

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Labour NEC plans purge of Socialist Organiser

Stop this

secret trial



Solidarity with Soviet socialists

By Tony Benn MP

At the end of June Tony Benn was the guest in Moscow of the founding conference of Boris Kagarlitsky's Socialist Party. We reproduce extracts from Tony Benn's speech.

bring fraternal greetings from socialists in Britain who are attempting exactly what you are attempting in the Soviet Union.

We set up a Socialist Movement like your own three years ago for very similar reasons. There is one problem we share in societies that are democratic — once any government comes to power that calls itself socialist, it doesn't want anybody else to talk about socialism. For the last 50 years the Labour Party has not discussed socialism at all, but only how to get into power and how to stay in power.

Capital brings pressure to bear on any government in the interests of capital. If socialism is to develop, we have to bring pressure to bear on the government of the day, whatever government it is. So the issues that are being discussed in Moscow this week are being discussed everywhere.

The Cold War is over, which was one of the biggest barriers to socialism. Those who advocated socialism in Britain were called agents of the KGB. If you criticised the government of the Soviet Union in the USSR they said you were an enemy of the people, working for the CIA. That mutual nightmare is over.

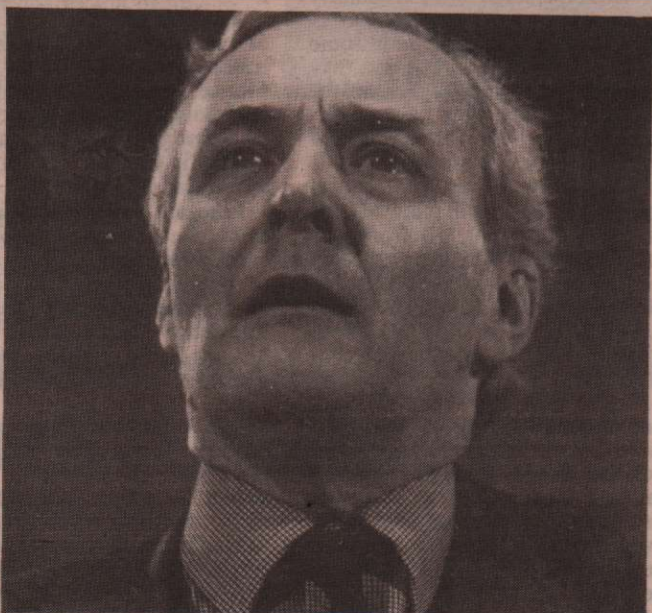
That liberates us to think and argue. It also liberates us to reduce military expenditure which is one of the main reasons why industry in

Britain — and maybe in the Soviet Union — has not been able to meet the needs of their own people.

Real choices are opening up. And the choice is not Gosplan or Wall St. The centralised power associated with Stalinism produced bureaucracy and a degree of repression which meant it was not truly socialist or democratic. But the fully-fledged international market system is not about efficiency in production, it is about transferring political power to business people, bankers, the administration and the mass media which have no real interest in democracy or socialism.

Those in the west who want market forces in the Soviet Union believe they can destroy socialism, and open up a huge area of low

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The Labour Party says it supports a Freedom of Information Act. Yet when the Party organisers proposed to the June meeting of the National Executive Committee that it should ban Socialist Organiser, they backed up the proposal with a few sentences culled from old minutes and a secret and "confidential" document making the most preposterous allegations against Socialist Organiser and against its editor, John O'Mahony.

They did not even inform us of the document's existence.

We have since got hold of a copy of the document by unofficial channels (see page 5). It consists of ludicrous and nonsensical, and libellous, stories and allegations.

To take one example, it says that John O'Mahony — who has lived in England since the age of 12 and was never a member of the IRA — was in the IRA and then fled Ireland to get away from the IRA who wanted to shoot him as an informer!

With stuff like that a picture is built up of Socialist Organiser as a weird sect of odd people. And that was the documentary backup to the proposal — which is likely to pass at the July NEC — that the Labour Party should ban a socialist newspaper and drive its supporters out of the Party!

Freedom of information? This was a document we were not allowed to see, which we were not even allowed to know the existence of, and which, therefore, we couldn't comment on, even in a letter to the NEC. Uncharged, untried and unheard we were to be bundled out of the Labour Party. And we are to

- * No charges
- * No evidence
- * No hearing
- * No justice

be bundled out — at the 25 July NEC.

What on earth is the Kinnock faction doing to the Labour Party? They are turning it into a quasi-Stalinist one-faction party.

The attempt to ban SO concerns more than SO. It is a new extension of the witch-hunt beyond the boundaries and the demarcation lines set when *Militant* was banned.

As we pointed out last week, the argument used to ban *Militant* was that *Militant* — whose expulsion we opposed and oppose — was a special case, something unique. It was a one-off purge.

The banning of SO will mean the open breaching of the limits the Kinnockites said they accepted when *Militant* was banned.

A lot of 'soft lefts' who should have known better were disarmed by those assurances and, scandalously, either supported the driving out of *Militant* or didn't go out of their way to fight it. Now the witch-hunt spreads.

If it is allowed to spread to SO, that won't be the end, any more than *Militant* was the end. There will be others. Even some of the 'soft left' may find themselves on the tumbrels.

The Kinnockites want to turn the Labour Party into a flaccid, media-nourished and media-dependent, party with no goal other than of-

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Women demonstrate in Algiers on International Women's Day

Algerian women organise against fundamentalists

Algeria has been going through its own "perestroika" and "glasnost". In the recent local government elections, opposition candidates could stand for the first time since independence in 1962. The result was victory for the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front. This article, translated and abridged from the French socialist weekly *Rouge*, describes the implications for Algerian women.

The government has consciously let the situation deteriorate, with the aim of using fear to rally people round it at the elections.

So violence has increased, from Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) thugs or just from young men left hanging around without jobs or a future, victims of social selection to whom the Islamists, in their inflamed rhetoric, give an easy scapegoat: women, pointed out as the cause of all evils, denounced as "stealing jobs" or as "catspaws of neo-colonialism" and "the vanguard of Western cultural aggression".

But the government's tactic of trying to manipulate the population by polarising it between the ISF and the NLF (National Liberation Front, the ruling party) has backfired.

People's rejection of the policies carried out over nearly thirty years has been stronger than their fear. And, according to Samira, a member of a women's group in Constantine, "It can't be denied that the Islamic Salvation Front's campaign on early retirement for women workers and a pension for mothers staying at home had an impact on many ordinary women.

"The double shift for working women is particularly hard here. There is nothing that eases household tasks: no food pro-

cessors, no ready meals... And then the water supply is irregular, which often forces women to do their washing in the middle of the night! All that was a factor in the elections".

Getting women back into the home was a big theme of the ISF's campaign. They presented it as the solution to unemployment.

"But then", says Khalida Messaoudi, the president of the Independent Association for the Triumph of Women's Rights, "what is the record of the one-party state on women's right to work?"

"Today there are 365,000 women with a job, as against eight million without. More than three quarters of the women between 20 and 24 years of age do only housework.

"At university women's residences fundamentalists... installed a curfew, forbidding students to go out after 7pm"

What the ISF is demanding is what the NLF is already doing: making women pay for the crisis".

Samira emphasises that the liberal free-market option adopted by the present regime is leading to a growing insecurity of employment.

"And in this general framework of growing insecurity, it is worst for women. You can't yet speak of massive sackings, but there are already lots of insidious mechanisms preparing the way for such sackings. We know many cases of women who have been isolated at their work, discouraged, accused of misdeeds, and bit by bit excluded from their jobs".

The ISF has the ground well prepared for it. "For the moment", Samira told us at the end of June, "the ISF has not yet done anything which enables us to say precisely how things will be for women in a few months time. The new local Popular Assemblies have only just taken office.

"But the danger is real. There are many women who work for the Popular Assemblies or for schools

coming under the Popular Assemblies. How are the new elected members going to create the jobs that they have promised to the unemployed?"

According to reports collated by Soumia, a member of the Association for the Emancipation of Women in Algiers, the fundamentalists have already begun to separate the workers in several places: women in one office, men in another.

Opposition to mixing the sexes has been one of the themes of the ISF from the start, and particularly in education.

"It is already happening in some schools", says Soumia. "First, they separate boys and girls in the playground; then they have single-sex classes. Little by little, all mixed establishments will probably go.

"We know what the consequences will be. It will allow double standards for going up from one class to another. Already girls often need an average mark of 12 to go into the second class, while boys only need 8. How can you talk about equality of opportunity in such conditions?"

A few days after the election, fundamentalists did at the Setif university women's residences what they had already done at Blida: installed a curfew for the students, forbidding them to go out after seven o'clock in the evening. Thus they showed their desire to control the lives of all women.

But Algerian women do not intend to let the few bits of liberty they have won be eaten away. At a meeting in Tizi-Ouzou on 28-29 June, representatives of the different women's groups decided on a national campaign against the electoral law around the coming parliamentary elections.

One clause in the electoral law has legalised an old practice by authorising the head of a family to vote for all the members of the family — and in the first place his wife — just by presenting his family passbook, and often, in fact, without that.

The meeting insisted that voting is a personal and secret act, and denounced the manipulations of the female electorate authorised by this law. It called on all democratic forces to join it in this battle.

Czechoslovakia plans big sell-off

Tony Dale reports on prospects in Czechoslovakia after the elections

The big problem for the new Civic Forum/Public Against Violence government in Czechoslovakia under pressure is the economy.

Vaclav Klaus, the Finance Minister, has stated — "What we have in mind is rapid denationalisation of state companies. This must be done very soon. It will be a wholesale privatisation — we don't have time to privatise 2 or 3 a year, as in western countries".

A new law is being drafted for the mass sale of state industries through a voucher system. Each Czechoslovak citizen would get vouchers. They would then buy shares with the vouchers. The price of the shares would vary due to demand.

Therefore, Skoda shares would be worth far more vouchers than some antiquated inefficient chemical works. At first, it would be illegal to sell vouchers for cash. But after the period of time cash payment for shares would replace

the vouchers.

Such privatisation will be disastrous for workers. This populist share flotation would not stop ownership gradually being concentrated in the hands of a few capitalists.

The suffocating grip of the state over industry does need to be loosened. The economic rule of the bureaucrats needs to be destroyed.

But socialists and workers need to fight for workers' control of production through workers' self-management.

The elections were a clear victory for Civic Forum and its Slovak sister organisation, Public Against Violence.

Czechs and Slovaks voted for a consolidation of November's 'velvet revolution'. The result shows that the broad coalition which came together in November to demand democracy is still holding together.

Slovak, Moravian and Silesian nationalist parties got 11.7% of votes.

The challenge from the Christian Democratic Union was weaker than expected. They ended up with 40 seats — fewer seats and votes than the Stalinists.

The Social Democrats failed to get the 5% necessary to win seats.

All power to Doris

WOMEN'S EYE

By Liz Millward

Some of my critics will be glad to hear I've been reading collections of the work of "master" columnists recently in an attempt to improve this one.

These columns fall into a number of categories, but I have concentrated on what I call the "South of France" school. "South of France" columnists write about the minutiae of everyday life, gently gaining our sympathy by their inability to cope with familiar problems.

Like all the water disappearing from the swimming pool, or the cook giving notice, or the difficulty of buying clothes for a weekend, all-expenses-paid trip to Turkey. The genre is best summed up in this passage from Patrick Campbell's *Sunday Times* column published in 1969:

"I should have known there was nothing wrong with my armature electrode. Of course it was the strike. We'd been waiting for it ever since the near-revolution of last May. The syndicalists — the sinister French word for trades unionists — had done it again. It was March 11th, and there would be no electricity in all of France from 9am till 5pm — leaving me with half a face shaved and her with the laundry unrinsed, and both lavatories out of action. *Quel malheur!*"

As an additional bonus, some columnists of the "South of France" school include sweeping political statements delivered with all the modesty of a *Militant* editorial. Such opinions usually purport to be liberal. For instance: "The advantage of being in possession of an all embracing political theory is that you need never be at a loss either to explain events or to propose their remedy. Marxists, for example..." (Clive James, *Observer*). You may take it from me that Mr James does not go on to flatter Marxists.

The *Weekend Guardian* is the

distilled essence of these columns: witty, erudite and peppered with untranslated foreign phrases, the *Guardian's* "tabloid" supplement is an eye-ful of expensively educated complacency. Some columns are even written by women. The paper is liberal middle class life broken down into its component parts — Tesco's extra-virgin olive oil selection (good), whether to take up an academic post in the States (no, think of the kids' education), the decline of the language (as always), camel trekking in the Himalayas (too touristy), and the effect of modern building regulations on thatched cottages (bad) (tell that to the inhabitants of Ronan Point).

But there is hidden treasure in the middle of all this gorgeous goo. To find it, you must carefully dispose of the jobs pull-out in a recycling bin, and turn over the remaining pages one by one. At the top of the 'sports' page you will find her. Doris.

If Doris were to write her own column, the others would be thrown away with the jobs. Doris does not have a villa in France or a cottage in Devon. She does not holiday in Nepal because she does not holiday at all. She has no trouble with the servants because she is one.

I suspect that the cartoonist who makes Doris has not seen her revolutionary potential. She is too tongue in cheek. But Doris has a fantasy life more revealing (and interesting) than the 'real' lives led by the oh-so-concerned columnists in the rest of the paper.

