

# THE FIRST TASK OF THE LEFT

**Socialist  
Organiser  
DEBATE**

**VLADIMIR DERER**, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, outlines a perspective for the Left and criticises John O'Mahony's perspective for a Workers' Government (SO 27/28).

**THE correctness of the diagnosis that this year Blackpool was not just another Labour Party conference is being gradually confirmed.**

The election of Michael Foot by the Parliamentary Labour Party in preference to its favourite son, the defection in all but name of Shirley Williams and David Owen, the acceptance of the wider franchise for the election of the Leader by union leaders previously hostile to the idea, are all indications that the process set in motion in the Ball Room of the Winter Gardens is going on.

We may argue whether Blackpool really amounted to 'half a revolution' as suggested by John O'Mahony (SO, 11 October). But an exact assessment of the degree of change that has occurred is not really all that important. What is important is whether the Left will be able to take advantage of the situation created by that change.

One can therefore only agree with comrade O'Mahony that "if we organise to make these reforms work for the working class, they are the beginning of a situation that has not existed in the three quarters of a century since the trade unions developed a political arm".

## Question

The obvious question is, how are we to do this. Comrade O'Mahony claims that "Our central weakness is that the working class movement does not yet have a coherent policy to deal with the enormous crisis of British society. It has a hodge-podge of measures which propose more or less drastic tinkering with the economy and the political system — not its replacement by a radically new system".

What we need, according to comrade O'Mahony, is "the submission of the economy to democratic planning on the basis of social ownership..." and the take-over by the working class of 200 monopolies.

To do this "we need to organise ourselves to take on the existing rulers" and here "the great hole in the leftward-looking renewal of the Labour Party is on the question of the state".

*"It is an illusion that the transformation of the labour movement can be done in segmented stages".*

The questions comrade O'Mahony raises — reiterates would be a more accurate way of putting it — are of course important, though some of the answers he gives are perhaps not as straightforward as he seems to suggest. Thus the replacement of the present by "a radically new system" is not possible overnight, i.e. without a transitional period such as would inevitably have to be full of "hodge-podge measures". Nor is the failure to take account of the Marxist theory of the state "the great hole in the leftward-looking renewal" or at any rate not in the way comrade O'Mahony poses it when he says, "We must not confuse Parliament with state power".

The state is not a monolith. The bourgeois democratic state, i.e. a state in which the ruling class relies on those who operate the representative democratic institutions to ensure that the latter are used in its interest, is in fact full of contradictions. Under certain circumstances its representative institutions can be used against the interests of the ruling class, and the reassertion of the bourgeois supremacy within the state is by no means automatic.

The main problem on the Left at this stage is not reformist illusions but sectarian illusions and practices. It was not reformist illusions which prevented — during the last forty or so years — the Left from producing a credible alternative to Labour's right wing leadership. It was the Left's preference for a fantasy world inhabited not by real people but lifeless formulae. And it was the Left's steadfast refusal to engage in such political struggles as are possible in the environment we actually live in.

## Battles

It is true that comrade O'Mahony wishes to see "the broadest possible alliances for the immediate struggles (around the January conference, the cuts... etc)". But these battles, important though they are, are already going on. What is not going on, and what needs to be started, is the struggle to give the Left political credibility.

Participation in existing struggles is not enough to do so. Nor will tireless repetition of the somewhat abstract recommendation to the working class to break with reformism and to adopt a radical socialist programme achieve it. This approach has been tried for decades and failed

come politically influential, must show its capacity to gain support among the broad masses of the people as well as among the more class conscious elements of the working class. But people can be organised only around such demands as they are already prepar-

out their programme. Clearly the possibility that the ruling class may resort to force in order to safeguard its privileges must always be taken into account, as must the need to prepare appropriate counter-measures. Nevertheless this is not the situa-

tion we are facing at this stage. The problem is not what extra-parliamentary action is appropriate to organise support for a reforming government, it is to get such a government.

