

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Poll tax riot

One of the most telling facts about the fighting between police and anti-poll-tax demonstrators last Saturday, 31 March, was pinpointed by the crime correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, Neil Darbyshire, in an article outlining the thinking and observation of top policemen.

"A significant number of those involved in violence had joined the march apparently spontaneously after drinking in local public houses". The source for that was David Meynell, Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

Despite all their hypocritical talk about conspiracies by anarchists and Trotskyists, the police and the politicians *know* that much of the violence that spread through Central London last Saturday was a spontaneous outburst of rebellion against the poll tax and other aspects of Thatcher's Britain.

They know, too, that it was the police who started the violence when they charged down Whitehall into some hundreds of demonstrators who had sat down in peaceful protest opposite Downing Street.

Of course there are organisations of anarchists who believe that the only way and the best way to register their opposition to the poll tax, and maybe destroy it, is by violent demonstrations as near to outright insurrection as possible. But those anarchists cannot organise such things at will.

On Saturday it was the combination of outrage over the poll tax and the mounted police charge against the would-be sitdowners in Whitehall which ignited the demonstrators — not the anarchists.

The wonder of it is that such outbreaks have not happened before in a capital city where upwards of 75,000 people are homeless, and many of them, sheltering in squats, hostels, or bed-and-breakfast places, must now find the money to pay poll tax for the privilege of breathing London air.

Much of the violence by demonstrators on Saturday was blind, destructive and counter-productive — people climbing scaffolding and throwing rivets into the crowd of demonstrators, looting, destruction of cars in the streets, and so on. In so far as anarchists had anything to do with such events, they proved once more that with such people it is not so much the rocks in their hands as the rocks in their heads that make them dangerous.

But — to repeat — the point about what happened on Saturday was not the anarchists, but the large "spontaneous" element in it. Most of those who went on the rampage through parts of Mrs Thatcher's capital given over to conspicuous consumption were people driven to revolt by intolerable pressure. The pressure of the poll tax was merely the detonator. The police charge against the peaceful sit-down in Whitehall was the spark that set off the explosion.

THATCHER REAPS WHAT SHE SOWS



Enemies of freedom

Riot cop assaults peaceful demonstrator in Trafalgar Square. Who are the enemies of freedom, comrade Kinnock?

Students fight the Tories

Mark Osborn reports on the conference of the National Union of Students

This year's Easter conference of the National Union of Students — currently running in Blackpool — takes place in the midst of a Tory onslaught on education and student living standards.

The National Union of Students has been run by a Labour-dominated Executive since 1982. But the dominant Kinnockite group have manipulated and carved their way through the '80s, offering strategies based on lobbying backbench MPs rather than mobilising mass action.

There is mounting dissatisfaction with a Labour machine which has failed to stop the Tories. This year the "independent" right wing have made a serious attempt to replace Labour as the dominant group on the National Executive.

The right wing, led by 'Cosmo' Hawkes, have no scruples. They are cynical operators, making demagogic claims.

Labour is undemocratic, they say. The National Executive does not implement conference policy; for example, Left Unity strategy on loans and poll tax was passed at the December 1989 NUS conference, but remains unimplemented. Cosmo says he will implement conference policy.

Labour is right wing, they say. The NUS leaders are in favour of paying the poll tax. Cosmo says he will not pay.

Unfortunately Cosmo and his faction are insincere. Their pose is designed to undercut Labour's vote. In power they would depoliticise the National Union of Students in the same way that Cosmo depoliticised Manchester University Students Union when he was President there.

Cosmo and his friends have repeatedly voted against policy which would mobilise against the Poll Tax and loans. They did so at the December 1989 NUS conference, and they have done so on the National Executive.

As part of the drive to clamp down on dissent inside NUS, the

leadership have proposed a number of — allegedly democratic — changes to NUS structures. A year ago they were defeated when they tried to abolish one of NUS's two conferences per year. This year they are attempting to cut the size of the National Executive.

But at this conference the leadership have been defeated again, and Left Unity proposals to pay all the part-time members of the National Executive have been passed. This is a victory for Left Unity and the left, and a defeat for the undemocratic right wing.

Left Unity has pole position in all the remaining conference policy debates — housing, education, abortion rights, and the crucially important debate on the development of the working-class Further Education sector.

Left Unity will be proposing a strategy based on mass mobilisations of students in alliance with the labour movement to defend education and to defeat loans and poll tax.

Unfortunately there will be no direct debate on poll tax at this conference. NUS has extensive (Left-Unity-inspired) policy, passed at the December 1989 conference. But the policy has not been implemented by the Labour-led National Executive. Walworth Road finds our policy of "Don't pay, don't collect" far too embarrassing.

Poll tax is a pressing issue for students. It is not only the direct effect of the poll tax on student pockets that is worrying activists. Through its effect on council budgets, poll tax will lead to closures and cuts at Further Education colleges.

On Monday 2nd, activists heard Ian Greaves, one of the non-Militant members of the National Committee of the All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation, address a 150-strong Left Unity fringe meeting.

Ian's message was: implement NUS policy and beat the Poll Tax!

Also at the meeting was Left Unity supporter Mark Studdart from Leeds University, who had 25 stitches in his head after being attacked by the police on the demonstration last Saturday, 31 March.

Ian Greaves won the conference poll for guest speakers, and will be addressing the full conference on the poll tax.

New Labour left get-together

Labour Party Socialists", the Labour Party offshoot of the Socialist Movement, is holding its first conference in Sheffield on 19-20 May.

The agenda will include the fight against the witch-hunt and for democracy in the Labour Party; solidarity with socialists in Eastern Europe; policy workshops; and future organisation of "Labour Party Socialists".

Both delegates and individuals

are invited. The conference is at Sheffield Poly, Pond Street, from 11am to 5pm Saturday (registration begins at 10am) and from 10am to 2.30pm Sunday.

Credentials are £10 (organisations), £6 (waged individuals) and £3 (unwaged) from PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD. The next planning meeting for the conference is on Sunday 8 April, 11am at Durham Road Community Centre, off Seven Sisters Road, London N4.



The Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB) protested at Downing Street last Saturday, 31 March, against the British government's tacit support for Russian aggression

in Lithuania.

In Lithuania, the slow-motion crackdown continues as the Moscow-backed rump of the old Communist Party banned almost all the independent press on Monday 2 April.

The form of the ban was the seizure of the printing presses of the

old party, said to be the property of the 'Soviet Communist Party'. The nationalist-inclined Lithuanian CP, and the Sajudis nationalist movement, were told that they could no longer have their papers printed.

The Lithuanian parliament has yet to reach a decision on how to respond to Moscow's aggression.

Revolt in the hell-hole

As we go to press, it is still not known how many, if any, have died in the rioting at Strangeways prison in Manchester.

According to a banner displayed at a prison window, none. According to the emergency services, dead are to be expected.

What is clear is that the riot was a product of appalling and inhuman conditions in the overcrowded prison. It is not the first riot in Britain caused by such conditions in recent years, nor will it be the last. The scale of its violence only reflects the urgency of the situation.

The prison officers have been saying for a long time that British prisons are overcrowded and understaffed. Indeed, last year they staged a strike against the conditions they have to work under, and police were drafted in to do their job — badly.

One of the biggest scandals of all is the equal overcrowding to be found in remand centres, such as

the one in the north east known as 'grisly Risley'. Here men who have not even been convicted of a crime — they are waiting to be tried — are kept cooped up like chickens in a battery farm. Last year there was a riot and rooftop occupation at Risley.

Britain is notoriously worse than most West European countries. It is not so much that our prisons are smaller or less well-equipped. Quite simply, more people are in them — three times as many in proportion to population as in Holland, for example.

People get put in prison in Britain for crimes which, in other countries, they would not.

In other words, prison is used in Britain as a form of punishment, and a supposed 'deterrent', far more than in other countries. That the numbers in prison are so high must show, surely, that as a method of crime prevention it is a failure.

The Strangeways riot shows graphically the real results of this policy. Prisoners are treated like animals.

Prisoners are not animals. They are people. Even those who have

committed dreadful crimes are people.

Some of the worst offenders probably need care and attention more than punishment, although that is an unfashionable 'pinko' opinion these days. Certainly, cooping prisoners up in hell-holes will not make them better able to take their places in society.

The reason most prisoners are from working-class backgrounds is not hard to find out. Poverty and insecurity breed crime. Rich people get off more: they can pay for good lawyers, they play golf with the judges, they are more likely to have "good characters" and so be let off prison even when found guilty.

Prisons are tied in with the whole system of rich and poor, powerful and powerless.

Any democratic socialist society would have to have some way of dealing with people who broke its laws, who killed or raped or stole. But a socialist society would approach the matter differently, and treat any prisoners differently.

Speaking about the Action Committee established in Alexandra Township, South Africa, a few years back, independent trade union leader Moses Mayekiso commented: "In Alexandra, the question of sentencing is problematic, because how do you sentence a person?"

"We do not believe in corporal punishment, but we have been lucky because people listen to whatever decision is made. If people listen we don't need to implement any punishment..."

"We believe that the courts [the 'people's courts'] have an educational function. They are there to politicise the offender. Most crime in the area is caused by the capitalist and apartheid systems, so we tell the offender that he mustn't allow himself to be used by them"

Such an approach doesn't spell out exactly what prisons like Strangeways should be replaced with. But a society that adopted that approach would surely be more likely to avoid the "Strangeways syndrome".



Photo: Paul Herrmann, Profile

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Thatcher reaps what she sows

From front page

Not to distinguish between foolish anarchists and people driven to spontaneous revolt is not to be able to understand what happened and why.

The main responsibility for what happened on Saturday lies with the leaders of the labour movement. No wonder people feel desperate and hopeless enough to lash out blindly when the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC confine themselves to verbal fireworks and fencing displays with Mrs Thatcher and her ministers in the House of Commons.

As Tony Benn has said, had the Labour Party and the TUC backed Saturday's demonstration, then it could have been a million or more strong. Proper stewarding could have controlled the unruly.

Even the police would perhaps have had to behave themselves better at a demonstration with Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis marching at its head.

Instead the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC have eagerly joined in the Tory-conducted chorus against "violence". It is a long time since anything quite so odiously hypocritical has been seen in Britain.

People sitting in their homes saw on their TV screens a troop of perhaps 20 mounted police ride down a lone woman in the centre of a road, ride over her without faltering, and go on their way, leaving her on the ground where the horses' hooves had trampled her.

They saw a mounted policeman with a long baton leaning down to club a man who had fallen on the ground, beating him repeatedly on his head. They saw policemen — sometimes mounted — charge wildly into crowds of bystanders, swinging batons indiscriminately.

They saw peaceful bystanders with their heads streaming blood as a result of such tactics by the police.

And the politicians — Labour and Tory alike — go on and on about violence, meaning violence by the poll tax demonstrators!

Labour leaders Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley vie with the Tories to demand exemplary punishment of those arrested, and call for police investigations into the "conspirators" behind it all. Roy Hattersley blames the Socialist Workers Party — though even the police have stated that known SWPers were seen trying to calm things down! So does George Galloway, the well-off "left" MP (quoted in the Guardian, 2 April).

It is hard to imagine anything more disgusting, or more scandalous, than the Labour leaders in the Commons appealing to the Tories not to blame them but instead to form a common front against "the enemies of democracy". To unite with Thatcher against the enemies of democracy is to unite with the devil to fight sin!

The ramming through of the poll tax by Thatcher's minority-elected government against the manifest opposition of a big majority of the electorate — and maybe even of a

majority of Tory voters — is the very opposite of democracy. If Thatcher's attempt to brand Labour with responsibility for last Saturday's semi-uprising has failed, that is not because Labour's leaders have played little sir echo to Mrs Thatcher but because people in Britain know where the violence comes from.

Vast numbers of desperate people in Britain probably sympathise, half-sympathise, or can anyway understand those who ran amok last Saturday.

If Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley are interested in democracy, then they should cut the cackle and the cant about the democratic nature of Mrs Thatcher's tyranny and fight for the democratic rights of the British people now by campaigning for an immediate general election.

It is still not too late for the leaders of the labour movement to take their proper place at the head of a powerful labour-movement-based movement against the poll tax and Mrs Thatcher. If they believe their own talk about democracy, that is what they will do. Probably they won't.

The months ahead may well see other explosions of anger like last Saturday's, essentially spontaneous. If the leaders of the labour movement won't lead an organised fight back, then the rank and file must.

Not only Labour MPs like Hattersley and Galloway have gone in for "fingering" sections of the left and acting, or promising to act, as "felon-setters" for the police by trying to identify left-wingers as being responsible.

The officers of the All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation — Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan — have promised to hold their own investigation" and then "go public naming names" (Nally). To whom? To the police? To go public is to go to the police.

The left has a right to defend itself against anarchist disorganisers and against outbreaks of wild hooliganism, including the right to throw disrupters off marches. Nally and Sheridan had a right to dissociate themselves from the violence last Saturday.

But nobody on the left has the right to felon-set people on our side who act against Thatcher and her poll tax according to their best lights.

Nally and Sheridan are *Militant* people, and the All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation is completely (and very bureaucratically) controlled by *Militant*. Those who run *Militant* should call them to order at once; if they don't, the activists in the anti-poll-tax movement should.

The *Militant*-controlled All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation also bears responsibility for the chaos which engulfed the demonstration last Saturday, a responsibility second only to that of the leaders of the Labour and trade union movement.

They have a one-sided, exclusively "direct action" strategy for beating the poll tax — don't pay.



Photo: John Harris

They talk for the record about not collecting, and call for a general election now to "bring down the Government", but in practice they pay no attention at all to the fight to line up Labour councils to refuse to implement the poll tax, or trade unions to refuse to cooperate.

This is surprising, but true. *Militant* burned its fingers too much in Liverpool.

And *Militant* is in considerable disarray politically. People in Scotland like Tommy Sheridan looked set early this year to stand as candidates against Labour in the local government elections. They seem to have been dissuaded.

It is right to advocate non-payment, and *Socialist Organiser* does advocate it. But *Militant*

makes it into a one-side panacea, and foolishly ignores its limitations and difficulties, while at the same time channelling the anti-poll-tax movement away from concern with the trade unions or with local government, which is the interface between the Tories, the labour movement, and the working class.

These politics — or lack of politics — help push young people new to politics and not part of the labour movement into anarchist attitudes.

More than that. *Militant* was in charge last Saturday. The Anti-Poll-Tax Federation is tightly controlled by them and patrolled in their usual ultra-sectarian spirit. Most of the stewards on Saturday were *Militant* (many of them full-

timers), or controlled and selected by *Militant*, and *Militant* had an airtight grip on the overall organisation.

There can be no certainty that better stewarding would have made a decisive difference, but it is a matter of fact that the stewarding failed completely at the end. Since *Militant* has a jealously-guarded near-monopoly on the Anti-Poll-Tax Federation, the responsibility is *Militant's* when things go wrong.

To cap this inept performance with a public promise to investigate and publish a list of names of allegedly violent people there on Saturday — that is, in effect to hand them over to the police — is to reduce things to a nasty and unpleasant farce.

Protest to the BBC!

Capitalist leaders like Bush and Thatcher have made it clear to the people of Lithuania that they will not support them against the Kremlin.

They are sympathetic to Gorbachev, or at any rate they are more concerned that Gorbachev should have his way in Lithuania than that Lithuania should be allowed to throw off the yoke of national oppression put in place by Stalin and Hitler 50 years ago.

This open and shameless collusion with the neo-Stalinists who run the USSR goes hand in hand with a sustained ideological offensive against socialism. There too, of course, they have a united front with the new-fledged dictator Gorbachev.

Stalinism was and is socialism; socialism was and is Stalinism; socialism can be nothing but Stalinism — that is the message.

All those socialists, from the reformist to the revolutionary side of the spectrum, who fought and died fighting Stalin and Stalinism were, it seems, only inconsistent Stalinists!

This is ludicrous and stupid, but socialists should not be complacent about the likely effects of this anti-socialist offensive, combined as it is with the collapse of the self-proclaimed socialist systems in the Stalinist states.

We should protest and make a fuss about every single time the media identifies socialism and Stalinism. We must insist that socialism is not fair game now!

A crass example of what we can now expect was last Sunday night's film on BBC2, "Kremlin Farewell". This was a BBC-made film based on the death of Nikolai Bukharin and his infant son's painful growth into knowledge of the world around him inside an orphanage which is a microcosm of Stalinist Russian society.

It was a good play, even if the Stalin character didn't carry much conviction. The lightly-fictionalised Bukharin character is made to say anachronistic things like "I have spent my life fighting to give communism a human face", and there are other similar clumsinesses.

And of course the film was built around the fashionable Bukharin cult, which tries to ignore the degree of

Bukharin's responsibility for the Stalinist system. Bukharin was Stalin's comrade in arms in the battle to defeat and crush the working-class opposition in the Soviet Union led by Leon Trotsky.

But still, it was a good play, moving and evocative. But what song do you think the children being "processed" in the orphanage sang? The Red Flag! The song of the British Labour Party!

We don't know if that song — written by an Irishman at the time of the great dock strike of 1889 — was ever popular in the USSR, but it seems highly improbable that it would be sung by children in Stalin's xenophobic USSR of the late '40s.

And even if the song was sung in the USSR, the effect of using it like that in the play was to say that those who sing the Red Flag somehow also partake in the responsibility for Stalinism!

It is a pretty monstrous slander, and it should not be let go by without protest. The Labour Party should protest to the BBC. So should everybody else who intends to refuse to sit quiet as our enemies whip up a gale of fraudulent anti-socialist propaganda against us.

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

Karl Marx

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4 LETTERS

Apartheid's been good for business

GRAFFITI

The times they are a-changing. The giant South African multinational Anglo-American has started putting ads in the press explaining how they campaigned for the legalisation of independent trade unions in South Africa.

Rather coyly, remembering that it hasn't all been cosy, they note that "In 1987, for example, our coal and gold mines experienced a costly and disruptive strike". But on balance, unions have been good for business.

The truth is, of course, that it was the unions who fought for the legalisation of unions. Anglo-American were just a bit more far-sighted than some of their rivals.

And the 1987 strike certainly was "costly and disruptive" — for the miners who lost their lives as a result of police and company violence, and the families they left behind.

Anglo-American is South Africa's biggest company. They have oceans of blood on their hands, going back decades. Let's hope that real record is not forgotten.

Still on South Africa, the Trust Bank of Africa's computer estimates the following effects of sanctions since 1985.

Foreign exchange, a loss of \$16 billion. Total production, a loss of \$32

billion. Standard of living, a loss of \$40 billion. Gross domestic product, a loss of \$8 billion. Jobs, half a million lost.

Everyone knows that the poll tax is hard to administer because people's whereabouts are hard to establish.

But imagine the surprise of a man in Maidstone who was handed a poll tax demand addressed to "The Occupier, Bus Stop, High Street". The council says it was a computer error.

"We will still report news, but only reasonable news".

Liaou Tsang Tsung, a Taiwan TV news executive, whose state-owned station has banned coverage of political violence.

"The Mars bar, the alleged Mars bar, is a lie".

Marianne Faithfull.

Don't those Ariel ads drive you mad? "Now I know I can wash all my husband's clothes and clean up after my 2 point whatever it is kids and do my bit for the environment".

Gosh. Maybe the next step would be to give over your kitchen to a few hundred homeless.

Anyway the government also is continuing in its greenery. They are going to stop pumping sewage into the North Sea.

By 1998.

Bad news for fish.

A lawyer's feast

THE HIDDEN HAND

By Colin Foster

City advisers, accountants, lawyers, stockbrokers, and advertising firms will pocket at least £300 million from the selling off of the electricity industry.

Meanwhile the price of your electricity goes up by an average of 9½ per cent this year, even more than the average rate of inflation.

So much for the Tories' claim that privatisation means a cheaper and more efficient service for us all. Privatisation is likely to mean big gains for the new shareholders in the sold-off electricity companies, too.

They are being sold off for £11 billion, while their assets are worth £35 billion. And many of the rules, regulations and conditions governing privatisation are designed to ensure that the newly-privatised companies are profitable.

Expensive nuclear power is being kept in public ownership, and the new companies are heavily protected from competition for a transitional period.

Electricity supply is privately owned in the US. That may go some way towards explaining why New York City has huge black-outs twice since 1965, when its supplier, Consolidated Edison, could not keep the power running.

Part of the privatisation package is a weakening of the legal obligation on the power industry to keep the lights on.

Private enterprise is supposed to be a simple, straightforward, self-adjusting and

natural way of running things, as opposed to the contrived and error-prone methods of public control.

In fact the privatisation of the electricity industry involves huge bureaucratic complication. For the first stage of it, last week, "the great and good of the electricity industry", so the *Financial Times* reported, had "to sign a mountain of contracts so large that it would have left Kafka reeling.

"National Grid Company, one of the companies invited to this lawyer's feast, has to put its mark on about 700 contracts. Three days have been set aside to ensure that the right signatures are on the right papers..."

The electricity industry has been divided into 19 companies. Sixteen will be sold off between autumn 1990 and summer 1991 — the twelve area supply companies, two generating companies for England and Wales, and two generating-and-supply companies for Scotland.

Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear will remain public, running nuclear power stations. The National Grid Company will be jointly owned by the area supply companies. It will buy electricity for the National Grid by taking the cheapest bids from generating companies for each half-hour slot.

How all this will work exactly, no-one knows. It must be fairly certain that energy conservation will suffer. However rational it is from the point of view of conserving finite resources and protecting the environment, it is bad news for private electricity companies which want to make more profits by selling more power.

In the year after gas privatisation, the number of people whose gas was cut off because of unpaid bills doubled. The same may happen with electricity. Only the lawyers, the bankers, and the advertising agents are sure to win.

Bristol and the porn tycoon

PRESS GANG

Daily Express
The Guardian
Mirror
Daily Star

By Leon Edwards

Apologies for the absence of Jim Denham, but the loveable rogue of the left managed to persuade me to write *Press Gang* this week so that he could go AWOL.

My suspicion is that he has gone in search of a column with more respectability — following in the footsteps of that well-known purveyor of artistic values, David Sullivan.

Mr Sullivan — he of such exclusive headlines as "Threat from killer Nazi wasps", "Spitfire found on moon", and "People love the Poll Tax!", and the constant portrayal of women as sex objects — is attempting to build on his empire of *The Sport* and *Sunday Sport*. He wants to show his commitment to freedom of the press by purchasing an established, middle of the road newspaper company to boost his blossoming image as a respectable and upstanding newspaper baron.

With Cap'n Bob's and Mr Sky's fingers firmly on most nationals, Sullivan looked westward at the successful Bristol United Press (BUP).

BUP produces three papers of amazing variety. The early morning *Western Daily Press* is a Thatcherite rag boycotted by the labour movement. Its weekly freebie, *The Bristol Observer*, is used by most political organisations as a regular free newsletter. The third product of the BUP stable is the daily *Bristol Evening Post*, and it is this that Sullivan wants to get his hands on.

The *Post*, with a circulation of over 100,000, sits with fencing up its

he was mistaken. The uproar has been huge, with figureheads from all parties declaring opposition to the devil, and hundreds of readers writing in to express their opposition.

Amazing stuff really, but the *Post* has been through similar campaigns in its 58 year history, starting a readership war with the old *Evening World* which it eventually won in 1956.

