

# Socialist Newsletter



10P

NUMBER 30  
JUNE 1984

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIALIST LABOUR GROUP, BRITISH SECTION  
OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL (ICR)  
BCM BOX 7727, LONDON WC1 6XX.

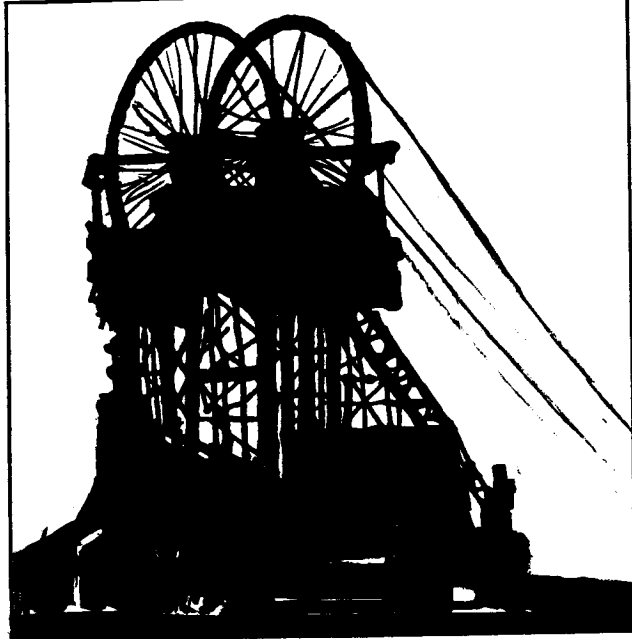
## THE MINERS STRIKE A TROTSKYIST ANALYSIS

BY FRANK IRVINE.

The current miners' strike has now lasted longer than any miners' strike since 1926. Comparisons with the 1972 and 1974 strikes become increasingly less relevant as the crisis expressed by the present strike deepens. The political, social and economic problems faced by British capitalism in this dispute are far more profound than those in 1972/4. This is not to say that today's strike is yet on a par with the General Strike of 1926. However the situation is slowly inching towards a confrontation of General Strike proportions.

### LANCS AND NOTTS

The strike has not yet shaken off many of the difficulties which have dogged it since the start. Much of the Notts coalfield is still scabbing. Sid Vincent and the Lancs NUM's decision to suspend several hundred miners from union membership reveal that there is still a small minority who refuse to join the strike. Notts Branch officials and men at the Agecroft pit in Lancs have taken their union to court and have course been backed by the judges. Bribery from the NCB partly explains



this obstinacy. In the Notts area for instance despite greatly reduced productivity, bonuses remain high. At the Agecroft colliery 45% of the men are over 45 years of age and are clearly worried about losing large redundancy pay outs.

These are very real problems. But the heart of the problem is leadership. In Lancashire even the miners on strike complain about the appalling leadership of Sid Vincent. The decision to suspend large numbers of men from the NUM, now

frozen by the courts, is a sign of Sid Vincent's failure to organise and convince the whole Lancs. coalfield. His vacillation in the first ten weeks of the strike is chiefly responsible for the doubts amongst the Agecroft men.

### PROBLEMS OF LEADERSHIP

The same problem exists in the Notts area. Early in the dispute Chadburn talked about a national ballot. A few weeks later he and Richardson denounced those who took up that call and continued working as scabs. Now attitudes have hardened and in some cases in the wrong direction. At branch level, like at Pye Hill in Notts, local officials who have taken the NUM to court are proving to be a key obstacle to getting more men out. They have started mumbling about Spencerism, that tradition of scab-unionism which emerged after 1926 and although dissolved in 1937 has lived on in the minds of many of the more conservative elements.

Mass picketing is of course vital to cracking these last vestiges of resistance to the strike. But it is clear that supplementary tactics must be utilised to reach the rank and file with arguments and literature in favour of striking to undermine the sway of these local branch officials who have so far managed to isolate their men from the union nationally.

However despite these problems, the constant threat of rebellions reported in the national press always fail to materialise. In North Derbyshire, Manton in Notts and Cynheidre near Llanelli press inspired return to work rebellions have all been total failures. In Notts as a whole about 12,000 are now on strike.

If the NUM right-wing are chiefly responsible for the difficulties in those areas where scabbing continues the left-wing have also revealed shortcomings. In many areas a large number of miners are not directly involved in the activity of the strike. The Mansfield demonstration of 45,000 was a tremendous display of determination. But many miners went to Mansfield expecting to stay on in Notts to picket and argue with those still at work. This didn't materialise because it wasn't organised. In South Kirby pit local activists have fought hard to treble the numbers involved in picketing. This cannot be left to spontaneity but must be organised at national and area level. Large demonstrations are important but are no substitute for the

continuous mobilisation of the majority of strikers.

