

Finish off  
the Poll  
Tax!

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**CPSA: rebuild  
from the base!**



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For workers' liberty!



For socialist renewal!

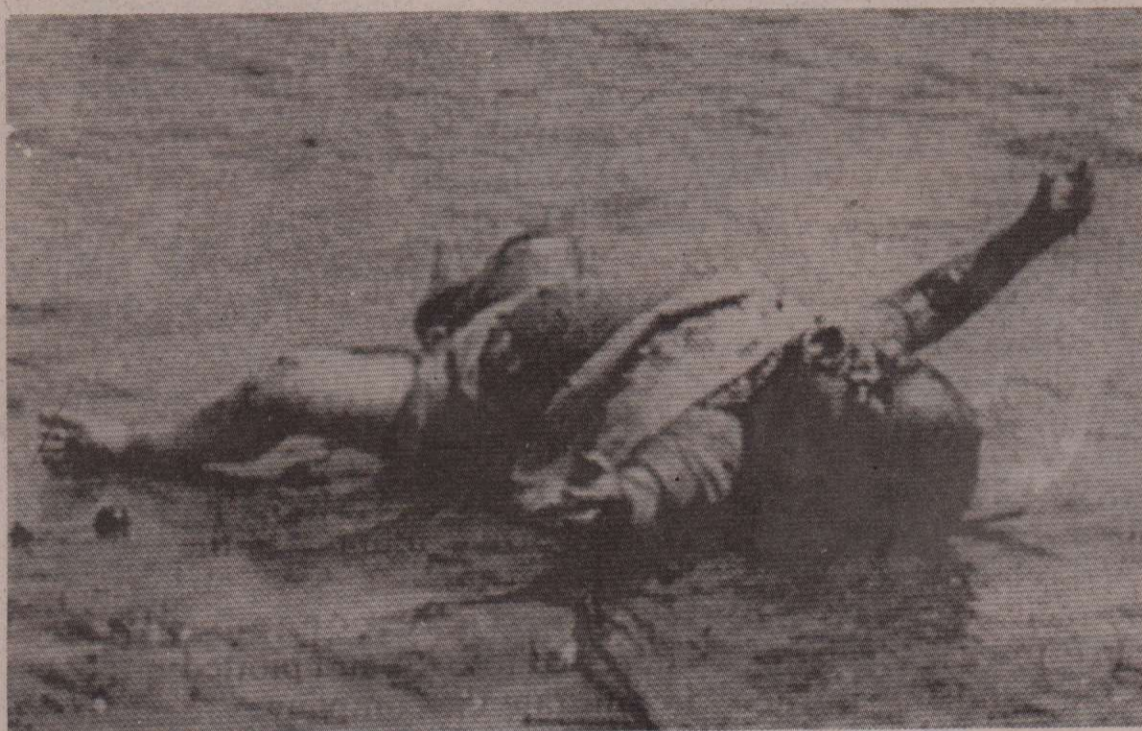
USSR and  
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# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER



## Bangladesh:

# Capitalism's wasteland

# The lie machine



The front page of last Sunday's *News of the World* is probably sure of a place in future textbooks dealing with late 20th century capitalism. Not for a long time has the moral imbecility in which our society is trapped been so cogently expressed. Here you have everything!

27 million face death from starvation in Africa, while Europe and America are glutted with unsaleable food? Right — let's think of a sales-promoting stunt! The *News of the World* arranges for the Princess Royal to "auction" Gazza — the talented sportsman reduced to a repulsive buffoon — to raise money for "the starving babies".

But we musn't let our standards slip: the bottom of the page has the usual instalment of smut.

Smut and prurience is the name of the game when a pretty young woman disappears and is found dead. Rachel McLean fits the bill. Jo Ramaden didn't. She is a Down's Syndrome woman with a mental age of ten. She disappeared four weeks ago and her family had to make a fuss before the tabloids would give the case, maybe helpful, publicity.

The chopping down of Charles goes on, vigorously.

# Bangladesh: capitalism's wasteland

**R**iches breed riches, poverty breeds poverty: that is the rule of capitalism, and that is the rule that makes wastelands of countries like Bangladesh.

Maybe 200,000 people are dead as a result of the cyclone which hit Bangladesh. Around ten million people are destitute. Their homes have been destroyed and their land has been polluted with salt water.

Perhaps four million are in immediate danger of deadly disease because they have no clean water and no adequate supplies of food.

Britain has given £4.5 million aid, the US £2 million. Against the scale of the disaster, these amounts are tiny. The US's aid to Bangladesh would cover just 86 seconds of the US's spending on the Gulf War.

Indeed, two days' US spending on the Gulf War totalled more than the whole yearly income of the poorer 50 per cent of the population of Bangladesh — some 50 million people.

Most Bangladeshis scrape a living by cultivating tiny plots of land with poor technology — or, even more precariously, by hiring out their labour for odd jobs in this poverty-stricken agriculture.

Tens of millions of them huddle round the often-flooded deltas of Bangladesh's great rivers, because the flooding deposits rich silt and creates fertile land. Every scrap of land, even the most dangerous and insecure, is occupied by people desperate for access to the means to work and gain a living.

Their plight is just as much a product of the world capitalist system as is the wealth of the rich districts of cities like London or New York. Capitalism creates tremendous resources, mobilises huge productive powers — and directs them where they are most profitable.

Bengal — Bangladesh is east Bengal — was, some 300 years ago, one of the world's greatest centres of handicraft production, a great industrial exporter as industry went in those days. Two centuries of British imperialism stunted its development.

Now it gets almost no investment in agriculture or industry: it's not profitable, because the infrastructure of roads, telecommunications, power supply, skilled labour and so on is not there. It gets almost no investment in infrastructure either, for that offers too low a rate of return. Capital prefers to direct itself where it can get quicker and easier returns, and leave Bangladesh as a holding pen for a reserve army of labour.

From a capitalist point of view, investment in protection against floods in Holland, or earthquakes in California, is worthwhile because there are ample profits to be protected. Investment in protection against disasters in Bangladesh is

uneconomic because there are hardly any profits to be protected, only people.

The great majority of the people have been thrown on the scrap heap of world capitalism in much the same way as the unemployed of each country are thrown on the scrap heap of national capitalism.

In fact their plight is even worse. The unemployed in the big capitalist economies at least get some meagre dole and public services. The people of Bangladesh are left to find some flood-swept pocket of land to keep themselves alive until such time as the big capitalist economies need to pull them in as migrant labour.

They are pulled in as migrant labour when that is profitable, pushed away when it is not. Only last week the *Daily Star* ran a virulent racist campaign against a worker of Bangladeshi origin — a British citizen, who had lived in Britain for 30 years — for daring to bring his wife and children to Britain and get a council house.

Capitalism is all about putting resources where they will bring profits, and not where they are most needed.



## Army threat in Yugoslavia

As we go to press, the Yugoslav army has publicly threatened to take control if the disintegrating federal government does not tame the country's exploding conflicts between its different nationalities. The immediate spark was clashes between Serbs

and Croats in Croatia, but there have also been conflicts between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and over Slovakia's wish to break away. Unless the Yugoslav workers can unite, the alternatives now are military rule or a collapse into civil war.

Bangladesh's suffering is a result of that system.

It is a terrible, hideous and tragic answer to all the pun-dits who are now claiming that socialism must be an illu-

sion, and capitalism is the "end of history", the final order of society which cannot be improved on.

So long as there are people willing to protest against the

fate of the poor of Bangladesh and to fight for a system which forbids the callous discarding of millions of people, the cause of socialism is alive and urgent.

# Free the Tottenham Three!

On 5 October 1985, during a riot on the Broadwater Farm estate in North London, PC Keith Blakelock was killed. Winston Silcott and two other young men were convicted of Blakelock's murder on very thin evidence. They are now serving long prison sentences. George Silcott, brother of Winston Silcott,



explains the campaign to free the Tottenham Three.

## Nationalism swells in Slovakia

By Steven Holt

Last week saw mass demonstrations in the Slovak capital, Bratislava, in support of the sacked prime minister Vladimir Meciar.

Tens of thousands protested against his removal and replacement by Jan Carnogursky of the Christian Democrat Party. All but one of Meciar's colleagues in the "Public Against Violence" party were also sacked from the coalition government.

This coup within the Slovak parliament against Meciar (who has 80% popular support) probably represents a move to the right and increased nationalism. Meciar's party and Car-

nogursky's party both want greater autonomy for Slovakia within Czechoslovakia. Meciar in particular has opposed Vaclav Havel's government in its moves towards the "free" market, since most of the resulting unemployment will come in the less industrialised Slovak areas.

Fears of unemployment have fuelled the resurgence of the Slovak fascist movement. A few weeks ago, several thousand fascists demonstrated to commemorate Josef Tiso, the Slovak fascist leader of independent pro-Nazi Slovakia during the Second World War.

Representatives of Havel's Prague government who tried to argue with the Slovak fascists were beaten up.

The police wanted to convict black people for the killing of Blakelock.

The press made out that only black people were involved. Both white and black people were involved. But the press portrayed Winston as the ring leader of a mob of crazy black people.

In fact, Winston was not even on the estate when Blakelock was killed. This has been proved. And the police know it very well.

The police wanted to get Winston Silcott because he spoke out against the police oppression of black people.

The police did not investigate the case properly. They used intimidation against frightened youth. They got youth who were denied access to lawyers and their parents to tell lies about themselves and others.

Winston Silcott was jailed with no evidence against him. He did not make any statement. He did not do anything.

The other two who were jailed were Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite.

Engin was 19 at the time. He was backward. He could not read or write. He put his mark on a statement which he

could not read. Mark Braithwaite suffered from claustrophobia. He demanded a doctor. In the end he would sign anything, just to get out of the cell.

They have all been jailed wrongly. These people should be released.

### Appeals

Engin Raghip will probably have an appeal hearing in July.

There is now medical evidence in the case of Mark Braithwaite, and it is hoped that he will soon get an appeal.

Winston Silcott is in a more difficult position. Appeals are normally only granted if there is new evidence which undermines the original evidence used to get the conviction. But in Silcott's case there never was any evidence.

Contact the Tottenham Three Families Campaign, 247a West Green Road, London N15 5ED.

# The poll tax battle isn't over

Is the fight against the poll tax all over, except for a little bit of additional shouting, and the tidying up of a few details?

Nothing could be further from the truth!

No idea could be more dangerous for the left in the run up to the general election than this.

The poll tax still has two years to run. It is still being collected. It will continue to be collected — if the Tories have their way — until after the general election. People are being hauled before courts for non-payment still.

There are perhaps as many as 14 million non-payers now: vast numbers of them under threat from the bailiffs. People are in jail for not paying the "abolished" poll tax.

No, the Tories haven't abolished the poll tax: they have only *begun* to dismantle it.

They hope that the announcement that it is to go in two years will disarm the opposition and resistance. They hope the resistance will collapse, that non-payers will start to pay, that the courts and the police will be obeyed.

And pigs might fly!

The government announcement that the poll tax is going is — whether they like it or not — an admission by the Tory government of political and moral bankruptcy.

The 14 million non-payers resisting this tax now have the government's sincere and heartfelt acknowledgement that the poll tax was never a good idea.

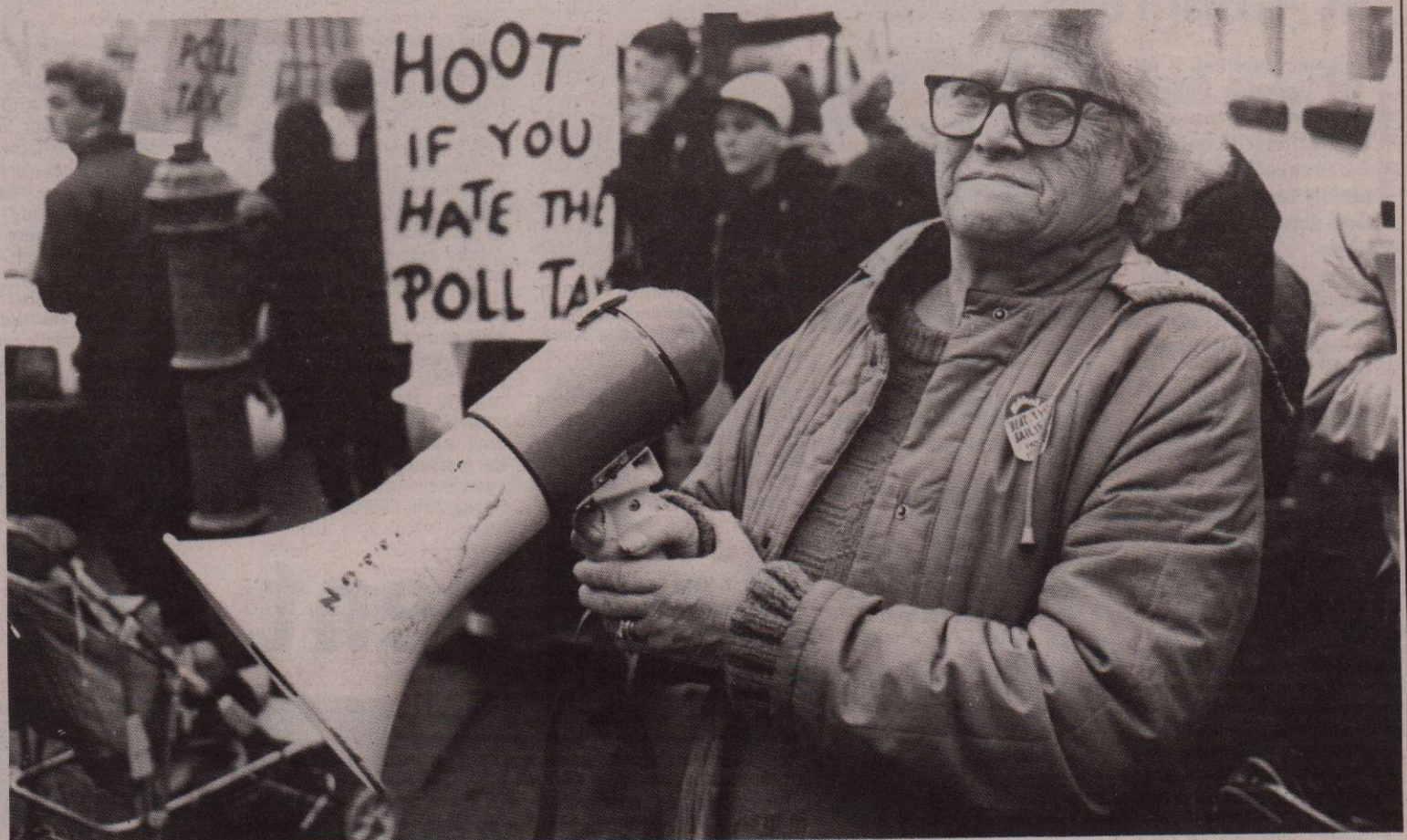
Lots of people who let themselves be hustled into reluctantly agreeing to pay will now think twice about it.

Those who resist bailiffs and police trying to enforce court orders now know that the government admits that they are in the right, that they are resisting a discredited tax, "officially" declared to be unworkable and unenforceable.

Support for such resistance is therefore likely to be wider, stronger, and more certain now that the Tories have surrendered the political and moral high ground.