During the last General Election they published a daily feature by former Labour MP Michael Cocks (now Lord Cocks of Hartcliffe). In election week, "Fighting Cocks" was a daily page of whingeing about how he had been deselected in Bristol South by Dawn Primarolo and her army of "bed-sit socialists" who had moved home in order to kick him out.

Despite him, Ms Primarolo is now a Campaign Group MP who suffers the occasional wrath of the "Voice of Bristol". The twist is that the paper which nearly lost Dawn her seat is now clinging on to her as she is a leading member of the "Off the Shelf" anti-pornography campaign.

Doubly ironic is the way the campaign against takeover has been waged in the paper itself. "Porn Star bid for Post", with examples of *Sport* pages, tells me that Mr Sullivan isn't really wanted — they can do it on their own! Maybe he does have the Midas touch after all.

The paper is urging readers to join them in complaining to the Monopolies Commission, which is due to announce its verdict in May. Indications are that the going may not be good for the *Sport*.

In the meantime, forget the *Daily Mirror*, Jim, because if Bristol is any indication, Paul Foot can rest assured that readers will rally to the defence of his award-winning column for Cap'n Bob.

bum editorially, and is the proud bearer of the masthead, "The paper all Bristol asked for and helped create".

Local people tend to swear by the *Post*, which obviously influenced Sullivan to try to increase his seven per cent share to 26 per cent. Another reason could have been the fat profits BUP announced last year.

However, if Sullivan thought the local yokels were that gullible, then

Wrong on Powell

LETTERS

Not quite sure whether Fergus Ennis has a peculiar sense of humour (though one suspects he has, liv-

ing in Rotherhithe) or whether his memory is getting rusty.

However, 'I See A Dark Stranger' wasn't made in "1946 or '47" nor, more to the point, was it made by Powell and Pressburger. It is not listed in Ian Christie's filmography of P&P's work in his 'Powell, Pressburger and Others' (BFI, 1978), but the usually reliable 'Halliwell's Film Guide' lists it as

directed by Frank Launder and made in 1945.

Readers who want to see any of Powell's films, as opposed to those of Frank Launder (who ended up making the St Trinian's series of films) are advised to keep an eye on the TV pages as they are being repeated.

John Cunningham
Sheffield

Conference forced to cancel

The Constituency Labour Parties Conference planned for 7 April in Wakefield Town Hall has been cancelled because of problems with the venue.

It may be just a coincidence, but the leaflet against the witch-hunt in

Wirral produced by the CLPs Conference, which contained an advertisement for the Wakefield conference, was part of the evidence submitted to the last National Executive Committee — and shortly afterwards the problem with the Town Hall arose.

This is the second time that a

meeting of the CLPs Conference has been undermined, the first time being when the AEU National Executive cancelled our booking in Liverpool AEU Hall because they did not agree with the aims of the CLPs Conference.

We have been unable to arrange another venue in Wakefield and have therefore had to cancel the Conference.

A CLPs Conference Organising Committee, which any interested member of the Labour Party can attend, will be held in Wakefield on 7 April. Those wishing to attend should meet outside Wakefield Town Hall, Wood Street (opposite the police station) at 11am.

I'm sorry about the cancellation, but this should make us even more determined in our campaign to bring democracy back to our Party.

Loi Duffy,
CLPs Conference Network,
Wallasey.

About-turn on unity

In my article on the left's debates about German unity (SO 439) I wrote that the French socialist group Lutte Ouvriere had come out against reunification.

Since then LO have changed their position. In their paper dated 23 March they advocated "taking account of the workers' feeling in favour of reunification and showing solidarity with it".

Indeed, they criticised the East German left (the United Left, Die Nelken, etc.) for "trailing behind the debris of the old political apparatus, by repeated declarations against reunification".

Especially in view of the harshness of their criticism of the East German left, it is unfortunate that LO make no self-criticism of their own previous position.

Colin Foster,
Islington.



The frame-up of the Birmingham Six

By Patrick Murphy

Shane McGowan of the *Spoques* had a better grasp of the truth of the Birmingham Six case than three British trial judges, three Lord Chief Justices, and two Home Office inquiries.

The six men are literally "doing time for being Irish in the wrong place and at the wrong time".

It is too easy to get bored with the apparently endless detail of the case, but it is important to remind ourselves that six people have spent 15 years in jail on the basis of astoundingly scanty evidence. At times it is hard to believe that even one inquiry survived without an embarrassing apology and the release of the men.

The evidence against the six is that they were leaving Birmingham for Belfast on the night that pubs were bombed in 1974. They were arrested at Heysham Ferry terminal and questioned at Merseyside police station.

Scientific tests carried out by a Home Office specialist, Dr Frank Skuse, showed that the men had a substance consistent with explosives on their hands. During interrogation the men confessed to the bombings. Some signed written confessions with details of the planning and locations of the bomb.

That is the sum total of evidence. The Lord Chief Justice, summing up the 1988 Appeal, stressed that the confessions were central. The scientific evidence was also important, but secondary.

The case for the Six is overwhelming. First, the judges' stress on the importance of the confessions in 1988 is revealing. It was just the latest example of the legal establishment shifting on to new ground as the old ground crumbled beneath them.

The scientific evidence was discredited by a simple test. A repeat of the Greiss test, which had provided the crucial evidence against the six, showed that the substance found on their hands could be picked up from playing cards. Previous evidence showed that the men were playing cards on the train to Heysham.

Dr Frank Skuse retired from his job three days after a *World in Action* TV programme proved his test worthless.

As the scientific evidence collapsed, the judiciary switched to the confessions. It is worth remembering throughout all this that in British justice a suspect is supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. The burden of proof is firmly with the prosecution, and juries should acquit if there is even a "reasonable doubt" as to the guilt of the accused.

In 1985 one of the major planks of the original conviction was

destroyed. That was accepted by the court in 1988. But there was no change in the verdict, no "reasonable doubt".

So the really important evidence is the confessions. There is no doubt that the men were severely beaten in custody.

When that became obvious, the police claimed that the beatings had been given by the prison warders at Winson Green, Birmingham. Prison warders charged were acquitted, but the police (and by implication a series of court judgments) insisted that meant that other prison warders were guilty.

A forensic scientist claimed that the men had been beaten in police custody, but his evidence was dismissed by the judge.

The question of the treatment of the six by the police is crucial, because their confessions are the only thing to justify their imprisonment. They denied the confessions from the beginning, and claimed that they had been beaten from them.

The courts simply would not believe that the police were capable of such behaviour. The police responsible for the investigation were the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad, now subject to an inquiry for their tendency to get results by framing suspects.

At the most recent appeal, in 1988, six key witnesses gave "new

evidence" on how the confessions were gained. All six suggested that they, as police officers or prison staff, had seen evidence of beatings.

A cleaner at Morecambe police station had cleaned blood off cell walls. An ex-constable saw beatings and arrangements to fiddle interview sheets. One by one, these witnesses were dismissed by judges as liars, perjurers, and revenge-seekers.

Of course, that didn't mean that the original evidence of those "perjurers" was to be discounted, only the most recent. It was one more disgraceful example of the judges selecting the evidence to fit their story.

The work of the Birmingham Six's legal advisers and supporters has exposed various absurdities in the confessions. According to the information in the written confessions, the so-called "bombers" can't agree on where exactly the bombs were placed and how many there were. And generally none of this testimony tallied with the known facts about the bombings.

Add to this a less tangible element in the case, the sheer implausibility of the state's story. Six men, who have just carefully planned and ruthlessly carried out the most brutal civilian bombing in an English city for many years then go off together, as a group, to an IRA funeral in Belfast.

They make no attempt to go underground, to scatter, or to prepare alibis.

There is a huge contradiction in the state's story of a calculating, professional IRA bomb gang on the one hand and their selection of the Birmingham Six for the role on the other.

The most recent development in the case is Granada TV's decision to name four of the five people originally suspected by the Special Branch.

They obtained a Special Branch document which confirmed years of research by Labour MP Chris Mullin and suggested that the bombings were the work of another group entirely and that the police knew this.

David Waddington, the Home Secretary, announced a new inquiry

into the case just days before the programme. On his mind, most likely, were the Granada revelations to come, and also the endorsement of the men's case by a US House of Representatives Human Rights Committee.

The innocence of the Birmingham Six is so plain that their continuing imprisonment is difficult to believe. After all, the court system has found ways to release the Guildford Four, albeit after many years.

The problem is that the Birmingham case, unlike Guildford and most other cases of injustice, cannot be put down to a few bad police officers. The higher judiciary is fully implicated, in fact it is more guilty, as at least some police officers and prison staff have tried to put the record straight.

Ex-Attorney-General Sam Silkin seems to have complied in defending the police story at all costs. The most notorious offender was the arch-reactionary Lord Denning, who dismissed an earlier appeal on the grounds that the implications of the men's innocence for the entire legal system were too great to be acceptable.

These six men are now in prison not because of police brutality or scientific incompetence, but because of the naked prejudice and self-interest of the senior judiciary.

The very people who most liberals and many socialists tell us are broadly fair-minded, legally trained to be scrupulous and impartial, have been repeatedly responsible for the simplest form of bias known — they have refused to allow the facts to get in the way of an agreed good story.

David Waddington may want to release the men, but he insists on new evidence to distract from the power of the very damaging evidence that has existed for years. No new evidence is required, nor for that matter should it be necessary to name new suspects to a legal system so incapable of the most rudimentary principles of fairness in Irish cases.

The old evidence is screaming at all those who will listen. The Birmingham Six are innocent! They must be released now!

Sheffield strike against the tax

By a Sheffield NALGO worker

As the 400 housing staff have voted not to cooperate with the poll tax in Sheffield, management have asked staff in housing offices to collect poll tax along with rents and benefits.

Housing staff and benefit staff are to calculate poll tax rebates along with housing benefit. NALGO has demanded regrading for the extra burden poll tax work will represent both in workrate and stress. Also we have raised issues of confidentiality.

We're not prepared to snoop on claimants and not willing to hand on details to the registration officer. We're asking for more staff and adequate working facilities which are stretched already as it is.

The vote for non-co-operation with the poll tax was passed by a 75% 'yes' vote in a ballot of two weeks ago. Since then management have attempted to play for time adjusting offers slightly but never addressing the NALGO demands.

Negotiating procedures have

been rubbished by management, and it now seems likely that instructions will go out to NALGO members to do poll tax work.

We have re-affirmed that any

NALGO member disciplined for refusing instructions to do poll tax work will be supported by walk-outs and, if need be, by an all-out strike.

Manchester workers say 'we won't collect'

By Tony Dale

Manchester Housing workers have voted to fight council plans to collect the Poll Tax at housing offices.

The Council claims that housing office poll tax collection is in the interests of tenants because it is "easier for those who want to pay". Despite this supposed concern for the welfare of tenants, there has, in the words of a senior member of management, been "no tenant consultation, no management consultation".

A Housing Department NALGO meeting and NALGO shop steward meetings have voted to fight poll tax collection at housing offices.

Housing members have consistently opposed the NALGO branch position of cooperating in the implementation of the poll tax. In branch meetings and on

the branch executive a policy of non-implementation, non-payments, and no cuts has consistently received the support of at least one third of those attending.

When the Labour council voted to implement the poll tax, promises were made that it would be kept as far away as possible from council services. That promise has been broken.

The use of housing offices will sour the relationship between staff and tenants. The public will be scared off from using repairs and rehousing services for fear of being pursued for poll tax payments.

Many housing offices are inadequately equipped for dealing with extra inquiries. Staff have been offered no extra money for the proposed additional duty.

Support from tenants' groups for housing workers' refusal to collect the poll tax is growing.



Photo: Paul Mattisson

It was a marvellous demonstration

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

I think it was a marvellous demonstration against the poll tax last Saturday.

I think it was well organised and well marshalled. Our bus had said it was leaving at 4.30; we left at 3.55 from Trafalgar Square and there was not one iota of bother or trouble.

