

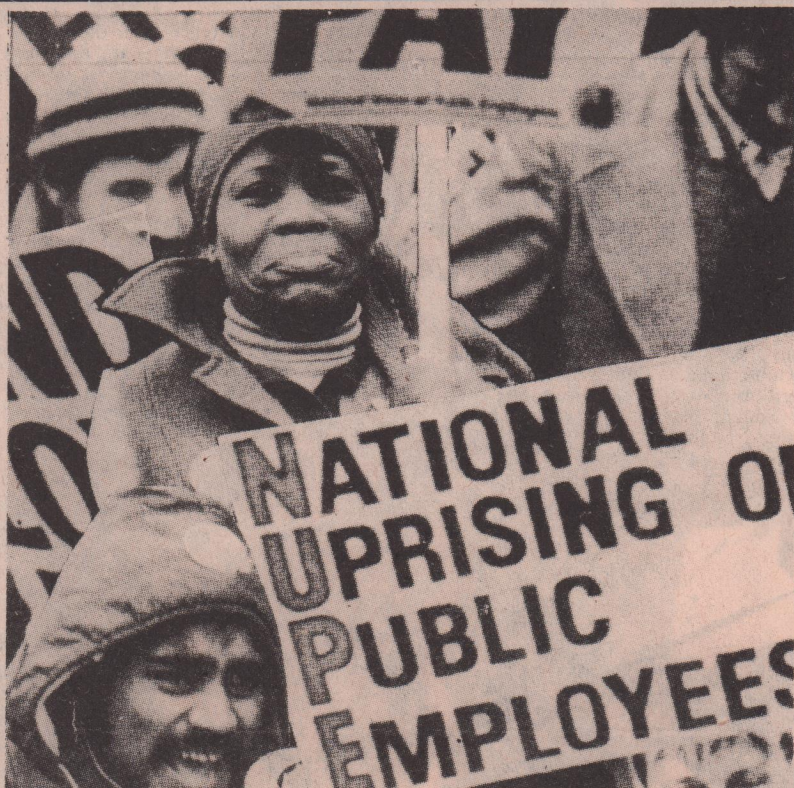
woman worker

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British Leyland and public sector workers ready to take action – but held back by union leaders.

OUR PROBLEM: LEADERS WHO WON'T LEAD ... and blame us!

All over the country the working class is saying that something must be done to stop the Thatcher government.

Everyone—from the 2½ million unemployed to the 1 million homeless; from those affected by the cuts to those terrified of the massive nuclear build-up; from jobless school leavers to pensioners—all are saying the Tories can't be allowed to get away with it much longer.

Something's got to be done: if we don't get the Tories out there'll be nothing left.

The working class have realised if they don't defeat the government no-one else will—they realise what's at stake.

Given this massive hostility to the Tories, why has so little happened to threaten their rule?

The reason for this can be seen quite clearly in the attitude of the union leaders at this years TUC Conference.

In the face of Thatcher's massive attacks not one single effective action was organised from this national body of working class leadership.

They were desperate to get through the week without a demand for strike action against Tories being placed upon them.

Instead their whole strategy was to list the dire effects of Tory policy and to seek talks with Thatcher to make her see reason!

So we saw the degrading spectacle of the national leadership of 12 million of workers crawling to Downing Street to plead with Thatcher "to sit around the table and see some sense".

Thatcher saw sense alright! She saw that the leadership of the working class were determined 'not to rock the boat' and to head off and dissipate the militancy of the working class which could threaten the Tories' rule.

Every opportunity that could have been developed into full scale confrontation with the Tories has been sabotaged by the trade union leadership by whatever means they could use.

The examples are endless. There were the strikes at Adwest Engineering and at DHSS office Brixton—both major struggles against Priors anti union law. Not only did the union leaders not support these strikes (the TGWU would not even make the Adwest strike official) but strikers were attacked and abused by national officials for their militancy.

Or take the case of the struggle of Eileen Crosbie the Nottingham Nursery teacher who took a stand against inadequate staffing levels caused by the 136 nursery nurses, and was sacked for refusing to teach an oversized class.

This received national publicity and was a major focus against education cuts.

216 teachers in Nottingham signed a petition to the Nottingham NUT Division saying they were prepared to come out on indefinite strike action and if necessary risk being sacked too, like Eileen Crosbie in defence of teaching standards.

But they *weren't* called out on indefinite strike action: they were only called out on ineffective selective actions here and there. Eileen Crosbie was left victimised by the NUT leadership—who should have called for national supporting action to defend her. They didn't.

Eileen Crosbie lost her job—along with 40,000 others (mainly women) workers in local authorities throughout the country.

Or take the case of the defence of St. Benedicts Hospital in Tooting. This hospital occupation again received national publicity and had widespread support from both the trade union movement and the community in Tooting (where nine hospitals are up for closure).

St. Benedicts was regarded by many as a beacon in the fight against health cuts, showing the way that not only hospitals but also schools, nurseries and factories could be defended against closure.

It was vital that the occupation there was supported and defended so all could see it was possible to save these jobs and services and resist attack.

As soon as the St. Benedicts occupation was threatened, as soon as the attempt was made to move patients, equipment, *immediate* strike action *should* have been organised at a national level with all resources being given by NUPE in getting their members out in London and spreading supporting strike action to other section.

Fisher

Instead what did we see but Fisher (as the new leader of the TUC) coming down on the picket line, wringing his hands at the suffering caused as patients were dragged out—but totally unprepared to organise the strike action necessary to stop such suffering.

Some of the tame excuses these leaders use to cover themselves for leaving such struggles defenceless, unsupported and for not organising against the Tories are examined on Page 2.

Most argue like Ron Keating Assistant General Secretary of NUPE that there is so much "fear in the land" that it is impossible to conceive of large scale action by next January,

let alone now!

Keating's argument along these lines at the conference "Crisis in Local Government" called by Lambeth Labour Council was heavily attacked and was shown to be the well worn excuse of all the trade union leaders.

A speech by Alan Thornett from British Leyland's Cowley Assembly Plant stressed that it is not the *membership*, but the *leadership* who won't fight.

Union leaders create demoralisation and apathy and then use it as a shield to hide behind.

The same arguments exactly had been used in BL by the TGWU and AUEW leadership.

By offering no national lead and by instructing their members back to work they had actually supervised the acceptance of the Edwardes' plan, of plant closures the 25,000

redundancies and the sacking of Derek Robinson.

