

THE BIG BATTLES ARE AHEAD OF US

TABLOID WORKERS PRESS TO BE LAUNCHED ON 6 MAY

FROM 6 May Workers Press will come out as an eight-page tabloid selling at 30p. This was decided at the Workers Revolutionary Party conference last week-end.

The new Workers Press will continue to be in the leadership of the work internationally for the rebuilding of the Fourth International. It will be the organiser of the campaign to defend democratic rights - fight the Tories, and the lobby of the TUC in September.

Cliff Slaughter, WRP secretary, expressed the sentiments of all delegates and visitors to the conference when he said:

'The miners' strike showed the ruling class that if they think they can get away with taking back from workers what they need for this modern capitalism they've got another think coming! The big battle is still in front.'

To prepare for this battle the decisive question is to build an independent revolutionary party, which means building the Fourth International in Britain. This is the only way to assure the political independence of the working class.

The WRP's progress has been possible only because in 1985 it expelled its old degenerated leadership and turned to the work of the Preparatory Committee for the Rebuilding of the Fourth International against Stalinism.

It is based on the unity of the social revolution in the west, where the lives of millions are dominated by a tiny group of 'vulture' capitalists dealing in fictitious capital, and the political revolution in the degenerated and deformed workers' states of the USSR, China and eastern Europe, where the Stalinist policy of 'socialism in one country' has tied the lives of millions to this self-same imperialism.

Summing up the discussion on the draft programme, Cliff Slaughter said:

'In 1945 a Labour government was elected and it was possible to avoid the effects of the decline of capitalism for a few more decades.

'But the old 19th-century version of liberal democracy had to be replaced by a political system which incorporated the labour movement and to a certain extent

BY DOT GIBSON

the working class. Capitalism could not have survived without doing that.

'It would not have survived World War I or the 1926 General Strike without the TUC bureaucracy and the Labour Party being incorporated into the British political system. The ruling class were able to do that out of the super-profits of imperialism.

'The question that now arises is whether British capitalism can afford the whole system of occasional concessions which goes along with incorporating the working class into the body politic. Isn't any kind of demand which the working class makes now something British capitalism can't afford and will have to resist?

'Isn't this why they can no longer

afford democratic rights? They can't afford to have trade unions with any independence. Not only is it no longer possible to give reforms, it has become absolutely necessary to take back what has been given.

'That is a big political change and the Labour and trade union leaders will adapt themselves to that situation just as they adapted themselves to the need to be the direct counter-revolutionary agents of the bourgeoisie in Germany in 1918-19.

'No longer will they be there only when there are concessions to be given. They will do whatever they are asked. They are the slaves, the servants of the bourgeoisie.'

Large masses of people who have not been in politics before are now being drawn into struggles.

In Britain they are coming into action on the poll tax, whether they will have a roof over their heads, the destruction of the National Health Service and education, and 'social engineering'

- plans to shift hundreds of thousands of people out of London to areas where they can more easily be exploited in circumstances where independent trade unions are 'outlawed' through government legislation.

'Therefore what the state does and how the working class defends itself is the big question. This is the key offensive for which the ruling class is preparing.

The WRP Conference was conscious that it must prepare, warn and recruit for the struggles of a revolutionary character in a number of countries, including Britain.

There will be a further session of the Conference within eight weeks to vote on the final version of the draft programme. This will then be published for public discussion and go to the WRP Congress at the end of the year.

Delegates and visitors pledged an additional £5,500 for the April Fighting Fund for the new paper and international work.



The 'Friends of Kurdistan' organised a rally and 'die-in' in Glasgow last week to publicise the murder of Kurds by the Iraqi regime. The demonstrator is wearing a gas mask to draw attention to the inhuman methods of chemical warfare being used against Kurdish civilians. (story page 3)

WORKERS PRESS

Services rendered

THE intentions of the leading imperialist countries - the US and Britain - towards South Africa are clear.

Underlying their hypocritical denunciation of apartheid is the more fundamental objective that capitalism should survive in the country. This is the main meaning of the US 'constructive engagement policy', which Thatcher fully endorses.

While apartheid has been integral to the development of capitalism in South Africa, it is at the same time also the Achilles' heel of the ruling class.

This detested system, which denies the black majority all political rights, has become particularly vulnerable given the chronic economic crisis which grips South Africa.

The black masses know from their own experiences that 'constructive engagement' is a fraud.

It is the multinational companies, supported by these self-same governments, that are among their biggest exploiters. So it has been impossible for the international bourgeoisie to conceal its complicity in the apartheid state.

But now the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Soviet Union has come to the rescue of the beleaguered South African ruling class and the discredited international bourgeoisie.

Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' is being applied to South Africa - in fact, to the whole region of southern Africa - with consummate cynicism.

Manipulating the prestige which it still enjoys among the black masses, the Stalinist bureaucracy has become the foremost backer of world imperialism's designs for South Africa.

A series of secret and high-level encounters has recently taken place between South African and Soviet representatives, in which the latter have stated unequivocally that they do not wish to see the South African economy 'destroyed' (i.e. capitalism overthrown).

The Soviet representatives have even gone so far as to suggest 'that in a post-apartheid society whites should be given the constitutional right to veto legislation proposed by a black government.' ('The Independent', 20 March).

One such encounter was chaired by Sir John Killock, former British ambassador in Moscow, later Britain's envoy to Nato, and a former director of Dunlop South Africa.

As the political and ideological crisis of the Stalinist bureaucracy intensifies, its subordination to the world bourgeoisie is increasingly being transformed into outright dependency. It cannot hold back the political revolution without the direct support of imperialism.

Having proved its bona fides by forcing a deal in Namibia and Angola, the bureaucracy is now preparing to hand to world imperialism the biggest prize: South Africa itself.

That these services rendered is not lost on the apartheid regime. A commentary by the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation observed that the Soviet presence in the region was proving most 'helpful'.

No doubt the African National Congress and South African Communist Party will again try to cover up for the Soviet bureaucracy's policy in South Africa.

But for the South African masses the message is coming through clearly: imperialism wants at all costs to prevent fundamental change, and its main ally in this endeavour is the Stalinist bureaucracy.

WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND

In so far: £1,379.90

As this column is written there are ten days left to raise £620 to reach our £2,000 target. Let's make sure this comes in.

The Workers Revolutionary Party conference last weekend decided to launch the new Workers Press on 6 May, and raise an April Fighting Fund of £7,500.

£2,500 of this sum is for international activities. There is no contradiction that this included in the Workers Press Fighting Fund, because the Preparatory Committee for the Rebuilding of the Fourth International is our central work.

The day after our conference a member came into the office with £100. He didn't see the point in waiting until April to start paying. I hope all our readers feel the same!

Dot Gibson

Send collections and donations to:
Workers Press Fighting Fund
PO Box 735, London, SW9 7QS

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 30 March

SUPPORT MOSES MAYEKISO AND OTHER TRADE UNION VICTIMS OF APARTHEID

Khola Mayekiso Public Meeting
Lambeth Town Hall (Assembly Room), Brixton, London SW9 7.30 p.m.

Sunday 2 April:

WORKERS PRESS PUBLIC MEETING

Defend democratic rights!
Fight the Tories!
Blythswood Hotel, Argyle St, Glasgow
2 p.m.

Speakers include: Dave Temple (WRP), Norman Bissell (Lanarkshire EIS member), Josie O'Kane (Republican Band Alliance), a victimised miner, Scottish Council for Civil Liberties

Saturday 15 April

FIGHTING DEPORTATIONS!

LABOUR MOVEMENT CONFERENCE ON IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY
Manchester Town Hall
10 a.m.

Details/credentials from Rena Wood, NALGO, Manchester Branch (061-834 6564)

Sunday 23 April

BLAIR PEACH MEMORIAL MARCH

Assemble at: Southall Park, Uxbridge Road, Southall
March through Southall for a rally at Fenner Brockway Centre, South Road

Monday 1 May

MAY DAY DEMONSTRATIONS

Saturday-Sunday 10-11 June

THIRD SOCIALIST CONFERENCE, CHESTERFIELD

Saturday 17 June

NUM CENTENARY GALA, YORKSHIRE

Saturday 24 June

WORKERS PRESS MINERS' STRIKE 5TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT

Durham University, Lecture Theatre, Old Elvet, Durham
10 a.m.

