

Youth Trade Union Rights Campaign

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**NATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

Tories say 'beg for jobs'

TAKE LOWER wages and worse conditions! Crawl on your knees for the 'privilege' of working! That is the message to workers from the blackmailing bosses of Ford, P&O, LWT and the Telegraph.

They are backed by a Tory government which has handed out £2 billion to the richest few, but now condemns unions which try to maintain their members' living standards.

They have destroyed tens of thousands of jobs, yet have the nerve to blame the unions for the loss of 450 jobs at Ford's planned factory in Dundee. What have Thatcher or Rifkind done to save jobs at Seafield, Caterpillar or Gartcosh, or to fight the threat to the entire Scottish coalfield?

Ford's decision is a blow to a city that has almost 20 per cent unemployment. The press and the Tories blame union opposition to the single-union deal signed by the AEU. But the blame rests squarely with Ford's greed and cynicism.

Lower wages

They have made unprecedented profits over the last few years, but to squeeze out even more, they wanted to attack the wage levels of all the workers whose sweat has created those profits.

The AEU deal would mean wages in Dundee up to 50 per cent lower than in other Ford plants and an agreement on flexible working, the very things the Ford workers were striking against earlier this year. The deal would have undermined the national agreement on wages and conditions.

But after giving Ford a bloody nose in the national

By Philip Stott,
Dundee Labour Party

strike, the other 11 Ford unions, by demanding to be represented at Dundee, threatened to thwart management's manoeuvres.

The AEU leadership have played a perfidious role by allowing themselves to be used as a stick with which to beat the trade union movement.

Both the AEU leaders and the local Labour councils agreed to all Ford's demands. They have swallowed the idea that in return for jobs, companies like Ford should be given a free rein to trample over workers' hard-won gains and that the trade union movement should simply lie down and die. Scandalously they have now been backed by the TUC general council.

If they are not to become accomplices in the bosses' plans, the union leaders and TUC must be forced by pressure from below to outlaw one-union deals which only serve to divide the labour and union movement and open the way to wage cuts.

Instead they should lead a real campaign to save jobs, starting with full support to the seafarers' strike. In Dundee in particular, there should be a campaign of meetings to explain the issues and to clear up the inevitable confusion that has arisen.

The Dundee episode shows that multi-national

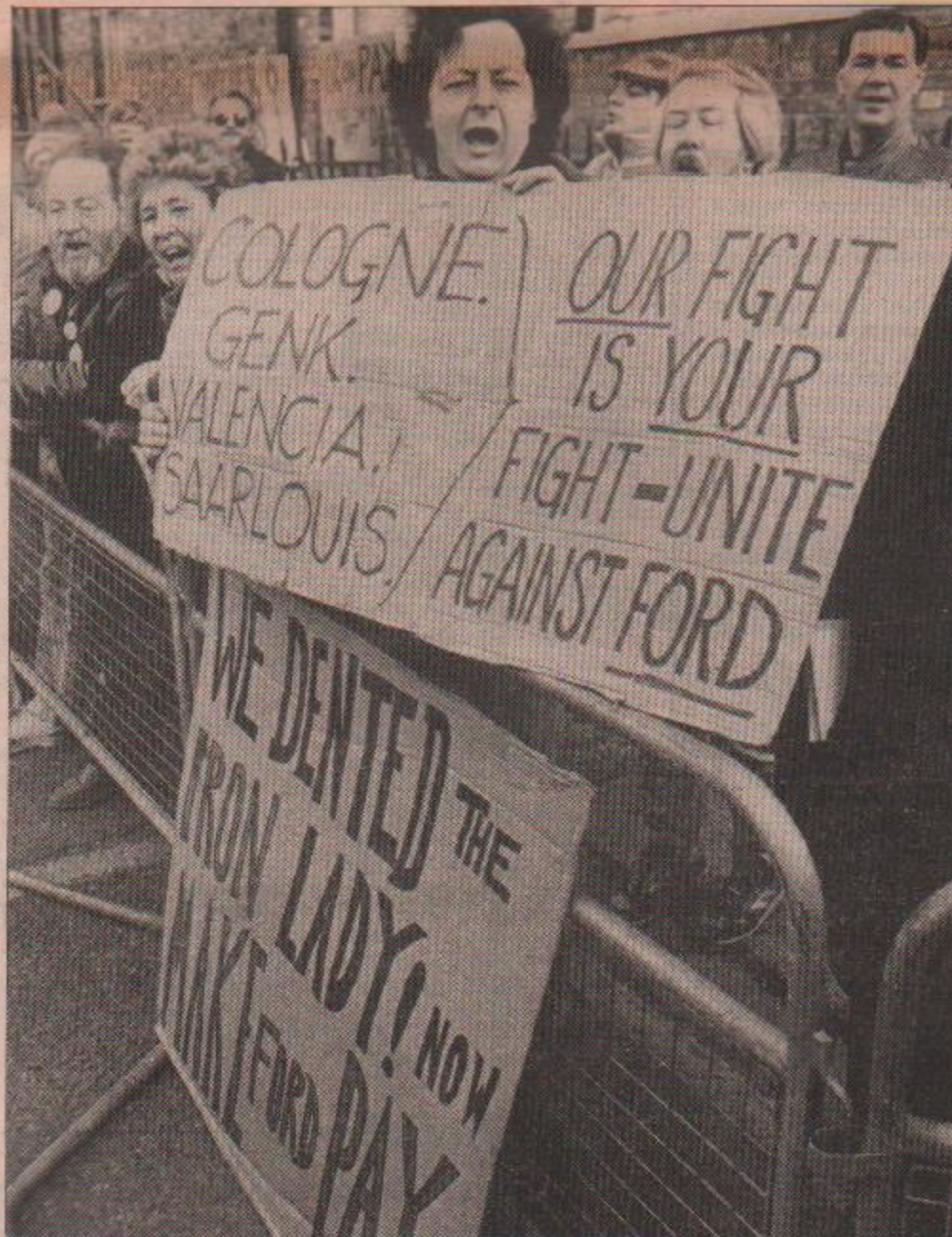


Photo: Dave Sinclair

Ford strikers call for workers unity against their multi-national bosses.

companies have no concern for working people. Labour must be committed to nationalise monopolies like Ford, under workers' control and management, with compensation only on the

basis of need.

Workers' jobs and living standards must not be in the gift of unaccountable billionaires. Jobs and decent wages must be a right not a privilege. But that

will only be possible in a planned socialist economy, where production is for need and not profit and all workers share the wealth created by their labour.

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Militant

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Union leaders must act

ONLY THE labour movement can show a way out of the cycle of violence in Northern Ireland. Under capitalism Northern Ireland economically is one of the most depressed areas of Europe. Last week's bloodshed underlines that an even worse nightmare could develop for all workers in the North, unless their own class organisations intervene.

The British capitalists have used divide and rule, setting Protestant against Catholic, to maintain their domination. They bear the primary responsibility for the violence of the past two decades. All the current political parties are either Tory, sectarian or both and have helped reinforce the sectarian polarisation.

Yet the labour and trade union movement remains on the sidelines.

In 1970 the then Northern Ireland Labour Party received over 100,000 votes of Protestant and Catholic workers. But rather than fight for a class programme to defeat Tory and sectarian rule they departed to the political wilderness.

Today the leaders of the Northern Ireland trade unions maintain they must stand aloof from politics. But it is precisely the lack of a working class alternative that gives the bigots a clear field.

Even during the current bloody events the leaders of the trade union movement are presented with opportunities to intervene. The marvellous demonstrations of Catholic and Protestant workers in defence of the NHS show the potential.

The slaying of shop steward Charles McGrillen provided an opportunity for the unions to step in. His union, the ATGWU, should have called for a one day strike against sectarianism on the day of his funeral.

In August 1986 when workers at Lisburn DHSS office were threatened by sectarian killers, they responded by strike action. Following this lead, 4000 other DHSS workers throughout the North also struck.

Only the labour and trade union movement can deal with the defence of workers against sectarian attack. Urgently a conference of labour and trade union organisations in the North should be convened. Top of its agenda must be discussion of how to create a trade union defence force for the protection of workers and their families.

The mass of the working class can be united but only on a programme for socialist change.

For Catholic workers the Northern Ireland capitalist state linked with Britain has meant nothing but 70 years of poverty, sectarianism and repression. They will never accept it.

But Protestant workers see no attraction in a capitalist united Ireland. They hold genuine fears of being a discriminated minority in a poverty-ridden Irish state, dominated by the Catholic church.

If a capitalist united Ireland was forced upon them they would resist. The result would be a bloody civil war, with massive casualties, pushing far back the possibility of workers' unity and with it any solution to the problems of Ireland.

Last week's events show that violence can develop a momentum of its own, with the potential for the situation getting completely out of control. Ultimately, if a socialist alternative is not presented British capitalism and the bigots on both sides will plunge the North into unrestrained civil war.

The trade unions must now campaign for a socialist programme. It must begin with the fundamental need for the unity of Protestant and Catholic workers. It must link the demand for decent jobs, wages and conditions for all workers to the need for a political solution.

That necessitates opposition to all forms of state repression. It means a struggle against the crisis-ridden regimes North and South. The campaign should put forward the slogan of a socialist united Ireland linked to a socialist federation of the British Isles.

The carrying through of this programme requires the construction of a political arm by the trade unions—a mass Labour Party in the North committed to socialist policies.

In 1981 the British Labour Party conference pledged to support the building of a Labour Party in Northern Ireland. For seven years Britain's Labour and trade union leaders have merely sat on this policy. By their inactivity they bear a responsibility for allowing the current situation to deteriorate.

Last week was a stark warning to the working class—a Beirut situation, even an all-out civil war, will be the result unless the labour movement decides to act.

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Workers' unity the only solution

MILLIONS WERE horrified to see on their TV screens and then in full ghoulish detail in photographs in their newspapers, the beating and subsequent shooting dead of two British soldiers in plain clothes who were caught up in an IRA funeral.

By our Belfast correspondent

It is not at all clear why the two soldiers should have been in the immediate vicinity of the procession. This funeral was for one of the victims of the terrifying attack by a Loyalist gunman just three days before, at the funeral of those killed in Gibraltar.

Those who immediately set upon the soldiers may well have believed that another murderous outrage was about to be launched on mourners. The soldiers' car drove at speed at the procession, mounting the pavement.

But British workers and workers in Ireland recoiled at the brutality meted out to the soldiers. It gave a glimpse of the barbarity that would erupt if Northern Ireland were to drift into all-out civil war.

The background to the events of 19 March was one of mounting tension in the North. The brutal gunning down of three IRA members in Gibraltar; the shooting by a British soldier of Aidan Macanespie as he walked harmlessly near to a border post; and the refusal to order a retrial of the Birmingham Six, despite overwhelming new evidence.

Also while young Catholics sentenced by the

non-jury Diplock courts sit out life sentences, a British soldier found guilty of murdering a Northern Ireland Catholic is able to rejoin his regiment after only two years.

The past two weeks has seen a hideous catalogue of sectarian killing. Between 14 and 21 March, 10 people died as a result of violence. Riots erupted nightly and many families were petrol bombed in their homes.

When the bodies arrived back from Gibraltar, the Catholic areas of Belfast, Derry, Newry and Strabane were engulfed in riots as youth demonstrated their anger at the security forces' shoot-to-kill policy.

That day the Ulster Freedom Fighters announced that they were to intensify their military campaign. That was seen as a warning that it would step up its assassinations of ordinary Catholics.

"We are better equipped now than at any time in the 1970s," the UFF threatened.

Shop steward

The following morning, 15 March, two UFF killers shot dead shop steward, Charles McGrillen, as he began work at Dunnes supermarket off the Ormeau Road, South Belfast. The only organisation he was a member of was the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union.

It was the following day

that the Loyalist killer made the savage bomb and gun attack at the Milltown cemetery. He was pursued by hundreds of youths who were not deterred by his lethal weapons. He was eventually disarmed and severely beaten before the RUC arrived and arrested him. His first words to RUC detectives were: "How many of the f...ing bastards did I kill."

Within minutes hijacking and burning of lorries and rioting broke out in West Belfast and Ardoyne, and that night in many other Catholic areas throughout the North.

In North Belfast a Protestant family who lived in Alliance Crescent near the Catholic Ardoyne, just escaped when Catholic bigots petrol-bombed the home they had lived in for 27 years. Two other Protestant homes were also attacked.

Similar attacks could have been more widespread but for local Catholics helping drive off the attackers.

The same night Kevin Mulligan, shot by the UFF last August, died of his injuries in his Short Strand home.

On 18 March the Provisionals, in a sectarian attack, killed a 21 year old Protestant woman, Gillian Johnston, and wounded her boyfriend in County Fermanagh. Later the Provisionals claimed the killing was a 'mistake'. They had intended to shoot her

brother who they claimed is a UDR soldier. In fact he is not.

The same night a 34 year old Catholic, Dennis McConway, had a narrow escape in his Dunmurry home, outside Belfast. A three-man armed Loyalist gang smashed their way in, grabbing his wife and demanding to know where her husband was. She broke free and was able to alert him to escape out of a back window. Hideously, the gunmen smashed her over the head with a crowbar before leaving.

Assassins

The next night would be Loyalist assassins struck again. A 23 year old Catholic standing on a street corner, was shot when gunmen in a car drove through the Catholic Short Strand enclave in East Belfast. As the car sped from the scene they also sprayed a grocers' shop packed with women and children, with a sub-machine gun.

On 21 March the IRA in Derry shot an RUC man through the head.

What bodies other than the organisations of the labour and trade union movement, encompassing Catholic and Protestant workers, can provide real protection for ordinary people? The trade union leaders in the North particularly have a burning responsibility to act now.

Health strikes show the way

ON 14 MARCH 12,000 workers, Protestant and Catholic, marched through Belfast in defence of the NHS. In Derry 2000 workers demonstrated, and in other towns throughout the North workers joined in rallies, pickets and protests.

On 19 March 8000 workers marched through Downpatrick in County Down, again protesting against Tory health cuts.

On the day of the Loyalist attack on

Milltown, 200 workers at a cannery factory in Killinchy marched the 12 miles to Belfast protesting at its closure. 600 Belfast seafarers have just been balloted for all-out strike action.

Yet the trade union leaders fail to use these mass struggles to present a class alternative. In the campaign against health cuts the union leaders incredibly invited the bigots and the Tories on to the protests. One trade

union leaflet called on workers to "get your MP, your church leaders and your councillors to lead your protests."

If these strikes and demonstrations were used to expose the Tories and the bigots and hammer out the need for a political arm for the trade union movement, a mass socialist Labour Party could be built.

No return to back streets

OVER TWENTY thousand people, mostly young women, demonstrated against the Alton Bill on 19 March. The chants of "no return to the back streets" showed they understood Alton's bill would be a most serious attack on their lives.

The Bill is due to go through committee stage on 23 April. Nothing short of a decisive political campaign organised by the labour and trade union movement can stop this anti-abortion bill.

Trade union leaders were noticeably absent from Saturday's demonstration, even though it was officially jointly organised by the TUC. They should be reminded that it was the collective strength and unity of the unions which defeated the Corrie Bill in 1979. 100,000 trade unionists and Labour Party members took to the streets then.

Alton's Bill is a fundamental attack on women's rights. Union leaders representing thousands of low paid workers must understand that many of their members in factories, hospitals, shops and offices would be forced into having dangerous back street abortions if Alton is allowed to succeed.

The support for 'new realism' among the union leaders has made them write off political cam-

By Maureen Hearn

paigns as 'unpopular' and unlikely to appeal to the 'middle ground'. But there were many middle-class women on the demonstration who will be won to the labour movement if a bold political programme is put forward on the question of abortion rights.

Class issue

The loudest applause at the Hyde Park rally was for a Nupe speaker who pointed out that the right to safe abortion was a class issue as the poorest women would bear the brunt of the suffering.

It is high time union leaders went on the offensive. Meetings should be organised in every workplace to discuss all the 'controversial' issues raised by this question and to counter all the vile emotive propaganda of pro-Alton groups like Spuc and Life.

Union branches should start to build now for a



Photo: Dave Sinclair

mass mobilisation to coincide with the third reading in parliament. The unions should also bring sponsored MPs into line with union policy on abortion.

All Labour Party organisations, including

Young Socialists, women's sections/councils, student Labour clubs and constituencies should lobby MPs who voted for Alton or abstained to make clear the consequences for ordinary women's lives. Spuc

and pro-Life organisations should be challenged to public debates with full use of the local media.

The labour and trade union movement should never miss the chance to counteract the Tories' reac-

tionary ideas on women's rights. Working class women will demand real action from their leaders to defend these rights.

The fight against the Alton Bill must be stepped up.



Any questions for Mr Clay?

