

Workers Power

MONTHLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

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ORGANISE TO STOP THATCHER NOW!

THE TORIES HAVE wasted no time in pressing home the advantage of their election victory. Their new parliamentary programme includes attacks on the right to strike, trade union finances and rule books and measures to privatise nationalised industry and to prevent "overspending" by local councils.

On the industrial front they have already given British Telecom management the go-ahead to provoke a dispute over the installation of the private Mercury communication system. Private capitalists have also recognised the green light, announcing thousands of new redundancies within days of the election result. At the same time mortgage rates have been raised 1.25%.

Yet their victory has not essentially solved any of the Tories' fundamental problems. British industry is still a long way from being able to compete effectively internationally, state spending is still far higher than the Tories themselves want and, whilst productivity of those still at work has improved, overall production is 4% lower than when the Tories came to power in 1979. For the first time since the Industrial Revolution Britain is now a net importer of finished manufactured goods. The UK recorded a deficit of £664 million in its trade in manufactured goods during the first quarter of the year.

This has prompted the house journal of the more crazed and militant sections of capital, *The Economist*, to complain that Thatcher "has not yet proved that she has a coherent political strategy". By this they mean that although the Tories has displayed some pretty fancy footwork in the last four years, cutting back the number of strikes, increasing unemployment, defeating the steelworkers, railway men and health workers whilst carefully avoiding a stand up fight with, for example, the miners, they have not yet landed a real knockout blow to the working class as a whole. Indeed, average earnings have just about kept pace with price rises over the last four years, according to government statistics.

A thoroughgoing defeat of the sort *The Economist* wants to see would mean not just a wage freeze while prices rose but an actual cut in wages of the order of 30-40%. This is the maximum programme of the British bosses. And they do not want a small drop in union membership caused by unemployment but the loss of millions of members as the closed shop is destroyed and union membership in itself threatens job security.

That is the scale of the attack the Tories need to mount - and they need to mount it fast. By late 1985 or 1986, revenue from North Sea Oil will have passed its peak and be declining rapidly. It has been



Mike Abrahams: Network

largely this revenue that has funded the increased state expenditure of the last four years. In turn interest rates would rise and the pound, consequently, strengthen. The result would be ever greater increases in imports, an inability to compete on the world market and insufficient capital to invest in new industry within Britain.

Within the next two years then, the Tories have to cut state spending on industrial subsidies, the NHS, and social and welfare provision. This is the strategy that lies behind the Tories' programme for the coming period. It is a strategy that requires a massive drop in the living standards of the mass of workers. The last four years have essentially been years of preparation for the coming attack. The introduction of the anti-union laws of Prior and Tebbit, the

removal of social security payments from strikers, the development of specialised police squads for dealing with crowd control and pickets, the picking off of the weaker sections of the working class have all been designed with this end in mind.

The new Cabinet is stuffed with handpicked Thatcherites. They now have absolute dominance in the ruling class and mean to press on with their attacks fast. The next stage in the Tory strategy is to set up a fight in which they can deliver the knockout punch, a blow they hope can rock the whole working class back on its heels. There can be little doubt that it is the miners that they have in mind. The much-publicised transfer of McGregor from steel to coal, the stockpiling of six months' supply of coal, and after the election, the admission that they have a big hit-list of sev-

enty pits for closure, all point to a showdown in the near future.

There can be no doubt that the working class will move to defend itself against the Tories' attacks. The last four years have shown, quite consistently in all the major disputes, the existence of a stratum of militants willing to fight even after months of footdragging, obstruction and downright sabotage by their bureaucratic trade union leaders. What has been lacking has been the ability of these militants to gain the leadership of their struggles, ousting the leaders who will not lead.

Those leaders were not stopped from leading a fight by either government legislation or passivity among their members. They chose not to fight and their choice was, ultimately a political choice. Confronted with a government that proudly declared that it would not turn away from its chosen strategy, the union leaders realised that the escalation of any dispute would mean an increase in the forces the government would mobilise to ensure victory. In the end success for any of the major disputes would have had to mean a showdown with the government. Above all, they feared that they would lose control of any strikes that they did allow to develop. That's why they tried to prevent any effective strikes from starting.

Although it expressed itself in lack of organisation and co-ordination amongst, for example, the rank and file of the steel workers, health workers and water workers, the inability of militants to overcome this bureaucratic betrayal was ultimately rooted in a political weakness. They had no defences against their own leaders, against the media and

against the uncertainties amongst the rank and file. In the end they also had no answer to the question of government.

With the present massive parliamentary majority of the Tories this remains at the heart of the problems facing militants. To do nothing except wait for the next election in the hope of a Labour Government would obviously be suicidal. But to fight back challenges the right of the Tories to rule. Ultimately there is no way round this problem. Because we think parliamentary democracy is a sham that cloaks the real power of the bosses we say the workers have every right to destroy the Tory government.

In the coming period militants will have to fight on two fronts. Firstly, amongst the rank and file to convince them of the need to, and possibility of, mounting a successful fight against the Tories. Secondly, against the trade union leaders. Their position is now even worse than before. Not only do the Tories take no notice of them but, if government plans were to be successful, the very existence of some unions, and the financial stability of almost all of them, would be placed in jeopardy. And still they have the problem that if they were to make the bosses take notice of them they would have to unleash forces they cannot control, forces that could push them aside completely.

Militants must organise to force the leaders to fight. And when, as the case of Arthur Scargill, they declare that they're prepared to fight, militants must hold them to account and force them to put their words into action. Every step the bureaucrats are forced to take in defence of the unions or their members must be backed up with demonstrations of rank and file support and demands to go further. We must demand that the trade unions should immediately withdraw from "consultative" bodies such as the NEDC. When the government moves against any section of workers, be it the NUM, the POEU or some less well organised group, the demand for TUC-organised solidarity must be raised and acted upon independently.

Within all disputes, large or small, militants have to argue for the forms of organisations - democratic strike committees, regular report backs from stewards in work time, mass pickets and organised defence of them, that can not only win disputes but lay the basis for the action councils and workers' militia that will be necessary to take on the forces of the government.

Put the Unions on a War Footing. Break off all Talks with the Tories. Organise to smash Thatcher's Offensive.

Yes to a workers' paper

SEPTEMBER'S TUC ANNUAL Congress will discuss proposals for the creation of a daily newspaper sympathetic to the trade union and labour movement. Fearful for their public image, the frightened chiefs of Congress House are coming close to the idea that the labour movement needs its own press.

The election will have reminded many militants of just how much the official media hates the working class. The undisguised glee of the SDP and Tory media hacks will have disgusted many. Any workers involved in a strike can vouch that the press will crucify the strikers and intimidate the more backward workers. As the Tories roll up their sleeves to do battle with the miners again all the airwaves and printing presses will be at their disposal as they will attempt to persuade the miners that they have not got a hope in hell or that they are "holding the nation to ransom".

Of course, the working class needs a press at its disposal that can argue its

case, refute ruling class lies and organise action and struggle. Will the conservative functionaries of Congress House be able to deliver such goods? No way! They got the trusted Lord McCarthy to do a feasibility study to a 32 page tabloid daily that would give "critical support" to the labour movement. His lordship reckons on needing to raise £6.7 million in order to produce a paper with a 300,000 circulation. Len Murray has now declared his support. This has proved the kiss of death to many schemes before.

The *Morning Star* is sulking about the project. They had hoped to get their sagging sales boosted from the coffers of the trade union lefts. That's why they have complained that McCarthy's report appears to be based on "an almost studious avoidance of drawing any conclusions from the unique experience of the movement's only newspaper today - the *Morning Star*." (June 18th).

To leave the production of a paper in the hands of the TUC is a sure fire way to kill the project. They want a paper that will improve their credibility with the middle-class and employers. They

want a paper that would make a funeral parlour catalogue look exciting. And, most importantly, they would want to stamp out any politics that offended them or their intended allies. Just as they policed the People's March so they produced a tedious unpolitical paper in support of the march. The *Morning Star* could be wrong. The TUC would take more from the experience of the Star's politics and dreary style than its editors might care to think. In Len Murray's hands what chance a 300,000 circulation daily workers' newspaper?

The working class needs a paper. It is a burning task of the labour movement today. No less is it an urgent task to support the print unions and fight to impose the right of reply to anti-working class articles in the bosses' press. The two tasks are not counterposed. At the TUC Congress this means fighting for an editorial board that is responsible to, and recallable by, rank and file trade unionists. It means fighting for a paper that has no editorial bans and proscriptions but is open to all political currents in the workers' movement. ■

LABOUR LEADERSHIP

Take the election into the unions

THE TRADE UNION chiefs and the PLP leaders want to arrange a successor for Michael Foot as quietly as possible. They are trying to stamp out any political debate in the leadership contest in order to rig up a Kinnock/Hattersley joint platform - the bureaucrats' "dream ticket."

There is enormous pressure on Labour Party and Trade Union activists to go along with this unpolitical charade in the name of unity. Feuding in the Labour Party now - it is claimed - would only serve the SDP. The left's darling, Tony Benn, has lent his weight to this argument. Immediately after the election he declared: "I believe that I speak for a very large number of people, today, in the morrow of a defeat, in saying there is no room for personal bitterness or recrimination, and that the desire for us to be united and strong, to face this challenge is the dominant thought in our midst at the moment."

He has repeatedly urged his own version of a "dream ticket" with his calls for a collective style leadership like a "wheel where each spoke gives strength and balance."

To give in to this pressure is to give up the fight against the openly pro-boss right-wing in the party. It allows the Trade Union and Parliamentary leaders to decide on Labour's leadership. It will allow them to decide which of Labour's policies will be unceremoniously dumped. It would be tantamount to Labour and Trade Union activists agreeing to gag themselves.

The leadership election must be used as a stage on which to debate politics in every Trade Union and Labour Party branch. At the very least branches must commit themselves to voting only for candidates who defend those policies of the Labour Party which, if implemented, would in some measure defend the interests of the working class. Each candidate must be forced to come clean on exactly where he stands on the witch-hunt, on recent conference democratic reforms, on Incomes Policy, on coalition with the SDP, on maintaining Polaris and siting Cruise. Branches should only give their support to candidates who will fight the right and oppose their policies.

