



Spanish right strengthened by coup attempt

FRANCO'S MEN FLEX THEIR MUSCLES



Tejero in the Cortes

Spain is not ruled by a military dictatorship today. That is worth saying because it is only just true.

And unless there is a major political change it may not remain true for long.

The attempt by Spain's rulers to promote the myth that last week's attempted coup was the work of a handful of madmen like Lieutenant-General Tejero, have already failed.

The evidence so far revealed—and it is still very confused—proves beyond doubt that Spain last week came within an ace of becoming another Turkey.

At least half the top generals of the army seem to be either directly implicated in the coup or else showed marked ambiguity in the direction of their loyalties.

Indeed Juan Carlos was told of the coup by the country's Deputy Chief of Staff, General Alfonso Armada, the proposed new head of a right wing junta.

Credibility

Another aspect of the official version of the coup seems to have gained more credibility—the role of the King.

In a clear and decisive exercise of his authority as Commander-in-Chief, King Juan Carlos is supposed to have brought the rebels to heel, and kept the doubters on the side of constitutionality.

Political leaders of the main parties leaned over backwards in praising the monarch that Franco had bequeathed them. First among the arch-monarchists was Communist Party leader Santiago Carrillo, who was seen fondly embracing the King on television around the world.

Unfortunately the 'King single-handedly saves democracy' story doesn't explain what the King was doing during the seven hours that elapsed between the seizure of the Parliament and the proposal by some of the plotters to Juan Carlos that he should lead the coup, and his brief broadcast at 1 a.m. in support of the constitution.

Was he trying to control the rebel generals or desperately trying to find out which way the wind was blowing?

In any case the picture of the decisive constitutional love of democracy has been well established and Juan Carlos has emerged from the coup attempt with his reputation greatly enhanced and the monarchy strengthened.

At the same time the reputation of the political reform

engineered by Adolfo Suarez has fallen. The same has to be said of the labour movement.

Again the official story that complete calm ruled in Spain throughout the seventeen hours of the coup attempt is a myth.

There were factory meetings, even protest strikes in some towns (Pamplona, in particular). And there was universal hostility to the coup among the masses.

But nonetheless the response of the labour movement was frighteningly weak and slow. The main workers parties—the PSOE (Socialists) and the CP: their respective unions—the UGT and the Workers Commissions: and even the radical Basque nationalists of ETA all did their best to demobilise a working class that was willing to resist but was lamentably unorganised.

In many factories on the Tuesday, the day after the coup, they called meetings and then sent workers back to work. There were virtually no street demonstrations in the early part of the week and very few political posters.

The Communist and Socialist leaders tied the fate of democracy to the monarchy and the right wing.

They both called demonstrations on the Friday after the coup along with the Centre Democratic Union (UCD), the ruling party of the 'democratic Francoists'.

Report from HENRY PHILLIPS in Madrid

Socialist leader Felipe Gonzalez, with the support of Santiago Carrillo of the Communist Party, called for a coalition government on a minimum programme of "defence of democracy" with the UCD, and even by implication, with Manuel Fraga's further right Democratic Alliance.

Weakness

Had the coup not collapsed so quickly the resistance would have been much more evident.

But the tardiness and weakness of the response of the labour movement will be a lesson for those in the Francoist armed forces who have no doubt already begun to plan the next coup.

They will also note the ease with which General Millans del Bosch, was able for seven hours, without visible opposition, to send his tanks onto the streets of the province of Valencia, declaring a curfew, a ban on all political meetings, a ban on



Juan Carlos

strikes and all the other classical elements of reactionary military rule.

The failure of last week's coup provides a breathing space, but possibly a brief one, in which it is possible for the workers' movement to learn its lessons: the need for vigilance, preparation, organisation, resistance; the arming of workers' militias; the creation of a united front of workers and nationalist organisations against the coup; the setting up of a public workers' inquiry into the coup in support of the demand for the punishment of those responsible and the dissolution of the Francoist armed forces.

Last week there was little sign of any of this taking place. Instead, the week ended with a series of massive demonstrations—over a million in Madrid, and several of more than 250,000—in favour of "freedom, democracy and the constitution" in which the Socialist and Communist masses marched behind banners carried not only by their own leaders but also by the democratic Francoists of the UCD and even by Manuel Fraga.

The abortive coup underlines the necessity to build a revolutionary, Trotskyist party in Spain which can combat the danger of a renewed military crackdown on the workers' movement and the treacherous politics of the reformist and Stalinist leaders.

Could it happen here?

Those who cling to the liberal notion that the transition to socialism can be achieved by the peaceful road of the ballot box must have experienced a severe jolt this week with the revelations in the *New Statesman* about Airey Neave's secret preparations for the liquidation of leading socialists in the event of Tony Benn forming a government.

Ironically Neave himself is to be found in several small pieces in a coffin in a country churchyard, but that should in no way lead workers to underestimate the significance of his paramilitary preparations.

The *New Statesman* article points to the tip of a very formidable iceberg which shows the lengths to which key layers

of the ruling class will resort when faced with mass movements in the working class.

In 1974 fairly widespread coverage was given to "private armies" being organised by tinpot Colonel Blimps in homes for senile ex-British Raj brigadiers—but the real danger comes from powerful elements of the bourgeoisie working hand in hand with the agencies of state surveillance.

If Airey Neave, at the time Thatcher's closest advisor and a man with lifelong contacts in the state security machine, was involved in such clandestine planning right up to his death and during the course of a General Election campaign, what other murky facts have still to be revealed?

The significance for workers coming forward in struggle is crystal clear. A general strike to bring down the Tories could lead to an election and the

return of a Labour government under Michael Foot.

But it could also take place under conditions where councils of action became widespread, where direct confrontation with the state was a daily necessity and where the establishment of a workers' government was posed.

In such a situation the physical defence of workers' organisations and workers' leaders would be of paramount importance.

Even the institutions of bourgeois democracy such as Parliament and local councils will be jettisoned by an endangered ruling class when the crunch comes.

The events of Spain, Chile and Turkey are watched closely by the right as well as the left, and the left already has much further to go in shedding its liberal illusions.

Charles' wedding—p.2

New hunger strike DON'T LET BOBBY SANDS DIE!

Bobby Sands, the former commanding officer of the republican prisoners in the Long Kesh concentration camp, began a hunger strike to the death on Sunday 1 March.

He is the first of the new wave of republicans to resume hunger strike action in pursuit of political status for the 400 prisoners of war currently 'on the blanket'—refusing to wear prison clothing or do prison work—in Long Kesh, and the republican women in Armagh jail.

The renewed struggle takes place in the wake of a definitive decision by the Tory government to tear up the written and verbal agreement which persuaded the seven republican hunger strikers to end their 53-day fast just before Christmas.

Strike action

Faced by mounting mass mobilisations and by increasing strike action throughout the 32 counties of Ireland in support of the hunger strikes, the Thatcher government had offered what appeared to be a formula for conceding the five demands of the prisoners.

But once the mass pressure had been removed, so too were the concessions. Thatcher and torture-chief Atkins made statements repudiating the deal—and the prisoners have been forced once again to desperate measures in their fight for recognition as political prisoners—jailed for their struggle against imperialist rule in the six counties.

The renewed hunger strike comes at an awkward time for the republican movement, which in the aftermath of the previous hunger strike had

reverted to its guerrillaist military campaign.

Now the links with the mass movement and in particular with the trade unions North and South must be rebuilt, and the fight for all-out working class action to support the Sands' struggle must be brought to the fore.

Solidarity

In Britain, socialists must at once take up the fight to ensure that this hunger strike—unlike the previous one—is supported by the mobilisation of trade unions and Labour Parties in active solidarity.

We call all *Socialist Press* readers to participate in this joint struggle. We must fight alongside courageous Irish militants against the common enemy—Thatcher's vicious imperialist government.

*Restore political status to republican prisoners of war!

*Troops out of Ireland now!

*Self determination for the Irish people!

COVENTRY and District Hunger Strike Action Committee has been busy preparing for the re-launching of the campaign.

During the last hunger strike the committee was able to publish a support statement signed by approximately 60 prominent figures in the local labour movement and gain affiliations from, among others, the Trades Council and four Labour Party wards.

The campaign leaflet, of which 12,000 copies were distributed, is being updated and further leafletting campaigns, public meetings and a march are being organised.

An impressive local Newsletter has already begun publication.

Nearly 130 NUJ members and delegates from other trade unions and from trades councils attended last Saturday's Birmingham conference on media censorship of Northern Ireland.

The platform appeared determined to minimise, deny or defend the operation of censorship.

Certainly all the main speakers were united in not raising the central issue, that the need of the British state to defend partition as a means of preserving imperialist rule in Ireland, is the cause of the censorship.

Alan Murray (*Irish Press* NUJ) was the first of several speakers to argue for the British state to introduce a "freedom of information" Act, but he also argued that "people" don't want to read news, still less news about conflict in Ireland.

An Official Unionist speaker argued that it was the lack of formal censorship laws in the six counties like those existing in the South which created problems for journalists!

"Panorama" editor Roger Bolton, sacked by the BBC over the Carrickmore incident, argued a "democratic" line.

