

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

**INSIDE:**

**WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK** CONFERENCE SPECIAL

**MAKE LABOUR OUR PARTY!**

By Alice Mahon

4 page pull-out



# POLAND:

## Workers defy the bureaucrats



**This week the Central Committee of Poland's ruling party is due to consider making Solidarnosc legal again.**

Since martial law was imposed in December 1981, Solidarnosc has been illegal. The bureaucratic state-monopoly system cannot tolerate independent workers' organisation.

The two great strike waves in Poland last year seem to have driven the country's rulers to a new risky experiment. In return for some sort of legislation, they hope to get the leaders of Solidarnosc to support the government's economic policies.

But rank and file worker activists in Poland are defiant. Jack Alison reports.

**D**uring my visit to Poland I visited a small flat in Warsaw where a group of some 24 members of the opposition were on hunger strike.

The hunger strike went on from 25 December to 1 January and was organised by the Polish Socialist Party Democratic Revolution (PPS-RD), the Polish free students union NZS, Peace and Freedom (WIP) and the Czechoslovak-Polish Solidarity Committee.

The strike demands were the release of all political prisoners in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Their leaflets named specific prisoners in both countries, and particularly Jana Tomasiewiczza, who was arrested when the police violently broke up a PPS-RD and NZS demo on 13 December, the anniversary of martial law.

The hunger strike and the action around it shows that, far from being dead, the Polish opposition has a whole new and growing layer of activists often in political organisations who have no belief in the 'round table discussions' with the ruling class in Poland but want to build Solidarity and take on the Stalinists.

The fact that the action was ignored, and went unreported by the 'official' leadership of Solidarity, shows a growing separation of that old leadership from the activists of the opposition.

What was most impressive was the way that those involved in the strike got publicity, particularly the

PPS-RD — graffiti, leafleting through rank and file groups in the factories, members of the party leafleting supermarkets with sandwich boards in Wloclaw and Krakow.

These activities led to regular arrests but, as one member of PPS-RD explained to me, an activist in PPS-RD will carry out acts leading to arrest as a regular part of their work. The most amazing action to publicise the protest was carried out on 30 December at 1 pm, when a member of PPS-RD on the hunger strike and a member of MRKS, a rank and file workers' group climbed up the outside of the Communist Party's Central Committee building in central Warsaw and hung up a banner calling for the release of all political prisoners. This brought the support of 2,200 steel workers from a Warsaw steel factory to the strike.

The political police, of course raided the Hunger Strike and took away Piotr, who had climbed the CP building.

At a national press conference Jerzy Urban the spokesman for the regime was asked about the incident but avoided the topic of political prisoners.

When I asked members of the opposition why the state was holding

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### Free all political prisoners!

Activists from the Polish Socialist Party and a rank and file worker group hang a banner calling for the release of all political prisoners the Communist Party headquarters in Warsaw.

# Reselection against the odds

By John Bloxam

**T**he Labour Party's procedure for selection and reselection of Parliamentary candidates was due to start this month, but will actually start for a small number of Constituency Labour Parties in February and March.

In part the delay has been caused by the new procedure for the selection meetings, pushed through at last year's conference by the leadership in order to give added weight to the passive party membership and weaken the links between selection and accountability.

Under the old system the General Management Committee (GMC) decided. The new system involves an 'electoral college' in which the affiliated organisations (trade unions and socialist societies) decide collectively how to cast their votes (up to a maximum of 40% of the final vote) and there is an individual ballot of the party membership.

Although the new procedure should have started this month, Labour Party headquarters at Walworth Road have still to send out guidelines to Constituency Labour Parties. Presumably they believe that delay and confusion will work to their advantage.

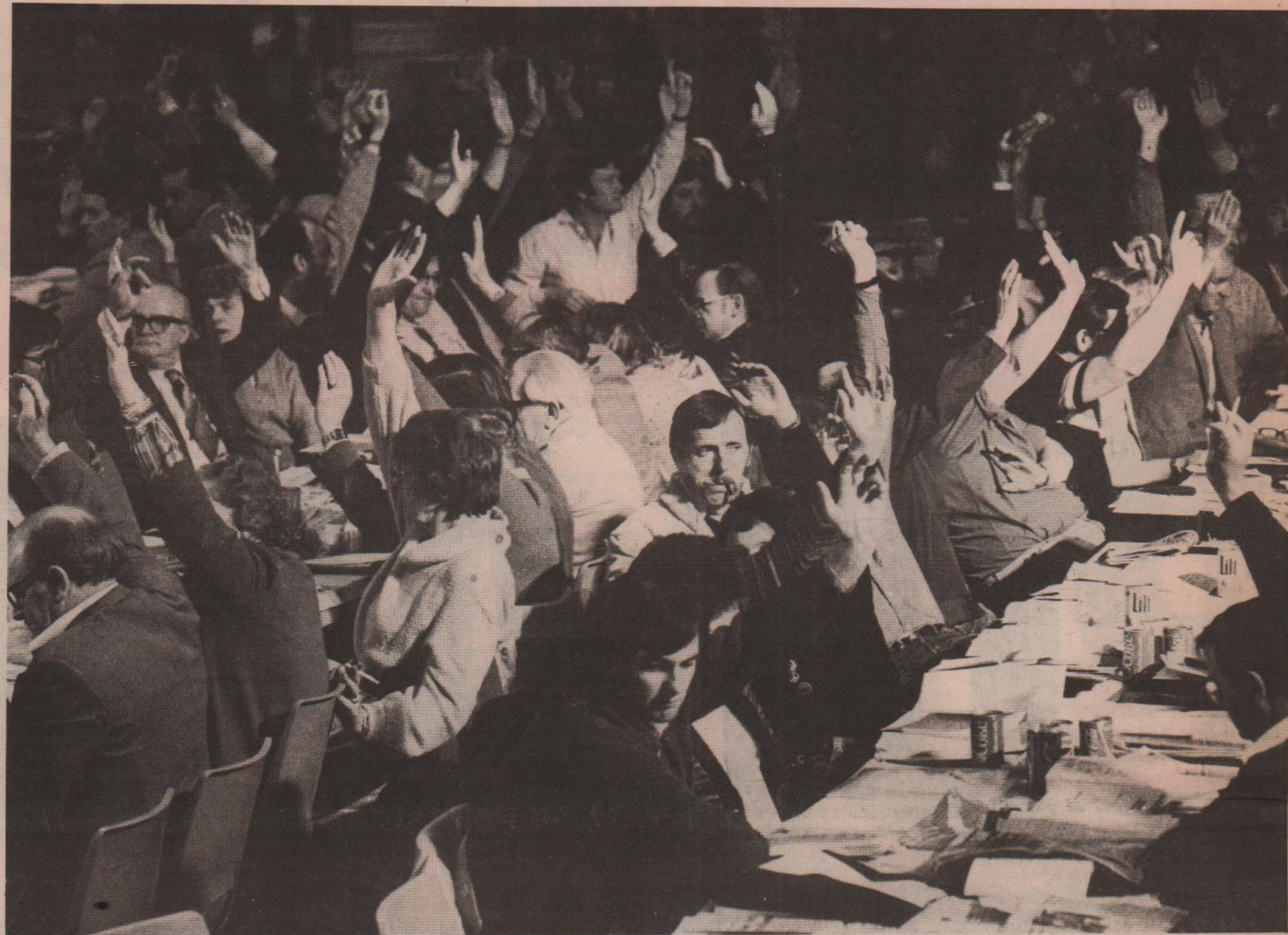
There is an additional element. The 1988 Party Conference established the rule that there should be at least one woman on every selection shortlist provided they have got nomination. Not only does this significantly improve the chances of women getting selected; it also seriously dents the right's tactics in the past of going for a 'shortlist of one' — an 'election' with only one candidate, usually the sitting MP. In the last round of reselections only about 20% of sitting Labour MPs faced a contest.

As a guide for the party rank and file, Danny Nicol and Pete Willsman from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy have explained ten things party members need to know about the reselection system.

1. The constituency EC and GC will continue to decide the shortlist. If CLPs do not have a Labour MP, there must be a shortlist of 5 (providing 5 or more have been nominated) of which one must be a woman (if one is nominated).

If CLPs have a Labour MP, there must be at least one woman on the shortlist — but only if one has been nominated — if not the CLP can have a shortlist of one, the sitting MP. A sitting MP must be supported, as must any nominee with 25% of the nomination, including at least one from a party branch.

2. There are no rules governing how trade unions and socialist societies are



to decide their votes; even non-levy payers could be involved in some unions. The branch secretary just has to send the CLP secretary the branch's ballot paper in a sealed envelope.

3. A union branch can only vote if it has eligible delegates (maximum 5). An eligible delegate must have had 12 months membership of the party and have attended one GC meeting before the freeze date.

4. Party branches must hold selection meetings open to all members. CLPs are free to arrange single-branch, joint-branch or all-constituency meetings to hear candidates and cast votes.

5. The weighting of the votes between affiliated organisations on the one hand and party branches on the other depends on their respective strengths on the GC. If branches have 70% of the eligible delegates, and affiliates 30%, then that is the proportions of the electoral college each will be awarded. But affiliates are not allowed more than 40% of the total.

6. To calculate the members' votes obtained by any one candidate, divide the number of votes each obtains by the number of votes cast, then multiply by 100. Then, to convert this to the candidate's share of the college, the per-

centage of the vote that the candidate has received must be multiplied by the percentage size of the electoral college section divided by 100.

If this sounds horrific, here's an example: in Tryingham CLP, Ms X receives 50 out of the total 200 votes cast = 25%. Party branches have 70% of the local electoral college, so 25 times 70 divided by 100 = 17.5. That is her share of the individual member's section of the college.

7. To calculate the affiliated organisations' votes, find out the 'college value' of each eligible delegate. If affiliates have 50 eligible delegates and 36% of the

total vote, then each delegate's 'college value' is 0.72 (ie. 36 divided by 50). Then if an affiliate's GC delegation consists of, say, 5 delegates, just multiply the 'college value' by 5.

8. Branches must give the regional organiser an annual membership list, since only members with 12 months membership can vote.

9. The count will take place at a special GC, presided over by the NEC's 'delegated representative'; perhaps the regional organiser or a full-time agent, although Walworth Rd are worried there won't be enough to go around and are rushing to train up 'rank and file'

members — eg. full-time union officials and members of Regional Labour Party executives. There will also be scrutineers — one per branch plus two from affiliated organisations.

10. Voting will be by single transferable vote; lowest-polling candidates are gradually eliminated and second preferences of eliminated candidates redistributed until one candidate has 50% plus one.

11. Postal votes are available as for parliamentary elections, and additionally for 'carers' of the sick, elderly and children. (From Campaign Group News)

## No to book-banning!

By Clive Bradley

**T**he prize-winning novel, 'The Satanic Verses', by Salman Rushdie, has been withdrawn by WH Smith following protests in Bradford that included a public burning.

WH Smith say that outside Bradford the withdrawal is for commercial reasons, but Rushdie intends to fight what he calls a 'ban'. The test, presumably, will be the bookstore's attitude to the paperback edition, yet to be released.

Muslims oppose the book, already banned in India and Saudi Arabia, because it is 'blasphemous'. It takes its title from a section of the Koran deleted by Mohamed because it had been inspired by the devil.

'The Satanic Verses' is Rushdie's fourth novel. His second, and best-known, the award-winning 'Midnight's Children', was a fictionalised and surrealistic account of

modern India; 'Shame' dealt with the history of Pakistan. The latest novel, which won the Whitbread Prize for fiction and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, concerns the Anglo-Indian experience and the question of religion.

Opponents in Bradford equate its anti-Islamic content to anti-

semitism. But to accuse Rushdie of racism is absurd. He is, of course opposed to religion.

This is a basic issue of freedom of expression. As Rushdie has said: "If it's my book today it could be someone else's tomorrow; if it's the Moslem zealots today it could be another zealot group tomorrow."

## Poland

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back from a full scale crackdown, they simply explained that after the strikes of that summer the regime was happy to have even one relatively quiet month amongst the workers.

By this spring they reckon a new wave of strikes will shake the system to its roots; and it will be groups like the PPS-RD and the MRKS

that may well lead these strikes to victory.

There remains a simple choice in Poland and the whole Eastern Bloc; either you support the ruling class and their front organisations, like the state 'unions', or you support the working class.

The British labour movement should be clear and the most vociferous supporters of our class in the Eastern Bloc, not leaving it to disgusting hypocrites from our ruling class like Thatcher.

# STOP THE KILLINGS!

Stop executions in Iran!  
Stop massacring the Kurds!  
Hands off all Iran-Iraq refugees!

Committee against the massacres in Iran, Iraq and Turkey

**Activities**  
• Iranian embassy, Princes Gate, 1pm, Saturday 28 January. Tube: High St Kensington  
• Iraqi Cultural Centre, Tottenham Court Rd, 1pm, Saturday 25 February  
• Turkish airways, 1pm, 18 March  
• United Nations Information Centre, 1pm, 25 March, Public Meeting  
22 April  
Demo, 6 May



## Paved with good intentions

### PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

It is one of the great paradoxes of our time that while the sales of lying, sleazy tabloids like the *Sun* and the *News of the World* (not to mention the preposterous *Sport*) soar, there is increasing evidence that "the public" is in favour of legislation to control the excesses of these kind of papers.

Presumably, many of the people who buy the tabloids are at the same time in favour of curbing the excesses of these publications. Such is life.

An additional paradox is that moves (laudable as they may be in principle) to bring the gutter press to heel coincide rather conveniently with the present government's onslaught on the freedom of the media as a whole; it started with the BBC, moved on to the IBA (spurred on by the now discredited press campaign against 'Death on the Rock') but has so far noticeably steered clear of the printed media — presumably because of Fleet Street's overwhelming sympathy towards the present administration.

Nevertheless, one suspects that Mrs Thatcher would not be altogether unsympathetic to moves to restrict another source of occasional criticism and even exposure.

That is why the left needs to be very careful about its response to some current moves concerning press "freedom". Labour Party policy presently favours a proposal to recognise a citizen's right to privacy. So does a private members bill (said to stand a good chance) proposed by Tory John Browne MP.

The debate surrounding "privacy" has, so far, largely revolved around well-publicised cases involving royalty and wealthy public figures like Jeffrey Archer, Koo Stark and Elton John. But what about the many "little" people — the trade unionists, the rape victims or the random objects of public interest like the boy whose family was wiped out at Lockerbie? Press treatment of such people has been a disgrace and should evoke the sympathy and outrage of all decent folk.

But the answer should not be to invoke legislation that could (and in practice would) be used to protect hypocritical politicians like Cecil Parkinson or Nicholas Ridley from legitimate public exposure of their personal dual standards. Much simpler (and more effective) would be the proposal raised in this column and elsewhere, to extend the legal aid scheme to cases of libel. That wouldn't be of use to people like the Lockerbie boy: I honestly can't think of a solution to that problem.

The Right of Reply Bill, proposed by Labour MP Tony Worthington, has the support of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and on the face of it seems a much more unambiguously desirable measure than Browne's Bill. But even here we have problems: who is going to judge who has been "misrepresented in the press", and so has an automatic right of reply? This is not made clear by the Bill.

Is it to be the Press Council (appointed and controlled by the newspaper proprietors themselves) or some new, government-appointed, body? Either way you can be sure that genuine investigative journalism and the left-wing press would be the main victims of any such arrangement.

None of which is intended to suggest that we should be indifferent to the regular outrages that are committed against ordinary people by Rupert Murdoch and others of his ilk: it's just that freedom of expression and criticism, limited as it is at the moment, is a commodity that is increasingly under attack these days and we shouldn't give any hostages to fortune at the moment.

## Towards a 'Social Europe'?

The EEC's bosses have come out against the 'Social Europe' — the idea of bringing workers' rights and welfare provision in different European countries in line with each other as part of the project of creating a 'single European market' in 1992.

From their own point of view, they're right. It would be logical to even out workers' rights and welfare provision at the same time as laws are harmonised and trade barriers brought down; but it would also be expensive for the bosses.

Child benefit and family allowances in France are about three times as high as in Britain. Unemployment benefit in Denmark is much higher than in Britain, and is paid for much longer. Italy has many more public holidays, more nurseries, and wide-ranging legal rights for workers to have trade union representation and to strike.

No country's working class will allow its standards to be levelled down to a neighbouring country's without a struggle. But levelling up will cost the capitalists a lot. That is why Margaret Thatcher is against the 'Social Europe', and why Europe's bosses federation is

against it too.

