

# 16 million face tax rises PAY BATTLE LOOMS

**THE Tory government is gearing up to slash the wages of millions of public sector workers.**

Two reports landed on Prime Minister Major's desk last week recommending that doctors and nurses receive an extra 3 per cent. Even though this would hardly cover inflation, the government is set to throw them out.

Other public sector workers with wage claims in the pipeline, including teachers and civil servants, will get the same treatment.

The Tories will demand that any pay increases come out of 'economies', that is out of yet more job losses.

## Hardest

While the government embarks on its wage-cutting plans, in a few weeks time it will hit 16 million people with increased taxes. Value Added Tax on domestic fuel will strike hardest at the poor and mean tens of thousands may have to go without heating.

Midland Bank's chief eco-

## BY THE EDITOR

nomist Roger Bootle says the cost of the welfare state was now 'rampant'.

Defence spending cuts were a drop in the ocean when compared with the soaring cost of welfare benefits, Bootle said.

Professor Christopher Hood from the London School of Economics was even blunter in expressing current thinking in ruling-class circles:

'Even during the hottest ideological periods of anti-government spending the tendency has been to raise spending,'

Hood charged. So much for Thatcherism having broken the fighting strength of the working class.

As further attacks on government spending are prepared, the burden of taxes for ordinary people is becoming intolerable.

## Take

The Tories will take more in tax from the average family than at any time since the war, according to Treasury figures.

By next year a family with two children with an income equivalent to average male

earnings will pay 35 per cent of that income in taxes.

The government has mounted a three-pronged attack on the working class and sections of the middle class:

## Hammer

■ Services are to be even further slashed, reducing millions to poverty or near-poverty;

■ As inflation accelerates, public sector wages are under the hammer; and

■ Heavier taxes will hit millions.

## Unite in Manchester!

**WHILE the Tories intensify their attacks, the working class suffers under a leadership that does everything possible to prevent it from uniting to get rid of the government.**

These leaders confine themselves to polite parliamentary exchanges with Major and company, and to fraudulent promises of what 'the next Labour government' would do.

In any case, millions cannot wait for such a government.

Trades Union Congress chief John Monks revealed last year

that he had been in secret talks for months with Tory ministers about the resumption of relations with the government.

The greatest fighting unity must be forged now among all those under the Tory attack against this sort of treachery.

How this is to be achieved will be discussed at the Unite the Struggles conference in Manchester next weekend (see advert below).

We urge all our readers to attend and take part in the discussion.



## Education is a right, not a privilege!

STUDENTS around Britain oppose Tory plans to cut their grants by 30 per cent, which would push more into debt and poverty, and put higher education out of reach of working class people.

As part of a national day of action on Thursday 20 January, more than 2,000 took part in a demonstration in Leicester, joined also by

college lecturers' union NATFHE, and members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of University Teachers (AUT). Local people said it was Leicester's biggest demonstration for years.

Photo: Mark Salmon

## Unite the Struggles conference

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£5 trades unions, £1 community groups  
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## Stop press on Bosnia convoy Drivers: get ready!

WORKERS AID FOR BOSNIA drivers have been alerted to prepare their return to Zagreb to join their trucks to go to Tuzla along the northern route.

Edo Asceric, director of the Tuzla Logistic Centre in Zagreb, anticipates an early-February start. The campaign to lift the blockade on this, the shortest route to the Tuzla and Posavina regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, escalated when Workers Aid for Bosnia was joined by the logistic centres of 19 towns in those regions.

The Workers Aid for Bosnia Christmas convoy arrived in Zagreb on 25 December, after being held on the Hungarian border by Croatian police, who tried to divert it to Split.

On 28 December, the commander of the 2nd Corps of the Bosnia and Herzegovina army gave it permission to travel in the area under his control.

On 29 December, the Croatian government provided per-

mission to travel out of Croatia via Zupanja to Orasje — the start of the northern route.

The Brcko Logistic Centre was also negotiating with the Bosnian Serbs who occupy between 5 and 10km of the road to Tuzla, and Workers Aid for Bosnia asked the HVO (Bosnian Croat forces) commanders to open the road from Orasje.

Hundreds of faxes were sent to the Croatian minister of defence from trades unions and other organisations demanding that the blockade be lifted.

Workers Aid drivers secured their trucks in Zagreb and returned home to campaign in the trades unions and other workers' organisations for the all-European workers' convoy planned for late February.

At the same time negotiations, based on the permissions already won, continued in Zagreb. Now a further step has been taken to lift the blockade of the Tuzla and Posavina regions.

# Mandel and the PLO

**LAST September the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation signed an agreement with the state of Israel. The agreement marked an abject capitulation by the PLO to Zionism.**

PLO leader Yasser Arafat agreed to recognise the imperialist state of Israel and renounce the use of violence. In return the PLO was given jurisdiction over the Gaza strip — a piece of land some 20 miles by 5 miles — which is largely a rubbish heap, and over Jericho, with its tiny Palestinian population. To call this even a statelet would be a violation of the English language

Further, the PLO agreed that it would be responsible for an anti-terrorist squad to deal with Arab 'extremists' opposed to Arafat. The Tory government said it would provide every facility to train such a squad.

But matters did not end there. Since September Arafat has been touring the Middle East horse trading with Arab nationalists and the imperialists.

Last week, for instance, he was in Riyadh to apologise to King Fahd for the support that he extended to Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war. Arafat hoped that this crawling would restore the large funds from Saudi Arabia to the PLO that were cut off at the time of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.

\* \* \* \* \*

**OF GREAT significance has been the response of many so-called Trotskyists to the PLO's capitulation. The United (!) Secretariat — the group headed by Ernest Mandel — is split down the middle on the issue. Michel Pablo, recently re-admitted to Mandel's organisation against the decision of the Greek section, welcomes the PLO's capitulation as . . . a historic advance.**

Now comes the turn of the Israeli section of the Mandel group, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL).

In a statement issued in the January issue of the journal 'International Viewpoint' (reprinted in 'Socialist Organiser', 20 January) they make the following statement:

'The Palestinian national movement faced one choice only: to accept the formula that was dictated by [former Israeli prime minister] Shamir and [US Secretary of State] Baker, and to open up negotiations with Israel under monstrous conditions, or reject it and pay the price of conflict with most Arab governments. After weighing up the consequences, the PLO leadership accepted the American dictate.'

So despite much bleating about the shortcomings of the deal, according to these 'Trotskyists' Arafat had no choice but to capitulate. This from people who have spent years chanting 'Victory to the PLO!'

Further:  
'If there were political forces supported by the masses, and not just small groups detached from the masses, these forces could have disrupted the process, even using terrorist activity. Then the RCL would have fought with them against this agreement, for a better one.'

Under these circumstances, 'Our public task is not to denounce the agreement but to express lack of confidence in the Rabin government.'

For these 'Trotskyists' a political line, a matter of principle, is decided by how much support there is for it among the working class! In the vocabulary of revolutionary Marxism this has long been called opportunism and there is no clearer example of it than here.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The immediate source of the crisis now threatening to tear the PLO apart is the collapse of Stalinism.**

It was the ability of the PLO to balance between Stalinism, on the one hand, and imperialism, on the other, that gave it (and similar bourgeois nationalist movements) a relative degree of stability in the postwar period. It also gave the PLO a 'left' face that it could present to the masses.

Now the mask is stripped away. The PLO is seen as a direct tool of imperialism in the Middle East.

But the unmasking does not stop there. For this self-same collapse of Stalinism has brought to light more clearly than ever before the class character and role of Mandel's revisionist movement.

# Letters

## Complex paths

I CANNOT allow the comments of John Robinson (11 December) and 'A London Reader' (22 January) on Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex to pass unchallenged.

The statement by 'A London Reader' that Freud held that the 'Oedipus complex . . . is an innate sexual attraction for the parent of the opposite sex' is stunningly ignorant, and I am surprised that John Robinson holds the same view.

It seems that neither of your correspondents has reflected on the meaning of the word 'complex'. The word refers to the coming together of a number of paths and Freud means (and says) just that. The innate component, which is the child's drive for libidinal pleasure (which has a much wider meaning than just 'sexual'), is just one of these paths.

Specific parts of the complex include: the location of the child's pleasure centres in the genital area, which develops at around the ages of three to five years; the fixation and attention of the child on (usually but not always) the parent of the opposite sex; the fear of the boy child that he may be punished by his father for the child's sexual interest in his mother; the fear that this punishment may be carried out by removal of his penis (known as 'castration anxiety'); the growing inquisitiveness of the child on matters of sex; interest in what goes on between his/her parents; and the rebuff by both parents of the child.

All of this gives rise to a traumatic situation which the boy child resolves by repressing his love feelings for his mother, and identifying with his father as a surrogate (and safe) way of getting to his mother.

Much of the outward show of this conforms to the behaviour of children at this age. (Ask any infant teacher about children's preoccupations with these matters!) The precise interpretation placed on this behaviour is of course another matter.

It is clear then that the 'inherited component' of the Oedipus complex (why 'A London Reader' refers to it as 'so-called' is beyond me) is but one part of a chain of events. At every stage in its development, this drive of the child is thrust up against the rules of society, parental relationships, and other such social things. Out of this mix comes the personality of the child, its sexual orienta-

tion and so on.  
The ludicrous compression of Freud's conception to the stunted product advanced by John Robinson and 'A London Reader' puts serious questions against the integrity of these correspondents. You don't have to agree with Freud, but at least let us have an honest showing of his position.

'A London Reader' challenges Roger Horrocks 'to show anything in Freud's own writings' (emphasis in original) to contradict 'London Reader'. This task is so simple that I find difficulty in believing it is serious. I would refer to the penultimate section of the fourth of Freud's 'Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis'.

As for the 'reactionary' nature of Freud's work, Horrocks has pointed out there were reactionary aspects. However I feel that, on balance, Hitler probably had a better understanding when in 1933 he authorised the public burning of Freud's books in Berlin.

