

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

It will be socialism or barbarism!

Inside this week



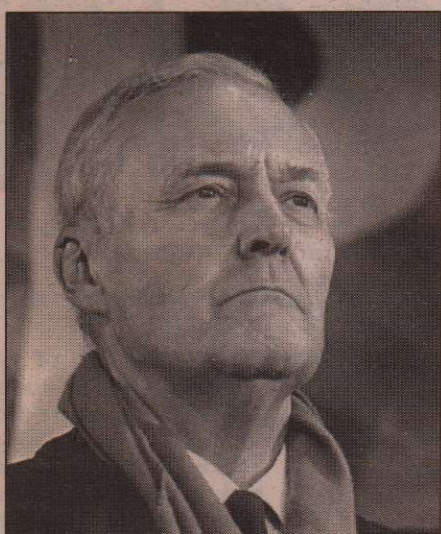
Why Blair doesn't care



Page 3

Police incitement to murder page 4

The life and works of Lindsay Anderson page 10



Tony Benn calls for a crusade

New campaign to save Health Service



WELFARE STATE NETWORK SET UP
● SEE PAGE 3 AND CENTRE PAGES

STUDENTS

Shephard is as bad as Patten

By Liam Conway (NUT)

GILLIAN Shephard, it appears, represents the Government's new face of conciliation and moderation. League tables for SATs at age 11 are not to be introduced until the new tests, compulsory from next year, are bedded down. Recently, the smiling Gillian appeared in a Nottingham primary school praising the state education service and promising talks with those who oppose the Government's plans for education.

But no one should be fooled by appearances. Behind the smile Gillian Shephard is every bit as bad as John Patten. For "bedding down the tests" read "nailing down teachers and pupils." The facts speak for themselves. The Government has no plans to abandon any of its damaging policies.

Opting Out, the Government's gateway to the hell of selection, proceeds unaltered. Class sizes rise and resources diminish as Local Authority provision is slashed because of central government cuts. Teachers' pay remains frozen whilst the prospect of Performance-Related-Pay looms as large as ever.

Worst of all, tests and league tables remain at 7 and 14, and they will become compulsory at 11 next year, with league tables to follow. In fact, the test at 11 is the most dangerous test of all. Even the Labour Party has now noticed that this SAT represents a return to the 11+ in disguise.

If the Government fulfils its threat to force all secondary schools to opt out, the SAT at 11 will lead to misery and lost opportunity for millions of pupils in a selective system of education.

All this makes it rather odd that the NASUWT leadership has backed the use of external markers and has all but welcomed the Government's plans for compulsory tests at age 11.

The NASUWT claims that the final workload issue has been solved by the promise of external markers.

In reality, Nigel DeGruchy, NASUWT General Secretary, has lost touch with what it is like to be a teacher. Marking is only part of the workload problem involved in SATs. Even if you

agree with SATs on educational grounds, any test will mean extra work. And once the tests are "bedded down" there will be heavy pressure on schools to have even more pointless "mock tests" to boost the performance of their schools in the league tables.

Ominously, there are signs that the NUT leadership is wavering over the SATs boycott. After re-election as General Secretary by the skin of his teeth, Doug McAvoy is no longer so keen to act the militant. He and the majority "Broad Left" faction on the National Executive are more interested in cuddling up to Tony Blair and his Oxbridge kitchen cabinet.

Fortunately, McAvoy will not find it easy to call off the boycott. The boycott is strongly supported in schools, where teachers are well aware of the government's intentions.

In fact teachers want something more done about ever-increasing class-sizes, job cuts and the continuing pay freeze, as well as a continuation of the SATs boycott. And, as with SATs, the left must convince teachers that action is the best way to win on all fronts.

Meanwhile, the current Deputy General Secretary campaign has unearthed deep splits within the "Broad Left." Steve Sinnott was their chosen candidate for the election, but Marion Darke, who had agreed at the "Broad Left" meeting not to stand if she did not win their backing, is now seeking nomination for the post at local level. This is common knowledge because three "Broad Left" ex-National Presidents of the union have written to local secretaries complaining about Marion Darke's undemocratic behaviour: pretty rich stuff when you consider that they are all ex-Stalinists.

Still this should be grist to the mill for the left. It gives us the chance to build on recent successes in NUT elections by ensuring that the real left candidate, Mary Hufford, the current Deputy General Secretary, hammers both "Broad Left" candidates in the election this October. It could be a good year ahead for the left, which is now more united, well-organised and clearly thought-out than it has been for many a year. We should not waste our opportunities.

Protests on 12 October, 19 October, 9 November

A living grant for students!

By Alison Brown, National Union of Students Executive

OVER THE next few weeks students will be starting back at Universities after a hard summer of living on no money.

Those entitled to grants — an ever decreasing number — will be collecting their grant cheques of around £680 outside London (reduced by 10% in the last budget). As students can not claim Income Support, this money will have to last until the beginning of next year. To make matters worse, many grant cheques will come late, because local authorities have not adjusted their payment system to the new college timetables.

Once the grant arrives it will barely cover the cost of students' rent. With rent at around £550 a term outside London, students will have £130 to cover food, books, equipment, trav-

el and any social life.

Students are increasingly having to take on low-paid jobs to survive, which places greater stress on their studies. And most students will be forced to take out huge loans simply to live. The average debt for students per year is around £1,000.

The burden of this debt means students orientate totally to the hope of getting a decently paid job when they leave college, and with more graduate unemployment that is getting harder.

The Government's talk of opening up education is empty. Their policies, especially the cuts in benefit rights for students in 1990 and the grant cuts, have left students under enormous financial pressure. They have also excluded thousands of working-class people from any hope of taking up further and higher education.

Labour Party leaders talk about a well trained labour force, and a commitment to

education, but as usual they skirt away from making any promises. They have made it fairly clear that they no longer support the idea of state-funded grants. Instead they are discussing forms of graduate tax, whereby once people finish their education they will pay increased tax. This is a move away from the notion of education as a right.

Labour Students (NOLS), who run the National Union of Students (NUS), dropped their support for student grants last year under pressure from Labour HQ, and have fudged the issue ever since. The Labour Party and NOLS are trying to keep this debate very quiet.

But NUS policy is still for decent grants paid to all students in further and higher education.

Students across the country will be organising action, including a picket of Tory Party Conference in Bournemouth on 12 October and a demon-

stration called by Cumbria and Lancashire Area NUS on 19 October before the national demonstration on 9 November.

This action should be used not only to highlight student poverty and campaign against the Government, but also to put pressure on the Labour Party, locally and nationally, to put itself fully behind students and the right to education for all.

South African students start fees strike

By Alison Brown

STUDENTS AT Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa, are demonstrating and refusing to pay fees. They began these protests after many of them were expelled for owing back rent and fees to the University. The fact that many black students, particularly those from the townships, have been driven into poverty by apartheid has not moved the college authorities.

Exclusions on academic grounds, which are made without giving students a chance to retake their failed year, also discriminate against those black students who have only had access to "Bantu" education before University and therefore require more academic support.

In other areas, specifically at the Vaal Technical, formerly an all-white technical university, black students have been attacked by right-wing white students. The authorities have failed to act.

Students are demanding an end to exclusions on financial grounds, and more academic and financial support for traditionally disadvantaged students, in other words, those who are black and poor.

The demands coming from students to democratise their institutions are also central. The education system can have no chance of eliminating racism with those authorities who ran the colleges under apartheid still in place. Students are calling for representative councils involving students, academics and workers.

Massive changes and huge investment are needed if students are to have a chance to redress the inequalities of the past.

Students in this country should send messages of support to the students at Wits University via WOSA, c/o PO Box 31408, Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg (or fax 010 27 11 337 8423).

Women students

Join the fight to defend the NHS

By Sarah Wellings

AN ANTI-ABORTION organisation called "Labour Life" has recently been targeting student members of the Labour Party in an attempt to organise in student unions.

On abortion rights, as on many other issues, the Labour Party has failed to represent women. The Labour Party allows MPs a free vote on the issue despite Labour Party policy for a woman's right to choose, and they allow this anti-choice group to organise within the Labour Party without producing counter-arguments or publicity.

Tony Blair recently said that he

didn't support a woman's right to choose in certain circumstances, and he couldn't support a woman who chose to have a child on her own.

Women need to demand action from the Labour Party — not just on the legal right to abortion, but on proper abortion facilities in the Health Service.

Over half of the abortions in North Yorkshire are performed in private health care.

Women who can afford to pay for abortions can get them, but those who can't may be forced to return to unsafe methods of abortion or have an unwanted child.

Women's health care is often the first to be attacked in NHS cuts —

for example, research into breast and cervical cancer.

500 women die every week from breast cancer which could be prevented with effective screening. Post-natal and pre-natal facilities suffer.

Women need to be raising these issues and must be central to a campaign in defence of the NHS.

Women students should link up with local campaigns, and build within their colleges for the Women's Campaign lobby of parliament on 6 December.

This will be the start of an active campaign amongst students to help defend the NHS and to promote the funding of women's health projects around the country.

WORKERS' LIBERTY

Public meetings

LONDON

Wednesday 28 September
AWL London Forum:

Ireland after the ceasefire

Speakers: Workers' Press and Sean Matgamna of the AWL
7.30, Lucas Arms, Gray's Inn Road, Kings Cross

Saturday 1 October

The History of American Trotskyism

For details of reading and venue write to London AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
12.00-5.00, South London

NOTTINGHAM

Thursday 22 September

The IRA ceasefire: will it mean peace?

Speakers from: AWL, Militant, TOM
7.30, ICC, Mansfield Road

NEWCASTLE

Thursday 22 September

Ireland after the ceasefire: what next for Irish workers?

Speaker: Elaine Jones
7.30, Rossetti Studios (next to Trent House)

LEEDS

Thursday 29 September

After the IRA ceasefire

7.30, Adelphi Pub

LANCASTER

Monday 26 September

How to beat the racists

8.00, Albert Pub

LEICESTER

Thursday 29 September

After the IRA ceasefire

7.30, Castle Rooms

MANCHESTER

Thursday 29 September

Socialists and the Second World War

8.00, Unicorn Pub, Church Street

SHEFFIELD

Thursday 29 September

The IRA ceasefire, what next for Irish workers?

7.30, SCCAU, West Street

Scrap the immigration laws!

By Mick Duncan

Linda Sewell, a 26-year old black woman from Birmingham, is fighting to be allowed to bring her husband, Dexter, to Britain.

Linda met Dexter while on holiday in Jamaica in 1991. They were married in September 1993.

Linda has had to fly to Jamaica in order to spend her wedding anniversary with her husband.

The Home Office has refused Dexter the right to live in Britain because they say the main purpose of the marriage was to help Dexter emigrate to Britain. They also say that Linda does not earn enough to look after her husband.

Linda's union UNISON are backing her case. For more details phone Mohammed Idrish on 021-551 4518.



Asylum seekers on hunger strike

NINE ALGERIAN detainees, held under the terms of the Immigration Act, currently in Halsar Prison, Gosport, are on hunger strike in protest against their detention.

The hunger strike began on 8 September and the men say they are prepared to die if they are not released. They can no longer move from their beds. The nine say they will be persecuted if they are

returned to Algeria.

The current Immigration Act gives the Home Office powers to detain people without the sanction of any court.

Write demanding the release of the Halsar Nine to Michael Howard, the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1.

More information: contact the Campaign Against the Immigration Act Detentions: 071-254 9701.

Birmingham
Community
Conference

Saturday 19
November

The Union Club,
Perschore Road,
Birmingham

Unions and local Labour Parties say: Labour must pledge to restore the Welfare State

ONE ISSUE overshadows all others in the proposals from trade unions and local Labour Parties to this year's Labour Party conference, beginning in Blackpool on 3 October. It is the Welfare State.

No fewer than 67 motions take up themes summarised in a motion from the giant Transport and General Workers' Union: to "commit the Party at all levels to defend the Welfare State on the basis of... universality of provisions, available at the point and time of need and funded according to ability to pay".

They call for safeguarding and increasing child benefit, increasing the basic state pension to catch up with average earnings, restoring benefits for 16 and 17 year olds, and taxing the rich to pay for it all.

A separate section of 25 motions try to commit Labour to restoring the Health Service, and other motions demand the rebuilding of the Welfare State in areas such as community care, education, and housing.

In short, Labour's rank and file — the whole rank and file, and not just the usual "hard left" minority — is demanding a concerted effort to save and restore the Welfare State.

We will not get that effort from the current Labour Party leadership. Even if all the basic proposals on the Welfare State are voted through — and probably they will be — Tony Blair will continue to fight shy of any clear commitments that might alarm the bankers and pundits whose favour he so much values.

Labour front-bencher Donald Dewar, when questioned persistently on radio last week, specifically refused to make a commitment to universal benefits — benefits like child benefit and the basic state pension, available to all as of right, in contrast to the means-tested benefits which are more like charity doled out by the state to those whom its tests define as the "deserving poor".

And Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown still insists that Labour must make no commitment to increased



Labour's rank and file calls for a campaign for the welfare state. Photo: Mark Salmon

public spending — not even the minimal commitment which John Smith made in the "Shadow Budget" before the 1992 general election.

Blair and his team have no notion of active public campaigning — the sort of campaigning that mobilises people through rallies, demonstrations, lobbies, and industrial action. In their dictionary, a "campaign" is a slick press release, or a clever TV soundbite.

Instead of responding to the clear message from Labour's ranks, they have shuffled the issue of the Welfare State off to a Commission on Social Justice, stacked out with Liberal-Democrats. This Commission is due to produce its recommendations on 24 October — safely after the Labour Party conference.

It is a sorry state of affairs. The greatest achievement of over 150 years of political action by the British labour movement, the Welfare State, is being ripped to shreds, and the Labour leaders quibble and mumble, scared stiff of losing their hard-won reputation as respectable, realistic, and moderate.

What can we do about it? Labour Party members and trade unionists should keep putting in resolutions like those for next month's conference. We should try to make those resolutions as hard-hitting, precise, and difficult to evade as possible.

But resolutions alone will not change things. Nor can the many valuable local campaigns be enough on their own. They do mobilise people, and they do win small victories — saving a hospital ward here, an old people's home there, a nursery somewhere else — but they remain pin-pricks against the Tory juggernaut.

We have to create a coordinated network which can tie together the local campaigns and the local Labour

Parties and trade unions, and mobilise the vast army of people who hate what the Tories are doing to the Welfare State but can see no effective way of fighting back.

It is a huge task. It is a huge issue. The stakes are high. But we can win. The Tories are discredited. There is a great pool of anger against what they are doing to the Welfare State. The Labour leaders are feeble, and they can be pushed, if the resolutions are backed up by mass action.

