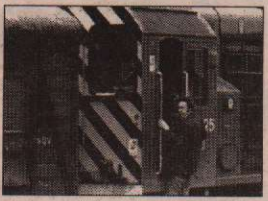


Tories loot BR



page 3



An
abuse
of
power
page 4

For socialist renewal!



Tories
sell off
the
public
sector
pages 7-10



The left and Europe
page 5

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Unite the left!

- 4 million on the dole
- Pay freeze
- Cuts in jobs and services

UNITE AND FIGHT!

Nearly three million people are now unemployed, according to the official government statistics released last week. A more accurate estimate of unemployment would put it around the four million mark. But the Tories' readiness to fiddle the figures is the least of their crimes.

Last week also saw publication of the Tories' plans to sell off British Rail. Whilst jobs are axed and services slashed, another public asset is to be sold off on the cheap. What the Tories have in store for other workers — if they can get away with it — is equally grim.

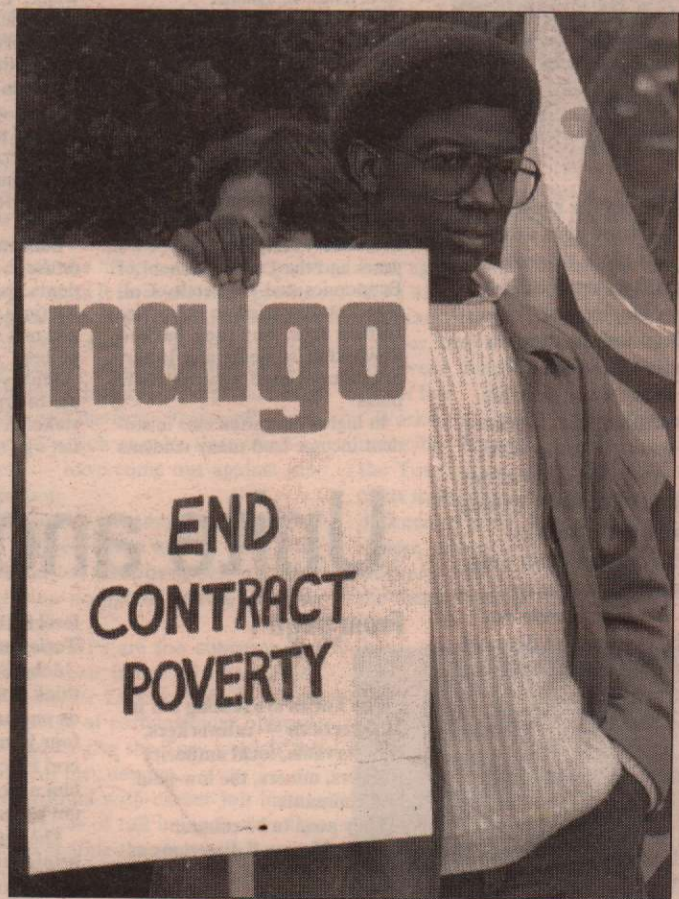
Public sector pay increases are to be kept down to 1.5% — less than half the rate of inflation.

Jobs in the Civil Service are being "market-tested" in preparation for contracting out. And cuts in local authority funding will mean worse services and more job losses.

Tory plans to strap Wages Councils will leave ten million of the worst-paid workers in the country wide open to wage cuts. Hundreds of thousands of lone parents will be forced to take low-paid, part-time work by the Tories' misnamed Child Support Act.

And all the Tories' back-tracking on the question of pit closures amounts only to a stay of execution rather than a complete climbdown.

Continued on page 2



KICK OUT THE TORIES!

The Poisoned Well

Tories offer immediate closure or 5 years on death row



Following the radical Sun we draw your attention to a piece of gross inequality. Army officer "Tony Dryland, 47" was "sacked for cheating on his wife Christine, 43", who drove a car over his lover, killing her. Dryland now wants to know what they are going to do about "Colonel Charles", Prince Charles is Colonel-in-Chief of no less than 6 regiments. "Kick him out", says the Sun. Surely not — the progressive demand is this: full sexual freedom for army officers now!

The "assassin's" bomb that Mr Major really should worry about is not in India but ticking away at Westminster, as "The Yard moves in on ex-Minister" Alan Clark over his role in the Churchill-Matrix affair (supplying weapons of war to Saddam Hussein and lying about it). A number of Tory Ministers are at risk and maybe the Prime Tory Minister, John Major himself.

Don't believe the headlines. Whatever precise picture emerges when the Commons Select Committee report is finally presented at the end of this week, the reading is that the Tories do not intend to reprove a single pit.

At best, between 18 and 20 of the 31 threatened pits will be

"saved" for a limited period only, probably no more than 3 years. Or 15 might be saved for 5 years.

For miners and their families that will amount to little more than a stay of execution. Life in the pit communities will be dominated by the prospect of impending doom. The carrot of possible salvation will be

used to force through longer hours and more dangerous working practices.

The labour movement must back the NUM's demand that all the pits stay open. Instead of helping the Tories cook up a rotten "compromise" the Labour members of the Select Committee should have published a minority report argu-

ing for a planned socialist energy policy.

It is now vital to keep up and increase the pressure on the Tories.

• Preparations should be made for occupations of all those pits that could face immediate closure.

• The maximum possible mobilisation should be built

for the WAPC Central London demonstration on 6 February.

• Workers in the public sector who face the Tory pay freeze should link up their struggles with those of the miners and railworkers who have decided to hold a joint ballot on 5 March for a series of one-day cross public sector strikes

Defend free education!

By Mark Sandell

Like most of us the Tories want something for nothing. They want to expand higher education to provide a more skilled workforce, but they do not want to pay for this expansion. They plan to make students foot the bill.

As the number of students in higher education has increased, the Tories have saved money by cutting back on students incomes. They have frozen grants and barred students from all benefits.

At the same time the Tories have changed the funding systems to reward colleges who expand. Colleges have been increasingly forced to compete with each other. For example FEs will become corporations later this year, to pack in as many students as possible at the lowest cost per-head.

This expansion has caused a massive overloading of colleges resources.

The Tories now announce plans to double the number of Higher Education students; but they have not mentioned how this further expansion will be funded. However the Tories have a hidden agenda.

In 1983 the then Education Secretary Keith Joseph tried to introduce means tested fees, but fear of a middle class revolt stopped him.

Now the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, representing Universities and New Universities management are looking to student fees to increase their incomes. Two years ago the London School of Economics and University College London tried to introduce tuition fees, but they backed down after students and lecturers campaigned against their plans.

In higher education cuts in student income lead many students

to drop out rather than incur a debt burden that would stay with them for years after leaving college. Student debt affects the worst off most. It penalises students on courses that do not lead to well paid jobs, and those who are discriminated against in the job market, like women and black workers.

As with Tories attacks in so many areas it is working class people who end up paying for the cuts. Student fees will make a bad situation worse.

The response of NUS and Labour to the crisis in education has been pathetic. Instead of leading the fight against these attacks it looks as if Labour is preparing to accept the Tories agenda.

Stephen Twigg ex-Labour President of NUS has voiced his support for graduate tax, and Jeff Rooker, the Shadow Minister for Higher and Further Education supports student tuition fees.

The student movement must stick to our demand that expansion in higher and further education must be matched with an expansion in funding. All students over 16 should have the right to a grant of at least £70 a week. Central is the right of everyone to real education.

The student movement must link with the labour movement in a massive political battle against cash-on-delivery education. Any attempt by college managers or by a single college management to introduce tuition fees should spark national action.

Education trade unions should refuse to collect tuition fees, students should organise demonstrations, occupations, fee strikes and rent strikes against any form of fees.

After years of cuts the principle of free education is now at stake. A fightback is essential. Let's go to it!

Unite and fight — kick the Tories out!

From page 1

The Tories are lashing out in all directions — railworkers, civil servants, local authority workers, miners, the low-paid and claimants.

They need to be counter-attacked from all directions as well!

We need a united fightback against the Tories. The Tories want to keep us divided and pick us off one by one. They know that unity is strength, and that's what they're afraid of. We need to make sure their worst dreams come true.

A united campaign in defence of jobs and pay can turn the tables on the Tories, and drive them out of office. Joint action by workers at rank and file

level is the only language the Tories understood.

John Smith and his friends think that we should sit around on our backsides for another four years until the next General Election. We should send him a clear message: we are not prepared to wait that long!

The Labour Party should be helping to mobilise opposition to the Tories. We've had enough of Labour-controlled local authorities doing the Tories' dirty work by sacking workers and cutting services.

It's time the Labour Party stood up to the Tories for a change.

In Parliament Labour should mount a campaign of obstruction and disruption. Labour-controlled authorities should defy Tory dictates. And local

Labour Parties should rally to the support of workers in struggle.

Hardly a week goes by without the Tories being confronted by yet another crisis. Let's put

them out of their misery once and for all — by driving them out of office.

Labour must fight! Draft appeal

We call on the Labour Party and the TUC leaders to lead a fight against the Tory Government, with the aim of driving them from office and forcing a General Election.

We call for:
• Solidarity with the miners. For a national TUC day of action on a weekday!
• Rebuild the Health Service! Stop the Tory cuts! Labour must commit itself to reverse all Tory cuts

in health, education and other public services.

• Support all workers in struggle! Smash the Tory 1.5% pay limit! Occupy to stop closures!

• Free our trade unions! Support all workers in conflict with the anti-union laws. Labour must commit itself to repeal those laws and replace them by laws guaranteeing the right to organise a union, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.

What you can do to keep up the pressure for a fightback:

Collect signatures for the draft appeal. Petitions are available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Don't just look for support from activists in your local trade union bodies and Labour Parties go out onto the estates and shopping precincts!

Set up a broad local public meeting on the theme "Labour Must Fight".

Send reports of activities to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Support the pit camps!

On 18 January Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures set up a camp outside of Parkside Colliery — the last remaining pit in Lancashire, and one of the ten pits originally targeted for closure this month.

Lesley Lomas, the local Women Against Pit Closures treasurer, outlined the background to the establishment of the pit camp:

"We took the decision to set it up because we did not think that enough was happening in the TUC. They were not going ahead with a Day of Action (on January 19) or whatever they called it.

"We thought that something needed to be done, and quickly. So we just went ahead and set up the camp.

"About 35 or 40 women are involved in the camp, keeping it

going 24 hours a day on a rota basis. We're staying here until they start full production at Parkside again — worked by our men, not private contractors.

"We have had a fantastic amount of support from all over the country. We have had letters, cards, messages of support, and even tee-shirts sent to us. There has been a tremendous response from everyone.

"There are now women's camps at seven of the ten pits which were due to close in January. Soon, there should be camps at all ten pits."

The next stage in the Women Against Pit Closures campaign in support of the miners' fight for jobs is the national demonstration being held in London on 6 February.

Lesley Lomas stressed the need for the biggest possible turnout, given that neither last month's High Court verdict nor last week's Commons Select Committee report had given the miners their jobs back:

"We're no better off with the court verdict or the Select Committee's report than we were before. The miners are still not working, and there's still no decision been made that they can go back to work. It's still all up in the air."

Messages of support/financial donations to: Women Against Pit Closures Camp, Parkside Colliery, Winwick Road, Newton-le-Willows, Lancashire. Cheques payable to: "Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures".



Birmingham NALGO defend jobs and services NALGO one day strike in Birmingham 19 January organised after the city council announced job cuts of 2-3,000 in order to save £35-40,000 out of the budget. Photo Mark Salmon.



Thousands of jobs are to be lost on the railways through contracting out and franchising

The Tories go looting again

Last Friday, the Tory vandals announced their plans for the sell-off of British Rail.

Running to 132 clauses spread over 117 pages, the "enabling" bill is a promise of more job losses, more line closures, a worse railway service — and a hefty profit for some of the Tories' friends in big business.

Under the legislation, British Rail is to be split into two separate operations. One body will handle rail infrastructure (such as track and signalling), while the second body will have responsibility for franchising out the train services themselves.

"Railtrack", the body responsible for the infrastructure, will be obliged to contract out as many services as possible. Eventually, though probably not until after the turn of the century, "Railtrack" itself will be privatised.

The franchising out of train services to be conducted by the other body will be done on an exclusive basis: contracts for running the services will be handed out to individual companies. So much for the Tories' promise of "more competition".

British Rail's freight and parcels business are to be sold outright. Front-runners for the takeover

include TNT, the company which played the leading role in shipping Murdoch's papers through picket lines in the Wapping dispute of 1986.

The bill also proposes the creation of a new and complex bureaucratic structure of the kind normally condemned by the Tories. The annual cost of these bureaucratic quangos will amount to £15 million.

John MacGregor, the Tories' Secretary of State for Transport, has used typical Tory double-speak to try to justify privatisation of British Rail:

"The existing culture is more about keeping the trains running than the market-oriented thrust of identifying what the customer wants and then being flexible enough to provide it".

"This is the latest example of blatant asset-stripping by the Tories. A nationalised industry built up over years with money raised through the taxation of working class people is to be broken up and sold off at bargain-basement prices to a few big business friends of the Tories."

But most rail passengers and railway workers would agree that "keeping the trains running" is a pretty good idea! And what the reference to "market-oriented thrust" really means was accurately summed up by one union official:

"Charging the maximum fares we can in the busy period when the cus-

tomers want to travel, and ceasing to provide services in the evenings and at weekends".

Railway experts are already predicting that, even in just the short term, over 1,000 miles of railway lines will be shut down in the drive to sell off the more profitable parts of British Rail. Such massive line closures have not been seen since the "Beeching Butchery" of the early 1960s.

Thousands of jobs are under threat as well. Three months ago British Rail announced 5,000 job losses, not counting any job losses which would result from possible pit closures. Contracting out "Railtrack" services and franchising out rail services will cost thousands more jobs.

The Tories claim that privatisation of British Rail will save public money. But before they sell it off they plan to spend an extra £2 billion: because the network has suffered from under-investment for years, such a massive injection of cash is needed to make British Rail an attractive option for privatisation.

The Tories have not been prepared to spend a penny on British Rail for the benefit of passengers and railworkers. But now, with privatisation on the horizon, the sky is the limit.