ON 18 MARCH, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) invited Radio Four's *Any Questions* to a hospital in Oxford. The recently formed Nurses' Action Group submitted dozens of questions.

There was a live audience of over 200, mainly nurses. Many came to hear what Trevor Clay, RCN general secretary, had to offer as a way forward against the cuts.

My question was chosen. "Should nurses strike to defend the NHS?" Nobody on the panel answered 'yes' and Gordon Brown, Labour MP remained firmly on the fence.

Many RCN members on the Nurses' Action Group were very angry at the wording of their ballot on strike action: "Do you agree with the RCN stance on no strike action and no action that will put patients and clients at risk?"

Trevor Clay argued it was impossible for nurses to take any form of action. Peter Lillie, Tory MP, enthusiastically agreed. Presumably nurses should carry on working hours of unpaid overtime because refusal to do so might put patients at risk.

Nurses heard a clear message from the RCN. If you want action against the cuts join a real union. The RCN will keep playing their strike breaking role, supported by the Tories.

By Peter Howarth,
Charge nurse and assistant
branch secretary, Oxford
Cohse.

Health workers organise

HEALTH WORKERS from around Britain will launch the National Health Shop Stewards Combine (NHSSC) on 26 March.

By Mick Griffiths

Cohse Pindarfields branch
secretary (personal capacity)

This historic move gives us a chance to fight the attacks on the health service and plan the next move in the campaign to force the Tories to fund the NHS and pay us decent wages.

Robin Hood in reverse, taking from the poor to give to the rich, may be funny in a Monty Python sketch, but tax cuts for the upper crust in Lawson's budget are no laughing matter for nurses, porters and cleaners.

We don't find the recent antics of our own union leaders very amusing either. Nupe's call for a day of action on 15 March as opposed to Cohse's on 14 March convinced health workers that closer links are needed between members of the two unions.

The building of local Joint Shop Stewards Committees (JSSCs) and the launch of the NHSSC show the support for a united fight against the government.

The call for a one-day general strike got a great echo. The pressure for such action led Cohse and Nupe leaders to make their 'day of action' calls. Some leaders seemed to hope this would dissipate the mood as activists let off

THE GOVERNMENT always allege that health workers' strikes delay operations. They should look over the river from Parliament to see their policies permanently cancelling operations.

A package to be put to West Lambeth health authority next week aims to cut what the Tories say is an 'overspend' of £3.4 million. The 137 beds at

steam.

Instead it made many health workers realise that isolated 'days of action' are not enough. Everyone is asking: "Where do we go from here?"

The thousands of bus workers, dockers, engineers, building workers, seafarers and others who took to the streets to back our struggle give a glimpse of what could be done. What is needed is a proper call from the TUC or even the Nupe/Cohse leaderships. This has not been lost on health workers.

National lead

Activists in Sheffield are considering a May Day rally on the theme of 'defend the NHS'. This will be repeated up and down the country. Demonstrations and protests will continue. Even if press stories that the Tories will fund in full next month's nurses' pay award are true, local disputes will still arise.

Budget shortfalls for health authorities, cuts, closures of hospitals and beds, staggering workloads and terrible working conditions will remain.

May Day rallies and other protests must be organised. Every bed must be defended, every closure opposed. But these must be stepping stones to intensified action. Already there is talk of three-day strikes in Edinburgh and possible all-out strikes at individual London hospitals, which will gain mass support if

St. Thomas' hospital, closed temporarily last October, are recommended for permanent closure along with an extra 56 beds.

112 nursing posts, 24 medical and dental staff and 70 clerical and admin jobs are at risk. 2,100 fewer in-patient cases and 60,000 fewer out-patients will be treated if the Tories have their way.

the policy of maintaining emergency cover is kept up.

The dispute must be nationally co-ordinated and not allowed to become a series of isolated struggles. The NHSSC could be vital in building the unity and leadership the dispute has been lacking.

The anger of health workers must be channelled into building for united, national action. One focus for attention should be the NHS's fortieth anniversary on 5 July. Every health union branch and stewards committee must demand that the labour movement organises a massive demonstra-

tion to save the health service.

A colossal movement could build up over the next few months if we organise properly. Local JSSCs should try to involve workers and trade unionists from local industries in preparing for 5 July, turning themselves into joint action committees in the process.

The potential support is there, and could be mobilised to defend the health service, but we have to work for it. The NHSSC is an important contribution to the fight back in the NHS.

National Health Shop Stewards Combine Inaugural Conference

Saturday 26 March, 11am to 5pm Memorial Hall, Barker's Pool, Sheffield S1

Admission: £3 per delegate

Supported by Sheffield, Leeds and Wakefield Cohse stewards committees, and Gwent Nupe stewards committee.

Nigerian Marxists arrested

ON 19 MARCH, the Nigerian military regime began arresting Marxists who took the lead in calling on unions to organise a campaign of action against the government's suspension of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). Details page 10 and *Militant* 11 March.

The first arrested was Kunle Bakare, a member of Lagos State Council of the Civil Service Technical Workers Union and a supporter of the Nigerian Marxist paper *Labour Militant*. Then Femi Aborisade, editor of *Labour Militant* and former NLC Education Officer was arrested.

No reasons have been given for their detention by the State Security Service but it is apparently in connection with a leaflet issued by *Labour Militant* supporters calling for industrial action in defence of the NLC.

Letters etc. calling for their immediate release and the lifting of the ban on the Nigerian Labour Congress should be sent to the Nigerian High Commission, 9 Northumberland Avenue, London WC2, with copies to the Footwear, Leather and Rubber Products Workers' Union of Nigeria, National Secretariat, 71 Palm Avenue, Olorunsogo-Mushin, PO Box 3730, Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria.



The Rich—will they work harder?

Bury this government

of the rich

“EPITAPH FOR socialism” is how Thatcher described the budget which gave £2 billion to Britain’s wealthiest three per cent. She gloated over the Tories’ strangulation of the Welfare State.

By Tony Cross

Perhaps she could also pen an epitaph for Derek Bainbridge who set fire to himself in Downing Street after over a year on the dole. Many more will be driven to suicide by the Tories’ Social Security Bill and Housing Bills, which will slash £1.1 billion from benefits.

It is not just the unemployed who will have more misery heaped onto them. Low-paid workers will have every penny they gained in tax cuts taken back.

A million people will lose all their housing benefit and five million will lose part of it. They want housing associations and councils to charge ‘affordable’ (ie higher) rents. Gas and electricity prices are set to soar way over the rate of inflation.

If you are a nurse on £6,260 per year, this means you lose all the £2.23 you gain from Lawson’s tax cuts.

But if you are already fabulously wealthy, you can expect to get thousands of pounds more per week from the tax cuts.

Merchant banker Christopher Heath, who gets a breathtaking £2,512,595 a year for his indispensable

contribution to society, will get £9,534 extra every week! His weekly rise is more than most nurses earn in a year!

It was a booty-full budget for poultry-plucker Bernard Matthews, too. He will be £1,055 per week better off, while Maurice Saatchi, boss of the Tories’ advertising agency, will get £1,794 extra.

Some talent!

Thatcher told the Tory Central Council that ‘Enterprise Culture’ means that ‘top talent no longer flows abroad’. So the £2 billion the health workers wanted for the NHS is being handed out to such

towering talents as Benny Hill, Jeffrey Archer and Barbara Cartland!

The Tories pretend to be the tax-cutting party. Pat Wall MP exposed this lie during the budget debate: “Overall the burden of taxation has increased because of indirect taxation, which hits working people hardest, and which has increased from 34 per cent to 38 per cent under this government.”

Workers are always glad to get a tax cut, but polls for the high-Tory *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Times* showed that a majority opposed the handouts to the rich and wanted the money spent on the NHS.

What a chance for the Labour leaders to campaign to kick the Tories out! If they did, then we could be writing this government’s epitaph.

Labour Party news

‘I will be back’ says expelled L’pool member

JOSIE AITMAN, from Liverpool Broadgreen, expresses her reaction to being the latest to be expelled from the Labour Party by the National Constitutional Committee:

Pam Luckock, wife of one of the 47 surcharged Liverpool councillors, who was at my expulsion hearing said: “This is worse than being surcharged by the Tory judges!”

NHS battles

I feel outrage that when health service workers are looking to the Labour Party for a lead in their battles against the Tories, the party leaders are concentrating their attack on socialists in their own party.

But as I said when I received the ‘sentence’ of

expulsion: “I will be back. When the Labour Party is transformed by the struggle of the working class, I believe that all the expelled socialists will be welcomed back with honour.”

Elaine Bannister and I were expelled for allegedly breaking the rules and constitution. The hearing was a farce. David Hughes, for the national executive committee (NEC), failed to give any evidence of my ‘guilt’.

The chair was going through her diary during Elaine’s submission. Yet the right-wing majority found the case proven. So much for a ‘fair’ hearing in accordance with ‘natural justice’!

David Hughes said I had deliberately broken the rules, proved that I was disloyal to the Labour Party, was unfit for member-

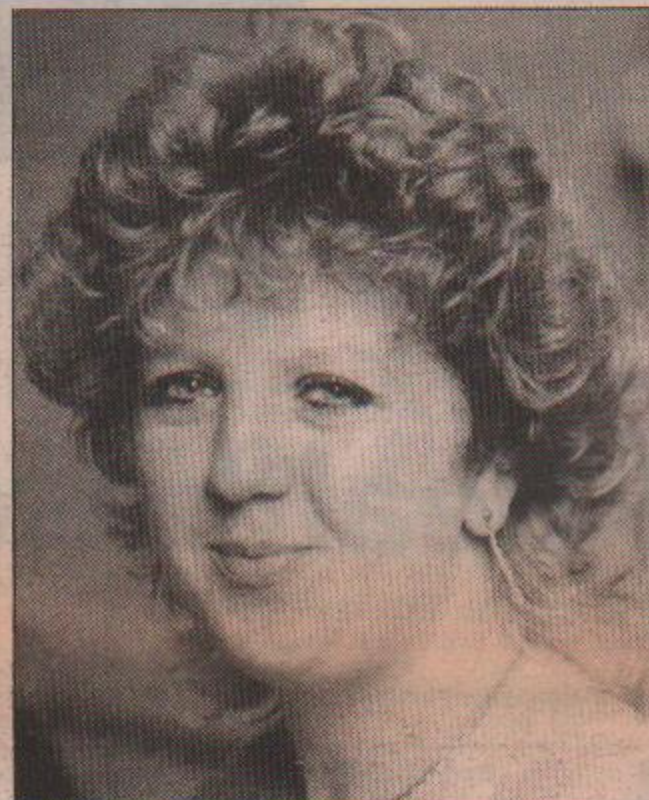
ship and should be expelled.

But my loyalty and commitment to the working class and socialism cannot be questioned. I joined the Labour Party in 1972, as a 17-year-old school student, at the time of the miners’ strike against the Heath government.

In the February 1974 general election, I went out night after night with the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) to campaign for a Labour victory.

Hard work

The candidate then was Tony Clarke, now on the NEC. Although at the time he appreciated the hard work I put in, he nevertheless voted for me to be included in the original list of 16 Liverpool members



Josie Aitman—16 years’ loyal membership.

for expulsion.

In my 16 years membership I have proudly held many positions in the party. Perhaps my proudest moments were being involved in Liverpool City Council’s historic victory over the Tory government to win extra resources for the council and being election agent for Terry Fields in 1983 and 1987.

It is not us who are disloyal, but those representatives of the working class who fail to represent them but see only a career for themselves on their backs.

I find it incredible that

we have been expelled from the party when people like Prendergast, an official of the Union of Democratic Miners, who was reportedly urging people not to vote Labour and that Kinnock was not fit to be Prime Minister, was only suspended for two years.

Despite my expulsion, I will still support Labour and do all I can to defeat the Tories’ attacks on ordinary people. I will fight for Labour to be elected and be as loyal to the working class as the Tories are to the ruling class that they represent.

London officials impose by-election candidate

LONDON LABOUR Party officials have imposed a candidate for a forth-coming by-election in Bermondsey’s Riverside ward, who previously stood as an independent against the party.

By a Militant reporter

All norms of democratic procedure and the party rules have been flouted. The candidate, Coral Newell, a contemporary of old-guard right wingers, former MP Bob Mellish and ex-council leader John O’Grady, only rejoined the party a few days ago through the regional office.

The ward’s only nominated candidate, Tom Gregory, was not even approached after a secret conclave, consisting of regional secretary Terry Ashton and some local government committee officers, imposed the candidate.

Rule broken

The decision blatantly breaks the 12-month membership rule for all candidates, and went against the democratic decision of the mainly right-wing local government committee executive to uphold the constitution.

Party members are incensed that Bermondsey’s suspension and the NEC inquiry is being used to try to turn the party back to the dark ages of right wing authoritarian control. Many members suspect that other right wing relics have been approached by regional officials, desperate to give credence to their actions and to stop good socialists like Tom Gregory winning elections.

The Bermondsey Defence Campaign will be holding a meeting on Friday 25 March at the party rooms, 133 Lower Road, at 7.30pm, to continue the battle against expulsions, cuts in services and rent rises.

No evidence to throw out Byrne

EVEN LABOUR’S ‘Star Chamber’, the National Constitutional Committee, has been forced to accept that surcharged Liverpool council leader, Tony Byrne, should not be expelled from the Party.

But it was not to the liking of the prosecution. When the verdict was read out, national official Joyce Gould exclaimed: “If that is the way it is we will have to change the constitution.”

However the evidence was so overwhelmingly in Tony Byrne’s favour, there was no case to answer.

He was charged with not being a member of the

Labour Party. (If so, how could the NCC expel him?) But he compelled the NCC to confirm that it is up to the constituency Labour Party, not the local branch, to determine who is a member. And Tony’s constituency party is right behind him.

Even though it is well known that Tony Byrne is not a Militant supporter, the right put him on trial for daring to fight Thatcher, in defiance of the subsmissiveness of the Labour leaders.

By a Militant reporter

Liverpool council makes legal budget

LIVERPOOL CITY Council will be able to make a legal budget this year and will continue the Urban Regeneration Strategy. There will be no overall job losses and no rent rises.

By a Militant reporter

Party and trade union members at a special meeting were relieved to hear that most of the gap between income and ex-

penditure can be closed without serious cuts, partly through the use of funds inherited from the previous budget of the 47 disqualified and surcharged councillors.

The rest of the gap of £19 million is to be filled by the sale of council assets such as land.

But these purely financial and organisational measures will store up huge problems for next year. If funds and assets had not been available and ratecap-

ping had not been applied, Liverpool could have been fixing a 55 per cent rates rise.

Next year there will be a bigger deficit and more financial loopholes will have been closed by Ridley.

The campaign which the Broad Left have been calling for must be launched at the District Labour Party policy conference, to mobilise workers against the new threats to local government.

Save the Sharpeville Six

Toxteth

Manchester

MANCHESTER LPYS members have organised a protest picket outside South Africa Airways, which started Wednesday last week.

LPYS placards with "Save the Sharpeville Six", and the LPYS banner lined the street. In the first two days, 1,024 signatures were collected and over 20 were interested in joining the LPYS.

Cyclists, cars and vans stopped on the main road to sign. Council binmen took a petition away with them and the postman wouldn't cross the picket to deliver the mail.

There was overwhelming support from passers by, including tourists from Japan, Canada and Denmark. Even the three office workers from SAA signed a petition, although the office door remained locked!

Students from St John's and Shena Simon further education colleges have joined the protest at dinner time along with local trade unionists from the GMBATU, TGWU and AEU. Manchester AEU district committee supported the picket and have sent telexes to the TUC, AEU headquarters and the South African embassy, after Andrea Enisouh (chairperson, Manchester LPYS) spoke at their meeting.

The LPYS is also planning a big public meeting. Action must be stepped up to tap the massive support amongst the workers and youth.

By Phil Forrester.

YTURC conference Biggest and best event

TWO THOUSAND young people will be going to the Youth Trade Union Rights Campaign's first national conference at Easter weekend.

The conference will discuss the launching of a new mass unionisation campaign, and how to continue the campaign against compulsory YTS.

Debates

Issues such as education and training, youth and labour, poll tax, racism, the NHS and the Alton Bill will be discussed. Guest speakers include Dave Nellist MP, John Macreadie, CPSA deputy general secretary and Tony Mulhearn, surcharged Liverpool councillor.

There will also be speakers from USA, South Africa, and Ireland.

On the Friday night there will be a rally in defence of the Labour Party Young Socialists

addressed by Terry Fields MP. Young socialists in every part of the country will be organising to attend, given that the LPYS national conference has been stopped by Labour's national executive.

Davie Archibald, national secretary of YTURC says: "As well as the formal political sessions there will be excellent social activities making it the best event we have ever organised."

