

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Time To Go

March for British withdrawal from
Ireland

Assemble 11.00am
Whittington Park, Holloway
Road (tube: Archway)

Saturday
12th August

Water privatisation is a rip-off

Public poison private profit

Let them drink Perrier say Tories

Britain's water is so bad that the Common Market is going to prosecute Britain in the European Court.

But for the Tory government nothing much matters except making sure of profits for their friends to whom they plan to sell off the water companies.

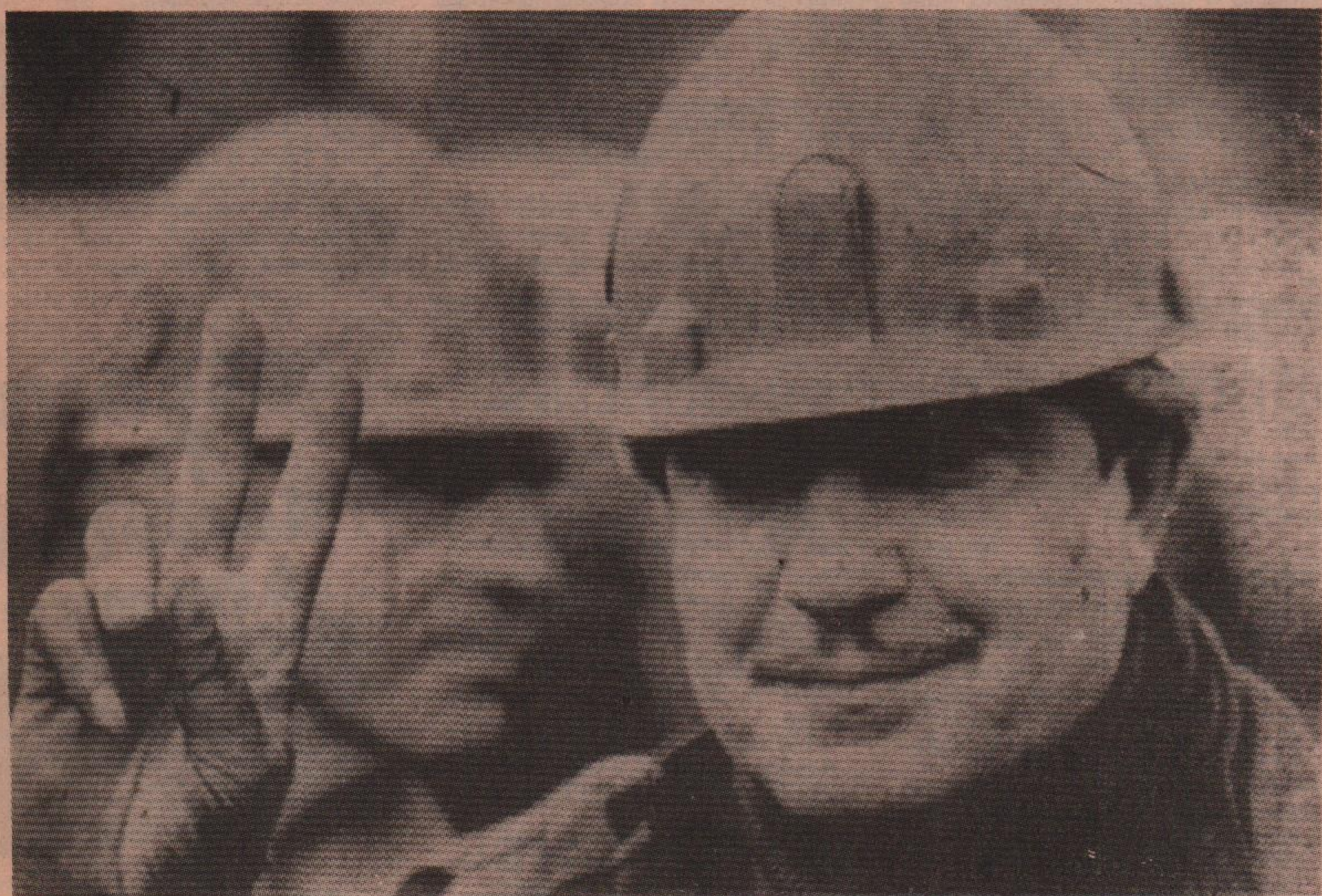
The government has ignored Common Market standards and deadlines: given water authorities immunity from prosecution for pollution even under British law; pushed up water charges; and pumped billions of taxpayers' money into the water

companies to fatten them for selling off.

On top of decades of under-investment in the water and sewage system, this policy is creating serious risks to our health.

"Let them drink Perrier", the Tories would say. that's the "market solution" to the problem — for those who can afford it.

We can't afford this profit-mad Tory government. And it is beginning to look shaky. The Labour Party and trade unions should launch an all-out public campaign now to stop water privatisation. We could win.



A Soviet Solidarnosc

Workers are again taking action in the USSR. See page 3

**Why the dockers
went back: see
pages 6, 7 and 11**

Chinese Solidarity Campaign established

Over 200 people attended the founding conference of the Chinese Solidarity Campaign held in London on Saturday 29 July.

The CSC has now firmly established itself as a national campaigning organisation in what may be a long and difficult struggle to make solidarity with those fighting for freedom and democracy in China.

All the activity of the weeks when the Chinese democracy movement was making big news must now be consolidated: the CSC is still looking for affiliations and donations.

The only sad note of the conference was that sections of the British left showed yet again why so many people think the whole left are just sectarian ranters.

The Socialist Workers Party moved that the CSC adopt their view that China is state capitalist. *Militant* tried the same ploy with their view that it is a bureaucratic workers' state.

Some people on the left seem to have difficulty in spotting the difference between a solidarity campaign and a revolutionary party.

Contact the CSC for speakers and affiliations at 68 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1.



Sacked for opposing apartheid!

2 TGWU members, Ross Galbraith (right) and Guy Sherriff, have been sacked by Granby Plastics at Leicester for refusing to do work on a South African contract. They are campaign-

ing for their reinstatement. For more details contact Ross Galbraith on 0533 367264.

Photo: Mark Salmon

Free Mark Curtis!

Socialists in the US are campaigning for the release of Mark Curtis, an activist jailed for 25 years on trumped-up charges of rape and burglary.

Mark Curtis is a member of the Socialist Workers' Party (US) and a trade unionist at the Swift meat packing plant in Des Moines, Iowa. He was driving to the supermarket on the evening of 4 March 1988 when he stopped at traffic lights and a young black woman came up and asked for a lift, saying that a man had threatened her.

Curtis arrived at a house, escorted the woman to the door, and waited to see if she was safe. Seconds later the cops arrived, hustled him into the bedroom, arrested him, then took him to jail.

In jail he was beaten up and abused as a "Mexican-lover". Many of the workers at Curtis's workplace are from Latin America; Curtis speaks Spanish and had been active in helping them organise.

Curtis was convicted despite clear alibi evidence that he was with friends in a bar at the time of the alleged assault, before driving to the supermarket.

The Defence Committee says that Curtis is the victim of a political frame-up. Contact the Mark Curtis Defence Committee c/o Pathfinder Books, 47 The Cut, London SE1 8LL.



Mark Curtis

Gatting helps apartheid

By Ray Ferris

Mike Gatting, the former England cricket captain who is leading the rebel tour to South Africa, says he isn't interested in politics. He also says the tour will help integration in South African sport.

Both claims are false. The rebel

tour is highly political. All those clamouring for keeping politics out of sport are hypocrites.

To break the sports boycott, flouting the wishes of South African non-racial sports organisations, is to make a political stand. Not quite necessarily an overtly pro-apartheid stand, maybe, but the tour will boost those forces in South African sport that obstruct the development of non-racialism.

True, some boycotts of South Africa have been artificial or even counter-productive, and cut against the best interests of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The most celebrated case in point concerned Paul Simon's 'Gracelands', where eventually campaigners critical of Simon for 'breaking the boycott' by recording in South Africa with South African musicians were forced to back down.

Some academic boycotts have been equally perverse. And for a long time direct workers' links with South African non-racial trade unionists were opposed in the name of 'boycotting apartheid'.

But the sports boycott is fairly clear. Where non-racial sports organisations seek out international

competition, that is a different matter. But 'rebel tours' of the Gatting type clearly go against the wishes of those organisations.

The isolation of apartheid in sport is seen to be important by black South Africans.

Now Black African states look set to take action against England's participation in January's Commonwealth Games if sterner action is not taken against the 'rebels'.

Jay Naidoo of the South African non-racial trade union federation Cosatu has warned there could be violent clashes if the English team goes ahead with the tour.

Nicaragua's opposition dumps contras

WORLD BRIEFS

Opposition parties inside Nicaragua have called for the Contras to demobilise.

The call came as part of a package agreed between 20 opposition parties and the ruling Sandinistas for the forthcoming general election in February.

The Sandinistas agreed to a reduction of police powers, soldiers not voting at their barracks, a halt to military conscription, and an amnesty for political prisoners once the Contras demobilise.

Central American presidents have also backed the call for the Contras to demobilise, and the only major force opposing the call — apart from

the Contras themselves — is the US government.

The Islamic rebels in Afghanistan are falling out with each other, bloodily and messily.

Last month 30 of them were killed in a battle between rival groups. Now the US-backed (and very right-wing) faction of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has called for an alliance with allegedly dissident officers of the Kabul regime's army to overthrow the government of the People's Democratic Party.

Hekmatyar has accused one of the main guerrilla leaders inside Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Masoud, of watching X-rated videos and having Maoists and French women wearing only bikinis in his camp.

It is possible that the rebels' government-in-exile, put together after painful negotiations, will fall apart.

A US court has found Korean Airlines guilty of "wilful misconduct" over the shooting down of one of its planes in September 1983.

Flight 007 from Alaska to South Korea went off course, flew into Soviet airspace, and was shot down. All 269 people aboard were killed.

The official US story at the time was that the plane's deviation was just a mistake. The court didn't believe it.

The court decision thus gives backing to theories that the plane was deliberately sent into Soviet airspace, either to spy, or more likely to enable US surveillance to test and observe the USSR's defence systems.

It gives no backing, however, to the position taken by papers like *Socialist Action*, which said that the shooting down was regrettable but a reasonable measure of "defence of the USSR".

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer



With contributions from Sinn Féin, Tony Benn, Geoff Bell, Stan Crookall, Patrick Murphy and John O'Mahony.

A Workers' Ireland pamphlet. £1.

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Towards a Soviet Solidarnosc

EDITORIAL

Mikhail Gorbachev is not out of trouble yet. Although the Soviet miners went back to work after an appeal from the President and nationally-made promises, on Saturday (5 August) miners north of the Arctic Circle staged a one-day stoppage simply to see a written guarantee of the promises the government made.

Other reports mention a short strike by Kuzbass miners in Siberia last Thursday against threatened water pollution by a hydro-electric power scheme.

Committees formed during the big strikes continue to function as Workers' Committees, monitoring the implementation of the deal. Communist Party officials are warning of the threat of new strikes.

Certainly the situation remains volatile. One of the most significant demands to emerge from the strike wave was for the formation of a 'Soviet Solidarnosc'. As a formal demand, this came only from a minority in the Ukraine; but the parallel with Poland in 1980 was widely recognised.

In the Workers' Committees, the raw material exists for such a development, the implications of which would be immense.

Caught between growing ethnic unrest and deepening workers' struggles, it is not clear what Gorbachev can and will do. He is presiding over a system that is fundamentally unviable. The economic situation is continuing to worsen; *Pravda*, in a change of tune, has begun to criticise the economic disruption caused by strikes, indicating the government's fears.

The deal agreed with the miners will cost about two million roubles (about £2 billion), according to Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov.

Possibly worse, from the bureaucracy's point of view, is that they have been forced to accede to the miners' demands for self-management, although what this means in practice is not clear.

For certain, big struggles continue to loom in the USSR, and the labour movement here must be ready to support the Soviet working class against its bureaucratic overlords.



Soviet miners

Understanding what happened in China

The massacre in Tiananmen Square, before the eyes of the world, revealed more graphically than any article or book the barbaric nature of the neo-Stalinist regime in China.

The new issue of *Workers' Liberty* looks in detail at the background to events in China, and publishes documents from the Beijing Autonomous Workers' Union. The magazine includes an analysis of the 1925-27 Chinese revolution and two articles by veteran Chinese Trotskyist Wang Fan-hsi.

The analysis of the Eastern Bloc regimes has been a consistent

theme of *Workers' Liberty* and this issue continues it, with a symposium on 'Which Class Rules in the USSR?' including Robert Brenner, Frank Furedi, Oliver Macdonald, Martin Thomas and an Iranian Marxist.

A special feature of the magazine is an article on art and the Russian revolution, including an 8-page picture feature.

The 200th anniversary of the French Revolution has been seized on by the New Right to oppose the idea of revolution as such. Simon Schama's book 'Citizens' expands on this theme, arguing that the Revolution set back the modernisation of French society. In an extended critique, Martin Thomas refutes this view.

Responding to a deep need for debate in the labour movement over the ideas published by the journal *Marxism Today*, *Workers' Liberty* includes a debate between Mark Perryman and Alan Johnson of Socialist Organiser.

Ruth Cockcroft analyses social



democracy, Clare Short talks about 'troops out' and Irish Protestants, and Adam Keller talks about the other Israelis.

There are also lots of the usual surveys and book reviews. A double issue, at £1.80, it's a must.

Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA £1.80 + 32 pence p&p

PRESS GANG

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR DAILY STAR

Fans weep for brave Kelvin

By Jim Denham

Tough Scousers wept openly in the Scotty Road, as news of the *Sun's* editor Kelvin McSpreader's shock admission "We Were Wrong, Wrong, A Thousand Times Wrong" reached Merseyside.

Meanwhile Press Council chiefs ruled that pictures of Mr McSpreader flagellating himself with a rolled up copy of the Soaraway Sizzling *Sun*, should not be published, as they would cause "untold distress to innocent people everywhere, especially in Liverpool."

But Mr McSmutt's heartrending statement admitted that he had been wrong to publish the front page headlines "Pissed Scouse Gits Crushed Themselves To Death" and "Fans Acted Like Beasts Say Brave Bobbies". Articles like these may well have conveyed the entirely erroneous impression that Liverpool fans were in some way to blame for the tragedy and that officers of the South Yorkshire police were a reliable source of information.

"Words cannot express my bitter regret for what I did," said an ashen-faced Mr McFiltch. As tears welled up in his red-rimmed eyes, the man at the helm of Britain's top selling tabloid confessed, "I don't know what came over me. I was completely taken in by unscrupulous men wearing blue uniforms claiming to be police officers. Make no mistake, the *Sun* newspaper will not rest until these evil men are brought to book. Even now, I am personally supervising a Shock Horror front page expose headlined 'Bent Copper Lied To Save His Own Skin'."

Meanwhile, big-hearted Liverpool fans have already made Mr McSmutt a local folk hero. Sid and Doris Scally, regulars at the famous 'Philharmonic' pub, said: "It takes guts to admit an honest mistake. Few human beings would be big enough to say what he did. God bless him, and the wonderful Soaraway *Sun*." Elsewhere on Merseyside, Kelvin Courage, as he's now known, was the toast of the city and newagents everywhere ordered EXTRA copies of the Paper with the Conscience — the Super, Sizzling, honest to goodness *Sun*.

STOP PRESS: Rumburs that Mr McSmugg has offered to follow the example of South Yorkshire police chief Peter Wright, and offer his resignation, were denied by a *Sun* spokesman: "It's true that Kelvin had considered that course of action at one point, but thousands of messages of support from Liverpool fans poured into our offices, begging him to stay on as editor of Britain's No.1 top selling popular newspaper," said the spokesman Mr R Murdoch.

c. DiggerTrash International. On other pages — * Saucy Janine takes it all off as Britain sizzles * Lanzarote greaseballs steal our birds * 20 things you never knew about hearthrob Andrew Neil * Win a super Sky satellite dish....etc, etc....

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

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823, London
SE15 4NA. Phone 01 639
7965.

Latest date for reports: first post

Monday or by phone Monday

PO Box 823, London SE15
4NA.

Printed by Press Link
International (UK) Ltd (TU).

Registered as a newspaper at
the Post Office.

Signed articles do not
necessarily reflect the views of
Socialist Organiser.

4 LETTERS

The Tories know strikes work

GRAFFITI

Last Thursday, 3 August, a "strike" by passengers forced the London Underground to run a train that they wanted to cancel. The evening rush-hour train stopped short at Archway station, and passengers were told to squeeze into the already-jammed train coming behind. They refused and "sat in" for half an hour until Underground bosses agreed to let the train continue.

Who led this militant wildcat action? Caroline Muir, a Tory party official.

Last year 16,150 households had their houses or flats repossessed by the building society or the bank.

In 1979 the figure was only 2,500. Repossessions have boomed as the cutbacks in council housing force people to strain to buy a home, and as interest rates have increased. By December 1988 37,440 people were more than six months in arrears on their mortgage payments.

In 1987 only 15,000 council houses were built, and in 1988 only 9,000 housing association homes. There are now 1,200,000 fewer rented homes than in 1978. (Figures from Shelter).

Not just clothing, electronics, and ship-building are moving to Third World sites. The highest of high-tech service trades are moving, too.

According to a recent report in *Newsweek* magazine, American corporations are contracting out their computer programming to firms in the Philippines and India. These countries have thousands of qualified computer programmers who can be hired for a fifth of what similar labour would cost in the US. Improved international telecommunications cut the cost and the problems of shifting work around the world in this way.

Hungary and Ireland also have software companies doing work for US and West European corporations. And one Japanese corporation has a contract with a software house in China.

Only the little people pay taxes", according to US property dealer and hotel magnate Lorna Helmsley.

After many, many years the US tax authorities have finally caught up with her and taken her to court. So grim is her position that her defence lawyer's case is that Ms Helmsley is such an unpleasant person that her staff fiddled financial transactions on her behalf rather than have to speak to her.

Things have gone full circle since the 1960s, when Fidel Castro used to make speeches criticising the bureaucratic regime of the USSR in scarcely veiled terms.

Last week Cuba banned two Soviet newspapers which have supported *glasnost*, on the grounds that they "present a chaotic impression of the present".

The increasingly rigid Stalinism of Castro's regime does not, however, faze those would-be Trotskyists who continue to boost Cuba as a model of workers' democracy.

Worse: the latest issue of *Bulletin in Defence of Marxism*, a magazine produced by members of the Socialist Workers' Party USA who were expelled for protesting at that party's pro-Cuba turn in the early '80s, notes that the SWP USA's coverage of recent events in China has studiously failed to mention the idea of the revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy by the workers and students. The reason, no doubt, is that Fidel Castro was the world's most vocal supporter of Deng Xiaoping's crackdown.



Fidel Castro

Free the Uppington 26!

By Bill Holdsworth and Mark Lindsay

In June, Norwood Labour Party passed the following resolution: "We note with alarm the case of the Uppington 26, the largest group ever to face the gallows in South Africa."

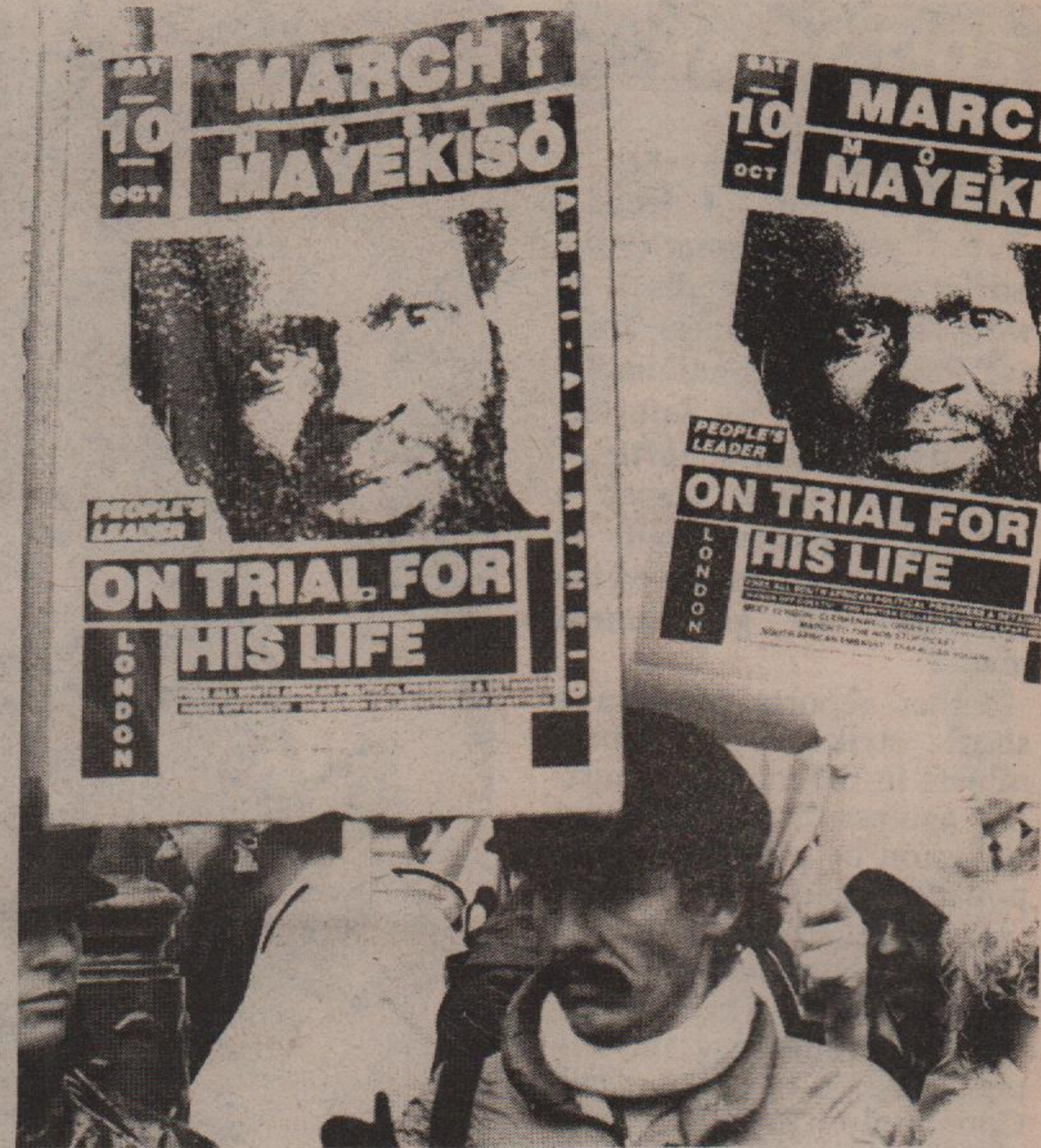
"They have been convicted on the same charge as the Sharpeville 6. We call upon the Anti-Apartheid Movement and South Africa the Imprisoned Society to launch a campaign like that which saved the Sharpeville 6."

The Uppington 26 were charged under the principle of 'common purpose', which is that they had been part of a crowd where a policeman was killed.

On 13 November 1983, in the rural township of Paballo, Uppington, a policeman fired into an unarmed, peaceful meeting, killing an eight-year old child. The events that followed resulted in the killing of a policeman and the Uppington 26 having the threat of the death sentence over them, for the 'crime' of being in the crowd at that time.

This crime of 'common purpose' is the same law that was used against the Sharpeville 6, whose death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, which came about because of international pressure by anti-apartheid activists. Another case of when pressure succeeded in victory was when Moses Mayekiso was released, after being accused of treason.

This shows that when campaigns like this are raised, then victories



like these can be achieved. Therefore, it is strange that the Anti-Apartheid Movement haven't taken this issue up, like they did with the Sharpeville 6. Anti-apartheid activists should bring immediate pressure upon AAM to campaign on this issue before it's too late!

A campaign has already been set up to help the Uppington 26, called 'Friends of Uppington 26', which is based at the Azania Namibia Forum, Greenwich Resource Centre, MacBean Street, London SE18. Please sponsor the campaign by sending a donation to the above address.

Classes in the USSR

LETTERS

Stan Crooke (letters, SO 409) declares that I am "simply wrong".

"One need merely ask the question why workers in capitalism go to work and why workers in the Soviet Union go to work (insofar as they bother to do so) to recognise the qualitative difference between the Soviet economy and a capitalist-type economy."

I think Stan would say that the answer to the question is that in capitalist society we go to work from economic compulsion — we have to sell our labour power in order to be able to buy food, clothes, housing and so on — whereas in the Soviet Union they work because of political compulsion (and, he would presumably argue, the food, clothes, housing, etc are provided politically too).

Political compulsion does play a bigger role in the Soviet Union than in the West. Yet there is a qualitative difference between ordinary workers in the USSR and those in labour camps. For ordinary workers, the major compulsion to work is economic.

If not, then why do the bureaucrats fear workers' resistance to their plans to increase unemployment? Why do the bosses in the USSR and Eastern Europe use piecework pay systems so much? (See Zbigniew Kowalewski's article in *Workers' Liberty* 11, for example).

If wages are just a meaningless token, concealing the real business of exploitation through political compulsion, then why do workers like the Soviet miners who struck recently demand pay rises? And sometimes win them? Why do

workers in the Eastern Bloc resist price rises, as they did in Poland in 1980?

Both the bureaucrats' and the workers' actions in the class struggle between them indicate that it really is wage labour in the Eastern Bloc, even though with special features.

Stan summarises my argument on the Eastern Bloc like this: "Look, there's a bit of a market in the Soviet Union, so we'll say it's really a kind of state-capitalist economy".

I'm aware that "a bit of a market", in fact a large sphere of market economy, can exist without capitalism. Whether the Eastern Bloc systems are state-capitalist is determined not only by how the working class is reproduced, but also by how the exploiting class and the whole system of production are reproduced.

On that side things are more complex. Investment is largely still regulated by government decision, not by markets, even bad markets. The question is, how does the

government regulate these matters? Badly, of course — but what is the basic drift of what they do badly?

I submit that an examination of the criteria and patterns of the government regulation show it to be capitalist in type, concerned with expanding the state-owned total capital in competition with other capitals world-wide.

The surplus is pumped from the workers, production is expanded, and the basic social classes are reproduced in a fundamentally capitalist way. It's certainly a "deformed" sort of capitalism, and I can well understand those who argue that it is so "deformed" that we'd best not call it capitalist at all.

Those like Stan, however, who argue that there is no surplus produced, or at least no-one controls it, that there is no regular process of reproduction of the social classes, and indeed that there is no ruling class and not much of a working class either, just do not begin dealing with the central issues.

Martin Thomas
Islington

The quiet revolutionary

Our Labour Party General Committee in mid-Sussex recently presented Margaret Dewar, veteran local Trotskyist, with an ILP plaque and a copy of Jan Valtin's 'Out of the Night' (Fortress), in recognition of her services to Socialism.

