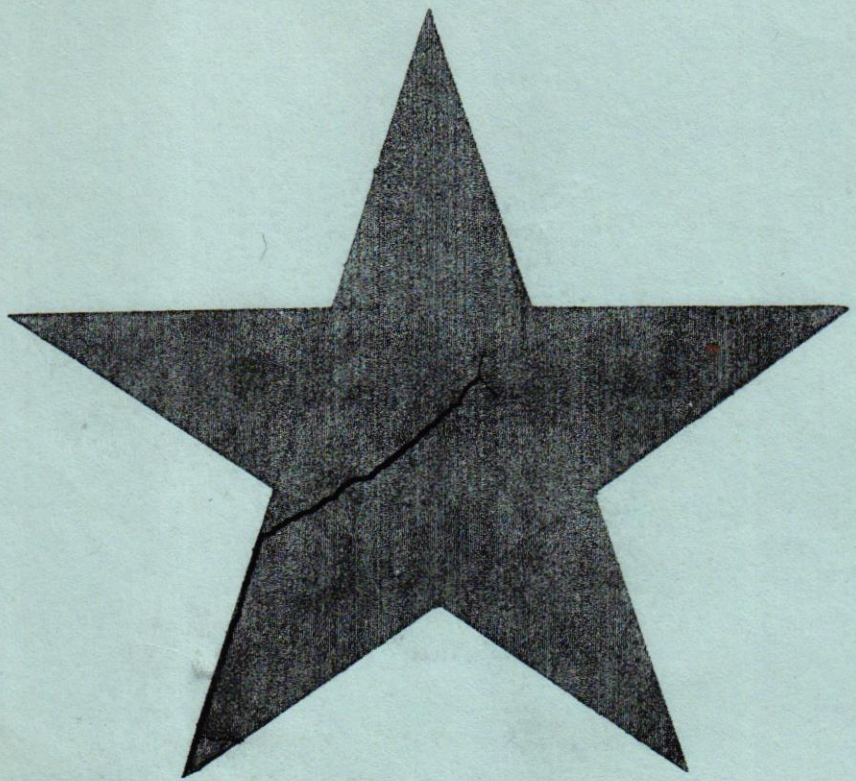
MARXIST STUDENT



5p

BULLETIN OF THE W.S.L. STUDENT SOCIETIES

No. 5

18th January 1978



BROAD LEFT BLOCKS WITH TORIES

The main feature of the December 1977 NUS conference was the consolidation of the Broad Left/Federation of Conservative Students (FCS) alliance; a clear demonstration of the lengths to which the Stalinist-dominated NUS executive are prepared to go to hold back and betray NUS members who are prepared to struggle against the government's attacks on their living standard and on education.

The conference kicked off with a red baiting speech from Sue Slipman, NUS President and CP member. She said "There are those who wish to see students unions operating as political parties, imposing a narrow ideology on our members", and went on to attack "politically motivated individuals" of the "ultra left" to the rabid applause of the FCS.

The Broad Left on the executive then went even further when they joined the FCS in a rapturous and sustained standing ovation for Shirley Williams, the Education Minister actually responsible for the cuts NUS claims to fight. While Shirley Williams explained the need to defend British capitalism by cutting social services, another side of this 'defence' was being revealed at Blackpool police station, where a delegate from Northern Ireland was being held by the police under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The majority of the Executive refused a call to picket the police station or even to put it to the Conference, instead leaving it to Shirley Williams to sort out. The following day Deputy President Pete Ashby blamed the 'ultra left' who had picketed for the fact that the student was still being detained.

These developments set the tone for a conference in which the emergent Broad Left/FCS alliance gradually succeeded in pushing NUS policy decisivly to the right.

In the Saturday morning debate on grants and cuts mass action against the cuts and for index linked grants were thrown out in favour of lobbies, submissions and working parties and the thrust of the campaign was to be directed towards anomalies such as discretionary awards and the means test.

This seemed to have been FCS policy for some time as a means of diverting and confusing the strongest sections of students. At the same time the Broad Left seemed to want to dress it up as a debate about the need to 'democratise education' and forging alliances with 'progressive Vice-Chancellors'. The experiences of students, for instance at Essex, who have taken direct action against fee increases and college closures sharply exposes the bankrupcy of the Broad Left policy. Their defeated occupations, whose failure can be attributed to the lack of national direction and leadership, have been followed by vicious attacks on student union autonomy by these very same Vice-Chancellors.

