

woman worker

a paper of the workers socialist league number 3 october 1979 6p



The Tories are hell bent on their programme of full frontal attack on democratic rights in order to boost up their rotten economic system of private profit.

"The nation isn't earning enough" they say, so cuts must be made in the welfare state until children and the elderly are at risk.

The workers in the factories, down the mines and in the mills aren't working hard enough so measures must be introduced to weaken their organising ability against the employer who wishes to impose speed up, redundancies and keep wages down.

Picketing rights are being legislated against by the Tory government which is also introducing state funded ballots so that the national TV and capitalist press can have the fullest influence on workers' decisions.

The Tories are also planning to exempt "small" firms from the Employment Protection Act which among other things gives women the right to claim maternity leave and return to their jobs some months after the birth of the baby.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

High on the list of priorities of the government for attacks on democratic rights is the reduction of women's basic rights. The right to work for women has never been solidly enough established, and the unemployment figures for women have always been camouflaged since many women don't qualify for the dole. But now our slender rights are being undermined.

Attacks on women's employment rights come alongside the Corrie Bill to severely restrict abortion rights and the measures to decimate the health, education and social services which provide women both with jobs and the services to care for their children and elderly and sick relatives while they are at work.

All of these attacks on women's rights are a conscious part of the Tory party philosophy, central to which is the disciplining role women confined to the home play with regard to workers and children. Millions of women find themselves in a contradictory position. They love and care for their families, but see no way of fighting side by side with husbands and youth against the attacks of the employers and the Tory government.

The Tories are desperate that the working class be fragmented and torn by contradictory loyalties and they seek to oppress and exploit women deliberately in this way and boost the "women's place is in the home" ideology.

In this they are backed to the hilt by the junior party of the capitalists, the Liberal Party, who recently at their Party Conference in Margate passed a motion blaming the rottenness of society on the breakup of families and calling for wages for housework.

Yet there are increasing signs that women are certainly not prepared to give up their basic rights without a fight. Throughout the country parents are demonstrating against education cuts, particularly against nursery closures in Clwyd, Oxford and London and against changes in school hours in Staffs.

In several counties school crossing patrols are ceasing and in Hull many hundreds of women have been blocking the roads and lobbying Council meetings in protest. Also in Hull mass meetings of school cleaners and school meals staff have been held demanding action against the cuts.

In hospitals more and more health workers are discussing the necessity for occupation and work-ins to defend against closure. On October 28 many thousands of women will be demonstrating through London calling for free abortion on demand.

UNION LEADERS

But again, up and down the country, these women are coming up against a massive blockage. Where are the union leaders and what are they doing to defend basic rights and conditions? NUPE and NUT leaders have called on their members to

refuse to cover for unfilled jobs—after the cuts have been made.

The TUC at its Congress in September voted against taking any action to stop the government introducing its anti-union legislation and continues to discuss with them.

Meanwhile Benn and the other 'lefts' in the Labour Party, though full of fiery words of condemnation against the Callaghan leadership for refusing to carry out last year's conference mandate against the cuts and wage controls have not mounted a single campaign or led a single demonstration against the Tories nor led a single Council to defy the government and refuse to carry out the cuts.

Women must take the fight to defend their basic rights and services into the trade union and labour movement and join the campaign there to expose and overthrow the old leadership of fake lefts and right wing and to elect a new leadership which will take up policies designed to protect the rights, jobs and living standards of the whole working class.

Wages, pensions and social services spending must all be protected from inflation by rises linked to a working class cost of living index, as worked out by unions, labour movement and community group representatives. The books of firms, local authorities and Area Health Authorities must be opened up to workers and consumers for

investigation to see who profits at the expense of the working class.

It will emerge that only a socialist planned economy will provide for the needs of workers—men and women and their children, their sick and their elderly.



Oxfordshire County Council has proposed the closure of all the county's nurseries.

The Oxford City Nursery Campaign which

occupied a threatened nursery class last year for over seven weeks called an immediate meeting. It was attended by well over a hundred parents, teachers and trade unionists and a county-wide Save Our Nurseries Campaign was set up to co-ordinate the mass protest against these cuts.