Western Europe's trade unions should start preparing for 1992 now — with a campaign to level up workers' rights and welfare provisions across the EEC.

And they should put some substance into the shadowy official European trade union campaign for

a 35 hour week.

Italy's steelworkers are now fighting against the rundown of the Bagnoli steelworks in Naples. They are fighting the same battle that British, French and German steelworkers fought, all at different times in the 1980s.

Each national group of

steelworkers has fought separately and, so far, been defeated separately. Western Europe's steel bosses have had a concerted strategy; Western Europe's steelworkers have been divided.

Capitalism became international long ago. Workers' organisation should be international, too.

## The sourness of 14 years after

Even this Tory government now admits that there may be serious evidence that the 'Guildford Four' did not do the 1974 pub bombing for which they have served 14 years in jail.

The case is going to the Court of Appeal. Just think what this would mean if the death penalty had still existed in 1974. Almost certainly the four would now be dead — and a court decision that they had been wrongly convicted would not bring them back to life.

In the hullabaloo and media

hysteria following the pub bombings, the police went full-tilt to get someone convicted — and it wasn't too difficult to succeed. The only evidence was confessions which the four said were forced out of them by the police, but in the mood of the time that was enough.

Fortunately the death penalty was no longer law. Only for some people, then and since, there has still been a 'death penalty', carried out through the 'shoot to kill' policies of the Army and the Northern Ireland police.

When the mass-circulation press rants about 'IRA murderers',

sometimes they seem to make a good cause. Slaughter of civilians, as at Enniskillen, can make people sympathise with calls for revenge.

But the 'revenge' for the Guildford pub bombings tastes sour 14 years afterwards, and it would taste a lot more sour if it had been comprehensive revenge, with the death penalty. Better to understand than to call for revenge.

Better to understand the fundamental justice of the revolt of the Northern Ireland Catholics, which the IRA reflects, and the need for a political settlement to meet the oppressed Catholics' demands.

## Spain's socialists break union links

Spain's ruling Socialist Party (PSOE), reeling from the 90% solid

general strike on 14 December, is looking to break its links with the trade union federation UGT

(General Workers Union).

It was the rare degree of unity between the UGT and the Communist Party-dominated CC.OO (Workers Commission) that made last December's general strike such a success. The immediate issue was opposition to a YTS-like youth training scheme; but underlying the strike was deep dissatisfaction with the government of Felipe Gonzalez.

The PSOE, which theoretically dates back to pre-Franco days, for along time described itself as a Marxist party. But in fact it scarcely existed for a long time before the mid-'70s; and like many other similar parties, in power it has sought to serve the Spanish bosses and be a loyal partner in NATO. 1987 saw a huge wave of strikes,

including violent confrontations between strikers and police in certain areas. Also that year there was a long strike by doctors and medical workers.

The strike on 14 December was extraordinarily solid. There was an element of political gamesmanship by the trade union bureaucracy involved. But that it was a powerful and militant action is beyond doubt.

PSOE's wish to break with the UGT is only a further step down a road already well trodden. But it is no less significant for that. The party leadership want to do away with UGT membership as a condition for PSOE membership.

Meanwhile the two Communist parties (the PCE and the PCIE) have taken steps towards unity.

'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx

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The gerontocrats already had private clinics...

## NHS crisis in the East

### GRAFFITI

The fastest growing part of the new cooperative sector of the Soviet economy is... private medicine.

Apparently conditions are so bad in the free state health service that patients are queuing up to pay for treatment in the cooperative sector. Doctors are eager to set up medical cooperation because of poor pay and facilities in state hospitals.

The Soviet authorities are attempting to stop the rot by imposing a series of restrictions on the medical co-ops — they now cannot manage pregnancy, perform surgery or treat infectious diseases.

The DHSS is re-drafting guidelines on the operation of the Social Fund after the publication of projections which show that £25m of grants will remain unspent by the end of March.

The Social Fund replaced the old single payments system last April. The bulk of the Social Fund is set aside for loans to claimants for essential items.

It's very difficult to get a Social Fund loan — some offices have been turning down those in greatest need on the grounds that they would be unable to afford repayments!

Now the government says there should be more 'flexibility' in loan allocation.

But welfare rights groups point out that this will not alleviate the serious hardship which the abolition of single payments grants has meant for pregnant women, women leaving refugees, and many more. Bob Morely, director of the Family Welfare Association, said that discretionary payments simply "are not good enough".

The Communist Party's national executive has formally come out in favour of electoral pacts at the next election.

This should come as no surprise to anyone who has read the CP magazine *Marxism Today* over the past couple of years. That house journal of the trendy left has shown a considerable enthusiasm for a 'broad democratic anti-Thatcher alliance' of a motley selection of Tory wets, SDPers, Liberals etc.

*Marxism Today's* greatest venom has been reserved for those poor old-fashioned types like ourselves who think that the way to get rid of Thatcher is by stopping Kinnock's stampede to the right and mobilising the working class against the Tories.

The CP are offering their cooperation in this proposed electoral pact. As they received less than 0.1% of the vote at the last election, their offer is unlikely to cause any excitement.

Stories are beginning to emerge about the government's much-advertised Employment Training scheme which should prove, if anyone was in any doubt, that the scheme is a complete waste of time.

On the Wirral a trainee painter and decorator is being taught by unqualified ex-landscape gardeners. He says he generally has to show them what to do.

A trainee in Birmingham who asked for a literacy and numeracy course was sent to a private agency who sat him in a room without a teacher and gave him some sums to do.

An anonymous manager for a voluntary agency said: "We get paid at least £17.50 a week for every trainee we take on, so my boss wants us to send them on any old course just so we can keep the money."

So that's what ET's all about!

## Women for Socialism Conference Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 February "Socialist Feminism into the '90s" Wesley House, Holborn, London WC1

Saturday: Starts 10.45am

Plenary with Martha Osamor, SWAPO representative, Bernadette McAliskey, Betty Heathfield and other labour movement speakers

Workshops on the themes of: Women & the Family; Welfare State; Women and Work; Internationalism; Education & Culture

Sunday: Launching Women for Socialism

Discussions on: producing a newsletter; developing regional and national structures; and much more

For more details contact: Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY

Creche, food, accommodation, social, help with fares for women outside London.

# What Labour should say about the Constitution

## DISCUSSION

By Ian McCalman

The recent walkout of all the Scottish representatives of the opposition parties from the Commons over the government's intended abolition of the Scottish Select Committee underlines the concern felt regarding the government's continued centralising drive and its contempt for Scottish opinion.

In the post-Govan atmosphere of Scottish politics, this can only give added impetus to the moves to create a Constitutional Convention, long campaigned for by the campaign for a Scottish Assembly (CSA).

Although all of the opposition parties are pledged to such a Convention, the tensions between these parties are already apparent. The SNP, in the glow of post-Govan euphoria, are arguing that representation at the Convention be on the basis of the results of the forthcoming Euro-elections in which they expect to do well. They are also asking that part of the agenda of pre-Convention discussions be the reaction to a government refusal to heed the outcome of the Convention.

Labour meanwhile is playing it low key. Dewar and his colleagues are fearful of the implications involved and (followed by some on the Left) are continually emphasising that the "real" issues are elsewhere eg housing, health etc.

What worries Dewar and his friends is not only the possibility of the nationalists being the major gainers from such a scenario but also the constitutional implications of the road ahead.

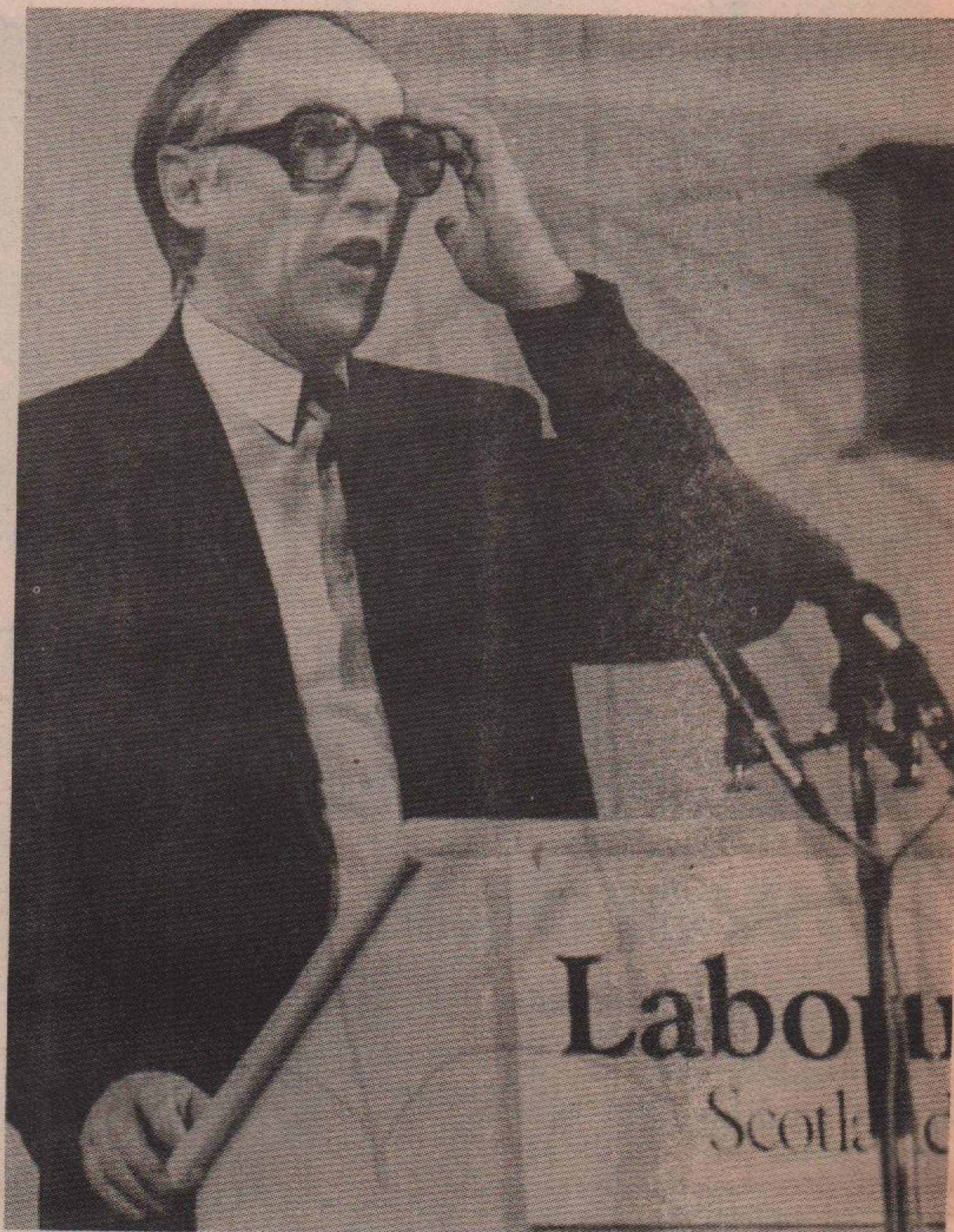
The prospect of a Convention opens up the question of a written constitutional framework, an unheard of innovation in terms of British governmental structures. How else could a federal system be developed other than in written form? The situation in Britain historically has been that of an unwritten constitution, leaving maximum room for the ruling elites to manoeuvre. A written federal framework would not disestablish the ruling elites but it would present more scope for limiting their powers.

Labour still equivocate on the need for a federal system which historically (since the 1880s) has been the property of the Liberals. That concept must now be unequivocally espoused and implemented.

A written constitution has further implications. It must be accompanied by a Freedom of Information Act and a Bill of Rights, spelling out the rights of citizenship within a democratic society.

In debating and developing such a constitutional framework, Labour must also thoroughly espouse the cause of republicanism. The monarchy, the apex of the Anglo-British system of government, has never gripped the popular consciousness in Scotland to the extent that it does in the South East of England and the time is ripe to break unequivocally from this reactionary institution which both reflects outmoded values and legitimises the prevailing governmental structures.

The Convention should also provide the opportunity for raising the issue of abolition of the House of Lords.



Scottish Labour Party leader Donald Dewar: evading the issues

Although these two demands, in relation to the Monarchy and the Lords, cannot be achieved within a Scottish context alone, the opportunity is raised to argue their irrelevance in the context of a debate concerning a written federal constitution.

What certainly can be achieved is the establishment of severe limitations upon the powers of the upper echelons of the Civil Service and the introduction of proportional representation into the electoral system.

These kinds of issues have not

hitherto been central to the thinking of the British Left. They have been regarded as peripheral to the "real" concerns of the class struggle seen largely in economic terms.

The Constitutional Convention and the possibility of an Assembly provide the opportunity not only to raise these issues but to demand their implementation, even if only in a Scottish context at first. Such a democratisation of the structures of government would open doors in terms of campaigning for the implementation of a socialist programme.

## NZ Labour stays Thatcherite

### LETTERS

You may have received the news that Roger Douglas the ultra-right Finance Minister in the far-right New Zealand Labour government has been sacked by the Prime Minister D. Lange.

This does not mean as many have been saying, that the government is going to move away from the ultra Thatcherite policies pursued until now. It simply means that exactly the same policies will be followed but that the rhetoric which accompanies the policies will be modified a bit to project a more caring image. We now have 11.3% of the workforce unemployed with no end in sight. This constitutes a gargantuan increase for New Zealand which had about 4% unemployment when the National (Tory) Party lost the election in 1984.

The Labour Party is now 19 percentage points behind the Nationalists in the opinion polls but a fact of even greater significance is that 28% of those surveyed responded in the Don't Know

category. In fact the 'Don't Knows' as a percentage of the total are almost as large a group as those responding as Labour voters.

New Zealand is doing its utmost to curry favour with USA and Australia in defence and foreign affairs (without openly repudiating anti-nuclearism.)

A new electronic spying facility at Waihopai has been started to join the already completed installations at Tangimogna and Black Birch. The only beneficiary of these facilities is the USA. The New Zealand government is poised to order a number of frigates to be built in Australia which will cost two thousand million dollars over a number of years. This, in spite of the fact that the government concedes that there is no foreseeable threat to New Zealand from any quarter.

New Zealand has in effect recognised the anti-democratic regime in Fiji and is step by step restoring financial aid to that country, thus ensuring that the regime there can entrench a racialist constitution and persecute people of Indian origin or indeed Melanesian origin who support Labour.

Hector MacNeil,  
Wellington, NZ.

# Charter 88 — right issue, wrong approach

By Martin Thomas

**T**he second list of signatories to "Charter 88" will be published on 22 January.

The Charter is a call for a new, more democratic 'constitutional settlement' in Britain. The name is intended to associate it with Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, and with the People's Charter proclaimed by the British working class in 1838; but Charter 88's signatories, when it first appeared on 29 November last year, were drawn more from the Establishment than from the people.

It was a broad range of the establishment, though: from leaders of the Democrats (Roy Jenkins, Richard Holme, Des Wilson, Richard Wainwright), through a wide range of showbiz people, writers, and academics, to figures of the literary Marxist left (Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn, Darcus Howe, Ralph Miliband, Sheila Rowbotham, A. Sivanandan) and two right wing trade union leaders (Gavin Laird of the AEU and John Ellis of the CPSA).

The call for a campaign to defend, extend and safeguard civil liberties is timely. But Charter 88 is the wrong platform for such a campaign, with the wrong people and the wrong methods.

The labour movement should launch a campaign for civil liberties; should have launched one long ago. The Tories' assault of civil liberties — from their trade union laws, through their strengthening of the police, to the poll tax, Clause 28, and rate-capping — is a policy of class struggle, and must be fought through class struggle.

As Bob Fine puts it in the new issue of *Workers' Liberty*, "The substance of authoritarianism is an attack on the social foundations of the labour movement; the trade unions, local government in the large cities, and the capacity of workers to use their vast numbers to control the streets". The substance of a fight back must correspondingly be a mobilisation of those social foundations of the labour movement.

Nothing can be done hand-in-

hand with the bigwigs of Liberalism. During the miners' strike, the Liberal-SDP Alliance criticised the Tories for not repressing the miners enough, for not using the law against them sufficiently! David Owen set the pace, but the future 'Social and Liberal Democrats' did not dissent.

No wonder, then, that Charter 88 says **nothing** about workers' rights to organise, to strike and to picket. Its version of a fight for civil liberties is one divorced and abstracted from the class struggle. Hugo Young summed it up quite aptly in the *Guardian*: "The Charter 88 movement, founded to push for the Democrats' version of constitutional reform, is the stronger for having gathered significant backing among Labour activists".