We walked down Whitehall and the police were lining up in riot gear with their horses and all the rest of it. It was approximately 4.10. They didn't come out to stop any violence. They came out, and then the violence started.

I said to the guy I was with that it reminded me of what happened at Mansfield during the big demonstration in the miners' strike — the police waited until the main body of protesters had started to drift away, and then went steaming in.

I don't believe that the main body of demonstrators caused any violence whatsoever.

That there was violence is a tragedy for us, but a victory for them in so far as it allows them to take the argument away from the poll tax and people's genuine fear and anger at it, to spend all the time talking about violence.

The Labour leaders have tried to outdo the Tories in condemning the violence of the demonstrators. I'm only pleased that people like that were not elected onto the committees in East Berlin or Romania.

If they'd been elected onto the committee in Romania and gone charging about shouting "No violence! You've got to obey the law!", Ceausescu would still be in power. If they'd been on a commit-

tee to get rid of the Berlin Wall, with their "no violence and obey the law", then the Berlin Wall would still be standing.

Not only have you got a right, you have a moral duty, to stand up and fight bad law, and this is bad law. I feel the same about the anti-trade-union legislation. We cannot go on accepting bad law. We've got a right to stand up and object to it.

If you have three men to a cell in prison, having to slop out, and being banged up 23½ hours a day, that is asking for trouble.

The excuse from ministers is that we

are spending a fortune, updating the prisons. But I believe that the violence we've seen recently is just the tip of an iceberg.

I believe that there is going to be a lot more unrest, and whether or not that breaks into violence will depend largely on the reaction of the authorities. But what will the response of the Labour Party be?

They seem to be adopting the old, old Liberal line where you have to obey the law and rely on sweet reason triumphing one fine day. It seems to me that they've lost Labour's idealism, they've forgotten why the labour movement was set up, to represent working-class interests and to change society.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.

Retreat in Tower Hamlets

The Labour Party in Tower Hamlets, East London, has been bludgeoned by Labour Party HQ into dropping a policy of not prosecuting poll-tax non-payers.

The policy was decided at a local Labour Party "congress" on 10 February, with members of the Local Government Committee, the constituency General Committees, the Labour councillors, and extra delegates from wards. Moves to commit Labour in Tower Hamlets fully to non-implementation of the poll tax were defeated there.

Labour HQ intervened, saying that if the manifesto for the local elections were not changed by 28 March, then Labour's National Executive would impose its own manifesto — on every issue, not just the poll tax.

The Local Government Commit-

tee met on 27 March and decided to back down.

Militant supporters took a strange tack. At the LGC they were 101 per cent in favour of backing down — they proposed the deletion of everything in the manifesto about the poll tax, not just what the National Executive had objected to.

Since then, however, they have claimed that there has been no real retreat. A passage in the amended manifesto which commits Labour in Tower Hamlets to mitigating the effects of the poll tax on the poor actually means (so they say) that a Labour-controlled council would not prosecute non-payers.

Such hide-and-seek politics cannot help the fight against the poll tax.

Tower Hamlets is currently controlled by the Liberal Democrats, but Labour hopes to win control in the May elections.

How the po started the

By an eyewitness on the 31 March anti-poll-tax march

I reached Whitehall, with other members of my local Anti-Poll-Tax Union, about 3.30.

Like just about everyone on the march, we had conducted ourselves sensibly and vocally, in a carnival atmosphere.

As we passed Downing Street, the march slowed to a standstill. The

police were diverting the remainder of the march, behind us, along the Embankment, and pushing our part of the march into a small space along Whitehall.

The reason for this seemed to be that a group of a few hundred demonstrators had sat down on a grassy verge on the opposite side of Whitehall to Downing Street. Up to this point the demonstration had been marching past them with no trouble.

A few empty cans and sticks were being thrown in the direction of the police, but I personally did not see

In the cells

An eyewitness account by a young woman from Nottingham who was arrested on the anti-poll-tax march of 31 March.

The police were continuing to intimidate the protesters [outside Downing Street], so I picked up an empty can and threw it in the direction of the snatch squads who were using unprovoked violence.

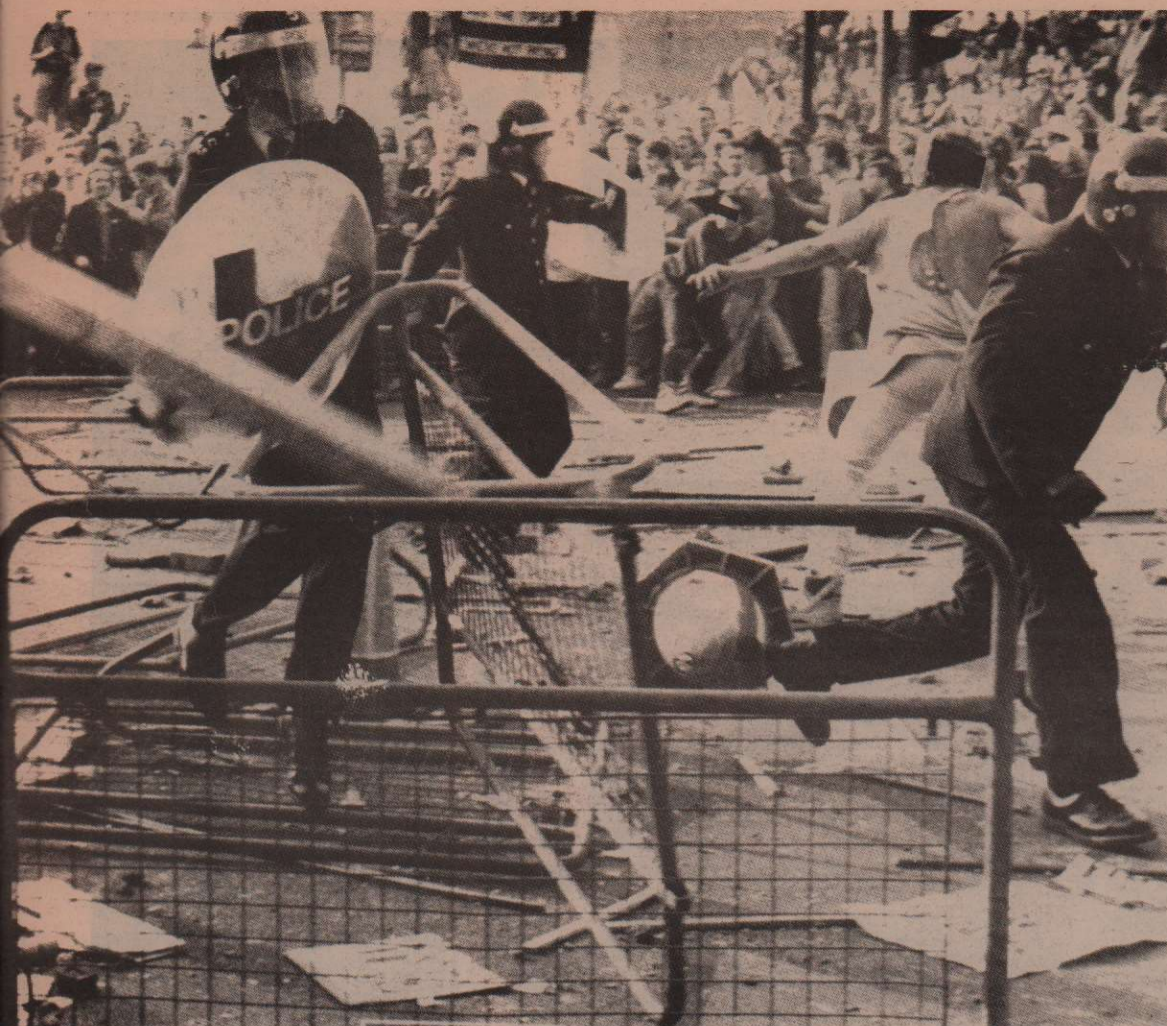
Immediately a policeman rushed over. I tried to hide but he grabbed me by the wrist... A snatch squad ran in and succeeded in pulling me away from the crowd. I was led to a police van and taken to Southwark police station. This was at about

4pm.

At the police station my photo was taken and the police asked for my details, which I refused to give, saying I wanted to see a solicitor first. They said I could see the duty solicitor, make a phone call either now or later, and see the codes of conduct [outlining the rights of arrested people].

I said that I would see a solicitor. They made it quite clear that if I didn't make a statement there and then, I would be in the cells longer. I said that I would make a phone call later, as everyone whose number I had was on the march. They told me to empty my pockets and took down all my details and details of what was in my purse including CPSA [union] membership card.

During the time that I was in the police cell, seven hours in all, I continually asked to see a solicitor. The solicitor never turned up.



Police violence

anything thrown at this point which was likely to cause injury.

The police response was to bring horses into Whitehall. One of the women in our Anti-Poll-Tax Union went up to where the horses were standing, and attempted to explain that there were young children among the demonstrators whom they intended to charge.

She asked to speak to the commanding officer of the mounted police, and demanded to know under whose orders they were acting. They did not know.

They ran her down and charged

the crowd on the grass. The throwing of light objects intensified, and the mood among the demonstrators changed to fear and anger.

As the police attacked the crowd, all hell broke loose. The police behaved like rabid animals. Many people fought back as the police forced and beat us to Trafalgar Square. Demonstrators were being crushed, and people were shouting "Hillsborough" at the police who were still pushing us.

As we reached Trafalgar Square, a cordon of non-riot police who appeared to be struggling with

When we asked to make our phone call the police said they would do it for us and asked for a phone number from which they could verify my address. I gave my father's number and the police came back and said they had phoned him and he knew where I was. This phone call was never made.

I asked if anyone had been enquiring about me because I knew that people would be looking for us. They said no-one had, but later I learnt that friends had been ringing the station. None of us received the codes of conduct.

There were five women, and for an hour six, in a cell designed for two. For seven hours I had to endure refusal of basic rights, phone, solicitor, food and water. The police would give us no food. One woman hadn't eaten for 15 hours, and the rest of us were feeling faint. Water was given to us at first, but for the last couple of hours our

pleas and cries were ignored, and the cell was becoming increasingly hot and intolerable.

Eventually I admitted throwing a can and said just get me out of here. Under the conditions I had little choice but to admit and I don't regret it. Half an hour later I was let out.

One of the women who was put in my cell had been searched and her clothes thrown in after her. She shouted to be let out to the jailer, as she hadn't done anything. The jailer just kept saying, "Can't help you, love, I'm not in charge".

She said she had been picked out of the crowd and accused of hitting a policeman over the head with a brick and now he was in intensive care. They had absolutely no evidence against her at all. For the next five hours she demanded to be charged for something, as they had taken no details off her.

She was eventually let out at

demonstrators fell back, pursued by demonstrators. The riot police then charged the crowd. From that point on, the riot police went wild, hitting anyone who happened to be in their way.

I am not a supporter of looting or rioting. I think it detracted from what would have been an incredibly successful march.

I was outraged, though, to see complete fabrications in the press blaming the ensuing violence on "anarchists" and others who "tried to storm Downing Street" or "sat down and stopped the march".

The police had no good cause to attack the march as they did. Demonstrators could quite well have continued to march past Downing Street and the people sitting on the grass opposite.

From what I saw, it seemed as if the police wanted to start a fight. They behaved like thugs, and now they bleat that they were at the sharp end of "a vicious and sustained attack".

We, like the overwhelming majority on that demonstration, were not there to cause violence. We did not even react violently against police violence. In return we were pushed, bated, crushed, or run down with horses. I do not condemn those who fought back or defended themselves.

about 10.30pm. She had been indiscriminately snatched off the streets and kept in a cell for five and a half hours.

Another girl of 18 lived on the streets at the Strand. She had been begging and had been caught while struggling with the police. She had looted a shop of tobacco, whisky and vodka.

She was worried she would be kept in for 48 hours because she had no fixed address; she was also worried because she was losing begging time and her blanket might be stolen.