The encouraging truth is this: resistance to the poll tax, and to the courts, police and bailiffs enforcing it, could grow massively in the period ahead. It may grow anyway — but it is certain to grow if it is properly organised and led.

The two year gap between the Tory decision to scrap it and the ac-



The Tories' climbdown can fuel new resistance

tual ending of the poll tax could yet prove to be wide enough to swallow the Tory government.

It could — if it were not for the wretched policy of the Labour Party leaders. One of the great crimes of Neil Kinnock and his "team" has been, and is, their failure to use the mass revolt against the poll tax to drive the Tories from office. The failure and defeat of their cherished poll tax should have brought the Tory government to terminal crisis, to the point where they could not go on without a general election.

The flabbiness and demoralisation of Labour has allowed them — minus Thatcher — to shrug off a defeat that should have crushed them.

It is still not too late to bury the Tories in the ruins of the poll tax. The Tory surrender on the poll tax, combined with two more years of trying to enforce it, add up to the most favourable conditions yet for an intensive mass resistance campaign of civil disobedience. The poll tax is still as oppressive and unjust as it always was, and it is now a lame duck law still being forced after its injustice is accepted even by the government which tried to perpetrate it.

If the leaders of the labour movement won't lead, then the rank and file must — that has always been the response in situations like this. Rank and file direct action! Right now it means that we must use the new conditions to intensify the campaign of mass civil disobedience combined with obstruction of the courts and resistance to bailiffs: such resistance, we repeat, could now become a powerful mass movement that will make it impossible for the Tories to get themselves off the poll tax hook.

The new conditions affect the struggle in the trade unions too. *Socialist Organiser* has advocated that council trade unionists should refuse to collect the poll tax and other trade unionists refuse to cooperate with deductions of tax from wages.

If such trade union action had been combined with the mass non-payment campaign, then the anti-poll tax movement would have been more effective and part of the

**"The Tories are on the run — go after them! Amnesty for non-payers! Don't pay, don't collect! Campaign for a general election!"**

organised labour movement would have been central to it.

Use by the Tories of the anti-union legislation to punish unions whose members took such political action would have made the struggle against the anti-union laws immediately part of the struggle against the poll tax.

The largely spontaneous mass resistance to the poll tax backed by the "public opinion" of at least three-quarters of the electorate did cripple the poll tax and panic the Tories into throwing the savage old lady overboard. To bring Britain's

anti-union legislation — the most undemocratic in western and central Europe — into the centre of the struggle would have been to strike a blow against everything the Tories have achieved in their 11 years of misrule.

It would have brought the question of working class rights in general back centre-stage, backed by an active sympathy much wider than the trade union movement itself now is. It would have helped politicise and form, and educate the anti-poll tax revolt. It would have made it impossible for the Tories to divest themselves of the poll tax, and still stay in office.

It would have allowed the possibility of the anti-poll tax revolt swelling into a great tidal wave to wash the Tories from office.

And such a victory, and a Labour general election victory as part of it, would at least have shifted the centre of gravity in British politics to the left and undone much that the Tories had achieved in pushing Britain in the opposite direction since 1979.

It was not to be. It is part of the terrible price we pay for having as labour movement leadership this rotten bunch of tired and demoralised careerists.

Yet it still might be — if the left seizes its chance now. But it was not only the Kinnockites who held back and limited the anti-poll tax revolt. Others did too, and in the first place *Militant*, which has many supporters amongst rank and file trade unionists who collect and process the poll tax.

*Militant* too rejected labour movement political action and limited organisations like the anti-poll tax federation which they controlled to the necessarily amorphous and necessarily limited

"Don't pay" policy. Instead of a rounded all-sided policy seeking to unite the trade unions with the non-payment movement and give the civil disobedience movement a political focus, they were one-sided, and, perhaps intimidated by the Tory anti-union laws, worked actively to keep the trade unions out of the struggle.

Don't let the Labour leaders conspire with the Tories to throw away our victory over the poll tax! The Tories are on the run — go after them and run down the bourgeois scum!

There is still time to give the anti-poll tax movement a new departure: Amnesty for non-payers! Amnesty for jailed poll tax campaigners! Don't Pay, Don't Collect! Campaign for a general election!

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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

Socialist Organiser  
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA  
Newsdesk: 071 639 7965  
Latest date for reports: Monday

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

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

## STUDENTS

# National Union of Students conference Discredit for Labour students means left must organise

Paul McGarry reports  
on the National Union  
of Students conference

The recent NUS Conference (22-25 April) lived up to all expectations: directionless, bureaucratic and out of step with the concerns of students.

The ruling Kinnockite Labour Students (NOLS) came out of conference severely weakened and discredited, due to their incompetence and bureaucratic approach.

Two issues dominated the agenda: the structural "reform" of NUS and elections to the National Executive Committee (NEC), though lesbian and gay rights and the plight of the Kurds were discussed.

Left Unity led the campaign to maintain the existing NUS structures and to extend union democracy. Delegates rejected moves to set up regional structures and supported a motion defending

the role of the smaller NUS area organisations. Ironically, much of the reform debates fell off the agenda paper because of time wasting by NOLS.

In the NEC elections, Left Unity supporter Steve Mitchell was re-elected as Vice President Further Education Union Development, and Mark Sandell and Alice Sharp were elected as ordinary Executive members.

As reported in *SO*, NOLS failed to submit their NEC nomination papers properly and were ruled out. The campaign to re-open nominations in those positions that NOLS were set to contest was successful. The resulting re-elections ended in farce, as 60 candidates contested seven positions. The count for these elections, including President, takes place this weekend (11 May).

The lesbian and gay debate saw Left Unity supporters taking the majority of speeches for positions defending autonomy, and laying out a strategy for a campaign against Section 25, Paragraph 16 and Operation

Spanner. The excellent work done by Left Unity supporters in the lesbian and gay movement is second to none in NUS.

Unfortunately delegates backed a motion that supported the idea of a UN "solution" for the Kurds.

In the context of the lack of activity, and the move to the right in many colleges, the left did reasonably well. This was down in large part to Left Unity. The SWP were satisfied with making agitation for socialism whilst failing to address what is really happening in NUS. Their criteria for success is recruitment rather than the concerns of the existing movement; Militant were small and largely irrelevant.

More importantly, NOLS are now in real crisis. Their representation on the NEC looks to be sharply reduced, and the anti-left "independent" alliance which NOLS gave political oxygen to as a means of beating back the left has now turned on them.

NOLS were further discredited by issuing a leaflet



supporting a Liberal against Labour Party member Mark Sandell for NUS Treasurer, causing revolt in NOLS' ranks.

This, combined with the looming general election, means the possibilities of rebuilding the left in NOLS look better than for some time. Left activists must start looking to orientating to Labour Clubs and NOLS as a priority.

## Elaborate quadrilles at Congress House

None dare call it an "Incomes Policy". But the proposal for a "National Economic Assessment" (NEA) is plainly an Incomes Policy that dares not speak its name.

The idea was first canvassed a year or so back by John Edmonds of the GMB and Alan Tuffin of the UCW.

Since then Norman Willis and Shadow Chancellor John Smith have snapped up the NEA as the key to solving all the economic problems that will face an incoming Labour government.

Briefly, the NEA would mean that every autumn a Labour Chancellor would publish a statement of economic prospects and policy options facing the nation. Comrades Kinnock and Smith would then hold court with the CBI, TUC and other interested parties, in the hope that all concerned would see what was required in terms of pay claims and investment decisions.

This would be followed up by a system of "synchronised" pay bargaining under which key industries would link their wage negotiations to the NEA, thus preventing the dreaded "leap-frog" effect of escalating pay claims.

This, in essence, is the content of the TUC's latest economic proposals and the Labour Party's latest policy review, "Opportunity Britain".

But in both documents the NEA is mixed up with a quite separate proposal: a national minimum wage set at half of average earnings.

The TUC document included the phrase "unions will be expected not to quote the agreed minimum pay rise in negotiations for other workers". This, of course, raised that old bug-bear, *differentials*.

It was bad luck (or bad timing) for Willis, Edmonds and the other NEA champions that the general council met in the same week as the AEU's National Committee — the lay-member national policy making body of the engineers. The National Committee made it clear that it wanted no truck with pay restraint in any shape or form, passing a resolution opposing "any attempt to suppress free collective bargaining and replace it with national wage assessments and similar devices".

Bill Jordan and Gavin Laird (neither of whom is in principle opposed to the NEA) then started making militant noises about defending differentials, opposing wage restraint, fighting to their last breath, etc. etc.

Thus it was that the last week of April saw a series of elaborate quadrilles being danced around the proposed NEA, culminating in a grand finale of formal "unity" at the general council. The wording of the minimum wage proposal was subtly altered to take account of Bros. Jordan and Laird: it now reads that "any exceptional increases (given solely to implement minimum pay legislation) would not be regarded as a vehicle for general increases". In the end, everybody went away from the general council reasonably happy.

The irony is that far from holding general wage rises down, a national minimum wage would almost certainly benefit *all* workers. In the words of a "Kinnock loyalist" (quoted recently in the *Sunday Telegraph*), "it would be bound to push up other people's wage claims. Nobody wants to see their differentials eroded and once skilled workers see that unskilled people are closing the gap they will want more money."

Meanwhile, leading figures in NUPE (presently in the process of amalgamating with NALGO and CoHSE), have let it be known that they mean business on the minimum wage question: "we've put up with a lot of back-sliding from Kinnock but on 'his issue we're willing to put up a real fight if he tries to wriggle out" is the kind of thing now being said by people normally considered "Kinnock loyalists". The fudging, mudding and elaborate quadrilles of the last few weeks are *not* the end of this story.



### INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

# Argument, not bans!

By Jill Mountford

The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) always has an input into the National Union of Students' (NUS) Conference.

Half a dozen or so students from Higher Education colleges, usually Oxford and Cambridge Universities, come to NUS Conference as delegates.

They stand in elections to make anti-abortion speeches to conference. They also give out some pretty horrible literature.

Their ideas are offensive, reactionary and, by their logic, anti-women.

These people are moralists, and usually religious. They peddle misinformation about abortion and foetal development.

However, they represent widely-held views which have to be defeated in argument rather than just shouted against. They have every right to hold their views and distribute their literature.

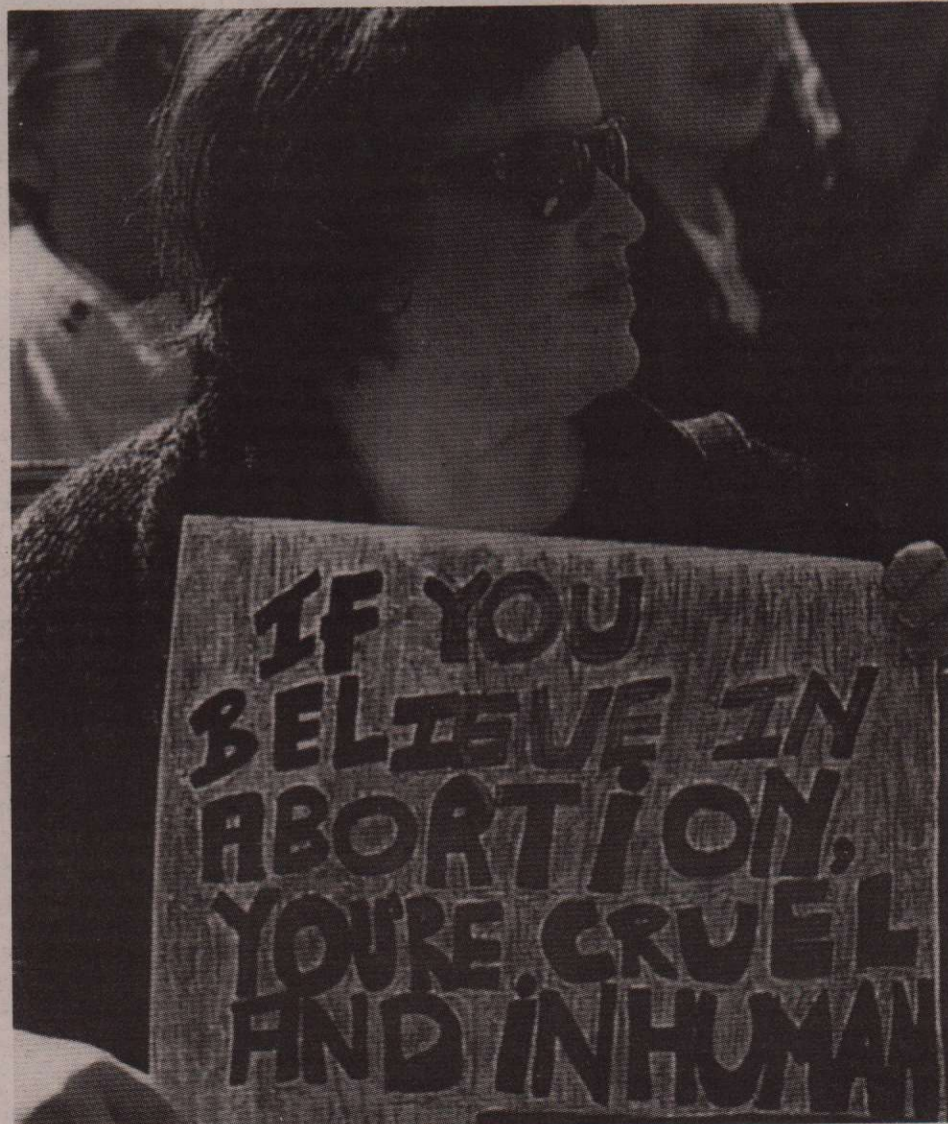
They do not incite violence or racial hatred. Even though their literature is often factually incorrect — for example, they frequently use pictures of 20 week old foetuses claiming that they are 12 to 14 weeks old — they should not be banned.

Just as every year SPUC peddle their crap, every year the Socialist Worker Party respond in exactly the same way.

The SWP use conference standing orders to make hysterical speeches about why anti-abortionist literature should be banned; they then lead a band of self-appointed vigilantes off conference floor to drive SPUC leafletters out of the Winter Gardens.

Every year 50 to 60 students, the vast majority of them SWP with a couple of Socialist Action supporters tagging along, gang up on the half dozen or so anti-abortionists, chanting, screaming, pushing them around and grabbing their leaflets.

The scene is always quite ugly with SWP men snatching and grabbing leaflets from SPUC



Can we defeat anti-abortion campaigners by intimidation and banning? supporters.

This year again, SPUC gave out their leaflets, the SWP went hysterical and the usual affray broke out.

Janine Booth, (NUS Women's Officer and Left Unity supporter) argued that she personally believes SPUC has every right to give out their literature; however, she asked the NUS President to uphold the National Abortion Campaign policy that

SPUC literature which is factually incorrect, should be banned. The President did so.

That evening at the Left Unity meeting Janine explained why as socialists we should oppose the banning of literature simply because we find it offensive or distasteful. She pointed out that bans and censorship are used by the state against women, lesbians and gays and socialists to suppress our ideas.

The Socialist Workers Party lumps together the SPUC leaflets and their distributors with the anti-abortionists who fire bomb abortion clinics and terrorise women going into clinics. We don't.

We should organise to stop people who endanger women's lives or the lives of workers in abortion clinics; but we should not confuse that issue with the basic right to distribute literature which we dislike.

