

woman worker

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Clay Cross rent campaigners in 1972.

RENT STRIKES

Your chance to fight back

All over the country, local authorities are fixing their 1981/82 budgets—and deciding on cuts and rent and rates increases. With the Tory government demanding massive cuts and trying to force through rent increases of at least £3.25, these budgets are resulting in an attack on working class living standards—whether in the shape of cuts in services or rent and rates rises which are, in effect, cuts in wages. But in many areas there is a fight being organised. In particular, movements against rent increases are getting off the ground. Tenants' associations are being re-vitalised, and some are already organising rent strikes.

Working class women, many of whom have never been politically active and are not part of the organised labour movement are playing a prominent role in these tenants' movements. Here we outline what some local councils are doing and how tenants are beginning to organise and fight back.

"Let's not pretend it's anything else: this is a political fight and we must see it as such, we must be prepared to confront the Council now."

An angry tenant voiced these sentiments on the 'Day of Housing' organised by the Coventry Federation of Tenants. The fury of Council tenants against Coventry Labour Council's implementation of Heseltine's policy is gaining momentum. Tenants in many areas of Coventry are organising themselves in action groups and associations.

The Labour Council has already (prematurely) implemented part of Heseltine's increase on February 16, and plan a further rate rise in April and another rent increase in October.

In an effort to balance the books, the Council has come up against a deficit of £516,000 which is the amount it hopes to collect from tenants with this increase. In doing so they are acting as direct agents of Heseltine, placing the entire burden of the deficit arising from the capitalist crisis onto the backs of Council tenants.

Faced with an ever-falling standard of living, tenants, frustrated with the appalling

Midlands

state of Council housing, long-overdue repairs and an unending barrage of increases are organising themselves to challenge the Council.

The Tenants' Associations vary from area to area: Stoke, Hadford and Hillfields are encouraging tenants to withhold the rent increase, whereas areas like Willenhall are concentrating on extensive repairs surveys.

It is believed that 900 tenants in Coventry are withholding recent rent increases. The Council is clearly worried. Last week it discovered £800,000 in their coffers and have agreed to spend it on repairs. But as one tenant remarked, this amount could be spent on her estate alone.

There have been numerous cases of harassment by the Council: a meeting held by one Tenants Association was taped; individual tenants have been bribed and offered

transfers, and in one area, the Council is setting up its own meeting with tenants in an attempt to bypass the newly founded Residents Association.

It is working class women in particular, who have come to the forefront in taking up a fight on housing conditions. Their determination to struggle and organise effectively is clearly there. To win these struggles it is necessary to have a perspective and programme of victory which can give confidence to those opening themselves to victimisation.

The Tenants Associations must be strengthened and prepare the groundwork for a sharp political confrontation. 13 Labour Councillors voted against the rent increase. Tenants must link up with these Councillors and lead the fight against those right wing Councillors that are betraying the interests of the working class.

The fight must be taken into the organised strength of the trade union movement to kick out the right and in the process bring this anti-working-class government to its knees.

London

existing cuts, and rent and rates increases.

The £11million cuts (about 10% of next year's projected expenditure) include £1million from housing repairs, £2.3million from Social Services, £200,000 (20%) from grants to voluntary organisations, £1million from amenities and recreation.

A £4 two-stage rent increase is proposed together with 37½% on the domestic rate.

Knight argues that these cuts will 'protect essential services'—and yet for the past 2 years he has insisted, correctly, against Tory accusations of waste and extravagance, that any cuts would affect services.

He also argues that his proposals 'protect

existing job holders' and maintains a commitment to no redundancies. However, it is clear and he has admitted, that natural wastage will occur—thus leaving people on the dole who might have taken those jobs. 200 white collar jobs are to disappear in this way.

These cuts will not satisfy the Tories who have demanded much greater cuts—including slashing the Council's workforce.

They certainly will not satisfy Lambeth workers, who will see their services deteriorate in quality while they are forced to fork out more money for them.

