

U.S. Union Militant Tours Britain **For International Labor Solidarity**

During the week of July 4-12, Bolshevik Tendency (BT) supporter Howard Keylor was sponsored by the Cambridge Area Trades Union Council to tour Britain and speak about his experiences in the 1984 San Francisco longshore boycott of South African cargo. The interest in Keylor's visit was sparked by the growing disenchantment of British trade-union militants with the strategy of "disinvestment" and their increasing interest in the possibility of direct industrial action ("workers sanctions") against the vicious apartheid regime.

Keylor addressed trade-union groups in Cardiff and Cambridge, and spoke at public meetings of trade unionists, anti-apartheid activists and leftists in Derby, Newcastle, Cambridge and London. He described the events and drew the political lessons of the San Francisco boycott—the only sustained political strike by American workers against apartheid to date. He pointed out that the 11-day boycott of South African cargo by members of Local 10 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) was the culmination of years of propaganda and education on international working-class solidarity. He explained that the basis for the 1984 action had been laid by two much smaller cargo boycotts in 1974 and 1978; the former in defense of the Chilean working class and the latter against the oppression of the black masses in South Africa.

Keylor emphasized that a sectarian approach to workers sanctions is doomed to failure and that the implementation of the San Francisco boycott was due in part to the careful building of a united front comprised of union members who supported different left and trade-union currents. Unfortunately, it appears that in Britain some groups which, in theory, favor workers sanctions are subordinating the fight to implement them to considerations of petty-sectarian maneuvering.

In Derby, Keylor shared the podium with Frank Murphy, Educational Director of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the second largest union in COSATU. Brother Murphy told the audience that during the 1984 San Francisco cargo boycott a FOSATU (a forerunner to COSATU) representative appeared on television in New York and praised the longshoremen's action and called for similar direct industrial actions by other U.S. workers.

Murphy also described how the highly publicized disinvestment by U.S. and British companies doing business in South Africa frequently concealed a continuing economic connection and continued profiteering from the apartheid system. He said that in many cases it left unionized black workers without even the meager pen-

sion, wage and trade-union protection won over the past decade of militant struggles. Murphy said the metalworkers union wanted to build direct ties with British (and American) trade unions working for the same multinational corporations, or in similar industries and trades, in order to facilitate direct action by British workers in support of South African trade-union and anti-apartheid struggles.

In public discussions at the meetings, and in informal exchanges afterward, the British trade unionists were concerned about the legal restrictions and penalties used against the U.S. trade-union movement, especially those aimed at striking unions and international solidarity actions. Many trade unionists in the audience asked detailed questions as to how the U.S. trade unions function within these legal restrictions, and were particularly interested in those cases where workers were successful in defying court injunctions and anti-labor laws. Keylor drew parallels between the situation in the U.S. and Thatcher's program of anti-union legislation and massive police attacks on striking workers, and warned that only a trade-union leadership committed to mobilizing the working class against capitalist government repression could defend even the limited gains of the workers movement.

The London meeting at Camden town hall was organized and chaired by a leader of a rank-and-file militant trade-union group that had led a combative strike of London construction workers. In attendance were members of a number of ostensibly Trotskyist organizations, including the British affiliates of David North's American Workers League, who attacked Keylor for advocating and participating in a united-front action with workers who support the Communist Party. The Northites ludicrously characterized the San Francisco action bloc as a "popular front"! Most of the other groups present accused each other of "sectarianism" while failing to clearly commit themselves to principled united-front tactics aimed at building international solidarity actions within the trade-union movement. In Keylor's brief tour he was able to carry the lessons of his exemplary trade-union work into a small section of the British left and workers movement. The intense interest of trade unionists, anti-apartheid activists and ostensible revolutionary political groups in our supporters' struggles on the docks in San Francisco demonstrates the powerful international impact which even a small revolutionary propaganda group with some influence in the unions can have, if it is able to apply its program intelligently. ■