## CPSA Conference

# Rebuild from below!

The civil service clerical workers' union CPSA holds its annual conference next week (12-18 May). Trudy Saunders (CPSA, DH HQ) urges activists to unite in defence of pay and conditions as the first step to rebuilding the union

Small groups of members up and down the country are fighting back, but it is not enough.

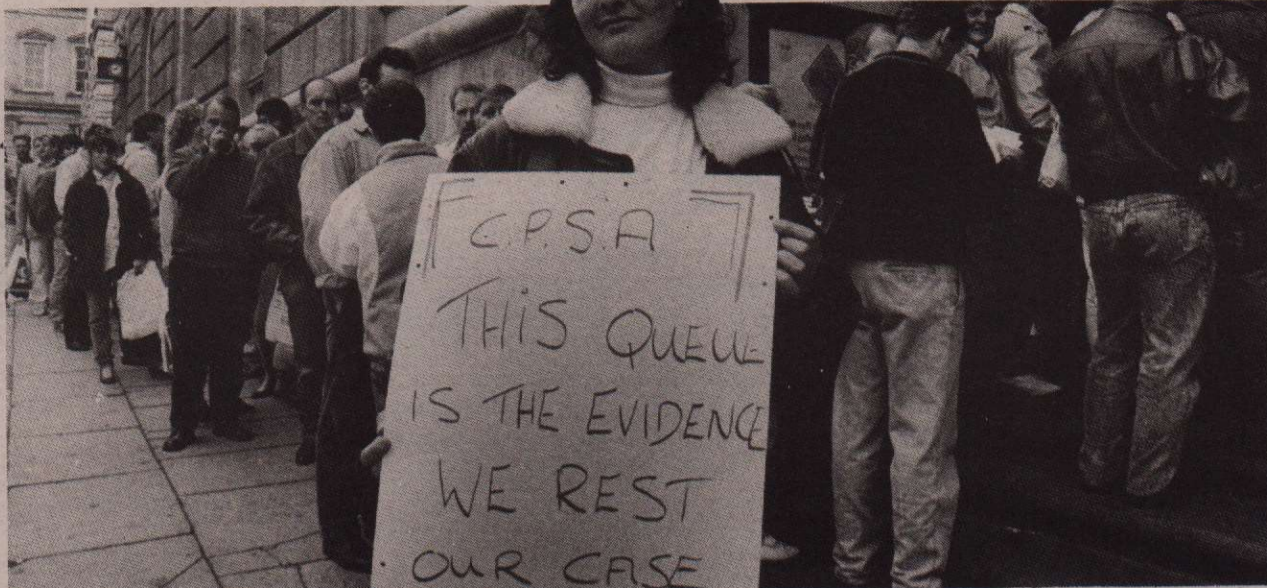
Look at Agencies: making agreements section by section has meant members in weaker areas now face, for example, having their pay determined locally, as in the Medicines Control Agency in DH HQ. The effects of privatisation speak for themselves, and relocation of CPSA members' jobs has already meant redundancies.

The Tories are having a field day. They are pushing to end the national redundancy agreement, and in some areas have already found ways to bypass it, leaving members without jobs and without redundancy pay.

The approaching general election is no reason for complacency. Labour is committed to keeping Agencies. They will not reverse the Tories' policies in the civil service without a fight.

We can be more confident of mobilising members and winning some of our demands under Labour. But those in our leadership who attempt to soothe us by saying "wait for a Labour government" should be ignored. We also need to organise a ballot for re-affiliation to the Labour Party now, so we can put pressure on from within the party.

The prevailing conditions in the economy, the civil service and the CPSA, all point to the need for members to be well organised and able to fight on all fronts — against the Tories, management and our own



Passport office strike over staffing, 1990. Photo: John Smith

union leadership.

The role of our leaders becomes particularly important in the light of the latest Tory anti-union legislation — the 1990 Employment Act — which gives management the ability to sack workers involved in the unofficial strike action. Our union has a long history of walk-outs and strike action as a result of spontaneous action by members in offices.

Such action is now effectively illegal. Where management feel strong enough, they may invoke the new law. Workers sacked under this law cannot even appeal against the sackings.

So far, this law has been used to intimidate CPSA members against taking strike action. Not by management, but by a union official!

It is tragic that there is no effective opposition to the so-called "Moderate" leadership.

The main opposition group, the Broad Left, controlled and run by supporters of *Militant*, has systematically failed to build amongst rank and file CPSA members.

*Militant's* belief in its ability to lead for the working class rather than look to workers fighting for themselves takes the form in

the CPSA of concentrating on winning elections rather than building a rank and file movement. Yet the Broad Left has failed to win elections in the CPSA over the last three years.

On the two occasions when a Broad Left Executive took power — 1983 and 1987 — *Militant* Executive members failed to provide fighting leadership. Worse, they actually attempted to put the lid on action in the Birmingham and Oxford DHSS strikes in 1982-3. As leaders of the DHSS Section Executive Committee in 1986-7, *Militant* supporters on the SEC refused to carry out conference policy to fight the Fowler Reviews for fear of the Tory law, despite the fact that in 1986-7 the anti-trade union laws had not become so entrenched as they are now, and despite the fact that DHSS members clearly wanted to fight.

In 1984 the Broad Left split

when a number of individuals, including Mike Duggan and Ian Leedham, left to form "Broad Left '84". They were mainly Kinnockites and Communist Party members, fed up with the electoral dominance of *Militant* in the Broad Left, but without any clear, unifying policies of their own.

Mike Duggan's scab, witchhunting record since then is well-known, and the record of those on the "left" of BL'84 is no better (and often worse) than that of *Militant*. BL'84 has effectively now split between those who have made an electoral alliance with the "Moderates" in the Charter Group and those, like Leedham, who are looking for a new direction.

It is vital that the base of the union is rebuilt. There are many activists, individuals and branches who want to fight, yet feel weighed down by the state of the union leadership and disillusioned

by the lack of effective opposition.

How do we get a decent pay rise? How do we raise staffing levels? How do we protect our conditions of service? How do we protect our jobs?

It can only be through our own strength and organisation.

We must unite as many members as possible around the basic issues of supporting strikes in defence of jobs, wages and conditions and creating a forum for genuine discussion and debate on the way forward.

The Socialist Caucus in the Broad Left, including *Socialist Organiser* supporters. Socialist Caucus must now look outward to the members in the branches instead of inwards to the warring factions in the union. We must rebuild our union from the base.

## Strikes spread in DSS

By Mark Serwotka (Rotherham DSS)

Despite the right-wing leadership of the DSS section, who have refused to lead, call for, or support any industrial action over staffing, more and more offices are voting for strike action.

Hull West office have now been on indefinite strike since the beginning of April, the other Hull office was also on strike for nearly a week.

In Sheffield, all four offices struck for three days, with two of them taking a further three days action.

## Pay: another wasted opportunity

By Steve Battlemuch (Notts South DSS)

"We know that our national pay agreement means the floor cannot be lower than 8%".

So said CPSA general secretary John Ellis in his circular CSE-Gen-2-91 (19 March). So how come we end up with 7.6% and a recommendation to accept?

Doncaster have been out for most of this week. Added to this, both Barnsley and Rotherham have voted overwhelmingly for a strike ballot to be authorised by the union.

Other parts of the country have also seen strikes, with a number of offices in Wales striking for a day.

The cause of these disputes is the chronic levels of understaffing in DSS offices, which see claims rising while staffing levels drop!

The leadership refused to provide any clear policy on the question; indeed, in some cases they have merely stalled for time before even giving the go ahead for strike ballots. Why is this?

Mainly because these same leaders recommended acceptance of the computer system that is now responsible for all the staff-

ing problems, and true to form, rather than accept their error and now lead a fight over staffing, they would rather keep their heads down and sanction the odd local dispute.

This is not enough, though! What is required is a national staffing campaign, for this would force management to increase staffing levels.

The action so far has been a magnificent testament to members' willingness to fight. If this willingness to fight was coupled with a strategy designed to inflict maximum pressure on management then a victory would be there for the taking.

DSS Section Conference must vote for a co-ordinated national campaign. In the meantime more and more offices should join the fight, for only this will ensure victory!

## From agencies to sell-offs

By John Moloney (PSA London)

The right wing claim that Agencies are just a re-organisation of the Civil Service.

They may involve slightly different terms and conditions for each Agency and more local bargaining but things will remain basically the same. And they claim that Agencies can't be privatised.

The Left has argued that Agencies are an attempt to "commercialise" the Civil Service, to break up national terms and conditions, and to prepare parts of the Service for sale.

In general the Left has proved correct. Take the Department of Transport.

At present it has four Agencies. In the Vehicle Inspectorate agency (VI), senior management have brought in the "vertical slice". This means a cross-section of VI staff are brought together and they talk about how their work can be improved, not of course from the point of view of bettering conditions but of increasing income.

Senior management proposals are put to the 'slice' before they go to the Unions. Increasingly VI regard the 'slice' as the proper forum to consult staff.

A recent staff inspection recommended that EO posts be created at some of the larger District offices. VI refused to implement the report. Instead, they have introduced the concept of 'flexible grading'. Under this, certain AOs will be given a responsibility allowance (5% on the max) and, although remaining AOs, will carry out full EO duties!

In all four Agencies, we are getting indications that senior management want to introduce new pay systems.

The computer section of DVLA, the agency which does the driving licences, is now being threatened with privatisation. According to press reports the Tories' next manifesto will promise to sell off large chunks of central government.

Obviously the bosses are taking no heed of the promises from CPSA General Secretary John Ellis. We have two choices: sit back and watch, or fight.

## DE activist victimised

John Williams, Treasurer of CPSA DE Plymouth Area Branch, has been sacked by Employment Service (ES) Agency management.

His sacking after over a year of victimisation by management, is just one more addition to the list of attacks against activists under agency status in the Civil Service.

Management used every trick in their power to sack John, including: switching between inefficiency and disciplinary proceedings contrary to DE Personnel Handbook instructions; trumped up allegations of poor conduct; a false charge of shouting and swearing at a supervisor (this charge was later dropped); and an attempt to prove malicious damage to a fire door (the overwhelming majority of staff said it was an accident) — until John was finally suspended from duty for "slamming" a VDU keyboard onto a desk.

The sacking came after management refused to follow their own rules for sick absences. John's sacking is an outrage. He now has a date for his appeal. But management have made it clear they will not reinstate him. His case clearly shows the dangers of agencies.

## Relocation equals redundancies

By Dave Armes (DSS HQ London)

At least 22,000 Civil Service jobs will be relocating out of London in the next three years.

That affects one fifth of all London's Civil Servants directly. The Treasury has barred government departments from giving their staff guaranteed job security, and many of us will find ourselves without a job, as no department is in a position to provide work for that many surplus staff.

CPSA's National Executive is doing nothing about it. If we are not all to be left fighting each other for the few jobs left, then all affected branches must join together to fight for the job security of all our members.

In my own branch (DSS HQ),

members in Southampton have been advised by our Section Executive delegate who negotiates with management that they will probably face redundancy. The Treasury Unit which is supposed to obtain new posts for staff in this position advised our Personnel section, who wrote to some staff in Southampton stating "We have been told by [the unit] that any officer who presents themselves in such a way as to leave the new department with no option to withdraw the post offer will be deemed to have resigned and will lose their entitlement to redundancy compensation".

Members over 56, with box 4 or 5's, or with poor sick or conduct records will not be helped by the unit.

This is happening in Southampton now, but it will happen all over London tomorrow unless union branches fight this together.

GRAFFITI

The Daily Star finds its audience

# A right racist read



1987: Scab lorries drive into Wapping. Wapping workers are now being balloted for strike action

## To you, three times the price

GRAFFITI

Who trusts car salesmen? Especially in the United States, where they offer "special finance deals".

An American Bar Foundation survey found that black women pay three times more than white men for the same car.

Black men pay twice as much and white women 40% more than white men.

Maybe car salesmen lead the way in dishonesty. But, to judge by a new survey, other US citizens aren't far behind them.

91% of Americans said they lied routinely. 81% lie about their feelings, 43 per cent about income, 40 per cent about sex.

But didn't Marx say it all nearly 150 years ago? "Money transforms loyalty into treason, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, nonsense into reason and reason into nonsense."

Or Shakespeare, 400 years ago: "Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?...Thus much of this will make black, white, foul, fair; wrong, right; base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant."

No wonder that in the US, where money and purchasing power count for so much, and all else for so little, lying is so widespread.

The Tories' student loans scheme is a fiasco. Very few students are taking loans — only 100,000 so far, barely 40% of the number the Government expected — and now a new report says the administrative costs are huge.

Administration costs universities up to £15 per application form completed, but they are paid only £3.50 by the government's Student Loans Company.

The Tories say that their loans scheme and other moves to impose the principles of free market economics on higher education will bring more efficiency, and more resources, to the system.

But look at Australia, where the Labor government has "Thatcherised" higher education even quicker than the Tories have managed here. The *Times Higher Education Supplement* (3 May) reports that "at Macquarie University students taking examination in lecture theatre were forced to sit in the aisles, with three students sharing the one examination paper."

The worm is turning at Wapping. According to the *Independent* (28 April), the EETPU is balloting production workers at News International's

Wapping plant for strike action over bosses' plans to change the work week and cut jobs.

The *Independent* also reports that "two worker representatives — Peter Goddard and Gordon Thompson — were dismissed a few months ago. Mr Goddard, who drove a bus through picket lines in the print workers' dispute, distributes EETPU recruitment forms outside the plant gates."

Whatever the ideologues say, workers remain workers, capitalists remain capitalists, and class struggle remains class struggle.

We've just received the first issue of the new fortnightly *Socialist Outlook*.

It's a well-done 20 pages, if rather bland politically. Unfortunately, the blandness hasn't stopped *Outlook* from using scurrilous lies and smears against their opponents on the left.

The new *Outlook* carries no retraction of an article by Andrew Berry in an earlier pilot issue, which recycled the claim, first circulated by one Tony Greenstein, that *Socialist Organiser* and Left Unity had supported the banning of the anti-Israeli magazine *Return* in the National Union of Students. Greenstein is the editor of *Return*.

It is now an old smear — the banning happened over a year ago, rather than being hot news as one might imagine from Berry's article — and the record has long since been put straight, in correspondence with Greenstein in the columns of *SO* (and in a phone call from *SO*'s office to *Outlook* after Berry's article appeared).

At the Easter 1990 conference of NUS, the Union of Jewish Students petitioned for *Return* to be banned. Two individual Left Unity supporters signed the petition. The other hundred or so at conference did not. Left Unity's organisers told UJS they would not back the petition.

The ban was decreed from the chair, without a vote, by NUS President Maeve Sherlock. Left Unity did not support it.

Since Easter 1990 Left Unity has been the only faction in NUS to campaign against the ban on *Return*! Left Unity supporter Emma Colyer argued on the NUS Executive for *Return* to be allowed a stall at NUS conference. Left Unity supporter Mark Sandell attempted to get the ban overturned at the winter 1990 NUS conference.

*SO* abhors much of *Return*'s politics. But *SO* and Left Unity have a long record of fighting in NUS for principles of free speech, against the political culture which has people forever wanting to ban any opinions they find abhorrent or distasteful — the anti-Zionists banning the Zionists, then the Zionists banning the anti-Zionists, etc.