The 30 elected Provisional Sinn Fein councillors in Eire should not be banned by the Irish RTE under Section 31 he argued.

British media

But such a policy would leave the republican movement—with no MPs—denied the right to express identical views in the British media.

However, Bolton reiterated that NUJ members' action had won his reinstatement, a principled defence which Mary Holland had not received when sacked for her reporting on Ireland at the *Observer*.

Holland pointed out that for every TV programme that was banned, 20 were planned but never made because of the "British Way of Censorship".

A message from Danny Morrison, editor of *Republican News* was read out; it welcomed the conference but regretted that he would not be able to attend as invited because he would again be seized as he entered Britain under section 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Afternoon workshops made it clear that the delegates had different ideas from the plat-

form.

The questions of partition, the role of the army, the bias in favour of the army and Loyalists (which the morning's platform had illustrated) and of censorship in the labour movement were discussed.

In one workshop all but two delegates were in favour of a journalists' code of conduct for reporting on Ireland, along the lines of existing NUJ codes against racism and sexism.

Another workshop detailed the threat and use of the PTA against journalists as well as others, and reported Dublin NUJ branch's campaign for suspension of the banning provisions in Eire's Section 31 rules.

TUC witch-hunt

The final plenary session reflected these preoccupations.

Tameside Trades Council secretary Dave Hallsworth appealed for support against TUC moves to expel any trades council sending delegates to the Coventry 'TUC Hands Off Ireland' conference on 14 March.

It is vital that there is support for this appeal and that NUJ members build on their 1980 conference defence of

Tameside.

Pointing to the centrality of the issue of partition in censorship, Peter McIntyre (NUJ Oxford) underlined the agreement between the invited Official Unionist speaker and the "balancing" views of Austin Currie (SDLP).

Favoured censorship

Both favoured state censorship and both were equally hostile towards the Provisional Sinn Fein.

McIntyre called for action at workplace level—for instance by journalists refusing to go on Army propaganda tours.

This conference however was all but wrecked, not so much by the platform speakers as by organisational chaos which left NUJ branches without any printed information with which to campaign for a broader based conference until a mere 20 days before the conference!

However, this initiative can still be used to take the issue of Ireland further into the wider labour movement.

A report of the conference is to be published by the NUJ.

By Bill McKeith

Reagan/Thatcher talks WARMONGERS SUMMIT



After three days of "staring down the same gun barrel" Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan have come out with equally savage plans for international aggression.

Thatcher declared her enthusiasm for the neutron bomb, for a combined Rapid Deployment Force to intervene against liberation struggles in the Middle East and South East Asia, and received the Wild Bill Donovan medal for warmongering and anti-communist rhetoric.

She offered British troops and naval forces to help Reagan begin again the task of policing the world which the US imperialists have shied away from since their defeat in the Vietnam war.

The three days resounded with bloodcurdling war-whoops and anti-Soviet declarations.

But while Thatcher if anything exceeded Reagan in Sabre-rattling, she also came under criticism from the US administration—for weakness!

Failure

US Treasury Secretary Donald Reagan slammed the Tories' failure to control the money supply, her inadequate tax cuts and her cash subsidies to industry.

More annoying to the US warmongers is likely to be the fact that Thatcher's spending cuts have also cut her ability to offer them significant military support in their plans to attack workers and peasants in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Central America.

*President Reagan is likely to be faced soon by a national strike of miners, called in protest at government plans to axe the scheme that compensates miners suffering from 'Black Lung'.

The UMWA has called upon its own members and also on the large non-unionised workforce in the American mining industry to mobilise in joint action against this attack.

Royal Wedding CARNIVAL OF REACTION

It was a bumper week for the monarchists. Fascists, aristocrats, chauvinists and bigots also did well.

Their first cause to cheer came from the rising fortunes of King Juan Carlos of Spain.

From a comparatively unnoticed, apparently insignificant figurehead of a supposedly "democratised" fascist regime, he emerged as a central arbiter of whether or not the military coup should succeed.

After a mere seven hours of deliberations—weighing the odds each way—he plumped for the restoration of "democracy", on even more rickety foundations than before.

In Britain, meanwhile, the final dope-tests, virginity tests, screening and degrading inquiries were being completed on Lady Diana Spencer before the announcement that Prince Charles is to marry her.

Raucous cheer

The whole bourgeois establishment let loose a raucous cheer. The wedding is an ideal vehicle to further their varied objectives.

*It boosts the institution of the monarch—a handy fall-back for the British capitalist class in the event of a frontal challenge to its control of the state machinery.

*It boosts the institution of



the family unit—through which millions of women less well-off than "Lady Di" find themselves reduced to economic dependence upon a man, chained to the home, and confined to menial domestic tasks.

*The church service will boost sagging interest in religion and the marriage ceremony. Mrs Whitehouse will be pleased.

*The ballyhoo began half-an-hour before the new unemployment figures came out: and it should last almost until the 3 million figure is reached. The Tories are delighted.

*Ghastly souvenirs are already being mass produced to give a lift to bankrupt potteries

and offer a brief reprieve to a few doomed plastics factories.

*Aristocrats and bourgeois parasites from all over the world will arrive to patronise London hotels—to the delight of Sir Charles Forte and his reactionary colleagues.

The ceremony will be a focal point for reactionaries of every stripe. Not least the fascist thugs of the British Movement, one of whom—the leader of "Hounslow SS"—expressed his support to a *Sunday Times* reporter:

"That is this way, we're pleased Prince Charles is getting married. We're all happy. We fight for the flag. Sieg Heil!"

New threat to Salvador masses

Last week saw the bizarre spectacle of Dennis Healey arguing against American action to stem the flow of arms to the freedom fighters in El Salvador.

Healey, like his colleagues in the Second International and a number of bourgeois governments headed by the Mexican regime, sees US intervention as a dangerous and open ended action which could only destabilise capitalism in El Salvador.

They seek instead a negotiated settlement with the bourgeois Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR).

crats bleat, there are ominous signs that the Nicaraguan junta, under economic and political pressure and direct military threats from Washington, may be weakening in its support for the guerrilla war being waged by the forces of the FMLN.

'Mistake'

One "high ranking" Sandinista leader reportedly told the reactionary *Newsweek* magazine:

"We have realised that our support for El Salvador could cost us more than we could afford to pay. It was a painful mistake. We were not the only

ones who were tricked into believing that a Marxist victory was at hand in El Salvador.

Yet the fact is that if there is a setback in El Salvador, the Nicaraguan regime itself will stand threatened.

The guerrilla forces in Salvador are in the front rank of the struggle against US imperialism. They must be actively supported by the British and international labour movement.

DEMONSTRATION

US Hands Off El Salvador!

Saturday 4 April at 2.30 pm.

Assemble 'The Plains' OXFORD

Women workers in the Six Counties

Part 2
by Mary Smythe

As in every other capitalist country, women in the six counties of Ireland suffer an additional burden of oppression.

Abortion is not available in the six counties. While middle class and bourgeois women can travel to England, working class women can rarely afford this.

Deaths at the hands of illicit abortionists are common. Family planning clinics do exist, but the slander campaigns of both the Catholic and Protestant church hierarchies deter many women from using them.

The 1979 statistics for rape released by the RUC revealed an increase of 23% over the previous year.

Chief Inspector Jean Gallagher gave an interview to the press in which she claimed that many rape victims "lead their attackers on", while many more "pretend" that they have been raped.

This reactionary approach—typical of the attitude and actions of the RUC—spell out the need to fight for the establishment of rape crisis centres.

This should be linked to a widespread propaganda campaign to warn Irish women who are raped of the likely consequences of reporting it to the police.

Intimidation

Since 1969 when British troops were sent into the six counties to smash the uprising of Catholic workers, a military police state has been established.

Working class women in nationalist areas face the daily threat of violence and intimidation from the British Army and RUC.

When going into town or walking on the streets, it is a daily occurrence to be forced to undergo a physical body search, have bags emptied and all contents opened and examined.

Women live under the constant barrage of obscenities hurled at them by the British Army.

At home, women face the threat of early morning raids when the Army break into homes, force all the family at gunpoint into one room while the house is ransacked.

This often results in the woman or members of her family being arrested, taken to a police or army barracks and interrogated for hours and days at a time.

Many nationalist women have been murdered by the British Army, while many more have had to bear the burden of grief when members of their families have been killed, tortured or imprisoned.

Daily terror

In addition to facing the daily terror of the occupying British Army nationalist working class areas face the constant threat of Loyalist terror gang attacks.

There are daily attacks on schoolchildren, going to and returning from school. There is the constant threat of Loyalist assassinations and petrol bombing of homes.

The recent spate of assassinations and bomb attacks are part of an upsurge in right wing terror fuelled by the growing militancy and combativity of the Catholic working class.

It is against this background of oppression and terror that the courage and determination of those women who take up the anti-imperialist struggle must be seen.

To speak out openly against the forces of oppression, to join the Republican movement or any anti-imperialist organisation demands untold sacrifice.

For women to take up the struggle demands not only a

willingness to risk their own lives but the agonising awareness that in so doing they are placing their entire family in the front line for Loyalist and British Army attacks.

