

Rents: Labour Movement must lead

TENANTS REVOLT

Liverpool: anger mounts

By TONY MULHEARN
Prospective Labour Councillor
Childwall

The situation in Liverpool as far as rent increases are concerned has reached a point where the Council tenants are not prepared to carry on any further in paying for the colossal interest rates on loans for housebuilding.

The situation nationally is reaching crisis proportions, with tenants in various parts of the country, i.e. Sheffield, Birmingham, London, Skelmersdale, are demanding that action be taken for a permanent solution to the question of rents.

In Liverpool, the problem of the housing debt is assuming gigantic proportions. The overall debt on the housing revenue account now stands at £117 million. £1m. was added to this sum in interest charges alone in 1966-67, when the council had to borrow over £13m. to meet the cost of new houses, and the average rate of interest rose from £5. 5/4 per £100 to £5. 9/2. These tremendous problems face Liverpool where, according to the report of the National Building Agency in 1966, there are 78,000 dwellings unfit for human habitation.

In the year 1966-67 £7,476,241 was collected in rents, but £6,139,000 of the housing revenue account was wiped out in interest and debt management charges, thus converting a surplus of over £5m. into a deficit of nearly half a million pounds. The intention is now, as in the past, to make the **TENANTS** pay the crippling interest charges.

The intolerable situation must not be allowed to continue. The tenants must not be forced to accept a drop in living standards to satisfy the demands of the money-lenders and to line the pockets of the building tycoons.

The Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party is demanding an immediate freeze on rents and is mounting a campaign to pressure the Labour Government to take the responsibility for financing building out of the hands of the local authorities. The standing debt should then be wiped out, with compensation to the finance houses on the basis of need. These are immediate demands, but it is quite clear that the problem of housing generally can only be met permanently by the Labour Government taking into public ownership the finance houses and the building industry, thereby being in a position to utilise these resources to provide sufficient houses at low rents for those who need them.

To add insult to injury, in Liverpool the Tory controlled council has also circulated the tenants with a list of repairs that they have to take the responsibility of fixing themselves. At the same time, they are in the process of running down the direct works department and handing most of the house building contract over to private enterprise.

RENTS STRIKE

The question of a rent strike has been posed by the tenants. Obviously,
Continued on page 2

London: tory G.L.C. unites with money-grabbers

BOB EDWARDS (Loughton C.L.P.)

"If the capitalist class could fence up the air they would sell it for gain."

Over the last few hundred years every aspect of Mankind's most essential requirements have been used by the capitalist class to extract fat profits from the workers. Certainly in the field of housing the sharks of society have reaped in huge harvests. Building societies, money lenders, private landlords, building firms, land and property speculators, have all had a huge bonanza, not only confined to the private sector of housing, but also in the realm of council housing they are making fat gains, with an ever increasing slice going from the pockets of council tenants into the bulging coffers of those who prey on our most basic need of shelter.

This is especially so in London, where the housing account costs of the G.L.C. will have doubled on the 1958 figure by 1970, although there has been no dramatic increase in dwellings built. This is as a result, not only of an astronomical increase in land and building costs, but the enormous increase in the slice going to the money-lenders: 10 million pounds in 1958, rising to thirty-six million pounds in 1970, in interest charges alone! This will mean over 16/- in the £ of rent going to satisfy the greed of financiers.

With the Tories in County Hall, G.L.C. tenants expected a bombshell, and a bomb it is! The G.L.C. proposed rent increases, averaging 70% by 1970. These increases as a result,

not only of rising costs, but the abolition of the rate subsidy, which means that council tenants and they alone will have to shoulder the burden of all new council house development. The rate subsidy was about 10%-60% coming from private enterprise, and a large slice of the remainder coming from Council tenants through the rates they pay anyway. This helped to spread the costs of new building over the whole community. Along with these largest ever increases, the G.L.C. also propose cuts in the repair service and the abolition of doorstep rent collection and interior decoration.

On the estate where I live, tenants will face increases averaging £2 a week, which with rates will mean giving over £6 a week to the council. Once this fact circulated tenants began to move: the tenants association, which had only 12 members at the beginning of the year, has now over 500 and is still growing rapidly. Two packed meetings have unanimously decided to refuse to pay the increases, and this militancy is not only expressed here, but on every G.L.C. estate in London. Already there is a Joint Estates committee, demonstrations, lobbies and rent withdrawals are being organised on a London and national level. The developing militancy shows that the tenants in London are not prepared to make crippling sacrifices to give the sharks their pounds of flesh. The mood of the tenants has been clearly expressed in Debden, where the contemptuous attempt to

abolish doorstep rent collection and have tenants take their rents to the district office is being met with militant resistance and a likely refusal to deliver the rents.

The G.L.C. may use the fact that tenants had to deliver their rents in the '30's as an excuse for its reintroduction in the '60's, but the tenants of today are not prepared to lose their hard-won gains so easily.