The British Rail sell-off is the latest example of blatant asset-stripping by the Tories. A nationalised industry which has been built up over years with money raised through the taxation of working class people, is to be broken up and sold off at bargain-basement prices to a few big business friends of the Tories.

Railworkers will lose their jobs. Passengers will pay higher fares for worse services. Taxpayers will foot the bill for privatisation. And a few big business spivs will cream off the profit. This is the reality of the Tories' "classless society".

A massive groundswell of opposition to privatisation of the railways has already been generated by the Tories' announcement of their plans. Much of the opposition comes from people who are no friends of the working class.

Many industrialists are uneasy about privatisation. Higher freight charges and a worse service will eat into their profit margins and undermine their competitiveness. These people think the "free market" is a good thing — until it threatens their profits.

Opposition to privatisation has also been expressed by Tories and the newspapers which function as their loyal mouthpieces. Even Nicholas Ridley and the *Daily Telegraph* — neither of which can be described as "wet" — have come out against privatisation.

The Parliamentary Labour Party and the rail union leaders have condemned the proposed sell-off. But they show no sign of leading a serious fightback.

Labour MPs are too concerned to preserve their image of a "sensible" and moderate Labour Party to mount a campaign of parliamentary obstruction and to give the Tory vandals the treatment they deserve.

Confronted with earlier job losses, the response of rail union leaders has been to confine themselves to a polite campaign of lobbying Tory MPs. The decision to call a ballot on 5 March for a one-day strike is a step in the right direction. But it is not enough.

The natural and ingrained response of the union and Labour Party leaders will be to let the dissident Tories do the fighting for them. Instead of a campaign to mobilise workers, they will spend their time cheering on Tory MPs.

The fact that dissident Tory MPs have taken the lead in opposing rail

privatisation is not a condemnation of the proposed sell-off. It is a condemnation of the lack of fight on the part of the labour movement leaders.

In combating privatisation and the threat to their jobs, railworkers need to link up with other sections of the working class fighting in defence of their jobs and living standards.

The Labour Party inside and outside of Parliament should stand shoulder to shoulder with workers fighting back against the Tory attacks. Labour MPs should stop swapping polite pleasantries with Tory MPs. The Labour Party should mobilise support for every demonstration and every picket line.

Workers no longer see the Tories as invincible. Since the General Election the Tories have staggered from one crisis to another. A united struggle in defence of jobs, bringing together miners, railworkers, local government workers, civil servants could sound the death knell of this Tory government.

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

Karl Marx

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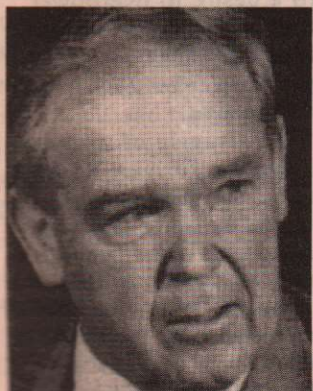
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Bob Reid

Changed face of unionism

Last week an over-enthusiastic (or just plain malicious) sub-editor committed me to writing some more about the *Employment Gazette's* Labour Force Survey of union density. I'm supposed to explain "why 53% of trade unionists now have "A" level education or above and why supervisors appear to be more unionised than ordinary workers".

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

First of all, neither of these findings is quite as surprising as might first appear. Both are reflections of the fact that the public sector is now the main bastion of trade unionism. In fact, there appears to be no systematic pattern linking union density and educational qualifications amongst men. But amongst women there is a clear divide: by far the highest level of union density is amongst those with higher education qualifications (64% as against 26% of those with "O" levels or equivalent only). This can be explained by the high concentration of well qualified women in occupations like teaching and the health service, where union density is high.

The question of supervisors is rather more complex. LFS divides employees into three groups: managers, foremen/supervisors and people with no managerial or supervisory responsibilities. Union density in 1991 was higher amongst foremen/supervisors (46%) than among employees with no supervisory responsibilities (37%). Unsurprisingly, managers were least likely to be union members.

LFS suggest that this pattern can be explained by "entry routes" to supervisory jobs: "Such positions are typically held by people who have progressed from more junior positions within the firm. As such, they are likely to possess considerable seniority which... is positively related to union membership". But here again, the question of the public sector is crucial: "Union density is high amongst managers in energy and water supply, transport and communications and other services... suggesting that union membership amongst managers is primarily a public service phenomenon".

Of course, the LFS's statistics do not tell the whole story. An estate Housing Manager has a very different relationship to the employer than, say a foreman in a manufacturing industry. But both are lumped together into the same LFS category. What the survey does confirm, however, is that the "shape" of trade union membership has changed fundamentally since the rise of post-war manufacturing unionism. Density remains high in industries like metal extraction and manufacture, motor vehicles and transport equipment. But otherwise all the industries with above 50% density in 1991 are in the public sector (or former public sector industries, like telecommunications).

The implications of this need to be understood. As stated last week, public sector workers (in general) lack the direct industrial muscle of manufacturing workers. The refusal of many lefties to accept this can result in ridiculous posturing: social workers who believe that all-out strike action will bring the employers to their knees, civil servants who think that stopping benefit giro's will shake the government to its foundations. The fact is that those areas of the public sector that are "well organised" have generally adopted the wrong model of trade unions, one that assumes a level of industrial muscle that they simply don't possess.

Those who have seen the futility of pretending to be industrial workers generally retreat into Politically Correct "good cause" trade unionism (the left) or what old Fred Engels describe as the "funeral society" concept of unions as personal service organisations (the right). The basic principle of real trade unionism — collective workplace self-defence — is in danger of being lost. One way of saving it is to face facts. We could all do worse than ploughing through the LFS survey (in January's *Employment Gazette*) for a start.

Rape as a weapon

By Jean Lane

A couple of years ago myself and a friend were sitting in my flat getting gently stoned, and had just switched on a video of the film *Doctor Strangelove*. We were really enjoying ourselves drinking and smoking and chatting when it slowly dawned on us that a sound coming from outside and below my window had been doing so for about the last 15 or 20 minutes. We stopped talking and listened. It was a woman alternately screaming and moaning, "No, please no, please no". She was being raped.

We switched off the film and leaned out of the window, straining to see through the darkness. The sounds were so close that, despite being one floor up, we could hear practically everything being said, including the filthy names the woman was being called by her attacker or attackers (it seemed there was more than one but it was hard to tell).

But for a tree or a wall, we would surely have been able to see the whole thing in plain view. As the horror of what we were (almost) witnessing washed over us we began to shake.

My friend had been raped when very young by a friend of her family who told her, while he was doing it, not to try telling anyone as no-one would believe her anyway and it would only serve to make her look bad. I had been through the much lesser experience, when older, of having picked someone up at a party, determined not to spend the night alone, and finding when I got home

that I had picked up a really unsavoury character, that I had changed my mind but dared not say so for fear of the consequences.

We both felt utterly hopeless, and during the days after the event we berated ourselves for not having gone down there with a kitchen knife or a saucepan or anything at all and put a stop to it. We should at least have switched the light off and yelled out of the window to leave her alone. But the only thing we could think of doing to help this poor woman was to call the police. We did so, twice. The second time, which was a long time after the first, yelling down the phone, "It is still happening, are you coming or aren't you?" Going back to the window, we eventually saw a young woman stagger into view, her rapist(s) having run off; pee, which must have been extremely painful, and vomit on the ground.

"How to explain men raping neighbours with whom they have co-existed all their lives?"

To this day I will never forget the sight of a male copper, coming up behind her, after the event, knowing what she had been through because we had told them, grabbing her from behind and swinging her round, taking her completely by surprise. Whatever the insensitive bastard said to her, she clearly had no intention of going with him or of answering any

questions about her experience.

She managed to get away from him and staggered off into the maze of alleyways that made up the neighbouring housing estate.

The overriding emotion, still, after two or three years, is of guilt at doing nothing to help that woman.

Today, watching the news and reading the first-hand reports of the mass rapes of women, mainly Muslim by Serbian soldiers, in the villages of the former Yugoslavia, a feeling of utter revulsion washes over me, as it must over all women watching this horror unfolding before their very eyes, along with the terrible feeling of helplessness.

How to explain the deliberate use of mass rape as a weapon of war, of men raping their neighbours with whom they have peacefully co-existed all their lives, of children being repeatedly raped by gangs of soldiers who, not so long ago, were carpenters, bakers, members of a small tight-knit community?

There are those who say that men, being naturally aggressive, are all potential rapists, and the aggressive situation of war and the breakdown of law and order brings this side of them out. I cannot subscribe to this view.

Firstly, you could just as easily argue that all people are potential murderers. The fact that many have done it proves that it can be done. But the majority of us choose not to, or are not driven to do so. Human beings, men included, are capable of making rational choices and decisions about

what they do and how they behave. They do not just follow natural drives and impulses.

It is not *all* men caught up in the war of Yugoslavia who are raping women. I cannot believe that all the men there are capable of such behaviour (any more than I can believe that *all* the Muslim men will reject their wives who have been victims of rape). It is a conscious decision of a few who are using it as a weapon to spread fear and despair, and as an aid to the misnamed policy of 'ethnic cleansing'.

Secondly, the very idea of men's natural aggression leading them all to be potential rapists lets the men who do it off the hook. If it is only "natural", what can we do? How could we persuade them that it is wrong? What would be the use of trying? This is the *real* politics of hopelessness.

"The idea of all men being potential rapists lets the men who do it off the hook."

What is felt by an individual or individuals, however many, unable to help another or others is nothing compared to this. It tells us we can do nothing. It means that the women, and men, inside that war-torn country who are getting this information out at enormous risk to their lives, are doing it to no purpose. They are not!

And it means that the women around the world who are protesting against this outrage are wasting their time, which they are not.

Rape, whether carried out on a London housing estate or as a policy of war, is not a 'sex' crime but an abuse of *power*. It is done consciously by men, mostly to women, not to fulfil an uncontrollable and necessary sexual urge, but to fulfil a desire to overpower and dominate their victim. It can be fought, whether physically, ideologically or in the courts.

The struggle of women from the former Yugoslavia, and their supporters around the world, to get the use of mass rape recognised as a war crime is one of immense courage and necessity, and it should give heart to all those victims around the world who have felt the utter hopelessness and degradation of rape.



The struggle of these women to get the use of mass rape recognised as a war crime is one of immense courage and necessity



Mourners at Milltown cemetery seconds after a hand-grenade is thrown. Photo: David Stewart/Reflex

Scapegoats jailed in Northern Ireland

PLATFORM

The British state has a long and dishonourable record of human rights abuses in Ireland. The latest example of this can be seen in the so-called Casement Park trials.

Over 41 Irish nationalists have been accused of offences related to the killing of two British soldiers in March 1988. Five men have received life sentences for abetting murder. The point here is that none of the accused were involved in actually killing the soldiers. Their conviction rests on an interpretation of the legal doctrine of common purpose, hitherto unknown in UK law and only previously seen in South Africa.

The background to all this lies in a series of extraordinary events which profoundly affected the nationalist communities in the North of Ireland during the month of March in 1988. The tragic sequence of events began when three unarmed Republicans, including Mairead Farrell, were shot dead by the SAS.

The concern and anger that these shootings gave

rise to were manifested by a huge turnout at their funeral, held in Belfast's Milltown Cemetery. At this point the Loyalist Michael Stone launched a murderous hand-grenade and gun assault on the mourners. Three men were shot dead, and over thirty were injured.

Some days later the funeral took place of Kevin Brady, one of Stone's victims. The night before this another Belfast Catholic had been murdered in a random UDA assassination.

"The crime they are truly guilty of is attending a Republican funeral and having the audacity to defend themselves."

The cortege set off, therefore, in a mood of high tension. At one point a car drove into the funeral at high speed and, as frightened mourners surrounded the vehicle, its two occupants produced revolvers: a shot was discharged. Everyone in the crowd believed — and why would they not? — that once again they

were under attack. They responded accordingly.

A courageous group of mourners (all unarmed) advanced and disarmed the two men. The car was searched for bombs and the men were moved to the nearby Casement Park where it was discovered that they were soldiers. Sometime later an armed unit from the IRA arrived, took the two men into their own custody and shot them. The members of this unit have never been identified or arrested, but many others have.

The burden of the state's case against the Casement accused is that they had a common purpose with those who actually did carry out the killings.

This is particularly absurd when we see that three of those currently serving life for aiding and abetting murder, Patrick Kane, Michael Timmons and Sean Kelly, were not even present at Casement Park and could not possibly share a common purpose with an IRA unit whose existence they were unaware of.

Like all the accused, the crime they are truly guilty of is attending a Republican funeral and having the audacity to defend themselves. Two

soldiers were killed and the state is looking for vengeance. They would be doing the public a great service if they explain what exactly the two were doing, and why it was that no soldiers or RUC officers were present at the scene until well after the events were over.

Other serious doubts about the state's behaviour over these trials have emerged. Identification of defendants depends very largely on poor quality video film shot from an Army helicopter some hundreds of feet above the confused and tumultuous events in the narrow streets of Belfast.

The right of an accused person to silence has also been effectively removed.

In the case of Sean Kelly, Mr Justice Carsell specifically referred to his refusal to testify as grounds for inferring guilt. Not for the first time Ireland is being used as a testing ground for an assault on civil liberties that we may all live to regret.

This is a statement from the Justice for the Casement Park Accused Campaign c/o Green Ink Bookshop, 8 Archway Mall, London N19 5RG.

The left's Euro-shame

THE POLITICAL FRONT

By Dale Street

Debate about the European Community always seems to bring out the worst in the British left.

In the early 1970s, the bulk of the revolutionary left, especially the Socialist Workers' Party, fell into line behind the flag-waving Little Englanders and opposed British membership of the Common Market.

The serious left should have maintained its original position: the alternatives were a capitalist Britain in a capitalist Europe, or a capitalist Britain in "splendid isolation".

Two decades on, the debate about Maastricht has once again driven sections of the left into a frenzied bout of flag-waving and class collaboration. Leading the rush, of course, has been the *Morning Star*, paper of the ailing and grossly misnamed Communist Party of Great Britain.

One letter recently published in the paper argued that left-wingers should share a platform with Tories in the common "patriotic" cause of opposing "German imperialism".

"It is a disgrace for Benn to campaign alongside of Tory diehards and outright fascists."