Doris does the washing up while younger, wealthier women are being creative. Her employers mouth off about sexism, racism and the trouble with nannies. Doris listens with a smile on her face and plans revenge on her exploiters, the exploiters of her class.

Doris will be with us on the barricades, sisters. Her tea-making, nappy changing days will be over for ever. Those of her liberal employers who aren't doing their own washing up now Ealing council's changed hands, like all those others who surround her every Saturday, will be where they belong. In the only place they feel safe. Under the bed in the South of France.

For a united socialist Europe!

EDITORIAL

Nicholas Ridley, the man who planned the miners' strike, deserves no sympathy for his sudden disappearance from the political scene.

Like so many other Thatcherite casualties, he did no more than say what others think; or rather, as it turns out, say publicly what others only say at Checkers.

The right-wing luminaries who gathered to discuss the national characteristics of the Germans at a meeting chaired by Margaret Thatcher have all been caught on the hop by the leaking of insider information. They learnedly advised the Prime Minister that Germans suffer, among other character defects, from angst, aggressiveness, bullying, egoism, sentimentality and a tendency to overestimate their abilities.

Professor Norman Stone insists passionately that these are all national characteristics of the Germans used to have, as if nationally stereotyping the dead were somehow less reprehensible.

It says a lot for the standards of scholarship at Oxford University. Hitler's rise to power is not explicable through alleged national weaknesses of the Germans. In Germany there was a powerful workers' movement — the most powerful there has ever been, perhaps — which could have defeated Hitler.

That it fell to Hitler without a fight was not because it was German; it was because, between them, Social Democracy and Stalinism were inept and pitiful political forces.

That the French, Mr Ridley's other lump of national inadequacy, were conquered by Hitler was not because the presumed consumption of snails and frogs' legs renders a nation militarily inefficient. That too had historical roots.

Ridley and his puppet-mistress plainly share straightforward chauvinism about their soon-to-be partners in Europe. All the high-powered talk about Ecus and Ems comes down to a simple fact: they are being dragged into European unity against their better judgement, and if it were at all possible to avoid getting together with all these Huns and Frogs and other old enemies of Biggles, they would do so.

All of which is to be expected, no doubt, from representatives of a ruling class which never managed to get over the sun no longer lingering over its empire.

But there is a lesson also for the Left. Not only the right have whined about the danger of German expansionism in Europe. The Right is

mainly bemoaning the limits to its own expansionism. But the Left has frequently joined in the chorus.

The campaign against entry into the EEC was led, in Britain, by the mainstream Left. At root their fear was about "foreign" domination of Britain, and no amount of internationalist padding could alter this basic message.

Opposition to the EEC was tied to a nationalist economic programme. That, nowadays, is seldom heard.

In France, the Communist Party campaigned for a while against a "German Europe", and for "socialism in the colours of France". The same CP campaigned for restrictions on Arab immigration, and led physical attacks on immigrants who were "taking French jobs".

Paranoia about German unification is these days quite widespread.

Of course German imperialism is not to be taken lightly. But nor are any of the imperialisms which make up the European community or its NATO ally across the Atlantic.

There is nothing about Germany which will make their imperialism qualitatively more rapacious or vile than anyone else's. And in reality, what the world is witnessing at the moment is not snatch-and-grab inter-imperialist rivalry like the periods before the two world wars. A European imperialism, within which Germany is especially strong, is being built.

The labour movement needs to respond to this but not with Ridley-esque cries of anti-German horror. It needs to develop its own European unity, its own international organisations and strategies; if capital is European, so must be the workers' movement.

The lack of accountability of EC institutions is a genuine problem. The answer, surely, is for the labour movement to fight to make them accountable, to expand democracy across Europe. The European parliament should have teeth. Representative institutions across post 1992 Europe should be able to reflect the real wishes of Europeans.

The labour movements of Europe should combine to fight racism on a European level. If citizens of different EC member states are to be free to move where they want to sell their labour, why not everyone? Why not north Africans who want to work in France, or Pakistanis who want to live in Britain, or Turks who want to go to Germany?

And if there are to be equal rights



His Mistress's Voice

for European workers, the labour movement should guarantee equal rights also for immigrant workers.

It is to be hoped that Ridley turns out to be the Thatcher government's last banana skin. His departure should certainly be greeted with a heartfelt cheer.

But let's make sure the labour movement doesn't share any of the prejudices that brought about Ridley's fall.

Mark Lindsay

Mark Lindsay, a Socialist Organiser comrade in South London, died suddenly and tragically last week.

Still in his late twenties, he died from the effects of an epileptic fit. Mark was a fighter. Personally, he faced serious physical disabilities, but this never stopped his political activity. He did not discuss his personal circumstances or expect special treatment. As Governor of a local special school he constantly urged the children on — using himself as a role model.

Mark had a long political history. He earned tremendous respect wherever his life touched the labour movement in South London. He was a regular delegate to annual and London Labour Party conferences from his constituency, Norwood. And he was instrumental in pushing both the Workers' Charter and Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc in both

the Labour Party and his trade union, the NCU.

Mark had supported the *Militant* newspaper before discovering *Socialist Organiser* and cementing his relationship to revolutionary politics.

A lively, enthusiastic and driving force amongst his comrades in South London, he will be sadly missed. But he was not just a good activist: Mark was never afraid to speak his mind or voice criticism, and he intended to write a long article contributing his own ideas to our discussion on the nature of the Eastern Bloc systems.

It is impossible here to capture those moments which added up to living and working alongside Mark. His sense of humour and his enthusiasm for campaigning will not be forgotten. But our lasting testimony to his life must be to pick up the fight where he left off in the struggle for socialism and a better world.

A memorial meeting for Mark will be arranged shortly.



Service, Friday 20 July, 10.00am at Sacred Hearts, Edge Hill, Wimbledon. Burial, 11.00am, Merton and Sutton cemetery, Garth Road, Morden

Over the top with Old Nick

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

I don't know about you, but I've got so used to hearing Tory politicians saying outrageous things about the unemployed, the poor, single parents, immigrants, northerners, foreigners, etc, that I don't take much notice any more.

So the full force of Nicholas Ridley's powerful contribution to Anglo-German understanding and trans-European harmony was only driven home to me by the following:

"Your great strength, Mr Ridley, is that you speak your mind. You are no hypocrite. But next time present your thoughts in more moderate language."

It has surely come to something when the *Sun* urges a Tory minister to moderate his language on the subject of foreigners. In fact, the *Sun's* coverage on Friday morning was remarkably restrained all round, with headlines about "Sour Krauts" notable for their absence. Instead, the paper led on the crisis that Ridley's outburst had caused in the Tory Party ("Fire Ridley or face a challenge, Tory Chief tells Maggie"), while on page two a quite informative piece explained that Mrs Thatcher had given Ridley the go-ahead for a spot of "Kraut bashing...but the plan backfired when Ridley went over the top."

The *Sun* also dealt with the obvious question, quoting *Spectator* editor Dominic Lawson: "Mr Ridley had the smallest glass of wine with lunch". And a special 4-page pull-out explained to *Sun* readers "Why the Germans are wealthier and smarter than us".

Presumably, in the wake of the Calcutt Report, Kelvin McKenzie is going through one of his periodic (and usually short-lived) efforts to clean up the *Sun's* image. So it was left to the *Daily Star* to uphold the great traditions of British tabloid journalism with "Up Yours Helmut!" on the front page and an editorial that declared: "The Krauts are the Rottweilers of European politics. And when East and West Germany unite they will be running in a pack, savaging Eurocrats into doing their bidding. French poodles and even British bulldogs won't stand a chance...If we'd wanted to be ruled by Germans we'd have held our hands up in 1939."

The *Daily Star's* stable-mate, the *Daily Express*, can at least claim the virtue of consistency in its long-standing opposition to Europe and all things European. While avoiding the crude language of its down-market sister (and, come to that, of Ridley), the *Express* could scarcely conceal its glee: "The groundswell of support for Mr Nicholas Ridley indicates the gulf that exists between the chattering classes and the general public...the majority of voters have cheered him on for voicing their own unspoken thoughts."

This was the theme of most of Saturday's tabloids, generally citing the results of readers' phone polls (97% backed Ridley in the *Express*; 94% in the *Star*; and 80% in the *Sun*). The unreliability of this method of assessing "public opinion" was demonstrated the next day, when all the proper opinion polls in the *Sundays* showed overwhelming opposition to Ridley's views.

The prize for the strangest response to the whole business must, however, go to the *Morning Star*: after condemning Ridley's "anti-German presentation", this mouthpiece of what still passes for "the left" in some circles, went on to argue that, "the same big business firms which backed Hitler form the backbone of German capitalism today", and called for "asserting the sovereignty of our own parliament... (which) would inevitably lead to our withdrawal from the EC..." Not quite in the "Up Yours Helmut" class, perhaps, but good patriotic stuff nonetheless.

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

Karl Marx

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4 POLL TAX

Homophobia in Poland

GRAFFITI

Lenin once said words to the effect that the measure of a society's real level of general emancipation was the position of women.

Lenin wouldn't, I think, have added that its attitude to homosexuals is pretty important, but he should have.

And one of the measures of the right wing backlash to decades of Stalinism now blitzing parts of Eastern Europe is what its spokesmen (I use the word advisedly) say they have in store for lesbians and gay men.

Lech Walesa, he told Polish TV, wants to see homosexuals eliminated, along with drug addicts. He probably associates the two.

What eliminated would mean exactly is not too clear: although the soil of Poland has seen a fair few homosexuals eliminated this century, by Nazis.

It is to be hoped that the Polish left, which recognises the poison of anti-semitism for what it is, also challenges this bit of bigotry. A gay movement is just emerging in Poland, and it would be worse than a tragedy if the Solidarnosc government cut it down. It would be one more knot in the noose around the necks of the Polish workers.

week's Socialist Workers Party event, "Intolerance 90".

The audience included a number of comrades who were attending "Intolerance". They heard *Socialist Organiser* editor John O'Mahony discuss the SWP's anti-Jewish politics in the context of increasing anti-semitism and the need for a lasting, democratic peace in the Middle East.

We had hoped to debate with the SWP's guru, Tony Cliff. Unfortunately, the obsessive old anti-Zionist sniffed out our Zionist plot to draw him into a debate! Heavens, debate our differences — with Zionists! — that would never do. Don't we know that lack of debate and ignorance are part of the proud tradition of anti-Zionist socialism?

The annual "Intolerance" event is organised by the absurdly named SWP. Its aim is to spread a bizarrely skewed and intolerant view of history right through the British labour movement. To this end no debate is allowed. *Socialist Organiser* is (annually) thrown out and our views are misrepresented.

Viva intolerance! Long live anti-Zionism!

It's a very good question, very direct, and I'm not going to answer it."

George Bush, on what proposals to reduce the US budget deficit he will deliver to Democratic congressional leaders

40 people attended the *Socialist Organiser* fringe meeting at last

Councillors against poll tax

By Tony Serjeant

Councillors Against the Poll Tax (CAPT) was launched recently as a network for councillors who support non-payment of the poll tax.

Labour Councillors Against the Poll Tax, a Labour Party oriented campaign initiated by Labour Party Socialists has agreed to support the broader campaign and hopes to hold a conference jointly with CAPT in September to discuss the way ahead. A united campaign is needed which will address organising for Labour Party Conference in October, and the current witch-hunt of anti-poll tax activists within the party as issues for urgent action.

Civil disobedience against the poll tax is not only evil in itself — it's also a vote loser — or so the right-wing in the Labour Party tells us. It was on these grounds that Labour HQ stepped in to impose other candidates on Labour Parties which had chosen anti-poll tax activists to fight the May local authority elections.

This theory was put to the test recently when Brian Smedly was selected to contest a vacant district council seat in Bridgwater, Somerset. Not only is Brian secretary of Bridgwater Labour Party, but he is also a well-known member of his local anti-poll tax union, and, worse still, has appeared on platforms advocating mass non-payment.

The Tories constantly pointed to these facts throughout the election campaign trying to link Brian falsely with the *Militant* newspaper. According to the right's criteria, Brian should have been hammered. Not so. Brian won the seat with

673 votes — an increase of over 200, and a majority over the Tories of 450. As Brian told *Socialist Organiser*: "It's not just that it's possible to win elections while supporting non-payment, this result suggests that non-payment is a vote winner. My first action on the council will be to support a motion calling for no prosecutions of poll tax defaulters."

Meanwhile, the witch-hunt against anti-poll tax councillors continues. Southampton City Councillor Paul Russell is being threatened with expulsion from the Labour Party for his refusal to vote for the poll tax. Paul walked out of Southampton City Council's March poll tax setting meeting at which, on the initiative of Labour Group leader Alan Whitehead, the police were called to eject poll tax protestors from the council chamber.

A motion from Whitehead's own branch — Portswood Labour Party — was subsequently sent to Southampton CLP calling for Paul's expulsion on the grounds that his actions at the March 7th council meeting "had brought the Labour Party into disrepute".

A panel, comprising three prominent right-wingers, was set up to investigate the complaint, and agreed that there were grounds to proceed for Paul's expulsion, and by a narrow vote of 27-23 the Southampton CLP decided to forward the panel's recommendation to Southern Region Labour Party to take action on. Paul is still waiting to hear from Southern Region.

Pass a resolution of support for all victimised poll-tax councillors at your Labour Party, and send messages of support to Paul Russell, 130 Rowhams Road, Maybush, Southampton SO1 6EA.