A lobby has been called of the rate-fixing council meeting on March 26. A huge turnout is essential to stop these proposals being implemented and show once again that Lambeth Council will have the support of Lambeth workers if it stands and fights the Tories, instead of retreating.

Scotland

Scottish Councils have also been announcing big rises in rates and in council rents.

In Stirling District local rates have been increased by 120% by a council pledged to maintain and extend services, while council rents go up by a further £1.15.

And in Dundee, another Labour Council opposing the cuts has refused to increase rents but raised rates by 150%. Such huge rate increases encourage workers to blame Labour Councils rather than Tory cuts for the attacks on their living standards.

Meanwhile, in Paisley angry demonstrations and the threat of a rent strike have forced the Labour council to reduce its rent increase from 50% to 35%. Tenants' leaders still predict the rent strike will go ahead.

North-West

The Mid-Cheshire Trades Council's council of action has called a rally on March 16 to protest at rent and rate increases and the cuts.

The Tory-controlled local council is proposing average rent increases of around £4.50—£1.55 more than Heseltine has asked for. On top of this tenants will be faced with about £1.50 more on their rates bill each week.

As Dave Murphy, chairman of the council of action, pointed out:

"They are political increases. The tenants and ratepayers should not be responsible for any kind of Tory-imposed cuts and rent and rates increases."

The council of action is hoping that the rally will launch a massive protest movement—including a rent strike.

Lambeth's Labour-controlled Council has, until now, defiantly refused to carry out the cuts demanded by Heseltine and the Tory government.

Council leader, Ted Knight, has led two marches through the Borough to demonstrate support for the Council's stand. In February Lambeth trades unions staged a week of action, including strike action and work-ins, in support of their refusal to cut.

However, the tide is now beginning to turn, and Lambeth's Council is retreating from its defiant stand.

Cowed by threats of surcharge by the District Auditor and by a reactionary mass movement whipped up by the Tories and other right-wing organisations against his former (in our view mistaken) policy of raising the rates to keep the Council afloat, Ted Knight is now proposing a 1981/82 budget which

HOSPITAL OCCUPATION



Kate White

Woman Worker interviewed four women who took part in the occupation of Longworth Hospital in Oxfordshire—Kate White, Myra Bungay, Margaret Bradbury and Sylvia Firth.

Longworth is a hospital for geriatric women, which was occupied in December 1980 to prevent the Area Health Authority (which is chaired by a leading local Labour Party member Lady McCarthy) carrying out their threat to close the first floor—which the staff saw as the first step to total closure.

On February 10, the AHA, with the co-operation of the police, raided the hospital, removed patients from the first floor and closed the floor down. The occupation was subsequently suspended—but as this interview makes clear, the fight is by no means over.

Why did you go into occupation?

KW: Well it's simple really. I went into it because I feel so deeply about the elderly and our old ladies here.

SF: I was nervous when Margaret rang me up and told me we were occupying. I thought I'm not an argumentative person, I can't stand up like that.

MB: Well that's how I felt but we just had to do it. You do when you feel strongly, you feel you just can't let them get away with it.

SF: Yes, when you hear they're 200 beds short for the old people, then you know you've got to get back at the AHA. It's for the elderly. They can't do the fighting, so whether we were used to it or not we had to do it for them, even though I'd never thought I'd see the day when I'd be picketing.

Did the occupation change the atmosphere in the hospital?

Myra: Oh yes, that's why the RCN and some sisters didn't like it. It put their noses out of joint when it was us making the decisions.

MB: We all felt happier working during the occupation. There was a sense of purpose, of doing something constructive and of being in control of things, taking decisions, keeping the AHA out.

What about the raid?

MB: Well everyone was shocked by that. I didn't think anyone really expected the AHA to use those kind of methods.

What could have prevented the raid?

Myra: I don't think just having more pickets would have stopped it. They were prepared to do the job with all the police. I think it would have been stopped if they really felt the unions meant business. If we'd had the real power of the union behind us.

