

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For Workers' Liberty East and West

**Fight the Tories! Rebuild the left!**



**Back Benn and Heffer!**

# USSR: Is it really a revolution?

**“Harder work is asked of the workers, but so far they have received little more pay and they are not allowed to drink vodka”. That is how Roy Medvedev — a dissident sympathetic to Gorbachev — sums up what the current reforms in the USSR mean for the workers.**

Last October workers in a bus factory near the Urals struck against the effect of the reforms on them. They were having to work two or three hours extra a day, and weekends, and still losing £15 a week.

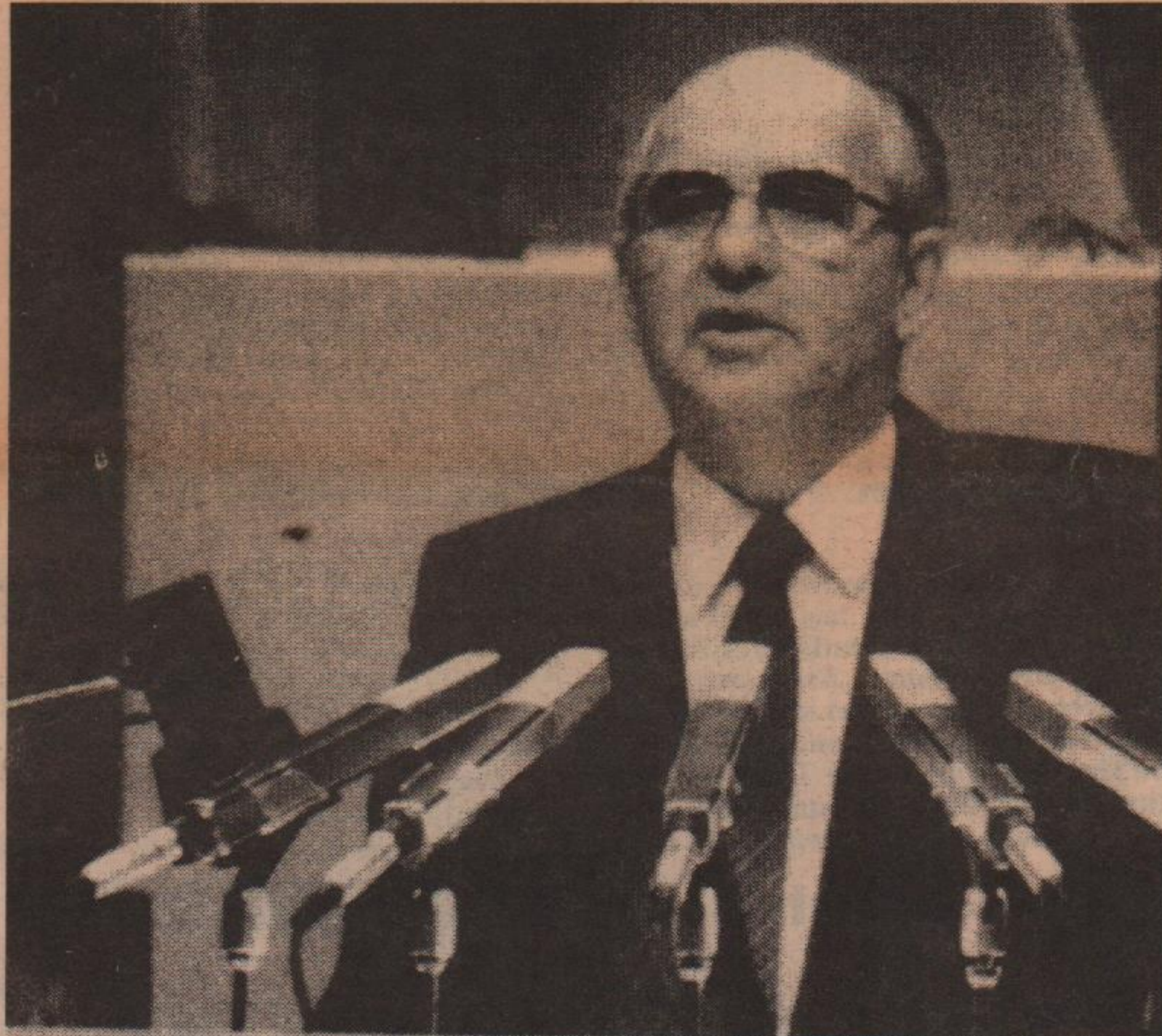
Their factory had previously “fulfilled its plan” by turning out buses with 40 or 50 parts missing. Then stricter quality control was introduced. Previously the factory had shipped out 33 or 34 buses each day. Now it had trouble getting 25 through the quality control. The workers lost bonus money.

## Deliberate

In many other Soviet factories, ill-managed and with outdated equipment, workers must be facing the same problems. It is a deliberate part of Gorbachev's plans to increase inequality of wages — paying more productive or skilled workers more, at the expense of the others — to increase work rates, and to weaken job security. Some 15 million jobs are to be ‘shaken out’ over the next decade.

Everywhere in the Eastern bloc — Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary — workers have supported all attempts at democratic reform; and no doubt Soviet workers welcome Gorbachev's measures of liberalisation, however limited they may be. To have access even to a limited range of views in the media is better than being bombarded by a mind-numbing uniform ‘party line’; to be able to vote even between two officially-vetted candidates for works manager is better than having no vote at all.

But the measures are very



limited. They stop far short of letting workers organise themselves freely in independent trade unions or new political parties. All moves for workers' self-organisation and

self-liberation — and in the USSR, as everywhere, the liberation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves — will be moves against the resistance of Gor-

bachev and the bureaucracy.

The rights of nationalities are central to democracy in the USSR, a multinational empire where the oppressed nationalities, Ukrainians, Armenians, Latvians, Estonians, and others, between them are the majority of the population.

The issue is already explosive. The Kremlin admits that it has lost control in Nagorny Karabakh, an Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan which wants to be united with Armenia. Armenians have staged a general strike on the Karabakh issue, with support from the local Armenian bureaucracy. There are mass protests in Latvia against Russification.

## Corruption

Yet Gorbachev's faction in the bureaucracy is very much a Great Russian faction. Gorbachev has sacked local chiefs in several minority-nationalist areas — accusing them, probably rightly, of corruption — and replaced them by men more in tune with Moscow.

“Try to get your flat repaired. You will have to find a moonlighter to do it for you, and he will have to steal the materials from a building site.” What Gorbachev says about repairs to flats is equally true of repairs to shoes, cars, televisions, vacuum cleaners, or fridges. In the USSR you even have to bribe doctors to get treatment.

Certainly Gorbachev's plans for more small cooperative enterprises are better than this combination of ham-handed bureaucratic planning and wildcat capitalism. But workers will expect few miracles from them — certainly not enough to offset the bad effects of ‘perestroika’ on their wages and conditions in the factories.

For the workers, Gorbachev's reforms are far from being a revolution. What's important about them is that they may shake up and destabilise the system enough for a real revolution to be made by the workers.

## We were right to stand!

By Eric Heffer MP

**If we hadn't had the contest for Leader and Deputy Leader, the political issues would not be coming to the fore as they are at the present time.**

The leadership is being forced to discuss policies, even though they would prefer not to. The debate on unilateral nuclear disarmament has come about precisely because there is a leadership contest.

When Neil Kinnock gave his ‘personal position’ on television it amounted to an attempt to change policy on the hoof.

There has been a very strong reaction to that. Denzil Davies resigned. He was never a unilateralist but nevertheless he did go along with Party policy on the basis of spending the money saved by scrapping nuclear weapons on other armaments. He was fed up with policy being made on television without consultation.

The whole position is in total disarray despite the fact that in the *Independent* the leader of the Party is now saying that he maintains the policy of the Party. He is quoted from a private luncheon, where he was speaking on the record so that it was printed by the *Independent*.

It was not a proper statement from the Leader's office. It is an attempt to rebuild bridges and fences. There has been a clear groundswell coming up from the membership of the Party and the trade unions. Neil Kinnock obviously wants to try and maintain the support for the leadership, and to convince unions like the TGWU that there has been no real change in policy.

But if Kinnock's original statement didn't represent a change in policy, people like Peter Shore wouldn't have welcomed it with such open arms. Nor would Bruce Kent from CND have reacted in the way he did. All the serious commentators regarded it as a real move in Party policy.

To me it indicates how correct it was to have the leadership contest. We are doing much better than anticipated, with support coming particularly from constituency parties. There is a very strong body of opinion in the Party which does want a radical socialist programme and policy, and wants the leadership of the Party to carry out such a policy and programme.

It has all been worthwhile, and between now and Party Conference there is a hell of a lot to play for in terms of support.

# PRESS GANG

## Yobs and nobs

By Jim Denham

*The Sun* has taken a firm line on the recent outbreak of soccer hooliganism. "After the mayhem in Germany there can now be no question of lifting the ban. There will be no tears if it is made permanent.... the Europeans do not want us. And we certainly have no right to inflict on them the dregs of our society."

Can this be the same newspaper that habitually refers to Germans as "Krauts" (especially when they're "sour"), the French as "frogs", Spaniards as the "sick senors", etc. etc?

Anyway, *the Sun* on Thursday carried an in-depth probe into the mind of the yob. They commissioned a "panel of experts" on the subject and came up with some most interesting findings.

**JOBS:** "Some yobs are unemployed — but surprisingly many of the ringleaders are accountants, solicitors and company directors..."

"Self-confessed super-yob Paul Scarratt... sees himself as a superhero, a patriot and leader of men... they have fantasies about being Superman or Conan the Barbarian..."

**DRINK:** "Drink is the driving force behind most outbreaks of mass hooliganism, say the experts." (Well I never!)

**SEX:** "Yobs, as a breed, find enormous problems dealing with girls... it is only when they grow up and stop feeling the need to prove themselves as macho heroes that they can settle into loving relationships." (Ahh!)

**FAMILY:** "Yobs often come from broken homes or families which starve their children of affections." (Ahh!)

**IEWS:** "Politically British yobs tend to be right-wing. Ironically (why?) they are more likely to back the Tories than Britain's smaller Nazi splinter groups. They are blindly loyal to Mrs Thatcher even though the Prime Minister detests their violent behaviour."

You get the picture then? My only question is why didn't the *Sun* ask them about which newspaper your typical hooligan reads?

Predictably Peregrine Worsthorne devoted his *Sunday Telegraph* editorial to the yob question.

Usually Worsthorne's column makes intelligent right-wing reading. But I'm afraid that on the evidence of this week's offering, old Perry seems to be losing his grip. The chap seriously tries to argue that hooliganism is the direct result of "that evil decade, the 1960s, when doctrinaire socialist egalitarians put the whole process in reverse."

The "process" Worsthorne is on about is, apparently, the permeation of "courtly conduct" from the top of society gradually downwards. "Thus did the civilising process begin: by making successful careers conditional on courtly — or gentlemanly, as it became known — conduct."

This centuries-long process was, according to Worsthorne, reversed in a few permissive years, two decades ago, and last week's events in Dusseldorf are a direct result.

"It will be a long haul before the recivilising process gets underway again in this country. But a first condition is to recognise that economic inequality is not enough... social authority must be added to economic power," concludes the great thinker.

I suspect that this last bit is a tacit admission by Perry that there is one big flaw in his argument, viz. the small fact of nine years of Tory rule. I shall maintain a close watch on Perry's column for further worrying signs of mental decline and keep *Press Gang* readers fully informed of developments.

Even the *Sun's* "panel of experts" made more sense.

# USSR: what's at stake

## What is Gorbachev's programme?

In the 1980s, the USSR's economic performance has been bad compared to that of the Western economies with their slumps and crises.