Paul Henderson  
Leicester

*Editor: This correspondence is now closed. No doubt there is much more to say about the matters raised in the recent correspondence. But given the specialist character of the discussion about Freud's contribution to psychoanalysis I feel it more appropriate that it be pursued in more specialist journals.*

## Honesty affirmed

MY political integrity has been called into question for a second time on your letters page — this time by Sam Levy (15 January) — with no attempt made to deal with my views.

For Sam Levy's benefit, my reference to Vern and Ryan's documents does not 'proclaim' my 'ignorance and simultaneously [my] intellectual range'. I do not have to go to the Spartacist League's pamphlet on this question to discover what they said, as he evidently does. I was the first person in England to publish one of Vern-Ryan's documents, which I did in the 'International Bulletin' of the Revolutionary Communist League in spring 1971.

The fact that they are not referred to in the accounts of the debates in 'War and the International' is because they were not written until well after 1949 when the book ends, and therefore played no part in the debate between the Revolutionary

Communist Party and the International Secretariat of the Fourth International.

They have all been present in the files Sam Bornstein and I used for well over 20 years. The thesis that the states of eastern Europe became workers' states when they were conquered by the Red Army appears in them long before Sam and I set pen to paper, and it is that that is developed in our book (pp. 217-8).

Perhaps Sam Levy should be reminded of Trotsky's famous remark to Simone Weil to the effect that everybody has the right to ignorance, but it is important not to abuse that right.

Al Richardson  
London SW17

## Returning chickens

IN THEIR selling off of council estates and similar tricks, Westminster Tories took lessons from their colleagues in Wandsworth, some of whom went on to high office.

This is the same council which last year refused to let an empty old people's home be used to temporarily house Bosnian refugees, victims of torture, in case their presence lowered property values — the only kind of values Tories care about.

When Tory ministers launched their disgusting, hypocritical 'moral' crusade against single-parents, Wandsworth Tory leaders came on television saying they would stop young mothers 'jumping the queue' for council housing. But if you've got the money, there is no housing 'queue'!

I was employed by a security firm under contract to Wandsworth council in 1980, patrolling the new-built Althorp Grove estate, which Wandsworth took over from the Greater London Council. Families in neighbouring tower blocks looked forward to being able to move into this low-rise estate, but they hadn't a chance. No sooner were homes completed than they went on the market. Prospective buyers came from posh areas, such as Chelsea, over the river.

Across Battersea high street, a large block of pre-war London County Council flats was given a lick of paint and some potted shrubs and sold off as 'Battersea Village'. An old boy in an empty cafe told me how he used to be busy with workers going to nearby factories, where all the local lads did their apprenticeships. Now,

after factories like Morgan's had made way for the developers, and the wine-bars and stripped pine had sprouted, taxi-drivers told of the stripe-shirted 'yuppy' who'd hailed a cab in the King's Road, and asked for 'south Chelsea', meaning Battersea.

We were placed on a new housing estate being built at East Hill, where we were supposed to guard against vandalism or squatters. This development replaced a run-down old council estate.

Estate agents were given an office on the estate, and show flats were opened. A firm of landscape gardeners from somewhere out in Buckinghamshire was brought in just to mow the lawns. As for the people who'd lived there before, a senior Wandsworth council official told us: 'I'm glad we got rid of those people from East Hill, they were scum.'

Later the big 'Flats for Sale' sign went up on top of a tower block overlooking Clapham Junction (handy for Arding & Hobbs, and trains to the City, of course). Even some of the supposedly 'hard to let' blocks down Falcon Road were given the posh-entrance and potted-shrub treatment — I thought they might run to liveried flunkies — and sold.

Besides 'yuppification' of some parts of the borough, there was another side to Wandsworth's policy. Young couples who tried to get on the council waiting-list were told their only chance was to buy, and be saddled with big mortgage debts on places whose value has gone down. Tenants were encouraged to buy their homes, only to find themselves with big repairs bills, and flats they couldn't sell (building societies wouldn't lend on tower-block flats).

I was told it was involvement in the 1960s-70s Poulson affair (involving crooked deals with a firm of architects) which did for Labour rule in Wandsworth. Once in, the Tories were able to use the shift from industry to finance-capital under Thatcher to almost wipe out a proud working-class tradition, juggling money and people to consolidate their grip. Leading Wandsworth Tories were promoted to government positions.

Now, as the chickens come home to roost, and the bills come in, Wandsworth Tories could follow those in Westminster and get their come-uppance. But looking at what happened to 'municipal socialism' in other boroughs, is Labour in any position to make a come-back, or do we need something new?

'Streetwise'  
London SW12

## WORKERS PRESS £3,000 MONTHLY FUND

In so far: £583.63

WRITING this column is really hard work, and it's really hard to keep going. This week we've only managed to get £148.50! That's £11.50 less than last week. At this rate by issue 404 (24 April), readers will be writing in to ask us for money! That's if we're still here!

How to avoid this absurd scenario? Hopefully this is a seasonal fluctuation (presents, excess consumption, etc., after a hard year). But for those of us in work, pay packets should be coming in and I would ask you to put us high up on the payments to be made.

So we need to shake off the New Year lethargy and start trying to make the £3,000 target: as usual I will appeal that you try to break out of the normal group of supporters to try and find new supporters for the paper.

Mike Cooke

Money to: Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.

## INDEX BOOKCENTRES

28 Charlotte Street  
London W1P 1HJ  
071-636 3532  
□ Trotskyist bookshops

10-12 Atlantic Road  
London SW9 8HY  
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## Coming soon

**SATURDAY 29 JANUARY:** Bloody Sunday march for British withdrawal from Ireland. Organised by Bloody Sunday Organising Committee. Assemble 12 noon, Hyde Park (Marble Arch tube).

**TUESDAY 8 FEBRUARY:** Safety & Health at Work Exhibition at Olympia, London. Construction Safety Campaign is organising a protest outside on this the first morning of the exhibition. CSC office: 071-537 7220.

**TUESDAY 8 FEBRUARY:** Construction Safety Campaign advise that there is a coroner's inquest into the death of Mr Hipel (30), who died after a fall from a ladder in Watford on 6 November 1993. 9am at St Pancras coroner's court, Camley St, London NW1 (tel. 071-387 4884).

**WEDNESDAY 9 FEBRUARY:** Construction Safety Campaign advise that there is a coroner's inquest into the death of Mr

Hodge (42) who was killed in an incident at a bridge. 9am, Southwark coroner's court, Tennis St, London SE1.

**WEDNESDAY 9 FEBRUARY:** Construction Safety Campaign advise that there is a coroner's inquest into the death of Stuart Wybrow, who fell 7-8m from a scaffold while working on phase 1 redevelopment of Smithfield Market on 11 May 1993. The site is run by Taylor Woodrow and Stuart is reported as probably working for SGB Scaffold. Case may go on until 10 February.

And inquest into death of James Nicholas (26 or 28), who fell 70 feet on a demolition site at the Old Corn Exchange, Tower Hill, on 23 August 1993. Site was run by Trollope & Colls and James was working for Keltbray. The site was UCATT-organised. Both at City of London Coroner's Court, Milton Court, London EC2 (tel. 071-606 3030).

# No substitute for workers' control

**Boots  
grass up  
customer**

IT'S NOT just photojournalists who pass on pictures to 'help the police with their inquiries'.

Staff at a branch of Boots chemists in Newcastle upon Tyne told police that they had pictures that they maintained showed people smoking cannabis. The pictures had been brought in by a 19-year-old student, Raphael Bourgeois.

When he came to collect his snaps he was met by police and spent three hours in custody and was cautioned.

'My friends have stopped smoking because it's a real drag,' Bourgeois said later.

'The Times' reports that the staff at Boots 'saw' pictures of people smoking cannabis. Unless Bourgeois admitted this to the police the pics could just as well have been of people smoking large roll-ups.

It's not just the Animal Liberation Front that has grounds for being angry with Boots!

RJB MINING has bought Clifton colliery in Notts, and is to re-open the pit which was closed and mothballed by the British Coal (BC). RJB says it will only need 300 miners (the mine used to employ over 800), at lower wages.

The same RJB Mining has also offered to buy out the employee-owned Monktonhall colliery for £167,000. However, this will mean the 167 miners who put £10,000 each into buying the pit from BC will lose almost all of that £10,000.

The employee-owned pit lost £3,700,000 up to May 1993.

As part of a cost-cutting rescue plan for Aer Lingus, now in serious financial trouble, the trades unions have agreed to a two-year pay freeze in return for a 50 per cent share in the company.

## Leading

Paul O'Sullivan, the leading union negotiator, is quoted as saying 'Workers have achieved a major breakthrough... Aer

Lingus workers will immediately become real shareholders in the company and be able to influence its strategic direction.'

The cost-cutting pay freeze was needed to save £47,200,000 to keep Aer Lingus aloft.

Like the miners at Monktonhall, Aer Lingus workers may find themselves whistling for their investment and their jobs very soon. Owning shares in one's own company is no guarantee of a job, wages, or any say in, let alone control of, the company.

Since the deregulation of bus services in Sheffield in 1986, average fares have gone from 8p to 48p. The number of passengers has fallen from 300 million to 200 million. Traffic congestion has become a major problem for the first time, as it is often cheaper to use a private car than to use public transport.

Because of the fall in the number of those using the buses, the level of services outside the rush hour has dropped, meaning even more people are unable to use the bus services.

Under pressure from the government and its privatisation drive, South Yorkshire bus services have now been sold to the workforce. Or rather it has been sold to the banks.

## Wages

The Sheffield bus workers and bus passengers will find that they will be paying the banks for their jobs and services through lower wages and higher fares for many years to come.

## Disabled people to be hit by benefit cut

MANY people face a serious drop in income as a result of the government's decision to 'tighten up' on invalidity benefit. This warning came from the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux as the Incapacity for Work Bill was given its second reading in the Commons.