The Oxford City Nursery Campaign, through its 'Open the Books Committee' points out the money is there—for example in the £11 million interest paid out into the pockets of private bankers by Oxfordshire County Council while it attempts to save £450,000 by the wholesale destruction of nurseries.

The Division of the National Union of Teachers has called out its members on a half day strike on 13 November. The Oxford and District Trades Union Council has also passed the following resolution:

"All lost nursery places should be restored and where cuts are threatened we declare full support for trade union and community action to defend the nursery places, if necessary by occupation and supporting strike action."

TORIES STEP UP CLASS WAR



Labour Party conference delegates

Woman Worker, a paper of the Workers Socialist League, fights to construct a principled leadership capable of heading the struggle for such a socialist society.

PREPARE MASS ACTION NOW!

IRISH WOMEN OPPRESSED

In the context of the continuing war of liberation against the British army and the falsified press coverage of events, the plight of Irish women in the six counties is easily forgotten.

Of course the whole Catholic population of Northern Ireland have suffered discrimination in jobs, housing and every aspect of life since the partition of Ireland in 1920 and the creation of the Unionist Orange State.

For the last ten years the Catholic population has had to endure the arrests, internment, torture and prison camps that back up the British military occupation.

POVERTY

Economically the six counties' population as a whole is worse off than the working class in Britain.

A staggering 35.5% of households live below the poverty line.

Yet one-third of these households have people in full-time work.

Indeed the average family income is just under £10 less than that of the UK, although food, fuel and transport all cost more.

On top of that, there is also special legislation—the Payment of Debts Act (Emergency Provisions)—which gives the state the power to deduct rent and rate arrears from supplementary benefit payments and wages.

This was originally introduced following a rent and rates strike organised by Catholic women in protest at internment.

But the attacks of the state are not the only onslaught faced by women in the six counties.

The combined forces of the Catholic Church and the Protestant ascendancy have also ensured that the cult of the family remains strong and that therefore women are rigidly tied to the home.

PARLIAMENT

Northern Ireland MPs in the Westminster Parliament have voted consistently against women's rights, and have prevented reforming legislation on divorce, domestic violence, married women's property rights, abortion and homosexuality from being implemented in the Six Counties.

The 1967 Abortion Act, for instance, does not apply, and abortion is illegal.

As a result, over 1,100 women from the North had to go to England in 1976 to get abortions.

BY MARIE CAMPBELL

Many more were forced into continuing with unwanted pregnancies.

Contraception is available but the Catholic Church's mediaeval opposition to birth control and a lack of enlightened education has left many Catholic women without a real choice.

Women in the Catholic ghettos also suffer daily harassment from the British army and the sectarian Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Thousands of homes are raided and husbands, sons and daughters by the dozen are arrested, beaten up, tortured, "tried" in no-jury courts, and imprisoned.

Several innocent Catholic youth have been shot dead by the British army as suspected 'snipers' and 'terrorists'.

Proven cases include those of Leo Norney, Brian Stewart and Danny McCooey.

DRIVE OUT ARMY

In response to these deaths in 1977, women in the Turf Lodge area of Belfast, organised to drive the army out of the area.

The boys' mothers have done speaking tours in England to expose the role of the army.

As well as routine day-to-day army violence, Irish women are subject to particular sexual harassment by soldiers and RUC.

The Women's Committee of the International Tribunal have documented many cases where young girls have been questioned about their sex lives, strip searched and sexually assaulted.

Threats of rape have been used to intimidate suspects into signing statements of guilt for bombings and other so-called 'terrorist' offences.

Despite all this oppression—or perhaps because of it—Irish women have been very active in the war against British imperialism.

The main women's organisations, the Relatives Action Committees, were started by women whose relatives were 'on the blanket' in the 'H' Blocks of Long Kesh.

The 'blanket protest' started in 1976 when political status was withdrawn from Republican prisoners.

