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centre pages



For workers' liberty!



For socialist renewal!

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SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

**By Eric
Heffer MP**

The Kurds have a right to a state of their own. There should be a Kurdistan which goes across the existing borders of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the USSR.

The Kurds should have a state of their own, with their own government. They have been a persecuted nation for hundreds of years, and it is no solution to bottle them up in the various countries they have been divided into.

We have a responsibility as socialists to give them full backing in their fight for independence, whoever it's against.

If the Americans, and the British and the others, really were pursuing non-imperialist policies, then they would give the Kurds financial aid and even military aid.

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Tragedy of the Kurds

Why they let them die

"Havens" come too late for thousands

The lie machine



Have you noticed the subtle change of tone lately in the Tory growls of "h'yor, h'yors" picked up by the microphones in the House of Commons? Not so much the triumphant snarling of dogs in secure possession, more the edgy and desperate self-pitying shrillness of the dog eyeing a much bigger dog coming to take his bone away, of course.

Things are going rapidly downhill for the Tories! £90 a session for sado-masochistic "therapy" in the Chancellor's sub-let home? Only a few short months back Maggie kept them happy for nothing. Elizabeth and Philip won't be happy though at stories that they have had a liberal "continental" "go your own way discretely" marriage all these years.



Thousands marched last Saturday in Manchester for lesbian and gay liberation. Photo: Profile

14 days to go

Socialist Organiser supporters and sympathisers are continuing to canvass and sell tickets for the "Workers' Liberty '91" summer school.

There are now only two weeks left to sell discount tickets for the event — three days of socialist discussion and debate.

Meanwhile, regular sales of

Socialist Organiser initiated during the Gulf war are being continued and expanded.

Around 80 papers were sold at the Manchester Liberation '91 lesbian and gay demonstration last Saturday, 13th.

Southwark comrades began a pub sale in Walworth Road last Thursday. Other new sales have been started in Newcastle, Leeds and Merseyside.

£20 worth of literature was sold at Labour Party women's conference in Wolverhampton on 13-14 April, including 39 copies of Women's Fightback and 15 copies of the new pamphlet 'The Case for Socialist Feminism'.

At the National Union of Students women's conference in Newcastle 22 papers and 38 copies of 'The Case for Socialist Feminism' were sold. One young woman from a Further Education college decided to begin selling Socialist Organiser regularly.

Copies of 'The Case for Socialist Feminism' (£1 plus 32p post) can be ordered from Cate on 071 639 7965.

Workers' Liberty 91

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 (others) 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'

Don't forget poll tax prisoners!

Matt Lee, chair of the Birmingham Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions, was arrested at the Trafalgar Square demonstration against the poll tax on 31 March 1991.

On 25 March 1991 Matt was imprisoned for two and a half years for violent disorder.

The conviction was based solely on three minutes of edited video evidence, and falsified police statements.

On 26 March 1991 the Birmingham Poll Tax Prisoners Support Group was formed in response to the savage sentencing of Matt and other poll tax prisoners. As the Tories move towards scrapping the poll tax prisoners should not be forgotten.

We're asking socialists, and labour movement organisations, to send Matt messages of support and, if possible, free copies of their publications. Letters and messages of support should be sent to Matt Lee, MW 1054, HMP Wandsworth, Heathfield Road, Wandsworth, London SW18 3HS.

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.....

Time to fight the Tories

Labour's leaders pledge to create stable conditions for industry to build its markets in their launch on Tuesday 16th of "The Labour Way for the 1990s".

The statement, issued for the May local council elections, waters down even further the 1988 "Democratic Aims and Values" policy. 1988's commitment to a "more equal" society has now been replaced by one pledging "more opportunity".

Neil Kinnock, launching the statement, dishonestly posed the only alternatives as being either a command economy or letting the free market rip. True, Labour's vague alternative — some

middle way to manage capitalism — can hardly be taken seriously. What about socialism?

John Major is being savaged more by other Tories than by the Labour front bench. The Labour leaders are more interested in trying to clean up their image by attacking Labour councils in Lambeth and Liverpool, and hounding left wing opposition out of the party, than fighting the Tories.

Rather than purging the Labour Party and just talking about a June election, Neil Kinnock should be out campaigning for one. With the Tories attacking each other and incapable of producing their new local tax scheme, now is the best time for Labour to push for an election.

Witch-hunts in Sheffield and Southampton

Sheffield Labour Council leader Clive Betts has initiated a witch-hunt of local Labour Party member Nof Ttofias.

Nof has been attacked for selling Socialist Organiser. Nof Ttofias has recently transferred his Labour Party membership from Sheffield Central to Sheffield Brightside Labour Party.

At last week's meeting of his ward, Firth Park, he attempted to second a motion opposing the closure of local schools. At this point his membership was questioned.

In the subsequent debate the ward decided to request that the Constituency Secretary (also Firth Park ward's chair) write to the National Labour Party asking the NEC to investigate Nof's association with Socialist Organiser.

During the discussion Nof was repeatedly attacked by local councillors, but was not allowed to speak in his own defence. Nof was denied a vote at the meeting despite having confirmation from Walworth Road that his "full membership rights commence immediately".

Sheffield Labour Party Socialists have produced a leaflet defending Nof Ttofias and opposing any investigation. A lobby of the Constituency Party was organised.

The CLP has policy to oppose the banning of SO and witch-hunts. The CLP has not discussed the specific issue of Nof Ttofias yet.

This Wednesday, 17 April, Southampton Labour Party executive will recommend to its local management committee that SO supporter Alan Fraser be denied membership.

The reason given by the local party hierarchy is Alan's alleged "membership" of SO. It's clear this witch-hunt is a direct result of SO's and Alan's involvement in the effective local anti-poll tax campaign and the recent anti-war movement.

During his membership of the Labour Party Alan has a history of being a principled socialist. While Chair of the Basingstoke CLP he played a key role in turning the local party out to working class struggles, namely rent strikes, NHS support work, as well as helping to establish a Labour Party workplace branch at Basingstoke Post Office.

Since moving to Southampton Alan has continued his activity, building support during the ambulance dispute and was editor of the fortnightly strike support bulletin.

Bush, Major and the Kurds

From page 1

The fact is that the Americans and the British and the rest of the imperialists are not concerned with the freedom of the Kurds.

They have made that absolutely clear. That is why they look the other way. That is why they encouraged the Kurds to take action and then ducked for cover.

What they are concerned with is the imperialist interests of the big powers, and what is behind it all is still oil. That is oil in Iraqi Kurdistan on quite a large scale.

The big powers are concerned with maintaining secure oil supplies, and if that means that there should be no break-up of Iraq — it should be a unified state, even under a dictator like Saddam Hussein — then they

are perfectly happy to support that outcome, hoping that later there can be a less radical government and a removal of Saddam.

Their policy over Kurdistan is a continuation of previous policy in many parts of the world. What did they do over Cyprus? What did they do over East Timor?

Everywhere they have a hypocritical policy. The fact that Saddam's Iraq was a mini-superpower, with certain imperialist aims in the region, doesn't justify the Americans.

They have been masking their real policies with pretences. They have certainly taken in the Labour leadership. But it is wrong. Socialists must not fall into that trap.

All the imperialist pretences and hypocrisies are now exposed for what they always were.



Soviet miners demonstrate. Workers in Eastern Europe, emerging from Stalinism, are groping for ideas

"This is the time that tries men's souls", wrote Tom Paine at the lowest point in the fortunes of the revolutionary army during the American War of Independence in the late 18th century.

It seemed that the superior power and wealth of the British oligarchy were unbeatable. Its redcoat army was rampaging through the territory of the 13 rebellious states which had declared their independence from Britain. It would, so it seemed, inexorably crush the rebels.

But the Americans held on, fought back, and, eventually, they won.

At the final surrender of the British Army to the victorious Americans at Yorktown, the British Army band chose to play an appropriate tune, "The World Turned Upside Down". That is what it was.

In our time the souls and minds of socialist men and women are being tried. The world of conventional "socialism" has been turned upside down and inside out.

Generations of socialists have been repelled by the horrors of capitalism — its exploitation and squalor in the metropolitan countries, its murderous cannibalism in the Third World, its ineradicable drive to reduce all life to pounds, dollars and cents.

For decades most of those who rebelled took as their model of an alternative to capitalism the Stalinist states.

Many even of those socialists who aimed only to rub the rough edges off capitalism, to reform it, were influenced by Stalinist models.

Most of those — Trotskyists — who bitterly criticised the Stalinist system and advocated working-class revolution there still believed that in the Stalinist states the

"The time that tries our souls"

"planned" collectivist foundations of socialism had been laid. History had gone further ahead in those Stalinist societies. They were "post-capitalist".

Even some of those who insisted that they were "state-capitalist" — notably Tony Cliff of the SWP — nevertheless believed that the Stalinist state-monopoly economies represented the furthest advance of capitalism. In this view, too, Stalinism was on the high road of history — if not "post-capitalist", then certainly "ultra-capitalist".

Now it has been shown beyond serious dispute by the events in the USSR and Eastern Europe that the Stalinist social formations were historic cul-de-sacs — not the highways but enormously wasteful lost paths and byways of historic development.

Millions who believed themselves to live in a partially socialist world now wake up to the truth that a socialist world remains entirely to be won.

Yet, from the point of view of Marx's ideas, in terms of the real tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, all this is *old* truth.

There was never good Marxist reason to believe that the Eastern Bloc represented either progress or socialism.

Lenin and Trotsky never believed that socialism could come from isolated, backward, stultified societies, developing in the wake of the advanced capitalist world under the whip, the club and the gun of merciless slavedriving dictators. They held to the basic idea of Marxists that socialism comes out of and after advanced capitalism, which paves the way for it, creating the working class and preparing it — by way of the class struggle — to become the ruling class.

Socialism, Lenin and Trotsky knew and said, was impossible in the USSR. What was possible was that the workers could take power there, and act as international pioneers for revolution in the

advanced capitalist countries which were ripe for socialism.

The Russian workers took power, and fought off capitalist invasion and sabotage to hold it. The workers in France, Italy and Germany were defeated. The workers' republic was isolated. The Stalinist bureaucracy emerged around the state machine and, through a very bloody counter-revolution, displaced the working class as rulers.

"In fact the ground is being cleared for the redevelopment of a real socialist movement based on the genuine ideas of Marx (and of Lenin and Trotsky too)"

Everywhere the Russian Stalinists and those, in China and elsewhere, who followed their example, created slave states for the workers and farmers. That those societies represented workers' power, or socialism, or even real progress, was always an illusion. Now it is gone.

Now international capitalism celebrates its triumph. And American capitalism has celebrated the freedom it gained from the collapse of the pretensions of its imperialist competitor, the USSR, by bombing Iraq back into the 19th century.

It is good that the poisonous illusions have gone or are going.

It is good for socialists — it is immense progress! — that those who rebel against capitalism should be forced to move in their minds from a world of delusions and pretences to the real world.

Socialism has lost nothing real. We have gained the beginning of emancipation from the crippling myths and lies which for decades did as much as the force and strength of capitalism ever did to derail the socialist movement.

In fact the ground is being cleared for the redevelopment of a real socialist movement based on the genuine ideas of Marx (and of Lenin and Trotsky too).

That does not make the collapse of the old "socialism" held to by so many any the less painful and disorienting now. The pain and disorientation is made all the more deep because the outright reformist currents of socialism in countries like Britain have also collapsed.

Neil Kinnock's Labour Party today does not even pretend to pay lip service to the goal of seriously reforming capitalism. The idea of replacing capitalism with something better is proscribable heresy in the Labour Party today. It is the same with similar movements elsewhere.

There is a common root to the collapse and crisis of both the Stalinist and reformist wings of socialism: the power of the bourgeoisie.

On a world scale, they kept the advanced areas of the world economy and have successfully "sat out" the Stalinist revolutions. In countries like Britain, even when the working class forced big reforms on them, they kept both the commanding heights of the economy and the power of the state machine (permanent civil service hierarchy, army, police, etc.) They have used them to take back reforms; Mrs Thatcher used the state power — the semi-militarised police — deployed to beat down miners during their 1984-5 strike, for example — to defeat the labour movement.

But there was never any good reason, either, to believe that the reformists had secured permanent reforms, or the world of steady working-class progress within

capitalism which some of them claimed to have won. The Marxists knew, and said, differently.

The long dominance of reformist and Stalinist socialism has led the working class to a series of great defeats and missed chances. Structural change in the working class itself has shaken up the traditional labour movement. In turn those changes have led superficial and ignorant people to claim that the working class itself is disappearing.

Capitalism cannot exist without a working class to exploit! The working class has undergone vast structural change time and again in its history: the workers who built history's first mass working-class movement, the British Chartists of the 1830s and '40s, were handloom weavers, cotton spinners, and similar people. Their descendants moved to different occupations; few of them changed their class position of being wage-labourers,

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"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."
Karl Marx

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Rank-and-file link-ups needed

The unions in



Hambo's final flex

The Sun newspaper likes the EETPU. And with good reason: it was the scabbing and treachery of the EETPU leaders that ensured the success of Rupert Murdoch's union-busting operation against the printers during the move to Fortress Wapping. For a while, EETPU general secretary Eric Hammond became a Sun hero with his own nickname, 'Hambo' (geddit?).

So what's this? A Sun scare-story about nasty, greedy unions threatening to eat babies and bring the nation to its knees. Nothing new about that, of course. Except that this time the chief culprit is the "previously moderate" EETPU electricians, where Eric Hammond is preparing to retire as leader.

Perhaps the Sun was trying to suggest that the imminent retirement of good old Hambo is the reason for the EETPU's terrifying change of character. If so, they couldn't be more wrong. Under Eric Hammond, the electricians regularly threatened industrial action over the annual power industry pay claim. Usually they didn't have to deliver (the threat was usually sufficient to get a satisfactory result). But they were always deadly serious about it.

The reason is simple — too simple, perhaps, for the Sun and a good few people on the left, to grasp — the power workers are the EETPU's ace in the hole. Without them the union would be virtually impotent and all the no-strike deals and single union arrangements in the world wouldn't persuade anyone (least of all potential members) to take the EETPU seriously. Being seen to flex muscle and deliver the goods is more important for a hardened, right-wing exponent of "business unionism" than it is for your run-of-the-mill TUC New Realist.