For more details of CAPT contact Steve French, 56 Ashby House, Brixton, London SW9 7SL.



Demonstrators at Lambeth Town Hall, south London. Photo: John Harris

A democratic campaign

Danny Burns and Ian Greaves, two of the three independents on the All Britain Federation national committee, and members of 3D, outline their strategy for taking the poll tax fight forward

The 3D network has been set up to foster open communication and democracy within the anti-poll tax movement.

3D does not set itself up in opposition to the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Rather, in recognising that an all Britain federation has an important role, 3D hopes to be a positive force towards democratising that organisation and enabling it to represent the needs of the thousands of groups on the ground in a way which we believe it has failed to do to date.

We believe that there is a need to learn from the events of the past year, and as a result outline the following principles as being necessary for the movement to acknowledge.

1. The strength of the anti-poll tax movement is its diversity. This must be encouraged. Attempts by any groups, factions, parties, to control the movement should be resisted.

2. The initiatives of the movement should come from the bottom up. The role of the national federation should primarily be: provision of information, co-ordination of national events, national press work.

3. The movement should be united and concentrate its energy on actively pursuing a range of strategies against the tax. It should not get caught up in minor disputes about emphasis. We believe that non-payment and non-collection are mutually interdependent. Both must be actively pursued. We should also continue to put pressure on councils and call for non-implementation.

4. The movement must defend all those intimidated by the police and assertively expose the violence and brutality of the state whenever it moves to strike against us.

5. The movement should clearly state its bottom line and make clear that it will continue to fight until these bottom line conditions are met:

- A system based on ability to pay.
- A system which protects jobs and services.
- A system which gives local people/councillors the right to determine their own level of service

provision.

- An immediate amnesty for all non-payers of the poll tax.

Currently the All Britain Federation is dominated by one political tendency. 13 members out of the 16 on the national committee are supporters of *Militant*. Considering the amount of work *Militant* supporters have put in on the ground it would be perverse if they were not

represented on the national committee. But their dominance of the national committee is not a fair reflection of the true diverse nature of our campaign. It constitutes a political imbalance which does not bode well for the unity of our campaign.

The resignation of their portfolios by the three independent members of the national committee [Sham Singh, London; Danny Burns, South West; Ian Greaves, Yorkshire] comes against a background of the Federation's unwillingness to work with other political groupings, and their deliberate blocking of the non-*Militant* national committee members.

Predictably, the work of the Federation has fallen on very few shoulders. A mass movement cannot be serviced by a handful of activists. Almost all our shortcomings to date can be blamed on this situation.

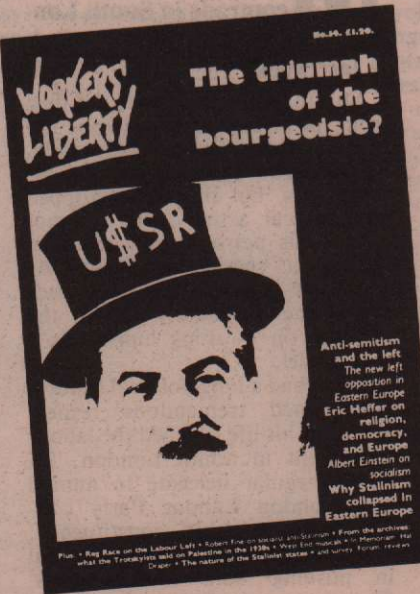
In conclusion, our only chance of broadening the National Federation will come about if there is a mass affiliation to the ABAPTF of every anti-poll tax union in the country. Then, as delegates at the next national conference, we can all vote to support those candidates who represent the broad and grassroots nature of our movement. We can then draw on the strength of our diversity to secure victory.

- Come to the 3D national activists' meeting, 15 September in Leeds.

- For more information about 3D, and for copies of its regular bulletin, contact 3D, 116 The Avenue, Tottenham, London N17 6DG.

The Poll Tax and the Unions

Defend rights, jobs, services and democracy
Saturday 8 September
Sheffield Poly Students Union
10.00am — 5.00pm
Organised by the
Socialist Movement
Trade Union Committee
For more details contact
Carolyn Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E15



Out now!
Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, for £1.20 plus 22p postage. Cheques payable to SO.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

"Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently"

Rosa Luxemburg



On 25 July Labour's NEC is likely to ban *Socialist Organiser* on the basis of a "report" which we have been given no chance to reply to. The "report" consists of six sentences culled from some old minutes (which we dealt with in last week's *SO*) and two pages from a fanciful scandal sheet on *SO* apparently originating among Labour Student leaders.

We reply to the witch hunters

A reply to Joyce Gould's report to the NEC

By John O'Mahony

Procedure

The last meeting of Labour's NEC (June 1990) left on the table for the next (July) meeting a large part of Joyce Gould's report on her investigation of Birkenhead Labour Party and *Socialist Organiser*. A vote on Gould's proposal that the Labour Party ban *Socialist Organiser* was thereby postponed.

Socialist Organiser is still legal in the Labour Party, but now, so to speak, we wait trussed up in a tumbrel for a brief pause on the road to proscription at the July NEC. More or less automatic proscription, it seems. That, at least, would seem to be Joyce Gould's calculation — that the NEC will let her recommendation through on the nod. Otherwise she would not treat the NEC with such contempt as to present as

her report of an "investigation" into *Socialist Organiser* what appears to be part of a factional document circulated two years ago in the student movement (or rather, among a small clique of students).

The document is, it must be said immediately, a slovenly piece of work, full of inaccuracies. In its alleged account of my history it says damaging things about me. It is therefore a libellous document. I can easily prove much of what it says to be untrue. I could, I believe, choose to go to law for satisfaction against anyone who has circulated it.

In fact, to my knowledge, Joyce Gould conducted no independent investigation into *SO*. No approach was made to the newspaper's office. I tried and failed on a number of occasions to get Joyce Gould on the phone. Requests that she return my calls were always ignored.

All this adds up to a pretty frightening state of affairs for Labour Party democracy and Labour Party justice. On 27 June we came close to a ban on *Socialist Organiser* without any attempt by those recommending or likely to impose the ban to ascertain the facts.

The recommendation was backed only by a few sentences snipped out of some old minutes, and an old document produced in the hot-house atmosphere of intra-Labour student animosities, the accuracy of which neither Joyce Gould nor the NEC had put themselves in any position to judge.

Socialist Organiser people were not given any chance to comment on the document, nor even notified of its existence. Everything was to be done behind closed doors and in the dark. We were, according to the procedures interrupted by the clock on 27 June and postponed to 25 July, to be condemned in our absence without even hearing the charges on which we were to be condemned. We were to be refused the right to offer the NEC even a written comment on the charges, let alone a proper right to defend ourselves. Even now I am able to write this reply not thanks to any second thoughts by the Labour Party's national officials, but because a copy of the document from the 27 June NEC reached me by unofficial means.

Such procedure falls a long, long way below the norms of the British courts. It harks back to the Tudor Star Chamber, or further back. The central pillar of the "prosecution" case was to be a secret, unsigned "confidential" document which could say anything its authors like because those libelled in it were not allowed even to know of its existence.

The business, if it concerned a State body, could serve as a good illustration of why the Labour Party

favours a Freedom of Information Act. It also illustrates why Labour needs its own internal Freedom of Information Act.

The unpleasant truth about what was attempted on 27 June, and will again be attempted on 25 July, is that Frank Field made his blackmailing threats to provoke a damaging by-election, and his charges against people in Birkenhead and against *Socialist Organiser* — and the Labour Party leadership has rushed to placate him.

Nothing else has, it seems, mattered. In the 1987 general election Field refused to endorse Lol Duffy, the Labour candidate in neighbouring Wallasey, and thereby probably lost Labour a Tory minister's seat (Lynda Chalker's). Lol Duffy lost by just 279 votes. When questioned about that on BBC Newsnight, Field responded not by denying that he had sabotaged a Labour candidate's election campaign, but —

implicitly admitting that he had, and had meant to, sabotage Duffy — with the smug comment that he looked forward to the day when "one could endorse all Labour candidates"!

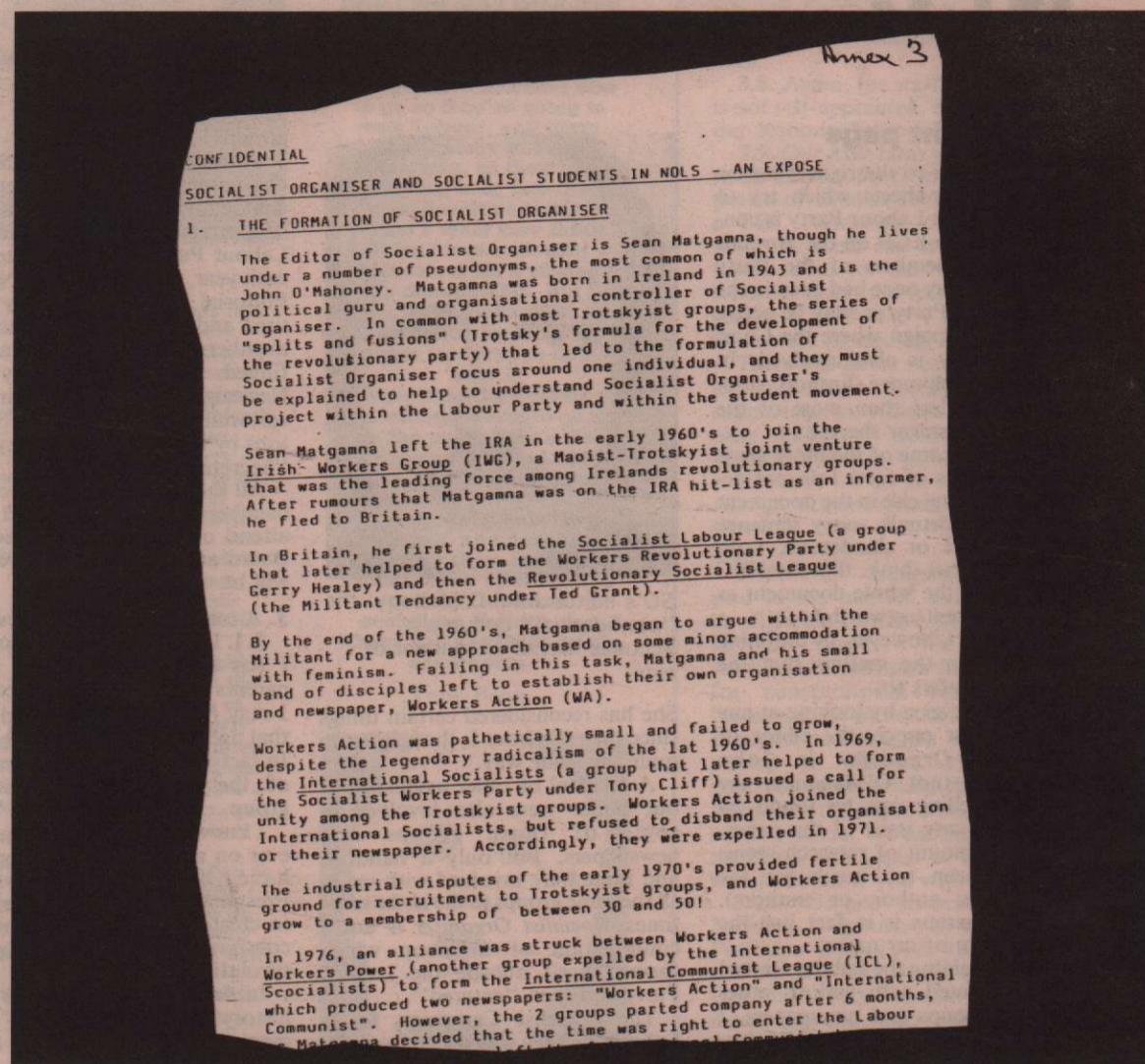
Yet Field has only to make his demands for the banning of *Socialist Organiser*, and the Labour Party organisation department rushes to rig up a case for him. Serious Labour Party people should not stand for it.

The details of the document

1 The document is not signed; it cites no evidence to enable anyone to check any of its claims; and it is labelled "confidential".

It is riddled with provable lies or, to be charitable, errors.

Turn to centre pages



**Lobby the NEC!
Hands off Socialist
Organiser!**
9.00am
Wednesday 25 July
Labour Party HQ
150 Walworth Road
London SE17

Defend the right to socialist dissent

A reply to Joyce Gould's report to the NEC

From front page

It is similar to the right-wing extremist smear-sheets which try to prove that the Labour Party is controlled by the KGB on the grounds that some members of the Party leadership may once had been in the Communist Party or may be active in some campaign where the Communist Party is also involved. In fact it is much more slipshod, sloppy and careless than most of the right-wing's smear sheets.

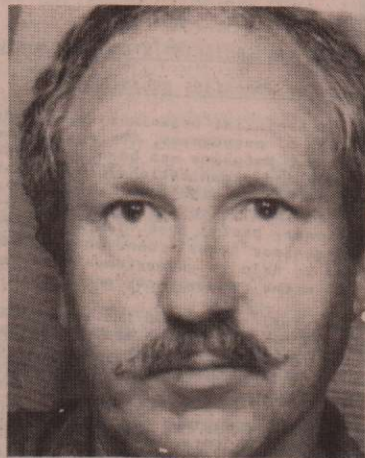
By listing some of the more gross lies (or errors of fact) I do not accept everything else in the document as correct: virtually every sentence is inaccurate or slanderous. I do demonstrate, I think, that the NEC must reject the whole document as completely untrustworthy.