Industrial production in the USSR is estimated to be about 40% that of the USA, and agricultural productivity 20 to 25% that of the USA.

The economy is stifling under the dead weight of buggin's-turn, pass-the-buck, time-serving bureaucratic mismanagement.

Gorbachev wants to shake up the managers and shake up the economy. He is moving in five main directions.

- \* A drive for discipline, against corruption and alcoholism.

- \* Giving the rules of profit and loss, supply and demand, more scope in the economy.

- \* Exposing corrupt, stick-in-the-mud bureaucrats to the threat of public exposure and losing their jobs.

- \* Stacking top jobs with his own supporters.

- \* Withdrawing from Afghanistan, and negotiating arms cuts with the US, so as to lessen the terrible drain on the USSR of military spending.

## Results so far?

Gorbachev has succeeded in improving relations with the US. He has replaced 13 out of the 20 members of the Politburo, and 11 out of the 13 members of the Secretariat, but there is still evidence of a lot of conservative resistance within the bureaucracy.

The media have become much less rigid, and there is much more liberty for writers and film-makers. Much of the 'democratisation' programme, however remains on paper.

The proposal to the ruling party's conference which opens on 28 June include:

- \* Limiting the term of office for all officials to ten years, unless they get

a 75% mandate for a further five years.

- \* Secret ballots for all positions in the state and in the ruling party. The ruling party will, however, keep its monopoly over candidates.

- \* Better legal procedures for people to bring complaints against officials. (At present the main method for doing this — a widely-used though ineffective one — is anonymous letters to higher authorities).

And economically? As from 1 January this year, 22,000 out of the country's 37,000 enterprises are supposed to be working on a profit-and-loss basis. In fact, most of their profits still go to central ministries, and most of their production is still determined by what the planners in Moscow tell them.

Repeated attempts to shift to market economics in the past, in the USSR itself and elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc, have been ineffective because of the tremendous inertia in the system. The bureaucrats in each sector have great power to conserve the status quo. And since every enterprise is desperate to ensure supplies, the web of vested interest spreads wide.

Since May 1987, small-scale cooperatives have been encouraged, especially in service sectors. This means little, however, except bringing part of the black or grey economy into legality.

In Hungary economic reforms like Gorbachev's have been pushed for the last 25 years. The economy is still bureaucratically-regulated — or at least the official economy is. A big black or grey economy has developed, people talk openly about the 'new bourgeoisie', real wages have fallen about 17% since 1979, and some 25% of the population is below the breadline.

Gorbachev, too, has little to show so far. On official figures, the USSR's national income grew only 2.5% last year, while 4.1% growth was planned. The more daring of Gorbachev's associates have called for buying and selling of shares, more bankruptcies, allocation of investment funds by banks on commercial terms, and the end of all central planning outside utilities like electricity supply.

Market reforms have had more effect in China, where agriculture has effectively been transformed from collectivist organisation into

private peasant farming. No such radical moves, however, are planned for Soviet agriculture.

## What is the socialist alternative?

- \* Disbandment of the police and armed forces, replacement by a workers' militia.

- \* Breaking-up of the bureaucratic hierarchy of administration, and its replacement by a democratic regime of councils of elected and recallable workers' delegates, with freedom to form many workers' political parties.

- \* Workers' control in industry. Free trade unions.

- \* Abolition of bureaucratic privileges: reorganisation of the economy according to a democratically-decided plan.

- \* Abolition of the bureaucracy's monopoly over information: freedom for working-class newspapers, meetings, radio and TV stations, etc.

- \* Self-determination for the nations oppressed by the Kremlin.

## EETPU

# STOP THIS RIVAL TUC!

As we go to press, the electricians' union, the EETPU, is expected to be suspended from the TUC for signing various no-strike deals.

The TUC has told the EETPU to withdraw from two of them, but the electricians' right-wing leader, Eric Hammond, has remained determined. For Hammond, no-strike 'business unionism' is the only way unions can survive into the 1990s.

As a first step towards forming an 'alternative TUC', he has called a conference for 4 July, jointly with the no-strike Professional Association of Teachers and some other small scab outfits. The AEU, Hammond's major ally on the right wing of the TUC, has said that it will definitely stay inside the TUC, though it is still having talks for a

merger with the EETPU.

One of the ironies of the TUC's stand over the electricians is that some of the unions now pushing to suspend the EETPU — like the GMB — have themselves signed no-strike deals. The EETPU, not without some justice, calls

## Bosses' pay rise

# £1400 in the pocket

If you're one of Britain's top ten per cent of chief company executives, your take-home pay went up by 64 per cent this year — to a cool £184,900.

Slightly lower on the scale, and your increase would have been 77% — from

them hypocrites.

What is needed is to organise the rank and file of the EETPU to ditch Hammond. EETPU-style strike-free agreements are a threat to trade unionism. The answer is a fight throughout the EETPU and all trade unions for real, effective, class-struggle trade unionism.

## 'A Very British Coup'

# Who threatens democracy?

**At 9.15pm the next two Sundays (with repeats on Wednesdays), Channel 4 TV will be showing an unusual sort of thriller — about a left Labour government being brought down by the unelected Establishment.**

**Labour MP Chris Mullin wrote the book, 'A Very British Coup' on which the TV series is based. When it was published, he discussed it with SO.**

*Your novel ends with the defeat of the Left. Obviously in writing it you must have had some ideal of how it could have ended in victory. How?*

I think Perkins should have done a lot more to mobilise the mass movement. Also, I don't think he should have resigned when he did. He should have stood up to the blackmail.

*If you had written the story from the point of view of a rank and filer rather than the prime minister, it would have raised different questions. As it is, the main question raised is, 'what should the prime minister have done differently?'*

The decisions that affect the lives of most people in this country are not taken by those people themselves. What you and I are aiming for is a situation where the decisions that affect the lives of people are taken by the people themselves. Before we can even begin to make progress in that

direction we've got to convince people who it is that is running the country at the moment.

*Isn't the point that working class people can run society instead, that it doesn't all depend on what decision a prime minister takes?*

I agree. But I think we're talking about two different novels. You're talking about one where we've arrived at, or are well on the way to, the promised land, and I'm talking about one where accidentally the electoral process delivers up our kind of government. I'm coping with the reactions of the existing established forces.

*What about the reactions of the existing forces that are opposed to the Establishment?*

I do think Perkins could have been far more involved with the trade union movement than he was.

## Sri Lanka

# Stop this deportation!

An appeal by Viraj Mendis

The Court of Appeal has today turned down my appeal against deportation. My lawyer has petitioned for leave to appeal to the House of Lords. Timothy Renton MP has told my MP, Robert Litherland, that no action will be taken pending the House of Lords decision.

The verdict was not unexpected,

given that the evidence before the Court of Appeal was severely limited. Amnesty International have also issued an emergency statement emphasising their support for my claim to asylum, and asking the Home Office to lift the deportation order.

Contact: Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign, c/o North Hulme Centre, Jackson Crescent, Manchester M15 5AL.

# ACTIVISTS' DIARY

**Thursday 23 June.**

Sheffield SO meeting: 'Fascism in France'. Speaker: Martin Thomas. 7.30, SCCAU, West St.

**Saturday 25 June.** Gay Pride March, 2pm from Hyde Park to Jubilee Gardens, London.

**Sunday 26 June.** South London SO meeting. 'The black civil rights movement in the US'. Speaker: Dion D'Silva. 7.30, 'The Station' pub, Camberwell.

**Sunday 26 June.** North London SO discussion meeting: 'The workers' struggle in Poland'. 5pm.

**Wednesday 29 June.** Northampton SO meeting: 'The Struggle in South Africa'. Speaker: Bob Fine. 7.30, Guildhall.

**Sunday 10 July.** South London SO meeting. 'The workers' struggles in Poland'. Speaker: Cate Murphy. 7.30, 'The Station' pub, Camberwell.

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# WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

## CONFERENCE SPECIAL

# MAKE LABOUR OUR PARTY!

By Alice Mahon  
MP

I think the leadership election is absolutely vital.

I have been in the Party for 30 years. Sometimes I have felt like leaving. I have looked at other parties — there are many good comrades who are friends in other parties — nevertheless I have stuck with it because I believe it is the only mass party that is going to do anything in our country.

I believe that if we do not take control of our own Party at this moment in time — and this leadership election is an absolutely vital part of that — then I believe that we will lose the Party as we know it. I don't think there is any question: this is crunch time.

I have just been out to Nicaragua with three other MPs. I brought back hope. I went out there quite dejected. I knew about the policy review documents — I have a very good friend on the NEC who let me have a look at them. They have written a policy document that forgets to talk about nuclear power and what we do with nuclear waste; we have got a document on the economy that has not got a single line in it telling people what is going to happen in Halifax when KP Foods closes next year with 1,000 jobs going.

That is the kind of revisionist claptrap that is coming from these so-called policy review groups. The trade unions will probably find themselves worse off if the document on Jobs and Industry goes through.

I think that everything is possible after last weekend. Because last Sunday I sat and watched Neil Kinnock ditch Labour policy on unilateral disarmament — the biggest single act of betrayal that I

have seen by a Labour leader.

Now he has not only betrayed the whole of the movement by what he said last week, but I think actually in a sense he has done us

all a favour because I think he is finished.

*Alice Mahon was speaking at a Benn-Heffer rally at the Chesterfield Socialist Conference on June 11th.*



# Back Benn and Heffer!

# Women fight 'the will of God'

By CARI women

On the 7th March 1979 Khomeini, the brutal Islamic ruler of Iran, decreed the compulsory wearing of the veil by women. He said "It is the will of God and it must be done". Thousands of Iranian women spontaneously poured into the streets protesting at this declaration and other attacks on women. The protest continued for days despite constant physical attack from the troops.

Since then the reactionary and vicious regime in Iran has not only rolled back the gains of the 1979 revolution but has pushed women back into the brutal conditions of the middle ages.

The "will of God" is used as an excuse for many atrocities against women, besides flogging or imprisoning them for failing to wear the veil. 'Adulterous' women and prostitutes are stoned to death. Lesbians are executed. Abortion is a 'sacrilege' and punishable by death, both for the woman and the doctor who carries it out.

Today, women in Iran cannot get a divorce and cannot oppose polygamy. Men are allowed four permanent wives and as many temporary ones as they can afford. They can also divorce their wives for any reason and at any time they like and without the consent of the

woman. The double standards against women are such that it is possible for a man to obtain a temporary form of marriage that may not last more than a few minutes — ie. a form of state-run prostitution!

As well as this total control over women's bodies and lives, women in Iran are becoming increasingly excluded from active participation in decision-making processes. Sex segregation in offices, schools, etc. is widespread. Many girls' schools have been closed down. Women workers have been sacked in great numbers. And the few and inefficient workplace nurseries that did exist are all closed down.

These attacks happen to all women who live under capitalism. They are used as a pool of reserve labour to be made unemployed in times of recession. Women were men's property in Iran before the establishment of the present regime. The Shah did introduce a few reforms but they did not change the social position of women.

This Islamic regime, however, makes the subjection of women to men's will and the role of women as wives and carers "the natural order" of things, and therefore much harder to fight against.

When women have fought back many groups, even progressive ones who oppose the regime, do not support them. The Tudeh Party (Iranian Communist Party) went so far as to support the regime in its attacks on women.

That, and the sheer force of repression against women (women in prison are brutally tortured and



Khomeini's women's militia marches on the streets of Teheran. Photo: Karez Golestan, Reflex.

raped, for example) has forced most women's organisations underground. Women political prisoners form a large and increasing proportion of the massive numbers in Khomeini's dungeons. Many women have been forced to

seek political asylum abroad and, of those, many are organising defence campaigns in exile and spreading the word about women's oppression in Iran.

