

# Workers' fight

3p

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## ENGINEERS: FIRST TO STAND UP TO FOOT'S PHASE 3

A FULL six months after putting in their claim, the engineering workers decided this week to launch an overtime ban, to begin on Easter Monday, April 15th.

The decision of the Confederation of Ship-building and Engineering Unions was supported by all its 19 member unions, bar only the right wing dominated electricians' EEPTU.

The engineers' pay claim calls for a rise of £10 in the basic rate for craftsmen, to push the basic up from £25 to £35 per week, and a cut in hours to 35. The employers' last offer, rejected by the unions as derisory, was for a rise of £2.50 for craftsmen and £2 for labourers.

The employers claim that

the unions' claim would breach the Tories. Phase 3, which is still law under Labour, and within which about 20% of engineers have already signed local agreements.

The union leaderships are trying to evade the issue of Phase 3 by arguing that it would be possible to increase the basic rate, leave plenty for negotiation at local level, and still remain within Phase 3.

It is expected that Employment Secretary Michael Foot will intervene to attempt a settlement.

This is the first big test of whether or not the government has succeeded in pulling the sting out of the

unions. The bosses' press knows that it is a test case for the 'Social Contract' confidence trick — in which the working class is expected to be satisfied with a few sops from the government and in return bow down meekly to statutory wage restraint now and pledge voluntary curbs later.

The Social Contract's ideal for the working class under Wilson's government is of a forlorn and bewildered rabble, begging openhandedly for what the government, in their humanitarian wisdom, are prepared to let them have.

But the engineers are showing that, despite their

leadership's pussy-footing, they have learned the lesson that concessions are made not when you beg with your hand

open, but when you shake your fist in their faces. The engineers are the first to challenge Labour's attempt to

continue with Phase 3.

The engineers have a big fist. If they use it, they can finish off Labour's Phase 3.

### NEW FINES ON AUEW: SCRAP NIRC NOW

NO-ONE seems to have told Sir John Donaldson of the Industrial Relations Court that he is due, according to the pledges of the new Labour government, to walk the plank by May Day. The £47,000 compensation just awarded against the AUEW is an award made by an arrogant Tory reactionary backed up by an anti-working-class court.

£47,000 damages — for what? Con Mech is a company which, in this day and age, dared to refuse negotiating rights to the union its workers had created in the shop, and which then went on to sack two stewards who tried to negotiate. Even a biased commission of inquiry set up under the Industrial Relations Act itself found the company's attitude indefensible — and

recommended that the company should recognise the union and take back the victimised shop stewards.

Yet the union has already been fined £75,000 for contempt of the National Industrial Relations Court. The added £47,000 make the total £122,000 — for daring to fight a backward firm and for making official a strike against victimisation. The same union has already lost £62,000 as a result of the case of the scab, James Goad of Sudbury.

The compensation includes half the £535 spent by the firm on sending three scabs and their families on a holiday in Majorca so that they could recover from the strain of judasing on Con-Mech's workers. The union isn't just bled by the court for behaving as a union fighting for its

members. It is humiliatingly forced to foot the bill for the scabs who crossed the picket line as well.

Not a single penny of the fine should be paid! We should not see this as just one more fine. It is the first fine with the Labour government in power — and it must be the last!

The government is pledged to scrap the Act. It should not wait. It must scrap it now — and return all monies seized or demanded by the NIRC to the unions. Immediately it should freeze all operations of the NIRC. Otherwise the suspicion is going to grow that the government is using the NIRC as a means of holding the unions to ransom between now and May Day, making them jump through the hoops of Phase 3 in return for the promised repeal.

## BUDGET — NO HOWLS FROM THE RICH

DENNIS Healey promised there would be "howls of anguish" from the rich when the budget appeared. But if there were going to be howls of anguish — they would be from anyone who had illusions that this was going to be a socialist budget.

Small tax benefits for the lower paid; subsidies on a few food prices; cigarettes and beer up; old age pensions up to £10 single and £16 for a couple; corporation tax up by 12%.

No wealth tax, which Labour had promised. And the promised gift tax to plug

loopholes in death duty procedure is postponed "until the autumn".

This is not even a radical budget. The concessions on taxes to lower-paid workers and increases in pensions will largely come out of the increased revenues from indirect taxes on cigarettes, foodstuffs and petrol. Healey thus gives to sections of workers what he largely takes

from other workers. Indirect taxes, especially on basic items, always hit at the lower paid. The increased taxes on the rich do far less even than reversing the concessions made by the Tories to the wealthy.

The paltry food subsidies aim at slowing down the rise in food prices. This is welcome, though it also means the high profits of the

food monopolies are being subsidised by taxpayers instead of slashed. But it is a matter of fact that if it slows up the rate of increase, it will — and it is intended to — postpone the day of reckoning when the Phase 3 threshold agreement wage increases fall due — now expected to arrive in May. The prospect of those thresholds being tripped sends shivers up the spines of the bosses and the government.

The pension rises are the best part of the budget from a working class point of view.

Even here the pension, after the increase, will reach only 22% of the average wage. That's quite a standard of living for those who have worked a lifetime for the bosses of Britain. It is a lower percentage than that of almost any other European country.

In terms of managing the economy, the budget is generally said to be 'neutral' or on the deflationary side of neutral. In other words, the world economic situation is so unclear that the Chancellor doesn't dare move the steering wheel to left or right. Only

marginally deflationary it may be — but even that margin can lead to a serious growth of unemployment, especially as the world economy is expected to slow down drastically by the autumn.

The budget is stage 1 of the Government's social contract with the unions. They hope that the union leaders are so house-broken and terrified by the looming economic crisis that they will trade their independence over the counter to the Labour government in return for sops like this.

It is also, of course, designed to sweeten the atmosphere in what is, after all, a period leading up to a general election, in June or in the Autumn.