The Welfare State Network planning meeting on 18 September was an important start. It was only a start. We need to reach out to many more people — not just to hundreds, or thousands, but to millions.

But the Network points the way forward to all the activists who have pushed for and voted through those pro-Welfare-State proposals on Labour's conference agenda.

They can go away from Labour's conference foolishly cheerful because Tony Blair makes some vague general speech in favour of welfare. They can

go away despondent because they can see that Blair will do nothing. Or they can decide to take things into their own hands, and build an effective campaign despite Blair. That is what the Network has set out to do.



Tony Blair won't risk his hard won TV respectability on a campaign to save the welfare state

"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

The Colin Stagg case The police incite to murder

THE POLICE incited Colin Stagg to commit murder. That is the important point which has been missed in the fuss that has rightly been made over the police's efforts to trap Stagg into confessing to the murder of Rachel Nickell on Wimbledon Common two and a half years ago.

Stagg was released after a judge threw out the case against him, refusing even to hear the police "evidence". Essentially the police had no case except that Stagg - like many thousands of others - seemed to fit a speculative "psychological profile" of the killer.

In fact, it seems that the police were wrong even about Stagg's psychology. But had their "profile" been correct - if Stagg were a potential killer - then what they did to him might have spurred him on to go and murder a woman, picked at random, exactly as Rachel Nickell was murdered.

What the police did amount to, in the circumstances, to incitement to murder.

They had a policewoman, "Lizzie James", who volunteered for the job, contact Stagg and draw him into a correspondence. She led the 31 year old virgin into a relationship heavy with sexual promise in which they wrote to each other of their desires and fantasies.

She presented herself as a woman whose sexual needs had been most fulfilled when linked with activities by herself and a lover to "hurt people". She told him that she had killed with a knife for sexual gratification. She repeatedly told the man who was by now naively besotted with her that she could only have a "relationship" with him if he had had experiences of the same sort to share with her.

The idea was to get him to admit to killing Rachel Nickell. "James" even put it to him explicitly that she dearly wished that he was the man who raped and killed Nickell.

He told her, apologetically, that he was not that man. But he desperately wanted "Lizzie James", and therefore he desperately wanted to give her what she needed.

Thus the police goaded and egged on a man assessed by the police psychologist - who was telling "Lizzie James" what to write and say - as having all the characteristics of Rachel Nickell's murderer, as being a man capable and desirous of doing such a deed!

Stagg responded to the pressure from "Lizzie James" not by going out and butchering some poor woman, but by telling her the lie that he had done such a thing, long ago. The police quickly established that no such murder as Stagg described to "James" had taken place. So she told she knew he had lied - and began to put the pressure on again.

It seems that the police "psychological profile" of Stagg was way off beam. He was more masochist than sadist; more inclined to be dominated than to be dominating; and he was not interested in the sort of sex that Rachel Nickell's killer had forced on her. In other words, he was not at all likely to behave as a man who was really of the same psychological type as Nickell's killer might have behaved.

But what if the police had been right in their judgment of Stagg's character? Then, under the relentless pressure of the police provocateur who had captured his sexual imagination, he might well have gone over the edge and into a decision to act for his own gratification and that of "Lizzie James". The police were guilty of incitement to murder.

This terrible example of what the police get up to came to court before a conscientious judge, and he pulled the police case down on their heads. In fact, though, the police behave like this all the time.

They invent, concoct and plant "evidence" when it does not exist. Too often, they act as police, prosecutor and jury all in one, and deliver the case to court all tied up with manufactured evidence so that the end result is a foregone conclusion.

Sometimes a case blows up in their faces, as the Colin Stagg case did. Thousands of fabricated cases get through the courts.

The innocent people in jail probably run into the thousands. In recent years, the exposure of police methods in "political" cases such as the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four has brought deep discredit on the system of justice in Britain.

What the police did in the Stagg case is what they do routinely, writ large.

Putting sanity back on the agenda

Martin Thomas reviews
"Beyond the Famished Road", a new pamphlet by Alan Simpson MP

THE WORLD still spends billions upon billions on nuclear weapons, while people starve, fall sick, and die for lack of food, clean water, or medicines costing a few pence.

With the collapse of the USSR, the prospect of an all-destroying nuclear Armageddon through all-out war between superpowers has become less threatening. But the megadeath nuclear arsenal remains just as dangerous, if not more so.

The US, Britain, France, Russia and other countries still have enough nuclear weapons to kill us all several times over. And the idea of a limited "tactical" use of nuclear weapons - just to wipe out a few million people, rather than billions - probably looks more plausible to warmongers across the world than it did when they had to fear that such use would trigger their own destruction. As part of their general drive for the grey-suit image, the Labour Party's leaders have buried all talk of nuclear disarmament, unilateral or even multilateral. As on other issues, they have no political arguments to justify their retreat.

The nearest thing to an argument was the claim, in the Gorbachev era, that unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain was unnecessary (because



Civil war in Rwanda: worsened, rather than checked by the siphoning-off of resources to nuclear weaponry

international negotiations would get rid of the nuclear arsenal) and even counterproductive (because unilateral action would rule Britain out of those negotiations). Gorbachev has gone; there is no pressure now on the US to cut its nuclear arsenal beyond the pressure created by

its own economic difficulties; and the whole argument has lost any credibility it could ever have had. Yet Labour's leaders still oppose disarmament.

Battered and bruised, the left has allowed nuclear disarmament to slip off the agenda. Alan Simpson's pamphlet is an important contribution to reversing this slide.

"The ending of the Cold War", he points out, "did not herald an era of peace and stability. Instead Rwanda and Yugoslavia have lurched into catastrophic civil wars and large areas of Eastern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia could follow.

"Nuclear weapons have

deterred none of this and seriously distort government spending."

"Even now, Britain could save £15 billion by scrapping its nuclear programme - and the world waits to celebrate the arrival of the first ex-nuclear state..."

"The ending of the Cold War did not herald peace and stability."

"We need to reduce the level of defence spending to the European average, but spend the money in a different way.

"We often forget the phenomenal skill and organisational abilities in the armed forces. Their ability to build bridges, schools and emergency hospital units; their skills at installing water supplies and irrigation/ drainage systems; the knowledge of logistical arrangements for getting food supplies into the midst of famine - such a resource is breathtaking and indispensable.

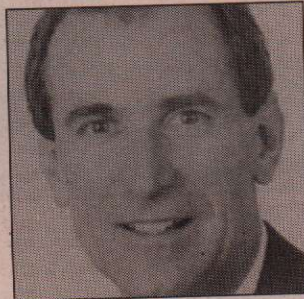
"I can see a place for retaining it, whilst I can see none for nuclear weapons".

Simpson calls for international schemes to mobilise young people to work on "the infrastructures of safety and stability".

Where I would disagree with Alan Simpson is on his hopes of the United Nations becoming an effective vehicle for "the world community to shift its focus from war-fighting capabilities to peace-building ones". As long as the world's powerful states are capitalist and imperialist, their cartels cannot be "peace-building". After all, what was the last major initiative under the banner of the UN? The Gulf war.

But this pamphlet can and should be a major contribution to getting nuclear sanity back on the agenda of the labour movement.

• "Beyond the Famished Road", with a foreword by Tony Benn MP, is published in association with the Socialist Campaign Group and is available from the Mushroom Bookshop, 10-12 Heathcote St, Nottingham NG1 8AA (0602 582506), price £2.50 post free.



Alan Simpson

More about Ireland from the AWL

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- Provos, Protestants and working-class

politics.

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A WORKERS' GUIDE TO IRELAND



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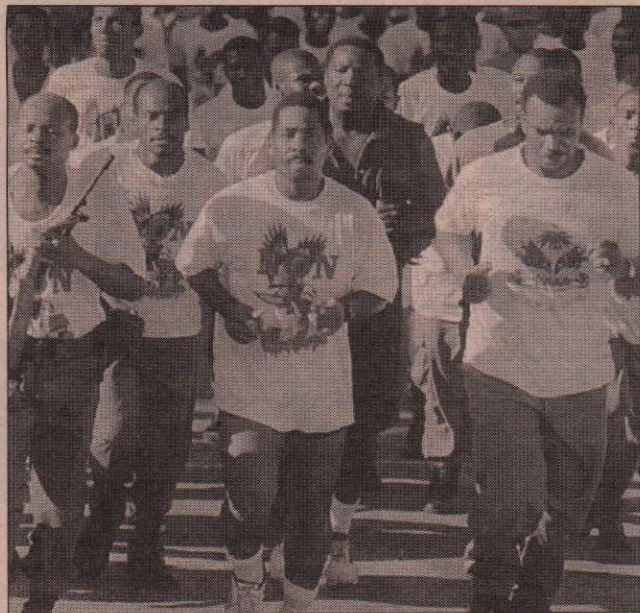
Haiti: no victory for democracy

By Colin Foster

A VICTORY FOR democracy? Almost certainly not. After three years of threats and ultimatums, US armed forces entered Haiti this week with the agreement of the military leaders who have run the country since September 1991.

The coup leaders have promised to go off into no doubt luxurious retirement after 15 October. "Conditions will be created" for Jean-Baptiste Aristide, elected president in December 1990 but forced to flee to the US by a military coup in September 1991, to be restored to office — under heavy US supervision.

The US did not intervene in Haiti out of love for democracy. For decades before December 1990, they had lived very comfortably with the horrific Duvalier dictatorships and its



Military strongman Philippe Biamby (centre) may go — but his cronies will keep control

successors. Important sections of the US Establishment — the

CIA, for example — were much more worried by Aristide's rad-

ical rhetoric than they were by the Haitian military's death squads.

"the military machine of the Haitian state will be kept intact"

What worried the US was that Haiti was becoming unstable. Thousands of Haitians were fleeing to the US, and American businesses there had packed up and moved out.

What the deal must mean is that the US has got solid guarantees that Aristide will do what international bankers tell him to do, and that the military machine of the Haitian state will be kept intact.

Cuba: devastated by the dollar

A REPORT by Marcel Niedergang in the French daily *Le Monde* of 16 September sheds light on why thousands of people are fleeing beleaguered Cuba.

Education and health, Niedergang reports, were long considered the great achievements of Castro's 1959 revolution — and with some justice.

Now there are no drugs in the hospitals, and sometimes no running water either. In theory, seeing a doctor is free; in practice, you have to bribe the doctor — a chicken, a few dollars, whatever.

"But the special sections of the hospitals, reserved for foreigners or Cubans who pay in dollars, have normal comforts, drugs and equipment".

In the schools, there are no textbooks, no pencils, no pens, no paper. They have to be bought — for dollars. There are no free school dinners any more, either.

Cuban society has been deformed and twisted by the regime's desperate attempt to keep afloat economically by promoting tourism. The old special shops, reserved for the

top bureaucrats and diplomats, have been replaced by dollar shops, open to everyone with dollars. "There you find food-stuffs, drugs, clothing, and household equipment of very average quality — everything which has disappeared from the desperately empty state shops".

Ivelis is a nursery teacher. She describes her life. "Hours waiting for the bus. No electricity, no bread, no coffee, only rice when you can get it. No fish. You can get these with dollars. But I have no dollars".

She shares a room with her uncle in an old colonial house. "The stairs smell of urine and filth. A single room, with two alcoves for the beds."

Louisita, a nurse, explains that she has to work and trade on the black market in order to survive. Through her regular ration, she got, for September, three kilos of rice, some sugar, a little oil, a handful of beans, and half a dozen eggs. And no soap for two months.

Maritza used to be a university professor. Now she is a waitress in a big hotel. This way, she gets enough to eat and some access to dollars. "Professionals, engineers, professors, and even, so they say, soldiers, have moved into the tourist industry". As well as the waitresses, there are the prostitutes — thousands of them — and the petty black-market traders.

Socialists should side with Cuba against the US blockade — and with the Cuban workers against the bureaucrats.

European workers defend welfare

ITALIAN WORKERS have struck against plans by the new right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi to cut pensions.

The first two weeks of September saw a series of stoppages, including a strike on 13 September at the giant Fiat Mirafiori car factory in Turin.

After a meeting with Berlusconi on 13 September, the top union leaders called off the action because Berlusconi said the government would be "flexible". The union leaders have another meeting with Berlusconi on Monday 19 September, but so far his concessions do not seem to amount to much: his government says it is still looking to cut £18 billion from public spending and £3 to £4 billion from pensions.

Sergio D'Antoni, a leader of the CISL, one of Italy's three

trade-union federations, said: "If expressions of flexibility regarding our demands are followed by facts, then fine. If not, we'll draw what conclusions we have to".

Meanwhile Swedish workers have voted the Social Democrats back in after three years of Conservative government.

Carl Bildt's Conservatives had declared that the "Swedish model" — probably the world's best Welfare State, and unemployment no higher than two per cent — was finished. Their semi-Thatcherite programme had pushed unemployment up to over ten per cent.

Even Bildt, however, had been unable to do more than nibble at Sweden's Welfare State. Public support for it was too strong. In fact, the ratio of public spending to national income actually rose under Bildt.

Public support for the Welfare State gave the Social Democrats and other left parties about 56% of the vote in the poll on 18 September, and reduced Bildt's Conservatives to 22%.

Social Democrat leader Ingvar Carlsson said: "In the last election Bildt said that the Social Democrats were finished, that the Swedish model was dead. But we came back. And Sweden is going to change direction now".

The problem, however, is that the Social Democrat leaders, too, now accept welfare cuts in principle. Carlsson is trying to get the Liberal Party, which was part of Bildt's coalition, to join with the Social Democrats in forming a government so that he can avoid having to ally with left-wing parties. The struggle to save Sweden's Welfare State is still on.

Knowing the SWP, knowing the signallers

ALAN PARTRIDGE, the inspired host of *Knowing Me, Knowing You*, goes through an unvarying routine with his 'studio guests': he starts out grovelling to them, then bores them, then annoys them (by ignoring or totally misunderstanding what they say) and, when they protest, he turns on them with petulant rage.

Much the same sequence of events can presently be observed in the SWP's 'intervention' into the signalworkers' dispute. The grovelling takes

the form of monetary gifts, accompanied by speeches about how wonderful and heroic the strike are. Nothing wrong with that, of course: what's wrong is the SWP's willingness to go along with (indeed, encourage) the notion that the RMT leadership is deliberately starving the signallers of funds and that there is something strange and unnatural about a strike involving a degree of financial hardship.