All information taken from a CARI (Campaign Against Repres-

sion in Iran) publication called 'Iranian Women Against the Islamic Regime', written by CARI's women's section. Women's Fightback will, from now on, be carrying articles from the CARI women's section on a regular basis.

## Rioting for page 3

By Jean Lane

When prisoners at a low security prison called Haverigg rioted three weeks ago, causing extensive damage to the buildings and the escape of 25 of the prisoners, much emphasis was put on the enforced removal of pin-ups from the men's dormitory walls, by the press, as a possible cause of the riot.

In the 70s the press used to rage about the power of the unions and the stupidity of the workers, eg. of British Leyland, who would strike because of the lack of paper in the toilets. In fact, the lack of toilet paper, though a real grievance, was only one small example of the general lack of care and concern about the workers' conditions in the factory; a small example picked on by an anti-union press to trivialise the real grievances of the workers.

No doubt the removal of the men's pin-ups did cause a real grievance. It would be yet another petty rule designed to take your control away, to make you know you are in an institution; like turning down the heating when it's cold, switching off the lights when you can't sleep or on when you want to. Rules which together with the massive overcrowding and filthy conditions in many prisons are

leading to general prison unrest. The removal of pin-ups would have the same effect and cause the same resentment as the removal of books, light or blankets, all of which most of us would consider just cause for unrest.

Yet we campaign against pin-ups in the workplace. We argue that they belittle women, portraying them as sexual objects to be used by men. They make the women's environment at best uncomfortable and at worst threatening. And they give men the impression that women are mere bodies — or bits of bodies — with no brain, no thoughts or opinions and therefore no rights: not worth considering.

And we are right to do so. We are not, however, in favour of management walking round an office or a factory and tearing down pin-ups without any word to the union or the workforce. No more could we be in favour of prison warders removing pin-ups from the men's walls when they are out on their tea breaks. We are not in favour of management, prison workers or the state being able to impose what people shall read or look at.

In fighting against pin-ups we hope, rather, to persuade, to educate. Better that the man removes the pin-up himself because he has been made to see that women are real human beings to be treated with respect, than to live with a sense of injustice because his dignity was taken away from him!



The latest issue of Workers' Liberty is now available. Features include analysis of the Gulf War, Fascism in France plus debate on Ireland. 95p plus 30p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

## Stop the poll tax!

By Katherine O'Leary

The poll tax will come into effect in 1989 in Scotland and 1990 in England and Wales. Most people will wind up losing out financially. But for women the losses won't just be financial.

Three quarters of Britain's low-paid workers are women. Poll tax is unrelated to the ability to pay — as has been frequently said, you pay the same whether you are an Earl of a dinner lady. Poll-tax will futher reduce the already paltry incomes of many women.

70% of old-age pensioners are women. Even those existing only on social security will have to pay 20% of their poll tax. Money which women need to spend on food and fuel will now have to be set aside to pay the tax. Older women who live with relatives will feel themselves to be a burden as their poll-tax adds to the household bills.

Many people who at present do not pay rates will have to pay poll tax. Take residential workers. The overwhelming majority of these are women, and the overwhelming majority are low paid. And of course, employers won't increase wages to cover the cost of poll tax. Voluntary organisations who might wish to can't afford to.

The non-financial implications are positively sinister. We all know about social security snoopers — well now they'll be poll-tax snoopers. Questions asked to ascertain whether a couple are "living together as man and wife" (!) include: do they have a sexual relationship? Is their relationship stable? Have they had children together? Are they known by neighbours and friends as a married couple? Single women will be at the mercy of the tittle-tattle of spiteful neighbours.

Women who escape from violent husbands will be placed at risk.

Partners who are "jointly severely liable" are entitled to see each-other's entry in the poll-tax register. So ... a violent husband will be aided and abetted in tracking down his wife, until she has obtained a legal separation. Even more — the first thing a woman is likely to receive on arrival at a women's refuge will be — a poll-tax form.

A relatively little publicised aspect of the poll tax, is that councils will no longer be able to levy rates on non-domestic properties. The Government will instead collect

a "business rate". So reduced income for councils, and more cuts in services — which, as we all know will hit women hardest.

It's time for the labour movement to start a mass campaign against the poll tax. The unorganised opposition to the tax is vast — even amongst Tory voters. We can start now, by taking petitions round estates, schools, workplaces, by holding public meetings. Labour councils must refuse to co-operate with any aspect of the legislation. United we can win!

Put this resolution through your Women's Section for Regional Conference.

(1) This conference believes that women are coming increasingly under attack from the Tories' policies of cuts, closures and privatisation.

(2) It recognises that women are especially hard hit by the new social security changes and the proposed poll tax.

(3) Conference believes that the Labour Party Women's Sections should be seen as one of the main organisers against these attacks and should begin an outward-looking campaign amongst women which would:

a) build a groundswell of resistance to these attacks and;

b) draw those women affected by them into the Labour Party, transforming the Labour Party Women's Sections into a mass working class women's movement.

(4) Such a campaign should at least include the following elements:

a) leaflets and petitions should be produced to be used by Women's Sections in local areas around specific campaigns, eg. anti-poll tax, hospital closures, etc. Local leaflets should be used as much as

possible to give local information. These should be produced in different languages so they are accessible to all women in the area.

b) information packs on poll tax, social security changes, health cuts, etc. to be used by local groups.

c) national and regional assistance should be given to local Women's Sections to encourage and support holding regular street meetings, factory gate meetings, estate meetings, along with regular stunts such as bed pushes and pickets of Tory MP's surgeries.

d) regular local, regional and national schools as part of a programme of political education aimed at all women in every level of the party.

e) An essential part of the campaign will be Women's Sections actively supporting and working with other campaigns in support of working class women's interests, including industrial action by trade unionists, and action by tenants and community organisations against privatisation and the poll tax.

(5) Conference believes that in building nationally such a campaigning programme the Labour Party will be able to massively increase its membership of working class women who will greatly strengthen the demands of women in the party for democracy.

# Making Labour a real force for change

By Lynn Ferguson

Socialist ideas are gaining in popularity in Britain. A recent Sunday Times survey showed that a majority favour a more caring, democratic society, with a predominantly socialist complexion. Even a significant number of Tory voters answered that they would prefer a "mainly socialist" society.

Now there is a saying that there are lies, damn lies and statistics and opinion polls should always be looked at with a critical eye. But there have been many surveys of political attitudes over the past few years and the general view is that there has been a slight shift to the left in most people's views during the Thatcher years.

Thatcher sees herself as an ideological warrior — but her confidence in her own success is shifting opinion to the right is misplaced. People may buy their own council houses, but they still think that the NHS should be properly funded.

Workers may buy shares in the companies they work for, but they'll still strike if their wages and conditions are attacked. Shipyard workers in Barrow bought shares in the company when it was privatised, but are threatening strike action over threats to their holidays. They said "Nobody gives a bugger about shares." Thatcher's project to buy people off by giving them a stake in the system has flopped dramatically.

But has it? Ordinary people may have kept their heads, but the leadership of our labour movement have lost theirs. Instead of forcefully countering Thatcher's vision with a vision of our own, with our own view of how society should be run, our leadership has moved over onto the Tories' ground, has accepted all Thatcher's premises. Legislation to shackle trade unions? Don't fight it, find a new *modus vivendi*. Wholesale privatisations? Drop the 'old fashioned' idea of nationalisation in favour of, at best, a nebulous 'social ownership' idea.

This 'new realism' has affected the left of our movement too. The labour left, vigorous and optimistic in the early 80s, has for the past few years kept its head down, ground down, pessimistic and demoralised, hoping for better days. The experience of the left in local government no doubt had a large part to play in this. In power but without a strategy to challenge the government's merciless offensive, the local government left became managers, believing all it was possible to do was to make 'kind cuts' and hang on for dear life until the next Labour government.

Of course this was crass foolishness. The next Labour government didn't appear like some *deus ex machina* and magically save the day. We can't wait for the cavalry to come over the hill — we've got to do it ourselves. After all, who's going to vote for a Labour Party that presents no alternative, that passes on Conservative



Women protest against their exclusion from the debate at Labour Party conference 1983. Photo: John

## Build fighting women's sections!

For years Labour women have been demanding a real role for our women's conference. This year Labour Women's Conference is discussing the Report of the Consultation on the National Conference of Labour Women.

The Women's Action Committee (WAC) has been campaigning since the early 1980s around a set of constitutional demands which we should adopt at this conference as our view of the way the women's organisation should be reformed, namely voting at conference by an electoral college, reserved women's seats on the NEC to be elected by women's conference, five resolutions to be sent to national conference and national, not regional election of the National Labour Women's Committee.

WAC are to be applauded for the way they have pushed these demands over the years. But the WAC leadership integrates these demands into a very odd political

By Sarah Cotterill

framework.

WAC's perspective is that our main priority should be to gain more power for women within the party. Only then would it be possible for turn to campaigning.

But the main problem besetting the women's organisation at present is the lack of a clear campaigning perspective. Women are under attack — and we can't wait until we have a few more women MPs or women in the NEC to fight back.

We want an organisation which can attract thousands of women and mobilise them against the Tories. We need to take our women's sections out on to the estates, in the shopping centres, outside the schools, campaigning amongst women and winning them to Labour.

There is a whole series of issues we can take up — the issues which Kinnock & Co. have failed signally to take up: fighting against the poll

tax, campaigning against local hospital closures and NHS cuts, co-ordinating action on estates to stop privatisation of housing, and so on.

The women's organisation could be in the forefront of getting the Labour Party as a whole to swing into action around these issues, linking up with Benn and Heffer campaign for the Party leadership.

Sadly, WAC, though they support Tony Benn's bid for the Leader's position, have as yet taken no position on the Deputy Leader, mainly because of Eric Heffer's personal reservations about abortion, even though he has voted consistently for women's rights to abortion over the years.

WAC's present position can only weaken the chances of reinvigorating the left of the Labour Party — and that's bad for women.

Getting constitutional changes is important but it isn't enough on its own. We also have to build the women's sections into a campaigning movement of socialist women which can show Kinnock what fighting the Tories is all about.

## Missed chances in Chesterfield

By Daisy Messer

It's not often you get several hundred socialist women together in the same hall, so those of us from *Women's Fightback* who attended the 'Women for Socialism' session at the 2nd Chesterfield Conference earlier this month started out feeling quite optimistic.

Sadly, the meeting didn't fulfill our expectations. Poorly organised, and dominated by set-piece speeches from the platform, the meeting afforded very little time for discussion of how we can force the labour movement to fight with us against Thatcher's attacks on women and how we can get new women involved in the movement.

What little discussion there was from the floor revolved around the old debate — sex or class, which is primary? Well, we've been having that discussion for years, and no doubt will continue to do so. Meanwhile the Tories are pushing through the poll tax, NHS cuts, deregulation of housing — all of which primarily affect women. Yes, the theoretical debates are important, but we have a duty to those of our sisters who aren't as yet involved in the movement, but who are under attack, to begin to organise a fightback.

But the opportunity was missed. Issues of concern to women in the Labour Party such as the Benn-Heffer campaign and Labour Women's Conference, were not even mentioned. Strange, as most of the women in the room were Labour Party members.

We do have a chance to set this right. 'Women for Socialism' has decided to hold a conference sometime in the autumn. Apparently there will be an open meeting to discuss the agenda and format of the conference. We must seize this opportunity not only to have out the theoretical discussions but to map out a strategy for women in the labour movement.

*Women's Fightback* hopes to attend the meeting and we will be arguing that it is of crucial importance that we set about the job of turning our Labour Party Women's Sections into outward-going campaigning groups. We should go out onto the estates with petitions and leaflets and talk to women about issues like the poll tax, the plans to sell off council housing and organise these women into the labour movement to fight against the Tory plans.

