

Forensic fools and the Birmingham Six page 11



Boris Kagarlitsky on the USSR's Socialist Party page 2



COURTS Poll tax victory centre pages



The sharpest film critic ever page 13



SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Tories' 'social market' throws thousands on the dole

Save jobs— fight now!



Vickers Shipyard, Barrow: 5,500 face the sack

A new pastel-shaded "social market" Toryism is replacing the old electric-blue Thatcherism. But despite the change of image, the jobs axe swings just the same.

Unemployment is rising faster than at any time since late 1980, and the rise is accelerating. It started in March 1990. The government's official unemployment figure (which much underestimates the reality) is now over two million, and even the government says it will be 2.75 million by the end of the year.

Last week British Aerospace announced 4,700 more job cuts, making a total of 10,900 now on the agenda. The VSEL shipyard in Barrow declared 5,500 job cuts.

Barclays Bank plans to chop 5,000 jobs this year. Hawker Siddeley is to cut 4,000, and Rolls Royce 3,000. 4,000 people are losing their jobs after the collapse of the travel company ILG. London Underground proposes to axe 1,800 jobs.

If the "free market" grinds away Turn to page 2

The lie machine



What is Britain coming to? Last week the *News of the World's* Clive Goodman ("Our Royal Man in the Know") took page one and two inside pages to come as near as winking and nudging to branding the future Queen of England an adulteress...

The *Star* led on yet another royal scandal, and the *Mirror* put it on its front page too.

Today's front page had a picture of Princess Di, with a caption claiming she looked "glum" because Prince Charles had stayed at home instead of coming out with her.

Not so long ago any one of those front pages would have caused a huge outcry about disrespect to the sacred institutions of the British state, and probably the editor responsible would have been sacked. Now they're routine.

Rupert Murdoch's personal hostility to the monarchy has something to do with it. But there must be more to it: the readers evidently lap up this stuff. Millions of people reckon the Windsor parasites deserve all they get in the way of mudslinging.

Roll on the republic!

USSR: the real socialists meet

Boris Kagarlitsky reports on the Congress of the USSR's Socialist Party

On Sunday 24 March the Socialist Party had its second congress, in Leningrad.

The most important question discussed was that of left unity. Some of the left groups which have previously attacked us, attended the congress.

The leader of the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists spoke to the conference. This was important for the prospects of joint work in the trade unions. We adopted a

resolution which looked to strengthening the left wing in the various trade union groups and federations.

We have learned a lot from the experience of our original socialist trade union organisation, Sotsprof.

Although some of the elements of Sotsprof are still working, it has split into a number of groups. Some of the groups have joined the Confederation of Labour.

The break-up of Sotsprof probably happened because the project was premature and was built around one too-small nucleus.

We now follow a strategy of united work with various left-wing organisations, to strengthen the left in existing trade unions.

Perhaps in the future we will be able to bring the different left elements

together to form a new union federation.

Two tendencies in the Socialist Party were visible at the congress. It was a traditional right-left division. A right-wing tendency argued for working together with the liberals against the central state. They wanted to become the left of the liberal camp. The left insisted on the need to build a third, socialist force, against both the pro-capitalist liberal and the old bureaucrats.

It is strange how history repeats itself — it was quite like the Bolshevik-Menshevik debate during the 1905 revolution. It produced almost the same result: the left had an impressive majority!

We are continuing to fight for genuine socialism in the USSR.



Protest against Gorbachev

Hollywood Oscars

Money behind Depardieu smear

Nobody loves a bad sport, so sections of the American media will probably take a pasting over the "Depardieu affair". If so, they richly deserve it.

The American press, worried that the actor Gerard Depardieu would take the best actor Oscar for his work in the movie *Cyrano de Bergerac*, decided to fight foul. Claiming he participated in rape while still a young boy, they have sought to smear him, as a way of ruining his chances for the big night.

They've been successful. American feminists are insisting he pay indemnities to women's groups. People are outdoing themselves in self-righteous accusations. The august *Time* is one of the magazines proclaiming Depardieu a rapist.

Storm in a teacup? Maybe. But there's a lot of money at stake, and money is the reason for the smear.

Films that win Oscars don't just score critically; they often double and quadruple their box office takings on the hype created by the Oscars. For all that free publicity to be "wasted" on a foreign film, and a subtitled foreign film at that, makes Hollywood see red.

So Depardieu was smeared as a way of making him lose. The Academy play safe; they wouldn't make such a controversial choice. For to choose *Cyrano* now would create controversy. Bad publicity, not good. Hollywood wouldn't like it.

Depardieu denied the rumours, aired in such publications as the *National Inquirer* (a paper so low it makes the *Sun* look like quality journalism). Jack Lang, the French Minister of Culture, has called them so contemptible as not to be worth answering.

Who benefits from the rumours? The answer has to be Hollywood's money men and deal makers.

It was bad enough Jeremy Irons (a British actor) winning

the Oscar, but at least he is part of the Anglo-American

industry. Depardieu would be even worse.

Save jobs, fight now!

From front page

unchecked, it will lay waste hundreds of thousands of lives in the coming months as it did in the early '80s. As Barrow local councillor Terry Smith puts it: "If we are left to the mercy of the markets, we will be a fishing village in five years' time."

For all Major's soft talk, the Tories are still as dedicated to the "discipline" of the market and the profit drive as ever. They have kept up the financial squeeze on local government, forcing thousands of job cuts there. The cuts are particularly

harsh in adult education, where maybe 2,000 jobs and half a million class places will go.

The Tories plan to press ahead with privatising and contracting-out as fast as ever — and that means yet more job cuts.

The time to fight back is now. Before March last year, unemployment had been falling for four years. The trade union movement has been regaining confidence, slowly, partially, patchily.

The chances for a fight back are much better now than they will be in a few months' time, when rising unemployment has cut deep into trade union organisation and workers' confidence.

And a fight back is starting. On Tuesday 26th British Aerospace workers marched in London and lobbied Parliament to demand a Defence Diversification Programme transferring jobs to peaceful

work. On 8 April London Underground workers will ballot on strike action against the job cuts on the Tube.

There is an alternative. A cut in hours to 35 per week across the board would create hundreds of thousands of new jobs. *Work-sharing without loss of pay* would save workers from the scrapheap.

Government money for an arms conversion programme and much-needed public projects (housing, hospitals, schools, railways) would create new jobs meeting real needs. And a public programme of training and re-training at trade union rates of pay — instead of the current rundown of training and adult education — would give workers access to new skills.

We beat back the Tories on the poll tax. With a strong trade union fight back, we can beat the Tories and the bosses on the jobs front too.

Police harass peace activist

The internment and deportation of Iraqis, Palestinians other Arabs has received some small coverage in the media, but there have been a number of cases of police harassment of Middle-Eastern peace activists which have been ignored.

Mary Howard is an Iranian anti-war campaigner living in Brighton. She has been active in co-ordinating the Iranian Community Association in the area for the past few years.

On the third of February, she helped to organise an anti-war dayschool at Brighton Poly. Eight days later, at 7.30 in the morning, she was arrested with her 22 year old son, on a charge of "obtaining by deception", a charge relating to a reference on a mortgage several years ago.

The police took away Mary's passport, address book, the addresses of members of the local Iranian Community Association, farsi typewriters and travelcard! All these things are connected

with mortgage fraud, and nothing to do with the surveillance and harassment of peace activists!

Mary and her son were held for 10½ hours during which she was subjected to a

barrage of police threats, and racist abuse. Initially, she was refused an interpreter. Since her arrest, her car has been broken into every night although nothing has been stolen.



There was no mass working class protest demonstration in Liverpool this Tuesday (26th) when Derek Hatton, one-time leader of the "Militant" left on the Liverpool Council was charged with "conspiracy to

defraud the ratepayers". Hatton was on his own. He told reporters: "I have never defrauded the ratepayers in this city — nor would I. I will prove my innocence." He was let out on bail, pending trial in July.

Budget: new style, old content

Norman Lamont's first Budget was more cautious than the old squeeze-the-poor, reward-the-rich, Budgets of high Thatcherism, but not much different.

He promised £140 off everyone's poll tax. In fact the £140 includes "transitional relief" already allocated. The actual amount off will be only £100 on average, and much less in many areas. And you're better off, of course, only if you actually pay the poll tax.

The possible one-off benefit on poll tax will be paid for by a permanent

2½% increase in Value Added Tax, pushing up the prices of almost everything.

The tax increases of 5p on a pint of beer and 22p on a packet of 20 cigarettes will hit working class people hardest. For the better-off there was a mix of measures: less income tax (through a big increase in the threshold for higher-rate tax); less income tax relief for mortgage payments; a tax on company cars and mobile phones; a cut in corporation tax.

The Budget kept a tight squeeze on public spending, and that means that unemployment will continue to rise fast.

Tories retreat over poll tax

Down but not out

We have won the battle of the poll tax. The Tories hope that, nevertheless, they will win the war to stay in power — that they can still win the general election.

Not long ago the Tories were heading for seemingly certain defeat in the next general election. Now they are trying to snatch a sneak electoral victory out of the jaws of defeat.

Ruthless and cynical ruling class pirates that they are, they first threw Captain Thatcher unceremoniously over the side. Now the poll tax is going after her. Nothing is more important to them than holding on to power.

They may very well succeed.

If they do, if, having divested themselves of the poll tax, they go on to win the election, the blame will lie squarely on the shoulders of Labour leaders like Neil Kinnock and on the leaders of the TUC. It will lie with those Labour councils which did — and do — the Tories' dirty work, collecting the poll tax for them, rejecting the socialist policy expressed in the slogan: 'Don't pay, Don't collect'.

They left the initiative in the Tories' hands. If the Tories survive, the responsibility will be theirs.

Instead of putting themselves at the head of a powerful mass resistance, the Labour leaders bided their time. They kept their distance. They condemned "law breaking" — even though the Tories had made their poll tax laws without a popular mandate and in defiance of an obvious and vociferous majority of the electorate.

When, after last year's clashes between anti-poll tax demonstrators and police, the Tories tried to repeat the trick they worked during the 1984-85 miners' strike, by making "violence" the issue on which public discussion focused, what did the Labour leaders do? They joined in the Tory-police outcry against the demonstrators!

The trade union leaders were no different. The local government and civil service unions could have



acted to back up the mass resistance to the poll tax by refusing to do the paper work. They would have had the sympathy and support of a majority of the British people. Such action would have encouraged vastly greater numbers to refuse to pay the tax.

Things could have been brought to a head quicker and earlier. The Tories would have had the initiative taken away from them. A manoeuvre such as their present one — a controlled self-demolition by the Tories of part of the Tory edifice in the interests of keeping the whole Tory regime in being — would have been unthinkable.

The trade union leaders didn't dare. Like the Labour leaders they were too afraid of the Tories to do anything but coast along, hoping the Tories would continue to blindly stumble into greater and greater unpopularity, all the way to electoral defeat. That is not what the Tories are in business to do! Like the bourgeois class they serve, they are in business to win!

Would not trade union action — or defiance by Labour councils — have given the Tories the chance to raise a hue and cry thus damaging Labour?

The tried and tested trick with "violence" didn't work after last year's riots — neither would a hue and cry against political trade unionism, or law-breaking by councils.

The poll tax was too unpopular. Too many people would have been grateful to the unions and the councils: too many would have been tipped by union and council action into taking the decision that they too would refuse to pay.

In the end it was the refusal of a minority to pay, combined with the continued opposition to it of over 90% of the electorate (in a recent poll) which convinced the Tories that the poll tax would be destroyed and that their choice lay between doing it themselves and seeing a Labour government do it, after the Tories had gone down to electoral defeat.

Neither the Labour nor trade union leaders dared to organise the mass opposition to the poll tax into



an organised movement that could drive the Tories from office.

Nobody can say that a coordinated labour movement campaign against paying and collecting the poll tax would *certainly* have driven the Tories from office, made certain they will lose the next election. You can say for certain that such a campaign would have done far more damage to the Tories, lessened their room for manoeuvre, made their disarray in retreat worse, and therefore increased the chance that they will lose the election.

But it is not *only* the Labour and trade union leaders. Militant and is a political party of perhaps 3,000 members, with strong support in the CPSA. Militant could have taken the CPSA into the centre of the struggle if it had supported "Don't Collect" action.

Militant, too, didn't dare. Likewise, in the local government union NALGO, the Militant-controlled Broad Left made no serious effort to organise an effective

"Don't Collect" policy: and Militant only came late to the idea that the battle against cuts in jobs and services should be a focus of the anti-poll tax campaign as a whole, and linked to the mass non-payment campaign.

Militant here played the role typically played by the CP in the '50s and '60s, whose role it has usurped as a special wing of the trade union bureaucracy and as organisers of machines to tie sections of the rank and file to "left" bureaucrats. It compartmentalises the different struggles, separating trade unionism from political work. It built a very bureaucratic — very Stalinist — anti-poll tax campaign. It confined itself to the passive "Don't Pay": it refused to campaign for "Don't Collect" in the unions and the Labour councils.

It is that passivity that left the initiative with the Tories and has now led us to the possibility that, having beaten the Tory poll tax, we may see the Tories go on to beat us in the election.

Advisory Editorial Board

Graham Bash
Vladimir Derer
Terry Eagleton
Jatin Haria (Labour Party
Black Sections)
Eric Heffer MP
Dorothy Macedo
Joe Marino
John McIlroy
John Nicholson
Peter Tatchell

Members of the Advisory Committee are drawn from a broad cross-section of the left who are opposed to the Labour Party's witch-hunt against Socialist Organiser. Views expressed in articles are the responsibility of the authors and not of the Advisory Editorial Board.

"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
Newsdesk: 071 639 7965
Latest date for reports: Monday

Editor: John O'Mahony
Published by WL Publications Ltd,
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
Printed by Tridant Press, Edenbridge
Registered as a newspaper at the
Post Office

Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser and are in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated

Recycling old junk

You know how it is: you've finally got around to clearing out all the accumulated pamphlets, leaflets and miscellaneous junk that has made your home look like a paper recycling warehouse and then, for the first time in years, you find you need some of that stuff.



INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

I recently had a big clear-out and first in the bin-bag was anything to do with the 'Alternative Economic Strategy'. Do you remember this? It was very popular in Labour left and CP circles in the 1970s. It was the official policy of much of the trade union movement (especially 'left' unions like the TGWU and AEU-TASS) and, in a very watered down form, it formed the basis of Labour's economic policy for the 1974 general election.

The key aspects of the AES were Planning Agreements (quotas for investment, employment, etc. to be agreed between private firms and the government), compulsory worker participation, tight controls over both imports and overseas investment, and the nationalisation (with 'prompt and fair compensation') of ailing industries like aircraft and shipbuilding. This was to be achieved by the creation of a National Enterprise Board (NEB) and a whole series of "tri-partite" bodies involving employers, government and the TUC. Under the Labour government of the 1970s, the whole scenario degenerated into the nationalisation of a few bankrupt industries, the handing over of millions of pounds to Chrysler (who promptly disinvested and scarpred with the loot) and that highest form of national "trade union participation", the Social Contract.

After 1979, the strategy became one of appeals — even pleas — to the government to "change course" and to employers to join a grand alliance with the unions, to save British manufacturing. It was summed up in a 1980 pamphlet by the then-general secretary of the TGWU, Moss Evans: "We take the view that the Confederation of British Industry, the employers' organisation, ought to end its silence and represent the interests of its members properly, as individual industries press the government for action. If they do not respond and if it becomes necessary for an initiative to come from the unions for us to forge direct links with employers' associations against the government, then we will do it."