The bill would introduce a new incapacity benefit to replace invalidity and sickness benefits, and mean a more stringent medical test to measure capacity for work. According to the association, there is evidence that back-door moves to reduce the number able to claim the benefit are already under way.

It reports an alarming increase in people having benefits withdrawn, indicating that a narrower definition of incapacity is being used.

These changes, combined with the tighter rules now proposed, would severely cut the income of many disabled people, leaving them unable either to find work or to qualify for unemployment.

The chief executive of the Spastics Society commented: 'This legislation is about reducing public expenditure, not ensuring the right benefits reach the right people.'



Invalidity benefit cuts are about expenditure and are not helping disabled people

## The fight goes on at GCHQ

THE fight for the restoration of trade union rights at GCHQ goes on, ten years after the Tory government imposed a ban on trade union membership at the Cheltenham 'spy centre'.

Mike Grindley, chair of GCHQ Trade Unions and formerly the centre's only expert in Mandarin says: 'I consider the 10th anniversary as the time to redouble the fight. However long it takes we will win the battle.'

Operating from a two-room office above a hairdresser's shop in Cheltenham, a small group sacked ten years ago has kept the fight going with the help of a journal 'Warning Signal', which is still published.

Grindley was among a 14-strong group of cypher officers, linguists and skilled radio scanners who refused to accept the ban and were sacked. Around 100 others, including brilliant code-breakers and computer experts, expressed their hostility to the ban by resigning or taking early retirement.

So terrified was GCHQ management that the decision to impose the ban might be leaked that the notice declaring it was sent out individually in sealed envelopes to the centre's 7,000 staff in January 1984. The letters were printed in Fort Meade, Maryland, home of GCHQ's American partner, the US National Security Agency.

The letter contained a promise of £1,000 for all those giving up their trade union membership.

## Lifting

Recent discussion with the government about the lifting of the ban broke down when Prime Minister John Major said the gap between the two sides was 'unbridgeable'.

Even Tory MPs condemned the decision. John Gorst, Tory MP for Hendon North — no lover of trade unionism — described the ban as 'the nasty thin wedge of fascism'.

■ The TUC is holding a rally today (29 January) in Cheltenham.

## Romancing the voters Major Barbara's moral crusade

NINETY-TWO year old romantic novelist Barbara Cartland says she was the intellectual inspiration for Prime Minister John Major's ill-fated 'back to basics' crusade. 'It's a possibility', a secretary in Major's office admitted.

Wearing seven strands of pearls, several layers of make-up, and a frock in what Tory central office might deem a dangerous shade of pink, Dame Barbara said she'd entertained the Majors, John and Norma, to lunch shortly before the Tory party conference.

The prime minister wanted to know the secret of her success. 'I give my readers what they want, good moral stories' she told him, showing him over her bookshelves. 'I pointed him back to basics'.

At the Tory conference Major pledged: 'The Conservative Party will lead the country

back to these basics, right across the board: sound money, free trade; traditional teaching; respect for the family and the law.'

Unfortunately, events and revelations since, with the prime minister saying he knew nothing about Britain's arms deals, the chancellor picking pensioners' pockets, ministers sowing wild oats, and Tory councils selling homes for votes, have ripped off Major's moral chastity belt.

Dame Barbara, authoress of 'A Circus for Love', 'For All Eternity' (about student debts?), and 'Lies for Love', should understand.

Much-married daughter Raine and separated step-granddaughter Diana have made the tabloids with their troubles. And the slogan she originally suggested to Major was 'back to romance'.

## Cut in working hours a health issue

THE FRENCH government, as part of its attempt to reduce the growing numbers of unemployed, has challenged the unions to agree to changes in the organisation of working time.

In return the government would agree to a cut in the working week to 37 hours. Keeping a 48-week working year, this would mean a 1,680-hour year.

In the run-up to the European Parliament elections in June 1994, the European Social Democratic group has prepared a campaign to cut working hours. Ken Coates, editor of the European Labour Forum, wrote in the New Year issue: 'Today millions of people throughout Europe are out of work. Poverty is growing. Social peace in Europe is under threat.'

## Needs

So 'social peace', rather than the needs of the working class, is what motivates these Euro-Labourites.

Yet the problem of ill-health, stress, excessive periods of repetitive or monstrous work, the uncertainty and constant change, and over-demanding work schedules, and the longer and longer hours have become the cause of concern to activists.

Workers in Britain endure

the longest full-time working hours in Europe. On top of that they put in 80 million hours of overtime each week.

Wage cutting and the forcing down of hourly wage rates has forced many workers to work those extra hours vital to pay the bills, and keep a roof over their heads.

## Reduction

The reduction in unemployment, and the improvements in the health and working conditions all require a reduction in working hours.

The government's call for deregulation, the lifting of any control over working hours for many workers, young people, and the current government proposals to reduce the control of hours worked by bus and lorry drivers, are all part of a pattern of increasing exploitation to defend profits.

The phrase 'no sentiment in business' means safety levels, injuries and deaths must not be allowed to get in the way of making a profit.

The call of the First International for a legal maximum eight-hour day for all workers could strike an important blow for health and safety, and against the growing level of unemployment.

**Bristol Marxist Forum conference  
Towards revolution: Socialist politics now  
Saturday-Sunday 5-6 March  
The Bristol Settlement, Ducie Road,  
Barton Hill, Bristol 5  
Saturday — 1.30pm-5.30pm; Sunday — 10am-2pm  
Details from: J. Clarke, 23 Monmouth Road, Bristol BS7 8LF. Tel.  
0272-423435**

**WORKERS AID  
FOR BOSNIA  
National Steering  
Committee meeting**  
**5 February  
2pm-5pm  
Highfields Community Centre,  
Leicester**  
**All local groups and other interested  
individuals are invited to send a representative**  
For further details please contact: WAB, PO Box 9,  
Eccles SO, Salford M30 7FX. Phone: 061-707 1584  
or 071-582 5462.

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## Inside left

### Network of struggle

CROATIAN defence minister Gojko Susak's fax machine was buzzing earlier this month with calls for the obstacles to be removed from in front of Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy, which was heading for Tuzla. Messages came from friends of Workers Aid in, among other places, London, Paris, Barcelona, Glasgow, Manchester, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights (IPHR) did not hesitate: 'As a group of Israeli and Palestinian health workers who have struggled together against the violation of human rights during a period of conflict and suffering, we ask you to do everything in your power to enable the convoy to pass the [Croatia-Bosnia] border so that it may reach its destination.'

Formed in response to Israeli harassment and detention of Palestinian health workers, IPHR has exposed ill-treatment and torture of prisoners (see 'International Trade Unionist', June 1993), and is campaigning for public health provision for Palestinians, particularly children.

A journalist from the left-wing 'Hanitzotz/As-Sharara' publishing house, Roni Ben Efrat, sent this message to Susak: 'We hear with great distress the worrying news that comes from your country. We would like to see an end to the agony and pain of all civilians in former Yugoslavia.'

'We hear that the Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy is in Zupanja on the border of Croatia and Bosnia. It has almost reached its goal to take desperately needed aid to the people of Bosnia. Please do everything in your power to enable the convoy to pass.'

Roni Ben Efrat was among several journalists arrested in the spring of 1988, when the Israeli state clamped down on reporting of the Palestinian Intifada. She spent nine months in detention, and was involved with Palestinian women in a hunger strike against assaults and ill-treatment at Neve Tirza women's prison.

An old working-class adage says 'It's the poor as helps the poor'. Campaigning for solidarity with the Bosnian people, we find it's usually those in struggle themselves who recognise the need to support others.

### Errand for the Raj

RAJANI Palme Dutt, 'for many years the leading theorist of the British Communist Party' and 'the most brilliant Oxford scholar of his generation', 'did not always get it right. But he usually did', declares John Foster in the 'Morning Star' ('Imperfect Brilliance', 17 January). Like when Dutt called Stalin's crimes mere 'sun-spots'?

'Dutt played a critical role in developing anti-colonial movements', Foster claims, mentioning the British Stalinist's influence on the Indian Communist Party and the Indian National Congress. 'He was banned from entry to all colonial territories from 1921 till the early 1940s.' Thereby hangs a tale.

When World War II broke out, the leaders of the Communist Party of India were prisoners of the British Raj. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in September 1941, they continued to regard the war as imperialist. Palme Dutt was sent to see them in prison. Persuaded to back the British war effort, the Indian Stalinists were released and in 1942 provided information to help imprison nationalists.

Charlie Pottin:

# Don't let fascis

'FORGIVE me, but I have not cried in public before.' These words, spoken by a former Tuzla professor now in his seventies, will give some idea of the intensity of the extraordinary Workers Aid meeting in Stuttgart.

A small, densely packed room in the city's Bosnian citizens' club was the setting for this emotional, inspiring and, at times, abrasive meeting. Bosnians from Germany, Sweden, Slovenia and Croatia were joined by trades unionists and aid workers from Britain, Belgium, Spain, Hungary, Sweden, the Czech Republic and France.

Co-chair Salko Kavcic of the Bosnian miners' aid organisation in Slovenia opened the meeting by urging everyone to come together to help Tuzla, the destination of Workers Aid's convoy campaign that it had been prevented from reaching.

A German aid worker, Henning Zierock, from the Gesellschaft Kultur des Friedens and Mir Sada,

**JOHN DAVIES reports on the Workers Aid for Bosnia meeting held in Stuttgart on 15-16 January, which prepared for the continuation of the campaign in Europe.**

out that one of the methods by which aid is prevented from getting through is by wearing people down through deliberate delay.

After pointing out that hunger and disease was now being used as a weapon of war, she concluded: 'We need to find a way of continuing this convoy. Tuzla is the bulwark against ethnic cleansing and we must come to its aid. We must take the campaign out, again and again, into the trades unions, for the opening of the northern route.'

