

For Workers' Liberty East and West

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

**Vote  
Labour  
May 3rd!**



## Who will defend Lithuania?

By John O'Mahony

**T**he capitalist dogs of the Western world are too panting and fawning their approval of Gorbachev to raise even one good convincing bark as their hero strangles Lithuania.

The USSR is now starving the people of Lithuania of gas, electricity and food, in Gorbachev's escalating economic war to break the Lithuanians' will for independence.

And where are the professional heroes of freedom, the erstwhile champions of independence for "the captive nations" of the East? Busy telling the Lithuanians to "be reasonable" and "compromise",

telling them to abandon their declaration of independence and "talk" to Gorbachev about it!

In the real world, that would mean that the Lithuanians would begin the "negotiations" by accepting the Kremlin's right to tell them whether they can be independent again as they were 50 years ago, before Hitler and Stalin reduced this small nation to slavery.

The West is not offering even economic aid to the three and a half million Lithuanians standing up to their giant neighbour.

The leaders of the West plainly agree with President Franklin D Roosevelt's much quoted comment on the Nicaraguan dictator Somoza (father of the one kicked out in

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# DEFEY THE POLL TAX!

By Cate Murphy

**A**s the first poll tax bills come through the doors of England and Wales, a recent survey shows 75% of people are against the poll tax.

13 per cent — or five million people — say they won't pay.

Poll tax bills are being burned on estates up and down the country; more and more anti-poll tax unions are being set up.

The conferences of the National Union of Journalists and National Union of Teachers voted to take industrial action against the poll tax. Rank and file teachers are calling an unofficial conference to co-ordinate the fight against redundancies caused by the poll tax — in defiance of

the NUT executive.

Guerrilla action by NALGO activists is spreading; workplace anti-poll tax unions are springing up. Nurses in London are planning a day of action against the poll tax on May Day.

This hostility will grow as poll tax capped councils make cuts — read redundancies — to keep poll tax levels down, and as more trade unionists face wage arrestments or, like civil service workers, are forced to deduct poll tax arrears from benefits.

An organised campaign of non-cooperation is needed, drawing in trade unionists from every industry who want to fight — and defeat — the Tory tax.

Trade union non co-operation is vital. By itself non-payment won't defeat the poll tax. Workers organising to prevent bosses handing over details of wages to the

courts; of refusing to deduct poll tax arrears from fellow workers' pay packets; NALGO workers in housing departments refusing to act as poll tax collectors can sink the tax.

Of course the mass non-payment campaign is important: already it has drawn millions of people into political activity for the first time. Undoubtedly the strength of the non-payment campaign has boosted the confidence of workers to adopt non-implementation policies. But if the non-payment campaign is to succeed, it must be backed by trade union action against the tax.

Disgracefully, the Labour Party and TUC leaderships have come out against trade union non-cooperation and non-payment. They have spent their time condem-

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# Sandinistas lose office but not power

By Clive Bradley

**T**he defeated Sandinista president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, last week moved to allay fears about the transition to the new government of Violeta Chamorro.

He promised to hand over power even if the war between the Sandinistas and the contras, which has gone on virtually since the revolution of 1979, continues. Fears nevertheless remain.

Agreement was reached with the contra leaders that their forces would be disarmed by Wednesday

25 April. The contras tried unsuccessfully to tie this demand to the simultaneous disarmament of the Sandinista army.

This, of course, the Sandinistas could not accept: some sections, if not all, of the new government coalition will be out for revenge, and without protection, Sandinistas would be prey to an orgy of violence.

And despite the agreement, many contras have been able to evade the ritual surrender of their weapons by slipping over the border from their bases in Honduras.

Nicaragua under Chamorro will in reality have two separate centres

of power. Through the army and much of the rest of the state apparatus, the Sandinistas will still have a lot of power, indeed they will continue to have effective state power.

And although the Sandinistas lost the election to Chamorro's UNO, UNO is an extremely unstable coalition, ranging from communists to conservatives. The Frente Sandinista remains the largest single party, both within the assembly and 'on the ground' in the country. There will still be a majority in the assembly for many Sandinista policies.

Doubtless some sections of the

Sandinistas will not want to hand over power to UNO. But Ortega has made his attitude clear, and it is almost certain to prevail. Any attempt by the Sandinistas at this stage to stop Chamorro taking office would provoke a serious response from the United States, not excluding the possibility of military action. That is far too big a risk to take.

UNO's divisions are sure to widen now it has power. The sharpest split is on the issue of privatisation. One wing, Cosep, wants to introduce wide-ranging privatisation: about 40% of the economy is currently in state hands.

But Eli Altamirano, a member of UNO's Political Council and leader of the Communist Party, said: "These people are dreaming if they think they are going to privatise everything."

Chamorro has yet to name her ministers, and in-fighting in UNO gets fiercer as the days go by.

For the Sandinistas, this instability allows a degree of optimism. If UNO falls apart, if Chamorro, despite huge amounts of money from the United States, fails to improve Nicaragua's disastrously ailing economy, the tide could turn once again in the Sandinistas' direction.

## Organise for mass non-payment

By Chris Barnes

**I**n Newcastle, the Anti-Poll Tax campaign is really strong.

The work that went into building the London Anti-poll-tax march and our routine work of stalls, meetings and canvassing have really paid off.

In Heaton and Sandyford we have two stalls every Saturday morning to co-ordinate our street networks of non-payers, to keep our profile high and to give out the relevant news, as well as to raise money and sell pamphlets.

The street networks to support non-payers against the bailiffs and to give legal advice are alive and growing, but of course when we get nearer the time of court cases and bailiffs action we will have to firm up these networks.

We are opening a shop front in the Northern Region to direct the work and to give information and free legal advice and representation to non-payers.

On the stalls a good 50% of people who pass say they aren't paying the poll tax.

Our local federation is holding its second conference on 19 May. Two main issues are on the agenda: the legal implications of non-payment, and the vote of the trade unions in defeating the tax.

Most people on the streets and at our meetings are eager to know the legal implications. The most commonly asked question is:

• Can they send the bailiffs in?

The law says that the courts must warn the occupier 7 days before any sequestration attempt. That gives the non-payer enough time to remove important items from the house.

Everyday goods are deemed necessities and cannot be taken — TVs, carpets, beds, cookers. Only

items considered luxury extras can be taken — jewelry, videos, Hi-Fi's.

However, the bailiffs cannot break into your home or force entry. You really don't have to allow them in. By a strange quirk, no electrical equipment that is switched on can be taken.

It is unlikely that many non-payers will be sent bailiffs, because the bailiffs are not well enough staffed to deal with mass non-payment. Even those who will be singled out as an example will have their Anti-Poll Tax Union behind them to stop bailiffs taking their goods. With a network system we can mobilise a few hundred people quickly and fill the house with so many people that the bailiffs simply won't be able to enter.

The next most asked question is: • Can they seize ('arrest') my wages, bank account, pension or Income Support?

Bank accounts are quite safe. The government wants firms to help them arrest wages, but the employers are up in arms about the request. Strikes would be probable and working relations would be seriously damaged if the employers did this, and many won't risk such hostility. Pensions, Income Support and other benefits can be arrested but only to the tune of £1.75 per week. In some areas this may well be lower than the poll tax, so at the end of the day the only thing they can do to people on benefits is make them pay the tax.

Even people who intend paying the poll tax should wait until the last minute, which is the day before being taken to court. They will have lost nothing by doing this and they will have helped to clog up the system and make it unworkable.

Also asked is:

• Will I get a criminal record?

No. Non-payment of the poll tax is a civil offence, not a criminal one.



Police attack demonstrators on March 31 demo. Photo Paul Mattsson

**T**ottenham Against the Poll Tax is setting up a defence campaign for people charged as a result of the police attack on the poll tax demonstration in Trafalgar Square on Saturday 31 March.

An initial meeting to gather together as many defendants as

possible has been organised at Conway Hall on 3 May at 7.30pm.

All defendants, their close relations, or personal representatives are welcome to attend.

The campaign will have as its sole objective the legal defence of those charged. The campaign will be politically independent and answerable to the defendants only.

To date the meeting has the back-

ing of the following groups: Tottenham Against the Poll Tax, Haringey Against the Poll Tax, Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign, Hackney Community Defence Campaign.

For further information contact Anthony Benson: 808 3611 (h), 808 4581 ext 298 (w); Terry Conway 263 8289; Tottenham Unwaged Centre 802 9804.

## Town hall workers ballot on strike

By Nik Barstow

**T**wo hundred front-line staff in Islington Council's neighbourhood offices are now balloting on official action to refuse to collect the poll tax.

The threatened action by reception and clerical workers in the council's chief executive section was in response to a paltry offer by management of a handful of extra staff to deal with the increased work the poll tax will bring.

The council's own estimates are that over a quarter of a million "new transactions" will take place at the 24

neighbourhood office cashdesks every year. But they only offered 8 extra workers, plus two peripatetics.

NALGO believes they will need between 2 and 4 extra workers in each office just to handle the tax. The action of refusing to deal with the poll tax, although officially part of a dispute on extra staff, is being fuelled by the unpopularity of the tax, and by the growing feeling among council workers that we should have nothing to do with it.

If the ballot is successful and the action sticks, it could soon spread to include many other sections, both

neighbourhood offices and the council's central finance department, as the council panics and tries to spread to shift-work in order to "cope".

It would of course have been very different if the council had given a lead against the poll tax rather than implementing it, albeit with feeble protests against its unfairness.

That message has probably now been brought home to councillors as the Tories move to poll tax-cap Islington, threatening major cuts and the collapse of services.

## Organising against poll tax in York

By Paul Hampton

**I**n the last 18 months, Socialist Organiser supporters in York have been almost alone in arguing for the need for local support groups for poll tax non-payers, federated to the town group.

With bills dropping through letter boxes and more local people getting involved, this project has been taken up to organise those not paying the poll tax.

SO supporters have also helped organise the burning of the bills event held on 14 April, the demonstration called by York Trades Council for 5 May, and a Nurses Against the Poll Tax group.

Our main activity recently was setting up a local residents' group in the Graves area of York, organising the first public meeting of people against the poll tax in that area. We leafleted the whole area, including houses, shops and pubs, got the tenants' association involved, and put a stall up outside the shops. Members of our local Labour Party were also involved.

We had a meeting of over 50 people, where we had prepared ourselves for many of the legal questions we would be asked.

We had an hour and a half of questions and answers, explaining some of the myths about criminal offences, fines and taking money out of people's pensions or wages. Everyone agreed to come to another meeting to set up a proper local group.

## Defy the poll tax

From front page

ning the 'violence' of protesters and demonstrators, but done nothing to harness and build on the hostility to the poll tax.

Instead, Neil Kinnock has witch-hunted Labour councillors who have stood alongside working class people who will be impoverished and criminalised by the Tory poll tax, and urged Labour councils to seize working class people's possessions and wages. The likes of NUT leader Doug McAvoy have rushed to state denounce their members' decision to fight the tax.

We can't let the leaders of our labour movement get away with this — we have to mount a campaign throughout the labour movement to make the Kinnocks and McAvoy's lead the fight back against the Tories.

The conference for trade unionists who want to fight the poll tax called by the Socialist Movement and supported by the All Britain Anti Poll Tax Federation is an important step in building that campaign.

Already the conference, on Saturday 23 June in Manchester, has got the support of Tony Benn, Joe Marino of the Bakers Union, NUT executive member Andy Dix-

on, NUJ executive member Kyran Connolly, CPSA Broad Left, and Labour Against the Cuts and Poll Tax in Manchester, as well as numerous CPSA, NALGO, NUR, NUT, NUJ, AEU branches and district councils, and trades councils.

The conference will be an open, broad-based, democratic conference to thrash out a strategy for building effective opposition to the poll tax in the unions.

All trade unionists should support this conference.

For more details contact the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, 53a Geere Road, London E15.

Killer bimbos exposed!

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

**A** decade of Thatcherism ought to have killed off the idea that simply putting women (any women) in charge of things necessarily makes the world a nicer place for all of us.

But this illusion is still remarkably widely held, despite mounting evidence to the contrary.