Thus it is that the EETPU has once again thrown down the gauntlet in pursuit of a "substantial" pay claim in the power industry. Members of the EETPU and the four other unions involved (GMB, TGWU, AEU and UCATT) have voted by 64% to 36% for all-out strike action if the employers don't increase their 8% offer before midnight on 24 April.

And no-one campaigned harder for a strike vote than Bro. Hammond and the "scab" EETPU. The Sun can't understand it and neither can all those left-wingers who campaigned hard to get the electricians expelled from the TUC and who still (occasionally) call for the union to be "ostracised" from joint action with TUC affiliates...

Many of the same people who argued for the expulsion of the EETPU also argued very strongly against the idea of a national minimum wage. I won't, here, go into the details of their case against the minimum wage as it is very difficult to do full justice to a very stupid line of argument.

Enough to say that last week the TUC General Council threw its weight behind a proposal for public sector workers and major private-sector employees to have their wage settlements fixed on the basis of a "national assessment" at the start of every year. This is, to all intents and purposes, the scheme put forward last year by John Edmonds of the GMB and Alan Tuffin of the UCW, for a new "Social Contract".

The Independent on Sunday's City correspondent, Robert Preston, describes the plan as "a more creditable plan to provide a permanent cure to the particularly British economic illness than anything offered by the political parties or the CBI". Preston goes on to berate the Labour Party for clinging to the idea of a "national minimum wage, which would be inflationary".

It looks like the next big left vs right fight at the TUC will be between supporters of the Edmonds/Tuffin plan and supporters of a national minimum wage. There can be no doubting which side the left will be on — but will all those "left" opponents of the minimum wage now admit that they were wrong?

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

Renate Hurlgen of the IKG (Initiative of Critical Trade Unionists) in Eastern Berlin, gives a sober assessment of the trade union movement in East Germany in this interview with Angela Klein, translated from the Cologne newspaper *Sozialistische Zeitung*. Instead of new trade unions emerging there, the hulk of the old government-run unions (the FDGB) has been taken over by the West German-based unions.

I should perhaps mention that I draw my information from weekly or twice-weekly meetings with up to 60 colleagues from East and West.

Over a period of many weeks a certain picture emerges, but no detailed empirical proof of what I'll say.

The first activities here by the Western trade unions, strikes in refuse collection, etc., were received with great enthusiasm: "The Western unions know how to do this sort of thing". The mood did not last, however.

In the Berlin district committee of the DGB I now hear worried voices: the members in the East are running away, they are leaving or not joining.

There are not only political reasons for this development; the trade unions also are not getting to grips with it organisationally. One example: in the Charité (a big hospital in East Berlin) a large group of workers wanted to join, six months ago. The union was not in a position to collect membership contributions other than standing order through the bank. The workers, however, still did not have bank accounts.

The union made such a bureaucratic fuss, and despite that found no proper way to collect the contributions, that the 50 or 60 people involved said: thanks very much, we won't join then.

There are also justified expressions of dissatisfaction because the Western unions obviously have no programme at all for the unemployed. My impression is that it is mostly workers on short time who are leaving the unions.

There is a figure given for the number of members from the FDGB [the old East German state-run unions] which have come over to the new unions — 60 per cent. That is, however, a few weeks old, and in the district committee I've been told that no-one has an overview.

There is a second indication. The unions need a certain income from the membership to be able to operate. Because wages are so low here, not enough comes in. Even the 60 per cent is not

enough to keep the union apparatus in the East going. I start from the assumption, however, that the 60 per cent figure is not accurate.

The colleagues in the workplaces report unanimously that the unions, to their astonishment, have put more initiatives into the building of works council structures than into shop stewards structures. With us, of course, the system used to be different; the union with its workplace union leaderships was built up in close relation with the enterprise. That is no longer the case. The workforce, however is not informed about the new structure.

It cannot all be blamed on the bureaucracies. It also goes together with a widespread trade union weariness, at least as regards people being ready to take on functions.

There are just about people for the works council, because it brings a certain job protection which trade union functions do not. Relating to the trade unions as service organisations, which exists in the West too, is much more evident here.

After the FDGB congress at the end of January last year it was obvious to everyone that it was no longer viable. The DGB [German TUC] used the neat formulation, with raised eyebrows: "The FDGB no longer corresponds to our criteria".

So the single trade unions [ie. Western unions extending to the East, forming single West-and-East organisations] got going. They went to the former functionaries, the reform-minded ones of course. Those were then properly schooled in the direction of works council activity.

I know umpteen people from our former work as "Initiative for independent trade unions" who previously had tried to build groups out-



Harry Tisch, the former leader of the FDGB. Tisch's conspicuous spending of union funds on his own lifestyle symbolised the corruption of the state-run union federation

side the FDGB — many have gone into the works councils. That was apparently true across the board.

To be sure, most of the old functionaries have been taken over by IG Chemie [the Western-based chemical workers' union]. The results in the workplaces vary. It depends on the personal integrity of such functionaries.

What I heard about it is filtered through the fact that the people who come to us and give us information are critically engaged. They are, of course, disappointed, and say: the works councils do what the workplace union leaderships [of the old state unions] did before, and they are more oriented to the interests of the management than to those of the workforce.

But since it is a selection of people who come to us, I'm not sure how widespread this opinion is.

A mixture has developed in the apparatus. The setting-up of the higher structures is not yet complete. They still lack people for it.

The cleverest of the bureaucrats already have the legitimate feeling that using only the Westerners won't

work, they lack the overview; they still need a few with "East-feeling".

To generalise, you can say: most work is put into the development of administration and of works councils, while the workforce and local levels of unions are still non-existent.

That, of course, also shows that the unions do not rest on a specially powerful rank and file, but on a rank and file which is resigned to things coming from above.

I don't accept that we've had more success than the left in the West. I'd like to say something about this. It's not a matter of an abstract principle, and a lamentation about the fact that the rank and file is taken into account too little.

I believe that if the Western unions, with their classical view of themselves, do not abandon their anxiety about rank and file activity, then they will fall flat on their faces.

Take the silly business I mentioned earlier about the union contributions. Their organisational structure does not even function in a society where, for example, bank standing orders are unknown. That is beginning.

And it is beginning in an industrial situation where it is more a matter of sackings than of a distribution of the enterprise's profits: such structures simply don't get a grip any more.

[The interviewer said: "However, the strikes, demonstrations, perhaps also workplace occupations, in the last period have been led by the unions..."]

I'm not quite sure about the workplace occupations. There are various indications that these activities have partly bypassed the unions.

For example, the works councils marching to the Treuhand [the government agency for privatising the East German economy] was



The homeless of Leipzig

East Germany



East German workers' protest march in Rostock

not agreed with the unions. That shows, of course, the helplessness of the trade unions, but also that dissatisfaction reigns and that a situation can develop which will slip out of the hands of the trade union. People address themselves directly to the authorities, in whatever way.

I know of no special proposals from the trade union side for the East. Over the last four weeks the IKG has had discussions in Berlin about wages policy in this situation.

In this connection we have collated what there is in the way of proposals: Ingrid Kurz-Scherf, Ulrich Fink, the Three-Funds-Model worked out by a scientific institute — these are all models, which no Easterner had any part in.

They are all quite honourable — solidaristic models, sacrificial models, saying that the Westerners should give up between one and three per cent of their wage rises for the Easterners — but they are not proposals from an Eastern point of view.

I know of no programme from an Eastern point of view, other than in the unemployed federation. But that is not openly discussed at all.

In my opinion the funds models are unrealistic; and, besides, I see in the models proposing wage sacrifices a presumption that we cannot accept.

As for the IKG, what holds

us together are some fundamental ideas rather than a worked-out platform. We'll be able to develop such a platform at best in one or two years' time.

At the beginning there was an Initiative for Independent Trade Unions (IUG) which was left in mid-air by the collapse of the FDGB and the arrival of the DGB. The rank and file groups dissolved, and there was no longer even the utopia of an independent trade union movement.

"We are not an alternative organisation, but we provide a common framework for joint meetings, and information about what is going on."

A proper movement did not come out of it; but, for a short time, about 8 to 12 weeks, we had certainly many more adherents and sympathisers than the [broad anti-Stalinist] citizens' movement. There were about 100 to 150 sympathisers in Berlin, each of whom had a group behind them, mostly between 5 and 150 people.

When the DGB came in, the IUG dissolved. Then we

worked on criticism of the DGB for a year. In October we set up an office in Berlin, which sees itself as an umbrella for initiatives involved in critical trade union work. We are not an alternative organisation, but we provide a common framework for joint meetings, and information about what is going on.

The common basic idea is that we do not proceed on the basis of "social partnership". We want to be a bit of a thorn in the side of the trade unions. We also have people who are not in a union. All branches of industry are represented. There are, unfortunately, more Westerners than Easterners involved.

We are just beginning work across Germany: the meeting in Halle with the VSP and the

United Left opened up possibilities.

The strongest group in the framework of the Initiative is the Alliance of Critical Trade Unionists, which is a forum for East-West collaboration of trade unionists and works councils at the Berlin level.

Interestingly, the unions have reacted to the Alliance with disproportionate sharpness, although it has done nothing at all yet. The IG Metall [metalworkers' union] leaders in Berlin have just said it is a splitting organisation. That is, of course, nonsense, but the threat of expulsion is already on the agenda.

As for our perspectives, we want to work on wages policy and develop a sort of catalogue of demands which we will bring into the unions.



Dresden, one of the industrial centres of East Germany: only deprivation and despair

Bush's other war

By Robin Templeton

Washington DC, 8 April. In the aftermath of the Gulf war, two contradictory images were broadcast pervasively here: the exaggerated triumph of US soldiers coming home and the videotaped brutalisation of Rodney King by the Los Angeles police force (LAPD).

Police brutality is rampant in the US, but seldom reported. On March 3, however, the brutalisation of unemployed construction worker Rodney King by white members of the LAPD was home-videotaped and broadcast nationwide.

The incident left King with optic nerve damage and broken limbs and provided the American left with a graphic illustration of increased state violence and repression.

Protesters are now calling for the resignation of LAPD police chief Daryl Gates and are linking police brutality at home to US militarism abroad.

As the US economy shrinks, unemployment and educational costs are increasing. In the US, there are more African American men in prison than there are enrolled in higher education. While African Americans are 13% of the general population, they are only 8.3% of the college student population. But they are over 30% of the US army!

According to the African American Coalition to Stop US Intervention in the Middle East, the homicide rate for African Americans in the military is 9 per 100,000 — the homicide rate for African American civilians in the same age group is 100 per 100,000!

As political prisoner — currently on death row — Mumia Abu-Jamal puts it: "The only homes being built for African Americans are jails and military bunkers." A real, non-racist war on crime would involve prosecuting white collar crime, which is 80% of all US crime. The US Justice Department inflicts capital punishment only on those who have no capital. Equality before the law does not in fact exist here, and never has existed.

On 6 March, three days after the beating of King, Bush referred to his longtime campaign supporter the Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates as "an all-American hero". This is the same Gates who has instituted a repressive regime in the Los Angeles inner city, which includes the police "choke hold" and the electric stun gun used against King.

During the 1980s, 15 people were killed in Los Angeles while in police "choke holds". Twelve of these people were black. Gates once defended the controversial choke hold saying that blacks were more likely than "normal" people to die from it.

Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee last September, Gates said that drug users "ought to be taken out and shot". When later questioned about this comment, Gates said he was not being facetious. Gates added that "we're in a war" and said that even casual drug use "is treason".

Resistance to racist police brutality is now being organised in the US and such resistance has a rich history, especially among African Americans.

Hundreds have demonstrated at the LAPD's office complex every Saturday since the King beating took place. They demand that Gates should resign and that the police who beat King be charged with attempted murder, instead of assault only.

A broad and diverse coalition of organisations has assembled to express outrage at continued police brutality. "Demonstrators have brought together former Black Panthers with anti-abortion forces", noted one Los Angeles activist.

The *Washington Post* claims that the King beating "has touched off a federal investigation of police violence nationwide." But just as US militarism expands and ravages the Third World, police violence goes unchecked and unabated in Los Angeles and in communities across the country. Seeing this repression in conjunction with the government/media campaign of military glorification, Vermont's Independent/Socialist congressman Bernie Sanders said "There's more than a whiff of fascism".

The US anti-war movement is now faced with the challenge of building strategic opposition to the government-sanctioned aggression at home and abroad. The King incident made obvious what poor and black victims of police brutality experience daily: there is a war at home.

Documenting, exposing and challenging police brutality on American streets contributes to the global struggle against US imperialism. A Central American youth living in Los Angeles said this of the LAPD protests: "I relate [Rodney] King's name to Martin Luther King. We're getting freedom from some kind of slavery."

GRAFFITI



What enrages Hattersley... (Photo: John Harris)

The case of Audrey Wise's badge

GRAFFITI

If Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley manage to lose the forthcoming General Election for Labour despite all the Tories' fiascos, then they have got themselves an alibi in advance: Audrey Wise's badge.

Last month, according to *Tribune*, Hattersley sent Audrey Wise MP a letter full of spluttering rage: "Party members...claimed that you and the people with you [at a meeting in her Preston constituency] were wearing badges critical of the policy on the Gulf war. This will undoubtedly be raised during the NEC discussion of the result [in the Ribble Valley by-election]".

Tribune also reports Audrey Wise's response: "It is not even true that I was wearing a badge! The one other person who was with me was my daughter who drove me, and she may well have worn a badge saying 'Stop the War'."

"If that is to be regarded as a factor in the Ribble Valley result, I think the search for scapegoats must be reaching paranoia."

We now know that George Bush would rather see Saddam Hussein still in place, massacring the peoples of Iraq, than have the peoples take their future into their own hands.

He would prefer a more pliant Iraqi general in place of Saddam, but better Saddam than revolution.

And, to judge from a report in the *Independent* last week, at least one profession will be lining up behind Bush.

