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Inside
MAIRE O'SHEA
Interview

PAPER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST ORGANISATION, BIG FLAME

Bold Sanctions

Bold Colliery miners (St. Helens) - where 700 jobs are threatened - are joining Merseyside Anti-Apartheid in a campaign against planned South African coal imports through Liverpool docks. Recent action by Swansea dockers against S.African coal is raising hopes of an effective blockade. From Sweden to Southampton to San Francisco, transport workers are starting to apply the real sanctions. But divisions within Liverpool docks threaten to undermine the possibilities of solidarity.

BANBURY FUEL SERVICES

In the wake of the 1984 strike against pit closures, the Central Electricity Generating Board decided to increase coal imports. Banbury Fuel Services Ltd., owned by the US mining company Drummond Coal, hatched a plan to build a terminal at the North 2 Gladstone Dock to handle up to 250,000 tons/year of coal from America, Australia, and S. Africa. Opposed by the NUM and questioned by docks clerical staff, the plan gained qualified support from dockers who've seen their industry demolished by containerisation and the transfer of trade to south coast ports.

Despite a proud record of solidarity with miners, health workers, and on international issues - trade with Chile was sabotaged after the Coup - many dockers felt they couldn't refuse Banbury's. The Times quotes a shop steward saying "We want the work. If we don't do it someone else will. It's now dog eat dog."

But dockers were concerned that Banbury's planned to use their own men rather than registered dockers. The staffing dispute prevented the first ship in the scheme from unloading last May. Now the company are trying again - with the "Rayna" due to be offloaded on Nov 4. This time the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company plan to use dockers for clerical jobs, provoking a strike threat by clerical staff.

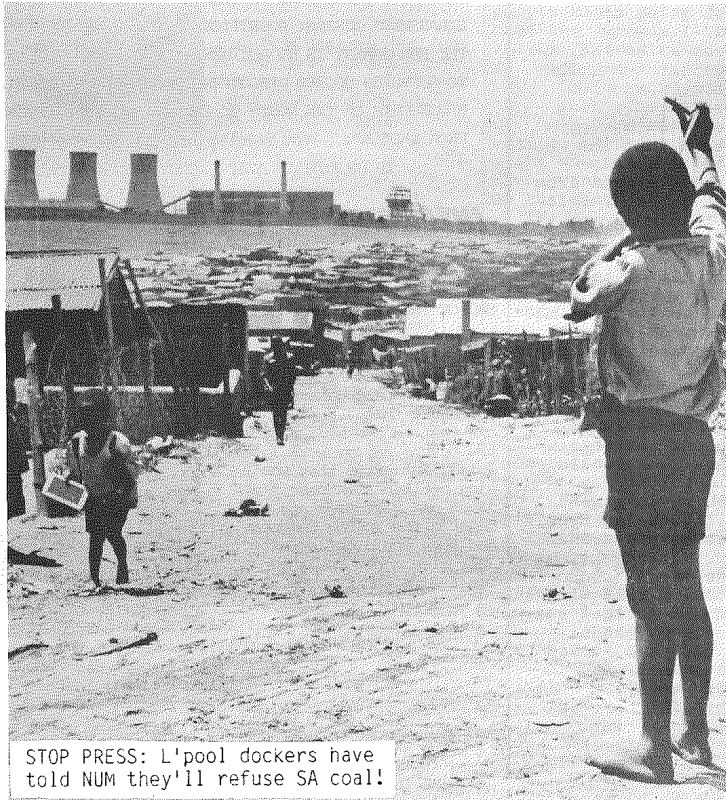
These battles over staffing levels obscure the real issues: will Liverpool port workers join the growing international campaign against collaboration with apartheid, and help save Bold Colliery in the process?

