- Hundreds more trade unionists detained without trial;
- Bomb attacks on Zambia and Zimbabwe;
- And catastrophic famine for Mozambique, a disaster directly created by Apartheid's rulers and their MNR mercenaries.

There can be no question. This is *international terrorism* and we have to respond to the calls of the South African people to put an end to it.

Now, we recognise that these trade union leaders and leaders of the liberation movement have earned the right to speak on behalf of the South African people when they call for sanctions. We recognise *no* such right of Margaret Thatcher to speak on behalf of the people of South Africa. Her argument is supposed to be that there will be job losses and suffering for black working people if sanctions are applied.

Comrades, the National Union of Mineworkers is well-placed to know how much Margaret Thatcher cares about the job losses or suffering of working class people, and black people in Britain know it too.

The fact of the matter is that sanctions are against the interests of international capitalism and the multinationals — the interests which Thatcher truly represents. If Consolidated Goldfields and Rio Tinto Zinc and Shell and all the other partners in apartheid don't want sanctions then Thatcher's decision will be against applying them — no matter what suffering the South African people face. It is that approach which really lies behind British government policy at the present time.

## Condemn

We have to condemn — as history will surely condemn — those who prolong the life of that abhorrent system by one more day. But condemnation is not enough. Because of the Tories' attitude, the task of achieving sanctions falls to our movement and indeed organising better to achieve sanctions should be a major task of this conference this week.

It is a task which we in the NUM take up with particular sense of urgency and of responsibility. I say that because it is mining and minerals which are the key to apartheid's survival. It is coal which is the energy source that fuels apartheid and it is miners who are in the front line in the struggle to bring it down.

It is because of developments like that that we take up the People's Sanctions campaign, and in particular the campaign against South African coal imports, that I want to report to you now what is happening with South African coal imports, and our fight against them.

In 1986 over 21 million tonnes of South African coal were imported into Europe. That constituted the majority of coal exported by the apartheid state — exports which provide its second largest source of foreign revenue. The coal is an attractive proposition in

market terms, reaching Europe for as little as 24 dollars per tonne.

But the *real* price of apartheid coal is not cheap. It is known only to those miners who pay for the wealth they create but do not share with their sweat, their misery and their lives — because to achieve such a level of competitiveness black miners must face living and working conditions which are an international disgrace.

During the strike the conditions were publicised widely — migrant labour — paid a pittance to work in appalling conditions with little or no compensation — all for apartheid's profits. And in spite of the rich loads of coal, diamonds and gold which the miners have won with their lives, miners, like the black majority, still cannot even vote. But, although activists of the South African NUM have been tortured and killed, their union has grown from 2,000 in 1982 to a mighty force of 350,000 mineworkers today.

## Charter

With their adoption of the ANC's Freedom Charter, their linking up with other forces in the South African struggle and their potential power of industrial action to stop the flow of South African minerals and coal, the miners are challenging apartheid head on.

Last year, according to official figures, 313,000 tonnes of that coal came into Britain. Much more besides came in blended form via Belgium and Holland.

We have consistently demanded an

end to those imports and for *sanctions now* against apartheid.

We have taken the case to the British and European parliaments and throughout the international trade union movement. Our international — the International Miners' Organisation — last year agreed to bring pressure to bear on those countries importing South African coal and called for a complete boycott of it.

## Campaign

In response to calls from our brothers in the South African NUM we have stepped up that campaign. Within our own union we have launched the Miners United Against Apartheid campaign, producing a briefing pamphlet on a one per member basis, as well as other materials, in order to make sure our membership is fully informed of the issues involved and will be responding to our call for action. In addition to calling for a boycott of all South African products, we have called for a boycott of all Shell's products through our press.

The United States, France and Denmark have already banned South African coal imports, while the European Parliament is dithering on the issue. We believe that by continuing a sustained multi-level campaign of publicity, lobbying and protest we can bring a very telling pressure to bear on those who continue to allow the coal to flow into Britain.

the next four years, and whether Labour is going to win the election or not will be decided primarily by domestic political issues. But the internationalism of the movement has to be developed.

## Priority

I will be spending a lot of time on feminism — which will clearly be a key international issue which will be discussed in the party in the next year. I also hope to play a role in the campaign in defence of abortion rights — the lines which the women in the party will decide.

But as well as these Labour has to put a high priority to South Africa, Central America and, immediately, the

I think perhaps I have a difference with some on the left on this at present. It seems to be a high priority on NATO. I think this is not quite right. I don't get me wrong, I'm against British membership of NATO, but to get Britain out of NATO requires a change in the entire world political situation — and that would produce a change in the world political situation. We have to approach NATO membership by first showing the consequences of Britain's alliance with the United States. That is why I think we should particularly build up work on Central America and South Africa where the nature of British and American foreign policy is particularly horrendous.

Obviously I'm very identified with the Irish issue — which I don't regret at all. I will be in Chicago next week testifying in support of the MacBride principles. But I want to extend that to taking on the more general issues of British and foreign policy.

AAM 13 Mandela Street, London NW1. Telephone 01-367 7966

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## US-Britain out of the Gulf! Victory to Iran!

# Discussion article on Iran

**SOCIALIST ACTION** has presented its views on the Iran-Iraq war in its pages. **BRIAN GROGAN** represents an alternative, minority view.

THE 1979 Iranian revolution sent shock waves through imperialist circles. Iran under the Shah had been the key imperialist policeman for the whole region. The Shah's overthrow was devastating. The Gulf is of central strategic importance for imperialism. The Gulf contains 57 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves — with Saudi Arabia alone accounting for 24 per cent.

To the further consternation of imperialism, the struggles of the Iranian people have sent reverberations throughout the whole region. This is what Reagan and Thatcher are referring to when they chatter on about Iranian 'de-stabilisation' of the region, and about Iran's defensive actions in the Gulf war as threatening 'world peace'. It is imperialism's 'stability' and imperialism's 'peace' that is their concern.