By the mid '80s the AES was dead and buried: the CP (its main champion in the trade union movement) had lost their influence, the Labour left was moving away from its siege economy mentality and membership of the EEC had made key aspects of the AES (import and investment controls) non-starters.

But the approach represented by the AES did not die: the idea that the way to save industries and jobs is through appeals to government and employers (rather than by working class direct action) runs through the bureaucratic mentality like the word "Blackpool" through a stick of rock. The latest manifestation of this is to be found in the present campaign against the closures and redundancies recently announced at British Aerospace. BAe have announced a total of 10,860 redundancies and the closure of its Kingston and Preston sites — the "peace premium" for workers in BAe.

The "strategy" drawn up by the main BAe unions (AEU, TGWU and MSF) is summed up in a statement from the Confed: it calls on the government to "change course"; emphasises the need to defend the "wealth creating sector"; demands "an end to dithering by the MoD"; a "commitment to orders NOW to save the UK's dynamic capacity"; a "further significant cut in interest rates"; and an "end to contracting out" (ie. no more overseas investment).

All this could have come straight out of an AES pamphlet from the '70s. And at a rally in Westminster this week, these "demands" will be presented by some of the leading lights associated with the old AES: Jack Adams and Jack Dromey of the TGWU, Alex Ferry of the Confed, John Weakly of the AEU and Tim Walsh of MSF.

One aspect of the union's "strategy" does, in reality, offer a way forward: the call for "diversification" — conversion from military to civilian work. But no practical proposals for "diversification" have been put forward by the unions (even though the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards drew up very detailed "alternative plan" for utilising military manufacturing skills for socially useful, civilian work nearly 20 years ago). Of course, there is no mention of industrial action of any kind. Presumably, Adams, Ferry and Co. hope to induce a "change of course" by their powers of verbal persuasion.

Obviously, the AEU, TGWU and MSF officials haven't thrown out their old AES pamphlets, even if I have. Now, where's that old copy of the "Lucas Aerospace Alternative Plan" — I haven't thrown that out as well, have I?



1985 London demonstration against rate-capping. Such central government controls need to be scrapped. Photo: Stefano Cagononi (IFL)

What should we say about local taxes?

By Colin Foster

The Tories are now proposing a combined property-plus-poll tax to replace the poll tax.

Labour says councils should have a revised version of the rates (a property tax). The Liberal Democrats favour a local income tax.

What should socialists say? No system of local taxes, however well-designed, can undo the inequality and injustice of capitalism. Only collective ownership and democratic control of the wealth of society can do that.

But some sorts of taxes are better, or less bad, than others.

Property taxes, or rates, have one great advantage. They are simple and easy to administer. That's an advantage not just for administrators but also for socialists. Rich people will always find ways to evade any complicated tax. They can't evade rates.

Moreover, businesses have to pay rates out of their profits as well as workers having to pay out of our wages.

Rates mean the rich paying

more than the poor. But — and this is the big disadvantage — they tend to mean the rich paying a smaller proportion of their income than the poor, because the poor spend more of their income on housing than the rich.

Rate rebates compensate, but clumsily and partially.

Small businesses also suffer from the rates system, because they have to pay more in rates, as a proportion of their turnover, than bigger businesses.

Some of these problems could be reduced by making rates more flexible. Why shouldn't councils be able to charge more rates per pound of property value on bigger, more costly buildings than on small, cheap buildings? Why shouldn't councils be able to set rates on businesses much higher than rates on homes, rather than the relation between them being set by Whitehall?

Local income taxes have the advantage that your tax rate is decided directly by your ability to pay. They have two disadvantages: they can be no fairer than the national income tax system,

with all its loopholes for the rich; and, like the poll tax, they involve some sort of local "register" of people in each council's area.

Again, a more flexible system could be better. Why shouldn't councils be able to claim a sort of "poll tax" from the employers of workers who live in their area (and from the central government for unemployed people) in the same way that the National Insurance fund collects employers' contributions? After all, employers wouldn't have a workforce without the education, housing, and social services provided by the council: why shouldn't those employers help pay?

Central government grant to councils is good in that it siphons money from rich areas to poor areas where the council has a lot to do and few rich people to get any sort of tax from. What's bad about it is that it can give central government excessive power to control and victimise local councils — power which the Tories have used ruthlessly.

Central government grant should be decided by predictable formulas which the

government can't easily alter. Generally, socialists should support local government having more autonomy to raise its own income and make its own decisions. Local councils in Britain are much more restricted in what they can do than councils in other countries.

Several times since 1979 courts have found the Tory government to be breaking the law. Each time the Tories have just changed the law to square it with what they want to do.

Local councillors, in contrast, can be hauled up in court when they have broken no definite law but only done what the District Auditor reckons to be "imprudent". Labour councillors in Liverpool have been disqualified from office and fined huge sums for their delay in setting a rate in 1985.

Central government needs to be much more subject to the law, and local government needs to be much less subject to central government.

Such reforms would mean more local democracy and more scope for genuinely socialist local councils.

'Alliance for Workers' Liberty' plans conference

A group of Socialist Organiser supporters, meeting in London last Saturday (23rd), decided to plan a conference in London on 4-5 May to set up an "Alliance for Workers' Liberty".

The conference will discuss and decide policies on a wide range of issues, and last Saturday's meeting looked at draft documents on those issues.

First, it discussed the "new world order". Much of the left "has had its throat cut" by the collapse of Stalinism, for its whole world-view depended on the notion that Stalinism was "post-capitalist" — bureaucratic and criminally "deformed", to be sure, but nonetheless living proof that capitalism was decaying and losing ground inexorably to successive waves of revolution.

In truth, Stalinism was never "post-capitalist", never a higher and more progressive system, but only a deformed parallel to capitalism in its earlier stages of industrialisation. We need a crusade to clarify and restate the ideas of socialism, free from all taint of Stalinism, and to help the

political reconstitution of the working class.

On this point, some comrades asked for more coverage on the struggles now unfolding in Eastern Europe.

The second point was immediate perspectives for activity. In a situation still defined by the miners' defeat in 1985, with a relatively low level of confidence, activity and radicalisation in the working class, so the document argued, we should focus on educational work, circulation of literature, and seeking out interested individuals for one-to-one discussions.

At the same time we should promote broader initiatives where possible:

- Round the coming General Election;
 - In the trade unions, where the demise of the Communist Party, the decline of Militant, and the self-marginalisation of Socialist Worker, have made great openings for new moves to regroup the left;
 - In the Labour Party, and especially in "Labour Party Socialists";
 - In the student movement;
 - And in the Labour Party Young Socialists.
- Militant's withdrawal and

the Kinnockites' lack of interest and lack of activists have left Labour without a youth movement, and working-class youth without a space where they can "try out" politics without getting fully involved with one of the factions of the left. Efforts to fill the gap should give us a chance to get socialist ideas across to numbers of working-class youth.

The left, as we had noted in the discussion on the "new world order", needs debate and critical scrutiny of its ideas more than ever. We agreed that we should campaign for such debate, and in particular challenge the ideas of Socialist Worker, currently the largest faction on the left.

Contributors to this discussion on immediate perspectives asked for more coverage on:

- The Middle East as a key issue for the left in the coming year;
- Student-union work;
- Labour Party work.

Finally, we discussed areas of activity in more detail: anti-poll tax, students, trade unions, and Labour Party; and held a more detailed discussion about improving educational work and the circulation of socialist literature.

The documents will be amended and submitted to further discussion with interested comrades across the country before going to the Conference in May.

Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Launch conference Saturday-Sunday 4-5 May London

Redefining the Left

Sessions include:
 The "new world order" • Prospects for the Labour left • Rebuilding the left in the

unions • Finishing off the poll tax • Winning students to socialism • Organising the Alliance • Redefining the left

Registration: £8 waged/£5 students/low-waged/£2 unwaged. Send cheques payable to Workers' Liberty, to AWL, c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Name.....
 Address.....

National tensions in Yugoslavia

Unrest in Serbia

By Stephen Holt

The chances of a Yugoslav civil war may have decreased. In Yugoslavia the position of the Serbian stalinist nationalist leader, Milosevic, has been weakened by mass unrest within Serbia.

The Serbian stalinists called in troops to clear a student demonstration in Belgrade, the Serbian capital, and arrested opposition leaders. But mass demonstrations, defying the army, then forced the release of Vuk Draskovic, the leader of the main opposition group, the Serbian Renewal Movement.

Milosevic has been forced to sack some of his more hardline stalinist ministers. He has not managed to appease those calling for his own resignation.

Within Croatia, the other main

Yugoslavian republic, tension remains high between Croats and the Serbian minority. A clash between Croatian Militia and Serbian police in the eastern Croatian town of Pakrac left six people dead and many wounded.

This has been followed by declaration of a Serbian republic within Croatia at the town Knin in southern Croatia.

Milosevic's promise to maintain the command economy by stamping out corruption had yielded no results. His only chance of staying in power is to whip up Serb nationalist hatred against Croatia.

His latest move has been to withdraw Serbia from the federal presidency, thus increasing instability and, he hopes, making it more likely that the army will take control and maintain him in power.

One of the few hopeful signs for averting a bloodbath in Yugoslavia is that Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement sees the need to



Students demonstrate in Belgrade

negotiate with the Croatian leader, Franjo Tudjman, rather than impose Serbian domination by brute

force.

Unfortunately, this policy is not applied to Kosovo, the 80% ethnic

Albanian "autonomous region". Draskovic insists that Kosovo remain under Serbian control.

University education and the market-place

Lecturers chopped for speaking out

By Martin Thomas

"Academic standards used to be a slogan of the right", says Colwyn Williamson. "We now see it as a slogan of the left".

Williamson and another philosophy lecturer, Michael Cohen, were suspended from their jobs and banished from the college premises by the Council of University College Swansea on Monday 25 March. A third lecturer, Anne Maclean, was suspended in November 1990 and forced to resign in February this year; a fourth, Geoff Hunt, quit, dissatisfied, in June last year. The row is all because the lecturers spoke out to question academic standards in the College's Centre

for Philosophy and Health Care.

"The economic pressures on academic administrators", says Colwyn Williamson, "are making them hysterical. They're desperately competing for students, with fewer and fewer resources to deal with them. There is tremendous pressure to lower standards.

"We are not against more students coming to university, far from it; but the resources necessary to maintain standards in the face of increased numbers must be provided".

The criticisms have provoked such sharp reaction, says Colwyn Williamson, because of the "new management style" in colleges like Swansea, which mostly means "just acting tough".

"By the end of 1989", report

Williamson and Cohen, "53 MA dissertations had been submitted in that year by students in the Centre... the examiners found them all worthy of the degree... (This) might suggest an exceptionally high standard of work, but it might also suggest that the examiners were not doing their job properly".

The students had to submit a dissertation and "a minimum of four" essays. But one student got an MA having submitted only two essays, another having submitted only one. One successful dissertation had been copied word for word from books — to the extent of at least 4,257 of its 9,500 words — and the student's tutor had warned the examiners in advance that there might be such copying.

How the examining board decided to pass such candidates is unclear because, according to Cohen and Williamson, it looks as if the examining board never met.

The teaching on the MA course consists mainly of five 2½ day conferences held over the two years of the course. The speakers are mostly prestigious medical figures, rather than academic philosophers. The sessions tend — so the critics say — towards ambling debates on issues like abortion or euthanasia, rather than any sustained academic study.

"One persistent request made by students was for reading lists... in advance... but it was not taken up".

The students for the MA are mostly doctors and other health-care workers, and their applications are usually supported by references rather than academic qualifications. Cohen and Williamson cite a statement from two former secretaries of the Centre: "We were never asked to write for references and we never saw any references. At no time did we arrange interviews for applicants...". Almost all applicants were accepted. A PhD student proved unable to spell the word "university".

Cohen and Williamson question the whole rationale of the Centre. It was launched in 1986-7, they say, as an effort to "make philosophy useful and relevant, and give it a value in the market-place. It purports to teach doctors and others how to deal with the ethical problems of modern medical technologies".

This market-oriented approach "is a paradigm of the priorities that are now expected to govern universities".

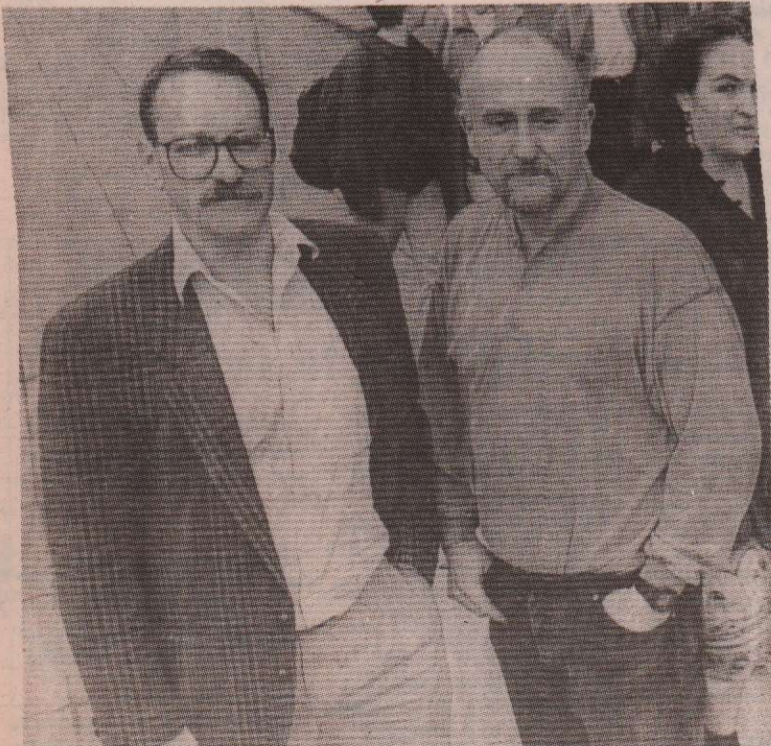
The lecturers' union, the AUT, has supported the critics' call for an inquiry into the academic standards of the Centre by qualified people from outside the College. On Friday 22nd the authorities half-conceded this demand, commissioning an inquiry by Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer, Chief Executive of the Universities Funding Council. Cohen and Williamson are arguing for academic philosophers from outside the University of Wales to be involved in the inquiry, and

protesting that the inquiry has been pre-empted by the decision to suspend and banish them.

A slate supporting the critics has swept the board in the Swansea Student Union elections. Colwyn Williamson emphasises that the critics' campaign for academic standards is not directed against students: on the contrary, they want to make sure that students are offered something worth studying.

Essex University Students' Union has passed a resolution calling on all students to boycott Swansea for postgraduate work until it reinstates the critics.

Cohen, Williamson and their allies want to extend their battle into a national campaign for academic standards and for adequate public spending on higher education, mobilising both lecturers and students. They have set up a Fighting Fund, and ask for contributions (cheques payable to "Academic Standards Fighting Fund") to Chris Arthur, 17 Bristol Road, Brighton BN2 1AP.



Michael Cohen (left) and Colwyn Williamson: suspended for speaking out

Special ticket offer!