In the campaign for political status the RACs have organised

mass protests and demonstrations and have done speaking tours in England.

There are also 35 Republican women prisoners on the political status protest in Armagh jail.

They are not "on the blanket" because, unlike the men, they are allowed to wear their own clothes.

PROTEST

Their protest consists of refusing to do prison work—and in punishment they are locked in their cells 21 hours a day.

They receive no literature and radios are barred as are cigarettes and food parcels.

They receive one visit a month, but even this 'privilege' can be withdrawn.

The women are subject to petty harassment and beatings from the warders.

Medical neglect is practised by the prison doctor who prescribes the same painkillers for every ailment.

Two of the women have been seriously ill with anorexia nervosa.

Though Irish women have become radicalised by the war, the Republican movement still largely maintains the traditional Catholic reactionary view that "a woman's place is in the home".

Struggles for abortion and contraception rights are often seen as some kind of British plot.

REILLY

In an article in *Hands off Ireland*, leading Republican Jim Reilly gives his opinion of abortion and on women's sexuality, clearly assuming that all Irish women are happy to remain monogamous:

"But I do remember Maui Drumm, former vice-president of Sinn Féin, being interviewed on TV on abortion and birth control.

"Maura said abortion and birth control were never any great problem to her, because for most of her child-bearing years, her husband Jimmy was locked up as a guest of Her Majesty.

"The same conditions apply to hundreds of women in Ireland today. Their husbands are locked up as a guest of Her Majesty, your Queen. Maybe people have more on their minds than abortion."

In the same article Reilly, in a backward reference to English feminists, says:

"Maybe when our war has been won, the Provos will come over and liberate the English male."

Of course, the main objective of the Irish people must be to force the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

But the failure of the Republican movement to fight for basic democratic rights for women exposes the hollowness of their claim to be fighting for a socialist republic.

Only if Irish women are freed from all forms of repression in the home and given the right to control their own bodies through abortion and contraception facilities can they achieve equality in an Irish workers' republic.

Marx wrote correctly that no nation which oppresses another can itself be free. This remains equally true of sexual oppression: only the most conscious struggle against all forms of sexual discrimination, and for state nursery provision and free abortion, contraception and sterilisation on demand can end such oppression.

To wage such a struggle North and South of the border in the context of the fight against British imperialism a Marxist leadership must be built in Ireland.



Out shopping

No retreat on abortion fight!

As the October 28 demonstration against the Corrie Bill approaches, there is a danger that the fight NAC has put up for free abortion on demand will be diverted into the single issue of campaigning against the Corrie Bill.

Earlier this year NAC formed CAC—Campaign Against Corrie—to work specifically around the fight against the Corrie Bill.

In so doing they have shifted the emphasis away from the question of free abortion on demand and woman's right to choose to simple defence of the 1967 Abortion Act.

The Corrie Bill must be seen however as a part of the whole Tory attack on the working class which hits particularly at women workers.

With capitalism in deep crisis on a world scale, women are no longer required for the workforce. The Tories now wish to dump women just as they have

dumped thousands of working class youth.

Thus the statements by Patrick Jenkin—a woman's place is in the home with her children and the proposal to exempt small firms from the Employment Protection Act which gives women the right to return to their job after pregnancy.

These, coupled with the slashing of nursery education and plans to raise the school starting age to six, all form part of the plan to drive the woman back into the home. Forcibly burdening women with unwanted children by denying abortion rights is simply part and parcel of this strategy.

In this situation the watering down of NAC policy in a vain attempt to sway public opinion can only lead to the compromising of NAC's position as a serious campaigning women's organisation.

This danger is highlighted by the decision to postpone the NAC conference, planned for November until some time late in 1980. Whatever the excuses, the fact remains that such a

conference held immediately after the TUC demonstration would have provided a powerful focus for developing a campaign to win the labour movement to free abortion on demand.

There is only one alternative to the Corrie straight-jacket and that is a woman's right to choose. It is this slogan that must form the centre of the October 28 demonstration.

