

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

Let the boat people come here!

The British government is about to transport tens of thousands of Vietnamese 'boat people' — currently held in terrible conditions in Hong Kong — back to Vietnam.

These people risked dangerous seas in frail boats, and an uncertain future, to flee poverty and repression in Vietnam. Many say they would die rather than return.

Thousands have been literally penned up in Hong Kong because countries such as Britain, Australia and the USA refuse to accept them. Britain has a particularly shameful record of refusing refuge to Vietnamese.

Stop this barbarity! The Vietnamese refugees should be allowed to live wherever they want in the world. We must demand of the British government that instead of inflicting further hardship — or worse — on the Vietnamese, they give them the right to come and live in Britain.

Eastern Europe: towards capitalism or workers' liberty?

By Clive Bradley

Ninety per cent of the Czech people, and huge numbers of Slovaks, observed the two-hour general strike on Monday 27 November, demanding free elections.

Faced with the momentous mass movement in Czechoslovakia, all the most hated Stalinist officials have been forced to go, including Prague party boss Miroslav Stepan, and Milos Jakes, the national party leader himself.

The opposition Civic Forum, now demanding talks with the government, has the biggest movement in Czech history behind it. It looks like Alexander Dubcek, deposed by the Russians after the 1968 'Prague Spring', could be the next president.

Old party hacks are dropping like flies, and those that remain must be nervous about their futures. In a matter of days, the system imposed on Czechoslovakia after the Second World War and only briefly disrupted in 1968 has undergone an immense upheaval.

Czechoslovakia is witnessing the first phase of a revolution. But it is only the first phase. Power still lies in the hands of the Communist Party. The loyalty and stability of the army has yet to be tested.

The movement could dissipate, and hard-liners regain the upper hand. The 'Tiananmen option' — massacre — has already been discussed by some sectors of the old party leadership.

And what would the second phase of the revolution be? In Poland and Hungary, the old ruling parties and opposition groups have combined to start extensive moves away from the command economy towards the market. Poland has a non-Communist government (headed by Solidarnosc), and the Hungarian Communist Party has declared itself a Western-style social democracy aiming for a "market economy without qualifying adjectives". Many prominent people in Czechoslovakia want the same thing.

So is capitalism — perhaps on a social-democratic model — the real alternative to 'communism', as Thatcher (and Neil Kinnock, for that matter) are saying?

After their experiences of 'socialism', it is not surprising if Eastern European workers and students look to capitalism as a

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# Support the ambulance crews!

As the Tory propaganda war intensifies, ambulance workers need the active support of other trade unionists to help them win.

Union branches, Labour Parties and shop stewards' committees up and down the country have rallied to the ambulance workers, organising collections, petitioning and speaking tours. What's needed now is to build on that huge reservoir of support.

The TUC should call a national Day of Action, on a workday, as a first step in a campaign of mobilising direct industrial support

Already in London, the North West London NUPE ambulance branch has called a Day of Action on 6 December. Council workers and civil servants in Hackney have pledged to strike that day in support. Plans are underway to spread the action with promises of support from workers in other London boroughs, including Islington, Camden, Greenwich, Wandsworth, Lambeth and Southwark.

Keith Veness, from the Hackney Joint Shop Stewards' Committee, explained how the solidarity action is being organised there.

The only way the ambulance workers are going to win this is by escalating the action and making the government sit up.

Once the Tories see other groups of workers on the move, that's when they're likely to concede. At the moment there's a stalemate where the Tories can't beat the ambulance workers.

But the government hasn't yet given anything up, and the ambulance workers haven't been able to force any real concessions out of them.

Potentially if it comes off, the strike on 6 December will be the biggest day of action in the East End since the early '70s.

As well as the council workers, the CPSA are going to pull people out of the benefit offices and there's a good chance of getting the buses out. But a lot of people are still meeting and voting on it.

It originally started in the two NUPE branches. We've got a thing called a District Committee which sounds more

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Troops stand by while locked-out ambulance workers extricate a badly injured passenger from a crashed and mangled car. Who's risking lives?

By Stan Crooke

Staff you! Staff the patients!" This was how management on Merseyside responded to last week's decision by ambulance crews to escalate the action in support of their demand for a decent pay rise.

At midnight a week last Tuesday (21 November), ambulance crews implemented a new range of sanctions. They stepped up the pressure on management, whilst continuing to guarantee accident and emergency and other vital services.

Amongst the cases no longer to be covered by the ambulance crews were GDHs (ie. transporting elderly people to and from the geriatric day hospitals, where they might spend a day two or three times a week). The crews have agreed, however, to continue to transport any elderly people classified as 'at risk' if left at home all day.

This arrangement was perfectly ac-

## 'Management's tough line comes from the top'

ceptable to the hospitals. Initially it was thought that management would accept this arrangement as well. But only hours after the new sanctions came into effect, Owen Bisley (Chief Metropolitan Ambulance Officer for Merseyside) demanded that all GDHs be transported.

When ambulance crews rejected this demand, Bisley declared that anyone refusing to deal with their whole caseload of GDHs from 8am on 23 November would be suspended without pay, again ambulance crews refused to knuckle under to such threats, even though asked individually at each sta-

tion whether they were prepared to carry all GDHs.

About 100 ambulance workers were soon suspended. Shop stewards immediately called a mass meeting, to which some 250 ambulance workers turned up.

The meeting agreed to a further escalation of action, going beyond the TUC Code of Conduct, but not going so far as to answer 999 calls only. At the time of writing, Merseyside shop stewards are meeting to consider another escalation of sanctions.

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### TUC must call a national day of action



# Kinnockites stifle Labour youth

By Mark Osborn

**A** couple of hundred people — only some of whom could be described as 'youth' — attended the 'historic' first Labour Youth Conference in mid-November.

The conference's main features were these:

- A (successful) attempt by the Labour Coordinating Committee and supporters of Neil Kinnock to break *Militant's* hold on the apparatus of the Party's youth wing.
- A visible attempt to build a right-wing cadre.

An embarrassing fact for the right-wing was how few people they could actually count on to do the job. So you had the spectacle of:

- A right-wing candidate being replaced when it was discovered

that she was not even a Labour Party member!

- The leader of the GMB delegation being a full-time student at Sheffield University.

- Quite a few people being ruled out of an already 'sculptured' conference.

- The odd 'irregularity' in voting. It was reminiscent of Labour Students' 'bent' conferences.

The only vote at the conference was to select the youth rep on Labour's National Executive. The Kinnockite candidate beat the candidate of the *Militant* tendency — which has had this position for 20 years — by 11%.

The conference was gutted, and voting on policy was replaced with workshops, which "would be listened to". And if you believe that I'm a banana.

The job now for the Party's youth is to dig in, build up the LPYS and Labour Student Clubs — and take the trade union youth wings seriously.

While we are working away and

fighting for democratic conferences we have got to combat the falsification of history — for example, *Militant's* claim that the reason the LPYS has been collapsed into an inadequate, tightly controlled youth wing of the Labour Party is because of its "bold, campaigning record".

This is rubbish. The truth is that for a decade and a half the Labour Party bureaucracy and *Militant* leadership of the YS coexisted very peacefully because *Militant* didn't campaign, didn't rock the boat, and quietly got on with making abstract propaganda, ignoring or boycotting the struggle in the world outside.

*Militant* didn't lead the YS into the battles against racism in the streets.

Didn't lead the YS into the big Ban the Bomb movement of the early '80s.

Didn't lead the YS into an active role in the big industrial struggles of the '70s.

You can list almost everything that happened of any importance in the Labour and trade union move-

ment over the 20 years of *Militant* control of Labour's youth organisation and simply add: the *Militant*-led YS was not there!

*Militant's* head-down strategy lasted until the upsurge of the Bennite left led the press to seize on *Militant* as a stick to beat the whole left with, and pressurised Labour into a limited purge of *Militant* leaders.

*Militant* should be defended against the witchhunters. And the truth should be defended against *Militant*!

The Kinnockites should respect democracy; the *Militant* should admit that the LPYS has been pretty much a dead rump for nearly 20 years.

That is why the Kinnockites could cut it down so easily. That is one reason why *Militant* was unable to lead it into any sort of fight to defend its own existence against those who cut it down.

Now the battle to revive a Labour Party youth movement begins all over again.

## Stitch-up in Gorton

By Eva Elliott

**T**wo people were recently nominated for the parliamentary candidate in Manchester Gorton Constituency Labour Party — Gerald Kaufman, the sitting MP, and John Nicholson, former deputy leader of Manchester City Council, and despised by the right for his left-wing views.

Most affiliated organisations nominated Kaufman. However 3 out of 6 branches decided not to nominate Kaufman, and two of them supported John Nicholson.

The undemocratic decision was then made to put out a short-list of one. Kaufman's supporters did this even though it goes against the Party's own rules that 'only in exceptional circumstances' should a short list of one be allowed. The person on the short-list was of course Gerald Kaufman.

John Nicholson, not one to simply cry into his cornflakes, then wrote to branches and affiliated organisations urging that the matter be discussed and that appropriate action against the decision be taken.

The next day a letter arrived from Peter Kilfoyle, the Regional Organiser, informing people that "Mr Nicholson clearly misunderstands the rules." The rule about shortlists of one only being allowed in exceptional circumstances did not apply to sitting MPs.

Mr Kilfoyle went on to say that John Nicholson had interfered with democratic procedures and to 'instruct' members to ignore the contents of this letter.

This was closely followed up by a letter to John Nicholson from Labour Party national official Joyce Gould, informing him that he was "directly interfering in the democratic processes of the Party".

The sad fact is that the Kaufman affair is not an isolated event. The recent expulsions and suspensions have shown just how far Labour's right wing are prepared to go to fight off the left. We are right to continue to fight for conference sovereignty and for democracy for the Constituency Labour Parties.

## Teachers' left victory

**T**he left wing in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has won a remarkable and unexpected victory with the election of Mary Hufford as assistant general secretary.

Her main right wing rival for the position was so confident of victory that he had already re-mortgaged on the strength of the big salary he expected. In the last major contest for a position in the NUT, right-winger Doug McAvoy defeated two left-wing opponents very easily.

But this time the left won narrowly, despite the time to return the ballot papers being extended for two weeks on account of "difficulties with the post". Three factors seem to have been important.

There was a united candidate of the left. Mary Hufford was the only woman candidate. And teachers are getting more and more impatient with the right-wing NUT leadership's failure to organise a campaign on pay.

Particular anger has been caused by the leadership's decision to take £1 million out of the union fund for strike pay and to spend it instead on a series of press advertisements about teacher shortage, aimed at everybody and nobody.

## Free the framed-up prisoners!

By Mike Shankland

**T**he West Midlands Police Force have announced that they are now videoing and taping interviews with suspects in a number of police stations in their region.

This is meant to eliminate recent 'misunderstandings' which have arisen in Court when people arrested by them have found sentences added to confessions, or the police have read out notes from interviews the defendant had never given.

Most of these allegations centre round the Serious Crime Squad, now disbanded and largely discredited. The West Yorkshire Force are investigating arrests the SCS has made since 1986.

Campaigners supporting framed prisoners who were arrested and convicted by this squad are demanding that the investigations go back further, at least to 1974, and that there is a public inquiry — police forces investigating each other will never do more than scapegoat a few renegade officers.

Prisoners framed by this outfit include the Birmingham Six, the Carl Bridgewater men, and Martin Foran. The Birmingham Six are facing the start of their fifteenth year in custody for a crime they did not commit, but in relatively good health. The Carl Bridgewater men have suffered from severe depression, and one of them died from a heart attack.

Martin Foran is still desperately



Fascists skulk round the Manchester Martyrs march last weekend. Photo: Paul Herrmann

## Scots Labour debates issues

By Ian McCalman

**L**abour Party branches in Scotland are currently debating resolutions to go to the Scottish conference in March of next year.

The issues which seem likely to be high profile are the Poll Tax, electoral arrangements for the proposed Scottish Parliament and unilateral nuclear disarmament.

On the Poll Tax, the emphasis will likely be on the issue of opposition to warrant sales and arrestment of wages to cover unpaid bills. Estimates of numbers of non-

payers in Scotland vary widely between half a million and a million, but clearly there is still enormous opposition to payment, and the pressure will mount on Labour regional councillors, many of whom claim they have no choice but to enforce payment or face fines themselves. If that is the choice, clearly the question of the value of their continued tenure of office is up for discussion.

On electoral arrangements for a Scottish Parliament, the debate will centre around PR and the degree of positive discrimination for women, with some people claiming that half the seats should be reserved for women. Clearly socialists should support PR; whether we should favour the degree of positive discrimination being proposed from some quarters is up for discussion.

Unilateralism will be a third key issue. At Cathcart LP last week a motion for conference endorsing that position was passed. The debate tended to be around the electoral desirability or otherwise of that issue. Socialists should, however, turn the debate towards the wider international issues. The daily collapse of Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe renders totally meaningless the concepts of Cold War and detente. In that context, unilateralism becomes the most valid response.

We must emphasise that Kinnock and Co have been overtaken by events on this issue and so must change their stance. Scottish Conference may well re-endorse unilateralism and place the issue firmly back on the agenda again.

ill and his family and supporters are still fighting for him to have medical treatment. The prison authorities are as obstructive as ever, doing their best to take away his health as well as his freedom for a crime he did not commit.

At present 53 members and ex-members of the Squad are now off active duty. Clare Short MP has said that she has heard from 50 people who have claimed to have been fitted up by this unit.

When the truth concerning this squad's corruption emerges, the British legal system will be left with very little credibility.

runs the union.

Indeed, left unity achieved over the Deputy General Secretary election should form the basis for a mobilisation against the leadership on the salaries issue. The CDFU should support the STA's call for a one-day national strike before Christmas, and a lobby of the National Executive meeting in London on 13 December.