### Preventing partition of Bosnia

A NUMBER of speakers echoed the earlier calls for proper preparation and advance publicity. Agreeing with a speaker who felt that the

**'We need to find a way of continuing this convoy. Tuzla is a bulwark against ethnic cleansing and we must come to its aid. We must take the campaign out, again and again, into the trades unions, for the opening of the northern route.'**

described how his organisation's attempts to get to Sarajevo had convinced it of the need to open the northern route to Tuzla. Zierock stressed the importance of taking the work onto a new level, of advance publicity, and of proper logistical preparation.

Dot Gibson, a member of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International and of Workers Aid for Bosnia, then gave a report on the latest Worker Aid convoy, which had sought to get to Bosnia from late December till earlier this month. She drew attention to how the United Nations had done everything possible to prevent aid getting through.

While acknowledging the many problems that had surrounded the convoy, some of which had been associated with difficulties caused by personal parcels, Gibson said many of the delays had been at the hands of the UN and the Croatian government. Indeed, she pointed

meeting shouldn't be taken up with past personal experiences, a representative of Workers Aid added that it was also necessary to be clear about how Workers Aid approached the campaign.

Workers Aid believed the only force that could prevent the partition of Bosnia was the international working class:

'Not everyone at this meeting will necessarily agree with this. But we discovered during the course of our first two convoys the real nature of the UN's role in preventing aid from getting through. Other aid organisations are coming to the same conclusions.'

Victor, from Stuttgart, outlined some of the problems he had encountered with the Christmas convoy. He felt that the convoy had let him down because it had failed to deliver the personal parcels he had handed over.

Olivia Meerson, from Paris and

representing Workers Aid in France, spoke of people's disappointment when convoys organised by Presence and Equilibre had failed to get through over Christmas.

'About 200 lorries had left France over Christmas, heading for Bosnia. Organisations had preferred the Split route until they had heard about the possible opening of the northern route. They have now picked up the call for the northern route.'

Meerson would be reporting back to a conference of aid groups from throughout France and would need precise instructions from this meeting.

A message of support was given by the Bosnian consul in Stuttgart, who had been involved in aid himself. A complicated discussion taking in the problems of organisation and how best to link in with other aid convoys was continued on Sunday, after a minute's silence for the people of Bosnia.

### An appeal to ordinary people

THE meeting's main resolution was moved by Dot Gibson, who said: 'This constitutes an appeal to the ordinary people of Europe — are they going to stand aside and let fascism succeed again in Europe?'

'We have to understand that what happened in ex-Yugoslavia could happen in the rest of Europe. There have already been two world wars, where worker was forced to fight against worker. Many of those in Workers Aid are long-standing socialists. We believe that it is now vital for the working class to rebuild its internationalism after years of Stalinist domination.'

'Many young people demonstrate throughout Europe against fascism. We have to convince them that the struggle for Bosnia-Herzegovina is part of that fight.'

'Through organising the convoy to open the northern route we give people a concrete way of acting on their feelings.'



Platform speakers at the Workers Aid for Bosnia meeting in Stuttgart.

Referring to the differences that had occasionally emerged at the meeting, she finished: 'Despite these we have to take on the biggest fight. If we cannot take this stand then we admit that we cannot respond to the needs of the people of the world. Fascism must be stopped!'

Faruk Ibrahimovic, who was a representative of the mayor of Tuzla, followed on by saying that many Bosnians did not have a clear idea of what Workers Aid for Bosnia is.

'Workers Aid was the first to campaign to take aid to Tuzla; it was the first to campaign for the opening of Tuzla airport; it was the first to campaign for the opening of the northern route. The mayor of Tuzla supports these initiatives.'

Faruk also pointed out the importance of the northern route in reducing the flourishing black market. The opening of the route would deal a blow to the racketeers by increasing supplies and so reduce prices.

### French activists

**Last weekend saw a two-day conference held in Orleans, France, to oppose the carve-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. OLIVIA MEERSON reports**

PARTICIPATION in the Workers Aid for Bosnia February convoy was considered by a conference of French activists, last weekend, as the immediate way to centralise all actions in support of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The February convoy, which will plan to reach the mining town of Tuzla in north-east Bosnia, is an important way of combining political propaganda with active support for the resistance to Greater Serbian aggression.

On the Sunday, a Serbian member of the Workers International, Radoslav Pavlovic, described to the conference the crisis in Serbia where he lives. He spoke of the necessity to unite opposition to Serbian nationalism both inside and



Unloading a Workers Aid truck in Croatia during the first convoy in October last year

# m succeed



Bosnia meeting in Stuttgart on 15-16 January

There followed an interesting exchange that will give Workers Press readers some idea of the complexity of the convoy's logistical considerations.

Replying to a question as to why certain vehicles were left behind in Bosnia, Faruk explained that there was no diesel available to get them to Zagreb in Croatia, let alone Stuttgart.

'But why couldn't diesel be taken to these trucks?' asked another questioner. Faruk explained that diesel was regarded as a weapon of war, and George Angus from the convoy team added that it was necessary for trucks to carry enough diesel for the return trip.

## Opening the northern route

RADO Faslovic returned to the question of the opening of the northern route. He urged that the next convoy should travel from Britain to Zagreb with all other countries joining on the way.

'There is great respect for this

meeting', he added, 'both for the initiative of Workers Aid and the Tuzla Logistic Centre and for the work done by Azra Marosovic in Manchester and by Nella in Heidelberg, Germany.' He concluded by stating that he hoped that the convoy would have a working-class basis.

Hasim, a Bosnian who had been living in Sweden for many years, offered his help on behalf of three aid agencies that he represented. They could send 15 trucks he said, and were buying more.

Vaughan Thomas, a London bus-worker and treasurer of Workers Aid, brought greetings from the 200,000 London transport workers who he was representing at the meeting. 'I was on the first convoy,' he said, 'and was deeply affected by the experience. What is happening in Bosnia is fascism and genocide.'

Referring to the blockade, he said it is 'a political problem requiring political solutions. In that sense aid alone is not enough. The Bosnians need bread but they also

need arms to defend themselves.'

His appeal caught the mood of the meeting very well: 'The people of Europe need to speak with one voice and so loudly that those in Tuzla and Sarajevo can hear us above the sound of the bombs.'

A young student from Manchester, Peter Garret, told of how he had come into contact with Workers Aid through a campaign at his college to preserve educational standards.

There had been much support from the student population, which came from many countries, and they were planning to ask for a 50p levy, which he urged others to adopt.

## Reality of the blockade

SOME of the day-to-day reality of what the blockade actually meant for Tuzla's people came through in a contribution from a journalist from the town.

'One million people are nearly starving. Although life in the villages is a little better, the black market now means that flour is 12 Deutschmarks a kilo and sugar DM60.'

One Muslim speaker, supporting the call for the opening of the northern route, said that 'this Christian war against the Muslims must be stopped'.

This brought disagreement from a number of fellow Muslims, one of whom said that while she agreed that governments wanted to destroy a nation that was primarily Muslim, it was not a Christian war, although she herself was a Muslim.

Stefan Peric from Tuzla, whose father had been a miner, spoke of mining's crucial place in Tuzla and of the adversities faced by its workers. 'In 1962 over 6,000 miners either died or were injured in a mine accident,' he said.

This long, crowded Stuttgart meeting ended with a unanimous vote in support of the resolution calling for the next convoy.

A delicious, traditional Bosnian meal had been provided by the friendly staff of the club, and toasts of solidarity were shared before the many visitors set off for their different destinations.

# sts support February convoy to Bosnia

outside Serbia. This must necessarily end with a denunciation of the war against Bosnia-Herzegovina, which none of the recent electoral opponents of Serb president Milosevic had even mentioned.

Pavlovic called for the opening of the northern route to the Posavina and Tuzla regions of Bosnia, and for the organisation — with the support of working people and their unions — of the massive convoy planned by Workers Aid for February.

Many links were established during this highly productive weekend. However, many questions still remain to be clarified, principally on the role of the unions and the workers' movement, which is not yet at the centre of the thinking of most of the activists in this campaign.

The Saturday part of the meeting was organised by the 'Sarajevo, Cultural Capital of Europe' organisation. Saturday began with a panel which consisted of Bosnian and French activists in support of the resistance of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Bosnian ambassador in Paris, Jack Ralite, the mayor and

MP of Aubervilliers, and representatives of artists, intellectuals, democrats and legal specialists were among the speakers who outlined the future of the campaign.

There was general agreement on the guilt and (more or less passive) complicity of the Western powers and the French government. A 'States General', a system of tribunals, is being prepared for March. There were appeals for testimony from victims of ethnic cleansing so that the war criminals can be sued under international law.

## Political

Workshops discussed humanitarian aid, political action, refugees, cultural co-operation, the media, and even military problems. There was a determination to oppose the carve-up of Bosnia, although some bitter lessons had to be learnt from the difficulties in getting wide public support and breaking the blockade of aid.

The Saturday's session ended with the question being raised of

opening the northern route to the Tuzla and the Posavina region. At the same time, the majority of speakers advocated military intervention to lift the blockade of Sarajevo, as well as the lifting of the embargo on arms.

The Sunday meeting brought together for the fourth time most of the committees and associations active throughout France. It differed from the Saturday session in its composition. It was not dependent on famous personalities, but more on anonymous activists.

There were 85 participants, the majority of whom had also taken part in the Saturday's proceedings. They represented all regions and a majority of committees.

The Sunday meeting was opened by Jesenko Galijsevic, a Bosnian, who drew a picture of the current course of the war. He spoke of the necessity of centralising, both politically and practically, the various initiatives.

Musa Jupolli, an Albanian from Kosovo, explained the situation of his people, and why they felt solidarity with Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Bronwen Handyside reports

# Two nations



## Water companies' nice little earner

GOOD news for lawyers, not so good for the rest of us who find it difficult to find an alternative to the old H<sub>2</sub>O for keeping ourselves hydrated.

