

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Unite the left!

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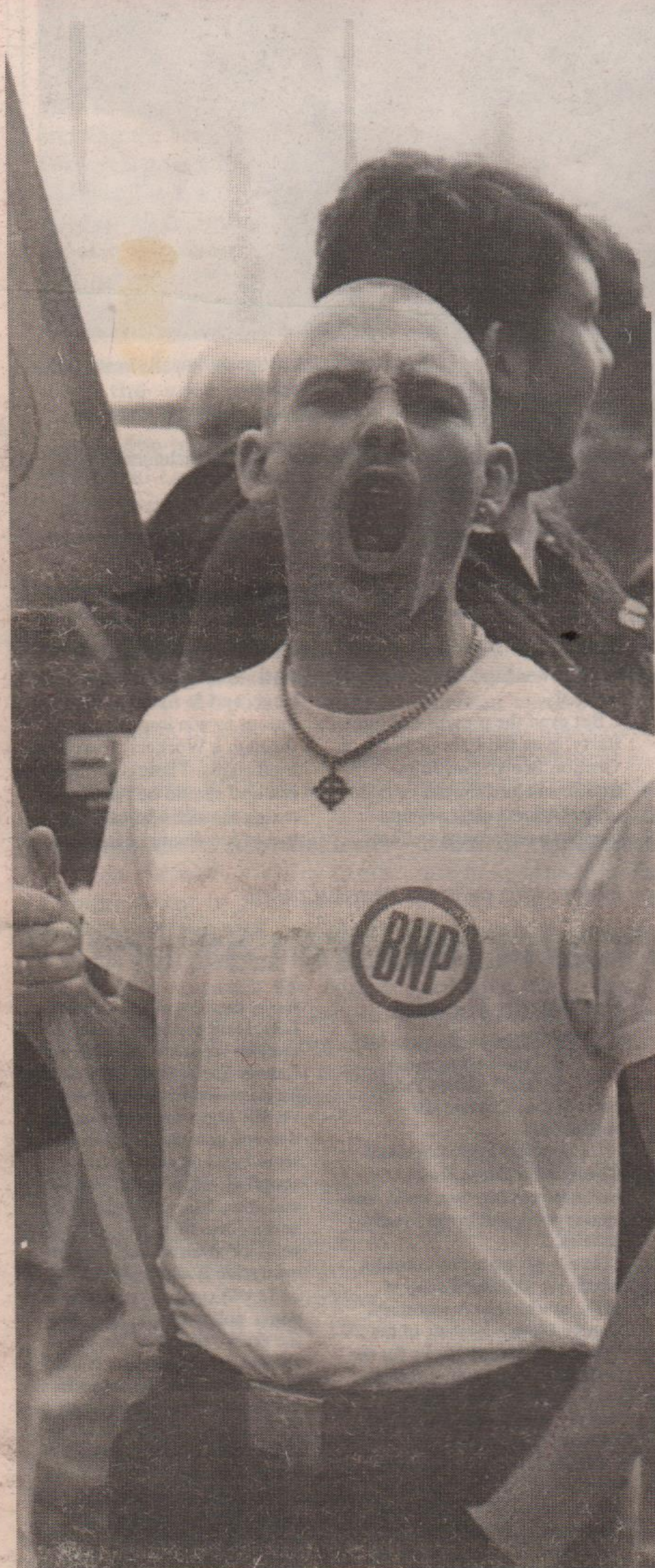
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Fascist poll victory sounds alarm



LABOUR

MUST

FIGHT

THE WINNING of a local government by-election in Tower Hamlets (East London) by the fascist British National Party is a defeat for the Labour Party greater by far than the loss of one council seat.

It is a tremendous moral defeat. Worst of all, it is a symptom of a great sickness at the heart of the party which is, still despite what its leaders would like, the mass party of the British working-class movement.

This sickness, of which Labour's part in letting the BNP win in Millwall ward is one symptom, can destroy the labour movement. The conditions for a serious growth of fascism exist in Britain now, the same conditions that have spawned mass fascist movements in France and Germany.

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The Nazis won because Labour failed to fight the Tories.

Photo: Mark Salmon

We can bury the Nazis!

"This could lead to full Palestinian statehood"

Afif Safiah, chief representative of the PLO in London, talked to Socialist Organiser

WE STILL believe in the "Two States" solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Unfortunately we have had to accept a transitional period.

I believe that the agreement we have reached was the only possibility open to us. Yet I also believe that it has the potential to lead us, over three to five years, to full Palestinian statehood.

The Gaza Strip and Jericho will have almost total Palestinian sovereignty. On the rest of the West Bank we will have a transitional period.

It is now up to us, with interna-

tional support, to make the state a political success. And economic success will help our political success. We need help to reverse 25 years of non-development.

It is only by economic success that we can smoothly bring back into our homeland our people displaced by the war of 1967 and then, in a second phase, those displaced in 1948.

We have had to agree that three major issues are deferred

to the second phase of negotiations beginning in three years. These are: the Israeli settlers, East Jerusalem, and the return of the 1948 refugees.

There is a very large Palestinian majority in favour of Arafat's initiative.

There is, consequently, a lot of pressure on various Palestinian factions that the democratic processes should be respected. Elections are scheduled and

organisations such as Hamas should take part, rather than boycotting.

There is a commitment from all factions that the majority verdict will be respected. We have not struggled for all this time to create an undemocratic society.

Personally I think that those in favour of the agreement will win a comfortable electoral victory, although I welcome the opportu-

nity to debate the issues with those that disagree.

I believe that the settlers are a major concern. Some have openly said they will try to disrupt the agreement. Personally I believe that it is in everyone's interest that the settlers are gradually withdrawn from the Occupied Territories. The settlements — built illegally — could be part of what Israel owes the Palestinians.

Why pure and simple anti-Nazism will not work

POLITICAL FRONT

By Tom Rigby

LAST SUNDAY'S battle in Brick Lane (19 September) shows that when the left acts together the BNP can be driven off the streets.

But whether we like it or not, the BNP won a much more important victory on Thursday night, 16 September, when stormtrooper Derek Beackon won the BNP's first ever council seat.

The BNP did not win because everyone who voted for them is a hardened, conscious fascist.

The Liberals, Tories and Labour all sowed the seeds for the BNP's success by failing to offer any positive answers to the social decay which East Londoners can see all around them, and by promoting "respectable" versions of the same racist scapegoating that the BNP advocates militantly.

Tower Hamlets Labour councillor Phil Maxwell explains: "With the drift to the right in the party at a national level, some people in the local party have begun to take on board parts of the racist agenda. There have been far too many references to 'Islanders' and nothing about the need for black and white to unite to improve their conditions together. The people who benefited from this are the fascists".

According to other Tower Hamlets Labour Party members, Labour's problems on the Isle of Dogs have been exacerbated by a right-wing purge.

The party has been gutted. Long-standing and hard-working activists have been driven out and left-wing councillors like Yve Amor have been suspended. "It's created a situation", according to one local party member, "where [Liberal leader] Paddy Ashdown is not entirely wrong to accuse [Labour front bencher] Jack Straw of hypocrisy in denouncing racist Liberal leaflets without doing anything about some of the dodgy stuff that has been put out in Labour's name."

The witch hunt in the local party certainly developed themes that could only benefit the racists.

For instance, defeated Labour candidate Jim Hunt told a local paper that: "The loony left was more concerned about Cuba

than Cuba St, E14".

He may have thought he was being clever, but he must have felt pretty stupid on Thursday night.

Labour needs to change its approach.

The surest way to defeat the BNP next May is for Labour to fight on the basis of black and white workers' unity — not just vapid liberal "be patient-and-nice-to-everyone" unity, but workers' unity to fight for improvements in social conditions.

The London Regional Labour Party should start to campaign now on the theme of "jobs and homes for all". The resources of the party across London should be focused on the Isle of Dogs for the next few months. Councillor Yve Amor should be reinstated and the party opened up.

A call should be made for volunteer canvassers and campaigners from throughout the London area to help in this work. Surely every serious anti-fascist would be prepared to get involved.

The Anti-Nazi League mobilised many people to campaign in the Isle of Dogs — but this organisation (which is tightly controlled by the Socialist Workers' Party) did not even call for a Labour vote against the BNP!

Instead, the ANL (ie the SWP) put out leaflets under the heading "The Island against the Nazis" which simply said "Don't vote for Nazis", a slogan which leaves the door open to voting Liberal and even Tory.

Maybe the ANL, too, thought they were being clever, seeking a broad appeal without tying themselves to Labour. But to many people they must have come across as just the militant wing of the Establishment, saying: "Vote any way you like, as long as it's respectable! As long as you don't rock the boat! Vote any way you like, as long as it's not for the party of protest!" That could only be counterproductive.

We cannot beat the fascists by appeals for patience and tolerance, or by horror stories about fascist movements of the past — useful though these stories are as part of a campaign. We need to offer positive answers to the anger and frustration in areas like Tower Hamlets — and we can do that only by fighting to mobilise the labour movement to offer positive answers.

Crisis in Russia

Russia's president Boris Yeltsin has suspended Parliament and called new elections for December.

As we go to press on Tuesday 21 September, parliamentary leader Ruslan Khasbulatov has called on troops to defy Yeltsin and named Yeltsin's deputy Alexander Rutskoi as acting president. Rutskoi has denounced Yeltsin's move as "an open coup d'etat" and said that troops are moving on Moscow.

Previous clashes between

Yeltsin and the parliament have shown support for the parliament to be weak. It was elected in a different political epoch, in polls heavily controlled by the now-defunct Communist Party: new elections would certainly produce a more representative assembly.

Khasbulatov and Rutskoi cannot claim to be the democrats. But socialists cannot endorse Yeltsin: he is a demagogue, willing to throw millions into poverty and misery in his desperate drive towards free-market economics.

We must defend the new, fragile trade union movement in Russia, and the equally fragile democratic rights there, against dictatorship from either side.



Socialist Organiser plans special edition

Because of the dramatic events in East London, with Nazis winning a local government seat for the first time in Britain since the 1970s, we are changing our usual routine with Socialist Organiser for the next few weeks. The next edition will be a special double-issue (575-6), in pamphlet form, on the fight against racism, and it will be out in the week of 6 October. The next ordinary issue, no 577, will be out on 14 October.

Anti-Racist Alliance March for Justice

Sat 16 October
Assemble: Temple tube
12 noon
Speakers include John Monks, Ken Livingstone
Sponsors include TUC, NUM, RMT etc

Unity demonstration Close down the BNP HQ!

Saturday 16 October
Winns Common,
Plumstead, London
SE18
Assemble 1 pm

Labour must tax the rich

By Colin Foster

LABOUR'S Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown, says that, as far as he is concerned, Labour now has no commitments at all on tax or spending.

No commitment to restore Health Service spending. No commitment to ease the central government squeeze which has pushed local councils to cut housing, nurseries, libraries, schools, and other services. No commitment to let public sector workers restore their real wages, or reach Labour's promised minimum wage. Certainly no commitment to renationalise anything.

No commitment, in fact, to do anything but be not-the-Tories.

Brown's talk of "invest and grow" as his alternative to "tax and spend" is just blather. Capitalists are happy enough to "invest and grow". It's their business: But they do it their way — and that way, in Britain today, means more unemployment, more poverty, more exploitation, fewer public services. To change that, a Labour Government must grasp the necessary resources, including financial resources.

Brown's "do-nothing" policy will probably not even win elections. On the contrary, a "do-nothing" Labour Party will drive the desperate, the jobless, and the bewildered towards fascist groups like the British National Party. After the Tower Hamlets by-election, that should be obvious.

Socialist Organiser believes that the labour movement should be transformed and reorganised to fight for the complete overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by com-

mon ownership and democratic control.

But even the present Labour Party, even the Labour Party of Gordon Brown and John Smith, can and should be tied down to some clear commitments: to restore the welfare

state, to introduce a minimum wage, and to free the trade unions to win improvements through a Workers' Charter of legal rights. These commitments can and should be paid for by taxing the rich and taking control of key financial institutions.

Peter Hain calls for regroupment

Can Labour's Left unite?

By Martin Thomas

"THIS IS the time for the Left to speak out", writes Peter Hain MP in Tribune (10 September).

"Labour has ceased to stand for anything clear... Labour's Left needs to regroup, build common ground, and project radical policies..."

Hain's initiative has caused a row in the Tribune Group of MPs, of which he is secretary. George Howarth, chair of the Tribune Group, spoke up for the "soft-left" approach of recent years by denouncing Hain's "openly hostile criticism of the Labour Party leadership".

Yet Hain is right. Not even Howarth claims that Hain is wrong, only that his ideas are "ill-timed". (When would be the right time? How long must we wait?)

Hain focuses on economic policy. "Resources must be switched... into investment in industry, in skills and in infrastructure..."

Certainly the Labour Left needs to give more serious thought and debate to economics. We will never achieve anything fundamental until we get a clear idea of how to transform the economic basis of society.

However, economic policy is not the basis for uniting the dif-

ferent factions of the Labour Left. Hain seems to favour a tougher version of the official Labour line of state regulation of industry and finance; others on the left argue for renationalisation and new nationalisations; some focus on cutting arms spending; Socialist Organiser and other Marxists believe that nothing less than comprehensive workers' control and common ownership is adequate.

We will not get a common economic policy for the Left until the grass-roots working-class challenge to capitalism is much more advanced. We can unite the Labour and trade-union Left now around opening the way for that grass-roots working-class challenge.

The Workers' Charter of trade union rights, the right to organise, to strike, to picket, and to act in solidarity; the right to a minimum wage, is central. Without those rights, opening the way for radical Labour policies is piffle.

A second plank for Labour Left unity should be defence of the Labour/union link — that is, defence of the channels which will allow working-class radicalisation, once given scope to develop by the Workers' Charter, to reshape Labour policy.

And the third plank should be restoration of the Health Service and other public services.

The only way to stop the fascists

Labour must fight!

Continued from front page

THOSE CONDITIONS are mass poverty and hopelessness, combined with a decay of the traditional organisations of the socialist left, the fading of the collective memory of what fascism is, and the existence of immigrant communities to be used as scapegoats by fascist demagogues.

Because of its utter failure to be a serious opposition, either in Parliament or outside it, Labour bears a responsibility second only to Thatcher and Major for creating the conditions in which fascism is growing.

Millwall is a warning! The loss of Millwall to outright fascists is an alarming indication of just how far the rot has gone for the Labour Party.

In Britain these fascists are fattening on Labour's decay, winning the vote of Labour's constituency and of people who are fifth generation traditional Labour voters.

There were, of course, special local factors in East London. For years the Tower Hamlets Liberal Party has engaged in a deliberate and systematic incitement of racial resentment. They have used racist scapegoating and thinly disguised racist denunciation to keep themselves in power: they cleared the tracks on which the BNP crawled to victory in Millwall.

Even so, the fundamental truth is that fascist victory and Labour defeat in Millwall were generated by the national Labour Party. Labour has gone along with so much the Tories have done for so long that fascist agitators can plausibly dismiss the Labour Party as having no "answers" — on housing or anything else.

OF COURSE, the Labour Party now joins the rest of the liberal Establishment to denounce the Millwall racists — and to denounce the working-class people who voted for a racist.