The starting point of last week's BBC "Forty Minutes" programme, "Killer Bimbos on Fleet Street!" was the supposed paradox that the rise of women journalists to senior positions on the nation's tabloids has coincided with a decline to new depths of sleaze by those very papers.

When the programme's maker, Sheila Hayman, began her preparations last year, all three mass-market Sunday tabloids were edited by women: "crammed as they were with tales of lust and degradation clearly designed to appeal to men, this phenomenon seemed worth investigating", she explained in last Wednesday's *Independent*.

But is it really the case that all this lust and degradation is "designed to appeal to men"? The programme itself pointed out that 48 per cent of *Sun* readers are female, and a quarter of all women over 15 read it. It seems reasonable to assume that the same sort of thing applies to the Sunday tabloids.

A more interesting "phenomenon" was dealt with by Ms Hayman in her *Independent* article: the extreme reluctance of tabloid editors to expose themselves to media scrutiny. Admittedly *Sunday Mirror* editor Eve Pollard used to be a regular on "Blankety-Blank", but even that show's most devoted fans would scarcely claim that it presented any very great challenge to its panelists.

*Sunday People* editor Wendy Henry's "unconditional and persistent" refusal to take part in Hayman's programme was resolved by Cap'n Bob, who sacked her at the end of 1989. Ms Henry had, of course, previously been sacked from editorship of the *News of the World* by Murdoch; her successor, Patsy Chapman, was also uncooperative and only agreed to appear after pressure from Murdoch's "publicity supremo" Jane Reed, who (according to Hayman) saw an opportunity to present "the pietistic, post-Code-of-Conduct face of her employer".

Eve Pollard at first seemed more reasonable. But once filming began she started to get very prima-donnaish. "You weren't rolling on that, were you? Well, I'm not signing any consent form if you do. In fact, thinking about it, I'm not signing any consent form at all until I've seen transcripts of everything you're using, and I'll need a cassette in advance of transmission as well".

Ms Pollard (who likes to be thought of as glamorous) even failed to appreciate the kindness of being filmed through her own black stockings: this, according to Hayman, is a technique "known in the trade as KTOL or Kind To Old Ladies"...

To judge by Hayman's article, it was little short of a miracle that the programme ever got made, and congratulations are surely in order, if only for persistence. But I can't help thinking that the programme's basic theme (why haven't women editors had more of an improving influence on the tabloids?) was less interesting than the *Independent* background piece.

Last year, ITV's "Hard News" did a splendid job of "door-stepping" *Sun* editor Kelvin McKenzie; it would be nice to see a follow-up to "Killer Bimbos!" along the same lines. I've even thought of a couple of titles which I offer to Ms Hayman *gratis*: how about "The Bitters Bit"? Or, better still, "Have a Dose of Your Own Medicine, You Bastards!"

PS. Before the complaints arrive, I'd better make it clear that I am not against women getting to be editors of national newspapers, or, indeed, getting to be Prime Minister...

# The fight continues on abortion rights

EDITORIAL

**W**omen are facing the most serious threat to abortion rights since the 1967 Abortion Act was passed.

As we go to press, Parliament is debating a series of amendments to the government's Embryology Bill designed to reduce the upper time limit for abortions.

At the very least the upper time limit will probably be reduced to 24 weeks. Anti-abortionists are confident that they may win a reduction to 22 or 20 weeks.

Despite the fact that the majority of people are in favour of defending the present Abortion Act, doctors and even most pro-choice MPs — including Labour MPs — have been won to a position of a 24-week limit. They have accepted the arguments that, at 24 weeks a foetus is 'viable' — capable of independent life — even if that life is dependent on a battery of technology.

In reality, a reduction to even 24 weeks will in practice mean a limit of 20 weeks, as doctors allow a four-week margin of error in calculating the beginning of pregnancy. As a result, thousands of women — often the most vulnerable — will be denied the choice of an abortion and forced to carry on with an unwanted pregnancy.

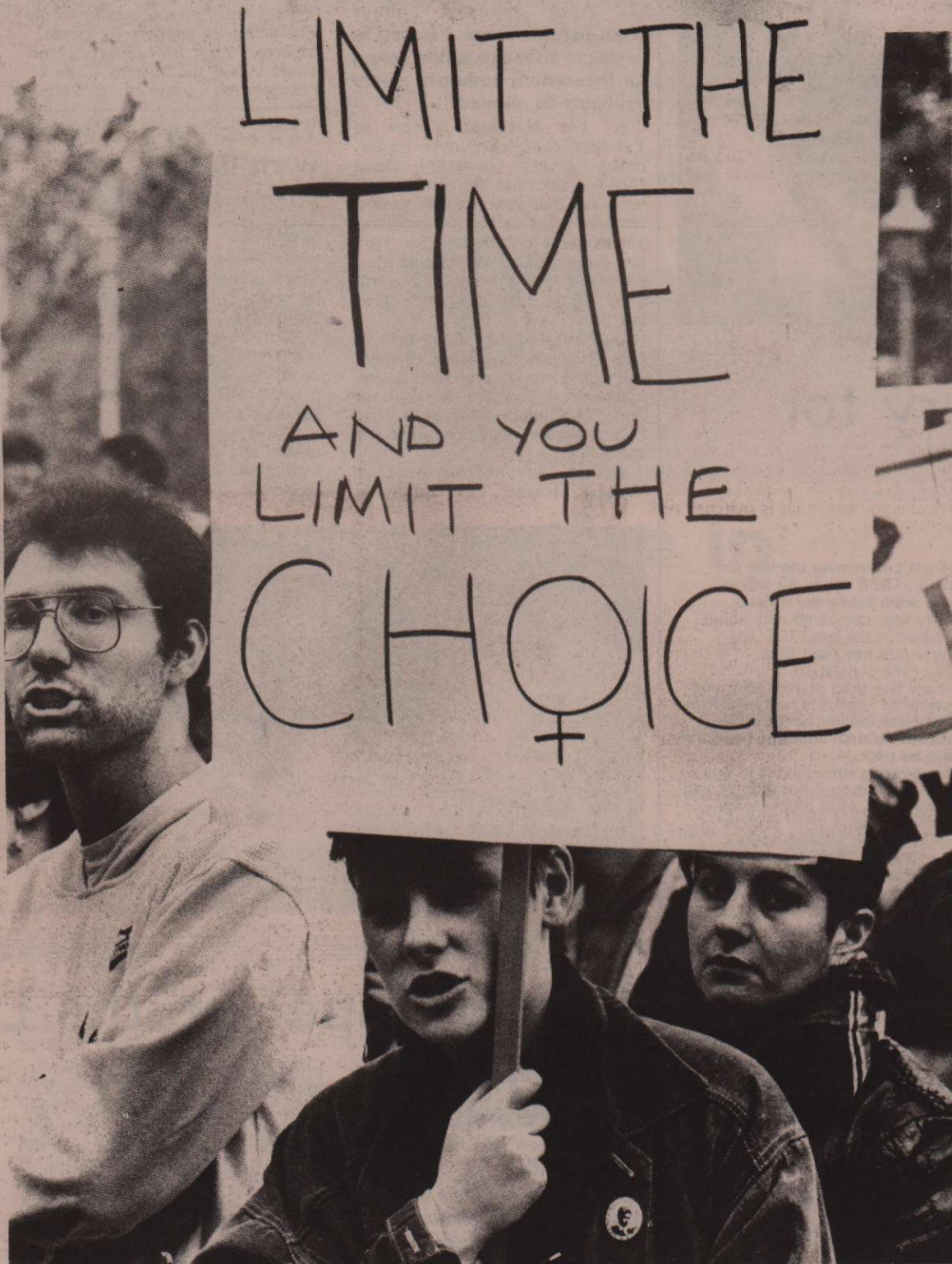
All of us would like to see fewer women needing late abortions but the way to make this happen is by providing better sex education; better contraception; increased NHS resources; preventing doctors allowing to obstruct women's access to abortion on grounds of their 'conscience'; and giving women the right to decide for themselves whether they want an abortion (self-referral), a right they have for early abortions in the majority of European countries.

But the Tories — and the so-called 'pro-Lifers' — aren't interested in any of these.

The Tories have systematically starved the NHS of cash; cuts in local health authority budgets have led to a reduction in family planning services of up to 50%.

Making late abortions illegal will not stop women needing late abortions and will not stop women having late abortions.

The lower the time limit, the more women will be forced into misery, injury and possible death in the backstreets. Something about which the grotesquely misnamed 'Pro-Lifers' seem to care precious little.



Protest against Alton Bill, 1988. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni

Any reduction in time limits and further threatened restrictions on women's right to abortion on 'social' grounds, will encourage the anti-abortionists to confine their campaign to outlaw abortion altogether. Their confidence and organisation is growing — witness the disgusting, intimidatory tactics of the 'Operation Rescue' thugs, who harass and attack women entering abortion clinics. We must stop these bigots now.

Undoubtedly, the larger vote to allow embryo research to continue up to 14 days is a victory for the pro-choice movement and a blow to the anti-abortionists. It allows the possibility of further research to improve contraception; determine — and so prevent — causes of miscarriage; and to help in eradicating genetic diseases. Such research would allow women a more informed choice, and as such should be welcomed.

However, while we support the increased opportunity for embryo research, it can't be on the basis of a restriction in other reproductive rights for women. Improving diagnostic techniques that enable

women to know whether the foetus they are carrying has an inherited, disabling disease would be valueless if restrictions in abortion rights meant a woman couldn't choose whether to terminate the pregnancy.

And we can't support improved fertility treatments on the basis that only married, heterosexual women can benefit from them. MPs still have to debate and vote on the amendment tabled by Tory MP Ann Winterton which seeks to ban lesbians and single women from access to donor insemination.

We must maintain the pressure to make sure that this attempt by the bigoted homophobes to determine who is, and who isn't, 'fit' to bear children is defeated.

Whatever the outcome of the vote on abortions tonight, the campaign must continue. The Stop the Amendment Campaign and the Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination should join forces in a single united campaign to mobilise maximum support in defence of women's rights to choose, and against the Embryology Bill if it is amended to restrict abortion or ac-

cess to donor insemination rights.

This campaign must include the support of the organised labour movement. Paper policies on equal opportunities aren't enough: the unions and Labour Party must prove they are serious about women's equality by defending the most fundamental right of women to control their own bodies.

Within the Labour Party we must fight to make MPs obey democratically decided party policy: on no other issue are they allowed to exercise their 'consciences' — why should we tolerate it when it comes to women's rights?

A woman's right to choose means being able to choose to have a child — which means fighting also for increased benefits, free and adequate nursery provision, an extension of fertility and reproductive treatments available to all women on the NHS, increased provision for the disabled — as well as being able to choose to have an abortion.

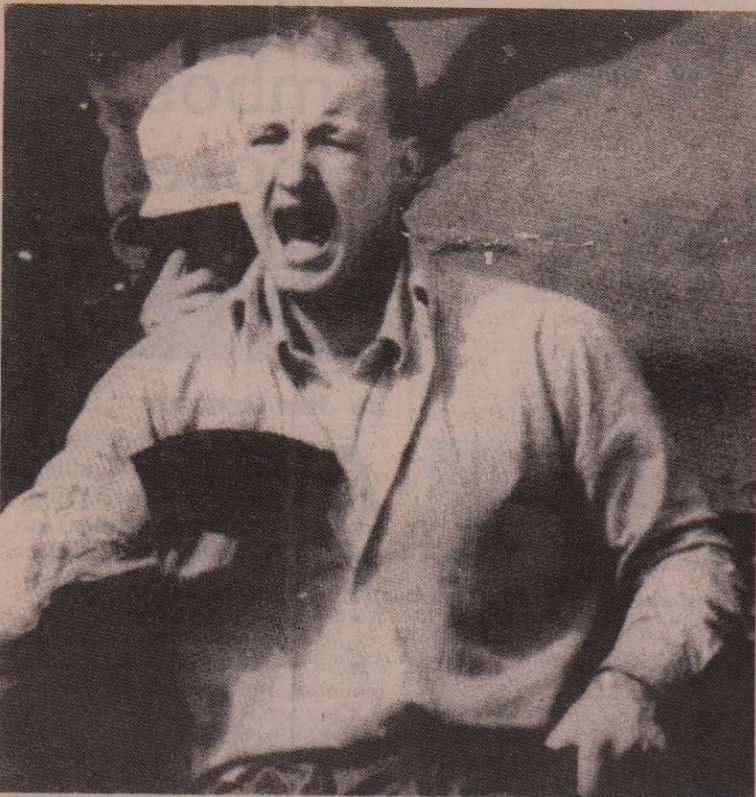
And women should have the right to make that choice themselves.

