

Workers' fight

3p

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LITTLEJOHN: 'Under-cover' out in the open

WILSON, like his Tory predecessors, is trying to keep the lid on the Littlejohn affair. In a reply to a Parliamentary question, he states that there will be no inquiry into Littlejohn's allegations, despite the fact that Labour called for such an inquiry when in opposition. Clearly the Labour opposition was then solely interested in embarrassing the Tory government, one of whose ministers had been in personal contact with Kenneth Littlejohn.

Now that the Labour government, which has taken over lock stock and barrel all the Tories' antics in Ireland, chokes to hush up the affair, Littlejohn's story can only be given greater credence.

In an interview in TIME OUT, Littlejohn reiterates that the Grafton Street bank raid, for which he was extradited and imprisoned, was instigated by British intelligence, in order to discredit the IRA. He gives the thinking behind the bank raid as follows: "They [the IRA] weren't molested or arrested in any way by the Southern Irish authorities, and the British were very uptight about this and obviously decided to do something about it. The Offences Against the State Act was already in operation, but there was an amendment being talked about at that time. It was thought that we could push it through by creating trouble in the South, which would be laid at the door of the IRA. It was felt



Kenneth Littlejohn

that the bank robbery would help to shove it through. And in fact this proved to be the case."

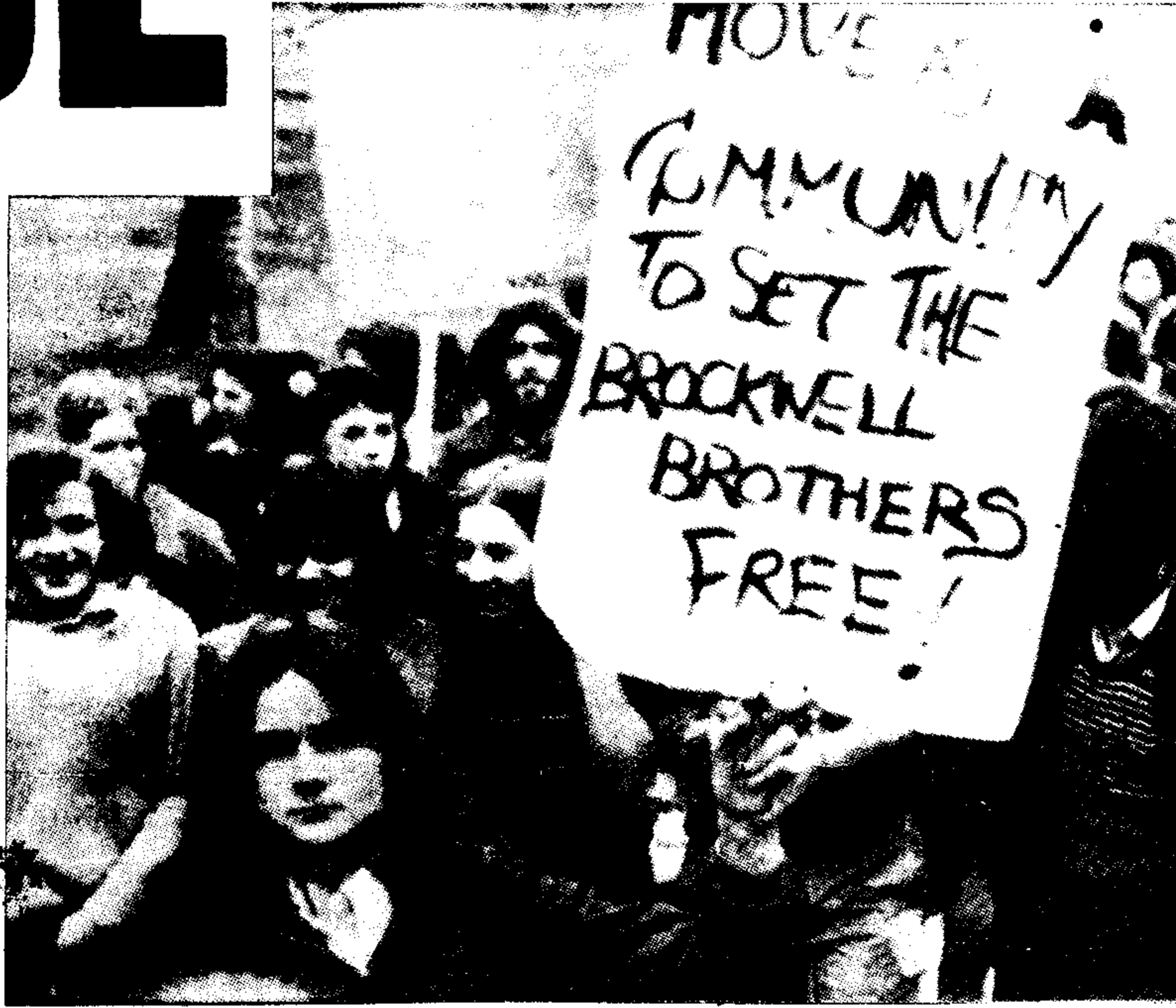
But Littlejohn's participation in the machinations of British intelligence is certainly no more than the tip of the iceberg. The Dublin bomb explosions, which were responsible for Lynch getting the anti-IRA legislation through in the Dail, are widely suspected (even by the most respectable bourgeois opinion in Ireland) of being the work of British intelligence.

Besides this, 'An Phoblacht', the paper of the Provisional Sinn Fein, has been claiming for some time that the sectarian murders in the North were attributable to the activities of British counter-insurgency units. The accusation is not in the least far fetched, since it is now admitted that the British Army's undercover murder squad, the SAS (Special Air Services) is active in the North. Such provocative actions as those of the Littlejohns form part of the strategy openly advocated by such counter-insurgency experts as Frank Kitson.

We must demand that Labour now set up a public inquiry into all the secret activities of the military in Ireland - and, of course, that they withdraw all those thugs and murderers from Ireland now.

ANDREW ROBERTS

VICTIMS OF POLICE RACE HATE



London school students march for the 'Brockwell Park 3'

Horace Parkinson (top) and Robin Sterling (below)

"THERE is a sense of outrage in the area... a feeling shared, in fact, by Black people all over London. Sentences of three years each have been passed on the Brockwell Park Three. Three Black youths... and one of them is only 15 years old!" (Black Star, 30th March).