LONDON YTURC PARTY

Saturday
26 March
8 'till late
Florence
Nightingale Pub,
Westminster
Bridge Road,
Waterloo
£2 waged
£1 unwaged

The system stinks

ANGRY, NOISY and chanting "the system stinks", over 200 mainly black young people marched out of Brixton college to the South African Embassy to protest at the threatened execution of the 'Sharpeville Six'.

This tremendous mobilisation was organised within just 24 hours by the students. On Wednesday three students from the college attended an all London Youth Trade Union Rights Campaign meeting to discuss the issue of the Sharpeville Six at just one hour's notice.

Word of the protest spread like wildfire. The mood of anger was such that the college principal was forced to excuse students from classes.

On Thursday lunch hour a rally was called by the students union. April Ashley spoke from the South African Labour Education Project. She called on students to join the protest and to join the

By Lesleigh Woodburn
London FELS

LPYS.

Leslie Okuongbowa, president of Brixton students union, spoke of the anger felt by students over the death sentences given to their brothers and sister in South Africa. At the end students voted overwhelmingly to walk out and march to the embassy.

The march set off from one college site to another urging other students to join. People were tooting their horns and joining in from the

street as the chants echoed out: "We salute you Sharpeville Six" and "Maggie, Botha, out, out, out!"

Cheers

News that the Sharpeville Six had won a stay of execution was met by euphoric cheers by the marchers who believed it was due to the international repercussions which would take place if the hangings were to continue.

Thursday's protest is just the start of Brixton's campaign against apar-

THE STRENGTH of feeling against the death sentences on the Sharpeville Six was shown in Liverpool by a demonstration in Toxteth organised by the Liverpool Anti-Apartheid group.

The demonstration stopped at every major junction holding up traffic while the case of the Sharpeville Six was explained to passengers in the cars and buses.

Most waited patiently in support while the demonstration moved on rather than taking diversions.

But the organisers hadn't built support for the demonstration within the local community and the wider labour and trade union movement and it was therefore not as big as it could have been.

This is a case for all workers to take up and to demand the TUC to take decisive action which will force the hand of the Botha government and help to build international links with our fellow workers in South Africa.

By Tina Carroll,
Liverpool 8

theid. Out of the Brixton demo 25 people agreed to join the LPYS. SALEP have been invited to speak to a students union meeting and two students agreed to go to YTURC conference.

The month-long reprieve given to the Sharpeville Six must signal a mass wave of protest by students everywhere. Rod Alexander has put a motion to the NUS Further Education National Committee calling for a national demonstration on 15 April against the death sentences.

We decide — you listen

"I WENT looking for debate, discussions and a conclusion. I was disappointed," was one comment after a 'Labour Listens to Youth' event in the West of Scotland. All the organisers wanted was a talking shop.

By YTURC and LPYS members

They even refused to allow the 'workshops' they had organised to elect someone to report back to the full session. "That's the way this event is going to be run," was the reply to protests.

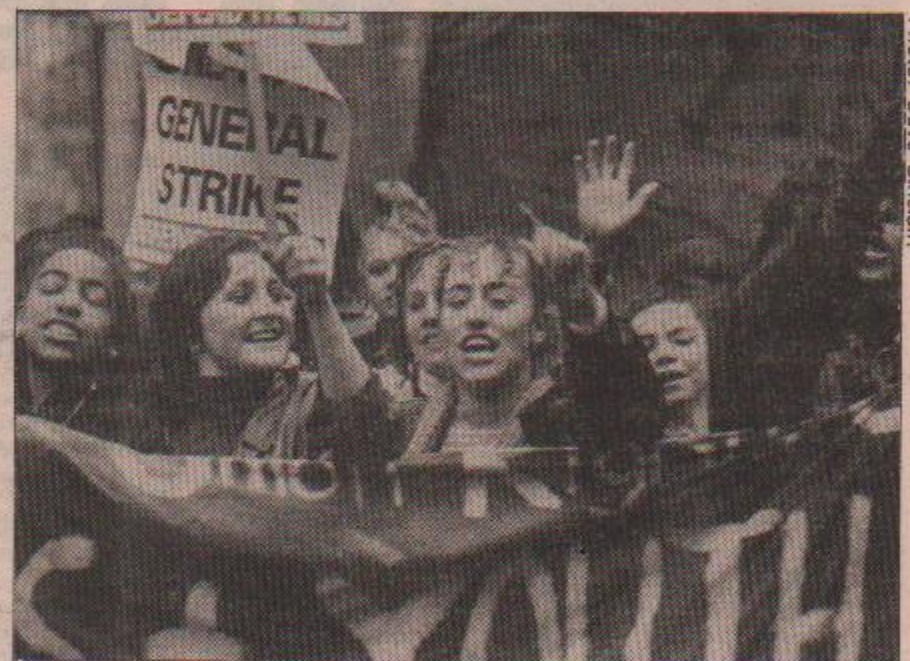
But, despite this total disregard for democracy, Marxist ideas dominated.

Jobs for youth

The most contentious workshop turned out to be the one on 'jobs for youth'. 14 speakers lambasted the Scottish Labour Party executive for doing nothing about YTS conscription on the one hand and hounding Yturc on the other.

"Why attack Yturc?" asked one student. "They're the only ones campaigning against YTS conscription."

"Who else exposes the real slave labour nature of the schemes while at the same time organising school students and encouraging



School students on 14 March health service demo in London.

unionisation of YTS trainees?" asked a YTSer.

The Scottish executive representative was absolutely overwhelmed. Every speaker called for support for Yturc and condemned the Scottish Labour and TUC leaders. The majority in the poll tax workshop supported a mass labour movement campaign prepared to break the law.

"Let's take votes on the discussions," "Let's decide what youth want from Labour," were the demands in the report-back session.

"There will be no votes at this event", came the reply. The chair closed the conference early and the fake-left LCC group led a 'mass' walk out of 12.

Photo: Dave Sinclair.



Cost of health

SCHOOL CARETAKER Linval Ayton won £1.6 million in a Florida court action against a doctor's error which left his wife in a permanent coma. He is now penniless. He has lost his job. His lawyer has taken a 45 per cent cut. And officials at North Miami Medical Centre say it is costing £500 a day to keep Mrs Ayton alive.

The USA has a privately based health service.

Man of straw

JACK STRAW, Labour's witch-hunting shadow education secretary is 'leading' the opposition to Baker's Education Bill. But *The Guardian* has commented on his 'chumminess' with Baker, passing notes and giggling at each others' jokes.

Straw says: "I have never believed you should turn conflicts of principle into conflicts of personality." Except with *Militant* supporters. of course. Civilised ex-public schoolboys like Baker and Straw can be chums but people who break their capitalist consensus can be witch-hunted.

Straw calls himself Jack because of admiration for the Peasants' Revolt leader of the same name. If any reader knows of stories of the original Jack Straw giggling at Richard the Second's jokes, please let us know.

Striking picture

SOUTH KOREAN TV, worried about new militancy in their country, came to London recently to interview British Department of Employment bosses on their "good industrial relations record." They found 300 CPSA members on strike and lobbying the headquarters about compulsory transfers and service cuts.

Take your pick?

A BY-ELECTION is due in Church Lane ward of Langbaugh, a hung council with no overall control. But there are four Labour candidates standing. There is the official candidate chosen by the district party, endorsed by the national office but later unendorsed. A second candidate was chosen by the ward party.

Also in the running is a right winger claiming to be a Labour candidate. The fourth candidate is arch right winger and witch hunter Arthur Seed, former council leader defeated when he stood as a scab candidate in May's local elections. He was referred to the national constitutional committee but no action has been taken.

Walworth Road have caused confusion by backing first the DLP's candidate and now the ward nomination. Their failure to punish right wing candidates who stand against Labour while *Militant* supporters are being hounded out is even more farcical.

Thanks to Andy Walker.



A still from the film 'The Last Emperor' now showing in the West End of London.

The last Son of Heaven

"THE LAST Emperor", made with the permission of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy, looks at twentieth century changes in China through the eyes of the country's last emperor Pu Yi.

Extolled as the Son of Heaven at the age of three, he lived to see the 1949 revolution and ended up 're-educated' and working as a gardener. Working class opponents of Mao Tse Tung, who fought for international revolution against bureaucracy did not get such lenient treatment.

The film captures very well the grandeur of the Forbidden City in Beijing, a world apart inhabited by the decaying Manchu dynasty.

Pu Yi's life covered an astonishing period in China's history with the Manchu dynasty's fall in 1911, the rapid growth of

industry and a modern industrial working class, the coup of Chiang Kai Shek and the capitalist nationalist Kuomintang party.

It saw Japanese capitalism invade Manchuria, the struggles of the peasant based Red Army, the coming to power of the Communist Party in 1949 and the days of the 'cultural revolution'.

But the film slides over these events, even though they affected not only the boy emperor but a billion Chinese workers and peasants.

The emperor is shown as naive and arrogant, but with frequent bursts of megalomania, not surprisingly given his bizarre childhood, which is

shown in detail.

Crowned at three years old to succeed to a line of Ching emperors going back to 1644, he was waited on as a god by thousands of eunuchs and tended by a wet nurse until puberty. Every whim was pandered to. But these anachronisms just seem quaint without showing why early twentieth century China stayed so backward.

Sad waste

Western imperialist nations and later Japan bled the economy and prevented development. But you only get vague, fleeting references to this or the Russian revolution or the first world war.

The birth of the Communist Party in 1920 and its smashing by Chiang Kai Shek, aided by the false policies of Stalin and Bukharin, are also ignored.

These developments were forcing China to modernise, often at the cost of many lives. But the film seems to imply changes arose because the emperor wanted 'reforms', a new haircut and a wife who could dance the quickstep!

The filming of the opulent Forbidden City is very well done but the lack of understanding and predictable storyline makes it a bit like an adult fairytale. Given the potential, this is a sad waste.

By John Timberlake

Working on the bread line

A FIRM in Birkenhead supplies filled bread rolls and sandwiches to catering outlets like motorway cafeterias. They employ mainly part time workers for £2 an hour, including Sundays at no extra.

Tempted by these enormous rewards I began there one recent Friday from 10am to 1pm. As I had to work a 'week in hand', the next Friday I asked for the first day's wages.

"You don't get paid for the first day's work. You should have been told that. It's training day!" the manageress said proudly.

Training? That first day, I packed rolls in wrapping film. The other days I buttered rolls. It was tedious but the skill could have been mastered by a retarded chimpanzee in ten minutes.

Even on the first day I easily filled my quota. Nor was my work ever checked. I saw no signs of instruction or quality control.

Their attitude was one of utter contempt. The workers, mainly women, used to leave their coats in the working area. One morning they were told they had to use the cloakroom. Fair enough; that was in line with health and safety requirements.

But one cloakroom door opens on to

an unfenced car park open to passers-by. The first day of the new rule, three coats, the most expensive looking, went missing.

The forewoman who insisted on the ruling and had not checked the outer door was secure, told the women: "We're not insured for losses to personal property."

They're not sexist, though. They treat male workers just as badly. When two teenage lads failed to complete their quota, they were told to work unpaid overtime to make up the work.

"We're locking up at one o'clock though" said the boss. Then with the brilliance of the true wealth maker, he suggested: "We'll lock you in. The cleaners will be in in an hour, you should be finished by then."

At 8.30, seven and a half hours after being locked in, the lads were cheered by the sound of the head cleaner's key in the lock. They weren't paid a penny extra. And of course there could have been a fire.

I don't work there any more. I suppose I haven't adjusted to present day economic realities. Perhaps I never will. I hope not.

By Ruth Martin

Dear Peter Taaffe,

I have just finished reading your book on Liverpool. The detail of what happened made engrossing reading and I couldn't put it down till I'd finished it.

As a socialist, the depth of the establishment and media's venom took my breath away and the betrayal by Kinnock and the right wing was sad and disgraceful.

But the people of Liverpool came through as the down to earth people they must be and I was moved to tears by their understanding and appreciation of the tremendous events that were happening as a result of their votes.

I enclose £100 to the *Militant* fighting fund to balance up the venom.

Yours sincerely, Betty Coates, Melbourne, Australia

Dear comrades,

As a council worker I eagerly awaited *Liverpool - A City that Dared to Fight* and it was well worth the wait. The book outlines the gains made in Liverpool and how the battle was fought.

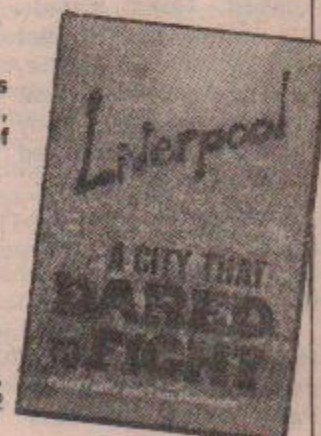
It should be compulsory reading for Labour Party members and trade unionists, particularly council workers. My own council, Stoke on Trent, has again made tradesmen redundant but where is the criticism from Kinnock and Straw? Please read this book and learn from it as I hope I've done.

Fraternally, Dave Furze

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Repression fails to break stayaway

FOR BLACK South Africa 21 March was Sharpeville Day. It was the 28th anniversary of the bloody shooting of demonstrators against the apartheid regime. Black workers and youth commemorated the massacre and protested against the current state crackdown with a stayaway strike.

A correspondent in South Africa writes:

At 7.30 am on the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, there were few people from the townships at Park station, where hundreds of thousands mill normally. Chiefs and Swallows who played at Ellis Park on Saturday, could have

played on the Soweto Freeway in Johannesburg, there were so few cars on the road.

The transport services reported that their normal commuter load of a quarter of a million was down to 12,000. Noord Street, where buses and taxis come from Alex, Tembisa and the East Rand was empty.

OK Bazaars reported 90 per cent absenteeism amongst its staff. A similar figure was recorded for all supermarkets. White staff were working the tills. Unions on the Witwatersrand claim support in the region of 70 per cent.

There was widespread action

by the metal workers' union. Some factories had as few as five workers turn up, although in others the action was less successful.

Successful

The gold mines were all at work. There was no call from the NUM leadership to observe the day. Similarly, in Johannesburg for the taxis servicing the coloured and Indian areas of Lenasia and Eldorado Park, it seemed it was business as usual.

Reports indicate fewer strikers in Port Elizabeth, but Uitenhage saw 80 to 90 per cent involved in

strike action.

Reports are confused from the Natal area, with notice of quite widespread clashes, particularly at township levels, between strikers and Inkatha thugs who wanted to force people to go to work.

From the point of view of the banned 'Congress organisations', who had called protest action to mark Sharpeville day and the crackdown, the events of 21 March in South Africa can only be described as hugely successful.

The stayaway was not as extensive as on 5 and 6 May last year. But still millions did not go to school and probably more than a

million people did not go to work.

Cosatu did not make any call because of the recent restrictions and did not seem to organise any mass response.

But, given all this, the stayaway seems an astonishing rebuff to the government.

Radio South Africa, the government oriented news service, made no mention in any bulletin at any point in the day of the nature of the stayaway or its success. Its lead item throughout the day was the level of the flood waters in the Vaal River. There are more than one set of flood waters they may care to be worried about.

MILITANT has public meetings and discussion groups in most towns throughout the country. Below is a listing of meetings or contacts for further information. If you want to know the nearest one to you telephone the 'MEETING LINE' (01) 533 3311 ext 227.

Where to find us

EAST SCOTLAND

For information of meetings in the following areas contact: Andrea Charles-031 659 6187.

Edinburgh:

30 March
Fight the Alton Bill
Cafe Royale. 7.30pm

STRATHCLYDE

For details of meetings contact: 041 221 1443.

NORTHERN

For details of any further meetings contact: Bill Hopwood 091 276 1736.

Newcastle:

24 March
The truth about
Militant and the
CPSA
Brandling Villa pub,
South Gosforth.
6.30 pm

MERSEYSIDE

For details of meetings in the following areas contact: Richard Venton 051 260 3111

Liverpool:

Marxist discussion group
Liverpool—a city that dared to fight
27 March and fortnightly thereafter
2, Lower Breck Rd. (Ring 051 260 3111 if interested)
7.0 pm

YORKSHIRE

For further details phone: Henry Gregory 0709 371250

MANCHESTER/LANCS

For details of discussion groups held contact: Mike Johnson on 061 273 8648

WEST MIDLANDS

For details of meetings in Birmingham contact: Bill Mullins 021 552 7624 For details of meetings in Stafford and Stoke area contact: Dugald Mckinnon 0782 633568.

Birmingham:

5 April
The car industry
The Australian Bar pub, Hirst St, City centre. 7.30 pm

EAST MIDLANDS

For details of further meetings contact: Andy Jackson 0602 623112.

WALES

For details of further meetings contact: 0222 736682.