Let's use the opportunity to go on the offensive, and fight for real choice.

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



Strangeways prisoner Paul Taylor: facing life in solitary?

## Life in solitary for the rioters?

### GRAFFITI

If you had some prisoners holding out on the roof, driven mad by the appalling conditions inside and afraid of the consequences of surrender, what would you do?

Well, the prison officers at Strangeways have had a really good idea: tell them they'll be put in solitary confinement for the rest of their lives.

The rioters will never again be allowed to mix with fellow prisoners.

Wow, can't wait to get down, you can hear them shouting already. It's one solution to the problem of overcrowding, anyway. Sick of too many people, too many to one cell, never got any privacy? Well, you need never worry again. You need never speak another word to a living soul for the rest of your days.

You won't be able to even if you want to, of course, but we can't have prisoners jumping up demanding to be treated like human beings, now, can we? Whatever would the world come to?

Yes, at least one of those still on the roof is a 17 year old on remand (not convicted) for joy-riding. But never mind. He's probably guilty, and anyway he shouldn't have got so impatient about prison conditions.

The real danger to society is the idiot who dreamed up this 'solution' to prison rioting.

One in four of the contracts won by private companies in hospitals since 1983 has failed.

Of 439 contracts awarded to companies for cleaning, catering or laundry, 103 have ended with the company quitting or being sacked, according to a report published by health workers' unions.

The unions describe 'dramatic disasters by contractors — many of them very serious, some of them dangerous'. Cases cited include bacteria discovered in an operating theatre, cockroach infestations, and an alleged attempt by one company's cleaner to disconnect an oxygen tube being used by a patient.

The report also shows that private contractors are winning fewer contracts. The vast majority of services are performed by in-house health service teams.

The top half a per cent of Americans own nearly a quarter of all individual wealth, and the top 10 per cent hold 65% of the country's wealth, according to an article in the *Financial Times*.

In the meantime, America's poor

have got poorer over the last ten years. In 1988 nearly 32 million people were below the official poverty line, compared with about 24 million in the late '70s. The poverty rate has risen from 11% to 13% of the population.

Nearly one third of all blacks, and a quarter of Hispanics, are below the poverty line. Nearly a fifth of all American children are classified officially as poor.

The housing situation, as in Britain, is bad. Up to 3.5 million people are homeless. 45% of low-wage households spend 70% or more of their income on housing costs.

The poorest 20% of society pay nearly 20% more of their income in tax now than in 1980, while the richest 20% pay 5% less. The richest 5% pay 10% less. So in the glorious US of A, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The fall in trade union membership since 1979 is now levelling off, according to an official report.

The Certification Officer, Matthew Wake, said in his annual report that although union membership fell last year for the ninth consecutive year, the fall was 'relatively small'.

One year after the introduction of the poll tax in Scotland, about 15,000 people have taken their names off the electoral roll, putting the lie to Tory propaganda.

The February 1989 electoral register already contained 91,000 fewer names than a year before, according to academic research.

Dear DHSS, As I am a homeless person, I was wondering if you could lend me 35p to buy a newspaper, as this would come in very handy on cold nights when I'm trying to sleep.

If your resources could stretch to it, I'd be grateful for a few extra quid so maybe I could eat occasionally, although please believe me I don't want to be too much trouble.

My friend Kevin thought it would be nice if he could have a new pair of socks, as you've no idea how unpleasant it can get when you can't have a bath anywhere. And his girlfriend Shirley would be very relieved if you could send her £1.40.

Oh, while I think of it, there's an old man under our bridge whose cardboard box leaks. You don't need to give him any money or anything, but maybe one of you could think to pick one up for him from your local supermarket. Please try to find a large one, as despite his recent weight loss he won't fit in a shoebox.

Yours very glad the weather's getting better,  
Homeless and rootless, Waterloo.

## Labour backs "McAvoy's Law"

National strikes over local redundancies are likely to be illegal under a Labour government", so the *Sunday Correspondent* (22 April) reported Labour front-bencher Derek Fatchett as saying, "although action across an [education] authority would probably be allowed".

At the National Union of Teachers conference over Easter, union general secretary Doug McAvoy said that the conference's vote for national strikes against teachers being sacked was impossible to carry out because of Tory law. Now the Labour front bench is promising that a Kinnoch Government would keep that same Tory law!

It is the latest step in a process of Labour committing itself to more and more curbs on trade union rights. Last October the Labour Party conference adopted a long Policy Review document on trade union law.

Within days, front-bencher Michael Meacher had committed

Labour to a list of restrictions that were nowhere mentioned in the Policy Review.

"Would it be lawful for workers to refuse to handle imports from South Africa?" Answer, no. "Would meat porters be allowed to take action in support of nurses?" Answer, no." Moreover, "we would retain the current Code of Practice on peaceful picketing

*The Labour leaders want to keep solidarity strikes illegal*

which limits the number of pickets [to six]". (*Independent*, 9 October 1989).

Next month the National Executive will publish a new policy document which, according to the press, will include many of Meacher's restrictions.

It will agree to keep Tory laws against the closed shop, and Tory regulations limiting picket lines to six people. It will recognise the right

to solidarity action only for workers with a direct "occupational or professional interest" in the original dispute.

Fatchett's new statement takes us further down the road of state regulation even before the new document is published. It's a very narrow definition of "occupational or professional interest" which rules that teachers in one local authority have no interest in helping to save the jobs of teachers in another threatened by cuts due to poll tax and "Local Management of Schools"!

The North-West regional Labour Party conference at the end of March carried a resolution calling for a Workers' Charter of trade union rights, including the right to strike, the right to picket in whatever numbers we like, and the right to solidarity action.

The campaign for this Workers' Charter must be taken into every trade union branch and every Constituency Labour Party.

For copies of the Workers' Charter, send a stamped addressed envelope to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Smithfield meat porters strike against health cuts, 1989. Labour would make such action unlawful

## A joint paper of the Left?

### LETTER

Andrew Melville asks (Letters, SO 444) why there shouldn't be a joint weekly paper produced by Socialist Organiser, Labour Briefing and Socialist Campaign Group News.

No one can deny that the proliferation of socialist newspapers confuses people and, indeed, can look ridiculous. It would be desirable to have more unity on the Left, and such unity could include a joint paper. But unfortunately, it isn't so simple.

Labour Briefing was originally set up by people who left Socialist Organiser because they favoured rate rises as an alternative to local government cuts. It was their decision to part company.

Now that is water under the bridge, and many of the supporters of Briefing today never had the 'rate rises' position. In fact when the journal 'International' first appeared (which later merged with another journal to become 'Socialist Outlook') SO wrote to its editorial board proposing collaboration on a joint paper. They weren't interested.

We can't just wish away the political differences which do exist and which make the various currents reluctant to collaborate except on short-lived projects. Rather, we have to find the best way to thrash out the differences. A joint paper with Briefing? It's a good idea in

principle, but for the present it hardly looks workable in practice.

Socialist Campaign Group News involves even bigger problems. Its function is rather different even to that of Briefing, never mind SO: it's intended to be an information sheet for the Labour Left rather than a paper arguing definite views. In fact, insofar as it has a clear political identity, it is that of the 'rainbow coalition' ex-GLC Left, with which SO has very big disagreements. Far from being willing to do a joint paper with us, the people who produce it won't even advertise events like the Constituency Labour Parties Conference where they see SO being involved.

While I wouldn't rule out all kinds of unity in the future, we

can't just hang around pleading togetherness. So we produce a paper with distinct ideas, aimed at the regeneration of socialism, as official socialism of the Stalinist variety collapses. Much of what appears in Socialist Campaign Group News, especially, is precisely the sort of socialism we need to transcend if we are to be adequate for the 1990s.

In theory, a joint paper could provide a forum for debate. In practice, at the moment, it wouldn't; it would be a confused mish-mash unable to relate clearly to events in the world around it. That might sound pessimistic or cynical, but unfortunately it is a realistic assessment of the way things are.

Clive Bradley, Southwark.

## Sectarian on ANC

Nothing could reveal the sectarianism of Socialist Organiser more clearly than in the week that one billion people hear Nelson Mandela's appeal for intensified sanctions against the regime you should decide to concentrate your coverage on grossly exaggerated claims of 'ANC torture'.

The ANC is completely correct to maintain an iron vigilance against the agents of Pretoria and against any attempt by imperialist provocateurs to penetrate into its ranks.

If that means that occasionally innocent comrades may get hurt, then that is only an unfortunate consequence of the war in which the ANC is engaged against the forces of racial tyranny.

MK is a genuinely popular liberation army and the implementation of its programme — the Freedom Charter — is incompatible with the maintenance of racial capitalism. It is therefore inconceivable that MK will be used to defend Anglo American and other representatives of South African capitalism.

Yours in comradeship,

Dick Carter,  
Manchester



Polish socialists demonstrate. Photo: Mark Catterall

## Building a left alternative in Eastern Europe

**Jozef Pinior, a leader of the 'Socialist Political Centre' in Poland, visited London recently and spoke to Mark Sandell and Martin Thomas. (This is the first of two parts).**

**What assistance can socialists in Britain best give you?**

In the first place, defeat Thatcher! It is very important for us in Eastern Europe and in Poland because Thatcher is a symbol of capitalism.

If the British people vote against Thatcher and against capitalism, that will be a big success for us in the propaganda battle. It will help us in organising a left alternative in Eastern Europe.

At present the left is very weak in Eastern Europe. You have a move to the right all the time in every country.

I think the move to the right is short term. In the long term it will be different. The collapse of Stalinism is a big chance to build a revolutionary alternative to capitalism.

People hate Stalinism, and of course reject it. On the other hand you have in Poland the first results of the IMF austerity measures, and people must defend themselves against them. There will be a struggle.

Because of these objective factors there are real possibilities for building a left alternative in Eastern Europe. The very weak left which exists now must organise publishing houses, must publish books and bulletins, must be with the workers in their struggle, their strikes, their demonstrations, with pamphlets, with leaflets, with magazines and bulletins.

The left must help the workers to produce factory magazines and newsletters. We must organise help for the workers when they are on strike, because the Walesa leader-

ship is against strikes.

It is a very ambitious programme, and we have a long way to go. But just as the right wing bourgeoisie in the West helps the right in Eastern Europe, so the left here must help the leftist groups in Eastern Europe.

The collapse of Stalinism creates the possibility for a new consciousness in the international workers' movement, and a big regroupment. We must be together in this struggle.

*You've recently had a split in the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution). What are the perspectives now of your group, the Socialist Political Centre?*

In the process of building a left alternative in Eastern Europe, we must be very careful.

We must not be sectarian in this process. It is very easy to discredit revolutionaries in Eastern Europe now, because of objective factors. For most people, Marxism and left wing ideas are the language of the oppressor.

In Poland, the labour movement is inside Solidarity, not outside. In my opinion, after all the Trotskyist experience in Poland under the martial law and since, and my individual experience in the PPS(RD), it is not possible to build a serious, big political party in this situation, with the whole labour movement inside Solidarity.

For example, I think that last December there was a sort of sectarian development in my party, the PPS(RD). We were against the Round Table [agreement between the Stalinists and Solidarity]. Our analysis was correct. Walesa and his leadership did betray Solidarity's revolutionary current in the Round Table. But on the other hand he won legality for the Solidarity trade union. And of course the workers went to the legalised trade union and not to us.

It would be stupid to be angry at the workers for going to a trade union. But our group was marginalised. And we had sectarianism in the group — fighting inside it, around a lot of currents and so on.

What has to be done now is to prepare a base for a serious left political party to emerge in the future when we have a workers' mobilisation from below. My model for this political party is the

Brazilian Workers' Party. It is a political party with deep roots in the working class and with many currents.

