

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Socialist Forum Revolt in Eastern Europe

Thursday 27 April
7.30

Lucas Arms
Grays Inn Road
(tube: Kings X)

Speakers • Eyewitness from Hungary and Czechoslovakia — fresh from discussions with the opposition
• Polish Socialist Party — PPS (RD)
• The British representative of the Hungarian opposition group the Young Democrats

Back the Dockers!



By Eric Heffer MP

In Parliament today the Tories were waving their order papers and baying like wolves. What Nye Bevan said about them being lower than vermin is absolutely true.

I said that Labour's front bench, when we get into office — and we will — must throw all their support behind a National Dock Labour Scheme to cover every port in the country. I didn't get any response to that.

The dockers are weakened now because we didn't bring all the ports into the scheme in 1947. We allowed competition between scheme and non-scheme ports.

True, the non-scheme ports were only small then. But once we entered the Common Market, it was obvious that they were going to hype non-scheme ports like Felixstowe.

It was also clear that the Tories were going to smash the Dock Labour Scheme when they felt strong enough.

I've never been a docker, but I remember how when I first went to Liverpool dockers had to stand around each day in hope of getting employment. With the Dock Labour Board, employers had to go to the union for workers.

The port employers say they won't return to casual labour, but I don't believe it. The nature of the docks is such that the volume of work varies constantly. What are they going to do? Do you imagine employers are going to continue to pay you when they don't have to any more? They'll lay off workers, won't they?

Under the Dock Labour Board, dockers didn't get full wages in slack times, but they weren't



sacked. Instead of going on the dole they were paid a certain level of wages by the Dock Labour Board. The idea that they had jobs for life at full wages is absolutely untrue.

The Tories also try to give the impression that the Dock Labour Board is unique. But something like it operates in some USA ports, like San Francisco. Other ports actually ban serious trade unions and they have workers milling around to be hired.

The dock employers have wanted to smash the Dock Labour Scheme for a long time. They want to reorganise the ports, but not where the workers have a position of strength.

The employers have prepared, but it is different from the miners' strike. Then they had alternative fuels and stocks. Now if the Scheme ports come out, the strike will bite quickly — within five weeks, I'd say. A long strike will be very

effective.

We must give full support and ensure that the trade union movement falls in behind the strike. That's difficult because the leadership will run for cover at any decisive moment.

The Tories will try to get the dockers for breaking the law about secondary pickets. They might even say that it is not an industrial strike but against legislation, therefore political and illegal. I don't think

they can get away with it, but they'll try anything.

The union leaders are so frightened about their money that they're constantly looking over their shoulders at the lawyers.

There come times when you have to break the law — or you're totally on your knees.

Inside: four-page pull-out on docks dispute

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Bristol against poll tax

POLL TAX

Bristol Anti-Poll Tax Federation's first meeting on 2 April brought together the dozen local anti-poll tax unions in a campaign for mass non-payment and non-implementation by Bristol's Labour Council.

Its immediate focus will be frustration of the registration process now taking place in Bristol, and building for a May Day demonstration against the poll tax in the city centre.

Labour Party activists have played a central role in Bristol's anti-poll tax campaign, most of the local groups being initiated by Labour Party wards. Wards have distributed leaflets explaining how the tax affects people, and how to

campaign against it, organised petitioning as well as hosting regular public meetings and organising a successful 'Peasants Revolt' day on 1 April.

A number of Labour councillors are involved in the campaign, pledging to fight for the council to refuse to prosecute non-payers and people who refuse to register, but Bristol's only Labour MP, Dawn Primarolo, has kept a low profile, and argued for a 'Committee of 100' rather than mass non-payment and non-implementation.

Five of the Labour candidates for the Avon county elections, due to take place in May, are fighting the election campaign specifically on a platform of non-payment and non-implementation of the tax — which is already proving a vote-winner. Despite what Kinnock believes, working class people aren't prepared to sit tight and vote Labour at the next general election, they want a fight back now.

In Bristol the campaigning work done by local wards has paid off, with significant numbers of people joining the Labour Party. Neil Kinnock, take note!



Neil Kinnock signing a poll tax petition, flanked by Miriam Karlin and Jack Cunningham

Town hall workers rally against tax

By Nik Barstow

The campaign against poll tax among the people who'll have to collect it — NALGO members in councils — is growing.

Lambeth NALGO have called a conference this Saturday for branches "with a view to developing a more co-ordinated and fighting strategy on a national basis, and to break down the isolation felt by some branches."

The conference has won the sponsorship of over a dozen large inner-city branches, and delegates are expected from over 40 branches all around the country, including Scotland.

The response to the Lambeth conference is reflected in the union's official structure too. 18 branches have submitted motions on poll tax to the NALGO conference. If we organise branches together now, there is a real chance of mounting a major challenge

to the union leadership's 'do nothing' policy and committing NALGO to refuse to cooperate with poll tax.

The Lambeth conference gives activists in NALGO a real chance to defend democracy in the union — the leadership have effectively overturned the 1988 conference decision to campaign against poll tax.

It offers a bigger chance too — to build a permanent network of activists who want to fight poll tax, cuts, privatisation and attacks on public sector workers' conditions. Activists and branches in London will be making a national call on 15 April to launch a regular rank and file bulletin in the union — 'NALGO Action' — and expect a lot of support.

NALGO Poll Tax Conference • Saturday 15 April • 11-4pm • Brixton Town Hall, London SW2 (Brixton tube)

Mersey reselection scandal

LABOUR PARTY

Activists in the Merseyside East Euro-constituency are asking CLPs to send resolutions to Labour's National Executive on the following lines:

This Constituency Labour Party: Supports those CLPs, the TGWU North West Regional Committee and General Secretary Ron Todd in ask-

ing that the Merseyside East reselection procedure should be restarted, recognising that the British Labour Group of MEPs also received legal advice that the procedure has not been conducted according to Labour Party rules.

And therefore calls for an Inquiry into allegations over the Merseyside East Reselection procedure to include the following items:

1. The reason why the reselection lasted nearly two years. Wigan and Leigh CLPs were told to proceed in July 1987, yet the selection finally took place on March 21 1989;

2. The legal advice given to the Wigan TGWU 6/120 branch that the Wigan nomination procedure was irregular;

3. The situation in St Helens North, where the CLP, on March 10 1989 asked for the reselection procedure to be restarted, in order to elect its delegation normally, thus repudiating a Euro-delegation 'elected' from its Executive in November 1987;

4. Membership of Knowsley North following its 2-year suspension. At ward reconvening meetings, many new members suddenly appeared. The Assistant Regional Organiser explained that they had joined while the CLP was suspended and could vote, without providing information on how they had joined or their subscriptions were paid;

5. The Knowsley South procedure, where there was apparently no GMC meeting to decide on participation in reselection or to elect Euro-delegates, some being told they were delegates by phone;

6. Makerfield CLP, which on January 19 1989 reversed its decision not to participate in Euro-reselection. A protest lodged with Regional Office about an apparent breach of CLP Standing Order 4a has now led to an inquiry which the CLP is now conducting;

Finally, we strongly believe the central issue in the Merseyside East reselection is not any individual, but each CLP's right democratically to make its choice, since those CLPs not allowed to participate normally now have an imposed Euro-candidate — the fourth imposed Parliamentary Candidate within this Euro-CLP.

Scots workers lose £5 a week

By Cate Murphy

Some four million people in Scotland have received their first poll tax bill.

Working class people in inner city areas will have to find an average of £230 a year extra.

For 90% of households poll tax means paying an average increase of 26% on last year's rates bill: if you live in Skye, you'll have to find 78% more!

There are only four districts out of 56 where a household with two adults will save money. Two of them are well-heeled, Tory-controlled districts.

Even in Strathclyde, where the Tories have deliberately increased the local authority grant for this year to keep the poll tax artificially low, and so undermine opposition, working class couples will face increases of up to 30%.

The Tories promised rebates for those in low incomes. But, partly because of the tight implementation

deadline and partly because of uncertainty as to exactly who is entitled to a rebate, most of the two million people, on official figures, who are entitled to a rebate will in fact be wrongly billed for the full amount.

Millions of working class people will get into arrears very quickly, with the threat of fines, benefit and wage arrestments and bailiffs being sent in.

The overall costs of implementing the poll tax are far greater than Tory estimates. In Scotland the cost will reach £72 million by 1990 — only £58 million of which will be paid for by central government. The remaining £14

million will be passed on to poll tax payers — along with the costs of extra staff, etc.

As poll tax bills drop through letterboxes, opposition to the tax can only increase. We should be fighting for Labour councils to refuse to do the Tories' dirty work for them, and to argue that trade unionists should refuse to implement prosecutions or wage arrestments.

It's not enough for the Labour Party to wring its hands and say 'vote for us next time', they must fight alongside the working class to beat this tax.

(Information from the latest issue of *Labour Research* magazine)

Fight for democratic rights!

LETTER

We are writing to urge you to join us in sponsoring and organising a National Convention for Democratic Rights.

We hope to bring together groups and individuals appalled at the current attacks on democratic rights and determined to do something about them.

Though the Call to Action has been issued by the Socialist Conference, it is by no means restricted to people who consider themselves socialists. On the contrary, we believe that a National Convention

for Democratic Rights can only become a reality if it involves the widest and most diverse forces.

We will be holding an open meeting at the Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Road, London, N4 on Saturday, 13 May to discuss and develop our plans for the National Convention. We hope you will send people along to this meeting and agree to become a co-sponsor of the Call to Action and the National Convention.

If you have any queries please call Dave Palmer on 01-881 3187 (day) or 01-881 1254 (evening).

Democratic Rights,
c/o Reading Matters Bookshop,
Box 35, High Road,
Wood Green,
London N22.

CLPs Conference on the witch-hunt and democracy Saturday 29 April AEU Hall, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool. 11am to 5pm

Each CLP is entitled to three delegates at £2.00 per delegate. Visitors are welcome.

Contact: Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom,
Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG

Pass this resolution!

This model motion for Labour's Annual Conference has been circulated by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

This Conference regrets the refusal of the NEC to make provision for affiliated organisations and CLPs to amend the Policy Review documents at Annual Conference in either 1988 or this year. Amend-

ments would have enabled Conference to debate and resolve specific issues on their individual merit. Conference does not accept that lengthy and wide-ranging Policy Review documents should be put to Conference on an all or nothing basis and be allowed to overrule and nullify specific resolutions debated and agreed by Conference.

It therefore instructs the NEC to ensure that resolutions adopted by Conference take precedence over the Review documents in the event of any ambiguity or contradiction.

Support Namibia!

EDITORIAL

Fighting last week between South African forces and South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) guerrillas may have come close to scuttling Namibia's independence.

But as SWAPO retreated on the central issue of being confined to barracks in Namibia, the agreement seems to have been saved.

After the current furore has died down, South African troops will be withdrawn from Namibia, and independence will begin. SWAPO still seems likely to win the elections that will then be held.

Both South African and, more surprisingly, the United Nations, claimed that SWAPO had broken the ceasefire agreement by sending armed guerrillas into Namibia from across the border in Angola. It was attacks on SWAPO commandos by the South African army and by the South African backed SWATF that started the bitter fighting in which nearly 200 people, mainly SWAPO, died.

The question arises: what interest did SWAPO have in risking the independence agreement? There has been some speculation that SWAPO might want to appear as conquering heroes emerging from the bush in the wake of South African retreat. But the guerrillas seem to have been extremely ill-prepared for the attacks when they came.

Moreover, prisoners taken by the South Africans told a different story: they were going to bases inside Namibia to deliver their arms under the ceasefire agreement.

SWAPO is set to win in the elections that are to be held in independent Namibia. Why risk that?

South Africa on the other hand, had a lot to gain from a breach, if only a temporary one, in the ceasefire. First, they could physically weaken SWAPO. Second, if they could make it seem that SWAPO was breaking agreements, they could not only score a propaganda victory against SWAPO, but also against the African National Congress. South African politicians could claim that the ANC, likewise, could not be trusted.

Moreover, the present South African government is under a lot of pressure from its right wing flank. 'Getting tough' with SWAPO would be an important way to demonstrate that by coming to an agreement over Namibia in the first place they had not 'sold out'.

They perhaps risk the agreement; but the events of the last week have shown that South Africa was able to take the ceasefire to the edge and yet not let it fall. It would have to be SWAPO that backed down.

No agreement signed by SWAPO ever existed that would prevent SWAPO fighters crossing the border into Namibia. Agreements by other parties to the negotiations (the UN, South Africa, Angola and



South African riot cops face SWAPO supporters

Cuba) did exist; and it has been claimed that SWAPO had agreed to stand by these. Even so, there was certainly a grey area.

In any event, the spectacle of the United Nations first sanctioning South African attacks on SWAPO, and then participating in them, was a sorry comment on that organisation's credibility.

Whether SWAPO deliberately broke any agreement or not, there can be no doubt that the 'South African Defence Force' has throughout possessed far greater force, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered 'defensive', and in the actual fighting last week suffered fewer casualties by far.

SWAPO did have no choice but to back down. Not only South

Africa and the United Nations, but also Angola, Cuba and Zimbabwe were putting pressure on SWAPO to retreat; so they did. Indeed Angola and Cuba had been expected by the UN to control SWAPO during the ceasefire and withdrawal process.

So the ceasefire survives, and Namibian independence is still scheduled to occur. Last week's fighting shows how easy it is for South Africa to move into military action despite the ceasefire.

Even an independent and sovereign state of Namibia might well have to face South African military incursions; both neighbouring Angola, and Mozambique, not far away, have suffered South African interference directly and indirectly ever since

independence in the mid 1970s. In both cases the results have been tragic.

Independent Namibia will need to be able to defend itself. And so no wonder SWAPO wants to be sure it has bases inside its own country in preparation for independence.

Part of our solidarity with SWAPO should be the demand for an end to this condition for the continued ceasefire and 'peace process'. SWAPO has every right to have its members, armed, in Namibia. Solidarity also means accepting that if SWAPO cannot guarantee this, it has to negotiate, or participate in negotiations indirectly (as it has largely done), on whatever grounds are available to it.

US's biggest march since Vietnam

WOMEN'S EYE

By Lynn Ferguson

300,000 marched in Washington on Sunday in defence of the right to abortion. The march drew upon a wide range of support — even including the National Coalition of American Nuns!

Film and TV stars have publicly come out in support of abortion rights — Cybil Shepherd and Whoopi Goldberg were visible on the march, and an action group has been set up of women in soap operas!

Abortion rights in the US have always been precarious, and have constantly been under attack. Pickets of abortion clinics by 'pro-

lifers' are a daily event. So far this year nine abortion clinics have been firebombed.

As different states can make their own laws, American women have had a constant struggle to maintain their right to abortion. As many states have already banned the use of public funds and facilities for abortions and counselling, access for working class and black women is severely restricted.

But the latest threat which provoked the march is the most serious of all. Abortion rights in the US rest on a 1973 High Court ruling — *Roe v Wade*. That ruling is now being challenged in the courts by the State of Missouri, a state which has openly declared war on abortion.

Throughout the Reagan years, Cowboy Ron consistently appointed anti-abortion judges to the Supreme Court. There are a couple of judges whose views are not yet known, but there is a real possibility that the right to abortion may be taken away.

It is certain that new president George Bush will throw his weight behind the attempts to overturn *Roe v Wade* — during his election campaign he pledged to fight abortion. This is his opportunity to fulfill his promise to his moral majority supporters.

In the 1960s, 5,000 women a year died in the US as a result of backstreet abortions. For poor women in the US the backstreet is already becoming the only real option. If Bush and his friends have their way American women will have nowhere else to go.

Back home, battered women's refuges are facing severe hardship, many may even have to close.

Social security changes mean that refuges will no longer qualify for 'board and lodging' payments. Instead, women will have to claim income support and housing benefit.

At Chiswick women's refuge, the average waiting time for housing benefit is *six months*. By that time many women have moved on. Keeping track of money, ensuring that cheques are cashed when women have left, let alone the struggle of managing for that long without payment, will cripple many refuges.

Refuges have always faced a struggle for survival, existing on donations and short-term grants. Grants from local authorities have been drying up as the cuts bite.

This latest attack threatens to leave many women imprisoned in violent relationships, with nowhere to go.

Warning

This Saturday, 15 April, is the deadline for Constituency Labour Parties to pay their affiliations to Labour Party headquarters. Constituencies which don't pay won't be able to put motions or send delegates to Annual Conference.

'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823, London
SE15 4NA. Phone 01-639
7965.

