



Le Pen with NF MPs

Fascism in France

As Workers' Liberty goes to press, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the French National Front, has just cancelled his plans to speak at a fringe meeting at Tory Party conference in October.

Le Pen was invited by Alfred Sherman, a former adviser to Margaret Thatcher. But an ad hoc committee, 'Picket Le Pen', immediately made plans to demonstrate in protest. Worried Tories complained, and Le Pen withdrew.

In France, the National Front's 10 per cent of the vote has won it a lot of collaboration from the mainstream right.

This summer a formal coalition of the Gaullist and Radical parties with the National Front won a local election in Grasse. And the mainstream right-wing parties on a regional council voted through a National Front proposal that jobs at a new Disneyland should be reserved for people of French nationality.

In recent years the National Front has tried to present itself as a normal right-wing party, not fascist or violent. For the French parliamentary elections in May 1986 it pulled in a lot of traditional right-wing politicians with no fascist past to stand as NF candidates.

Le Pen's recent comment that the Nazis' mass murder of six million Jews was a matter of debate, and anyway "a detail in the history of the Second World War", was a lapse. But Le Pen himself

has spent most of his political history in fascist fringe politics.

As a student he joined Action Française, the fascist movement of the time. In 1956 he was elected to parliament on the ticket of the semi-fascist Poujadist movement. During the Algerian war of independence, there is evidence that he took part in torturing Algerian prisoners. In 1968 he got a court conviction for publishing a record of Nazi songs.

His associates in the NF are of the same stripe. Pierre Sergent was the head of the French section of the OAS, the terrorist organisation set up by European settlers in Algeria to fight against the French government's decision to give Algeria independence. He was sentenced to death for his OAS activities, and is able to take part in politics today only because of a general amnesty granted by De Gaulle in 1968.

Roger Holleindre is another former OAS man and veteran fascist. Pierre Ceyrac is a Moonie.

The National Front was founded in 1972. Its main forces came from an openly fascist group, Ordre Nouveau, which in its turn was a successor to the Nazi group Occident. But the NF broke decisively out of the world of Hitler-nostalgia fringe politics when it got a big vote in the municipal elections of 1983.

In the Euro-elections of 1984 it did even better: 11% of the vote. The NF's score in France's parliamentary elections of May 1986 was slightly lower, at

9.8%, but the significant thing was that the 1984 result had been shown not to be a one-off. Today, 24% of those questioned will tell an opinion poll that they agree with much of what Le Pen says.

The NF won 35 MPs in 1986. Across France, it had only 20,000 votes fewer than the once-mighty French Communist Party. It scored heavily in run-down working-class areas. It got 14½% of the vote in Seine-St. Denis, the Paris suburbs which were once the stronghold of the CP.

The NF's biggest successes were in the south, where large numbers of former Algerian settlers provide a base for far right politics. It scored 24% in Marseilles.

The NF's main pitch is anti-immigrant. 2½ million unemployed equals 2½ million immigrants, it says. It claims not to be violent, but a Socialist Party activist was killed by a NF member during the May 1986 election campaign. Many NF members have attacked Arabs, Jews and worker militants — sometimes fatally. The electoral rise of the NF has gone together with a rise in street violence against Arabs.

SOS-Racisme was founded in 1985 to oppose Le Pen, and had a big success in that year with a badge saying 'Touche pas à mon pote' (Don't touch my pal), defending blacks and Arabs against the NF's racism. Socialist Party members have played a big role in SOS-Racisme.

However, the weaknesses of the Left helped lay the basis for Le Pen's rise. In

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no other metropolitan country is the Left so nationalist as in France. The French Communist Party displays posters with messages like 'No to a German Europe' or 'I love my country — I'm joining the French Communist Party'. Both the Communist Party and the Socialist Party favour a complete ban on further immigration. The Socialist Party sings the national anthem, the Marseillaise, as its own song. A CP mayor, some years ago, even led a violent attack on a Malian workers' hostel in his municipality, complaining

that the municipality had 'too many' immigrants and they should be sent to right-wing municipalities instead. Both the CP and the SP also support France's 'independent' nuclear arsenal.