I think there is a big chance to build such parties in Eastern Europe — in the first place in Poland, when we have a workers' mobilisation from below and a new mass strike movement.

Now we must prepare a base. So we decided — me and my comrades — to build a socialist political centre. We will discuss on the ideological and political level. We work with journalists, with students and with workers.

At the same time we work in the workers' struggles. We help the Solidarity factory committees to publish papers.

Our political centre is an open centre. Some of us are close to the Fourth International. But it is an open centre. It is not a section or a revolutionary party.

We will discuss all the problems. At the moment we are discussing the nature of the Eastern European states and the USSR.

We are active in the municipal elections. We have a candidate, and we have our political platform.

*What's the difference between this political centre and a small political party?*

Organisationally we are more open. It is not a political party structure. It is a first step to build a political party.

*What's your view of the Solidarnosc congress?*

Solidarity is the labour movement in Poland. There is no labour movement outside Solidarity.

Inside Solidarity there are a lot of platforms, a lot of positions, a lot of groups. For me, the Walesa leadership are classical reformists. But in Poland there is no place for social democracy. If you want to be a social democrat, you must do something for the workers — shoes, housing and so on — but it is impossible in Poland.

The Walesa leadership want to turn Solidarity into a classical bureaucratic trade union. But it is difficult for them to do it. The situation in Solidarity is different from what it was at the time of the Round Table. Then, Walesa, controlled the situation by nominating people and so on. But now you have democracy in Solidarity. Workers can elect their represen-

tatives in factories and regions.

It will be very difficult for the Walesa leadership to change themselves into a labour aristocracy. They can't change their material conditions of living.

Walesa has had to explain why he moved to a better house — he published a book in the West, and he got money from that — but in our region, Lower Silesia, which is the biggest Solidarity region, with one third of all the members of Solidarity, it is impossible for the regional leadership to change their material conditions.

It will be possible, maybe, but very difficult for them to change themselves to a labour aristocracy.

And we have a new wave of radicalisation in Solidarnosc. It's not on an ideological or political level, but on the level of trade union militancy.

For example, when the Solidarity congress began in Gdansk there was a transport strike.

There were elections in the regions, and a lot of Walesa's opponents won these elections, Rulewski in Bydgoszcz, for instance, Slowik in Lodz.

It will be impossible for Walesa to control this movement in future. The problem is that in Poland there is no serious left political alternative.

My error two years ago was that I thought radical workers had to move to a left alternative. It is not true. It does not happen mechanically if there is no left publishing house, Marxist cadres and so on.

Instead you get demoralisation, frustration, aggression, some radical workers moving to the reactionary wing — we say, the fundamentalists, like Jurczyk. On the one hand, they are against austerity; on the other hand, they are chauvinistic, sometimes openly anti-semitic.

There is also an anti-abortion platform mixed with populism. It is a real problem for us.

*How strong would you say Jurczyk's current is?*

It is weak. It exists only in one region, in Szczecin. They split from Solidarity and organised a separate trade union, Solidarity 80.

It is difficult to say what the strong currents are within Solidarity. Walesa controls the situation.

But there is a kind of new left

trade union bureaucracy in Solidarity. For instance, there is the Solidarity leader in Lower Silesia, Frasyniuk. He is a real workers' leader, and he is open to the left. And if Walesa becomes president of Poland, Frasyniuk has the best chance of becoming president of Solidarity.

Frasyniuk is in our campaign against racism and anti-semitism. He wants to fight against unemployment. He is not a leftist as a conscious position, but I think we must be for such people inside Solidarity if we want to build a left current.

Walesa is the strongest in Solidarity at the moment, but some of his opponents are strong too. For instance, Slowik in Lodz, who is very close to the Church, or Rulewski in Bydgoszcz, who is not close to the Church — he is radical, and he supported demonstrations against the Church's plan to change the abortion law.

*What did your group do at the Congress?*

We had a delegate. In our policies now in Solidarity we must be careful to avoid sectarianism.

Do you want free market measures? OK — but we must control. The workers, the labour movement, society must control. Do you want to open up the Polish economy for investments from foreign control? OK — but we must control. We must have a sovereign state. Society and the labour movement must control.

We rejected Stalinism and the bureaucracy. But capitalism in Poland is Argentine capitalism, not Swedish capitalism. So we need the self-management alternative. We must control the economic situation.

Is there a democracy in our country? No. There is a danger of authoritarianism. Right-wing ideas, chauvinism, and anti-semitism are very strong. We must fight for democracy. We must fight for democracy from below, for the possibility to control the situation in every factory, in every region, and in the state.

So we explain to the workers that in Poland today the left stands for more freedom, more equality, more solidarity. We on the left are for democracy.

On this platform we are active inside Solidarity.

## 6 RACISM

# Daily racism: violence, discrimination, deportations

**'12** year old Shenara was helping out in her parents' shop in Knox Road, Forest Gate, when a white man came into the shop wearing a crash helmet to hide his face and demanding money.

"Having grabbed a few pounds, he then pulled out a bottle and lit a piece of cloth coming out of it (the bottle was filled with petrol). The man proceeded to smash the bottle behind the counter and then ran off.

"The bottle landed less than a foot away from Shenara and set fire to some papers..."

"Mrs P who uses a walking frame, heard something at her letter box one evening and went to investigate the noise...By the time she managed to get to the passageway, she could smell smoke and saw her curtains smouldering. Fortunately she managed to call for assistance..."

*Newham Monitoring Project Annual Report, 1988.*

These are just two examples of the kind of racist attacks black people in Britain face all the time. As well as petrol bombs, racists use firearms, and knives. Racial harassment can also involve verbal abuse. In 1988, 107 cases of racial harassment were reported in Newham alone.

Many black people face the threat also of deportation. "Illegal immigrant" is a cry that goes up frequently from the Tory press, intended to evoke images of secretive and evil people.

It was a Labour government that introduced "virginity testing" for women (in practice only for black women) who wanted to come to Britain. The idea was to "test" whether they were really coming here to marry.

Black people visiting Britain know only too well how severe is the interrogation they get from immigration officials, who refuse to believe that they don't intend to try to stay, confiscate their passports for long periods, and generally harass.

And people who have lived in Britain for years can suddenly discover they are "illegal immigrants" and get kicked out. The best known recent case was the Sri Lankan Viraj Mendis, who was

eventually deported to Sri Lanka after over a year in sanctuary in a church in Manchester. He was known to be an opponent of the Sri Lankan government, and his life would be in danger if he returned, but the British government was determined to send him back.

But there are hundreds of deportation cases: men and women separated from each other; mother separated from their children because the Home Office refuses to believe that they are really married, or really related. Viraj Mendis had been in Britain for fourteen years. Others have been here longer, sometimes all their lives, and are "sent back" to a country they don't even know.

Deportations show that racism in Britain is not only a problem of a few individuals with nasty ideas. Racism exists within the institutions of the state. The whole immigration system is inevitably racist: immigration officials have to administer racist laws, the essential content of which is to obstruct the entry and residence here only of black people.

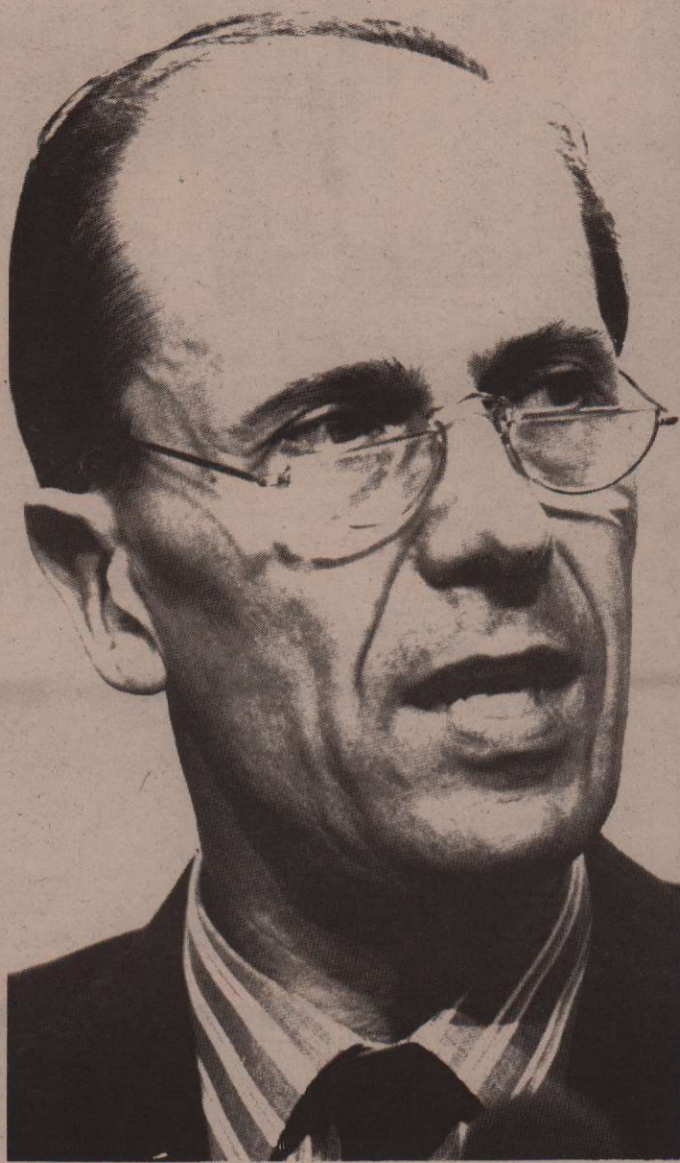
But it's not only black people under threat of deportation who suffer racism. Discrimination exists at every level of society despite laws supposed to prevent it.

Black people are overwhelmingly concentrated in the worst and lowest paid jobs, and have a disproportionately high number of unemployed, living in the worst inner city areas. Far from causing unemployment, as the racist myth would have it, black people suffer more from it.

Private employers are notoriously racist. The Department of Employment has policy to take legal action against racist employers, detected for example through job centres. In practice, very little gets done, as there is neither the will nor the legislation to enforce anti-racist intentions.

The labour movement has, on the whole, a poor record of fighting state racism; its record against fascism is better. But the labour movement's failure in this regard helps alienate many black people, very often in particular the most politically active.

It is in the interests of the whole working class that racism is ended. Racism means disunity, and a disunited labour movement will be unable to defend itself.



Norman Tebbit



## Tebbit plays the racist card

**N**orman Tebbit thinks that if you don't support England at cricket, you aren't really British, and by implication shouldn't be here.

Obviously, he wasn't talking about Scottish or Welsh people living in England. Nor for that matter was he bothered about Americans or Australians living in Britain, most of whom are white. Norman Tebbit's bugbear is black people.

His comments to an American magazine, reiterated on British radio, were a cynical political ploy. Norman Tebbit knows full well that he is stirring up racism, for all his dubious protestations that he is an

"integrationist". Tebbit thinks that if the Tories play the racist card they can reverse their decline in the opinion polls.

Undoubtedly he has already had an effect. The *News of the World* last Sunday headlined "We smash £2m illegal immigrant marriage racket". Tebbit is helping create a climate that the tabloids can use.

The modern world was created by a racial "melting pot". The United States, for example, is a nation created by immigration. And the lack of integration of the different immigrant groups in the US is far greater than anything Tebbit refers to. Italian, Hispanic, Chinese, Irish, Polish, Jewish: these groups

all retain a distinct identity in the United States.

The migration of mainly black people from the ex-colonial world to the industrialised countries of Europe is likewise a feature of twentieth century civilisation. If there is a failure of "integration", it is for one clear reason: the immigrants found the societies they came to unwelcoming and hostile — in a word, racist.

Tebbit knows that his outburst will work against integration, by intensifying the climate of racism.

And what should "integration" mean? For people to live together peacefully, without discrimination, without racism, need not necessari-

## Colonialism and the roots of racism

**R**acism isn't something new to Britain. It didn't arrive from the West Indies or India with Commonwealth immigrants.

It was brought back together with the loot from the pirate raids the British bosses mounted against other countries and civilisations.

It is deeply rooted in Britain's history as first a colonial power, and then a major power of modern imperialism.

Britain's colonial and imperialist system was barbarous and savage: there has never been a system of intense exploitation that wasn't.