In Scotland the problem of rhetoric not being translated into action has raised questions about left-winger Mick McGahey. The Ravenscraig saga has revealed that tough talking on television is translated into concessions to Bill Sirs behind the scenes on how much coal to allow into the steel plant. Miners in Scotland have experienced this problem before. Some months prior to the current strike certain pits in Scotland wanted to begin the fight against pit closures only to discover that despite his rhetoric McGahey was not prepared to spread their willingness to fight. Indeed it has to be said that left-wing leadership or not, the present dispute was forced on the area and national executives by the strength of the movement amongst the rank and file.

Behind these problems of leadership, both right and left wings of the NUM, is the problem of the TUC. EETPU leader Hammond has refused the miners any support in the name of protecting a democratically elected government, in other words the Tories. Len Murray denounced the solidarity organised by Yorks and Humberside TUC as "unconstitutional" Bill Sirs uses scare tactics by saying that this miners strike will cost steelworkers their jobs. Much of the TUC left has so far only offered passive support.



All these leaders are backing off from a confrontation which they know could so easily spill over into a movement that goes beyond parliamentary parameters. But the outcome of the miners strike will directly influence the crisis in the rail, docks, steel and sea industries. Indeed the decision of the British Rail Board to drop their demand that a pay increase must be linked to productivity is a direct consequence of the miners strike. The bosses feared that a joint rail and miners strike could trigger a massive movement

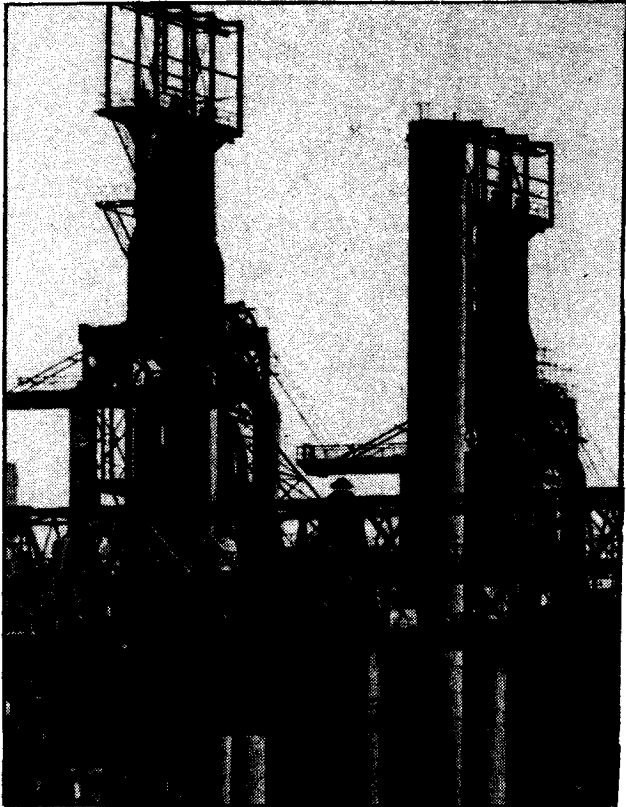
in the working class. This fear is shared by the TUC leadership but arguably with even greater dread.

### TUC MUST ACT

The TUC left must be made to take up an active struggle against the Murray wing. If this left is not to oversee a disastrous defeat of the miners it must begin today an effort to combine the miners' strike with the railworkers campaign to defeat further job cutting productivity proposals, the dockers defence of the national dock labour scheme, the steelworkers fight against more closures and the seamens battle against the privatisation of Sealink. Each one of these different unions will face a situation twice as tough if their leaders allow the NUM to go down. The future of rail, steel, docks and sea depends on the support given to the miners today.

### TRIPLE ALLIANCE CRUCIAL

This alliance, in particular the Triple Alliance, is a necessity if victory is to be won. The steel industry is vital in this whole process. Bill Sirs pretends in public that steelworkers cannot afford to back the miners. The opposite is true. Polkemmet pit produces coal solely for Ravenscraig steel plant. If Polkemmet is closed it provides the Tories with yet another argument to close Ravenscraig as uneconomic. Llanwern and other steel plants still produce the majority of steel for Fords and BL. If steel production was stopped here the miners strike would be rapidly escalated and brought nearer to victory. A victory for the miners would be the best possible way to defend steelworkers jobs because it would force the ruling class onto the defensive.