Last Saturday we saw the bizarre sight of the putrid, racist *Sun* running a front-page "denunciation of racism"! And Paddy Ashdown, hypocritical leader of the party whose Tower Hamlets organisers use openly racist incitement, blazing the trail for the BNP — Ashdown, too, was quick to express shock and outrage. But these are the people who have fostered the BNP in Tower Hamlets! Denunciation is necessary. But who can give credence to this Establishment "anti-racism"?

Denunciation — hypocritical, tongue-in-cheek, or sincere —



Brick Lane Sunday 19 September. We need to mobilise the labour movement. Photo: Phil Maxwell

will not stop the fascists. They will not be stopped by the cheap and hollow conventional anti-racism, synthetic outrage and downright hypocrisy with which the Establishment — including people like Labour leader, John Smith — is trying to wash its hands of responsibility for the alarming growth of fascism.

They will not be stopped by Labour Party leaders who want to cut the links with the unions, reducing it to a thing of TV ads, junk mailings, and careerists in suits jockeying for the good camera angle.

"The only serious anti-racism is anti-racism that fights to change the conditions in which racism and fascism flourish."

ONLY A vigorous campaign by the labour movement against the waste and devastation the Tories have brought to Millwall, Tower Hamlets, and many other areas all over the country, will raise the working class out of despair and stop the growth of the BNP and similar organisations. The only serious anti-racism is anti-racism that

fights to change the conditions in which racism and fascism flourish.

It is obscene to find the virtuously "anti-racist" Establishment — including the *Sun!* — denouncing desperate working-class people in Millwall for their racism at the same time as they maintain the conditions in which racism flourishes.

Only the labour movement can provide general social answers to the social conditions created by capitalism and made worse by Tory rule.

It is time the labour movement began to fight back. We repeat: Millwall is a grim warning.

SMITH'S LABOUR Party will not fight for socialism, the only real answer to capitalism and to what it does to people like the white electors in Millwall.

But Labour should, and can be made to, fight to kick out the Tories — to take advantage of their present disarray and confusion and to rouse people to act against them. The Tories are now very discredited.

We saw a great wave of indignation last October against the typically callous, typically Tory way they proposed to close down 31 pits. That upsurge concerned more than the miners and their jobs. It was a spasm of mass revulsion against Toryism in general.

What happened? It could have been the start of a broad general campaign to drive the Tories

from office, linking issues like the proposed pit closures and the death by a thousand cuts to which the Tories continue to submit the Health Service. But Labour's leaders allowed it to drain away.

The chance was missed! It is still not too late.

"If the Labour leaders will not heed the warning of Millwall, they should heed the warning of Neil Kinnock and his fate."

If the Labour leaders will not heed the warning of Millwall, they should heed the awful warning of Neil Kinnock and his fate. Kinnock for years led the Labour Party on a "strategy" of doing little except waiting for the golden apples of office to fall at his feet in due time as Thatcher and the Tories exhausted their credit with the electorate.

Under Kinnock Labour simply did not campaign against the Tories. It joined the Tories in campaigning against anti-poll-tax activists and even against striking miners. What happened? The Tories ditched the unpopular Mrs Thatcher, and

then went on to win the 1992 election.

It can happen again! Labour rides high in the polls now — but the election is a long way off. John Major's tenure of office as Prime Minister is even less assured than Mrs Thatcher's was. Labour's miserable leaders may yet succeed in losing another General Election for us — if we do not stop them now.

Learn the lessons of Millwall! Look at the cadaverous ghost of Neil Kinnock, wandering around this year's Labour Party conference, and learn the lessons of 1992 and all the wasted years before it that led Labour to an avoidable defeat.

Labour must fight!

• See also *Political Front*, page 2

"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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The weak link?

IT'S NOT OFTEN that the Somnolent One agrees with Mr. John Smith and his Walworth Road PR apparatchiks, but they are dead right about one thing: the question of the Labour Party's union link is the single most important issue facing the British labour movement right now. This is in stark contrast to most of the left, who have signally failed to get very excited about the issue, even if they pay lip-service to defending the link.

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

The importance of the issue is reflected in the amount of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring that has been going on over the last few months. Walworth Road has plainly targeted John Edmonds of the GMB as the potential weak link (so to speak) in the pro-link united front of general secretaries. And with good reason: prior to his dramatic conversion towards the end of last year, Edmonds was a leading advocate of the Neil Kinnock/John Smith nostrum for Labour Party 'democracy', One Member One Vote.

Bro. Edmonds's conversion may have been the result of intense deliberation on the more philosophical aspects of the concept of collective democracy. Or it may have been the result of his desire to stay on good terms with Bill Morris and achieve a speedy merger with the TGWU. Either way, Walworth Road have him pencilled in at the top of their list of general secretaries who can be "reasoned with" on this most delicate question.

Walworth Road have made full use of their chums on the labour/industrial desks of the non-Tory national press ever since the 'break the link' campaign began in earnest immediately after the last general election. First, a supposed 'survey' of why wavering voters failed to rally to Labour on the day was leaked to chosen journo from the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Mirror* and *Today*. Surprise, surprise: the union link was identified as the main culprit. It has since turned out that this 'survey' and its 'results' were the product of the fertile imagination of Ms. Patricia Hewitt and the other Kinnock creatures in the Walworth Road PR department.

This crude attempt at blaming the unions for Kinnock's failure at the election backfired and antagonised almost all the general secretaries except that well-known friend of democracy, Bill Jordan of the AEEU.

Walworth Road's next attempt at media manipulation was equally counter-productive: in mid-July, papers like the *Guardian* and *Independent* were suddenly full of stories predicting a 'deal' between the Labour leadership and the GMB. According to these reports the GMB's representatives on the Labour Party's "Trade Union Review Group", Tom Burlinson, had agreed to Smith's OMOV proposals and a slightly rearranged version of the "levy-plus" formula. An ashen-faced Edmonds, foreseeing his cherished merger with the T&G going down the pan, demanded a full explanation from Burlinson, and was assured that no such deal had been reached. Edmonds immediately issued a furious denial, stating that "GMB opposition to... the formula will be voiced at the Labour Party NEC... and Tom Burlinson will vote against the plan at that meeting". The statement concluded with a thinly veiled attack on the Walworth Road PR department: "Unfortunately, some people think it is fun to give misleading briefings to the press".

But Walworth Road were undeterred: like a thick-skinned suitor whose advances have been repeatedly rebuffed, they pursued Edmonds all the way to this month's TUC, convinced that he was just playing hard-to-get. When Smith addressed Congress with a carefully calculated 'pro-union' speech and Edmonds gave the press a suitably diplomatic response, the *Guardian* and *Independent* once again predicted the collapse of union opposition to OMOV. Barrie Clement, the *Independent's* labour correspondent and one of Walworth Road's leading "friends" in the press, went so far as to announce "the end of any attempt to draw up a united front against Mr. Smith's proposals among the big unions".

Once again, this has proved to be a Walworth Road wish-fulfilment fantasy. Edmonds would, no doubt, love to do a deal with Smith, but the T&G merger is more important to him. And Bill Morris and Jack Adams have made it very clear that any back-sliding on the link will kill off the merger once and for all. Edmonds now says that he gave Smith's TUC speech a warm response because it contained lots of good stuff about a future Labour government's commitment to union rights (which it did): but he has not shifted on the question of the link and OMOV.

But don't overestimate the persuasive powers of Walworth Road. Edmonds (and, perhaps, even Morris) could still be 'persuaded' — just as the leadership of USDAW seem to have been (in defiance of their national conference). There's still everything to play for and both sides know it.

PS. The latest on the link includes good news and bad. First, the good: it seems that the crucial CLPD emergency motion (see opposite page) will be allowed onto the agenda. This gives the left a great chance to stop the NEC this year and postpones the decisive showdown.

Now the bad: it looks like attempts to get the GMB and T&G to present a common front on the issue, based on a shared belief that trade unionists should vote on parliamentary selections through their unions, will not succeed. The unions are likely to present separate motions. Cynics among you will no doubt see this as a way for Edmonds and Morris to maintain a 'principled' position while letting Smith win...

Stop the "modernisers" • Defend and Labour at Poisoners of the workers' movement

Anne Field looks at some of the arguments for breaking the Labour-union link in the pages of *Fabian Review*

"COMPLACENT pedants, prattling eclectics, sentimental careerists, liveried footmen of the bourgeoisie, inflated authorities, conceited and pompous cowards, poisoners of the labour movement," was Trotsky's definition of the Fabians seventy years ago.

A review of the Fabians' arguments for ending Labour-union links reveals that the definition still retains all its validity.

"Why, in the 1992 General Election, did the Tory message 'you can't trust Labour' strike a chord?" ask the Fabians. Because of the untrustworthy and opportunist political record of the Party leaders?

No, say the Fabians. Despite polling evidence to the contrary, they blame Labour's tarnished image on its links with the trade unions.

In language reminiscent of the *Sun*, Fabian literature talks of "trade union control over policy making", "union control of the Party", and "trade union control of the NEC". Labour-union links are "unnecessary historical baggage," they are "the weakest link in our claim to be a modern party".

In the nineteenth century, explain the Fabians, "the mass of the working class was exploited." But now things are different: "majori-

ties exploit minorities."

Presumably, therefore, the 10% of the population who own 50% of the wealth are cruelly exploited and oppressed by the 50% of the population who own just 8% of the wealth.

In the nineteenth century, continue the Fabians, workers were justified in setting up a political party to defend themselves. But not any more: "trade union control over policy-making stifles new and imaginative ideas and prevents the party from talking to the whole nation."

Just how modern this argument is can be seen by comparing it with a quote from Ramsay MacDonald from the early 1920s: "The future of the Labour Party is to be determined by its success in making its principles clear to itself and the country. If it narrows itself to a class movement or a trade movement it will weaken and finally disappear."

Continuing trade union input into the Labour Party, according to the Fabians, is an example of "sectional interests dictating policies," such as NUPE hostility to compulsory competitive tendering, or TGWU opposition to road-pricing.

The Fabians seem oblivious to the fact that compulsory competitive tendering is as bad for service-users as it is for workers who provide the services. And if opposition to road-pricing is the expression of a "sectional interest" — why do the rail unions oppose it as well?

Even Labour's commitment in the last General Election to a modest increase in pensions is attacked by the Fabians as another case of trade union sectional input dictat-

ing policy:

"Did Labour's commitment to increase pensions owe more to TGWU pressure, at the behest of their former General Secretary, Jack Jones, now the head of the national pensioners' organisation, than to a proper appraisal of all the priorities?"

Continuing along the same line of argument, the Fabians discover a new socialist principle: "It should be a basic socialist principle that the interests of the non-unionised individual are of equal value to interests of the trade union member." Let us apply this "socialist principle" to the recent Timex dispute.

A poor non-union individual, whose only interest is to earn a little extra money for their starving family, crosses the picket line every day. On the outside of the factory stand the trade unionists, a piece of "historical baggage" whose only concern is to promote a "sectional interest".

Clearly: Fabianism is the theory, scabbing is the practice.

Pay restraint — the polite expression for falling living standards — is another area in which the Fabians regard Labour-union links as a liability.

The need of "the economy as a whole" for pay restraint conflicts with the basic trade union goal of winning better pay for their members. But lament the Fabians, "Labour cannot hope to convince the electorate that it will pursue the public interest when it is tied to sectional pressure groups."

Only a Fabian would believe that Labour would be more electorally attractive if it cuts its links with the unions in order to facilitate attacks on living standards. Few Labour Party members or voters would share the Fabians' enthusiasm for the slogan: "Vote Labour — Your Country Needs Lower Living Standards!"

And since the Fabians support "pay restraint" in the interest of the "the economy as a whole", one must again conclude: Fabianism is the theory, Kenneth Clarke is the practice.

The case against Labour-union links, conclude the Fabians, is "overwhelming". So why do so few Party members speak out against it? Because, the Fabians admit, in a rare moment of honesty

about some of their friends on the soft left, "they do not want to damage their own career prospects."

Why do Fabians write this kind of nonsense? The easy answer is to say that they are a bunch of "complacent pedants, prattling eclectics, sentimental careerists, etc., etc." This is true, but only part of the answer.

The logic of Fabianism is a commitment to capitalism in its pure form. They praise Tony Blair for suggesting that Labour should become "the party that defends the individual against vested interests."

The "vested interests" which the Fabians are prepared to attack are certainly not those of the bankers and the bosses, that small minority of the population which owns the means of production and dictates policy to elected governments. (Remember: "majorities exploit minorities"!)

The "vested interests" targeted by the Fabians are the very organisations which individual workers combined to form in the struggle against capitalist exploitation: trade unions.

The Fabians' commitment to "social justice" — the in-phrase of the moment — is individualistic, not collectivist. "Social Justice" for the Fabians is a matter of equal rights for the individual within a capitalist society, rather than the use of collective action to end capitalism, creating the possibility of real individual self-development for the vast majority.

The "social justice" on offer from the Fabians is therefore the negation of real social justice. The market mechanism of capitalism is a force which inherently increases inequalities of power and wealth. Collective action by the labour movement — the sectional interests so despised by the Fabians — is the only effective defence against capitalism.

In the final analysis the pathetic whimperings of the Fabians are nothing but a plea that capitalism should be allowed to run its course, free from the influences of "sectional interest" and with the role of the government reduced to tightening the odd nut and bolt.

The Tories don't need any advice from the Fabians. Still less so does the labour movement.



Tony Blair

extend the union link

the crossroads

The most far-reaching rule changes since 1918:

Emergency — defend Labour democracy!