Albanian houses demolished

BY RADOSLAV PAVLOVIC

IT happens in Palestine, and in Yugoslavia as well. A reactionary government takes on a whole nation struggling to have its legitimate rights recognised.

In both countries the government blows up people's houses with dynamite as one means of opposing their struggle.

National tensions within Yugoslavia are worsening. The Serbian bureaucracy under Slobodan Milosevic has sought to impose itself as the head of the Yugoslav Federal Republic.

It has demanded 'real leadership' and it presents the 'Albanian danger' as a pretext for everything it does.

In the east of Macedonia, near the border with Kosovo, where the situation is worst, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of ethnic Albanians.

This is a problem for the ignorant Macedonian bureaucracy, which can do nothing to resolve it.

This bureaucracy is terrified of the working class, especially in Skopje, the capital, and it raises a similar slogan to that raised by the Yugoslav regime: 'Danger! Albanian expansionism!'

The bureaucracy is at bay, and this slogan provides it with a scapegoat.

Last year at Kumanovo, a town in east Macedonia where there are large numbers of Albanians, school students demonstrated, demanding respect for the Albanian language in secondary schools.

In retaliation the Macedonian government sacked many Albanian teachers and head teachers and expelled them from the Communist Party. But that wasn't enough for them.

They knew they had to hit at the whole Albanian population. So the Kumanovo local council suddenly decided to demolish 328 houses out of about 8,000 that had been built without planning permission over the years.

Most of these houses belonged to Albanians. Since the state is incapable of solving the housing problem, people have been sorting things out for themselves as best they can and building houses for themselves.

Many of these houses were properly set out in streets, and all the council had to do was put a bit of tarmac on the road surface, lay some pipes, and bring in the water supply.

But this was too simple for the bureaucracy. It preferred to destroy the houses - without making any proposals for rehousing the inhabitants - and to evict all the Albanians.

This was blatant political revenge. The Macedonian bureaucracy dare not say that they intend to drive the Albanians out of 'their' republic now that the Serbians have decided that they don't want the Albanians to have even territorial autonomy in Kosovo any more.

If the houses were built in contravention of the town plan - and in Yugoslavia a 'plan' is often just a vague idea that never gets put into practice for lack of funds - why did the council let them be built in the first place?

This is what the outraged Albanians are asking.

The bureaucracy is not doing this kind of thing merely in Kumanovo, where a third of the population are Albanians, mostly recent arrivals.

A group of 127 inhabitants of a district in Skopje went to the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party in Belgrade to complain about their council's decision to demolish their homes, which had been 'built without regard for the town plan of Skopje'.

The delegation, which included Albanians, Macedonians, and Gypsies, demanded that they should be rehoused.

In Tetovo, another Macedonian town, where Albanians comprise 70 per cent of the population, and a large-scale scheme of home demo-

litions is under way, 1,700 houses and other buildings are described as 'unauthorised'.

Albanians traditionally build high walls round their houses, and the local council began by attacking these walls.

After they had knocked down 5,000 walls there were still another 1,600 walls and 1,700 houses to go.

There was no proposal to compensate any of these people by rehousing them.

The Macedonian bureaucracy is aiming to drive Albanians out of Macedonia.

Under various pretexts they have made many teachers redundant and forced them to leave for Kosovo.

This process has enraged the Albanian population.

Jakov Lazaroski, a member of the Central Committee of the Macedonian Communist Party, has accused Albanians of 'buying property at exorbitant prices.'

As we say, they want butter on their bread, but they want the money to pay for the butter too!

Germ war on Kurds

STUDENTS from Glasgow and Edinburgh joined a rally and 'die-in' in Glasgow's George Square last week organised by the Friends of Kurdistan.

The demonstration was on the anniversary of the mustard-gas bombings of the Kurdish city of Halabja by the Iraqi Ba'athist regime, in which 15,000 people were slaughtered.

The attack was in revenge after the Kurdish guerrillas had inflicted a military defeat on Saddam Hussein's troops.

Hundreds of thousands of Kurds have fled to Iran and Turkey, where they are living in makeshift refugee camps at the mercy of disease and starvation.

Protest organisers said Hussein's government was now also using germ warfare against defenceless civilians of the Kurdish nation.

They condemned the United Nations for absolving Iraq last week of any violation of human rights.



Three of the dancers from the 'Irie' dance company who presented a benefit on 20 March for the Capetown 16 Campaign - a campaign to defend 16 young political activists in South Africa, victimised, and some jailed for long periods for fighting apartheid. (Photo: Rod Leon)

Exeter students occupy against loans

BY ROGER J. COTTRELL

FORTY students recently occupied the administration block in Exeter University's Northcott House.

They were protesting against the government's attack on the grant system through its proposal to introduce 'top-up loans'.

They were also protesting against the University Vice-Chancellor's refusal to support the campaign against loans, which is endorsed by

the Association of University Teachers.

The Vice-Chancellor persists in calling for a 'graduate tax', in opposition to the wishes of students and academic staff alike.

Ordered by the courts to leave, the students - including members of the Guild (students' union) executive - marched out singing, in disciplined order. Four of them later appeared in court, charged with trespass. The University's lawyer pressed for costs, and the case has

been adjourned.

'For the students to be penalised further would be to pile injustice on injustice', declared students' representative Dave Spacey.

The demand is growing within the student movement for a national strategy of co-ordinated occupations to smash the loans system.

Much closer co-operation is needed among all trade unionists involved in education, to resist loans and the Tories' attempts to turn education into a privilege for the rich.

THE POLITICS OF



A view of Albany prison

THIS article aims to enlighten Workers Press readers as to what is going on in the Scottish penal system, and show the connection with what is happening in England.

I apologise for the absence of statistics or quotations. Since 7 September 1988 my fellow-prisoners and I have been locked up in Shotts prison 'A' hall more or less 24 hours a day.

In that time we have been refused exercise in the fresh air, which I believe is illegal. And, in this predicament, I have no access to libraries or other sources of documented information.

Glen Ochil prison

The first major incident in Scotland's prisons last year was at Glen Ochil, on 3 May, when a small fire and a scuffle between a prisoner and a screw gave the authorities a pretext for locking down the jail.

Immediately on this lock-down, the governor stopped all visits.

So prisoners' families and friends - many of whom had travelled long distances, putting themselves to expense and inconvenience - were refused admittance to the prison.

It was only after several days of this that prisoners started smashing up their cells. Some prisoners who had not done so were removed to other halls. When they left their cells, the screws went in and smashed them.

One good thing followed this vandalism - the resignation of the governor. In his place came Gordon 'Whacko' Jackson, an ex-colonel. On taking over, Jackson is alleged to have told the world: 'I am at war and I will win.'

At the time of writing, Jackson is suspended pending the outcome of a criminal trial, in which he is accused of possession of shot-gun cartridges and CS gas canisters.

Alleged plot

Another incident at Glen Ochil had 'dirty tricks' written all over it, and could be used as a justification for abusing prisoners: an alleged plot to smuggle £500,000-worth of heroin into the prison.

Now, assuming there was such a millionaire and master criminal who had such a quantity of heroin, where would he sell his merchandise when 99 per cent of the prisoners are poor?

Let us assume that this master criminal could pull in £300 a week (and he would need to be good to do that). Let us further assume that his heroin was 90 per cent pure and that, like an honest businessman, he cut his drug only three times.

BY GARY KELLY Shotts prison, Lanarkshire

The poor guy would need to be in jail for over 100 to sell the stuff. Only a simple soul would believe that such a plot ever existed.

Shotts hate factory

At Shotts the pretext for the mass lock-up came after two minor incidents.

In the first incident, an argument developed between a screw and a prisoner in the textiles department, and the warden grabbed the prisoner by the throat.

When other prisoners witnessed this, a small melée ensued where the turnkeys distinguished themselves, as usual, by showing a clean pair of heels. While this was going on the rest of the prisoners were being taken back to their cells to be locked up.