At 10.30 on June 9th last year, over 100 police armed with truncheons and dogs invaded the area surrounding the Brockwell Park fair, which was then just closing down following a stabbing incident. The result was that three black youths were dragged into a police van and hauled up on their way to Brixton Police Station. One of the youths, Horace Parkinson, needed stitches in his head

afterwards. The case first came up at Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court, and later was heard in Well Street Magistrates' Court, where statements from the police, from police witnesses and from the man who'd been stabbed were heard.

By this time the youngest of the three, Robin Sterling, had reached the age of 15 and was thus old enough to receive sentence.

Assault

Although the police withdrew some of the assault charges (one police officer, who had been hit on the head by a flying bottle - allegedly thrown by Robin Sterling - didn't press the charge) the presiding magistrate recommended that the three charges of grievous

bodily harm against Sterling should stand, and also that further charges of affray should be pressed against all three.

Weapon

On Monday 4th March the proceedings came up at the Old Bailey before Rhodesian educated Judge Abdela. Robin Sterling faced three charges of grievous bodily harm against police officers and one of affray. Lloyd James (18) faced one charge of grievous bodily harm against police officers and one of affray. And Horace Parkinson (20) faced two charges of grievous bodily harm against police officers, one of affray, and one carrying an offensive weapon (which has yet to be found).

Members of the local community

BY IAN HOLLINGWORTH

were unable to attend and witness the trial as it was conducted in a court without a public gallery and the court refused to lay on facilities for spectators.

Harassment

In this near-secret trial, the three were found guilty on all counts and on 15th March were sentenced to three years' imprisonment each. Robin Sterling was brought back before the Judge on the following Monday, but despite pleas for leniency from his lawyers and local community workers, the sentence was confirmed.

These sentences have to be seen

in the context of the constant harassment of black people in the Brixton area. In the last four years they have been subject to a number of attacks by police and free-lance racists. The Special Patrol Group has been operating in the area for over a year. Last year a series of bomb attacks were made against the houses and shops of black people, including the burning down of the Unity Centre - yet the police devote their time to harassing and pushing around black youths and have shown no interest in these vicious and criminal attacks.

As 'Black Star' said, there has been outraged reaction in the boys' community. But teachers and students are also moving into action to get the three out of jail.

Angry

Last Saturday an angry demonstration marched through Brixton, organised by the Black Student Action Collective (BSAC) and supported by the Black Peoples Defence Committee and Lambeth NUT. On Wednesday 3rd April, BSAC organised a strike and demonstration of London school students, which was supported by the National Union of School Students, and endorsed by the 1300 delegates at the NUS conference in Liverpool.

Defence

Lambeth NUT has pledged £25 to the Defence Fund (the three have lodged appeals) and North London NUT is following suit. Tulse Hill School, where Robin Sterling is a pupil, has already collected £100 for the defence.

Telegrams of support and donations should be sent to the Black Students Action Collective at 1, Gresham Road, London SW9 and the Black Peoples Defence Committee at 1, Mayall Road, SE 21. Information can be obtained from BSAC at 01-733-5...

Sean Matgamna

Labour reject TUC request to Free the Six

Home Secretary Jenkins has rejected the request of the TUC that he should release the six building workers jailed at Shrewsbury for their part in organising militant picketing during the 1972 national building strike.

He says that it is not "constitutionally possible" for him to release them.

Liar

He is a liar! He could release them tomorrow if he chose. If workers learned anything in the two years of struggle before we brought down the Tory government, it is that the law is very flexible - like india-rubber in the hands of the bosses and their governments to be bent, twisted, knocked down or built up to suit their purposes. If - as in July 1972 when

the five dockers were jailed - a quarter of a million workers were on strike for the release of the six, and if, as in 1972, the TUC called even a one-day general strike, then you would see new constitutional possibilities show themselves very quickly.

Remember the sudden appearance of that quaint and previously unknown gentleman, the Official Solicitor, who waved a magic wand to release the five dockers and get the Tories off the hook.

Release

The problem, of course, is that the TUC is merely "requesting" the release of the builders, and not threatening action to force the government to release them. And there has been a

lamentable lack of rank and file action to force the TUC to act to force their release.

The reason why Jenkins stands by the Tories' savage persecution of the building pickets is that the Labour government, too, is prepared when 'necessary' to beat down working class militant direct action.

Revolt

The police preparations for future confrontations continue still, despite the change of government. Labour seems to be succeeding where the Tories failed in getting the enthusiastic support of the Union leaders. But they know very well that the rank and file are sure to revolt and fight back despite the Trade Union leaders. Therefore Labour is

now building on Tory 'achievements' in the war against picketing as in other fields.

Victims

Talk of redefining and liberalising the right of picketing rings very hollow indeed when Jenkins keeps the six victims in jail.

This question is a major touchstone for the Labour government.

The whole labour movement must tell Jenkins with one voice to release these men now. The best way to make that voice heard is to fight for industrial action to force their release. If the working class had responded as in 1972, the men would not have been in jail for the last four months. Organise to fight for their release.

STRIKES MAY END FEUDAL DICTATORSHIP

THE NEXT STAGE in the uprisings in Ethiopia promises to be the explosion of the bitterly oppressed peasantry.

90% of the 26 million people of Ethiopia are peasants. Up to 75% of their produce goes to the landlords and 80% of the land is owned by 0.2% of the population. Emperor Haile Selassie and the Coptic Church are the biggest landowners. "I plow the earth to feed the church, the government and the army", a peasant told one NEWSWEEK reporter last week.

The peasants live in extreme poverty. Average life expectancy is 30 years, literacy 3%. This year two devastating famines have hit the peasants, the first wiping out 100,000 people in Wollo province in the north, the second threatening three southern provinces right now, where another quarter of a million lives are at stake. The famine deaths are no 'act of God': the drought was foreseen, relief supplies have been corruptly handled by the government, and throughout the famine food has actually been shipped out of Ethiopia, using, moreover, transportation desperately needed to bring relief supplies to the stricken areas.

Above all, it is the enforced poverty of the peasants that accounts for the devastation wrought by drought. They are left with no reserves (a good crop, indeed, usually brings demands for extra tithes from the landowners) and live at such a level of bare subsistence that they have nothing to fall back on.

Already the call for "Land to the tiller" has been raised by students and rebellious groups in the armed forces.