Latest date for reports: first post
Monday or by phone Monday

Published by Socialist Organiser,
PO Box 823, London SE15
4NA.

Printed by Press Link
International (UK) Ltd (TU).

Registered as a newspaper at
the Post Office.

Signed articles do not
necessarily reflect the views of
Socialist Organiser.

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR
DAILY STAR

PRESS
GANG

Gorby comes to town

By Jim Denham

During the Second World War, papers like the *Daily Express* used to call the Russians, 'Our Comrades' and refer to Stalin as 'Uncle Joe'.

That sort of chumminess rather wore off after 1945, what with the Cold War, the Iron Curtain and so forth. Last week, as you probably noticed, the old spirit of Anglo-Russian matiness made a big comeback.

You could tell that Gorbachev must be OK because the tabloids gave him a nickname. They always do that with OK people.

The *Sun* experimented briefly with 'Miki', which made for such catchy headlines as 'It's Miki Mania!'. But finally they settled on 'Gorby'.

This somehow brought to mind a certain comparison between the Russian premier and the popular 'comedian' Jimmy Tarbuck. Both are cuddly, harmless figures and very much OK people as far as the tabloids are concerned. You wouldn't be surprised to see Gorby wearing a woolly sweater, knocking off a round of golf with Denis Thatcher, while Raisa and Maggie exchanged recipes in the club house.

Gorby must, however, be somewhat funnier than Tarby. According to Saturday's *Star*, 'The Queen and Gorby the Great had a laugh a minute lunch at Windsor Castle yesterday... Barriers disappeared as the Queen and Gorby giggled their way through a lavish three course meal in the Castle's state dining room.'

Tarby, on the other hand, has never been known to make anyone actually laugh — least of all the Queen of England.

It was perhaps not that remarkable that Gorby should hit it off with those well-known pinkos at Windsor Castle. But he also did well with The Boss herself.

Friday's *Express* led with 'So happy together', complete with a photo of Mrs T and Gorby cuddling up and grinning outside No.10. According to political editor Robert Gibson, another Russian buzzword has now entered the English language: 'Blizost. It means togetherness... and it was the message to the world from the talks between Gorbachev and Mrs Thatcher as he poured out his heart to her and their Special Relationship took hold, gave hope, and made history.'

The *Daily Mail* went so far as to invoke Ira Gershwin to sum up the Special Relationship between Maggie, Gorby, Denis and Raisa: 'I've got a crush on you' was the headline on Friday's centre page photo special featuring highlights of the visit.

The *Mail's* comment column was a little more restrained, but even so it admitted that, 'As a human being, Mr Gorbachev is a notable improvement on his android-like predecessors. His body language is friendly and he knows how to smile.'

The *Mail* also drew attention to more practical matters: 'Trade and Industry secretary Lord Young is understandably pleased with the £300 million deal he signed yesterday for converting Russian plants...'

It almost brings us back to the real world. Almost, but not quite. We had to wait for the *Sunday Times* to remind us that Mrs Thatcher had time for a few little matters other than Gorby mania last week. 'While Britain focused its attention on the Gorbachev visit last Thursday, Margaret Thatcher was chairing a specially convened breakfast time Cabinet meeting. Top of the agenda was the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme...'

Come to think of it, that's probably what Maggie and Gorby were chattering about in all their photos.



Anti-Nazi protest in Frankfurt

German right revives

GRAFFITI

Afrightening resurgence of far-right sympathies in West Germany has been revealed by a poll in Der Spiegel magazine.

The poll asked West Germans to rate their sympathy for Adolf Hitler on a scale from +5 to -5. Only 36% rated Hitler entirely negatively, at -5. 14% gave him a positive mark, and 12% a zero.

A staggering 43% thought the National Socialist period had good and bad sides, though only 3% considered it to be clearly positive.

Continuing anti-semitic attitudes were also revealed by the poll.

Social security benefits rise this week — but for over one million claimants the real value of their benefits will drop.

Some of the worst off claimants have suffered as a result of the changeover last year from supplementary benefit to income support. Over half a million have had their benefits frozen for two years running, because their entitlement under the old system was higher than under the new — all this whilst prices have risen by 12%.

Another 600,000 claimants will get a rise lower than the rate of inflation.

The ending of special allowances for heating, diet and domestic help have hit those most in need — the old, the sick and the handicapped.

So *this* is what the Tories mean by 'targetting'.

Mid-Glamorgan Health Authority is planning to compensate for government cuts by making a bargain with a car dealer.

The deal would involve advertising space on hospital notice boards and the use of hospital grounds for car lots.

In return, the Health Authority will get a percentage of every car sale, and staff discounts on cars and parts will be available.

The proposal is just the latest in a series of wild money-making ideas from Health Authorities, who are desperate to make up for shortfalls caused by government cuts.

In February, health bosses in Cheltenham mooted the idea of private firms sponsoring hospital staff, with nurses wearing advertisements on their uniforms.

Imelda Marcos, wife of ex-despot of the Philippines, Ferdinand, has announced funeral arrangements for her sick husband.

When he dies, he will be embalmed and put on public display, until she is allowed to take his body back to the Philippines.

The Marcos family seem rather enamoured of this macabre ritual. Marcos' mother died last May and her body is still on show in the Philippines — the Marcoses refuse to bury her until the former dictator is allowed back into the country.

Despite the lack of skilled labour, and the shortage of school-leavers entering the workforce, most employers are doing nothing to change their recruitment methods, or change traditional work organisation to attract new workers.

A survey of 2,000 employers shows that only half are considering job share or part-time work schemes. Only 14% are making special provision for 'returning mothers'. One in ten offer extended leave or career-break schemes — and a mere 9% are prepared to consider them.

Childcare is still a major problem, with only 2% of employers offering workplace nurseries, and 19% contributing to childcare costs.

McDonalds is already operating in Budapest in Hungary and is currently setting up 20 outlets in Moscow, the first of them to be open by the end of the year. The future managers of McDonald's outlets in Moscow are already being trained in Canada.

McDonald's has been trying to expand into the Soviet Union since the mid-1970s, but initially without success. A recent article in *Pravda* explained: "We continued to stigmatise McDonald's as the producer of low-quality food and as a plunderer of peoples".

But then things began to change: "In the meantime, for some strange reason or other, these peoples allowed themselves to be 'plundered', and turned out to be not in the least choosy about a piece of the 'low-quality food'".

In fact, it now turns out that McDonald's is the home of culinary excellence: "The products of McDonald's are products of the highest quality. The standards of the company are very high". Such praise for McDonald's says a lot about the general quality of food in the Soviet Union.

Maintaining its high standards of concern for workers' conditions at work, *Pravda* is likewise enthusiastic about the prospects of those fortunate to work for McDonald's: "The equipment and surroundings in McDonald's restaurants will attract workers, will render their labour aesthetically pleasant".

But McDonald's is not taking any chances about recruiting counter-staff in the Soviet Union. Describing it as an example of "hamburger diplomacy," McDonald's will be using counter-staff recruited in America, Canada and West Germany to run its Moscow restaurants, gradually replacing them by an indigenous workforce.

McDonald's can rest assured that none of their employees in the USSR will end up joining a trade union — there aren't any real unions for them to join.

Socialist Organiser readers wishing to apply for a job with McDonald's in the Soviet Union should write to: Vladimir Malyshev, Moscow-Restaurant-Service, 19a Gorky Street, Moscow, USSR.

Comparing the USSR to ancient despotism

LETTERS

I found very interesting the article of Clive Bradley (SO 388) in which he compared the Soviet Union to the Ottoman Empire. For my part, I have a similar analogy in mind for a long time. We once discussed this question in Turkey.

The Soviet bureaucracy was born as a pseudo-class from a political counter-revolution led by Stalin. I would also say that it was a by-product of Bolshevism.

It is a fact that the Russian Revolution was a premature and unexpected revolution. It occurred by chance. Lenin never foresaw that a socialist revolution would take place in Russia. Only

Plekhanov and Trotsky had foreseen it a long time before. Trotsky elaborated his theory of Permanent Revolution.

The other problem is that the Leninist concept of party was one of an end for itself just like a conspiratorial organisation. It was a finalist or teleological concept.

Stalin found a ready-made machine in his hands. The party bodies were already ideologically assimilated and they were submitted to the supreme authority. And he used it in a very talented way to usurp the political power. The means were transformed into an end in itself.

The bureaucracy was born as a pseudo-class. It did not have the legal ownership of the means of production. But that is not important. The promulgation of laws does not determine the entire process.

What is important is how the system or organism works and how its self-regulation reproduces it: that is what defines whether the

bureaucracy is a new class.

The bureaucracy is an independent and uncontrolled body. It controls the means of production and dominates the society and economy. It usurps the surplus and it uses this surplus according to its own needs. I think these are the most important points to classify a social group and decide whether it is a ruling class or not.

Effectively the bureaucracy acts as a ruling class. But I'm not certain that the Soviet Union and the others represent a new type of class society from the phylogenetic-sociological points of view. More correctly speaking, I can't find a term for them.

In sum, there is a class exploitation in the Soviet Union and the similar societies. This exploitation is somewhat similar to that in the Ottoman Empire and the Asiatic type of production described by Marx.

Adem Topol
Dijon, France.

Taking sides in Afghanistan

Tony Dale (Letters, SO 393) argues that we should support neither side in the current civil war in Afghanistan. The mullah-led 'rebels' are reactionary; the government shares responsibility with the Kremlin for what has been done over the past 9 years.

It might be true to say that whichever side we take won't make much difference: we have no audience for our ideas in Afghanistan. But I don't think socialists should be indifferent to the outcome of the civil war.

The Najibullah government, of course, *does* share responsibility with Moscow for the years of occupation — it has blood on its hands, or maybe up to its neck. And I don't think there's any question of supporting the *government*.

But wouldn't socialists have to choose whose side to fight on? Without giving any support to Najibullah, and indeed whilst ruthlessly criticising Najibullah, not least for collaborating with the USSR, I think we'd choose to fight against the Mujahedin. We'd choose to be alongside people who wanted to see rights for women, land reforms, some secularisation and so on.

It isn't unusual for socialists to participate in one side of a civil war without supporting the government currently expressing that side: consider the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9. Socialists were simultaneously against the Popular Front government but with the Republican struggle.

I'm not saying Afghanistan now is Spain in 1936, and the real socialist possibilities in Afghanistan are microscopic. But the general principles are similar.

Perhaps Tony felt that by taking sides now we are retrospectively condemning our own record on Afghanistan — which was wholehearted opposition to the Russian 'side'. Certainly some left groups have jeered at us along those lines.

But it only shows the limits of our support for the Stalinist side. We don't and can't support them to the extent of riding roughshod over the national rights of Afghanistan, via a Russian occupation which if it were to have been successful would have required *more* brutality and oppression.

If it's the case that the only way the 'progressive forces' in Afghanistan can win is through the USSR wiping out a large section of the population and imposing its

own techniques of rule, the 'progressive forces' will have to lose.

I'm not sure it *is* the only way. If things look bleak now for the twentieth century, it's the Kremlin's fault. Our political priority is to state that openly.

But even during Russian occupation, we weren't indifferent to social questions in Afghanistan, and would have been for the defence of what limited progressive measures had been introduced. Our emphasis was on the rights of nations, but that never exhausted the issues.

Now I think our emphasis has to be different. Now it is a matter of a *civil war* — now the Russians have gone — we do have to choose between social forces who at least identify with modern history, and social and political forces who might well be worse than Khomeini.

There isn't really a neat formula to express this approach. Maybe "Defend the cities" wasn't too brilliant a slogan. But I think Tony's approach is sectarian — and followed through consistently could lead to all kinds of sectarian errors in relating to Third World Stalinism of the Afghan type.

Edward Ellis
Southwark

14 years' jail for no crime

By Mike Shankland and Ian Doran

The case of Martin Foran has recently taken a disturbing turn for the worse.

Martin was arrested and charged on 10 September 1984 for robbing a pub in Birmingham. The robbers described were three youths: first a half-caste West Indian male, about 17 years old with dark wavy hair; the second a taller West Indian wearing a balaclava; and the third unseen. All three had Birmingham accents.

Martin is a middle-aged white Irishman with an obvious Irish accent. He does not match any of the descriptions. He had 15 witnesses confirming his alibi. Prosecution evidence was inconsistent, and there was no ID parade. But Martin was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

In prison, Martin has vigorously protested his innocence, taking part in rooftop demonstrations for which he was placed in solitary confinement. He has suffered recurring health problems and has been refused treatment.

Martin's health deteriorated to such an extent that to get an emergency colostomy operation he had to take a prison officer hostage. For this desperate act, Martin was sentenced to an extra six years for false imprisonment of a warder.

Whilst recovering from his operation at Walton prison, Martin was set upon by three warders, who stripped him naked, beat him up and ripped up his colostomy bag. In December Martin successfully took civil action against the warders. He was awarded minimal compensation (about £750). The Director of Public Prosecutions has so far failed to press criminal charges.

Over Christmas, whilst on hunger strike in protest at continued

harassment, Martin was moved *illegally* to Franklands Prison, Durham. No reason was given.

With Martin still needing treatment the nearest prison hospital is Walton. The intent is clear. Martin risks abuse at Walton, so the authorities hope he will be unwilling to be moved there and this can be construed as refusing treatment. Martin would thus let the warders off the hook and be unable to prove that he has been consistently denied medical treatment.

Martin is not going to refuse the move, but Martin's supporters are hoping to take action to stop the authorities forcing the move.

For more information and details of any further action, contact Paul, Leeds Black Cross, Box JAG, 52 Call Lane, Leeds LS1.

Send messages of support and solidarity to Martin Foran, C51796, HMP Frankland, PO Box 40, Frankland-low-Newton, Brasside, Durham DH1 5XF.

A stompie of a life

This article from the South African *Weekly Mail* describes the life of Stompie Mokhetsi, the young activist apparently murdered by Winnie Mandela's bodyguards

In October 1987, at the age of 13 and the height of less than four feet, Stompie Mokhetsi didn't think he would live much longer. "They can come and get me at any time," he remarked impassively to Peter Godwin, a British journalist who had tracked him down in Tumahole township. "I'm likely to die in the struggle," he said. "But the struggle will go on."

Stompie's predictions were proved correct in a forensic laboratory in Pretoria this week (17 February): a single identifiable fingerprint taking from his badly decomposed body put an end to weeks of speculation about his whereabouts.

Stompie's short life was extraordinary. At the time of the interview in Tumahole, the miniscule activist was arguably the best-known figure in the township. He was the "little general" to an "Under-14" army of some 1,500 ghetto children. He had just resumed his "command" after spending a year on remand in prison and being acquitted on public violence charges.

The Under-14s, he explained, were formed in 1985 — when he was ten — because "the other groups were all talk and no action. We formed an army to protect the people from harassment." His youngest foot-soldier was eight. "We're braver than the adults," he said.

The child army fought physical battles with the municipal police — "Green Beans" — and right-wing vigilantes called the "A-team".

When the Tumahole town hall was burnt down in 1987 it was rumoured to have been torched by the Under-14s in protest against the town councillors' refusal to allow the hall to be used by the local civic association.

Many of his comrades affectionately called him Tompana, a Zulu/Xhosa diminutive for the Afrikaans diminutive, Stompie. He'd inherited the nickname "Stompie" because of the apparent contradiction between his slight physique and overpowering presence. A stompie, in this sense, is a hard, unyielding thing.

Friends — most of whom doubled as admirers, if not disciples —

tell of him forever discussing politics. "What is the *direction*, comrade" was said to be his catchphrase.

His personality touched many people beyond his immediate comrades. Professor Mervin Shear, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand, recalls being so struck by Stompie that he invited him to lunch.

The pocket-sized activist addressed a mass meeting at Wits in 1987: he entered the hall and mounted the stage carrying a businesslike black briefcase. Some felt he was emulating the Rev. Allan Boesak, whom he admired. Shear said after the meeting he saw Stompie "enthralled a large group of students who gathered round to hear his oratory. Students stood around with their mouths wide open" as the boy recited chunks of the Freedom Charter.

It was "one of those sensitive days" on campus, said Shear, and he was concerned that some people who were not "well-disposed towards Stompie" would take advantage of his presence. The vice-chancellor therefore invited Stompie to lunch, along with Tiego Moseneke, ex-president of the Azanian Students Organisation, who translated between them when communication faltered.