This background of nationalism helped Le Pen gain ground after 1983, when the Socialist/Communist government elected in 1981 gave up on its reforming promises and went for a full-scale austerity policy, disillusioning and disgusting its working-class supporters. ●

Michele Carlisle

TUC congress

Fudging the issues

'Building for the future' was the official slogan of this year's British TUC congress. The official optimism was in sharp contrast to the pessimism — verging, in some quarters, on panic — that reigned behind the scenes at Congress House and that permeated the debates at Blackpool.

TUC membership dropped by 342,000 last year, bringing the total down to 9.2 million. The 1979 peak was 12 million. It is, according to Paul Routledge writing in *New Society*, widely accepted in Congress House that membership will drop to 5.5 million on present trends.

The problem is that the 'mainstream' union leaders (from Todd on the left to Edmonds on the right) have no very coherent ideas about how to halt the decline. The maverick EETPU leaders, of course, do have an answer — business unionism. The failure of the mainstreamers to offer a clear alternative to the EETPU approach was the underlying reason for the fudge at Blackpool on union organisation, whereby a showdown over no-strike deals was avoided. All such contentious issues are to be referred to a 'review body' intended to chart the way forward for the movement.

Meanwhile the EETPU has a free hand to go on signing no-strike deals.

EETPU leader Eric Hammond was able to point to the fact that while other union leaders may denounce the EETPU, many of them have been surreptitiously adopting the electricians' own practices. Ron Todd was visibly embarrassed by Hammond's reference to the TGWU's single-union deals (Norsk-Hydro on Tyneside, for instance), which amount to no-strike deals in all but name.

All the TUC mainstreamers could offer as an alternative to business unionism was (in the contemptuous words of Arthur Scargill) 'Saatchi and Saatchi trade unionism': credit cards, slick advertising, and glossy brochures. Scargill and CPSA deputy general secretary John Macreadie were just

about the only voices raised for class struggle and solidarity.

In fairness to Edmonds and Todd, it

Australia

No break from Labor

Labor got back with an increased majority in Australia's July general election.

Many workers were disillusioned with the Labor government's right-wing record, but that disillusion did not turn them to the left. Left-of-Labor candidates did badly, and the main gains went to the Democrats, who are something like Britain's Liberals (while Australia's Liberals correspond to Britain's Tories).

The results reinforce the need to build a political alternative to Hawke and Keating within the Australian Labor

Party. Many on the left say that this is hopeless. Many ALP members have left the Party in disgust. But the fight for a socialist alternative in the ALP has not been seriously tested. The 'official' left has not fought at all.

Socialism cannot be won except by the struggle of the working class. The ALP still has the affiliation of the major unions. The problem of the lack of a socialist party cannot be solved unless socialists conduct a fight in the labour movement — the unions and the ALP — for their politics and programme. ●

Jim Denham

Jim Denham

Child abuse

Who helps the victims?

IF YOUR child's friend comes to you tomorrow and says that her dad is doing bad things to her and playing with parts she doesn't like when Mum goes out, how do you respond?

Rush to the police station? Your local social services office? A solicitor?

Or do you ignore the child and hope that it will all go away. After all, you know what children are, they always make up stories — probably from something they have seen on the telly!

Never make that mistake. If a child tells you that she has been sexually abused, believe her. She will be telling the truth.

You may decide to go to the police. If the child has had full sexual intercourse within the last 48 hours and she can be subjected to full internal medical examination, usually by a grumpy male police doctor and often in a police sta-

tion (where the child will be terrified, because only naughty children go to police stations), then perhaps she might stand a chance.

But UK law is very narrow in its definition of incest. There must be a blood tie between abuser and victim. Sexual intercourse must take place, and it must be between male and female.

In my experience of working with young children, sexual intercourse of fathers with daughters or mothers with sons are among the less likely types of abuse. The abusers are more often step-parents or 'uncles', i.e. Mum's or Dad's friends. Full intercourse is less common than genital fingering, masturbation, or oral sex — which legally count as indecent assault, with a maximum sentence of five years rather than life (as for incest).

Sentences for sexual abuse of girls also become much shorter when the victim reaches the magic age of 13 years. Why?

With parole, a father who has constantly sexually abused his daughter for five years could be out of prison in nine months.

The rules on sentencing are extremely inconsistent. I would not argue for longer sentences, which usually only reinforce the perpetrator in his feelings of correctness and rightness about what he has done. There is virtually no treatment offered to the men who perpetrate these acts.

