

SOCIALIST

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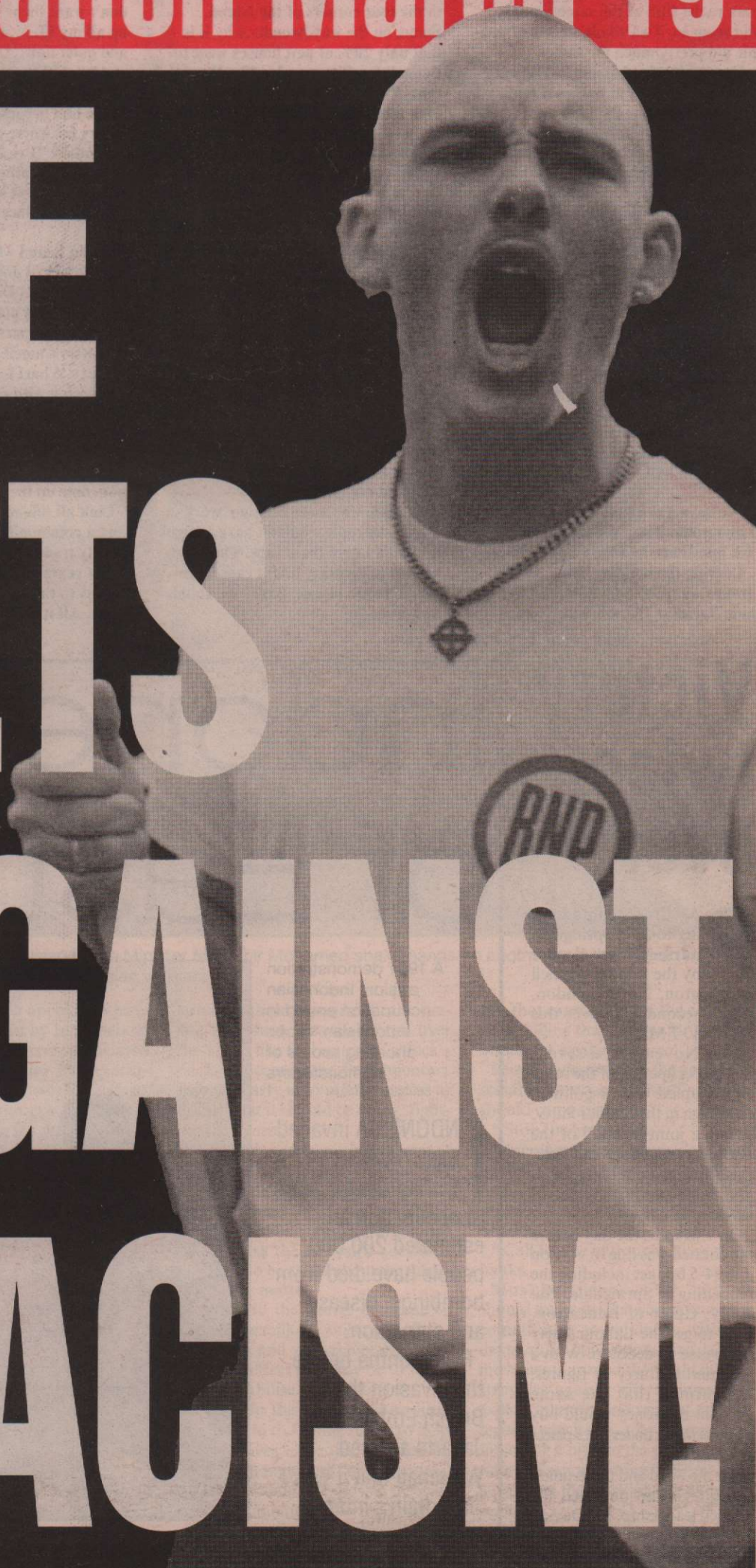
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ORGANISER

It will be socialism or barbarism!

TUC demonstration March 19:

ON THE STREETS



Mick Connolly, organiser of the TUC march spoke to Socialist Organiser.

MARCH 19th looks as if it will be one of the biggest demonstrations we have seen for years. Trains have been booked from the North West by the regional TUC. A train is coming from Hull and another from Scotland. Northern Region TUC and UNISON have booked a train from Newcastle.

Coaches are coming from all over Britain.

The response to the TUC's call for a demonstration against racism has been very encouraging. For example, I attended a mobilising meeting in Leicester organised by the Indian Workers Association, at which there were over 200 people.

All the anti-racist organisations have come in behind the march. At local level much of the friction between the various groups has been replaced by co-operation.

Rally speakers include TUC General Secretary John Monks, Bill Morris of the TGWU, Labour MP Tony Blair and Pauline Green, the Labour MEP. Other speakers will include representatives of anti-racist campaigns.

There will be no speakers from the Liberals or Tory Party.

I urge all trade unionists to attend and help build this important march.

AGAINST RACISM!

Assemble 11 am Spitalfields market

Vote Labour on 5 May!

Jean Lane reports on canvassing in Millwall, East London, where fascist Derek Beackon recently won a council by-election

"OH, I know there's good and bad in all, but it makes me mad to see them drawing their money in the Post Office. What right have they to so much money?" The woman looked a perfectly reasonable person: friendly and willing to talk — so long as you were white. Was it possible that someone could seem so pleasant and talk racist filth at the same time? It did seem so. Two whole streets of people did pretty much the same.

Canvassing for Labour in Millwall. Everyone gathers at half past ten. People have come from all over; Labour Party members who want to see the BNP kicked out of the Isle of Dogs. That means pulling a Labour vote.

The day, a "Millwall Day" organised by the constituency and the ward, is well planned. Canvass cards are handed out, people divided up into groups of four, every group having a car. Information sheets are given out with statistics about housing in the area to equip canvassers with the arguments they will need on the doorstep. Of all the new houses made available in the recent past only 20% went to Bengali families. Of all the homeless people housed in the area fewer than half were Bengali. And so on.

We have a pep talk from a local Labour dignitary, get the chance to ask questions, and then we're off.

Leaving the building in our little groups we troop hopefully past the lone *Socialist Worker* seller who

bravely peddles his inadequate line to the people doing the work:

"We call for a Labour vote," he says defensively.

"Well come inside and get your canvass cards, then, Comrade. Come and do some work," someone has a go.

"If we did the work here on the Island, we could pull a bigger Labour vote than you," he blusters, playground style, begging the question: "If you know you could and choose not to, aren't you part of the problem?"

The real revolutionaries and the Labour Party activists trudge past him, climb into their cars and depart to the four corners of the Island. Some, on the way, wonder why it is that only 20% of new houses went to Bengali families, or why 40 odd percent of the homeless are Bengali, or even why these are important facts to know — until they hit the door steps.

"All of that estate over there went to Pakis", an arm waved vaguely in the direction of an imagined hotbed of foreign infiltration. "They're taking over the whole Island."

"Er. No. Actually, that's not true. Only 20% of new..."

"Aaah!! That's what they say in the council. But what do they care? They're all corrupt — feathering their own nest, aren't they."

Try next door. "Would you sign my petition calling on the London Docklands Development Corporation to free land for social housing, please?"

They all sign and while they do, you put your oar in:

"If there was more housing, working-class people wouldn't have to fight each other over the scraps. The shortage isn't necessary and it causes tension between people. Everyone could be housed."

"Hold on, who are you going to give this new housing to then?"

"Well, everyone".

"Oh." The door shuts. "You bleeding hypocrite" a young woman can be overheard berating her husband for signing the petition. "That's not what you think."

One woman explains: "My daughter is 28. She's got her own place now, but for years she's been sleeping in my bedroom with me. They wouldn't house her because they said she wasn't homeless."

Another: "My son's just married. They both sleep in our spare room. I don't want them here. I've brought him up all my life. I want a bit of peace and quiet now. And he wants his independence. They want kids. What kind of start is this for them? They won't house him because they say there are others far worse off than he is."

Another: "I've lived in this street all my life. My father and his father were born in the next street over, but they can't find a place for my daughter to live".

On an Island where council homes were knocked down to make way for the Docklands Development Corporation's plans, housing is short. New, fancy apartment blocks go for prices no council tenant could afford. Canary Wharf looms on the horizon, overseeing with empty-office-eyes the chaos created by the Tories' home-owning democracy. 500 council homes were knocked down by the LDDC to make way for a rail link that now will not come up there.

Link all this with high unemployment and a community with a strong, white, family tradition that goes back donkey's years and the recipe for disaster begins to take on explosive proportions. All it needs is the raising agent

of Beackon's fascism for the fermentation to begin.

Many say that they voted for the BNP last time as a protest vote. Some say, it could have been anyone — Greens, Monster Raving Loonies — so long as they weren't one of the mainstream parties. But, one does wonder. The BNP have tweaked a nerve that was already there. Racism is rife in an area where someone from over the river is considered a foreigner. Over the years, the mainstream parties have ignored it, failed to fight it, or have positively used it to gain votes. The BNP is providing easy answers to very real problems and fuelling that racism in the process.

The Labour Party is right to target housing in its election campaign. It's got to be prepared to fight head on some very ugly attitudes amongst its own natural and historical supporters, and also to fight for better services rather than just give the usual "our hands are tied by the Tory government" excuse.

One last door to knock. A white bloke: built like a brick shit-house, sawn-off T-shirt and tattoos.

"What d'you want?" he glowers down from a great height.

"I wonder if you have decided yet how you will vote in the May elections?" Timidly asked, one eye on him, the other on the stairs.

"Never vote. They're all a bunch of wankers" comes the reply and as he signs the petition:

"Mind you, I might just do it this time and break the habit of a lifetime."

"Oh?", the stairwell beckoning invitingly, "and how would you vote?"

"Labour. Got to stop that fascist scum getting back in."

Never judge a book by its cover!

German metal workers' strike called off

THE German metal workers' strike due to start on 7 March has been called off.

Despite a 92% vote for strike action by union members in the area selected to start the campaign, Lower Saxony, their leaders settled for a deal which means real wage cuts. The metalworkers' union, the 3.2 million member IG Metall [IGM], is the strongest in Europe, and maybe in the world.

The wages bill will be frozen in money terms. The union won a guarantee of no job cuts only where a whole company is short of orders and cuts hours down to 30 a week. In such cases workers will suffer wage cuts fully proportional to the cut in hours.

Under the new agreement other companies can put particular sections on short term without any guarantee against job cuts, though with less than full wage cuts.

The employers backed down on their threat effectively to break up national collective bargaining and to have working hours negotiated factory-by-factory with works councils, but the union abandoned its demand for early introduction of the 35 hour week.

Bosses in other sectors of the German economy will take this deal as the go-ahead signal for other cost-cutting drives against wages and conditions. Public service bosses want their 3.5 million workers to accept a pay freeze in talks opening on Wednesday 9 March, and bank workers, printers and construction workers also have pay negotiations coming up.

IGM official Otto Konig gives the background to the metalworkers' dispute

FOR IGM, saving jobs has absolute priority. Shorter working hours are the most effective way not only to prevent a further increase of unemployment, but also to make possible the return into the world of work of those currently jobless. At the top of the list is the demand to bring forward the 35 hour week, due to come into force on 1 October 1995, by one and a half years.

Besides that a clause should be agreed, limited to two years, which enables enterprises to cut the work week down to 30 hours without full wage compensation. During this time the employers pledge themselves not to make redundancies in the enterprise.

The employers do indeed call for "making work hours flexible", but want a "working-hours corridor of 30 to 40 hours", with actual hours settled freely between works councils and bosses.

The bosses want to annul the 35 hour week victory. The shifting of the decision to enterprise level, where the works councils have the water coming up to their necks and thus are open to blackmail, would restrict the trade unions' ability to act on a cross-enterprise level. Thus Daimler boss Helmut Werner comments contentedly on his blackmail game over the production site for the new mini-Mercedes that "the German system of collaboration of employers and workers can prove itself outstandingly under difficult conditions".

The conflict is not only shaped by these rival demands, but gets its political sharpness from the employers' camp. In fact the aim of the middle-ranking employers is a last-ing weakening of the unions' power to resist in the enterprises and in society.

Abridged from *Sozialismus* 314, 1994

Victory twice over

PARENTS campaigning to save Springdale nursery from closure by the Labour council in Islington, North London, won a second time over this Monday, 7 March.

Last November, a seven-month occupation of the nursery, coupled with a political campaign in the Labour Party, swung a joint meeting of the Labour councillors and delegates from Labour Party wards and trade unions to vote to reverse the closure.

On 7 March, the day before the council was due to vote on a 1994-5 budget including the reopening of Springdale, Phil Kelly, Chair of Education, tried to get the Labour Party to reverse its decision. With a last-minute flurry of figures, he claimed that the same amount of money would buy twice as many under-fives places elsewhere.

But the ward and trade-union delegates again outvoted the council leadership. Liz Davies, chair of the council Women's Committee, commented: "This shows the strength of the campaign, and that rank-and-file Labour Party members will not let themselves be used as rubber stamps for the council leadership".

Indonesia out of East Timor!

A 1991 demonstration against Indonesian occupation ended in Indonesian troops shooting scores of demonstrators

INDONESIA invaded East Timor in 1975.

During the 18 years of occupation an estimated 200,000 people have died from bombings, disease and starvation.

Five months before the invasion the British Embassy in Jakarta advised Whitehall that it was "in Britain's interest that Indonesia should absorb East Timor as soon and as unobtrusively as possible." Britain is a



major arms supplier to Indonesia, providing planes, frigates and missile

systems. In 1993 the government authorised the sale of another 24 Hawk

fighters.