Shear told the *Weekly Mail* he was amazed by the young character who related his experiences in detention. Shear was "very saddened" to see Stompie's picture in newspapers once he had disappeared.

He had been living in the Orlando Methodist Church sanctuary, set up for children whose home environments were devastated by the prolonged State of Emergency and widespread repression and violence in the townships.

At the age of 11 he'd been the youngest State of Emergency detainee in the country. His twelfth birthday was celebrated in a cell. After his release, it was rumoured Stompie had gone into hiding in Johannesburg. He'd already been expelled from school in Tumahole — his headmistress called the police when he tried to be readmitted.

While speaking to the London *Sunday Times* in 1987, he said he was worried about his education, and borrowed books from other children when he had a break from politicking.

Those who knew him while he lived in Johannesburg said he told them that while in detention he was driven to agree to spy for the police. Yet, they say, he was later reunited with his "comrades" and was accepted back.

An ex-colleague in Johannesburg said the youngster would not only recite the Freedom Charter by heart, but also chunks of writing by Karl Marx. "He was a genius. For someone of his age he was very advanced. He had such an amazing understanding of the political situation in South Africa. We used to have political discussions. But it is



not only the discussions I remember. No-one did the *toy-toyi* (Zulu dance) like Stompie did."

Stompie is said to have hated watching television and preferred discussion with his companions. Activists remember his sense of humour. He was considered a master at political jokes. "He could make a grim situation look like a picnic," said one.

On Christmas Eve last year, members of the Federation of Transvaal Women took food to the children at the Methodist Sanctuary and saw Stompie. One asked him whether he would go home to Tumahole for Christmas. Stompie declined: he feared "the system would harass him if he went home."

His mother told the *Weekly Mail* Stompie had been an active campaigner against the 1988 October municipal elections. Before his death he faced various charges under the Emergency Regulations in the Parys' Magistrates' Court.

He had visited his home, according to his mother, on December 1 last year. She told the *Weekly Mail* that he had given her the only

money he had at the time, a R5 note and some cents. He had also told his mother he was "happy at the home".

Stompie was a close friend of another child who died in the political turmoil of the 1980s — Siculo Dhlomo. According to Dhlomo's mother, the boys had a special salute they used to greet each other. They slapped each other's palms, wrists and fists whenever they met. "They would sit in the kitchen and discuss political issues all day," she said. She has a wistful phrase for the tragedy that, like her own son, befell Stompie. "He had a stompie of a life," she said.

The British reporter who spent time with Stompie in 1987 said there was "more to his personality than politics." He recalls his last memory of Stompie: "Sitting reading the newspapers at the table of township cafe, his feet not long enough to reach the floor, the child in him suddenly re-emerged. Asked what he wanted more than anything right now, his answer was... 'a BMX bike, some new clothes that fit and something to eat'."

Vietnam pulls out

WORLD BRIEFS

Vietnam has announced that it will pull its troops out of Cambodia by the end of September regardless of whether or not a deal has been negotiated with China, Thailand and the rebel forces in Cambodia.

Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1979 after repeated border clashes between the two countries. The Cambodian people mostly welcomed the Vietnamese as liberating them from the hideous dictatorship of Pol Pot.

Opposition to the Vietnamese occupation has however been organised by an alliance of right-wingers and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge now say that they have been converted from communism to free-enterprise capitalism, and Western politicians like Margaret Thatcher have said that the Khmer Rouge should be included in Cambodia's government.

A letter from Dorothea Breiten of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in New York has informed us of the death of Jim Kutcher.

Jim Kutcher was the central figure in an important witch-hunt case in 1948. Although he had lost both legs as a soldier in World War 2, he was fired from his government job because he was a member of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party.

After long campaigning he won his job back in 1956.

The SWP moved away from Trotskyism towards uncritical Castroism after 1979, and Jim Kutcher was expelled. At the time of his death he was a supporter of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency.

No glasnost in Georgia

At least 18 are dead and perhaps as many as 200 in a new upsurge of nationalist violence in the USSR, this time in Georgia.

Demonstrations and strikes brought Georgia's capital city Tbilisi to a halt, as Georgian's pressed demands for independence from the USSR.

Last Friday 7th, a demonstration of some 100,000 people took place in front of the local party headquarters, in support of 100 nationalist hunger strikers. 30 major factories struck in support, schools were closed — even the local TV station went off the air.

Troops and armoured vehicles were sent in. Reports vary, but it seems police attacked demonstrators with clubs. The government of course, insists that demonstrators were responsible for the violence.

The main demand is for independence for Georgia, but a large number of Georgians also want the full incorporation into Georgia of Abkhazia, an autonomous area on the Black Sea coast. There have been reports of violence inflicted on the Abkhaz minority by Georgians.

Nationalism has been bubbling away in Georgia for several months, a nationalism directed not only against the Kremlin, but also against national minorities, which make up around 30% of Georgia's population.

It looks like violence along the lines of Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is likely.

Defend the Cape Town sixteen!

In December 1988, fourteen black activists in Cape Town, all members of Umkhonto We Siswe, the armed wing of the African National Congress, were sentenced for their 'crime' of resistance to the hated system of apartheid.

Ashley Forbes (24 years old) was sentenced to 15 years; Peter Jacobs (22) and Nicklo Pedro (21) were sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. Anwa Dramat (20) received a sentence of 12 years. Nazeem Lowe

(25) and Clement Baadjies (20) are both to serve 10 years' imprisonment.

David Fortuin (25), Jeremy Veary (25), Wayne Malgas (22) and Ashraf Karriem (25) will serve a two-year sentence each. Walter Rhoode (25), Colin Petersen (23) and Leon Scott (30) received five-year suspended sentences.

Ashley Kriel, a comrade-in-arms of the fourteen, and in the same Umkhonto cell, paid the highest price — he was shot in the back by the security police. An inquest into

his death is presently in session.

The fourteen, together with Ashley's wife, Yasmina (they got married while in police custody), spent over a year and a half in police detention. At the tail-end of this period, the charges against Yasmina were dropped and she was released.

All fourteen were the victims of incessant interrogation and brutal mental and physical torture, which in most cases included repeated beatings and electro-shock treatment.

The four who were given suspended sentences have to report regularly to the police station in their magisterial district. The terms of their sentences are aimed at effectively preventing them from participating in political activity.

On 16 March, Andrina Forbes, 64 year old mother of Ashley Forbes, arrived in Britain to campaign in defence of the 16. She will be in the country from March to May 1989.

• For further information contact Ethne Swartz (0625) 582247.

Has there really been a 'Thatcher Revolution'?

Martin Thomas reviews 'Me and Mine: the Triumph of the New Individualism?' by John Rentoul. Unwin Hyman, £12.95.

One of Shaw's characters wanted to abolish the British working class and replace them with sensible persons; Mrs Thatcher has succeeded in doing just that.

"Much of...British history is explained by the fact that we never had a bourgeois revolution. But we are having one now — or at least a petit-bourgeois revolution."

Bruce Anderson learned the Marxist phrases when he was a member of the SWP (then called IS). Now he writes political commentary for the *Sunday Telegraph*. His assessment of the 'Thatcher Revolution' is repeated, less crisply and less joyously, by *Marxism Today*, and by writers from the political centre like Peter Jenkins.

According to Jenkins, Mrs Thatcher has "presided over a considerable, although far from complete, change of attitudes. (A new 'common ground' has been established. Its assumptions are individualistic rather than collectivist...")

All this argument, jubilant or sorrowing, has — says John Rentoul — proceeded in a sort of "evidence-free zone". Rentoul marshals the evidence.

Opinion surveys show, if anything, a slight shift towards more collectivist, egalitarian and liberal attitudes since 1979.

Should the government redistribute income and wealth to reduce inequality? 47 per cent said yes in 1983, 57 per cent in 1987. Should workers have more control over their workplaces? 56 per cent said yes in 1974, 68% in 1983.

Are trade unions a good thing? 51 per cent said yes in 1979, 71% in

1987. Have welfare benefits gone too far? 50 per cent said yes in 1979, 16% in 1987.

Do we prefer tax cuts and poorer public services, or better services even at the cost of higher taxes? In 1979 34 per cent preferred tax cuts, and 34 per cent better services. By 1987 opinion had swung in favour of public services. 66 per cent gave priority to services, 11 per cent to tax cuts.

Nationalisation is still unpopular — but so is further denationalisation. Nationalisation has become more popular since 1979. Should council tenants have an automatic and universal right to buy their houses? 74 per cent said yes in 1979, but only 60 per cent in 1985.

On women's equality, divorce, abortion rights and hanging, opinion has become more liberal. On racial equality it is static. Only on lesbian and gay rights has opinion become less liberal.

Opinion poll evidence is always slippery; and on many of the issues the goalposts have been moved. Trade unions are weaker, the nationalised sector is smaller, welfare benefits are more meagre, so opinion in their favour may not mean so much today.

But Rentoul also provides a series of interviews with working class Tory or Alliance voters which fill out the picture. These people still see themselves as working class. They may well see the Tories as 'for the rich'. They support many 'Labour' values.

But they don't believe that Labour has a workable economic policy; they don't believe that Labour could put its good intentions into practice. They would like a more collectivist and egalitarian

society, but they don't see any workable policy to achieve it. In the meantime they have to live in a dog-eat-dog world; and many of them have gained personally from Tory policies.

Rentoul does not discuss how much the Tory government has changed the mechanics of British society, as distinct from people's attitudes. Certainly it has changed a lot; and perhaps here an analysis of the 'Thatcher Revolution' could find surer ground.

After World War II coal, steel, cars and ships were the pivots of the world economy and of the British economy in particular. One by one these industries were nationalised, in efforts to rescue them. They declined nonetheless.

British industry was caught in a cycle of reliance on declining European markets, low investment, and low profits. With technical change and the rapid spread of basic industry in the Third World, the coal-and-metal industries ceased to be important for industrial leadership.

Thatcher has cut British capitalism's losses by scrapping the bulk of those coal-and-metal industries — and, in a parallel operation, battering the trade union movement which had its strongholds in those industries.

By doing so she has greatly raised the rate of profit in Britain. But the government still stands some way short of creating a dynamic new economic regime.

Britain is the chief site for Japanese and US investment in Europe — it always was, because of the language advantage. But Britain's lag behind the leading capitalist countries in new microelectronic technology has become worse in the Thatcher years. Manufacturing investment is still lower than in 1979.

Modern industrial development needs not just union-bashing but also infrastructure (transport, communications, power), and an educated and trained workforce. London has the worst public

workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

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

workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

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

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

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

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

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

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

WHERE WE STAND

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We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under

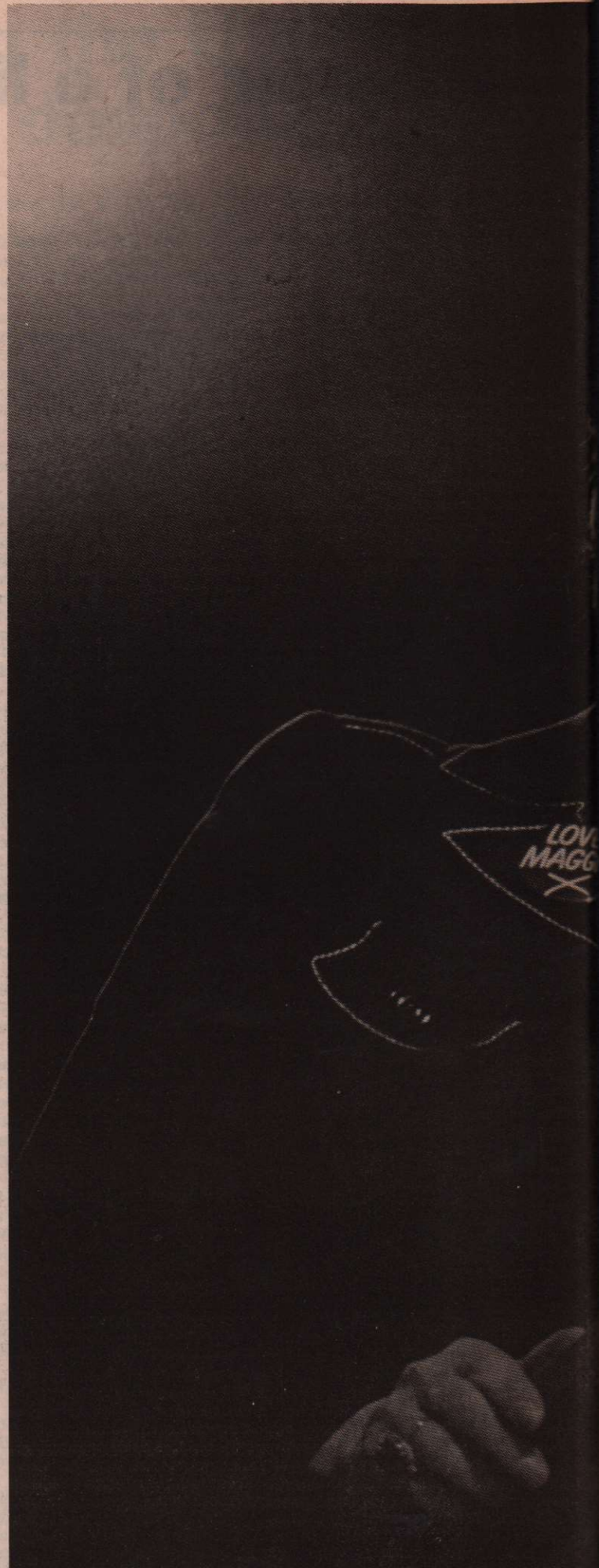
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transport of any major city in Europe, and Britain has the lowest proportion of youth in universities outside Turkey...

North Sea Oil money cushioned the problems for a time but now it is running out, and the Tories have a huge trade deficit.

So 'Thatcherism' is still a scheme for managing a capitalist power in relative decline, rather than a new formula for dynamic profit-making. That it looks so much more impressive, that it appears so much stronger, is largely a reflection of the weak-kneed response of the labour movement.

Neil Kinnock's stampede towards market economics and pink Thatcherism is partly just a response to defeat — the response of a time-serving, short-sighted politician to whom any idea of fighting a real political crusade and mobilising the working class seems dangerously wild. There is also something more to it.

When nationalisation was advocated with some confidence by the Labour leadership, it was as a better, more efficient way of running capitalism. That was probably the basis of much of the mass sup-

port that nationalisation had in 1945, too. It was never clear socialist.

Today nationalisation has very little grip as a better way to run capitalism. In many industries British national enterprise is only small — and clumsy — player on the global market. Bureaucratic planning, whether of the partial social democratic type or on the more comprehensive Stalinist mode shows more and more shortcomings as new technology develops.

Western capitalists and Eastern state-monopoly rulers turn to the free market. And social democrats too, see no better fall back.

A fall-back is all it is. The free market does 'work' after a fashion. We've always known that. Yet in China or in Detroit, in Hungary or in Spain, in the City of London or on Merseyside, it continues to generate inequality, poverty, squalor, insecurity and chaos. It has always done.

Marxism Today, followed by Neil Kinnock, reckons that the left must nonetheless base itself on market economics as the basis for the future, arguing only for a more humanised and softened version

Is Solidarnosc selling out?

By Jack Allison

Almost without exception the round-table discussions in Poland between Solidarnosc and the state have been reported without the slightest mention of the massive strike wave of last summer which forced the Polish state to renegotiate.

That round of strikes forced the Polish ruling class to realise that they could not afford to ignore Solidarnosc and that their attempt to crush opposition has failed, post 1981.

Once the Polish state offered the round-table talks, the Solidarnosc leaders jumped at the chance and actively quashed the strike wave of August 1988 to meet the conditions laid down for the talks.

The Solidarnosc leaders' attempts to cool down the strike wave aroused the anger of many strikers. The strikes had not been started by the Solidarnosc leaders, who only put themselves at the head of the strikes after they had started and spread.

During my visit to Poland in January this year, I witnessed a great deal of resentment at the quashing of the August strikes. It also became clear that most of the radicals in Solidarnosc had little interest in the round-table talks.

After months of delay and weeks of talks, the results of the discussions were announced in a bizarre television broadcast on Wednesday 4 April. What will the round-table agreement mean for Polish workers and Solidarnosc?

The political reforms of the system are certainly to be welcomed. The legalisation of Solidarnosc is a great prize won by the Polish workers. The introduction of a 35% block of freely elected members of the opposition into Parliament and the establishment of a freely elected senate provide for the first time since the establishment of the Stalinist system an open political challenge to the system.

