

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For Workers' Liberty East and West

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



**Back Benn and Heffer!**

# Labour's rank and file speak out



Part of the audience at last Saturday's conference. Photo Paul Herman (Profile)

**A rank-and-file conference on September 17th brought together 71 delegates from 53 Constituency Labour Parties to fight Labour's drift to the right. Eric Heffer MP, candidate for Deputy Leader, gave the concluding speech.**

The Labour Party represents the mass of working people and therefore it is our responsibility

to organise inside it, in the trade union movement but especially in the CLPs. That is why this Conference is absolutely necessary.

I'm pleased that this conference is concerned with issues like the defence of Clause 4, the question of unilateralism and party democracy. You have been discussing what I would call the second 'Secret Agenda'. We now have two agendas in the Party: the first agenda and the one that's pushed through at the last minute — the secret agenda.

If I may give a plug to that book I wrote 3 years ago, I had this to say: "Pressure for changes in the Party conference is also growing. There are those in the Party who think it

should be less of a body of deliberation and decision making and more of a political rally like Tory Party Conference, where Shadow Cabinet members are paraded out to make their speeches for the general public rather than dealing with issues raised in resolutions". I said a lot more about the way things were developing in the Party which is now being confirmed — more than confirmed — and if you want a pretty good report of what they're doing, read today's Guardian: it's very, very revealing. For Parliamentary candidates, the Executive in the event of a by-election will be able to set aside normal selection rules and impose a candidate on a Constituency. And it goes on: the Executive will also be empowered for the first

time, to suspend individuals from party membership pending a disciplinary enquiry.

No MP will be allowed to stand for Party Leader without nominations from at least 20% of Labour MPs. If you've got 200 Labour MPs then 20% is a hell of a lot of people and that means the incumbents will be there pretty well for ever.

People come into Parliament with great left wing reputations, thinking that they're going to set the world right. But somebody comes along and says "I wouldn't do that comrade, I really wouldn't. After all you might get a front bench position and if we're the government you might become a Minister and in any case the whips

are watching out who will be on a trip to the USA or somewhere next week."

And if you think that doesn't have any effect, I can assure you that's why you have to have control over your members of Parliament. Nye Bevan once said you have to concern yourself with the 'aristocratic embrace'; we could say the 'leadership's embrace'. But it's the same basic point.

In 1983, a lot of people thought we had elected a young leader and if we didn't agree with all he said, after all he was quite a handsome chap (there were some that thought that) and the fact was he really was quite left wing. He might not have voted the right way on every issue — he didn't vote for Tony Benn in '81 — but the party membership felt, well, okay, we're not entirely happy, but we'll be able to push socialist policies.

Whatever else, unilateralism was safe in his hands.

That's not the situation now. At least in the past Party leaders only ratted on policies and principles when they got into Number 10. We've now got a situation where they are ratting before they're in Number 10.

That's why the Campaign Group are absolutely right to decide to contest the leadership this year.

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**Inside: Postal workers page 4; Poll Tax pullout**

# Burmese coup d'etat

**Jingies** are sharpened bicycle spokes shot by catapults. They are among the improvised weapons used by Burmese demonstrators against the 'socialist' army. Such weapons are a necessity, as the Burmese army, reeling from crisis to crisis, mows down its opponents in the streets.

At least 100 people, possibly a lot more, were killed on Monday (September 19) in the latest round of violence following a coup d'etat that brought the army to power. Thousands have died since the country's dictator for 26 years, Ne Win, "retired" at the end of July.

By Sam Eaton

The military coup is the third change in government since then. But Ne Win is still the power behind the throne. The army remains loyal to him.

But the cracks are showing. Hundreds of soldiers have joined anti-regime demonstrations over the past few weeks.

Can the regime survive? The capital, Rangoon has been torn apart by an escalation cycle of violence. In other cities, many have lost their lives.

The barricades are up in Rangoon. Government employees are on general strike. Demonstrations are smaller than a week ago,

but the opposition shows no real signs of weakening. The slaughter following the latest coup has staved off the threat from below to the regime — but it has not abolished it.

Ne Win's Socialist Programme Party took power in a coup in 1962. As in many Third World countries, a viciously repressive and economically-nationalist regime adopted the rhetoric of 'socialism'. 26 years on, the economy is in tatters — even compared to nearby Thailand or Malaysia — and the regime has utterly lost control.

The opposition's chief demand has been for democracy and since July has shown increasing confidence. The former President

Maung Maung offered general elections, this was rejected as inadequate: they wanted the government to resign and allow the formation of an alternative interim administration.

There are no major organised groups among the oppositions, although this feature is often exaggerated by its spokespeople. In its demands and rhetoric there is perhaps a similarity with the 'people's power' movement that overthrew Marcos in the Philippines and the democracy movement in South Korea. Students have spearheaded the street demonstrations. The overall ideological tone of the opposition is moderate and pro-capitalist.

## Labour's rank and file speak out!

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And it mustn't stop, whatever the outcome. Whatever the outcome, we have to carry on the campaign for socialism. And we have to carry on that campaign by **organising**.

I don't believe that organisation in itself solves all the problems. I know there are some comrades who think that when you get into a difficult political situation, if you only organise differently the political situation would change.

I don't believe you can divorce organisation from politics. If we had the right politics in this party at the moment, we would actually be conducting that political fight. We wouldn't be too worried about organisation. We wouldn't need to be. It's because the Party's got the wrong politics, because the leadership is organising to keep the left wing down, that we have to fight back.

I'll conclude on this. From time to time, every movement has to rebuild itself. If it doesn't it dies. And we're at this stage now.

We've seen retreat after retreat after retreat. The Policy Review shows that the leadership is retreating even further. They've accepted the concept of capitalism.

We must fight back, not turning to the past, but creating the future. Surely that's what we're all about. We are the ones who are the future. They want to go back to old policies, which haven't worked and which cannot work. We're the one who have the vision of changing society, of creating that new society of building socialism. That's what our forefathers and foremothers in this movement started off with — that vision to change society. Our job is to carry on their work — to ensure that we bring our black comrades into the movement, make certain women comrades have their rights in every way, that there is no discrimination against gays and lesbians, that working people as a whole get the fruits of their labour. That's what it's about. Comrades, let's go from this conference determined to make a further step to build socialism.

## Awkward question for 'Militant'

For the 'Militant' tendency, events in Burma present awkward questions. Since 1982, following his general approach, Militant's Ted Grant has proclaimed Burma to be a 'deformed workers' state'. Capitalism, they said, was overthrown by Ne Win — but instead of socialism, bureaucratic rule was imposed on the Russian model.

Was this system better than capitalism or not? Did it develop the forces of production more than capitalism? Was it closer to socialism than capitalism was? In Grant's theory, whatever the undeniable facts of a crippling lack of democracy in these societies, a planned economy — even a mismanaged one — was unquestionably superior to capitalism. The creation of a 'deformed workers' state' was, for Grant, historically progressive.

Yet Pat Craven, writing in Militant (19 August 1988) proclaims:

"Despite the advantages of having a nationalised economy, the ruling military bureaucracy has proved that it is impossible to develop a backward economy in isolation and without democratic control and management by the workers".

Moreover, "it cannot be entirely ruled out that, theoretically, for the first time, a proletarian bonapartist deformed workers' state could revert back to capitalism and landlordism". And if it did so,

"This would be a far worse catastrophe for the workers and peasants" than any bad thing happening now.

But how can this be? Why is this 'workers' state' progressive, if the workers have no power and the economy has failed to develop?

Militant's traditional criteria for 'progressiveness' are demonstrably false in Burma, but they make no effort to rethink their theory.

'Reversion' to capitalism would be a 'catastrophe'. But here also is a problem. If Burma now — with all its deformations — is an advance on capitalism, surely socialists should oppose a 'reversion' — and oppose those forces fighting for it?

Why don't the Militant applaud the army of the workers' state beating down the pro-capitalist opposition? Why don't they call for defense of the nationalised property? Maybe Militant's instincts to be with the demonstrators are sounder than their theoretical skills. But surely the theory is gaping open with holes?

In fact it is bizarre to describe Burma as a workers' state. Socialist Organiser has always thought so, even before we considered the label to be questionable when applied to the USSR. But the oddities of Militant's theory do perhaps expose some of the problems with the label even in more subtle versions.

What Militant call a 'deformed workers' state' they describe as a new, progressive, form of class society. Except in Burma they have had to face facts.



Burmese Housewives Committee protesting against the government



### Women's refuges

Women's refuges are likely to be the next victims of the government's social security changes.

For many women who make the break from violent relationships, a women's refuge is the only place to go. On average around 20,000 women and children a year find safety in a refuge.

But their existence has become more precarious over the years. They have never received statutory funding, managing on local authority grants. As the cuts bite, so non-

statutory grant aid is lost.

A fairly secure source of income has been from the DHSS. As refuges clearly provide 'care' for women and children, they have received money from the DHSS for 'board and lodging'.

But the DHSS has changed its mind. In contradiction to research which the Ministry itself commissioned, and which found a high standard of care in most refuges, the DHSS has said that refuges provide no care at all.

So women in refuges

will have to claim income support and housing benefit, leaving refuges even more short of cash.

Jobs will be lost, and standards of support for women and children will fall. A quarter of all refuges get three quarters of their funding from board and lodging. They may face closure.

Refuges have acted as a safety net for inadequately funded social services and housing. Now the government seems quite happy to let them die — after all, family life is the most important thing, isn't it.

### State approved

Is Gorbachev getting cold feet about glasnost?

On 28th July a decree was issued by the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation banning all demonstrations not registered 10 days in advance, and approved by the powers that be.

A day later another decree was adopted which has only now been made public. It introduces strict penalties for people organising or taking part in unauthorised protests.

Under the new scheme anyone taking part in an unauthorised gathering can be fined as much as

300 roubles (1½ months wages) or imprisonment for 15 days. A second offence within a year is punishable by a fine of up to 1,000 roubles or "corrective labour" for 2 months.

Organisers face even more severe penalties — as much as 6 months in a labour camp or a 2,000 rouble fine.

New police units have been set up to enforce the decrees, and have already been seen in action in Moscow.

All in all the message is clear — dissent is fine — so long as it's state approved dissent.

### Teacher training

Four out of every ten newly qualified teachers are not taking-up jobs in the profession.

Every year around 5,500 teachers completing their training are deciding to take jobs elsewhere.

Low pay is likely to be a

major factor in their decision, but under-resourcing of schools and the demoralisation that it causes is also significant.

So now we know what educational 'choice' means for teachers — like it or lumpit.

### Papacy

Channel 4 has abandoned plans for a Comic Strip series poking fun at, gasp, the papacy.

The Comic Strip planned a parody of the American mini-series which have swarmed across our TV screens over the past few years. The working title was 'The Pope Must Die' and was to catalogue the exploits of Pope Dave the First, played by ex-Maoist Alexei Sayle.

Channel 4, noted for its trendy-radical programming policy has been scared off by the possibility of prosecution for blasphemy. Instead they are commissioning the Comic Strip team to make a programme set in a corrupt Latin American dictatorship.

Well, of course, nobody minds taking the mickey out of tin-pot dictators in banana republics. But when it comes to offending upstanding British god-fearing people that's going too far.

## Learn the lessons of the postal strike

Pete Keenlyside  
Manchester UCW

"I must have been reading the wrong papers because as far as I'm aware Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party leadership don't even know that there is a postal strike on at the moment. But even if they do, we certainly haven't been hearing their messages of support..."