2. I'll start, however, by outlining the facts on the matters that the document refers to.

As can be seen by looking at any issue of our paper, the editor of *Socialist Organiser* is John O'Mahony (not O'Mahoney: the correct spelling can be found by looking at any issue of the paper, but that amount of research seems to have been too much for the anonymous author or authors). Sean Matgamna is in fact just the Gaelic form of my name.

Before joining the Labour Party I was associated with various other socialist groups and newspapers. I have never made any secret of this. So were many other Labour Party members, including members of the NEC!

According to the weekly paper of one of the splinter WRPs, *Workers Press*, Joyce Gould herself was a founder member of the organisation that became Gerry Healy's WRP, the Socialist Labour League, in early 1959, thirty-one years ago.



SO's editor John O'Mahony: the "confidential" document accuses him of all manner of sins

She has reconsidered certain things since then. So have I, though not in quite the same way.

A handful of other associates of our paper were also involved in some of those groups and newspapers. But only a handful; and none were involved with me in all the same groups as me at the same times. *Socialist Organiser* is not a continuation of a group which formed itself outside the Labour Party and then "entered".

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory was set up, and *SO* was launched, in 1978. The chair of its launch conference was Ted Knight, then leader of Lambeth Council, and its Secretary was Mike Davis, later an associate of the Labour Coordinating Committee. I was its organiser. Ken Livingstone was a keynote speaker. It was not "controlled" by the "International Communist League" or any such

group.

Throughout its existence *Socialist Organiser* has been run openly and democratically. Meetings of local supporters' groups are open to all Labour Party members. The AGM each year, which elects the National Editorial Board, is publicly advertised and open to all Labour Party members. This year it was even filmed for television by BBC Newsnight. The editor and the editorial staff are elected to their jobs by the NEB, not by any shady "Secretariat"!

All these facts can be checked. If members of the NEC would like to attend our next National Editorial Board and see for themselves, they will be welcome.

3. A selection from the document:

3.1. I was born in 1941, not 1943. I was brought to England by my parents as a child of 12. Precocious I may have been, but I had not at that age been a member of the IRA! In fact I have never been a member of the IRA or any Republican group.

I know of no rumours that I was ever on an IRA "hit-list" or that I have been "an informer". Presumably all this stuff is stuck in to create associations with military conspiracies and romantic guerilla revolutionaries.

In fact anyone who knows the history of the Republican Movement — and I have written quite a bit about it over the last 25 years — will doubt the existence of an "IRA hit-list" in the '60s, certainly after 1962 when the IRA declared a ceasefire. *Socialist Organiser* is not the only thing the author of this document is disabblingly ignorant about.

3.2. I was for a while a member (in England) of the Irish Workers'



Group, but in the mid-'60s, not the early '60s, when that group did not exist.

3.3. I was indeed earlier a member of the SLL, then very briefly associated with *Militant*, an

association which ceased in 1966, not "the end of the 1960s". As many members of the NEC will recall, it is a fact, if an unfortunate one, that no-one on the left was having big arguments about

IRELAND: The Socialist Answer



With contributions from Alan Fain, Tony Benn, Geoff Ball, Stan Crookall, Patrick Murphy and John O'Mahony.

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet. £1.

Arabs, Jews and socialism

The debate on Palestine, Zionism and anti-semitism (including "Trotsky and Zionism")

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet

Is Socialist Organiser a 'Le

The document lays out the thesis that *Socialist Organiser* is an organisation like *Militant*. Now I opposed and oppose the proscription of *Militant*; I believe that where *Militant* acts harmfully it must be fought politically. But it is false to equate *Socialist Organiser* with *Militant*.

The document tries to "prove" its case in two ways. The first stage of one "proof" is asserting that all such groups as *Militant* are formed around one individual; *Socialist Organiser* is said to be so organised around myself; *Socialist Organiser* and myself are thus asserted to be identical; and my alleged history is then recounted to prove that *Socialist Organiser* is what it is alleged to be.

The second way of "proving" that *Socialist Organiser* is like *Militant* is to make assertions about how the supporters of *Socialist Organiser* organise to produce, circulate and sustain the paper.

The document's account of both my history and how *Socialist Organiser* supporters organise ourselves is riddled with inaccuracies big and little, many of them preposterous. Worse than that, however, from the authors' point of view, is the palpable fact that though they are engaged in pontificating about the nature of

"Leninist" groups and of sects like *Militant*, the WRP and the SWP, to which they allege *Socialist Organiser* is identical, they plainly do not understand how such sects function or what it is that gives them their special character.

If they had bothered to do any research into *Socialist Organiser* — even to the extent of leafing through a file of the paper — they could not have made that mistake.

If you place Gerry Healy's WRP at one end of the spectrum, the SWP at the other and *Militant* in the centre, you see important differences but also certain things in common which give such sects their character. They are organised as tight single-faction organisations. There is a pre-designated leadership, and a narrowly defined set of ideas which function as shibboleths and are not open to discussion. Internal dissent is not allowed, or is allowed only so long as it does not impinge on the cardinal doctrines of the group. Dissent in the public press is very, very rare, and for most such groups simply unknown. Minorities are not allowed to form factions. The possibility of putting up an across-the-board alternative slate on a distinct political platform to challenge the incumbent leadership simply does not exist. It ceased to exist, for example, in the loosest and most nearly civilised of such

groups in Britain, the SWP, twenty years ago (about the time I parted company with that organisation).

But more than that: I have only sketched in the formalities and structures. There is also the spirit of these groups. It is the spirit of the narrow, persecuting religious sect. The feeling and emotions and commitment which is a necessary part of any sustained activity around the old socialist programme of replacing capitalism by "the cooperative commonwealth" is all focused on the group, on its particular ideas and shibboleths, and on its own claimed identity as "the party", the Church of the Lord.

It is that spirit — cultivated and cherished by the organisers of the groups listed above — which gives the final stamp to the groups' character as sects. From the spirit flows intolerance, the transmutation of ideas supposedly based on theorising about an evolving and changing world into religious dogmas, believed on faith and separating the faithful and the saved from the sinners and the deservedly damned.

Such quasi-religious formations need intolerance, need a "party regime" that keeps an iron grip, need the typical internal atmosphere of an intense religious cult — or they disintegrate.

They need certainties and dogmas

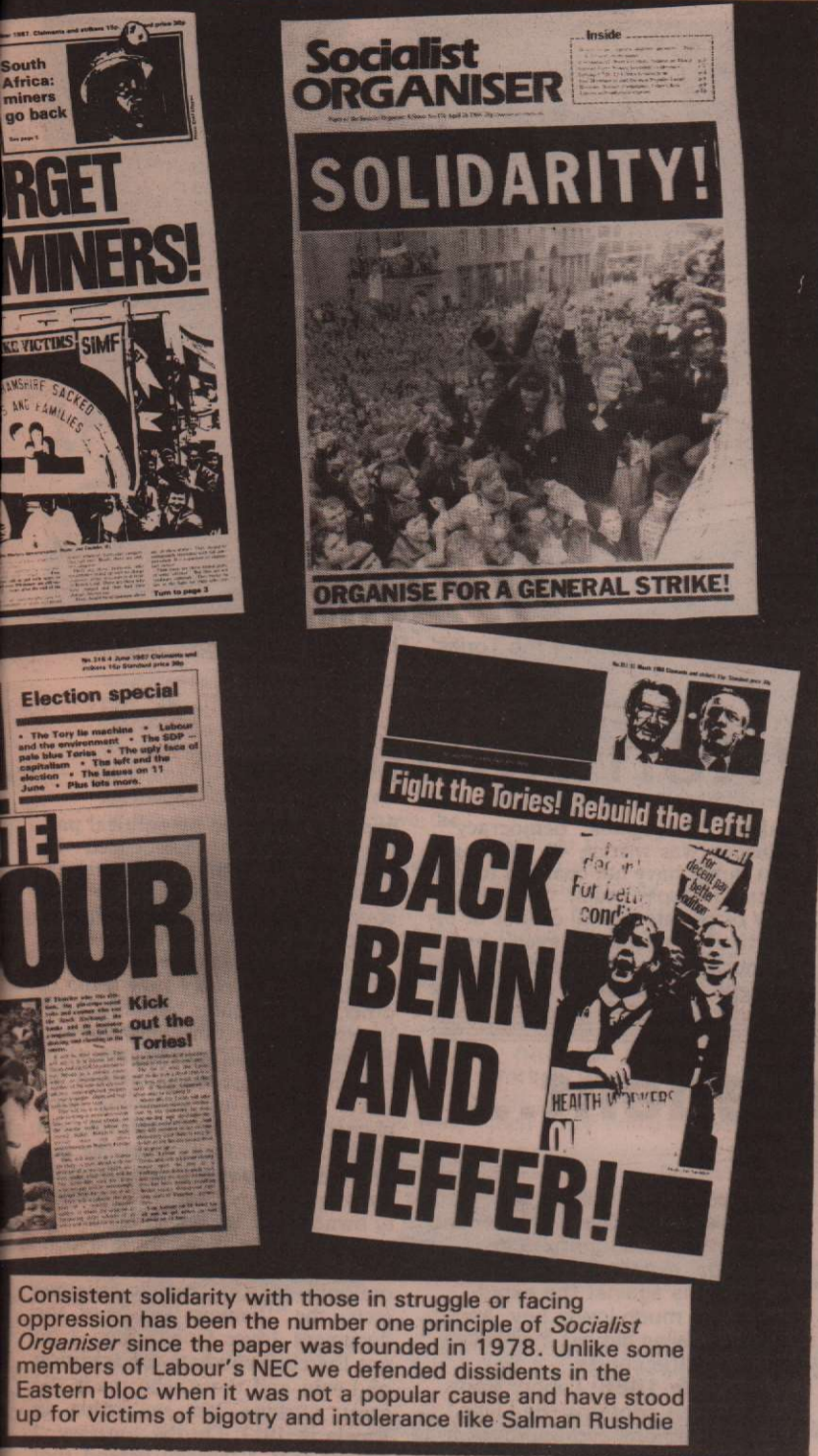
A broad range of debate

These two pamphlets *Ireland: the socialist answer* and *Arabs, Jews and socialism* face up to some of the most difficult and complicated issues for the left. A glance at the breadth of contributors to our debates on Ireland, from Tony Benn, Clive

Soley and Clare Short through to Daisy Mules of Sinn Fein shows that *SO* and *Workers Liberty* are hardly the publications of some ossified sect

Ireland: the socialist answer and *Arabs, Jews and socialism* are available for £1 and £1.80 respectively, plus 22p post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Defend the right to socialist dissent



"I've read *Socialist Organiser* for many years, and I believe that such papers are an important part of building a broad movement for socialism. I think the purpose of the new moves is to separate the electoral machine from any interest in politics. I used to think the target was the left, then the unions, then the party, but now I just don't think they want any discussion of any kind at all.

They think that people on the left have nowhere else to go so they're going to vote Labour, and there aren't many of them anyway, so they're raiding deep into the Owen/Heseltine territory — that's what they think. It isn't tremendously impressive. As a strategy it's disreputable. But I think that's the explanation for what the Labour leaders are doing now.

Every time they clobber the left they seem to go up in the polls. That's the beginning and end of it. They'll do fund-raising outside the party, get the support of Robert Maxwell, and hope this will carry them in. I don't think they're interested in politics, let alone socialism. Politics, for them, are a subsidiary of advertising."

Tony Benn



"*Socialist Organiser* is a small body, loosely organised around a newspaper. Its socialist credentials are beyond reproach. Its sympathisers — like many other socialists in the party — may hold minority views. But they are loyal members of the Labour Party, an asset to it, and they will, I understand, be happy to make any adjustments to their activity which the NEC may require.

This, however, would rather interfere with the NEC's likely plans of disqualifying Lol Duffy. Hence the NEC may deem it necessary to build up *Socialist Organiser* into a Merseyside bug-bear, and on this basis proceed against it. These methods are alien to Labour's democratic tradition and should be condemned. Members must be alerted to the drift away from party democracy and towards intolerance and must mobilise against it."

Vladimir Derer

could have been, the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory "controlled" by the I-CL.

3.7. Nobody was, has been, or (in the nature of our structure) can be expelled from the SCLV or the *Socialist Organiser* Alliance. A number of supporters of the SCLV did break away from it in early 1980, some to launch *Labour Briefing*, others in other directions; but it was their choice, arising out of a political disagreement, quite publicly and hotly debated in the pages of *Socialist Organiser*, about the then left-wing majority policy of high rate rises to counter Thatcher's cuts.

3.8. Again, the staff at our office is not self-appointed, but elected by our National Editorial Board.

3.9. Our AGM this year was open to all Labour Party members (as in previous years) and this time also to a BBC Newsnight crew. Anyone who was there can testify that the nominations for the NEB all came from the floor, not from some "Executive Committee", and anyway there were 25 elected, not 34.

There has never been an election at a gathering of *Socialist Organiser* supporters in which nominations were limited — according to the Stalinist version of "democratic centralism" — to an official slate. All participants have had equal rights to stand for office, and to vote.