The FCS/Broad Left majority went on to narrowly throw out NUS 'No platform for Fascists' in favour of a vague formulation which basically allows them free speech. Slipman attacked the policy of mobilising the working-class to stop the fascists on the streets or at meetings in terms which showed that she regarded the SWP as a more dangerous threat than the NF.

SCABBING

One apparent defeat for the Broad Left/FCS alliance was the conference's censure of their executive members for crossing a picket line when their own staff in ACTS went on strike over NUS threatened cutbacks with Slipman even kicking one on the way in. However Conference then went on to freeze staff vacancies by voting for the Executives priorities motion.

The debates continued to hot up with many students becoming increasingly concerned at the political and financial crisis gripping the union, with mounting anger at the collapse of Endsleigh Student Insurance Company, still not adequately explained by the Executive, and their tacit support for the state's education cuts and general attacks on students' rights. This came to a head with the defeat of the executive on the tuition fees debate. Students occupying against fee increases at Brunel University successfully got through an amendment calling for a national

campaign of occupations and other forms of direct action to stop all fee increases being backed by the SSA, NOISS, overseas students and a growing number of dissident Broad Left rank and file.

The narrow victory was short lived, however, with the Broad Left/Tories remaining control in the debate on Women's autonomy. The NUS Womens Conference in November had been closed down by the BL executive members who were running it because the majority of women there had voted to throw out the only man there,a male chauvinist FCS member. The conference had, therefore, been closed down in a totally bureaucratic manner, against a majority vote, and the Executive members responsible received a vote of confidence for this behaviour. The 'Women in Society' motion passed at the previous women's conference was passed - but only after the clauses calling for higher status and greater strength for women's conference were amended out - thus making the resolution useless. The call for an autonomous women's conference was also, correctly, amended out, despite opposition from SSA, NOISS and the feminists who argue that the conference should exclude men as a matter of principle.

UNION AUTONOMY

The final session was taken up mainly with a discussion on union autonomy, the most important issue at conference. At present NUS is like a chairty, it cannot legally use money outside its members own welfare, unlike a trade union. In the past the Tory government used this to attack NUS autonomy backed up by the courts, but in 1972 a national campaign of direct action led by the Broad Left forced them to retreat. Today Tory students up and down the country are taking their own union locally to court over claims that donations to Grunwicks, or the striking firemen, even affiliations to Trades Councils are illegal. The Broad Left report merely pointed this out but went on not to challenge this Tory law or even lobby for its change but to accept it on the grounds that it could be worse if they argued about it! This debate had the Broad Left again split and the emergency motion calling for a campaign for union autonomy and for support for colleges taken to courts was narrowly defeated on a count of 13 votes. The bureaucratic Executive then closed the debate without accepting a card vote which may ell have gone the other way, since many unions had mandates for union autonomy and a written card vote would make it more difficult to break them.

That was the final fling, though the Guest Speakers from Grunwicks and the firemen were moving, with nice sounding resolutions passed and large collections held. NUS policy on union autonomy (or lack of it) now means that empty gestures and not practical support for trade unionists will now become the order of the day.

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DISCRETIONARY AWARDS CUT

North Yorkshire NUS Area, comprising of about 10,000 students, has come under severe attack from the educational cuts. North Yorkshire Education sub-committee, with the approval of the County Council, has cut some discretionary awards from £1010 to £650. This has affected about 800 agricultural and technical students who had expected to receive the normal mandatory award of £1010. North Yorkshire NUS launched a campaign as soon as the position regarding award was realised. There was a limited response from the trade union movement, and a fairly substantial response from CO's, particularly those worst affected. At a lobby of parliament in November, Alex Lyons, Labour MP for York, predictably was patronising and uninterested and anxious to defend the government's policy of education cuts.

The hardship caused by these cuts has been extreme - nearly all the affected students are working-class, unable to rely on parental subsidies - subsidies which no students should ever have to rely on. Furthermore, the hypocrisy of a government with an educational policy of encouraging students to attend 'useful' courses is evident in cutting grants of students who are attending engineering, technical and agricultural courses.