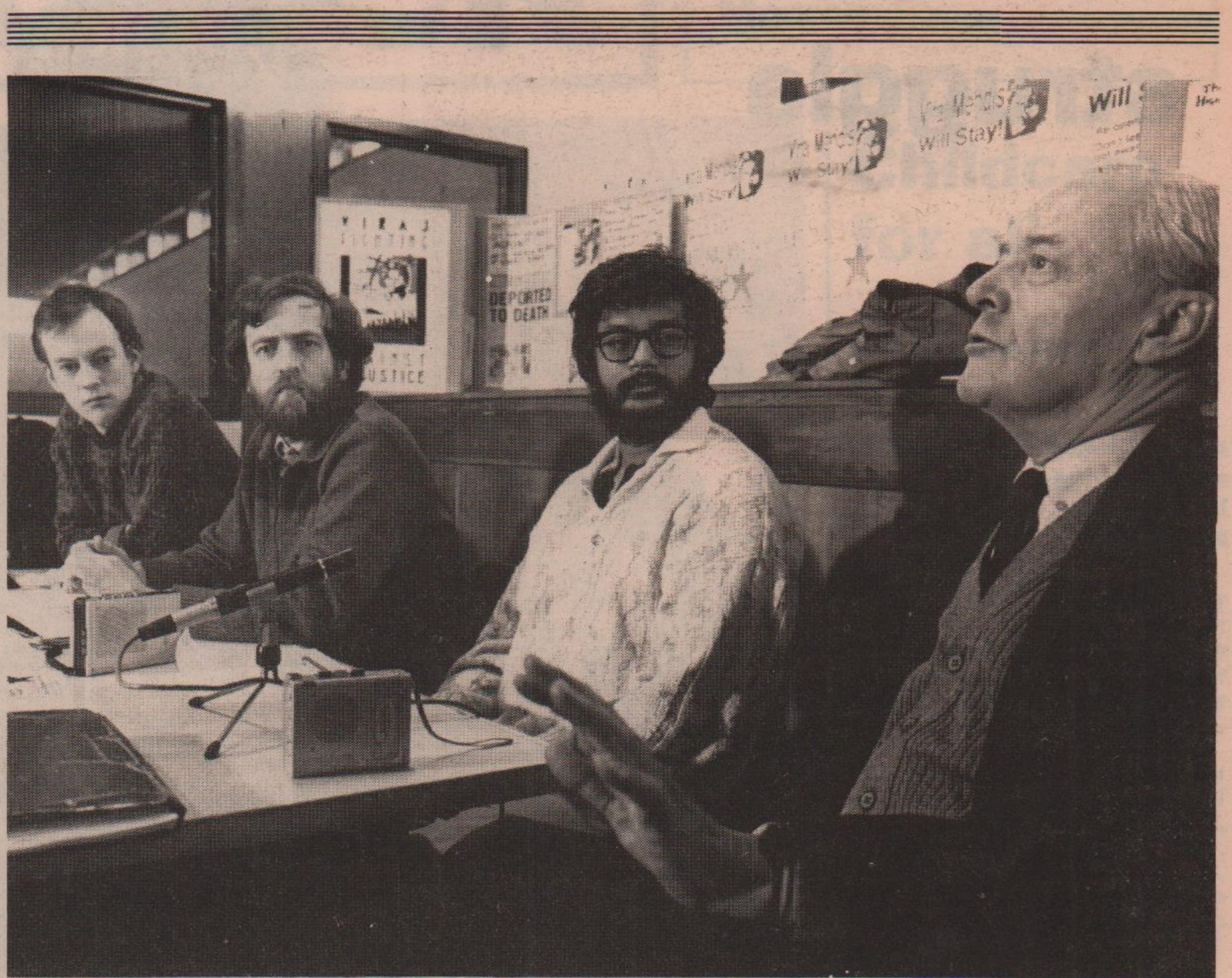
It is very much "the Democrats' version". It omits mention not only of trade union rights, but also of the "shoot to kill" policy in Ireland, the increasing aggressiveness of the police, the poll tax, and much else. On most issues it does cover, Charter 88 is vague. It calls for "reform (of) the upper house to establish a democratic, non-hereditary second chamber", for example — but why not **abolition** of the House of Lords, and what do they mean by "democratic"?

On one point, and one point only, Charter 88 is suddenly precise: "Create a fair electoral system of proportional representation".

Yes, proportional representation would be fairer than the first-past-the-post-system. But when this one element of democratic reform appears in sharp relief, with all else shrouded in fog or completely off the scene, then it is clear that the socialist signatories of Charter 88 are being taken for a ride by the Democrats.

Charter 88 was initiated by the magazine "New Statesman and Society". Its editor, Stuart Weir, was sacked as editor of the Labour Party journal "New Socialist" for advocating a Labour/Alliance pact. Charter 88 cannot but be a new attempt to float the same project.

Weir's editorial announced the Charter like this: "It will initiate, we hope, a new and historic reforming alliance of citizens of the libertarian left and the democratic



## Viraj Mendis will stay!

Press conference to protest against the deportation threat against Viraj Mendis: (from right to left) Tony Benn MP, Viraj Mendis, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Chris Proctor (Viraj Mendis Defence

Campaign). Photo Paul Herrmann (Reflex) Demonstrate, Saturday 4th February, Assemble 12 Noon, All Saints, Oxford Road, Manchester

centre in Britain, outside, between and within the political parties..."

Very high-flown; but not very different from the way that the disastrous "Popular Fronts against Fascism" were explained in the 1930s.

In a letter to the *Guardian*, Weir has protested that Charter 88 is not "a call for some sort of electoral pact; nor...a stalking horse for any political party (but) a citizens'

charter (which) has struck a chord across parties..." But civil liberties and democracy are hardly issues outside party politics! Either Charter 88 is a stalking horse for a Labour/SLD pact, or it is simply an overblown "Disgusted of Hampstead" letter to the Establishment press.

Indeed, it was only a few days after the publication of Charter 88 that John Evans became the first

member of the top Labour Party leadership to call openly for a Labour/SLD pact. The timing can hardly be accidental.

Maybe Charter 88 will do some good after all — if it spurs the labour movement into our own campaign for civil liberties. Otherwise it is a snare to pull socialists into the swamp of coalitions.

## Labour councils cooperate with tax

### POLL TAX

By Nik Barstow

**M**ost councils in England and Wales aren't only 'co-operating' with the Poll Tax — but have sorted out their plans for council departments to register people for the tax and collect it.

Only one council is really 'standing against the stream' — 'loony right' Wesminster, which has already privatised their new Poll Tax department.

Labour councils, despite saying they oppose the tax, are nothing like as strong in their opposition to the tax as Westminster is in favour. All Labour councils in England and Wales are following those in Scotland and plan to collect the

money — but they want to pretend it's not them doing it!

Their policy of 'total disassociation' amounts to little more than putting Poll Tax collection staff in 'leper colony' buildings away from other council staff, and sending out Poll Tax forms with different letterheads and different colour printing than normal council forms.

This sort of nonsense has left council trade unions as the only force with a chance of stopping the implementation of the tax, rather than fighting to stop registration and collection when the system — with all its threats of fines — is set up.

Unfortunately, the main union representing finance workers in local councils, NALGO, has recently seen its leaders trying to sabotage the fight against implementation. NALGO's 1988 Conference in June committed the union to protest against the Poll Tax, and to support mass

campaigns against it. But in December the leaders of NALGO's local council branches decided to limit the policy to one simply of protest.

On December 13th, NALGO's national local government committee decided they "could not support branches which adopted blanket principled non-cooperation with Poll Tax implementation..." because branches were starting to take action.

The next day, two NALGO branches which had adopted non-implementation policies — Islington and Knowsley — appealed to the union's National Emergency Committee for support to hold ballots on industrial action to boycott work on the Poll Tax; their views were rejected out of hand.

The arguments for council trade unionists opposing the tax aren't just limited to the undemocratic nature of the tax and the threat to civil liberties, but also to its intention — to cut council

spending, services, and jobs by increasing the price working people have to pay for those services so they will 'choose cuts'.

Despite official support being denied, it certainly won't stop disputes — where social services staff refuse to hand over confidential information to Poll Tax officers, when council staff are asked to process prosecutions and seizures of property against people who refuse to, or can't, pay the tax.

Though undermined, the non-implementation campaign isn't dead. It needs to be linked to wider community-based campaigns for non-registrations and non-payment, and kept up.

NALGO branches all round the country are putting motions to the union's conference that will ensure that a major debate takes place on Poll Tax there, and which could give the union a clear policy that involves really fighting the Poll Tax rather than leaving it to a non-payment campaign.

**Lambeth NALGO is organising a conference in March for NALGO members who want to fight the Poll Tax. Contact: Kelvin Aubrey, Lambeth NALGO, 64 Acre Lane, London SW2 5SG. March in Glasgow 18th March. Called by Strathclyde Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions.**

# Palestine and Israel's class struggle

Edward Ellis reviews 'Terrible Days: social division and political paradox in Israel' by Adam Keller (Cypres)

**B**ooks abound on Israel and the Israeli/Palestine conflict. But often they cover the same or similar ground. Adam Keller's 'Terrible Days', however, deals with rarely touched-on subjects.

His focus is on Israeli Jewish social structure, though he also gives a powerful portrayal of the position of Arabs in Israel. For example, he deals much more thoroughly with the question of 'Oriental' Jews than most writers do. Keller examines the early formation of Israeli society, and the role played in it by ethnic division. 'Oriental' immigrants came to fill the lower places in Israeli society, housed in 'development towns' in Israel's outlying regions, working for the lowest wages.

Keller describes how this ethnic division (European Ashkenazi Jews at the top, Orientals or Sephardis at the bottom — but above the Arabs, of course!) has helped, along with the national conflict, to



Adam Keller warp Israeli politics. So 'left' and 'right' have a peculiar significance. People who are 'progressive' on the Palestinian question — favour negotiations with the PLO, or favour a Palestinian state — might be, in British terms, right-wing on economic policy.

Conversely, the most rabid reactionaries on the Palestinian question can be populist, at least (or demagogic) on issues such as housing.

Racism towards Sephardi Jews pervades even the mainstream left. Keller recounts how many in the 'peace camp' tend to see Sephardis as inherently or unchangeably 'with the right'. Keller quotes one columnist associated with the 'peace camp': "I am asked to have consideration for their (the Sephardis) cultural deprivation...I am being put in a cage with a rampaging baboon... throw him a banana, after all you are brothers." (p.69)

Keller is acutely aware of the problems these attitudes pose, as unlike most writers he is concerned about the nature of the Israeli working class. He looks also at the structure of the Israeli labour movement. This is quite a widely researched topic, but Keller's account of it is particularly lucid.

He shows how the would-be



socialist origins of Israel led to a peculiar dominance in society of the vastly bureaucratic Histadrut. He describes "the paradoxes created by the Histadrut's position as Israel's largest employer and, simultaneously, its only trade union federation.

"The perpetuation of this anomaly can be attributed to the Histadrut's continuing ability to fragment, coopt or break all challenges to its authority; to the Histadrut's sheer organisational power, and...to the lack of any coherent alternative." (p.25)

Also interesting is Keller's

analysis of the kibbutzim. He shows how here, also, the socialist Zionist dream is exploitative in practice, relying upon Arab labour. Unlike many critics of the kibbutzim, however, Keller notes how many of their members participate in progressive movements in Israel.

The book's indictment of Israel's treatment of the Arabs covers perhaps more familiar ground. But it is a particularly accessible account, full of detail. He deals especially with the notorious Koenig memorandum of 1976 which recommended action against the overly

Arab demographic character of the Galilee, which threatened the Jewishness of the state.

Keller's final chapter deals with the various organisations and struggles of the peace movement, touching on a wider range of different issues.

'Terrible Days' is an extremely useful and readable addition to the literature on Israel from an Israeli radical perspective, reflecting the concerns and strategies of the Israeli radical left. It holds firmly to a 'two states' view, advocating a separate Palestinian state and a dialogue with Palestinian nationalists.

**Launch Meeting  
The Struggle for  
Palestinian-Israeli  
peace  
Speakers: Adam  
Keller, Represent-  
ative from the  
PLO, Clare Short  
MP, Represent-  
ative from the  
Jewish Socialist  
Group and other  
guest speakers  
7.30 pm Monday  
13th Feb  
Conway Hall, Red  
Lion Square,  
Holborn London  
WC1**

## British company backs police state unions

From 'The Bloc' ('Voice of Solidarity', 16A Glenfield Rd, London SW12)

In Jaslo (a small town in southern Poland) it was decided in October 1987 that a chipboard plant should join Furnel International Corporation Ltd, an international joint venture with headquarters in Warsaw. The British firm ICL of London, (with a 35% commercial interest) is the largest shareholder in the Corporation.

The workforce at the chipboard plant were informed by their director that only members of the new, party-run union would be employed by the new enterprise. This threat has become a reality. To date only members of the new union have been offered employment by the Corporation.

In Jaslo employment is difficult to find. Blackmail ensured that many people joined the new unions. However, a substantial group of workers mounted an energetic protest action against the unlawful decision of director Wieslaw Nawrot.

Their complaint was lodged with the Regional Prosecutor in Jaslo. Fifty five people signed a petition demanding that the willful breach of the fundamental labour laws be punished.

A separate complaint was presented by Wieslaw Tomasik, the representative of The Commission for Intervention and the Rule of

Law in Jaslo. His complaint stressed the lack of any regulation, under current Polish labour law, permitting an employer to set conditions of employment on the basis of trade union membership.

In fact, the decision of the director contravenes the law, which states that in matters of union membership workers must be given a free choice.

It was learnt that W. Nawrot is organising the sale of chipboard panels, as well as offering loans from the Corporation housing fund, on the condition that workers join the official trade union and take part in the 1 May procession.

Both the directors of the chipboard plant and the official trade union have as yet made no provisions to retrain discharged workers, nor have they helped workers to set-up their own work-shops, or given any guarantee of unemployment benefit during the period between employment.

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So far, the stand taken by the directors of the Furnel Company and its British partner with regard to the scandalous situation in Jaslo is unclear.

"I am not interested in the relationship between director, Mr Nawrot and his workforce at the chipboard plant in Jaslo", claimed Mr Klug, the British director of the Warsaw branch of ICL. "As far as I am concerned, the financial benefits to my firm are of paramount importance. And Mr Nawrot is observing Polish law."

"Also he has complete liberty to run his firm. Undoubtedly there must be a self-managing body, capable of selecting a new director if the current one is in frequent dispute with his workforce."

The previous three years of effort has resulted in 55% membership in the new union. Mr Nawrot has found a method of inducing the remainder.

When the chipboard plant joined the Corporation, for every 560 workers employed, 100 were to be made redundant. The terms of employment are also changing. The manager of the plant announced that the neo-union members will receive wage increases of from 30% to 100%. Nearly everyone gave in.

Despite this, however, 10% of the workforce signed a petition which was presented to the Regional Prosecutor in Jaslo by Boguslaw Gladysz, a senior foreman in the plant's transport department.

Now Mr Nawrot, after not signing the new work agreements, has dismissed 25 workers, 23 of whom had recently joined the official union. Thus none were saved, not even by compulsory entry into the new trade union which had remained untroubled by the situation.

Information Service of the Commission for Intervention and the Rule of Law No 13, 20.01.1988.

### WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working-class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control. We want

democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggle of nationalities in the Stalinist

states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

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Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

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Adam Keller's book 'Terrible Days' is available for £9.50 from:

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The Adam Keller Tour  
Committee  
24 Rye Court  
Peckham Rye  
London SE22

Cheques for the book and donations towards the cost of the tour should be made payable to 'Visit Fund'.

Adam Keller will be at meetings in the following towns:

Sunday 12th February —

Sheffield  
Monday 13th February —  
London

Wednesday 15th February

— Sheffield and Leeds

Thursday 16th February —

Newcastle

Friday 17th February —

Manchester

Monday 20th February —

Liverpool

Tuesday 21st February —

London

Wednesday 22nd February

— Brighton

Other dates and further

details will be available

soon.