We must however recognise that these changes will not make the system democratic. The senate is unlikely to have much power and the whole opposition are only given a 35% stake in the Parliament.

Real power will still rest with the ruling party. Parliament will elect a President, inevitably the leader of the ruling party, who will have great power. Control of the state, the army and the economy is still firmly in the grip of the state-monopoly

bureaucrats.

The elections will open up great opportunities for the opposition to organise. The degree of freedom allowed in the elections, especially to socialists like the PPS-RD will be a test of the limits of Polish glasnost.

But there is a catch. Lech Walesa called for an end to industrial action during the talks. And now the discussions are over, the catch is clearer in the economic 'deal' contained in the agreement.

Information on this economic 'deal' is still limited. However, several central elements seem clear. The 'deal' seems to have pulled the Solidarnosc leadership behind the Polish state's 'economic reform programme'.

Lech Walesa has launched himself into a campaign to get foreign economic aid, stating that he is prepared to beg for it, if necessary. And the round-table agreement has pegged workers' wage rises at 80% of the inflation rate.

The state wanted a far lower figure, but the decision of the Solidarnosc leadership to agree to a wage cut of 20% a year in an economy of 100% plus annual inflation and great poverty will be met with massive opposition.

How strong and effective the opposition is will depend on the extent to which the leadership of Solidarnosc headed by Walesa will try to hold back the workers demanding and fighting for wage rises over the 80%.

It certainly seems that the state have managed to tie the Solidarnosc leadership into their programme of 'economic reforms' — whether it can tie the Polish workers to this programme and whether it can hold the Solidarnosc leaders when the workers fight back is another matter.

For some time now sections of the Polish opposition have expressed the view that Solidarnosc has built a bureaucracy of its own, based on a leadership who would rather negotiate for reforms with the state and subdue radical action than fight for real change. One of the groups who express this mood in the Polish opposition is the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution.

PPS-RD and various rank and file workers groups have for some time pointed to the contradiction inside Solidarnosc between a radical rank and file worker and youth base and a leadership composed of 'big names' from the 1980s.

In the 1980s Solidarnosc was built as a workers' free trade union, based on the finest traditions of working class democracy and action. It was built by a massive

workers revolt and soon grew to a mass movement of some 10 million people. The workers were always central to Solidarnosc.

The last few years, however, have seen leaders like Lech Walesa move away from this view towards a view of Solidarnosc as a broad social movement — not a union or even a worker based movement. The PPS-RD and rank and file groups have on the other hand asserted that it is vital to rebuild the union and Solidarnosc based on workers and their demands.

It is highly unlikely that these groups will support the results of the round-table talks, and the gulf between the Solidarnosc leadership and these activists is bound to widen.

Walesa still commands enormous respect, but he did not come out of the quashing of the August 1988 strikes without a fair amount of workers' resentment against him. If the Solidarnosc leadership intend to try to hold workers to the 80% ceiling to wage rises and to the economic reform programme of the state, Walesa's authority could soon diminish.

This new situation will face the militants with the massive and vital task of preventing this loss of faith in the leadership and especially in Walesa turning to disillusionment, and instead organising the workers behind a socialist leadership to rebuild Solidarnosc.

A glance at Hungary shows that the 'economic reform' programme will fail to solve the massive crisis in the Polish state monopoly system. In the light of this one danger arises from an unlikely quarter.

Mr Miodowicz, the leader of the state 'trade union', is calling the deal a sell-out of the workers. Fine words from a Stalinist butcher of workers and free trade unions!

The danger is that hard line Stalinists like Miodowicz will be able to mobilise some workers against the reforms and Solidarnosc due to the effects of the 'economic reform' on their living standards.

It seems highly unlikely that the reforms from the round-table will prevent a new outbreak of strikes. The PPS-RD and rank and file groups need not only to link these struggles through strike committees as they did in 1988 but also to fight or a clear leadership from Solidarnosc. The fight for a socialist leadership of Solidarnosc in the struggles to come is central.

We must support that fight and work in Solidarity with our class in Poland. The only change that can take the mass of the Polish people forward is a system of democratic workers' control of society — a workers' revolution not just reform.



'social movements'. John Rentoul, after disputing all *Marxism Today's* assessment, paradoxically arrives at very similar conclusions.

He wants a "radical left-wing 'revolution'" — but the scare-quotes round the word 'revolution' need to be there! This 'revolution' is to be achieved by Labour reducing its links with the trade unions and allying with the Democrats in a 'popular front' based on the collectivist and liberal consensus which (Rentoul believes) already commands a majority in Britain.

Rentoul finds that "The class divide remains, even if some don't think it has widened...Class divisions have become deeper and sharper...Class...is the most important factor in British politics." Yet in his conclusions he ignores this "most important factor".

Class struggle remains the road to change. Working class confidence in struggle has been severely battered in recent years, and so, in many areas, has workers' organisation. But British society has not been reduced to the stifling conformism and 'normalcy' of the early 1950s, of the 1850s-1880s, or of America in the 1920s.

Even if it had, the fact would still remain that capitalism can never abolish the working class and can never stifle working class struggle more than temporarily. But one of Rentoul's most startling opinion poll figures is for the percentage of people who say that they have been politically active beyond just voting, by doing something "to try to influence an Act of Parliament".

In 1959 only 6 per cent had been active on that level; in 1986, 44 per cent. Most of that 44 per cent had done nothing more militant than sign a petition; but the figure does point to an increased readiness to think critically and to speak out about politics. We haven't been "replaced by sensible persons" yet.

Thatcherism still has many storms ahead of it; and, while socialist politics in coming years will have a big proportion of long, hard slog in it, there will also be more boisterous, turbulent moments. We need an alternative both to market economics and to nationalist, bureaucratic '1945 socialism' — a programme based on internationalism, workers' control, workers' democracy and workers' liberty.



Protest in Czechoslovakia backing Solidarnosc

Is Militant Marxist?

The Militant tendency is still perhaps the biggest and best-known of the left groups in this country. But where do Militant really stand? Clive Bradley investigates. Part Two next week

If you ever hear the Militant tendency talk about the rest of the 'far Left', you'll notice they describe everyone as 'the sects'. But Militant are themselves a real sect, even if an unusually large one by British standards. They're a bit like a religious sect — a group walled off from the rest of the world convinced they've got the tablets of stone, and seeing their own interests as the most important thing.

Debate on the left is as important as unity, if we're to build an intelligent socialist movement. Different left groups should argue, debate and criticise each other — and unite against the right-wing.

What is a Marxist tendency? Marxism is a way of analysing society which understands politics as the sum total of struggle between different classes — mainly between big business and the working class. We think real change comes about when people fight for it. A national dock strike, if the whole labour and trade union (and student) movement back it, will have more effect in turning the tide on the Tories than glitzy Labour Party TU commercials.

So Marxists don't just analyse the world — we work to change it. We try to find a link between our ideas about society and the struggles that take place.

The working class will change society. And the working class in Britain has built a movement — the Labour Party and the trade unions — over 200 years. We get involved

to change this movement so that it can change the world.

The movement won't change all in one go. The working class learns lessons from its different struggles; but sometimes it is a slow process and the job of Marxists is to help the working class learn, not like teachers with a blackboard, but by being part of the education itself.

A Marxist tendency is that section of the movement that has studied and understood the big lessons of the class struggle. It tries to help the rest of the movement learn the same lessons by fighting alongside it, and within it.

A sect, on the other hand, just sees changing society as a matter of gradually getting bigger. It sees getting bigger as more important than the development of the whole movement.

Back in the heady days of 1968 Militant was a small very lacklustre part of the left. In the '70s it grew to a few thousand supporters because it had control of the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS). It took control in 1969-70, when the rest of the left had left the Labour Party — sometimes out of stupidity, sometimes to get involved in big struggles against the Labour government in the late 'sixties, and the Tories in the early 'seventies.

The 17 years or so during which Militant ran the LPYS were a strange time in the history of Labour's youth movements.

Outside those 18 years, the entire history is of radical, combative groups gaining support among the youth and coming into stormy conflict with Labour's bureaucratic leaders. But the 17 years of 'revolutionary Marxist' leadership by Militant were years of peace and quiet. And then when Neil Kinnock decided to shut down the LPYS it went with scarcely a whimper.

When Militant took over the LPYS, it was a shell with a few right wingers in it. The Labour Party leadership had imposed undemocratic rules on the LPYS, because in the early 'sixties the LPYS had been too radical.

Militant never changed those

rules, and fiercely opposed those of us who wanted them changed.

For example, LPYS National Committee was not elected by its annual national conference — regional conferences elected one representative each, instead. This meant that the NC was not accountable to the conferences that made the policy it was supposed to act on.

It also meant that minority views never had any hope of representation. Unlike the National Union of Students for example, there was never any provision for minority viewpoints to be reflected on the leading committee. If NUS Exec was elected in the way LPYS NC was, Militant would not have anybody on it.

So the LPYS was generally not very democratic. At national conferences the overwhelming majority of speaking time was taken up by Militant (often through long 'summing up') with very little debate. Debates were often stitched-up to make sure as few non-Militant supporters as possible got to speak.

Democracy and debate aren't just nice thoughts for the working class movement. We need debate, so we can be sure about what we're doing.

Worse, the LPYS was never much more than a stage with a Militant speaker on it. It never intervened in the world around it. Two examples:

1. In the late 1970s, there was the biggest radicalisation of youth since the Vietnam war, focussed around the Anti-Nazi League (ANL).

The ANL was set up by the Socialist Workers' Party. It had lots wrong with it, and eventually declined because it failed to defend black people from fascist attacks. In October 1978, the ANL deliberately avoided a clash with fascists threatening the Asian community in East London, and marched tens of thousands of people to a pop concert instead.

But thousands of youth involved in and around the ANL wanted to do something to stop the National Front, who had been getting high votes in by-elections. And the ANL certainly did help force the NF into the retreat.

A socialist youth movement should have got involved wholeheartedly in the ANL, built it, been the best activists in it, and tried to give it a socialist direction. That way, it would have built itself.

The LPYS largely sat on the sidelines, complaining that the ANL wasn't socialist. Militant wasn't in East London, helping the Asian community to beat back the fascists — and it wasn't visible at the ANL pop concert either!

This was typical Militant. Their argument ran: "We know how to fight fascism — fight for socialism. That's the only way — anything less is a blind alley. The ANL are wasting their time."

For Militant, 'understanding' or 'seeing the need for socialism', was an alternative to actual struggle in the here and now. They just criticised the ANL (sometimes fairly, often not) rather than try to convince ANL activists by fighting alongside them.

The end result, of course, was that the ANL collapsed and very few of the youth in it got involved in the LPYS.

2. A few years later, there was another youth radicalisation, around Youth CND. It was a repeat performance.

The Militant-dominated LPYS did almost no work in the YCND. Instead it lectured YCND that 'only socialism can stop war' (which is true) and felt very pleased with itself. Another opportunity was wasted.

Again, Militant's arguments were typical of them. They had a very off-hand attitude to the threat of nuclear war (implying it was

impossible because the working class was too strong) and were opposed to British withdrawal from NATO (because it would make no real difference).

They didn't understand that a struggle against nuclear weapons — or NATO — could make far more difference to people's understanding and to their real ability to achieve socialism, than Militant's 'patient explanations'. Explanation is fine — but it must be connected to struggles around us, or it doesn't really contribute to building a socialist movement. Militant counterposed a future socialist movement to the current-day 'raw material', like YCND activists, who could create such a movement.

Year after year for 17 years, Militant had declared at each year's LPYS conference that it was the best ever. "The Marxists" were going ever onwards and upwards, building a strong movement of working class youth.

When Kinnock finally moved against it, that movement proved to be dead and hollow. It crumbled into dust. Militant moved shop into the Youth Trade Union Rights Campaign and the National Union of Students — and there was nothing left.

Empty, lifeless, bureaucratic, radical in its words about 100% nationalisation but timid and narrow-minded in activity — that, on the evidence of the LPYS, is what a Militant-led youth movement looks like. Students attracted by Militant's new upbeat style in the National Union of Students should take note.

Because Militant only saw the LPYS as a theatre to perform in, it remained small and ineffective. When the Labour Party leadership decided to axe it, they met little real resistance.

The whole story of the witch-hunt is instructive too. The current Kinnockite leadership of the Labour Party came about because of the 'rise and fall' of the Labour Left. Militant's sectarianism throughout that process cut their own throat later.

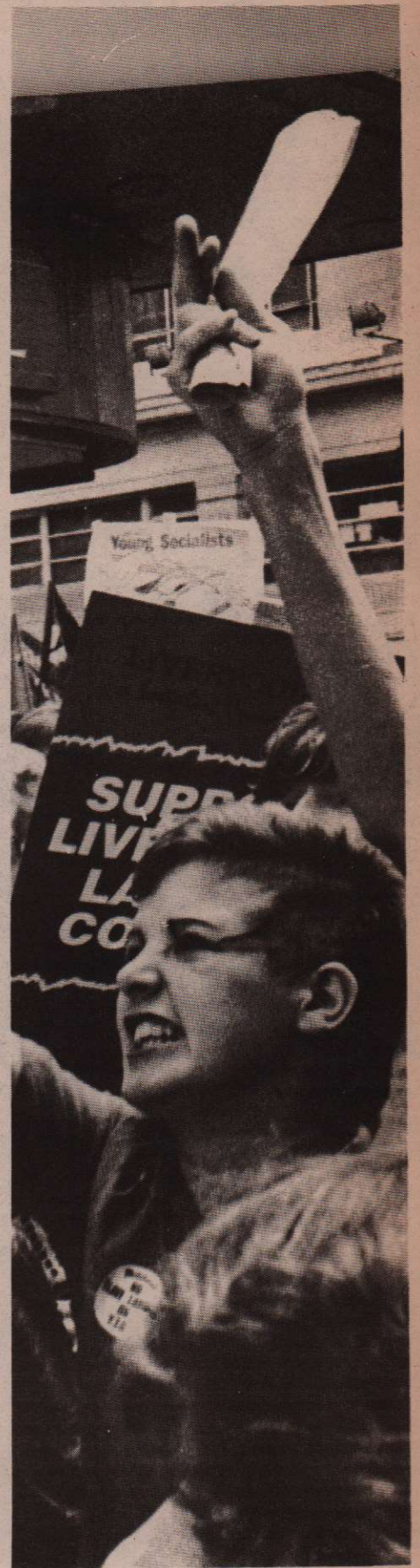
Thatcher won the election of 1979 because the previous Labour government had been a disaster. Labour Party activists resolved 'never again' to allow a Labour government like it — right-wing, cut-making, ignoring conference policy, anti-working class. A powerful campaign for democracy was organised.

Its culmination was the campaign to elect Tony Benn as Labour Party Deputy leader, in 1981. He was very narrowly defeated. Other victories had been won — that Leader and Deputy Leader were elected at all, for example. But thereafter, for reasons we will go into, the movement declined.

Militant played very, very little role in all this — except in their usual way of making general propaganda. When the right wing counter-attacked after 1981, Militant argued it was impossible for them to win, because the left was too strong.

Militant itself was a big target for the right-wing, of course — not because it had been the main force fighting for change, but because it was visible and unpopular. The witch-hunt was launched.

Just as Militant had little to do with the democracy campaign, it also had little to do with fighting the witch-hunt. It had its own front, and paid little attention to Labour Against the witchhunt, the campaign run by Labour rank and file activists. In fact, Militant tended to be far more timid than most Labour Party activists.



Instead of mobilising, it went to the capitalist courts. This was wrong in principle — we don't want the capitalist courts deciding the internal affairs of the labour movement — and foolishly short-sighted in practice.