The men and women workers of BL have now refused the 'final' offer by mass meetings and have shown their willingness to fight on an overwhelming scale.

Yet once again they have been stabbed in the back by their leaders who have ignored a 2-1 strike vote and called off the action. Sections that take up the challenge and fight the Tories in the next few months must not be allowed to be isolated in their struggle like the steelworkers were.

Other sections like the waterworkers, Fords miners and above all the public sector unions must come out in national action to *bring down* the Tories this winter and replace them with a workers' government accountable to those that have put them in power.

FOOT STEPS IN

Michael Foot has been selected by the Parliamentary Labour Party as the 'man most likely'.

They see him as best equipped to stem a forward movement of workers that threatens to oust the Thatcher government and return a Labour government under stormy conditions.

Despite his ageing and tattered 'left' image—laboriously refurbished by the Tory press in recent weeks—Foot has for years been a loyal servant of the Callaghan gang.

During the lifetime of the last Labour government Foot as a Cabinet minister lent his support to four phases of wage controls, to huge public spending cuts, mass unemployment, cash handouts to private industry, and intensified repression of the Irish people.

Since the election of the Tory government Foot has devoted his main energies to forestalling moves towards Labour Party democracy and bolstering the discredited Callaghan leadership.

Like Callaghan, Foot stands resolutely *opposed* to mass action to bring down the Tories.

But his methods of argument for a perspective of seeking to pressurise Thatcher into a change of policy are more subtle and flexible than those of his main rival for the Party leadership, Dennis Healey.

While Healey bluntly and arrogantly argues the need for capitalist policies—wage cuts, public spending cuts and unemployment—to resolve the capitalist crisis, Foot seeks more tactfully to dress up the same policies as a variety of socialism.

It is on this basis that Foot has clearly won substantial support from the right wing dominated PLP, who recognise that they now face a battle to retain control of the Labour Party in the face of rising rank and file militancy.

Sooner than further antagonise the new left wing within the Party, the PLP have chosen Foot—whose flights of windy rhetoric will, they hope bamboozle them and defuse their struggle.

The fight for a principled socialist leadership in the labour movement must now proceed against Foot as it did against Callaghan. With the extreme right wing's chosen leader defeated, the battle will now be further out in the open in the run-up to the Special Conference in January.

WOMEN TEXTILE WORKERS ORGANISE

Once again the audacity of the employers has been brought to light when the management of a clothing factory in Winsford called its shop stewards to a meeting unveiling their plan to cut the wages of the work force by an average of 23% with some reductions amounting to 45%.

Surprised that the shop stewards immediately rejected this massive cut in wages, the management gave them a week to think about it.

In a factory of 150 workers, 95% of the women are on piecework where such wages as £60-£80 per week can be achieved and where at the opposite end of the scale £30 for 40 hours can also be achieved—this comes at the end of a long period of struggles between management and its workforce.

The anti-union management opposed the union recruiting members in 1976 by threats and actually making life so difficult in some of its factories that workers were frightened to appoint a shop steward for fear of victimisation.

Wages and increases were fiddled so many times that any rises were immediately clawed back by some underhand method.

The strength the women felt in joining the union was so evident that an immediate change could be felt in the factory.

Although a lengthy fight against the management had to be put up to get the union recognised, an equally lengthy fight had to be put to the union official for branch meetings to be held.

He insisted "women weren't interested and wouldn't attend such meetings". It was around this time we found out the National Union of Tailoring and Garment Workers branch had been present in Winsford for ten years—and never had a branch meeting.

After much insistence from the shop steward we finally got one arranged, and 60 women turned up—not bad for "women not interested".

Ever since we have had a consistent 30-40 turn up at meetings.

We have also organised demonstrations against both the low wages paid in the clothing industry and the Tory Prime Minister and the government's policies.

Over the last months, in keeping with the reduced market for clothes and high inflation, the management have made every cut possible; canteen facilities have been lost, cleaners reduced and machinists not replaced.

Smaller factories have been merged into larger units, prices have been calculated as tight as the time-study engineer can make it, and short time working (2-3 day week) brought in.

We have in our factory resisted any redundancies, and the union meetings now take on a more and more political turn.

This is much resisted by the official whose favourite theme seems to be "we must not stray into the realms of politics".

But as his women members are more and more desperate to keep their jobs, in an area where unemployment has gone up 50% in twelve months, and where the majority of women work in the clothing trade, the interest in the political reasons for the crisis in industry is growing weekly.

Factories like Metal Box, ICL, Fodans, James Carr are sacking hundreds of workers and increasingly this produces a situation where some women are the sole wage earner in the house.

It is in this climate the management of Winsford Textiles Ltd now feel confident enough to demand a 23%-45% reduction in the wages of the workers.

We, of course, have rejected this outright and we are confident a mass meeting of the women machinists, pressers and packers will back up our refusal to accept slave wages in an already low paid industry.

But we must be prepared for a long, hard struggle and it will be the strength of our politics which will determine how long and how much support we get in our struggle.

We have asked for support from the other factories in the group.

We will organise an Action Committee willing to put in as many hours as necessary in order to organise total opposition to this vicious attack.

And when we win we will show other workers that the working class can and will struggle to maintain the rights and standard of living they have won over the years.

We demand:

*No reduction in wage rates!

*Open the company books!

*Share the work with no reduction in pay!

Furthermore we must call for a general strike to bring down this Tory government before the whole working class pays for the crisis of the capitalist system.



Scenes from the picket line outside King Henry's Meat Products factory in Levenshulme, where workers have been on strike for over 3 months over union recognition.

FIGHTING REDUNDANCIES

At a recent meeting of the North West Division of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers the main discussion was led by full time official Ralph Don.

He first apologised for bringing politics into his discussion—then went on to talk about the problem of closures.

He expressed his sympathy for those hard-up employers who couldn't afford to eat at the luxury hotel where the employers and union EC were meeting to discuss the wage increase for 1981—and had to eat with the union officials at a local pub!

In the heated discussion that followed, a Winsford delegate raised the question of a lack of union policy to fight the massive closures in the clothing industry and to organise against the Tory government.

The crisis that is hitting the clothing workers is a result of the crisis of capitalism, she said, and not the problem of imports from low cost countries.

The union leaders are simply using the question of imports to divert from the fight against the Tory government.

A call for the nationalisation of the clothing industry was received favourably by the delegates, but diverted by the officials.

Three delegates, however, declared their willingness to fight for this policy before the conference next April, to make it a real issue in the union.