A weekend of socialist discussion

Workers' Liberty 91

Dozens of speakers from a wide range of socialist opinion gather for three days of debate. Many international guests.

Caxton House, North London
Friday 28-Sunday 30 June

creche • food • social • accommodation

Special ticket offer! Before the end of April: unwaged £4; students/low-waged £7; waged £10 (These prices are for Saturday & Sunday. Add £1 (unwaged) and £2 (other) for tickets which include Friday.)

Name.....

Address.....

Return to Alliance for Workers' Liberty, c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques to 'Workers' Liberty'

GRAFFITI

First things first in Kuwait

GRAFFITI

You'll be pleased to know that the giant fountain at the Emir's palace in Kuwait is now back in operation.

The Kuwaiti authorities are still working on the problem of drinking water for the general population. First things first, after all.

New furniture has also been shipped in for the palace. It arrived six days before the first emergency food distribution in Kuwait City.

Outside Kuwait City, the stretch of road where thousands of fleeing Iraqi soldiers — and civilians — were massacred by US bombing at the end of the war has become a tourist spectacle.

American visitors, and members of the Kuwaiti elite, gloat at the murderous "revenge" taken for Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

Ordinary members of the US-led forces, however, sometimes think differently. "No human being should be allowed to do this to another human being," one British soldier is quoted as commenting. "They didn't stand a chance."

After they privatised water, it looked like the next step for the Tories must be to bring the principles of the market place to bear on the distribution of air.

Perhaps Thatcher's departure and John Major's new "social market" turn stopped them. In any case they have been pipped to it by the entrepreneurs of Mexico City.

25 oxygen booths have been set up on the streets of the heavily polluted city, where respiratory infections are the most common cause of death. A refreshing gulp of oxygen costs about £1, or a good part of a day's pay for many Mexican workers.

First Stalin, then Helmut Kohl: the publication of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels* is under threat again.

The first attempt at a complete edition was started in the Soviet Union soon after the 1917 Revolution, by the great Marxian scholar David Ryazanov. It was halted after Ryazanov fell victim to Stalin's purges.

A new edition has been under preparation in East Berlin, and 43 out of 130 volumes have been published. But the authorities responsible for former East German government property have now stopped finance for the project.

An international appeal to save the project has been launched by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.



Tabloid press, business as usual: sex, royalty and money 'Equestrian consultancy fees'

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

The war is won and the poll tax has been sorted out. Stormin' Norman Lamont's budget had them dancing in the streets and all's well with the world.

So now the British tabloids can get back to the things that really matter: sex, royalty and money. There was plenty of all three — plus a novel equestrian element — in last week's Big Story.

"Mark Phillips in Baby Wrangle" screamed the front page of Thursday's *Daily Express*, heralding a scoop involving the estranged husband of Princess Anne and a paternity claim filed by a horsey New Zealander, Heather Tonkin.

It read like one of the juicier bits from a Jilly Cooper novel: they first met at one of Captain Phillips's riding clinics ("the pace was hot...Mark was a hard taskmaster") and from there

the action moved, inexorably, to a hotel room ("I would recognise his room by the riding boots outside the door").

As you can see, this is a cut above the usual "kiss and tell" stuff involving Page Three girls and sweaty businessmen of the Ralph Halpern variety: this is high class scandal and it was only right and proper that it should appear first in a nice, respectable tabloid like the *Express* rather than the *Sun* or *News of the World*.

Of course, the rest of the pack wasted no time in picking up on the story. The *Sun* (predictably) went to town with headlines like "Bonkin' Miss Tonkin" while the *Mirror* offered its readers an in-depth analysis of the aphrodisiac effects of the equestrian life: "That's why you'll often find the course caravans swaying after a particularly good dinner."

The nocturnal activity of the whip 'n' jodphur set is not the sort of thing that I buy a newspaper to read about; nor is it a particularly edifying subject for a column in a family publication like *Socialist Organiser*. But it does give us some insight into the mentality (and morality) of the upper classes.

According to the *Guardian*, Ms Tonkin was moved to spill the beans when she read that Captain Phillips was likely to obtain a £1 million settlement when his marriage ended. She said: "I



Cap'n Bob up to his usual business, union-busting in New York

am doing what I am doing for my child...I just hope and pray Mark will do the right thing and make a proper and legally binding settlement on her [the child]."

Captain Phillips's friend and adviser, James Erskine (who had arranged for £7,400 per year to be paid from Phillips to Tonkin as "equestrian consultancy fees") told Tonkin: "If you want a barney, he's going to deny it...and I will make life a bloody misery for you." Critical but unconditional support for Ms Tonkin, I think.

It's good to see that our old friend Bob Maxwell has got off to a splendid start as the new owner of the *New York Daily News*. As all readers of the Cap'n's publications round the world

will know, the Great Man recently stepped in to resolve a four-month strike and save the paper.

Last week the Cap'n pitched up at the *Daily News* offices for a TV interview to mark his first day of ownership. Unfortunately, the interviewer had the audacity to quote a *News* trade unionist as saying: "anyone dealing with Mr Maxwell should get things in writing"; Maxwell replied: "What's the betting he never said that?" When the offending employee could not be found the matter was dropped.

But a quote from the *Financial Times* criticising various Maxwell business practices was not passed over so easily: "I will not participate if there are libels... I'm not going to answer shit," boomed a purple-faced Cap'n.

The Great Man went on to accuse the TV interviewer of being influenced by the unauthorised biography by Tom Bower, which he has been trying to suppress for the last three years.

He finally stormed out, telling the TV crew: "Unless you scrub it or put in what he [Bower] should have put in the first place, I'm not appearing."

The Cap'n wrote a personal editorial for that day's *News*: "This city will overcome its troubles and so will the *Daily News*. I love them both. Your slogan, my slogan, has got to be Forward With New York."

Spare us the pretend ideology

WOMEN'S EYE



By Liz Millward

The Christian Church has a parable about three men being given a number of "talents" (in those days a form of money).

The first man frittered his talents away on wine, women and song and was left in debt. The second man buried his talents, neither using nor abusing them, consequently getting nowhere. The third man used his talents to the full, putting them to work, so finishing up much better off than when he started.

I would like to offer the following alternative parable. Three women were each given a number of talents (in our sense of talents). The first woman used all her talents making herself beautiful so that a talented man would come along and look after her for the rest of her life. This is the equivalent of feeding a cow on grain then eating the cow. Why not just eat the grain? Or use the

talents?

The second woman denied she had any talents. She thought she was a worthless person and that all the talents had been given to other people. Consequently she went through life feeling bad, and the world was a poorer place for it.

The third woman used her talents to the full. But she had a miserable life too because everyone said she was trying to be like a man.

The fourth woman would argue that she reads *Cosmopolitan* and so has the best of all possible words. (But that's rubbish, actually she reads *SO!*)

ideologically sound or not. Other people are going to write down their fantasies to share them.

I cannot see that such fantasies (realised or not) are liberating, on a world scale. On the other hand, I am not in favour of the ideologues of the bedroom trying to "stop" such fantasies escaping into practice or onto paper.

Truly the best of all possible worlds would be if so-called feminists stopped writing to *Spare Rib* about it, and spend their time worrying about something important.

Vanity Fair by contrast treats its readers as sentient beings, capable of sustaining concentration for more than

5 minutes. From the outside the magazine looks like *Cosmopolitan*. Inside it has several long articles on current events (Palestine for example).

It's like the *Economist* with beauty advertisements. It had nothing about sex! *Vanity Fair* is what a woman's magazine ought to be (without the advertisements preferably).

Women deserve better than the banality of *Cosmo* or the pettiness of *Spare Rib*. Women are not an alien species who need snappy guides to a great sex life because we are too stupid to read anything else.

Women need *Spare Rib* and its pretend ideology like we need a hole in the head.

A conference organised by Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, Haldane Society, Labour Party Socialists, Solidarity Network, and Trade Union News

Unshackle the Unions

Fighting the Tory Anti-Union Laws

Saturday 27 April, 11am-5.30pm

ULU, Malet St, London

The Law • The Struggles • The Strategies
Speakers will include: John Hendy QC • Ronnie McDonald (OILC) • Micky Fenn (sacked Tilbury dock)

If your organisation is prepared to sponsor and/or make a financial contribution to this event please fill in this form and send it to the address below.

We are prepared to sponsor this event on the issue of the Tory anti-union laws, their effects on the trade union, and how they can be opposed.

Name of organisation.....

Address of organisation.....

We enclose a donation of £..... towards the costs.

Please send a form for the registration of delegates at £5 waged, £3 unwaged per delegate.

Send to Carolyn Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E5

The case for socialist feminism

In 64 closely-argued pages, this new pamphlet from *Women's Fightback* takes the debate from the prehistoric origins of women's oppression, through the interaction of capitalism with the social position of women and the classic Marxist analyses, to a critique of "modern feminisms", "rainbow coalition" politics, and the varieties of socialist feminism which see two parallel systems, capitalism and patriarchy, to be tackled by two parallel struggles, socialist and feminist. The price is £1 plus 30p

The case for Socialist Feminism



A Women's Fightback pamphlet £1.50

postage (cheques payable to *Women's Fightback*), from WF, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq

A Yemeni worker's view of the Gulf war

By Abdul Sharif (Yemeni Workers' Association)

There are about 2,500 Yemenis in Sheffield and altogether there's about 8,000 in Britain.

Throughout the Gulf crisis we've had to put up with beatings, racial attacks and telephone calls, and threats of bombing.

And what is really happening in the Gulf? People say the war is over, but people are still getting killed every day.

Kuwait is blown apart, it's not liberated. Iraq has become another Lebanon. It is total chaos in the Arab world.

The Americans, the British and the French can go all the way to the Middle East and carry out war on the soil of the Middle East, not on their soil, and leave chaos behind them.

And what for? To maintain the Emir of Kuwait? To maintain the Saudi family in Saudi Arabia?

Yet Saudi Arabia is a system which doesn't allow a woman to drive a motor car or travel on buses without a companion. It doesn't allow

a woman to study with men at a university — a woman has to go to different classes, or look at lessons on a television. That is the kind of system the war was trying to prop up.

It is a system which still chops people's heads and legs off. It can repatriate a million Yemeni workers overnight because their country didn't agree with the war.

That was the system which our troops were supposed to die for. The Saudi ruling family are fundamentally important for the development of the British economy and the American economy, and they have to be propped up at the expense of the workers in the Middle East.



One million Yemeni workers were expelled from Saudi Arabia

And the Emir of Kuwait, who has \$72 billion in British and American banks, is a man who we're supposed to help to prop up, to maintain,

so that he can say now that Kuwait is for Kuwaitis, it's not for the Palestinians, it's not for the Yemenis, it's not for the Pakistanis: Kuwait is for the Kuwaitis — this is the official statement of the Kuwaiti government. The people who have built Kuwait no longer are allowed to live in Kuwait, they have to leave.

Yet the people who supported the war have continued to support the intervention, because really they haven't heard the arguments. The way the media has behaved has been disgusting, ghastly and unbelievable.

When there was an anti-war demonstration of about 40,000 people we got two or three seconds on television. When 400 Kuwaitis demonstrated in favour of the war, they got full coverage.

Yet both myself and many people in my community feel that Britain is our country, and we are going to stay here and live here for a long time to come. We have got to fight against the injustices, and expose the Gulf war for what it really was.

The only way to do that is to have solidarity with other black and white people fighting together against these injustices. That is the only way that we can overcome the problems.

Abdul Sharif was speaking at the Trade Unionists Against War conference.

PLO demands action

By Bassam Al-Baz (PLO representative)

There is tremendous hypocrisy amongst the Americans and their allies. For years and years they have ignored the UN resolutions on the Palestinian question.

People are now saying that the Palestinian question should be resolved now, after the Gulf war. The Americans now have to deal with their hypocrisy. We want the international community to act on the UN resolutions on the Palestine question in the same way it acted on the resolutions in the Gulf.

Now in Kuwait the Palestinians and other minority groups are the people who built Kuwait. Now the Palestinians are receiving no protection from the Kuwaiti government. Palestinians are not receiving water rations because they are not Kuwaitis.

The Palestinians are being picked on now in Kuwait because the PLO decided to take a peace stand during the war. We got an agreement from the Iraqi government to say it would withdraw from Kuwait in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestine. The allies did not want this to happen.

Bassam Al-Baz was speaking at the Trade Unionists Against War conference.

Trade unionists call for troops out of the Gulf

The campaign against Western intervention in the Gulf must continue.

That was the unanimous feeling at last Sunday's trade union working conference organised by the ad hoc grouping 'Trade Unionists Against the War'.

About 80 people attended the conference, from many different unions. Speakers included representatives of

the PLO, Yemeni Workers Association, Kuwaiti activists, and NALGO black members group.

It was agreed to organise a fringe meeting at this year's TUC, to circulate a statement condemning the TUC's support for the war, and calling for solidarity with the Palestinians and the Kurds; for coalition troops out of the Gulf and for the right of all the people of the Middle East to determine their own future.

Nottingham campaigns against purge

By Pete Radcliff

The Labour Party's Inquiry into Nottingham East constituency is nearing its conclusion after a year.

The Labour Party's National Executive meets on Wednesday 27th March and is expected to confirm recommendations from the Organisational Subcommittee to:

1. Suspend councillor Hassan Ahmed from holding office or being a delegate in the party, pending charges being presented to the NCC.
2. Further investigate Steve Battlemuch for alleged association with *Socialist Organiser*.

Hassan Ahmed has been a long-standing advocate of Black Sections within the party, and opposed the party's line on the Gulf War. He is also a sitting Labour councillor who has just been re-elected to fight the elections in May. The effect of the Executive's decision will be to bar him from standing.

Steve, who was Chair of

the CLP, has opposed the party leadership on the Poll Tax and on the Gulf War.

Hassan has sent a 29 page dossier to the NEC answering the allegations against him, but Organisation Director, Joyce Gould, didn't circulate it to the Organisational Subcommittee!

In Steve's case, Joyce Gould moved the goal posts, from allegations about his chairing of the 1990 AGM, which have now all been dropped, to alleged association with *Socialist Organiser*, about which he has not been questioned in either of his two interviews with Joyce Gould.

A campaign has been launched in Nottingham to oppose the action against Steve and Hassan.

Almost 100 signatures have been collected in 5 days in support of Steve. Supporters include Ken Coates MEP, Alan Simpson (PPC Nottingham South), Harry Barnes MP, Tony Benn, John Dennis Skinner MP, John Taylor (Deputy Leader, Nottingham City Council), and many officers of surrounding CLPs.

Plans to step up Liverpool witch-hunt

By Dale Street

The meeting of the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) which is taking place as we go to press (27 March), will have before it a document from Joyce Gould recommending an intensification of the witch-hunt in Liverpool.

The District Labour Party, the Women's Council, 29 Labour councillors and a further eight individual party members are already suspended. Even so, the right wing still does not have control.

40 out of 67 elected Labour councillors voted against the financial year 1991-2 a fortnight ago. The budget had been drawn up by right-wing Labour councillors and Liberal councillors, and was adopted as the council's budget only as a result of a bloc between a minority of Labour councillors (27) and the Liberal councillors.

The document being presented to this Wednesday's NEC opens with a series of inflammatory and inaccurate allegations, claiming that setting a budget was "hampered by threats of violence and intimidation", and that the suspended councillors had sought to "disrupt and undermine the council", and to "split the Labour Group".