THE SANCTIONS DEBATE

Thatcher never stops telling us how sanctions would hurt black South Africans (not that she cares about black unemployment, racist immigration laws or police brutality here). She means they'd damage Britain's £11

"Big Flame? I thought it had died." So did lots of people. We survived two splits and now we're back fighting for our vision of a socialist feminist revolution. This paper, our first since July '83, is the re-launch. We are as aware as you will be that many key issues are hardly touched in this 4 page edition. Some of the articles will be expanded in our next Discussion Bulletin. We welcome letters, criticism, debate, donations. You can even join Big Flame!

Contact us at Big Flame, c/o LCI, PO Box 70, Liverpool L69 8BE.



STOP PRESS: L'pool dockers have told NUM they'll refuse SA coal!

Photo: Peter Magubane.

billion stake in the apartheid economy.

But what do black S. Africans think about a trade blockade or disinvestment by multinational companies? The State of Emergency has so far prevented the British NUM from asking the S. African NUM their view of Banbury. But this summer, when Botha threatened to deport all foreign migrant workers in retaliation for possible sanctions, the S. African NUM promised a strike in response. That is, the NUM were and are in favour of sanctions.

When the regime prevented the Dunne's strikers (Dublin shopworkers sacked for refusing to handle S. African produce) from entering S. Africa, it was to prevent the women receiving a heroine's welcome.

During the bitter union recognition strike at Sarmcol, owned by UK multinational BTR, black workers have put forward the slogan "NEGOTIATE OR GET OUT!"

CAPITAL DIVISIONS

Western capital is now deeply divided over sanctions. BTR backs its S. African chairman, Peter Southerly, who said "The State of Emergency was necessary to bring the situation under control" and that "outside pressure" would cause "change to happen too quickly". Thatcher speaks for union-bashers BTR, uranium importers RTZ, oil exporters BP and Shell, arms traders Marconi and Plessey, money lenders Barclays and Hill Samuel, etc

But the collapse of the Rand, the enormous cost of wars in Namibia and

(continued on back page)

Liverpool's Many-Headed Monster

The Labour Party is already resounding with accusations about who has betrayed the people of Liverpool. In our view events reveal the fundamental failing of all wings of the Labour Party, who have used Liverpool to push their own factional interests.

A left council took office on a manifesto of no cuts in services, redundancies, or massive rate rises to compensate for Tory cuts (the so-called Bottom Line). There was also a commitment to council house building and job creation.

The Labour Party made a strong case for extra government money based on disproportionate rate grant reductions (the money stolen by the Tories).

This formed the basis of the campaign. The Council resolved not to implement Tory cuts and so to introduce an illegal budget, forcing the Government to cough up all or most of the financial shortfall.

Central to the campaign was the willingness of councillors to follow in the traditions of Poplar and Clay Cross and face personal bankruptcy, disqualification and possible imprisonment (Break the Law, not the Poor).

MILITANT MANOEUVRES

If the Council had kept to its policies it would have deserved the support of all socialists but the reality, despite the rhetoric, has

(continued on back page)

Fowler's Workhouse Without Walls

Since the '70s the numbers of unemployed, pensioners, single parents and the low paid have risen until a majority of the working class are now claimants. As such they are increasingly treated as criminals. A pensioner dies of a heart attack when she is threatened with imprisonment for non-payment of rates; a man is jailed for 3 months for not declaring £400 earnings to the DHSS; snoopers, withdrawal of benefit, disconnections and the bailiff are all part of life on low incomes. Yet over the last six years, with barely a murmur of protest, the Tories have slashed £3,000 millions from the Social Security budget.

Now the Fowler reviews propose a fresh onslaught on the rights of claimants to basic necessities.

Four ideas underpin the plans:

- ** Taking from the poor in benefit cuts and giving to the rich in tax cuts.
- ** Opening up fresh areas of the Welfare State to capitalist investment - e.g. the proposed replacement of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme by private schemes.
- ** Deepening existing divisions within the working class, not only between waged and wageless, but also between women and men, and young people and their families. Married women's child benefit would disappear into male wage packets, while single mothers would be hit by the plan to

replace DHSS grants for clothes, heating, laundry etc. with loans repayable from basic benefits plus advice on how to budget properly! Meanwhile, young people who have long lost the £3.10 household addition when living a at home, are hit by the vicious new board and lodgings regulation if they leave.