The pessimism admitted by one union official in no way reflects the workers in the clothing industry, who are more than willing to take on the Tory government and discuss the question of occupations and strikes to bring down Thatcher.

The mobilisation of workers for 29 November must not be left there.

Clothing workers must carry on the fight with other workers to build councils of action to fight closures, cuts, and unemployment.

6 houses burn in 1 year TENANTS' REVOLT

200 angry tenants marched to County Hall in Leicester last month after a fire in which a mother and her three year old son died and another woman suffered 65 degree burns.

Tenants are angry as this is the sixth recorded fire in one year in steel-built houses on the New Parks Estate in Leicester.

A year ago all the houses were re-wired by an outside contractor. Many tenants complained that the work was cheap and shoddy, with wire sticking out of walls and sockets hanging off. The contractors only spent half a day on rewiring each house.

The residents had to threaten a rent strike after the fourth fire before the council eventually had the wiring checked and began a programme of insulating the houses.

Holes were drilled in the outside walls and insulation material inserted. In most cases the holes were left open and as one resident remarked: "It hasn't made any difference to us but all the birds in the area now have fire-proof nests!"

The house which burned down had in fact been checked and insulated. Workmen doing this work downed tools in protest after the fire.

Representatives of the Housing Department, the fire prevention officer, local Labour councillors and local Labour MP Grenville Janner have all combined in insisting that there is no fault in the wiring or in the structure of the houses.

They claim that all six accidents are due to people—yet in each case the houses have burnt down in less than six minutes!

At a public meeting, a council spokesman claimed that these houses up to October 1979 had a better than average fire record—the average being one fire in every 565 council houses per year.

Steel Houses

Yet of the 500 steel houses on the estate, no less than six have burnt down in one single year!

The council representatives and fire officers continually avoided questions posed by tenants at the meeting and devoted much of the time to giving fire precaution advice.

Nor is this just a local issue. It is estimated there are 40,000 of these steel houses in various areas of the country.

They were built in 1946 with cheap materials as temporary residences designed to last 15-17 years!

In Hull a tenants' action committee is stepping up the fight to force the council to renovate 150 steel houses.

The campaigners claim that Scunthorpe Council carried out such work on 500 houses. But despite a successful fight to stop the Hull Council from simply demolishing the hazardous buildings, they have not been successful in forcing them to carry out the renovation work, the cost of which is estimated at £6,800 per house.

Inquiry

In Leicester a resolution calling for an independent trade union inquiry into the fires has been passed by the Trades Council after an appeal by the residents.

This inquiry must involve both trade unionists and the tenants to investigate the real causes of the fires and the structure of the houses.

Since the issue will inevitably be either a massive renovation or rebuilding programme it must also be taken into the Labour Party and linked with a demand that the Labour-controlled City Council reverse their policy on ending council house building.

STOP THE EXCUSES!

We reprint here the text of a leaflet distributed by Woman Worker supporters at the recent conference on "Local Government in Crisis" called by Lambeth Labour Group.

The major excuse of the union leaders for not calling a strike is to say that it is not up to them to do so—that it is the responsibility of the membership "at a local level".

The membership, they claim, are "apathetic" and "don't want to fight the Tories".

But take the question of defending school meals. In union branch meetings up and down the country, the membership, outraged at the attack on jobs and services, have been made "apathetic" by the fact that their union leaders have offered them no perspective for a fight to stop the school meals cuts.

They are told they have to find solutions at a local level and that there is to be no nationally organised campaign.

"Natural Wastage"

This means that instead of mobilising the strength of the whole union the fight is left up to isolated sections already run down to skeleton staff by the union leaders' acceptance of "natural wastage", and huge rises in school meal prices.

Other members are assured, especially in NUPE, that there would be no public support for any strike action as we are in the grip of a prejudiced national press who will only portray our actions as inflicting suffering on the helpless!

With leaders like these who needs enemies? At best the union leaders offer members the gesture of one-day or half-day token strike—which many members reject as being pointless, and just a straight loss of pay.

Usually, however, the leadership say that since the rest of the membership won't fight, no strike is better than an unsupported strike.

One way and the other, union members are encouraged to settle for no action.

In many other cases defensive action against the cuts, like the use of strike action, is not even discussed and the local leadership seeking the point of least resistance, fight to get members to accept voluntary redundancy schemes (GMWU Hull, Oxford County NUPE).

Another well known argument familiar to the many women in the membership of the public sector unions is that the only people who suffer from strike action in the public sector are the people we are paid to look after.

A desperate picture is painted of geriatrics abandoned as old peoples' homes go on strike or the sick dying in hospital wards as the heating is cut off.

Strike action presented in this way is therefore immediately dismissed as impossible by the members who care very deeply about the services that they provide.

What is not placed before union members is the whole question of emergency cover, that in strike action the services would not necessarily be withdrawn, but placed under workers' control. The strike committee should decide on what provision had to be made and would decide not to withdraw homehelps, for example, from essential jobs.

We would not be inflicting suffering on the users of the public sector but would be dealing an enormous political blow by taking these services out of management's hands and running them ourselves with the workers deciding on emergency cover.

Such cover was provided during the firemen's national strike and the strikes of ambulance drivers.

The point that is dodged by the national leaderships of NUPE, GMWU, and NALGO is that it really shouldn't be left up to the membership in 'caring' sections to take action alone on a local level.

They never mention the fact that nationally the three public sector unions have the power to bring the country to a standstill. They control our cities, the water works, sewage, waste disposal, our roads, courts and local government offices.

"all-out strike action"

Full all-out strike action, not an odd day's stoppage here and there, could well end Tory rule.

What is needed is a strong lead from a national level. The stakes must be clearly placed before the working class: either we must endure three more years of Tory rule, the end of our social services, the loss of still more jobs and union rights or we fight for national strike action.

Occupations should be established immediately to defend threatened facilities, with full scale back up strike action.

Labour-run local authorities should refuse to implement cuts, not put up rents and rates, repudiate interest charges and in the event of any victimisation call upon immediate supporting strike action.

Enough is enough! Stop the TUC making excuses! Force action now!

IS POLAND SOCIALIST?

All socialists find themselves continually confronted with the problem of the 'communist countries'.

Whether it's right wingers yelling at us to "get back to Russia" or people genuinely interested to know the difference between the Soviet Union and our policies for socialism, the question crops up all the time.

The purpose of this article is to explain our criticisms of these regimes and to look at the historical background, showing how the socialist revolution of 1917 degenerated into repression.