It is in this context that we must salute the heroism of the women Prisoners of War in Armagh Jail. These women were

arrested under "emergency legislation", tortured and interrogated in British Army torture camps, tried in non-jury Diplock Courts and given lengthy sentences.

In the vast majority of the cases the only evidence was a statement signed or verbally admitted under torture.

In 1976, with the withdrawal of special category status, the women in Armagh adopted a courageous policy of non-co-operation with the prison regime, refusing to do any prison work.

Since that date they have been locked in their cells 23

hours a day and subjected to systematic harassment and beatings by the prison authorities in an attempt to break their fighting spirit.

Its only effect was to increase the women's determination. On February 7 1980 40 male warders invaded the women's wing in Armagh, beating the women and tearing their cells apart.

For two days, the women were locked in their cells and denied toilet facilities. At the end of this period the prison authorities offered toilet facilities as a "privilege".

The women demanded toilet facilities as a right, and being denied this, were forced onto the no-wash protest.

Living in faeces-covered cells, the risk of disease and infection is extremely high. Many of the women developed menstrual and kidney disorders as sanitary towels are thrown unwrapped into the cells and the women have no means of disposing of them.

They are denied all medical treatment.

Suffered most

The woman who has suffered most through lack of medical treatment is Pauline McLaughlin. Pauline was arrested on the basis of a signed statement, despite the fact that at her court case, it was shown that she was illiterate.

She was detained at "the Secretary of State's Pleasure" and served four years in Armagh Jail.

She went down to 4½ stone in weight, suffering from an undiagnosed illness, a symptom of which was an inability to digest food.

In October she was taken to Musgrave Park Military Hospital after a heart attack. She was

kept in solitary confinement in a locked cell, guarded by soldiers.

At her own request she returned to Armagh and in December rejoined the protest. She was consistently denied any medical treatment and in the words of cowardly Prison Doctor Cole: "It was her decision to remain on protest, therefore it was her decision to die."

Only in January, in the aftermath of the Hunger Strikes, was Pauline McLaughlin eventually released from custody on medical grounds.

On Monday 1 December three women prisoners began a hunger strike to the death for political status. They took the decision to hunger strike in their own right and in solidarity with male prisoners in the H Blocks.

On 18 December 1980 the hunger strike in the H Blocks was called off.

A representative of Atkins presented the male hunger strikers, then on the point of death, and their Commanding Officer with a 32-page document which the IRA leadership claim in effect acceded to the five demands of the prisoners.

The women prisoners ended their hunger strike the following day—but the no-wash protest continues.

The prisoners, backed by massive demonstrations throughout the 32 counties and a number of strikes and walk-outs, had seemed to have won a number of concessions.

However, the subsequent refusal of the government to implement the agreement shows that these gains can not be secured and extended without the independent mobilisation of the working class in the 32 counties in support of the prisoners as part of the daily struggle against imperialism and its agents.



Linwood must learn lessons of UCS!

By Ian MacCalman

Behind the enthusiasm and capacity to struggle of the 4,800 workers at Talbot Linwood there is a concerted effort by those in the leadership of the workers there to run the whole campaign against closure into the ground.

Both Ron Rigby and Jimmy Livingstone, the leading figures in the shop stewards committee, have given the workforce a perspective that can only lead to disillusion and defeat.

Claiming that they are a "responsible" leadership (responsible to whom?) they have given the go-ahead for five day per week working from now until closure.

Sections of the workforce have even gone on to overtime working, despite having already received their redundancy notices.

In the meantime, they argue, the Tory government and the Peugeot management must be pressured into securing a year's "stay of execution", whilst they seek another prospective buyer for the plant.

The continual references to a "UCS-style" campaign are indicative of the dangers in front.

The campaign in 1971-2 to prevent the closure of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, led by the Communist Party members, Reid and Airlie, was, under the guise of a "work in", directed at finding an alternative buyer and finished up with the implementation of the Ridley Plan for carving up the yards, the sale of the John Brown yard to Marathon and the concentration of production at Govan.

There must be no illusions about UCS in 1972 having been some kind of victory for the working class in the West of Scotland. It was an outright betrayal which has had extremely bad effects ever since in terms of confusing workers involved in redundancy and closure struggles about the correct course of action to be pursued.

(For the best analysis of the UCS campaign readers should consult the pamphlet by Stephen Johns, *Reformism on the Clyde*, New Park Publications, 1973).

Principled

Throughout the struggle Reid and Airlie rejected the policy of turning the work-in into an all-out occupation and making the UCS campaign the focal point for a struggle to bring down the Tory government.

There were then principled socialists, like Joe Moriarty at Clydebank, who argued for that course of action in mass meetings, in face of the virulent slander and windy rhetoric of James Reid.

In that situation, with a mass movement mobilised behind Reid, it was extremely difficult to turn the tide of the campaign in a principled socialist direction, but it should never be

forgotten that there were those who had the conviction and courage to stand up and argue for these policies.

Those stewards at Linwood today who are now (but this time in a much more favourable context) taking up a similar struggle, must be given every encouragement and support.

The miasma of confusion and lies spread by the leaderships of the STUC and the Labour Party must be swept aside.

The first lie that must be nailed is that the Peugeot company had ever any intention of making Linwood a going concern.

Anyone who is acquainted with the Eurofinance Report commissioned by the unions will know that Peugeot took over Chrysler UK primarily to lay hands on the extensive chain of retail outlets that company had built up in Britain. Now they have secured that at a knock-down price, Linwood must go and so also must the Coventry operation.

Let us have no illusions on this score. Begging Peugeot to stay at Linwood is less productive than spitting in the wind.

What of the other so-called "alternatives"? Much has been made of the possibilities of attracting Nissan-Datsun to take over the Linwood site.

That is as much a non-starter as pressuring Peugeot to stay. Nissan has made it clear that they require a greenfield site to build up their operations from scratch.

Another kite being flown is that the Tory government should be pressured into improving regional development grants so as to attract industrialists to take over the Linwood plant and break it up into smaller units.

Ludicrous

Strathclyde University Business School has reckoned that, on past experience, for that to be a viable proposition, 200 new enterprises would have to be attracted to take up premises on the site. To even conceive of such a possibility in the midst of the present recession with companies folding daily is too ludicrous for words.

However much the leadership of the STUC and the Labour Party may try to twist and turn, the policy of occupation remains the only way forward.

How can the unions involved call upon other trade unionists, such as dockers, to black Talbot products when their own members at Linwood are busily producing them?

Even to pose the question shows how hollow is their position.

But behind an occupation on such a scale as Linwood the working class in the West of Scotland and throughout Britain would immediately be mobilised for an all-out confrontation with the Tory government.

The bringing down of this government must be seen as the first step towards the creation of a government which truly represents the interests of the working class, a government which will expropriate Peugeot assets, nationalise Linwood under the control of the workforce, invest in an integrated car plant and expand production as part of a planned socialist economy.

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LAMBETH AND THE FIGHT TO DEFEAT THE TORIES

As Labour councils up and down the country decide on rate levels for the coming financial year the question of how to respond to Tory attacks on local government finance is sharply posed. *Socialist Press* has consistently argued for a policy of mobilising the working class behind Labour councils in a confrontation with the Tories. But some of Labour councils have argued for raising rates in order to 'buy time' to prepare a movement against the Tories. Lambeth council leader TED KNIGHT is recognised as expressing this view most consistently. *Socialist Press* supporters KEITH WHITE and IAN SWINDALE recently interviewed him and the first part of this interview is printed below. The second part will appear next week.

KW: You talk about building a movement, I wonder if you could say what you actually mean by this—how you try to build the movement in Lambeth and what you see as the aim of the movement.

TK: I think that when we talk about the need to build the movement, we are talking about a movement against the Tory government, we are talking about a movement which links Labour councils, Labour MPs, trades unions and community groups which represent areas of particular need within the borough together, to weld them together into a movement, to extend that outside the boundaries of Lambeth with the direction of changing government policy with, because I don't believe we can persuade such a change, the object of bringing down that government.

And that's the way we see it. How have we done it? We haven't built that movement but made a contribution towards it, by posing very clearly the effects of Tory monetary policy in relation to working class living standards, shown how their objective of destroying the welfare state at a local level has in practice been carried out, and so raised the consciousness of both trades unions within the establishment of town hall employees. And also we think those groups outside who represent particular need interests—we brought them around the position of the council in that fight.