But this unity with steel is being directly obstructed. At Ravenscraig the convener denied the workers the right to vote on whether or not to come out on the May 9th Scottish day of action. Proof that steelworkers don't accept Sirs' lies was given by the Clydebridge men who came out on strike on May 9th.



Sirs won't call steelworkers out



The question of alliances and direct solidarity with the miners does not rest solely with industrial unions. The public sector is also immediately involved. The mining industry is publicly owned. The attacks on it, including the dream of privatising pits let out of

the bag by the prince of darkness Norman Tebbit, are part of the same Tory plans which have closed hospitals, cut civil service jobs and privatised profitable sections of state owned enterprises.

### PUBLIC SECTOR ALLIANCE

The call for a public sector alliance from many groups of public sector workers has pressing significance in this miners strike. Again the future of the NHS, British Telecom and civil servants' jobs will be decisively shaped by the outcome of the fight to defend pit jobs. At the CPSA conference the Queen's latest tea-drinking partner Alistair Graham poured scorn on the idea of civil servants linking their struggles with the miners. Yet this is precisely what must be done if the jobs of those Graham pretends to represent are to be protected.

There is ample evidence to suggest that increasing numbers of workers are bracing themselves for major struggle behind the miners. Only 10% of coal trains are still running despite confusions sown by the TUC. The May 9th Scottish day of action saw 15,000 on the streets of Glasgow, 7,000 on the streets of Edinburgh and widespread strike action including 2,000 strikers at the Rosyth naval dockyard, a 24 hour strike of the Strathclyde firemen and the non-appearance of the Daily Record because its owners refused a SOGAT request for a front page appeal from

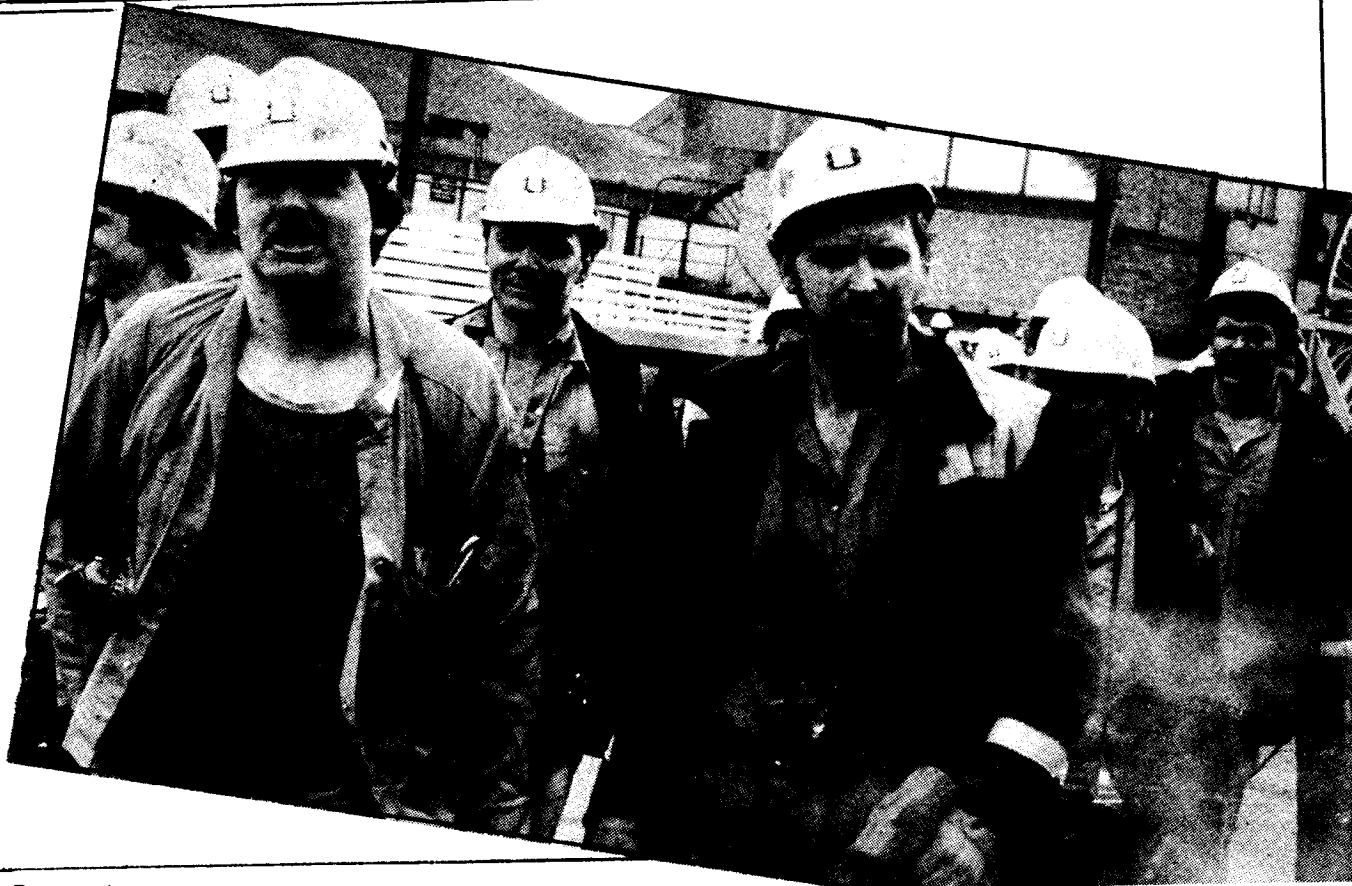
the miners. The May 21st Yorks and Humberside day of action saw solidarity in similar proportions.