### Fear

The desperate fear of imperialism was revealed in Saudi Arabia in August this year at the annual Haj to Mecca. The Iranian anti-US demonstration there clearly struck a chord with the downtrodden throughout the whole of the mid-East. This is why the response of the Saudi authorities under the tutelage of the US (aptly named the 'Great Satan'), was so ferocious — massacring at least 400 Iranian pilgrims. The fact of the matter is that for all imperialism's talk of the 'Arabs' lining up against Iran, many states in the Gulf and beyond face a threat within their own borders which is inspired by the peoples in Iran.

The capitalist media

tries to hide all this by presenting the issues in religious terms. But this is no more a religious conflict than that in Ireland or Poland. Islamic fundamentalism is the cloak under which the masses take up their demands and aspirations.

### Overthrow

The overthrow of the Shah was no religious act. It removed a vicious dictatorship whose repressive apparatus and hated secret police invaded every aspect of everyday life leading to the degradation of working people of both town and country and the massive expulsion of peasants from the land.

In the wake of the 1979 revolution there were wholesale seizures of land. Mass organisations and the trades unions came out into the open. Oppressed Kurds began to organise. And the US was expelled along with 25,000 US troops. It was denied the use of Iranian territory to organise its military domination of the region.

The Iranian government has done its best to contain and roll back the gains of the revolution. It has refused to legalise, let alone extend the land seizures. It has refused to impose a government monopoly over foreign trade. It has viciously attacked democratic rights and forced the trades unions underground.

However, the resilience of the Iranian people has been such that it has not found the strength to take on and defeat the masses in a centralised confrontation. Instead, the government has had to adapt to the pressure on it to confront imperialism and tolerate the land seizures

and other such gains.

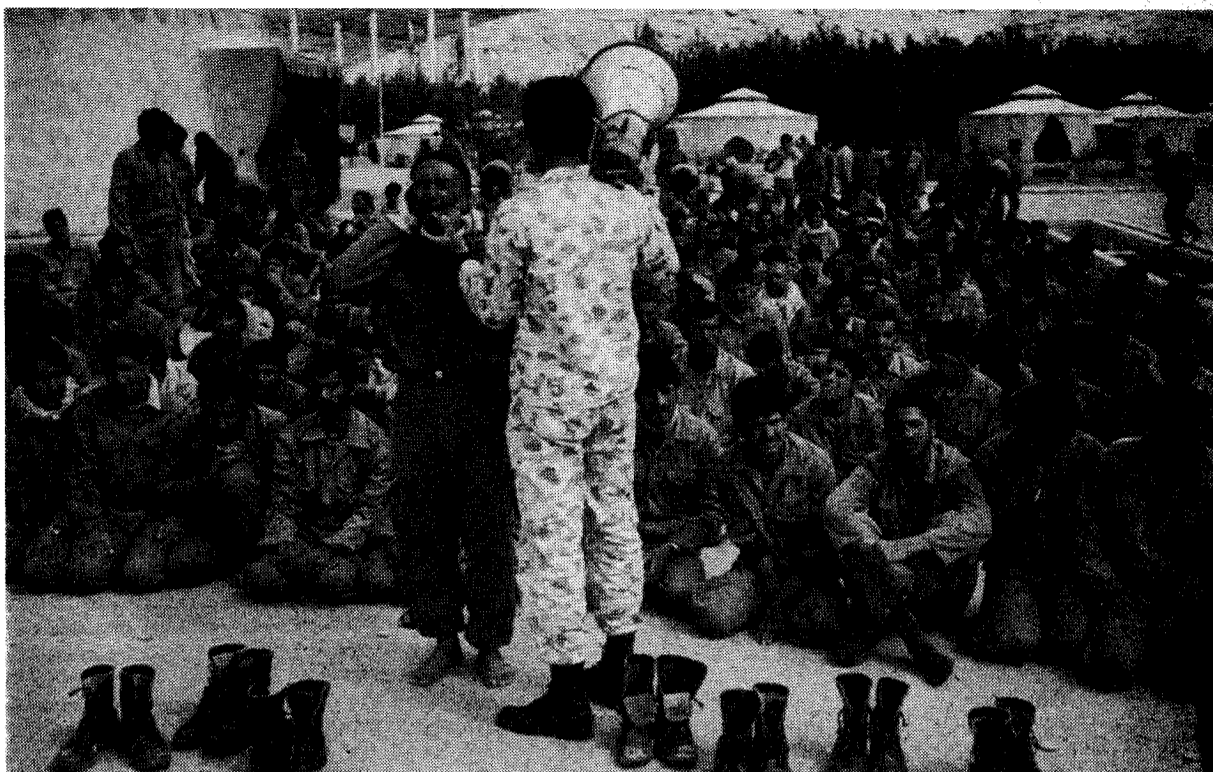
It is these gains that the Iranian masses have continuously mobilised to protect over the past eight years including in the mobilisations to defeat Iraqi aggression in the Gulf war.

It is testimony to the grotesque misleadership which is given to the British labour movement that Reagan and Thatcher have succeeded in equating the unpopular measures of the Iranian government aimed at rolling back the gains of the revolution with the revolution itself. On the basis of this, imperialism has managed to assemble its huge armada, pointed at a semi-colonial country, with hardly a murmur of protest from the labour movement. Other imperialist powers which have been unable to utilise their navies in an openly aggressive way since 1945 — like Italy — have used the cover of anti-Iranian hysteria to get in on the act.

### Imperialist

The imperialist flotilla is the largest assembled since World War II, presently numbering some 100 ships, and growing. The US component is bigger than the whole of the British fleet and in excess of anything it put together in the Vietnam war. This fleet is openly aimed at Iran. It is attacking Iranian shipping directly and giving cover to massively stepped up Iraqi air raids on Iran. It is clearly preparing to assault targets on Iranian territory.

Despite this, the Labour Party conference last week endorsed imperialism's call for an arms



embargo, cast in pseudo-neutral terms, but clearly aimed at Iran. Accordingly, it welcomed the Tory government's closure of the Iranian arms purchasing office in London. Scandalously, this position emanated from the Labour left. It was the position carried in *Campaign Group News*.

### Left

In this, the Labour left has been led by the nose by the *Morning Star* whose main concern has been to win support for the diplomatic manoeuvres of the USSR aimed at currying favour with Reagan. A pseudo-hostility to imperialism has been generated which charges that real US intention is to prolong the war, to the mutual destruction of both Iran and Iraq.

