

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

**A charter
for trade
union
rights**

See centre pages

Is this the end of apartheid?

By Tom Rigby

According to the African National Congress South Africa has passed the point of 'no return'. Can it be true? Can the apartheid regime really reform itself out of existence?

The answer appears to be yes.

Last week's talks between the ANC and the South African government make a negotiated settlement a real possibility, although still only a possibility.

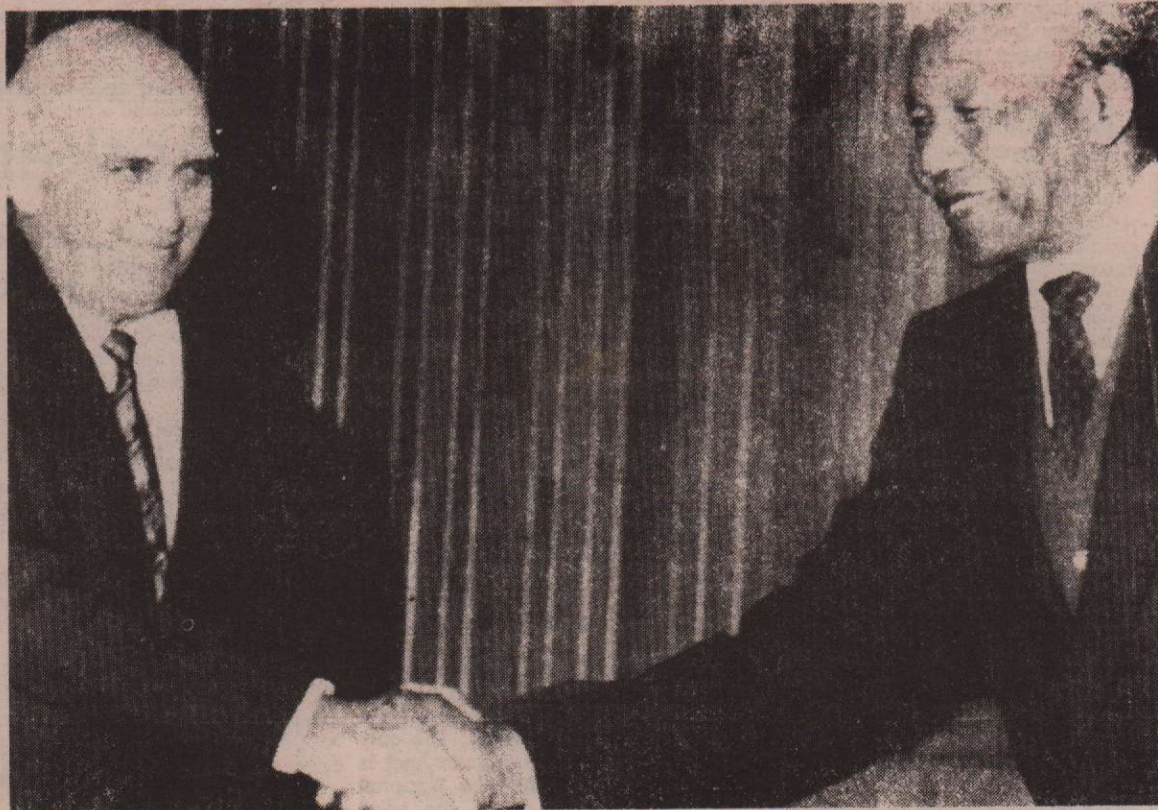
The regime has opened the door to the release of all political prisoners. In return, Nelson Mandela has indicated that the ANC may be about to suspend the "armed struggle".

Speaking after the negotiations had finished, Mandela said the ANC would "honour every word" of its agreement with De Klerk, and added: "We are going to look very hard and earnestly into the whole question of armed struggle and take appropriate decisions."

Already the ANC has effectively suspended guerilla activity over the last four months.

For several decades the orthodoxy on the South African left has been that "Apartheid cannot be reformed".

Racism and capitalism were supposed to be so closely interlinked that any attempt to separate capitalism from apartheid to save capitalism would never work. Anyone who tried to argue that apartheid no longer made any sense



Mandela and De Klerk: a meeting of minds?

for large sections of South African capital and that real reform from above was possible, was branded as a hopeless 'liberal'.

But now it seems that the 'liberals' have won the day not just in the cabinet, but in the ANC as

well. The regime now sees the dangers of change as smaller than the dangers of staying the same.

Mandela says he is against white domination and black domination. De Klerk says he is against simplistic majority rule but refuses

to rule out a unitary state or a common voters' roll.

Joe Slovo, for the post-perestroika Communist Party, has given the 'mixed economy' his official blessing.

De Klerk has even sketched out

the possibility of a two-tier parliament, with the lower house based on universal adult suffrage and an upper house "providing some safeguards and guarantees". ANC lawyers are working on a 'Bill of Rights'.

If all goes according to plan, by 21 May the ANC and the government will be discussing precisely how to work out a constitutional settlement, or more precisely the shape of the negotiating table.

The ANC wants a two-sided table — with all those who support a one person, one vote in a unitary state on one side, and the rest on the other. The government wants a round table with De Klerk in the chair.

The aim of all the major partners in negotiation now seems to be roughly the same — the end of the formal trappings of apartheid, one person one vote on a common voters' roll, with built in guarantees for the whites but not necessarily as whites, and the preservation with more or less minor reforms of the present structure of ownership in the economy.

The question is, can De Klerk calm or control the fears of many whites, and can Mandela halt and limit the aspirations of the black majority?

And, if and when some sort of political democracy is won, how different will everyday life look for most black workers in a land still presided over by the 'white business community'?

Soweto and the white suburbs will still be worlds apart.

More on South Africa page 2

2 SOUTH AFRICA

From repression to negotiation

By Anne Mack

What is happening in South Africa? This question can only be answered by looking at the background to recent events.

In 1976 the Soweto rebellion of black school students sparked a national township uprising. Ever since then the white racist regime has faced a fundamental problem: how to modernise South Africa, creating a stable balance with a black middle class and a skilled black working class without surrendering white privilege and power.

PW Botha made real but limited attempts at controlled reform from above, but only fanned the flames of black revolt.

For instance, the Botha government's proposals to create tame, controlled unions for black workers backfired. His limited legal reforms were exploited to build a militant labour movement that now organises well over a million workers.

Other reforms were less substan-

tial. Pass laws went, only to be replaced by "a new identity card for all South Africans", advertised on billboards in every segregated township and squatter camp in the country.

In the mid '80s, the township rebellion of the students and youth threatened to fuse with the workplace struggles of the new unions. A general strike paralysed the Transvaal (South Africa's industrial heartland) in November 1984. The Botha government turned towards repression.

In July 1985 the first state of emergency was declared. Since then, thousands of activists have been detained. Township organisations have been smashed and/or driven underground, and the workers' movement has reverted to purely workplace concerns.

Now FW De Klerk has seized the opportunity to dictate the pace and set the agenda for change.

De Klerk undoubtedly faces external pressures. South Africa's foreign debt is mounting, sanctions are affecting international competitiveness, massive public spending and arms cuts have been forc-



Workers' demonstration

ed on the government and exacerbated by the Angola and Namibian war.

The leading white members of the security apparatus are behind the government. De Klerk is not a Noriega or a Honecker. Bush, Thatcher and Kohl cannot pull the

plug on him. So he has chosen the present favourable balance of forces to act decisively.

On the other side, the ANC's strategy of "people's war" has proved ineffective. Under pressure from Gorbachev (who is the movement's main backer but

prefers consumer goods in Moscow to revolution in Africa) the ANC has cautiously moved towards a new policy and towards negotiations.

Now, both sides are locked into a process of negotiations in which they will have to move fast.

New purge on Merseyside

By Stan Crooke

Sixteen Liverpool Labour councillors have been suspended from the Labour Group on the council for two months.

The suspensions were approved by last week's meeting of Labour's National Executive Committee, and may be followed by further disciplinary action.

The 16 suspended councillors are among the 18 who voted against setting a poll tax (of £449) for Liverpool at a council meeting late last month. A further five councillors, against whom no action is to be taken, abstained.

Why have only 16 out of the 18 been suspended? Because these 16 councillors are members of the 'Broad Left' caucus, and the other two are not!

The suspensions are only the latest chapter in a long-running series of conflicts in the Liverpool Labour Group, which has 56 of the 99 seats on the council and consists of three factions: the 'Broad Left' (most of whom are *Militant* readers); the 'Progressive Left' (right wingers, plus the soft left that does not want to work with *Militant*); and the so-called 'Sainsbury Seven' (the power-brokers, including leading figures in the council).

At the beginning of the year a majority of the Labour Group broke the whip to vote against providing council funding for two 'Euro-liaison officers' appointed by local Euro-MP Ken Stewart.

Stewart's method of selection had been in breach of the District Party's commitment to Equal Opportunities policies. There was no job description in the advert, and less than four days in which to apply for the posts.

The jobs went to Tony Mulhearn and Frank Mills. Both are members of the "Liverpool 47" (former Labour councillors currently barred from holding office). Mulhearn is also a *Militant* supporter.

The Broad Left claimed that the withholding of funding for the posts was a case of "political victimisation" and "McCarthyite

witch-hunting". Most other people regarded the selection procedure as inadequate.

This affair was soon followed by reports in the *Sunday Times* that council leader Keva Coombes had misused his position to push through controversial land deals for which the lobbying had been done by Derek Hatton.

Hatton is currently eking out a living (three cars and six horses to provide for!) as an agent for developers seeking land or planning consent from the council.

Coombes denied the allegations. The Broad Left rallied to his defence (and thereby that of comrade Hatton as well), whilst the Progressives wrote to Neil Kinnock asking for a meeting to discuss the allegations and alleged *Militant* influence in the Labour group.

The same month saw the clash over the setting of a poll tax, followed up by a letter from local Labour Party full-timer Peter Kilfoyle to all Labour councillors and candidates in the forthcoming elections in Liverpool, in which Kilfoyle launched a broadside against *Militant*.

He described the anti-poll tax campaign as "Militant-inspired" and directed against Labour local authorities rather than the Tories. The refusal of Broad Left councillors to vote for a poll tax was a "political sham". The answer to the poll tax was to pay it and wait for the next Labour government.

The District Labour Party meanwhile remains de facto suspended. Its quorum has been set at the unrealistically high figure of 100. A vote by the Annual General Meeting of the District Party to reduce the quorum to 80 has been ruled out of order by Kilfoyle.

With inquiries already underway into the reselection procedure in Birkenhead CLP and into *Socialist Organiser* influence in Wallasey CLP, the stage is thus set for a sweeping witch-hunt on Merseyside as a whole.

A broad-based campaign which brings together the local Labour left as a whole could defeat such a witch-hunt. A divisive and sectarian charade of a campaign by *Militant*, on the other hand, would only guarantee defeat.

Can the white backlash be tamed?

Will the white racists accept one person, one vote and Mandela as president?

That is not an easy question to answer. When FW De Klerk decided to embark on his current strategy he called together all his security chiefs and police chiefs and spelt out his strategy. Simply put it is this:

- In Zimbabwe the whites waited too long before they made concessions. As a result they had to give up more than they would have needed to if they had moved more decisively earlier.

- The present situation cannot carry on forever. Unless the regime reforms itself, in the long run there will be a bloodbath.

- Whites can afford to make political concessions to blacks, as

white economic privilege can be maintained for a long time by the operations of the market.

The security chiefs backed De Klerk. Judging by some recent polls, large numbers of ordinary whites concur. For now the far right are not an immediate threat.

But as real change starts to happen, and as white police are asked to police their own people, the tide may begin to turn in white politics.

Where is the workers' voice?

Over the last couple of years the leadership of the African National Congress has done a very successful U-turn.

They have abandoned their failed strategy of people's war and people's power, and embraced the politics of negotiations.

But despite that change, much has stayed the same. The aim of the ANC's struggle is still 'national democracy' — a post-apartheid state constructed through an alliance involving liberal sections of white capital, the black middle class and working class.

The alliance must be based on the subordination of working class interests to the goal of a long-term alliance with the bosses. The only difference from a few years back is that it appears that the National Party has now joined the good guys.

In the old strategy the working class were seen as the foot soldiers in the people's war, with the task of creating so much chaos that the government would fall.

In the new strategy, the organised working class is a threat — another card to play at the negotiating table.

The black workers have no class voice of their own in these negotiations. Such a voice is desperately needed. As on militant in the shop workers union SACCAWU put it: "COSATU [the giant indepen-

dent trade union federation] has no clear position on negotiations.

"But, to the extent that COSATU does have a position, it is to function as the working class wing of the broad popular movement rather than as an independent socialist force.

"There is a lot of talk of the need for a workers' charter, conceived in terms of trade union rights — but

not in the sense of a socialist programme of action for the working class.

"The idea seems to be to protect workers' rights in a constitutional set-up which does not guarantee the interests of the working class. But we should be advancing a socialist programme of action for the working class."

students & socialism

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March: thousands demonstrate with Gorbachev's tacit approval. Now they are turning against him.

On her way out

WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

Thatcher is finally on her way out. If the electorate don't get her, her own party will.

All her likely (Tory) successors are men. So what has Britain's first ever woman PM done for women?

Thatcher's was the "greed decade", which saw the rise of "power dressing" for women — high heels and padded shoulders. Many of the female Thatcher-inspired entrepreneurs went out of business when the stock market crashed in '87. Shame.

The Tories still think they can control capitalism so they put interest rates up and up — and down and out go thousands of those encouraged to buy their own homes by Mrs T.

Down and down goes spending by local authorities. Nursery places are slashed. Few new council houses are built. Services like hospital cleaning and catering are privatised.

Down and down go the wages of thousands of women workers, and down and down go their chances of a nursery place for their kids or a decent home.

But Thatcher has introduced independent taxation for married women. With the other hand she has introduced student loans so that fewer women will make it to the sort of jobs which benefit from independent taxation. The same applies to tax relief on workplace nurseries.

A tiny minority will benefit — but all women lose out when child benefit is frozen year after year.

Thatcher's decade began with millions on the dole. Now many of those people are working — for the same amount of money as they got on the dole, on schemes which deny women the opportunity of learning anything but 'traditional' (ie. low paid) jobs.

Thousands more have their dole refused because they are not 'available for work' — ie. they can't find childcare at a moment's notice.

After unemployment Thatcher moves to sort out the unions — smashing the mining communities and removing the livelihoods of tens of thousands of families. The fight back produced the magnificent Women Against Pit Closures, the most inspiring women's movement for decades. But Thatcher found no sisterhood with women like these — her loyalty is to the rich.

This year she rewarded them with the biggest pay-off for centuries — the poll tax. In so doing she has reduced working class women to even greater poverty and misery.

And how will Thatcher's friends reward her? Thatcher has done capitalism's dirty work for 10 years, and she has made herself into the most hated British PM since the war.

Her reward will be to be kicked out by the masters she has served. And good riddance.

Conflicts coming in the USSR

EDITORIAL

Were we wrong about the official trade unions in the USSR?

Socialist Organiser has argued that those official unions are not real workers' organisations, but state organisations for controlling workers. Yet the official unions have been protesting strongly against government plans for more free market measures.

The central trade union council has demanded that:

- the state continue to guarantee the right to work;
- the transition to a 'regulated market economy' be gradual;
- the government conclude an annual 'social contract' with the unions.

This protest reflects the discontent of one wing of the ruling bureaucracy more than that of the workers.

For decades the leaders of the official unions have been nominated by the top bureaucrats rather than freely elected by the workers. A man could go from being head of the KGB secret police to being chief of the trade unions simply as a move sideways within the hierarchy.

The unions' job was not to defend workers' interests — they never called strikes — but to help raise productivity. They were able to recruit workers because they controlled welfare provision, sick pay, sports facilities, holidays, housing.

But in the miners' strikes of last year, the official unions took part in negotiations on the management side. One of the miners' demands was for a drastic reduction in the

number of trade union officials.

The opening-up of Soviet society under Gorbachev has lessened central Government control over the trade unions. In some countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia for example, it seems that the collapse of the Stalinist regime has led to reform movements taking over the old state unions and transforming them into workers' organisations. Nothing like that has happened in the USSR, though.

Last weekend a new Confederation of Labour was set up at a conference of independent trade union groups in Novokuznetsk, western Siberia. According to reports in the *Financial Times* the conference supported the right of Lithuania to independence, condemned the Soviet Government for taking the economy to the brink of collapse, and discussed but rejected a proposal from a Social Democrat to set up a new workers' political party.

Those independent trade union groups, not the state-run organisations, are the real Soviet labour movement. Some part of the state unions' new show of militancy must be due to an effort to compete with the independent movement.

According to official figures, strikes in the USSR totalled over nine million striker-days in the first quarter of 1990 — an average of 130,000 strikers per day. In 1989 the average was 100,000 per day.

The background to the conflicts between the bureaucracy and the working class and within the bureaucracy is economic impasse. After five years, Mikhail Gorbachev's evolving programme for modernising the Soviet economy is at a dead end.

The economy is worse than ever. The latest official statistics show labour productivity down two per cent compared with a year before. By the end of 1989, only 50 out of 1200 basic consumer goods were readily available.