The prisoners in 'B' hall refused to go behind their doors for a couple of hours, but finally let themselves be locked up without any trouble.

The prisoners had meanwhile smashed up the textile machinery on which they were being exploited seven hours a day for £3.50 a week.

When this incident was over, the prisoners decreed to be the 'ringleaders' were all shipped out to other prisons, where they are now all in normal circulation.

Most of the prisoners who were not involved are still in lock-up almost six months later.

Since this lock-down began the turnkey administration have introduced a system for assessing prisoners which supposedly places everyone in neat little concrete boxes.

In theory 'A' hall is the 'bad boys' playground, and as a sign of your 'progress' (whatever that means) you are promoted to 'B' hall, then 'D' hall, and then finally to 'heaven on earth', 'C' hall, where the bovine prisoners are treated to such undreamt-of privileges that they would kill to get there!

Such schemes show how simple the workings of the prison managers' minds really are.

It goes without saying that most prisoners are not in the least interested in the baubles the administration has to offer as bribes, for turning a man into a base informer.

A further insight into the cesspit recesses of the prison managers' minds can be witnessed in 'A' hall, where the only ones allowed out to work in the hall are child molesters, informers and other such types.

Over the last six months the screws have taken to going about in gangs, outnumbering prisoners at least four to one.

A few months ago the heroic turnkeys were given orders to go round the cells and remove prisoners' medallions, rings, photographs, musical instruments and other miscellaneous items that overnight became prohibited.

Some prisoners refused to hand over items of sentimental value like rings, and in such cases about ten clowns in 'skateboard outfits' (i.e. riot gear), armed with shields, would overpower individuals one at a time, tearing and wrenching the rings from their fingers.

They were just like thugs in uniform, and it is really quite amazing to have observed the transformation in them since the lock-up. Before, they wouldn't say 'boo', but now they are swaggering about like arrogant bullies.

However, every dog has its day, as the saying goes, and the prison won't be in lock-down for ever.

It is rumoured that Shotts jail is to be opened up in the near future and, to try and prevent this, our brave keepers are threatening industrial action.

Their cowardice is enough to make you vomit: they like to abuse prisoners and their visitors, cutting visiting-time to a mere 30 minutes, and holding visitors under hostile conditions.

But when it comes to opening the jail up and facing the music, and meeting men on a man-to-man basis, they are so yellow they refuse to work normally.

Other prison unrest

A few weeks ago an industrial dispute at Wandsworth prison over a new work rota system, called Fresh-Start, was settled.

It was claimed in the popular press that before the screws came out on strike they went round telling the prisoners that their visits, exercise, mail and work would be stopped when the police came in.

It is unfortunate that some prisoners were disruptive while the police were in. Perhaps they should have sat tight.

At Barlinnie, for example, the screws threatened industrial action last month 'supposedly' over their concern for overcrowding. It is nice to know that these thugs are developing a social conscience!

But somehow their claims don't ring true to me. They were never interested in overcrowding in the past, when conditions were far worse than they are today, and the prison population was nearly 2,000.

Ten years of attacks HOW THE TORIES DESTROY TRADE UNION RIGHTS

DURING the ten years since 1979 the Tories have laid down a mass of anti-union legislation which seeks to undermine and destroy the elementary rights of working people to protect themselves from the ruthlessness of employers and governments.

Before 1979 most actions of workers in an industrial dispute were free from harassment by the courts.

Exceptions were made, often savage, to show who was boss, but generally it was legal to picket, to hold open ballots, for a union to call a strike, for the strong to support the weak, and vice versa, and for workers to form a closed shop where the great majority wished.

Today trade unionists are barred from solidarity actions, banned from ordering strikes and heavily restricted in regard to picketing, free voting, demonstrations, public assembly and forming closed shops.

The door has been opened wide for the courts to smash the unions by seizing their funds on the excuse of any breach in the new rules.

BERNARD FRANKS looks at the changes in the last ten years.

TAKING their cue from the Labour government's attempts in 1969 to introduce oppressive labour law through the White Paper 'In Place of Strife', the Tories in 1971 introduced their own Industrial Relations Act.

In the confrontation of 1974 the miners defeated the Heath government.

The incoming Labour government under prime minister Wilson was forced to repeal the anti-union law.

The Tories under Thatcher learned from that experience. In place of a head-on clash they set about gradually installing a mass of anti-union legislation on the statutes with a minimum of publicity.

Laws to end the rights of association, balloting, solidarity and collective action have been passed in a series of Acts appearing every two years.

These can be laid down with a minimum of detail as 'enabling legislation', because in Britain judges have wide powers for interpreting the law in their judgements.

These then act as a precedent in future cases, extending the scope of the statute by what is in effect judge's law.

The 'reply' of trade union and Labour opposition leaders to this huge assault on basic rights has ranged from total silence to an active hostility to any opposition.

They argue that the Tories must not be given an excuse to pass nastier laws, that the unions can only survive by operating within the law and that untoward action will

threaten the chance of electing a Labour government, which, it is implied, is the only road to repealing iniquitous legislation.

The main anti-union laws of this period have been the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts, the 1984 Trade Union Act, the 1986 Public Order Act and the 1988 Employment Act.

Leaving aside the Public Order Act, which has been dealt with in previous issues of Workers Press, and the 1986 Wages Act which attacks employment protection rights, some of the areas of activity where huge limitations have been applied are as follows.

Picketing

Picketing was, until 1979, a lawful part of a trade dispute. Under the 1980 Employment Act picketing is lawful only if against your own employer at your specific place of work.

Legal protection even disappears at other workplaces even if they belong to the same employer, or if work has been diverted to them.

A court decision of 1985 gave police licence to arrest pickets on the basis that their action might constitute a breach of the peace.

It was enough for the police to have seen something in a newspaper to lead them to that conclusion.

A decision against South Wales miners in the 1984-1985 strike has meant that all mass pickets could be declared illegal as 'unreasonable harassment'.

This decision was used by News International in its successful action against the print union SOGAT 82 in July 1986.

In a number of disputes police have sought to enforce a 'six pickets only' rule.

According to the Labour Research Department's latest pamphlet 'The Law at Work', there is nothing in law which lays down the number who can picket.

The figure six comes from the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service 'Code of Practice on Picketing', which is merely advisory.

However the South Wales decisions went some of the way towards confirming this in law.

Last year a new step was taken. In the P&O dispute a police officer who considered that a nearby crowd of onlookers did not form part of an illegal picket was admonished by a judge, who ruled that it did.

'Secondary Action'

Before 1980 workers involved in trade disputes had a widespread immunity from being taken to court in a civil action.

Under the 1980 Act, secondary action likely to 'interfere with a commercial contract' was limited to that against a supplier or customer of the employer whose workers were in dispute or against

HOW THE TORIES DESTROY TRADE UNION RIGHTS: BY BERNARD FRANKS

another employer where the work had been transferred.

Most secondary action therefore ceased to be protected from legal claims for damages.

A subsequent court decision tightened the rules still further.

In 1984 the judge in the case of *Dimbleby versus the National Union of Journalists* declared that an action against an allied employer was illegal secondary action, even where it was likely that the companies concerned were in reality the same firm.

The court was not prepared to order an investigation of whether or not a single firm was involved using different names.

This decision led to the position in the *News International* dispute in which separate companies were deliberately set up to present a legal defence against strike action.

This meant no action could be taken to limit various aspects of the newspaper's work as these were conducted by NI Distribution, NI Supply, NI Advertising, Times Paper, Times Printing and Times Publishing, all deemed to be separate companies.

Trade Union funds

Ever since trade unions first existed the state and employers have tried to undermine them by depriving them of their funds.

Mainly this was by letting them be sued through the courts for damages, also by refusing to let them act to recover money stolen by officials.

The most notorious attack occurred in 1901 with the *Taff Vale* case.

A judge decided that the *Amalgamated Society of Railwaymen* could be sued for loss of trade caused to an employer by a strike. The decision was upheld by the House of Lords.

In 1906 a newly elected Liberal government had to repeal the decision - via the *Trades Disputes Act* - in a period of rising labour unrest and the rapid growth of the Labour Party.