The grovelling continues as rank-and-file signal workers complain about lack of leadership and direction from Knapp and the executive. Again, there's nothing wrong with this as such — it's absolutely true. But here's where the Partridge factor comes to the fore: the SWP aren't really listening to what's being said. It is enough that Knapp and the executive are being criticised. The fact that such complaints often end with a call for unconditional talks and/or arbitration is ignored. Or, perhaps, wilfully misunderstood. The human mind's capacity for holding two contradictory opinions at the same time is apparently beyond the comprehension of the SWP. They nod with approval as the RMT leadership is denounced but appear not to hear the conclusion — which could be a call for stepping up the action or a call for arbitration. Quite often, from rank and file signalworkers, it's both at the same time.

The fact is that, so far, Knapp and co. have not acted as heavy-handed bureaucrats so much as deliberately 'under-led' the strike. Signalworkers know this and are getting frustrated. Things can't go on like this indefinitely, they're saying. They are looking for a way forward — or at least, some light at the end of the tunnel. That could be all-out action or spreading the dispute to other grades. But it could be dropping the demand for an interim payment and going for arbitration.

The Signalling Grades Conference last weekend was bureaucratically prevented from debating a resolution calling for spreading the dispute to other grades (the rule book says that the conference can only discuss resolutions directly related to the signalling grade and that grade alone!) That ruling should have been overturned, but it wasn't. So what emerged was the decision to drop the insistence on the interim payment before negotiation on future productivity can begin: the so-called "parallel negotiations". It's undoubtedly a climb-down and one that needn't have happened if the resolution for spreading the dispute had been taken and debated. Nevertheless, you can't blame the rank and file for voting that way in the absence of any alternative beyond the status quo. If no hope of progress had emerged from the conference, all the signs are that the strike would have begun to crumble.

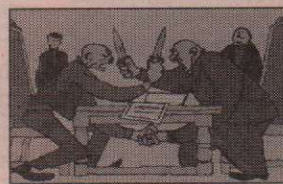
But already, the SWP are blaming their erstwhile 'heroes' for not having adopted their pet position (demanding a 25p per week TUC levy) and for daring to retreat. Partridge-like, our r-r-revolutionaries, not having listened or understood, are now furious at being contradicted.

Oh yes, I missed out the 'boredom' stage of the Partridge process. But with the SWP, that really goes without saying, doesn't it?

P.S.

In their enthusiasm to recruit out of their activity around the RMT dispute, the SWP have been taking money from collections direct to signal boxes rather than delivering it to picket lines or to local strike committees. Unfortunately though, there are one or two signalworkers on strike days, and in one signal box in Oldham the SWP ended up giving £50 to a scab! If the SWP are collecting in your workplace, make sure the money is going to support the right side! (Better still, make sure you have direct links with your local RMT strike committee, and the money is going to the right place).

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

Killing as kindness

LAST WEEK US Admiral Elmo Zumwalt returned to Vietnam for the first time in 24 years. Not surprisingly, they were not exactly delighted to see him. The last time he was there he ordered 20 million gallons of Agent Orange to be sprayed over the Vietnamese forests ad jungles — killing 10% of the country's vegetation and, as he admits himself, causing deformities to develop in unborn children and cancer.

So is he sorry? "How tragic" was his response to seeing some of the children deformed as a result. But the stony-faced warmonger didn't let weak emotion get the better of him. He continued "it is the kind of tragic decision that has to be made in wartime. We used Agent Orange to save lives."

MANY people, quite rightly, are shocked by the fact that almost all dolls are white, blue-eyed and fair haired. If you want a black doll you have to search hard. Evidence, however, suggests that this may not be an entirely bad thing for black children.

In a new study by the University of Arizona, 90% of young white girls expressed dissatisfaction with their own bodies and felt it necessary to diet. Asked what they would like to look like when they grew up, they aspired to a height of five foot seven, a weight of less than seven stone and a body shape with so little fat that they would not menstruate. Black youngsters on the other hand were, in 70% of cases, happy with their bodies and thought little about dieting. Their ideals were expressed on the whole in terms of style rather than body shape. The reason for this, the study concludes, is that media images in general are largely white and therefore tend to indoctrinate the black youngsters less. The image above all others is the all-white Barbie doll, two sold every second and possibly the most popular toy ever made. If you blew that up to full size it would be a long legged and impossible 40-18-32, about 5-7 and seven stone.

IF YOU do succumb to Barbie-inspired body fascism and have a bob or two you could always opt for the cut and tuck and silicon implants of plastic surgery. This is not mere vanity, but an art form, protests bust-booster and pec-perker to the stars, Dr

GRAFFITI

VIVELA
REVOLUCION

By Cyclops

Rod Palmer.

Opening his new London clinic last week, he stated "I consider myself a soft-tissue sculptor. If men like ... Michelangelo had been living in our times they would have been human sculptors." But would they have had the same priorities as Dr Rod? Perhaps he should pack a syringe full of silicone and head for Italy — although Michelangelo's male sculptures have the torsos of Adonis they would appear to be, well, hung like dormice.

WANT to attack under age single mothers and the job culture all in one go?

The Tories could well take a leaf out of the book of some village elders from Ghana. Any man found guilty of helping a woman under the age of 18 to become pregnant is fined \$50, three bottles of gin and one sheep, while the woman gets off lightly with a \$25 fine (and one small child). This should hold many attractions for the Tory government — apart from killing two policy scapegoats with one stone, the \$75 per conception could be used to fuel tax cuts for the rich, and the gin could be drunk when the expected upturn in the polls does not materialise. Exactly what could be done with the sheep is uncertain (there is a glut of sheep on the back benches). Perhaps something in the field of back to baa-sics?

EVERYONE knows that most members of local Conservative associations are either lunatics or bigots, the rest being both. But Bow and Poplar Tories deserve some sort of prize, straitjackets and Prozac perhaps. Their motion to this year's party conference reads:

"This conference urges the government to recognise that no sane person wants a classless society, which is a society run by bureaucrats and composed of slaves; it therefore urges the government to grant tax relief to the employment of domestic servants. This will bring employment to the unemployed and civilised living to the middle classes."

Strange death of a liberal journo

PRESS GANG

THE GUARDIAN TODAY
SUNDAY PRESS
THE WORLD

By Jim Denham

SPARE a thought if you will for poor Melanie Phillips, former social conscience of the *Guardian* and now a columnist on the *Observer*. For years she conformed to the identi-kit picture of a *Guardian* writer (or reader): a left-of-centre intellectual and child of the Sixties. A little smug, maybe, but well-meaning and impeccably right-on.

The first signs that all was not well with Melanie came about ten years ago, when she began to rail against 'modern' teaching methods and state education in general, in her *Guardian* column.

Melanie's tirades began to read more and more like the sort of stuff you'd expect of find in the *Mail* or *Express* under the by-line of, say, Rhodes Boyson or Roger Scruton. Nevertheless, Melanie emphasised that her concern was with the poor and underprivileged and the "right of every child to master the language."

The furious response she received in the *Guardian's* correspondence pages (from Open University professors, FE lecturers and various other educationalists) did rather go to confirm her proposition that such people "often came from

the kind of backgrounds which meant they simply had no imaginative grasp of the importance of school to a child living in social and intellectual poverty."

At about this time the news filtered out (via *Private Eye*, as I recall) that the *Guardian's* social affairs correspondent had withdrawn her own children from the state system and put them into a private school. No-one was terribly surprised when Melanie finally left the *Guardian* and took her column to the less ideologically rigorous pages of the *Observer*.

But it seems that the whole experience was much more painful for her than any of us suspected. In an anguished piece in the high-Tory *Spectator* magazine, Melanie protests that "one minute the government was criticising my allegedly left-wing views towards the poor, or

sick, or jobless, or immigrants; the next I was being condemned by people on the left for being a traitor to the cause."

Much of the article, in truth, is a rather sad and embarrassing attempt at self-justification by a middle-class ex-leftie whose gradually found herself out of step with the fashionable leftist orthodoxy of the day. Melanie seems excessively concerned with being personally ostracised by her friends and colleagues. It's almost a cry for help.

And yet, and yet: along the way she makes some telling points, especially about the degeneration of the liberal/leftist '60s consensus into the ridiculous and authoritarian 'politically correct' movement: "This strange perversion co-incided with the arrival of particularly authoritarian and long-lasting Conservative government. Mrs Thatcher remade the who

machinery of government in her image. Anyone who was not 'one of us' was cast into the wilderness of political opposition.

"As the years rolled on with no change of government in sight, an alternative establishment grew up of those on the left who had been excluded from any power over public life. And so instead of operating in the public sphere the left exercised their power in the one area still open to them — the private sphere of personal behaviour."

None of this is terribly original, of course. The same points have been made by critics of the 'PC' movement from both left and right many times before, including in this publication. But Ms Phillips' account, for all its special pleading and self-justification, had the power of a story told by someone who feels personally betrayed.

My guess is that this is not the end of her rightward journey and not the last article she'll write for the *Spectator* (who clearly loved the piece and gave it front page billing). It's sad commentary on the poverty of liberalism but well worth reading. It also goes to show that, despite popular belief, even journalists have feelings.

How the cuts can be beaten



WOMEN'S
EYE

By Jean Lane

EVER wondered what possible benefit there could be from having one Labour councillor elected in a Tory area? Ask pensioners in Hove. A Labour councillor was recently elected there for the first time, who got onto the council's Policy and Resources Committee. There he learned of a plan to close down a 44-bed old people's home and to put in its place a 12-bed resource centre. A resource centre is a local government office from which community care — or as one local activist said, community neglect — goes out to people in their own homes.

On hearing about his plan, a broad local action campaign was set up to fight the closure. They lobbied the Policy and Resources Committee with about 20 people, where it was recommended that the closure go ahead. Only that one Labour councillor voted against it.

The action group went on to

lobby all the Labour councillors on the East Sussex County Council, the next full council meeting and the Labour Group meeting prior to it.

They heard that all of the residents in the home in Wayfield Avenue, most of whom are women, had been told that they could return to the new unit if they wanted to. "So far as we were concerned" said Christine Bowden, one of the Labour Party activists involved in the campaign, "this meant that they expected a number of residents to die in the meantime, since the new unit would only have 12 beds in it!"

"Councillors could not understand how local people could have the gall to turn up and meddle in their affairs."

In fact, one male resident did die during the campaign — a resident who was worried sick about what was going to happen to him. So much for the "cradle to the grave" Welfare State that that old man had grown up with and spent his entire life paying into — to die

wondering whether the council would continue to house and care for him, or whether he or his family would have to sell off their own homes or use up their savings in order to pay for a place in a private home.

Christine added, "The attitude of some of the councillors was amazing. They just could not understand how local people could have the gall to turn up uninvited and meddle in their affairs." Once councillor was overheard to say "we've already cut 18 old people homes in the area. What's so special about this one?"

At one of the council meetings, the activists had armed a sympathetic councillor with quotes and plans from builders and architects — the council's own — showing how the home could be kept open.

Time and again the council had made these cutting decision behind closed doors, without any alternative plans offered as an option. They had got so used to getting their own way, they could not believe it when an alternative plan was produced.

As a result of the hard work put in by the action group, a proposal to reverse the closure decision was won. This time all the Labour councillors voted for it.

The group plans not to stop there. "We won," said Christine. "Now we have to monitor every council meeting and produce plans to counter officers who will try to re-introduce their plan. We have to hold locally elected councillors to account."

Many councils are not used to being treated like this and will do everything they can to avoid public scrutiny.

Indeed, in this case, the action group had been told not to bother turning up to one of the meetings as the issue "probably wouldn't come up." But the group didn't believe them and went anyway. "And it's a good job we did," Christine explained, "because it was on the agenda."

Not only that, but when the closure was first planned, the workers at the home, again mostly women, were told by their employers (i.e. the council) not to speak about it or to demonstrate against it. The action group got that rescinded as well.

So, if you want to know what's going on in your area, get a Labour councillor in and then hold them to account. The main lesson of this story however, is that there is absolutely no need to just accept the Tories' cuts. They can be fought and beaten.

After the IRA ceasefire

Armed struggle and the politics of war

By Mark Sandell

IT'S A well-worn saying that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter. Or: those who are terrorists one day are freedom fighters the next.

Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress were terrorists. Now Mandela is a heroic freedom fighter.

The bosses approach the question of terrorism as total hypocrites. They direct moral outrage at "terrorists" who are on the other side, but flip over 180 degrees if their interests demand that.

After the justified world outcry about the genocide carried out by Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the West — Britain and the USA — then provided the funds which armed and trained the same Khmer Rouge to fight against the Vietnamese-installed Cambodian government.

In a world dominated by such hypocrisy, socialists must understand violence and war as part of politics. As the great military theorist Clausewitz put it: "War is the continuation of politics by other means."

Unlike pacifists — sincere or hypocritical — we do not equate the violence of a black youth who defends himself from a Nazi thug with the

violence of that Nazi thug, or the violence of a scab-herding copper with the violence of a line of pickets.

Most cases of violence or war are not so clear-cut. Most wars are not the workers against the bosses. Instead, they are led on both sides by sections of the bosses, or those who want to become the new bosses.

If the people of a country are fighting to become free from domination by a foreign power, that is an important step forward that will benefit workers; yet these struggles are often led by middle-class groups who want to be the bosses themselves.

In such a war we argue for an independent workers' movement to fight for national self-determination alongside the middle-class leaders, but to prepare to turn their guns on that middle class when they attempt to become the new bosses.

We take sides with the dominated country against the imperialist country.

We backed the Vietnamese people against the French and American imperialists.

Terrible things are done in wars — all wars. Where socialists take sides, we do not necessarily support every act of "our" side; but neither should we recoil in moral horror and withdraw our support from a just war because of its atrocities.



"We do not share the Establishment line that IRA fighters are psychopaths"

There are wars in which it is wrong to take sides at all — wars where a victory for either side would be a bad thing for the workers' movement.

And where we do take sides, that does not imply that we must automatically support military action as the way for "our" side to win. We side with the oppressed Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, but an all-out civil war there could bring no good at all.

What is needed is a political settlement, and democratic political programmes that can unite the divided working class.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty believes a Labour Party based on the Northern Irish trade unions and fighting for a federal, united Ireland could create Protestant-Catholic working-class unity.

We have called for an IRA ceasefire for years, not because we oppose armed struggle on principle, and not because we are indifferent to the oppression of the Northern Catholics, but because this armed struggle drove a wedge between Protestant and Catholic workers and could not lead to a democratic, united Ireland or to any progress at all.

At the same time, we did not echo the hypocritical condemnation of the IRA by Establishment politicians. We tried to explain why the Catholic minority in the North, trapped in an enclave created by the British state, produces and sustains the soldiers of the IRA. We denounced the everyday army and police harassment of the Catholic community. We do not share the Establishment line that the young men and women who risk their lives to fight against all the odds for what they see as the only way to free their trapped community are cowards, or psychopaths, or sub-humans who should be put down like dogs by the SAS.