# Eastern Bloc: a chronically unstable

**Bruce Robinson contributes to our discussion on the Eastern Bloc. He argues that Trotsky's theory of the 1930s is indeed outdated, but that there is no new ruling class in the Eastern Bloc systems, and that they have some particular progressive features which workers do and should defend. Part 3 of Vladimir Derer's article will appear next week.**

In many respects Trotsky's theory of Stalinism is today outmoded and needs replacement by a theory that reflects the history of the past 50 years, in particular that:

\* Stalinism has expanded into a whole number of new countries, rather than collapsing in World War II as Trotsky predicted;

\* The main contradictions in these countries are between the working class and the bureaucracy, rather than between basically healthy proletarian property relations and capitalism, with the bureaucracy endangering those property relations by its usurpation of them;

\* The bureaucracy is not just parasitic on nationalised property but has moulded the Stalinist societies into very specific forms of social relations which are neither capitalist nor socialist.

Despite having existed as long as 60 years, Stalinist societies remain highly unstable. The power of the bureaucracy is maintained by force, atomising the working class so that no collective action is possible. Once the barriers to collective action are removed, as in Hungary in 1956 or Poland in 1980-1, the Stalinist regimes are shown to lack any popular support and any ideological legitimacy.

Questions of workers' control and state power immediately come to the fore and the regime can only survive by using force to reimpose the atomisation of the working class. This instability of Stalinism is the reason why no independent unions can exist there, though they can in countries such as South Korea.

The Stalinist states have also been for a long time in economic crisis. It is possible to develop highly backward countries up to a certain point by a combination of terror/slave labour camps,

Stakhanovism, squeezing the peasantry and command planning from above.

However, the system cannot go beyond that to high-technology production (which requires a cooperative and at least somewhat motivated workforce). It cannot respond flexibly to the needs of the population, for those needs can be expressed neither through the market nor through democratic planning.

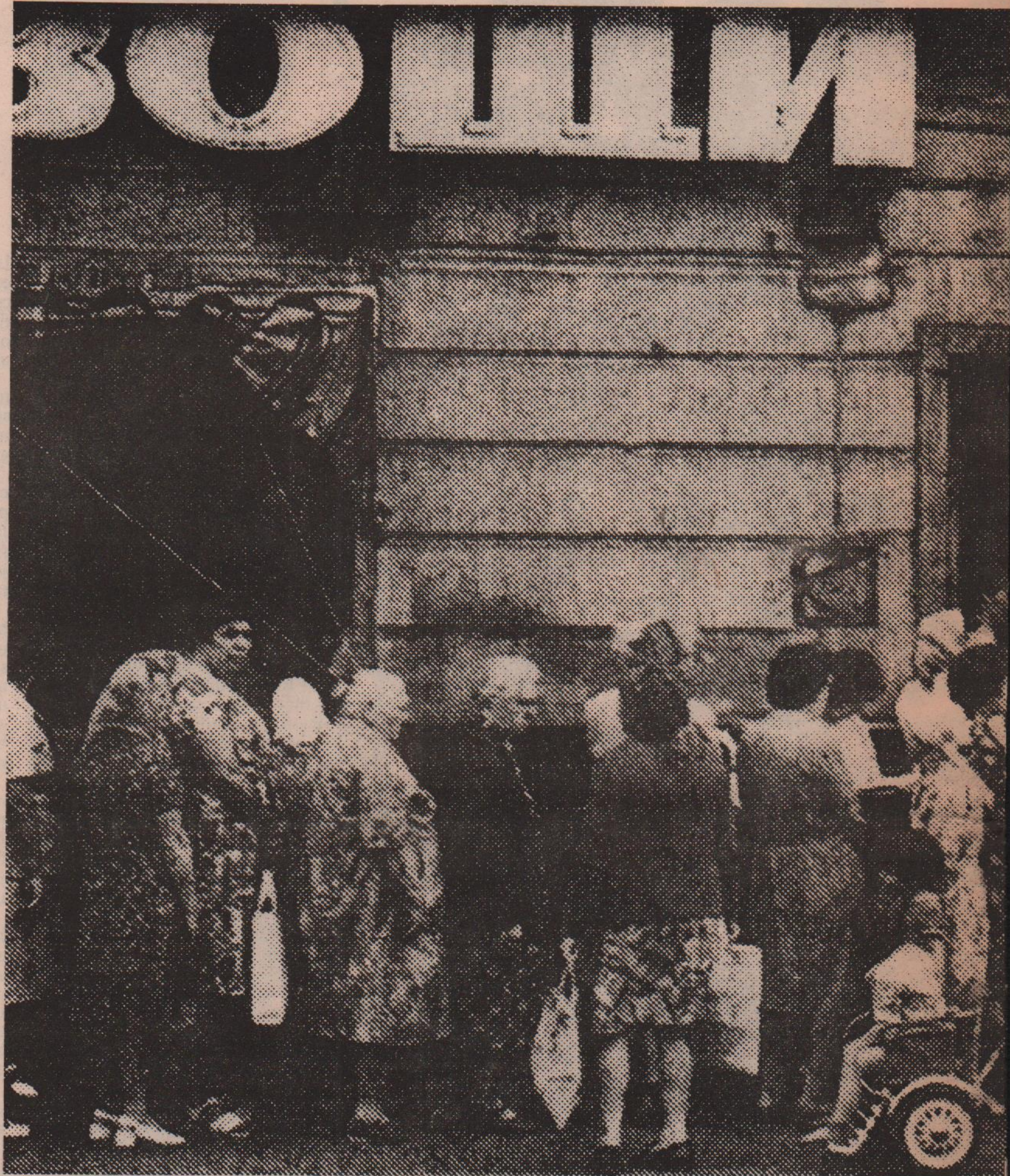
The Stalinist societies possess neither the dynamism of capitalism nor that which would be unleashed by real democratic planning. As Trotsky wrote:

"The working people themselves must participate in the running of the economy if it is really to be socialism, that is, production and other economic activity for the benefit of the people. It must not be that the bureaucrats unilaterally make decisions and the people simply obey — in that case the plans will not be corrected by those whom these plans ostensibly should be serving.

"Under capitalism the correction takes place — or more accurately took place — through competition. Under socialism that can happen only through workers' and farmers' control. If that is not done, disproportions can develop which can lead to disproportionate results." (June 1935)

Thus these economies, once they have reached a certain level, stagnate and are unable to fulfill the real needs of the workers. Even the bureaucracy itself cannot really control how its plans will be executed, as it also consists of conflicting interests, which are arbitrated by and within the top levels of the Communist Parties and the state.

Introducing elements of market economy into these states is seen by the bureaucracy as a means of giving them some dynamism. This is the main motivation behind



perestroika in the USSR today.

But, as we are now seeing in China, there are limits to how far Stalinism can let market forces develop. The bureaucracy's independent existence is tied up with the existence of nationalised property and the existing system in the Stalinist states.

The bureaucracy has neither the historic mission or viability nor the independent ideology of a new class. Many 'new class' theorists content themselves with a general description of the USSR and a few general arguments as to why what exists there must be presided over by a ruling class. For Marxists the existence of a ruling class is tied up with the need to develop the productive forces under specific social relations of production.

**So is there anything progressive in the Stalinist states?**

In relation to the real possibilities of working class democracy and socialism, Stalinism is totally reactionary. But this does not answer the question as to whether the Russian Revolution has degenerated so far that nothing progressive remains, or whether the Stalinist states have any features that go beyond capitalism.

To recognise such features does not necessarily imply a particular 'tag' for the Stalinist states. Max Shachtman originally thought that

while they represented a new form of class society, they were nevertheless progressive in relation to capitalism.

Our basic approach should remain that of Trotsky in 1940: "Our general appraisal of the Kremlin and the Comintern does not, however, alter the particular fact that the statification of property in the occupied territories is in itself a progressive measure. We must recognise this openly..."

"The statification of the means of production is, as we said, a progressive measure. But its progressiveness is relative; its specific weight depends on the sum-total of all the other factors. Thus, we must first and foremost establish that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism, cloaked by 'socialist' measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the proletarian revolution by bureaucratic manoeuvres, and so on.

"This evil by far outweighs the progressive content of Stalinist reforms in Poland. In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR, becomes a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist, development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy." (In Defence of Marxism, New Park. pp.23-4)


There is a progressive content to the "particular measures" carried through by Stalinism, despite the generally reactionary nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

State ownership of the means of production is part of our programme, whether for Stalinist countries, or advanced or backward capitalism. It is a pre-condition of socialism, though socialism is only realised when that state-owned industry is democratically controlled by the workers and forms part of an overall plan for society as a whole.


Nevertheless we defend even 1945-style capitalist nationalisation against attempts to reverse it, not because the workers' conditions or wages in those industries are necessarily "better" (compare the Eastern bloc!) nor because it is itself inherently socialist.

Similarly we defend nationalisation in the Stalinist states because any revolution which will lead to real workers' rule in those countries will build on the basis of the existing state ownership of the means of production. A reversion to private property would be regressive both in terms of the workers' immediate interests and our long-term aims.

If workers organisations such as Solidarnosc nevertheless were to wish to move towards a market economy, we still defend their right to exist and not give any support to the bureaucracy against them as the



## REFORM OR REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE?

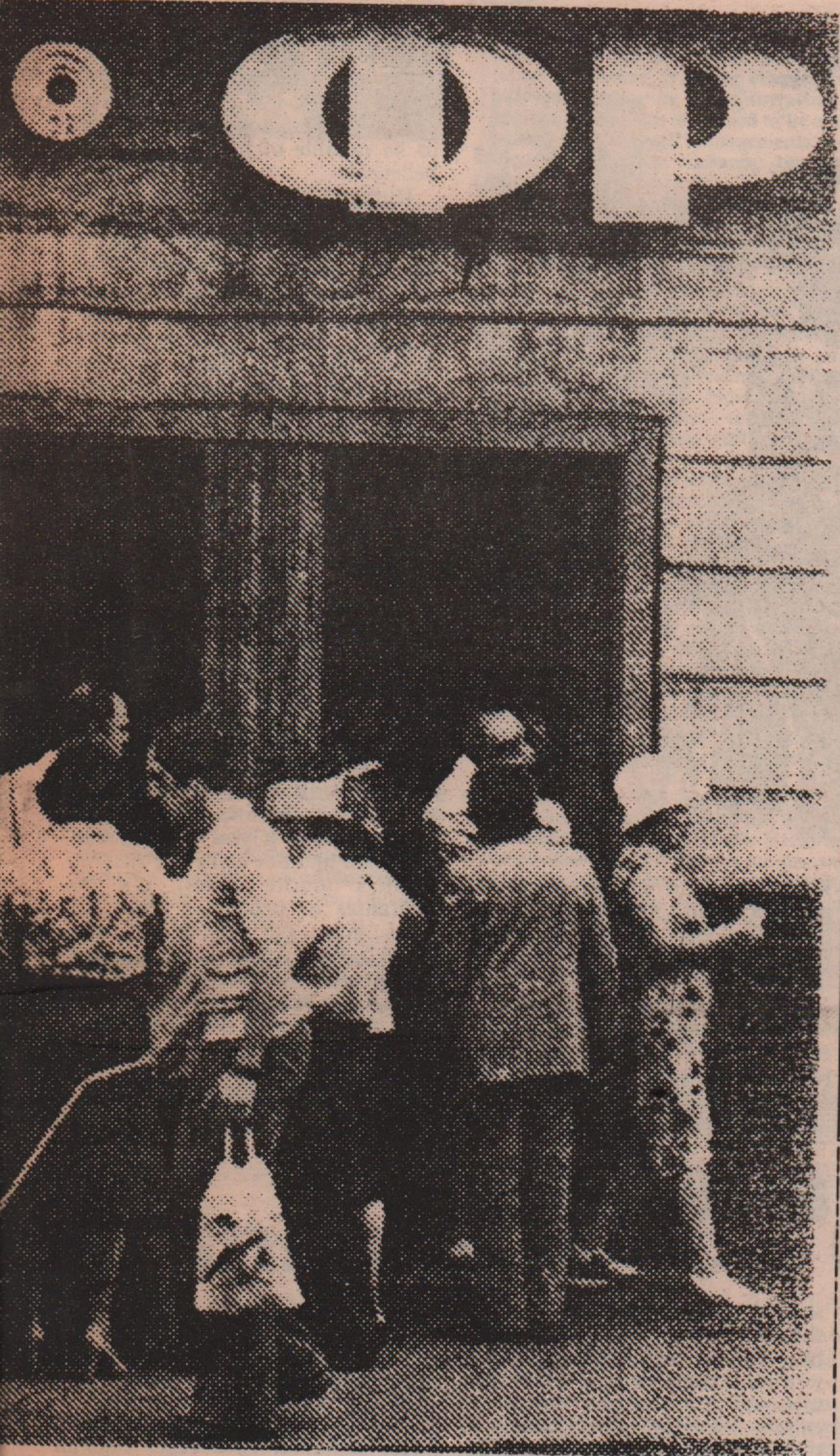


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system



supposed "defender of nationalised property". We would nevertheless argue they were wrong to do so.

In practice, in all the major working class upsurges in Eastern Europe workers' control rather than the restoration of private ownership has been the focus of workers' demands.

The same approach applies to the extent that these societies are not subject to the law of the market and retain the capacity for planning. We should emphasise that the bureaucracy cannot plan properly because it cannot allow working class initiative, rather than rejecting planning as meaningless in Stalinist societies, or supporting market reforms because they have working class support.

The system in the Eastern Bloc has granted a number of economic concessions to the working class: low levels of unemployment and high job security; subsidised prices and rents. To some extent, these represent concessions to the negative pressure of the working class; in other respects they may be necessary for the system itself (eg. hoarding labour).

Nevertheless they represent something of considerable importance to the workers in those countries. For example, in Poland, both in 1976 and 1980, announcements of rises in food prices led to waves of strikes, which in 1980 directly led to the formation of Solidarnosc.

A recent Guardian report on the far-reaching introduction of market reforms in China states: "To put Chinese factories on a commercial footing would mean sacking up to 30 million workers or 20% of the urban industrial workforce. To really allow the market to set prices would inevitably mean real hardship for millions."

Similarly perestroika is aimed to increase the intensity of work, close unprofitable factories and cut subsidies on food, the carrot being the promise of a switch of resources to the production of consumer goods.

To the extent that the market is allowed free rein the bureaucracy will come increasingly into conflict with the working class. Our position should be to defend those elements of the existing system that are in the interests of the working class, independent of all factions of the bureaucracy.

It is of course true that features such as job security and low rents do not in themselves define whether a society is progressive or not. However if working class living standards cannot prove that a regime is progressive, no more can they be used to prove it's not.

If higher workers' living standards in the West show the superiority of market capitalism, then market capitalism was also progressive in relation to the healthy but backward workers' state of Lenin and Trotsky.

## Fake unions in USSR

By Stan Crooke

**T**here are no trade unions in the Soviet Union. The All-union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) is not the Soviet equivalent of the TUC. It is a branch of the Soviet government. Its function is the opposite of a trade union: it does not defend workers against the state, but the state against the workers.

The theoretical rationale for the role played by what pass themselves off as trade unions in the Soviet Union is that the working class holds state power and that the state is therefore a workers' state which should be protected and strengthened (ie. against the workers themselves).

Since the Communist Party is the ruling party the trade unions have the job of carrying out its policies: "...The Congress (of the AUCCTU) assures the Leninist Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union...that the trade unions of the USSR will always be reliable supporters of the Party and its active helpers..."

The top men in the AUCCTU are therefore Party members, not elected to their positions by rank and file workers, but appointed by their fellow bureaucrats in the Communist Party. In general, they have little or no experience of "trade union" work. Shelepin, last-but-one AUCCTU president, was transferred to the post from that of head of the KGB.

Although the Soviet media, and the admirers of the Soviet bureaucracy abroad, make great play of the supposed say which Soviet "trade unions" have in the running of society, their role is in fact small.

Rates of basic pay are decided nationally, within the framework of the overall economic "plan". In the individual workplace the basic rate of pay depends upon this national decision. Even if they so desired (and they do not anyway), Soviet "trade unions" could not therefore win higher basic rates of pay at workplace level through challenging

management.

Nor do "trade unions" have any say in production quotas, upon fulfillment of which other elements of workers' pay depends. Such quotas are partly determined by the production target set for a workplace by a higher level of the bureaucracy, and partly by production norms set by the workplace management on a supposedly "scientific" basis. There is no element of a bargaining process between trade unions and management.