** Cutting their living standards to drive the unwaged into any available low-paid, dangerous, non-unionised work: "a workhouse without walls". Attacks on claimants are part of the wider strategy of privatisation and the crippling of Trade Unions, designed to produce a working class as weak and profitable as that of South East Asia.

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Strip Searches

A STATE CRIME

SINCE NOVEMBER 1982, women prisoners in Armagh jail have been systematically physically and psychologically tortured by strip searching.

This degrading and humiliating practice, and the constant threat of it, is now being used against two Irish women held on remand in Brixton prison.

Ella O'Dwyer and Martina Anderson are locked in solitary confinement for between 18 and 22 hours each day. They are subjected to harassment not only through strip searches but also through body and cell searches. They have been denied proper association time, refused access to the toilet and Martina was left for days without medical treatment when suffering from a severe migraine.

Martina and Ella are charged with "conspiracy to cause explosions". This is the classic holding charge used by the Home Office when they have no evidence against the people they wish to detain. The two women have been in jail since June this year.

Groups and individuals campaigning on their behalf have been told that their treatment is routine for high security prisoners. This is a lie. Other high security prisoners are not strip searched ten times in 3 days as Martina has been, in addition to 34 body searches in the same period.

The campaign has been successful in publicising what is happening in Brixton. Ella and Martina have slightly more time out of their cells now. (They were previously often locked up for 23 hours a day). But recently the strip searching has been stepped up.

This particular tactic is being used increasingly against groups of women who are well organised and politically strong. Republican women in the north of Ireland were the first to face regular strip-searching, but since 1982 Greenham women and women supporting the miners strike have also been strip searched. The practice is also being used to humiliate young men at Glenochill prison for young offenders. Prison officers from Holloway have been to Brixton for 'training' in this dehumanising torture, so we can expect that yet another repressive technique pioneered in Ireland (like plastic bullets, tear gas and riot control) will be increasingly used in England Scotland and Wales.

SYSTEMATIC

It is difficult to realise how awful systematic strip searching is, and the constant threat of it held over prisoners is as powerful a torture as the event. One woman

held in Armagh describes her first strip search and her fight against it:

"I WAS stripped naked to confront me with their control, to enforce on me my own vulnerability, to degrade me. But they were not going to succeed. I saw my nakedness as an indictment against them. They thought my womanhood would serve to defeat me. They didn't understand that the strength of ideals cannot be stripped from one's mind. As I felt a hand slowly moving down the calves of my legs, my flesh crawled. They weren't content to jibe at my naked state, they had to 'search' me. A skin-search, aye it sounds ridiculous but it's true.

I was ordered to turn round, and I managed to totally ignore that command and the following ones. They could strip me but no way was I going to assist them... I steeled myself again as they searched my hair.. It took eight of these screws to be present... I felt drained and noticed a tremble in my hands. I felt violated, invaded, victimised. And very very angry.

Within the next 48 hours I was strip searched five times" (Women behind the Wire no 2)

Few white British women confront the British state in a direct way, as Republican women do. But when we do, we get the same tactics used against us. As women and as feminists we cannot stand by and do nothing while our government uses blatant sexual harassment against our sisters.

What you can do:

- * Please protest to the Home Office and Brixton Prison governors
 - a) to stop the strip searches
 - b) for more association time (ie time not locked in the cells)
 - c) against medical neglect of Martina's migraine
- Home Office (Prison Dept), 89 Eccleston Sq, London SW1
The Board of Governors, Brixton Prison, Jebb Ave, London SW2 5XF.

- * Send cards or letters to Martina Anderson, D25134 Category A, and to Ella O'Dwyer, D25135 Category A. Both at Brixton Prison, Jebb Ave PO Box 369, London SW2 5XF.