Howls of anguish from the bosses — the people who made £9,453 million profit out of the workers last year? A few growls of discontent, perhaps. But they are not going out of business, or even seriously hurt.

The budget shows that workers can rely on the government for little to advance our interests. We are left to our own resources, to direct action. Militant action must stay in business, too.



Profits of £9,453 million were made from workers last year. ...



Budget brings pensions to a mere 22% of average wage



# Tory threshold trick turns in workers' favour

by Chris Reynolds

WHEN threshold agreements were brought in under Phase 3, the Government, the employers and the TUC all saw them as a fine, well-wrapped gift package — with the pretty paper concealing the fact that the 'gift' was almost worthless.

Now the package looks like blowing up in their faces.

When Phase 3 was put together at the joint TUC/CBI/Tory meetings last year, all three parties saw the threshold agreement as a sop — as a way of buying off rank and file militancy.

## MODEL

The model agreement based itself on the Retail Price Index (RPI) figure for October 1973 and was to run for no more than 12 months from that date. As soon as the RPI has increased by 7% since October 1973, a payment of 40p is to be made for each 1% increase over the 7%.

The payment is a supplementary one. It doesn't go on the basic rate, and therefore doesn't affect overtime or piecework rates. People working less than 21 hours a week were excluded anyway.

Even above the 7% threshold, the agreements would not give adequate protection against price increases. As one report put it, "monitoring price changes for individual commodities is a simple and straightforward exercise. An index is a very different matter. Each man's index is peculiar to himself the vegetarian may laugh at the rising cost of meat,

and house owners at soaring rents."

Price increases hit different classes very differently. For working class families, the heavy increases in basic items — food, rent, public transport, clothes — take a very large bite out of a very small cherry. Wealthy families spend more of their income on "consumer durables" for which prices may even be dropping. For them, the increases in basic prices are like nibbles out of something more

that the threshold would not be crossed until the late summer of 1974, if then. It would thus give workers what seemed to be an answer to the problem of rising prices, as little or no cost to the bosses! And even if prices rose more sharply than expected, the thresholds seemed to promise a year free of serious industrial action.

But the situation has changed. The miners' militancy has cracked Phase 3 and pushed out the Tories. Prices are

7% threshold is crossed.

It is estimated that there are about 16 million workers who could make claims within Phase 3. Of course, many of these are not trade unionists, let alone militants. But if one quarter of the 22 million eligible get a pay-out, then the cost for a 1% increase over the threshold will be £2.4 million per week — or around £50 million for the time until October. If, for example, the index increases by 14% between October 1973 and October 1974, the cost would be about £180 million.

The employers and the government are looking for ways to avoid this pay-out. Certainly no international lending scheme will tolerate this amount of money being paid out, even before there is a claim for increases on basic rates.

## ROCKING

For the Labour government, this is all part of the "social contract". They have settled with the miners, frozen rents, and promised to repeal the Industrial Relations Act. For those concessions, they want their price from the unions. That is, voluntary wage restraint, "no rocking the boat", and co-operation in preventing the threshold agreements exploding in a way which will damage the chances of Labour getting back in a September or October election.

Last year, after unions and employers had signed deals including threshold agreements, the Tories stopped payment by introducing Phase 2. Printworkers, construction workers and plumbers all lost out. It would not be beyond the powers of the Employment Secretary — not so much the left Foot as the right hand of the "social contract" — to adopt similar tactics. He could try to get the trade unions to drop the threshold, to delay the pay-out, or to accept a higher threshold.

Any such action must meet an immediate militant response from the rank and file.

Meanwhile, however, Labour will use every way of juggling they can to postpone the RPI going over the 7%.

The temporary freeze in rents, the slowdown in rent increases, the £500 million food subsidies, the temporary deal with the EEC on prices, all will push down the Index a couple of points. It is possible we will see further measures, including a new budget, to further stave off the pay-out.

## RE-JIG

In addition there are moves to re-jig the statistical methods used in calculating the RPI and keep the figure down that way. We could see the percentage increase sticking around 6.9% in the same way as some people's age sticks at 29!

When the threshold agreements were introduced they were a fraud within the larger fraud of Phase 3. But now, with the worsening capitalist crisis, workers will have to fight to defend even this minimal half-protection of living standards. We must demand implementation of every penny of the threshold agreements. We must oppose any sell-out by the unions' official leaderships. We must oppose any government juggling with the price index, and demand that the trade unions set up our own cost of living index (as the unions do in France, for example).

And, of course, we must not be stopped from going for real increases in our standards just because the agreements, if they are paid out, are supposed to stop the steep slide at 7%. They don't even do that.



resembling a watermelon.

Thus the RPI, basing itself on the buying patterns of "a cross section of society", does not adequately reflect the working class cost of living index.

The Tories had hopes of a real recovery in the British economy. In that perspective, the threshold agreements were an excellent antidote to working class militancy there and then.

Government, CBI and TUC all expected, or, at least hoped,

soaring and recession is looming.

Food prices have gone up 50% since the Tories came to power in 1970, and more than 20% since January 1973. At the present rate, it looks as if the threshold will be crossed by May or even before.

Six million workers were led into accepting Phase 3, 4 million of them with automatically operating threshold clauses, others with provisions to negotiate once the

# Defeats in Africa shake Portugal

THE Portuguese regime is busy trying to paint last week's army mutiny, headed by General Spínola, as the work of a crank whose actions in no way reflect the reality of Portuguese society. This view may appear to be borne out by the fact that the armed column which, led by young dissaffected officers, had driven to the outskirts of Lisbon, was so easily disarmed and then sent back to barracks. But the opposite is in fact the case.