Let's hope the next issue of *Outlook*, due out on 15 May, does carry a retraction.



By Jim Denham

The *Daily Star* has always been a paper in search of an audience.

Launched by the Express Group in the mid-'70s, the *Star* at first posed as a Labour paper in the hope of stealing readers from the increasingly pro-Tory *Sun*. In 1981 it backed Michael Foot for Labour leader, only to announce its sudden conversion to the Thatcherite cause at the 1983 election.

This political about-turn brought the *Star* no noticeable gain in terms of circulation, and it continued to run a poor third behind the *Sun* and the *Mirror*. For most of the 1980s the *Star* was a pale imitation of the *Sun* — as right wing and bigotted as the original but lacking its crude panache.

In desperation, the Express Group reached an arrangement with David Sullivan (later to found the *Sunday Sport*) whereby the self-confessed pornographer was given complete control of the

*Star* on the understanding that he would attack the *Sun* from "below". This disastrous experiment ended after 18 months when the owner of the Express Group, Lord Stevens, became aware that his company was engaged in purveying pornography.

So, for the past few years, the *Star* has returned to its pre-Sullivan role as *Sun* clone. Or almost. There have recently been some very, very silent signs that the Murdoch tabloid is pulling in its horns. In particular, the repeated charges of racism (and raps over the knuckles on that score from the Press Council) during the 1980s, seem to have had some limited effect upon *Sun* editor Kelvin Mackenzie.

Meanwhile, the *Star* has stepped into the breach. During the Gulf war it outdid the *Sun* in anti-Muslim hysteria. Denunciations of "Krauts", "Frogs", "Japs", etc. are as commonplace in the *Star* as they ever were in the *Sun*.

Last Wednesday the *Star*'s front page lead (banner headline: "House that for cheek?") concerned a Bangladeshi family who had been given housing by North Bedfordshire Council. According to the *Star*, they knew "just one English word — house. And the Bangladeshi couple repeated it parrot-style as they wandered the streets with their seven kids. They were immediately given bed and breakfast accommodation and last night were



The *Daily Star* has replaced the *Sun* as the most racist tabloid

staying in a rent free council flat."

The next day's *Star* again led on the story, this time with a front page lead editorial ("Bloody stupid! Immigrant law must be scrapped") apparently calling for a total ban on immigration to Britain ("Why should they be allowed to come here and sponge off the rest of us? Our resources cannot stretch for ever. There must be a breaking point. And it is right here and now"). Another article in the same issue describes "thousands of families pouring in every year" to "good-life Britain".

You'd never guess, from the *Star*'s story, that Britain has the tightest immigration laws in the EC. And, although it's there, tucked

away in the small print, you could be forgiven for missing the fact that the father of the family, Abdul Motlib, had lived and worked in Britain for more than 30 years before, quite legally (and after a "genetic fingerprint" test to prove his paternity) bringing his family over.

It is often said that the *Star*'s brief period under the control of David Sullivan represented the low-water mark of British tabloid journalism. But at least Sullivan wasn't noticeably a racist. The present *Star*, edited by Sir Brian Hitchen (knighted by Mrs Thatcher) is a filthier publication than anything David Sullivan ever dreamt of.

All of which rather goes to undermine last week's suggestion that the tabloid press might be in the process of "cleaning up its act". I also stated that "Today has recently introduced 'serious' news coverage."

Last Saturday *Today*'s front page lead was "Jesus did not die on the cross". According to Dr Trevor Davies (a former doctor to the Queen) Jesus merely fainted and was then removed and revived by Mary Magdalene and the disciples. "There is no reason, once recovered from his wounds, why he could not have lived for years", says Dr Davies.

Sounds reasonable to me. But front-page news? "Serious" news? In 1991?

## If this is recession, when was the boom?

WOMEN'S EYE



By Liz Millward

Hands up anyone who noticed the boom... Apparently the economy is taking a dive into recession. This is not news.

What came as news to me was that since the last recession (in the early '80s) there has been a "boom". I have to say that this boom passed me by.

With my admittedly small knowledge of economic theory I thought that during a boom the workers got some kind of pay-off for the misery of recession. For example, more people in better paid work equals more taxes, equals increases in welfare benefits. Yet benefits like child benefit have gone down in real terms over the last 10 years.

Unemployment is climbing again. But it has hardly fallen significantly over the "boom" period. I don't base this claim on Tory figures but on their policies — if employers were queuing up to

recruit people why were/are the Tories forcing young people onto YTS schemes. Such schemes are a replacement for real employment and a way of reducing the numbers of "claimants".

During the alleged boom there was a lot of talk about opportunities for women. Flexi-time caught on in the public sector along with job-sharing. Both of these are supposed to help women. There was supposed to be a labour shortage which meant women would have to be seduced back to work with these small sops.

At the same time women who tried to sign on were asked if they could find childcare within 24 hours of being offered a job. Answer no and get no dole. The things which would induce women with children to regular jobs (decent wages and free, good quality childcare) were not on offer.

In the health service, and local authorities, women auxiliaries, cleaners, catering staff etc. were privatised. The boom for these women was lower wages, poorer conditions, fewer rights. Flexitime means come to work when you are told or get the sack.

That was the boom that was.

The truth about the boom was that it was only noticeable if you were in work, in the right job, in the right part of the country. For the rest (ie. most of us) it meant a partial lifting of worries about unemployment, and the "opportunity" to buy shares in British Gas.

This new recession means that many families will be straight back to the misery of a few years ago.

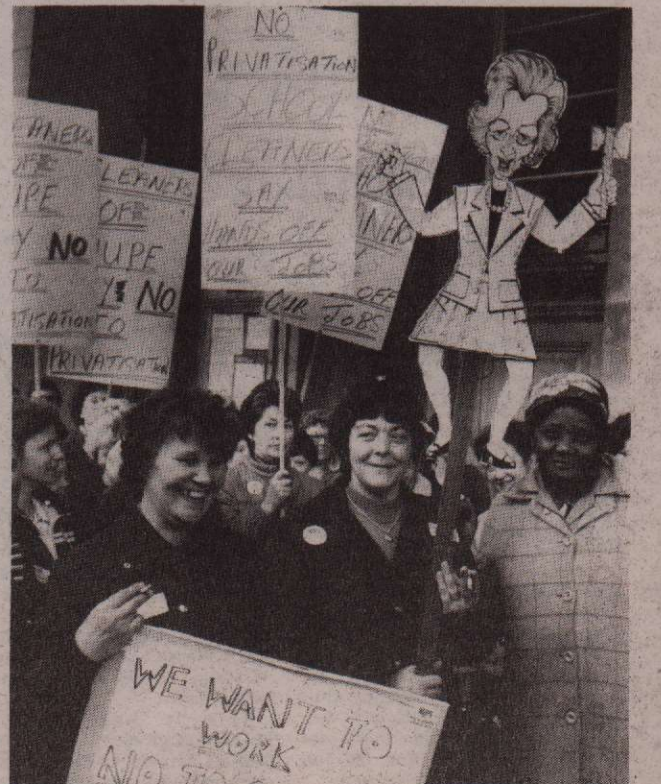
A majority of my friends have either been made redundant or expect redundancy notices soon. The rest are doing more work for the same money.

As the recession deepens we can expect more attacks on workers' rights, and to be told that employers "can't afford" decent (or any) wage rises. Our conditions will be

slowly eroded in the hope that we will be so terrified by unemployment that we will keep quiet.

One class of people weather recession well. The ruling class will make 600 people redundant before they will see profits drop by a penny. When the boom comes round again they will expect to benefit.

During a recession the working class gets the misery, in a boom the ruling class gets the good times.



The boom for women was lower wages, poor conditions and fewer rights

Labour's vote collapses by a third

# Purge in Liverpool leads to fiasco

By Dale Street

In the local council elections last Thursday (2 May), Labour's vote in Liverpool collapsed by a third.

Across the city Labour totalled a thousand votes fewer than the Liberals.

The blame for this debacle lies squarely with the right wing leaders of the Labour Group in Liverpool and its backers in the national Labour Party leadership.

For most of the past twelve months, 29 elected Labour councillors have been suspended by the National Executive from the Labour Group because they voted at council meetings in line with their election commitments and District Labour Party policy.

The suspensions gave the right wing, led by Harry Rimmer, control of the Labour Group. Under Rimmer's leadership the Labour Group pushed through a series of anti-working class policies, including two rent increases, the use of bailiffs against non-payers of the poll tax and an abandonment of the Council's house-building programme.

This year's budget doubled school meal charges, cut back voluntary sector funding, ran down council services, and axed a thousand jobs.

Meanwhile the District Labour Party, along with the Women's Council, was suspended and control over the panel of candidates for this month's elections was handed over to the local Party full-timers.

Their 38 names for the 33 seats being contested were mostly right wingers who could be relied upon to tow the Rimmer line.

Five wards selected candidates who were not on the panel. They were immediately suspended, and their candidates were expelled from the Labour Party. Official Labour candidates were imposed on the wards.

A sixth ward selected a candidate who was on the panel. Another ward which had selected the same candidate agreed that the candidate should stand in the first ward. The local Party full-timer refused to accept this. The result: another ward suspended, another candidate expelled, and another candidate imposed.

Three wards were allowed to select candidates who were not on the panel. Needless to say, they were all right-wingers. In another ward, the imposed candidate was not on the panel either.

The election campaign itself took place against a backdrop of a three-day all-out strike by council workers, ongoing indefinite strike action by selected groups of council workers, bailiffs being sent in against opponents of the poll tax, and growing mountains of rubbish as refuse-workers imposed a ban on overtime in protest at the threatened job losses.

The pro-Rimmer candidates sought a mandate from the electorate to take on the unions. In one ward a Labour election leaflet declared:

"In some instances the

decisions which need to be taken will lead to disruption of some services through industrial action. This is a symptom of the firm intentions of this Council to get to grips with the real issues confronting us." (Emphasis in the original).

In last year's elections the Labour candidate (now suspended) won this ward from the Liberals. In this year's elections the Labour candidate was easily defeated by the Liberal candidate, by a margin of over 500 votes.

Only in one ward did a Labour candidate defeat a sitting Liberal councillor. The Labour candidate stood on a ticket of opposition to council redundancies. He is the co-ordinator of the local Unemployed Workers Centre and backed by the local TGWU machine, so the Labour Party full-timers could not keep him off the panel.

The election results were a vote of no-confidence in the bankrupt policies being pursued by Rimmer and his fellow travellers. They wanted a mandate to smash the unions. But they did not get it. Instead, they needlessly squandered a third of the Labour vote in Liverpool.

Rimmer must be the first council leader in history to declare himself 'satisfied' with election results which saw support for his party collapse by a third.

But the election results from Liverpool are not just a message to Rimmer. They are a message to the Labour Party as a whole: Rimmer



Council workers in Liverpool strike against Rimmer's policies

was implementing the policies which at a national level, Kinnoch has promised the

next Labour government will implement. Such policies have proven

to be a disaster for Labour in Liverpool. If the next Labour government were to act in

similar fashion, it would be equally disastrous for Labour as a national organisation.

## 'Real Labour' victories lead nowhere

By Sam Campbell

Six Labour Party wards in Liverpool ran their own candidates against the official Labour candidates in last week's council elections (2 May).

The ward candidates had been democratically selected by the wards themselves; but they were not given the official 'stamp of approval'. The wards were suspended, the candidates expelled from the Labour Party, and official Labour candidates were bureaucratically imposed.

In five cases, the ward candidates won. In one ward the local candidate had a majority of



Martin Burke and Mick Bolland, two of the 'real Labour' candidates. Their campaign has alienated potential support for a fight against chaos

a thousand, whilst in the other four wards the majority was around the hundred mark. The one unsuccessful ward candidate was defeated by 50 votes.

There are four main reasons

for the victories of the ward candidates.

They were opposed to the anti-working class policies being pursued by the right-wing leadership of the Labour Group

and supported by the bureaucratically imposed candidates. They therefore benefitted from the Liverpool wide revulsion at Rimmer's policies.

The ward candidates generally already had a base of support in the wards where they were standing. In three cases they were sitting councillors. The imposed candidates were a particularly uninspiring bunch.

The ward candidates had big teams of supporters to help campaigning for them. In some cases this was Militant moving people into the wards in large numbers. In other cases it was ordinary Labour supporters sickened by Rimmer's policies. The official candidates, however, could manage only a token campaign.

Finally, the ward candidates profiled as the 'real Labour candidates'. On election material and ballot papers they had the name of their ward plus 'Labour' next to their name. They were therefore not perceived as independent candidates (which, from a technical and Labour constitutional view, is what they were) but as a variety of Labour candidate.

To equate this factor with 'confusion' is misleading, even if the latter played a role. Electors did not view these candidates from the point of view of the Labour Party rule book. They saw them as candidates selected by the local Labour Party.

Militant originally opposed the idea of independent ward candidates as 'an act of desperation', but then did a 180 degree turn and supported the independents with everything they could muster. Now they will be portraying the ward candidates' victories as the biggest step forward for the working class since the Bolshevik

Revolution of 1917.

The majority of the Broad Left in the Liverpool Labour Party have also hailed the victories. (The majority of the ward candidates themselves and the majority of the Broad Left, are not outright Militant supporters).

But the election results will not help bring about the lifting of the suspension of the District Labour Party, which is the key issue. If the District Party were re-established, then it would be possible to democratically select the panel of candidates and undo the current chaos.

Six wards have been suspended, and the six ward candidates expelled. Two CLPs may be suspended in the immediate future. Dozens more expulsions are imminent as the Labour Party bureaucracy begins expelling Party members who campaigned for the independent candidates.

Middle-of-the-road Party members, whose support must be won to fight the forthcoming expulsions have been alienated by the fact that sections of the Left played no role in the election campaigns of their own wards and instead went off to the campaign for the independent candidates.

Standing independent candidates has a dynamic of its own. Now it seems likely that the elected independents and the bulk of the suspended Labour councillors will declare their own political party, contest a council by-election in Granby next month, and put up a candidate to contest the Walton constituency in the event of a by-election or at the next General Election.

Once the euphoria wears off, the Liverpool Labour left (or what's left of it after the coming wave of expulsions) will have a lot of hard thinking to do.

## South Africa: De Klerk smiles as the townships burn

By Tom Rigby

South Africa appears to be sliding towards civil war. At least 102 people have died in township fighting over the last four days.

Inkatha, the Zulu nationalist organisation, has threatened to deploy 100,000 fighters in Soweto against the ANC.

The ANC itself has given the government a deadline of 9 May to respond to its demands — including the dismissal of the Ministers of Defence and Law and Order!

— or else it will withdraw from constitutional talks.

COSATU, the giant trade union federation, has played with the idea of a general strike to "stop the violence", but can't even get its Zulu members to meetings in many areas.

The township war is spiralling out of the control of the leaders of both Inkatha and the ANC. In one recent case, "pro-ANC" youths crucified and whipped alleged "enemies of the people".

De Klerk must be loving all this. His strategy is working. The long term aim of the National Party is to moder-

nise South Africa with controlled reform from above and eventually one-person, one-vote. But to do this safely they must reassure the white right and divide and weaken the non-racial left.

The ANC, in turn, is caught between its base, increasingly alienated from the authoritarian state, and its desire to be a "partner" with De Klerk.