Britain forced the Opium trade on China by war. The history of India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a history of plunder and

massacres by the British boss class. Britain enslaved Africa, having already built the wealth of its rulers on the inhuman trade in black African slaves.

These things had to be 'justified' somehow. They were inevitably justified by making out that the victims of British rule were inferior, uncivilised, outlandish, less than human.

But for the most part anti-'coloured' racism at that period found its outlet overseas rather than within Britain itself. (There was violent racism directed against the Irish immigrants, who suffered riots and pogroms.)

For a period, moreover, the working class retained a remarkable degree of immunity to the virus of anti-Black racism. For example,

during the American Civil War, the Northern states which stood for the abolition of slavery blockaded the ports of the slave-owning South. The blockade meant that the English cotton mills either closed or went onto short time, and as a result thousands of working people in Lancashire were thrown near to starvation.

Under pressure from the mill owners, the British government threatened to break the blockade. The mill owners, who had lost only profits, were solidly for the South. But the cotton workers, who stood to lose their lives as a result of the blockade, organised massive protests against the government's plans and declared that their own misery was as nothing compared to the evils of slavery.

Thus the British working class can look beyond its own apparently most immediate 'interests' — or what the lying propaganda told it were 'its' interests.

Yet today there is a heavy streak of anti-black racism within the working class. Its roots are in the British bosses' empire.

The more recent colonial wars of Britain against 'native' peoples struggling only for the right to control their own countries were fought by conscript armies, made up mostly of young workers. These wars have created a poisonous feedback of racism into the working class.

The British trade unionist sent to suppress the revolts in Malaya had to be indoctrinated with a typically imperialist contempt for those he was fighting. Lest he sympathise

with his victims, he was encouraged to see them as from another species.

Look at the Americans in Vietnam, doing work such as the casual slaughter in ditches of women, children, babies and old men at My Lai. Most people in a 'normal' state of mind wouldn't be able to do that to cattle, let alone human beings.

Learning to live with this sort of thing involved quite ordinary, even anti-war GIs, in thinking of the Vietnamese (whose civilisation is older than that of Europe) as inferior beings, whom they called 'Gooks'.

Britain's dealings, despite a carefully constructed image of benevolence, have been as ruthless, if less technological, as those of Nixon, Johnson and Kennedy in Vietnam.

# Racism and the working class



Photo: Andrew Moore

## No segregation in the schools!

**Jenny Carney, the woman who had her child removed from a school in Cleveland because she was "learning Pakistani" should not have been allowed to do so.**

Even if the woman herself is not racist, her action can only give encouragement to others who are. If other education authorities were to follow Cleveland's example, there would be a tide of racism in our schools.

Isn't it legitimate for a parent to be worried about their child's education, if the majority of the pupils don't have English as a first language?

No. Young children learn languages extremely fast, and even

if, hypothetically, the children of immigrants do not speak good English when they start school at the age of five, they will speak it by the time they are six. If white kids learn an Asian language in the meantime, which is possible, all to the good.

There is no evidence at all that short-term language problems at an early stage in education have any detrimental effect. On average, Asian children do better in English schools than English children.

In England the language of instruction is always English. The children for whom there might be a problem are the ones who don't speak good English.

In many parts of the world, it is common for the middle class and the rich to send their kids to "English schools", that is schools where the language of instruction is English. The result is that the children get a good education and learn to speak English more or less natively.

If in England (and it does not happen) children were taught in Urdu, the result would be that the children received the same education as children anywhere else, and into the bargain learned to speak Urdu fluently.

The desire to withdraw a child from a school where many students are black comes not from evidence of the child's learning difficulties, but from the parents' own irrational, and in the final analysis racist, fears and assumptions.

Ms Carney herself may not be a racist; she is married to a Nigerian, apparently. But the attitudes she has expressed feed racism.

And Cleveland education authority, in upholding her "right" to remove her daughter from the school, has contributed to racism based on ignorance and irrational fear.

working class conscripts.

How can working class involvement in such deeds (involvement being active participation, general political collusion and subsequent acceptance of the ruling class's propaganda version of the event) — how can this fail to be a virulent well-spring of working class racism?

Building on these foundations, the British rulers' propaganda machine has worked to turn workers' anger at social shortages and life under capitalism away from those responsible and onto black workers. Today, a septic stream of racism exists among workers, many of whom are in other ways quite class conscious and even militant.

It is a racism based on insecurity, ignorance and the consciousness of 'difference' hardened into prejudice and bigotry.

It's no use arguing with a hard-core racist. Mere words are of no use. They are sick people who need to focus their hate on another group of people.

Let's look, though, at some of the common, reasonable-seeming arguments of many white workers. The bosses' newspapers plug these ideas and arguments — about the social services, the 'overcrowded island', etc — with one thing in mind: to divide the working class against itself, to drive in the ruling class wedge of racism.

They are arguments that must be taken up every day. How must militants answer them?

*Why immigration at all? Why not everyone to his or her own country?*

Well, 'everyone to their own country' has hardly been part of the British philosophy. In many countries in Africa, for example, the British immigrants, unlike the harassed and exploited immigrant population of this country, formed a minority which exploits and dominates the rest of the population.

The movement of workers from the poorer countries to the richer countries is an essential part of capitalism. Integral to capitalism is the existence of 'free labour' — workers moving from the countryside and small towns into the big city employment centres.

As capitalism became a worldwide system, so did 'free labour', and today there is hardly a capitalist country in the world which does not have an immigrant population.

But Britain's big increase in post war immigration came as the deliberate result of government policy. There was a labour shortage in many basic industries after the war and this became acute in the early fifties. The government mounted lavish recruitment campaigns in Africa, India, Pakistan and the West Indies.

Tories toured Uganda and Kenya appealing to the African

Asians that they should take British passports and come to Britain. Potential immigrants were promised a fuller life in the British 'motherland' and many took up the offer.

*Hasn't immigration caused unemployment?*

By the early '70s immigration from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the West Indies had been practically stopped except for family reunions.

Yet it is that same period, since the early '70s, which has seen unemployment rise from a few hundred thousand to two, three or four million.

Unemployment is part and parcel of capitalism: with every slump in the economy, unemployment rockets. It is sheer lunacy to think that unemployment can be solved by a campaign against black people, since this would disrupt the working class unity which is essential to fighting unemployment.

We must demand the right to work as a right for the whole working class and in particular for black workers who are, more often than not, the first to be made redundant.

*How can one fight racism when it is deep and widespread?*

This is not easy. First we must attack its roots by explaining Britain's past and present role as an imperialist power.

There is also an immediate daily struggle here and now. Black people themselves have started to fight back and to fight for their rights. They are not any longer prepared to be kicked around.

White militants must defend the right of blacks to fight back and to organise separately, politically, culturally and in any other way they think fit, and explain in the factories what it is they fight back against.

We must also fight for working class unity — black and white. White workers must fight against the bosses' (and in many cases, trade union bureaucrats) attempts to divide workers by blatant discrimination.

## Anti-Jewish attacks in London

**The rise of anti-semitism in Eastern Europe is well-known. Less so is the rise of anti-semitic attacks in Britain.**

Last week, six orthodox Jewish children in Stamford Hill, North London, were attacked in a taxi by thugs spraying a noxious gas through the windows. A religious school in Lampard Grove has been attacked every day for the last month, its windows broken.

A student at Yesodey Hatorah School had to be taken to hospital when his glasses were shattered by a stone. The same day, a man was hit on the head by a bottle thrown from a doorway, a woman was mugged and a 14 year-old boy was attacked

by six youths.

An elderly woman was knocked to the ground by a man armed with a dangerous Kung Fu weapon: some Jewish teenagers later disarmed him.

One yeshivah student told the *Jewish Chronicle*: "We're scared to walk alone. We can't protect ourselves — even in the middle of Stamford Hill."

It is often assumed that anti-semitism is an old-fashioned sort of racism that no-one bothers with any more. It is even common on the left to hear people dismissing anti-semitism as a serious issue.

But it is a serious issue. The labour movement must be aware of the growth of anti-semitic attacks, and respond to them.

ly imply that the "ethnic minorities" have to lose what is distinct to them, their own language and cultures; still less need it imply having to support England at cricket!

Tebbit's comments are against the backdrop of the passing of a law allowing a few thousands Hong Kong Chinese into Britain. His comments will help provide those immigrants with an inhospitable new home.

The labour movement must unite to defend the rights of all black people living in Britain, and of those who wish to live here in the future. Racism can only make the labour movement weaker. If Tebbit's outburst is the signal for a renewed tide of establishment racism in this country, the labour movement will have to be ready to fight it.

So far, now as in the past, the Labour leaders have not given an inspiring example. They have been more concerned to show that they are against immigration than to defend the rights of Chinese immigrants. That cowardice must end.

Norman Tebbit, incidentally, supports Middlesex cricket team. Middlesex was abolished in 1965.

In the early 1950s in Kenya the so-called Mau Mau rebellion was savagely suppressed by the British Army (led, among others by Frank Kitson, later the boss class's expert on how most effectively to use force within Britain — against the working class).

According to newspaper legend it was a series of savage massacres of innocent and immensely precious white 'civilisers'. In fact it was a heroic revolt by the Kikuyu people to reclaim their stolen land; and they were forced to form a 'secret society' in the same way and for the same reasons as the first English trade unions were secret societies.

The whites who died can be counted on one's fingers. But between 5,000 and 10,000 Africans were slaughtered by the British Army — an army mainly made up of

# Lessons from the 1960s

**"Thirteen years of Tory misrule": 1991 will bring the 13th year of Tory government since 1979, and maybe the end of it. In this article Martin Thomas looks back at the last time Labour won office after 13 years of Tory government, in 1964.**

**O**n 8 October 1959 Labour lost its third general in a row.

The Tory prime minister, Harold Macmillan, had told the voters: "You've never had it so good." Over the 1950s living standards had risen faster than ever before in Britain, though sluggishly compared to some other advanced capitalist countries.

The Labour Party was sluggish, right-wing, and bureaucratic. Its individual membership had declined from 1,105,000 in 1953 to 848,000 in 1959. The big trade unions, TGWU, G&M, AEU and NUM had been largely dominated by the right wing.

Rank-and-file industrial militancy and shop stewards' organisation were growing, and beginning to alarm the ruling class; left-winger Frank Cousins had become general secretary of the TGWU in 1956; but the union block votes still mostly belonged to the Cold War right wing. Between 1948 and 1960 the platform suffered not one single defeat at Labour Party conference, except on a minor issue in 1950.

Constituencies which wanted to replace their MPs — as Liverpool Exchange wanted to replace Bessie Braddock in 1954-5 — were told by the National Executive Committee that they could do no such thing. Witch-hunters pursued activists who might be involved in any of a long list of Stalinist, Trotskyist and other left-wing "proscribed organisations".

All the Trotskyist groups were nonetheless active in the Labour Party. The most important of them, Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League, had its organisation and its newspaper proscribed, but managed to maintain fairly vigorous activity. The forerunners of today's SWP, Militant, Socialist Action and Socialist Outlook were too small for the Party leadership to bother to proscribe them.

Although the Trotskyist groups had grown since the 1956 crisis in the Communist Party, that was from a very low point in the early '50s. The British labour movement of the 1950s was a harsh and unfriendly environment for revolutionary Marxist ideas.

First indications were that the 1959 election defeat would push Labour further to the right. Sociologists argued that working-class solidarity was fading away, being replaced by the values of consumer society. At the Party conference that followed the election,

*"A mood of dissatisfaction with the status quo was abroad. Public opinion was more liberal..."*

Party leader Hugh Gaitskell called for the formal removal of Clause Four of Labour's constitution, with its commitment to public ownership. That same year, at Bad Godesburg, the German Social-Democratic party had dropped its verbal adherence to Marxism and common ownership, changed the colour of its membership cards from red to blue, abandoned the use of the term 'Comrade', and declared itself a "people's", not a workers' party.

But Gaitskell soon had to back down on Clause Four. The shift in the labour movement was to the left, not the right.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had been founded in 1958. By April 1960 it could mobilise 100,000 people in Trafalgar Square.