Students

As late as 25th March, paratroops were sent to surround Ethiopia's main air force base at Debre Zeit, because of a rebellion there. In early March, a leaflet had appeared in Addis Ababa, signed by army and air force units at Debre Zeit, saying: "No, we have not been bought off by the salary raises. We are with the people and the students. Continue your movement; we will join you soon." The original mutiny in late February and early March had involved about a quarter of the 40,000 members of the armed forces, who had arrested many of their senior officers (including Selassie's grandson Rear Admiral Eskindar Desta), notables, high functionaries and landowners. It led to wage increases for the troops, and also to the ousting of the cabinet.

A leaflet dropped by an air force helicopter over Addis Ababa on March 4th, and signed by some armed forces units, outlined eleven demands: freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, release of political prisoners, the right to form political parties, liberalisation of labour legislation, free and universal education, increases in civilian and military salaries, imposition of price controls, land reform with 'Land to the Tillers', trial of the previous cabinet ministers for corruption and the formation of joint committees of soldiers and civilians.

These elementary democratic demands pose a serious threat to Emperor Haile Selassie's dictatorship. At present, only 4 million out of the 26 million population are allowed to vote, and then only for a lower house of parliament which has very little power. All political parties are banned. Selassie has now promised constitutional reform — but with no definite timetable, and no concrete pledges of reform. State control of the press has been heavy until loosened by the recent rebellions.

The right for government employees to strike and organise, for free education for children of union members and agreement in principle on an increased minimum wage were won by a four-day general strike from March 7th to 11th, involving over 100,000 workers. But many were dissatisfied at the strike being called off so soon, by a union leadership (the CELU) which was set up by the regime 11 years ago and which is assisted by three U.S. 'advisers'. Now many previously unorganised workers, particularly the airline

workers, are considering the formation of "more genuine" unions.

Only a few hours after the end of the general strike, airline workers struck again, in protest against the arrest of 46 workers for distributing leaflets during the general strike, and only went back on 1st April after being promised a board of inquiry.

It was even reported, on March 12th, that 500 priests of the Coptic Church has threatened to strike for higher pay, pension rights and cheaper medical care!

Students have consistently supported the rebellions in the armed forces and the workers' strikes. The encirclement of Debre Zeit air base on March 25th prompted a student demonstration in support of the airmen. Students' demands have included "Land to the Tiller" and also the ousting of the government and the emperor, and "popular elections".

One student described the events as an "Ethiopian May 1968". In some ways, of course, these events are very different from those of May 1968. The immediate demands are for basic democratic rights which were fought for in France in 1789, not 1968. But the crucial similarity lies in the militancy of the students, the vital role played by the working class, and the increasing involvement of many sections of society.



Prime Minister Makonnen

Haile Selassie has ruled as a dictator since he returned to power in 1941, by courtesy of the British Army, after the Italian occupation. He now relies on the peasantry, the vast bulk of the population, remaining quiet and leaving the struggle in the hands of the small section of urban workers. But the unrest is already spreading to the countryside. NEWSWEEK reports (8th April issue) that "recent increases in prices of such basic commodities as salt together with continued bureaucratic abuse have aggravated the farmers' long-standing resentments to the point where they seem ready to join their city cousins in demanding a change in government."

If the Ethiopian working class can fuse its demands with those of the peasants and lead them into a concerted struggle, it will be more than just the government that will be changed in Ethiopia.

STANTON STEELWORKS AMENDMENT

THIS CONFERENCE pledges itself to fight against racialism and religious sectarianism. We advocate campaigns to recruit immigrant workers to trade unions (using leaflets in the immigrants' own languages, etc). We fight against any discrimination at work or within the unions (including social clubs). We fight for full equality in pay, conditions, status, grading, training, further education, access to skilled jobs and promotion opportunities, in support of any demands black or immigrant workers make for educational and special religious rights (holy day paid leave, right to wear religious dress, turbans etc.). Recognising the importance of the specially close relationship between black and immigrant workers and their communities. **Against all immigration laws and controls or discriminatory legislation against their offshoots, the contract labour system, voucher system and deportations. For the physical defence of black workers under attack. For automatic official endorsement of industrial action by black or immigrant workers against instances of racialism whether they are in the minority or not.**

WE STAND for the expropriation without compensation of the key branches of industry and finance, transport, distribution and land. Likewise the expropriation of the most parasitic capitalists. We stand for the nationalisation of all enterprises that cannot meet the requirements of their workers. We advocate the placing of all such nationalised or expropriated enterprises under direct workers' control. We fight for workers control over work conditions, over hiring and firing, over the actual aims of

THE FIRST National Rank and File Delegate Conference was held in Birmingham last Saturday, March 30th. It was designed to be the first step in building a national rank and file movement — the need for which is now felt by more militants than ever before.

The witchhunt launched against the Conference by right wing U P W leader Tom Jackson (see WF49) showed that the prospect of a rank and file movement provokes fear in bureaucrats as well as hope in militants.

Today the trade union leaders prepare to outdo even their own record of ineptness and treachery during the years of Tory rule by indecently snuggling up to the Labour government. They declare sympathy and understanding for the problems of this government which is still pursuing Tory policies, which allows the NIRC to confiscate further tens of thousands of pounds from trade union funds and which allows trade unionists jailed under the Tories to stay locked up. Militants can rely neither on Union leaders nor on Harold Wilson and the Labour Party. That is why we need a rank and file movement.

DISCUSSION

The conference was called by an Organising Committee (OC) set up under the auspices of a number of rank and file papers — The Collier, Hospital Worker, Redder Tape, Rank and File Teacher, Steelworker, and others, all associated with the International Socialist Organisation. This OC produced a resolution around which the discussion at the conference was structured during the four and a half hours it was in session.

Admission to the conference was for delegates elected by trade union branches or trades councils. The conference was chaired by Will Fancy of NALGO.

Only one serious disagreement emerged, around an amendment submitted by workers at Stanton steelworks (see below). There was very little general political discussion, and on the

whole the only real 'life' in the discussion was when delegates described their experiences in struggle.

A highlight of the conference was a speech by John Llywarch, who received a 6 months suspended prison sentence in the first of the Shrewsbury trials. He described his experience of how these building workers were railroaded to jail by the Tory government. Analysing the evidence, he showed the trials to be a mockery of even bourgeois justice. The only hard evidence against Des Warren was that he had made a speech — and he got three years' jail for that. Ricky Tomlinson got two years for booking two coaches. John Mackinsie Jones got 9 months for calling a scab with whiskers a "walrus-faced bastard".