We know very well where the leadership candidates stand on these issues. Shore is a hoary old bourgeois politician who is committed to the witch-hunt and Incomes Policy. He thinks Labour's road back to government lies in winning back the trust of the manufacturing bosses. Hattersley has been the right-wing's trusted spokesman. This smarmy and mediocre scribbler loves to put himself about in "cultured" ruling class circles. He was a close ally of Owen and Williams. He is a staunch opponent of any Labour policy that militants would defend or fight for. Neil Kinnock's candidature is no different. He is the Trade Union bureaucrat's favourite because they think he would serve their interests best. He would be better than Shore or Hattersley at rallying the faithful foot soldiers with flights of phoney socialist rhetoric. Crucially, he would guarantee to hold the line for the Parliamentarians and Trade Union overlords. He has supported the Witch-hunt. He has supported Incomes Policy and opposed committing Labour to nationalising the banks. Kinnock has been complicit in the deal to keep politics out of the campaign. He hopes to win by backstage deals with the Trade Union barons, and projecting himself as the leader of the respectable house-trained left.

Only the left's old war-horse Eric Heffer has given any commitment to oppose Labour's anti-working class policies. He says he's against the witch-hunt and for the democratic reforms. He is prepared to commit himself to supporting unilateral disarmament and opposing incomes policies. For those reasons Labour and Trade Union activists should critically support the candidature of Heffer against the other candidates. Yet it doesn't take much nous to realise that Heffer hasn't got a hope in this election. If it eventually takes place, the electoral college might, at the outside, be treated to a second round runoff between Kinnock and Hattersley.

Already the soft-headed "hard left" are gritting their teeth and declaring for Kinnock. After the election was announced *Socialist Action* declared that "to refuse to back him against Hattersley or Shore in the final analysis would be an ultra-left stupidity - handing the game to the right-wing without a fight" (SA 17.6.83) *Socialist Organiser* that week was calling on Dennis Skinner to stand and urging Jo Richardson to step forward too: "It would be good to have a woman candidate, and Jo Richardson is well qualified in other ways too." (SO 16.6.83). By the next week however, it was announcing that in the second round it would end up voting "for the fake-left Kinnock against the open right Hattersley." Labour Herald has suggested that it too thinks that after Heffer "Kinnock would appear to be the least of the remaining evils." (LH 17.6.83).

In the existing campaign there has not yet emerged one inch of difference on concrete policies that would allow activists to commit their vote to Kinnock against Hattersley. At this moment militants would have to declare that they would abstain from voting in a "beauty contest" ballot between these two. Of course things might not stay that way. If the plans of the Trade Union leaders are successfully scuppered then the months ahead could see real differences emerge.

Only if Kinnock came out clearly to defend pro-working class policies against the right could militants vote for him against Hattersley. That's not the way he, or anyone else in the Labour and Trade Union leadership intend to fight this contest. Only the intervention of rank and file activists can break up the plans of this cosy coterie of careerists.

The Trade Union leaders want to keep the bloc votes tightly in their own hands. In many unions the votes will be cast as a result of the executive's decision or the wishes of the union's delegation to Party conference. In some, the members will be consulted in branch ballots. It is vital that militants organise now to ensure that rank and file members discuss and decide how their union's vote will be cast at specially convened meetings. The votes of the unions should be cast proportionately to reflect the varying strengths of the candidates among the members. Only in this way can we break the bureaucrats' grip on the Labour Party and draw new sections of workers into open political discussion. The alternative is that thousands of workers will come to believe that Tebbit is right. And they will agree that the Trade Unions' links with the Labour Party should be broken because they give no voice to the majority of rank and file Trade Unionists. ■

LABOUR'S DEFEAT IN the General Election has thrown the left into turmoil. The Left have claimed major victories in the Labour Party over the last four years. In its own way the Manifesto dutifully reflected these gains for the Left. Yet these paper victories for the Left failed to halt Labour's decline.

Labour's working class vote has been declining throughout the 60s and 70s. This should come as no surprise. The 1945 Labour Government was able to appear as a government of reform which brought about significant benefits to large sections of workers. Wilson and Callaghan's governments appeared rather different. Presiding over an ailing British capitalism they attempted to hold wages down through incomes policy and failed to introduce meaningful improvements in social welfare provisions. No wonder then that Labour has increasingly been unable to rely on the backing of a passive and loyal working class vote. No wonder either that the constituency parties shrank and, in many areas, became dominated by white-collar public sector employees.

Thatcher's victory and the boost in the Alliance vote reflects a marked acceleration in that tendency. Only 39% of trade unionists voted Labour with the Tories commanding 4% more votes from skilled manual workers than Labour. Despite fashionable talk of the North/South divide the features of Labour's decline are evident on a national scale. While over the last 9 years Labour has lost 62% of its seats in Southern England it has also lost 25% of its seats elsewhere. This time round in Sheffield and Leeds there were higher than average drops in Labour's vote. The scale of the dramatic slump in Labour's fortunes is evidenced by the fact that only 17% of first time voters put a cross for Labour. It was unable to inspire confidence amongst a younger generation for whom Thatcherism can offer little but the dole queue.

Of course, short term and particular factors served to accelerate Labour's decline. The bourgeoisie had no interest in Labour winning and were out to sculpt the Alliance into a safe bet should they need an alternative to Thatcher. The craven British media carried out their masters' bidding to the letter. It is also true that Labour's front-line team were particularly lack-lustre, unconvicted and unconvincing.

Tribune

"A substantial minority of the PLP chose to hand the election to the Tories on a plate and condemn Britain to ten years of Thatcherism." (No.23, 10.6.83)

Yet Foot's leadership is a fitting symbol of the decrepitude and senility of the Labour Party itself. It could offer no plausible alternative that could galvanise workers to support it. While the Tories fought tooth and nail for their class the Labour leaders bleated about unity. Labour's only strategy for new jobs was an implausible letter to the IMF requesting a huge loan in the middle of a banking crisis. Its campaigns on peace, on lead in the petrol and animal liberation were all aimed at winning a mythical middle ground of concerned middle class voters and came to nothing. In short, Labour has nothing to offer a working class that has been ground down by four years of government at the hands of hard ruling class militants.



BENN

**"For the first time since 1945, a political party with an openly socialist policy has received the support of over 8½ million people."
"Socialism has re-appeared once more upon the national agenda."
(Guardian 20.6.83)**

For some on the left the defeat can simply be ignored. Benn, for example, has decided that in fact Labour won a great victory on June 9th. In a Guardian article under the incredible title "Spirit of Labour Reborn" Benn declared that the media had ignored the most striking fact about the 1983 election, namely "that for the first time since 1945, a political party with an openly socialist policy has received the support of over 8½ million people." Labour's defeat was turned by Benn into evidence "that Socialism has re-appeared once more upon the national agenda." With the arrogance and smugness of a besotted Parliamentarian he takes Labour's voters to be committed readers and endorsers of Labour's Manifesto. With the typical complacency of a Parliamentary Left he declares socialist a manifesto which gave no guarantee to cut unemployment below a million; which gave no commitments to nationalise firms declaring redundancies; which would have paved the way for an incomes policy and which fudged the disarmament issue.

Since Bishop Stortford, Benn has been extremely careful not to break the pact he struck there with Healey, Foot and the TUC leaders. Not for him, therefore, any attacks on the action of the campaign leaders. Instead he claims that re-born British socialism was beaten at the polls because of a vicious campaign against it which deliberately set out to conceal the depth of support for Labour's policies: "If you look at the public opinion polls that were never published, and I went through them all with great care, you will find that for month after month the British people, when asked for their judgement on the policies of the Labour Party confirmed them time and time again." (Socialist Action 17.6.83). Quite consistently for Benn, therefore, all that is needed is to keep existing policies, existing members and new collective leaders while waiting for Labour's prophecies to be

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The defeat the Left can't explain

confirmed before the eyes of the electorate. "I believe that as the months go by, the relevance of what we said will become apparent, like a prophecy against which we can judge our own experience." (ibid.)

Not party to the Bishop Stortford pact the Tribune has felt free to place the blame for defeat on the shoulders of the Labour leaders. According to Tribune, Labour's "Guilty Men" were the right-wing around Healey, Callaghan, Shore and Hattersley who deliberately sabotaged Labour's campaign and stopped it winning. Labour's Manifesto threatened to break the cosy bi-partisan mould of British politics: "Rather than allow that to happen, a substantial minority of the PLP chose to hand the election to the Tories on a plate and condemn Britain to ten years of Thatcherism." (Tribune 10.6.83). But the Tribune editorial board chooses to ignore the fact that the Manifesto represented a real fudge precisely on the issues where the Right take exception to the Labour Party policy such as on Incomes Policy and Disarmament. At the same time Tribune is silent on the fact that the Left allowed Healey, Hattersley and Shore to call the shots and explain the policies throughout the entire campaign. The Right were allowed to push the Left aside. Labour's campaign showed just how shallow the Left's much vaun-

But he's already set about clearing the Labour GLC from any responsibility to mobilise to stop the Tories' plans. Speaking in Socialist Organiser (No. 136 16.6.83) he declared "Our problem is that we are in a position of responding to what the Tories do. We're not in a position of being able to initiate, because we aren't in a position to mobilise the sort of forces required. You come back to what's always been the case - without the trade unions mobilised behind the Labour Party locally or nationally, there's a very limited amount you can do." So Livingstone puts the blame on the trade unions for the GLC's failure to successfully resist Thatcher. Once again its the rank and file trade unionists who get the blame for the inaction of the left leaders.

Benn, Tribune and Derer have never hidden the fact that they are reformists from anyone. There is nothing particularly surprising in their analysis or in their solutions. What may be more surprising to some however is the striking similarity between the line of Labour's established left and that produced by papers that declare themselves to be revolutionary. Committed to reforming the Labour Party, "The Militant", like Benn, cannot bring itself to face up to the historic decline of the Labour Party. History is, in fact, working for the editorial board. Two MPs make a summer for the Militant.

According to The Militant's soothsayers, the Tories will split and the Alliance has already reached its peak. We are told this categorically. As the crisis unfolds thousands of workers will flood into the Labour Party: "Many thousands of workers will not rest content with trade union activity but will draw the logical conclusion that it is necessary for them to get involved also in the Labour Party." (Militant 17.6.83). And this mass influx will serve to further isolate the right wing in the party. After all, it was the Right and not the Party's Left who suffered defeat at the election....according to Militant! Indeed "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds!" "More and more workers will come to the conclusion advocated by the Militant that only socialist policies offer a way out of the enormous crisis faced by society. A re-born Labour Party is bound to increasingly bear the imprint of its ideas. And never mind

of a decline of the Tory vote which has now been going on for fifty years." The very ferocity of Thatcher's proposed attacks is supposed to reflect this decline and the Tory's dramatic insecurity: "The very scale of the Tories' assault on basic rights is a result of Thatcher's lack of authentic mass support." Ross imagines Thatcher is going to abolish the GLC "because she is not sure the Tories could win an election against Labour in London." Perhaps Ross has seen some of Benn's buried opinion polls!