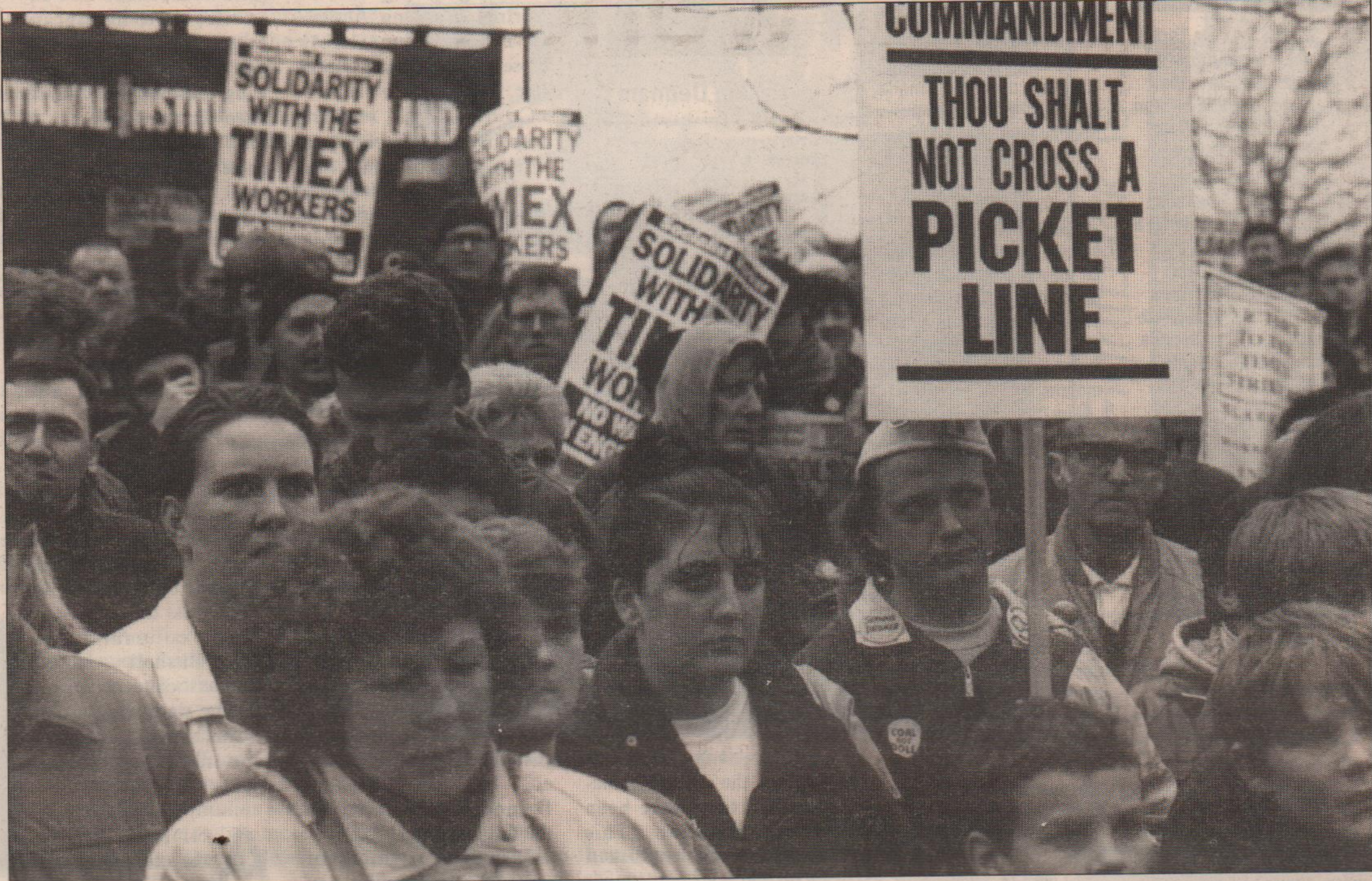
CAMPAIGN FOR LABOUR PARTY DEMOCRACY

Vera Derer, Vladimir Derer, Robin Laney and Danny Nichol explain why delegates to this year's Labour Party conference should not allow the National Executive Committee to railroad through a set of rule changes which strike at the heart of Party democracy and the Labour-union link.

THE NEC'S Agenda II contains the most far-reaching changes presented to a Labour Party Conference since 1918. Many of the proposals are quite new: the Party has not been consulted on them. It's essential that they shouldn't be accepted on the nod at this year's Conference and that CLPs and affiliated organisations are given time to consider their implications.

The proposals put forward include:

- **Ending collective involvement of trade unions**
"Registered members" are to be recruited from the affiliated organisations. This is the thin end of the wedge: the proposal ends trade unions' collective involvement.
- **Phantom equal rights**
Registered members will pay £3 per year — less than what the Party expects the unemployed and OAPs to pay. But the cost of servicing



The union link must be defended, as a channel for grass-roots struggle, as at Timex (above), to sway the Labour Party

a member is well over £3. According to Larry Whitty it costs £6 to provide a member with *Labour Party News* and put him/her on the national membership system. The rule change says registered members will get "equivalent rights within all units of the party". But CLPs won't be able to service them without income from their subs. It

seems the only thing they will be able to do is come and vote at the meeting that chooses the parliamentary candidate. This is a recipe for abuse.

The NEC seems to think that it can saddle the union with the administrative costs of this new class of membership.

• **Two thirds of CLPs to be**

disenfranchised?

An unbelievable rule change: "Resolutions for the Annual Party Conference: not exceeding one resolution per every full 500 members in the case of constituency parties."

What this seems to mean is that CLPs who don't have as many as 500 members will lose their present right to

submit a resolution.

• **No votes just nominations**
A completely new set of mechanisms to trigger parliamentary selection is proposed — not based on membership ballots but on nominations from branches. MPs nominated by two thirds of branches/affiliated organisations would be automatically reselected. This proposal was mooted in a recent Fabian Society pamphlet but has never been in any of the numerous NEC consultative documents.

• **Notoriously inaccurate**
There would be a nationally-organised postal ballot of individual members for the NEC Constituency Section, Women's Section, Treasurer, Conference Arrangements Committee and National Constitutional Committee. This will reduce yet further the role of CLPs and discourage branches who are struggling to persuade members to attend meetings. It victimises small CLPs in Tory areas that are trying hard to keep going.

It also makes party democracy dependant on the accuracy of the notoriously inaccurate National Membership.

• **Postal democracy**
The new parliamentary selection procedure would

restrict voting to individual members. CLPs would be obliged a) to issue all members with an application for a postal vote, and b) to give a postal vote to anyone who wants one. So the majority of members in a CLP could vote without seeing the nominees.

• **Phantom trade union involvement**

Leadership elections would be on the basis of one third MPs and MEPs/one third affiliated members/one third individual members. Affiliated organisations would be obliged to ballot members but the exact nature of the ballot would be a matter for each affiliate to decide. There would doubtless be wide differences in the method of voting, and yet the results would be "aggregated for a national total." Individual members would vote through a national postal ballot.

• **Ending collective involvement**

The proposals, taken together, would immensely weaken the CLP structure: CLPs would no longer have a role in leadership elections or NEC elections and many would lose their policy-making input into Annual Conference. The collective input of the trade unions would be lost.

"We've got to look for areas where there is movement"

Dorothy Macedo from the steering committee of the Socialist Campaign Group Network talked to *Socialist Organiser* about the prospects of the left at this year's conference.

THE LEFT IN THE Party has to look for areas where there is movement. When we spot movement, like on the trade union link, that is a key area to get involved in. There is too much on the left of people just talking to themselves.

The Socialist Campaign Group Network will have an office open for 24 hours a day at conference and we will be producing a daily bulletin.

Unfortunately, negotiations for a joint bulletin with the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and

their allies fell through, but we have written to them about negotiations for a possible joint bulletin next year.

We will be holding a fringe meeting on the Sunday night with Tony Benn MP and Lorraine Monks from the Women's Committee. The meeting is intended as a forum in which the grass roots have their say, not just as a rally.

We will be happy to get reports from the regions so that people can get some idea of a movement which isn't just based in Westminster or London.

Our basic aim is to create a real functioning network of activists at all levels of the Party.

One of our central targets has to be to pull trade unionists into the Network so that we can have an integrated political and industrial grouping.

We are still trying to find our

feet. We are making new contacts up and down the country all the time.

The key issue at conference is, of course, the trade union link. There is no discussion on the left about that. Any "compromise" that involves trade unionists only being represented as individuals simply misses the point completely.

We must have collective trade union involvement, although we of course also welcome individual trade unionists joining the Party as well.

One of the best things to have come out of the debate on the union link is the growing movement of grass roots opposition that has emerged. You have seen this in both CLPs and in the unions, and it could also be seen at the TUC earlier this month when 2.5 million votes were cast

in support of defiance of the anti-union laws.

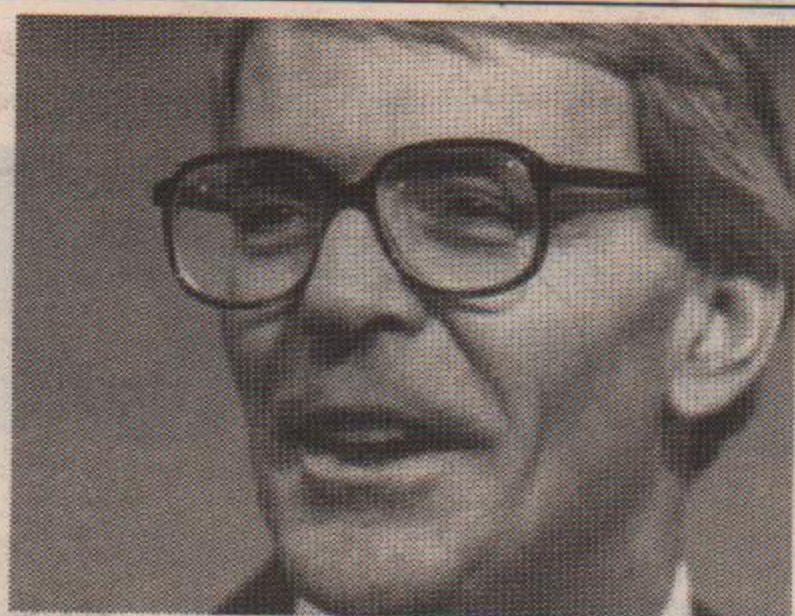
The tide seems to have turned amongst the grass roots, though I would not say we are on the up yet. There are possibilities. All those pessimists who just said things will get worse until the Labour Party disappears are wrong. That is a self-defeating attitude. It is understandable — people are battle-weary — but it is still wrong. In the end there is no alternative to patient and steady work at the grass roots of the Labour Party.

**Socialist Campaign
Group Network**

Fringe Meeting

Sunday 26 September, 7.30

Royal Albion Hotel, Old Steine



He gets the pay, we freeze

Nice lolly

GRAFFITI

IT SEEMS that the Tories might have to allow one little exception to their pay freeze. While 5 million public sector employees are expected to happily accept 0% pay rise, an elite group of 650 public workers will be receiving a thumping great big 20%. Under an arrangement worked out last year MPs will have their pay upgraded to a senior civil service pay scale, taking them from £30,854 to £38,153. Even John Major will be pocketing an extra £7,000 a year on top of his hefty Prime Ministerial salary — should he still be drawing it in October.

With the fuel tax, it is now possible to understand what a pay freeze is — the Tories get the pay, the rest of us get to freeze.

SPOT THE psychotic criminal: last week Mark Irvin, the Tennessee Assistant District Attorney, congratulated himself for locking up another dangerous threat to society. 17-year-old Deundra Caldwell was sentenced to three years in prison for stealing ice cream from a school cafeteria. "Burglary is burglary" pointed out Irvin.

MORE effluvia and scum bubbling up to the surface of European politics. Vladimir Meciar, Prime Minister of Slovakia, was furious at reports that he suggested cutting social security costs by reducing the "reproduction of socially unadaptable and mentally backward populations"... that is, gypsies.

He took out a libel suit against the journalist who first reported it. Then, to clear his name of the suspicions of racism, the government released an official transcript of Meciar's words:

"They [the gypsies] should be perceived as a problem group that is growing in size... This means that if we do not deal with them now, they will deal with us later... Another thing we need to consider is extended reproduction of socially unadaptable populations."

That's cleared that up then.

AMAZING BUT true department: burgeoning Rumanian capital-

ism has its first enigma. A shadowy organisation known as Caritas has been operating in Cluj, the regional capital of Transylvania. They take deposits of money and repay eight times the original sum after 100 days — the equivalent of a 250,000% interest rate. Even with inflation running at 230%, that's a pretty shrewd investment, and so far they've paid back every penny due to their investors. The amount paid out by the scheme is due to overtake Rumania's GDP within three months.

Now Cluj is awash with ready money and more and more depositors are coming from farther and farther afield. And how does it work? It seems that no one knows and no one cares to find out. The mayor of Cluj has made a killing from the schemes, as have many other Clujians, and he is not going to ask too many questions. There are half-whispered rumours of drug dealing and gun running. There are even stories that the government is attempting to buy popularity by flooding the country with cash.

The case of Jęzdomir Vasiljevic offers a more plausible explanation. He was the head of the Serbian Yugokandic Bank, which offered the impressive rate of 15% a month for hard currency deposits (400% a year). How can he possibly do it, asked the greedy investors, putting \$2 billion in hard currency into the bank. And then, one day, Vasiljevic didn't turn up for work. Happily he is alive and well, having a thoroughly good time in Tel Aviv.

IT IS NOW A time-honoured strategy to try to change something by changing its name. Homeless people become "differently domiciled", disabled people become "differently abled". Now the Labour leadership has jumped on the renaming bandwagon. This year's conference will attempt to relaunch the Party's youth section, in the past a thorn in the leadership's side because of its tendency to go socialist.

John Smith's advisors have clearly identified the source of the problem in the name "Labour Party Young Socialists". This year they intend to change the name to "Young Labour". That'll solve the problem!

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

EVEN THE *Sun* seemed to appreciate the full awfulness of the Millwall election result. On Saturday the paper's "The Sun says" editorial column was uncharacteristically sombre and not altogether coherent. *Sun* editorials usually offer the reader a snappy line if nothing else.

This one was more of a stream of consciousness: the BNP are denounced as a "despicable bunch" and the Bangladeshi population's right to housing and community resources is affirmed. "But in our anxiety to give these immigrants from the third world a proper start in our country, it is clear that some of the white population feel they have been given a raw deal... This election result will sicken all people who realise that a multi-racial Britain is

here to stay. But nobody, from the Government to the local council, can afford to ignore it".

Nothing very profound about any of that, I suppose, but at least it suggests a little bit of serious thinking going on at Fortress Wapping. Actually, it comes remarkably close to that classic liberal line, "we are all to blame".

Could this sombre response even betoken just a tiny sense of guilt? For years, the *Sun* — along with most of the rest of

Britain's Tory tabloids — has gleefully run stories about the alleged excesses of the "race relations industry" and the so-called "loony left" councils. The clear message, to the predominantly white, working-class readers of the *Sun*, has been that black people (and black immigrants in particular) are somehow getting preferential treatment.

That was the message that the BNP (ably assisted by the Liberal Democrats) exploited to the full in Millwall.

Of course, it would be ridiculously simplistic to blame the *Sun* for what

happened at Millwall. The housing shortage, unemployment and the Tories' systematic undermining of local government finance are much more obvious and important causes. But the drip-drip-drip of subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) anti-immigrant propaganda from the *Sun* and the rest of the right-wing tabloids must surely have had some effect — if only to focus and legitimise the prejudices of the poor, white inhabitants of places like Millwall.

"It would be ridiculously simplistic to blame the Sun for what happened at Millwall..."

If this frightening election result has persuaded Mr. MacKenzie and the other men and women who produce the *Sun* to take a more responsible attitude, then maybe some good

will come of it. And isn't it about time that the *Sun*'s "star" columnist Mr. Garry Bushell — once a close associate of various extreme right-wing groups — was asked to publicly renounce his former friends?

ANDREW NEIL, the oleaginous editor of the *Sunday Times*, is presently cele-

brating ten years at the helm of Britain's heaviest middle-brow newspaper. His boss, Rupert Murdoch, is to host a lavish celebration at the Victoria and Albert Museum, at which such toadies as Peter Kellner and Alastair Burnett will no doubt tell the world what a wonderful editor, brilliant journalist and all-round great guy Neil is.

Before we all vomit, it's probably worth noting that Neil has, in fact, done a few worthwhile things while busy dragging the *Sunday Times* down-market and rightwards: he gave us all a great laugh with the "Hitler diaries" debacle and the great "New Britain is Old Britain" libel case against Peregrine Worsthorpe, for instance. He hired Martin Jacques and in doing so effectively exposed him as the charlatan he always was.

Most valuably (as far as I'm concerned), Mr. Neil seems to love appearing on television and plainly believes that he comes over well on the box. Every appearance by Neil is a salutary lesson that money, power and success may be very desirable in their own right but they don't stop you being a preposterous, sad buffoon.