The system responds by breaking up families. It puts children into care, it puts Dad into prison, and it leaves Mum feeling bitter, lost and angry.

So the law doesn't do much good. You might decide to go to social services. They will often be sympathetic, but their resources are stretched to the limit. Staff are often carrying large and difficult case-loads, and there are few or no places in local authority children's homes.

They may be able to find a foster family if you are willing to wait for some weeks or months. They may have one worker who specialises in this area, but there will be a six week wait to see her.

Children can be removed for their own safety and protection. This usually means that they have to leave home, or social services departments try to get the perpetrators to leave home. This often reinforces the child's misery and unhappiness, because in many cases the child does have a special relationship with the perpetrator. She was after all special, and didn't he tell her that all these awful things would happen if she ever told anyone about their 'little secret'?

There are no short cliché-type answers to these dilemmas. We live in a society that publicly condemns but privately condones sexual abuse of children.

There are statistics which indicate that it is more common in poorer households, but I doubt that there is any class distinction. We live in a system that reinforces men's sexual power over women with every picture of a naked woman and every lurid tabloid story.

We need to change the system which promotes the superiority of one sex over another. We need to push ideas of deferred prosecution and deferred sentencing so that families and children can be worked with therapeutically. The victims should be able to stay with the people they love most so that they and the perpetrator can get the help they desperately need.

We also need to educate children from a very early age that they have the right to say no. We need more nursery places, so that young children come into contact with adults who are trained to deal with sexual abuse.

We need a large-scale education programme to make people aware that children do have rights. One of the reasons that an adult abuser has so

much power over a child is total secrecy. We need a communal awareness that the perpetrator is sick and needs help, but the child should not have to save in her adult life "I needed to talk, I needed help, but there was no-one to go to. There was no help".

This subject is enormous. There is a lot of research taking place both here and in America, and I've attempted to give only the briefest outline of the subject. I hope I have offered food for thought and a basis for discussion. ●

Liz Williams

South Korea

Workers step in

Since the end of July a massive strike wave has swept South Korea. Taking their cue from the great movement for democratic reform earlier in the year, thousands of workers have taken to the streets, confronted their bosses and the police, and forced concessions out of both the employers and the government.

This dramatic rise of working class struggle has centred around two kinds of demands — for economic improvements, higher wages and so on, and for democratic, free trade unions.

Lee Sung Chol is one of 2,000 workers at a car-parts plant. He earns £169 a month — for a *seventy-four* hour week. He told the Christian Science Monitor: "Two years ago we tried to form a union. Management got wind of it, and locked us all in for the night. If forty workers go to the Labour Ministry and register their desire to form a union, the demand will be accepted. So the management forcibly kept us from registering." Workers were afraid of losing their jobs, and so such intimidation was successful.

Now the frustrations created by the union-busting policies of the big South Korean companies have exploded in a powerful surge of working class anger. Coal miners, shipyard workers, car workers, precision electronics assemblers — all sections of industry have been involved in strikes.

According to the South Korean Economic Planning Board, in the two months July-August, there were 1,040 disputes. By the end of August there were 500 still unresolved. All the major centres of Korean industry were hit, including the 'big three' corporations — Daewoo, Samsung and Hyundai.

The strike movement spread out principally from the coal industry in late July. 24,000 miners at 18 mines, including the country's largest, clashed with police. On August 10, hundreds of miners halted trains heading east from

the capital Seoul for 15 hours. A bus strike in Kwanju — site of a huge insurrectionary rebellion in 1980 — led to government intervention. Two leading shipbuilders and the three big car manufacturers were hit. By 15 August, according to Labour Minister Lee Heun-Ki, \$180 million of production had been lost.

At Hyundai's plant in the city of Ulsan, workers were locked out by their bosses. But a march of 40,000 into the city centre led to confrontations with the police and forced the government to try to find a settlement. According to one account, "Workers wearing gas masks were armed with staves and were led by a line of heavy equipment."

High degrees of organisation, and in particular readiness to face both the police and scabs, have characterised the strike movement.

The government has played a double-handed game. As at Hyundai, it has been prepared to intervene to force belligerent managements to retreat; the strikes have helped spur on the government to negotiate constitutional changes with opposition leaders — and to make significant concessions.