All workers and socialists must have been impressed by the strength and determination of the Polish workers in their huge strike wave this summer.

By using the traditional weapons of their class—solid strike action combined with occupations of their factories and shipyards—these workers have shaken the government, overthrown Prime Minister Gierk and wrested major concessions from their rulers.

They returned to work undefeated and the Polish Communist Party is still reeling from the shock waves.

Although they used the same weapons as workers in this country, although they encountered similar problems of leadership, the Polish workers were not fighting similar capitalist bosses.

Their struggle is against rulers who claim to govern in the name of the working class, who claim that there is no need of independent trade unions, since the "socialist" state is based on the needs of workers.

The Polish strikes expose starkly the basic contradiction of the Stalinist regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

These so-called "socialist countries" are governed by bureaucratic elites who have usurped power from the working class.

In order to maintain their privileged positions as minority rulers, they have to suppress even the most elemental rights, crush their opponents and yet still maintain the fiction that they rule on behalf of the working class.

In order to understand the nature of the Polish and other Eastern European regimes, it is necessary to go back to the 1917 revolution in Russia.

Enormous gains were made by the Russian masses after the overthrow of capitalism.

Socialist revolution did not just mean the nationalisation of property and booting out all the factory bosses—although this was an essential part!

It also meant that *real* power in the country was seized from the hands of the bosses and the Duma (parliament) by the Soviets (i.e. workers' councils).

These soviets were composed of delegates from all working class and peasant organisations and from the rank and file soldiers.

A similar organisation in Britain today would have delegates from trade union branches, working class political parties, black organisations, women's groups, tenants' associations, etc.

These Soviets—led by the Bolshevik Party—ran the country. They decided how transport and production was organised, how food and other supplies were distributed and so on.

All delegates were democratically elected and if the members of the organisations which elected them disagreed with their delegates' actions they could recall them at any time.

Despite the fact that the economy was ravaged by war and famine, advances were made towards reorganising many aspects of social life.

To use the position of women as an example, of course women's liberation could not and did not miraculously happen overnight.

But despite the backwardness of the country—and the backward positions of even many Bolshevik Party members, steps were made.

Abortion was legalised—an important decree, since abortion was at the time, the only effective—if hazardous and unpleasant—form of birth control.

Communal dining rooms were widely established—largely because they provided the best means of rationing food in a period of acute shortage, but also as a step towards lightening the burden of housework on women.

Trotsky describes the plans that were made on *Revolution Betrayed*.

"The place of the family as a shut-in petty enterprise was to be occupied, according to the plans, by a finished system of social care and accommodation: maternity houses, creches, kindergartens, schools, social dining rooms, social laundries, first-aid stations, hospitals, sanatoria, moving pictures, theatres, etc. The complete absorption of the house-keeping functions of the family by institutions of the socialist society, uniting all generations in solidarity and mutual aid, was to bring to woman, and thereby to the loving couple, a real liberation from the thousand year old fetters."

When Lenin and the Bolsheviks led the working class to power in 1917, they fully expected similar revolutions to erupt throughout capitalist Europe in the aftermath of the devastating 1914-18 war.

They thought their own revolution would act as the spark.



Women shipyard workers at Gdansk

The Communist International was founded to provide the leadership necessary for these uprisings. But these hopes were never realised.

The young socialist state remained, not just isolated, but under military and economic attack from all the imperialist nations who fought on the side of the Whites in the Civil War.

Despite a massive increase in production under the new planned system, the economy remained close to ruin.

It was these two factors, isolation and economic devastation that were crucial to the emergence of a state bureaucracy.

As Trotsky points out, shortages lead to queues and queues need policing; these are the conditions that easily give rise to the development of bureaucracy.

After Lenin's death in 1923, there was a prolonged struggle within the party over questions of democracy and economic development.



Instead of fighting for women's rights, the Stalinist regimes promote sentimental images of Motherhood & Family Life—as in this Soviet poster.

Stalin began to climb up the party hierarchy and came to represent the new breed of bureaucrat that was springing up at all levels.

Since the Communist Party were now firmly in power, all sorts of self-seeking careerists joined to feather their own nests.

Under Stalin's direction the conditions of membership were relaxed to allow these people in. Supervision of politically hostile technicians was relaxed and managers gradually replaced workers' committees in the factories.

Stalin also made a virtue out of international isolation: he developed the notion that it was necessary to build "socialism in one country"—and, by implication, accept *capitalism* everywhere else.

Deals were struck with imperialism, and the Communist International became no longer an organisation for building revolutionary parties, but rather—with the aid of repeated purges of leadership—reduced to the role of a tool of Stalin's foreign policy.

As far as women were concerned, Stalinisation resulted in the reversal of all the gains that had been made.

The Bolshevik policy of replacing the family in order to free women from household drudgery was anathema to the Stalinists.

With their deep conservatism, the idea of liberating youth and women through the replacement of the family horrified them.

Furthermore they desperately needed to establish authority and discipline among the nation's youth, and the family provided the ideal means:

"The most compelling nature of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40,000,000 points of support for authority and power."

Abortion

Abortion became illegal in 1936. Although it is now legal again, contraception is virtually unobtainable in the USSR.

Women are seen almost entirely as child-bearers: (although almost all women work outside the home as well).

"Motherhood" became exalted—women get medals for producing a large number of children in much the same way that factory managers get bonuses for overfulfilling their production quotas.

International Women's Day, once the celebration of the strike of female textile workers that sparked off the first, February 1917, revolution, has now become the occasion for a sickening display of sentimentality about femininity.

Take this quotation from *Pravda* of 8 March 1976 (quoted in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*):

"The warmth of the female soul, the solicitude of wives and mothers makes the Soviet family strong, loving and attentive. Women raise their child—the future builders of communism—to be healthy of body and ideologically firm of mind, to be worthy citizens of the socialist fatherland. The nation is grateful to you, women, for your great and noble work."

A proper examination of the position of women in the Soviet Union requires a separate article—suffice to say here that women suffered particularly as bureaucracy and savage repression settled on the Soviet Union, destroying the fragile workers' democracy and crushing all liberating experiments.

It was these events of the 1920s, as bureaucratic rule was established, that determined the nature of the Soviet Union today.

Indirectly, they are also at the root of the system prevailing in the countries of the Eastern bloc.

Red Army

In all essential respects, these regimes were created by the Red Army forcibly extending the Soviet system.