Also the growing movement and opposition to the G.L.C. proposals is not confined to tenants. Many sectors of the Labour Movement are being drawn into the struggle, Trade Unions, Constituency Labour Parties, and Co-op. Parties. People are realising that a G.L.C. victory could well mean the magnitude of the increases being used as a yard-stick for other councils and private landlords, especially as the problem of increasing costs is a national one.

Along with the development of the tenants organisations is the recognition that the fight is not just against the G.L.C., but the money-lenders and property interests, whose greed is the main cause of the problem, for while man's need for shelter is used for private gain the housing problem will be a long way from being solved. Only when the housing industry in all its aspects is in public hands can society successfully provide every family with decent accommodation without them having to forfeit an enormous slice from their wages to acquire such a state.

Brighton: councillors shaken

Labour Party aids tenants

RAY APPS Secretary, (Whitehawk Ward L.P.)

In the year 1967-68 the total expenditure of the Brighton Housing Revenue Account will be £1,770,000. Of this £1,235,000 will be debt charges. With this in mind, a meeting of 50 tenants called by Whitehawk section of Kempdown CLP protested against massive proposed rent rises with a resolution to the Minister of Housing rejecting the means test implicit in the rent rebate scheme and calling for an immediate freeze on rent rises and for interest free loans to build houses as part of a national plan.

The tenants demanded a second meeting to call the Tory members of the Housing Committee to account. 67 people attended. The absence of the Tory Chairman of the Committee, being in Scotland, angered the tenants who continued to heckle and interrupt the Labour councillor who spoke

first "We know the rents are going up, what are you going to do about it?" He was forced to slam the blame on the money-lenders. After a short speech from me, tenants shouted, "Yes, but what are we going to do?" "Rent strike!" I pointed out that we must build and organise mass support for this to avoid evictions of individual militants. "Prices and Incomes Board!" I explained that little could be expected from this body but they decided to send a letter calling for a halt to rises as a way to find out. "Demonstration!" some shouted. An action committee was formed to organise a demonstration for March 28. The committee decided to call for a Permanent Residents' Association, wide contact with the tenants of other estates in Brighton, and on a regional and national level, and, after some spade work, the calling of a local conference.

Appreciation of the Whitehawk Party's work was expressed to the extent of four tenants joining the Labour Party — "despite the Government", they said. At coming meetings, tenants will be urged to go home and organise their street, estate, block of flats and to get the support of their trade union branches.

As one of our leaflets put it:— "The socialist answer would be: Withhold all further payment of interest and call on the Government to pass an enabling act to take into public ownership under workers' control the banks and insurance companies together with all land available for housing. Then a democratic plan could be worked out to solve the housing problem in the interests of the working classes instead of those of the loan sharks and land and property speculators".

On other pages:

Budget

Czechoslovakia

Liverpool strike-wave

Y.S. Conference special

Czechoslovakia: For real workers power!

By ROGER and JULIAN SILVERMAN

The wave of revolt now flooding the streets of Prague, after twenty years of totalitarian rule, provides further evidence that the days of Stalinism are numbered. With the disintegration of what appeared to be the most rigid and stable of Stalinist regimes, the whole of Eastern Europe is in a ferment.

In Czechoslovakia, the most advanced of the Eastern European states, nationalisation was carried out by an armed working class. Having led the workers into the blind alley of a "national" government after the flight of the quisling capitalist class, the Communist Party effected a bloodless coup d'état in 1948. It then disarmed the workers and built a state in the image of Stalin's Russia. The revolution was controlled and held in check even without the bayonets of the Red Army.

Czechoslovakia was insulated from the upheavals of 1956. The crisis today is all the more ominous from the Kremlin's point of view. As with the Hungarian revolution of 1956, what began as a protest movement of intellectuals, reflecting subterranean undercurrents of dissatisfaction within the working class, snowballed into a mass movement involving the entire population in political activity.

The tensions caused by a monolithic stranglehold over society, with which the national bureaucracy was attempting to build an entirely self-sufficient economy with its own infrastructure—in a country of 17 million!—caused gross wastage. In the attempt to counteract the effects, the rulers introduced the "Libermanist" gimmicks which are being tried in

LIVERPOOLS ANGRY TENANTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

such action would have a dramatic effect on the powers that be. The important thing on a question like this is organisation and the measure of support which could be mobilised. Given the will of the tenants and the various committees linking up with each other, and the Trade Unions becoming actively involved, with the aid and encouragement of the local Labour Parties, and the Trades Councils, a successful rents strike would be possible.

The activities at the moment in Liverpool include protest meetings of tenants at Labour clubs all over the city, and a mass demonstration has been arranged for Saturday, March 30.