With the loosening of central control, the command economy has broken down. But it has not been replaced by a functioning free-market economy.

"The rule and the laws of Moscow are now being more or less openly defied by everybody from individual republics to regions, cities, enterprises and workers' organisations... At enterprise level, the crumbling economy has promoted a host of semi-legal or openly illegal practices.

"Factories have long been involved in direct barter transactions to

get around the bottlenecks of central purchasing. Now they are forced to use other devices, like priming orders with scarce dollars to ensure supplies" (*Financial Times*, 3 May)

The response of Gorbachev's faction is to press forward faster. The talk is of privatising seventy per cent of state enterprises, and freeing seventy per cent of prices — in other words, going for a full-blooded private-profit market economy. Some of Gorbachev's advisers talk of ten million unemployed in the USSR.

A programme on those lines was promised for this month. Then the press was told that it might be delayed until autumn. Now the line is that a package will be announced very soon, but it will be more gradual than Poland's 'shock therapy'.

"Most independent trade unionists in the USSR...are determined to defend workers' interests in the transition."

The USSR is following Eastern Europe's path towards Western-type capitalism. But the hesitations and contradictory signals from Moscow indicate that there is strong resistance within the ruling bureaucracy (and among ordinary people) — much stronger resistance than in any East European country.

The growth of independent trade unions in Eastern Europe has been feeble since the revolutions of 1989. Most workers are evidently willing to wait and see the results of the drive towards market economies. Even in Poland, where an independent trade union movement, Solidarnosc, has existed since 1980, workers' militancy has been low-key.

The USSR is different in this respect too. Most independent trade unionists in the USSR seem not to oppose the drive for market economics on principle, but they are determined to defend workers' interests in the transition. And theirs is a militant and growing movement.

Bureaucratic resistance and workers' militancy combines with the simmering and intractable problem of breakaway movements in the USSR's minority nations to

make the Gorbachev faction's drive towards a private-profit economy an extremely perilous venture.

Yet it would be difficult to restore the old command economy now even if the Government wanted to. A Stalinist economy, to function effectively, requires a mighty political machine for terror, mobilisation and repression; and such a machine cannot be obtained just by government decree. The present method of economic regulation — bureaucratic haggling and muddling through, complemented by the black market — cannot continue.

Even if Gorbachev is ousted in the coming months, the same choices would face his successors. They could retrench only for a short period. Sooner or later, they would probably be driven on the same course towards a private-profit economy — and they would face the same obstacles and conflicts.

Already the USSR has seen open war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, bloody conflicts between central government and local nationalism in Georgia, and economic war with Lithuania. The coming months are likely to see even more open conflict.

Despite the long-term potential of the growing workers' militancy in the USSR, the short-term prospects are not good for socialists.

The nationalist movements of the USSR's minorities are often intolerant towards their own minorities — Russians in the Baltic states, Abkhazians in Georgia, the Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan. As far as can be judged from Western press reports, most of those in the USSR who reject free-market economics are conservative Russian nationalists, and most of the democrats are pro-capitalist, at best social democratic.

There are socialists in the Soviet Union who reject both Stalinism and capitalism, and fight for a democratically planned economy with self-management — but very few.

The immediate prospect is of messy, brutal conflicts in which neither side stands for democratic socialism. Our response must be guided by principles;

- consistent democracy for relations between nations. The right for every nation to determine its own future, the right of every minority to full equality;

- support for the workers against the bureaucrats who exploit and oppress them, whatever confused or wrong ideas the workers may have.

'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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A totalitarian movement? Photo: John Harris

Here is the filth

GRAFFITI

Deeply obnoxious *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn thinks it's a bit much that Duncan Campbell "screwed £50,000 out of the BBC", and that Campbell's libel action was an infringement of free speech.

Campbell was awarded damages after a BBC programme, 'Here is the News', which centred around a fictional character who was obviously based on him. The investigative reporter in the programme was ethically quite dubious, and a rather screwed up repressed homosexual.

Campbell objected to both aspects, arguing in particular that he is not a repressed homosexual: he has been publicly gay for some time.

According to Littlejohn, the character in the play "liked dressing up in women's clothes". Then, after attacking Campbell for "boasting about being a homosexual", goes on: "You could argue that being a frock-wearer is less disreputable than being a shirt-lifter."

Mr Littlejohn presumably believes that he is here only exercising his inalienable right to freedom of speech.

So here's an idea for a BBC play. It's about this foul-mouthed ugly wife-battering ignorant but multi-opinionated child-molesting fascist who works for a top-selling tabloid writing rubbish and spends his evenings hanging around outside public toilets waiting to beat shit out of people as they come out.

His name is Dick Littleprick and he never sues anyone for libel.

Any takers?

The *Sun* likes giving advice. Last year they had a helpful article on how black people should cope with racism, which suggested that when faced with a racist restaurateur, the thing to do is...eat somewhere else.

This week, it's advice for women who want to keep their men monogamous. There are, it seems, five "golden rules":

1. remember that sex is important; 2. be attentive to his pro-

blems; 3. "never stop telling him you admire him"; 4. "make an extra effort to see his point of view"; 5. (rather more obscurely) "learn about him from what he says to others".

The *Sun* also has advice about those difficult times in everyone's marriage when men well, can't help it, but want someone else. What to do? "A wife needs to understand and meet her man's needs".

I'm sure we can think of more rules than that, can't we. Six: never ever ever disagree with him or even voice an opinion; better still, don't say anything at all apart from the obligatory moans and grunts to show he can give you an orgasm.

Seven: don't leave the house in case some other man looks at you, or worse, you look at some other man.

Eight: in fact, you might as well be chained to the bed.

The loathsome Beatrix Campbell, writing in the latest *Marxism Today*, complains that the Labour leadership's "anxiety about activism", combined with the sad demerit of the Communist Party, has allowed the ultra-left to dominate the anti-poll tax campaign.

Militant and the SWP, she says, "appropriate" the poll tax campaign, and "polarise its politics". They show that "the old culture of popular frontism... (is) incipiently totalitarian, because it reduces all interests to a single slogan." The single slogan she doesn't like in this case is, of course, "don't pay, don't collect".

"However", she insists, "the campaign against the poll tax calls out for a campaign which isn't simple or singular, but which derives from diversity."

The sheer nerve of a CP spokesperson moaning about left groups dominating campaigns for their own purposes is really very rich indeed. But Campbell's argument is anyway ridiculous.

"If the campaign against the poll tax is to belong to new times, if it is to welcome all those people, millions of them, conservatives, socialists, poor people, affluent people, brave people, timid people, who want to do something about it, then it must... (abandon) the totalitarianism of 'unity is strength'."

Ends and means

AGAINST THE TIDE

By Sean Matgamna

The spectacle of Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan, the *Militant* leaders of the Anti-Poll-Tax Federation, on television promising to "go public and name names" of anti-poll-tax rioters in Trafalgar Square — that is, to turn their names over to the police — reminded me of the time a few years ago when I began to feel something like warmth for *Militant* — and how short-lived it was.

I'd been made uneasy. People who didn't like what I was saying about Ireland jeered that it was almost identical to what *Militant* said. So I spent nearly a week reading back over almost two decades of *Militant's* coverage of Irish and Anglo-Irish affairs, making detailed notes.

It had been very many years since I had paid attention to what *Militant* said about anything (with the exception of their support for the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, about which I wrote a pamphlet). In part this was because *Militant's* "line" on everything was fixed and unchanging, usually expressed in the same prefabricated phrases, which were thought to embody "science" and "Marxism". Essentially the same articles appeared again and again, faced up by a few paragraphs about the news.

You didn't have to agree with Ted Grant's dictum that "Marxism is the science of prediction" to feel a *Militant*-level dogmatic certainty that once you knew *Militant's* general ideas you could predict exactly what *Militant* would say about more or less anything!

I found all that was true on Ireland. To get the drift, the ebb and flow, of their thinking, you had to study the shifts in emphasis within the routine fare, and note occasional dramatic absences. But I found other things too, in the nooks and crannies, so to speak, of the ever-repeated boulder-like big ideas, the "line".

The boulders dominating the landscape of *Militant's* coverage were "socialism now" and "a trade union defence force against the IRA and UDA" (a slogan raised first by the then Northern Ireland Communist Party in 1969 for a couple of weeks, then dropped, only to be picked up and passed on to *Militant* by the British and Irish Communist Organisation).

Interspersed between the boulders were strange political creatures, scurrying briefly into the light, then disappearing. There was the call for a socialist solution within the Six Counties; the un-concealed if ambivalent joy at the 1974 Orange General Strike; the nonsensical seven-year fetish of the tiny rump Orange Northern Ireland Labour Party; the call on the leaders of the Republican movement to build a party of labour; the de facto abandonment of the central slogan of a trade union defence force against the Green and Orange sectarians just at the point in 1974 when civil war seemed imminent, and *Militant's* weary recommendation instead that each community should defend itself; and so on.

I ploughed through reams and reams and years of abstract socialist propaganda which simply had no grip on the political situation, nor even much real contact with the social and national realities underlying it. Of course I fervently agreed with the aspiration to "a socialist solution" and to working-class unity. I would have been happy to support proposals for a trade union defence force if that slogan were not rendered an evasive and irresponsible pipedream by the deep Orange-Green cleavage down the centre of the working class. But the one thing *Militant's* propaganda proved to me clearly was the need for something more than pious wishes — the need for a democratic and transitional programme as well as the socialist "maximum programme", the need to find solutions to the chronic conflict of national identities between Catholic and Protestant communities so that workers really could begin to unite on the basis of an agreed working-class solution to the divisive "constitutional questions". That was where what I said differed from what *Militant* was saying.

Militant's "line" on Ireland was and is a political rendition of the old fable

about the mice who decide that the best way to stop the rapacious cat is to put a bell round his neck so that they always know where he is — but they can not figure out how to get the bell in place.

Militant continued to insist that the bell was the thing, and since they couldn't get it in place that meant they had *nothing* to say about real Irish politics.

Then there was the unexpected note that made me warm a little to *Militant*.

Despite my irritation with *Militant's* prayer-like litany of ideal solutions, devoid of any sensible idea of how to go about achieving even the basics of working-class unity, I found myself warming to a certain recurring humanitarian streak in the articles — an oft-repeated indignation with "bombers" and "killers" from the simple and uncomplicated point of view of common humanity.

Naive, a-political, and supra-class though the humanitarian sentiments usually were, I warmed to them because they seemed to have a raw genuineness, because they seemed to be something alive and real within the dried and dead "socialist" verbiage.

Their politics may have been dim-witted nonsense wrapped up in the eternal socialist truths, but at least there was this saving spark of humanity. Perhaps I felt that the material I'd published on Ireland in the '70s had too ruthlessly suppressed and expunged such feelings in deference to the need for solidarity with the oppressed Catholics and their Republican organisations.

Then I came upon *Militant's* commentary on the Ranger Best affair in mid-1972. It was during the truce between the British Army and the then two IRAs, leftist Officials and then right-wing Provisionals. Best was an 18 year old serving British soldier who went home to Catholic Derry to visit his people. He was captured by the Official IRA and after a while shot in cold blood.

The Catholics of Derry reacted with great hostility to the Official Republican heroes. There was a powerful march by Catholic women in protest at this act of pointless savagery. The Official IRA responded with a ceasefire which brought to an end their war against the British. The Provisionals were both more humane and more effective at the propaganda game when, soon after, they released a British officer whom they had captured.

I was then editing *Workers' Fight*, a British paper which felt obliged to support the Republicans' right to make war

The end may justify the means, but only such means as do not warp the end

on the British state, and did so in an atmosphere in the labour movement and on the left very different from that of today, when even some tepid reformists are favourable to the Provisionals. In 1972 even the SWP (then IS) did not dare defend the IRA. *Workers' Fight* felt obliged to refrain as much as possible from attacking the Republicans.

Yet we also felt obliged — all too mildly — to describe the killing of Best as "an ugly deed of doubtful utility".

And *Militant*, the naively, classlessly humanitarian *Militant*? They snarled that it was not for the vicious right-wing Provisional IRA killers to condemn the left-wing Officials on such a thing!

Militant, you see, was then trying to get friendly with the Officials. *Militant's* nucleus of a group in Ireland had come from the same seed-pod as the left-wing Derry Officials who killed the 18 year old lad from the Bogside, the Derry Young Socialists of 1968-70.

Humanitarianism is all very well when you haven't got anything to say except the wish to be in some other situation (socialism is the only answer) and a fervent wish that nastiness would go away. If political deals and gains become possible — then, we're Marxists, comrades, aren't we? We have no abstract morality. We can turn the names of anti-poll-tax rioters over to the cops. They're just anarchists and "petty bourgeois elements" anyway. We can collect money on demonstrations of ambulance workers, or striking miners, and siphon it off to *Militant*.

In Liverpool we can take over the scams and fiddles, the graft and corruption, long associated with the Liverpool labour movement's Catholic Action mafia, and siphon off some of that for



And that's my attitude to morality... Photo: Ian Swindale

the organisation. When a prominent "Militant" decides to feather his own nest we can be quiet about it and defend him; and when he cuts loose completely we can express regret and agree a mutual pact of silence.

When we find ourselves in Liverpool opposed by leaders of the black community — a community suffering very badly from institutionalised racism and from white working-class racism — we can explain to the Young Socialists and to white workers in Liverpool that the black leaders are just "pimps and gangsters" — that is, we can wallow in the most vicious and backward racist stereotype-mongering.

In short, we can do whatever serves the organisation. That is the old fallacy of Stalinists — or rather the fallacy of honest Stalinists who really thought they could serve socialism by the methods of corruption, double standards, and gangsterism.

Marxists *don't* believe in an abstract morality which comes from God or some timeless principles outside of history and society. It is wrong to kill; and wrong not to kill, if that is the only way to free ourselves from class slavery.

We want to cleanse human relations of all violence; yet the tragedy of the miners' strike lay in our inability to deploy enough violence to defeat the state violence inflicted on our side by Thatcher's police thugs. Our business is to fight the working class struggle, not propound moral principles to underpin and define a good way of life which we know is impossible under capitalism.

But neither do we reject the idea that some things are right and others wrong, or believe that the end justifies any means, that anything goes which serves 'the party'. Trotsky dealt with this long ago in *Their Morals and Ours*. The means condition the end, and some "means" may render the end more difficult, or even impossible to attain. The end may justify the means, but only such means as do not contradict, work against, pollute, warp or mutilate the end.

For example, we want to win the working class over to our political programme for replacing capitalism with democratic collectivism. We might at certain times and places have a much better chance of doing that if we accepted and promoted anti-black racism. But that means of "building the party" would corrupt and destroy the end which it supposedly served — working-class and, ultimately, human solidarity, equality, and liberty.

We live in a labour movement grown spiritually cross-eyed from the long pursuit of realpolitik and the operation of double standards, a movement ideologically sick and poisoned. In terms of moral ecology, the left and the labour movement is something of a disaster area because of the long-term use of methods and arguments which have corrupted the consciousness of the working class. The most poisonous root of that corruption was the Stalinist movement.

Militant is the biggest organisation in Britain claiming roots in the Communist International. In the trade unions it increasingly plays the role the Communist Party played for decades, in terms of its weight and bureaucratic inertia.

The Communist Party went rotten over decades under the influence of the Stalinist bureaucratic ruling class in the Soviet Union. But *Militant*, too, believes that bureaucracy rules on behalf of the working class. For 43 years *Militant* and its predecessors have eagerly supported the expansion of Stalinism. That is one of the sources of the moral and intellectual infection in *Militant* — that, and its inclination to follow the modus operandi of the Stalinised Communist Parties, for which "the interests of the party" were everything, and the rest increasingly came to count for nothing.

The Healyites (WRP), once an imposing organisation and now a scattering of a dozen or more negligible groups, have learned how short-sighted is such sect-building "realpolitik".

Stalinist diehards denounce "Red Zionists"

By Stan Crooke

The anti-semitic organisation Pamyat is growing dangerously in the USSR.

Anti-semitism has a long and powerful tradition in the Soviet Union and the Tsarist Russian Empire before it. In the more "liberal" atmosphere of Gorbachev's glasnost, this anti-semitism has again come out into the open, with Pamyat as its organised expression.

Speeches by Igor Sergeyevich Sychev, one of Pamyat's leading figures, hold Jews (or "Zionists" and "rootless cosmopolitans") responsible for all the sufferings of the Russian people.

Stalin, on the other hand, is portrayed as a hero, conducting a lone and valiant battle against the "Red Zionists". The victims become the tyrants, and the tyrant becomes the hero in Sychev's view of history, completely turned upside down and back to front by his anti-semitism.

Thus, the death of many revolutionaries in the civil war of 1918-21, which paved the way for Stalin and his supporters, is portrayed by Sychev as paving the way for Jewish domination. Lenin's warning about Stalin and the emerging bureaucracy is transformed by Sychev into a warning about "Jewish Marxists"!