SCANDAL

Llywarch said that the sleepy indifference with which the broad labour movement had accepted the jailings was a scandal. He pointed out that it was rank and file action that had released the 5 jailed dockers in 1972, panicking the Tory government and forcing the TUC to call a one day general strike. We need to build a rank and file movement that can respond to every challenge the ruling class throws down, he said. He also called for a national stoppage to be prepared against the continued jailing of the Shrewsbury 6.

Discussion from the floor took up most of the conference time.

HUGH KERR (ATTI) pointed out that in 1974 workers' living standards were due to fall further than at any time since 1926. The trade union leaders had already shown themselves willing to drop backwards over a barrel for a Labour government. The defeat of the Tories in the elections was a victory for the working class, but a Labour government that carries out Tory policies is no better than a Tory government. The rank and file must fight back.

Europ Singh made an impassioned appeal to the conference not to confine itself to the vague anti-racist sentiments of the official resolution — "against racialism because it splits and divides workers. Bro. Singh said it was necessary to know and

THE CONFERENCE. More to the point, **The Dockworker** a paper set up by IS in opposition to The Hook, but which has now fallen under the domination of the CP, was not one of the sponsoring papers. The CP itself naturally did not participate, nor, except for a few individuals, did the International Marxist Group. Workers Fight was the only other tendency to participate in an organised way.

Attendance at the conference is difficult to establish. Opening the proceedings, the Chairman Will Fancy (NALGO) said that over 700 applications for credentials had been received from 307 trade union organisations. These included 40 stewards and combine

Rank and Conference

say what to do about racialism. Under the 1971 Immigration Act a black immigrant worker can now be deported for picketing. This is a crucial issue. He believed the policy of the bosses was to reduce the immigrant community here to the level of the immigrants in the EEC, who are treated as cheap disposable labour to be shipped in when needed and out when redundant, during economic recessions. Heavy raids were coming on the black community, he warned.

Gerry Kelly, a Birmingham building worker, said he was totally opposed to any government, Labour or Tory, that allowed the 6 trade unionists to stay in jail.

Brother McGough, Chairman of Dunlops Combine Committee, called for international link-ups on a rank and file basis. More and more international companies, responsible to no-one but the moneylords, were dominating our lives. Workers needed to organise internationally too. He recalled that British Dunlop workers and Pirelli workers in Italy had organised the first multi-national rank and file stoppage, in 1971. "If the rank and file agree, they can confront the employer, who is only interested in profits, and stop him doing whatever he wants to do."

FRATERNAL

A steward from **Strachans of Eastleigh** told how the workers had recently occupied the factory and now hold £2m. worth of goods. The works committee had been given half an hour's notice to quit and the rest of the workers were told to get out at a minute's notice. After three days' picketing in the cold outside they decided "this is stupid, we could be inside. The manager objected, so we got

shot of the manager." They were fighting for their jobs. "You can forget about your social contracts and about wage rises if the trade unions aren't prepared to fight back. Whether prices are high or low, you need wages." He told how they had been asked at the Social Security if they were "employed" on the picket line. About thirty of them had then had their money stopped.

Bro. Chris Gibson brought fraternal greetings from the Dublin Shop Stewards movement. He told how the DSSM had developed in opposition to class collaborationist trade union bureaucrats in Ireland. 350 stewards had attended a conference which they'd held (in British population terms that would amount to 7,500!). Now 100 towards made up the regular committee.

EMERGENCY

Fraternal greetings were read out from an Italian rank and file movement, the organisation of "Committees of the Base". The telegram told of hundreds of arrests of trade unionists in the previous two weeks, of fascist attacks on trade unionists and rumours of a military coup in Italy. They appealed for solidarity to the Conference, which voted unanimously to send them a suitable reply.

Two emergency resolutions were passed, one in support of plans to occupy and run the **Scottish Daily Express**, due to be closed down, and another condemning the latest fines on the AUEW.

The Organising Committee refused to accept an emergency resolution proposed by Stephen Corbishly (CPSA) from the floor, calling for the return to Ireland of

IS control limits movement

committees, 19 trades councils, and 231 trade union branches and chapels 58 AUEW, 38 T&GWU, 16 print union chapels, 5 miners' lodges (many less than sponsor **The Collier**) 7 UCATT branches, 22 NALGO, 14 NUPE and 32 from 4 teachers' unions. However, the only vote counted showed a total of 271, with abstentions uncounted. The organisers claim that about 450 delegates registered.

There was a great deal about the conference that was artificial. Apart from a procedural resolution, one tiny amendment and an amendment proposing a newsletter for the rank and file movement, the only amendment to the official resolution was the one from Stanton. There was thus no feedback at all from the organisations that had applied for credentials. As one delegate, Sister Coates, pointed out, this could only mean that no discussion at all had occurred among the participating organisations.

RESOLUTION

No less instructive was the unanimity with which the official resolution was accepted by the conference — vague, general, pious and incredibly incomplete as it was, and leading to no practical conclusions. In response to Bro. Singh's speech, the OC admitted the shortcomings of the official resolution on racism — yet they opposed the Stanton amendment, and got a majority on the basis of the flimsiest of arguments.

Also disturbing is the pretense that the rank and file conference was broadly based, while only IS-controlled papers have an organisational voice.

The Editorial Board of the most influential of these papers, Rank and File teacher, is elected on a winner-take-all basis, with no representation for the large non-IS minority involved in the paper. The election of a new Organising Committee was shelved for now, at the behest of the existing Organising Committee — and not a murmur of dissent was heard from delegates collected together on the basis of a militant stand against non-elected union leaderships.

NEWSLETTER

A resolution from Mid-Leicester Teachers Association that a newsletter should be started to act as an organising link between the various papers and industries forced IS to show its controlling hand. Amidst the evasive arguments used by the brother put up to oppose this, the one that carried most weight was that "other papers will report our activities". What 'other paper' could he mean but IS's weekly, Socialist Worker? The hand of the IS puppet master was clearly visible behind the curtain!

Most indicative of the control of IS, as well as of the politics of IS, was the incredible rejection of the Stanton amendment. It is scarcely credible that, without IS's urging, a conference of militant, politically orientated rank and file trade unionists would have opposed the inclusion in the 'programme' of a rank and file movement of demands for nationalisation! Such a demand was not only that of the Minority Movement of the 1920s, but is a commonplace one at official trade union conferences.