"Dictators with imperial ambitions," reports Matthew Bray, "tend to build on a massive scale. No wonder architects, engineers and building contractors tend to find them irresistible..."

Bray quotes Ron Marsh of Ove Arup and Partners as looking forward to more work in Iraq (as long as it has a suitable "dictator with imperial ambitions", of course). His firm worked on the Baghdad Metro, and developments in Khulafa Street, Haifa Street and the 'Martyrs' monument in the early '80s.

Also in the early '80s, Robert Venturi, architect of the new National Gallery extension and one of the world's highest-paid traders in "post-modern" kitsch, did a design for a huge new state mosque commissioned by Saddam. The design is bitterly criticised in a new book on art in totalitarian Iraq by Samir al-Khalil, author of *The Republic of Fear*.

By then, however, even the commercial servility of people like Venturi was not enough for Saddam: he was coming to rely only on Iraqi architects who could be controlled more completely, for such projects as his monument celebrating "victory" in the war against

Iran, which is a huge arch made by two arms holding swords. The arms are giant replicas of Saddam's own limbs.

35 per cent of all mothers in the USA get no ante-natal care at all.

60 per cent get no more than three check-ups. In Britain, even in the present state of the Health Service, all mothers-to-be get several check-ups - fortnightly at least in the later stages of pregnancy - and probably ante-natal classes too, free.

The contrast is equally bleak in post-natal care. A mother in Britain has a community midwife visiting daily and access to baby clinics - free. A mother in the US gets nothing unless she pays for it.

The results are seen by infant mortality figures in US cities - much higher than in Western Europe, despite the US's much higher overall spending on health care - and, no doubt, in masses of suffering which comes short of showing up in mortality figures.

I got all these figures from a talk at University College Hospital last week. The lecturer, a senior doctor there, emphasised the links between Tory government philosophy, the cuts already under way in Britain, and the full-scale market economics in health care in the US. Interestingly, it was not a political lecture. The comment on market economics were asides - extensive asides - in the hospital's standard lecture for expectant parents. Not one of the parents-to-be in the audience said a word in the question period to defend Tory philosophy.

John Major may hope he has rid himself of one political liability with the poll tax. He has another, certainly still vigorous, in Tory policy on the Health Service.

The news that London Zoo may close has set many people - including Roy Hattersley in the *Guardian* - philosophising on the idea that zoos are undesirable anyway, and others apparently orchestrating a press campaign on the theme that the closure threat is just blackmail on the government by an incompetent zoo management.

The zoo bosses may well be incompetent. According to the *Independent on Sunday* they have paid out millions to a consulting company in which Michael Heseltine had an interest, supposedly to improve their "marketing", and they have seen nothing for their money. A case for some workers' control, I think.

But there is a class issue involved if the zoo closes. Children whose parents can afford to take them to safari parks will not lose out much. Children of poorer parents who don't have cars will. And seeing animals in wildlife shows on TV is no substitute for seeing them in the flesh.

I'd rather keep the chance for working-class London children to see a giraffe.

Andrew Neil goes to European Court of Human Rights

Good luck, Andrew Neil!

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

Like me, you have probably almost forgotten about the Peter Wright *Spycatcher* affair. A shambling old Australian with a big hat was very upset about being deprived of his pension from MI5 and decided to write a book about the dirty deeds of the cloak-and-dagger brigade.

Wright's revelations included the claim that Maurice Oldfield, the former head of MI5, had been a Russian agent. More interestingly, from our point of view, were his accounts of plots to discredit Harold Wilson and plans for military coups against the Wilson government.

When the *Guardian* and the *Observer* attempted to publish extracts from Wright's book in June 1986, the government immediately sent the Attorney General out to get "temporary" injunctions banning publication. In July 1987, co-inciding with the book's publication in America, the *Sunday Times* and the *Independent* both

published extracts.

The two papers were promptly hauled up before the Law Lords who decided (by a 3-2 majority) that further publication would "possibly" be in contempt of court because the litigation against the *Guardian* and *Observer* had still not been settled.

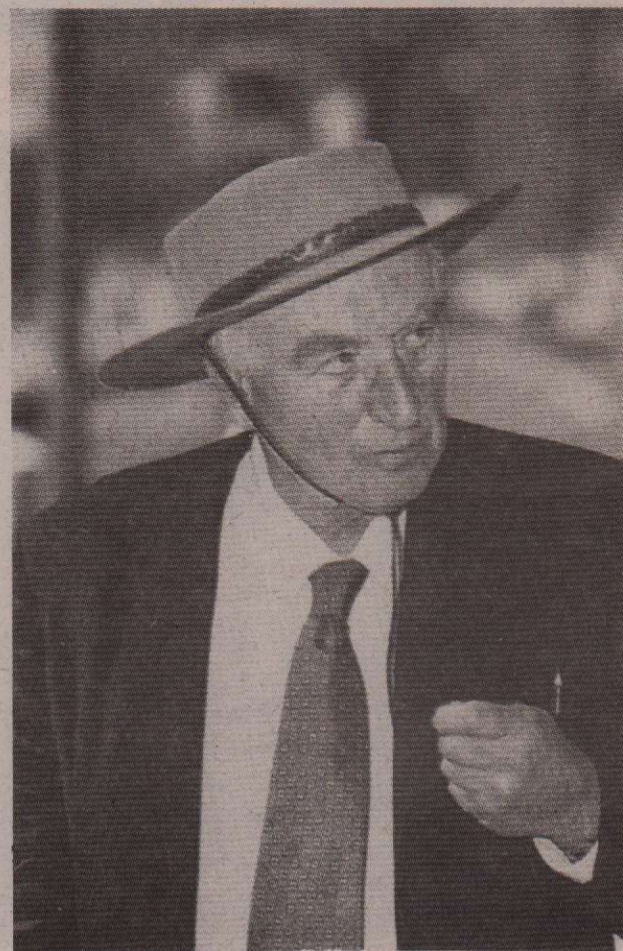
It amounted to a "holding" injunction, justified (in the words of the Law Lords) on grounds of the "balance of convenience". To most people it looked more like a desperate attempt by the state to suppress embarrassing information. An element of farce was provided by the fact that the book was freely available in America and enterprising Arthur Daley-types were selling it fairly openly in Britain.

Andrew Neil and Andreas Whittam-Smith huffed and puffed about "freedom of the press" but neither the *ST* nor the *Independent* published any more extracts.

Last week the Law Lords ruled that the *Sunday Times* and its editor were guilty of contempt in 1987. In effect, this means that all media organisations can be silenced by an injunction against just one paper. "Public interest" considerations were dismissed.

An identical decision by the Court of Appeal in 1987 banned all media coverage of a report into the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad by Walsall Council, after the Police Authority obtained an injunction against the Council.

The British press is not



Peter Wright made the headlines in 1986 when his book *Spycatcher* was banned

much loved by us on the left. "Radical" Labour MPs can always be found to support any proposed legislation aimed at curbing various "excesses", "invasion of privacy", "bias", etc, etc.

The grievances are real enough. But the *Spycatcher* affair and this latest,

outrageous, ruling should alert us to the need to defend "freedom of the press" even when that principle's champion takes the unattractive form of Mr Andrew Neil. I for one wish him well when he takes the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Stop this racist abuse!

RACE AND CLASS



By Dion D'Silva

There are many different forms of racial incitement. One of the commonest in Britain now is agitation against alleged black privilege.

The tabloids incite and stir up white workers against any and every effort to compensate black people for their disadvantages and help them to overcome their special oppression in our society.

White workers who feel the pressures, shortages and uncertainties of capitalism are told to blame it on blacks and those who "mollycoddle" them, especially "loony left" councils.

Last Saturday the *Star*, whose editor Brian Hitchens habitually deploys the rich

emotional and intellectual equipment of a brain-damaged National Front thug when commenting on public affairs, gave up page one to a blatant piece of racial incitement of this kind.

Bill Galbraith, the formerly prominent Cheltenham Tory who called John Taylor, the black man seeking the Tory candidacy for Cheltenham, a "bloody nigger" is being prosecuted.

The *Star* contrasts this with the decision of the Director of Public Prosecution not to bring to trial Omar Mohammed, a Muslim who allegedly called for John Major to be killed.

The headline says "Two faced", and "Rent-a-gob" Tory MP Geoffrey Dickens is given space to say that

Galbraith shouldn't be prosecuted and Mohammed should.

Not to be outdone, the *Sun* caught up with Hitchens on Monday with an editorial on the same subject.

But hold on a minute! Something is very wrong here.

Galbraith's comment was outright racist abuse, and incitement to racial discrimination. Mohammed commented as a Muslim fundamentalist attacking Major because of Britain's role in the war, not as a black man on a white man.

"Galbraith's comment was outright racist abuse and incitement to racial discrimination."



The tabloids' stirring up of racial hatred leads to racist attacks

These are not comparable issues.

The *Star* and the *Sun* comments ignore everything else and focus on colour and ethnicity.

It is a piece of blatant racial incitement: "the blacks are getting away with it again."

If the race relations legislation were used properly and seriously, then not only would "bloody nigger" Galbraith be brought to court - so would the editors of the *Star* and *Sun*.



Social crisis: LA cops show their reputation for beating people up

Stagnation and crisis

Last part of Tony Brown's series on the decline of the US

In 1982 the industrialised nations entered their second generalised recession in less than a decade.

Reagan sought to drag the US out of recession by increasing spending and by overseeing a rapid expansion in the availability of credit. Between 1983 and 1987 American business experienced a mini-boom.

Up to the stockmarket crash of 1987 the easing of central controls and regulations on financial institutions saw credit spiral out of control and resulted in numerous and some spectacular crashes. The combined unpaid or written off debt of these companies would have been unthinkable even ten years ago.

What eventually happened in October '87 was that foreign investors panicked that the size and rate of the US trade and budget deficits and the inflated value of the dollar would lead to its collapse. Once the first signs of panic appeared there was a snowball of selling, and the result was the biggest stockmarket collapse since September 1929.

Prosecutions of Ivan Boesky, Dennis Levine and the junk bond pioneer Michael Milken exposed the immorality, greed and predatory nature of Reagan's entrepreneurs. The number of bank failures since 1987 has topped 200 each year, the highest rate since 1929.

But nothing compares to the collapse of the Savings and Loans institutions (S&Ls).

Reagan abolished the controls on these mostly small institutions in 1982. Previously they had lent money to people to buy houses. But the government continued to guarantee depositors their savings, thereby giving managers carte blanche to invest in whatever speculative project they wanted.

For their troubles the managers paid themselves huge salaries and bonuses — in some cases tens of millions of dollars per year.

In the new de-regulated environment no-one had any idea of the magnitude of the crash. Now it's a financial disaster of unprecedented magnitude. The American people are going to have to pay out \$500 billion or more to bail out the mess.

To get one perspective — the total cost of the Vietnam War, including veterans' benefits, stands at \$172 billion. That is one third the

amount of the S&L losses.

The S&L bill was one of the major factors threatening the US with recession before the Gulf. Add in the cost of the war, and the total bill for the American people is awesome. Bush and the Congress won't have the nerve to tax Americans to pay for it in the short term. Instead they will try to borrow more, most probably from the Japanese.

But the willingness of the Japanese to provide these funds is diminishing. So America faces economic trouble. It already has a growing "third world" within its own borders.

37 million, or one third of wage-earners, have no social insurance. The last Census report on poverty reported 34.4 million living below the official poverty line; that is, one in seven — a higher figure than in 1965.

"Rivalry between Europe, Japan and the US goes back some time, at least to the oil crisis in the early '70s. But can the US be replaced by Germany or Japan?"

The standard of living for the poorest 20% of the population — 40 million — fell by 9% in the last decade. In 1987 real wages were 14% less than 1973 and slightly less than in 1962. Average hourly wages have gone down from \$9.86 an hour to \$9.66 an hour.

Workers' organisational strength has dropped to the point where only 17% are unionised, and in the fastest growing sectors and regions there is often no union at all.

For the first time in decades the gap between life expectancy between black and white is growing. Life expectancy of a black is 69 years and a white is 75 years.

Gang related killings in Los Angeles in 1987-88 averaged more than one per day. More than 50,000 are homeless each night, and in New York it's worse.

Non-white infant mortality is approaching Third World levels. Despite unbroken regional growth throughout the 1980s, unemployment

among black youth in LA is 45%. 40% of all children in LA either live below or hover slightly above the poverty line.

The LA Unified School District, America's second largest with 590,000 students has a drop-out rate of 30-50% in its central high schools. In south central LA there are more crack houses than liquor stores.

A recent television documentary on Chicago's south side showed one high school of 1,000 kids which had 300 pregnancies a year. One public hospital reported 1,000 gunshot casualties in a year.

In the countryside there are no less far-reaching problems. In Iowa for instance, in the heart of the mid-west farm belt, tens of thousands have been driven from their farms. It's estimated that one half of all farms in Iowa will go under this decade.

What's happening is a return to a sort of feudal capitalism. Farmers default on loans, banks foreclose, the homesteads are bulldozed and amalgamated with neighbouring farms. Some families remain to work for the new corporate owners, others move to the agri-factories, such as poultry farms and packing plants or sell fast food.

The risks of global economic crisis have been accumulating since the Wall Street crash in October 1987. Its effects are still working their way through the system.

The brawl with Japan and Germany over paying for the Gulf war will only have worsened the atmosphere among those the US needs to fund its deteriorating economy.

If it does push the US over the brink into recession then the world economy will follow. Not only the third world inside the US, but those third world manufacturing countries that rely so heavily on the US as a market for their goods, will suffer.

Rivalry between Europe, Japan and the US goes back some time, at least to the oil crisis in the early 1970s. But can the US be replaced by Germany or Japan?

It's not likely. West Germany has a population of 60 million (or 75 million if you add East Germany). That cannot replace the market of 240 million in the US. Germany cannot import the same volume of goods as the US does from Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan or Mexico.

Japan's huge trade surpluses are largely the result of low import levels.

So the world is moving not

towards a stable US-dominated "new order" but an unstable, increasingly multi-polar, world.