PALESTINE AND ZIONISM
THE REVOLUTIONARY ANSWER

The recent meetings between Sadat and Begin have been billed as 'historic occasions' by the bourgeois media, but the true significance of this 'courageous bid for peace' was of necessity concealed beneath all the red carpets and ticker-tape. While it is certainly the case that both Begin and Sadat desire an end to armed hostility between Israel and Egypt, other Arab leaders were quick to seize this golden opportunity of denouncing the sellout of the Palestinian liberation struggles which will inevitably be involved in such a deal.

This apparent split among the Arab leaders does not represent any principled division on the questions of negotiations with Israel or support for the Palestinians. It is partly a division over tactics based on different assessments of the present balance of forces, and on the individual requirements of national leaders. But it is clear that even this distinction will soon resolve itself into a simple division of labour, with some governments busily concocting an 'acceptable' settlement while others continue their militant propaganda, but do nothing to actually jeopardise this delicate operation.

Whatever part the Palestinian nationalist leaders may play in these manoeuvres, no such settlement between different national sections of the bourgeoisie can satisfy the requirements of the Palestinian people. The urgent democratic demands of the Palestinians cannot be fulfilled by an isolated struggle - they form an integral part of the specific problems that the strategies of imperialism have created for all the workers and peasants of the Middle East.

In creating and nourishing the state of Israel, imperialism sought the double aim of stabilising its domination in both the Middle East and the metropolitan capitalist nations of Europe and America. Firstly, by providing 'a homeland for the Jews', bourgeois governments hoped that the democratic demands of an oppressed minority could be exploited to their own advantage. For centuries, Jews in Europe had been an oppressed, and often presecuted minority. Anti-semitism was expressed not only as 'prejudice' and legal discrimination, but in the form of pogroms and other violent attacks. Although this variety of racialism had not been created by capitalism, it was employed as a useful political tool by bourgeois democratic and autocratic governments alike in the late 19th century.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Racialism has a material basis. It develops as a response to the social inequalities created by the prevailing economic system. As capitalism moves into one of its periodic crises, with unemployment and falling living standards, workers experience not only poverty and starvation, but also frustration. Without the leadership of revolutionary socialists, that frustration leaves them prey to the whole range of reactionary propaganda. These forces combine to drive individual workers and groups of workers into competition amongst themselves for a limited supply of jobs and wages. At a more consciously political leavel, this reaction is expressed as nationalism or in other forms of chauvinism. Such conditions create the need for scapegoats - groups whose actions or very existence can be defined as the cause of all the problems generated by the anarchy of capitalism.

This syndrome can be of enormous value to the ruling-class. Not only does it divide and weaken the proletariat, the only force capable of overthrowing the domination of world imperialism; it also offers a false analysis of the crisis, and so diverts the development of revolutionary consciousness in the class.

While the ruling-class closes factories and cuts wages with its right hand, its left hand is busy stirring these confused responses to develop sexism, racism, religious mania and other oppressive ideological formations. These formations were not created by capitalism - their origin reaches far back into the history of general want - but the uses to which they can be put by the bourgeoisie have been starkly displayed by the fascist movements of this century.

At the end of the 19th century, anti-semitism was employed as one amongst many devices in the industrially developed states of Western Europe, but it was a far stronger force in Russia and Poland. There the Jewish community had been

far less assimilated, and was still for the most part living in ghettos. There too the effects of the great depression of the late 19th century were particularly severe, as the disruption of industrial revolution accompanied a catastrophic crisis in agricultural production. The pogroms of that period were not of course spontaneous outbursts of racial hatred, but took place at the instigation and provocation of the Tsarist autocracy.

The political response of Jews to this assault took two main forms. Many joined the ranks of socialist organisations to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist organisations to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system which made racialism possible. At the same time, the Zionist movement developed as a chauvinist response to persecution. The Zionist demands provided imperialism with an ideal 'solution' to the Jewish problem. The creation of a separate Jewish state appeared as the fulfilment of the Jews' demands for equality, while in reality it did nothing to destroy the basis of such racialism. Certain factors in the equation were transferred, and the Jewish problem was transformed into the Palestinian problem.

It was by no means the case that all Zionists were subjectively racialist, desiring to drive the Arabs out of Palestine. Many wished to form a democratic, multi-racial state. However, their subjective positions came into conflict with reality when the separate Jewish state was established. Objectively and inevitably, Israel was a racialist state, thrown into violent antagonism with the Arab population within and around its boundaries. Formerly Jews had competed with other Europeans and Americans for jobs and houses. Now as settlers they needed to seize land and resources from the Palestinians. The ghetto had been transformed into a nation-state. To preserve its identity that state now had to practice all the techniques of repression and oppression which its inhabitants had experienced in the past.