An apparent counter to judge-made law was included in the stipulation that action in pursuit of a trade dispute shall

not be unlawful for trade unions or trade unionists.

In its 1980s legislation, the Tory government has set out to turn the clock back and restore the 1901 decision by destroying the 1906 immunities.

Under the 1982 Act, trade unions are liable to pay compensation to employers and others if they are in breach of any of the new limitations on picketing, secondary action, balloting, etc.

Even where a union repudiates an unlawful act by its members, a judge may decide that this is not done decisively enough - for example, by disciplining or expelling the activists concerned - and may seize the funds by imposing a sequestration anyway.

Damages were set by the Act on a sliding scale, up to a maximum of £250,000 for a union of over 100,000 members.

Under the 1988 Act, union trustees lose the right to administer finances where the union has acted in breach of a court order.

All assets are frozen and cash can no longer be directed to union activities if a judge has granted an injunction against that activity.

In addition, individual union members or officials incurring fines while engaged in union business cannot have these fines paid by the union.

Unions challenging the law risk losing their funds, but those unwilling to challenge the law leave themselves the only alternative of policing their members, ordering an end to strikes, condemning solidarity action and mass pickets, and disciplining and expelling militants to protect their funds.

Union Ballots

Trade unions were not built by postal ballots but by struggles agreed by the open vote of activists.

The Tories are out to smash this structure, dissolving the militants in the mass and leaving right-wing bureaucrats in absolute control.

The 1980 Act offered unions government cash if they altered their voting procedures to hold secret ballots for action and elections.

Initially £2 million was provided to meet costs, and by 1985 two TUC and nine non-TUC unions had obtained refunds.

The bulk of this money went

to the engineers' union the AEU (£1.4 million).

Under the 1984 Act, unions were required to hold secret ballots before strikes or other actions. Failure to do this meant loss of immunity from civil action.

Strict rules applied to prevent unions from influencing the vote - but no equivalent rule stopped influence from employers or outside agencies such as the national press.

At this stage employers had to take the decision to sue.

Court decisions against the *Civil and Public Servants Association* in 1985, and the rail unions *ASLEF* and *NUR* in 1986, banned action and set a liability for damages because action had been called without a ballot.

Under the 1984 Act, judges can overturn, order or bar ballots as they see fit.

In 1988 a judge barred the *NUS* from calling a national ballot of seamen over the *P&O* dispute, declaring that it was a purely local issue.

The 1988 Act lets an individual sue a union which has disciplined her or him for ignoring democratically-reached decisions.

A strike-breaker in such a case can be rewarded with up to £13,240 from union funds.

This Act also separates workplaces for voting purposes so that workers who have voted not to strike in a company-wide ballot would be encouraged to use the law to opt out of any industrial action agreed by the majority.

When it comes to voting for union officials, the 1984 Act required secret ballots. Under the 1988 Act only postal votes are valid.

All executive members must stand for re-election every five years.

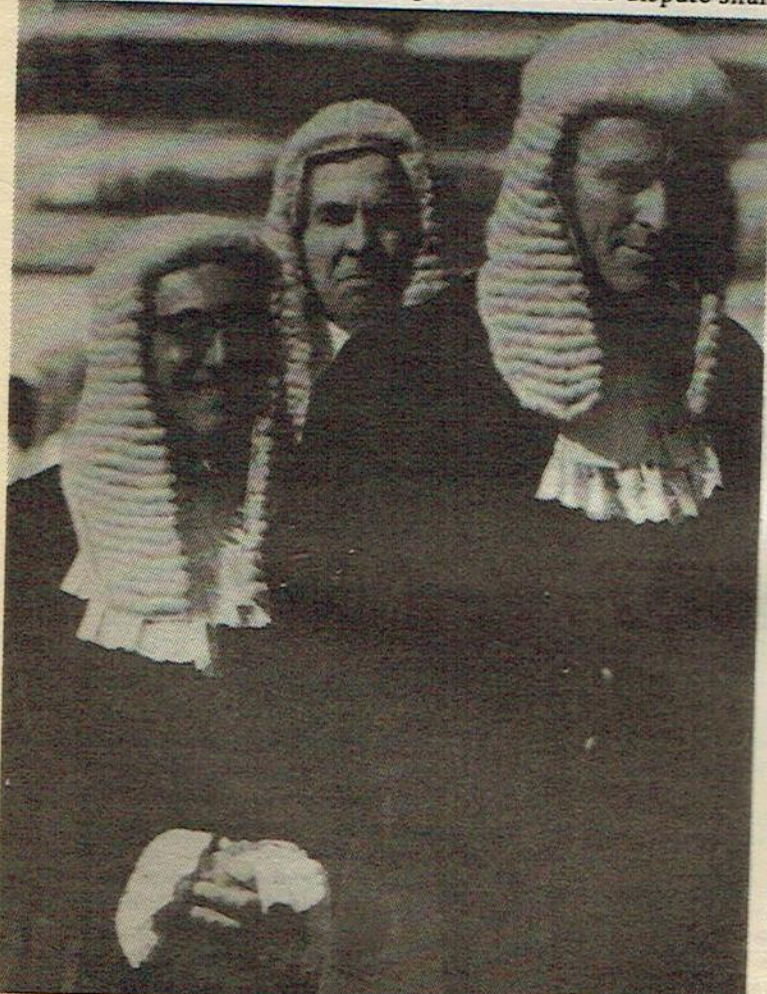
Before 1984 it was only necessary to abide by whatever methods are laid down in the union's rule book.

Political fund

The 1980 Act provided government money towards a ballot to agree political contributions.

The political levy as a means of supplying the Labour Party with funds had been protected since 1913. Legislation in 1984 amended the 1913 Act to require unions to hold secret postal or workplace ballots on the matter every ten years.

All union members were given



Judges have wide powers for interpreting the law - and setting precedents



A mass picket of miners in 1984. Since the 1984-1985 strike, the courts could declare all mass pickets illegal as 'unreasonable harassment'

the vote, not only those actually paying the levy.

The first round proved a total disaster for the Tories as union after union voted for the levy by huge majorities.

So since 1988, only a postal ballot will do, and this must go to home addresses, not to the workplace.

In addition, any union member, including one not paying the levy, has a year in which to cry 'fix' to a law court and demand a new vote.

The closed shop

The Tories hate and fear the closed shop and want to destroy it in both its pre-entry and post-entry forms.

Under the 1980 Act, any non-union member sacked for failing to abide by a decision to form a closed shop is automatically a victim of unfair dismissal.

Under the 1982 Act, unions had to hold ballots to retain existing closed shops.

The Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) conducted 113 such ballots,

The majority of them were overwhelmingly in favour of the closed shop; 88 satisfied

the stipulated 85 per cent majority.

Under the 1988 Act all industrial action to create or maintain a closed shop or to induce an employer to act against a non-member is unlawful. Currently three million workers are covered by post-entry closed shops.

The Tories are planning new laws to ban the pre-entry closed shop (where employees must be in a union or be prepared to join in order to be employed). At present 400,000 workers are in such closed shops.

Commissioner for scabs

A 'Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members' is provided for in the 1988 Act.

This person will give advice and cash support to anyone alleging that ballots have been improperly conducted or who seeks to prove that funds have been used to finance unlawful actions.

This means government funds for anyone eager to pursue legal actions against a union or its officers.

Employment rights

Other clauses of the recent laws, in combination with court judgements, have undermined all rights to union recognition, abolished 'fair wages' provisions, banned all action to oppose 'lump' and 'cowboy' sub-contract labour and removed what limited protection there was against the type of victimisation carried out by mass sacking followed with selective re-employment.

Other Acts have systematically undermined the trade union and employment rights of women, young people, part-time and temporary workers - and more attacks are in the pipeline.

Legality

All these laws and limitations testify to the depth of the underlying economic crisis of British capitalism and to the vastness of the social explosion the Tories expect one day to have to contain.

For those who want to oppose government and

employers' attacks on the working class wholly 'within the law', the question must be put, just which law is that?