EASTERN

For details of meetings contact Teresa MacKay 0473 713179

Basildon:

29 March
Liverpool—a city that dared to fight launch
Pitsea Leisure Centre.
8.00 pm

Harlow:

Discussion group,
Every Thursday,
Harlow Unemployed Centre.
8.00pm 24 March:
The USA

SOUTH EAST

For details of meetings phone 01 533 3311

HAMPSHIRE/THAMES VALLEY

For meeting details phone 0703 786879

Southampton:

Redbridge Marxist discussion group
Every Wednesday,
7, Goodwin Close, Millbrook. 2 pm
30 March: Marxist philosophy. 6 April: The development of class society

SOUTH WEST

For details of meetings ring 0272 631471.

Poole:

1 April
What we stand for
phone above for venue

LONDON

For further details of meetings contact: George Roberts 01 739 9123.

MAY DAY! To all union and labour movement organisations and other readers.

Place May Day greetings to the labour movement in *Militant*.

Rates are: Semi-display; three column centimetres, £8, six column centimetres, £15. Display; one-sixteenth page, £25, one-eighth page, £40, one quarter page, £75.

Cheques/postal orders payable to Militant publications. Send to Circulation Department, Militant, 3/13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB.

What we stand for

* The immediate introduction of a 35 hour week without loss of pay as a step towards the elimination of unemployment.

* A minimum wage of £135 a week, tied to the cost of living, for everyone including sick and disabled people.

* Reversal of all Tory cuts and a massive programme of public works on housing, education, and the health service etc.

* Opposition to the Tories' anti-trade union laws and reversal of attacks on trade unions.

* Massive cuts in arms spending. Support for unilateral nuclear disarmament, but with the recognition that only a socialist change of society in Britain and internationally can eliminate the danger of a nuclear holocaust.

* Workers' management of nationalised industries. These should be run on the basis of one-third of the places on the management board coming from the unions in the industry, one third from the TUC representing the working class as a whole, and one third from the government.

* Nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies, including the banks and insurance companies which control 80 per cent to 85 per cent of the economy. This should be through an Enabling Bill in Parliament with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need.

* A socialist plan of production democratically drawn up and implemented by committees involving trade unions, shop stewards, the unwaged and small business people.

* Opposition to the capitalist Common Market, the EEC. For a socialist United States of Europe as a step towards a World Socialist Federation.

YTURC CONFERENCE MILITANT MEETING

Saturday 2 April

Youth fight for socialism

Main Hall, The Winter Gardens, Blackpool. 7.0pm

Speakers: Ted Grant

National Union of Seamen member

A health worker.

Become a Militant supporter

YOUR NEXT STEP...
OUR FIGHT IS YOUR FIGHT...JOIN IT!

I wish to become a Militant supporter:

Name.....

Address.....

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or telephone 01-533 3311 NOW!



Militant

"NEXT TIME you call can you bring me an extra eight Militants for some of the people in work?" Margaret, an orderly at St. Mary's hospital, Paddington, asked one of our sellers.

She started taking Militant every week after a seller called on her during our October sales campaign. For the past few weeks she has been taking Militant into work.

"I've pinned up some of the articles about the NHS on the notice board," she says. "I think there are about eight people on my ward that would like their own copy. Everyone at work agrees with your paper." Margaret also took some 'One-day general strike' stickers into work.

Tim White works in a postal sorting office in Redhill, Surrey and has recently started selling Militant. He told us: "We had a union meeting and sold 70 copies of Militant and I've now got 20-30 people at work that I sell to."

Why not follow the example of Margaret and Tim and take Militant into your workplace. Contact us or your local sellers to get supplies or if you need help to start a sale at work. Comrades from Newcastle phoned in to tell us that 33 Militants were sold at the DHSS central office in Long-benton last week—well done!

Help build Militant's sales in your workplace. Ring Ruth Campbell on 01 533 3311.

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT OUR 1985 & 1986 RALLIES:

'SOME SIDE SHOW' Daily Mail 4/11/85.

'LENIN AND LASERS' Militant is a perplexing beast. Despite everything it seems to be thriving. 7 Days 21/11/86.

'This spectacular five thousand-strong Militant Tendency rally in London's Albert Hall on Sunday was an

RALLY '88

ALEXANDRA PALACE
19TH JUNE 1988

12-6pm £6.

Impressive show of strength'. Frank Chapple in the 'Daily Mail' 20/11/86.

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING NOW:

"The size of this rally clearly shows that Militant is thriving despite Neil Kinnock's claims to have moderated the Labour Party". From a Tory Councillor in the 'Hampstead and Highgate Express' 19/2/88.

TICKET APPLICATION FORM

Please send me.....Tickets. I enclose £.....

Please send me details of transport:.....

Please send me a creche booking form:.....

Name.....

Address.....

Return to MILITANT RALLY: 3/13 HEPSCOTT ROAD
LONDON E9 5HB.



Without Lenin's policy on the national question the Russian revolution would have been impossible. It won the confidence of the oppressed peoples of Tsarist Russia. But a gulf separates Lenin's approach to the question from that of Gorbachev and the Stalinist bureaucracy today.

THE MIGHTY events in Armenia have shaken the Stalinist regime represented by Gorbachev to its foundations. Never before, at least in its own backyard, has the bureaucratic elite which dominates Russian society faced a challenge on such a scale.

A mounting wave of mass protests demanding the return of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian enclave in neighbouring Azerbaijan, has engulfed Armenia. Five days of demonstrations, occupations, and mass meetings in the factories culminated in one million people gathering in the centre of Yerevan. The city's population is 1.2 million and the Republic of Armenia has only 3.5 million inhabitants!

At this first whiff of mass demonstrations, the 'liberal' Gorbachev immediately put *Glasnost* (openness) into cold storage. Foreign correspondents were prevented from visiting the area, in a desperate attempt to suppress all reports. But reports have leaked out which give a graphic picture of these convulsive events.

Just as *Militant* had predicted, Gorbachev's attempt to carry through reforms from above in order to prevent revolution, political revolution, from below, has conjured up forces which represent a mortal threat to the rule of the bureaucracy.

The concept of *Glasnost* has been seized on to air those grievances which have been festering just below the surface. One of the most explosive is undoubtedly the unresolved national problem. Only six months ago, in his book *Perestroika*, Gorbachev boldly claimed: "The revolution and socialism have done away with national oppression and inequality and ensured economic, intellectual and cultural progress for all nations and nationalities."

Battles

The events in Armenia, and the bloody repercussions in battles between Armenians and Azerbaijanis within Azerbaijan itself, have resulted in more than 30 people being killed according to official sources. This gives the lie to Gorbachev's claims that socialism exists in Russia and that the national question has been resolved.

On the contrary, the bureaucratic elite have not only failed to solve the national question, but through their totalitarian grip on society have guaranteed that it has re-emerged in an aggravated form.

And yet Lenin's policy on the national question, which Gorbachev claims to follow, is one of the eternal treasures of mankind. Without it, neither the Russian revolution, nor the creation of a federation of 'United Soviet Socialist Republics' would have been possible.

Tsarist Russia was a prison of nations. The Bolsheviks defended the right of self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of Russia, enshrined in the famous paragraph 9 of their constitution.

Lenin fought an implacable struggle against all shades of Great Russian chauvinism. He pointed out that it was impossible

By Peter Taaffe

to win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities without proclaiming the right of self-determination.

The Bolsheviks' defence of self-determination did not mean they became evangelists of separation. At the same time as proclaiming the right, not the duty, of an oppressed nationality to separate from the oppressing nation, they also conducted a struggle for the union of nations, or states, in a socialist federation.

The Bolsheviks' opponents accused Lenin of wishing the dismemberment of Russia. But as Trotsky pointed out: "This bold revolutionary formulation of the national problem won for the Bolshevik party the indestructible confidence of the small and oppressed peoples of Tsarist Russia."

At the same time Lenin fought an implacable struggle against any taint of nationalism within the workers' movement: "In contrast to the bickering among the different national bourgeois parties over questions of language etc., workers' democracy puts forward the demand for absolute unity, complete amalgamation in all workers' organisations...to counter bourgeois nationalism of every kind."

What a contrast to those little sects who claim to support Lenin's ideas but advocate black sections and other schismatic ideas which divide and separate workers instead of uniting them!

A gulf separates Lenin's approach to the national problem from that of his alleged heir, Gorbachev. Lenin pointed out that above all the workers of Great Russia in taking power must scrupulously recognise the right of self-determination, up to and including secession, of the former oppressed nationalities in the former Tsarist empire. Thus the separation of Finland from Russia was accepted by the Bolsheviks.

However such sensitivity on the national question was foreign to the bureaucracy which gradually usurped power, personified in the rise of Stalin. This in turn resulted from the isolation of the Russian revolution, its cultural backwardness and the lag of the world revolution.

Russia's bureaucratic rulers have deployed hooligan and brutal repression against different nationalities with the consolidation of their totalitarian regime.

Notwithstanding this, the Russian bureaucracy to some extent carried out certain progressive work in the sphere of national policy. But "with immoderate overhead expenses", as Trotsky pointed out

New nations were created where none existed before. The bureaucracy's "progressive mission" consisted in carrying out those tasks which the effete Russian capitalists had been in-

capable of accomplishing.

But in the process they never hesitated to trample on the democratic rights of the nationalities of the USSR.

Trotsky's approach in opposing the Stalinists' national policy provides a key to solving the national question in Russia today. He pointed out that the very development of Russian society would inevitably bring the national question back onto the agenda, given the domination of the totalitarian bureaucratic elite: "The more considerable the development of a given national group, or the higher the sphere of its cultural creation, or again the more closely it grapples with the problems of society and personality, the more heavy and intolerable becomes the pressure of the bureaucracy." Today living standards in Armenia are higher than in Moscow and Leningrad.

In Russia the national question is not properly speaking a question of the oppression of one nationality by another, but the oppression by a centralised police apparatus over the cultural development of all nations, starting with the Great Russians themselves.

Nationalism

It is not just Armenia that has recently witnessed nationalist demonstrations and disturbances. So have the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and the Asian republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The events in Armenia show that national protests will fuse with and be fuelled by the resistance to the bureaucracy's rule. In Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and recently in Poland, the elements of resistance to national oppression and threats from the Russian bureaucracy fused with a movement to overthrow the bureaucratic elite and establish workers' democracy.

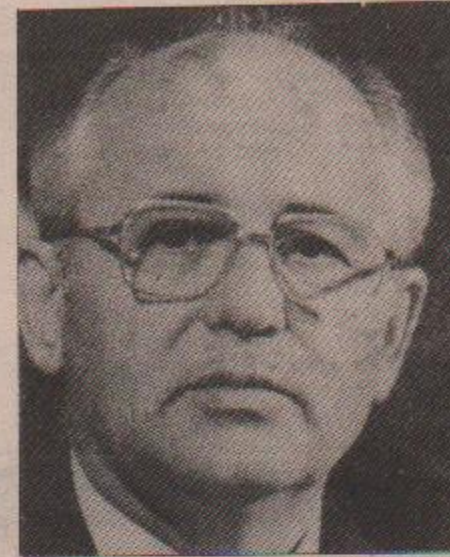
Moreover, as Trotsky pointed out, the nationalism of workers and peasants is often merely the "outer shell of an immature Bolshevism".

The demand for the return of Nagorno-Karabakh is longstanding. But recently two factors have brought the issue to a head. On the one side, by lifting the lid on the pressure cooker of Russian society, Gorbachev has aroused the expectations of the oppressed nationalities.

At the same time, the Armenian elite have leaned on their own population in their conflict with the Russian bureaucracy, which has stimulated this national revolt but gone far beyond the limits that they had prescribed.

The present upheavals were prepared by demonstrations and meetings in October. Initially the issue was not Nagorno-Karabakh but mass protests and demonstrations demanding the shutting down of dangerous chemical plants and a nuclear power station. The example of Chernobyl was fresh in the minds of the population. Their fear of another nuclear catastrophe and the bureaucratic hooliganism of the elite on these issues prompted the

Gorbachev national dilemmas



Above: Over a million pack the streets of Yerevan. Right: The 'Soviet Union's' patchwork of nations. Only half the Armenians live in the Armenian Republic.



demonstrations.

At the same time *Pravda*, as the organ of the central bureaucracy, carried articles denouncing the "Party elite" in Armenia. It particularly concentrated its fire on top bureaucrat Demirchyan, who was blamed for huge scandals in health care and pollution.

Gorbachev's creatures attacked the Armenian bosses but were shouted down in a party meeting in October. *Pravda's* riposte was "they (the party elite) could not believe that a normal, sober-minded person would dare challenge the consolidated ranks of nomenclatura" The nomenclatura is a list of those deemed suitable for the top bureaucratic jobs.

The Armenian bureaucracy demanded in turn the punishment of "those journalists" of *Pravda*. Typifying the Russian economy as a whole, Armenia has suffered economic stagnation in the recent period.

The noisy agitation for the return of the Karabakh found enormous echoes both within the enclave and throughout Armenia.

Demonstrations began in Karabakh with mass meetings in workplaces. This fused with a mass demonstration from Abovyan, a town near Yerevan, in protest at the opening of a synthetic rubber factory.

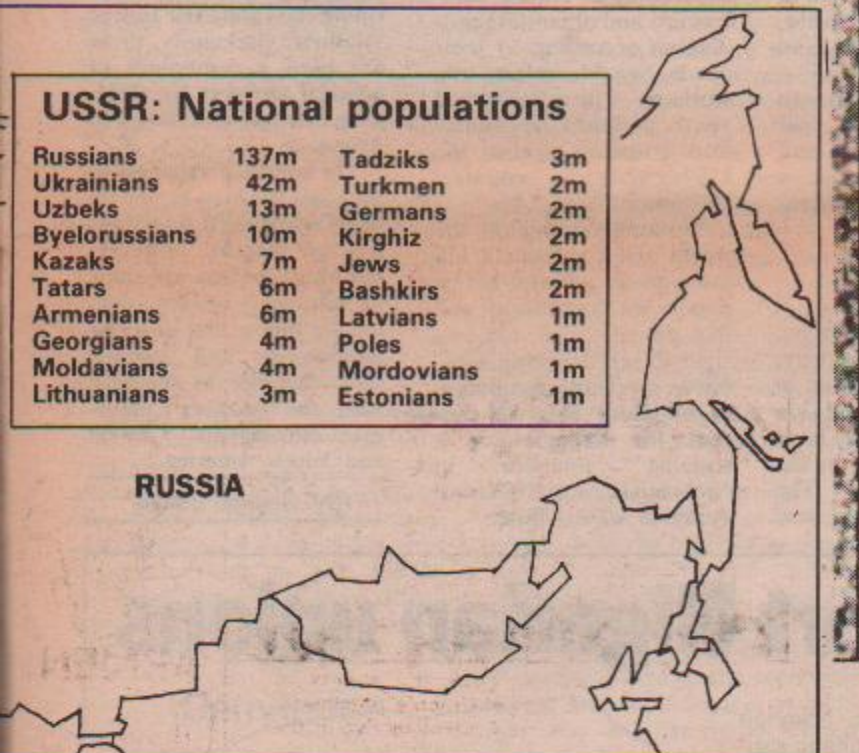
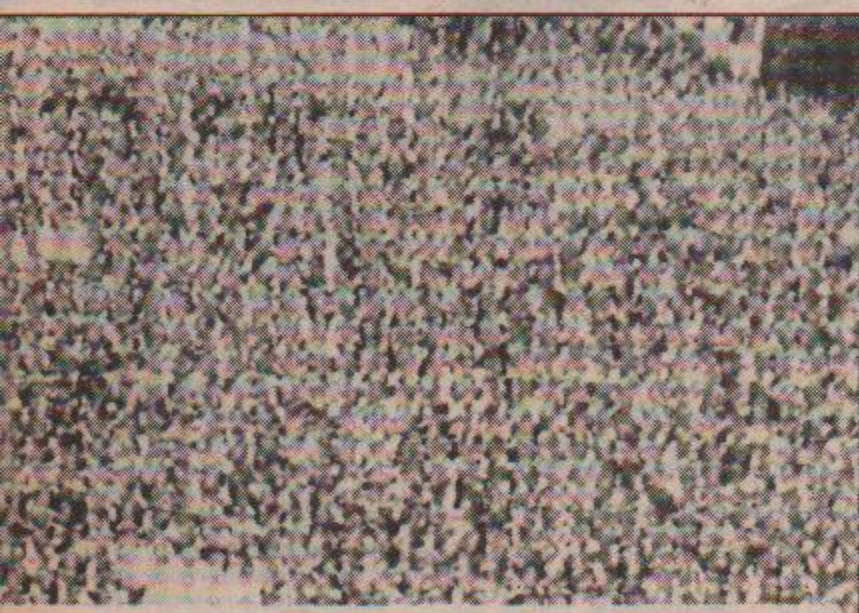
When the demonstrators reached Yerevan with petitions demanding that the plant should not be opened, they secured a temporary victory. The marchers were then joined by nationalist demonstrators seeking the immediate return of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Stoppages

Thus the movement began as a combination of nationalist protest and demonstrations against the arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy. This in turn led to the sacking of the Communist Party chief in Karabakh for "shortcomings in his work".