DEMONSTRATE
against the Corrie Bill

Sunday October 28
Assemble Speakers Corner
11.30 for march to
Trafalgar Square

Called by the TUC



Daily life in Belfast

WHY WOMAN

Woman Worker is the women's paper of the Workers Socialist League, a Trotskyist organisation which is seeking to build a Marxist leadership in this country and internationally which, starting from today's problems and today's consciousness within the working class, will lead workers in struggle to grasp the need for socialist revolution.

Women play a major role in the struggle of the working class to overthrow the shackles of international capitalism. Women—in workplaces and in the home—are doubly oppressed by capitalism and the present crisis affecting the whole working class attacks women disproportionately.

Woman Worker seeks to give policies and programme—a way forward—to women who are oppressed by this capitalist system. We believe that the leaderships of the traditional organisations of the working class—the Labour Party and the trade unions—are not at this time—and never will be—acting in the interests of the members they were elected to serve.

The Labour Party leadership for example has just presided over a five year period in government—a period when the working class experienced the biggest cuts in its wages, and the worse unemployment, since the 1930s.

A period when women were given the paper rights of Equal Pay and the Sex Discrimination Act with one hand—and their jobs, hospitals, nurseries and abortion facilities threatened with the other.

Women are now 28% of the trade union movement—3 million trade unionists and the numbers are growing.

But what have Len Murray and the TUC done for women? In conference after conference, trade union bureaucrats like the

Labour Party leadership manoeuvre the real questions of workers' lives—the specific questions affecting appalling with sexist attacks on questions of abortion facilities.

Yet *Woman Worker* insists the trade unions and the Labour Housewives isolated in the day-to-day questions of the ideal targets for reactionary potential strength of the organisation.

Woman Worker calls upon that lie ahead. We believe that to be prepared to fight to improve, defend their jobs and social services.

The block that stands in bureaucratic leadership in every

Woman Worker calls upon places and union branches, to policies such as demanding a 'rate increases, whereby wage inflation every month. This in establishing a cost-of-living increases.

Other policies will include strike action to defend factory closure.

Woman Worker would like women—and men—workers in shop stewards, branch officers extending this fight for progress against their union leadership.

Communist Party's LINK with values of capital

Although most people have at least heard of the *Morning Star*, the Communist Party's daily newspaper, comparatively few people seem to have heard of—let alone read—their women's journal *Link*.

If you are in this position, I would like to reassure you—you are not missing much.

The most striking thing about the three issues of *Link* produced so far this year, is the total absence of articles about working women actually involved in struggles whether for state nursery provision, in workplace disputes, or whatever.

There are many articles about unions, written mainly by trade union bureaucrats (like Terry Marsland, deputy general secretary of the tobacco workers union).

There are reports of conferences like the National Abortion Campaign Trade Union Conference.

CHILDCARE

There are numerous articles on childcare. But there is no indication from cover to cover of what grass-roots struggles for women the Communist Party is engaged in.

This should not surprise us: the record of the Communist Party in the struggles of the working class and the oppressed is certainly nothing to boast about.

In fact, even their reports of various conferences only tell part of the story. Their reports of two conferences in which members and supporters of the Workers Socialist League played a significant part, are a case in point.

NAC

Link No. 24 carries a report of the NAC trade union conference, in which their only comment on the crucial policy debate is the smug declaration:

"The conference ended with a debate of the action proposals submitted by the organising committee. Delegates voted their support for these proposals, which included support for a TUC-organised demonstration against any proposed restrictive legislation and support for campaigning against the 'conscience' vote for MP."

This statement completely covers up for the role that CP (and International Marxist Group) members played in that debate. Delegates did not just vote their support for the organising committee's proposals. In fact there was a sharp confrontation



tation between the CP and IMG dominated platform, and supporters of the WSL who fought for an amendment which committed the conference to a campaign against the cuts—a campaign which is crucial to the defence of existing abortion facilities.

The report on the South-East Region TUC conference on the Under-5s covers up for the CP's manoeuvres in a similar way.