We do not condemn working-class Catholic youth who want to fight for freedom. We try to show them that their leaders and their policy are wrong and destructive.

We need cold political logic to find the policies that workers need, but we also need to understand the real forces behind movements like the IRA.



"We called for an IRA ceasefire — but not because we oppose armed struggle on principle"

7

YOUTH FIGHTBACK

Rebellion

... 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.

Youth Fightback is...

national cnd demonstration

29 OCTOBER 1994

NUCLEAR-FREE WORLD OR NUCLEAR FREE-FOR-ALL

Trafalgar Square, London from 12.00 midday.

Contact CND for further information and transport details for your area:

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament,
162 Holloway Road, London N7 8DQ.
Telephone: 071-700 2393

Is all that equally true of the other side, of the Unionist-Protestant paramilitaries? No! The IRA attracts youth who believe they are fighting for Irish republicanism, for freedom for their community. Their twisted "republicanism" is false because effectively it treats one million Irish people — the Northern Protestants — as the enemy. Yet the IRA mobilises the oppressed to fight against oppression.

The Unionist paramilitaries are overtly anti-Catholic. It is not only in logic and in practical effect that they act against Catholic workers; they are overtly racist against Catholics, and kill at random with no attempt

at political justification. They believe they represent a people which has a right to rule over others, and the aim of their military campaign is to keep this "superior" position.

Logically the IRA's war and the Unionist paramilitaries' war are anti-working class on both sides. The IRA is Catholic chauvinist; its war was a block to workers' unity, a block to real republicanism, and a block to a united Ireland.

But to put an equals sign between the fighters of the IRA and the Unionist paramilitaries is to ignore the roots and motivation of the fighters and is a block to understanding the real situation.

Criminal Justice Bill	Demonstrate.	3.00, Forest Recreation Ground.
	Assemble: 11.30, Mandela Park, Welford Road.	LONDON
Protests	NOTTINGHAM	Sunday 9 October
	Saturday 24 September	Demonstrate. Assemble: 12.00, Embankment.
LEICESTER	Saturday 24 September	Demonstrate. Assemble:

The fight to save the Welfare State starts

Last Sunday, 18 September, 60 people attended the launch meeting of the new Welfare State Network. Speakers included Tony Benn MP, John Lister of London Health Emergency,

Joe Harris (chair, Islington Pensioners' Forum) and Liz Davies (Islington councillor). Christine Bowden from Hove Labour Party spoke about a successful battle there to save an old people's

home from closure.

The meeting decided a plan of action of no fewer than 28 points. Highlights:

• Produce a national newspaper, the first issue for Labour Party Conference.

- Hold a conference early in 1995.
- Organise a lobby of Tory Party Conference, Bournemouth, on 12 October.
- Organise a lobby of Labour Party Conference.
- Organise a lobby of Parliament on Budget Day.
- Advertise and build the Pensioners' Rally (1.30, 29 September, Trafalgar Square)
- Call on labour movement bodies to affiliate to London Health Emergency and to the Network.

"The Tories have no right to do what they are doing"

Trudy Saunders, Assistant Secretary of the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, which sponsored the Network, gave the keynote opening speech of the Welfare State Network organising conference



THIS MEETING, called by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee and the Campaign Group Network, has the job of launching a drive to build a broad mass campaign to fight for the Welfare State. We aim to link together trade unionists and local welfare activists, and other labour movement activists, in a serious fight to defend and extend the Welfare State.

The Tories have no right to do what they are doing!

The majority of people in this country believe that the right to life is greater than the rights to property and that the right to health care for everyone should come before the right of the well-off to pay less taxes. The Tories have reversed these principles over the last 15 years.

The Welfare State Network, as well as uniting activists in a mass campaign, must take on the Tory ideology of the ruling class which puts greed before need.

The formation of the modern Welfare State in 1945 was the result of years of working-class activity and struggle. It could only become a reality because 1945 was the election of the first majority Labour government. In 1945, the Welfare State embraced many areas of life, but its crowning glory was the NHS, which embod-

ied the working-class principle of the equal right to life for all.

This is the principle that the Tories are attempting to uproot and destroy through cuts in health, housing and benefits. For them, only the ruling class matters. So funds are channelled out of hospitals, schools, local government and benefits — that is, away from the poor — into the hands of the rich and wealthy.

We need the Welfare State Network not only to organise the fightback against Tory attacks on the Welfare State, but also to force the lead-

ers of our movement to take up the issue in a forceful way.

The Labour Party leadership has failed to take on the Tories ideologically. Instead of fighting for the defence of the Welfare State they have caved in to the Tories. At best, they argue for less vicious attacks on the Welfare State. Instead of arguing for taxing the rich to pay for decent health care, housing, education and benefits for all, the Labour leaders go along with the idea that the cost of a Welfare State is prohibitively high. They go along with the idea that the poor do not have an equal right to life.

We must launch a fight to reassert the idea, inside and outside the labour movement, that workers do have an equal right to life and that a society which does not operate according to the belief that all its citizens have an equal right to life is a society sinking into barbarism. The labour movement must rescue British society from Tory darkness.

The defence and extension of the Welfare State is very much a trade union issue. Only when the Tories had disabled the trade unions through their vicious anti-trade union laws were they able to begin dismantling the Welfare State. Before these laws, trade unions often took strike action over political issues not directly affecting the terms and conditions of the workers.

In 1986, for example, CPSA members in the DHSS Section voted to take strike action against the Fowler Social Security Review. The then leadership of the DHSS Section refused to go ahead with the strike because it was deemed "political" and therefore illegal. The fact that the ballot took place at all seems amazing today. Yet, in the past, industrial action by public sector trade unionists in particular has been vital in defending services.

The Welfare State Network aims to be big, broad, active and campaigning. We aim to link up activists and work in unity with other initiatives such as the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State. Everything is up for debate and discussion at today's meeting — it's your meeting — but I'd like to suggest that we discuss producing a regular national bulletin and begin to plan for the holding of a conference in the spring.

Today's meeting is another proof that the labour movement is still very much alive. It is beginning to fight back. Look at the signal workers' strike!

A small group of workers bring the country to a standstill every week and may force the Tories to break their public sector pay freeze. The massive support the signal workers are getting is partly due to the extreme unpopularity of Major and his government.

There are millions out there who loathe the Tories! We have a massive opportunity to mobilise these forces and defeat the Tories.

In doing so, we not only fight to defend and extend the Welfare State in the here and now, but begin to put the labour movement back on the path of fighting for the end of a society run on the basis of profit before need, where the Welfare State will always be inadequate and under threat.



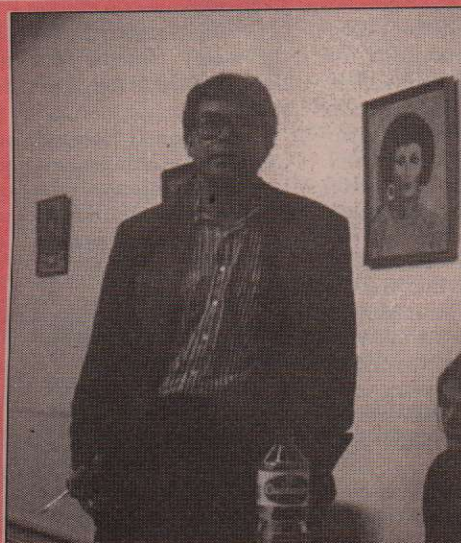
London 1993: UCH nurses protest at closures

"We cannot put a price on human life"

JOHN LISTER from London Health Emergency highlighted the fact that 20% of casualty units have already gone in London since 1990, with a further 25% now under threat. Bart's and Guy's casualty units are due to close, thus sending another 110,000 patients to the remaining casualty units — with no extra resources to deal with them.

Meanwhile, they are advertising for Chairs of Greenwich and Brighton NHS Trusts on £19,000 a year for a three-day week.

The Tories, said Lister, are moving towards



imposing charges for health care, as they have already imposed them for continuing care for the elderly. It is high time, he said, that the left started to put the Welfare State at the top of its agenda.

He proposed that the Network should launch a newspaper.

here!

- Contact "Incapacity Action" to discuss joint work on welfare rights for disabled people.

- Support the campaign initiated by Lancaster Young Labour to reinstate benefits for young people.

- Set up an open committee, with its first meeting on Saturday 1 October.

- Contact the Network c/o Trudy Saunders, 22 Maude Road, London SE5.

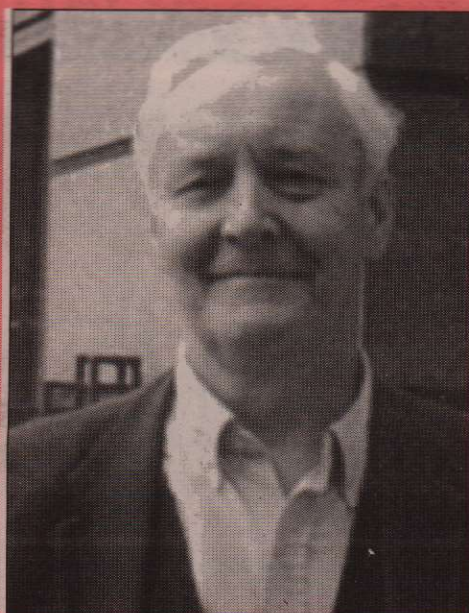


Photo: John Harris

"We must propose a clear alternative to the Tories"

TONY BENN told activists that it is no longer enough to demand a stop to the attacks on the Welfare State. We must, he said, campaign for our vision of democratic and comprehensive welfare provision for all.

The Welfare State that was established by the Labour government in 1945 was the result of a long campaign by the labour movement to erect the right to a dignified healthy life above the rule of profit in our society. The ruling class too



benefited of course, because the Welfare State created a fit, healthy, skilled workforce, capable of rebuilding Britain's economy.

Today there is no labour shortage, quite the opposite: there is permanent mass unemployment. The Tories now claim that we can no longer afford universal benefits or comprehensive health care or education.

With the Tories, Lilley, Bottomley and Portillo

in charge of the Welfare State we now see a major new push by the Tories to attack social welfare provision.

Recent Tory attacks on beggars and homeless people are closely linked with their attacks on the Welfare State. They are creating an underclass of destitute people with no home, no job, the right to claim benefits. Why? To have a permanent threat hanging over the heads of those lucky enough to have a job or a house and thus "discipline" them.

The erosion of the Welfare State makes this threat more real and more harsh than it has been for generations. The message is: if you complain about your boss, or if you fight back, you might slip out of society altogether, down into the "underclass."

Tony Blair and his chums at the top of our movement seem capable of only murmuring opposition at best; and at worst they compete with the Tories in such enterprises as condemning single mothers. We must instead propose a clear alternative to the Tories and their cry, "we can't afford it." What we can't afford is tax cuts, nuclear weapons, the royal family, and smashing the signal workers. We can afford hip replacements, unemployment benefit, free education and all the other things people need and should have.

We must propose a clear set of principles and policies and a plan for rebuilding the Welfare State.

With that Labour can win mass support.

"Labour must launch a crusade for life"

Debbie, a student nurse, spoke about Health Service cuts

SINCE THE Tories were elected in 1979, around 500 hospitals have closed. In just 10 years, one third of all hospital beds have gone. Hospitals are still being shut and beds still being lost. One fifth of London's casualty units have gone since 1990. The proposed closure of Guy's hospital in London is just the latest example.

The closure of Guy's is likely to go ahead, despite opposition from many quarters and even from surprising ones, like the City of London police. Dozens of specialist units and medical teams will face massive cutbacks or complete extinction and a further 2,000 jobs will be lost.

A couple of months ago, I took someone to Guy's Accident and Emergency after they suffered from a *grand mal* seizure. This was on a Tuesday afternoon, which isn't the busiest time, but the unit was crowded and it still took hours for a doctor to see the patient. If Guy's closes, its waiting times will be increased in another hospital, the end result will be even longer delays and massive pressure on the units that do remain open.

This is just one example of what the Tories are doing. They are pushing relentlessly to turn the health service into a two tier structure, with strict rationing in both quantity and quality for the poor.

The NHS is no longer free. This can be seen clearly with charges for dental treatment, eye checks and prescriptions, but on a more day-to-day basis, charges occur through the internal market. Under this, the local health authority and fundholding GPs buy healthcare from hos-

pitals, most of which are now run as semi-independent Trusts, leading to doctors and nurses being unable to give desperately needed care because the health authority has overspent the budget.

We have the longest waiting lists ever, but those patients lucky enough to get treatment can't get the quality of care they deserve. The cuts in very basic necessities in hospitals are unbelievable. Without using any gruesome horror stories, here are just a few examples of what is going on.

In the last few months there have been occasions when I've needed to change a bed but not had any clean sheets on the ward. Another example is having to help someone get washed, and not being able to find any soap! Basic everyday things such as soap and towels are having

"Nurses can't get hold of a 20p bar of soap, but can use flash computers to draw up impressive care plans!"

to be brought in by the patients, because they're not on the ward. This is a disgusting state of affairs. Nurses can't get hold of a 20p bar of soap, but can use flash computers to draw up impressive care plans!

Back injuries among nurses are notorious and recent changes have banned lifting over certain weights. This is all well and good, but with only one hoist on the ward, these changes either have to be ignored or the work of the morning shift wouldn't end until midnight. Long waits on trolleys are commonplace, planned operations are continuously being cancelled and, throughout London, camp beds on wards are an increasingly frequent sight.

With the way things are going, I won't be at all surprised to see the day when drugs and dressings are not available either.

Although, the school of nursing isn't run by the Trust, cuts are still affecting student nurses like myself.

- The changes in nurse training mean that Project 2000 students get paid roughly 40% less than traditional training students.

- There have been massive increases in rents in nurses' homes in places such as London's UCH and York, and students in Leicester faced a 200% increase.

- More hidden cuts that have affected my course include not getting a uniform in the first eighteen months of training. Thus we have to buy them ourselves.



Alan Simpson MP sent a message of support to the meeting

How to save the Welfare State

How to save the Welfare State

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Free all the prisoners!

LETTER

GARY WILSON cannot support an amnesty for Republican prisoners because they "were not jailed for writing books, for their ideas." This was always the argument used by Amnesty International to justify their refusal to campaign for rights for political prisoners in Northern Ireland. They only dealt with "prisoners of conscience", non-violent people jailed only for their views.

Like Gary, they are wrong. We should support an amnesty for all Republican prisoners.

The system under which they were jailed was very far from democratic or just even by the low standards of liberal capitalist societies. Republicans were tried under the Diplock court system, with no juries, where the evidence of a police officer on its own was enough to gain a conviction. For certain some, quite likely a majority, of those convicted in this was were responsible for the actions for which they were charged. But this is not "normal" justice, it is the product of a violent political conflict.