However, the work of the Labour movement in the city is being hampered to a degree by certain elements around the mis-named "Labour Worker". These people have issued leaflets and spoken up denouncing Labour Party, rank and file speakers at meetings as "politicians only interested in votes". They have lumped together the Labour Party, Tories, Liberals, Communist Party, and branded them all as politicians, not interested in the grievances of the tenants. Their programme is completely bankrupt, in fact, non-existent. No permanent solution to the problems is posed by them. All they are interested in is this year's rent increases, and any political influence that they can gain from this issue. After that—nothing. Their Rents Action Committee does have the support of sections of the tenants in the city, and they are instructing these tenants not to support the demonstration organised by the TCLP on March 30.

The solution, of course, lies in entirely the opposite direction: it is a question of involving the tenants directly in the Labour Movement generally linking up with the Trades Unions and private tenants, all of whom suffer the same burdens and who alone, between them have the policy and the fighting-power to achieve victory.

Russia and other Stalinist states—aping the "profit incentives" of the early days of capitalism, as a trick to spur the managers' long-suppressed initiative.

However, the lunacy of grafting the worst features of "competition" on to a planned economy was immediately evident. Prices shot up by 30%, and unemployment mounted, so that the authorities were forced to apply credit restrictions after six months of the new system! Inflationary tendencies were "endangering the fate of the new system of management itself" ("Rude Pravo", 3. 10. 67).

It was against this background that the battles with the writers burst into the open. The last Writers' Congress was taken over momentarily by the opposition, their official journal was suppressed by the government, and more than 450 Czechoslovak intellectuals signed a "Manifesto to the World Public" denouncing censorship. "The Times" (4. 10. 67) noted that "part of the unrest among writers was due to discontent over the economy". When Prague students marched in protest against bad facilities in their hostels, they were met by police brutality that indicated panic in ruling circles.

RULERS PANIC

Their panic was well-founded, but impotent. As the "Guardian" (3. 10. 67) put it: "They remember that the 'Petofi circle' which prepared the ground for the Hungarian revolution of 1956 had begun as a writers' debating club. They are determined that nothing like this should happen again. But in trying to suppress the writers, they are creating the very conditions which could lead to an explosion."

Opposition mounted, and the students threatened to take their case to the factory workers (see MILITANT No. 33). Faced with the danger of mass unrest, the Central Committee split and the "liberal" faction won a victory over Novotny. The new leadership made hasty concessions to the students and to the Slovak nationalists, hoping that the explosion could still be averted. But the defeat of Novotny—the diehard who had risen to power under Stalin and calmly survived the Twentieth Congress, the Hungarian revolution, the split with China—only strengthened the confidence of the masses. They eagerly grasped the opportunity to vent the frustrations of twenty hard years.

Then a new scandal further rocked the nation. General Sejna, top military administrator and a protégé of Novotny, led an army coup to restore Novotny to power, and, having failed, threw in his cards and defected to America! The real inclinations of the top strata when faced with the wrath of the masses were revealed at one stroke. Suspicion that Novotny had helped Sejna to flee roused the anger of the people to a new pitch. Mr Dubcek and the new leadership had been anxious to restore the situation to "normal", to make the transition to milder methods as gradual as possible. Thus Novotny had been retained in the nominal position of President, and the Foreign and Defence Ministers even today are still at their posts, as a gesture of reassurance to Russia. But the irresistible pressure of the masses in demanding explanations of every crime from the Slansky trial to Sejna's defection forced General Janko, Deputy Defence Minister, to shoot himself, and Novotny to resign from his last remaining office.

REDUNDANT PRESIDENTS

It is no longer the intelligentsia who are leading the struggle. Novotny at first tried to win the workers to his side by touring the factories with demagogic attacks on the intellectuals. But the state apparatus and the

censorship had just melted away by now. The Press attacked Novotny and called for free political association. The television became a genuine forum for the people. The censors themselves denounced censorship! One factory worker, asked on television what he thought about the intellectuals, replied: "Well, we need the intellectuals, of course, just like we need plumbers and carpenters. The one thing we could do without is a President!" ("Times", 11. 3. 68) "Prace", the trade union paper (23. 3. 68) rejoiced that "ever wider circles of people awake to political life". Not only has the workers' scepticism about the fight for democratisation vanished, but they are already distrustful of the vacillations and timidity of the Dubcek leadership. The same article warned that "the fragile fate of democratisation lies in our hands". 70,000 Prague workers have threatened to strike unless the newly chosen chairman of the Trade Union Congress is withdrawn. A tea-break meeting, called at one big factory to vote support to Dubcek, lasted an hour and a half, and called for full political rights. 1,000 workers in Pisek struck against management methods and forced the director to accept their proposals for improving them. The workers are proving their ability to manage the economy democratically.