And Sychev looks forward to a "new Nuremberg" — not to try the oppressors of Jews, as was the case in the post-war Nuremberg trials, but to try the "enemies" (ie. the Jews, "rootless cosmopolitans", etc) of anti-semitic Pamyat!!

According to Sychev: "The Russian Popular Front of the movement Pamyat is the vanguard of the

socialist Marxist-Leninist patriotic forces of Russia.

"With the victory of the October socialist revolution, with the victory of working people, people who did not have anything to do with what is truly national rode the crest of the revolutionary wave and entered our 'socialist paradise', if it is possible to use such an expression.

"To recall Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, he warned about this danger. The words of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin are holy for us. I would summarise them as follows: if we do not fight against the Jewish Marxists, then they will sit astride us and ride on our backs...

"To mention the name of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin in relation to the destruction of the churches and other places of worship of the Russian people is a lie.

"Stalin on his own was simply unable to withstand the representatives of power, composed totally of rootless cosmopolitans, and this evil of destruction.

"The destruction of the places of worship of the Russian people is therefore nothing to do with the hands of Stalin, it was the work of the hands of rootless cosmopolitans: Kaganovich, Ginzburg and others.

"As far as Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin is concerned, once he began the struggle against the rootless cosmopolitans, an end was put to the destruction of the places of worship of the Russian people...

"In the fires of civil war [after the 1917 Revolution] the majority of the national-revolutionary cadres perished. The fundamental key positions in the state turned out to be in the hands of Jewish Marxists,

or, as we would say, Red Zionists...

"Thanks to the victory of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin over the cosmopolitan, Russo-phobic, pro-Zionist forces, our people was able to rally together to deliver a decisive rebuff to the fascists.

"The role of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, his services to our fatherland, to our native land, are invaluable. Stalin continued his activity of cleansing our fatherland of rootless cosmopolitans and other enemies who sabotaged the development of our state, the construction of genuine socialism on the road to the construction of communism...

"In the 1970s and earlier years the tentacles of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were crushed with the assistance of our state. International Zionism was unable to celebrate a victory.

"The goal of international imperialism and its shock troops — Zionism — is to transform our country into a colonial appendage, an appendage of international imperialism providing it with raw materials, and of course, above all, an appendage of American imperialism...

"We respond to the movements in the Baltic states in two ways. On the one hand, national interests are a sacred cause of every people. But in the Baltic states we are witnessing the struggle for what is national growing over into nationalism. This is greeted by all anti-Soviet and anti-socialist forces.

"Sooner or later our enemies will answer before the court of a new Nuremberg. Unfortunately, this will take place without us. But even



Leader of anti-semitic Pamyat, Igor Sychev

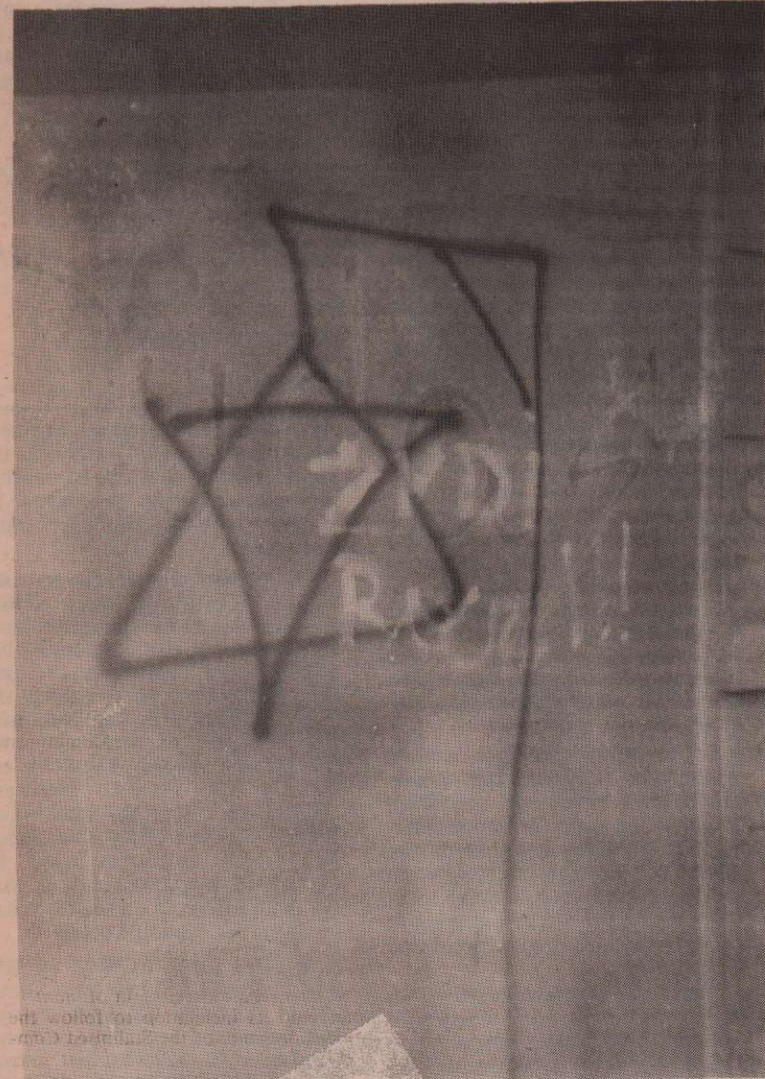
if we depart this world before the new Nuremberg, our example will serve many of our compatriots as an example of how it is necessary to fight..."

According to many reports, Pamyat has strong connections in the ruling bureaucracy, and Sychev's speech makes it very plain how Stalinist rule fostered and nur-

tured anti-semitism.

The only force that can overcome anti-semitism and chauvinism of all sorts is a new labour movement which unites Soviet workers of different nationalities on the basis of recognising the democratic rights of each nation and group. Socialists in the West must do all we can to help such a movement develop.

Fascism stirs in Poland



Anti-semitic graffiti in Poland

By David Holland

The wave of popular right wing feeling which has surged across Eastern

Europe following the anti-Communist revolutions has provided favourable conditions for the re-emergence of anti-semitic and openly fascist

political groups.

Nowhere is this more true than in Poland, where the classic conditions now exist for the growth of such currents: a disoriented mass workers' movement and living standards falling through the floor. The search for scapegoats and simple conspiratorial explanations flourishes in such a situation.

It should be made absolutely clear though, for the benefit of those on the left who have an interest in distorting the history of the 1980s, that the Solidarity leadership has always had a clear attitude of firm opposition to anti-semitic and chauvinist attitudes.

There is an ugly history of anti-semitism in Poland. The pre-war fascist leader, Boleslaw Piasecki, became a post-war regime big-wig.

Many of the Jewish Communists who escaped the Nazis by fleeing to the Soviet Union returned with the Red Army and some of them then occupied the very unpopular positions in the security services. This fed popular prejudices about the figure of the Communist Jew.

The children of such people, in some cases, became the intellectual elite of the liberal opposition. The Stalinist regime then used anti-semitic slurs against them ("liberal masonic slogans" was one such coded catch-phrase).

A disgusting purge of Jewish people from public life took place in 1968 as part of an inner-Party power struggle.

In 1980-81 the Security Services attempted various, largely unsuccessful anti-semitic stunts, intended to divide and weaken Solidarity.

The Polish Church is not innocent in this matter. The identity of the national movement with Catholicism has an ugly tendency to reject non-Catholics. A recent example was the disgraceful anti-semitic speech by Cardinal Glemp during the controversy over the Carmelite nuns at Auschwitz.

The text of this speech was distributed from every news kiosk in the country. These kiosks belonged to the old Polish Communist Party (Polish United Workers' Party). As usual in Polish politics, there is the pervasive smell of political intrigue and provocation.

There is now a threatening tendency for workers who are against the austerity and privatisation plans of the coalition government to move, not to the left, but to a "fundamentalist" position of chauvinist anti-communism, with a distinct tinge of anti-semitism. The leaders emerging in opposition to Walesa are people like Slowik in Lodz and Jurczyk in Gdansk — opposition from the right.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the group around Jurczyk in Szczecin, called "Solidarnosc-80". This is a split from Walesa's Solidarity, which controls the shipyards and a nationally distributed weekly newspaper, *Solidarnosc Szczecinska*.

In the 2 April edition of *Solidarnosc Szczecinska* is found an article promoting a new political organisation: the Congress of the Polish Nation. The programme of this group hails the downfall of the "Totalitarian Zionist Masonic

government in the Soviet Union"; calls for the recovery of full political rights by "Polish citizens of Polish nationality"; proposes "proportional representation of national minorities in public life"; demands the "liquidation, in the course of democratic elections, of the hitherto prevailing domination by the Jewish minority in parliament and government"; opposes "the sell off of national property to foreign capital"; and calls for opposition to "cosmopolitan tendencies".

I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of this doubtless marginal group. However, this programme was, in my opinion, written by a conscious ideological fascist, who is able to find a platform in a nationally distributed trade union newspaper. This is deeply worrying.

Groups such as this begin as marginal, but frustrated popular expectations, combined with growing economic hardship provide fertile grounds for their growth. The left internationally should sound the alert and offer support to those prepared to stand up and denounce the poisonous paranoia of anti-semitism in the workers' movement.

Labour Party Socialists Conference

Saturday-Sunday 19-20 May

at Sheffield Poly Students Union, Pond St.

Registration from 10am, Saturday

Credentials £10 (delegates from organisations); £6 (waged individuals); or £3 (unwaged) from PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD

6 WORKERS' RIGHTS

A Workers' Charter for free trade unions

Solidarity is what trade unionism is all about. Without collective organisation and solidarity, the working class is only a collection of victims of exploitation, individuals at the mercy of market forces.

That, of course, is what the Tories want. Over the past ten years they have introduced law after law against solidarity.

Any action at all is unlawful unless it is against your own employer at your own place of work. That means that if your employer does what Rupert Murdoch did to his printworkers — provoke a strike, sack them, and re-open business elsewhere — there is nothing you can do lawfully against him. If your boss artificially divides his business into separate units, you can only take action unit by unit, on issues within the unit.

Even within those limits, you cannot strike unless you have first balloted — and balloted in a way that a crusty old High Court judge finds satisfactory. The number of things they can find wrong with ballots is increasing all the time! They said the railworkers' ballot last year was no good because the question was unclear. They said the dockers' ballot was no good because the Dock Labour Scheme allegedly ruled out strikes. They considered saying that the engineers' ballot was no good because of the arrangements for counting manual and white-collar votes.

Then you cannot have more than six pickets, and you can't expel strikebreakers from your union or penalise them.

Already, if you strike unlawfully, your union leaders have to do more than just abstain from supporting you. As the National Union of Seamen found out in the Dover P&O Ferries dispute, they have to act effectively to wreck your strike. Otherwise the union's entire funds will be seized.

The labour movement needs to fight to stop the new Tory Bill and to ensure that the next Labour Government makes effective trade unionism lawful once again.

At first glance the GMB composite does not look too bad. It calls for "the repeal of anti-union legislation and its replacement by a fair and positive framework of industrial relations legislation". Moving it, GMB general secretary John Edmonds said that a Labour Government must repeal not just parts, but all, of the "mass of menace" represented by the Tory anti-union laws.

The real intentions of the Labour Party leadership, however, were made clear in the weeks following conference. In the *Independent* on 9 October, Michael Meacher wrote: "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 which limits the number of pickets [to six]".

None of this had been voted through Labour Party conference. What had been voted through, as a package with amendments or voting in parts forbidden, was the Policy Review. Alongside many positive proposals, the Policy Review pro-

mises to keep many parts of the Tory law.

"Union members should have the right to a secret ballot on...strikes. Although in the nature of industrial disputes there will continue to be occasions on which walk-outs take place and strike action occurs before any ballot can be arranged, a ballot should subsequently be held. Any union member should be able to appeal to an independent tribunal if a ballot has not been held."

The problem here is not whether ballots are desirable. On the whole they are, so long as they are workplace ballots held after collective discussion. The problem is whether a judge, or a supposedly 'independent' tribunal, should have the power to decide when and how a ballot should be called, and whether the ballot is a satisfactory one.

It doesn't take a lot of imagination to picture how judges could use such power to call ballots at critical moments during strikes, timed to suit the bosses. They should not have that power. Trade union democracy should be regulated by union members, not by the State.

But the Policy Review is only half the story. This 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 pro-

fessional interest" in the original dispute.

And even before that document is published, a statement by Labour front-bencher Derek Fatchett on teachers' plans for action to save jobs has taken us further down the road of state regulation.

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

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".

Labour's policy on trade union rights is grossly inadequate. The 1989 TUC Congress called for full restoration of the right to strike, but many TUC leaders have gone along with Labour front-bench policy, or actively supported it. We need a campaign from the rank and file for a better policy.

At the 1988 and 1989 Labour Party conferences, Wallasey CLP moved composites demanding a Workers' Charter of trade union rights. In 1989 the composite got 2¼ million votes. The North West Regional Labour Party conference in March 1990 supported Wallasey's call for a Workers' Charter.

Now 33 trade union leaders have launched a "Campaign for Free



"Solidarity is what trade unionism is all about"

Trade Unions", with a four-point charter including the main items from Wallasey's 12-point list.

These are arguments for trade union rights:

The core of our composite is the twelve points of our proposed Workers' Charter. These are our arguments for them.

• **1. The right to unionise.** Individual workers are always in a weaker position than individual employers. In any case, employers do not operate individually: they have their own "unions". Without the right to organise, workers will be helpless victims of exploitation.

• **2. The right to strike and picket.** Unions are no use unless they can take action. And the strike is the basic form of trade union action.

Six people plaintively waving placards as cars and coaches speed by do not make an effective picket line! We do not advocate violence. We do advocate that the picket lines should be strong enough to make workers stop and listen to the arguments. We do advocate that when bosses bus in scabs and back them up with massed ranks of police, strikers should not be limited to helpless token protests. We do insist that a restriction on the number of pickets is as undemocratic as would be a restriction on the number of people allowed to join demonstrations.

• **3. The right to solidarity action.** Ambulance workers and nurses need decent wages and conditions as much as other workers. They want to fight against cuts in the NHS. Yet they are inhibited from striking by concern for the sick. They need other workers striking to support them and to support the NHS.

Many workers are prepared to strike. In an opinion survey in January 1990, 50% overall, and 30% of Tory voters, were willing to strike in support of the ambulance workers. Yet any such strike is unlawful under Tory law — and if Labour's front bench get their way, it will continue to be unlawful under a Labour Government.

Also, as long as trade unions are barred from solidarity action, any small workforce facing a hostile boss is helpless. The boss can sack

them and hire scabs, and then they can do little lawfully. If the boss shuts down and re-opens business under another name, there is nothing they can do lawfully.

• **4. The right to organise.** The new Tory Bill is supposed to make it unlawful to refuse someone a job, or sack them, solely on grounds of union membership. That is not enough. There needs to be a legal

Get your CLP to circulate the Charter to all its affiliated union branches, with a covering letter asking them to discuss it.

right of access for union representatives from outside — full-time officials, or shop stewards from other workplaces: people who cannot be victimised by the employer under any pretext.

• **5. Union control over rule-books.** Certainly every union member should have a right to vote on who should lead their union. It's a scandal that some unions refused that right, and thus enabled the Tories to look as if they were putting through a democratic reform. But union democracy should be enforced by union members themselves, not by anti-union judges. Current Tory law insists that union executives must be elected, but by postal ballot, so that the main influence on the members voting is the capitalist media.

• **6. The right to stop unsafe work.** Unions had protested about unsafe practices on P&O ferries long before the Zeebrugge disaster. Workers had complained about risks on the North Sea oil rigs long before the Piper Alpha disaster. Nothing was done — so people died. If work is unsafe, it should be stopped at once. It's no good waiting for a government inspector.

• **7. Consultation and information.** Every employer owes his wealth to the workers who produced it. Why should he have the right



Fortress Wapping

The anti-union laws

Laws against strikes and picketing in Britain are now harsher than anywhere else in Western Europe.

A report from the International Labour Office, a joint body of trade unions and governments, says that Britain's laws suppress what it considers to be minimum democratic rights for workers in eight different ways.

The Tories did not introduce these anti-union laws all at once, and they were very careful about it when they did introduce them.

The Industrial Relations Act in the early 'seventies provoked widespread opposition from trade unionists, building up to a big strike wave in July 1972 when five dockers were jailed. The strikes made the Act almost unworkable, and eventually the 1974 Labour Government repealed it.

The Tories were anxious not to create a similar situation this time round. And the almost complete inaction of the trade union leaders — especially the central TUC leadership — has helped them enormously.

There are four anti-union laws: the Employment Acts 1980, 1982 and 1988, and the 1984 Trade Union Act.

The 1980 and 1982 Acts made it possible for unions to be taken to court for a large number of reasons. Individual employers or individual scabs take the initiative to prosecute, so shifting the target for opposition away from the government itself.

Those two Acts made industrial action unlawful unless:

- It is between workers and their employer.
- It relates wholly or mainly to pay and conditions, dismissal, jobs, discipline, union membership or a similar issue.
- It is to do with a dispute in the UK.