The mass of laws against union action, and against political action, over the last ten years shows that 'the law' is not a fixed edifice of occasionally modified statutes but an ever-tightening noose.

Any protest or protective or opposition action that is legal this year will not be next.

Find a way through or round, and a new law will follow to block that route.

Anyone who sits quietly, hoping not to provoke a violent reaction, is condoning slow strangulation.

Only revolutionary socialists are prepared to face up to this situation, on the one hand seeking to defend democratic and trade union rights, campaigning for a repeal of this mass of repressive legislation, but at the same time fighting to turn the trade unions into revolutionary bodies.

These, like those which existed in the earliest days of trade unionism, must be able to adopt new forms of organisation and action towards the defence of their members, even in the conditions of a repressive illegality.

LETTERS

Write to: Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS

Trotskyists and Ireland

THE LETTER from a Republican Prisoner (Workers Press, 11 March 1989) contributed to an important dialogue between Trotskyists and the Irish resistance movement.

Its author, A. McIntyre, also raised some important questions which hitherto even articles in Workers Press have failed to resolve. In the first place, comrade McIntyre recognises that sectarianism within the loyalist working class is a structural (as distinct from ideological) phenomenon, with a material basis in the peculiarities of Northern Ireland capitalism.

It is particularly anchored in the nature of the six counties' job market. This fact of itself explains the tenacity of sectarianism and why economic class unity - whenever it has emerged in N.E. Ulster - has been so fragile and short-lived, decomposing into sectarianism whenever a threat to the statelet's constitutional stakes within the United Kingdom is invoked.

On the question of the loyalist working class, I think comrade McIntyre makes two mistakes. On the one hand, he ascribes to loyalist wage labour a historical role independent of imperialism and Orange capital, ignoring that the former at least is the sole guarantor of capitalism in Ireland.

On the other, I think that comrade McIntyre underestimates the importance of the crisis within loyalism that the Anglo-Irish Agreement brought to a head. The structural nature of sectarianism is such that economic unity, issuing from economic crises, cannot rise above sectarianism itself. But the binding of loyalist workers to a state they once considered their own personal property was also contingent - from the very point of the state's inception in 1921 - upon the derogation of repressive power, under the Ulster Special Constabulary.

When, under the impact of the political crisis and war, that derogation of repressive power was removed, this altered the relationship of loyalist workers to the state. This process was lent permanence by the policy changes in 1975 and was taken into a second year by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Britain's response to the hunger strikes and the political successes of Sinn Fein.

By 1986 it had brought loyalist workers into collision with the state and by 1987, had produced an internecine feud within the UDA.

On the issue of unconditional support for all Irish republican violence, comrade McIntyre seems astonished that the WRP will support the IRA's war effort however it is conducted. What he ignores is that we are organising in the oppressor nation with an eye to politically arming the British working class.

Only when British workers support republican violence against Britain - and against a common class enemy - will they be armed to fight for their own class dictatorship and the overthrow of capitalism.

None of this detracts from our criticism of the petty-bourgeois content of Sinn Fein's programme, nor from our recognition of the need to build an Irish section of the Fourth International. But in conducting this task, we must never lose sight of the mistakes conducted by Irish Trotskyists groups in the past.

That so many Irish Trotskyist groups have been organised as 'Irish Sections' of British groups is bad enough. That the Irish 'Militant' explicitly attack republicanism and give de facto support to imperialism is a disgrace. But more principled groups have recreated - in gross caricature - the predilection of reformists for trying to build economic class unity in Ireland by avoiding the all important national question.

That class unity between protestant and Catholic workers can be built is not disputed here. But it will only be built - like that between Jews and Arabs in Palestine - upon the basis of the political destabilisation of the sectarian bourgeois garrison state.

The party, if it is to become part of the life of the Irish working class, must also nail its republican colours to the mast and proclaim the struggle for national self-determination as central to the permanent revolution in all 32 counties of Ireland.

Roger Cottrell

However repellent...

REGARDING the rather absurd Vanessa Redgrave correspondence, it is surely obvious that an actor's or actress's political opinions, however repellent these may be, have nothing whatever to do with their performing abilities.

The late Emil Jannings was a racist and fervent Nazi sympathiser, but the fact remains that he was one of the greatest actors of this century.

John L. Broom

Who are they kidding?

THE LIFTING of the earning limit for old age pensioners is looked upon by the national media as something positive that has come out of the budget. Since when did the Tories ever give anything to anyone without there being an overriding reason for it?

This action is no exception. At the moment the employers have a massive pool of cheap labour taken from one section of society - the youth.

Lifting the earning limit has now created a pool of cheap skilled/experienced labour, and will be used as just another weapon to be used to undermine trade union organisation.

Norman Harding

An employer will be able to offer a retired worker a wage reduced at least by the amount of the old age pension as this will not be forfeited.

The state will be subsidising his wage bill. Such a retired worker finding employment will be taking with him all his skill and discipline. But above all will be losing his right to live the rest of his life in comfort and to be able to enjoy the fruits of a life time of work.

The only way that this will be achieved is by increasing the pension to a limit that will allow this. And this Tory government and the system of profit and exploitation will not and cannot do this.

The budget and world economy

THE editorial on the budget (Workers Press, 18 March) was inaccurate and misleading.

It claimed that the budget was framed 'with the interests of the international bankers in the forefront'; that the 'balance of payments deficit will be financed by the world's bankers' on condition that 'the Thatcher government will press ahead remorselessly with its attack on the working class'; and that 'British capitalism is in pawn to the world bankers'.

Readers may well have believed that the real enemy is the world's bankers - faceless and nameless people with no fixed address.

Who are these 'international bankers' who 'will lend money to British capital only if they are assured of an adequate return'?

The distinction between 'British capital' and 'international bankers' is a dubious one these days. Financial institutions and banks giving a City address make up no small part of international finance.

London is by far the leading centre for Euro-currency transactions; and as old, traditional industries decline, City financiers - whatever passport they hold - wax fat. It is no secret that Lawson himself has his eyes on a top job in the City with a seven-figure income, like some of his ex-Cabinet colleagues.

Last year, reports 'The Times' (18 March), 'British predators' (beasts of prey which live off their victims' flesh) spent £16.6 billion buying up foreign companies, mainly in the US and Europe - that is to say, more than the total balance of payments deficit and more than three times the reverse flow of capital to Britain!

The financing of the deficit, to which such transactions make a major contribution, is made possible by the huge holdings of British capital overseas.

Britain is not a debtor country in the same category as Brazil or Mexico, but still ranks among the imperialist exploiting countries, responsible for the poverty and hunger which stalk the so-called 'developing countries'. Indeed, it

is a major creditor of such countries.

The budget did, of course, express Lawson's dilemma. He could not give more tax breaks to his rich friends without provoking more inflation.

Nor, for the same reason, could he make the British tax system still more regressive by putting up indirect taxes - on the things everybody has to buy in the shops - at the expense of the working class. As the City organ, the 'Financial Times', puts it (18 March), 'the economy is on a knife-edge'; and William Keegan follows up in the next day's 'Observer' by saying:

'In hoping that the balance of payments problem will simply go away, the Chancellor himself seems to be trying to suspend the laws of economic gravity.'

It is precisely the objective laws of capitalist development that Chancellors, governments, or even 'world bankers' are unable to abrogate. Lawson is unable to control the economy or even to predict the effects of his own measures. They could be rapidly overtaken by a stock market crash, runaway inflation, or a run on the pound.

The Tory government needs no prompting from 'world bankers' to attack the working class; what it cannot do through the budget it will strive to do by other means, as the Workers Press editorial points out.

In the event, the Tories are buffeted by the same free market forces that they idealise. Their attack on the working class runs into increasing trouble, with real wages in Britain rising faster in 1988 than in any of the other major capitalist countries.

The significance of the budget lies in the fact that Lawson was not able to use it directly to attack the working class, notwithstanding what the famous 'international bankers' may have wanted.

The point to emphasise is that the whole world capitalist system is running out of control, sensitive to every shock and ready to explode.

Tom Kemp

THE PIG TROUGH

Last year in England the Holloway prison dispute was settled after much disruption over what I believe was a manning dispute.