Neil Kinnock

Ross subscribed to the Tribune view that the SDP picked up votes that were "driven into their hands by Callaghan and Healey." He and Freeman peddle the Tribune line that Labour's policies themselves were not properly presented to the electorate. For these so-called revolutionaries the problem is now to re-build the Labour Party's support on its existing left policies but with a new membership of activists drawn in from the various "movements" against Thatcher. Thatcher's government will get weaker. It has no mandate to govern....and Ross's re-born Labour Party must therefore step up the fight "to get this government out and to force a new general election in which the Tories are crushed." Socialist Action, stripped of a few of its infantile fantasies, finds itself politically indistinguishable from Tribune.

The rest of the Left press has been predictable. True to form the "Bennite" Socialist Organiser could not manage a word of criticism of Benn and the Labour Left in its post election papers. And although, unlike Socialist Action it owns up that Labour's policies were wrong, it still laments the non-activity of the Socialists for a Labour Victory campaign, which was formed to fight the election campaign on a prettified list of those very same "Labour Policies".

What made Michael Foot a loser has made a monkey out of the Left. All the pressure on the Labour Party activists will now be for them to shut-up and put-up so as to not rock the boat. The established Labour Left will move right fast. Now is precisely the time that the blind alley of reformism needs to be explained and argued about with thousands of militants who want to know what happened. Now is the time when we need to make it clear that the working class does not need a sanitised Labour Party be it in the hands of Benn or Kinnock. The task is not to re-build the Labour Party. The task is, in fact, to build a revolutionary party that can stand as a real alternative to the bankrupt and discredited programmes of Labour. Benn's "revolutionary" followers have themselves been wined by Labour's defeat. They have no alternative explanation of it to that offered by the reformist left. It can come as no surprise that they have no alternative solution either. ■

Network: Judah Passow

Militant

"The recovery and renewal of the Labour Party is assured." (17.6.83)

ted victories really were and it showed quite how spineless the Left's leaders were in practice.

For Benn and Tribune Labour's policies are not in question. The key to Labour's defeat lies in the means by which Labour was prevented from addressing the electorate. A similar explanation has come from Campaign for Labour Party Democracy Secretary Vladimir Derer. He puts the major blame on the Labour leadership's failure to make the Alternative Economic Strategy the main plank of their platform because the current balance of forces in the party precluded Labour advancing a "Socialist Incomes Policy." Even more symptomatic of the right turn of Labour's Left are Derer's charges against the Left.

He accuses the Left of having to take part of the blame for Labour's disunity which cost it dear at the election. "Unfortunately many of those on the party's left wing who have helped to achieve Labour's democratic reform completely fail to appreciate the paramount importance of party unity." (Socialist Action 17.6.83). No doubt Labour's new leadership will be able to rely on Derer to join its campaign for unity against the Left.

A slightly different analysis of Labour's defeat has come from the pages of Labour Herald and the speeches of GLC leader Ken Livingstone. At least Livingstone has the sense to see that Labour's policies themselves had no real attraction for large numbers of working class voters and to question the value of the Left's advances over the last years. Labour Herald (vol2 no.40) declared "The lesson of Labour's defeat is not just that our leadership was inadequate but that its policies were bankrupt too." Livingstone has recently criticised the record of Labour's Left in fighting for "accountability" when they should have been fighting over "policies." But behind Labour Herald's analysis lies yet another warmed up variant of the bankrupt policies of British labourism. Livingstone's answer is for Labour to commit itself to "control capital." Yet the history of all Labour governments has shown that capital won't allow itself to be controlled and administered in the interests of the working class. Either capital will have to be expropriated through struggle or it will maintain the means to control a Labour Government. Livingstone has also issued much publicised calls for extra-parliamentary action.

Socialist ACTION

"These election results are part of a decline in the Tory vote which has now been going on for fifty years." "The very scale of the Tories' assault on basic rights is a result of Thatcher's lack of authentic mass support." (17.6.83)

Labour's declining vote and diminishing support "The recovery and renewal of the Labour Party is assured."

Socialist Action too has its Hans Christian Andersen's to hand to explain away Labour's defeat. According to its editor Alan Freeman, it was the Left who lost the election by their silence. In a commentary entitled "Left kept quiet, Tories Won" (SA 17.6.83) Alan Freeman presents a grovelling criticism of Benn for not speaking up on disarmament. While making it clear that "That did not diminish anyone's respect for his integrity", Freeman suggests that a speech on unilateralism from Benn would have given new heart to Labour's activists and won over "millions in the peace movement who had not made up their minds for Labour." It might even have turned the tide against Callaghan! But the best fiction writer on Socialist Action remains John Ross. This political commentator claims to have discovered that in reality the election results highlight the decline of the Tory party. His version of Benn's "Spirit of Labour Reborn" is the claim "These election results are part

Stop privatisation plans

The following article on privatisation and the NHS is reprinted from Workers' Powers' action programme for health workers which has just been published.

Health workers face a new threat to their jobs and incomes - privatisation. The Tories aim is a wholesale handing over of the profitable sections of the NHS to the private sector. Health workers must fight for a health service free at the time of need and against the introduction of a two tier service, one for the rich and one for the poor.

The first steps towards privatisation came through pay beds in the NHS. The Labour government equivocated on the issue and made it easier for the private sector outside the NHS to take a firm toe-hold. The Tories, through the 1980 Health Services Act, at a stroke, knocked down virtually all barriers for the private sector. Consultants have new contracts allowing them to undertake private work without damaging their NHS status and pay beds are not to be phased out.

Moreover the Secretary of State under that Act is empowered to make NHS services and accommodation available to private patients and authorise private practice in an NHS hospital where demand requires it. Health workers must block all private work in the NHS, that is pay beds, diagnostic procedures such as blood tests, X-rays and all operations and treatment. There should be no co-operation with consultants or other medical practitioners using NHS time or equipment for their profiteering.

The private sector, outside the NHS, has grown considerably with the encouragement of the Tory government both directly through legislation and indirectly through cuts. In 1982 there were 140 acute private hospitals with 35,000 beds. There are plenty of profits to be made out of acute health care, so much so that companies not connected with health are taking a keen interest. British Caledonian Airways and Trafalgar House are in discussions over the building of a private hospital near Gatwick Airport. This private sector has grown up on the back of the NHS and its workforce, milking it of funds, technology and staff. These private consortiums should be immediately nationalised without compensation and integrated into the NHS under workers' control.

Another area that has profited considerably under the Tories is the private health insurance sector - companies like BUPA. The number of subscribers has more than doubled between 1979 and 1983. Subscriptions of £125 million yielded profits for BUPA and PPP of £40 million. Ill health is a very profitable business. EETPU negotiated entry into a private medical scheme for 40,000 electricians as part of a wage deal. All such deals should be scrapped. There should be no encouragement of such schemes in the Trade Union movement.

Geoffrey Howe is obviously pleased with the growth of these schemes but is keen to force them to grow even more: "Private health insurance is already one of Britain's growth industries. We must encourage it to grow faster." (July 1982)

The one way the Tories can ensure the growth of private health insurance is through privatising the NHS. This is the aim of Tory strategy. Their attempts began in June 1980 through a circular encouraging contracting out, which was largely ignored by Area Health Authorities at the time. The Tories in March 1983 have made it clear that laundry, catering and domestic services (to start with) must be tendered out. Financial incentives have been offered. These moves are a direct attack on those sections that have been traditionally better organised and taken action on pay, conditions and the cuts. Privatisation is a political move against health workers and against the NHS. It will mean a break up of union organisations, redundancies, lowering of wage rates, deterioration in conditions, scrapping of health and safety. It must be fought nationally and locally with direct action, mass pickets, occupations to prevent moving out of equipment and strike action. No contractor should be allowed inside the hospital gates. All present contractors should be kicked out. There should be no co-operation with contract workers already there. Workers' committees should be elected to monitor all attempts at contracting out and all other private work. The District Health Authority should open the books to workers' inspection to pin-point all areas of private work. ■

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IMPERIALISM TIGHTENS THE SCREW

FOUR YEARS AFTER the overthrow of the US puppet, the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime faces its severest test yet. On the Honduran borders in the North, the CIA and Honduran Army backed "contras", numbering several thousand heavily armed guerrillas of the openly Somozist Fuerza Democrática Nicaraguense (FDN), have launched a number of full scale incursions into the country. In the South, "democratic little Costa Rica" is busily aiding and abetting Eden Pastora's (formerly "Commander Zero" of the FSLN) Alianza Revolucionaria Democrática (ARDE) in its guerrilla campaign.

These developments mark a new stage in US imperialism's campaign to destabilise and overthrow the Sandinista regime, an objective openly proclaimed in Reagan's election platform. For US imperialism this objective becomes more urgent as its puppet regime in El Salvador faces serious reverses at the hands of the FMLN guerrilla forces, despite massive increases in American military and economic aid. At all costs the US government must avoid the victory of another anti-imperialist movement in Central America which would strengthen the hand of the Sandinistas against Washington, and threaten other US puppet regimes in Honduras and Guatemala. *Time Magazine* recently summed up what it called Reagan's "broader plans", "to win the war in El Salvador, find working ground with Guatemala's dictatorship, to back up Honduras and Costa Rica - and to squeeze Nicaragua until the Sandinistas topple." (*Time* 6.6.83)

The new urgency given to Washington's plans has been registered in the launching of the new offensive by the contras and the ousting of Thomas Enders as Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. Enders, it appears, had given consistently optimistic reports of the situation in El Salvador which contrasted dramatically both with the reality and with UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick's desire for more direct US involvement in Central America to save a dramatically deteriorating situation.

Kirkpatrick has got her way. In the last few months Reagan has dramatically stepped up aid to Honduras. He intends to get round the limit of 55 US advisors in El Salvador simply by opening up a new military training centre in Honduras - aiming at 100 US "advisors" training 2,400 Salvadorean army troops within a few months. This will all be backed by a newly installed, highly sophisticated Radar installation near Choluteca, which is designed to monitor air traffic over Honduras, El Salvador and most of Nicaragua. Indeed such is the state of current surveillance over Nicaragua that one US intelligence analyst recently boasted "We can hear a toilet flush in Managua."