Thus all these countries are built on a betrayal of the socialist revolution.

The socialised property—a major gain—remains intact however: there are virtually no capitalists or private profit—mainly among peasants and farmers—in the deformed workers' states.

The rhetoric of socialism also remains, but it is mouthed by conservative bureaucrats who have more in common with our own right-wing trade union leaders than with the working class.

Elaborate and extensive repression is necessary to preserve the bureaucrats' material privileges—since the whole edifice is built on corruption and special privileges.

Since the economy is not based on workers' needs but on clumsy, bureaucratic mismanagement, and increasingly linked to the crisis-ridden capitalist economies, these countries are lurching into economic chaos.

So repression is also necessary to quell workers' resistance to the lowering of their living standards which is beginning to happen throughout the bloc.

In Poland this hasn't worked—and the Polish working class has not only demonstrated its own strength but also, without realising it, pointed to the need for a new, political, revolution to overthrow the bureaucrats and re-establish workers' democracy on the basis of the nationalised property relations that flow from the 1917 revolution.

T&G HANDBOOK:

A GUIDE TO

AVOID ACTION

A new women's handbook, just produced by the Transport and General Workers Union, is an attractively produced booklet about "policies and action for the TGWU".

It is also written in a very clear style. It deals with problems of women's equality inside the union, in the workplace and in the eyes of the law.

It also includes interviews with a number of women TGWU members, and notes on pioneering women trade unionists.

The handbook does not disguise the fact that women are very much underrepresented in the leadership of the T&G, in comparison with their growing numbers in the union.

It offers some suggestions about how this might be changed. But the really important question of women's equality at work is not effectively dealt with at all.

The handbook sets out in great detail what the "Sex Discrimination Act" and other legislation says.

And, to its credit, it also points out some of the problems with these laws. What it doesn't make absolutely clear is that parliamentary legislation isn't likely to give women equality.

Women's fight for equality at work boils down to the strength and militancy of the union, and its willingness to take up these issues.

For even where the law *does* support a woman over discrimination, a tribunal generally takes months to meet and reach a decision.

And even if the employee wins the case, the woman concerned often gets no more than a small cash payment and doesn't always get her job back, even if she's been unfairly dismissed.

The only real safeguard for women's equality at work lies in the union's backing her case with industrial action.

The same is true of the section in the handbook called "Bargaining with Employers for Equality".

Resolution

This contains a number of good resolutions, and model claims on everything from maternity and paternity rights to recruitment and training.

It also lists some companies where concessions have been won by TGWU members. But what the book fails to offer is any commitment that the TGWU will adopt a policy of automatically backing industrial action taken by TGWU members to win such claims.

Of course, the T&G isn't likely to do so—especially when you consider that the T&G leadership hasn't even given official backing to the women and men on strike for months on end at say, Advest Engineering in Reading, in a dispute over something as basic and vital as victimisation of union members.

It's just not good enough for the union to produce model clauses unless it puts its weight behind them when disputes are being fought against the employers.



Illustration from TGWU Handbook: what they don't mention are the marathon Trust House Forte hotel strikes that the T&G leaders sold out at the same time!

However, while some of the TGWU's policies for women's equality look all right on paper, others are an obvious sell-out from the start.

This is especially true of the T&G policy on nurseries and creches. The handbook says that: "The TGWU supports the full provision of a comprehensive state system of nursery schools and day nurseries for the under 5's."

"at the moment this provision is totally inadequate and, with the present government, will get a lot worse."

Workplace Nurseries

Does it, therefore, urge union members to fight the Tory cuts and demand free state nurseries? Not a bit of it. Instead it opts for a policy of seeking workplace nurseries.

This policy is adopted despite the fact that one of the TGWU's own officials interviewed earlier in the handbook says of workplace nurseries:

"There's always the danger with factory nurseries that when industrial action comes up, the management could threaten women with their jobs. The answer is with the local authorities."

Never mind. The handbook has another solution:

"Alternatively, the employer and union might keep a list of local registered childminders available to all parents!"

Available, that is, if they can afford £20 or more a week for each child.

Reading between the lines, you get a distinct feeling that the T&G leadership isn't all that committed to fighting for women's equality.

Typically perhaps, the section about changing sexist attitudes and practices is opposite a picture of T&G women demonstrating under a banner reading "T&G. The grip of brotherhood the world o'er!"

More importantly, the T&G is also in the grip of leaders who are busily caving in to the Tories, and refusing to lead an effective fight for the rights of women—or any other workers!

ABORTION RIGHTS IN IRELAND

INTERVIEW

A *Woman Worker* supporter recently met a member of the Dublin "Women's Right to Choose Group", and found out about their struggle for abortion rights in the Republic.

How long has the abortion referral centre which you set up been going?

Only a couple of weeks so far. Up till then the "Wellwoman Clinic" in Dublin used to arrange for women in the Republic to get abortions in England. But the Wellwoman deals with every aspect of women's health and just couldn't cope with the number of women wanting to be referred to abortion clinics. So we set up the Right to Choose Centre especially for that.

How does the centre operate?

We have a full time worker and trained staff. But we have to survive on donations alone, since there's absolutely no chance of getting state financial aid! We make it as smooth as possible for the women. We book their flight to England, arrange for someone to meet them at the airport, fix up hotel accommodation and—of course—book them in at the clinic. All in all it costs about £160—which is obviously hard for women without much money.

Are you planning to campaign for contraceptive clinics too?

Yes—you can't really separate the two. The Wellwoman clinic provided an abortion referral centre and a contraceptive service too. More recently a number of Family Planning Clinics have been set up in Dublin and elsewhere.

These aren't technically illegal at the moment. They sort of operate in a loop-hole in the law. It's illegal to sell contraceptives, so they given them away and ask for donations to keep the clinics going.

But Haughey (the Prime Minister) is about to bring in a new law to restrict the Family Planning Clinics and try to shut them down. In places like Galway, the Church and the "League of Decency" are flat out on an anti-contraceptive

campaign.

If the clinics are to survive, they'll have to break the new law and build up support from the women who use them and from the labour movement to defend themselves.

Are you involved in campaigning too?

Well, we've only been going for a short while. But we intend to launch a pro-choice campaign and to campaign around the contraceptives issue. There's only seven of us so far, though we've got the support of several left groups.

Even the women's movement in Dublin is cautious. Many women's groups don't have a pro-choice position for fear of alienating women. We're planning to work for support from the labour movement. The issue has already been debated in the NUJ. That's a British-based union which organises in the Republic too, and has a pro-choice policy.