"STEM THE TIDE"

As in Hungary, the demands of the masses have become clearer every day. Already they insist on freedom of political expression within the framework of the planned economy. Tomorrow the call for election of all administrators, for a maximum wage differential, for a people's militia, for Soviet power through workers' elected councils, will echo the cry of the Budapest workers, and resurrect the programme of Lenin and Trotsky against bureaucracy.

The movement is still in its early stages, and the bureaucracy may succeed in stemming the tide temporarily, but only at the cost of still greater upheavals later. A "progressive" Professor warned in "Rude Pravo" against "rabble-rousing". Dubcek is widely blamed for indecisiveness and lack of leadership. However, he is anxious not to be either shot by the Russians or lynched by the mob! The "Financial Times" predicted (22. 12. 67) that if the "liberals" won, they would face a difficult situation: "Freedom gives an appetite for more, and pressure might emerge for the transformation of the entire present system." This is just what has happened.

All Western commentators reiterate the hopes of the "liberals" and the Stalinists that the situation can be "kept under control". The "Times" has confessed that a return to private ownership is inconceivable. Even the "Morning Star" has conceded this. It will find it hard to defend the Kremlin when it chooses to slander the Czechoslovak workers as "fascists" and "counter-revolutionaries"! Already Hungarian leaders have warned against "anti-Socialist Right Wing forces" in the situation.

BUREAUCRATS TREMBLE

All the Stalinist bureaucracies are united in fear at the Czechoslovak upheavals. The Soviet press has made no mention of the ferment in Czechoslovakia or riot-torn Poland. East Germany has cancelled bus tours of Czechoslovakia and intercepted supplies of a Prague German-language newspaper. Top bureaucrats Kosygin and Brezhnev went in person to Dresden, together with their favourite "theoretician" Suslov, to rebuke Dubcek. The "Observer" (24. 3. 68) comments cynically: "his Communist neighbours are demanding from Mr Dubcek some guarantee that his happy and excited little country will not export revolution." Alas, he can give them no assurances, but only heartfelt sympathy with their hope that the situation will not get "out of hand".

Meanwhile, it is reported that large-scale Soviet military "manoeuvres" are being undertaken near Czechoslovakia's borders (there are no Soviet troops stationed there). A sinister but hollow threat to the workers re-

awakening at last to political life. For the blood that flowed in Budapest in 1956 washed away all the new paint of the Soviet rulers. Having crudely reviled Stalin only months earlier, Khrushchev had gained a certain trust; but even so he was able to invade Hungary and use Soviet troops to crush a workers' political revolution only by pretending to the backward peasant soldiers that they were fighting fascism.

Today the authority of the leaders has vanished. It would be madness to dare to intervene. While Polish students riot, singing the "Internationale" and shouting "Long live Czechoslovakia!", while Gomulka pays the price of diverting the 1956 Polish revolution along national lines, while Kadar and Ulbricht quake in their shoes, all the conditions are ripening for a massive explosion inside Russia (see MILITANT No. 34), which could cleanse society of all the scum formed from fifty years of worldwide class deadlock. The Bolshevik ideals of internationalism and workers' democracy cannot be buried by distortion any more than by the firing squad. Let the struggle of the Czech people inspire workers of all countries in the fight for these ideals.

Liverpool strike-wave

By TERRY HARRISON

(Boilermakers Union)

AGAINST THE WAGE FREEZE! FOR A £17 MINIMUM WAGE!

The strikes of workers employed on Merseyside, have created a situation which could have extremely important repercussions for the whole of the Labour movement.

The strikes started with the stoppage of work by the busmen of the Seaforth bus depot, and quickly spread to the whole of the city's 3400 drivers and conductors. Originally, the busmen came out calling for a change in the situation where, besides an under-staffing of about 800 men, a split-shift system of work is operated—i.e. they work from 6.00 a.m. to 10 a.m., restart at 12 till 2, and again at 5 till 7, etc., for a 6 day, 40 hour week—and where a driver earns £12.17.9 minimum, and a conductor £12.13.0. Thus, in order to earn a decent living wage of £21 at maximum (the average is £18), busmen must work a 7 day week. Even here, their earning power is limited, as the Government's new Transport Bill will restrict hours worked to 60 per week, so that the men at most can only earn £18, including Sunday work. Thus, while their original demands for a 23/- per week increase was agreed to by the corporation, its holding up by the P.I.B., and the new Transport Bill, led the busmen to push for a £17 per week minimum wage, and the declaration of the strike as official.

Thus the strike, which was 100% solid—all strikers attending weekly meetings held at the Stadium, and no pickets were needed at the depots—has moved a stage further. This demonstrates the fact that the workers are prepared to carry on the tradition of seamen in opposing the wage freeze, and calling for a minimum wage. This has been a strike provoked directly by the state's attacks on living standards. That the busmen should come out in a strike of this nature has important national implications, and is indicative of what could occur nationally.