This view of imperialism's 'real' intentions has equally been expressed in *Socialist Action*. In a front page lead (11 Sept) it opined that 'imperialism's aim has been to allow the two regimes to bleed themselves to death.'

Such a view cannot be squared with the facts. Imperialism has ensured that Iraq has overwhelming military superiority. It has 4.5 times as many tanks, eight times as many combat aircraft, three times as many helicopters, and four times as much artillery. (See *Economist*, 19-25

September). Despite this, Iran is winning! Without popular support, this would be impossible. Unfortunately, *Socialist Action* has joined with the Labour left in viewing the mass mobilisations in Iran as akin to fascism. So Jude Woodward, writing in *Socialist Action* on 25 September, explained that 'the state established around Khomeini is exceptionally weak as an institutional structure, its ability to survive has depended upon a continuously reactionary mobilisation of the population, particularly the petty bourgeoisie, in the ideological framework of Islamic fundamentalism'.

### Blind

What blindness is it that writes off the million strong demonstration denouncing the 'Great Satan' in the wake of the Mecca massacres as a 'reactionary mobilisation'? These and other gigantic mobilisations we have witnessed in Iran over the past months, together with the continuing popular support for the war including large voluntary army registration, is testimony not to fascism but to the well founded understanding of the Iranian people that there is still quite a bit to defend of their revolution.

Defence of the revolution, let alone its further advance, cannot go outside of the fight against

imperialism — and therefore victory in the war against Iraq. The war tactics of the capitalist government in Iran, which has showed great disdain for the massive loss of life, should not be allowed to obscure the fundamentals of struggle.

Calls for an arms embargo on Iran in the present situation therefore actually line the Labour left up with imperialism and against the aspirations of working people in Iran.

### Arms

*Socialist Action*, to its credit, has opposed the call for an arms embargo and trained its fire on the British and US fleets threatening Iran. In that, it has stood honourably alone on the left. Unfortunately, its neutral stance to the Iran-Iraq war has rendered its position illogical and unconvincing.

It is impossible to oppose imperialism's war drive against Iran and maintain neutrality on the Iran-Iraq war. Imperialism's present build-up in the Gulf is just the latest stage of consistent hostility to Iran since the revolution. Immediately after the overthrow of the Shah, the US intervened to attempt to de-stabilise the government and put one in place favourable to imperialism. Spurring on further radicalisation, it had to resort to direct military means — President Carter launching his ill-fated air

raid into Iran which ended in fiasco in the desert. The outcome of this blocked off further direct US aggression for the time being. Instead, in 1981, the US encouraged the Iraqi invasion.

### Proxies

Since that time, the US has bankrolled Iraq's war effort through its Saudi and Kuwaiti proxies. Saudi Arabia alone has contributed £25bn. France has chipped in with £8bn and a steady flow of Exocet missiles. While attempting a blockade of Iran, the US has raised Iraq to its third biggest trading partner in the region, extending virtually unlimited credit and providing it with subsidised food from its strategic reserve.

### Losing

Now, despite this support, Iraq is losing the war. Such an outcome would threaten a radicalisation throughout the region to the detriment of imperialism. This is why the flotilla has been assembled. This itself is merely a preliminary stage to direct military incursions into Iran.

Socialists today must stand up alongside Iran, demand Britain and US out of the Gulf, oppose an arms embargo on Iran, and stand for its victory in the war.

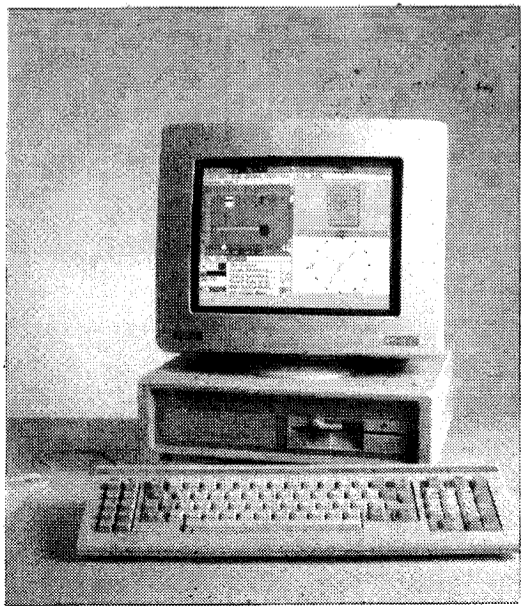
## Socialist Action Xmas draw

WITH this issue of *Socialist Action*, we launch our 1987 Xmas raffle. Last year, we raised £1000 which helped us maintain our fortnightly publication schedule. So we have decided to repeat the successful formula of 1986.

There is one major prize — an Amstrad word processor. But the winner can choose the £399 cash equivalent. Tickets sell at 50p each or 3 for £1.

Buying a raffle ticket, or better, helping sell some, is an easy way to show your political support for our newspaper. The extra money that we hope to raise in this way is indispensable to our regular publication. Sales alone cannot meet our cost. It is only the generosity of our readers and the commitment of our supporters that keeps a paper like ours afloat.

So ask your *Socialist Action* seller for some raffle tickets. And if you can help sell some, please write to us at Box 50, London N1 2XP.





# Second coup in Fiji

THE 300 islands in the south Pacific which make up Fiji would once attract press reports about 'paradise' aimed at British and US tourists. The second coup there within five months has again brought the islands to the attention of the world's media. But the 'constitutional crisis' provoked by Col Sitiveni's self-designation as head of state which has gripped media attention, or the so-called 'racial conflict' to which they refer, have as little relevance to the country's 715,000 inhabitants as the previous description of 'paradise'. The present crisis in Fiji has rather everything to do with the British empire, class relations and the struggle for non-racialism, democracy and independence. JON SILBERMAN explains.

Fiji became 'independent' from Britain in 1970. But political rule in the new Fiji was maintained in the hands of the same hereditary chiefs who originally ceded Fiji to Britain in 1874 and who were incorporated by Britain into its colonial administration. These chiefs were each given a province to rule over. Their warriors were employed to police indentured labourers brought by Britain from the Indian sub-continent to work on the sugar plantations.