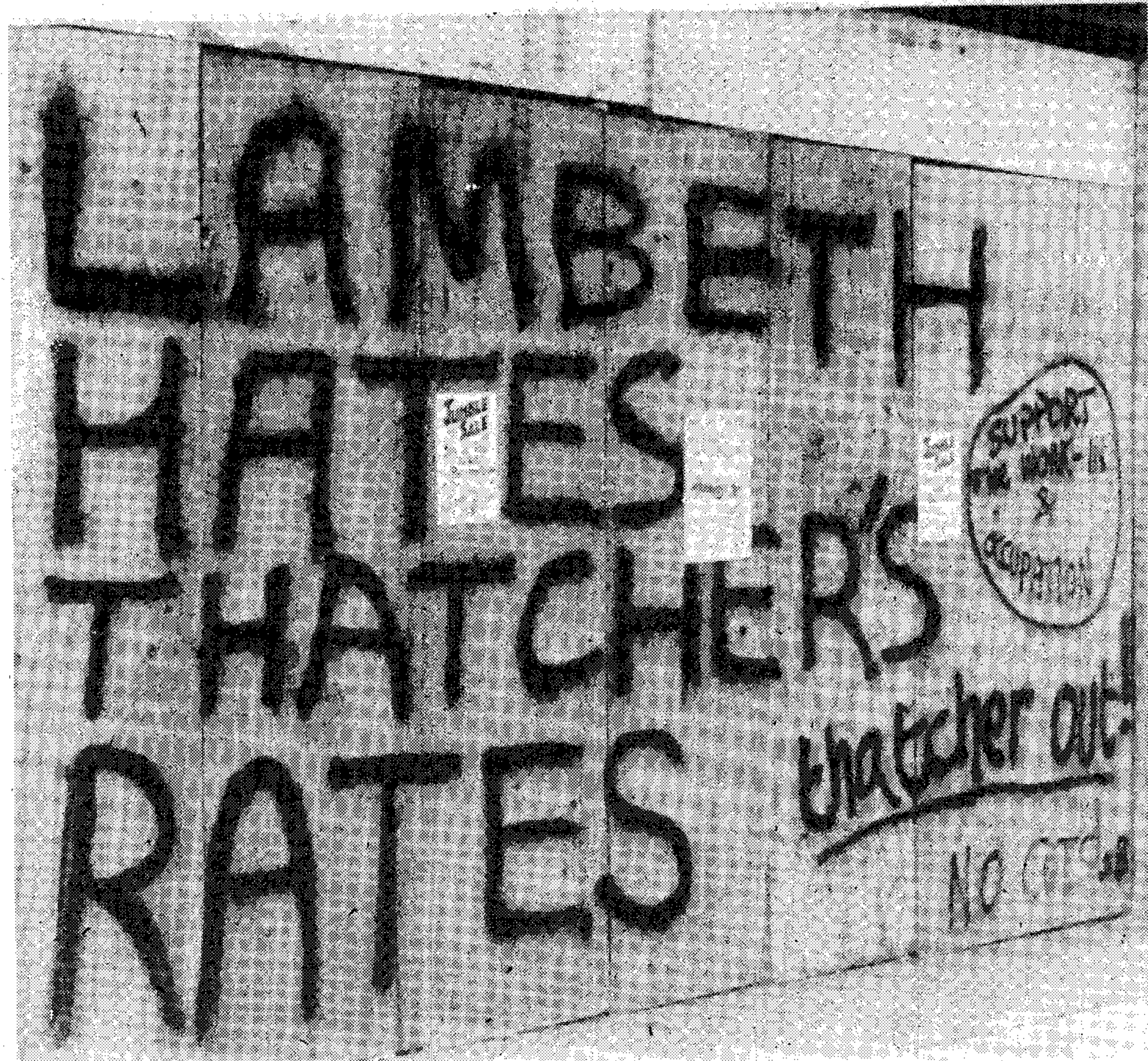
I think there is sufficient evidence of that here. Our problem is that we haven't been able to widen the frontiers of that too well. But then of course it's because the fight against the Tories is at various stages of development in various parts of the country.

And in local government, where we have obviously had to concentrate, the situation there is that because councils have accommodated to Tory attacks, this tends to defuse the fight back.

Unions in particular have concentrated on one-off struggles of course in their own particular authorities and not been able to bring that onto a national front against the Tory government.

But I think the indications we have received from the conferences which were originally initiated by Lambeth—the Local Government in Crisis Conferences—have tended to show that workers are willing to come to grips with this government. What is lacking is leadership. We think that we have made a contribution towards that but we are still at the beginning of that particular movement.

KW: One of the problems which arises from that is that you say that you are at the beginning of the movement, but certain councils such as Sheffield, Lambeth and Lothian that have attempted to take the most left stance, are actually in a sense out on a limb. What do you think about the problem then that faces, say Sheffield, Lambeth and Lothian as places with the most developed opposition. What sort of links do you see as being possible to establish



Support for the Lambeth council's stand

between those places in terms of joint declarations and things like that?

TK: We have obviously looked at that. The problem that you face with, for instance, Lothian, is that there are different laws relating to Scottish local government which tends to place them in a somewhat different situation to us. We have discussed with them and basically kept in touch.

Sheffield, while it has maintained a generally similar line to ourselves, because financially they were in a better position than Lambeth because they had resources, balances, this has tended to ease the situation for them somewhat.

That's what I meant a little earlier, that in local government it's at different stages because conditions regrettably are different in the boroughs.

I think the problem we are facing is that as we are out on a limb and so are the other boroughs that you mentioned, in isolation I don't think we can defeat the government.

Our contribution must be to continuously attempt to raise consciousness, seek agreements where we can on unified policies, to keep pushing the Labour Parties and the trade unions into that fight with the perspective of bringing down the government as the only answer and that's what we're hoping to do.

In order to continue that process I think that it is necessary for Labour to remain in control of these authorities and therefore I reject arguments which are presented which will take us out of that control situation. I think that without the platform of the local government, without the availability of protecting local services then frankly we would be isolated and destroyed very rapidly.

KW: What assessment then would you make of the

Lambeth conferences I think the last Lambeth conference passed a resolution which said that it was important to establish local steering committees and local conferences in different areas. What do you think of that as a direction forward?

TK: Yes, I support that. You can't mobilise a movement artificially from a particular geographical point. You have to have local involvement, local action, which is developed on an area basis, and therefore I support the line that in local areas, that there should be a liaison, that there should be a working out of the situation, agreement on what tactics can be drawn up, what tactics can be fought for in that particular area. I would say I supported that position.

I think the first conference certainly indicated the willingness of people to engage in a fight. Again the lack of leadership which I referred to was a continuous cry.

The second conference indicated that yes, there is again a strong recognition of the need for that fight. Again I think a total lack of leadership was being posed.

At the second conference the debate degenerated in my opinion on what Lambeth council was doing. We had people there from areas who obviously were not taking up the matter at their own area level, but were merely hoping that an action by Lambeth would provoke the necessary breakthrough in the class struggle.

So they divided themselves on how they saw Lambeth in operation and I think that was regrettable. But if anything positive came out of it I think it was the move to have a wider base of activity throughout the country.

KW: What's your assessment of the meetings you've spoken at? How do you think you've been able to use the Lambeth experience to develop the movement in areas where you've spoken?

TK: I think that the way the contribution has been made from Lambeth is the fact that Lambeth is seen as the focal point of the struggle nationally, that even if there are disagreements on the way in which we have approached tactically the question, that what it has done is to pose the issues very clearly.

I think that it does also provoke people to argue not just on abstract principled questions but also on real tactical questions and I think probably as a consequence of that we have seen some developments or that we have been able to assist developments.

Whether they have been in exactly the direction we took is immaterial. People in struggle will move within their own experience and within what resources they see available to them.

We have been able to show at least that it is possible to take the stand that we have, which is primarily a no cuts position; that we have been able to pose the limitations of that struggle and I don't think I've ever hesitated to say that there are limitations. I think that that, in itself, brings the contribution of Lambeth's experience to their debates and that's worthwhile. The government's attack is relentless. They will proceed firmly on their position over the next period and so people who thought that it was perhaps somewhat abstract will find that it's no longer an abstract issue.

IS: You say you think the Tories are going to proceed relentlessly on their course. What implications then do you think that has for the Lambeth council and where is the



Saying it with flowers, the interflora backlash



Knight

Lambeth council going to go next in terms of its no cuts policy?

TK: I think we will make every attempt to retain our no cuts policy without cuts in services, without loss of jobs and we will continue to use the rates to maintain that situation.

IS: Do you not think that this contains the threat of losing control of the borough anyway to the District Auditor or whatever?

TK: I don't think it does. The situation in Lambeth is that we haven't placed ourselves in a position where they have been able to use those other methods against us.

We're continuously working under the threat of the District Auditor, but I think that we have been able to pose in the course of that certain key problems that may rebound on the Tories.

I think, for instance, we're in a major one at the moment. We have been advised by our own legal advisers and also by our Director of Finance and

chief officers that because Heseltine has threatened a further penalty in the course of the next financial year, if we don't reduce our spending to avoid that possible penalty then we could be in a surcharge situation as far as our councillors are concerned.

Now we have taken that situation up, and since, according to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, it affects half the authorities in the country, this may force a retreat on the part of Heseltine or a re-evaluation of the situation.

In other words I think we are able to use our experiences to fight back at the Tories on issues like that.

I think it also poses another very important issue within the Labour Party and that is the one that we raised at the Blackpool conference (of Labour Party councillors) last week which is what is the role of the District Auditor, what are the roles of the councillors? Will the new Labour government give us a clear indication and pledge that they will remove such surcharges and also any bans from office.

And I think the support we received—widespread—even across political levels within the Labour Party, and the intransigent position of the Parliamentary leadership, poses another big issue within the party.