The role of women in this strike also reveals the depth and breadth of class unity. Not only are the miners wives organising food distribution and general welfare, but they are becoming increasingly involved in the picketing. The 10,000 strong Barnsley womens' march was an historic step forward in the organisation of working class women.

### INTERNATIONALISM

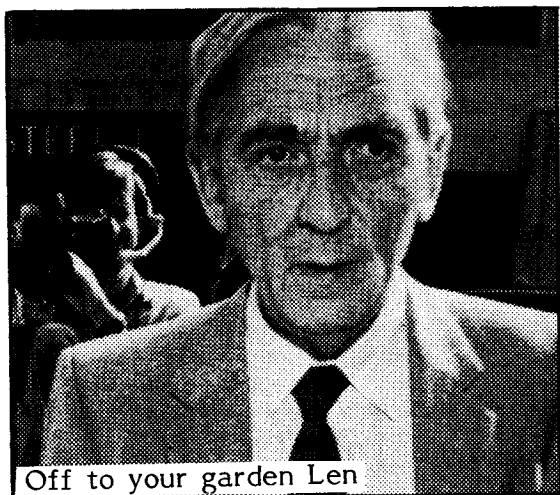
Internationally there is still a great deal to do. In early May the Polish government sent a sales team to Britain to step up the export of coal to Britain. The Polish miners in Silesia are at the heart of Solidarnosc. Its time Scargill reexamined his hostility to the independent trade union movement in Poland. Direct links need to be made between the NUM and Solidarnosc to stop Polish coal being used to scab on the strike. Only Solidarnosc can do this. The Polish government are only too eager to seize the opportunity of the miners strike to increase exports even at the expense of British miners.

The holding in custody of Kent area President Malcolm Pitt and the rioting charges made against 50 miners in Mansfield proves that the Tories are seeking confrontation. However at



the same time the recent moves by the NCB to open negotiations reveals that the Tories are worried that the miners will not easily be beaten and that a variety of tactics must be used to drive the miners back to work.

Although the NUM have understandably kept the TUC out of the strike so far, we have now reached the stage where the TUC must be brought in to organise at national level the complete halt to all transportation of coal and the preparation of the whole trade union movement for a major confrontation. A vital component of this campaign is to oust all those like Murray, Sirs and Hammond who refuse to do what is necessary to win.



Off to your garden Len

Victory for the miners and therefore for the whole working class and the defeat of the TUC right-wing who are obstructing this victory, centres on problems of leadership.

### THE LABOUR PARTY

In the Labour Party Neil Kinnock has been a leading voice in pushing a national ballot against the wishes of the majority of miners. He has also exerted considerable pressure on Scargill to talk to McGregor about pit closures. Some of Kinnock's shadow

ministers like Peter Shore have openly attacked Scargill. Kinnock's refusal to give unconditional backing to the miners provides the Labour Left with a focus around which to rebuild an organised challenge for party leadership.