The job of conferences like this, one of Constituency Labour Parties is that we learn the lessons of disputes like ours. So that everytime we go forward a bit more it makes it that much less easy for our leaders in the trade union movement to sell us out; it makes it that much easier for the rank and file to begin to take control of the movement and to build the Labour Party and trade unions that serve our interests and not ones that are operating against us."

Pete Keenlyside was speaking at the CLPs conference in Manchester last weekend.

# Labour's rank and file get organised

By Lol Duffy (PPC Wallasey CLP)

The CLP's conference held in the Mechanics Institute, Manchester, on Saturday 17th September, was the most positive, comradely conference I have attended in years.

The turnout, despite problems with notifying delegates, and despite us being unable to send out more publicity material to Constituency Labour Parties because of the post strike, shows that there is a strong demand by constituencies for this type of conference and organisation.

71 delegates and 31 visitors from 53 constituencies attended the conference, called in defence of Clause 4, unilateralism and Party democracy.

Seven delegates who had paid delegation fees didn't turn up on the day but had expressed support for the conference.

The conference had been organised after a good response to an idea of a delegate-based CLPs conference at a meeting organised by Wallasey CLP at the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield last June.

A meeting to organise the conference was held on 20th August and decided that the maximum time should be given to contributions from the floor, so platform speakers kept their speeches short and concise.

Constituencies were given a chance that is rarely given in any

local Labour Party to get together and discuss where to take the campaign; there was a chance to discuss the socialist ideas which can take the Labour Party forward. We talked about ways to turn the Labour Party outwards to the people it's supposed to represent by campaigning activity.

Richard Aplin (Wallasey CLP Secretary) explained why the conference had been organised. The issues coming up at National Labour Party conference were outlined by John Nicholson from Manchester Gorton CLP, by Vladimir Derer from Hendon South and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and by Les Huckfield from the Campaign Group of MPs.

Workshops were held on unilateralism, public ownership and the witch-hunt. A further full conference session was held on Party Democracy. In the reportback and proposals session, the following proposals were adopted:

- \* That another conference be held in 1989;

- \* The Campaign Group of MPs to be asked to carry a regular 'Constituencies Column' in Campaign Group News compiled by the CLP conference committee;

- \* That we instruct the Campaign Group of MPs to invite a representative from the CLP conference committee to their meetings;

- \* That we establish a constituency newsletter to keep the free flow of information to subscribing CLPs;

- \* That we organise a fringe meeting at national conference to explain our reasons for calling a CLP conference to all constituencies;



Lol Duffy and Eric Heffer at Saturday's conference. Photo Paul Herman (Profile)

- \* That we support a members Bill of Rights, submitted by Wallasey CLP;

- \* That we call an open organising meeting in the near future;

- \* That we discuss the idea of a conference about the witch-hunt that open organising meeting.

The final session of the conference was addressed by Eric Heffer, the left's candidate for deputy

leader of the Labour Party. Eric Heffer welcomed the conference and hoped that the initiative would continue, along with other campaigns like the Socialist Conference and the Campaign groups.

## 'There couldn't be a better time'

By John Nicholson, Manchester City Councillor

We all owe a vote of thanks to Wallasey CLP for organising this conference. I understand they may have been given an unexpected boost by North-West Regional Office.

Regional Office sent a letter to targeted CLPs saying that Labour Party members should not be sent as delegates.

With all the issues at this year's Labour Party conference, there couldn't be a better time for the CLPs to get organised.

Judging from the conference agenda, there is a real feeling from CLPs for a return to socialist principles in the Labour Party. There are a large number of resolutions

for retaining unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The drawback is that we're concentrating on defending what we've got rather than trying to push still further — for withdrawal from NATO, and all the other consequences of unilateralism.

Neil Kinnock's speech on TV on defence provided a massive response from the CLPs in defence of unilateralism. Then a couple of weeks later Neil Kinnock had his 'on the record' lunch with 'The Independent' saying there really had been no change in policy — we can shake him.

Also on the agenda are a large number of resolutions on public ownership. This is very positive. We need to re-establish public ownership at the centre of Labour Party policy.

There are far fewer resolutions on internal Labour Party affairs for example on women on shortlists, women's conference controlling the election to the women's places on the NEC. This is worrying, because while there is a genuine desire for discussion on the part of ordinary party membership the leadership has been acting to suppress debate.

At a meeting organised by Burnley CLP to discuss the elections for leader and deputy leader, the representative of the Kinnock-Hattersley campaign was George Howarth. He started his speech by saying how important it was that the meeting was taking place — but that there was no need for a leader-

ship election this year! Of course, the meeting would not have taken place without the election.

Then he went on to talk about the Policy Review and say that he was now able to consult all his constituency members to give them their say on the issues at this year's Labour Party Conference. Rather ironic from a man who's expelled 11 members of his CLP simply because they wanted the opportunity to be consulted about the selection of their MP!

It illustrates the problems with the process laid down for the discussion of the Policy Review at Conference this year. We have always been able to fall back on our conference to hold our MPs to account and to raise issues of policy.

Now they are taking our conference away from us, so that MPs who are supposed to be held accountable to something have no real constituency input.

This conference today, and ones that follow must stress the policies that we need to be fighting for: an anti-racist immigration policy; support for lesbians and gay men in their fight against Section 28; support for the women at Greenham Common and support for trade unions in struggle.

Lol Duffy and others proved at the last General Election that if you support those campaigns you start winning support — not just votes but support between elections.

On 29 October in Manchester there will be a meeting for all CLP

activists who want to get organised around policies within the Labour Party. I hope this sort of conference will be happening in all regions before too long and that they will be able to feed into something nationally which will enable us in the constituencies to define our own

agenda.

I think this conference today marks a very important first step, and I hope that the success of this will lead on to more successes. We must claim our party back, and not let Neil Kinnock take it away from us.

### Rank and file views

'I thought it was really good to see so many people on the left nationwide getting together to expound their views, to formulate policies and make plans for the future. It's about time, in my opinion, that the left got its act together in the light of pending witch-hunts and various other bits of right-wing trickery we're now faced with. I only hope that out of this, like a phoenix out of the ashes, we come to positive and concrete decisions for the future, that we begin to defend ourselves and that we begin to flourish on the left in the Labour Party and make this a party that's accountable to the rank and file, with true democracy.'

Paul Fitzpatrick, Wallasey CLP

'I thought that, considering the conference was the first one organised by Wallasey, the first one of its kind, it was excellent. It was varied, it was interesting, there was no animosity, differences of opinion were not allowed to become anything else. I think if it continues as it started it could, as Eric Heffer said, become a power base for

the left, with work and thought, if you get people motivated enough to do something, they'll do it willingly and that's important. I found the workshop on campaigning particularly interesting. When I heard the report-backs from the other three workshops I was sorry I couldn't have gone to each one. It's a shame we didn't have more time, because lots of people didn't get a chance to speak.'

Brenda Alexander, Wallasey CLP

'I thought it was very good. I was more than impressed at the turnout. I think the proposals were very good, particularly the Bill of Rights — it's about time there was something like that.'

Eddie Doyle, Wallasey CLP

'I thought today's conference was really good, it was really inspiring. I hope that out of this we can coordinate CLPs across the country to act, to highlight true socialist ideas, and to win people in this country to real socialism.'

Edwina Doyle, Wallasey CLP

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# Tuffin's Treachery

By Tom Rigby

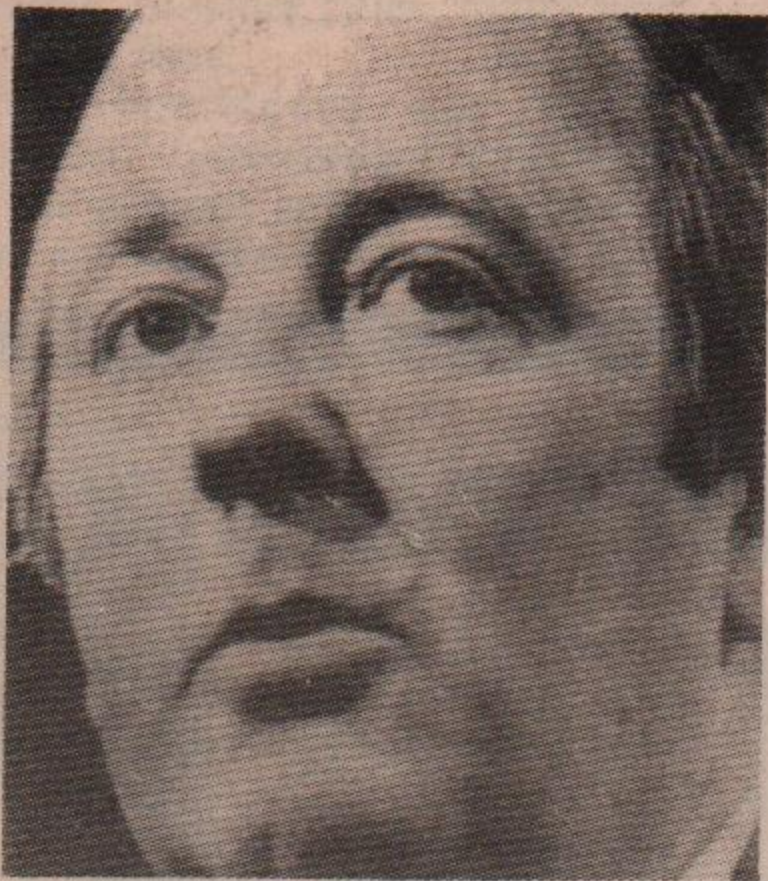
Right from the start, Tuffin and the Executive did it all wrong.

The one-day strike, on August 31st, was badly prepared; in many offices the official call for strike action on Wednesday wasn't received until after the early shifts on Tuesday had gone home.

It didn't take a genius to work out that management might use the excuse of the 'backlog' to bring in casuals and re-direct mail, so provoking strike action. Yet the Executive failed completely to prepare for this possibility, there was no attempt to set up a strike fund to sustain those who stayed out.

Nor was there any real attempt to use all the combined muscle of the postal workers to defeat DRAS (Difficult Recruitment Area Supplement). Engineers were not asked to join the action by the Executive — though in areas like Manchester they did — and when they did the Executive did its utmost to get them back to work. The C and CS (Counter Clerks) dispute over closures, backdoor privatisation and 5,000 job losses should have been linked up to the fight against DRAS. This would have strengthened and concentrated the union's forces.

But what did Tuffin and the Executive do? They postponed indefinitely the C and CS ballot result thus stopping the two sec-



Tuffin

tions of postal workers linking arms together against management.

And when C&CS came out on strike in Manchester and other places, the full time national official, Ernie Dudley, told them to go back to work and cross picket lines!

This failure to unite the union's forces is particularly criminal given the obvious danger presented by a management determined to go on the offensive and the Tory government's strategy of privatisation and splitting up the Post Office. If management and the Tories are allowed to get away with it now united action will be even more difficult in the future.

Tuffin should have been on the TV every night putting over the basic arguments in support of the strikers and walkouts. Instead he spent most of his time waffling on about the need for the Tories to hold an inquiry into Post Office management.

## Stand by the strikers

As we go to press Liverpool and Coventry are still out. They have to face not just a local management bent on revenge, but an Executive that has become part of the problem and is attempting to arm-twist the strikers back to work.

They have been betrayed by Tuffin and the rest of the Executive, the broad labour movement must not desert them.