KW: Yes, if the union had stressed that they were going for all out strike action that would have stopped them. But we just didn't get that kind of help from the top in our union and the AHA knew it.

Did the union officers do all they could to help?

KW: Yes. One or two locally, but the rest really let us down. For the most part they just left us alone to get on with it but the one they did send down, Ernie Brooks, was just wishy washy. He would only point to all the problems of the occupation. He'd really get

you down. He never offered you any ideas about what we could do to strengthen it, he never lifted you up, gave you encouragement, he'd just try and take the fight out of you.

He only seemed concerned with settling for the best we can—which usually meant to us nothing at all!

What did the union officers do to strengthen the occupation?

Myra: Well, they never did what we asked them for, like getting support from the other unions and going all-out to get supporting action from the other COHSE members, and other things like press statements. We asked for a typewriter and duplicator from the first week and we never got it. For publicity we managed to get one poster and one badge but not till it had been going for two months.

SF: I don't think the union was doing all it could do. I always thought the union would be behind me. That's what I paid my money for, but what have we got them for if they don't do any good?

MB: I thought if we were fighting to save the hospital we'd need the help from all the other members and the leaders who are the only ones in a position to do it, would call on them to coordinate it.

Has it made you want to leave the union?

Myra: Oh no. It makes you want to stay in and fight and tell them they're not the union, it's us, the members, and we've got to let them know they've got to do what we want.

KW: Where I come from in the mining villages in Wales, the unions we've built, struggled for through blood and sweat to give us that strength and protection.

You've got to be part of it and get it back out of the grip of that lot. You saw what they were like at the South East Region TUC conference. They've got it all there but they don't use it. Talking, talking, but no action.

Why do you think that is?

Myra: Well, they've got their own cosy quiet little world, leave well be is their motto.

KW: Yes. They're so busy mixing with management they begin to get like them. They start not wanting what they call 'trouble'. As far as they're concerned if we want to fight then they want to stay well out of it.

The AHA say the cuts aren't their fault. They say there isn't the money.

Myra: If they're so short of money why don't they open the books so we can see for ourselves.

As far as I'm concerned it's a case of too many chiefs and not enough Indians—we could run this place for a week for what it costs a day. And look at where the money's going. All that money on the drugs, the food, the beds, everything. It goes into someone's private pocket, not into our health service.

What about the role of Lady McCarthy?

KW: I don't think you should print what we feel about her.

MB: I thought the Labour Party was always reckoned to be the party of the working class but she's just fighting against everything we believe in.

Myra: Well I didn't vote Labour in the last election because the way I look at it, if you've got policies that you say are for the working class you should stick to it and do just that. But the last lot didn't when they were in government and McCarthy's not now. She's just going along with money. It's balancing her books that matters to her, not our old ladies.

MB: It's wrong when she'd prefer to see this place sold off as a private nursing home or something.

Myra: Yes, give her her way and in another two years we won't have our health service. It will all be BUPA like you see on TV all the time now.

KW: Oh no we just can't, won't let it go back to that. I've lived through it before, kids dying for want of blood which their parents couldn't afford to pay for.

When I was in school in winter six or seven funerals would go past our classroom, children, babies, and all because they've got no money for proper health care.

SF: It's like poor old 'H'. If she'd had the money for private care she wouldn't be dead now.

She came in here before Christmas. We knew she couldn't cope at home. She'd no relatives and had had some nasty falls and she was getting a bit dotty.

But McCarthy refused her a bed here saying they weren't taking in any new patients as they wanted to close the first floor.

Well last week she was found dead on the cold stone floor in the hallway of her cottage. She had been trying to light her electric fire with matches and had fallen.

KW: It's for H and all the hundreds like her that we're fighting.

EL SALVADOR U.S. brut

Margaret Thatcher returned recently from a friendly visit to co-thinker and 'free world' champion Ronald Reagan where she pledged her government's total support for US military involvement in El Salvador 'to combat Russian and Cuban communist intervention' in that country.