And there is, of course, no guarantee, to put it mildly, that the next Labour government will be a reforming one. Given the present level of consciousness among Labour Party members, Labour supporters and Labour voters, there is not a hope that they would be prepared to support the kind of programme of radical social change that comrade O'Mahony advocates. Does this mean that there is no hope for socialism in our time? No.

The problem with the last Labour government was not that it lacked a programme which was sufficiently radical — which of course it did. The trouble was that it failed to carry out even the programme of the mild social reforms on which it was elected.

This failure was not due to the fact that "nothing can be achieved within the system". It was not "The system" which stopped virtuous men and women from carrying out their excellent intentions. Barbara Castle when discussing the difficulties of getting through some of her social reform schemes put her finger on the real problem: It was not the Civil Service, let alone the police and the army, which prevented her mild reforms from going through. It was her Cabinet colleagues.

The first task of the Left must therefore be to ensure that the next Labour government is composed of men and women ready to honour Labour's election pledges and to ensure that these pledges are as radical as the present level of consciousness of Labour Party members allows. Labour Party members would respond positively to such aims and would rally around an organisation campaigning on such a platform. If the Left agreed to campaign on a programme of reforms it would be the first step towards winning political credibility and support.

## Pledges

Every Labour Party member realises that the last Labour government went back on its pledges and thus helped the Tories to win the election. They do not want this to happen again.

But only the Left can actually initiate a campaign of this type. No one else will. We must engage in such political class struggle as is possible in the present situation. To refuse to do so on grounds of doctrinal purity is to contract out.



*'The use of the army and the police against a government enjoying legitimacy by bourgeois standards is not a simple operation'*

PHOTO: KAREN GARDINER



*'The first task... to ensure the next Labour Government is willing to carry out election pledges...'*

The use of the army and even of the police against a government enjoying legitimacy by bourgeois standards is not a simple operation. But, of course, no serious socialist would deny that such dangers do exist.

However, should the reiteration of old truths — particularly when they are presented in a somewhat dated setting — be our first priority? For the whole underlying trend of argument in comrade O'Mahony's 'Viewpoint' is directed against reformist illusions.

These certainly do exist among the broad masses (who do not read SO) and among many Labour Party members (who are just a little less likely to do so). But these illusions do not exist amongst the many socialists who do read SO and who comrade O'Mahony hopes to rally round its platform.

to produce results.

The failure cannot be put down to the new lease of life capitalism seems to have won during the fifties and early sixties, for, after all, prior to 1914, strong socialist parties were built

## Ensure

up during a similar period of economic upswing. The possibility of becoming politically influential is not limited to periods of economic decline.

But even if this was so, it would still need to be explained why the Left was not more successful during the late sixties and in the seventies.

The Left's political impotence is in fact not due to any 'objective factors'. It is entirely of the Left's own making.

A socialist group, to be-

ed to support. The programme of the Left, at any given stage, must therefore correspond to the existing level of consciousness of the people to whom we are appealing.

If the great majority believe that improvements in their condition can be achieved through the pursuit of social reforms, it is no good lecturing them about the need for a revolution. Whether social reforms can actually be achieved without radical change in the political structure can only be shown in practice and in any case most people will learn only from their own experience.

Only if those who oppose major social reforms resort to extra-parliamentary resistance will it be possible to convince people that extra-parliamentary means are required to reinforce the powers of reforming governments trying to carry

out their programme. Clearly the possibility that the ruling class may resort to force in order to safeguard its privileges must always be taken into account, as must the need to prepare appropriate counter-measures. Nevertheless this is not the situa-

tion we are facing at this stage. The problem is not what extra-parliamentary action is appropriate to organise support for a reforming government, it is to get such a government. And there is, of course, no guarantee, to put it mildly, that the next Labour government will be a reforming one. Given the present level of consciousness among Labour Party members, Labour supporters and Labour voters, there is not a hope that they would be prepared to support the kind of programme of radical social change that comrade O'Mahony advocates. Does this mean that there is no hope for socialism in our time? No.

