

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For Workers' Liberty East and West

Reassessing the Eastern Bloc

Is the USSR socialist? State capitalist? A quite new form of class society? Socialist Organiser opens a discussion.

See page 4 inside

Fight the Tories!

Stop the retreat!

It is important that the CLPs should get together and exchange their views because clearly the people that do the work in the party, the backbone of the party, are the individual members.

They're the ones that have to do the work in the party, they're the ones that carry the banner to the public all the time and when, as now, the party leaders start to retreat it is the rank and file who get the rough end of it.

Therefore the rank and file

By Eric Heffer MP

have the right to get together and discuss the state of affairs in the fight against the Tories, and how best to fight them. When there is a shameful retreat taking place it is the rank and file who must raise the cry: Fight the Tories! Stop the retreat. That's why I support this weekend conference of Constituency Labour Parties in

Manchester, initiated by Wallasey CLP.

After the conference we will have to continue the work of rebuilding the left. The stronghold of the left in the Party is, of course, in the CLPs.

I hope that there will be other conferences following on from this one. What I would like to see is a national organisation of the Campaign Group throughout the country with CLPs affiliated to that.

Constituency Labour Parties conference

**17 September, 11am to 5pm, at the
Manchester Mechanics' Institute
Guest speaker: Eric Heffer**

Postal workers' strike pull-out inside

WOMAN'S EYE

Choice in childbirth

By Lynn Ferguson

Midwives get a rough deal. Over the years they have been downgraded from being the experts on childbirth to being little more than handmaidens for (generally male) obstetricians.

Over recent years there have been some moves back towards giving midwives more of a role.

But is the tide changing? Two recent cases involving midwives suggest so.

Jilly Rosser has been struck off and is unable to practise as a midwife. No mother or child has suffered at her hands — indeed, at her hearing there was a large lobby of women and babies who had been attended by Jilly Rosser. The action she has been struck off for could well have saved a mother's life.

During an apparently normal home delivery, a mother began haemorrhaging. The nearest hospital was minutes away. Jilly Rosser calculated that it would be quicker to ferry the mother to hospital in her own car than to wait for the local obstetric 'flying squad' to arrive. This broke the rules. Jilly Rosser was struck off.

The second case concerns a midwife working for Croydon Health Authority, Christine Warren.

Croydon's policy is to have two midwives in attendance at home births. In February this year Christine Warren arrived at the home of one of her patients who had just gone into labour. She rang the second midwife, but labour proceeded more quickly than expected, and as the second midwife arrived so did the baby.

Ms Warren was suspended the following morning, and in June was sacked for 'gross misconduct'.

Such events seem rather ironic when we look at the state of maternity services and the experience of many mothers who go through the hospitals' consultant-controlled reproduction line.

A national newspaper recently reported the case of a woman who gave birth in a hospital toilet because the powers-that-be refused to believe that her labour was as advanced as she said it was.

Many women either receive anaesthesia they do not want, or are unable to obtain epidurals at night because an all-night anaesthetist service is not available. Cases of unnecessary inductions, caesarians, and episiotomies done for the consultant's personal convenience, or to fit into hospital timetables, are rife.

The weight of reputable medical research now says that flat-on-the-back labour is not only inefficient, but can cause more trauma to the baby — lack of oxygen and the like. Still most hospitals offer no alternative, unless you really push for it (no pun intended).

Choice for women disrupts set hospital routines. Unfortunately, childbirth is not something which can be confined to hospital timetables. More midwife involvement and autonomy undermines consultants' power. Consultants who step out of line can be victimised, ostracised and miss out on promotion — just remember the case of Wendy Savage.

Women need more choice in childbirth. Not the sort of choice exercised by 'Mother of the Year' the Duchess of York, in her private champagne-suite hospital, not the choice advocated by Thatcher and Moore, but choice dependent on democratic input to a properly funded NHS maternity system.



EETPU militants — their branch closed by Hammond — march to back printworkers at Wapping. Photo: Ian Swindale

Stay in the EETPU and fight Hammond!

By Tom Rigby

The EETPU are now out of the TUC. How should socialists and rank and file electricians respond? What's the best way to beat EETPU leader Hammond and the scab business unionism he represents?

There are two possible responses: to stay in the EETPU and fight Hammond from within or to support the breakaway pro-TUC electricians under the EPIU.

Although the prospect of being free from Hammond may appear attractive to a few rank and file electricians, a breakaway union is not the best way to fight at this stage.

The vast bulk of EETPU members, who are by no means hardened scabs, will remain with the union. Meanwhile the EPIU breakaway will be just too small and weak to pose a serious alternative to Hammond.

Formed on the first day of this year's TUC Congress, the EPIU (Electrical and Plumbing Industrial Union) is top heavy and lacks a serious rank and file base.

Only 32 people attended its founding conference. It organised no mass lobby of angry electricians against Hammond at the TUC. After 1 week of existence it has around 540 members or less than 0.015% of the EETPU's 336,000. The breakaway's initial target for members is 5,000 but even if they achieve this figure that only amounts to 1.48% of the EETPU's total membership.

The breakaway union will be dependent on existing TUC unions, in particular the TGWU and MSF, for its initial recruits. Under the EPIU's plan for growth dissident electricians will first join 'holding' branches or sections of existing unions and at a later date transfer to the EPIU.

The fact that the breakaway have adopted this strategy only highlights their weakness amongst rank and file electricians.

If they were as strong as EPIU leader John Aitken seems to suggest then the EPIU would surely be able to pull electricians and plumbers out of the EETPU in its own name

and on the basis of already existing rank and file organisation.

The problem is that the EPIU clearly doesn't have the strength to do this, except in a few isolated cases, and as a result, has to rely on the bureaucratic strength of the other TUC unions to recruit new members.

The EPIU might guarantee safe bureaucratic careers for some of its leaders like John Aitken and Ian Brown but it isn't the best way to fight Hammond.

Rank and file activist electricians should stay in the EETPU where the majority of electricians remain. They should use the ferment created by the union's expulsion to raise the arguments against Hammond and everything he represents.

There may come a time when it's fruitless to continue in the EETPU but the point has not been reached yet. The job of socialists and all active trade unionists is to **fight now** while we still have a chance to stop

Hammond turning the EETPU into a totally closed, hardened scab outfit.

The future of the EETPU will be decided by this struggle.

A policy to defeat Hammond must include:

* Opposition to single union, no-strike deals.

* For immediate reaffiliation to the TUC.

* Support for workers in struggle.

* Opposition to EETPU poaching against TUC unions, as on the Docklands Light Railway.

* A campaign for union democracy including election of all officials for fixed periods and the right of branches and members to communicate independent of the executive.

* Encouragement of the maximum possible contact between rank and file electricians and members of TUC unions. Dissident EETPU branches **must not** be kicked off joint shop stewards committees and trades councils.

* Kick EETPU leaders out of the Labour Party.

TUC should back left in the EETPU

The EPIU strategy of relying on a recruitment campaign from the existing TUC unions to win it members might make some sense if there was a class struggle-orientated TUC at war with Hammond.

But the reality is a long way from that. Though there are real differences between the open scab unionism of Hammond and the tamer new realism of Willis, Edmonds, Christopher, etc., these differences are not clear enough to the vast majority of organised workers either inside or outside the EETPU to justify the 'membership war' approach.

And anyway, a left-led TUC would actually have adopted a different course of action against Hammond. The TUC expulsion

and now the potential membership war both flow from a bureaucratic strategy: first the TUC tries to deal with Hammond by backroom deals, fudge and compromise, then, as this fails, the TUC turns to direct threats and expulsion.

Until now the TUC has given a nod and a wink to union organisers to go and get Hammond's members. All the time Hammond has pulled the TUC centre further to the right.

If the TUC had devoted the resources that could now potentially be thrown into a membership war to the task of campaigning inside the EETPU, with the aim of convincing the rank and file that Hammond's policies are wrong, then things might have turned out differently.

That is what a left-led TUC would have done.

PRESS GANG

Yuppie smut

By Jim Denham

Pornographer David Sullivan's *Sunday Sport* now has a sister publication, called simply *The Sport* published on Wednesdays. Sullivan also has a new editor with the strangely Dickensian name of Peter Grimdsitch to replace the late and unlamented Mike Gabbert.

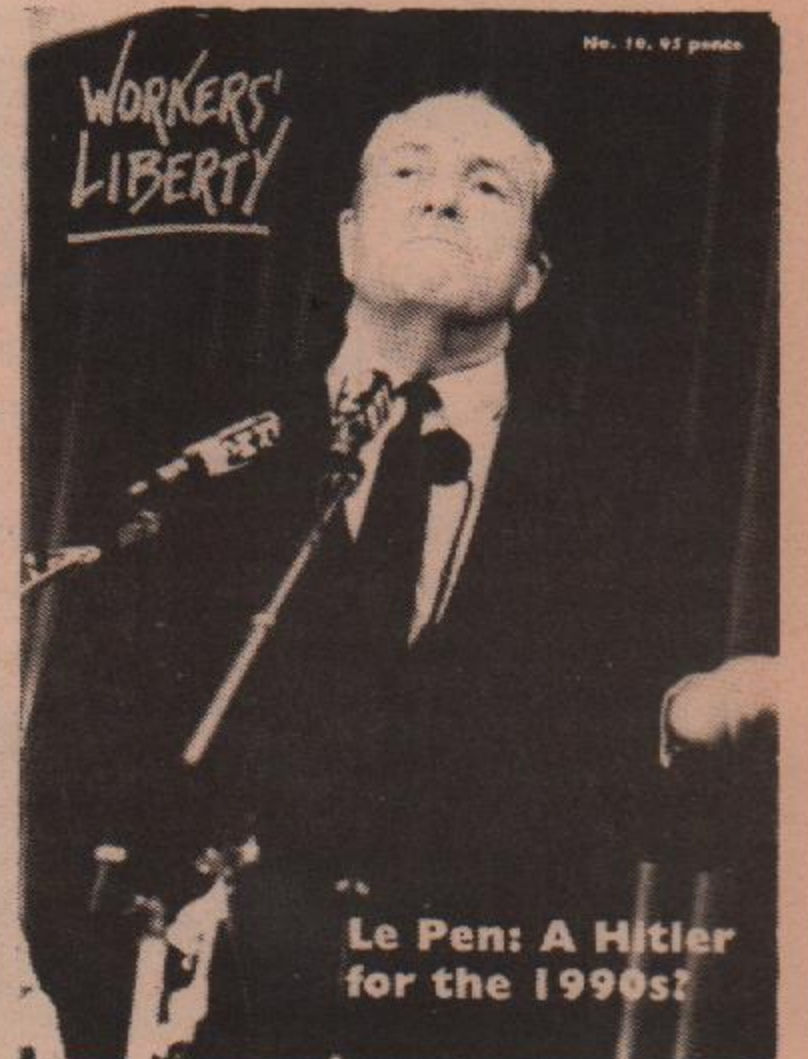
You may recall the period last year when Express Newspapers were so concerned by the success of the *Sunday Sport* that they handed control of their ailing *Star* tabloid over to the Sullivan/Gabbert team. The experiment was not a success and the final straw for the Express group and its suave chairman Lord Stevens was the loss of millions of pounds worth of advertising from Tesco and the Co-op. The *Star* is, to this day, vainly attempting to recover its image as a 'family' newspaper.

Meanwhile the new team of Sullivan and Grimdsitch claim that their Wednesday *Sport* has overtaken the circulation of *Today* and is building up a cult following among yuppies. Grimdsitch has taken tabloid journalism to its logical conclusion by blatantly inventing stories so bizarre that not even Ms Wendy Henry would believe them.

A few examples have included the revelation that Adolf Hitler was a woman; a story about a baby from space brought up by gorillas in the Amazon jungle; a 100-stone man who hasn't eaten for months in an attempt to find a girlfriend; and 'World War II bomber found on moon' (plus the follow-up story, 'World War II bomber found on moon vanishes').

Unlike, say, the *Sun* or *Star*, the *Sport* makes not even a token effort to carry anything vaguely resembling news in the usually understood sense. Apart from bizarre 'exclusives', its other main content is, of course, sex...in the form of obviously fabricated 'true life' letters, articles about 'nights of passion', etc., and various ads, many of which seem to emanate from companies owned by Mr Sullivan himself.

I can quite believe that the *Sport's* main audience is now yuppies rather than the working class readers who Mike Gabbert aimed at; it has just the right combination of trivia, childishness and smut that would appeal to the Porsche and winebar crowd. I can also understand people (especially women) getting very angry about this so-called newspaper and backing calls from Claire Short and others to have it banned. But is it really dangerous, or just silly and degrading? My personal view is the latter but I'm willing to be persuaded otherwise.



Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. 90p plus 30p postage.



Kinnock and Hattersley in 1983: as we said, not our dream! Photo: John Harris.

Labour Left organises

What should socialists in the Labour Party do at a time like this?

We live in a time of arrogant, strutting Tory rule, and labour movement retreat. A time of demoralised, faltering leaders, like Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley. A time when the weak and the timid and the self-serving desert the movement, or change sides from left to right within it, guided in their own way by Mrs Thatcher's golden rule: look after Number One.

It is a time when many of those who set out only a few years ago to fight capitalism until wage-slavery was abolished have shrunk and sunk into tepid reformists and hot careerists.

What should socialists do? Hold the line and organise! Organise in the Labour Party, in the trade unions, in the factories, and in the offices!

The health workers' and Post Office strikers have shown that working-class militancy is not dead. It will revive.

Those strikes are also evidence that, given a lead from the labour

By John O'Mahony

movement, a mass fight back could be launched against the Tories now — on the poll tax, for example.

But what are the Labour leaders doing? They are trying to *Thatcherise* the Labour Party. They are systematically trying to expunge from the Party what's left of any socialist aspirations. They are now on the point of launching a new wave of witch-hunting expulsions.

These days Neil Kinnock on the TV comes across like a nervous and unconfident new pupil in a Parliamentary school of etiquette who feels himself to be a yokel and is willing to take instruction from the Tories, the press and the TV interviewers on how he should behave.

It was *indecent*, the way that under the questioning of a TV interviewer he distanced himself from the TUC decision to expel the scabbed EETPU. Indecent!

Kinnock went to the TUC. Did he call for resistance to the Tories? Pledge Labour Party support to trade unionists fighting back? Just the contrary. He tried to do the Tories' work. He tried to persuade the TUC out of one of its timid acts of defiance of the Government. His contribution was to say that the TUC should not boycott the compulsory-cheap-labour 'Employment Training' scheme.

The same Neil Kinnock cut an almost creditable figure during the 1987 election when he spoke on behalf of the oppressed and downtrodden of Britain. But that was the election. Now it's back to business as usual — to the business

of bowing the knee to Thatcher.

Kinnock wants the labour movement and the Labour Party to *accept* and agree to perpetuate what Thatcher has done in the last nine years. He will not even accept a commitment to reverse the Tory cuts in the NHS!

At the Labour Party's 1983 conference, soon after Labour's defeat in the General Election, *Socialist Organiser* outraged many delegates with our front page comment on the Kinnock-Hattersley 'dream ticket' — "Not Our Dream". Were we wrong?

The record has been fudge, retreat, and crawl where the Tories are concerned — and expel, stifle, intimidate or buy off where the Left is concerned.

Neil Kinnock was elected leader of the Labour Party, like Michael Foot before him, as the candidate of the Left. We had better candidates — like, for example, Eric Heffer, who stood for the leadership in 1983 — but it was the broad left which elected Kinnock.

Kinnock owed his victory to the series of semi-revolutionary changes in the Labour Party at the beginning of the 1980s which put the broad labour movement — the unions and the Constituency Labour Parties — in substantial control of the Party, breaking the MPs' monopoly. Kinnock and his soft-left allies have rattled on the hopes of their supporters.

The Labour Party is not yet ready to roll over and play dead. It is not yet ready to abandon all concerns except the concern to win office on any, even quasi-Thatcherite, policies.

Many in the Labour Party have seen the deployment of semi-Thatcherite policies by 'Socialist'

parties in France, Spain, Australia and New Zealand, and do not want a repetition in Britain. There is a strong spirit of resistance to what Kinnock is doing in the Labour Party.

The Benn-Heffer leadership campaign is one expression of this. The conference of Constituency Labour Parties initiated by Wallasey CLP

and to be held on 17 September is another. Over 30 CLPs have already said they will send delegates. It will be the biggest such gathering for many a year.

If the Left organises and fights back, we can stop Kinnock's drive to Thatcherise the Labour Party. Saturday's conference is an important beginning.

Call for campaign

The letter of invitation for the CLPs conference to be held this Saturday, 17 September

This year's Party Conference will be crucial for the fundamental direction of the Party. Basic aspects of Party policy are now up for grabs — especially Clause Four and unilateralism — and the move to whittle away Party democracy continues.

CLPs have so far been denied any voice in Walworth Road's 'Policy Reviews'. And the National Executive Committee will be putting a constitutional amendment to this year's Party Conference giving MPs a powerful veto over future elections for the Party leadership, requiring 20 per cent of them to first agree

before CLPs, other affiliated organisations and MPs have the right to determine what the leadership should be.

We need a Party campaign in defence of Clause Four, unilateralism, and Party democracy.

We hope that the CLPs conference will help build such a campaign. A big representative conference of CLPs on the eve of Party conference would have an effect on the outcome of the votes there — demonstrating, for example, the strength of feeling among the Party's grassroots to trade union delegations.

In addition, CLPs are far too often isolated from each other. The conference will provide a forum for us to meet, exchange experiences and discuss ongoing organisation.

It will also give us a chance to review and discuss tactics for Party conference, and by improving coordination maximise our impact.

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Reassessing the Eastern Bloc

The most common idea on the left is that the USSR and the East European states it controls are some sort of socialist societies.

We, however, don't think so — never have. We have subscribed to the so-called 'orthodox Trotskyist' notion that the Stalinist states are best categorised as "degenerated and deformed workers' states" — far from socialism because of their bureaucratic regimes, but an advance on capitalism because of their nationalised economies.

We have long said that the "degenerated and deformed workers' states" formula was unsatisfactory. By now, most supporters of *Socialist Organiser* no longer believe that the designation "workers' state" — degenerated, deformed, or whatever — makes any sort of sense.

The paper's National Editorial Board voted last Sunday to review our nominal adherence to that formula, and to open a discussion in the paper on the Eastern Bloc states. This editorial explains why.

Our programme

We are for workers' liberty East and West. We are for working-class self-liberation East and West. We are with the workers when they demand the right to organise and speak freely, the right to freedom for individuals and for nationalities, and the right to control economic affairs — East and West. We are with the workers when they fight for wages and conditions — East and West.

We are therefore with Solidarnosc — for its right to operate and its fight for the wages, conditions, and liberties of its members — against Poland's rulers. We are with Solidarnosc even when, as at present, its leaders call for a market economy.

The official trade-union organisations in the Eastern bloc are not real workers' unions. They are agencies of the factory managements and the government. We are therefore for trade unions in other countries breaking links with those state unions, and establishing links instead with Solidarnosc in Poland and the pioneer free trade union groups elsewhere.

We are for the democratic right to self-determination of nations, as the only basis for international workers' unity. In accord with that

MARXISM, STALINISM AND AFGHANISTAN



80p
Second edition
March 1987

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet

This pamphlet contains an account of the events which preceded the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and a detailed examination of the 'Workers' State' theory of *Militant* which supported the Russian occupation.

EDITORIAL

principle, we have opposed the USSR's military occupation of Afghanistan.

We are for:

- Disbandment of the police and armed forces, and their replacement by a people's militia.

- Breaking up the bureaucratic hierarchy of administration, and replacing it with a democratic regime of councils of elected and recallable workers' delegates, with freedom to form many 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.

We are for nationalisation of the major means of production. But what exists now in the Eastern Bloc is no form of socialism. Nationalisation is a means to an end — working-class liberation from the economic exploitation of those who control the means of production. That is not achieved when the nationalised economy and the monopolising state are in effect the property of a ruling elite whose upper layers lord it over society as the aristocrats and capitalists do elsewhere.

We advocate the replacement of the system of nationalised economy under a state-monopoly bureaucracy with a socialised economy under the democratic control of the working class.

Trotsky's approach

All these positions follow from our basic goal of working-class self-liberation, and our belief — based on the evidence of the Russian Revolution of 1917, France 1968, Portugal 1974-5, Hungary 1956, Poland 1980-1, and many other struggles — that the working class can liberate itself and reconstruct society on socialist lines.

None of these positions depends on, or is affected by, precise sociological definitions of the states with nationalised economies and structures similar to the USSR's. Whatever progressive significance we attach to the fact of nationalised property — even if it is a large one — it cannot outweigh our allegiance to the living struggles of the working class.

In taking this approach, we follow Trotsky. "The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organisation of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones..."

The stratification of the means of production is, as we said, a progressive measure. But its progressiveness is relative: its specific weight depends on the sum-total of all the other factors.

Thus, we must first and foremost establish that the extension of the territory dominated by bureaucratic autocracy and parasitism, cloaked by 'socialist' measures, can augment the prestige of the Kremlin, engender illusions concerning the possibility of replacing the proletarian revolution by bureaucratic manoeuvres, and so on. This evil by far outweighs the progressive con-

tent of Stalinist reforms...

In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy."

We also follow the Trotskyist movement of 1948.

"It will be necessary to continue this revolutionary class struggle consistently and uninterruptedly in the case of the occupation of any given country by the Russian army, even though the revolutionary forces clash with the Russian army, and also in spite of the military consequences which this might entail for the Russian army in its operations against the imperialist military forces. In any case, the use of military means remains subordinated to the necessities of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat in whatever countries it may be. Thus, our defence of the USSR remains identical in all cases with the continuation of the revolutionary class struggle..."

'Deformed workers' states'

After 1948 the Trotskyist movement went off the rails. It lost its clear focus on the working class as the agency of socialist politics. Often it looked instead to a vaguely-defined 'process of world revolution'. Working-class action was desirable for this process to go forward rapidly and healthily — but the world revolution could very well progress without or despite the working class.

Undeniably, this wavering of focus accompanied the Trotskyists' codification of a new analysis of the Eastern Bloc states, as "degenerated and deformed workers' states". We have accepted that codification, but dissented from the conclusions that most of its adherents have drawn from it.

Trotsky, right up to his death, regarded the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state". He considered that its nationalised and planned economy, created by the workers' revolution, defined it as a form of workers' state — a society beyond capitalism — but that economic base was combined in a contradictory and unstable structure with the totalitarian rule of a vicious bureaucracy, "different from fascism only in more unbridled savagery". The bureaucracy had all the vices of a ruling class, but had not yet demonstrated the stability and substantial historical role of one.

Such an attitude did not lead Trotsky to waver in any way in his political focus on working-class self-liberation.

In 1945-9 the Trotskyists saw the basic economic forms of the USSR — those which had for Trotsky defined it as a sort of workers' state — established in many other countries. Political regimes similar to the USSR's were also established in those countries. If the USSR was a degenerated workers' state, then these countries must also be some sort of workers' state. They could not be called "degenerated", because they had been bureaucratic police states from the start. So they were "deformed" workers' states — states in which Stalinist political formations or the USSR's army had created as much as survived of 'the conquests of October 1917', together with a Stalinist regime.

On the face of it, this conclusion need not lead to any weakness in our allegiance to working-class self-liberation in the states thus

designated "degenerated and deformed workers' states". If it means that we call the workers' anti-bureaucratic revolution there "political" rather than "social", then — as Trotsky explained back in 1939 — the difference is in terminology rather than programme.

Perspective

The Trotskyists in 1945-51 were in part influenced by issues of broad historical perspective. If the Stalinist states were "degenerated and deformed workers' states", then the following perspective could be deduced.

Capitalism must be in extreme decay: that was why post-capitalist states had been created even under bureaucratic leadership and therefore in such aberrant forms. The aberrant forms were inherently and acutely unstable. A world of collapsing capitalism and unstable aberrant bureaucratisms put workers' power on the agenda as soon as the necessary political leadership came forward.

In 1939 Trotsky had written: "The historical alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society". Now the alternative was posed not only for the USSR but also for Stalinist states covering one third of the world.

If these were not workers' states, then what were they? They must be new exploiting societies, and new exploiting societies of undeniable dynamism. Capitalist development was leading not to socialism but to a new revived form of capitalism (state capitalism) or to a new form of exploitation (bureaucratic collectivism). Where did this leave socialist workers? As helpless utopians?

Some Trotskyists in 1945-51 did try to formulate "state capitalist" or "bureaucratic collectivist" analyses. But they dealt unconvincingly with the issues of historical perspective. Most of them became hopeless sectarians.

