

WHO ROBBS THE NHS?

'This autumn some (Health) authorities will just run out of money; we will have the ward closures and all the rest of it' said Health Minister Kenneth Clarke in a recent radio interview.

'It happens every year, sometimes through incompetence, sometimes the reverse - they buck their ideas up, they put more patients through their unit and they find it wasn't planned and hadn't been prepared for and they run out of money.'

He speaks like an aristocrat annoyed by the antics of the peasantry.

Questioned about the funding of the nurses pay award, Clarke was adamant that no extra money would be forthcoming from the Tories.

If central government continues its refusal to fund the award, and the Health Authorities are forced to make up the deficit, it is estimated that another 4,000 hospital beds will be closed this year in London alone.

The necessity for having decently paid hospital workers is apparent to all who use the NHS. Neither is the British health service exorbitantly expensive, as Thatcher claims. (Only Portugal and Greece, the two poorest European countries, spend less on health).

It is not overburdened with an expensive bureaucratic apparatus. France and Germany spend twice as much on administration, and America - Thatcher's favourite model - three times more.

Under a system where you have to pay for services, the cost of administration automatically goes up, because of the amount of paper work involved.

In America, the most advanced capitalist country in the world, most people are left to finance their own private health schemes, and only the poorest qualify for the state system. Forty nine million out of a population of 211 million have no health cover at all because they cannot afford it.

A recent national survey revealed that two per cent of American families had been refused medical

BY BRONWEN HANDYSIDE

treatment because they could not pay.

The American system, means that competition between independent sources of care makes it impossible to plan rationally. There is massive underprovision in the unprofitable areas of health care - those involving the old and the poor - and overprovision of elaborate tests and procedures in the

hospitals which are run for profit.

It is obvious that the US model, yearned after and legislated for by the Tory government, automatically places financial considerations higher than people's lives.

A genuine concern about costs in the NHS would mean the exercise of price control over the scandalous profiteering of the multi-national drug companies. Their bills amount to £2,000 million a year.

The full funding of the nurses' pay award is estimated at a measly £150 million.

The drug companies' profits during the worst moments of the economy have been more than

the average for industry generally and are increasing continuously in spite of the recession.

The 'underdeveloped' countries never see most of the drugs produced by these companies. Those offloaded there at a cheap rate are those which have been declared too dangerous to use by the 'developed' world - like Depo-Provera.

As man-made disasters like the floods in Bangladesh and drought in Africa occur, through the ravages of the world capitalist system, and millions give money or participate in charitable events like Sports Aid, the profits of these hyenas rocket again, as their drugs are purchased to save lives.

The Tories represent the owners of these companies and obviously can never control them for the benefit of ordinary people.

They must be taken out of private ownership, so that life-saving drugs can be produced on a non profit making basis to be distributed internationally according to need.

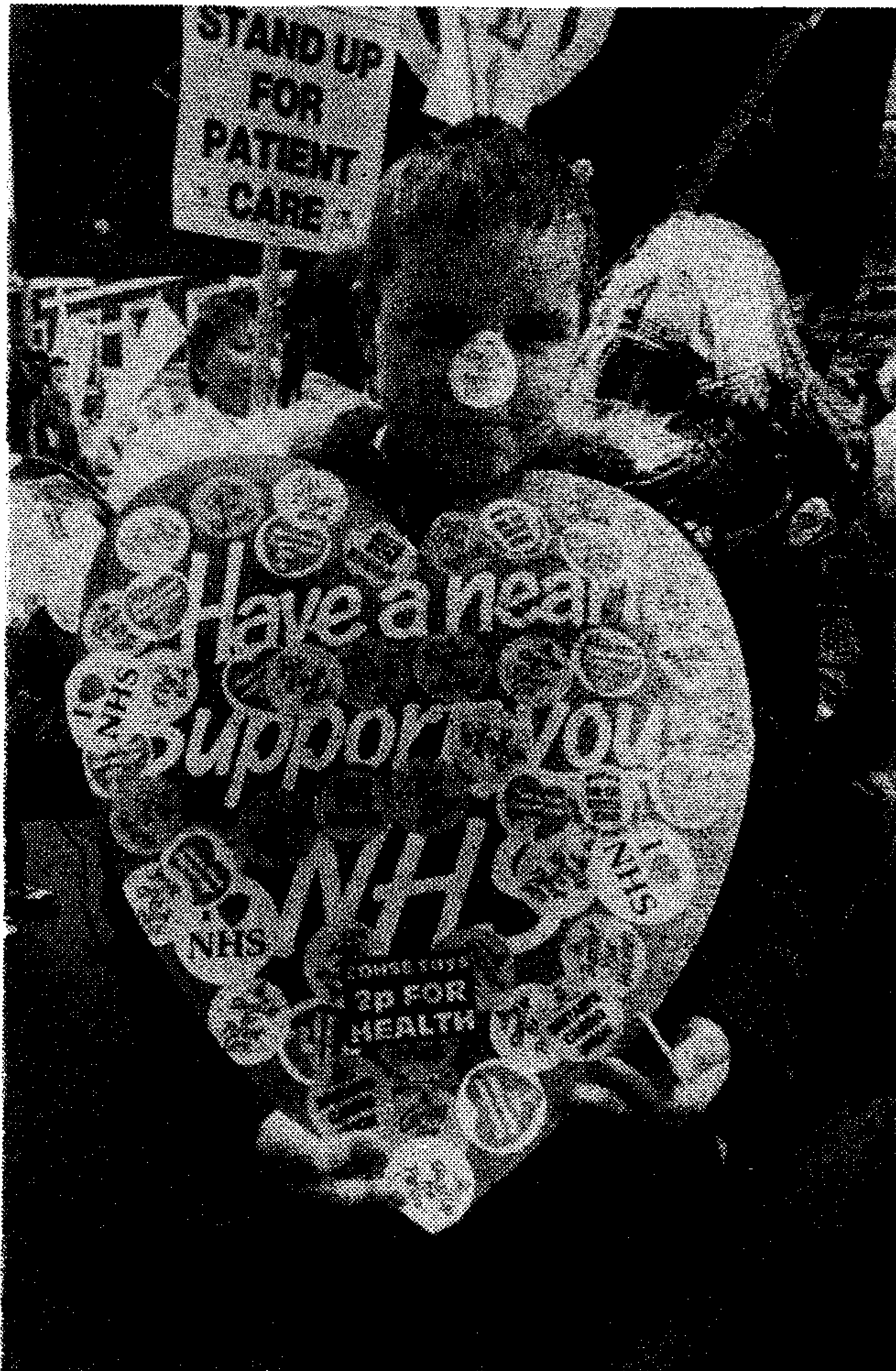
The question remains: if the NHS is not expensive, and far more efficient in providing care for all regardless of income (unlike its American counterpart) - why the apparently wilful disregard of the Tories for both logic and intense public opinion in favour of its proper funding?