PAWNS OF IMPERIALISM

The Israeli masses became a pawn in the global strategy of imperialism. The international bourgeoisie saw the possibility of establishing a state grateful and subservient to imperialism, which could counter the fierce anti-imperialism that had developed during Arab resistance to colonial domination of the Middle East. When Israel emerged as a nation-state, the Arab workers and peasants had only recently freed themselves from the 'mandates' and 'protectorates' of colonial rule. Their sympathy and solidarity with the Palestinians flowed naturally from the experience of these struggles against the British and French occupying forces. Throughout the 1960's, the repressive bourgeois governments and dictatorships of the Middle East sought to derive much-needed popular support from this anti-imperialist consciousness. Their populist rhetoric developed as an adroit combination of nationalism, anti-imperialism and racialism.

At the same time this championing of the Palestinian cause was increasingly dictated by another pressure - the threat which an independent armed movement posed to their regimes. The longer they encouraged the development of the Palestinian liberation movement by their militant speeches, and more material support from the Arab masses, and check a full awareness amongst the Palestinians of the opportunist motives of their 'supporters'.

War with Israel was the inevitable outcome of this strategy. While it ensured the subordination of the Palestinians' struggle to the designs of other Arab nationalist leaders, such a tactic had other advantages. By attacking the state which most directly represented imperialist interests in the region, Arab governments could make a show of strength and relative independence from the dominance of the metropolitan capitalist states. If successful, the war would enormously strengthen the prestige of the Arab leaders and any Palestinian state created would be firmly under their thumb. In generating popular support for such an initiative, the Arab governments were also able to divert attention away from the massive material problems crippling the lives of millions in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq.

Sadat's meetings with Begin are the clearest manifestation to date of the shift in strategy engineered by the Arab nationalist leaders after the meagre gains and

substantial losses of the 1973 war. In large part this has been determined by a re orientation in the foreign policy of the US government. After the crushing defeats in South-East Asia, the US administration placed less reliance on a one-sided strategy of strengthening openly reactionary regimes as a 'bulwark against communism'.

Without abandoning its crucial support for states such as Israel and South Africa, the American bourgeoisie sought to develop states with less compromised credentials as strategic clients and agents. This policy flowed from an awareness of the change in the international balance of class forces, and a recognition of the massive struggles that would be launched by American workers against involvement in any further imperialist war. US capitalism made the assessment that in the short-term its profits could be more surely guaranteed by promoting betrayals and collaboration, than by provoking military conflict. While investment and aid poured into suitable areas, such as Iran and Morocco, pressure was applied on other dependents to engage in negotiations and compromise.

In the Middle East, Washington worked to ensure its political and economic dominance over a region vital for its military significance and natural resources (especially oil). The nationalist leaders were constant rivals for the hegemony of the Arab bloc, and above all the relatively well-established Egyptian bourgeoisie had repeatedly tried to realise such aspirations, particularly in its relations with Syria, Yemen and Libya. Cairo was the obvious destination for the American eagles, now released from Washington in their new guise as doves of peace.

'BANTUSTAN' STATE

This new turn is now working through in the Sadat-Begin discussions presided over by the USA. The Palestinian exiles and refugees can expect only a complete betrayal of their cause from these talks. But, for all their militant posturing, the Iraqi regime and the bloc of Arab nationalists who oppose any discussions with the Israeli government, will provide no more satisfactory solution to the Palestinians' demands. There is no way forward to win this struggle with the creation of a Bantustan-type Palestinian state that will be completely subject politically to Israel or neighbouring Arab states, however or wherever it is fabricated.

No confusion must be held in the manoeuvres of the Arab bourgeois nationalists, and no illusions held as to their motives. The masses of Syria, Iraq and Libya have discovered the class interests of their 'revolutionary' leaders in the experience of repression and dictatorship.

The only perspective that the Palestinians have for gaining their democratic rights lies in the fight for a programme to overthrow capitalism and imperialist domination in the Middle East. The central task of that struggle is building solidarity between the workers in Israel and the Arab states, who are all exploited and repressed by their 'own' native bourgeoisie and international capital. The workers in Egypt who staged massive demonstrations against price increases last January, and the workers in Israel who struck in protest at the proposed austerity measures in November, have an independent and international class interest. The petty-bourgeois leaderships of the PLO are incapable of mobilising this revolutionary strength, and their weaknesses and betrayals require constant exposure.