Messages of support, solidarity, donations to Liverpool strikers: Phone 051 704 3995 ext 214.

This is a strange idea indeed. Who else but the Tories does Tuffin think Post Office management get their orders from?

The Executive failed to act as the co-ordinating centre of the union and keep the members informed. Strikers who wanted to know what was going on had to turn to the same hostile papers that attacked the strike.

And if that wasn't bad enough Tuffin and the rest of the Executive kept the negotiations with management secret.

As one Manchester postal worker put it:

"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".

If all this wasn't bad enough

the real low point came with the national agreement on Monday 12th which Tuffin described as "a very successful agreement — if not a victory — for the arguments we've been making".

Tuffin is a liar, the deal was a sell-out and a disaster. Signed when the strike was at its strongest the agreement gives the postal workers nothing.

DRAS is accepted for now and there are only talks which may at a later stage give it a different name and maybe alter it a little.

The position is worse than that before the strike. Postal workers originally went on strike against the continuation of DRAS but now the Executive is recommending that DRAS be accepted for the time being.

Management and the Tories are delighted. The acceptance of DRAS means that the union has backed down over merit and regional pay. This looks like the beginning of the end of national pay agreements, something that the government wants and something that can only weaken the union in the face of managements aggressive divide and rule tactics.

One Borough postal worker put it like this:

"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 Post Office's plans to decentralise management responsibility and play one area off against another."

The deal also recognises management's right to bring in casuals and divert mail — precisely the issues which sparked the walkouts! It is a particularly stupid concession given that management are talking about setting up a 'national grid' to by-pass individual striking offices.

With this deal the UCW Executive have given management a free hand to isolate and pick off the most militant branches by agreeing to the Post Office's deadline for return to work agreements. Those who stayed out because of lousy local deals got no backing from the national union, but they did get a lot of arm twisting from the Executive.



Anger on the picket line at Liverpool

## 21 days of st

\* Wednesday 31st August  
One day UCW national strike in protest against Difficult Recruitment Area Supplement (DRAS). First official national postal workers strikes since 1971.

\* Thursday 1st September  
12 regional and 2 London Mechanised letter offices (MLOs) stay out on strike in protest at UCW members suspended for refusing to handle re-directed mail, cross picket lines or work with casuals.

UCW leader Alan Tuffin offers to suspend any further official industrial action if Post Office management will agree to 'open-ended' talks.

\* Friday 2nd September  
At least one third of all Post Offices and sorting offices are now out as strike spreads.

\* Saturday 3rd September  
Strike still spreading.  
Post Office management drops its insistence on agreement in advance to some form of regional/bonus pay. They say they are now prepared to discuss whether to agree this kind of system.

Tuffin says that dispute over casuals must be settled at local level.

\* Sunday 4th September  
Virtually all foreign mail halted as strike bites. Informal secret talks begin between second rank UCW officials and Post Office management.

The Tories hint at lifting the Royal Mail letter monopoly if the strike continues.

\* Monday 5th September  
Over half of Britain's sorting offices are at a standstill.

At least 45,000 workers involved in the strike action. All international post suspended indefinitely. Nearly all the

## Organisation needed to focus anger

The strike action of the last few weeks has given us more than a glimpse of the tremendous power of the postal workers.

For a few days the entire mail network ground to a halt. Private businesses were in a terrible panic and the scab delivery firms were totally incapable of taking over more than a tiny percentage of the Post Office's business.

The strike was a rank and file revolt, showing the depth of commitment to basic trade union principles — like not crossing picket lines and not handling redirected scab mail — amongst ordinary postal workers.

A commitment to trade union principles which shames Tuffin who advised members that Stage 3 letters should be signed, if the employer makes it a condition of a return to work. These letters

commit the signatories to agree to handle redirected mail, cross picket lines and work with strike breakers.

Behind the strike are broader issues than DRAS; there is the low pay, lousy hours and terrible conditions that have created a situation where postalworkers have accounted for nearly 20% of the strikes in the last year even though they account for only around 1.5% of the TUC's membership.

The tragedy is that this rank and file anger lacked any clear focus. There was no alternative pole of attraction inside the union that could have prevented the executive riding out and then betraying the rank and file revolt.

This situation needs to change. The rank and file must organise. Immediately, the militant active branches of the union, like Liverpool and Manchester, should call a national meeting of all the local

UCW branches that are unhappy with Tuffin's leadership of the strike. The meeting should discuss the lessons of the strike and what needs to be done to re-arm the union and defeat Post Office management's offensive.

Such a meeting could be the first step towards knitting together a powerful movement of the rank and file inside the UCW.

The existing UCW Broad Left must be transformed into an active interventionist force rather than the dull organisation, which it is at the moment, and which waited 2 hours before it discussed the strike at a recent meeting.

And the rank and file must move quickly to consolidate, organise, draw out the lessons of the recent strike and provide an alternative, otherwise cynicism and scepticism will grow within the ranks of the UCW.

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

10 pence if sold separately

# POLL TAX

# TORY LIES!

The poll tax will make councils more accountable. The Tories argue that only a limited proportion of users of council services pay the rates which help finance those services. In Scotland, for example, there is an electorate of 3.9 million, but only 1.9 million of the electorate are householders and thereby liable to pay rates. As the poll tax will be paid by the entire adult electorate, it will therefore make councils more accountable.

But, by this logic, MPs are not accountable either: only half of Scotland's adult population, for example, pays income tax, which helps finance central government spending in the same way that the poll tax helps finance local government spending.

It is also factually inaccurate to claim that only householders pay rates. Many of the 2 million non-householders in Scotland are spouses of ratepayers and organise their finances jointly.

The introduction of the poll tax will in fact mean more central government control over local authorities and consequently less accountability of the latter to the local electorate: not only will the government retain powers to order a cut in the poll tax charged by councils (just as it can at present order a cut in rates), but the abolition of non-domestic rates and replacement of them by a Uniform National Business Rate set and collected by the government will also reduce local authority control over their own budget.

Moreover, given that the electoral register is one source of information for compilation of the poll tax register, the poll tax will act as a disincentive to exercise a limited degree of accountability through voting. Those forced through economic hardship to try to avoid the poll tax will have to ensure that their name is not on the electoral register and will consequently disenfranchise themselves.

**Claimants will receive extra benefits to cover the poll tax.** Either this is a lie or it makes nonsense of the Tories' claims about the poll tax increasing the accountability of councils: if claimants were to receive the full cost of the poll tax in their benefits then, by the Tories' logic, they would be indifferent to the level of council spending.

The Tories claim that income support will be increased so that claimants can pay the 20% of the poll tax which they will have to pay up from out of their fortnightly giro. But the figure which the Tories will fix as 20% of the tax will be 20% of the average poll tax nationally. So claimants in areas with above average poll taxes (ie. areas where council expenditure is higher due to above average levels of hard-

## By Stan Crooke

ship) will automatically lose out.

Claimants in areas with average or below average poll taxes will also be worse off. Whilst the Tories might add on a certain amount to income support to cover 20% of the poll tax, the overall level of benefits is being cut. In 1988, for example, the Tories claimed that they had included the amount required by claimants to pay 20% of their domestic rates in income support allowances. At the same time, though, it cut the overall level of income support and slashed housing benefit. It is clearly nonsense to claim that claimants will receive compensation for the 20% of the poll tax they will have to pay whilst at the same time cutting the overall benefit level.

**The poll tax will stop high spending by councils.** According to Nicholas Ridley, 'The Labour Party in local government, especially the extremists, always over-bid others in their promises to spend, spend, spend... (and use) ill-concealed bribes in the form of higher spending and higher subsidies for those who do not have to pay the bills.' The Tories argue that the poll tax will enable voters to see more clearly which councils are guilty of 'excessive' expenditure.

In fact, the 'high-spending council' is a Tory myth. In Scotland, overall annual expenditure by local authorities has declined by 0.95% since the Tories came to power. The Tories own Green Paper, *Paying for Local Government*, declared: 'Spending in Scotland has been held virtually constant in volume terms.'

Rates have certainly increased in the same period. But this is due to cuts in central government funding, not to 'profligate' spending by councils. If the Tories were to restore all cuts in funding made since 1979 then the entire population could be given a year free of rates entirely.

Moreover, even if councils were 'guilty' of 'high spending' (ie. providing services which people need), then the democratic mechanism to put a check on them would be the ballot box. In fact, though, the Tories will be using their dictatorial poll tax-capping powers to reduce the spending of councils elected with a democratic mandate to carry out such spending.

**The poll tax is an improvement on the current rating system.** The current rating system certainly has its faults. But the poll tax is a negation



of anything positive in the current system and an exacerbation of all its worst features. Under the rating system there is a rough relationship between income and the level of rates paid: 8.3% of people earning £50 or less per week live in properties with average or below average rateable values; 75% of households with an income of over £300 a week live in properties with above average rateable values. Under the poll tax, however, there is no relationship between income and the poll tax to be paid.

Rates are easier to collect than the poll tax. They are a tax on property, and property does not move. The poll tax is a tax on people and they move — a lot. 800,000 people move home in Scotland each year. 34% of 18-24 year olds in Scotland have at least three addresses during those years. Difficulties in collecting the poll tax will mean a higher poll tax which, in turn, given the unfair nature of tax, will mean a still bigger burden on the less well-off.

Nor will the poll tax end the differences between one part of the country and another which exist under the current rating system, with some local authorities charging higher rates than others. If the poll tax had been in operation in Scotland in 1987 and its level of collection had been 100% then its level would have ranged from £99 in Orkney to £293 in Glasgow.

Moreover, as has already been noted, the poll tax will not improve local authority accountability either partly because of the powers of central government intervention or partly because the Tories deliberately underestimate the numbers of those who help pay the rates under the existing system.

Finally, it is worth noting the spurious nature of the Tories' favourite example of why a poll tax would supposedly be a great improvement on the rating system: that it would end the situation of a widowed pensioner paying the same rates as the family of four wage earners next door.

Only 9% of the population live in single-person households. At most only 5% of the population are single pensioners living alone. Since rates attract Housing Benefit according to income, there are no single, elderly householders on low income who actually pay full rates. And only 9% of the population live in households of three or more working adults. In the majority of such cases the 'additional' wage earners are usually young people who soon move out to become householders themselves.

**Replacing the rating system with the poll tax will be good for business.** Socialists certainly have no brief to defend business interests. On the contrary, their job is to fight for an end to private ownership of the means of production. It is worth

noting in passing, however, that this alleged virtue of the poll tax is surrounded by a series of Tory myths.

Research carried out by the Department of the Environment revealed that there was no direct link between the level of non-domestic rates and decisions on business location and employment, due to the fact that the rates bill constituted such a small proportion of overall turnover.

In fact, council spending, financed out of the rates, benefitted business in a number of ways: providing essential services, purchasing goods and services, increased consumption from out of the wages paid by the council to its employees, etc.

Moreover, the introduction of a Uniform National Business Rate will mean increased bills for businesses located in areas which are now relatively low rated. And since rateable values would remain different in different areas, the introduction of a Uniform National Business Rate would not result in equal rates payments for similar premises.

Hence the opposition to the Tories' proposals from, amongst others, the Forum of Private Business and the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses.

# Fight the Poll Tax!

The Labour Party nationally has produced an informative but lacklustre campaigning pack on the poll tax. The model leaflets which it has produced end with such rallying calls as, 'If (!!!) you think the poll tax is unfair, write to your local council...write to your local MP or local paper,' and 'Find out what the poll tax will cost you. Write to your town hall now. If (!!!) you want to take it (what it?) further, write to your MP.'