Contact: the Coalition for East Timor, PO Box 2349, London E1 3HX.

The real scandals behind the Malaysian dam deal

Labour should expose the Tories!

IN 1988 THE Tory Government flouted Parliamentary rules and its own legal code by linking aid to Malaysia (in the form of finance for the building of a dam) to £1 billion worth of arms sales. The Tory Government is trying to squirm its way out of these charges, but Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd has in effect pleaded guilty, by admitting a "temporary entanglement" of arms and aid.

The Pergau dam affair, which is currently being investigated by the House of Commons, is the latest in a series of sordid incidents, grubby scandals and damaging revelations which have plagued John Major's Government.

In a half-way decent democracy, the Tory government would have collapsed by now under this burgeoning weight and stench of scandal. Britain does not have such a democracy. This is why William Waldegrave thinks he can get away with saying it is permissible for the Government to sometimes to lie to the House of Commons.

Britain does not even have a decent opposition willing and able to harry the Tories. Therefore, it is impossible to predict what damage this latest 'scandal' — together with the almost-daily revelations of the "arms to Iraq" Scott Inquiry — will do to the Government. They have after all survived so many other exposures of their hypocrisy and corruption that they may sail blithely through the present 'bad patch' too.

But the potential damage to the Government is just one key aspect of this affair.

The general nature of overseas aid is the other.

British overseas aid (currently running at over £2 billion, 0.2% of the Gross Domestic Product) has next to nothing to do with relieving starvation or drought and it does nothing to tackle the desperate poverty in the Third World. Governments which preen themselves publicly for "giving aid" routinely turn a blind eye to famines which continue to blight many countries in the world. They do as little as possible to help victims of natural disasters.

The reality of aid is very different indeed from its official image.

Firstly, it is normal for Western aid to be used as a sweetener to get various regimes around the world to buy from the aid donor. Where Britain is concerned, "buying British" very often means buying British arms. Aid

is targeted not at the poorest countries but at "better off" countries, that is to say at those countries that can afford to buy British goods, including British arms. Recipients of large amounts of aid over the last decades have been Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Oman and Jordan (all "better off" and developing economies). These countries have also purchased large quantities of arms from Britain.

Secondly, aid has often consisted of financing high-profile, prestigious projects that bring some kudos to local politicians and bosses in the 'aided' country but have very dubious or little benefit for working-class people or peasants. The Pergau dam has apparently increased electricity prices for Malaysian people and has in the process wreaked environmental havoc there by destroying part of the rain forest.

Overseas aid is very often made "conditional" on the aided government making certain kinds of reform. But not conditional on democratic reforms or improving human rights records. Never! Aid is conditional on

such things as a "free trade" policy. Corruption, violence, torture, locking up political dissenters, shooting down protesters — all of these things are okay by the Tories. At least they do not lead to a withdrawal of "aid".

The Malaysian government has been incensed by the exposures of the Pergau dam affair in the British media, not because the arms and aid link became known, but because the press has also mentioned the fact that

bribes went routinely to Malaysian capitalists and politicians as part of the aid package. Malaysian governments are notoriously riddled with corruption. It runs also a fundamentally undemocratic regime. But do the Tories care about this? Or care about the Indonesian government's genocidal war against the people of East Timor? Or care about the lack of democracy in Oman and Jordan? Do they hell!

Thatcher in particular was very fond of a "you scratch our back and we'll scratch yours" aid policy. After all free trade and the market were her twin gods. In reality Thatcher's policy was never as "high-minded" as this. Thatcher wanted plum jobs and lucre for the Tory party's mates — for people like her son Mark, who grew amazingly rich in the '80s and all the "free" trade had to go to them: to the construction companies and the arms manufacturers who donated generously to the Tory party political campaigning year after year.

The hard-faced meanness of this



Thatcher and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed shake hands on another deal that will do nothing to improve the lives of Malaysian workers

Government which appears to have no limits is exposed by such facts as these. In 1991 the government delayed the paltry £11 million it had allocated to areas of the world such as Somalia and Ethiopia facing real crises. The reason for the delay? The Gulf war and the cost of killing people in Baghdad was absorbing too much of the Government's money; therefore they cut back on famine relief.

These are the real scandals behind the Pergau dam affair.

But there is another scandal too. In all the furore of the last few weeks — Pergau and the Scott Inquiry — only squeaks of protest have come from the Labour front bench concerned with such things as "abuses of Parliamentary procedures" or how "the House has been misled". The Labour Party should forget about Parliamentary niceties. These are not the important issues.

The only reason the Tories have

survived these "scandals", the reason that these "scandals" roll over the Tories like foul water off a duck's back, is because the Parliamentary Labour Party is so utterly useless at doing what it should be doing: fighting the Tories.

Labour should be raising a storm of agitation and protest about the exploitation, greed and corruption that lie behind the Tories' scandals. Labour MPs should indignantly begin to ask the awkward questions that need to be asked about the things that really matter.

* Why do the Tories continue to finance the military ambitions of dictatorships and virtual dictatorships, when the effect can only be to shore up and stabilise such regimes?

* Why do the Tories give so little real aid: aid to famine relief, to help save the lives of people blighted by floods in Bangladesh for instance?

Labour should be exposing the irrational inhumanity of a system such as

this that cares more for the economics of killing than it does for the economics of saving lives.

Pergau demonstrates the need for a socialist approach to "aid". Labour should campaign to:

- * Stop the arms trade;
- * Increase the emergency aid budget;
- * Get the Western banks and governments to cancel Third World debts;
- * Call for the nationalisation of the banks.

Most important of all, Labour should make its first commitment, a commitment to solidarity with the democratic oppositions and labour movements around the world in their struggles against vile regimes that exploit, plunder and murder and the regimes which squander Western aid, siphoning it off into the pockets of the ruling classes and using it to buy arms to oppress the working class and the poor.

"In 1991 the Government delayed the paltry £11 million it had allocated to areas of the world such as Somalia and Ethiopia facing real crises. The reason for the delay? The Gulf war and the cost of killing people in Baghdad was absorbing too much of the Government's money."

"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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WE SAY

Why they hate Arthur Scargill

THE tenth anniversary of the heroic 1984-5 miners' strike has been used as an occasion for the bosses' press — both broadsheet and tabloid — to attack the president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill. Scargill has been blamed for what the Tory pit-butchers have done to the mining communities.

You would expect that from the bosses' press.

Disgracefully, however, the attack has been joined by people who are supposed to be on the same side as the miners, such as the Labour MP and former South Wales NUM research officer, Kim Howells.

People like Howells say that Scargill and the other NUM leaders were too militant. Their demands were too extreme. To oppose all economic pit closures was to seem to fly in the face of iron laws; some more moderate formula should have been found. They didn't address themselves sufficiently to broad public opinion, and instead narrowed their appeal to the dwindling ranks of traditional industrial trade unionism.

Moreover — so the argument goes — the miners were too violent, and their leaders were at fault in not condemning miners' violence. Besides, their picketing was too heavy-handed: it antagonised the Notts miners.

The whole argument is scurrilous. The miners' defiance of the 'iron laws' of Profit First actually broadened their appeal. By arguing the issue head-on, they rallied professors of accountancy, editors of scientific journals, pop stars and bishops to come out against the Coal Board — and, more importantly, they helped to generate a mass working-class support movement.

The class politics put across by the NUM leaders built a broader popular movement (and not only among 'traditional' sectors of the working class) than 'moderation' ever could. Indeed, if a valid criticism can be made of the NUM leaders, it is the opposite one to that made by people like Howells: that they laced their class message with phrases about the 'national interest' and did not talk about a workers' plan for energy.

Violence? How could the miners maintain effective picket lines against massive police assault without self-defensive violence? How would it have helped if Arthur Scargill had condemned miners' violence? Who would it have helped? It would have been about as useful to the miners as nightly appearances on TV by Margaret Thatcher to denounce police violence would have been to the Tories!

Again, any valid criticism would be in quite the opposite direction: that the NUM did not manage sufficiently to *organise* its self-defence, nor to press home the arguments about police accountability and so on.

It does seem that some Yorkshire miners started off with a hostile attitude towards Notts miners, and that didn't help on the picket lines. But the answer was more pickets, better organised, better trained, better primed with the arguments.

Socialist Organiser and the AWL have many differences with Arthur Scargill. With the dog-pack baying for his blood, we do not have differences of opinion, or arguments to resolve: we are simply on the other side of the class-struggle line.

Fight for the Workers' Charter!

LAST October the Labour Party conference committed itself to supporting "the right to strike following a ballot, to picket effectively, and to take industrial action in support of others without fear of sequestration of union funds or persecution."

Why are John Smith and the Labour Party leaders not raising an outcry about the High Court's outrageous ban on the NATFHE strike?

The Labour leaders say nothing because they do not want to alarm the bosses by campaigning for trade union rights. They voted for those trade union rights last October only in order to soft-soap trade unionists into backing their scheme to weaken the Labour/union link.

The Labour leaders should be called to account. And the fight for a comprehensive Workers' Charter of positive legal rights for workers and trade unions should be linked with efforts to build a force which gives teeth to the paper commitments won at Labour and trade union conferences — a militant rank-and-file movement in the trade unions.

Official strikes are still possible

A LOT of trade unionists have responded to the court ban on last week's college lecturers' strike by saying that official strikes are now *impossible* and that the *only* way forward is through unofficial action.

They are right to be angry at the Tories and their vicious laws, but wrong about the sweeping conclusions.

Official, legal strikes are still possible. Train crew on London Underground's Central Line organised one last autumn and won the reinstatement of sacked guards Ray Stelzner and Pat Sikorski.

The strike was organised in a watertight way to be legal even under the most vicious interpretation of the new laws on balloting.

The judge's ruling against the lecturers' union NATFHE was outrageous. But the union could have done a lot more to get round the law. It made little serious effort to organise a ballot within the rather vague provisions of the new law which state that unions must provide employers with at least seven days' written notice of industrial action and "describe the employees involved so that their employer can readily ascertain them."

Lots of union bureaucrats and some ultra-left or impatient activists are now united in claiming that official strikes are impossible. See, for example, our UNISON conference report on page 15 this week. But serious trade unionists should adopt a three pronged approach.

Firstly, do everything you can to organise a watertight ballot. The Central Line union activists, for instance, even collected guards' and drivers' National Insurance numbers!

Secondly, test the courts. Given their current troubles, the Tories would find it extremely risky politically to let the courts seize the funds of a union that had voted for a strike by a clear majority in a ballot.

Thirdly, the unions should step up the campaign for positive legal rights for trade unionists.

Winning the argument on full employment



POLITICAL FRONT
Alan Simpson, Labour MP for Nottingham South, talked to *Socialist Organiser* about prospects for the left. This is the second of three articles.

HERE is a whole sheaf of issues which intrude into everyone's lives and on which I think we could be battering the Tories day in, day out.

At a grassroots level, I think the arguments have already been won about the link between crime and unemployment. If we go out onto the streets and into communities, addressing the issues of crime and personal safety and ask people what they think what do we get? After the first ten minutes of "hang them and flog them" stuff, they come round to saying "we've got to give these kids jobs. If we treat them the way we do, can we expect anything different?"

The public are now willing to write a much more radical agenda than the parties. It seems to be the first time in my life when the public are streets ahead of the Labour Party.

Maybe it's part of the nature of parliament that it deludes you into feeling it is the real world — when it is a monumentally unreal world. But in the Labour Party leadership lots of people have convinced themselves that to make any specific commitments is to play into the Tories' hands and offer hostages.

To the tabloids the best line is: attack the Tories, but say now that they can come back to you on. I believe that this is pro-

foundly wrong. If you want people to vote for you, you can't win an argument in the three weeks of a general election.

You must treat the public as serious, competent people capable of facing up to the problems this society faces.

However, the Party at the grass roots has been seriously damaged by the changes over the last ten years or so. The level of morale in constituency Labour Parties is desperately low.

A lot of people who thought they had joined a political party find that they are in a tupperware party. You can buy badges and you can buy mugs and ties — but the last thing you do is talk about political issues.

The dynamism that once existed, where Constituency Parties had real debates, has been lost. The argument and debate which is the life blood of a democratic socialist party has been slowly taken through the wringer. The leadership quite clearly wanted a party that was house trained, and we are paying the price for it.

NO ONE in the Labour Party leadership was using the phrase "full employment" before Party conference. It was the stand made by the unions that brought it to the lips of those on the front bench.

It was a real struggle. But if you're going to say "full employment", you have to say how.

I think we have to begin with the bread and butter



Ordinary people are more willing to consider radical alternatives to the Tories than are the Labour leaders

issues for socialism. We should look around our own communities and produce a shopping list of the needs that ought to be met if we are to set up the framework of a civilised society.

The Party can easily convert these into a jobs programme that would bring us full employment in a five year period using the skills you find on the dole queues now, and those you would have to train up.

How could we pay for it? The fairest system of taxation is a progressive one — the more that you earn, the more you contribute. The marginal tax rates should increase as your income increases.

In the budget debate in November/December I said there ought to be a 50/50 tax. For everyone earning £50,000, you have a 50% rate of tax.

I discovered that John Edmonds had been saying we should have a 60% rate of tax, so yet again the left inside parliament is behind the trade unions.

I also suggested that we should impose a 0.125% tax on the speculative movements of capital through London — that would bring in an annual tax take of £50 billion.