We think this is the way to build a strong, socialist women's movement. We have the chance to do that — let's not waste it.

cuts, that appears to be embarrassed by some of its own policies? Why vote for wishy-washy Toryism when you can have the real thing?

This year things have started to move. The healthworkers struck for the NHS. The seafarers are striking over safety at sea. Tony Benn and Eric Heffer have decided to challenge for the leadership of the Labour Party. We may all have our disagreements with aspects of Benn or Heffer's politics, but we can be sure of one thing: they stand four-square behind working class struggles and for democracy and accountability in our movement. Their campaign gives us the opportunity to re-open debate in our movement, debate which under Kinnock has thus far been thin on the ground.

We have a chance to make Labour a real alternative to the Tories. Enough chances have been lost already — don't let's lose this one.

1. We aim to build a mass campaign of action against the major attacks being mounted on women's rights, such as the right to control our own fertility, the right to health and childcare facilities, the right to work, the right to live in this country with the partner of our choice, the right to maternity leave and job security for mothers, the right to wages, benefits and legal status independent of a man, the right to organise as trade unionists and as women.

These rights and many other, many not yet won or consolidated, must be defended and extended in face of the onslaught against women by this government.

2. Such a mass campaign has to be part of a labour movement response to the Tory attacks. We aim to provide a focus for united action by women already organised in the labour movement and in campaigns and groups of the women's move-

## Where we stand

ment, and to involve women who do not relate to these movements.

3. We aim to strengthen the position of women in the labour movement, and fight for it to take our needs as a priority. We will encourage and aid the organisation and consciousness of women as women in the labour movement, and fight for the aims and demands of the women's movement in the unions and labour organisations.

We fight to change the sexist atmosphere in the labour movement, and for positive discrimination and changes in arrangements and practices to enable women to play a full

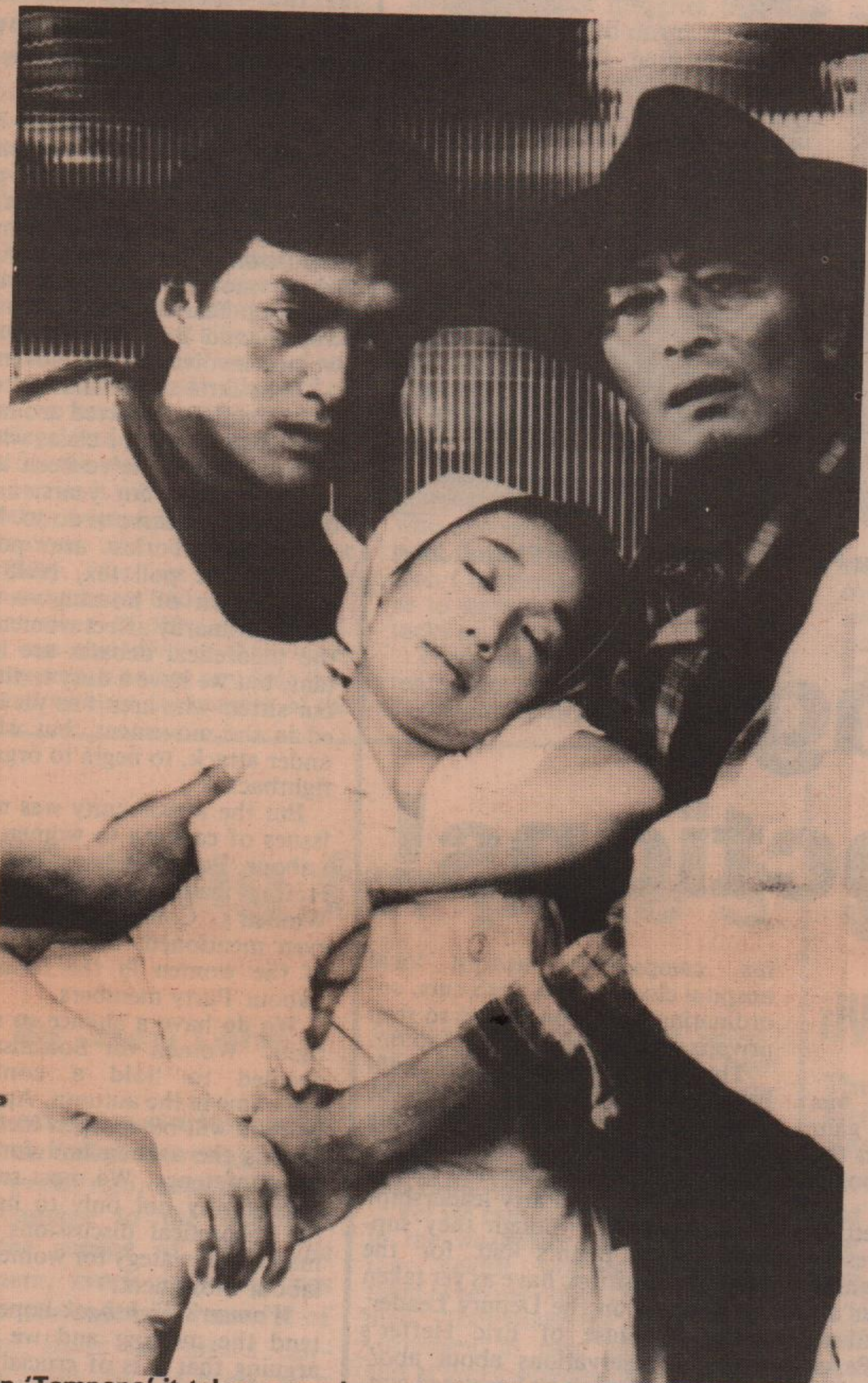
part at all levels. We fight for the implementation of the TUC Charter of Women in the unions.

We fight against the labour movement's reflecting in any way the oppressive ideas about a woman's role, which can undermine women's ability to fight back, and dangerously divide the movement. We ally with all those fighting for rank and file control, democracy and accountability, against those who hold back and sell out our fight. Never again a 'Labour' government that ignores party decisions, serves the bosses and bankers, and beats down workers' living standards and struggles.

4. We aim to co-ordinate and assist those women in the Labour Party, and the trade unions, who are fighting for these aims.

5. We are for direct action, solidarity as women and as workers, and for maximum mobilisation for all actions against the capitalist system that exploits and oppresses us.

# Women: wimps and psychos?



In 'Tampopo' it takes several men to teach the woman noodle-shop owner how to cook properly....

**Belinda Weaver looks at the stereotype roles that most Hollywood films give to women — and at a few exceptions to the dismal rule**

Women get a raw deal in movies. That is still true in movies today, when most films either show women screaming in fear or looking desperately for a man to lean on.

We go to films to be entertained, educated, pleasantly frightened and stimulated, and all too often we come out feeling let down. We didn't recognise ourselves in those women up on the screens. We didn't, couldn't identify with them. Why?

We're all familiar with the scenario of helpless little women squealing while two men fight. We mentally urge her to DO SOMETHING, but she just squeals on.

Film makers also love to linger on women's naked bodies, but male full frontal

nudity is still an absolute no no, except for the split second coy glimpse of genitals here and there. So we feel overexposed and uncomfortable.

Women are always the ones menaced by psychos, attacked by robbers and rapists, kidnapped by spacemen and so on. The wondrous male comes along to protect her from all these terrors, but the message is clear — being a woman isn't safe. I couldn't happily get into a lift for months after seeing *Dressed to Kill*.

## Age

The male actors around are allowed to age gracefully but the women companions they flaunt have to change constantly so that they always have young women by their sides. Witness James Bond, with a new Bond girl every film. Fred Astaire and Cary Grant went on for generations, replacing

Ginger Rogers and Katharine Hepburn with Rita Hayworth and Audrey Hepburn and so on. It's as if women disintegrate after 40 while men go from strength to strength. Another way movies sell us out is by selling the impossible-to-achieve ideal. In movies, women get a hand-

# China's political nerve

If you are coming down to London for the Workers Liberty Summer School then you must go and see *Hibiscus Town*. It's much better for you than an evening in a smoke-filled bar!

This film was made last year in Shanghai by the veteran director Xie Jin who also directed the *Two Stage Sisters*. Like *Two Stage Sisters*, *Hibiscus Town* is about two contrasting women. The women in *Hibiscus Town* are a party cadre and a 'rich peasant'. The film is about how they survived two decades of China under Mao. You don't have to be a film buff or an expert about the Cultural Revolution to enjoy this powerful melodrama, which touches on every political nerve of post-1949 China.

The story starts in 1962 in rural Hibiscus Town, where Hu Yuyin and her husband worked hard to make a success of their bean curd

By Cheung Siu Ming

stall. At that time much of China was in dire poverty after three years of bad harvests, and the Russians had just withdrawn all technical aid.

A zealous work team headed by the woman cadre Li Guoxing comes into town to continue the movement against the "five bad elements" — ie, people with dubious class backgrounds, including the village idiot "crazy" Qing. The "movement" soon focuses on the bean curd stall's profits.

Hu Yuyin is made to sweep the streets with the "crazy" Qing who is, in fact, an artist purged in 1957 (during the period of the Hundred Flowers, when the film director himself had a rough time).

Qing and Yuyin fall in love and go through some horrific times, for "bad elements" had no rights at all,

not even to love or marry each other.

Cadre Li herself survives purge after purge, and remains firmly in political power in Deng's China after the Gang of Four have been toppled, which is when the film ends. She is the target of the film's venom. There must be thousands in the middle and upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party today who will squirm a bit if they get to see this film for they are bureaucratic and hypocritical survivors just like Li.

The film's ending is ambiguous and cleverly so, because film directors have to be survivors too! For me, the film is saying: never mind whether it's Deng's "capitalist road" or Gorbachev's "perestroika" the Chinese and Russian parties are made up of cadres like Li, and are rotten through and through. Don't expect them to bring about socialism!

Go and see this film with a beautifully told story and strong characters. It's on at the ICA cinema, Pall Mall, until 4th July.





Glenda Jackson in 'Business as Usual' — a film that portrays women differently.

some bloke, kiddies and, lately, an interesting job and it all ends at the altar or on a lingering kiss. Heroines go off into Barbara Cartland-land of happy ever after.

Life isn't like that. And for lots of people, that life would have no appeal anyway. If you're gay, or if you don't want kids, or if you don't fancy monogamy, or if you want to work and have kids without feeling guilty, then these fairy tale films are just a pain.

Society won't let us have images of the kind of women we could honour and like. We go looking for heroines and role models and come out feeling disheartened. Even the new movies showing the corporate woman, or the woman doing a 'man's' job aren't satisfying or convincing.

## Ideology

In the recent *Baby Boom* Diane Keaton's Manhattan corporate woman turns down success in favour of man and baby. In *Overboard* Goldie Hawn only discovers bliss when she gets off her ritzy yacht and becomes a downtrodden wife and mother. And we all know about *Fatal Attraction*. In that the corporate woman is 'exposed' — a woman without a man of her own is a potential psycho!

We have to remember that films reflect ideology not reality. The society we live in is bourgeois capitalism and that ideology permeates the whole of society. The ruling class is able to make their culture the ruling culture. Their values, their ideals dominate art, the media, education.

Most of what we get is just Maggie Thatcher values dressed up in

sets and costumes, with the hidden message that life will always be this way. We may know it's a lie, but that doesn't stop us from being swamped by it all, and even going along with it to some extent.

When a film sets out to make you laugh it's hard not to, even though the joke may be sexist, racist or homophobic (as most comedy seems to be!). Movies affect us on an unconscious, as well as a conscious level, so it's hard to disentangle what we really feel about them from what we consciously THINK about them. I've cried at films that I've despised with my head, laughed at films then felt ashamed, and felt really angry at things the rest of the audience seemed to find hilarious.