More important these are not "normal" conditions. Republicans have been involved in a war (albeit a low-level limited war) with the British government. In that war they and the loyalists are not the only ones to have "killed people nothing to do with the conflict." The British Army, RUC and UDR (RIR) have all been guilty of the murder of civilians, torture, harassment etc. — but most of them have come nowhere near a courthouse because the state and legal system were never neutral in this conflict. Now that a complete ceasefire has been called and there is a real prospect of an end to the armed conflict it is correct to raise the issue of political prisoners — for that is what those convicted of "terrorist offences" are.

Of course, if the release of political prisoners is raised in any settlement then it must be applied to loyalists as well. This is largely a communal conflict and our concern has got to be how to resolve it democratically — not revenge, triumphalism or punishment. The working-class areas of both communities will never feel that peace and normality have returned as long as a large part of their young (mainly male) populations is imprisoned as a constant reminder of the Troubles.

Socialists should join the demands for an amnesty — but we should widen that demand too. The Republicans should immediately extend an amnesty to the people they have driven out of their communities for "anti-social behaviour" and those currently under threat from the IRA. There has always been a good deal of romanticism on the left about republican "community justice" but the plain truth is that paramilitary policing is arbitrary, brutal and completely outside any popular democratic control. It needs to be said bluntly that even the justice of the bourgeois democratic legal system, limited as it is, is to be preferred to paramilitary gangsterism when it comes to dealing with crime. An amnesty for Republicans and their victims.

Patrick Murphy, Leeds

Lindsay Anderson

The angry humanist

John Cunningham surveys the career of Lindsay Anderson, who died at the beginning of September

A FEW years ago Channel Four broadcast a short series in which prominent film makers discussed a film of their choice with students from the National Film School. One of the invited alumni was the British director Lindsay Anderson. His choice was the John Ford movie *My Darling Clementine*. But the one memory of this programme which stands out for me is not so much Anderson's analysis of the film as the particularly dismissive, almost bullying, way he put down a student who suggested an alternative viewpoint to Anderson's own.

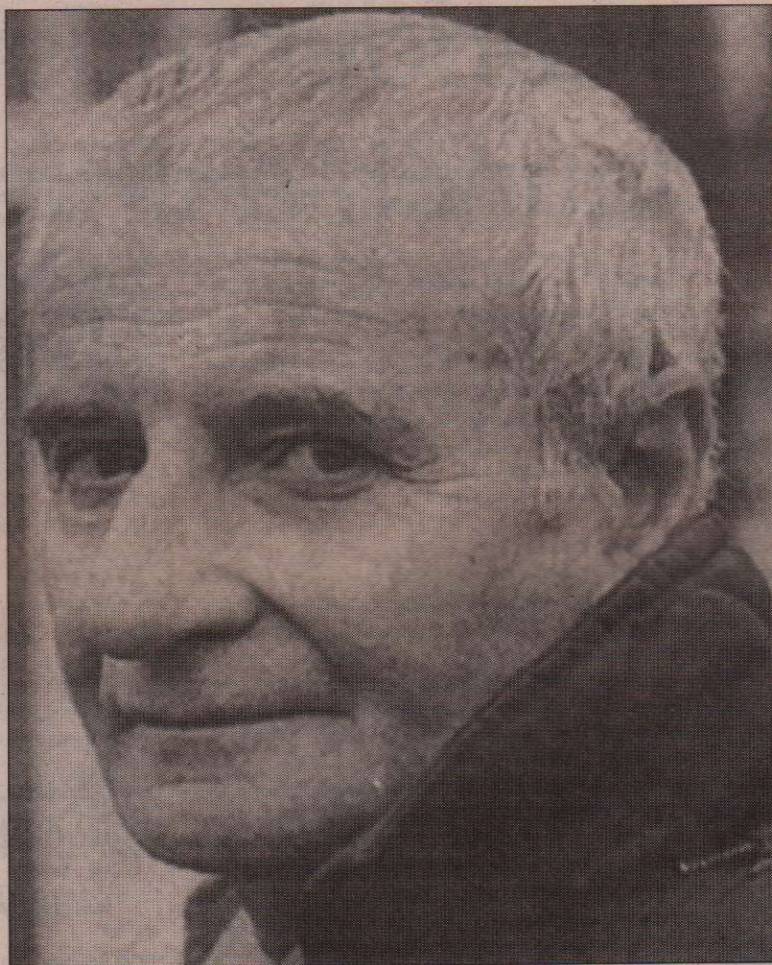
It was difficult to reconcile this 'headmasterliness' with the man who made *...If* one of the key anti-establishment movies of the 1960s. This contradiction is only one of many in Anderson, starting with his birth into the British military-colonial elite in India.

After serving in the Army during the Second World War, Anderson returned to Britain and was caught up in the social and political changes brought about by the post-war 1945 Labour Government. He moved leftward, leaving his upper middle-class background behind. At Oxford, along with Gavin Lambert, he helped to produce a critical magazine called *Sequence*. Only 13 issues were produced between 1947 and 1951 but it was to help Anderson become a film critic.

Writing alone did not satisfy him: he wanted to make films. But this was not easy in Britain in the 1950s. Under the double pressure of Hollywood competition and TV, the film industry was contracting. It was virtually impossible to get a foot in the door.

It was, however, possible to make documentaries, particularly for industry. Anderson gained valuable experience filming such unglamorous subjects as the installation of conveyor belts in NCB mines.

And there was the development of the 'Free Cinema' movement. An experimental film fund had been set up by Michael Balcon (of the famous Ealing Studios) and a number of young film-makers benefitted, Anderson and Karel Reisz being the most notable. They attempted to broaden the boundaries of docu-



An "angry young man" who stayed angry

mentary with such landmark studies as *We are the Lambeth Boys* (Reisz); Anderson's *O Dreamland* (1953), which looked at the holiday resort of Margate; *Wakefield Express* (1952); and *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957), a film about workers in Covent Garden Market.

By the end of the 1950s most of the 'Free Cinema' personnel had been absorbed into mainstream film and/or theatre. Anderson developed strong ties with the theatre, particularly the Royal Court in London, which was known for experimental theatre. This bond with the theatre was strengthened when he made his first feature film, *This Sporting Life* (1963). Based on a

novel by David Storey, it started a lifelong collaboration between the two men which centred mainly around the theatre.

Although it wasn't a box-office success, *This Sporting Life* established Anderson as a major new talent and placed him within the general cultural movement of the period which became associated with different labels and phrases: the 'angry young men', 'social realism' and the 'kitchen

sink drama.' These labels can be misleading. Some of the so-called angry young men weren't all that angry and it wasn't so long before they became conservative old men. Some of the so-called realism looks a little stagey today (particularly the film version of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* made in 1958). They did however represent an important development in film, theatre and literature, even if they never became a coherent 'movement.'

The film portraits of working-class and lower middle-class life in *This Sporting Life*, John Schlesinger's *A Kind of Loving*, Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and Clayton's *Room at the Top* broke new ground, depicting an area of British society rarely before considered important or worthy of treatment. The defiant words of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning's* working-class hero — "I'm only out for a good time, all the rest's propaganda!" — summed up for many the mood of the early 1960s. Political cynicism, the growing influence of TV and a limited social mobility produced an atmosphere of conflict and instability. This is well portrayed in

all these films.

Yet much of the conflict is not played out at a class level. It is often channelled into sexuality. (But this was never the case in many of the novels on which these films were based). Typically, the conflict is between the aggressive working-class male — the "great ape" as *This Sporting Life's* rugby player is called — and a woman usually from slightly up the social ladder.

Five years later, in 1968, Anderson went on to make one of the most quintessentially '60s films, *...If*. Inspired by an earlier film by Jean Vigo (*Zéro de Conduite*) and taking its title from Kipling's poem, *...If* blasted the British public school system (of which Anderson himself was a product).

Driven to the limits of their patience and endurance by a bunch of bullying head boys and incompetent, addle-brained teachers, a small group of friends mount a rooftop attack on the school's annual get-together, slaughtering them unmercifully using guns and grenades stolen from the school armoury. The final action of the film has Malcolm MacDowell, hate in his eyes, pumping lead into the assembled upper classes. It is one of the great and lasting images of British cinema.

The angry young man had come of age directing a film which was not only controversial and hard-hitting but also transcended the realist/documentary tradition (some may say strait-jacket) of British film. But Anderson and his collaborators were essentially liberal humanists and, to his credit, Anderson never claimed to be anything else. This was not enough to sustain the so-called 'British New Wave.'

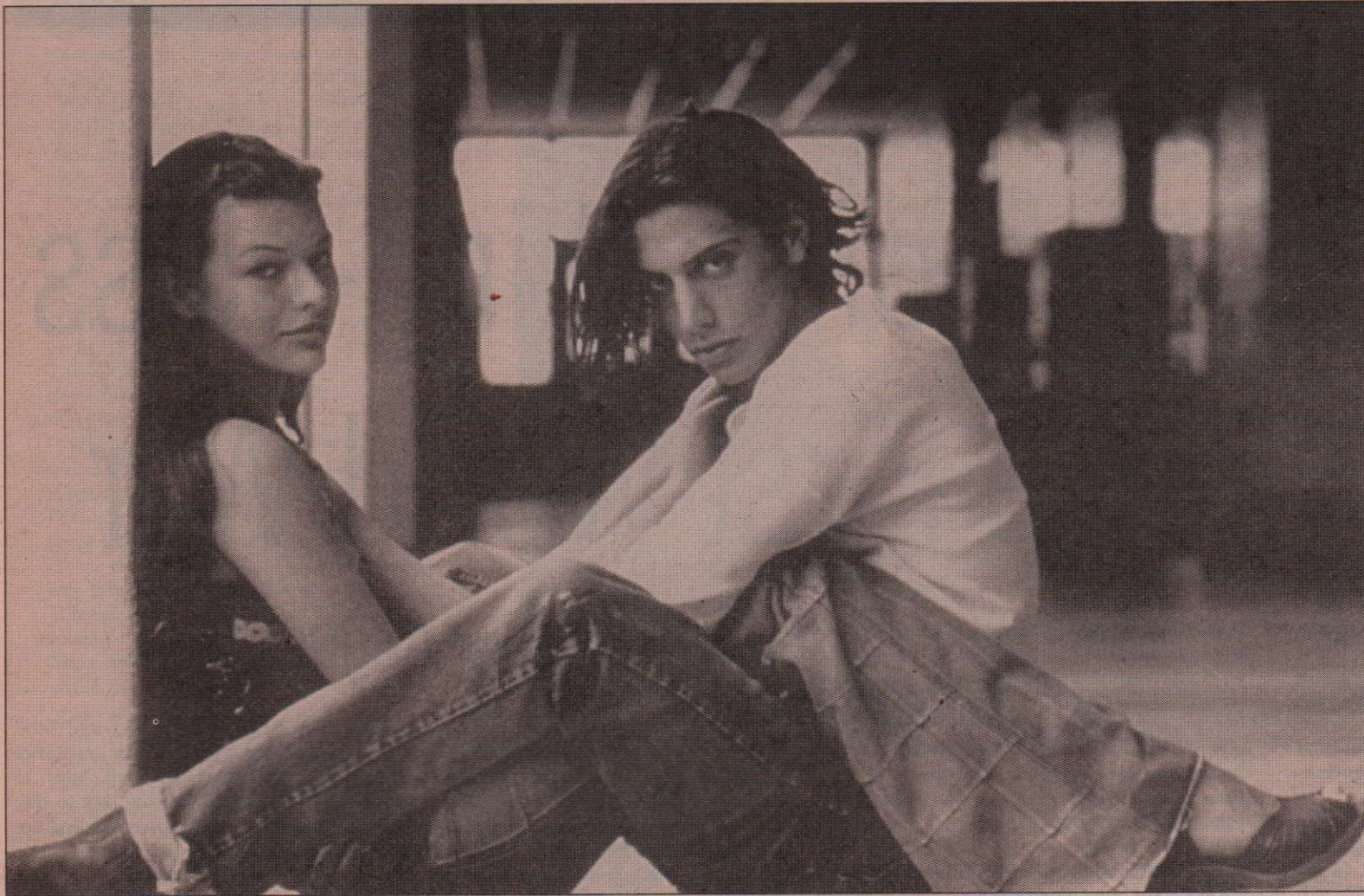
By the late '70s many of the more radically-inclined film makers and writers in Britain were finding it increasingly difficult to get their projects accepted. Anderson went on to make other films such as *O Lucky Man!* (1973) but, increasingly, he turned to the theatre, more probably, as a matter of personal preference than any-

thing else.

Anderson will be remembered for *...If* more than anything else. How many of us who saw this film when it was released, wished to join MacDowell and his companions as they scythed down the establishment. Purely by chance I saw *...If* only a few months ago and, despite the passage of time, the same feelings came back: a fitting tribute, I think, to Lindsay Anderson, liberal humanist or not!

"Anderson was caught up in the social and political changes brought about by the 1945 Labour government."

"The film portraits of working-class and lower middle-class life broke new ground."



No worries!

The voice of toil

I heard men saying, Leave hope and praying,
All days shall be as all have been;
To-day and to-morrow bring fear and sorrow,
The never-ending toil between.

When Earth was younger mid toil and hunger,
In hope we strove, and our hands were strong;
Then great men led us, with words they fed us,
And bade us right the earthly wrong.

Go read in story their deeds and glory,
Their names amidst the nameless dead;
Turn then from lying to us slow-dying
In that good world to which they led;

Where fast and faster our iron master,
The thing we made, for ever drives,
Bids us grind treasure and fashion pleasure
For other hopes and other lives.

Where home is a hovel and dull we grovel,
Forgetting that the world is fair;
Where no babe we cherish, lest its very soul perish;
Where mirth is crime, and love a snare.

Who now shall lead us, what god shall heed us
As we lie in the hell our hands have won?
For us are no rulers but fools and befoolers,
The great are fallen, the wise men gone.

I heard men saying, Leave tears and praying,
The sharp knife heedeth not the sheep;
Are we not stronger than the rich and the wronger,
When day breaks over dreams and sleep?

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere the world grows older!
Help lies in nought but thee and me;
Hope is before us, the long years that bore us
Bore leaders more than men may be.

Let dead hearts tarry and trade and marry,
And trembling nurse their dreams of mirth,
While we the living our lives are giving
To bring the bright new world to birth.

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere earth grows older!
The Cause spreads over land and sea;
Now the world shaketh, and fear awaketh
And joy at last for thee and me.