Seventy five years ago internationalism was a watchword of the workers' movement. While the capitalists prepared to launch world war, everywhere socialists argued for working class solidarity across borders.

Now the labour movement is dominated by futile attempts to reintroduce national solutions to an integrated world economy. Never has the need to establish real links between working class struggles been so important.

Each new recession now begins with a higher base level of social misery than the previous one.

Unemployment is approximately 40 million throughout the industrial countries. That is, about 100 million people rely on welfare or charity. This figure could increase by 10% in a new recession.

A US Federal Reserve economist recently predicted that the repercussions of 1987 are such that if another recession hit similar to that of 1973-74 one quarter of all US corporations would have a stockmarket value less than their debt.

Some on the right have claimed that history is finished now that the cold war is over, others on the left argue that with the end of Stalinism (which they call communism) only capitalism can survive and it's just a question of improving it.

They're both wrong. The past 24 months have been the most dramatic for decades. Extraordinary change is occurring everywhere, and with breathtaking speed.

Even the fall of the American empire has been historically rapid. For instance, Britain's decline stretched over several decades.

The long wave of expansion and growth is over. A decade of buoyant far right governments under Reagan and Bush have failed to restore American capitalism's pre-eminent position. We are in a period of stagnation and crisis.

The state of the world economy fits Gramsci's idea that the old is dying but there is nothing to replace it.

There is no inexorable logic which leads from an economic and social crisis to a new and higher form of organisation — socialism. The outcome of such crisis is resolved at the political level and that depends on organisation, experience, consciousness and combativity.

"The time that tries our souls"

From page 3

forced to sell their labour-power to a capitalist in order to live.

The working class and the socialist movement will renew and reconstitute themselves, as they have before.

The job socialists must do today is to prepare that future by learning and transmitting the lessons of the past. This activity is irreplaceable. It can make the difference between working-class victory and defeat in the future.

In Eastern Europe now we see what its absence can mean. A working class emerging for Stalinism gropes for answers, towed along behind priests and aspirant bourgeois, in countries where the genuine socialist tradition was extirpated by the Stalinists for many decades and the oppressor claimed to act in the name of socialism.

Had it been possible under the old system to build up and develop genuine socialist parties, then the working class in Eastern Europe and the USSR could now be spared much suffering and hardship. Working-class socialism, not capitalism, would replace Stalinism. But Stalinism sterilised the political terrain.

The working class there is now fighting heroically to clarify and organise itself. For the first time in decades it has the chance to live and act as a self-determining class. Tremendous things have been done in a short time. More could have been achieved had socialists been able to prepare for these struggles.

To help in the irreplaceable work of preparing the future is the goal set by its organisers for the founding conference of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on 4-5 May.

Around us, the ex-reformists despair of even defeating the Tories. The ex-Stalinists go over to capitalism, outdoing even the traditional Labour Party right wing. Many socialists — organised round *Militant* and *Socialist Worker* — run away from the real working-class movement, which still, despite everything, includes the Labour Party, into sectarian ghettos, organised on semi-Stalinist principles into so many ideological command economies. Real discussion is choked off.

The serious socialists need to organise themselves to fight the bourgeoisie, and to fight the right wing of the Labour Party and the unions. But we must do so in such a way that the revolutionary left itself can learn from its experiences, and can think and grow.

Socialism will reconstitute itself, hardened, sharpened, clarified and cleansed by the bitter experience of working-class history so far this century. In spite of everything, and in defiance of the faint-hearts, we have no doubt that the future remains with the left.

That is why *Socialist Organiser* will be covering and publicising the forthcoming conference of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

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Students an

Thousands of students have been involved in the anti-poll tax and the Gulf war campaigns. That radicalisation will be reflected at the National Union of Students conference in Blackpool on 22-25 April. Mark Sandell looks at the history of student struggle since 1968.

For a long time the image of students in the minds of militant workers was represented by 1926. During the General Strike, undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge were the backbone of the army of strikebreakers mobilised under the government's wing.

Yet by the early 1970s students were playing an important role in building support for strikes — for example at Saltley Gate in 1972, where striking miners and their supporters successfully picketed out a coke plant in defiance of the police.

The radicalisation took place in the late '60s — part of a worldwide upheaval that led some socialists to see students as a new "revolutionary vanguard".

The London School of Economics was a major battleground, seeing its first sit-in in 1967 in support of the union president, victimised for opposing the appointment of a new Director who had Rhodesian connections.

LSE was still central a year later when the wave of radicalisation rose in earnest. 1968 was the year that shaped the modern left. In Vietnam, the National Liberation Front launched the "Tet offensive" that marked a major intensification of the Vietnam war. In France, ten million workers — inspired by the example of revolutionary students — went on strike in May. In Czechoslovakia the "Prague Spring" was brutally interrupted by the invasion of Russian tanks.

Everywhere, students were at the heart of the movement in solidarity with Vietnam. In Britain, it was mainly students who were mobilised in mass demonstrations against the American war — for example in the huge demonstrations

in Grosvenor Square that led for the first time to shocking clashes with the police.

Two groups on the "far left" in particular grew after '68: the International Marxist Group (IMG) and — much more so — what was then called the International Socialists (IS) and later became the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP).

The IMG were vital in organising the mass-based Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, but tended to be invisible within it as a political tendency — although individual members such as Tariq Ali had a very high public profile. Furthermore, the IMG went along with the ultra-leftism of a lot of the students, developing weird political strategies calling for "red bases" in the



Mark Sandell

universities ("sociologically inaccessible to the repressive forces of the ruling class"). The IMG's paper after the French general strike was underway headlined: "The power of student action!"

IS were more serious. By the early '70s they had a relatively significant working-class base.

Throughout the '60s the National Union of Students remained under the control of "non-political" right wingers.

In 1971 the left — in the shape of the Communist Party — won the presidency with Digby Jacks. Then in 1972 the Tory government launched an attack on student union autonomy.

The then Education Minister Margaret Thatcher's plan was to put student unions under the control of an Auditor General, who would authorise payments. The aim was to stop student union donations to strike funds. This issue — so-

called "ultra vires" payments — has resurfaced many times.

The Thatcher proposals were defeated. An enormous mobilisation of students stopped the Tories in their tracks.

It was different to the movement of four years previously. In 1972 the student movement as a whole went into action; it was not a matter only of a politicised minority. In a sense, of course, the action against Thatcher was less political than Vietnam solidarity. Often it was a low-level affair: members of Rugby Clubs fighting to keep hold of their funds.

But it transformed NUS. NUS conferences became dominated by the left — the Broad Left (CP, Labour Liberals) and the revolutionary left (the IMG in various hats, and the IS). In local colleges, too, the left was strong.

The Broad Left dominated NUS until the early 1980s, successfully standing a string of presidential candidates. Following the mass mobilisations of 1972, and particularly under the Labour government of 1974-79, this Broad Left leadership became more and more conservative.

It saw its role as a pressure group on the government, rather than as a campaigning movement. Of course, NUS held national demonstrations, but often stifled action from below that was independent of the national leadership.

From the mid-'70s a major issue was the government's raising of fees for overseas students. Massive fee increases, besides being unfair, were a way to divide students from each other. A big campaign to defend the rights of overseas students peaked in late 1979 with a wave of occupations.

The campaign was defeated. Overseas students' fees went up, reducing drastically the numbers of overseas students from less than extremely affluent backgrounds.

In the wake of that defeat, the government introduced new measures for student union financing, very similar in aim to the defeated 1972 Thatcher proposals. The new rules were designed to tie student unions hand and foot to their college administration. The campaign to defend union autonomy was defeated.

But in 1981-82 there was a concerted student fightback — a big wave of occupations against education cuts led, and indeed planned, by the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS). NOLS took a majority on the NUS Executive in 1982, including the presidency.

Until the late 1970s, NOLS had been invisible as a force for itself in NUS, keeping firmly in tow to the Communist Party-led Broad Left. The Broad Left transformed itself into the Left Alliance (LA) in 1979, and NOLS split — although not immediately — leaving the LA as a straightforward pact between the CP and the Liberals.

From the mid-'70s the far left in NUS consisted largely of the SWP and the Socialist Students Alliance (SSA), which included the IMG. Within NOLS the chief opposition had been Militant until the early 1980s. But by 1983 there was a serious left alternative in NOLS to its "Clause 4" leadership (later broadened out to be the "Democratic Left", and now "New Directions"). Socialist Student (the forerunner of Left Unity) was formed, bringing together a number of tendencies and individuals and



Chinese Students fight for democracy

joining up with the fragments of what had been the SSA. Within Socialist Student the dominant force was *Socialist Organiser*.

Socialist Student rapidly grew to be the main left opposition within NUS. On a whole series of issues Socialist Student led successful struggles against the "Democratic Left" leadership — only to find that policy passed by conferences would be ignored by the leadership if they didn't like it.

In 1989, Socialist Student launched Left Unity as an attempt to unite sections of the left against the drift to the right in NOLS and NUS.

Yet there are peculiarities in this situation. The rise of Left Unity has not been accompanied by a wave of radicalisation comparable to the late '60s or early '70s. It is not that students are uniformly apathetic. Far from it: big struggles have continued to take place over cuts and other issues. But the general background today is the inability of the NUS leadership to cope with the "Thatcher years".

Left Unity's strength has been that it has provided immediate answers and shown the way forward — on basic questions such as the necessary strategy to fight the cuts, on the defence of student unionism, and on grants, benefits and housing.

Groups like the SSA in the '70s were unable to provide such immediate answers, and focused rather more on traditional "revolutionary" issues — such as Ireland. Such issues are still discussed today; but the fundamental question has been how to reverse the retreats students have endured for so long.

Certain lessons can be drawn from the past two decades of student struggles.

With sufficiently broad mobilisations students can win campaigns even on their own, given the right conditions. For sure, nothing can be won without grass roots mobilisation and rank and file involvement.

The 1972 campaign for student union autonomy was the best example of such a victory.

Women's ca

By Allison Roche

Last week saw the largest ever NUS women's Campaign Conference. It discussed many different policy issues, and Left Unity candidate Janine Booth was re-elected as NUS Women's Officer.

Policy agreed included:

- uniting our main campaigning areas into a single "A Woman's Place is in Her Union" campaign;
- campaigning to kick out the Tories;
- making anti-racism, women's safety and lesbian issues priorities in the women's campaign;
- campaigning for women's rights in education, including internationally;
- highlighting women's health issues and fighting alongside healthworkers in defence of the NHS;
- supporting and further developing *Escort*, a practical service to Irish women;



Spanish students and workers united in strike action against the Gulf war

and socialism

Issues for the national union



By Emma Colyer, NUS National Secretary

The four main debates at conference are NUS Reform, the Gulf war, Education, and Lesbian and Gay rights.

The plight of the Kurds will be taken as an emergency debate.

The discussion about NUS structures has now dragged on for five years! The Kinnockite-led National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) aims to cut down on democracy — that is what they mean by "reform".

They want to axe Winter Conference, chop down the size of the National Executive Committee and replace democratically-controlled NUS Areas with bureaucratic regional structures.

By contrast, Left Unity will be proposing a series of motions that widen democracy and increase participation.

NOLS supported the Western forces in the Gulf for six months. The NEC will come under deserved attack for this at conference. Instead of throwing NUS resources into the peace movement, NUS's leaders kept quiet.

Instead of using the Education Campaign to fight off Tory attacks, NOLS has produced a flash publication hoping to influence the educational world.

The NUS Education Initiative is a parallel document to the Labour Party's Policy Review. It is the sum total of NUS's Education Campaign. It outlines what kind of education system NOLS wants, but doesn't explain how to get it.

The last 12 years have proved that such an approach is bound to fail.

Lesbian and gay men are under attack again: Paragraph 16 and Clause 25, and the "Operation Spanner" case will be discussed.

Left Unity supporters are the only group on the left to take these attacks seriously and they actually organised a fightback. NOLS and their friends have done nothing.

If the left unites around the policies submitted by Left Unity, NUS will be given a good basis to



Emma Colyer

start fighting the Tories again.

Left Unity will be contesting several of the NEC elections. Left Unity members are the only Labour candidates in the elections. It is vital to ensure the return of Labour. The prospect of a number of Liberal Democrats and Independents leading NUS in a general election year would be disastrous. Socialists need a campaign for Labour in all the elections.

Mark Sandell, presently an Executive Member, is contesting the position of National Treasurer against the incumbent Eugene Arokisamy and Liberal Democrat Mark Mitchell. Mark Sandell is fighting for more democracy in the running of NUS finances, after the success of the One Member, One Vote campaign at the recent Student Services Conference.

The position of Vice-President Further Education Union Development (VP FEUD) is central to organising NUS's working class base. Steve Mitchell, the present VP FEUD, is fighting off a challenge from the Liberal Democrats.

Left Unity is fielding a number of candidates for the part-time posts. Alice Sharpe is presently Tyne Tees Area Convenor, Habda Rashid is a student at Hackney College, Jed Marsh is the only gay candidate, and Allison Roche is Sheffield University's Women's Officer.

NOLS having failed to submit adequate nominations are running a Re-Open Nominations campaign. Left Unity is supporting the campaign for those elections it is not contesting.

But many of the attacks on students have formed part of a broader Tory policy to beat down opposition and impose cuts. To defeat such attacks, unity with the labour movement is essential.

The '68 generation often saw themselves as the "advanced guard" of social revolution. They saw how students in France had

sparked a huge wave of working class militancy, and imagined that all they had to do to create such a movement in Britain was to appear on television getting their heads cracked open by the cops.

Many Marxists, who should have known better, completely capitulated to this impatient mood. The worst offenders were the IMG

— which no longer exists, although its general ideological tradition is represented today by Socialist Action (Campaign Student).

Robin Blackburn, a prominent *New Left Review* intellectual and member of the IMG in the '60s and early '70s, argued in 1968 that "those who reject the strategy of the Red Bases...will be in serious danger of becoming the objective allies of social imperialism and social fascism".

Now many of the red-hot revolutionaries of '68 are right wingers of various shades.

A more sober, though not a conservative, approach is needed. Students are a volatile social group, able to flip suddenly from militancy to apathy. That lasting links are made between the student and labour movements is essential for students to win, and thus prevent bouts of apathy.