There was a big row here recently with right-wing, anti-abortion journalists threatening to resign if the union's policy was made to apply to the Republic as well as Britain. But it did bring the whole question into the open. Until recently no-one discussed abortion in public or in the media, giving both sides of the argument.

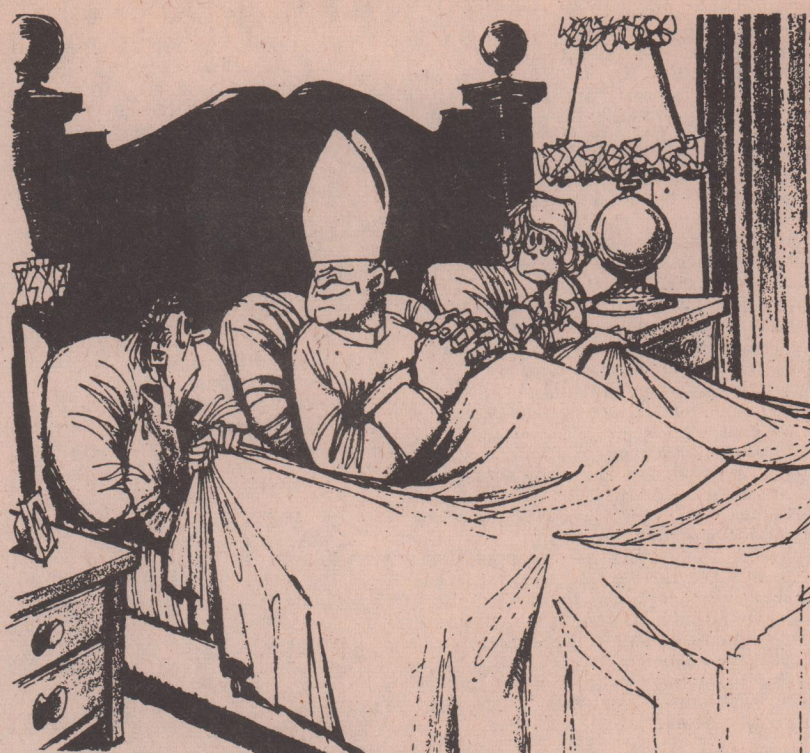
We hope to get support for the centre from other British-based unions with a good policy on abortion, and from Dublin Trades Council. But it's an uphill struggle.

How is it that when about 9,000 Irish women each year get an abortion in England, there's no strong campaign for it to be legalised in the Republic?

Well, one thing is the tremendous power of the Church here, and its built-in links with the state and the media. Also, many women think that, since England's not too far away, it's all right to go there for an abortion and not bother to fight for legalised abortion here. But of course, that's easy to say if you've got the money. The fact is, middle class, well-off women will always get round the problem. It's those of us who don't have much money who really suffer.

How do you see the future?

Well I think the contraceptive question has been won—what we're getting now is a rearguard action, trying to turn back the clock, though we're still a long way from free contraception for whoever wants it. As for abortion, it's going to be a long, hard battle, but we've made a start.



'I hope I'm not intruding ...'

WHY WOMAN WORKER?

Woman Worker is published by the Workers Socialist League as part of the fight to mobilise women together with the working class in the international fight against capitalism. As Trotskyists we are fighting to reconstruct the Fourth International—the world party of socialist revolution—to lead the struggles of the working class.

Our programme, based on the Transitional Programme, is directed towards linking women's struggles for democratic rights and against economic oppression, with the need to overthrow capitalism.

*Women to take on positions of leadership within the unions in order to fight for these policies.

*Joint price committees of trade unionists and housewives to organise the fight against inflation.

*For a sliding scale of wages on top of flat rate increases: for wages to be linked to

price increases as assessed by elected price committees.

*For strike action and occupations to defend the health, education and social services and threatened factories.

*For open-the-books committees to discover the real financial state of the social services, and private companies threatening closure.

*For nationalisation under workers' management without compensation of firms that declare themselves bankrupt.

*Against all anti-abortion legislation—for free abortion and contraception on demand and workers and consumers control of the health service.

*Solidarity with struggles of women internationally against oppression by international imperialism or by the Stalinist bureaucracies in the deformed workers states.

FIGHTING THE CUTS...



...in Birmingham

As part of the cuts in social services, Birmingham Labour City Council has decided to close all the residential nurseries in the city. Other children's homes are also under threat of changed use and some are to be sold to another authority.

The effects of the closures will be devastating; staff in the homes that will have to take the nursery-aged children are neither experienced or sufficient in numbers to deal with the particular needs of these children.

Young babies and multiple-handicapped under 5's cannot easily be placed in family group homes designed for older children.

The decision to close the homes is the logical conclusion of the council's Child Care Review report. And despite promises of alternative provision for child care first, the closures of the homes are being proposed with no such alternative provisions being arranged.

In fact, the widely advertised fostering campaign has miserably failed to find sufficient families to place children with and with the current levels of cuts, it is extremely unlikely that sufficient funds will be made available to potential foster parents—even assuming that sufficient numbers of foster parents could be found.

The news of the closures was not a shock to the two unions—NUPE and NALGO—involved; the child care review had been meeting for some 18 months, but its largely statistical conclusions that showed a reduced need for residential nurseries had been self-created by the deliberate run-down of the homes and the blocking of beds.

The two unions, however, had on the whole ignored the Review group and had allowed the running down of the homes to take place without putting up a fight at all.

Now, with the full time officials negotiating redundancies, the branch officials—who have done nothing to prevent or inform the union membership of the run-down of the homes—are belatedly mouthing militant opposition against the line of the official full timers and are setting up a campaign. Yet their continual expression of doubt on the success of this campaign itself encourages demoralisation among the members, opening the best chance of eventual defeat.

At a joint NUPE/NALGO meeting following the council's decision, it was decided to set up an action committee consisting of representatives from all the homes and others interested in the two unions.

The meeting also declared itself totally opposed to the closures of any of the homes and resolved to prevent the closures with occupations or 'work-ins' and the setting up of an alternative placements unit to by-pass the management's blocking of beds.

There has been no doubt expressed by the workers involved about the need for the residential nurseries but, left to the management, they could be run down to an extent that their defence would become impossible.

It is therefore essential that the workers—both in the homes and fieldworkers—control where the children are to be placed and maintain them as a viable service and thereby challenge the management's arguments that the homes are no longer viable.