Reagan is stepping up economic and political sanctions aimed at strangling the economy and building up internal opposition to the Sandinistas. The US successfully deployed this tactic against the Manley regime in Jamaica. While allocating millions to "covert" operations, the US has used all its weight to block economic aid to Nicaragua. Forty million dollars aimed at revitalising the fishing industry on the Atlantic coast was blocked by the US in the Inter-American Development Bank. The IMF and World Bank have come under similar injunctions. Most recently, the US government cut Nicaragua's sugar quota by 17% - on the initiative, according to the *New York Times*, of the National Security Council and State Department, which redistributed the quota to Honduras and El Salvador. This means a

further loss of 15 million dollars in exports in a period when Nicaragua's balance of trade is running a deficit of 500 million dollars a year.

In a further move to cut back US-Nicaraguan trade on June 7th Reagan closed down all six Nicaraguan consulates in the US expelling 60 staff, leaving the 20% of its entire foreign trade which Nicaragua does with the US to be conducted through one office in Washington.

This latest round of attacks on the Nicaraguan government has had a major impact inside the country. The economic destruction and disruption caused by the attacks of the contras is an important destabilising factor. Most factories are now working at only 60% capacity. Many basic necessities - including rice, sugar, toilet paper, gasoline and cooking oil - are now rationed, while empty shelves and shortages have led to a flourishing black market. In this situation the continued strength of the capitalist sector inside Nicaragua poses a major threat to the gains made by the masses in the 1979 revolution.

Reagan's fifth column inside Nicaragua, the big capitalists organised in COSEP, have been quick to seize their chance. While the Directors of Nicaraguan Sugar Estates, which own 50-60% of the sugar industry, sent a "protest letter" to the US Ambassador over the quota cut, COSEP refused to criticise the US action. Even official Sandinista sources recognise the widespread sabotage being conducted by the Nicaraguan capitalists. Tomas Borge, Minister of the Interior, has declared that growing shortages are the result of "economic sabotage" by the private sector, while *Barricada*, the Sandinista paper has been pointing out the role of the big merchants and private wholesalers in contributing to the shortage by hoarding and speculation (*International Press*, 16.5.83).

Despite a "Decapitalisation Law", which threatens recalcitrant capitalists with nationalisation if they run down their factories in Nicaragua, capital flight from the country is still running at the enormous rate of 112.9 million dollars a year. The big multi-nationals like Exxon and ICI are quite blatant in their actions. *International Viewpoint* (Jan 83) reports the case of Casa - an ICI subsidiary - and the biggest agri-chemical plant in Nicaragua - which set up a rival plant in Guatemala and proceeded to run down its operations through forcing its Nicaraguan plant to sell to its rival cheap and buy dear! The Sandinista union in the plant was broken, with the CST union secretary being barred from the plant. No doubt if the CIA backed forces grow in strength the capitalists will become even bolder in their economic sabotage.

The present developments in Nicaragua are beginning to expose the fatal flaws in the FSLN's strategy for the Nicaraguan revolution. The FSLN has never hidden its commitment to a "mixed economy" i.e. an economy in which the capitalists predominate as a "stage" on the road to socialism. Tomas Borge, Interior Minister in the Government of National Reconstruction, quite recently reaffirmed the FSLN's commitment to this policy in reply to a question from a *Le Monde* reporter on the impact of Reagan's pressure. He declared: "Whatever he does we will be neither more nor less radical. We don't talk about political pluralism and a mixed economy to please the Americans. This is our programme and we will continue it no matter what policy Reagan follows." (*Intercontinental Press* 31.1.83).

Daniel Ortega, head of the government, was even more explicit in how the FSLN sees the



Processing Gold ore, Siuna mine, Nicaragua

partnership with private capital. Following the timeworn Stalinist analysis of "good" and "bad" capitalists he declared: "In Nicaragua there is the kind of businessman who doesn't flee, who doesn't hide his money, but who invests it and puts it at the service of the revolution." (*Multi-National Monitor* May 81).

This approach to the private capitalists explains both the continuing strength of the private sector in Nicaragua - between 60-75% of the economy remains in private hands - and the continued emphasis of the FSLN government on providing increased incentives for private investment. However, the developing imperialist stranglehold on Nicaragua is exposing the deep contradictions in this policy. Having accepted that in the present "stage" of the revolution it was impossible to end Nicaraguan dependency on the imperialist powers, the government saw itself instead as "diversifying dependency" through aid from Western Europe, Latin America, the "Socialist" countries and the Arab Oil States. While this has had some success one result is that foreign debt now stands at 2.5 billion dollars, one of the highest per capita in South America, while 40% of Nicaragua's export earnings goes on servicing it. The result is a chronic economic crisis in Nicaragua which, as long as the capitalists dominate the economy, can only be solved on the backs of the workers and peasants.

The present government in Nicaragua, as we have said before, is one which, because it came to power on the wave of a massive worker and peasant rising which smashed the bourgeoisie's army, is able to balance between the major classes of Nicaraguan society. At times it leans on the bourgeoisie for support and hits out at the left - strikes have been illegal in Nicaragua since Sept. 1981; trade unionists who have pressed wage demands have been gaoled, independent trade unions harassed. The very same Borge who denounced economic sabotage has argued against trade union freedom to struggle against the capitalists in the following stark terms: "There are some workers who believe that the main enemy of the working class is the bourgeoisie. But the bourgeoisie as a class has been mortally wounded in this country, and the dying have never been dangerous enemies." (31.6.82) At other times, particularly when it is locked in conflict with imperialism, it leans on the controlled mass mobilisation of the workers and peasants.

The FSLN/GRN is a coalition of different political tendencies - from its priest father Miguel D'Escoto (a member of the US based Maryknoll order) to its "Marxist-Socialist" Tomas Borge - united at the moment by its commitment to defend capitalism in Nicaragua for the foreseeable future. Such a coalition can only fragment under the pressure of the imperialist offensive.

The Reaganites have yet to tighten the screws on Nicaragua as tightly as Eisenhower and Kennedy did to Castro's Cuba in 1960. The US bourgeoisie is not yet sufficiently united around such a course and neither are significant sections of European capital. But as the blockade tightens and Nicaragua's economic crisis intensifies, so more and more sectors of the Nicaraguan capitalists and petit-bourgeois will

move into open opposition to the regime. In these circumstances the FSLN will face choices that Castro's July 26th Movement either they can capitulate to imperialism, open up Nicaragua again to direct rapacious exploitation by the US capitalists, or prepare themselves to be thrown from power to defend themselves against the imperialist onslaught.

Effective defence against imperialism is possible without the expropriation of the capitalists who are holding a dagger to the heart of the revolution - the capitalists. As Castro did in Cuba, the expropriation of the capitalists becomes a life and death matter as the imperialists close in. But the absence of a revolutionary party based on revolutionary organs of workers and peasants means that even if the revolution (or elements within it) carried through expropriation it would be carried through in Cuba, in a bureaucratic fashion. The complexity of the FSLN means that it cannot be accompanied by independent mass organisations of the masses, the struggle for control in the factories, or the organisation of soviets uniting the workers and peasants in defence of the revolution. As in Cuba the working class would be deprived of direct power throughout the process of creating a bureaucratically degenerate workers' state.

The present bonapartist features of Sandinista Nicaragua, the powerless and plebeian organs of "Popular Power", (the Sandinista defence Committees, the Sandinista trade unions, the Economic Reactivation Committees, etc) will in such a situation, like the organs of a bureaucratic overturn, in Cuba, which both expropriates the capitalist class and excludes the working class from political power.

It is possible, but by no means inevitable, that the Soviet bureaucracy would be prepared to aid and underwrite such an overturn in Cuba. But to date the "Socialist" countries have been reluctant to aid the working class which only receives 17% of its aid from the Soviet quarters. The Soviet bureaucracy is extremely afraid of becoming heavily embroiled in a confrontation with US imperialism in its backyard and highly volatile "front yard". Its dominant economy would find the costs hard to bear. Even if it was to back such a turn of events, Sandinistas, it would do so in order to improve its bargaining position with imperialism and to show solidarity with the oppressed and exploited. And a strict condition of Soviet aid would be tight bureaucratic control over the workers and peasants of Nicaragua.

The primary task of revolutionaries in Nicaragua today is to fight to defend the Sandinista regime against US imperialism's attacks. But such a task does not mean falling into the "stagist" perspective of the Sandinista leadership, of defending it as a "Workers' Government" as the American socialist USEC does. The present regime far from guaranteeing the long-term defence of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants and the gains of the 1979 revolution, is pursuing a policy which will ensure their defeat in one form or another.

by S. King

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Arafat comes unstuck

THE BLOODY FEUDING within the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) since April this year is the latest consequence of the defeat suffered by the PLO at the hands of Israel in the Lebanon War of 1982. The rebellion led by deputy field commander Abu Musa - was sparked off by Arafat's appointment of Haj Ismail and Abu Hajim as PLO commanders in Syrian-controlled Lebanon. Their reputation for venality and cowardice amongst ordinary Fatah guerrillas sparked the revolt. Yet the real target of their venom was Arafat himself.

Between September 1982 and April of this year the Palestinian fighters had watched with alarm whilst Arafat shuttled across the Arab world leaving behind a trail of diplomatic manoeuvres and shoddy deals with imperialism and its local agents in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Ever since 1974 Arafat has asserted the primacy of diplomacy over the armed struggle against Zionism. With the defeat and dispersal of the PLO last year Arafat has stepped up his efforts to reconcile the Palestinians' right to a state with Israel's right to exist. The Reagan Plan of last autumn tried to consolidate Israel's victory quickly with proposals for a West Bank-Jordan confederation which would have effectively amounted to transferring the keys of the Palestinians' jail to King Hussein.

The PLO and the Arab bourgeoisie responded with the Fez plan, which effectively recognised Israel's right to exist by sanctioning its pre-1967 occupations. Arafat tried desperately to reconcile the two plans, more concerned to establish the right of the PLO officialdom to negotiate than the right of the Palestinians to live free of Zionist terror. Arafat's chief aide, Nabil Shaat, argued: "The PLO has not rejected the Reagan Plan, but only its omission as regards its rights...We are looking for ways to ...bring the plans closer together".

Arafat proved unable to sell this to the PLO's National Council in April. The tensions within the PLO's largest group - Fatah - erupted. Many guerrillas are sickened by Arafat's manoeuvres. As one was reported as saying in the Beka'a Valley in Lebanon, Arafat "only represents Fatah corporations, money, positions, cars and aeroplanes."