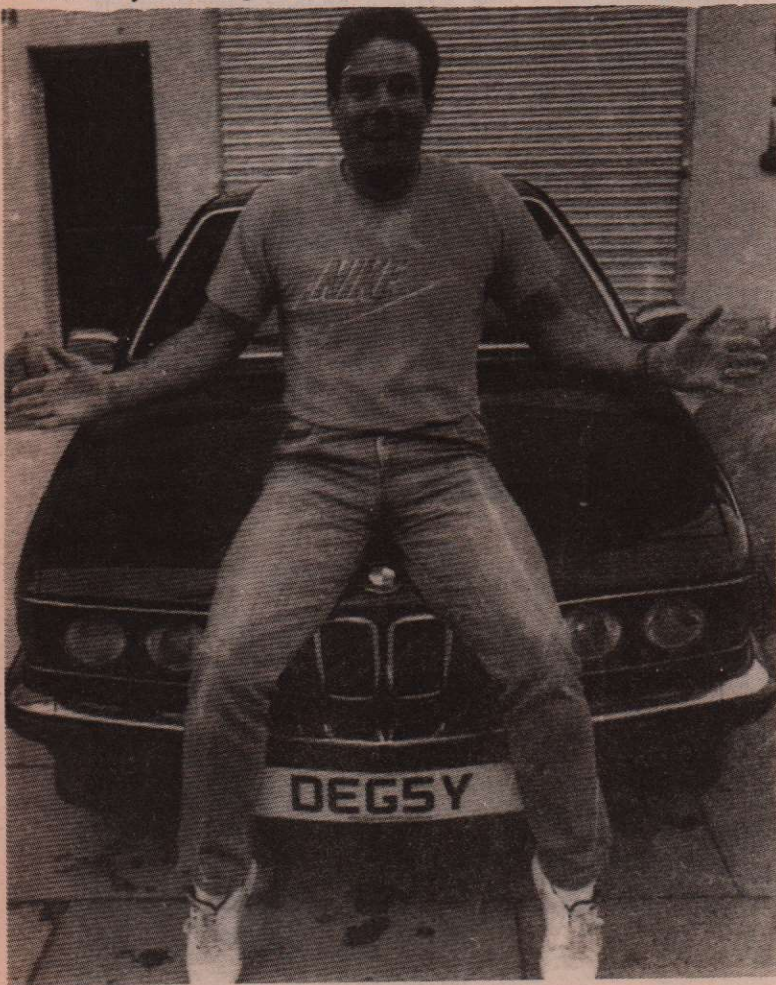
When the knives came out for the LPYS from 1986, Militant put up very little opposition. LPYS national conference was abolished and Militant's campaign to save it was too little, too late.

By then, something else had happened which had shaped British politics generally, and to which Militant had been central: Liverpool.

Local government proved to be both an opportunity and a snare for the Labour Left. The same Labour Left that had fought the right wing on democracy found itself in many cases in control of local town halls in the early 1980s.

There was a great opportunity to use Labour councils as the organising centres for war on the Tory government; instead, over time, the left councils gave up the idea of fighting the Tories and set about making cuts and in many instances acting like old-style employers. So the Labour Left was defeated — and defeat propelled it to the right.

In Liverpool Militant was the dominant political force. Liverpool



Derek Hatton: while Militant campaigned for workers' MPs on workers' wages, he was their public figurehead on Liverpool council

Militant's record on Ireland

Since 1970 Militant has failed to give any support to the struggles of the oppressed Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

Support for working class unity and socialism is not unique to Militant. What is unique is the use of abstract lectures about socialism to evade the issues and the struggles of the here and now.

Initially it opposed the deployment of British troops on the streets after August 1969, and sympathised with the Catholics. It quickly veered (by 1970 or '71) to an attitude of condemning the 'sectionalism' and then the 'terrorism' of the Catholics. It was like its attitude to the struggles of blacks, women, gays and others in Britain itself: the Catholic revolt in Northern Ireland was a complication which it wished would go away.

Ever since Militant has not supported the just revolt of the Catholics. Within the labour movement they are among the most vicious opponents of any attempt to get a calm discussion of the Republicans, their struggle and their objectives. Militant peddles its own cure-alls and nostrums, like the famous 'trade union defence force'.

In 1969, it speculated, fantastically, about the prospects for a pioneering socialist society in...the Six Counties unit!

"If the demands (minimum wage; equal pay; crash building programme; take over big building companies; improved social services) are pressed home in action, it can be linked up to the demand for the taking over of the big monopolies and the establishment of a democratic socialist society — which would have immediate repercussions in the South, in Britain, and internationally..." (*Militant*, May 1969).

Then, responding to the slaughter of 14 Catholics by the British Army in January 1972, Militant waxed eloquent about...organising the British Army for socialism.

"A campaign of individual assassinations...of the British soldiers can only provide excuse for further repressions...Also it can only reinforce the hostility of the ordinary soldier to the Catholic population...(Rank and file soliders) could be appealed to on a class basis and won away from the army brass, if a clear socialist alternative was given to them." (*Militant*, February 4, 1972).

Faced with what looked like civil war in mid-'72, Peter Taaffe wrote this: "But, given the failure of the trade union leadership to initiate a trade union defence force, every working class area must have the right to defend itself." (*Militant* no.113, July 1972).

You're on your own boys! In fact this was to give the seal of Militant's approval to the Protestant-biased Ulster Defence Association (UDA). It should be remembered that it was the Catholics who were likely to need defending if it came to an all-out war.

Militant's main slogan has been the 'trade union defence force', as though the communal clashes against which defence must be organised were in a different world from the trade unions.

At the same time Militant has speculated about the processes going on in the UDA that would produce class consciousness.

"The development of the UDA with its veneer of class consciousness shows that Protestants are well aware of their class position..." (*Militant* no.118, August 18, 1972).

During the Orange general strike of 1974 Militant opposed any action by the Labour government to break the reactionary — and even racist — strike, thus telling British workers that the strike was entitled



Workers' defence force? Leaders of the reactionary 1974 strike.

to be treated as a working class action, if not quite a proper or normal one.

In 1980-81 Militant opposed the granting of political status to the Republican hunger strikers.

For centuries the Irish people were oppressed by British imperialism. In 1920-21 Southern Ireland won independence — but half a million Catholics were trapped in a 'Protestant state for Protestant people' in Northern Ireland. The British government, allied with the Northern Protestants, partitioned Ireland undemocratically.

In the 1960s the Northern Catholics finally rebelled. Signs of some desire for reform from Britain — which had mended its relations with Southern Ireland — and the model of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA encouraged them.

Northern Ireland had been run as a one-party Protestant state, with Protestant workers getting preference for scarce jobs and houses. Behind the Catholic revolt the Protestant workers saw the prospect of a reunited Ireland with a Catholic government in Dublin which would oppress them as they had oppressed the Catholics in the North. They reacted with panic and bigotry.

The artificial Northern Ireland state began to fall apart into civil war. British troops went on the streets to hold it together. Britain's strategy was to control the situation by beating down the rebellious Catholics, then impose reforms.

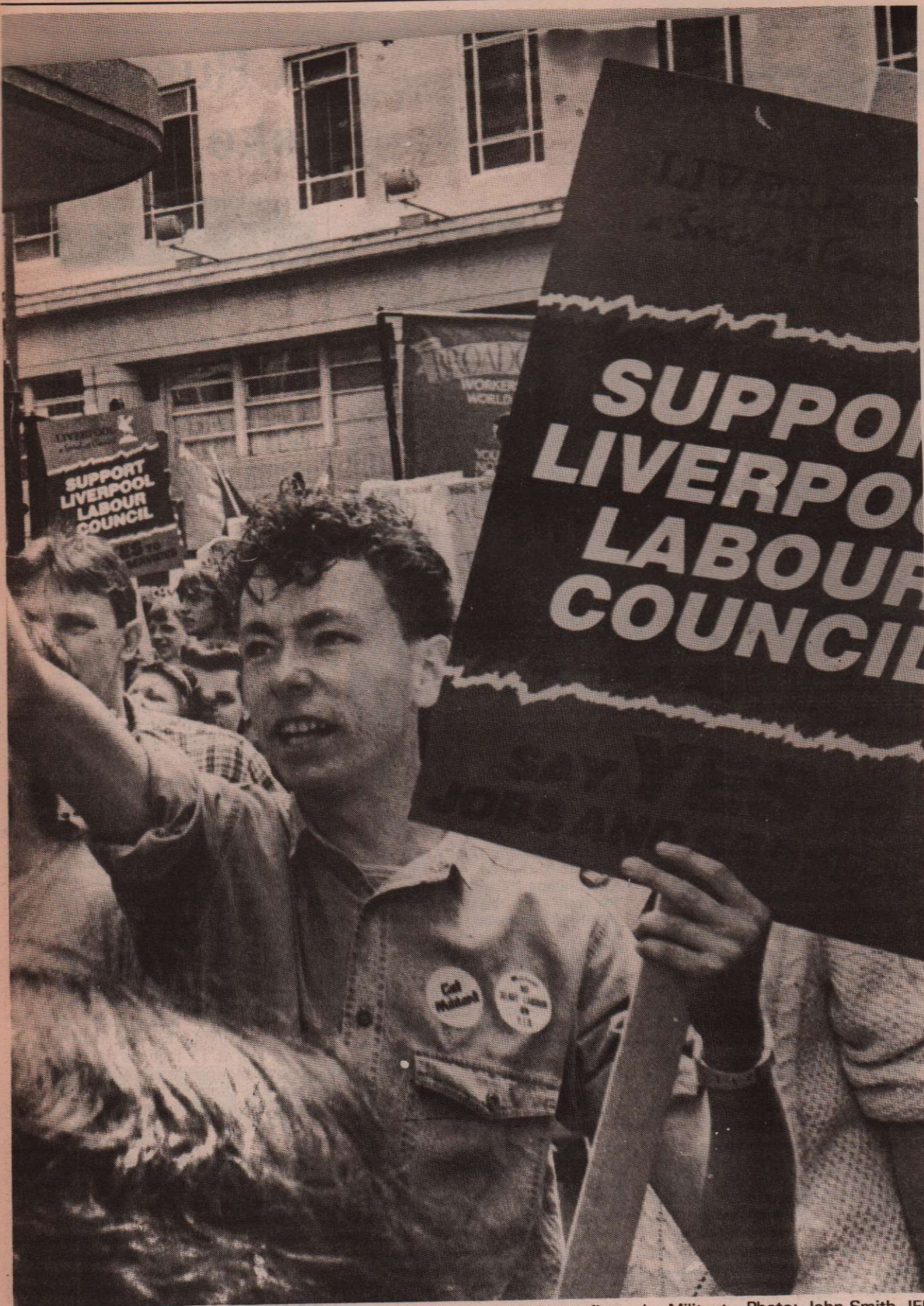
The reforms faded away after a Protestant general strike in 1974 toppled a British-sponsored 'power-sharing' (joint Catholic-Protestant) government in Northern Ireland. The repression against the Catholics remained.

The Catholics are fighting against British repression, and a British-dominated state, that they never wanted to be part of. Socialists must support them. At the same time we must put forward ideas for a positive solution.

Replacing a half-million oppressed minority of Catholics in Northern Ireland by a million-strong oppressed minority of Protestants in a united Ireland would not be progress; and anyway, given the strength of the Protestants, it is not possible.

A serious drive to push the Protestants into a united Ireland by brute force would result only in full-scale civil war and repartition. That is why Socialist Organiser argues for a free federal united Ireland, with regional autonomy for the mainly-Protestant areas.

Militant answers none of the issues. Instead it preaches about abstract socialism to evade them.



Liverpool: a great mobilisation was led into a fiasco by Militant. Photo: John Smith, IFL.

City Council decided on a policy in 1983, that committed it to an all-out fight with the Tories. Unlike other councils, they worked hard to convince local working class people that a fight was necessary and possible. In later 1983, Liverpool saw a one-day general strike in support of the council and in defiance of the Tories.

But the campaign never reached such a pitch again.

It was wound down after the local elections in May 1984. By then the miners' strike was underway — the biggest single working class struggle since World War Two. And the miners' strike created a context that both Liverpool and the Tory government had to be aware of. The Tories were: Militant weren't.

In his book 'Inside Left', Derek Hatton recounts how a Tory MP told him: "You do realise that we had to tell Patrick to give you the money. At this stage we want Scargill. He's our priority. But we'll come for you later."

In short, Liverpool were being fobbed off to divide the labour movement. This is what Militant called a 95 per cent victory!

Then things got worse and worse. Militant began to alienate important sections of the community in Liverpool, notably the section of the black community represented in the Black Caucus. The Caucus had been recognised as representative by the council; but Militant picked a fight with it by

appointing a Militant supporter, Samson Bond, as Race Relations officer.

Who was right in the dispute that followed isn't really very important. The council needed full support against the Tories; if a fight with the Black Caucus was necessary, it could have waited. But to achieve their own objective — a political appointment (one of many), Militant were prepared to provoke a bitter and deeply divisive controversy.

In typical Militant style, they then demanded full support against the Black Caucus from the rest of the left, denouncing left-wing critics as 'witch hunters'. This was a technique they repeated throughout the coming months.

Meanwhile the council was sleepwalking towards disaster. It made general agitation about fighting the Tories but ran no real campaign like the one it organised in 1983-4. Periodically council leaders predicted all-out struggle in the next few days. Workers in Liverpool got confused, then demoralised. Support for the council faded.

In September 1985, the council committed the fantastic blunder (later admitted by Militant as 'a mistake') of sending sacking notices to all 30,000 of its staff, because money was running out. In the chaos that ensued, a Swiss bank came up with the money, and more breathing-space was found.

But the council never recovered.

It had been defeated; soon, left wing councillors were fined and barred from office.

But it turned out the deal with the Swiss bank had been concluded two months before it was made public. So for two months, the council had been playing games with its own supporters. That alone is a disgrace.

The disgraceful behaviour of Derek Hatton, who increasingly became an embarrassment to Militant, was just the public face of the inner political collapse of the Militant in Liverpool.

Like other Labour lefts, they 'seized control' of the local government machine — and in the end the machine seized them.

Their much-vaunted 'Marxism' didn't help much. There were two main reasons for this.

First, Militant see control of the machine almost as an end in itself (as we shall see when we look at the unions).

Second, Militant's "Marxist perspective" always says that the situation will improve. If the future is going to prevent better opportunities for socialists, why risk anything in struggles now?

Due partly to luck and partly to its position in the Labour Party, Militant was able to grow. Even so, it has always been a sect. It only acts out of self-interest; when it controls something — like the LPYS — it strangles it. What the working class needs is a different sort of 'Marxist tendency' altogether.

Cinderella in Manhattan

CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Working Girl'

Working Girl" is a fairy tale updated for the new world of female corporate achievers. In it Cinderella wants to get into the boardroom, not go to a ball, and she wants to do it on her own, too, not by marrying any stray prince who might come along.

At the beginning, Tess (Melanie Griffith) is a filofax toting secretary with a ferocious ambition to get on in New York's hustling, bustling brokerage world. But she's from the wrong side of the tracks (or rather the water; she's from Staten Island) and so she keeps getting turned down for training programmes at work.

Every day Tess joins the group of workers who crowd on to the Staten Island ferry for the trip to Manhattan. They're like guest workers, tolerated by day because they're needed to do the lowly jobs, but banished at night. Tess is already a little apart from the girls she grew up with. She's struggled to get her degree by studying at night, and she's taking voice lessons too. But she looks all wrong — lots of makeup and jangly jewellery, teased hair.

When she's assigned to a new female boss, Tess thinks her big moment has come. Katherine, played by Sigourney Weaver, has a good line in psycho-babble; she tells Tess that she herself must be the one to 'make it happen'. Tess tries. She reads everything, follows the market, and comes up with bright ideas.

When Katherine is put out of action by a skiing accident, Tess sees her chance. Like Michael J. Fox in 'The Secret of My Success', she takes over Katherine's empty office, and starts putting deals



together. It's a bluff, but she hopes it will pay off.

In the meantime, she meets Prince Charming, another dealmaker, played with a kind of bewildered aplomb by Harrison Ford, but it's still the deal that interests Tess. It's rather nice to see a woman in movies put love second for a change. (In 'Baby Boom', Diane Keaton threw away her million dollar deal to stay with her sweetheart in rural bliss.)

The plot takes a few twists and turns with the introduction of the fairy godfather, Orrin Trask, who plays the latest in a long line of supposedly 'nice' capitalists. Hollywood has long been in love with these mythical figures, men who must have risen to the top by ruthless ambition and exploitation, but who have hearts of gold underneath. Somehow they never quite work.

Sigourney Weaver's Katherine turns out to be the ugly sister, despite all her surface charm, and in fairy tale style, she gets the

comeuppance she deserves.

The film is a study in serendipity. Far from being a manual on how to make it, it's almost a cautionary tale; Tess succeeds by extraordinary luck. Amazing improbabilities just keep stacking up on her side. But for every Tess, there are also a hundred girls like Cyn, Tess's friend, who stays in Staten Island, marries her childhood sweetheart, and never gets further than the typing pool.

There's no questioning at all in the movie about whether what Tess wants is worth having. Manhattan is presented as the magic kingdom of opportunity, whose gleaming towers seem to mock the poor Staten Islanders across the water. There's no glimpse of the sordid side of New York, nor any condemnation of corporate cut and thrust, except where it hurts Tess. The room where the deal is to be signed is like a chapel consecrated to the twin gods of money and success.