If the "unions" have no say in what workers are to be paid or how much they are expected to produce, they certainly have an important role to play in ensuring the maximum rates of productivity from the workforce. According to the statutes of the AUCCTU:

"The Soviet trade unions direct their activities towards securing a further and powerful advance in all branches of the economy, fulfillment and overfulfillment of economic plans...Trade unions jointly with the organs of management organise socialist emulation among workers...they organise the movement for a communist attitude towards work."

Increased productivity is not to be achieved by the "unions" winning better working conditions, which would lead to more job satisfaction and, in turn, to a higher output. It is to be achieved by better labour discipline. The KGB-chief-turned-trade-union-bureaucrat Shelepin summed this up in 1972:

"It is our commitment to step up the struggle for the strengthening of labour and production discipline...Everyone must know that idlers and slackers, job-switchers and bad workmen will receive no indulgence or leniency and that nothing will protect them from the wrath of their comrades. The rights and opportunities of the trade unions for this are great and they must be used to a substantially improved degree."

The All-Union Congress of Soviet "trade unions" is, according to its statutes, meant to meet once every four years. In fact, it meets on the odd occasion that the Party bureaucracy finds it useful for it to meet — between 1932 and 1954 it met twice. Even if it met more often it would not thereby be more

democratic — the congresses are merely a series of speeches plus the obligatory unanimous vote.

The "unions" are so hand-in-glove with management that they do not even provide their members with the protection they are accorded by the Soviet legal system. No worker can be sacked without the approval of their "union". But over 50% of workers who appeal to the local "People's Court" against their sacking win their case. This says more about the spinelessness of the "unions" than about the "fairness" of the Soviet legal system.

On the hitherto rare occasions that Soviet workers have dared to go on strike — thus opening themselves up to the catch-all charge of "anti-Soviet agitation" — they have not received any support from their "unions", even when, as in Novocherkassk in 1962, their strike had been crushed by troops.

Attempts by workers in the Soviet Union to set up genuine trade unions, free of state control, have swiftly been stomped upon by the bureaucracy, with the blessing, of course, of the official "trade unions".

In 1977 the Ukrainian miners Klebanov and Nikitin launched the Association of Free Trade Unions. Within a year the Association had effectively been destroyed, crushed by harassment, arrests and detention of its founders in psychiatric hospitals.

The following year the Free Inter-professional Association of Workers was launched in Moscow. Despite the majority of its founder members being jailed, sent to mental hospitals, or despatched into exile shortly after the launch of the Association, and despite subsequent waves of arrests, the Association continues to exist, albeit weakly.

Although Gorbachev has encouraged more debate and criticism within the fake state-run "unions", and has also finally allowed Klebanov to be released, there is no prospect of him permitting a rebirth of genuine trade unionism in the Soviet Union. Free trade unionism will not be achieved in the Soviet Union as a concession from Gorbachev but as part of the struggle against the ruling bureaucracy and its sham "trade unions".

## ACTIVISTS' DIARY

**Saturday 21 January.** Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign conference. City University, Northampton St, London EC1. Starts 10am. Contact: 01-253 2464.

**Saturday 21 January.** 'Further Education Socialists' planning meeting, in London. Details: contact Mark, 01-639 7967.

**Saturday 21/Sunday 22 January.** Weekend school for women supporters of Socialist Organiser. Details: contact Cate, 01-639 7965.

**Monday 23 January.** London SO education series on British labour history. 'The Chartists'. Speaker: Martin Thomas. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1. 7pm.

**Monday 23 January.** Manchester SO meeting. 'The Arab-Israeli conflict'. The Millstone pub, Thomas St. 7.30pm.

**Monday 23 January.** Leeds SO meeting. 'The New Realism'. Leeds Univ. Student Union. 7.30pm.

**Monday 30 January.** London Socialist Forum: 'Socialist Feminism into the 1990s'. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. 7.30pm.

**Monday 30 January.** Sheffield SO meeting: 'Arabs, Jews and Socialism'. Speaker: John O'Mahony. SCCAU, West St. 8pm.

**Saturday 4 February.** 'Alternative Policy Review' conference. Queen Mary College, East London.

**Monday 6 February.** London SO education series on British labour history. 'The New Unionism and the first Marxist groups'. Speaker: Bruce Robinson. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1. 7pm.

**Monday 6 February.** Manchester SO: debate with Socialist Outlook on the Eastern bloc.

**Monday 6 February.** Nottingham SO meeting: 'Why the PLO has gone for two states'. Speaker: Paul McGarry. 7.30. International Community Centre, Mansfield Rd.

**Saturday 11/Sunday 12 February.** Socialist Student weekend conference, in Sheffield. Details: contact Mark, 01-639 7967.

**Saturday 11 February.** Marxism Today 'New Times, New Thinking' conference. Caxton House, St Johns Way, London N19. Starts 10am.

**Sunday 12 February.** Cardiff SO public meeting. Speaker: John O'Mahony.

**Saturday 18/Sunday 19 February.** Socialist Organiser industrial weekend school. Manchester Poly Student Union, Oxford Rd. Contact Tom, 01-639 7965.

**Monday 20 February.** London SO education series. 'The formation of the Labour Party'. Speaker: Cathy Nugent. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1. 7pm.

**Saturday 25 February.** Women for Socialism conference. Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2. Contact Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY (01-992 0945).

**Saturday 8/Sunday 9 April.** 'Gorbachev and the European Left' conference. ULU, Malet St, London WC1. Contact: Gus Fagan, 30 Bridge St, Oxford OX2 0BA.

**Saturday 29 April.** CLPs conference on Party Democracy.

**Saturday 20 May.** Socialist Conference Local Government Conference. Shawfield School, Rochdale. Contact: Tony Trehy, 7 East View, Mitchell St, Rochdale.

**Saturday 17 June.** Socialist Conference. Octagon Centre, Sheffield.



## Who chooses our TV?

TV

By Jean Lane

The average American viewer apparently reaches for his or her channel-changer on average once every three minutes.

Although we haven't reached this quick-change style of TV viewing in Britain yet, we are getting there, according to Channel 4's chief, Michael Grade (interviewed on '3 Minute Culture', BBC2, Sunday). One of the reasons for it in the USA is the vast choice of programmes on offer. And one of the results is, according to Grade, the creation of an audience which does not have to think any more but can switch to the easiest, least challenging item to watch.

The logic of his argument appears to be against the opening up of new channels and the widening of choice. But surely he is missing the point.

During the interview we were treated to a view of Grade presiding over a scheduling meeting when an important decision is being made: whether Mork and Mindy (that thought-provoking programme with an in-depth analysis of the ills of our society) should clash with Neighbours (another one) or Mr Ed (the talking horse). All of them clash between 5.30 and 6pm of a weekday evening! Surely the question is not how much drivel we have to choose from, but who chooses what we watch.

If the average American viewer is, like us, offered a choice between James Bond or Bob Monkhouse or — after deregulation — between 10 channels of American soaps and 10 of Australian ones, then is not the three minute channel-changer a sign of intelligence: a desperate search for something decent to watch?

Grade goes on to explain that TV does not tell us what to think. It merely offers us alternatives. "TV did not create Thatcherism," for example.

Well, that's true. Thatcherism is the logical ideology for a ruling class in trouble. But if Grade really thinks that all TV does is offer the different political options and lets the people choose then he is either naive and in the wrong job, or (as I suspect) doing exactly what he says TV doesn't do — being economical with the truth — giving, in fact, the lie to his words as he says them.

TV didn't create the ruling class or the working class either. It didn't create the class struggle. But it is in the hands of one class and shows the other its own version of the truth.

Thus, the cameras were only allowed to be pointed in certain directions during miners' clashes with the police during the great strike. Thus, during the Watts Riots in the '60s in America, full length James Brown concerts were put on the box.

Thus, in fact, an overpaid git like Grade or a dangerous one like Murdoch can choose what goes on the airwaves for us and call it "freedom of choice."

# Real life in the townships

## CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Mapantsula'

The posters for the film 'Mapantsula' claim 'Banned in South Africa!' It's not hard to see why. This excellent film shows how impossible it is for black people to try to live normal, apolitical lives in South Africa's townships. Their daily lives inevitably bring them up against the racist apartheid state. Neutrality is impossible.

'Mapantsula' tells the story of a petty criminal, nicknamed Panic, who lives in Soweto and who scrapes a poor living by robbing whites and housebreaking. When he's broke, he sponges off his mother or his girlfriend, Pat, who has a job as maid to a prosperous white family in Johannesburg.

Panic isn't much of a tough though. Despite his readily deployed flick knife, he's small and a bit of a weakling, given to boasting and bragging. He never lets truth get in the way of a good story.

He's not in any sense political. He likes to drink and dance and have a good time. He can't be bothered to work for the poor wages offered to black people. He feels no guilt about living off Pat and his mother, both hard working women.

His mother complains about rent



increases, but Panic can't get worried about it. He's not interested in going to meetings or fighting the police. Let other people do that; he's got other things on his mind.

For all his weaknesses, Panic isn't loathsome. There is a touching kind of vulnerability about him.

He's naive and simple. When he gets drawn into a protest and ends up in gaol, he's pitiful. He doesn't have the comradeship that sustains the other men in the cells; he's a complete outsider.

With his crime record, the police can really put the screws on, trying to force him to inform on the the

other men in the cells. Though he's always been out to save his skin before, Panic begins to realise he can't do that now. Times have changed; he can't stay out of the struggle any more.

The characters in the film aren't simple ones. Panic himself is a selfish, petty crook who turns out to be capable of heroism, and it's believable.

Duma, a trade union activist he meets, is a real hero, who runs considerable risks defending workers' rights, yet he's the kind of Sir Galahad who uses his good deeds as a come on to women.

Pat, who's long been downtrodden by Panic and her employers alike, begins to feel angry and to want to fight back.

This film doesn't present its main characters as saints. Too often anti-apartheid films present their black characters as fleshless martyrs in a hope to gain our sympathies. Such an approach is wrong. Black South Africans deserve justice because they are human and no human being should have to endure that kind of oppression.

But 'Mapantsula' is different. The characters live; they're not just abstract figures dreamed up by outraged liberalism. Because they seem real, the story has much more resonance. It has plenty to say about life in the townships.

There, even if you are prepared to lie low and not make any fuss, as Panic's mother does, it's no guarantee of protection from the state. What the film says is that black South Africans can't make peace with the apartheid regime, can't live with it, even if they try. The circumstances of everyday life force them into conflict with the regime, even against their will.

# Why seat belts save lives

## SCIENCE

By Les Hearn

Looking through last month's British Medical Journals, I came across the following interesting items.

**Lasting effects of smoking in pregnancy.** Most people are aware that smoking in pregnancy can affect the foetus, with a higher incidence of perinatal mortality (death around the time of birth), including stillbirth. The rate is increased by over a quarter where the woman smokes more than 10 cigarettes a day in the second half of pregnancy.

Babies of smokers are on average 6oz (170g) lighter than those of non-smokers.

It now seems that smoking in pregnancy affects the growth rate of surviving children so that there is a small but real difference in the average height of adult children of pregnant smokers and non-smokers. The difference is nearly a centimetre in men and over 1.5 cm in women, probably corresponding to a deficit in body size of between 1.5 and 3%.

This information was taken from an on-going study of all the children born in the week 3-9 March 1958.

The researchers also detected a small but significant deficit in educational attainment though the origin of this remains doubtful.

**Dangers of ejector seats.** As a motor-cyclist, I am a keen observer of the stupidity of (some) car drivers and passengers. I frequently

observe, for example, children unrestrained in the back seats, often standing up, sometimes perched between the front seat, even with their heads poking out of the sun roof!

One of the risks of not being belted into a vehicle is that of being ejected or thrown out during a collision. Researchers at an Oxford hospital surveyed the fates of car occupants who had been ejected this way. They found that, out of some 1500 injured over a two year period in their hospital's area, some 3% or 45 had been ejected from the vehicle.

These people were five times more likely to be seriously injured or killed.

Back seat passengers had a 1 in 12 chance of being thrown out, none of those being thrown out wearing seat belts. Five front seat occupants were ejected despite wearing seat belts (perhaps they weren't tight enough). Two others were small children being carried in the laps of front seat passengers!

Why is it more injurious to be ejected? Certainly, ejection is more likely in higher speed accidents but it may be that back seat passengers not ejected are to some extent cushioned by hitting the seats in front of them and indeed the bodies of front seat occupants. Those thrown "clear" experience the full force of impact with the ground etc.

It would be interesting to see to what extent injuries to belted front seat occupants are due to being struck by the bodies of unbelted back seat passengers.

Reluctant as I am to say "There ought to be a law", I think there

should. All vehicle occupants should be belted in and there should be publicity campaigns at least as well-funded as the ones advertising fast new cars. Local authorities should insist that all occupants of their vehicles be belted and insurance companies should offer discounts where belts are fitted.

**Lack of exercise kills!** That's my conclusion, not that of a survey relating exercise and calcium in the diet to hip fracture among the elderly.

The survey, in Southampton, found that women and men who took little or no exercise (defined as standing, walking briskly, carrying loads, climbing stairs, doing housework or gardening) ran up to 8 times the risk of breaking a hip.

This is due to the loss of calcium from the bones (osteoporosis), a process most pronounced in women

after the menopause. In men, it can be slowed by eating lots of calcium-rich foods and in both men and women it can be slowed or even reversed by exercise.

Putting stress on bones, even by just standing, encourages calcium to be deposited, strengthening them.

Most elderly people get ill and die after breaking a hip so it is obviously important to encourage exercise and a healthy diet.

**... and thereby hung a tail.** In one BMJ, there was a photo of a baby boy born recently with a tail, it was about two inches long, covered in downy hair, and moved independently. It was immediately removed which I suppose is understandable. I've often thought it would be nice to have a tail. I hope they've kept it to show him when he gets older.



## Out now!

The new issue of Workers' Liberty includes Max Shachtman's key articles on Stalinism (in print for the first time for decades); Zbigniew Kowalewski on super-exploitation in the Eastern Bloc; Bob Fine on civil liberties in Britain; and articles and reviews on 'post-Fordism', modern architecture, Ireland, Palestine, Thatcherism, the Greens and much else. £1.50 plus 22p post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

# The twin apparitions: inflation and the wages fight

## INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

**A**n old spectre, that was supposed to have been exorcised once and for all by the glorious Thatcher revolution, has returned to stalk the land.

This terrifying apparition goes by the name of 'inflation'. And legend has it that hordes of greedy workers periodically gather together to initiate an ancient ritual called the 'Pay Claim'; this in turn sends weak and short-sighted employers scurrying to reach a 'settlement', which conjures up the hideous spectre.

Funnily enough, Mrs Thatcher and her cronies — who usually like to blame the working class for just about everything — always rather sneered at the old superstitions surrounding inflation. It had nothing to do with wages, they said: so long as the borrowing requirement is kept down, there can be no excessive monetary creation and so no inflation.

Or, in the recent words of Chancellor Lawson, "inflation is a monetary phenomenon and therefore must be dealt with by monetary policies." (A statement that led a writer in the *Financial Times* to recall Dr Johnson's comment on a similar plausible-sounding non-sequitur: "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat.")

But with inflation creeping up to 7% and oxen-driver Lawson's credentials as Economic Genius of Our Times looking increasingly unconvincing, the old superstitions are making a big comeback.

Even Lawson has taken to issuing dire warnings to employers, talking of plague and pestilence that inevitably result from "excessive" wage set-

tlements. Paradoxically, the main source of the present panic over wages (apart, of course, from the exaggerated but real decline in unemployment) is something that was supposed to be a big victory for "strong" managements over their bolshevik shop stewards: two-year pay deals.

A report by Incomes Data Services (a business-sponsored 'pay research agency') warns that "The increased willingness of employers seeking long-term deals to commit themselves to unqualified pay increases in the future reflects some of the wider pressures on pay." The report singles out in particular, the settlement reached after the Ford strike, that last November triggered an 8.9% increase — the second instalment of a two-year deal guaranteeing rises of inflation plus 2.5%.

At the time of the strike, many Ford workers rightly regarded the deal as a sell-out and felt that much more could have been achieved. Nevertheless, the deal marked an important breakthrough and boosted shopfloor confidence especially in the motor industry. The formula was recently copied by Nissan, anxious to pacify a workforce showing increasing dissatisfaction with wages and conditions in Sunderland where an AEU sweetheart deal had proved so attractive to the workforce that nearly 8% of employees had bothered to join the union.