Socialists, explained the letter-writer, had fought alongside of Tories against German fascism in the Second World War. Now, in the battle against the Maastricht Treaty (a stalking-horse for German imperialism) socialists should again join forces with Tories.

One left-winger who has acted in line with the letter-writer's advice is Tony Benn.

At a rally organised a fortnight ago by the Campaign for a British Referendum, Benn shared a platform with anti-Maastricht Tories on the far right of their party: Teddy Taylor, Bill Cash and Richard Shepherd.

On the demonstration which preceded the rally, awash with Union Jacks and British-nationalist slogans, the National Front was visibly present. This was hardly surprising: nationalism, not internationalism, was the order of the day.

Teddy Taylor, for example, denounced the European

Community as standing for "the destruction of jobs, the suppression of democratic rights, and the deliberate damaging of the Third World."

But exactly the same denunciation is applicable to Teddy Taylor's beloved Tory government itself! British Tories can commit such crimes. But when foreigners do it, it's a different story!

Taylor also called on supporters of a referendum on Maastricht to "stand up for your rights and never give up the fight". He certainly does not give the same advice to workers fighting for their jobs, or to public-sector workers fighting the 1.5% pay rise limit.

It is a disgrace for Benn, or any other socialist, to share a platform with the likes of Taylor, and to campaign alongside of Tory diehards and outright fascists.

Socialists should be to the fore in challenging and eradicating the poison of nationalism, rather than helping whip it up in the debate over Maastricht. Socialists should mobilise to drive fascists off the streets, rather than appeal for their support from a cross-party platform.

Ironically, Benn's role in the Tory-led Campaign for a British Referendum is no different from the role played by the Labour Party 'modernisers' and 'Clintonisers' — whom Benn rightly denounces.

Their goal is the destruction of the Labour Party as a working-class party based on the trade unions.

The attacks on the trade union block vote and trade union involvement in the selection procedures, together with the involvement of Liberal-Democrats in the Commission on Social Justice, are all part of this strategy.

Instead of fighting specifically for working-class interests, the John Smiths of this world want to build an alliance with individuals and organisations hostile to the working class on the basis of a common "national interest".

John Smith wants to do this. But Tony Benn, through his involvement in anti-Maastricht campaigning, is already doing it.

The bizarre sight of Tony Benn on a platform alongside Teddy Taylor, speaking to an audience of rabid nationalists and fascists, or semi-fascists, is a graphic illustration of what the left's anti-Maastricht campaigning is really all about.

The left should wake up to reality and stop kidding itself into believing that its anti-Maastricht diatribes have anything to do with internationalism. The Union Jack is not the banner of internationalism.

GRAFFITI



Martin Jacques: methinks this tank can't think

Fewer than 50 attend 40 something AGM

GRAFFITI

Socialist Organiser was saddened to learn that the "broad church" Socialist Movement (SM) has decided not to declare itself "a party". It was probably an inevitable decision. There were fewer than 50 "delegates" at its AGM, and all of them seemed to disagree with each other.

Due to bureaucratic carving the motion demanding that the Movement immediately change its name to "40-something" was not taken.

However, one important name change was agreed. The SM magazine, rising from the ashes of the socialist last year with the name *Red, Green and Radical*, is to be replaced by a title with the word 'socialist' in it. What about 'Ikea, Vins de Pays and er... Socialist'?

The winners at the AGM were the *Socialist Society* — the losers *Socialist Outlook* which has been deeply embedded in the SM. The balance sheet for *Outlook*? Several years, and lots of human and money resources wasted to build "a mass" *Socialist Movement* that ends up as an extended *Socialist Society*.

The *Guardian* had the good sense to cut ex-*Marxism Today* editor Martin Jacques' Saturday column; how has he been keeping himself busy since? Apart from a new and more Jacques-friendly environment at the *Sunday Times*, he has set up a think tank, "Demos". The name took months for Jacques, with the aid of an advertising executive, to formulate.

No cheap jokes about the old Stalinist having his tank — all he needs is a friend who can think. No, the think tank is poised to change the face of British politics (stop me if you've heard this one before). Its directors and advisors include Anita "Bodyshop" Broderick, Douglas Hague (a former economic adviser to Thatcher), and a hotch-potch of right wingers and... well, more right wingers.

Despite this, we can expect Jacques to continue to be at the cutting edge of radical politics. The first pamphlet they intend to put out will be on tax. Jacques, giving a taster for the pamphlet, says "income tax and corporation tax [i.e tax on companies' profits] don't meet the criteria for a good tax system; they penalise people for working hard..."

But haven't we heard this before... doesn't it sound a little like the ultra-Thatcherite

Adam Smith Institute arguing for tax cuts for the rich while blithely ignoring the fact that people on low incomes pay a higher proportion of their earnings on tax than those on higher incomes? As Jacques himself says, "I expect quite a lot of our stuff to be reported in the *Daily Mail*, the *Sun* as well".

Next week: Jacques argues for the re-introduction of the Poll Tax.

The *Sunday Times* is giving money away. Yes, you can collect bank notes from the newly emerging Eastern European states. This week, a 10 dinar note from Macedonia. It's difficult to say what it's worth, because no-one in Macedonia will accept them. But if it's in any way related to the old Yugoslav dinar, you'd need a fairly thick wad of these to buy a penny chew.

Many of the other bank notes the *Sunday Times* will be giving away come from economies so weak that the rouble is considered a hard currency in comparison.

But all the currencies will fit well with the *Sunday Times*. Both come in huge unmanageable wads, and neither is worth the paper it's printed on.

A big "well done" to John Major's Opportunity 2000, aimed at fighting discrimination against women in the job market by voluntary action.

The centrepiece of the programme is a touring exhibition, "New Horizons", that will "raise women's awareness" about the jobs available in the private sector. The TUC has a stall, as do the Pre-School Playgroup Association and 34 other organisations. The problem is, with the sole exception of Tesco's, none of them is a private sector employer.

As Gillian Shepherd said, opening the exhibition, "Now is the time for employers to exploit the skills of everyone in the country". That explains where all the private sector employers were: busy screwing the workers.

Next time you feel a little hung-over, fancy a lie-in or simply want to take a day off work, feel free — your employers might well already be pocketing your sick pay. It has emerged that many companies make false claims to the Department of Social Security for sick and maternity benefit. An audit has exposed that 25-30% of the £1 billion worth of claims made each year are less than the real McCoy.

The People's Champion vs the Establishment

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

As he strode into the room he betrayed no signs of fear. He looked the inquisitors in the eye, scarcely bothering to hide his contempt. Here was a champion of the ordinary people, confronting the Establishment on its own ground. Secure in the knowledge that Truth, Justice and Righteousness were on his side, he never flinched.

Yes, Kelvin MacKenzie, editor of the *Sun*, made quite an impression when he appeared before last week's select committee on press intrusion. Acting upon the principle that attack is the best form of defence, MacKenzie, started off by telling the

MPs "I frankly believe that you are hostile to the press and you are hostile to ordinary people knowing what is going on in public life".

The Honourable Members protested that their only aim in life was to protect those self same "ordinary people" from unwarranted press harassment. Their chief example seemed to be Mrs Camilla Parker Bowles. The *Sun* had not, in fact, published the "Camillagate" tape, but MacKenzie solidified with those papers that had: "What you are saying is that the whole world can know but not your poor people in the United Kingdom, who pay their bills and support their castles". Mr Gyles Brandreth (a man who started out as a children's TV presenter before dropping his intellectual standards to become a Tory MP) persisted with the description of Mrs Parker Bowles as a "private citizen"; MacKenzie could not conceal his derision: "When you sleep with the next King of England, you go into a slightly different stratosphere than the

ordinary person you have in mind". Collapse of stout party.

It was indeed a bravura performance. It was also apparently sincere (MacKenzie even admitted that the *Sun* may have made a few mistakes over the

"Statutory press controls ... will inevitably benefit the rich and powerful and be abused by the government of the day"

years) and strangely dignified. You felt yourself siding instinctively with the man who edits the vilest right wing rag ever to achieve a mass circulation in Britain. Partly this was because of the rank hypocrisy of his would-be tormentors: by their definition of "ordinary person"/"private citizen", MPs would almost certainly be included. And quite a few of them have

not been averse to taking the tabloid shilling themselves, as MacKenzie pointed out to the obvious embarrassment of former *Daily Star* columnist Joe Ashton MP.

But what gave MacKenzie's testimony its main force was that everything he said was true — even if his definition of an "Establishment" that does not, it seems, include himself or Mr Rupert Murdoch may be open to question. The message — that statutory press controls, whether Calcutt's draconian recommendations or Clive Soley's apparently more balanced proposals, will inevitably benefit the rich and powerful and be abused by the government of the day — is one that we should all heed, even if we don't like the messenger.

Actually, MacKenzie was more honest than he intended. He made one slip, but the MPs were too dazed to pick up on it: "We only print the truth, now". No one asked when Mr MacKenzie's paper had adopted this policy. Or what had been its previous practice.

Hillary Clinton, President in 2000 AD?

WOMEN'S EYE

By Annie O'Keeffe

Hillary Clinton has been given a big government job by her husband, Slick Willy Clinton, the US President.

In some quarters she is already more popular than he is.

Her job is to put together some system of public health care for a country where "the free market" operates in medicine.

In this "richest country in the world" many tens of thousands die each year who could have lived had they been able to pay a doctor to care for them. A health care system based entirely on private payment

and Bupa-style private health insurance inevitably leaves out those who cannot afford to pay.

Thirty five million people in the US have no medical insurance. People who are in company-operated health insurance systems lose their coverage if they lose their jobs: people with chronic illnesses, or who are aged, find it impossible to get new coverage if they change their jobs. They would not be profitable clients.

Is it any wonder that there is a tremendous mass demand in the USA for some system of public health care? Bill Clinton is committed to providing it and the job goes to Hillary.

If she makes any sort of a go of it, she may well be standing for President in

2000. There are a lot of big "ifs" there — if Bill Clinton wins a second term, being one of them. But watch Hillary.

Hillary Clinton's job once again raises an issue of the token women in politics. We have saccharin-sweet Ginny Bottomley. We used to have Mrs Thatcher. Many feminists in 1979, when Thatcher first led the Tories into a General Election, voted Tory, though they were not Tories, because they expected great things for women in general from a woman Prime Minister, even a Tory one.

Thinking along these lines, the *Guardian's* main "feminist" correspondent of the time, Jill Tweedie, who was not a Tory and not usually a fool, advocated a

feminist vote for Thatcher. You know the rest of the story.

There was no general advance for women under Thatcher. She proved to be a token "honorary" man, not a woman who got into the fortress and opened the gates for the rest of womankind.

So I'm not celebrating the rise of Hillary Clinton.

Women politicians too must be judged by politics. Hillary has probably got more to her than Slick Willy ever had, but that is not saying much.

One interesting question arises now, though: when the pixilated idiots who run the Labour Party speak of "Clintonising" Labour, do they mean Billying it or Hillarying it? Tell us, please, John Smith!

Public sector up for sale



A one-day strike at the British Library in London begins the fight against "contracting out". Photo Stefano Cagnoni

AT LEAST a million public sector workers could lose their jobs in the next few years if the Tories manage to get away with their plans to extend massively the "contracting out" of public services to private companies.

Wages will be driven down. Full-time workers will become part-time, insecurity will increase as groups of workers bid with each other's terms and conditions in a desperate attempt to keep their jobs. The unions could be seriously weakened.

Yet this massive attack on public sector workers has not received the attention it deserves from the leaders of the labour and trade union movement. Instead, we have had a deafening silence.

What it means for workers

It is now over a year since the Tories introduced the White Paper "Competing For Quality", with Treasury minister Francis Maude promising to "extend competition in the provision of public services further and faster than ever before".

The Tories' plans will hit the big majority of public sector workers. Their aim is to reduce the public sector, through mass contracting out, to the role of purchasing private sector services (with a policy making elite at the centre). Yet the response of the Labour and trade union leaders to this monumental threat has been absolutely appalling.

Our leaders have totally failed to understand the nature of the attack and in many instances they have ideologically capitulated to the Tories. At best some unions have presented arguments against 'market testing' of their own members' jobs but they have not put forward a genuine political alternative. There has consequently been no serious attempt to link the defence of public sector workers with

the interests of service users. The public sector union leaderships have not even attempted to mobilise and coordinate membership action within and across the unions.

There are rarely such glaring illustrations of our desperate need for a politically coherent, united Left and a serious rank and file movement in the unions.

Instead sections of workers in different parts of the public sector are being left isolated under the first wave of 'market testing' attacks.

Either with the officials or, if necessary, against them, the ranks of the movement must grasp the strategic character of "Competing For Quality" and respond accordingly. The mass 'market testing' and contracting out of public services is more than 'just' an industrial attack on public sector workers. It is a political attack on all working class people best understood in the context of the wider Tory attack on the public sector:

• **The privatisation of British Coal, British Railways, the London buses,**

Parcelforce; and sections of the civil service.

- **The driving home of education reforms resulting in a highly selective education system and big job losses.**
- **The consolidation of the NHS 'internal market' - destroying services, closing hospitals, and slashing front line jobs while bureaucratising the health care.**
- **The continued redefinition of local authority social service departments as the purchasers rather than the providers of non-health social and community care.**
- **The break up of the housing role of local authorities, the continued forcing up of council house rents, and the moves to attack the role of housing associations.**

The mass contracting out of public services is an integral and perhaps the most vital part of the Tories attempt to recast British society in the image of a more unforgiving, more savage capitalism befitting the decrepit, uncompetitive condition of the British economy.

If the Tories succeed in their plans hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs will be lost:

- **The pay and conditions of huge numbers of workers will be slashed;**
- **Tens of thousands will be cast into poverty, now and in their old age (as pension rights are eroded);**
- **Women will be especially hard hit;**
- **A major social change will have been effected as workers are moved from historically secure to immensely insecure employment;**
- **Local democracy will be further and significantly weakened;**
- **British trade unionism will suffer a dreadful setback; and the material bases for Labour politics will be substantially undermined.**
- **And for the service users and taxpayers in whose name this "counter-revolution" against the (misnamed) welfare state is being undertaken? Worse services at greater cost!**

This is the very real danger but it is not pre-ordained that the Tories should win.