Margaret Dewar was a schoolgirl in Russia at the time of the Bolshevik revolution. Her family later moved to Germany, where she was active in Trotsky's Left Op-

position. Fleeing the Nazis, she eventually came to Britain, and married Hugo Dewar, an ex-member of the pioneer British Trotskyist organisation, the Balham Group.

Her autobiography, 'The Quiet Revolutionary' (Bookmarks), is a remarkable life story which concludes: "Obviously I am disappointed that it is taking so long for the revolution to materialise. But come it must, if exploitation of man by man is to end and mankind is to survive. It is now up to the younger generation to give a lead."

Richard Hanford

Which way forward for the left in the unions?

A national conference for the left in the trade union movement organised by the Socialist Conference

Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 November
Sheffield Polytechnic Students Union
Pond St (opposite rail station)

Saturday: registration 10.30am, conference 11.00am-5.00pm; Sunday 10.00am-4.00pm

Credentials: £6 waged, £4 unwaged from The Socialist Conference, 9 Poland St, London W1V 3DG

Where state corruption is the road to capitalist success



Robert Mugabe

By our reporter in Southern Africa

In less than a year Zimbabwe will have been independent for a decade. Instead of looking forward to the anniversary in a spirit of optimism many Zimbabwean politicians must secretly be nursing deep anxieties for the future.

Several major domestic news stories have hit the headlines over the past year, but underpinning them all has been the Willowvale motor industries corruption scandal. Last October the *Bulawayo Chronicle* revealed that a provincial governor had used his influence to obtain a Scania lorry from one of the few national distributors and had then resold it way above the government-controlled price.

Eventually a whole network of influence-peddling and corruption was unearthed by a special commission appointed by President Mugabe. So far three cabinet ministers and the provincial governor have resigned.

One of the ministers, Maurice Nyagumbo, had been held in detention by the Rhodesians for longer than any other nationalist. He committed suicide and now occupies a plot in heroes' acre. Another one of the ministers, Enos Nkala, was a founding member of the ruling party, ZANU, in 1963.

Meanwhile, Mugabe has pardoned the third minister (who had been sentenced to nine months in goal) and the Attorney General has now said that there is no point in further prosecutions. The corruption scandals have triggered a major political crisis.

The December 1987 unity accord between ZANU(PF) and PF-ZAPU was one step further down the road to Mugabe's proclaimed goal of a one-party state. However, former ZANU(PF) General Secretary and long-time Mugabe aide Edgar Tekere has thrown a spanner in the works by forming his own Zimbabwean Unity Movement on an explicitly anti-corruption platform.

Tekere cannot be called left-wing. The launch of ZUM was endorsed by the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe (ex-Rhodesian Front) and former collaborationists Abel Muzorewa and Ndabingi Sithole. But Tekere has challenged the complacency and arrogance of many ZANU-PF politicians.

The death of Nyagumbo led to a by-election in Harare's Dzivarasekwa suburb which was contested by ZUM. TV and radio worked overtime to denounce Tekere — even reminding viewers that he had been let off a murder charge in 1983 (when he was still a comrade of Mugabe).

The Dzivarasekwa result shows the Zimbabwean political malaise in graphic form. Out of 60,000 eligible electors, only 10,000 bothered to vote. 3,000 of them voted for ZUM in spite of the propaganda campaign.

After nine years of independence there seems to be a deep cynicism and distrust of politicians. With unemployment mounting and little progress in such areas as land redistribution, perhaps it isn't too hard to find the root causes of such attitudes — corruption was just the icing on the cake.

Corruption, of course, is not a speciality of the Third World — try telling that to the Japanese or the French at the moment — but here it seems to take a special form. A powerful position in party or state is often used to amass personal wealth or launch a business career which would be otherwise difficult in what is still a white and multinational dominated economy.

To put it bluntly — the state machine is being used by the black petty (and not so petty) bourgeoisie to carve a niche for themselves in what is still a virulently capitalist economy. This is the natural fruit of a revolution fought primarily as a military struggle under the direction of a petty-bourgeois leadership and ended by a negotiated compromise with imperialism.

For a socialist there are some bright spots on the horizon. Striking artisans on the National Railways seem destined to part company with their official (and anti-strike) union, ZARU. We can hope that this will trigger a chain of splits inside the supine (and corrupt) Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.

One thing is certain, Zimbabwe is further from socialism today than it has ever been. Genuine Zimbabwean socialists will face an uphill struggle against an ineradicably hostile state and a population numbed by nearly ten years of official 'socialism'.

Democratic socialism against Stalinism

Lech Walesa presented a Solidarnosc policy statement to George Bush, calling for US aid to Poland on condition that it goes to private enterprise, that privatisation is pushed forward, that a stock exchange is created and that debt payments to the USSR (though not to the West) are suspended.

This statement from the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution) on the round table talks between Solidarnosc and the Polish government indicates what socialists in Solidarnosc think of this.

The reckless sale of Polish national property must lead to unemployment and to the treatment of working people as cheap labour.

The current decisions on the dissolution of workplaces are certainly the result of the anti-working class course of Premier Rakowski.

The examples of the Gdansk Shipyards and of MPK in Plock testify to the dominance of political over economic considerations.

The political line of the group



Lech Walesa

around Lech Walesa's Citizens' Committee, by, amongst other things, introducing undemocratic mechanisms into union structures and through adding a codicil to the Solidarnosc statute, having the effect of disarming the fundamental social force able to oppose the communist dictatorship.

Only the workers have the right to decide about the future of their workplaces.

The 'Round Table' discussions finished with a compromise between part

of the opposition and the leadership of Solidarnosc with the governing elite.

The agreement encompassed the possibility of Solidarnosc and Farmers' Solidarnosc undertaking legal activity and also opened the way for the further liberalisation of the system. The content of the agreement arouses many reservations for opposition organisations and for the workers' movement.

1. The Round Table has become the basis for the introduction of authoritarian governments in Poland. A thirty five per cent democracy, a Senate and the office of President guarantee the continuing security of the nomenklatura.

The area of freedom that has been gained, such as the liberalisation of the law on associations, the pledge of a reform of the judiciary, limited and selective access to the means of mass communication do constitute a degree of self-organisation of society. The right to found associations has been obtained in a situation in which opposition political parties are already active in Poland. The creation of authoritarian structures is in definite conflict with the aspiration of society for democracy.

2. The leadership of Solidarnosc at the Round Table permitted the

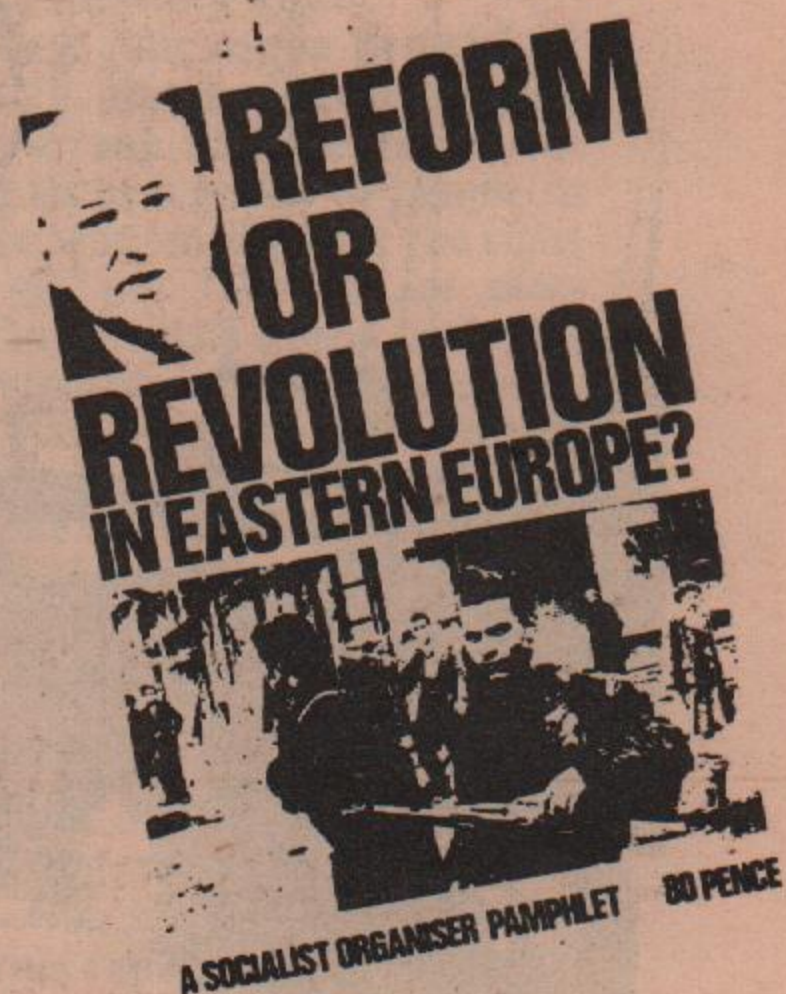
imposition of significant restrictions which are likely to hinder the conduct of effective struggle in defence of the rights and interests of the workers.

The 1982 law on trade unions, to which Solidarnosc is now subject, makes it impossible for trade unions to organise certain categories of workers as well as practically paralysing the conduct of legal strike action. The undemocratic way in which the agreement was concluded arouses apprehensions about the state of democracy in the union.

3. The acceptance at the Round Table of the model of economic reform is in contradiction with the programme of the Self Managing Republic adopted by the First Solidarnosc Congress. The workers will not have any influence on the fate of their workplace. The planned economic changes that have been accepted do not leave any role for authentic workers' self-management.

The PPS(RD) will continue to actively participate in the process of building Solidarnosc as a trade union representing the interests and aspirations of the workers' movement.

PPS(RD) will therefore aim to destroy the Party-State system of government over society.



The socialist answer to Stalinism. 80p plus 32p post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

A victory for gangsters, thugs and bully-boys

What effect will the dockers' defeat have on the rest of the labour movement?

London Port bosses set a new precedent in industrial gangsterism and managerial dictatorship. They sacked 16 stewards at Tilbury, derecognising the union. They issued ultimatums — sign new contracts in 24 hours or you are sacked.

Of course not all of Britain's bosses are in a position to dictate terms that way — but many must have looked on enviously, approvingly and with the thought that they might try the same thing some time if the port bosses succeeded.

In the short term 'non scheme' ports will come into the firing line. Already bosses at Felixstowe and Dover will be planning to undercut wages and conditions in the wake of the strike.

As the port employers federation breaks up, competition will speed up this process. The argument that all Britain's dockers had a common fight is likely to be brought home more concretely.

On a European scale, the defeat of the dockers in Britain will encourage bosses on the continent to stick the boot into their workforces. French port employers already have plans.

Arguably the 'New Realists' in the labour movement will be boosted too. After all they live and breathe off defeat and demoralisation.

Todd is not a typical 'new realist'. The strike was characterised more by blundering and incompetence than a calculated drive for compromise. A new realist, after all, could have made sure no national strike took place at all. And certainly elements within the T&G wanted to have nothing to do with it.

Todd does not easily fit the pattern — he seemed genuinely enraged at the

Ray Ferris looks at the reasons behind the defeat of the dockers' strike

Tilbury sackings and did not counsel caution at the Docks Delegate meeting that called to step up the strike.

Maybe now those who advocate a colder more hard-faced line of dumping supposedly 'unwinnable' struggles will gain ground.

This won't necessarily depress trade union struggle on all fronts. In the current situation of reduced unemployment, skill shortages in many trades, high profits and high inflation, many wages battles are winnable in anybody's terms. Many sections of workers have proved it by winning wage rises way above the odds. The encouraging effects of those victories will not be wiped out by the dockers' defeat.

If we build on that boost to workers' confidence we can offset and overcome the setbacks stemming from the docks defeat.

Three lessons stand out clearly from the 3 week dispute. One is the need for socialists and trade union militants to draw up their own battle plans to take on management and win disputes. Too often we fight on unfamiliar and unfavourable territory.

Linked to this is the need to build up living, breathing, rank and file movements throughout the unions. Once the Port Shops Stewards Committee could take hold of a dispute despite union leaders and carry dockers with them. In this dispute they found themselves too weak to take an independent line and make it stick.

Finally the T&G were hoist by their own petard. From the outset Todd insisted that the law was sacrosanct and he would have to wage a legal strike. He made big mistakes even within the limits of that framework. It was right to try to minimise clashes with the law; but any responsible union leader also had to recognise that at the end of the day dockers would probably have to challenge the laws or succumb quietly.

The union should have built an effective strike and used every opening to get arguments across to 'non-scheme' dockers, transport and other workers.

In this way it should have been preparing the ground for solidarity action so that when shop stewards were picked off at Tilbury and ultimatums fired at rank and file dockers the union too could have stepped up its offensive.

The stronger and more general the solidarity action, the less likely the laws would be used.



Midnight 11-12 July: Strike starts.
Monday 17 July: European unions pledge support. Rochester votes to go back.

Tuesday 18 July: Poole votes to go back.

Wednesday 19 July: Under the threat of the sack, 350 at Grimsby and Immingham go back. Boston, Hull and Goole go back. Over 200 dockers are sacked at Grimsby and Immingham after returning to work.

Monday 24 July: Southampton and Hull vote to stay on strike.

Tuesday 25 July: Dockers are

The strike da

sacked at Tilbury, including all 16 Tilbury shop stewards. The rest of the workforce are given till 5pm Wednesday to sign new contracts and return. Liverpool dockers also receive threats.

Wednesday 26 July: Some dockers return at Tilbury.