The dominant theme of 1979's *Links* is the International Year of the Child—hence the proliferation of articles on childcare.

There are several articles on nursery education, but with no mention of *how* to fight for free, adequate nursery provision.

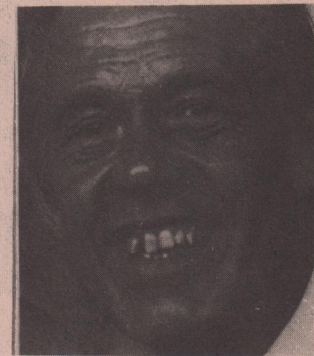
For instance, their support for the TUC Charter on the Under-5s is completely uncritical of its silence over the question of *how* to achieve its recommendations.

The other aspect of this concentration on childcare is a "debate" on how to bring up children in a 'communist' (i.e. CP) household. These articles,

especially those by Jean Styles and Margaret Bowden in *Link* no. 25, reveal the CP's attitude to the norms of 'family life' under capitalism.

Even the illustration of the article is revealing: it is a photograph of a statue of Madonna and Child.

Jean Styles' article completely accepts the bourgeois notion that children grow up happiest and healthiest in the nuclear family unit. She paints a rosy picture of her loving, caring family, for whose sake she chose to give up her job.



Fisher

While we accept that most workers (including women) do regard their family (or at least some ideal family) as a haven from the hardships of life in capitalist society, we would argue that the reality of working class family life under capitalism is very different to ideals that workers and the Jean Styles of this world would look to.

In reality, the individual family unit under capitalism is an instrument of oppression—both of women and youth.

As Communists, we fight to replace the bourgeois family. In concrete terms, this means that society as a whole has to take responsibility for the practical functions of the family.

Childcare, cooking, washing clothes—all the household drudgery carried out by the over-burdened housewife, should be organised at a social level.

Of course, this will only become an immediate possibility when the economy is planned on a socialist basis. Only then will the functions of the family be replaced, so that personal relationships can be based on choice rather than economic necessity or the pressure of ideology or convention.

The family is not the only institution of capitalist society glorified by the CP. An article on new technology by Renee Blackburn, a District Official of the Amalgamated Textile Workers Union begins:

"The textile industry in Britain has a history to be immensely proud of, in that in spite of all the hardships experienced by our forefathers—terrible working conditions, long hours at the looms and very low wages—children leaving school were still prepared to follow their parents into the traditional industry in the north-west of England."

No doubt the capitalist profiteers of the textile industry are very proud of their success in maintaining extreme exploitation. Renee Blackburn is probably also proud that she has prevented the members of her union from fighting back. She obviously accepts redundancies as inevitable—as we see from this passage:

"... I have to (!) visit mills to discuss their closure with management. What a feeling of sadness and futility! When a mill closes its gates on employees, it makes you wonder whether all that our parents and grandparents fought for was worth while."

It certainly should make you wonder what she or the CP has done to prevent such closures.

The CP's alliance with the present reformist Labour and trade union leaders is central to all their political practice. *Link* shows (provided one can read between the lines) that their treacherous strategy is also central to their 'work' on women's questions.

Any campaign to defend or extend the democratic rights of women—whether it is a campaign on abortion or nursery facilities or unemployment—will come up against the manoeuvring of the CP and will require a sharp battle against them.



Kampuchean peasant in ruins after US bombing in 1973

Who is to blame for Cambodia massacre?

The Tory press—in particular the *Daily Mirror* with articles by John Pilger—have made much of the mass deaths in Kampuchea (Cambodia). What is the truth?

Few if any of the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy in other countries can have surpassed the deeds of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea between 1975 and the end of 1978.

It now seems to be generally accepted that between one and three million Kampucheans died under the Pol Pot regime.

Probably an exact estimate will never now be made but there can be no doubt that the slaughter and suffering were almost unimaginable.

According to the evidence of refugees and the very few observers from outside who were in Kampuchea at the time the commonest causes of death were famine and exhaustion on the one hand and murder by agents of the Pol Pot regime on the other.