Continued on next page

"Tens of thousands face poverty now and in old age"

Everything up for grabs

THE SHEER range of the Tories attack has been pretty clear from the start. The White paper identified 'promising areas for contracting out' in virtually every sphere of central government, outlining in careful formulas what Graham Mather, Director of the Right-wing Institute of Economic Affairs explicitly stated some five years back: 'the Government of Britain is moving towards a series of contracts in which a core of fewer than 10,000 civil servants will specify and buy public services from outside agencies, private contractors, and consortia of former public sector managers.'

43-44,000 civil servants will be market tested this year. The value of the central government work being market tested has risen from £25 million in 1992 to £1.5 billion in 1993. On 18 January this year the Government hosted a conference for private companies explaining how to compete for that work.

William Waldegrave, the minister responsible for this programme, rightly told an appreciative audience at last June's Sunday Times Business Conference, 'the opportunities for the private sector can be enormous.'

Increasing exploitation

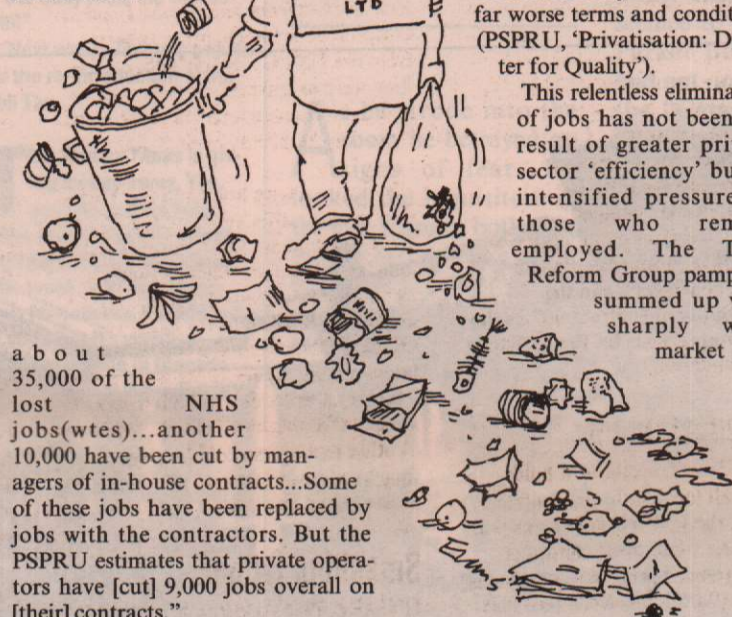
THE PROFITS on 'these enormous opportunities' and the (alleged) 'savings for the taxpayer' will be screwed out of public sector workers (and eventually their contracted replacements) as staffing levels and employment conditions are driven down.

Job losses

IN AN ESSENTIAL document published last year, the Public Services Privatisation Research Unit

(PSPRU) point out that "the NHS has lost 111,000 ancillary jobs since contracting out began in 1983. The number of 'whole-time equivalents (wtes)' lost is about 84,000, as many were part-time jobs which only count as half in the statistics. Women have been worse hit.

They have lost about 90,000 NHS jobs - four-fifths of all the jobs gone... Around 26% of all ancillary contracts have been handed to private contractors since 1983; this accounts for



about 35,000 of the lost NHS jobs (wtes)... another 10,000 have been cut by managers of in-house contracts... Some of these jobs have been replaced by jobs with the contractors. But the PSPRU estimates that private operators have [cut] 9,000 jobs overall on [their] contracts."

19,000 jobs directly lost and an unknown number of others indirectly lost as NHS managers failed to replace staff in anticipation of market testing. Other ancillary jobs have of course been cut as part of the general attacks on the NHS even taking into account ancillary jobs 'created' by the succeeding contractors.

Again the PSPRU report that "over 114,000 manual jobs were lost from councils in Britain in the three years to September 1991. Much of this loss is due to the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering - although the Act did not take effect until April 1989, many councils prepared for it by making cuts in the preceding year."

Similarly, 10,000 already appallingly low paid cleaning jobs were cut from the civil service between 1980 and 1991, with only partial 'replacement' in the private sector and - as with NHS and local authority workers - on far worse terms and conditions (PSPRU, 'Privatisation: Disaster for Quality').

This relentless elimination of jobs has not been the result of greater private sector 'efficiency' but of intensified pressure on those who remain employed. The Tory Reform Group pamphlet summed up very sharply what market test-

ing and contracting out is really about - and the different class interests involved - in a 1984 pamphlet, 'High Noon in the NHS':

"Contractors have discovered great scope for making savings by rationalising pensions, conditions of service, like sick pay, off the job training

courses, overtime payments, and holiday pay... contractors control the use of labour tightly: there are no half hour breaks for every 3.5 hours worked... workers can only leave with full pay when the job is finished. The unions call this type of working practice slave driving. The contractors call it efficiency... The conditions of service are estimated to be about 29% of the NHS total wage bill."

The potential job loss is astronomical and now mostly in areas of historically secure employment.

Insecure employment

IF THE TORIES proceed unchallenged they will place up to a million workers into conditions of extreme uncertainty. People will find their employment hanging on one 'customer' (a council, a hospital and so forth) for a one, two or three year contract. Over and again workers will find their pay and conditions under the pressure of the tendering process.

These workers will not be manufacturing goods which can be sold to more than one customer. Either the particular public sector body will continue to require their service or they will be redundant; in many cases on minimum terms rather than those currently applying in the public sector. 'Competing for Quality' will turn out to be competition between workers - constantly under pressure to cut their numbers and conditions to retain employment.

Smashing conditions

AS JOBS GO and security of employment is eliminated so contractors will smash up conditions to minimise prices, win contracts, and ensure profits.

When Westminster Council let the refuse and street cleaning contract to MRS (a management buy out team) 100 jobs were immediately lost (out of 800) and inferior terms and conditions were imposed on the workforce. One of the MBO team commented, 'lets say we have reduced what we saw as over generous conditions of service. Basically that means making the men work harder and cutting back their holidays.'

Private contractors have typically cut the hours of part-time staff to below 16 hours to rob them of statutory employment rights and national insurance benefits and increased the hours of full-time staff to enable fewer workers to undertake the work for less cost than the public sector. Refuse contractors (for example Biffa, BFI) and security firms (like Centurion) have typically resorted to longer hours to reduce costs.

The effect is to ratchet up the pressure of work not just on those part-time and full-time workers being directly attacked but on those who have to work directly alongside them.

According to a 1991 report by the University of Warwick, hospital ancillary workers believe that they have been forced to work much harder in the last ten years. Yet the resultant pressure is also felt by nursing staff. After Crothall won a contract to clean the Papworth Hospital in Cambridgeshire in 1984, the *Nursing Times* revealed how the company was able to cut cleaning staff by partly shifting work onto the nurses who subsequently had to: 'make patients' tea at 6am and collect the cups afterwards; collect cups after evening tea (because domestics were no longer

providing a 24 hour cover); undertake one of the cleaning shifts in the sterilised 'bubble rooms'; and wash up crockery in the ICU area.

A conscious attack

NONE OF THIS is accidental. The Tories have been explicitly using 'market testing' and contracting out to cut jobs and conditions. They have expressly instructed public sector bodies not to take account of poorer employment conditions when considering bids. In a 1983 letter to the Medway District Health Authority (DHA), the DHSS stated, 'none of these factors - such as conditions of service - feature in our policy advice which is firmly that the lowest tenderer should be appointed' (30.8.83).

The Treasury officially conceded in 1986, 'most of the savings from contracting out arise because contractors offer poorer conditions of employment... they eliminate costly bonus schemes and overtime working, provide little or no sick pay and avoid national insurance payments by means of more part-time working. The difference in total labour costs may be of the order of 25%. Pensions are the main single element in it' (Using Private Enterprise In Government).

A relatively decent pension scheme is the one thing all public sector workers have prized in their employment. Now it is up for grabs. If victory goes to the Tories they will consign workers to poverty in their old age.



Women will suffer most

Forming the great majority of the basic and low paid grades throughout the public sector, mass market testing and contracting out will significantly narrow women's employment opportunities while driving down their pay levels even further.

The 'equal opportunities' policies negotiated by the public sector unions will be eradicated by mass contracting out. Agreements on part-time working; job-sharing; special training programmes; creche and summer school play schemes will all go.

The effect on women will further widen inequalities in rates of pay and total paid income, working hours, statutory rights, contributory state pensions, state benefits, holidays, and occupational pensions.

By far the most bitter effects of market testing and contracting out will continue to be

felt by the part-time, almost totally female, workers on whom the public sector is heavily dependent.

A survey last year of Barnsley Council showed 65% of the workforce to be female, 77% on low or poverty pay. One quarter of Barnsley's workforce is part-time, overwhelmingly women.

By reducing the hourly rates, the hours worked per week, the number of paid weeks per year (eliminating all year wages or 'retainers' for school cleaners and dinner staff during school holidays), and refusing paid annual, sick and maternity leave, contractors have ruthlessly driven down the living standards of part-time workers.

By removing them from the protection of employment laws the contractors have effectively casualised a whole layer of the workforce,

making them especially vulnerable to dismissal. In what ought to be an object lesson to the union bureaucrats who advise members to pin all their hopes on in-house bids rather than an active strategy, "the weekly hours of part-timers on in-house contracts have also been cut by many NHS managers emulating contractors. According to the NES, by 1991 over 37% of part-time women ancillaries still employed by the NHS were paid for fewer than 16 hours a week - in 1983 the corresponding figure was 18%" (PSPRU).

When such grotesquely exploited workers fall out of employment they do not qualify for unemployment benefit. If they are living with a partner they also fail to qualify for income supplement, making them wholly dependent on that partner for financial support.



Workers for Liverpool City Council

What it means for service users

Bashing local democracy

EVER SINCE 1979 local councils have increasingly found themselves carrying out the dictates of centralising Tory governments. It might seem as if things could not get much worse. But the contracting out of even the so-called core functions of local government will be a huge body blow to — perhaps the death-knell of — genuine local democracy: fundamentally transforming the character of local government to accord with Nicholas Ridley's old programmatic slogan, 'enablers not providers'.

Instead of local parties collectively determining their election policies, presenting them to the electorate, winning votes and majorities, and so implementing their election commitments, they will be reduced to...managing pre-existing contracts! An in-coming majority will simply take over the the previous regime's legally binding contracts, delivering services to specifications which differ radically from their own policies and quality requirements.

Just as fundamentally, the whole concept of public services as commercial services effectively denies those users any democratic say in the nature, design, management and delivery of those services.

The Tory agenda

BREAKING UP the public sector, commercialising what remains, eroding local democracy further, and cracking the unions is in part about destroying the material base for traditional labour politics in Britain. Whatever has actually happened, the Tories

are convinced that 'model' Thatcherite councils like Wandsworth have pointed the way to permanent defeat of Labour.

Collective organisation and the collective provision it has brought about may not of themselves be socialist but they do provide a barrier to the unrestrained ravages of capitalism; a basis for non-market social values; and a point of departure for socialists who want something more than an ameliorated capitalism. The Tories, who are obviously a lot clearer about this than the Labour leadership, are determined to put an end to the 'nanny state' and the reform politics associated with it.

Attacking services

THE PSPRU booklet demolishes the Tory claim that 'competition' and contracting out improve the quality of public services. A comprehensive study which draws on the PSPRU's database of over 5,000 contracts and 500 contractors in the NHS, local and central government, it reveals that "private contractors consistently perform worse than direct employees...:

- Almost one quarter of contracts awarded to private contractors have problems
- One in ten of all [these] contracts have been terminated
- Just one per cent of in-house contracts in the NHS have had problems
- The failure rate of contracts held by private contractors is four and a half times higher than for contracts held by the in-house workforce in local government and 18 times higher in the health service."

Falling standards

AN EXAMPLE of the falling standards created by CCT is the failure of Superclean to "live up to its name" in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. "One school was so dirty that it had to be closed. A local union survey found that half the schools considered themselves to be worse or much worse off."

Similarly, Tory controlled Cheltenham was "so disappointed by the performance of their chosen (ground maintenance) contractor Community Leisure, that they asked local people to help prepare the town for the 'Britain in Bloom' competition."

The PSPRU identify "recruitment and retention" problems, "under-resourced contracts", and the "[un]suitability of contractors" as the fundamental reasons for the decline in service standards.

Local government

THE PRIVATE sector now holds 39.8% of all local authority building contracts, the PSPRU points out that "one quarter of all these contracts have experienced problems and almost one in ten (9.6%) have been terminated. For DOs 18% had problems and only 3.6% have been terminated."

There are similar trends in other council services — refuse collection, street cleaning, school meals, vehicle maintenance, and catering contracts. 37% of private sector held sport and leisure management contracts have been terminated!

The experience of NHS cleaning is especially horrifying because of its

critical importance to clinical hygiene. Stressing this — "cleaning is an essential service...in hospitals where the health of the patients and staff may be at risk from cross-infection" — the PSPRU detailed the record of Mediclean. They "...have had at least 100 contracts, 13 of which have had problems. They withdrew from two and were sacked from one. At the London Hospital at Whitechapel, a report from the Unit General Manager said they were at least 50% below acceptable performance levels in some areas, including high risk, clinical and ward areas."

It has been long known to the Tories that quality suffers under CCT. In 1983 Cheltenham DHA described the laundry service provided by Sunlight as "nothing short of appalling" (DHA document, 8.4.83). In the same year Oldham DHA sacked a succession of laundry contractors "because of unsatisfactory standards and high losses of linen" (DHA letter 21.3.83). Examples of other examples could be given — they have never intruded on the picture presented by the Tories.

Smashing labour

UNLIKE THE LABOUR leadership the Tories know what a serious business they have embarked upon. With Waldegrave promising "a revolution in the organisation and delivery of our public services — a revolution that will affect both their users and their providers", the Tories have thrown themselves into a full scale war against organised labour in the public sector.

According to Waldegrave, "Competition is the key to quality".

Yet even on the grounds of bourgeois economics, there is no automatic equation between competition and quality. The market is awash with junk products and poor services. What is actually purchased depends on the resources and requirements of the purchaser. Tory ministers and their junior partners in local government have shown in practice that they will accept far lower standards of service if it is paid for through 'savings' on workers' conditions. The same is true if less enthusiastically — for other cash strapped local and health authorities.