Thursday 27 July: More dockers return at Tilbury. 7 sacked with no compensation.

The bosses had a strategy the union didn't

With hindsight the union accepted that a national agreement could not be won" argued TGWU leader Ron Todd last Tuesday, 1 August after calling off the national docks strike.

"They" said a Tilbury shop steward "have voted for us to get the sack".

The decision by the T&G Executive was a black day for the trade-union movement.

It was a betrayal of the Liverpool dockers who had sent pickets across the country to spread and breathe more life into the strike. They were left isolated against the bosses' ultimatums to go back 'or else' — "a sugar coated bullet" as one steward put it.

It was a betrayal of those sacked at Tilbury including the 16 shop stewards who were picked out and issued with redundancies. Dockers at Tilbury now face a battle to re-unite their workforce.

And it was a betrayal of the 70 Tilbury dockers who had rejoined the strike after the docks delegate decision just the Friday before 28 July to step up the action. They were forced to go back to work on Wednesday 2nd.

The most astonishing contrast in the 3 week strike was the way in which the two sides had prepared for it.

The T&G leaders bumbled on from one crisis to another without a clear strategy of organising an effective strike, and sinking feelers into the rest of the labour movement to call on their support. But no benefit of 'hindsight' was necessary

to realise it would be an all or nothing dispute.

Port bosses had been planning to scrap the National Dock Labour Scheme for years. They fiercely lobbied back bench Tory MP's. They even drew up a detailed plan 18 months ago, to break a national strike.

They followed those battle tactics to the letter:

- The use of the law.
- Waging a propaganda war.
- Strikebreaking — though in the end they achieved this through ultimatums.
- Contingency plans to move essential supplies in and out of the country.

The T&G leaders knew of this document. They knew what tactics the enemy intended to follow — yet they failed to develop a strategy for their own side. How many more times must we allow this to happen before learning the lessons?

The sudden about-face by Todd between Friday 28 July and Tuesday 1 August was only the last in a series of crisis reactions to the initiatives of port bosses.

The union must have known the law would become an issue immediately in the case of a strike call. Yet they had made no preparations beforehand to deal with this, nor to think of a way of including 'non-scheme' ports in the action.

It is perfectly reasonable that the unions should try to get round Tory trade union laws. But there were unnecessary delays. It took over a month to organise the first strike ballot. After a month of legal wrangles it took another 3 weeks to ballot fewer than 10,000 dockers.

In the meantime Todd threw his



Rail: did we win or lose?

By a railworker

The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) suspended its series of 24-hour strikes on 27 July so as to meet British Rail's demand that talks on the negotiating machinery could not be held "with a pistol at their heads".

Meanwhile the 8.8% pay offer was accepted, as it already had been by the leadership of the other rail unions, ASLEF (drivers) and TSSA (clericals).

So did we win or lose? Certainly we got a bigger pay rise than BR intended paying, 8.8% instead of 7% — and even 7% was only coughed up in the hope of heading off industrial action this year.

The 8.8%, without strings, was won after our fourth one-day strike on 12 July. It was then that ASLEF and TSSA accepted it, leaving the NUR isolated. Many members of both those unions are disgusted at their leaderships' acceptance which made it fairly inevitable that the NUR would be unable to increase the pay deal.

BR were then able to take up their obstinate stance of refusing any further money or any further talks on machinery until the action was called off. Two further 24-hour strikes on 18 and 26 July failed to shift that position.

Certainly BR were emboldened in this by the signals they were receiving. The 18 July strike was only confirmed 90 minutes before it was due to start. Despite the fact that it was as strong among the rank and file as all the others the delay showed evidence of a split among the NUR leadership.

The news that later came out, of a 12 to 8 majority (with one absent) on the union Executive for continuing the action, and Knapp in favour of calling it off was the signal for a media witch-hunt. The hard left it seemed had duped just enough moderates to bring another day of chaos to Britain's hard pressed commuters.

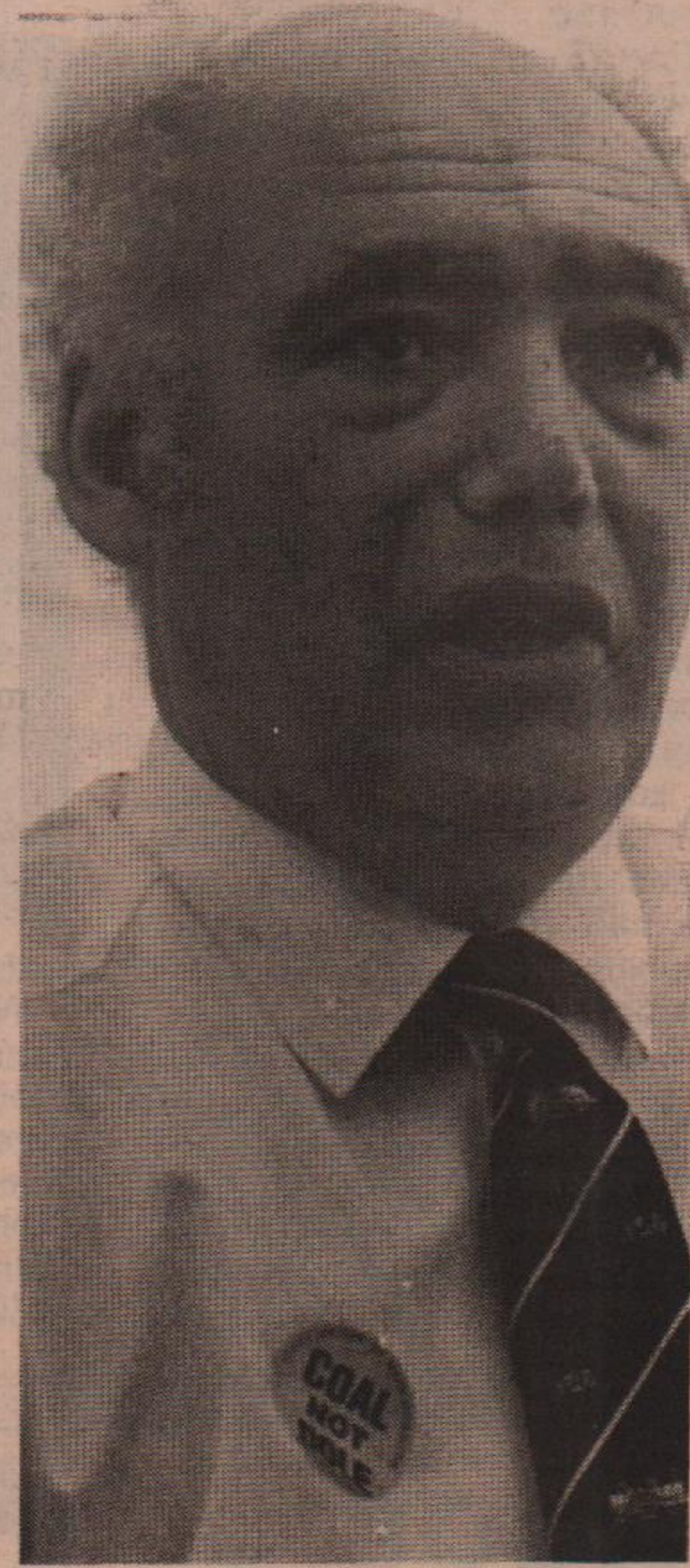
On the Executive, general secretary Jimmy Knapp had talked up BR's concessions on the machinery. But what had been said at talks was not borne out in black and white. When the documents arrived (half an hour after the deadline for accepting them) the changes were absolutely minimal.

The National Conference proposal would also conduct a "general pay review", it would also discuss "industry-wide collective bargaining principles" and London Allowance.

But the five 'Functions' into which BR was to be divided would remain crucial. The only other concession was that the machinery could include non-binding arbitration when referred by one side only. And that was it.

There was nothing else. The left had to keep the pressure up and reject the document as grossly inadequate, way below what could have been achieved. Only through outwitting the right-wing who were unable to argue that anything substantial had been gained, was the sixth 24-hour strike called on 26 July.

By then the strike showed signs of fraying at the edges — though nothing of any substance. BR's figures of 12,500 returning to work and 400 trains were wild exaggera-



tions; and even if wholly true, way below anything that they could have expected from their efforts to get people back to work. The sixth 24-hour strike hurt them just as much as the other five.

The few who did refuse to come out on the sixth day did so because of the splits in the leadership. Knapp made it known that he wanted to settle. Kinnoch sticking the boot in didn't help, of course.

The national officers of the union didn't do much about the media barrage. The impression given was that the NUR dispute was only about money and since the other unions had accepted the NUR could win no more. Many railworkers tended to agree even while loyally supporting the action.

The fact that there were two issues was lost. The union top officials failed to give replies to this media barrage. Even the newspaper advertisement on the eve of the 26 July strike, good though it was, concentrated on the pay issue.

Knapp thinks he has got what he wanted on the bargaining issue — a role in national negotiations for the general secretary of the NUR — and so union propaganda reflected that.

All of this contributed to a decline in morale among the membership, with some returning, while the activists flooded Head Office with messages and resolutions demanding that the issue of the right to effective negotiations not be forgotten.

The activists are only too aware of the need for national negotiations, but also for local power to back these up, to make national pay and conditions of service only the base line that we can work within. Without local power, effectively recognition of the union at local level, which is policy, BR can divide and rule, making concessions only where 'market forces' dictate they must and so corrode any national concessions from within.

But the issue of local negotiating rights has not even been discussed.

At the meeting that called off the action, the left on the Executive submitted a minority report. It said that the action should be suspended until 16 August, giving BR time to make concessions and the union time to regroup. This was thrown out in favour of accepting BR's terms (though the action has only been 'suspended'), the money taken and talks to be held at ACAS to work out a new Machinery of Negotiation before BR's new abolition date for our current negotiating rights of 31 January 1990. Now the pistol is at our heads.

If our unions leaders are left to themselves now, nothing much will happen. The pressure is off BR and they need concede nothing more, and without pressure from the activists the union leadership won't fight for it.

The government is looking for replacements for its 'hard men' on the BR board who proved foolish and incompetent in their handling of the dispute. The remit of the replacements when they are found won't be to be nice to the unions now that we have shown a little of our potential power, but to undo what concessions have been made. The Tories want to get BR straight back on to the road of privatisation and there's no room for an uppity workforce in that.

The left in the three main rail unions need to spend the next few months working out what we do next. We need to decide exactly what we need to fight for and what doesn't matter. And we need to work out how to make the unions fight for it.

Without pressure and organisation nothing more will be gained on the right to negotiate. BR will concede only where they have to. We need to ensure that the Executive's sentiments agreed on calling off the dispute become reality: that accepting 8.8% is only the prelude to a vigorous campaign against low pay ready for next year and that we really do mean to keep up the pressure on the right to negotiate.

That done, this dispute is not over. We can expect BR's attacks to intensify in the next months now that the Tories have got the dockers' dispute out of the way and new hatchet men are brought in. If the NUR is to stay true to its policy then BR will need to be forced to negotiate seriously again.

This task falls to the Broad Left in the NUR. But it will need to build itself as a rank and file movement rather than as a group of people in the know who ensure that the right people get put forward for elections. The strength that a rank and file movement could provide, providing backbone to the union especially during disputes, could have made the difference this time round. This dispute has been run and settled (so far) according to the needs of the national leadership rather than the needs of the rank and file.

The strike overall has been a success, re-invigorating and uniting the union, winning concessions on negotiating rights and more pay for the membership. But if we remain with what has been gained so far all of that will be eroded in the not too distant future.

Keeping what we've got and getting back much of what has been lost over the last decade will only be achieved if the union acts in the interests of the rank and file.



Southampton and Fleetwood go back under the threat of the sack. 70 dockers at Tilbury rejoin the strike.

Tuesday 1 August: T&G Exec votes by 18-12 to call off national strike. Bristol, Liverpool, Teesside, Ipswich stay out for local deals.

Thursday 3 August: 4 more ports vote to go back. Only Liverpool left out. Port bosses give a deadline of 5pm Friday to sign new contracts, extended till Monday 5pm.

Monday 7 August: Todd speaks at a mass meeting in Liverpool, and it votes to return to work.

by day

Friday 28 July: 300-strong lobby at docks delegate meeting which votes for strike to be stepped up, Todd to our country, T&G drivers to be instructed not to cross pickets. T&G Exec is to meet on Tuesday to consider ways of backing dockers.

9-30 July: Weekend meetings at Southampton and Hull to discuss strike. Todd refuses to attend.

Monday 31 July: Dockers at Hull,

egy,

ull weight behind stopping all unofficial strike action.

Sheerness was left to make a local deal. Indeed Bill Morris, speaking at the Scottish TUC as acting General Secretary talked of national and local negotiations.

This time should have been used to mobilise dockers. It should have been used to hammer out demands and a strategy to win them and build a propaganda machine to get their case across to the rest of the labour movement.

Port bosses used this time to their advantage. They sounded out local deals. They put the screws on individual dockers and began a propaganda barrage which was to dominate the strike. Churning out endless figures about how the strike was crumbling from day one.

By the first week of the strike, the bosses' shipping paper, the Lloyds List could say "it is understood that elaborate plans were laid weeks ago by individual companies to feed shipments into the UK through ports unaffected by the dispute". Firms had also had 4 months breathing space to build up stocks to ride out the strike.

In contrast the T&G secured international support only after a port shop stewards delegation visited Europe. On the eve of the strike Transport House still did not have a bank account number for the dockers solidarity fund account!