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John O'Mahony  
replies to Vladimir  
Derer, arguing  
that if we don't  
fight for socialism  
NOW then we  
never will

NO serious socialist would counterpose socialism to the fight for reforms. Now, on the contrary, the fight for reforms and against the vicious Tory counter-reforms is especially important, in a situation where the Right of the Labour Party, those who built their plans for mild reforms on a continually expanding full-employment capitalism, are public political bankrupts.

But it would be a self-neutering exercise if the Left were to confine itself to reforms and see this as counterposed for the immediate future to the fight for a new society, for socialism.

That would be to mistake where we are at, what we need to try to do, and what we can realistically attempt to do in the period ahead.

What kind of reform programme would Vladimir Derer put forward now? That is the key question. Would it be limited to what was considered — by an a-priori calculation — to be 'possible' without having to shake or overthrow capitalism? Or would it be drawn up according to the minimum that the working class can settle for if it is to begin to solve the problems loaded onto it by the crisis of capitalism — mass unemployment for example?

Vladimir Derer should think out what even a modest reform like the 35 hour week (which would only go part of the way to answering the workers' needs) implies in today's conditions. Such a reform is inconceivable without mass industrial/political mobilisations of the working class. Even should a Labour government decree it, it would not be implemented unless the labour movement mobilised itself and fought to impose it. Otherwise it would suffer the fate of the 40 hour week decreed by a reforming government in France in 1936: a dead letter within a short time.

## Defy

The capitalists would resist, defy the law, evade it, use the courts to obstruct it, or organise lock-outs if necessary. They could probably be defeated only through sweeping nationalisations and replacement of the present managers by people elected by the workers.

We will only win any serious reforms now on the basis of struggles which shake the capitalist system, perhaps to its foundation. That does not mean, as one might conclude from what Vladimir Derer says, that it is all hopeless.

For Vladimir Derer's picture of the situation is too pessimistic and his conception of how the presently reformist workers will be won to fight for socialism is inadequate.

Suppose it is true that only reforms are likely to be accepted as goals by the mass of workers now. How do we get from this to a struggle for a different society?

There have been different answers to this problem, a recurrent one in the history of the labour movement. According to one, the struggle for reforms would be organised by the socialists, who would build up

# The fight for socialism NOW OR NEVER

"PEOPLE who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society, they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society... Our programme becomes not the realisation of socialism, but the reform of capitalism, not the suppression of the system of wage labour, but the diminution of exploitation, that is the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of the suppression of capitalism itself".

Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform and Revolution*.

trade unions — and a party committed to carry out the socialist transformation of society when it had convinced and organised enough workers.

Their method would be the ballot box, backed by force if (as they expected) the ruling-class state was used to stop them.

This was the Second International before 1914. Essentially it was an apparatus-building, bureaucratic, and propagandist view. It led to a situation where in fact the goal of socialism was forgotten and reform became everything, leading to reconciliation with the national capitalists. The day to day activities came to be everything; the goal came to be nothing.

Against this view there came to be counterposed another one: the struggle for reforms should be linked to a struggle for socialism. Reform demands should not be formulated as a minimum programme drafted to be compatible with capitalism and therefore not attached to the goal of socialism, nor even necessarily pointing to it.

Reform demands should be formulated according to the needs of the working class, without regard to whether or not they were compatible with capitalism (that is, with the maintenance of the principles and boundaries within which the capitalists owned industry and controlled the political system).

The name such 'reform' demands are known by in the history of the socialist movement is 'transitional demands'.

The working class would mobilise and be mobilised on its felt needs to gain such demands. Engaged in the struggle for them, it would learn with great strides about the system and about itself. It would choose between achieving its own needs at the expense of capitalism — or abandoning its own needs and confining itself to a 'minimum' reform programme none of which challenged the capitalist system.

In fact, in a situation of capitalist crisis, the minimal approach yields practically no reforms at all. To return to the example above, the 35-hour week is a rather modest demand — in Britain now only an onslaught on capitalism could achieve it throughout industry.