We can thus expect the ANC leaders to pull back from a full-scale confrontation with the state. What it will do next is unclear. But the longer it dithers, the better for De Klerk.

# The market brings chaos

By Mark Osborn

Since the 1960s the Soviet economy has been relatively stagnant and consistently outstripped by the more dynamic parts of the West.

The Soviet-style economies have proved successful at the back-breaking work of building an economic infrastructure — pulling backward economies into the modern industrial age. But they falter when societies need a mass of thinking, educated technicians and ever more complex economic relations.

Thought-police clash with thinking, and bureaucratic planning clashes with control over complicated economic systems.

The USSR was not only a bureaucratically planned economy, but also a badly bureaucratically planned economy.

That was the background to Gorbachev's drive for reform from mid-1985, a drive that was to destabilise the whole system. Under the blanket of state control, Gorbachev expanded market mechanisms. The aim was to improve performance by incentive and fear of failure. Unemployment was to be pushed up, as was the managers' leeway. The market was to oil the machine.

Glasnost, more freedom, was used to sell Perestroika, more hardship. The Gorbachevites believed that even Glasnost would have a spin off for them: limited criticism could be used to pressurise bureaucrats who were crooked or inefficient. There were well-publicised trials of officials caught with their hand in the till.

In the West the bulk of the left rallied to "Gorb". Here was the real hope for socialism, or so they thought. Here was a man who could purge socialism of some of its more vile aspects (utter lack of freedom, political police) and keep the essen-

tial "socialist" components (nationalisation, overbearing state).

Stories about the lack of economic want in the USSR continued to pass as good coin. The Western media loved the Gorbachev show. And the capitalist politicians struck arms agreements with Shevardnadze.

Detente replaced the Cold War, and then was itself replaced by recognition that the USSR could not compete as an equal of the US.

At home, Gorbachev became increasingly unpopular. Glasnost had allowed some discussion to begin in earnest. Discontent was directed at the nomenclatura and the system they run.

The economic situation worsened. The bureaucratic control over the economy relaxed and yet there was not enough of the market to regulate the economy. No firms went bust. Prices were artificial.

Nationalist movements developed. The old CP die-hards looked on in concern. The Gorbachevites used the mounting problems to push further ahead.

**"Reform in Moscow destabilised the East European regimes by removing the guarantee of force behind them"**

They chopped away at leadership level, cutting away old Brezhnevites. Chaos was used as a battering ram against those who wanted to bury their heads to avoid the crisis.

The Party itself began to feel the pressure. Yeltsin split.

Lower down the ladder, Gorbachev had problems with smaller bureaucrats who disliked the market because it disturbs their ways and promises nothing except increased scrutiny and insecurity.

And who was to finance reform? Who was to supply the investment? The West applauded Gorbachev, the peace maker and the reformer who admitted, implicitly at least, that 'socialism' was a mess, but was not prepared to buy out the USSR.

It will take vast amounts of Western money to prop up the USSR. The Soviet economy is much bigger and more decrepit than the old GDR. West Germany still has its belly full with eastern Germany, the US economy is hardly in shape to throw cash at the USSR, and Gorbachev failed to get Japan to open its wallet on his recent visit to Tokyo.

Gorbachev's reform programme had been pioneered years before in Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary.

But reform in Moscow destabilised the Eastern European regimes by removing the guarantee of force behind them.

In Stalin's days the leaders had been installed by foreign tanks; if out of step they were purged and perhaps killed by Moscow. Now, in 1989, it was the people who moved to purge their governments.

Years of martial law had failed to wipe out the Polish workers' movement, Solidarnosc: in 1988, it rose again, forcing the bureaucrats to retreat. In 1989, the oppositions in Czechoslovakia and East Germany began by demanding their own Gorbachevs and Glasnosts and the downfall of their own Ligachevs.

At the end of '89, mass democratic movements spread with fantastic rapidity through Czechoslovakia and the GDR. Hundreds of thousands ran to the banner of western-style democracy.

The regimes fell away very quickly. Gorbachev had refused to step in and back up his clients. There was to be no repeat of Hungary '56 or Czechoslovakia '68.

The East European regimes had been installed by a foreign power at the point of a gun. They had less legitimacy, their rule was less solid, than that of the USSR's ruling class.

The spin off from Czechoslovakia and the GDR was three fold. Over Christmas '89 the Ceausescu nightmare in Romania ended with a bloody revolution. Even Stalinist states with autonomy from the USSR — like Romania — had felt the cold wind.

Second, the nationalist movements inside the USSR were boosted. If the Soviet empire could crumble outside the USSR, then why not inside? The scene was set for the break-up of the USSR.

And, thirdly, the Western left became rather confused. If these societies were post-capitalist, why did the workers prefer VWs to the charming Trabant motor car?

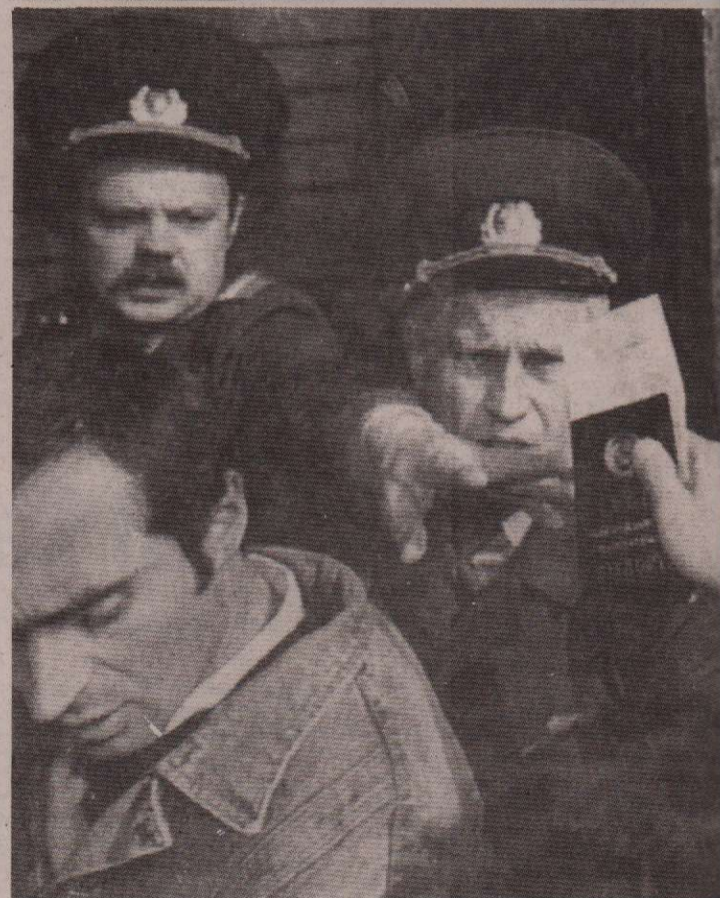
The confidence of the weak Stalinist ruling classes had been dealt a savage blow.

The big lie of their economic superiority to capitalism had been very publicly repudiated. The populations refused to live in the old way.

In Czechoslovakia and Poland, pro-capitalist governments promised cheap labour and markets to the west in return for investment. Many old Stalinist functionaries bailed out, converting state property into private property or beginning their own businesses. In Hungary every regional Party chief was also a private capitalist.

But the scale of the problem is awesome. In Hungary 2,700 large enterprises are to be privatised by 1992. Poland shed a million state-sector jobs last year in the run-up to the privatisation of 7,000 enterprises.

Who will buy these enterprises? In Poland the state has had great difficulty in privatising the first



Top: cops seize woman demonstrating against Gorbachev in Moscow. The KGB and the Interior Ministry police are still intact. Above: chaos as people queue to exchange rouble notes about to be made worthless

handful of enterprises. People are poor, and anyway believe that shares will be given away free in the coming year. The west is reluctant: lending to Poland with a foreign debt of £40 billion, or Hungary with £20 billion after the experience of South American debt defaulting is not "attractive". Direct investment is not flowing in either to countries with depressed economies.

In some of the East European countries revamped Stalinist parties won free elections. First in Romania, then last June in Bulgaria, and most recently in Albania. These governments too have all started down the road of marketisation.

In Romania at the end of 1990 the government removed many of the restrictions on foreign investment, abolished most price controls and encouraged managers to lay off workers in the run-up to massive privatisation.

All the East European governments, no matter what their lineage, are heading for the market.

The problems of marketisation are greatest in the USSR. Not only is the scale of the bigger than elsewhere, but also obstacles are biggest: resistance from functionaries, from the workers. Here also are most explosive of national questions.

In the USSR the economic situation produced mass miners' strikes in mid-'89. The bulk of the USSR 600 pits and hundreds of thousands of miners were involved. Miners formed independent unions based on the mine regions, pledged to improve workers' living standards and demanding wholesale reorganisation of the industry at the bureaucracy.

If the USSR's ruling class achieves capitalism, it will be Soviet American capitalism with mass poverty and permanent mass unemployment. The IMF-World Bank report commissioned for Soviet government at the end of 1990 was quite blunt.

The solution was wholes





# It can offer a way out



away. Shatalin has left Gorbachev's circle. He and others have been replaced by figures more suited to the new line.

**Y**eltsin and Gorbachev now represent two wings of the Soviet ruling class.

Yeltsin, the popular pro-market demagogue standing outside the CP, has his base in the bureaucrats of the Russian Federation. His big advantage over Gorbachev is that he is a critic who has not had to put his programme into effect. Yeltsin has big support among the new independent workers' organisations; he backs them when they raise political demands that weaken Gorbachev, though he is not so keen on their economic struggles.

The "conservatives" move against the radicals with bureaucratic strangulation. Many of the shortages in the big cities seem to be bureaucratically constructed by hardliners stirring up trouble against radical administrations.

In the Republics there is now widespread disobedience. The centre is ignored and snubbed by radical and nationalist governments. The worst features for the centre are the ignoring of the Red Army draft and the withdrawal of funds from central government.

Last autumn's call-up has been dodged by between 70 and 90% of youth in some of the Republics. Worse, governments have actively promoted alternative schemes for those refusing to serve in the foreign Red Army. Georgia has used the youth who were supposed to serve in the Red Army to strengthen its own army. Yeltsin has called on Russian youth in the Red Army to refuse to fire on nationalist demonstrators in the Baltics.

Of course, Gorbachev is not dead and buried. The KGB remains relatively unscathed, a national force with informers and networks intact. From 1987 Gorbachev began building up the Black Beret force, organised under the Interior Ministry and loyal to the centre — these units have intervened in the Baltics.

And we should not idealise the break-up of the USSR. Its effects will be terrible, the method is likely to be bloody and the nationalist movements are a million miles from socialism. The oppression suffered by the Soviet minorities during decades of the rule of Russian chauvinists has produced a nationalist renaissance.

privatisation. Unfortunately, the report conceded, this would lead to the bankruptcy of all Soviet industry. The only way to square the circle would be to impose a 30% tariff wall around the USSR. There would be terrible social consequences.

As the forward march to the market became more and more unpalatable, the pressure on Gorbachev increased towards the end of last year. The "conservatives" upped the pressure, Gorbachev saw no way out and retreated back towards them.

At the Congress of late last December Gorbachev took new powers and Shevardnadze resigned, denouncing the dictatorial path Gorbachev was following.

Since that date Gorbachev has used his new right to rule by decree to give the KGB and the army new powers. Now the army is seen on the streets of Moscow and is used to intimidate the "radical" opposition which leads the Moscow soviet.

The Shatalin plan for a 500-day drive to the market has been thrown

**T**he only conceivable way out, to begin to heal the wounds, is to champion the rights of the various peoples to a democratic choice — to separation if they choose. But the movements themselves, some at least, want more. The Georgian nationalists want the right to oppress others, smaller groups inside the current boundary of Georgia.

Matters are made worse by the malign influence of the old guard, using the fears of various nationalities to win allies. The Ossetian minority in Georgia turns to Moscow and the centre of the Empire to avoid Georgian nationalism.

And not only in the USSR, but in Yugoslavia too, the "Communists" have become nationalist demagogues and used national antagonisms which they themselves stoked up over years and years.

The USSR is on the road to disaster. Only the working class could possibly lead the people out of disaster. Capitalism won't work and Stalinism has failed. Working class democracy is the only alternative.

**"If the USSR's ruling class achieve capitalism, it will be South American capitalism with mass poverty and permanent unemployment"**

But the working class movement is just being born. From the Stalinist ice age the working class has emerged in the thaw as a class without a past, needing to learn all the lessons anew.

Soon, in the east of German one third of the workers will be unemployed. Unless the working class intervenes in the process, by 1995 it is expected that six million will be out of work in Poland and four million in Romania.

The basic working class organisations are emerging in new strikes in the USSR. These organisations are militant but dominated by Yeltsin's ideas. In the USSR the number of genuine socialists is very small. But the situation can change very quickly. The small minority can become a majority. On that minority hangs an awful lot.

# History has just restarted

**A**nd this is 'the end of history'? That was the claim of many bourgeois intellectuals after the democratic revolutions of late 1989.

This was the final refutation of "socialism"; proof, once and for all, that capitalism was the best way of organising society. With capitalism's final victory in the battle with the USSR, apparently the major contradiction in the world had been resolved: conflict was withering away.

One year on their claims look a little thin. Far from ending, history has just restarted for the workers of Eastern Europe.

In the wider world the crumbling of Soviet power is a big factor in the shaping of Bush's New World Order. The US-USSR demarcation lines set after World War II have withered, and a new wave of conflicts is on its way. We have already had a Gulf war. Next may well be trade wars as Japan and Germany rise to meet the US. Far from ending, history is speeding up.

Is it the "victory of the bourgeoisie"? Yes, it is, but not over socialism. It is the victory of advanced capitalism over Stalinism. Socialism remains as necessary as ever because capitalism remains as unable as ever to satisfy the basic needs of humanity.

In the advanced capitalist heartlands, 40 million are unemployed. The figure is rising and is a sign of an uncertain future for much wider layers of workers.

In Poland, a capitalist victory means some poor people in Warsaw eat cats and dogs to survive. Capitalism in the developing world has led to great riches for a few and poverty for millions.

In Rio, when it rains, shanty towns fall down the hillsides. And right now, in the poorest countries of Africa, 27 million people are starving to death while the Western bourgeoisie wrings its hands over a few million dollars of aid.

Capitalist crisis and inadequacy means they are unable to win the battle for ideas in the long run. In Poland there is a tremendous ideological vacuum.

In it, because of the weakness of the genuine socialists (they have the stigma of the word "socialist" to overcome in countries where people associate socialism with Stalinism), other forces are growing. There is a resurgence of anti-semitism. But how could the Poles be anti-semitic? If anti-semitism is always an irrational world view, how much more so in Poland. The Jews have been driven out or killed. In the late '30s there were three and a half million Jews in Poland. Now there are fewer than 5,000. Anti-semitism is a symptom of desperation and a void of ideas.

In the USSR there are hopeful signs. The working class is beginning to reassert itself. The miners' strikes are drawing in new sections of the working class.

The base is being laid for the development of a cross-Union, multi-nationality workers' movement. This is the prerequisite for the mass rediscovery of socialism from below.



The new workers' movement in the USSR is still dominated by Yeltsin's ideas, but will need new politics to fight the prospect of Third-World-type capitalism in the USSR

# The anti-union laws – a balance sheet

By John McIlroy

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of the purposes and the most important provisions of the mass of legislation enacted by the Tories since 1979.