THE RIGHT TO RETURN

The tensions and contradictions within the Middle East have even found their pale reflection within the NUS, where a confused campaign has been under way to restrict the activity of Zionist groupings. The Workers Socialist League opposes efforts to use the apparatus of the state or the bureaucracy to ban such racialist groups, or other reactionary organisations. These moves represent a dangerous and incorrect policy of seeking a formal and organisational solution to a problem which must be fought politically. We campaign consistently against making union funds and facilities available to societies which produce reactionary propaganda, and mobilise wherever necessary to counter the public activity of reactionary forces. But this

position is based in our total fight for the Transitional programme, and we offer an alternative political direction which leads to a solution of those problems distorted by bourgeois ideology. The WSL counters the arguments of Zionists and Arab nationalists by showing the necessity for destroying the present racialist state of Israel and creating a multi-racial Palestine within a socialist confederation of the Middle East.

Nearly 2 million Palestinians are enforced exiles, and more than 1 million live under military occupation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. It is extremely difficult for those Palestinians who remained in Israel after the 1947 partition to obtain rights of full citizenship. The immediate demand to be raised is for the right of all Palestinians to return with full democratic rights to any of the territories now controlled by the Israeli government. No Zionist government will ever grant such a concession, but the demand does not aim to achieve the impossible by reforming the racialist Israeli state. Its objective is to unite Jewish and Arab workers in revolutionary struggle. The campaign for this basic democratic right can be waged within the labour movement in Israel, and provides a basis for mobilising Jewish workers to unite with the struggles of the oppressed Palestinians. Within Israel, the fight to develop struggles around this demand must be integrated into the fight for a programme to defend the economic interests of workers and assert their political independence from the bourgeois state. Jewish workers can be broken from the grip of racialism and imperialism only in such a struggle which directs at the root of the existence of the racialist state. But this demand also exposes to the Palestinians the political inadequacies of their nationalist leadership by countering its dependence on other bourgeois Arab leaders with a strategy that is based on the political independence and revolutionary unity of the leadership of the working-class. All other strategies for the liberation of the Palestinians can lead only to a setback for the class struggle internationally, can must be fought with determination by revolutionary socialists. This perspective cannot be won overnight, but only through long hard battles.

It is not by extending the executive's bureaucratic powers, but in campaigning for this democratic right alongside the labour movement, that students in the NUS can offer real solidarity with the Palestine liberation struggles.

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BUILD INDEPENDENT UNIONS!

Union autonomy has become a major issue in NUS, with the refusal of the Executive to even defend the basic right of a student union to spend its money as its members democratically decide. In many universities, and in still more Colleges of Further Education and Colleges of Education, independent unions do not exist or exist only in a distorted form.

In Oxford University the problem is particularly acute, because the collegiate system makes united action by students extremely difficult. The Central Students Union campaign has reemerged this year, but the campaign is being dangerously misled by the present SWP-dominated leadership.

That there is widespread support for a CSU was shown at an emergency general meeting of Oxford University Students Union - the 'union' whose constitution was written by the university and includes a clause forbidding constitutional changes (such as making general meetings sovereign) without the permission of the authors. The EGM, attended by an unprecedented 800 members overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for an 'independent, united, area CSU'

However there is confusion among the campaign's supporters about what the significance of a union is.- confusion which the SWP fosters in its direction of the campaign. The orientation of the campaign has been towards demanding that the university provide a building to hold meetings, discos etc.. But a union is not a building - it is an organisation formed independently by students to take action in defence of their interests. Such an organisation cannot by petitioning the university - it can only be built by students themselves.

FIGHT FOR NURSERY FACILITIES!

The 1977 NUS Nurseries Conference held in October at Lady Spencer Churchill College, Wheatley, was attended by about 120 delegates and observers from 40 universities in Britain. This low attendance was related by many delegates to NUS' failure to give sufficient publicity to the Nurseries campaign; as well as to the high cost of the Conference itself (£3.50 per person) which prevented many of the smaller colleges from sending delegates, and ensured that the number of Further Education Colleges and Colleges of Education represented was ludicrously low - around a dozen.