According to a report from the water industry watchdog OFWAT, the water companies probably made about £14 million last year by suing more than 1,300 people a day for late payment of bills.

Over two-thirds of those sued are blacklisted as bad debtors for up to six years.

In 1991-92 the 31 water companies in England and Wales issued 475,000 county-court summonses — making the water industry Britain's single biggest litigant. They sued at the rate of one person every minute.

Most summonses are issued by computer with little or no warning, and the 'legal' fees charged to their hapless customers every time a letter is sent out turns the water companies' zealotry into what is colloquially known as a nice little earner. That at least explains where the industry's executives are finding the wherewithal for their soaring salaries.

Yvonne Glasgow spent a short time in America looking after her sick parents and returned to find a summons on her doormat from Yorkshire Water.

'We were away for just a few weeks visiting my parents and there was absolutely no warning. By the time we got back the judgement had been recorded. It's a disgrace. I've always paid my bills and you can't live without water.'

She had the judgement overturned, but not without some suffering — emotional and financial. 'A judge has now cleared my name but it was not without considerable cost and embarrassment . . . the final bill was £174, almost £50 more than the original', Glasgow said.

Nigel Hodgkinson, a solicitor in a firm near Southampton, ended up in court when Southern Water issued a summons:

'I had been late in paying the first instalment of my water bill, having just moved homes, and they issued a summons against me. I notified them that they had been paid and asked them to stop proceedings but they went ahead and issued a judgement anyway.'

His firm has a computer program similar to the water company's for issuing summonses.

'If they have anything like the same program we have, the operation will almost certainly be profitable,' he said. 'To issue a summons all you have to do is push a button — you don't need a lawyer, anyone could do it. For a big company, the cost of issuing summonses should be no more than a few pounds per case.'

Just think of all those other victims of the water companies who do not have the knowledge, and/or the cash to pursue their cases against these blood-sucking bandits.

## The left hand knows

WHAT an amazing coincidence that at the same time the water companies are getting more bolshy with their customers, many leading consumer protection organisations are to be savagely cut from April this year.

The National Consumer Council, the Gas Consumers' Council, the Post Office Users' National Council and the Domestic Coal Consumers' Council face funding cuts of up to 50 per cent.

The National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, now handling record numbers of cases,

including hundreds of thousands of debt problems, is to have its budget frozen.

The cuts are in preparation for a deregulation bill, which will end all consumer protection which this wild and wacky government proposes for next year.

What was that Tory policy called the Citizen's Charter about? Was it something to do with handing back control from big unfriendly bureaucratic organisations to the individual? Or in the immortal words of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty: 'Words mean what I want them to mean — neither more nor less.'

## Debts are big business

AND as Alice in Wonderland herself remarked, things are getting 'Curiouser and curiouser'. Despite the much vaunted 'improvements' in the economy, debt collection remains very big business. London Scottish Bank, a Manchester-based finance house, saw its pre-tax profits soar by over 18 per cent to £4.54 million through the pursuit of a bundle of debts (a portfolio) it took over from another bunch of sharks in August last year.

The bank said: 'The year has commenced very well and we are more confident about the future than for some time.' At least somebody is doing all right then.

## The welfare of princes

BUT never fear, the valorous members of the Labour Party are on the job.

Frank Field MP last week got up in parliament and asked a question about the happiness of crown prince William and his brother Harry.

One is inclined to wonder why he doesn't demand the same kind of inquiry into the mental health of the 3 million children now living below the official poverty line. Possibly Mr Field thinks they are better able to look after themselves, being less gently bred.

## The rotten borough

AS THE foul bag of corruption that was Westminster city council spills over the front pages of the national press, it might interest you taxpayers to know that the government has paid more than half the cost of grants handed out by Westminster to enable tenants to buy homes.

The cash was used to buy houses all over Britain, and as far afield as Barbados, Italy, Australia, Egypt and Chile.

It came from a government scheme which was ostensibly to help the homeless by encouraging council tenants to leave their homes.

In its first letter applying for the scheme to the government in 1989 Westminster said it had not meant-tested or interviewed applicants for grant money in any depth.

But in 1990-91 Westminster received £1.45 million of the £19.1 million fund, and in 1992-93 the wealthy council got a further £2.49 million. In the same two years, Camden, which has a higher homelessness rate, got £1 million and £300,000.

In the same year banks and building societies repossessed more than 1,100 homes a week from your ordinary punters — nearly four times the number in 1989.

If you have any material for this column, please send it to me at Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB.

## Tom Kemp and 'Labour Review'

I WAS asked the other day how I'd feel about contributing an essay to a projected memorial volume in honour of the late Tom Kemp — specifically, by writing some recollections of the old 'Labour Review', to which Tom was a valued contributor.

This is something I'd dearly love to do. What follows is by way of a preliminary sketch for such an essay, and I should welcome corrections of fact and emphasis as well as anecdotal and other recollections that might supplement my fast-dimming memory of what happened 35 or more years ago.

First of all, about Tom. He came into the office rarely and, to my regret, we didn't get to know each other at all well — though we did also meet from time to time, I think, at 'Labour Review' editorial board meetings in Leeds and Nottingham.

What did come into the office, always absolutely bang on time, was Tom's copy, which I have cause to remember since, almost uniquely, it was typed and, like his lectures, always exactly the agreed length.

Here, as in many other areas of his work, Tom set a standard that few others were even aware of. Not that we couldn't handle handwritten copy when it was legible and the pages were numbered in sequence.

From this point of view I had no quarrel with Brian Pearce, whose handwriting presented few problems — and who, in any case, since he shared with me the task of proof-reading, was in a unique position to pick up my occasional misreadings.

But another contributor, who bore the same forename as Pearce, wrote without margins on both sides of the paper, in a scrawl that looked for all the world as if he had dipped what he himself would have called 'a good-looking spider' into a bottle of ink and set it free to roam across the page. And he was far from untypical.

I started my stint on 'Labour Review' and 'The Newsletter' without having had any formal training whatever as a sub-editor. Tom Kemp, by his fine example, taught me a great deal. Above all, he taught me what it meant to take a professional attitude to the work.

'Subbing' his writing was a joy. It was as clear as a bell and needed almost no rewriting. Once or twice I ventured to suggest that an unusually long sentence might with advantage be divided into two; with characteristic modesty, Tom went along with these suggestions.

And his professionalism and personality shone out, not only in the form of his contributions, but also in their content.

He was a born polemicist and, when he felt it necessary, a positively savage one. He was no respecter of academic titles or reputations. And he stuck to his guns with a quiet tenacity that a bulldog with its jaws clamped on a piece of meat might have envied.

One of the first pieces of his that I remember 'subbing' was a blistering open letter (September-October 1957) to the compiler of a Soviet textbook on political economy, the English translation of which had just appeared.

Tom wiped the floor with the 'pseudo-Marxist apologetics' of Professor Ostrovityanov and his colleagues, concluding with the words: 'I hope that the sharpness of many of my criticisms will not prevent you from sending me a reply.' So far as I know, no reply ever came.

Another vigorous polemic, well worth reprinting in any future selection of Tom's occasional pieces, was his penetrating and unanswerable review

## PERSONAL COLUMN

(May-June-July 1958) of Milovan Djilas's *The New Class*.

THE MAIN thing to remember about the 'Labour Review' of the late 1950s, it seems to me after more than a third of a century, is that it was essentially a discussion journal run under Trotskyist auspices.

The theoretical position of the Socialist Labour League, launched in 1959, and of its predecessor, was put firmly, clearly, and consistently in its editorials.

But the journal was never narrow. It did its best to retain amicable relationships with the nascent New Left: paying tribute to the work 'of great value' done by 'avowed Marxists' among them, while constructively criticising 'some dangerous trends in the present thinking of Left intellectuals' (Cliff Slaughter, 'The "New Left" and the Working Class', July-August 1959).

And it found room for contributions from a surprisingly wide spectrum of writers who had not the remotest connection with the SLL, among them Henry Collins, Gordon Cruickshank, Isaac Deutscher, Stanley Evans, Douglas Goldring, Donald Soper, Peter Worsley, and James D. Young.

There was no departure from principle in thus throwing the journal open to those willing to take part in a healthy and hard-hitting discussion. For students and other young readers interested in ideas, it made 'Labour Review' not merely attractive, but indispensable.

I'm not saying it was perfect, or that 1957-59 was a kind of golden age. But there's a lot to be said for conducting a Marxist theoretical journal on such lines.

## A word in season?

IT'S not logophobia, or morbid dislike of words, on my part if I point out that 'homophobia', a word that has been popping up all over the place lately, is technically a barbarism: i.e. a word not formed in accordance with normal standards.

Etymologically, it means 'morbid dislike of the same' or 'morbid dislike of sameness'. That, at any rate, is what the ancient Greeks would have taken it to mean.

The meaning of a word is of course determined by its usage, not its etymology. And 'homophobia', though apparently a recent coinage, is now, I suppose, the established word for 'morbid dislike of homosexuals, or of homosexuality'.

But it's curious that it has apparently been formed by tacking the Greek '-phobia' on to the English 'homo'.

In the 1960s, as I well remember, the word 'homo' was regarded not merely as a colloquialism but as a highly derogatory word.

So it was sedulously avoided by those of us blatant heterosexuals who, long before the advent of 'political correctness' and the appropriation of 'gay', chose not to give offence.

## Valediction

THIS is the last column of mine that will appear in Workers Press for several weeks. I'm pleased that Terry Brotherton, whose wit and wisdom are well known to Workers Press readers, has agreed to contribute a weekly column in my absence.

I couldn't wish for a better stand-in.

Peter Fryer

## Television

# Behind successful sitcoms

Review by Roger Horrocks

The theme of petty-bourgeois pretensions was seen 30 years ago in Tony Hancock's great portrayals of life in East Cheam: utterly tedious and narrow, but inflated by Hancock's manic flights of fancy, which are always brought down to earth.