T&G drivers were not instructed to respect picket lines. In the first week of the strike dockers at Felix-owe rejected an 8.2% pay offer (with strings). A titanic effort could and should have been made to bring them out alongside 'scheme' ports. Instead they settled for an extra

½%.

Todd himself should have been out on the picket lines of ports where the strike was less solid. Instead rank and file dockers at Liverpool were left trying to hold things together.

The sacking of 140 dockers at Tilbury, picking off stewards and 'ultimatums' was clearly a major escalation. By the end of the week 550 had returned and the union had been derecognised.

This undoubtedly helped pull dockers together and led to the call from the docks delegate conference to step up the action.

But then Todd refused to attend mass meetings at Hull and Southampton. Even the bosses' Financial Times asked "If Mr Ron Todd had been intent on mass meetings to stem the return to work why did he not visit Hull or Southampton before vital votes over the weekend?" These votes to return the following Monday were then used by the T&G Executive to call off the strike.

Todd's argument that 'you can only have leadership if you have an army prepared to fight' is an indictment of himself. Twice the dockers voted by 3 to 1 for an all-out strike. Seventy workers at Tilbury came back out on strike, risking their jobs and redundancy pay, when they believed the union was prepared to back them. Faced with such hard nosed managements and massive redundancy payments, what more could be expected of them?

Todd was not denied his army led by the shock battalions of Liverpool. He led them blindly into an ambush without a plan of battle.

Labour ranks hit back at Policy Review

Neil Kinnock may think that the new, ever-so-pale-pink Policy Review is the way forward, but Labour activists do not agree.

Of 33 submissions on the Policy Review in the resolution book for this year's Labour Party conference, only two back the Party leadership. 31 criticise the attempt to bypass regular Party policy-making through the Review, and 25 specifically demand that conference decisions should override the Policy Review where there is conflict.

The National Executive is insisting that no amendments to the Policy Review can be debated at the conference.

Green issues, nuclear disarmament, electoral reform and trade union rights also loom large on the agenda.

71 Constituency Labour Parties have sent in motions calling for a stronger environmental policy. Of the 68 motions on armaments, the great majority, including one from the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union MSF, call for unilateral nuclear disarmament and reject Neil Kinnock's moves to drop that policy.

There are 47 motions about constitutional reform in one way or another. Of those, 37 support a changed voting system, some specifically favouring proportional representation, single transferable vote, or alternative vote, most just calling for the National Executive to prepare a report.

A number of motions call for the

replacement of the House of Lords by an elected chamber, for a Bill of Rights, or for compulsory voting.

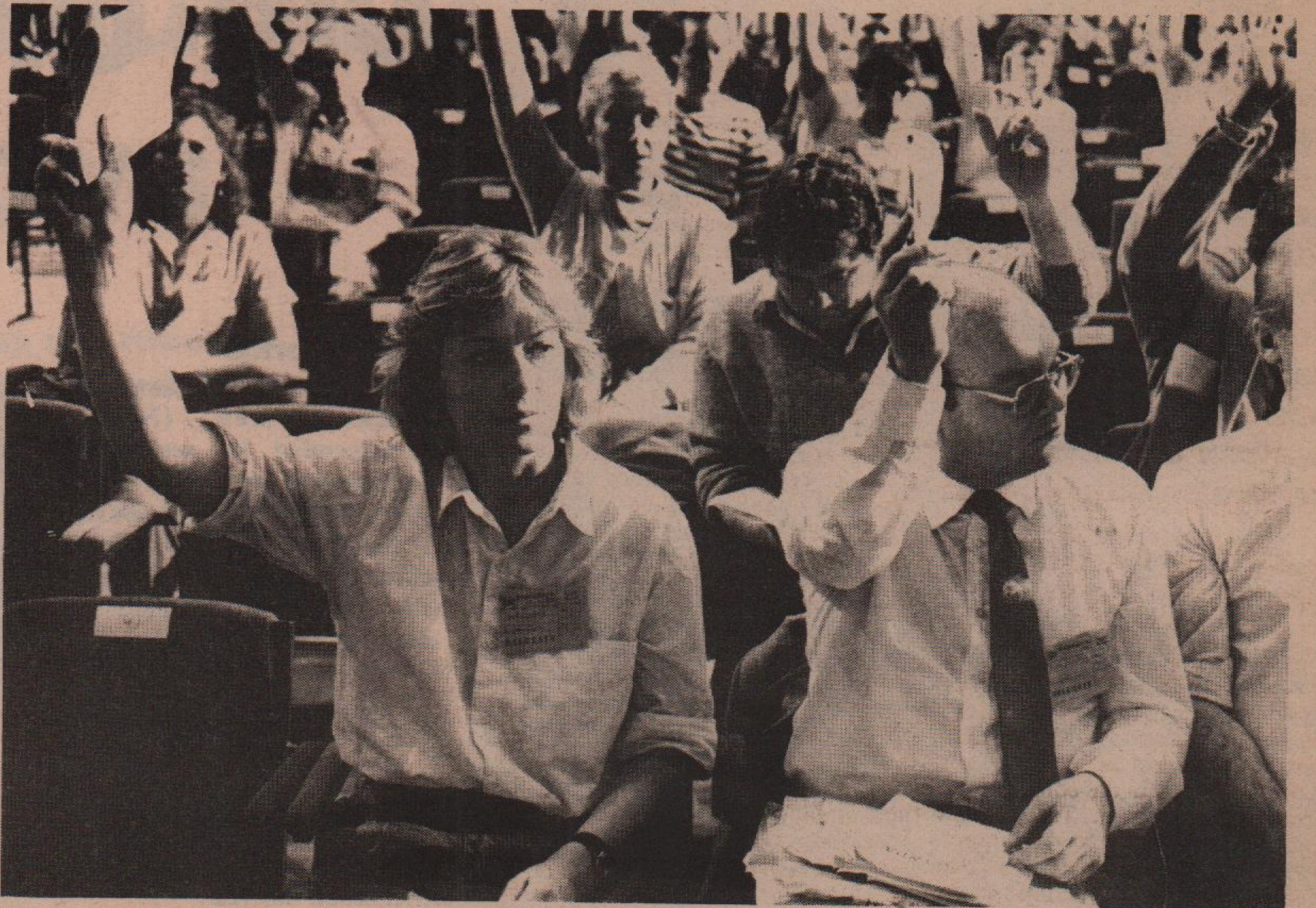
The motions favouring electoral reform are from a range of constituencies, both urban and rural, both left and right. Those on the left who insist on rejecting all forms of proportional representation out of hand are painting themselves into an untenable corner, because the present 'first-past-the-post' system is indefensibly arbitrary and undemocratic.

26 Constituency Labour Parties and five trade unions have sent in motions on 'Rights at Work', all demanding, in one way or another, restoration and improvement of the workers' and trade union rights attacked by this Tory government.

Ten motions specifically demand that the next Labour government legislate a 'Workers' Charter' including the right to strike, the right to picket, the right to organise and so on, and motions from Wallasey, Broxtowe and Sheffield Central spell out a detailed list for this Charter.

There are 25 motions on health, 19 on education, 18 on housing, and 13 on transport — including one from the TGWU which contains a call for the next Labour government to restore the Dock Labour Scheme.

There are ten motions on the Poll Tax. Brighton Kempdown and Liverpool Riverside CLPs (under Militant influence) call for mass non-payment; Glasgow Govan and Bow & Poplar also call for non-cooperation by trade unions and



Labour councils.

Nine CLPs have submitted versions of the Black Sections model motion, calling for the party to recognise the Black Sections. Only five CLPs have sent in motions on Northern Ireland (all variants of the 'Time To Go' policy), making it unlikely that this issue will reach

conference floor.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Common Market looks like being another issue which won't win conference time. Only two CLPs have submitted motions, both calling for the European Parliament to become a sovereign democratic authority. Some other motions on 1992 and

the 'Social Charter' have been tucked away in the 'Rights at Work' section of the agenda.

Only one motion has been submitted on China.

Amendments have to be submitted by 18 August and the conference takes place on 1-6 October in Brighton.

Poll tax in chaos

By Jim Denham

Every passing day seems to bring a new tale of chaos and confusion involving the poll tax.

The new Environment Secretary Chris Patten may come over better on the telly than his unloved predecessor, Nicholas Ridley, but he has inherited the task of implementing the single most unpopular measure the present government has yet come up with.

A Tory backbench revolt was simmering before the summer recess as the government became entangled in its own "safety net" proposals. Even small business people and the shire county squirearchy are up in arms now that the full implications of the poll tax are sinking in.

The registration process has been thrown into chaos in many areas because local councils are demanding information that contravenes the Data Protection Act. Hundreds of thousands of registration forms have had to be withdrawn, amended and re-issued after the Data Protection Registrar refused to allow Trafford Council in Greater Manchester, to transfer information from poll tax forms onto its computer. The Department of the Environment has confirmed that forms sent out by dozens of other councils (including Richmond on Thames, Hounslow, Solihull, Watford, Epsom and Ewell, Chelmsford and Winchester) "seem to" contravene the law. This week, the first steps to prosecute 22 councils believed to have contravened the Data Protection Act will begin.

The government has been forced to admit that councils cannot insist on being provided with any information other than the identity of household members who will be 18 or over when the tax is due to be introduced in April of next year — and no one person in any household can be committed to providing this information.

Partly as a result of these setbacks, and partly because of grassroots resistance (both organised and spontaneous) the rate of return for registration forms has been very low. In some areas as few as 40% of the forms have been returned and even in Birmingham — which is supposed to have one of the highest rates of return in England — the figure is still only 70% and that probably includes all those who sent back

their forms incomplete and unsigned.

Meanwhile, in Scotland (where the poll tax has been in operation since April) about half a million people have still not paid. At a recent conference of senior officials from local authorities Bill Anderson, Registration Officer for Tayside, said he had "never known a piece of legislation cause such widespread unrest, dissatisfaction and outright hostility." He was sure that "officers dealing with England and Wales will suffer similarly."

A sign of the panic gripping many local authorities came last week with the decision by Trafford Council to back off from prosecuting Labour councillor Sean Rogers for refusing to fill in a registration form. Despite the fact that Rogers offered to pay the £50 fine, the Registration Officer told him he was no longer required to fill in the form. The Department of the Environment now say that no-one is legally bound to complete the form, only to supply the information required — by writing a letter, for instance.

Of course, the battle against the poll tax is far from having been won. A particular problem is that the level of organised opposition within the unions is nowhere near as widespread as it is at community level. But the signs are that the government is in serious trouble. Those like the Labour leadership (and the SWP!) who long ago declared the anti-poll tax campaign dead, have been shown to be (in the words of Mark Twain) somewhat premature, to say the least.

Lambeth wavers on poll tax

Lambeth Council's ruling Labour Group is deeply divided by the recent decision to buy a poll tax computer system.

When the left recently won control of the Labour Group, they promised a real campaign of defiance against the Tory tax, which immediately meant freezing all expenditure on the poll tax — not completing the purchase of the computer system, for instance. This opposition collapsed in the face of the poll tax officers' threats and a major opportunity to mobilise support behind the council's non-implementation stance was lost.

The council leader, Joan Twelves, is

How not to reform party conference

The Labour leaders have used the Policy Review as a way to bypass the democratic procedures of Party conference. A motion to Labour Party conference from the GMB (GMW section) seeks to extend the principle.

The motion is full of fine words about "greater involvement by Party members", "more representative of all sections of the membership", "expanding the role of Conference", and so on. Its real drift is just the opposite.

The GMB wants to change the make-up of the National Executive so that it would include representatives of Labour councillors and of Euro-MPs. In practice this would have to mean electing the National Executive piecemeal, from the Euro-MPs' caucus, the conference of Labour councillors, Labour regional conferences, and so on. All direct control by Party conference over the National Executive would be removed.

Then most of the Conference would be given over to considering reports from "policy commissions" set up by the National Executive. In principle such a system of commissions could be good. In practice we can be certain what the GMB wants is a system where Constituency Labour Parties' right to propose policy will be eliminated and the Conference will have no role but to rubber-stamp a series of take-it-or-leave-it packages from the Party leadership.

There is a lot of sugar coating on the

GMB motion. It concludes with a call to change the balance of voting at conference, so that CLPs will control about half the votes instead of only six per cent or so, as at present.

The notion of giving CLPs more say in Conference is widely supported. But it's no good if it goes together with depriving Conference of any real say in the Party.

Model amendments for Labour Party conference

To motion 114 from Wallasey CLP (on Rights at Work):

In lines 13-4, delete "and for unions to gain recognition"; insert "for unions to gain recognition, and for elected union workplace representatives to have facilities to do their job".

In line 15, delete "the right to stop at work"; insert "the right to inspections of all workplaces by Health and Safety Executive inspectors, and the right to stop work".

In line 21, delete "by the courts"; insert "by the courts or any other state tribunal".

To motion 14 from Cooperative

Retail Services (on the Policy Review):

In line 4, delete "vote on all those sections of the Policy Review document where these conflict with the resolutions which secured majority support or where ambiguous wording or omission in the Policy Review text could give rise to widely differing interpretations", and insert "vote where a part of the Policy Review document conflicts with a resolution which secured majority support, so that Conference may choose between the resolution and the appropriate part of the Review document".

Lines 9-10; delete all.

Coaches to the Time To Go demo

Cardiff: £6 (£4 unwaged) from Museum Steps; phone Roger Phillips, 0222 232153.

Oxford: £5 (£3 unwaged) from Martyrs Memorial, Cowley Rd T&G, Swan, Cowley, Headington PO:

phone Gerard Ward, 0865 779552.