The strike of the busmen, however, must be judged in context with the other strikes in the area, which led to over 13,000 workers being out.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

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LIVERPOOL STRIKE-WAVE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

About 7,000 transport and heavy haulage workers were on strike—again, demanding £17 per week minimum wage as a basic necessity for a decent standard of living. As a result, Tate & Lyles closed down, laying off many of their workers, as have Jacobs Biscuits, and the Metal Box Co., and, had the strikes continued much longer, many other firms would have been forced to take similar action. A section of the dockers also came out on strike; they originally demanded a wage increase of 25/- for off-loading flour which caused skin-rash, but they have since returned to work; however, the matter is still unsettled, and a further strike is not an impossibility. Thus, with the growing numbers of men out on strike and with the privations caused by the strikes—lack of transport, the rationing at exorbitant prices and the disappearance from the shops of sugar, the scarcity of milk, meat and bread, and the rationing of petrol in a number of garages—the atmosphere on Merseyside approached that of a general strike. Public sympathy for the strikers, particularly the busmen was tremendous, and all sections called for a spreading of the movement: as all are faced with rising prices, rising rents, and frozen wages. The busmen themselves are somewhat annoyed by the fact that no Labour councillors approached them; the Liverpool Trades Council & Labour Party, however, tried to help in the strike.

The demands for a £17 per week minimum wage are demands which arise completely from the workers' most basic needs as the minimum required for a decent standard of living.

Thus, Merseyside has taken the lead in the struggle to obtain a better standard of living; the busmen's demand for £17 a week minimum has shown that the workers are not prepared to stand for a wages freeze while millions of workers earn less than £10 per week, and while an onslaught on the standards of living continues.

The lessons of the strikes must be learnt by the whole of the Labour Movement. The Trades Council must act, as the body representing the broad mass of the organised workers, as a co-ordinating body for the strikers, and must support and extend the strikes until the demands of the strikers are met.

The position of the Labour movement must be to support the strikes, and their recognition by the unions involved, taking the struggle into other areas. Members of the Glasgow busmen have contacted the Liverpool strikers, and a similar movement is starting among the London busmen. Merseyside has started the movement; the busmen's demand for £17 a week minimum must now be taken up by the whole of the Trade Union and Labour movement, and must be spread throughout the rest of the country.

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NEW ATTACK ON WORKERS

The Budget presents a new attack on the standard of living of the working class following on that of devaluation, and the "deflationary" policies pursued by the Government. Despite the mild increase of 2½% in Corporation Tax and the once for all capital tax on all incomes of over £3,000 a year, it consisted mainly of taxes on the "consumers" i.e. the working class and the middle class.

According to Government estimates this will amount to a 1 or 2% cut in consumption. In reality with the increase in prices which this will involve, together with the effects of devaluation, it will mean a cut in real wages of 8% or more this year. At the same time a "ceiling" on wages of 3½% is to be introduced compulsorily by law. Only "productivity" increases are to be rewarded by higher wages.

AID TO INVESTORS

The reason advanced by the Labour leaders for this savage attack on living standards is the need to increase investments and exports. The Times declared recently that no Conservative Government would have been able to launch such a series of attacks on working class standards in the "national" interest—what they mean is the interests of the parasites, of the bankers, landlords and capitalists—and got away with it without provoking the massive resistance of the trade union and Labour Movement. The Budget, apart from moans about "class" legislation in relation to surtax on incomes of over £3,000, and squeals at the minuscule increase of Corporation Tax, has been received with delight by the bankers and the industrialists. It has led to a boom on the stock exchange. Wilson castigated this as the casino society. He has certainly added to their "chips". The Financial Times index of shares has risen 11½ points to an all-time record. Since the black Budget Day of Tuesday 19th it rose within the space of a week by 31.3 points or nearly 8%.

The stock exchange sharks have reason to rejoice. The Budget represents a further surrender to their interests. Militant has pointed out many times that the profits of the capitalists represent the unpaid labour of the working class. Capitalists are in business as the directors of BMC and GEC have bluntly declared not to make motor cars, or electrical goods but to make money. Meanwhile the Labour leaders have cringingly lavished hundreds of millions of pounds in subsidies. They have assisted in the further monopolisation of industry. BMC-Leylands received a "dowry" of a £25 million loan to speed their merger. The latest computer merger is to receive £17 million, in addition to the subsidies previously given to them to help them "modernise" the industry.

"SOCIALIST BUDGET"?

Yet there are still Left Wing "Socialists", who can find that the Budget is a "Socialist" one. Eric Heffer writing in Tribune of March 22nd says "The Budget, despite its harshness, contains much which is positive and Socialist (!) It ignores (?) a good deal of the advice of the Confederation of British Industry, and accepts some of the advice of the TUC—although not enough of it. Because of this, a new unity could be forged within the Labour Movement. The chance to do that could be jeopardised by going ahead with wages legis-

lation. That way would lead to disaster and victory for the Tories."