Thatcher's hatchmen are dismantling the NHS and the education system in response to the demands of an international economic crisis.

In a Britain which has had its industrial base destroyed there is no need for a healthy, well educated workforce. This is why Kenneth Clarke says - with an air of surprise at having to spell it out - that if the NHS cannot finance itself it will be closed down.

But they now have an enormous problem - how to smash a health service that the working class and large sections of the middle class will fight ferociously to preserve.

Clarke's speech shows that the government has been forced by the crisis to go for confrontation. It may be their downfall.



A youthful supporter of the NHS in April this year

Workers Press

Testing times

A FULL-PAGE article in a recent edition of 'Pravda' devoted to the political career of Leon Trotsky admitted that he had been murdered by an agent of the GPU in Mexico in 1940.

This is in sharp contrast to the coy terms in which his death has normally been spoken of. Only recently a piece in the Soviet press suggested that he had been killed in a car crash.

The article by Dmitry Volkogonov, headed 'Demon of the Revolution' openly acknowledged the leading role that Trotsky played in the early years of the Russian Revolution, praise mixed up with criticisms of the founder of the Fourth International who, we are told, had an 'excessive desire' for power.

Here again is an indication of the crisis which any discussion of the history of Trotsky, second only to Lenin and defender of the heritage of October and leader of the fight against the Stalinist degeneration and betrayal of 1917 poses for the bureaucracy.

Volkogonov's article raises a number of questions, not least about how Soviet historians now intend to explain to the world the reasons why Stalin had to murder the entire leadership of Lenin's party, Trotsky included.

But there is a specific question for several self-styled Trotskyists who have devoted their energies for the past several years to trying to prove that certain leaders of the Trotskyist movement at the time of Trotsky's murder were complicit in that act.

Amongst those supposedly involved in the assassination of Trotsky was one of the leaders of the American movement, Joseph Hansen.

This is the long-held claim of former Workers Revolutionary Party leader Gerry Healy (Healy was expelled from the WRP in 1985 for physical and sexual abuse of Party members and slander against his political opponents.)

According to Healy, Hansen and others were in the pay of the GPU. Healy's erstwhile political collaborator, David North, leader of the American Workers League, also continues to subscribe to this theory. Indeed the British supporters of North have gone even further in their agent-hunting and now accuse Healy himself of being a GPU accomplice!

We now believe there is no foundation in these 'theories'. Healy increasingly accused any opponent in the working class movement of being an 'agent' (whether of the Soviet, American or British state it mattered little) as a substitute for the struggle for political principle and clarification. The rare social invitations Healy now receives are invariably turned down on the grounds that they will be visited by swarms of unnamed agents.

But now the test can be made. All the materials surrounding Trotsky's murder are locked away in the Moscow archives.

We demand that all the circumstances surrounding the events in Mexico nearly 50 years ago be made available to the international working class movement and in particular all those directly and indirectly involved in Trotsky's death be named.

Workers Press readers will no doubt watch who takes up this demand. If they are looking in the direction of Healy and North we fear they are in for a disappointment.

WORKERS PRESS INTERNATIONAL FIGHTING FUND

We need: £4,458

We have a further month, until 31 October, to raise £2,000 of our £10,000 Fighting Fund.

The Central Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party made this decision at a meeting on 11 September when we discussed our financial commitments to the Centre for Rebuilding the Fourth International.

There was unanimous agreement that priority must be given to important and urgent international work, which needs £2,350 and the Central Committee resolved to lead the fight to raise this sum, in addition to £2,108 to bring the Fighting Fund up to £8,000 by the end of September.

Raising these resources is a major part of the campaign for the international meeting on 9 October organised by the Preparatory Committee for an International Conference of Trotskyists.

We are proud that this meeting to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International is being held in London and will host comrades on the Preparatory Committee as well as other Trotskyists who are discussing the Ten Points on which the International Conference is being called.

It especially gives us the opportunity to invite workers and youth in Thatcher's Britain to this meeting. We can explain that the long history of struggle against Stalinism of the Fourth International has been the indispensable preparation for the new upsurge in the struggles of the international working class which is now making it possible and necessary to rebuild the Fourth International.

This is the essence of our call for the financial resources to carry out our tasks. We urge our members and readers to respond generously.

Dot Gibson

Please send your donations to:
Workers Press International Fighting Fund
PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS

Workers Revolutionary Party/Preparatory Committee

50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

MEETING IN GLASGOW

Sunday 23 October
1pm

Blythswood Hotel
320 Argyle Street
Glasgow

PUBLIC MEETING IN EAST LONDON

SUNDAY 2 October
7pm

Methodist Church Hall
Bryant Street, London E15
(nearest tube Stratford)
speaker: Bob Archer

Scottish Area Workers Revolutionary Party

calls on all supporters to join the

DEMONSTRATION FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM IRELAND Glasgow

Saturday 8 October

Assemble 10 am: Forge Street, off Royston Road
March to City Halls, Candleriggs, 10.30 am

News briefs...