This chiefly aristocracy have total control over the land: in an agrarian society such as Fiji, such control allows them to dominate the country's political institutions. The Great Council of Chiefs — the Fijian House of Lords — is the real power in the country. The officer corps of the army and the top of the civil service are staffed by their key supporters, often trained in Britain.

In order to maintain their privileges, this chiefly aristocracy and their British masters devised a racially segregated society. The parliament that was established under the 1970 constitution, was based upon a legal and political segregation of Fijian people. Indo-Fijians — descendants of the indentured labourers brought by the British 100 years ago — are not allowed, for instance, to own land.

Press claims that Indo-Fijians represent an economically privileged

social layer are simply false. Today they make up the majority of exploited workers and tenant farmers in the modern capitalist sector of the economy. They are a majority in the trade unions and in the union-initiated Labour Party, founded in 1985.

## Poor

The bulk of indigenous Fijians are also extremely poor. They have hereditary rights to farm allotment on tribal lands in return for providing the tribal chiefs with money, food and labour. Those who live and farm in the tribal lands are often under the sway of the chiefs. But they can get out of such tribal duties by renting land outside their tribal area alongside Indo-Fijians. Through this process, despite formally owning 83 per cent of all land in Fiji, indigenous Fijians are in fact forced to subsist on the poorest lands.

It was these indigenous Fijians, who farm outside of their tribal areas who, alongside Indo-Fijian workers and tenant farmers, made up the social base of the Bavadra election victory in April of this year.

This non-racial movement was a real threat to the hereditary chiefs. It struck at their entire 'divide and rule' policy, which had been maintained since 1970 by the parliamentary majority



Rabuka and the army who size has been doubled since the first coup in May.

enjoyed by the Alliance Party of Ratu Mara.

When Mara was defeated in the April election the chiefs turned to other political methods to defend their aristocratic privileges. They launched the appropriately named Taukei movement to carry out anti-Bavadra mobilisations — Taukei means 'owner' — and carried through the May coup.

The bulk of the Fijian personalities who are today the subject of newspaper stories and articles represent this chiefly aristocracy.

Prime amongst them is Ratu Sir Benaia Ganileau, the Queen's representative with the title of governor-general. Ex-prime minister and leader of the Alliance Party, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara is another. Ratu Meli Vesikula, the leader of the Taukei movement, is a third. 'Ratu' means chief.

## Coup

Following the first coup, stories about the constitutional crisis and inter-racial conflict were simply designed to hide this reality of the 'ratu's' seeking to defend their chiefly privileges. Alongside the promotion of the Taukei movement,

they also took steps to expand the military — doubling its size in the last five months.

The Public Service Commission imposed a 25 per cent wage cut on the country's 19,000 civil servants. Under the state of emergency, democratic activists were harassed, trade union leaders were attacked and even arrested, and a racist campaign against Indo-Fijians and 'foreigners' was initiated. Opponents of the coup within the armed forces were purged.

## Interests

Britain's stance was equally governed by its political and economic interests. Fearing that a government headed up by Bavadra would seek to turn the formal independence into a more serious break with imperialist interests, as had been the case with nearby Vanuatu, Britain wanted a stable 'constitutional' arrangement to legitimise the coup.

Britain is particularly concerned with the regional implications of the developments in Fiji. As Robin Pauley wrote in the *Financial Times* of 5 October, 'for the West to ignore what is going on there could send a wrong

signal, to Moscow and elsewhere, about its attitude towards the remoter regions of the Pacific.'

Meanwhile the leading capitalist forces sought to take advantage of the post-coup fall-out. The country's three oil companies announced plans for a 16 per cent wage cut.

But the Rabuka-Ganilau government was meeting serious opposition. The economy was in a state of near collapse as Bavadra supporters took action to disrupt the sugar harvest and as revenue from tourism plummeted. Dockers in New Zealand boycotted Fijian trade.

It was to get round these problems that a new administration was put together by Ganilau and which involved both Ratu Mara and Timoci Bavadra, only to be smartly overthrown by Rabuka's second coup.

The problem for Britain, the chiefly aristocracy and the military is how to establish a stable form of political rule against a background of demands for non-racialism, democracy and real independence. More manoeuvres are on the way — that's why this small country will be at the centre of the attention of this month's Commonwealth conference.

# World in action

## Angola

Apartheid military forces have inflicted 'considerable casualties' on government troops in south-east Angola in the past few days. South Africa has confirmed that its troops have crossed the Namibian-Angolan border. According to the Johannesburg paper, *The Star*, 'at least three' mechanised infantry battalions entered Angola in two places. The Angolan defence ministry says that ten war planes have been involved and that three more battalions are planning entry.

Continued support by the US and Pretoria for the Unita terrorists has cost Angola dear — \$12bn, 60,000 deaths, 150,000 refugees; 600,000 people of the country's 8m population have fled from the cities to the countryside. Economic consequences of the war are devastating, and Luanda has been the site of a major cholera epidemic.

Internationalist volunteers from Cuba first arrived in Angola to counter the 1975 South African invasion. Today, they number 37,000 and are the decisive barrier to Washington's and Pretoria's aggression.

## Burkina Faso

A MAJOR conference involving organisations throughout the African continent is being held in the west African country of Burkina Faso. The conference has the backing of the United Nations special committee against apartheid. Participants will include representatives of anti-apartheid organisations, peace associations, youth and women's groups, trade unions, prominent individuals in the international struggle against apartheid and representatives of the South African and Namibian liberation movements.

A statement issued by Burkina Faso's United Nations mission said that although a poor country 'its willingness to host the conference reflects the importance it accords to the struggle against apartheid — one of the key questions facing the entire African continent. One of Ouagadougou's (the capital) central avenues has been named in honour of imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela, mass anti-apartheid demonstrations have been staged there, and in May 1986 anti-apartheid activists held a conference in Ouagadougou on sanctions against South Africa.'

## Soviet Union

THE prospect of the rehabilitation of all the old Bolsheviks on 7 November during the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Russian revolution is being strongly rumoured. Ever since the days of Joseph Stalin official Soviet history has either excluded mention of certain key personalities or simply subjected leaders like Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin to calumny and slander.