3.10. The "arguments that appear in the internal bulletins" are no different to those which appear in the paper. We produce duplicated discussion bulletins not for conspiratorial reasons, but because some of our debates — for example, recently, on what's happening in Eastern Europe — generate more writing than can be fitted into the paper without boring newer readers. We can supply NEC members with copies of the discussion bulletins if you wish.

3.11. No-one associated with *Socialist Organiser* lives at 54a Peckham Rye. (Visit the address and check!) Why would it matter if they did? Only because the document, in the worst gutter-press traditions, wants to create an impression of us as weird people, "pure from thought tainted by subjective circumstances", whatever that means, living all huddled together in a squalid coven.

3.12. The paper is printed by Press Link International Ltd, who operate not in Rye Lane but at the Elephant and Castle. This information can be got by reading any copy of *Socialist Organiser*: but yet again the anonymous author is evidently much more interested in his lurid tales of revolutionary covens of ex-IRA men than in such humdrum research as simply reading the paper!

3.13. As noted above, *Socialist Organiser* is not organised in some sort of militarist or hierarchical "democratic centralist" fashion. It does not have "different types of members"; all our supporters have an equal say.

3.14. In short: the document is better suited to the pages of the *Sun* than to the consideration of the NEC, though even the *Sun* would probably bin it for lack of journalistic professionalism.

If the Labour Party bans *Socialist Organiser* on the basis of this document, then it will have dealt a far bigger blow at the Labour Party itself — at its right to claim it is a democratic party — than at *Socialist Organiser*.

What is Socialist Organiser?

What, positively, is *Socialist Organiser*? What exactly is our socialism?

We think capitalism at root depends on the exploitation of wage labour by the owners of large property. We want to end that system by the working class acting to end it, and replace it by collective, cooperative, self-controlling ownership of the means of production. It is the goal expressed in the Labour Party's Clause IV Part 4.

We think the system we live under is not only one of exploitation, of what earlier Labour Party

feminism in 1966, three years before the rebirth of the women's movement in Britain!

3.4. *Workers' Action* was not launched until late 1975.

3.5. The International Socialists'

call for left unity was made in 1968, not 1969. With a few others (none of them, by the way, associated with *SO* today) I did respond to that call. We did not publish a newspaper of our own, but sold

Socialist Worker!

With yet other people I was expelled in 1971 when the IS/SWP decided to shut down its internal democracy and move towards the Stalinist concept of a one-faction

party. The SWP's experience with that concept should not encourage the Labour Party to follow suit now.

3.6. *Workers' Action* was not produced by the I-CL, nor was, or

minist sect'?

and infallible leaders, and these can be sustained in place only when dissent is forbidden or limited and ritualised. A political culture in which every participant has the taken-for-granted right to disagree with the majority, to pose awkward questions about both ideas and individuals, and to express his or her opinions and proselytise for them in word and writing would be anathema to the quasi-religious "Leninist" sects.

Contact with that way of working would dissolve the pretensions of the leaders of such cults, dissipate the holy aura surrounding the ideas for which they function as a priestly caste. For that reason such groups not only control or stifle elements of such an approach within their own ranks, but they also cultivate and foment extreme hostility and hatred for it when it comes from outside their own band. Instead of teaching their supporters to reason about the world, they teach them dogmas. Complicated theories are reduced to phrases packaging hopes and wishes about, for example, the Middle East or Ireland, which then fill the space that should be filled by a rational account of the world we have to deal with.

That is the spirit of the cults and sects, ranging from the still relatively civilised SWP through to the Militant and beyond to the old,

openly crazy WRP.

Demonstrably *Socialist Organiser* is not of that type. Nobody who reads the paper could honestly make a case that we belong to that spectrum of politics. A few *SO* supporters, and most prominently myself long ago, have a distant background in such political formations. But we have tried to learn the lesson of the awful fate of the people who try to be honest socialists but tragically fall back into the primitive semi-religious approach characteristic of the dawn of the labour movements in the last century and earlier.

Socialist Organiser conducts its discussions openly in the pages of our paper. There are no sacrosanct ideas or individuals that cannot be discussed or questioned, no religious awe around either our ideas or our activities. To a considerable extent, the debates that should have occupied the whole Left, but have been absent from it, have taken place in *Socialist Organiser* over the last ten or so years. The list of subjects is a long one.

Strategy for the left in local government occupied *Socialist Organiser* in the early '80s; nobody could write a serious history of the left of that period without using the *Socialist Organiser* discussions as essential raw material. Even after

most of those who thought the best course was high rates had parted company with *Socialist Organiser*, the discussion continued.

We have had the only debates on the left in the '80s on the European Community. The same with Ireland: in no other paper has there been a wide-ranging discussion — a discussion involving participants from the full range of the left — on Ireland's long war. We have discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict at length, and, more recently, the nature of the old systems in Eastern Europe.

In those discussions the people who are assigned the roles of high priests and gurus in the document Joyce Gould uses have had to participate "on the floor", arguing their case with the same rights as other participants and no privileges. I am *SO*'s pope according to the document: the pages of the paper show me arguing in democratic debate — and not infrequently being abused — on questions ranging from Ireland through Europe to the Middle East. I have been in the minority in some of those debates — on the Middle East, for example — for a long, long time.

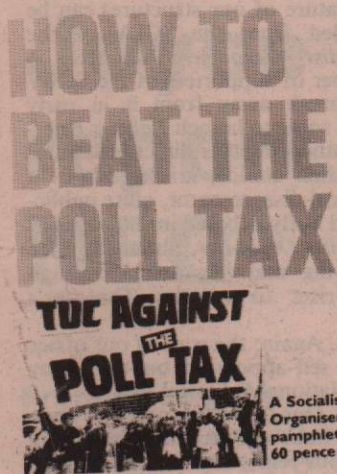
If *Socialist Organiser* were in fact organised like the cults and sects I have described above, then it would

dissolve when its alleged gurus and leaders were subjected to such rules and such treatment, when the freedom in the pages of the paper exercised by *Socialist Organiser* supporters challenged the leading ideas with argument, scorn, irony or denial. In fact *Socialist Organiser* has thrived on such discussion because we are a democratic collective, committed to rational democratic working-class politics, not a cult with gurus and disciples.

The indisputable evidence of what *Socialist Organiser* is, is there for the examining in the files of the paper. A sect like, say, Militant could not survive if it ran an open paper like *Socialist Organiser*.

In short, the attempt by the author of Joyce Gould's document to identify *Socialist Organiser* with the "Leninist" cults shows simply that the author does not understand the nature of the thing he or she wants to denounce. The author gets all the detail of how *Socialist Organiser* functions wrong, but even if some of it were accurate he or she would still be like the small child who notices that matches are red and then tries to make matches by dipping sticks in red paint. The author simply does not understand the nature of the things being compared and analysed, does not understand why they are what they are and how it all fits together.

Defend the right to socialist dissent

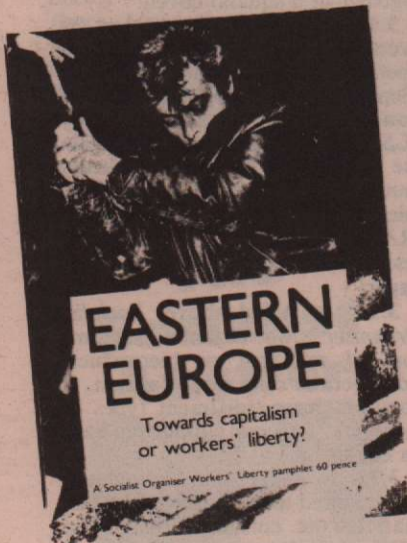


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In September 1983, *Socialist Organiser* launched a conference on the theme of 'How to fight the Tories'. The platform included Reg Race (speaking), Jeremy Corbyn MP (right)

We reply to the witch-hunters

From centre pages

socialists were not embarrassed to call wage slavery, under the largely uncontrolled industrial and commercial tyranny of the bourgeoisie,

but also a system in which political democracy is stifled, warped and rendered ineffective — if by democracy is meant real self-rule by the majority of the people.

No less a person than Albert Einstein can be cited to sum up our criticism of what some socialists

called "bourgeois democracy". Einstein was writing 40 years ago, but things have not changed for the better in those years. "The oligarchy of private capital cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organised political society. The members of legislative

bodies are selected by political parties financed or influenced by private capitalists. Moreover, private capitalists control the main sources of information (press, radio, education)."

To say that is not for us — or for Einstein — to imply that some or other of the existing "socialist" dictatorships are better. They are not. But we need the idea expressed by Einstein if we are to understand the world we live in, including such phenomena as the transformation of the Labour Party over the last few years into what it is now under the incessant pressure of the property owners and their media.

With sincere revulsion and contempt I repudiate the antics and the outlook of the pseudo-religious sects, the "Leninist sects" of the document Joyce Gould cites. I do not thereby repudiate the tradition of Lenin and those who made the great working-class revolution in Russia in 1917. On the contrary, I believe that I thereby defend that tradition as it really was.

That the outcome in history of the 1917 revolution was — by way of Stalinist counter-revolution — a negative and horrible outcome, was not the fault of Lenin or his "tradition", but of those socialists in the West (those in whose "tradition" the majority of Labour's NEC are proud to stand) who left the Russian workers in the lurch and made their peace with their own ruling classes. Rosa Luxemburg, who was a bitter and forceful critic of some things the Bolsheviks did as well as being their partisan, said it all very well in 1918, in the course of criticising Lenin and his comrades.

"Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian revolution, it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism."

Post-Stalinist socialism will have to be rethought, and the elements of socialism recast. It seems to me that Lenin's tradition will and should be part of that process. It must be critically evaluated and assimilated, of course, but with loyal and honest criticism, not with bourgeois propaganda masquerading as socialist criticism.

I believe that the only point of view from which it can be asserted that such a strand of socialism has no place in the Labour Party is the point of view which wants to make Labour a one-faction party.

From that point of view not only *Socialist Organiser* will be considered intolerable but — if the present trends continue — all who remain loyal to and organise and fight for the basic ideas enshrined in the Labour Party constitution itself.

Precedent after precedent...

1979-80: Big left-wing upsurge in Labour Party, winning important democratic reforms, alarms the Establishment.

March 1981: David Owen and others split from Labour Party to form SDP.

October 1981: 'Manifesto Group' of right-wing MPs demand purge of *Militant* after Pat Wall is selected as Labour candidate for Bradford North. NEC stalls Wall's endorsement as a candidate and starts an "inquiry" into *Militant*.

November 1981: NEC forbids Hornsey Labour Party (in north London) to admit Tariq Ali, a former leader of the International Marxist Group, as a member.

December 1981: Labour's leader Michael Foot, speaking in Parliament, denounces Peter Tatchell, the Labour candidate selected for Bermondsey (south-east London), because Tatchell has written an article advocating "extra-parliamentary action".

January 1982: Cabal of trade union and Labour leaders at Bishops Cleeve agrees plans to make the Labour Party safe for capitalism again.

Tribune calls for a Party tribunal to investigate and expel "some of the more secretive sectarian organisations".

June 1982: NEC discusses report of "inquiry" into *Militant* and decides to set up a "register" of approved groups in the Labour Party (so that *Militant* can be dubbed a disapproved group and expelled).

Two campaigns set up against this: the 'Labour Steering Committee Against the Witch-hunt' (controlled by *Militant*) and 'Labour Against the Witch-hunt'.

Militant supporters take the Labour Party to court: To cut through its legal difficulties, and also to get round the problem that many right-wing groups in the Labour Party turn out to be ineligible for the register, the NEC lets the register become a dead letter.

February 1983: The NEC finally finds a "legal" formula to expel five members of the *Militant* editorial board (though their local Labour Parties refuse to recognise the expulsions, some of them maintaining this refusal for years). In the same month, Peter Tatchell, finally

endorsed as Labour candidate for Bermondsey after the right-wing former MP Bob Mellish resigns to force a sudden by-election, is trounced by a vicious anti-gay, anti-left campaign from the Liberals.

October 1983: Labour Party conference confirms the expulsion of the five *Militant* EB members after they address the conference. Neil Kinnock elected leader.

1984-5: With opinion swinging to the left because of the miners' strike, the witch-hunt marks time.

Late 1985: *Militant*, influential on Liverpool City Council, discredits itself by issuing 24,000 redundancy notices (as a "tactical move") and then collapsing into making cuts.

November: Liverpool District

Labour Party is suspended.

June 1986: Derek Hatton and other *Militant* supporters in Liverpool expelled. This time the campaigns against the expulsions are much lower key, and *Militant* relies almost exclusively on using the courts.

October 1986: Labour Party conference confirms the Liverpool expulsions and approves a new disciplinary procedure giving a "National Constitutional Committee" a right to expel anyone guilty of "a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party".

Between then and its report to the 1989 Labour Party conference, the NCC dealt with 134 cases. Most of them concerned "membership of the Militant Tendency" and led to expulsion.

Verdict: innocent. Sentence: banning

The original grounds for Labour's National Executive to "investigate" *Socialist Organiser* were allegations by Frank Field MP that the paper somehow controlled Wallasey Labour party in a malign way, excluding and intimidating right wingers.

The fact is that Wallasey Constituency Labour Party has a record to be proud of. In 1987 it increased the Labour vote by 39 per cent over 1983's figure. It cut the Tories' majority to 279, and would probably have won the seat for Labour if not for the intervention of Frank Field, pointedly telling the local press that he would not support Wallasey's Labour candidate.