The ruling junta in El Salvador came to power in a CIA backed coup in October 1979, has received \$75 million in military and economic aid from the US and welcomed large teams of 'advisers' who work closely with the army. The US Rapid Deployment Force of 100,000 men is poised for action in Florida, the Caribbean Joint Task Force is at the ready and CONDECA (Central American Defence Council) forces are massed on El Salvador's borders with Honduras and Guatemala.

SHACKS

So what is it that these champions of freedom and democracy are so anxious to defend? Most of the land in El Salvador is owned by the so-called '14 families'; 73% of children suffer malnutrition; the majority of



El Salvador soldiers look at their victims: ever

What about the suspension of the occupation?

Myra: We've suspended the occupation as the first floor is closed because of the raid.

The AHA say they consider that the hospital will stay open for three to four years, but we don't believe that. We may well be back in occupation before the end of the year and just now we're reserving our strength.

MB: Yes, and when we reoccupy we'll be a lot stronger. We learnt a great deal about our strengths and mistakes and the whole occupation has made everyone aware of the health cuts and just what can be done to fight them. We'll be back all right. After all, we've just got to, haven't we?

NOTE: COHSE is the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the union which represents the Longworth workers. RCN is the Royal College of Nursing, which, although registered as a union is not affiliated to the TUC and often acts in a very anti-union way.

AL VADOR backing for al regime

the population has no access to clean water, education or housing, other than cardboard shacks; 60% of the adult population earns £1 a week; peasant unions exist but are completely illegal and industrial unions are persecuted.

MASSACRES

Last year 10,000 people were murdered by the security forces (most of them unarmed workers and peasants), their mutilated bodies dumped on the side of a road or in shallow graves and another 2,000 have already been killed this year.

These statistics can be illustrated by examples of the level of brutality necessary to maintain this economic and political injustice: peasant women blindfolded, tied to a bunk in the barracks and gang-raped, officers first; entire landless peasant workforces massacred for asking for a wage rise; worker militants tortured and killed for organising strike action; peaceful demonstrations shot at by army snipers . . . a level of brutality we acquiesce in if we fail to organise solidarity action here in Britain. After all, it's Britain's ally, the USA, and Thatcher's pal Reagan who are propping up this regime.

Although here in Britain the working class pays a high price for the current recession in the world economy—unemployment, cuts, low wages, etc., we are still relatively privileged because we live in a rich, imperialist country, the highest price of all is always paid by workers and peasants in the underdeveloped countries, *underdeveloped by imperialism*. In order to keep labour cheap for the multinationals, in order to guarantee cheap imports of raw products, (mainly coffee from El Salvador), in order to guarantee that these dependent economies respect their foreign debts and remain under the political control of capitalist banks like the IMF, in order to prevent workers and peasants rising up and fighting against capitalism, imperialist governments like our own prop up the most vicious anti-worker regimes.

"CUBAN ARMS"

Unfortunately indeed, the only outside military involvement is that of the US since the Soviet Union and Cuba have been so reticent with their aid—contrary to Reagan's claims that "communist" arms are flooding into the country.



day 30 people are assassinated or disappear.

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.

Oxford Latin America Committee

DEMONSTRATION

Against US intervention in El Salvador
Saturday April 4th

Assemble 2.00 pm. at 'The Plain'
OXFORD

Followed by Rally with speakers from the Nicaraguan Embassy, the Grenadan High Commissioner and others

Social in the evening

Come and support it!
Bring banners!

Although as Trotskyists we have many political disagreements with the leaders of the guerrilla movement, the FMLN, we have a clear responsibility to support them against the bloody military junta and their imperialist allies.

The US State Department assesses that a guerrilla army must be outnumbered 10-1 by the regular army if it is to be completely routed.

At present they are only outnumbered 4-1 and a full scale intervention to follow the new military package just approved cannot be ruled out.

*Fight for solidarity with the workers' and peasants' resistance!

*Demonstrate your hostility to Thatcher-backed US intervention!

*Fight for the reconstruction of an international revolutionary socialist party—the Fourth International—as the only organisation which will be capable of concrete solidarity with the oppressed masses over the world.