Another deal that looms large in the IDS role of dishonour is the HP Bulmer settlement. Sleeper has to admit that he has no idea who HP Bulmer are (brown sauce?, cider?) but they apparently employ 890 workers and have agreed to increase basic rates by £8 or 6.5% from last October with a further rise a year later amounting to the RPI increase plus 0.5%.

Pilkingtons (I'm more confident of this one: they're the glass people) have agreed rises worth 10% over two years plus separate inflation-proofing formulas to protect real earnings until 1990.

IDS concludes with horror that the

Ford deal "appears to have been taken as a guide rather than a warning of the dangers of linking pay to the Retail Price Index." The return of the dreaded inflation spectre may also account for the relatively tough line that AEU president Bill Jordan has (so far) been taking over the Confed/Engineering Employers Federation negotiations: last year Brother Jordan was willing to settle for total flexibility throughout the industry and next to nothing on the Minimum Time Rate (which has little effect on basic pay rates but is important when it comes to sick pay, overtime and shift allowances), in exchange for the phased introduction for a 37½ hour week.

He was thwarted by a rank and file revolt and a surprisingly recalcitrant AEU National Committee. This year, Our Bill has rejected the employers' initial 5.1% offer out of hand and cited the 8.9% Ford deal as "the going rate". But engineering workers should still be on their guard: Jordan is undoubtedly still toying with the idea of some sort of national no-strike deal, plus last year's aborted flexibility arrangement.

But it is at Jaguar, until recently the

glistening jewel in the crown of the Tories' privatisation and "industrial relations" measures, that the spectre has made its most dramatic appearance of late. After years of apparently rational behaviour, the Jag workforce seems to be in the grip of powerful, primitive emotions brought on by the spectre and its attendant manifestation, "the mortgage rate": in last week's ballot on management's "final" offer (a two-year deal working out at between 4 and 5% per annum), just over 2,000 workers voted to accept, while 5,604 rejected the deal.

Union officials had not even recommended a rejection. Now a further ballot is to be held on "industrial action" in pursuit of the £17 a week claim.

AEU official John Allen lamented, "It is the last thing we want. Our negotiating team has bent over backwards in the last four months to ensure that industrial action was seen as a last resort. Now it looks as if we are going to be driven down that route by the company." Sleeper confidently predicts more primitive rituals in the general vicinity of Coventry and Castle Bromwich in the near future.

## IN BRIEF

A walkout by stacker drivers at Austin Rover's Longbridge plant, Birmingham, halted production of the Rover 200 series on Monday.

Ford has announced a European reorganisation, switching Sierra production from Dagenham to Genk, Belgium, with the loss of around 500 jobs. Union officials meet Thursday to discuss their response.

Teachers: In response to AUT action, management at St Andrews university have proposed a 5% pay offer to their lecturers. Whilst insisting on a national deal, union leaders hope this will encourage

management divisions.

NUS leaders have accepted a 6½% pay offer. They had threatened to ballot for industrial action over a previous 6% offer, and management had threatened to break up national pay bargaining.

Airport firefighting officers are threatening industrial action over management attempts to end national pay bargaining.

UCW leaders are still threatening strike action over the downgrading of 250 Crown Post offices.

Government Training Agency figures show the ET scheme to be running 25% below target figures.

The Scottish TUC has called an anti-poll tax demo on 1 April in Edinburgh.

# Reinstate Mick Gosling!

**O**n this page we print a resolution from the 4,000-strong TGWU 1/1107 Branch at Ford Dagenham seeking your support in its campaign to win the reinstatement of Branch Chair, Mick Gosling.

He has been framed and sacked by Ford management then smeared in the press before his appeal is heard. Several features of his sacking make it of wide concern to our movement.

1. When first hauled before senior managers the major charge against him was that he was absent from the plant during working time chairing a meeting on Ireland addressed by Bernadette McAliskey. In fact this was an official lunchtime meeting called by the Branch and Mick was able to call over 20 witnesses to prove he was not absent in working time.

This charge — carrying an automatic five-shift suspension — was dropped, but Ford's press department encouraged this story in the press (including a ludicrous account in *The Sun* that he actually was in Ireland). In a climate of growing censorship and hysteria concerning discussion of the Irish question this was clearly a political move by Ford management to try and undercut support for Mick on the shop floor.

2. Mick is also being held responsible for three "unconstitutional stoppages" of work on the Sierra production line where he works. He has effectively denied these allegations — being absent from the plant the day one of the incidents occurred and in the medical when another stoppage started. Nevertheless, the Assembly Plant Stewards Committee believe he is being scapegoated for the large number of unofficial stoppages in the plant. They claim sacking a prominent trade

unionist over this issue would be a major victory for management.

It was the workers in the Dagenham Assembly Plant who led the unofficial action which preceded the official pay strike of February 1988 — a strike rightly seen as restoring morale in the trade union movement and giving Thatcher one in the eye. The Assembly Plant went so far as to reject the final deal, believing more could have been won, and has been the most resistant to the job cuts and changes in working practices which Ford want.

3. When Ford's frame-up fell apart, management tried to get him to sign a document accepting a Final Warning and making him liable to instant dismissal for taking part in or encouraging any future action whether official or unofficial. This was rejected outright by the trade unions in the plant which see it as a fundamental attack on the right to free speech and assembly and an effective ban on all trade union activity.

4. Mick's sacking is also an attack on the TGWU 1/1107 Branch, a powerful supporter of progressive policies within the labour movement, and one of the focal points of continuing attacks within the TGWU aimed at destabilising the union. The 1/1107 Branch has played a leading role in winning successful boycott action against work to and from South Africa in the Assembly Plant.

The campaign for Mick Gosling's reinstatement is therefore a defence of shop floor organisation, a defence of socialist policies in the trade union movement and a defence of basic democratic rights. This is why we are urging you to raise the issue and move the resolution printed below.

**Statement from the Socialist Conference.**

## Move this motion

This branch condemns the victimisation

and sacking by the Ford Motor Company of Mick Gosling, Chair of the TGWU 1/1107 Ford Central Branch at Dagenham.

We believe this is part of a continuing attack on the rights of all trade unionists and is totally unacceptable to our movement.

We fully support his union's rejection of the special conditions of employment Ford tried to impose on him. These amounted to Mick working with the constant threat of dismissal over his head and effectively denied his rights to free speech and assembly and trade

union activity.

We call for his unconditional reinstatement on appeal and will:

1. Write a letter of protest at his victimisation and sacking and demanding his reinstatement to John Hougham, Director of Personnel, Ford Motor Company, Eagle Way, Brentwood, Essex CM13 3BW.

2. Send resolutions of support and copies of any correspondence with Ford to the branch.

Steve Riley, Branch Secretary, 27 Courtland Grove, Thamesmead, London SE28.

## Fightback in DHSS!

**By Steve Battlemuch, CPSA DHSS Section Executive Committee (personal capacity)**

**The Tories are continuing their attacks on claimants and DHSS workers.**

In April many claimants will get no increase in their benefit, a hang-over from last year's benefit changes, whilst the DHSS workers face an uncertain future with the widescale introduction of new technology, leading to over 13,000 job losses.

CPSA, the largest union in the DHSS, representing the clerical grades, has a conference policy of fighting the job cuts by widescale strike action, leading to an all-out section-wide strike.

However, the DHSS section of CPSA is controlled by a Moderate/BL84 coalition which has no regard for conference policy. (BL84 is a group of Kinnockites and CP members). They have decided belatedly to 'fight' the cuts — the trials started in October — by

putting forward a minimum programme of action designed not to achieve the conference policy of "no overall job losses" but merely to look for a deal on redundancy payments.

They are proposing limiting the action in the trial offices to two weeks and then calling action of three days duration. CPSA members will remember this strategy from the failed 1987 pay campaign — and have no faith in it whatsoever.

A ballot will take place during February, leaving the left with a difficult choice to make — voting yes to a strategy doomed to failure and which the members don't want, or voting no, which would probably kill off the campaign straight away.

Either way the Moderate/BL84 coalition are to blame for the mess we are now in — and it would be an uphill struggle to make any gains from the situation they have put us in.

**The response to the action in London this week in which 15 out of 21 offices took part shows that there is a willingness to fight despite the section executive leadership's strategy.**

## Campaign to stop AEU/EETPU merger

By an AEU member

**A**bout 50 opponents of the proposed merger between the AEU and the EETPU attended a meeting in Birmingham last Saturday (January 14). It had been called by the Birmingham branch of the Engineering Gazette and Birmingham AEU No.4 branch.

First, the chair gave an introduction on the need to have a campaign to mobilise AEU and EETPU members against Jordan and Hammond's attempts to create a single union modelled on the business unions in the USA and the fact that the existing Engineering Gazette leadership is doing virtually nothing to mobilise such a campaign.

A speaker from the EETPU told of what it is actually like to be an activist in his union.

It's a grim picture: branches closed down or amalgamated because they are active. The speaker pointed out that Hammond had even applied to join the CBI and that the EETPU had not been thrown out of the TUC on the principle of no-strike and single union deals but for poaching other union's members.

An AEU activist from Birmingham spoke of the Dickensian conditions of small engineering factories where in a so-called advanced country women were dying at 60 because of pollution from chemical and other wastes in the air, and a complete lack of health and safety provisions on the shopfloor. Short term contracts — 3 months at a time — made the job insecure and led to speed-ups and thus even more unsafe conditions.

This showed the need for a militant union to fight low pay and disgusting conditions. Other speakers outlined the current situation in the merger talks. Information is very difficult to find and activists have to look to the bosses' in-house paper the *Financial Times* for reasonable commentary about the state of our movement.

Meanwhile the Militant tendency, were claiming "The wedding is off and even the engagement is now in doubt, suitor Hammond has been scorned by the strict conditions set by the bride's family".

That attitude is dangerous. One thing we can't afford is complacency. We have to assume that Jordan and Hammond still want to get married, sooner rather than later.

The overwhelming feeling of the meeting was that we should come up with some practical proposals to take back to our regions. The importance of this campaign cannot be overestimated. It is an urgent task to mobilise the membership. To this end a number of resolutions were adopted by the meeting including the following:

1. No talks with the EETPU leadership whilst they are outside the TUC.

2. Uphold the democratic structures of the AEU. Defend the National Committee, District Committees, Final Appeals court and the branches.

3. For regular elections of all officials.

4. No to business unionism! Reject single union no-strike deals!

5. Whilst recognising that a single union throughout engineering is a desirable, long-term objective any talks with other unions must be on the above non-negotiable conditions.

6. For a rank and file campaign against the merger involving progressive EETPU members.

Therefore:

1. This meeting elects a steering committee to co-ordinate the campaign against the merger at regional level.

2. That this single issue campaign works with the Engineering Gazette wherever possible. There must be no provocative moves to setting up an alternative movement.

3. That in every area supporters of this campaign circulate leaflets as model resolutions at District Committee, branch and workplace level.

4. Wherever possible local meetings open to all AEU members and progressive trade unionists are held to build up maximum opposition to the merger.

Contact Norman Goodwin on: 021 373 1463.

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Reassessing the Eastern Bloc

A new pamphlet from Socialist Organiser examines the arguments about the Eastern Bloc — are the bureaucratic state-monopoly systems some sort of workers' state, or new exploitative class societies? Price 60p plus 14p postage from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

A Socialist Organiser pamphlet 60p

## Fight the landlords' law

By Colin Foster

**T**he Tories' Housing Act — major parts of which came into effect last week — is a charter for profiteering landlords.

Rent controls have been scrapped on all new tenancies. The landlord can charge whatever the market will bear. And it has become easier for landlords to evict tenants.

As Tory Minister Lord Caithness puts it, "Both landlord and tenant will be free to agree a contract covering levels of rent and the length and terms of tenancy, without any possibility of outside intervention." Both landlord and tenant will be "free" — but the wealthy landlord will be a lot more "free" than the working class tenant desperate to find a place to live!

The Tories want to revive private profit-making rented housing. There are several prongs to their strategy.

\* Council rents are being forced

up towards "market" levels — and councils are being starved of cash to repair and maintain housing.

\* Private landlords will have a legal right to buy whole estates from councils. Tenants have a vote — but non-voters count as votes for the private landlord!

Once the private landlords have taken over, they can raise rents as high as they like.

\* The Tories propose to take over some rundown estates themselves — through 'Housing Action Trusts' — do them up, and then sell them off.

\* Housing associations, rather than individuals, are the most likely buyers for sold-off council estates. The Tories plan to make housing associations behave more like ordinary capitalist businesses.

They are cutting back government aid to housing associations, and telling them to go to private investors instead. Housing associations will have to charge higher rents in order to give a return on the investment.

For millions of tenants, it all means two things: higher rents, and less security.

The Tories have forced councils to sell off nearly one million homes since 1979, thus reducing the stock of public low-rent housing. But even house-buyers face a grim future now.

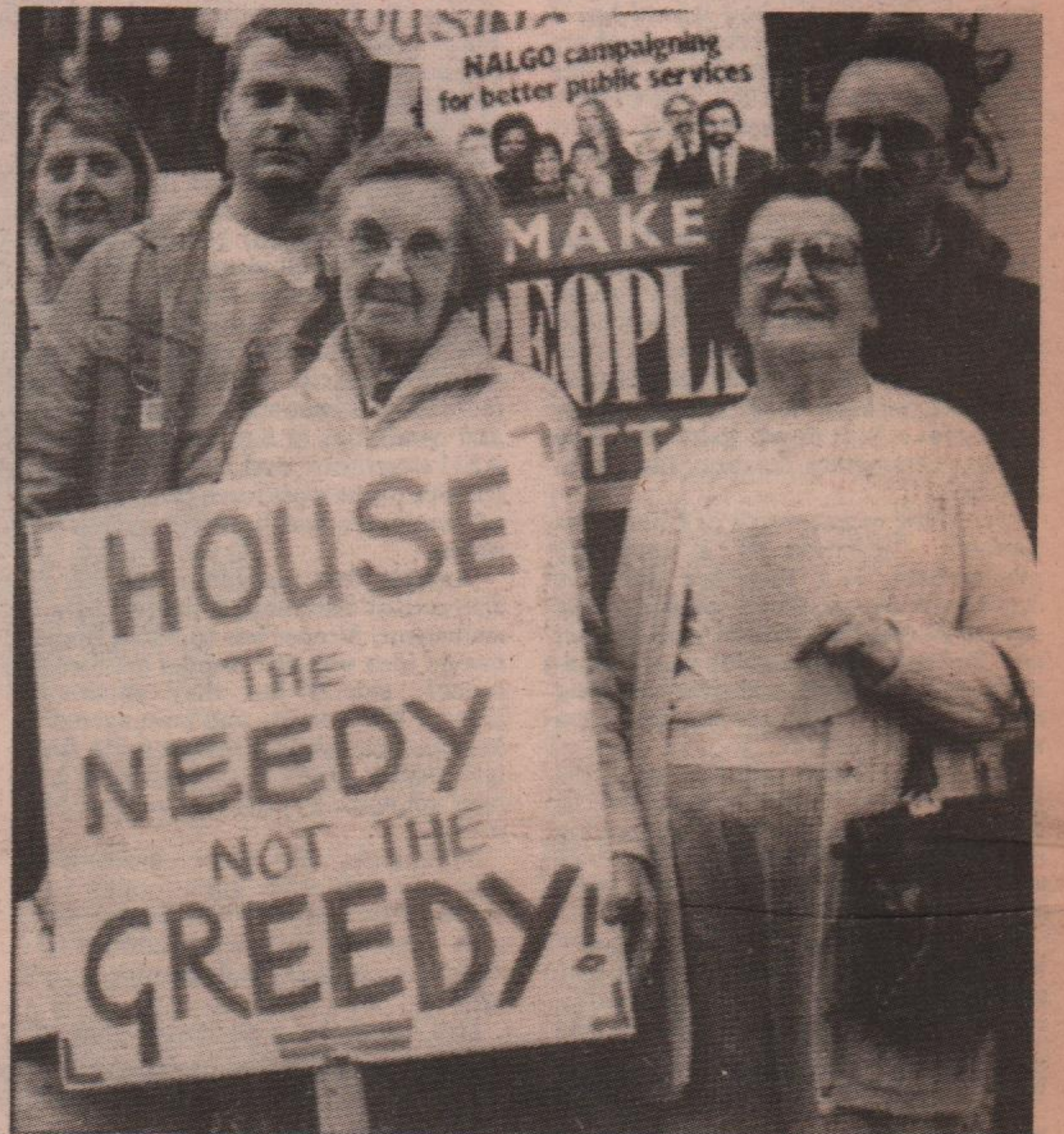
Already nine times as many people as in 1979 are having their homes repossessed because they've failed to keep up mortgage payments. Now mortgage payments have gone up by an average of about £70 a month. Even more homes will be repossessed.