It is also seen in 'Only Fools and Horses' (BBC1, Fridays) in David Jason's Del Boy: the man who always threatens to do a big deal tomorrow, but today has to make do with a barrowload of dodgy men's wigs. The same structure is found in 'Minder', and in fact in 'Steptoe and Son':

straddled the border between comedy and anguish.

But American sitcoms are different. They have a tendency towards family schmaltz: thus for example 'The Cosby Show' (Channel 4, Sundays). Cosby's dry wit tends to get drowned in floods of cute kids, cute granddads, cute everything. But from America also comes the wonderful 'Roseanne' (Channel 4, Mondays), starring the acid-tongued Roseanne Barr. Let me also mention 'Fresh Prince of Bel-Air' (BBC2, Mondays) for the hugely talented Will Smith, who looks astringently around

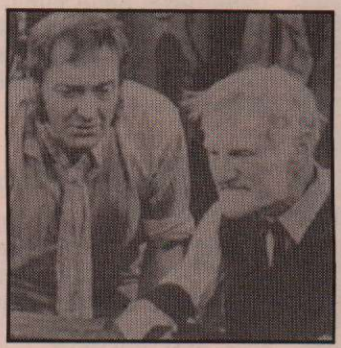
NEWS that the BBC has recently uncovered four lost episodes of 'Steptoe and Son' (BBC2, Sundays) is a reminder of the importance of sitcoms on TV. There are certainly plenty of them, for television companies are constantly trying new ones, hoping to find the right formula for a hit, another 'Only Fools and Horses' or 'Minder' or 'Birds of a Feather'. But 95 per cent of new sitcoms disappear without trace, never to be seen again.

The BBC has a virtual monopoly on good sitcoms, partly because of its great traditions of broadcast humour, going back to radio days, the Goons, Hancock, 'Round the Horne', and so on.

What are the basic elements of sitcom humour? Obviously prime requirements are a sharp script and a good cast, but in terms of the actual content, the following elements have been prominent in British sitcoms: petty-bourgeois and inadequate characters who are debunked; hostility between the main characters; class tension; and often a certain amount of slapstick.

## Superb

All of these elements can be seen clearly in the classic 'Dad's Army' (BBC1, Saturdays). Arthur Lowe plays the superb comic creation, Captain Mainwaring, the bank manager and pompous, self-inflated head of a platoon of ageing Home Guard. Much humour is provided by the conflicts between him and his sergeant (played by John Le Mesurier): for Mainwaring has a provincial petty-bourgeois stuffiness, whereas Wilson (Le Mesurier) comes from aristocratic stock, which Mainwaring resents.



Lost episodes of 'Steptoe and Son' (left) have been found (BBC 2, Sundays). 'Roseanne' is acid-tongued (Channel 4, Mondays), but US sitcoms are cosier than British ones



Harry H. Corbett constantly aims for higher things than a rag-and-bone yard, but events (and the gruesome Steptoe senior) constantly puncture his illusions.

Hancock's memorable portrayal has perhaps only been equalled by John Cleese's Basil Fawlty: peevish, egocentric, fluctuating between omnipotence and impotence — a comic performance that brilliantly

him at another black American family.

American sitcoms are much cosier, much more comforting, than the British ones. They are not obsessed with class, and they are more centred on the family, whereas many of the best British sitcoms have focused on hostilities within the family. In fact the basic structure has two individuals, who constantly bicker and make up,

similar to the great comic double-acts such as Morecambe and Wise. Thus Hancock had Sid James, Del Boy has Rodders, Harold Steptoe has his dad, Fawlty has his wife (and Manuel), and so on.

Sitcoms tend to fade after several years, for quite simply the scripts start to sag. Prime example at the moment is 'Birds of a Feather' (BBC1, Saturdays), which used to crackle with a wonderful hostility between the characters, but now is often like a damp squib.

## Tensions

But 'Birds' is unusual in being centred on two women, whose husbands are in prison for bank-robbery. They are working class and live in a posh part of Chigwell, and much of the humour again revolves around class tensions, especially with their middle-class Jewish neighbour, Dorian.

The great danger for a sitcom is that it becomes too cosy; at their best they are full of black humour and surrealism. A classic example of the surreal from the past: Hancock looks lugubriously at his Sunday dinner, which has been cooked by Sid. Finally the peevish malcontent decides to protest: 'At least mother's gravy used to move around a bit!' Imperishable!

A point of great interest: why should British humour be so interested in the pompous petty-bourgeois mentality? It could be argued that this kind of comedy allows a safe expression of class hostility, and hostility towards and within the family. In this sense the British sitcom, at its best, has been more savage and less comforting than the American.

## Programme guide

**Monday 31 January** 'Tango of Slaves'. Israeli-born filmmaker Ilan Ziv records his father's return to his pre-war Warsaw home, where traces of his family's Jewish ghetto are now to be found only in photographs, home movies and German Ministry of Propaganda films (11pm, Channel 4).

**Tuesday 1 February** ASSIGNMENT: 'The Disposables'. A new form of murder has been developed in Colombia: death squads roam the streets 'socially cleansing' them of beggars, prostitutes and waifs (7.45pm, BBC2).

**Wednesday 2 February** WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: 'Hackers and Phreakers'. Follows two teenage prodigy computer-

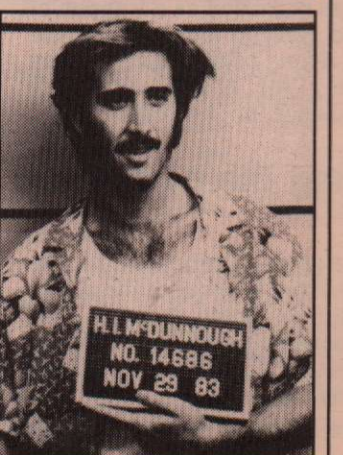
outlaws who aim to prove that the telecommunications systems are just channels by which global corporations fleece the public (11pm, Channel 4).



Jewish ghetto recorded in 'Tango of Slaves', Mon, C4

## Selected films

**ELVIS: THE MOVIE** (1979). John Carpenter's credible retelling of Presley's career up to his Las Vegas comeback in 1971 (Saturday, 3.35pm, BBC2). **RAISING ARIZONA** (1987). Slapstick comedy from the Coen brothers. Childless couple (ex-robber Nicholas Cage and former cop Holly Hunter) kidnap one of tycoon's quintuplets (Sunday, 9pm, Channel 4). **THE LEOPARD** (1963). Luchino Visconti's sumptuous recreation of 1860s Sicily, with Burt Lancaster in the title-role. Regrettably this is the shortened and disastrously dubbed version (Sunday, 11pm, BBC2).



Slapstick comedy from Nicholas Cage in 'Raising Arizona' on Sunday, C4

# Pension fund raided

THE state-owned company, Nuclear Electric, has been caught raiding its employees' pension fund. The electricity generating company, which is pressing for privatisation, used £70 million of the £114 million pension fund surplus to finance redundancies. Trustees of the fund, representing over 7,000 pensioners, were not properly consulted over the plans.

The company did use some of the surplus to improve certain areas of the scheme, for example increasing death-in-service benefits — which are obviously of no use to existing pensioners. There have been increases in children's allowances, and widows' and widowers' benefits, but some pensioners have seen no improvement.

One trustee accused the company of acting 'immorally, if not illegally'. Another stated that 'what the company has done is to asset-strip the fund'.

Tim Eggar, energy minis-

ter, defended the decision to appropriate the £70 million, saying that it was quite legal.

Less than a year after the High Court blocked an attempt to use a superannuation scheme surplus for redundancy payments by British Coal, this revelation stresses that the government's commitment to profit is incompatible with defending the rights of pensioners.

Indeed as Derek Smart, personnel director of Nuclear Electric, cynically made clear, they do not regard this as a right at all. 'It would be tempting', he said, 'to use every single penny of the pension surplus to help the company's position.'

The solicitor who represented the National Union of Mineworkers in their successful bid to stop British Coal raiding their pension fund has expressed an interest in defending the Nuclear Electric pensioners. 'It is very likely that what happened is inappropriate,' he said.



Pensioners' rights are under attack in the scramble for profit

Appreciation

# A toast to Rabbie Burns

IN the food section of Marks and Spencer in Falkirk, for a week and more a Burns Night section stood out proudly and defiantly in its splendid and un-historic tartan.

Underneath the big printed 'Burns Night', in the new circumstances where money can be made out of the Scots cultural resistance to London domination, haggis, turnips and shortbread were on sale alongside the obligatory (mock) whisky.

And in Bargain Books there was a major new biography of Burns and some bargain-priced novels on Burns's life by the late James Barke. In some of the secondary schools the poetry of Burns is being taught in a systematic way for the Highers for the very first time.

Interpret these inescapable facts as you will, they cannot be ignored. They represent many things, but it is a sign of the cultural resistance to the new 'end of history' philosophy of unending 'market forces' capitalism.

Moreover, this cultural nationalism — a cultural nationalism existing well beyond the Scottish National Party — is essentially democratic, and outward-looking. It has nothing in common with 'Great Serbian' chauvinism and ethnic cleansing.

Internationalist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist to its core, the new cultural nationalism has gained important victories — not just in defeating the hated poll tax and in getting Burns taught in our secondary schools, but in the struggle to keep our own distinctive Scottish pound notes in a capitalist world hell-bent on wiping out all national distinctions and individuality.

Engaged in teaching Burns in a secondary school in the Falkirk area, my sister-in-law has told me of her exciting experiences. At first the pupils said they did not know the old Scots words: suggesting that their parents would know them, the children came back excited and enthusiastic.

Yet some historians, enthusiastic about Burns, have also spoken about the role of 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume in persuading people to perceive of the Irish as blacks, that is 'rude', 'primitive' and 'uncivilised' like the African-Americans.