William Morris

Dazed and confused



Matt Cooper
reviews
Dazed and Confused

Directed by
Richard Linklater

RICHARD LINKLATER came to notice with his first film, *Slackers*. This consisted of a number of semi-biographical cameos based on people Linklater knew from college in Atlanta who were generally "doing their own thing", having chosen not to dive headlong into the rat race. Many appeared to have chosen to do very little indeed.

Quite unwittingly *Slackers* became

a major exhibit in the case for the supposed existence of "Generation X", post-Reaganite youth of the States who have no direction or belief, and quietly chose not to follow their parents on the paths of respectability. As with most media-driven theories it was much less than the sum of its colour-supplement parts. Linklater for one was not happy. He had made a film, he argued, about a few people he knew in Atlanta, not a statement about a generation.

In the meantime, Generation X became a major media marketing drive, major record labels signed "grunge" bands like Nirvana, and manufactured paler imitations like the Spin Doctors and Pearl Jam. Early this year the dull and half-hearted cash-in teen movie *Reality*

Bites was released as a star vehicle for Winona Ryder.

Linklater wanted no part of this and therefore used the major studio interest that *Slackers* earned him to make *Dazed and Confused*, a film set in 1976 (which is just as well, since the media has now announced the death of Generation X along with its only real icon, Kurt Cobain). *Dazed and Confused* is still avowedly a film from outside the mainstream. It eschews straight-forward plot, instead preferring to look at the interconnected lives of a group of high school students over a period of around 15 hours on the last day of term in the summer of '76.

Immediate and justified parallels are suggested with the superior *American Graffiti*, made in 1973, and set in 1963 with an almost identical

premise and structure. The difference is that in *American Graffiti* the high school graduates had something to worry about — going to Vietnam — whereas the graduates in *Dazed and Confused* appear to have nothing to worry about apart from not believing there is a place for them in the future. Thus both films are really about when they were made and not when they were set.

In *Dazed and Confused*, Pink, a footballer who has been asked by his coach to sign an anti-drink and drug pledge. He doesn't know whether he should bite his tongue and sign.

Everyone wants to drink as much alcohol and smoke as much dope as possible. The high school seniors are inducting the "freshmen" from junior high (who are about 15) into high school. This means spanking the boys with bats, and forcing an equally bizarre, if more ritual, humiliation on the girls.

Uniting the elements is the character of the freshman, Mitch, revenging himself for a beating from a senior, befriended by Pink and inducted into the senior high school adolescent world of girls, drink and dope.

Explaining that he no longer wants to become a lawyer and help the needy, one character sums it up: now all he wants is to dance! The future might be uncertain, but right now there is definitely a party going on.

Although the film is wittily and tightly scripted, acted well by a cast of unknowns and diverting enough in its way, it is, in the end, too insubstantial to hold an audience.

Leaving the cinema you are left with the same feeling you might have experienced leaving a party, that you might well have been better off staying at home and reading a book.

Charlie battles on



Geoff Ward
reviews
Casualty

BBC 1
8pm, Saturday

CASUALTY, BBC's longest-running drama series, is back, having been given the *Hill Street Blues* treatment. Now it really looks like it is being filmed in a real hospital.

New producer, Corinne Hollingworth, wanted to "develop the characters" in this series — but at the expense of ditching the programme's left-wing stance. Thus her claim that the programme is safe in

her hands sounds as hollow as John Major's claim that the NHS is safe in his.

This is one more example of Alan Yentob's BBC pulling its punches to placate its political paymasters.

Yet, to judge by the opening episode, its handling of moral and social issues has become better balanced.

At times in earlier series I thought *Casualty* was a little too earnest in this respect, sometimes almost appearing to be a send-up of the genre.

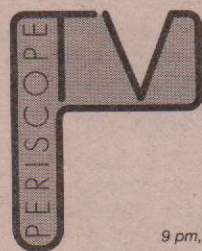
Stories concerned a poor woman who illegally sold one of her kidneys to be able to pay for better care for her child, and a youth torn between loyalty to his criminal brother or a career in the army.

Even so, removing the hospital politics, if this is the intention, will render the programme false, and it will seem to regular viewers as if Charlie had suddenly grown a new face.

In fact, Charlie has his old political face still. One yuppy interviewer wanted to know if Charlie, being interviewed for the job of Contracts Manager, was capable of "driving a hard bargain."

Reading what lay behind this question — working the "internal market" which is destroying the NHS — Charlie, became exasperated.

The yuppy drove an expensive Mercedes so Charlie snapped: "Can't you drive a Lada then?" Don't let them grind you down, Charlie!



Dan Katz
reviews
Tasting Freedom

Channel 4
9 pm, Thursday 29 September

THIS IS a film about the struggles of asylum seekers and covers the case of Joy Gardner, the killing of Omasase Lumumba in Pentonville jail in 1991, and the recent series of detention centre protests.

Before the Welfare State

The struggles of working-class women in the First World War

THE SYSTEMATIC Tory drive to undermine and destroy the Welfare State is one of the main events in recent British history. They have already gone a considerable part of the way towards wiping out the structures of social provision erected by the Labour government after 1945.

Today the fight to stop the Tories and to restore the Welfare State is the burning immediate question facing the British labour movement. In the work of organising this fight we can gain additional strength if we know the long history of the struggles of generations of working class people that went to the making of Labour's great victory in 1945 and the Welfare State that came out of it.

Some of the most inspiring of these early struggles took place during the First World War including the Glasgow rent strike of 1915 and those in the East End of London around the activities of Sylvia Pankhurst and her wing of the women's suffrage movement.

The state's welfare provision at the time was very rudimentary. The pressure on working-class men to enlist was intense. If they were the main breadwinners they had to leave their families in desperate poverty. Unemployment, at the beginning of the war especially, was very high and women could not find jobs. Yet the ruling class, who wanted workers to serve as cannon fodder in their imperialist war, were not prepared to give assistance and relief.

It was only the struggles of working class people, many of them women, during the war, that won some degree of welfare provision.

Sylvia Pankhurst worked alongside the women of London's East End to organise nurseries and health clinics and various forms of self-help.

She told the inspiring story of her work and other struggles during the war in "The Home Front", short extracts from which are printed here.

These stories are very relevant today to the atti-



A malnourished baby is cared for in one of the nurseries set up by the Women's Suffrage Federation.

tude of Major's Government, its miserly objections to "hand-outs", where benefits are not seen as rights but are only given to the "deserving poor", so that working-class people have to "prove" their distress and poverty. These struggles did help to win welfare provision as a right for working-class people in this country. It has been a long struggle and one which the bosses cannot easily destroy.

A MEMBER of the famous radical Pankhurst family, Sylvia was active in the "suffragette" movement led by her mother Emmeline and older sister, Christabel.

They organised demonstrations, raised fines, broke up political meetings in their militant campaign to win the vote for women "on equal terms with men". When jailed they went on hunger strike, were force fed and showed great heroism. Sylvia was jailed repeatedly and endured the torture of force-feeding during more than a dozen imprisonments.

Sylvia fell out with her mother and sister, who moved steadily to the right from their beginnings in Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party. Concerned to win the principle of "votes for women on the same basis as men" they relied more and more on an elite of bourgeois and aristocratic women — women who would gain the right to vote, in 1918 after the war, because they were rich enough to be property owners in their own right. The vote "for men" then was hedged about with property qualifications that excluded millions of working-class men — those who were not householders but were "sons in their fathers' households" or lodgers.

Where the labour movement — including a powerful women's suffrage component of it — campaigned for universal suffrage for men and women over 21, the Pankhursts' "suffragette" movement campaigned in effect, as its critics said, not for votes for women, but "votes for ladies".

Sylvia disagreed with this approach. She remained a socialist and went on to organise for suffrage with the working-class women of London's East End — who would not have the vote if it was granted to women only "on the same basis as men". Soon she organised the voteless men too, campaigning for universal suffrage.

When war broke out there was an unparalleled upsurge of war hysteria. There were anti-German riots. Conscientious objectors were bullied and beaten. Whilst the other Pankhursts became unbridled chauvinists, Sylvia campaigned against the war and she extended her activities with the working-class women of the East End to organise the "welfare" activities described here. She also campaigned for the protection of factory workers and the prohibition of child employment.

Sylvia Pankhurst's organisation of suffrage activists, the Women's Suffrage Federation became the Workers' Suffrage Federation and then the Workers' Socialist Federation in the course of the war. Her campaigning newspaper changed from the "Women's Dreadnought" to the "Workers' Dreadnought". She welcomed the Russian workers' revolution in 1917. The movement flowed into the early British Communist Party, though Sylvia herself broke with that organisation considering it too right wing and "Parliamentarian". But by the late '20s she was engaged once more in reform agitation — for rights for pregnant women — in and around the Labour Party.

The ruling class knows their own history and therefore they know exactly what they are about at any given moment. We need to know ours. This is a proud part of it.



Sylvia Pankhurst with her son Richard

August 1914

ALREADY BEFORE the war had been declared, dealers had sent their emissaries to buy up commodities at the small shops, to make a corner in supplies. From day to day prices rose hugely. Reservists were called up, men enlisted, their families left without sustenance, for there were no separation allowances yet. Industry was dislocated, employers shut down their factories in panic, leaving their workers to starve, or enlist.

To be workless then meant literal starvation. The small unemployment benefit obtainable under the National Insurance applied only to a few trades. It was an axiom of then Poor Law practice that relief, save the shelter of the Workhouse, must not be granted to the "able-bodied" and their dependents. Even the impotent Poor Law relief was then but a meagre supplement, mainly in kind. The "dole" as it developed after the War, was non-existent. The Guardians had not the funds to cope with this great wave of unemployment, though their expenditure actually rose to double its former rate.

I had no thought, as yet, of collecting charitable donations. On the contrary, I wanted the need for such charity abolished, by the Community taking the responsibility for the well-being of its members; for the unemployed, not doles, but work at a living wage; for the men drafted away to fight, pay at least not worse than the best obtainable in industry; nationalisation of food to keep down prices and insure that the incidence of shortage should be equally shared; such measures as steps toward the goal of plenty for all by mutual aid.

A Cabinet Committee for the prevention and relief of distress was formed. John Burns was made Chairman of the Committee for London, a seat was found for Mrs Sidney Webb. Both these appointments were calculated to appeal to progressive sentiment; for Burns had left the Government from opposition to the War, and Beatrice Webb had received more praise than any woman of her generation, for her authorship of the Minority Report to the Poor Law Commission of 1905-9. To many people the ideology of the Webbs was still the last word in social regeneration. Of the first £100,000,000 which Parliament voted for the War a part was promised for civilian distress. Moreover, a National Relief Fund was inaugurated under the auspices of the Prince of Wales. It was to be administered by so-called Local Representative Committees convened by the mayor of each area. The Government promised £4,000,000 for the erection of working class dwellings.

[But the promised relief did not materialise or was woefully inadequate].

Under pressure of the need I announced an employment bureau, and appealed for work for brushmakers, shoemakers and others. In the following issue [of the Dreadnought] I had thrown away reserves, and was pleading for funds to buy milk, for eggs to provide albumen water for infants too ill to digest milk.

Orders for the various sorts of homework our distressed people could do, we gave out, as they came to us, through the employment bureau; but these were miserably few, as compared with our numbers.

From the first we laid it down rigidly that we should pay no woman less than 5d per hour, the district minimum wage of the unskilled

labouring man. To pay a woman less, and call it charity, was to connive at sweating.

We had now a systemised distress bureau. Already before the War we carried on a continuous house to house canvas of East End districts, to draw the women into our movement. From the canvassers' reports, and from the constant stream of distress callers, great shoals of misery were cast up to me. To aid these unhappy souls one must deal with each case in detail, appealing, demanding, exhorting the Government Department, or the Board of Guardians, the landlord, the employer, the Trade Union appropriate to the case. Sometimes one must attend a police court to plead with the magistrate.

[We] called on a woman with six children under thirteen years. Her twins, only two months old, she was feeding on boiled bread, having no other food in the house, and but little of that. A girl of nineteen, the sole support of her mother and four little brothers and sisters, was unemployed. She was flagging from anaemia and debility; if her plight were prolonged she might never be fit to work again. More fortunate than many, they got 8s a week and four loaves from the Guardians, "and a job to get that!"

The War Office had issued notices stating the separation allowances to be paid to the men who had been called up or enlisted. They were paltry indeed! 1s 1d a day for wives of privates, corporals and sergeants, the great majority; 1s 4d a day for wives of colour-sergeants; 2s 2d a day for wives of quartermaster-sergeants and equivalent ranks; 2s 3d for wives of warrant officers.

Such separation allowances as came through during the first months of war were paid in part direct, in part through the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association, a semi-patronal, semi-charitable organisation.

After applying to the Association women were often kept waiting weeks without receiving a penny. Some received small doles and loans to tide them over.

The notion that the women were entitled to separation allowance as a right, not as a charitable act of grace, seemed difficult for the Association's officials to assimilate.

[One woman was denied assistance because she could not produce a copy of her marriage certificate]. The SSFA [finally] lent her 6s and told her to make it last a fortnight. It went immediately in rent, for the landlord was threatening eviction. She wrote to me:

"I think it is a shame that the Government should be allowed to do such things just because you are poor... When they take your man you might as well say they have took all you possess; and they don't care so long as they have him, what becomes of them left behind... We have a right to have what our husbands slave for, and get treated like dogs to earn. It is enough to make one go mad to think what they go through!"

Our members were daily at the House of Commons demanding the nationalisation of the food supply; work for the unemployed; and adequate separation allowances for the dependents of the men who had gone to war. Will Thorne, the stout Labour Member for West Ham, answered jovial and complacent:

"I had a Bill before the House of Commons twelve months ago for municipal work for the unemployed, but they would not touch it with a barge-pole!"

"What it amounts to is that they are going to starve the men into joining the Army" [we said].

Thorne shrugged his shoulders. A pupil of Eleanor Marx in the long ago, he was now one of the noisiest war men.

At our Federation Committee [it was] proposed that our members should go to the shops, offer to buy food at the old price, and take it forcibly if refused. I know that some women did this, in other districts, and went out with the goods they had seized unmolested. The shopkeepers feared to provoke a riot by calling the police.

To allay discontent an Emergency Act was rushed through, providing that where the Board of Trade was of opinion that foodstuffs were being unreasonably withheld from the



Pensioners' deputation to the House of Commons

market, the Board might be empowered to commandeer such foodstuffs, at prices agreed upon with the owner, or determined by the arbitration of a judge of the High Court. The Act was virtually a dead letter. Prices soared, discontent murmured.

Lady Frances Balfour wrote to the Daily Mail:

"Let there be no complaining in our streets... Women can save the situation by accepting it. We have heard of women giving tongue over the counter because the full tale of their goods could not be delivered at the usual price. Such people are as deserving of being treated as deserters as ever any soldier is who runs from the rifle fire of the entrenched position he has to take."