It is possible that some legal formula will be designed to discriminate between particular leaders such as rehabilitating those who were tried by Stalin — Trotsky was 'simply' expelled from the party and executed by Stalin's agent and would therefore not be included. Certainly there will be no rehabilitation of Trotsky's, Zinoviev's or others' political views. But mere recognition that these were genuine leaders of the revolution and not 'agents' or 'criminals' would allow a more objective appraisal of them by communists throughout the world.

## Hungary

A MAJOR package of austerity measures has been adopted by the Hungarian government. A massive foreign debt which has spiralled from \$5bn at the beginning of 1986 to over \$10bn today and an associated budget deficit have been cited as 'reasons'. The new prime minister, Koroly Grosz has called for cuts in personal consumption and is moving to personal tax increases which will lead to a 14 per cent rise in consumer prices. Wages will increase by four per cent, whilst a new wage structure is being devised to give special incentives to 'efficient workers'. A change in taxation for companies has also been proposed. The change is designed to stimulate inefficient companies to do better or to go bankrupt.

## Guatemala

# 'Either we die of hunger or of bullets'

THE SIGNING of the Guatemala peace treaty by the five Central American presidents has shown to the world that it is the US and its clients who are the chief obstacle to peace in the region. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas have reopened *La Prensa* and *Radio Catolica*, and lifted press censorship. They have declared an amnesty for contra forces who lay down their arms, and unilaterally imposed a cease-fire in three previous war zones. Meanwhile Reagan continues his campaign for \$270m of contra aid.

As we go to press, the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala have been forced to sit down and negotiate with the liberation forces in their countries. In this, the third article in our series on the treaty, BRIDGET ELTON looks at the country which gave its name to the peace accord — Guatemala.

PRIOR TO the 1985 elections Guatemala was a byword for military dictators, coups and repression of the most brutal kind. 38,000 people have been murdered or disappeared. The human rights situation was so bad that even the US was forced to cut off aid. So when a civilian, Vinicio Cerezo, won what was generally accepted as a fair election, (the first time since

the CIA organised coup in 1954 that the military did not fix the results), Guatemalans were hopeful of improvement.

Nothing changed. Cerezo is the military's front man — he is Mr Clean. After 32 years of virtually unbroken military rule, and with a growing trade union and peasant movement and a revived guerrilla struggle, the army

decided Guatemala needed a new image. As former army spokesperson Col D'Jalma Dominguez put it recently, 'For convenience sake a civilian government is preferable. It's better to remain outside: the real power will not be lost'.

Having failed to physically annihilate the guerrilla movement, the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity), a civilian government was central to the army's plan for enforcing mass involvement in the army's civilian patrols and so-called development programmes, (known in Vietnam as strategic hamlets). The army returned to barracks after Cerezo's election, but on its definition the barracks cover most of Guatemala.

When the Mutual Support Group for the Relatives of the Disappeared (GAM) demanded justice, Cerezo told them 'not to poke around in the

past'. Indeed, death and disappearance continue to be daily events.

The Cerezo government has made no attempt to tackle the huge inequalities of Guatemalan society. Rogoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan Indian and representative of the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC) explained at a recent meeting in London that 'the principle source of conflict in Guatemala is hunger'.

Yet there has been no land reform, no reform of the extremely regressive and crippling (for the poor) tax system, no change in the feudal labour relations on most plantations, no reduction in unemployment.

Cerezo's support for the Guatemala accord is an attempt to present a facade of democracy to all this. Guatemala received \$104m in 1986 and an expected \$134m this year from the US. A visit to Europe at the end of the year yielded

\$300m in loans and grants. In presenting himself as regional peacemaker, Cerezo hopes to ensure that the money keeps flowing in, and tries to brand the liberation forces of the URNG as the real opponents of peace.

But as Guatemalan lawyer, Frank La Rue — in London with Rigoberta Menchú — pointed out, like the FMLN of El Salvador and unlike the Contras, the URNG are indigenous and receive no aid from outside, so a cut off of aid will not affect them. 'There will be no peace in Central America without dialogue with the FMLN and the URNG', he said, 'Guatemala is a country where there is struggle'.

There could be no peace while there were human rights violations, he went on. 'The peace plan has not altered the situation of the Guatemalan people'. Menchú added, 'Either we die of hunger or of bullets'.



# COMRADES

IF NOTHING else, *Comrades* is a film which tells more about working class history than Neil Kinnock or Norman Willis standing with a shovel under a tree in Dorset at an anniversary to commemorate the Tolpuddle Martyrs. The film sympathetically — for once — dramatises part of working class history, though not broadening out at all into the context in which the struggle took place (straight after the 1832 Bill at the beginning of the Chartist movement).

This shouldn't detract from some important aspects within the film. For example, the role of religion as an ideology among the working class.

Reviewed by  
Ray Sirotkin

We are given a vivid description of one of the labourers being told by the Church of England preacher that he 'must accept his lot on earth'. He immediately walks out of the church to be welcomed by the Methodist community on the basis 'you are entitled to a better lot in this life'.

Such basic ideas were important in initiating struggle and were an advance. However, the cost

was the rooting of Methodism within the working class. Significantly, these events occurred before the writing of the Communist Manifesto.

The independence of the working class is confused by the role of a liberal magistrate in pursuit of justice. Undoubtedly such people existed, but the working class then and now have been the main fighters for justice — not just for 'trade union' issues.

Throughout we are only shown the workers fighting for wages and could easily be led to believe that the London Dorchester Committee, the campaign for the release of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, had nothing to do with them.

Perhaps it would be

strange to expect a film about six men to show women in a leading role. From glimpses, it is obvious that women participated in the struggle.

But how are they portrayed? As mothers. As taking food to the men in the fields. Then later, sweeping up the meeting room of the London Dorchester Committee!

It would have served well to show that women in struggle is not new — or maybe Bill Douglas the director forgot too?

The exploits of the six in Australia reveal little. But, quite interestingly, Old Standfield, one of the six, is seen fraternising with aborigines. Not very usual in the British Empire of the time. This relationship is referred to only briefly.