Moving into the New Year, the left should ensure single candidates across the country for the National Executive elections and use the election campaigns to hammer the leadership over salaries, the failure to defend teachers against shortages, the National Curriculum, and the impending threat of LMS (Local Management of Schools).

The STA and CDFU should agree to organise a joint national meeting as soon as possible to prepare and enact the alternative pay campaign.

## Teachers need to build for action

By Liam Conway

**T**he teaching unions have recently unveiled their plans for next year's pay campaign.

The strategy of the leaders of the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers' union, is a particularly sorry and dishonest affair.

Phase One involves grovelling to the public, MPs, and the Interim Advisory Committee (IAC) on teachers' pay, to persuade them that teachers need more money. Phase Two involves unspecified action at some point after the IAC, a government-appointed body, has made its ruling on pay, next year.

This strategy shows that the NUT leaders have learned nothing from the disastrous campaigns against the loss of their teachers' negotiating rights, rigid new contracts and the Education

Reform Act.

They have learned nothing from the action campaign this summer of local government and railway workers. When will the NUT leaders tell teachers the truth? This government will not be moved by adverts, lobbying, or public opinion alone.

Tragically, even the NUT Executive line of action in the second phase is unknown to anyone outside the NUT, because the general secretary, Doug McAvoy, is persistently telling the media that the NUT will not be taking any action.

Worse still, McAvoy has joined forces with the Professional Association of Teachers, a long-standing scab union, to promote the teachers' cause. In fact McAvoy's media mutterings are symptomatic of a big split in the right-wing faction (called 'Broad Left!') that



# Freedom for Eritrea and Tigre!

## EDITORIAL

Once again, as if it is an annual event without which Christmas wouldn't be Christmas, people are starving to death in Ethiopia.

Once again we see horrifying pictures on our TV sets of dying old people, pot-bellied kids, and foreign relief workers begging governments to send more aid, and faster.

How on earth has this been allowed to happen again to Ethiopia? There are two reasons.

Western aid has never been enough to lift the Ethiopian people out of the crisis resulting from the 1984 drought. The underlying problems of Ethiopian agriculture remain unsolved. The country can't feed itself.

Much more immediately important is the role of the Ethiopian government. Its obstruction of aid, often as a result of corruption and embezzlement, is notorious.

And its refusal to allow the peoples of Eritrea and Tigre their right to self-determination has resulted in years and years of ferocious war. The direct cause of the current famine is fighting between the government and Eritrean 'rebels' — the biggest battle in Africa since World War Two. The Ethiopian government even bombs food lorries heading for the famine area.

Eritrea and Tigre have the right to independence. For years the Mengistu regime in Addis Ababa has tried to crush the resistance of these two small nations. Despite all the disasters visited upon them, the peoples of Eritrea and Tigre have not surrendered.

To stop the immediate famine, they should have their rights.

## Czechoslovakia From page 1

more democratic and prosperous system.

But the market will bring unemployment, low wages, increased inequality, and no assurance at all of democracy. If the workers and students fight for their jobs and living standards, and for real freedom, they will have to find a third option, neither the bureaucratic-monopoly system, nor the market.

That alternative is genuine, democratic socialism. Rational, democratic planning, workers' control in the factories; popular control over government; real civil liberties; these are the chief elements of the socialist alternative.

In its heyday, 1980-81, Poland's Solidarnosc called for a "self-managed republic", based on working-class control. That idea still has enormous relevance in Eastern — or Western — Europe. Pro-market sentiment may prove short-lived, and in East Germany there is a strong current that wants a "better socialism".

It would be a tragedy if the exhilarating events in Eastern Europe produced only capitalism — underdeveloped, poverty-stricken capitalism more like South America than Western Europe, for the most part.

The peoples of Eastern Europe, struggling to find their feet after years and years of suppression, deserve our support. Indeed, solidarity from the labour movement can help East European workers towards the socialist conclusions that are necessary.

## East Europe: towards capitalism or workers' liberty?

Next week we're publishing a special double issue on the upheavals in Eastern Europe,



Dubcek in Prague

# East German opposition looks for answers

By Bruce Robinson

The political scene in East Germany is still changing fast, despite the attempts of Egon Krenz and the new leadership of the SED to head off the movement.

The old leadership around Erich Honecker is being scapegoated and is likely to be expelled from the party soon, even though those now in charge were silent on their crimes when they were actually being committed. Krenz has stated that the SED is willing to give up its "leading role" in the state, which is enshrined in the East German constitution.

The party with the "leading role", according to a recent official opinion poll, would only win 19% of the votes if free elections took place now. Krenz was only viewed favourably by 9.6% of the population, though the Prime Minister, Modrow, who has a reformer's reputation, was viewed sympathetically by 42%.

The leadership even has little credibility with members of the SED. In the last two months 200,000 members (about 10%) have left the SED, 70% of those leaving were industrial workers.

Given this unpopularity, Krenz is not eager to face elections. He now states that they will not be held before the end of 1990.

It is very unlikely, however, that the SED will be able to solve the increasing economic crisis without West German help.

Since the opening of the border, 3 billion East German marks have crossed into the West, as East Germans remove their savings before an official devaluation takes place. To prevent smuggling, subsidised East German products can no

longer be sold to foreigners. Kohl has made West German aid dependent not just on free elections, but also on widespread marketisation of the economy.

Many East Germans are opposed to this. The opinion poll mentioned above showed that 83% of those asked want the GDR "to remain a socialist country", and only 10% actively favoured reunification.

The largest opposition group, New Forum, has a draft economic programme, which envisages all firms with more than 300 employees remaining in state hands. The programme is clearly influenced by Soviet perestroika, showing more economic autonomy at factory level, small-scale co-ops, and private firms and abandonment of the state monopoly of foreign trade.

In contrast to Gorbachev, New Forum argues for the right to strike and free wage negotiations, and supports various welfare state measures to protect workers from the effects of the removal of state control. Some degree of central planning would remain.

This programme of a move from centralised bureaucratic planning to a limited degree of market forces within a largely nationalised economy is probably the closest thing that exists to a consensus among the East German opposition on economic questions. It is compatible in the long-run with the plans of the reform wing of the SED.

Whether it is compatible with the plans of Western capital is something quite different.

The left wing in the opposition must become better organised in order to give an alternative to both market capitalism and a limited perestroika in East Germany.

### Correction

As a result of my illegible handwriting, one sentence in the article 'The Political Vacuum in East Germany' in SO425 was garbled. The sentence "There is a real urgency to the organisation of independent socialists around the limited left" should have read "...around the united left."

# The bankruptcy of Stalinism

Vladimir Derer, veteran Czechoslovakian socialist and secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy comments on events in Eastern Europe

The recent events in Eastern Europe are the final testament to the political bankruptcy of Stalinism.

However, they are also incontrovertible evidence of the ideological bankruptcy of currents which continue to regard 'Soviet' economic and political structures as predominantly progressive, no matter how 'degenerated' or 'deformed'.

For the mass rejection of those structures by the overwhelming majority of the peoples of Eastern

Europe, including the Eastern European working class, has shown the ideology of the 'deformed workers' statist' to be little more than a 'left-wing' cover for the interests of the bureaucratic ruling class.

Unfortunately, the fact that nearly the whole of the Western left has managed to delude itself about the class character of 'Soviet-type' societies, is not merely a testimony to the Western left's existing provincial outlook, i.e. Eastern European institutions, and forces to which they give rise, are judged by Western standards relevant only to Western capitalist societies.

The left's failure to demonstrate its irreconcilable opposition to the 'Soviet-type' institutions had profound political consequences. It helped to discredit socialism both East and West.

# Sick standards

## PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

The Press Council came down on the Sun with uncharacteristic speed and firmness last week, after that paper published a photo of journalist David Blundy dead in an El Salvador morgue.

A lot of people must have wondered what exactly was the point of publishing such a photo? The Press Council have written to Sun editor Kelvin MacKenzie asking him just that: it will be interesting to see his reply.

Actually, the photo was not especially horrible by recent tabloid standards — what was distasteful was the idea of the Sun using Blundy posthumously, for the purpose of titillating its readers.

Blundy was a journalist who stood for just about everything the Sun isn't: he was honest, compassionate, self-effacing and determinedly anti-sensationalist. Above all, he was an internationalist.

When Murdoch moved his empire to Fortress Wapping, Blundy left his job at the Sunday Times to join the Sunday Telegraph. At the time of his death he was covering the civil war in El Salvador for the Sunday Correspondent.

the Independent Magazine's 'Weasel' (Alexander Chancellor) offered this interesting possible explanation for the Sun's behaviour:

"This is that the Sun's editor wished to pay some kind of tribute to a brave colleague who was shot and killed while doing his job, but could not think of a way of doing so that would meet the Sun's sick standards of entertainment for its readers. The photograph in the morgue may have come to the rescue."

## Hackney From page 1

important than it is but it's basically a joint stewards' committee. And we've been doing a lot of work around the ambulance action and we decided we wanted to do something more in terms of solidarity action.

So what we did then was take the idea to the joint shop stewards' organisation in the council and get the other unions to back us and it's all grown out from there.

We had a mass meeting of the workforce at the Town Hall and a show of hands to come out. So we're going back to all the unions, branches, sections and sites trying to get decisions to strike on the day.

In principle we've got a decision from the mass meeting but obviously we also want to build support at the grass roots.

Apart from one letter appealing for money, we haven't received much direction from NUPE nationally. So what we did is walk up to the local ambulance station and took it from there. Already we've collected about £4,000 for them. The first couple of days we went there we were given a hundred petitions which were filled in in about 10 minutes. So we've been running petitions off for them, producing stickers and leaflets and everything.

The other thing we found is that a lot of the ambulance stewards are very new, elected a couple of days before the dispute and this sort of thing. So we've tried to support and back them up.

There's such huge public sympathy over this, even more than the nurses.

## Liverpool From page 1

"The goodwill we are trying to show is being abused," said Liverpool ambulances shop steward Roy Carrick, "attitudes are really hardening now. It would seem that the tough line which has been used since midnight on Monday has come from a much higher level and that would mean from Clarke and Nichol."

Management's failure to make any inroads into support for the ambulance crews can be seen from the response to ambulance workers who have been out petitioning and collecting money in local shopping arcades on Merseyside. £35,000 and 25,000 signatures have been collected since last Thursday. £8,000 was collected last Monday (27 November) alone.

The ambulance workers now have facilities in the Merseyside Trade Union, Community and Unemployed Resource Centre in Hardman Street in Liverpool, phone 051 709 3995 ext 210, and can be contacted there for handing over donations, requesting speakers, etc.



## 4 ENGINEERS

# Lessons from '79

Gerry Bates tells the story of the 1979 engineering dispute

**M**y task is to convince workers that management can be trusted... I don't believe in strikes... I have never led a strike in my life. No victory can come from a strike".

So spoke Terry Duffy the former right wing leader of the engineers. But he wasn't exactly telling the truth. Ten years ago, and despite himself, Duffy was forced to lead, however reluctantly, a series of massive national engineering strikes which established the 39 hour week across the industry.

The settlement was described by the bosses paper the *Financial Times* as a 'costly defeat' for their side. The story of that dispute holds many lessons for engineering workers today.

Just like the current battle for a 35 hour week the '79 dispute appeared to come out of nowhere.

As late as June '79 even the left in the industry did not expect a battle. As Jack Robertson editor of the *Engineers Charter* commented after the first set of talks had broken down:

"Although there is much sabre rattling from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Union officials, who talk about a 'collision course' they now see developing, Thursday's abortive talks have gone a long way towards defusing any fight that might have been possible.

"The two main points were for a £80 minimum time rate and the 35 hour week.

"Only £2 now separates the employers' offer — it has been raised by £8 to £68 — and the union claim dropped by £10 to £70. Other aspects of the claim... such as the 35 hour week... have been hived off to a working party that will report in a year's time.

"...The only sticking point between the two sides is the date of implementation... the chances of mobilising the membership for a fight over this fine point are remote."

But the remote can happen sometimes and a battle did develop. This should act as a warning to those who seem to think that a big battle can't develop out of the present 35 hour week campaign.

### The campaign begins

The right wing leadership of Terry Duffy (President) and Sir John Boyd (General Secretary and part time Salvation Army tuba player) found themselves overturned at the lay delegate based AEUW national committee.

The vote was very close: 27 to 25 but enough to set in motion a chain of events that led to a full scale con-

frontation.

A writer in 'Workers' Action' 28th July '79 takes up the story:

"On Monday 30th July, 2½ million workers covered by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions will start an overtime ban, and, on 6th August, a series of one day strikes in support of the national wage claim.

The amended claim is £80 minimum time rate, a one hour reduction in the working week with progress to 35 hours by 1982, 2 days extra holiday and a common implementation date on April 1st 1979.

Inadequate as the claim and the action are, we must support them. Those of us already earning more than £80 must stand beside the lower paid factories. Extra holidays and a shorter week will benefit us all.

We have little chance of winning next year's £100 claim if we lose this one. If the action flags, then the right wing will gain and they will have a strong argument to use for discrediting any future proposals for militant action.

Yet the present claim — especially the demand for a shorter working week — is too big to be won easily by the one-day strikes. Domestic engineering orders have slumped 12½% in the first four months of this year to the lowest level for two years, and the engineering bosses are in no mood to give easy concessions.

The one-day strikes have also been called at the time when they are least likely to be effective: in many major engineering districts, the factories are shut down for the annual holidays, and the strikes will just mean a one-day stoppage of maintenance work.

Only in Sheffield, the stronghold of the Broad Left, has the District Committee yet made much effort to organise for the claim."