## Success

Notwithstanding the success of today's Scottish cultural resistance in getting Burns onto the curriculum, the Scots have suffered from a more complex form of cultural oppression since the 18th century. And so we have to go back to Burns to understand the surrender of Marks and Spenser to Scottish cultural resistance: a culture at once national and working class.

In a world context Burns was a more representative figure of the Scottish Enlightenment than Adam Smith, David Hume, Dugald Stewart or John Millar. The European Enlightenment marked the beginning of a revolutionary epoch in which historical fatalism was discredited for the first time in world history.

## Free-will

Moreover, French and German thinkers like Voltaire convinced countless ordinary people that humanity possessed free-will, and that it could make its own history. And so did Burns.

When I suggested something like that in my book, 'The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class', in 1979, the wrath of the Anglo-Saxon establishment came down on my naive head like a ton of bricks. But I have survived that and other unpleasant experiences, bloodied but unbowed.

But there was — and is — a class dimension to the Scottish national question; and it was Burns who kept our national identity alive against those in the universities like Smith, Hume, Stewart and Millar, who were trying to create a *British capitalist consciousness*.

Incidentally, if there are any sympathetic publishers out there, I am looking for someone to republish 'The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class' and James Thomson Callender's 'The Political Progress of Britain'.

A neglected and almost unknown figure in Scottish history, Callender produced the only booklet to offer a Jacobin and Scottish nationalist interpretation of British history from 1668 onwards. Writing in 1792, Callender insisted that the Scottish people would be better off with 35 empty elbow-chairs than their actual 35 'representatives' in the House of Commons.

Moreover, in contrast to Smith, Hume, Stewart and Millar, who supported British imperialism in Asia and Africa and the eradication of the Scots and Gaelic languages by fostering English and a British consciousness in the nominally Scottish universities, Callender and Robert Burns defended American independence and the French Revolution of 1789.

In the 19th century the revolutionary Jacobin poetry of Burns was hidden and buried by the anti-Scottish, pro-capitalist establishment in Edinburgh. When the Republican poems like 'Why we should lose our prime' were rediscovered by James Barke in the 1950s, they did not make much impact on Scottish working-class consciousness.

But Barke more than anyone else during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s kept the real Burns tradition alive and relevant to the

Last Tuesday, 25 January, marked the annual Burns Night, the occasion when Scots throughout the world celebrate the birth of Robert Burns (1759-96), the Scottish national poet. The Scottish historian JAMES D. YOUNG contributes this article to mark the occasion.



Robert Burns

struggle for social justice, egalitarianism and socialist internationalism. Besides, there were others before and after Barke who contributed more than a mite to the same process.

In his neglected autobiography, 'The Green Hills Far Away', Barke recalled the influence of Burns during his upbringing in Tulliallan between 1907 and 1918 as the son of a farm labourer. The farm labourer's patron saint was, as Barke put it, 'Robert Burns, the Rabbie o' his mither tongue'.

## Denunciation

Published in 1940, when he was still a liberal Marxist, Barke's autobiography expressed his Scottish nationalism alongside his denunciation of the Nazis. Expressing the irrepressible national consciousness of a repressed people, he wrote: 'The Anglicisation of Scot-

land proceeded apace with the growth of industrialisation. Very soon appeared a type of Scot, the finished product of this Anglicisation.

'He knew nothing of nationhood and he strove to obliterate his nationality. The more ambitious of them went south of the Border or over the seas characterised by such types as Ramsay MacDonald, J.M. Barrie, etc.'

Summing up, Barke said: 'It was the common people of Scotland — ploughmen, farmers, fishermen, coal miners and the like — who did not completely lose their sense of nationality.'

In 1911, William Stewart, who was later on known as 'the grand old man' of Scottish socialism, produced his book, 'Robert Burns and the Common People'. It is an outstanding, though almost unknown book. Unlike other socialists in Scotland, who in the words of another Scottish socialist, John Carstairs Matherson, turned 'internationalism' into a sort of 'international jingoism', Stewart captured the significance of the real Robert Burns.

## Refuting

Refuting the idea of Henley, the influential 19th-century biographer, that Burns was 'the last of the old Scots poets', Stewart insisted that 'Walter Scott, who came later, is more antiquarian, not to say antiquated, both in spirit and outlook than Robert Burns'.

Indeed, the appeal of Burns, according to Stewart, is to 'that element in humanity which looks forward rather than backward'.

From Stewart's perspective, Burns was too close to reality to be misled by 'the romantic gentle shepherds of Allan Ramsay'. Furthermore, he looked on that

old Scots world through the eyes of a Jacobin internationalist with deep roots in Scottish history. Where Ramsay and Ferguson saw 'the surfaces and fringes' of Scottish society, Burns discovered, in Stewart's words, 'the importance of the common people'.

And towards the end 'the terrible hell of the 20th century', another great Scot, R.F. Mackenzie, in his last great socialist book 'In Search of Scotland', wrote about the importance of Burns.

In describing his upbringing in Aberdeenshire in the 1920s, Mackenzie expressed the experiences of many other Scots of

his generation when he said: 'We were brought up on tales of Robert the Bruce and Bonnie Prince Charlie and Robert Burns. . . . But we did not feel a sense of community with the rest of Scotland except in a vague way'.

Back to the question of why Marks and Spenser is exploiting Burns in 1994 and we don't have our own Scottish Socialist Republic.

The discovery of oil in the North Sea in the 1960s did not just usher in the beginnings of the break-up of Britain; it also stimulated Scots to ask why our own real history had been suppressed and why the revenue from the oil was going into the coffers of anti-trade-union multinational corporations.

In conditions where classical capitalism was trying to reassert itself in the 1960s, the SNP moved increasingly to the left and the Labour Party to the right.

The year 1979 marked a watershed, a historic turning-point: in the referendum of 1979 a majority of Scots already voted for their own parliament — some, like me, wanted a Soviet in Edinburgh.

Although a majority of Scots have voted against the Tories and for self-government in the last four general elections, the dictatorial Westminster establishment and Labour Party hangers-on have refused to give us our own parliament.

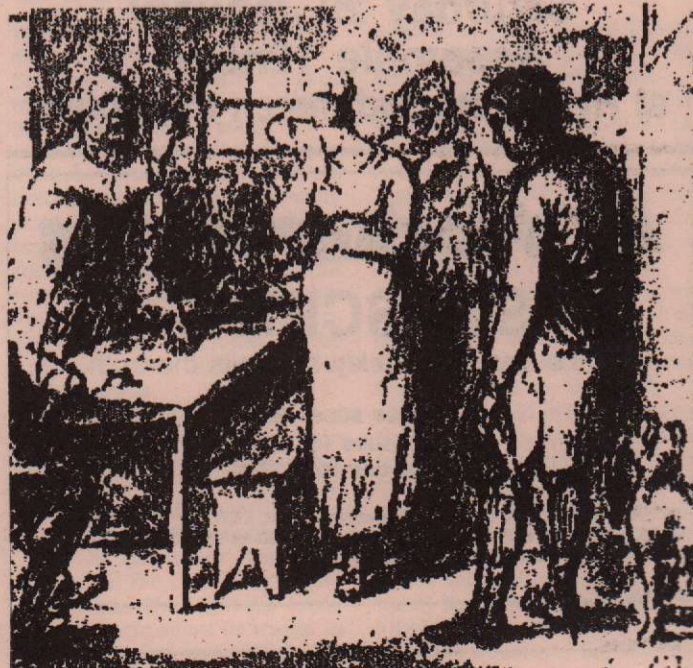
## Freedom

Until we get rid of our collective mentality as a colonial people with a deep sense of national inferiority we will not have the confidence to take the question of our national freedom or workers' control into our own hands.

But the fact that Marks and Spenser and Bargain Books can now make substantial profits out of the growing awareness of our national cultural heritage is testimony to the big advance we have made since the 1960s. But Burns did not just play a role in creating a Scottish identity and resistance: he also helped to keep alive our sense of national identity and outward-looking internationalism.

In paying homage to Robert Burns, we are making an important contribution to the national struggle. In the almost ancient struggle for social justice, egalitarianism and national freedom, Burns continues to inspire us.

I am proud to ask you to join me in proposing a toast to the immortal memory of the Scottish national bard, the incomparable Rabbie Burns.



'Robert Burns before the Kirk Session' by John Burnet — an episode in Burns's life: in 1785, he was hauled before the ministers and elders of the Kirk, after his involvement with Jean Armour. He declared his intention of marrying her. This, following consumation, was as good as a ceremony in Scots law. Unfortunately for him, Armour's parents were horrified!

## Charles Curtiss (1908-93)

A WORKING-CLASS veteran who helped Leon Trotsky in Mexico was remembered by friends, family and comrades at a gathering in Los Angeles last week.

Born in 1908, Charles Curtiss, who died on 20 December, was one of the founders, with James Cannon, of the Communist League of America, which later became the Socialist Workers Party. When Trotsky was granted political asylum in Mexico, Curtiss and his wife Lillian joined the exiled revolutionary's staff there.

A fluent Spanish-speaker, he acted as Trotsky's liaison with the Mexican Trotskyists,

and also tried to resolve differences with artist Diego Riviera. Shortly before the assassination of Trotsky, Curtiss is said to have been among those who tried to warn against Ramon Mercader, the GPU agent.

As Socialist Workers Party organiser in Los Angeles, Charles Curtiss strongly opposed the breakaway faction led by Max Shachtman and James Burnham.

In 1941, when Cannon and other American Trotskyists were put on trial by the Roosevelt administration, in Minneapolis, Curtiss became party secretary, but was conscripted into the army before

he could take up the post. He saw combat duty in Europe. Lillian Curtiss was manager of Pioneer Press, publishers of Trotsky's works in the United States, for a time.

Critical of the Cannon leadership in the SWP, Charles Curtiss became disenchanted with the Trotskyist movement, and Bolshevism, and joined the Socialist Party in 1951.