The barriers keeping Tess down

are the barriers of class. She has the wrong accent, the wrong clothes, the wrong background. Yet though the capitalist system is what is keeping Tess down, it is also the elevator that she finally gets on in her ride to the top. The film seems to be saying "Capitalism can work for you!" But the small print says, "Only if you're one in a million". Tess is that one in a million.

What is delusive in films like "Working Girl" is that every single person will identify with Tess and say "Yes, I can do that". So while the film shows only one "Working Girl" making it, everyone watching the film can go away comforted, thinking she too would be the successful one, given half the chance.

Because capitalism offers the occasional individual an escape clause, it can seem less unbearable than it is. Each person can dream that success is just around the corner. "Working Girl" is just a female version of that other old fairy tale, the American Dream.

A Russian joke

TV

By Vicki Morris

Every concrete result of Gorbachev's visit to Britain, the media could have covered in five minutes. Yet, for two days we endured tedious and excessive news coverage recording the great man's every public word and deed.

We saw him land, we saw him leave. And in between times we saw him in a double-act with Thatcher at the Guildhall. We cast a wry smile at the episode of the broken headphones. I don't know why, but the commentators at least seemed to find this trivial detail of unfathomable ironic significance.

We also watched the Queen show Mikhail and Raisa around the really boring bits of Windsor Castle. We were denied news of what the VIPs ate for lunch, information which might just have relieved the boredom of the episode.

The whole visit seemed to be a PR exercise for Mrs Thatcher. Being seen with Gorbachev helped her to project herself as a pragmatic statesperson, and to pose as the leader of a still greater power. And while the nation's attention was carefully focused on the Gorbachev diversion, the government announced the controversial bad news of its plan to abolish the National Dock Labour Scheme.

Against this background of momentary public interest, real or hyped, lots of TV regulars took the opportunities presented by glasnost to show us those parts of the USSR which are of sufficient interest to support a tourist trade. Although most of the presenters politely refrained from saying so, Soviet living, even at its height, makes grim viewing.

On '0107 for Mockba' we saw Moscow's sole fashion show where the clothes were as exciting as any you would find in a Jaeger sale. They were extremely expensive, and the designer was forced to admit that quality clothes are not so much made to be worn, as to be exhibited like an art-form.

In any case, there are few mass lines of clothes for designers to influence. Moscow's crowds dress in an assortment of styles from the '50s, '60s, '70s and a few from the '80s.

'Blue Peter' visited the Black Sea coast, where a holiday is a once-in-a-lifetime treat for only a few privileged party flunkies. The resort staff are a grim-faced army of medics who won't let you enjoy the sunshine if you are pale skinned, but shepherd you to lie under an awning from where you can watch you more fortunate friends cavorting in the waves.

As I watched an uncomplaining 'Blue Peter' crew sit down and eat a lunch consisting mainly of bread and tomatoes, I wished that Channel 4 would repeat 'East Meets Wax', in which the caustic American comedienne spends a few weeks in the USSR attempting to get her brand of humour across to the bemused Soviet public.

A lot of people complained about the programme, saying Ruby insulted the Russian people. I think she told it like it was, criticising the society rather than the people.

Increasingly, throughout these programmes, I found myself having a laugh at the expense of the Russian people. But the only way you could feel guilty is if you didn't hope for a change in the USSR, and support the Soviet people in their stifled attempts to overturn that rotten system.

Storm in a test tube

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



Nuclear fusion powers the sun and gives the hydrogen bomb its powers of destruction.

So far, attempts to harness fusion for useful production have centred on trying to reproduce the conditions found in the sun. There, very high temperatures and pressures force the hydrogen atoms close enough together for them to fuse.

Such efforts have not been successful, using more energy than they have produced, as well as costing hundreds of millions of pounds. Therefore, when chemists Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann, of the Universities of Utah and Southampton, claimed to have demonstrated nuclear fusion in, if not a test tube, a sort of jar, at ordinary temperatures and pressure, they got a mixed reception.

Their method was to pass an electric current through 'heavy' water, enriched in deuterium (see box), using a cathode of palladium. This produced extra energy, enough to power a rather dim electric light, indicating, say Pons and Fleischmann, fusion reactions.

The result has been confirmed by at least two groups of researchers, including one at the Brigham Young University in Utah, led by Steven Jones. The confirmation seems less impressive when we learn that Jones' group found an energy output about ten trillion times less. On this basis, an area the size of Oxfordshire would have to be covered with the little jars to make enough energy to power a light bulb!

So how does test tube fusion work, if indeed it *does* work? Palladium is very good at absorbing hydrogen atoms. When the electric current flows, ions of heavy hydrogen migrate to the cathode

where they are held fast in a small volume. They are held under an effective pressure far higher than that at the centre of the sun.

There is still a substantial energy barrier to their fusion but, due to a phenomenon called 'quantum tunnelling', some pairs of ions still manage to fuse.

Quantum tunnelling is a sort of 'with one bound, Jack was free' process. It is as if I was standing on one side of a 30 foot wall and then I was to discover that I was on the other side without having climbed it. It sounds impossible, and for large objects it is, to all intents and purposes. However, it is a well-known phenomenon for small things, like electrons and protons.

Even if cold fusion is confirmed, it is unlikely it will ever be useful for producing energy. According to Jones, however, it could be an important *natural* process.

He believes that some of the heat inside the earth is due to cold fusion as sea water is carried below ground as the sea bed is swallowed up. He also thinks that Jupiter's energy output is due to cold fusion at the centre of its core of solid hydrogen. Jupiter is usually regarded as a failed star, being too small for ordinary fusion to take place.

Interestingly enough, there was a previous report of cold fusion. A few years back, *New Scientist* claimed that cannon balls

dredged up from the bottom of the Mediterranean were warm and had pitted surfaces.

The iron had reacted with the sea water, making tiny bubbles of hydrogen. The pressure in a bubble increases as it gets smaller and the report claimed pressures were high enough for fusion to occur — hence the warmth. The principle is similar to the above but the article was actually an April Fool's hoax. A case of life imitating art!

Ordinary hydrogen (H-1) atoms have a nucleus of one proton. 'Heavy' hydrogen (deuterium or H-2) has one neutron as well. Tritium (H-3) has two neutrons.

One atom of hydrogen in 20,000 is deuterium. Tritium is rarer still, being radioactive.

Nuclear fusion takes several forms. In the sun, H-1 atoms fuse, eventually forming helium (He-4). Conventional fusion experiments aim to fuse deuterium and tritium, forming He-4 and a neutron. Cold fusion is thought to involve two deuterium atoms making tritium and a proton or He-3 and a neutron.

In all cases, the products weigh slightly less than the reactants, the missing mass having been turned into energy ($E=mc^2$). Extra energy from a reaction may indicate fusion or an unknown chemical process (or a mistake by the experimenters). Confirmation depends on detecting neutrons which are *not* produced by chemical reactions or radioactive decay.

Tubes anger grows

The unofficial tube strike last Wednesday, 6 April brought chaos to London's underground.

Despite union leaders' pleas to work normally strikers brought two thirds of the network to a standstill. There were no services on the District, Circle, Jubilee, Piccadilly, Metropolitan or East London lines, and the Bakerloo line was badly disrupted. However, there were very few picket lines.

The strike was called over a claim for a £64 per week pay rise without strings, for train drivers.

Initially the demand came from one person operated (OPO) train operators, but they decided to call for the same pay rises for train drivers who still work with guards. Most of the OPO drivers struck last



week. The explosion of anger and militancy obviously took union officials by surprise. But it is simply the result of a whole series of bosses' attacks and run down services. With their eyes on profits and privatisation the tube bosses want more work for less pay. Safety

takes second place. To add insult to injury the manager who resigned over the Kings Cross fire was given a golden handshake and shunted off to another top job — while ordinary tube workers face disciplinary charges for mistakes caused by overwork.

The NUR is already balloting for strike action over station reorganisation. If management get their way a day off sick will be a disciplinary offence, even with a sick note!

Station masters will have to reappear for their own jobs. Workers will have to pass psychology tests to prove they are passenger friendly! It is a slave's charter.

Strike action is needed. The union leaders must be brought to account and forced to organise official action. A united response is needed.

Tube workers have tremendous power. Around 3 million passengers a day use the system.

The tube workers can bring an already heavily congested capital to a grinding halt. Last week's success could be the confidence boost to take the offensive.

Labour and the dockers

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

Neil Kinnock's so-called 're-launch' of the Labour Party is essentially a populist ticket.

I want a Labour government elected on socialist principles and sticking to them. Kinnock is going for power at any price, saying to the electorate that Mrs Thatcher is over the top, so we'll take her policies and water them down a bit.

It's offering still the same old stuff, continuing anti-trade union legislation, a question mark over nuclear disarmament, etc.

It's not the direction for a socialist movement to take. We ought to pin our socialism to our banner and be proud of it — even if we lose. We can't accept being elected in order to be the second eleven to manage capitalism better — then when it's better we can hand back to the Tories.

The Labour Party was created out of the trade union movement in order to effect a fundamental shift in power to the working class. People want to get us away from that, and I don't go along with it.

We've had the parliamentary selection where I was standing against Joe Ashton. In our policy statements I stuck to basic socialist principles, unilateral nuclear disarmament, and real jobs. Joe tended to be broader.

Joe got 73.76% of the vote, and I got 26.18%. The trade union vote divided 17.81% for me and 21.92% for Joe, and the Labour Party branch vote was 8.37% for me and 51.84% for Joe.

I was looking for a third of the vote, and ended up with about a quarter, so that was a disappointment. But it was not a disaster.

All MPs should be challenged. Having created a system for parliamentary reselection, we should use it. Even Joe admits it's healthy for the party for there to be a contest, and unhealthy when it doesn't take place.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.

IN BRIEF

89% have voted for action against the bosses' 8.3% pay offer at **Vesper Thorneycroft**.

Union leaders representing around 20,000 **water workers** are recommending acceptance of a 7.5% pay rise.

Electricity manual workers are to ballot on their pay offer of around 7%.

Polytechnic bosses say they can afford a 4% pay rise for lecturers. Since leaving Local Education Authority control on 1 April, polytechnic managements have begun a series of attacks on working conditions.

A survey of seven regional **health authorities** has shown around 100,000 nurses regrading appeals in England alone.

The **seafarers' union** has accepted comprehensive changes in working practices at Portsmouth. These include redundancies, reduced leave and, for the first time, lower pay rates for casual and seasonal labourers. This is one of the consequences of the seafarers' defeat by P&O in Dover.

An independent report on the government's **Youth Training Scheme** concludes that it has failed to provide occupational training for young people. No surprises there.

Birds Eye are still insisting on closing their Kirkby plant — Birds Eye workers have other ideas. The national Birds Eye combine supports the campaign to keep the plant open. And a Liverpool May Day demo will be held in Kirkby supported by the Trades Council.

What is still needed is a commitment from Birds Eye workers at Grimsby not to take any work transferred. And a commitment from the Kirkby workers to lead the fight.

Militants oppose strike vote

By Tony Dale

200 Manchester NALGO members have signed a petition calling for an emergency branch meeting.

They want to censure the branch executive for calling a ballot on industrial action. The bulk of the signatures came from the most militant workplaces.

The explanation for this strange situation is that the branch leadership are proposing action in order to break growing opposition over neighbourhood services. Three weeks ago a NALGO meeting defeated a branch officers' proposal to accept extended opening hours, including Saturday mornings, for the new Neighbourhood Offices.

The call for action from the branch

leadership includes a one-day strike by all members of the NALGO branch, an indefinite strike by the Neighbourhood services unit, and an all-out strike by the whole branch if anybody is disciplined for not cooperating with anybody appointed to the Neighbourhood Officer posts.

Quite clearly at the present time a ballot on these proposals is premature and unnecessary. The branch leadership have one aim — a 'no' vote.

This dispute over Neighbourhood services also sparked a meeting of left-wing activists last week to launch a rank and file socialist caucus. The call for the branch meeting to censure the executive was the first initiative of the caucus.

The success of this initiative bodes well for its future.

A quiet sell-off

By John Maloney

Not all privatisations are as spectacular as British Telecom or British Gas. Many are low key affairs with little publicity.

Such is the case with The Crown Suppliers (TCS). TCS is an agency which buys a large range of goods/services for government departments. It will be sold off early next year.

Union reactions have been dismal, but none more so than that of the CPSA, the union which covers lower level administrative grades.

The section of the CPSA responsible for TCS has been run by the Militant-dominated Broad Left for over a decade. Despite this the union has done nothing. It failed to seize the opportunity to develop a fighting campaign when

there were walkouts in the major offices.

Instead the Broad Left has been content to trust the Tories on a 'gentlemen's agreement' that CPSA grades won't be sacked, and watch over the collapse of a number of TCS branches through total apathy. This is where electoralism gets you — total ineffectiveness.

Still the lessons haven't been lost on activists in the PSA, the government's umbrella organisation of which TCS is a part, and which is next on the sell-off list. Don't trust the Broad Left leadership, the activists must organise the fight themselves.

Stop NHS opt-out!

By Paul Woolley

Health bosses are wasting no time in targetting hospitals for opting out as a result of the government's White Paper announced in January.

"Management have been keen to opt out from the word go", said a healthworker at Manchester Royal Infirmary (MRI).

Central Manchester Health Authority announced in March that the MRI, along with St. Mary's Hospital and the Eye Hospital, on the same site, would be "better off" running their own business.

Hospital managers and consultants support the idea of some or all of the three hospitals opting out, to sell their services to the Health Authority, other health authorities or other hospitals.

The proposal to forge ahead with the Tories' carve-up of health services come from a strange quarter — the Chair of

Central Manchester Health Authority, Ken Collis, who is also a Labour councillor in Manchester! Trafford District Labour Party has called for Collis's resignation from the Health Authority.

Stretford Labour MP, Tony Lloyd, is backing the call. Some Labour Party activists have called for Collis's expulsion from the party. He is very likely to be kicked off Manchester's Labour group.

The trade unions on the site are preparing to fight the opt-out. There is to be a demonstration when Junior Health Minister, Roger Freeman, visits Manchester on 5 May. Manchester Community Health Council is holding a delegate conference at the MRI on 27 April to discuss the threat and what can be done.

As well as organising the rank and file in the hospitals, the trade unions should link up with the Labour Party in a broader campaign of opposition to mobilise the thousands who depend on these hospitals.

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

Monday 10 April Edinburgh SO: 'A Scottish Assembly: is it the way forward?'. Windsor Buffet, Leith Walk, 8.30

Thursday 13 April 'An Evening for Blair Peach' organised by Friends of Blair Peach and Southall Monitoring Group. Dominion Theatre, Southall, 7.00. Contact Southall Monitoring Group, 01 834 2333.

Sunday 16 April York SO: 'Reassessing the Eastern Bloc'. York University, 7.00

Monday 17 April 'Stop the Merger' lobby of AEU National Committee. Winter Gardens, Eastbourne, 8.30. Contact N Goodwin, 28 Bowling Green Close, Birmingham B23 5QU

Saturday 22 April Student Left Activist Conference. Octagon Centre, Western Bank,

Sheffield, 11.00. Contact Jill, 01 639 7967.

Sunday 23 April Memorial march and meeting for Blair Peach, organised by Blair Peach 10th Anniversary Committee. From Southall Park, Uxbridge Road, 1.00. Contact Anniversary Committee at 01 834 2333

Thursday 27 April London Socialist Forum: 'Revolt in Eastern Europe'. Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road, 7.30

Friday 28 April York SO: 'How to beat the poll tax'

Saturday 29 April CLPs Conference on Party Democracy. AEU, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, 11.00. Contact Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom, Merseyside L44 8BG

Monday 1 May London SO education series: 'Early years of the Communist Party', speaker Tom Rigby. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1, 7.00

Saturday 6 May Yorkshire SO day school: 'Transforming the labour movement'. St John's College, York, 10.30

Wednesday 10 May

'Hands off Guys' march against NHS White Paper. From Guys Hospital (Melior St) to St Thomas's Hospital, 6.30. Contact Richard Excell, Southwark TU Support Unit, 01 582 0996

Saturday 13 May Lutte Ouvriere fete (three days). Near Paris. Contact Clive, 01 639 7965

Wednesday 24 May Bristol SO: 'Dockers against the Tories', speaker John O'Mahony

Saturday 3 June Gorbachev and the European Left conference (two days). ULU, Malet St, London WC1. Contact Gus Fagan, 30 Bridge St, Oxford OX2 0BA

Saturday 17 June 'Time To Go' Show (two days). City University, London

Saturday 8 July Workers' Liberty Summer School (two days). Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19

Saturday 12 August 'Time To Go' demonstration on Ireland

Transforming the labour movement

Socialist Organiser Dayschool

Saturday 6 May, 10.30am
Ripon & York College of St John,
Phoenix Block

Workshops

- Marx's Communism, Marxism and the Labour Party, Ireland: Time to Rethink
- Lenin & the Bolsheviks, Marxism and Trade Unions, Two States: A defeat for the PLO?
- Trotsky: A tragic figure?, Marxism & Women's Oppression, Eyewitness Report: Poland
- Stalin: Totalitarianism or Leninist?, Marxist Economics, Gorbachev's Reforms
- Transforming the labour movement and the fight against New Realism.