The student movement needs a rank and file organisation that can cement these links: that is why Left Unity exists.

Campaign sets its agenda



Allison Roche

the tasks of the women's campaign and covering many of the important issues — it's available at this conference.

Left Unity women organised a fringe meeting at women's conference that was attended by over 40 people. Speakers covered the campaign against Paragraph 16, and the case for socialist feminism.

Three Left Unity women were elected to women's committee (Allison Roche, Jenni Bailey and Ruth Woodhead), and three to the new Steering Committee (Claire Amos, Helen Lewis and Claire O'Sullivan).

The only sad thing to report about women's conference is the behaviour of some of the delegates. Small-minded pettiness characterised Sarah Colborne's election campaign, which spoiled some people's enjoyment of the event. Still, these things happen...

What matters most about women's campaign is what happens in the colleges. There are many issues to be angry about, and much campaigning action that can be organised.



Left Unity supporters have been at the forefront of the student struggle

• supporting the struggle of the Kurdish people for self-determination.

Much of the debate was lively — an improvement on past years when bored unanimity was common.

There is enormous potential for taking the women's campaign forward over the next year. Left Unity women have produced an 8-page pamphlet outlining our opinions of

The Tories and consensus politics

John McIlroy continues his series on the Tory party

Their electoral reverse in 1945 is usually seen as the occasion for the revolution in Conservative politics which produced the new post-war welfare Conservatism of Butler and Macmillan.

However, the Conservatives had already accepted the Beveridge Report arguing for the need for an efficient system of social security, the need for a new state provision of health, and introduced the 1944 Education Act as part of the policies of the wartime coalition.

There was not a great deal to choose between the policies of the Conservatives and the platform of the Labour Party in the 1945 general election.

In accepting the need for the state to intervene to a greater extent than hitherto, to influence employment levels and guarantee the supply of healthy, well-housed, well-educated labour to capitalist production, and rationalise capitalist organisation — as well as thus legitimising capitalism as a fair and decent



Hugh Gaitskell, Labour Party leader from 1955 to 1963, represented the Labour side of the consensus politics called "Butskellism"

The party of Beveridge, Keynes and nationalisation

system — the Conservative Party were responding generally to the same social pressure as the Labour Party. These were essentially the radicalism induced by the war, the example of wartime policies, the disillusion with the policies of the inter-war years, the fear of revolution and the expanding Empire of Stalinism.

Moreover, many of the changes were initially limited — for example, the ideas outlined by Beveridge for the welfare state and by Keynes for intervention to regulate the economy were far narrower in scope than what was to become practice in the '50s and '60s. As RA Butler put it, invoking history: "As in the days of Peel the Conser-

vatives must be seen to have accommodated themselves to a social revolution."

More specifically, the Conservatives were responding to a crushing and suprising electoral defeat. This produced, or strengthened, new thinking in key policy areas, led by figures such as Butler, Macleod and Maudling, who based themselves on the Conservative Political Centre and the Research Department.

Over the longer haul the new Conservatism was the product not so much of 1945 as of the post-war economic boom taking off from the late '40s, and the marginalisation of the Liberals gave the Conservatives, now the capitalist party, plenty of room for manoeuvre.

Labour's propaganda in the 1951 general election claimed that Winston Churchill would lead a return to the 'thirties.

Instead, the administrators of Churchill and Eden accepted most of Labour's reforms. All sections of capital in a situation of large-scale expansion of the world economy could live with them. Many could benefit from them. For some they were essential.

But they would not take the reforms further. In some cases there was a paring at the edges, as with the de-nationalisation of steel, and in some cases a reversal of forward planning, as with the move from council housing to the private sector; in some cases, as with the NHS and the welfare state generally, there was a qualitative expansion of the structures and services laid down by the government. The Conservatives accepted that unemployment levels of more than 500,000 spelled electoral disaster and intervened to stimulate demand as Keynesian market management became the new orthodoxy.

Relationships with the unions were good indeed. Many in the TUC favourably compared them with the clashes of 1945-51, and Walter Monckton was long



The Tories continued the disbanding of the British Empire. Above: Tory Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in Swaziland, which gained self-government in 1964 and full independence in 1968

remembered as a model Minister of Labour.

In foreign policy the Conservatives continued Labour's dismantling of Empire with only the bitter, but swiftly disavowed, hiccup of Suez.

Both parties subscribed to a broad consensus in which there were important differences of emphasis.

Capitalism would continue as "the mixed economy" with selective nationalisation producing cheap efficient infrastructure and subsidies to private enterprise, an enlarged welfare state, full employment and a fairer distribution of income — though less so after the 'forties.

The argument now centred basically not on what kind of system but on which party was best

"Conservative success derived from the party's ability to produce increased living standards"

fitted to manage post-capitalism (as the Labour right saw it). The class struggle continued, but it was more muffled.

Pundits pontificated about the "End of Ideology" and Harold Macmillan's social democratic Conservative Party of "the middle way" won the 1959 general election on the slogan "You've never had it so good".

Based on the expansion of the world economy, Conservative success derived from the Party's ability to produce increased living standards and project itself as an efficient economic manager.

Its mass vote in the thirteen years of Conservative rule between 1951 and 1964 remained firmly based on the professional managerial and clerical groups — many of whom were of course working class. But it depended crucially on around a quarter of the manual working class voting Conservative — and here the Conservatives were successful in developing the tradition pioneered by Disraeli with cross-class support. Eden won 49.7% of the vote in 1955 and Macmillan only fractionally

less in 1959.

There was one big problem. In the years after the war industrial productivity in the UK was half that in the USA and Germany, and its share in manufacturing exports from the advanced economies dropped from 25% to 10%. The guarantee of full employment produced strong unions.

The expansion of the welfare state was financed by increased taxation. This in turn produced pressures from the workers to make up their losses through increased wages. As international economic competition intensified through the '50s and '60s so did the UK's decline.

The cold war compromise and the acceptance by both parties of a position as junior partner to the USA imposed costs in terms of military expenditure and cut the UK off from the development of a European alternative. The East of Suez role and the interests of finance capital imposed costs in terms of the outward flow of capital and defence of the pound as an international currency.

Increased awareness of decline pushed the Macmillan government by 1961 to look to increased state intervention in an attempt to modernise British industry and make it more competitive and efficient.

This centred on a mild injection of planning and attempts to influence the processes of industrial relations and wage determination. The focus was on attempts to cultivate closer links with the unions and employers through the National Economic Development Council and the National Incomes Commission.

Chancellor Selwyn Lloyd's pay pause signalled the beginnings of the end of "voluntarism" in which collective bargaining between unions and employers was left to regulate industrial relations.

But economic problems, social scandals such as the Profumo affair, and the presentation of a compelling alternative project of modernisation by the Labour opposition led by Harold Wilson, contributed towards the downfall of Macmillan.

It was a tribute to the political sway the Conservatives exercised that they lost the 1964 election by only a handful of seats.



Ted Heath becomes Prime Minister in 1970. His proto-Thatcherite "Selsdon" programme was to end in fiasco

The rise and fall of 'Selsdon man'

The rehabilitation of the market

The next stage of Conservative evolution represented in some ways a throwback in its rehabilitation of the role of market forces — although the real exemplar for the change of direction was the model of France and Germany. The failure of Wilson's attempts to come to terms with Britain's economic decline — by policies in essence extending Macmillan's initiatives of the early '60s — led the Conservatives to question whether the problem could be favourably resolved within the framework of the post-war settlement.

This was particularly so as the Wilson government's attempts at incomes policy and legal regulation in *In Place of Strife* had actually made things worse.

Far from drawing the fangs of the unions, they had rendered them more ferocious. They had contributed to the emergence of left wing leadership in the biggest unions the TGWU and the AEU, stimulated a qualitative increase in union membership, produced the highest levels of industrial conflict since the 1920s and led to the re-emergence of the political strike in response to the proposed legislation in 1969. The protests against the Vietnam war and the renewal of struggle in the Six Counties demonstrated that what was developing was a general social crisis.

Perhaps the first drummer of the New Right was Enoch Powell who from 1968 represented not only nationalism and racism but a developing critique of planning and state intervention and support for a greater role for the market, denationalisation, reductions in public expenditure and a proto-monetarism.

While Ted Heath, Conservative leader from 1965, and Prime Minister 1970-74, distanced himself

from Powell, his policies in the first two years of his administration represented a clear change of tack within the confines of the post-war settlement, by pushing against these confines in key areas.

Whereas Macmillan and Wilson had attempted to use the state, albeit in a halting and limited way, to rationalise and galvanise manufacturing industry, Heath saw the way to make it more competitive via the market.

Heath was determined to renounce Britain's attempt to pose as an independent small great power based on the USA and the Commonwealth, and threw the lot of

"Heath, unlike Thatcher, was not prepared to break with the past by using unemployment as a weapon"

British capital in with the EEC.

Industrial capital would be opened up to more intense competition from European firms and become more efficient and welded into a new economic bloc — capable of competing with the USA — with the City at its financial centre.

In consequence, there would be an internal move towards the market. In line with their manifesto commitments, Heath's Tories abolished Wilson's Prices and Incomes Board and state intervention was further alleviated by the winding up of the other instruments of planning such as the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation and the Ministry of Technology.

Modernisation would now proceed through the survival of the fittest, the capitalist begging bowl would go unanswered and there would be no state aid for lame ducks.

The unions would be subject to a new and detailed legal framework which would outlaw or restrict effective forms of industrial action and the closed shop, but they would in return receive certain legal advantages and would be accepted as junior partners in the regulation of the economy and the enterprise. The "social partners" approach of Germany, with "strong" but "responsible" unions linked closely with employers at industry level and the results then projected into the political process, appealed strongly to Heath. He had no wish to delegitimise unions like his successors.

He wanted unions to be more legitimate, but to behave in a fashion more consonant with the objectives of the market. He saw a role for the state and for public expenditure. He had no desire to severely weaken the welfare state although "efficiency" was the new watchword.

Heath's policies were put together by the Conservative leadership at a conference at Selsdon Park in 1970.

The Party's first attempt to push out the parameters of the post-war consensus was ill-fated and short-lived. It failed because it was too limited, too civilised and too lacking in statecraft.

It foundered on resistance from a working class which Heath assaulted frontally without a preliminary civil war to undermine its confidence and sap its strength, nourished by a quarter of a century of a political and economic framework conducive to union power.

Like Thatcher, Heath was

prepared initially to sit out long strikes. The 13 week struggle with the Post Office workers might be compared to the 1980 steel strike.

But Heath had not carried out adequate preparations for the 1972 Miners' Strike. Heath failed to understand that it was very difficult, perhaps impossible, to change the working class without changing the processes of capitalist accumulation which had built up the muscle of the working class. Unlike Thatcher, he was not prepared to break from the past by using unemployment as a weapon.

Unlike Thatcher, he was not prepared to use the full force of a strong state. The police backdown at Saltley Gates may be compared with Orgrave in the 1984 strike.

By 1972, the "no aid for lame ducks" policy had been pierced by the collapse of Rolls-Royce the previous year and the struggle of workers at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders to resist closure.

Heath had tried to impose an extended legal framework in one fell swoop through the massive 1971 Industrial Relations Act. Thatcher was to use a far more cunning step by step approach.

The tactical ineptitude of drafting the legislation so as to open up the possibility of jailing trade unionists rather than sequestering a union's assets produced the nightmare of the summer of 1972 when five dockers were incarcerated at Pentonville jail, prompting widespread strike action and a call by the TUC for a one day General Strike.

The legislation provoked the biggest crisis of state legitimacy and the highpoint of working class action since 1926.

Heath beat a retreat, did a U-turn, went back on his manifesto commitment and imposed an incomes policy on a movement whose

underlying strength had not diminished. His attempts to reflate the economy and go for growth collided with an unfavourable international picture. Against the background of the oil crisis, wage restraint produced a second battle with the NUM and in early 1974 a "who rules the country?" election.

He lost narrowly but with a catastrophic 37.8% of the vote which in the October 1974 election plummeted to an all time low of 35.8%.

The Conservatives' first attempt to move to the right had produced in turn a lurch towards a quasi corporatism and eventual humiliation. Heath was widely seen as having betrayed Selsdon Man, then botched his alternative to it and brought the Conservative Party to its lowest point since the 1840s.

Like Peel, he had failed to negotiate the cataracts of change. The Conservatives had now lost four out of the previous five elections culminating in their lowest vote this century. Change was urgent and the road to Thatcherism now open.



Vic Turner, one of the five dockers jailed in July 1972 and then freed under pressure of mass strike action

How to stop going soft

THE POLITICAL FRONT

By Patrick Murphy



These are hard times for socialists in the Labour Party. Just as Neil Kinnock drops the last vestiges of radicalism from Labour's programme, the sectarian left, which counterposes itself to the living labour movement, points triumphantly to every defeat for Labour socialists as another vindication of their self-isolating strategy.

They point, in particular, to the rapid shift of startling numbers of socialists to the right. Neil Kinnock was, in the 1970s, certainly on the left of the party, he voted against the incomes policy of the Wilson and Callaghan governments. Joan Ruddock, until recently Chair of CND, supported the Gulf war. Indeed, most of Kinnock's kitchen cabinet were once part of the great movement for Labour democracy from 1979-81.

"There is a relationship between the social pressures and the tendency to conform. What I reject absolutely is the idea that this process is inevitable. It is most likely to be prevented by active involvement in politics, organising with co-thinkers."

They were never eager democrats, most withdrawing from that struggle when Tony Benn insisted on *seriously* challenging the Labour establishment by standing against Denis Healey for the Deputy leadership. A quite separate, though no less disgraceful, example is the rags-to-Rolux story of Derek — 'Degsy' — Hatton.



The "dream ticket" has meant the ditching of any policy with the least hint of radicalism. They did not

These little pen-portraits are the bread of life to groups like the SWP. They illustrate, so they say, a decisive argument against working within the Labour Party because *it is inevitable that people who try to achieve socialism through Labour will move to the right*. The pressures of membership, the milieu within which they operate and above all the demands of electoralism will drag socialists to the right. Very much of the SWP's prolific writings on the subject, including Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein's lengthy "Marxist history" is simply a matter of recording evidence of this phenomenon.