Bad air

A SURVEY just published by the National Society for Clean Air claims that the main source of air pollution in some areas comes from antiquated hospital incinerators operated by ill-trained staff.

The NSCA's secretary general, in a plea for an end to Crown Immunity, says 'It seems incredible that services devoted to human health are actually a major source of pollution'.

The cost, approaching 1 billion, of bringing incinerators up to the standards required by a forthcoming EEC draft directive, is said to be worrying the Department of Health.

Unequal signs

INNER London Education Authority's research and statistics branch proposes that 8 million should be set aside to promote an equal opportunities initiative. Students from ethnic minorities, women and disabled people are too poorly represented at polytechnics and colleges of higher education, it says.

Their analysis also shows that, in 1986-1987, a third of those suspended from ILEA schools were black. Caribbean pupils account for 14 per cent of the school population.

In accordance with recommendations from the Commission for Racial Equality, schools were being advised on how to change their rules to ensure 'that they do not adversely affect blacks'.

How about a flea market?

ONE of the effects of the Big Bang reforms of October 1986 has been to leave the trading floor of the London Stock Exchange almost deserted. Plans to redevelop the area and unused space on another three levels, amounting to some 50,000 square feet in all, include a shopping area.

The empty space is said to be costing £150,000 a month.

Whale 'experiments'

UNDER the guise of a scientific expedition, Japanese whalers are preparing to set sail for the Antarctic in November with plans to catch 825 minke whales.

In defiance of the International Whaling Commission, the government-financed scheme, described as 'research whaling' is being launched as a way of resuming commercial whaling.

Last year a similar hunt took place which caused an international outcry. The 273 carcasses caught were examined for 'data' then sold for huge profits.

Thatcher's mad dogs in Gibraltar

BY STUART CARTER

THE SUMMARY executions of IRA volunteers in Gibraltar and Drumnakilly County Tyrone carried out by the SAS show that a war is taking place in Ireland.

A war is being waged by the Republican movement to liberate the North of Ireland from British occupation. The British working class must take sides by demanding the withdrawal of British troops.

The pathologist at the Gibraltar inquest described the murder of Sean Savage as a 'frenzied attack' in which 16 bullets were pumped into his head and body by two SAS soldiers.

Murder

The murders of the unarmed volunteers in Gibraltar and the three volunteers ambushed in Tyrone are a continuation of a shoot-to-kill policy which has been authorised at the top levels of the British state.

When Manchester deputy police chief John Stalker threatened to expose this policy

in 1986, he was framed and sacked from his investigation into the RUC.

After the coach bombing at Ballygawley which killed eight soldiers, Labour spokesman Merlyn Rees called on Ulster Unionists to publish lists of alleged IRA members so that the army could 'take the gloves off'.

Executed

Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis, a former RUC intelligence officer rushed to Downing Street to give Thatcher and Hurd a list of known Republicans.

Shortly afterwards the three IRA volunteers were executed in Tyrone.

Asked whether they had been on his list, ex-intelligence officer Maginnis said he couldn't remember.

The Gibraltar inquest is a smokescreen where arguments will take place about whether the SAS followed correct procedures.

These executions are ordered by Thatcher who declared in Australia 'The IRA has to be wiped out'.

However after the last 19 years of military repression the resistance of the republican forces is as strong as ever.

This disproves the statements of Thatcher and Kinnock that they are just a minority of mindless murderers without any support from the nationalist people. Forty per cent of nationalists voted Sinn Fein in the last election.

Battle

The British working class must take sides not only because the republican movement is fighting for a just cause, but because it will have to do battle with the same enemy to establish socialism in Britain.

When British workers become a threat to capitalist rule the savagery of the state forces shown in Gibraltar will be turned against them.

The WRP has political differences with Sinn Fein and the IRA. They are fighting first for a united Ireland with socialism coming at a later stage if at all.

We are convinced, as James Connolly was, that the struggle for socialism led by the working class and the fight for national liberation are inseparable.

Greedy Griffin

AN UNNAMED Midland Bank director received a 296.3 per cent increase last year, which brought his salary up to £748,458. On average, directors' salaries rose by 46.3 per cent and some poor devil from the Allied Lyons board only got a 3.7 per cent rise (bringing him up to £303,975).

The statistics are from a Labour Research report which compares rises for directors and workers in major companies.

Top of the Bill

THE INTERNATIONAL Police Exhibition and Conference in London witnessed a star turn by Mr James Anderton on its opening day. Quoting 'staggering' annual figures of street crime, executive fraud and drug trafficking, he painted a picture of Britain in which nearly everyone lived with 'intense feelings of fear'.

The 'sanctity of family life', 'respect for the elderly' 'regard for tradition' and - wait for it! - yes, 'the preservation of our democratic way of life' were all evoked in what must undoubtedly have been another of his show-stopping performances.

LETTER

MAY I congratulate those comrades responsible for the reports from the Edinburgh Festival. The recent series of reviews and reports have been, and will continue to be, just as important in the development of Workers Press as the economic and political reports from the class struggle.

We should understand that there is no part of society immune from the onslaught of the ruling class. Witness the implanting of another Thatcher clone, this time as head of the Arts Council. Marxists have a duty to fight for the complete freedom for art.

Freedom from the moneybag patrons dozing in expensive seats at the opera while theatre companies who dare to challenge scratch an existence. Freedom from literary spivs who sell books to each other before they are written like commodities in the futures market.

In the same way as we ask workers to join our party, so too should we appeal to authors, artists, playwrights and poets to take their stand with the Fourth International. The Redgraves and their ilk need not apply.