The activity in Sheffield was to prove important. In early July a conference held there of over 260 stewards called for the rebuilding of the National Shop Stewards Movement in engineering. Sheffield stewards and convenors pushed for regular mass meetings and report backs thus helping to build up a real head of steam behind the campaign.

The first one day strike was on August 6th and was strongly supported by upwards of 2 million engineers. Despite some difficulties the overtime ban held too.

Phase 1 of the campaign was to last until the August bank holiday. It involved 3 one-day strikes. Sensing weakness on the union side the employers dug their heels in. Many companies threatened a 3 day week, others hinted at lock-outs and lay-offs. Union officials faced petty hostility.

In one south east engineering plant the AEU district secretary was denied access to talk to a mass meeting. Roll Royce did this in October this year to AEU executive member Jimmy Airlie.

Crucially the stewards started to move. Attendance at special shop stewards meetings reached levels unseen in years. 400 turned up in Manchester and 500 in Leeds.

Other battles helped fuel activity; there was pay fights at GEC Liverpool, at Plessey Edge Lane in the same city and at Chrysler's Ryton plant.

August 20th the day of the final one-day strike marked a further escalation. Proper picket lines were set up for the first time in many places. Demonstrations provided a focus for activity and a militant meeting of over 250 stewards in Leeds voted for an all-out strike to the obvious embarrassment of AEUW Executive member Harold Roberts.

Up and down the country motions from the floor at rally's and stewards meetings stressing no retreat on the full claim were passed unanimously.

The last week of August saw a pause in the dispute. Duffy floated the idea of scaling down the campaign to regional action. Sounds familiar...

### The battle hots up

September marked Phase 2 of the campaign. Duffy didn't get his way. A series of weekly two day strikes were announced. The number of lock-outs increased as management at places like Chrysler in Stoke and Veedor Root in Dundee retaliated against the action. 'Back to work' movements developed in some places, for instance at Lucas in Birmingham, but the fact that the strategic BL Longbridge plant stayed solid behind the strike helped hold the line.

Longbridge convenor Derek Robinson was sacked shortly afterwards and one argument at the time was that BL boss Edwardes was determined to get Robinson because the Longbridge stewards had held the line both in the West Midlands and across BL as a whole, while the Cowley plant for instance did not strike.

The EEF held back from large scale lay-offs and lock-outs for fear of increasing the temperature, the employers' early confidence had now vanished.

Rumours circulated that Duffy was prepared to drop the demand for any reduction in the working week in return for a £80 minimum time rate for skilled engineers. Rank and file engineers kept up the pressure with lobbies of all negotiations. In public, at least, Duffy had to keep up his commitment to the shorter working week.

The two day strikes continued, even involving non-union shops. Slowly, the employers built up the pressure. They hit back with petty vindictive actions like the withdrawal of overall allowances (Castle Bromwich) and the withdrawal of productivity increases (GKN, Lucas, GEC).

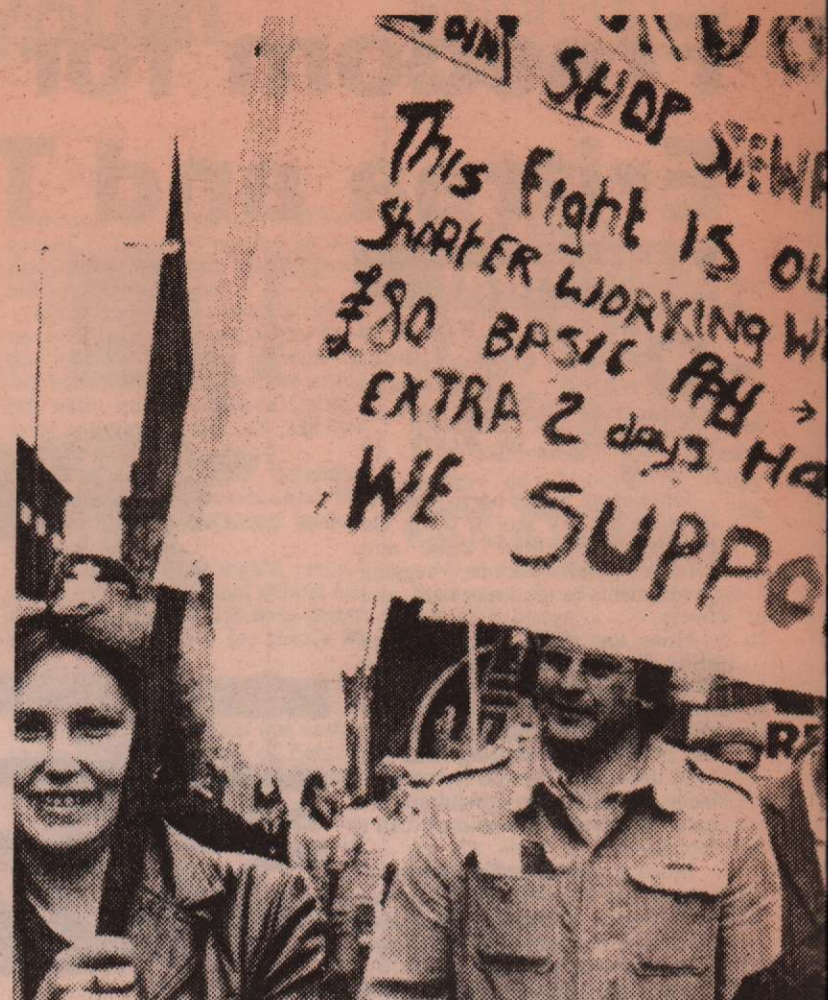
In turn the workers escalated the action. At Ferranti, Parsons, Edinburgh and GEC Liverpool workers went on all-out strike for the Confed claim and their own supplementary demands.

The two day strikes start to bite as September goes on. The fight gets more bitter. Flying pickets are used to great effect in Scotland and West Yorkshire. Other groups come out in all-out action as strikers refuse to work alongside scabs or touch scab work.

At one Rolls plant a single picket (A Tory voter) prevents the entire workforce from breaking the strike.

Sensing the gap opening up between the rank and file and right wing national officials and with one eye on the 'back to work' movements the employers strike back hard.

At the end of September after two months of one and two day strikes the big lock-out begins. It



On the march in '79

Rolls Royce Derby over 11,000 workers are affected. At first the Tories refuse to set up special DHSS offices to help the workers but are forced to provide them.

The propaganda war intensifies. Rolls Royce staff hand out a special leaflet to the locked-out workers queuing for their benefits. The leaflet is a reprint of an article for the *Sunday Express* from Rolls Royce Chairman Kenneth Keith entitled, "Do union members want to throw their jobs away?". Workers respond by throwing the letter away.

Other Rolls plants copy Derby. GKN adopt the same policy. As do many smaller firms. By early October 60,000 at least are locked out.

### Towards a deal

But despite these attacks the employers as a whole are far from confident.

Many desperately want a settlement. The strikes are biting. As the *Financial Times* editorial said:

"Large parts of the engineering industry have just endured their fifth two-day strike. Quite apart from the impact on profitability and hence on employment, permanent damage has been caused to relations with overseas customers. At a time when the intake of new orders is tending to fall off, companies are in danger of losing orders which they already have on their books. A few companies have left the Engineering Employers Federation to settle on their own terms; a few groups of employees have defied their union and gone back to work. But for the most part solidarity on both sides appears to persist. The longer the dispute goes on the greater risk there is that the bitterness of the national confrontation will infect labour-management relations in individual companies and plants."

Negotiations did restart. The employers were helped greatly by Frank Chapple of the EETPU. He threatened the solidarity of the Confed by threatening a separate ballot of EETPU members so pulling them out of the campaign. Even Duffy was forced to distance himself from Chapple.

But the employers had problems too. They wanted negotiations. As the FT reported:

"First signs of a real breakthrough in the long and damaging engineering industry dispute emerged at the Labour Party conference in Brighton yesterday. After some late-night contacts, the two sides will resume negotiations tomorrow at a Ger-

wick Airport hotel.

There is now intense pressure for a rapid settlement. As the dispute drags on there are signs of deep divisions on both sides.

The employers' ranks have been split by the London area engineering companies and the union ranks by the electricians who threatened a ballot to end their involvement in the two day stoppages."

The deal that emerged from the talks was hardly an inspiring victory for the engineers but it was a defeat for the employers. In a display of clear class consciousness the FT rounded on the EEF for conceding the 'sacred principle' of a shorter working week.

Workers' Action assessed the outcome of the action from the workers' point of view:

"Without any consultation with the membership, the leaders of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (Confed) have agreed to a four year freeze on further claims on hours and holidays. Of course there will be no freeze on sackings and speed-up by the bosses.

The unions demanded a 39 hour week immediately and a 35 hour week by 1982, plus two days extra annual holiday. They got 39 hours from November 1981, two days extra holiday this year, and one day extra each year for the three following years.

They demanded a minimum time rate of £80 for skilled workers and £65 for unskilled with a common implementation date of April 1st 1979. They got £73 for skilled workers and £52.50 for unskilled to apply from local anniversary dates in each firm (though overtime and premium payments are to be calculated on the increased rates straight away).

Apart from not being enough, the money offer increases differentials substantially.

Many engineering workers are angry about these meagre results after such a long struggle.

Inadequate though the settlement was from the workers' point of view, the bosses regarded it as a defeat. EEF leaders tried to put a brave face on it, but the top big-business papers were scathing.

The *Economist* said the EEF had 'painted itself in to a corner'. The *Financial Times* virtually suggested the EEF should be broken up, and described the outcome as a 'climb-down on the part of the EEF', 'a classic case of how not to manage a full scale confrontation'."

## The dangers of exaggeration

As the action started to fray at the edges in some areas, the exaggerated arguments that certain people used to motivate the completely correct call for all-out action — that the current strikes were too limited, weak, inefficient, even pointless — tended to play into the hands of hardened opponents of the strike who were organising to break the action. Workers who were by no means hardened scabs would say things like 'I would come out if it was

all-out', as they crossed the picket lines.

This underlines how careful socialists in the unions need to be in assessing how what they are saying interacts with what other forces, who may have very different interests, are saying. Sadly, in some instances in '79, the well intentioned posturings of the ultra-left provided some sort of justification for those who wanted to give up.



# East German workers organise free trade union

Interview with a free trade union activist in East Germany

**Y**ou helped write the appeal for the formation of free trade unions.

What is your opinion on the role of the FDGB [the official trade unions] in East Germany? Is it just an instrument of the party? Or does it defend the interests of the working class, if only partially?

The FDGB plays a role, certainly: that of a big welfare service.

It runs the whole social security system, pensions, sick pay, family benefit... It administers the building and management of public housing for workers, and organises summer holiday trips.

It is known for these functions, and that is why workers look to it.

But as regards our interests, our wages, and our working conditions, in general and in each workplace, I would say without hesitation that this 'trade union' is nothing of the sort.

Our wages are fixed by agreements at national level for the general framework, and for each workplace in detail. They are, if I can dare to use the word, *negotiated* between the State, i.e. the party, and the FDGB.

I have never, ever heard of the union applying pressure on our behalf. It takes note of what the State feels like giving us, that's all.

In my workplace the working conditions are particularly bad. There is a lot of noise, emissions of noxious substances, and high temperatures. The union couldn't care less.

As regards the demand for a bonus for dirty work, I heard a trade union official complaining that we always wanted to earn more. It was a foreman, and not the union, who discovered that the management were not paying us the legal wage.

**How is the FDGB organised? Don't you have the possibility of electing people you trust to union positions?**

The shop stewards are elected by their units and work brigades. Theoretically it is possible to elect people whom we trust and who will dare to open their mouths. But, in practice, few people want to stand in the elections. People have to be pushed into it. It's not surprising when you reckon that the possibilities open to these shop stewards amount to the right to grumble.

The trade union full-timers in the workplace are appointed from above, and the trade union committee is elected on the basis of an imposed list. The last trade union full-timers in my workplace came straight out of the party school.

**But despite everything, it seems that the rate of unionisation is very high in East Germany.**

True. It's about 98 per cent, I think. People don't join the union to fight for their interests, but for the reasons I've mentioned before.

You can't avoid the union. And besides, you can get into trouble if you don't join. Very often, you join the union compulsorily when you start at a workplace. With your left hand you sign your labour contract, and with your right hand the union membership form.

**Apart from the pension and sick-pay funds, how are the welfare services financed which the union runs?**

By State subsidies on the one hand, and union dues on the other. In your appeal, you say that the FDGB has never demanded a reduction in working time. What is the working week in East Germany?

As I've already said, the FDGB has never mobilised on any problem. The normal working week in

Appeal from independent union

**I**n forty years, what has the FDGB done for us? Has it put the demand for a cut in the working week as a permanent demand to factory management? Why has it not mobilised with us for the forty hour week?

Has it acted to get our wages indexed to hidden inflation? Why aren't there permanent negotiations on wage rises?

Where are the FDGB officials when new speed-ups are imposed in the factory? Are they on our side? Do they stop new work norms being imposed before there is a guarantee of corresponding wage rises?

How can the FDGB tolerate the fact that on average we have ten days less paid holiday than our colleagues in the West?

Has the FDGB demanded a reduction of the retirement age?

Have we ever seen the workplace union leadership acting in our interest and refusing to accept the State plan? In general, have we ever seen the union win anything for us against the State and against the party?

Forty years without any real defence of our interests is enough!

We should not let ourselves be organised any longer, even by 'decent men'. We should do it ourselves.

The next few years will not be easy. They want to squeeze us. Prices will rise, but not wages. When subsidies are cut, it has consequences for us. The State demands more productivity. Soon it will threaten us with sackings.

