

# Ten Years since Des Warren's release

## A Message to the TUC from Des Warren



IF THEY take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night. . .

# THEY'VE BEEN COMING FOR US EVER SINCE!

TEN YEARS AGO this month I was released from Leicester prison. I had spent nearly two and a half years in ten prisons, with a total of eight months in solitary confinement.

I had been jailed as a result of a conspiracy by the building employers, the Tories and the state, following the first-ever national building workers' strike in 1972.

It is not yet fully realised, I think, how extensive was the scale of the state's attack on picketing in 1973.

When I was tried at Shrewsbury in October 1973, there were six of us in the dock, accused, amongst other 'crimes', of 'conspiracy to intimidate'.

But this was only one of many trials of building workers at that time.

1973 was the year when the state laid down an extensive barrage to lay the basis for its offensive to criminalise picketing.

Before the Shrewsbury Trial, there were no less than five trials of building pickets at Mold, in North Wales.

After our trial at Shrewsbury, which lasted almost three months, another eighteen pickets were tried in 1974.

### Violence

The state was learning in these trials.

One of the major lessons for trade unionists to take on board is how it learned to create an atmosphere of violence, by provocation, as we have witnessed in the recent miners' strike.

We were accused of being violent men.

This slander was wholly manufactured by the press and the court.

I documented that in my book: 'The Key to my Cell'.

In 1974, a demonstration of trade unionists marched to the court in London where Ricky Tomlinson and myself were appealing against our sentences.

At the front of the demonstration was a big banner with a drawing of an employer, a policeman and a judge on it.

The banner declared: 'If they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night!'

The salient fact before the Trades Union Congress this year is that they have kept coming since!

### Strength

How right were those of us, inside and outside of jail at the time, who demanded that the full strength of the trade union movement be used in action to obtain the release of the Shrewsbury pickets.

If trade union leaders had not retreated at decisive times and betrayed that struggle, then there would not have been further wholesale criminalising of pickets in the miners' strike when state bodies, judiciary, press and ruling class politicians combined.

They put a ring around mining communities, provoked, picked out and restricted the movement of the foremost militants and jailed thousands.

There is the violence — without which the capitalist system cannot survive. And Kinnock, in effect, blamed the miners for the violence!

A prime example of class leadership in our experience is an incident I cannot forget.

I reported it in my book and it concerns Mick McGahey who was chairman

of the Communist Party in 1975.

I was a member of the Party at the time but I flung the 'Morning Star' across my cell when I read its report of McGahey's speech at the Trades Union Congress.

He had spoken about my being in jail and had said that if I had been a miner I would not still have been inside.

I wrote in my book about my feelings then: 'McGahey of all people should have understood.'

In my mind I said angrily to him: 'The employers aren't interested whether it is a docker, miner or building worker.'

'It is the whole working class they are after, including you and your members, McGahey.' I was angry.

But I learned, from painful experience that McGahey was not just suffering from sectional blindness.

### Stalinist

He was playing on sectionalism in carrying out his stalinist policy, which subordinates the independent struggle of the working class to collaboration with the trade union bureaucracy.

The Communist Party, I learned, was unable to carry a real campaign, even for its own members, who were class war prisoners.

It is a lesson, that is there again, in the scandalous treatment which has been handed out to David Kitson by the Communist Party-influenced leadership of TASS.

Now, the trade union leaders are holding the struggle back on the promise of a Labour Government.

What was the experience of the Shrewsbury pickets in relation to that?

Almost every trade union in the country — except the Prison Officers' Association' — passed resolutions for our release.

I commented in 'Key to my Cell': 'Labour Party Conference, Trade Union Congress, manual unions, white collar unions, Medical Practitioners' Union, Tribune MPs etc., etc., were all supporting our release — but we were still in jail.'

### Campaign

This campaign of words, with workers reduced to a protest force, got all the trade union leaders off the hook.

It guaranteed every opportunist leader that he could make radical speeches without having to put his money where his mouth was.

But, without action, even a resolution from the Holy Ghost wouldn't have got us out.

When I was finally released, there had been a Labour Government in for two years.

It was a Labour Home Secretary — Mr. R Jenkins — who made a personal decision to keep me in solitary confinement for six months without any charge.

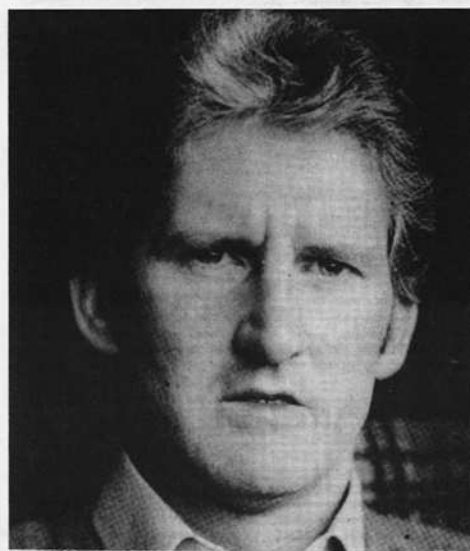
Jenkins has departed for the SDP, but can any trade union member stand up honestly and say that the present leaders would act any differently?

### Fight

We did not remain in jail because of any lack of fight from the working class.

We have to look to leadership for the reasons we were not freed. It is the same problem today.

The well-produced official



Des Warren

'History of the TUC, 1868 — 1968', which calls itself a 'Pictorial survey of a social revolution', described this so-called social revolution as meaning that, in 1968, 'bargaining with the government — any government — is day-to-day TUC business'.

The height of ambition of this type of leadership is not the emancipation of the working class.

The rights of the working class were won despite this type of leadership, which sees advances solely in terms of the positions they personally have arrived at in collaboration with capitalism.

We are now in a situation where schools are being closed, hospitals going; infant mortality rate is rising; social services are being

stripped; life expectancy for the over 47's is lower in Britain than other countries in Europe.

Youth apprenticeships and training are being destroyed and exploitation of youth intensified.

The majority of working class youth are now 'surplus to the requirements of capitalism'. There are five million unemployed.

Capitalism is destroying the working class as well as its organisations.

In this situation we have this type of trade union leader who wants only to be a partner with capitalism.

Out of this Trades Union Congress must come the beginnings of a new leadership to replace them.

The TUC belongs to the working class and not the bureaucrats.