What Heffer wants is Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. The Budget from the point of view of taxation of the working class is worse than the budgets of Selwyn Lloyd and Maudling, which were received with horror and disgust by Wilson, Jenkins and other members of the Cabinet. The taxes on income and the freeze on dividends will only mean deferred gains to the capitalists. They will actually pay less tax on them as capital gains in the future!

The attempt to "restrain" wage rises while allowing prices of transport, gas, electricity, telephones, and especially food, as well as the so-called durable goods such as vacuum cleaners, furniture, and such necessities as clothing, is bound to provoke the resistance of the organised working class. It will force the trade unions into semi-opposition to the Government. But it is inevitable once the assumptions of capitalism are to be accepted and the capitalist system, used as a framework for the policies of the Government. That is why the airy and cloudy theories of "equality" of income put forward by Roy Jenkins, Wilson and others when in opposition have been precipitately abandoned. They could not stand the test of the realities of the capitalist system and how it works.

WORKERS SACRIFICED

All these calculations on the part of the Labour leaders, and the sacrifices of the working class are to bring forth a miserable growth rate of 3 or 4% in the economy. That will mean that industry will not work at more than 80% of capacity, and hundreds of thousands will still remain unemployed. There is expected to be an increase in investment of 7%! Thus at the altar of the City of London financiers the workers are to be sacrificed. Wilson threatens the TUC that there will be 2 or 3 million unemployed unless this policy is adopted. The whole capitalist world will be brought to ruin! That may be the capitalist alternative. It certainly has nothing to do with Socialist policies! If there is to be sacrifice, let those who benefit from the system make it. The banks, the insurance companies and the 300 monopolies who control the greatest part of the wealth of the country are the main beneficiaries of the Tory policies of the Government. Tory policies lead only to disillusionment and despair, and to further doses of capitalist policies at the expense of the working people. Instead of allowing the market forces nationally and internationally to dominate the economy, the socialist alternative would be to introduce a plan of production involving the taking over of "commanding heights" with selective compensation on the basis of need, to those capitalists incapable of earning an honest living, but living on the surplus labour of others. This would mean not a 3 or 4% increase in production, but the harnessing of the energies of the people for full production for the needs of the people. 12 to 20% increases in production would be possible with a minimum wage of £20 a week, lowering of hours worked and maximum utilisation of the potential of the people.

The disease gnawing at the vitals of the capitalist system has been shown by the run on the dollar following the forced devaluation of the £. There has been the frenzied changing of dollars and other currencies into gold. For the time being this run

on the dollar has subsided with the introduction of the two-tier system of an official and an "unofficial" free market "price" for gold i.e. the number of currency notes exchangeable for the yellow metal. This run on gold has been caused by the 18 years of deficits of the American Government, which could only be continued by the fact of the strength of the American economy, and the swindle of the gold exchange standard, whereby the dollar and the pound functioned as money as the medium for international trade, and they in turn were linked with gold at the fixed price of \$35 to an ounce. Abusing this position American imperialism exported their deficits and bought up some of the most modern industries in Japan, W. Europe and Britain. But the war in Vietnam has brought to a head the contradictions between W. Europe, especially France and the United States. The French capitalists have objected to the purchase of industries abroad with fictitious capital with \$ notes without the backing of gold or goods. The gold exchange-standard has been undermined by the staggering expenditures on Vietnam and in other areas of the world by American Imperialism, which has tried to play the role of the policeman for world capitalism. This has transformed a colossal surplus in American balance of payments into a staggering deficit in the balance of trade. This has been maintained during the last 18 years by the operation of the gold exchange standard, which has given the American and British financiers enormous advantages. But an adverse balance of payments, and especially a growing one, cannot be maintained indefinitely. Even the mighty American economy is subject to the dictates of the world market. Hence the present crisis. The two tier system will not last for long, but can only be a temporary stopgap.

LABOUR MUST FIGHT BACK

British capitalism, far more dependent on world trade than America, was compelled to devalue the £. Now the background to the Budget is the attempt to shift the burdens of the mistakes and crimes of the City, of the bankers and industrialists, of the contradictions of the world capitalist system, and make the working class pay for them.

READERS LETTER

Dear Comrades,

I must write and congratulate the paper for the excellent article on housing.

It stimulated an interest in the MILITANT amongst those adult members of the Party who formerly didn't buy the paper.

The lead consistently and patiently given by the MILITANT on all the 'bread and butter' issues of the Labour Movement must have an effect in the long term.

Keep up the good work and best wishes for the future.

Yours fraternally,

Sandra Ward
Wallasey Young Socialist

Y.S. MUST LEAD THE WAY!

PETER TAAFFE

(Hackney L.P.Y.S.)