The guerrillas closest to the Palestinian families in the camps, in the occupied territories, know from bitter experience the impossibility of a compromise with Zionism. 47,000 were killed or mutilated last summer; the shattered buildings of Beirut provided rough tomb-

stones for over 5,000 Palestinians. Even now 15,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli concentration camps.

In 1948 over 700,000 were expelled from their land to consolidate Israel. The 1967 war resulted in the occupation of the West Bank. In 1973 the Zionists took Sinai from Egypt. Israel is an expansionist colonial settler state. It is bolstered by American imperialism, standing guard over the latter's Middle East interests.

Israel lives by promoting immigration. This gives it the capacity and means to expand its borders to create new settlements. It fuels its expansionist appetite. One of the chief aims of the war in the Lebanon was to consolidate the annexation of the West Bank. Israel plans to settle another 20,000 in the West Bank this year.

Faced with these political facts the idea of any Palestinian state, however restricted and policed, trying to permanently co-exist with Zionism is utopian. Any promotion of this idea as a strategic goal is reactionary.

Although the grievances behind the present rebellion are genuine, there is no lack of false Messiahs ready to exploit them for their own, equally reactionary ends. Chief amongst these is Syria. Syria is no friend of the Palestinians, having intervened against them in 1976 in the Lebanon Civil War when the PLO looked to be securing a victory against the Phalangist forces of the right-wing. Despite its "rejectionist" stance which often puts it at odds with the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, the petit-bourgeois nationalist regime of Assad has but one goal. It wants to carve out a role for itself in Middle East diplomacy, to be recognised as a major force by the USA and Moscow, so as to become a leading force in the Arab bourgeois camp.

As a result Syria merely plays with the fortunes of the Palestinians. Despite its humiliation at the hands of Israel last summer, Syria's position remains a strong one. It occupies much of Northern Lebanon and is heavily armed by the Soviet Union. Most of the Fatah dissidents are in Syrian-controlled Lebanon and receive Assad's backing. Arafat has been expelled from Syria, and Assad is happy to see Arafat's grip on the PLO weakened decisively or destroyed, so that the pro-Syrian factions in the PLO have a more prominent role in the direction of the movement.

Nor should genuine fighters for Palestinian statehood put any faith in the revived interest of the Kremlin in the Middle East's affairs. With the Andropov succession last November Moscow launched itself into the fray, re-arming Syria with Sam-5 missiles and over 5,000 "technicians." Andropov's aim is to increase the Krem-



lin's bargaining position in the Middle East. Moscow would dearly love to return to the position it held in 1973 when it co-chaired the Geneva talks on the Middle East with the USA. If it could do this it could gain more stable pawns in its reactionary policy of peaceful co-existence with imperialism.

The recent rise in the Soviet bureaucracy's influence has been all the sharper because of the Arab bourgeoisies' mounting frustration with the USA. The Reagan Plan foundered as much on the intransigence of the Israelis as of the Palestinian freedom fighters. Previously, regimes like Saudi Arabia had been encouraged to recognise that only the US could force Israel to make concessions. Events during and since the invasion of Lebanon have shown the US has no interest in doing this. It is beyond question that Reagan will back a tougher line from Israel if the Kremlin is seeking to carve out a role for itself.

The split in the PLO is an inevitable product of the political failure of the Arafat leadership. The role of revolutionary socialists in the Middle East is not to artificially heal the divisions merely because the

imperialists stand to gain. Maximum unity in action is possible and necessary against the Zionist and UN occupation forces. Yet a political split is equally necessary. Revolutionary Fatah militants must be broken from the rotten methods of petit-bourgeois nationalism and won to the programme of Permanent Revolution.

Recent events in the West Bank have indicated the real way forward. Far from being crushed by recent events the West Bank Palestinians have increased their activity. Strikes and demonstrations against the odds in Ramallah, El Bireh and Tulkeran have increased the self-confidence of Palestinian workers. Yet it is here that the PLO is weakest because its strategy of guerilla war has dictated that it concentrates its energies in the camps of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Against this, a revolutionary Trotskyist Party is urgently needed, working in the West Bank and among the Arabs of Israel to bring the working class to the head of the struggle, to crush the Zionist state and on its ruins build a secular workers' republic of Palestine. ■

TIME RUNS OUT FOR PINOCHET

AFTER NEARLY TEN years of brutal dictatorship in Chile, the Pinochet regime is finally being rocked by mass protests. On May 11th and again on June 11th, thousands demonstrated in the streets against the regime and its policies. June 23rd saw the first attempted general strike against the regime. Mass detentions and arrests, the normal resort of the regime, have failed to stem the tide of opposition which has involved all classes of Chilean society. It includes many who were Pinochet's most fervent supporters in the overthrow of Allende's Popular Unity government in 1973.

The causes of this unrest are not hard to see. The Pinochet regime was brought to power, with the aid of US imperialism, to accomplish one essential task - to break the power of the workers' movement, which threatened Chilean and US capital, and thus open up Chile once again as an area of profitable and stable investment. The junta set about this task with a will - murdering, torturing and imprisoning trade union and political activists. It broke up and atomised the trade unions, and drove over a million Chileans into exile.

On the economic front the Chilean junta followed a fiercely "monetarist" policy, which for a semi-colonial country meant above all providing the most advantageous conditions for imperialist capital. It guaranteed low wages, cowed trade unions and the free movement of capital. A group of Milton Friedman trained economists - nicknamed "the Chicago boys" - took charge of this strategy under Pinochet; dropping tariff barriers on foreign goods, selling off the state owned companies to the private sector and eliminating government subsidies. While these policies achieved a "healthier economy" from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, that is, given it was paid for in the falling living standards of the labouring popu-

lation, as the world economy plunged into its second major slump within a decade in 1980, Chile (like other semi-colonial countries) plunged with it.

With its free market, open door policy, Chile has felt the world recession even more dramatically than most Latin American countries. By the end of 1981 the "monetarist" strategy was in ruins - "virtue unrewarded" was The Economist's rueful comment. In that year real wages fell by 16% and unemployment rose to 21%. By 1982 the peso was collapsing on the international money markets and there was a massive flight of capital out of the country, due to the free movement allowed by the "Chicago boys."

Bankruptcies soared and banks toppled. By the end of 1982 industrial production had collapsed by 21% as unprotected domestic industry collapsed. Such is the state of the economy that Chilectra has stated that 150,000 families and 1,500 small to medium businesses in Santiago have had their electricity cut off for non-payment of bills. This year inflation is running at 50% as the economy lurches from crisis to crisis and the government struggles with its 22 billion dollars foreign debt.

As the effects of the recession were felt by even Chile's prosperous upper middle classes there was a growing chorus of criticism of Pinochet's economic policies. As the Latin American Correspondent of the magazine *South* noted at the end of 1982: "The recession has spread dangerously among the middle class with particular ferocity, and unrest has spread dangerously among the army officers corps, drawn mainly from this class. An unprecedented degree of opposition has built up among agricultural entrepreneurs, lorry and taxi owners, and to some extent industrialists and bankers..."

Despite the sacking by Pinochet of the arch-monetarist Finance Minister Sergio de Castro in 1982 after intense pressure from Chilean capitalists, criticism of the regime has continued unabated as it becomes clear that the regime is paralysed in the face of an



economic crisis. This has been the root of the revival of the "respectable" opposition parties and the calls for a "democratic opening." In February an ad hoc alliance of opposition leaders proposed a constitutional amendment allowing a civilian government to take over, but allowing the armed forces a "watchdog role." In March, a conference of Roman Catholic bishops, along with a group of former opposition leaders, called for a return to democracy. All these developments point to the growing desire of sections of the bourgeoisie in Chile to return to parliamentary rule and to create a government more responsive to the needs of Chilean capital. Of course, they want this transition to follow the Spanish, rather than the Portuguese, model.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the middle classes have actively involved themselves alongside trade unionists in the days of protest, with the middle class women dusting off their pots and pans - this time to use them not against Popular Unity but its gravedigger, Pinochet. One Santiago newspaper reported how, as the pot-banging and horn-sounding protest against Pinochet on May 11th spread from the residential areas to the centre of Santiago, one of the most enthusiastic horn sounders was a leading banker, Javier Vial. Herein lies the real danger for the Chilean working class. While, of course, united front actions with bourgeois sectors opposed to Pinochet are necessary in the struggle against the dictatorship, all the signs are that the disastrous errors of the popular front in Chile between 1970 and 1973 are being repeated anew. This fact should not be surprising given the continued strength of the underground Communist Party in the trade unions.

The leadership of the Copper Workers' Union (CTC) Chile's largest union, has been at pains to try to involve the Christian Democracy in the organisation of the "Days of Protest". Indeed, so willing was its leader, Rodolfo Seguel, to moderate his union's tactics that he called off May 11th as a day of strike action, changing it to a "day of protest", after

attending one of the US Embassy's social gatherings with trusted trade union leaders. (Reported in Latin America Weekly Reports)

Such moderation failed to impress Pinochet who, of course, reserved his major repression for the working class and trade union protesters, arresting Seguel and other leading trade unionists and declaring some of the biggest copper mines "military zones". The Junta's new crack riot squad, appropriately named the "Gurkhas" by the Chilean population, was used to attack predominantly working class areas on the two days of protest, resulting in five deaths. While Pinochet's declared intention of "sending the politicians back to their caves" it could well be that the struggle to get rid of Pinochet might not be as smooth as sections of the bourgeoisie would wish.

In circumstances where they are forced to turn to the Chilean working class to achieve their ends it will become even more vital for the rank and file of the trade unions to ensure that their leaders maintain complete political and tactical independence from the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties and associations involved in the joint struggle. In this the general strike, despite the enormous difficulties exposed by the results of the 23rd June, remains the decisive weapon for bringing down the Pinochet regime and for scuppering the plans of the ruling class for a neutered "democracy". In the general strike the Chilean workers can rediscover the confidence and ability to create the organs, in the tradition of the industrial cordones of the Allende era, of a government of their own class and open the road to the destruction of capitalism in Chile.

- Solidarity with the workers of Chile!
- Release the jailed trade unionists!
- For a general strike to smash the Pinochet dictatorship!
- No to a civilian-military government - for a Democratic Constituent Assembly!
- Workers and Peasants to power!

by John Laing

FEUD OVER FADING STAR



LAST JANUARY THE Communist Party of Great Britain launched a "Save the Star" campaign. In June this campaign took on a new meaning. Fund raising schemes and circulation drives gave way to a bitter conflict between rival factions within the CP doing battle for control of the Morning Star.

The Morning Star is owned by the Peoples' Press Printing Society. This "independent" co-operative has always been one of those front organisations much beloved by the Stalinists.