She was charged with threatening behaviour for calling a policeman a bastard while he was strangling her. The other two women were done for assaulting a policeman, one while having her hair pulled.

During the last two hours of hell the other prisoners were singing, "We won't pay the Poll Tax", and "Maggie Out".

What their papers say

By Jim Denham

You are the editor of a 'popular', Tory-supporting tabloid. You are required to maintain your paper's usual slavish loyalty to the present government...but...the poll tax is hated and reviled by most of your readership. You have a problem.

Various stratagems for squaring the circle have been tried in recent weeks: the *Daily Express* seized upon the cause of student nurses (who don't get poll tax rebates) in an effort to make itself look just a little bit "dissident"; the *Sun* favoured the jokey approach, giving apparently favourable coverage to eccentrics with poll tax avoidance schemes involving non-existent Cornish tin mines and "closed religious orders" made up of the local darts team; the *Daily Mail* has simply called for "major reforms" to deal with the "disturbing anomalies" that spoil this otherwise splendid and long overdue reform.

But none of this could get round the central problem: these "popular" papers were saddled with having to support a deeply unpopular measure. It was time for that sure-fire winner, the Red Scare. Suddenly it was discovered that supporters of the dreaded Militant Tendency were prominent in the anti-poll tax campaign. For a while, the unlikely figure of Mr Steve Nally (remember him?) became the tabloid's Evil Genius — a man constantly on the move, his entire life dedicated to stirring up protests throughout the length and breadth of the land. In fact, the vast majority of last month's town hall protests were fairly good natured affairs with about as much "violence" as your average WI jumble sale. Where things did get out of hand — Hackney, for instance — it was clearly not because of "outside agitators" but the genuine outburst of anger and frustration by young people for whom the poll tax was just the latest kick in the teeth from the Tory government, passed on by gutless Labour councils.

Militant bent over backwards to distance themselves from the "violence" (real and imagined), but it suited the national press to play up their involvement, if only to embarrass Kinnock and the Labour leadership. But no-one out in the real world took these press fantasies very seriously: according to a NOP poll for the *Independent*, well over half the electorate continued to blame either the government or councils and the government equally, for the poll tax.

And so we come to last Saturday's "Battle of Trafalgar", when all the tabloids' fantasies seemed to come true: "Like a scene from a revolution, bloody mob rule gripped the heart of London last night," was the opening of the *Mail on Sunday's* not altogether inaccurate report. It continued, "From Leicester Square to Regent Street, down Whitehall to the gates of Parliament itself, the capital became a battleground of sheer howling terror".

If that wasn't enough to give the *Mail on Sunday's* nice middle class readers the heebiegeebies, there were plenty of photos as well; youths throwing bricks at lines of helmeted cops; police horses being stoned; a demonstrator brandishing

a staff; someone kicking in the window of a MacDonalds; cars overturned and portacabins on fire.

Tucked away in the *Mail on Sunday's* report was an account of how one of their own photographers, Keith Pannell, was injured: "I fell over a barrier and as I was getting up I saw this policeman coming at me. I heard him say: 'You'll do' and then he hit me with his baton. I put my arm up and he hit my forearm. Then the policeman started hitting the bloke behind me. It was terrible. The mob was just running wild." Not only the mob, you might think, from that account. Mr Pannell was also quoted in the *Observer*, saying virtually the same thing, but adding his assessment that "the police had lost control".

Some of the other "quality" Sundays also carried critical accounts of police behaviour — specifically wading into sit-down protestors outside Downing Street and, later, charging into demonstrators at Whitehall, crushing them from both sides. Monday's *Independent* even published a lengthy and detailed letter from an SWP member accusing the police of "a brutal plan, clinically exercised, to smash the demonstration in the square. In these circumstances, I put it to

"No-one out in the real world took these press fantasies very seriously."

readers that the outraged response to this provocation was wholly justified."

But for the tabloids, of course, the police and their brave horses were the heroes of the day. Monday's *Express* gave two pages over to police accounts of narrow escapes from death at the hands of the frenzied mob. The *Sun* confidently asserted that "at all times the police displayed courage and restraint." Meanwhile, the *Mail* unmasked a new and fearsome enemy, worse even than Militant or the SWP: "The black flag flying in Trafalgar Square was the signal to unleash mayhem...Behind the standard were the supporters of Class War, the sinister urban revolutionaries dedicated to turning the nation's inner cities into no-go areas for the police." The *Mail* even found a Class War "leader" called Max Max who espoused the view that police should be attacked using whatever weapons are appropriate, which is certainly spicier than anything the papers ever got from Steve Nally.

The silliest commentary of all, though, came from poor deranged Paul Johnson in the same paper: under the headline "Kinnock cannot dodge the blame", Johnson claimed that, "the Fascist-Left militants who were behind the weekend riots...are all active supporters of the Labour Party...one and all they want to see Kinnock and his friends in 10 Downing St."

Now, there is an argument that by not giving any clear lead to the anti-poll tax campaign, Kinnock is partly responsible for the influence of anarchists like Class War. But I don't think that's what Paul Johnson meant. And I hate to think what Max Max would have to say about it.



Soviet paratroops break into Lithuanian Communist Party headquarters

Can the USSR survive?

By Stan Crooke

Much of what we have to say about national conflicts and nationalist unrest in the Soviet Union has been along the following lines:

Under Gorbachev there has been a relative 'liberalisation' (ie. the policies of glasnost) which has created the space in which latent national antagonisms and national demands which had remained repressed under Stalin and his immediate successors have now come out into the open.

This is certainly one aspect of the current flourishing of nationalism/national demands in the Soviet Union. The clearest example is the campaigning for the 'right of return' by the various ethnic groups forcibly deported from their homelands at the close of the Second World War (Crimean Tartars, Meskhetian Turks and, to a lesser extent, Volga Germans). Similarly, ethnic conflict between the Armenians and the Azeris has a history stretching back into the last century and beyond.

However, there are other aspects to nationalist unrest in the Soviet Union as well, aspects which deserve more attention in our coverage and analysis of current developments.

In particular, there is the role of the local non-Russian bureaucracies in the various republics of deliberately 'stirring up' national antagonisms in order to try to establish some kind of popular social base for themselves. For example:

- At the close of 1986 serious rioting broke out in Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan after Brezhnev's protégé Kunyaev was replaced by a Russian as First Secretary of the Kazakhstan CP. Local Kazakh bureaucrats supported this nationalist unrest.

- In Armenia the leaders of the

republic's CP have supported the agitation in favour of sovereignty over Nagorny Karabakh being transferred from Azerbaidzhan to Armenia (and apparently began to agitate in favour of this demand just when they faced dismissal from office, in the way that Kunyaev had been dismissed). Similarly, in Nagorny Karabakh itself, members of the local CP bureaucracy have played a central role in mobilisations demanding transference of sovereignty.

- In the subsequent anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaidzhan — first in Sumgait, then, more recently, in Baku — local Azeri bureaucrats were clearly involved, just as they have been involved in more peaceful nationalist protests over the months against the demand for transference of sovereignty over Nagorny Karabakh.

- In the Baltic states the situation is more complicated in a number of ways. But here too the local CPs have split (or declared their independence of the Soviet CP) and sections of the local CP bureaucracies have aligned themselves with the local Baltic nationalist movements.

To point to the role played by the local bureaucracies in encouraging nationalist passions is **not** to reduce all national conflicts in the Soviet Union to a 'plot' by the local bureaucrats to promote divisions in the working class and safeguard their own positions.

This is sometimes a view expressed by the SWP, especially in its coverage of the recent massacre in Baku. It was certainly the view expressed by members of the RCP at a recent 'Critique' dayschool in London. But, even rejecting such excessively conspiratorial views of history, the role of the local bureaucracies in encouraging nationalist-based unrest is clear enough, and can be attributed to two basic factors.

Firstly, there is the drive on the part of the local bureaucracies to strengthen their local standing by

trying to shift the blame for appalling social and economic conditions in their republics away from themselves and place it at the door of the centre in Moscow. (This applies only in a very modified form to the Baltic states, where it is not so much a question of shifting the blame for bad local conditions, but rather a question of arguing how much better conditions would be if the republics could govern their own affairs independently of Moscow.)

In the Central Asian republics and the republics in the Caucasus,

"Gorbachev's policies have created the space within which the local bureaucracies can manoeuvre to strengthen their position... to build a base for themselves independently of Moscow in a way which would have been inconceivable under Stalin, or even under Brezhnev".

where there is a high level of national conflict, economic policies have resulted in major ecological havoc. Real unemployment (as opposed to the traditional form of unemployment in the Soviet Union) has long been a serious problem. Housing problems in the peripheral republics are generally even worse than in the central republics. The forced dependence of certain of these republics on monocultures has merely made matters even worse.

Given that the economic policies

which have created such problems are determined at the centre, it makes sense, from the point of view of the local bureaucracies, to point the finger of guilt at Moscow, even if (in fact, all the more so because) they themselves have hitherto been only too willing to implement such policies.

Secondly, Gorbachev's policies have created the space within which the local bureaucracies can manoeuvre to try to strengthen their positions. Just as his policies have given greater 'autonomy' and 'freedom' to individual enterprises (eg. the introduction of cost-accounting), to private enterprise (eg. the promotion of co-operatives), or to individual farmers (eg. the new agricultural reforms), so too his policies have created openings for the local bureaucracies to build a base for themselves independently of Moscow in a way which would have been inconceivable under Stalin, or even under Brezhnev.

This, in turn, raises the question of how far the central bureaucracy would be prepared to allow such developments to proceed. Hitherto we have struck an extremely cautious note. In reality, though, there is a sound basis for such speculation.

The more Slavophile sections of the central Russian bureaucracy would certainly support such a retreat to the 'laager'. In the current round of republican elections one of the Russian-nationalist organisations participating in them is standing on a platform of ending all subsidies to non-Slav republics and allowing them to go their own way (ie effectively secession from above) in order that money, and the purity of the Russian character can be saved.

Whilst Gorbachev would not endorse such a crude Slavophilia, his faction must certainly recognise the economic arguments in favour of re-drawing of borders. Talking of the Central Asian republics, for example, Kagarlitsky writes: "They

are costing the Soviet Union so much that, according to some experts here, it would be better to grant them independence... The Soviet state simply has no more resources to develop these regions by the old means. The government simply can't create more industrial jobs in Central Asia, especially since there are still not enough of the national cadres, and ethnic Russians are afraid to move there because of the growing local nationalism."

Not all non-Slav republics are economic black holes in the manner of the Central Asian ones. Again, the obvious example would be the Baltic states. But an armed intervention into the latter to prevent secession would, apart from questions of military feasibility in the aftermath of Afghanistan, prove a political disaster.

It would therefore be wrong to assume that the central bureaucracy is opposed in principle to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the creation of a mini-'Soviet Union' (Russia, Siberia, White Russia, and, if they can hang on to it, Ukraine). What the central bureaucracy must be concerned about, though, is to be able to control the process of that break-up, to prevent any subsequent conflicts flowing over into a mini-'Soviet Union'. (Just as, by way of a rough analogy, the British state is not opposed to British withdrawal from Northern Ireland in principle, but is concerned about the conditions under which that might take place).

Thus the national question in the Soviet Union should not be seen merely in terms of the loosening of repression leading to an upsurge of latent nationalist hostility. Also, perhaps equally important, are the role of the local bureaucracies in stirring up nationalism, and arguably, the readiness of the central bureaucracy to see a controlled break-up of the Soviet Union (following on from the way it has allowed the collapse of the puppet regimes in Eastern Europe).

Why East Germany moved to the right

Five months ago the Berlin Wall was opened, and at a rally in West Berlin celebrating this victory, Chancellor Kohl was booed when he led the singing of the German national anthem. Many of those who had gone on the streets in East Germany to bring down the old Stalinist regime called for a 'better socialism' there.