Outside election time, it is a campaigning, active party which has increased its membership at a time when Labour Party numbers nationally have stagnated. Wallasey's campaign against the local Liberal-Tory coalition council's sell-off of elderly people's homes was

highlighted by an emergency resolution at last year's Labour Party conference, with great applause from the platform.

The credit for all this does not belong to *Socialist Organiser*, though our small number of supporters in the constituency have played their part. Wallasey CLP is not controlled by any particular faction. It is open and democratic.

And Joyce Gould agrees — or so it would seem. In her report to the 27 June NEC, she makes no recommendations for any action against Wallasey CLP. She upholds none of Frank Field's allegations about shady finances, procedural irregularities, intimidation of minority views, or control by *Socialist Organiser*; implicitly, therefore, but clearly, she rejects those allegations.

The verdict is "innocent". But what Joyce Gould then did was to drag up a whole new set of "charges" against *Socialist Organiser*, scavenged from the dustbins of Labour Student polemic, and declare the paper guilty and deserving to be banned on those grounds.

Adam Smith: Thatcherite or radical?

By Martin Thomas

Adam Smith, who died 200 years ago this month, has been adopted by the Thatcherites as their intellectual hero. Yet some of his views, transposed to today, would probably get him banned from the Labour Party as a "Leninist sectarian".

"Civil government," he wrote, "so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor..."

For that and other reasons the employers would have an advantage in the class struggle. "What are the common wages of labour, depends everywhere upon the contract usually made between [the] two parties, whose interests are by no means the same. The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible...It is not, however, difficult to foresee which of the two parties must...have the advantage..."

The "merchants and master manufacturers", although they were bound to dominate government, were "an order of men whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have upon many occasions both deceived and oppressed it."

Indeed, "All for ourselves and

nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind."

Smith was a radical in his day — in favour of the newly-emerging free-market capitalist economy; against the old privileges and vested interests; against more than minimal powers for the government; in favour of organised distrust of anyone who secured wealth and power, even from the



ranks of the new capitalists.

He opposed any idea of a natural hierarchy among people: "The difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature as from habit, custom and education."

Although he believed that the workers' lack of education, leisure and economic power meant that their voice would inevitably be "lit-

tle heard and less regarded", he favoured "liberal reward of labour". "To complain of it is to lament over the necessary effect and cause of the greatest public prosperity"; and in any case, "It is but equity that they who food, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged."

Smith was the first writer to present the whole process of production and distribution as a set of human arrangements subject to rational analysis and to change. His nearest forerunners, the so-called "Physiocrats" in France, considered only agricultural labour to be productive. Smith, writing at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, started his analysis with the division of labour over a vast range of industries and trades.

"In civilised society [man] stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons...man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence alone." The "invisible hand" of the market would solve the dilemma. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, from their regard to their own interest."

What regulated the proportions of trade? Certainly goods did not exchange in proportion to their

usefulness: a diamond would exchange for a vast amount of water. No: "the real price of everything" must be "the toil and trouble of acquiring it", or in other words the labour required to make it (or rather the average amount required: but actual amounts would be adjusted "by the higgling and bargaining of the market").

Alternatively, Smith wrote, the value of goods equalled the amount of labour they could purchase or command.

The two definitions were inconsistent, though Smith never seems to have recognised that. The labour needed to make goods can be purchased for less than the value of the goods, and the difference is profit.

Smith dealt with the difficulty by arguing that in a society of independent producers, the labour needed for goods would equal the labour commanded; but once "stock has accumulated in the hands of particular persons" profit on that stock would (for some unstated reason) also enter as an element of price. Thus he ended up with the trite theory that the price of goods equals the price of the inputs required, plus wages, plus profit, plus rent.

For all that Smith was no apologist. Although he was generally optimistic about the prospects for free-market capitalism, his perspective was clouded by the belief that in due course industry would expand to the limits of the natural resources of the country, and would then fall into a "stationary state", with both wages and profits low.

Ironically, Smith's great successor, Ricardo, shared the same perspective (for slightly different reasons), and among the classical economists it was the anti-capitalist Marx who most stressed the capacity of the market economy to expand beyond all apparently predefined limits.

Smith opened the question of the rational reconstruction of economic life. His answer was limited by his implicit assumption that free-market capitalism was the natural form of economy, as against previous forms of economy restricted by privilege and traditions. What he would think today, as he saw free-market manufacturing capitalism transformed by its own inner workings into a capitalism dominated by great vested interests of the state and high finance, no-one can tell.

His labour theory of value was limited and confused because it took the representation of labour as value, and the buying and selling of labour, as facts of nature, rather than features of a particular organisation of society.

"Political economy," as Marx commented, "has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and its magnitude...But it has never once asked the question why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour-time by the magnitude of that value. These formula...bear it stamped upon them in unmistakable letter that they belong to a state of society, in which the process of production has the mastery of man, instead of being controlled by him..."

A different approach

LETTERS

I am concerned that our approach to the Socialist Workers Party (SO 453) is overly-provocative, which is ultimately wasteful and counter-productive.

What I wish to address is not the question of the SWP's position on the Middle East — the logic of which does undoubtedly lead to a sorry support for Arab chauvinism and by extension anti-semitism — but our approach to the far left and more generally those sympathetic to socialist politics.

It should come as no surprise to anyone who has met with the realpolitik of the SWP that they are hostile to any organised criticism or dissent. 'Marxism 90' (as with their past summer schools), although described as a "week of discussion and debate" is used quite cynically not to discuss and debate with the revolutionary left, but to recruit new people to the SWP.

What discussion and debate does take place, when it is not solely SWP members providing it, comes from either invited academics/literati or the mainstream left in general — not from revolutionary critics they view as competitors.

Incidentally, we are fortunate to have the Workers' Liberty summer school where there is genuinely the opportunity to meet with, and hear, the views of others on the left, in real, not stage-managed, discussion.

However, whilst noting the above, I am not implying that we should refrain from attempting to get a hearing for our politics from people attracted to 'Marxism 90', arguably the biggest organised annual gathering for those interested in revolutionary politics in Britain, but to consider a different method.

Firstly, we should say that Socialist Organiser stand for real and genuine dialogue between the left, to clarify issues and to build the left. So why doesn't the SWP at

'Marxism 90'? Then we should refer to their day-to-day practice in the class struggle, for example:

1. Their opportunism in selectively jumping in and out of anti-poll tax groups.

2. Their sectarianism in acting as "proxy" agents of the leadership and right-wing of the Labour Party by their siren role of luring the disaffected (rightly so!) from the Labour Party, rather than helping the left to steel themselves to reorganise and fight back inside together.

3. Their incoherence in trade union and broad left politics, for instance in the NUT and CPSA to name but two.

The points above, or others, would obviously be expanded on.

Finally, we should state that we believe they are at serious error with their position on the Middle East. We are ready to debate them at any

time, in meetings or in our press, or both, on the issues raised in the 'Open Letter to Tony Cliff' in the latest edition of *Workers Liberty*.

Such an approach, I believe, has a better chance of receiving a hearing and making some people stop and think, rather than one that can be readily misconstrued as some odd left group squabble over an abstruse point of doctrine. As a regular reader put it to me, "It just comes across as the latest of O'Mahony's [the editor's] bees in the bonnet!"

Our politics are too important to allow for them to be so easily belittled. We have an obligation to present them clearly to as wide a readership as possible. We should avoid at all costs falling into the role of the left pariah, or giving any ammunition to those who wish to maliciously portray us as loonies.

Bryan Edmonds, South London

"We'd do just the same"

In depots, workplaces and pubs around Merseyside the recent upheavals in Romania, and Militant's comments, have been avidly debated," claimed a recent issue of *Militant* (issue 999).

I missed the debate. Maybe it's because I'm an unemployed teetotaler. More likely it's because the "avid debate" has been confined to *Militant* paper sellers who have rebelled against the leadership's demand that they operate as cheerleaders for Stalinist oppression.

Militant's response to the violent clashes which occurred in Bucharest in June was to belittle the violence and justify the attacks on the student opponents of the Iliescu regime.

"There were excesses and even an element of brutality in the suppression of opposition," said *Militant*.

According to *Militant*, however,

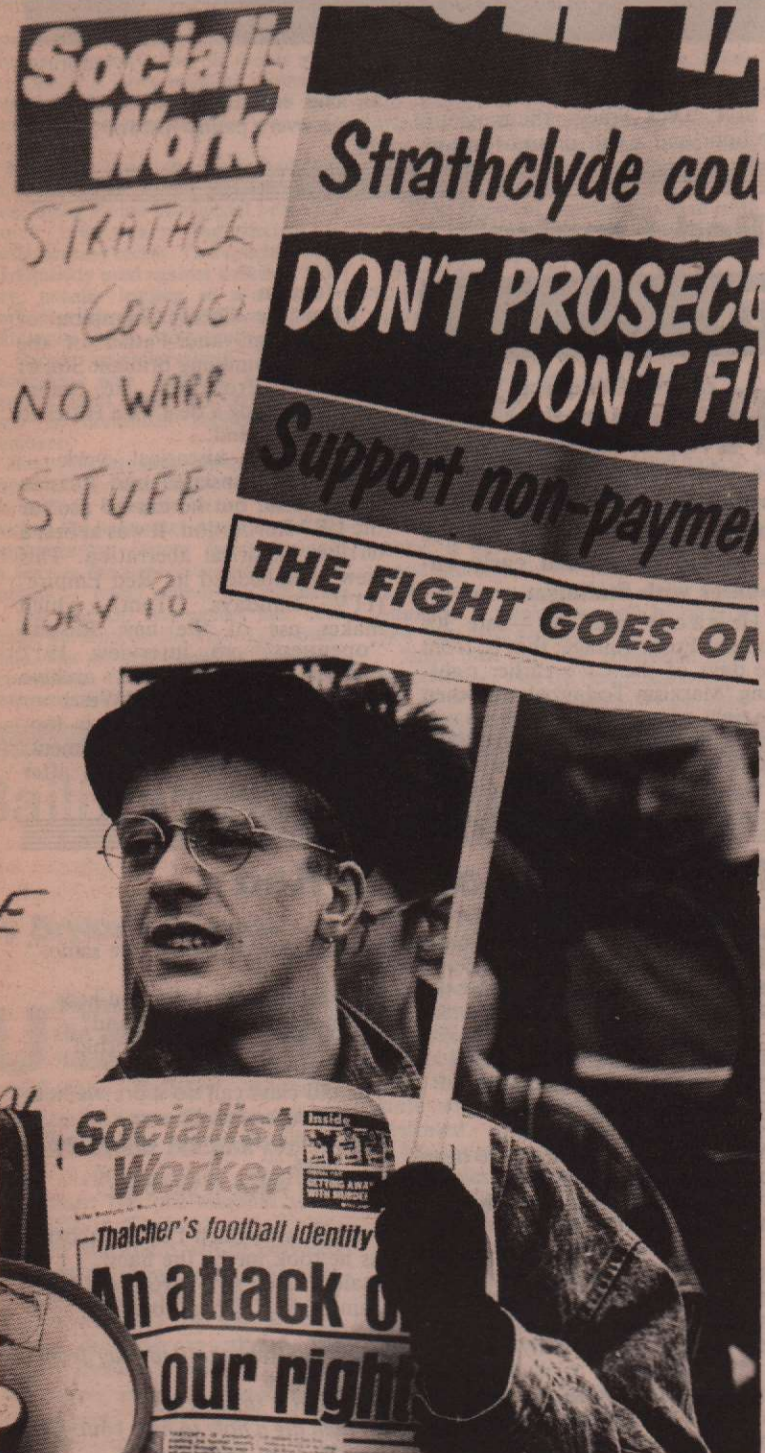
it is a "gigantic distortion" to compare the events of Bucharest with "Ceausescu's forced mobilisation of unwilling mass demonstrations... Miners and factory workers came to this government's aid enthusiastically."

Mobilising badly-informed miners by telling them a pack of lies about an imminent coup (and even *Militant* accepts that "it is unlikely there was a serious coup attempt") and strengthening their ranks with ex-Securitate agents hardly fits in with the image of downtrodden workers rallying enthusiastically around "their" government.

As one *Militant* article put it: "The workers took part in a revolution in Romania. They understood the advantages of a planned economy. They were putting down a counter-revolutionary minority, and we'd do exactly the same."

Too bloody right they would.

Stan Crooke,
Merseyside



SWP banned Socialist Organiser supporters from their summer school, 'Marxism 90'. But should we have gone more softly? Photo: John Harris

The film of the comic

FILM

Edward Ellis reviews
'Dick Tracy'

Batman', the movie, set out to create an altogether smokier and uglier Gotham City, and its inhabitants, than had been etched by DC Comics. 'Dick Tracy', the movie, sets out, it would seem, to recreate Dick Tracy, the comic strip, in as much loving detail and verisimilitude as megabucks can buy.

As, to the best of my knowledge, I have never so much as glanced at a copy of Dick Tracy, the comic strip (whereas I used to have box fulls of Batman, sadly now pulped, an act of parental vandalism I and my bank balance will never forgive), it is hard for me to comment on whether Warren Beatty's extravagant efforts are successful.

That it is a pretty fair stab at it would, however, seem likely.