Then I discovered that some Representatives in the American Congress were equally worried about these flows of speculative capital around the world, and are talking about a 1% transactions tax.

If you look outside the confines of Labour in parliament, you find that radical and practical ideas are gaining ground that the Labour Party is unwilling to recognise. We can sell the arguments with no problem at all.



Israeli opinion is beginning to realise the terrible reality of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza

Arabs and Jews march together for peace

Adam Keller, editor of *The Other Israel*, reports from Tel Aviv

ISRAELI ARABS and Israeli Jews marched together in a very large Peace Now demon-

stration on Saturday 5 March demanding of the government that it "Take the settlers out of Hebron" and "Take away their guns". The organisers claim 100,000 marchers, the police 25,000.

It was a big step for Peace

Now because it was the first joint Jewish-Arab march. The leadership of the Arabs inside Israel, the Arab Mayors' Committee, co-sponsored the march.

There were an equal number of Jewish and Arab speakers.

In its early years — in 1978 and '79 — Peace Now did not want Arab members, fearing that Arab members would discredit them in the eyes of Jews. This is progress.

My organisation, Gush Shalom (the Peace Bloc), had a contingent of several hundred on the march where we raised the slogan "Dismantle all the settlements, now." We found a lot of support among the Peace Now marchers.

On Tuesday 8 March the official Commission of Inquiry is to meet. It is not clear whether Palestinian witnesses will actually co-operate.

RABIN HAS always maintained channels of communication with Rafael Eitan, former general and leader of the nationalist Tzomet Party.

Rafael Eitan is an open racist. In the past he has referred to the Arabs as cockroaches. But Eitan is also a pragmatist whose policy has always been to appeal to both the right and the centre. He has an appeal to a certain section of younger Israeli voters.

Rabin has always wanted Eitan in the government. Rabin feels some urgency about this as everyone in Israel is expecting some sort of horrible revenge for the Baruch Goldstein massacre in Hebron. If it happens, Rabin expects the Israeli right to take to the streets. He wants Eitan to be in the government sharing the responsibility.

The pressure on the left wing Meretz is not so much to withdraw from the government as to maintain their veto. I do not expect that Rafael Eitan will enter the government soon. Meretz is strongly against it.

What is actually at stake at the moment is the interpretation of the Oslo agreement. The question here is precisely: Palestinian state — yes or no?

Rabin seems to want something less than a Palestinian

state. The supporters of this policy describe what they want as Palestinian "cantons". They want several Palestinian enclaves cut off from each other, and surrounded by the Israeli army. This would be a Bantustan.

The Oslo agreement could be interpreted as having this meaning. Pushing for this, Rabin is looking for an understanding with Eitan, Sharon and a part of the settlers' leadership.

There is a strong movement for the removal of the settlements from Hebron — particularly given the open support many of these settlers have given Goldstein.

No settlers have yet been moved because of Rabin's strong opposition. It seems that there is a majority of government ministers in favour of removal of the Hebron settlers, but they can not overcome Rabin.

The Other Israel
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Jewish — Arab tent of mourning at Jaffa

SINCE February 28, a coalition of peace groups has been maintaining a day and night presence at a Tent of Mourning, erected as an act of solidarity and identification with the families of the Hebron Massacre victims. The tent is located in Jaffa, at the very spot which saw fierce rioting following news of the massacre.

Numerous Jewish and Arab Jaffa inhabitants passing the spot signed a petition calling upon the Israeli government to remove from the Occupied

Territories all perpetrators of and inciters to such acts.

Among the signatories was Salwa el-Rani — whose husband Abd-el-Karim, a Jaffa Arab, was killed last year while trying to save a Jewish girl attacked by a knife-wielding Gazan.

Near the tent was placed a memorial plaque for the Hebron victims. Numerous people, including representatives of several Jewish and Arab organisations, lighted candles or placed flowers at the site.

What the Israeli press is saying

More and more voices in Israel are saying that the Hebron massacre was a logical result of Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories. These two excerpts from mainstream newspapers show the questions being raised

Everyone knew, and permitted it

By Ronny Shaked and Zvi Zinger

The government of Israel, the Shin Bet, the Civil Administration, the Israeli Defence Force, and also the settlers in Kiryat Arba, are guilty.

They granted legitimacy to a handful of fundamentalists, the vast majority of whom are of American origin, and allowed that tumour to grow wild.

Dr Goldstein was not emotionally insane. He was the outcome of a mad Kahanist outlook, which engraved unrealistic aims on its banner, leading Goldstein to perpetrate a massacre that certainly could have been anticipated — and prevented.

The Kach movement was not banned, although the government, the Shin Bet and even the general public, knew who that band of madmen were. Just the opposite. Its members received legal weapons, to carry out illegal actions; photographs in which they appeared harming Arabs and their property, shooting throwing stones and rioting, were published in the media; they

even permitted filming them during arms training, or performing battle exercises in the kasbah of Hebron. The army approved, and protected them, every Friday, when they held power patrols in the city's alleys, under the cover of "tours of Jewish sites."

The Kiryat Arba settlers called them "a bunch of madmen," yet nevertheless granted legitimacy to their activity and even let them join the settlement's council. They did not understand, or did not want to understand, what damage such a small group could cause to the entire public of settlers. On Friday, they awoke to discover that they were all distributed with the Kach image. From now on, every settler is a target in the eyes of the Arabs, and in the eyes of the Jews, all of the settlers as a community are tainted.

Yediot Acharonot, 27 February 1994

A costume of insanity

By Uzi Benziman

JUST LIKE my freedom fighter is a terrorists in the eyes of my adversary, thus a mass murderer in the eyes of my enemy is merely a madman in my eyes. "An insane act of a psychopath," is how Yitzhak Rabin two days ago defined the terrible massacre perpetrated by Dr Baruch Goldstein against Moslem worshippers at the Makhpela cave, and he was inaccurate. It was not an act of madness in the usual sense of the word; it was premeditated murder, the inevitable result of circumstances for which, to

no small degree, Rabin and the previous Prime Ministers are responsible, and with which the entire Israeli political establishment has been reconciled for many years. Sixty five years after the [1929] massacre of Jews in Hebron a balance has been registered in the mythology of blood that is poisoning relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

The murder at the Makhpela cave took place because for many years in the territories, and even more so in Hebron, there has been a wanton atmosphere of brutal harassment towards the Arab residents. The crime was committed because for years the Israeli government and the IDF have accepted the existence of armed Jewish militias who do whatever they please with the Arabs.

Ha'aretz, 27 February 1994

Fighting racists in Melbourne

AUSTRALIA

Richard Lane reports from Melbourne

FASCISTS have increased their activity in Northcote and Brunswick recently. These working class northern suburbs of Melbourne have been covered in racist graffiti. A gang of swastika clad National Action thugs are harassing blacks, Asians, lefties and gays.

In November, a group based on Latrobe University students organised an "Action to remove fascist propaganda" in Northcote.

On the day, 200 turned out to show their anger. While the demonstration went about its business of changing graffiti (from "Asians out" to "racists out") and tearing down posters, a group of half a dozen fascists taunted the crowd. Police warnings convinced them to leave, but they returned later. This time the fascists were driven away by a solid beating.

Action has now been sparked off in Brunswick, where these thugs have taken to walking down Sydney Rd, a street with a large Turkish population, to the Sarah Sands Hotel. A group, largely members of the ISO (Australian sister-group of the SWP), took up a petition in the shopping square and called a march to the pub to pressure management into refusing to serve people wearing fascist paraphernalia.

The march attracted over 100 people.

Unfortunately the ISO organised the demo basically on their own — no other labour movement bodies were invited to help.

"We need to forge a powerful coalition of unionists, leftists, gays, women, blacks, Asians and others to drive the fascists off the streets and back into the sewers."

It would have been a simple matter to ring twenty or so political, trade union and migrant groups to attend an organising meeting. No doubt Turkish workers groups and the Brunswick Tram depot would have been very interested.

This must not be a one-off action without the essential follow-up work of door-knocking and leafletting in the community. A further action can draw wider forces into the planning and organising.

We need to forge a powerful coalition of unionists, leftists, gays, women, blacks, Asians and others to drive the fascists off the streets and back into the sewers.

Marvels of the market

HEALTH care, as we now all know, is much better provided though market mechanisms than through an interfering and incompetent state. Take just one private hospital, the Royal Masonic based in Hammersmith. Since 1986 it has admitted anyone who can pay (you needed to be able to do the funny handshake to get in before that), and it has made someone very healthy indeed — there is £2.5 million missing from the hospital coffers.

No one seems to know where the money has gone. Not the £35,000 a year financial controller Michael Gerard, who ran up a £800 bill on the hospital's credit card while on holiday in New York and was sacked, then formed a consultancy to sell his services back to the hospital at £50,000 a year. Nor the £47,000 a year managing director, Graham Ford, who managed £1,400 of private spending on his hospital credit card.

And the former chairman, Sir Robert Ling, certainly does not know where the missing money is. He didn't even know the hospital he was supposedly chairing the board of had spent £3 million on a nursing home in Cambridgeshire.

The hospital is now being run by Coopers and Lybrand as receivers. This is surely a model that the NHS opt-out hospitals will wish to follow.

OUR clutching-at straws-department has some bad news for those armchair socialists out there.

The wait for the ruling class to die off from ill-health looks more forlorn than ever.

That staple of middle-management illnesses, the ulcer, can now be crossed off the list of ailments that might just wipe out the bosses and save us the bother. It seems that ulcers are, at least in part, caused by bacteria, and these bacteria are more common in the intestines of the undernourished and poor.

So it's back to politics to cause the fall of the bourgeoisie, unless someone discovers a

GRAFFITI

VIVELA
REBOLUCION

By Cyclops

virulent and fatal disease spread through use of the Amex Card.

AT least in the Western democracies everyone is elected on their merit, rather than through the webs of nepotism so common across the Third World. Take that fine, upstanding Democratic candidate Hugh Rodham, who is attempting to gain election to the United States Senate from Florida. A successful lawyer, he had never even voted until he was persuaded to by his sister Hillary in 1992.

Hang on, that's Hillary Rodham who became Hillary Rodham Clinton, and then dropped the Rodham. As in Bill Clinton's partner.

IN the information age you can call up just about anything on your PC (that's personal computer) screen — some of it not particularly PC (politically correct this time). The guardians of the nation's morals are demanding action.

The following editorial appeared last week: "Perils of porn. Once it used to be dirty books. Now porn is available on computer. Anyone who says that smutty pictures never hurt anyone should think again. A boy aged 13 tried to rape a girl after watching porn at school. This evil must be stamped out now. The government must crack down on computer porn. And teachers and parents can act too. Make your children show you what's on every computer disc they've got."

Very high minded stuff, but aren't the sentences a little short for the *Independent*? That is because it's from the *Sun*, well-known purveyor of artistic pictures supplied only for edification and cultural improvement (see page 3).

Mine's bigger and it's got more sections

PRESS GANG

THE INDEPENDENT TODAY
SUNDAY PRESS
THE GUARDIAN

By Jim Denham

A FEW weeks ago the *Sunday Times*, announcing the arrival of yet another section, boasted that it was "Britain's Biggest Newspaper". Not "Best", you notice, but "Biggest". This equation of size with quality bore the unmistakable imprimatur of the *Sunday Times*'s very own Mr. Big, Andrew Neil, a man who once claimed that he didn't have to worry about a rival in love (the *Observer*'s then-editor, Donald Treford) because "I beat him every Sunday with my newspaper." Mr. Neil is plainly a Freudian delight, but this obsession with size and sections is not

limited to the *Sunday Times* — or, indeed, to the Sundays.

The *Mail* has its "Weekend" magazine, the *Express* its "Saturday Review" and all the Saturday broadsheets have glossy magazines and/or enhanced newsprint tabloid supplements. The *Independent* set the trend for Saturday magazines in 1987, with a non-glossy mag notable for quality writing, sharp political commentary and excellent (often black and white) photography.

Unfortunately, most of the Saturday supplements that followed in the *Indie*'s wake have concentrated on the dreadful "style" (or "life", "lifestyle"

etc.) angle: the term "style", in this context, tends to mean articles about cars, holidays, furniture, food, health, films, gardening... in fact, just about anything so long as it isn't news.

The nadir was surely reached by the *Telegraph* magazine's extraordinary "Me and My Mantelpiece" feature. Another favourite space-filler is the "Uptowners" photo-spread of various superannuated rock stars, film stars and other worthless nonentities staggering about in Stringfellows or wherever.

And yet the punters seem to like this garbage. The *Guardian* (whose own "Weekend" supplement represents a sort of thinking person's lifestyle section) commissioned some research into supplements and has found that people do, indeed, read these things and sales have risen accordingly: the seven-section *Saturday Telegraph*, for instance, outsells the other days' editions by over 200,000. The *Sun* (with its Saturday TV listings mag)

now sells 400,000 more than in mid-week.

Roy Greenslade, commenting upon the *Guardian*'s research, noted that the *raison d'être* for supplements now seems to be "think of a subject... don't ask if it's worth the odd piece but whether it is possible to sell advertising to it and produce a weekly stapled supplement on enhanced newsprint."

Greenslade also offers an explanation for a phenomenon that has increasingly bothered me: the remarkable degree of congruence in the subject matter of these supplements. Do you remember all those articles last November about Naomi Wolf, the photogenic American feminist? Well, of course, she was plugging her book and free for interviews. As Greenslade notes: "too many features tied to book publications, film openings and TV series get massive space with almost no regard for the value of the topic." But the editors have to fill their sections with something, don't they?