These measures alone—though necessary and correct—will not prevent the closures. But so far both NUPE and NALGO have refused to take up the question and develop a policy of *strike action* to defend the occupied homes, which ultimately will be the only way to prevent their closure.

It has also become clear that arguments about the "oppressive nature" of the welfare state are being used to prevent any action at all.

While we as socialists recognise the repressive state interference of placing children in care, often leaving parents ignorant of their rights of access and/or contesting care orders, we nevertheless have to defend existing services where there are no viable alternatives.

It has been quite clear from the meetings of the workers that—contrary to "progressive" social workers arguments about the relative merits of fostering—a significant number of the children in these homes are foster break-downs and these are in addition to the large number of children who are unlikely to be fostered in any case.

No leadership

It is clear so far that the workers in the homes are quite prepared to fight. But it is also clear that the union is offering no leadership and is only reluctantly responding to the demands of the workers in the homes.

Without strike action, the homes are not going to be defended. Unless the union takes up this demand and fights for it the campaign could be a repeat of the one, two years ago in Birmingham, which, while partially successful in preventing the closure of 14 children's homes out of 18 then under threat, relied on stunt politics alone and laid the basis for the weakened union position which has allowed the council now to propose closures.

What has also come out from the campaign so far is the need for unions to be constantly monitoring cuts as they are gradually being implemented.

Workers in the homes have in some cases refused to take children they consider should be in other homes. But many of the workers, isolated with no support from the union and under enormous pressure from management, have been unable to resist and have therefore wound up assisting in the run-down of homes.

The majority of these workers in the homes are women for whom their jobs are essential.

These workers are also the ones who have the greatest problems in attending evening branch meetings and easily become detached from the union.

What is quite clear is the willingness of the workers in these homes to fight, but without clear policies of occupation and supporting strike action against the cuts, NUPE and NALGO have no prospect whatsoever of mobilising their membership to defend existing services and fight the cuts.

In this situation, spineless officials will no doubt continue to blame their own lack of action on the supposed "apathy" of the working class.

...in Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire AHA, with the support of local consultants and the Community Health Council have renewed their attempts to close the vitally necessary long-stay Longworth Hospital for 50 highly dependant elderly women.

There is a critical shortage of well over 300 beds for the elderly in Oxfordshire, admitted by the AHA.

They have just closed the geriatric hospital in Cowley Road, which they argue was not a cut but a straight transfer of beds.

In fact, 13 beds have been lost as well as the specialist geriatric care received there.

The closure of Cowley Road Hospital met with great public hostility, but crucial though this community support for the hospital was, it was only the hospital staff who were in a position to defend it.

It soon became clear, however, that the official line of NUPE—the major union at the hospital—was not to fight to save the hospital, but instead to organise for "the best transfer terms for staff" when closure took place.

When the support committee for Cowley Road was set up, therefore, it did not receive the fullest participation by the union leaders in the hospital.

In fact the NUPE senior steward Betty Ward—a NUPE national executive member—took every opportunity to attack it.

Without a fighting leadership within the hospital, the workers there became demoralised and insecure about carrying out an effective fight

to save the hospital.

The hospital closed, the beds were lost and Betty Ward became full time convenor at the brand new multi-million pound John Radcliffe Hospital.

Fortunately the story at Longworth is very different.

It was in May 1978 that the staff were all gathered together for a mass meeting to be told by an AHA officer that their hospital would close.

"Use your union to get jobs at the new Witney hospital" he said.

Fortunately the union steward at Longworth Hospital had other ideas about what a union was for.

She called a meeting for all union members in the hospital and asked them to oppose the closure when the time came by continuing to work with the patients and keeping all the hospital's facilities open.

To succeed, she said, they would have to seek the support of all the NHS trade unions locally, especially from their own union branch, COHSE.

The site meeting voted unanimously to continue working with their patients in the wards, to go into occupation to prevent bed removal and to ask for supporting strike action when the AHA moves in to physically close it.

It is clear that the AHA and the consultants see geriatric facilities in general and Longworth in particular as a soft option for closure.

Woman Worker supporters are fighting to ensure that the COHSE workers' action with supporting strike action from other health service unions will prove them wrong and keep this much needed hospital open.

...in London

The savagery of the Tories' cuts in the health service are being seen in all their gory detail in London.

At the end of September there was the closure of St. Benedict's geriatric hospital in Tooting, despite heroic resistance by hospital staff.

Now another struggle has emerged at St. Columba's Hospital in Hampstead. *Woman Worker* has often commented on the way the cuts hit the weakest first, but the attack on St. Columba's is the most graphic example yet.

Cancer Patients

It's a hospital for terminally ill cancer patients which the Area Health Authority decided over a year ago should close.

Local trade unionists and staff resisted the plan, with the result that the AHA chose a simple method of running the hospital down: just wait while the patients die off one by one.

So the remaining patients have had to contend not only with their own terminal illness, but with the grim atmosphere of a hospital emptying around them.

However, at the beginning of October, local administrators decided that the patients weren't dying fast enough, so they announced that the remaining eight would be moved and the hospital closed.

When a local consultant publicly opposed the move, he was sacked.

Hospital staff, with official support from NUPE, have been picketing the gates to prevent the move, and have been supported by ambulance drivers. The feeling against the closure is so strong that even private ambulance firms (which moved patients at St. Benedict's) have refused to become involved, and the AHA resorted to minicabs to remove three patients.

The St. Columba's workers need all the support they can get to be assured of victory.

They need support on the picket line (every day, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the hospital, Spaniards Lane, London N.W.3).

But more importantly, they need strike action throughout the public sector in London. Members of NUPE and other public sector unions should be pressing their leadership to call strike action immediately.

woman worker

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Monday November 24
at 7.30 p.m.
Lower Town Hall, Brixton
Called by South London
Hunger Strike Action
Committee

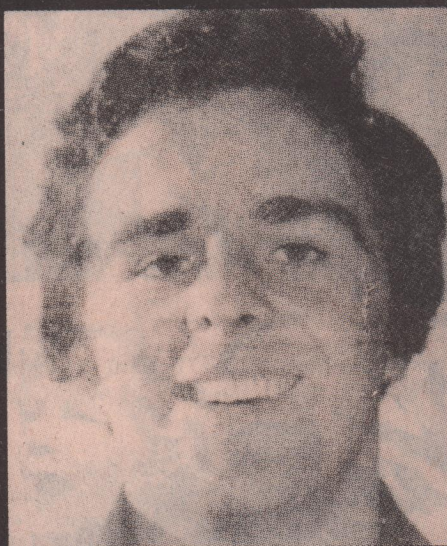
Wednesday November 26
at 7.30 p.m.
Battersea Town Hall,
Lavender Hill
Called by Charter 80



Tommy McKearney (28)
Moy, Co. Tyrone



John Nixon (25)
Armagh City



Ray McCartney (25)
Derry City



Leo Green (27)
Lurgan, Co. Armagh

DON'T LET THEM DIE!