DEATH CAMP

The whole country was converted into a death camp. Evidence which would be hard to refute is now being presented by the occupying Vietnamese forces and the Heng Samrin regime of the existence of extermination camps modelled on those of the Nazis.

But the greatest deaths probably came as a result of the rigours of daily life and work under Pol Pot. Within a few hours of the capture of Phnom Penh from the retreating imperialists in April 1975 the forced evacuation of the city began.

Many died on the march to the countryside where Khmer Rouge-operated collective farms were set up. A new working week of ten days (9 days work and one day rest) was established in these labour camps; and survivors have claimed that the working day was often from 3 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Rations were given out according to work done—but in any case only amounted on average to a woefully inadequate quantity of rice (today the ration is only four pounds a month).

FAMINE

Recent reports from OXFAM and other relief workers suggest that the famine is now reaching its critical point and that there is imminent

danger of two million more deaths from starvation unless much more food reaches the country very soon.

There is little or no locally grown food available because of the decimation especially of the male adult population who did most of the agricultural work.

In addition medical workers have said that as a result of the effects of the starvation 85% of women of child-bearing age have stopped menstruating, that at present there are ten deaths for every one live birth and that diseases like anthrax and bubonic plague are rife.

POL POT

The Vietnamese occupying forces blame the situation on the Pol Pot regime and they add, correctly, that one of the reasons that supplies of food are not available is the imperialist blockade imposed on Vietnam and Kampuchea after the invasion of last December.

It is wrong to lay the appalling disaster of the Kampuchean people solely at the door of the Khmer leadership.

The gigantic tragedy of Kampuchea was all the more severe because it hit a country which, to begin with, was one of the most backward on earth.

When the Khmer Rouge is justly accused of ending medical services and education along with all other marks of civilisation, it must not be forgotten how little of these already existed in Kampuchea before 1975.

For instance, there was in 1971 only one doctor for every 15,000 people; and virtually none of the doctors were in the countryside where the great majority of Kampucheans lived.

FRENCH

The legacy of French imperialism and the corrupt, reactionary puppet regime which succeeded it was that in 1970 Kampuchea had what was estimated to be the lowest standard of living of any country in the world.

Then from 1970 to 1975 Kampuchea was bombarded by US planes with an amount of explosives equivalent to five Hiroshimas. It was that, as much as the policies of Pol Pot which destroyed Kampuchean agriculture and sent millions of refugees fleeing to the cities.

And it must be accepted that if the Vietnamese occupying forces at present wished to begin to reverse the tragedy of the Kampuchean people it would be very difficult because of the hostile policies of imperialism.

WOMAN WORKER?

covered out discussions and votes on living standards, wages and jobs. On women the record was even more in women delegates trying to raise

that it is vital that women do join Party.

home and their interests confined to care of children and husbands, are forces which seek to destroy the working class.

women to recognise the real tasks of unionists—male and female—are their conditions and wages and to

their way must be removed—the trade union and the Labour Party. Its readers to organise in their work—commit the membership to fighting the scale of wages' on top of flat will automatically increase with will necessitate the union branch committee which will monitor price

the commitment to occupations and strikes, hospitals, schools etc., from

to see its readers giving a lead to their places of work by becoming conference delegates and thereby

Similarly we would like to see our readers taking our fighting policies into the Labour Party and supporting our call for the removal of the right wing leadership of Callaghan and Healey and their replacement by a leadership prepared to fight to improve the lot of the working class.

Woman Worker will stand in the long traditions of the international Bolshevik movement's work among women. We will be publishing theoretical articles, not to promote an abstract debate but to broaden and deepen our understanding of the politics of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism and the sharp programmatic tasks we will need to undertake to build the Fourth International the world revolutionary party—to bring about the overthrow of capitalism on an international scale and the establishment of socialism.

These tasks will inevitably bring us into conflict with the feminists of the "women's movement" who are so blinkered by their conviction that "autonomy" for women will bring about their liberation—by building autonomous women's groupings in the unions—that they refuse to confront the key questions of leadership and programme, arguing even at times that leadership equals dictatorship and oppression.