The rejection of this amendment is the clearest indication of IS's conception of

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file papers' - report

our republican hunger in British jails, Feeney, and the Price sisters, on the fact that it didn't come from an organisation of the movement. The fact that the T&GWU had called on trade unionists to demand return was clearly not in the eyes of the OC. At 4.30 in the afternoon, a special resolution was passed unanimously, with amendments accepted or rejected by the OC. Half an hour before the meeting was due to close, the resolution from the Spun Plant of the G&MWU (Stanton BSC), was called as an annual Resolution, with time for one speaker for and one

Geordie Barclay, member of Workers Fight, spoke for his side at which over 30 workers had unanimously passed the amendment, which was a section on organisation and workers (completely omitted from the official resolution) and which expanded the two issues on the fight against racism and against the oppression of women.

RACIALISM

Racism, he said, was so ingrained, even within the movement, that nothing was taken for granted and opposition to it had to be fought out, as the amendment recalled that the OC had admitted the inadequacy of its resolution in this regard. He went on to argue that in this age no militant rank and file movement that wanted to be the guard of the working class could do its job properly without fighting for equality and

to build a rank and file movement. Stated bluntly, it is a question of tailing and following rather than leading and fighting for policies and demands that will take the movement forward.

A section of the movement on women's rights of course need to be fought for against the demagogic sections of the class and labour movement. Yet precisely this is the issue. After all, what is a rank and file movement, which is to draw the most militant sections of our class into struggle, for unless it is such backward

demagogically, the rank and file put up to speak at the amendment tried to do the vaguer and more demagogic resolution was, a chance there is of opposition to mere good intentions. Yet that action is to be extended and not otherwise dampened or finished according to the goals it sets. The issue they are, the more is that militants in the rank and file be fobbed off with promises, promises and sellouts.

FUNCTIONALISM

the voting down of the amendment on racialism, this is to be understood in terms of crude IS functionalism, a refusal to be led by another political

movement is involved than an attempt to save face. IS is criticised by a tendency to after the moods and of the broad working class instead of fighting for a Marxist line, it tries to dress with the working class in all sorts of ways and, above all, to avoid a clash with the moods in the class. It is to build an organisation to struggle with bourgeois class, as expressed within the working class, but by trying to avoid the issue. Thus for



Voting on the first emergency motion Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

fullest rights for women. He told how the steelworkers at Stanton had successfully fought for equality for women workers within the plant. A militant rank and file movement had to be in advance of the general level in fighting for women's rights — including the right to abortion on demand, without which equality for women workers could never be realised.

Ken Hume, a member of IS, was called by the Chairman to speak in opposition to the 'additional resolution'. He argued that it "lacked a feel for the labour

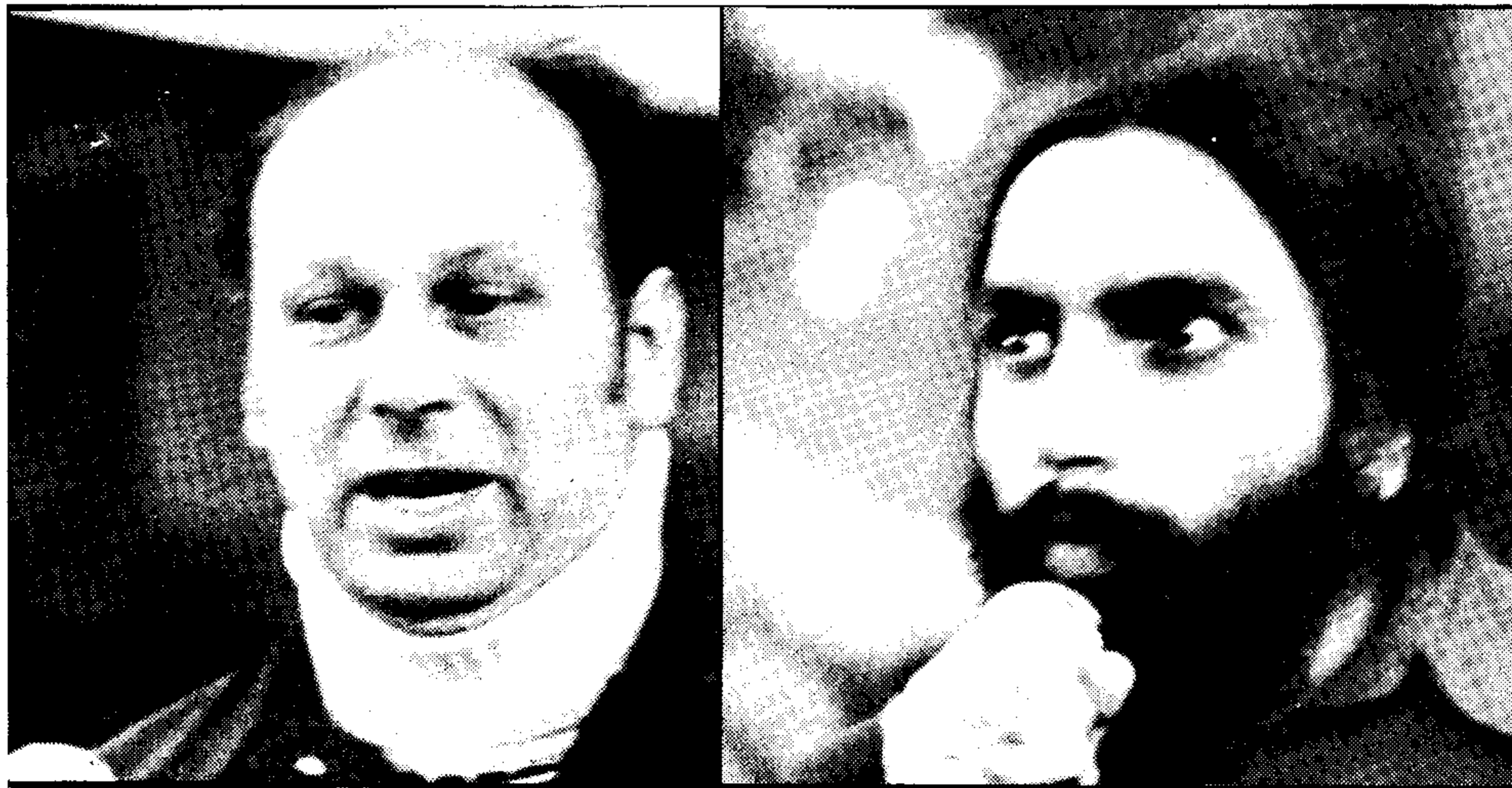
movement". It resembled a programme for a political party more than anything else. Conference must aim to unite workers "on a minimal basis" around issues like the Shrewsbury 24, not to divide them. He wanted a resolution that militants could go back to their jobs and fight for, with a chance of convincing their mates. The additional resolution offered no such possibility and he urged Conference to reject it.