A series of alarming events kept its demonstrations big throughout the first half of the '60s. In May 1960 an American spy plane was



Wilson

brought down over the USSR; in August 1961 the Berlin Wall was erected; in October 1962 the US and USSR seemed close to war over the Soviet missile bases in Cuba.

The October 1960 Labour Party conference voted for unilateral nuclear disarmament. Gaitskell furiously promised to "fight and

fight and fight again" to reverse the decision; and fight he did. The leaders of the Left, MPs like Michael Foot, proved weak and hesitant and by 1961 Gaitskell was able to get a large majority against unilateralism.

Nevertheless, the right wing's hold on the Party was weakening. In 1959 Labour had also decided to revive a youth movement. The Young Socialists, drawing heavily on CND, provided an arena for the Trotskyists to grow rapidly.

The Healyites were most successful; they had the largest organisation and were most energetic about going out to recruit working-class youth, especially through social activities ("Wiganisation").

The witch-hunters were losing ground. In 1962 they tried to expel Bertrand Russell — a famous social-democratic philosopher, 90 years old, and a founder member of the Labour Party — for attending a Stalinist peace conference. They had to retreat in great confusion.

In January 1963 Gaitskell died. The ensuing Labour leadership election was won by the left-wing candidate, Harold Wilson.

Wilson prided himself on his abilities as a political manipulator. During the storm over unilateral nuclear disarmament, he had boasted that he could draft at least seven different defence policies capable of uniting the Labour Party; and he told a journalist that his aim was to hold up the banner of nationalisation while leading the Labour Party away from it. For a while he succeeded.

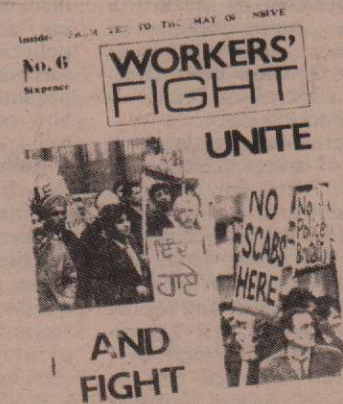
Increasingly aware that British capitalism was lagging in world competition, the Tories turned to "planning" and towards Europe in the early '60s. But their regime was decaying. Wilson's denunciations

of "thirteen wasted years", "the grouse-moor mentality", "the old boy network", "parasitic speculators", and "candy-floss commercialism", struck a chord.

There was nothing at all socialist about this, nor about Wilson's proclaimed alternative, "the white heat of technological revolution". The big-business weekly, *The Economist*, felt able to support Labour in the 1964 general election.

Undoubtedly, however, a mood of dissatisfaction with the status quo was abroad. Public opinion was more liberal and self-assertive than it had been in the Cold War 1950s. Rising rank-and-file industrial militancy was one aspect; another was to be reflected in the fact that the sole positive achievement of the 1964-70 Labour government would be liberal reforms of the law on abortion, divorce, homosexuality, the death penalty, and censorship.

Labour won the general election in October 1964. In September



**Workers' Fight:** arguing for an orientation to the Labour Party, but without Militant's schematism

## WHERE WE STAND

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

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under

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

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

workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

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# The left in the sixties

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**THE NEWSLETTER**  
Weekly Journal of the Socialist Labour League

**UNITY IN ACTION BY LABOUR'S LEFT CAN DEFEAT THE RIGHT WING**

Open letter to a Labour Party member

**The Newsletter**  
Weekly Journal of the Central Committee of the Socialist Labour League

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Standing ovation for festival's 'labour history' documentary

**Force Tories to resign!** Militants take up call

£1,250 February Appeal Fund stands at £207.40

The time to fight is NOW!

**Socialist Labour League, later Workers Revolutionary Party: 1959:** a relatively sane attitude to the Labour Party though coupled with serious illusions in Michael Foot. **1967:** call on

Labour Party members to quit and join the SLL. **1971:** 'Build a mass revolutionary party' becomes main slogan, coupled with demands on the Tories to resign.

Labour Government imposed a wage freeze. In November 1967 it devalued the pound, and in January 1968 it made public spending cuts and re-introduced prescription charges. In February 1968 it responded to the persecution of the Asians in Kenya — who were mostly British citizens — by introducing a law to stop them coming to Britain. In 1969 it tried to introduce anti-strike laws ("In Place of Strife"), and retreated only after strong protests from the trade unions. The Labour Party conference repeatedly condemned the Government's policy on Vietnam. But Labour Party membership declined from 830,000 in 1964 to 690,000 in 1970. The real decline was probably greater than shown by the official figures.

On other pages: Connolly and 1916 rising; Indonesia: 21 May 1968; Cowley: 'Workers' Courts' Monopolies

**MILITANT**  
FOR LABOUR AND YOUTH

**NOW CARRY OUT A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME**

Militant 1966: After Wilson's re-election in 1966, Militant suggested he carry out socialist revolution. Surprisingly, he ignored them.

**The Week**  
A NEWS ANALYSIS FOR SOCIALISTS  
Vol. 3, No. 26, 16th Nov. 1966

Tobacco  
Workers say  
"Re-instate Ken Coates"

**ZURICH OR WESTMINSTER**

**International**  
A SURVEY OF BRITISH AND WORLD AFFAIRS

**The Fight against 'In Place of Strife'**

**PERMANENT REVOLUTION REACHES U.K.** **WOMEN: Why we are marching**

**Labour Worker**  
HOUSING - LABOUR MUST ACT

To do this effectively, some type of socialist organisation, within the Labour Party is required. It is a sign of the lack of seriousness of the Parliamentary Left, in the past, right back to the time of Bevan, that it never really saw this need and contented itself with operating within parliamentary confines. Only when such an organisation exists will it be possible for the Left to thrash out its problems and articulate its point of view. Then the Parliamentary Left will lose its separate identity. It will become simply part of a broad movement, expressing socialist ideas and struggling for socialism. And, as it echoes the opinions of the Left in the country, so its influence in Parliament will increase.

Guess which group this paper belonged to. Labour Worker later changed its name to — yes — Socialist Worker... and took a slightly different line on the Labour Party! Paul Foot edited Labour Worker. The quotation is from 'Open Letter to a Left MP', 5 August 1966.

**The Black Dwarf**

**Fred Halliday on the Dialectics of Christmas. Imperialism by Malcolm Caldwell.**

**The International Marxist Group 1966:** indistinguishable from the 'little Englandism' dominant on the left. They ask the question who runs Britain: Zurich or Westminster? **1969:** The struggle in Ireland is merely the earthly form of the ghost of 'permanent revolution', flitting

**Red Mole**

**SMASH PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE**

Middle East/Chad/Ireland/Nigeria  
Where are the trade-unions going?

across the UK (!) on its way to Vietnam. 'The Black Dwarf', as well as this issue on Christmas, carried headlines like 'All power to the campus soviets'. **1970:** 'Red Mole' thinks a zooming guerrilla will start the world revolution.

1965, with great fanfare, it presented its National Plan for the British economy. That Plan soon became waste paper; but, with a few reforms (trade union law, abolition of the death penalty, tenants' rights, free prescriptions), the Labour government was popular enough to win a greatly increased majority in May 1966. Things started going wrong for Wilson very soon afterwards. But in the meantime the Healyites, the biggest Trotskyist faction, had left the Labour Party in 1964-5. After winning control of the Young Socialists in 1963-4, they

had faced a witch-hunt. Instead of ducking and weaving, as they had done with previous witch-hunts, the Healyites went out to get themselves expelled. Healy had become intoxicated by their successes in the youth movement and thought he could declare an "alternative leadership" to rival the Labour Party. For 15 hard years, the Trotskyists had battled against the odds in the Labour Party, always looking to the day when the reformist leaders would be "exposed" in office and the disappointed workers would turn to the Marxists. Things could turn out to be more complicated than that, but there cannot be much doubt that a serious Trotskyist

group could have made much headway in the Labour Party after 1966. Yet the Healyites chose to quit when Wilson was still riding high, and only months before he would predictably start to be discredited. For a while they maintained a verbal orientation to the Labour Party, with slogans like "Make the Left MPs fight!" and "Stop Wilson's Visit to Washington", but, rapidly and inevitably, the Healyites eliminated themselves as a force in the Labour Party. The remaining Trotskyist groups were growing, but ineffectual. Militant was dim, lacklustre and sluggish. It prided itself on how its complacent faith in "perspectives" contrasted with the energy of the

Healyites. The IS (SWP) was explicitly anti-Leninist and anyway drifted out of the Labour Party in the late '60s. The IMG (forerunner of Socialist Action and Socialist Outlook) was tiny, and invisible within the various projects it adopted. Thus the discrediting of Wilson, when it came, produced not so much rebellion as an exodus from the Labour Party. The United States started bombing North Vietnam in 1965; Wilson supported the Americans. In May-July 1966 Wilson vehemently campaigned against a national seafarers' strike. In July 1966 the

By 1970, the rule according to which Constituency Labour Parties were counted as having a minimum of 1000 members whatever their real membership was inflating the figures seriously. It meant that the official membership figure could not drop below about 650,000 even if every single member left. When the rule was abolished in 1981, the official membership figure immediately fell to 348,000. The latest figure is 266,000. Labour activists turned to the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign — which, founded in 1966, had 100,000 on the streets of London by 1967-8 — and to trade union militancy. Strike activity was increasing. Hugh Scanlon became president of the AEU in 1967; Jack Jones became general secretary of the TGWU in 1969; both of them encouraged shop stewards' organisation. Thousands of students became radicalised, but looked to the far left rather than the Labour Party. Virtually all college Labour Clubs were disaffiliated by the Labour Party. Militant remained solidly attached to Labour Party routine, and indifferent to the radical movements outside the Labour Party. The other Trotskyist groups, rightly, oriented to the new radical movements. Wrongly, they tended to argue that the Labour Party was dead or dying. For almost 20 years they had regarded it as almost axiomatic that political progress would come through the emergence of a left-wing current in the Labour Party, the "workers' party". Now they flipped over to an equally mechanical perspective of somehow by-passing the Labour Party. Yet Labour remained the political wing of the mass labour movement. Despite considerable tensions between Labour Party leaders and trade union leaders, the link between the unions and the Party was not seriously shaken. It would have been possible for Trotskyists to orient to the new radical movements while retaining a foothold in the Labour Party and explaining to new recruits the long-term strategic necessity of tackling the Labour Party. But no group did that. The call for revolutionary unity made by the IS (SWP) in 1968 did generate a loose, leftward-moving, rapidly growing, and relatively open and democratic group of some 1000 members — contrasting with the deserted and demoralised Labour Party wards. Some people in IS (SWP) did write about the strategic importance of the Labour Party and the need to work inside it in future — but even they left it to the small print, not emphasised sufficiently. Even they were swept away by the mood of ultra-leftism — a mood which severely damaged the left's ability to build something solid out of the reaction against the Labour Government's policies.

# Hollywood's ultimate icon

## CINEMA

**John Cunningham looks at the film career of Greta Garbo**

In his book 'Mythologies', published in 1957, the French writer Roland Barthes said of Greta Garbo:

"Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre [magic drink or love potion], when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced."

And it is probably for her face that Garbo is best remembered (as well as her oft-quoted remarks about wanting to be alone).

Often shown in tight close-up, as in the famous portrait of Clarence Sinclair Bull, Garbo's face appears almost as a mask, disembodied, often the hair, neck and shoulders not visible. White and ghostlike, it emerges from a diffuse black background.

Yet at one level the face was as manufactured as any other Hollywood icon — Dietrich's legs, Monroe's blond hair. As Walter Benjamin so ably put it — "The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality', the phony spell of a commodity."

What made Garbo that little bit different was the element of ambiguity. Her expression is often ambiguous, the smile somewhat enigmatic, the voice wavering, uncertain — a woman of mystery, to use the cliché.

The film moguls managed even to capitalise on this aspect of the Garbo persona, however. One magazine in the '30s referred to her as "that weird and wonderful woman from the far north".

Most of all, it was her androgynous beauty which encapsulated her appeal and mystery. It should come as no surprise, once this idea is accepted, that Garbo was the ideal vehicle for such roles as 'Queen Christina', where the Queen of Sweden masquerades as a man. In the first version of 'Anna Karenina' in which she appeared ('Love', directed by Edmund Goulding, in 1927) she transfers all



her feeling on to her son, played in the film by an extremely androgynous 10 year old called Freddie Bartholomew.