We need representatives who act in our interests, or otherwise our standard of living will decline.

Organise general assemblies and demand that the workplace union leadership gives an account of itself.

Elect colleagues from your ranks as spokespeople.

Demand of these colleagues that they take your demands to the workplace management.

Protect those colleagues if they have problems!

Publish the results. That is a means of protection against reprisals.

Seek contact with colleagues in other workplaces.

Form independent trade unions!

For contact, information, and support: Initiative für unabhängige Gewerkschaften Klub, Conrad-Blenke Straße 1, 1055 Berlin.

East Germany is 43 hours 45 minutes.

12 years ago, the government proposed and adopted a law to reduce it by stages to 40 hours, beginning with shift workers and women with children. Since then we haven't heard a word.

As regards paid holidays, we got done over by the government eleven years ago. When it fixed the length of the annual holidays nationally, it cancelled all supplementary holidays won locally in workplace agreements. There was no reaction from the union.

Today, with the massive emigration to West Germany, the new line is "You don't think that we can cut the working week with this shortage of labour".

It is true, though, that the workers don't put on much pressure for a mobilisation for a cut in the working week. A recent study showed that in the eight hours 45 minutes of the working day there are only five hours of actual work.

People say that it's better to work at your own pace than have the intensity of work increased.

There's a similar problem with wages. On the whole, you manage to cover your basic needs and have a drink in the evening. Anything above that, like consumer products which are not absolutely necessary, is so expensive and seems so much out of your reach that a wage rise of a few per cent won't make it accessible.

**Today the whole system is being massively challenged. How is the FDGB standing up?**

We don't have a network of information connecting different workplaces, so my picture is incomplete. But I do know that there are collective resignations from the union, and workers refusing to pay their union dues if the union continues to tag along with the government.

The leadership has dropped Tisch, the former general secretary, and trade unions in different industries have sacked their leaders and replaced them by new faces. The FDGB has not postponed its conference as it was intending to. All that is not an accident. It is due to the pressure from inside the union and from the streets.

**Your appeal is not the first initiative towards creating independent trade unions. What do you know about the others? Do you have the impression that a significant section of workers understand the need for independent trade unions.**

Through the bulletin *Telegraph*, published by the Umweltsbibliothek [Environment Library], and by word of mouth, we have heard of several initiatives. Unfortunately, the party's absolute monopoly on the means of information prevents us from getting a clear picture.

I tried to go and see the contact who was given in the *Telegraph*. The worker in question had been transferred to Bulgaria at top speed. That shows clearly that we are hitting the system at a sensitive point.

In any case, we'll see. We see our group as an initiating group which wants to get discussions going about the independence necessary for a trade union and which seeks contact with other groups of workers who want to break with the present policy of the FDGB. The organisation of a challenge to the system in the workplaces has lagged behind the political mobilisation. We need to catch up.

**Do you think you have at least small groups of workers whom you can count on?**

Absolutely. Now it's a matter of making contact, because we have no horizontal structures between workplaces that enable us to find each other.

Until now, our whole society has been dominated by fear. In the streets we have been able to liberate ourselves from that straitjacket. We have become confident of our strength.

In the factories, for the time being, it's not the same, because you are identifiable as an individual and you could lose your job. A lot of people are waiting for the initial breakthrough.

**Talking about fear, I was sometimes astounded by your completely carefree attitude to surveillance. It was as if you considered any precautions as a step into the past.**

All I know is that courage is necessary at times like this. History is being made today here, in the East. We are living through a historic opportunity which must be seized at all costs. I will never forgive myself for letting it slip. It's a moment I have been waiting for for 20 years.

Translated from the French socialist weekly *Rouge*.

K 8 ALLCARD  
ARDS COMMITTEE

R Fight  
EEK - MEANS WORK SHORING  
INFLATION NOW 135%  
HOLIDAYS WHY NOT?

RT - UNITY IS STRE



## Lessons for today

So what are the lessons for today?

Firstly, it's important to remember that even badly conceived and bureaucratically executed campaigns can generate a momentum and level of activity of their own which can quite quickly take events out of the complete control of national officials. Bill Jordan take note.

Secondly, a good push from the stewards with regular report backs and mass meetings can build up a momentum behind the campaign. This is what the Sheffield stewards did. And in 1979, the first stages of the campaign were less hopeful than this year, for instance, the turn out on the lobby of the EEF in April this year was double that in '79.

So the current campaign needs to be taken back to the districts and the workplaces. Regular mass meetings need to start now while the campaign is in the upswing. A national Confed stewards conference would give a great boost to this.

Thirdly, national action, even designed in the way it was in '79 can quickly generate a level of solidarity much greater than the localised guerrilla tactics adopted today and in '72 (see last week's SO). That's why a one day national Confed strike would give such a boost to today's campaign.

Finally we saw in '79 glimpses of what a well organised rank and file movement can do to take control of events. Many of the Sheffield stewards and others who got some rank and file co-ordination off the ground and who organised the flying pickets were often members of the Broad Left, and sometimes the smaller more left wing, Engineer's Charter. But at no point did the rank and file have a powerful enough unofficial movement.

The National Shop Stewards Movement the Sheffield stewards tried to launch after the strike didn't flourish. The Communist Party, which was the biggest single political force on the left in engineering at the time, was too tied into the union bureaucracy and didn't have the politics necessary to build such a movement in time of recession and ruling class offensive. Their only answer to the threat of job losses was reactionary talk of import controls' a policy that could only set engineering workers from different countries against each other at a time when the employers were organising and centralising themselves across national boundaries.

In the 1980s Jimmy Airlie, the leading AEU official closely associated with the CP, has moved so far to the right that he was the architect of the AEU's proposal for a single-union, no-strike deal with Ford at Dundee.

The much smaller Socialist Workers Party could not fill the gap left by the CP. Not least because they were in the process of giving up serious trade union work and transforming themselves into a single issue 'Leave the Labour Party' campaign.

Within two years they closed down 'Engineer's Charter' and pushed the line that nothing much could be done in engineering until there was an economic 'upturn'.

The left in engineering never really linked up with the left in the Labour Party which in 1979 was on the rise. Duffy, Boyd and Chapple were not so one-sided, they mobilised and organised to defeat the 'Benite Left'.

If the left had linked up the political and industrial struggles then we might have been able to put up a co-ordinated challenge to the Thatcher government.

The engineers' demand for a 35 hour week, with no loss of pay, could have been taken up across the movement as a whole and put forward as part of our answer to the economic crisis. But this never happened.

The Thatcherites triumphed and whole areas of the basic manufacturing were destroyed forever. Millions were put onto the dole.

Now ten years later, with Thatcher looking weak, a co-ordinated push across industry for a 35 hour week could give a real cutting edge to the reviving industrial militancy.

At least it would make Duffy and Boyd turn in their graves.

## Invite strikers to your meeting

**All districts are urged to invite striking members to local meetings and rallies. They will inspire members in your area and help boost funds. Contact the appropriate district secretary: Alwyn Rowlands (for Chester) - 0248 362098; Len Brindle (for Preston) - 0772 57765; Tony Berry (for Cheltenham) - 0242 517488; Les Elliott (for Kingston) - 01 587 1831; and John Carty (for Glasgow Hillington) - 041 248 7131. (From the CSEU information bulletin)**



# The End of History

The bourgeoisie has not been so confident as it is now since 1914, when the old 19th century world collapsed into World War and chaos.

The disintegration of Stalinism seems to open before the bourgeoisie a new golden age.

A sign of the times is the debate and discussion triggered in America by the Deputy Director of Policy Planning at the State Department,

Francis Fukuyama, who has aired the notion that we have reached the end of History. The world, he says, has reached bourgeois stability and equilibrium — forever.

This notion is a refurbishment of an idea propounded by the famous German philosopher, Georg Hegel, that History — that is, all great world struggles — had ended with the triumph of Reason early in the 19th century.

In this New Age, our Age of Gold,  
We reach the end of History;  
All things on earth are bought and sold,  
All things, including you and me:  
The rich inherit the good green earth,  
And socialism is cause for mirth.

They might not blow your world apart,  
The Bourgeois and the Stalinists,  
Who now converge to praise the mart:  
No longer cramped in Stalin's fist,  
New converts see, with heady zeal,  
This is the better way to steal.

Wage-slavery is here to stay.  
Karl Marx and Trotsky got it wrong:  
It's proved there is no other way,  
Than plunder by the rich and strong.  
"Without it, they won't have a job,"  
Said Rupert Pigg to Captain Bob.

Pre-history will never grow  
To socialism, as Marx once taught.  
It stops here, where sad embers glow,  
Where Freedom still is sold and bought.  
If you can't buy it — tough! Like me  
You are trapped in bourgeois history.

For God's not dead at all, not He,  
No matter what some people say;  
He changes form, our Deity  
From Age to Age, in His own way:  
He dwells now at the Stock Exchange,  
Inheres in stocks and shares, like Keynes.

The Age of Reason never dawned,  
We settled for the Hidden Hand,  
And History has never spawned,  
Its conscious self, to take command:  
The working class forever must  
Stay down and cringe, more social dust.

Mass culture too was all my eye —  
Who needs it in this Golden Age?  
We have the Sun, and pigs can fly  
For Sport, now Kylie's all the rage;  
And civilisation spirals high  
When millions worship Princess Di.

Old Chartist notions came to naught,  
Year Parliaments are not OK!  
The bourgeoisie was never caught,  
They never gave control away:  
But still, we vote: — Democracy!  
Narrowed down, for you and me.

We've got it good right now, unfree,  
The chains are padded here below;  
Though tyrants rule in industry  
We've got what freedom trade allows:  
It's all that you can hope to see,  
Here, at the End of History.

Revolt would lead us to the Gulag,  
You can not doubt it was the root:  
Dark dried blood made brown the Red  
Flag,  
Of tumult and revolt the fruit.  
They knew it well, oh, long before —  
And always crushed the angry poor.

The starvelings now will never rise,  
Hungry ideals cease to live,  
The rich will always take the prize:  
All against all, and never give;  
No Age for solidarity,  
It's you for you and me for me.

Our City of God is Megalopolis,  
Utopia, a ringing till,  
From rural to urban idiocy  
We did advance, and advance still:  
The working class will never rise —  
Class war is peace and truth is lies. S.M.



Bourgeois bliss, the end of history...

# Indicting State murder

By John Jones

In 'A Short Film About Killing' we see, graphically, the murder of a taxi driver, and then the psychological agony leading to the murderer's execution.

There is no doubt of the murderer's guilt. But is his murder at the hands of state any less dreadful?

The taxi driver who is killed is himself not a sympathetic character — no mere victim, although there is no real reason for his murder. Thus the film presents us with rounded characters and a subtle plot: it is not just propaganda against the death penalty.

An indictment of the death penalty it is, however. Although we have no reason to like the murderer, we have no reason to see him dead.

'A Short Film About Killing' is a chilling look at the drab Polish society in which it was made.

## ACTIVISTS' DIARY

**Thursday 30 November**  
Canterbury SO: 'South Africa': speaker Clive Bradley. Eliot Cloister Room 1, Kent University, 7pm

**Friday 1 December**  
Newcastle SO public meeting. Heaton Library, 7pm

**Wednesday 6 December**  
Bristol SO: 'Solidarity with workers in the Eastern Bloc', 7pm

**Thursday 7 December**  
South London SO: 'Labour into the 1990s'. Two Eagles pub, Austral St, Elephant and Castle, 7pm

**Saturday 9 December**  
'Nazis out of Welling!' Demonstration against BNP called by Bexley and Greenwich Campaign Against Fascism. Plumstead (Winns) Common, 11am

**Saturday 9 December**  
Leicester Trades Council demo in support of Ross Galbraith and Gary Sheriff, sacked for boycotting S African goods. Cossington Park, Belgrave, Leicester, 12am

**Thursday 14 December**  
Canterbury SO: 'Iran': speaker, an Iranian socialist. Eliot Cloister Room 1, Kent University, 7pm

**Saturday 27 January**  
Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc conference. ULU, Malet St, London WC1, 11am

## NEW PROBLEMS NEW STRUGGLES



A handbook for trade unionists by Socialist Organiser and Workers' Liberty £1

A new pamphlet from Socialist Organiser looks at the issues of new technology, business unionism, the changing composition of the working class, and 1992, draws lessons from the history of the movement, and proposes socialist answers. £1 plus 22p post from P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

# Wanton slaughter

## LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



The wanton slaughter of the elephant is more well known than that of the rhinoceros — although both have the same cause — stupidity and greed.

The elephant's tusk is at least made of a material with useful properties, though this by no means ex-

cuses driving them to extinction. However, the rhino is being poached out of existence for a horn made out of nothing more than plain old keratin, the protein that makes up hair, skin, claws and nails in all mammals.

Attempts to protect rhinos have so far met with limited success. One method, translocation, involves sedating the animals and transporting them to areas where they can be more easily protected. Unfortunately, translocation has an associated death rate of 15%, mainly due to problems of feeding.

Rhinos live on a low energy diet and must eat massive amounts to get enough nourishment. They depend on bacteria in their guts to ferment their food to release that energy, rather as do cows. The balance of bacteria is related to the diet of the rhinos. Moving them interrupts their feeding, causing inappetence and undernourishment. The new diet in their changed habitat then causes an upset in the balance of bacteria with accompanying digestive problems.

Compounded with this is the problem of establishing themselves in a new environment. Young rhinos are taught what to eat and where to get water from their mothers. Having established them in a territory, their mothers then move away. When translocated, they have to establish themselves in an unfamiliar habitat

as well as adapting to a new diet. In one case, a rhino died after eating poisonous plants and another died after falling over a cliff, such geographical features having presumably not been present in its former habitat.