In other words, industrial action is unlawful if it is:

- It is in support of other workers.
- It is political; or
- It is to do with a dispute outside the UK (e.g. solidarity with workers who are employed by the same multinational company, perhaps in South Africa).

Solidarity action is unlawful under almost all circumstances. Picketing is severely restricted. A Code of Practice, not strictly part of the law but supposed to guide the courts, limits pickets to six.

The 1980 Act also severely restricted the closed shop. Closed shop agreements had to be approved by 85% majorities. Since most workplaces managed to win those 85% majorities, the 1988 Act has now made closed shops completely unworkable, by making it unlawful to enforce them.

The 1982 Act also banned 'union labour only' contracts, or industrial action in support of them.

The 1982 Act reversed British law since 1906 by making unions liable for damages. That means fines of up to £250,000 for big unions.

If those fines are not paid, all union funds can be seized ('sequestered').

At first, bosses were cautious about using these laws. Two climb-downs by trade union leaders after the Tories' second election victory in 1983 gave them the green light.

First, a High Court judge ruled that the action by the Post Office

Engineering Union (now National Communications Union) against Mercury telephones was political (opposition to privatisation of telecommunications), and therefore unlawful. The judge, it turned out, had shares in Mercury. But the left-led union executive called off the action.

Second, Eddie Shah won his battle to establish a non-union printshop in Warrington for his Stockport Messenger newspaper. The print union NGA organised mass pickets and called on the TUC for support. The TUC abandoned the NGA, which lost a lot of money, at one point having all its funds sequestered. The NGA had to pay Shah £250,000 in damages.

The 1984-5 miners' strike also saw a lot of legal action. Although most of it was under laws much older than the Tories' recent legislation, it proved to union leaders the dangers of 'unlawful action', and to bosses the benefits of going to court.

In 1984, a new Act became law. The Trade Union Act 1984 made it illegal to strike without first holding a secret ballot of all the workers involved in the action and winning a majority. The wording in the ballot must require a 'yes' or 'no' answer, and must specifically ask if you are prepared to go on strike in breach of contract.

Another bit of the Trade Union Act 1984 failed. All unions had to hold ballots on the 'political levy', which pays for trade union affiliations to the Labour Party and for unions' political campaigning. The Tories hoped to cripple both the unions and the Labour Party in one fell swoop. But it backfired.

Every ballot on an existing political fund was won, and a number of unions won ballots to set up new political funds.

The 1984 Act also required ballots for union executives.

The Employment Act 1988, as well as effectively outlawing the closed shop, also laid down that ballots for union executives must be *by post*. (Strike ballots can still be held at workplaces). The 1988 Act also made it unlawful for unions to



Miners demand the right to picket

expel or penalise strikebreakers, even if the strike is entirely lawful.

A big increase in the number of court cases (70 by August 1985) scared off trade union leaders. Unions gradually incorporated secret balloting into their constitutions. And in more and more disputes, the laws become an apparently insuperable obstacle. Big recent examples were the seafarer's dispute with P&O, and the dockers.

But in many cases — like the postal strike, or the health service dispute — the Tories felt unable to use the laws.

Rank-and-file activists and some national officials were coming to look to unofficial action as a way around the law. This was the case in the London Underground strikes last year.

The Tories' new Bill, published on 21 December 1989, adds three more restrictions.

If workers strike unofficially, their union will have to call a ballot

to make the action official or send every individual a letter opposing the strike. Otherwise the union may have its assets seized.

Once the union has sent its letter, the employer may legally sack the shop stewards or any other selected group of workers. A strike against those sackings will be unlawful.

It is already unlawful for unions to organise sympathy strikes. Under the 1989 Bill it will also be unlawful to threaten sympathy action.

The closed shop has already been largely outlawed by the 1988 Employment Act, which made it unlawful to sack anyone for not being a union member. The 1989 Bill would complete the process by making it unlawful to refuse anyone a job on the grounds that they are not a union member.

This legislation will open the way for any employer who wants to break strong union organisation to do it by selectively recruiting anti-union workers.

Back this campaign!

33 trade union leaders have launched a campaign for the right to strike.

The "Campaign for Free Trade Unions" demands:

- The right to belong to a trade union, to recruit fellow workers into unions and to have your union recognised by the employer for collective bargaining;
- The right to be active in your union and to take industrial action without the fear of the sack;
- The right to strike, to picket effectively and to take industrial action in support of other groups of workers, without fear of losing your job or legal attacks on your union;

- The right of union members to determine their own rules, in line with ILO Convention of Freedom of Association.

Between them, the unions whose general secretaries have signed the Charter command 2,478,000 out of 5,491,000 trade union votes at Labour Party conference. Add a big majority of the Constituency Labour Party votes, and the campaign is already close to victory at the Labour Party conference!

We must clinch this victory! Back the campaign!

For the "Campaign for Free Trade Unions", contact NUCPS, 124/130 Southwark Street, London SE1 0TU; or FTAT, Fairfield, Roe

Green, Kingsbury, London NW9 0PT.

Sponsors of "CFTU"

- Leslie Christie, Gen Sec, NUCPS
- Colin Christopher, Gen Sec, FTAT
- Pete Hagger, Executive Council, TGWU
- Ron Todd, Gen Sec, TGWU
- Margaret Prosser, Women's Officer, TGWU
- Bill Morris, Deputy Gen Sec, TGWU
- Dan Duffey, Chair, EC, TGWU
- Maureen Twomey, EC, TGWU
- Ken Gill, Gen Sec, MSF
- Jack Carr, Asst Gen Sec, MSF
- Ann Gibson, Women's Officer, MSF
- Terry Marsland, National Sec, MSF
- Barbara Switzer, Asst Gen Sec, MSF
- Alan Sapper, Gen Sec, ACTT
- Derrick Fullick, Gen Sec, ASLEF
- Ken Cameron, Gen Sec, FBU
- Peter Heathfield, Gen Sec, NUM
- Tony Dubbins, Gen Sec, NGA
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- John Aitken, Gen Sec, EPIU
- John Barry, EC, NUR
- Mike Hicks, EC, SOGAT
- Joe Marino, Gen Sec, BFAWU
- Harry Conroy, Gen Sec, NUJ
- Alan Jinkinson, Deputy Gen Sec, NALGO
- Rita Donoghue, President, NALGO
- Bill Fry, President, NCU
- Bob Stewart, EC, NUS
- Jim Airlie, EC, AEU
- Tony Hearn, Gen Sec, BETA



to dispose of that wealth, and of the workers' livelihoods, without consulting them?

• **8. No discrimination.** Sackings on grounds of sexual orientation have become more common, and sometimes industrial tribunals have upheld them. Even if a tribunal finds you were sacked unfairly, the employer still does not have to reinstate you. Tribunals should be able to compel reinstatement.

• **9, 10, 11. Rights for part-time workers, short-term contract workers, and homeworkers.** Fully a third of the workforce are now part-time, temporary, casual, or self-employed. They do not get the same rights as permanent full-time workers. This means a divided workforce; terrible exploitation for women workers, who are the majority of part-timers; and a constant downward pressure on the wages and conditions of the permanent full-time workers.

• **12. Right to political action.** The Tories' attempt to destroy trade unions' political funds failed when every union which had a fund voted to maintain it, and several new unions voted to set up funds. This victory should be written into the law.

We ask you to:

- Move motions in your union branch and Constituency Labour Party backing the Campaign for Free Trade Unions and calling for a rank-and-file labour movement campaign to organise the campaign.
- Get your union branch to send its motion to its district or national committee, to your Trades Council, to your national union conference, and to the organisers of the Campaign for Free Trade Unions.
- Get your CLP to circulate its motion to all its affiliated union branches, with a covering letter asking them to discuss it.
- Get your CLP to submit the motion to regional and national Labour Party conference.
- Consider organising a local day school, sponsored by Labour Parties and trade unions, on the Workers' Charter and the Campaign for Free Trade Unions.
- Let us know how you are getting on. Write to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

8 CZECHOSLOVAKIA

After the fairy tale, some harsh realities

Sarah Cotterill and Tony Dale, just returned from Czechoslovakia, report on the bitter conflicts emerging as the country moves towards a free-market private-profit economy.

"And now the bell rings and the fairy-tale is over."

The last line of traditional Czechoslovakian fairytales has taken on a new meaning for tens of thousands of people attending demonstrations. The end of Communist Party dictatorship is celebrated by crowds ringing small bells and jangling keys.

When we arrived in Prague, our first impression was of a beautiful historic city on a par with Paris or Florence. This was rapidly followed by a second impression of an intense political atmosphere.

Political posters are everywhere. The posters of the new Czechoslovak President, Vaclav Havel, are only rivalled by posters of Tomas Masaryk, who, following World War I, became the first President of the newly independent Czechoslovakia. It seems that everyone — in bars, cafes, or on the streets — wants to discuss politics.

There is a strong feeling of national — as well as political — liberation. It is not just the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) who have been overthrown; as importantly, the country feels liberated from the Russian empire.

Last November, 41 years of Communist Party rule was ended by a broad coalition.

The "velvet revolution" was sparked by student demonstrations. The Communist Party government disintegrated under the weight of a two-hour general strike which brought the country to a standstill on 27 November.

Workers, students, intellectuals combined around demands for democracy and an end to Communist Party rule. A British television documentary filmed in November interviewed numerous people who simply wanted the right to speak openly.

Civic Forum (Obcanske Forum) and its Slovak counterpart, Public Against Violence, emerged as the representatives of the people — the champion of democracy and free speech.

The Havel posters, the Civic Forum T-shirts, the Czechoslovak flags represent the ending of the Communist Party's dictatorship. They are the symbols of a democratic revolution.

In that revolution many different political strands were united in a broad coalition. Inevitably that coalition is now breaking up into its component parts.

In many ways Civic Forum's job has been completed. Their aim was to create a parliamentary democracy. The elections are set for 8 June. This done, Civic Forum is starting to break up.

All the main issues dominating the political scene — should the Communist Party be banned? How to deal with the old state apparatus? The nature and speed of the economic reforms? — all these questions cause sharp diversions in Civic Forum.

Nevertheless, Civic Forum will not disappear. In the elections Civic Forum is likely to be the biggest votewinner, with around 25% of the vote.

The electoral system works

undemocratically against smaller parties.

To be able to stand candidates, parties had to get signatures from 10,000 supporters. At the polls, voters will have to choose between party lists, so individuals stand little chance of election. Parties will have to win at least 5% of the vote in either Czech or Slovak areas to win seats.

27 parties have been formed. On the far right a number of parties have blocked together as the Republican Union.

A more serious threat from the right will be posed by the Christian Democratic Union. The CDU is an alliance composing the Christian Democratic Party, Czechoslovak People's Party, and Slovakia's Christian Democratic Movement. This bloc allies itself closely with West European Christian Democrats, and may do well in the elections, especially in Slovakia.

A Social Democratic Party has been formed and will be a force in the elections. It stands in the tradition of West European Social Democracy. At present, it is a small electoral machine with few real links with the unions. The Social Democrats are seen as being to the left of Civic Forum and are likely to win 10% of the vote.

One surprising feature is that the discredited Communist Party (KSC) is likely to win close to 10% of the vote! They seem to have been able to maintain support among a layer of older voters and among sections who have a privileged position under Communist Party rule.

Two groups of dissident Communists have been formed. The Czechoslovak Democratic Forum are still KSC members while Obroda (Renewal) have split from the KSC.

On the anti-Stalinist socialist left, Leva Alternativa (Left Alternative) has been formed. It is a group encompassing activists from different traditions who would describe themselves as socialists, Trotskyists, Marxists, Anarchists, etc.

Left Alternative fully supports the ending of the Communist Party's monopoly of power. They

The economic rule of the bureaucrats needs to be destroyed, but by workers' control of production.

believe more scope for market mechanisms is necessary to correct the distortions and mismanagement of the bureaucratic command economy; but Left Alternative warns against and opposes the moves to full privatisation. They see "self-management" as the key to defending workers' interests.

Left Alternative is still part of Civic Forum. The most widely-known member of Left Alternative, Petr Uhl, is standing as a Civic Forum candidate in Prague.

During and following the November events, socialists presented themselves as the left wing of Civic Forum. Now, there is a need for a more independent orientation.

While we were in Czechoslovakia, Left Alternative launched their new paper, *Polarita*. The initial print run of 6,000 sold out in a few days! There is a wide audience for anti-Stalinist socialist ideas.



Democracy wall in Prague, December 1989

The economy is still dominated by state ownership and price controls. The government is debating major economic reforms.

Civic Forum officially calls for various forms of ownership ranging from co-operative and municipal right through to joint stock and private companies. The issue of the nature and speed of economic reform has caused sharp divisions in the government and Civic Forum.

Vaclav Klaus, the Finance Minister, wants the immediate lifting of price controls, a far reaching privatisation programme, and tight monetary control.

Inside the government the opposition to Klaus is led by Valtr Komarek, the Deputy Prime Minister. Vaclav Havel is sympathetic to Komarek. However, the core of Komarek's disagreement with Klaus is not over the measures advocated but over the timing. Komarek advocates a slower approach, Klaus wants a fast transition.

The suffocating grip of the state over enterprise does need to be loosened, but the privatisation plans will work against workers. Even if share distribution is restricted it will eventually lead to ownership and control being concentrated in the hands of a small number of capitalists. Private share ownership should be opposed.

The economic rule of the bureaucrats needs to be destroyed but by workers' control of production through self-management. Faced with the economic reforms, socialists and workers need to intensify the fight for self-management.

Across Czechoslovakia people have high expectations on what Western market capitalism will bring. Nearly everybody is looking forward to capitalism — West German-style.

Czechoslovakia may well turn out to be one of the winners as Eastern Europe is fully integrated into the Western Europe market. Prior to the 1948 Stalinist takeover Czechoslovakia was a major industrial power.

The workforce is skilled, inflation is low and the foreign debt is a "respectable" \$7 billion.

However, under Stalinist rule Czechoslovakia gradually slipped down the table of industrial powers. Today, a lot of industry is old and would not be able to compete on the world market. The economy is very reliant on trade with Russia, and the other Eastern Bloc states.

Whatever happens, market capitalism will bring social differentiation, inequalities, unemployment, regional disparities, etc. Alongside the winners, there will

also be losers.

Western capitalism is having a honeymoon in Prague but that honeymoon will come to an end.

Many Czechs and Slovaks have big illusions in Western European capitalism. But illusions mean high expectations. Once the reality of market capitalism is seen, the denied expectations may well turn into major struggles by workers to defend their class instincts.

Since the general strike last November the trade unions have been dormant. The 10 minute general strike on 11 April, demanding the state take over all Communist Party property, was the first major action by workers since November. Even then, the strike was very much an action to add strength to the political demands against the KSC. In this, the striking workers were playing a **supportive** role.

Despite this, action by tens of thousands of workers showed that the workers are still organised. Rumblings of discontent have begun to grow in the unions as workers realise what may be in store under any proposed private ownership, market capitalist system. Even if the workers appear dormant at present, economic changes will bring class conflict.

If workers' discontent can be armed with the socialist ideas of self-management, possibilities of radical change will be on the agenda.

The continued existence of the old Stalinist state apparatus rivals economic reform as the major political issue of the day. Dissatisfaction is growing with the government's inactivity in dismantling the old state apparatus.

The secret police (STB) has been disbanded and ordered to hand its guns in. But rumours are rife that the organisation is still active. The arrest of 30 STB agents in April — months after the secret police was supposedly disbanded — suggests the rumours are true.

There is also popular discontent over the kid glove treatment meted out to ex-members of the STB. In total, 40 million crowns per month is being paid to "retired" STB members.

This discontent has surfaced in demands for the ousting of Interior Minister, Richard Sacher. Sacher is a member of Civic Forum and a Christian Democrat. A scandal broke in April when it was discovered that Sacher was leaking secret police files to discredit rivals. So far, Sacher has survived.

The legitimate demands for the full destruction of the Stalinist repressive apparatus have now, un-

fortunately, been diverted into calls for the banning of the KSC. Yet again, Civic Forum is split over the issue.

It is no surprise that the anger created by 40 years of Stalinist dictatorship should surface in demands for proscribing the KSC. But any proscription of the KSC could be the start of a wider restriction of democratic rights, including attacks on anti-Stalinist socialists like Left Alliance.

Any ban of the KSC would be a step back for Czechoslovakia's democratic revolution.

Czechoslovakia as a state was created through the amalgamation of three distinctive regions — Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. In Bohemia and Moravia the Czechs form a clear majority. Slovakia, to the east, is mainly populated by a distinctive national grouping of Slovaks. Slovaks number a third of the country's 15 million people.

Following the November events, national differences have risen to the surface. In Slovakia there have been demonstrations calling for an independent Slovak republic. Calls for national independence are still quite weak, but there are widespread demands for recognition of Slovaks as equal partners to Czechs.

Slovak demands were aired in what became known as the "great hyphen debate". The Slovaks wanted the country's name changed to Czecho-Slovakia. The Czechs saw this as divisive. Havel proposed that Slovaks could call it Czecho-Slovakia and the Czechs call it Czechoslovakia! Parliament instead decided in April to rename the country the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic.