There are films around that do challenge society's values and that do try to present reality rather than ideology. But they make up a minuscule part of moviemaking and they aren't the films that most film goers see. They are worth catching up on if you feel browned off with the blockbuster circuit, or even if you're not.

Of course, some of the 'system' films aren't too bad. *Crimes of the Heart*, a comedy around last year, had great scenes with its three women characters, who played sisters. The relationship between the three was believable and it celebrated the women and their closeness. Women's friendship doesn't get much of a look in the movies, yet to most women it's one of the great things in their lives — having a friend, sharing thoughts and feelings.

Last year's *Business as Usual* was another hope giver. Glenda Jackson played a strong, believable woman who gets involved in a political fight

about sexism and discovers a whole lot about herself. Of course, she was punished a bit because hubby strayed with her not being at home doing a woman's job, but the film was on her side.

Sally Field had a similar complaint made to her when she played a textile worker who got a union started in her factory in the film *Norma Rae*. In a hilarious scene she rushed around, putting clothes in the washer, throwing food haphazardly into pots, and urging her husband to 'have his way' with her from behind while she caught up with the ironing. He just looked like a clod, and she appeared triumphant.

## Stereotype

Movies can try to put women down, but sometimes they break through it. Women manage to transcend suffocating, stereotyped images the films try to sell us.

No matter what role they put her in we know Katharine Hepburn is pretty feisty. And hardly anyone could keep Bette Davis down. Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo seemed worth a dozen men each.

But until we get the films that show you can make choices that are different from the nuclear family without being a freak, or that you can love women rather than men sexually, that you can work and succeed without being a repressed hysteric pining for a husband and kids, that you can have close friendships with women, rather than compete constantly with them for men's attention, that there are other ways to run society — we'll just have to put up with the ones we've got but we shouldn't buy their message.

## Andrea Dworkin: feminist or woman-hater?

By Ruth Cockcroft

Since the publication of her book *Pornography, Our Blood* Dworkin has taken the American feminist scene by storm. Her book *Intercourse* is likely also to be a feminist best-seller, advertised as part of the feminist book fortnight.

In America, Dworkin's feminism has become massively popular, almost unchallenged. Mary Daly, devoted to creating a new female language to encourage a "cleansing/depolluting of the self by the self" has described Dworkin's new book as "feminist work at its best." It is hardly surprising as both writers come from the same feminist current, cultural feminism, and a very reactionary creed it is too.

Cultural feminism is the American feminist norm, its highly emotive, hyperbolic language permeates through a great deal of literature in America and Britain. Its central point is that 'patriarchy' or what Dworkin calls 'male supremacy', 'man made world' or even 'gynocide' has achieved the absolute domination of women. This gynocide is expressed and maintained through rape, clitorrectomy, incest, prostitution, woman hatred in male fantasies. Pornography is the male ideological tool which theorises this murderous sexual hatred of women.

But gynocide is also, if not more so, maintained through the mutually consented-to fuck. Patriarchy is all powerful, there is no escape from it, its historical span is timeless, it is not a system that can be shattered or cracked.

Why, regardless of political and economic reform, regardless of periods in history in which women have gained greater sexual freedom, such as the 60s, does the position of women not change? For Dworkin the answer is simple: women are stupid and silly, they don't recognise this state of affairs, they continue to want to fuck men (although for Dworkin this is impossible — women are fucked, i.e. they are passive and inactive in sex). She maintains "occupied women will be collaborators more base in their collaboration than any other collaborators have ever been; experiencing pleasure in their own inferiority; calling intercourse freedom."

In fact women who most enjoy fucking are "a living corpse existing for sexual use". Sexual pleasure for heterosexual women living in a 'man made world' means that the woman is empty, dumb, an automaton "being owned and fucked". Dworkin states: "We exist as persons only to the extent that men in power recognise us" for that we must be willing to fuck and then our "will is raped" so we become less human anyway.

Dworkin is nauseating and offensive. Her method is to deliberately use passages of literature in which men discuss sex to illustrate misogyny. The symbolic becomes the literal, words become reality. The Freudian notion that intercourse is an attempt by men to return to the womb is hysterically denounced as proving that all men are incestuous.

Similarly, the notion that the Nazi death camps were sadism out of control gives Dworkin the excuse to call men 'National Socialists'. A story about a woman raped by the devil, constantly defiled until she goes into a coma and eventually dies is used to illustrate Dworkin's belief that sexually active women have all physical strength sapped and become mere shadows in real life. A Tolstoyan story of a man who murders his wife in order to save her from his lust is taken to mean that only in death can women be free. Rape, incest, women prostituting their bodies, becomes the

language with which Dworkin describes all sex and as a result degrades the trauma of real sexual violation.

Like a goddess on the far horizon is a different woman. She is Joan of Arc and virgin. Dworkin describes her in terms reminiscent of Christ: "Joan died for the right of physical privacy from which other rights could derive, without which other rights are meaningless — and in this sense she died for and on behalf of all women." Joan "did not want the clothes of sex, she wanted clothing that was a barrier to invasion by look, by touch, by thought." As a virgin, she was able to have a real physical freedom and, according to Dworkin, patriarchy murdered her for her crime.

The virtues which Dworkin stresses in Joan, her virginity, her refusal to ornament herself shows Dworkin's peculiar dislike of modern women. Modern virginity is merely a state of waiting while make up and fashion show a willingness of the modern female to invite invasion and possession. Dworkin's moral code is a strict one indeed, only too frighteningly similar to that of the Right.

Quite clearly sex in our society is distorted, much of male sexuality is ugly and both men and women place too much emphasis on the act of intercourse itself. A feminist poem talks of the meaningless syndrome in which men "whang, whang and come". It is a sexuality that gropes in the dark, that is embarrassed and rushed. Women do not explore their own bodies and are told in women's magazines, "Ten ways to fake an orgasm". Fear, deep alienation from ourselves and other human beings will inevitably mean that sex cannot be pure, that there will be gross fantasies, sexual failure, that erotic feelings are impoverished.

But human desire is immensely complex; the mind can imagine a supersexual world that bears little relationship to sex itself. Fantasies of rape and degradation are only real when they are acted upon. What is most difficult for most feminists to come to terms with is that female desire is often only too similar to that produced by mainstream soft porn. Women's romance books sell millions, and in all the male is the dominant, erect stranger and the woman a quivering wreck. Does this mean then the woman's sexuality is passive? No, women can transform images of passivity in an active way. Anybody out on the town on a Friday night will see groups of women out together, feet shod in stilletos, clip clop on the pavement, short skirts, bare arms, painted pouting lips. The message is that they want sex, but they are assertive about it to the point of being aggressive.

Andrea Dworkin has a tale about such women. When Joan was sick of women following soldiers for sex she murdered them. Dworkin is pleased about it. Cultural feminism is elitist, not only are men hated, but so are stupid women, the ones who like fucking. Only a few women are fit for the feminist future, not even the women who have a positive sexual identity towards other women — Dworkin is against lesbian erotica. No, it is women who will accept the need to re-establish an "old virginity" and put it upon a pedestal, the women who want to create a new female language and deny the culture and science and knowledge we have learned to use for the oppressed.

All of Dworkin's criteria for real womanhood are negative, hostile, nihilistic. Her sex war is apocalyptic: men are irredeemable, inherent National Socialists and collaborators to be dealt with. I have read very little that is more intense in its dislike of women. My fear is that Dworkin will be uncritically accepted as the dominant feminist voice to the extent that 'feminism' will become a term that we, as socialists, must disassociate ourselves from.

# Not a 'mere plaything'

## Working women and the suffrage movement

Cathy Nugent finds some lessons for today in the history of the women's suffrage movement.

"Women do not want their political power to enable them to boast that they are on equal terms with men. They want to use it for the same purpose as men — to get better conditions... We do not want it as a mere plaything!" Selina Cooper — textile worker, organiser for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

"Our members are absolutely single-minded; they concentrate all their forces on one object, political equality with men. No member of the WPSU divides her attention between suffrage and other social reforms". (Mrs) Emmeline Pankhurst.

The history of the women's suffrage movement is most popularly associated with the Pankhurst family and the organisation they set up — the Women's Political and Social Union (WPSU). The campaign for "Votes for Women" has been seen to be about spectacular 'militant' actions — hunger strikes, women chaining themselves to the railings outside 10 Downing Street and in its latter stages acts of arson. But there was another dimension to the campaign that has only recently been researched and discovered. No less effective or important, this is the involvement of working class women, specifically women workers in the textile industries of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

### Injustice

These women became involved in the suffrage campaign not only because they felt the injustice of the lack of a basic democratic right. For them, it was also connected to fighting for better conditions as working women, and for many it was part of a struggle for a better society.

Indeed the 'vote' had this broader meaning and connection with social equality for many working class militants in the early period of British working class organisation.

However this was beyond the understanding and horizons of many of the middle class women within the suffrage movement. The debates and conflicts that took place within the movement as a result of these differences, and the responses of the labour movement — for it was by no means supportive — are still very relevant for socialist women today.

### Socialist

Throughout the nineteenth century the highest concentration of women's employment was in the textile industries: the Nottinghamshire hosiery workers, the woollen workers of the West Riding and the cotton workers of Lancashire. They were a cheap (being paid substantially less than men) and flexible workforce for the factory and mill owners. Married women were especially preferred, as Marx



Factory gate suffrage meeting in about 1910

pointed out:

"They have families at home dependant on them for support; they are attentive, docile, more so than unmarried females, and are compelled to use their utmost exertion to procure the necessaries of life."

Despite opposition from some male trade unionists and protective legislation these women were never excluded from these industries for women's wages were as important to working class families dependant on this industry (where work was often slack and seasonal), as their cheap labour was to the bosses. By the end of the nineteenth century, these women were relatively well unionised. Women were also involved in the early socialist organisations, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). It was from the trade unions and the socialist organisations that the local leadership of the suffrage movement emerged.

The women's suffrage campaign really started off in Manchester. (It was here that the WPSU was established by the Pankhursts). Manchester had always had a history of radical liberalism and within this, women's suffrage organisation. The Secretary of the Manchester Suffrage Society at the end of the nineteenth century was a university graduate, Esther Roper. Unlike her predecessors she decided to direct her efforts toward working class women. In 1893 she launched a "Special Appeal", a petition calling for the enfranchisement of women, which was to be taken out to the working women of Lancashire.

### Petitions

The petition was initially taken up by the Women's Cooperative Guild. This was not a nineteenth century equivalent of the Women's Institute! The local branch of the Guild would organise regular meetings for women, freeing them for an evening at least, from the daily round of drudgery. They discussed all kinds of issues from the rights and wrongs of "rational dress" (i.e. not wearing corsets!) to workers' education and votes for women.

The petition was taken round to local mills and factories by guild activists and trade union women. Factory gate meetings were organised,

delegations were sent to Parliament. Later ballots were agitated for in the textile unions on the question of women's suffrage. Most votes went in favour.

All of these 'activist' women were workers, or wives, or mothers or all three. Unlike middle class women they had little or no free time. Yet by 1901 29,359 signatures had been collected. In the same year the Lancashire petition was adapted and taken round the wool workers in Yorkshire, and cotton and silk workers in Cheshire.

The campaign was taken up in the TUC by Helen Silcock who was President of the Wigan Weavers Association. She moved a motion calling for votes for women on the same basis as men. At that time the franchise was still based on a property qualification. Some working class men without sufficient income still lacked the vote.