Conservationists in Northern Namibia, faced with acute problems in trying to save the desert black rhino, have tried a different approach. They have simply removed the source of the rhino's value, its horn.

I say 'simply', but of course nothing is ever as simple as it sounds. A rhino will hardly submit willingly to what it sees as a vicious assault. It has to be 'knocked out' first and, being a fairly massive animal, it takes a fairly hefty dose of a powerful anaesthetic. Tracked down by helicopter, the rhino is shot with a dart containing a powerful opioid (morphine-like) drug and a sedative. Like all opioids, this drug causes respiratory depression (a slowed rate of breathing), so as soon as the helicopter lands beside the comatose beast another drug to stimulate breathing has to be given.

The problem is that the rhino has been sprinting certainly from the time that it got the dart in its backside and has built up an oxygen debt. It will be in some respiratory distress as well as suffering some hyperthermia (overheating). If the rhino's temperature is too high, the

de-horning must be abandoned, and the antidote to the opioid given.

Throughout the operation, buckets of water are thrown over the rhino to keep its temperature down in the baking sun. The horn is cut off about 2½ inches above the skin, just above the quick. The stump is filed smooth with the rhino equivalent of a nail file and painted with antiseptic.

Then the antidote is given and the team beat a hasty retreat. After a minute, the rhino is up and after someone's blood.

The question conservationists will want answered is: 'Will this save the rhino?' It is no use rendering the animal unattractive to poachers if it is thereby unable to defend itself against its predators or against other rhinos. Neither is it any use if the de-horned rhino is unattractive to potential mates and can no longer breed.

Happily, no ill effects have been observed with the pioneer rhinos and poachers have left the area.

The question is now: 'Could this technique be adapted to saving the elephant?' Undoubtedly, the problems are greater: for one, elephants live in herds, not in ones and twos. But it seems at present as though desperate measures may have to be considered to defeat those driven by prospects of extraordinary financial gain.



# Issues at student conference

By Paul McGarry

**D**elegates to this year's NUS Winter Conference will be deciding what direction the union's two most important campaigns, against loans and the poll tax, take.

Debates on education and the reform of NUS are also on the agenda. NUS's Labour chiefs didn't want this conference at all, but they lost that proposal last year. So they've decided to cut it by 25%. There's less time for debate and accountability, so the left must use the time effectively.

The Kinnockite leadership seem more interested in making NUS safe for a Labour government than organising a fight for students' interests. They've already thrown in the towel on the poll tax — they want to ditch any commitment to the non-payment tactic.

"It can't be beaten," said President Maeve Sherlock recently. So the Tories have won without a fight. Instead of backing a campaign that looks to workers in local government, linked to local community action, NOLS take their cue from Norman Willis and Neil Kinnock: "Can't fight, Won't fight!" The TUC and the Labour Party are running an information campaign on how bad the poll tax is; between now and a Labour government Neil's children offer nothing but condolences. And if Labour wins?...

A similar theme runs through Vice-President Education Steven Twigg's Education Initiative. No-one disputes the need for NUS to take the initiative in organising action for the fight against the privatisation of education, against cuts and closures, to build rank and file worker-student links, etc., etc., but Twigg's intentions are obviously elsewhere. "Labour Students' new campaign for NUS... is about... what we want Neil Kinnock's government to do when it take office." And, of course, there will be no "blank cheques".

Students can do without another campaign that is high on rhetoric and posturing, and low on commitments. So while NUS's policy review gets away from the "tired old formulas" like grants restored to 1979 levels, and the reversal of all Tory cuts, students engage in real struggles against cuts.

Over the last two or three years NUS has spent much of its time contemplating its navel. The Tories say they are going to smash NUS because they don't like it, and the

Kinnockite leadership respond immediately by making structural reforms. So the Tories don't like us — few people but the leadership would expect anything else!

As a result of this bending over backwards to appease the Tories, we will be spending more of what precious little conference time there is on debating how we can best smash ourselves up to save the Tories a job.

The leadership's proposals do absolutely nothing to maintain or extend democracy and accountability inside our national union. An overall cut back on the number of National Executive members, and the merging of fundamental positions like the VP Welfare and VP Education at a time when the student movement and education as a whole are facing some of the worst attacks ever will do nothing to build and co-ordinate the desperately needed fight back on campuses around Britain.

The proposal to elect the National President by cross-campus ballot every two years will basically disenfranchise many Further Education colleges, as it will be practically impossible to implement. It is also a backward step for democracy and accountability — our leadership should be elected annually and should be recallable and held accountable at twice yearly national conferences.

The Tories' new social security regulations that require claimants to prove that they are "actively seeking work" means a serious and additional pressure on many of the part-time NEC members. If full-time wages cannot be afforded for all of the Exec at its present size, then part-time wages and all the necessary expenses should be paid to part-time members and there should be no cuts in the size of the National Executive.

Steven Twigg is the most likely NOLS candidate for NUS President. The other possible candidate is Sara Adams.

Sara and her chums want to stop loans, but they are unable to locate where the potential lies to win. Every decision they make is either late or early, and always wrong.

A national demonstration, rejected in September, accepted in October and held in Glasgow. Now th chips are down, NOLS are moving a little: they support the idea of a rolling programme of occupations, shutdowns, pickets, etc. It is an empirical desperate shift of position, ironically supported by the likes of 'Cosmo' Hawkes, who chooses political strategies like choosing a tie — which one looks

good today, which one fits best.

Sector conferences will look at the issues that affect FE, Public Sector Higher Education, and university students in particular. Jane Marshall, VP FEUD, will be expecting a hard time from delegates over FE publicity lacking an FE perspective in NUS work. She is also responsible for the Area Development document which has proved very unpopular in colleges and Areas up and down the country.

Delegates should support moves to restrict the power of the NUS Exec on central funding. Much of the left has still to shake off its inadequacies. Militant, in true Militant style, offers skewed, even perverse, answers to students — a socialist Labour government, one-day education strikes, NUS as a TUC affiliate. It is propaganda and little else.

The SWP want to disrupt education, and appear to be as left-wing as possible. They want more militancy, and of course, more recruits.

Delegates should support those motions submitted by supporters of Left Unity. In all of the debates Left Unity gives the best strategy for NUS: that is, the need to build a militant and democratic union, basing its strength on its membership and on rank and file links with the labour movement.

In a sense this conference represents a watershed in NUS politics. NOLS are out as open Labourite reformists.

## Continuing the fight after 50 years

By Eric Heffer MP

**I**t is now 25 years since I was elected Labour MP for Walton. It has been a great honour and privilege to have represented the Walton Labour Party and the people of Walton for all those years.

It will be a great honour to continue to represent Walton until the next General Election, which could be up to two and a half or three years away.

But there are a number of important reasons why I feel I must retire as an MP at the next election. If Mrs Thatcher goes on until almost the end of her five years for this Parliament, I shall be getting on in years and would have been well retired had I still been at my trade as a joiner.

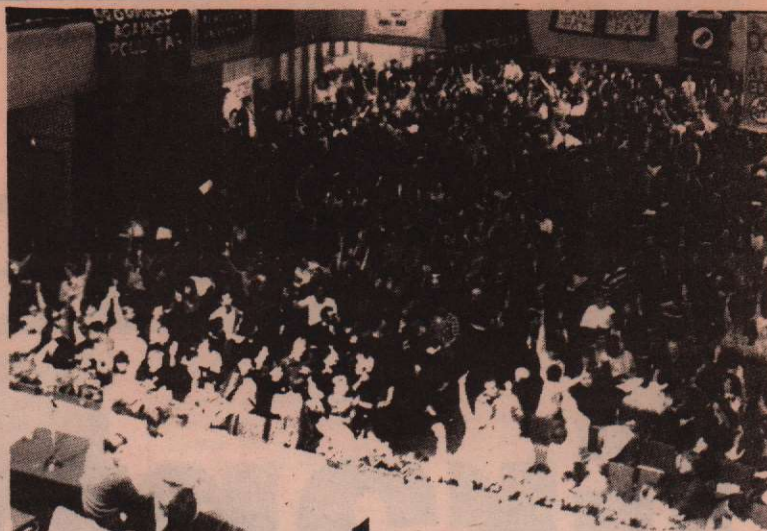
Secondly, there is always a time for everyone to move over, and it is wrong for people to cling on when they feel it is time to depart.

Thirdly, politically, I find myself increasingly out of step with the way the Labour Party has been going in the last six years.

Labour is a socialist crusade, wanting to end poverty, inequality, and oppression, and build a new society which brings to an end the drive for profit and private greed and power by small groups, a society which develops the talent of all and releases the human spirit in genuine freedom, both collective and individual — or it is nothing.

All my life, since I entered the Labour and trade union movement, I have fought for a classless democratic socialist society, and as long as I live I shall continue to do so.

Despite what has happened in the Labour Party, i.e. the swing to the right and the abandonment of genuine socialist concepts — a trend that has developed throughout the European Socialist movement, I personally want Labour to win the next election. I think it will, but it



Voting at the conference. Photo: John Smith, Profile

## Wasted chances at poll tax conference

By Jim Denham

**L**ast Saturday, 25 November, over 1500 activists attended the 'All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Organising Conference'.

It should have been an opportunity to exchange experiences, learn from what has happened in Scotland, hammer out an effective constitution and elect a representative national steering committee. In the event, the conference did none of these things and the reason for that was quite simple: it was totally dominated by the Militant tendency.

Of course, Militant has put a great deal of time and effort into campaigning against the poll tax and it is probably the case that they would be the largest organised force in any representative national anti-poll tax conference. The problem was that they used their control of the conference organisation and their majority on the floor to stifle

serious discussion.

For instance, several amendments to the Steering Committee's proposed Statement of Aims and Constitution attempted to emphasise the need for non-implementation of the tax, and to ensure that Labour Parties and trade unions are fully involved in the campaign.

Militant's proposals did little more than pay lip-service to non-implementation and put all the emphasis on non-payment. But instead of debating this matter seriously, Militant supporters made demagogic speeches implying that those who said non-payment (even "mass" non-payment) on its own was not enough, were actually opposed to non-payment!

Given that the 'All Britain Federation' that emerged from this shambles is the only authoritative national anti-poll tax movement, activists will have to give it some support: but Militant domination of the steering committee (the three national officers positions and all but two regional places were taken by Militant supporters) means that the campaign is unlikely to have a serious labour movement orientation to it.

The best way for those of us who are committed to a serious labour movement orientation would be to organise through 3D — the non-aligned grouping set up on 3 September — and thus to put pressure on the All Britain Federation to build a broad-based, democratic organisation with a strategy that is capable of defeating the poll tax.

## Support Polish Socialists

**Social to raise money for printing equipment for the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution)**

**Speaker from the PPS-RD**

**Music, late bar**  
*workers are going*

**Saturday**  
**December 9th,**  
**8pm**

**West London Trade Union Club, Acton High Street, W3**

**This petition is being circulated by the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution).**

**The coalition government in Poland plans to marketise the economy and sell off national assets to private interests at home and abroad. This will profoundly affect working people. It will deepen social inequality and provoke unemployment.**

**We the undersigned call upon the new Polish government:**

- 1) To legalise the activity of political parties in Poland by socialists, such as the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution).
- 2) To respect the right to strike by trade unionists as a basic human freedom.

PPSRD, The Basement, 92 Lad-broke Grove, London W11.

Conference

### Solidarity with workers in the Eastern Bloc

Saturday 27 January 1990  
11.00 — 5.00  
University of London Union  
Malet St, London WC1

For tickets, cut out this slip and send to 'Solidarity Conference', 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London SE5.

Name.....

Address.....

Tickets ..... (number).

Money enclosed £..... Tickets: £8 waged/£4 low waged & students/£2 unwaged.



# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

### Militant ditch the oppressed

By Mark Osborn

**B**elow we reprint a motion voted down at Saturday's All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Conference. All the votes opposing this motion came from the Militant Tendency.

It is disgusting that the Militant, a group of socialists — at least formally committed to the liberation of the specially oppressed — should vote down a motion which aimed to make the Anti-Poll Tax campaign habitable for society's most oppressed.

Unfortunately, this sort of behaviour comes as no surprise to anyone who has worked with the Militant in the Labour Party unions or LPYS.

The Militant policy panders to backward ideas inside the working class movement by refusing to challenge prejudice. They do this in the name of working class unity, but in fact they achieve exactly the opposite.

If the specially oppressed feel they can not be involved in a campaign because of the open bigotry of others in the campaign then there is no working class unity.

If the campaign fails to register the additional effects of a Tory policy like the Poll Tax on the specially oppressed then the campaign will fail to live up to the aspirations of the whole working class: there will be no unity right across the working class.

The Militant's record is bad. In 1974 during the Leicester Imperial Typewriters dispute, one of the first major disputes involving black workers in Britain, Militant argued that black workers striking against racist trade union practices were disrupting class unity!

In the Labour Party, Militant have consistently opposed the quite legitimate right of black people to organise Black Sections.

In the LPYS the first debate on lesbian and gay rights took place in 1984. This was 15 years after the Militant took control of the LPYS!

The reason was pure and simple prejudice. You can still find Militant supporters who believe that homosexuality is a 'bourgeois deviation' which will disappear with the coming of socialism.

Their terrible record continues. Many honest Militant supporters are unhappy with this sort of bigotry, but go along with it when Militant's leaders tell them it is necessary if Militant is not to offend 'ordinary workers'.

Yes we should try not to offend miseducated workers by being needlessly provocative, though in fact many 'ordinary workers' are a lot less backward than Militant thinks. But this is a different thing altogether from reflecting and thus reinforcing such backwardness, which is what Militant does.