Beneath this rather comic episode lies a serious issue. The Slovak question could develop into a demand for independence. Socialists need to relate sympathetically to the Slovak minority and build unity among workers and socialists across Czechoslovakia.

The far right are organised in the Republican Union; around the paper *Republican Unity*. They have built some support by being the most vehement anti-Communists. They are now trying to stoke up racist discontent against the Vietnamese and the Romany gypsies.

Attacks on hostels housing Vietnamese workers have been reported.

There is a danger that the right could turn the pride in the new Czechoslovakia into racism against these groups. With threatened unemployment the right will try to scapegoat gypsies and Vietnamese for the problems created by Western market capitalism.

Prague is covered with posters of Vaclav Havel and Tomas Masaryk. The comparison between Havel and Masaryk is one encouraged by Civic Forum and is a useful comparison to make.

Tomas Masaryk was a fighter for an independent Czechoslovak state. He attempted to use the First World War to mobilise a fight against the Austro-Hungarian empire. He helped lead Czechoslovakia to national independence.

Nevertheless, Masaryk remained a bourgeois politician. In 1920 a workers' general strike swept Czechoslovakia. It was led by the Marxist left-wing of the Social Democratic Party. The real possibility of radical socialist change existed.

Masaryk played a leading role in sending armed police to defeat the strike. Areas of the country were put under martial law. 3,000 socialists and worker activists were arrested.

When push came to shove, Masaryk showed himself as an enemy of the Czech and Slovak workers. Will Havel follow Masaryk's footsteps?

The people's game?

John Cunningham looks at the row about the bid for Sheffield United FC by an Iraqi businessman

A valuable piece of real estate near the centre of Britain's fourth largest city, a takeover bid of some £6m from a Middle East businessman, a boardroom tussle — what are we talking about here, Harrods?

No chance. This is football in the 1990s.

For most of the season the talk on the terraces at Bramall Lane, home of Second Division Sheffield United (the "Blades"), has been about the chances of promotion to Division 1, the merits or demerits of manager Dave Bassett's notorious "long-ball game", and whether or not the ground should be moved to South Yorkshire's soon-to-be illustrious white elephant — the Don Valley Athletics Stadium.

Suddenly the massed ranks on the Kop had to stop craning their necks at the latest up-field punt from goalie Simon Tracey or the dazzling twists and turns of forward Tony Agana. The club was going to be bought, lock stock and barrel, by a Mr Sam Hashimi, an Iraqi-born businessman.

Early in March he had offered to buy up Chairman Reg Brearley's majority shareholding. That would give him control of the club although, apparently, he had never



Sheffield United: big business or sport?

even seen the team play.

Brearley told a stunned board meeting that he had agreed to the offer.

The news hit the papers the same day. So what were Hashimi's plans?

They never appeared in any concrete form, but they certainly had little to do with football as a sport. Most of the phrases he used revolved around that well-worn concept "redevelopment".

Bramall Lane was to become a "leisure complex", with hotels, restaurants and amusements, oh,

and there would be a football team as well. The other main interest for him appeared to be his various contacts in the Middle East.

There was talk of "lucrative" business deals and links with the mayor of Jeddah. Hashimi's interests were purely business, and he showed no interest in the fans, the traditions of the club, its history or place in Sheffield culture.

For Reg Brearley, too, it was a business deal, just as much as for Hashimi. Paul Woolhouse, another director, put in a rival bid, and for a time bids and rival bids flew around

like paper money on a Monopoly board.

Eventually the deal fell through. Brearley withdrew his offer to sell his shares, Hashimi was shown the door, and Woolhouse appears to have dropped out too.

The only person to come out of this whole sordid business with any credit is the manager Dave Bassett who clearly looked unhappy at the photo-call he was asked (ordered?) to do with Hashimi, holding aloft red and white scarves. Eventually he held his own press conference and expressed his desire that the

business should be wound up.

No-one, throughout this dog fight, asked how the fans felt about it. Woolhouse's objections to Hashimi seemed to centre around the fact that he wasn't local and, worse than that, he was a foreigner! What a short memory people have! What about Alex Sabella, the Argentine who played for United, or one-time coach Uruguayan Danny Begera?

Brearley seemed mainly concerned to make a fast buck, possibly because of certain difficulties he is encountering in India with his other businesses. Who knows?

Certainly not the long-suffering fans. Brearley's so-called statements to the press were masterpieces of the art of saying nothing, and Woolhouse, appearing on the TV documentary 'United' could only repeat that running a football club is a business which "the fans don't know anything about".

No mention of informing them on a regular basis. No discussion of consulting the fans. One suspects he would have collapsed at the suggestion of a supporters' representative on the Board!

The United fanzine, *Flashing Blade* (copies available from 4 Cross Myrtle Road, Sheffield S2 3EL, South Yorkshire, price 40p plus postage) expressed the sentiment of many Blades fans in its latest issue with the following:

"At Bramall Lane it was both annoying and sad to see a football club again the plaything of rich men claiming to want all the best for the club but more likely motivated by personal gain, status and glory.

"As they dreamt of rubbing shoulders with minor Royals at Wembley or of development opportunities which could fill their own pockets they were simultaneously threatening the dreams of people who give their lives to the club."

The growth of fanzines like *Flashing Blade*, or the national *When Saturday Comes*, the phenomenal growth of the Football Supporters Association, and an increasing awareness among fans that they are not going to be treated like dogs any more, shows that the moguls and sharks who control the "beautiful game" aren't going to have things all their own way.

The massive movement against the loony ID card scheme clearly demonstrated the depth of feeling and the potential for mass involvement of those who really care about the game. As attendances at football matches steadily go up the possibilities for affirmative action (as opposed to just grumbling) increase.

One day, perhaps, the "people's game" will belong to the people — I'd be over the moon about that!

The media, the MPs, and the fans

Nick Lowles was there with the Leeds football fans in Bournemouth

To the chants of "We are Leeds" and "United are back" the fans of Leeds United rampaged through Bournemouth and nearby seaside towns last weekend.

The media, politicians and so-called football experts had a field day using the events to prove their points on issues ranging from ID cards to the breakdown of the nuclear family.

No-one can deny the chaos caused by Leeds fans, but the reaction of the media and politicians was selective.

The media realised that trouble was likely and were there in force. They ignored all the Leeds fans who were there to enjoy Leeds's victory, and were concerned only with those causing trouble. Leeds fans responded to media requests by explaining how they were going to smash their way into the ground, and giving Nazi salutes.

We saw one camera crew ask Leeds fans to show off their "Bournemouth Invasion '90" T-shirts and sing some songs. This approach was only too tempting for hundreds of Leeds fans to ignore.

When the Ku Klux Klan turned up, the photographers rushed over to the white-hooded fascists and asked them to pose for photos. This led to hundreds of Leeds fans who wanted to be on telly rushing behind the KKK and joining in.

A fire on the beach, lit in order to keep warm, became "Leeds fans set fire to Bournemouth Pier". In fact, the pier is concrete! One 16-year old without a ticket but with the intention of getting in became "Leeds fans' plans to smash their way in".



After the trouble the politicians and experts were wheeled out to give their answers. MP (many of whom have never been to a football match in their lives) told us that Leeds should be shut down. ID cards and national service were the answer.

What ID cards would do to stop 10,000 fans without tickets turning up to a ground no-one could quite answer. The idea of shutting Leeds down missed the whole issue. Everyone would just go and support another club!

To understand why many young people act like they did — and it's not just at Leeds, or football for that matter — one has to understand who these fans are. They are

predominantly working class youth who have shit boring jobs and no future. Supporting Leeds and travelling around the country with them is for many their only excitement of the week.

In a perverse way, terrorising other towns, attacking other fans and the reputation that follows them makes them feel important and big for the first time.

Even if trouble at football matches declines, the alienation of many young people will continue as long as capitalism exists and people have no control over their lives.

The future of Leeds and English football looks grim. The arrival of Leeds in the First Division is likely to spark off a wave of trouble not

seen for four or five years.

After Leeds won, some fans were already planning their assaults on the Stretford End at Manchester United, and the North Bank at Arsenal. Retaliation and retribution is almost certain to follow.

In the near future things look equally depressing. With an estimated 500 Leeds fans heading for Italy for the World Cup, the return of English clubs to Europe looks doubtful. Many fans gleefully commented that the First Division just wasn't aware of what they are about to face and that Leeds were unbeatable. Unfortunately they weren't talking about Leeds on the field.

Dream and nightmare in America

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'The Hunt for Red October' and 'Roger and Me'

Films don't need slogans and manifestos to be political. All movies are political, since they present pictures of society based on certain assumptions. If the same assumptions are repeated over and over again, it's because filmmakers believe that they are true, that they represent the way things are.

In American movies, the American Dream — that anyone, regardless of background, can 'make it' — is the underlying myth of many films. It's a con, of course, but that fact is never admitted; American directors have mastered the art of presenting society as they wish it to be, rather than as it is. Myths about America abound in their films, nowhere more blatantly than in comedies. Laughs are the sugar coating that makes the bitter pill easier to swallow.

Yet dramas also have their share of myths. 'The Hunt for Red October', superficially a chase movie, is built on a vast superstructure of myth. Briefly, the message is 'Russians bad, Americans good', but it's put across a little more subtly than that.

The Red October is a new super-quiet nuclear submarine, capable of penetrating American defences and landing its warheads off the American coast. When it goes AWOL, the Soviets want to find it and sink it, and so do the Americans who fear they have a first strike weapon aimed right at them.

But Dr Jack Ryan, a CIA analyst, is convinced that Ramius, captain of the Red October, is defecting and we're all set for a tense countdown. Who will find the Red October first?

Critics haven't been kind to the

movie, but it's first class entertainment of the kind many critics are too lofty to enjoy these days — a simple adventure story, well told.

It has its weaknesses. The Russian crew, headed by Sean Connery's Ramius (speaking Russian with a nifty Scots accent) talk perfect English till they're confronted by Americans when once again Russian becomes the language of choice.

Scenes where the defecting Russians muse about their future life in America are sentimental slop.

The other weakness is in the underlying assumptions. We're expected to swallow, straight faced, the assumption that the Russians (devious, lying, treacherous) can't be trusted with a first strike weapon, but the Americans (straight talking, fair minded) can. Piffle. This is cold war rhetoric of the first kind, but the Americans get away with it because of the introductory disclaimer 'Pre-Glasnost...'

'The Hunt for Red October', enjoyable as it is as an adventure movie, is cultural brainwashing, based on a thoroughly false view of America as upright and fair, the land of opportunity and freedom.

A more tarnished image of the land of opportunity is on view in 'Roger and Me', a rather black documentary about the effects of unbridled capitalism on an American town.

Flint, Michigan, was a one-industry town, and the industry was cars. General Motors had a number of factories there, which it began to close in the sixties. First the truck plant shut down, then the car plants closed, and pretty soon, thousands upon thousands of car workers were out of a job.

General Motors wasn't closing down production though; they simply opened new plants, in Mexico, where the workers came cheaper, and had fewer rights, and where there were fewer controls on industry. Profits accordingly skyrocketed.

During the time of the Flint closures, GM president Roger Smith was annually awarded higher and higher bonuses, at one point clocking up a two million dollar raise.

Michael Moore, creator of 'Roger and Me', tried to find Roger



A 'pre-glasnost' adventure story Smith and bring him to Flint, to confront him with the human tragedy of his company's policies.

Smith proved elusive, so Moore told the story anyway, filming interviews with laid off workers and other residents of Flint, the dying town.

This is no straightforward documentary, but a rather savage black comedy. The deputy sheriff responsible for evictions comforts himself that people are at least being thrown out of their homes by someone they know, someone sympathetic.

Destitute people try to stay afloat as best they can, and their efforts to survive are nothing short of heroic. Moore challenges the view that a

company's only duty is to stay in profit, and that it should be accountable only to its stockholders. What about accountability to the workers who built the company and were the basis of its profits? Don't they deserve some consideration?

The residents of Flint, long encouraged to work for and depend on GM for jobs, were suddenly left with nothing — no job, no future, no compensation. GM sucked Flint dry, then decamped to Mexico to begin the same scenario over again.

GM is of course only doing what all capitalists do — chasing profits. The human consequences are never considered.

Michael Moore says that's not acceptable. He's right.

On the Black Hills

TV

By Vicki Morris

My English teacher used to extol the virtues of William Wordsworth's poems though, she said, some people found them rather "so-whattish".

William Wordsworth goes out for a day in the country and sees some daffodils or an old turf-cutter slaving his guts out and goes "aren't they nice? So pastoral."

Well, Channel 4's 'On the Black Hill' was better entertainment than a Wordsworth poem, and every bit as so-whattish but, if I can be allowed to judge, had nothing like as much literary merit.

It was quite simply the story of three generations of one family growing up in the Black Hills of the West Midlands. I had anticipated an epic family saga — more tasteful than the usual, being Channel 4 — but, though it had its moments of passion, the stream of the years had the effect of ironing out the ups and downs and ending up an anodyne chronicle of rites of passage — growing up, having children, or not, dying.

This in spite of nicking literary conventions from authors as varied as Thomas Hardy, DH Lawrence and Dylan Thomas.

The central characters were twin brothers growing up almost inseparable, and ageing together, eventually coming to share the same

bed that their parents had slept in. As seems popular at the moment, the twins were portrayed as having a telepathic understanding, and a tendency to smother each other with their more or less mutual jealousies.

Hence neither ever got married, though one would have liked to.

Just as in most people's lives there wasn't much plot although there were plenty of ironies. These consisted mostly of people not forgiving in other people the same faults they had themselves committed previously in other contexts.

And there was a rather clumsy device of showing change in the outside world by the regular intrusion of modern aeroplanes into the brothers' lives.

I tried to work out why the programme was so unsatisfying. Perhaps because the countryside bores the life out of me, although there are ways of treating the subject which wouldn't make the brothers' story just a pretty picture of a stagnant backwater of history.

Wordsworth is worth something because he uses the rural idyll upon which he reflects to a purpose — to contrast with the life and values of the town. Thomas Hardy's gripping 'Mayor of Casterbridge' is all about a dying way of life, but there's the point: his stories have a dynamic: the clash of old and new. No such dynamic was present in 'On the Black Hill'.

I don't know if it's sad to be so adamant that drama needs a bit of conflict to take it out of the mundane. But some competition is clearly a good thing...at least in historical drama.

The con-trick economy

THE HIDDEN HAND

By Colin Foster

When the *Sunday Times* printed its list of Britain's 200 richest people on 8 April, it was dominated by millionaires who had inherited wealth.

The minority in the list who are self-made millionaires give us some measure of what the market economy rewards.

Most of them made their fortunes in the City. Their special talent, if any, is for outdoing and swindling other rich people.

Four, by my reckoning, got rich through success in a productive trade rather than in managing or trading. Andrew Lloyd Webber, George Michael, Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney got into the ranks of the super-rich through show business.

Why does the market economy reward performance by musicians — and by movie actors and actresses — so much more than performance by, say, scientists or technologists?

The paradoxical, but quite logical, fact is that showbiz performance is rewarded better partly because no-one can measure very well whether it is good or not. "Stars" are stars because they command big money, and they command big money because they're stars. Whether they are good or not is secondary.

Is Paul McCartney really a better performer than Joe Soap whom no-one has ever heard of? Who knows? When Paul McCartney records a song, it is heavily advertised, and thousands of people will buy the recording just because of his name.

As for Joe Soap, he'll need luck even to get in to the recording studio — and a great deal more luck for the recording company to give his song any publicity.

Is Meryl Streep a better actress than Jane Soap who has to scratch around for bit parts?

Maybe, maybe not. But if Jane Soap isn't lucky, she may spend her whole career in bit parts. Meanwhile Meryl Streep gets big money from producers because they know her name will sell pictures to distributors and to audiences.

Between two scientists, Professor Z and Dr X, it is relatively easy to have an objective measure of who has produced more and better work. But neither will get rich.

The way the market works when buyers don't have any objective measure of whether product A is better than product B is that buyers take price as an indicator of quality. If A costs more than B, buyers assume A is better than B. A gets a reputation for being better than B; so A is priced higher; so A maintains the reputation.

Something similar happens among capitalists and entrepreneurs. On the whole capitalists get super-rich not through manufacturing useful goods but through financial wheeler-dealing.

People have got rich on Wall Street and in the City while being complete dunces at the technicalities of finance. Once they get a reputation for being good deal-makers, they get brought in on the big deals, they get big money, and their reputation is reinforced.

The manufacturing capitalist, however, deals in more tangible, objectively measurable things.

The capitalist market economy rewards the confidence-trick much more than it rewards performance.



'Unbridled capitalism in an American town

Our hostages at home

WHETTON'S WEEK A miner's diary

There is a very strong call for action to be taken by the British government in order to obtain the release of the hostages in Lebanon.

Whilst not for one moment wanting to detract from it, I would ask people also to think about the political hostages that are being held in this country by Maggie Thatcher.

There are 130 sacked miners who are nothing more and nothing less than political hostages. Maggie Thatcher says that she will not talk to hostage-takers, but people should remember that she herself is a hostage-taker — and under no circumstances will she negotiate with us about the release of those hostages!