So I think we are able to use the experiences here in a number of key ways, and in Camden of course.

I don't share the pessimism that flows from those comrades who want to seek a quick way out. There isn't the need for such pessimism. I think the working class is ready to fight. I think it is a question of building leadership. And I don't think you necessarily build leadership by becoming martyrs on a cross at the earliest opportunity.

1931: LABOUR'S FIRST 'GANG OF THREE'

Part One

By Colin Morrow



MacDonald with Thomas (centre) leaving a Privy Council meeting in 1924

As Roy Jenkins, the 'Gang of Three' and their motley assortment of right wing supporters begin to quit the Labour Party, a number of questions about 'Labourism' have been thrown open to public debate.

For example, what is the difference between socialism and social democracy?

In particular, when we talk of 'social democracy', which for the likes of Williams and Owen or Foot for that matter, comes first: defence of the interests of the working class in the struggle for socialism; or defence of the interests of capitalism and its state in the form of *bourgeois* democracy?

Another, equally important question is why the reformist Labour Party, with its idea of gradually winning socialism through Parliament, continually spawns reactionary, crypto-Tory groups like that around Reg Prentice, the Social Democratic Alliance, or now the much inflated Council for Social Democracy?

Witch-hunt

And why, when such anti-socialist groups appear, does the leadership of the party, instead of driving them out, beg them to stay?

This is particularly important when we bear in mind the constant witch-hunts against socialists in the Labour Party, (such as Oxford Socialist Press supporter Ted Heslin), who want to be members!

Ever groups like the Militant tendency are constantly subjected to witch-hunting inquiries.

Thus, on the eve of the January 24 Special Conference, Foot stated that he wanted yet another investigation of Militant's activities. He has sought no such investigation of the Council for Social Democracy.

To understand recent developments in the Labour Party and draw out their real political significance it is useful to look back to the 1930s, and the split from the Labour Party in 1931.

James Ramsay MacDonald is now remembered by the labour movement as the arch traitor who abandoned the Labour government in order to secure a 'coalition' National Government which included 472 Tory MPs.

Lessons

Unfortunately, while this is true, as is the additional point that the split occurred over the determination of MacDonald

and his supporters to cut the dole by 10%, this simple truth masks a number of other more significant lessons for workers about the politics of the Labour Party and particularly its leadership.

For, in reality, we learn nothing simply by branding MacDonald, Snowden and JH Thomas—the then 'Gang of 3'—as traitors.

The important point is, why did they become traitors to their class? And how did they come to that position when they were the official leaders of the Labour Party and its government?

'Left' MP

Ramsay MacDonald was a founding member of the Labour Party, and for much of his life was regarded as a 'left' MP. He was a leading figure in the independent Labour Party, defended conscientious objectors during the First World War and became the first Labour Prime Minister in 1924.

When his short-lived government was driven out of office after less than a year, the main weapon used by the Tories to attack MacDonald and Labour at the polls was the claim that they were Communist agents. The fake "Zinoviev letter" ensured there would be no re-election for MacDonald.

JH Thomas, the second of the trio, also had a long pedigree in the labour movement. Leader of the railwaymen's union in the 1920s, he had been a Labour MP since 1912. Thomas personified the links between the trade unions and the Labour Party they had created.

Finally, there was Phillip Snowden. Like MacDonald, he was a 'left'. In the First World War he had, together with MacDonald, repudiated the Labour Party's majority support for the war policy of the Conservatives. He joined the first Labour cabinet in 1924.

'Continuation'

Yet, these were the men who in 1931 were to abandon their past to join hands with the Tories.

Or did they? In many respects there is much to be learned from MacDonald's own speech to his constituents in Seaham on October 12 1931, ten days after his expulsion from the Labour Party, where he explained his decision.

In this speech he *denied* that he had changed his politics, argued that his decision to form the National Government was a *continuation* of his Labour politics and concluded by saying:

"We shall look back to this time when for a moment—for it is to be but a moment—the men who made the Labour Party seem to turn away from it."

[our emphasis] In fact—though in very ironic fashion—there is much truth in this. For MacDonald, socialism meant "social democracy".

He was a reformist, who believed in gradual, peaceful parliamentary change within capitalism, with socialism as some distant 'never-never land' as one of his colleagues put it.

As such, he was opposed fundamentally to the notion of a workers' revolution. He was, despite his 'left' reputation, an anti-communist, and, like the rest of his reformist co-thinkers, he saw parliamentary democracy as the key to the future.

Nor was he, in this, any different from those who in 1931 chose to remain loyal to

the Labour Party.

Throughout the 1920s the Labour Party refused to allow the British Communist Party the same rights of affiliation given to the Fabians and the ILP.

The Labour Party, which men like MacDonald and Thomas had helped to build, was *not* a pure workers' party but a *bourgeois* workers' party.

Its politics were the politics of class collaboration, not of class struggle, and its perspectives were restricted *within* the confines of the continued existence of capitalism.

In government, therefore, it sought simply to manage capitalism better—by legislating reforms for the working class—not to smash the system of capitalist exploitation. There lies the key to MacDonald's treachery.

Nor can it be said that this was concealed before the momentous days of August 1931.

Those, like Arthur Henderson, Lansbury and Attlee who remained 'loyal' to Labour had already passed through the experience of the 1926 General Strike.

There they had experienced at first hand the politics of JH Thomas—whose commitment to *bourgeois* democracy was so great as to lead him to say, on the eve of the strike, that he hoped that Baldwin's Tory government would *not* be defeated. Thomas worked ruthlessly throughout the nine days of the strike to destroy the unity around the miners.

Such open treachery by Thomas in the General Strike did not prevent loyal Labourites like Henderson and Lansbury from serving in the same Cabinet as Thomas three years later.

After all, Thomas personified the politics of Labour as the political wing of the trade

unions, trade unions themselves led by reformist social democrats!

Nor is it surprising that MacDonald, having decided to dissolve the two year old Labour government on August 24 1931, was concerned *not* to destroy his old party.

In a meeting of Junior Ministers he advised them to *remain* in the Labour Party. "You have your careers to think of," he told them.

But probably more importantly at the end of his stirring advice he added, "you still have a job to do." MacDonald knew his Labour Party just as well as the bankers, businessmen and Tories knew their MacDonald.

And today the capitalists still know their Healeys, Hattersleys and Foots!

Continued next week

People's march— Never mind the quality ...!

The forthcoming 'People's March' against unemployment can offer a useful focus around which to campaign for a working class solution to the crisis.

But it will also offer almost unprecedented opportunities for woolly rhetoric from do-nothing bureaucrats.

The basis of the march is a cross class alliance of those 'concerned' with the problem of unemployment.

At last month's Coventry Trades Council meeting almost an hour was given over to a speech from Regional TUC official and CP member Pete Carter outlining the sort of support that is being generated.

'Broad colour'

The broad nature of the march means that it must have a 'broad' colour as its symbol.

Red (bemused delegates were informed) is apparently a 'narrow' colour; so green has

been adopted.

Up and down the country support for the march is gaining ground—especially (so it seems) from sections of the clergy.

In Coventry, for example, the church bells will ring and a special service will be held when the march arrives in the city.

Another significant area of support mentioned by Carter was 'sections of the Territorial Army'. Twenty-one gun salutes may yet be in order.

With such a broad base of support it is not surprising that the march has no programme of demands to fight unemployment. Nor that it will apparently end up outside Buckingham Palace!

Carter was able to report that the growing support (and hopes of a royal wave, perhaps?) had so excited down-in-the-mouth TUC officials that "you could see the gleam in their eyes"!

Despite its 'narrow' quality red will be allowed on the march at specific stages. Appar-

ently Coventry Trades Council's banner can be carried—within the city boundaries!

How the march organisers would respond to the emerald green banners of Irish Republicans we can hazard a more than educated guess.

In each area along the route local trades councils, union branches and Labour Parties must organise working class contingents behind *red* banners, with slogans pointing to the need for independent organisation of the unemployed and a socialist solution to the crisis.

Competition.

To show our feelings on the march, Socialist Press is running a "breadth" competition.

All you have to do:

1) Place the following colours in order of breadth:—Pink; Blue; Yellow; Orange; Brown.

2) Place the following leaders in order of breadth:

—Roy Hattersley; Michael Foot; Gordon McLennan; Shirley Williams; Cyril Smith; Albert Spenswick.

3) How Broad is the Broad Left?

a) Leftish; b) Centre Left; c) Broadly right wing.

In the event of a tie the winner will be the entrant with the best original title for a People's March hymn.

The prize is a handsomely bound (in green leather) copy of the CP's forthcoming book, *Praying for Jobs: the Marxist Approach*.

Fighting the cuts...

NO CUTS!

Camden workers join with Labour Left

By Graham Shurety

The task of preparing workers for industrial action against the Tories and the Labour Council continues in Camden.

That task is less straightforward than it might have appeared.

This week has seen the working class move towards strike action—yet not without setbacks that will limit the impact on March 4—the rate fixing day that NUPE has chosen to fire its first shot, with a one day strike.