Portugal is at present wracked by the internal contradictions of its own backward colonial rule in Africa. Unlike the more advanced imperialist nations such as Britain and France, Portugal never looked seriously to the possibility of establishing a neo-colonialist relationship with its African possessions. On the contrary, it attempted a combination of "assimilado" (integration into Portugal, with Africans as Portuguese citizens)... and massacre the former in words and the latter in deeds.

## LIBERATED

But for over a decade now the guerrilla movements of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea (Bissau) have waged a bitter and increasingly successful national liberation struggle. They want neither "assimilado" nor massacre — they want complete independence from Portugal.

Portuguese military efforts in Africa have been financed by NATO, but more particularly by the USA and South Africa. They fear that the whole of Southern Africa might fall if Angola and Mozambique were to be liberated.

Despite this, it is clear that the Portuguese military operations in Africa are all doomed. The



national liberation governments administer areas with stable institutions covering in some cases the vast majority of the population — certainly the majority of territory outside the main towns. So much so that Guinea has already been recognised as a state by the United Nations, and its representatives are official delegates to social democratic party conferences (though not the British Labour Party's!) in many European capitalist countries.

And that is precisely the issue. Spínola, in his recent book *Portugal and the Future*, made it quite clear that Portugal's role would have to change in Africa. Precisely because he is a war "hero" of Portugal's African campaigns his voice commands great authority, and may be taken as an indication of the mood of despair and defeatism that has gripped troops attempting to impose Portugal's colonial rule.

His statements were in themselves a direct challenge to the old Salazar clique in the Government, led by the President Americo Tomaz, who in any case had been feeling the ground slip away from under him. New reports coming into Portugal from Africa have further lent strength to Spínola's argument by revealing the extent of guerrilla infiltration and battle-readiness in areas which the Portuguese thought were safely in their hands.

Spínola seems to have thought the time right, given the coincid-

ence of these events, for a military coup to remove the ultra-right old guard. The failure, apparently by a slip-up, of the 5th Infantry Regiment to join him has temporarily led to a re-stabilisation of the Tomaz clique, and the possible end of Caetano's career.

Nevertheless, this cannot alter the facts Portugal is losing and sooner or later it is going to have to attempt the neo-colonialist option. Increasingly, sections of the bourgeoisie have come over to Spínola's position in order to guarantee their investments. They are clearly hoping for at least a solution along the lines of the Evian agreements between Algeria and France.

The bourgeoisie are not suggesting this now, though. They seem to be angling much more for the kind of arrangement that existed between the ex-French colonies of French Equatorial Africa.

## BASE

Any less control than this would pose not only a threat to the Portuguese bourgeoisie's investments, but also to the stability of imperialism's set-up in Southern Africa as a whole. In the final analysis US imperialism would probably prefer a scorched earth policy rather than any new states that might harbour guerrillas endangering Southern Africa's white settler regimes.

If this were not the case, Tomaz's clique would long ago have lost its base.

CLIVE BANE

Recently a delegation mainly made up of trade unionists arrived back in Britain after a visit to Belfast. In this article FRAN BRODIE — a member of the delegation a Manchester housewife with three children, married to a construction worker — reports on her impressions.



# 'The Brits will be running v

WE WERE in the city centre of Belfast when a British soldier was killed. Some of the women shoppers were visibly upset that this young working class man had been shot — but the British troops charged the shoppers, screaming abuse. The crowd of people turned and ran, including a newsreel man. On the news that night, it was stated that "the crowd fled from the gunmen". Too true, but it was British gunmen, British thugs they had to run from.

We were on the last day of our stay as the North West delegation to Belfast — 2 students, one member of Women's Liberation, one housewife and 12 trade unionists.

On the second day we had seen Long Kesh. First we had to wait for an hour and a half going through the rigmarole of being searched and questioned before we were allowed into the cages to visit the internees.

Long Kesh is a damp and squalid place. It is a sea of mud which visitors and prisoners have to wade through. The huts the prisoners 'live' in are makeshift, cold and damp and overrun with rats. The prisoners are allowed out into the 'cages' surrounding their huts for a 'walk' — these cages are hardly big enough to swing a cat; 50-60 men are imprisoned in each cage in these conditions.

## REFUSED

The prisoners' food is swamped in grease and completely uneatable. The internees' wives and relatives (who are usually on Social Security) spend about £ to £5 per week on food which the can send in to the men, such as meat, cheese, butter, eggs, sugar etc. But the British troops and the RUC, who are running the place have a habit of 'improving' what comes in; they add salt to the sugar, break the egg, steal cigarettes. All part of "British justice".

One of the internees' wives, Teresa, told me of her experience and degradation at the hands of these camp guards. She said that before the Quakers set up a canteen for the visitors to wait in the women and children would have to stand for at least two hours, even in the pouring rain and the mud of Long Kesh.

On one occasion she wanted to change the nappy of her baby daughter, who was then only a few weeks old. It was pouring with rain, so she asked one of the 'civilising' British troops ("you lads" as they're spoken of in Britain; if only people knew...!) could she use the office to see to her child.

They refused — and then laughed at her struggling in the rain.

It's coming up to the third

# On its feet but

ONCE AGAIN a Labour government has come to power with the avowed aims of "Getting Britain back to work" and "Putting Britain back on its feet".

"Which do the government want most? Do they want stagnation and a firm balance of payments, or do they want growth and to handle the difficulties that would arise in the balance of payments as they occur? I would chose the second".

One could be forgiven for thinking that this statement is quoted from the debate which is at present raging in ruling class circles about what to do with the British capitalist economy. In fact it comes from James Callaghan in 1962.

## ANARCHY

Callaghan was saying that going into debt should be a secondary consideration to maintaining expanding production and full employment. Now, 12 years later, the same problems and the same impossibility of a solution are dogging British capitalism.