No mention in the document, of course, that the NEC itself split the Labour Group by unconstitutionally suspending 29 councillors. No mention either that the right-wing Labour Group

leadership deepened the split by their backroom deals with the Liberals. And no mention that the suspended councillors proposed their own perfectly legal budget as an alternative to the one adopted at the expense of nearly 400 jobs.

The document goes on to declare the importance of the Labour Party "offering the maximum support to the Liverpool Labour Group". For "Labour Group" read the minority of the Labour Group (27 out of 67) who prefer to do deals with the Liberals rather than abide by election commitments and local party policy.

The document also declares the importance of the Labour Party "offering the maximum support to the local election campaign" (ie. for the 2 May City Council elections). The subsequent recommendations make clear that Joyce Gould wants to "support" the campaign in the sense that a rope supports a hanging man.

The NEC and its local minions in Liverpool are to "determine a candidate" (ie. impose one) in the event of a ward not selecting a candidate from the local panel (which was drawn up to the exclusion of any known left-wingers), and then suspend the ward "pending investigation".

A "city-wide campaign strategy team" is to be set up, which will co-ordinate the election campaign, and "consideration is to be given to financially supporting a city-wide leaflet for the local election".

In other words, the NEC and its local footsoldiers will impose candidates, usurp control over the election campaign.

Labour councils and the poll tax

When the Tories first decided on the poll tax, some Labour councils in Scotland said they would refuse to cooperate with the preparations to introduce the tax.

Their refusal quickly collapsed. Since then every single Labour council in the country has been cooperating with the Tories and collecting the tax. A number of them have even taken Labour councillors and MPs to court for non-payment.

Lambeth council in South London briefly promised defiance: then council leader Joan Twelves retreated to a stance where she would cooperate with collecting the poll tax but not pay it herself.

Earlier this month she paid up, apparently after being threatened by the Labour Party with expulsion if she didn't.

The argument of the Labour leaders, nationally and in local government, has been that you mustn't break the law, or at any rate that it would be suicidal to try.

Now the "law breakers" have defeated the Tories: and the Tories themselves admit in almost so many words that the poll tax is unjust and uncollectable.

What are the Labour councils doing? Still collecting the tax and pursuing non-payers!

They should be made to turn round, to stop collecting, and to help force the Tories to scrap the tax now rather than in two years' time.

Now drive out

By Cate Murphy

It is the most spectacular U-turn in recent political history! The Tories have admitted defeat, and started to abolish the poll tax!

"The poll tax has become uncollectable and has to go", was how Major announced the sinking of the Tory flagship just two months after declaring that abolition was not on the cards.

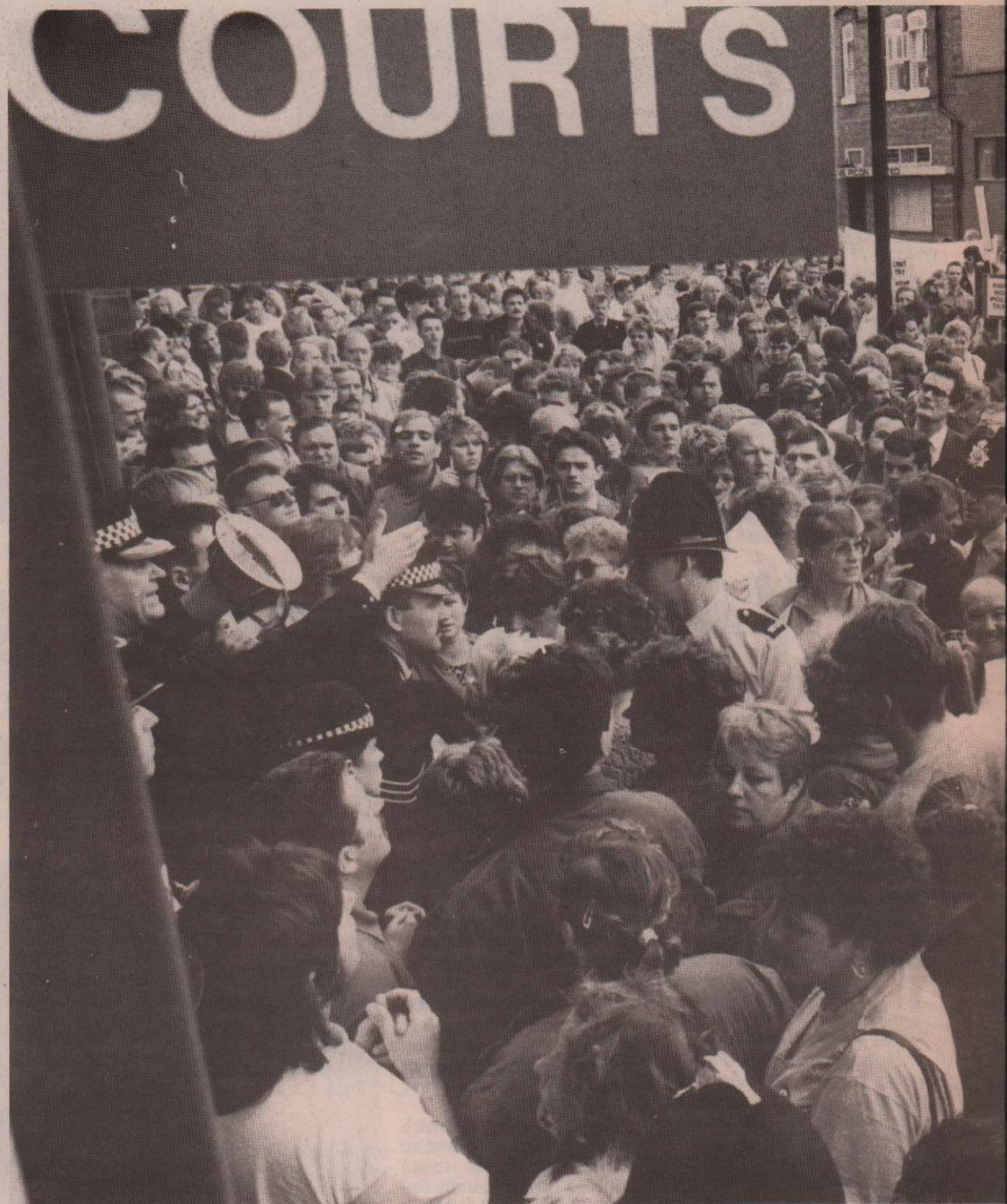
Spending £14.3 billion to keep the tax afloat, and avoid a humiliating climbdown, didn't work. No amount of tinkering with the rules persuaded people to accept the tax.

14 million people refused to pay — and are still refusing. But the scale of opposition goes even further than that. Apart from the very rich, who benefited enormously from this regressive tax, even those who did pay some poll tax were not convinced by the Tories' claims of "fairness" of the tax. It was universally hated.

And it was the scale of that hostility that led to its demise. Polls show that 95% of people wanted the tax to go. Far from being the electoral asset Thatcher proclaimed it would be, the tax was the single biggest threat to the Tory government. As the by-election in Ribble Valley showed, even their safest seats were under threat as long as the poll tax remained.

Fear of the electoral damage it could cause them, prompted the Tories to ditch its staunchest defender: Margaret Thatcher. But that wasn't enough to ensure their survival, so they've now had to ditch the tax itself.

The anti-poll tax movement should rightly celebrate its victory over the Tories. Working class people, many of whom were drawn into political activity for the first time, fought back against the most blatant attack yet by the Tories on their living



standards, and on local democracy and accountability.

They organised a campaign of resistance across the country, protesting at every stage against the tax: organising non-payment, frustrating court cases, chasing off the bailiffs, linking up with council workers to oppose redundancies and

cuts in services — never letting the Tories off the hook.

The Tories believed they could force the tax to work: liability orders, threatened jailings, fear of the bailiffs were measures they felt could break opposition.

The Labour leaders, too, believed there was nothing that

could be achieved this side of a general election. Mass non-payment was not viable, they claimed, so pay up now and vote for us next time.

The mass non-payment campaign should be a lesson not just to the Tories but also, and more importantly, to Labour too: that mass campaigns, mass working class action, can achieve things, can force governments to back down.

Had the Labour Party and trade union leaders backed the campaign from the start, thrown their full weight behind the millions of working class people taking on the Tories, how much sooner could we have killed off the poll tax? Labour would have been assured of victory at the next election had it stood on the side of the anti-poll tax campaign.

The battle has been won, but the war continues. The Tories may have announced abolition, but the tax remains until at least 1993, possibly longer. And if they win the next election, "son of poll tax", as Nigel Lawson infamously called it, will be with us. It's a tax that threatens to combine the worst aspects of the poll tax — a charge per head — with a property tax: a double tax torture.

It's a tax that, you can be sure, will benefit the rich at the expense of the poor — the U-turn in Tory ranks doesn't



the Tories!



extend to making life better for the working class!

Within the Tory ranks there is a lot of dismay over the proposed poll tax replacement. Die-hard Thatcherites bemoan the loss of their flagship, and the abandonment of the principles of everyone paying something (read: the poor paying to line the pockets of the rich). No-one in the Tory party is happy about the return to rates, fearing it will lose them the middle class voters who benefitted under the poll tax.

Despite ditching the poll tax, the Tories' ratings in the polls haven't improved much: the voters are still wary — rightly — of putting their faith in the party which gave them the poll tax (dreaming up a fairer, more democratic system of local government financing. And still, local government is being drained of funding by central government; more and more services are being cut, more jobs lost. Instead of handing control to local authorities, the practice of centralising local services will continue.

The Tories have yet to dig themselves out of the hole they created for themselves with the poll tax. But they haven't yet been driven from office, either. And if we are to make sure that our victory is not a hollow one, we must make sure we do precisely that.

The answer is for the anti-poll tax campaigners to turn to the Labour Party: to flood its ranks and put pressure on the leadership to take up the fight against the Tories. To campaign within the party to turn the promise of immediate abolition of the poll tax into reality after the next general election. To fight to make sure that any Labour

scheme for local government funding reflects the interests of the working class communities who have played such a major role in getting the Tories on the run.

The way to ensure that the Tory tax is finally defeated once and for all is to make sure Labour wins the next general election.

The poll tax was brought in by the Tories for two reasons.

First: revaluations in Scotland (recalculations of the property values on which rates were based) had caused outrage among householders and business people whose premises had gained value over the years, as they suddenly faced much greater bills.

A revaluation was due in England and Wales, and the Tories wanted to avoid it.

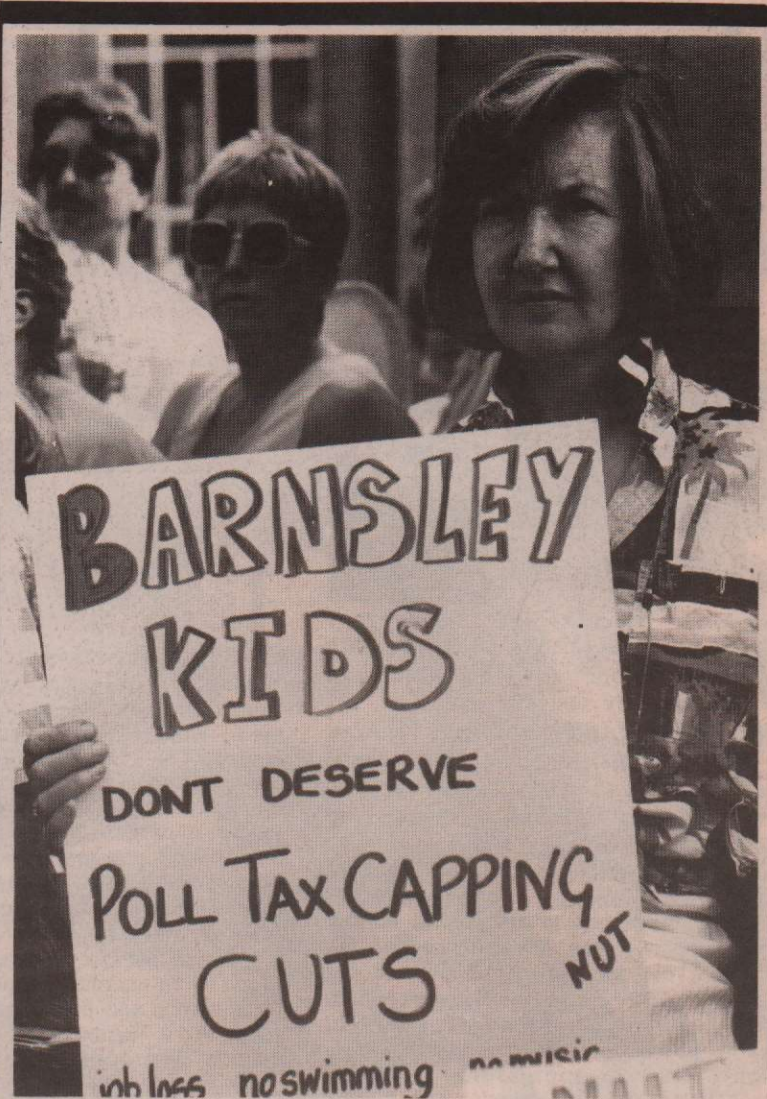
Secondly: the Tories' whittling-down of central government grant to local authorities had led many councils to raise rates drastically as they tried to save services.

Tories who ran businesses

or owned big houses were furious about their increased bills — and doubly furious when local voters refused to vote out rate-raising Labour administrations.

The trouble, the Tories declared, was that so many voters paid not rates, because someone else in their household paid instead or because they were on social security. Everybody must be made to pay local taxes!

The poll tax was introduced in Scotland in April 1989, and in England in April 1990. It was — or it was intended to be — a huge tax cut for the rich at the expense of the poor. But Scottish councils are still trying to collect tax due from 1989-90!



Above: teachers strike against education cuts due to the poll tax in Barnsley, 19 July last year. We've broken the poll tax — now to make good the cuts! (Photo: John Harris)

Left: The poll tax was made unworkable by non-payers and their supporters turning up en masse when councils took them to court. The courts couldn't cope. Above: Warrington Magistrates Court, 28 June last year. (Photo: Paul Herrman, Profile)

Trafalgar Square, March 1990: the police ran amok at the end of the huge anti-poll tax demo. Amnesty for all those jailed after being arrested then must be one of our demands now. (Photo: Paul Mattsson)

Amnesty for all non-payers!

The poll tax is dead: but it won't be buried for another two years at least. Until 1993 (or longer if the Tories win the next election) we'll be made to continue paying it.

It will be much harder to collect, of course. The experience of Scotland has shown that non-payment levels went up in the second year, not down. Now that the Tories themselves have declared the tax uncollectable, not even a "sweetener" of £140 a head will be enough to bribe people into paying it.

Councils will try, of course. The tax isn't dead as far as they are concerned. They will still harry people through the courts, still issue liability orders, authorise the use of bailiffs, attempt to have people jailed for non-payment. The government's Audit Commission, recognising that non-payment is likely to increase, has demanded firm action against "defaulters", regardless of any announced changes.

Councils will still try to push through cuts in local services, and redundancies, to try to balance the books: continue making the working class pay for Tory policies.

We still need to continue to campaign for defence of non-payers, and to prevent jailings of people for the "crime" of poverty; prevent bailiffs seizing working class people's goods.