Women against racism

WOMEN'S EYE

By Joan Trevor

WITH RACIST attacks on the increase all over Britain, and the election to Tower Hamlets Council last week of a British National Party candidate, here is a story to give you hope.

It happened last May in Abercanaid, a small Welsh village near Merthyr Tydfil. Abercanaid has three pubs and one corner shop, to give you some idea of the scale of the place. The shop was run by a Bangladeshi man, Ali Khan. He'd just taken over the lease from Debbie, the woman who lives with her family above the shop.

Ali Khan was out for the day and he left a Bangladeshi friend, Bob,

in charge of the shop.

Debbie heard shouts in the street outside. When she went down to investigate, her mum told her that a gang of youths was hassling Ali Khan's friend, knocking over displays and abusing him. Having bomb the shop most of them went off down the street. Debbie told two youths still hanging around to go away and leave them alone.

The whole lot of the gang came back and tried to get into the shop again. But by this time Debbie and five other women had linked arms to bar their way. Debbie told the gang they couldn't go in, and a crowd of the women's children gathered round the shop cheering their mums' stand — as kids do!

The gang gave up and went away. The women stayed on guard for a few hours in case they returned.

What made the women

act in this way? They wanted to be left in peace. And Debbie didn't want the shop which was also her home to be burned down! But there was more to it than that.

Debbie knew that Ali and his friend were being targeted because they are black. She'd never had any trouble when she ran the shop. It was partly her anger at the gang's racist intimidation of Ali's friend which prompted her bravery.

She thought it was important to make Ali welcome in the community.

Next day the police arrested two of the gang and charged them with criminal damage and with using threatening and abusive behaviour.

Not surprisingly, Ali was impressed and pleased by the support he'd received from the women. The story got into the papers and people wrote to Debbie from all around the

country: other women who were opposed to racism and some other victims of racist abuse.

This all goes to prove that there are as many and more working-class people who are against racism as there are working-class racists. Of course, it takes courage to act as Debbie did.

Not just standing up to potentially violent and dangerous thugs, but daring to go outside "normal" behaviour — direct action such as that of these women probably goes down as "unrespectable" in a small village. In a big city you'd have to do something as "unrespectable" as beating up the BNP on Brick Lane to get comparable notice!

But Debbie knew that there is nothing more unrespectable than racism and her quick reaction was an example to the other women who, like her, felt that it just wasn't on.

Unite to drive the Nazis off our streets

Jason, Ilford

ON SUNDAY, 19 September anti-racists demonstrated in Brick Lane, East London against racist attacks in the area. The demonstration was also a response to the Nazi BNP's victory in a local government by-election in Tower Hamlets.

Many people of Asian origin live in the Brick Lane area, where the BNP sell their filthy paper every weekend.

On 19 September, 300 anti-fascists and Asian youth turned out to stop the BNP selling their race hate rag.

Police protected the fascists from the demonstrators. Protected by the police, the fascists waved Union Jacks and shouted 'rights for whites'. About 20

anti-fascists broke through the police lines, and the fascists fled. There were some arrests of anti-fascists.

When the police cleared their pitch for them, the fascists came back to the sight of anti-fascists burning Union Jacks and copies of the BNP paper. Incensed the fascists screamed filthy slogans. Again the anti-fascists broke through the police to attack the Nazis. Now kitted up in riot gear, the police waded-in to defend the BNP thugs. Up to 30 anti-fascists were arrested during the day, and despite the police's efforts to defend the BNP the Nazis fled again. The anti-fascists walked down Brick Lane, declaring it fascist free for the first time in years of Sunday BNP paper sales.

Another demonstration is planned for next Sunday. The BNP will not be stopped by one demonstration. Routed in Brick Lane, the fascists attacked a black man who happened to pass their favourite Bethnal Green pub. Four BNP members including a leader in the area, Richard Edmonds were arrested. The newly elected BNP councillor Derek Beackon was also in the pub.

The BNP are a bunch of racist



The police tried to defend the fascists

thugs.

We must stop them building their squads which batter and kill black people. Socialists

must unite with black and Jewish people and build a movement to drive these murdering thugs off our streets.



Derek Beackon

Youth needs labour to fight

THE GROWTH of the Nazi BNP in Tower Hamlets is just one result of Labour Party failure to relate to working class youth.

Yet without a labour movement that fights for working-class youth the left will get increasingly isolated and the Nazis will have a free hand in turning white youth against black communities and against the labour movement.

The Labour Party must change course and turn to youth: the alternative will be a disaster for Labour and a tragedy for young people.

For over a decade the Tory government has given working class youth a kicking. Leave millions to rot on the dole? That was the bad part. Things are worse now. They

leave youth to rot without dole! They have removed benefit rights from youths under nineteen.

That effectively makes the Youth Training scheme compulsory.

Yet the YT system is a joke. Last year a shortfall of places left 80,000 unemployed with no means of support.

38% of YTer's leave with no qualification at all.

Despite all the government "training", youth unemployment did not drop below half a million throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Now it is over three quarters of a million.

At the same time youth wages have been slashed by the abolition of Wages Councils. Training schemes are little more than an excuse to conscript youth as cheap labour. In 1979 the wages of under 18 year olds were 42% of the average wage; in 1991, 37%.

These attacks on youth mean that in parts of the inner-cities today crime is the only thing that offers either excitement or money. A whole generation knows nothing but cuts in services, unemployment and decaying housing.

In this vicious new Tory world young working class people need answers.

Any serious Labour activist has to admit that Labour fails young people. The Labour leaders who fail to oppose Tory attacks on

youth run scared of supporting young people in their struggles.

Now we reach the shameful situation where Tony Blair joins with the Tories and their press in a demand for a crackdown on youth. This smooth-faced careerist creep in an expensive suit blames young people for the increasing viciousness of the world the Tories and their system has created!

Labour must show young people that we will fight with them against Tory attacks, against racism against unemployment and for jobs for all: rights to a job, rights at work and the right to decent housing.

In 1987 Neil Kinnock destroyed Labour's youth section by closing down the national LPYS. It should now be a top priority for Labour to build a new national youth section that turns out and campaigns on the streets and in the estates to win youth to the labour movement. If Labour continues to ignore youth, if Labour does not fight and show youth a progressive decent alternative to Tory Britain, then those like the Nazi BNP are all too ready to offer white youth a vile reactionary, fascist alternative to the Toryism Labour refuses to fight. That is the lesson of the fascist by-election victory in Tower Hamlets last week.

To working class youth trapped in inner city hell holes like Tower

Hamlets the only real answer is class-struggle socialism. Only the power of the labour movement, united with black and white youth, can take on and defeat the Tories. Only by replacing capitalism with a system based on need, not pandering to greed, that is socialism based on democratic control of the economy by working people — can we rid society of poverty and unemployment.

To do this we need a mass workers' movement that will fight to overthrow this system.

Britain has the oldest labour movement in the world. Over seven million workers are in trade unions and over 4 million workers pay a political levy to the Labour Party. This movement has the power to smash capitalism.

Youth Fightback believes that it is only the mass organisation of our class that can present a real alternative for working class youth. That is why we aim to win young people to Labour. That is why any young socialist who is serious about changing the world, and stopping the Nazis and wiping the obscenity that is capitalism out of our lives, must fight to change the Labour Party and trade unions into organisations that turn out to working class youth and fight to smash the Tories and their still nastier friends and assistants in the Nazi groups like the BNP.

Youth Fightback is...

... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth. This page is separately edited.

Editor: Mark Sandell

Phone: 071-639 7967

for details of our activity.

Letters and articles to Youth Fightback c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Youth Fightback Meetings

Battersea Youth Fightback

"Stop the race hate!"

Thursday 23 September, 8pm, Battersea District Library, Lavender Hill

Calderdale college Youth Fightback

"Is there a future for young people in Tory Britain?"

Wednesday 29 September 4.30 pm. Room W2

Newcastle Youth Fightback meeting

"How to stop the rise in racism"

1 October, 12.30 pm, North Tyneside College

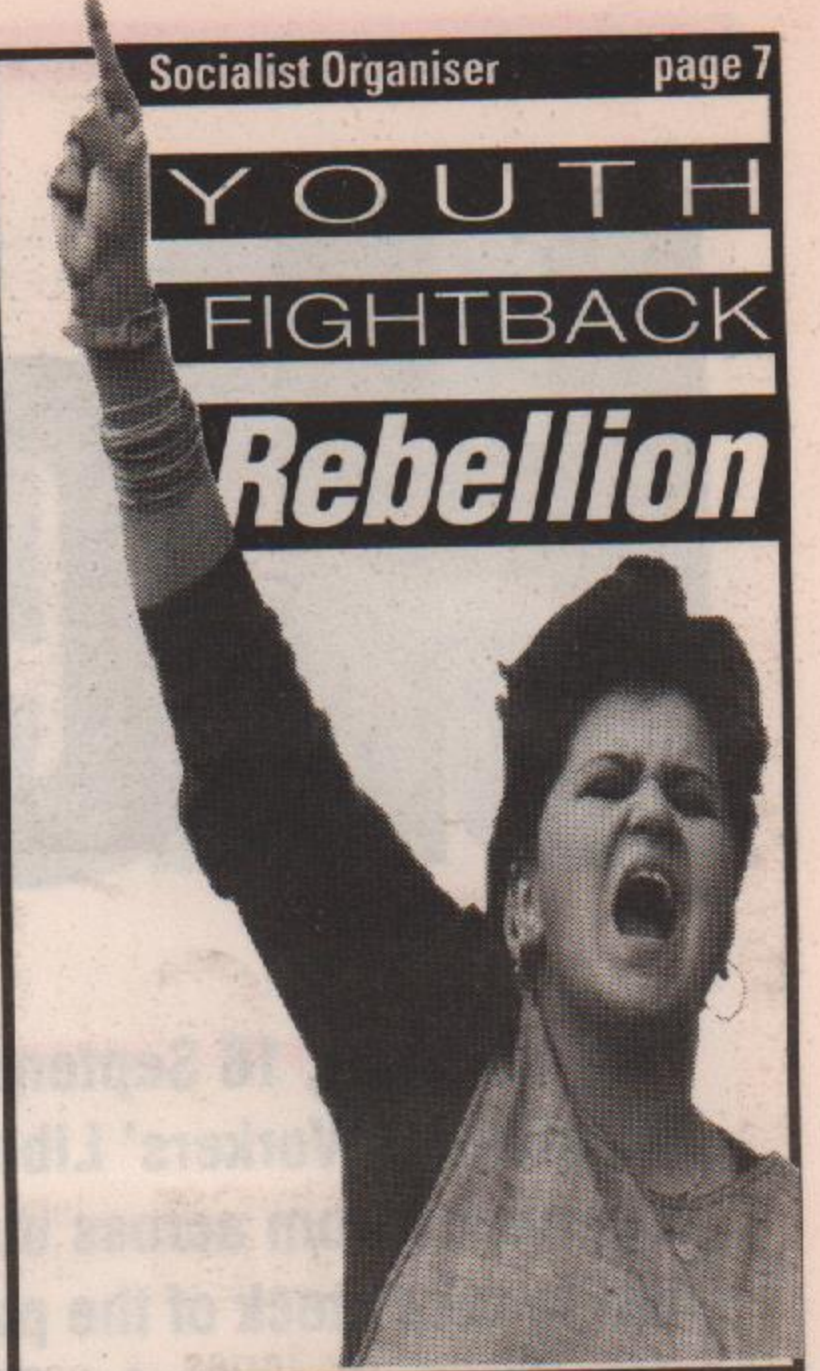
Sheffield Youth Fightback

"Racism — where it comes from and how to fight it"

Thursday 23 September 12 noon Parkwood College
Friday 24 September 12 noon, Castle College

Hot cakes

Manchester Youth Fightback have sold this week 25 copies of Youth Fightback on one sale at Xaverian sixth form and 18 copies at South Trafford College.



How to rebu

Last Saturday, 18 September, Alliance for Workers' Liberty organisers from across the country met to take stock of the political situation and our tasks. These were their conclusions.

THE EXPLOSION OF protest last October against pit closures marked a deep discrediting of the Tory government, and a major revival of the idea that a better alternative is possible.

Political protest and disillusion are important contributory factors for mass working-class direct action — but they are not the same thing as working-class direct action. The protest never became powerful and concentrated enough to threaten the ability of the official labour movement leadership to channel it.

Socialist Organiser called for "Anti-Tory Action Committees" as a formula to organise new activists: experience showed that there were not enough such new activists to make our call more than an aspiration.

Since then the Tories have largely got their way on pit closures. Two strong sections of the working class have suffered defeats, on the London Underground and the London buses. The Timex lock-out has ended with the closure of the factory. And a fierce new anti-union law has come into force without any campaign against it by the labour movement. These are the facts: industrially, the working class remains very much on the defensive.

The Tories remain discredited, as all the polls show, and in disarray. Their problems remain formidable: how can a government with a shaky political base cope with a £50 billion budget deficit? Their lifeline, as ever, is the feebleness of the Labour leaders.

With a different trade union and Labour leadership, the protests of last October might well have been translated into effective industrial action. The joint one-day strikes by the railworkers and the miners gave some index of what was possible if we had a leadership committed — or even half-committed — to action.

Important trade union struggles are still

possible, for example over Market Testing in the Civil Service, over restructuring in the Post Office or over the Tories' public sector pay freeze.

But we need to know where we are. Sober assessment is not defeatism. We need to understand reality in order to change it. We are still living in the shadow of the miners' defeat in 1984-5, and only just beginning to come out of it.

A GAINST THIS BACKGROUND, the successes in the trade unions for the "Keep the Link" campaign are remarkable.

A big majority of the unions have been won to policies opposing the Labour

"The Tories' lifeline is the feebleness of the Labour leaders. With a different leadership, the protests of last October might well have been translated into effective industrial action."

leaders' plan to cut links with the unions and turn Labour into a party based exclusively on credit cards, advertising campaigns, targeted mailings and grey suits.

John Smith may well yet force through some weakening of the link, thanks to the willingness of right-wing leaders in unions like USDAW to defy their own union conference decision. But even with the help of those leaders he will not make the clean sweep he wanted. Remember: less than 18 months ago, when the Labour leadership contest opened after Neil Kinnock's resignation, Smith and Bryan Gould were competing to see who could be bolder about turning Labour into a pure "one-member-one-vote" party, with

no accountable, collective working-class representation.

Their plans have been upset by a genuine rank-and-file revolt. It reveals deep reservoirs of working-class commitment in the labour movement — reservoirs initially invisible to the likes of Blair and Brown and Smith and Gould, and reservoirs which remain deep despite the constant drain they have suffered in recent years.

In this year's Labour Party conference agenda, one issue attracts even more resolutions than the Labour/union link: taxes and benefits. Almost all the resolutions argue for higher taxes on the well-off and/or for defending universal (as against means-tested) benefits. Here too we have a genuine rank-and-file revolt.

After the 1992 election, all the middle-class "modernisers" said that Labour must scrap all talk of taxing the well-off, and pare down its commitment to welfare benefits.

THESE RESPONSES indicate that *Socialist Organiser* has been right to argue that Marxists must still orient primarily to the existing labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party.