Registration £1.50/£1. Creche and food available. For more details ring Richard on 0904 626529

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Stop the rise of business unionism!

The proposed AEU/EETPU merger is of crucial importance to all trade unionists. A successful amalgamation would do more

than destroy democracy in the AEU; it would represent a massive step forward for 'business unionism' in Britain.

Business unionism is a very old idea. It means that unions are committed first and foremost to ensuring the smooth running and profitability of the bosses' businesses. The theory is that the workers will then share in the success of the business.

In practice, things don't work like that in the real world. What business unionism **does** ensure is that union leaders act as policemen over the workforce on behalf of the bosses. Proper shop floor organisation, rank and file action and any sort of working class solidarity is inimical to business unionism.

In Britain today, Eric Hammond and the EETPU leadership are the leading advocates of business unionism. They pioneered the idea of single union/no-strike deals and, at Orion and Christian Salveson, thought nothing of breaking up other unions' organisation.

At Wapping, they went still further and actively conspired with Murdoch to steal the jobs of the printers and drive out the print unions. Jordan and Laird have not been far behind. The AEU single-union deal at Nissan is a classic example of business unionism, with no independent shopfloor organisation, and binding arbitration that amounts to a no-strike deal in all but words.

In the national Confed negotiations, Jordan is once more offering the Engineering Employers Federation total flexibility and all-embracing 'joint negotiation committees' that would deny the rank and file any independent organisation at shopfloor level. No wonder Jordan is so keen to link up with the EETPU!

Of course, other unions (like the GMB and TGWU) have signed single-union deals and accepted binding arbitration. The TUC's concept of 'new realism' contains many elements of business unionism. The EETPU was expelled from the TUC not because of its scabbing on the Isle of Grain, but because it broke the bureaucratic 'Bridlington Agreement'. Nevertheless, the EETPU represents something clearly worse than TUC-style 'new realism'.

An AEU/EETPU lash-up would create a one million-strong bastion of business unionism that would pose a mortal threat to genuine trade unionism — in or out of the TUC.

And it would massively strengthen the forces of outright class collaboration within the Labour Party. Already, AEU and EETPU leaders are at the forefront of witchhunts against Labour Party left-wingers and openly advocate deals with the SDP/SLD. EETPU Press Officer John Grant stood as an SDP candidate in the last general election.

Class collaboration and business unionism cannot tolerate active rank and file democracy within the workers' movement. That's why Jordan and Laird are so keen to link up with the EETPU and to tear up the AEU's rule book. That's why all trade unionists and Labour Party members must stop them.

8.30am onwards outside the Winter Gardens, Eastbourne
Called by Anti-Merger Campaign. Contact N Goodwin, 28 Bowling Green Close, Birmingham B23 5QU
Stop the merger!
Defend democracy in the AEU
Lobby the AEU National Committee
Monday 17 April 1989

By Jim Denham

The AEU is — on paper, at least — the most democratic union in Britain. Its rule book and structures were originally designed to promote rank and file participation and control at every level of the union. All AEU officials are elected. The lay National Committee is the 'parliament' of the union, over and above the National Executive.

That's the theory. In practice, the AEU's democratic structures have become worn and rusty due to years of neglect and misuse. This decline accelerated sharply when Boyd and Duffy took control in the late Seventies. Now, under Jordan and Laird, the rule book and the entire structure of the AEU are under threat.

Bill Jordan has never made any secret of his liking for the EETPU. Small wonder. In the EETPU the Executive Committee is all-powerful. Rank and file participation is minimal and 'dissident' branches are closed down without hesitation. Officials — other than the President, General Secretary and Executive Council — are appointed.

Merger talks between the two leaderships have been going on for years. But over the past twelve months the courtship ritual has taken on a new urgency. Both prospective partners are now eager to jump into bed. All this has been going on in secret meetings between Laird, Jordan and Weakly of the AEU and Hammond, Gallacher and Davis of the EETPU. The membership of both unions have been kept in the dark and what little information has trickled out to the rank and file, has been via the *Financial Times*!

On 10 January, the AEU executive was presented with a '10-Point Plan' for merger. This document makes it clear that Jordan and Laird's vision of a new, merged, union is the EETPU writ large.

The AEU leadership intend to creep up on union democracy and strangle it quietly: they want the 'general framework' of the amalgamation agreed first, with 'details' sorted out over a six year period. The 10 Point Plan states, "We are prepared to negotiate a step-by-step merger leading to full integration by an agreed date. A strict timetable would specify the dates by which the various stages leading to full integration must be achieved by the date of the first Rules Revision Conference six years after the date of amalgamation."

The document proposes the "complete integration of shop steward representatives from both unions. The Industrial Structure at District level would have authority similar to that which applies at District Committee level of the AEU."

That sounds fair enough, doesn't it. But...the experience of regional "Industrial Committees" in the EETPU is that they are powerless advisory bodies. The comparison with AEU District Committees is a cynical pretence intended to pacify engineers who value the District Committees. Jordan's document

Save AEU democracy!



Tweedledum and Tweedledee

gives the game away when it states that "once the powers of the AEU District Committees have passed to the new Regional Industrial Committees, the District Committees would cease to function."

The kind of 'democracy' that Jordan and Laird have in mind for the new union is made all too clear in the section dealing with conference: "There would be a Policy Conference every two years and a Rules Conference every six years...Conference decisions would bind the Executive *subject to the Executive's powers to put matters of major concern to a ballot of members*" (our emphasis).

In other words, any conference decision that doesn't meet with the approval of the Executive can be put to a ballot — and Jordan's friends in the press will do their damndest to ensure that the decision is overturned!

Perhaps the most outrageous of all, are the proposals for dealing with the election of officials. This was the issue that only a few years ago caused the break-up of the AEU/TASS amalgamation because Ken Gill's union insisted on *appointing* its officials. Now, it seems that it doesn't really matter after all: "The AEU wishes to elect all full-

time officials, the EETPU prefers appointment...The issue should therefore be put to a ballot of the members at a date preceding the first meeting of the Rules Committee." Meanwhile, "the position of all serving full-time officials at the time of the amalgamation would be guaranteed"...that means *jobs for life* for all the present officials of both unions! What a mockery that makes of the AEU's proud tradition of accountability!

There are a couple of 'sweeteners' thrown into the package in order to make the proposals a little more palatable to the membership and the National Committee: higher benefits and an Appeals body that would be independent of the Executive. These hardly compensate for the dismantling of the entire democratic structure of the union!

The "10-point plan" was passed by 5 votes to 4 at the Executive of January 10, with Peter Burns and Nigel Harris of the Foundry Section voting against, along with John Weakley and Jimmy Airley. Virtually the same document was presented to Hammond on January 26th — with the significant additional point that the new union would "apply for affiliation to the TUC".

These proposals will be put to the joint meeting of the two executives on Thursday 13 and then to the annual conference of the AEU National Committee on April 17.

It is not inevitable that the NC will approve the merger. Even NC members generally considered as right-wingers value the democratic structures of their union. Last year the NC put a warning shot across Jordan's bows when it voted for "meaningful amalgamations on the basis of the existing rule book" — a form of words which, decoded, meant "no deals with the EETPU."

As details of the merger proposals have gradually filtered through to the rank and file, the opposition has grown. At the time of writing 13 out of the total of 25 Divisions of the union have submitted resolutions, against the merger to the NC.

Jordan and Laird have had to spring a fait accompli on the NC this month. It is now clear that, thanks to the work of vigilant rank and file activists — there will be strong opposition to the merger plans. The NC must clearly instruct its Executive to break off all negotiations with the EETPU for as long as it remains outside the TUC.

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Dockers' special. 10 pence (if sold separately)



Now is the time to fight!

As we go to press the situation on the docks is unclear.

After meeting for nearly two full days, Monday and Tuesday, 10th and 11th April, the national dock committee passed the following resolution:

"That a ballot of T&G registered dockworkers be undertaken on the policy of defence of the provisions of the Dock Labour Scheme".

However, T&G General Secretary, Ron Todd does not appear to agree with this decision. He wants a special meeting of the T&G General Executive Council on Friday to discuss the situation on

the docks before Saturday's delegate meeting which could ratify the ballot call and set a date for a strike. The General Executive Council can overrule the decision of the docks section of the T&G.

Todd motivated this special meeting by saying that there was "a genuine difference of opinion over the strategy and tactics for defending the scheme". It seems that the T&G General Secretary is against an immediate ballot for strike action on the grounds that there is a real threat that strike action in defence of the NDLB even after a ballot could be declared illegal 'political' action. Simply because it is strike action against a

government policy despite the fact that this policy decision deeply affects the contract of employment of 9,400 dockers.

After the experience of the miners, printers and seafarers it would be wrong to sneer at Todd's attempt to manoeuvre around the law but there are serious flaws in the strategy he spelt out: "I believe very strongly, that we should be demanding from the employers that they start negotiations with us to restore the protection that we would have had under the scheme". Todd later went on to say that should such negotiations break down or should the port employers refuse

negotiations then "we would have to take up the struggle again".

The problem with this approach is that it runs the risk of demobilising and confusing the dockers and giving the port employers and government even more time to prepare. Even if the dockers got round the law by Todd's method and were able to launch an effective national strike by registered dockers any attempt by the T&G to stop the movement of diverted goods through non-registered ports would immediately be declared illegal and the T&G would again face the threat of sequestration of all its assets.

As the law stands it is virtually impossible to organise an effective docks strike which would not be illegal. In this context the best way for the dockers to fight abolition of the NDLB is to seize the time and unite all their forces now in a national strike in defence of the NDLB.

Only a fool would dismiss the danger the T&G could face from the lawcourts in this dispute. But the Tories and their courts make up the laws they need in the struggle against the workers as they need them. Even so, workers must fight back. The best way to diminish the threat from the courts is to get maximum industrial action now in defence of the NDLB. Faced with a big dock strike they may not feel so confident about using the law. But if the T&G runs before the threat of the law then the Tory dogs are sure to give chase.

Dockers' fight is our fight!

By Pete Gilman

The announcement by employment secretary Norman Fowler that the Tory government is scrapping the National Dock Labour Scheme is the most fundamental

challenge yet, not only to the dockers but to the whole trade union movement in Britain.

Without any consultation, discussion or debate, the Tories — like a military dictator issuing decree laws — arbitrarily decree the scheme is to be abolished, thereby throwing into jeopardy the jobs of 9,400 dockers, seriously worsening working conditions and threatening the very existence of trade unions within the docks.

This attack is the latest stage in Tory plans to de-unionise British industry and boost profits still more at the expense of the working class.

Big business welcomes the attack, saying "it will make us more competitive." But the lie is given to this by Sir Keith Stuart, chairman of Associated British Ports, when he announced record profits of £46.5 million.

The dockers have no alternative, they must fight and win, or go to the wall.

There must be mass meetings at every port in Britain operating the scheme to get the backing of all dockers for industrial action and to actively involve them in that struggle.

Large delegations must then visit every port in Britain not in the scheme to explain the issues to unregistered dockers and get their support.

There will be a ballot, but even before that ballot takes place, unregistered docks must be leafleted, and strong links established between registered and unregistered dockers.

Links must also be established now between dockers in Britain and those on the continent. We want dockers and seamen throughout Europe to impose a complete blacking of all goods and materials to and from Britain.

There can be no deals or compromises. Dockers and the dockers' union are fighting for their lives.

Under Thatcher the courts are not about 'decent law and order' and most certainly they have nothing to do with justice — they've been turned into blatant weapons of class oppression. The courts are used ruthlessly to attack working people who fight for their rights and for justice.

As soon as the strike starts so will the injunctions, and judges will back the bosses. No amount of grovelling by trade union leaders will stop that.

The best protection we can have against the law is to get the maximum number of dockers on strike in defence of the NDLB and united in determination not to be browbeaten by class law.

There are numerous options open to union leaders to put union money where judges cannot get their hands on it. It is up to dockers and rank and file trade unionists to force them to take those options now, before the strike starts.

The Tory propaganda machine of Fleet Street and Wapping will bombard us with hate articles against the dockers to mobilise public opinion against them, and undermine solidarity. Dockers must have publicity and propaganda committees to counter the Tory lie machine, and it is up to socialists everywhere to force the Labour Party into action, to use its electoral machinery to get across the truth about the strike.

With a lot of guts, determination, planning and the active involvement of the whole of the registered dock labour force, forging links with the rest of the trade union movement, and with dockers and seamen throughout Europe, we can both save the National Dock Labour Scheme and inflict a crushing defeat on Thatcher.

The alternative is a major defeat not only for the dockers, not only for the TGWU, but for the whole of the labour and trade union movement.

The dockers have great power

By Tony Benn MP

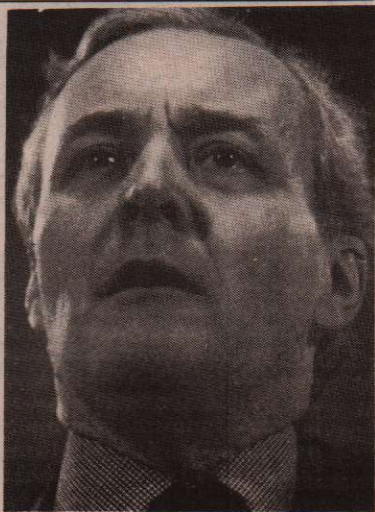
The attack on the National Dock Labour Scheme has been long prepared and the government are hoping that they can frighten the dockers into accepting a return to casual labour.

Obviously the dockers group within the TGWU have to decide what action they wish to take, but

whatever the decision is, the entire trade union movement and Labour Party must give 100% support.

The psychological warfare designed to prevent a strike is an indication of the government's nervousness about the possibility that a strike may take place, and that points to the power the dockers have to defend their interests.

As the Thatcher period moves to an end, the resistance must be stepped up.



Why we should defend the dock labour scheme

The National Dock Labour Scheme was set up in 1947 by the reforming Labour government.

Before that, dockers were not registered. Anyone could go along and compete for a job — a difficult and dangerous job. You didn't need experience, and no training was given.

Dockers were hired for a few days or a few hours at a time, as the ships came in. There was no job security at all. The ports were an employers' paradise, and a hell for the workers.

The Dock Labour Scheme set up a National Dock Labour Board — 50 per cent union representatives and 50 per cent employers' representatives — to register and employ a pool of dockers who would be hired out to the port employers and have a small guaranteed fall-back wage when no employer would take them. 80,000 dockers were registered under the Scheme.

Dockers continued to be exploited by the bosses — as the miners, railworkers, and others working in the industries which Labour nationalised continued to be exploited. Dockers did not get 'jobs for life'. It was more difficult

to sack dockers — the union reps on local Dock Labour Boards could block sackings — but dockers could be and were sacked. Indeed, in the 1950s, when the main dockers' union, the TGWU, was extremely right wing, sacking was a threat used by right-wing union leaders against militant dockers.

But exploitation on the dockers became less savage, less unrestrained, after 1947. Dockers did not get the same job security as judges or professors, but they did not have to vie for jobs each day. Workers had rights. 'Protective practices' were recognised and accepted.

Over the 1950s and '60s militant dockers won a considerable degree of control over work practices. Dockers were legendary in the labour movement for their solidarity. Wages were pushed up.

The Dock Labour Scheme was one of a number of gains won by the working class in the 1940s, alongside such advances as the National Health Services. Those reforms did not change the fact that workers were enslaved and exploited by capital — but they softened the exploitation.

The bosses made those concessions because the workers were in a strong position. "If you do not give the people social reforms",

declared one Tory, "they will give you social revolution".