The Star's editor Tony Chater, together with a number of supporters within the PPPS, has used the co-operative's nominal independence to secure a majority for his faction on the paper's management committee. At the shareholders' meeting Chater's supporters won all the seats on the committee while three EC candidates were defeated. What lies behind this factional struggle?

Tony Chater



CP influence in the unions has shrunk dramatically. It has been reduced to a humiliating minority status in the AUEW. Its inability to mobilise trade unionists was highlighted by last December's LCFTU conference, the smallest ever held.

This marginalisation in the unions has been accompanied by strategic rethinking on the part of sections in the Communist Party, particularly those most influenced by Eurocommunism. Their strength in the unions had once enabled the CP to exercise a significant influence on sections of the trade union bureaucracy and even certain "left" MPs. As this strength declined so did the relevance of the CP. Yet, elements of the CP were looking enviously at the rise of the Labour Left and its ability to win support from, and influence in, those paradises of petit-bourgeois activism - the peace movement, the women's movement, the ecological movement, etc.

The battle for the Morning Star is an expression of the tensions within the party between those who wish to cling to the CP's role as the "left" in industry and those, the Eurocommunists and under their influence the Party's leadership around Gordon McLennan, who want to turn the Party towards "new movements" and endow it with "new thinking."

BLOC FOR ELECTORAL PURPOSES

The Management Committee is now in the hands of the "trade unionists". Chater himself is a long-standing advocate of the strategy of the "left advance" in the unions - that is a permanent bloc with left bureaucrats for electoral purposes. At his side is Mick Costello. He was the Party's industrial organiser until he resigned after a row with the Executive. The Executive defended the Eurocommunist journal Marxism Today's decision to print an article by Tony Lane. The article gave some examples of the bureaucratisation of the stewards' movement, particularly its top layers. This enraged Costello, many of whose best friends are top-level stewards.

After resigning his post, Costello, against



Executive wishes, became industrial correspondent for the Star.

This debate proved to be the prelude to the war over the Star. The "trade union" wing marshalled their forces for a showdown. They put forward a plan to revitalise the Star by making it an open Labour movement paper, and by buying a new plant so that the PPPS could become a printing house for the Trade Union bureaucracy. Chater and Costello know that sections of the Trade Union bureaucracy are interested in producing a paper of some kind. The way out of the Morning Star's impasse would be to produce it for them. They won support for this from assorted friends in the bureaucracy - Moss Evans, Jack Dromey and the like - and stuffed the management committee with union leaders like Ken Brett (AUEW), George Willoughby (SOGAT 82) and Terry Marsland (Tobacco Workers' Union).

For its part the CP apparatus failed, miserably, in its attempt to turn the tide on its recalcitrant members. Having made an alliance with the Eurocommunists around Marxism Today, they cut themselves off from many traditional faithful party members. What is more they antagonised whole sections of the membership by their campaign to secure control of the Star.

SHARED POLITICAL TERRAIN

The political substance of this conflict is, to the uninitiated, difficult to detect. There is an obvious difference of emphasis - towards the labour movement (read officialdom) or towards new forces and movements. This dispute over emphasis, however, is taking place on the basis of a shared political terrain. Both sides are thoroughly Stalinist. Both sides are in fact putting forward strategies that are disastrous for the independent interests of the working class. Both strategies are rooted in the CP's programme "The British Road to Socialism" (revised in 1977). The two cornerstones of this programme are that a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism can be achieved, and that the means for doing this is to be found in the construction of an alliance of progressive minded people from all classes. Only a broad, democratic alliance against big business can bring about lasting social change. The Chater wing accept the need for this alliance but emphasise the central role of the labour movement in it.

situation we've got." He concluded his ramblings with a statement that the did not believe that the Labour movement has the capacity to "reorganise and reconstruct itself" for the battle against Thatcherism.

Aaranovitch is undoubtedly in advance of his allies within the CP, particularly those in the party apparatus. However, he is a leading ideologue of the party and, if nothing else, his statements are a good indication of which way the wind is blowing. Labour's catastrophic electoral defeat is likely to strengthen the appeal of his views and win him more supporters.

For our part we are bitterly opposed to the popular frontist politics of the CP. The very idea that an alliance with David Owen and Steel is somehow a means of advance for workers is ludicrous. Both politicians explicitly stand for the interests of capital, profit and the "mixed economy." That is why their manifesto was permeated with politics-like wage controls - designed to make the working class pay for the crisis. Aaranovitch would no doubt counter this with the argument that Thatcherism is the greater evil and unity against Thatcher is vital. But what would this mean in practice?

Thatcher will give the go-ahead to close mines. Unity is needed to defeat her. That is obvious - but unity between whom, and to do what? Clearly what is needed is the unity of the miners, and behind them other workers, prepared to strike against the bosses' plans. In such a battle, Owen and Steel would - as they did with the health strikes - denounce the workers. Were the CP to try and preserve its previous alliance then the party would be going along with the strike-breaking bourgeois fifth at the top of the Alliance. But then, it wouldn't be the first time the CP have chosen to stick with bourgeois pals rather than support the working class.

Of course it might be objected that our case against the popular front is speculative and fanciful. The genuine proponent of the Broad Democratic Alliance might not believe that in practice it inevitably means the subordination of working class interests. A recent experience demonstrates that we are being far from fanciful.

The People's March for Jobs was the popular

The broad democratic alliance, be it led by trade union bureaucrats like Moss Evans or revered churchmen like Bruce Kent, is not what the working class needs. The Evanses of the world are responsible for numberless betrayals of the working class' interests. Evans' own role in the demobilisation of the strike to re-instate Longbridge convenor and CP member Derek Robinson, is sufficient to make plain enough. The churchmen, the small businessmen and the rest of the middle class are able that the Eurocommunists are so eager to team up with may provide a respectable cover but they sure as hell won't muster many soldiers for the war against big business.

Neither side in the battle to get the Star represents a "progressive" or supportable way of Stalinism. Indeed, to paraphrase Stalin, they are not antipodes but twins. They reveal the inability of Stalinism to chart an independent course of working class action. Both seek substitutes for class struggle and mass action. In the hands of Chater the Morning Star will become even more of a bureaucrats' mouth-piece.

In the hands of McLennan and the Eurocommunists it will become a tribune for middle class fads. For the working class then, the most favourable outcome of the present political struggle would be the collapse and disappearance of the Morning Star. Speed the day. ■



front in practice, albeit in miniature. It was designed to turn opposition to the unemployment suffered by millions of workers into a cross class protest, which the workers came a poor second to SDP Tories and Tories. Pete Carter, the Eurocommunist replacement for Costello as industrial organiser spelt this out quite clearly. The March, he said: "provides the best opportunity for the construction of the broadest possible alliance of all who agree the demand" (That the government should make full employment a first priority - WP) which of course ranges from bishops to bricklayers, from non-Thatcherite Tories to revolutionary socialists."

To achieve this alliance the CP banned anti-Thatcher slogans on the march. They used violence against marchers who chanted "Maggie Out". They insulted the unemployed by making them cringe before jeering but "friendly" Tory councils, SDPers and senile clerics. They went to enormous lengths to make sure that marchers themselves had no say in the running of the march. And on demonstration called by workers to welcome the march (few big names were to be seen) they strove to dissociate the march from the welcomers.

In Birmingham the Stalinists colluded with the police to prevent the labour movement welcoming the March, and from accompanying it to the City Centre. Yet in every town it was the labour movement that organised food, accommodation, support me and so on. At the mass rally in June in London it was the Labour movement that turned out in the thousands to greet the march. For the Stalinists, however none of these factors weighed anything like as decisively as the fact that once or twice a patronising SDP or Tory expressed sorrow at mass unemployment.

The People's March was Aaranovitch's views in practice. The popular front became, in real life, a Gulag on the road far worse than the most intimidating DHSS office. At a governmental level it paved the way to a historic defeat for the workers and the triumph of counter-revolution. Against this policy of cross-class alliances we reaffirm the essential validity of Trotsky's opposition to the popular front in the 1930s: "A bloc of divergent groups in the working class is sometimes completely indispensable for the solution of common political problems. In certain historical circumstances, such a bloc is capable of attracting the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses whose interests are close to the interests of the proletariat. The joint force of such a bloc can prove far stronger than the sum of the forces of its component parts. On the contrary, the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralysing the revolutionary force of the proletariat." (On Spain, p.309). ■

Euros fawn on SDP

THEY MAY HAVE lost the Morning Star, but Britain's small band of Eurocommunists remain firmly in control of Marxism Today. This theoretical journal of the CP is proving to be the most consistent voice for popular frontist politics in Britain. Its editor Martin Jacques said that it was aimed at appealing to the left and "others beyond the Left, but disturbed by and opposed to Thatcherism... This is an essential aspect of the politics of the Broad Democratic Alliance - or to give it a longer historical trajectory - it was a keynote of the politics of the popular front in the 1930s." (Focus No.5)

Jacques and the Eurocommunists look to multifarious non-labour forces as the key elements of their sought for broad democratic alliance. In peddling their view, they draw on such choice sections of the CP's programme as that referring to lesser capitalists: "There is, therefore an objective basis for an alliance between the working class and many of these sections of the capitalist class, against the common enemy - the big British and International capitalists." (The British Road to Socialism)

The middle classes, the churches, the various "movements" are all candidates for places in the democratic alliance. So the politics of the Eurocommunists in the CP are, in a sense, nothing new. They are a continuum of Stalinism's long-standing opposition to the organised working class fighting for its independent interests.

They are the politics that in the 1930s led the Stalinists to murder the flower of the Barcelona proletariat for the sake of preserving their alliance with bourgeois republicans in Spain. They are the politics that led the Chilean Stalinists to call into the government the murderous coup-makers who turned on and butchered the working class in 1973.

The chase after the centre began with the growing recognition that "left-advance" was faltering and that Labour Party support in the working class was declining significantly. Eric Hobsbawm first raised the problem of winning back the "middle ground" and restarting the "forward march of Labour" which, he argued, had been decisively halted. He took his analysis a stage further in Marxism Today in September 1982. The middle ground rested in the various peace and ecological movements. While this was less obvious in Britain, it was, for Hobsbawm, undoubtedly true across Europe and likely to become so for Britain.

Given Hobsbawm's belief that the working class is a "declining class" (he concludes, from the decline in numbers of manual workers, the decline in political and social importance of the working class)

he cast an envious eye at European social democratic leaders like Mitterrand, Papandreou and Gonzalez, who "have tended to lose what organic connection with the workers their predecessors had. They are rather groups of politicians raising electoral banners under which a wide and heterogeneous range of discontented voters can be brought together."