Abortion Rights Conference

Saturday March 14th is the date of the next National Abortion Campaign/Labour Abortion Rights Campaign Trade Union conference.

For about the first time in its history, NAC is actually going on the offensive, to fight for 'positive' legislation, rather than being forced to defend the 1967 Act. This involves extending abortion rights and facilities under the NHS, and seeking to end the regional differences which now exist.

It will be an important conference. NAC/LARC recognise that changes will not come without pressure from the Labour movement—the trade unions and the Labour Party.

Pro-choice MPs may make an attempt to liberalise the 1967 Act and to push for new laws requiring the DHSS to provide adequate abortion facilities, but we also need the strength of the Labour movement, in national and locally organised action, for such an attempt to have any chance of success.

We have had to defend what we have got for too long—now is the time to go on the offensive.

FILM REVIEW Prostitute

For a film produced solely by men "Prostitute" is a gripping and sympathetic insight into the everyday lives of women prostitutes.

Shot in a documentary film style, Tony Garnett (the director) brings the audience closer to the feel of the women portrayed.

The scene is set in a multi-racial, working class region of Birmingham amidst the dilapidated streets of an obviously run-down area.

Nearly all the prostitutes are mothers who, contrary to stilted public opinion, take their responsibilities seriously. The absence of men, in the role of husband, father or lover, is conspicuous. Whether this is due to the particular relationship they have with men by virtue of their profession is not examined in the film.

In any case, little respect or acknowledgement is given towards men in their conversations, except in a derogatory sense. Yet there is a feeling of solidarity within the prostitutes' community; the women often rallying together to help look after children whilst a mother undergoes imprisonment. (With the help of a sympathetic social worker, the prostitutes try to organise themselves).

Eager that some form of organisation is set up to help prostitutes against the discriminating arm of the law, the women are equally suspicious of any moralistic preaching or hints of reform.

Prostitution is seen as just another job. One which offers greater financial rewards than any factory job could—even if they were easy to get—and the hours can be made to fit in with the children's needs.

Whether this attitude is justifiable in a political sense, (something which we have yet to iron out), this is how these women view their profession.

Garnett also shows how different working class prostitution is from it's middle class equivalent. Perhaps not so much directly, as in the attitudes and consciousness behind the act.

When Sandra (the central character) attends a businessmen's convention, she is at a loss. Contact with her clients on the streets seems clearcut by comparison.

The prostitute gets into a car, has sex, gets out and waits for the next customer. Dialogue is minimal, interest is nil.

'Hostesses' on the other hand, must talk, be witty and look interested in their clients if they are to score. The role play needed in this situation is completely at odds with the defined prostitute/client line Sandra is used to. However, the money is good, and she meets a sophisticated prostitute from London who offers the possibility of a job.

This decision is not welcomed by the social worker who wants Sandra to stay in

Birmingham and help build the prostitutes action committee. They are friends and live in the same house (much to the disapproval of the social services department).

There is a hilarious yet telling interlude within the film when the social worker meets a trendy sociology lecturer at a conference. A great deal of time is spent in theorising about sex, yet when they actually stop talking long enough to actually get around to it, their sexual advances are embarrassingly awkward and self conscious.

This scene produces more red faces amongst the audience (myself included) than any other explicit sexual act involving the prostitutes.

Garnett masterfully hits out again at the complicated theme of role-play, with special reference to the sexual morality that even the most 'liberated' middle class people struggle to overcome. This uneasiness is highlighted when Sandra proclaims that at least she isn't stupid enough to give it away for free!

Needless to say, the social worker never meets up with the trendy lecturer again. He goes happily back to his wife and family after securing a weekend with 'a bit on the side'.

Yet we all know that this is a million miles away from prostituting yourself . . . don't we?

Perhaps Garnett is suggesting that the outcome of these two women's actions are much the same, with only the degree to which it is done making one acceptable and the other not.