A callous saying this to mothers whose children were crying for food.

Rent strike victory November 1915

RENTS WERE RISING. Evictions were rife. Rents strikes developed. There were rent strikes round us in the East End. Appeals from the strikers came to us daily. In all cases we succeeded in preventing evictions. In munition areas, where the drafting in of workers from other districts had created great shortage of housing, the strife was greatest.

From the wretched one- and two-roomed "houses" in the great jerry-built barracks of Partick and other Glasgow districts, 15,000 people marched to the City Hall with banners, demanding municipal housing and complaining of rent increases of 20 per cent. Glasgow's disgraceful housing conditions had long been notorious.

A few days later the landlords applied for twelve eviction warrants against the rent strikers. Three warrants were granted, but the remainder were adjourned for a week, on representations being made that rioting would ensue if soldiers' wives or munition workers were turned out.

[Meanwhile] the Government had decided to introduce still further large numbers of munition workers into Glasgow, but the existing housing accommodation must suffice. 15,000 householders signed a declaration of refusal to pay increased rent and intention to resist eviction. Indignant rent-strikers made a bonfire of ejectment notices in the road before the City Hall. In Glasgow, Govan, and surrounding districts, pickets were set, and great throngs of people gathered to prevent the threatened evictions. Numbers flocked into the Women's Housing Association, formed by the Socialists

to focus agitation. Women kept watch all night on the common stair of the barrack dwellings, their neighbours heartening them with tea in their cold vigil. The men who came to serve the ejectment orders were greeted with volleys of flour.

To allay the agitation the Government promised legislation to protect Scottish tenants against rent increase; the appearance of similar agitations in other parts produced a Rent Act applicable to the British Isles. Originally the Act could only be specially extended to each district by Order In Council which would only be issued as a result of agitation. It contained numerous other defects, many of which were gradually eradicated — but only by agitation.

[The Act restricted rents and mortgages interest on all housing in which tenants paid £30 a year at least in rent].

Summer 1916

THE SAD plight of the old people starving on their meagre pensions of 5s a week was sometimes raised in Parliament. Food prices in the summer of 1916 had risen to 65 per cent above the pre-war level. The Government would vouchsafe no increase in the old age pension. Economists, like Lord Midleton, were even demanding that the pension should be reduced, or suspended altogether. The earnings of the old people themselves, and the pensions and allowances on behalf of soldiers, still counted in reduction of the old age pension. The aged were being driven into the Workhouse from inability to exist on the pension outside.

Arthur Henderson [the Labour Party leader] became the first Minister of Pensions. I wish I could report a great revolution in the administration of pensions. Alas! it remained miserly and truculent. The instruction given by the assistant manager of an Irish employment exchange to a new member of his staff about that time embodied the spirit equally to be found in the Pensions administration.

"I suppose you understand that our main object here is to save the fund, and never pay benefit if we can possibly avoid it."

Always new efforts were made to renew enthusiasm for the War. Mother's Day was inaugurated and linked with the War panoply. A woman wrote to me expressing her rage and sorrow that mothers should be "put upon the same basis as flags of all nations... What mothers want is their husbands and sons intact... And what is offered to those who are bereaved and cannot be comforted? A few coins, certificates, buttons, badges, rubbish of all sorts! What is there offered for those who return crippled, insane, nervous wrecks? A beautiful hospital in which to live out their days, chocolates, cigarettes, parts of the alphabet sewn on their coats, visits from duchesses... All sense of values seems lost..."

• *The Home Front — a mirror to life during the First World War* is published by The Cresset Library.



Selling the Dreadnought in London's East End

Why we must reject John Smith's political legacy

Alan Johnson reviews "John Smith. A Life 1938-1994" by Andy McSmith (Mandarin, £4.99) and "Labour's Last Chance? The 1992 Election and Beyond" by Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell and John Curtice with Bridget Taylor (Dartmouth, £17.95)

THE SHADOW Budget and its tax increases were not the reason why Labour lost the 1992 General Election. According to Heath, Jowell and Curtice: "What was more damaging was concern and anxiety about Labour fulfilling and delivering its health and education promises: the spending part of the tax and spending equation. Labour has to understand that the pursuit of the middle ground has its limits ... There are dangers in Labour trying to be the low tax party because Labour's spending priorities are popular, and it is the link between priorities and action that is already causing difficulty."

They offer detailed evidence for this conclusion.

What Andy McSmith's much less serious book shows is that Labour can only work out policies which deliver the promise of a rebuilt Welfare State if it rejects the whole political outlook of John Smith.

Andy McSmith used to be a member of the International Marxist Group, working in the Tyneside socialist bookshop "Days of Hope" in the late '70s. He was a bit of a cynic even then.

And what better place for a cynic in the 1980s than the coven of image makers, spin-doctors and witchhunters at Walworth Road? McSmith became the chief press officer for the Labour Party, and his book is full of such wisdom as that the 1979-1983 Party democracy battles were a case of "activists disrespectful of their leadership", and that "the second half of the '80s was placid thanks to new prosperity".

But McSmith the journalist has dug up enough of Smith's past to remind us that the eulogies of some of the left at the time of his tragic death were misplaced.

Smith was schooled in the Glasgow University Labour Club, part of "an elite young band of hard Gaitskellites" known as the "seat-seekers".

He allegedly helped the right to fix the vote in a close contest in Woodside constituency in 1962 by bussing in false delegates and by himself taking up the credentials of a G&M delegate for a moribund branch.

Smith climbed the greasy pole as a consistent right-winger: pro-bomb, pro-Market, pro-PLP against the demands of the constituencies, and anti-abortion. Out of government after 1979, Smith simply developed his other career as a lawyer, speaking only once in the House of Commons in 1982.

John Smith's much vaunted integrity had its limits also. He never tackled the alleged corruption of Monklands council, in his constituency. Tom McFarlane, a Party member, and council employee, spoke out against the alleged corruption. After receiving threatening phone calls, he was sacked aged 52, in an area of chronic unemployment. He contacted Smith in desperation. Smith told him "There's nothing I can do. It's terrible, really terrible, but I can't help you, Tom."

But for McSmith the 'homespun common sense' of Smith transcends all problems.

"His approach to industrial relations was typified by a story he was fond of telling: some years earlier a company manager had phoned him to appeal for help in settling a three week old strike which was threatening the very future of a plant in North Lanarkshire. Smith knew the relevant trade union organiser, and arranged a meeting between the two sides. 'After an initial flurry, it was decided to get down to negotiations. I acted as chairman and I arranged for each side to have discussions with one another and then individually.' Six hours later they emerged with a two-year pay agreement".

A bit of common sense, and the class struggle disappears. I know it's unfashionable to bang on about Karl Marx these days, but didn't he warn us to look out for socialists who "consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms" and who "endeavour, and that consistently, to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonisms"?

McSmith reminds us why Labour Party leaders set off to woo the rich and privileged of the City of London in Smith's "prawn cocktail offensive". The scene is a Shadow Cabinet Strategy Day in 1989.

"The idea that the state could stimulate the



John Smith: the eulogies were misplaced

economy, either by expanding nationalised industries or through local councils, was out, Smith told them. The government was not going to raise enough through taxes or borrowing to make any significant impact on unemployment because other considerations aside, the rules of the ERM prevented it. Consequently growth would have to come through private investment. That would mean holding fast to 'Beckett's Law', and meeting industrial and financial leaders to establish trust before election day. 'We can leave dogmatism to the Tories,' he said."

So off set Smith, Brown, Blair and Beckett to pursue the capitalist road to socialism in the expensive restaurants of the City.

In April 1990 Smith "told the America-European Community Association that Labour was now a 'significantly European party' and with a much revised attitude to capitalism. 'We welcome and endorse the dynamism, efficiency and realism which markets can provide' he assured the association."

With this approach any idiot can resolve the class struggle. It's called giving up. At the same time as this farce was being played out, Clive Soley, Labour's housing spokesperson, was publicly humiliated by Smith for daring to suggest that the Treasury rules might have to be changed to allow councils to build hous-

es with money from council house sales!

Marx wrote despairingly of socialists who, seeing working people as 'a class without historical initiative or any independent political movement', seek to 'realise all these castles in the air' by appealing 'to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois'.

At least the people Marx had in mind, like Robert Owen, really did set out to create a new society. Today's Christian socialists, like John Smith and Tony Blair, want to persuade us that late 1990s capitalism can deliver a world of strong communities, flourishing individuals and ecological balance. Because Stalinist centralised state planning did not work, we must apparently cease to imagine any economic framework other than capitalism.

Unable to imagine a socialism which is not a statist socialism from above, much of the Labour Party has given up imagining any socialism. The vision of socialism from below — in which strong communities and flourishing individuals can emerge because of a bedrock of popular participation and democratic planning of production — is still the property of small groups. Until this situation changes, there will continue to be a hole filled with phrases where the left's alternative should be.

Criticisms from within the SWP tradition

FORUM

From the International Socialist Group

WE WERE glad that *Socialist Organiser* printed extracts from the IS Group discussion document (not a 'programme', as your article suggested), *For a Democratic SWP* (15 September, Democratise the SWP). It is important that debate on the left be open, principled and unsectarian, and your publication of a critique of the SWP by some of its ex-members could have helped to encourage just such a debate. As far as we are concerned our critique of the SWP is not an internal matter or a secret, but a problem that needs to be considered by the whole of the workers' movement and the revolutionary left. As Trotsky once said, a sectarian is a frightened opportunist — in other words, Marxists have nothing to lose by putting their arguments honestly to the working class, because we have enough faith in the justice of our case to believe

that we have nothing to lose by putting it to as many people as are prepared to listen to it. That is why the IS Group welcomes any group on the left honestly reporting our difference with the leadership of the SWP.

We understand and accept that limitations of space meant that you had to edit our original document. However, we feel that your editing of the document distorted our view of the SWP to make it seem to fit your own analysis much more closely than could possibly be the case. It is fair that you should have edited our piece, but you should at least have indicated where the cuts were made. More than that, an accurate presentation of our views would not have edited out every single reference to those aspects of SWP theory and practice we believe have made a great contribution to the left as a whole. We understand that you, like the rest of the left, have your own critique of the SWP, but if you wish to report the latest developments in the SWP at least you should try to do so objectively and honestly.

The result of your editing was that we

were made to appear to have a far more jaundiced view of the IS/SWP tradition than is the case — if we really were that hostile to the SWP and the IS tradition, we would hardly have called ourselves an 'IS Group' when we decided to work outside the SWP. Our critique of the SWP today is far-reaching, but it is a critique from within the IS tradition. Whether you agree with the conclusion or not, the fact is that we believe that Marxists today still have much to learn from the IS tradition as it developed in the '50s and '60s and that a successful revolutionary group today would have to be built on the basis of this tradition.

It is our view that it is impossible to understand the modern world, after the collapse of the regimes of the eastern bloc, without the theories of state capitalism and deflected permanent revolution as they were developed by Cliff and the IS tradition. Perhaps this tradition needs to be built upon and expanded, but such a development would still have to take place on the basis of these theories and ideas. Any attempt to simply continue the ideas of orthodox Trot-

skyism and the Fourth International, even if spiced up with elements of sociology in the form of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, will lead only to a dead end. Of course, many revolutionaries can take a correct position on this or that political question on the basis of other theories, but we think that in the end, only the IS tradition can form the basis of a consistent theory of revolution — whatever the faults of the current SWP.

Obviously the letters page of *Socialist Organiser* is not the place to try to resolve such debates, but we would recommend that if any of our readers want to know what we really have to argue, rather than a simplified and stereotyped version of our arguments, they could start by reading a copy of our pamphlet *Democracy and the SWP* which includes a number of articles by the German IS Group and ourselves.

Comrades who are interested in a real debate with the IS traditions rather than just celebrating their differences with it and corroborating their prejudices can order our pamphlet on 071-249 1009.

Signal strikers are still solid

An AWL railworker reports from the Signalling Grades Conference

SOME trade unionists will have been alarmed by the press reports that the RMT signal workers' conference (16-17 September) showed the dispute weakening. But that is a one-sided interpretation.

More than half the delegates who spoke during the dispute debate were for all-out action, and most of those who called for binding arbitration willingly admitted that the strike was solid in their areas.

If there was a general mood at conference, it was that inactivity would weaken the dispute and they wanted to find a way forward.

Those who wanted to escalate the action basically failed to convince conference that it could be done successfully because they were still looking for solutions within the signals grade alone. Willesden asked for an all-grades ballot for action if signalworkers were

sacked during all-out signals action, and as the debate wore on it became obvious that the "ruled out" resolution from Sheffield calling for track and train grades to stop work on safety grounds was the realistic way forward. Delegates from Edinburgh and Glasgow supported it in their speeches.

The call for arbitration was in many cases an honest but naive attempt to expose Railtrack. However, the hard right wing in the RMT wanted to use it as a cover for calling off the strikes. Their hand was strengthened by the support given to this idea by Tony Blair. The conference rejected binding arbitration.

The resolution that signalworkers passed calling for "parallel talks" on an interim pay rise and on restructuring is dangerous but not catastrophic, the leadership have an opening that could allow them to make major concessions to Railtrack while claiming a formal victory on the upfront payment. Railtrack current demands on "restructuring" would mean a £1,000 a year pay cut for at least 25% of all signalworkers.

• **Signal grades conference resolution**
"This conference congratulates all sig-

nalling members who have supported the GGC decisions attempting to resolve our interim claim. We request the GGC examine the possibility of restarting talks on this claim and progressing restructuring talks, the present action

"Off the Rails"

AROUND 45 signalworkers attended a signal grades conference fringe meeting on "How do we take the dispute forward" which was organised by the rank and file paper "Off the Rails" and Willesden Rail branch. The meeting represented a very large segment of those conference delegates who wanted to extend the action. (The total number of delegates was around 100). The discussion was lively and focused on ideas like pulling out the train crews over safety and an all-out strike.

Copies of "Off the Rails" are available from 136 Popple Street, Sheffield S4 8JS. 30p per copy and

being taken to be retained and if no progress is made means of stepping up action to be examined. We reaffirm our commitment that any final package be the subject of a referendum of signalling grades members."

20 pence post and packing.

London rally

OVER 150 people attended a signalworkers' solidarity rally in central London last week (September 13th). Speakers included Jimmy Knapp and Jeremy Corbyn MP as well as strike committee leader John Tilley plus rank and file signalworkers and tubeworkers. The meeting was a lot livelier than many "solidarity rallies" due to interventions from signalworkers, train drivers and tube workers and other railworkers present, who all pressed Knapp and the executive to spread the action and call out the train grades over safety.