The Chairman, taking the resolution as a whole, then went to the vote, which was 89 for the amendment, and 182 against.

Insofar as it was possible to judge, the obviously unaffiliated trade unionists (including some who had spoken) voted with IS against the amendment. The solid core voting against were members of IS, though some IS comrades voted for the amendment.

There was a great deal of feeling on this issue, and cries of 'Shame' — especially from some of the women present — greeted both the speaker against the amendment and the vote that followed.

The OC remains in being, and further Conferences are planned.



GEORDIE BARCLAY

EUROP SINGH

example, IS for over a decade denounced the fake left and its meaningless shadow-boxing around the issue of the Common Market — only in 1971 to come out in insincere opposition to it in order to avoid swimming against the stream of working class opposition to the Common Market.

Its approach in the rank and file movement is exactly the same. It would be slanderous to say IS or any of its delegates to the conference were racists. They most certainly are not. But, in their view (and now, under their influence, the view of their militant working class contacts) to go beyond the generalisation that racism splits the working class and to take the fight against racism aggressively into the labour movement — that is 'needlessly to provoke difficulties'.

Better stick to generalities and "build the revolutionary party". Never mind that a 'revolutionary party' built on this soft-options approach is a sham and a mockery which can only collapse when the struggle becomes intense. The same approach can be seen on the question of Ireland. Were the Organising Committee a revolutionary

body, it would have seized on the Irish TGWU request for help to propose that the conference takes a stand against the systematic daily torture of the four Irish freedom fighters. But IS, true to form, chose to evade the issue.

As long as five years ago, when Workers Fight was part of IS, we proposed that IS should take as one of its major objectives the building of a Rank and File movement. We saw it as necessary, and incidentally as a way of building an organised periphery around IS, rather than the approach of the IS leadership of direct mass recruitment into the organisation itself of people with, often, little political education and only a vague idea of what IS was.

CENTRIST

5 years later on, IS has anything up to 4,000 members recruited on this loose basis, without selection or tempering and with little education other than the demagogic catch-cries of the IS leaders. Long ago this method of building the alleged 'revolutionary party', which leaves no method of leadership open to the IS leaders except

internal manipulation and demagoguery, had destroyed any real internal democracy inside IS. It is now a swollen, bureaucratically organised centrist, and sometimes even left reformist, organisation.

It is this organisation that now seeks to build a rank and file movement. It is probably inevitable that any such movement would be dominated by some political tendency. The question is, which tendency with which politics. The trouble with this movement is that it is IS, with its tailist, line-of-least-resistance politics that is dominating.

Nevertheless on balance (and its discrete manipulations last Saturday notwithstanding), IS's domination so



Art Castings workers picketing

ASIAN WORKERS

Discovering their own power

SEVERAL strikes recently have shattered whatever myths still existed about the passivity of Asian workers in face of bad conditions, pay and treatment. Jaffe's in Nottingham, Mansfield Hosiery in Leicester, Art Castings at Nuneaton, Gutterman Perivale in Southall, and scores more — unreported by a press stuck deep in the muck of racism.

RACE TODAY's current series of statements by militant Asian workers* now brings a much-needed insight into the attitudes and problems of these workers. Each relates his working experiences and tells how he came into struggle against racism and the super-exploitation of textile mill and foundry.

Musstaq Hussein's account is a vivid description of the rapid development in the consciousness of the younger immigrant workers, and their disappointment with the backwardness of many of the white workers they encounter.

He started work in 1965 as a fifteen year old, working near Nottingham for £4 a week. "It wasn't until I was about 18 that I realised that we are discriminated against and not being treated the same as a white person. They were using us as cheap labour." Bro. Hussein soon found that the racism of the employers was backed up by the racism of his white fellow workers. They helped the boss to keep wage rates a secret so that he could underpay the immigrants. The most common thing was that the immigrants were made to work long hours; of overtime for the same pay. "Later on when we had a dispute the white workers started running our machines."

Miserable

Soon, however, the workers got to know other Asian workers who were on strike. "It was a shock to us because we never knew anything like that in our community. ... They told us to join the union, so one by one we all quietly joined."

Musstaq Hussein was then working at Jaffe's (a racist textile firm where there has recently been a successful strike). Within a short space of time there grew up a sense of working class solidarity that totally transformed the situation. Musstaq Hussein was made shop steward, whereupon Mr. Jaffe offered him what until then he had always been denied — promotion. "But I told him I had wanted promotion earlier and he hadn't done anything about it. Now it was too late and I would stick with the men because I didn't want to be on his side."

But this lightning leap from initial bewilderment to solid class conscious union organisation received the most miserable response from the trade union itself. The T&GWU proved no less racist than Jaffe. They sent a series

of negotiators who didn't consult with the Asian workers. Finally "when the fourth one came we didn't know if he was working for us or the management — he left us standing in the rain while he sat in the manager's office. ... The union didn't do anything to help us: whenever we rang them they would say they were doing everything in their power, but they never came round to see us. Lorries went through the picket line..."

One reason why this shocked him so much is that the relation between the immigrant community and the workers, organised or not, is so much closer — such scabbing would be unthinkable. He thinks he might start a union but "it would be more than a union, it would be supported from the community, for instance, and anyway the (official) unions might not make a strike official. ... Our experience has shown us in past strikes that if our community supports us we can go through any situation."

What a vital lesson is here for British workers, whose organisation rarely extends beyond the workplace and the union. And what a damning indictment of the racism of the British trade union movement that these workers, so new to trade union organisation, should need to look for help beyond this movement.

All the contributors to this feature in RACE TODAY reveal a gigantic change in attitude among Asian workers towards working class struggle. Sarwan Singh, who is from the Punjab and now lives in Bradford, recalls "Once when I was working in a firm there were some Indian workers working at the furnace for over ten years and when I tried to convince them to join the union they said 'No, only workers join unions. We are peasants, agriculturalists.' But I know this is changing." Musstaq Hussein remarks "If you don't make trouble they won't pay you. ... My father doesn't struggle, he thinks you just go to the factory and work for them no matter what they pay you. ... I think the younger generation of Asians are prepared to do anything if they are not treated right."