But we should press home our advantage; force the crisis-ridden Tories even more onto the defen-

sive. We must call for an amnesty for non-payers — and fight within the Labour Party for the next Labour government to deliver that amnesty as one of its first acts.

Nor should we let the Tories get away with simply changing the method of how they force money out of the worst-off in society. To switch the burden from poll tax to VAT is still to make the poor pay. Even the poorest buy many things on which they'll have to pay the extra 2½%. And the Tories' replacement property-plus-poll tax could continue many of the evils of the poll tax.

Why should the poor be made to pay? If the Tories can afford to write off £5.5 billion-worth of debts to privatise the water industry, they can write off £1.6 billion in poll tax debt.

Nor must we forget those poll tax protesters victimised by the Tories and their police agents after the Trafalgar Square demonstrations. Some are in prison for two or three years; more cases are still to be heard — and the judges show no signs of leniency in their sentencing. We must fight for their immediate release.

We have got the Tories on the run — but now is not the time to let up in the campaign. On all fronts, both in the non-payment campaign, in linking up with council workers in defence of jobs and services, and in the Labour Party — committing it to a system of properly funded local government, with, at the minimum, the return of the £57 billion the Tories have stolen since 1979 — we must continue to fight to kick out the Tories.

Revenge and the Palestinians

AGAINST THE TIDE

Sean Matgamna



As you read this, terrible things are being done to Palestinians in Kuwait by vengeful Kuwaitis. Of the 200,000 or so Palestinians in Kuwait — a high proportion of them Kuwaiti-born — god knows how many have now been killed or tortured or rounded up and imprisoned.

The settling of scores and the meting out of summary punishment — frequently arbitrary, unjust, and savage — is a normal feature of overturns such as that which the flight of the Iraqi army has allowed the Kuwaitis to carry out. Aggressive cruelty is also “liberated”, and people who were recently in fear of their lives act out the part played by their recent oppressors, hunting “collaborators”, “quislings”, and suspect foreigners of all sorts.

“Moral judgements on the Palestinians in Kuwait who collaborated with the Iraqis tell us nothing about the attitude we should take to them where basic rights are concerned.”

It does seem to be true that there was extensive Palestinian collaboration with the Iraqis. That should surprise no-one. Many Palestinians in Kuwait had lived too long as hewers of wood and drawers of water not to be antagonistic to the caste of privileged Kuwaitis; the PLO's support for Saddam Hussein must have translated “on the ground” into more than mere words; and the well-publicised mass enthusiasm for Saddam of the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians must have had its counterpart among Palestinians in Kuwait.

Now, after the defeat of Iraq, the PLO and the Palestinians stand disgraced. They are, lots of people seem to think, no longer wor-

thy of support, or less worthy than they used to be. The realpolitik case for “solving” the “Palestinian problem” remains, but the moral drive based on recognition of the Palestinians' rights and indignation at the injustice they suffer is weakened.

The Palestinians are in some measure experiencing what the Israeli Jews have experienced over the last ten or 20 years: a massive loss of sympathy.

After the Holocaust sank into people's consciousness there was much sympathy for the Israeli Jews, for decades. Then, slowly, it eroded. The prolonged occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the repression of the Palestinians; the consequences in world capitalism of the Arab use of oil as a weapon of economic pressure after the Yom Kippur war of 1973; the development of close alliances between the metropolitan capitalist countries and some Arab states — all shifted the way people saw the Israeli Jews. The *intifada* — an unarmed people standing up to the powerful and brutal Israeli army of occupation — finally turned general “public opinion” very hostile to Israel.

For the left, the hostility had come much earlier — from the Six Day war of 1967 and shortly after, as Israel assumed the repulsive role of an oppressive colonial power.

To the left the Israeli Jews became — though not in these words — a “bad people”, undeserving of support and forfeiting their right to self-determination because of Israel's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs.

It seems to me that what has happened with the Palestinians in broad public opinion shows in a fresh light just how wrong and false is the attitude the left has taken up towards the Israeli Jews.

The idea that because of the PLO's alliance with Saddam Hussein and the oppressive behaviour of some Palestinians in Kuwait the Palestinians are proven a “bad people”, or a people who have forfeited or had diminished their basic right to self-determination — that is the same idea that the left has about the Israeli Jews. It is false and destructive.

There are neither good nor bad peoples. People in general behave in certain ways in certain conditions. Moral judgments on the Palestinians in Kuwait who collaborated with the Iraqis are neither here nor there politically: they tell us nothing about the attitude we



Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it

On 26 March 1871 the first workers' government ever was set up — the Paris Commune.

Prussia had defeated France in war, and France's bourgeois government signed an agreement giving the Prussian troops the right to enter Paris. The workers of Paris rebelled.

The Commune survived only nine weeks, until the capitalist government at Versailles reconquered the city and massacred the workers, killing tens of thousands and deporting others. The Commune's positive socialist measures were necessarily limited.

But what it did do led Karl Marx to write: “Workingmen's Paris, with its Commune, will live forever as the glorious harbinger of a new society.”



Above: supporters of the Commune on the barricades. On the right: Louise Michel, one of the leaders of the Commune.



The Palestinians' right to a homeland is inalienable

should take to them where basic rights are concerned. Likewise, moral judgment on the Israelis has no weight when their right to self-determination is under discussion.

Socialists try to understand why people behave in certain ways in certain circumstances, and look for change in those circumstances. We make moral judgments, but we do not lose sight of the historical realities.

All peoples are capable of becoming oppressors. It is a central concern of Marxists — it was a central concern, for example, of Lenin when dealing with the national question in the Tsarist Empire and in Eastern Europe — that while supporting the oppressed we do not support them in demands which would make them oppressors of others. For example: we support the Northern Ireland Catholics. We do not support Irish Catholic nationalist proposals that would exchange half a million oppressed Catholics for one million oppressed Protestants coerced into a united Ireland.

At the heart of the process that turned the left comprehensively hostile to Israel and to “Zionists” was a moral feeling that the long-oppressed Jews should know better, a moral outrage and indignation that they didn't.

Yes, the Jews should know better. In a world controlled by reason and morality which truly takes account of experience properly evaluated from the standpoint of a common humanity, they would. But that is not the world we live in. In our world the experience of national oppression and crazy chauvinism helps a few of its victims rise above it to a higher human standpoint: it convinces most of its surviving victims that they must in future be more assertive, more self-reliant, more ruthless, quicker on the draw for their own cause, their own nationalism, their own chauvinism.

That is what Hitler did to the Jews; that is what Israel has done to the Palestinians, though you cannot compare what happened to Europe's Jews with what has happened to the Palestinian Arabs. It is a common human

experience wherever there is national or communal conflict.

Modern Irish nationalism was reshaped and hardened into a new determination and ruthlessness by the memory of the murderous famines between 1845 and '49, which depopulated Ireland while the landlords, protected by the foreign English government, exported food. People born a hundred years later look back with shame — and, worse, sometimes with pangs of questioning, embittering doubt about their own nature, as part of a people who could let this happen to them — on the passivity with which so many easy-going, good-natured people let themselves be starved to death or driven off the land: it is, even today a living factor in the ruthlessness of the IRA.

It is not Marxism which teaches that suffering makes you morally better, but mystical Christianity!

“Socialists deal not in moralism but in programmes and perspectives for action. The Palestinian Arabs have an inalienable right to self-determination; so do the Israeli Jews.”

The left will stand up to the backlash against the Palestinians. The left should also re-examine its own parallel “backlash” against Israel.

There are no good peoples and no bad peoples. There are only peoples struggling blindly in human pre-history. Serious socialists are moralists, but we do not confuse morality with an understanding of the imperatives of historical and political events as they really evolve and will continue to evolve until the working-class as a conscious force, a “class for itself”, transforms them.

Socialists deal not in moralism but in programmes and perspectives for action. The Palestinian Arabs have an inalienable right to self-determination; so do the Israeli Jews.



Supporters greet Hugh Callaghan — one of the Birmingham Six — on his release. Photo: John Harris

Forensic fools

By Les Hearn

Scientific evidence contributed largely to the convictions of the Birmingham Six and to the loss of their appeal. It has also contributed to their acquittal after 16 years of imprisonment.

While the freeing of the Six will highlight the dishonesty and brutality of the interrogating police officers, it also calls into question the role of the forensic service, funded by the government but not therefore licensed to distort the evidence against the accused.

Had they handled explosives?

Evidence that some of the Six had handled nitroglycerine came from two sources: forensic scientist Dr Frank Skuse reported the presence of nitroglycerine in hand swabs from Patrick Hill and William Power and Dr Janet Drayton reported a "possible positive" for nitroglycerine from a second swab from Hill. Despite the doubt cast over Skuse's evidence in the 1988 appeal (he was later compulsorily retired on grounds of "limited efficiency"), the judges placed great faith in Dr Drayton's tentative view.

Now Skuse used the Greiss test for the presence of nitroglycerine. This involves the use of a solution of sodium hydroxide, the strength of which is crucial to the sensitivity of the test. Later investigators found that with the concentration said to have been used by Skuse they obtained many "positive" results for other substances which also contain the nitro- chemical group.

These include nitrocellulose, found in the coating of some playing cards and smoking on the train to Heysham before their arrest. Skuse then claimed to have used a different concentration of sodium hydroxide but this would have implied such a level of contamination that the men would have been ill from nitroglycerine poisoning (it is used in small doses to treat the symptoms of heart disease).

However, recent findings by leading government scientists mean that it is possible that the positive results obtained by Skuse may have been due to a substance present on his own hands. Drs John Lloyd and Alan Scaplehorn obtained positive results from the liquid soap in use in 1974 and with which Skuse had washed his hands and his equipment. Skuse had in fact got positives from the equipment alone (ie. without the hand swabs), a hitherto inexplicable finding.

Also not mentioned at the trial was the fact that other passengers on ferries to Ireland were tested positive for the presence of explosives on their hands. They were however released when they said they had been handling rolls of adhesive tape which were then found to give positive results.

Drayton's results involved a test using gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GCMS). This works by vaporising the sample which then disintegrates into charged fragments — ions. These are accelerated by electric and magnetic fields by different amounts according to their mass. The fragment being sought was the nitro- group with a relative mass of 46 and Dr Drayton reported a "possible positive".

This means that the amount was

How scientific 'experts' helped to keep the Birmingham Six behind bars

not much more than would be expected from the natural background concentration of the nitro- group. This was interpreted as showing the possible presence of nitroglycerine but, as pointed out previously, the nitro-group occurs in many other compounds, most of them innocuous.

Skuse reported Drayton's findings as his own in the original trial. Curiously, he seems not to have mentioned that his test on the hand swab used by Drayton was negative.

Drayton herself gave evidence at the 1988 appeal and the judges found her testimony particularly damning. She later said that they had misunderstood her, a point which perhaps underlines an incompatibility of the legal and scientific minds.

Drs Lloyd and Scaplehorn also looked at the GCMS test and found that they could obtain "positive" results for nitroglycerine from a hand swab from a smoker and from the food preservative cinnamaldehyde and various fatty acids found in food and cosmetics.

They concluded that Drayton should not even have recorded a "possible" positive, the information she had obtained being "fruitless and misleading".

It was this report that led the Director of Public Prosecutions to say that he was no longer relying on forensic evidence in defending the appeal. Drayton has now agreed that her original judgement was in-

correct and she admits that the Gas Chromatograph in question had been experiencing problems in recording the passage of samples through it. The chart for Hill's hand swab had been "lost".

The Mass Spectrometry side of the apparatus could also be monitored using an ultra-violet photography system. This would provide a check on the results of tests. Drayton said the UV system had not been switched on the day of Hill's test, but 13 years later rolls of film taken on that day were discovered. These were only made known when they were handed to Dr Lloyd's team last September. Two of the rolls were of the "background", to test the purity of the machine. Nevertheless, they too showed a peak at a mass of 46.

That left only the circumstantial evidence and the men's alleged confessions and it is with these that science has intervened.

Did they confess?

Confessions are often thought to be the strongest possible evidence of a person's guilt but there are all sorts of reasons why an innocent person might admit to a crime they hadn't committed. Some people are very suggestible; others are so claustrophobic that they will do anything to get out; others believe they will be found guilty anyway and know they will get a lighter sentence if they don't argue; some are simply beaten into submission.

But what about those people who

won't confess. Do the police simply insert extra sheets before the prisoner's signature? Until recently, this has been difficult to detect but there is now a test called ElectroStatic Document Analysis (ESDA) which can show by analysis of the imprint on following pages whether the pages of a statement were written at the same time.

ESDA of Richard McKenny's interview notes show that, in his first interview, the first six pages were of a different type to the last three and were written in a different ball-point pen. His second interview notes were on 19 pages from four different pads and were also not written at the same time.

The record of the timings of interviews in Detective Superintendent Reade's notebook (he was in overall charge of the case) were also found to have been altered or added to later.

The issues raised by the case are manifold, but paramount among them are those concerning the scientific integrity of the Home Office Forensic Service. An incredible sloppiness seems to have been a feature of the work of some of the scientists, who, once they had an answer suggesting the guilt of a person, were unwilling to carry out confirmatory tests or were unwilling to accept the results of these if they did not support the initial findings.

There is also the fact that evidence tending to exonerate the accused was suppressed for up to 15 years. Surely the Forensic Service should have the duty to communicate its findings to the defence. It could be argued that faulty scientific evidence was the major reason for the lengthy imprisonment of the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, and the Maguires.

Movie writer Pauline Kael retires

"The sharpest film critic ever"

Film

Belinda Weaver mourns Pauline Kael's retirement

Pauline Kael is stepping down as film critic of the *New Yorker*, a position she has held, either singly or in collaboration with other writers, for more than twenty years.

Pauline Kael, for those who haven't read her, is (in my opinion) the most interesting film writer around. Her retirement is a shame and a loss to anyone interested in movies.

For my money, Kael is the sharpest, most intelligent, most consistent and most individual film critic ever. She is the one film writer whose books of collected reviews sell consistently well. They aren't just ephemeral stuff. They have lasting value, both as entertainment and as a guide to twenty-five years of movie history.

All of which sounds rather pious and dull. But Kael is never dull. Infuriating at times, yes, but never boring. Her reviews are slangy and easy to read, and even if you disagree wholeheartedly, her review is still stimulating stuff. She helps you see what you saw in a wholly new way. Her words win you over. Quite often, you find you've come round to her way of seeing a movie.

Kael began her film writing career with *Sight and Sound*, but she never really belonged there. Her style is much freer and looser than the rather hermetic, theory-dense prose of most *Sight and Sound* writing. At the *New Yorker*, she found her place. She wrote what she liked, they didn't change a word, and the public lapped it up.

Her reviews alone are worth keeping, but she has never concerned herself solely with films. She has always been interested in the film business, and the ways the industry has changed and developed since the collapse of the old studio system. In her collections of reviews, there is usually at least one long article on the current state of film making. Occasionally pessimistic, she is nonetheless hopeful on the whole about movies. She believes they're worth caring about, worth arguing for.

Kael has never believed that a film critic should be a dry and abstract theoretician, or worse, an extension of a film studio's publicity department. If a film is bad, she says so, and she tells you why — not in wordy theories, but in simple trenchant language.

She has offended all kinds of people — film producers, stars, studio heads — but she keeps on. They fear her because she can back up what she says. Step by step, she takes a film apart and shows us what it's really made of.