Even BET plc, a major contractor, have commented, "as one of the largest providers of services to the UK public sector, we have been disappointed by the continuing emphasis on price, at the cost of quality, built into the competitive tendering process" (1990 Annual Report).

The vehement opposition of both Government and contractors to the proper application of European law to the tendering process, providing some minimal protection to workers whose jobs are being contracted out, shows that they are not interested in 'quality' but exploitation.

Bureaucracy gone mad

In truth the only way the Tories can market test much of the internal operations of the state sector is to create a bureaucracy which does not actually provide any services but instead simply buys them, audits them and — where services remain in-house — undertakes the massively increased accounting

functions.

Civil Service Departments are now awash with in-house 'market testing units' and consultants advising on and controlling 'market tests' (is it sensible to 'test', how best to undertake them, production of tender documentation, whether to submit an in-house bid, how best to put together an in-house bid, evaluating the results). A small fortune is being spent on delivering not a single service. Moreover, to ensure contract compliance further sums are then spent on monitoring those services.

In some cases one branch of a public body is 'hard charging' another branch of the same organisation, creating ever more auditing, accounting and administrative tasks completely extraneous to the tasks of the organisation. The marketisation of the NHS illustrates the bureaucratic nightmare: nursing staff are leaving in their droves while accountants and administrators are taken on in their thousands, with the Tories arguing that the NHS is now 'better managed!' In a rational world the nurses would be allowed to nurse and the administrators put to better work!

Choice

IN A SPEECH to the Adam Smith institute last July Major promised to 'shift the balance of choice in society more radically than ever before into the hands of ordinary people...In the 1990s...we mean to empower...the least well off — those most dependent on public services as well...[the privatisation to which Major is] most committed is the privatisation of choice."

Major proclaimed deregulation, competitive tendering and privatisation as the 'slings and stones' with which he was empowering the people.

The speech was astonishing for its presumption (from a man presiding over crippling interest rates, record unemployment, record housing repossessions, record homelessness) and banality.

Banal because the 'promises' are simply undeliverable in a capitalist society.

Major mentioned 'choice' more than 20 times in his speech but mere repetition cannot alter the basic facts of capitalist economy. The hungry may choose to eat and the homeless to have a home but without the money to buy those things — or a commitment to deliver them collectively — their choices remain wishful thinking.

Contracting out public services will not alter that basic fact one iota. On the contrary, insofar as it throws more people out of a job and drives down the living standards of others it will lessen 'choice'.

The Independent hit the nail on the head when it commented on Major's speech: "...today we report the case of a sick child who languished on a trust hospital's waiting list for months — until one day her father offered the asking fee of £8,500 and, presto, his daughter had her operation in a matter of days; a private operation but performed in the same trust hospital, where she recovered in a public ward alongside NHS patients. This demonstrates a truism, that in a market economy, the mechanism that provides the power to choose is money." Quite so.



Against redundancies in 1991. Privatisation will result in many thousands more redundancies: Photo John Smith

How to organise the fightback

An attack on the scale of the misnamed "Competing For Quality" will not be fought off sectionally. It requires a co-ordinated national fightback which integrates the industrial, political and ideological fronts. Such a strategy must:

* Recognise the class-wide character of this attack and build for a struggle across the public sector rather than on a sectional basis.

At the moment sections of every public sector union are under attack — 43,000 civil servants targeted this year — but are being isolated from the rest of their own union. This is a recipe for surrender bit by bit. In part this is deliberate sabotage by the union bureaucracies who do not know what to do but are as sure as hell not going to let the members do anything.

Only the tax union, IRSF, has actually carried out a national ballot of members (for non-cooperation with further market testing). The massive IRSF membership majority for non-cooperation indicates the potential for a fight.

The struggle of any individual union will be significantly undermined if the members of other unions work normally.

The launch of a cross union national campaign — even a "moderate" one by UNISON, NUCPS, CPSA, IRSF and so forth would massively boost membership confidence and resistance. At the moment nobody — least of all the

Tories — believes the unions are serious.

- **Be committed to the militant and effective use of industrial action. The idea of defending members from an attack of this seriousness without industrial action is idiocy. We need action whenever and wherever we can get it.**
- **Seek to develop real links between service workers and users, using labour movement resources to develop the democratic organisation of working class women, pensioners, the unemployed, and other service users.**
- **Fight to open up state services to the democratic control of service users and workers, shifting resources from the capitalists' priorities to ours and so securing the welfare funding which they say is unaffordable.**
- **Respond to the ideological lies of the Tories, advancing the socialist case for collective provision of services.**

Labour must force a public debate on this issue; advancing parliamentary bills in defence of public sector workers' conditions; using Parliamentary procedures to highlight the further pending destruction of jobs and the rundown of services. The Campaign Group of Labour MPs must take a lead. Labour must fight!

The left and union activists must forge a united front to turn the movement around on this issue. There is a real and objective basis for class struggle unity across the

movement: privatisation of the railways, closure of the pits, mass contracting out, soaring unemployment, public sector wage freeze.

The rank and file, cross union, civil service Conference Against Market Testing on 30 January must establish a permanent and democratic campaign which links activists up irrespective of union and department.

The Public Sector Alliance conference due late this year must not become a traditional Militant rally designed to boost their small group interest but the basis of a genuine rank and file campaign based on the public sector unions.

Don't rely on in-house bids

RELIANCE ON in-house bids is a recipe for massive job loss and a savage worsening of employment conditions. The whole experience of the council and NHS manual unions tells us that even when in-house bids are won it is usually on the basis of job cuts and worse conditions.

Serious trade unionists will place no reliance on in-house bids; they will avoid involvement with in-house bids.

This branch-by-branch, bid-by-bid approach leads you up a blind alley. Naturally members will rely on in-house bids if there is no alternative defence. The task of the unions is to provide that defence.

Can we rely on EC law?

CAN WE RELY on EC law? The idea that we can is most aggressively argued by NUCPS and NUPE. It is a complicated question. Union bureaucrats are substituting reliance on the Acquired Rights Directive for an active membership campaign.

This must be rejected: it is not even clearly established that EC law will apply to the majority of contracted out services!

Nevertheless, while arguing for a serious campaign by the members, action activists should not surrender to a knee-jerk rejection of the use of the law as a tactic — a tactic subordinate to, and flowing from, the campaign against the membership.

Defend and democratise!

BUT IF THE left and union activists restrict the campaign to defence of public services then:

- **The Tories ideological lies will go unanswered.**
 - **We will cop the blame for both underfunded services and for state activities which are hostile to working people (the harrying of single mothers for instance). The Tories will succeed in driving a wedge between the public sector workers on the one hand and both service users (who do not find services satisfactory even though they consider them vital) and (increasingly non-unionised) private sector workers (who have borne the brunt of job loss over the last 13 years) on the other.**
- The left and public sector workers

should openly state that public services are costly for ordinary people! Even before the advent of Thatcherism — and despite the myths of super taxation of the rich — state services and activities were largely paid for by working class and lower middle class people. As a result the "welfare state" has largely transferred resources within the working and lower middle class — between the healthy and sick, young and old, the employed and unemployed — rather than between classes.

Such collectively provided services — historically beyond the scope of the trade unions and old friendly societies — is invaluable. But if we are serious about any sort of decent society then we must demand a truly progressive taxation system, rejecting the moralistic appeals for working class people to pay more taxes.

The fact that services are not equitably funded points to the real nature of the British state: it is not a "welfare state" but a capitalist state with welfare functions. Although the notion of a welfare state points to invaluable achievements in collective provision, the worth of which — for all the problems — is now revealed by the appalling sight of young and old on our streets, it is nevertheless misleading.

The British state is not a socially neutral instrument for the "public good", as if society is a socially undifferentiated mass with a common interest. The *raison d'être* of the state is the maintenance of capitalism and it acts according to the interest and priorities of the most powerful and wealthiest section of society.

While working class struggle won welfare laws it was still the capitalist state which determined how those services were to be organised and provided.

As a result both service workers and users are denied any democratic

involvement in determining the services. The services do not in any fundamental sense "belong" to us and the result is a bureaucratic nightmare.

The answer to bureaucracy is not "market testing" — but a campaign to open up the state services to our needs, bridging the divisions between service users and workers. That gap is created by the position of service users as supplicants. People become hostile to those delivering the service.

The subordinate position of service users, and the tasks of service workers, reinforce the notions of people as 'spongers', people getting something for nothing: note the Tory condemnations of "single mothers jumping the housing queue".

A huge amount of state expenditure goes on activities which are solely designed to protect the interests of those who run society:

- **The secret police who spend most of their time spying on the citizens of this country;**
- **The military establishment (bombing Iraq!)**
- **The royal family;**
- **Nuclear bunkers for members of the ruling class;**
- **Bureaucratic and political junkets and perks (subsidised canteens and bars for MPs!)**

The resources expended on these functions and the ordinary trade unionists carrying them out should be redeployed to meeting real social needs.

If the left and union activists are going to defend the public services we need to say clearly what is wrong with them as well as what is right. We must pinpoint the blame, and set out our own political agenda. Particularly as many state jobs have nothing to do with the well being of the great majority of people who have no obvious interest in how they are undertaken.

Undermining the unions

Bulb: With the decline of manufacturing industry, the public sector is now a bigger base for trade unionism than the private sector. The Tories are determined to break up the public sector "monopolies" in order to break the unions based in them.

Trade unions which have recruited and organised public sector workers on a relatively easy basis will find things a lot harder with private contractors who are vehemently anti-union and whose contracts are dependent on a cheap, docile workforce.

Derecognition and the breaking up of trade unions has been a central feature of contracting out to date. Indeed in some cases like civil service computing, it seems to have been the major reason for contracting out. Even where work remains in-house the possibility of contracting out squeezes serious trade unionism.

The day after the last general election the Financial Times stat-

ed explicitly "In practice the ability of unions to hold individual councils to ransom has been considerably weakened by compulsory competitive tendering. Council or health authority manual workers must now work to targets they agree in contracts with the employer. If they take industrial action and fail to hit those targets, they may lose the contracts to the private sector. In the 1991 Liverpool strike, the council's manual workers abandoned their action before the white collar staff, after losing some contracts to outside companies. It is unlikely that white collar staff will be able to hold out as long as they did in Liverpool with the imminent extension of compulsory competitive tendering to their jobs. The formation of Unison, increasing as it does the potential for abuse of union power, makes it essential that compulsory competitive tendering should continue in the public services."

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Chaplin as audiences knew him best

Chaplin unrevealed

Cinema

Joan Trevor reviews *Chaplin*

If you are a Chaplin fanatic you will want to go and see this film, just like you'll buy nasty T-shirts or pencil cases which have a picture of his cheeky, heart-warming Tramp character on them. But if your bag is rags to riches stories, or the early history of Hollywood, or understanding the artistic temperament, this isn't really a very good film.

The facts of Chaplin's life are gone through as quickly, I suppose, as you can go through eighty-odd years, which isn't very quickly. Chaplin goes on the stage to divert attention from his mother's appalling performances. Chaplin grows up in dire poverty. Chaplin puts his mother in a mental home. Chaplin gets taken on by a West End impresario.

Chaplin tours America and gets discovered and goes to Hollywood to star in silent films. He is a hit and he makes more and more films, and he has lots of — young — girlfriends and wives.

He upsets J. Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI, and finally gets chucked out of America. He goes to Switzerland, has seven more children — bringing the count to ten — and dies there shortly after visiting Hollywood to receive a special award for services to the industry. That sort of thing.

Say you just wanted to know these facts, you could look up "Chaplin" in the Dictionary of National Biography. For this you should not spend millions of pounds if you are a director; or £4 to see the film if you are a punter.

What you want is some exploration of *how* Chaplin thought, and worked out his character who is selfish and cheeky, but basically kind-hearted, always coming up against authority figures and making them appear ridiculous. Exploration of Chaplin's method ought to entail a bit more than just showing him working like a man possessed to finish films, and alienating his wives in the process. Dark rings around the eyes do not a comic genius make.

Some critics have said Attenborough is soft on Chaplin's sexual proclivities. That does not come across in the film. Attenborough

tells us all about his liaisons, the sixteen-year olds and everyone. Short of getting under-age girls to play the women Chaplin goes to bed with, which might have satisfied his salacious critics on this score, I do not think Attenborough could have treated this subject more honestly.

Unless you know differently, you have no reason to believe that his girlfriends were not all well and truly able to cope with the whims of an increasingly old, "dirty" man.

If it helps, Chaplin seems to have made honest women of most of his younger dalliances. And Robert Downey Jr., who plays him, is darkly sexy which helps even more.

Famously, Chaplin championed the underdog, the despised immigrant, and, in real life, stood up to the fascists over whom many in Hollywood fawned during the '20s and '30s. You can't fit these insights with the character of Chaplin we see growing up in this film. It doesn't seem enough, somehow, that Chaplin's brother Sid is half-Jewish, when Sid himself is more concerned with making films than defending his birth-right.

Chaplin was thrown out of America for alleged links with labour movement personalities, and accused of being a Communist. All he seems to have been is a decent fellow. But why do people get to be decent?

The man who braved ridicule in Hollywood for his stand against Nazism in films like *The Great Dictator* deserves a bit more psychological analysis or he is not interesting. Unfortunately, Richard Attenborough's film does not go far beyond the sentimentality that people who do not know his films see. If that's what you want, buy a T-shirt and get the wear out of it.

Revulsion is not enough

Television

Liz Millward reviews *Public Eye*, ITV

I was going to say how revolting the pop stars of the 1970s were until I saw the "Public Eye" documentary on the racist right wing. The sight of skinheads stripped to the waist dancing to the music of "Skrewdriver" put it all into perspective.

This documentary didn't say anything new, showing as it did how racists recruit young people at football matches and on run-down council estates in poor areas. But documentaries like this should be shown regularly and routinely, especially in schools. Hopefully, any young person attracted by the excitement of the mob violence would be put off by the cynical manipulation of the leaders of far-right organisations.

Perhaps someone raised on racism could find something respectable in these people, but an outside observer can easily see that the skinheads are being exploited as so many expendable thugs and thugettes.