The new approach argued that the working class needed stable organisations, but as a fighting

class it could rouse itself in tremendous industrial mass strike mobilisations, and for political ends too.

In the struggle it could learn in days or weeks more than in decades of slow organisation and propaganda.

Is this idea of a mass transformation of consciousness an irrational appeal to belief in and reliance on miracles? Not at all.

The spontaneous strike of ten million in France in 1968 came a few weeks after the failure of an attempt by the trade union bureaucrats to call a token strike. The defeat of the riot police by the students on their barricades galvanised the workers and gave them a model of victory to which they responded eagerly and with an explosive energy.

The idea is emphatically not that socialists manipulate. We say who and what we are and what our goal is — and we say more than transitional demands. The key idea is that the workers can and do mobilise with limited immediate objectives, but that the struggle unfolds and has a sharp anti-capitalist logic when the fight for satisfaction of even limited, immediate needs brings the workers into clear conflict with capitalism.

## Chain

A linked chain of demands can be constructed — beginning, say, from the 35 hour week or the sliding scale of hours and wages, and going on to the struggle for workplace and other workers' committees, to the struggle for workers' control to challenge the employers' untrammelled rule in a factory, to the creation of a workers' militia from (for example) flying pickets — all the way to the overthrow of the political power of the bourgeoisie.

There is no a-priori schematic sequence in the way a struggle will unfold, and no a-priori order in which a sequence of demands will be raised. The logic and intensity of the struggle will determine that.

The role of Marxists in the great working class struggles on which such a view is based is first to learn from the working class. But Marxist theory acts as the codified memory of the class, and Marxists try to bring that 'memory' to the living struggle around them. They try to raise transitional de-

mands appropriate to the given level of working class struggle, according to the logic of each stage in the struggle.

Transitional demands are a bridge between the consciousness of labour movements dominated by the reformist allies of the ruling class, and the consciousness of the need for a radical break with capitalism: the energy and dynamism is provided by the struggle. The movement grows in consciousness by way of its escalating mobilisations and struggles, and through interaction with the more-or-less stable groups of revolutionary socialists.

BUT VLADIMIR Derer asserts that "people can be organised only around such demands as they are already prepared to support. The programme of the Left, at any given stage, must therefore correspond to the existing level of consciousness of the people to whom we are appealing".

Obviously people can be organised only around such demands as they are prepared to support. (But ALREADY prepared to support? Where have those



Mass action... the freeing of the dockers, July 1972.

ideas 'already' come from? Can we not help to shape the ideas people support?). The conclusion does not follow that the Left's programme must correspond to the existing level of consciousness. If it did, either you would have no such thing as a stable Left, defined by some difference from the existing level, or you would have a privately-defined manipulative 'Left'. (And where do THEIR ideas come from? How would new people arrive at them?)

Why? \* There is not just one level of consciousness, nor are we appealing to a known homogeneous group.

\* A given consciousness is not homogeneous: it has many contradictory elements which make rapid changes in consciousness possible under pressure of events.

\* The Left must be defined by an overall analysis of society and a basic historical programme for the working class to create a socialist society.

\* The tasks of the Left are many, not one task, because the class struggle takes place on a number of fronts (at least on the economic, political and ideological). A central task of a serious Left is to prevent these fronts falling apart into mutually exclusive activities (and therefore organisations) by integrating them into a strategy.

Over-adaptation, chameleonism in one area means repelling the others. The Left is either a force for integrating the different fronts, issues, struggles, campaigns, etc., via a comprehensive programme and organisation which creates specialised groups for specific areas and tasks without dislocating them from the whole, or it is itself a chaos and a force for creating chaos via one-sidedness and mutual repulsion of 'Lefts' with different assessments and focuses.

\* It is necessary for the Left to explain (and develop) a socialist overview, goal, and criticism of society, and win people to that; and to educate the people with whom it is active on specific issues to see those issues in that framework.

\* The Left organises first as a minority. It does not only relate to the masses. It relates to individuals, groups, etc., and only by first organising them can it acquire the levers to reach, let alone organise, the masses.