What 1984-5 changed for women



By Jean Lane

THE WOMEN in the minibus were dressed as if they were going out on the town: stockings, stilettos and best coats. They were full of spirit, having a laugh and a joke. But it wasn't night time. They weren't off for a good night out. It was daytime. They were on their way down to Nottinghamshire to spend the day with some other women who needed a bit of a hand. They were travelling from Yorkshire.

Their husbands were all on strike and they had set up a women's support group to try and raise some money for the strikers and themselves so they could feed the kids for as long as the strike lasted. They knew it was going to be hard, but they never dreamed at that time that they would be involved in the greatest strike Britain had seen for over sixty years or that it would go on for a whole year. They never dreamed that at the end of that year their lives would be unrecognisable from what they were now.

Some of them had never even done this: booked a van for the day and gone off with a few of the girls, telling their husbands that they'd see them when they'd see them. But they had heard that the women in Notts were having it even harder than they were. They were all right. Everyone in their village, Thurnscoe, was out. There were no scabs. There were no masses of police taking over the vil-

lage. They were just having to tighten their belts for a bit, that's all.

But the strikers in Notts coal field were only a third of the workforce. All of the rest were scabbing. The wives of the strikers were shouted at in the shop queues, and their kids were picked on in school. They had had to fight to use the miners' welfare for the strike headquarters, but they had won, which meant that the women had the kitchens there.

The minibus-load were going down to give them a bit of solidarity for the day and exchange information about how they were organising their women's group. It was like a holiday, and the feeling was good.

Then suddenly, on the outskirts of Nottinghamshire, they were stopped by the police. "Where are you going?" "Where have you come from?" "Where exactly will you be while you are in the area?" "How long will you be there?" "What are your names?" "Why should we believe you?" It was incredible. None of them had ever known anything like this before. Then one of the women said, "Look, are you going to let us through or not? Because if you are going to treat us like flying pickets, that's what we might as well be."

It had not been their intention at all. Women didn't picket. That's what the men did. Women ran the kitchens, provided support. They got out of the van, high-heels and all, and walked three miles to the nearest pit. The men couldn't believe it and weren't sure if they were pleased. But the women picketed the pit with them and stopped five lorries going through before getting back on their bus and going home.

Those women did eventually

make it to Ollerton in Nottinghamshire, "the island in the sea of scabs", and the beginning of the linking up of all the Women Against Pit Closures groups took place and spread over the months all around the country. And the strikers in Notts were able to hold out for the whole year because of the solidarity and support provided by people from outside, despite the permanent police cordon around the area.

Many women's lives were changed by the miners' strike of 1984/85 on a personal level; never to be consigned to the housework again, never to be isolated in the home again. But the biggest gain of the miners' strike was on a much wider level, too. For the first time, the demands of the women's movement, which had been common fare for some middle-class women for nearly twenty years, became the demands of organised, fighting, working-class women i.e. of women who could make them, and much more, really happen. The demands for real equality, for equal pay, free nursery provision, freedom from violence, freedom of sexuality, free abortion, the right to work, for an end to nuclear proliferation, all became linked to the struggle of a section of the working class who took on the Tories and everything they stood for. All of these things can be won under capitalism. But for as long as this system exists, they can be taken away from us again when it suits the state to do so and when they feel strong enough to achieve it.

The miners' strike was not just about jobs. It was about people before profit; "Coal Not Dole". And at certain times during that year it was potentially about who rules society. It was a struggle by the organised

working class against a vicious, naked ruling-class government which was prepared to spend millions of pounds in its quest to defeat the miners' union — and the rest of the union movement after them — and consider it money well spent.

Linked to such a struggle, the demands of the women's movement took on a resonance never heard before. Those demands became part of the fight, not just to get a bit more from society as it exists, i.e. to improve the lot of a few women and leave the rest behind, but to change society, to turn the world upside down. The demands for women's equality became linked to demands for all human equality. And the fight to turn society upside down, drawing in more and more people, becomes the fight that makes those demands for real equality possible.

The miners' strike, in the end, was lost. The ruling class proved, on that occasion, to be better organised and better led than the labour movement. It is not surprising that, since then, the women's movement has barely existed, because the health of the women's movement is linked to that of the labour movement. It is not surprising that politically the women's debate, such as it is, has spun on the betterment of the fortunes of the individual, on personal achievement and advancement, and on "cultural feminism".

But the class will fight again. And when it does, the women's movement will grow again, and will be linked to that fight. When that happens the lessons and the experience of the women in the great miners' strike will be remembered and will be drawn upon, and a working-class women's movement will be born.



Women students are ready to fight if they get a lead

NUS Women's Conference

A chance to fight back!

WHEN the Tories attack education — which they have done through grant cuts, attacks on student unions, underfunding and “incorporation” — it is often women students who are hardest hit.

For this reason, the student movement has over recent years built a Women's Campaign in student unions and nationally in NUS.

Over the three years prior to

this year, the NUS Women's Campaign took up a lot of important issues, brought many women students into involvement in the Campaign, and organised campaigning action on important issues. With Left Unity Women's Officers, the Campaign was at the forefront of the fight against the poll tax amongst students, took women students to Ireland to canvass in the abortion referenda, and took up the fight for decent child-care provision in colleges.

This academic year, though, has been a disaster for the NUS Women's Campaign.

Siobhan Endean, from the right wing of Labour Students, has held the post of Women's Officer and has done next to nothing. Even the most basic things that Women's Officers and women activists have come to expect — such as campaign materials and mailings with news and information — have not been forthcoming.

Not all of this can be put down to incompetence. It

seems that Labour Students have made a conscious decision to run down the Women's Campaign.

Perhaps they feel that it is an embarrassment to their efforts to impress Tory MPs.

Perhaps they don't like the fact that Women's Conference often criticises their leadership of NUS.

Whatever the reason, their treatment of the Campaign is appalling. It is an abrogation of their duty to involve and represent women students.

Youth Fightback is...

... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth.

This page is separately edited.

Editor: Mark Sandell

Phone: 071-639 7967 for details of our activity.

Letters and articles to *Youth Fightback* c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

On top of the failure to even produce materials, Siobhan Endean has ignored Women's Campaign decisions to run campaigns and has gone against Conference policies on campaign strategies.

THIS year's NUS Women's Campaign Conference is at Blackpool's Winter Gardens from 14-16 March.

Delegates from over 100 colleges will debate Women and Education, Women and Health, and Women and Work. We can decide policy and action to take the Campaign forward.

Delegates will also hear guest speakers from the National Abortion Campaign and the Middlebrook Mushrooms dispute.

Perhaps most importantly, though, Women's Campaign Conference gives us the chance to reverse the decline in the NUS Women's Campaign and to start to rebuild the Campaign into what it should be — an active, fighting campaign for women's liberation.

Central to this is to elect a Women's Officer who is prepared to build such a Campaign.

Left Unity's candidate in this election is Sarah Wellings, a committed socialist feminist with a proven track record of fighting for women's rights. Her only opposition is the Labour Students candidate, Kate Skipworth.

The choice for delegates is clear — more of the same from Labour Students, or a chance to rebuild and fight back.

A chance to fight back!

Vote Sarah Wellings!

Tory racism in Leicester

By Anita, Leicester

THE Tories are trying to win the coming by-elections in the Humberstone area of Leicester by way of a racist campaign which plays on the fears and ignorance of what is, essentially, a right-wing, working-class area of the city. Leicester City Council proposed to sell off land at a subsidised rate (50%) to certain community groups so that they can build two temples and a mosque.

This is being cited by the Tories as evidence of Leicester City Council's infection by the “loony left”.

Christian groups in the area have said they do not need the land because existing facilities are adequate. By contrast,

places of worship in the city for Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs cannot cope with the demand.

Now, a reasonable objection could be raised to any religious group being subsidised.

For example, socialists object strongly to the subsidising of Christian private schools.

The Tories, however, are here deliberately whipping up hostility against black people who are recent arrivals, or their children.

The Tories are waging a right-wing election campaign with their eyes clearly on future gains.

Labour is split over the issue. Even some right-wing Labour City Councillors are calling for an effective fightback campaign. But the right-wing dominated CLP has decided to keep activity around the elections low-key.

This is an attempt to dig themselves out of the hole which they created during the County elections of a year ago, when they told canvassers to deny knowledge of the building proposals. After all, they can go flat out for the next round of elections in four years time!

In contrast, the Socialist Campaign Group has mobilised a sustained drive up to the elections — demonstrating the need for a fighting Labour left. This is vital.

The main thrust of work being done outside of the Group, against the Tory racists, is by Leicester United Against Racism, and the Interracial Solidarity Group.

They have produced a leaflet for the Humberstone area explaining what the Tories are trying to do.

Unfortunately, they are not advocating a Labour vote.

With the events in Tower Hamlets and the appearance in Leicester of literature belonging to the racist, American-based NSDAP-AO (NSDAP-Ausland-Und-Aufbauorganisation), a platform of “Don't Vote Fascist” is not enough.

The Tories have not given anything to the working-class and they never will. Neither have the Liberal-Democrats.

Anti-racists must say, boldly, “Vote Labour!”

The CLP needs to drag its head from the sand, account for its actions, fight for its politics, and challenge the Tories who have lamely justified their attack by pointing to the actions of the Liberal-Democrats in Tower Hamlets.

Empire, exploitation and unemployment

FOR the poor of India, it is, as the French writer Claude Levi-Strauss put it, "as if history and economics had managed to establish, indeed superimpose, their most tragic phases of development on these wretched victims: the shortages and epidemics of medieval times, frenzied exploitation as in the early years of the industrial revolution, and the unemployment and speculation of modern capitalism".

India today probably has more desperately poor people, living on the edge of starvation, than any other country in the world; it also has more trained engineers than any other country, including the USA.

It has sizeable industries — manufacturing production rose at 7.1 per cent a year through the 1980s — and some big companies, like the Tata conglomerate, which are multinationals with major overseas investments. About three-quarters of India's exports are manufactured goods.

Yet over 70 per cent of the population still lives in the countryside. The majority of them, and a large proportion of the people of the cities, are desperately poor, scratching a livelihood from odd jobs or tiny plots of land.

The average income per head for India's 850 million people is the equivalent of about £800 a year, £16 a week. That average hides huge inequalities. India has millions of people as wealthy as the upper and middle classes of Europe, and hundreds of millions who barely get enough to eat.

92 out of every 1,000 babies die before the age of one; in Britain, it is 8 out of every thousand. Life expectancy is 59, fifteen or twenty years less than in Europe. 52 per cent of adults, and 66 per cent of women, are illiterate. There are 542 people for every car, 155 for every television set, and 191 for every telephone.

Two hundred years of British rule helped shape today's India. 17th century India was the greatest industrial country in the world. British rule destroyed India's handicraft industries, developed only patches of modern industry, and set up a new landlord/tax-collector class to help it siphon wealth from the peasants.

Some ten per cent of India's total income — that is, a large proportion of the surplus potentially available for investment — would be siphoned off into the pockets of the upper and middle classes in Britain. India's peasants were as poor, and in as backward conditions, when Britain left in 1947 as they had been two hundred years earlier.

The Indian capitalist class, having won independence, did set about developing Indian industry to some effect. They have even increased productivity in agriculture markedly.

But, with those capitalists safely in control, having smoothly taken over the machine of government built up for British rule, India has never seen any revolutionary drive against the pre-capitalist remnants which clog its society and trammel its poor.

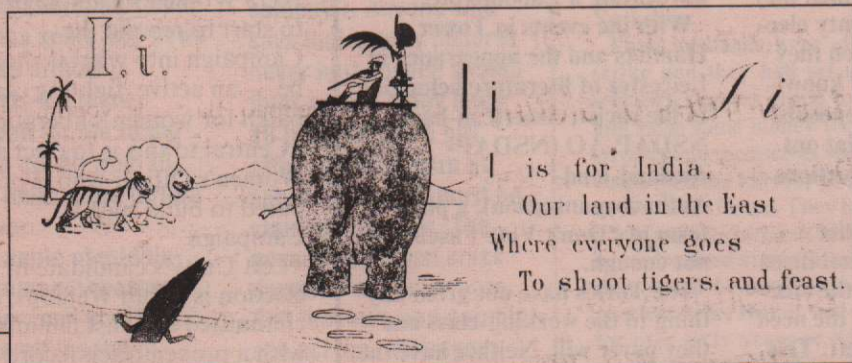
Despite decades of "socialist" speech-making by its rulers, India has had less effective land reform than almost any other country in the Third World. Caste divisions among Hindus — slotting every individual into a hierarchy, with the "lower castes" able to get only the most menial jobs — remain powerful. There is discrimination against Muslims, who are 12 per cent of the country's population.

The Congress party, set up by the Indian bourgeoisie to fight for independence, has ruled India for most of the time since 1947. It has become more and more corrupt, fragmented, and time-serving.

Its major opponent now is the BJP, a right-wing Hindu-chauvinist party with free-market economic policies.

The main left parties have long been the Communist Parties — the Communist Party of India, which was loyal to the USSR, and the stronger Communist Party of India (Marxist), which kept an equal distance from the USSR and China. But these parties are regionally based, reformist, and geared to finding "progressive" bourgeois factions to support against "reactionary" ones.