But while Labour politicians coin new slogans and their economic advisers debate alternate government actions, the fundamental fact remains that the anarchy of capitalism on a world



scale and the particular backwardness of British capitalism cannot be wished away. And it is just these factors which throw governments to and fro, regardless of their will.

The most pressing of these factors at the moment is the balance of payments deficit. The Tory government's boom of 1972-73 was engineered by increasing indebtedness. Home demand was stimulated by such measures as tax cuts, and the inability of British companies to meet this increased demand led to an influx of imports. Add to this the increased price of raw materials and in particular the tripling of oil prices, and the result is the present yearly balance of payments deficit of £4,000 million.

Such a deficit has to be financed by borrowing abroad and inevitably creditors put conditions on their money. The





"Fantastic morale" — the women who defied the Belfast curfew.

# wild tonight...!

anniversary of the start of internment without charge or trial, a Tory policy that Labour is now administering. Some of the men in Long Kesh have been there, in those conditions, year in, year out. Others there have been 'tried' and convicted by courts without juries, with hidden, anonymous witnesses, and in which the accused has to prove his innocence. There are men in Long Kesh sentenced to as long as 15 years from such a 'court'.

In Belfast itself, the place is overrun with the 'Brits'. Factories are occupied by troops, and the factory yards are parking grounds for army lorries, Saracens and helicopters. One is constantly stopped and searched.

Three women from the delegation were walking along the street when one of the British patrols went by. They whistled at us, and shouted "I bet you're lonely", meaning that most of the men were in Long Kesh.

Further along the same street the same patrol which had been harassing us now began to bait some young Catholic boys (they looked in their early teens, some as young as 9 or 10) by singing an Orange hymn. These 'peace-keepers' were deliberately fostering religious sectarianism, deliberately stirring up hatred.

At another time, some of us were walking past Unity Flats (a solid Catholic area) when one of

the British soldiers deliberately aimed his gun at us. We had to scurry into a shop doorway in case this thug with a gun in his hands went berserk and shot at us!

This is the daily reality of army bullying and harassment which people in the Catholic areas have to live with.

## KILLED

The people told us how the 'peace-keepers' force their way into their homes and wreck them, tearing fireplaces out of the wall, smashing staircases, ripping out complete chimneys from the wall, ripping up floors, smashing holes into ceilings, smashing down doors, wrecking lavatories. (When one old age pensioner had a heart attack after an army raid, they refused the plea by the woman's daughter to take her mother to hospital. In fact they not only refused, they pushed the daughter down in the street as she went to get help.)

The day we left, people told us that because a British soldier had just been killed, they would all be harassed and some lifted during the night. One man remarked that "hardly anyone will be out on the streets tonight because the Brits will be running wild."

Some of us came to understand better why the Catholic people of Northern Ireland have resorted to armed struggle in their fight against British oppression — and

why it is utterly hypocritical for 'socialists' in Britain to fail to support the armed struggle of the IRA while our 'army' daily terrorises people fighting for the most elementary rights.

Despite all the harassment (of which of course we saw only a small part) the morale of these people is very high. The women and men from New Lodge, Unity Flats, Divis Flats, Ardoyne and Twinbrook Estate gave us a welcome we will never forget. They actually made our stay enjoyable — even with the British troops stationed on all street corners and occupying positions inside the very courtyards of these council flats.

The friendship and mutual help among the women is fantastic. These women, who bear the brunt of the soldiers' bullying, these women who are facing so many hardships and still struggling against British oppression, are an example to the women's movement in this country. These are the women who smashed the Belfast curfew of July 1970 when they marched down the Falls Road to take food to the people who were confined in the curfew area, brushing contemptuously past the British Army.

We must continue our solidarity with these women and men. We must fight with them for all political hostages to be released and for British troops to be withdrawn from Ireland.

# BATTERED WIVES - COUNCIL MUST PROVIDE HOUSING

WHEN Mr Justice Dunn interrupts counsel to offer his opinion that "in the North of England wives accept being beaten", he gave not so much an accurate picture of life in the North of England, rather a perfect picture of barbaric indifference to the oppression of women.

He would have done better to learn from the recent occupation by the Manchester Women's Liberation Group of an empty house they are turning into a refuge for battered wives.

The occupation was precipitated by the arrival over the previous weekend at the group's Women's Centre of two women and their children. Olga Peters and her three children, aged ten months, eight years, and twelve years, arrived on March 9th. Her husband had arrived home drunk and told her and the kids to get out. On previous occasions when this had happened he had also beaten her up. On the following day, Mary, who is six months pregnant, arrived with her four children, aged 2, 7, 8 and 10. She had been sent to the Centre by the Samaritans.

During the past year at least twelve women have arrived at the Centre in similar circumstances, and last weekend it became

unavoidably clear that more room was needed than the Centre can provide. So the house, at 18 Stockton Road, Chorlton, was occupied.

Efforts are now being made to buy the house, which has been up for sale for fifteen months. But the Women's Liberation Group declare — "We will not leave Stockton Road until Manchester Corporation give a house which can be used as a refuge for battered wives".

IN Rochdale the Women's Liberation group is currently helping two homeless women beaten and thrown out by their husbands.

One woman, with three children, was thrown out by her husband two weeks ago. She has moved into an empty house belonging to the corporation (due for redevelopment). Bailiffs have tried to get her out, but Rochdale Women's Liberation group have helped and advised her.

Another woman, with four children, was kicked out a week ago. She is a council tenant and therefore the council won't give her another house. They say she must go back to her husband. Apart from that, the best thing they could offer her was to put her on the housing list — a four year wait!

The Women's Liberation group decided to focus their demands on the council. So on Wednesday March 27th, 18 women, and quite a few children, accompanied Joan into the Housing Department. We also invited the press and TV along, and the place was pretty well covered with camera crews.