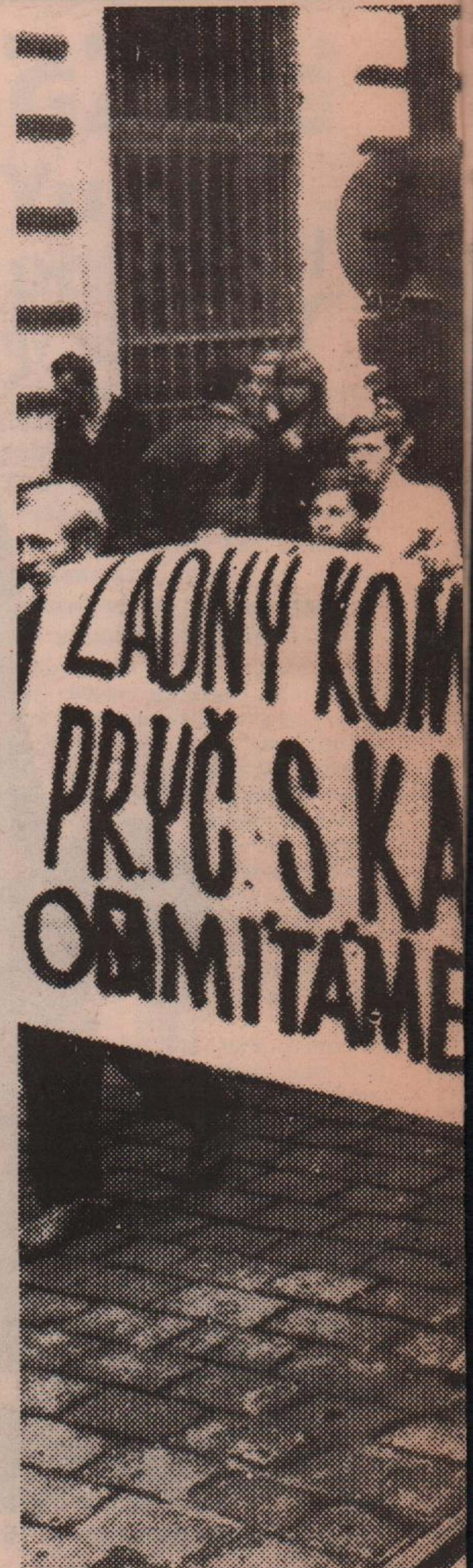
The name-tag and the theories

But what in fact did the mainstream of the Trotskyist movement achieve with the codification of the "degenerated and deformed workers' state" thesis in 1951 at the Third World Congress of the Fourth International? Not a coherent theory with a grip on reality. They achieved only a name-tag — "degenerated and deformed workers' state" — behind which over the years accumulated a wide variety of different theories.

What the "workers' state" name-tag signified was the acceptance of the Stalinist states as in some way progressive. Within that framework, the description and analysis differed widely in both detail and implications.

For Ted Grant, of what is now the *Militant* tendency, a nationalised economy was ipso facto a workers' state, no matter how or by whom it was created. For Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, the deformed workers' states were nationalised economies created by some sort of working-class agency — by the USSR's state authority in Eastern Europe, or by dissident Stalinist parties in Yugoslavia and China which were in fact "deformed workers' parties". For Joseph Hansen, the "working-class" character of the agency in Yugoslavia and China was defined by the mass pressure on the Stalinist parties — although these parties remained Stalinist, they had been forced to go further than they wanted.

None of these theories was satisfactory. Grant's theory implied



Students march through Prague, 1968

that workers' states could be created without, despite, against, or in the absence of a working class. It pointed Trotskyists towards supporting such creation without, despite, or against the working class as a major if flawed step forward towards socialism. It could be sustained only by saying that state capitalism and bureaucratic collectivism were by definition impossible — a view Trotsky never took.

The Pablo/Mandel or the Hansen thesis could be sustained only by gross illusions about the nature of the Yugoslav and Chinese (and later Vietnamese, Cuban etc.) revolutions. These were not workers' revolutions. The social base of the revolutionary parties was mainly peasant; the parties were heavily bureaucratized and militarised; their ideology was Stalinist; and, far from being pushed against their wishes by the working class, they clamped down on the workers.

These theories were advanced by sincere and militant anti-Stalinists. Yet they all led to softness on some bureaucracies, some times — whether it be Grant's steadfast support for the USSR's murderous occupation of Afghanistan, or the illusions of various parts of the Pablo/Mandel/Hansen current (represented in Britain today by *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook*) on the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutionaries.

Most Trotskyists have wallowed in confusion and vacillation — glorifying a succession of Stalinist totalitarian bureaucracies from Tito through Mao to Castro and Ho Chi Minh. One staggering fact: it was 20 years after Mao took power in all of China, clamping down on the workers and jailing the Chinese Trotskyists, before the mainstream of post-Trotsky Trotskyism decided that a political revolution was necessary!

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Tuffin's



dirty deal

Reject the deal! No retreat on DRAS!

By a Manchester postal worker

The return to work agreement is completely unacceptable, and we should throw it out.

Although the agreement deals with the issue of the stage 3 letters, the situation is still unclear about casuals and diversion of mail. There must be no diversion of mail without the agreement of the branches affected.

As far as DRAS goes, the agreement leaves us in a worse position than before the strike.

We came out on a 24 hour strike against the payment of DRAS to offices in the South East. That strike was part of a campaign of industrial action to force the Post Office to withdraw the payment (as agreed by both sides in the shorter working week deal) and to negotiate other ways of solving the recruitment problem — like a better basic wage!

The Post Office tried to undermine our action by bringing in the casuals. That's why we have been out for the last two weeks.

And what does the National Executive want us to accept now? The

Post Office to continue paying DRAS while negotiations continue for an alternative.

What a sell out! The Post Office have got what they want, and we've got nothing.

We've lost almost two weeks' wages. Through rank and file action we have put massive pressure on the Post Office. Even big business has been telling them to sort it out.

Yet the Executive wants to throw all this away. They are trying to make fools of us. They've done nothing to back our action, and now they're trying to pull the rug from under us.

No-one wants to stay out longer than we have to, but surely we can't accept this. Like they did at Ford, we should tell them to go back and get what we want — the withdrawal of DRAS. And until then we stay out!

Branches that vote to reject the agreement should get together and send pickets out to keep the strike solid. No-one should go back until we all do! We should set up a joint strike committee.

We have seen we can't rely on our Executive. It's time we started relying on ourselves.



Police protect scabs. Photo Paul Hermman (Profile)

A test case

This dispute is a test case and Tuffin has failed the test. Management is just probing us in this dispute; for instance they don't have an effective scab system worked out. They want to see how the union will react.

They must be happy because Tuffin has backed down. Now management will be preparing to come in harder, and next time they come for us they'll probably have a well-prepared scabbing operation and therefore they will be harder to beat.

The situation is like in 1982, when the South Yorkshire miners forced the Tories to retreat. This was possible because the Tories didn't have all their strike-breaking machinery in place. But

in '84, when the Tories went looking for a fight, they did have their squads of riot police, anti-union laws and stockpiles of coal. So they provoked the miners, and went in for the kill.

The leaders of the labour movement just stood back and watched.

If the miners had fought earlier, as Arthur Scargill had argued, perhaps the defeat of 1984-5 could have been avoided.

Tuffin has done the opposite of Scargill. Postal workers want to fight now, but the union leadership have stabbed them in the back. Post Office management can now prepare for the battles of the future with more confidence.

Stage 3

Many of the suspensions of staff around the country are because UCW members refused to sign Stage 3 letters on returning to work. The letter commits them to working 'normally', i.e. handling mail redirected from offices in dispute and doing whatever you are told. Clearly we are against such bullyboy tactics.

Here is what Alan Tuffin had to say about the possibility of this type of letter issued by management, in a circular for the 24 hour strike: 'If such papers are produced, refusal to sign them should not be pursued to the extent that it endangers our members' ability to return to work. If the employer makes it a condition of return to work then the forms should be signed.'

Broad Left meeting

About 60 people from branches throughout the country came to the UCW Broad Left meeting in Manchester on Sunday 11th.

The meeting voted to campaign for much the sort of policies we have been putting forward, although it lost touch with reality when it agreed with a Militant-sponsored resolution that a minimum condition for a return to work should be a £20 across the board increase!

The meeting also went on for two hours before the dispute was discussed.

Even if the meeting had been better, however, 60 people isn't enough. We need hundreds if we are going to bring the Executive under the control of the members.

Casuals

Half the casuals working at Mount Pleasant sorting office in London refused to cross the UCW picket lines last week.

The strikers spoke to the casuals, explaining the issues, and produced a leaflet arguing their case.

The backsta

By Gerry Bates

Why union leaders sell out strikes and how to stop them

Question: What does "talks without pre-conditions" mean to Alan Tuffin?

Answer: It means he can give away as much as he wants without pre-conditions.

This may sound like a sick joke, but sadly, it's a fair picture of postal workers' leader Alan Tuffin. The question that comes to mind is how come such a shabby character can get to become the leader of a union?

Part of the answer to this question can be found by turning to the pages of last Friday's 'Independent'.

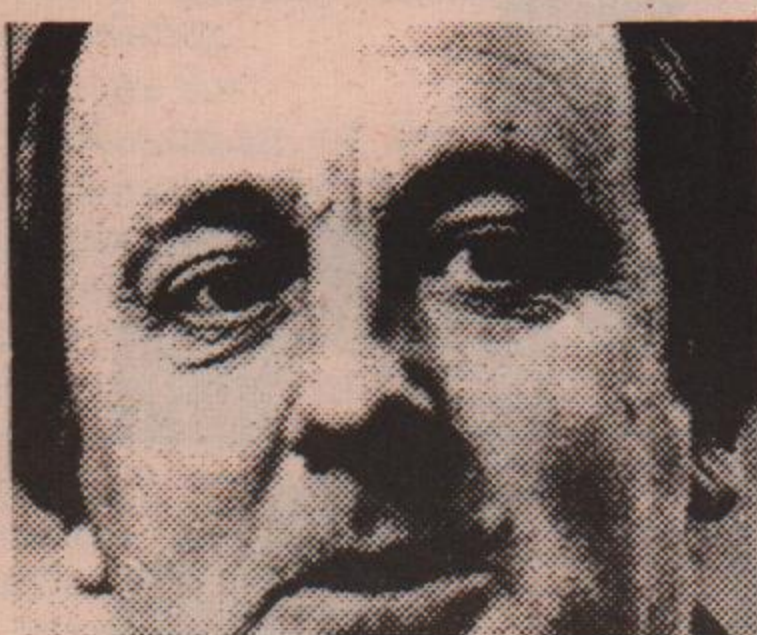
There we can find a profile of Tuffin ('A misunderstood mirror image of Arthur Scargill') by one Barrie Clement.

Unlike Scargill — who is universally hated by what we used to call Fleet Street — Tuffin gets a good press; well at least from the quality end of the market. Clement writes: "The 'Postman Pat' tag hung on him by one paper during a strike over working hours before last Christmas was unfair. It was Mr Tuffin's discreet discussion with Sir Bryan Nicholson, the Post Office chairman that brought about the final settlement.

Almost certainly it will be Mr Tuffin's confidential conversations with Sir Bryan on this occasion — over the head of Royal Mail management — which will help to smooth the way to industrial peace...

His skill as a negotiator and his realisation of the realities of commercial life should mean that the present dispute will not develop into a life or death battle like the miner's strike."

So Tuffin has all the qualities for a top trade union official according to Fleet St: he likes backroom stitch-ups and understands 'the realities of



commercial life'. Now 'the realities of commercial life' is one of those strange phrases adopted by our rulers to disguise a cruder point. What they really mean is Tuffin understands that the bosses have got to make a profit and the union can't stand in the way of that.

Tuffin is the kind of trade union leader that management like. He accepts the rules of the game as they lay them down.

Though he comes from the working class (Tuffin joined the Post Office as a telegram boy straight from secondary school at the age of 16) he stands between the workers and management. He sees his role as a duel one. He tries to do two different things at the same time. He is forced to defend 'my members' while at the same time attempting to limit the demands of the rank and file to the horizons set by management according to that magic formula 'commercial realities'.

Now in some conditions skilful trade union officials can get away with this. In conditions of boom and expansion trade unions can win major concessions out of the employers. But, unfortunately for Alan Tuffin, the 1980s are not years of boom and expansion, and Post Office management want to modernise the industry by screwing as much as possible out of the

workforce. As one Liverpool postal worker put it:

"In car industry terms we are faced with speed ups, and Post Office management is squeezing us more and more.

They admit that the mail has gone up 25% in the last five years. With productivity deals there has been an increased pressure on the workers.

Something like 80% of the Post Office costs go on wages: hence the attack on wages and conditions".

In conditions like this Tuffin is forced to make some stark choices. He is faced with a militant and angry rank and file on the one hand who want to see some action and a determined management on the other who want see him face up to, yes you've guessed it, 'commercial realities'.

In this kind of situation Tuffin can loose control. The Financial Times put it quite well:

"The Union of Communication Workers Executive Council will today attempt to answer a key question which the postal strike has raised for it: who is running the dispute, the union's leadership or the rank and file?"