On 11 February, the Karabakh 'soviet', a 'parliament' of hand-picked representatives of the elite, voted by 110 out of 140 for union with Armenia! This triggered work stoppages, strikes,

Gorbachev's National Dilemma



occupations and demonstrations throughout Armenia and particularly in Yerevan.

Gorbachev in his attempt to cut down the 'illegal' privileges of the bureaucratic elite, as opposed to the legal lavish lifestyle of the bureaucracy, has tried to base himself on such local 'soviets' as a whip against the middle layers of the bureaucracy. Yet the decision of the Karabakh 'soviet', obviously supported by 95 per cent of the area's population, is denounced by Gorbachev.

Demonstrations which swept Yerevan were under the slogan of "One people, one republic" and "Self-determination is not treason". Such was the scale of the protests that one resident commented: "The whole city centre is completely packed, I have never seen anything like it."

Initially the demonstrators were carrying pictures of Gorbachev. But after his appearance on TV, they threw them to the ground. Gorbachev's radio and TV appearance calling for calm was the first time that he had made such an appeal.

Moreover, the local bureauc-

racy led by Demirchyan, having first of all leant on the masses, now desperately appealed for calm also. Demirchyan appeared before a mass meeting declaring: "You're not working, so who will pay your wages? What will your families eat?", only to be whistled off the podium.

The scale of the movement was reflected in the comments a British visitor made to the *Times*: "It was one of the most amazing sights I have ever seen. On virtually every road into the city, groups marching under banners have been walking towards the centre of the demonstration, which is outside the Opera.

"At night, the protestors are being put up in a vast network of private apartments, ready to resume their demonstrations. We know for certain that many have walked for 20 miles or more to get here. And even this morning we could see more groups heading past our hotel, which is about half a kilometre from the site."

After seeing the film of the demonstration in Yerevan, a US correspondent commented: "It is clear that this is not a problem

Armenia's bloody history

THE BITTER and bloody history of the Armenian people means that they are extremely sensitive to the violation of their national feelings. Between one and a half and two million Armenians were massacred in 1915 under the Turkish Ottoman empire, in the first case of genocide this century.

In 1920 there were bloody clashes between Armenians, who are of Christian origin, and the Azerbaijanis, who are Shi-ite Muslims of Turkish origin. They resulted in 30,000 Armenians and half as many Azerbaijanis being slaughtered. By 1923 70,000 remained in Armenia while others were forced to flee to Europe and America. The 3.5 million who now live in Armenia only account for half the world's Armenian population.

Somewhat perversely Nagorno-Karabakh was incorporated into Azerbaijan in 1923, even though 80 per cent of its 160,000 population are

Armenians. Given the region's history, this was bound to be a running sore.

On the basis of workers' democracy in Russia the population of this area would in all probability have been satisfied with autonomy within Azerbaijan. The democratic discussion and debate of a healthy workers' state would serve to allay the fears and suspicions of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples and break down remaining prejudices.

A democratic workers' state in Azerbaijan and Armenia and throughout the USSR would allow the population themselves to decide their own state forms.

But, for the central bureaucracy and the bureaucracy of Azerbaijan and Armenia, defence of their privileged position takes precedence over any of the national aspirations of the Armenian people.

that is going to go away. Those people looked as though they had sensed their own power."

But the most illuminating comments were made by a Russian dissident who was in Yerevan at the time. "With little self organisation," he pointed out, "a million people kept order perfectly. It was an unprecedented week of freedom and democracy for the whole people."

He likened the demonstrations and mood of the working class in Yerevan to that during the sit-in at the Gdansk shipyards in 1980.

An organising committee had been improvised in the course of the movement. As with the Petofi Circle of writers and artists in the Hungarian revolution, this was composed in the main of "respected cultural and scientific figures".

The demonstration was exemplary in its discipline and order. The police had disappeared from the streets and yet there was no outbreak of crime and violence. The police in fact commented that not one single crime had been perpetrated in Yerevan in the course of the week long protest.

It is easy to imagine the terror which must have gripped the Kremlin lords in the face of such a movement. One false move and a social explosion would have ignited in Armenia which could have triggered similar movements throughout the whole of the region and spread into Great Russia itself.

Intellectuals

It is clear that the 'liberal' Gorbachev had contingency plans for the use of troops. Airport workers witnessed paratroopers and other troops being rushed into the region. However the use of force in such a situation would have triggered off an uprising.

But Gorbachev found support from an unexpected quarter. The leaders of the movement, such as Sylva Kaputikyan, a poetess, and Zori Babayan, a literary critic, flew to Moscow to meet Gorbachev. They are of a similar social type to the leaders of the Polish intellectuals' group, KOR, who played such a baleful role in derailing the revolution there.

They assured the vast crowds in Yerevan after their meeting that Gorbachev had promised that the Armenian claim to Karabakh would be justly solved. The demonstrations were called off with Gorbachev given a month to settle the issue.

Here had been an opportunity, at the height of the struggle, to generalise, broaden and deepen the movement of the masses in Armenia. All that was required was for the movement of the working class and the peasants to be given an organised form.

Committees had sprung up in the workplaces. The outline of real soviets, workers' and peasants' councils, had been

created. If this had been linked to the idea of the election of all officials and the right of recall, the elimination of bureaucratic privileges, with the average official receiving no more than the wage of a skilled worker, etc—in other words the four conditions that Lenin laid down for a healthy workers' state in 1917—this would have marked the beginnings of the political revolution.

This would have meant the beginning of the end of the rule of the bureaucracy not just in Armenia but throughout the whole of Russia. As it is, Gorbachev is on the horns of a very uncomfortable dilemma. To grant the claims of the Armenian people for the return of Karabakh would inflame Azerbaijan and lead to a growth of national conflict in the region.

It would be vigorously opposed by the Azerbaijani wing of the bureaucracy, whose main concern is to defend 'their territory'.

Failure to satisfy the Armenians however, will result in further upheavals in the area. On a bureaucratic basis it is completely impossible to solve the national problem, either in Armenia or throughout the USSR.

It is the feelings of the population of Karabakh which should first and foremost determine whether it should link up with Armenia or not.

How to ascertain the will of the population? There is no way except through a democratically conducted referendum or elections to a representative 'constituent assembly' which could reflect the will of the masses.

Fifty years ago, Trotsky pointed out: "Cultural demands aroused by the revolution require the widest possible autonomy. At the same time industry can only develop by subjecting all parts of the union to a general centralised plan. There can be no once-and-for-all formula to resolve and reconcile these two tendencies. Nevertheless it can be done—particularly through the will of the interested masses."

He went on: "Only their actual participation in the administration of their own destinies can at each stage draw the necessary lines between the legitimate demands of economic centralisation and the living gravitations of national culture."

Trotsky's profound comments retain their full force for Russia today. Not just in the USSR but throughout Eastern Europe the national question has re-emerged.

In Russia itself, the national question is emerging not just in the east, but also in those states with a higher living standard than Russia itself, such as in the Baltic states.

The Armenian revolt shows that the incapacity of the bureaucracy to solve the national question in Russia and Eastern Europe will be one of the factors which will serve to undermine its rule.

In Eastern Europe they have even been incapable of carrying through a degree of unification which has been attained by the capitalist Common Market. Each national bureaucracy has to develop its own industrial base, upon which its power and prestige rests.

Federation

A socialist federation, in which the mutual confidence and trust of the working class would be pre-eminent, would immediately eliminate the harmful replication which takes place under the rule of the autocratic bureaucracy.

Without any danger of the domination of one nationality by another, in a society of human solidarity, collaboration for the benefit of all the peoples of Eastern Europe and Russia would unfold.

On the basis of their experience, this perspective will be more and more understood by the mass of the populations of Russia and Eastern Europe.

Actual or threatened military intervention from Russia could put a stop to the movements of the Hungarian and Polish workers in 1956 and 1981. But it will be impossible to use the troops of Eastern Europe and Russia against a movement of the working class, particularly one that will unfold in the major working class centres of Leningrad and Moscow.

The dramatic events in Armenia in the past month signify that the era of the political revolution has opened up in Russia itself.

Revolution Betrayed by Trotsky normally £5.75 our price £5 including post.

Right of Nations to Self-determination by Lenin 70p.

Collins: Russia—How the bureaucracy seized power 50p.

Grant: Russia—Reform or political revolution 30p. Please add 25% post for pamphlets from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscott Rd, London E9 5HB.



Hands off Nicaragua!

El Salvador: Blow for regime

THOUSANDS OF Nicaraguan reservists were called up and the whole population put on the alert when the US government flew in 3,200 troops to neighbouring Honduras on 17 March.

By Pat Craven

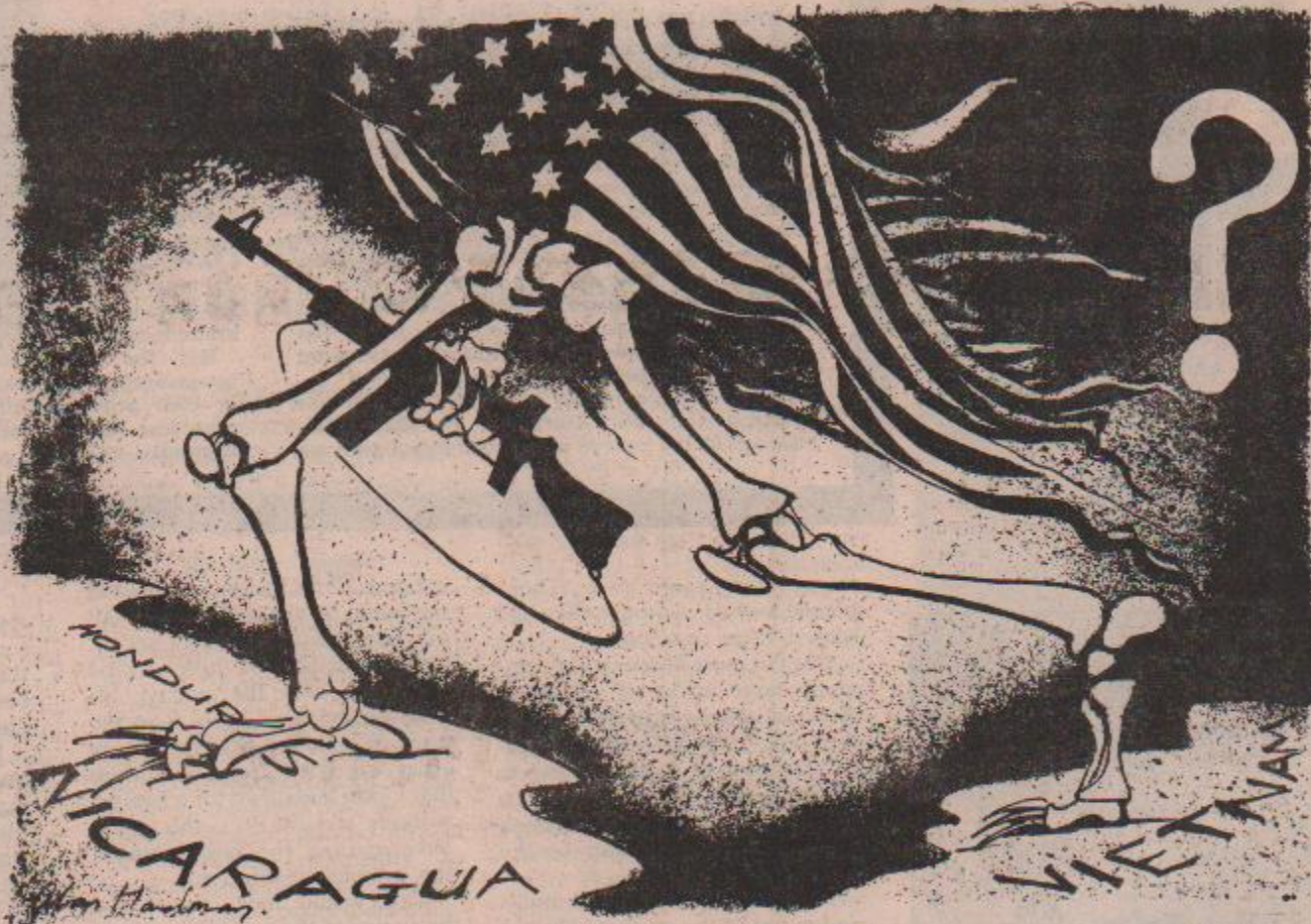
The US action, described by the White House as an "emergency deployment readiness exercise", was first justified as a response to a request from Honduras. It was then admitted that President Azcona had been in bed with flu when the decision was taken and only "made his request" afterwards.

Reagan's pretext was an alleged 'invasion' of Honduras by Nicaraguan forces who are fighting the US-backed right-wing Contra guerrillas, who have their bases in Honduras. Nicaragua denies invading Honduras, though their troops did undoubtedly inflict a severe defeat on the Contras.

With their military aid cut off by the US Congress, their supplies threatened with capture and negligible support within Nicaragua, the Contras are now being crushed. Reagan faces a humiliating setback in his crusade on behalf of the gangsters he calls 'freedom fighters'.

His advisers fear that the collapse of the Contras would inspire the forces of revolution in all the rest of Central America. This is forcing Reagan to react with a show of strength. At the very least he is mounting a drive to get Congress to reauthorise military assistance to the Contras.

At present US troops are supposed to be advising rather than fighting in Honduras. But it cannot be ruled out that Reagan is preparing the ground for



Faced with the imposition of the Contra gangsters by the US, the Nicaraguan population will fight heroically to prevent it. Such a struggle, however, could not be confined to defensive goals alone.

direct US military involvement, by engineering a crisis to serve as a pretext for the invasion of Nicaragua itself.

Hated thugs

This would meet the resistance of all the workers and peasants of Nicaragua. They know that in the US army's baggage train would follow all the hated thugs of the former Somoza regime overthrown in 1979, who would reimpose a reign of terror.

The Sandinista government has stopped short of carrying through a socialist transformation of society,

even on a bureaucratically deformed basis as in Cuba. It has left most industry in private hands and has not put an end to hunger and poverty.

But it has carried through reforms. The main blame for the country's difficulties is seen to lie with the Contras and their US backers, whose murderous war has cost 30,000 lives and devastated the economy.

Faced with the reimposition of these gangsters by the US, the population would fight heroically to prevent it. Such a struggle, however, could not be confined to defensive goals

alone. Arms in hand, the working people will want to carry forward the revolution that opened in 1979.

This will bring them into conflict with the Nicaraguan capitalists and landlords, and the policies of the Sandinista government.

Victory

A socialist programme, linked to an appeal to the working class in the rest of Central America and the USA itself, is the only basis for a decisive victory by the Nicaraguan masses. The prospect of gaining real

control over the economy and the state, ending landlessness and organising production according to their needs, would enthrone the workers, peasants and youth, and turn the country into a fortress against the US-backed counter-revolution.

Workers throughout the world will condemn a US invasion as a brutal act of imperialist aggression and the denial of a nation's right to self-determination. Given a clear explanation of the issues, they will support the struggle for a socialist solution in Nicaragua and Central America as a whole.

THE DEFEAT of El Salvador's ruling Christian Democrats in last Sunday's Assembly and local elections is a sign of the growing discontent with President Duarte's regime.

The gains by the reactionary Arena party do not reflect any general swing to the right, but a protest against the government's austerity policies, their corruption and their failure to end the war against the FMLN guerrillas, which has cost 62,000 lives in seven years.

Despite massive US aid for 'reform' programmes, little or no improvement has filtered through to working people. Journalists report a general disillusionment with all political parties.

The FMLN called for an election boycott and enforced it in many rural areas.

The elections took place against the background of an escalation in the war and a major strike wave in the cities, including unions that have not been on the left.

Workers occupied the Ministry of Labour. A militant protest exploded after soldiers beat up a left-wing union leader. Workers burned government vehicles and lit a bonfire in front of the US Embassy.

The election result emphasises the paralysis of the ruling class and their lack of solutions. Ominously, there has been a resurgence of political murders by right-wing death squads linked to Arena.

The guerillas' response to the crisis has been to step up their activities in the cities. Not car bombs, however, but Marxist ideas will show El Salvador's working people the way to end poverty, landlessness and oppression, shoulder to shoulder with the workers' movement throughout Central and South America.