At the same time, repression has been heavy. In late August a worker was killed at one of the shipyards and angry workers rioted. Hundreds of strikers have been arrested, and the South Korean police have attempted brutally to crush strikes.

But presidential elections — promised after the student revolt in the Spring — are looming in December. And the ruling Democratic Justice Party can no more be seen to be anti-worker than the opposition Reunification Democratic Party: everyone needs working class votes. As one astute western diplomat put it: "No political party in their right mind would be anti-labour right now." Even South Korea's miserable counterfeit of bourgeois democracy counts for something, sometimes!



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This wave of working class action was partly prompted by government promises to change the labour law under which, for the past 20 years, strikes have been illegal. And now, for example at Hyundai, the government has promised to push the company to grant higher wages, allow free trade unions and compensate workers for any injuries incurred during the strike.

On the overtly political plane, ruling party candidate Roh Tae Woo, after negotiations with the opposition leader Kim Young Sam, agreed to a weaker presidency than he initially advocated in the new constitution. Undoubtedly, this was in response to the strike wave and the threat of more to come, and beyond that the danger that South Korea would become ungovernable.

So the working class has finally imposed its stamp on the struggle in South Korea. Many commentators have noted that the demands of the workers have been limited and economic in scope, compared to the democratic objectives of the student movement. Yet no one can deny the relationship between the two. And the striking feature of the strikes is the centrality of the demand for free trade unions — a democratic demand that is also at the very heart of working class interest. This is much more than just a militant strike wave: it marks the emergence of a working class *movement* in the model country of the new Third World capitalism. This will raise as many questions and provide as many lessons for workers internationally as the independent unions in South Africa have done.

What lies behind this is the extraordinary development of South Korean capitalism — and therefore of the working class — coupled with the frustrations engendered in the middle classes as a result of this growth. The student movement, supported by wide layers of society, was and is essentially the product of a relatively affluent, well-educated class highly conscious of its exclusion from power in an extremely authoritarian state.

Nevertheless, the militant and *successful* student movement gave inspiration to the workers. A similar thing also happened in Spain this year, although as in Spain the actual links between students' and workers' organisations are virtually, if not completely, non-existent.

Another parallel — very obvious to Koreans — is with the Philippines. The Korean liberal opposition has often borrowed the Philippines slogan of 'people's power'. There is, for sure, a trigger-happy army in South Korea, too — although for the moment the need to maintain a good international image and so not endanger the Seoul Olympics is helping to restrain them.

Politically, despite the marvellous intervention of the workers, the broad

movement — or movements — in South Korea are not very well developed. The 'two Kims' — Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung — are straightforward liberals, who have urged striking workers to be calm and not overdo it. Kim Dae Jung commented that "violence and radical behaviour should be avoided and maturity should be displayed with dialogue and compromise." Although some of the students are much more radical, there is not much of an organised left alternative to the two Kims.

But the workers' movement poses the possibility of a real, powerful socialist alternative — one that would have immense ramifications in North Korea, blighted by a regime that is austere and repressive even by the standards of such 'communist' countries. Such an alternative has yet to emerge, but its potential is clear.

What is also clear is that the political direction such a movement must take will be completely different from the nationalist-populist 'Third Worldism' still so prevalent on the left. South Korea is a long way from being an impoverished pre-industrial society. Far from it. South Korean capitalism has been extremely dynamic — at the expense of its working class (in 1986, the rise in labour productivity was more than double the rise in wage levels). Narrow nationalist solutions are no solution at all. An independent working class movement, reaching out to the workers of North Korea, China, Japan — and elsewhere — to destroy their respective oppression and develop international, democratic workers' rule is what is needed. The seeds of that socialist future have now been planted. ●

Clive Bradley



The campaigning days: 1983. Photo: John Harris.

Rail union

Knapp loses the knack

JIMMY Knapp, general secretary of the National Union of Railmen (NUR), was elected as the left candidate in March 1983 with 63 per cent of the vote.

He took over from the disgraced Sid Weighell, a harsh right-winger. Knapp retains his left image today, even if it is a bit tarnished. But what has his record been?