Martin Westwood

WRITE TO WORKERS PRESS

WORKERS PRESS welcomes letters on all subjects, but please be as brief as you can. Only in exceptional cases are we able to print letters longer than 200 words.

We also welcome new contributors of articles or reviews.

Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS
Telephone us on 01-274 7271

Tuffin between hammer and anvil

BY DOT GIBSON

THOUSANDS of postal workers remained on strike this week despite agreement between the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) and Post Office management.

It is clear that they are grappling with issues worrying large sections of the working class fortunate enough to have jobs. Their work is becoming more stressful and inhuman; inflation is eating into their pay packets; failure to meet mortgage repayments could leave them homeless.

Discussions on the picket lines and at mass meetings show there is a growing awareness that questions of leadership must be settled.

Millions

For millions of workers there is no respite. They cannot discuss these matters in comfort, and come to a 'suitable' conclusion.

There just comes a point where they have to stand and fight.

At Mount Pleasant, for instance, postal workers are increasingly subjected to speed-up and the degrading rule that they must register with the supervisor when they want to go to the toilet.

An example of the tense situation came to light in Redhill, Surrey. Local union officials turned up, as invited, for talks with management, who then refused to negotiate and called the police to evict postal workers. They decided to return to work to make the point that management was being difficult.

And within the so-called 'family' of the TUC there is no mechanism for workers to discuss their common problems - to decide how to fight together; but full-time leaders and officials sit down to agree how to adjust the trade union movement to Thatcher's Britain all the time.

Divided

Both Thatcher and the TUC leaders rely on a system where the working class is kept divided along trade, profession and regional lines.

The postal workers' strike reveals this situation very clearly. Delivery workers are in a different position from those who work in mechanised sorting offices.

Particularly in London, there are staff shortages, which is why DRAS (Difficult Recruitment Areas Supplement) is an issue. There are plans to privatise the Post Office counter service, and decentralise the rest.

Postal workers' insistence on a national pay structure is not just a demand on post office management: it is also against the leadership of the UCW.

Management see the possibility of cheap

labour in high unemployment areas in the north and Scotland and want a regional structure, preparing for privatisation.

Alan Tuffin, UCW general secretary, and the Executive Committee have a policy of reaching basic agreements nationally but these have to be implemented by local negotiations. This has led to the de facto break-up of the national agreement and the build-up of the situation which led to this strike.

Alan Tuffin is now caught between the hammer and the anvil - the Post Office management on the one hand and his irate members on the other.

Encouraged by Thatcher and huge profits, post office management have been thrusting speed-up decisions down the throats of the workforce in this highly labour intensive industry. Failure of their national leadership has meant that UCW members have been involved in 213 (recorded) 'unofficial' disputes with 63,500 working days lost in the last 12 months - four times as many as the last five years.

Forfeit

Last year the UCW managed to avoid a Christmas strike by negotiating a shorter working week, but the big UCW centres in Leeds, Liverpool and London had to forfeit overtime payments.

In May this year, the UCW's delegate conference pressed five motions of censure and no confidence in their leadership, particularly aimed at Alan Tuffin. Finally, the UCW executive had no choice - they were forced to support a 24-hour strike.

But at no time did they take up leadership and call a national all-out stoppage. Management provocations led to the strike which very quickly spread to all the major sorting offices except Belfast.

And so yet another action is added to the long list of 'unofficial' disputes. Soon 100,000 postal workers were involved, and they are very angry that the UCW leadership did not call for the entire membership to strike.

In Leeds, for instance, two 18-year old girls refused to handle post sent from Liverpool; they were suspended and a mass meeting immediately voted for strike action. When postal workers struck at the massive East Croydon sorting office, management marched other postal workers from two smaller offices to the site. They asked them to cross the picket lines. The postal workers refused. Management suspended the lot.

Discussion

Since the end of the miners' strike in 1985 there has been a discussion amongst the political and trade union left in which most stated that: the working class was defeated; this was proved by another Tory victory in the general election; Thatcher's anti-union laws were all-powerful; there was a downturn in the class struggle and the working class would not come into action.

But Workers Press consistently fought this conception. We argued that the deep social crisis is revealed at its sharpest point in the crisis of working class revolutionary leadership; that unless the trade unions become independent revolutionary organs of the working class in the fight for socialism, they must turn into organisations which police their members on behalf of the capitalist state.

We maintain that the miners' strike had a profound influence on the thinking of the entire working class.

A struggle over pit closures became a year-long battle against the capitalist state in which the National Union of Mine-workers was left alone by the TUC leader-

ship to take the hammer blows of the Tory laws and the violence of the capitalist state.

During that dispute the working class set up independent organisations in the form of support groups; women and youth came into the action and many lessons began to be learned by the whole working class about its tasks and the nature of its leadership. Subsequent strikes in News International, the National Health Service, education, local government, ferries and now the post office reveal this growing awareness.

International

In each case the struggle requires an understanding that the enemy is international in character. It is the bankers who hold the gun at the heads of local government; it is the big drug consortiums who make money from illness; it is the TNT vulture which stands in the wings waiting for the fat pickings at News International and the post office.

Mass meetings of postal workers up and down the country have been deciding whether or not to continue the action. Many who argued that the result of the miners' strike indicated a downturn in working class militancy were taken unaware by the militancy of UCW members.

Lack of confidence in the UCW leadership showed itself in the refusal to end the strike of workers at most major sorting offices. In Edinburgh fists were flying as a small majority decided the return to work. And everywhere, UCW members have told Tuffin: DRAS is still 'on the table'.

Comfortable

Meanwhile he is cynically trying to reach a deal with the post office that will keep DRAS in disguised form with another name, and prepare for a regional structure, thus breaking up the national union, enabling him to keep his comfortable well-paid job and divide and rule the membership.