### Hysterical

Helen Silcock's motion was defeated because, it was argued, somehow or other, it would entrench the property qualification. Possibly a fair objection. However, rightly or wrongly, the women's suffrage question was associated with the 'hysterical demands of bourgeois spinsters' with nothing better to do with their time than squeal about votes for women. Really prejudice won the day, for Helen Silcock, had been careful to pose the demand as a class demand, that working class women needed, and deserved the vote as workers.

This debate was to rage on for many years, not only in the TUC but also within the SDF and the ILP. One side supported votes for women on the same basis as men the other adult suffrage.

To many women the latter was a device adopted in order to ignore the principle of women's rights. This was probably some of the motivation. The debate was aggravated and polarised further however, by the very public campaigns of the Pankhursts and the WPSU.

Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst had all been members of the ILP in Manchester. Emmeline in particular was a prominent member of the ILP. Her aim, initially, was to convert the ILP and in 1903 she formed the Women's

Labour Representation Committee for this purpose. This later became the WPSU. The group was tiny and firmly in the control of the Pankhursts and their close friends.

In the first few years the Pankhursts maintained their links with the Lancashire campaign, they spoke at public meetings in the area. But it was clear from the beginning that the Pankhursts were less concerned with agitation at the grass-roots than with trying to influence Labour leaders and 'public opinion' at a national level.

### Militancy

In 1906 the Pankhursts, and thus the WPSU moved down to London, abandoning their links with the Lancashire women. The policy of 'militancy' began to develop. Under the influence of Christabel Pankhurst their group became far narrower. Only one working class woman from the East End, Annie Keeny, carefully cultivated by Christabel was ever allowed to enter their charmed circle. The WPSU was the first to adopt the slogan 'Votes for Women' and they certainly meant votes for some women. And the women who were involved in their campaign were middle class women. For sure their actions were sometimes brave, but when banquets at the Savoy Hotel were held to celebrate the release of women from Holloway prison, it is not surprising trade unionists and working class suffragists recoiled from their behaviour. They did not want to be associated with it as Eva Gore Booth (a long-time friend of both Esther Roper and the Pankhursts put it):

"It is not the fact of demonstrations or even violence that is offensive to them, it is being mixed up and held accountable as a class for educated and upper class women who kick, shriek, bite and spit".

### Narrow

For Christabel these tactics worked and because the one, narrow goal was all important, so be it: "It is evident that the House of Commons and even its Labour members, were more impressed by the demonstrations of the feminine bourgeoisie than of the female proletariat".

Today of course, the vote no longer has the same importance and connection to the fight for a better society, within the labour movement. The women's suffrage movement in Lancashire and the north of England was based on that idea. It also emerged from a tradition, in one particular locality, where it was possible for women to organise and where women did organise despite the huge restrictions in their lives.

### Elitist

The struggle for the vote is past history but there is, in many ways a similar debate taking place in the labour movement today. For a long time the Labour Party's Women's Organisation has been demanding political equality within the Party. This fight has been led by the Women's Action Committee. But WAC are in danger of forgetting just as the WPSU forgot, that no amount of political equality or constitutional changes will guarantee genuine equality for ordinary working women. Unless we take on board and link that struggle to the wider needs and interests of working class women, we are lost. The fight becomes, sterile, narrow and ultimately elitist. Women's sections today are exactly like the WPSU seventy years ago, charmed circles of well-educated, able women, personally dissatisfied with their lives maybe, but not interested in involving ordinary women whose need to organise is as real and important as it was for the Lancashire textile workers.

### Equality

We don't need political equality as a "mere plaything" to get so many women into prominent positions in the labour movement, when the vast majority of women remain 'powerless' and unorganised. We need political equality because it is part of a bigger battle to get the labour movement to fight for the interests of working class women and the working class as a whole.

Most of the research into the participation of working women in the suffrage movement is contained in: "One Hand Tied Behind Us" by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, published by Virago, priced £4.95.



# Workers' Liberty

# 88



The 'Workers' Liberty 88' summer school will be held from Friday 1 July to Sunday 3 July in London.

It opens on Friday evening with a meeting on the Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc, with speakers including Zbigniew Kowalewski, an exiled leader of Solidarnosc's left wing.

On the Saturday and Sunday, the main themes will be:

**Party and class:** how should socialists organise so as best to help the development of working-class politics?

**The National Question:** what answer can we give to the national and communal conflicts that dominate politics in Ireland, in Palestine, in Sri Lanka and so many other places?

**Workers in the Eastern Bloc:** does Gorbachev offer a way forward? Can Solidarnosc provide a model for independent workers' movements in other countries of the Eastern Bloc?

There will also be a series of introductory workshops, explaining and discussing basic ideas of Marxism for people new to socialist politics.

There will be a creche, socials in the evenings, and accommodation provided for people coming from outside London.

## Suggested reading

### Workers in the Eastern bloc:

- Trotsky: 'The Revolution Betrayed'.
  - Gorbachev: Martin Walker, 'The Waking Giant'. Workers' Liberty no.8
  - Hungary: Bill Lomax, 'Hungary 1956'.
  - Poland: Workers' Liberty no.8,9,10.
- Colin Barker, 'Festival of the Oppressed.'

### Party and Class

- Trotsky: 'Lessons of October.' Workers' Liberty pamphlet, 'Is the SWP an alternative?' Workers' Action magazine, article on 'Organising the Revolutionaries'.
- Workers' Liberty pamphlet, 'Illusions of Power'.
- Women's Fightback/Socialist Organiser pamphlet, 'No Turning Back'.
- Lynne Segal, 'Is the Future Female?'
- Iran: CARI pamphlet, 'The Iranian workers' movement'.

### National question

- Lenin: 'The Rights of Nations to Self-Determination.' 'Critical Remarks on the National Question'. Socialist Organiser pamphlet on '1917' - Trotsky's article on the national question.
- Ireland: Workers' Liberty no.5 'Provos, Protestants and Working-class politics'. Socialist Forum no.2 'Ireland 1969-85'. Workers' Liberty no.10: debate on Ireland.
- Middle East: Workers' Liberty no.9 Maxime Rodinson: 'Israel and the Arabs'.
- South Africa: Workers' Liberty no.3 'Breaking the Chains'. Workers' Liberty no.8

### Introducing Marxism

- Socialist Organiser pamphlets 'Organising for Socialism'; '1917'; 'Lenin', and 'Magnificent Miners'.
- Women's Fightback/Socialist Organiser pamphlet, 'No Turning Back'.
- Workers' Liberty no.10: article on May 1968.
- Sheila Rowbotham, 'Women, resistance and revolution'.
- Trotsky, 'My Life'.
- Ralph Miliband, 'The State in Capitalist Society'.

The summer school is at Sir William Collins School, Charrington St, London NW1. The Friday evening meeting is at University College London Student Union, Gordon St, London WC1.

Tickets in advance: £9 waged, £5 unwaged, for the whole weekend, from Mark Osborn, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Tickets bought at the door will be £1 extra.



#### Friday 1

July, 7.30 Rally at University College, London: Victory to Solidarnosc! Speakers: Zbigniew Kowalewski, Marek Garztecki, Simon Pottinger, and others.  
Followed by social.

#### Saturday 2

July, 10.30 Plenary: THE LEFT SINCE 1968. Speaker: John O'Mahony.

11.45 Lunch

12.45 Party & Class:  
Introduction  
John O'Mahony

2.30 The Wobblies  
Alan Johnson

4.15 The Labour Left  
John Bloxam

5.45 Trade union caucuses

7.30 Social

#### Sunday

10.30 Capitalism, socialism,  
and women's  
liberation  
Lynn Ferguson

12.00 Lunch: campaign caucuses.

1.30 Marxists and trade  
unions: Mick  
O'Sullivan

2.45 Workers in the Iranian  
revolution: speaker  
from CARI

4.00 Final plenary

National Question:  
Introduction  
Martin Thomas

Europe's biggest  
oppressed nation:  
the Ukraine: Marko  
Bojcun and Zbigniew  
Kowalewski

Debate on  
Ireland: John  
O'Mahony/Martin  
Collins

The Tamils in Sri  
Lanka  
Rajes Bala

Israel and Palestine  
Clive Bradley

Nationalism in South  
Africa: Bob Fine

Eastern Bloc:  
Can Gorbachev  
bring freedom?  
Tony Jain

Freud and Marxism  
George Davey Smith

Hungary 1956  
Bill Lomax

Hungary today  
George Krasso and  
Gus Fagan

Czechoslovakia today  
Adam Novotny

Soviet anti-semitism  
Stan Crooke

Introductory:  
Why the working  
class?  
Tom Rigby

Greens and socialism  
Les Hearn

Women's liberation  
Cate Murphy

Reform and revolution  
Pat Murphy

Who are the  
Sandinistas?  
Peter Sandiford

Our tradition  
Ruth Cockcroft

# Three unions launch drive against ET

The NALGO conference decision to oppose the new Employment Training Scheme means that all three of the major local authority unions (NALGO, NUPE, TGWU) have the same policy on this issue — despite the TUC General Council's shameful decision to give ET "conditional support".

The emergency resolution at NALGO conference commits the union to a policy of non-cooperation with the ET and to establishing a joint campaign with the TGWU, NUPE, health authorities and community organisations opposed to this scheme.

About one quarter of the proposed 600,000 ET places are dependent upon local authorities and many Labour councils have already drawn up plans to make use of ET cheap labour. So it is vital that the NALGO decision is translated into action as soon as possible.

Rank and file members of all unions with anti-ET policy should be pushing for a joint national campaign to boycott ET and to disrupt all efforts to introduce it whether by local authorities, voluntary groups or private managing agents.

The success of the TGWU Community Programme Shop Stewards' Combine (who have disrupted CP schemes on Merseyside and the Wirral, obtaining guarantees from several CP managers that they will not transfer onto ET) shows what can be done.

But time is short and a national campaign needs to be built NOW.



# Deadenders: women on YTS

The YTS scheme has been bad for all young people — but young women get a particularly raw deal. Not only do young women experience all the same things as male trainees — poor pay, no real training, poor health and safety — but they have the added burden of sexism, not just from individuals, but virtually structured into the scheme.

The YTS has set a precedent for pushing down young people's wages. The government pays a paltry allowance, so employers of youth not on YTS follow suit. As women are concentrated in the lowest paid jobs anyway (women make up three quarters of the low paid), they are even worse hit. Indeed, young women's wages are now lower in real terms than in 1979.

The YTS has done nothing to break down the sex stereotyping that pushes young women into low paid and low status dead end work. Alternative options are rarely presented to young women and when young women themselves try to break into traditionally 'male' areas of work barriers are put in their way. One young woman says: "I was in the careers office and I told them what I wanted to try. I had just lost a job in a shoe shop and I said that I wanted to try maybe a YTS in painting and decorating. They told me that was something I shouldn't do. They said I should try office work. I didn't like office work. I don't even like typing."

Women who do manage to enter the 'male' preserves find it heavy going. Tutors expect them to fail. They face put downs from tutors and male trainees alike. Sometimes the harassment can reach unbearable proportions. One young woman who was subjected to male trainees reading aloud stories from 'Playboy' complained to the tutor — who confiscated the magazine and proceeded to read it himself. Another young woman training as a plumber was told by the men that the only place for women in the trade was on a calendar.

There have been incidents of women suffering physical attacks

By Jane Johnson

and sexual assault.

The areas in which male trainees are concentrated — like engineering — are jobs in which it is relatively easy to find employment and not too badly paid. Hairdressing and caring jobs, two of the major areas for women trainees, have high rates of unemployment and low rates of pay. Research shows that by the time current trainees reach the age of 35 the women will be earning only £6 or £7 to every £10 earned by the men.

In 1985, in response to pressure, the MSC set itself objectives for challenging the sexism in YTS. This included single sex schemes, reserved places for women and publicity to show young women that there are options other than the traditional ones.