"Tremendous support"

By Manchester signalworker

FOR OTHER WORKERS our dispute will be a milestone. That is why the Conservatives are fighting us so viciously - they know that if we burst through the Government's pay freeze it will give every other trade union the confidence that has been sapped out of them, particularly after the miners.

We've all had a belly-full of it and we're all fed up, but that doesn't mean that we're not going to remain solid. An 'all-out' strike would be suicide, because people just would not be able to sustain themselves - it wouldn't get support.

ASLEF has said is that any driver who feels that it's unsafe to work will get backing and support if he refuses to move a train, but that's putting the onus on the individual as opposed to doing something collectively.

If there are enough of these safe-

ty issues reported to the Railways Inspectorate and the Health and Safety Executive they'll be forced to take notice. Unfortunately they've not done a great deal because those two organisations are government controlled.

At the beginning there were half a dozen of us active locally, but as the weeks go by there have been more and more involved. On the last strike we were able to put pickets on all but two of the signal boxes that there was a supervisor in. Through the local fund we are looking after special hardship cases as well as printing leaflets and paying for transport.

The support that we've had has been absolutely tremendous. Virtually every section of what was BR has had collections for us. At grass roots level the Labour Party has been tremendous, but if you take one step up above that there's nothing. Tony Blair seems to be very talented really - he can talk for half an hour and say absolutely nothing.

Action on Highways cut

By a DOT worker

IT SEEMS that the phoney peace in the Highways Agency (part of the Department of Transport) is over. Senior management want to shut 7 offices and shed 544 jobs.

They agreed not to implement these proposals until 'full' consultation has taken place with the union. Not surprisingly they haven't kept their word. In a number of offices the Agency began to re-organise work.

Despite a decision in mid-August to ask for a ballot for non-co-operation amongst Agency staff, CPSA is only now beginning that

process. With luck management will be notified, as required by law, of the ballot this week. In CPSA's sister union, NUCPS activists will push for a similar ballot as well.

From reports across the country we are confident that non-co-operation will be won. If it is it should seriously hamper the Agency's plans to relocate work and to push through office closure.

Members should have no illusions that non-co-operation in itself will prevent office closures. What is needed is strike action. It is vital that we get a good turnout and a resounding Yes vote for the upcoming ballot.

UNISON Health Sector pay

HEALTH WORKERS not covered by the pay review bodies are currently being consulted on the employer's final offer. UNISON organises half of the 400,000 NHS workers in admin & clerical sections, and also ambulance staff and officers.

UNISON's Service Group Executive is recommending rejection of the offer, which amounts to 2.4%, plus an increase of 2.4% on London Weighting. They say that members would need at least 5% to break even, and anything less would be a pay cut. Although the offer is 0.5% less than the offer accepted by other health workers, the crucial point is that performance-related

pay. Half a million nurses have voted to reject PRP. UNISON is recommending strike action on these two issues. It is proposed that this would take the form of 1, 2, and 3-day strikes. Consultation is taking place now in the form of local meetings which will be reported back to Regions. However, a national campaign against local pay deals is needed right across UNISON to tell the employer there will be no negotiations on PRP.

Consultation on local government pay is still going on although most UNISON members had a settlement date of 1 July. There should be a campaign for a big yes vote for action in both sectors, and any strike action should be co-ordinated in a massive campaign to defend these public services.

Missed chance for UNISON left

By AWL UNISON members

THE UNISON Fightback conference held last Saturday (17 September) was attended by 200 delegates and observers from 80 branches and stewards' committees. Unfortunately the event became an SWP dominated rally.

So far, UNISON Fightback exists as an informal link-up between a number of branches and occasionally has conferences. It has always been unclear how and by whom decisions are taken. The suspicion is that the SWP call the shots with little democratic accountability.

The SWP successfully pushed that the campaign should "organise further Fightback Meetings at UNISON Conferences and over immediate disputes as they arise". This leaves the campaign without any formal structure, and activists with no way to influence the campaign priorities. For example, over the witchhunt of activists in Liverpool UNISON Fightback has done little, while glossy brochures have been produced on Sefton.

At the conference *Socialist Organiser* supporters proposed that UNISON Fightback hold co-ordinating meetings every two months to discuss, plan and organ-

ise campaigning activities. The SWP vociferously opposed this proposal, and voted it down.

It is equally important to get a united left in UNISON. *Militant* supporters active in organising the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON proposed UNISON Fightback and CFDU should get together to create one united UNISON left. The conference never got the chance to vote on this as it was ruled out of order by a "Standing Orders Committee" as being submitted too late. The Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON meets on 3 December in Leeds. Hopefully it will be a more open affair.

The UNISON Fightback conference did agree to organise a lobby of the union executive on 24 September in support of Sefton and Liverpool. It also agreed to push for a special UNISON Delegate Conference over Sefton and Liverpool. Both are useful initiatives and should be supported.

The latest issue is out of *Unity* - a journal for rank and file UNISON activists supported by 30 UNISON branches. This newsletter can play a vital role in challenging the arguments of the national leadership and in helping to develop an organised left in UNISON.

No dirty deals with BT!

By a British Telecom engineer

IN THE LATEST stage of the dispute between the telecom workers union NCU and BT on the changes in attendance patterns (CSIP), the NCU negotiators have said they have a basis for an agreement.

The proposed joint agreement will be presented to the Executive meeting on 20 September.

Many NCU branches are expressing their lack of faith in this potential 'joint agreement' by lobbying union headquarters on 20 September to urge Executive members to keep the pressure up on BT.

BT's deadline for all workers on the personal communication side to have signed up for changes in their working patterns has now passed. Despite tremendous pressure to sign from managers, only a small minority of engineers have signed.

The union's main claim in the negotiation was for a shorter working week for all BT staff, at least overtime-equivalent premium payments for Saturday working, volunteers only for weekend working, and protection for supervisory grades. The claim for a

shorter working week, is all but lost, as this has not been fought for. But it is difficult to see how a package that did not include the other three points would be acceptable for the majority of the membership.

BT want more flexibility from their staff, later hours working and more rota weekends, but they want it without having to meet overtime or reasonable shift payments. The NCU is not in principle opposed to more flexibility, as long as members are paid for it. The main battle is how much the NCU can force BT to pay to its members for the greater flexibility.

Tony Young and other NCU officers fundamentally undermine the strong position that the NCU is in by conceding that BT has a business case for the changes. The NCU should react to the current stage of CSIP, by building confidence amongst the membership on the basis of the 85% vote against the changes in a consultative ballot, and the fact that the majority have not signed up. A stepping up of the pressure on BT is necessary. And if BT still try to railroad the changes through, an industrial action ballot must be called.

Proven: the more the merrier!



THERE ARE perhaps about 20 million species of animal and a similar number of plant species on the Earth at present. A majority of these have not been identified yet. Many never will be described, as the rate of extinction is running at about a thousand times the average before humans evolved. But does this matter? Just how many species of beetle do we need? Or nettle? Or nematode worm? I, for one, won't be protesting when the last stocks of small-pox virus are destroyed next year, as is proposed.

However, there is evidence that the greater the diversity of species, plant and animal, in a habitat, the more successful are the species in using the energy coming in from the sun. Jeremy Cherfas, a prominent science journalist, summarised some of this evidence in *New Scientist* last month.

It's difficult to carry out experiments on a whole environment: Biosphere 2 showed some of the pitfalls in trying to construct a realistic but controlled model environment. The smaller the experiment, the easier to control what goes into it, but the less lifelike the results. The Centre for Population Biology near Ascot, run by the National Environment Research Council (NERC), has arrived at a compromise with its Ecotron. In the Ecotron, on the second floor of a research building, it is always a cloudy day in June. From 12°C in the morning, the temperature climbs to 20°C by mid-afternoon. At 7.00, 16.15 and 20.30, it rains for one minute. There are 16 species of plant, all self-pollinating annuals; there are five species of herbivorous insects, three aphids, a whitefly and a leaf miner, and five species of parasitic wasps that prey on each of these; there are a slug and a snail; and earthworms and springtails to recycle dead plant material. This community is just a simplified model but it is able to provide answers to what would happen if temperatures rose, if carbon dioxide levels rose or, the subject of this article, if diversity of species fell.

In Ecotron's first experiment, species were removed from some of the rooms, mimicking the loss of diversity in nature as species are eradicated for whatever reason. In the high-diversity group, there were 31 species, as already described; in the medium-diversity group, 15; and in the low-diversity, 9 species. Over 200 days, the ecologists monitored all aspects of the functioning of the model ecosystems. The most striking difference was in the uptake of carbon dioxide. The more diverse the system, the better it was in taking up CO2 and incorporating it into plant tissue.

Since all other factors were kept the same, the conclusion is that more diverse ecosystems are more efficient in utilising the sun's energy. This is particularly interesting since the ecosystems included animals that ate plants and their natural predators. Experiments in the open are more difficult to control but they seem to bear out the results of the Ecotron experiment. One such experiment involved 200 plots of tall-grass prairie in Minnesota. Twelve years ago, University of Minnesota researchers marked out the plots and added different amounts of fertiliser to each. Different species use scarce nutrients like nitrogen in different ways so it would be expected that those species that used nitrogen best would tend to crowd out the other species on the high-fertiliser plots. The diversity would therefore decline on the high-fertiliser plots. But would the use of CO2 be unchanged?

After five years, the researchers started to measure the biomass (mass of plant material) on the plots. But the course of the experiment was upset by nature when, the following year, there came the most severe drought for 50 years. All the plots were badly affected but the most diverse (low fertiliser) ones were less affected. These were still producing half of their pre-drought biomass. The least diverse (high fertiliser) plots were only producing one eighth of their former biomass.

When the rains returned, after three years, the researchers could then find out if diversity affected the rate of recovery of the plots. Sure enough, the most diverse plots had recovered fully by three years from the end of the drought while the least diverse were still below their former levels.

The findings from the Ecotron and Minnesota experiments confirm a previous study in the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania. There, an ecologist studied plots with naturally different diversities. He fenced off part of each plot to prevent grazing by migrating herds of zebra, gazelle and wildebeest. After these had passed, he compared the plants in the grazed and ungrazed parts of each plot. He found that the less-diverse plots had lost three quarters of their biomass while the more diverse ones had only lost one quarter.

These experiments show that more diverse habitats are more productive and are more able to resist stresses such as drought or overgrazing. With CO2 levels rising, it will be interesting to see how more and less diverse ecosystems respond. This is a question that Ecotron will be able to attempt to answer. The message to us now and in the future is that we would be unwise to allow biodiversity to decline in view of the increasing stresses that we will inevitably be placing on our environment.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Labour must back the strikers and scrap anti-union laws

By Tom Rigby

SIGNALS STRIKE

Step up the action to win!

By an RMT member

AS WE GO TO PRESS the leaders of the signalworkers' union RMT and Railtrack are in talks at the government arbitration service ACAS.

It's vital that the union steps up the pressure on Railtrack:

• Hold out for the full claim.

The signals dispute is now 15 weeks old. After such a long struggle no deal should be accepted that does not include the granting of the union's claim for an 11% upfront payment for past productivity.

• Stop all trains on strike days.

The dispute could be won very quickly if the union stopped Railtrack's life-threatening operations on strike days.

What was and is needed is a clear instruction to health and safety reps and drivers to refuse to work on strike days if they think they are in serious or imminent danger, backed up with support for industrial action if any dismissals take place.

If Knäpp and co. (not to mention the ASLEF leadership) continue to block such a call then it is up to the rank and file to organise local depot meetings in order to do it themselves.

• Step up the solidarity!

Railtrack management are prepared for a long dispute. In order to strengthen the signalworkers' action, the broad labour movement must step up its solidarity activity.

• Organise workplace and street collections



Stopping the trains on strike days on grounds of safety is the way forward. Photo: John Harris.

for the signalworkers' strike fund.

The RMT are asking the TUC to levy every trade unionist £1, but the money will only materialise if rank and file trade unionists do the work.

• Invite a signalworker or RMT activist to talk to your union, Labour Party or student organisation.

• Set up a signalworkers' support group with other trade unionists in your area in order to better co-ordinate solidarity activity.

These three key policies: standing firm for the full claim; spreading the dispute to train crew; and stepping up solidarity work provide the way forward.

Victory to the signalworkers!

MANY SIGNALWORKERS are rightly angry at the way Tony Blair has refused to give clear support to their strike and has instead called for binding arbitration.

Many are also angry that the Labour leaders are committed to keeping in place the anti-union laws that have been used to bludgeon the trade union movement over the last decade or more.

As one signalworker put it at last weekend's RMT union signal grades conference,

"If it wasn't for the anti-union laws and our leadership's fear of sequestration we could have won this dispute months ago."

He's dead right. Tony Blair should be backing the strike and attacking the Tory laws as well as denouncing Railtrack for "secondary action" in bringing in scabs from BR to try to break the strike.

As things stand, there are two Labour Party policies on the Tory anti-union laws.

There is conference policy, which includes a commitment to "repeal all anti-union laws" and to bring in a series of positive legal rights, including rights to take solidarity action and to picket effectively.

Then there is the policy of Tony Blair and Labour's front bench.

Blair supports the great bulk of the anti-union laws and opposes effective picketing and secondary action.

At this year's Labour Party conference, starting on 3 October, delegates should be able to vote on emergency motions putting Labour finally behind the signalers. They will also set a chance to reaffirm union rights. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has a motion calling for "the repeal of all anti-union laws and their replacement with positive rights for trade unionists."

It deserves the support of every socialist and trade union activist.

Tube strike promises second front

MONDAY 19 SEPTEMBER SAW confrontation on the Tube head closer, with a vote for action in the RMT pay ballot. RMT tubeworkers voted 2072 to 809 for action. The vote for action has inevitably been attacked by the tube bosses because of the 38% turnout. In truth the turnout is not bad for a postal ballot, and the result presents us with a firm basis for action. The first 24 hour stoppage has been scheduled for Friday 30 September and will coincide with the signalworkers' 48 hour stoppage. This is particularly good news for both tube workers and signalworkers.

However, the ASLEF leaders grovelling treachery in calling off the ballot in return for a half percent increase hangs over the upcoming

dispute. A campaign over the next week by RMT activists to sign up ASLEF members to RMT would legally cover ASLEF members angry with their executive and wanting to take action and hit the only thing the ASLEF leadership care about, their income from subs!

Knapp's pleading for immediate talks with London Underground via ACAS is scarcely good news, but it is scarcely a surprise either.

Tubeworkers now have a real chance to both win back some ground and support the signalworkers. This will only happen in spite of, not because of, our union leaderships.

All out on Friday 30th!

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