\* That is why the SO groups are important. While fighting together with people who will struggle only for reforms it is essential to explain about socialism — on the basis of their own experience — and organise in an all-round way.

VLADIMIR DERER says that a socialist system could not arise overnight, that there would be a transitional period. The point however is that today's 'hodge-podge of measures' (Alternative Economic Strategy etc.) would not come anywhere near effectively transforming society. There would indeed have to be a transitional period between capitalism and socialist society — but is there a point at which there is a qualitative breakthrough out of capitalism and towards socialism (with the transitional period beyond it)? Is there a dividing line between the two systems?

There is a dividing-line and a break — at the point where the working class

deprives the capitalist class of the possibility of exploitation, by making industry its own democratically-owned and controlled social property, and by breaking the power of the army and police to make a bloody counter-revolution against the workers.

The state is not a monolith, comrade Derer adds. But does it not have a core of 'armed bodies of men', backed up by the state bureaucracy? Are not both linked directly by a thousand strings of education, wealth, family, and therefore loyalty, to the ruling class, and committed to the defence of the existing system?

If that is agreed, then it can usefully be added that Parliament is part of the state, formally in control of it, and that there are, or can be, contradictions (potentially contradictions which will lead the ruling class to turn on Parliament).

In fact though Parliament itself is directly under the bourgeois influence. For example, Tony Benn has shown from his experience in government how the permanent bureaucracy has something like a parallel steering wheel and drives the vehicle of state often against the will of some or all of those elected to that function.

In reality, not a great deal even in the way of reforms has been pushed through against the serious opposition of the ruling class, and nothing fundamentally against their interests.

"Under certain circumstances", says Vladimir Derer, "its representative institutions can be used against the interests of the ruling class, and the reassertion of bourgeois supremacy within the state is by no means automatic".

Yes, the labour movement has used Parliament, and must use it now. But Parliament has also dominated and even tamed large sections of the labour movement. Surely that is what much of the fight to make the MPs accountable is about: to reverse the historical experience and subordinate Parliament to the priorities and concerns of the working class.

## State

The great significance of the decision on re-selection of MPs, and what may be decided on the Party leader, is that it would bring Parliament itself under the direct influence and partly even under the control (if Labour had a majority) of the labour movement.

But what would happen then? Certainly the direct grip and real control of such a Parliament over the 'armed bodies of men' and over the bureaucrats would diminish. If such a parliamentary majority reflected the working-class, and fought the ruling-class interest, then it would be shown that Parliament does not control the state.

If the conflict between Parliament and the state became intense, then parliamentary control would cease to be real; and to the degree that the Labour MPs really fought for the working-class interest, then the conflict would become intense. Either the working class would disarm the ruling-class state, or it would face disaster.

At issue here is not a choice for 'bloody revolution', but the protection of the labour movement from bloodier counterrevolution.

Of course, parliamentary legality would be of

## From p9

very great advantage to the working class movement. But the ruling class would probably erode and begin to destroy the power of such a Parliament and Government before they attacked it directly. The bourgeoisie would not need to reassert supremacy within the core of the state. Their real supremacy is a direct system of class links, loyalties, and connections, consolidated by their economic supremacy in society. *It would be fatal to confuse Parliamentary with State power, or to believe in an eternal loyalty of the armed forces to Parliament.*

Comrade Derer is right that only the Left will fight even for reforms. Then who but the Left can be trusted to push them through?

No-one in the leadership of the Parliamentary left has a real record of struggle: on the contrary, they went along, protesting privately no doubt, with Healey and Callaghan. The working class and the labour movement must travel as far as possible with the present leaders who do now contribute to the struggle. But we must be prepared to go on marching without them, and if necessary against them.

We must fight for the maximum direct control by the movement outside Parliament over the MPs, and, if Labour has a majority, over Parliament.

This too leads to the conclusion that the Left must organise itself on a real socialist programme, and fight to add a radical political content to the Labour Party as it renews its structures and procedures. For if we start a serious campaign for reforms in the present situation, it is certain it will escalate way beyond what we start with, 'such struggle as is possible in the present situation'. We need a labour movement politically prepared for that.