Indian workers — railworkers, mill workers, dockers, others — have conducted some epic strikes, but the trade union movement is as yet weak, with a lot of small, locally-based trade unions, linked to various political parties.



Such feelings of superiority justified the British ruling class creaming off wealth from and oppressing the inhabitants of the countries they governed

Delhi to the Taj Mahal

Variety

Joan Trevor recently spent eight days in northern India. This week and next she describes her impressions and her attempts to come to terms with what she saw.

I'VE found that there's no adequate mental preparation you can make for a trip to India. If you are going, just have your jabs and hold your breath — sometimes literally hold your breath. When you land at Delhi airport at night the first impression you get is that someone has set light to a tyre factory nearby. The air is full of a burning rubber smell which will remain with you throughout your stay in the Indian capital.

We woke up in our hotel next morning to the burning rubber smell. The hotel is one of several built with taxpayers' money for the Asian Games. Some of the MPs who approved the expenditure bought up the hotels after the Games and now make a nice profit from them.

From our 14th floor vantage point we watched buzzards wheeling on the thermals above the city. In the street below my friend's window, wedged between lowrise office buildings, was a small collection of dirty shanty dwellings.

In the afternoon we went out in a cab. This part of town is full of poor people cycling, walking, running after buses, barefoot and dirty faced, repairing bicycles at the side of the road, pushing bicycles stacked up with something to sell, I thought.

Everything's dusty and therefore dirty, and the traffic is manic. No one pays any attention to lights or zebra crossings. Buses, lorries, taxis and three-wheeled "auto-rickshaws", cycle-rickshaws, horse and pony carts, mopeds, bicycles, cows and the odd camel stream along. Everyone has a horn or a bell and uses it continuously. A cab driver will run over a one-legged beggar if he gets in his way. If we saw the same man in Britain we would probably stop the car and take him to the nearest hospital.

I am shocked at the astonishing variety of degrees of hardship, and the complete *sang froid* of the Indians themselves in the face of it. Some will drive while another man, bare-backed, will strain every sinew to push huge commodities along on two thin bicycle wheels. Some people might marvel at his strength — "you couldn't even get that started!" But I am not at all impressed because I don't think the man should die 20 years younger than me.

It quickly and depressingly dawns on me not that this part of town is full of poor people but that every part of town is full of poor people.

Lest you think I am going to resort to the oft-used phrase to describe all this — "teeming millions" — I'd like to point out that there are probably fewer people here than in a London rush-hour. The difference is that these people don't go into offices at 9am, or shops, or, indeed, anywhere, but stay out on the streets all day pursuing some humble trade, from selling sports bags to begging. And many of them stay out here all night as well.

When you go to India you find uses for phrases you never knew you had in our head. By evening I found that phrases along the lines of "he has gone very

low", or "she has gone low but not as low as he has" fitted the bill very often. And through all this respectably dressed and well-fed people pick their way too. They are used to it, inured to it, or despairing of it ever changing, or positively *in favour* of keeping "everyone in their place". I don't think that I could ever get used to it. It is too fascinating.

By bedtime I am not so much fascinated as appalled.

How can you be *fascinated* by appalling poverty? It's not like looking at a variety of exotic flowers or curious animals. A variety of degrees of poverty is not fascinating at all.

I drank a cup of coffee before I went to bed, couldn't get to sleep and spent most of the night pondering not poverty but mortality. Lots of poverty, it seems, gets me that way. The place is so dirty, corners so rusty and sharp I don't want to get touched by anything. I don't want that close fear of death rubbing off on me too.

WHEN people come to India via Delhi they usually go to the Taj Mahal at Agra, 100 miles distant.

The next morning, with very little sleep to bear me up, we went at 5am to New Delhi station to catch the train.

I'd looked up "Taj Mahal, how to get to," in my backpacker's bible, *The Lonely Planet Survival Kit*. "Look out for pickpockets at the station" is the most understated way there must be to describe Hades.

The approach to the station is through busy, acrid-stinking streets where in the dark, small hours people sell and buy snacks and drinks and god knows what else around blazing braziers. The place is hot, dry, noisy and *very* dark, but for the fires which illuminate a "coolie shelter", where barefoot, skinny men in filthy red shirts — their Indian Railways porters' uniforms — snatch some rest. They look like the sort of person you avoid sitting next to on a train, let alone someone you would ask to carry your luggage.

When we get inside the station we see

"There are probably fewer people than in a London rush-hour. The difference is they don't go into offices at 9am but stay on the streets all day... many of them all night."

the types of people you avoid on Indian trains. Wild-eyed, murderous looking people who live in the station, sleeping on the floors and on counters, spitting betel nut juice, sidling longingly around your baggage.

Behind a grill we see the snack bar, still closed for the night, where a large rat jumps happily in and out of pots and

es of poverty



To this day, 70% of Indians eke a poor living from the land

pans. On one side behind another grill two skinny men are making up extraordinarily sharp and accurate paper darts which they fire blow-pipe style, including at us.

This was disconcerting. I had always counted on criminals being too scared of the consequences to molest foreigners.

Everywhere we went in India people were kind or helpful, but this — and the darker corners of Calcutta's "Central Park", the Maidan — was the one place where the policemen with their fearsome wooden staffs were a welcome, not chastening sight.

We were glad to get on to the train. But Agra was no picnic either — a thoroughly depressing place, being more rural than Delhi but every bit as squalid and dusty, and seething with miniscule trades. Recycling is a way of life in India. And, where the tourists go, hustling.

The Taj Mahal is a lovely place, mostly for its setting beside a wide river facing rice paddies, but the hordes of skinny boys who hawk books of cheap postcards on commission got me — and get everyone — down.

I am not in the habit of ignoring other human beings when they address me in the street or pluck at my sleeve. But you have to learn this habit when you are in India or you would quickly, as distinct from slowly, go mad. I could keep it up for hours sometimes, but my resolve would weaken eventually and then the best thing was to go indoors somewhere

until I was again hardhearted and stony-faced enough to ignore the hawkers and the beggars.

This is hardest of all but most necessary on station platforms, where a beggar can be born, live and expire in dire and familiar poverty.

Though Indian trains are always on time, you might have to wait an hour for yours. Of course, if twenty people are circling around you it's not you they're round but your dirty small-denomination notes, and it's not them that's round you but the beggar in them.

Later, at Jamshedpur station we had a good conversation with a small boy of eight or nine — he wasn't sure — years. He travels the trains on a 700 mile stretch of railway begging between his home village and Jamshedpur steel town, bringing stuff home to his nine siblings and, very occasionally, going to school.

When the train arrived he turned into a — rather churlish — beggar again, and we turned into almsgivers. To avoid unseemly jealous squabbles it is best to give to your favourite worthy cause just as your train is leaving.

To my shame I didn't realise that the beggars are actually starving hungry most of the time until a drunk Indian "businessman" we met on one journey ostentatiously doled out the chapatis in his "tiffin" box to some children who literally screamed with joy at his munificence. Which goes to prove that, while India is self-sufficient in food, you don't

have to be starving to be very hungry indeed.

If you are disinclined to hand over your very useful small-denomination notes at the station, go through your rucksack pockets for recyclable old plastic bottles, bits of string or polythene

"The Taj Mahal is a lovely place but the hordes of skinny boys who hawk books of cheap postcards on commission got me — and get everyone — down."

bags and leave those behind when you get on the train, as the hawkers can and will use them to package their wares.

THE trip to Agra was thoroughly depressing for the reason mainly that it drove home something I hadn't wanted to believe and still can't quite believe — that there is not a

bit of northern India which is not at least 80% squalid and desperately poor. All that variety of poverty I'd marvelled over in Delhi emerged as what it is — not a million fascinating trades and gradations but, by anyone's standards of decency, 80% ugly, monotonous misery.

Until today my brain simply hadn't believed what my eyes were seeing. Now, with the overwhelming weight of evidence, I am just starting to believe.

I described before how the Delhi cab drivers would, for instance, cold-bloodedly run a skinny cycle-rickshaw man off the road. Bastards! you might think.

In fact, the cab drivers rent their cars for about a fiver a day and pay for all the petrol they use. Anything they make on top they keep and that will be very little, given that, for example, tourists who pay over the odds still pay a fraction what they'd pay in Britain for a ride.

None of them will ever be able to afford a car, and they live in the one they rent.

They park it in the hotels' car parks and sleep there waiting to be summoned by the doorman on a tannoy and, whatever the hour, hurry up combing their hair, having just climbed into the front seat from their bed on the back.

From Delhi which was dry and hazy with pollution and that stinking burning rubber smell we flew to Calcutta with no great hopes of its being better.

Next week: Calcutta and southern Bihar

Chartism: when workers fought for democracy

The world's first ever General Strike

Gary Scott continues his series on the Chartists. The Chartist movement, founded in 1836, fought for votes for working-class men, for annual elections to parliament, and for other demands to widen parliamentary democracy. At that time, when the permanent, unelected state machine was still flimsy, these demands added up to a claim for working-class power. The Chartists organised two mass petitions for their demands, in 1839 and 1841, both of which were rejected. Following that, sections of the movement turned to direct action — armed uprising (as in Newport in 1839) and a General Strike (as in 1842). Then the movement swung back towards peaceful methods, with the Land Plan, which sought to win a secure livelihood for working-class people by reclaiming the land.

THE result of the violence of 1839 and the General Strike of 1842 was the disassociation of the respectable middle classes from Chartism.

After the 1842 General Strike Engels was to write that "Chartism was purely a working man's cause, freed from all bourgeois elements".

Towards the end of 1841 the Complete Suffrage Movement was

established by Birmingham radical Joseph Sturge. It opposed the violence of 1839 and favoured an alliance with the middle classes.

Many of the moderates, including those involved in the Complete Suffrage Movement, diverted their energy to the Anti-Corn Law League.

The Corn Laws (laws restricting imports of corn) were opposed not only by sections of the middle classes but also by the working classes who believed the Corn Laws to be the cause of high bread prices. The main body of the Chartists were hostile towards the Anti-Corn Law League, believing it to be a diversion from campaigning for the Charter.

The 1843 Chartist Convention, meanwhile, approved the outline of what was to be the Chartist Land Plan. Devised by Feargus O'Connor,

it involved working people clubbing together to buy land which would be given to the winners of a lottery of the subscribers. It was seen as a means of settling the unemployed on the land. Ultimately it was an attempt to return common land taken away from the people through Enclosure Acts.

It represented a desire to return to a preindustrial precapitalist society.

Speaking to Rochdale Chartists in 1839 O'Connor articulated his dream as follows:

"The people ought to have a portion of their native soil, and the poor squalid wretches who are put in close rooms and noxious alleys of Manchester should have the power of turning out from them and enjoying the invaluable blessings of the sun and the air... The land belonged to the people, those who by their labour

and capital cultivated it have a right to its production, but no man had a right to more than his share of the soil itself, which upon every principle of justice belonged equally to all the inhabitants of the country... The labourers ought to possess the earth."

Opponents of the Chartists poured scorn on the Land Scheme and there was opposition to it from within the movement. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to see the Land Scheme as a utopian experiment that was bound to fail.

In the mid 1840s, however, there existed among the urban population a strong desire to escape the exploitation and alienation of the factory, the mine and the mill and gain a sense of independence through living on the land.

Many workers had chosen to emigrate to countries like America where land was widely available. In America settlements had been created based on the ideas of the French utopian socialist Fourier. Groups of workers in Chartist strongholds in the Nottingham area and parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire had established allotment societies to alleviate poverty.

Given the already existing hunger for the land, the Land Company experienced steady growth. The scheme got underway in 1845 and during the first eighteen months 13,000 members joined and £20,000 was taken in subscriptions.

Impending economic crisis in 1847 and the threat of unemployment and a fall in wages coincided with growth in the Land Company as workers saw it as a means of escape.

In May 1847 alone more than £10,000 was received in subscriptions and it was in May 1847 that the first Chartist estate was opened at Heronsgate.

By August 1847 there were eighty-six branches of the Land Company in the north, forty-eight in the Midlands, eighty-nine in the south and twenty-four in London.

Faced with insurmountable problems the Land Company was to be on the verge of collapse by the winter of 1847.

It had been faced with the practical problem of settling on the land urban workers with no agricultural experience or knowledge.

The press continually attacked O'Connor and his scheme and some allottees joined in the attack, demanding security and compensation.

Sir Benjamin Holt, MP for Marylebone demanded a government inquiry into the Land Company. The Select Committee found the Company illegal, its management chaotic and it was on the brink of insolvency.

Subscription to the Land Company dried up and complaints continued. Attempts were made to raise rents to pay interest on mortgages but they failed.

In 1851 the Company was finally dissolved by an Act of Parliament.

The Newport uprising

MANY Chartists carried arms to be used in self defence, and some were prepared for insurrection. Chartist drilling took place in Yorkshire, the Midlands and the north-east. Arms were manufactured and sold in many parts of the country.

The day after the rejection of the first Chartist petition a manifesto was issued by the Chartist Convention that contained the following:

"Shall it be said fellow countrymen, that four millions of men, capable of bearing arms and defending their country against every foreign assailant, allowed a few domestic oppressors to enslave and degrade them?... We have resolved to obtain our rights 'peacefully if we may, forcibly if we must', but woe to those who begin the warfare with the millions, or who forcibly restrain their peaceful agitation for justice — at one signal they will be enlightened to their error and in one brief moment destroyed."

There was an armed Chartist

uprising in Newport in November 1839. It was well planned and amounted to much more than a demonstration.