There is a temptation to respond to this sort of sloppiness by listing a few prominent Labourites who have clearly moved to the left because of the experience in the Labour Party, like Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, but this doesn't get to the heart of the matter. The method of our opponent has been to decide that activity in the Labour Party is wrong and take whatever evidence can be found as further proof of this, rather than attempt to explain why many people do make their peace with capitalism the better to equip us to halt the process.

Each time I hear the argument I am reminded of the patient lectures I received from my parents as a teenager about my enthusiasm for socialism. Many readers must have been told, like me, that this was all very well when you are young, with no responsibilities in the real world, but that when you get older more conservative, less "idealistic" tendencies would set in.

It was a profoundly patronising message designed to discourage and pass on the scepticism of maturity, but it had evidence in its favour. There were real pressures to conform and they increased with age; the need to earn to survive, the reduction in free time to think, to study and discuss; the possible responsibility for children, etc. There was a wealth of "pen-portraits" to show that many, many people who were keen world-shakers when young had settled into passive resigned lives when older.

Clearly there was a relationship between the social pressures and the tendency to conform. What I reject absolutely is the idea that this process is inevitable. It is most likely to be prevented by *active* involvement in politics, organising with co-thinkers and holding onto a politics that can relate to the real world while resisting its pressures.

go unchallenged and socialists can resist the pressures to conform and adopt right-wing politics



Those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it

Tony Benn was not always Tony Benn, as sneering Tory papers sometimes remind us. Thirty years ago he was, for a while, Viscount Stansgate, succeeding his father, a well known Labour peer.

Benn did not want to be a peer, but a peer he was, nevertheless, and, as the law then stood there was nothing he could do about it.

A commoner could be made a peer by the Queen, but no power on earth could "unannoint", make a commoner out of a peer!

It was Tony Benn's response to the trap he found himself in which first marked him out as a Labour politician. He refused to

go to the House of Lords.

He stood, although a peer, for his old Bristol seat and was re-elected.

He was still not allowed to take his Commons seat: so he stood in the subsequent by-election, and again he won!

His model was Charles Bradlaugh, who, a hundred years earlier, had been refused the right to take his seat in Parliament because he was an atheist, but was re-elected again and again by his Northampton constituents.

Benn finally forced a change in the law, shed his unwanted peerage, and with one short break, has been an MP ever since.

In the Labour Party it is very much the same. There are undoubtedly pressures to conform and they do bear down on most people. Their effect is not inevitable, however, and it is a profoundly patronising and demoralising message to suggest that it is.

People whose political activity consists largely of transmitting that message bear a large part of the responsibility for the pessimism of the British left. The way to resist these pressures in the Labour Party, as in society generally, is to organise; to fight for and develop socialist ideas; to turn Labour outwards and take the lifeblood of struggle into the ideological corpse that is Labour, but above all to erect a base for political ideas which understand the role of Labour in our society and have no illusions about its potential for achieving socialism.

Our project is to transform the labour movement, to make it fit to transform society, it is an aggressive dynamic project driven by powerful ideas, the labour movement will not transform us.

"Electoralism of course holds many traps, but is nowhere near so dangerous as is opportunism for socialists who don't take basic political ideas seriously."

There is something else to say about this "inevitable shift to the right" myth. The pressures which can pull socialists rightwards exist for anyone who has any serious contact with reformist politics. No-one is immune.

In the 1970s, for example, there was a tremendous mood amongst the trade union and Labour left to resist British entry into the EEC. The arguments were overwhelmingly nationalist (we should look after our "own" jobs, "our own" industries, a European parliament would be less sympathetic to Labour-type reforms than Westminster) and should not have affected the revolutionary left who, throughout the 1960s, had been neutral on the issue.

Capitalist market conditions would govern whether Britain was in or out of the EEC, only the names of some of the dominant employers would change. The pressure was great, however, and because of the big industrial struggles of the early '70s, much of the revolutionary left, particularly the SWP (IS), had developed a pattern of serious work in the trade unions. One after another, Britain's revolutionary left organisations capitulated to the nationalist arguments of the anti-European reformists. The SWP led the way. British withdrawal from the EEC became an accepted "socialist" policy.

Socialist Organiser resisted the pull. We still regard it as far more important to develop a working-class strategy for unity across Europe to respond to the bosses' market than to support British economic sovereignty. The pressure to concede an important political idea existed and exerted its influence on the entire left in the 1970s, on the SWP just as on the forerunners of *SO*. Our different responses came above all from the state of our politics, our relative ideological strength and our seriousness, not from the secondary matter of whether we are organisationally separate from the Labour Party.

Electoralism, of course, holds many traps for people like us, who take elections seriously, but it is nowhere near so dangerous as is opportunism for socialists who don't take basic political ideas seriously.



A clash of four New Yorks: lawyers Kramer (left — Jewish) and Killian (right — Irish) with Wall Street man McCoy (centre — Wasp) and judge Kovitsky (Jewish in Tom Wolfe's book)

Turned into shallow parody

Cinema

Tony Brown reviews *Bonfire of the Vanities*

Tom Wolfe's novel is a story about New York. New York, the biggest, richest city in the world at the end of the twentieth century. Like Rome, Paris or London of earlier eras New York is the centre of the world, and *Bonfire of the Vanities* sets out to show what makes it tick.

The complexity of the city is portrayed through a series of characters who represent the Irish, Jews, Italians, Blacks and Wasps, and who live in the Bronx, Manhattan, Long Island and Queens.

Essentially it's about the corrup-

tion of politics, justice and power in the Big Apple. At the centre is Sherman McCoy, a Wasp, product of Yale who takes his position for granted.

So isolated is he by his wealth, privilege and office on Wall Street, that one wrong turn off the freeway into the Bronx brings about his downfall. Sherman, who can't survive on his \$1 million a year income, makes multi-million dollar deals over the telephone, and considers himself a "master of the universe".

He is the epitome of 1980s greed, and yet he is not another Gordon Gekko. He turns out to be a pathetic creature who doesn't understand the society around him even though he reaps such privilege from it.

Sherman in the end becomes everyone's victim. But unlike older tragedy tales there is no sympathy for Sherman because it is impossible to empathise with his position in the world.

It's a rare story full of insight and depth.

Most of the main characters are "outsiders". They have come to New York from the south, the mid-west, England, other cultures and backgrounds, but are all in the end shaped by the society around them. Their actions are guided by feuds and prejudices that are almost tribal in origin.

This week a film with the same name opened. Its characters are also called Sherman, Fallow, Maria, Kramer and Reverend Bacon. But that's about as close as it gets to the real thing.

Where the book is a wry commentary on modern New York, the film is a shallow parody.

All the characters are wrong. Everything is tipped on its head. Instead of a Jewish Judge in the Bronx we have a black Judge. Instead of a boozing English journalist we get Bruce Willis. Instead of a 40-year old "master of the

universe" we get a preppy Tom Hanks.

All the major characters are stripped bare and become caricatures.

Why? Are novels simply too complex to translate into film? Is it that movies can't cope with depth? I don't think so. But whatever it is, the result is clear. Brian de Palma doesn't know what to do with the story. All the social aspects have been cut out, put in the too hard basket. Rather than getting a gourmet meal we get dished up cream cake and weak tea.

It will be interesting to compare *Bonfire* to the forthcoming *Madame Bovary* by Claude Chabrol. *Bovary* is also a complex book that seeks to shed light on the morality of French rural life in the 19th century. Perhaps we will see how this novel is translated onto film without the "benefits" of Hollywood financing and casting.

In the meantime, read Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*.

Unearthing what Marx really meant

Book

Colin Foster reviews *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, volume 4: Critique of Other Socialisms*, by Hal Draper (Monthly Review Press, £9.50)

Critique of Other Socialisms, just published, is the fourth volume in Hal Draper's monumental study of Marx's politics.

The fifth and other volumes planned in this ever-expanding work seem condemned never to appear. The project was started by Draper in old age, after four decades of activity in the Trotskyist and neo-Trotskyist movement; he died in January 1990, after finishing all but a couple of details of this volume.

Most of volume 4 is about Marx's critique of anarchism (as represented by the French advocate of a society of small cooperatives, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and the Russian advocate of

"pan-destruction", Mikhail Bakunin), and of "state-socialism" (as represented notably by Ferdinand Lassalle, a German socialist whose main agitation was for Bismarck's government to provide state aid to worker cooperatives).

A lot of the volume is only more detailed recital of what has already been outlined in a previous volume; moreover, Draper's self-imposed limits on his work press particularly hard here. Draper aimed to limit himself to accurate exposition of what Marx wrote, rather than new discussion of the substantive issues covered by Marx or disputes about the application of Marx's ideas to later developments; here this means exposition of Marx on Bakunin, or Marx on Lassalle, with only minimal references to the relevance, for example, of Marx's critique of "state-socialism" to the pretensions of Stalinism.

The relevance, however, is pretty clear; and the whole four volumes remain well worth reading — conscientious, superbly written, and often witty in their demolition of academic "Marxology".

Volume 2 (*The Politics of Social Classes*) is a good introduction to Marx's politics. It shows that Marx and Engels were the first socialists to appreciate the importance of the trade

union movement, and that — contrary to much writing about their "anti-peasant" attitudes — they were also the first socialists to try to work out a policy for the peasantry. It covers their analyses of the middle classes, and their changing ideas on how the working class should relate to middle-class revolutionary movements.

Volume 1 (*State and Bureaucracy*) has two distinct sections. The first follows through Marx's development from radical democrat to communist, emphasising that, unlike almost all others of the day, Marx's communism or socialism embraced and included radical democracy. The second traces Marx's analyses of particular states. Its chief argument is that Marx admitted, and indeed frequently used, the notion of a *bureaucracy* being a *ruling class*. This argument is related to Draper's own view of the Stalinist states as "bureaucratic collectivism", though Draper, respecting his self-imposed limits, does not draw out the implications.

Volume 3 (*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*) is devoted to proving one proposition, and one proposition only: that by "dictatorship of the proletariat" Marx meant only the rule of the working class, no more, no less. The term "dictatorship" did not imply that the workers' rule would be "dictatorial" in

the modern sense; nor did it refer to some special "dictatorial" form of workers' rule. Even though Marx was well aware of the need for revolutionary regimes to use force, his use of the term "dictatorship" was not meant to signal that need.

The book proceeds by exhaustively analysing every use Marx ever made of the term. It shows that the word "dictatorship" did not have the same connotations of uncontrolled state repression when Marx was writing as it has now; it argues that Marx used the term mainly to help explain his ideas to the Blanquist current in the socialist movement of the time, counterposing his dictatorship of the working class to their "educational" dictatorship of a socialist minority.

A companion volume by Draper (*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat from Marx to Lenin*) demonstrates (convincingly, to my mind) that all the classical Marxists, including Lenin and Trotsky but possibly excepting Rosa Luxemburg, were to some degree or another confused on this point.

The introduction to volume 4 does not tell us how far Draper had progressed before his death in his work for the subsequent volumes, nor whether he left substantial fragments in publishable form. It is to be hoped that he did.

Failing the test

Television

By Jean Lane

Humanity is bleeding. It is on trial and failing to pass the test. That is how it feels to watch the TV now.

From the comfort of their living rooms millions upon millions of people are watching the Kurdish refugees die before their very eyes. And it hurts.

One Israeli businessman turned up in the mountains on the border of Iraq and Turkey with a lorry load of bottled water. "I saw what was happening on my TV and could not just sit and do nothing," he said.

Millions of people feel the same way, but now owning a business, a lorry or any water extra to their own requirements, can do nothing but feel useless, hopeless and guilty!

That admirable man got off his arse and did something, out of basic human decency.

Are those people who cannot less decent? No. Just caught in a system in which they own nothing more than their ability to work to sell in order to live powerless. Everyone feels the same way.

One extraordinary news broadcast from the mountainside showed the reporter saying: "It makes me not want to be a reporter any more, but an aid worker."

It is rather like saying "I don't want to be part of the scab on the wound anymore, I want to be part of the sticking plaster instead".

So do we all. Those of us who cannot do as the businessman did should put our energies into fighting the system that causes and allows such atrocities to happen — wherever we are.



Moscow anti-semites say what some "lefts" say here: "Zionists and Nazis are one"

Periscope

Rex Bloomstein's series on anti-semitism continues on Tuesday evenings. Part one traced it back to the poisoned springs of Christianity.

The image conjured up of the cross turning into the swastika will have offended some Christians. It was no offense against historic truth.

They did offend against historic truth when they presented Karl Marx denouncing "Jewish capitalism". Marx shared in the stereotyping common in his time: ideas like "Jewish capitalism" have taken on a distinct modern meaning which they did not have and could not have had for Marx.

Nothing is gained by such muddying and blurring and anachronism-mongering.

Channel 4's season of *Banned* material is fascinating, bringing the banned of yesteryear, films and TV shows. Unfortunately, the banned and hidden of today is still banned and hidden...

It's moved on since 1940

All that jazz

WRITEBACK

Your paper's coverage of "the cultural front" is one of its great strengths, and, quite rightly, you seem to recognise that jazz is an important art form for socialists.

However, can you really not find anyone better qualified to write about jazz than Jim Denham? All his jazz articles seem to take the form of obituaries, which says a lot.

Has Jim listened to any jazz since 78rpm records gave way to LPs? Has he heard of Charlie Parker? Does he

know that there is a contemporary British jazz scene which fuses influences as diverse as bop, African music, hip-hop and funk?

The last straw came with an article about some guy who played sax with the Glenn Miller Orchestra (!!) This space could more usefully have been given to what people like Courtney Pine, Jason Rebello or Tommy Smith are doing now.

SO has distanced itself from those "orthodox" Trotskyists who think the world stopped when the Transitional Programme was published. But your jazz coverage seems to be controlled by someone who thinks nothing worthwhile has happened since that terrible year when Trotsky was murdered and Cootie



"Nothing good has happened since Duke Ellington and Co"

Williams defected from Duke Ellington to Benny Goodman.