Today Kohl's East German allies have won a big election victory on the promise of quick unification with West Germany and no messing around with any socialist experiments. The small pioneer free trade union groups in East Germany remain very small.

Why? We have translated and abridged this article by Thomas Klein from the election broadsheet of the East German 'United Left'. We do not agree with its assessment of the SED (the old ruling party, now renamed PDS), nor with its attitude on German unity, but we print it as a contribution towards helping socialists in this country understand the debates on the German left.

As late as November 1989, the process of transformation then underway was defined by all the apparently united political currents as "revolutionary".

A broad campaign emerged under the slogan, "We are the people!", against the corrupt political bureaucracy whose days were finally numbered as a result of the growing mass pressure from below.

A broad consensus on fundamental questions of democracy and human rights bound together the opposition of the "period before the turning point" in a community of solidarity, and left-wingers, who had been persistently persecuted in the GDR, were an important part of this movement, in the sense of Rosa Luxemburg's sentence about freedom being freedom for people who think differently.

With the slogan "We stay here!", the majority of the protest movement was determined to counterpose collective commitment for a renewed socialism to departure from the GDR, regarded as an individual solution to heightened social conflicts. There was clearly no decision in favour of capitalism in the GDR.

And today? The people of October 1989 are no longer on the streets. New demonstrators with completely different slogans dominate the scene. Now the slogans are: "Germany, one fatherland!" and "We are one people!"

Why have the voices of those in the GDR who cry out for reunification become ever louder? Why have

the people who dominated the streets in September and October given way to those who wave the German flag and agitate in favour of reunification? Why are we now seeing violence again against people who think differently and in particular against the left?

What is the cause of the rise of xenophobic, far-right, and even fascist currents in the GDR? What has happened between November and February?

Here are the stages:

1 As a result of the vain attempt to keep the collapsing SED in control by deceiving and placating the population in revolt, from November onwards the impatience of the population, which again feared manoeuvres, grew. Verbal pledges of reform by Krenz's Politbureau remained without any results.

2 The resignation of the Politbureau, which had been forced through by the indignation of the SED rank and file, and the creation of a new government, led to a tug of war between hardline SED-PDS apparatchiks and that section of the party rank and file that was pressing for a real renewal.

Those forces of renewal, and the hesitant party executive of the SED-PDS, missed the last chance to put themselves at the head of the anti-Stalinist movement in the name of a future socialist alternative. Instead of drawing the only correct conclusion — to support the resolute party rank and file in the occupation of party buildings and in locking out the party apparatus — the various currents of the SED-PDS exhausted themselves in a wrangle about the profile of the future party.

The party executive, for its part, limited itself to manoeuvres to preserve the assets and existence of a party in the process of dissolution, at a time when it was a question of making political decisions.

3 The Modrow government adopted the profile of being the political arm of a technocratic reform current, pursuing a course which was politically acceptable to the ex-satellite parties.

Its creed was a commitment to a market economy, and its politics came to no more than the announcement of far-reaching measures of economic reform based on a thorough rationalisation directed by managers and, above all, on aid from West German capital.

No impulses for a comprehensive implementation of co-determination, let alone of self-management, by the workforces in their enterprises, came from the government. Nor did it take its bearings from the concept of a wide development of self-government organisations and bodies of popular sovereignty. It very soon became clear that such a thing was not to be expected from this government.

The tempo at which independent trade union initiatives and factory council initiatives were formed as self-help organs against the arrogant actions of factory and combine bosses, alongside the painfully slow process of the reorganisation of the official trade unions, was too slow to prevent economic and political collapse.

Instead of a speedily implemented package of economic reforms, we had preparations for the selling-out of the GDR by economic functionaries who were converted with breathtaking speed from advocates of the command economy to "pioneers of the free market" lined up for the starter's gun.

With this continuing uncertainty, the condition of the GDR economy continued to grow worse, shaken by crisis and further destabilised by the

KONDOME SCHÜTZEN



DOCH WER SCHÜTZT VOR:

ARBEITSLOSIGKEIT
MIETWUCHER
SOZIALEM KAHLSCHLAG

VEREINIGTE LINKE

United Left poster in the East German elections: "Condoms protect... but who will protect you from unemployment, exorbitant rents, and attacks on social rights?"

continuing emigration.

4 This period coincided with the second about-turn by the parliamentary parties which were gradually breaking out of their bloc with the SED-PDS: the abandonment of Stalinism which had been forced on them by the people also imposed on them the first about-turn "away from the old SED".

After a short moment of horror this was continued by the old parties, and taken immediately to the point of distancing themselves from socialism in general, in order finally to be able to seize the initiative again. Linked to this, of course, was the hope (false, as it turned out) of thereby throwing off at a stroke their own past and the burden of their shared responsibility for the past.

5 In an atmosphere of growing anger about the slow rate at which the party was cleaning itself up, the SED-PDS was afraid to profess the socialist perspective which had been discredited by the SED.

This led to the flight of the SED-PDS to a woolly parliamentarism which lacked any precise shape, and to new mass resignations and attempts to rally forces outside the SED-PDS.

The profile adopted by the old parties — "away from socialism" — was meant to express in a popular way the equation of Stalinism and socialism which was accepted by broad layers of the population.

The survival of Stalinist structures in the state and in the apparatus of the successor-party of the SED favoured a populist mood which was opposed to anything that was left wing. This mood increasingly threw off all restraint. Although people kept a realistic view of the character of the opportunist "double about-turn" of the old parties, this mood began to rub off on the citizens' movement too.

6 The SDP (Social Democratic Party), which had originally emerged in the autumn of 1989 claiming to have a profile of its own, very quickly adopted the label "SPD" and latched on to its wealthy West German sister party, without, however, adopting the endorsement by the SDP-West of "democratic socialism" at its Berlin conference.

This process is a prime example of how, in an attempt to carry through to completion the annexation of political opinion-making from the citizens' movement, the steps of opportunist adaptation to the mood of targeted electoral groups are taken, and how that is reflected in programmatic documents, above all in relation to the economy.

There quickly emerged various declarations of readiness for the immediate adoption of West German market-economy models, while the concerns of trade unions and other interest groups remained permanently in the shadows. Clearly people were at pains to keep their

distance from the discredited trade unions.

7 The negative attitude of the Modrow government towards abolition of the Ministry for National Security as the successor-institution of the unconstitutional Ministry for State Security strengthened the distrust of the population and its lack of confidence that a break with the past could really be achieved with this government and with the party from which Modrow came.

After the link-up of the conservative and liberal parties with their West German sister parties began the capitulation of the government to their political demands, principally on the question of reunification.

Under cover of a "government of national responsibility", Modrow was able to execute his ultimate manoeuvre, the three-point plan for German unity. From now on it was no longer at all clear for broad layers of the population that a sovereign alternative was still achievable in the GDR.

8 Inside the organised citizens' movements it had already long been clear that the rupture between the different currents could no longer be repaired.

The conservative "Alliance", consisting of the CDU, DSU, and "Democratic Upsurge", adopted a profile of hackneyed anti-socialist clichés drawn from the electoral campaign of the Western CDU against the SPD in the 1970s, not even acknowledging that the SPD-East had already, as a precautionary measure, renounced any propaganda about socialism.

The citizens' movements adopted proposals which ruled out any alliance with the United Left, without giving any reason for this apart from the danger of such an alliance being less attractive in the eyes of the voters. Thus occurred the failure of the broad democratic coalition of the citizens' movements which had been sought by the United Left.

At present the social fear of the consequences of a "reunification" in the sense of a policy of immediate annexation to the Federal Republic on the conditions laid down by the D-Mark is growing throughout the population. Neither the Modrow government nor the SPD, and certainly not the liberal or the conservative alliances, show themselves to be particularly interested in working out an alternative to the Kohl plan.

In the Federal Republic capital is deeply divided over the road to reunification.

The social and economic consequences of an immediate economic and monetary union have been soberly outlined by the representatives of big capital: as a result of the enormous gap in productivity we will have to reckon with structural mass unemployment, large-scale bankruptcies, and a substantial cut in social services.

If, on the other hand, the process of unification takes place slowly, in line with the progress of GDR economic reforms, in conditions of an evening-out of the gap in productivity, and through the stages of monetary association and economic cooperation, then as far as capital is concerned there exists the danger that, on the one hand, a diversification of the economic cooperation of the GDR with Western countries will occur in opposition to the interests of Federal Republic capital, and, on the other hand, with the process of unification a consolidated GDR will not only be inclined to defend social and economic achievements but also determined to introduce political achievements (perhaps even self-managed economic units and direct democracy!)

The American hero as mad dog

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Black Rain'

There is something pathetic about a country whose propaganda movies only help the other side. American movies so often do.

Either they exaggerate the evils of the enemy so grossly that the 'peril' begins to seem funny, or the American heroes are so unappealing that sympathy swings towards the 'enemy'.

Anti-communist movies of the witch-hunting fifties were often hilarious. Equally pitiful are the cop films of today which tell us only that Americans are violent, xenophobic, and embarrassingly ignorant.

Far from helping America's image, these films are a gift to the so-called baddies, even when the crooks are drug dealers or crazies. Films like *Rambo*, *Year of the Dragon* and now *Black Rain* go so wildly over the top in their portrayal of evil Asians that our sympathy rushes straight towards the supposed bad guys.

In films like this, democracy seems to mean the unassailable right of Americans anywhere to be as violent as they like to anyone they like, to ignore liberal namby-pamby stuff like civil rights and fair trials, and to insist on English as the language of insult, even when in a foreign country, in fact, especially in a foreign country.

Anything less would be wimpish and unAmerican. John Wayne would be proud.

Black Rain is a pre-emptive strike in America's propaganda war against the Japanese. The US is sore about Japan's economic dominance, hence films like *Black Rain* which help ease the blow to American pride.

The film is meant to show the Japanese as mindless conformists who don't have the vigour or



bravery of even one lone American. Ghastly as the film is, it doesn't achieve its goal; we feel only sympathy for the Japanese who have to deal with possibly the vilest cop ever to come out of America — Michael Douglas's Nick.

The image of cops in American movies has long been on a downward slide, but *Black Rain* probably marks Hollywood's lowest assessment yet of cops. Nick is simply a mad dog, a guy who becomes a policeman to find a legal outlet for his violence. He's also thoroughly dishonest, so dishonest that he can see nothing wrong in bribes or money on the side. Cops deserve it, he thinks; it goes with the territory.

He has no scruples, no qualms, no redeeming features at all. With his motorbike, his shades, the perpetual cigarette dangling from his mouth, he's almost a caricature of a tough guy. He's trying too hard to prove himself; his complexes can be spotted a mile away.

This is not an enjoyable movie, but it's interesting in its further debasement of the cop, and in its racist depiction of American's newest enemy, the Japanese, whose

booming economy has replaced the Soviet Union as American bugbear.

In *Black Rain* the Japanese are to blame for everything. When Nick signs a fake form in good faith, it's their fault: the form was in Japanese for Christ's sake! Nick sees the determination of the Japanese people to speak their native tongue (in their own country!) as some kind of congenital weakness. Nick's English would be no help to them anyway, limited as it is to insults and swearing.

The Japanese actor who plays Nick's reluctant partner has one speech where he abases himself before Nick's "individual" approach; this is utterly offensive.

All Japanese customs are ridiculed, from chopsticks to indoor golf, from ritual politeness to sticking to the rules. Good manners are signs of sinister intent, playing by the rules absolute proof of decadence.

Honour, honesty, courtesy, they're for dummies, is the message; America didn't become great by saying please. Well, er, no.

Director Ridley Scott seems to have recycled his *Blade Runner* set to stand in for Osaka. The Japanese are just a new set of sinister Orient-

als, living cheek by jowl in a perpetually steam-filled environment.

Why all the steam? In the countryside where the final showdown is set, and where steam would be implausible, small fires have been lit to provide smoke, a second-best substitute for steam. Mystifying.