Garbo at this time was only 22, and the scenes between them have a peculiar and very powerful effect. There is less erotic power in this relationship in the 'Anna Karenina' of 1935 (directed by George Cukor); however, the understated but ever-present 'mothering' of her

lover Vronsky adds another layer of ambiguity.

Curiously enough, the costume dramas of the 1930s for which she is probably best remembered today ('Queen Christina', 'Anna Karenina' and 'Marie Walewska') were not box-office successes and found their greatest appeal among women audiences. Her almost stoic composure and somewhat detached 'Scandinavian coolness' in the face of disaster and tragedy evoked a response from women who didn't identify with her earlier 'femme fatale' roles (such as 'The Temptress', 1926).

Men, it seemed, found her unsettling or even threatening. A contemporary critic Don Herold advised his readers to "...detach themselves from the Garbo spell", but the writer Cecilia Ager wrote: "Garbo in 'Camille' has character and standing, and, surprisingly, warmth. You don't just admire her you like her. You find her human at last. You actually feel sorry for her — nor does she sacrifice any of her natural dignity to win your sympathy."

Originally portrayed as the 'Moon Goddess' (in contradistinction to Mary Pickford's 'Hearth Goddess'), Garbo was after a time able to transcend the role that was thrust upon her — the sexual escape route from domesticity, the vamp or the scarlet woman, the polar opposite of the Pickford virgin whose only path led to the altar.

As such Garbo displayed an inner strength, perhaps best manifested not so much in her "I want to be alone" remarks, but in the consis-

tent and determined way she put them into practice.

In certain aspects of her life and work Garbo was able to define her own self, carve out at least some space for herself and her work in a way few other actresses could.

Bette Davis is one name that springs to mind for she, like Garbo, had a certain indefinable, ambiguousness about her. In this aspect if in no other Garbo was able to resist the totalising domination of tinsel town values.

She was able to show that behind the face-mask was something else, deeper and stronger — still perhaps resisting accurate definition, but you'll be able to see and feel it in her films.

## Not so brassy...

## TV

By Vicki Morris

It is the eve of the Second World War and the War is about to impinge on the rather insular community of 'Brass' (now removed to London).

Unfortunately it seems also to have changed the humour of 'Brass', although, admittedly, this was only a scene-setting first episode.

To put the goings on in historical context, Bradley Hardacre is about to make a damn great fortune out of the war: "Men's lives are blades of grass... and them that makes the mowing machines 'll harvest a lot of brass".

Indeed, the plot gave him the chance to disastrously divert the course of history by delaying Hitler's reply to Neville Chamberlain's ultimatum, which would have sealed the affair amicably with the two parties carving up such spheres of global influence as the Isle of Wight.

This, was the funniest bit of the programme. Unscrupulous Hardacre foils the chances of an unscrupulous peace.

We caught up with the latest on the Hardacre brood and, there, it is business as usual. Isabelle, for instance, is set to become the air-raid siren as she relieves young men setting off for war — perhaps never to return — of their virginity.

There is a new George and a new Austin. Both seem a bit too real to be funny. So does the set. There's the usual wealth of playing on words — but lots of it isn't jokes.

It ends up just sounding like clichés and purple prose, not a send up of those things. If the humour doesn't get sparkier, the programme is in danger of looking like the social melodrama it takes off.

It's going to end up like a jocular 'Upstairs, Downstairs' given that it is wartime. There might be too much temptation to concentrate on outside events, and to lose what was always the essence of the humour — the class interaction of the rich and poor families.

Or, if not so much that actual interaction, the way it has been treated by great literary characters like D H Lawrence, and others not so great.

For that reason, it's impossible to do a 'Black Adder' where the same blackguardly upper-class character scrapes through the centuries. 'Brass', I fear, is a child of the '30s and of the very specific conditions it portrays.

If now, as happened in real life, everyone pulls together, the tedium might be relieved by interpersonal niggles and the appearance of the odd GI, but, on first showing, 'Brass' ain't what it used to be.

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# From Colombia to China, rulers repress trade unionists

**Stan Crooke surveys the persecution of trade unionists across the world.**

**I**n many countries trade unionists face the daily threat of arrest, imprisonment, torture or murder.

A new report from Amnesty International describes how the families of trade unionists are threatened and harassed. Trade union offices are ransacked and bombed, often with the approval of the state authorities.

In **COLOMBIA** over 300 members of the trade union federation CUT have been murdered since its establishment in November 1986. Members of the Colombian Federation of Teachers in particular have faced a high level of violence — 50 were killed and eight “disappeared” in 1988 alone — as a result of the union’s decision to promote critical thinking in the classroom.

The killings have been carried out by members of the paramilitary “death squads”, acting under the command of, or with the approval of, the regular armed forces. Some murders have been committed by members of the army and police themselves, or by gunmen hired by local landowners.

Hundreds of trade union leaders and activists were murdered or “disappeared” in **GUATEMALA** prior to the election of a civilian administration in 1986. Despite the end of military government, trade unionists continue to face harassment, beatings and even worse.

The Coca Cola bottling plant in Guatemala City is at the forefront of the struggle for trade union rights in the country. Trade unionists there have been threatened, the plant has been machine-gunned, and two union leaders were recently murdered after having been tortured.

Since the Tiananmen Square

massacre in **CHINA** last year, thousands of critics and pro-democracy activists, including in particular leading figures in the Workers Autonomous Federation (the first free trade union in Stalinist China), have been arrested or continue to live in the underground.

One example is Bai Dongping, a 26 year old railway worker and central committee member of the Workers Autonomous Federation. He has been charged with participation in “counter-revolutionary rebellion”. The other charges which he faces have not been made public, nor has his place of detention.

In **SUDAN**, where a military coup was carried out in 1989, an indefinite state of emergency remains in force, and all political parties, trade unions, and professional associations are banned.

Over a hundred trade unionists were arrested after the coup, and many remain in detention without charge or trial. Under the emergency legislation organising a strike is an offence punishable by death. One member of the now-banned Doctors’ Union was sentenced to death (according to unconfirmed reports the sentence has been commuted) for calling a doctors’ strike and participating in a 10-minute long preparatory meeting.

Since the military coup in **TURKEY** in 1980 Labour Day celebrations have been banned, and assemblies on 1 May have been the target of intense security operations resulting in many arrests.

Workers arrested last year for the crime of carrying leaflets calling for non-violent celebrations on May Day were tortured during interrogation and sentenced to up to five years in prison.

A new wave of repression has hit trade unionists in **EL SALVADOR** since the current government took office last year. Trade unionists have been the victims of detention, torture and “disappearance”. Union offices have been raided and

bombed.

In October of last year the offices of the trade union FENASTRAS were bombed in San Salvador during a conference of trade union leaders. Six were killed immediately, and another four died in hospital. Members of the police and other branches of the Salvadorian security forces are believed to have been responsible for the attack.

Many trade unionists in **SOUTH AFRICA**, including union leaders such as Noel Williams, vice-president of the Western Cape branch of the trade union federation COSATU, have benefitted from the government’s recent decision to lift restriction orders imposed on hundreds of former detainees. Noel Williams had been detained without trial for 15 months.

But trade union activity in South Africa continues to be hampered and obstructed by the security forces to a much more serious degree than is the case in Western Europe, with protests over labour legislation and working conditions regularly being violently broken up.

Violence against trade unionists remains a recurring problem in **EGYPT**. In one of the worst cases last year police used tear-gas, electric batons and live ammunition to break up a sit-in at a steelworks near Cairo. One worker was shot dead, and 600 were detained. The strike leader was tortured through the application of electric shocks, and his interrogators threatened to rape his wife.

In the weeks following the sit-in, many prominent supporters of workers’ rights, including other trade unionists, journalists, lawyers and human rights activists, were arrested and placed in detention, in order to stifle criticism of government policies and actions.

In **YUGOSLAVIA** striking mineworkers have been on trial since October of last year on charges of “counter-revolutionary undermining of the social order”. Among those on trial is the miners’

trade union branch secretary. They face prison sentences of between 10 and 12 years, or even the death penalty.

Over 1,000 people, including many trade union activists, have been killed in land disputes in **BRAZIL** since 1980. In December of last year the President of the Rural Workers Trade Union of Xapuri was shot dead outside his home. The Brazilian government has done little or nothing to stop the killings.

Attempts to build a new trade union federation, Chonnohyop, in **SOUTH KOREA** have been systematically repressed by the government. Hundreds of police firing tear gas attacked the inaugural rally of Chonnohyop in January this year, and arrested a hundred participants.

Chonnohyop calls for an extension of trade union rights, improved labour laws, and the right to cooperate with dissident organisations. The government has denounced the trade union as “leftist” and illegal, and threatened to arrest activists for violating labour laws which ban “third party intervention” — including intervention by a trade union! — in labour disputes.

Socialists must fight for free trade unions, East and West, North and South.

*Information from Amnesty International newsletter, April 1990.*

## Victory at Rover

**T**he 37-hour week agreed at Rover this week is an important victory for the trade union movement.

On the same day, 4,500 workers at four Lucas and two Weir Group sites have voted for strike action in favour of a 35-hour week.

The sites voted by an 82% majority for strike action, although one other Lucas site voted not to strike.

The deal at Rover, Longbridge, was reached without strike action having to be called. Workers are to be balloted on the deal. Engineers’ leader Bill Jordan commented that Rover was “the first major car producer to concede our demand for reduced working time.”

The Longbridge decision is sure to encourage other workers in engineering who have been fighting for a 35-hour week for the last year.

We need national strike action in pursuit of the full claim for a 35-hour week without strings. Other engineering plants should follow the Lucas and Weir examples.

The engineering bosses can afford a shorter working week. The workers can’t afford not to have one. And a victory on this front in engineering would be a victory for the whole labour movement. With a shorter working week, not only will workers’ lives be better, more people can be given jobs.

Support the Lucas and Weir strikes. 35 hours now!

## Solidarity should begin at home

**By Stan Crooke**

**W**orkers at the NALGO Sports and Social Club in Liverpool City Centre returned to work last Friday (20 April) after a 4-week long strike, the longest strike ever against a trade union employer.

The club employs 3 full-time and 3 casual workers. The full-time workers are badly paid and, despite having worked there for a year, only one of them has received a job description and a contract of employment.

The casuals are also badly paid, in one case even below the national minimum rate of pay recommended by trade unions.

The club’s management constantly failed to provide kitchen staff with adequate clothing. Equipment in the kitchen was of a low standard and wrongly laid out as regards safety for workers. Repeated visits from the health and safety inspectors culminated in the threat of the imposition of a fine unless appropriate improvements were carried out.

When Liverpool NALGO called on its members to strike for a day in support of the ambulance workers on the Day of Action in January of this year, the club management insisted that the workers come in to work for the full day and stage only a 15-minute protest at midday.

And when NALGO members were out on strike last summer in their own pay dispute, workers at the club had to work longer hours, starting at 7.30 in the morning, and sometimes not getting away until 8.00 in the evening.

Appeals by workers at the club for an improvement in their conditions were

swallowed up in the internecine factional warfare which characterises the Liverpool NALGO branch and its sub-committee, a veritable mini-Beirut of the trade union movement.

Members of the club’s general management committee, especially a number of those who served on the committee last year, seemed to have no idea how to run the club. The failure of the treasurer even to provide a financial report was merely the starkest example of this.

As one of the workers at the club put it: “We are professionals and know our job, but we were treated like dirt by people who are not professionals in this kind of work. We wouldn’t tell them how to do their job, but they wouldn’t listen to us when we told them how this place should be run. They were a bunch of amateurs and right-wingers.”

These were the conditions under which workers in the club toiled whilst trendy lefty club members pledged themselves to the overthrow of capitalism after the next double brandy.

Matters came to a head when the club management decided to reduce working hours for the casuals from 40 hours a week to 24 hours, if they accepted split shifts, or 17½ hours if they didn’t.

In the best traditions of the trade union movement, the management also decided to impose a pay cut on the casuals, with a new hourly rate of £2.30, which would have left one casual 20p an hour worse off, and a second casual 70p an hour worse off.