It would have seemed that an uprising in South Wales at the time would receive enough support to ensure its success. There already existed in the area a tradition of "physical force" tactics. In 1831 an uprising had taken place at Merthyr and in 1834 colliers had turned to the tactic of blowing up the mines of coal owners who failed to meet their demands.

Another factor in the Chartists' favour was the weakness of the army in South Wales compared with other industrial areas where Chartism was strong.

The leaders of the Newport Uprising were Zephaniah Williams, William Jones and John Frost. Frost was described by Tyneside Chartist Robert Lowery as "the last man in the Convention that I should ever have expected to be connected with such a proceeding. His language was ever mild, though firm and in no way did he appear to favour the spirit of violence."

He was the ex-mayor of Newport

and one of the most important spokespersons in the Chartist Convention. On 1 January 1839, he had condemned the extravagance of the monarchy — it cost the taxpayer £510,000 a year. In his speech he noted that Queen Victoria had twelve grooms of her bed chamber, each costing £10,000 annually. Why, he asked, did the queen require twelve? And what did they do for their money?

The time chosen for the uprising was 3 November. At this time of the year, around the time of Guy Fawkes Night, there was traditionally a great deal of violence. It was thought that the sound of muskets being fired would be mistaken for fireworks and the forces of law and order would be stretched.

They planned to gather their forces at Newport before marching to Monmouth gaol to secure the release of Henry Vincent, one of the most influential Chartists in the West Country.

Frost's detachment, made up of 5,000 people, mainly miners, set off before the other two columns that were to be led by Zephaniah Williams and William Jones.

Next week: 1848 and after



Presentation of the 1842 Chartist petition

The 1842 General Strike

THE 1842 General Strike was the first General Strike to take place anywhere in the world. It affected twenty-three counties between July and September. The eye of the storm was the North Staffs coalfield and the Potteries, where there had already existed a strong radical culture.

At Longton in North Staffs rioting had taken place in 1839 against the new police force. Arms were sold and there were barricades in the street.

North Staffordshire Chartists had been involved in a wide range of social and political activity including Chartist tea parties and balls and political meetings of Chartist controversy, tending to support Feargus O'Connor and those Chartists favouring "physical force" methods. They disrupted Anti-Corn Law League meetings, opposed church rates and intervened at a meeting organised to congratulate the Queen on a royal birth. In July 1842, they took over a public meeting in Tunstall called to consider the need for barracks in the town and defeated the proposal.

Chartist lecturers often toured the area and in July 1842 there were eight National Charter Association branches in the area federated in a Potteries District Council. At its peak there may have been something approaching 1,000 members in the area.

The strike took place against a background of economic depression. The summer of 1842 was the worst depression of the century. Trade was at a low ebb, the workhouses were overcrowded, wages were low and prices were high. Unemployment in some towns was as high as 50% and large sections of the working class was on the verge of starvation.

The employers responded to the economic depression by attempting to impose wage cuts on the workers of up to 25%. Spontaneous strikes took place in most industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales in response to the wage cuts.

It began as a strike by colliers against wage reductions at Longton in the potteries in early June and spread throughout the North Staffs coalfields. Despite the background of economic depression and mass unemployment the striking colliers were in a strong position —

without coal to fire the kilns the pottery industry would halt.

The strike quickly spread to other areas as more employers attempted to force wage cuts on their workforce. The strike spread to the textile towns of Lancashire and Cheshire.

By 11 July a strike committee had been set up in the North Staffs area to co-ordinate the strike action. Throughout the next two weeks hundreds of colliers roamed through the districts turning out other pits and stopping the colliery engines by raking out the fires of the boiler and pulling out the plus. Almost all the potteries were forced to close for lack of fuel.

By 18 July the strikers were making demands of their own such as four shillings a day for an eight-hour working day, plus a free allowance of coal, weekly payment in cash and that five nights' work should be paid for six days.

During the strike workers' impoverishment increased, particularly in mining areas. They were often forced to beg or sell their furniture to buy food, living on a diet of potatoes and porridge.

As well as being starved back to work the strikers were faced with state repression.

At the Staffordshire Special Commission in October 1842, 276 people were put on trial, 49 were transported and 116 men and women were imprisoned for offences in connection with the potteries disturbances.

All told, 1,000 arrests were made throughout the country and 749 imprisoned. To speak at a public meeting was enough to be arrested.

As the strike progressed it took on a more political character as Chartist support and involvement increased.

John Mason, speaking at a meeting in Sedgeley, South Staffs, said:

"The laws of this country were made by the aristocracy; that the people had no voice in the election of their representatives; that the laws which were to be obeyed by all should be made by all; that the individuals who worked the hardest received the least, and those that worked the least received the most."

At another meeting in the Potteries John Richards, one of the most promi-

nent Chartists in the area, moved the resolution "that all labour cease until the People's Charter becomes the law of the land." The mass meeting carried the resolution unanimously and the crowd then marched to Longton bringing out on their way the few potters who still remained at work.

Despite being starved back to work, in many areas workers won their demands.

In Lancashire, for example, Richard Pilling told the court that "if it had not been for the late struggle, I firmly believe thousands would have starved to death". Many employers in Lancashire re-opened their mills and withdrew their wage cuts, while the Bolton spinners won an increase.

As a result of the strike trade unionism increased. The Miners' Association in particular was greatly strengthened.

The General Strike of 1842 illustrates the interaction of the political and industrial struggle. After the failure of the political struggle — the rejection of the Chartist petitions by the Government — the Chartists threw their weight behind the industrial struggle and attempted to give it a political character.

Glossary

Enclosure Acts:

Acts of Parliament that were used throughout the 18th and early part of the 19th centuries to transform common land into privately-owned land. This legalised theft of land created a landless proletariat to be exploited by industrialists.

Fouquier (1772-1837):

He identified the main problem with capitalism as being the monotonous and unnatural way in which work was organised. He devised an ideal community in which people carried out a variety of tasks and had plenty of leisure time. One of his proposals was a band of children keeping the sewers in order — since it appeared natural for children to be attracted to filth.

He hoped that rich capitalists would provide the funds for his communities — naturally, they refused. Although he did not live to see any of his communities established, communities based on his principles were to be established in America where land was available.

Jesus was born of a Virgin?

THE sources of this idea are to be found in only two of the Gospels — in one paragraph in Matthew and in two verses in Luke — but both contain points that contradict the idea. John knows nothing of it. And there is something in the Gospel of Mark that implicitly criticises the idea.

Matthew (1:18-25): "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

"But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

"Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus."

This passage follows immediately on the opening section of Matthew, indeed the opening section of the *New Testament*, which is a genealogy: "Ozias begat Joatham" etc. This begins with Abraham and runs through the line of David, the first King of Israel, following his line right down to "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ". What is that doing there? What is the point of opening with a genealogy running through the major figures of Jewish history, particularly its royal line, and culminating in Jesus?

First of all, it is clearly making a political claim for the Jesus figure. Here is someone standing in the line of all Jewish history and indeed someone of royal blood, someone who perhaps can indeed claim to be King of the Jews and who in that capacity may be expected to do something about Jewish national aspirations in a situation of Roman occupation.

Secondly, what sense can we make of the fact that the genealogy, as is usual, follows the line of descent through the male line? It makes no sense unless we are to assume that Joseph is the father of Jesus. Indeed this is the sense of the passage and the last line in some old Greek manuscripts still in the Vatican does read "and Joseph begat Jesus". The piece quoted above that follows, about the visit from the angel of the Lord, can be removed in its entirety and the text flows perfectly well. It removes the contradiction of two passages side by side, claiming on the one hand a claim through the male line for Jesus back to Abraham and David and on the other hand a virgin birth.

This does not necessarily mean that the passage claiming the virgin birth was inserted after whoever wrote the Gospel of Matthew completed it. It could have equally well been included by the author, who was careless and concerned with making both earthly and prominent political claims for the Jesus figure as well as magical ones.

The relevant verses from Luke are underlined in the following quote. Luke (1:26): "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the virgin's name was Mary.

"And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: thou hast found favour with God. And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

"Then Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Take the piece underlined out and the story runs perfectly well — the passage following relating to the common belief that babies in wombs were in danger from the work of Satan and therefore needed watching over, "overshadowing"; especially pretenders to "the throne of his father David". And "Son of God" is a common enough name for someone so exalted as a King.

But why take it out? Because it is a contradiction. The angel does not say that Mary is pregnant but "thou shalt conceive". So why does she say "I know not a man" when she fully expects to do so in the near future, being "espoused to Joseph"?

Again this does not necessarily mean that this line was inserted in the text after it was completed by the author of Luke. It could just as well be the same clumsy result of attempting to make great claims, political and magical, for the Jesus figure.

Also at 2:48 Luke has Mary say after searching for Jesus and finding him talking with the doctors: "Son, why has thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

And at 3:23-38 Luke again confuses the issue by offering his own, different, genealogy for Jesus at the point of his baptism by John the Baptist. This one also traces him through the male line, repeating not "begat" but "which was the son of" through David and this time right back to "Adam, which was the son of God". It begins "And Jesus began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli".

You can't have it both ways!

Also the Gospel of John which knows nothing of a virgin birth quotes "the Jews" as saying (6:42) "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"

Next week: the Mother of God thinks Jesus is out of his mind



By Rob Dawber

How class divides Britain's Asian communities

By Sab Sanghera

ON the anniversary of John Major's election as leader of the Conservative Party in 1992, a special dinner was held. What was special about this dinner was that the guests were mainly Asian and that they were all multi-millionaires. The dinner cemented an ever closer relationship between a section of the Asian community and the Tories. This is just one instance of a community that is changing.

How significant is that change? This question needs to be addressed. We need to understand these processes of change in order to give a lead to Asian workers and incorporate their struggles into the working-class movement.

Traditionally, it has been assumed that the Asian community is an introverted, close-knit community, determined to preserve its distinct cultures. Asian people are perceived as hard working, religious, determined to attain educational qualifications. The Asian community has, importantly, been viewed as a homogeneous group. Increasingly this is an incorrect label and suggests a lack of will to examine the changes that have taken place over the last 25 years.

It is important to state that for a majority of Asian people the situation has not changed a great deal. Jobs are hard to get, housing is poor, and racism and fascism are rife. But in so many ways the situation is different to that of the '50s or '60s.

During the 1970s and 1980s there was a massive decline in manufacturing industry, particularly in those parts of the country where there were large Asian communities, for example in the West Midlands. This led to massive male unemployment; indirectly it led to a greater number of Asian women seeking work for the first time, Indian women particularly. Amongst Muslim women, there was greater cultural resistance. Indian women are twice as likely to be economically active as Pakistani women.

Most of these women were employed at very poor wages and in sweatshop conditions, by Asian businessmen. The wages were the worst anywhere, but Asian women worked in such places because they did not have to speak English there.

At the same time, there was an expansion of Asian businessmen into the retail sector. Often there was simply no alternative for an Asian extended family but to make a shop viable through sheer hard work.

Things have changed with the emergence of a very wealthy Asian section of society able to diversify into other areas such as manufacturing. Self-employment in the Asian community is higher than in any other section of British society. By 1991, one in six members of the Asian community were self-employed.

Indian restaurants now employ more people than the steel and coal industries! The point to emphasise here is that there is a small minority fast becoming millionaires, while Asian workers continue to be massively exploited. Now it seems there are even trade wars and violence between Asian capitalists, as in Bristol recently, competing for huge sums.

The evidence shows that, by contrast with the '50s and '60s, there is a big gap between rich and poor within the Asian



With the increase in female employment, Asian women are likely to challenge their traditional role

community. There is a sharp divergence of class interest.

There is now an Asian business club that meets regularly to establish closer links between the Asian community and the Tories, and which raises large amounts of money to donate to the Tories. There are 100 millionaire Patels alone in this country!

As the 1991 Census showed, the proportion of "entrepreneurs" (i.e. people with businesses that employ other people) within the Asian community is much higher than in any other category.

This class division is reflected in voting patterns in the Asian community. In 1974 90% of all Asians voted Labour. By 1992, that figure had declined to 67%; votes for the Tories had increased proportionately.

When Asian people first came to Britain they were not only poor, but expected to be treated badly in terms of the — often very menial — jobs they did. They identified themselves with the Labour and trade union movement, which were perceived within the Asian community as organisations that were there to help working-class people. At the beginning of the '70s, an Asian person was much more likely to be a member of a trade union than a white person, despite the hostility that Asian people

encountered from some in the trade union movement.

Class is now a major factor in the identity of Asian people. Two years ago fights broke out in Blackburn between groups in the Asian community, both groups being Muslim. Although a number of factors were in play, one of the main ones was the Pakistani Muslims' belief that the Indian

Muslims had all the power and wealth, while they had nothing.

Another, more complex, issue is that of the extended family. During the '50s and '60s there was a strong emphasis on retaining old family values during what was anticipated to be a short time in Britain. The migrants had been attracted to Britain as a place to earn a decent living, but they tended to feel that they would eventu-

ally go home to their country of origin. Incidentally, this explains why racism was challenged only on a minimal basis.

The change came in the early '70s. Asian workers began to challenge their employers on better conditions, pay and trade union rights.

The first generation of British-born Asians had a very different outlook to their parents. The slogan of the '70s was: "Here to stay, here to fight". It was felt that Britain did owe us something, a decent home, a job, education. Younger

Asians began to look outwards more and to make demands for resources and facilities.