130 sacked miners who have been blatantly victimised for nothing more than supporting their union. Not only the miners themselves, but also those miners' wives and kids, are still political hostages.

Whilst not detracting from the

seriousness and the strength of the cause of those in the Middle East, we need to remember those that we've got at home.

Quite a lot of people are prepared not to pay the poll tax.

A lot of people were undecided, but I think the latest government step-back has convinced a lot of people not to pay who were either undecided or were going to pay.

They've seen that the Tories don't know what they're going to do — so why the hell pay money in?

The Labour Party and the TUC should really be piling the pressure on the Tories. They should really be throwing their weight behind the argument about not paying and not complying with the poll tax.

If they did that we could kill that tax virtually overnight, and bring down the government with it.

The hypocrisy of the Tories trying to claim some sort of victory in the council elections shows exactly what they are.

They told bare-faced lies. But it was not the major victory that the Labour Party counted on.

Instead of tinkering about with the internal machinations of the Labour Par-

ty, Kinnock ought to be throwing his weight against the Tories. He's got them on the run.

He can see that victory is within his grasp. He can see himself stepping inside No.10. What he's trying to do is to protect his back from his own kind when he gets inside No.10.

Now if he's not careful, if he spends that much time waffling about and protecting his own back for when he does get in to No.10, he's going to let the Tories back in.

He should pile the pressure on the Tories and let the Party sort itself out at its annual conference, which is where Party decisions should be made.

He's playing a silly game by announcing major changes right at the time when he needs the Party to rally round.

An internal row will break out, and that isn't going to do us any good. It's totally wrong, and the way he's done it is totally out of order.

If an when Neil Kinnock does get in to No.10 the last think he'll want is trade unions demanding pay and rights.

So he's prepared to let quite a lot of the anti-trade union legislation stay on the books, and he'll use it just as readily as the Tories will.

The rank and file have got to organise against that. We ought to organise the rank and file in order to throw our

weight behind any campaign that demands that basic trade union rights be given back to trade unionists.

That applies whether it's a Labour government, a Tory government or any other sort of government. The shade of the government is immaterial; we should be organising to demand back our basic trade union rights.

I was very pleased to see the the Winchester 3 released. The paranoid reaction of the Tories and the media during the trial and since goes to show the lengths they are prepared to go to.

Then, as a result of the Strangeways riot, the government has said that they are going to tighten the lid. I cannot possibly think of any worse thing to do.

That demo at Strangeways was like a safety valve going off. Now they want to remove the safety valve and tighten the lid down even more! They are going to cause a major explosion.

It used to be "short, sharp shock". What they're planning now is more of the "long hard grind".

If they carry out their threat and tighten the lid, then prisoners will have absolutely no avenue for their frustrations and it's just going to blow up.

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

Poll tax rebellion in Somerset

POLL TAX

By Tony Serjeant

Over 40 delegates from 17 protest groups met in Glastonbury on 29 April to review the revolt against the poll tax in this predominantly Tory shire.

There are now anti-poll tax organisations in every sizeable town in the county.

Delegates heard how in Taunton 120 had attended a bill burning addressed by Labour MP Bernie Grant. A hysterical and slanderous smear campaign by the local Tory MP convinced many traders on the route of the march to board up their windows in anticipation of violence. Needless to say, the march passed off entirely peacefully.

In Yeovil a march to the town's Tory offices started with 300 and had been joined by an additional 200 protestors by the time it reached its goal.

From anti-poll tax group attracted over 300 to their inaugural meeting, Chard had seen 120 at their launch, while Coleford had 100. Delegates pointed out that even in the smaller towns public meetings have been reasonably attended and groups exist in villages like North Petherton and Milverton.

In Shepton Mallet, following a meeting of over 300, a picket of Mendip District Council was arranged. Protestors used the council's own waste disposal system to rid themselves of poll tax demands.

One of the most active groups, Bridgwater anti-poll tax union, is calling on local councillors to refuse to issue summonses against non-payers and for magistrates to resign.

The Somerset Network Against the Poll Tax (SNAPT) agreed to affiliate to the All Britain Federation. Groups are mobilising hard for the 'Somerset Poll Tax Rebellion' march planned for Bridgwater on 12 May, which promises to be the biggest event of its kind yet seen in the county.

**Somerset Poll Tax Rebellion march
Saturday 12 May
Assemble, Cranleigh Gardens,
Bridgwater, 11am
Speakers: Ken Livingstone, Dawn
Primarolo, East European trade
unionist**

Nottingham labour moves against poll tax

By Steve Battlemuch

A new group, Labour Against the Poll Tax, has been launched in Nottingham following the big anti-poll tax march there on Bank Holiday Monday.

Its first meeting will be on Tuesday 22 May.

Over 1,000 people attended the anti-poll tax rally on 7 May. Organised by the Trades Council, the 'Don't Pay, Don't Collect' march saw dozens of anti-poll tax groups join trade union branches for the largest May Day event in Nottingham for years.

Paul Gosling, a Labour councillor from Leicester, who has been disciplined three times by Labour Party HQ for his anti-poll tax stance, and for voting against cuts, spoke of the need to take the battle into the Labour Party, and force Kinnock to back the campaign.

Also speaking at the rally was Arthur Scargill, who reminded the marchers that it was only by breaking anti-working class laws that the labour movement came into existence, and that the vote for working class people was won. Echoing Paul Gosling, Scargill, too, called on the Labour and trade union leaders to head the fight against the Tory tax.

The rally heard speakers from the South African mining union NUMSA, who are currently on a two-week visit to Britain, as well as a speaker from the local Federation, and Joss, a woman arrested on the 31 March demo in London, who is facing charges of throwing a "sharpened" can!

Why Longbridge rejected the shorter-week deal

SO spoke to a Longbridge shop steward about the background to last week's vote rejecting the company's much-publicised deal on hours

The deal affected different areas in different ways. For workers in Power and Train it would have meant three shifts from Monday to Friday, plus contractual Saturday and Sunday working, averaging out at a 31-hour week over 5 weeks.

For Body and Assembly workers on the Rover 200 and 400 models it meant three shifts from Monday to Friday, the abolition of the Friday night shift, and an average of 36 hours per week over three weeks.

Everyone else — that's to say, the Metro workers, would remain more or less unaffected except that their hours would have gone down to a basic 37.

Each section had their own particular gripes against the deal. In the East Works (Power and Train) the weekend shifts were obviously very unpopular. In Body and Assembly the proposal to

reduce the lunchbreak to 45 minutes over an 8-hour shift was not exactly welcomed. And there would be problems with holidays, because the new shift patterns would have begun on Saturdays, not Mondays. Probably the one universal complaint was that the deal didn't involve any extra money.

Without seeing a detailed break-down of how the vote went in the different areas of the plant, it's difficult to know exactly which elements of the package were the most unpopular — my guess is that the East Works were solidly against and the rest roughly 50-50 on it. But, to be honest, the most important factor was what someone once described as

"The dreadful years which followed the sacking of Derek Robinson are now over."

"Brummie bloody-mindedness".

People resented what they saw as being railroaded by the company, the officials and the plants works committee. There was actually a sense of inevitability about it all, and everyone was quite surprised by the final vote (4,901 in favour, 6,997 against). I suspect most people thought "it'll be passed anyway, but I'll register my protest by voting against, just so the company don't think we're a pushover".

The company were gob-smacked by the result — they'd already started interviewing for the new jobs. The result also caused a constitutional crisis within the plant's union organisation. The Joint Shop Stewards Committee threw the deal out, despite the Works Committee (ie. Senior Stewards Committee) endorsing it: this was effectively a vote of no confidence in the Works Committee.

The AEU Senior Steward, Brian Chambers, told the JSSC that the Works Committee could not change its position because a press release had already gone out from the officials and the Works Committee, backing the deal — this effectively reversed the official relationship between the JSSC and the Works Committee, by which the latter is supposed to be guided by the decisions of the former.

Rank and file stewards challenged Chambers' ruling, but in the end the JSSC pulled back from actually passing a formal resolution of no confidence — they'd gone to the abyss and pulled back. The Convenor, Joe Carroll, who's not a bad bloke in many ways, played a bit of a double game: he backed the deal but went round telling stewards that he still wanted a "good vote against". In the end he got a "better" vote against than he bargained for!

The officials, who'd more or less promised the company they would

"deliver" the membership's agreement, were obviously panicked by the result. Jack Adams (TGWU National Automotive Officer) came into the plant on Friday, presumably to give the Works Committee a good talking to. And John Allean (AEU Motor Industry Officer) rang up in a right flap, instructing Chambers not to go to any meetings with the company without an AEU full-timer present.

The vote leaves us in a very strong position: we've got two new models that the company say customers are queuing up for, and the workforce have effectively said we want a better deal before we're willing to talk about increasing production in any way.

Rank and file stewards who organised for the "No" vote are now getting together to plan our next moves. I'm arguing for a campaign to bring November's wage review forward and to draw up a set of demands including a big flat-rate pay increase and a 35-hour week with no strings.

After years of being clobbered by

"tough-guy" management tactics and a bureaucratic, weak-kneed leadership, the rank and file have finally re-asserted themselves. I think that's the most important result of this vote. It was summed up by a small incident in the CABs (Car Assembly Buildings) prior to the vote: the night shift were due to hold a meeting to discuss the proposals, but no-one from the Works Committee turned up to address the meeting.

The workers carried on with the rest of the shift, but said they wouldn't start the next shift until someone from the Works Committee came to address them. In effect, they were saying "You can't take us for granted — you can't 'deliver' us to the management without even consulting us." That's the real lesson of this vote.

The dreadful years that followed the sacking of Derek Robinson are now over. The rank and file is confident again and they're ready to assert themselves again. We need a plant leadership that reflects the new strength and confidence."

Engineers and national action

The engineers campaign for a shorter working week continues.

Action is spreading to companies outside the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions' (CSEU) hit list.

An overtime ban has been imposed at Rolls Royce Parkside, Coventry, by manual workers determined to keep their morning teabreak and not surrender it to get a 37-hour week. At BAe Bristol stewards have cut overtime in protest at similar strings.

Rolls Royce and BAe are crucial companies in engineering. As a minimum, they should be forced to make proper combine-wide agreements rather than

the local deals they have so far been prepared to offer. The CSEU leadership don't seem very interesting in pursuing these two companies. This is quite strange because at one stage in the campaign a deal with BAe was considered decisive for the outcome of the campaign as a whole.

But rather than concentrate on the key companies, and the need for a national agreement, the CSEU leadership have shifted the focus to a series of small firms. This is good because it means there could be action in every Confed district but a concentrated campaign of national action for a national deal, starting with a one-day strike across engineering, would be a lot better.

IN BRIEF

The Tories are planning new anti-union laws. The aim is to make it more difficult to automatically deduct union dues at source. The aim is to stem the flow of union finances.

According to a survey published by the Low Pay Unit 16,000 support grade civil servants — cleaners, messengers,

telephonists, and security guards — earn less than the Council of Europe's 'decency threshold' of £163 a week.

The NUR executive has rejected a 9.3% pay offer for tube workers and a ballot on industrial action is expected this week. Any action is unlikely till June.

National officials of the power workers unions are recommending acceptance of the government's 10.2% pay offer.

Construction Safety Campaign National Conference and AGM
23rd and 24th June 1990

Kingsway Princeton College
Grays Inn Centre,
Sidmouth Street,
London WC1

This conference is aimed at safety reps, shop stewards, siteworkers and others who want to bring about an end to the unnecessary deaths, injuries and disease in Britain's construction industry

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Local polls shake Tories

The local council elections on 3 May produced contradictory results, but on the whole were a victory for Labour.

The Tories increased their majorities in Westminster and Wandsworth and took Ealing off Labour, but elsewhere they were hammered. They lost the showcase council of Bradford.

The press had deliberately hyped up the possibility of Tory defeats in the run up to the election, so that Labour's victory would look 'less impressive' than predicted. Labour did very well in the 1986 local elections, so we would have had to do extremely well to produce a spectacular swing this time.

According to some commentators, for example in Sunday's *Independent*, the Tory vote in places like Westminster could collapse in the general election. People will vote to keep their poll tax down; but that doesn't mean they approve of the poll tax or that they will vote Tory when the setting of the poll tax is not an issue.

Labour is in a good position to campaign hard for a general election. The Tories are on the run. The poll tax remains extremely unpopular.

Labour must fight for jobs!

By Clive Bradley

A Labour government will not intervene for full employment.

Employment will be left to the market, and if unions push for too-high wage increases, they will "create unemployment". The unions must "stand by their own decisions".

So said Labour's chief economic spokesperson, John Smith, in an interview with Sunday's *Independent*, marking the most explicit declaration yet that Labour does not intend to stand by its old policy of full employment.

In the past five months, John

Smith has had between 35 and 40 appointments in the City, in an effort to reassure top financiers that Labour will be no threat to them. Taxation will increase, but not too much; otherwise, Labour will be good for business.

Smith told the *Independent* that he wanted to reduce unemployment, but "I don't think I can take responsibility for companies making mistakes and unemployment resulting from that."

He went on: "They [the unions] can cause unemployment. They might. They must judge that...I think they have to stand by the results of their own decisions."

Independent on Sunday research suggests that Smith's efforts have yet to be completely successful. A

strong majority of City fund managers considers that gilts and equities will fall "in both the short and medium term" after a Labour victory. Almost all said they would commit less of their funds to the British market.

However, the City's acceptance of Labour seems to be restored to levels familiar to past Labour governments. This marks a shift in the City towards Labour, after years of considering it completely beyond the pale.

Past Labour governments have found how obstructive the City can be, however. Labour should not be a bosses' party, and Labour politicians should be concerned first and foremost not with what the City thinks of them, but of what work-

ing class people think.

On top of Labour's clear refusal to repeal all the Tory anti-union legislation, Smith's statements spell out a future Labour government's attitude to the unions. They would draw the union leaders back into the partnership the Tories broke; but where they felt necessary, the Labour government would fight for the interests of the bosses.

This stand must be changed. If the Labour government is not to fight for full employment, it will enormously disappoint its supporters. The rank and file of the Labour Party must fight to commit Labour to a policy of full employment, through a reduced working week and a big programme of public works.

Workers' Liberty 1990

A weekend of socialist discussion and debate

SPEAKERS INCLUDE

- Harry Barnes MP
- Robin Blackburn
- Robert Fine
- Sue Himmelweit
- Moshe Machover
- Alice Mahon MP
- Simon Mohun
- Adam Novak
- John O'Mahony
- Mark Perryman
- Jozef Pinior
- Hillel Ticktin

Speakers from the opposition movements in Czechoslovakia and East Germany

Sessions include

THE END OF THATCHERISM

REVOLUTIONS IN EAST EUROPE

- * Nicaragua: what went wrong?
- * China: will the democratic movement revive?
- * South Africa: is apartheid on the way out?
- * What would socialists do about prisons?
- * What way for lesbian and gay liberation?
- * The new technology of childbirth

Other courses on

**MARXIST ECONOMICS
OUR HISTORY AND THEIRS
THE POLITICS OF WORKERS'
LIBERTY**

And extra sessions on

- * The politics of football
- * Freud and Reich
- * Is the world dying
- * Myths in the movies
- * Chaos theory
- * The novels of Salman Rushdie
- * Racism in Fortress Europe
- * Anti-semitism in the USSR
- * Which way for the student left?
- * and much, much more

This Agenda is provisional. A full timetable will be available nearer to the date of the school.

Friday-Saturday-Sunday
29-30 June, 1 July 1990

University of
London Union
Malet Street
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Creche provided, accommodation provided, food available, socials Friday and Saturday evenings.

Tickets

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Before			
21 May	£6/£5	£12/£10	£18/£15
Before			
27 June	£8/£7	£15/£13	£22/£20
On the door	£9/£8	£18/£15	£25/£22

The first price is for 3 days, the second in each category is for 2 days.

To book, send a cheque payable to Socialist Organiser with this form to WL90, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Name _____
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Enclose £_____ for Friday/Saturday/Sunday at unwaged/student-low wage/waged rate. (Delete as appropriate).

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

SO fringe meeting

Unions and the Labour Party — one battle, two fronts

Speakers:
Gail Cameron, Wallasey CLP
Jim Denham, SO Editorial Board
Mark Serwotka, Secretary Branches Against Agencies

Monday 14 May
7.30pm
Winterbourne Hotel, Priory Road

Organise against Agencies!

By Mark Serwotka, DSS Merthyr Tydfil

The last twelve months have witnessed the creation of numerous Agencies in the Civil Service.