We demanded to see the Housing Manager. After an initial refusal, Joan got to see him, and one of the group, Chris, went in with her. After some discussion, he promised her a house the next day! This sounded good, but we all insisted that we wouldn't leave until we got the key.

After a long wait, and some threats to call the police, came another interview with the Housing Manager, this time better prepared and himself accompanied by officials from the Social Services Department. Now it turned out that the house was not available after all, but a place in a hostel was offered (even this had previously been refused), with the promise of a house within a month.

This was accepted, and it was generally felt that the publicity would help to prevent any reneging on the promise. However, we are all prepared for further action if this does happen.

# DANGER - MEN AT WORK!

A WORKER in a Frigidaire factory in London was told one day to scrape up some foam that had leaked from a pipe onto the floor.

Some days later he began to feel wheezy and had great difficulty breathing. The symptoms got much worse, and eventually he was found to be suffering from severe asthma, caused by one of the chemicals in the foam which he had, unquestioningly, cleaned off the factory floor.

The specialist who examined his lungs concluded that he was 30% disabled, could never be cured, and might get worse as he got older.

All this from 20 minutes' exposure to the chemical Toluene di-isocyanate!

He had to change his job, since all he could manage was the lightest possible work, and often spent whole nights gasping for breath.

This terrible incident sets the scene for Patrick Kinnersley's bitter indictment of the provisions for safety and health at work. \*Essentially this is a handbook for workers who want to understand the dangers of the place where they

work and get some ideas on what to do about them. Written in an easily readable style with a good, clear layout, the book surveys the major areas where hazards are most likely and reviews the major causes of disease and accidents.

The picture that emerges is one of workers falling victim at work in large numbers through the incompetence and profiteering of employers and the prevarication of the State's agencies, such as the Factory Inspectorate.

Contrary to what many people no doubt believed to be the practices of 'enlightened' bosses, workers are still injured and killed at work by the thousand each year. Kinnersley shows how the official statistics presented in the Annual Report of the Chief Factory Inspector are a gross under-representation of reality. Figures for many diseases, such as pneumoconiosis, are not included and many types of industrial injury or disease are not reported anyway.

Thus for 1964, for instance, 3 deaths from notifiable industrial disease are recorded and 585 cases of these diseases themselves.

If it is possible to glean anything at all from figures so completely unrelated to real life, one thing at

least is clear: there has been little or no improvement over the years, despite all the new possibilities for eliminating a situation whereby a person risks life and health just by going to work. In 1950 there were 25 cases of gassing of workers by chlorine; in 1967 there were 71 such cases, two of them fatal. Chlorine is a particularly unpleasant gas causing severe irritation and damage to the lining of the nose, throat and lungs. One of the men killed was a 49 year old boiler house operator who, working in a liquification plant, was exposed to a cloud of escaped chlorine. The man was taken home seriously ill and died a few hours later.

Even such sketchy 'case histories' go a long way to exposing the dangers and suffering lying behind the dull columns of statistics.

But more important than description is information on the possibilities of changing the situation. The great merit of Patrick Kinnersley's book is that it goes into some detail to explain how to improve conditions in your own work-place. The sections on how to organise safety committees and on the role of the Factory Inspectorate should prove invaluable to anyone attempting to fight in his own workplace for better conditions.

Often militants will find themselves facing the hostility of the bosses, the bureaucracy of the Inspectorate and also, very often, the indifference of their own trade union officials.

This point is perhaps not emphasised enough — in many cases the employers and the union seem to be trying to outdo each other in playing down the hazards of work. To my knowledge, only one union, the AUEW, employs safety officers full time, whereas many, many unions have members who daily risk life and limb at work.

At the grass-roots level, it must be said that indifference is also widespread. However, it is indifference based not on callousness or a lack of concern, but on a lack of knowledge. How many workers can spare the time to plough through the Factory Inspectorate's reports or read the technically complicated reports in the occupational medical journals?

This is where this handbook is so useful. It cuts through the technicalities to reveal and inform, for the benefit not of the 'experts' in their safe offices, but those who stand to know the pain and the loss and are most in need of knowing the dangers. And they, too, are the ones with the potential power to challenge the smugness, complacency and vested interest that kill and maim as surely as chlorine gas or molten steel.

NEAL SMITH



from 1964/66. Already it is clear that once again we will be in the position of fighting attacks on working class living standards. It now looks as though even the Phase 3 thresholds will not be implemented.

In this fight back, neither the balance of payments nor a minority in parliament can serve as an alibi for Labour. The balance of payments deficit is part and parcel of British capitalism and there is no solution to it that

is not at the expense of the working class. When Heath remarked that the deficit was a "problem of success" he came nearer the truth than he intended, for the crisis of payments is the inevitable result of even the most superficial and short-lived boom. Within the anarchy of capitalism, workers can take no responsibility for the idiocies of the capitalist cycle — we can only defend ourselves against their effects.

# way off balance

conditions are that the debtor country should balance its books and this means, in more direct terms, a cut in workers' living standards. How will Labour square such demands with its programme of higher pensions, more houses and more spending on education?

The record of the last Labour government gives us the answer.

When the 1964 Labour government came to power it did so on a programme which had two basic planks. There would be social reforms which depended on increased government spending, and these reforms were to be financed by modernising British capitalism. Instead of the regular 'stop-go' cycle of expansion and full employment followed by deflation and unemployment, there was to be a national economic plan to ensure a growth of 25% by 1970.

In fact the Labour government was immediately faced with a 700 million balance of payments deficit and it reacted by throwing the election programme out of the window paragraph by paragraph. Redressing the balance of payments deficit and maintaining a fixed exchange rate for the £ became the over-riding object of government policy and an alibi for every betrayal. Taxes were increased, imports were restricted and plans for increased

expenditure on social services were shelved. Labour apologists consoled themselves that the turn-about was simply a result of Labour's narrow majority in parliament.