What always surprises me about documentaries about the far right is the trouble the presenters go to to show the link between the racists and racial violence. Can there still be people who haven't grasped that violence against ethnic minorities is the point of much racist organisation? The British National Party thrives on racist violence — without it, the Party would have about 10 supporters world-wide.

But the presenters always go to great lengths to show that racist attacks follow far-right organisations like flies follow sewage. The other people who show surprise at the connection between organised racism and violence are the police.

Describing a march by the BNP over the place where a young black man was murdered as "insensitive"; one police officer simply could not commit himself to the admission that the BNP practises what it preaches.

The state is apparently capable of listening to the telephone conversations of the future monarch, but claims ignorance of much far-right activity. Telephone calls planning a demonstration through a council estate by hundreds of thugs from all over the country probably wouldn't fetch a high price from the tabloids.

"No nature programme about slugs could have the same effect of making you want to go and wash as the sight of skin heads dancing (or even breathing)."

But all these are minor points. The main reason for documentaries like this must be to show the viewer how disgusting the far right are. No nature programme about slugs could have the same effect of making you want to go and wash as the sight of skin heads dancing (or even breathing). No politician is as repulsively cynical as the BNP organiser innocently asking why black people are scared.

If our revulsion was enough, the far right would be finished. Unfortunately it isn't and we have to beat the racists on their own ground — by telling young people the truth about unemployment, poverty and bad housing, and recruiting them to the fight to liberate humanity.

Periscope

My Beautiful Laundrette, Channel 4, Tuesday 2 February

This film has Daniel Day-Lewis, before Oscar success in *My Left Foot*, in run-down London, throwing off his gang of racist friends to help a young Pakistani run his launderette. The two

become lovers.

The film caused a stir when it first came out. It talks about people who aren't usually fashionable in films, but it didn't bend the stick too far the other way. These people are good and bad.

And, though it certainly has it all, the film doesn't get as rambling and bitty as Hanif Kureishi's later, overwrought *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*.

The animals held a Parliament
And whom do you think the silly sheep sent
As a fitting person to represent them there?
They voted just the same as men:
They voted for the wolf; but then
He liked them so — he found them tender fare.

S Claude Tickell

Saving the children of the Dublin

Against the priests

Readers of our recent series on the Dublin Labour War of 1913 will recall that in the years before the First World War, the great Jim Larkin organised the savagely oppressed workers of Ireland's capital city and made them a power in Ireland.

Organisation, labour solidarity, the sympathetic strike by workers not directly in dispute — these were their weapons. These weapons began to mark them out as no longer a driven rabble but a class, women and men increasingly conscious of a common interest, a common identity and common goals.

The bosses organised a 'union' too and fought back.

Their leader was WM Murphy, one of Ireland's biggest capitalists, and a prominent Home Rule nationalist politician. In August 1913, they locked out their employees, intent on using starvation to get

them to submit and foreswear "Larkinism". The British state in Ireland backed them, sending hordes of police to attack strikers, some of whom were beaten to death. It turned into a war of attrition.

Here, fighting impoverished workers with no reserves, all the advantages were with the employers. The workers' chance of victory depended on two things: on an adequate supply of food or money from sympathisers, and on an industrial solidarity that would tie up the whole trade of Dublin. It was to the British labour movement that Dublin's workers had to look for help.

Magnificent help came. Ships full of food for the strikers came up the Liffey, and all over Britain the labour movement rallied, collecting money and food. But industrial action did not come, and that was decisive: money and food would

keep Dublin's workers in the fight, but only industrial action in Britain — by the NUR and the Seamen's Union, for example — would allow them to win.

In Britain, militants argued for industrial action, even for a general strike, in support of Dublin. But the trade union leaders — who held a special conference in December 1913 on Dublin — would not agree to take action.

The strike dragged on 8 months, and then, beaten but not crushed, the union, whose destruction had been the bosses' prime aim, went back to work.

What follows is the story of an episode in this struggle, the attempt to move starving Dublin children to homes in Britain where they would be fed. It is told as much as possible in the words of Dora B Montefiore, who — 62 years-old and in frail health — organised it.

what was required for the 50 children, taking the [train and boat] tickets, arranging for reserve carriages on the other side and buying food for the kiddies on the journey. It was when I returned to [Liberty] Hall that I heard the first news of trouble being made by the priests, who were taking away the children from the Tara Street Baths.

"I at once drove down and found Mrs Rand being personally annoyed and technically assaulted by the priests who were shouting and ordering the children about in the passageway leading to the girls' baths.

"The scene of confusion was indescribable; some of the women were 'answering back' to the priests, and reminding them how they had been refused bread by the representatives of the Church, and how, now that they had a chance of getting their children properly cared for, the priests were preventing the children from going.

"Other women, worked upon by violent speeches of the priests, were wailing and calling on the saints to forgive them.

"They could not prevail against the priests and their mob.

"When we found we could, in consequence of the action of the priests, do nothing more for the children we had promised to befriend, we drove back to Liberty Hall, through a crowd that threw mud at us as we got into the cab and raised cries of 'throw them in the Liffey!'"

What else should they do with white slavers and those who came to steal the souls of Irish children? These, many believed, were "soups" — like the legendary Protestants offering food during the Great Famine to Catholics who converted.

Back at Liberty Hall, "kindly hands were stretched out to us on all sides, and 'God bless you' followed us as we went up to the rooms where the rest of the children were being dressed for their journey."

When the "little batch" of children was ready, Larkin spoke from a window of Liberty Hall to the crowd gathered down below. He "asked the men to see to it that the children reached the railway station... The whole party of women and children left the Hall under the escort of the men, while Mrs Rand and I drove with a little chap of 5 to the station."

But the priests and the "Hibernian" mob got there first.

"We found at first every door shut against us and we were pulled back and forth and separated from the men and the mothers and children who were crowding the entrance to the station. At last one door was opened", and Montefiore counted through the women and children who were to accompany Rand. Having given out the tickets she found that she had a large block left, bought for those who had "been snatched away by the priests".

She made her way to the carriage where Lucille Rand sat with her group of women and children. "As I approached the carriage door, a priest threw me rudely aside and held me back by the shoulder. I told him he was assaulting me by laying his hand on me, and when he saw I was calm but very much in earnest in the matter, he let me go." Montefiore of course dressed and spoke like the upper-class Englishwoman she was. The ragged Catholics of Dublin's slums were another matter. They could be pushed

about with impunity.

"I again approached the door to speak to Mrs Rand, when another priest flung the door back against me, hurting me considerably and making me feel very faint. I then got into the next carriage to Mrs Rand, determined to go down to the quay, and help her get the children on board. In the carriage were four of our boys, wearing our jerseys and the green and red badges. The train was already late, but the officials, at the command of the priests, delayed it further; and just as the train started, two priests who had no tickets pushed two women into the carriage where I was, and got in themselves.

"The journey down to Kingstown [now Dun Laoghaire] takes about 20 minutes, and during that time the women were kneeling in hysterics on the floor of the carriage, calling on the saints to forgive them, while the priests started a systematic bullying of the four boys, telling them they would deal with their fathers and mothers for having let them go. They pulled off the labels and the rosettes we had put on the boys' jerseys, and told me, as I sat passive and contemptuous in the corner, that they did not want any of our English charity for their children."

They, and their charitable organisations had been letting the children starve rather than give indirect help to the red anti-Christ Larkin.

Montefiore continues:

"The same gross scenes of intimidation of the children that we had seen at the station were repeated at the quay... More children were snatched away from Mrs Rand... and she, feeling her responsibility towards all the children who were in her care, and who, she was told by passengers would be removed by priests at Holyhead [on the British side of the Channel] left the steamer with her charges at the last moment."

When she got off the boat, she was arrested and taken to the police station, to be charged with "kidnapping a child under 14 years of age, and feloniously removing it from the care of its father!"

Dora Montefiore herself when she got back to her hotel, was visited by detectives and taken to the police station. She too was charged with kidnapping. Constance Mankiewicz and others came down to the police station and got her released on bail. Mrs Rand too was bailed out. The charges were later dropped. By this time, the Dublin press was in full cry against them, and their release was greeted with the headline: "English kidnappers bailed out by Dublin Jews"! The "kidnappers" you will recall, were really white slavers.

Throughout the conflict over the children, the Dublin boss-class press stoked up the sectarians. For example, the *Evening Herald* on 23 October headlined: "Priests' unavailing protest — fifty more to be sent tonight. Priests to attend: hope that all city Catholics will support them" etc.

Larkin's response to these events was to announce from the window of Liberty Hall that 15 children would start for Liverpool on the boat that same night. He appealed to the men listening to him to see that they got through. The men would go with Grace Neal to see that the children were not snatched by priests or

By Sean Matgamna

In mid October 1913, two months into the strike, Dora Montefiore spoke in the Memorial Hall, London — one of many enormous meetings being held all over Britain to build support for the Transport Workers' Union. As she sat on the platform listening to Larkin talk of Dublin, Montefiore remembered what had been done to save the children of strikers during bitter battles in Belgium and in the USA.

When Larkin sat down she passed a note along the table suggesting that the starving children of working-class Dublin should be evacuated from the labour-war zone, to be looked after by the British labour movement for the duration of the strike. Would he, she asked, back such a scheme?

Larkin passed a reply back along the table: yes, he would. He thought it was a fine idea.

Montefiore then passed a note to another of the speakers, the Countess of Warwick — an unlikely but genuine socialist — asking if she would be the Treasurer. Warwick replied: Yes. So a committee was set up.

Next day, Dora Montefiore explained her plan in the *Daily Herald*. Soon they had offers of 350 places for children, and more were coming all the time. Labour movement bodies, trade union branches and trades councils, offered to take the responsibility for one or more children. So did sections of the militant suffragettes, the WSPU. It was not as critics said and the Stalinist historian Desmond Greaves repeats in the official history of the ITSWU, an irresponsible stunt by busy-bodies, but a properly organised part of the effort of British labour to help Dublin. Dora Montefiore reported to the readers of the *Daily Herald* on 14 October:

"From Glasgow, Liverpool, London and a dozen other places, come the welcome offers, and I know that if the Dublin mothers could read some of the letters it would do their hearts good to know the sort of mothers and fathers who are planning these temporary homes for little ones.

"Several Roman Catholics have written and one friend offers 'travelling, lodging and board expenses for two Dublin children while the strike

lasts', and suggests 'boarding them for a time in a convent in Liverpool or London'."

And on 17 October she wrote: "...Plymouth friends offered to house 40 children and 5 mothers; and they wired later that they were in communication with the Catholic parish priest and Catholic medical officer ré the care of the 'kiddies'."

On 17 October, Dora Montefiore, Lucille Rand and Grace Neal, a TU organiser who acted as secretary, went to Dublin to organise the migration of the children.

They were given a room at Liberty Hall, the Transport Union HQ and a meeting of wives of strikers was called. These mothers of hungry children eagerly grasped at this offer of help.

"Meetings of wives of the locked-out workers were then called, and we three delegates from the English and Scottish workers gave our message and laid the scheme before them. As a result Grace Neal was kept busy Tuesday and Wednesday registering the names of mothers who were anxious to take advantage of our offer. The passage leading to our room was blocked 'til evening with women and children. We tried to let them in only one at a time, but each time the door opened the crush was so great that often two or three mothers forced their way in..."

"When the work of registration was over, 50 children were selected to meet Lucille Rand at the Baths, where a trained woman had been engaged to clean their heads and bodies [of lice, which were endemic]... Grace Neal presided over a batch of volunteer workers at our room in Liberty Hall, who were sewing on to the children's new clothing labels bearing their names and addresses, and small rosettes of green and red ribbon."

But if the strikers saw Montefiore's plan as the rescue it was, so too did the bosses and their friends. They resented this attempt to deprive them of one of their traditional weapons — the power to weaken and break the spirit of strikers and their wives by forcing them to watch while their children starved and wasted. More: they saw the chance to whip up a political and sectarian scandal as a weapon to undermine "Larkin" by lining up Catholic Ireland against him.

Catholic charitable organisations

such as the Saint Vincent De Paul Society had already refused help to strikers and their families. Now the Church discovered that the strikers' children faced danger worse than starvation. This plan to deport children, was, they said, a plot to convert "Catholic children" into Protestants! They set up a great hue and cry against Montefiore and her friends.

The campaign was led by fanatic young priests and by the then very strong Catholic Orange Order, the "Ancient Order of Hibernians" (or "Hibs", "Molly Maguires").

"They whispered that it was a plot to wreck the morals of the women of working class Dublin: take away from them the daily responsibility for their children and they would inevitably become adulterous and promiscuous."

Publicly they campaigned on religious grounds. Underground, they spread the whisper that Montefiore and her friends were really "Agents of the White Slave Trade" — recruiters of prostitutes — who would sell their children to foreign brothels.

They whispered too that it was a plot to wreck the morals of the women of working class Dublin: take away from them the daily responsibility for their children and they would inevitably become adulterous and promiscuous. These are the stories that were reported to Montefiore. People threw stones and mud at 'the white slavers' in the street.

Dr Walsh, the Archbishop of Dublin, issued a public proclamation condemning the "deportation" of the children, adding his full weight to the frantic agitation of the 'Hibs'.

It was not long before sectarian violence erupted. Dora Montefiore describes it:

While the children were at the public bath-house "I was out in the town selecting enough clothing to make up

strikers

and the bosses

"Hibs".

That evening, a small procession left Liberty Hall for the railway station, each of the 15 children perched on the shoulders of a docker.

They were met once again by a horde of priests and "Hibs" and by police who were on the side of the sectarian roughnecks. This time, the union men forced a way through, and the 15 children got on the train and then the boat. Counting them, Grace Neal found that she had 18, not 15: 3 extra children had been smuggled onto the boat by their parents at the last moment...

Grace Neal and her helpers stayed awake all night, on guard for the children. Cattedrovers with their cows on board the boat milked the cows and brought them fresh milk in the morning. At Liverpool, the fortunate 18 were met by friends and taken to their temporary homes, where they stayed for some months.