No attempt to resemble real life has been made whatsoever. It is a movie which revels in its resolute over-the-topness, with villains easily

recognised by their extraordinarily bad complexions, sets of glorious comic-strip technicolour (apparently they stuck to the colours of the original, mainly shades of red, green and blue — plus Tracy's canary-yellow mackintosh), and dialogue of, shall we say, refreshing simplicity.

Tracy is a good guy in the superhero mould. He has no special powers, unless you could the ability to stand in the middle of the street surrounded by hoodlums all shooting sub-machine guns and emerge completely unscathed, but is able to beat people up as only good guys can.

Like all good guys, he doesn't want an office job. He'd rather be in the thick of things, shooting bad guys, or, occasionally, benevolently rescuing kids — or The Kid, I should say, his juvenile delinquent side-kick — from horrid baddies, which he prefers to describe as "cockroaches".

Like all good guys, he has a girl. Actually, he almost has two girls, but manages to resist the charms even of Madonna, because he is such a good guy that he remains faithful to his extremely nice girlfriend, who he can never summon up the courage to marry.

This is because, being a good

guy, he is a little boy at heart, and although he can wander into warehouses full of murderous maniacs who all look like the back ends of armoured vehicles, comes over all silly when it comes to emotional stuff.

It would be hard to say if Warren Beatty's performance is of much quality, as he doesn't have to do much, except look mean (yet sympathetic), calm (yet worried), and (when it comes to girls) confused. If playing a comic strip character is difficult, Beatty does a good job.

Madonna, however, is spectacular. She plays Breathless Mahony (doubtless a forebear of this paper's editor) like a kind of trashy Marilyn Monroe, surviving in gangland by virtue of her secretly ruthless (yet vulnerable) personality.

She falls in love with Tracy, although we can't help but wonder if Warren Beatty isn't just a teensy bit older than he would like us to believe, not that I'm trying to suggest people can't fall in love with old men, or anything. The big question is, does he fall in love with her? We, like her, will never know. He's too confused to tell her.

I don't want to give too much of the plot away (and you'd never be able to guess what was going to happen), but she doesn't really have the time to hang around for Tracy to sort himself out, being a gangster's moll, and therefore doomed to a sticky end, especially as the man she is in love with is a good guy with a girlfriend already.

'Dick Tracy' must have cost a bomb, going to prove that if you've got the money you can bring your fantasies to life. Beatty, I presume, fancies himself as Tracy, as well as just fancying himself generally.

Ideologically, if that isn't a word consisting of too many syllables for a review of such a film, its assumptions are that crooks are inherently crooks (you can see it in their faces — Jeez, are they ugly!), and cops, therefore, can do whatever they like to round them up. Tracy breaks the police rulebook with reckless abandon. No namby pamby pussy-footing for him. This man is violent. Being, however, a nice guy, this doesn't really matter. Heck, they're only villains.

I don't wish to appear naive. Tracy's villains are of the Al Capone variety and he, I suppose, is a sort of fictionalised Elliot Ness. I know all about this because I've seen 'The Untouchables' (a film of even greater disregard for reality) and these gangsters were not nice people.

But in portraying all crime in Prohibition America as so simple, and so plainly to do with the workings of evil men, comics of the Dick Tracy type played a political role. If villains were quintessentially Bad, it followed that the cops were plain Good — like Tracy, turning down bribes (except for a few who got bought, but every apple cart has its rotten ones).

Superheroes all fulfilled this role. The world is divided into Good and Bad. Most superheroes live somewhere on the edge of socially acceptable Goodness; some are even wrongly believed by the state to be bad guys. But they represent the unadulterated virtue of the American individual, sometimes obstructed by inefficient and incompetent government officials, but able to triumph over evil, and so keep America safe from harm.

Superheroes, in other words, stink. And for my money Dick Tracy stinks more than most.

Lots of 'fifties comic strips had anti-communist Cold War undertones (although some were wrongly accused of this by the Communist Party, which led a successful campaign to in Britain to have "horror comics" banned).

If Dick Tracy had been walking the streets in the 1950s, he sure as hell would have been massacring commies with just as much fearless



Madonna

relish.

Still, 'Dick Tracy', the movie, is an hour and a half or so of not-at-

all bad entertainment, and worth almost every penny just for Madonna.

Iran's earthquake — act of god?

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

It may never be known how many died in the earthquake that occurred a few weeks ago, but it seems to have killed more than did the Armenian earthquake of 1988, centred some 500 miles northwest.

Speculation in religious circles in Iran as to the reason for the quake centres on the idea of its being a "test" with some fundamentalists* claiming that its purpose was to punish the wicked and send the righteous to heaven.

In fact, the reason for earthquakes is understood quite well and is explained by the structure of the earth. The continents are actually the highest parts of great masses of rock that float on the molten core of the earth. Convection currents in the liquid cause the continents to spread apart in some places and collide in others. Such collisions are responsible for earthquake activity in the band of countries which include Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Turkey, Armenia and Iran.

The theory which explains and predicts where (but not, unfortunately, when) earthquakes will occur has only gained wide acceptance in the last 30 years. However, it did not need this theory to be able to say that Iran was a high-risk area. Seismic activity has been known of throughout recorded history and significant earthquakes do not occur outside of known areas.

So why then has the Iranian earthquake killed upwards of 50,000 people while the recent San Francisco one killed only a few dozen?

The differing geographies are no doubt important factors — collapsing mountain sides seem to have caused many casualties in Iran — but another, perhaps decisive, factor is the style and standard of building in the Iranian villages. People are said to live in adobe (mud) houses with heavy roofs. As the walls are shaken, these roofs would collapse, trapping those

underneath.

It is not just such fairly primitive styles of building which are dangerous in earthquakes. Many blocks of flats in Armenia also collapsed in 1988. The solution is to build them to withstand quakes, something which was generally done in San Francisco but not in Armenia.

This, of course, can be expensive, but it is difficult to see why, in a known danger zone, governments such as the Soviet and the Iranian cannot at least warn their people of the dangers of certain types of building.

Thanks...for nothing!

In the wave of international sympathy that followed the Armenian earthquake in 1988, more than 5000 tonnes of drugs and other medical supplies and equipment were sent in aid.

The Armenian Ministry of Health together with the independent medical aid organisation, Medecins sans Frontieres, made an inventory of the drugs sent. They found that many of the drugs were useless and even dangerous. Others were no longer normally marketed. 8% were beyond their expiry dates before their arrival in Armenia. The 11% of useless preparations included vitamin preparations, and drugs for treating such tropical diseases as bilharzia (common in Egypt's Nile delta) and malaria (prevalent in many parts of Africa). These diseases were unlikely to be a problem in the mountainous land of Armenia in the depths of winter!

A report in *The Lancet*, giving the above details, reveals that only about a third of the donated medicines could actually be used by the health workers. The author, Philippe Autier of the European Association for Health and Development, concludes that these useless drugs "waste time, manpower and financial resources and represent serious health and environmental hazards."

It is rather sad that governments and companies should seek to gain kudos by palming a load of old rubbish off on to the victims of one of the worst natural disasters of recent years. The report suggests that international aid organisations should discourage the collection of unsorted drugs, unsold surpluses of drugs, out-of-time drugs and samples. Donors should label boxes of medicines in the language of the recipient or at least give the proper name of the drugs so that they can be easily identified. But they shouldn't have to be told that, should they?

'Red Empire'

TV

Robert Conquest is the historian of the Stalinist Terror, one of those people who started out good for something but were then politically poisoned — forever — by an unguarded early encounter with Stalinism.

He is a one-time CPER — late '30s Popular Front vintage; that is, from the days of the CP's earlier right-wing 'Marxism Today' phase, when the right-wing non-class politics was spiced up and made to seem self-righteously militant and Marxist by a passionate but indiscriminating

anti-fascism.

Then the Great Champion of Anti-Fascism, and Father of the People, the undying brilliant Son of the World Proletariat, etc, Stalin, went and made a deal with Hitler to carve up Poland...

Conquest's historical work — now being translated into Russian — is useful, but he has no use for the 1917 Revolution. It was at best a terrible historical aberration. This view is embedded in 'Red Empire' (ITV, Sundays, 11pm), which makes use of the new Russian "openness" to interview 1917 veterans and seek out archive material unknown in the West.

And fascinating stuff it is too. Try to catch the next instalment, which deals with the period after the Bolsheviks seized power.

The waning of the Red

This parody dates from the early '60s. What it says has not become less relevant with the passing of the years!

Oh Illich dear and did you hear
The news that's going round?
The Red Flag is by law forbid
Within the Kremlin ground!
The old class call no more we hear
The workers are misled
And there's a bloody law agin'
The wearing of the Red.

I met with Illich Lenin's ghost
And he took me by the hand.
And said: "How is the old CP
How ever does she stand?"

"It's the most disgraceful party
That there has ever been,
And not a trace of Marx or you
In it is to be seen.
They've murdered Leon Trotsky,
And blotted out his name
And if you'd lived, old Illich dear,

To you they'd've done the same."

Oh Illich dear and did you hear
The news that's goin' round?
The Red Flag is by law forbid
Within the Kremlin ground.
The old class call no more we hear
Its message can't be seen.
And tanks, H-bombs and money
bags
Are now where it has been.

I talked with Illich Lenin's ghost
As he took me by the hand.
I said: "That's now your old CP
Cain-Stalin's orphan band."

"You can tear the Red Flag from
its mast
And foul it in the clay
— then dig a hole to hide yourselves
For we'll yet have our day.
The working class will rise again
More firecely than before
And on that day the Red Flag will
Be flying high once more."

Norway's oil workers strike

Class struggle in Social Democrat utopia

By Dave Barter

This summer has seen the shattering of Norway's relative industrial peace. As Norwegian trade unions are preparing for their second national ballot on wages in two months, the last fortnight has seen an unprecedented scale of defiance of anti-trade union legislation and a bosses response unusually savage for Norway.

Members of the Norwegian oilworkers union OFS started strike action on the North Sea oil rigs on Sunday 1 July, after rejecting the wage deal agreed by the Norwegian Oil and Petroleum Workers Federation (NOPEF), the oil industry union affiliated to LO, the Norwegian TUC equivalent. OFS is not affiliated to LO, having been formed out of the amalgamation of a number of former 'company unions', but in recent years has gained a more militant reputation than NOPEF. OFS and NOPEF have been locked in a membership war in the North Sea.

Within 36 hours the strike had been declared illegal. Prime Minister Jan P Suse, using Prime Ministerial powers to enact temporary legislation in parliamentary recess. This special power is frequently used against strikes in Norway, usually leading to a return to work. But this time the strike continued, with secret strike committees organised in Bergen and Stavanger. The OFS leadership, now required by law to distance itself from the strike, made plain its continued support for its members.

The strike was solid, closing down the whole of the Norwegian sector of the North Sea. Workers on oil platforms blocked the helicopter decks to prevent supplementary labour being brought on, leaving the airports crowded with oil workers — many supporting the strike — that the oil companies had been unable to drop on the rigs. LO, meanwhile, was actively opposing the strike, providing the newspapers with statements for a hostile anti-strike cam-

paign. NOPEF acted officially neither for nor against the strike, though NOPEF members refused to do OFS members' work.

With attempts to use scab labour defeated, the oil bosses — acting in concert through their employers' federation — threatened sackings, almost unheard of in Norwegian industrial relations. They sacked more than 30, and threatened to sue individual workers for losses brought during the strike — an estimated £40-50 million.

Ultimately the oil bosses blocked communications, cutting off the satellite telephone links. With contact broken between rigs and between rigs and the strike committees, the strikers were forced back, one platform after another. The strike ended on Saturday 7th.

This whole episode comes as Norwegian unions are preparing to ballot for the second time on the results of LO's across-the-board wage negotiations. The previous wage deal LO struck was narrowly rejected in a national ballot of all LO unions in June, itself a major development, as Norwegian socialist activist Steinar Norstebbe explained when visiting Britain last month:

"In 1988 we had a two year ban on wage increases imposed by the Labour government and the TUC leadership. Interest rates were 14, 15, 16 per cent, inflation was double European figures. We were told we 'weren't competitive' — you know the phrase. The agreement was struck: every wage increase was unlawful. It was never sent out for a ballot because the TUC leadership knew it wouldn't be accepted.

"When the Labour government took over in 1986 unemployment was very low. Then they started this 'economic cure' (to save the capitalists!). We had a wage freeze and severe cuts in public spending. Unemployment rose rapidly in Norwegian terms. We went from 40,000 up to 150,000 this winter — all created during the Labour government. After the last election [Autumn 1989] the Conservatives and Centre were able to re-establish their government. Then we had the negotiations this spring after the two-year ban on wage rises. The TUC still said we should go for a moderate claim!

"The results of negotiations were sent out to ballot and when the results came in on Monday the whole thing had been turned down by 50.08% of the votes, though the TUC had had a big campaign for its acceptance — ads in the newspapers saying 'say yes to the deal'. It's the first time, at least that I know of, that his has happened since the second world war.

"So what we are facing now is a very interesting situation, because the TUC leadership have had a defeat and have to do something about it. But I don't think they will get a much better agreement.

"I think there will be sectional actions. It has obviously created a very good situation for the left in the unions in Norway. It has created a very open situation. I think there will be quite a few industrial actions."

Since then, LO has completed new negotiations, with the results again to be put to a ballot. Workers are to vote

again in August on a deal just 0.17% higher. There is little doubt that the Norwegian government, the employers and the LO leadership had more than half an eye on that vote when they jointly worked to break the strike on the rigs.