The 1966 election returned Labour with a majority of 97. But now the retreat only accelerated, and in the next four years the seeds of future Tory policy were all sown by Labour. So keenly did Labour follow the dictates of capital that by 1970 unemployment was running at a record level, and to save the most miserly sum prescription charges had been reintroduced.

## DEFICIT

But the situation is now far more pressing than in 1964. It is not just that the debt is six times greater, but also that the world economic situation is more precarious. Long before the oil crisis the bourgeois economists were predicting a downturn in world trade for 1974. The effect of the new oil prices can only be to accentuate any such recession, for the increases mean that Japan and all the Western European nations will be running balance of payments deficits and will be looking for loans on the world money markets. For example in February France had a balance of payments deficit of Fr.1,657

million (the biggest for 5 years) despite a record 36% increase in exports. Already Italy has negotiated a loan from the International Monetary Fund, the terms of which were so stringent that they caused the breaking up of the coalition government.

## ATTACKS

In a situation where there is such competition for credit, the terms will be that much harsher. And for Britain, which is one of the least attractive propositions for potential creditors, the conditions will be harsher still.

Moreover, besides financing their balance of payments deficits by borrowing, the capitalist governments will also be trying to correct their deficits by cutting down on imports. The result of such moves would be a sharpening of the expected recession in world trade, which Britain is the least likely to be able to ride out. Britain imports 45% of its food and 70% of its raw materials, the cost of which must be covered by exports. No other capitalist economy is so vulnerable to the movements of world trade.

It would be facile to think that the present Labour government's reaction to the problems of capitalism will be any different



# Teachers' Conference puts on blinkers

by Ivan Wels

THE 23-24 March annual conference of the "RANK AND FILE" militant teachers' group had some important lessons for the 'Rank and File Papers' conference (30 March).

Rank and File, with over 1000 supporters and a print order of 10,000 for its paper, is one of the most successful militant rank-and-file movements in the British labour movement. It has seriously shaken up the hold the official bureaucracy in the National Union of Teachers.

The conference decided to continue R&F's work by campaigning for a £500 interim award on salaries from 1st October, and against the cuts in educational expenditure imposed by the Tory government (and not reversed by Labour).

There were useful discussions at the conference on these campaigns. Long sections, however, had that dead and sluggish air which comes from having the oxygen flow of open discussion bureaucratically stifled.

A key question, raising its head again and again in debates, was whether R&F should confine itself to the issues most visibly connected to the teacher's situation (teachers' own demands on pay and conditions, and elementary trade union solidarity) — or whether it should also take up issues where the connections are more difficult to see. Raised particularly at this conference was the question of the struggle in Ireland.

The International Socialists, who are the dominant political tendency in R&F, argued that R&F must expand to include wider sections of teachers not very interested in broader political issues, and R&F should therefore largely confine itself to issues directly affecting teachers' immediate interests.

Other delegates, particularly supporters of Workers' Fight and of the International Marxist Group, disagreed. Struggles like the war in Ireland are connected with the interests of teachers, as part of the British working class — that the connections are not obvious is all the more reason to fight to make them clear.

R&F should draw in militant teachers who are not very aware politically, without any 'exclusive brethren' attitude. But R&F should also fight to help make them aware.

R&F has decided to campaign against army recruitment in schools — but how can that campaign be effective if R&F is silent about what the army does in Ireland?

The 'trade-unionist' approach could in fact lead to R&F taking a very conservative stand on some issues in education. R&F has declared in favour of school students' right to organise and fight for control, against racialism in education, etc. These policies, however, remain largely

on the discussion-group plane — partly, necessarily, on account of R&F's limited strength, partly because of R&F's general sluggishness. If R&F sticks to the 'trade unionist' line, these principles may never come down from the discussion-group plane to concerted action.

But the International Socialists used their two-thirds majority at the conference simply to assert bureaucratic control — seeing to it, for example, that none of the resolutions raising the question of Ireland were even discussed. IS's approach was shown most graphically in the elections for the R&F Executive Committee.

There were 19 candidates for the 12 places. Seven stood on a platform put out by the International Marxist Group (the largest of the minority tendencies in R&F.) One could well disagree with a lot in that platform, but at least those seven made it clear what they stood for. The remaining 12 were quite obviously an IS slate. Yet they put forward no platform, and in fact the majority of them blocked together to reject a Manchester R&F resolution calling on Executive Committee candidates to present platforms.

The voting results showed the IS slate of 12 elected, with between 116 and 106 votes each. The other seven polled between 45 and 29 votes. The EC had been elected, not on the basis of policy, but simply through the IS block vote.

Such bureaucratic dead-hand tactics inevitably lead to a general stifling of initiative. This was illustrated on a very practical issue, the question of R&F's response to the recent NUT salaries sell-out. John Bloxam, a Liverpool R&F delegate and a supporter of Workers' Fight, asked why there had been really no centrally-organised response — no special R&F broadsheet or leaflet.

## Dead hand

Dick North, R&F editor, simply evaded the question by referring to the ample coverage of the salaries issue in R&F before the sell-out. And, of course, he could evade the question, knowing that, come what may, he would have the support of two-thirds of the conference.

Militants will continue to fight in R&F, to expand R&F and to shake it out of the semi-paralysis which IS's dead hand is imposing. Many IS members, too, will take up a fight inside IS for IS to operate in R&F politically, not just bureaucratically.

For the 30th March conference, we must draw the lessons. Rank and file movements in industry must not confine themselves shortsightedly and parochially to their own backyard issues. And policies must be debated and discussed openly and freely, without steamroller tactics.