This is the opportunist nature of the TUC leaders who will police their members rather than lead a fight for the independence of the trade unions in a struggle to bring down the Thatcher government and defeat the Tory laws.

The postal workers' dilemma is that of the whole working class. Different responses to the situation - hesitation on the part of some, the frustration of others and the firm stand by those in the big centres - arise from the real contradiction that faces trade unionists who have come to a clearer understanding of the tasks ahead through the lessons of the miners' strike and their own experience.

The postal workers' action strikes fear in the hearts of the trade union bureaucracy - and so it should.

Battle

Those who concluded in 1985 that the working class was defeated and unwilling to take action were wrong. Postal workers have yet again proved this and there are many more ready to do battle for wages and to defend services. The question of the hour is: What kind of leadership is to take forward this struggle?

In actions like those of postal workers, nurses, seafarers etc. new leaders are coming forward prepared to represent the aspirations of their fellow workers. If you agree that a revolutionary leadership must be built in the trade unions to unite the working class as a whole to do battle with Thatcher, we invite you to join the Workers Revolutionary Party to carry forward this task.

TUC CRISIS TUC CRISIS TUC CRISIS

Boot for TUC

GEOFF PILLING comments on developments after the Bournemouth TUC. Readers are asked to contribute to this series on the crisis facing the unions.

THE Tory government is about to kick the TUC off all public bodies on which it is now represented. An announcement could be made at the forthcoming Tory Party conference at Brighton.

This follows the TUC's decision at their recent Bournemouth conference for a 'phased withdrawal' from the government's Employment Training programme. This itself was a decision taken to avoid the immediate break with the government's scheme - a step along the road to compulsory work for the unemployed.

Crawling

This is how Thatcher treats the creeping and crawling of Norman Willis and the rest of the TUC who only acted against the EETPU with the greatest reluctance and at the very last minute.

At the moment the TUC, sitting alongside government and industry representatives, is on the National Economic Development Council, the Health and Safety Executive, the Equal Opportunities Commission and many other bodies.

Thatcher is now telling the frightened trade union bureaucracy: you must step completely into line with the needs of the capitalist state and the employers. Nothing less will do. The only unions she now wants are those led by the likes of Hammond and Jordan.

The teachers were told last week, following the removal of the right of their unions to bargain collectively for them, that their next pay increase will be limited to 5.1 per cent, a figure well below the current inflation rate.

Thousands

In other words the state imposes a direct cut on the living standards of thousands of teachers with the unions under their present leaders powerless to do anything about it.

Many of these 'leaders' are jumping like frightened rabbits to obey Thatcher's commands.

No sooner had the Bournemouth decision been reached than the building workers' union made it clear that it had no intention of following the decision but would remain involved in the 'training' schemes into which it had entered.

The engineers and the GMB will follow the building workers in flouting the TUC decision.

Cowardice

Engineers' leader Bill Jordan indicated the cowardice of the union leaders when he whined:

'Any move by the government of this nature will be very serious and further weaken the TUC's influence in areas that matter'.

Thatcher has already indicated that scab unions such as Eric Hammond's electricians and the Union of Democratic Mineworkers will be welcomed onto the bodies after the TUC representatives have been cleared away.

The decision to expel the EETPU from the TUC and the TUC's refusal (however half-hearted) to participate in the Tory Employment Training programme will be moves supported by every worker who wants to see a fighting trade union movement. But it is clear that such decisions, of themselves, will not resolve the crisis in the movement.

Tolerate

The government will no longer tolerate free and independent unions. The great majority of the union leaders are quite willing to go along with Thatcher's dictates and become policemen of the working class.

Hammond and Jordan are not the only ones: many who voted for the EETPU's expulsion will travel this road.

This is why we say that a new leadership is urgently required if the trade unions are not to meet the fate Thatcher has in store for them.

A leadership is needed that sets out consciously to break the unions from the capitalist state, that sets out to establish the maximum democracy throughout the movement so that the unions are brought under the effective control of their members, that seeks to transform the unions into fighting bodies in the struggle for socialism.

Destruction

Only this sort of leadership can now save the unions from complete destruction.

This is the lesson of Bournemouth and its immediate aftermath.

50 YEARS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL!
Workers Revolutionary Party
Workers Press

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Personal Column

Peter Fryer

Five years in the English Gulag

A. N. WILSON's new novel 'Incline Our Hearts' defines the 'English Gulag' as prep school, public school, National Service. Of the first and last of these I have no experience, but half a century ago this month I began a five-year stint in an institution that was the nearest thing to a public school to be found in my natal city.

Of course it wasn't really a public school, but a third-rate imitation of one, cunningly designed to impress the burghesses of Hull as being almost as good as the real thing, and accordingly furnished with prefects, 'houses', compulsory games, a semi-compulsory Officers' Training Corps, a vain-glorious school song, and a flogging headmaster.

Major Cavill caned, not across the buttocks, but across the lower part of the spine. It hurt damnably, and gave me an abiding hatred of corporal punishment and punishers.

We were never allowed to forget that this sadistic despot had won the Military Cross in World War I - in a period when, to bolster shaky morale, such decorations were being handed out like sweets.

At Hymers College Major Cavill presided over as tacky a bunch of grotesques and eccentrics masquerading as educators as could be found outside the pages of Dickens.

The man who taught us English was a cruel, self-regarding snob who later became a priest and quite a big bug in the Church of England.

He looked down on scholarship boys, of whom I was one, from an infinite height and, on my second day, when in my plebeian way I referred to him and his colleagues as 'teachers', he put me in my place with the words: 'We don't use that word here. Here, we say "masters".'