The British Labour Party showed no signs of being open to the new-thinking that Hobsbawm was preaching. On the other hand, the SDP/Liberal Alliance, in 1981 and 1982 was doing very well in by-elections, and looked like "breaking the mould". For popular frontists in search of a centre the Alliance looked an enticing prospect to the CP. It had even stolen their name - Alliance. Enter stage right a long-time Stalinist, Sam Aaranovitch.

Following Hobsbawm's article, Marxism Today staged a Eurocommunist spectacular "The Moving Left Show" in October 1982. Focus described this as "an important exercise in the politics of alliances" and marvelled that: "In the discussion on re-alignment in British politics, new potential areas of dialogue emerged between the Left and people attracted by the centre."

Yes, the SDP, in the shape of anti-working class Guardian journalist Peter Jenkins, graced the CP's event. The CP were not slow to extend a hand of friendship to this hired scribe of the bourgeoisie. The December 1982 Marxism Today carried the transcript of a discussion between Aaranovitch, Jenkins and Stuart Hall. In it the "new style" popular front became the idea of an alliance with the Alliance.

The Eurocommunist intellectuals were now set on alliance with a party committed to wage controls, anti-union laws and a host of other reactionary policies. Of course under the present electoral system such an alliance would be inconceivable. But under Proportional Representation, the CP could prove a useful ally in carrying through participation schemes and wage controls (as it was to Labour 1974-79).

In the roundtable discussion of Aaranovitch, Jenkins and Hall, Aaranovitch eloquently explained this project: "I think the forces associated with the Alliance are very significant and I don't want to give the impression of any kind of sectarian view about them. I also think the nature of Thatcherism is such that I'm prepared to construct an alliance with all kinds of forces who are prepared to challenge what Thatcherism is about, and I don't care, in a sense, what party they're in." (December 1982)

He went on to lament the Labour Party's isolation from the working class, expressed hope in the Alliance and declared that their policies "contain elements which would certainly be in advance of the

JUDGED BY THE parliamentary outcome alone, the General Election results in Northern Ireland would give the Tories nothing to worry about. The June election returned fifteen unionists from the seventeen constituencies. Even more comforting for Thatcher, within the Protestant Loyalist vote there was a swing away from the truculent Paisleyites (DUP) towards the "easier to manage" Official Unionist Party.

However the Tories are decidedly depressed by the returns from the Six Counties. The reason is simple; over 100,000 of the nationalist population gave a mandate to the Sinn Fein's programme of armed resistance to the British occupation forces and the struggle for a united Ireland. The Sinn Fein vote, which saw Gerry Adams elected in West Belfast and Danny Morrison narrowly fail by 78 votes in Ulster-Mid, even exceeded the republicans' hopes. They received 13.4% of the total vote - over 3% up on the 1982 Assembly Election performance. More importantly Sinn Fein obtained 42% of the nationalist community vote. When one considers that the SDLP vote (down on its 1979 and 1982 score) includes a majority of middle-class nationalists, the Sinn Fein can reasonably claim to represent the majority of the exploited and most oppressed sections of the nationalist minority in the North.

This fact is a severe blow to the plans of Thatcher and the Unionists. For years the British ruling

SINN FEIN GET THE MANDATE

class has depended on the craven SDLP's ability to speak for the nationalists. This has been crucial in legitimising the army's reign of terror against the revolutionary Irish nationalists - the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein, its political wing. Since the Assembly Elections, and more so now, it can no longer be said that the "gunmen" have no support. It was as though 100,000 silver bullets had been posted to Prior's office.

The success of Sinn Fein was all the more remarkable given the circumstances of the campaign. Everywhere they stood canvassers were harassed by the army and the RUC. Party workers were lifted and detained in endless succession. The Catholic Church hierarchy campaigned vociferously against Sinn Fein and for the SDLP and the "non-sectarian" Alliance Party.

Furthermore, the SDLP reversed their position of not standing against Sinn Fein in Fermanagh and badly split the vote. Owen Carron lost his seat to the unionists as a result. Even worse, in West Bel-

fast, Adams won even though, in addition to the SDLP and Alliance, he had to contend with the sitting MP - renegade Gerry Fitt, "Fitt the Brit", as he is contemptuously known in the Falls Road, campaigned only on an anti-IRA "Keep Adams Out" ticket. On this basis he was able to encourage a few thousand Protestant workers to make a tactical voting switch to him.

None of these ruses and secondary irritations, however, could obscure one fundamental fact, namely that the Sinn Fein vote reflected the fact that the

Provisionals are recognised as the force in the nationalist community that defends it from the daily attacks of British imperialism and its stooges.

When Parliament was opened by the Queen on the 22nd June there was no new initiative mentioned on Ireland. This is not surprising. Thatcher's plans for the Six Counties are in disarray. Her house-trained constitutionalists - the SDLP - are in crisis. Now they have only one MP at Westminster their very political existence is in peril. In order to survive they have to try and dress themselves in the garb of fake nationalist intransigence. They can't participate in the Assembly; they have been forced to end their collaboration on Derry Council with the Unionists. As a result, Prior's Assembly is a dead-duck and Britain is forced to fall back upon intensified repression.

British socialists and trade union militants have a duty to further tie the hands of the Tories. The Home Office had to quickly lift the exclusion order on Gerry Adams which prevented him putting the republican case to British workers. Adams now has plans to visit Britain at the GLC's invitation. Over the summer activists in the unions and Labour Party branches must commit these bodies to inviting Adams to Britain to speak out. A campaign focussed around this could and must be used to build the Labour Committee on Ireland and - crucially - trade union caucuses welded together on an anti-imperialist basis around the twin demands:

Troops Out Now!

Self-Determination for the Irish People as a Whole!

. . . .but what will they do with it ?

HISTORICALLY REPUBLICANS HAVE refused to take their seats in any post-Treaty Parliaments and institutions. The normal practice has been to abstain from elections to all such bodies. To do otherwise was seen as a tacit acceptance of the legitimacy of British imperialism's division of Ireland.

In reality, this meant that the Parliamentary misrepresentation of the anti-unionist population was left open to the constitutional nationalists - most importantly the SDLP. This, in turn, served to give the constitutional nationalists a cloak of legitimacy which the likes of Gerry Fitt and the SDLP were able to use to attack those struggling against British rule as unrepresentative and illegitimate. Organised for military struggle against the British army the Provisionals continued a tradition within which the anti-unionist population has no organised and permanent political means with which to express their opposition to Britain, or to actively take part in the struggle against imperialism. They did, however, look to the IRA for military defence against Orange thugs and the British army.

The Hunger Strike campaign against Britain's criminalisation policy compelled Sinn Fein to take the battle on to the electoral

terrain where first Bobby Sands and then Owen Carron won parliamentary seats. But these seats were won on an abstentionist basis. The mass sympathy for Sinn Fein in addition forced them to take advantage of last year's Assembly elections as a means of further isolating the discredited and slavish SDLP. Once again, Sinn Fein stood on an abstentionist ticket.

The ballot box successes of Sinn Fein plunged them ever further into the most unashamed municipal reformism as a means of consolidating a formidable election machine. Sinn Fein established grievance clinics and began to feverishly take up individual complaints - representing the anti-unionist population on housing, rents and social services to officials of the local agencies of the British state. All of the electoral campaigning had one important thing in common with the military campaign. The mass of anti-unionists were assigned no role other than as passive supporters of Sinn Fein. Behind all the heady nationalist rhetoric Sinn Fein operated like any reformist party does. Its electoral turn was not a tactic aimed at mobilising the independent fighting ability of the oppressed population of the Northern statelet, but was aimed at demonstrating to liberal opinion that Sinn Fein were representative.

In the Assembly Elections Workers' Power and the Irish Workers' Group argued for a boycott of the vote in the absence of revolutionary candidates. We argued against a vote for Sinn Fein. We now think we were tactically wrong. We looked at the Assembly Election simply as a battle of political programmes and leaderships and failed to take sufficient account of the role of such elections as plebiscites which serve to legitimise the existence of the Orange State and the national oppression which dismembers and retards the entire Irish working class. With that point in mind we considered it correct to call for a critical vote for Sinn Fein in the General Election as an act of solidarity with the anti-unionist masses for whom that vote is an act of opposition to British imperialism and the Northern State.

On the political terrain, no less than the military struggle, Sinn Fein's perspective can only disarm and mislead the anti-imperialist struggle. For Sinn Fein politics is not, as it is for Marxists, about the mobilisation of the working class and oppressed to destroy capitalism. It opposes imperialism with the armed force of an organised few and with the aspiration to create an ordered society of patriotic producers and co-operatives as the means of creating national independence and economic justice. As a result, it fails to organise the struggle for Ireland's independence as a class struggle against imperialist capitalism.

To call for a vote for Sinn Fein therefore is not an endorsement of their politics. Our error in tactics over the Assembly Elections flowed precisely from our concern to defend the content of the Marxist programme against the petit-bourgeois utopian programme of the nationalists.



Gerry Adams

It is vital that Marxists put Sinn Fein to the test of struggle if they are to prove the superiority of their programme in practice. Sinn Fein will resist all attempts to put them on the spot and hold them to account. They will claim the democratic mandate to enhance their municipal reformism and the prestige of their military campaign but nothing else. Gerry Adams has made it plain that he will not be taking his seat in Westminster. All the old republican arguments have been dredged up to justify this: Adams himself said: "Sinn Fein MPs will not take up their seats in Westminster because we don't accept that the British have a right to legislate for any part of our country." But in reality refusing to take his seat frees Adams from having to visibly take the grievances of the oppressed to the floor of the bourgeoisie's debating chamber and using that seat to rally the independent mobilisations of the anti-unionist masses. It implies no legitimisation of Britain's rule to enter its Parliament as an accountable spokesperson of the oppressed. McAliskey's assault of Home Secretary Maudling after Bloody Sunday in 1972 was no recognition of Britain's right to rule Ireland. If Sinn Fein is worried about its MP being drawn into the alien and corrupting atmosphere of Westminster then they should organise the masses to hold him to account. Arguments against this position look increasingly spurious given that the Sinn Fein "lefts" are openly talking of winning and taking Euro-Parliament seats together with seats in the Southern Dail. Moreover Sinn Fein has taken up a seat on a local council, where it is forced to demand of British-imposed structures some relief for the nationalist population. Yet more of these have the same potential for creating a revolutionary tribune against British imperialism and, as a consequence, putting Sinn Fein to the test. The fact of the matter is that, like all petit-bourgeois nationalists, they have no principled political positions which, like an anchor, can secure them when buffeted by imperialist pressure.