Trotsky often warned his supporters not to let a 'pedagogical adaption' to backwardness, that is adopting the best approach to the job of re-educating the backward, become an adaptation to the backwardness itself.

Militant and the Militant controlled LPYS has itself long been a school, indeed a veritable university of generalised backwardness!

### The defeated motion

The federation shall actively campaign to draw in national and local groups representing the most oppressed and discriminated against sections of society, who will be especially hard hit by the poll tax, the cuts it will lead to and the restrictions it will impose on civil liberties: black people, women, lesbians and gays, young people, claimants, the unemployed, etc. The Federation shall encourage the affiliation of such organisations which agree with the Federation's policy of mass non-payment of the poll tax nationally and locally, and campaign on an anti-racist, anti-sexist basis. Accordingly, racist, fascist or homophobic activity or abuse of women shall be regarded as incompatible with membership, once it is explained to any member who behaves in this way, and if they refuse to accept these policies.

# Grants not loans!

By Emma Colyer, NUS NEC (personal capacity)

**N**ewcastle University Students Union was built by the local Board of Commerce, a gift for the students who helped scab on the 1926 General Strike.

Four decades later students were occupying their colleges, marching against the Vietnam war, defying governments, Tory and Labour alike. Students sided with the oppressed — from Paris in '68 to China '89 students have sparked revolts and played central roles in revolutionary movements.

Freed from the dreary routines, responsibilities and pressures workers experience, students react and relate to new ideas and circumstances dynamically and radically.

Students in Britain in 1989 face the seemingly mundane task of turning back the Tory assault on education and being part of the alliance that drives the Tories from office and elects a Labour government. Luckily today's student movement is not that of 1926, but neither is it inspired by revolutionary aspirations. There is little immediate evidence of the working class's revolutionary potential to fire **COHEN** the Thatcher generation; even the miners' strike, five years ago, is outside of today's student experience.

Other factors have played their part in creating the terrain on which the student movement must struggle; the lack of an alternative from the labour movement; the political, economic and ideological onslaught on young people — the "me now" society and, of course, the weakness of the NUS leadership.

Hopefully the events in China, and the recent industrial upturn, will permeate into the popular student conscience. And while the Tories are in crisis, Labour is particularly popular amongst young people.

Over the next two years, the student movement must immerse itself in the fight for a Labour government. A successful strategy has three elements. Firstly the struggles are presently engaged in, the need for labour movement orientations and the question of a future Labour government's policies.

The Labour Student (NOLS) leadership of NUS is supporting Kinnock in dropping Labour's radical policies such as unilateralism, not rocking the election boat, and steering clear of making "impossibilist" demands. The Kinnockites are clear of their role, the left must be equally clear.

The student movement must build a massive campaign against loans. The arguments about what kind of campaign have been well rehearsed; it must rely on students' self-activity, creativity and needs. It should be self-organising, militant



and positive. Support can be won from working class organisations. Rallies and demonstrations should have Labour Party and trade union representation. Activities should be organised democratically and openly drawing in sections of students not usually involved in campaigning.

Every college should have an anti-poll tax group, linking up with the local anti-poll tax federation. Getting involved in local groups is important, it is a useful method of integrating students into labour movement activities.

Focusing on those and other issues which make the Tories unpopular, principally through energetic Labour Club campaigns, given the concrete political link to the Labour Party. Students need to be convinced that their short and long-term interests are best served by joint struggles with workers. Campaigns by NATFHE and the AUT for pay, and the present ambulance and engineers' disputes are

opportunities for the student left. Speakers can be invited to general meetings, collections can be made, picket lines supported, etc. As in the 1984/85 miners' strike, students can help the labour movement and workers will reciprocate. Miners were regular participants on student demos, and the political lessons were learnt by thousands of young people.

With Labour 10 points ahead in the polls, it's not surprising that attentions are on the next general election and a future Labour government. The issue dominates the minds of our leaders to the extent that they reduce everything to their perceived electoral popularity. Their agents in the student movement can thus appear responsible and reasonable.

However, linking struggles in the here and now to the election and programme of a future Labour government is pivotal for the left too.

An integral component of beating loans is to campaign for better grants, etc. And other issues flow from the loans issue: how can access to higher education be widened, what will a Labour government do for Further and Higher education and training? Currently the Labour Party and NOLS will give no real commitments to students beyond the vagueness of the Policy Reviews.

So action on loans must focus on positive demands and link to what kind of Labour government students and workers need. More than that, socialists will need to explain the failure of the last Labour government and of the subsequent democracy and Bennite movements.

Socialists grouped in Left Unity are best placed to tie together campaigning and political strategies in the run up to the next election. Left Unity must be built by those who want a Labour victory, but also want to transform the labour movement into a movement that fights for socialism.

### Vote Janine Booth!

**A**t NUS Conference there will be a by-election for a part-time NEC post.

Janine Booth, Convenor of Manchester Area NUS, will be standing as a supporter of Left Unity. Janine will be the left's main candidate. The Labour Party right appear to be running Lorna Fitzsimmons.

The main point of interest in this sort of election is the way the left votes. The SWP normally stand a candidate. Then, if they think Janine is likely to win the election, they will probably vote for the right-wing candidate to stop her.

The Militant tendency also have a record of either voting for right-wing candidates or staying in bed

on the morning of elections where they are not standing.

These two groups, who quite reasonably moan when the right-wing led NEC demobilise the student movement, are the very people responsible for the right's continuing domination: if they had voted for Socialist Student candidates at Easter '88 NUS Conference, we would have a hard-left NUS NEC.

The SWP and Militant vote for the right-wing rather than "help" their "competitors" in the student movement. Doing so they damage the student movement — they are genuine sectarians.

Will the SWP vote for Janine Booth? Will the Militant tendency hide in the toilet when the election is taking place?





# WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Inside: more on reproductive rights & embryo research, the pornography debate, quotas for women, plus lots more

# FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE!

Women's rights to choose when to bear children is under attack again. The anti-abortion lobby, is to have another go at the 1967 Act which gives women the right to have a legal abortion up to 28 weeks of pregnancy, with the permission of two doctors.

It is likely that when the Embryo Research Bill comes up in Parliament later this year 3 amendments will be tabled to reduce the upper time limit for abortions to 24, 22 and 20 weeks respectively.

That in the words of leading anti-abortionist Anne Widdecombe (quoted in this week's Observer) is only the beginning: "If we bring the limit down to 22 weeks... then we will have broken the Act, and I will consider myself very well satisfied. Then I can get on with the rest of the business."

The 'business' is to chip away at the 1967 Act, at first using apparently reasonable 'medical' evidence, then moving on to the moral bludgeon. Organisations like SPUC which support all attacks on the '67 Act are anti-all abortion, even in the case of rape, or severe foetal abnormality.

They believe a full-frontal attack would fail, so choose instead, the bit-by-bit approach, figuring that once the Act is 'broken' other 'breaks' will follow.

The most likely reduction in the time limit is to 24 weeks. This is because late abortions are an easy target for the anti-abortion lobby.

The foetus in some exceptional cases capable of independent life at 24 weeks, 4 weeks earlier than when the limit was set in 1967. Consequently only a very few abortions are carried out after 20 weeks. The 'date of conception' is always just an estimate and it is only accurate to 4 weeks anyway so a 28 week limit, as now, means a 24 week limit in reality.

Only 22 late abortions were carried out last year and 18 of those were for severe foetal abnormality.

To reduce the time limit to 24 weeks would effectively outlaw those abortions, and condemn those women to months if not years of misery, bearing babies incapable of life, in the full knowledge of what will happen.

Yet, anti-abortionists talk of late abortions as if hundreds happened each year, all for 'social' reasons. The truth would win far fewer converts to their reactionary cause.

If the abortion amendments reach the House of Commons, MPs will be given a 'free vote', ie one not bound by party policy. This is usually invoked for matters of 'conscience' like hanging.

In fact the Labour Party has

comprehensive policy on abortion. Labour Party conference voted for the defence and extension of the 1967 Act. It should not be a matter of 'conscience' at all when what is at stake is the overwhelming needs of the millions of women who will need abortions in the future, and who will either get them legally or at the hands of backstreet abortionists.

Nor is it a matter of one person's 'conscience' when the Labour Party has democratically decided on a pro-choice policy. The idea of 'conscience' makes a mockery of Labour Party democracy.

All Labour MPs should be voting in line with Party policy — we did not put them into parliament to vote with their 'conscience' in questions like housing or unemployment and abortion should be no different. All three are issues affecting the lives of working class people.

The anti-abortionists' campaign will be well-funded and professional. SPUC estimates it will have to spend £200,000, £50,000 of which will come from one man — property 'developer' Geoffrey Bradman.

SPUC's money will be spent on emotive propaganda and glossy advertisements in the national press. They will concentrate on guilt and generalities rather than facts, with the sort of (untrue) stories which make every woman seeking abortion seem like a feckless, convenience-seeker and every doctor who helps her a money grabbing accomplice to murder.

The pro-choice campaign will be somewhat different. It will be made up of thousands of ordinary women who know the real facts about abortion.

Like the recent FAB campaign, we will have to get all those people who agree with a woman's right to choose to come out and say so.

But unlike the FAB campaign, we won't be able to use parliamentary tactics to defeat the Widdecombe amendment. As an amendment to a government bill, it will be guaranteed debating time. The only way we will be able to defeat this latest attack is by building a mass, broad campaign, involving trade union support.

However, while it is vital that we mobilise to prevent the lowering of time limits, we mustn't forget that the Embryo Research Bills has other implications for our reproductive rights.

We must campaign for the right of lesbians and single women to have AID; for the right of black women not to have abortions, or forced sterilisations or be used as guinea pigs for drugs such as Depo Provera. We must ensure that



research on life-threatening diseases includes those that affect predominantly black people — like sickle cell anaemia.

And we should be fighting to ensure that women who do want abortions have access to adequate facilities.

We will need to build a big, broad, militant campaign involving trade unions, students, tenants' associations and every group where women are organised.

Organising meetings have already begun, initiated by the National Abortion Campaign. Get involved! Our campaign should include:

- A campaign amongst trade unions to win them to a position of

support for a woman's right to abortion, and to encourage them to join the campaign.

- Pressure on Labour MPs to vote in line with Party Policy.

• Lots of petitions, demonstrations and letter writing to 'undecided' MPs to show that just because we don't have huge donations from industrialists we do have massive support from women.

We must also try to broaden the campaign so that it remains to fight for extending the '67 Act, after this current attack is defeated.

- We must use groups like Women for Socialism which have developed recently to intervene in the labour movement.

**Stop the Amendment Campaign meeting 7.00pm Monday 4 December LSE, Houghton St**



# Reproductive rights — whose choice

By Sigrid Fisher

That was the title of a successful Women for Socialism meeting held in Newcastle last week, called in response to the latest attack on women's right to abortion that 'pro-life' MPs are waging in connection with the Embryo Research Bill that is being presented in Parliament.

With the debate raging yet again around the legal time limit for abortion — and the anti-abortionists' aim of cutting it from 28 to 24 — or even 18 weeks — women are yet again having to fight for the right to control our own bodies and our own fertility.

The speaker, Claire Standing, emphasised that the fight is not just about the right to have safe, legal and free abortions, but about the right to choose. And that means real choice, including the right to choose to go ahead with a pregnancy, knowing their are adequate facilities.

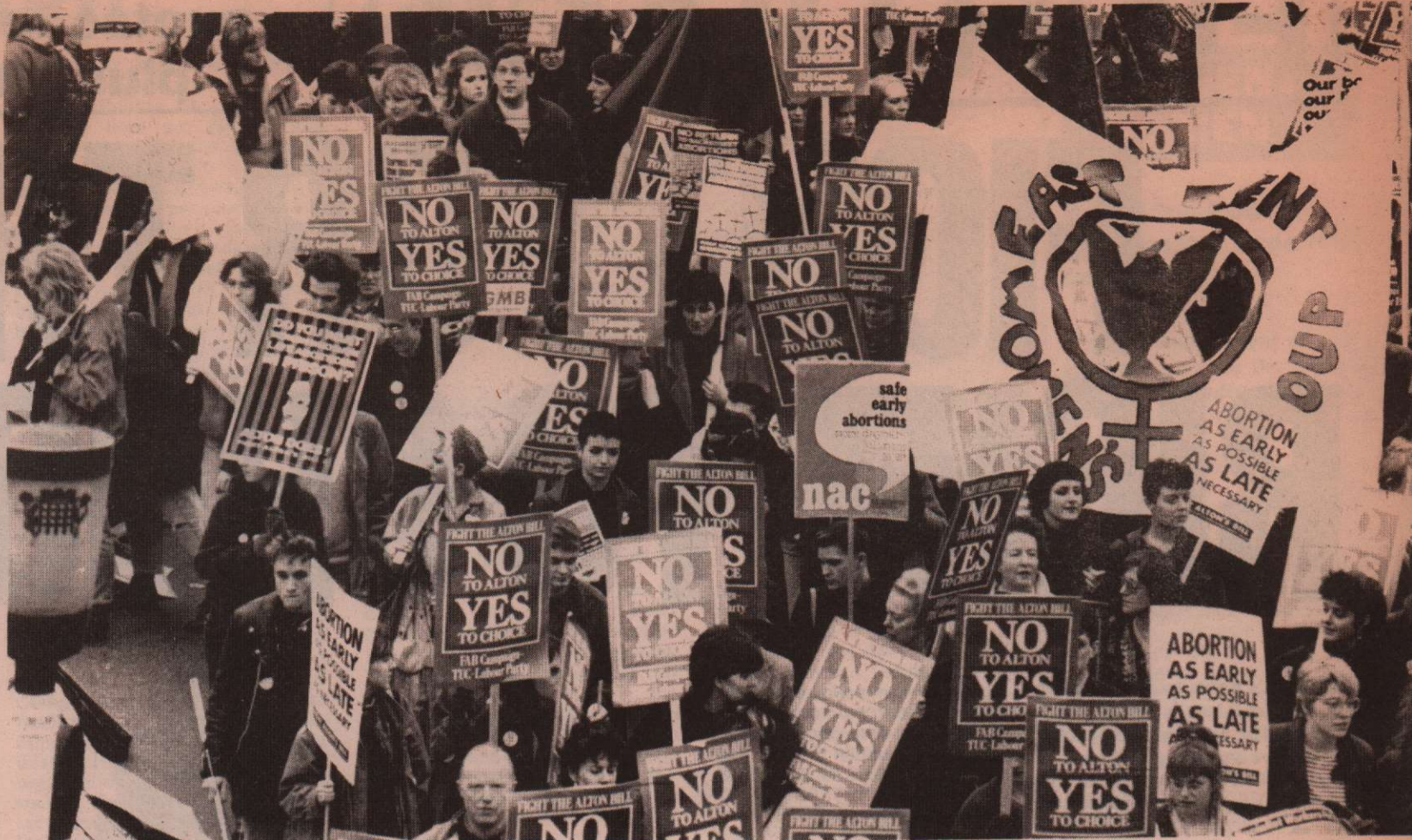
Faced with the prospect of isolation, poverty, lack of childcare facilities, and many forms of discrimination, women can find that abortion is the only option. It is not a decision made easily.