The same Liverpool postal worker that we quoted earlier made a similar point:

"The Post Office is even beginning to sound like the old port employers, complaining about 'wildcat' strikes. They make agreements with the national officials, which then get overturned by delegates and the shop floor. In the Post Office the bosses have got a union leadership that cannot deliver."

In cooking up the present sell-out deal Tuffin has been at least as worried about how to bring the rank and file of the union under some

kind of control as he has been to force concessions out of management.

He has to prove he can 'deliver'. In fact if anything the present 'agreement' looks like a deal between management and the national union leadership to pull the militant branches of the union into line.

Tuffin has described the deal as a success but really he's been about as "successful" in the present negotiations as Sebastian Coe is likely to be in the Seoul Olympics!

Here's some food for thought for those strikers who've been on the picket lines for the last 12 days.

While you stand firm without strike pay your leader — sure of his salary because he hasn't declared a national strike — was enjoying the good life.

As the Independent put it:

"The conflict has not prevented Mr Tuffin from spending most of the week at Bournemouth... He plays squash and swims to ease the tension! It's good to relax, because otherwise tempers can become frayed'.

So Tuffin relaxes whilst his members fight. Well, he can afford to, the UCW general secretary receives a wage of at least £35,000 a year (the same as the salary of a District Head Postmaster).

Unfortunately, he's not so keen to protect the standard of living of ordinary postal workers.

Under the last deal Tuffin negotiated some postal workers lost as much as £50 a week. Tuffin didn't start off in life to be such a scoundral. But over time, the habits, the routine, the lifestyle of a modern trade union leader can bend and shape even the best individuals. Union leaders start to behave and think like the managers who they spend more and more of their time with. Their first loyalty becomes the union machine from which they derive their status, position and livelihood — rather than the flesh and blood human beings who make up the union in the real world.

Even principled left wingers can become right wing bureaucrats if they take up positions and responsibilities in the union machine without possessing clear political ideas or without being willing to subject themselves to rank and file control.

For instance during the Basingstoke postal workers strike of 1983 over the victimisation of Socialist Organiser supporters and UCW branch official Alan Fraser it was officials with a left reputation John Taylor and Gerry Casey who broke the strike.

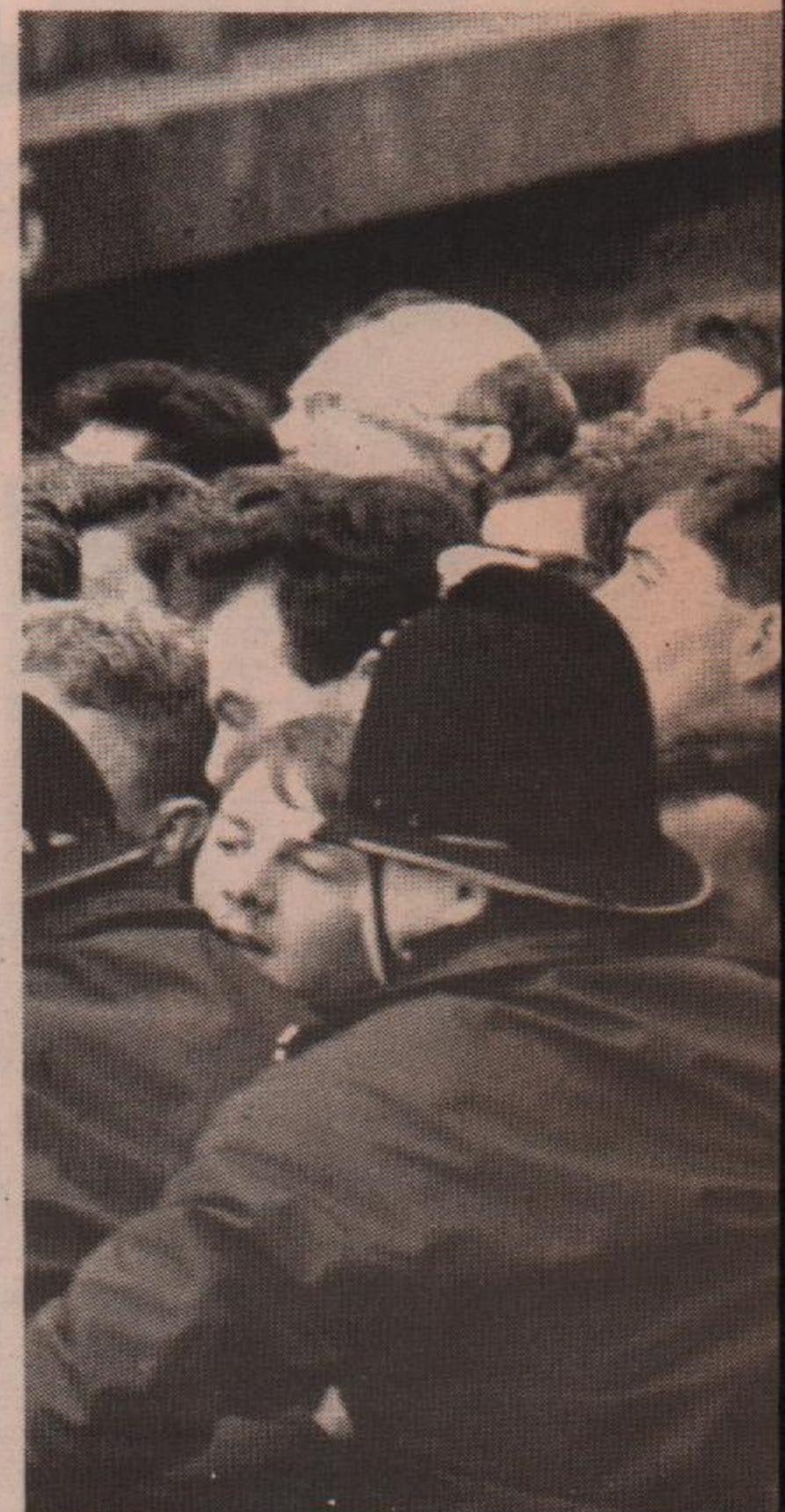
So how do we stop this happening? How can the rank and file take control of the union?

The first step is for the rank and file to organise and campaign for democracy and fighting policies in the union.

All officials should be elected for definite terms (no more than two years) — Tuffin is elected for five. And all officials should be subject to recall at any time. Full time officials should be paid the average wage in their industry.

Union policy making bodies and delegations to the TUC and Labour Party should be made up of elected lay members only.

It's important for the left to challenge for the leadership of the union. There is nothing inevitable about left officials moving right it depends on the extent the rank and file can control these officials and on their having a clear political commitment to fighting for the interests of working class people.



Pickets confront police at Liverpool. P

A woman

I'll never forget that day we got our own back: me and Hyacinth on the walks next door to each other. For some reason all the blokes used to grab Hyacinth. All the women got their share of bum-pinching and breast-grabbing, except those of us who fought back. But Hyacinth seemed to cop for the lot. Perhaps because she let them get away with it. They used to make you feel like, if you didn't go along with it, you were a prude or a kill-joy — "can't take a joke". Hyacinth didn't want that saying about her. So she blushed and giggled and struggled. But she never said,

Privatisation

"Divide and rule" is the motto behind the Tory Government's drive for privatisation.

Through privatisation they can chop up big public-sector strongholds of trade unionism into separate enterprises with separate employers and separate negotiations.

Tory anti-union law will then ban workers in those separate enterprises from actively supporting each other. Sectors that the Tories want to cut back can be isolated and exposed to the cutting edge of the market.

The first steps in privatising a public enterprise are to squeeze up profitability — so that it will be saleable — and to chop it up into separate sectors which can then become separate private enterprises.

The Tories have already taken those first steps with the Post Office. Work rates have been speeded up and wages squeezed so that it is now the most profitable postal service in the world.



Union leaders like Willis and Tuffin live in a different world from ordinary union members.

Robbers



Photo: Paul Herrman (Profile).

Man in the post office

By Jean Lane

"No", or hit out. So they pretended to believe she liked it.

I knew she didn't like it. I worked next to her. I watched her stiffen in anticipation when she knew it was coming. Then the forced smile and then the wriggling and "oh go on, let me go". And when he had gone away again, the smile suddenly disappearing, the rubbing of the sore spots, sometimes close to tears and having to work quicker now to get the bag packed and out in time for the bus.

But I'll never forget that one day. A young lad, new in that week, and desperate to be "one of the lads", had noticed the treatment Hyacinth got and decided to try his

luck. As he walked past us to his own frame he grabbed her round the waist from behind, picked her up and swung her round, then walked away laughing.

Hyacinth wasn't laughing though. Nor was she close to tears. She was mad! The indignity of it: a woman in her 40s being treated like a plaything by a young boy who hadn't been in the office 5 minutes. And the indignity of the fact that anyone can treat you so: invading your space, assaulting your body.

Well anyway, we decided to get him back. The next time he walked behind us, we both swung round. I got his feet. Hy got his head and we got him on the floor and sat on him. The whole place was laughing at him. He never tried to grab anyone again. Hy looked ten feet tall.

Of course it wasn't just off our

Man: divide and rule

In 1981 Telecom was split off from the Post Office. Telecom was privatised in 1984 — and the spiral of increased prices for most customers and worse service has not stopped since then!

In 1986 the Post Office was split into four sections — Letters, Parcels, Counters, and Girobank. The Government is now privatising Girobank.

Parcels and Counters are on the Tories' list as possibles for privatisation. Piecemeal semi-privatisation is already on the agenda for Counters, through plans to shift a lot of Crown post offices and shift the business to more privately-run sub post offices.

During the 1987 general election campaign, Margaret Thatcher said that Letters would not be privatised. There would indeed be problems even from a Tory point of view in selling it off.

As present a letter to the next post in London costs the same as a letter to the Shetlands. Mail services in rural areas are subsidised from

big-city mail.

It would not be difficult for competitors to undercut the Post Office on big-city mail. Then what would happen to rural services? Post Office bosses say they would have to put the charge for a first-class letter up to 75p to cover costs.

Now rural areas provide a lot of Tory voters — and a lot of customers for direct-mail and mail order operations. So the Tories are hesitant about privatising the letter post.

Early this year, however, the Tory Centre for Policy Studies published proposals for gradual privatisation. First private companies would be allowed to compete for mail priced at 50p or above. (The present limit is £1). Then they would be allowed to compete without restriction; and finally the letters business would be sold off.

Whatever their hesitations on detail, there is a consistent drive behind the Tories' plans. It's time we had more than a piecemeal fight back.

blokes we got the hassle. There were always stories of inspectors who would give you a bit of extra overtime if you put up with the groping. And if anyone heard of you getting a bit extra, or getting away without a ticking-off or something, you must have done something to get it. As though it's your fault that the inspector's a sexist pig who gives women special treatment they don't ask for or want. Of course, if they heard of you telling an inspector to get his bloody hands off, you were frigid!

One year I got to go to UCW Conference as a visitor. Looking at the delegate hall you could see how the National Union got away with using the women's page for weddings, recipes and knitting patterns instead of working women, equal opportunities and sexual harassment.

A sea of men's faces, despite the fact that a large percentage of the UCW are women. A woman was called by the chairperson, John Taylor, to take part in the debate. "Come on darling", he said. Wolf whistles followed her all the way down the delegate hall to the rostrum and all the way back — "Get 'em off, luv!". I don't think anyone listened to what she had to say. I got told off by my delegation for complaining about it. They were all men too.

Over half the workers in my office were women. They never got anywhere near the union branch let alone the national conference. They worked there because the shifts fitted in with their family commitments. But the branch officers used to say that the women weren't interested in the union and only worked for pin-money. They should hold meetings in work time. That's the only way the women in my office could go. They should organise baby-sitting or a creche. And they should encourage women to get involved because they are just as militant, have just as much to offer the union and have special issues of their own to get the union to take up as well, like sexual harassment for a start.

The lessons of 1971

By Mick O'Sullivan

The post workers have been centre-stage in the class struggle before. Their strike in 1971 was one of the great battles between the working class and the Tory government elected in 1970, which was then making a first attempt at what is today called Thatcherism.

The Tories won that battle, as they had previously won a battle against the power workers. It was not until the miners humbled them in early 1972 that the Tories began to lose their confidence. But the post workers could have won in 1971. That defeat has lessons for today.

In October 1970 the union — then called the UPW (Union of Post Office Workers) — lodged a claim for £3 or 15% wage increase, whichever was the greater. Militants wanted a £5 claim.

The Post Office offered 8%. Unofficial strikes took place.

The national strike began in January. It ended 44 days later with no real advances. The right wing UPW leaders believed they were in for a quick strike or more likely just the threat of a strike to bring the government to the negotiating table. They were unprepared for the Tories' intransigence — and for the determination and combativity of the rank and file.