We have opposed the Socialist Workers' Party's comic opera stunts designed to gain it recognition as "the alternative" and to build its "own" little labour movement in parallel to the existing one; opposed the illusion of Militant Labour that it can become an effective electoral alternative to Labour; and countered the impulse of scattered leftists (represented in ventures like the *socialist* newspaper) to give up on the labour movement. We have insisted that for serious socialists the battle to transform the existing labour movement and to build a coherent left wing within it remains central. Day-to-day work in the shop stewards' committees, trade union branches and Labour Party wards remains vital.

The fight to kick out the Tories and put in a Labour government is still central for working-class politics in Britain. We do not counterpose that general political fight to immediate trade union and other struggles. We do not advise anyone to wait for a Labour government. We do not exclude the possibility of huge unexpected explosions of working-class struggle which will change the whole perspective. We do not give an inch to any illusions about the Labour leaders.

Nevertheless, the Tory anti-union laws impose tight limits on working-class struggle. The fight for the Workers' Charter of trade union rights is central — and the only way we can fight for it now is to battle to win the trade unions and the Labour Party to it and to get a Labour government that will implement it.

THE LOW GENERAL level of class struggle, the necessity of orienting to a labour movement which, despite everything, remains sluggish and depressed — do these mean that socialists can achieve little? Not at all!

There are not yet hundreds of thousands of workers confident enough to launch a decisive industrial offensive against the Tories and the bosses. There are thousands of workers and youth infuriated by the Tories and open to socialist alternatives. And a great deal in the future depends on how many of those thousands we can recruit, educate, and integrate into the only coherent revolutionary Marxist organisation, the Alliance for Workers'

Liberty.

The basic plan for *Socialist Organiser* and the AWL in this period of working-class defeat and depression is this: to consolidate, to educate, to win recruits one-by-one and integrate them, to tighten our structures and routines, and to strengthen our roots in the labour movement through patient work. While doing this we participate in all the struggles of the trade unions and the Labour Party, and in such campaigns as the fight against racism and the oppression of women.

ESPECIALLY IN LOW periods, a spirit of initiative, a willingness to jump into campaigns or start them, is vital for a revolutionary organisation wanting to attract new people.

That campaigning initiative must be combined with a solid routine of fundamental, long-term political and theoretical education.

James P Cannon put it well in the early 1950s, when the American Trotskyists were learning how to operate in conditions of working-class depression far more drastic than ours.

"In Detroit I would say that first-class Leninist trade union tactics have been exemplified in the last period. Our comrades in unions there have been patient and careful. But they did not... play dead

"There are thousands of workers and youth open to socialist alternatives.

A great deal in the future depends on how many of those thousands we can recruit and educate."

in the general political arena. They ran candidates for office. They jumped into the Square D strike. They started activity among the students at Wayne University. They distributed our press and made it known to thousands of new workers...

"We find here in LA, where a modest amount of recruiting goes on steadily all the time, that very few if any of the new recruits consist of this remarkable selected breed known as 'advanced elements' who are supposedly 'best equipped to understand our world program'. On the contrary they are contacts flushed out and attracted by our activity in the election campaigns, by our agitational fight on the issue of the Korean War, and in general by our rounded program of activities...

"The point is, nobody gave us a list of specially qualified hotshots to canvass. The contacts and recruits were attracted by our activities. We never heard of them before. They heard about us, because we were out in the open trying to attract attention by all kinds of activities".

EVERY BIT OF WORK done now to build an effective organisation of educated Marxists, well integrated into the labour movement, will be repaid a hundred times over in the great mass

Fighting to keep the link

THE BIG TRADE union votes against breaking Labour/union links reflect a genuine and widespread rank-and-file revolt.

But to make that revolt effective it needed co-ordination and organisation. It needed to be tied together by a coherent campaign.

That campaign — "Keep the Link" — was initiated by *Socialist Organiser* supporters, and has been organised mostly by us and by comrades from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

In key unions like the NCU and UCW the conference motions to keep the link were moved

or seconded by *Socialist Organiser* supporters.

Those motions could not have won without the rank-and-file revolt. But the rank-and-file revolt did not guarantee victory. Without the organised effort necessary to get the right proposal on the agenda and to unite people round it, protest could well have been too haphazard to overcome the entrenched obstruction of the union leaders.

The campaign is an example of how a small group can make a big impact — so long as it is able to identify the key issues and work out policies that correspond to the real needs of the movement.

Build the left



The protest against the pit closures of last year did not become powerful enough to challenge the hold of the labour bureaucracy

struggles to come, just as everything the French Trotskyists were able to do in the semi-revolutionary General Strike of May-June 1968 depended on the tenacious, apparently thankless work they had done in the grim days of the 1950s and early '60s.

Socialists are now in a race with the fascists and the neo-Nazis for the future of Britain. Our part in the race, for now, is mostly unglamorous training and preparation, rather than the spectacular dash down the final straight. But it is no less vital. We have to win.

Lessons of '68

Be prepared!

THE FRENCH GENERAL Strike of 1968 is the most potent example of revolutionary working-class revolt in a modern advanced capitalist country.

It is also a clear example of how dogged day-to-day Marxist activity in unfavourable times is vitally important for the shape and direction of the big working-class explosions that come after those unfavourable times.

In May-June 1968, eight million workers struck. All large-scale industry was shut down. Hundreds or thousands of factories were occupied. For a while not only the government but even the capitalist state wobbled. On 22 May the police federation came out in support of the strike and declared that the police would refuse to be used against it. On the same day, conscripts in one infantry regiment put out a declaration: "The young people and the workers must know that the soldiers will never shoot workers... Long live solidarity!"

There had been a build-up of protest in France for about three years before 1968, but no one expected the explosion.

France had been ruled by right-wing governments, under De Gaulle, for ten years. Membership of the main trade union federation, the CGT, had fallen from 2.5 million in 1952 to 1.5 million in 1948. Membership of the national students' union, UNEF, had fallen from 100,000 (out of 200,000 university students) in 1960 to 50,000 (out of 540,000) in 1968.

For almost twenty years the revolutionary left in France had been working in grim isolation. Having grown rapidly after World War 2 to about 1,500 members in 1968, the Trotskyist movement dwindled to about 150 people, split into different groups, in 1952.

After years of dogged battling against the stream, the Trotskyist groups revived a bit in the mid-'60s. But on the eve of May 1968 they were still extremely weak even by comparison with the revolutionary left in Britain today.

The JCR, the most prominent group of the far left in 1968, had only 300 members. Only one left group — Voix Ouvrière (now Lutte Ouvrière) — had the resources to produce a weekly paper. The whole of the revolutionary left — Maoists, anarchists, Trotskyists, the lot — numbered perhaps 3,000, including unorganised sympathisers.

In May 1968 those small revolutionary groups played a role out of all proportion to their size. For years everything they said had met almost blank indifference. Now their slogans resounded far and wide.

The general strike was triggered by big street battles between students and police. Yet the student protest which led up to those battles might well have petered out were it not for the leadership and political

arguments of one of the revolutionary groups, the JCR (arguing, as it happened, against other revolutionary groups whose policies would have let the movement peter out).

The trade unions called a one-day general strike on 13 May. In itself that was not dramatic: token one-day general strikes were common in France. What made the difference was several major factories being occupied by the workers over the next three days. In two of those factories, organised revolutionaries played a big role in getting the occupations — at Sud Aviation, Nantes (the OCI) and at Renault Billancourt (Voix Ouvrière).

Without those revolutionaries, quite possibly, the industrial protest would have quickly petered out.

Where the official union leaders could control things, the factory occupations were limited to a minority of union activists. One of the most active occupations was by the 10,000 workers at the Nuclear Research Centre at Saclay, near Paris. They organised a highly democratic workers' council and established links with farmers to organise food supplies for workers in a nearby shanty-town. They requisitioned medical supplies from the Centre's stocks for the casualties on the barricades.

That didn't happen automatically. The arguments and activity of organised revolutionaries (in this case, the JCR) were crucial.

In Nantes a sort of workers' council — the Central Strike Committee — ran the city for a week.

It happened at Nantes and not elsewhere, not because Nantes workers were generally more militant, but because Nantes was the one city in France where a revolutionary group (the OCI, with anarcho-syndicalist allies) had a strong position in the local labour movement.

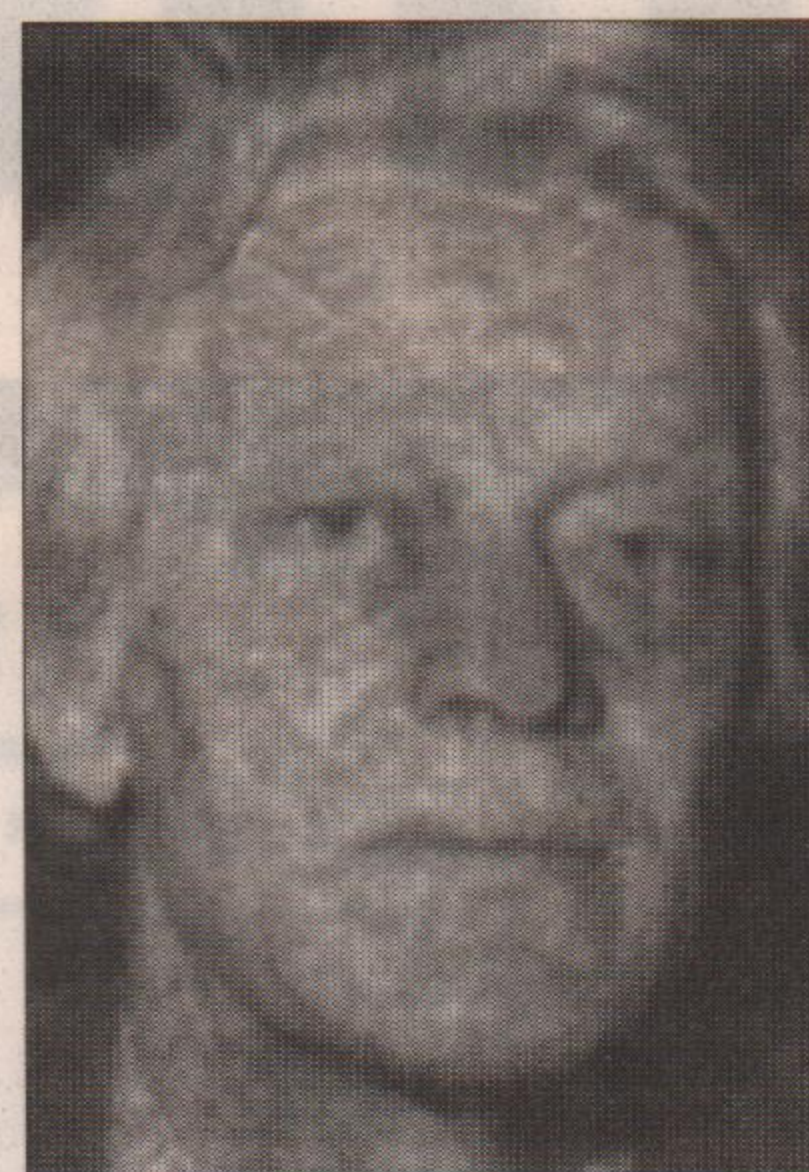
In short, in those few factories across France where revolutionaries had a real presence, that presence was suddenly transformed from a lonely voice of propaganda into a spark for action.

Everything positive the Trotskyists had achieved over years of dogged work was amplified and expanded; and, correspondingly, all the small failures and weaknesses of their years of isolation translated into huge gaps in their ability to shape events.

It would be foolish to expect an explosion like France's 1968 in Britain soon. A revival of working-class militancy is certain, but almost certainly much more gradual and less dramatic than what happened in France. Yet the general lesson still holds: every bit of progress made by revolutionaries now will be repaid a hundredfold in the big struggles to come, and every failure now will cost us a hundredfold.

EP Thompson

He served human liberty



EP Thompson

Edward Thompson, historian, poet, anti-nuclear campaigner and libertarian socialist, died on 28 August, aged 69, after a long illness. Alan Johnson surveys his life and work.

EP THOMPSON once wrote:

“One must, to survive as an unassimilated socialist in this infinitely assimilative culture, put oneself into a school of awkwardness. One must make one’s sensibility all knobbly — all knees and elbows of refusal.”

In 1956, when the smoke rose above Budapest as the Russian tanks put down the Hungarian Revolution, he left the British Communist Party and “began reasoning”.

Unlike many he resisted the assimilative pressures of both capitalism and Stalinism for the next 37 years, and his ‘knobbly sensibility’, and his reason provided the left with its greatest historian, its most powerful polemicist against the creeping authoritarianism of the British state and, ‘knees and elbows of refusal’ to the fore, its most indefatigable campaigner in the 1980s against the threat of nuclear annihilation.

And yet he was formed by the “communist” tradition of the thirties and forties. He scarcely mentions the figures and debates of an earlier classical Marxism. For all his strengths he remained, as he said in one of the last interviews of his life, “A child of my time, an unreconstructed anti-fascist of that time”. Any appreciation of the life and work of EP Thompson must be sensible of the baleful effects of this lineage as well as pay tribute to his peerless reconstruction of the lived experience of the English working

class, the poetry of this writing and the moral power — ‘the vocabulary of desire’ — he brought to the left through his work and through the example of his life.

He was born in 1924. His father, whom Thompson acknowledged as the major influence upon his childhood, was a missionary to India, but was more interested in writing poetry and supporting the Indian national movement than in religion. Both Nehru and Gandhi were visitors to his home; the former, according to legend, showing the young Edward how to play a straight cricket bat. His fierce hostility to the British state, undiminished to his death, was first kindled here when “I always assumed in my childhood that any of the really distinguished visitors to the house were automatically going to be enemies of the British state.”

The second world war was the key formative event in Thompson’s life. Aged 17, he was called up, and served as a lieutenant in a tank battalion in Italy, fighting in the Battle of Casino.

In 1942, with his brother Eric, he joined the Communist Party. Eric was executed shortly after by Bulgarian fascists while on a Special Operations mission in support of the partisans, an event which scarred his younger brother, providing him with his inspiration for a life of activity for socialism.

After getting his degree from Cambridge in 1946 Thompson returned to Yugoslavia as part of an International Brigade building a railway to Sarejevo. His companion on the journey, and for the rest of his life, was Dorothy Thompson. The couple married in 1948, the year he began working for the Workers’ Education Association in the extra-mural department of Leeds University.

TO JOIN THE Communist Party in the war years was to join a patriotic organisation fully behind the war effort, wrapping itself in the flag of liberalism, and uncritical of Stalin. Thompson himself wrote later in his “Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski” (his worst work) that his was a ‘hang-dog’, shamefaced sort of Stalinism. But this is not so. In his study of William Morris in 1955 (a magnificent work written at the age of 30) he wrote: “Stalin’s blueprint of the advance to Communism promise[s] fulfilment” of Morris’s hopes. He also wrote that Morris’s utopian

vision of “A Factory as it Might Be” under communism was being fulfilled in the workplace of the Soviet Union.

When one considers how much stress Morris placed on creative artisanal labour and then thinks of the mass of evidence of the barbarities of Stalinism available by the mid-’50s, this is a measure of how much of a distorting and corrupting influence Stalinism was. But Thompson was to break with it one year later.

In 1956 Nikita Khrushchev the Soviet leader made a speech which criticised Stalin’s record, outlining a few of the abuses the Trotskyists had been pointing out for decades.