Get hip, comrades!
Henry Newman
Birmingham

"You cannot avoid taking sides"

Leaving aside your continuing slanging match with the SWP there is a serious point (SO 481) at issue in respect of the anti-imperialist credentials of Saddam Hussein.

Iraq under Ba'athist rule is essentially a sub-imperialism, and following its defeat in the Gulf War is reverting to this role. American imperialism is quite happy to see Iraq play such a role, which explains why it supported Iraq against Iran and is supporting it again now.

The question of the period from August 1990 to March 1991 is rather different. Saddam was out to increase the clout of Iraq. I don't believe anyone on the left gave him political support in his subsequent adventures (with the possible exception of the Spartacists). His anti-imperialist credentials were the most spurious of any Arab nationalist since the 1940s. Yet Saddam did get into conflict with American imperialism.

In such circumstances the fight became not so much about whether or not Saddam should be in Kuwait but whether American imperialism's writ still ran East of Suez. Revolutionary socialists would have prefer-

red just about anybody else at all to be fighting America in Saddam's place.

And we would have preferred it even more if the Kurds or Islamic opposition had

done for him.

However, when war breaks out, unless you are a pacifist, you really cannot avoid taking sides. In practice this meant in the West hoping

that America wouldn't get away with it. But it did. And now the Kurds are paying the price.

Joe Lane
South London

Something went right, somewhere

Martin Thomas's response to my letter on his critique of the SWP and the Gulf War avoids or misses my central point.

Most of his response is spent in reasserting that the SWP either had no theory on the Gulf War or the wrong one. Therefore they failed to lead the anti-war movement. Even if this is true, the SWP did seem to have a large presence on anti-war demos, as Thomas

admits.

A quick glance at *Socialist Worker* seems to indicate that they have recruited quite considerably both during the war and afterwards. So, from the SWP's point of view something has clearly gone right somewhere.

The key point, however, is that of the Labour Party. Yes, of course, individual socialists in the Labour Party did oppose the war, including, no doubt, supporters of *Socialist Organiser*. That was fine although it made as much

difference to Neil Kinnock's position as did the activities of the SWP. That is to say, none whatsoever.

The SWP do seem though to have built further the forces of those who hated both Kinnock and the war. I'm not sure that those who protested from within the Labour Party can honestly say the same. Indeed, as far as I can see, socialists are leaving the Labour Party in droves, as they did when Wilson supported Vietnam.

Frank Kitz
North London

Not just an aberration

Your editorial suggests that Fred Halliday's support for Bush in the Gulf War was an aberration.

He would not normally be "so foolish". In my view, Halliday's posturings were

always fairly foolish, as he has done his best to prove in the *New Statesman* in recent weeks.

Certainly he supported the side of American imperialism in the Iran-Iraq war (where his position was "a plague on both your houses"), so there is nothing new about his

stance now.

Nor is there anything new about leftists going over to the enemy while trying to pretend that it can all be justified by reference to spurious left wing arguments.

Ernie Jones
Haringey

WHAT'S ON

Thursday 18 April

"The Gulf after the war", Sheffield SO meeting. 7.30, SCCAU, West St. Speaker: Clive Bradley
"Trade Unions and the law", South West London SO meeting. 7.30, Lambeth Town Hall. Speaker Tom Rigby
"Labour and the general election", Leeds SO meeting. 7.30, Packhorse Pub, Woodhouse Lane
"Justice for the Middle East". 7.30, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include Afif Safiah (PLD) and Tony Benn MP. Organised by the Committee for a Just Peace in the Middle East
"What we say about the USSR", East London SO meeting. 7.30, Oxford House, Derbyshire St. Speaker Cathy Nugent

Saturday 20 April

LPS National Committee. Durham Road Community Centre.

N4, 12 noon. Labour Party members welcome
Chinese Solidarity Campaign special meeting to discuss campaigning. 5.00, PCL, Marylebone Road, London

Sunday 21 April

"Beat the Bailiffs", Lewisham APT Federation. 2.00-6.00, Lewisham Labour Club, Limes Grove

Monday 22 April

"Pornography and Censorship", London SO Forum. 7.30, Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road. Speakers include Mary McIntosh (Feminists Against Censorship) and Cate Murphy

Saturday 27 April

Northampton Anti-Poll Tax Federation social. 8 till late, Racehorse Inn, £3

Monday 29 April

"Lessons of Iranian Revolution",

Manchester SO meeting. 8.00, Bridge St Tavern
"Lessons from Australia - Labour in Power", Islington SO meeting. 7.30, Red Rose Club. Speaker Janet Burstall

Tuesday 30 April

Lambeth Against the Witchhunt public meeting. 7.30, Lambeth Town Hall. Speakers include Dennis Skinner and Jeremy Corbyn
Meeting to organise a counter-demonstration to the 'Victory Parade'. 7.30, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square

Wednesday 1 May

"Socialists and Sexuality", East London SO meeting. 7.30, Oxford House, Derbyshire St. Speaker Janine Booth
Anti-cuts demonstration, Lambeth. Assemble 10.30, Brixton Oval. 12.00 Rally at Kennington Park

Thursday 2 May

"Their new world order", SW

London SO meeting. 7.30, Lambeth Town Hall

Wednesday 8 May

"Crisis in the USSR", SO London Forum. 7.30, LSE, Houghton St, Holborn

Thursday 9 May

"Myths of Irish history", Liverpool SO meeting. 7.30, Hardman St TU centre

Saturday 1 June

Socialist Movement AGM, Leeds

Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 July

Middle East Peace Conference, organised by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, London

Saturday 13 July

"Cancel the Third World Debt" demonstration

Propaganda and the Kurds

EYE ON THE LEFT

By Martin Thomas

What should socialists have said about John Major's proposal for a UN-protected Kurdish "enclave" in northern Iraq?

In *Socialist Organiser* last week we argued: "The short answer is that we should welcome it, while retaining our attitude of distrust and hostility to the 'Allies'."

Militant and *Socialist Worker* argued differently. *Militant*: "The Kurds' leaders have appealed to the UN and the US for help... But if they [the US and its allies] had given military aid in the last few weeks the strings attached would soon have turned into a noose for the Kurdish and Iraqi peoples..."

And instead? "An appeal to workers and peasants in and around Baghdad could have dealt the regime a fatal blow in its heart. The majority Sunni Moslem people in that area... could have been won by an Iraq-wide opposition with a... socialist programme."

In other words: socialism is the only answer. Or rather, socialism could have been the only answer.

By last week the uprisings in Iraq had been defeated. The Kurds were fleeing in terror and dying in hundreds. The editors of *Militant*, safe and warm in London, read them lectures on how it all could have been better if they had had an Iraq-wide movement with a socialist programme, and how it would be unprincipled for them now to manoeuvre and seek lesser evils!

"The line here was more 'anti-imperialism is the only answer' than 'socialism is the only answer'. It was still 'pseudo-radical'."

There is an approximate precedent for *Militant's* attitude in the politics of the Stalinist movement in its ultra-left "third period". After World War I, the Saarland, a corner of Germany, was cut off, with its administration under the League of Nations and its coal mines controlled by France. The Versailles Treaty laid down that a referendum should be organised there in 1935 on the future of the area.

The Nazis took power in Germany. But for a while, in mid-1933, the Stalinists called on workers to vote in the referendum for union with Germany. "A Red Saar in a Soviet Germany!" was their slogan.

Trotsky denounced this as "the cowardice of pseudo-radicalism". "Naturally we must come out for a Soviet Saar, that is, teaching the need for the conquest of power. The date of this conquest has not, however, been fixed anywhere, while the date of the referendum has been fixed quite precisely in the Versailles Treaty."

"That means that the party that fights for a Soviet Saar owes the workers an answer to the question: how should they vote in the year 1935?"

"To rally to Hitlerite Germany in practice, ie. through the referendum, means, theoretically speaking, to put national mysticism above the class interest and psychologically to conduct a really cur-like policy."

"Naturally, only traitors can demand annexation at present, for that means to sacrifice the most concrete and vital question

of the German workers in the Saar territory to the abstract, national factor."

Trotsky supported neither the Versailles Treaty, nor the League of Nations, nor imperialist France. But he favoured a vote for continued autonomy for the Saar (under the League of Nations). And the rapid bluster which *Militant* offers now to the Kurdish people facing Ba'athist genocide ("a red Kurdistan in a soviet Iraq"?) is no better than the "pseudo-radical" Stalinist response then to the Nazi threat to the rights and organisation of the Saar workers.

Socialist Worker came to the same conclusion as *Militant*, but less clear-cut. Its editorial offered three arguments. First, that the "enclave" idea was "a new version of partition — an old British trick". Second, that it was not a big enough partition of Iraq and the other states ruling Kurdish populations! "If Bush, Major, the EC leaders and the UN really wanted to create a safe haven for the Kurds, they would support their demand for a homeland and create a Kurdish state."

And, third, that the "enclave" "would effectively be controlled by Turkey", which would also oppress the Kurds. What *SW's* attitude would be to an enclave not controlled by Turkey it did not say. Its message to the fleeing, dying people was that there was "No Solution for the Kurds".

The line here was more "anti-imperialism is the only answer" than "socialism is the only answer". It was still "pseudo-radical". For *SW*, all concern for the Kurds was apparently subordinate to getting a simple and "saleable" line against the US-British military presence in the region for use in British politics.

SO also argued that Western socialists should continue to oppose the imperialist troop presence. We did not do so by denying that the Kurds might get some advantages from an imperialist-protected enclave, but by recalling fundamental arguments.

We could not trust the US and Britain to create the "enclave", still less to run it in line with the Kurds' interests. Even if they did help the Kurds a little, that could not outweigh the terrible things they did in the war against Iraq and are likely to do in future if they continue as imperialist overlords in the region.

We also argued that "the Kurds" — who have to operate in circumstances not chosen by themselves, with the US/British presence as a given fact — "have a right to play their enemies off against each other as best they can, and the right to take what help they can get." We called for arms to the Kurds, and for the opening of borders (including Britain's and the US's) to refugees.

SW and *Militant* evidently decided that such arguments were too complicated, too subtle. Trotsky once remarked that Stalin dealt with the national question, like all other questions, from the point of view of administrative convenience. *SW* and *Militant* dealt with the plight of the Kurds, like all other questions, from the point of view of propagandist convenience.



John Major — we distrust him, but is that all that there is to be said?

Council on the rampage; unions divided:

£1 million spent on sell-offs. 320 workers sacked:

Southwark builders retreat

By an EETPU shop steward, Southwark Council DLO

The Southwark Council building workers' strike in defence of jobs has been suspended.

At a mass meeting held at Lucas Gardens opposite Peckham Town Hall on Tuesday 16 April the action in protest at 180 compulsory redundancies and a cut in pay was called off.

This is a serious setback for trade unionism in Southwark.

In order to build for the future we need to learn the lessons and understand how this defeat came about.

A big part of the blame must lie with the national officials of

Unshackle the unions

Fighting the Tory anti-union laws

Saturday 27 April
11.00am-5.30pm

ULU, Malet St, London

Speakers will include • John Hendy QC • Ronnie McDonald (OILC) • Mickey Fenn (sacked Tilbury docker)

the two main unions involved, UCATT and the EETPU.

Both sets of officials took their time, to say the least, in organising official ballots for strike action. EETPU officer Barry Chapple — son of the beloved Frank — denied his members a workplace ballot and then held back announcing the result of the postal ballot until after the strike was supposed to start.

The TGWU and the GMB, which only cover around 15% of the workforce, also failed to complete their ballot.

This confusion was then exploited by pro-management anti-strike individuals who at last Friday's (12 April) mass meeting argued against falling in line with the UCATT result, even though UCATT is the majority union in the DLO.

While the officials were stringing out the ballot, management went on the offensive. They announced 180 compulsory redundancies in the second week of the UCATT ballot, hoping to sap the workers' will to fight through such a display of arrogance. Their aim was to create a mood of pessimism in a workforce that has seen 320 jobs go out of 850 in the last six months, and lives in fear of the dole as recession grips the construction industry.

The "brains" behind the sackings — private consultant and DLO director Fernet — doesn't believe that the belt tightening in Southwark should affect him. He pays himself £350 per day!

Management used the anti-union laws to their advantage.

While the union officials prevaricated the Council dragged out negotiations over a series of secondary issues, thus allowing

an original ballot mandate for strike action to expire, necessitating a re-ballot. The Tories' 28-day rule had done its job. The original cross-union unity built up at the start of the year was thrown away (see below).

Thus delay and confusion forced the DLO stewards' committee to go into battle very late in the day. But as one UCATT

steward put it: "It's better to fight and lose than not to fight at all. Sometimes it is more important for working people to keep their dignity rather than to crawl to the boss in the hope that they will keep their jobs."

The task now is to rebuild union organisation in what remains of the DLO. Management's offensive must be resisted every step of the way.

A united fightback needed

By Roy Webb, Chair, Southwark NALGO

At the start of the year Southwark council trade unions were involved in a unique series of strikes.

This was the first time ever that all the unions had taken action together on a single issue, in defence of terms and conditions.

The results of the strike action has been that the council has set up working parties to look at all the disputed areas, which include sickness procedures, disciplinary codes, time off for trade union duties, redundancy and

redeployment procedures.

Progress seems to be good on most of these working parties. But less progress is being made on redeployment and redundancy. The council has now sacked 180 building workers and served official notice of over 100 redundancies in the education department.

So, just how effective has the joint trade union action been?

On the one hand the fact that all the unions have been acting together has been a major factor in the progress made so far. Negotiations with management would probably never have started or kept going so long, without the joint action of all the

unions.

But there are deeper problems. The fact that nothing was being offered on the real crunch point of redundancies and redeployment. What's more, the joint unions have failed to agree a proper programme of industrial action beyond a series of "rolling strikes" where the workforce would be divided up into 20 different units, each of which would take strike action on only one day per month.

Originally, the unions were committed to a series of one-day strikes, followed by a ballot for an all-out strike. It was that threat which eventually forced the council to come to the negotiating table. Since then, the action taken has been one single day of strike action followed by the move into the working parties, with the direction of any future strike action very unclear indeed.