In Scotland, where introduction of the poll tax is now less than a year away, the Labour Party has yet to decide what policies to adopt in opposition to it and will be holding a special conference on the issue in September. The Scottish TUC has set up a cross-party campaign against the poll tax. The most militant demand it has raised is for an 11 minute stoppage on 13th September.

The STUC and the Labour Party in Scotland both back the 'Stop It' campaign. Although there is some activity on the part of some local 'Stop It' groups, 'Stop It' at an all-Scottish level has failed to give any kind of a lead in the fight against the poll tax. Indeed, its unelected and non-accountable steering committee is more concerned to sit on real campaigning than encourage it.

If you wait for a lead from the top in the fight against the poll tax, you may as well wait for Godot. The impetus for, and direction of, a campaign must come from the rank and file or else there will be no campaign at all (unless one believes that telling people that the Labour-controlled authorities implementing the tax are not really to blame for it and it's really all the Tory government's fault, etc., etc., constitutes a campaign).

In alliance with trade unionists and community groups, Labour Party members must campaign for Labour-controlled local authorities not to comply with the Tory legislation on the poll tax, or to cease implementation of the poll tax where they are already collaborating in it.

Such a campaign is not simply a question of moving resolutions at ward meetings. It involves campaigning in the local community to increase the pressure on local councils, recruiting opponents of the tax to the Labour Party and demanding that Labour councillors either fight the poll tax or make way for those willing to do so.

In the council trade unions, especially in non-Labour-controlled authorities and in Labour-controlled authorities which go ahead with implementing the poll tax, a campaign must be built for trade union blacking the poll tax. In the event of commissioners being sent in to run any council which defies the poll tax legislation, council trade unions must also refuse collaboration with them.

The call for blacking of work on the poll tax also needs to be taken up in other unions as well, such as the Union of Communication Workers (whose members will be expected to deliver poll tax legislation, and the Civil and Public Servants Association, whose members may be asked to provide information to help compile the poll tax register.

Industrial action on the part of trade unionists not involved in implementation of the poll tax legisla-

tion will also be necessary, to increase the pressure on councils to refuse to implement the poll tax and to help force the withdrawal of commissioners sent in to run councils which do so.

Collective non-payment is also an important point around which to campaign, although it is important to keep a sense of proportion about it. Collective non-payment is less likely to defeat the poll tax than non-collection by the councils and blacking by trade unionists if the latter demands can be implemented (given the possibilities of deducting the poll tax from wages and welfare payments).

But large scale non-payment to which local authorities responded by attempting to deduct poll tax payments from workers' wages and salaries could trigger extensive strike action which, in turn, could make the poll tax unworkable.

In any case, a pledge not to pay the poll tax by Labour MPs and councillors and prominent trade unionists, plus large numbers of people pledging themselves not to pay the tax, would certainly have a mobilising effect and add to the pressure on the Labour-controlled councils and trade unions to take a stand.

Thus, to call for non-payment is important, but to make non-payment the sole or major focus of the campaign against the poll tax is to suggest, at least implicitly, that non-implementation by councils and trade unionists is either irrelevant or impossible.

Finally, there is the question of the policies to be pursued by the next Labour government in relation to the poll tax. Some aspects of the policies it should be pursuing are straightforward: abolition of the poll tax, restoration of central government funding to local authorities to at least 1979 levels as a first step; abolition of restrictive government powers over local authorities; quashing of and compensation for, all penalties imposed on councillors and individuals for defiance of the poll tax legislation.

There remains, however, the question of Labour's own alternative to both the poll tax and the existing rating system. The Labour Party briefing on the poll tax suggests a reformed property tax plus possibly an element of local income tax, whilst the current system of non-domestic rates for businesses would be restored. It also, quite rightly, advocates further discussion before reaching any final decision.

Labour Party members and members of affiliated organisations should encourage such discussion and ensure that it is **genuine** discussion, as opposed to the sham discussion around the Labour Party policy reviews, based on the principle that, whatever the exact details of the alternative eventually adopted, it promotes a redistribution of wealth and power in exactly the opposite direction from that being pursued by the Tories' poll tax.

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# GOVERNMENT



## Attacking ci

The Tories themselves have declared that there will be 'no place to hide' from the poll tax. This can only be achieved through a serious invasion of privacy — cross-checking of files, monitoring of people's movements, etc. — which brings nearer a society in which the carrying of identity cards is made a legal obligation.

There is no limit to the informa-

tion which can be contained about each individual by the poll tax register. According to the Scottish legislation, the register is to include the individual's name, address and date on which they are liable to pay and also 'such other matters as may be prescribed' — that is, prescribed in further regulations presented to Parliament, which will **not** be open to amendment.

Individuals will have the right to

see their entry in the poll tax register. They will not have the right to see their entry in the second file which local authorities will keep in addition to the register itself in order to track down or keep under surveillance those seeking to avoid the poll tax or suspected, rightly or wrongly, of attempting to do so.

That allegations about a second file are not mere scaremongering is born out by the contents of the

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According to the Tories' rhetoric, they are taking powers away from the state and giving them back to the individual. What they are in fact doing is taking powers away from local authorities (and elsewhere) and concentrating them in the government. The introduction of the poll tax is part of that process.

Since 1979 there has been a steady dilution of the powers of local councils and the imposition of ever tighter controls over them by central government. The Greater London Council and the six Metropolitan County Councils have been scrapped altogether. Many other councils have been 'rate-capped' — forced to cut their rates and thereby their expenditure, even where they were acting in line with the manifesto commitments upon which they had been elected.

The 1986 Green Paper *Paying for Local Government*, which first raised the question of a poll tax, listed the government's attempts since 1979 to ensure 'greater accountability' on the part of local authorities. In fact, all the measures listed involved increasing central

government powers at the expense of council accountability to the local electorate.

The Local Government Bill of 1987, re-introduced into Parliament at the start of the Tories' third term of office, ordered local authorities to privatise refuse collection, cleaning, catering and garden and vehicle maintenance, outlawed most aspects of 'contract compliance' (ie. making the awarding of contracts for council work conditional upon the pursuit of non-discriminatory employment policies, etc.), and severely curtailed the production of local authority publicity. The notorious Clause 28 was subsequently added to this Bill as well.

The Secretary of State (in reality, the government) has open-ended powers of sanctions where councils fail to comply with this legislation: 'Any order, regulation, specification or direction...may include such supplementary, incidental, consequential or transitional provisions as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient.' In other words, the powers of control over a council are vested in the

government, not the electorate.

The poll tax fits in perfectly with this growth of centralised government. Firstly, because the government will have poll tax-capping powers, just as at present it has rate-capping powers. If a local authority sets a poll tax which the Secretary of State considers too high, he can order the council to reduce it, whatever the mandate which the particular local authority had received from the local electorate.

Secondly, because the poll tax legislation gives the government increased control over local authority spending, in comparison with the current system. Non-domestic rates (ie. rates for businesses, currently set by the council) will be scrapped and replaced by a National Business Rate, set and collected by the government, and then distributed to local authorities in proportion to the size of the population. Whereas at present 44½% of local authority spending is raised through the rates and 55½% comes from government grants, under the new system only 20% of spending will be raised

# THREAT



## Civil liberties

Support on the poll tax drawn up by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting, and commissioned to do so by the Scottish Office, which advised that: 'The public register will need extensive support files including a domestic property register, a record of those fully or partially exempt from payment of the community charge and other records.'

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the authority itself, through the poll tax, whilst the remaining 80% will be under central government control.

Adding together the poll tax legislation with the rest of the Tories' legislation on local government, the result will be the effective destruction of the latter as a tier of government: council services will be cut off, schools will be allowed to 'rot out', entire housing estates will be privatised, the bulk of council revenue will be directly controlled by the central government and the remainder indirectly controlled.

The *Financial Times*, of all papers, has summed up the future of local government which the Tories have mapped out: 'Plans for the destruction of local democracy are now complete. The government's tanks are moving into place around every town hall. Battle will commence in the autumn. From now on local government is likely to suffer a series of blows from which it will be extremely fortunate to survive. Britain will be more than a centrally managed state, with power concentrated in Whitehall.'

If this second file is not computerised it will not be covered by the Data Protection Act. If it is computerised then individuals could still be barred access to it by the local authority claiming that it was a file concerned with the collection of a tax.

The poll tax Registration Officer has a duty, according to the Scottish legislation, to 'take all reasonable steps to obtain such information as is reasonably required by him' in compiling the register. The English legislation does not even include the words 'reasonably required'.

Sources of information open to the Registration Officer include: the electoral register, poll tax registers compiled by other Registration Officers, local authority services such as the housing and library departments, and local authority records such as records of applications for bus passes, season tickets for local authority facilities and housing improvement grants.

No limit is placed upon the information which local authorities can be obliged to supply to a Registration Officer: would housing departments with information on broken marriages which have necessitated rehousing have to supply this information as it would be relevant to the 'joint and several liability' of such couples to pay the poll tax?

Nor are there any real safeguards on the transfer of information between different records. Only computerised information is covered by the Data Information Act and even then a local authority would merely have to declare what kind of information was being transferred rather than record each transference of information. And, moreover, even under the Data Protection Act, no record at all of information transfers concerning the poll tax would have to be kept if the poll tax were to be considered a tax.

The compilation of the poll tax register represents an infringement upon civil liberties in other respects

as well. Given that the electoral register is used as a source of information for the poll tax register, anyone seeking to avoid paying the poll tax because of lack of money will have to keep their name off the electoral register. Only those who think they can afford the poll tax will not seek to keep their names off the electoral register where they think it is possible to do so. The poll tax thus constitutes a discouragement from exercising the right to vote.

The local canvas carried out on a door-to-door basis is a further infringement of civil liberties. In order to track down 'missing' persons or check up on 'suspect' information, canvassers will conduct personal enquiries amongst neighbours and pursue allegations of avoidance sent in to the Registration Officer anonymously. In its own document on the poll tax, the Rating and Valuation Association itself has declared that 'an expensive and intrusive inspectorate' will be required to track down the 'missing millions'.

The compilation of poll tax registers by the local authorities would, at least theoretically, mean that the country's entire adult population was recorded on the different registers. The next logical stage, justified on the grounds of 'efficiency' would be to make the data available on the different registers transferrable from one register to another and to establish one nationwide register, to which local authorities could turn to track down poll tax defaulters.

This would be achieved by issuing every adult with a 'personal identifier', an encoding of the surname, initials and date of birth. Once that had been accomplished, then not only would the basis have been established for a national identity card system but the government (or the police, or Special Branch, etc., etc.) would be in a position to monitor the whereabouts of every adult in the country.

## Poll tax special

# Women in the frontline

Women will be amongst the biggest losers if the poll tax is implemented. Partly because they represent a disproportionately large share of certain groups worst affected by the tax. And partly because certain aspects of the poll tax legislation are particularly damaging to women's rights.

Because the poll tax is a flat-rate tax, the lower one's pay, the higher the proportion of it consumed by it. Three quarters of low paid workers in Britain are women, either as main or secondary household earners. They will be forced to find substantial additional resources to pay their own poll tax and, in some situations, that of their male partner as well.

Women also represent a disproportionately large percentage of pensioners, nearly 70%. Contrary to the Tory image of the lone widow paying high rates under the current system and thereby benefitting from the poll tax, pensioners will be amongst those most adversely affected by the tax. In Scotland alone, for example, there are about one million married elderly women classified as non-householders and who will therefore suddenly be confronted with poll tax bills in 1989.