## CONCORDE:

# 'WORK OR FULL PAY' CALL FROM BRISTOL T.C.

IF you came across someone who proposed a massive project, its cost approaching £1000 million — who hailed it as a great step forward in human endeavour — and who then called it off when, twelve years after first being proposed, it is nearing actual completion — you would think he was mad.

That is just what the British ruling class — through successive governments, Tory and Labour — has done over Concorde.

Unfortunately this story is more than just an object lesson in the crazy nature of capitalism and the need for socialism. Apart from the fact that hundreds of millions of pounds have been used which could have gone to much better purposes, 21,000 jobs — and more in service industries not directly working on the project — are at stake.

On 28 March, union representatives flew to Paris for talks with representatives from the Toulouse works. John Blackley, Joint chairman of the BAC-Rolls Royce Aerospace Liaison Committee, said at the Bristol Trades Council meeting on 21st March, that his committee had demanded inquiries by Avon County Council and by MPs. To enforce these demands, they might take industrial action on the other projects in course, the RB-211 or Pegasus engines.

The resolution passed by the Trades Council demanded work or full maintenance for the workers involved with Concorde. The workers at BAC did not

decide to build the plane — why should they suffer from the cancellation?

John Blackley said that "Profits have already been made out of it. Probably a quarter of the expenditure so far has been milked off in profit." Militants have been raising the call for a proper inquiry — not by the County Council, or by MPs, but by workers' representatives — that would expose fully where hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money has been going. So far the exact intentions of the Government on cancellations are not clear. It seems clear from Healey's budget speech that he does not intend Concorde to continue beyond the 16 already in production — but it is not clear that even those 16 will be finished. Benn is having talk in Paris on 29 March.

## Basic

The basic demand of the Concorde workers must be the slogan put forward in the Trades Council resolution — work or full maintenance. If Concorde is not continued, jobs must be found for all those working on it, without loss of pay. There are plenty of ways in which the skills and abilities of those workers can be put to use — even on other aeroplane projects, if the aerospace industry is nationalised under workers' control. Any attempt to sack workers must be answered immediately by factory occupations.

# Clay X must not pay fine!

FROM words to deeds is a long way — for some people.

The October 1973 annual conference of the Labour Party passed a resolution supporting Clay Cross and committing the next Labour government to repay the fines levied on the councillors for defying the Housing Finance Act.

On 27th March the Nat. Exec. Committee of the Labour Party took up that resolution... in a weaker form. It called on the government to hold up the district auditor, who is threatening to try to collect £6,985 from the ex-councillors, and to rescind the surcharges.

Four cabinet ministers — Callaghan, Healey, Benn and Foot — were present at the NEC meeting, and blandly voted for the motion. Next day they sat in a cabinet meeting, which decided... that it didn't have time to discuss Clay Cross!

If the government moves to collect the fine, to jail the councillors for non-payment, or to deduct it from the ex-councillors' wages, there must be a storm of protest —

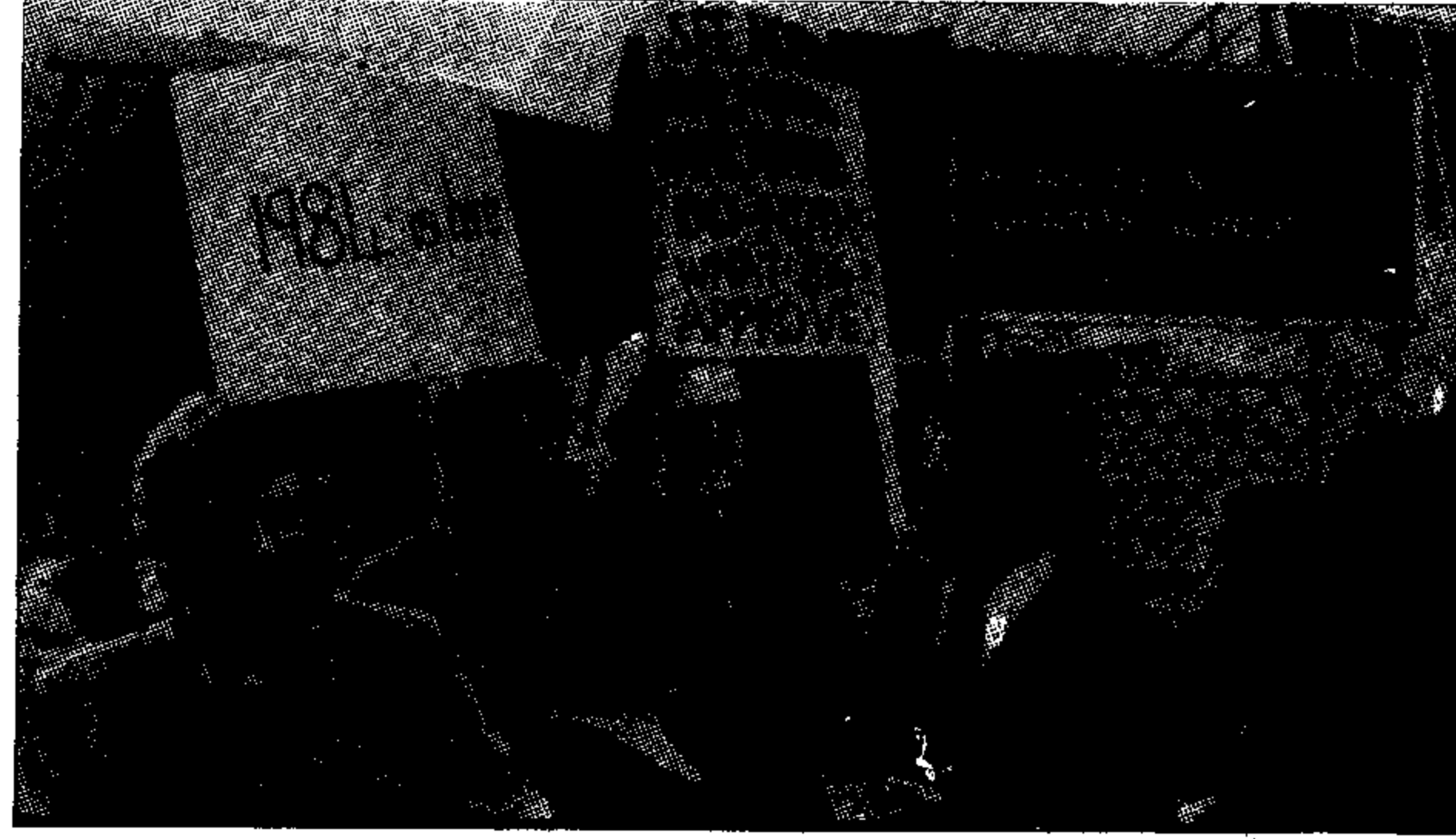
including rent strikes and industrial strikes. Workers didn't elect a Labour government in order for it to carry through the most infamous and vicious policies of the Tories!