One of this masterly person's little amusements in class was to pick on a scholarship boy (never a boy from a fee-paying family) with some minor physical defect and make his life hell for half an hour: as, for instance, the sensitive 12-year-old with projecting teeth to whom he would say: 'Shut your mouth and put your teeth in.'

The man who taught us history made us learn by heart sets of notes that he dictated to us and required us to reproduce verbatim in exams. This boring travesty of history-teaching eventually earned him a reprimand from the examiners, who complained that his pupils were producing virtually identical papers. The man who taught us French suffered from a severe facial tic, and swore fruitily during the spasms. His curses taught us more than his courses did.

He would amuse himself by painstakingly winding his pupils' hair round his finger and erecting it into tall tufts - a substitute, I now incline to think, for a less innocent form of contact.

The man who taught us physics habitually cooked his classroom experiments so that they gave the desired results. The man who taught us music also told us dirty jokes, while forbidding us to laugh at them.

Another master - I forget his subject but remember his habit - amused himself during lessons by playing, with little

attempt at concealment, what we called 'pocket billiards'.

We were taught art by a woman who was married to an undistinguished local poet and, for some unfathomable reason, required us to call her 'sir'. One of her amusements was to send boys to the headmaster to be caned for purely imaginary offences; protest served only to augment the penalty.

This wretched, seedy establishment with its staff of sick incompetents held back my education by five years. But it did teach me something about the English school system and class system, and about the need to rebel against arbitrary authority.

My rebellion at length led to my departure under a cloud. No, I wasn't expelled, but a job was found for me in a hurry at the age of 15.

I had joined the Young Communist League in the summer of 1942, and in the following spring was invited through the YCL branch to speak on 'Why I am an atheist' at a meeting organised by the local methodists.

My speech was, to put it mildly, uncompromising. It startled the methodists, and a colourful report got into one of the tabloids. The school governors were horrified.

So grave a threat to the boys' welfare did they perceive in my militant atheism that no less a personage than the Bishop of Hull was invited to deliver a stirring address to the whole school on the follies and errors of not believing in God.

At the end of that term, Hymers College and I parted company, to the immense satisfaction of both.

WHAT'S IN A WORD

IN A recent article this summer, Peter Fryer seemed to concede to an anonymous correspondent that the disappearance of the perceived difference between 'uninterested' and 'disinterested' represents the sad loss of the English speaking lexicon.

I too may regret the passing of an important semantic distinction, but I do agree with the spirit of Peter's diatribe, aimed at the more ludicrous and mindless linguistic colonels of Tonbridge Wells who seem to be able to make a connection between provincial speech, bad spelling and the imminent collapse of Western Civilisation.

The problem with compound words like 'disinterested' and 'uninterested' is that they are built from bits of Latin. Prefixes 'dis' and 'un' appear before a host of English words and the frustrating thing for linguistic conservatives is that historically they are notoriously unstable.

For example, we find a 1887 dictionary entry 'unbalanced' for what we now agree to mean 'imbalance'.

We also have 'unbalanced' which has a specialised meaning. Many of us who have grown up with the word 'inflammable', meaning likely to catch fire, but industrial safety registers use 'flammable' and 'non-flammable' to avoid confusion.

Language is constantly changing. The rustic conservatives can only see it changing for the

worse. In the case of prefixes there are constant inventions which enrich the language as for example 'hindsight' which was a useful antonym created from 'foresight'.

Our latinate or 'long words' are largely products of the 18th century (excluding the 10,000 words gleaned from 1066 and all that).

They are the invention of a rakish and inventive lexicographer like Samuel Johnson or quack grammarians who prescribed for the rising middle class, or the bourgeois *gentilhomme* that the French satirist Moliere so crudely ridiculed.

The serious problem with language change is that unlike some of the former examples it seems to take place unconsciously, outside our control and totally alien to its users. That is why it has become the 'object' of that pseudo-science, sociology.

We can say that language changes because human beings change and because social reality and nature are in a constant state of transformation.

For example, one could say that a language that does not change is a dead language, like Latin. But that would be undialectical. Modern Latin is Spanish, French, Italian, Catalan Rumanian, Portuguese and lives indirectly in English and a number of other European languages.

For the nostalgic classicist who yearns for the glories that were Rome expressed in the precision and analytical elegance of Latin prose we can offer the glories of

Dante, Cervantes, Balzac and Camoes and, yes, Shakespeare.

For those who wish to actively and politically reconstruct their antiquities we can point to Mussolini's pogroms against the Italian working class and peasantry in the 1920's and 1930's.

I hope it has become clear that these preoccupations are not merely pendant. In the present political climate they have become a centre for political intervention. Baker, Thatcher and the legion of Tory ex-liberal academics have been pronouncing on the state of the nation's literacy. Their 'concern' for 'standards' of English is a transparent camouflage for their attacks on public services, teacher unions and young people in general.

The prescriptions of the politicians are based on linguistic prejudice, ignorance and a virulent nationalism. The politicians have given the green light for a number of right-wing academics to crawl out of the woodwork and deliver a more polished apologia for nationalism.

A recent column in 'The Independent' by a professor Knight is a clear expression of this linguistic nationalism. His bete noir of English studies is comparative linguistics, which he claims in undermining the integrity of English studies and distracts you from the purity of English language which finds its highest expression in the works of Shakespeare et alia.

That English and its many regional, social and national varieties should be seen

alongside other languages is dismissed as 'sociological claptrap'.

Marxism stands against such arguments, but this is not the issue here. What the representative of the Lit & Hit men claim is that you cannot understand the social meaning of anything. Knight mirrors the crude Thatcherite statement that there is no such thing as society, only family and individuals.

In saying that students should study the achievements of a national culture, rather than that of humanity, with a distinctive species phenomenon language he throws light on the paucity of English critical letters.

That Shakespeare should be singled out as a model for English usage is ironic.