By 1987 the MSC had achieved virtually none of this. There were only two women-only schemes in the whole country, involving a massive total of 11 women. Seventeen reserved-place schemes existed, taking in 65 women. The publicity has been changed, but on its own this means very little.

So why do young women take YTS schemes? Parental pressure is one factor — it's better to be on a YTS than 'signing on'. Being at

home is boring and, if you're a young woman, you'll be expected to take on a major share of the housework. More importantly, YTS is now the only way into jobs such as hairdressing and secretarial work. Apprenticeships have all but disappeared. Young women often have no choice other than to accept a YTS scheme.

YTS isn't about training young people to work for virtually nothing. It is about keeping young women in their place in dead end, casualised work. The answer to the problems of young women on YTS is for unions to take YTS recruitment seriously, to help the trainees set up their own branches and to support them in winning concessions from their bosses.

# Personal slave to 16 sexist

By Sarah McSheffrey

I work for NACRO which stands for National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders. When I applied for the job it said "Canteen Assistant" but I found out I am the canteen. What it should have said was "personal slave to 16 sexist workmen" — but they neglected to put that in.

So here I sit, in a freezing church hall, bored out of my brain. The 9.30 rush is over. I've made 16 cups of tea, washed 16 cups, brushed the floor and mopped it ("Must be done twice a day dear, more hygienic you know," said the lady in the tweed suit and blue rinse from the MSC).

So here I sit, watching the floor dry. Every now and then one of the men walks in, stamping as much mud as he can on the way, to try and start an argument with me (I think it is one of their hobbies).

"All right darlin'?" he asks. Now if I wasn't so fed up I probably would have ignored this but I was, and I didn't. "No actually, it's rather boring," I reply, "and by the way, I'm not your darling."

"No need to get snotty about it," he shouts. "Would you rather be out there shovelling dirt from one

pile to another, like us?"

"Yes I would," I say. "It seems a lot less boring than being stuck in here."

"You couldn't stand the pace out there. You're only a woman," he suggests. "You should be at home with kids anyway."

Before I can answer he marches out of the door to tell the other lads how good he is at winding me up.

At 11am the Christian women come in for their weekly coffee morning and today they are acting strangely towards me. I try to work out why but can come to no answer. I approach the vicar's wife and she tells me that the vicar has explained to them just what we are doing on the site and what NACRO stands for. So that's it. They all think we are murderers and gunmen and now they are keeping their distance.

At 11.30 the senior supervisor comes to check up on us and I tell him about the vicar's little sermon. With that he goes and complains to the vicar and the vicar says he'll retract what he has said next week, but as far as I'm concerned the damage has been done.

At 12.30 the lads all come in for

their lunch break. I think this is the only time I am really busy — making tea, topping up tea cups, getting mouthfuls of abuse because the tea hasn't got sugar in it or something isn't perfect — generally running circles round myself to stop them moaning.

1.00 arrives and I have peace at last. They are all back at work and, apart from the supervisor, I am all alone. The supervisor, Bill, is nagging me because I am mopping the floor again. After he has finished he decides my moral fibre isn't what it used to be and lectures me on morality. God, if I had a pound for every lecture and sexist comment I got in this place I would never have to work here again!!

I look at my watch and sigh with relief. It's 1.30 and time to leave. I sign out and tell Bill that I am going. As I leave I get a taste of what every girl must get when they walk past the men: wolf whistles, cat calls, the lot. But I don't really care any more. I'm out of that place for another day and I've got time to do something really useful and educating: I'm off to Wallasey Unemployed Centre to do some real work and enjoy it too, which is a damn sight more than I can say about the job I've just left!

NO  
TURNING  
BACK!

Women and the struggle for socialism

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Les Hearn's  
**SCIENCE COLUMN**

## Science for People

The summer edition of SFP\* is now out, covering a wide range of scientific topics from a socialist viewpoint.

There is an eye-witness account of chemical warfare on the Iraqi Kurds of Halabja by "their own" government. Thousands died last year when mustard gas, cyanide and nerve gas were dropped on this Iranian-held town. The gases were manufactured in a "pesticides" plant built and supplied by European companies.

A feature on BST (bovine somatotropin) fills out the picture so far available to listeners to the Archers. BST is a cow growth hormone said to increase milk yields by up to 25% without increased feed costs.

It is genetically engineered: the gene for BST has been inserted into bacteria which happily make loads of the stuff. Injected into cows, it seems to have some detrimental effects on them and their calves. It is unclear whether BST gets into the milk or if it can affect hormones.

The Ministry refuses to release the evidence. But it does seem to increase the saturated fat content of milk. Therefore, it is doubly useless. It will increase milk surpluses and increase the butter mountains.

Another feature looks at schizophrenia. This to some extent invented disease, is often diagnosed on uncertain grounds. A body of symptoms is said to be typical of schizophrenia (thought disorder, delusions, hallucinations, hearing voices, loss of will, disturbed movement, incongruous emotional expressions) but someone suffering, say, two of these will be diagnosed as schizophrenic, just as someone else suffering from another two different symptoms. And yet there is no similarity in their behaviour. Indeed, there is no justification for linking all these symptoms together in something called schizophrenia.

The diagnosis is frequently made on subjective grounds and then the person's behaviour will be interpreted to suit the diagnosis. In one experiment, a group of volunteers presented themselves to mental hospitals, complaining of hearing voices. Many were admitted on these grounds alone.

Once inside, they said they no longer heard the voices but the staff disbelieved them. One "patient" who was making notes on the experience was said by staff to show "compulsive writing behaviour".

The hospitals were then informed of the study and its results and warned to expect more "pseudo-patients". Admissions for schizophrenia then fell and some one-fifth of new patients were confidently said to be faking their symptoms. In fact, no more pseudo-patients had been sent.

The article also shows how attempts to show a biochemical or genetic basis for schizophrenia have generally failed. Here, the argument falters, with credence being given to social theories of schizophrenia. These see the disease as an intelligible and perhaps logical response to disturbed relationships between members of families. Unfortunately, these theories are just as circular as the conventional ones.

And the fact remains, that some people do suffer from delusions and hear voices etc. Many find these feelings unbearable and for these it may be that the powerful drugs given in mental hospitals offer some welcome respite, despite the many drawbacks of such drugs.

\*Science for People is available for 25 Horsell Rd. London N5 1XL. Send £1 for single copy.



## Dover looks like Wapping

By Ray Ferris

As the seafarers' dispute drags on into its fifth month it increasingly resembles Wapping.

Rank and file trade unionists are fighting a heroic and tenacious battle against the odds, with an intransigent management and a timid union leadership.

P&O now has 3 passenger ships running a (reduced) service on its

"Jewel in the Crown" Dover-Calais service, as well as 3 freight ships running the Dover-Zeebrugge route.

The leaders of the TUC and the rest of the labour movement have been embarrassed by the strike. Instead of organising solidarity to win, the TUC has set up a charitable Trust Fund to alleviate the strikers' hardships as the battle drags on.

The union's assets still remain in

the hands of the courts, even after the leadership called off national action, agreed to co-operate with the sequestrators, and called off mass pickets at Dover.

The lessons for us all are clear. The Tories are out to bust trade unions, and at the first sign of weakness shown by the labour movement move in for the kill.

The mass pickets continue. The Dover strikers refuse to lie down and die. Support the Dover pickets!

Rail

## BR calls NUR's bluff

By Rob Dawber

Five thousand British Rail signal and telecommunications (S&T) staff are now in dispute over the imposition of a new pay and grading structure.

On Monday 9th May BR, claiming that they had talked enough, imposed a new structure at odds with union demands.

The new structure involves some extra money and scale payments for training. BR are to have the final say on who gets the training. The result is 15 grades of pay for five grades in the S&T department.

The union demands no scale payments with just four grades; easier classification of duties for each grade; and that seniority be the only guide to who gets training and thus promotion and more money.

In British Telecom comparable workers can earn up to £60 a week more on basic pay. At present, in BR, the lowest paid, the assistant technician, gets just £107.45 per week before stoppages. That means that even after the extra money through BR's imposed pay and grading structure, the assistant technician takes home little more than £80 for the basic week.

The NUR reluctantly organised a ballot on 2nd June to give the NEC authority to call industrial action. The result was a welcome surprise: 82% voted, and of them 81.8% said yes.

The National Executive then decided on an overtime ban from midnight on Friday 17th June to back up their demand for serious talks with BR. They have promised 24 hour stoppages for the near future.

The NEC thought this threat, along with the overwhelming response in the ballot, would be enough to squeeze concessions out of BR — and enough to justify calling the action off.

But BR have called their bluff. They met the union on 15th June, but refused to discuss pay and grading. Instead they

said they wanted to talk about the ballot.

They claim that since the union had instructed non-S&T staff not to do S&T work, or anything that would undermine the dispute, then the union was inducing a breach of contract by people who had not been balloted. Unless BR got some response by 3.30pm that day, then they would seek an injunction declaring the ballot void. The meeting ended after 25 minutes.

The NEC immediately met and clarified that they were not wanting anyone who had not been balloted to break their contract. They should just

do their own job and no-one else's.

The overtime ban on 19th June was overwhelmingly supported. Of the 5,000 staff involved only a few dozen scabbed at Derby, Trent, King's Cross and Hitcham.

During the course of Monday BR eventually admitted delays through signalling faults not attended to. BR, of course, play down the effects. In future they will no doubt send home workers who refuse to work overtime.

We need to respond effectively when that happens as well as ensuring that the NEC gets its act together and leads this dispute to victory.

Teachers

## Gains for the left

By Liam Conway

The Harrogate Special Conference did not produce the expected easy victory for the right-wing Executive majority of the National Union of Teachers. Supported now by a significant left minority on the Executive, left delegates at the conference managed to win significant changes to the Executive's proposals.

Most important of all was the failure of the Executive to abolish our annual conference. The special conference threw out any proposals to discuss the frequency or size of the conference.

But President Malcolm Horne, in the chair, repeatedly declared amendments lost which were clearly carried on a show of hands. He is a member of the so-called Broad Left. He felt safe cheating because limited time made card votes a limited option the left could only use occasionally.

Two votes declared lost by Horne on a show of hands were won by over 120,000 to 60,000 and another show of

hands that Horne could not decide on was also won by a 2-1 majority!

The whole Executive package, as amended, was carried by 101,000 to 83,000. It is designed to centralise the union in the hands of unelected national and regional officers.

Clearly a large section of conference and probably a larger section of the membership want democracy in the union preserved.

Andy Dixon, Executive member for Greater Manchester, summed up the day:

"Despite defeat on the memorandum as a whole, and the disgraceful manipulation of President Malcolm Horne, the balance sheet of the conference is better than expected for the left. The right-wing Executive majority, although not defeated, have been stopped in their tracks and the way is open for the left to make bigger gains in the future."

Birmingham

## Council purge

Twenty Birmingham councillors have been suspended from the ruling Labour Group after refusing to vote for the closure of a holiday home for disabled children.

The dispute is over Martineau House in Bognor Regis, run by Birmingham Council. Last year over 350 children had holidays there, with the 22 beds in great demand during the holiday season.

The right-wing Labour leadership (many close associates of Roy Hattersley) planned to save £200,000 a year by closing the home. Its sale value is estimated at £3 to £4 million.

Joyce Gould at Walworth Road has ruled that the suspension of 20 councillors for abstaining on the closure was unconstitutional, but the council leaders have pressed ahead.

WHEATON'S  
**WEEK**



## Ten feet tall

The Notts sacked miners and many Notts miners went to last Saturday's Yorkshire miners' gala. As always, we came away feeling ten feet tall because of the support we got from the rank and file there, and even the officials.