Sid Weighell is remembered as the general secretary who sold jobs for (small) pay rises. Jimmy Knapp has rejected linking pay and productivity, but we have had low pay increases and productivity changes nonetheless.

Sid Weighell fought his members — unsuccessfully — to get Driver Only Operation (DOO) introduced. Jimmy Knapp didn't fight his members, but now presides over implementation of DOO.

Sid Weighell accepted flexible rostering on behalf of guards who rejected it through a democratic vote, and publicly spoke out against drivers who struck against it. Flexible rostering was never fully implemented under Weighell because of resistance on the ground. But

Knapp has presided over the complete erosion of the guaranteed eight-hour working day and the full introduction of flexible rostering.

Weighell was a scab who worked with British Rail management to control the union. He would brook no opposition. He allowed no space for alternative views. You could not even get a letter printed in the union journal. In the era of the closed shop, he tried to expel leading members of the Broad Left from the union, and thus from their jobs.

Weighell was finally caught with his fingers in the ballot box at Labour Party conference in 1982. The NUR's decision to vote for the NUM candidate for the Labour Party national executive was not carried out. Arthur Scargill did a lasting service to the members of the NUR by exposing the fact. Weighell had no choice but to resign.

At the Special General Meeting in late 1982, Weighell had his resignation accepted in the morning, but in the afternoon was allowed to argue for acceptance of Rail Staff National Tribunal Award no.78. The SGM accepted this deal — a six per cent wage rise, and

agreement to follow through flexible rostering, Driver Only Operation of freight trains, DOO of passenger trains, Open Stations, the Trainmen concept (guards progressing up through promotion to drivers' grades), and Easement of Single Manning (restrictions on which trains can have only one driver).

What Weighell could not get through as general secretary of the union, he was finally able to hand on to Knapp; and this explains much of what has followed.

BR had made these productivity proposals in March 1980, and Weighell had worked hard for 2½ years to get them accepted. The Open Station concept meant doing away with staff who inspect tickets and help passengers on stations.

This affects ill-organised sections of the union, and there has been little resistance. The Trainmen concept is not opposed by most of the unions. The only barrier is craft prejudice among some drivers who believe that guards cannot and should not move up to do their jobs. The worry for the rank and file is BR's desire to promote on the basis of 'suitability' rather than seniority (a method which prevents management discriminating against union activists).

The other four items — flexible rostering, DOO of passenger and freight trains, and Easement of Single Manning — aimed to get more work from fewer people for less money from train crews. Resistance has been strongest here. Guards are one of the best organised sections of the NUR.

Activists gained hope from Knapp's overwhelming election as the left candidate in March 1983. However, much of Weighell's machine remained intact

from branch secretaries through Sectional Council Officers and some Divisional Officers up to the three Assistant General Secretaries.

The 21 members of the NUR's National Executive Committee serve for a three year period, but then have to stand down for three years. This ensures a high turnover on the NEC. It is formally democratic, but it weakens the NEC's control over the full-timers — the General Secretary, the Assistant General Secretaries, and the Divisional Officers, who are elected for life. They are backed up by clerks and officers appointed to run the various departments of the union.

Scargill, on election to the presidency of the NUM, smashed the old Gormley machine by moving the headquarters from London to Sheffield. Knapp has not attempted any similar challenge to Weighell's machine, nor attempted to change the rules so that full-time officials are elected for limited periods.

Knapp made a good start by restoring peace with the drivers' union ASLEF. BR were using ASLEF's refusal to operate the DOO trains on the Bedford-St. Pancras line without any extra payment as a reason for withholding the six per cent increase due from September 1982 from everyone. They eventually paid it in March 1983. Weighell would have publicly denounced ASLEF. Knapp didn't.

In October 1983 the Rail Federation was announced — loosely joining ASLEF and the NUR and ensuring as far as possible joint policy and wage claims, with a long-term view to merger.

Meanwhile NEC members were visiting branches and District Councils, letting it be known that if they took action to resist closures, redundancies or whatever, they would automatically receive the support of the union. This was a vast improvement on what had gone before, when we were fighting the

union leadership to resist closures.

However, it soon became apparent that the NEC had been sufficiently bruised in battle with Weighell, and particularly by his getting the AGM to call off the 1982 strike only 18 hours after it had started, that they had no intention of leading.