"A NATION THAT ANOTHER CAN"

WHEN THE TRIAL OF MAIRE O'SHEA AND OTHERS OPENS IN MANCHESTER NEXT JANUARY IT WILL MARK THE PASSING OF A WHOLE YEAR OF STATE HARASSMENT AGAINST A SECTION OF THE IRISH COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN. THE HARASSMENT IS NO ACCIDENT- IT FOLLOWS FROM THE USE OF FORCE TO SUPPRESS SOCIAL DISCONTENT. VICTIMS OF IMPERIALISM IN SOUTHWORTH OR THE NORTH OF IRELAND WILL BE LOOKING FOR SOLIDARITY FROM THE LEFT. YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE MAIRE O'SHEA DEFENCE COMMITTEE IS URGENTLY NEEDED: Contact 448 Stratford Rd, B'ham, B11 4AE.

INTERVIEW

BIG FLAME ASKED MAIRE HER VIEWS IN THE INTERVIEW WHICH FOLLOWS

WHAT EFFECT HAS YOUR ARREST HAD ON THE IRISH COMMUNITY ?

The reaction is low key- in Sparkhill in shops or at the laundrette people would ask "What's happening?"- and they are angry that I lost my job and that no one will be doing the psychotherapy work I was doing. But often they won't sign petitions in case their names and addresses are put down on the Police Computer, and they would get arrested. They give money but they won't give their names.

IS THIS TRUE EVERYWHERE ?

Yes-especially in the Irish Community because they are aware of things and are more vulnerable. On the other hand people in more mixed areas are more exposed. Birmingham is still a special case because the Press still whips up anger at the Pub Bombings.

The Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG) has the aim of organising the Irish Community to use its strength to combat racism against the Irish and to fight repression of the Irish in occupied Ireland- and in Britain. It was set up after the Hunger Strikes out of shame that no Irish organisation had protested at the Hunger Strikers deaths. It is for a withdrawal from Ireland

HOW DO YOU SEE THINGS AT PRESENT FOR THE I.B.R.G. ?

It's a testing time for the IBRG- since Christmas 1984 some IBRG members have been arrested and if it retreats and condemns violence (which to people here means the IRA) and if it doesn't strongly defend the people who are charged then people won't stand up and express their political views. If it is going to get anywhere it must make a bid for people's

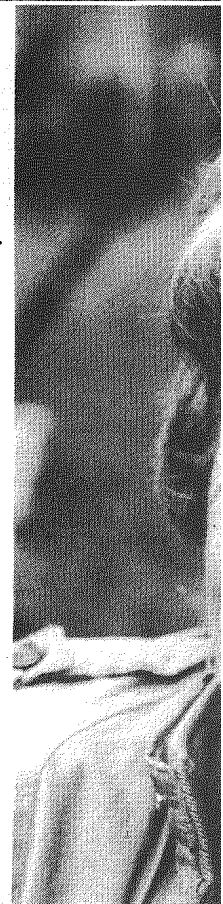
support by its campaigning. It would collapse if it does not take action on what's happening now.

HOW STRONG IS THE IDENTITY OF THE IRISH IN BRITAIN ?

The first generation came in the mass emigrations of the 50's at a time of disillusionment when the Irish Government had failed to provide them with a livelihood and had reneged on the nationalist people in the six counties. Many could see a future only in assimilating. The majority of the community now are second generation. Many of the first generation have died or gone back to Ireland. In the 60's emigration reduced to a trickle, going on observation family circumstances largely determine how far the second generation have maintained their Irish Identity. Some Irish parents married to English partners have kept a low profile and have refrained from passing on their Irish cultural and political heritage. Others have had a lot to offer to their kids if they go on holiday. Some are ashamed to see their relations if they haven't "made it". Some feel alienated by the present generation in Ireland - who think they have rejected Ireland by leaving and forget there was no other choice.