If she is unhappy about movies today, it's largely Hollywood she is chastising — the Hollywood where the real art form is no longer the movie, but the deal.

In *Taking it all in*, she says: "The studios no longer make movies primarily to attract and please moviegoers; they make movies in such a way as to get as much as possible from the prearranged and anticipated deals. Every picture (allowing for a few exceptions) is cast and planned in terms of those deals. Though the studio is very happy when it has a box office hit, it isn't terribly concerned about the people who come out grumbling. They don't grumble very loudly anyway, because even the lumpiest pictures are generally an improvement over television; at least they're always bigger...They [the studio heads] feel safe with big-star packages, with chase thrillers, with



Pauline Kael

known ingredients...There is an even grimmer side to all this: because the studios have discovered how to take the risk out of moviemaking, they don't want to make any movies they can't protect themselves on. Production and advertising costs have gone so high that there is genuine nervous panic about risky projects. If an executive finances what looks like a perfectly safe, stale piece of material and packs it with stars, and the production costs skyrocket way beyond the guarantees, and the picture loses many millions, he won't be blamed for it — he was playing the game by the same rules as everybody else. If, however, he takes a gamble on a small project that can't be sold in advance — something a gifted director really wants to do, with a subtle, not easily summarised theme, and no big names in the cast — and it loses just a little money, his neck is on the block. So to the executives a good script is one that attracts a star, and they will make

"It's becoming tough for a movie that isn't a big media-created event to find an audience, no matter how good it is. And if a movie has been turned into an event, it doesn't have to be good..."

their deals and set the full machinery of a big production in motion and schedule the picture's release dates, even though the script problems have never been worked out and everyone (even the director) secretly knows the film will be a confused mess, an embarrassment.

If that seems over the top, just think of *Ishtar* (over \$50 million down the tubes) or *Havana*, an expensive flop with "surefire" Robert

Redford, and any number of sure-to-be-blockbusters that no amount of hyping could sell.

Of the blockbuster phenomenon, she writes in *Reeling*:

"It's becoming tough for a movie that isn't a big media-created event to find an audience, no matter how good it is. And if a movie has been turned into an event, it doesn't have to be good; an event — such as *Papillon* — draws an audience simply because it's an event. You don't expect *Mount Rushmore* to be a work of art, but if you're anywhere near it, you have to go; *Papillon* is a movie *Mount Rushmore*, though it features only two heads...[People] want 'what everyone's talking about', and even if they don't like the picture...they don't feel out of it."

In *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, she has nothing but contempt for the Hollywood money men who see themselves as "creative":

"The men in the movie business who can work regularly and talk publicly about their creative freedom are those whose fundamental aspirations (they really have no convictions) are the same as

those of the studio heads — to be successful, to be acclaimed...Being creative means knowing how to ex-

"Not for her a wishy-washy retelling of the plot, followed by a half-hearted exhortation to 'go and see it and make up your own mind'."

plot other people's ideas or earlier work you remember; being creative justifies ignorance and ruthlessness, indifference and finally even contempt for art. Being creative is having something to sell, or knowing how to sell something, or having sold something...It's in this context that picture-making is considered a creative business...Despite their protestations...they enjoy the power of packaging something for the millions and they're contemptuous of something that reaches only a few thousand people — even

though what the millions buy may be so readily consumed that it has no more effect than one candy bar eaten by an adolescent already disfigured by acne, and even though the work that 'fails' now because it appeals only to a few thousand or a half a million may add a few thousand more year by year, may perhaps be of lasting value."

What distinguishes Kael's writing, apart from its readability, is that she consistently takes a stand, argues a point of view. Not for her a wishy-washy retelling of the plot, followed by a half-hearted exhortation to "go and see it and make up your own mind". She argues for the films she thinks are important, and she is ruthless about films she considers trash.

Not that she is high-minded. She enjoys "bad films" — films so bad they're funny — as much as anyone. She can see they're as much fun, maybe even more fun, than some "good" films. Of Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Raw Deal*, she writes:

"*Raw Deal* is reprehensible and enjoyable, the kind of movie that makes you feel brain dead in two minutes — after which point you're ready to laugh at its mixture of trashiness, violence and startlingly silly crude humour...It's lucky that Irvin [the director] doesn't ask us to believe in anything on the screen: that solves the problems of how to react to its star, Arnold Schwarzenegger...Schwarzenegger was ideally cast as the fearsome humanoid in *The Terminator*, but how can you make a hero out of a man who as an actor seems likably, harmlessly gaga, and who appears to have hams implanted above his elbows?"

All the same, she has never equated lowest common denominator films with good "bad" films. Formula films, rehashes of earlier successes, raids on old, worn-out genres, or the current rash of sequels all came under fire from her as evidence of the bankruptcy of Hollywood's "creative" community.

Kael's words were a compass to steer by. You might agree or disagree, but she was a pole you could depend on. She was consistent.

Though I found lately that I disagreed with her more and more, I still found her entertaining, pithy, witty and easy to read.

If her work has lasting value, and I think it has, it is because she has consistently punctured pretension, consistently exposed the crassness of Hollywood/money values, and consistently argued for the few good films and film makers around. She has pushed good films, wherever she found them, and in doing so, has kept alive what's most worthwhile about movies — she has helped us find and value the precious few films that make us feel and think and see the world in ways we hadn't thought of before.

When 'illegal' immigrants are allowed to stay

Television

By Jean Lane

A news report on the morning of Monday 25 March told of how thousands of immigrants are out-staying their work permits and living and working illegally in the country.

The remarkable thing about this particular report was that the immigrants were treated with so much sympathy by the presenter and TV interviewers.

There was no attempt at a numbers game, no threats of being overrun, no talk of unemployment

caused by outsiders doing the jobs, no rivers of blood scenarios.

There was not a whiff of a suggestion that these people be dealt with by locking them up in airport prisons to await deportation, of dawn raids on houses by police or on workplaces to catch them red-handed at the sewing machine or the beer pumps, of intimate examinations of the women to make sure that only bona fide relatives are coming in.

There wasn't even a compromise suggestion that we let the rich ones stay but the poor ones will have to go.

On the contrary, the presenter was at pains to suggest that the immigrants be treated leniently, ie.

allowed to stay, because of the "special relationship" that existed between the two countries involved.

Does this new method of reporting represent a turn-around in the thinking of the powers that be?

Perhaps another u-turn in Thatcherite policy to follow Europe and the poll tax? Unfortunately not. The country is Australia. The immigrants, British.

All of a sudden there's nothing wrong with crossing borders, finding work; no threat, no problem, no potential race riot. And of course there isn't.

They should be allowed to stay there, just as people from Asia, Africa, Hong Kong, and the Middle East should be allowed to stay here.

A Hollywood standard with charm

Film

Belinda Weaver reviews *Green Card*

Peter Weir's new film, *Green Card*, is based on some pretty loopy male-female psychology, but it works, largely due to Gerard Depardieu's performance as the hopeful immigrant composer, Georges Faure.

His French accent in this, his first English-speaking role, gives his English a charm that soon has people eating out of his hand.

Everyone, that is, except his wife, Bronte Parrish (Andie McDowell). She's a stuck-up horticulturalist he marries for convenience. He gets the much-coveted "green card" allowing him to live and work in America; Bronte gets an apartment only available to married couples.

Not that Bronte plans to live with Georges, far from it. They meet, marry and part in a day, and Bronte moves to her new apartment complete with built-in greenhouse, convinced (and relieved) that she won't see him again.

But the immigration authorities check up on them, and Bronte is forced to meet him to concoct a plausible tale of marriage, and of course, this being Hollywood, antipathy turns to attraction.

The world is basically divided into two kinds of people — those who think life is simple, and those who think everything's hopelessly complicated. Georges is the former, Bronte the latter. He likes to live and eat well, he thinks problems are there to be overcome. Bronte sees the flaw in everything, she's always finding snags.

So how on earth are they to get together?

Hollywood also solves this pro-

blem by falling back on the "opposites attract" theory, and *Green Card* is no exception here. Also true to form, Bronte (mistakenly) thinks she prefers another type of man altogether, Phil, the vegetarian tree-lover scorned by Georges as a drip. Of course, we know Bronte will eventually see the light and go for Georges. All we have to do is wait.

It's rather cute having Bronte the gardener end up with a man as earthy as Georges, but the gardening metaphors don't stop there. Bronte at first is dried up, and cut off from feeling, like a neglected, pot-bound plant. Georges (of course) is full of sap. As Bronte rather wistfully says of him: "He eats life."

The film is really a bit ungallant towards Bronte. Most of the learning and unbending and changing must come from her side. Her tastes and pastimes and obsessions are subtly criticised, whereas Georges's boozing, smoking and red-meat eating are trotted out as the mark of a real man.

Even Bronte's attempts to turn disused lots full of rusting cars and junk into inner-city gardens for poor children are sent up as the actions of a misguided do-gooder. Georges's position, that it's pointless, that it's better to do nothing for people trapped in squalor, gets the nod.

The film seems to be saying that intellectual women, women who've lost touch with their earthiness, need a man like Georges, a man who can give them a good fuck. Yet that crudeness is turned on its head by the casting of Depardieu, a form of cheating on Peter Weir's part.

For Depardieu explodes stereotyping. Yes, he's fat and a bit of a slob and his nose is too big. His hands are like bunches of bananas with unattractive bitten nails, he's tattooed, and his hair is a mess. But for all that, he exudes enormous charisma. He inhabits the screen like some benign, and irresistible, life force, and he's unexpectedly sensitive and sweet.

Peter Weir is very keen on the life force. His last film, *Dead Poets' Society*, was all about grabbing life and living it to the full, not being ground down by society and conventionality.

In *Green Card*, Bronte and Georges may be defeated by the bureaucracy, but they're victorious all the same. They both "eat life" by the end.

I'm a sucker for happy endings. I only hope Bronte keeps on gardening with the poor kids.

Songs of liberty and rebellion

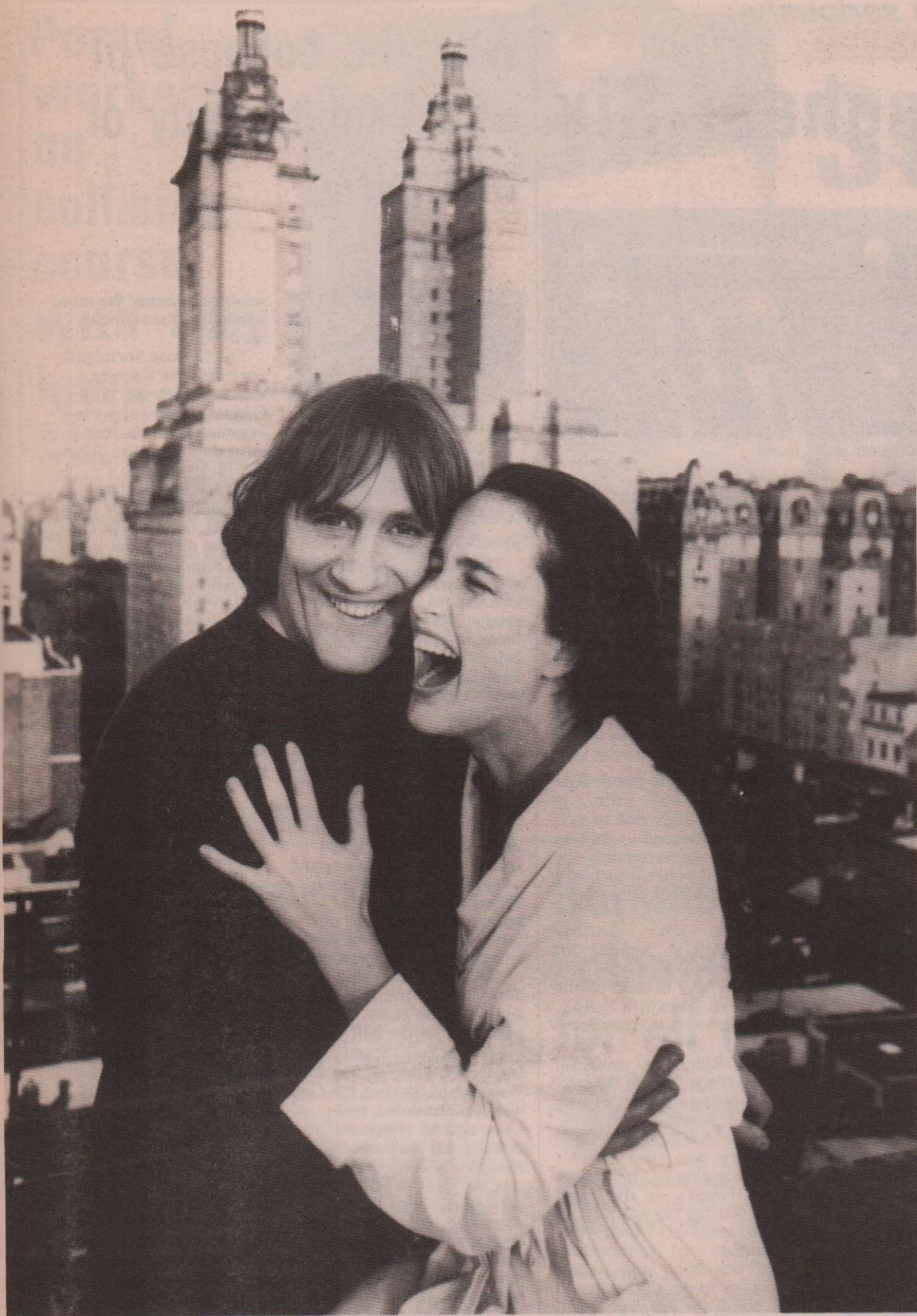
The world turned upside down

Through eating too much supper
— before I went to bed
Strange thoughts came on my slumber
Strange thoughts came in my head.

This world seemed topsy turvy
and people of renown
were doing the most peculiar things
as the world turned upside down.

I dreamt there was no workhouse
and there were no starving poor
and nations never did quarrel
nor never went to war

I thought all men were angels
and women ne'er wore a frown
Old maids they had large families
as the world turned upside down...
Circa 1870



OK, fall for him — but stay with the poor!

Two souls of jazz

Music

By Jim Denham

Jazz lovers of my generation and persuasions tend to be avid readers of the *Independent*. The rather morbid reason for our choice of paper is that it's how we find out when one more of our childhood heroes joins that great Big Band in the skies. They always get a good send-off from the paper's jazz obituarist, Steve Voce.

Two recent recruits to Gabriel's Orchestra struck me as worth commenting upon: Slim Gaillard and Al Klink. You have probably heard of Slim, who in recent years became a cult figure in the trendy London "scene" — even appearing on Jools Holland's surreal revival of "Juke Box Jury". By then Slim came over as something of a loveable old eccentric with his fixed grin and anachronistic jive-talk (adding "aroonie" or "arootie" to the ends of the words). You would never have guessed that for much of his career, Slim was regarded as a sinister and dangerous madman.

He was born (in 1915) in Cuba.

of a white Jewish father and a black Cuban mother. He pleaded with his seaman dad to be taken along on some voyages, and on one of them young Slim got left behind as the ship sailed away from port. He never saw his family again. After many youthful adventures, Slim turned up in Chicago where he worked variously as a factory hand, a prize-fighter and a getaway driver for the Capone mob. By the late 30's he had established himself as a musician and tap-dancer, singing in a style not unlike that of Fats Waller.