By George Collins

Panama: Workers show the way

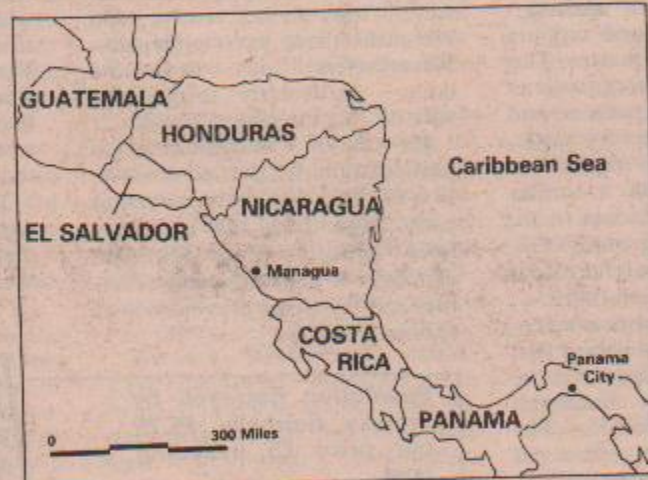
SECTION AFTER section of workers coming out on indefinite strike; burning barricades in the streets; a gangster-dictator, Noriega, fighting to stay in power—the recent scenes in Panama have been a preview of what can unfold throughout Latin America in the next period.

As we go to press an indefinite general strike demanding Noriega's departure has begun—this time with the participation of the trade unions, unlike previous protests by the capitalist opposition.

Panama, until recently, was regarded as one of the more stable countries in the region. The crisis was sparked off by the US freeze on Panama's bank funds, starving the regime of cash and stopping public sector workers' wages.

Noriega's greatest strength has been the total lack of credibility of the capitalist opposition, acting at the behest of US imperialism.

But the militant strike wave by dockers, teachers, electricity and telecommunications workers, doctors and nurses has changed the political landscape.



Traditional union support for the populist regime has been ended.

Now, with Noriega incapable of governing the country, the support of the military is crumbling. The dictator is running out of time.

US imperialism is willing to let Noriega go off into exile, to enjoy a life of luxury, and not press for his extradition on drug charges. This makes clear the cynical object of their

intervention—not to bring a criminal to book, but to instal a regime in Panama more closely under their control.

But the more lasting significance of these events will be the effect on Panama's working class. Trade unionists have been broken from their traditional outlook and propelled into militant political action. A wealth of experience has been gained. Panama will not be the same again.

Support Nigerian unions

ON 1 March the Nigerian military regime, acting in support of a right-wing faction of trade union leaders, suspended the leading bodies of the Nigerian Labour Congress (Militant 887). The regime is hoping to cripple the unions in order to head off protests against impending price rises.

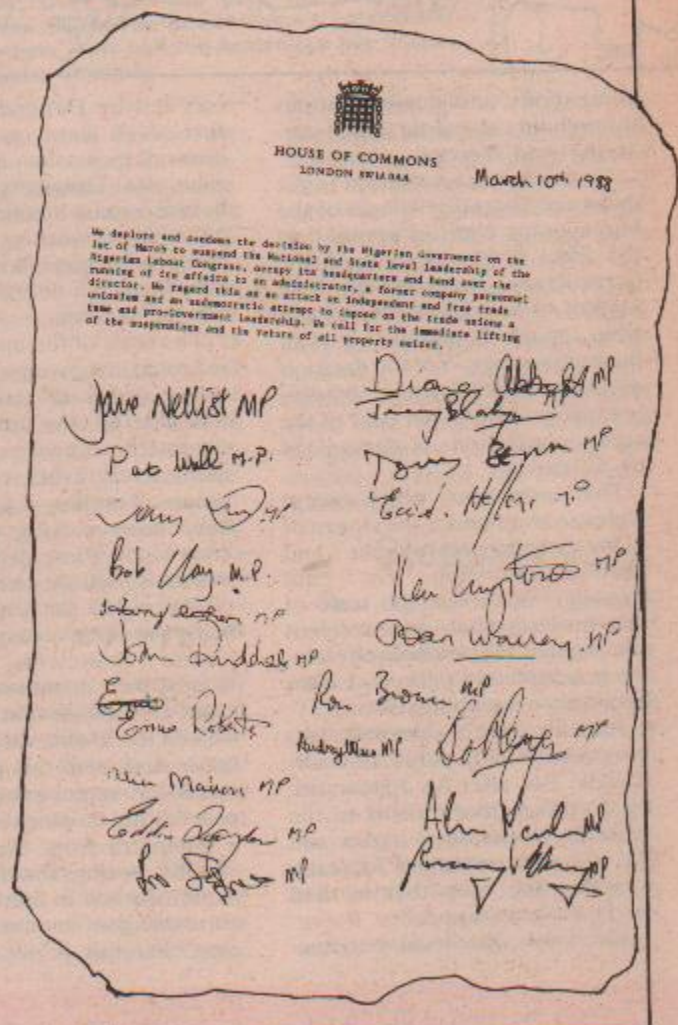
Twenty Labour MPs have responded with a protest to the regime (right). On behalf of the MPs Dave Nellist, MP for Coventry South-East, added:

"I am confident that as the knowledge of these disgraceful incidents becomes more widely known throughout the British labour and trade union movement, protests from other workers and their organisations will follow."

Trade unionists and Labour Party activists should take up the issue in their organisations and extend support to the Nigerian workers in the struggles they are facing.

Protests to: Nigerian High Commission, Nigeria House, 9 Northumberland Avenue, London WC2N 5BX.

● Marxists arrested
—see page 2



No short cuts to a socialist leadership

Plymouth college votes for a real union

THE ELECTIONS for a new National Union of Students' executive this April will be the most fiercely contested for years.

By John Jennings

In the coming months the government will carry out the worst attacks yet on student living standards and education. They also want to fundamentally alter the nature of the NUS through an amendment to the Education Bill which will end automatic membership of students' unions.

The National Organisation of Labour Students (Nols), led by the Kinnockite Democratic Left group who control the union, face a challenge from Socialist Students in Nols (Ssin), led by Socialist Organiser. In such an important election who should Marxists vote for?

Unfortunately neither the DL nor Ssin offer a clear way forward for students. The DL election slogan is "the force for change." The Ssin slogan is "time for change."

The bankrupt and bureaucratic policies of the DL leadership have led Nols to stagnation and decline, accentuated by their failure to lead NUS. Membership has fallen by 2000 since 1984. The recent conference was the smallest this decade. But Ssin do not offer a viable alternative to the DL.

Since the miners' strike, which along with attacks on education radicalised a wide layer of students, the DL have moved to the right. Ssin have temporarily attracted support from activists dissatisfied with the DL, but at the same time they have abandoned any pretence to a rounded-out socialist programme.

Demands

Instead, they have tailored their demands according to their rather short-sighted estimate of the prevailing mood among NUS activists. Ssin has not recognised the growing radicalisation of students, especially those involved in recent struggles. Fundamentally, they have no more confidence in the development of a massive movement for change among students than the DL leaders.

Ssin has adopted the inadequate "New Deal" approach abandoned by the DL three years ago. It is now echoed by Ssin's call for 'integrated' campaigns. They fail to put forward socialist demands or any strategy to link students seriously to the labour movement for a mass struggle against the government.

At a recent national executive, Ssin supporters voted with the DL against Collette Williams's proposal to organise its national demonstration on the same day as the TUC lobby of Parliament against the Education Bill.

Ssin have already resorted to blatant opportunism, dropping socialist parts of their programme. For example in December's Middle East debate they were prepared to drop the call for a socialist federation of the Middle East to get the votes of the Union of Jewish Students.

This opportunism shows Ssin's lack of a consistent socialist programme. Nor does Ssin have the wide ranging support amongst students, nor more importantly the real links with the labour movement needed to carry out a serious struggle.

It is a conference election machine, based around a number of individuals, particularly Simon Pottinger, the Ssin presidential candidate. Ssin's manifesto even says: "for the past three years Simon Pottinger has tried to turn NUS around."

In the NUS leadership they would be no different from the present DL leaders. As the name suggests, Ssin originally claimed to be fighting for a socialist leadership in Nols. However, they have effectively abandoned the struggle to democratise Labour's student organisation and win it to a socialist position.

Contest

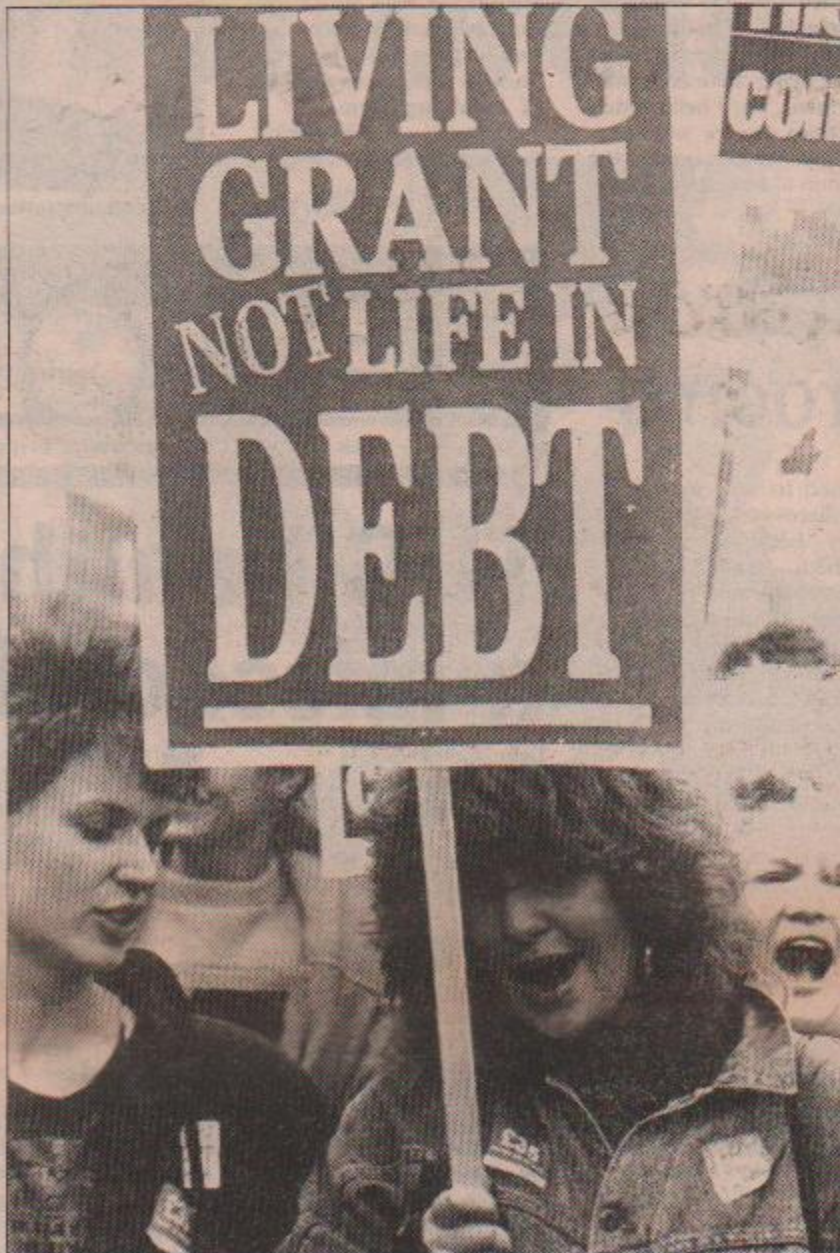
Yet the existence of a strong Labour student organisation, with a democratic structure and committed to socialist policies, is crucial to the fight for a socialist leadership of NUS. Otherwise, the battle for control of the NUS executive will continue to be, at best, a purely electoral contest between more or less well-intentioned individuals—who will be moulded by exactly the same pressures as their predecessors. In reality, Ssin, and especially Pottinger himself, are simply looking for a short-cut to control.

How could such a grouping as Ssin, which lacks clear policies and a coherent body of support, lead a union of 1.5 million members? Who would Ssin executive members be accountable to? Inevitably, individuals like Pottinger would go the same way as previous 'left' leaders of NUS like Sue Slipman (who started with the Communist Party and ended up in the SDP).

In these important NUS elections, therefore, socialist students are faced with a very poor choice. There is no fighting, socialist slate on offer. Under these circumstances, it is a question of which slate is preferable from the point of view of future developments. While in no way muting our opposition to the policies of the DL leadership, *Militant* supporters consider that it is preferable to vote for the NOLS slate in these elections.

Reflecting the Kinnockite policies of Labour's front bench, the DL leadership has held back the movement, and undermined students who are prepared to struggle. There is justifiably growing anger at the role the DL leaders are playing. With the backing of right-wing Labour Party officials, the DL have reduced Nols to an undemocratic monstrosity, resorting to unprecedented bureaucratic manipulation in order to cling on to their positions.

Nevertheless, Nols remains the Labour student organisation with links with the labour movement. Ssin's bid for the NUS leadership, on the other hand, is just an episodic development which owes more to the vacuum in NUS than anything Ssin has to offer. Ssin



NUS demo in London last year. Photo: Dave Sinclair.



NUS 'New Deal' campaign led nowhere. Photo: Sara Fentiman

will soon be eclipsed, but Nols, because of its links with the mass labour organisations, will continue to be important.

This is why *Militant* supporters call on all socialist students to vote for the Nols slate. Let the DL leaders, who are the political clients of the present Labour leadership, take responsibility for NUS. It is preferable, in the absence of a viable alternative, to put them to the test once again, so that even wider layers of students can judge them by their policies and actions over the next year.

The task for Marxist students is to campaign for a bold, socialist alternative. Wherever we have

forces, we will attempt to give a lead to the campaigns and struggles taking place, and maintain implacable criticism of the DL. The struggle to democratise Nols must be redoubled, so that there will be a real alternative on offer in future NUS elections.

Future developments can be seen in the success of Marxist ideas in the FE sector through the Further Education Labour Students (Fels). The ideas consistently advocated on the NUS national executive by Collette Williams, who will be standing for re-election in these elections, will become the dominant ideas in NUS as a whole.

STUDENTS AT Plymouth College of Further Education have won a big victory in their campaign to democratise their students' association and affiliate it to the National Union of Students.

Despite intimidation by the college authorities and manoeuvres by the Association a general meeting voted to affiliate to the NUS and for the removal of a final warning given to a student for handing out Further Education Labour Students' leaflets.

The Association is directly controlled by the college authorities—more to police the students rather than campaign against the Tories' attacks on education.

The Association and college authorities rely on students in the Marine Radio section for support. These students are being trained up to go into jobs in the Ministry of Defence such as Satellite Communications and GCHQ. As with GCHQ the Tories undoubtedly want to drive out genuine unions in these places.

Committee

A Students' Rights Committee was set up to campaign for a genuine union and to demand a general meeting to discuss the issue, but this was refused.

However, 60 students turned up to an Association meeting and successfully pressed them to name the date for a general meeting.

Just before the meeting the Principal sent a note to every lecturer to warn students against attending or voting for the resolutions. On the day over 200 students turned up.

They voted for the resolution to affiliate to the NUS, moved by Further Education National Committee member Rod Alexander, by 108 votes to 63 and to remove the final warning from the victimised student by 100 votes to 5. The mood in the college has been transformed since the meeting.

However the battle is by no means over. The Association have called another general meeting claiming the one we've already had was invalid.

We are prepared to fight to the end for our rights.

By a Plymouth college student

STOP PRESS

A FURTHER general meeting at the college has voted to affiliate to the NUS by an even bigger majority.

College authorities have warned the victimised student that he will be reported to his employers, and possibly sacked if he doesn't stop his political activities.

Alton attacks women's rights

Dear Comrades,

I am genuinely worried about what David Alton's Bill will mean to all women, especially young women. It will drop the legal limit for abortion from 28 weeks to 18, but if it goes through Parliament he will no doubt start pushing for a total ban on abortions.

Mr Alton does not seem to acknowledge that late abortions are usually carried out because of delays by the NHS or on young women who try not to acknowledge that they could be pregnant.

The NHS is in crisis, with

wards closing all the time, so how are women going to get earlier abortions? The Bill is an attack on the liberties of women.

Mr Alton seems to think that women automatically get abortions on request. This is not true; two doctors who know next to nothing about you have to decide whether you are incapable of bringing a baby up.

The moral question of a foetus being alive is a valid argument, but I believe that abortions are a necessary evil. No women make the decision to have an abortion lightly.

I believe women have the right to make up their own minds on issues that affect their lives. Alton and all the other MPs who are supporting his Bill have no right to decide women's lives for them.

Women have been finding ways to abort themselves for centuries. Reducing the legal time limit will not stop abortions but force women to revert back to dangerous methods of obtaining them.