In the unions the need to build a movement to remove Murray, Hammond, Graham, Sirs and Co. has been dramatically highlighted during the miners' strike. The March 24th BLOC conference revealed the enormous potential for building such a movement. In the May 18th issue of Militant, prime movers behind BLOC, Peter Taaffe argues that BLOC "...is not a substitute for the official trade union movement but is complementary to it." We agree with Taaffe that BLOC cannot act as such a



Kinnock - no unconditional support for miners

## Subscribe

**SUBSCRIBE TO SOCIALIST NEWSLETTER**  
For twelve issues - £3.50.  
Send cheques to Socialist Newsletter  
BCM Box 7727, London WC1V 6XX.

**SUBSCRIBE TO WORKERS REPUBLIC,**  
journal of the Irish section of the FI(ICR).  
Ireland and Britain £5, Europe £6, USA, etc £8.  
To: Workers Republic, c/o FI Agency,  
115, Upper Dorset Street, Dublin 1.  
Cheques payable to FI Agency.

**SUBSCRIBE TO INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNE**  
(French edition).

Ten issues a year - sealed 150 francs  
unsealed 100 francs.

International money orders to;  
Gerard Iltis, 87, rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis,  
75010 - Paris, France.



The women get into the front line

substitute. But the notion of it being complementary to the official movement is a far cry from the strongly voiced sentiment expressed at the BLOC conference for the building of a new leadership. BLOC should lead a fight to oust the right-wing. If it is to be complementary to Murray and Co. it will soon become a harmless left-wing. Taaffe argues that "BLOC is not in a similarly influential position in the trade union movement" to the National Minority Movement of the 1920's. But the construction of an NMM in the 1980's is precisely what is required.

The NMM was led by the then revolutionary Communist Party. Today the CP journals carry debate about forming an anti-Thatcher alliance with the SDP, Liberals and the Tory wets. Many leading elements in the NUM are CP members or strongly influenced by it. Where do they stand on this question of governmental perspective? If the miners' strike results in the defeat of the Thatcher government will they call for a popular front regime of the Labour Party, SDP, Liberal Party and anti-Thatcher Tories? Kinnock is touted as a possible leader of such a "popular government". Rank and file miners are justified in asking how far the NUM leaders will concede to Kinnock's pressure to negotiate with McGregor and his closure plans in order to stabilise Kinnock's position.

#### NATIONAL MINORITY MOVEMENT

These political problems of building a real challenge to the TUC right-wing and fighting for a Labour government independent of the bosses' parties pose the question of constructing a new revolutionary workers organisation based on the struggle for the independence of the working class and for a workers' government which defends the interests of the working class.

It is these political problems which the SLG seeks to discuss in the course of practical solidarity with the miners. We do not present ourselves as a ready-made alternative revolutionary organisation, but it is through discussion of the political questions, some of which are raised in this article, that workers will begin to develop a perspective for the overthrow of capitalism including the rebuilding of a mass communist organisation which was destroyed in Britain by stalinism in the late 1920's. The National Minority Movement of the early 1920's was built fundamentally because of revolutionary leadership. The construction of a mass movement today like the NMM is similarly dependent on the development of a revolutionary organisation and leadership. It is this goal which the SLG works for.

# FIGHT EEC

## Fourth International Statement

In April the General Council of the Fourth International (ICR) met. As well as discussing the strategy of its sections in several countries, particularly Brazil and France, and its continuing campaign in solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution, it discussed its attitude to the forthcoming European elections. We publish below excerpts from the statement that was adopted.

### STATEMENT

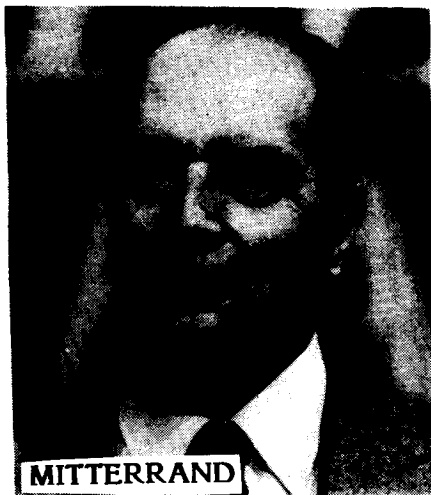
The statement begins by looking at the activity of the workers of Europe against their governments: the miners' strike in Britain, the anti-nuclear demonstrations in Germany, the big demonstrations against the closure of the steel industry in France and also in Belgium and the movement against the Italian proposal to repeal the law guaranteeing the indexation of wages and salaries.