“I was absolutely astounded” said Thompson. When Russian tanks crushed the Hungarian uprising

months later he left the party.

Thompson, “refusing to enter the well-worn paths of apostasy”, began to organise with other ex-CPers and with independent socialists to establish the ‘New Left’. He edited *The New Reasoner* from 1957-59, and helped to establish the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He became a figure of international stature.

What were the politics of the New Left?

“We addressed ourselves to the task of encouraging into being in Britain a movement of socialist thought and practice, purged of the old religious anti-communism, founded experientially upon British conditions, which was revolutionary, rational, democratic: which accentuated self-activity, which was sensitive to cultural forms of exploitation, which affirmed the values of égalité.”

The movement was, however, very loose indeed, both organisationally and politically. Thompson, reacting against the Stalinist caricature of the Leninist party, presented this as a virtue, and no doubt it was experienced as a liberation:

“The Clubs and discussion-centres will be places beyond the reach of the interference of the bureaucracy, where initiative rests in the hands of the rank and file... Their influence will pervade the labour movement.”

But licence alone does not a movement build. Despite the energies of Thompson and



Influences that shaped the young EP Thompson: the Spanish Civil War and Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin

EP Thompson

others, this left reformism collapsed a few years later, its anarchic methods revealed as a vice. "My colleagues and I turned back to work in our specialist professional or practical fields. We no longer represented a coherent and identifiable position".

The collapse of the New Left of the 1950s was a product fundamentally not of organisational failings but of a deafening political silence about, of all things, the communist tradition itself. Those who 'manned the stations of 1956' to fight Stalinism, as Thompson was fond of putting it, never provided an account of why those stations needed to be manned at all (the degeneration of the Russian revolution), nor ever clarified their own relationship to reformism: mostly they turned up their noses at the democratic, rational and revolutionary tradition whose militants had been manning stations since the twenties — the Trotskyist tradition.

Perry Anderson in his scrupulous study of Thompson's work points out that "for him it is as if the history of the Communist movement had started in 1936. There is virtually no mention of any major event or debate within the Third International before that date."

The absence of an engagement with classical Marxism after Marx was to condition not only Thompson's activism but his history-writing also.

BEFORE THOMPSON 'labour history' tended to be histories of institutions and organisations: the Webbs, for instance, with their histories of the doings of leaders, or GDH Cole, with narrow economism, ignorance of culture and marginalisation of women's experience. While the Hammonds did look at the lived experience of the working class, they did so from the vantage point of radical liberalism. What Thompson managed to achieve with *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) was to reconstruct the very textures of working-class experience and reveal the revolutionary strivings of that class in the period of its formation.

Here was a new kind of history-writing which rejected the thin-lipped progressivism of the reformist labour historians and their bureaucratic narrative of a smooth evolution of 'this great movement of ours'.

Making is a study of the making of the working class between 1790 and 1830. Thompson offers a new way to think about 'class'. He felt that thitherto

"Class was seen simply as a function of the relations of production. My emphasis was much more on the way in which working people themselves made the culture and political forms which emerged. The revolution which did not happen in Britain in the 1790s nevertheless permeated deep in the next 20 to 30 years in the sense that the supporters of Tom Paine and Republican-



Thompson broke with the Communist Party after Russian tanks suppressed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956

ism and *The Rights of Man* were driven underground and made common cause with the trade unions which were also banned at that time; so coming together they created a working-class consciousness of a very unusual kind."

Thompson sought to establish that "the working class made itself as much as it was made." He shifted the focus of historians of labour to the political and cultural relations between classes and to the process by which the consciousness of the working class is formed. In his famous words:

"Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born — or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way this experience is handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and cultural forms. If the experience appears as determined, class consciousness does not... class is defined

by men as they live their own history and, in the end, this is its only definition."

The book traces the key moments in this making: the English radical traditions of the 18th century from religious dissent to Paineite insurgency; the Industrial Revolution and how, in the words of Sheila Rowbotham (Thompson's heir if anyone is):

"Industrial capitalism tears through the existence of human beings, yet they are always themselves present, striving, deliberating, and rebelling, hewing out of exploitation another possibility"

— from Parliamentary campaigns to Luddism.

In telling the story he sought to "rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' handloom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan and even the deluded followers of Joanna Southcott from the enormous condescension of posterity."

HIS APPROACH HAS been criticised by Perry Anderson for losing the objective constraints which surround agency and consciousness:

"The result is to resolve the complex manifold of objective-subjective determinations whose totalization actually generated the English working class into a simple dialectic between suffering and resistance whose whole movement is internal to the subjectivity of the class".

I think it is possible to agree with Anderson while still seeing *Making* as a great book — not least because he does not write of 'complex manifolds' and 'totalizations'!

When he wished to break from the mechanical determinism of Stalinism, Thompson moved not to the classical Marxism of Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci, but to a 'socialist humanism' in

which the essence of Marxism, the analytical primacy of production, is dissolved into the superstructure, and mechanical determinism is replaced not by a dialectical tension between structure and agency but by indeterminacy.

In truth the Marxist tradition was not Thompson's. He wrote that after Marx his 'most intimate pantheon' was Milton, Swift, Wordsworth and, of course William Morris. He remained an English romantic and he brought to Marxism the strengths and weaknesses of that tradition.

One of these strengths was a feel for the importance of what might be called sensibility. In the article 'The Moral Economy of the Crowd' (reproduced in *Customs in Common*, 1991) he portrayed the food riots of 18th century England as being the product not simply of hunger but of a

"popular consensus about what was legitimate and illegitimate

practices in marketing, milling, baking even. This in turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions quite as much as actual deprivations was the usual occasion for direct action."

Three interventions stand out from Thompson's last two decades of political life.

In 1978 he published *The Poverty of Theory*, a 200 page polemic against the French Marxist Louis Althusser. It was an attempt to skewer Althusserianism, then highly influential on the British academic left, as a theorisation of Stalinism, and to present the case for a Marxism based upon the 'moment of 1956' — democratic, rational and based on the self-activity of the working class.

Much in Althusser was awful, not least his

"He sought to 'rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite, the utopian artisan from the enormous condescension of posterity'."



An early trade union wood cut

EP Thompson

denial of human agency — human beings were merely ‘bearers of structures’. Althusser’s British disciples like Hindess and Hirst, who are now on the hard right of the Labour Party, were even worse. The heart of Thompson’s critique was well made, but it has always seemed to me that Thompson and Althusser represented two overdeveloped and partial responses to Marx’s famous dictum that “Men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing”, Thompson taking the first clause (agency) and Althusser the second (structure), while historical materialism at its best involves the imaginative synthesis of both — Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* for instance, about which Thompson the historian never said a word.

Secondly, in 1981, he published *Writing by Candlelight*, a collection of essays published during the 1970s and aimed at both the British state which

“for two decades, whether under Conservative or Labour administrations, has been taking liberties, and those liberties were once ours” and at the media and the “manufacture (and suppression) of opinion [which] has now acquired an unprecedented reach, which threatens the democratic process, not at its margins but at its very centre.”

Today these essays are as important as ever — trial by jury is under threat, prison regimes are to be ‘toughened up’ and Mr Rupert Murdoch and his cables are creeping up our streets and into our imaginations.

Thirdly, and taking up all his energies in the 1980s, was what he called “the most serious political work I have ever done or will ever do in my life”, the building of European Nuclear Disarmament (END). It began with that ‘knobbly sensibility’ and its ‘knees and elbows of refusal’:

“When I heard about the Cruise Missiles which were coming along with the welcome of the British Government, which was going to put them down all over these islands, I just blew my top and decided they weren’t going to do that if I could stop it.”

He wrote one of the most influential political pamphlets of the century, *Protest and Survive*, and “engaged himself in everything from the administrative minutiae of choosing the design for badges to the high politics of ideological struggle”, as Mary Kaldor was to put it.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty disagreed with Thompson’s cross-class appeal

to all people of good will, at the time expressed in his article ‘The Logic of Exterminism’. We argued for the peace movement to orient to the labour movement and for the labour movement to rouse itself. But the imagination, the ardour and style of the peace movement was provided in no small part by Thompson.

As an 18 year old I remember hearing him speak in a packed hall in Newcastle in 1980, and travelling home on the bus ready to change the world, preferably before the week was out. I have never experienced that at a Labour Party or trade union meeting.

DESPITE THE CRITICAL stance this article has adopted, I believe EP Thompson was a socialist with whom we in the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty have far more in common — and from whom we can learn far more — than we do with many of the sectarian and unreasoning r-r-revolutionaries of today’s far left, who have, as Thompson observed in another context, “made such hideous faces that they are likely to be stuck like that for life” — words which will probably be as true for the SWP as they were for the WRP before them.

Firstly, he remained committed to reason and argument as the life-blood of a radical movement; and we who have tried to maintain that practice of reasoning in the face of an ignorant and unreasoning left can take strength from his dogged example.

Secondly, he remained to the last a ‘from below’ socialist looking to the creativity and power of people acting collectively as the agency of social change, not to the state, or left MPs and councillors. ‘Look Around You! Feel Your Power!’ he shouted to the mass CND rally in Trafalgar Square in the early 1980s. He attacked “the old statist norms and bureaucratic forms to be found in the orthodox traditions of both communism and social democracy”. And he could write (and, as I discovered, speak) in a way which could, like Shelley, ‘lift the slave before his lord.’

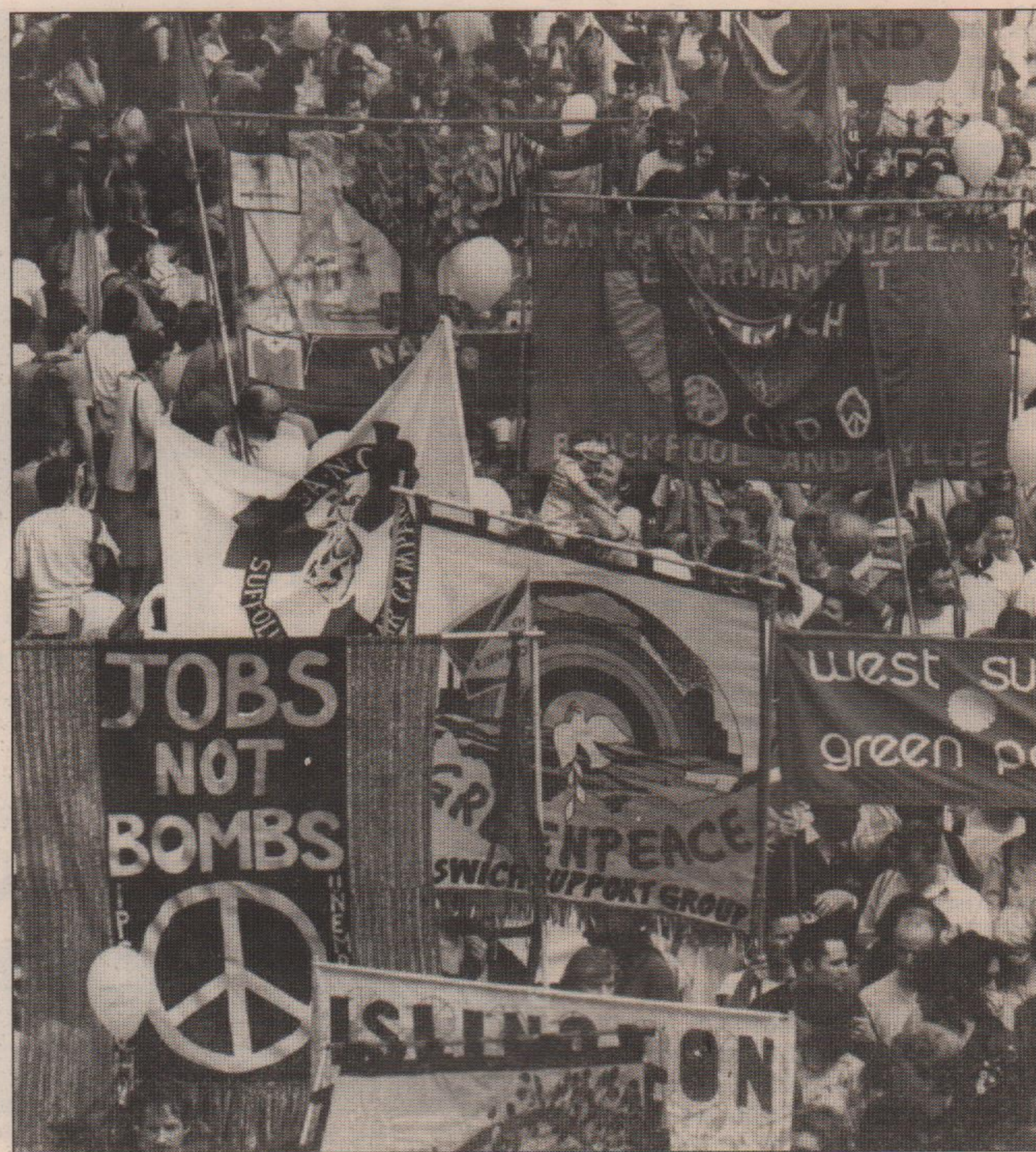
Thirdly, he stood for the transformation of the existing labour movement and against the politics of lifestyle and identity. In 1980 he defended the right of Marxists to be members of the Labour Party against Dr Conor Cruise O’Brien in these terms:

“As a Marxist in the Labour Party I have always tried to envisage a politics that will enable us, in this country, to effect a transition to a socialist society — and a society a great deal more democratic, in work as well as in government, than our present

“Marxists like myself by service and by democratic commitment are wholly entitled to be members’ of the Labour Party.”



The place of Marxists is in the labour movement, however bureaucratic it might be



At the end of his life Thompson devoted his time to campaigning against deployment of nuclear weapons

one. I know not by what right or office Dr O’Brien presumes to advise the Labour Party to purge itself of Marxists like myself who by service and by democratic commitment are wholly entitled to be members. Marxism, from the days of William Morris and Eleanor Marx, is among the traditions that have fed that party.”

Thompson rang the alarm bells about the spread of the ‘politics of identity’. He saw in such politics not an alternative route to liberation but a denial of reason itself. His warning is worth quoting in full because we suffer today from these politics in almost exactly the ways Thompson warned that we would.

“The notion has got about that one’s gender or colour or preferences must always, in every situation, be the primary existential facts, and that these differences must be nearly insurmountable barriers inhibiting common political action in a hundred other kinds of situation. This may start from valid premises. But when the notion is pressed too far, and when those who are under common threat of nuclear war, of loss of rights and of work, or under the common exploitation of money, can no longer work effectively together because they must always nurse primary differences in the form of grudges, then this is dangerously divisive. It marks the end of important affirmative traditions of radical, socialist and labour politics. Granted that very significant primary demands, especially of women, got hushed or annexed in mass movements of the past, then the answer is to convert such movements and their organisations to a new kind of attention to these demands. It is certainly not to throw away the possibility of a general movement, and leave us as a lot of fragmented and quarrelling pieces in the face of power.”

Thompson’s answer then is to fight to transform the existing movement, to make it habitable for women, black people, lesbians and gay men, not to separate off behind the high walls of ‘identity’, each shouting its own exclusive ‘truths’.