But the working class left the bosses in overall control. They could bide their time until conditions became favourable for them to take back their concessions.

Today the bosses are on the offensive. For a decade they have been systematically taking back the gains the working class won over many decades. They are running down the National Health Service. They are abolishing the National Dock Labour Scheme. These are similar moves in the same game.

The working class must stand against the Tory offensive wherever it is unleashed. The Dock Labour Scheme must be defended.

A deluge of hostile propaganda against the dockers will wash over us in the weeks ahead. Rich parasites and owners of vast inherited wealth — people who have luxury for life without ever needing to do a job of work — will orchestrate a campaign of denunciation against dockers for wanting 'jobs for life'.

The labour movement must resist and spurn that propaganda. Socialists must start now to build a powerful campaign of solidarity around the dockers' resistance to the Tory attack.



Solidarity is the key

Thatcher and the Port Employers are boasting that they can easily weather a docks strike.

What's the truth? 95% of Britain's imports and exports go through sea ports. According to the Tories' own figures, 290 million tonnes go through scheme, and 78,000 tonnes through non-scheme, ports. So a docks strike in the registered ports which was backed by non-registered dockers who refused to handle redirected goods, will halt the movement of 73% of Britain's trade in tonnage terms.

It's also wrong to believe that even if the employers can bludgeon non-registered dockers into handling redirected goods then a docks strike will have little effect.

In reality most of the non-scheme ports are ro-ro container bases and cannot easily deal with the bulk cargoes such as cereals, timber, food, ores, minerals and chemicals that usually go through scheme ports such as London, Southampton, Liverpool and Immingham.

To make things worse for the Port bosses, the largest port outside the scheme, Felixstowe, is already said to be working at 95% capacity, giving little room for making it the centre of scab operations.

So the dockers are in a far stronger position than the media would have us believe. But that position of strength will only lead to victory if other workers deliver the necessary solidarity action.

As John Bees, chair of the Bristol Docks Shop Stewards Committee explained: "The miners' strike deprived businesses of one commodity which was by-passed by nuclear power and oil, but dockers handle all imported and exported commodities. Solidarity between dockers and lorry drivers is a crucial factor in any dispute — interna-



tional solidarity would also be vital. Holland, Belgium, France and Italy also have a dockers scheme similar

to ours, and their trade unions could give support to striking British dockers."

How the bosses

The Tories and the port Employers have been preparing for this battle for a long time.

Their strategy is spelt out in a secret report drawn up over 18 months ago by the National Association of Port Employers (NAPE), entitled 'Repeal of the dock labour scheme: Industrial action — an analysis'.

There are three elements to this strategy:

- **Legal threats.** The bosses hope that the use (or threatened use) of the Tory anti-union laws can seriously weaken the dockers' resolve. As the secret report puts it, "Numerous difficulties present themselves" (for the union), particularly since the employers have committed themselves to using the law if any industrial action is felt to be unlawful.

- **Propaganda war.** The Port bosses see the importance of a propaganda war against the dockers. "During any strike it will be important to exploit any events likely to demoralise the rank and file, such as cargoes being handled normally in non-scheme ports, lack of disruption to industry and public alike, pointlessness of the dispute, alternative safeguards being offered."

- **Strikebreaking.** The Port Employers' report is quite explicit

about the need to work on strikebreaking and scab-hunting plans: "Special consideration should be given to ameliorating the effects of industrial action on the newspaper industry by building up stock level or investigating alternative ports."

Contingency plans have also been drawn up for the movement of wheat, ore and cereals after a special summit of Port bosses in London.

According to last week's *Sunday Times*, the bosses in the registered ports plan to fly in unemployed dockers from the continent to act as scab labour and to use clerks and managers for less skilled loading and unloading jobs. The police can be expected to have their picket-

Students

Marxist and Socialist Student supporter Paul McGarry proposed the motion printed below to yesterday's National Union of Students National Executive meeting.

The motion was passed, with no votes against, and commits the NUS to back dock workers' strike action.

The National Union is now committed to supporting individual student unions linking up with local workers. Socialist Student believes that a policy of linking the student movement, at all levels, with workers in struggle can only benefit all those facing cuts, privatisation and decreasing standards of living. Workers and students have a lot in

When dockers beat the law

In July 1972 a mass strike wave freed five dockers who had been put into Pentonville Jail for picketing in contempt of court.

There had been a long build-up to this explosion.

Demonstrations and meetings throughout 1971 had protested at the Tory government's Industrial Relations Bill, but the major part of it came into law in December 1971.

The employers did not use the Industrial Relations Act during the miners' strike in January and February 1972. The first — and, as it happened, a crucial — test case was the dockers' struggle over jobs.

Container firms had built depots outside the ports where containers could be stuffed and stripped by labour which did not have the relatively good conditions and protective agreements won by dockers. Dockers were picketing the depots to demand that the work be restored to registered dockworkers.

In March, Heaton's of St Helens took the TGWU to court. After a show of defiance, the TGWU leadership collapsed and paid a £55,000 fine — on May Day as it happened.

But the port shop stewards remained firm. In June three London dockers were served with an injunction to stop them picketing the Chobham Farm depot.

They defied the injunction. Other workers were ready to strike if they were jailed. The Court of Appeal cancelled the injunction.

It said there was not enough evidence that the named dockers were in fact picketing the depot. Meanwhile the three were appearing on television, defiantly on the picket line!

In a parallel to the cases brought by scab miners, the Chobham Farm court action had been started by workers at the depot. But the next,



Vic Turner, one of the Pentonville 5, triumphant after his release

and decisive, court action was brought by employers, the owners of Midland Cold Store.

They got their injunction — and on Friday 21 July the five dockers were jailed for defying it.

Dockers struck nationwide. Lorry drivers who had differences with the dockers over the picketing of the container depots struck too, declaring that "as trade unionists, we must fight the Industrial Relations Act together."

Many container workers struck too. Most major newspapers were shut down. So were Heathrow Airport and many building sites, pits, factories and shipyards.

On the last day of the strikes, Wednesday 26 July, a flying picket on the Kirkby Industrial Estate, near Liverpool, brought out several more factories. On Monday 24th, Liverpool Trades Council executive had called on all workers on

Merseyside to strike until the five were freed.

The initiative came from the rank and file — but the official leadership was forced to move, too. The TUC called a one-day general strike for Friday 28th. Many workers would have stayed out longer than one day.

So the Tories backed down. They discovered the Official Solicitor and sent him to make an appeal on behalf of the dockers. They came out of Pentonville Jail in triumph on Wednesday 26th.

It was a great victory, but also a missed opportunity. If the strike movement had continued, it could have forced the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, and maybe more.

But the Act remained. If the Tories had not been forced to the polls by the miners in February 1974 and voted out, in due course it could have been made usable again.

Prepared

busting plans in place.

Some of the employers even hope to organise any dockers who scab into a federation of yellow unions dominated by the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. We can expect strikebreaking scum like the notorious Medlock Bibby, who organised a back-to-work movement in 1984, to offer their services to the bosses.

Over the weekend of 8-9 April, the Port employers and shipping lines moved their strikebreaking plans into operation. The bosses are using them to their maximum advantage the time given to them by the delay of the strike. The employers want to clear the port areas of all cargo at top speed.

For instance, P&O, that well-known lover of trade unionism, good working conditions and health and safety, have been doing their best to weaken any dockers strike.

P&O Containers — the largest container line in the UK — have already set up a special department to control the import and export of cargo through Felixstowe and other non-scheme ports. Road haulage is to be used to move containers to inland container depots, by-passing the railways and the rail unions.

The bosses have prepared very thoroughly indeed for this battle. The labour movement needs to prepare to deliver the maximum solidarity possible to the dockers.

Back dockers

common — and linked together, whether over defence of the NDLS, fighting the Poll Tax or defending the standard of education, we are all stronger and better able to defeat employers and the government.

Right now student activists have the two-fold task of making active solidarity by setting up college Dock Workers Support Groups and making sure the grudging support the Kinnockite-led NEC have given to Paul McGarry's motion is actually carried out.

The NEC notes:
The attack on the NDLS by the government and the National Association of Port Employers in the form of the Dock Workers Bill.

The NEC believes:
1. It is in the interest of students that the dockers beat the employers and government. A victory by one section of

the working class aids others and similar struggles.

2. That the NDLS protects workers' pay and conditions and as such should be defended.

3. That NUS should support any strike action, etc. taken by the TGWU members in defence of the NDLS.

4. That NUS Exec should approach TGWU to ask what NUS can do to help the dockers.

5. That NUS Exec should encourage CMS (student unions) to make links with NDLS and non-scheme ports as soon as possible.

Instructs the NEC:

1. To approach the TGWU.
2. To carry articles in the next editions of NUS Action and NSM on the NDLS

Amendment (passed):

3. To invite a speaker from the dockers to the next NEC.

4. To write a letter of support to the dockers.

A miner's pledge

By Paul Whetton, Manton NUM

The docks dispute bears out what we said in the 1984-5 miners' strike: if we don't succeed, you're next. The printers and the seafarers have found the truth of that, and now the dockers.

We had a good response from dockers during our strikes, not as good as hoped for, but still I assure

dockers that we will throw our weight behind them.

I'd also warn them it will not be easy. The legislation against trade unions is now a minefield that both dockers and those showing solidarity will have to pick their way through. We are going to prepare links with the dockers.

I can assure dockers we'll be there if needed. I hope that they will stand true to their class, to their principles and to their traditions of

militancy. We will give them every support possible.

It's difficult for any section of the working class to take on the law now and win. But you cannot expect fairness from the law. If there is no alternative, you have to break those Tory laws.

To its eternal shame, the TUC has let down workers in struggle. Now people tend to say that we should no longer look towards the TUC for any support. That is wrong. This movement is ours, and we should demand that the TUC stand up and be counted as our organisation. It should take organised action in defence of the dockers and other workers.

The Labour Party leaders are whingeing about the law — hypocritically when you consider that the trade union movement itself was born in defiance of the law. If the Tolpuddle Martyrs had taken the advice to keep within the law, then the trade union movement and the Labour Party would never have been created.

The only way the working class can make advances is to challenge the law. The Labour Party can't afford to cut itself off from the working class. If they want to become the yuppie party, they will find themselves in a political desert. The Labour Party should clearly back the dockers.

Rail action needed

By a railworker

A strike in the docks is inevitable. That is the only way the dockers can defend the advantages of the registered dock scheme.

The problem is that while the bosses have clearly laid plans to take on the dockers, our side has made no such preparations. We've a lot of catching up to do.

Solidarity with the miners during their strike was made easier by the fact that a Triple Alliance had been formed a few years before, and the twinning of pits, rail depots and

steelworks had taken place, along with joint schools. That way we got to know our opposite numbers, and so knew who to contact to find out how best to help.

Such contact is vital now. Particularly as some ports are non-scheme, we'll need to know what to stop, and where, to ensure that the dockers can hold out against the government.

The rail unions have just begun a campaign to defend our rights to negotiate on the conditions of service established by negotiation.

These attacks came from the same source. Our best defence is to do what we can to help the dockers now.

Leith docker says: ballot now!

Eddie Trotter, chair of the Leith dockers TGWU branch, and member of the TGWU Regional and National Docks and Waterways Committee, spoke to Socialist Organiser.

Was there any indication in advance of last Thursday's announcement that the government intended introducing legislation to scrap the National Dock Labour Board (NDLB) scheme?

For the last two years or so the National Association of Port Employers (NAPE) has been lobbying various MPs for abolition of the scheme. Two early day motions have been put down and were well supported by Tory MPs.

But when we heard the news last night, that the bill to abolish the scheme was to have its first reading today (Friday), it came as a bolt from the blue. It was only three weeks so that the British Ports Authority and NAPE had their annual junket, and when Paul Channon spoke at it he gave no indication of any legislation in the pipeline.

Then, lo and behold, there was yesterday's statement by Fowler. But all we really know at the moment is what has been on TV. As the bill is read out today, things will become clearer. Our impression is that the Tories intend to scrap the NDLB by the end of June.

In the past few months there have been a number of local disputes about the NDLB — firms in Glasgow using unregistered labour to unload scrap, the use of unregistered labour by the Blue Circle cement company in London, the paying off of registered dockers in Liverpool, and then the dispute that blew up in Aberdeen last week. Were these local disputes preparing the ground for yesterday's announcement?

They were disputes which were bubbling up to give more publicity to the campaign to scrap the NDLB, they were building up to a crescendo. But now they have all been overtaken by yesterday's announcement.

The Glasgow dispute, for example, was taken to an industrial tribunal in early March, but then the hearing was postponed until May. In Aberdeen the fish lumpers



were paid off by their employers but the boss of the commercial dock in Aberdeen refused to take them on, meaning that they were put on the temporary unattached register. This would have been a crucial issue for us, but it is now inferior to Fowler's announcement yesterday.

The question that everyone is asking now is what happens on days when there is no work for us. At the moment, you are sent home idle and put on basic pay. But if the NDLB is scrapped, you might only get paid for two or three days a week, which is what the employers want.

What is the response of the union going to be to Fowler's announcement?

As far as I am aware, some ports like Southampton walked out on strike last night, and Tilbury as well, I think. But I don't know if

they have resumed work today.

The TGWU will be holding a special recall national docks and waterways committee, followed by a full national docks delegates conference. These will be held early next week, probably on the same day. The committee will recommend that a ballot be held for industrial action, in order that the NDLB be retained in its entirety. This recommendation will then be endorsed by the delegates' conference.

The ballot should be held as soon as possible, given the speed at which the Tories are moving. Only dockers in the scheme will take part in the ballot, otherwise it would be illegal, as it would be involving unregistered dockers in secondary action. But unregistered dockers have given a commitment that they will not handle cargoes transferred

from strike-bound ports.

The National Ports Shop Stewards Committee, an unofficial body, will also be meeting in Edinburgh next Saturday to discuss the outcome of the meetings being held during the week. Following on from

the decision taken at an earlier meeting, it will also be organising delegates to visit continental ports to appeal for the boycotting of Britain-bound cargoes in the event of a strike.

Southampton dockers ready to fight

On Friday 7 April, local SO supporters interviewed Dennis Harriman, TGWU National Docks Officer in Southampton. We asked him if the Tories' attack on the scheme had taken them by surprise:

"Absolutely, because of their economic problems, we thought they would hold off and avoid confrontation. So yes, we are quite stunned.

We have to be clear: this is a political act of vandalism. In our view there has been no dispute, yet Norman Fowler has torn up a statute overnight.

In some ways the issues are complex — we have got to realise that the scheme was introduced nationally in 1947 to put an end to casualisation, the ending of the scheme will mean job losses.

Our policy is to extend the scheme to all ports in the UK. In the last few decades we have been forced to accept containerisation and a number of ports have stayed out of the scheme. Today, 40 ports are covered by the scheme and 35 outside.

The fact is over 70% of seaborne trade is handled within scheme ports; if the scheme is abolished it will mean poorer wages and conditions and a return to casualisation, and all ports being deregulated, which will push us back to the tally system of the 1930s.

All 700 dockers in the scheme in Southampton are on unofficial strike indefinitely. At the last meeting, this morning, it was clear that dockers understand and are prepared to defend the scheme, morale is high. After the national

trade committee meeting in London this Monday we will have a clearer picture nationally as to whether stewards intend to set up strike committees and call for wider support.

Already one thing is clear: the Tories will be looking for a short strike and they think we can't do very much. We will have to run a prolonged strike to defeat their contingency plans. The power of dockers can gum up the whole system if we stay solid. In Southampton, for example, we handle 10% of all trade; there is no way other ports who are non-scheme can handle this capacity."

Southampton dockers are intent on staying on indefinite strike; a mass meeting is due to be held on Monday after the national meeting in London. At this meeting they must call for pickets on the gates to ensure any scab labour is blocked, and they need to set up a strike committee to liaise with scheme and non-scheme ports to spread the action and block any movement of ships.

They must also call out the 70 TGWU tug boat members in Southampton, who are vital in stopping the movement of ships.

What is needed is for the labour movement to get behind the strike, inviting dockers to speak at trade union and Labour Party branch meetings. Solidarity amongst the wider labour movement will be key in ensuring the dockers win.

Requests for speakers, and donations, should be made to TGWU Docks Dispute, London Rd, Southampton.

Stop press: Southampton dockers went back on Monday awaiting a national ballot.

WHERE WE STAND

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

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under

workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

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

workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

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

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

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

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

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

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

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