The majority of workers living in tied accommodation as part of their job, and therefore not currently liable to pay rates, are also women. There are currently some 177,000 nannies, au pairs and housekeepers, for example, in Britain. One union survey of workers in hotels and catering found that some 85% of women in the industry were low-paid and that a large percentage of them lived on their employer's premises.

Women workers living in tied accommodation will therefore likewise have to find extra cash for the poll tax. Employers are hardly likely to voluntarily increase pay to make allowance for the tax. And some employers (such as management committees of voluntary sector organisations) simply do not have the resources to do so anyway, due to local authorities passing on central government cuts in public spending.

Women will also be confronted with more strained family relationships as a result of the introduction of the poll tax by the Tories, the party which claims to be the defender of family life.

Ninety per cent of single-parent families are headed by a woman. 70% of single parents dependent on income support (formerly supplementary benefit) are women. Since income support will not fully cover the poll tax, this will add to the financial problems faced by such families and increase tensions within them.

When children in these families reach the age of 18 and thereby become liable for the poll tax themselves, the result will be either that financial difficulties and family relations are made even worse or that the children will be forced to leave home to reduce the liability of the parent, as the 'responsible person' in the household, for poll tax payments.

Similar problems in family life will also occur at the opposite end of the age scale, and again primarily

to the disadvantage of women. Nearly one in three of widowed women or single women over the age of 80 live with relatives. All these households would face higher bills with the poll tax, save for the wealthiest few living in properties of high rateable value.

Elderly relatives would struggle to try to find money for their poll tax payments. And families will be discouraged from caring for elderly relatives, most of whom tend to be women. The result would either be the break-up of such families or a family life dominated by economic problems.

Aspects of poll tax legislation regarding the compilation of the poll tax register and the ruling that partners are 'jointly and severally liable' will likewise create a situation fraught with difficulties and dangers for many women.

In order to ascertain whether or not a couple are living together as man and wife the canvassers involved in compilation of the poll tax register are entitled to ask such questions (and not just to the couple concerned but also to neighbours) as: Do they have a sexual relationship? Is their relationship stable? Have they had children together? Are they known by neighbours and friends as a married couple?

Asked in a radio interview whether snoopers would be coming round to see who was living where, Nicholas Ridley, then the Minister with responsibility for implementation of the poll tax, replied, 'If you like to use that perjorative term, yes.'

The concept of 'joint and several liability' means that women not in full time paid employment will be dependent on their partners to give them extra money to pay the poll tax. If deserted by their partner, they would also find themselves obliged to pay off their former partner's outstanding poll tax payments where the latter had fallen behind with them. The choice confronting such women is one of dependency or debt, and sometimes the first followed by the second.

Couples classified as 'jointly and severally liable' will be entitled to see each other's entries in the poll tax register. This means that a violent husband/partner will be aided and abetted in tracking down his former partner until she has obtained a legal separation — and, at the same time, she continues to remain liable for paying his poll tax!

Moreover, Women's Aid refuges in Scotland (though not in England and Wales, due to variations in legislation) are scheduled to have the 'collective community charge' imposed upon them. This means that amongst the first things greeting a battered woman at such a refuge will be a poll tax registration form, hardly calculated to foster mutual sympathy and understanding.

Finally, as noted elsewhere, the introduction of a Uniform National Business Rate will lead to a reduced income for councils which, in turn, will pass this on in the form of cuts in services. Again, the section of the population which makes the greater use of such services and which will therefore suffer the most as a result of any cutbacks, is women.

# Losers and winners

There is a simple rule of thumb to follow for anyone wanting to work out whether they will gain or lose from the poll tax: the richer you are the more you gain, the poorer you are the more you lose.

Research by the Scottish Local Government Information Unit and NALGO found that only in the top income bracket (annual income of £25,000 or more) would a majority gain from the new system. In all other income groups there would be more losers than winners. Among those groups with the most to lose are households with three or more adults, unemployed householders, young householders aged 18-24.

This is because the poll tax is even more regressive than the rates. Under the rating system, on average, a householder with an income of £75-100 a week pays 3.7% of net income in rates, whilst a householder with an income of £300 or more per week pays 1.8% of net income in rates. Under the poll tax the former would pay more (3.9%) whilst the latter less (1.0%).

According to the government figures, 51% of households will gain and 49% will lose. About 15% would gain £2-10 a week, and the same percentage stand to lose the same amount. The government has also admitted, however, that 3 million households might face an increase of more than 50% in their local tax bills...and 1.8 million might face an increase of 80% or more.

In fact, the government's figures, not unusually, underestimate the number of losers. Translated into figures on individuals rather than households, 44% will gain and 56% will lose, and the number of large losers (8.3 million people) far outweighs the number of large gainers (5.2 million).

Official government estimates of the level of poll tax in different areas are open to an equally broad range of objections. The poll tax



figure estimated for Edinburgh by the Scottish Office, for example, is based on the assumption that every single adult in Edinburgh will be liable for the tax, will be included on the poll tax register and will end up actually paying the tax, whilst ignoring the impact on the poll tax of the replacement of non-domestic rates by a Uniform Business Rate.

Moreover, it is not just a question of how many 'winners and losers' but also of which people will be gaining or losing and how much. Viewed from this angle the nature of the poll tax as a mechanism for a redistribution of wealth to the already wealthy becomes self-evident.

The Thatchers, who will pay rates of £61.75 per week on their retirement home replaced by a poll tax of

£17 per week, or Lord Vesty, gaining £5,000 a year from the introduction of the poll tax, are the kind of people who will be gaining — a lot. The two-adult working class family in Doncaster who will be faced with a poll tax bill twice the size of their rates bill are the kind of people who will be losing — a lot.

Losers from the replacement of rates by the poll tax are concentrated amongst those on low incomes. 60% of two-adult families with incomes of below £200 will end up worse off. Pensioner couples losing out from the poll tax outweigh those who stand to gain: 14% will lose up to 2% of their net income and another 10% more than 2% of their net income; only 3% of pensioners will see a rise in their net income of more than 2%.

Unemployed adults of pre-retirement age will also lose out heavily, though exact figures are not yet available.

In properties of average rateable value, a one-adult household stands to gain. Households of two adults or more will lose, with the loss increasing in proportion to the number of adults. In properties of low rateable value even one-adult households will end up worse off, and so will every other size of household in such properties. Only in properties with medium rateable values (unless there is a large adult household) and high rateable values is there even a possibility of any household gaining from the poll tax — at the expense of those in low-rated properties.

On a regional basis, the poll tax

will see a shift in the burden of local taxation away from the South towards the North, Yorkshire and Humberside. The North will see the average local tax bill rise by 31%, the South will see it fall by 23%. 49 out of 50 councils faced with the biggest increases are either in Inner London or north of a line from the Severn to the Trent. Almost all the authorities to benefit from the poll tax are in the prosperous South.

Within the different regions there will also be a further differentiation between rich and poor. In Edinburgh, for example, the seven wealthiest district council wards will benefit from the poll tax, whilst the other 55 will lose out. In Strathclyde region, wealthy areas such as Bearsden, Milngavie and Eastwood will make huge per capita gains, whilst poorer areas such as Glasgow, Clydebank and Motherwell will lose out badly.

Further inequalities will result from the centralised collection of the Uniform National Business Rate and its re-distribution according to how many people live in a given area. Many urban authorities will lose hundreds of millions of pounds of their income whilst industry-free Tory commuter zones can expect to see more money pumped in their direction. In Nottingham, for example, the new system would see income from non-domestic rates fall by £13 million, necessitating an extra pound per week on the personal poll tax.

In general, people living in Scotland, Wales the North and North West in the regions with the highest levels of unemployment, will pay more, whilst people who are already well off and living in the South East can expect to gain. Inner cities, especially London, will be particularly hard hit: even single adults and people in higher rateable property in London will lose out from the introduction of the poll tax.

# Another round of cuts

Since 1979 the Tories have repeatedly cut back the central government funding of local authority spending which, in turn, given the failure of local authorities to offer any effective resistance, has led to cutbacks in the provision of local authority services.

There have been 12 major changes in the Rate Support Grant system since 1979. The cuts in Rate Support Grant add up to a cumulative total of £22 billion. The proportion of local authority spend-

ing funded by central government has fallen from 66.5% in 1975 to 44½% today.

Nor have the cuts become less severe over the years. On the contrary, as the Tories have become more confident, the size of the cuts has increased correspondingly. In Scotland, for example, clawbacks of Rate Support Grant of £27 million were carried out in 1981/82 and 1982/83. By 1984/5 and

1985/86 the clawbacks had increased to £90 million and £126.5 million respectively. By 1987/88 the Tories were threatening a clawback of £202 million, unless councils cut their own spending 'voluntarily'.

In central government subsidies for council housing it has been the same story; central government funding has fallen from 41.2% in Scotland in 1979 to 6.1% today and local government funding (restricted by an Act of Parliament) has fallen from 14.1% to 5.7%.

distributed to local authorities on the basis of their size of population.

In a transitional period, non-domestic properties will continue to pay rates plus an annual increase at the rate of inflation as calculated by the government.

Rate Support Grants will be abolished and replaced by Revenue Support Grants, based on a needs grant (compensation for the difference between income from the poll tax and expenditure by the council) and a standard grant (a per capita sum for each adult in the area). The poll tax, the National Business Rate and the Revenue Support Grant will be paid into a 'collection fund'.

If an authority sets a poll tax which the Secretary of State regards as 'excessive' the latter, after obtaining the go-ahead from Parliament, can order the authority to reduce it. If the local authority fails to do so within 21 days, then all central government funds to the 'collection fund' will be cut off.

The Public Water Rate and the Domestic Water Rate will be scrapped and replaced by a Community Water Charge (to be paid by all poll tax payers and for which there will be no rebates), and a Non-Domestic Water Charge (a standard charge to be paid by businesses, based on the value of their property).

Whereas in 1979 council house rents provided 44.1% of expenditure on council housing, this has now increased to 83.2%.

The total Housing Support Grant paid out to councils in Scotland fell from £371.4 million in 1979/80 to £46.5 million in 1987/88. In 1982 all councils in Scotland were in receipt of Housing Support Grant, however small an amount. Since then the number receiving none at all has steadily grown: 11 councils in 1982/83, 26 in 1984/85 and 34 in 1986/87.

The Tories have pursued the same approach with regard to other services apart from those provided by councils — the savaging of the social security system or the crisis in the National Health Service, for example. The inevitable result is a deterioration of services due to under-funding. The poll tax legislation guarantees that this will become even worse.

Under the legislation, councils will be left with control over only 20% of their income (the poll tax itself). Non-domestic rates will be replaced by a uniform National Business Rate set by the government, increases in which are not to exceed the rate of inflation as estimated by the government. This means that even minor reductions in Revenue Support Grant (the new name for Rate Support Grant) and a failure to increase the uniform National Business Rate in line with inflation as experienced by council spending (often higher than average national inflation) will have a disastrous impact.

\* according to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Ac-

countancy, a 1% increase in council spending would necessitate a poll tax increase of up to 4%, whilst large increases in spending would, because of the so-called 'multiplier effect', demand even more disproportionately large increases in the poll tax;

\* if a council increased spending by 5% to cover actual costs (ie. to maintain the same level of services) but the government increased its funding by only 3% (either because of underestimating the rate of inflation or because of a deliberate cut in the Revenue Support Grant), then the council would have to increase the poll tax by 13% just to stand still;

\* a standstill council budget in real terms at a time of 5% inflation, and a cut of 5% in government funding would necessitate an increase of 55% in the poll tax.