To conclude: if it is not now possible, in the present terrible state of our society, to put forward a real socialist programme and an immediate socialist answer, and hope to win the working class for it, then in which conditions will it ever be possible and reasonable to do so?

If it is not right to pose to the militants of the Labour party and trade unions, who are now attempting a thorough transformation of their movement, that they should adopt such politics as their answer to the crisis of British society, then who can socialist politics ever be proposed to, and in which circumstances? If we do not now put forward a programme of reform and transitional demands that answer the immediate situation of the working class and mobilise the working class to fight for them, what is the way out for the working class now?

And if the radical socialists around *Socialist Organiser*, the SCLV, the CLPD, etc. do not elect to do it themselves then who will do it?

To me, the answer seems clear: if not now, never; if not the existing mass-movement militants and ourselves, no-one; if not a fighting reform and transitional programme, then no way.

★ Space rules out taking up Vladimir Derer's comments on the far left. Perhaps it will be possible to come back to it sometime.

## Socialist Organiser



Details and leaflets from:  
Festival, 374 Grays Inn Road, London WC1

# Sainsbury can be stopped

by Mandy Williams

ALTHOUGH Timothy Sainsbury MP, who came first in the ballot for Private Member's Bills, is reported to be considering abandoning his plans for a 24-week time limit Bill on abortion, it is still possible that he or the second-place winner will introduce a restrictive Bill in the next Parliamentary session.

Sainsbury is reported to be wary of 'wasting' his opportunity for a Bill, and

his other pet subject is indecent displays in shops, as contentious in Parliament as abortion.

The second place in the Private Members' ballot when to Donald Stewart, Scottish National Party MP for the Western Isles, and a strong anti-abortionist. He is under pressure from his constituents and from the SNP to present a Bill concerned with the needs of the Scottish people.

The title of the Bill is to be given on the 14th January, and the earliest date for a second reading is 30th January. Women and sympathisers in their struggle have been writing to both Sainsbury and Stewart putting the case against restricting abortion rights and suggesting that if these gentlemen are concerned about women, there is a huge number of issues which they could usefully take up: maternity and childcare provision; better laws on equal pay and job discrimination; better rape laws; and, for Stewart, extension of the Domestic Violence Act to Scotland.

Meanwhile, an Oxford consultant gynaecologist, Mr Mostyn Embrey, has announced the development of a safe and easily administered abortifacient pessary. The only problem with its use at home is the law, which forbids use of any method without medical supervision and premises. There are still some problems with side-effects of the drug used, prostoglandin.

The recent ruling which

10p

**How to fight for our jobs**

**Support the hunger strikers**

The December issue of *Women's Fightback* carried a full report and discussion of the TUC's Positive Action conference, two pages on health and abortion, a page contributed by the Edinburgh Fightback group, and reports on women in the Labour Party and trade unions. The January issue carries a centre-page on fighting health cuts, a guide to the Tories' Nationality proposals and letters from a woman in Chile, plus letters, debate and news. *Women's Fightback* is 10p monthly, from 41 Ellington Street, London N7

told nurses that it was unlawful to help administer doses of prostoglandin at abortions has been overturned unexpectedly by the Law-Lords.

The previous Appeal Court ruling could have stopped a possible 7,000 abortions a year. This is a substantial defeat for the anti-abortion groups which lobbied the Royal College of Nursing so vigorously to seek restriction via the Courts.

There is still time to write to Sainsbury and

Stewart to counter the highly efficient anti-abortion propaganda which we had to fight so hard in the recent campaign against the Corrie Bill.

Tory Health and Social Services chief Patrick Jenkin has decided that there will be no more money for improving maternity services — despite a recent official report that there are 5,000 avoidable baby deaths and 5,000 cases of avoidable handicap every year.