Whatever else he was, Shakespeare was a linguistic revolutionary. His extraordinary verbal repertoire is comprised of many neologisms (new words), foreign borrowings, grammatic, semantic and rhythmic irregularities which make him one of the most unconventional of linguistic paragons.

In fact, the 18th century purist regarded him as a barbarian, a butcher of linguistic and dramaturgic formalities who 'out-Herods Herod' in his slaughter of the language. And with that formulation I doubt that even by today's competitive standard he would have gained a respectable pass at GCSE. Come to think of it, neither would I.

Tom Owen

Slaughtered in the name of liberty

THE EDINBURGH Film Festival this year provided an important opportunity for the showing of the drama-documentary *Fire-raiser*, which was banned from Channel 4 earlier this year.

Made by the independent company, Twentieth Century Vixen, the film examines why the Allies bombed Dresden on February 13-14 1945 and how this night of terror played its part in the process whereby mass murder by bombing came to be 'acceptable'. It is mainly in the form of a fictitious monologue by Max Wall as Sir Arthur ('Bomber') Harris, the architect of night-bombing - a telling satire on those early TV series by aged generals reliving their moments of glory.

The British government decided on the wholesale bombing of German civilians because too many fighter planes were being shot down before they reached military targets.

Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden recommended that ill-defended smaller German cities be attacked. And Churchill himself gave the go-ahead for Harris to bomb

were destroyed.

Instead, mass bombing was used to terrorise the German working class - which had proved its revolutionary mettle several times in the previous three decades - and to intimidate the Soviet bureaucracy. As Harris was bombing Dresden, Churchill - with Stalin's connivance - was re-installing the monarchy in Greece.

Dresden was an indispensable step for the imperialist powers towards Hiroshima and the napalm onslaught in Vietnam.

Another Festival film which may never reach a mass audience in Britain was *Reefer and the Model*, directed by Joe Comerford, the last film to be funded by the Irish Film Board before it was closed by the government. It is the story of three chancers who make a precarious living trading off the west coast of Ireland in a clapped-out fishing trawler.

All of them are on the run from active politics; Reefer and Spider - much to the disgust of Reefer's flinty Republican moth

directorial debut of Zhang Yimou, the cameraman whose most well-known work in this country is 'Yellow Earth', shown at last year's Festival.

It is a Bergmanesque fable set during the Sino-Japanese war of the 1930s, whose lyrical opening and violent end are linked by the recurrence of the colour red: now in the intricate papercuts made by the young bride, carried off willingly by her litter-bearer away from her leprous old husband, to whom she has been sold for an ox; now in the redbronze of the sorghum wine over whose brewing she and her lover preside; now in the blood of the ritual killings by the Japanese invaders and, climactically, in the eclipse of the sun which marks the final slaughter.

The film is shot through with irresistible poetic detail. This is never intrusive, however, but always perfectly in tune with the gravity and passion of its subject which, according to Yimou, is not only a haunting love story, but a parable of resistance which shows 'the upright and unyielding' spirit of the peasants.



Robbie Coltrane as the transvestite Annabelle in *The Fruit Machine*

Dresden - even though he joined in the hypocritical questioning of 'these terror tactics' in the Commons, the day after the event.

A survivor of the attack - in which 135,000 were killed - more than three times the British civilian victims of German bombing in the whole of the war - remembers the 'thick snowstorm which was fire' that raged through the town.

Survivors, their hair and skin afloat, jumped frantically into the river. Fleeing the city in an attempt to escape the time bombs also dropped by the Allies, thousands were machine-gunned by planes as they reached the outskirts.

The film aptly points out the links between Hitler, Mussolini and the British ruling class, reminding us that the British government refused pleas to bomb the concentration camps - 'impossible for technical reasons' it was claimed, though chemical plants right next to Auschwitz

er - from the IRA, and Badger from a budding political career threatened by the revelation of his homosexuality.

Comerford has said he wanted to show how the war in the six counties affects the south. The film is set during the first hunger strike, which the three, despite their opting out, follow with great emotion.

Joined by a tough but vulnerable girl whom Reefer has picked up on her way back from London, the trio eventually become embroiled in a bank robbery which goes ludicrously wrong - a kind of parody of their former lives.

The film is sharp, witty, and has a political honesty completely alien to many British products. Comerford and other Irish film-makers are now fighting for a new Board which, he believes, must 'address basic questions about Irish filmmaking which have not been properly considered.'

Red Sorghum, from China, is the

The *Fruit Machine* is a disappointing second film script by Frank Clarke, who wrote 'Letter to Brezhnev'.

It is an uneasy combination of realistic, if bizarre, details of the seedy side of Liverpool and its attraction for two naive gay youngsters, and an odd fantasy unclearly related to the lads' experience with captive dolphins in Brighton, where they escape expecting excitement but meet only hostility.

Robbie Coltrane as Annabelle, the transvestite nightclub owner, is the high point - but as he/she is murdered after twenty minutes, the film rapidly degenerates thereafter.

On general release from the beginning of November. Too bad the same cannot be said of the others, far superior, mentioned here.

Hilary Horrocks

MOSES MAYEKISO AND THE ANC

BY WAYNE POULSEN

MOSES MAYEKISO last week gave evidence as the first accused in the Alexandra Five treason trial.

With his comrades from the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) he is accused of establishing 'alternative structures' of community organisation such as street committees and 'people's courts' designed to undermine the government.

Mayekiso's own story personifies the birth of the modern black proletariat itself, its growing self-consciousness and drive for independence.

Forced to leave his family in the Transkei, Moses braved the perils faced by the amagoduka ('those who go home', migrant workers), hounded like animals under the 'influx' control regulations.

Today's powerful black trade unions did not yet exist in the late 1960s but were to emerge in embryo in the next decade.

Mayekiso the trade union militant and socialist fighter emerged with them.