In a nutshell, the Thatcherite argument was that unions possessed too much economic power and that the legal "privileges" the state had granted the unions — the statutory immunities from common law liabilities developed by the judges — were a crucial factor in artificially boosting union power.

The importance placed by the Tories upon legislative changes as a key to economic change can be gauged from a glance at the writings of Mrs Thatcher's intellectual guru FA Hayek.

He asserted forcefully that the dismantling of the immunities (enacted in prototype in the 1870s and extended and refurbished in 1906), the protections which insulated the unions from a judge-made law which recognised no formal or practical right to strike, and without which unions would be unable to mount any lawful industrial action, was crucial to the

strategy of the new Conservatism.

He claimed: "These legalised powers of the unions have become the biggest obstacle to raising the living standards of the working class as a whole. They are the prime source of unemployment. They are the main reason for the decline of the British economy in general."

Armed with the power of these privileges, the New Right argued, the unions were able to exercise continual pressure on the state for further privileges. The pro-union legislation of the 1970s exacted at the point of a gun from Labour governments had strengthened the monopoly power of the closed shop, extending coercive rights to union recognition, buttressed the licence to strike and picket, and addressed new financial burdens in employment protection rights such as unfair dismissal and anti-discrimination legislation.

All of this interfered with management prerogative and the efficient operation of the market. It bred restrictive practices and artificially high wages which in turn stoked inflation and cramped profitability.

Normal Fowler, the Secretary of State for Employment in the mid-'80s, put it all very simply: "Trade unions have used their power in



March 1988: TUC-organised demonstration for the Health Service

ways which adversely affected labour costs, productivity, and jobs. Trade unions tended to push up the earnings of people they represented; excessive pay increases hit jobs."

A move towards greater market regulation was therefore in this view essential to restore a healthy capitalist economy. An erosion and a re-moulding of residual union power was essential to economic regeneration. As Norman Tebbit's Green Paper, *Trade Union Immunities* stated starkly in 1981: "The government believes that improvements in industrial relations are essential to an economic recovery."

Everything, of course, could not be done at once and it would be impossible in the 1980s to return to the market conditions of the 1840s, advocated by Hayek. Nonetheless, the law and the economy should be swivelled to a far greater degree in that direction.

A recasting of employment law would represent an important contribution to this objective. It would facilitate a renewal and revitalisation of management prerogative to hire and fire, stimulate a move from collective agreements to individual contracts and enable the bosses to operate the labour process as the market dictated, free from union controls and the fear of industrial action.

Wages plugged into individual performance would find their real market level, banking down on unemployment and boxing off inflation. More rational and limited trade unions, covering a smaller proportion of the workforce and dedicated to capitalist economics would palpate to the pulse of "their" employers' product market, and profitability. This was the Thatcherite dream.

## The legal offensive

The consequent legal offensive to attain these objectives was opened up on a very broad front. To undermine union organisation, diminish its social legitimacy and liberate the supply of labour, the existing legal procedures facilitating union recognition were abolished.

The protections for the closed shop were first eroded by the provisions in the 1980 and 1982 Acts requiring ballots with 80% majorities, and then summarily terminated by the 1988 Act which simply made

dismissal on the grounds of non-membership of a union automatically unfair.

To confine trade unionism to the enterprise and weaken its bargaining power, the right to take secondary action was circumscribed. Picketing was limited to the pickets' own workplace. The central definition of a *trade dispute* — the formula which gave industrial action protection from the judge-made laws — was carefully trimmed in 1982. To attract protection disputes had not merely to *relate* to basic employment issues — they had to be *wholly or mainly* about these issues.

To attract protection disputes now had to be between *employers and their workers*; wider disputes between *worker and worker* were no longer protected and support for disputes *outside the UK* minimally so.

**"Thatcher got the most extensive anti-union legislation this century onto the statute books. She saw it used and saw it stick."**

If what trade unionists could lawfully do in the area of industrial action was restrictively redefined, so was the key question of *responsibility for breaches of the law*.

Centrally, the Taff Vale judgement making unions as legal persons, and thus their funds and assets, liable for breaches of the law, rather than as hitherto their officers, was re-enacted. This meant, crucially, that injunctions for violation of the legislation would be issued against the union itself and the failure of members to obey them would lead to sequestration of their assets.

This was intended to enhance caution amongst union functionaries, stimulate a greater concentration of power in the hands of the leadership, and generate a greater degree of control over rank and file action.

To aid these tendencies, weaken the strike weapon and reduce

wages, the law was relaxed to make it easier to sack strike leaders. Social security reform in general, the limitation of payments to strikers, specifically, were introduced with the same objectives.

And these concerns also produced legal intervention in internal union government. To mobilise what were stereotyped as "responsible" passive members against the militant activists, and to make industrial action more formal, predictable and pasteurised, again weakening wage pressures, detailed balloting systems were introduced. These were also applied to internal union elections with the objective of strengthening moderate leadership.

As with the other reforms, they were intended to provide a fertile field for judicial developments and extension. If Parliament started the attack on the unions the intention was that the judges would take it a stage further.

Even more ambitious was the introduction of balloting on the maintenance of unions' political funds, aimed at stimulating and formalising political differentiation within the unions and a withdrawal of support from the Labour Party.

The government saw national wage bargaining arrangements as inflationary. They wanted to relate wage determination more directly to specific profit centres and push it down to a level where it could be more simply adjusted to market changes and more transparently related to performance.

Institutional support for the inflationary extension of terms and conditions established by collective bargaining were kicked out from under the unions through the abolition of schedule II of the 1975 Employment Protection Act and the Fair Wages Resolution 1946. Young people were removed from the protection of wage councils.

Labour market deregulation was also pursued through a gradual diminution of individual employment protection rights intended to open the workforce to harsher discipline and strengthen differentiation within the working class between core workers and peripheral workers.

For example, all those without two years continuous employment and working 16 hours or more a week were excluded from the unfair dismissal provisions, lubricating an extension of short-term contracts and the growth of part-time tem-



At Frickley, Yorkshire, during the 1984-5 miners' strike. But the Tories and their police didn't agree! Photo: John Harris



Mounted police ride into the picket lines at Wapping in 1986. Photo: John Harris

porary workforce less insulated from management control, more insecure, more scared, more exploitable.

The redundancy payments fund was abolished and the redundancy consultation provisions were attenuated. The maternity leave provisions of Labour's legislation were turned into a tortuous obstacle course to deter their utilisation. Protections regulating the hours and conditions of women and young workers were repealed. Tribunal procedure was made far less user-friendly, with pre-hearing assessments, and greater costs awarded against workers, culminating in the introduction of £150 deposits before you could bring a case.

Not to be overlooked were expenditure cuts. Whilst the law on health and safety, for example, remained formally intact, its operation was limited in the 1980s by financial restrictions, as was the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality.

**The success story**

These are the bare bones of the Conservative assault on the unions. How successful has it been? The average punter would say very successful indeed — a small cameo of how Thatcher got some things right through vision, planning, firm political will and the rub of the green.

There is some justification in this view. The Tories were acting against the background of previous failures; the bungling over *In Place of Strife* in 1969, the fiasco over the Industrial Relations Act.

Success was far from ensured. Yet Thatcher got the most extensive anti-union legislation this century onto the statute books. She saw it used and saw it stick. As we know to our cost, the legislation has in

practice limited the scope of industrial action brought to the surface and strengthened divisions within the movement, contributed to the isolation of those who were prepared to fight Thatcherism, and played an important role in a series of defeats we have suffered in nose-to-nose confrontation with the Tories over the last decade.

The landmarks from the Eddie Shah-NGA stand off, the Dimbleby-NUJ set-to, the miners' strike (although here it was the pre-existing common law rather than the legislation which was crucial), the slogging match with Murdoch over Wapping, to the more recent 1988 seafarers' dispute and the industrial action involving railworkers and dockers in 1989 should remain fresh and rankling in the memory.

So, too, should the sorry saga of the development and disintegration of TUC policy intended to defeat the legislation — an illuminating essay in Conservative political success.

This began, you may remember, with the wait and see policy of 1979-81, as the TUC kept a low profile, hoped that the 1980 Act was a once-and-for-all measure and prayed and prayed and prayed for a Tory U-turn. It developed into the second phase of armed opposition as the Wembley principles giving the General Council power to call a general strike to support unions falling foul of the legislation were adopted in the spring of 1982.

The events of late 1983 when, in the wake of Thatcher's second election victory, Len Murray and his cronies developed the "new realism", sought an accommodation with Thatcherism and, in consequence, refused to use the Wembley principles to seek solidarity action in support of the NGA, produced the third phase of armed retreat.

It was now clearer than ever that

one group of workers or even one union could not, standing alone, successfully defeat the legislation. And whilst the TUC was still armed with the Wembley principles — and the argument that in the NGA dispute the time had not been ripe to use them — it was now highly unlikely that any unified action would ever be launched from above.

The state of the movement by the mid-'80s meant that a movement from below such as that which had freed the Pentonville Five was also very unlikely.

The TUC's role in the miners' strike and the dispute between the general council and the EETPU over TUC policy on the boycott of state funds for ballots symbolised the fourth phase — the disintegration of any unified policy of active opposition.

Faced with the 1984 Act, the TUC had already left it to individual unions to decide whether or not to comply with the requirements for ballots on industrial action, union elections and political funds. It now bowed the knee to the AEU and EETPU and allowed them to make TUC policy by defying it in practice and dropped opposition to state funds for ballots. By the time of the Wapping dispute, nobody even talked of using the Wembley principles to help the print unions.

The battle against the legislation not only represents a direct defeat for the TUC. Its failure in this area strengthened internal dissension over wider strategy and weakened TUC authority generally, within and beyond the movement, undermining its role as a co-ordinator and broker for its affiliated unions so patiently built up in the '60s and '70s.

By the time the measures which were to become the 1988 Act were announced, TUC policy was already in its fifth phase — total ac-

ceptance in practice with even verbal opposition now the most mealy-mouthed bleating in comparison with the glorious, if empty, rhetoric of earlier days. By the time the 1988 Bill was law, TUC opposition to it focused on talks with the CBI and lobbying Tory MPs.

For the unions, the proof of the pudding was in the eating. After the strategic defiance up to and including sequestration mounted by the NGA and the NUM the Wapping dispute reached a watershed. After that experience, where sequestration was the product of the industrial action running out of the hands of the leadership in a dispute marked by "responsibility", public relations and "learning the lessons of the miners' strike", no union was prepared to fight the law to the hilt.

In these terms, therefore, the employment legislation has been a success. Its influence on a recent major dispute such as the Dock strike in 1989 clearly illustrates this. This was a good example of a "new model" dispute with leadership strategy predicated almost completely upon the need to avoid a collision with the law to the clear detriment of winning.

As the bill abolishing the Dock Labour Board Scheme, a bill which would strengthen the power of the employers by allowing dismissal, began its race through parliament, the T&G leadership insisted that no industrial action should even be prepared. They felt, with good legal justification, that it was essential to first of all negotiate to breakdown point with the employers over what would replace the scheme.

This was to ensure that the courts would later accept that this was an industrial dispute with employers — and thus protected — and not a political dispute with the government over legislation — which would not be.

The T&G were successful in this,

as Mr Justice Miller refused the employers an injunction. But Ron Todd, complying with the spirit as well as the letter of the law, then promised the court that no action would occur until the employers had appealed.

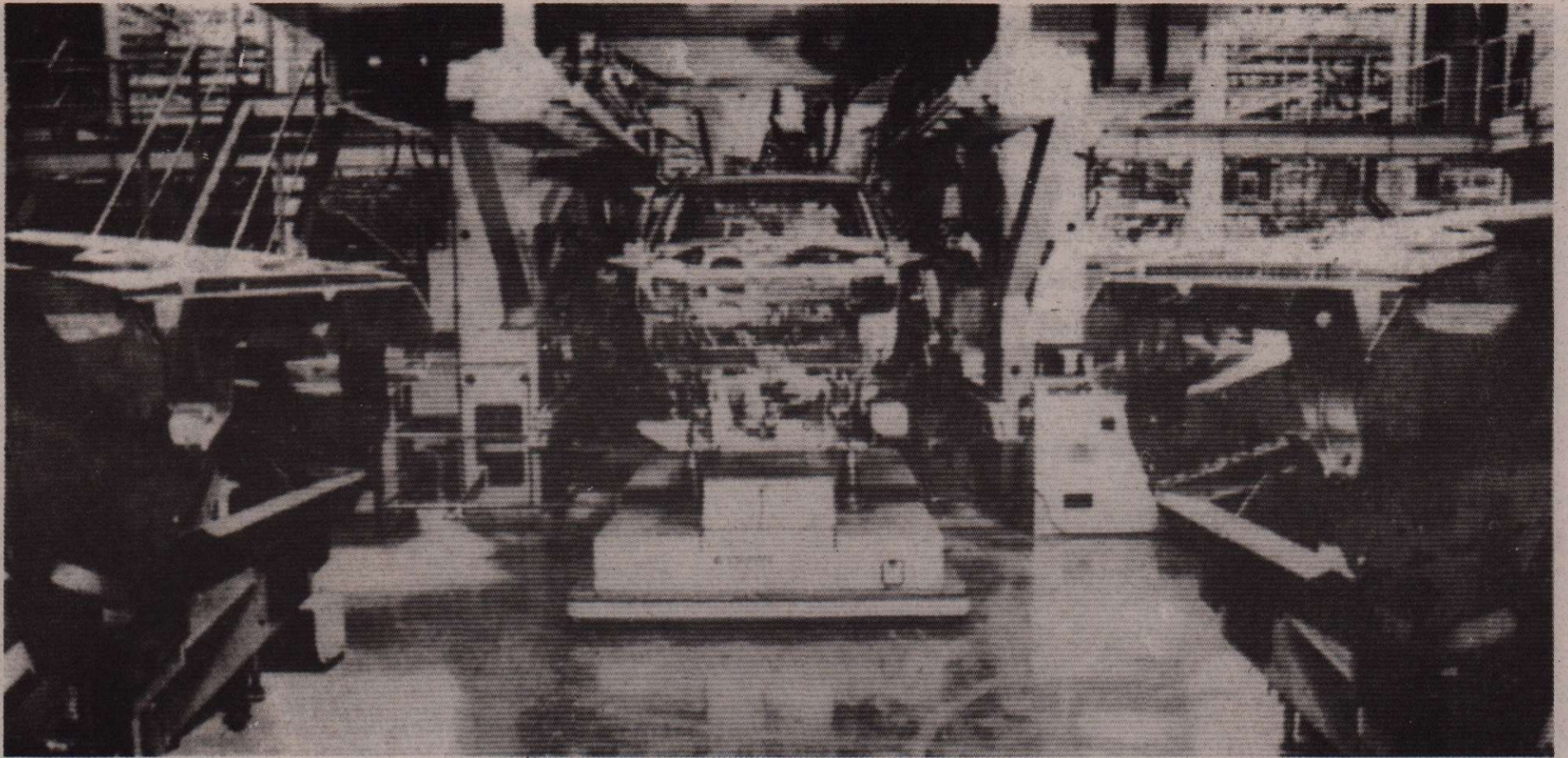
Enter judicial intervention with the Appeal Court granting the employers an injunction on the amazing grounds that dockers had never had the right to strike. Then, still further delays whilst the union took the case to the House of Lords. When they won there was still, of course, the need for a new ballot, as under the legislation the initial vote was time barred.