The issue here is how did these tactical decisions get made? SO supporters working for the council argued that rank and file groups needed to be set up in all the unions. NALGO had an official policy of setting up strike committees in each department to allow the members of the union as much say in the running of the dispute as possible. In practice, very few of these committees were ever established, and none of the other unions followed suit.

So the key tactical decisions have been made in caucuses of the senior branch officials from the unions involved, with little or no involvement from the rank and file membership.

This shows how the key issue of democracy is raised very starkly when several unions are acting in concert with each other.

Labour council brings in temporary labour

By a Southwark DLO shop steward

Southwark council is the largest elected public housing authority in London. It is responsible for the maintenance of over 59,000 properties, the majority of households in Southwark.

And yet it spends less money on the maintenance and repairs of these properties than nearly, if not all, of the other London boroughs.

In order to pursue its privatisation policies, the Tory government attempted to introduce a Housing Action Trust, that is to remove Southwark council as the landlord, on two of the largest estates, the North Peckham and the Gloucester Grove. £1 million was spent on publicity to persuade the tenants that services should be carried out by contractors. Despite this publicity, the tenants voted 2:1 against privatisation.

Yet despite this vote the council has set up a separate contract, so the private contractors have taken over. The government may not have succeeded with the privatisation of these estates, but Southwark's Labour council has done it for them.

Why was no vote allowed on the use of private contractors? And what a disgrace for a Labour council to treat its tenants with such contempt.

To make matters worse, all the maintenance and repair work is now being carried out by anti-union Beazers contractors. It was claimed that they were the cheapest tender for this contract.

The fact is that they were not the cheapest. Direct labour was the cheapest, and the best, the only reason why our tender was shown as more expensive was because we have to show a profit.

Direct labour was set up to operate on the basis of cost of materials and labour, not to make a profit out of tenants. The real fact was, direct labour was cheaper in real terms to the tenants of Southwark than this private contractor. Any profit we are now forced to make does go

back to the council for their use. The profits of contractors will boost their own private wealth.

It was also a fact that Southwark was advised by its own legal department that it could have let us have the contract because of the additional costs it would have incurred as a result of sacking of our members. It chose instead to sack 180 building workers.

Southwark council over the last six months has driven out or sacked 320 of our workmates who have been employed for many years to carry out repairs to council properties. The 180 sackings that have occurred over the last two weeks show that Southwark has adopted a brutal attitude to its employees. In some cases workers with over 30 years service were given instant dismissal over the Easter Bank

Holiday weekend, with a letter delivered by a taxi driver. Others who were sacked had not more than a few days notice.

It seems that an elected council does not believe it has to behave in a civilised manner, or even apply the minimal requirements of employment law.

These sackings need not have taken place. Management have refused voluntary redundancies to some of the workforce, who have had enough of Southwark increasing oppressive practices. It could also have redeployed direct labour to the work it was itself sub-letting to contractors.

It has also run down the numbers of those it employs as craft apprentices and attempted to sack 20 apprentices.

The council has brought in bogus contractors to replace those it has sacked. These

workers are not directly employed by these contractors; the responsibility for tax and insurance, safety of tenants and their property are being given over to these workers who are hired on a daily basis, with a large number of these workers being on the lump, with no tax, no insurance, no responsibility to tenants, or anyone else, other than cash in hand.

It is also obscene for the council to condone the abuse of these workers by the employment of these contractors.

No more sackings! Reinstate those sacked! Remove lump labour contractors! For full repairs by direct labour!

For messages of support contact DLO shop stewards, c/o Southwark TU Support Unit, 42 Braganza St, London SE17. Phone: 071 582 8555.

British Timken: down but definitely not out!

By an AEU member

The issue of the sacking of AEU shop steward Pat Markey from his job as a machine setter-operator at British Timken Northampton has been closely reported in Northampton's local newspaper, the *Chronicle and Echo*.

On Friday 12 April it reported on the ballot for industrial action for Pat's reinstatement: "Union bosses today lifted the strike threat hanging over Northampton engineering giant British Timken — and then blamed the recession..."

"Workers in the firm's roller grinding department voted 58 to 38 against a walkout in protest at the sacking of Pat Markey, who claims he lost his job after contracting dermatitis at work... Amalgamated Engineering Union officials blamed the recent redundancies at the firm for the result... British Timken has maintained it went through all

the proper procedures in Mr Markey's case. Both the firm and Mr Markey declined to comment on the vote today..."

"It is claimed up to 60 workers have contracted dermatitis during the last 18 months after Timken changed to a different type of liquid coolant. Health and safety officials have been investigating products used."

"An official union statement said: 'From the union's point of view it is obviously a very disappointing result. Timken workers have suffered during the last few months. There has been no overtime and short-time and members have experienced colleagues being made redundant. This result reflects the circumstances. At the bottom line the principle is that no worker should be sacked because he or she has been unfortunate to contract a disease at work'. AEU shop steward Ken Thain said: 'I am gutted. I am very upset and disappointed about the result. We've had numerous disputes and this is the first time members have voted not to support the shop steward's recommendations.'"

It is true that the work situation contributed to the ballot

result. But that is not the whole story. As reported in last week's SO the joint shop stewards committee had voted to support the strike ballot in RGS and also to support a strike levy in the rest of the factory in the event of a strike, but: "You can be sure that the company and unfortunately a minority on the union side won't waste any time putting the boot in in an attempt to undermine any support for Pat".

The sole contribution to the dispute on the part of the works convenor was to appear in RGS on the day of the ballot to spread the word that in fact no levy would be collected in the event of a strike. The minimum effect would be to spread confusion.

Meanwhile, the clique around the convenor and the full-time district official were conspicuous by their absence. Their active support in defence of a victimised shop steward could or would, in the difficult circumstances, have contributed to a positive result in the strike ballot.

But why did the convenor stick the boot in? It appears he was stung by criticism in an article about redundancies in a recent *Socialist Organiser* rank and file bulletin, "Bearing Up". The ar-

ticle reports on the decision taken by the JSSC to oppose compulsory redundancies and to oppose the terms for voluntary redundancies but notes that, "by Wednesday morning, one day after the voluntary redundancy expiry date, and one week after the shop stewards committee formulated their response, no 'failure to agree' has been submitted. Why not?"

It was right to ask such a question. However, this seemed to be the excuse for the minority around the works convenor not to support Pat. To them an active shop steward, a rank and file bulletin which doesn't duck the issues, and the thought of a strike were all too much. Such people should be made to account for their actions.

In such circumstances the vote of 58 to 38 against striking was not surprising, and reflects a substantial minority who were prepared to fight. If Timken and some in the union feel satisfied at the result, they're making a big mistake.

The ideas that Pat represents will be around live and kicking long after those miserable toads have been confined to the dustbin of history.

Staffing strikes in DSS

By Mark Serwotka, Rotherham DSS CPSA

The situation inside most DSS local offices has become unbearable.

Computerisation and new working practices means that management are attempting to force through big job cuts. In some offices this could mean 40 sackings.

In one office over 15,000 pieces of case work are outstanding, as a result huge queues of claimants wait for benefits, crisis loans are not being processed, and staff morale is low.

On top of all this, management announced that under their newly acquired "right to manage" status all existing union agreements were invalid.

They also spent thousands of pounds on gimmicks like balloons and sweets to woo over the public to a new style of service!

As if anyone is fooled, particularly the public who cannot get a decent service from our chaotic system.

Despite our right-wing leaders being unable and unwilling to act, members are beginning to take matters into their own hands. In both Sheffield and Hull there have been strikes in recent days. In Sheffield all four offices were on strike for three days as a protest against proposed cuts of 120 staff, including the sacking of 80 casuals on fixed term contracts.

On return to work the members voted by 250 to 5 to operate a work to rule, while further action is planned. In Hull one office is on indefinite strike until management are prepared to staff the office adequately.

Another Hull office has also been on strike for three days. In both Sheffield and Hull NUCPS have also taken action.

In Merthyr Tydfil members are being consulted on strike action over plans to sack 30 clerical staff. All of these actions point the way forward.

In South Yorkshire and Humberside there are plans for an area-wide strike which, if successful, will further pressure management.

More than this, though, we need a national staffing campaign. This alone will really force management to reverse their cuts. Activists and members should demand that the union organises a national campaign, but in the meantime as many local strikes as possible should be called for to bring enough pressure on both management and our own union.

Hull strike: send donations and messages of support to Steve Cawkwell, 150 Chamberlain Road, Hull 8.

Up against the law

The 1991 Employment Act, designed by the Tories to clamp down on unofficial action, could find its first victims later this month.

After 800 Liverpool postal workers struck for a day in solidarity with postal engineers, 14 Union of Communications Workers (UCW) reps are up in court, charged with organising illegal unofficial solidarity action.

Post Office bosses are saying that the 14 reps and the national union were instrumental in organising the walk-out. UCW leaders have made it clear in a branch circular that they will disown all such action, so it looks as if the 14 union reps could face victimisation.

The court case will continue until 29 April.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

USSR: the start of a new labour movement

By Mark Osborn

With the Soviet miners in the lead, the wave of working class protests in the USSR is steadily growing.

Latest reports suggest that many different groups of workers are following the lead from the pits and striking for their own demands.

In the oil equipment factories in Azerbaijan workers have called strikes.

On Tuesday 16 April, a section of bus and trolley bus workers in Kiev struck to demand Gorbachev's resignation. The workers also demanded the release of political prisoners and the nationalisation of Ukrainian Communist Party property.

In Minsk, a traditionally conservative Byelorussian city, tens of thousands of workers took general strike action last week.

Two mass rallies of 50,000 striking workers were held in Minsk on Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 April.

The strikes involved over 60 plants, including one of the USSR's biggest car factories.

The workers took action to win more wages following the huge price rises of 2 April, but by Thursday 11th the demands had been expanded to include calls for the resignation of Gorbachev and for new elections to the Byelorussian and Soviet parliaments.

The workers only called their action off when the Byelorussian Prime Minister, Vyahislav Pebich, backed down and agreed to negotiate with the strikers.

Workers are becoming increasingly desperate as standards of living fall. The price rises of two weeks ago led to 240% increases in the cost of food and 175% rises for consumer goods.

A most significant development in the Minsk action was the presence of striking miners' representatives from the Ukrainian Donbass and Siberian Kuzbass coalfields. They were collaborating with the Minsk strike committees.

The base is now being laid for a cross-union, multi-nationality workers' movement.

Strikes are spreading among the Kuzbass pits. More mines than ever are on strike: 48 pits (or 65%) have stopped work.

Soviet TV reports a mine in Buryatia has struck issuing political and economic demands.

Twelve out of the 13 pits in Vorkhuta are now on strike.

The *Komsomolskaya Pravda* of 16 April reports that a two-hour political general strike has been called for Thursday 18 April in Sverdlovsk. 53 labour collectives representing hundreds of thousands of workers are to attend rallies in the area.

The strikers are demanding the resignation of Gorbachev and the USSR's government.

Meanwhile, the slide towards economic disaster continues. National income for the first three months of 1991 is 12% lower than the same period in 1990. The slump is accelerating and the economy may shrink by 20% this year.

Moscow's problems are compounded by economic strangulation caused by some of the republics refusing to pay tax revenues to the centre. The Soviet government predicts a 123 billion rouble shortfall for '91 unless the republics pay up.

Gorbachev is now using fear of economic chaos against the striking workers. In a speech on 15 April he called for the "saving of the homeland" and saving "our economy from collapse...we must restore law and order".

The strikes in essential services — like coal — are nominally illegal; Gorbachev has been unable to enforce "law and order" against the miners.

Last week the leader of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, took the opportunity of an emergency session of the Russian parliament to take new powers.

Yeltsin is expected to use his new powers to implement a version of the Shatalin marketisation plan in the Russian republic. The 500 day Shatalin forced march to the market was rejected by Gorbachev at the end of last year.

Gorbachev has announced his own "anti-crisis" package. He is demanding a halt to the strikes and the removal of all price controls by October 1992.



Liverpool NALGO branch secretary Judy Cotter burns redundancy notices as workers march to the council offices. Photo: Profile

Class war in Liverpool

By Dale Street

Liverpool City Council will be at a standstill by the time this paper appears. Council workers are striking for three days (16-18 April) as part of their campaign to prevent a thousand job cuts.

386 redundancies were proposed in the Council budget voted through last month by the right-wing minority of the Labour Group, in alliance with Liberal Democrats. Over 600 more redundancies were approved a week later by one of the Council committees, where right-wing Labour councillors voted for the cuts, and

Liberal Democrats abstained.

The 14 unions in the City Council Joint Trade Union Committee responded by balloting for strike action. Results to date show a high level of support for the action — 20 to 1 in UCATT, and 14 to 1 in one of the TGWU section ballots.

The three days of all-out strike are to be followed by a guerrilla strategy of pulling out key sections of workers. There have already been spontaneous walk-outs.

Last Thursday (11 April) over a thousand workers marched through the city centre after four gatekeepers at a highways lighting depot became the first workers to receive redundancy notices.

The following day hundreds of workers in the Cleansing Department walked out against redundan-

cy notices there.

The Council is also attacking working conditions. Last week, for example, City Council cleaners and catering staff were sent letters "offering" them new contracts from 1 July. For some workers the new contracts mean a loss of up to £15 a week.

As Ian Lowes, convenor of GMB Branch 5, put it at the rally at the start of last Thursday's city centre demonstration: "This dispute is not just about redundancies; it is a wholesale attack on working conditions and trade unionism. Dean, Roberts, and Rimmer (the leaders of the right-wing minority of the Labour Group) have declared war on the workforce."

Labour Party members should

demand that their candidates in the May local council elections come out in support of the strike and organise public meetings with strikers on the platform; and they should work with the council workers to build support for the demonstrations and rallies being planned in the course of the dispute.

All trade unionists should provide moral and financial support to the striking council workers: although the fight against job losses should not be run as a campaign to "woo public opinion", council trade unionists should ensure public support by combining the fight for job security and better working conditions for council workers with proposals for better council services for people in Liverpool.