But it's not over. According to Norwegian labour law, the oil rig workers' wage claim will now be settled through arbitration. And depending on the results of the arbitration, there could be strikes on the rigs again. At the same time, a four-week journalists' strike in broadcasting has just ended — there has been no news on radio or television all that time. The strike won some concessions from management.

The oilworkers' fight was hampered by union rivalry. As Steinar Norstebbe commented:

"The fight between NOPEF and OFS has weakened oilworkers' position over many years. I can understand why many oilworkers don't want to be in NOPEF because of the TUC leadership, but if I was in the North Sea I think I would be in NOPEF."

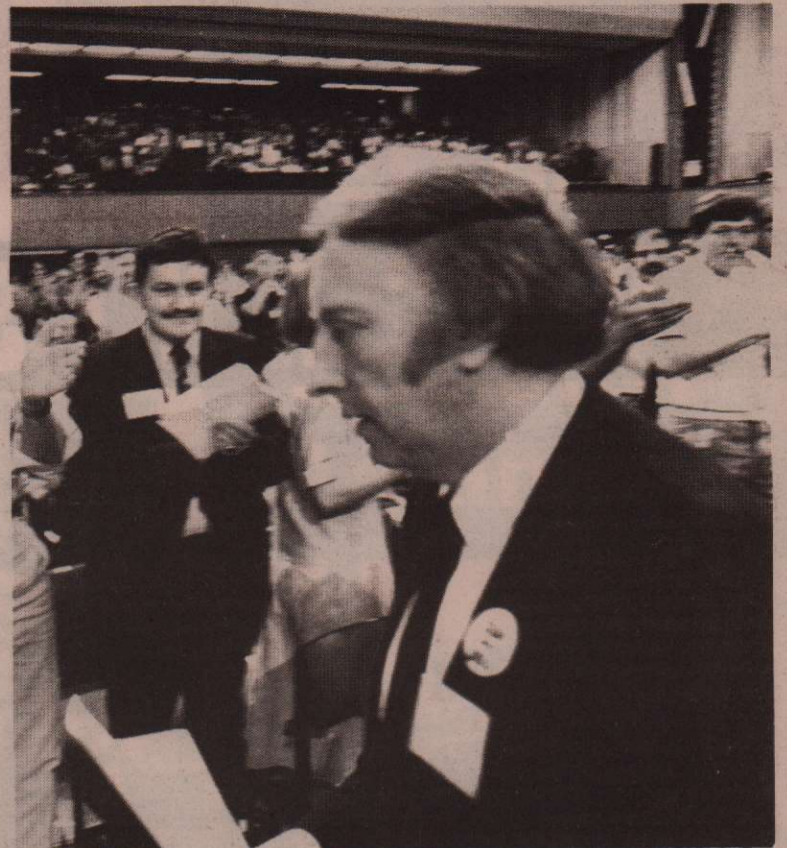
The issues in the Norwegian oil strike are significant for British oilworkers, themselves presently engaged in an overtime ban in a fight for unionisation and over working conditions and hours.

Whilst the Norwegian strike caused a noticeable shake on the international oil market, co-ordination of action across the different sections of the North Sea oilfield could be even more effective. Union organisation is not easy on the rigs, and nor are international links, but both British and Norwegian oilworkers have a lot to gain from effort put in to achieve the closest possible co-operation in their disputes.

The other obvious significance of the Norwegian strike in Britain is in the Labour Party. The industrial relations framework in Norway is one formed in a country where a sister organisation of the British Labour Party has been the dominant political force for most of this century. And when Jan P Suse's banning of the oil strike comes before the Norwegian parliament for ratification, as it has to, it will be only one or two Labour rebels who join the handful of Socialist Left Party (SV) members (and the rag-bag of the far right) in voting against.

The Labour Party will support the Conservative/Centre government. And the Norwegian Labour Party's policy of a two-year ban on wage increases isn't anything so unusual for social democracy. It's not so different to the two-year ban on strikes that the Swedish SAP (Labour Party) got into so much trouble with not so long ago. I for one find it very interesting to see what social democracy and the sister parties of the Second International have been getting up to elsewhere whilst Labour's been out of office here in Britain. Now we know what the Labour careerists mean when they say "look to Sweden".

For Norway the trade union left has got a major challenge facing it. Steinar Norstebbe comments on the aftermath of the oil strike: "It shows the TUC leadership isn't in control of what's happening in the trade unions." In that situation, organising the rank and file to control could mean creating a whole new political situation in the country.



Standing ovation for Scargill at the TUC congress 1984. Photo: Andrew Wiard

Four square for Scargill

WHETTON'S WEEK A miner's diary

I welcome the full support that Socialist Organiser has thrown behind Scargill. I need to reiterate what has been said about SO in the past, that it was one of the leading organs that we had during the strike, and we got tremendous help from it.

But there are differences of opinion. For four or five years I have disagreed with SO's support for Solidarnosc and Lech Walesa, who is, to my mind, Poland's answer to Jimmy Reid. I never believed for one moment that Solidarnosc was a bona fide trade union.

It is more of a political party, used by the likes of Lech Walesa to climb up the ladder. Now, of course, Lech Walesa wants to do away with Solidarnosc; he wants to pull the ladder up behind him.

Then, this week, there is the statement from the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc about Yuri Budchenko, who is, as near as we can get to it, a bloody Russian fascist. The point I'm trying to make is that there are all sorts of things crawling from under the stones during the upheavals in Eastern Europe.

I give full support to any honest working class organisations and to the people trying to set them up. But I urge people to treat many of them with caution.

We have to be very, very careful. For Walesa and Solidarnosc have rushed to the flag in support of what people saw

as a working class organisation, a trade union, now we find out that it's nothing of the sort. There must be others.

Our message to Eastern Europe must be 'don't be blinded by the glitter and capitalism of the West. There are serious and fundamental problems in the West: there is wage slavery in the West'.

During this time of upheaval I've no doubt that the working class will come through. But we have to be wary. The CIA is up to its tricks.

I welcome the SO support for Scargill and Heathfield. I think it's important that papers like SO and others that align themselves with the left get the message home that it isn't just an attack on Scargill and Heathfield, it's an attack on the NUM. They failed to smash us in 1984-85. Their fight is still going on to smash our union.

I think that another important thing that SO can do is to appeal to trade unions, Labour Party branches and to all political organisations and trade union organisations to send messages of solidarity with Scargill, Heathfield and the NUM.

We must show that the working class isn't down, we aren't out — we are still fighting!

The Durham Miners' Gala is every year a marvellous show of working class solidarity. It gets smaller every year due to pit closures, but it is still a great event, and a standing ovation greeted Scargill and Heathfield. There is great support for Scargill. I saw one timely message on the 'Justice for Mineworkers' stall: the next man who said there's no smoke without fire would have to make an appointment to see a dentist.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire

Bailiffs against the tax?

By Bryan Edmands

Unworkable!" That was the conclusion of Simon Smith, secretary of the Certificated Bailiffs' Association, speaking on London radio last week about the poll tax.

The 1,000-strong members association, the professional voice of bailiffs in England and Wales, estimates that there will be between 10-12 million non-payers this year — potentially the amount of "distress warrants" to handle, and possibly resulting in about one million "arrest warrants".

According to Smith, his association believes that many local authorities won't bother in using liability orders to seek attachment of earnings/benefit orders, because

of the administrative burden, and instead will pass them wholesale to his members.

If then the bailiffs fail to seize sufficient property to pay the debt, councils can apply to magistrates courts for arrest warrants, committing the non-payer to appear to state why they should not be imprisoned.

However, a number of Chief Constables have said to Smith that they have not the resources to commit to the serving of such warrants, which means the task falling to the bailiffs.

Given the huge scale of non-payment and the comparatively tiny number of bailiffs, what all this shows is the scale of the difficulties facing local authorities, though ultimately the government. The Tories have taken a massive gamble that the threat of action against non-payers will eventually in-

timidate the opposition to the poll tax to crumble.

But already some estates in London, Smith admitted, are no-go areas for bailiffs, so action against softer targets can be expected — lone non-payers in a street, for instance.

One more thing needs saying, though. Given the expectation of high amounts of uncollected poll tax next year, the government's powers to cap more councils mean that instead of local authorities having the possibility of raising poll tax levels higher to account for the non-payment debt, that severe cuts in services will be the only option available to maintain balanced budgets. Trade unionists should be organising and campaigning now around this likelihood to prevent opposition to the poll tax being diverted, and for no further implementation.

**Build the demo!
Don't Pay!
Don't Collect!**

- Stop loans
- No benefit cuts!

October, Leeds

Called by West Yorkshire NUS.
More details: 0532 452312

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Ukraine moves to independence

The Ukraine, the second biggest republic in the USSR, has declared itself independent, though it does not now propose to secede.

This is an altogether more important development than the earlier declaration of its "independence" from the central USSR government by the Russian Republic. That was

part of the power-struggle between Yeltsin, with his pro-capitalist "radical" allies in the government of the Russian Republic, and the slower-moving Gorbachevites.

The Great Russians of the Russian Republic have been the main oppressor nation within the "prison house of nations" into which Stalin turned the USSR. *But the Ukrainians are the biggest oppressed nation in the USSR, indeed the biggest in Europe.*

The Ukrainians were the victims of a vicious cultural offensive of Russification as recently as the 1970s. They know themselves for an oppressed nation. The step from what they have now done to what Lithuania did — tried to secede — is a small one. And the tide of Ukrainian nationalism is still rising.

Even less than the Baltic states could the Ukraine be allowed by the Kremlin to secede. It is industrially the most developed area of the USSR. Yet with every such development — and they come thick and fast — it becomes more difficult, and maybe impossible, for the Kremlin to resort to force to reclaim the disintegrating Great Russian Empire.

They are now faced with renegotiating the relations between the components of the USSR. A free and voluntary federation to replace what has existed for 60 years would be a better outcome from the point of view of socialism than the fragmentation of the USSR in an explosion of national and communal animosities. We have already seen something of what that explosion could mean, in Azerbaijan for example. But it remains more likely than a free federation.

On the very eve of World War 2 Leon Trotsky raised the call for socialists to support Ukrainian independence against the Great Russian oppressors. This week the Ukraine took a large step towards freeing itself from its long oppression: if it chooses to go on to full secession, it is entitled to the support of socialists.



Soviet miners flex their muscles

The Soviet miners' strike, supported across the country, focused on political demands.

The chief of these, raised around the coalfields, is for the

resignation of the Ryzhkov government.

A statement from the Kuzbass miners said: "Our demands...are prompted by anxiety over the rallying of generals and reactionaries,

which has been particularly graphically manifested at the constituent congress of the CP of Russia."

66 pits and coal extracting enterprises stopped work in

Kemerovo Oblast, 12 in Ukrzapugol, and 124 in the Donbass region. In big towns, rallies were held. At Novokuznetsk, a centre of last year's strike, a rally of the whole town was held.

In Vorkuta, where a strike last winter raised far-reaching political demands, striking miners were joined by workers

at other enterprises, including the locomotive depot.

Although the strike was nationally for one day, in some areas, miners struck for shorter periods — as little as two hours.

And in most areas, quite large numbers of miners refused to support the strike at all. Pleas for the government seem to have had some effect.

Solidarity with Soviet socialists

From front page

wages that could be exploited by Western capital. So we have to put socialist ideas back at the top of the political agenda.

Certain principles seem clear. The first is that for socialism to advance there must be solidarity and a sense of community.

The second characteristic of true socialism is a strong democratic challenge to the abuse of power. I have five democratic questions that I would put to an American businessman or the general secretary of the Communist Party. What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose in-

terests do you use it? To whom are you accountable? And how can we get rid of you?

And socialism must be international, particularly in the very small world in which we live.

We have to explain what is happening. We have to concentrate on the issues that concern people in a practical way. We have to campaign with people directly. Above all we have to build people's confidence, because when people are frightened they swing to the right. Morale is 99 per cent of every struggle.

We have to develop more international links, like those today with my presence here and members of your party in Britain.

We have to build a new Europe

free from military blocs, without the Warsaw Pact or NATO, where all foreign troops are withdrawn and all nuclear weapons are abandoned, because that sort of Europe would strengthen all of us. We have to recognise that the enormous changes in technology this century have given us, for the first time in human history, the capacity to meet the needs of everyone alive in the world today.

We have a new world to build and a new chance to do it. And if I live to a be 100 I shall be proud to say I attended the founding congress of the Russian Socialist Party. Good luck!

From Socialist Campaign Group News

Stop this secret trial

From front page

face, and no militants other than those motivated by the hope of office. They have failed to do anything remotely adequate to put the Labour Party at the head of the great anti-Tory revolt against the Poll Tax. They dawdle in hope that they will win the next election on Mrs Thatcher's unpopularity (and, unfortunately, they may even be wrong about that). Fight the Tories? That's Trotskyism!

The extension of the witch-hunt to SO is part of the process of

cauterising the Labour Party and making it safe for Kinnock's decaffeinated a-political media-electoral politics.

SO intends to fight the witch-hunt. We will not let ourselves be buried. Genuine working-class socialism is now beginning to re-emerge from the Stalinist ice age in a large part of the world. We will not let ourselves be stifled in Britain.

We fight on! We appeal to all other socialists in the Labour Party and the trade unions to help us resist and fight back.