A revolutionary Trotskyist party in opposition to Sinn Fein needs to be constructed. United action with Sinn Fein and those they represent and our unconditional support for the armed struggle cannot obscure this fact. We do not subscribe to the views of degenerate Trotskyists, such as People's Democracy, who peddle the illusion that mass working class pressure will force Sinn Fein on to the road of consistent revolutionary marxist politics. The greater that pressure, in fact, the more Sinn Fein will seek to divert its inherent radicalism into municipal sideshows, or further recruitment into the IRA.

In the months ahead when the illusions in

Sinn Fein will be heightened we demand that they be put to the test and organise the masses to fight:

* Take all the seats you win in the parliaments, assemblies or councils - abstention is fake intransigence. Enter them to defend the national and working class interest you claim to stand for. Such actions, against the British, against the Orange bigots, will in itself be tremendous propaganda for the anti-imperialist struggle even amongst the Protestant workers who will say - the Republicans defend our interests; our jobs and unions against the Tories and bosses. Similarly even one MP can draw attention to Ireland or disrupt the "normal business" of the imperialist parliament.

* If you democratically represent the nationalist masses, organise them democratically to fight; elect councils of action based on real fighting organisations, trade unions, workplace organisations, tenants committees or street committees. Help create and train a mass people's militia - to defend the minority areas against pogromists, against the police and the British Army and to defend workers in Catholic and Protestant struggle - against unemployment and factory closures, cuts in social services or anti-union laws.

* Form a united front with socialists and militant trade unionists in the 26 counties to fight repression and oppose, by direct action, the pro-imperialist actions of the Southern bourgeoisie and the austerity measures that Imperialism and its Irish clients are seeking to impose on the Irish people. In the North, participate in mobilising Catholic and Protestant workers in defence of the unions against Tebbit and co.

* No deals with British imperialism short of a complete, unconditional and immediate withdrawal of its troops from Northern Ireland. ■

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Defend Muhammed Idrish!

ON SATURDAY 17th September there will be a national demonstration in Birmingham against the deportation threat to social worker Muhammed Idrish. This has been called by Idrish's union, NALGO, after a concerted campaign by rank and file union activists resulted in a resolution of support being passed at NALGO conference.

The resolution, which came as an emergency motion from several branches, not only called for the national demonstration but also for a one day national NALGO stoppage in the event of deportation. It also asks fellow trade unionists to refuse to handle all work connected with the deportation, at both Whitehall and the airport.

Such a commitment was altogether too much for the

NALGO executive who tried to get the resolution remitted. Speeches from the delegates of the London Metropolitan District, Wiltshire and Birmingham ensured that the executive was defeated and the resolution overwhelmingly carried. Idrish addressed the conference, calling on delegates to turn their words into action, and received a standing ovation. These successes testified not only to the work of the Defence Campaign, but also to the growth of the NALGO Black Workers Group, which earlier in the conference had fought a determined, although unsuccessful, battle for more thoroughgoing measures of positive action and anti-racism within the union.

On the same Friday afternoon, several hundred miles away, the

High Court gave Idrish leave to appeal against the Home Office deportation order. This means the immediate threat is lifted, but does not diminish the need for continued campaigning. There is now an opportunity to consolidate and extend the support, and explain why trade unions should campaign against all deportations, the immigration laws and the Nationality Act which gave rise to them.

In their coming onslaught on the working class, the Tories will undoubtedly increase their use of the racist laws to weaken working class resistance, harassing and threatening black militants at work and in the community. Already deportations are running at a staggering 250 per month. We should use the Idrish campaign to speak for all those who disappear unseen and unheard. Representatives from all other deportation campaigns should come to the demonstration on September 17th. NALGO members should reach out to other trade unionists and the black community, ordering, financing and publicising coaches for the demonstration.

For further details of the Muhammad Idrish Defence Committee contact Barry Lovejoy, or Graham Reid, 30 Antrobus Rd., Handsworth, Birmingham 21, or 62 Bedminster Park, Bristol 3.

STOP TEBBIT IN HIS TRACKS!

TEBBIT'S SECOND BATCH of anti-union laws is well calculated to exploit the weaknesses in the trade union movement as revealed by the feeble opposition to his first lot.

The determination of the trade union leaders to prevent any effective action against either Prior's or Tebbit's laws, or, indeed, on any other issue, was enforced bureaucratically. Their hostility to real trade union democracy is now to be turned around against them; the Tories are posing as the guardians of the democratic rights of trade unionists against the god-fathers of the TUC.

For example, the proposal that all union executives be elected by secret ballot will be seen by many as a way of getting their own back on the appointed-for-life careerists who sit at the head of several unions. For the bureaucrats, who are completely tied to support for parliamentary democracy, itself based on the secret ballot, there is no realistic argument they can use to resist the extension of the same system to their own organisations. Any attempt to hide behind their rule books will only confirm the appeal of Tebbit's arguments.

The long awaited attack on the financial links between the unions and the Labour Party has been broken down into two proposals. Firstly, there is to be a legally enforceable secret ballot of all members of a union on whether that union should even have a political fund, never mind to what purpose it is put. The intention here is to strengthen the argument for non-political trade unions. The Tories are prepared to accept unions as negotiators for the workforce but they oppose the idea that workers, as a class, have any need of their own political representation. Here too the Tories can build on the constant opposition, by the leaders of the unions and the Labour Party, to the raising of political issues within the rank and file of the unions. Len Murray and company want, and need, a political voice for themselves, but not for their members. That is the reason for the absurdly undemocratic block vote system.

The second proposal is to ask the unions to ensure that all members receive, annually, a "contracting-out" form and a full explanation of their right not to contribute to the political fund. If the unions do not do this then the law will be changed to allow only for "contracting-in". This plan shows the Tories' quite accurate assessment of the impossible position into which they have forced the union leaders. They have got them over a barrel. Put bluntly these gentlemen are scared stiff of a fight in which they stand to lose either at the hands of the Tories or of their own members. In effect the Tories are being 'magnanimous in victory'. They are politely offering the trade union leaders a loaded gun and suggesting that they do the 'hon-

ourable thing'. If they refuse then Tebbit will deliver the coup de grace.

The last of the proposals, the removal of legal immunity where strikes are called without a prior ballot, is very shrewd. This is a measure whose primary function would be to take away the initiative in calling strike action from the shop floor. A ballot means a "cooling-off" period during which the management, the media and, no doubt, the bureaucrats, could go to work on the individual worker to explain the evils of strike action. The initiative in calling strikes would then be held by the bureaucrats who, we can be sure, would make sure that any strikes they could not prevent would be undertaken in a bureaucratic strait-jacket, free of the kind of activity that might tempt the Tories to attack trade unions even more.

The heart of the answer that militants must give to all these measures is to fight for the extension of real workers' democracy within the unions whilst opposing any state interference in workers' organisations. We are, for example, in favour not only of the election of the executives but of all union officials, and by election we mean election by mass meetings of the workers they will represent. More, we are in favour of their instant recallability and for them to be paid the average wage of their members.

On the question of the political levy Workers Power has argued for several years that unions should affiliate all levy-paying members to the Labour Party and that the resulting voting power should be used in a way that represents the differences of opinion within the union. Political questions should be raised and debated in union branches, there is no brick wall between economics and politics — as Tory policy actually makes very clear. The working class has no interest in being politically 'neutral' in their trade unions. Those unions are organisations for struggle against the bosses and the Tory party is the open party of those bosses.

The purpose of the secret postal ballot on any question is to expose union members to the persuasive powers of the media and their own individual doubts and family pressures. In order to make a really considered decision about, say, strike action, a worker needs to know, above all else, what his/her workmates feel on the question. Properly conducted, democratic discussion of management proposals, pay claims etc. at shop floor level is what democracy should mean. In that context workers can take a really informed decision not just as isolated individuals bombarded by media threats but as a body that knows its own strength and determination.

These new anti-union laws are the cornerstone of Thatcher's policies. That is why she kept Tebbit in place to see them through. The trade union bureaucrats will doubtless launch a pathetic and lame campaign against them. Last time round they organised no effective



Norman Tebbit

action whatsoever. They carried out no effective propaganda campaign to explain to members what was wrong with the Tories' anti-union laws or why they should fight them. Their propaganda consisted primarily of cringing leaflets aimed at explaining to the 'public' that the unions were respectable and responsible bodies. Their action consisted of half-hearted 'moments' of action which were badly attended and profoundly uninspiring.

Such limp bureaucratic actions may well make Tebbit laugh. They certainly will not stop his plans. Only if we can mobilise the industrial might of the working class against Tebbit can he be stopped in his tracks. The unimaginative, half-hearted and bureaucratic protests of the TUC will have to be supported. Failure to do so will be used by

the right wing as an excuse for giving up altogether. However, defence of the trade unions is far too important to be left to the TUC chiefs. Militants must organise to launch their own campaign to stop Tebbit.

The problem is to organise effective action. Unconvinced and backward workers can always use the sheer uselessness of token protests to do nothing. Militants themselves can get demoralised trying to drum up support for actions they know are of little use except to allow the bureaucrats to sound off and blame the members for their inactivity.

We must fight to commit every union, and the TUC, to organising a one day general strike the moment Tebbit's plans see the light of day as a White Paper. Let that be a warning

to the Tories and a sign to millions of workers that the labour movement is prepared for a fight. We must commit the same bodies to calling an indefinite general strike the moment Tebbit tries to put these proposals on the statute book.

Bureaucrats will snigger at such proposals. "They're light years ahead of the members" they will say — and proceed to send those members to sleep with their own useless schemes. Most militants will accept that it will be an enormous task to get the members' support. Yet they know too, from experience, that the bureaucrats' dreary processions can summon up no support. They know that Tebbit will not take a blind bit of notice of them. That means that an enormous amount of work by militants must be done in order to persuade the rank and file of the importance of these laws, what they would mean in practice and why action against them is necessary. It will mean holding meetings at shop floor level. It will mean holding local conferences to explain the proposals to militants and activists and it will mean the production of lively and well-argued bulletins and factory papers to put the case across. To do otherwise will be to allow Tebbit to manacle the unions. If the rank and file raise themselves up for a fight against these laws then it can be they, not Tebbit, who put the bureaucrats in their place. ■

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Thatcher's victory-workers' defeat

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