The dates tell the sorry story in a dispute where speed was of the essence. The results of the strike ballot were announced on 19 May yet it was more than a month later, on 21 June, that the House of Lords' decision "freed" the union to take action. The Bill received the Royal Assent on 3 July, five days before the national strike began.

This legally induced series of delays led to demoralisation, and disorientation in the ranks and divisions within the union expressed in conflicts over the unofficial strikes.

The delays bought time for the employers to develop dissension, talk up the buy outs, and hammer home that dismissal with no redundancy pay would await those who turned them down. Of course, there were pre-existing weaknesses and divisions. But this dispute demonstrated how useful a weapon the law, essentially the fear of sequestration, is for the employers in this kind of conflict and how it can dovetail with the interests of union leaders who are hesitant in fighting a particular battle, to produce total defeat.

John McIlroy is the author of *Trade Unions in Britain Today* and of a forthcoming book on the trade union laws. Part 2 next week.



# The new era at Nissan

## AGAINST THE TIDE

By Jo Bishop

**R**ecently I was doing some research on how workers in the car industry have organised over the last 20 years.

I wanted to interview some workers from the Longbridge factory in Birmingham which used to be described as the last bastion of British trade union militancy, and to compare what I found with interviews at the new Nissan plant, opened in 1986 in Washington, near Sunderland.

Getting interviews with former Longbridge workers was no problem. I already knew an ex-worker from Longbridge, and he fixed up meetings for me. The Longbridge workers I talked to, including Derek Robinson, Longbridge Convenor for much of the 1970s, and once described in the national press as one of the most powerful men in Britain, were interesting, open, and quite willing to talk.

Nissan was, however, a different story. When they opened their factory in 1986 they placed a large advertisement feature in the *Observer* magazine. One worker in particular was featured quite frequently, extolling the virtues of working for Nissan.

I managed to track him down through a local phone directory. I thought if he was still working there it would be interesting to get his views some five years on.

I explained who I was and why I was interested in talking to him. He told me that he would have to "Okay it with work first", and asked me to ring back the following evening.

That I did, at 9pm to be precise, but I never did get to speak to him again because the press officer for Nissan UK was waiting at his home to take my call. Let's just hope she got overtime.

She instructed me to ring the plant the next morning with the following information: who I was, what my intentions were, what the interview was for, what sort of questions I would be asking, whether the work was to be published.

She asked me if I was a journalist. "No", I said, "a student". Where was I studying? What was I studying? The questions were endless.

**W**hen I phoned the factory the next morning I spoke to a different press officer who, despite less than 12 hours lapsing between the phone calls, knew all about me and what I wanted. It will be no surprise that my request was refused.

The reason given was, and I quote, "The fact that this is a new plant and a new work set-up means we get thousands of requests every year from students like yourself for interviews and, as you must appreciate, if we

said yes to every single one we'd never have any staffers left on the factory floor to make the cars." Determined to get the last word in on this matter I asked to be put through to the trade union rep.

"Oh," he answered, "I don't think we have one of those here. I could put you through to Personnel," he added helpfully.

It was at this point that I decided to hang up, for this conversation, like one of those old Monty Python sketches, was fast becoming irrelevant and silly.

For those of you not conversant with Nissan industrial relations language, I will translate. "Staffers" are workers, and that isn't the only difference in the Nissan set up.

**I**n this workplace workers and management wear the same overalls, eat in the same canteen, and most importantly work as a team. Nissan is meant to symbolise a new era of harmony in industrial relations, where cooperation and discussion, not conflict and disputes, are the order of the day.

Trade union militancy is seen as a thing of the past. Management and workers have come together, both identifying with the company aims.

What Nissan don't tell us is that Washington was carefully chosen as a greenfield site in the North East — traditionally an area of high unemployment.

Nissan allowed only a single-union deal, and all applicants are screened in order to exclude trade union activists.

In the plant the workforce do a 39 hour

week with an added 12 hours compulsory overtime. The labour process is extremely intensive, and the average age of the worker is very low.

The labour process relies on a huge amount of sub-contracting, so in actual fact the mass of workers involved in their project are out on the periphery, often casual, temporary and/or part-time, with none of the fundamental rights of a full-time, permanent worker such as sickness and holiday pay.

**T**he Longbridge management have tried to pick out bits of the Nissan labour process and import them into their set up. I asked one of the Longbridge workers how much of the Nissan influence had been felt in the factory.

"We all wear the same overalls now, which is a bit of a pain for us because you can't see the gaffer coming down. On the working with pride bit, I think most people operate on the basis that essentially the gaffer's a bastard and we go in there to do as little as possible for as much as we can get and they try to get us to do as much as possible for as little as possible.

"So I don't actually see where pride fits in to this...except the pride that I've done as little as possible."

Nissan, and "Japanisation" in its British context, has thankfully a long way to go before claiming any of the "success" it claims to have achieved in the North East. Who says the working class is dead?

## From Kuwait to East St Louis

### TV EYE

By John Moloney

**L**ast Wednesday I watched *News at Ten*. Towards the end of the broadcast came a report on St Louis, a large city in the "Heartland of America".

The report started with pictures of West St Louis. Over scenes of skyscrapers, modern housing, we were told that St Louis had boomed during the '80s. Straight away we then switched to East St Louis, which resembled bombed

Baghdad rather than a city in mid America.

As the camera panned round, all you could see was ruins, burnt buildings and dilapidated housing.

The reporter went on to say that 10 years ago, industry had left East St Louis. As a result of rising unemployment and crime, 50% of the town's population had fled.

Of the remaining population 80% are on welfare. Not surprisingly the tax base has collapsed and the city's finances have passed crisis point.

The town hall and the hospital have shut. The police haven't been paid for over a month. Their patrol cars are so dilapidated that the police

use their own cars for patrol work.

Because of the lack of repair work, sewage pours into local estates.

The report then moved to interviews with local people. All contrasted the poverty in East St Louis with Bush's readiness to spend seemingly unlimited sums to "free Kuwait".

Next we have were shown Bush speaking — with what even the reporter admitted was hollow rhetoric — about the "fight at home".

The report ended with the reporters walking down the smashed streets of East St Louis. How long before America would concentrate on its own massive domestic problems? How long indeed!



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

1 May 1886 and a bomb exploded during a workers' demonstration in the Haymarket, Chicago. The police fired into the crowd. Four workers were eventually hung for planting the bomb. There was virtually no evidence against them. From 1889, 1 May became an international workers' holiday.

# All surface, symbols and sheen

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews *Sleeping with the Enemy*

**S**leeping with the Enemy is so shallow I kept expecting the screen to show through.

This Hollywood foray into the subject of wife-battering is all gloss and sheen — designer domestic violence. When Martin Burney batters wife Laura, he flings her down on a black marble floor in their white cube house by the ocean. She's wearing black and white; the blood just seems like a matching accessory.

There's nothing real here, no tension. Martin is just a Hollywood-standard eye-popping psychopath; he'll get his before the final reel. Nothing is surer.

Of course, Laura has to get away from him or there'd be no plot. It's ordained that he must come after her, so that the audience can get the full range of creepy music, dark house, man in the bushes, chills and thrills that drive this kind of film. It's your basic stalker plot — woman alone threatened by nasty man.

What makes it sickly is the celebration of all-American values supposedly enshrined in the small mid-Western town Laura escapes to. There she meets and falls for a teacher, Ben, who's brimming over with puppy dog charm.

We're supposed to know she'll be safe with him because he goes to Fourth of July parades and carnivals and likes apple pie. He's a spaniel type; he won't grow into a Rottweiler like Martin.

The film is like Martin's house — black and white, polarised between

bad guy Martin and sweet Ben. There's no clue as to why Laura picked Martin in the first place, and having picked him, then runs away and chooses his opposite. Neither man rings true; they're both cardboard. We never know quite why Martin is so obsessive, about Laura, about everything. One minute he's normal; then he's over the edge.

There's no development of any of the characters. Ben and Laura's courtship all seems to happen at arms length. We see her laugh when she's with him, but we never hear the joke. We see them dance together, but it's the music on the soundtrack we hear, not what they're saying.

The screenwriters bottled out of writing slop lines, and went for images instead. All we get is tableau after tableau of Laura and Ben being life-affirming and innocently fun-loving. It's enough to make you long for the psychopath.

The film is full of implausibilities. Laura bumbles her escape by leaving clues behind that prove she isn't dead, but the film skates over all that, as if it's unimportant.

Maybe it is. After all, the clues are only there to serve the plot and get the psycho husband moving; they're not signs of ambivalence on Laura's part about leaving, or hints that she wants to be found. There's nothing subtle or hidden in this movie. It's all surface.

Everything in the film is a symbol. Laura's escape from the cool modern beach house to one of middle American clutter is presented as a journey back to normalcy, as if rocking chairs and porch swings were a badge of integrity. Ben's shaggy beard is meant to represent decency. (Martin, of course, has a clipped, Hitlerish moustache.)

The film feels like it was put together by people who only know commercials, by people who



Julia Roberts endures designer sexism

regularly use objects to represent values, to sell things, and to tell a story. It's a sledgehammer approach, cliched, obvious, where

everything is labelled and laid out for us.

This is film pre-packaging at its worst. The contents aren't merely

spelled out for us; they're pre-digested too, so there's nothing left to respond to. Films like this just leave you numb.

## America's rank-and-file organisers

Book

Barry Finger reviews *Rank and File Rebellion*, by Dan La Botz (Verso, London, 1990)

**A**ccording to bourgeois pundits, the American labour movement is slipping into terminal decline.

Twenty years ago most major newspapers and news magazines had regular bylines by writers whose beat was the labour movement. This is no longer the case.

The politics and controversies of the labour movement clearly no longer engage the imaginations of the middle class public. Because the labour movement poses no challenge to the industrial tyranny of the bosses by means of its own forms of workplace democracy, it has lost both its attractive and repulsive force in society.

In other words, American society lost interest in the labour movement as soon as it was able to assimilate the movement itself into the American ethos. La Botz argues

that the decline of American labour occurred when the labour bosses accepted "absolutely the right of the employers to run their companies, of businessmen in general to dominate the economy, of the corporate elite to control politics."

This book chronicles the efforts of rank and file militants to reclaim the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the giant truck drivers' union, which is in a particularly advanced stage of degeneration. Dissidents in this union are likely to lose their jobs, their union pensions and the temporary use of their limbs.

How did the IBT find itself in such straits? In fact, it was the industrial union approach pioneered by the Minneapolis Teamster movement in the 1930s — and led by the Trotskyists, most prominent among whom was Farrell Dobbs — that put the Teamsters on the map. What rapidly developed thereafter was a power struggle between Dobbs's "brand of radical, democratic unionism from-the-bottom-up, and Dave Beck's conservative, authoritarian unionism from-the-top-down".

But when World War II broke out, the Teamster heads — then Democrats and ardent Roosevelt supporters — were able to convince the Washington administration that

jailing their mutual opponents would be a boon to the war effort. The subsequent arrest and incarceration of the 29 SWP and Teamsters union leaders under the "Smith Act" destroyed the left wing of the union.

From then on the Teamsters were mired interminably in personal corruption from the top down. Teamster boss Dave Beck was sent to jail in 1957 for tax evasion on assets and businesses amassed from teamster funds.

Jimmy Hoffa, his successor, brought the Mafia into the union at the national level. Jackie Presser, who assumed a leadership position in the labour movement as a result of nepotism, only entered this line of "business" after his Teamster pension-funded restaurant went bankrupt.

During the relatively prosperous '50s and '60s, this corruption was shrugged off by the rank and file. One freight hauler La Botz quotes summed it up this way: "Ah, so what if he [Hoffa] stole five bucks from me, he got me fifteen, so am I going to complain?"

Only when union heads began to refine concessionary bargaining into a high art form did the atmosphere become more hospitable for union reformers. By 1976, when the Teamsters for a

Democratic Union was formed, the national union had given way on numerous fronts.

The industry had been permitted to set up non-union subsidiaries (a practice known as "double-breasting"); allowed non-union casual hires to replace full-time union workers and made no efforts to organise the casuals; and been acceded to in a two-tiered wage structure, which segments workers and plants the seeds of disunity.

Out of this atmosphere the TDU grew from 200 to 10,000 within its fifteen year existence. This may seem modest in a union of 1.6 million. But TDU has had some spectacular victories.

It has campaigned successfully against the two-thirds rule. This had allowed the union bosses to impose contracts on memberships that had rejected such proposals by a majority of less than two-thirds.

It has won a number of impressive victories in the area of safety, protected the Teamster pension fund, and intervened to win numerous victories guaranteeing the members' rights to fair elections.

Moreover, the TDU influenced the shape of a federal government-IBT consent decree settling a racketeering suit that charged the union leadership with being

dominated by the Mafia. The TDU, without endorsing the principle of government-supervised election with — for the first time — a direct, secret ballot of the rank and file.

As a result, the union agreed to a government-supervised election with — for the first time — a direct, secret ballot of the rank and file.

But the TDU's most impressive achievement, as La Botz correctly states, is "its ability to attract the most idealistic rank and file reformers and organise them into a reform organisation. Rank and file opposition to employers, and to union officials who are allied to employers, is (now) constantly appearing in local unions and in particular companies".

The TDU has both inspired and encouraged the arduous task of returning the union to its membership and of remaking the union into a combative, democratic force for progressive social change.

The TDU will get an opportunity to test its vision this coming December. It has endorsed Ron Carey, a New York local president, for general Teamster president in the upcoming elections. A victory here could go a long way in redirecting the American labour movement.

# Council workers' fight Southwark woe was exaggerated

## WRITEBACK

Your articles in *SO* of 18 April, while correctly criticising the role of Southwark council and the EETPU official, were as a whole misleading to the readers of your paper.

The articles claimed that the trades unions are divided, that trades union members are in retreat, that a defeat has been inflicted on the workforce. They were full of tales of woe, as if you were at the funeral of the DLO in Southwark.

You falsely claim that (1) 320 workers have been sacked. Not true. 94 were sacked, of which 24 have been reinstated.

(2) That all maintenance work is now done by Beazer contractors. Not true. They only do 20% of the total day-to-day maintenance repairs. Otherwise the DLO would not exist at all.

(3) That the Labour council brings in temporary labour. Not true. The DLO management has not yet brought in such labour, although it would like to do so, as temporary labour has been in existence for many years in the Officer and manual section of Southwark and many other councils.

No overall analysis is made of what is taking place in Direct Labour Organisations, which has seen many thousands of job losses in the London area alone over the past 12 months. This has happened without any strike action taking place.

This is no surprise to us as there has been no campaign by the National Building Trades Unions Against the destruction of DLOs.

To understand our problems is also to understand the nature of our industry. The building employers have a brutal history of exploitation and abuse. They use lump labour and the threat of the blacklist to impose their domination over the lives of building workers.

Building DLO managers and workers come from this same background, so don't be surprised when workers hesitate to go on all-out strike, which was based on a 9 vote majority by only one of the trades unions concerned.

Yet you seem to think that a two-day strike was a retreat. We also would have preferred, and did originally recommend, a longer strike. However, our members make their own decisions.