Anyhow, Sandra leaves for London and with the help of her contact is introduced to a woman who runs a prostitution racket (who is unfortunately portrayed as a 'butch' Madame).

She enters the world of fantasy eroticism and hard-core prostitution. After a series of grotesque encounters she finally stops working for the agency and decides to go it alone.

Moving into a new area she is totally inexperienced in the dealings of the organised crime syndicate and soon falls prey to the local protection racket. This experience induces her to go back home to the relative security and safety of her old haunts.

Meanwhile, the social worker has finally got some recognition for her work. A television network is interested in making a documentary about the lives of prostitutes, with a difference.

Things look promising, but as Sandra steps out onto the Birmingham streets again, the vice squad is not far away.

by Karen Hammond



IRELAND WHY WE MUST SUPPORT HUNGER STRIKERS

On 1 March Bobby Sands began a hunger strike to the death in the H Blocks of Long Kesh concentration camp.

The following day all the republican prisoners both in the H Blocks and in Armagh jail came off the "no-wash" protest. This protest started in 1978 in the H Blocks and last April in the women's prison in Armagh.

The women were beaten up and kept in their cells for 48 hours and denied the use of toilet and washing facilities. They tried in desperation to empty their overflowing chamber pots out of the window but the warders barred these up, allowing no natural light and fresh air into the cells.

At the end of this period the prison authorities offered the women the use of the toilet as a privilege which could be withdrawn at any time.

The women demanded the use of a toilet as a basic human right but were refused this. The women faced no alternative than living in cells with their urine and faeces. They rubbed their faeces on the wall as this is the only means of allowing it to dry. It also keeps the floor, where their food and bedding is placed, as clean as possible, given the barbaric conditions imposed by the prison regime.

On December 1 three women prisoners joined seven male prisoners then on hunger strike in the H Blocks to demand political status.

The women in Armagh, all young, working class women, have been imprisoned for allegedly playing a part in the war that has been going on in the six counties for the past twelve years.

They come from working class districts that have been attacked by loyalist gangs, the police (RUC), and the British Army.

80% of male and female prisoners have been convicted on the basis of a statement signed under torture in the army and police interrogation centres.

They have been tried in special secret non-jury Diplock Courts. All are in prison for their part in alleged political offences and have been arrested, tried and sentenced under special emergency legislation. Their demand in the hunger strike was and is for recognition as political prisoners.

During the hunger strike there were massive street demonstrations and a wave of strikes in support of the prisoners. Confronted by this working class anger and fearing an escalation in working class action the British government was forced to back down.

On December 17 they did a deal with the prisoners, as a result of which the hunger strike was called off. When the demonstrations and strikes began to subside Thatcher's bosses' government felt safe enough to tear up their side of the agreement. This has resulted in the new hunger strike.

Women in Armagh will also be joining the hunger strike but no date has been set as yet.

The British Army was sent to the six counties in 1969, not "to keep the peace", as the bosses would have us believe, but to hold back the Catholic working class which had taken to the streets in its tens of thousands demanding decent housing, jobs, a decent wage and the right to control decisions affecting their daily lives.

Occupation

The prisoners in Armagh and the H Blocks have been imprisoned for fighting to get the British Army out of Ireland.

Their struggle is part of the daily struggle of the Irish working class against police and army repression and terrible poverty—imposed on them by the same class enemy that is attacking the living standards and political rights of workers in Britain.

British workers have a duty to support the struggle of their class brothers and sisters in Ireland against the British occupation of their country.

Any attempt to raise the issue of Ireland in the British working class will be met with the immediate opposition from leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions. They have, for decades, lined themselves up with

the bosses' policy on Ireland. This is the same leadership that time and again holds back British workers in their struggles around jobs, wages and living conditions.

There is an urgent need to raise the issue of the Irish prisoners in trade union branches and the Labour Party. It is necessary to pass resolutions in support of the prisoners' demands and demand of those labour leaders who have already given token support that they fight for action in support of the prisoners.

The fight to take up the cause of the Irish prisoners is part of the fight for working class action in Britain to force the withdrawal of the British army from Ireland.

by Mary Smythe

NURSERY VICTORY!