The speakers in the Plenary session (from NATFHE, NUS and the National Campaign for Nursery Education) were unanimous in stressing the importance of building student, trade union and community support for the NUS Nurseries campaign. But what emerged, first in the plenary discussions, and then over and over in the workshops on methods of building the campaigns, was that, in the words of a delegatefrom Birkbeck College, London, "There is no NUS Nurseries campaign"

What was meant was that every contribution had the character of a report on h the circumstances specific to one college or campus; in the absence of any co-ordination or leadership at the national level from the NUS, the conference could only function as a jam session, with delegates exchanging scraps of information, handy hints on have to deal with recalcitrant administrators or apathetic students unions. And these reports demonstrated nothing so much as the futility of attempting to achieve permanent gains by such local struggles, without national support - in several colleges, in the 4 years during which the NUS had been conducting its invisible campaign for nursery facilities, nurseries have been instituted on the unsatisfactory base of cost-sharing between administration and Student Unions, requiring exorbitant fees of parents and still piling up, in every case, enormous deficits for the unions (at Sheffield University, £25,000 in 5 years). In some campuses, in this period, nursery facilities have closed because of such financial problems, without a murmer from NUS nationally.

These local reports demonstrated graphically the importance to such campaigns of a national NUS policy which will put the demand for nursery facilities on the basis of the right of parents, students and workers alike, to free, adequate nursery facilities for all children. But despite the continual demands which delegates made for national policies, and a national campaign to link up local struggles, the speakers from NUS executive responded with nothing but bland encouragement.

The conference ended by reaffirming the motion from the 1976 NUS women's conference which demanded a firm commitment to such a national campaign; though there was much rueful head-shaking from the executive members as to whether such a low-priority motion would even be put to the December conference.

POWERLESS

The Nursery Conference itself had of course no power to make policy or to initiate a campaign, these satellite conferences of the NUS function as a container for isolating the struggles of students and localise them to particular issues and particular areas.

Students must work to break the isolation in which the question of campus nurseries is generally seen, and fight to turn the campaigns in their colleges outward - by trying to win trade union support and in particular by linking with local committees against the cuts and closures in nursery facilities. They must d demand that NUS areas support the initiatives and send delegates to these committees and send delegates to these committees and that they put pressure on NUS nationally to provide serious opposition to cuts and closures in day care, and in nursery and primary, as well as in higher, education. The real basis of a national campaign for adequate nursery facilities for all lies in placing demands, not on university and college administrations, but on local authorities who are

committed by law to provide day-care and nursery education to meet the needs of their areas, - and must be made to do just that. In this way by linking with area nursery campaigns, campaigns in individual colleges are taken out of the context of financial negotiations between individual Student Union's and individual administrations, and into the context of a national campaign against cuts in education and the social services.

NUS WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN:

STERILE AUTONOMY OR A SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN?

NUS is supposed to be conducting a 'women's campaign' and holds a 'women's conference' twice a year to prove it. But this campaign and the conferences are in a scarcely better position than the mythical NUS nurseries campaign. The womens conference has no power - all decisions taken at it can be and are ignored by the executive. To strengthen the campaign and force the Broad Left leadership to put their speechifying about women's rights into action, the central demand must be for the women's conference to have higher status - decisions taken by women's conference should be automatically given priority for debate and final decision by the policy-making national NUS conference.

This demand, although raised at every conference for the past three years, has continually been obscured by confused demands for autonomy - for a women's conference closed to men. The first 1977/78 women's conference, held at Keele University on 19/20th November, was totally dominated by demands for the exclusion of the men delegates who had arrived. There were plenary sessions on Sexism, Rape, National Abortion Campaign, Northern Ireland and several other important issues - but each session began with a heated debate about autonomy and a vote to exclude the only male delegate who had insisted on remaining at the conference.

This particular delegate - a Tory who was known for trying to break up student union organisation in Edinburgh by campaigning for disaffiliation from NUS - had obviously come to cause trouble rather than from any principled dedication to a campaign for women's rights. But the general exclusion of men students and workers can only hamper an effective fight for women's rights.

Such demands are not based on an analysis of the roots of women's oppression in capitalism but reduces the causes of sexist attitudes to something in the minds of men. But such attitudes are created by bourgeois ideology to divide and confuse the working-class and to force women into a subservient role as wife and mother. Women are used to serve capitalism either as cheap labour, or as child-bearers and child-rearers confined to the home. They are denied abortion rights, equal pay, equal job and educational opportunities, nursery schools for their children to reinforce that role.