Also in England last year there were two major riots in semi-open prisons, caused by warders going out of their way to antagonise prisoners.

Because of the actions of certain prison authorities, prisoners have been refused admittance and have had to be housed in police stations all over England.

Some prisoners have been kept incarcerated in police stations for weeks on end, because of the warders' concern for overcrowding.

Reasons for the unrest

Why all this unrest, and what are the real reasons behind it?

Anyone with a vague knowledge of British prisons can be forgiven for being somewhat cynical when the state's myrmidons start making humanitarian gestures.

I have lost count of the number of prisoners in Barlinnie who have thrown themselves off the top landings to their deaths.

To date no safety-nets have been installed - but the Barlinnie authorities are in the process of installing riot-proof pill-boxes on the top floors, where they can video-tape prisoners and play high-powered hoses down on them.

In Peterhead prison, safety nets were introduced in 'A', 'B' and 'D' halls, to save the screws being bombarded by missiles and not as a preventive measure against those with suicidal inclinations.

With the introduction of 'Fresh-Start', warders were given higher basic wages and a new rota scheme that obliges them to work a certain number of hours overtime duty. But instead of being paid in cash, they are now given holidays in lieu.

This, I believe, is the whole cause of the continuing nationwide unrest. Although the average screw has still got good conditions and wages under 'Fresh-Start', he has seen many of his traditional Spanish customs and fiddles go to the wall.

Before these new work arrangements were introduced it was quite common for screws on basic grade to be taking home over £400 clear a week. This is not an exaggeration: I have seen some of their wage slips.

In short, the prison warders have been the 'spoiled brats' of civil service and they are at present in a tantrum at their paymasters, who have decided to cut back on the amount of swill each pig at the public trough is fed.

It is the general consensus of opinion among prisoners that the Prison Officers Association (POA) are engaged in a campaign to scrap 'Fresh-Start', and that there is a tacit agreement among warders throughout the UK to attain this objective.

A thread of conspiracy appears to run throughout the whole prison system. Its aim is simply to cause so much disruption by being bloody-minded that they bring about a serious crisis.

The screws' strategy is to foment unrest among prisoners, thus creating the excuse to bring in more screws to deal with the 'crisis' and clock up more overtime, which will be given in time off, in place of cash.

Now imagine a scenario when all these screws decide to take their holidays at the same time.

Yes, you have the picture: another crisis. This leaves the door open for the POA to go to the government offering to resolve the crisis.

Of course the panacea to end the crisis is a nice little back-hander, as a sign of the government's recognition of the difficult role the prison officer has to play in protecting the public from dangerous rapists and psychotic murderers.

Well I have news for this misanthropic fraternity and 'supposed' trade union of the POA: you have outlived your usefulness and the govern-

ment can see through your plays just as I can.

The game is up, and all your subversive activities are seen in the context of the economics and politics of the pig trough.

My advice to the POA is this: whether they like it or not, their days of extra swill at the pig trough are over, and they had better stop their destructive nonsense soon.

Otherwise they could well find themselves on the dole and their jobs taken over by multinational companies if Thatcher puts her blueprint for the privatisation of the prisons into operation.



Prison protest, Hull

The ABC of the LCS

KEITH HETT, in his interesting letter (18 March), says the London Corresponding Society of the 1790s consisted of 'middle-class radicals'. This is incorrect.

To be sure, there were some middle-class radicals among the leaders of this organisation: men like the lecturer and poet John Thelwall, a close friend of Coleridge and Wordsworth; and John Horne Tooke, educated at Eton and Cambridge.

But the Society's chief founder and first secretary and treasurer was a Stirlingshire shoemaker who had worked as a bricklayer: Thomas Hardy, who wrote a few weeks after its launch in 1792 that the LCS consisted of 'tradesmen, mechanics and shopkeepers'.

And indeed the LCS was above all an organisation of artisans. Of the 347 members whose jobs we know, the three largest categories were: 43 shoemakers or workers in allied trades; 27 weavers or men connected with weaving; 24 tailors and breeches-makers.

The membership list of one of the Society's divisions, with a total membership of 98, records 9 watchmakers, 8 tailors, 8 weavers, 6 cabinet-makers, 5 shoemakers, 4 cord-wainers and 3 carpenters, besides bedstead-makers, bricklayers, butchers, china burners and hosiers, a founder, a glazier, a hatter, a labourer, a locksmith, an upholsterer, a warehouseman, a wire-worker - and 2 merchants, a bookseller and a surgeon.

One of the government spies with which the LCS was plagued reported to his masters that 'the most numerous consist of the very lowest order of society'; some were 'filthy and ragged', others, 'wretched looking blackguards'. (Another reported ruefully how he had been challenged at a

meeting, and kicked down the stairs.)

Precisely to prevent the capture of the LCS leadership by men of means, the principle of paying officers' out-of-pocket expenses was strictly adhered to.

In contrast to the middle-class Society for Constitutional Information, whose members paid five guineas a year subscription, and the middle-class Society of Friends of the People, which charged half that sum, LCS members subscribed a penny a week.

If the LCS wasn't the first predominantly working-class radical organisation in Britain - Sheffield's cutlers had formed a Constitutional Society towards the end of 1791 - it was certainly the strongest such organisation of the period, and the one the provincial radical societies looked to for a lead.

Its object was to secure adult male suffrage and parliamentary reform. And for six years its 73 divisions met openly in spite of constant harassment by magistrates and press gangs; newspaper slanders; repressive legislation; arrests of members; trials for high treason; savage sentences of transportation; prolonged imprisonment without trial or sentence.

At length, in 1799, it was banned by Act of Parliament.

In the way the LCS conducted its affairs we can study the very earliest forms of working-class self-organisation.

Each division sent a delegate to a general committee meeting on Thursday evenings. On Sunday evenings there were local meetings in pubs: hence the labelling of LCS members as 'Pothouse Reformers', and threats by magistrates that publicans who permitted such meetings would lose their licences.

There were strict rules of decorum and procedure. No one 'in liquor' was admitted to meetings. Habitual drunkards were expelled.

When a member spoke he had to stand and address the chair. No one could speak a second time until all who wanted to speak had done so once. And no one could speak more than twice to a question.

The LCS published two periodicals and organised a series of massive demonstrations, one of which was advertised by the distribution among the poor of basket-loads of biscuits, stamped: 'Freedom and plenty, or slavery and want'.

Here, in the infancy of the working class, we see the foundations of the British labour movement being laid.

FURTHER READING:

• Much information on the LCS is scattered through the first 500 pages of E. P. Thompson's 'The Making of the English Working Class' (Gollancz, 1963), and Thompson's account is usefully supplemented by two other books: Albert Goodwin, 'The Friends of Liberty: the English Democratic Movement in the age of the French revolution' (Hutchinson, 1979); and J. Ann Hone, 'For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London 1796-1821' (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982).

• The essay on the LCS by Henry Collins in 'Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in honour of Dona Torr', edited by John Saville (Lawrence & Wishart, 1954), is a good brief introductory survey.

• 'Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799', edited by Mary Thale (Cambridge University Press, 1983), is a magnificent source-book, indispensable to the serious student.

AS I SEE IT

BY TOM OWEN

Daniel Defoe

THE 'Satanic Verses' has a prefatory introduction from Daniel Defoe's 'The History of the Devil'.

Many people will have been astonished by the political storm that has accompanied the publication of this book. Part of the reason is that in Britain we have been 'educated' in the belief that art does not, and indeed should not, have anything to do with politics.

We are led to believe that novels, poems or paintings will sometimes have to be judged in court but only because the state is portrayed as a guardian of public decency.

Literature and the arts may be the cause of public scandal but only because of sex, blasphemy or libel.

That these domains should have a political dimension is never raised.

This is particularly ironic in the British Isles and Ireland, where literature has above all things been politically inspired.

Not only does literature in the English language, like the writing in other languages, reflect the social and political issues of the time, but also has an active and partisan tradition.

In the case of the novel it is particularly revealing to look at

the life and work of one of the innovators who had a formative influence on the genre.