The seventh Young Socialist Conference, which takes place in Great Yarmouth at Easter Weekend, opens against the background of the gravest crisis within the Labour Movement in the post-war period. Attack upon attack has been the "medicine" for the working class over the past period. Since devaluation alone over 4,000 price increases have been recorded while the grocers' magazine reckons on a "good" week when a "mere" 100 increases are recorded. The expenditure on social services, school milk, education have been slashed while rents and fares have rocketed—and now in the Budget an additional massive tax burden has been unloaded on to the poorer sections of society (See article elsewhere in this issue).

To the rank and file of the Labour Party, the past three years, have been a traumatic experience. The illusions that the reform programme of the Labour Leaders could be implemented under a diseased and ailing British capitalism have been shattered. Faced with the odium of the Government doing the dirty work of big business many rank and file members have dropped out disheartened—a small section of trade unionists have withdrawn the political levy. But of late a new mood within the Labour Movement has begun to develop. From the base of the party

on "Social Services" give a concrete lead. The whole tenor of these resolutions is that the middle classes and the politically backward inert layers of the working class will only be won to the Labour Movement through action. The cynical attitude summed up by "All politicians are the same... they are only in it for what they can get" can only be changed if they can see in practice that we are prepared to fight for and put into practice their demands. Thus the GLASGOW POLLOCK YS resolution demands that "Conference gives full support to the T&GWU and other unions which have advanced the ideas of the £15 minimum wage etc. but calls for action to secure their implementation." How straightforward it would be for the mighty forces of the Labour Movement to mobilise the estimated 9½ million workers who get less than £10 basic weekly wage! If the capitalists replied that "they could not afford" even this bare minimum £15 then these 9½ million would, we are sure, be in favour of scrapping the system to replace it by one that could, namely, a socialist society. Thus it is possible to link up the various sectional demands of the workers for the need for a radical change in society.

It is in foreign policy that the greatest divergence in ideas has been revealed in the past. Many YS members who take an uncompromising clear class position on the domestic front take a hazy indecisive attitude

ability to work out how to approach youth on their level. Little or no attention is given to the developments amongst industrial youth. But the A.E.F.U. Junior Workers, at their recent Conference, came out with an Apprentices' Charter which the YS could help in broadening, expanding and popularising. The efforts made in areas such as Merseyside and Tyne-side need to be taken up and co-ordinated on a national scale. The National Committee has timidly suggested in the past period that a campaign be conducted by YS branches on the problems of industrial youth. But no real lead was given. A programme was not devised, approaches at national level to the Trade Unions was not made—nor at local level. Leaflets and pamphlets were not produced nor was there any of the serious education in YS branches necessary to ensure the beginnings of a campaign. This alone is proof enough of the need for a discussion at the YS Conference.

Y.S. WILL GROW

Overall the YS Conference promises to lay the basis for a revival of the organisation nationally. The prophets of doom who three years ago, from a "left" stance at the Malvern Conference, forecast the rapid demise

of the YS have been proved wrong. Even the report on future organisation by the unelected National Committee promises big steps forward for the YS. However, it is not in organisational form but in the ideas and perspectives for the Labour Movement that the YS will grow. Once having formulated a clear programme the YS will be able at all levels to make common cause with the militants in the CLPs, wards, and TU branches in the fight for an alternative programme. All appeals for breaking from the Labour Party—there are veiled suggestions for this in a number of resolutions—should be decisively rejected. It is only now that the ideas of the YS are beginning to find an echo amongst the rank and file in the adult party. With the battles that impend first on the industrial plane, and among the tenants, battles which will subsequently be reflected in the TU branches and spill over into the Trades Councils and Labour Parties, the whole of the Labour Movement will be shaken up and fresh elements will enter looking for a lead. It is in patient positive explanation and common work that the older workers will take heed of our ideas. This is the perspective that should be clearly before us as we thrash out a programme for the Young Socialist for the coming period.

Conference special

comes the first stirring of opposition. Thus, the St. Pancras CLP, reacting angrily to shameful capitulation on prescription charges, has demanded of their MP, Kenneth Robinson—the Health Minister, that he resign from the Government in protest. A number of other CLPs are actively declaring their opposition to the present course. All this expresses the search for an alternative programme albeit haltingly, by the active layers inside the Labour Party. And it is in the agenda of the YS Conference that can be found the fundamentals of such an alternative. No section of the Movement has so criticised the programme of the Government from the outset, the impracticality of even the promised minimum reforms, and advanced a positive realistic alternative. Never has this been clearer than in this year's provisional agenda. Only a tiny handful of resolutions support the record of the Government.