Mike Rodda, works convenor of the United Glass factory in South London's New Cross, is from Calcutta. "My experience in the factory is that if there is a strike, it's more supported by the immigrant workers than the white workers, which to me means that they are not prepared to accept a raw deal. ... They are first at the picket line, the first at the demonstrations, the first to fight for a better deal."

The six contributions that make up this feature deliver jointly a harrowing testimony of the backwardness of so many white workers — eager to have the support of the blacks in the union sometimes, but jealously excluding them from every advantage. Kewal Lehal, an AUEW worker, points out "there were always trade unions in the factory and if there was any pushing around by people, they'd stand by us. But they were usually against the blacks when we got better jobs like crane drivers or slingers; they'd tell the foreman that they don't want blackie in the cabin."

There is also a pervasive disquiet in all the voices recorded here that if Britain enters a period of high unemployment, it will take up Powellite repatriation policies. Certainly, unless we fight more vigorously against the racist ideas and practices prevalent in the labour movement (and of course in society generally) we will be condemning our Asian brothers to the brutality of mass deportation and the savagery of racist pogroms.

JOHN O'MAHONY

* See back page ads.

MINERS BACK STUDENTS IN STRUGGLE FOR A FIGHTING UNION!

Last week, 18 students at Oxford were suspended for one year and forbidden to enter any University building without written permission.

The victimisations occurred as a result of an occupation in support of the demand for a Central Students' Union. The trial came to an abrupt end after the Bench had ruled that no student who had taken part in the occupation could appear as a witness to what had happened inside the building (particularly the violence used by the University in ending the occupation) without being open

to prosecution. As evidence of the violence used outside as the building was cleared was almost all ruled irrelevant, the Court's refusal to grant anonymity or immunity to witnesses made it impossible for the Defence to present its case. All the defendants, with the exception of one who was defending himself, then withdrew from the court. In a statement to the court, one defendant said "The court is sitting to return a verdict of guilty against us and to smash the campaign for a central students' union of which we are proud to be a part... It is the senior members

who stand accused of not listening to student demands and not negotiating through the students' union.

Warned

The case then quickly moved to a conclusion. The one victim remaining in the court warned in a closing speech that harsh sentences would not defeat the campaign, but would instead lead to an Essex-type situation. The judges, on the other hand, who throughout have been scarcely distinguishable from the prosecution, obviously thought

that the sentences would deprive the campaign of its 'ring-leaders'. The response of the campaign was, however, to immediately discuss how it could best prepare for mass action next term both against the sentences and to further the original demands of the campaign.

At Essex, however, the situation is somewhat more precarious. After the mass arrests of 105 student pickets, who were attempting to prevent supplies entering the University, and a demonstration of over 1000 students, the Administration has taken clear steps to divide the student body. While granting the 'independent' enquiry (at the same time reserving the right to nominate its members), the Administration refused point-blank to stop the disciplinary proceedings against 26 students. The two already banned from the campus are fighting the sentences in the High Court.

Blank cheque

The barricades were removed last week. The latest news is that Vice-Chancellor Sloman has taken this as an opportunity to break his previous assurance that no further deliveries to the University would occur. There is therefore a need for as many students as possible to go to Essex to help man the pickets.

Encouragingly, a growing amount of support has been coming from the labour movement. Local trade unionists both on and off the campus have helped to black goods heading for the University, and the local Trades Council has been active in support. Jack Collins of Kent NUM spoke at the demonstration last week and the Derbyshire NUM sent a blank cheque to pay

for bail for those arrested. That the Vice-Chancellors have a clear strategy for dealing with student militancy, was made clear by the statement from the Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors on Monday. He said, in effect, that Universities would only support student unions if they behaved themselves within whatever framework the Universities chose to lay down. While he is willing to see student unions enmeshed in a system of meaningless participation without any real control, he is not willing to have student unions which will fight seriously.



NUS President Randall

It is this issue — of a fighting union — that underlies the victimisations at Essex and at Oxford. It was by that issue that the National Union of Students conference in Liverpool had to be judged — and re-elected President John Randall and the new Broad Left-dominated executive have failed to give any clear lead.

As a first step, a demonstration has been called for 3rd May in London. There is a danger, however, that without a clear lead, there will be demoralisation before any campaign gets off the ground. This must not be allowed to happen. Sympathetic action must take place in dozens of colleges up and down the country. The victimisations at Essex, Kent, and Oxford are attacks on all students' ability to undertake serious mass political action in the future.

Bruce Robinson

£90 still to come this month

The money is still coming in too slowly for the Workers' Fight £100 monthly fund. In the first week of the new month, we have received £10.50.

The TUC's agreement with the Government (see front page) should help to convince anyone who is still doubtful that we cannot rely on the Trade Union or Labour Party tops to defend our interests. And last weekend's Rank and File conference should have shown that we can't just rely on the rank and file coming up with something, somehow.

We need a fighting socialist paper and a fighting socialist organisation. For that, we need much more than just contributions to our fund. But we need that as a start.

WORKERS FIGHT will not be published next week. No.51 will be published on April 20th.

Support anti-Junta demo on May 5th

THE latest 'Socialist Worker' (6 April) declares that the International Socialists will support the national demonstration on 5th May to demand that Labour immediately end all diplomatic, trade, and military relations with the counter-revolutionary military junta in Chile.

This is a welcome change from the days of the first demonstration against the coup, when the IS comrades formed up separately alongside the Chile protest demonstration, with their own banners about... South Africa.

The 5th May demonstration was put as a proposal at the Chile Solidarity Campaign National Action Conference in Birmingham on 23rd March. But the chairman, Communist Party member Dick Etheridge, steadfastly refused to put the proposal to the vote. He even refused to take a vote on whether the proposal should be discussed. Finally, militants wanting some action to come out of the 'action' conference had to walk out and hold their own meeting in another part of the hall.

Bas Hardy

Students demonstrate for higher grants



Laggers in health hazard strike

by Bas Hardy

"His father, brother, and two nephews have died of asbestosis. He's worked 39 years for the company and he's certain to have contracted it. We had to send him home from the picket line because he was sick with worry."

That was what happened to one of the five workers who are manning a picket line to demand, not an increase in wages, but the implementation of the 1969 Asbestos Regulations.