We reported last week on the reactionary intervention of NALGO National Organiser Mike Blick into a mass meeting of Camden members.

This helped not only to pull back NALGO members from solidifying with NUPE on the one-day strike, but also to reverse the principled position of the branch executive of resisting the Council's attempts to introduce voluntary redundancy and redeployment.

The Executive thus found itself in the impossible position of being mandated to co-operate with the Council's attempts to reduce the workforce.

Rejecting this mandate, all but nine of the 40 member executive resigned last week.

They aim to stand again on the platform of no redeployment, no voluntary redundancies and support for the JSSC steering committee's plan for selective strike action and support for tenants' rate and rent strikes.

The UCATT leadership, dominated by Communist Party members and supporters, continues to vacillate between advocating all-out indefinite strike action and complete inaction.

The shop stewards committee decided two weeks ago to take no action on March 4 and accept the "inevitable" loss of 200 jobs.

Since then, however, a meeting with council officers revealed the pathetic amounts being offered to those taking voluntary redundancy.

Indefinite strike

A leaflet circulated to all members on Tuesday spelt out the dangers of VR.

The stewards meeting on Wednesday voted to propose indefinite strike action to a mass meeting on Tuesday 3 March.

Given the retreat by NALGO officials and the vacillation of the UCATT leadership, it is hardly surprising that the resolve of some NUPE stewards

has been crumbling.

At a fully attended NUPE shop stewards committee on Monday 23 February, stewards representing two of Camden's three refuse depots pulled their members out of the strike.

And then, in what appeared to be an organised manoeuvre, they turned up at a section meeting of the Cressy Road refuse depot on Thursday morning.

Rejecting the arguments of shop steward John Seymour and Branch Secretary John Suddaby the Cressy Road men voted to follow the other depots and go into work on March 4.

At this stage it is hard to assess the impact of this action on the rest of the NUPE workforce.

It would be wrong to be demoralised by this apparent disarray.

The fact that 31 out of 40 members of the NALGO executive stand united in their resolve to persuade their members to accept the campaign adopted by the JSSC is a strength which is encouraging.

However the tactic of resigning en masse can be disastrous if the right wing organise to destroy the principled lead so far given.

The present leadership feels

confident of gaining a new mandate for their militant policies.

The way all out action has been posed to the UCATT membership seems almost designed to lead to rejection by the members. All-out till when? Until the Tories are brought down?

With no fall back position of support for NUPE's guerrilla actions, this all-or-nothing position could lead to capitulation without a struggle.

Then, of course, the argument will be put forward that the working class were unwilling to fight!

It is important that militants begin to challenge the ultimatum that the Stalinist leadership is presenting to UCATT members.

Nevertheless it is clear that with no room to manoeuvre the UCATT leadership is being forced down the road to confrontation.

Paradoxically it is those NUPE sections who were the least militant in the low pay strike of 1979 that are the hardest hit by the Council-imposed pay freeze.

The whole social services

section—who were the weakest link in that strike—look like holding firm for March 4.

They have given a lead that other NUPE sections must follow.

As the events in Southend have shown, no section of public employees is immune from the rapacious Tories.

Socialists in NUPE must build on the strengths forged in the fight for action on March 4 and persuade those who have hesitated this time round that they must begin to take part in a united campaign.

The NUPE leadership have so far correctly refused to back down on strike action on March 4 despite their retreat by the refuse sections.

They see the strike on March 4 as just the beginning of a campaign and for that reason they have correctly gone for a mass picket of the Town Hall at 5 pm that night rather than a march during working hours.

This means that all workers in the Borough have a chance to express their hostility to the Council's decisions.

Furthermore the boiler section has already started industrial action blacking all repairs

to Town Hall boilers and getting agreement from Shell TGWU stewards to black oil deliveries.

In the Labour Party the Camden Labour Left is fighting to swing support behind the ten rebel left councillors who are campaigning against the Tories and the cuts imposed by the majority on the council.

The chances of such a united campaign were advanced on Tuesday 24 February when the St. Pancras North GMC (traditionally the most conservative of the three CLPs in Camden) voted for a resolution put forward by a supporter of the Camden Labour Left.

The resolution 'disassociated' the GMC from the Labour Group majority, supported the councillors who voted against the cuts and pledged the party to throw its full weight behind the unions and tenants' associations in industrial action and rent and rate strikes.

So—behind the appearances of division, the working class in Camden is moving into conflict with the Tories.

And in that movement workers are examining and testing leadership on every level within the labour movement.

No rent rises!

Mass demonstrations by tenants clashes with police outside council meetings, and the threat of a rent strike at the end of March have had an effect on Paisley's Labour council.

At a meeting on Thursday last, Renfrew District Council decided to reverse its earlier decision to impose a rent increase of 50% on the people of Paisley.

Instead they agreed a 35%

increase plus a 60% increase in rates.

Tom McNamara, a leading militant in the Ferguslie Park tenants' movement, which has been at the forefront of the tenants' struggles in Paisley, commented:

"The fight will go on as far as I am concerned. The councillors claim they cut the increase because of the imminent closure at Linwood, and not because of what is

referred to as 'mob rule'.

We know this small concession was a result of pressure by the tenants alongside the trade union and labour movement in the area.

In my opinion the committee leading the struggle against rent increases will not accept this position but will go ahead with the rent strike."

He said the maximum increase the committee might be prepared to accept would be one in line with inflation over the last year.

NO RATE INCREASES

The media in Scotland had a heyday last week with the announcement of a 122% increase in rates by Stirling District Council.

In a period of huge rate increases as councils try to defend services against Tory government cuts, the increase in Stirling sets a new record.

In announcing the increase, council convenor Eddie Monaghan said the administration had decided to face up to the government challenge to local government.

The level of service they planned would require the employment of 111 new staff.

Explaining this to *Socialist Press*, chairman of the Labour Group Ian Wyles said:

"Having won control of the council a year and a half ago, the Labour Group has now drawn up plans for expanding the property maintenance department to a position where any contracts going 'outside' will be exceptional.

We have maintained all services, as promised in our

election manifesto. We have refused to implement any redundancies, in keeping with the national policy of the Labour Party.

Recently we announced an average increase of £1.15 in our rents, an 18% increase. The Tory government wanted us to increase them by £2.80—a 43% increase.

Because we refused they cut £1 million off our housing borrowing allocation. This, on top of other cuts, has led to the rate increases.

Next year we will have bigger problems. The Tories are taking over direct control of council spending, and will try to set tight limits, legally binding."

Cuts in services

The total impact on rates in Stirling District will only be a 50% increase. The Regional Council Labour Group have made cuts in services and have had a policy of 'natural wastage'.

Their expected 25% increase in rates lowers the average to

50%.

Lothian Regional Council, another council where the Labour Group have refused to make cuts in services, announced a rates increase of 50%.

This was narrowly carried in the council after the defection of the ex-convenor Peter Wilson to the Council for Social Democracy and support for the Tories.

However Wilson failed to carry any other Labour councillors with him.

Dundee District Council, who are maintaining services and refusing to put any increase on the rents, have yet to announce their rate increase. However another record increase is expected.

These three councils have followed the policy of the Labour Coordinating Committee and have maintained services at the expense of rate increases.

However the effect of the increases on working class living standards and the upping of the stakes by the Tory government is bringing growing recognition



Cuts Conference

POLICIES TO STOP THE CUTS

Called jointly by the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement and Socialist Organiser

Saturday March 21 from 10.30 am. to 5.00 pm.

Islington Central Library, Holloway Road, London N7

Details and credentials from: SO/CDLM Cuts Conference, c/o 66 Brookesley Street, London E3.

that the only way forward is open confrontation with the government.

The LCC has not faced up to this challenge. Originally they had seen this as a problem two or three years ahead. But the toughening attitude of the government means that this question now stares them in the face.

Five resolutions on resistance to local authority cuts have been submitted to the annual congress of the STUC to be held in April.

Stirling and District Trades Council have called for a joint

conference of the STUC and the Scottish Council of the Labour Party to discuss "a united response to the government's attacks on local government and other public services".

The Fire Brigades Union have asked for the STUC and Labour Party to discuss the possibility of a "no cuts no rate rises" policy.

Midlothian and East Lothian Trades Council are asking for "mass action aimed at forcing a General Election and returning a Labour government pledged to socialist policies."

The LCC cannot duck the question much longer. Only a policy of developing mass action with a view to bringing down the Tory government can defend working class living standards now under attack on all fronts.

*An interesting comment on the role of the media should be added. One Labour supporter stopped and interviewed in a Stirling street by a TV reporter found the interview came to an abrupt end when she declared her support for the 122% increase in rates!

SERTUC: talk about anything—except action

By our Cuts Correspondent

"Of all the regional councils in this country, the SERTUC is recognised as being the most active."

We hold more conferences, for example, just this month we've had Working Women in the '80s, the Engineering Conference and now today a conference on cuts.

We are setting up seven different industry committees—communication, co-ordination, organisation are the central questions here today: on local, regional and national level."

This was Jack Dromey (Secretary of SERTUC) introducing himself at one of the workshops at last Saturday's SERTUC conference, opposing public spending cuts.