It is these false positions which allow the feminists to co-exist with the Stalinists of the Communist Party who play a leading bureaucratic role in every country in the world in keeping down the working class.

This bureaucratic role is of course most obvious in the Soviet states themselves. *Woman Worker* supports Trotsky's call for the political revolution in these states to overthrow the bureaucracy and bring about true proletarian democracy, while arguing for the defence of the economic gains of the Bolshevik revolution against imperialist attack.

MORE DETAILS

Please send me more details about the Workers Socialist League.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Send to WSL, 31, Dartmouth Park Hill, London, NW5 1HR.

woman worker

POLICIES TO FIGHT THE CUTS



PHOTO: Andrew Ward, Report

Up and down the country, from Cheshire to East London, from Hull to Milton Keynes, women are coming forward in the forefront of mass struggles against the Tory attacks.

But willingness to struggle is not enough. It is vital that these mass movements do not restrict themselves to futile and demoralising protests, but take up policies that can stop the cuts and defeat the Tories.

Occupy to save NHS!

The National Executive of Britain's biggest health service union, COHSE, has declared a policy of occupying hospitals to prevent closure.

Though General Secretary Albert Spanswick hedged about this call by a string of 'ifs' and 'buts', the adoption of the work-in policy is a step forward, offering a perspective to all health workers and public sector workers fighting the Tory cuts.

They must demand that COHSE and other union officials implement this policy, and call

COHSE work-in policy

official occupations as a focus for mass supporting strikes to stop the cuts in the public services.

One area where such a policy could be effective is Oxford, where the Area Health Authority has announced plans to close two geriatric hospitals—Longworth and Cowley Road.

COHSE members, at Longworth, with the backing of a COHSE official, voted last September to set up a support committee and prepare to occupy

the hospital.

The campaign has won widespread support from trade union bodies, Labour Party wards and community organisations.

SECRET DECISIONS

This put massive pressure on the AHA, lobbying their meetings and forcing them to drop any attempt to decide the future of the Hospital in secret and not to close it 'for the time being'—a temporary reprieve.

The noticeable absence on all the lobbies of the AHA meetings over the past year has been however that of the workers of the Cowley Road Hospital.

Not one was ever present. Did they think opposition to the AHA plans were hopeless or did they not know how to organise?

A year ago in September 1978 400 met to oppose the Cowley Road closure, and yet the months have since ticked away closer to the closure date without any further organised protest.

Meanwhile several union branches asked that a support committee be set up, but there was no response from the NUPE leaders "representing" the workers at Cowley Road.

OPPOSITION

Finally, a year after the proposed closure was announced the local NHS Joint Trade Union Committee set up a working party to discover the views of the staff on the closure.

The result was overwhelming opposition from nearly a hundred staff. They said they were ready to fight but hadn't been given a lead, like at Longworth. They have now set up a support committee. They realise that petitions and other forms of protest are of limited value and can be ignored by those carrying out cuts, but the organised strength of the labour movement supporting an occupation of threatened hospitals cannot be so easily dismissed.

The Cowley Road Hospital Support Committee has therefore declared that they, like Longworth, will work-in in opposition to closure if adequate medical cover is given. GPs have now been circulated, requesting their help and from the response it looks like it will be obtained.

London fights

We could fill the pages of this paper with an account of the number of assaults by the Tories and their Labour henchmen in London alone—attacks on public spending in general and in particular on the hospitals.

The list of hospitals threatened with full or partial closure is massive, stretching in the south from St. George's, Hyde Park, St. Benedicts, Putney and Guy's Hospital to St. Mary's W9, the Prince, Tottenham and St. Leonards, Hackney, to name but a few.

These cuts of course are a major assault on women workers (the majority of hospital workers are women) and, alongside the plans of Prior to reduce women's right to work by the plans to end the protection of employment for mothers in small factories, are part of the determined drive to force women back into the home.

The response by the labour movement in London has been massive, with demonstrations, meetings, petitions and campaigns against the hydra-headed cuts.