Daniel Defoe, a prolific and versatile writer, was arguably one of the first professional writers of note who wrote novels as well. He was born in 1660 at St Giles, Cripplegate, London, and had a typical dissenter's education at Morton's Academy for Dissenters in Newington Green.

These academies were the independent educational institutions of the rising bourgeoisie.

The curriculum included the sciences, modern languages, and religion; that is to say the free and open discussion of all issues of conscience within the traditions of the English Revolution.

He resisted family pressure to become a minister and instead was apprenticed to a hosier. By the age of 24 he had become a merchant in his own right.

He served briefly as a soldier in the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion and then travelled widely in Europe.

Defoe was drawn into the political intrigue of the post-restoration period. His first political tract appeared in 1688.

It was directed against James II who dabbled with the idea of establishing an absolute monarchy after the model of the French. This was followed by the satirical poem 'The True-Born Englishman' in 1701.

In 1703 he was committed to Newgate prison because of a

caustic satire of High Church Toryism, and pilloried.

Defoe welcomed the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 for it represented for him and many others of his class, the ascendancy of a 'true protestant monarch' in the person of William III. He served for William as a spy from 1697 to 1701, and took up this profession again from 1703 to 1714.

The art of dissembling and disguise fascinated him and must have influenced his stance as an author of fiction in later life. But the writing of this 'middle period' covered an immense range.

He wrote on economics, politics, crime, religion, geography, marriage, psychology, etc. etc., with all the passion and meticulous attention to detail of early empirical scientific endeavour.

One of his most remarkable political works is 'An Essay on Projects', a programme of radical reforms which presage a modern state.

The proposals include public works, a national road system, direction of labour, a central bank, a military academy, and the emancipation of women.

Defoe became a novelist late in life. He brought to the early English novel the journalist's passion for actuality, the satirist's ambivalence and the puritan's deep distrust of art.

These four great novels are all contrived to be 'artless memories' of one kind or another.

The most obvious trickery or 'disguise' is to be found in 'The Journal of the Plague Year'.

Here Defoe assumes the persona of a good-hearted if shrewd London merchant who survives the plague to chronicle it in his own garrulous way. At the time of the pestilence, Defoe was only three.

The 'Journal' is a remarkable piece of social documentation of a catastrophe which could only be understood at the time as some form of divine retribution.

For Defoe and his merchant it was the price the English people had to pay for the failure of the 'Commonwealth'.

'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Moll Flanders' are amongst the first studies of the economic definitions of man and woman under emergent capitalism. Crusoe is man reduced to the bare economic struggle with necessity.

He is the economic individual. Moll is the economic woman. Her first sexual experience is accompanied by payment in gold.

Her subsequent struggle for existence leads her to prostitution and theft. At the nadir of her career she has to deny even her value as a commodity by disguising herself as a man.

Both Moll and Crusoe, the reformed woman and the ex-recuse, end up as prosperous and therefore virtuous members of the English middle class. Both owe their salvation to slavery, one as a single-handed colonist, the other as a plantation owner.

Irish women prisoners

BY CHARLIE WALSH

THE isolation of an English prison punishment block was briefly broken for two Irish women prisoners of war on International Women's Day when over 100 people protested against the appalling conditions suffered by Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer in Durham jail.

The protest was organised by the Irish Republican POW Campaign.

A second picket took place outside Frankland prison in support of the Irish POWs held there.

A message from the Durham POWs was read out, and a recent letter from Ella O'Dwyer (see extracts below) told how she and Martina have been locked up 23 hours a day because of their campaign for the closure of H-wing.

Lee Minto, who chaired the meeting, said the two women, now in their fourth year of imprisonment, were still strip-searched and still spent most of their days and nights in a cell smaller than the minimum European requirement.

The picket was supported by the United Campaign against Strip Searches, Irish in Britain Representation Group, Irish Hunger Strike Commemoration Committee, Winchester Three Campaign, Irish Prisoners' Appeal, Troops Out Movement, Workers Revolutionary Party/Workers Press, Revolutionary Communist Group, and Irish Freedom Movement.

Letter

Ella O'Dwyer's letter to the Irish Prisoners' Appeal said in part:

'We had our meal for my birthday, the night before my birthday - all of us who had plans for a bit of a get-together, presents, cakes etc. on the next day.'

'The next day we were all called in from the workroom. Everyone was locked up, then Martina and the two women involved in the birthday plans were all given cell searches - long ones, papers read over and over, etc.'

'A governor (security) by the name of Jennings called round. He said I would be on "good order and discipline" from now on (Rule 47).'

'I told him, truthfully, that I didn't know why I was being put on Rule 47, but I asked him if he meant that I could no longer talk to people visiting the wing about conditions. He said: "That's right."

'He told Martina the same, referring to her planning to get the H-wing closed down.

'The other woman asked him what was going on. He told her to ask her friends. We were put in the punishment block and we're here since.'

Post

'We got no post that day and presume that they may have wanted, among other things, to

time this event to go against our more festive plans...

'All our cell searches were conducted in the same way, reading each paper over and over as if to take as much time as possible... Some of the screws showed an almost insane delight, while at least two seem like they don't really want to be involved at all...

'A Board of Visitors woman was up last night, saying we were suspected of setting out to disrupt the wing.'

'She asked if I had been in any kind of clique or been grouping off to discuss things.'

'The only thing being planned lately was my birthday, and they knew that.'

British Chauvinists

AN array of 'socialists' have decided against using the slogan 'Self-Determination for the Irish People', at a march marking 20 years of British army presence in Ireland. The slogan was thrown out by the Mobilising Committee for the march in London on 12 August.

At a meeting on 9 March, a proposal to base the demonstration on 'British Withdrawal from Ireland, Time To Go, Self-Determination for the Irish People' was supported by the Troops Out Movement (TOM) and one delegate from the Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI).

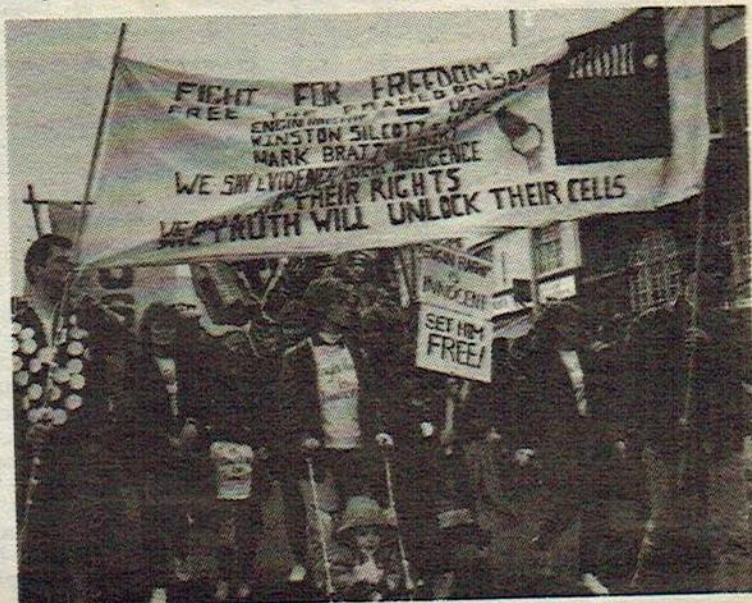
Nine votes were cast to scrap 'Self-Determination for the Irish People' but keep the other slogans. These included the leadership of the LCI (dominated by so-called Trotskyists of 'Socialist Action'), Time To Go Campaign, Labour Party Irish Sections (LPIS), Labour Women on Ireland, National Union of Students, Communist Party of Britain, Connolly Association, and Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

A second meeting on 21 March was attended also by the WRP who were not notified of the first meeting. We said that, by dropping 'Irish National Self-Determination' the organisers would bear responsibility for splitting the demonstration, as many Irish people and British left-wingers would only march with contingents who raised that slogan.

Charlie Walsh of the WRP said: 'To vote against the slogan of Irish national self-determination here is nothing but chauvinism on the part of British so-called socialists.'

A proposal that a national meeting of activists from Irish community and solidarity groups be called, to ascertain their views about the slogans was supported by the WRP, Irish in Britain Representation Group, and Workers Power.