Councils would thus soon be in a position of having to demand a poll tax of around £1,000 a year. Edinburgh, for example, would reach this situation by 1991. Either the council would find it electorally impossible to demand such a poll tax and cut jobs and services instead. Or the government would refuse to allow the council to charge such a poll tax and force it to cut jobs and services instead.

Whatever the precise details, cuts in jobs and services far outshading any which have taken place to date would be the order of the day. And the Tory government, the real culprit by having introduced the poll tax, would merely shrug its shoulders and put the blame on that mythical beast, 'the high-spending council'.

## Few exceptions to the rule

With few exceptions, every adult over 18 will have to pay the poll tax (officially called 'community charge') where they have their 'sole or main residence'.

Husbands and wives, and those living together as husband and wife, will be 'jointly or severally liable' for each other's poll tax bills. There will be three forms of poll tax:

\* personal community charge (to be paid by the majority of the population);

\* standard community charge (a charge levied on residential property which is not the main place of residence of the owners);

\* collective community charge (designed to cover those who live in multiple occupancy properties, many of whom are transient, e.g. DHSS bed and breakfast accommodation).

Anyone who fails to pay the poll tax will be liable to: court summons; arrestation of wages; warrant sales of their property; a surcharge of 10% on the outstanding amount; an additional

charge to cover legal costs; imprisonment. A poll tax register is to be compiled by each local authority responsible for collecting the tax. Chief Finance Officers (in Scotland, Regional Assessors) will be renamed Community Charge Registration Officers and will be allowed whatever powers are necessary for compilation of the register, including use of the electoral register, access to local authority records, and organisation of door-to-door canvassing.

Those who fail to give the information required for registration will be liable to a first fine of £50 and subsequent fines of £200. A system of rebates for those on low incomes will operate, but its details have yet to be announced.

Non-domestic rates (business rates) will eventually be replaced by a National Business Rate, the level of which will be set by central government and which will also be collected by central government, then



# Putting across the arguments

By Dave Barter

Since the action in the Post Office started with the 24 hour strike on September 1st, Socialist Organiser supporters in Manchester have produced seven issues of a strike bulletin for local UCW members.

Over 5,000 copies of the bulletin have been distributed, read and discussed on the picket lines.

At a Socialist Organiser public meeting in the first week of the strike, a Manchester postal worker explained the role of the bulletin: 'It allows the rank and file to organise and argue how the strike can be won.' Another striker told us on the picket line: 'This bulletin is the only thing that tells us what is happening. We wouldn't know a thing otherwise. Your bulletin tells the truth.'

In the first bulletin we argued for a national strike: 'Our action is spreading, with branches up and down the country bringing their members out. By the end of the weekend more than a third of the UCW's membership in the Post Office nationally had joined the strike.'

'The action we're taking is official — our Executive Council have told the press that last Wednesday's action is continuing. But what are they doing to resolve the dispute? Alan Tuffin says it's up to individual managers to sort things out at a local level. Wrong, Alan! These people are just acting under orders from Post Office HQ and behind them the Tory Government.'

'Strikers from Liverpool are lobbying the national strike committee on Monday demanding they make the strike national. We agree — pull out every UCW member in the Post Office. If the Executive aren't prepared to do this then we in the branches on strike will have to do it ourselves.'

By Friday 9th, when our third bulletin came out, we said the strike was no longer just over casuals: 'Any return-to-work settlement must be put to a mass meeting of those on strike. It must include the removal of all casuals and the scrapping of DRAS and any other schemes that divide up the membership.'

Bulletin No.4 warned of the threatened sell-out: 'The only reason we can think of for the Exec reluctance to keep us informed is that they're scared of us finding out what they are doing.'

It argued for the rank and file to get organised: 'We say that branches like Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, etc. should take the lead in calling a national meeting of rank and file members to discuss how we are going to do this. Otherwise the Executive will continue to do just as they please, no matter what the views of the membership might be.'

Bulletin No.5 was given out at a mass meeting on Wednesday 14th and called for rejection of the deal: 'The return-to-work agreement that is before us today is completely unacceptable. We should throw it out. As far as DRAS goes, the 'agreement' leaves us in a worse position than before the strike. Through rank and file action we've put massive pressure on the Post Office. Yet the Executive want to throw all this away.'

It argued how the strike could be kept solid: 'If we do vote to reject the agreement the big danger is that we'll be isolated with other branches going back. To stop that happening we've got to get together with other branches that vote against the deal. We've got to send pickets out to keep the strike solid. No-one goes back till we all do.'

'Along with other branches that stay out we should set up a joint

strike committee. We've seen that we can't rely on our Executive — it's time we started to rely on ourselves.'

Many of the strikers who spoke at the meeting argued points from our bulletin. Only six voted to return to work. A motion of 'no confidence' in Alan Tuffin was carried unanimously.

By Friday 16th, strikers in many other parts of the country had been forced back to work. In Bulletin No.6 we argued how the strike could still be won: 'The branches in the North West have already met once to decide a common line. Those meetings should now be happening every day. Both the management and the Executive would like to see us stuck out on our own. The North West branches must start organising pickets to go to offices outside the region. The message must go out — if we're still out so should they be.'

Bulletin No.7 was produced for a meeting on Tuesday 20th. 'The only agreement we can expect is one that involves the withdrawal of casuals from both Letters and Parcels, and prevents management diverting mail as and when they please. Even that would only be a victory of sorts; the DRAS issue that we first came out over seems to have gone well and truly out the window.'

The bulletin explained how the Manchester strike had been left isolated: 'A week ago there were 100,000 of us out on strike. Now, apart from a couple of branches in South Wales, there is only us, Liverpool and Stockport. The Post Office's plan right from the start was to divide us up.'

'The Post Office's plan worked, but only because our Executive Council let it. After the 24 hour strike they should have told management that either we all return to work or none do. They didn't. When the overwhelming majority of branches came out again they should have made the strike national. They didn't.'

Then they negotiated a deal that not only gave the Post Office everything they wanted on DRAS, but also gave ground on the issues of casuals and diversions.'

We argued again for the striking branches to call a national rank and file meeting.

The mass meeting voted narrowly for a return to work, not defeated, but sold out!

The bulletin produced by Socialist Organiser supporters in Manchester is a model of how socialists can relate to strikes, drawing on the experience of socialists in a number of workplaces throughout the country, who produced fortnightly bulletins for their own workplaces.

It involved many UCW members (meeting in a pub near the picket line to discuss its contents) and trained socialists outside the Post Office in the ideas and techniques of relating to the day-to-day problems and issues in the strike.

As Bulletin No.6 put it: 'Our strike should be getting the full active support of the Labour Party and TUC leaderships — but they've been nowhere. That needs changing — the whole labour movement needs shaking up from top to bottom. We need leaders that really are in touch with the grassroots, and a rank and file organised to keep its leaders in check.'

'With that sort of labour movement our strike could have been long won by now. And that sort of movement could defeat the Tories, and give a better alternative than any Labour government we've seen up to now. That is why Socialist Organiser exists — to work to transform the labour movement so that our struggles can win and so that it can win a real democracy and freedom for ordinary people.'

## struggle

West Midlands are out. Post Office management accept that the strike is solid in Scotland.

Tony Benn calls on the Labour Party leadership to give full backing to the strike.

\* Tuesday 6th September  
Strike continues to escalate. 60 out of 80 MLOs now out. At least 75,000 UCW members on strike. It's revealed that the government are using scab haulage firm TNT to distribute benefit cheques.

\* Wednesday 7th September  
Tuffin calls for public inquiry into Post Office management. NUR executive urge railworkers not to work with casuals handling scab mail.

\* Thursday 8th September  
Strikers at Mount Pleasant in London receive threats from management that unless they sign an agreement to work normally, ie. handle scab mail, they will be suspended.

The strike is still spreading. Belfast is now the only MLO still working. Tuffin leaves the TUC to "take control of the strike centre in London".

3 casuals sacked in Chester for tampering with the mail. Secret talks continue between Tuffin's hatchet man Alan Johnson and Bryan Roberts, Personnel Manager, Royal Mail letters. Backlog rises to 100 million items. Driver and vehicle licensing centre in Swansea threaten to lay off 1,000 if strike continues.

Labour's frontbench employment spokesperson finally gets round to intervening in the dispute. He writes a letter to Lord Young and Norman Fowler asking them to hold an inquiry into Post Office management.

\* Friday 9th September  
Union and management continue secret talks at a secret venue. Post Office talk of 'a basis for agreement'. Tuffin talks of 'progress'.

Meanwhile 2 pickets hospitalised in Liverpool as police attack picket lines. Mass meeting of over 1,000 in Preston votes unanimously to continue the strike.

\* Saturday 10th September  
Talks continue.

\* Sunday 11th September  
UCW Executive and management working out final details of the deal. Postal service virtually at a standstill. Strike is at its strongest. 150 million item backlog.

\* Monday 12th September  
The dirty deal is signed. Tuffin describes it as "a very successful agreement indeed — if not a victory — for the arguments we have been making".

In reality the deal leaves UCW members in a worse situation than before the one-day strike on 31st August. (For details of the deal see article).

\* Tuesday 13th September  
Branches up and down the country vote to stay out. Even in Leeds where workers go back they also pass a vote of no confidence in Tuffin and the Executive.

Branches still out include: Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, Chester, York, Hull, Glasgow, Coventry and London.

\* Wednesday 14th September  
More branches go back with local agreements. Great confusion. London District Council can't reach an agreement on a return to work so London

stays out. Liverpool rejects local deal and organises mass picket of local Post Office headquarters. Manchester votes virtually unanimously to continue strike.

\* Thursday 15th September  
The strike is weakening. London goes back. Micky Hogan, of the LDC, shrugs his shoulders and tells angry strikers at ECDO: "It's one of those things". Romford, the North West, Newport and Cardiff stay out. Glasgow and Hull also go back.

\* Friday 16th September  
75 out of 80 MLOs are now back. Romford joins them. Royal Mail manager Cockburn attacks the Liverpool UCW branch for "the worst industrial relations record in the industry". Liverpool and the bulk of the North West stand firm.

\* Saturday 17th September  
600 postal workers join the strike in South Wales after suspensions following refusal to handle scab mail redirected from Cardiff and Newport which are still out.

Oldham and Hull vote to go back. Talks continue in Liverpool and Manchester. Tuffin's hatchetman Alan Johnson takes charge of the negotiations.

\* Monday 19th September  
Cardiff and Newport go back.

\* Tuesday 20th September  
Mass meeting in Manchester of 1,500 narrowly votes to go back. There is a lot of anger in the meeting at the idea of leaving Liverpool to fight alone. Stockport, which already has a deal, also goes back.

Coventry and Liverpool are still out.