The public "manifesto" by Archbishop Walsh of Dublin was the authority by which priests and Hibs claimed to act. So Montefiore wrote him a letter, explaining that she and her friends were in Dublin as representatives of the British labour movement and that the children were, contrary to all the rumours, going to working class homes in Britain. She assured him that they would be put in contact with each local Catholic priest. In most cases, it would be possible for them to go to Catholic schools. She offered to call on him to explain further or give additional information.

"British force and Irish Catholic religious fraud had succeeded in blocking this avenue of help to the Dublin labour movement. The union had to abandon the attempt to get the children out."

He replied on 22 October. They had, he said, a fund in Dublin, organised by the Lady Mayoress. Then, against the background of mob violence roused by the tales of "white slavery" and soul stealing, rewrote this in a letter that was not intended to remain "private": "If the motive which has inspired the scheme is a purely philanthropic one — and I dare say you have been made aware of some sinister rumours to the contrary that are afoot in Dublin — let whatever means are available be diverted to the fund to which I have referred. If that be done, I can answer for it, the children of Dublin will not suffer want.

"Believe me to be, dear madam, your faithful servant, William J Walsh."

Dora Montefiore commented: "there were, according to Larkin 21 thousand slum 'homes' of one room, in which families herd and breed, feed and sleep! And his grace, Archbishop Walsh, who should be the shepherd of his flock, has the insolence to suggest to 3 women delegates from the workers of Great Britain, that he is not certain whether the 'sinister rumours' in connection with their visit to Dublin have not a substratum of truth!"

Montefiore could see for herself what confidence to place in the Arch-

bishop's assurances. She reported in the *Daily Herald* on 21 October:

"In the gutter in front of our hotel in the main street of Dublin there stood 3 garbage tins and each tin was being searched furtively but rapidly by ragged kiddies, aged from 4 or 5, who threw the ashes into their bags and wolfed the pieces of broken bread and meat they found among the garbage..." That was normal, lock-out or no lock-out.

Now a new chapter opened. Delia Larkin, Jim Larkin's sister, a union organiser too, suggested that the way to answer the charge that the children were being taken to English homes to make Protestants of them, was to send them out of Dublin to Irish Catholics' homes in Belfast. This was agreed. Arguably it was a self-poisoning act of political and ideological submission to the priests and the Hibs. There were left-wing and labour movement Protestants in Belfast (denounced as "rotten Prods" by the Orange first cousins of the Hibs; they would be driven out of the ship yards along with the Catholics in the Orange Riots of 1920, which were triggered by the war waged for independence against Britain in the south).

But this was what was decided — to Catholic homes in Belfast. Once more Grace Neal met with mobs of Hibs and priests out to stop her! But now the nakedly political — "Smash Larkin!" — motive of the priests and Hibs could not be disguised.

Dora Montefiore went with Delia Larkin to the station.

"At one end of the platform, in front of the compartment into which the parents were attempting to get their children, there was a compact, shouting, gesticulating crowd of Hibs. In the centre of the crowd was the little party of children and parents, and among them were the priests, who were talking, uttering threats against the parents, and forbidding them to send their children to Protestant homes. Some of the women were upbraiding the priests for allowing the children to starve in Dublin; and according to an American paper, whose correspondent was on the platform 'one woman slapped the face of a priest who was attempting to interfere'.

"As a climax to this disgraceful scene, as the priests and Hibs found it impossible to prevent the parents from placing their children in the train under the charge of Miss Neal, they telegraphed for more police, and I watched the reinforcements of 20 spike-helmeted destroyers of law and order march on to the platform, make a ring around the little group of parents and children, and then, when they had successfully played the priests' game and prevented the children from leaving for Belfast, the train was whistled and left the station, leaving the now infuriated parents to go back to the slum homes which capitalist conditions in Dublin provided for the workers and their children."

British force and Irish Catholic religious fraud had succeeded in blocking this avenue of help to the Dublin labour movement. The union had to abandon the attempt to get the children out.

Jim Larkin — who was a Catholic — commented bitterly: "Until the present labour crisis, the priests never acknowledged that there were such things as slums in Dublin. The religion that could not afford to send children



Jim Larkin, organiser of Dublin's working class

away for a fortnight [for fear they would 'lose their faith'] had not much to boast of". Some of the priests, he said, had shares in Murphy's companies.

The union was now forced to play hideous politics with hungry children. Archbishop Walsh had promised publicly that the church would "deal with all cases of distress". The union tested the promise by suspending free dinners at Liberty Hall, and the women and children were sent to the Church to ask for their dinners. They were turned away — there was "nothing for them", nothing for Larkin's crew.

As winter drew in, the Union resumed its attempt to feed the children, who would queue up in feet bare or wrapped in rags.

One of the Catholic Church's motives in this affair was pinpointed by George Russell, the Dublin journalist, speaking at one of the meetings to support the workers, at the Albert Hall London on 1 November 1913: "You see, if these children were, even for a little, out of the slums they would

get discontented with their poor homes. Once getting full meals, they might be so inconsiderate to ask for them all their lives. They might destroy the interesting experiment carried on in Dublin for generations to find out how closely human beings can be packed together, on how little a human being can live, and what is the minimum wage an employer need pay him. James Larkin interrupted these interesting experiments towards the evolution of the underman, and he is in jail."

It is one of the great strange things of history that a large part of Catholic working class Ireland did not turn violently against the Church as town workers in Catholic France and Belgium had done. In fact, very few ever did. The sound of that Dublin working-class woman's slap in the face of a hooligan priest — something shocking and almost unimaginable in Catholic Ireland — should have echoed and re-echoed through Irish political life, announcing a new start. But it did not.

One reason may be that the leaders,

Larkin, Connolly and others, themselves remained Catholics. Larkin — who had for a while in 1907 united Belfast's Protestant and Catholic workers — could say this about the priests and the AOH: "I have tried to kill sectarianism, whether Catholic or Protestant. I am against bigotry or intolerance on either side. Those who would divide the workers have resorted to the foulest methods" But he, like Connolly, argued with the priests from inside Catholicism.

In the years after 1916, the Catholic hierarchy took a lead in nationalist politics. The anti-conscription campaign which fuelled Sinn Fein to victory in the 1918 election was heavily organised by bishops and priests. The priests kept their place, even with the Dublin workers.

But through the next four decades many thousands of — Catholic — workers continued to back Larkin, openly a Communist until well into the '30s, and never renouncing such politics, despite many a violent campaign against him.

Why you should be a socialist

We live in a capitalist world. Production is social; ownership of the social means of production is private.

Ownership by a state which serves those who own most of the means of production is also essentially "private".

Those who own the means of production buy the labour power of those who own nothing but their labour-power and set them to work. At work they produce more than the equivalent of their wages. The difference (today in Britain it may be more than £20,000 a year per worker) is taken by the capitalist. This is exploitation of wage-labour by capital, and it is the basic cell of capitalist society, its very heart-beat.

Everything else flows from that. The relentless drive for profit and accumulation decreases the judgment of all things in existence by their relationship of productivity and profitability.

From that come such things as the savage exploitation of Brazilian goldminers, whose life expectancy is now less than 40 years; the working to death — it is officially admitted by the government! — of its employees by advanced Japanese capitalism; and also the economic neglect and virtual abandonment to ruin and starvation of "unprofitable" areas like Bangladesh and parts of Africa.

From that comes the cultural blight and barbarism of a society force-fed on profitable pap. From it come products with "built-in obsolescence" and a society orientated to the grossly wasteful production and reproduction of shoddy goods, not to the development of leisure and culture.

From it come mass unemployment, the development of a vast and growing underclass, living in ghettos and the recreation in some American cities of the worst Third World conditions.

From it comes the unfolding ecological disaster of a world crying out for planning and the rational use of resources, but which is, tragically, organised by the ruling classes around the principles of anarchy and the barbarous worship of blind and humanly irrational market forces.

From it come wars and genocides; twice this century capitalist gangs possessing worldwide power have fallen on each other in quarrels over the division of the spoils, and wrecked the world economy, killing many tens of millions. From it come racism, imperialism, and fascism.

The capitalist cult of icy egotism and the "cash nexus" as the decisive social tie produces societies like Britain now where vast numbers of young people are condemned to live in the streets, and societies like that of Brazil, where homeless children are hunted and killed on the streets like rodents.

From the exploitation of wage-labour comes our society in which the rich, who with their servants and agents hold state power, fight a relentless class struggle to maintain the people in a condition to accept

their own exploitation and abuse, and to prevent real democratic self-control developing with the forms of what they call democracy. They use tabloid propaganda or — as in the 1984-85 miners strike — savage and illegal police violence, as they need to. They have used fascist gangs when they need to, and will use them again, if necessary.

Against this system we seek to convince the working class — the wage slaves of the capitalist system — to fight for socialism.

Socialism means the abolition of wage slavery, the taking of the social economy out of private ownership into common cooperative ownership. It means the realisation of the old demands for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Under socialism the economy will be run and planned deliberately and democratically: market mechanisms will cease to be our master, and will be cut down and re-shaped to serve broadly sketched-out and planned, rational social goals.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control.

The working class can win reforms within capitalism, but we can only win socialism by overthrowing capitalism and by breaking the state power — that is, the monopoly of violence and reserve violence — now held by the capitalist class. We want a democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggles of workers and oppressed nationalities in the ex-Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and in still-Stalinist China.

What are the alternatives now? We may face new wars as European and Japanese capitalism confronts the US. Fascism is rising. Poverty, inequality and misery are growing.

Face the bitter truth: either we build a new, decent, sane, democratic world or, finally, the capitalists will ruin us all — we will be dragged down by the fascist barbarians or new massive wars. Civilisation will be eclipsed by a new dark age. The choice is socialism or barbarism.

Socialists work in the trade unions and the Labour Party to win the existing labour movement to socialism. We work with presently unorganised workers and youth.

To do that work the Marxists organise themselves in a democratic association, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

To join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, write to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

ELEMENTS OF MARXISM

Why class struggle happens

Karl Marx described the class struggle as "the motor of history". So why does class struggle happen in the first place?

In this extract from his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx provides a condensed answer.

We publish this piece as a supplement to VI Lenin's piece in last week's *Socialist Organiser* on "The roots of the class struggle".

If you want to be a better fighter against capitalism, study this series.

The general result at which I arrived and which, once won, served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows:

- In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.

- The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

- The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

- At a certain stage of their development, the material pro-

ductive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto.

From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical — in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.

No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself.

Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution

already exist or are at least in the process of formation.

In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.

The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production — antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close.

This sketch of the course of my studies in the sphere of political economy is intended only to show that my views, however they may be judged and however little they coincide with the interested prejudices of the ruling classes, are the result of conscientious investigation lasting many years. But at the entrance to science, as at the entrance to hell, the demand must be posted:

Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto; Ogni viltà convien che qui sia morta.

Here all mistrust must be abandoned. And here must perish every craven thought.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*.

Footnotes

• Readers will note that the words "class struggle" do not actually appear in this text. The reason is simple: Marx was writing to get round the censor. In the wake of the revolution of 1848 it was a crime in Germany to incite "class struggle".

Students

Sat 6 March

Left Unity conference. London. Details: Jill 071-639 7967.

AWL events

• Marxist dayschool

Saturday 20 February. 11.00-5.00, Manchester Town Hall. For full agenda phone 061-881 1377.

• New members school

Saturday 20/Sunday 21 February. London. Details: Mark 071-639 7965.

• Organisers meeting

"Building the AWL". Sat 13/Sun 14 February. Sheffield. Details: Cathy 071-639 7965.

Support the Palestinians! Move this motion

- This...
1. Condemns the deportation without trial by Israel of 415 Palestinians;
 2. Opposes the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza;
 3. Believes there will be no peace in the region until Israel allows the formation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Both the Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs have the right to a state.

We resolve to:

Alliance for Workers' Liberty public meetings

Thurs 28 January

"Labour must fight for the miners". Middlesex University AWL meeting. 1pm, All Saints site. Speakers: Paul Whetton and Mark Osborn.

"America: policeman of the world?" South West London AWL meeting. 7.30 pm, Lambeth Town Hall. Speaker: Mark Osborn.

Tues 2 February

"Can the miners win?" Lancaster AWL meeting. 8pm, Priory pub.

Wed 3 February

"Fight the Child Support Act". Merseyside AWL meeting. 7.30pm, Wallasey Unemployed Centre. Speaker: Janine Booth.

Thurs 4 February

"Crisis in the Middle East — what socialists say". Manchester AWL meeting. 8pm, Town Hall.

"Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq — is UN the answer?" Sheffield AWL meeting. 7.30pm, SCCAU, West Street.

Wed 10 February

"What solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?" AWL London Forum. The AWL debates Roland Rance (*Return*).

7.30 pm, Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road.

Thurs 11 February

"How to fight cuts and job losses". Nottingham AWL meeting. 8.00, ICC, Mansfield Road.

Education

Sat 6 February

Conference: Defend State Education. 10.00-4.00, North Westminster School, North Wharf Road, NW1. More information: Flat 2, Downs Park Road, E5.

Miners

Thurs 28 January

East Kent Miners Support Group meeting. Speakers: Paul Whetton, Terry French, WAPC. 7.30pm, Poppy Seed, Canterbury.

Sat 30 January

Demonstrations in Nottingham and Preston.

Sat 6 February

Women Against Pit Closures march. Assemble 11.00, Embankment, London.

Labour Youth Conference

Sat 6 February

"Labour must fight" meeting. 6pm, Wessex Hotel, Bournemouth.

So, to ensure that his ideas could be openly published and circulated, Marx decided to present them in a slightly 'legalistic' form.

This has left the text open to crude misinterpretation by bourgeois academics who absurdly argue that Marx saw historical change as mechanically related to technological development.

Academic "Marxists" have also garbled the meaning of Marx's argument. For instance, the French Stalinist Louis Althusser saw human beings as simply "the bearers" of relations of production, as if it is these relationships which make history rather than human beings.

Marx argued the opposite: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."

• Marx's book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* was the product of 15 years study of the subject. It was the first part of a major book on political economy which was to be published in parts. He only published one section. Unhappy with his plan, Marx decided to revise it. The result was *Capital*.

1. Write to the Israeli Embassy to demand Israel allows those deported to return;
2. Take a collection for/make a donation to those campaigning inside Israel for the return of those expelled.

Israeli Embassy, 2 Palace Gardens, London W8.