Andrea Camberbatch, Peckham student.



The demonstration against Alton's bill on 19 March.

Patients left in the wrong rooms

Dear Comrades,

I have recently come out of a London hospital, having firstly been put into a local military hospital, in order, I was told, "to be sure of getting a bed".

The military nurses are so overworked that the one who came with me in the ambulance was "delighted to be away from the chaos".

However she was to discover that the London one was far more chaotic—patients left on the wrong floors, on trolleys, in the wrong rooms, no staff to supervise, no porters, etc. And when the ambulance

returned to take me back, she discovered that her trolley, bedding, etc. had vanished.

This nurse had qualified one year earlier and lost her job on the same day. So she joined the army: "Coming from Durham what else was there for me to do?" she said: "I will leave in two years' time; by then there must be decent jobs for people, the NHS will be sound and that woman and her government will be gone. I am a socialist and I will continue to fight for the future."

Anne Ursell, Sittingbourne.

Classified ads

20p per word, minimum 10 words. Semi-display £3 per column centimetre. Three weeks for the price of two Militant meeting ads free. All advertisement copy should reach this office by first post on Friday, the week before publication.

Wanted co-op and green shield stamps. Loose, part or full books. All proceeds to the fighting fund. Send c/o Militant circulation, 3/13 Hepscoth Rd, London E9 5HB.

○ Kenny Peeney Memorial Evening. Friday 25 March. Dockers Club, Edinburgh Park, Townsend Lane, Liverpool. Tickets £2.

□ New sticker available in rolls of 250. 'One day general strike—Defend the health service'. Other stickers: 'Kick out the Tories', 'No to slave labour on YTS', 'For a socialist South Africa', £2.50 per roll. 'Militant for labour and youth' enamel stud badges £1 each. A3 size posters of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg 50p each collecting tins £1 each, 10 or more 75p each.

Available from Fighting Fund Dept, 3-13 Hepscoth Rd, London E9 5HB. For all orders add 25p per cent P&P. Cheques payable to Militant.

WINTER 1988 issue. ★ Future of the trade unions. ★ 1929 crash.

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Workers' Education Group Summer Camp '88. Saturday 6-13 August

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For further details, write to WEG, PO Box 332, London E15 3BY.

Letters

Send us your views, comments or criticism.

Militant, 3-13 Hepscoth Road, London E9 5HB

TUC health demo—a missed chance

Dear Comrades,

How good it is to have a TUC general council member writing in Militant. John Macreadie wrote: "I urged that 5 March should not just be a rally with fighting speeches".

Well John, we did not even have that minimum requirement! As I reached Hyde Park, TUC general secretary Norman Willis was singing 'When the saints go marching in.' The rally was addressed by Willis, Jack Jones, Claire Rayner and Bishop Huddleston. But where was the voice of the health service unions or a nurse? Where was the Labour Party or

Neil Kinnock?

The TUC has spent the Thatcher years in the doldrums, so much so that when it does have the chance to register a blow to the Tories on an issue that is fundamental to working people, it is incapable of giving a meaningful lead.

The Tories have set themselves the task of destroying the labour and trade union movement because they fear its potential strength. The TUC now has the chance to start the destruction of the Tories. It will be unforgivable if they do not grasp this chance. Ann Jones, Lewisham West Labour Party.

Dear Comrades,

As a disabled person, I have to travel by taxi. After the TUC health demo, two other comrades and I travelled by taxi between Hyde Park and Marylebone Road.

On learning that we'd been on the demo, the taxi driver refused to take any money, as an act of solidarity to show his support for the NHS, as he had been unable to attend the demo.

Stuart Bracking, Lancaster University.



On the TUC demo.

Who is the enemy?

Dear Comrades,

At a recent 'GMBATU for Labour' meeting, Tom Burlison, our regional secretary, stated that "other parties are our opponents but our real enemy lies within our own party".

This would explain why the GMB leaders have invested most of their time and energy policing the

labour movement rather than fighting the Tories.

In a question from the floor, I gave John Edmonds, our general secretary, the chance to renounce this statement. He merely stated that he was in favour of expulsions of individuals but against a general purge. That is equivalent to saying "I'm in favour of the war as long

as there are no deaths!"

The whole meeting was a very low-key affair and a confirmation of the lack of ideas the right wing have. The sooner we have a leadership in our union which sees Thatcher and her class as the real enemy the better.

Ged Grebby, Newcastle GMBATU

LPYS conference—truth admitted

Dear Comrades,

Poole Labour Party's annual general meeting went relatively smoothly until in my Youth Officer's report I made critical remarks over decisions to cancel LPYS conference, shut Socialist Youth and sack Andy Bevan.

When the chairman asked for comments, the SW regional organiser, David Gardner, piped up: "Socialist Youth was shut because sales were

tiny (!) and instead the party's free magazine will be posted direct to young members who ask for it.

"The post of National Youth Officer was done away with as a 'cost cutting exercise' and LPYS national conference because 'it had become a rally for Militant'."

So there you have the truth at last. As Militant has said all along, the youth conference has been cancelled not for 'irregularities' or 'intimida-

tion', but purely for political reasons.

The right-wing 'realists' have lost the argument on policy, so they resort to dictatorial methods to silence dissent. Unfortunately for them, industrial battles in the near future will push the party far to the left and the ideas of Militant will grow stronger still.

Forward to a Marxist Labour Party!

Julie Hayes, Poole Labour Party.

Verbal disgust

Dear Comrades,

I heard on the radio the uproar caused by the left-wing backbenchers on Budget day, protesting noisily at the easing of the tax burden of the enormously rich by continually shouting 'Shame! Shame!'

They were clearly defending with their verbal disgust the interests of the mass of ordinary decent working-class people. During all this commotion, Mr Kinnock the Labour leader, so it is widely reported, sat tight-lipped and stony-faced, a thorn amongst roses perhaps! Shame!

Roy Cousins, Cardiff.

Changed times?

Dear Comrades,

On a visit to W Germany last year I went to the modern art gallery at Stuttgart, where there was a painting by Otto Dix, painted in the early 20s just after the first world war.

It was a match-seller with no arms and legs being ignored by everyone and being urinated on by a dog. Well at least this would not happen today, I thought.

But in Stuttgart town centre there was an old man, obviously war-wounded, with just one arm, selling postcards. Well, times do change!

The capitalist system uses people for its own ends during wars and then ignores them afterwards. Obviously the 'wealth and prosperity' of W Germany since the second world war has not benefited this individual.

Katrine Williams, Lancaster University.

Safety threatened by shipowners' 'quest for profit'

What new P&O contracts mean

THE ATTEMPT by P&O to sack all its Dover ferry workers has highlighted the threat to passengers' safety if manning levels are cut to the level the company is demanding.

By Pat Craven.

There are also fears that shipowners are to escape any obligation to improve the safety of their ferries in the wake of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* tragedy. These were expressed by Labour MPs in the Standing Committee on the Merchant Shipping Bill.

Terry Fields, MP for Liverpool Broadgreen, said: "Masters and crews face enormous pressures because of large-scale unemployment among seafarers. There is a quest for profit. P&O European Ferries says that profits are down, but the company made £11 million on Dover sailings last year.

"A sea captain has a duty to carry out the wishes of his bosses, and there is a feeling that profit is being maximised prior to selling off the ferries when the Channel Tunnel is built."

Terry Fields was backed up by Tony Lloyd, the Labour MP for Stretford. He quoted the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers (Numasto) who said that the P&O plan for manning levels was "totally unrealistic and unreasonable and would put passengers at risk.

"It would mean officers working for up to 16 hours a day, seven days a week on ships not designed for taking rest and sleep breaks."

Exhausted

"It is a serious charge" said Tony Lloyd, "that by reducing manning levels on board ship the company is jeopardising safe levels per se because of lack of cover, and is inducing fatigue in the crew."

"The minister's response has been disappointing and foolish. The Numasto figures suggest that in some circumstances, the master of a coaster would work an average of 110.5 hours a week."

He quoted from the testimony of the master of a vessel in the short sea trade in Europe last year:

"Having run into thick fog in the North sea, I crossed the busy shipping lanes to pick up my pilot at the Elbe, thence into Hamburg, discharged in six hours. Down the Elbe through the Kiel Canal in dense fog and thick ice all the way to Gdansk, whereupon I arrived totally exhausted with only six hours sleep in three days.

"Passing through the busy ferry routes between Germany and Sweden I was almost too tired to care what happened."

Earlier Terry Fields had observed that "it appears that the government are



Thousands of seafarers and families recently commemorated the anniversary of the Zeebrugge disaster.

reluctant, to say the least, even to consider prosecution in the case of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*."

He quoted a report of the Royal Institute of Naval Architects on the European Gateway accident off Felixstowe in 1982.

It expressed the hope "that the lessons from the sinking of this ship will be heeded in time to prevent the catastrophic loss of life, which must surely occur, if a fully-loaded roll-on-roll-off ferry is ever the victim of such a collision." This proved tragically prophetic.

"These ferries" said Terry Fields "use one of the busiest, if not the busiest sea lanes in the world and further collisions seem inevitable. Clearly we must establish responsibility in certain circumstances and provide punishment for those responsible for crimes committed against innocent people.

"We heard the minister say that we cannot be too hard on people, especially the ship owners. If I were the owner of a fleet of buses which I knew were unroadworthy and I allowed drivers who also knew of their condition, to drive them, and if I were brought before a court, I am sure that the Department would ensure that I was held responsible for allowing my drivers to take out vehicles which were unroadworthy.

"Therefore the same criteria should logically apply to the owners of ferries and other vessels that go to sea."

"The government's responsibility in the circumstances is clear and so is the overall responsibility of management" he said: "We should discuss the requests that have been made, individually and collectively, by the families of those who were on the *Herald of Free Enterprise*..."

"I had a personal friend who went down on the *Herald of Free Enterprise*. I shall not become emotional about it, but someone is ultimately responsible for the circumstances that caused that disaster and some of the families have asked me why the government, with their knowledge of the maladministration, mismanagement and unsafe practices that went on have not acted on behalf of the innocent people who lost their lives..."

Unholy alliance

"I have the nasty suspicion that there is an unholy alliance between the government and big business interests." He referred to the fact that the chairman of P&O is Geoffrey Stirling:

"In the 1987 edition of 'Who's who' his clubs are listed as the Garrick, of which the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a member,

"P&O proposed that to allow crews to sleep in cabins near the engine room, sound proofing should be installed—ignoring the fact that this would cut out the sound of alarm bells!"

-Gloria Rodgers, striking NUS member

and the Carlton—which has on its books the Thatchers, Lord Whitelaw and someone called Brookes, who used to be in MIS and was part and parcel of the scandal relating to Lord Wilson of Rievaulx...

"The members of those families believe that there is a cosy relationship. Geoffrey Stirling was advisor to the Secretary of State for Industry.

"One should not impugn the integrity of judges but, coincidentally, Mr Justice Sheen was appointed by the Prime Minister, and he, of course was part of the inquiry. He is a member of the Hurlingham Club and so is Geoffrey Stirling..."

"The most damning item which leads people to suspect that the government are not prepared to prosecute for reasons other than they have said is that in 1986 P&O donated £20,000 to the Tory Party..."

"The government must act to prevent the ferry owners who, with a craven

disregard for human safety, are allowing vessels to go out to sea knowing damn well that they are unsafe. If the committee does nothing about it, it will stand condemned in the eyes of ordinary people, as are shipping owners for what happened in the past..."

"I hope to introduce a clause on retrospective legislation to take to task those who, in my view, are criminally responsible for the loss of life on the *Herald of Free Enterprise* and the *European Gateway*, and perhaps others who may suffer in the future because of the inactivity of government and shipowners."

"We are discussing the balance between the risk to human life and safety on the one hand and the profit motives of companies like P&O on the other. I am afraid that the government appear to believe that regard for the profit of P&O is a superior consideration."

P&O WORKERS have voted to continue their strike over management attempts to savage their working conditions with all that entails for ship safety.

In a letter sent out to all employees last December the company gave its reasons for rising costs, prominent among which were "seafarers' wages (which) have increased by between 22 per cent and 24 per cent". The letter goes on to state that "the inescapable fact is that it costs too much to man our vessels. This is largely...because of our generous time-off agreements which require so many crews per vessel." They failed to mention last year's £11 million profits.

Inevitably this was the prelude to an attack on conditions represented by the new contract of employment which the company wants its workers to sign. Some of the points in this new contract include:

☆ Crews per vessel will be drastically reduced. On the Zeebrugge and Boulogne services this will mean two crews to cover each ferry in place of the 3.5 at present.

☆ Seafarers will be expected to work a minimum of three 24 hour duties together, with a maximum of seven-168 hours aboard ship.

☆ Within each 24 hour duty day, the contract allows for "a minimum of six hours continuous off time". This is time for meals, rest and sleep.

☆ Hours could be even further lengthened by problems with relief crews. According to the contract: "A rating will not be allowed to leave the vessel until his relief has reported for duty and permission to leave has been granted by the head of department. If retained on board because of absence of relief the rating will continue to work as required."

☆ Worse, the company want to dictate other aspects of the workers' lives. For example, they say "a rating may not consume alcohol...in public whether on board or ashore while wearing identifiable company clothing". This becomes a dismissable offence.

☆ Further, "A rating should not have any outside interests or activities which will or might conflict with his obligation to work his duties..."

☆ "It is a condition of service that all ratings live locally. It is fundamental to the employment of ratings that each will provide himself with a telephone service at his home address and place of residence if different."

☆ Seafarers on the Zeebrugge and Boulogne services will lose £33 per week and those on the Calais ferries will be £45 worse off.

By Tim Harris

Dundee—Ford bosses to blame

TUC accepts single-union deal

IN THEIR Detroit boardroom, the millionaire directors of Ford have scrapped plans to build a high-tech factory in Dundee, ending the hope of creating 450 jobs in this unemployment blackspot.

This tiny handful of men control an obscene amount of power over the destiny of millions of working people throughout the world.

Whilst they are now hypocritically attacking the Transport and General Workers' Union, they remain silent over the fact that they have presided over a slashing of the British workforce from 80,000 to under 50,000 in just seven years.

It is this which should be taken up by the leadership of the trade unions and Labour Party. Whose interests do the directors operate in, anyway? Certainly not the workers'. As long as companies like Ford are privately owned they will never look to the well-being of working people.

Everything was done to entice the multi-national to open its factory in Dundee. It was sited in an enterprise zone which is of course rate-free. The Scottish Development Agency threw in a few millions to make life easier for Ford. But Ford wanted more. Essential to their plans was a tame union. Unfortunately, leaders of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) applied for a single union deal.

The decision of the TUC general and finance committee to allow a single union deal is a threat to all workers because it paves the way for any employer opening a new plant to demand what they require from the unions and endorses the idea of regional pay which undermines the wages and conditions of all workers.

The AEU, the union at the centre of the Dundee issue, in order to win the bosses' favour, were willing to break the national 'blue book' agreements. The Dundee workers were to receive 50 per cent less wages than other Ford workers.

Compliance

Rather than struggle for members in newly opened factories, management are offered single union deals, even with no-strike clauses. The EETPU set the pace and other unions have followed in the wake.

The AEU sneaked through the backdoor and signed a single union deal, probably giving as a reference their compliance with Nissan in its Sunderland plant.

It is claimed that 25 per cent of the 1400 strong Nissan workforce have joined the AEU, but recent figures made available to *Militant* supporters show a worse picture. Only ten per cent of the workers have applied to join the union and

only six per cent are on check-off. With either little or no facilities for the shop stewards and grievances processed through the works committee which is elected by the whole workforce, union and non-union alike, the lack of enthusiasm for the union is entirely understandable. It is often foremen who are elected.

Management also handpick the staff. Nissan interviewed 30,000 for the original 500 jobs in Sunderland. This meant no chance for any applicant with a trade union background.

Ford, when it opened its Halewood factory 25 years ago, chose ex-farm labour and small shop workers attracted by the high wages but within two years it had gained its militant reputation.

The Tory propaganda machine has gone into top gear, crying crocodile tears about the loss of job prospects in Dundee. Thatcher and her government's policies have devastated industry in Scotland. Ford UK themselves have cut thousands over the past few years.

Because of the actions of the AEU, however, the Tories have been handed a propaganda point on a plate. The union movement

have been forced onto the defensive. Jimmy Airlie, the AEU official at the centre of the Dundee agreement, is a leading light in the broad left. Calls should be made to convene a special meeting of the left as soon as possible to thrash out a policy to stop Laird and Jordan continuing the drift to the right inside the union.

The decision of the Ford directors was in part due to their humiliation during the recent dispute. Management backed away and this has given new confidence to the shopfloor. Ford are now more wary about concentrating the production of one component at one plant after the breakdown of their European operations in the strike.