The campaign to keep the Fosse Road Nursery in Leicester from closing down has scored an important victory.

At its meeting on January 21 the Leicestershire County Council decided to drop plans to close the nursery when the new Family Centre opens in the area and instead to extend the catchment area to allow children from the nearby Braunstone Estate to use the nursery.

The news came in a letter to Nursery Campaign Secretary Jane Atkin from the new Director of Social Services and arrived by hand the day before an important nursery meeting was to take place.

Although the letter is evasive on the question of maintaining the number of places, this will nevertheless mean an extension of full-time facilities in this particular area of Leicester.

However, the campaign is now involved on the other side of the city in Highfields, where a nursery is scheduled to close at the end of March. The nursery, purpose-built and only 10 years old, will close because of the withdrawal of urban aid grant. Parents have already lobbied the director's visit to the nursery and a council meeting and are to hold a public meeting.

Thatcher humiliated

Since the Tories came to power almost 2 years ago, there have been little effective labour movement action to defend working class interests against their vicious attacks.

The TUC has done nothing apart from organising 'days of action' and weak-kneed leafletting campaigns. The Steel strike was sold out by Bill Sirs and the rest of the steelworkers' union leaders after a 13 week struggle.

But the action of the miners last month, in defence of jobs in the coal industry, showed what workers can do when they are organised and determined to fight. Within a matter of days Thatcher had made a U turn, and postponed pit closures. Should the Tories try at a later date to go ahead with cuts in coal production and jobs, the miners have indicated they will again take action.

This is a clear example for workers in other industries that the Tories can be defeated. And while it is difficult for workers in small, privately owned firms, or in jobs which are not of central importance to the economy, to defy Thatcher single-handed, it is now clear for all to see, that when workers unite in a determined fight against job loss or attacks on living standards, they can win.

The way to defend working class interests is not to wait for the next election, or to wait for a TUC initiative, but to organise now for a General Strike to bring down the Tories.

REAGAN WAR-MONGERING

Not many people can have been very surprised to see that our own Margaret Thatcher was the first foreign dignitary to visit the new US President, Ronald Reagan.

Nor can there have been much amazement at seeing how marvellously Reagan and Thatcher got on together. The only real point of dispute between the two was how fast they should go in attacking working class living standards.

Reagan and his aides, of course, completely agree with Thatcher's monetarist policies. But they claim that the only reason the package of massive public spending cuts, tax cuts for the rich, and high interest rates have failed to rejuvenate British industry is because they haven't been vicious enough!

In line with this theory, Reagan's budget amounts to a massive attack on the American working class. He proposes to cut income taxes by 10% in each of the next three years. Public spending is scheduled to be cut by £2,000 million in this year and £22,000 million next year.

Unemployment is bound to shoot up, while workers suffer the effects of what will amount to demolition of welfare programmes. As in Britain, women workers will be the first and hardest hit.

At the same time, military spending is being increased as Reagan acts on his election pledges to pursue a hard-line foreign policy.

He has already promised to re-start production of the neutron bomb—a weapon that has a most useful quality for the imperialists: it destroys life while leaving property intact.

Carter backed away from deployment of the neutron bomb because even he considered it politically unacceptable. Reagan obviously has no such qualms—especially since American lives are not threatened: it is only to be stationed in Europe.

Reagan has also re-started his determination to suppress popular uprisings against repressive right-wing dictatorships. He has threatened to blockade Cuba to prevent arms getting through to guerrillas fighting the junta in El Salvador (see separate article).

Thatcher and Reagan have been egging each other in their war-mongering speeches and have now apparently agreed to a joint 'rapid deployment' force to police the world, able to intervene where friendly repressive dictatorships are threatened by popular resistance. Even Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington is reported to be surprised at this announcement!

The miners in Britain have shown that the likes of Thatcher can be stopped in their tracks by determined opposition in the organised working class. It is to be hoped that the American working class will soon begin to follow suit.

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