Time and again the strikers went beyond the constraints of the leadership. Strict instructions had been issued that picketing be restricted to four people. There was no law at the time restricting picketing. The union leaders just wanted to keep the strike quiet and respectable.

Yet where serious scabbing took

place, at the telephone exchanges dealing with international calls, the number of pickets exceeded 100. (Telephones were then run by the Post Office, rather than being a separate business.)

Strike committees also organised regular report-back meetings.

Solidarity was also shown every Thursday at the weekly strike rallies in Hyde Park. Each week these got bigger and more militant in their outlook.

The rank and file were determined and willing to face hardship. But the union leaders were aghast at the drain on the union funds of a long strike. The UPW was running out of money, and its leaders had no concept of organising a broad campaign for financial support. They seized at the first chance to end the dispute through arbitration.

Many strikers were disgusted. But the experienced militant activists were few and scattered. At the start of the strike mass meetings would enthusiastically cheer the union's right wing leader, Tom Jackson, with chants of 'J-A-C-K-S-O-N, Jackson!' Having decided to go for arbitration, Jackson was able to rush through a vote to return to work.

Strikes need militant and determined leadership. And if the official leaders are not militant and determined, then the best activists must get organised in a rank and file movement which can challenge those officials, explain the issues and map out a fighting strategy right from the start.

Solidarity betrayed

Just how far management will go in attacking workers' rights can be shown by the experience of the Basingstoke strike in 1983.

By Dion D'Silva

The strike was against the victimisation of post office worker Alan Fraser, a Socialist Organiser supporter. The victimisation was part of Post Office management's drive to clear the way for its 'efficiency' drive.

The national union leadership played a shameful role in the strike's defeat.

Traditionally Basingstoke branch wasn't very active. However strike action had led to the reinstatement of a young postman sacked in 1980. This resulted in a change of branch leadership, with Alan Fraser becoming Postal Secretary.

In 1982 a 24-hour strike forced management to reinstate another suspended postman and to increase the number of duties in the office.

Management were now out to get Alan. His signature had been forged on Late Attendance slips and false charges of leaving letters behind were made. In August 1983 Alan was sacked for absenteeism — a total of 15 days in a year — nothing extraordinary.

A mass meeting voted by 120-1 to strike. Daily mass meetings were held and strike bulletins produced. Regional Officer Gerry Casey told the strikers that the best they could hope for was to appeal to management on 'humanitarian grounds'.

This was rejected by the strikers who continued to receive tremendous support from other postal workers, health workers and the local Labour Party.

John Taylor, UCW Assistant Secretary at the time, had gained a

left reputation for the struggle in the Grunwick dispute, often against the union leadership. Yet he told Alan to accept the bosses' offer of £6,000. Alan refused.

However, after nearly a week on strike and after two votes, Taylor convinced the strikers to go back. Many broke down and wept. They knew they could have won.

Subsequently the UCW leadership sought to justify the sell-out by themselves, publishing Alan's sick record in a union circular and launching a witch-hunting attack on Socialist Organiser.

Nevertheless the strike had shown that a lifeless branch could be transformed into a fighting, campaigning one. This was achieved through a democratic and accountable leadership.

The strikers had support from other workers who had remembered the solidarity shown by the Basingstoke workers in their disputes. The lessons from this local branch hold good for the national union.

Solidarity betrayed



LESSONS OF THE Basingstoke POST OFFICE WORKERS STRIKE

Basingstoke Socialist Organiser 25p

Post strike special

Wirral

A striker spoke to SO

We've been solid here, with the one scab in Neston, so we've been sending our pickets to Liverpool most of the time.

Casuals employed by the Post Office have been pinching the mail and breaking into people's lockers in offices round the country. Round here we found out about a scandal with the mail organised by the management.

A load of mail — possibly as much as 30,000 items — was destroyed under their supervision after being terribly delayed from Christmas. Those responsible only got demoted and moved to different offices. If we get caught pinching one letter it's the immediate sack and we'll probably end up in court. So it's one rule for them and another for us.

We'll be sending half a dozen strikers down on the Liverpool coach to see the NEC. Tuffin has been sitting on the fence all the time — hand in glove with management. He's always making deals with them — 'When the going gets tough, Tuffin gets going!'

We'll tell him to get his finger out and do what he's paid for. They should have sent union reps up here as soon as the dispute over casuals started.

The TUC needs to give some leadership to trade unions involved in big disputes. Willis is another one like Tuffin; he should never have let the miners go down to defeat.

And the Labour Party isn't the party for the working man anymore. Kinnock believes everything he reads in the Tory press. We get this argument all the time, the Labour Party saying the unions rule over you — but we are the Labour Party.



Police pile into pickets at Liverpool

Round the picket lines

Liverpool

A striker spoke to SO

We've had branch leaflets and meetings every day here to keep people informed of what's going on. That way people don't pay attention to rumours.

Our mass pickets have hit the news. We reduced the number of casuals going in over the last week and today there weren't any at all. We've also had collections, set up a strike fund and sent speakers round the local Labour Party and trade unions.

Tomorrow we're sending a coach load of strikers to London to see the NEC. We want to see everyone out and an end to the use of casuals.

Tuffin should have been rallying support for us at the TUC conference in Bournemouth. The only reason the Post Office haven't used the Tory trade union laws against us is because of the strength of our membership.

As for the Labour Party, Tony

Benn has supported us and we've had some Labour MPs down here too. We need to re-orientate the party back to supporting ordinary workers on strike.

Edinburgh

George Thomson, Assistant District Organiser (Counters) of the Edinburgh UCW branch, outlined the situation in East Lothian, where the Post Office workforce is much more scattered than in the cities such as Edinburgh and Glasgow:

'My branch has been out solid for the last week. We had trouble on the Wednesday (31st August), the day of the official strike, when people went into work in Haddington. But since then the postal side of the branch has been out completely.

The counters side has been working normally. I donated my week's wages to the dispute to help the strikers.

What's been happening in a lot of the small rural areas is that management has been allowing the postmen to come in, although there is no work for them from the Mechanical Letters Offices and the big sorting offices.

This means that they might be deliver-

ing hardly anything, perhaps just six or seven letters. But it means that the Post Office can say that they are working.

Tight controls are needed on the use of casuals. They should not be allowed to be brought in willy-nilly, as has been happening in Liverpool for example.

The acceptance of DRAS would mean going down the road to regional pay-bargaining.

I think management has been testing the water and using a heavy-handed approach.

They were surprised at the solidarity and the speed with which the strike spread, they have been surprised by the fightback by the rank-and-file.

The strike in Scotland

By Stan Crooke

At the time of writing, over three quarters of the Post Office's workforce in Scotland are out on strike, leaving a backlog of some five million letters. Even the Post Office's Scottish spokesperson himself has admitted: 'With the exception of very patchy rural services, there is no movement of letters at all in Scotland.'

Derek Durkin, chairperson of the Edinburgh UCW Outdoor branch, outlined the situation in and around Edinburgh:

'On Friday afternoon (2nd September) we learnt that mail had been diverted to Glasgow and that the Glasgow Mechanised Letters Office had walked out. One of our drivers had been deemed to have taken industrial action for refusing to cross the picket line in Glasgow. Mail from Cardiff was also being diverted to the Edinburgh Mechanised Letters Office.

'Our branch officials met that evening and decided that Edinburgh should come out as well. The Mechanised Letters Office here came out on strike at 9.30pm the same evening. We have had pickets in here 24 hours a day ever since.

On Monday management escalated the dispute by attempting to bus in casuals hidden in the back of a 'Capital Removals' furniture van. We had 400 pickets here at the time, who stopped the van getting in. It seems that management has backed off since then, and there have been no more attempts to bus in casuals here.

'Around Edinburgh the strike is now solid as well. We have had pickets going out daily, and East Lothian and Midlothian are now sealed completely.

'The dispute initially began about the Post Office's plan to make additional payments to new recruits in the South East of England, and we should keep coming back to that. It has now escalated into a dispute about casualisation, especially in areas like Liverpool. But the issue of extra payments in the South East is still on the table and must be resolved before there can be an end to the industrial action. There can be no acceptance of the establishment of regional pay bargaining.

Donations for the strikers and requests for speakers to: picket lines, Mechanised Letters Office, Brunswick Road, Edinburgh.

What the strikers say

Reports compiled by Ray Ferris

Secret talks

'I've said this all along. The union is made up of its members as far as I'm concerned and we are given a vote as to who we want to represent us. And nothing should be behind our backs — things shouldn't be kept behind closed doors.

'We've got to educate them in London to do what we want them to do — not what they want to do. They are paid by us, and paid a damn sight better than we're being paid.'

In Manchester, engineers, members of the NCU, came out in support of postal workers.

'One of our members was suspended because he wouldn't repair a machine used by imposed casual labour. When management refused to back down we decided to all come out rather than face more suspensions. The whole of Manchester, Oldham and Stockport, over 300 engineers, are out. In this area we have a good working relationship between the NCU and the UCW which improved markedly with the introduction of mechanisation.'

The Manchester Socialist Organiser strike bulletin

'Well I think it's done better than the union has done anyway. It has informed us of a lot of things that have been happening like, as I was saying, in Newton St (MLO) everybody's solid and the members are reading about this and obviously it boosts their morale. The bulletin has bucked us up and kept us informed — so we took a bundle down to our office to hand out to people.'

The backlog in Manchester

'We had a 24 hour strike on Wednesday. Six o'clock postmen emptied out the letter boxes then sealed them up. No letters in. Thursday came back in. They say we've got a backlog — millions of letters and parcels. We had 14 hours with nothing inside those letter boxes. We came in here, sorted them out for five hours then went on strike again. So we're wondering how can we get such a backlog?'

Borough, Tuesday

'We had a meeting here this morning for all members in S.E. London to discuss the new deal. I'm not happy with the way DRAS was settled. We should have sorted out both DRAS and London weighting but the Exec saw an open door and dived for it. We must not accept regional pay — it fits in with the Post Office's plans to decentralise management responsibility and play one area off against another.

'We went along to our union HQ yesterday to lobby them and show our solidarity and strength. I think the Liverpool coach is a great idea too — we needed to keep pressure on the NEC. We won't go back to work till all the offices in S.E. London have got adequate return to work agreements. And we won't handle any mail redirected from offices in dispute.'

Militancy in the South-East

By a UCW member, Sevenoaks

The postal workers throughout Kent came out on strike last week as management began suspending anyone who refused to cross picket lines or handle mail from strike-bound offices in London. Workers walked out in the large offices first and then the strike spread when workers from smaller offices were suspended for refusing to cross picket lines at the larger offices. By Wednesday virtually all offices in Kent were out and the strike has remained pretty solid

since.

Management's cynical use of suspension was demonstrated in Canterbury where a worker was not suspended for refusing to cross a picket line. Management did this to avoid any action, thus ensuring a full delivery in the morning. When he refused to cross the picket line again the next day he was suspended. This time there was little mail left in the office.

The feeling here is that management are forcing us out on purpose. Workers at Dover carried on working in an attempt not to be pushed out by management even though 12 of their colleagues had been suspended. However, by Friday they were all out as management

tried to get them to handle diverted mail.

The mood on the picket line is one of anger directed at senior management — not just because of the current dispute but also because of its heavy-handed approach to industrial relations. Resentment has built up over the deal struck by Tuffin and the Post Office at Christmas, team briefings and the pay award this summer. This dispute is now over more than just special bonuses. We need a decent wage for everyone — this is the only way to solve the recruitment problem. However, there is little trust in Tuffin's ability to secure a good deal for postal workers. It's up to the rank and file to keep up the pressure.

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty, East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles world-wide, including the struggle of workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own

anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class based women's movement.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and

gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER
Britain's death squad exposed!
Ulster cops did shoot to kill
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The last 40 years

A number of facts are unmistakable from the evidence of the last 40 years, central to clear assessment of the struggles in the Eastern Bloc, yet obscured by or difficult to reconcile with the "deformed and degenerated workers' states" codification.

1. The position of the working class in the command economies is generally worse than in the market economies. Low rents and food prices, and fairly full employment, do make the poorest in the Eastern Bloc better off than the poorest in the West. Yet average working-class living standards are lower, even at the same level of general industrial development.

Work conditions, despite the sluggish pace of work in many Eastern Bloc factories much of the time, are worse. And — centrally — the ruling bureaucracies repress all independent organisation by the working class.

South Korea is a society based on ruthless exploitation and brutal repression: yet it has allowed some openings for trade unions to develop against the odds. North Korea has allowed no such openings. The contrast between the two Koreas reflects the general picture.