Lesbian women who want children have to deal with the bigotry of a homophobic society — one that is currently trying to make artificial insemination illegal for lesbians.

The government's White Paper on the Health Service does not identify gynaecological services as core ones — meaning many health authorities will not be able to provide this basic care for women. And under the Tories' axe, maternity services have been cut to the bone.

It is within this context that we must look at reproductive rights, in order to plan a successful campaign for defeating yet another attack on women's basic right to play an equal role in society. This also means learning the lessons of the FAB (Fight Alton Bill) campaign two years ago.

Here, women were put on the defensive, having to fight a campaign around the agenda set by Alton and his supporters. Any fight for real reproductive rights for women must be a positive one. Our



FAB demo 1988

demands must be clear: free abortion on demand, with no time limit; self-referral up to 12 weeks as in countries like Sweden; decent sex education, free pregnancy testing and family planning services; free contraception; full gynaecological and maternity services; free 24-hour childcare and support services; child benefits and maternity benefits that really meet need and are available to all women; AID for lesbians; and no involuntary sterilisation, as we have seen forced on black women in recent years.

Fundamentally, we must win the argument that in a society where women are truly equal and able to take up a full role, our right to decide what is best for us, for our lives and our future, and for any children we may choose to have or not to have, these services would be basic and automatic.

That is why groups like Women

for Socialism must be at the forefront of any campaign for reproductive rights. For it is in a socialist society that women will be recognised and treated as equal, where sexism and all forms of oppression can be eliminated and

where society is based on the value of the population, on enabling us all to reach our full potential and not on exploitation and the search for ever more profit.

Campaigns for reproductive rights should reflect this view: they

must involve the community, women in the home, girls' clubs and women's groups, the trade union and labour movement — we cannot allow Labour MPs to vote against women's right to abortion again.

These are some of the ideas that

## Embryo research: open to ab

By Liz Millward

The proposed abortion amendments will be added to the Embryo Research Bill. This Bill arises out of the controversy surrounding medical experiments using human embryos. There is a clear case for legislation in this matter — many people having a fear of medical research 'going too far'.

This fear does seem justified. Research laboratories have the reputation of being staffed by mad scientists who are all capable of cruel and needless experiments such

as breaking a cat's back and seeing if it can then keep its balance!

At the same time extremely valuable and life-saving research is carried out, without which many people would die from preventable diseases.

Human tissues are already used in medical research, and can substitute in some case for live animals. The use of human embryos, now we have the ability to produce them outside the womb seems an obvious next step — not to substitute for animals, but to push back the barriers of medical science.

Anti-abortionists would stop this research. Logically the reasoning must be that 'life' in a meaningful sense begins when sperm and ovum unite.

Yet millions of sperm and ova are 'wasted' every day and no tears are shed over their fate. Many (some say a majority) of united sperm and ova are rejected by the womb almost immediately, others a few days after conception without the women being any the wiser.

Recently it has been possible to unite sperm and ova outside the womb and to implant the result in a woman's womb to allow pregnancy. Many more foetuses are produced than are ever implanted.

If life really begins at 'conception' it must be both inside and outside the womb, and many more 'potential' murders are being committed than we ever realised! Truly in the words of the song 'every sperm is sacred'!

The anti-abortionist's case is

## Stop these bigots!

'Rescue', a rabid right-wing anti-abortionists group in America, have brought their guerilla tactics to Britain.

Run by a Catholic priest, an ex-leader of SPUC, Rescue's stated aim is to close down all abortion clinics in Britain.

In the US the tactics of these so-called 'pro-lifers' have included firebombing of clinics, the kidnapping of a doctor, and abusive phone calls to clinic staff.

While — as yet — nothing quite so extreme has been practiced by these bigots here, the British 'Rescue' group has taken to picketing abortion clinics, attempting to blockade entrances so that neither staff nor women seeking abortions can enter the clinics.

Their vile and intimidatory form of 'pavement counselling' involves screaming abuse at women entering the clinics, and thrusting pictures of aborted foetuses into women's hands.

In Stockport, a 'Rescue' member managed to get into the clinic and stage a sit-in, having to be removed by the police. Altogether, over 100 members of 'Rescue' have been arrested in recent months.

And their views are as repulsive as their actions. Kathy O'Keefe, a member of American 'Rescue' who has come over to help launch the British group, claims she is on a 'race-saving' mission:

'I understand your population is declining and that the Greens are calling for the population to be reduced. You're basically being wiped out as a race. I'm doing you a favour coming here.'

In Manchester, women have mobilised to defend the clinics from these bigots. We must spread the action, and force the labour movement as a whole to join women in defending women's right to abortion, and kicking these people off the streets.

## 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.

4. 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.

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

6. 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.



ce?

# Unity not division

**Gail Cameron replies to Betty Heathfield's proposals for a women's union featured in the last issue of *Women's Fightback***

For some time socialist feminists have been grappling with the problem of how to build a feminist movement that's capable of addressing the specific oppression of women and combining that with an overall fight against the exploitation of working class women and men.

The fragmentation beginning in the mid-'70s of the women's movement, coupled with demoralisation in the labour movement, has at once made the question more difficult but all the more important.

The last issue of *Women's Fightback* carried an article by Betty Heathfield, which attempted to put forward some answers to this question. Drawing on the experiences of Women Against Pit Closures — an organisation acclaimed throughout the strike for the irreplaceable role it played in integrating the struggle of the class with the struggle and organisation of women, yet afterwards was defeated in its attempts to become an affiliate of the NUM — Betty puts forward the case for establishing a permanent national structure:

"A women's union type of movement, which would encourage the self-organisation of women in every community — in other words the thousands of women without a

voice or ability to wield power in defence of their equal value.

"The mobilisation of thousands of women now still outside the labour and trades union movement for various reasons, could be won for the movement and a women's movement could be the stepping stone to facilitate this move..."

Given the continued attacks on women's rights alongside the influx of women into the labour force, the need for such an organisation is essential.

Up until now the response of the labour movement has been all too predictable. Falling membership rolls have only now pushed unions into recruiting in the traditionally unorganised sectors; politically the Labour Party leadership's response has been to pull out a leaf from the Bush election campaign. The Labour Party is set to woo women voters with nice family photos and bunches of red roses instead of looking to give real political answers to the problems women face.

But for whatever reasons the labour movement is attempting to be "women friendly", the fact that it now is, opens opportunities to organise and ensure our demands are integral to the movement. Is a women's union the vehicle to make sure this happens?

When first the idea of a women's union was floated a few years ago the emphasis was on the creation of a trade union organisation affiliated to the TUC. The reasoning behind this was clear: the labour movement's historic indifference to the struggles of women and the marginalisation of women within working class organisation. A women's union was seen as a bridge to simultaneously organise and integrate women into the movement.

From Betty's article it remains unclear whether this is what is



Should these women healthworkers leave their union?

meant by a union. But if it does remain the case the proposals should be treated with a great deal of caution. For what in practice would a women's trade union mean? Organising in sectors with majority women workers, recruiting women workers already organised in existing trades unions? Splitting the most militant women from those unions?

For a women's union to mean anything, the answer to those questions would have to be yes. Far from creating a bridge for the women to pass into the movement the movement would be split retrogressively. For it isn't that the labour movement cannot, de facto, respond to the struggles of women, but that politically it has generally

not seen it as particularly important or necessary to take seriously the demands of women. But that can be countered. For example, the Vauxhall car workers are currently in dispute not just over pay, but better conditions. Their key demands include the provision of workplace nurseries and full rights to paternity leave. For sure that has resulted from many years of women insisting that such issues should be fought for by all the labour movement.

We need an independent organisation that can key into and organise around the demands of working class women. But one that seeks to transform the existing labour movement not create a women's alternative.

ouse?

# Quotas for women — or quotas for the media?

**This year's Labour Party conference voted in support of 'quotas' for women — but who gets to decide which women? Nadine Finch of the Socialist Movement looks behind the feminist gloss**

To read the reaction of some erstwhile luminaries of the Left, whose views grace the pages of *Tribune* most weeks, you would think that the Left had won solid support for a range of issues — around defence, equality for women and recognition of the black and lesbian and gay communities' rights. They must surely have been at another conference from the rest of us.

Defending policy to acknowledge that lesbians and gay men had the same legal rights as others in the community or that a socialist party should spend resources on welfare not nuclear arms is scarcely progressive. Similarly, allowing the NEC to formulate a quota system to increase women's representation is a very far cry from an acknowledgement of women's

autonomous voice within a socialist party.

As socialists we should be campaigning to ensure that all sections of the community — women, black people, the Irish, people with disabilities and lesbians and gay men — have a representative voice. But representation has to be the operative word.

Somehow over the last few years the clarity and militancy of women's demands within the party for the right to elect their own representatives to the NEC, to be able to submit five resolutions representing the key issues for women in the party to annual conference, and for a recognition of the wide range of political work in the party by women, has been dissipated.

In sanitising women's demands, in order to market them to the trade union and labour leadership, they have become unrecognisable to the very women who had fought in the wards and GCs for them.

Yes, we want women on the NEC, but we don't want them to be there as a tokenistic gesture to fool the liberal media. We want them there, firstly because that is their rightful place, reflecting the political contribution they make to the party. But, perhaps more significantly, we want them there to represent the unheard voice of women in the party.

Women's reproductive rights, their views on unilateralism and Ireland and their experience of the welfare state and employment are not accurately reflected by the pre-

sent leadership. The danger is that if we accept this status quo with the addition of a small quota of women (which is undoubtedly what we will be offered) it will continue to be unrepresented.

We should remember that the Labour Party, created to represent the views of working people, was so far removed at a leadership level from those same people during the miners' strike, that its voice was indistinguishable from that of the Tory establishment. If we do not demand a representative voice for women, this could well happen in relation of the next attack on our

reproductive rights, the minimum wage or immigration controls.

We need to renew our campaign for a Labour Women's Organisation that reflects the concerns of working class and socialist women and insist that the Labour leadership gives that organisation the space to speak for women, instead of hand-picking women whose dress sense and good looks might impress TV pundits, but merely alienate the very women making do on benefit or struggling in their union, whose concerns should be the concerns of all in the Labour Party, women and men.

**WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK**

Inside: Betty Heathfield: A new kind of women's movement

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# Nothing positive about porn

## DEBATE

The call amongst feminists for the banning of pornography would not actually lead to its disappearance, and would not achieve the desired effects of liberating women from the oppression which they face in our society.

Ruth Cockcroft is right to argue against such a ban, but the only reason which feminists and socialists should do so is on the grounds that such censorship would give tremendous power to the state. This power would inevitably be abused so that instead of having a liberating effect on women, the capitalist state would censor feminist, lesbian and gay literature, sex education material, etc.

But I feel the fundamental mistake which Ruth makes is to go from a position of being against the banning of pornography to one which justifies its existence and even looks at it in a positive light.

Ruth argues that many women have "not had the courage to speak up for a more liberal attitude to pornography, and a more sophisticated understanding of what it represents". Since when have we, as socialists, wanted a more liberal attitude to anything?

Most feminists are not afraid to speak out on the issue of pornography, but a liberal attitude towards it is really just the dominant male attitude to it.

Nor do we need a more sophisticated understanding of pornography. We certainly do have to examine what pornography is and what it represents in our society, but this does not call for sophistica-

tion, merely an ordinary, everyday way of looking at the world.

My definition of pornography certainly does not include such literature as Mills and Boon, and even if there were any evidence for the switch from sentimental porn to less romanticised porn for women, I would not view this as progressive.