# Sisters of the Long March

The sisters of the Long March are coming to Britain. Their tour starts next week and will continue until

December. They will be near you soon, make sure you see them! This is their story...  
 "We are an all-women dancing

and singing group from Mpophomeni. We call ourselves *Sisters of the Long March*. We compose our own songs about women's struggles in South Africa, and we also collect songs from other countries, like Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. These songs tell

different stories about the nature of life in each place. Initially, we took our music as some kind of sport to make ourselves happy. But we soon realised that we would like our skills to support our mothers and fathers in their struggle against BTR Sarmcol. As we developed our dances and composed our songs we saw that certain talents abounded within our group. People here in South Africa enjoy our performances as much as we enjoy performing them! Long live democratic forces! We shall conquer in unity!"

of co-ops to create some employment, and by developing a range of pressures against BTR eg. by organising some 70% of other 4,000 BTR workers in South Africa into NUMSA where they are coordinating solidarity actions of various kinds.  
 Outside South Africa, NUMSA has sought to spread the message that "In South Africa BTR means Blood, Tears, Repression". The play *The Long March* (produced by 7 of the strikers) conveyed this message to Britain in autumn 1987. Now the Sisters of the Long March come to tell the tale — from the women's viewpoint — of life in the strikebound Mpophomeni community in this the longest strike in South African history.

## Star Wars update

### Les Hearn's SCIENCE COLUMN

Right from the start, Ronald Raygun's strategic Defense Initiative was ridiculed for being as much science fiction as the film "Star Wars", its nicknamesake.

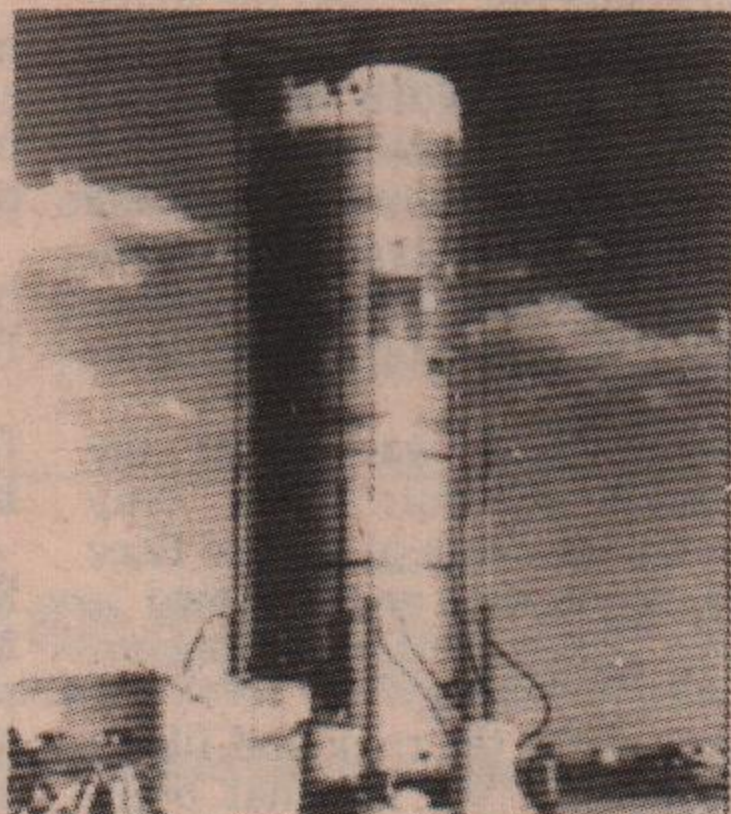
SDI's subsequent progress has largely justified this response but this does not mean that some measure of "defence" against enemy missiles is impossible.

True, the promises of a shield to eliminate Russian ICBMs (accompanied by stomach-turning adverts featuring cute American children) have been scaled down substantially.

Now, this might seem to destroy the whole rationale of SDI. There are enough nuclear warheads to kill everyone on Earth several times over. If even a tiny fraction were to get past the defences, they would kill enough people and destroy enough property to render civilisation impossible. And SDI wasn't even supposed to tackle the low-flying cruise and submarine launched missiles.

So far, SDI research has mainly succeeded in eliminating more or less ambitious ideas:

\* Space-based radar to track warheads and distinguish decoys would be, it is now agreed, unable to do the job. Impossibly large telescopes would be needed for long-distance tracking. SDI supporters must be fondly hoping the Russians wouldn't fire loads of decoy rockets to fool the system.



\* SDI critics said ultra-violet lasers to destroy missiles would require huge sources of electricity. The SDI Organisation now agrees.

\* Rail guns to fire lumps of metal into space and the X-ray laser, to be powered by nuclear explosions are now out of favour.

\* SDI "tests" so far have just been gimmicks. The destruction of a Titan rocket booster by the MIRACL heat laser looked impressive but it was standing still at the time. And scientists are still complaining about the destruction of a "redundant" satellite that was in fact still sending back useful data.

\* A project to develop space-based interceptor rockets for attacking missiles as they blast off into space has been reduced by 90%.

\* A plan to intercept warheads as they come down was severely disrupted when the rocket shed carrying the prototype jumped its tracks, destroying the equipment.

The Strategic Defense system now proposed consists of a first phase to be fully operational in the early years of next century. Phase 1 will consist of 300 satellites carrying



interceptor rockets and a surveillance and tracking system. Its goal is to destroy at most only half of the USSR's SS-18 warheads, a small fraction of its nuclear arsenal.

Phase 2 may contain more exotic weapons, such as destructive lasers, and sensors capable of telling between real and dummy warheads. Only if Phase 2 is thought technically feasible will Phase 1 be OKed.

A minimum position would be to introduce surveillance satellites to improve the US's early warning system and enough interceptor rockets to knock out any warheads heading for the underground bunkers where the President and his military staff would be hiding.

Meanwhile SDI research consumes \$ billions in open and hidden funding. My feeling is that top military strategists are cynically backing SDI because its spin-offs will include technologies useful for conventional warfare and surveillance. It also has the effect of forcing the USSR to increase its military spending, with destabilising effects at home, discouraging military interventions abroad.

### The BTR Sarmcol Struggle

In May 1985, BTR (one of the largest British multinational companies) sacked nearly 1000 long-service employees at its BTR Sarmcol plant at Howick in South Africa. Their "crime"? They went on a 2-day lawful strike to win basic trade union rights.

These workers are still meeting weekly to renew their demand for a settlement, but BTR refuses to even start negotiations towards this. The result in the semi-rural community where BTR is the only major employer, is devastation. The apartheid system makes moving home in search of work almost impossible for blacks, so the workers and their families face gradual starvation. The rate of malnutrition in the community has risen from 22% before the strike to over 40% now. BTR must negotiate a settlement or be held responsible for each fresh grave that is dug in the Mpophomeni graveyard.

### The NUMSA Campaign against BTR

The BTR Sarmcol workers' union NUMSA (a COSATU affiliate) has been helping the sacked workers with food parcels, by assisting them in forming a number

"When a murderer buries a victim, he does it at night so no one will see. Then he walks the streets by day like an honest man. What we want to do is to dig up that body and put it at the front door of the murderer. Then the whole world can see the truth. This is why NUMSA must campaign against BTR."

(A verbatim quote in April 1988 from a BTR employee of 25 years' service).

For details about the tour contact:  
**NUMSA/SAWCO. UK address: PO Box 153, Leicester LE2 4FX**

# The secret war breaks out again

Internecine warfare has broken out once again on the Executive Council of the TGWU.

At the meeting on Sunday 18th September, 17 members staged a walkout after they had failed to remove left-winger Steve Riley as Region 1 (London, Inner) territorial representative.

The charge against Riley was that his membership dues had fallen into arrears by more than six weeks, barring him from holding office. Riley, a Ford shop steward, has his dues deducted automatically by the company, so any arrears are plainly beyond his control.

Ron Todd and the majority of the executive decided against allowing the Ford Motor Co. to determine the make-up of the union's executive.

In any case, the real charge against Riley was that he defeated the right's guru and former union president, Brian Nicholson, in February's executive elections.

Since February, when the left gained a 22-17 majority on the executive, an uneasy peace has reigned in the T&G. Over the preceding two years it had been all-out war, with the union's regions divided into hostile fiefdoms, some of which were no-go areas even for the general secretary.

On one infamous occasion, full

## INSIDE THE UNIONS

### By Sleeper

time officials from the two opposing camps came to blows in public. During this period the right, represented by Nicholson and Welsh regional secretary George Wright, held a narrow majority of both the executive and the Finance and General Purposes Committee, which they used to systematically undermine Todd's authority, to keep black deputy secretary Bill Morris off both the Labour Party NEC and the TUC General Council, and to install their chosen placemen as regional secretaries.

In Region 1, the behaviour of Brian Nicholson (breaking his region's mandate and deliberately misleading the regional committees in order to install his supporter, Ken Reid, as regional secretary) nearly provoked a strike of Smith Square full time officials.

But the issues at stake have never been clear — at least as far as the

TGWU rank and file members could see. What was this battle that raged behind the closed doors of the union's inner sanctums all about?

After all, both sides proclaim their loyalty to Neil Kinnock and no discernable policy differences were ever presented to the membership. Indeed, Brian Nicholson claimed until very recently to be a supporter of the Broad Left, while George Wright flashed his CND badge on every possible occasion.

At the July 1987 Biennial Delegate Conference matters became a little clearer when the Wright/Nicholson camp nearly succeeded in overturning the union's long-standing unilateralist stance, and made their hostility to the Todd/Morris-inspired 'Link Up' campaign (aimed at recruiting women, black people and part-time workers) clear.

After February's elections, the 'left' (ie. executive members generally loyal to Todd) reckoned that the right-Nicholson axis had been trounced once and for all.

They were wrong: in bastions like Region 5 (the Midlands) and Region 4 (Wales) the right stepped up its organising.

The right's other big asset has been its close contacts with various industrial correspondents from the national press, to whom useful tidbits of 'inside info' are regularly

passed — like the story of Steve Riley's arrears.

Meanwhile, the 'left' has still not deigned to inform the membership what they actually stand for, beyond a general commitment to the 'Link Up' campaign and vague opposition to aspects of Kinnock's policy reviews. The Broad Left (to which the majority of the new executive pay lip service) remains a small, shadowy organisation made up of full time officials and people with subscriptions to the *Morning Star*.

The Labour Party leadership election typifies the approach of the new 'left' executive: no sort of consultation with the membership, either at workplace or branch level, has been organised and the final decision will be left entirely in the hands of the union's Labour Party delegation, which is to the right of the executive and almost certain to back Kinnock and Hattersley.

One or two of the harder 'left' talked about pushing for a vote for Prescott, but backed off when Todd argued that for the executive to endorse anyone but Kinnock and Hattersley after the 17 had walked out would give the media a field day.

Meanwhile, the left v right battle looks like heating up again. But the membership, as usual, won't be involved.

## Defend Newcastle Central!

By Trudy Saunders, CPSPA, London

Since the right-wing took power in the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSPA) in May this year, one outrage has followed another. It would not be unreasonable for CPSPA members to believe that our union is being run by a latter-day Joseph Stalin.

Perhaps the most disgusting and undemocratic act of right-wing General Secretary John Ellis and his gang of thugs has been the closing down of the Newcastle Central Office (NCO) DHSS CPSPA branch.

The branch was closed down after right-wing NCO officers accused Broad Left supporters on the NCO branch executive committee of intimidation. The Broad Left supporters in question stand to lose not only their union positions, but also their jobs. They have not been allowed to hear or see the 'evidence' against them. As far as the right-wing are concerned, the Broad Left supporters are guilty until proved innocent. There's more justice in the bosses' law courts!

The truth behind the closure of NCO branch is as follows: since the mid-1970s, the branch has been run by CPSPA Broad Left supporters. Last year the right-wing 'Campaign to Defeat Militant Tendency' at NCO was formed. This motley crew, using smears and lies, won the branch officer positions at the NCO Annual General Meeting. The Broad Left won the majority of branch executive committee positions.