Except for the TOM, these organisations rejected a move to reverse the decision on the 'self-determination' slogan, by the IBRG, the TOM, and Workers Power. The WRP supports the slogan, but didn't participate in the vote because we thought it as undemocratic as that of the previous meeting.



The march for Civil Rights and Justice in London 18 March. A march from Broadwater Farm, demanding the release of the Tottenham 3 (jailed for the death of PC Blakelock after the riots) met with the Irish in Britain Representation Group for a joint rally.

Labour leaders for split in T&GWU

BY ROY THOMAS

THE Transport and General Workers' Union Conference will meet at the end of June under the cloud of a concerted attack by the media and right-wing leaders of the Labour Party and trade unions manoeuvring to split the union to take members into Eric Hammond's EETPU electricians' union.

At one recent Executive Committee 17 members attempted to find legal grounds for action against the T&GWU, and walked out of the meeting.

Yet faced with this attempt to split the union, the Executive, under the leadership of Ron Todd, is ready to give ground on issues such as state funding for ballots and the training of young people.

The conference agenda, which is published this week, gives details of the 644 motions to be considered by 800 elected branch delegates at the end of June.

In reply to Kinnock's attack on the union at last year's Labour Party Conference, 32 branches throughout the country support the union's policy for unilateral

nuclear disarmament.

This matter is likely to provoke a major battle as branches in Wales and the South West, both under the control of right-wing Regional Secretaries, have tabled motions calling for a ballot of all members on the question of a more flexible approach to nuclear weapons.

Government funding for ballots is the issue which highlights the contradictions of the 'left' leadership. Here the Executive is calling for acceptance of such funding, supported by the two right-wing regions, and only the London Docks and Waterways Committee calls for rejection.

The membership as a whole is concerned about the anti-trade union laws.

A large list of branches and trade group committees call for a Labour government to repeal these laws; three London branches and the London Bus Committee call for the T&GWU to 'take whatever action is needed to defend trade union organisations, their right to strike and for trade unions free and independent of state control'.

News briefs . . .

Sheffield and the poll tax

THE Labour-controlled council of Sheffield, over the next year, is to cut council jobs by 700. This will be done by natural wastage. Staff wishing to stay will be transferred to other departments. School dinner ladies are to be retrained in clerical work. Refuse collectors are to be taught to compile Poll Tax registers!!

'Socialist' labour camps

ALTHOUGH reforms have cut the prison population in the Soviet Union, one million were in labour camps until the mid-1980's. This is the highest per-capita figure in the industrialised world.

Izvestia said 5,000 Soviet prison service employees were punished for breaking the law against inmates. 50% of the prison population serve between 5 and fifteen years, only 0.5% serve less than a year.

Maximum sentences of ten years are now proposed. The death sentence is still used, though it is proposed to reduce the number of crimes for which it is the penalty from the present 18.

Women hooligans

AN amendment to the football ID cards Bill excluding women from the compulsory carrying of the cards was debated in the Lords but failed by 113 votes to 107. Women make up ten to 15 per cent of football attendances. Lord Stoddard of Swindon (Lab) said, 'Women are very fortunately not violent. The young men who indulge in football hooliganism want to portray a macho image. Therefore they are unlikely to go to football matches in drag.'

US young stay home

EIGHTEEN million single US adults between 18 and 34 still live with their parents. This is an increase of a third since 1974. This is back to the figure for 1900. One major reason is the cost of accommodation which since 1982 has risen 28%.

Police state

PERSONAL information on 27,800 people interviewed by police in Brighton before and during the Tory Party conference has been retained on computer. Operation Radcot involved questioning 51,000 residents and visitors, including a large section of the towns Irish community. Brighton council said that those questioned were not told that their replies would be computerised and stored.

Sussex police were asked by the council to destroy the files but chief constable, Roger Bird, refused.

Liquid cosh for OAP's

OLD people in private nursing homes are being kept under sedation, often without any medical review of their problems. This was the finding of a survey by the British Geriatrics Society.

THE SOVIET ELECTIONS

BY TOM KEMP

WHAT might otherwise have been a dull campaign for the elections for the Congress of People's Deputies, has been enlivened by the presence of Boris Yeltsin, one time leader of the Moscow Communist Party.

Wherever he has gone, thousands of people have turned out to hear him. His popularity greatly exceeds that of his conservative critics, and perhaps that of president Gorbachev himself.

The mounting pressure of the masses has propelled Yeltsin to the front of the political scene.

He has been the most outspoken critic of bureaucratic abuses, and it was that which lost him his job, and made him the focus of much popular discontent.

Yeltsin is thus perceived as an alternative leader, now that perestroika is failing to produce any improvements in the living conditions of ordinary people.

But Yeltsin himself is a man of the apparatus who wishes not to overthrow it, but to reform it.

His differences with Gorbachev are more of emphasis than of principle, calling for example for a faster reduction in arms spending to make possible a more rapid improvement in the supply of consumer goods.

Identified as a danger to their privileges by the more conservative elements in the bureaucracy, Yeltsin was first sacked from his job as the Secretary of the Moscow Party, then dropped from the Politburo, and is now under investigation by the Central Committee of which he remains a member.

For the moment he is being swept along by a powerful current of popular discontent.

Whether he is an ambitious power-seeker or a bureaucrat with a conscience, what is significant is the upsurge of working class protest against the bureaucracy itself shown in the huge rallies which have been the feature of his electoral campaign.

The demand for an alternative leadership is growing as a prelude to the coming political revolution.

Meanwhile Yeltsin's conservative opponents on the Central Committee appear to be in disarray.

In particular, Igor Ligachev has been publicly humiliated by President Gorbachev's attack on agricultural policy for which he was nominally responsible.

Gorbachev is now playing off one camp against another to maintain his own position as an arbiter, blaming others for the failure of the leadership as a whole.



Meanwhile Soviet workers are coming forward with ever greater confidence, today behind leaders like Yeltsin who have no inten-

tion of taking the struggle to the end, tomorrow behind new leaders determined to restore the rule of the working class.

Milestone for Irish struggle

BY BERNARD FRANKS

A PACKED meeting at Queen Mary College, called by the East London Irish Year of Action, was recognised by speakers and audience as a milestone in the struggle for support in Britain for the cause of Irish freedom from British rule. In spite of massive anti-Irish propaganda, a witch-hunt in the local press and attempts by the college authorities to ban publicity on or near the campus, several hundred people crowded the Great Hall to hear pro-Irish speakers and a representative of Sinn Fein.

Labour councillor Therese Shanahan reminded the audience that it was a Labour government that had sent troops into Ireland. She linked the anti-Irish laws with the actions of the Tory government against the miners' strike and Wapping print workers and the mass of new repressive legislation including Clause 28 and the anti-union laws. She concluded by calling for a commitment for withdrawal of Britain from Ireland to be included in Labour's next election manifesto.

Paul Hill's uncle then gave harrowing details of the arrest, trial and prison treatment of his nephew, one of the Guildford Four. They were, he said, in effect being held as hostages by a British government which knew them to be innocent.

Ken Livingstone considered the meeting to be one of the

two or three largest of its type during the past ten years.

He outlined a web of corruption and degeneracy in the north of Ireland, involving MI5, civil servants and politicians, which the Tory government unites with the capitalist media to cover up.

Mick Gosling, the recently framed and sacked Fords Transport and General Workers' branch chairman, linked the management's attack with the fact that Bernadette McAliskey had spoken at the Ford's branch. He warned that failure of the English working class to struggle for the end of Irish enslavement would greatly weaken its battle on its own behalf.

A Sinn Fein speaker ended the meeting by outlining the history of censorship, brutality, torture and murder of the nationalist population along with systematic destruction of their civil liberties, finally calling for a widening of the support movement in Britain.

No speaker addressed the subject of the fight to build a proletarian movement towards the achievement of a socialist Ireland, an omission which can only give credence to the illusion that nationalism is the solution to the crisis of the Irish people.

The meeting gave unanimous endorsement to a message of support for Eamon Wadley, a Labour Party member seized and held recently under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.