A shop steward in the Typographical Union, he also held posts in the Socialist Party in California, and edited its paper 'The Socialist' until last year. He was active against the Vietnam war and the Gulf war. CP

# DEFEND BLOODY SUNDAY MARCH

**THE annual Bloody Sunday march takes place today (29 January) in London. It commemorates the January 1972 slaughter of 14 unarmed civil rights marchers in Derry by British paratroopers.**

The legal whitewash and coverups which followed the killings has given strength to the many years of brutal repression by the British army in the north of Ireland.

It has always been vitally important for the organised working class in Britain to remember Bloody Sunday and demonstrate for the removal of British troops from Ireland.

But the events surrounding last year's London demonstration make it even more important for a large turnout this Saturday.

Over 500 well-organised fascist supporters of the British National Party attacked the march, holding up the start for two hours.

In the evening the fascist thugs roamed unchallenged through the north London area of Kilburn stabbing and kicking people with Irish accents.

The growing fascist presence in Britain, reflected in the recent election of a BNP councillor in Tower Hamlets, is encouraged by the repressive legislation and attacks on democratic rights in the north of Ireland.

There is a link-up, physical and political, between many members of the BNP and the loyalist killer gangs, particularly the Ulster Defence Association, which recently revealed plans for 'ethnic cleansing' — the removal of Catholics from certain areas in the event of a British withdrawal.

Working-class involvement — with the necessary fight for independent methods of organisation and class politics — also takes on added importance in the wake of the Hume-Adams talks and the joint declaration by the British and Dublin prime ministers.

With the willing compliance of the Republican leadership British imperialism is attempting to behead the nationalist

BY JOHN STEELE

revolt and do a deal which will suck Sinn Fein into the negotiating process.

This deal will not threaten, in the slightest, the continued partition of Ireland.

The main organisers of the Bloody Sunday march, the Troops Out Movement (TOM) has always coat-tailed the Republican leadership, faithfully following its anti-socialist position.

## Disbanded

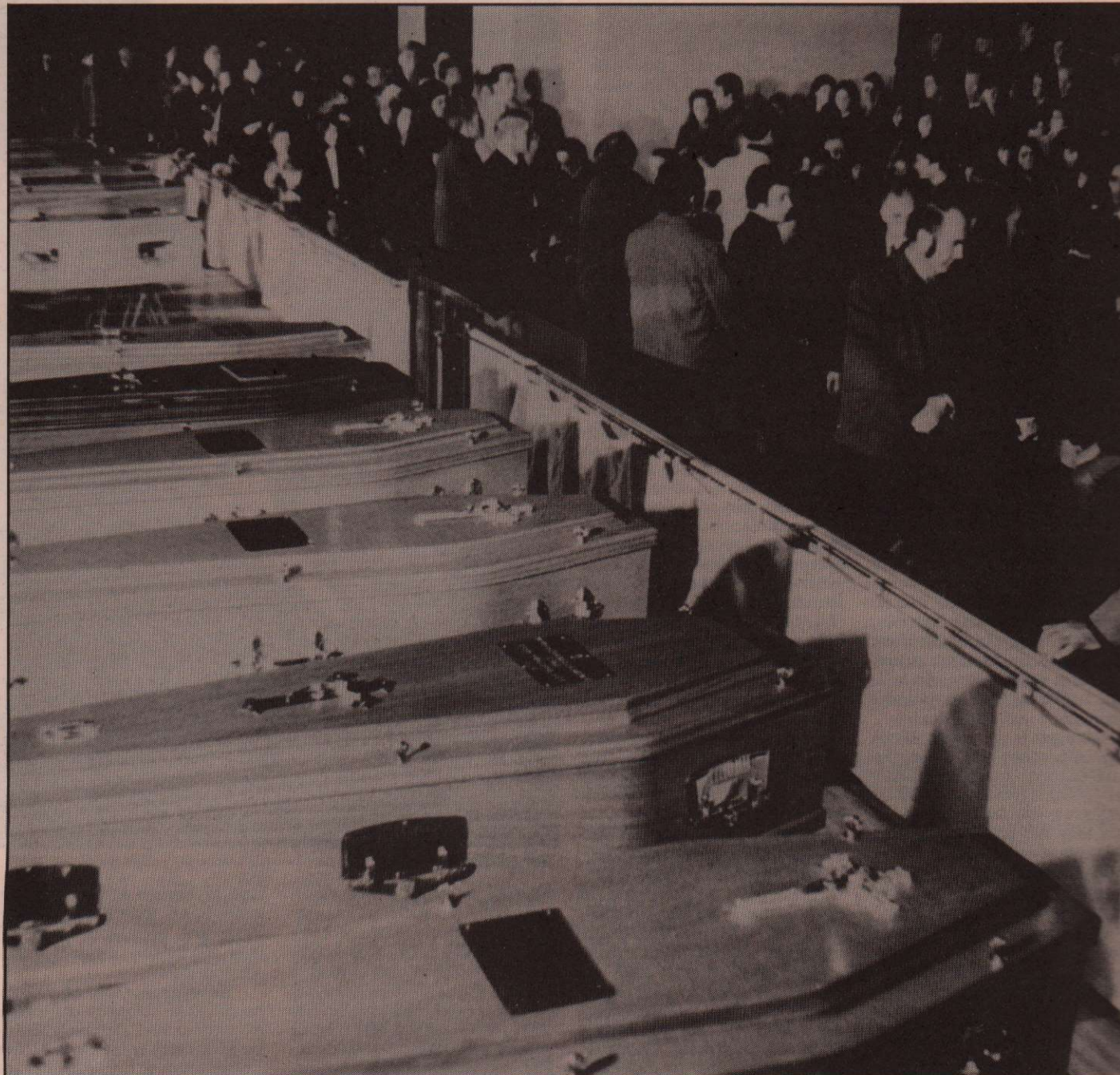
In 1989 the Kilburn branch of TOM was disbanded because its members insisted on having political discussions.

The Troops Out Movement has attempted to turn the Bloody Sunday commemoration into a non-controversial ritual.

In line with Adams's views the propaganda for the march peddles the illusion that a deal between Sinn Fein, the Unionists and the British government can bring peace and stability.

The working class must mobilise to smash the Hume-Adams agreement as well as the Major-Reynolds accord. Both these manoeuvres are steps on the way to a restored Stormont with increased repressive legislation.

The defence of the Bloody Sunday march against fascist attacks is not separate from this mobilisation. Trades unionists and socialists should participate fully in the demonstration, particularly with the stewarding, and rally behind the banners of the Kilburn Defence Campaign and the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.



Derry 1972: the funeral of the unarmed victims of the Bloody Sunday massacre by the British state's paratroopers

**Bloody Sunday march**  
Saturday 29 January  
Assemble 12noon  
at Hyde Park and march to Kilburn

## Arms, dam lies, and official secrets

FOREIGN Secretary Douglas Hurd tried to parry questions in parliament last week about links between British aid for an 'unsound' dam project in Malaysia and a £1 billion arms deal. Official documents about the project are being withheld from parliament's watchdog, the National Audit Office.

Hurd also faced questions from Lord Justice Scott about a July 1990 ministerial meeting he chaired which decided to relax guidelines on arms exports to Iraq, two weeks before Kuwait was invaded.

A former Malaysian foreign minister has said British aid for his country was 'undeniably

linked' to arms purchases. In 1988, then prime minister Margaret Thatcher saw Lord Younger, then Defence Minister, to ensure the arms deal went through.

Three years later, John Major and Douglas Hurd approved aid for Malaysia's Pergau dam, criticised both by environmentalists and senior British civil servants as 'unequivocally unsound'. Sir Tim Lankester, permanent secretary at the Overseas Development Administration, had told Hurd that he couldn't approve the dam project.

Sir Tim's memorandum, saying he wouldn't sign the £234

million aid cheque, is among more than 1,500 Whitehall files being kept from the National Audit Office gaze.

Two years ago, a National Audit Office report criticising huge backhanders paid to secure a Saudi arms deal was withheld from publication before the general election. A Saudi businessman friend of the Thatcher family was implicated in press reports.

Major has admitted overriding civil servants' advice on the Malaysian aid deal, saying it was a matter of winning business and jobs for Britain, while all Labour could do was 'carp and criticise'. But a link be-

tween aid and the arms deal, proven, would be illegal even under the government's own rules.

## His usual, dodgy, self

'Mr Hurd was his usual consummate diplomatic self, but managed to avoid answering many of the practical questions put to him in writing.' A staff representative, commenting on the foreign secretary's failure to reassure worried junior Foreign Office staff who met him about jobs, pay and conditions ('Financial Times', 25 January

## Conspiracy against Iranian refugees

IRANIAN socialist refugees living in Turkey are being sent back home to certain execution with the full knowledge of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Yet the UNHCR in Ankara refuses to give any protection to those refugees most at risk. Appeals that these refugees be sent to places like Sweden where there are established support networks have been re-

fused. By contrast, former supporters of the Tudeh Party (Iranian Communist Party) are allowed to travel to the West. It is the non-Tudeh refugees that are sent back.

Between 200 and 300 have already been sent back. The evidence has been growing of collusion between the Turkish and Iranian governments to send back socialists and opponents who fled Iran when Khomeini

came to power. And over the last few months assassination squads from Iran have been targeting individuals living in Turkey.

Baram Aagmy and Ally Kishipour were killed in early 1993; Mohamed Kadry was killed last October; and, just before Christmas Taha Krmangy was killed.

One man living in Ankara was followed by two armed men

who were taking photographs on 10 October 1993. He is a known and active opponent of the Iranian regime who fought the government for 11 years as a guerrilla. Twelve members of his family were killed by the regime. After being followed, he went to a Turkish police station for protection, but the police refused to help. He then went to the UNHCR to try to get out of Turkey — without success.

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