Women alone cannot fight the material basis of their oppression - only the working-class, organised around a programme which includes the fight for women's rights as a central part of policy - can overthrow capitalism. Autonomous formulation of policy by women will inevitably reinforce the view that women's issues only concern women and will weaken the fight for the labour and student movement as a whole to seriously take up these issues.

The IMG's and the feminists' demands for the exclusion of men from 'women's conferences' is a diversion from the real fight against the Broad Left leadership. The most important demands specifically affecting women students are for free abortion and contraception on demand and for free, adequate nursery provision that is controlled by people who use it and the workers involved. Neither of these demands can be separated from the fight against the cuts in the sovial services and for increasing social expenditure. At the same time NUS must look outwards and develop links with the labour movement, campaign for equal pay and for a national minimum wage. This means challenging the government's wage controls and the trade union bureaucrats who enforce those controls, by demanding that wages actually increase to keep pace with inflation - inflation as assessed by trade unionists, students, and housewives, not the government-determined retail price index.

The present leadership of NUS has shown itself incapable of carrying out such a fight. Unless the women's campaign is directed towards such a programme and against the betrayals of the Stalinist 'leaders', it will remain, as it was this year, a debating arena for powerless and confused militants.

FIGHT THE FEE INCREASES!

When the Labour government announced its huge increases in tuition fees at the beginning of last year, there was a massive reaction from the student movement. Many students were outraged at the blatantly racist way in which overseas students were discriminated against and fearful for what it meant for the education system as a whole. A wave of occupations swept the country, affecting even traditionally conservative colleges. Here at Sheffield University 4000 students packed the largest union general meeting ever held which voted to occupy the university administration building.

The response from the NUS leadership was the same as during the campaign in the colleges of education in 1976 - they did their level best to smother the movement. The fifty or so colleges which did occupy were left to fight on their own, and one by one the campaign petered out, having won little or nothing.

The foreign students, who were the hardest hit by the rises, were predictably one of the most hostile to the Broad Left. Trevor Philips, now NUS secretary, was shouted down at the Overseas Students Conference in the winter of - of 1976. Following this the National Coordinating Committee of Overseas Students (NCCOS)was formed on the initiative of Sheffield University Overseas Students Bureau (OSB) in January 1977.

However what might have been an important part of the fight for a new leadership in the NUS is now quite clearly holding back from a fight with the Broad Left. The Sheffield OSB (led by Anees Esmail and K.K. Tan) did nothing to challenge the Sheffield Union officers who sold out last years occupation, though it loudly denounced it afterwards.

Indeed the Sheffield OSB is now haggling over a hardship fund with the University, which conceded it so as to allow the Union leadership to call the occupation off. It fought and defeated an attempt to establish an elected campaign committee and has done nothing this term apart from organise a fees strike - a quite ineffective form of action. It now plans a series of short 'lightning' actions with talk of a sustained occupation in the future. They argue that 'there isn't enough support for an occupation' (because they haven't tried to mobilise it)and that 'anyway last year's occupation was a failure' (partly because of their role)

OPPORTUNIST LEADERSHIP

The Esmail-Tan leadership carry this opportunist approach into the NCCOS. At its conference in November, they succeeded in defeating a call from Brunel University, soon to be in occupation, for an immediate national campaign for occupations to join its fight. Debate on programme was kept to a minimum, despite protest from several delegations.

Despite all their demagogic denunciations of the Broad Left, Esmail, Tan and Company consistently avoid a real fight against their sabotage of the campaign, which would bring them into conflict withthe Stalinist-Tory coalition on the NUS executive. Behind this lies a conscious method dressed up with Maoist demagogy, about the Third World, which sees the role of the campaign as an 'educational experience' for foreign students in Britain to expose to them the reactionary nature of imperialism, so that they can go home and fight the real battle there, (of course impossible in the imperialist heartland). They openly admit that the last thing they want to do is even begin to win the fight here!

Overseas students have often been isolated from the rest of students in Britain. However, it is essential to construct a Trotskyist leadership amongst overseas students today, in order to win them to a common fight with British students against the Stalinist leadership of the NUS. Such a leadership will be constructed in fierce opposition to such opportunist demagogues.