His aim was to bedazzle us 'lads and lasses' with an endless stream of slick talk of "solving difficulties in liaison", "identifying problem areas", "being rooted in reality", and of course "getting working structures fully operational"—but by the end of the day, the delegates who had attended had realised that for all the fast talking, Jack 'the lad' Dromey (with a little help from his friends) had sold them yet another bum steer.

Identical

It was another public spending cuts conference, following the two previous, identical ones.

It seems that Dromey had made a mistake in trying to pull off the hat trick.

The attendance was small—only about 100.

It ran to exactly the same formula as all the other

SERTUC conferences.

In the morning came speeches from the row of carefully selected safe speakers from the network of SERTUC committees.

They gave what was without doubt a terrible account of cuts, closures, rundown and unemployment, causing suffering and deprivation throughout the previously "affluent" South.

And from listening to the speakers you could be totally convinced by their fatalism that the cuts were inevitably going to be carried out in full because we were defenceless.

There was, however, one ray of hope in the morning. Mike Birken from the civil service unions spoke of his members' determination to beat the 6% cash limits.

He issued the clarion call of 'follow the miners' example'. And he spoke of the 40 strike centres being set up around the country.

But you could depend on Nick Sharman, Dromey's sidekick to steer us right back into the cul-de-sac. He pointed out that the real purpose of the conference was 'activity' not action.

In the afternoon we were herded into workshops—based on which locality we came from—for the purpose of "link forging".

In the workshop I was in there were struggles that were reported.

But delegates who had come wanting advice on strategy and tactics in campaigns were confronted with mumbo-jumbo about general inter-county communication.

There were delegates from Wycombe and District Action Committee Against the Cuts. They talked of the fight to prevent 56 hospital beds and facilities being lost in the Wycombe area.

Also, as Wycombe and

District had lost their rate support grant and the council were putting up rents by a staggering 56% they wanted to discuss how they could organise a rent strike.

Liz Page from Southampton Trades Council talked of the fight to keep open an ante-natal clinic in a deprived working class community.

The strongest speaker, however, was Kate White from the Longworth Hospital Occupation Committee.

She told of how just last week one old lady who had been refused a bed at Longworth at Christmas before the AHA raid had been found dead on a cold stone floor in her cottage where she had been trying to light an electric fire with matches.

Because of effects of cuts, unlike the speakers she had heard in the morning, the staff at Longworth had decided to fight back and, seeking advice

from supporters in COHSE, the Health Service JTUC and the local Trades Council had occupied.

She said that they had all felt let down by the union's officers and officials.

Kate pointed at Dromey, saying:

"It's the likes of you, sitting pretty there, away from us who are doing the fighting that are the problem."

You have all the power and the know-how: but you keep it from us and leave us to struggle alone until it's too late.

No wonder Maggie Thatcher is getting away with it all! You have us here talking about everything except how to get on and fight the cuts! It's not the talking but the *doing* I want to see."

Southend—the fight goes on!

On the day that Southend Council signed a contract with Exclusive Cleaning to hive off the refuse department, hundreds of dustmen and their supporters marched through the town.

Southend dustmen, on their second one-day strike, were joined by workers from as far afield as Brent, Lambeth and Camden and other parts of London.

Banners on the march came from NUPE London Division, TGWU Region 1, Camden NUPE and Southend Trades Council.

Speakers at the rally included Ron Keating from NUPE and Larry Smith from the TGWU and TUC General Council.

Shop steward Arthur Smith is confident that with such support the council can be forced to follow the example of the government and do a U-turn.

In order to build up support in the community the dustmen, members of the TGWU, have delivered a letter to all the households in the area explaining their case.

Paying more

The letter points out that the contractors are interested only in profit and in the long-term the ratepayers will end up paying more.

Already council appliances are being sold off at dirt-cheap prices and the amount local traders have to pay is being

doubled.

As well as trying to enlist the support of ratepayers, the council workers are contemplating further, more drastic, industrial action to force the council to back down.

Such action must obviously be given the maximum support by the TGWU and everyone else concerned to defend the public sector.

Evans, the boss of Exclusive Cleaning, clearly sees Southend as the thin end of the wedge that will take him into profitable London boroughs.

Already some, including Labour-controlled ones, are said to be interested.

'We only won a verbal agreement'

What do you think was gained by the strike?

The only gain was it involved Scargill with Ezra which got guarantees which we wouldn't have got without strike action.

I don't trust Ezra who three months ago was denying that there would be any pit closures.

But how can the government and NCB back down from their agreements?

They'll be more subtle; Gormley remarked on Monday (while saying the Welsh lads had jumped the gun) that it wasn't the fact that they are closing pits that he objected to but the

speed at which closures were being implemented.

Gormley wanted a national ballot which would have taken about 3 weeks—in which time he would have negotiated higher redundancy pay. He hoped by doing so to get the vote his way, which would have been for no industrial action.

It was a public backdown by the government though, wasn't it?

Over the last couple of years unions have backed down in other industries, allowing their members to take wage cuts and join the dole queue.

The government thought the miners would back down: but

Socialist Press interviews Burt Whittle, NUM, Markham Main Colliery, Armthorpe, about the outcome of the miners' strike.

they were wrong.

But we've only got verbal agreements.

What role do you think transport, railway and other sections of workers played?

They backed us up totally in Wales and if this had happened nationwide it could have led to a general strike and brought the government down.

Do you think that's why the government backed down?

Yes, they would have taken us on if we had been on our own. But really the Tories haven't backed down, they are just buying time, and they will come back when they have defeated other sections of workers.

Would you agree that the Tories have made a retreat?

Yes, but only a tactical retreat. They'll come back again.

What do you think the water workers' pay claim had to do with the retreat?

I think that came into it but mainly the solidarity we got from railway workers was the main factor because you see, no matter how much stocks they have they can't shift it with that type of solidarity. I hope the water workers fight for solidarity in action and not just verbal solidarity.

Has the strike changed your thinking in any way?

Yes, it's given me a lot

more confidence in the rank and file working class, particularly the miners, here in Yorkshire.

The ballot for industrial action against pit closures was 86% in favour of industrial action.

Do you think the 15 to 8 vote by the NUM executive to return to work was a sell out?

Yes, we should have ignored it and action carried on until there were cast iron signed agreements, saying that there would be no pit closures. As a matter of fact, when Gormley announced the deal, we at Markham Main came out on unofficial strike.

Do you think Yorkshire should have been called out alongside the Welsh miners?

Yes I do. Scargill had an 86% mandate from the membership and should have called us out straight away even though the Yorkshire closures hadn't been announced.

It wasn't an area question it was a national question and even when closures were announced for Yorkshire on the Wednesday we still were not called out on strike.

A major part of the NUM campaign was for import controls. What is your opinion of campaigning for import controls?

By import controls we are only exporting unemployment. Foreign workers aren't the cause of recession, it is the ruling class who are to blame.

The enemy is the British ruling class, not foreign workers.

CRISIS IN SUGAR INDUSTRY

The closure of Tate and Lyle's Liverpool refinery and four BSC refineries highlights the crisis in the sugar industry.

There is no glut. Last year saw a world production deficit of 5 million tonnes. This year's deficit is expected to be 2-3 million tonnes.

Indeed traditional exporters of sugar—such as India, Thailand, Mexico and Peru—imported last year, due to poor

crops.

High exports from EEC stocks have offset the immediate world shortage, and reduced the EEC production surplus of 4 million tonnes last year alone.

In Britain, Agriculture Minister Peter Walker has slapped an 18% tax on all European farm imports and refused to cut British sugar beet quotas below 1.15 million tonnes.

He is being pressed along this path by the NFU and by BSC—

the sole refiners of sugar beet. Despite profits of £31 million, BSC are threatening to close four more refineries if quotas are cut.

But Tate and Lyle, backed by African, Caribbean and Pacific sugar producing countries want a drastic reduction in beet quotas in order to make room for their cane sugar.

Further cutbacks in cane sugar production could have a catastrophic effect on the economies of small sugar-producing countries.

Seldom has there been a clearer case of the anarchy of capitalism in its drive for profits cutting off supplies of vital goods at the expense of the working class throughout the world.

CND Labour Movement CONFERENCE AGAINST THE MISSILES

Saturday March 28, at UMIST Students' Union, Manchester.

Up to 2 delegates from labour movement bodies. Details and credentials from: CND, 11 Goodwin St, London N4.



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FUND

As the last day of February came and went we found ourselves with only £536.52 towards our monthly fund target of £850. This means that a great deal of money that was promised for the fund has still to be paid in. We urge our readers and supporters who have pledged money to rush it to us straight away and to make an early start on the March fund so that we don't find ourselves short of cash at the end of the month.

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TORIES ON THE RUN: CHASE THEM OUT!



The Tories are on the run. And running by their side are the TUC leaders.

The Thatcher government is still reeling from their defeat at the hands of the miners. They are disoriented by the catastrophic failure of their economic policies.

And, just as they thought they were out of the woods on wages, they have been hit by the militancy of the water workers, pay demands from the power workers and the anger of the civil service unions—all of which have crashed through Thatcher's 6% limit.