The high point was Dennis Skinner's speech. Many people look forward to him as an amusing speaker, which he is, but underneath it always is a very serious message. This time it was the demand for real political debate in the Labour Party, and not having decisions handed down on tablets of stone from Moses Kinnock.

The message was very well received; it was also echoed by Yorkshire miners' president Jack Taylor, who said that under no circumstances should Labour shift from unilateralism.

It makes it even more of a shame that the NUM will be nominating Kinnock. Tony Benn and Eric Heffer's late entry did leave us very little time to do any work in the branches.

But I was amazed at Kinnock's speech about ditching unilateralism. I know the way he is going, but I thought he would have waited until he got a commitment from the TGWU for the 'dream ticket'. I hope he has now dropped himself in it! Denzil Davies' resignation will lead many people to see the thing in an entirely different light.

The UDM seem to have got themselves in a bit of a mess. Apparently Roy Lynk left things in John Liptrott's hands when he went off on his recruiting tour. He did not like the way Liptrott had handled things when he was away, but all his recruiting campaign came up with was ten Church of England priests and a rabbi! Seeking divine intervention, as Dennis Skinner pointed out.

Robert Haslam (boss of British Coal) told the UDM about his plans to bring in 4 shifts per day, get rid of fixed summer holidays, introduce 6 day working to all pits and not just new developments, and all the rest of it. It's back to the Bevercotes agreement of 20 years ago, with its continental shifts and everything else.

Thatcher has been very fond of comparing football hooligans with striking miners, but it is a different world. For a start, the strength of the football hooligans rests with the National Front.

During the strike they were able to stop Yorkshire miners coming into Nottinghamshire and even Notts miners going from one village to another, father visiting son and vice versa. Yet they now seem unable to stop known criminal elements and National Front organisers arranging violence and trouble! In a way, football violence is convenient to them because it takes the spotlight away from what they are doing and gives them excuses for creating a stronger state.

We have just had the annual holiday for the Notts sacked miners and their families, paid for out of fund-raising and labour movement donations. We want to thank everybody who contributed towards that holiday — it was absolutely great for all the sacked miners, their wives and kids to get together and have a week by the seaside.

A special thanks to Kate Lees for organising it and doing a marvellous job.

As for my own case: I have just got a telephone call to attend a medical at Mansfield for the NCB, so there might be some developments there!

Paul Whetton is a member of Bevercotes NUM, Notts.

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# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

## Conference called to organise fightback

By John Bloxam

"Labour Listens," says Neil Kinnock. But Neil Kinnock clearly listens only to the opinion polls and the Tory press.

Labour activists want a leadership that listens to the labour movement. That's why Wallasey Constituency Labour Party is calling a conference of Constituency Labour Parties in the run-up to this year's Blackpool Conference.

The initiative was announced at the Chesterfield Socialist Conference at a meeting with representation from 25 CLPs.

Even Kinnock loyalists have been badly jolted by his attack on unilateralism.

And at this year's conference the NEC will propose a constitutional change requiring future leadership challengers to first get the support of 20% of Labour MPs, instead of the present 5%. This means giving the Parliamentary Labour Party an effective veto over Party members' rights to choose the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Party.

The NEC is also moving to increase the already considerable — and increasingly regularly used — powers of the NEC and Party leadership to impose candidates on local parties.

The leadership challenge of Tony Benn and Eric Heffer has blown the whistle on all this, and given the left the signal to reorganise.

Party members far too often still feel isolated in the face of Kinnock and Hatterley's relentless move to the right. That's why we need the conference called by Wallasey.

It is especially important now that the Labour leaders have published the policy review documents now out, with only a vague promise that they will be open to some form of amendment.

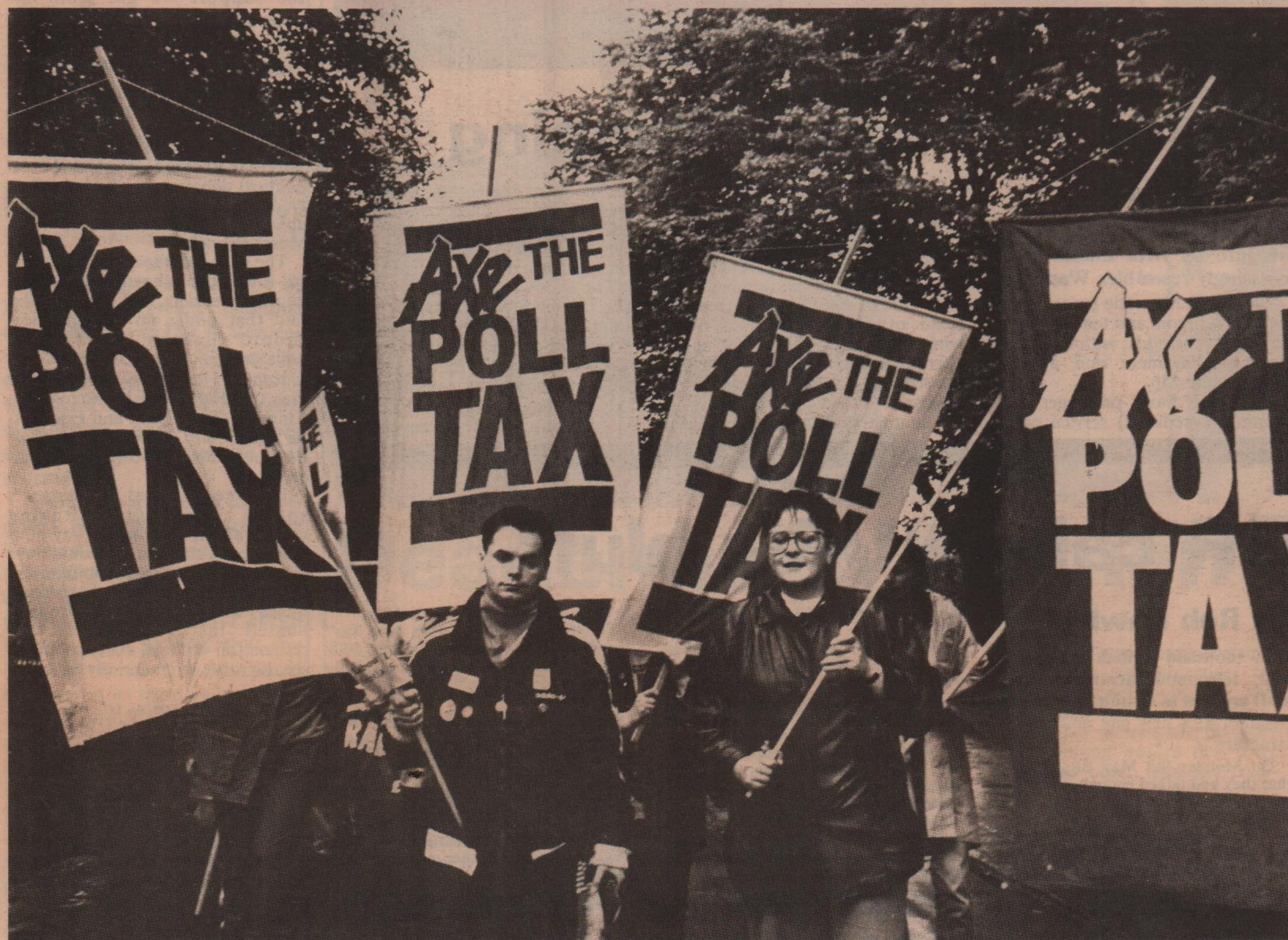
Speaking to *Socialist Organiser*, Wallasey CLP secretary Richard Aplin explained that he is booking a venue for the conference in the North West sometime in September. A letter will soon be sent out to CLPs asking for support, sponsorship and help in organising the conference.

"There could not be a more important time for CLPs to get together. We need the strongest possible grassroots campaign to defend unilateralism, Clause 4 and party democracy. If we organise now then I am sure we can mount a successful defence.

"I would urge all CLPs to attend the conference we are helping to organise in September. If you want more information, contact me at 108 Seaview Road, Wallasey, Merseyside."

**Eight pages of this week's paper are given over to Women's Fightback, who are producing a special issue for Labour Party women's conference.**

**Next week we will have a special magazine-format double issue of SO on the Labour Party policy reviews. That issue will run for three weeks, and the following number of SO will be dated 21 July.**



## POLL TAX: DEFY THIS LAW!

A campaign to defy the poll tax is gaining ground in Scotland. In Edinburgh Labour Party left-wingers have won over the official Scottish TUC/Labour Party "Stop It" campaign to policies including non-implementation of the poll tax by Labour-controlled councils, boycotting of work on the poll tax by trade unionists and non-payment of the tax by individuals.

As a result the right-wing has now resigned from Edinburgh "Stop It" and is attempting to prevent it from building a base in the labour movement. But the campaign has called a demonstration for Saturday 25 June which will also be backed by the 15 or so local anti-poll tax groups.

As the date for the implementa-

By Stan Crooke

tion of poll tax in Scotland approaches, divisions are growing within the Labour Party and trade unions.

In the Labour Party conflict is growing between those party members who advocate defiance of the tax and those who control the regional council Labour Groups and have given in to the Tories. The Labour Party Scottish Executive has yet to take a position on non-payment and continues to hedge its bets until the special Scottish Party Conference on the poll tax in September.

But Dick Douglas has resigned as leader of the Scottish Parliamentary

Labour Party in protest at Kinnock's refusal to back non-payment. The Labour Coordinating Committee is openly divided over the question of non-payment. Scottish Labour Action, an LCC mark II, is calling for a more militant response by Labour to the poll tax.

There are similar divisions in the trade unions. In a number of unions caucuses against the poll tax have been established, although so far the bureaucracy has been able to hold the line, especially in the all-important union, NALGO. NALGO members are administering the tax now and will lose their jobs once it becomes fully operational.

The recent UCW conference passed a resolution from the Edinburgh Outdoor Branch calling for civil disobedience. The mover of the resolution made it clear that this meant breaking the law.

The Scottish TUC passed a resolution this year for 'total opposition' to the poll tax, without spelling out what that means. It has now called a week of action in September, including a work stoppage of 15 minutes.

We need:

- campaigning by local anti-poll tax groups in the communities directed towards both individual poll tax payers and also local labour movement bodies (Labour Parties,

shop stewards' committees, etc);

- building anti-poll tax caucuses in the trade unions, especially in unions with members in local government whose jobs will be destroyed by the tax;

- Constituency Labour Parties and other affiliated bodies should send resolutions to the special Scottish Labour Party Conference on the poll tax advocating non-implementation of the tax by Labour-controlled councils; boycotting by trade unions; support for non-payment by individuals;

- ongoing pressure from all directions — Labour Parties, trade unions, local community groups, on Labour-controlled authorities to refuse to implement the poll tax, whatever the outcome of the Labour Party special conference.

Opinion poll after opinion poll in Scotland has demonstrated overwhelming support for non-payment.

If the Labour Party special conference fails to back this then it will not be for lack of support from the individual and affiliated membership of the party, but because the union bureaucrats have once again cast their block votes in opposition to the wishes of the members.

Support this Saturday's demonstration and step up the fight against the poll tax. Assemble 10.30am at Hillside Crescent, off Lindon Road, Edinburgh.

### Fund

Our second fund drive for £10,000 over three months is moving more slowly than our first.

In January to March this year, we fell only just short of the £10,000. With only two weeks to go of the April-June fund-drive period, our total stands at £7246.28.

Contributions from a sponsored swim in Sheffield, from a jumble sale in South Lon-

don, and from NUT conference delegates donating part of their expenses, have helped to make this total.

We will extend the April-June fund-drive just three days, to the Workers' Liberty summer school on 1-3 July. A good collection at the school will bring us up to the target we must reach to cover the costs of producing *Socialist Organiser*.

Send donations to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.