The statement continues, "Above all, the indomitable resistance of the working people of Poland, organised around their trade union organisation independent Solidarity, remains alive in the action and the consciousness of all the workers of Europe. " 'The decline of Europe': this expression is the headline of an article in the American weekly 'Newsweek' which points out in particular that 'unemployment in the countries of the European community has reached the figure of 12 and a half million and amounts to 19 million for the whole of Western Europe. This year a further million unemployed will be added to this figure,' and adds that even the best perspective for a 'recovery' are not very encouraging — Great Britain and Germany will not have a growth rate of more than 2 or 3 per cent — half of what is expected for the USA — "which is quite insufficient to halt unemployment'.

"What is happening today in the capitalist system of exploitation is in fact the dismantling of the bedrock of European industry, the ruination of whole regions. What has already happened in certain parts of Britain, in French-speaking Belgium and what directly

threatened the North and the East of France, reveals the future which capitalism has in store for millions of workers....

"Today, arising from the needs of each bourgeoisie as well as from the pressure of American imperialism and the injunctions of the IMF, the institutions of the EEC as the means whereby ruin and decay are imposed, they are the instrument of the 'organisation'



MITTERRAND

of unemployment which seeks to drive millions of men and women out of production.

"It is not just members of the European community which are affected. The crisis affects the other European capitalist countries as badly and the respect of the 'norms' for entry into the Common Market are used for the implementation of anti-working class plans.

"To just take the example of Spain; the plans for its entry into the Common Market demand 300,000 layoffs in the steel industry, in shipbuilding, in the electrical trade, mining and textiles. And they will also lead to the destruction of whole sections of the small farming population: 40 per cent of olive groves and 30 per cent of the vineyards will have to go...

"The propagandists for capitalism have presented the Common Market as the beginning of a new era of harmonious cooperation between the different capitalist powers of Europe and fraternity between the peoples of Europe.

"What is the reality? The Common Market only functions for the profit of the big capitalists and bankers of each country, and more and more it is a battle ground for pitiless struggle between the different imperialisms. And the bourgeoisie of each country tries to turn its own people against the peoples of other countries, pretending that the ruin of Spanish agriculture, for example, can save the small farmers of France from the poverty into which the bankers and agricultural credit societies are driving them.

But the workers have started to give their answer. They have the same enemies....

Against the Kohl government, against the Thatcher government, against the Martens government, the workers of Germany, of Britain, of Belgium, struggle for the same objectives.

"Since the 'European Parliament' was set up in 1979, the organisations of the Fourth International (ICR) have denounced this institution for what it is: an institution of participation in the division of Europe, instituted against the right of peoples to self-determination, an anti-democratic institution.

"The Strasbourg Assembly was set up on the basis of the denial of the right of peoples to self-determination, on the basis of the division of Germany, of the division of Ireland and the continuation of the occupation of the North of the country by British troops...

"The sections of the Fourth International (ICR) will carry out their political activity using these elections. This activity will take different forms, but will be on the basis of an orientation in every



Gerry Adams MP, leader of Provisional Sinn Fein, who are running candidates in the EEC elections.



French workers protesting against Mitterrand's austerity measures.

country which expresses the fight against the anti-worker plans of the capitalists, for which the Common Market provides both a framework and an instrument.

- against the austerity plans and attacks on workers' rights.
- against unemployment and lay-offs.
- against the Common Market and its institutions
- for democratic liberties and the defence of the right of people to self-determination.

"This the Internationalist Communist Party (French section of the Fourth International (ICR) is supporting a list of workers and small farmers united for a workers' party', which is fighting so that the majority in the National Assembly (made up of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party) takes urgent measures which arise from the pressing needs of the working class.....

"In Ireland the LWR (Irish section) is carrying out a campaign for withdrawal from the Common Market and for the unity and independence of Ireland and is calling for a vote for Sinn Fein, while calling for non-participation in the European parliament.



"In Germany the possibility — and the popular will — to say No to the policy of the Kohl government, and in particular policy of subordination to US imperialism, against the installation of missiles and against his job-cutting policy, allows the ISA (German section) to have a campaign along these lines. The election can become a referendum on the siting of missiles in Germany, which is why the ISA is calling for a vote for the SPD, while pointing out the positive character of a high vote for the Greens in this election....

"In Europe, the brutal necessity to finish with the rule of profit, the rule of capitalism, is linked with the need to overthrow the parasitic bureaucracies which, in the countries, where capital has been expropriated, run society according to their own needs and oppress workers and nationalities.

"The situation in all countries raises the need for a United Socialist States of Europe, which would finish with the artificial borders of Europe created by imperialism and the bureaucracy, with national oppression and which would allow cooperation between all the peoples of Europe on the basis of mutual respect".