Restrict demands

But at each stage union officials have done their utmost to contain the strength of their members, restrict their demands and prevent the growth of action which could grow into a General Strike to defeat the Tories.

As water workers followed the miners' example and walked out on unofficial strikes in pursuit of their pay claim, their officials got together with the employers to recommend acceptance of a miserable 12.3% offer—below the level of inflation!

Gas workers' leaders have replied to a "final" employers' offer of under 10% by cutting back their claim to 12-13%.

And leaders of the four manual workers in the power industry have submitted a claim for only 13%—again representing a cut in real wages for their 85,000 members.

No action

In the public services, too, union leaders continue to sound the retreat—with no call to action to defend jobs, conditions and services against cuts in local government and NHS spending.

Yet anger and militancy is rising in every sector of the working class—in the factories, on the estates, on the dole queues. Last week 70,000 marched through Glasgow in a huge anti-Tory march.

Workers have seen from the miners that it is possible to defeat the Tory offensive, and bring down the government.

But they are saddled with a trade union and Labour Party leadership who are determined to avoid any such fight, which they fear would flow over into the struggle for socialist policies under a Labour government.

The alliance of union bureaucrats and Labour right wingers against the democratic reforms of Wembley and Blackpool spells out their opposition to socialist politics.

But the growth of the left

wing within the labour movement shows the possibility and necessity of constructing a new, revolutionary leadership that will fight for a genuine workers' government.

Crypto-Tories throw in the towel

The Gang of Four and their parliamentary hangers-on have given up the fight to win back control of the Labour Party.

Their resignation and establishment of a Parliamentary Committee for the Council for Social Democracy is a confession of defeat and a living example of the kind of anti-democratic methods they stand for.

The Gang of Four have simply proclaimed themselves 'leaders' of their one-horse 'party'—and their followers have refused to stand for election on their political positions in any of the 12 constituencies

involved!

Having been elected with working class support, they have now declared openly their hostility to the trade unions—calling for wage controls, and laws against strikes.

While their rootless 'party' must soon merge with the Liberals or submerge altogether, the real danger to be fought now within the Labour Party is the Gang's co-thinkers in the Hattersley-Shore 'Labour Solidarity' grouping.

The right wing is fighting back strongly: it is in opposing this challenge that the Rank and File Mobilising Committee can continue to play a useful role inside the Labour Party.



Last to go: Rodgers

CIVIL SERVANTS PREPARE FOR BATTLE

Monday 9 March sees the start of what will certainly be a long and bitter fight on pay by half a million trade unionists in the civil service.

On that day all nine civil service unions are calling for a national one day strike and it is clear that there will be an almost total shut-down of government departments.

Even Lord Soames, Minister for Civil Service Affairs, looks like being fairly lonely that day as 149 out of 150 union members in his office will be out (an unprecedented situation in a normally apathetic work place).

Little room

The government has upped its 6% offer by an insulting 1% in the latest round of negotiations, leaving the trade union bureaucracy with little room for manoeuvre at this stage on the claim for 15% (with a £10 a week underpinning for the lowest paid).

At the heart of the fight will be the 220,000 strong CPSA, covering the main low paid grades of clerical officers and assistants, the SCPS (representing mainly lower management

grades) and the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF).

Each union is also beginning a membership levy to provide 85% strike pay to members in selected centres called out on extended strike, and area co-ordinating committees are being given special powers to organise local disruptive action.

Watch leaders

But the civil service workers on the picket lines on 9 March must keep a close watch on their leaders in the weeks ahead.

There is an immediate danger that the Council of Civil Service Unions will avoid the kind of action which will bring swift victory and will be looking to exhaust the membership through protracted piecemeal forms of action.

In the IRSF, for example, staff at the two key computer centres voted by an 80% majority to come out immediately but are being "held back in reserve".

Widespread action in the tax offices would obviously hit the government square on in a way that action in the more traditionally militant DHSS cannot do.

However, the strength of feeling in the membership has clearly been given a boost by the miners' victory and by the determination of the water workers.

The problems for the bureaucracy were ably summed up by a leading CPSA right winger this week when he bitterly complained that Thatcher had "achieved in one blow what the Trots haven't achieved in five years".

Strikes on pay are sheer

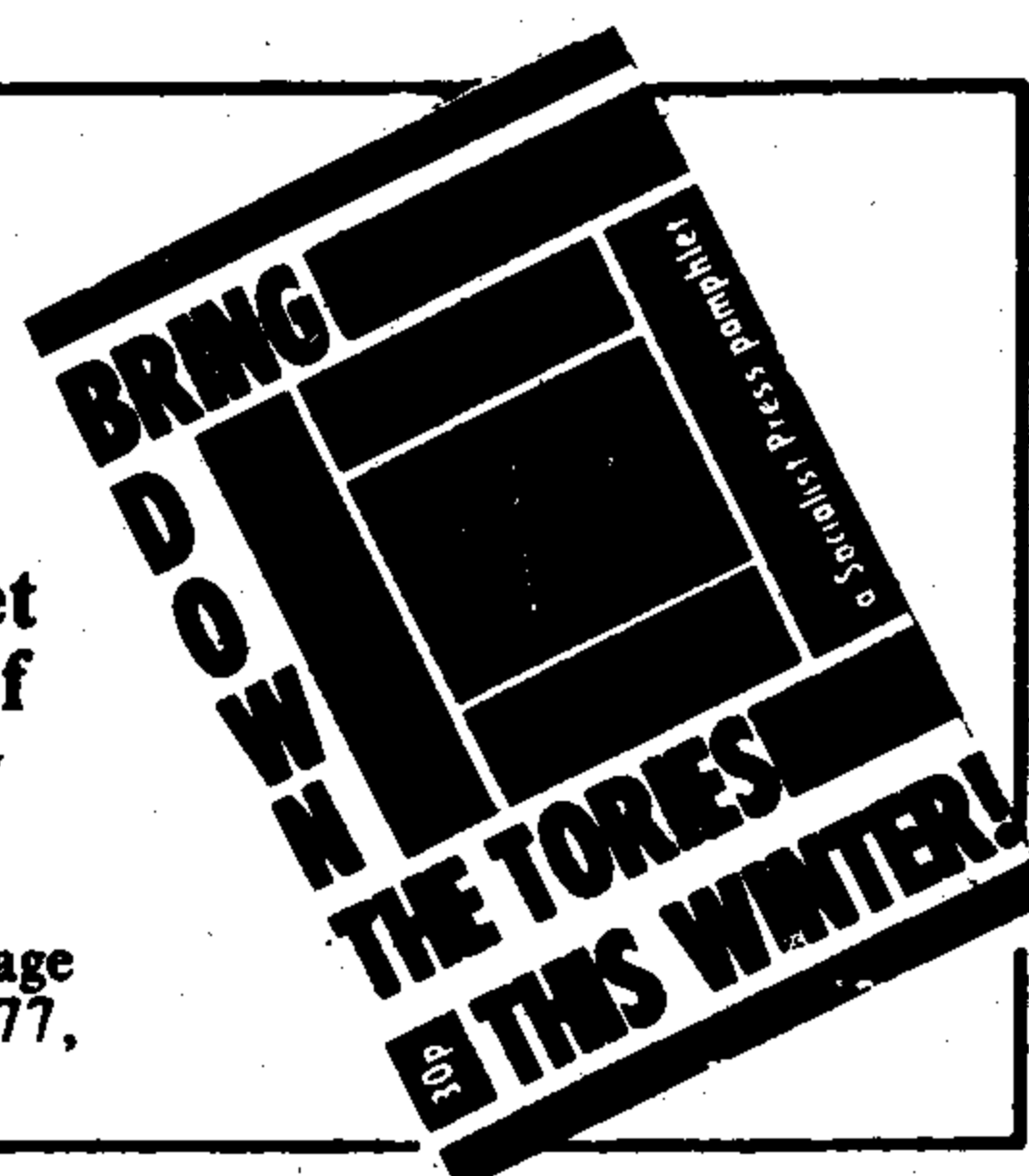
dynamite for the civil service union leaders because members can now begin to see real possibilities for resisting the cuts in all the various government departments.

Civil service union activists must work to extend the strike and to focus power in the local joint committees. Much is at stake in this pay campaign—a defeat for the government on the 6% cash limit in the belly of its own apparatus would be a major boost to the drive to overthrow Thatcher.

Our policies

Socialist Press pamphlet outlining programme of action against the Tory offensive.

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Lambeth budget cuts

Lambeth council leader Ted Knight, who has insisted on the need to defend services through rate increases, is now calling for a cut of £11 million in his 1981-2 budget proposals.

This represents a 10% cut on the council's budget—and runs alongside a two-stage £4 per week increase in council house rents and a 37½% increase in domestic rates.

But Knight is proposing that

the axe should fall in such a way as to avoid redundancies and protect existing jobs.

In doing so he is plainly trying to straddle the fence between Lambeth local government unions—who have supported his policy of rate increases—and Lambeth ratepayers.

But it is unlikely that the proposed budget will satisfy either working class tenants in Lambeth or the reactionary ratepayers movement.

(INTERVIEW, page 4)