## BRITAIN RENEGES ON HUNGER STRIKE DEAL

by Bruce Robinson

THE BRITISH press crowded with delight when the Republican prison protest and the hunger strike ended in mid-December. But what really happened? Did Thatcher give in? Did the prisoners gain nothing? Was there a deal?

And who has come out of the struggle strengthened, the IRA, British imperialism, the Protestants, or the Haughey government in the Republic?

The claim that the Tories didn't give an inch is certainly a lie. Atkins, the Northern Ireland Secretary, may have made the proposals in his 34-page document applicable to all prisoners, but they clearly contain concessions.

The protest and strike had been aimed at securing five demands that would have been tantamount to admitting that the Republican prisoners were 'political' and not just common criminals.

They wanted to wear their own clothes, to refrain from prison work, associate freely with other political prisoners, organise their own political and recreational activities, and have the right to full remission of sentence.

By blurring the distinction between work and study, the Atkins document goes a long way to meeting most of these demands. The fact that Bobby Sands, the IRA officer commanding in Long Kesh, was allowed to meet the hunger strikers and explain the docu-

ment to the officers in charge of the H-Blocks, is also seen as a breakthrough towards the recognition by the British of the IRA command structure.

According to Bernadette McAliskey (Devlin), clean cells were to be prepared for the prisoners on the 'no wash' protest and they were to be given their own clothing as well as 'civilian-type' clothing. The prison authorities would also turn a blind eye to the wearing of non-prison clothes during work/study hours. The way would then have been open also for the restoration of remission of sentences, which would have meant immediate release for some prisoners.

The document not only blurred over the issue of prison work and prison clothes, but committed the government 'to run a humane and flexible system under the prison rules'. Even a Tory back-bencher said that 'there is precious little difference between what the strikers are seeking and what is on offer'.

But how is the document being applied. There is growing evidence that the British government is reneging on its agreement with the starving men and women in its jails!

Relatives of some prisoners have been turned away when bringing civilian clothing to the jails, and prisoners are being told that they will have to wear prison clothing and obey prison regulations before they are moved to clean cells.

The result has been that almost all of the men on the blanket are still on protest. The National H-Block Committee has again urged its supporters to march, and there is even talk of a new hunger strike.

While Thatcher has managed to defuse the immediately explosive situation, and while the Tories have the upper hand in so far as the interpretation of the Atkins document is concerned, the Republican forces managed to mobilise support for the prisoners throughout Ireland. Committees were set up in every town, a number of big demonstrations were held — particularly in Belfast and Dublin — and backing was won from several national trade unions.

But if British imperialism has had to take a step back in its criminalisation policy, Thatcher's recent talks with Haughey will help the 'normalisation/Ulsterisation' prongs of British strategy. With Haughey's stated willingness to step up 'cross-border security', Britain can afford to continue its troop reductions in the North, handing things over to a strengthened para-military police force.

The renewed attention to the Irish question created by the prison protests provides us with a real opportunity to explain the issues within the working class and to win workers to a see the need to withdraw the troops and support the struggle for a united Ireland.

## Socialist Organiser IRELAND

### Ireland rally planned for Feb. 21

by Bruce Robinson

THE Labour Committee on Ireland is organising a rally on February 21st (the same weekend as the next AGM of the LCI) to highlight the struggles of the prisoners in H-Block and Armagh.

The plan for this rally came out of a special meeting of the LCI on December 13th. The meeting also decided to set up a special

prisoners' sub-committee of the LCI, and an LCI London committee.

The meeting discussed the LCI's submission to the National Executive Committee Working Party on Ireland. The vast majority of those at the AGM insisted that this submission must be based on the policy passed at the LCI's founding conference, without fudging the issues.

## IRELAND AND THE BRITISH

A LABOUR CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY BATTERSEA C.L.P.  
17th January 1981  
11.30 - 5.00  
177 Lavender Hill  
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Battersea CLP bookshop

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IRISH REPUBLICANISM  
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STATUS OF IRISH PRISONERS  
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and THE MEDIA AND IRELAND.

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ALF DUBS, MP  
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and CHARTER 80.