A report by the Tory Association of District Councils about 18 months ago found that over one-third of households in areas like the South-East could not possibly afford to buy a home anyway.

Homelessness and slum-landlord exploitation are bound to rise under this new Tory housing law.

But it can be fought. Already strong tenants' organisations on estates earmarked for Housing Action Trusts have shaken the Tories. Originally HATs were to be imposed without the tenants having a say. Now tenants will have a vote.

The Tories can be beaten. The answer is to organise.



## Socialists and the trade unions



### A Socialist Organiser weekend school

Saturday and Sunday February 18/19  
Manchester Polytechnic Students Union  
Oxford Road, Manchester

## Women in the pits?

**T**he Tories are now putting forward a package that will make it easier for the bosses to exploit workers and get cheap labour.

They want to get rid of a number of legal restrictions, including on the hours 16-18 year olds can work. They also want to remove the legal bar on women working in the pits.

Personally, I have no objection at all to women working down the pit, and I know a number of individuals who would make damn good colliers — much better than some of the men I know. But we also need to ask the question — what's in it for the bosses? Why are the Tories introducing the proposals now?

There are pluses and minuses for them. I don't believe they will want to spend the money on the new facilities that will be needed — particularly new bathing and toilet facilities and the kind of private facilities we have never had. The positive advantage for them, though, is that they believe it could add divisions to the workforce and that women, subjected to low wages and bad conditions in the past, will more readily accept them than the men.

I would welcome women down the pit. The issues affecting us are about fighting back against the bosses and the Tories, about stopping accidents and miners getting killed underground, not worrying about whether it's men or women involved. To me it makes no difference.

But women would experience a great deal of hostility from many of the men. Don't forget, the NUM is as chauvinistic as any other union, and there's a lot of chauvinism amongst the rank and file. All miners have been raised in an atmosphere of 'men only', and for most that will weigh much more heavily than any memory of the role women played during the strike.

### WHETTON'S WEEK



#### A miner's diary

It will take a great deal to change that. But that is part of the education of socialism — to get across that we are equal, that we are working class people together.

I met a couple of American women miners during the strike, and they were great comrades. I would be proud to work alongside them. But I know little of the practical experience of women working in the pits in America.

The press have been speculating recently about a possible merger between the NUM and the TGWU. They have found a group of white collar TGWU members in the airports who have said they will leave and join the EETPU if Arthur Scargill joins the TGWU!

The NUM has to seriously look at the

question of a merger. With pit closures we are losing members hand over fist. As for those who look the wrong way through the telescope and say "if Scargill comes in, I go out" — firstly, they must be a tiny minority; and secondly they cannot be worth much. The TGWU could gain the mineworkers and lose a few right-wingers.

But that's for the future. Today I believe we are still a force to be reckoned with, and that is how we intend to continue.

The Coal Board's attack on miners, including UDM members, continues. First the pay claim, which for the UDM is still going to arbitration. In the middle of this they have just announced the closure of six Notts pits, with the loss of 6,000 jobs — 4,500 of whom must be UDM members. It will have a serious effect on that organisation.

For the Coal Board, I think part of their plan with the closures is to use some of the men to man-up the new 'super-pit' at Ashfordby, near Leicester, on 6-day working. No doubt they will tell some of the men that there is a job for them at Ashfordby so long as they retain their UDM membership.

The NUM wants to vigorously fight the closures, and say to all rank and file mineworkers that there is a place for them in the union. Everybody except for the likes of the UDM leaders, Lynk and Prendergast.

Lynk has apparently just received immortality by getting a slot in 'Who's Who'. You stay there until you die. He might get in there, but he won't get back in the NUM.

But we shouldn't worry — him and his cronies have been and will continue to be very well looked after by the gaffers. They won't need to work again.

The tragedy is for the members they were supposed to represent, and for the divisions they have caused among miners, who they have dragged through the shit.

# WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

January 1989. Price 10p.

## INSIDE:

•The case for socialist feminism •Debate on patriarchy •'Women for Socialism' •Women in the unions •Marilyn Monroe



Demonstration against the anti-abortion Corrie Bill, 1979. 10 years on the 1967 Act is still under attack

## Time to rebuild socialist feminism

In 1979 tens of thousands of workers took action against the right-wing policies of the Labour government under Callaghan and Healey.

The workers were strong and they were angry — but in the absence of a left political alternative the ousting of the Callaghan government led to Thatcher.

But the experience of Labour's betrayals resulted in the rise of the left in the Labour Party. A left that swore 'Never Again' a Labour government like that of 1974-9, a left that fought for a democratic Labour Party, in which MPs would be accountable to the rank and file, a left that wanted any future Labour government to be a party for the working class,

not for the bosses.

Feminists joined the Labour Party in their droves, demanding the right of women to take our place in the labour movement. There was a real movement to bring women's demands, women's needs, into the labour movement, to link the left and women's liberation.

Women's Sections were transformed from tea-making and jumble sale organising gatherings to real campaigning political bodies. We challenged sexism in the party, fought for positive discrimination, for childcare, often just to be taken seriously as political human beings.

The Labour left, particularly in local government, took on board the demands of women. As left-Labour administrations

took power in the town halls women's units and equal opportunity programmes were established.

Ten years on, where are we? 10 years of Thatcher have taken their toll — many of the fighters of the early 1980s are now demoralised outriders for Neil Kinnock. The local government left is on the whole discredited, having used a feminist figleaf as a cover for the cuts. Kinnock has managed to roll back many of the gains made by the left in the early 1980s.

We have made gains — the Labour Party is far more habitable for women than it was 10 years ago. And this year women won the battle for better representation when conference agreed to one woman on every shortlist. But many of these

gains have been partial, some have been double-edged. What started out as a vibrant, energetic socialist feminist current in the Labour Party has dwindled to little more than a few committee-room cliques.

But there are still many women in the Labour Party who want to fight, who desperately feel the lack of a coherent fighting socialist women's current in the party. For sure there is much for us to organise around — Thatcher's attacks, local government cuts, Kinnock's policy reviews.

Now is the time for us to start building, to start organising. To all intents and purposes socialist-feminism has vanished from the Labour movement. Now we need it more than ever. Join the fightback!

## Childcare for all

By Katherine O'Leary

Britain has one of the worst records on pre-school education in Europe, with only one third of 3-5 year olds in state-funded nursery education.

Last week an all-party parliamentary committee came out in favour of state-funded nursery provision for all 3-5 year olds whose parents want it. Interestingly enough, the committee had a majority of Tory MPs.

Even more embarrassment for the Tories ensued when footage of Margaret Thatcher from 1972, when she was Education Secretary, was dug up. Yes, there she was, quite clearly asserting her intention to provide state nursery education for all 3-5 year olds.

Yet now Thatcher says that working mothers should arrange for friends or relations to mind their children. What is going on?

Well, the Tories have got themselves into a bit of a mess on this one. There is no real dispute about the educational benefits which children get from pre-school education. So the Tories have avoided that issue.

What they do know is that employers are going to need more and more women workers over the next 20 years, due to declining numbers of teenagers entering the labour market. However much the Tories insist that women must make their own childcare arrangements, they know it just will not do.

Just before Christmas Angela Rumbold told employers that they would have to change to "accommodate" women workers. This is the key to what the Tories probably intend to do. No way do they intend the state to fund universal nursery education. Employers should be encouraged to do it. Plans which have been mooted are for local employers to club together to fund nurseries — not workplace nurseries, which the Tories also disapprove of.

Time and again governments have provided nurseries — when they need women in the factories. When we're not needed at work, nurseries are cut back.

Nursery education should not be dependent on the needs of the bosses. Our children have a right to pre-school education. We have a right to have our children well cared for while we go to work or college. The Labour Party should lead a fight to get free nursery provision for our children.



# The case for socialist femin

**Cathy Nugent  
reviews the new  
Women's  
Fightback  
pamphlet, 'The  
Case for Socialist  
Feminism'**

"The Case for Socialist Feminism" attempts to sum up not only a history of women's oppression, but also a history of feminist thinking: how and why women have fought against their enslavement and the ideas that have been used to explain the nature of that fight.

Part 1 of "The Case for Socialist Feminism" deals with the debate on the origins of women's oppression, the development of that oppression under capitalism and the programme for women's emancipation the early socialists adopted. It starts (perhaps not logically!) with the position of women today and one 'hard fact': "Capitalism has brought ever larger numbers of women into wage labour". This trend is scrutinised later and described, broadly, as progressive. Progressive, because capitalism has brought women "into the labour force as *independent* individuals" and this has given women a "promise" of equality.

This is a partial explanation of how capitalism generates struggle by women for equality, for what is 'seemingly' and 'rightfully' theirs. At the same time however, domestic labour or 'housework' "became a sphere sharply separated off from social labour, rather than closely intermingled with it". Capitalism imposed a new role on women. Women were now burdened down with a series of endless tasks: endless shopping for bargains, endless planning of menus to suit finicky families, endless cleaning of surfaces too old and worn to ever be clean, endless making sure the dust never settles on the furniture. This is "Women's Realm", "Women's World".

And "this burden of housework has become the basis for the elaborate structure of women's disadvantage in capitalist society, including the relegation of women to lower paid jobs modelled on their domestic roles..."

And in conclusion: "Capitalism makes the promise of equality, and incites the demand for equality; but beyond a certain point its roots in the family household make it incapable of satisfying those demands and those promises. That is why the movement for women's liberation is a child of capitalism, but potentially a tremendous force for anti-capitalist revolution."

For the early socialists the position of women and the "emancipation of women" seemed to be bound up with a vision of a better, more equal society, with the liberation of humanity. Charles Fourier is quoted as one example: "the degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation". In part 2 of the pamphlet, which focuses on the modern women's movement we see how this idea of liberating the whole of humanity was central to the original aims of that movement.

Marx and Engels accepted the programme of the 'Utopian' socialists, but tried to integrate it into a perspective of class struggle. Whilst Marx and Engels added very little to an understanding of women's oppression under



Sylvia Pankhurst (left), militant socialist feminist

capitalism, their programme, for the socialisation of housework and childcare, is still pertinent today.

This section also outlines early attempts to organise working class women: the women's movement of German Social Democracy and later the efforts of Bolshevik women (Kollontai, Inessa Armand and Samoslova). What happened to women after the Bolsheviks' Russian revolution has become a taunt used by many feminists to say "women can't wait until the revolution, look what happened in Russia". In truth what happened in Russia was the defeat of the working class, women were defeated alongside that; the formal equality established after the revolution fell by the wayside, and with the rise of Stalinism and the corruption of workers' movements world-wide, so did the ideas of the early socialists and marxists.

Part 2 of the pamphlet explains how these ideas had to be rediscovered and developed and focuses on the ideas of the modern women's movement. The debate took place in the absence of a mass socialist movement: the connection (though it was always a tense and antagonistic connection) between

the "Woman Question" and socialism was no longer there. Although the women's movement did initially identify with the 'left', that was a much looser, more heterogeneous movement and it was a left that was unable and unwilling to integrate the new insights of the women's movement into its theory and practice.

*"The politics of 'moral priorities', 'different struggles' and 'hierarchies of oppression' now holds sway..."*

The project for many women was to create a different sort of socialism. Sheila Rowbotham summed it up this way: "The so-called women's question is thus a whole people question, not only because our liberation is inextricably bound up with the revolt of all those who are oppressed, but because their liberation is not realisable fully unless our subordination is ended."

The division between men and women was not explained in term of 'biology'. Even 'radical' feminists such as Kate Millet saw society and its institutions as the causes.

The pamphlet then proceeds to deal with issues that modern feminists have raised and assesses just how far the 'new feminists' have retreated from the original 'revolutionary' goals and imperatives.

How should socialist women relate to the 'new feminists' such as Dworkin, Mary Daly, and Dale Spender? "The Case for Socialist Feminism" is a short pamphlet, by no means a definitive statement. Still any kind of attempt to get to grips with this 'new feminism' in a genuinely critical way, is something unique on the revolutionary left.

Towards the end of the pamphlet this point is made (in the context of a critique of Heidi Harmann's 'dual systems' theory): (Marxists) "do not concern ourselves with attaching moral priorities to different struggles, but with soberly analysing which struggles present-day society inevitably generates, and their dynamics. We see working class struggle as central not because of moral choice, but because we believe hard facts say that the class

struggle has the scope and force to draw on all other liberation struggles and to change society in a revolutionary way". We should approach developing an "adequate" theory of women's oppression (one that can explain sexuality or rape for example) in this way. We should proceed on the basis of 'hard facts'. In the early years of the modern women's movement this was the theoretical approach of many feminists. But it is not that of most 'popular' feminists today. The politics of 'moral priorities', 'different struggles' and 'hierarchies of oppression' now holds sway and is not confined to a handful of literary feminists: it has taken root in local government, the student movement and elsewhere. How this has come about is one of the central themes of the pamphlet.

What is this new feminism? Lynn Segal sums it up: "The feminist writing which is now most popular in this country, which is always listed among the bestsellers in the progressive literary magazines, is a new form of radical feminism. Mostly from North America, where it is known as 'cultural feminism', it celebrates women's superior virtue spirituality and decries 'male'

## A simplistic view of patriarchy

violence and technology". Male violence (arising from the power of the penis and the biologically natural aggression in men) is one side of this trend. The other emphasises language and male values. The picture of society we see is one that is almost totalitarian for women. Male power (in whatever form) is all-pervasive. Now, this is very peculiar. How is it that these women, in such a brutal and hostile world manage to get themselves such very nice jobs, publish their books freely, get such a wide public hearing?

The 'new feminists' say women must strip (cleanse, exorcise) themselves of this domination. Whereas before women protested about language that expressed subordination and subjection because it was used to intimidate and stop women from getting a full say, now the line is that such language is a pivotal part of male domination: women's minds have been 'taken over'. What women need to do is get in touch with women's values, culture, language (peace, nature, wombs) in order to liberate themselves.

This is reactionary in several ways. Firstly, women have struggled to free themselves from these feminine stereotypes, which have been based on our reproductive capacities (peace, nature, mother nature, etc). Secondly presumably only a special group of women (and this is explicit in Daly's writings) can get 'truly' in touch with women's culture (whatever that may be — Daly lets her imagination run riot on this one with her spiders' webs, spinning and witches' ovens). The majority of women, working class women, will be traitors to their sex/class. Whilst poverty and economic inequality is so important, inevitably working class women will be ignored. The new feminism as the pamphlet rightly points out is the property of the "leisured and comfortable classes".

"The Case for Socialist Feminism" covers a lot of other ground. But perhaps the most important question for us is, why did the women's movement fragment? The pamphlet sums it up in this way: "Under the best of circumstances, a broad spontaneous movement like the women's movement of the late '60s and early '70s would fragment seriously as views and positions became more defined. The possibility of keeping a large fragment of it as a coherent, progressively-developing revolutionary movement depended on the ability of some fraction within it to produce an outlook which would integrate different concerns into a coherent political whole. Since feminists were not just women, but also working-class or middle-class, black or white, lesbian or straight, etc., such a coherent political vision would have to embrace other issues beyond immediate women's issues. Just as radical feminists could not produce such a vision, neither could the left despite some serious attempts to do so, particularly when many socialist feminists joined the Labour Party in the late '70s (for instance the domestic labour debate, the campaigns of the Working Women's Charter group and the efforts of ourselves, Women's Fightback). This failure of the left has been cited as proof that the factionalism of male socialists has been the problem, hierarchical organisation has been the problem — by radical and some socialist feminists alike.

But the need to organise and reach a mass of women, working class women, is still vitally necessary. We should learn the lessons.

"The Case for Socialist Feminism" will be published by Women's Fightback, later in the month. Price 70p.

### Penny Newell takes issue with Lynn Ferguson's criticisms of the theory of patriarchy

On reading Lynn Ferguson's article (WF, December) 'Patriarchy — a static theory', I must admit I flicked back to the cover of Women's Fightback. Yes I was reading WF! I thought for a minute that I'd picked up an old copy of Militant, from under my bed, dated 1978. (Bought in a moment of boredom on a march to be laughed at later).

Just imagine! We used to say to each other, if you believed Militant all that needs to happen is 'the revolution'. We've got to wait until then. Discussions on the question of women's oppression a Militant supporter used to regularly tell me was 'the politics of the crutch'.