In the 40's he became well-known in Hollywood where he was a big hit with the leading starlets of the day and had a big (recording) hit with "Flat Foot Floogie", made together with bass-player Slam Stewart (they were billed as "Slim and Slam"). Jack Kerouac ensured Slim's perennial status as a "beat generation" hero by featuring him in the book "On the Road". By the time he settled in London in the 80's, Slim was a legend made flesh and the Jonathan Ross/Jules Holland crowd naturally attempted to adopt him. Slim went along with the adulation (wouldn't you?) but one suspects that he never took it very seriously. He died a happy man, having achieved a degree of success and contentment that noticeably eluded most black jazz

musicians of his generation.

Now, I hear you ask, who the hell was Al Klink? In fact you are almost certainly familiar with one example of Klink's work: on the ubiquitous Glenn Miller record of "In the Mood" there is a tenor sax duet that is recreated, note-for-note, to this day by the myriad Miller-style "ghost" bands doing the rounds. One of the tenors was Tex Beneke, to whom Miller gave prominence for various non-musical reasons. The other (better) half of the duet was Al Klink. If this had been Klink's only claim to fame, then us "purists" would probably have written him off as one of dozens of competent non-entities who worked in the white big bands of the 30's and 40's. But Klink went on to play outstandingly tasteful tenor sax on literally hundreds of records over the following four decades. He worked with Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Billie Holiday, the Sauter-Finnegan Band and the immodestly-named "World's Greatest Jazz Band". As late as the mid-80's he made a memorable contribution to the "Great Songs from the Cotton Club" album by the veteran black vocalist Maxine Sullivan.

But for most of the '50's, '60's and '70's, Klink earned his living as an anonymous "studio man" for NBC and anyone else who needed a

good, reliable, sight-reading sax player. By all accounts he was a very quiet, respectable, middle-class sort of guy. Almost a WASP.

What could Al Klink possibly have in common with wild-man Slim Gaillard? Nothing, except that they were born within a year of each other and died within a few days of each other. And they were both jazz musicians. They talked the same (musical) language. I don't know whether they ever met or worked together. But they easily could have. Jazz breaks down conventional barriers like race and class, giving us a tantalising glimpse of what a socialist society might be like.

Farewell to two childhood heroes. And forward to the sort of world that they both — unwittingly — hinted at in their music.

PS. Since writing the above, I've heard about the death of yet another jazz hero, Bud Freeman. Like Al Klink, he was a white tenor sax player of great distinction. Unlike Klink, he was something of a "character", whose colourful life is well documented. For a while I considered re-writing this piece, taking Klink out and substituting Freeman. But then I thought better of behaving like a literary Benny Goodman: maybe I'll discuss Freeman in the future, if S.O. is willing to give me the space.

Left should oppose 'frame ups' more seriously

Not just the Birmingham Six

I am sure anyone who cares about justice would welcome Cathy Nugent's piece on the Birmingham Six.

The only disappointing feature in an otherwise fine and informative article was that it gave the impression that the Six were the only prisoners who had been "framed" besides the Tottenham Three and other famous miscarriages of justice.

There was no mention of the malpractice of the infamous elite police units such as the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad, responsible for dozens of alleged "framings".

Sadly the left in Britain



The Birmingham Six after their release. Other wrongfully imprisoned people should be released.

concerns itself far more with "wrongful" imprisonment thousands of miles away than with injustice at home. In fact, some middle class socialists are virtual experts on "human rights abuses" in South Africa and Latin America but seem to care lit-

tle (and do even less) to expose "framings" taking place on their own doorstep.

It's no surprise that the class ridden elitist legal system can steal years from the lives of innocent men and women. The fact that there is so little opposition to "fram-

ing" can only worsen the problem. It's time the left treated this issue with the seriousness it deserves and looks at the less famous cases of "wrongful" imprisonment.

Mike Shankland
Conviction
Sheffield

Theory and the anti-war movement

I agree with Frank Kitz (Letters, SO 479) that *Socialist Worker's* "core message was to oppose the Gulf war".

I also agree that "that the opposition [to war] was not bigger is not due to whether or not *Socialist Worker* got its line 100% correct..."

On the other hand, Frank Kitz seems to agree with me that *SW's* line was far from 100% correct; at least, he does not contest any of my argument against *SW's* initial pro-Saddam line (when it claimed that Saddam was "playing an anti-imperialist role"), against *SW's* subsequent retreat into bland pacifism, or against *SW's* support for Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

I disagree — and I hope Frank Kitz disagrees — with John Molyneux's ludicrous self-congratulation in his "Teach Yourself Marxism" column in *SW* of 16 March. "The struggle against the Gulf war is a perfect example of the importance of theory. "The positions taken by *Socialist Worker* and the Socialist Workers' Party enabled our paper and party to play a leading role in the anti-war movement..."

"But these positions were not simply a spontaneous reaction to events by SWP members. On the contrary, they were based on an analysis of imperialism developed and renewed by

Marxists since the beginning of the century..."

In the *SW* pamphlet on the war, the line of backing Saddam as "anti-imperialist" and supporting the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait is simply asserted — in half a sentence — without any supporting argument at all, good, bad, or indifferent. There is no "theory" at all, Marxist or otherwise.

What *SW* writers have done on the theory of imperialism points quite another way. Before 1968 they used to argue that imperialism had become a thing of the past. "It is difficult to see what value there is in still using the word imperialism today" (Michael Kidron, *International Capitalism*, 1965).

Later writings (like Nigel Harris's book *The End of the Third World*) take a view more similar to that from which we in *SO* denounced Iraq's occupation of Kuwait as "sub-imperialist".

It was partly because *SW* had no consistent, coherent line on the war linked to any body of theory that — despite *SW's* often large mobilisations for the anti-war demonstrations — it played no leading role at all in the anti-war movement. It only tagged along with the pacifist, pro-UN, pro-sanctions Committee to Stop War in the Gulf.

SW made its own propaganda, against illusions in

the UN and for troops out, but it did nothing to try to shape and direct the whole anti-war movement.

CND's top officials and their allies, in the Committee to Stop War; the "Revolutionary Communist Party" with its campaign for "Victory to Iraq!"; and *Socialist Organiser*, in alliance with *Socialist Outlook* in the Campaign Against War in the Gulf, Labour Against the War, Trade Unionists Against the War, and the Student Federation Against War in the Gulf — we all made our various efforts to shape and lead the anti-war movement, efforts good or bad, successful or unsuccessful. *SW* made no such effort.

John Molyneux is right, after all, that theory is important. No amount of good theory could have radically increased the opposition to the war. But good theory, in the hands of a substantial organisation, could have helped to sharpen the anti-war movement and to teach anti-war activists how to continue the struggle against the

roots of war. As Frank Kitz comments, the point is neither to laugh nor to cry, but to understand — and we arrive at understanding by debate and polemic such as I attempted in my criticism of *SW*.

Frank Kitz doubts "whether it is possible for honest socialists to stay in a Labour Party headed by the butcher of Walworth Road". But he answers his own argument.

Neil Kinnock's shameful line on the war made the anti-war movement much smaller than it could have been. Whether SWP leader Chris Bambery was closer in his understanding of the war to Leon Trotsky or the tooth fairy (I'd say the tooth fairy) made relatively little difference.

It was vital for honest socialists to do all they could to build the opposition to Kinnock where it mattered most, inside the Labour Party, rather than remaining on the sidelines and giving Kinnock a clear run.

Martin Thomas
Islington

Not the same at all!

"No significant political differences" between *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook* (Letters, 8 March)? Far from it! The affinities of *Socialist Action* are much more, shall we say, distinctive than that.

An obvious starting point is *Socialist Action's* role in the London Committee to Stop War in the Gulf. *SA* appointed itself gatekeeper of the CSWG, dedicated primarily to excluding the "Trots". This bizarre policy, the disastrous effects of which we now know, was of course backed all the way by the representatives of the CPB and CPGB.

Further evidence is supplied by *SA's* line on the revolutions of 1989; in opposition to the somewhat rose-tinted version retailed by the Mandel group, *SA* have concluded that the downfall

of Honecker and Ceausescu was an outright defeat for the working class. (To be fair, *SA* are not alone in this view; the Revolutionary Communist Group is right with them.)

Add to this *Socialist Action's* obsessive hatred of "ultra-leftism", even if this usually translates as "whatever *Socialist Outlook* do, say or think"; their opposition to broad front organisations, apart from ones they can control; and their predilection for wild insults (they recently characterised my own group, the Socialist Society, as a "Trojan horse for European capital"). A picture begins to emerge.

Socialist Outlook (not a bad lot, as wild-eyed Trots go) have published a pamphlet called *Socialism after Stalinism*. *Socialist Action's* platform appears to be quite the reverse.

Phil Edwards
Manchester

Was the collapse of Stalinism tragedy or triumph?

EYE ON THE LEFT

The World Congress of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) was held last month.

The USFI is one of the major international associations of Trotskyist groups. Its best-known figure is Ernest Mandel; in Britain, *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook* are the publications sympathetic to its ideas.

A report of the Congress in the 28 February issue of *Rouge* (weekly paper of the LCR, the French group affiliated to the USFI) explains that: "On the world situation, the debate was mostly about the assessment of the imperialist counter-offensive and the international relations of forces after the fall of the bureaucratic dictatorship."

"Differences on that point did not prevent wide agreement on tasks, and in particular on the anti-imperialist tasks (campaign for the abolition of Third World debt, against the Gulf war, for the defence of Cuba against American threats), on the democratic struggles in Eastern Europe (for the right to self-determination of the oppressed nationalities, for the reconstruction of an independent workers' movement), and on the attitude to adopt to the capitalist plan for Europe."

"However, the differences do maybe clarify disagreements which have emerged on the way to relate to the unification of Germany, the balance sheet of the Nicaraguan revolution, and, more generally, the direction and the international consequences of the dynamic under way in Eastern Europe."

"The resolution presented by the outgoing Executive Committee on this point got about 88% of the votes; a minority resolution, presented by the Tendency for the Construction of the Fourth International, got about 7%, the rest being divided between two other minority resolutions, presented by *Socialist Action* (US) and the Socialist League of Britain (a little more than 1% each) and abstentions."

"On the Soviet Union, the debate was about the crisis of the bureaucracy and the balance-sheet of the command economy, on the national question, on Gorbachev's international policy, on the plans for the restoration of a market economy and the obstacles to it, on the social and democratic demands around which an independent workers' movement can reconstruct itself. The majority resolution got about 83% of the votes, the percentages for the minority

resolutions being the same as on the international resolution."

The German fortnightly *Sozialistische Zeitung*, around which the West German USFI supporters organise, gives further information on the debates.

"There were no programmatic differences despite the dramatic political changes. There were clear political differences with three minority currents (ISG-Britain, *Socialist Action-US*, a part of the LCR-France), which were able to rally about 9 to 13 per cent of the delegates between them. Certain political assessments were common to them, but they had differences among themselves on a series of questions."

"They assess the collapse of Stalinism as uniformly positive, because it gives the working class new scope for its self-organisation and political formation."

"The atrocious ideological devastation, which Stalinism has left in the heads of the working class, and the fact that the socialist project as such possesses no credibility today is for them no cause to account to themselves for the contents and the new forms of politics. From the mass movements which are directed towards rejection of the consequences of the reintroduction of the market economy they hope for an immediate strengthening of the revolutionary forces, and the understanding that the old system was no sort of socialism and socialism has yet to be won..."

The *Sozialistische Zeitung* report also gives some organisational details.

"The Fourth International is not yet an organisational pole of attraction. Its membership has fallen to 9,000. 3,900 members live in Western Europe, 3,700 in Latin America; of those, over 3,200 in two countries, Mexico and Brazil."

"While the membership is growing in Latin America, it has fallen by about 25% in the West European sections."

"200 people took part in the Congress, of whom 20% were women. There were 85 mandates from 26 sections; three sections were not represented."

"In Sri Lanka, the NSSP, an organisation of 2,700 members, has demanded admission to the Fourth International."



Ernest Mandel

WHAT'S ON

Thursday 28 March

'Has the Poll Tax Finished the Tories?', Newcastle SO meeting. Speaker: Chris Croome, 8.00, Rossetti Studio by the Trent House pub

Thursday 4 April

"Ireland: Beyond the Slogans", Leeds SO meeting, 7.30, Packhorse pub, Woodhouse Lane "Left-wing anti-semitism — myth or reality?", Liverpool SO meeting, 7.30, Trade Union Centre, Hardman St

Friday 5 April

"After the war", Socialist Society meeting. Speakers include John Palmer, 7.30, ULU, Malet St

Monday 8 April

"Ireland and Socialists", Manchester SO meeting. Details 061 227 9004 "The politics of famine", London SO Forum. Details: 071 639 7965

Tuesday 9 April

"The Middle East — what solution?", Brighton SO meeting, 6.00, Further Education College, Pelham St

SO London Forums

Monday 8 April

"The politics of famine"

Monday 22 April

"Pornography and Censorship"

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, 7.30

INDUSTRIAL

Postal workers on collision course with Tory laws

By Gail Cameron

Last Friday, Liverpool postal engineers took their second 24-hour strike in the last month, with the support of 30-40 post delivery workers.

Workers in the Royal Mail engineering and construction section have been in dispute with management at the Copper Hill sorting office over the sacking, shortly after Christmas, of two engineers.

Management have refused to talk, so the engineers union, the NCU, have balloted and got the backing for a series of 24-hour strikes to force negotiations.



Postal workers on unofficial solidarity strike for ambulance workers.

and are also looking for support from Manchester and London sorting offices.

Support has come from the Union of Communication Workers, whose members are refusing to work machines used by scab labour. This has already

resulted in threats by management to use the Tory anti-union laws, banning secondary action, against the union. To date they've been forced to back down but as the dispute continues a collision looks more and more likely.

British Timken

Strike to defend Pat Markey!

By an AEU steward

Pat Markey, shop steward at British Timken Northampton, is facing his final appeal against dismissal on Thursday 28 March.

Management have seized on the chance to sack him because he has dermatitis and have timed it to coincide with a redundancy package at the plant.

The shop steward's committee has responded by formally supporting Pat in his fight for reinstatement, but some stewards seem more concerned with accusing him of being connected with a *Socialist Organiser* rank and file bulletin at the factory than building support for Pat.

As if the bulletin and not management were responsible for the attacks on the workforce!

The way to win now is to mobilise for indefinite strike ac-

tion in the roller grinding department where Pat works and to appeal for support from the rest of the workforce.

An obstacle to this is that, conveniently for management, the department is closed for a week after Easter due to short time working while the bulk of the remainder of the factory will be working!

If effective trade unionism is to survive at Timken Pat Markey must be defended.

Town Halls round up

Manchester council strikes

By Tony Dale, Assistant Convenor, NALGO

Housing

Manchester housing workers took one-day strike action on 22 March over proposals to restructure Manchester City

HIV/AIDS Unit

NALGO workers in Manchester City Council's HIV/AIDS Unit are on indefinite strike action. The strike started on Thursday 21 March.

The strike is in response to a threat of two redundancies in the section.

Seven out of the ten workers in the Unit are working to three year contracts, subject to annual review by the Department of Health. The Department of Health provides 70% of the Unit's funding.

The City Council has decided not to bid for funding for the two posts. Instead, management have restructured the Unit, carving out and victimising the two workers.