The strike, now over a week old, is by Thermo Insulations engineers (laggers) who have been stripping boilers and pipes of the asbestos lining at Deptford and Belvedere power stations. The men, members of the G.M.W.U.'s

only craft section, have come out against Medway Installation, which is guilty of victimisations, employment of non-union labour and, most important of all, a flagrant disregard of workers' health and safety standards.

The strikers are in no doubt that asbestosis is a killer. The disease, contracted through breathing asbestos dust, has a very similar effect to silicosis. Even after only a slight exposure to the dust, cancer of the lung or stomach can kill you within two years. In 1971, the deaths of 113 workers were directly traced to this disease, although this number represents only the tip of the iceberg.

"We want to live a full life", one of the strikers commented. "Now, very few laggers are lucky if they live until 65. If you look through the union books, you'll see men dying at 40 and 45, some of them even as young as thirty."

Two laws are already supposed to regulate asbestos hazards in the workplace, but still the health of workers remains at risk. Most unscrupulous contractors display criminal negligence in relation to this legislation, and Factory Inspectors in many cases have turned a blind eye to these breeches.

Banned

In one case last year, at West Thurrock, asbestos stripping was carried out without supervision, and the asbestos was taken away through the streets without a cover, thus putting the whole population at risk. More frightening still, another case was reported where insulation contractors employed youngsters of 16 to chip away blue asbestos, or crocidolite, without any protection whatsoever. This asbestos was described by one expert as "so dangerous that it should be banned".

Maximum

In Deptford, the Medway workers encounter similar materials. The cement they have to remove is full of asbestos fibres so fine that they cannot be detected with the eye. The 'hygiene standard', laid down in the 1969 Act, for asbestos in the air, is two fibres per cubic centimetre, averaged over four hours, although the law does not fix a maximum for asbestos concentration.

This implies there is a safe limit for asbestos. Yet when, in 1971, the Chief Inspector for Factories, Brian Harvey, was asked if it was possible to say that any

concentration was safe, he replied, "I certainly cannot get any of our medical advisors to make that statement. I wish I could".

Given the danger workers are exposed to by even the smallest concentration of asbestos in the air, the law requires them to wear a power operated mask and a hood, overshoes, clean overalls every day, and to have a changing room fitted with extractors and a shower bath. Medway supplies none of these with the exception of overalls. These have to be taken home to be cleaned, which exposes not only the workers, but his entire family to the risks. One woman who beat her husband's overalls to remove some of the dust before washing them, died later on from asbestosis.

Hazards

One lagger remarked that accusations of workers' "ignorance" are used by most employers to "explain" the asbestosis mortality rate. "They say workers remove asbestos warning signs etc. But if the employers were honest they should hire trained people to check up on the health risks, which they don't".

In fact, in the case of the Medway dispute, it was not the employer but the workers who were really concerned with minimising health hazards. They wanted the two power stations to employ skilled men only for lagging. Instead, the contractors employed an unskilled non-union man to do the job. The strikers claim that Jim Burns, who holds a lagger's card, was denied employment because, being on the safety committee, he knew too much about the dangers of the job. Now, with the dispute on, the local labour exchange has sent labourers to Belvedere to do lagging. These men know nothing of the dispute or the health hazards they are exposing themselves to.

Dying

Nine out of ten cases of compensation, which the G.M.W.U. fights in court, are concerned with asbestosis. The highest settlement so far has been for £15,000, though many settlements are well below this figure. A lagger is not in a union,

he has a very tough time fighting for compensation. One trade unionist told of wives who came to his house while their husbands were still dying to pay up the union dues so as to make sure they got compensation after their deaths.

Someone, however, does profit from all this misery — the Installation contractors. In 1971 two contractors received £20,000 each in salary from the work their workers did for the CEGB — more in one year than a lagger. He is worth a nationalised industry, the CEGB has operated a policy in favour of small contractors, and subjected union men to constant attack.

The CEGB stewards have made a poor response to the need for solidarity with the Medway strikers. At Deptford they have stopped scab labour, but this has not been done at Belvedere. These workers need to realise that they too are at risk.

Donations to P. Samuels, 11 Fingal St, London E10.

TUC plays Footsy at NEDC

THE business of the trade unions is, at least, to get the best bargain possible for their members. Even by this standard the bargain that the TUC entered into with the government and employers at this week's NEDC meeting, in return for the paltry government budget 'concessions', is a complete sell-out.

The TUC agreed to the continuation of Phase 3 — for now.

It agreed to urge wage restraint on unions and workers.

It agreed to fight for 'realistic' wage increases only to keep up with rises in the cost of living — not to fight

for a better share in the wealth of Britain for the working class, who are the sole creators of that wealth, now filched by the parasites, speculators, and property spivs.

The TUC commits itself to link any request for increases above such rises in the cost of living with productivity dealing, and to relate them to the profit level of the company.

Both Jack Jones, who seems to be applying for the job of wet nurse and nanny to Wilson's "tory policies still in operation" government, and Hugh Scanlon, who still maintains a mild and apologetic 'militant' posture,

were present at the meeting and apparently agree with all this.

So far the Labour government in office has been able to pour oil on the troubled waters of British industry — at least as far as the union leaders are concerned.

But the rank and file have still to speak. Such antics and commitments to industrial peace by the Trade Union leaders can only continue the education of shop stewards and militant workers that they must lead the fight back of the working class.

At any rate, the union leaders won't.

Ed Farraday

MEETINGS

LONDON Workers' Fight. Rachel Lever reports back from the Rank and File Conference. 8pm. Sunday 7th April. Golden Lion, Kings Cross Road.

East London Shrewsbury Defence Committee. FREE THE PICKETS NOW. March to picket Peter Shore, local Labour MP. 6.30pm. Friday 5th April. Assemble corner of Cannon St Rd and Cable St.

Indian Workers' Association of Great Britain. Protest against the recent shooting of people demanding food in Gujarat. 14 out of 21 states in India are seriously short of food. Assemble 1pm, Sunday 7th April, Speakers' Corner, and march to Indian High Commission.

Phoenix pamphlets

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11 important articles from Workers Fight, with introduction and appendix. They form an invaluable collection on the history, experience and theory of the General Strike. 20p plus postage (5p) from 98 Gifford Street, London N.1

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ASIAN Workers in Struggle. Five pages of interviews with workers engaged in day to day shop floor struggle make essential reading for socialists. In this month's Race Today. Single copies 15p. Annual subscription £2.00 — from 184 Kings Cross Road, London WC1.