The policy was: you, the rank and file, lead, and we'll follow. You organise what needs to be done, and if you're successful we will support you. Even that didn't last long. Before long possible disputes were having cold water poured on them.

The first wage claim Knapp handled, in 1983, was for a 'substantial' pay increase, extra holidays, and a shorter working week. We settled for 4.25% and nothing else. But Knapp was still in his honeymoon period.

At the end of 1982, BR chair Peter Parker had boasted in his Annual Report that "We are still running the same size network, but since mid-1981 we have cut our costs by £250 million. We have fewer locomotives, fewer coaches, fewer wagons, fewer marshalling yards, and fewer people — 27,000 off the payroll in two years". The feeling was that Knapp should be given a chance to do something about this.

There was a common view among miners before their 1984-5 strike that with Scargill elected they wouldn't need to have any strikes, as Scargill could do it all with his mouth. Scargill, of course, knew otherwise. But Knapp seemed to think he could talk his way out of the union's problems.

In July 1983 Sectional Councils were told not to enter discussions about closures and route rationalisations. Nonetheless, BR's new chair Bob Reid could boast in the Annual Report for 1983 that a loss of £175 million in 1982 had become a profit of £8 million in 1983. This had been achieved by a further reduction of 5,979 staff in 1983. Reid planned a further 14,500 job cuts in the following three years.

In 1984-5 Knapp missed several chances to link the railworkers' fight with the miners'. On 29 March he agreed with the other transport unions and the steel union ISTC to boycott all coal movements and to instruct all members not to cross picket lines. This was ratified by the NEC on 2 April. In practice it had already been done by the majority of NUR members right from the start.

The NUR, like ASLEF, stuck to this commitment a lot better than other unions. But that says more about the low level of official solidarity than about the virtues of the NUR leaders.

The NUR leaders made some effort to make the instruction stick, but not nearly enough to sew up the Notts coalfield. That job was left to the local officials. At the peak we had reduced coal movements by rail to eight trains a week, but we are still living with the consequences of the divisions that

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created.

The worst thing the NUR leaders did, however, was to abandon our 1984 wage claim within a month of the beginning of the miners' strike, and our 1985 claim just a few weeks after the miners went back, while power station stocks of coal were very low.

The 1984 claim, formulated as the miners' strike started, was for a 'substantial' increase (generally thought to be about 15%), an extra five days' holiday, and a 35 hour week. In early May BR offered four per cent and one extra day's holiday as long as the unions agreed to DOO. They also announced that 4,000 jobs would go from British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL), starting in June. There could hardly have been a better opportunity to fight for the full claim.

The response from Knapp and ASLEF leader Ray Buckton was first of all to rule out strike action. A week later, an overtime ban was called from 30 May. An overtime ban would have been pretty effective on the rail, as the average week worked is 54 hours. However, not even that was to be.

BR made the offer 4.9% and suggested that the union accept that DOO and the other issues be discussed in the established machinery of negotiation. And that was it. The claim was abandoned.

The 1985 claim was an extra five days' holiday, a 35 hour week, and £100 minimum wage (effectively 30% for the lowest grades). In February BR said that there was no money whatsoever for pay, mostly because we were refusing to carry coal traffic. Four weeks later BR offered 3.5%. The unions snatched their hands off.

During the miners' strike itself, an overtime ban and work-to-rule was scheduled to begin from 10 September 1984, to demand an end to the rundown of the railways and the beginning of expansion. The action was called off when BR conceded a new stage in the machinery of negotiation — for six months only!

In October 1984, pressure from below pushed the NUR and ASLEF into calling a one-day regional day of action in the East Midlands in protest against BR intimidation of railworkers boycotting coal. It was called off at the last minute. Apparently the Eastern Region General Manager had promised to investigate if the union called the action off.

Of course he didn't investigate, and of course the intimidation didn't stop. Pressure for action continued, and the strike eventually happened on 17 January 1985. Its potential immediately showed itself. At Shirebrook, for example, some guards and drivers who all the way along had refused the union instruction not to handle coal came out on strike and joined the picket line. It was a magnificent display of solidarity, but proved to be too little, too late, in too small an area.