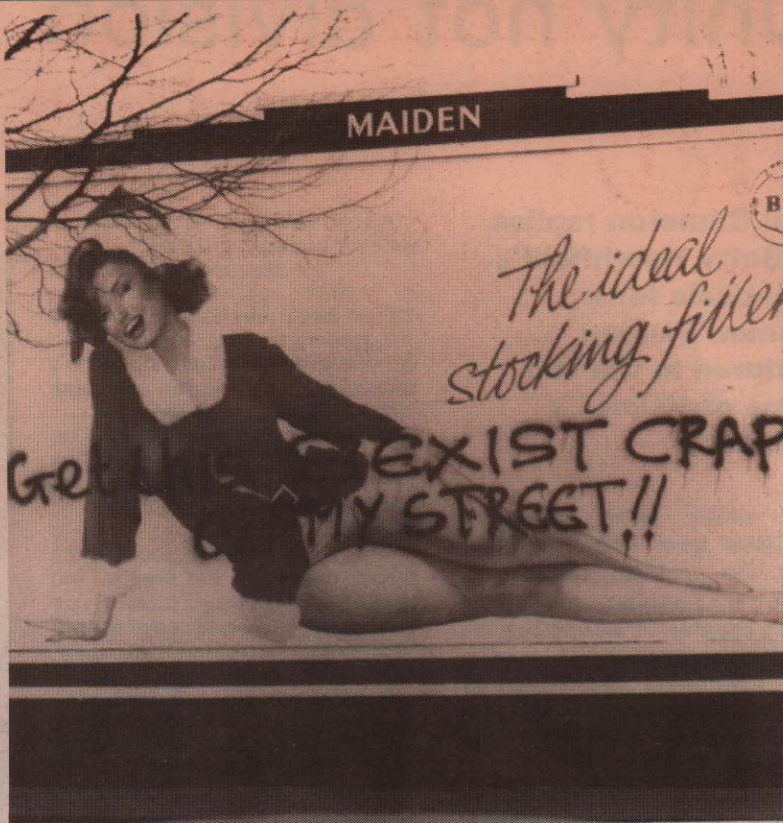
A feminist campaign against pornography would mean a certain shared ground with right-wing bigots like Victoria Gillick and Mary Whitehouse, but there is a big difference between sharing a hatred of pornography, and sharing a campaign of activity against it.

We must never let our politics be dictated by those of our enemy; Thatcher supported Solidarnosc in their struggle for trade union rights, and supported the democracy movement among students and workers in China, but that does not mean that we have to plan joint activities with the Tories around such issues.

The comparison which Ruth makes between pornography and fascism is not a valid one. She uses the term 'fascism' as interchangeable with 'racism' — but fascism entails much more than the oppression of black people, it is the destruction of all workers' organisations in a different form of society. The fact that people do not see pornography as as bad as racist literature is a reflection of the dominant ideology in our society, not proof that pornography is in some way progressive.

Pornography is about power; power used to degrade and humiliate women. It is a reflection of the wide oppression of women under capitalism, and reinforces that oppression.

It is certainly a fact that some women are consumers of por-



'Normal', everyday images of women — sexist and offensive

nography, but the appeal that it holds for them is not about positively exploring their sexuality; it is a reflection of the dominant male values about what their sexuality should be.

Some feminists have started to explore the relationship of women to pornography, such as Marion Bower in 'Feminist Review' (1986). Bower discusses women's responses to pornography as in some way an expression of their own sexuality, and by using psychoanalysis, she examines what porn really means to women. She does not conclude, with Ruth, that changing the present porn market would lead to pornography of an equal sexuality, but argues that:

"Rather than providing some ultimate form of equality with men, [pornography for women] is simply a shared form of personal aliena-

tion. I suspect that it will increase, but let us not delude ourselves that it is liberating or 'different'."

We must not deny that women are sexual beings, we must not feel guilty about our own sexuality. But, as socialists, we should not want anyone to have power over anyone else. That is ultimately what pornography is all about; power — not sex.

We must not confuse the issue of banning pornography with the issue of being against it. It is perfectly consistent to be against the censorship of pornography, and to think it is a totally bad thing. This is not to label women who enjoy pornography as 'collaborators' but to understand what pornography represents in our society, and whose interests it really serves.

Julia Coulton,  
Manchester

## Another opportunity wasted

### STUDENT WOMEN

By Janine Booth,  
Manchester Area NUS  
convenor

The first major event of a new academic year for the National Union of Students Women's Campaign was held on November 10.

Women's Officers' Day was an opportunity for student Union Women's Officers, and other women involved in student unions, to get together, discuss the issues, plan the campaigns and learn the skills. Disappointingly, it was another opportunity wasted.

Much of the pitch of the event was entirely on the wrong level. 'How to set up a Women's Group' advised women to book a meeting room in their student union building, invite a big name speaker and claim a sizeable slice of the union's societies budget. Not much use for the majority of women students — those in Further Education colleges, whose student unions manage on limited funding and facilities, and certainly don't inhabit their own buildings.

Strong, active, women's groups can be built in these colleges, built on campaigns for basic rights and facilities for women. Campaigning issues can range from nursery provision and women's safety to soft toilet paper and tampon machines.

Off I went to the discussion on pornography. What could have been an interesting and informative debate around the myriad issues involved was somewhat spoiled by the representative of the Campaign Against Pornography telling women who disagreed with her view that we were intimidating and anti-women's rights.

Anyway, having had a few discussions, eaten a very nice lunch, and had a few more discussions, it was time for the campaign briefing.

We were told what the NUS loans campaign was going to be, and what we were supposed to do in newsagents against pornography. It all seemed already decided, and a room full of women's officers appeared to be consumers rather than organisers.

The poll tax briefing had rather more potential, with an informative and impassioned introduction. However, it soon transpired that campaigning against the poll tax has taken a back seat in the women's campaign — no information produced, no publicity available, the speaking tour cancelled, and certainly no hint of the fact that the NUS women's campaign has policy to build a campaign of mass non-payment and non-implementation of the tax.

Women's officers are of vital importance to the work of the NUS Women's Campaign, and our national union should provide back-up, resources and training.

While bits of Women's Officers' Day were good, it was let down by its apparent attempt to just hand down campaigns and instructions to women's officers, instead of empowering us to get on with the job of organising a serious fightback amongst women students.

I got the train back to Manchester and went to the first organising meeting of the Manchester Area NUS Childcare Action group. But that is another story, and almost certainly a more successful and inspiring one.

# Support the anti-porn campaign

In Ruth Cockcroft's article on pornography in the last issue of *Women's Fightback*, she talks about the launch of a new anti-pornography group called the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship, and how campaigns such as Clare Short's attempts to end Page 3 have the support of thousands of women.

She also states that the reason for these campaigns is that contemporary feminism is dominated by cultural feminism not socialist feminists.

While I would agree that the analysis of pornography given by the cultural feminists, ie. that it encourages violence against women, leads to the justification of censorship, I would argue that the influence of cultural feminists and their ideas is limited to very narrow circles and the reason thousands of women want to get rid of pornography is different.

I would suggest the sort of pornography women want to get rid of is not hard, top-shelf pornography, but the soft porn which is used to embarrass and degrade women in everyday life, eg. at work. In these situations, if women complain or attempt to put up male pornography, they are made to feel as if they are being unreasonable and over reacting.

I am not arguing that unions mobilising against this issue would improve the inferior position of women in work, but I think it would decrease the embarrassment women feel at work, and it would also be a way of drawing women into the unions.

Another area of pornography which annoys a lot of women is soft

pornography in newspapers. This is seen in the support for Clare Short's attempts to ban Page 3. I think many women feel such literature conditions people to accept women as mere sex objects from an early age, ie. the first literature children pick up is the newspaper lying around the house, and this means young people accept such portrayal of women as normal.

While I agree state banning would not help women and would no doubt be used against them, I think to dismiss such campaigns as unimportant and irrelevant is a

mistake. We should argue within such campaigns that the way to successfully stop this pornography is to win the arguments within the unions and to get the people who print the papers to refuse to print such pictures.

I would also agree that pornography is a reflection of women's position in society and not its cause, but we cannot ignore campaigns which want to get rid of such soft pornography, nor should we treat them as unimportant and irrelevant.

Anger against pornography is, for many women, the first time they

## Support Islington's childcare workers!

**130 childcare workers have been locked out by their employers, Islington Council, for 8 weeks for refusing to admit any more children to the 13 council nurseries, in breach of safety guidelines.**

The Labour Council, who have axed over a quarter of the nurseries' staff in the last two years, were insisting that the day centres take on extra children above the agreed 1:4 staff to child ratio. The staff refused, believing that this would mean they were unable to provide adequate, safe, childcare.

The council suspended the nurseries' organisers and when other staff refused to admit the children they were locked out.

The following day 800 NALGO workers in social security and neighbourhood offices came out on a one-day strike in support of the nursery workers.

This strike, coupled with a lobby

of the council by NALGO workers, and parents, did force some concessions from the council — but they are still insisting that the nurseries admit an extra 84 children — which would increase the ratio to 1:8, double the government's recommended level.

The strikers fear that if the council force more children into the nurseries without extra staff, they could be on their way to a tragedy. In Camden in 1983 a child died in a council nursery, because there simply weren't enough staff to cope with the number of children.

"We are not prepared to work with a large number of extra children and wait for something appalling to happen to one of the children. We think the council should change its mind now, not wait until an accident happens," explained one of the workers.

"We are not happy with the council cutting the service, as we know that there are a lot of people on the nurseries' waiting lists. All childcare workers are asking is that

question women's position in society, and pornography, especially in its everyday forms, is offensive to a lot of people.

I think we should participate in, and take seriously, anti-pornography campaigns, pointing out the dangers of banning, and what the alternative solutions are, as well as arguing that the end of pornography will not lead to women's liberation and encouraging those women to extend their fight to tackle the real causes of women's oppression in society.

Elaine Jones  
Canterbury

we are allowed to continue to provide a good, safe service to families in Islington."

The strikers have the overwhelming support of parents, many of whom joined them on lobbies of the council.

The NALGO branch is now balloting workers in the field services department for all-out action in support of the nursery workers. The result of the ballot should be known by the end of November.

Support the Islington CDC strikers:

- invite a striker to your women's section, women's group, or trade union meeting: contact them c/o Islington NALGO, 2 Orlestone Road, London N7 8LH. Phone: 01 226 1234 x 5475.
- give to the strike fund — cheques to Islington NALGO (Hardship Fund), at above address.
- support the benefit — 1st December, Alton Day Centre, Durham Road, Islington. 7.30pm.
- write to Margaret Hodge, leader of Islington Council.



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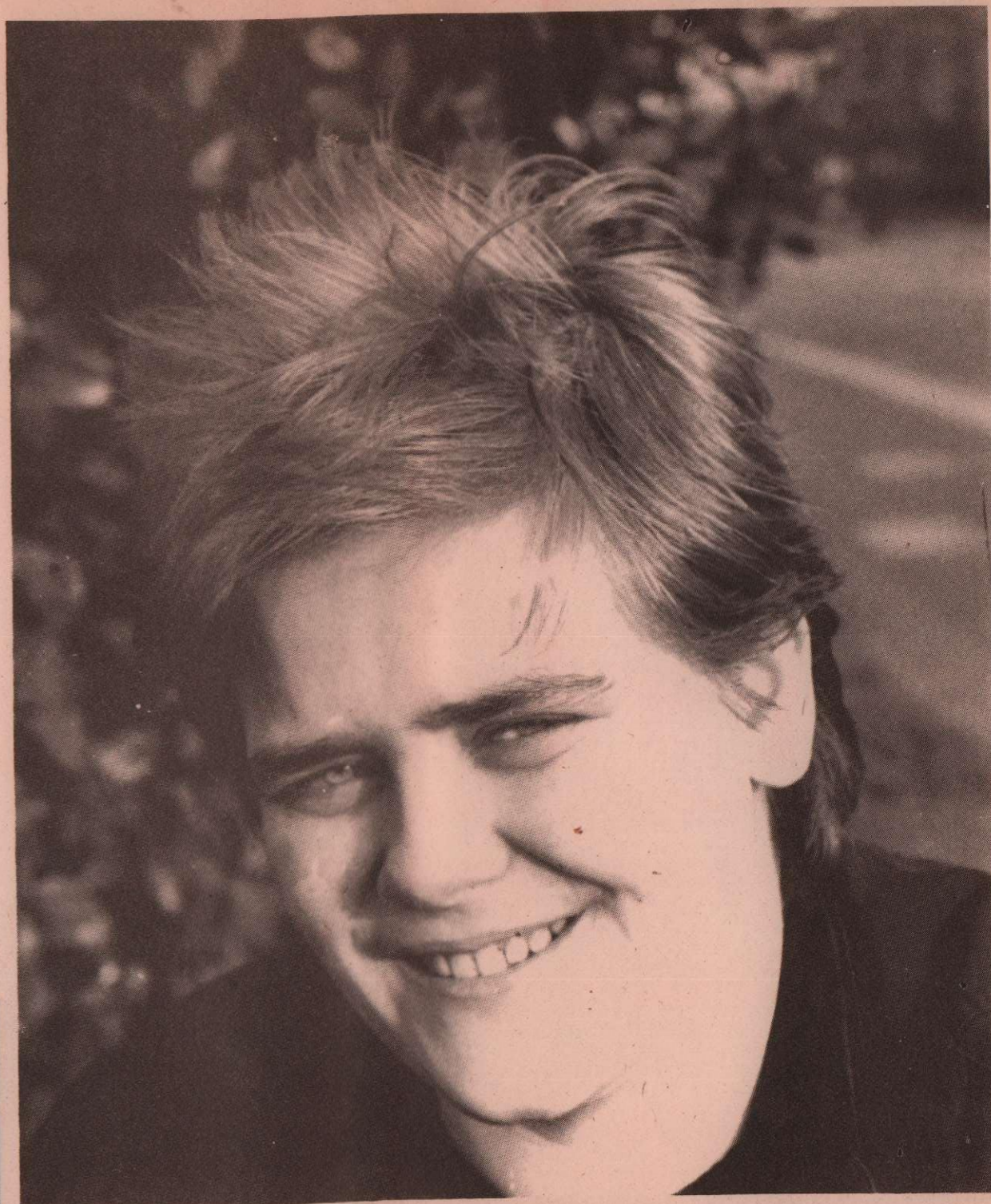
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