The starting point of this process was the high profile action taken by Asian community workers in disputes like Imperial Typewriters and Grunwicks.

They laid to rest a myth within the trade union movement that Asian workers were passive. It showed us that struggle could achieve something. More importantly, those disputes also attracted support from white workers, and that was important in terms of the arguments within the Asian community about what level of support they could expect from their white counterparts.

Central to the retention of community values was the family, and one feature of the changes taking place within the Asian community is the pressure being brought to bear on the extended family.

One of the trends in recent years is the number of young Asian people leaving home either to get a job or go to college. The net effect that been that those young people have started to ask some very important questions, particularly about the role of women and the aptness of traditional, arranged marriages. When this is combined with a greater resolve by younger Asians to speak up then other questions — questions about sexuality, sexual abuse, child abuse — start to get a hearing.

Ultimately, this will have to lead to a debate about the role of the extended family and its true worth. It is my belief that if the extended family is to survive it will have to change very dramatically. Although the extended family has built up community support, it has also been a very reactionary tool, particularly in the oppression of women and lesbians and gays.

Of course, the extended family is used by other people within the community to maintain the role of religion: going to the temple or mosque is very much a family affair. It is certainly true to say that religion's influence among young non-Muslim Asians has declined, although many youth might view themselves as Sikhs or Hindus for cultural rather than religious reasons.

In the Muslim community there is a more complicated situation, because of the Rushdie affair, and the feeling that Muslims are under attack. Religion within the Asian community is deliberately intermingled by certain people with culture, and consequently people are sometimes perceived as religious zealots when they are seeking to defend their community.

Finally, of course, there is the debate about what constitutes "Asian". Increasingly, this term will only have a general relevance; the fact is that there are a number of very different groups and classes.

For example, Kenyan and Ugandan Hindus are likely to have a very different economic background, expectations, existence to Bangladeshis. Even Indian and Pakistani identity can be said to be too broad, as Sikhs from India are much more likely to identify themselves with Muslims from Pakistan than with Hindus from India. This is why I believe the usefulness of the term "Asian" is very limited, and increasingly the way we view the Asian community will not be as a homogeneous group of people, but as a community that is very varied — a community where, increasingly, the main determinant, although not the only one, will be class.

"The first generation of British-born Asians had a very different outlook to their parents. The slogan of the '70s was: 'Here to stay, here to fight'."



Lily Tomlin and Tom Waits play waitress and chauffeur

Not to win, but to struggle



Matt Cooper
reviews
Short Cuts

Directed by
Robert Altman

SHORT CUTS begins with the sound of helicopters. They are flying over

Los Angeles, spraying insecticide to contain the fly population. People hurry indoors to avoid the chemicals the authorities have told them are safe, because no one trusts the authorities. The scene is a throwback to 1970 and Altman's most famous film, *M*A*S*H*.

*M*A*S*H* was a remarkable and groundbreaking film in many ways. Set in a mobile army field hospital in the Korean war, the film intertwined characters and

stories. Just as in life there were many different "stories" going on at one time, and any individual is involved in many stories, each with a different set of characters. This is a structure that Altman has used since and to great effect, but probably never on a grander scale and with more success than in *Short Cuts*. It is based on eight Raymond Carver short stories, one poem and one extra story of Altman's own invention (which is mainly to supply the soundtrack

to the film from within). Nine sets of characters drift in and out of each other's lives, interacting with each other in chaotic and unexpected ways.

*M*A*S*H* portrayed people fighting back, rebelling to be human in a dehumanising situation. It was the film of an optimist, but this film broods in the shadow of a pessimistic mind. It is as if the Korean war could not destroy the human soul, but the future graphically displayed by Los Angeles is a far greater alienating force (I'd say this is capitalism, but Altman, I'm sure, sees it in more general terms).

To even hint at the story of a film that clocks in at over three hours and has twenty-two major characters and more storylines than a year of British film production is impossible. Life is shown from the bottom to the top — from a waitress and chauffeur living in the trailer park to the rich and successful of Beverley Hills.

The main inspiration for the film can be summed up by Carver's poem, *Lemonade* about a child who drowns whilst going to buy some lemonade. What if, the grandfather asks, he had not wanted lemonade? What if there were no lemons? What if there were no Safeways? Then the child would still be alive. Loss, the poem and the film say, is hard to

deal with because it is so meaningless. Chains of accident and coincidence dominate our lives.

All of this sounds very depressing but the film isn't bleak. Altman might be misanthropic (and he seems to particularly dislike his male characters), but he allows his characters a quota of hope and resilience. Most don't give up, they try to survive, and it's not a question of whether they will make it since, if you struggle for life, that is making it.

If we must die

THIS poem by the American black Communist, Claude McKay, was written in the second decade of this century.

First published in the *Liberator* magazine, edited by Trotsky's friend and translator Max Eastman, it was once immensely popular in black America. It is about lynching and the fight against it.

In those days the lynching of black men — maybe for the crime of looking "disrespectfully" at a white man — was regular and frequent in the USA. It could be done with impunity.

This poem was used by ministers in the churches of black people as a text with which to end their sermons.

"It was repeated in negro clubs, negro schools and at negro mass meetings", as McKay said in his autobiography.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, Oh let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

Oh, kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

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1.00pm Wednesday 16 March
Goldsmith's College SU committee room

Education school — Socialists and the Labour Party

1.00 — 5.30 Sunday 20 March
Details: 071-639 7965

"Elections in South Africa — what should socialists say?"

7.30 Wednesday 23 March
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross

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Lunchtime Monday 14 March
University of Central England

CANTERBURY

"Students and the fight for socialism"

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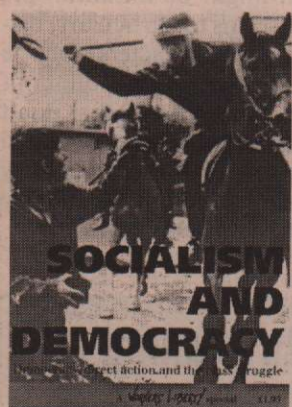
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OPINION

Anti-racism cannot be 'non-political'!

LETTER

ON 28th February, Lambeth Anti-Racist Alliance held an unconstitutional AGM. I arrived at the meeting late not having received any notice for the

A motion to campaign for Labour in the May elections was ruled out of order because it conflicted with the constitution which states that the organisation is 'non-party political.'

meeting. One other AWL supporter hadn't either, making us the only two people who hadn't received notices. The officers admitted they hadn't sent them out. Why? They did not have the funds for two let-

ters...

But worse, the notices that had been sent out didn't include motions — where the constitution clearly states they should. The same excuse, "lack of funds", was used again. However, the officers could have delayed sending out final notices until just after the deadline for motions — 31 January — thereby keeping within their budget and the constitution.

In my absence a motion calling on the Anti-Racist Alliance to campaign for Labour in the May election was ruled out of order because it conflicted with the ARA national constitution which states that the organisation is "non-party political".

Lambeth ARA's constitution states that it "will oppose racism and fascism by all means possible". Yet not, it seems, by campaigning and voting for



Isn't it about time ARA organised non-sectarian, political campaigns that will unite black and white youth?

Labour. This sort of sectarianism helped the fascist councillor in Tower Hamlets, Derek Beackon,

get elected last year.

I will be writing to the officers of the national ARA demanding they look into

the affair and calling for the re-running of Lambeth ARA's AGM.

Geoff Ward

Leaflet claims student demo "would bring down government"

The SWP hypes it up

EYE ON THE LEFT

By Mark Osborn

"A NATIONAL wave of [student] occupations and a march on parliament would stop the Tories in their tracks and bring the government down," said a Socialist Worker leaflet before a student demo on 23 February.

This was not just a matter of a wild speech made by an SWP student after a pint of beer and a line of speed. It was written down, and probably by the party centre. It is a considered opinion.

Trotsky taught us to call

things by their proper names, and the proper name for this was and is *potty*.

The question has to be asked — are these people barking mad? The answer is a qualified no. The qualification is that they may be in the process of going mad, politically.

The SWP asked their student members to believe that a national wave of occupations — by students! — can bring down Major's government. After the summer of 1971, when the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupied, thousands of workers joined a series of factory occupations. In the next two years occupations became very com-

mon. Some were directed against Edward Heath's Tory government. Heath's government did not fall because of factory occupations. Heath was eventually defeated at the polls by Labour, under tremendous pressure from the miners' strike of 1974. That Tory government had been battered by years of workers' action and even then Heath had to miscalculate, believing he could win the election, before the government was "brought down".

Ruling classes, particularly the British ruling class, do not just give up! They have tremendous reserves — in the media, the state, in industry.

In particular they do not just give up because of a student demonstration!

Now the SWP, or at least its leaders, know this. They know very clearly that what they say and write is politically idiotic.

So why do they do it? To recruit raw youth by incoherently appealing to a gut militancy.

In order to recruit their leaders are becoming more and more — cynically — hysterical.

I am told by an ex-member that *Socialist Worker's* editor, Chris Harman, now talks to internal SWP meetings of thousands of them being in concentration camps within

the next few years unless a mass SWP is built. Does he believe it? Harman wants to whip up the younger student SWPers to go out and recruit. But the technique is a double edged weapon, as the Healyite WRP, which eventually went crazy for real, found out.

During the miners' action at the end of 1992 the SWP called for an all-out General Strike "now". They used it like an advertising agency slogan, dropping it after a few weeks when it did not sell. Their leaders did not believe it then and references to it are now censored in their internal discussions. They made the call in order to recruit and they did not care that they were miseducating people, or that they were telling rubbish to the mass labour movement.

As part of such a move the SWP's leaders are once again marginalising the SWP's more experienced members (it happened in the 1970s too: see the article by Jim Higgins in *SO* 589). The SWP's leaders are looking to the youth to "carry the turn". Any opposition is verbally terrorised and threatened with expulsion. A month ago some oppositionists were expelled and others threatened with expulsion because they wanted to start a cultural journal!

SWP meetings are increasingly closed to socialists in other organisations. These "anti-party" people might argue against the line! Nothing must stand in the way of the next new recruit. Not even politics, especially politics!

If other organisations get in the way the SWP will now even use violence: they attacked two of our comrades at last year's Marxism 93 event.

We have seen this sort of thing before — in Gerry Healey's WRP. In the end they were taking money from Libya and other disgusting governments.

The Healyites started as a serious outfit, pledged to socialism. They went mad trying to bypass the working class. Colonel Gaddafi was only one of the routes they tried.

The lesson from Gerry Healey is that there is no artificial way, by stirring up layers of radical youth, to build a mass workers' party. What is required is serious work in the mass organisations of the working class — including the youth of course — allied to a policy of turning the youth to the workers' movement. Learn the lessons from Healy, Tony Cliff before you ride the District Line to Barking!

Sheffield council: strike together on 10 March, and stay together!

By Chris Croome, shop stewards' organiser, Unison no.2 branch

THIS THURSDAY, 10 March, will see a one-day council-wide strike in Sheffield against the Labour council's plans to declare mass compulsory redundancies or impose a pay cut.

But, tragically, a 3000-strong mass meeting of UNISON APT&C members on Tuesday 8 March threw away the chance to build a coherent united fight back across all the council departments.

The council will try to divide and rule by threatening huge job cuts in some sections unless all council workers accept a pay cut. We need to ballot all UNISON APT&C members on the principle of no compulsory redundancies and no pay cuts, to get a united response.

Instead, the one-day strike this week is due to be followed by departmental action against compulsory redundancy notices.

This will leave those departments facing compulsory redundancies isolated in the face of the council's attempts to bludgeon workers into "saving jobs" by accepting a pay cut, as happened last year in Sheffield. This danger is highlighted by the decision of the Land and Planning and DEEU shop stewards' committees to campaign for acceptance of the council's pay cut after they had already won an 80 per cent ballot majority for all-out strike action against compulsory redundancies in their departments.

The people responsible for wasting the chance at the 8 March mass meeting to build a united fight back are not only some of the right-wingers who pushed through a pay cut last year, but also members of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) who have recently

been elected on a left-wing ticket to the two leading positions in the ex-NALGO branch.

The SWP's "revolutionary" opposition to ballots, almost on principle, leaves them allied with right-wingers who do not think any united council-wide fight back is possible. The SWP gets to look militant, with talk of unofficial action, the right wing gets off the hook and gives the council a divided workforce. The elementary trade-union principle of a united fight back loses out.

In the afternoon after the big mass meeting, the second department ballot result came in, from the Department of Design and Building Services. They narrowly voted no to industrial action, on a poor turnout. The right-wing's strategy of industrial action department-by-department, the same strategy that the SWP had helped defend that morning, became a dead duck.

What happens next? The councillors may put off decisions until after the council elections in May. It is not clear what they will do.

What is clear is that the chance of balloting for effective, legal, industrial action, with strike pay, has been blown. If the council issues compulsory redundancy notices, there will be a 24 hour strike followed by a members' meeting.

At that meeting it will be necessary to go for the maximum unofficial action which can be won. But unofficial action is not preferable to official action. There is no strike pay. The national union leadership will instruct members to return to work.

And there is a real danger that departments facing redundancies, like Land and Planning and Design and Building Services, will opt for departmental pay cuts unilaterally as a way out, given that

there is no ballot across the whole membership for united action.

That would break up the union branch as a coherent organisation, and set members against each other.

All is not yet lost. The mass meeting did vote against pay cuts and for the one-day strike on 10 March. We can and must work for sufficient unofficial strike action to win. But a major chance has been missed.