Three months later, the right-wing NCO branch officers resigned. They all wrote to the CPSPA national executive committee claiming intimidation by Broad Left supporters as the reason for their resignation.

Fearing a Broad Left victory in new elections, the CPSPA NEC closed NCO CPSPA branch down.

The so-called 'evidence' of intimidation is a joke. One right-winger claimed he had been sworn at! Another claimed a Broad Left supporter had followed him home — in fact the Broad Left supporter lives in the same street as the right-winger!

A front page article on the subject in the CPSPA's newspaper, *Red Tape*, depicts Ellis et al as guardian angels, defending members at NCO! Well, we all know about the antics of the SAS!!

A Broad Left campaign to defend the 'accused' at NCO has been launched. It is vital all Broad Left supporters get out to ordinary CPSPA members and tell the truth about NCO.

However, such campaigns would be more effectively run if the structures of the Broad Left were working properly. The London Broad Left (Militant-run) has not met since April, despite the fact that as well as the attack on NCO Broad Left supporters, a number of vital issues such as the employment of known fascist Malcolm Skeggs in London need discussing. If the Broad Left is not organised efficiently and does not operate democratically we will not be able to fight the right-wing, let alone win the national elections next year.

Letters of support and donations to:

NCO Defence Campaign  
102, Tosson Terrace  
Heaton  
Newcastle upon Tyne

## Socialist STUDENT

### Weightless

By Jill Mountford

And now for something a little lighter. In fact, the new-look NOLS handbook, 'Labour Activist' 1988/89 isn't just a little lighter — it's weightless!

It covers issues such as the poll tax, voluntary membership, lesbian and gay rights, anti-racist work, safe sex and defending student unionism, with articles by big names such as George Galloway, Barbara Castle and good old Jack Straw.

Bearing in mind the handbook's title — 'Labour Activist' — none of the articles it carries actually offer any activist campaign strategies. Each issue is 'commented' upon. Telling us just how bad the poll tax, racism and voluntary membership, etc., are. As if we didn't already know!

But as always when it comes down to any real campaign ideas for turning the tide on the attacks against students and young people, the NOLSies, like their sisters and brothers running NUS, just can't get to grips with it.

So what's the problem? They're either incapable of sitting down and developing any serious campaign strategy (and this is possibly the case if you think about Jeremy Swift, NOLS vice-chair, and Tommy Hutchinson, NUS treasurer) or politically they simply don't see the need for it (and this is definitely the case if you think about the rest of them, with possibly one or two exceptions).

The 'Labour Activist' is the first official NOLS literature many new Labour Club members will see — the Dem Left have ruined a good opportunity to start off what should be the year of the big confrontation with the Tories, they've missed a chance to win a new layer of Labour students to the 'radical alternative' (which they continually talk about in the handbook) to nine years of Thatcher.

As far as NOLS are concerned the Labour activist of 1988/89 should be no more political, militant and willing to fight to defend and gain ground from the Tories than s/he was in 1987/88.

## Witch hunt in Scotland

A major witch-hunt of Militant supporters in Scotland is underway.

Supporters in Pollock and Cathcart constituencies have had reports compiled on them which have been handed over to Walworth Road. The reports were compiled after a call at the recent Scottish Labour conference on constituencies to report cases of 'disruptive behaviour'.

The Cathcart inquiry is being dealt with through the National Constitutional Committee. There is a massive backlog of cases waiting to be considered by the NCC — a testimony to the witch-hunt mania in Walworth Road.

To avoid this, Pollock have sent their report directly to Joyce Gould, who has passed it on to Labour's NEC. The idea is to complete the inquiry quickly in order to encourage other CLPs to bring

complaints against Militant supporters.

The 'crimes' for which Labour Party members are under investigation are patently political rather than organisational.

Previous attempts to organise a united fight against witch-hunts have been stymied by the arrogance and sec-

ularism of Militant supporters themselves. This must not be allowed to happen this time around. The attacks on Militant supporters in Scotland are an attack on the rights of all Labour Party members, and must be fought on this basis.

## NALGO Broad Left

The NALGO National Broad Left is meeting on September 23rd. But it has never been a strong grouping in the union. Can it grow?

Some local Broad Lefts have been successful in getting rank and

file members involved but NALGO's traditional 'federalism' has meant that the 'Militant' dominated national grouping has had a very shadowy existence.

We need a national Broad Left: one that can build as an open and democratic opposition which links together branches and members who want to fight the attacks on public services and democratise the union.

The grip on the union's structure by a coalition of right wingers, Kinnockites and the 'Morning Star' gives us a hard job to do. But already branches around the country are working together on issues of union democracy and anti-cuts campaigning.

If the Broad Left sets itself the task of uniting those campaigns not setting itself up as the type of electoral machine that 'Militant' supporters suggest, it could become a real force... but there's a long way to go.

## Maudsley strike

By Ray Ferris

Striking COHSE healthworkers at South London's Maudsley hospital suspended their indefinite strike action (with emergency cover) last Friday after 12 days.

The strikers demanded full funding and fair and proper implementation of the nurses pay and grading review. However, no other hospitals followed suit, waiting to see the results of the

regrading exercise first, so the Maudsley action has been suspended.

Next week the nurses will draw up a list of their own local demands.

A Maudsley nurse spoke to *Socialist Organiser*: 'Generally the strike was very successful. This isn't the end of our action — we're just waiting to see the results of regrading.'

'We're very proud of what we've achieved and won't go back demoralised because we've broken through the psychological barrier that nurses can only go on strike for 24 hours or so.'

## Gun to the head in South Wales

British coal bosses have now put the gun to the head of the South Wales NUM Area leadership. Either you accept 6-day working at the planned Margam pit by Friday or we will call in another 'union'. Already, the UDM is confidently boasting it will get in there.

The bosses are intent on introducing 6-day working, by fair means or foul.

What resolve will the South Wales leadership have against this blackmail? I certainly don't think they should go against the union's conference decision. In any case, would they ballot the Area's membership on the issue and test the feeling of those who would ac-

## WHEATON'S WEEK

tually have to work 6 days? If they did I think the membership would vote no.

The situation is not straightforward for the bosses. If they hand the pit over to Roy Lynk where is his membership going to come from? Nottinghamshire? I cannot see South Wales mines joining the UDM on the promise of opening one pit.

When Spencer tried to import his scab organisation into South Wales in the '20s and '30s he was defeated.

The TGWU has also been mentioned for Morgam, but I cannot see other TUC unions touching it

without NUM agreement. I have heard rumours of the NUM possibly becoming a section of the TGWU — such a possibility makes-breaking Bridlington against the NUM even more unlikely.

The Post Office has obviously been testing the feeling and strength of resistance in the run-up to the almost certain privatisation of the Post Office. By backing off the union leadership has shown its weakness in face of that threat.

It is quite obvious by the reaction of the membership that many of them were quite prepared to have a go. They can see what is at stake. The danger is that, having been sold out, some will get demoralised.

The lesson of course, is the urgent need to organise a rank and file movement in the UCW and other unions.

# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

## Exposed: Islington

## Council's secret sacking scheme

# Stop the massacre!

### Workers who fight the cuts will face the sack

Islington Council faces a storm of protest from trade unions and local Labour Parties after the leaking of a secret document showed that they plan to sack workers who won't co-operate with a new cuts exercise.

The Council is carrying what it describes as a 'Priority Based Budgeting Exercise' in its Homes for the Elderly, Libraries, Planning and Central Housing Departments.

The 'exercise' is meant to be a thorough review of the priority work in all four areas, but the Council has made it clear that it plans cuts as a result of the exercise — and is planning next year's budget with these cuts already built in.

So far, the Council has paid over £100,000 to a firm of management consultants, Coopers and Lybrand, to run the 'exercise'. But it is now asking council staff to help draw up cuts plans: managers are being asked to say which of their staff are least needed, and other workers are being told to say which parts of their jobs are least important.

NALGO the largest council workers' union, and MATSA have both urged their members not to co-operate in cutting their own or their workmates' jobs.

When NALGO voted overwhelmingly to refuse to co-operate with 'Priority Based Budgeting' councillors discussed secret plans to tell workers they would be "immediately suspended without pay and liable to dismissal" and talked about "isolating staff following the NALGO instruction".

The NALGO branch has given Socialist Organiser a copy of the document that spells out the sacking plan. The union's Assistant Secretary, Nik Barstow, told us:

"The Council are trying to duck the issue that they are planning to cut services to the elderly, library users, tenants, and ratepayers — and that they've spent a small fortune on employing a private firm to tell them how to do it.

They want council workers to tell them that the services we provide, and our jobs, aren't needed. It's not true, and they must be mad if they think that we are going to 'co-operate' in throwing ourselves on the dole.

Councillors talk about the 'agonising decisions they're having to make on cuts' — but they seem happy enough to draw up plans to turn Islington Council into another Wapping by threatening to sack workers in this way".

They talk about 'refusing to obey instructions' — but they're asking 400 council workers to help throw themselves, or someone they work with, out of a job — where's that in anyone's contract!

"We're confident that the ballot we've decided to hold among our members will give overwhelming support to the non-cooperation policy. We hope the council will negotiate instead of issuing threats.

But, more importantly, we hope that the people of Islington who use the Council services that are under threat will support our stand".

## Iraqi government slaughters Kurds

By Clive Bradley

The regime in Iraq, having fed off corpses for the last eight years, is unable to stop.

Since the ceasefire in the war with Iran, it has intensified its war against the Kurdish minority.

Terrible atrocities have been committed. Iraq has used poison gas against Kurdish communities — a practice they began during the war — slaughtering untold thousands. Kurdish villages have been wiped out in unspeakably barbaric fashion.

Thousands of Kurds have fled across the borders in Turkey; according to some estimates, over 100,000.

They now face worsening conditions, malnutrition and the threat of deportations.

Even so, they are the lucky ones. Descriptions of the fate of those who couldn't get away make harrowing reading. A Kurdish guerilla told *The Independent*: 'These bombs have destroyed everything. I truly believe that we are the only sur-

vivors. Our relatives have been forced to stay in Iraq.'

Observers have noted the relative health of the refugees. People either escape the Iraqi attacks — or they die. 'There are no wounded,' a Kurd told *The Guardian*.

Before the ceasefire, the Iraqi regime unleashed its first mini-Hiroshima on the town of Halabja. In retribution for small Kurdish military victories (in alliance with Iran), gas was deposited on Halabja, killing 4,000.

With an end to hostilities with Iran, Iraq was free to hurl all its power at the Kurds. It has been a massacre, pitting some of the most gruesome features of twentieth century technology against whole communities. It is the first time poison gas has been used against civilians. Extermination is what the Kurds have been calling it.

The Kurds are a nation of perhaps 15 million people, divided mainly between Iraq, Iran and Turkey, with smaller minorities in Syria and the USSR. In all the countries where they live they



have been brutally persecuted.

Turkey unsurprisingly shows little concern for the refugees. Its own sizeable Kurdish minority does not officially exist, and the word 'Kurd' is illegal. In Iran, the Kurds were among Khomeini's first victims.

The slaughter of the Kurds must stop. Pressure must be

put on the Iraqi government to stop the massacre. More than that, the Kurds should have their just national rights.

In fact the Iraqi Kurds have traditionally demanded no more than autonomy within Iraq. But if they were to choose independence, or a unified Kurdish state, that too is their right.