For the Ford multi-national to be successful it needs a compliant workforce and apparently the AEU leadership are willing to provide the means.

The TUC must not go down the blind alley of being prepared to sanction the ditching of wages and conditions in order to satisfy the bosses' greed for bigger profits.

By Peter Jarvis

THE TUC General Council, at its 23 March meeting, accepted the recommendation of its Finance and General Purposes Committee to endorse the single union deal between Ford and the AEU.

It was carried by 23 to 15, with the four GMBATU representatives voting in favour. But their general secretary, John Edmonds, had opposed the deal at the finance committee. Now he argued it should reluctantly be accepted in the hope that Ford would come back to Dundee. If the GMBATU had stuck by his original view, the General Council vote would at least have tied 19 to 19. Then chair Clive Jenkins of the MFS would have been under pressure to use his casting vote against, in line with his union's policy.

Secrecy

In the course of the meeting, Bill Jordan of the AEU revealed the role played by fellow AEU leader, Gavin Laird, who also sits on the Scottish Development Agency. As a result of his position on that body he became aware of Ford's search for a location and the single union condition they were demanding. He approached Ford for discussions which they insisted should be conducted in "absolute secrecy."

The AEU was acting in complete defiance of the 1987 TUC Congress decision. Then, opponents of single union deals had to be satisfied with the establishment of a TUC review of these deals along with an agreement that no more would be signed until the review reported back to the 1988 Congress. Now the AEU has hijacked the review and the TUC has endorsed it.

On the role of the EETPU at Wapping, Eric Hammond for the electricians did admit to a "temporary, minor breach of TUC directives!" But he dared the General Council to suspend the EETPU, saying it did not have the authority.

Norman Willis then recommended deferral of the issue to seek legal advice, and that was carried by 21 votes 14.

But when John Macreadie moved reference back of the health report, which contained no plans for future action, he could not get a seconder.

Rover bosses can be beaten

LAND ROVER workers showed at this week's mass meeting that they are not prepared to accept a wage deal that includes no more money than was on offer when the strike started five weeks ago.

A number of concessions were made after talks at Acas which were put to the meeting on Wednesday morning. Whilst management and some of the stewards were expecting the deal to be accepted, the meeting was not prepared to accept an offer which meant nothing more than the consolidation of bonus.

The offer will now be put to the workers in a ballot. Clearly, management have been forced back. They reckoned without the resolve of the Land Rover workers and can be pressured into giving more if the members' resolve is now matched by their leaders. The leading stewards should take note of the widespread feeling not to accept this deal and campaign for a rejection in the ballot. The full claim of an extra £25 per week new money must still be fought for.

During the course of the strike an estimated £63 million worth of production has been lost.

Campaign

As the strike has gone on the press have attempted to contrive a 'back to work' movement. This was a dismal flop. Even management claims of 170 scabbing on the dispute, itself a derisory figure, were grossly exaggerated. In reality, no more than one per cent have returned.

With a continuation of the strike it is vital that a clearer direction is given to the dispute by the officials and senior stewards to give every worker the confidence that the strike can be won. Regular mass meetings must be organised to keep the members informed and counter hostile propaganda. The confusion at Wednesday's mass meeting when there was not even a public address system was in part a reflection of the fact that this was the first such meeting organised for at least seven years.

By Les Kuriata.



Dave Nellist MP on the Land Rover picket line recently.

Photo: John Harris (IFL).

Dave Nellist thanked for support

THE LETTER below was sent by the Land Rover strike committee to Dave Nellist, Labour MP for Coventry South East.

"Dear brother Nellist, may I, on behalf of the Land Rover Strike Committee and the workers at Land Rover, thank you for all the support you have given us throughout this dispute.

"It is heartening that you, unlike most of your colleagues who appear to have run for cover, have stood shoulder to shoulder with us not only on the picket line

but unprompted in the House and at sympathetic organisations outside of our own.

"It is clear that as we enter the fourth week of what may be a prolonged and bitter dispute with Land Rover management, Margaret Thatcher and the media that we shall need the help of the more outspoken members of Parliament such as yourself to break this deadlock.

"I have, as you requested, enclosed a few copies of our collection sheets.

"I am sure that I would have the full support of the Strike Committee in saying that should you require a delegation from that committee to visit you to give you or any of your colleagues an up to date briefing on the dispute that they would be more than willing to do so.

Yours in comradeship and solidarity, John S Simpson, Secretary, Land Rover Strike Committee."

King's Cross sacking

THE BALLOT decision of the King's Cross Aslef members not to strike to defend Steve Forey, their assistant branch secretary, will be seen as a blow by all railway activists.

Management used intimidation to get this result. Letters were issued to all drivers saying that if any action was taken they would be liable for damages because of business lost.

The national union leaders played into British Rail's hands by not effec-

tively countering their tactics and by not throwing the whole weight of the national union behind this issue.

Activists from all round the country understand the threat posed by this sacking and were gearing up for sympathy action.

Sympathy

Members at Doncaster, Barking, Stratford, Ipswich and other depots were already prepared to vote in support.

What was needed was a national campaign. British Rail used the Tories' anti-union laws to stop the drivers taking action in support of the NHS and to sack Steve. They could have been fought if the action had not been called off but rather had been used to bring out the whole of the railways.

The national Aslef leaders, instead of aiding BR by condemning the ballot, should have thrown their whole weight behind the actions of the King's

Cross drivers.

This vote, which has not given the go ahead for strike action, must not be interpreted as the end of the story. Aslef branches should demand a branch-based conference to discuss this new threat to the union. If victimisations are to be fought and Steve's re-instatement won, then a bold programme of resistance needs to be carried out.

By Andy Viner



Firefighters honour one of their colleagues, killed in the King's Cross fire.

Photo: Dave Sinclair.

London underground: cost-cutting first, safety second

AS THE inquiry into the fire at King's Cross develops, it is starting to look as if senior management of London Underground Limited (LUL) will get off the hook. But it is they, with their loyalty to government policies on public transport, who have acted as the hatchmen for the Secretary of State for Transport, and created the conditions where disasters such as that at King's Cross can take place.

Since 1983, revenue support for LRT as a whole has been cut from £180 million to £52 million while investment has fallen from £122 million to £114 million. On the day of the fire, Tubeline, the LUL management magazine, announced that the budget for lifts and escalators was to be cut by 25 per cent—this on top of the 67 jobs that had already been lost.

This same commitment to cutting costs rather than improving safety is being seen across the underground as a whole. The underground ticketing system (UTS) will mean the loss of 1000 booking office and platform jobs. Management are pressing ahead

with their one person operation (OPO) programme, with the Jubilee and Bakerloo lines next—this in spite of concern over the safety of OPO in deep level tube lines. The works and building department, which three years ago employed 1300 staff, has now been shut down. Six signal cabins have closed.

Safety device

When OPO was first introduced on the Hammersmith and City and Circle lines, the railway inspectorate required all trains to be fitted with a radio so that the driver could contact the line controller. The unions argued that this was a safety device as the driver was now on his own and it would be his only means of passing and receiving information in the event of delays and emergencies.

Management however, not prepared

to buy reliable equipment because of cost, argued that as long as an OPO train was fitted with a radio it met with the requirements of the railway inspectorate—even if the radio did not work! As a result, OPO trains on the sub-surface lines have radios which cannot be relied on to work and will continue to do so until such a time as management find the money to upgrade the system.

These examples demonstrate the need for a reversal in policy, with the emphasis reverting to safety first and budgets second. But pressure will have to come from elsewhere to force change and ensure that LUL never again compromises the safety of the railway for the sake of the balance sheet.

By Tim Miles

Aslef Neasden NB and J branch secretary, personal capacity

Civil servants' ballot for strike

THE LONDON civil servants' strike against compulsory transfers, staffing cuts and the sacking of casuals has reached a critical stage. Members in every unemployment benefit office (UBO) and job centre throughout the London region have been balloted this week on taking all-out strike action in support of the dispute.

Management's 'final offer' was put before a strikers' meeting on Monday. Although some steps forward had been made in negotiations, management refused to make any concessions on staffing levels.

The strikers unanimously supported a proposal from CPSA deputy general secretary John Macreadie to reject

management's letter as a basis for settling the dispute. However this letter has served a useful purpose in demonstrating to members that only a significant escalation of the dispute will be sufficient to force management to recognise the justice of our claim for extra staffing resources.

Members at Reading computer centre have indicated that they will boycott all work from strike-bound offices if London members vote for all-out action. This would stop Gios from being sent out. The union is now in the best possible position to win the ballot on all-out action. Bulletins explaining the issues at stake have been sent to every office. This has been

backed up with 'warm-up' meetings in over 200 offices involving strikers and national executive members.

The balloting meetings will be used to drive the message home that no further progress is likely through negotiations. An overall 'yes' vote in the ballot will not only pave the way for a victory in defence of jobs and services, it will also serve as a warning to senior management that we will not allow them to prepare the service for privatisation.

Tom Taylor, DE eastern division convenor, personal capacity.

What's happening in your workplace?
Phone in your reports to
the Industrial Editor
on 01-533 3311
before 5pm on Monday.



News in Brief

Nalگو 'Yes' to political fund

IN WHAT must be the Tories' greatest ever own goal Nalگو members have voted to establish a political fund. This move is a direct result of legal action taken by leading members of the Conservative Trade Unionists Association in June last year which resulted in the union's 'Make People Matter' campaign being declared illegal during the general election.

Nalگو's rank and file members have responded magnificently to this political interference in the union's affairs. The 67 per cent return in the ballot saw

393,006 'yes' votes (77.4 per cent) against 114,645 'no' votes. Those in favour represent almost 52 per cent of the total membership of the union. This vote shatters the myth of Nalگو as a non-political union. The political funds should be put to immediate use, campaigning against these Tory attacks and the Broad Left should begin the campaign for affiliation to the Labour Party, the next logical step for the union to take.

By Roger Bannister

Edinburgh Nupe

THIS MONTH'S meeting of Nupe's biggest branch, Edinburgh number 1, which has over 6000 members, passed a resolution in support of the NHS struggle, calling for the action to be stepped up and for our leaders to put maximum pressure on the TUC to call a one day general strike.

Thatcher won't move on NHS funding unless she is forced to. Criticism was aired at the confusion caused by the NHS union leaders' lack of a co-ordinated fight and their

reluctance to give a bold lead.

The motion was carried with only two dissenters and it will now be sent to national conference in May as an emergency motion as well as to the national executive, Rodney Bickertaffe and assistant general secretary Tom Sawyer.

Graham Wilson
shop steward, Nupe
Edinburgh number 1
branch, personal
capacity

Hackney libraries

THREE BRANCH libraries in Hackney have been occupied by staff fighting to keep them open. Closure was announced as part of the council's 'streamlining' of services, in other words, cuts.

One of the councillors who favours cuts, Tommy Sheppard, has stated that the libraries are not wanted. The library lending service has been maintained by the staff, members of Nalگو, whilst they are involved in the round-the-clock occupation.

In contrast to this attitude, council officers have sent a letter to staff advising them their responsibility to pay electricity and gas bills!

The telephone service to the libraries has been cut and now some councillors are threatening to carry out evictions themselves.

The workers at Somerford Grove, Howard Road and Goldsmith's Row libraries would welcome any support.

By Tim White

Telegraph sack 220

JUST TWO years after moving its print operations from Fleet Street to West Ferry Printers on the Isle of Dogs, management of the Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph have an-

nounced far-reaching changes in work practices and manning levels, resulting in 220 redundancies of NGA and Sogat members—almost a third of all the printers.

Bradford trades council

BRADFORD TRADES council carried a motion calling for a one day general strike to defend the health service at its March meeting despite the opposition of Ronnie Fieldhouse, a Sogat official.

The motion was seconded by Pat Wall, MP for

Bradford North and an honorary member of the trades council. It was very significant that all those backing the witch-hunt against Militant supporters opposed the call and that the Sogat delegation itself was split.

Seafarers - strike to save jobs

"P+O ARE prepared to put at risk the lives of passengers and crew, with the real possibility of another Zeebrugge disaster, as part of their drive for increased profitability."

By Colin Shepherd

As the National Union of Seamen (NUS) ballot for all-out strike action these words from striking seafarer Gloria Rodgers show what is at stake. P+O bosses who took over Townsend Thoresen should forever have on their conscience the deaths of 193 passengers and crew at Zeebrugge. Now, despicably they are cutting ferry jobs with no thought for safety.

Workers on P+O ferries, on strike for seven weeks, were recently sacked by the company for refusing to return to work and sign new contracts. But the issues they are fighting for—jobs, hours and above all, safety—are common to all seafarers. That is why all 21,000 members are being balloted for strike action. A massive vote in favour is vital.

The new P+O contracts involve a whole range of attacks on conditions (see page 13) which will mean longer hours, fewer crews and more stress.

"Crews will be virtually confined on board the ships for the period of their shifts. Whenever the relief crew fail to turn up we would be forced to stay on and work their shift too. Only eight out of every 24 hours has been allocated for sleeping and eating. Crews will be working 16 hour days and could be

to save jobs



Seafarers and their families commemorate Zeebrugge. How many more lives must be lost? Photo: John Harris (IFL)

called back on duty throughout the whole 24 hours", said Gloria.

"P+O propose to accommodate the crews in cabins below the water line, where the noise from the engines and the anchor chains would make sleeping impossible. When the union

objected, the company suggested soundproofing the cabins—ignoring the fact that this would cut out the sound of the alarm bells!"

And all of this on ferries which the Royal Institution of Naval Architects, the professional body for ship

designers, has described as "unacceptably vulnerable" to rapid capsizing, particularly after collision.

Record profits

P+O represents the 'Wapping' of merchant shipping. If they were able

to force through these new contracts of employment every other ship owner would follow suit. Hours will be driven up, wages will be dragged down and safety levels will plummet—hundreds more lives will be lost at sea.

The company claim that

they have to become more profitable to compete with the Channel Tunnel, now under construction. This is rich when you consider they have just announced profits of £51.7 million for the European Ferries division.

That is why national strike action, involving the deep-sea members as well as ferries, is the only course to take. Lessons have to be learnt from the action earlier this year over the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company sackings. The NUS leaders have to be strong and determined. Any sign of weakness will invite the use of the courts by the employers.

Solidarity

Seafarers have to win the backing of other groups of workers now, particularly the dockers and transport workers in the TGWU and rail unions. An appeal has to be made to brothers and sisters in ports around the world. After all, they are facing the same attacks. Solidarity action will stop the employers and the Tories in their tracks.

In the words of Gloria Rodgers, "We are calling for an all-out strike until P+O put everything right, time wise, crew wise and safety wise".

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NUM branch gives £25

THE BRITISH miners are internationally respected for their traditions of struggle. This week solidarity between *Militant* and miners in Nottinghamshire, an area that has seen some of mining trade unionism's bitterest battles, has been cemented.

Gedling NUM branch has sent us £25, to "help continue your fight for socialism," writes branch secretary, Ben Chapman. Every union branch should follow this example and donate to *Militant*.

And Scottish MP Ron Brown has responded to our day's pay appeal with a donation of £50.

"In the absence of a strong Opposition..." writes Allison Burnley, aged 69 and still an active member of the Labour Party in Kent, "... I'm glad to support

Militant as I did the attacked Liverpool Councillors'. Mrs. Burnley gave us £50!

Our appeal for a minimum of a day's pay to build support for a one day general strike in defence of the NHS continues to get support. M.Hamett, a car worker from Coventry, gave £50. Simon Quinton, a Cohse member from Poole Hospital, donated £25.

Eighteen supporters from Brighton sent in £310! *Militant* meetings on the crisis in the health service raised £86.45 in Bristol, £45 in Ipswich and £43 in Southampton, after expenses. A collection at the Southern Region Labour Party conference netted £40.78.

Many thanks to all our contributors, including: Cindy Baum, Grantham, who gave £50.

Target May 1 £50,000 Raised this week £3,809

Fighting Funds

Area	Received	% of target achieved	Target
1 South East	444		1570
2 South West	274		1270
3 London	1351		7080
4 Northern	605		3270
5 East Midlands	383		2530
6 Yorkshire	752		5850
7 Merseyside	450		5000
8 Southern	135		2020
9 Manchester/Lancs	267		2890
10 West Midlands	357		3960
11 Eastern	189		2260
12 Scotland West	200		2520
13 Wales	269		3510
14 Scotland East	136		2150
15 National	113		4000
Total	6018		50000

N.Phillips, NUT, Dorset £25. Tony Percy, GMB, Manchester £15. A.Walsh, BIFU, Stretford, £10. Noel Pine, Naigo, Manchester £10. Special thanks to

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