Despite your talk of a serious set back, and defeat and retreat, we would maintain that a fight was led by the shop stewards' committee, which, despite the deliberate manipulations and delays by some of the trade union officials, resulted in:

(1) The reinstatement of 24 sacked apprentices.  
(2) The return of £1 million of our work which was previously sub let to contractors.

(3) Talks with our employer over our claim of their preferential treatment of contractors.

Those 70, not 320, of our members who were sacked will be continued to be supported by the stewards committee. Indeed, protest actions will be continued, as has happened since the end of the strike.

Our criticism of your articles is not sectarian. We recognise the valid work done by many *Socialist Organiser* supporters in the struggle against the employers. Our criticism is that articles by labour movement organisations must be (1) factual and objective; (2) recognise all aspects of the struggle and not just see defeats and victories; (3)

to give recognition to those who are prepared to lead workers in struggle against the employers in the knowledge that workers will hesitate (even when principled leadership is being given at a rank and file level) at certain stages of the struggle and may only give limited support.

If we expect anything else, we fail to understand the overall effects on workers of a history of trades union leaderships that has been overwhelmingly dominated by unprincipled compromise.

In this "real" situation any hesitation is not based on weakness of workers but of recognition that there is no substantial victories or overall successes possible without a leadership that will initiate a national campaign, so as to defeat the government and its policies, which is behind all these attacks.

We are now being confronted with the consequences of a massive recession. No local campaign to defend jobs and services



can be successful without the combined strength of a national campaign.

What drives local authorities to attack our jobs and conditions is this economic collapse — despite all the efforts of 11 years of Tory rule to make their system

work.

This requires a new leadership in the trades union and labour movement — a leadership which will be prepared to restore the confidence of workers to take on the employers and not back down when confronted by the

threat of the use of anti-union legislation or any other oppressive laws.

**Yours in unity  
Tony O'Brien  
Branch Secretary  
UCATT Borough of Southwark  
UG025 Branch**

## UCATT: the most corrupt of all

In recent issues of your paper you have given quite a bit of coverage to elections in various unions, with particular emphasis on the TGWU.

You also deal with some of the more unsavoury and corrupt aspects of these ballots. Again, this is to be welcomed.

However, we are surprised that none of your articles on union elections and some of the corruptions within these deal with what is undoubtedly the most corrupt union, and which is conducting the

most corrupt elections in the British labour movement. We refer to UCATT.

Proven ballot rigging has been endemic within UCATT, culminating in massive ballot rigging in an election for the UCATT NEC in June 1990.

This particularly blatant case of ballot rigging was the subject of a massive press exposé in many mass circulation newspapers.

Such was the furore created by this exposé, and the angry reaction of the UCATT membership, that the election is being re-run by

the Electoral Reform Society. Now the ballot for the election of the UCATT general secretary will also be run by the Electoral Reform Society.

No-one has been disciplined for any of the numerous proven cases of gross breaches of democracy in UCATT since 1985.

Three of the present UCATT NEC, Kelly, Brumwell and Hardman, are the only candidates in the ballot for the position of general secretary, which will take place in June 1991.

Please publish these facts in order to provide the same

type of information to the general labour movement who read your paper that you have done so admirably in the cases of other union elections you have recently covered.

Hopefully, we can thus put pressure on the labour movement, and UCATT membership, to demand changes to the disgraceful state of affairs which besmirches the good name of trade unionism in many UK unions at the present moment in time.

**Brian Higgins  
Secretary  
Building Worker Group  
Northampton**

## The essence of proletarian military policy

Having read Comrade Cleary's review of the latest Stalinist work about the war in the 14 March issue of *Socialist Organiser*, I must voice a strong criticism of his interpretation of the Proletarian Military Policy and of its application in Britain, which he justifies and claims was the policy of the WIL and the RCP.

Here we have a case of a cuckoo dropping its egg into the nest of another species of bird. He claims that their policy "was as near to 'revolutionary defen-

cism' as you could get short of announcing it." It is interesting in this context that he puts 'revolutionary defencism' in quotation marks — why, I don't know.

Either the policy was revolutionary defencism de facto, (whatever that might mean in a major capitalist country participating in an imperialist war) or it was not.

One gets the impression from his argument that the proletarian military policy arose with the occupation of France and the conflicts within the British capitalist class. However, the contrary is true. The basic argument for the Proletarian Military Policy was presented in the *Transitional Programme*. It was a universal policy and a universal tactic (ap-

plying to the United States as well as Britain) and was the source of contention throughout the Trotskyist movement.

The programme declares: "a correct policy is composed of two elements: an uncompromising attitude on imperialism and its wars and the ability to base one's programme on the experience of the masses themselves".

The rest of the section goes on to deal with it. On the question of defencism it makes this statement: "If we first bind our own (capitalists) hand and foot...; if the workers and farmers of our country become its real masters; if the wealth of the country be transferred from the hands of a tiny minority to the hands of the people; if the army becomes a

weapon of the exploited instead of the exploiters", then we would be defencists — i.e. the defence of the workers' state after the overthrow of the capitalist class.

It carries on with the following statement: "It is necessary to interpret these fundamental ideas by breaking them up into more concrete and partial ones, dependent upon the course of events and the orientation of thought of the masses". Herein lies the core of the tactic of the Proletarian Military Policy, a policy directly related to the working class with the aim of raising the level of political consciousness of the working class to the level of the struggle for power.

Precisely because we are Marxists and not Blanquists, and precisely because we believe along with Marx that the emancipation of the working class is the class conscious action of the working class itself, this concept determines our tactics and action.

Unlike the sectarians, who give an ultimatum to the working class, or the reformists, to whom the movement is everything and therefore principles and policy do not count, we recognise the interplay of both.

This was the essence of the principled political position of the Proletarian Military Policy combined with the development of the political action and consciousness of the working class: not ultimatum, but explanation and participation with the oppressed in its political development towards the struggle for power.

Sam Levy, London E7

## A gifted obituarist

Henry Newman's letter "All that jazz" (*SO* 483) has provoked an uproar within the 'Jim Denham Appreciation Society'. As one of the society's younger members, I defend one of *Socialist Organiser's* most gifted writers/obituarists from the unfair criticisms levelled at him by our "hip" comrade.

For those of us who have

little or no knowledge of jazz and its history, Jim cleverly builds up an appetite for it. He believes in getting to the bones of people. He does not patronise. He honestly, though colourfully, presents his readers with lots of fascinating facts.

The reader can be in no doubt about Jim's personal dedication, enthusiasm and respect for his "childhood heroes". More importantly, he makes his reader feel the same way.

Maybe *Socialist Organiser*

will take on board our comrade's call for some more coverage of the contemporary British jazz scene, but this should be done in marriage with and not at the expense of Jim's obituaries.

Jim, it seems, is not too far from the top of the Queen's telegram list. Maybe Henry Newman would consider stepping into Jim's shoes, when he leaves us and his 78 rpm's behind to join "that great Big Band in the skies".

Jenny Evans, Clwyd.

## WHAT'S ON

Thursday 9 May

"Myths of Irish history", Liverpool SO meeting. 7.30, Hardman St TU centre. Speaker: Nick Denton

"The left and the USSR", Oxford SO meeting. 7.30, G117 Gibbs Building, Oxford Polytechnic. Speaker: Mark Osborn

Saturday 11 May

"Secularism and Nationalism" seminar organised by Women Against Fundamentalism. 11.00-5.00, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London

Manchester Demonstration to Support the Kurds. Assembled 12.00, All Saints. Organised by MANUS and the Kurdish Society

Monday 13 May

"Crisis in the Soviet Union", Brighton SO meeting. 7.30, Brighton Technical College

"Where is the Council going?", Manchester SO meeting. Speakers: workers from the Housing Dept and library striker. 8.00, Town Hall

Wednesday 15 May

"Socialists and the Middle East", Essex University SO meeting. 6.00, Student Union

Thursday 16 May

"Who rules in the Soviet Union?", East London SO meeting. 7.30, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, E2

"Labour and the General Election", Leeds SO meeting. Details from Mike, 0532-452312

Monday 20 May

"Left-wing anti-semitism — myth or reality?", London Socialist Forum. 7.30, LSE Houghton Street, Aldwych

Thursday 23 May

"The Struggle for Socialism", Sheffield SO meeting. 7.30, SCAU, West Street  
"The General Election", Nottingham SO debate between a member of the Green Party and Jim Denham. 8.00, International Community Centre, Mansfield Road

Saturday 1 June

Socialist Movement AGM, Leeds

Saturday 3 June

"Socialists and the General Election", Manchester SO meeting. 8.00, Town Hall

Saturday 8 & Sunday 9 June

"Resourcing the Future" conference organised by the Red Green Network. Kingsway Princeton College, Sidmouth Street.

Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 July

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



# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

## Stop profit drive wrecking the NHS!

By Stephen Smith (NHS Group Secretary, MSF, Guy's Hospital)

Up to 600 jobs are to go at Guy's and Lewisham Hospitals in South London, according to £90,000 a

year Chief Executive of the Guy's and Lewisham NHS Trust, Peter Griffiths, in a statement released to the press on Thursday 25 April.

These cuts are to save £6.8 million, due to historical underfunding by the government of pay awards, an overspend of the previous year's budget (all the NHS was to have balanced its books by 1 April 1991), and inflation.

Guy's Hospital is the "flagship" of the first wave of the new NHS hospital trusts, which are meant to provide "more efficient" health care for the people of Britain.

Hospitals are now meant to operate as businesses, and bid for contracts for health care from the District Health Authorities (the bodies legally charged with the health care of the population in a particular area). The cuts, part of a package of £12.8 million in "savings" to be made during the financial year 1991-2, are supposed to make the hospital more attractive to health authorities as a provider of health care.

Every department has been cash-limited, and has had to come up with plans to live within this budget. As 70% of the Trust's money is spent on wages, jobs are an obvious target.

The cuts are supposed to be made by a combination of redeployment (ie. being employed in another area of work, no matter what your qualifications or wishes in the matter), vacancy freezes (not employing anybody to fill jobs if someone leaves) and redundancies. They are due to be decided on by 17 May.

Another £6 million is due to be "saved" on top of the £6.8 million from the 600 job cuts, in order to make the Guy's and Lewisham NHS Trust "more competitive", and to deal with £28 million worth of maintenance that the Tory government hasn't given us the money to tackle.

As a result, whole departments could be for the chop, because one option is to drop those areas of activity which the Trust is "less good" at (which are these? How do they know?), and expand others (presumably the ones which rake in most patients from other areas, and therefore the most money!).

Only 35% of the total income of the Trust comes from the local Health Authority, which has said that it will not take all the services that Guy's has to offer. For example, it will have colposcopies — an operation that examines the neck of the womb, and is very useful in detecting and treating early cancer — but won't have infertility treatment done there.

MSF is holding a meeting on 13 May at Guy's and we hope to have further meetings at both sites for all staff on 17 May.

Meanwhile, what are the TUC, other unions and the Labour Party doing about all this? In 1988 the TUC organised a national march; can they do better this time and have a continuing campaign that stresses that not just people's jobs, but also the Health Service, is at stake? Is a one-day general strike in order?

What support and solidarity are the unions going to give their members at Guy's, at Lewisham (and at Bradford)? What sort of action should healthworkers take to fight this? Can we join our communities and resist these cuts?

Can the Labour Party remember that it introduced the cheapest public health service in the First World (5.6% of Gross Domestic Product last year) and fight? Can it call demonstrations? Can it campaign on this?

Will a future Labour government reverse these changes? It says that trusts will be abolished. Will Labour give the NHS decent funding? *It had better do so!*



## Alliance raises flag of workers' liberty

By Thomas Carolan

Last weekend 150 revolutionary socialists met in North London to launch the "Alliance for Workers' Liberty" (AWL).

AWL is an organisation dedicated to the idea that society should be reorganised and reconstructed by a working class which has liberated itself from capitalist wage slavery.

What that name — Alliance for Workers' Liberty — means is best explained by Karl Marx:

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

In the process of freeing itself, the working class, of necessity, will free all of humankind. The working class finds no class lower than itself

which it can exploit, and therefore workers' liberty will be human liberty.

These are unpopular ideas right now, ideas which it is fashionable to bash, mock at and denounce.

Today, the prejudices and ideas that have passed for socialism throughout the world for the last five or six decades — the ideas of Stalinism and semi-Stalinism — have suffered shattering and irreparable blows as a result of the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. This is good news for socialism, argued Sean Matgamna, opening the first session of conference, on "The New World Order".

Matgamna argued that Stalinism was never any sort of socialism. The whole of Marxism, he argued, from Marx through to Lenin's Bolsheviks, who led the Russian working class to power in 1917, had denied the possibility that socialism could be built in a country as backward as Russia was.

Stalinism was a grotesque falsification of socialism; its collapse offers the chance for a new growth of liberating working class socialism, he argued.

But the immediate impact of the collapse of "socialism" is an upsurge of bourgeois triumphalism, and radical disorientation for socialists. The bourgeoisie is on the offensive with its ideas, everywhere.

What do socialists do in this situation? Other sessions of the AWL conference took up this question.

Cathy Nugent argued that the ideas of Lenin remained valid,

despite the prolonged Stalinist and bourgeois campaign to identify Leninism with Stalinism and to blame the Leninists and Trotskyists for the Stalinist system to which most of them fell victim.

She pointed to the recent great working class revolts in Eastern Europe and the USSR as proof of the need for "Leninist" organisations of revolutionary socialists, armed with Marxist ideas and fighting to help the working class establish its own class independence.

In Eastern Europe and the USSR, the workers, repelled by Stalinism and its "socialism", have fallen under the influence of capitalist ideas.

Instead of going from Stalinism to democratic political and economic self rule, and real socialism, they opt for capitalism, which brings chaos and suffering and a new growth of exploitation by way of new mechanisms.

The first job of socialists, she pointed out, was to fight bourgeois ideas in the working class.

What this means in Britain was discussed in sessions on the situation after Thatcher, on the Labour Party under Kinnock, and on the trade unions. Perspectives on youth and on lesbian and gay rights were also thoroughly discussed by a wide range of speakers from all over Britain.

The majority at the conference were young people in their 20s. A high proportion of those opening Conference sessions were young women.

Conference applauded a speech by Pat Markey, a victimised shop

steward from British Timken, Northampton.

The decision to launch the Alliance for Workers' Liberty was taken without opposition. The conference dedicated AWL to reject and fight the twin caricatures that dominate the left in Britain today.

On one side there are those misnamed "Leninist" sects like *Militant* and the SWP which pit themselves in boneheaded sectarianism against the existing broad labour movements — the movements which must be won for socialism if we are not forever to remain marginalised and impotent.

On the other there are the individual socialists bobbing about helplessly like driftwood on the waves of the labour movement — with no hope of ever changing it unless they can bind themselves together into a coherent organisation.

AWL set itself the goal of organising and developing a force of Marxists to fight for socialist ideas within the existing mass working-class movements, both Labour Party and trade union wings. It resolved to fight inch by inch and step by step the witch-hunters who exclude Marxists from the Labour Party. It will also appeal for support outside the labour movement — for example, winning youth such as students to the ideas of unfalsified Marxism and Leninism, and setting them to work in the labour movement.

In the next two or three issues of *Socialist Organiser* we will be printing papers and speeches from this important socialist and labour movement conference.

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