Send money direct to Adam Keller, editor of *The Other Israel*; or send a cheque payable to "Socialist Organiser", and "Israeli campaign against deportations" on the back, to: PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. We will forward all monies to Adam Keller.

COUNCIL WORKER

Lambeth Councilworker

Campaign? Yes! Clinton? No!

UNION RALLY AND LOBBY! Call in the Union and lobby! Friday 13 January. 11.00-12.30. 115, St. John's Lane, London E1 6AB. (Contact: Cathy 071-639 7965)

Lambeth Councilworker
The AWL has launched a new workplace bulletin, Lambeth Councilworker, which comes out every two weeks. If you work for Lambeth Council, and can help with stories or distribution, please contact: Mark, 071-639 7965.

No cuts! No pay freeze! Strike on 18 Feb!

Leaders of the local government union, NALGO, have given a nod and a wink to branch-

es who wish to take strike action over local disputes on the TUC's Jobs Day of Action on 18 February.

This is better than anything that the TUC itself has so far pushed for on the 18th but it's still a

long way from the kind of properly co-ordinated campaign of generalised strike action that will be

needed to stop the Tory council cuts, smash the pay freeze and save the pits.

Nevertheless, activists across the public sector should push for strike action on the 18th.

COUNCIL ROUND-UP

Sheffield

Sheffield NALGO's long-standing position of being in favour of wage cuts as an alternative to redundancies has been overturned.

In the face of £37 million of cuts in the next financial year, to stick to this position will need concerted industrial action. The branch is to ballot for one day of action on the 18 February. This could be the start of a fight back if the branch official campaign for the new branch policy.

The branch has also resolved to "Take every opportunity to put pressure on NALGO nationally to call for national industrial action" and it is planning to submit a resolution to the NALGO local government group meeting calling for a further reconvened meeting before the end of March to agree to strategy of national industrial action against cuts and redundancies.

Manchester

Two NALGO members in Manchester Housing Department were suspended on Friday 15 January on charges of gross misconduct, pending an investigation into their work performance.

Details of the charges are vague and refer to cases dating back several years.

NALGO members want all charges to be dropped, the workers to be reinstated, and the removal to elsewhere of the two workers brought in by management to fill the "vacant" posts.

At the Emergency General Meeting called on Monday 25 January, NALGO members unanimously passed a motion calling for a ballot to strike on the day of the next investigatory hearing and resolved to build a campaign of support for the reinstatement of the two Housing Officers.

The City Council is facing a severe financial crisis. During the next few months they are likely to announce compulsory redundancies. As managers try to tighten things up, we cannot allow a situation to continue where the blame for the current crisis can be laid on individual workers.

Southwark

Southwark NALGO leadership are balloting for a one-day strike on 18 February.

The job now is to build for a massive "yes" vote — to support the miners on the TUC Day of Action, and to press the council workers' own demands against the threats of job losses.

Islington

1,100 Islington Council strikers will discuss an offer from the council on Wednesday 27 January.

Many of the workers have been on strike for eight months. The strikers have been on full strike pay.

The offer includes a Council commitment to end their early retirement/voluntary redundancy tawls by 8 March.

The Council say they will select 50 workers in the Architects Department from the 100 who have been issued with compulsory redundancy notices, and these 50 workers will keep their jobs. The rest will have to try to get redeployed.

Contracts issued to workers on strike are to be withdrawn and workers will return on their old contracts.

It seems likely that the strikers will accept the lousy offer as the best possible in bad circumstances. NALGO will have to regroup and continue to fight management and the Labour council. Negotiations on a staff code will open after April.

Newham

800 Newham NALGO members are continuing their strike action against Newham's Labour Council.

The Council are refusing to negotiate. On Monday 25 January they voted to refuse arbitration.

The Council are refusing a decent redeployment agreement and will not reinstate seven temporary workers sacked during the last dispute.

Southwark NALGO leadership are balloting for a one-day strike on 18 February.

The job now is to build for a massive "yes" vote — to support the miners on the TUC Day of Action, and to press the council workers' own demands against the threats of job losses.

"Loony left" blamed for Tory created fraud

As the Lambeth Council "scandal" continues to hit the headlines it is council workers that will suffer. Over 200, mainly manual workers lobbied a Lambeth council meeting last Friday (22 January). They fear that the council will retender council services resulting in the loss of their jobs.

It is alleged that the Department of Operational Services had been operating a £10 million swindle going back five years. Contracts were allegedly paid for twice and other sections of the council charged for work never done.

The central point that has not been made in the press is that before the Tories brought in so-called "Compulsory Competitive Tendering" this specific kind of fraud would be impossible.

The council meeting decided to set up an independent investigation after demands from the trade unions — and possibly to retender all the services won previously by in-house bids.

All sorts of rumours are going around — that the people involved in the fraud are all in the same Freemasons lodge. Some councillors say that they have been physically intimidated and threatened.

The local and national media are having a field day — ably abetted by Council leader, Steve Whaley who narrowly avoided a vote of no-confidence. He keeps stressing the difference between the present Labour leadership and those bad old days when the loony-left ruled.

There is no suggestion that any councillors were involved in the alleged fraud. However many on the right are blaming past council leaderships. Yet over the last ten years it has often been the centre and right (including the Labour

Co-ordinating Committee) who have had control.

These "scandals" come just at the time when the council is talking of a £30 million deficit in next year's budget. They want to get rid of one-in-ten of the council workforce, ie

1,000 jobs.

Obviously fraud must be rooted out — it results in working class people being ripped off. However it must not be forgotten that the council has to be stopped from cutting jobs and services.

DSS: no name badges!

By Brian Nelson, Hull DSS

Management are pushing ahead with making compulsory the wearing of name badges and automatic giving of names on the telephone for workers. At a top-level meeting last week unions were told that Benefits Agency district managers would be expected to implement this policy, part of Major's Citizen's Charter, by 31 January. CPSA, the clerical workers' union whose members deal with the public daily, has a policy of supporting any member or group of members who face disciplinary action for refusing to wear a name badge. BA management, having let this potentially explosive issue lie since the 1992 General Election was announced, are now saying that refusal to comply with a management request to wear a name badge or give your name when answering the phone will be treated as a disciplinary offence. However, they seem unsure as to what penalty they would impose.

Workers in DSS offices have a legitimate fear for their safety. The "service" they have to

run is often under-staffed and benefits regulations such as the Social Fund are oppressive. The response from some of the public is often to take out their anger on the workers who are the public face of the Benefits Agency. This anger would be better turned on those responsible for the state of the benefits system ie the Tories. But that isn't much good to you when you need money urgently and can't get any.

The whole object of the Citizen's charter — name badges, etc — is to divert anger away from the Tories and to make the individual worker appear responsible for the rule they have to carry out. What do the Tories care if this results in workers' addresses being traced from their names and the aggro they often get at work follow them home?

Workers in DSS offices want to have a better relationship with the public, but this cannot happen until the service is properly staffed and benefits rules are designed to meet people's needs.

In the meantime front-line Benefits Agency workers who deal directly with the public, in person or by telephone, are

entitled to expect that their safety will be protected by their employer, not jeopardised.

DSS unions and welfare rights groups should continue to work together to improve the benefits system so that DSS workers can be proud to work for a decent, caring, public service and have no need to fear for their safety.

Under the current circumstances, however, DSS workers are correct to refuse to comply with giving their names and should be given full backing by their unions.

CPSA's Benefits Agency Committee was due to meet on 26 January to discuss its response to BA management's offensive. Workers in some inner city offices have said they would sooner be sacked than have to wear a name badge on the counter.

Opposition to name badges and giving of names is deep-seated and with management still unsure what disciplinary action they can take the unions should mount a campaign of opposition and not leave it up to individual members or offices to make a stand.

Murder, magic and medicine

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

Murder, magic and medicine by John Mann, Oxford University Press

This is a fascinating book which tells, using myths, ancient documents and modern science, how humans have used for their own purposes the many chemicals produced by animals and plants. One revelation is of the surprising dependence, even now, of modern medicine on plants and animal extracts or on altered or artificial versions of these.

After a short introduction, John Mann starts off with a chapter on "Murder", the use of poisons by people to kill animals and sometimes each other. The subject of poison-tipped arrows usually conjures up images of natives of the Amazon region using the poison curare. However, poisoned arrows were used as long ago as 1200 BC, according to the Indian poem, the Rig Veda. Homer mentions Odysseus searching for the deadly poison to anoint his bronze-tipped arrows and

the Greeks gave us the word "toxikon", meaning "arrow poison". This poison was probably aconite, from monkshood or wolfsbane. This was very much used by professional poisoners in Roman times and was still in use as an arrow poison in Spain only 300 years ago.

Mann informs us that it works by disrupting the uptake of sodium by cells. This affects the operation of nerves, which depend on a careful control of sodium levels for their correct operation. Death occurs as a result of disturbance to the nerves controlling heartbeat and breathing.

The South American natives perhaps perfected the use of arrow and dart poisons with their use of curare. Spanish explorers write of the death of their fellows from little more than a prick with a curare-tipped arrow. Scientific research laid bare the action of curare and made it a useful medical tool.

In 1820, Charles Waterton gave curare to a donkey which appeared to die ten minutes later. However, he kept the animal breathing artificially and it went on to make a full recovery. The curare worked by paralysing the muscles, including those controlling breathing. Death was by asphyxiation but, if prevented by artificial respiration, the body could recover by breaking down the poison. Later research

showed that curare blocked the transmission of messages from the nerves to the muscles, causing them to relax completely.

This is a useful medical property and curare or its derivatives or replacements has or have been used to relax muscles during surgery. Inexplicably, it took some time to realise that artificial respiration of the lungs was required, even though this was over 100 years after Waterton's experiment. The subject remains fully conscious and feeling unless anaesthetised, a fact which has led to suffering (inadequately compensated, in my view) when several women had Caesarean deliveries while fully conscious but unable to move even an eyelid to show they were awake.

No doubt humans have been altering their states of consciousness throughout their history. In some 50 pages of "Magic", Mann gives some idea of the breadth of ways in which this has been done. Caffeine and its relatives have been discovered independently in many plants in different parts of the world. They are now consumed in the form of tea, coffee, cocoa and cola. All cause a mild stimulation of the nervous system while theophylline, the active ingredient of tea, is useful in counteracting the effects of asthma.

Hallucinogenic drugs have also always been widely used, though often

only for religious reasons or for divining the future. One common drug is hyoscyne, found in deadly nightshade, henbane and mandrake. Lethal in large quantities, hyoscyne gives rise to typical visions in smaller amounts. In smaller amounts still, it has been used as a "truth" drug. It can be absorbed through the skin and causes illusions of dancing and flying, terrifying and exhilarating adventures populated with strange beings. Undoubtedly, it constitutes the kernel of truth to many stories of "witch-craft".

Another hallucinogen is obtained from fly agaric, the white-spotted, red toadstool of fairy tales. Mann quotes from the memoirs of a Swedish colonel, held prisoner of war by the Koryaks, a Siberian tribe, in the 18th century. He reported that the rich collected stores of these mushrooms and, in winter, made an infusion for drinking during festivals. This caused a mild euphoria, with visions and distortions of reality. The poor members of the tribe would collect the urine of the rich during these festivals and drink it. This would cause them to become just as intoxicated, if not more so since the active principle seems to be converted to a more potent compound during its passage through the body.

For "Medicine", Mann looks at the prescriptions of Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Arab herbals. Among the

remedies, many bogus, are several that are used even today, including ephedrine for asthma, castor oil and the various derivatives of the opium poppy's product, morphine.

Many of the modern antibiotics were discovered in various forms of mould or in other bacteria. Birth control has often been achieved using naturally-occurring plant products and many birth control hormones are now synthesised using as a starting point a drug derived from a plant growing in Mexico.

The most recent use of plants in medicine has been the extraction of several potent anti-cancer drugs from plants (the Madagascar rosy periwinkle), moulds and certain sea-creatures. In the pipeline may be drugs to fight AIDS.

This is a thoroughly fascinating book but it does have some failings. The introduction attempts to give a sort of rationale to the action of various drugs on the body. I don't think it succeeds in this, and recommend the complete scientific novice to skip through this. Also, the diagrams of selected compounds throughout the book do not at all assist in understanding how the chemicals work. At £17 it is quite pricey and I suggest you ask your local library to get it for you or else wait for it to come out in paperback.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Help us build links abroad

Support the pit camps!

**SAVE
OUR
PITS!**
March

**SATURDAY 6
FEBRUARY**

**Assemble:
11am, Embankment,
London**

**Called by the NUM
and Women Against
Pit Closures**



Tories plan to axe one million jobs

At last the ranks of the public sector trade unions are seriously organising against the mortal threat represented by contracting out.

This weekend, hundreds of trade unionists from over 100 branches across the country will attend a conference on how to fight the extension of contracting out in the public service. This is likely to be the most representative gathering of the Civil Service rank and file for years.

With up to one million jobs in the firing line this initiative is vital. Let's hope it leads to the creation of a campaigning body across the relevant unions. Inside: four pages on what these attacks involve and how to fight them.

Civil Service Conference on Market Testing Saturday 30 January

11 am, Library Theatre, Paradise Street, Birmingham

Sponsored by many branches in the frontline of the fight against Market Testing including CPSA British Library plus CPSA, IRSF and NUCPS Broad Lefts.

Branches are invited to sponsor the conference, send delegates, and submit motions (closing date for motions is 22 January 1993). Delegations will be on the basis of branch size, to be notified to branches when the likely size of the conference is clearer.

A professionally staffed crèche will be provided.

Socialist Organiser and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty are setting up a fund to develop and expand our international work and contacts.

Our paper and other publications are already read by comrades in many European countries and in America and Australia.

The movement that will bury capitalism will be an international movement. Within that we are a small organisation with a distinct set of ideas.

We think that these ideas will be important in rebuilding a genuine revolutionary socialist movement.

The problem is that we are gagged by the lack of funds necessary for this work.

Building links and maintaining international discussions is an expensive business. Distributing our publications, carrying international reports regularly in our paper, getting comrades from abroad to our summer school and Annual General Meeting are the very basics of such work. We need your help to do this.

Local AWL branches have been set fundraising targets and we are asking readers and sympathisers to make a donation.

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