We must also demand that the Labour government rescinds the £1 rent increase due from last autumn and not yet paid in Clay Cross. If the government enforces this increase, rent strikes in Clay Cross, backed up by support elsewhere, will be necessary.

## MEETINGS

MANCHESTER Workers' Fight public meeting, "Ireland after the elections". Speakers — George O'Docherty (participant in the Derry Civil Rights movement) and Fran Brodie (recently returned from the North West delegation to Belfast). 8pm, Thursday 4th April. The Castle, Oldham St, off Piccadilly.

COVENTRY Workers' Fight. Marxist education series — "Early British Trade Unions and the origins of the Labour Party". 7.30pm, Sunday 7th April. Elastic Inn, Lower Forge St.



Picket in support of victimised 'Rank & File' member Dorothy McColgan

# Home Office turns down hunger strikers' petition

31st March will be Hugh Feeney's 22nd birthday, and 5th April Gerard Kelly's.

On 5th April, also, these two young men, together with Marion and Dolours Price, will complete 142 days of hunger strike.

They are demanding that they be transferred to serve their 20-year sentences — imposed after the London car

bombings last year — in Northern Ireland, and given political prisoner status.

There were hopes that with the new Labour government their demands might be met. But on 23rd March Mrs Price was told by Dolours and Marion that their petition to the Home Office had been flatly turned down.

In addition, Mrs Feeney

and Mr Kelly were informed by the Home Office on 22nd March that on no account would their sons receive visits until they wore prison clothes. On 23rd March they were turned back at the prison.

The Joint Action Committee is planning an International Day of Solidarity on 28th April. A demonstration will assemble at Speakers' Corner at 2.30 and march to Downing Street.

The JAC is also appealing for contributions to the cost of an advertisement to appear in the Irish Post on 20th April. These contributions should be sent to the Joint Action Committee, 50 Colebrooke Row, London N.1.



Gerard Kelly

## MAKE IT £100 NEXT MONTH!

OUR first total for the Workers' Fight £100 monthly fund, in the first month of the Labour government, was only £73.30.

Obviously readers and supporters have let up in their efforts after we completed our £400 crisis fund during the

period of the 3-day week. But we need £100 every month to keep putting a fighting socialist alternative. And we need that fighting socialist alternative, as much under Labour as under the Tories. If you think that Workers' Fight has anything worth saying, then give us the means to say it.

Send contributions to the Treasurer, Workers' Fight, 98 Gifford St, London N10DF.

# Women and Socialism

THE third 'Women and Socialism' conference, held at Oxford on 23-24 March, was attended by 500 women.

In 1970 a conference in Oxford adopted the four demands of equal pay, equal jobs and education opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, and free 24-hour nurseries, which have become the basic planks of the women's movement.

At this year's conference, workshops were held on each of the four demands, to discuss progress and further ways forward.

A 'Women's Charter', adopted by London Trades Council, was endorsed by the conference. This Charter expands the four demands into 10 more detailed points, and the Conference resolved to use it to campaign for support from other trade union bodies. (copies of the Charter can be obtained from WF, 98 Gifford Street, London N.1)



Further discussion on the four demands will take place at the next Women's Liberation conference, in Edinburgh.

The 'Women and Ireland' collective proposed a motion in support of the Price sisters' demands for repatriation, for withdrawal of troops and self-determination for Ireland, and this was endorsed by the conference.

Viv Nicholls

# UPW leader goes

## red-baiting

Tom Jackson, big business's idea of a 'moderate trade union leader' is up to his old right wing, red-baiting tactics again.

Branches of the Union of Post Office Workers have received an official circular forbidding them from sending delegates to the 'Rank and File Papers' Conference to be held this weekend in Birmingham's Digbeth Hall.

Militants have suggested that it might have been better if the union leadership had received an instruction from delegates to the 'Rank and File Papers' Conference to be held this weekend in Birmingham's Digbeth Hall. wage curbs.

# Chile imports torture experts

AN Amnesty International report just published shows that after the overthrow of President Allende in Chile, the Brazilian government sent torture experts to 'aid' the new military junta headed by General Pinochet.

Their specific task was to train Chilean jailors in torture

practices to be used on political prisoners.

The Labour Government's review of the warship contract with Chile is a step in the right direction — we must demand that they go on to cancel the warships and offer an 'open door' to Chilean political refugees.

"The Case of the Irish Political Hostages". Pamphlet produced by the Irish Political Hostages Committee. Available from Workers' Fight, 98 Gifford St, London N1 0DF, price 10p plus 3p postage.

ASIAN Workers in Struggle. Five pages of interviews with workers engaged in day to day shop floor struggle make essential reading for socialists. In this month's Race Today. Single copies 15p. Annual subscription £2.00 — from 184 Kings Cross Road, London WC1.