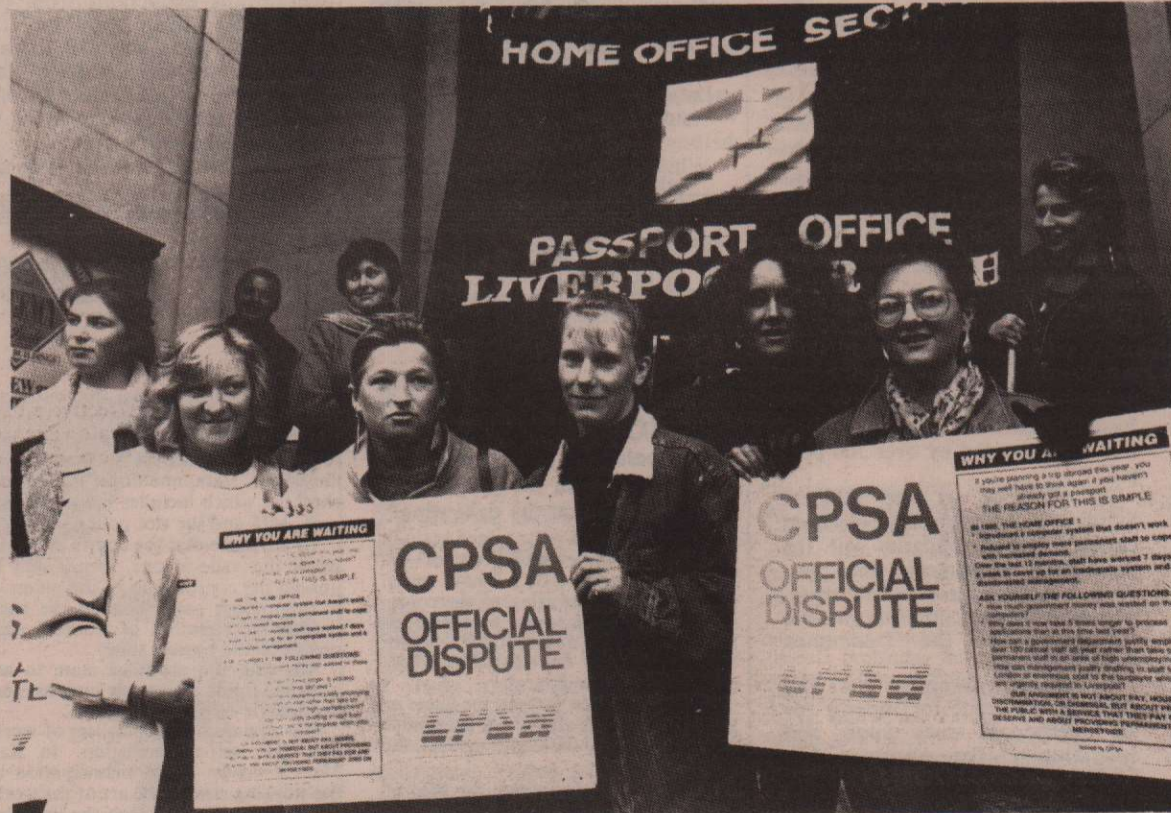
April saw the largest one yet, with the establishment of the Employment Services Agency. By next April we will have seen many more, including the largest of them all, the Benefits Agency (DSS).

Everyone knows the threats that these Agencies pose: jobs will be lost, hard-won conditions like flexible working hours, job security, etc. will be eroded, pay rates will be driven down, and the national union itself will be threatened.

The CPSA leadership know of these dangers. Indeed, they have been presented with documents to this effect by their own research department. They have also been informed directly by the members, who are unfortunate enough to already work in Agencies. Despite this though, they still refuse to act. Even worse, they continue to peddle the lie that Agencies are not a threat and will help fight off privatisation — this in spite of the fact that privatisations have already happened!

Because of this attitude, and the fact that the official policy of the union (ie. total opposition to Agencies) was being ignored, the rank and file of the union decided it would have to act. This has led to the creation of the Branches Against Agencies campaign (BAA), which was established last summer and held its founding conference in February this year.

BAA is a campaign set made up of, run by, and accountable to, Branches of the union. It has been supported by over 100 Branches since its establishment. Its aims are simple — to organise the members



Strike action can win. Liverpool Passport Office strikers. Photo: John Smith (Profile)

of the union into a fight over the issue of Agencies.

At the founding conference it was agreed that if the threats posed by Agencies were not fought, then the results would be catastrophic, and that his fight would have to be a national one, ie. one that linked every section of the union together.

It was further agreed that this fight would be best had under the official banner of the CPSA, and that every effort should be made to make this a reality. This conference therefore is important: we need to ensure that the union adopts a strategy that can be successful. That means the strategy outlined in Mo-

tion 337 which is the only motion that calls for co-ordinated national action.

Carrying this motion is not enough though. A right-wing executive would probably ignore it; even a Broad Left one would not fully implement it. Our job, therefore, is twofold: firstly, we must build BAA. We must gain the support of hundreds of Branches, thus ensuring that no executive can ignore the wishes of the members.

Secondly we must agitate and prepare for the all-out action that is needed to stop Agencies. This may need to be unofficial if the union refuses to act. If so, then we will

need to convince the members that only they have the power to defend themselves, and that official or not, all-out action can win.

• Delegates and observers can start this process by attending the BAA meeting on Monday at 12.45 in the Stour Rooms at the Bournemouth International Centre.

This meeting should be followed by any Branch not yet involved sponsoring the campaign. Most importantly of all, though, every activist in the union should raise the threat of Agencies in their workplace, and organise for the all-out assault that will be needed to fend them off.

Stop the witch-hunt!

By Trudy Saunders, DH-HQ

As we go to press, it is still unclear whether the Newcastle 8 — eight Broad Left supporters witch-hunted out of the CPSA by the right-wing Executive Committee — will be allowed an appeal to conference.

Only an appeal to conference — allowed for anyone expelled from the union under the constitution — can overturn the decision to expel the Newcastle 8.

If an appeal does go ahead it is likely to be under the least favourable conditions for the expelled eight.

The Newcastle 8 were expelled from the CPSA in what can only be described as circumstances which rival Stalin's Moscow show-trials. Witnesses for the eight accused were carefully "weeded" by the tribunal members. Documents relevant to the "trial" were kept away from the eight.

The whole "trial" was shrouded in secrecy. Other CPSA members were not even allowed to raise the issue in branches.

At the end of the so-called "trial", the eight were found "guilty" of using CPSA resources to produce Broad Left material, using CPSA funds to mail Broad Left literature and defying a Presidential ruling.

For anyone who knew the circumstances of the "trial" there was no doubt that the eight — although innocent — would be found guilty. The whole reason for trying the eight in the first place was political factionalism.

The NEC spent a massive amount of members' time and money to expel the eight in order to take a swipe at the Broad Left and attempt to destroy a Broad Left stronghold in Newcastle Central Office — an office with a very high membership and a large block vote at union conference.

During and since the investigation began, CPSA membership at Newcastle Central Office has fallen to an all-time low under the temporary officership of NEC members brought in to run the branch.

The NEC had not one shred of hard evidence with which to convict the eight. They were expelled for being suspected of doing as charged. Essentially they were forced to prove their innocence. Yet the NEC could not back down having spent so long building up such a weak case.

The eight were expelled in March. Their fate now lies in the hands of conference (if an appeal is allowed). It is vital that delegates ignore the circulars issued by John Ellis since the expulsions, which certainly seek to prejudice delegates against the eight, and vote overwhelmingly to reverse the expulsions. If not, who knows who a right-wing NEC will go for next?

All articles in a personal capacity. Contact SO Civil Servants, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

The merger — workers' unity?

By Mike Grayson,
British Library

Socialists are obviously in favour of the maximum possible unity of the working class.

As an aspect of this, traditionally we would support the coming together of separate trade unions to form a united organisation. But how should active socialists in the CPSA respond to the calls for merger between our union and one such as NUCPS, which is dominated by managerial grades?

For many years, both left and right in CPSA have been divided on the issue. Supporters of *Militant* have argued in favour of the principle of merger (though arguing against some aspects of the concrete merger proposals).

Others on the left have sometimes taken a simplistic view of NUCPS as a "bosses' union", which no honest worker should touch with a bargepole. Whilst we reject such naive notions, Socialist Organiser supporters believe that a merger would not be in the best interests of CPSA's membership.

The uniting in one union of the managers and the managed presents very great practical problems, and attempts a fusion of two groups with often conflicting interests. The result could easily be a decline in activism, and dominance by management grades over and above their numerical strength. Suggested

attempts to introduce rules and safeguards to try and prevent this are, at bottom, admissions that the two groups do not easily fit together.

It is absurd to view everyone who becomes an EO as a part of the "enemy". Unity in action between CPSA and NUCPS members (and, indeed, with other Civil Service unions) should be forged in the workplaces whenever and wherever possible.

At an official level we would support the sharing of premises and resources by unions. However, decision-making processes should be retained by the separate unions, each having control over their own rule books and electing their own leaderships. A merger would be neither necessary nor beneficial.

The merger deal on offer at present is a bureaucratic stitch-up. It would, for example, create a bigger layer of full-time officials whilst giving the membership less control over them. The incoming National Executive Committee should be instructed to campaign for a vote against the merger in any ballot of members on this question. Our aims for the future should be:

- To seek merger with other non-managerial groups of civil servants.
- To promote resource sharing, and general trimming of bureaucracy across civil service unions, where this would not damage services to members.
- To forge unity in action by the rank and file. To halt bureaucratic merger attempts.

Support motion 669.

Support the East European working class

By Martin Donahue,
DSS London

This last year we have seen a series of inspiring and historic events in the Eastern Bloc states.

Who would have thought a year ago that those seemingly invulnerable Stalinist dictatorships would have been largely smashed and we would now be witnessing the rebirth of independent working class activity after 40-plus years of Stalinist repression?

However, the picture has hardly been one of thoroughgoing victories for the working class.

No-one will have forgotten how the democracy movement in China was drowned in the blood of the workers and students in Tiananmen Square. In Romania the Stalinist National Salvation Front still holds power.

Even in those countries where the bureaucracies have been toppled there have been election victories for the free-market capitalist parties. And all across Eastern Europe the far right is growing and anti-semitism is widespread.

Given the records of 40-plus years of Stalinist "actually existing socialism", genuine socialists have a huge task in front of them and they remain relatively weak.

We have an absolute duty as socialists and Trade Unionists to do everything in our power to help those socialists in their struggle.

The British trade union movement has an appalling record on Stalinism — maintaining links with police-state official "unions" while socialists were imprisoned for their activities.

Now is the time to put that right. There are a number of concrete steps that conference can take to really help those in struggle:

□ Affiliate to the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB). CSWEB is currently organising a 'Support the Socialists' campaign to raise funds for workers' organisations in Eastern Europe. It also held a labour movement conference in January, addressed by Eric Heffer MP and socialists from Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and was attended by over 500 people.

□ Affiliate to the Chinese Solidarity Campaign. CSC has been campaigning in solidarity with the democracy movement since last year. It is organising a demonstration on 4 June to commemorate the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

□ Support composites 1087 and 1093. These argue for support for all independent trade unions and specifically for support for SOTSPROF, the Russian socialist independent trade union.

These are all important practical acts of solidarity which will materially help the working class in Eastern Europe. It will be a great step forward to pass these motions.

It is worth noting that as their sole contribution to this issue, the so-called *Militant* have a single motion which offers no course of action or makes any proposal for making solidarity with Eastern European workers. Instead, they offer their ponderous "theorising" about the nature of planning. It goes to show the complete rottenness of this semi-Stalinist sect that after a year of revolutionary upsurge this is all they have to say.



Trafalgar Square, 31 March. Photo: Geoff Ward

Poll tax — don't pay, don't collect

By Steve Battlemuch,
South Notts DHSS

Thousands of CPSA members will not pay the poll tax.

An opinion poll recently in the *Sunday Correspondent* estimated that 8 million people won't pay the Poll Tax in England and Wales. Add to this the one million non-payers in Scotland and you have a mass campaign which is shaking the Tories. Many low-paid CPSA members just cannot afford to pay — and this year's pay deal won't help.

Whilst the Tories are in crisis

over the Poll Tax, they are not finished yet. They will try and use all the methods available to them to force people into paying — by freezing our bank accounts, by wage arrestments, by deducting it direct from Income Support, etc.

As trade unionists we must resist this. We must insist on support from the national union against wage arrestments. The Treasury must be told that the union won't tolerate any deductions from our wages. We must continue the pressure on Ellis and Co. to take this issue seriously. A good start would be for CPSA to state it won't make any wage arrestments on its own staff who don't pay!

If Ellis refuses to act (as is likely)

we must lobby our own members in the computer centres to take a stand against wage arrestments.

As for deductions from Income Support, many DSS branches have policy against this. All motions on this issue have, however, been removed from the conference agenda by Chambers and Ellis.

Again, we should continue the pressure on Ellis to back his own members rather than the Tories. We cannot allow a repeat of last November when DSS members went on strike in some London offices against being used as Poll Tax snoopers and the union refused to support them! The union should give automatic support to members who take action against the Poll

Don't bring the courts in

By Trudy Saunders,
DH HQ

Should we take unions to court? Can the judges help the left beat the right wing?

This issue could well surface again in the CPSA. Some supporters of the Newcastle Central Office 8 have raised the prospect of resorting to the courts should the NCO 8 appeal be denied, or fail, or should an unacceptable sentence be re-imposed by the NEC after a successful conference appeal.

It's important to sort out the issues of principle, what is and is not acceptable for socialists in the fight against the right wing.

We should also separate the idea of using the law to defend jobs.

The NCO 8 are quite right to consider legal action against the DSS if they lose their jobs as a result of expulsion from the union but they should take on the employer not the union.

There is nothing necessarily wrong in using the law against right wingers. This should be separated off from the issue of using the courts as a power inside the trade unions.

This is wrong in principle.

The principle we seek to defend is the independence of the trade unions from the capitalist state.

The trade unions are working class organisations, the courts are part of the capitalist state. The unions — however imperfectly — defend the interests of workers. The courts — despite the fact that socialists can demand legal protec-

tion for workers against the worst excesses of capital — fundamentally defend the interests of the rich and powerful. The courts are an integral part of the bosses' state, one finger in the clenched fist which includes the anti-union laws, MI5 and the riot police.

To advocate that the courts intervene inside the trade unions, even if only to uphold the constitution of the union — is to propose subordinating the basic defence organisation of working class people to the bosses' state.

Allowing the capitalist state to adjudicate inside the trade unions goes against the ABCs of socialism.

Our socialism is a socialism of working class self-emancipation. In Karl Marx's words: "The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself". Through the interplay of ideas and struggles the working class must transform itself from passive victim of exploitation to active, conscious fighter for liberation.

There can be no short cuts. Socialism cannot be decreed from above, it cannot be introduced for the workers, it must be made by them. There is no substitute for the long, bitter and protracted battles to transform the working class and its organisations.

To call in the courts because we can't beat the right wing inside the unions is to give up on the working class as the agency of change.

The socialist way to fight the right wing is to mobilise the rank and file. If the left fail to beat the official apparatus because the rank and file is too weak, ill-informed or demoralised, then we

have lost.

To fight the right wing apparatus with the apparatus of the bourgeois state makes rank and file mobilisation and litigation equally valid options. The special place that working class activity has in the fight to democratise and transform the trade unions is lost.

Advocates of using the law inside the unions end up amending the old slogan of the Clyde workers' committee; instead of "If the leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must", we get "If the rank and file won't fight then the lawyers must".

Let's look at some of the arguments employed to justify using the courts inside the unions. By far the most popular is "We must fight the right wing by any means necessary".

This sounds very bold, uncompromising and militant, but very few people who voice this idea really believe it. "By any means necessary" must mean exactly that: ie. any means can be employed. But few people in the CPSA would contemplate murder and assassination or the taking of hostages as justifiable tactics in the current battle against the witch-hunt.

The left in the electricians' union used to justify ballot-rigging on the grounds that you must beat the right wing "by any means necessary". Look where it got them. The union has been in solid right wing control for the last thirty years.

Some of the more pompous supporters of *Militant* have tried to justify taking the union to court by calling Leon Trotsky to the witness stand in



Thatcher's attacks — a tale of two branches

We'll soon ballot on strike against sell- off

By Vicki Morris, PSA
London

The countdown to PSA privatisation has been a headlong rush shrouded in mystery...and the workers have already been paying the price.

We are used on the whole to working in ones or twos, in small teams with professional officers, and to taking a lot of responsibility for the work of the PSA. This often means clerical grades feel isolated from others of their grades and reluctant to take action to defend their interests.

In this atmosphere, the first steps towards privatisation badly demoralised people. Ministers and management, seeing clerical grades' goodwill in the past as a sign of stupidity and weakness, took the opportunity to give us a few good slaps in the face: an avalanche of circulars reassuring us, when all the time they were preparing their business plan to make the cuts in staff numbers and conditions which we feared.

They have tried to string us along and distract us from starting to organise opposition to their plans. But, whilst from a low base of interest, the unions' message has now got across in most areas, and the latest management dirty tricks — the cosmetic preference exercise — is seen for the red herring it is.

Now the mood seems to have changed from long-suffering to downright angry for a whole number of reasons. Staffing is low at a time when reorganisation has created masses more work. We're asked to work harder and smile more in order to retain custom and make the privatisation work. All this goes down badly now that people realise that, without guarantees of a right to return to the Civil Service

and of pension and redundancy terms, comparable with those we enjoy now, the move to the privatised PSA will be a personal disaster for thousands.