And this is not an extraordinary situation of acute short-term crisis — as the position in the USSR in the '30s could perhaps be viewed at the time. It is a stable pattern over 40, 50 or 60 years.

The command economies have built up large and powerful working classes, working classes which have shown tremendous socialist potential. In that sense they have created preconditions for socialism. But in their repression of the working class they are further away from socialism than many market economies.

2. The development of the productive forces may be progressive even if the immediate results for the workers are bad. Many post-1951

Trotskyists have let the goal of working-class self-liberation be obscured by the goal of national economic development, because that national economic development is where the "workers' states" are supposed to display their superiority over market capitalism. Some command economies have indeed developed industry fast.

But so — since 1945 — have many market economies. The command economies can certainly show no general, clear superiority over the market economies in developing the forces of production. Indeed, relative stagnation in the USSR and Eastern Europe is now the starting point for Gorbachev's reforms.

The command economies are not a stage beyond capitalism in developing the productive forces. Rather, they have emerged from underdeveloped capitalist societies with a big load of pre-capitalist or colonialist dross, and done broadly the same work as capitalist development.

A cooperative commonwealth — a nationalised economy planned under workers' democracy — will produce more efficiently and distribute more equally than any market economy ever can. We have no reason to doubt that.

But the sort of nationalised economy that exists in the Eastern Bloc has no superiority over a market economy — neither superiority in the conditions it creates for the workers, nor superiority in long-term development of the productive forces.

The bureaucracies

3. Outside the USSR, the ruling bureaucracies are not usurpers of the nationalised economies: they created them. They did not create them because mass pressure forced them to do so against their will. They created them according to their own wishes and their own designs.

The bureaucracies are not acutely unstable. For 40 to 50 years they

have been stably self-reproducing organisms. If we do not call them "ruling classes", it can only be on a technicality.

Although sometimes when in power the bureaucracies seek to recruit individuals from the working class, the core of these bureaucracies is certainly not a segment or a product of the working class. They come from the middle class. Perhaps nowhere is this seen more plainly than in Afghanistan, where a very large part of the middle class and the military and technical intelligentsia tried, in the 1978 coup and after, to transform themselves into a bureaucracy on the USSR model.

Trotsky spoke of the Kremlin bureaucracy as balancing between its social and economic base and the pressure of capitalist imperialism. Such a view is no longer tenable.

The USSR is the second world power. In Vietnam, China and elsewhere the bureaucratised revolutionary forces were able to defeat the old order and beat down the working class *simultaneously*. Even while they were revolutionary against the old order, they were *simultaneously* counter-revolutionary against the working class.

4. The USSR does not correspond exactly to Lenin's picture of imperialism in his 1916 pamphlet. But then neither does any other country today. Today we commonly use the word "imperialism" in a wider sense than did Lenin, for whom "imperialism" started only around 1898-1902. In that broader sense of the word "imperialism", the US, Britain, etc are imperialist — and so is the USSR.

Nearly 50 years ago Trotsky wrote: "The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling

castes, medieval estates and classes".

Today the USSR has in Eastern Europe an empire with over 100 million people. You can deny that the USSR is imperialism only by saying that imperialism is only the form of monopoly-capitalist imperialism described by Lenin, and nothing else. And that would be to deny the existence of the Athenian and Roman, the Spanish and Ottoman empires, or indeed of the British Empire for all but 70 or so years of its 300-year life.

The conflict between the US and the USSR is chiefly about competition for spheres of influence and control, rather than a dispute of market economy versus nationalised economy.

Pessimism?

One other fact of the last 40 years puts things in a different light. In the 1930s Trotsky saw capitalism in an impasse. The productive forces had ceased to grow. The working

class had ceased to grow, and was being eroded by mass unemployment. The USSR, however, was developing. Call the USSR a new exploiting society, and you said that the contradictions of capitalism led not to socialism but to that new form of exploitation.

Since 1945 capitalism has grown enormously — faster than ever before. The working class has greatly expanded. Dozens of new countries have industrialised. Seen from the perspective of 1988, the USSR's growth in the 1930s looks not like a bold stride beyond capitalism, but like something essentially parallel to the industrial growth of Japan in the same period, of several Latin American economies in the '30s and '40s, and of many Third World countries since 1945.

In the first place, this makes nonsense of the idea that "deformed workers' states" develop because of the utter impasse, decay and collapse of capitalism. Look at South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand, and it is hard to argue that China, Vietnam and North Korea could not have developed any further on a market-capitalist basis.

In the second place, it does away with the argument that to call the Eastern Bloc new exploiting societies is to commit ourselves to pessimism about the prospect for socialism, or to abandon it altogether. Whatever we call the Eastern Bloc, we have lived through 40 years of expanding capitalism. A "new exploiting society" may have grown — but the numbers and potential of the working class have grown also.

Post-1951 Trotskyism

In the polemics gathered together in the book *In Defence of Marxism* Trotsky insisted that the discussion on the class nature of the USSR could not be about labels only. It was and had to be essentially about the perspectives implied in the different name-tags.

On the level of name-tags, the post-1951 Trotskyists were extending Trotsky's theory of the USSR — as a degenerated workers' state in which the bureaucracy was in agonising contradiction with the nationalised means of production — to new "deformed workers' states". This did not square with the facts. The post-1951 Trotskyists tried to ignore or define away many facts; but the facts took their revenge.

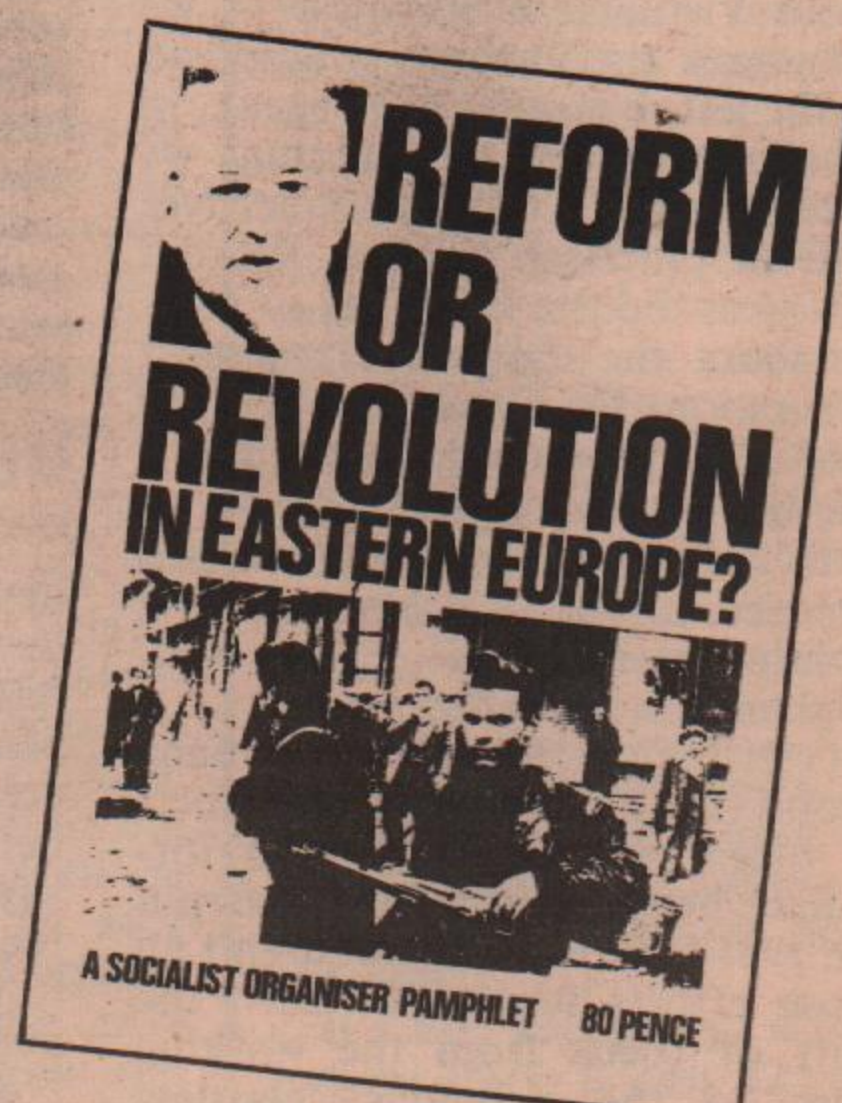
The post-1951 Trotskyists retained Trotsky's name-tag. But in fact they threw out his theory and perspective. Under the name-tag, what they described was a new form of society in which the nationalised economy was the creation of the bureaucracy. The bureaucracies — this would come through unmistakably despite efforts to present them, or some of them, as segments of the working class — were essentially new ruling classes. And they had the mission of developing backward countries for a whole historical period.

The "orthodox Trotskyists" who continued to mouth Trotsky's formula about the degenerated workers' state were actually describing the sort of new

Turn to page 10

More on the Eastern Bloc

Reform or Revolution in Eastern Europe looks at the different levels of oppression which exist in the Stalinist states — oppression of the working class, of many nationalities, of political dissidents. It argues that the labour movement in Britain must give wholehearted support to the struggle against that oppression.



From page 9

"bureaucratic collectivist" society which some of his opponents in 1940 described. Only where Trotsky's 1940 opponents put a minus sign on these new societies and called them barbarism, the neo-Trotskyists put a plus sign and called them the socialist revolution. That was the essential and only meaning of the "degenerated and deformed workers' states" tag.

Isaac Deutscher made this clear. His writings on Stalin and the Stalinist states greatly influenced the post-1951 Trotskyists. Yet, in a reflective summing-up published just after he died in 1967, he avowed that maybe the bureaucracies were new ruling classes. In substance — there can be no doubt about it — his picture of the Stalinist states was that of new societies which were progressive, but had no 'working-class' imprint on them at all.

This has been the fundamental tendency of all the post-1951 "workers' state" theories. It has been accompanied by another tendency, which *Militant* perhaps brings out most clearly: to write Stalinism into the socialist programme as a progressive (if limited) and perhaps necessary (if regrettable) stage between capitalism and socialism for underdeveloped countries.

The general pattern of post-1951 Trotskyism's response to Stalinist revolutions has been this: for a period to pretend that the revolutionaries are somehow "working-class" or at least part of the "world revolutionary process"; then finally to recognise that the regimes repress the working class, but to continue to see them as somehow progressive.

History took an ironic revenge on the ghost of Leon Trotsky. His most literal and "orthodox" followers embraced the politics of some of his most despised opponents on the left in the 1930s, the so-called "Brandlerites". These were the "Right Communists", the co-thinkers of Bukharin, expelled from the Communist International after 1929. They were much more numerous than the Trotskyists in the 1930s. They criticised the Comintern and the USSR for specific policies and for lack of democracy, but refused to define the bureaucracy as a distinct social formation and rejected Trotsky's call for a new — 'political' — revolution.

The mutation of neo-Trotskyism into neo-Brandlerism began in 1948. Tito fell out with Stalin. The neo-Trotskyists started to pretend that Tito's regime and Tito's bureaucracy were somehow part of the 'world revolution'. Since then the official Trotskyist movement has combined, in an unstable melange, Trotsky's revolutionary programme for the USSR with a critical-Stalinist reformist programme for a succession of other Stalinist states — Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam.

Our politics

Our political attitude to the workers and bureaucracies in the Eastern Bloc has been quite different from that of other Trotskyists following the 1951 formula of the "degenerated and deformed workers' states". We should have been more explicit and outspoken about Vietnamese Stalinism — we did attack the illusions widespread on the left, but only, so to speak, in footnotes — but beyond that we have nothing to reproach ourselves with in practical politics. We did not — as did the Healyites — prattle about the danger of capitalist restoration in Czechoslovakia in 1968. We supported Solidarnosc's call for a working-class boycott of Polish goods when martial law was imposed in 1981. We demanded the withdrawal of USSR troops from Afghanistan from day one.

Over the last 30-odd years, many Trotskyists have made many efforts — often very intricate — to formulate better theories to underpin the 1951 codification. But aren't all those efforts scholastic? Isn't the shift of focus from the working class to the nebulous, classless

'world revolution' a logical product of the attempt to define Yugoslavia, China, etc. as somehow distorted socialist revolutions? (For sure the working class was not centre stage to make those revolutions socialist. So what was? The 'world revolution'.) Isn't the great instability of official Trotskyism, its constant wavering in its attitude to the Eastern Bloc states, an inescapable consequence of the unviability of the 1951 formulas?

Increasingly, the formula "degenerated and deformed workers' states" plays no role at all in our substantive political arguments. Our conclusions are derived from factual assessment, and the formula sits uncomfortably on top of that factual assessment as a formula, no more. Isn't it time to reassess?