The film offends on so many levels that it's hard to single anything out for special mention, yet it has a strange innocence about it. Can Scott or Douglas or anybody really think Nick is a positive image of American values? Or is the film really a veiled threat to the Japanese that the gloves are off.

Black Rain is really the cry of a whipped cur. The Americans can't admit they're beaten, so they ridicule the winning team. The treatment of the Japanese is so awful that we end up feeling increasing sympathy for them, even for the Osaka police who keep trying to send Nick back to New York.

Japan's greatest crime in American eyes may not be their economic health after all, but their returning Nick to his old stamping ground, the US of A.

More sex please...

TV

By Vicki Morris

I can't find the sex which the Whitehouse brigade finds unacceptable", lamented Chris Dunkley, TV critic of the Financial Times.

He was speaking on Channel Four's "Right to Reply". They had chosen the weekend of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association's AGM to present the results of a poll of public opinion about sex on TV.

These days you might be afraid of being thought some sort of monster if you said there should be more, not less, sex on TV. In fact, Channel Four's poll, commissioned from Gallup, showed about half the people questioned in favour of more sex on TV, so long as it's shown after children's bedtime.

The figure was 59 per cent "for" among the 16-44 age group. However, bearing in mind that older people are more likely to rely on TV for entertainment than younger people, it wouldn't be fair to count their wishes as mattering less than those of younger people.

"Right to Reply" drew the conclusion that Mary Whitehouse is out of touch with what viewers and listeners actually think. It seems that she promulgates an opinion which she thinks people should hold.

William Cash, one of the Conservative MPs who agrees with her, spoke of "a shift in attitudes which needs to be rectified". In the view of the Whitehouse faction, people have been brainwashed into accepting more sex in the media, although who is corrupting the nation's morals and to what purpose they never explain.

Most people, sensibly, do not see more openness about sex as the result of some higher unidentified authority pandering to their baser instincts. Rather, it is the reflection of more honest and less repressive public attitudes generally — although, sadly, the average viewer is not so ready to accept the portrayal of homosexuality on TV or to accord it equal status in public life.

Does Mrs Whitehouse actually want to force people not to see sex in the media? She does submit to debate the issues. But she tends to consider only that evidence which supports her case.

When asked to comment on the obvious public approval for at least some sex on TV, she spoke about people's responsibilities to protect children, and of the common belief that seeing pornography leads people to commit sexual offences.

However, "Right to Reply" had been very careful to pose their survey so that people knew they were being asked about portraying not sexual violence but "sex in the context of a relationship" (whatever that means). In effect, Mary Whitehouse chose not to answer the question at all.

Meanwhile her Association is pressing the Government to reinforce the legislation against obscene publications, and to extend its effects to television. And it is finding an echo among many Tory MPs.

So, how should people lobby to defend our right to see sex on TV? And sex in what context? (I don't mean, should it be the kitchen, living room, or plain old bedroom?)

One viewer responding to the poll suggested that there should be a national station given over to sex... It would be a very strange programming schedule, where the criterion was only that there was some sex somewhere in every programme.

That probably wasn't what the viewer meant, but most purely pornographic programmes or films made now probably wouldn't pass on technical quality, let alone taste, to make it on to our screens.

In fact sex on TV is far less likely to be kinky than in its other formats, precisely because it is seen by so many people of differing tastes, and is open to public opinion and censure.

I hope it stays that way, and that we don't have a few MPs goaded by a vociferous minority curtailing our right to see programmes with sex in them, because sex is, after all, a part of most people's, even MPs', lives, in some way or another.

And it would be gross irresponsibility to allow prurience to end discussion and education about related issues like contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

Wonderful life

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Despite our best intentions, scientists (including the scientific socialists who write and read this paper) find it difficult to stand outside of our experience and situation and look objectively at our place and significance in the universe.

*Wonderful life**, by palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould, which has just joined Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time* in the best seller lists, helps us to do just that.

Many scientists, and not just religious ones, see the history of life on Earth as a steady growth in complexity and diversity, culminating with ourselves, the first (and last?) intelligent life form. The tree of life, starting from a slender shoot, burgeons upwards and outwards. Modestly, we place ourselves at the top.

Naturally, the religious world view sees all existing for our benefit. Unfortunately, this flawed outlook is shared by many scientists.

Scientists, such as astronomer Fred Hoyle, with brilliant insights and hard work, have laid bare the conditions which allowed:

- the stars to produce enough carbon for life to exist;
- dust to form balls of rock orbiting around medium-sized stars;
- atmosphere and oceans to accumulate around this ball of rock;
- the right temperatures etc. for the carbon atoms to combine in various ways, resulting in the self-perpetuating sunlight-driven set of reactions we call life.

But Fred Hoyle has said of the conditions for the synthesis of carbon in stars that he could not conceive of these arising by accident. The universe exists for us. We are not just one species but the species.

Non-scientist Mark Twain introduced a more realistic perspective with his comparison of the history of the Earth with the Eiffel Tower. On this scale, the human era would be the skin of paint on the pinnacle knob. And was the Eiffel Tower constructed for the benefit of that layer of paint?

So, is the history of life one of organisms growing more diverse and better adapted to their environments? If we were to rerun a film of life, would it always have the same ending?

Gould's model is one of blind chance acting to decimate more or

less at random the species existing at particular times. According to him, the rerun film could have all sorts of endings — and we might not feature in many of them!

Gould's theory is a testable one. Just look at the fossils from various periods, and see whether diversity increases over time or whether it sometimes increases, sometimes decreases.

Unfortunately the fossil record is notoriously incomplete. Dead things usually get eaten or decomposed. Only the teeth, bones or shells tend to survive, so we are particularly short of the earlier soft-bodied animals. However, there are a few examples where special conditions prevailed and creatures were preserved in astounding detail.

One such is the Burgess shale deposit of British Columbia, and it is this that provides Gould with his subject matter. Here, some 530 million years ago, a mud slide down an underwater cliff buried a collection of bizarre (to us!) sea animals. And the soft fine mud allowed an incredible amount of detail to survive inside as well as outside the fossils.

There was *Opabinia*, with its five eyes and frontal nozzles; *Yohoia*, with its unique grasping appendages; *Marrella*, with its headshield with backward pointing spines, its antennae, many gills and legs; and

the wonderfully named *Hallucigenia*, with its bulb on one end and a tube on the other, with its seven pairs of struts and seven tentacles.

It was difficult to relate these to known groups of animals, though the discoverer of the fossils some 80 years ago tried hard to do so. More recently, palaeontologists have reassessed the Burgess hoard and it is now clear that while more modern animals fall into four types of body plan, the ones in the Burgess shale fit into some 20 types. There was in fact about five times the diversity of living things in the oceans of that time that there is today.

Gould believes there is nothing special about the body plans that survived, including the one that gave rise to our line. Given an unfavourable change of environment, not all types could survive. Some had to go, and it could quite easily have been our ancestor as much as *Hallucigenia*.

Gould writes as well as any popular science writer of the day, without oversimplifying or patronising. The story of the Burgess shale is one of *discovery*, not only of the fossils from their rocky covering but of their nature from the covering of preconceptions.

*Hutchinson, £14.95 hardback.

For a one-day national engineering strike!

Engineering shop stewards from up and down the country meet in London this Thursday, 5 April, to discuss the next steps forward in the campaign for a shorter working week.

Rank and file activists will be looking for a clear lead from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. Pat Markey, an AEU steward from British Timken, Northampton, looks at the progress of the campaign so far and argues for a strategy of national action for the national claim.

No strings!

To jog Bill Jordan's memory and underline our resolve to win a 35 hour week with no strings, we reprint some information circulated by the AEU at the start of the campaign.

Examples of EEF companies' profitability:
 British Aerospace: pre-tax profits up 47 per cent (year ended 31.12.88)
 Ferranti: pre-tax profits up 34 per cent (year ended 31.12.88)
 Lucas: pre-tax profits up 24 per cent (year ended 31.7.88)
 NEI: pre-tax profits up 24 per cent (year ended 31.12.88).
 Directors' pay in 1988:
 Plessey chairman and EEF deputy president: 65 per cent increase. Pay: £391,956.
 Ferranti chairman and EEF vice-president: 33 per cent increase. Pay: £154,000.
 Vickers president and EEF vice-president: 37 per cent increase. Pay: £296,517.
 Rolls Royce managing director and EEF vice-president: 30 per cent increase. Pay: £168,330.
 So why do we have to finance reductions in the working week by accepting all kinds of strings, Bro. Jordan?

Preston forced back

We don't want to go down in history as the workers who killed the 35-hour week campaign."

That was the angry comment from one AEU picket at British Aerospace Preston before the mass meeting that voted to return to work on Friday 2 March. The settlement does not by any means represent the end of the fight for a shorter working week, but British Aerospace management have certainly got off very lightly indeed.

The deal pushed through by national officials and senior stewards gives an awful lot to management in return for a phased reduction to 37 hours.

- Bell to bell working, abolition of fixed tea breaks, abolition of washing up time.
- Skilled workers to clean and sweep the factory.
- Workers to inspect their own work.
- No hours cut at all for striking white collar workers.
- Increased flexibility between grades.

As the reduction in the first year is only one hour, and the 'strings' take back 50 minutes in labour time, the 18 week strike has won a real reduction of only ten minutes.

It took three votes at the Preston mass meeting for the senior stewards and national officials to get the result they wanted. They 'did a Nelson' by turning a blind eye to the numbers voting against.

Afterwards many workers were very

Eight months into the Confed's "Drive for 35" campaign, the shorter working week is firmly on the agenda.

Opinions on the number of workers winning a reduction in hours ranges from 19,000 according to the Engineering Employers' Federation to the Confed's figure of 66,000. Another 20,000 workers in the Scrap Metal Federation have won a 37 hour week with no strings.

But a lot more is needed. Back at the start of the campaign, on the glossy leaflets put out by the AEU, we were given figures about the big rise in productivity in engineering over the last ten years. "We've earned it!", the leaflets said about the demand for a cut in hours. The implication was that there would be no strings.

The reality is that the deal pushed through by the Confed leadership at British Aerospace Preston and Chester, for example, is almost identical to the kind of flexibility proposals put forward by the EEF in 1987 — proposals which Jordan wanted to accept, only to be met by a rank and file revolt.

This is crazy! Now is the time to step up the pressure, not cave in and stab our members in the back.

It is all the more galling because back in January, in an issue of the Central Strategy Committee's "Update" bulletin, they were praising the "absolutely magnificent dedication and determination of the 7,200 men and women, manual and staff, who are on strike in British Aerospace plants in Chester, Preston and Kingston. We pay tribute..."

According to Confed thinking there have been victories at BAe Preston and Chester; now "the rest of the engineering employers will be easy. It will like robbing old ladies or taking sweets from children."

So what do the Confed leaders propose? To ballot for indefinite strike ac-

tion at Lucas Aerospace at Wolverhampton and Lucas Automotive at Gloucester, Pontypool, Cwmbran, Gillingham, Sudbury and Durnley, and Weir Pumps at Cathcart, Alloa, and Manchester. There are also plans for one company to be balloted for industrial action in each Confed district.

This last idea is a good one, and should be organised at once. It would provide a useful focus for districts, helping to get strikers round the factories and to reinvigorate the levy collections.

But the rank and file must regain the initiative. So far the Confed leaders have pulled (and agreed to!) the strings. The time is ripe for Confed stewards to get together and discuss the strategy of the campaign so far and the way forward.

What is the best way to collect the levy? How do we turn the campaign from one run by the Confed leaders a million miles from the shop floor to one where the membership is actively involved? After all, we're paying the levy. We should be entitled to our say.

How do we get the Employers' Federation back round the table to negotiate on a national basis? This is crucial. The stronger sections might not feel the loss of the national agreement, but the weaker sections will.