The six workers walked out on strike on 26 March for a day’s protest. When management refused to meet them, the day’s protest escalated into an indefinite, unofficial strike.

During the four-week long dispute, the workers’ own union (the TGWU) failed to make the strike official, although the workers did receive assistance from the union and an application for the strike to be declared of-

ficial was due to be made three days after the end of the strike.

The workers were demanding negotiations with management about provision of job descriptions and contracts of employment for all staff; preservation of 40-hour week for the workers facing a cut in hours; decasualisation of all labour at the clubs and a minimum hourly rate of £3.17.

A meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of Liverpool NALGO agreed last week to send the difference between the rates of pay existing prior to the strike and the new rates which the club management was seeking to impose. The funding will run until the next meeting of the club’s general management committee in mid-May.

In the intervening period, negotiations between management and the workers are to be held to settle the issue of hours, rates of pay, contracts and jobs descriptions.

“It took them four weeks to give us what we wanted on the first day of the strike,” summed up one of the strikers. It is to be hoped that NALGO’s commitment to ending low pay will, like charity, begin at home, and that the workers at the club will receive decent pay and conditions without having to resort to further strike action.

**P**ower workers’ unions and bosses meet on Thursday 3 May to discuss pay.

Power bosses are expected to increase their 8.5 per cent offer after the four unions involved — EETPU, TGWU, GMBU and AEU — returned a majority of 27,719 to 16,959 for a strike.

Power workers potentially have huge industrial strength, and it’s likely that the bosses will increase their offer. The ballot mandate for a strike remains valid under Tory law until 10 May.

## IN BRIEF

**W**orkers are prepared to shut down Britain’s offshore oil fields this summer in pursuit of union recognition and decent health and safety provision.

The six main unions involved have agreed to campaign together. Already the TGWU, MSF, AEU, EETPU, NUS and GMB organise over two-thirds of the 30,000-strong offshore workforce.

Any action in the North Sea will undoubtedly upset the Tory government as the £1.2 billion in lost production the unions expect as a consequence of their planned action will hit the exchequer as well as the profits of the oil companies.

At present unions are not recognised offshore by the big oil companies like BP and Shell, or by many contractors.

Workers are forced to work long hours (15 hour shifts) in very dangerous conditions with no decent health and safety provision.

**L**ondon’s ambulance service is to be privatised and split in two.

This is the bitter fruit of Roger Poole’s deal that settled the dispute earlier this year and allowed for productivity payments funded by local incentive schemes.

Under the new set-up, non-emergency services will be run on business lines “using taxis and other transport when necessary”.

The emergency service will be run by

a new body similar to the trusts that run hospitals that can opt out of health authority control.

**B**reaking up London into two tiers will be the key test for the entire service nationally.

Co-ordinated resistance is going to be needed for ambulance workers to ensure decent pay and conditions and to maintain a decent service for the public. The Tories’ intentions are not to improve services but simply to cut costs.

**T**he Tories want to break up the ‘indexation’ pay formula won by the fire fighting service, allowing them to cut wages and extend the working week.

That’s the clear message of a Home Office document leaked this week to the *Morning Star*.

And fire brigade employers were warned by the government not to avoid ‘contentious’ issues in pay negotiations. In other words, if the employers want to take on the Fire Brigade Union, they will have the government’s blessing.

The Home Office document, on the Fire Service Pay Agreement, bemoans the fact that the existing pay system takes no account of ‘affordability’ and ‘market forces’, by which it means that firefighters’ wages are too high. It calls for a review of the pay agreement.

It also spells out the government’s belief that it would be possible to cut wages and still recruit to the fire service.

And it wants to extend the working week of fire fighters, calling for discussion on a working week of ‘perhaps 48 or 56 hours’. This is despite clear evidence that firefighters should, on health and safety grounds, work fewer hours, not more.

**Nottingham & District Trade Union Council**

**Mayday March & Rally**

**Monday 7 May**

**No Poll Tax!**

**Don’t Pay!**

**Don’t Collect!**

**Speakers include:**

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**March leaves 11.00am**

**Rally at Victoria Leisure Centre**

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

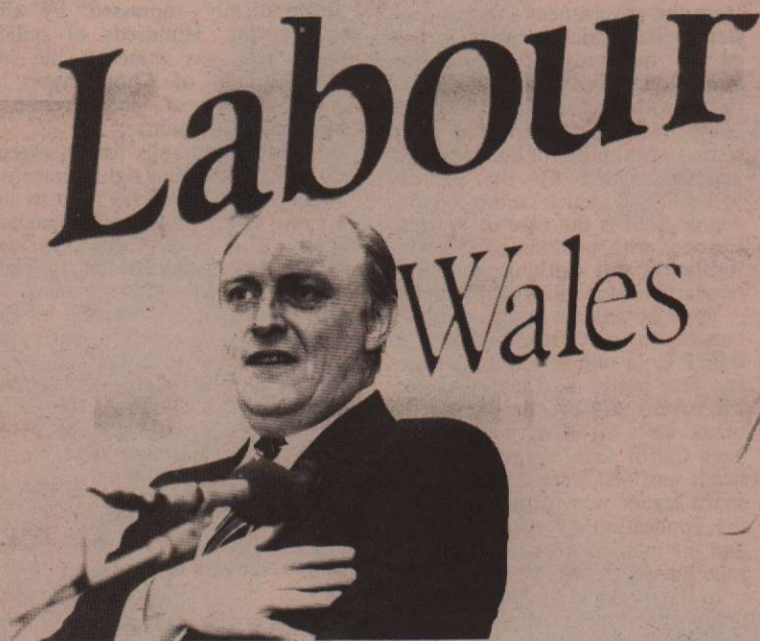
## Kinnock attacks conference democracy

Vladimir Derer, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, spoke to Socialist Organiser about the proposals at this month's Labour National Executive to create a 'national policy forum' which will pre-empt many of the powers of Annual Conference.

**T**hey are proposing the creation of a 170-strong policy council, to be elected every two years.

The idea is mentioned in the "Future of Labour Party Conference" document circulated recently, but unspecifically, without any details. They propose giving more power to the Parliamentary Labour Party, which is also not mentioned explicitly in the "Future of Labour Party Conference" document.

That document said that the longer-term issues would be put to Labour Party Conference only after the next general election. What is



new is that they are rushing things through to get a decision in principle.

Decisions would be made not at Conference, but prior to Conference at the "policy council". Conference would be a rubber stamp for the decisions.

It means taking power away from Party activists and, to a lesser extent, away from the trade unions.

They propose that the trade union vote at Labour Party Conference should be reduced initially

to 70 per cent of the total vote, and then reduced further as the individual membership rise to one million.

The proposals for increased membership are in the realm of fantasy. Even the figure given in the newspapers for current membership, 340,000, is not really substantiated. It does not seem, in fact, that membership has increased substantially.

It is ludicrous to suggest that the membership might be as much as

one million. This would be possible only if the subscription were to be reduced very substantially, and people were to join the Labour Party just as supporters.

They are also proposing that constituency delegates to Annual Conference must be elected by "one member, one vote".

The only way to combat this is to campaign as a united left for the next Conference and the one after, and in a longer-term perspective to see that the membership is regularly circulated with information which it does not have at present.

The only way to get to individual members is through local Party newsletters. Such newsletters can be enlarged, and contain the information on National Executive voting records and policy discussions. This is something the left should take up.

The left can win even with "one member, one vote" and postal votes. Once there is a Labour Government, things will change very radically because people will be

disillusioned. What the Party leaders are proposing now could boomerang. It's up to the local Party activists to make sure the members get information.

On "The Future of Labour Party Conference", a few constituencies chose CLPD's model response, but I don't have any information on how many CLPs altogether bothered to reply. Where they didn't follow our model, usually the replies were very short. Generally the level of interest was extremely low.

The leadership have been very unhappy since the democratic reforms were passed in 1979-81, and now they are riding high on an apathetic membership they want to fortify their position. Whether they can carry it off is doubtful, because all this can be overturned once the membership moves against them. Things can change.

They're making a mistake if they think that they can always rely on passive members to save them.

## Who will defend Lithuania?

### From front page

1979): "He's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch".

Gorbachev is doing what they want done in the USSR: restoring capitalism, preparing to let the rapacious multi-millionaires of Wall Street and Frankfurt asset-strip the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev is unpopular in the USSR — so unpopular that he didn't dare submit himself for election as president, and instead had himself installed as president, with legal powers greater than Stalin ever formally enjoyed, by the only partially elected parliament. But he still is so popular in the West that he only gets a patchy bad press over Lithuania.

It is not just the Bushes and Thatchers who refuse to support the Lithuanians.

On 15 April, Labour's shadow Foreign Secretary, Gerald Kaufman, attacked Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd for being too critical of Gorbachev! Thatcher, who tells the Lithuanians to "negotiate" about independence — i.e. begin by surrendering it in principle — was far more sensible and moderate, said the fawning Kaufman.

When the all-purpose talking head of the fake left, Ken Livingstone, said on Clive Anderson's TV talk show that Gorbachev was the best option the Lithuanians have, Anderson jeered: "So Red Ken supports the Foreign Office".

And not only the political lightweight Livingstone.

It is worth quoting Kaufman's reasons for his position. "At present Lithuania is part of the Soviet Union. There are two parties to a dispute but there are not two different nations.

I believe that all peoples have the right to self-determination. But it is important for them and the West to understand that if Mr Gorbachev is successfully challenged on this and overthrown, things will not be better for the Lithuanians.

They will be a great deal worse. It is in nobody's interest for them to push so hard that it causes a crisis".

Not separate nations? Hasn't Kaufman ever heard of the 1939 Stalin-Hitler pact, and what happened to the people of Poland and the Baltic states after it?

Yet it is true that Gorbachev can't let Lithuanian go, even if he wanted to, without sparking an immediate political crisis.

There are too many oppressed nations within the empire that is the USSR — including the 50 million strong Ukrainian nation — for the Kremlin to be able to let a tiddler like Lithuania go without summing up the separatist demands of many other nations, nations which add up to over half the population of the USSR, Georgians, Azeris, Ukrainians, Moldavians, and many others.

If the USSR begins to break up, Gorbachev's chances of

survival will be slim, and there could be an ultra-reactionary backlash, Stalinist, Great-Russian nationalist, or a combination of both. This, the comforting argument of the "lesser evil" — as well as the bourgeoisie's interest in the restoration of capitalism, to which Gorbachev now seems to be openly committed — inclines the bourgeoisie to the support of Gorbachev. And it seduces the left too — even when the "lesser" evil is increasingly monstrous, as it is becoming in Lithuania.

Glasnost — openness — is the best thing that has happened in the

*"To support Gorbachev as the lesser evil is to be blind to the lessons of history."*

USSR in 60 years. It has allowed the first open working-class activity in six decades. Nobody in their senses would want Gorbachev displaced by a regime that would bring back an iron totalitarianism.

Nor should anybody who wishes well for the peoples of the USSR — not to speak of wanting a socialist outcome to the seemingly terminal crisis of Stalinism in the USSR — want to see the USSR break up into national chaos such as we saw in the clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

So, therefore, back the lesser evil,

back Gorbachev?

Gorbachev should be given critical support wherever he — that is, his wing of the old Stalinist bureaucracy — does anything that eases things for the working class, or which removes the nationalist poison — intensified by decades of Stalinist Great-Russian oppression of the smaller nationalities — from the life of the USSR.

But police-state repression of the aspirations of the oppressed nations does the very opposite. Ultimately it can't succeed — and the attempt to contain the nation's will only embitters relations and makes the chauvinist poison more concentrated and lethal.

That is the lesson of all the decades of Stalinist control of these nations. It was such police-state control that stored up the now-threatening toxic national antagonisms for so many decades.

The solution is Lenin's and Trotsky's solution: the unfettered right of self-determination, and working-class unity on the basis of a common fight against oppression, against national chauvinism of all sorts, and for free voluntary federation of nations.

To support Gorbachev's regime as the lesser evil is to be blind to both present reality and to the lessons of history. In any case, beyond a certain point, the methods of repression of Gorbachev become inseparable from the "greater evil": there is no wall between

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