Fourthly, Thompson brought to his writ-

ing a moral vision which the left all too often lacks. Standing as he did in the tradition of William Morris, there was no better ‘educator of desire’. I also think Thompson was right to argue that there has been

“a subordination of the imaginative utopian faculties within the later Marxist tradition: its lack of moral self-consciousness or even a vocabulary of desire, its inability to project any images of the future, its tendency to fall back in lieu of these upon the utilitarian earthly paradise — the maximisation of economic growth”.

Marxism has paid a high price for taking too seriously the notion that ‘we should not dream up the future only the revolutionary working class will create’. We cannot, after the example of Stalinism, afford the luxury of that particular silence any longer. We must return again and again to the task of imagining futures and ‘educating desire’; or are we to leave the imagination and desire of the working class to the Greens, while we ‘take care of the strikes’?

If we turn to this work, Edward Thompson will prove a priceless resource. But he will not be sufficient.

Perry Anderson’s judgement still seems to me to be correct:

“Morality without a strategy, a human socialism equipped only with an ethic against a hostile world, is doomed to needless tragedy: a nobility without force leads to disaster, as the names of Dubcek and Allende remind us. Thompson’s formula for William Morris furnishes the fitting synthesis: what revolutionary socialism above all needs today is moral realism — with equal stress on each of the terms”.

Trying to think of a fitting epitaph for EP Thompson I was reminded of “Swift’s Epitaph” written by Yeats, one of EP Thompson’s favourite poets. From what I know of Swift he never deserved it. But Thompson does, for he:

*has sailed into his rest;
Savage indignation there
Cannot lacerate his breast.
Imitate him if you dare,
World besotted traveller;
Served human liberty.*

The right to be disgusted

Cinema

Matt Cooper reviews *The Baby of Macon*

PETER GREENAWAY'S films are uncompromisingly "art". His concessions to the audience are few. He does not even try to entertain or provide quietly enjoyable evenings at the cinema. Where a film like *Nightmare on Elm Street* titillates us with "cartoonified" shocks and horrors that are too unreal to upset us, Greenaway does everything in his considerable power to make his horror genuinely disgusting and truly shocking.

Macon is Greenaway's most unrelenting and dark piece to date. It has been panned by the critics for being "disgusting". They are right, the film is disgusting. But they have missed the point: this is exactly what it is meant to be.

With Greenaway's trademark lavish colour, dark undertones and sets created with geometric precision, the story is told in the form of a play performed in the Cathedral at Macon in the mid-seventeenth century in France. An

old, diseased woman gives birth to a miraculous and beautiful baby. The people take it as a good omen, a sign that famine will pass. And so it does.

Accordingly, both the local peasantry and aristocracy worship the baby. One of the baby's older sisters claims the child as her own virgin birth and tries to exploit the baby for her own gain. The church is jealous and seizes the baby, whose commercial potential it exploits, even more inhumanly.

This film is the second part of a trilogy which started with *Prospero's Books*. It has most in common with another of Greenaway's films: *The cook, the thief, his wife and her lover*. In *The cook* a restaurant is the site where the power of the market is displayed, a power that can not create but only vulgarise beauty, and which must eventually destroy it. In *Macon* the commodification of the saintly child is even more brutal. Unlike *The cook*, it has no moments of reprieve and no final redemption.

Greenaway uses the device of a play within the film to get closer to his audience. Between the audience of the play in the film and the

audience of the film the boundaries between reality and fiction become blurred. The miraculous baby in the play becomes a real miraculous baby. The actors in the film seem unsure of where the line is between play-action and reality. Death and rape on stage become real death and rape. The tool of having actors who are made to realise that this is no longer a game is remarkably effective. Finally, the audience become part of the play.

There is little explicit violence and gore, but the idea of violence is sharp, clear and brutal. And there is nothing titillating about the rape. It is disgusting, unsettling and unpleasant.

At the end of the Second World War Max Horkheimer wrote that history is like an angel being driven forward by an unstoppable wind. Facing backwards, the angel can only see the death, destruction and immiseration of the past; the future is undecided. Clearly, Greenaway can only see backwards; but at least he has the honesty to tell us what he sees.

If you like to go to the movies to eat popcorn and get away from it all, give this one a miss.



The Baby of Macon

God is not dead!

Television

Paddy Dollard reviews "Must The Priest Believe?" (BBC1, *Heart of the Matter*, Sunday 19 September)

A TV PROGRAMME ENTITLED "Must The Priest Believe?" — in God! — would, I thought, as my eye first flicked over the programme page, be a satire or a skit.

But no, it was a serious edition of Joan Bakewell's *Heart of the Matter*, provoked by the case of a Church of England priest, Anthony Freeman, "sacked" for publishing a book explaining why he no longer believes in God.

He doesn't want to be sacked either — he thinks he should continue as a priest! The exclamation mark embodies my own incredulity — but possibly my ideas about these things are old-fashioned. There are quite a number of such C of E priests, it seems, in regular communion with each other, if not with the God they no longer believe in.

Anthony Freeman explained himself clearly. When he now talks of "God", he said, the word did still have meaning for him but not a supernatural one. God is a word representing something human like "Duty" and "Conscience", not the traditional God conceived as a divine person who intervenes in the affairs of humankind.

Humanity made God; God did not make humanity — as Marxists have always said! When priests of the Church of England start to say it, organised religion is in a bad way.

150 years ago, for almost everyone, and 100, or even 50, years ago, for most people, religion intruded everywhere, hand-in-hand with the state, to tell you what you could and could not do, to tell you what you could and could not do. Now look at it! We see it melting and dissolving before our eyes, like an iceberg in a warming sea.

When, a hundred years ago, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche summarised his age's growing post-Darwin awareness of the real Descent of Man with the bold statement: "God is dead", it

was immensely shocking, startling, terrifying. Today, priests of the Church of England can say it casually on TV before millions, and with no visible sense of shock or terror!

We have moved so far that, I suppose, many people today have to make a special effort before they can understand the terror and shock of such an idea — or the fervent sense of elation and liberation with which a minority received the doctrine that God was dead.

It may be true, as someone said, that the British labour movement "owed more to Methodism than to Marxism", but the British labour movement also owes a great deal to the secularists. They too helped shape it. A hundred years ago one and the same man — Edward Aveling — could produce *The Student's Marx* and *The Student's Darwin* for the same working-class audience, and believed that he served the same cause with both primers.

But, oh, how disappointed they would be, those industrious spreaders of science, enlightenment, humanism and atheism inside the early working-class movement, if they could see what is replacing the once oppressively powerful and confident structures of official religion that now fall apart before our eyes!

Not science and enlightenment, or highmindedness and the proud ethics of human solidarity, but, among vast masses of people, regression from the worked-out internal coherence of the old structured religions to the Tarot card, astrology, and Mrs Thatcher's ethics of the piranha pool.

From the Virgin Mary to Mystic Meg is not progress! Except, perhaps, in so far as no-one feels obliged to coerce you into believing in astrology.

Marx's famous summary of what religion is ends by explaining why we fight religion.

"Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again."

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people."

"The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions..."

"Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man will wear the chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he will shake off the chain and cull the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusiones man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve round himself and therefore round his true sun..."

We are shedding the old religion but, so far, failing to replace it with a higher, rational, human outlook. People have become disillusioned in organised religion, but not freed from superstitious illusion, nor thereby spurred to do something about their condition. Instead, we live in the ruins, the debris, and the weeds and bacteria of decaying old religions.

Why? People in our society desperately need consolation, and need the illusion of a magical helper, whether Mystic Meg, the Virgin Mary, or — for earache in the west of Ireland — the blood, soaked in a piece of red gauze, of a "St Martin's cock" whose throat was cut on St Martin's Day.

Lenin tried to explain the survival of religion amid the enlightenment of his time by the effects of the social insecurities that are inseparable from capitalism — which reproduce in modern life the insecurities imposed by nature in earlier times.

That is true, but not fundamental. Human beings live for a short time, a life without intrinsic meaning. We can at best give meaning to our individual lives by struggling for the progress and betterment of the species. The individual is and will always be a mere leaf on the biological tree, shaking in the wind, soon gone. There has never yet been a "happy ending" to the story of any individual human being, and there never will be!

From those terrible brute underlying facts of human existence comes the need for denial, for wish-fulfilment, for consolation — all the things that combine with the insecurities of daily life

and with fantasies about a benign God-parent (and his malign relatives!) up above somewhere, to make and remake religions.

The alternative is stark, terrible, and difficult to sustain. It is:

"To face reality with seeing eyes
To fix with lucid gaze advancing night
And dare to know where it is you are, and what...
To build within intrinsically blind
Meaningless lives, an expanding human meaning
That extends our patch of light, although you know
That there is not nor can there ever be
More than a short staring back with life-light-ed eyes
Into inexorable lowering endless night."

God, or Mystic Meg, is easier than that harsh and comfortless truth! In a society governed by a profound and pervasive sense of human solidarity, it might seem less terrible, but capitalist society isolates the individual human being in a way that magnifies the underlying terror and horror on which we must construct our lives. It also, as Lenin said, creates an environment of needless insecurity in which the blind chance of the market rules, and often wreaks havoc.

Thus, though science tends to eliminate religion, nevertheless religion seems only to regress and diminish — back to primitive superstitions. It mutates. It does not disappear. The need is still too great.

We have failed to outgrow religion because we have so far failed to get further than the prehistory of humankind. Not even atheist C of E priests will make religion disappear! First, humanity must raise itself out of its still half-savage prehistory. Then the fantasies, hysterias, and imaginary consolations of religion will drain away — or most of them will, for most people, most of the time. A sense of truth and a self-respecting fidelity to truth will replace fond delusion.

Humankind will begin to be able to stand upright, up off our knees, groping for full self-possession at last.

STUDENTS

For a united, fighting National Union of Students! NUS leaders' no-fight policy sparks disaffiliation disaster

By Alison Brown,
Convenor, South
Yorkshire Area NUS

ON THE initiative of sabbatical Student Union officers at South Bank University, a letter has been circulated around the big universities calling for disaffiliation from the National Union of Students.

For some years now, the right-wing Labour leadership of the National Union of Students have sought and gained support from right-wing "independents". When those independents have become an election threat they've been bought off with guaranteed places on the NUS Executive.

Now, however, a number of discontented sabbatical officers are questioning their affiliation to NUS.

Many student unions pay as much as £50,000 a year, and they feel they're simply not getting their money's worth.

In the letter the student unionists propose the setting up of "an independent alternative which will be along the same guidelines as the CBI, which is an independent

body, not a union, and to whom the government tends to listen"

But the Confederation of British Industry is a union, a union of bosses! And for sure the Tory government "tends to listen". The CBI are the Tories in industry, they're the representatives of big capital.

South Bank are in a blind alley; but NUS leadership are cornered. They feel forced to make a deal about reducing affiliation payments from some universities. They will probably do it at a semi-clandestine meeting this.

But a special deal for some will lead to a special deal for all. NUS's income will be massively reduced. Who is to say a reduction in the affiliation fee will be a big enough concession to the right wing? What if they make political demands? How far will the NUS leadership go to appease these people?

The Government's proposals will make NUS and student unions in Britain little more than service organisations offering competitive rates on beer, snacks, travel etc.

The NUS response has been surrender: voluntarily going for charitable status, suggest-



"Those of us who have built demonstrations have been denounced as dinosaurs".

ing a government body be set up to police the activities of local unions, and so on.

The independents only take the next logical step from what NUS has said and done over the last few years. Lobbying Tory ministers has become a speciality. NUS President Lorna Fitzsimmons having cosy chats at Tory party HQ is now the norm. Her talk of being a venture capitalist when she's through with NUS has helped to cre-

ate a culture that inevitably leads to some union officers wanting an NUS in the style of the CBI.

The NUS leadership has become more and more passive in the face of Tory attacks. When students all over Britain occupied colleges in 1991/92 over cuts and overcrowding, Lorna Fitzsimmons (then VP Education, now NUS president) said that "Occupations are anathema to the student

movement".

Those of us who have called, supported and built action such as demonstrations, and have supported workers on strike, have been denounced as dinosaurs, living in the past.

Yet if NUS had called and built action; if they had run NUS in an open and democratic way, carrying out democratically-decided mandates; if they had run affiliation drives to involve more

students — then NUS would now be in a position to call on its members to oppose the Tories attacks, without the additional threat of big disaffiliations and bankruptcy for NUS.

A big disaffiliation campaign now will mean a weakened NUS. We need one united campaign to defeat the Tories' plans.

Organise to save NUS and for a democratic fighting leadership!

Graduate Tax is no answer

By Hannah Wood

COLLEGE BOSSES have decided it's about time students paid up and gave them some money. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of Higher Education colleges have put out a report supporting Graduate Tax.

By far the most likely form of Graduate Tax is a tax to pay off the debt run up by students to pay tuition fees.

This will open the way for elite colleges to charge higher fees, and will directly attack

working-class students and graduates who earn less, like women and black people.

College bosses have up till now called for the Government to increase funding for the increasing number of students. Now they have decided to turn on students. Unsurprisingly, the Labour Front Bench and Labour Students are supporting the college bosses.

Workers and students should make it clear to college bosses that the solution is to fight for more Government money and defend free education.

Tory market wrecks Further Education

By Tracy McGuire

THE GOVERNMENT has been changing the way Further Education colleges are run. In April they made colleges into independent corporations that have to compete with each other for students and money.

The Governments' model for our colleges is a factory that churn out a product — that's us students — for the consumer, that's the employers. They want an education machine that teaches us only what we need to get a job. The Government is cramming in more and more students

with less and less money per head into our colleges. That is why many colleges now have waiting lists to sit and work in the library, and students have to buy more and more things out of their own pockets.

The Government try to deny that they have a pile-us-high and teach us cheap policy. But Britain still has the worst take up of post-16 education in the western world. Any Government that seriously wanted to change this situation would fund further education properly and would give all students over 16 a minimum grant of £70 a week. What this Government has actually done is

to cut 16 and 17 year olds out of the benefit system all together.

This Government will pay you £29 a week to be a skivvie on a Youth Training scheme. YT is not real training. It's cheap labour for sweat shop bosses. If you want to get real training or to study at college, this Government will not give you a penny to live on. Government cuts have even killed the few local council grants that used to be available to students.

The truth is that this Government could not care less if young people just rot on the dole or live in dire poverty to get through college.

Lecturers in Further Education colleges are facing a huge attack on their wages and conditions as the new 'corporate' colleges try to drive down costs. They have taken strike action and are planning more action to defend themselves and education. Students should support their action and take action ourselves.

We want a properly funded education system.

We want at least £70 a week to live on while we study. We want the skivvie YT scheme scrapped and replaced with real training with a guaranteed job, trade union rates of pay, and full trade union rights.

Picket the Tory conference!

By Rosie Woods

Tory Party conference this year is sure to be the usual bigots' bunfight, with Tory MPs and Party stalwarts vying with each other to be as anti-youth, anti-union, anti-single parents, racist and right wing as possible. Last year both John Patten and John Major brought the conference to its feet by saying they were going to smash student unions. The Tories have been attacking education and students for years, but they are also divided and in crisis. That's why student activists in Cumbria and Lancashire Area NUS are organising a picket of the Tories' conference in Blackpool on Tuesday 5 October. Contact Rosie Woods or Pete Alder, SCAN office, Lancaster University Student Union, 0524 65201 x 2192

National demonstration

Hands off our student unions!
No to graduate tax!
Wednesday 3 November
Assemble All Saints Park, Oxford Road, Manchester, midday
Called by Manchester Area NUS

Save our Student Unions' re-launch meeting

Saturday 9 October
Birmingham
Building a broad based campaign to defend student unions
Everyone welcome
For more details phone Kev Sexton or Elaine Jones on 071 272 8900

Women's campaign ditches action

By Elaine Jones

SUPPORTING the Manchester Area NUS demo on 3 November would be divisive, or so the NUS Women's Committee decided on 15 September.