We will soon ballot for a one-day national strike and then selective action. These would deal a body-blow to management's assumption that PSA staff will go quietly into, first, a government-owned company to remove our civil service status, and finally the privatised PSA.

We have got some work to do persuading members that action will win. But initially it has been easy to make people see that management and government are so stubborn, action of some kind is now the only way to try to defend our jobs. And that it will be fun giving management a slap in the face back.

ment. It is not surprising, therefore, that management, realising the Branch Officers are a soft touch, have refused to give the CPSA full details of the proposed relocation and most importantly, whether jobs are guaranteed in London.

The Broad Left in DH/SS HQ have launched a campaign amongst CPSA members around demands that jobs, wages and conditions of service are guaranteed for all members. The right-wing branch leadership are content to seek management assurances on no compulsory redundancies. Whilst the Broad Left has argued for a vigorous campaign to build up support for strike action if management refuse to give guarantees, the right-wing have left the membership uninformed.

The Broad Left have argued for full membership consultation at every stage of negotiations. The right-wing leadership have not bothered to make any real attempts to find out what members think — let alone consult them before agreeing anything with management.

At the DSS HQ AGM this year, the right wing's motion calling for management assurances on job security were carried. DH HQ AGM did not even discuss relocation after an undemocratic and incompetent right-wing Chair wasted a huge amount of time attempting to prevent members from voting on whether to debate motions on the Poll Tax, Agencies and Newcastle Central Office. However, the right-wing's motion was forced through an unrepresentative Branch Executive Committee.

Members have since learnt that the Treasury has issued guidelines which prevent departments from giving guarantees on no compulsory redundancies. This is unacceptable. But the right-wing leadership remain unworried and are still simply seeking management assurances. This despite the fact that in Southampton DSS HQ (where all jobs relocate to Leeds) management gave assurances that existing workers would be offered new jobs in the area first. The first Southampton members heard of new jobs was when they saw them advertised in the local press.

The Broad Left have organised petitions to call Special General Meetings in both departments. The rank and file will fight for our jobs even if the Branch Officers won't.

Demanding that jobs, wages and conditions are kept safe

By Dave Armes, DSS
HQ

Since the announcement last November that over half of the work of DH and DSS HQ is to be relocated to Leeds, CPSA members have been plagued by a lack of information from both management and the right-wing CPSA officers of both branches.

The right-wing have for too long controlled DH/SS HQ and have always prided themselves in keeping sweet with local manage-

The fight for trade union democracy

By John Moloney,
PSA London

Socialist Organiser has a clear and straightforward positions on the question of trade union democracy: all full-time officials of the union should be elected annually, by individual ballot at workplace meetings, and should be on salaries linked to those of the members they represent.

This is the policy that Socialist Organiser supporters, and other activists within the Socialist Caucus group, have been arguing for within CPSA. This year's conference agenda gives us the opportunity to really move forward on this vital issue.

Motions 502, 503 and 510 together show the way ahead for all those who wish to see our union become a genuinely democratic organisation.

However, even if these motions are heard (and it is unlikely that enough time will be given to this part of the agenda), there will be organised opposition within conference arguing against them.

The National Moderate group, and

the mis-named Broad Left '84 will both be keen to tell delegates how 'unrealistic' and 'impractical' these proposals are. Perhaps they will tell us (again) how tired members are of all these boring old elections.

Having elections annually for all posts is not a magic solution to all the union's problems. But it is a means of giving to the ordinary membership a greater degree of control over the running of their union. One of the demands of the great Chartist movement of the 1840s was for annual elections to the British Parliament.

Why, 150 years later, is it a dangerous and unacceptable proposal that full-time officials be accountable every 12 months to the people they represent? Or could it just possibly be that some individuals and groups are more interested in hanging on to well-paid positions for themselves and their cronies than they are in the principles of democracy and accountability?

The fight for union democracy goes much further than annual elections. An overhaul is needed to turn our unions into genuine bastions of working class democracy and struggle. This means not only making formal changes such as electing full-time officials annually — and paying them the same wages as the workers they represent — but also ensuring that power really is in the hands of the rank and file members.

Measures to achieve this include:

- Union policy-making bodies to be made up of elected lay members only.
- Voting to be at workplace meetings — we want informed, collective decision making.
- Strikes to be automatically official.
- No secret negotiations. Every stage of negotiations should be subject to rank and file ratification at mass meetings.
- Shop stewards must be elected at mass meetings held in the workplace.
- The right of members to criticise union policy; to meet unofficially.
- Defence of the rights of trade union branches and district committees against the central union bureaucracy.
- Trade unions to fight for total independence from the state. Non-cooperation with the Tory anti-union laws.

It is also vital that unions represent all of the members — particularly black, women and lesbian and gay members. This means implementing measures to help ensure unions are habitable for oppressed groups, such as:

- The right to self-organisation for black people, women, lesbians and gays.
 - The purge of open racists from all union positions.
 - The expulsion of fascists.
 - Positive discrimination measures.
- The CPSA is our union. Let's begin the fight to control it.
Support motions 502, 503 and 510.

Tax. However, if the union won't support us we should consider seriously our ability to act independently.

The main debate at conference will be around Motion 553 — on affiliation to the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The Moderates/BL '84 will attack the Federation as a *Militant* front organisation. They will use any red scare tactics they can to stop the union affiliating to a body which openly advocates non-payment and non-collection.

It is true that *Militant* supporters have control of the national federation committee. We would prefer a more balanced, broad-based national committee. We would prefer that the main officers — *Militant* supporters Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan — hadn't rushed to condemn those people who got caught up in the police riot on 31 March. Nally's comments about "naming names" to the police was an absolute disgrace.

However, our criticisms of the national federation should be taken up inside the federation. By unions like CPSA and others affiliating it could make the federation more democratic. All branches should support Motion 553.

In order to get a more detailed discussion of the problems we face

in the trade unions, and how to fight the Poll Tax in the workplaces, two conferences have been called: one by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (which its founding conference in November instructed it to call), and one by the Federation.

The Socialist Movement hoped to work with the Federation to organise a joint conference, but the Federation refused to have anything to do with the Socialist Movement, and called their own conference, which is to be held in Liverpool on 23 June.

However, if the founding conference of the Federation is anything to go by, it will be more of a rally than a working conference, with bureaucratic manoeuvring by *Militant* supporters to hinder democratic debate.

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee will be held in Manchester in September, and will be an open, democratic, working conference, which will aim to come up with a fighting strategy to beat the Poll Tax. More details can be obtained from the SMTUC, 53a Geere Road, London E15.

By mass non-payment and a serious campaign in the unions for non-implementation, we can stop the Poll Tax!

to the union!

their defence.

The argument goes like this:
(i) A course of action is correct if it furthers the revolution. [So far, so good, but at this point *Militant's* logic takes over from that of Trotsky, with dire consequences.]

(ii) Without Marxist leadership the working class will never achieve socialism.

(iii) Therefore, any action which allows the "Marxist leadership" to stay in positions of influence etc. in the union [eg. Macreadie as general secretary] is to be supported.

In this argument, the positions of influence held by the "Marxist leadership" is the supreme goal. Court case after court case follows in which working class organisation is subordinated to the capitalist state for the sake of keeping a handful of "Marxists" in positions.

But what Trotsky actually said was that for Marxists means and ends are linked. We fight only by those means which help mobilise workers for our end of working class self-liberation. We reject those means which turn the working class into passive spectators or subordinate the unions to the bosses' state — neither of which help point to our goal.

So *Militant's* attempt to use Trotsky in their defence falls down.

It is no accident that *Militant* so love litigation. When they have found their positions of influence threatened they have not only issued writs against trade unions and the Labour Party, but even



Militant supporter John
Macreadie outside the High
Court

redundancy notices to workers [remember Derek Hatton]. Anything is permissible if it keeps the "Marxists" in power. In reality such behaviour only alienates workers.

All this reveals a lot about the *Militant* and their view of socialism. Their bureaucratic schedules ["don't strike this year, strike next year"] and their positions, from which they make their mind-numbing "socialist" propaganda, come first, working class action last.

CPSA CONFERENCE SPECIAL

Fight sexism at work and in the unions

By Caroline Henry,
Sheffield DE

The CPSA Broad Left have produced a "Charter for CPSA Women Workers". At first glance it appears good, covering issues ranging from low pay to sexual harassment.

But on closer inspection it becomes clear that the Charter offers no solutions to the many problems faced by women workers. The 10-line conclusion in the pamphlet offers but one piece of advice — join the Broad Left.

The Charter fails to address many questions pertaining to women's oppression, including one vital one: the oppression of women within the trade union movement. The Charter rightly shows how management oppress women. But it doesn't deal with an important issue.

Why, in a union where over 70% of the membership are women, do men overwhelmingly dominate the union structures? The reason the Charter fails to deal with this question is that the politics of the Charter are essentially those of *Militant*.

Over the years *Militant's* attitude towards women's oppression has been at best tokenistic and at worst downright reactionary. *Militant* have no answers as to how to fight women's oppression, other than to make propaganda now and to wait for the revolution to free women. The end of capitalism, in which women's oppression has its roots, will mean the beginning of the end of women's oppression. But *Militant* fail to accept that the divisive nature of capitalism which sets man against woman and white against black, must be fought in the here and now.

Working class women are doubly oppressed as workers and as women. Many women are now in waged work, yet they continue to bear the burden of family life. From this double burden stems many of the problems faced by women, both in the workplace and

in the unions. To effectively deal with women's oppression in the workplace, trade unions must look to reforming themselves.

The sexism of male trade unionists is a barrier to the involvement of women in trade unions. Additionally, there is the very real problem of bureaucratic union structures which reproduce the problem of the male-dominated union meeting. Add to this the lack of thought about childcare provision at meetings, unsociable meeting hours and transport difficulties for women then it is hardly surprising that unions are male-dominated. The Charter fails to recognise these problems within our union — let alone deal with them.

It is vital that women are fully represented in the structures of the CPSA in order to ensure that issues specifically relating to women members are raised effectively. Full

"Militant supporters pretend that problems do not exist between union members within the CPSA"

representation of women on union committees will also help to encourage other women union members to become more active. It is vital that CPSA looks at its own structures, promotes women positively into its ranks and fights for demands relevant to women.

Militant supporters pretend that problems do not exist between union members within the CPSA. The Charter reflects this blinkered view. This is partly because *Militant* argue vociferously against positive discrimination for women on the grounds that it "divides the working class" and have always opposed the self-organisation of women for the same reason.

Yet it is capitalism which divides the working class and making bland propaganda will not resolve the problem. Men will continue to dominate the CPSA unless some form of positive discrimination, eg. reserved seats for women on the NEC, is implemented. Women will continue to feel unable to participate in union meetings with men sitting on the top table unless CPSA women's groups are set up to encourage women's participation and give women confidence.

Positive discrimination and self-organisation, combined with a working women's charter raising both workplace and union demands will ensure that the specific oppressions faced by women are truly taken on.

The record of the CPSA Broad Left on women is far from progressive. Time and time again *Militant* have rejected motions at Broad Left conference calling for the setting up of Broad Left women's groups, and reserved seats for women on the CPSA NEC. When policy was carried in 1986 to set up Broad Left women's groups, the *Militant* women's officer and Broad Left National Committee failed to carry it out.

Militant themselves make no attempt to ensure Broad Left election slates reflect the 70%-plus women in the CPSA. This resulted in the disgraceful spectacle in 1987 of the Broad Left NEC largely dominated by men. *Militant* argue it is insulting to women to positively discriminate in their favour.

What is insulting however, is the fact that many good Broad Left women are passed over in favour of Broad Left men who have all the advantages in the first place. To put it in a nutshell, *Militant* refuse to accept that life in a union is much harder for a woman than a man. This attitude means that however good the demands of the CPSA Women's Charter, they won't be won unless our union is transformed to truly represent the majority of its members. Socialist Caucus has been agitating for many years for positive discrimination and self-organisation of oppressed groups within the CPSA.



CPSA conference: representing a union with 70% women members. Photo: John Harris

Casualisation: relaunch the fight

By Ruth Cockroft

In May 1989 I started working for the Civil Service, recruited on a casual basis at the Training Agency Head Office in Sheffield.

As a casual, my contract was at first for one week, eventually it was extended monthly for the next 12 months.

Management call this kind of job insecurity "flexible working", whereby workers are subject to incredible pressure to ensure that they keep their jobs from month to month.

The CPSA has a policy that sanctions casualisation for arguably legitimate reasons, such as long-term leave, maternity or annual leave, but the reality is that casualisation is now being used across many departments of the Civil Service to systematically substitute for permanent jobs, drive down the conditions and wages of all clerical grades and to erode union structures.

The CPSA should wake up and see casualisation for what it is — a massive attack on the union and on staffing procedures. In the Training Agency Head Office alone (Ian Leedham's branch — BL'84 Presidential candidate) there is widespread use of casualisation to cover for creeping staff cuts; management have not had an open panel for two years and there is a huge backlog of staff who have passed panels and who are not given promotion.

Instead, casuals are recruited to replace staff who have left and are often made to work out of grade.

Another effect of casualisation on the Training Agency Head Of-

fice branch has been the decline in union membership and the complete stagnation of the union branch itself. Without determination and an active union, casuals are notoriously hard to recruit — membership in the Training Agency has declined by 200, roughly the number of casuals there are in the building.

The BL'84's passivity about casuals and Leedham's own "couldn't care less" attitude has bred cynicism amongst rank and file members that the union is not really there to represent their interests. This is reflected in extremely tiny meetings.

Yet it is not only the right-wing/BL'84 who are to blame for the failure to fight casualisation. In 1986/7 a Broad Left DHSS SEC had the chance to lead a fight against Limited Period Appointments (LPAs) when DHSS workers in Wales took strike action. Instead, the DHSS SEC left the strikers stranded and refused to spread the fight, saying any fight against LPAs should be subsumed into a general fight against staffing cuts. It never was.

My own experience of being a casual I think represents the biggest argument against its systematic use in the workplace. Being a casual means you are super-exploited — it is difficult to be a union militant; you are requested to work out of grade and to cover other jobs constantly; you are paid a pittance (£80 a week in most cases); there is the constant weekly or monthly threat of losing your job.

Any trade union worth its salt should not be prepared to see its members suffer such a fundamental denial of rights. (Nor should any aspiring Presidential candidate.)

Organise the rank and file

By Mark Serwotka,
secretary, Branches
Against Agencies

The CPSA, like most major trade unions is controlled rigidly from the centre by the elected, but more often unelected, bureaucracy at HQ.

These people, who are often highly paid and totally out of touch with the rank and file, make decisions, often without consulting members or Branches, that affect our daily working conditions.

In the CPSA this has reached the point where our leaders have accepted job cuts, Agencies, pay cuts, expelled members and given themselves huge pay increases without even a by-your-leave to the membership.

This must stop.

We need to build a rank and file movement in the CPSA and across the trade union movement that ensures that the members run their own union and take the important decisions: in short, we need the active participation of members in every workplace throughout the country.

A rank and file movement would fight for control of the unions. Such a movement would take

disputes seriously, respond quickly and attempt to seize the initiative. It would try to generalise any action and operate to spread information and agitate and organise for solidarity.

Where necessary it would have to attempt to act as an alternative leadership in the union. As the old slogan goes: "If the leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must!"

A serious rank and file body would stand militants for positions and challenge for the national leadership of the union, at the same time acting to make those leaders accountable.

It would do so on the basis laid down by the Minority Movement in the '20s but sadly not fully acted upon. "To those who say 'We have seen leaders turn before and what guarantee is there that they will not continue to do so?' we reply, the Minority Movement must be strong enough inside the unions not only to make leaders but also to break them, if and when they reject the policy upon which they were elected."

At the moment no such movement exists either in the CPSA or anywhere else in the trade union movement.

We need to build it.

Though Branches Against Agencies (BAA) is a single issue cam-

paign, not a fully fledged rank and file movement, the experience of trying to set up BAA has thrown some light on the way various groupings on the left of the CPSA operate.

The initiative to set up BAA came from supporters of the Socialist Caucus. We wanted a broad-based campaign, rooted in the branches [not simply a collection of individuals or supporters of left groups] that could realistically combine pressurising the officials and organising action independently of them.

The *Militant*, who are the largest group in the Broad Left, thought differently. They wanted to concentrate on petitioning Ellis and voting Broad Left in the NEC and Section elections.

In other words, they said never mind campaigning now in defence of jobs, etc. elect the Broad Left and all will be well!

Recent CPSA history is full of such misguided nonsense. Only by building an active union in the workplace will we be able to defend ourselves from the attacks of our employer. Elections are important — it would be irresponsible to say otherwise — however, they must never be counterposed to effective action, and rank and file control of the union.

**Branches Against
Agencies Fringe
Meeting**

Monday 14 May
12.45

**Stop the Merger
Fringe Meeting**

Thursday 17 May
5.30pm

Stour Room,
Bournemouth
Conference Centre

**Socialist Caucus
Fringe Meeting**

Tuesday 15 May
7.30pm

Winterbourne Hotel,
Priory Road
Tuesday 15 May
7.30pm