Most significant have been two factors:

1) The ability of the labour movement to take independent actions which do not allow the cuts to be implemented.

2) The actions of Labour councils in response to the massive opposition to the cuts in local government spending.

These two factors are obviously connected and this has been shown in the battle against cuts in Haringey.

The Labour council there had voted to cut £2½ million off this year's budget (i.e. to be cut before April 1980), which involved attacks on every council sector, education and social services.

The social service cuts were to involve massive

reduction of the home help service, increasing the number of jobs held vacant, and the closure of three playgroups.

The playgroup workers refused to accept the closure (announced only two weeks before they were due to reopen) and continued to run the playgroups outside the locked premises—a 'work-in' outside! The action of these women workers and parents led to the decision of the social services committee to reverse the cuts and reopen the playgroups.

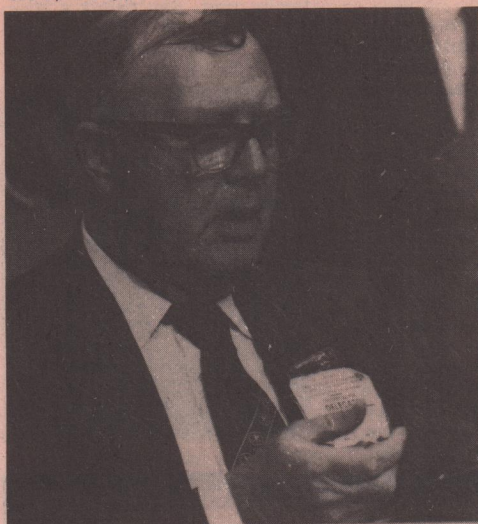
Other workers refused to cover the work of jobs held vacant, so that social services offices were shut and locked when there were insufficient staff to cover them.

This and similar action by teachers, together with a 500-strong demonstration, struck terror into the hearts of the Labour council. Unable to face confronting working class action, they finally took the principled position of reversing the previous decision and deciding not to implement the cuts.

The councillors are, however, going to raise the extra money by increasing rates instead of confronting the Tory government by overspending their budget.

Lambeth council, faced with similar opposition from the labour movement have also refused to cut and have called a lobby of Parliament on November 7 (although there is a possibility that this date may be altered to coincide with a Yorkshire lobby on November 21). This lobby and strike action to back it should become an important focus of the cuts struggle.

Strike action such as the one-day stoppage by council workers in Hackney, and march by 1,000 against the closure of St. Leonards must be centralised and linked for an all-London fight against the cuts.



Spanswick—ifs and buts

FIGHTING TO OPEN UP THE BOOKS

A trade union inquiry was set up in April 1979 from four trade union bodies in Oxfordshire to examine what are the real needs of the elderly and how far they are or are not being met by the present services provided.

The workers will investigate every aspect of care from health through to housing and the social services. It is crucially an independent workers' body. It does not start from the bias of considering cash limits—"what we can afford" or by being controlled by management, local authority or Area Health Authority, producing ultimately what they want to hear.

The workers inquiry starts from investigating the facts and figures on what is necessary to establish an adequate system of state geriatric care for the elderly members of the working class.

Under capitalism the level of care is totally inadequate, and even the skeleton services provided are threatened with destruction by public spending cuts.

The members of the inquiry mainly work in services for the elderly, doctors, homehelps, health visitors, social workers, ambulancemen and through their experience have knowledge and information of what is necessary.

The Geriatric Inquiry has just produced its first report on Cowley Road—this will provide crucial information to arm the struggle to defend the NHS.

The Geriatric Inquiry was set up on the initiative of the Longworth Hospital Support Committee. On the question of Cowley Road it has received so far, the existing knowledge of health service trade unionists, geriatricians, patients, relatives, the Community Health Council and statements from over 100 workers at Cowley Road.

Contrast with this the government's appointment during the past months of a one-man ten-day "independent" inquiry set up by the Minister of Health in order to give the illusion that a fair hearing has been given before the axe falls.

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