Many have found no excitement in the life of the Irish Community which has centered on Irish Pubs, Clubs and the Catholic Church

Irish Teachers in Catholic schools don't teach Irish language or Irish History, all history is from an English viewpoint. If you attack the church then you can end up feeding the prejudices of English people who see the Irish as being dominated by the Catholic Church. It must be pointed out that British colonialism is responsible for the persistent attachment of the Irish People to the Church, and the association of religion with Irish national identity. The British persecuted the native Irish as Catholics as



DROP THE Against Máire O'Shea

they couldn't be marked out by black skins.

During the dark centuries of penal laws against the Irish and the Catholic Church, the people sheltered the priests and were comforted by them with the assurance that they'd be alright in the next world.

The British bought the allegiance of the church by setting up and giving subsidies to the Theological College at Maynooth in return for clerical condemnation of militant political movements. The Pope condemned the Land League. Several bishops excommunicated the IRA in the Tan War. Rigid sexual morality goes back to Maynooth to French Jansenist Professors who said sex was allowable only for procreation and instilled massive

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DROP THE CHARGES!

"AT ENSLAVES NOT BE FREE"



The Irish Community in Britain - being the largest ethnic minority - has the potential to use its strength to force Britain to withdraw from Ireland. The IBRG is the first organisation that has the aim of organising that strength both to and British repression in the six counties and to fight for meeting its special social needs and for its civil rights.

Charging some of its members with terrorist offences is an attempt to discredit a legitimate Irish Organisation.

Trade Unionists still allow loyalist dominated trade unions in the Six Counties to operate a veto on the discussion of the Irish case within the Trade Union Movement in Britain. Trade Unionists committed to Irish Independence must organise like those in ASTMS to expose the loyalist veto and to open up discussion.

Now that the law, the police and Military forces are being used openly against British trade unionists, it is possible to get British trade unionists to understand the motivation of British forces in Ireland, its motivation to maintain British occupation of a part of Ireland as a bargaining counter to bring the whole of Ireland into NATO.

There's been very limited success in the Labour Party, and I have no illusions. The Labour Party must make a definite commitment to withdraw at an early date.

The struggle in Ireland will win it in the long run, but a decision by the British to withdraw would spare the people of the Six Counties many years of bloody oppression.

On paper the Labour Party is "against" the PTA - but only 30 MPs voted against it, there was no three line whip, and the other MPs didn't bother to turn up.

It was even worse with the Emergency Powers Act. Labour's commitment in the Ireland Act, 1949 to support the veto of the loyalist minority on Irish Unity, which it still maintains, has lost Labour the support of many in the Irish Community.

WHAT FORM DOES RACISM TAKE AGAINST IRISH PEOPLE ?

In the 50's there were still some signs saying: "No Irish need apply". That overt racism disappeared but it was still latent... it was replaced by racism against black and Asian people. When the war in the Six Counties restarted it came back - both in the media and in goods in shops (anti-Irish mugs). It has been fought with some success by the IBRG, with the help of the GIC, which withdrew its advertising from the Evening Standard in protest against an anti-Irish cartoon. I think its recurrence coinciding with the war in the Six Counties underlines the colonial basis of racism. The colonising power has to show that the natives are stupid, lazy and ignorant in order to justify the "need" to "civilise" them. That's some thing black people don't seem to accept - they see racism as colour prejudice, rather than as colonialism.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE WAY FORWARD NOW ?

sexual guilt. A lot of priests used to go out hunting courting couples and banned dancing in country houses.

WHEN DID THIS CHANGE?

After Internment and Bloody Sunday there was a resurgence of Irish national feeling and cultural identity. Some who had lost their identity then saw their Irishness as some thing to cling to.

The Irish government should take responsibility for the emigrants here. The IBRG has asked for subsidies for Irish cultural activities. The Irish Government should make demands that anti-Irish racism should be banned.

First and foremost British repression in the 6 Counties and its spin offs in Britain should end. The Irish embassy should end its "special relationship" with the UK Government. It should demand the abolition of the PTA and of conspiracy laws. It should demand that it is informed of arrests. It should arrange for legal representation here for its citizens as it does for example in West Germany.