Nevertheless, the film does bring out the ruthlessness of both the state and employers of the time. The fundamentals of class justice are apparent. (So what's new?)

For these essential reasons, the film is a must. But don't go when Norman Willis is in town!

## Too critical of Gorbachev?

WHY ever did Carol Turner spoil an

otherwise excellent article, 'What's behind

the US-Soviet arms deal?' (Socialist Action No 171, 25 Sept) by inserting the reactionary remark: 'Gorbachev would be perfectly prepared to sell out quite a few revolutions for an arms deal'?

There is absolutely no evidence to legitimate this statement. Nor is there any precedent to suspect that the Soviet Union will 'sell out' anything of the kind Carol Turner suggests.

Whatever criticisms may be levelled at the USSR — past or present — the fact is that it has always supported national liberation struggles, as well as having been a refuge for revolutionaries whenever necessary; also, the doors of Soviet universities and training camps have always been open to the oppressed and those struggling against capitalism, fascism and above all imperialism.

Geoff Wade,  
Nottingham

# Coal board steps up attacks

ACCORDING to figures issued last week, the miners overtime ban has cost the coal board £2.5 million in lost production. But these losses have been the occasion not for the board's retreat over the code of conduct but for an intensification of its dirty tricks. Miners in Yorkshire report that local pit managers have offered non-productive workers unlimited overtime in an attempt to divide them from face workers covered by the ban. Harassment of union activists has been stepped up. Long-running disputes at particular pits are being brought to a head by management out for blood and sensing weakness in the union's response.

But despite substantial rank and file pressure for more forthright action and as Yorkshire miners prepare for their own ballot over stronger action on 20/21 October, the NUM's national executive voted at its Labour Party meeting by 12 votes to nine to maintain status quo. CLIVE TURNBULL looks at why a softly-softly approach will not convince the coal board to back down, and why building a movement in support of the miners is vital for the entire labour movement.

'THE number of strikes per person employed in the coal industry is 35 times the average number of strikes in the economy as a whole. Typically, coal industry strikes are short, and involve small numbers of men, but even allowing for these factors the average mineworker loses eight times as many hours through strikes as the UK average'. British Coal, *Report and accounts 1986/7*.

The report went on to complain of a 'culture of militancy' in the coalfields. This is just two and a half years after the year long 1984-85 strike in which the miners were supposed to have been decisively beaten.

## Price

As Arthur Scargill has explained on many occasions, the miners have paid a high price for the return to work without a settlement in March 1985. Seventy thousand jobs have been lost. But alongside this, the ranks of the NUM gained a year's education and experience of class struggle. The union was also strengthened by the organisation of women in the coalfields into Women Against Pit Closures.

The average age of a miner is down to 34 years. With hardly any alternative work, even the fittest redundancy check offers little to a man with over 20 years to retirement. As management drives to increase output and productivity, miners have little choice but to stand and fight.

The 'culture of militancy' has nothing to do with something in the blood. It represents the refusal of miners to let the coal board ride roughshod over hard-fought gains in working conditions and procedures established over years.

## Code

The new code of conduct is designed to do what the outcome of the 1984-85 strike failed to do — break the NUM, and prepare the way for 'flexible working' and privatisation.

The attack started where the NUM is weakest, in Notts. Paul Whetton, NUM branch

secretary at Bevercotes, was sacked for posting a notice of a union meeting. Mark Hunter and Tony Geddes, NUM secretary and delegate at Welbeck were sacked for distributing NUM leaflets. Mick McGinty, Notts NUM vice-president was sacked for arguing with an overman.

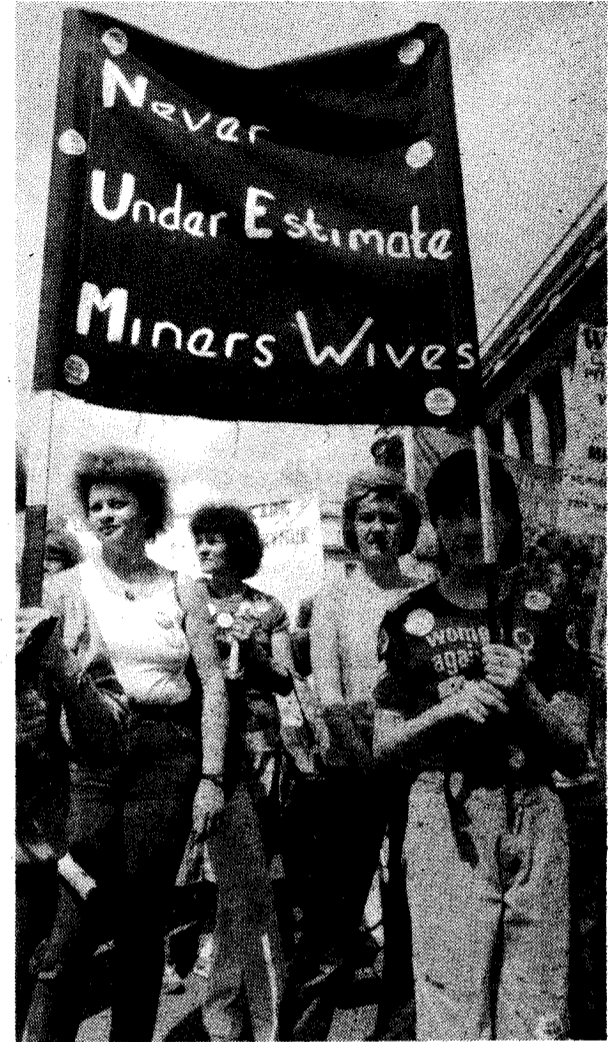
Even when the coal board lost its case at an industrial tribunal and was ordered to reinstate Paul Whetton, it still 'won'. Whetton was offered re-employment, not at Bevercotes but miles away at Manton or Shireoaks in the South Yorkshire coalfield.

Similarly Ted Scott, NUM branch secretary at Stillingfleet in the Selby complex was sacked for carrying out union duties. The board offered re-employment 20 miles away at Wheldale, which is due to close in 1988.