Seven Irish republican prisoners at the notorious Long Kesh concentration camp in Belfast are now in their third week on hunger strike.

They are demanding restoration of their status as prisoners of war, in opposition to the attempts by Labour and Tory governments to brand them as "criminals" for fighting to liberate their country from British rule—imposed by military force. In fighting such imperialist repression, the five specific demands raised by the prisoners are for:

- *The right to wear their own, not prison, clothing.
- *The right to refrain from prison work.
- *The right to free association amongst other political prisoners.
- *The right to organise their own educational and recreational facilities, and to receive one visit, one letter and one parcel a week.
- *The right to full remission of sentences.

These demands have been consistently raised by republican prisoners in Long Kesh since their special category status was stripped from them by the Wilson government in 1976, in a bid to portray as common criminals those who fight the efforts of the British army to preserve the imperialist oppression of the Irish people.

For four years, up to 300 republican prisoners at any one time have been engaged in the

"blanket" protest at Long Kesh in which they have refused to wear prison clothing or to slop out their cells.

In retaliation they have been subjected to savage intimidation: clothed only in a single blanket, they have been left in filthy, unheated cells and subjected to brutal body searches, beatings and endless abuse.

This maltreatment at the hands of British imperialism which has been internationally condemned, has run alongside a complete silence on the blanket struggle from the leadership of the British labour movement.

Trade union and Labour leaders—who so easily condemn barbaric behaviour by right wing regimes in far away Latin America, Asia and Africa—have raised not a whisper against similar activities being carried out by the British military authorities in their efforts to repress the liberation struggle in the six counties of Northern Ireland.

In some cases this shameful silence has been the result of indifference to the struggles of the Irish people for national liberation: in others it is the outcome of tacit or open support for their "own" British ruling class in maintaining its rule over the six counties of Northern Ireland.

As a result, few labour movement leaders have seen any political advantage to be gained from declaring themselves in support of the Blanket men of Long Kesh.

After four years of bitter struggle have failed to make any impact on the British government's position and failed to win the support they need from the British workers' movement, the 'H' Block prisoners have resorted to desperate tactics.

Desperate is certainly the word: the decision to launch a hunger strike in their present weakened state could quickly bring death to the seven men involved.

But there is no doubt that they have been so goaded by ill-treatment and oppression that they are willing to press through their struggle. The only way they can be saved is to ensure that they win their demands.

There have already been too many martyrs to the Irish revolution: the British labour movement has the responsibility to act in solidarity with the hunger strikers and ensure that no man dies.

Already it is clear that the hunger strikers' stand has formed a focal point for a growth of the struggle against British imperialism.

A huge 25,000-strong demonstration through Belfast bore witness to the solid support for the liberation struggle in the six counties—now at a greater level than any time in the last ten years.

And the fears of a rise in the struggle and of the possible deaths of hunger strikers have

helped to stampede a group of union leaders, Labour MPs and individual liberals into adding their signatures to the Charter 80 petition endorsing the prisoners' five demands.

With one or two notable exceptions, these signatories have until now taken no significant stand on the prisoners' issue or the Irish liberation struggle.

Their involvement now must be made the starting point of the broadest possible campaign throughout the labour movement for action in solidarity with the hunger strikers.

This means demanding that these union leaders and Labourites conduct an active campaign at every level in their own organisations for resolutions in support of the prisoners' demands, and for preparations to mobilise maximum support on the national demonstrations on November 15 and December 7 in London.

The fight on these issues must be linked to a full scale mobilisation in the British labour movement against the Thatcher government and against the defenders of British imperialism in the Labour leadership.

In this context, socialists must explicitly raise the demand for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland as the basis for the ending of imperialist rule and the self-determination of the Irish people as a whole.

THATCHER GREETES REAGAN.



Give us time and our policies
will produce a great boom!

It is no coincidence that Thatcher's was one of the first governments to congratulate Ronald Reagan on his victory in the U.S. Presidential elections.

Thatcher and Reagan (and the advisers who surround them) have a great deal in common. Both advocate the same economic policies: unbridled free enterprise; cuts in public spending and control of the money supply (i.e. high interest rates that squeeze and bankrupt weaker firms).

But, perhaps even more ominously for workers throughout the world, they share the same so-called "foreign policy". Like Thatcher, Reagan favours a vast build-up of arms and the most sophisticated nuclear technology.

Reagan has declared that he will "make America great again". He won't let the great American nation be pushed around by the Iranians, the Russians or anyone else. He won't allow popular uprisings against the dictatorships on America's doorstep to threaten her interests.

In other words, with Reagan's presidency the threat of nuclear war and the total destruction that means, have come several steps closer. It also threatens direct military intervention against mass movements in the semi-colonial world.

On Vietnam Reagan has declared: "It is time we recognised that ours was, in truth, a noble cause."

And he has put his words into practice already—by appointing Kissinger and

General Haig to key posts in his Cabinet.

It was these two who ordered the bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam war.

As for his other advisers, they include people like Richard V. Allen who believes that nuclear war is inevitable, so America should start building up military hardware as fast as possible, and should not even consider negotiating with the Soviet Union.

On domestic policy, Reagan is even more openly reactionary than Thatcher.

He is enthusiastically supported not only by reactionary Christian organisations, but also by the Ku Klux Klan, for his bolstering of "traditional values"—i.e. intensified oppression of women, blacks and gays.

He wants abortion made completely illegal, and he opposes the Equal Rights Amendment—a fairly tame constitutional amendment, whose effect would be similar to that of the Sex Discrimination Act in Britain.

So Reagan's election spells a grim time ahead for the American working class and the everpresent threat of nuclear holocaust.

The fact that fewer people voted than in any previous Presidential election shows that Reagan's support is minimal.

This latent opposition in the American working class must be turned into a mass movement to stop Reagan's offensive, and build an American Labour Party around policies to defend the interests of American workers, women, blacks and youth.