Sharpeville Six Appeal

SOUTH AFRICAN legal history is being made in a last-ditch attempt to save the lives of the Six who have now spent over 1,000 days on death row.

Five of the country's most senior judges, including the acting Chief Justice, are now considering the appeal presented by South Africa's most famous lawyer, Sidney Kentridge, and a team of four advocates.

The central courtroom in Bloemfontein was packed with relatives of the Six, foreign media and representatives of most embassies in South Africa.

The basis of the appeal was that the police had been guilty in the original trial of 'deliberate and fraudulent interference in the course of justice'. This claim was made in seeking to have the court admit new evidence from a state witness who claimed he had been intimidated by the police into perjuring himself at the trial.

The Six were found guilty of having 'common purpose' with unknown person responsible for the killing of collaborators in 1986.

International outrage stayed P.W. Botha's hand when he granted a temporary reprieve earlier this year, and the regime may be relying on the learned judges to let them off the hook with an extraordinary judgement to overturn an incredible sentence.

• The Six are Theresa Ramashola, Majalefa Sefatsa, Maleba Mokoena, Oupa Diniso, Duma Khumalo and Francis Mokhesi.

Introduced to the principles of trade unionism in 1977, he quickly became committed to organising workers. He led the drive in the Transvaal in 1979 to establish the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), predecessor of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA).

The Labour Relations Act of 1979 attempted to shackle the growing militancy of the young working class but the aspirations of the black workers only grew with the legal recognition of a number of workers' rights.

Mayekiso played a leading role in the protracted struggle to weld together the disparate elements that would constitute the most powerful organisation in the history of the South African working class, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

The most bitter opponents of this development were the exiled African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) alliance, championing their popular front as the only legitimate struggle for liberation.

Recognising that COSATU would be formed, and fearing further isolation from the growing trade union movement, the Stalinists of the ANC/SACP Alliance joined the Federation at the eleventh hour and set about subordinating it to the popular front.

Against this, Mayekiso and others put forward a 'Workers Charter' which recognised the struggle for socialism as the essential means to destroy apartheid.

Supporters of the ANC/SACP argued instead for the 'democratic' demands of the Freedom Charter.

Mayekiso and the AAC again clashed with the Stalinists when they fought to establish organs of working class power in Alexandra in the revolutionary upsurge of 1985-6.

But Mayekiso's sharpest and most bitter battle with Stalinism was yet to come. Behind bars, on trial for his life, he faces systematic slander and treacherous neglect by the Stalinist-dominated solidarity movement.

**DEFEND THE
NON STOP
PICKET!
PUBLIC
MEETING**

**Thursday 22 September
7.30pm**

**Friends Meeting House
St Martins Lane
London W1**

(nearest tube Leicester Square)

Scottish contortionists and the poll tax

BY HILARY HORROCKS

THE 'week of action' against the poll tax organised by the Scottish TUC did spring into life in the major cities - but it was inspired by independent campaigns rather than by the lacklustre official union leadership.

Throughout Glasgow, community based anti-poll tax organisations took the initiative by approaching local workplaces to hold joint factory gate meetings at 11 am on Tuesday, the time designated by the Scottish TUC for a derisory 11 minute stoppage.

Outside Govan shipbuilders shop stewards joined in calls from local activists for extended industrial action and for a united campaign between tenants and trade unionists - two prospects which strike mortal fear into the STUC and Labour Party leaders.

Other community organisations held sit-downs effectively stopping traffic on at least four of the city's main roads.

Students were prominent in these blockades as they were in a 1,000 strong afternoon march through the city centre organised by the Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

The protest action began last weekend with marches in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Falkirk, and will culminate in a lobby of the Special Scottish Labour Party Conference in Glasgow on Saturday, when the party's official attitude towards non-payment will be decided.

Many Scottish Labour MPs and regional councillors who have voted to implement the tax and so carry out the Tory's dirty work - have been compelled to make individual pledges of non-payment in the face of so much working class opposition to the tax.

But this avoids the question of their responsibility to lead a campaign of non-payment and independent action.

STUC secretary Campbell Christie has been seen in contortions this week trying to reconcile the irreconcilable - retaining enough credibility to control opposition to the tax while refusing to organise illegal action.

He claims - in a miserable abnegation of leadership - that the STUC will back a mass non-payment campaign if this emerges spontaneously.

But at the same time he condemns as 'splitters' those in the Labour movement who call for such a campaign.

Man-made 'natural' disasters

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

FLOODS in Bangladesh have left over 900 people dead, and millions of people homeless. Thousands more people are now in danger, stranded and hungry, and at risk of disease from contaminated water supplies.

Already some 135,000 people are suffering diarrhoea and other complaints from contaminated water or rotting food. Dysentery or even cholera could follow.

While various public bodies like the Red Crescent, students, and women's groups worked at distributing relief supplies and helping the homeless last week, the government denied allegations that it was involved in a racket selling supplies.

Government policies are being blamed for the poor drainage around Dhaka. Despite previous years' experience of floods, drainage canals were not built, some existing ones were even filled in, and road-building was allowed to block natural drainage.

However, the problem is not just in Bangladesh. Ruthless exploitation of forest resources in Nepal and north-east India has caused soil erosion there, washing down to silt up river estuaries in Bangladesh.

According to the Bangladesh opposition National Party, India's Farakka barrage, removing silt from the Ganges, has reduced the water flow in dry periods, causing worse silt in Bangladesh. The Indian government has refused to join in efforts at regional co-operation.

Despite greater scientific knowledge and technical abilities, millions of people are being threatened with environmental disasters - flooding in Bangladesh, famine in Africa, chemical and radio-active pollution in Europe.

In all these cases, the need is clear for proper socialist planning, democratically controlled by working people, on an international scale. This is not utopia, but literally a matter of life or death for humanity.