We should support calls for a one-day engineering strike as a first step of a national campaign for a 35 hour week with no strings. That would not go against the more localised action so far seen in the campaign. In fact, quite the opposite.

It would be a basis for uniting the stronger and weaker sections in engineering in pursuit of our claim.

Kingston votes to stay out

The shorter working week fight at British Aerospace Kingston continues.

"We must decide whether we are going to work in a factory where the bosses have total control, or one in which we have some dignity".

That was how shop stewards' chair Bert Long put the case for re-

jecting management's latest offer. The mass meeting backed the stewards overwhelmingly.

Despite some concessions, management are still pushing for:

- One hour off tea breaks this year
- 90 minutes off tea breaks next year
- Compulsory redeployment — within and between plants — and the sack if you refuse
- Multi-machine manning
- 'Flexible' working
- Production workers to sweep up and clean up
- Compulsory overtime and shift work
- Right to bring contractors on site
- Cutting overtime payments.

The stewards and strikers all want to see some real backing from the leadership of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU).

The rank and file must control

- Regular local Confed stewards' meeting should be held to act as local strategy committees and discuss ways of escalating the dispute such as unsubsidised solidarity strikes.
- National Confed stewards' conferences should be held on a regular basis to control the overall conduct of the dispute.

Escalate the action

- For a one-day national Confed strike!
- Defend all laid-off workers. Full strike pay for those laid off.
- Send delegations of strikers round every engineering plant. Organise delegations from non-striking plants to the picket lines.
- Prepare for all-out action.

Strings at Chester

Meanwhile, it took two counts at Chester to get the deal accepted. The strings include:

- Bell to bell working,
 - Continuous shift working,
 - Multi-machine working,
 - Introduction of sub-contractors on site,
- in return for a phased 37 hour week.

Manchester benefits victory

TOWN HALLS ROUNDUP

By Clare Tostevin (counter staff shop steward)

Customer counter staff at Manchester's Housing Benefit Office won our claim for regrading last Friday after pressurising the City Council through industrial action.

The counter staff had been trying to negotiate for over three years, with our claim continually rejected. In February, as management increased their drive for productivity, counter staff felt enough was enough, and voted unanimously for indefinite strike action.

The support from other workers in the office was tremendous, in terms of collections, helping on the picket line, and refusing to cross it. Despite the initial hostility of NALGO union branch officials, the determination of the counter staff and the strength of support in the office ensured that after only four days the officials were pushed into taking up the case, and got an early appeal date for the regrading claim to be heard.

Counter staff then organised a day of strike action to coincide with the opening of the new customer counter. This was followed by a lobby of the council Labour group, which was discussing the regrading, joined by workers from all sections of the office. We presented a petition signed by workers in Manchester Benefits and by many customers in support of the claim.

All counter staff were prepared to strike immediately if the claim was not agreed, and the NALGO branch had promised backing.

The Personnel Appeals Committee then heard the case on Friday, and agreed the full claim for customer advisers and an improved grading for the supervisor.

By taking strike action, counter staff won what four years of negotiations had failed to do. It shows that as the City Council prepares to make cuts in the workforce, by taking industrial action workers can still defend and improve their conditions.

Hostel workers strike

Workers at Manchester City Council's hostel for single homeless walked out on strike on Wednesday 28 March, following violent threats from a number of residents.

Because of the growing numbers of homeless in Manchester and the lack of rehousing possibilities, the hostel has been at crisis point for some time. But management failed to act.

The situation was brought to a head when a number of residents ganged together and started to terrorise staff and other residents. They were evicted then made violent threats against staff.

For their own safety, the hostel workers walked out. They reported to the Town Hall, stating that the hostel was no longer a safe workplace. Management responded by instructing them to "get out of the building".

The hostel workers want negotiations on safety measures and new operational procedures to prevent a similar situation arising. Housing Department management have responded in their usual insensitive, hamfisted and anti-union way — no talks with strikers, no talks until staff are back at work.

On Friday 30 March, NALGO balloted the hostel workers to make the dispute official. The staff unanimously voted in favour of a strike.

Teachers to strike

The NAS/UWT have voted 52% in favour of a one-day strike on Wednesday 4 April.

Despite the fact that this strike is only a protest and not intended to shift the government over pay, on the other hand, to the NAS/UWT's credit, they have organised trains and coaches from all over the country to attend a demo/lobby in London.

Unfortunately, the NUT leadership

have as good as condemned the strike by saying strikes alienate parents. However, there are many in the NUT who disagree and hopefully considerable numbers will have shown this by attending the NAS/UWT demo.

With the conferences of both TUC teachers unions around the corner, the strike can be used as a platform for preparing serious action by teachers against the government's free-market plans for education.

Fascist rally ends in farce

By Pete Radcliff

An attempt by the fascist British National Party to organise a show of strength in Nottingham on 31 March ended in farce.

Forty bedraggled fascists were escorted by police in groups of three and four from a field five miles outside the city where they had taken refuge from anti-fascist protesters.

Despite the departure of over a thousand anti-poll-tax demonstrators from Nottingham to London, a hasty counter-mobilisation against the BNP brought out 300 people. The majority of those turning up were black and white youth outside the normal ranks of the organised political left.

Occupying the avenue where the BNP were hoping to hear their leader John Tyndall speak, the anti-fascist demonstrators pursued them from a couple of alternative meeting places, and finally cornered them in the field.

The fascists clearly hope that the developing crisis of the parliamen-

tary Tory right will give them opportunities for growth and reorganising; but the mobilisation in Nottingham shows that the need to physically stop the fascists is still widely understood even after many years of fascist activity being at a low level.

Where now after the deal?

Ambulance activists' meeting

Called by Merseyside ambulance shop stewards.

Saturday 7 April, 10.30am, Liverpool trade union centre, 24 Hardman St. Further details from 051-709 3995.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Victories for student left

By Jill Mountford

In a major upset for the status quo, the National Union of Students this week elected Emma Colyer, a supporter of Left Unity and of Socialist Organiser, as National

Secretary.

Emma Colyer won an outstanding victory for socialism, democracy, and a fighting, campaigning union, by defeating "independent" candidate Naomi Cohen.

The leader of the "independent" faction, Cosmo Hawkes, was defeated in the presidential election by Labour candidate Stephen Twigg. Twigg got 479 votes to Hawkes's 339.

That was a setback for the "independent" right wing, and will take Hawkes out of NUS.

Never before has the National Union of Students been so well placed to build a mass rank and file campaign against student loans, against cuts in education, against sexism and racism in the colleges, and for a decent living grant for all in post-16 education.

Emma Colyer joins Janine Booth, already elected Women's Officer at the NUS Women's Conference, to make two Left Unity supporters elected to full-time positions on this year's National Executive. The student movement can confidently look forward to a year of campaigning.



We can beat the Poll Tax!

Tony Benn MP spoke at the anti-poll-tax demonstration in London on 31 March.

The Poll Tax is unjust, undemocratic, and unacceptable, and we are determined to persuade the government to drop it.

Millions of people cannot afford to pay the Poll Tax, and many regard it as an immoral law, to which they have a conscientious objection.

The decision as to whether to pay or not must be a personal decision, and it is not for anyone to tell anyone else what to do, because of the harsh penalties which the government would like to impose.

What is important is that each of us should support each other against all attempts to intimidate those who do not pay, or to punish them.

The campaign against the Poll Tax is supported by people of all

political opinions, and by those who have never involved themselves with politics before.

The rallies and demonstrations against it throughout the country have been bigger than any we have seen for fifty years, and can be compared to those others which

have taken place — also for freedom and justice — in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

In Scotland the Poll Tax has proved to be unenforceable, and the government dare not introduce it into Northern Ireland.

The opposition to it, in England,

is so powerful that we can defeat it if we stick together, payers and non-payers alike.

What we are engaged in is a peaceful political campaign for social justice and local democracy, and if we keep up the pressure we shall certainly win.



Emma Colyer

Don't collect! Don't pay!

By Gerry Bates

The anti-poll-tax demonstration on Saturday 31 March, with perhaps 200,000 people, was the one of the biggest in Britain in recent years.

Not since the big CND marches against Cruise missiles have so many people hit the streets in pro-

test.

It shows the strength of feeling against the government. Moreover, it shows what could be done if the Labour Party and the TUC were to call an official demonstration.

If the Anti-Poll-Tax Federation, with no backing from the official leaders of the labour movement, can organise a demonstration of this size, weightier bodies could organise a huge turnout.

The demonstration, despite the

Tories' attempt to brand everyone on it as a hooligan, shows how powerful the campaign can be. Its success needs to be built on immediately.

After Saturday night's violence, many people commented that Britain was becoming like Eastern Europe. But what brought about the fall of the dictators in the East? More and more, and bigger and bigger, demonstrations. We need more anti-poll-tax demonstrations, and even bigger ones.

The Tories have gone too far, and now they are facing an angry revolt. If we keep going like this, we can finish the Tories off.

According to opinion polls, eight

Tories 'cap' councils

Twenty local councils — none of them, surprise, surprise, Tory — have been "poll tax capped" by Environment Minister Chris Patten.

That means that the Government thinks their poll tax is too high, and they will receive correspondingly less money from central government.

What do the Tories mean by "overspending councils"? Anyone who lives in an inner city area knows perfectly well that the problem is not overspending by the council. The idea is absurd. The problem is that the council services are woefully inadequate. A lot more money is needed.

million people in England and Wales will refuse to pay the Poll Tax. In Scotland half a million have already received court orders because they haven't paid.

The non-payers and their supporters need to be organised in Anti-Poll-Tax Unions on every estate, in every neighbourhood.

In a number of areas, local government workers are refusing to collect the Poll Tax. Not only is the Poll Tax an unfair tax, it is a financial mechanism designed by the Government to force councils into further cuts which will cost local government workers their jobs.

Even worse cuts will be imposed when the Government "caps" the Poll Tax for selected councils.

The fightback by local government workers, and other workers involved in the administration of the tax, needs to be linked with the non-payment campaign. Don't collect, don't pay!

Moreover, how high or low a council's poll tax is, is determined more by the Government's initial allocation of money to it than anything else.

Chris Patten must live on another planet. He does, of course: planet Affluence. The Tory ministers simply have no idea what it's like for most people living in inner-city areas, or what it will be like for the millions who can't afford the poll tax. And they don't care.

Unfortunately, campaigning for councils' right to set high poll taxes is no answer to poll tax capping. What the Labour councils affected should do is throw their weight behind campaigns of local residents and trade unionists who refuse to pay or implement the poll tax.

Labour leaders launch attack on campaigners

By Clive Bradley

Labour's National Executive has gone on the attack over the Poll Tax — not against the tax, or against the Tories, but against Labour anti-poll-tax activists.

Last Wednesday, 28 March, it launched a crackdown on anti-poll-tax activists standing in the May local government elections. It may

bar several council candidates in Liverpool because "they support unlawful tactics" in the fight against the poll tax.

The National Executive also backed the local party in Haringey, which had barred three councillors from standing after they said they would campaign against a poll tax being set. The same meeting approved moves to end the process, instituted in the early 1980s, by which all Labour MPs have to seek reselection each parliament.

The National Executive's decisions are further blows against free speech in the Labour Party. They follow hot on the heels on the recent decision to "investigate" Birkenhead Labour Party and Socialist Organiser.

The implications could be far-reaching for the local elections. Are all Labour candidates around the country standing on a platform of not collecting the tax, or not prosecuting non-payers, to be disbarred?

The Labour leaders' cringing before the Tories' concept of 'legality' has got to end. Those councillors who are standing up for a real campaign against the poll tax are doing exactly what the Labour Party should be doing nationally.

No idea of democracy should mean the humble acceptance of unjust laws. Democracy includes the right to resist injustice and undemocratic edicts.

Reinstate the barred councillors! Democracy in the Labour Party!