No, I know, I thought, they've pasted up an old article from the Militant, by mistake, that was kept for reference — but the article clearly said, "by Lynn Ferguson" and I knew she writes for WF regularly.

Better read it again I thought. This must be an editorial starting off a new debate on women. Wrong again, no 'editorial' written next to the title.

I won't dissect the article sentence by sentence, like some of those boring men do who write letters to other left papers. I expect they can't help being boring though, it's probably a result of capitalism. Bits of their brains have got damaged by the mode of production. Aren't we girls lucky, because of our subordinate role we've missed that bit of damage to our bodies.

Seriously though, I could see some parts of the article that made sense, she said generously, but some parts didn't. To get down to the nitty gritty.

It seemed odd to me to quote Shulamith Firestone and Christine Delphy on their definition of women's oppression in relation to



Angela Davis

the term patriarchy and not any socialist-feminists. Basically it's difficult to take any woman with a name that sounds like a car tyre manufacturer seriously and on top of that she's got some pretty naff theories.

There were two sentences in Lynn's article I couldn't understand.

At the beginning she said, when talking about the history of women's subordination, "The exact details of this are impossible to discover but most evidence shows that this was because it was men's work that the growth took place". And then at the end: "For women's oppression began with the beginning of class society"... "it is only the end of class society that can provide the precondition for the liberation of women". These statements seem at odds with each other.

I also found the very large picture of black South African women on strike in support of a white woman worker with the caption "women must fight as part of the labour movement" too simplistic.

Black women's oppression isn't mentioned in the article and while I agree that black and white women must fight as part of the labour movement those black South African women's history is different from the white women's. They share the same conditions at work perhaps, but it ends at the factory gate. Just as Lynn says "A women's movement can't be built

on a fudge of classless sisterhood", so it can't be built on white women's history alone.

To quote Angela Davis from 'Women, Race and Class'. "Since slave women were classified as breeders as opposed to mothers their infant children could be sold away from them like calves from cows. At the end of the importation of Africans to the states a South Carolina court ruled that female slaves had no legal claim on their children and the young slaves 'could stand on the same footing as other animals'".

It's hard to reconcile that these laws could be passed at a time when white women were organising women's suffrage campaigns. Yet free black slaves like Soujourner Truth got involved in those suffrage campaigns too. Her famous "And ain't I a woman" speech took the breath away of the men and inspired the women.

Not only did Shulamith Firestone in the Dialectic of Sex map out her theory of patriarchy she also claimed that "racism is actually an extension of sexism". Susan Brownmiller in "Against our Will" also accepts the racist ideology that black men are more likely to rape than white men.

No article on Women and Class can easily skip over the different history of black women particularly women who are descendents of slaves in the USA and other colonies. It is not the same as white

women's history and it is insulting to not acknowledge this.

The article begins with the heading "Women's oppression is linked with class exploitation". Well strike a light what a revelation.

I feel like WF is saying that capitalism is linked with class exploitation. I didn't realise that this was a contended position. What I understood was that it isn't a matter of saying that a socialist revolution will automatically mean that women's oppression will wither away. Alexander Kollontai was constantly accused of 'bourgeois deviations' when she promoted her ideas in Russia before and after the revolutions. She said:

"As the struggle became increasingly bloodier, much of what was happening was very alien to many ways of thinking. But after all, there was still the unfinished task of women's liberation. Women of course, had received all rights but in practice they still lived under the old yoke without authority, enslaved by a thousand menial chores..." She was criticised for offering the "fantasy" of complete liberation for women and of irresponsibly encouraging indiscriminate sexual relationships which released "African passions" (little spot of racism there) in young people.

She died in 1982 just before her 80th birthday and she was saying then that she hadn't had a bed of roses in her life. One of the things she grieved about was "The lack of understanding of my basic ideas on the women's question and the right approach to sexual matters".

During the 1970s and early '80s the women's question was recognised as complicated by many revolutionary socialist feminists. The order you put socialism and feminism when describing yourself was the subject of lots of debate. If we credit women (and men) who read WF with some intelligence than I think they deserve a regular series of articles on the various theories that socialist feminists have put forward during the last 100 years or so.

To open that debate we could start with the view of Rosalind Petchesky who said "If we understand that patriarchal kinship relations are not static but like class relations are characterised by antagonism and struggle then we begin to speculate that women's consciousness and their periodic attempts to resist or change the dominant kinship structures will themselves affect class relations".

### 'Myself, I'd want to kill him'

by Rosemary Fletcher

Imagine yourself in this situation. You are out on a family picnic when

your young children tell you that your five year old daughter has been raped. The rapist is a young man who you have taken into your home, who calls you mum.

You are shocked, and very very angry. The obvious course of action is to call in the police. But how do you deal with your rage?

I'd want to kill him. So did a mother who this happened to. She went home,

took a kettle of boiling water and poured it over the rapist's genitals. She, her husband and her son beat him up.

Now a judge has sentenced the woman to two and a half years in prison, her husband and son to 21 months. The rapist has been put away for nine years.

So much for the British legal system, and so much for the supposedly raised awareness of the judge to deal with children who have been sexually abused.

What effect will it have on the little girl to have her family taken away from her after all she has already been through? The child's interests have been lost in the formalities of the law. Her family have all pleaded guilty to grievous bodily harm. So what. How many of us wouldn't want to do what they did in those circumstances. So what if it isn't the answer to rape. So what if revenge isn't an 'honourable' motive.

A television phone-in about the case had scores of women ringing in to say the woman should be congratulated, not imprisoned. I can't help but agree. Formally, justice has been done to all concerned. Meanwhile a little girl has her life ruined. As far as she's concerned she was raped, she spoke up, now her mummy, daddy and big brother have been taken away. I wonder if the learned judge Sir Jonathan Clarke has thought about that.

### Where we stand

1. We aim to build a mass campaign of action against the major attacks being mounted on women's rights, such as the right to control our own fertility, the right to health and childcare facilities, the right to work, the right to live in this country with the partner of our choice, the right to maternity leave and job security for mothers, the right to wages, benefits and legal status independent of a man, the right to organise as trade unionists and as women.
2. These rights and many other, many not yet won or consolidated, must be defended and extended in face of the onslaught against women by this government.
3. Such a mass campaign has to be part of a labour movement response to the Tory attacks. We aim to provide a focus for united action by women already organised in the labour movement and in campaigns and groups of the women's move-

ment, and to involve women who do not relate to these movements.

3. We aim to strengthen the position of women in the labour movement, and fight for it to take our needs as a priority. We will encourage and aid the organisation and consciousness of women as women in the labour movement, and fight for the aims and demands of the women's movement in the unions and labour organisations.

We fight to change the sexist atmosphere in the labour movement, and for positive discrimination and changes in arrangements and practices to enable women to play a full

part at all levels. We fight for the implementation of the TUC Charter of Women in the unions.

We fight against the labour movement's reflecting in any way the oppressive ideas about a woman's role, which can undermine women's ability to fight back, and dangerously divide the movement. We ally with all those fighting for rank and file control, democracy and accountability, against those who hold back and sell out our fight. Never again a 'Labour' government that ignores party decisions, serves the bosses and bankers, and beats down workers' living standards and struggles.

4. We aim to co-ordinate and assist those women in the Labour Party, and the trade unions, who are fighting for these aims.

5. We are for direct action, solidarity as women and as workers, and for maximum mobilisation for all actions against the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses us.

# Cherchez la femme!

Work  
A woman's place

By Trudy Saunders

Watch the TUC Conference on television, go to most trade union annual conferences or sit in on most trade union National Executive Committee meetings and you'll notice that something is missing — women.

It's no secret that in unions where women make up the majority of members they make up a minority of the officials. One of the worst examples is CoHSE (Confederation of Health Service Employers) which has 79% women members yet only 19% of its National Executive are women.

In the CPSA (Civil and Public Services Association — clerical and secretarial grades in the Civil Service) 71% of the members are women, but women make up only 41% of the National Executive Committee. A survey of women's participation in the CPSA carried out in 1988 showed a deterioration (on already poor numbers) in comparison to a similar 1986 survey. The survey covered women's participation at section (the CPSA is divided into a number of sections) and branch level. Results ranged from appalling — in the Department of National Savings where

71% of the members are women, none branch secretaries — to good in the Inland Revenue. Here 77% of branch treasurers are women whereas 72% of all members are women. But the vast majority of the figures lie somewhere in between — with women very poorly represented in proportion to their numbers.

Why are women officials such a rarity in unions? The answer is that trade unions reflect society — a society in which working class women do two jobs, at work and at home. A society in which women are usually judged by the way they look rather than what they say. A society where women are abused mentally and physically by men. A society in which working class women are doubly oppressed — as part of the working class and as women.

In trade unions women often find it practically more difficult to get to meetings — they might have children to look after. When they do get to meetings they are often subjected to ridicule and abuse or more subtle forms of undermining such as being patronised. And of course at most meetings, the majority of the officials will be men.

So how can this situation be changed? There are a number of practical steps which can be taken — providing creches, producing union material aimed specifically at



The boys line up at TUC Conference

women, establishing a women's officer post, holding women only schools and setting up union branch women's groups. But these will only happen if women push for them. Male union officials have shown little interest in changing the status quo.

But sexism runs deep through capitalism and sadly through the trade unions. The best creches in the world won't ensure women are represented at official levels in proportion to their numbers, when some male trade unionists still treat women trade unionists with contempt.

One way of ensuring women are adequately represented is by instituting a system of Reserve Seats for women on the Executive Committees.

The issue of reserve seats for women is one which has been long debated on the left. Opponents — notably Militant tendency supporters — argue that it is tokenistic and patronising to women. Yet the logic of their argument — that women do not need any special measures to ensure adequate

representation — is that women are in fact less able than men!

The argument against Reserve Seats that 'a person's politics are most important' is one which is true. Having Reserve Seats does not mean voting for any woman whatever her politics. In the CPSA, for example, it would mean all the factions — the right wing 'moderates'/'84 group and the Broad Left — would all be forced to stand a certain number of women on their slate. This in turn would ensure women are encouraged more politically and that issues specifically concerning women are given a higher priority.

In the CPSA, many women use VDU's (Visual Display Units). There is overwhelming evidence that working at a VDU while pregnant is damaging. Yet the CPSA has no firm agreement with management that a pregnant woman has an automatic right to be re-deployed away from a VDU. At the moment management are asked to consider such cases 'sympathetically'. As the Civil Service moves towards greater com-

puterisation women will soon be asked to make a choice — your baby or your job.

That the CPSA has done nothing is an outrage — the problem would have no doubt been taken more seriously if it had been men's sperm levels which are affected!

In the GMB (General, Municipal Boilermakers and Allied trade union) Reserve Seats for women on the Executive were brought in after the 1987 Conference. Already it has been successful in that three more women than there are Reserve Seats (10) have been elected. Previously there had only been 3 women on the Executive in the history of the union!

With the changes in the labour market bringing more women into the workplaces, unions will be forced to take the issue of the number of active women more seriously. But the situation will only really begin to change when campaigns and practical measure are coupled with positive discrimination measures such as Reserve Seats. And who knows we may spot the odd woman at TUC Conference!

## Marilyn

By Lynn Ferguson

Biographies of film stars are a sure way to make a fast buck. If the film star in question is dead, then all the better. If it's Marilyn Monroe, you can't lose — no matter who badly written, or how badly researched, the book will sell.

The problem with 'Goddess' is that it is probably over researched. Reading it is like reading endless footnotes and never actually getting to the text.

Every assertion about Marilyn is backed up by a bevy of unremarkable quotes from people who, in varying degrees, knew her. Each quote is backed up by digressions of remarkable irrelevance on the character and life of whoever is being quoted.

This all adds up to a book which has the veneer of being serious and well-researched but which is, in fact, just dense and laborious.

And what of these 'facts' which are so painstakingly investigated. Well, surprise, surprise, the Marilyn who emerges from the book is the one of popular myth — the extremely screwed-up woman who slept with a lot of men, some of them very famous.

Marilyn's supposed ex-lovers are tracked down and questioned. Their eagerness to reveal the intimate details of their relationships with her is quite revolting. How she looked without her make up, whether or not she enjoyed sex, or was 'good in bed' are gone into over and over again. Bad enough that the questions were asked — worse still that the bastards answered with such eagerness.

One of the few men who come out of this with any credit is Marlon Brando who refused to talk about her. Good on you Marlon.



The book's main selling point is "astounding new evidence" (I quote the author) indicating strange and unsavoury goings on involving the Kennedys, the State Department, the Mafia and Marilyn which culminated in a cover-up surrounding her time of death.

Much of this is quite convincing but it's hard to imagine that the allegations do the Kennedys any harm — it just adds a bit of spice to the legend.

All in all, 'Goddess' is a particularly pedestrian account of Marilyn's life. It's written with about as much enthusiasm and love for the subject as a railway timetable, and spiced up with repeated assertions that Marilyn never wore knickers — hardly a chapter fails to mention this astounding 'fact'. The book also contains a photo of Marilyn taken after her post-mortem which is quite unnecessary.

If you are desperate to read a Monroe biography go for 'Marilyn' by Norman Mailer. Mailer shows a complete disregard for fact and research and lets his imagination run riot. It's fantasy, but at least it's readable.

As it is Marilyn is so buried in myth that I doubt whether we'll ever get a biography of her that really throws light on her opinions, feelings and political beliefs. After all, who wants to know — she was only a dumb blonde, wasn't she?

## Into the Nineties

By Jane Kelly

Women for Socialism is having its first national conference on 25th and 26th February. *Socialist Feminism: Into the Nineties* will be held in London at Wesley House.

This will be the first socialist feminist conference for ten years — ten years in which Thatcher's governments have made big inroads into the gains made by women since the 1960s.

Women have been hit especially hard by the attacks on the Welfare State, on democratic and trade union rights. There is an obvious need for a national organisation of women with socialist principles.

Women for Socialism grew out of the Chesterfield Socialist Conference, holding its first meetings at the two conferences in Chesterfield. It is an autonomous organisation of women with 300 members in all parts of the country, including women in the Labour Party, trade unions, campaigns, solidarity movements. There are now some regional and local groups as well.

The conference will start with a



plenary including the following speakers: Martha Osamor, Betty Heathfield, Sandra Plummer, a woman from SWAPO, Inez MacIntosh and an MP from the Campaign Group.

The rest of the first day will be divided into a number of smaller workshop sessions including: Internationalism and international action; women and the economy; women's struggles; trade unions and women's employment; child abuse; education; pornography; deportations and family rights; housing; health; lesbianism and socialism; the Poll Tax.

The second day will be for members of Women for Socialism and will aim to set up a democratic structure for the

movement. It will include a mixture of workshops and plenaries and there will be time for women with particular interests, including those who are specially oppressed to meet together.

Ideas for workshops on the second day include: Women for Socialism newsletter; links with other women's organisations both in Britain and internationally; regional and national structures; organising in the trade unions and the Labour Party; Women for Socialism and the Socialist Conference. All women will be able to join Women for Socialism on the Saturday and a creche will be available all weekend, but must be booked by 18th February.

For further information on WFS, and the conference, please contact: Barbara Green 01-607 9729 (h), 01-278 6453 (w) or Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY, 01-992 0945.

•Women for Socialism conference, 25th February, at the London Women's Centre, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1. (Tube: Holborn). Registration: 10am. Conference for Women for Socialism members only, 26th February, same venue.

## Women for Socialism in Kent

### STUDENT WOMEN

By Katherine Hockley

At Kent university we have started a Women for Socialism group, an initiative to involve women who have had enough of the bland and apolitical mood that prevails in so much of women's politics at present.

The other main reason that women now involved give for supporting Women for Socialism is dissatisfaction with the Labour Party.

The group has only been going for a few weeks of term time, but we have held meetings on Women for Socialism and Women Against Pit Closures, with a woman from the Kent coalfield speaking at the latter.

The group has also decided that having meetings is not enough, that, unlike the women's group, we want to go out and campaign on issues such as childcare facilities, and against pornography in a way that puts forward the ideas of

socialism.

This term we are planning to hold meetings on the NHS, women and the Poll Tax, and women and the Housing Bill — amongst others. Already the group has succeeded in involving a layer of women not usually in either the Labour Club or the women's group and one member has rejoined the Labour Party having left five years ago, to carry on the fight there.

Women for Socialism is an initiative that can work and can involve a lot of good socialist women who have dropped out of the Labour Party and 'women's movements' after becoming disillusioned.