In September, coal boss Sir Robert Haslam, made his objectives clear in accusing Arthur Scargill of being 'more concerned about the protection of his union militants than anything else'.

## Notts

As Henry Richardson, Notts NUM president, explained — replying to leading members of the NUM who opposed stronger action against the



code of conduct on the grounds that a full overtime ban would allow the UDM to recruit — 'nobody knows the danger of the UDM better than we do. But if we don't beat this code of conduct, we won't have a union worth defending'.

## Rights

But what's at stake is more than just trade union rights in the mining industry. The imposition of the code of conduct on the miners would be a victory for every employer. If coal board management can pick and choose union representatives; if NUM branch officials can be sacked at will; who else is safe? It will give the green light to every employer to impose a similar draconian regime in a workplace.

Already Courtaulds, which employs a number of Notts coalfield women, has produced its own disciplinary measures to back up wide-ranging changes it is proposing to workers' contracts. Other employers will follow suit and a victory for the coal board would make every union activist feel vulnerable.

But if the miners win, it would similarly be a gain for the whole labour movement and strengthen the whole fight against the Tory government and the wider employers offensive. This is why the entire labour movement must rally to the miners' support, why old links forged during the strike should be renewed, why miners should be invited to put their case on labour movement platforms.

## Haslam threatens compulsory redundancies

BRITISH Coal boss, Sir Robert Haslam, has announced a new scheme aimed at buying miners' jobs. Mineworkers who take voluntary redundancy before next March will receive an extra £5000 according to the scheme.

In making the announcement, Haslam said that the corporation 'hoped to maintain redundancies on a voluntary basis' up to March 1988. Writing in the *Financial Times* of 3 October, Charles Leadbeater explained that Haslam's statement means that 'there will need to be compulsory redundancies in the 1988-89 financial year, if not before'. He went on to add that the announce-

ment is 'clearly aimed' at forcing new pit closures.

Haslam's statement comes not only in the midst of the fight against the new disciplinary code but also as Derbyshire miners have started a fight against the closure of Renishaw Park. The North Derbyshire workforce has been halved from its 1984 level of 12,000.

Speaking at a rally to fight the closure alongside Peter Heathfield and Dennis Skinner, Renishaw NUM branch chair, Ron Robinson, said that British Coal had put all sorts of pressure on miners to withdraw from the review procedure and accept the closure.

But several pit ballots

had been unanimous in deciding to fight. The closure is scheduled for March 1988 and would mean 400 jobs being axed. Renishaw Park still has between 10 and 15 years reserves of good quality coal.

Branch secretary, Mick Kirby, said 'we can't run or take redundancy. Selling ice cream and hot dogs as small businessmen is no alternative to jobs at the pit and its community.'

Marsha Marshall of Barnsley Women's Action Group urged a fight because the closure would affect everybody in the community — men, women and children. 'Don't for Christ's sake let 'em down' she urged.

## International VIEWPOINT

Europe to the Philippines, *IV* is indispensable reading for anyone wanting to keep up with events in the world today.

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# Support the firefighters

A WAVE OF anger has swept across the country's fire stations following news of the sacking of 360 firefighters in West Glamorgan. Fifteen areas, including the north-west, Scotland, West Midlands and north Wales were hit by solidarity action as local branches of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) adopted an 'emergency only' policy. JON SILBERMAN reports.

THE decision of the Labour-controlled West Glamorgan county council to dismiss the firefighters and bring in the army to allow it to carry through its cost-cutting attacks was likened to Murdoch's sacking of the News International printers by FBU leader, Ken Cameron. Though in the case of the West Glamorgan firefighters, they hadn't even taken strike action before the council moved. They had just threatened a one-hour stoppage.

The council's letter sacking the firefighters says that they are not 'locked out'. It even warns them that it will claim damages from the dismissed workers to pay for the extra cost of using the army!

## Cuts

The 400 firefighters had voted by four-to-one to take a series of one-hour stoppages in protest at a council decision to reorganise the service involving a cut of 48 full-time jobs, the reduction of the vehicle fleet by one pump, and the conversion of one full-time pump crew into part-time.

The reorganisation is the outcome of an 18

month review carried out on the basis of a government circular issued in 1985. It has major implications for other county councils. Immediately the reorganisation decision was taken on 26 August, the firefighters began a work-to-rule. Following the ballot for strike action, the council decided on a lock-out. They are instead using 120 army personnel and 20 'green goddess' fire engines for their strike-breaking operation.

## Labour

Frank Evans, chair of the council's public protection committee, made the Labour group's position absolutely clear in their determination to carry through the reorganisation which will 'save' the council £270,000 per year. 'If our firemen go out for one hour, they go out for good' he said.

In fact, of course, there will be no savings at all in the reorganisation plans. The council itself has admitted that 30,000 people — one-third of everyone covered — will get a worse service as a result of their imposed cuts. In strict monetary terms, the reduction in ser-



Ten years ago labour movement solidarity backed the fire fighters.

vice will create greater expense not less. But what price can you put on the threat to human life and well-being? The council's reply that the service is still within safety guidelines laid down by the Home Office simply reinforces the Tory government's

own plans for a national reorganisation to increase the 'efficiency' of the fire service.

One of the proposals in a recent national audit committee report was for changes in shift patterns and the replacement of full-time firefighters by

part-timers.

West Glamorgan is acting as a government stalking horse for a review which would, if implemented nationally, have dire consequences both for firefighters themselves and for the service they're able to pro-

vide. The union well understands the threat. The FBU members in Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, West Midlands, Tayside and Glasgow immediately started industrial action in solidarity with their West Glamorgan colleagues.

FBU general secretary, Ken Cameron has said that the union will reconvene its national conference to consider national industrial action in support of the South Wales firefighters.

He congratulated the firefighters for taking action and urged them to 'stand firm, avoid isolation and keep up the fight'. Cameron condemned the use of the army and its 'green goddesses'. 'It's a bloody disgrace to the people they represent if they think they can protect them with 30-year-old engines manned by people with only three days training'.

## Executive

As we go to press the union's national executive is meeting to consider action proposals.

During the last national fire brigade's dispute ten years ago, a huge wave of solidarity actions were launched across the labour movement. Similar support needs to be generated now if the 'money before jobs and services' policy of the government and West Glamorgan county council variety are to be defeated.