SWP and right wing in unholy alliance to block unity

AT THE meeting on 8 March, the SWP spoke both against a pay cut, and against a ballot of all members for strike action.

Annette Carey, branch secretary and an SWP member, said that "we need a campaign, not a ballot".

It was a clear from the mood of the meeting that there was a very good chance of getting a solid vote for a ballot of all members. But SWP-inspired manipulation of the agenda, and SWP speeches against adding to the existing "strategy" of departmental industrial action, derailed the meeting.

After the meeting, ordinary members were coming up to me and saying, "That was a stitch-up". It was - and it was done in the same way that the old right-wing branch leadership used to stitch up meetings, by a gerrymandered agenda and procedural bullshit.

The meeting's vote against a pay cut, and to reaffirm the call for a one-day strike across the whole branch, was very positive, and a huge step forward compared to how things went last year, but the real potential of the meeting was

squandered by the SWP. This basic strategy had already been agreed six weeks ago.

Increased taxes on Sheffield's workers?

THE COUNCIL has said that a continuation of the existing 3.25 per cent pay cut "... would enable the City Council... to reduce substantially or, at best, eliminate the risk of compulsory redundancy of APT&C employees..."

They were not prepared to offer any guarantee of no compulsory redundancies; and the council's position was conditional on them being allowed by the Government to raise the council tax higher, to get another £8 million. In other words, higher taxes for fewer services.

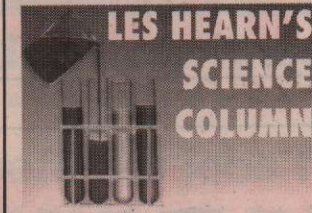
Socialists should argue not for higher council taxes, but for Labour to campaign to get the necessary money from the Government. But the local press is backing the council's call for higher council taxes - and so is the SWP.

An SWP leaflet given out on 8 March says that "Our stand has forced the council to go back to the Government for another £8 million. But the budget gap is £38 million. Mike Bower [the council leader] and the Labour councillors should be standing alongside us, fighting for the full amount".

But the council have not asked the Government for any extra money. They have asked the Government's permission to levy an extra £8 million council tax. For the union to support such tax rises can only undermine the potential for uniting with service-users against the cuts.

The SWP have become unbelievably disoriented since they took up their branch officer positions.

Dam lies and overseas aid



THE Pergau dam is not the only "bad buy" foisted on the developing world by "aid-giving" Western and Eastern governments. Dams seem to be a favoured type of project when it comes to "helping" developing countries solve their energy problems and they are frequently linked to construction companies in the donor country.

While the dams are of immense value to those companies, they often fail to come up to expectations in the beneficiary country. Two dams in Sri Lanka epitomise this: the Victoria and Samanalawewa dams in the central highlands.

The Victoria dam, which attracted the largest British aid contribution until the Pergau dam, has never produced enough electricity since its opening by Thatcher in 1985.

and two years after its virtual completion, the Samanalawewa dam cannot be filled because of large scale leaks.

The problem with the Victoria dam seems mainly to lie with over-optimistic estimates of rainfall. There is also a problem with leaking from its bed. Due to the great pressure of water, alternative routes for escape of water frequently reveal themselves as dams are filled. The Victoria bed required extensive grouting two years before its opening. The dam seems likely only to produce some 60% of the planned electricity. On the minus side, some 30,000 people lost their land as about 28 square kilometres of fertile coffee, cocoa, coconut and rubber growing land, the market garden of Kandy (Sri Lanka's second city) were flooded.

Before the British involvement in planning, Sri Lanka had intended to use the dam to irrigate new farmland with electricity as a by-product. British aid officials and engineers persuaded Sri Lanka to flood a much greater area for what now seems an illusory gain in electricity. Britain gave £117 million in aid provided that British firms got the contract for building the Victoria dam (a major product of the last Labour government!).

If the Victoria dam was a disappointment, the Samanalawewa dam is a disaster. In the early 1980s, Sri Lanka said it would like the British firms building the Victoria dam to take on the Samanalawewa project. Under Tebbit, Britain invested some £100 million in tied aid, though Japan was the major participant in the construction, also supplying tied aid. The scheme was to use the 300 metre difference in heights between two nearby rivers to generate electricity. A hundred metre high, 500 metre long embankment of rocks, with an impermeable clay core, would be built across

the upper river, the Walawe Ganga. A steep tunnel would take water from behind this dam down to a power station which would empty into the lower river, the Katupal Oya.

Unfortunately, the area is limestone country, known for its hidden caverns and underground water channels. Within months, the British company, Balfour Beatty, had hit the water table, and a tunnel roof collapsed and the entire flow of the Walawe Ganga poured through the tunnel, drying out paddy fields, streams and wells for miles around and for several months. An expensive lining of concrete to the tunnel solved the problem.

When the dam began to be filled in 1991, an enormous leak sprang in the abutment of the dam wall. Apparently, the problem had been expected but underestimated. No real survey had been undertaken five years earlier. A mile-long 12-foot wide tunnel was excavated and lined in the abutment: from this, 50 kilometres of holes were drilled and 15,000 tonnes of cement grouting injected into the limestone. Unfortunately, this did not solve the problem.

As the dam was filled to the level where it could start to generate electricity, another leak, this time of 7000 litres per second, enough to fill an Olympic swimming pool in less than a minute, sprang from the flank above the leaning abutment. The pressure of water was bursting the hillside at the dam's seams. Within hours, some 50,000 tonnes of rock and soil had been washed in the lower river. Local people fled, fearing landslides, until the water level had been reduced. The leak is now enough to fill the aforesaid swimming pool in over two minutes.

The outlook now is that hardly any electricity can be generated in the dry season because the dams cannot be filled enough to store extra water. The plan now is to carpet the bottom with about two million tonnes of clay, which will cost about £30 million and take two years. Even this may not solve the problem. The result of the West's aid to this poor country is to keep companies such as Balfour Beatty (donors to the Tories) in business while lumbering it with two massive white elephants.

Apology:

In last week's science column, (Should a 59 year old woman give birth?) we inadvertently omitted part of a sentence, rendering the remainder somewhat misleading. The second paragraph should have read:

"We have had a 59 year old British woman giving birth to twins after treatment in Italy (opportunities for ageism, sexism, anti-Italian prejudice): two "black" women opting for donated "white" eggs, one to avoid her child suffering racism, the other because there are no "black" eggs available (racism, displays of crass ignorance about genetic similarity); and now tales about eggs from aborted fetuses (the "yuk" factor substitutes for sensible discussion)."

In Brief

THE STRIKE over victimisation at JS Chinn near Coventry is over. On Friday last week 3 strikers started scabbing. A strikers meeting then voted to return to work. This is a serious defeat.

Senior steward John Watkins is still sacked.

The employers throughout the west Midlands engineering industry will be emboldened. A new wave of attempted victimisations of union activists can now be expected.

Postal workers in Newcastle are balloting for industrial action against the disciplining of four UCW members last December.

British Gas plan 5,000 new redundancies. UNISON and the GMB should organise a co-ordinated campaign of strike action to defeat it.

Missed opportunity for UNISON

By a delegate

UNISON'S FIRST local government conference since the merger, on the weekend of 5 March narrowly voted down proposals for an immediate ballot for a one day strike over cuts and the pay freeze.

The "Campaign Against Cuts" composite initiated by Socialist Organiser supporters was defeated on a card vote by 366,000 to 317,000 votes. The opposition to the proposal was led by the Service Group Executive who advocated a Day of Action through individual branches running branch ballots "where a legitimate trade dispute exists".

Last year NALGO ran a number of days of action on this basis and each one became more farcical involving fewer and fewer members.

Unfortunately, a number of SWP speakers "supporting" the composite for a national strike ballot spent the time telling conference what a waste of time and what a demoralising experience it is to go through a strike ballot. They spent the time arguing why council workers must take illegal

action and not why the union should ballot the membership on taking national action, which was what the composite was about.

Such talk must have alienated at least some delegates - maybe enough to make the 49,000 vote difference between victory and defeat.

Another composite calling for "a co-ordinated programme of strike action against the Tories pay freeze" and for "the TUC to co-ordinate a one day strike against the pay freeze", was also heavily defeated. Instead a composite from the Executive was overwhelmingly passed. It called for a "vigorous and co-ordinated campaign across the public sector to defeat the pay freeze and to seek the maximum co-ordination of claims.... Industrial action is likely to be necessary to break through the pay policy". The motion finished by instructing the Executive "to draw up plans, in consultation with branches and regions for a rolling programme of general and selective industrial action".

This policy is good as far as it goes. It gives a mandate to campaign against the pay freeze and to

call for strike action. The problem is the policy doesn't go very far. There are no specific proposals for action. The opportunity to use UNISON's local government conference as a launch pad for the start of the pay freeze fightback was missed.

Militant supporters, oddly, proposed a composite calling "upon the TUC to co-ordinate a one day strike of public sector workers", but omitting the proposal in some of the original motions "to ballot all UNISON's local government members for a one day national strike".

Policy was passed that all branches should merge by the end of 1995. The Service Group Executive are now instructed to submit a rule change on this to national conference.

Concerns for democracy and accountability in UNISON were voiced at Unity's fringe meeting on Saturday night. Unity is a journal supported by branches who want to see a fully democratic campaigning UNISON. Friday night saw a well attended meeting sponsored by over twenty branches, discussing the need for a fightback over pay and cuts.

London BT engineers hold strike ballot over jobs

TELECOM

By a Central London BT engineer.

A STRIKE ballot of central London British Telecom engineers is to be held by the National

Communication Union later this month.

The ballot is over the use of contractors in London to do "core" work when there are 1,000 to 1,200 "surplus" BT engineers already.

This could be the first step in a serious fight to save jobs in BT.

Vote yes for jobs fight on the Tube

By a Central Line guard

MEMBERS OF the main union on the London Underground, the RMT, are to ballot for strike action in defence of their track and transport members who have received "voluntary" redundancy notices.

It is vital to go all-out for a massive yes vote to ensure a well supported series of one day strikes. At the same time the RMT should approach the other tube unions, ASLEF and TSSA, with a view to developing a common fight in defence of jobs and for the shorter working week.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

New signs of life

MILLIONS

FOR

THEM



Pay cuts and the sack for us

THE SALARIES and lifestyles of the two rich and powerful bosses pictured on this page are an insult to every worker, every pensioner, and every unemployed person in Britain.

Peter Wood (top), boss of the Direct Line insurance company, got £18 million last year. When that was exposed, he had his salary cut back a bit — and got £24 million in compensation!

The other skunk is Bob Bauman, head of Smith Kline Bauman, the international drug firm. He was paid £21 million last year, and you can bet that a large part of that £21 million came out of the pockets of ordinary working-class taxpayers who pay for what's left of the National Health Service.

Bauman thinks that is still not enough. He had 480 workers sacked last week in order to "improve efficiency".

John Major and Kenneth Clarke have both defended Woods's and Bauman's huge payouts.

"This happens to be a free capitalist country in which companies determine their wages", said Major.

The bosses are free to make millions, while the unemployed, pensioners and the homeless are free to rot. Ambulance workers, nurses, firefighters and other public-service workers are free to be sacked or see their pay

cut, while parasites like Bauman are free to make millions out of the sufferings of the sick.

It's about time that the leaders of the trade unions and Labour Party started a fight back against the Tories and their capitalist friends like Bauman and Woods.

Labour and the trade-unions should be campaigning together to force the Tories out of office.

The first step would be a one-day coordinated national strike against the Tories' pay freeze and in defence of jobs and public services.

Labour should disrupt the Tories' business in Parliament, and campaign with demonstrations, rallies, petitions, leafletting and street stalls against the Tories' free-market barbarism.

At the same time, socialists will campaign to commit the next Labour government to restore and expand the Health Service, education, and other other public services and benefits, and to bring contracted-out services back into the public sector.

These measures can and should be paid for from the incomes of the rich, which have increased so hugely over the last 15 years, and by cutting military spending.

That will not be possible, however, if the commanding heights of industry and finance

are left in the hands of private capitalists. They would quickly wreck a full-employment policy by holding back investments and transferring money out of the country.

Labour must therefore be committed to public ownership of the commanding heights of industry and finance, under workers' and democratic control.

NEITHER wild hyping-up, nor dull resignation. Neither responding to the first signs of new life by shouting "The Baby! Now! Now! Now!", nor saying "Oh well, another miscarriage on the way".

Such is the attitude of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to the small signs now visible of the political situation opening up.

20,000 students marched against grant cuts on 23 February, despite an active campaign against the demonstration by the right-wing Labour leaders of the National Union of Students.

The TUC demonstration against racism on 19 March promises to be huge.

The Tories are more and more discredited. Trade unions are beginning to speak out — cautiously and mildly, so far — against the Labour Party leaders' pink Toryism, and for full employment and the defence of the welfare state.

A number of small industrial disputes have shown a new generation of trade-union militants beginning to emerge. And the debate between the AWL's John O'Mahony and former Labour Party leader Michael Foot this Wednesday, 9 March, on socialism and democracy, reopens areas of labour-movement thinking and debate long frozen over.

The AWL is doing a lot to develop and build on the signs of revival. For this we need money — money to pay for organisers, leaflets, posters, meetings, and the weekly production of Socialist Organiser. We have no wealthy backers, no easy sources of cash: we depend for everything on the sales of this paper and on the contributions of workers, students and Labour activists who believe the cause of workers' liberty should get a hearing.

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