ECONOMIC POLICY

Thus on economic policy, always the main item at the Conference, LIVERPOOL TOXTETH YS, one among many, indicts the Government... "Taxation has increased to around £2,500 million while the prices and incomes policy has served merely to control wages, prices meanwhile soaring tremendously. In view of these facts, it further condemns the action of the Labour Government in subsidising private industry to the tune of £1,500 million since they came to power". Most of the resolutions follow a similar pattern, quoting the facts and figures of the retreat of Labour Ministers before big capital, while Swansea and Hackney outline the concrete steps necessary to ensure the implementation of Labour's programme embodied in Clause IV part IV of the Constitution... the taking over of the 380 monopolies which control 70% of the economy, the banks, insurance companies and the implementation of a democratic plan of production involving all sections of the working people, so ensuring a vast increase in living standards, and the ending of want and poverty". In answer to the charge that these demands are "abstract... unrelated to reality... would alienate the middle classes etc." the resolutions on the National Executive's document

towards international events. This has been marked at the last two Conferences, particularly on the question of the United Nations. An amendment from St. PANCRAS NORTH YS poses the issues squarely, "the United Nations in reality the dis-united nations, act, in the final analysis, in the interests of imperialism". The lessons of the Congo and Cyprus, not to mention the Korean War seemed to be glossed over when the United Nations is under discussion. Apart from the bloody counter-revolutionary role played in the latter events, the Great Powers act outside the UN on fundamental issues e.g. the Cuban missile crisis. No amount of lectures or platitudes will be able to reconcile the irreconcilable. But many YS members look towards the UN out of an instinct of internationalism. Nevertheless the only force which can approach the problems of the world from an international viewpoint is the international working class and hence the amendment demands that... "the Labour Government carries out a socialist internationalist foreign policy, not through the UN, but through international working class organisations". There are other important issues on the agenda which we do not have space to comment on, but all giving direction to the struggles of the YS over the next period e.g. Housing, Vietnam, Education and Rhodesia.

YOUTH

One of the most burning issues is the question of the YOUTH PROGRAMME. For the past two Conferences, this item has been manoeuvred off the agenda. The officialdom of Transport House fears like the plague that the YS will get down to working out a programme to find an avenue to working class youth. While the usual excuses will be trotted out, it is clear that every trick will be devised to keep the issue of the agenda again this year. But never has a discussion on such a programme been more urgent. At a period of unprecedented upheaval, the YS has lost branches in the past year, actually losing "35 since the last report" NATIONAL COMMITTEE REPORT (to be presented to the Conference). This is partly due to the general political situation, but also the in-



National Committee: Half a step forward

By JOHN EWERS (N.C. member)

The NC recommendations on changes in the YS constitution make a number of important concessions to the feeling of YS members and the needs of a socialist youth movement (see report in national conference agenda). However the latest meeting of the National Committee (16 March 1968) highlights the spirit of grudging paternalism in which the reforms are offered, and the fear of a spontaneous and militant youth has always governed the bureaucrats of the Labour Party in their relations with the YS.

The pressures of the members have forced even the present unelected NC to make a pretence of campaigning. Yet the timidity and political 'ideas' of the chairman and the YS youth officer, with and for whom he acts, makes even 'safe' campaigns still-born. The decisions of the Rhodesia subcommittee were not submitted to the NC and the promised leaflet on this issue is not yet forthcoming — what could they say when here as elsewhere government policy is blown to tatters, by the first mild puff of the winds of reality?

The proposed new YS paper, for the first time to be under the control of YS members, is welcome. But what will we be able to say when every issue will be subject to NEC censorship? Already much of the YS policy, formulated at last years conference, is in direct opposition to that of the leadership.

The arrangements for Annual Conference were the most important matters dealt with at the NC meeting. These again reveal fear of socialist youth. Yet again no time has been allotted to motions calling for a Youth Programme, in spite of the four on

the agenda. The paper-thin excuse offered was that the YS has no power to implement the proposals. The same is true of all motions passed at Conference, at the moment! They all become no more than recommendations to the NEC of the Labour Party.

Are the bureaucrats afraid of discussion on the ideas of a youth programme? Are they afraid of the possibility of an active, campaigning youth movement, united on the basis of a programme a programme on socialism and striking a chord in the conditions of life of young people, in the schools, techs, universities and in the factories and offices?

The hesitancy of the NC can be easily dealt with if the proposal to elect it is accepted. More important this years YS Conference can make an important contribution to the whole Labour Movement. A socialist alternative policy can be taken back to CLP's, YS branches and Trades Unions. These are the places to campaign on policy and to win support for a truly democratic and effective YS. Such a fight cannot fail to win support.

MILITANT READERS MEETING

ROYAL HOTEL
MARINE PARADE
(Opp. Wellington Pier)

Sunday 14 April 6.30 p.m.

SPEAKERS:

Peter Taaffe (Editor)
Alan Woods

(Delegate Brighton Kempton Y.S.)
John Ewers
(N.C. member S.W. Region)