## Wapping

STAFF at Murdoch's News International plant in Wapping have voted in favour of being represented by a union other than the EETPU. Just 140 voted for EETPU representation, 239 in favour of staff council, and 321 for another TUC-affiliated union.

The TUC has been asked for assistance in the move to proper union organisation. A meeting of print unions is being called at TUC headquarters, Congress House.

## Postal strike vote

LEADERS of the Union of Communication Workers have voted to ballot their members over strike action for a shorter working week.

The strike vote — for a three hour reduction in the 43-hour week — will be held on 17 November. Under the law, action would have to take place within 28 days, and would thereby disrupt Christmas post.

The Post Office, which has offered a one-hour cut with productivity strings, has threatened 20,000 jobs if the unions take strike action.

## Rail

BRITISH Rail is proposing a wide-ranging change to collective bargaining arrangements in the industry. The board wants to see bargaining being tied more closely to the 'business needs' of the different sectors of the industry.

The proposals are understood to be related to the move to changes in working practices under consideration by BRB. This includes the new train crews concept which blurs previous demarcation and increases job 'flexibility'.

It is also related to plans for departments to be individually profitable and to possible future privatisation plans.

One of the sectors — freight — has registered an operating profit of £25m this year and forecasts profits of £53m in 1989-90.

Another, the engineering sector, BREL last month won orders worth £56m three days after announcing 3000 redundancies.

## Longbridge

UNION leaders at Austin Rover's Longbridge plant have threatened strike action from Monday, 12 October if a sacked shop steward is not reinstated.

Two workers were sacked for the same alleged time-keeping misconduct. One has been reinstated but the company has so far refused to reinstate the steward.

# Opposition mounts to engineering deal

A NATIONAL delegate conference representing 300,000 engineering members of the Transport and General Workers Union has voted unanimously against the proposed deal covering work practices for the engineering industry.

'Delegates to our conference felt that the employers are asking too much in new practices as a price for reduced hours' commented Fred Howell, T&G national secretary for power and engineering. 'This would not improve employment prospects and our delegates are suspicious of the motives behind the new procedure proposals.'

By Jon Silberman

The T&G decision comes shortly after a similar rejection move by GMB and TASS.

On 6 October the EETPU will hold its national delegate conference to consider the proposed deal. Three regional EETPU meetings have been held in the run-up to the national conference. Each has rejected the proposed deal, with full-time officials arguing for rejection.

This leaves the AEU leadership increasingly isolated in its support for further talks with the engineering employers around the package. The AEU is the major union in the industry and has a one-delegate majority on the executive of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions

(CSEU) which negotiated the deal with the employers federation (EEF).

Bill Jordan, AEU president, won support for further talks at the union's key policy-making national committee by a majority of 69 votes to 49. Strong reservations were expressed at the meeting including by those who favoured further talks aimed at reaching an agreement.

The successful resolution argued that in the reconvened talks, the AEU should 'press for the removal of contentious clauses and the overall improvement of the enabling conditions'.

## Ballot

After these negotiations, the resolution provides for a postal ballot of CSEU members in which two questions will be put: one on the ratification of the agreement, the other asking if members are prepared to take industrial action for the 35-hour week in the event of the deal being rejected.

Following the national committee, Bill Jordan expressed his hopes that further talks with the employers would remove a clause from the draft agreement which allows white-

collar and supervisory staff to do the jobs of skilled shop-floor workers on new technology machinery.

Jordan hopes that in the absence of any serious campaign around the 35-hour week by the union leadership, the removal of his clause combined with the threat of industrial action would result in union members reluctantly accepting the proposed deal.

## Flexibility

But the objections to the draft agreement go way beyond the question of shop floor/staff demarcation. The draft proposes a much broader flexibility arrangement amongst shop floor workers themselves and stringent measures for allowing total utilisation of plant and machinery at management's behest. The facility in the package of 'seasonable working' could result in weekend working at normal rates.

Under the catch-all phrase of management's right to manage, the deal would eliminate mutuality arrangements on a wide range of areas traditionally subject to bargaining. Under current procedures, 'status quo' remains throughout such negotiations.

The deal also provides the possibility for management withdrawing recognition from certain federated unions — thereby fitting in to proposals currently under TUC review for



Manchester engineering workers and supporters marching in solidarity with Senior Colman strikers. The nine month old strike was started when management sought to unilaterally impose new working practices and

sacked four workers who, in line with union policy, refused to implement them. Similar management tactics will become increasingly commonplace if the new flexibility deal is agreed.

single union deals.

Even that section of the agreement in which engineering workers stand to improve their conditions — the reduction in the working week of 1½ hours over three years — is conditional on no added costs.

Employers are given the right to determine how the reduction should be worked out, reproducing absurd arrangements reached in a number of firms in 1979 when the move to a 39-hour week was sometimes conceded at 12 minutes per

day! Deep felt opposition to the deal resulted in a 250-strong lobby of the national committee meeting in Eastbourne. A major lobby is planned for the CSEU executive meeting in London on 5 November.



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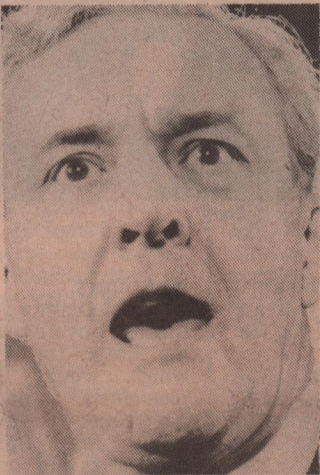
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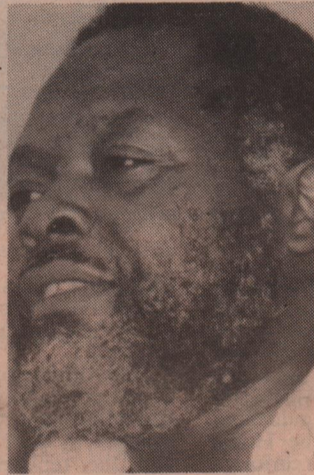
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