The provisional nature of Trotsky's formula

Trotsky, and the Trotskyists up to 1948, made it clear that they saw the description of the USSR as a "degenerated workers' state" as provisional — a makeshift term for an unstable contradictory structure. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1935), Trotsky's summary definition of the USSR appears under the heading, "The Character of the Soviet Union Not Yet Decided by History". In 1939 he commented on his definition of the ruling bureaucracy as a caste.

"Its relative superiority lies in this, that the makeshift character of the term is clear to everybody, since it would enter nobody's mind to identify the Moscow oligarchy with the Hindu caste of Brahmins. The old sociological terminology did not and could not prepare a name for a new social event which is in the process of evolution (degeneration) and which has not assumed stable forms".

And again: "Symptomatic of his oncoming death agony, by the sweep and monstrous fraudulence of his purge, Stalin testifies to nothing else but the incapacity of the bureaucracy to transform itself into a stable ruling class. Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?"

And in 1948 the Trotskyists wrote:

"Under these conditions, the progressive character of the productive relations means nothing else but that a change in property relations is not necessary for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. The production relations and bureaucratic management are more and more inextricably bound up. Consequently, the progressive character of the Russian economy, which is determined by its capacity to develop the productive forces, tends to become eliminated by the bureaucracy. The greatest attention must be devoted to the study of this development..."

If we apply the term 'degenerated workers' state' to this social organism, we are perfectly aware of the necessity to constantly bring up to date the complete and precise meaning of this definition. In reality, it is impossible to give any exact definition of present Russian society without a lengthy description. The relative superiority of this formula in comparison with all the others proposed up till now lies in this, that it takes into account the historic origin of the USSR and at the same time emphasises its non-capitalist character and the instability of its social relations, which have not yet acquired their final historic physiognomy..."

Time to reassess

"The greatest attention must be devoted to the study of this development..." But the attention has not been devoted. After 40 years — and after many years of increasingly clear political divergence between us and the post-1951 Trotskyist mainstream — it is time to reconsider.

The only political, programmatic consequence of dropping the "degenerated and deformed



Demonstration in support of Dubcek, Czechoslovakia 1968

workers' state" codification would be to drop the formula of "defence of the USSR" in war, or, as the Trotskyists of 1948 more precisely put it, "defence of what remains of the conquests of October". But we said long ago that that formula was a "tenth-rate issue" politically. In the era of nuclear weapons, it is difficult to see what such "defence of the USSR" could mean practically. How can you "defend nationalised property" in a nuclear armageddon?

It is time to reassess. It is time to examine the idea that the Eastern Bloc states are exploiting economies essentially parallel, as regards the development of the forces of production, to market capitalism.

It is a good time to reassess, too. Often in the past discussion among Trotskyists on the Eastern Bloc has been stifled by loud noise about "capitulation to imperialism" and "Shachtmanism". Today, when US imperialism and the Kremlin are on better terms than for many years and the bourgeois press is feting Gorbachev, such clamour is more difficult.

No doubt some will try to clamour. But we have learned enough in recent years not to be fazed when we are accused of "capitulation to imperialism" by those who think that supporting Argentina's mini-colonialism or the USSR's imperialism are the height of "anti-imperialism".

And what of "Shachtmanism"? Max Shachtman was a leader of the American Trotskyist movement who split with Trotsky in 1940 over reactions to the Hitler-Stalin pact and shortly afterwards developed a theory of the USSR as a new "bureaucratic collectivist" society.

Shachtman never fully sorted out his ideas on the place of "bureaucratic collectivism" in historical perspective. Initially he saw it as progressive compared to

capitalism; later, as utterly regressive and barbaric. In old age (he died, politically isolated, in 1972) he is said to have supported the US's Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and its bombing of North Vietnam.

Clearly we do not want to follow Shachtman in those respects. But that is not all there was to Shachtman.

As late as 1948, he was present at the Second World Congress of the Fourth International. The Congress Theses on 'The USSR and Stalinism' made a distinction between 'revolutionary' bureaucratic collectivists — meaning Shachtman — and reactionary bureaucratic collectivists like Dwight Macdonald and James Burnham. There was serious talk of a reunification. In that period — there is no doubt about it with hindsight — Shachtman was far clearer and sharper in his assessment of what was happening in the Eastern Bloc than were the official Trotskyists. There are positive things to learn from Shachtman.

How to discuss

We must conduct the discussion carefully. Too often discussion of the command economies on the left has been just a search for a label that can then be wielded as a sect badge. But a label is no substitute for detailed, careful, factual analysis.

We have seen that the *substantive theories* under the "degenerated and deformed workers' state" name-tag are various forms of "progressive bureaucratic collectivism". Under other name-tags, too, operate a variety of quite different and often incongruent theories.

Take the British SWP as an example. It calls the USSR state capitalist. That is its sect badge.

But read its basic text, Cliff's book of 1947. It says that capitalism is collapsing; the USSR is forging ahead industrially; the USSR's economy is regulated by international arms competition rather than the law of value; not even labour-power is a commodity there; it has no trend to overproduction; and so on. In fact it portrays the USSR as a "progressive bureaucratic collectivism" — a new form of exploiting society productively superior to capitalism. Cliff then evades the logical conclusions of this analysis by sheer moralism.

And what about the other Eastern Bloc states? They are called state capitalist, but no attempt is made to extend to them the thesis that arms competition regulates their economies and makes them capitalist.

In fact the SWP's "state capitalist" label is only a label. Underneath that label it chops and changes between a variety of substantive theories and political conclusions, with no clear accounting.

We are concerned, of course, to find the best label. Some of us think that some term like "bureaucratic collectivism" is the best approximation. Others would prefer "state capitalism". This must be discussed. But we have no intention, no intention at all, of finding a label according to a preset timetable.

Our concern is first and foremost to develop an exact, concrete assessment of the workers' struggles and the bureaucracy's operations in the Eastern Bloc, and to fight for a programme for workers' liberty East and West.

For too long the Trotskyist movement has been dominated by sect labels and shibboleths on the question of the USSR. We intend to break that domination. We hope other working-class socialists will join us in our discussion.

A SHABBY LITTLE TRICK

Fudges, muddles and cobbled together compromises are not exactly uncommon at TUC Congress; what is unusual is for union leaders to acknowledge that this is so. But that is exactly what Norman Willis, Tony Christopher, Bill Jordan and — especially — John Edmonds were falling over themselves to do after the debate on Employment Training at Bournemouth last week.

INSIDE THE UNIONS By Sleeper

Edmonds, general secretary of the GMB, went so far as to describe the outcome of the ET debate (in which he had played a central role) as a 'shabby little trick'.

This uncharacteristic outbreak of frankness is all the more surprising because the two substantive motions on ET that were finally passed were not, in fact, at all ambiguous or muddled. Motion 51, as amended by the TGWU and MSF, 'instructs the general council to

withdraw its support from Employment Training' and to pursue 'proper training...outside the narrow confines of the Employment Training scheme', based on eight conditions that could never be met within ET. You can't get much clearer than that, can you?

Motion 52 was moved by Norrie Steele of NALGO and seconded by Mr Edmonds himself. It 'regrets the decision of the general council to give conditional support to



Employment Training' and 'instructs the general council to withdraw support forthwith and institute a policy of non-cooperation'. The only exception to this allowed for by the motion is where employers running existing Community Programme schemes (due to transfer onto ET) claim that non-cooperation will make redundancies of supervisory staff unavoidable: 'where this is genuinely the case,' argues the motion, 'trade unions should enter into negotiation with the aim of reaching agreement that the scheme will be phased out over a period of not more than 2 years.' A perfectly sensible proviso that in no way detracts from the fundamental principle of non-cooperation, you might think.

So why all this talk of muddle, confusion, etc., etc.? The only muddle that exists would seem to be inside the head of John Edmonds, who in seconding motion 52 contradicted everything the mover had said and urged delegates to support an amendment (later defeated) supporting ET. Edmonds then went on TV and radio claiming that the final decision gave all unions two years as a matter of course in which to cooperate with ET and turn it into an 'acceptable scheme'.

In fact, the TUC's formal position on ET is now far from muddled but it suits Edmonds and Willis to make out that it is. Willis is desperate to hang on to the TUC's last remaining foothold in 'tripartism' as established by the '74-'79 Labour government, the Training Commission (formerly the MSC), and opposition to ET is likely to give the Tories the excuse they want to kick out the TUC Commissioners and transfer control of schemes like YTS and ET to a new agency.

This would be a devastating blow to the self-esteem of the TUC bureaucracy, despite the fact that they have already lost whatever real influence they once had in the MSC, due to a recent government decision to give the employers' side a built-in majority.

Edmonds' motives are even more disreputable: he has noted the recent change in the composition of the TGWU's executive and its consequent increased hostility to the MSC/Training Commission, resulting in Ron Todd's resignation as a commissioner earlier this year. The rank and file opposition to ET has, to date, been largely the result of the activities of TGWU members on the existing Community Programme scheme.

Edmonds reckons that the TGWU's opposition to ET will result in that union being frozen out of representing ET workers, leaving the field open to GMB sweetheart deals. Thus Edmonds' insistence that the TUC decision allows unions two years breathing space in which to cooperate with the scheme.

This also explains his remarkable about-face at the May 25th general council, where (after stomping up and down the country denouncing ET for months) Edmonds swung the vote in favour of 'conditional support' for the scheme. Since then, the GMB has been flooding MSC/Training Commission Manpower Boards with its full time officials (after filling places left vacant as other unions withdrew their representatives in protest against ET) and holding informal talks with scheme managers, like NACRO, who have recently been suffering at the hands of TGWU militants.

Edmonds has been aided in his efforts to snuggle up to MSC/Training Commission, not only by Willis and the TUC bureaucracy but also by what amounted to a plot (engineered by Labour Party general secretary Larry Whitty and TUC assistant general secretary Roy Jackson) to suppress news of the Labour Party NEC's vote in opposition to ET.

Unhappily for Edmonds, all his manoeuvring seems likely to come to naught: the Tories now seem certain to abolish the Training Commission.

Meanwhile, John Edmonds continues to peddle his 'shabby little tricks'.

Socialist STUDENT

FACTIONALISM IN NUS

By Jill Mountford

The chair of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) National Committee, Carol Judge, has an article, 'Welcome to Labour Students', in the Labour Activist handbook which says that 'in times like these factionalism is a luxury we cannot afford.'

I suppose she is talking about so-called 'voluntary membership', the Tory attack on student unionism which could smash us as a serious union. So Judge seems to think that now is the time for everyone in NUS to work together in organising a major fightback against the Tories.

Ms Judge — a member of the so-called 'Dem Left' — should practice what she preaches! She is one of those behind the closing down of the left wing-led Manchester Area NUS in a blatant piece of destructive factionalism! Is she perhaps working part time for the Tories?

On Monday 12th September, NUS NEC held a special meeting to discuss the 'de-recognition' of MANUS from NUS. According to the constitution:

17b. Transfer of status/non recognition. 'When an area organisation fails to satisfy the National Executive that it is a properly constituted body having the support of a majority of the constituent members within that geographical area, the National Executive shall have the right to withdraw recognition, subject to the approval of the National Conference immediately following such a decision.'

7b of the NUS constitution states: 'Area membership shall be open to associations of local student unions as recognised by the national union.' None of the 32 constituent members that last year affiliated to MANUS have voted to disaffiliate this year. Surely that is a clear indication of their support for the area organisation. Unfortunately for NUS it is not.

NUS claims to be de-recognising MANUS on grounds that are not even mentioned in its constitution. NUS says it is de-recognising MANUS because it is insolvent. So why, you might ask, didn't NUS de-recognise South Yorkshire Area NUS when it had financial problems — or indeed any of the other areas that over the years have had big money trouble.

Or, more importantly, why isn't NUS acting on what is clearly stated in its constitution and de-recognising London Area NUS that after all does not have 'the support of the majority of the constituent members within that geographical area'?

Regrettably, the answer is that very expensive luxury, factionalism. Apart from NUS fiddling while Rome burns, by discussing CD5, the restructuring of NUS, instead of mobilising its much boasted of 1 1/4 million membership against voluntary membership, loans, etc., NUS and NOLS are more concerned to factionalise against its main political competitors, SSI, even when it's constitutionally incorrect.

MANUS is the biggest and best organised area in NUS and has many SSI supporters active in it. NUS's illegal de-recognition of MANUS is nothing more than factional spite which the whole movement could well end up paying for quite dearly. After all, when NUS are prepared to close down sections of its own movement, who needs Tories to do the dirty work?

DL Quote of the Week:
Neil Usher, LP Youth and Student Officer: 'The Labour Party is now taking its youth work more seriously.'