One of the workers faced with redundancy has got a new job with another Council. The other worker, the publicity officer, is facing redundancy on 28 March.

The strike is official and is receiving support from many Council workers and community groups.

Social Services

Social Services workers at Ross Place Resource Centre in Manchester are on indefinite strike over staffing levels.

The strike, which started on Tuesday 19 March, follows a series of violent incidents at the Centre with staff receiving injuries.

With the rundown of the NHS, Centres like Ross Place are increasingly expected to deal with people who need more expert, better resourced psychiatric help. Care in the community is placing overworked Social Services staff at risk.

The dispute, which has official NALGO backing, is set to spread to another centre on Tuesday 26 March.

Council's housing department.

Hundreds of workers joined the strike as the majority of offices shut for the day.

The action, organised by NALGO, focused on a lobby of the Housing Committee.

The details of the restructuring proposals represent major changes in most workers' job descriptions with no improvement in pay. In contrast, the report recommends an increase in the number of managers from 34 to 63. The management wage bill would grow from £640,000 to £1.3 million.

The proposals offer workers nothing — management get a handsome pay rise!

Despite the strike the Labour Group pushed the report through the Committee. The Chair of the Housing Committee, Dave Lunts, has given assurances that full and detailed negotiations will follow.

Housing workers' opposition to the restructuring was strengthened by the one-day strike. Continuing pressure is needed to ensure management and the councillors shift ground and radically change their proposals.

Lambeth NALGO strike ballot

By Dion D'Silva

Following a successful day of action on 13 March, Lambeth NALGO are currently considering balloting for all-out indefinite strike action if any redundancy notices are issued.

The council is in a panic to try to get rid of 630 posts, some by compulsory redundancies.

The decision to authorise a ballot was taken at a branch meeting attended by over 800 members. Ed Hall, secretary of Lambeth NALGO, puts it like this: "We have no other option, and the situation could get even worse if the council is rate-capped."

Canteen staff, mostly black women, were given two days notice that the canteen subsidy would be withdrawn — with the result that their jobs could go! Some councillors are now back-tracking on this.

In the computer setion, people have received individual letters telling them to look for redeployment. Meanwhile, four

Hammersmith and Fulham: Vote yes for all out action!

By Sab Sanghera, Hammersmith NALGO shop steward

Hammersmith and Fulham NALGO are to ballot the whole membership for indefinite strike action.

This is in order to seek the withdrawal of compulsory redundancy notices issued to 23 workers in the Housing Benefits section. The Housing Benefits section went out on strike last week when the redundancy notices were given out.

At the branch meeting attended by nearly 500 people, workers felt that the only way we could effectively support the Housing Benefit workers was by striking ourselves, a point underlined when the Labour

leadership of the council refused to give NALGO an assurance that there would be no redundancies.

The Council have already reduced the workforce by 300 through voluntary severance in order to make cuts which would keep them out of trouble with the Tory government.

Many NALGO activists feel that it is no coincidence that the Housing Benefits section have been targeted for redundancies, as they represent one of Hammersmith NALGO's most militant sections.

The right-wing Labour leadership on the council feel that if they smash NALGO in Housing, then there's nothing to stop them from making further cuts. Throughout this week there will be shop and departmental meetings intent on delivering a "Yes" vote and mass action until the redundancy notices are withdrawn.

Assistant Director posts have been created, each with a salary of £50,000.

Other unions will probably join in the action, in particular the education unions. Lambeth NALGO are also looking at ways

to link in the action to other disputes. There are plans to organise a London-wide conference of local government unions and possibly organise a May Day protest strike across London.

Strike call in Islington

By Jo Thwaites, Islington NALGO

NALGO members in Islington council, north London, will be balloting soon on industrial action against compulsory redundancies.

The ballot will call for a yes vote both to an all-out indefinite strike by selected workers and to a rolling programme of strike action by the whole branch.

The once-left Labour council plans severe cuts this year. Its capital spending programme has collapsed to maybe half of last year's level. Years of gambits and dodges designed to soften Tory government cuts without fighting them have led the coun-

cil into a blind alley, and now the council wants the workforce to pay the price for its failure to fight.

A draft Management Services Review proposes cutting 100 posts in Architects and Surveying, and 150 in the Direct Labour Organisation. Management have spread rumours of compulsory redundancies since before Christmas.

Whether they will go for compulsory redundancies still remains uncertain. The council's current staffing agreement with the unions runs out at the end of March, and the council proposes an agreement open to revision every month.

NALGO is lobbying a negotiating meeting between the council and the unions on Tuesday 26 March, from 6pm at the Town Hall.

Teachers in conference Unite the left to fight the cuts

By Liam Conway, Central Notts NUT

The NUT conference meets this year in the context of a disastrous pay campaign, the immediate threat of massive teacher job cuts resulting from the poll tax and LMS, the prospect of a major reform of local government and the impending centralisation of the whole education system.

With all these danger signs one might expect alarm bells to be ringing at Hamilton House in readiness for the battles to come. But, as you might expect, you'd be wrong.

Instead the NUT leaders have conjured up another financial crisis of their own making. The latest debacle is a direct result of the union's reorganisation carried through three years ago, supposedly to solve a previous financial crisis.

As before, one might expect the union leaders to root out waste and unwanted luxuries — like the £615,000 spent on wages for the union's top 20 national and regional officials.

A likely story when you consider the enormous sums of money paid out recently in early retirement to ex-officials of the union. Yes, you can be sure the bureaucrats will look after their own.

And, as before, it's the members who will pay the price for the leadership's conference memorandum 'Funding the Future'. The two main innocent victims of this memorandum, if the leaders get their way, are to be annual conference and local associations (branches).

Conference representation will be cut in half, thereby ensuring that only local lay officials are able to attend, and local associations' grants will be cut, making it more difficult for them to defend members at grass-roots level.

And what of the attacks to come? Well the financial changes, if they get through, will ensure that the leaders have an even easier time avoiding any serious opposition to the dangers ahead. If last year is anything to go by, when the leaders did everything they could to block conference policy on redundancies, the leaders will seek the least line of resistance.

And, with an election looming, they will do everything to avoid upsetting their friends in the Labour Party.

But like last year we can make life difficult for them. And that process starts at conference.

We must ensure that 'Funding the Future' is thrown out. We must build for action against cuts, and seek to link up with other local government workers, as has already been done in some parts of the country. We must point out the futility, and cost, of last year's salaries campaign, with its expensive and unnecessary conference and membership 'consultative exercise', all of which led to absolutely nothing.

Most important of all, we must unite the left of the union, as we did in gaining our major victories at last year's conference, so that an alternative strategy on all these matters can be built for, both at conference and thereafter amongst the members.

No strikes in the North Sea this summer?

Full-time union officials are boasting that strike action is unlikely this summer in the North Sea oil and gas fields.

According to Tom MacLean, secretary of the official offshore union committee, there was now "no real prospect of industrial action this summer", after he and fellow bureaucrats cooked up a pay and benefits package over the heads of rank and file oil workers' representatives.

Ronnie McDonald, chair of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, condemned the talks.

The deal will include a 10% pay rise. There are no concessions by the employers over the key issue of health and safety. Mass meetings are discussing the offer over the next few weeks.

More next week

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

They are still killing Iraqi children

By Frank Higgins

Iraq withdrew from Kuwait, and the bombing of Iraq stopped three weeks ago. But the war against Iraq is still going on — the war of economic

sanctions and blockade.

In the six weeks war Iraq was bombed back into the 19th century, much of its economy destroyed and even the water supplies to major urban centres wrecked. The purpose of that war, we were told, was to

force the Iraqis to get out of Kuwait. So why have economic sanctions continued after Iraq is out of Kuwait?

Supposedly it is to do with outstanding details concerning the ceasefire. It is probably more to do with the American desire to continue to inflict damage on Iraq.

They continue to victimise the ordinary people of Iraq — themselves the worst victims of Saddam Hussein's regime, which the West spent 10 years building up before he got too big for the boots they had given him.

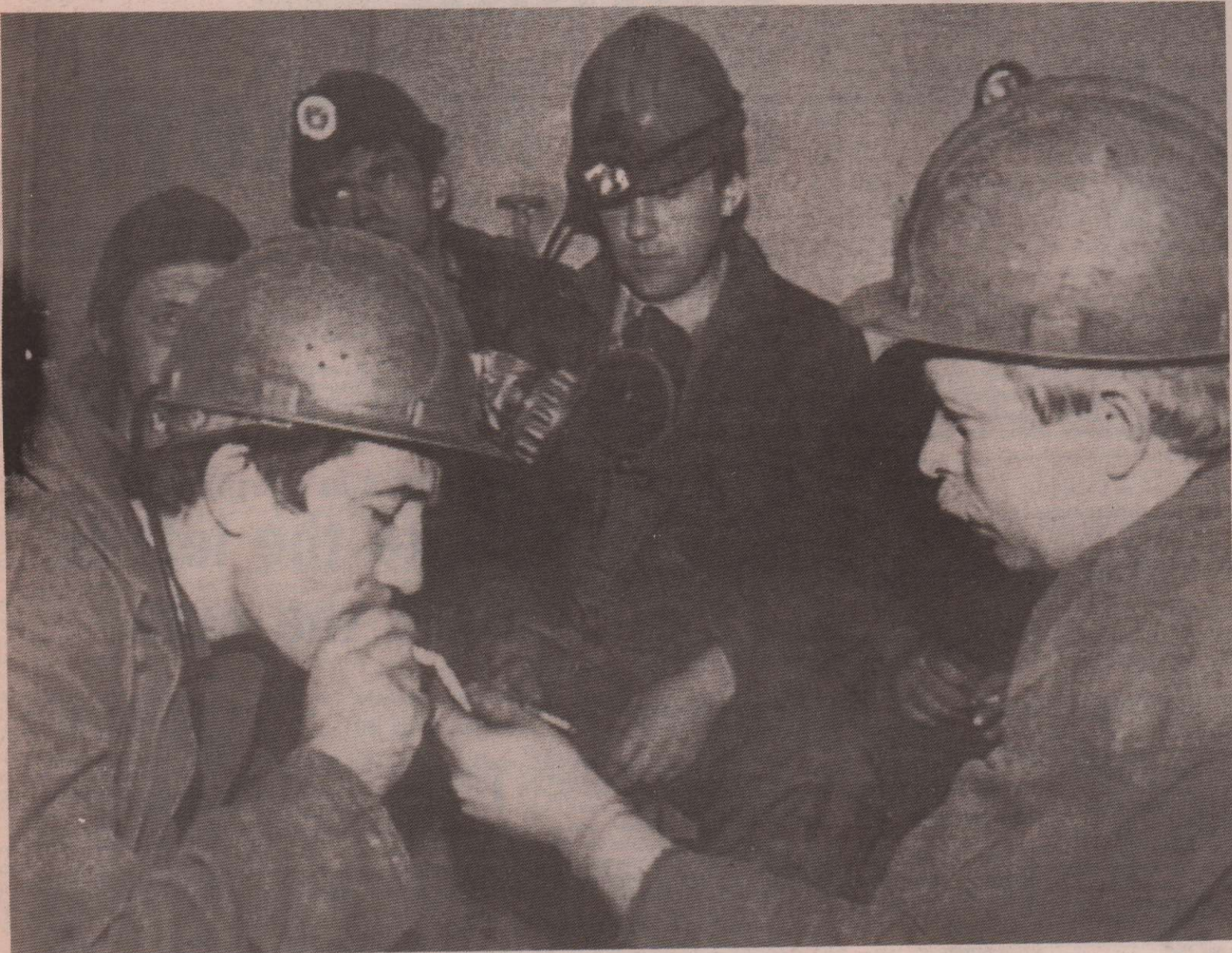
Last week the Americans decided to lift the ban on letting food into Iraq after a UN representative warned that incipient famine and cholera epidemics stalk Iraq.

Socialist workers in Britain have no time for the fascist butcher Saddam Hussein and his murdering regime. In defeat it remains what it was before the defeat.

Saddam is now waging a bloody war for survival against his own people in the South of the Iraqi state and against the Kurds in the North. The day that regime is consigned by the peoples of Iraq to the black museum of history will be a good day.

When they have finished off Saddam Hussein the Kurds and Arabs in the Iraqi state will owe no thanks to the USA, Britain or their allies, who first built up Saddam Hussein, then bombed Iraq into the pre-industrial age to punish him, and now pointlessly continue the economic war on Iraq.

All sanctions should stop now!



USSR: miners' strikes continue

Boris Kagarlitsky reports from Moscow

Up to 100,000 miners are currently involved in the wave of strike action in the Soviet pits. This type of action — short rolling strikes — means that the number of pits and workers involved is continually changing.

The various mining areas are coming forward with differing demands. Kuzbas is making political demands for the resignation of Gorbachev, while the Donbas region is striking for higher wages and better safety in the mines.

Karaganda is also somewhat separate with its own negotiations on economic questions with the republican government of Kazakstan.

There are rumours and reports that steel plants have had to shut because of coal shortages. This may be true.

But we can all remember the last Soviet miners' strikes when the government made the same claims. Eventually it was proved they had been lying.

The whole country is in a strange mood. Everyone is waiting for the huge price rises which have been announced for 2 April. No-one is exactly sure how badly these rises will affect standards of living.

Industrial militants do not expect strikes in response to these rises — but I would not rule it out.

Gorbachev has announced two measures to ease the concern about price rises.

The first measure will affect only those with state bank accounts. He is adding 40% onto each account. However, this money has been frozen until 1994. During these three years we expect inflation to have risen by at least 100%.

This is a measure which will only help the rich. Most people have no bank account or have very low sums in the account. I know a family with 5 roubles in their account. They will receive an extra 2 roubles (a very



Boris Kagarlitsky

small amount) for three years! Many people are very angry.

Secondly, Gorbachev has also said that enterprises must raise workers' wages. This extra money

will not come from state resources but from the enterprises' own wage funds.

This measure means that the unemployed will get nothing at all. And because the enterprises will get no extra funds they will have further financial troubles.

People have not been very interested in the referendum results. We have been saying: every big man has got his own referendum and every boss has got his own "yes" vote.

Gorbachev and Yeltsin are currently in stalemate. However, Yeltsin is usually very aggressive and will attack if he feels Gorbachev is getting weaker. The next move depends on the popular response to the 2 April price rises.

Funnily enough, all the Soviet papers have been printing the predictions of Nostradamus. It is said that he wrote that Gorbachev will fall in the coming year. We are waiting to see!

• See page 2 for a report of last week's Congress of the USSR's Socialist Party.

Rail ballot for industrial action

By a railworker

All RMT members on the Railways are to be balloted on industrial action in defence of the right to negotiate.

This follows BR's attempt to impose — through individual acceptances — the restructuring of the pay and conditions of 5,000 RMT members in the signal and telecoms departments.

This follows the criticisms of the pay and long hours of these workers in the Hidden report on the Clapham rail disasters. An RMT referendum ballot rejected the package last month despite BR saying there would be no more negotiations.

Allied with a rumoured 0% pay offer to the unions this April, the stage is set for a repeat of the one-day rail strikes of 1989. That resulted in a partial victory for the railworkers.

Subscribe to Socialist Organiser!

£25 for a year;
£13 for six months;
£5 for ten issues.

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

Name

Address

Overseas rates (for a year): Europe £30, US \$90, Australia A\$120. Giro account number: 367 9624.