CONSPIRACY

Whose Conspiracy ?

WHEN THE TRIAL of Patrick Brazil, William Grimes, Peter Jordan, Peter Lynch and Maire O'Shea begins on Jan 14th, the State will be using a traditional legal weapon: conspiracy.

NUM members, the Newham 7, Bradford 12, and Welsh Republican Socialist Movement have all been recent targets, but the history ranges back through the Chartists and Tolpuddle Martyrs to Guy Fawkes and beyond. Conspiracy is nearly as old as the British intervention in Ireland.

The current trial involves a charge of "conspiracy to cause an explosion". The fact that there wasn't any explosion is irrelevant.

A 'conspiracy' is simply an agreement to break a law. And the State is far more worried that

SKILL

people might agree to break laws than about law-breaking itself. Conspiracy charges carry potential life sentences. But proving that a group of people have agreed to do something takes skill. Phone-tapping, opening mail, and surveillance come in handy. Some of the accused may confess, but their statements can not be used as evidence against co-defendants. There could be a police agent who claims to know about an agreement, but then perhaps the police can be accused of setting up the 'conspiracy' themselves.

These knotty problems have led the Judges - who make the rules in conspiracy trials - to simplify the game. The prosecution merely has to show that the 'conspirators' acted - went to pubs, made phone calls, spoke at meetings, saw other 'conspirators'... - and then claim that these acts only 'make sense' in terms of a plan of action. To set the scene, the State can point to the defendants' political views - including the books they read! (Be sure to burn this BF before your trial!).

And so it is suddenly relevant that some of the defendants know each other or belong to the same organisations. But even if they don't know each other, they can still be part of a conspiracy. Anyone can go to gaol for life. This farce is deadly serious.

In the current case, four of the five defend-

FANTASY

ants will have spent over a year in prison before the trial opens. They were arrested under a modern political weapon - the Prevention of Terrorism Act. As propaganda, Conspiracy and the PTA employ the same fantasy. The problems of society are caused by a tiny minority of politically motivated terrorists who conspire to overthrow our democratic society for their own ends. To save ourselves, we must allow the State to go beyond the normal democratic framework.

...This story line is dusted down to explain anything from the war in Ireland to the resistance of black people in Brixton and Tottenham.

But while conspiracy laws aim at punishing activists, the PTA aims to intimidate the public - particularly the Irish community - into political apathy and silence, and to enable masses of low-level information to be collected from thousands of interrogations.

Around 40,000 are detained and 'checked' under the PTA every year, mainly while travelling between the British mainland and Ireland. Over 6000 have been arrested under the Act since 1974.

TERROR

But only 2% of these were charged under the PTA, while 5% faced other charges. Nearly 300 people have been 'excluded' from Britain under the terms of the PTA.

Being arrested under the PTA is terrifying. "I heard footsteps and by the time I got out of my bedroom, my flat door was down, an SPG man was up the stairs and had a gun trained at my head. Another one trained a gun at my brother's head when he came out of his bedroom. We were then pushed back into our bedrooms and quite forcibly frisked." (Frank Murphy, quoted in TOM pamphlet)

PTA suspects can be held up to 48 hours but the Home Secretary can extend this to 7 days. Last Xmas, a man spent five days in the Liverpool Bridewell before his wife was able to discover the fact - despite persistent enquiries. The police can refuse a private visit with a solicitor, in "exceptional" PTA cases, and can delay any legal visit for 48 hours.

It doesn't take much imagination to see how intense interrogation of people with no access to a solicitor can produce just the sort of 'information' to make a good conspiracy trial.

*

IF YOU KNOW of anyone being held under the PTA, contact the Troops Out Movement (01-250-1293), Release (01-603-8654), the NCCL (01-403-3888) or a sympathetic lawyer.

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REPEAL THE P.T.A.!