Immediately after the strike BR began to talk about recouping its losses from the unions under the 1984 Trade Union Act, as it had been called without a ballot. Nothing came of that, but a Sheffield businessman went to court to claim the price of an overnight stay in London because the strike had stopped him getting home. He won his £50, and this provided the excuse for Knapp's argument at the 1985 AGM, where he rammed through compliance with the first part of the 1984 Trade Union Act, about ballots. We could not afford to fight each small claim in the courts, he said.

Since then there has been at least one case where the NUR leaders have used a ballot to get out of a fight, during the battle over DOO. 270 guards were sacked at Glasgow, Margam, Immingham, Llanelli and Kings Cross, for refusing to cooperate with DOO. Instead of responding immediately, the NUR leaders went for a ballot. There was no campaign, no meetings, one leaflet of which only three copies went to each area, and just a few weeks to organise.

In the circumstances the vote for action was surprisingly high. But it wasn't a majority. So the NEC could say that the rank and file didn't want to fight. Knapp called a Special General Meeting and got the policy against DOO reversed. That, he said, was the only way to get the sacked guards reinstated.

While the guards were still sacked, a ballot was lost in Signals and Telecoms. That created a bad precedent for the next one, over BR's rundown of the engineering workshops. That one was lost overwhelmingly — 66% said no.

Since then the management offensive has speeded up. British Rail Engineering Limited has been split, with the light maintenance part being incorporated into BR and the 'new build' part put out for sale. Doncaster has been drastically run down and a National Stores located there. The contract for distribution from the stores was awarded to a private road haulage company, Swifts, supposedly a small family firm. An instruction to boycott this firm was carried out at Tinsley in Sheffield, but when support was requested from Head Office the Tinsley workers were told to drop it.

The most blatant example of the NUR leaders not being prepared to fight was the ballot on London Regional Transport in June 1985. Staff were to have their pay and conditions cut by up to 30% in preparation for privatisation. They voted 80% for action. It was called off at the last minute when the chair of LRT expressed surprise that the cuts were happening and promised to investigate. Heard that one before?

Both the 1986 and 1987 pay claims were abandoned for a fraction of what was claimed. Kinnock's office contacted the NUR and asked that we should not pursue our pay claim too vigorously, as 1987 was election year and unions taking action might scupper Labour's chances.

We got 4.5% and another five years of Tory government.

Knapp complains of the apathy of the members. The membership is not apathetic, but cynical. Superficially, it can look the same. Knapp would prefer to call it apathy, as then all he can do is complain. If it is recognised as cynicism, then that means a much harder job of convincing the members that things have really changed since Weighell, that the leadership is serious, and that a battle will be fought to win. That will be a hard job, as the membership has experienced too much evidence to the contrary.

What does the future hold? Sectorisation is going on apace. The fruits of this will be shown when the inter-city sector becomes private from April 1988. Sectorisation means preparing bits of BR for privatisation so that only a small administrative change is needed to hand them over when the time comes.

From April 1988, support from the government's Public Service Obligation (PSO) will be stopped for inter-city services, and they will be 'allowed' to seek private capital to cover their losses until they start to make profits expected for two years later. That will be it. No public fanfare, no big advertising campaign. It won't be necessary.

The freight sector and parcels already make a profit. But not yet enough. There will be further attacks on train crews' rostering. BR sees shifts of between seven and nine hours as not flexible enough. They will probably go for shifts of between four and 12 hours.

There will be a drive for more DOO and more Easement of Single Manning (less restriction on when only one driver is needed, rather than having an assistant). When BR get this, they will be ready to privatise.

The PSO grant has been reduced by 25% to £720 million in three years. The government wants another 25% off in the next three. This is to be achieved in part by cutting 10,000 jobs in the next five years.

No union leadership has a right to a comfortable job while this goes on. The right wing is showing signs of reviving in the NUR. A reinvigorated Broad Left is needed to get the union back on course and in a position to resist what BR have in store for us.

If we don't, then we can forget wage rises, negotiating rights, job security and conditions.

Some acceptance of the Tory anti-union laws on balloting has been urged by Knapp to make his job easier. Maybe something else ought to be accepted — something which we were pushing for long before the Tories thought of ballots, and which Knapp himself promised in his election campaign — that he (and all other officials) should stand for re-election every five years.

Maybe then some pressure from the rank and file will get through. ●

Rob Dawber