Nottingham: from Salutation Inn, Maid Marion Way; phone Dave Goodfield, 0602 782925.

Birmingham: £6 (£3 unwaged) from Cambridge St, Birmingham city centre; phone Mark Molina, 021 449 4453 or Mick Maughan, 021 384 7438.

Newham: £3 approx; ring 01 624 7438 for details.

Edinburgh: phone TTG office for details, 01 624 7438.

Glasgow: £15 from NALGO office, Cochrane St.

Manchester: £8 (£6 unwaged) from DHSS Aytoun St, tickets from Grassroots Books; phone Dick, 061 223 4470.

Liverpool: £10 (£5 unwaged) from Shakespeare Pub, Rose St gyratory, 6.30am; phone Mike Maguire, 051 548 0001 (w); 051 521 5887 (h).

Sheffield: £6 (£3 unwaged) from Paternoster Row, 7.30am; phone Brian McCaul, 0742 663090.

Bristol: £4 (£3 unwaged) from Anchor Road, behind the Watershed, 9am; phone Chris Murray 0272 559961.

now arguing that the 'tactic' should be a "rolling programme of opposition", identifying key issues on which to fight. If councillors are "forced to concede on a particular issue, then we must be ready to go on the offensive on other aspects of the legislation."

But at no point should this opposition leave councillors open to surcharge! For Joan Twelves, fighting the poll tax apparently means making a lot of noise about how awful the Tories are, how the poll tax is a threat to civil liberties, and 'grudgingly' implementing the tax.

This retreat from the non-implementation policy has led to the split among the left in Lambeth Labour Group, with other councillors arguing

that the council stand by its promises and refuse to implement the tax.

These councillors also call for all Lambeth Labour councillors to refuse to register and pay, to work with local community groups and, in particular, local trade unionists and Labour Party activists in building up the anti-poll tax campaign. They want Lambeth to organise outside the borough, to gain support for its action and to attempt to win other boroughs to their position.

We should be supporting the stand taken by these councillors and campaigning in the labour movement for solidarity from other councils and trade unionists to ensure that Lambeth is not left isolated.

Trotsky was right

Some time ago, Socialist Organiser carried a series of articles by Vladimir Derer on the nature of the Stalinist states, arguing that Trotsky's analysis of them was fundamentally flawed. Duncan Chapple continues the debate.

For Trotsky, the USSR under Stalin was neither socialist nor capitalist. He defined it as a degenerated workers' state.

What does that mean? For Marxists, a 'workers' state' is a state where capitalism as a dominant state machine and mode of production has been smashed, and where a society based on collectivised property is created. Trotsky saw the USSR as having degenerated to the point where the political power of the workers had been lost, but where the usurpers — Stalin's bureaucracy — had not formed themselves into a new class over a new kind of society.

There is another phrase Marxists use instead of workers' state — it is 'transitional society'. It is this phrase, and theory that Trotsky linked to it, that Derer tried to disprove.

The transitional society was not just a phrase thought up by Trotsky. The phrase and the theory were both expounded by Marx, Engels, Lenin and others before Trotsky wrote down his analysis of the USSR in 'The Revolution Betrayed' (1935). The transition is the period between the smashing of the old capitalist state and — after the capitalists and the remnants of their economy and ideas have been cleared away — stateless communism.

The prerequisite for the transition is working class power — the 'dictatorship' by the majority, the working class, over the capitalist minority. That power is then used to wipe away the old conditions of production and government.

For such a struggle to succeed, the workers need democratic control over their organisations, and a new state that represents the power of the workers themselves. The transition also needs the building of international working class power — through support to revolutions over the world.

The working class in state power has many tasks; the political destruction of the capitalist class; the economic expropriation of the means of production by the workers; and the construction of organs of direct democracy. To build and solidify the workers' state it may be necessary to use 'capitalist' methods — wages for instance. In the transition, the workers can only be freed by their own activity, and their fight to construct socialism.

In the USSR, the fight of the workers to defend and extend the gains of the revolution, and to eradicate the remnants of the old society was blocked by the rise of a conservative and Bonapartist bureaucracy.

Conservative because of its nature as a layer of Great Russian nationalist, ex-Czarist bureaucrats, who wished the transition and the world revolutionary movement halted. By the early '30s they had been able to achieve that through destroying the remnants of democratic control and purging the party.

But they were also Bonapartist in the same sense the French Bonapar-

tists excluded the French bourgeois from political power while presiding over and protecting capitalist property relations. Similarly the soviet bureaucrats took political power from the workers while at the same time defending the collectivised means of production — against the workers on the one hand and the fascists and capitalists on the other.

The bureaucrats in the USSR defend the stability of the nationalised economy because it is their bread and butter — they live off the surplus of goods and services made by the workers. And they can only extract that surplus precisely because the economy is nationalised and they control it!

So the loss of political power by the workers to the Stalinist bureaucracy did not mean the restoration of capitalism. The bureaucracy was not the old ruling class reformed, running a nationalised economy because it happened to be the best way to make profits. Rather, the bureaucracy is a layer of parasites that depends on the nationalised economy, but is unable to exist without it.

In terms of its basic make-up, the USSR is an unstable not natural formation. It was able to duplicate itself because of the weakness in the late '40s of both the working class and the imperialists.

And as we have seen many times, it produced not a cohesive stable structure, but an unbalanced, contradictory kind of society which has exploded time and time again.

The USSR is a society trapped between capitalism and communism. The bureaucrats fight hard to keep it away from revolution and counter-revolution. The fact that they have half-way succeeded in keeping that balance does not mean that there must have been some massive change.

People who argue that the length of time the bureaucrats have held power means that they are now a capitalist or other form of stable class argue against both Marxism and reality.

A relationship between time and change does exist. But it is not the only determinant. Imagine all the things that can happen to a tree during a period of time: it can rot or it can continue to grow; it can be chopped down or burnt; or it can fossilise or turn to oil.

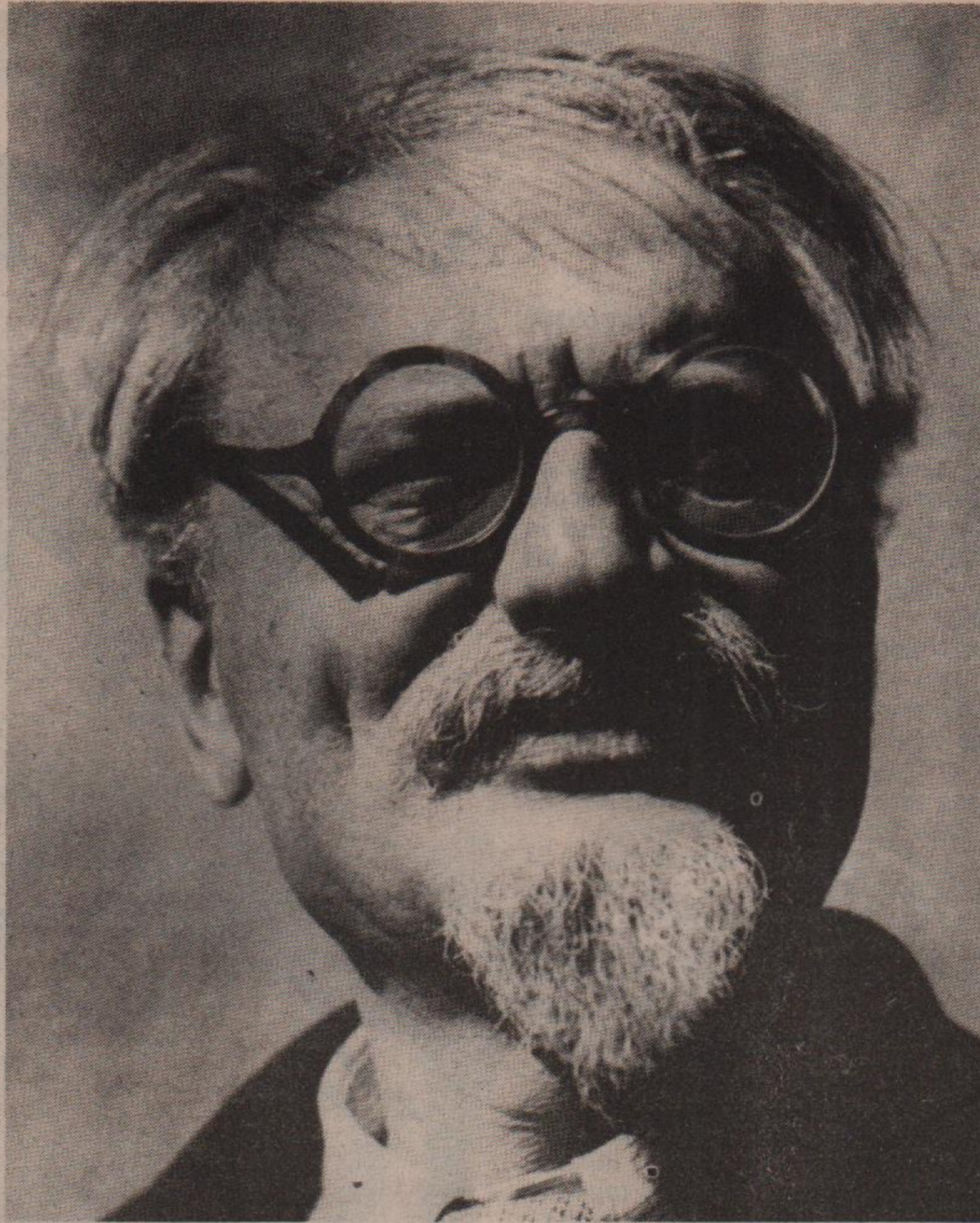
What is the best way of telling what actually has happened? Looking at the tree or looking at your watch? The answer is clear. The same point is true of the Soviet Union. A state blocked in transition does not automatically turn into another form of society just because of time!

Trotsky argued (in 'The workers' state and the question of Thermidor and Bonapartism', 1935) that the nature of the USSR could only be determined by its substance — "its social foundation and economic tendencies". The nature of a state remains the same until something happens to make it change — until a revolutionary force, either the capitalists or the workers, take power.

The way to tell if the class nature of the Soviet Union has changed is to look if its foundations have fundamentally changed. They haven't, at least in the 65 years since the Soviet thermidor began.

To argue that the Soviet state has undergone some massive change since then, is to argue an idea that does not hold together — because the USSR clearly has the same ruling elite and mode of production. The weakness of the argument can go further. Some argue a counter-revolution happened, some date it to 1928, but some argue a gradual counter-revolution happened!

Look at the first argument. By 1928, the position of the bureaucracy had been fairly secure for a few years. It was engaged in



Leon Trotsky

methodically eliminating threats to its rule. It smashed the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik party, and then the Right.

In 1928 it took on the 'kulaks', the rich farmers, by seizing their property. It was a bold move. But was it a revolution? The state, the holders of power and the nature of the economy all stayed the same. It was a change — but to argue it was a revolutionary transformation is to argue nonsense.

Equally wrong are those who argue that a gradual revolution has happened. Again, all that has happened is that time has moved on. But without some qualitative change in the substance of the Soviet state, how can there have been a counter-revolution? Point to it!

More to the point, how can you have a gradual revolution? The experience of the past and of Marxist theory is that the workers cannot take power through capitalism growing peacefully over into socialism. In fact socialism can only be built through our class, weapons in hand, smashing the repressive machine of the old ruling class.

As Trotsky wrote, "how, in that case, is the imperceptible, gradual, bourgeois counter-revolution possible...feudal as well as bourgeois counter-revolutions have never taken place 'organically' but they have invariably required the intervention of military surgery..."

"He who asserts that the soviet government has gradually been changed from proletarian to bourgeois is only, so to speak, running back the film of reformism." ('The class nature of the Soviet State', 1933).

Another charge is that Trotsky predicted wrong about the war — so his whole theory must be incorrect. Trotsky believed that a protracted world war had to lead to an end to the bureaucrats' power.

Not just because there was a war, but because of the effects of the war — in potentially weakening the hold of the bureaucracy, and strengthening the working class, and perhaps imperialism too. Trotsky also thought the war would regenerate the Marxists in the USSR, and an upsurge of workers' activity in the east and west would lead to revolution.

At the end of the war the situation was not too far away from that. European capitalism was weak at the end of the war. There was an upsurge in working class activity. But all over Europe — France, Germany, Greece — that upsurge was crushed by the 'Allied' and Soviet armies. A central reason for that was the decimation of the Trotskyists during the war and the un-

broken series of defeats the class had suffered.

So the survival of Stalinism after the end of the war isn't so hard to understand. Trotsky thought the class would be strong enough to win power. It was strong, but not strong enough, without the confidence and the leadership it needed. Its failure then, together with capitalism in handing over the buffer states in Eastern Europe, has allowed Stalinism to survive — permanently in crisis — since the war.

In a way there is a parallel today. Many Marxists have 'predicted' that the changes in the Soviet and Chinese Stalinists right now could produce the conditions for a revolution. A glance at reality will show that the revolution hasn't happened.

But it also shows how close it was. Two months ago the Chinese workers and students could have made a political revolution — they could have taken power for themselves. They did not. I think they will at some point.

But because the 'predictions' of some Marxists were wrong does it prove their theory wrong — no. Rather the strength and clarity of the movement was not great enough.

Trotsky said if there was no working class explosion, if Stalin could survive, there would be a need to examine and re-evaluate. If we do that, we can see that the basic dynamic of the USSR is still the same. Stalinism has survived through the weakness of our class, not by a magical power of its own.

Otherwise, why has it exploded so many times? Why has Stalinism split and split again? Because it is the same contradictory mass it was. Those are the facts. No amount of staring at the clock can change it.