It's not bad going, after all the Labour Party is only 82 years old?

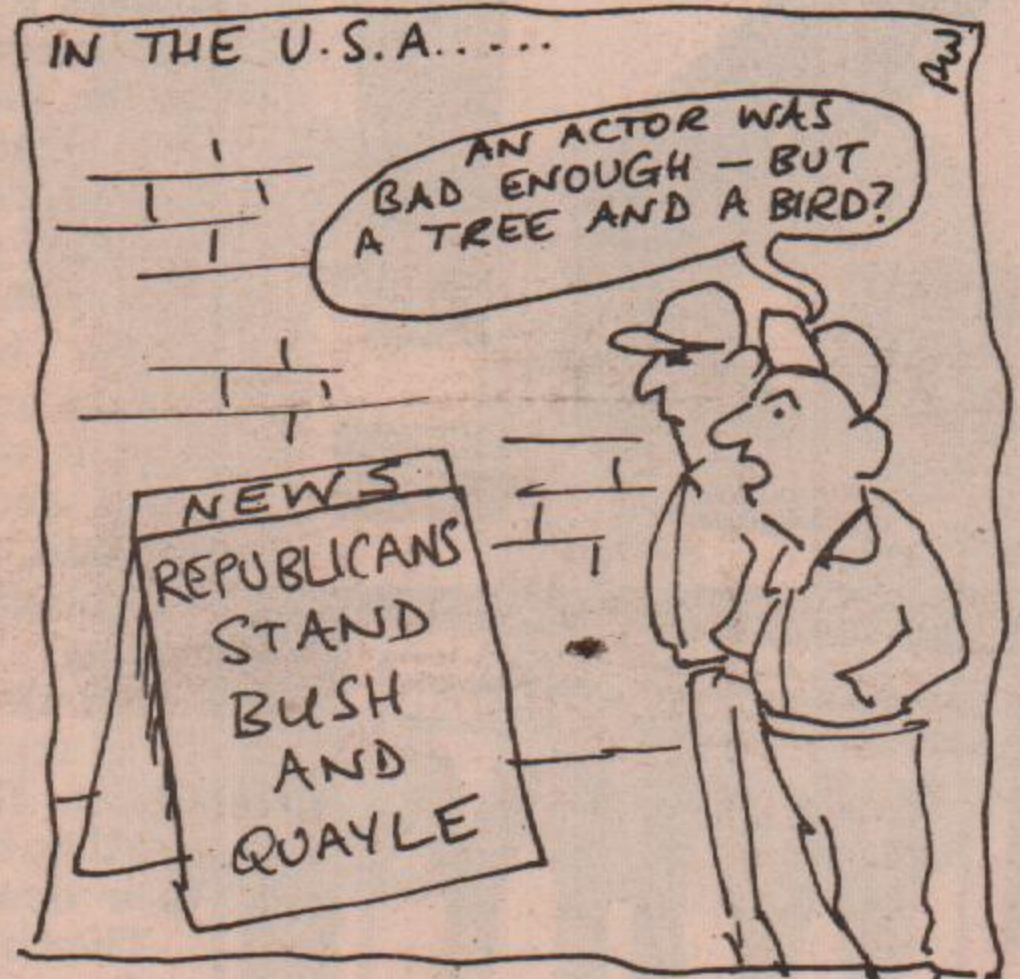


Dubcek

A possible addition to the growing list of rehabilitated 'communists' resulting from Gorbachev's glasnost may be the former Czech leader Alexander Dubcek.

Dubcek, who has been living in exile at a Bratislavan forestry centre, was ousted when Russian tanks rolled into Prague 20 years ago, putting an end to the period of relative freedom known as the 'Prague Spring'.

Over the weekend the Soviet ambassador to Italy, speaking at a festival organised by the Italian CP, described Dubcek's



policies as a 'precursor to perestroika'. He wouldn't committ himself however to saying whether or not Dubcek would be officially rehabilitated.

Decent maps

One of the side-effects of glasnost is that it should, in future, be easier in the Soviet Union to get from A to B. At present, it is impossible to get decent maps of the USSR. The most reliable is apparently provided by the CIA.

Since Stalin's time accurate maps have been classified information, kept under lock and key. Consequently a vast black-market in maps flourishes, with shabby second hand maps changing hands for as much as 200 roubles — around a month's salary.

Dead

Moscow News last week published an article by Roy Medvedev which revealed that Brezhnev was pronounced clinically dead in 1976. His doctors managed to revive him, though for 3 months he was virtually a vegetable. For the rest of the time until his death in 1982 he apparently only occasionally understood what was going on.

Even more damning is Medvedev's account of how Brezhnev became Soviet leader. He was, it seems, picked out by the bureaucrats because of his "weakness and lack of ambition".

However, the sight of a soviet Arthur Daly lurking around on street corners with Moscow A-Zs concealed in their overcoats should soon be a

Dodgy dealings

The attack on the Brezhnev era in the Soviet Union continues apace with the trial for corruption of Yuri Churbanov, the late Brezhnev's son-in-law.

Churbanov rose from obscurity as a body guard when he married Brezhnev's daughter. Shortly after they tied the knot he received high military rank. Finally he achieved high ranking office in the Ministry of the Interior.

Churbanov, together with several officials of the Uzbekistan party, is accused of corruption and of taking bribes. He admits abusing his post, but denies the allegations of bribe-taking. His defence, according to his lawyer, is that he was the 'product of a corrupt system'.

There is, of course, quite a lot in this. All levels of soviet life are riddled with corruption. Among bureaucrats major and minor graft is a way of life. In the west the cardinal sin is to get

thing of the past. A new official and supposedly accurate map of the USSR is about to be published — and it's 240,000 pages long!

In the Eastern bloc it's not that simple. Accusations of corruption are a pretty much standard way of weeding out the out of favour.

It's not just Churbanov who's on trial, but the entire Brezhnev era. In a system with no real structures of accountability trials are one of the few mechanisms of political change.

There must be thousands of other soviet officials worrying how to cover up their dodgy dealings — and doubtless many in Gorbachev's faction who know that for the time being they're safe.

Poor old Leonid, god rest his soul, is having a pretty rough time of it all round. Remember the old pre-Gorbachev joke about the entire Politburo in fact being dead, and the corpses being posed as if to seem alive? It seems it contains just a grain of truth.

TUC hypocrisy

There was a magnificent turnout last Saturday at the gala organised by the Notts NUM and the East Midlands Justice for Mineworkers.

There were miners' banners from every coalfield, marching through the heartland of the UDM, and the response we got from many people in Mansfield was very good.

Dennis Skinner was on form as usual at the rally. Underneath the humour is always a serious political message. He pointed at the causes for optimism — that Thatcher's policies are coming home to roost and the evidence in the strikes that are happening that the working class is prepared to fight back.

I thought the TUC went much as expected when the EETPU was expelled. My view is still the same — I understand those who say they want to stay in and fight Hammond, but I don't believe they will be able to fight within because they will be too

WHETTON'S WEEK

hamstrung.

There was a bit of hypocrisy in Bournemouth. They want a positive attitude to the EETPU, they want to stay within the law, but what have they done about the situation in Notts, where the NUM has been left on its own in its fight to secure its legal right, recognition?

Since day one of the strike, the Coal Board has wanted to take the Ollerton and Bevercotes Miners Welfares off the NUM. They eventually got a legal judgement to replace the NUM with the UDM. Now, in an attempt to drive us out completely they have suspended the manager and threatened to sack him because of his claimed support for the NUM. We have now organised a boycott to show our feeling.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Bigots' picket backfires

By Belinda Weaver

If God moves in mysterious ways, then so do His followers here in London.

Groups from the United Protestant Council are picketing the new film *The Last Temptation of Christ* in fairly large numbers. They 'prayerfully urge you not to see this devilish film'. There's a few not-too-subtle hints that eternal damnation may result for those who ignore this advice.

What's wacky about their actions is that it encourages people to rush off to see the film. Without the hype, how many people would go to see it? But all the fuss and bother makes people curious to see for themselves what the film is about.

So the Christians are helping *The Last Temptation* to healthy box office receipts. Surely that can't be in God's master plan? Or is this something too deep for us unbelievers to fathom?

By all accounts the film is fairly reverent and not too tacky. I couldn't get in, thanks to the well oiled Christian publicity machine: the film was solidly booked.

This is no ordinary protest. The Christians say they'll picket as long as the film is showing. With their help, that could be a long while.

They describe the film as 'the evil product of man's corrupt heart'. The film apparently shows Jesus Christ beset by fairly normal, human temptations of love and sex. This is what the Christians are so upset about. Two thousand years too late, they're telling Christ what he should have been thinking or feeling.

It's all a storm in a teacup. The film represents a viewpoint on Christ. The Christians picketing insist that the only acceptable view is their view. No other is allowed.

They have made valiant attempts to have it both banned and edited, so that the scenes they object to can't 'corrupt' the audience. Their Christian philosophy doesn't seem to include the right to free speech.

There's something worrying about this dwelling on things they find 'blasphemous' and 'gross'. Why don't they simply ignore the movie? It's as if they are simultaneously repelled and attracted to these 'sinful' things. By constantly dwelling on them, they can get all the fun of the 'sin' while saving face by damning it.

It's the Mary Whitehouse style of constantly seeking out pornography just so you can denounce it. In the meantime, of course, you've had quite a good look at the 'filth'.

Christians could just forget about the *Last Temptation*, but that would probably spoil their fun.

Disband the SAS!

Chiefs, kings and emperors of old had their minstrels and court poets, and the Queen today has her official Poet Laureate to write verse for important occasions.

Mrs Thatcher, too, has a Laureate whose voice rises to every occasion and squeals in the authentic notes and tones of her regime — the *Sun*.

Everything foul and beast-like in Thatcherism, everything nasty in Thatcher's Britain — you'll find it in the *Sun*, proudly shrieked out in a splutter of venom, spleen and self-righteousness.

Remember the 'Gotcha!' gloating of the front page when a shipload of Argentinians were sent to the bottom of the sea? The *Sun* last week celebrated the SAS's Gibraltar butchery with these headlines: "The Dogs Had To Die" and "Blow His Brains Out: the order SAS men must obey when they face terrorists".

The Government, of course, is resolutely pretending that it does not have a policy of sending soldiers from its mad-dog regiment out to kill those they think are in the IRA — armed or unarmed, willing to surrender or not, in Ireland or anywhere else.

Its soldiers — says the Government — operate strictly "under the rule of law". Up squawks the *Sun*, the parrot on Mrs Thatcher's

shoulder, to proclaim the truth: "Blow His Brains Out: the order SAS men must obey when they face terrorists".

Except that the armed forces also shoot uninvolved innocents like Michael Tighe. Seventeen years old and not interested in politics, Tighe was shot dead when the Northern Ireland police, the RUC, operated its own shoot-to-kill policy. His case was one of those investigated by John Stalker.

Outside of some sections of the Left, the IRA is very unpopular in the British labour movement. Many people will be inclined to shrug and say "Who cares?", or "Serve them right". This is very shortsighted.

Nobody will benefit if we have trained killers roaming around with a licence to be judge, jury and executioner. That is what the shoot-to-kill policy means.

Unless there is a sufficiently large outcry against it now, this sort of thing will increase in the period ahead as the Government comes under intensified pressure from an IRA out to make as big an impact as possible as we move up to the 20th anniversary of the start of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

Tory ministers have once more pointedly refused to rule out internment — jailing without charge or trial — as a response to the new upsurge of the IRA's military campaign. We need an outcry against that, too.

THE Sun Page One Opinion

WHY THE DOGS HAD TO DIE

Friday, September 9, 1988 28p Yesterday's sale 4,347,214 Thought: Live by bullet, die by bullet

This is why BUTCHERED David Howey — he was murdered after accidentally slipping into an IRA funeral mob.

DOGGS of war deserve to die like dogs. That is why it was right that these three IRA terrorists should be put down.

This is why OPPRIAN John Armstrong, 16. He dug his dead parents from the rubble of the Embsay bombing.

IRA FIEND CUT DOWN BY SIXTEEN BULLETS

IRA bomber Sean Savage was cut down by SIXTEEN bullets fired by SAS marksmen. The Gibraltar terror suspect heard yesterday.

THE SUN SPEAKS ITS MIND

Hatred

IRA FIEND CUT DOWN BY SIXTEEN BULLETS

£44,000 LOTTO: Page 13 • £31,000 BINGO: Page 27

BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT

The order SAS men must obey when they face terrorists

EXCLUSIVE BY MR. WALLIS
KILLING is a very exact science to the SAS team. He is taught it in a classroom just as much as in a firing range.

BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT

The Sun openly calls for 'shoot to kill'

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