Labour Students and the

Union of Jewish Students voted to ditch women's campaign policy to support direct action, and instead are doing nothing to fight voluntary membership.

However, all is not lost. The Women's Committee did vote in favour of an international

women's charter, "a charter of rights that can be applied to women all over the world". Well, who can argue with that? Why mess about with issues that you can actually influence when you can do something as grand as an international women's charter?

Real left and fake left

By Richy Carrothers

LEFT UNITY is leading the campaign against government attacks on NUS and local student unions, and at the same time having to fight the official Labour leadership of NUS.

What are the rest of the left in NUS doing. At the last NUS Executive meeting, on 8-9 September, the SWP exec member spent two days keeping very quiet in return for the right wings support of the Unity Demo on 16 October. The SWP

had nothing to say on the graduate tax, tuition fees, or voluntary membership.

The new term has barely begun, and already the r-r-revolutionary SWP are creeping round the leadership and failing to support real left initiatives.

Join Left Unity!

Left Unity is the campaigning left in the National Union of Students
Contact: 9 Love Walk, Camberwell, London SE5
Membership: £2.50 with grant, 50p without; cheques to Left Unity

Tube: stop the victimisations!

Socialist Organiser puts out a regular workplace bulletin on the Central Line, "Tubeworker". This is how we are arguing for strike action to reinstate sacked guards Ray Stelzner and Pat Sikorski.

WHEN Leytonstone guard Ray Stelzner was fitted up and sacked over the ludicrous charge of breaking security tags, we said in 'Tubeworker', "Any of us could be next".

It is a measure of the arrogance of management that they wasted no time before the next trumped-up Disciplinary Board, and it's a further measure of their arro-

gance who they chose to victimise.

Pat Sikorski, whose sacking was confirmed at appeal on Thursday [9 September], is secretary of the RMT District Council.

If they can sack the District Council secretary of the largest union on London Underground Limited, which one of us is safe? None of us!

Pat's sacking is an obvious and straightforward victimisation of a worker for carrying out his trade union duties in defence of another worker. The "threatening behaviour" charge is an obvious lie. There are five witness statements supporting Pat's case that he did nothing wrong. Management's two witness statements blatantly contradict each other on basic points of fact!

If Ray and Pat stay sacked then it will be open season on us all, but also note that it was no coincidence that when Ray and his driver were both on Disciplinary Boards, only the guard got sacked.

As far as management are concerned guards are surplus to requirements and the more that get the sack the better.

There is an avalanche of Disciplinary Boards waiting to happen, mostly due to the new Unauthorised Absence system. The outcome of this fight for Ray's and Pat's reinstatement will decide whether or not management feel confident to push ahead with dozens of Disciplinary Boards — i.e. UB40s — in the next couple of months.

RMT's ballot is starting on Monday [20 September].

Olympics mean cuts

By a Manchester Unison member

John Major has written to the 91 members of the International Olympic Committee urging them to "strike gold with Manchester" — according to a report in the Manchester Evening News.

People in Manchester might suspect that this will hardly help the City's bid to win the 2000 Olympics, and that the dozens of members of the IOC who have already "struck gold" on all-expenses-paid trips to the city (at local peoples' expense) might be put-off by such a brazen offer of more bribes.

Despite the suspicions a lot of people in Manchester do think that if "we" won on 23 September, when the IOC make their decision, things might improve for the city — restoring some of its importance and prestige. But the Manchester 2000 bid is a long way from being the type of self-confident municipal pride that the mill and mine owners of the nineteenth century expressed in the grand municipal buildings of their city. In fact it is a confidence trick.

The bid is a desperate attempt by the weary and worn-out leadership of Manchester City Council's Labour Group to find some way of getting money into the city — at the expense of other inner-city areas. In pursuit of their dream the council has dropped virtually every policy, has ignored every opportunity to campaign against the government's cuts, and has sought to make friends with and copy the techniques of the private sector.

Come 23 September Manchester's residents are likely to find out the bad news about the secret spending on promoting Manchester and the bid that failed. The money that has been spent will mean more cuts in local services. In the outside chance of the bid winning, the news will only be delayed.

For once the press might get the issues in perspective, when they report from Monte Carlo as the decision is made John Major will also be present and they are more likely to pursue him about his doomed leadership of the Tories than the doomed Olympic bid.

Town Hall workers vote on pay

THE RESULT of the ballot of 600,000 white collar Town Hall workers for six days of strike action against the government's 1.5% pay limit is due on 27 September. If the result is positive local Unison branches will have to swing into action quickly to ensure the strike is as effective as possible.

Stewards will have to ensure that all members are backing the action, encouraging active picketing and establishing open strike committees in departments, to make the strike as effective as possible.

Branches should be gearing up to produce daily strike bulletins and organising local lobbies and rallies against the pay limit.

Nationally Unison should call a march on parliament on one of the strike days and should

convene a meeting for representatives of all branches to discuss further escalation of the action.

It is clear that if members have voted for action this dispute will not only be about this year's pay claim for Town Hall

workers, it will be about the government's whole public sector pay policy.

CPSA: right wing leaders plan for disruption

By a DsHSS Section Executive member

The "moderate" leadership of CPSA are using the pretext of opening up regional offices in Leeds and Newcastle to break up the existing section structure for the DsHSS and the Department of Employment.

This will result in members from many of the smaller Agencies within DsHSS and DE losing their links with workers in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Services Agency, which will be the only parts to retain Sec-

tion status in the union.

Some DSS workplaces would have members organised into three separate branches. Members in the Contributions Agency and the Child Support Agency will find their branch offices up to 300 miles away.

While we need (and have got) proper negotiating channels for the different Agencies, there is no need to split up the union branches.

Behind the move is an attack on the left. The Broad Left won the DsHSS Section Executive elections in May overwhelmingly. This reorgan-

isation abolishes the Section Executive! The DE Section Executive is controlled by the left of the "BL84" faction — currently in "unity" talks with the Broad Left — and abolishing the DE section attacks BL84's base.

The 18-page document sent to all members allowed 15 working days for comments from branches — an outrageously unrealistic timetable. The deadline was then extended to 22 October: unfortunately, most members do not know this. However, activists should do all we can to put in submissions.

Genes discovered for Alzheimer's and breast cancer

SCIENCE COLUMN

By Les Hearn

GENETICS RESEARCH into inherited diseases has so far identified the causes of rare through dangerous diseases like sickle cell anaemia, haemophilia and cystic fibrosis. These were perhaps the easiest ones to track down since people with these were easily identifiable.

A genetic link has long been suspected with some forms of Alzheimer's disease (AD). Part of the problem with identifying this is that the disease may be confused with other forms of dementia and hitherto diagnosis has only been definitely possible after death.

Already, two genes associated with a rarer form of AD (mainly affecting people younger than 65) have been found. Now, another gene has been found linked to the most common form.

The gene codes for a protein called apolipoprotein E (ApoE) whose normal function is to ferry cholesterol in the bloodstream. Some people with AD have an altered form of the gene. It may be that this form is active in the wrong part of the body as large amounts of its product ApoE have typically been found in the brains of AD victims.

The ApoE is found in structures called plaques, in tangles of nerve fibrils and in other deposits. It is thought that these structures are linked to the disruption of brain function associated with AD. Not all those with

the altered gene have AD and not all those with the disease have the altered gene so other genes and/or environmental factors must be involved. However, those with one copy of the gene have a 50% chance of getting AD while those with two copies (one from each parent) have a 90% chance of getting it.

If confirmed as a cause of AD, the gene could be the basis of a test for susceptibility. But the knowledge that one might get AD at a very advanced age is not really a guide to action for a young adult. More useful might be to find a way of perhaps turning off the gene in brain cells, if indeed the problem is caused by the gene operating where it shouldn't.

Another disease known in some cases to have a genetic component is breast cancer.

Already researchers believe they are close to identifying the gene responsible for inherited breast cancer, tentatively called BRCA1. It also seems involved in causing inherited cancer of the ovaries.

As with the AD gene, possession of BRCA1 does not automatically mean the carrier will get breast cancer. This makes a test for the gene of limited value.

The gene also seems to be a "tumor-suppressor" gene, its natural role being to control the multiplication of cells. If so, it may be possible to treat carriers with a copy of the correct gene (which has been tried with some cystic fibrosis sufferers) or by giving them injections of the protein produced by the normal gene, which actually carries out the function of controlling cell growth.

Southwark council battle

IT'S GOOD TO report on a Constituency Labour Party that has decisively sided with the workers against the local Labour council.

Peckham Labour Party, in south-east London, has voted to support the schools catering staff.

This is what the catering staff's union, the GMB, are saying: "Cllr John McTiernan, as Chair of Education in 1992, pushed £750,000 of cuts to be doled out to the catering workers in Southwark."

The [department], faced with a massive cut in the budget just 18 months after winning the schools catering contract in-house, is now

intending to make massive cuts to the women part-time workers' pay.

The unions negotiated the catering contract in-house because we trusted the Chair of Education. How wrong we were.

Cllr John McTiernan should resign as Chair of the Education Committee.

The mainly women workforce who provide the school meals had worked for many years for the Inner London Education Authori-

ty. They transferred to Southwark to be faced with cut after cut after cut.

This is a cut too far, Cllr McTiernan. Members of our union are now considering industrial action".

Pay ballot for Telecom workers

THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS Union is recommending a NO vote to British Telecom's 12.9% pay offer and a Yes vote for industrial action.

BT is stepping up the pressure on workers. A new appraisal procedure (APR - Assignment/Realignment) is preparing the way for

compulsory redundancies in BT.

The pay ballot begins on 18 October — it is time for all activists to respond to BT's pressure by hard campaigning.

A victory on pay will help in the campaigns that will inevitably come against redundancies and changes in working hours.

Car allowances: no sell-out!

By Fiona Monkman, secretary, Barnsley Unison

COUNCIL workers across the country have now received details of the "compromise" from the latest talks over the car allowance dispute.

The dispute, now in its ninth week, has had solid support from members despite the union leadership's refusal to authorise any further escalation.

Members are angry because the "compromise" is little different from the employers' original line. The shift is basically to postpone the cuts for up to two and a half years.

Nationally, talks resume on 30 September. Branch meetings should demand rejection of the offer and

convening of a national delegate conference to discuss

any new deal and escalation of the action.

Unison action against BNP

By a Tower Hamlets Unison steward

ON FRIDAY 17 September over 250 Unison members and other trade unionists walked out in protest over the election of BNP member, Derek Beackon, on to Tower Hamlets Council. At a spontaneous meeting on Friday afternoon workers expressed anger at the election of the nazi, believing it would lead to an increase in overtly racist enquiries in local housing offices and to a rise in the number of racist attacks in the area.

At a Tower Hamlets Unison Executive meeting on 20 September a campaign of opposition to the BNP was discussed. It was agreed to call on Unison members to refuse to have any

direct contact with Beackon or to process his requests unless they were directed through the Isle of Dogs general manager.

It was also agreed to meet with the Labour Group to discuss how to curtail BNP influence in the council. A publicity campaign in the Isle of Dogs is planned to condemn the BNP's policies and make propaganda for decent housing and full employment. A massive lobby will be organised for the first full council meeting since Beackon's election. A Unison branch meeting will be held on that day and if well-supported may lead to another impromptu walk-out.

The local Unison will be at the forefront of labour movement resistance to the fascists on the Isle of Dogs.

Demo backs UCH

On the "day of activity in support of the Health Service" called by London Unison, on 16 September, hundreds demonstrated outside the threatened University College Hospital. Teachers and health workers from Middlesex Hospital struck. Nurses occupied a closed ward at UCH and hung banners out of the windows, to cheers from the crowd.

The round-the-clock occupation of Springdale nursery, in north London, to stop Islington council closing it, will be five months old on 5 October. The occupiers need support: messages and donations to Islington Under-Fives Action Group, c/o Springdale UFEC, 15a Springdale Road, London N16.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Smash the pay freeze!

TUC: call action on Budget Day!

By Tony Dale, convenor,
Manchester City Council
Housing Department, Unison

Trade unionists tell Smith:

Labour is our party!

THE TORIES' decision to impose a zero pay limit on public sector workers next year could provoke a huge fight back.

It comes on top of this year's 1.5 per cent limit, which could still be tested by strike action. For instance:

* Firefighters are due to meet the bosses for negotiations this week. If no new offer is made, then they could start a campaign of national strike action from 8 November.

* White-collar council workers are still balloting on a programme of one-day strikes against the 1.5% pay limit.

* Council manual workers have not yet settled this year's pay claim.

Already some unions have challenged Kenneth Clarke's new pay freeze. Nurses and hospital technicians are demanding substantial wage rises, well above the projected inflation rate for next year of three to four per cent.

The pay freeze could act as a focus for opposition to all the Tories' cuts. It comes on top of a whole series of other attacks.

* 140,000 public sector workers face the dole if leaks about the extent of Clarke's budget cuts are true.

* The Tories' plans to extend "Market Testing" (the contracting-out of work to private profiteers) would cut 25% of all civil service jobs.

* 15,000 Post Office jobs are on the line in the next five years.

* The reduction of British Rail's grant by 23% means that 500 trains per week will be cancelled, and 50 stations closed on Sundays.

Last week representatives of the giant public-services union Unison asked the TUC's public services committee to call a day of action on a work day over the pay freeze. But TUC leaders were apparently willing to back action only on a Saturday - thus avoiding the possibility of major strikes.

We can't allow such a pathetic response. The TUC should call a national day of action - including strike action - on the day Kenneth Clarke makes his Autumn Budget speech. If the TUC gives a lead, we can get demonstrations on the scale of the huge pit protests last October.

By Tom Rigby

LABOUR Party conference, starting in Brighton on 27 September, will be dominated by one issue: the Labour/union link.

The National Executive is pushing to end collective trade-union input into the selection of Labour's parliamentary candidates.

The attack on the link comes now because the Labour leaders are preparing for government. They intend to manage the capitalist system in much the same way as the Tories. And with capitalism in crisis, that will mean attacks on workers.

"Whatever happens at conference, the battle over the union link will continue."

Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown has already trashed even



The Labour Party should belong to workers like these at University College Hospital not to the men in suits. Photo: Garry Meyer

Labour's most limited promises of reform (see page 2). To insulate Labour MPs from trade-union opposition to such policies, Smith and his allies want to do away with any trade-union input into the selection or de-selection of the MPs.

The attack on the link is the flipside of the Labour leaders' determination to keep the bulk of the Tory anti-union laws.

Every socialist and trade-union activist will take heart from the rank-

and-file rebellion that has developed in both the Labour Party and the union in defence of the union link. Tens of thousands of workers have told the "modernisers": "Labour is our party!"

The vote, on Wednesday afternoon, 29th, is going to be very close. And whatever happens at this conference, the battle over the union link will continue.

*** More on Labour conference, pages 2, 4, 5.**

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