The 'failed' revolutions are the revolutions that actually happened. They are not part of the past but part of the dynamic flow that is history. Derer weighs up Trotsky's 'mistakes' but isn't bothered to provide a solid alternative. Derer does Marxists no favours.

The existence of the Stalinist states for so long is loathsome, not just to us, but to the bosses also. In the late '80s, the pressure on our movement to capitulate to the bosses, the reformists and the Stalinophobes is a real pressure. The only guarantee against that is through building the mass and the theory needed for a mass Marxist party.

That means the defence and regeneration of the Marxist programme — not just on the nature of Stalinism — by an international tendency that fights for workers' liberty. East and West.

Time to take risks

By Ian McCalman

The articles by Martin Thomas and Jack Allison in issue no.409 of SO are welcome contributions to the discussion on the current situation in Poland.

Martin's statement as to the increasing complexity of politics in Eastern Europe and the dangers of British socialists being dogmatic as to the way forward in Poland is especially welcome.

After the long nightmare of Communist tyranny in Eastern Europe, we are entering a period when politics in a meaningful sense of the word has been resumed. But this takes place in conditions which are not analogous to those prevailing in parliamentary democracies like Britain.

In many ways, it could be contended, the politics of Poland and Hungary are more similar to those of some Latin American states — high international debts, high inflation, political parties of a very fluid nature, a corrupt gangster-like regime and an army with a taste for power waiting in the wings.

Within that context, tactical considerations become increasingly significant, within the overall strategy of the struggle to break up entrenched bureaucratic power.

Without having unwarranted illusions, we cannot underestimate the significance of Gorbachev's reversal of the Brezhnev doctrine of 'limited sovereignty' which justified Warsaw Pact military intervention into the states of Eastern Europe when they threatened change in a democratic direction. That removes one of the main constraints upon Solidarity's capacity to challenge the regime, and of the main determinant of the 'self-limiting revolution' of 1980/81.

What it does not remove is the Polish army which established martial law in 1981 with relative ease and may well be prepared to step in again if the generals and their co-thinkers in the leadership of the PUWP (the Polish ruling party) think that change is proceeding too fast and too far.

Given these conditions, it would be foolhardy to reject tactical means to split the PUWP by offering a programme for change which the reformist wing of that party could identify with.

There are, as Martin indicates, many dangers in proceeding along that road — the dangers of becoming tied into a coalition-type situation with no challenge to bureaucratic power and a 'national' programme of economic recovery at the expense of the working class.

Any such tactical move must be linked to a specific programme of dismantling the bureaucracy, beginning with an end to the nomenklatura system ('jobs for the girls and boys'), and a programme for radical economic reconstruction which ensures that, as centralised state control of the economy is ended, so the market is brought under democratic and socialised control. Such a programme must avoid becoming more deeply indebted to the forces of international finance as personified by the visit of George Bush. (The fact that Polish shipyard workers fervently cheer Bush is simply a reminder of how awful Stalinism is in comparison to systems of representative democracy, however limited by property-owning relationships.)

Even with such provisos, any tactical moves of this nature are high risk but the situation is unprecedented and the stakes considerable. An abstentionist response is always appealing but rarely effective.

The best film this year

CINEMA

By Belinda Weaver

Objectively speaking, 'Eight Men Out' may not be the best film in town, but who's objective these days? I think it's the best film this year.

It's a sport movie, but don't let that turn you off. It's only a sports movie the way 'All the President's Men' was a movie about journalists.

The sport is baseball, the time is 1919, the place is Chicago, and it all really happened. The team we meet, the White Sox, are the champions, all set to win the World Series, the annual contest between the top two teams in the rival American baseball leagues.

In 1919 players barely got a living wage; this is way before the get-rich-quick days of sponsorship and endorsements, and the players are pretty disgruntled with the team's owner, Charlie Comiskey, a tight-fisted skinflint, who begs his players while downing champagne with fawning sportswriters.

When a cash offer to throw the series comes the team's way, some of the players jump at it.

That's the starting point for director John Sayles's story. The film shows what happened to the men who took the money and to the ones who didn't, and it's never less than involving.

Sayles's films are never simplistic and one-dimensional. In 'Eight Men Out', we get involved with a variety of characters, and even the minor ones are telling.

Arnold Rothstein, the fat Jewish American financier who bankrolls the fixing of the series, isn't just in it for the money; the fix is also his revenge on the all-American ball players of his childhood who sidelined him. He can finally look down on them with contempt; even champions go down for the money, he thinks, everyone has his price.

"Goodbye, suckers!" is his parting shot as, loaded with money, he heads for Europe on a cruise.

The team are a mixed bunch — the hard heads like Gandil and Risberg who set up the fix, Eddie Cicotte, the anxious, ageing star pitcher who's worried about the future, Buck Weaver and "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, perfectionists who never grew out of their boyish love of the game.

But mixed or not, the team are a tremendous unit, and in the moments when they pull together on the field, they display the kind of brilliance that looks easy and effortless. The grins they wear as they lark about say everything there is to say about the high that competitive sport can give.

Seeing them at their insouciant best underlines the shock we feel later when the fix is on, and the players have to try their damndest to lose. Solidarity is gone; no-one can look anyone in the eye. We've seen how good the team is, and we can't help feeling anguish.



'Shoeless' Joe Jackson (left)

Sayles is interested in the people, and he makes them live for us, but he's interested in wider issues, too, in the exploitation and corruption behind the fix. Rothstein taunts the ex-boxer who works for him, "I made twenty times what you did on the fights, Abe — and I never took a punch."

Later, when things have gone

hopelessly wrong, Eddie is the one to spell it out. "Talent don't mean nothin'! Look at who's facing a jail sentence, then look where they are — Rothstein, Comiskey, and the others! Out in the back room cutting up profits. That's the god-damned conspiracy!"

He's right. The gamblers, the crooks, all made money on the

series, while the players, the "suckers" who did the work, ended up losing everything. It's a parable of capitalist society. Sayles is the chronicler, but he's also on our side, against the men out there cutting up the profits.

I saw it three times in one week. You owe it to yourself to see it at least once.

Not so super-conductors



LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

When an electric current flows through a wire, heat is produced. This is due to a property of the wire called *resistance*.

The greater the resistance, the more the heat. Sometimes this is useful (electric heaters, cookers, etc). Often it is a waste of energy and, sometimes, it can be dangerous, causing overheating and even fire. If only this heating could be eliminated...

Well, it can! At very low temperatures, resistance disappears completely, and an electric current will flow for ever without energy loss. This is called *super-conductions*.

The potential advantages of super-conduction are out-weighed by the difficulty and expense of getting temperatures low enough. To refrigerate the wires requires liquid helium at about -269°C, costing about £3 per litre.

There is also some danger in case of malfunction. If the superconduc-

tor was allowed to warm up too much, it would suddenly regain its resistance. A run-away heating would take place, perhaps leading to fire or explosion.

The discovery of so-called high temperature super-conduction (HTSC) in 1986 therefore caused an immense wave of enthusiasm to pass over physicists, university research departments, electronics and chemical firms.

In 1986 George Beduorz and Alex Müller, researchers for IBM in Zurich, discovered a ceramic substance (like pottery) that would superconduct at -243°C, six degrees higher than previously obtained using metals. Then the record temperature shot up to -180°C in 1987, with the discovery by Paul Chu and colleagues in Texas and Alabama of another super-conducting ceramic.

After this breakthrough, the American Physical Society, already holding its annual meeting, organised at short notice an evening session on super-conduction. 4,000 attended the session which ended eleven hours later at 6am! The *New York Times* called it "Woodstock for physicists".

The record temperature for HTSC now stands at -145°C, a long way short of room temperature, +25°C, the ultimate goal of HTSC. Nevertheless, -145°C is easily achievable using liquid nitrogen at -190°C, widely available at about 8p a litre.

The promise of HTSC in revolutionising power transmission, transport, energy storage and electronics led swiftly to national initiatives, meetings of businessmen and scientists, seminars and journals.

But as David Goodstein, a physics professor at the California Institute of Technology, points out in *New Scientist*, these seem to have been the only successful commercial applications of HTSC. So why has the euphoria heralded little in the way of achievements?

For one, the new superconductors are complex mixtures of metal oxides. They require many quite expensive ingredients, mixed to exact proportions and baked to just the right temperature. It is furthermore quite difficult to fashion them into useful shapes like wires, because of the brittleness of ceramics.

For another, there are problems inherent in super-conduction that limit its usefulness, even at relatively high temperatures. And in any case, the potential savings turn out to be not so high.

Goodstein looked at the US power transmission system (similar to the UK National Grid) to illustrate these limitations. The potential savings are only some 10% of the power generated: ie. present losses through heating of

overhead or underground cables are only 10% of the electrical energy passed through them. This is achieved by reducing the current and stepping up the voltage.

Since heat loss depends on the square of the current, reducing this by, say, a factor of 10 reduces heat loss by a factor of 10 squared, or 100.

This system is only possible with alternating current as the transformers that increase and decrease the voltage only work on a.c. However, superconduction only works with direct current.

Superconduction would also require refrigeration of the entire power transmission system. When this was costed in the 1960s, it was found to be a surprisingly small proportion of the total cost of a

superconducting power transmission system. This was way before the discovery of HTSC.

The major problem though would be the instability of the system. Goodstein cites the example of a lightning strike, hardly a rare occurrence for overhead power lines. This would result in a local overheating and a breakdown of superconduction. This would lead to a runaway heating in both directions along the power lines.

Before the refrigeration system could cope, the entire power transmission system of the country could melt down. Goodstein suggests that most engineers would find this "embarrassing".

Next week, I'll look at a field where superconduction is useful but where HTSC is nevertheless unlikely to be of much use.

Summer paperbacks

BOOKS

By Gordon MacMillan

Rubicon Beach by Steve Erikson. Futura (£4.50)

A man is taken from prison after he repeated a joke which hanged a friend, a joke that he cannot remember the last line of. *Rubicon Beach* is set in a world which only has the name of familiarity; all else is strangely foreign.

It is a book which merges love with fantasy, ghosts and dreams and a haunting surrealism, beckoning to a deep longing which is the secret of darkness of the rubicon. Maybe the best novel I've read this year.

Velocity by Kristin McCloy. Hutchinson (£5.95)

A girl returns home to a small town in

the Southern USA following her mother's death. Father and daughter cannot face each other, let alone the loss.

Ellie escapes into a destructive passion with a half-Indian Hell's Angel, consuming herself with lust, trying to burn out the grief.

A novel that deals expertly with the empty, ill-formed and name-only relationships which come to light only after tragedy. An under-rated first novel.

Love Me Tender by Catherine Texier. Paladin (£3.99)

Not another novel about New York? *Love Me Tender's* French author has managed to give a new glow to those bright lights, in an exploration which achieves surprise more than any of its lame predecessors.

It relies on no gimmick or fad, but something much tougher, as it seeks from the beginning to uncover more fully the harsher reality of the beautiful city.

Voices From The Plains by Gianni Celati. Serpent's

Tail (£6.95)

No phrase and no description is wasted. *Voices From The Plains* is an immaculate collection of searching stories which are part fable, recounted in the greatest of fireside traditions.

It is utterly refreshing to find a story teller whose energy is not wasted. Like water to the fire in the desert, he uses only the precise amount of words to achieve the desired effect. At times enchanting, these thirty stories should be read.

Death. Granta 27

Death is the title of the latest collection of Burford's magazine Granta. The selection focuses on death, the strongest and most complete ending any story could have. There are contributions from Edmund White (*The Beautiful Room is Empty*), Mary McCarthy (*Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*), an excellent piece titled *Glitches* by John Gregory Dunne, and a photo-realism story, "emergency".

Granta never fails to pack in much diversity, regularly and well.

Why Liverpool dockers went back to work

The Liverpool dockers voted for a return to work at a mass meeting on Monday 7 August.

On the previous Friday they had voted with only about three against to continue their strike action. What had happened over the weekend to cause this turnaround?

Billy Jenks, a Liverpool docks shop steward, spoke to Socialist Organiser

The dock shop stewards didn't call today's [Monday's] mass meeting. That was called by Bobby Owens, the regional secretary of the T&G.

The first I heard about the meeting was when a letter came through the door on Saturday morning.

The Monday mass meeting was conducted in a very undemocratic way. The shop stewards met before the meeting. We had heard, through the media, that Ron Todd was going to speak at the meeting.



Ron Todd with dockers

We asked for Todd to come and meet us, but he refused. Before going in to the mass

meeting, we were given five minutes to talk to Todd, and weren't even given a chance to get any answers to our questions.

In the mass meeting we were told that Todd, Connolly (the TGWU national docks official) and Jimmy Simes (the local docks official) would address the meeting and then there would be time for discussion from the floor. When the officials had finished, instead of taking speakers from the floor, Bobby Owens asked if there was a feeling that the vote be taken straight away, then said there was and took the vote.

The vote was taken despite the fact that we were demanding the right to speak.

Some say the vote was fairly evenly split, others say it was 2-1 for a return to work. I can't say for sure because I was protesting to the platform for the right to speak.

The basis of the return to work as seen by the officials is: no sackings, recognition of the T&G, and nobody returning to less favourable terms than when they went out. The officials say we've got all these. But

we know we haven't!

The officials say that management won't negotiate while we are out on strike and that we should return to work to get negotiations going. Our strike action would have forced management to negotiate.

What the officials have told us to do is to sign binding contracts which take us back to a much weaker position, and then if we don't get what we want have another ballot on action. We would have been in a much stronger position if we stayed out.

One of the main reasons the strike has gone the way it has nationally has been the messing around with ballots and reballots and trying to stay within the law. The way the union conducted itself gave a signal of weakness and lack of support to dockers around the country.

Despite what Todd and the officials say, recognition has been withdrawn from all but two senior stewards. The T&G officials might have recognition but those of us who represent dockers on a day-to-day basis have had our recognition

withdrawn.

Instead of being able to work in different areas of dock work, we now get tied to one area and if that goes down the pan, so do you. It looks like a lot of the 'troublemakers', as the bosses see us, or people who stand up for their rights, as we see it, will end up on the 'conventional' dock work, the section that is likely to go first.

We've seen in other ports that stewards have remained sacked despite the return to work. Around the country dockers are finding out that they should have stayed out and fought, because their conditions of work are under massive attack.

When people realise how bad things are they might have another go because we have the strength to beat them, but the actions of our national and local officials won't inspire them with much confidence.

One thing is certain though, if our national officials had spent as much energy on convincing dockers to stay out as they have on getting us to go back, then the port employers wouldn't be feeling so smug now.

'NALGO has become a union rather than a staff association'

John Reilly, Branch Secretary of Merseyside NALGO Fire and Civil Defence, spoke (in a personal capacity) to Kevin Sexton

At the moment the employers are prepared to negotiate with NALGO, but without ACAS; they know that ACAS will say increase the offer and drop the strings.

Previously we had meetings with the employers which only lasted five minutes. From employers' internal mail we could see that they thought the rolling strike programme would not be solid. Even on the Local Authorities' figures, the strike was 85% solid, and in the North West 95%.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA), which is Labour controlled, is sticking to 7% and strings, while the Association of County Councils, which is Tory controlled, wants to increase the offer and maybe drop the strings. This might seem absurd. Labour authorities are taking the stance that they are being forced financially to take this position and do the Tories' dirty work.

I have tried continually with my executive to argue for all-out action and not selective action. However, this argument has been very hard to win with the executive, and we decided to press for a national ballot during August on an indefinite series of national strikes, a maximum of four strikes in any one four-week period.

For the selective action, our executive identified our purchasing and supplying office. Strike action there will severely affect fire appliances and also means a

loss of revenue to the bosses. Supplies will dry up extremely quickly.

The union discussion nationally seems to have centred around arguing against all-out strike action. I personally think that the six-day strike action should have been the launch pad for all-out action.

For a lot of the membership, this was the first time they had been on strike, and it gave them a sense of power.

The view you come up against from the leadership and local executives is 'you'll never get support, the history of the union doesn't point to that'. But it was the National Executive's responsibility to escalate the action and campaign for 'all-out'.

The National Executive has undermined the work we have been doing locally to build solidarity. For example their first NALGO strike leaflet asked people from other unions not to cross picket lines. In my area of work we had members of the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) who wouldn't cross our picket lines.

Then the following week the new leaflet dropped this line and people could cross picket lines but not do our work.

Selective action could make strikers isolated. We are using branch funds to help stop isolation by covering strikers' National Insurance, etc.

The National Executive, in my min, has given no leader. We've had to organise ourselves. I've learnt more about strikes and organisational work over the last few weeks than in years. The National Executive just give the words and glossy leaflets, we need a leadership which is going to really actively fight. I believe we will win at 8.8% and no strings.

One of the good and most positive things to come out of the last few weeks is that NALGO has become a union to be recognised rather than just a staff association. Locally we have become a force to be recognised and the membership has grown in trade union consciousness and that is important to our future.

IN BRIEF

Action on the North Sea oil rigs has been suspended pending talks at ACAS over union recognition. Meanwhile many union activists have been victimised and there is a virtual lock-out on the Beryl Field.

The engineering union's 'Drive for 35' campaign for a shorter working week is intensifying. Ballots for indefinite strike action are pending at 12 key firms: GKN, Weir, Vickers, TI, Plessey, NEI, Lucas, Dowty, Smiths, BAe, Rolls Royce and GEC.

Reports from mass meetings up and down the country suggest that the mood for a fight is there. At BAe in Humberside only two out of 3,500 workers voted against action.

The Confed plans a strike levy of one hour's pay a week to support the strikers.

Accompanying the 'Drive for 35' campaign has been a wave of local disputes across engineering as workers flex their muscles in a way not seen for a long time.

UCW members in the Post Office

parcels section have agreed to a pay deal worth 10%, but this won't necessarily compensate for the disastrous effects of the settlement to last September's dispute which involved big pay cuts for many postal workers. Workers on the Counter side of the business could

soon find themselves balloted for industrial action after management came up with a pathetic 6% pay offer.

Action at the BBC is to be suspended until September to allow a ballot to take place on management's 8.8% offer.

Tube workers stay strong

As we go to press, tube workers are ready to stage another 24-hour tube strike on Thursday 10 August.

Two disputes are involved. One directly affecting drivers and guards — a claim for £64 per week extra for running driver-only trains. The other, over 'Action Stations', directly involves station staff (though its proposed changes to promotion procedures would also affect drivers and guards).

The first dispute has gone to non-binding arbitration through ACAS. The

result is due out on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Tube bosses have agreed to drop 'Action Stations' but only so long as they can run a 'fast track' promotion system for 100 jobs — working on the 'blue eyed boy' syndrome no doubt.

Tube workers have shown their determination to fight. But to break the deadlock they should step up the action. An endless series of one-day strikes hold the danger of slowly draining morale.

And to retain unity between all tube workers common demands by the NUR and ASLEF are needed to both issues.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

NALGO: make the strikes bite!

By Nik Barstow,
assistant secretary
Islington NALGO,
personal capacity

Computers are being shut down in local councils, the poll tax is being slowed to a halt and the national supply of "chicken nuggets" is threatened by environmental health officers' action.

Indefinite strikes by "key groups" of NALGO members are beginning to bite, putting pressure on the councils to up their pay offer and drop the strings they've attached to it.

The key strikes have spread after the employers refused to negotiate seriously. On 1 August they only upped their pay offer from 7% to 8% and looked determined to keep most of the strings.

The council bosses panicked after NALGO's six days of strikes in July, showed a lot of division in public, and then decided to "tough it out".

The councils hope to get through August with only limited disruption, and want to see what will happen in NALGO's next ballot on national action.

That they feel safe in doing this is a result of how weak proposals for escalating the action by NALGO nationally look. Sectional strikes and more and more one-day or two-day strikes starting in September.

But, if we build on the ground-work we can turn that around. The sectional strikes can be extremely effective and can build confidence. A council without a switchboard, without a computer system, and with hardly any money coming in is a council in trouble.



What we need to do is make sure that the "key workers" are not left isolated in the branch or their districts.

The key workers need to meet together regularly, clear guidelines need to be laid down to make sure other workers do not cover their work and that those are stuck to. Branches need to make sure other members are backing the action, taking part in pickets, and committing themselves to all-out action if any of the key workers are threatened with dismissal or disciplinary action.

The sectional strikes can be used to boost the case for a Yes vote in the national ballot too. We cannot

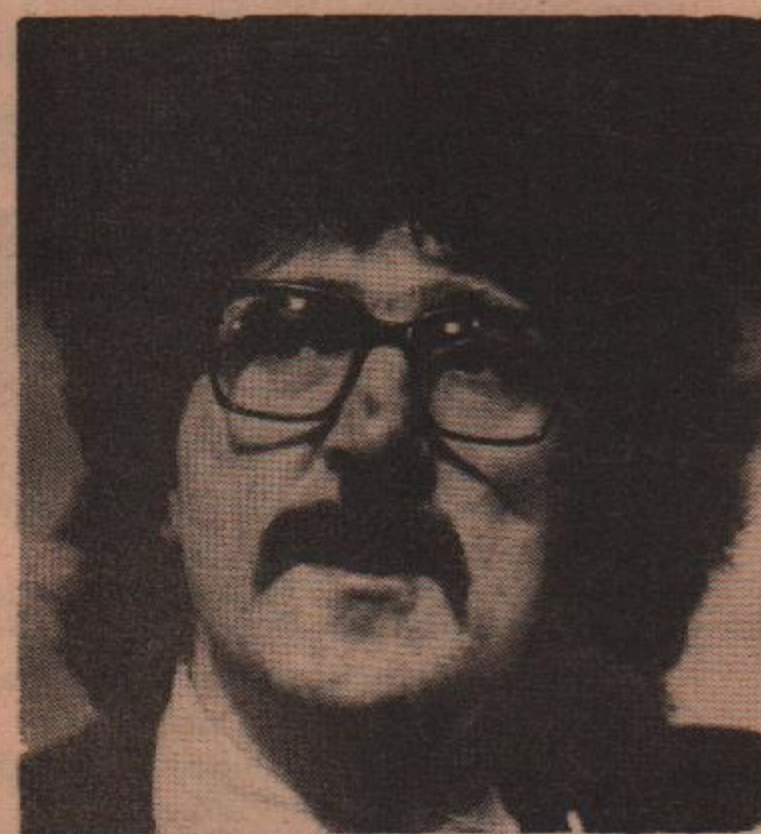
leave a few union members to do the work for the rest of us; we need to show our support on the ground now, and in that ballot by agreeing to take national action.

The best and quickest way of winning NALGO's £1200 or 12% pay claim was and still is an all-out

national strike but the action that is starting now can be made strong and effective.

If the councils really do manage to hold out despite their division into September we need to argue again for stepping up the action to finish them off.

Tories out to shut more pits



WHETTON'S WEEK
A miner's diary

I'm convinced that the Coal Board and the government will not be satisfied until they've got down to 50 pits, which will then be privatised perhaps individually or in

groups of twos or threes.

The NUM has stood rock solid and refused to bow its head. Some people have said we've got to cooperate with the Coal Board, but as Arthur Scargill says, that's like cooperating with the hangman and telling him how to put the noose around your neck.

We should be looking to the Labour Party for a firm commitment to rebuild the industry and make sure that we have deep mines that will supply our coal for many years to come.

The Tories are going to try to wipe out as much as they can and keep a few plums for the private sector. Then, when we're totally dependent on imported coal, the price of our coal will rocket and the price of imported coal will rocket.

We want a commitment from the Labour Party at the next election. Miners will have been fighting in order to get a Labour government elected and we want a fair return from them — not the same as we got last time, in 1974.

We could be returning to the private coal owners. Private enter-

prise is already putting men into the pits. I wouldn't be at all surprised to see companies bidding for two or three million-ton pits and then holding the country to ransom, both for home coal and imported coal.

I feel extremely sorry for the dockers. Since the end of the miners' strike we've seen seamen, printers, dockers under attack and standing up on their own.

If all those industries had come out and stood alongside the miners, then that woman in Downing Street would have been long gone.

Instead we are reaping the whirlwind of our failures.

The Tories had been building since 1972 — since the police had to march away from Saltley Gates. They vowed and declared that that would never ever happen again.

They'd planned it, put all the strategy behind it, and we have just sat back and reacted to them. It's going to continue until people say enough is enough.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire

Pull out the gunboats! Free the hostages!

The Western hostages in Lebanon are the victims of the appalling mess that has been made of that country

by a combination of external interference, communalism and social inequality.

The roots of Lebanon's terrible deadlock go back a long way. The pent-up tensions erupted into civil war in 1974-75; and since then the situation has gone from bad to worse.

The Hezbollah (Party of God), which is responsible for holding a lot of the hostages — sometimes it operates under different names — emerged in the 1980s. It is the product partly of the deep alienation of huge numbers of Lebanese Shi'ites, who have always been at the bottom of the social pile.

Their disaffection has been tapped by reactionary mullahs who hold out Islam as the alternative to the very earthly devastation the country has experienced. The Iranian regime gained power and influence in part through its own prestige as a 'revolutionary Islamic' state, in part with cash.

So Iran wields real influence, while the other (less extremist) Shi'ite group, Amal, is linked to Syria.

The influence of Western governments and Israel in Lebanon has contributed greatly to its problems. Israel left the country in ruins in 1982. The multinational peacekeeping force, fronted by the US, sent in after the Lebanon war — whose contribution to peace was the systematic bombardment of Druze villages — was forced to withdraw in 1984, having failed to achieve anything at all.

Now Lebanon is a patchwork quilt of rival Muslim groups, the Israelis, the Syrians, with a few small areas still dominated by Lebanese Christians or Palestinians (in certain camps).

All socialists must feel immense sympathy with the hostages. To be kept prisoner far away from home must be terrible; terrible also for family and friends.

Gunboat diplomacy, against Lebanon or Iran, is certainly no answer. Indeed, the noises made by sections of the US Congress in this direction are obscene. Tens of thousands of Lebanese have died since 1974. One American colonel gets hanged and they want to send in the marines.

Short-term answers are difficult to see, short of workers' unity in the whole region; but an end to foreign interference would help.

Greed in the boardrooms

8.3 per cent? Nine per cent? That's the sort of pay rise for workers that makes top bosses wail about the country being ruined by greed.

But they have different standards when it comes to their own pay. Nine per cent would be peanuts for them.

Tory tax changes increased company directors' take-home pay by 26 per cent last year. But even 26 per cent was not enough for them. 22 top directors had increases of one hundred per

cent or more before tax.

Overall, between September 1983 and late 1988, top executives' pay increased five times over in merchant banking, and three times over in other banks and insurance. Even in less cash-happy sectors, like engineering, top bosses' pay more than doubled.

Britain's bosses are making fat profits out of their workers, and they want to keep those profits for themselves. They shouldn't get away with it.