

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For Workers' Liberty East and West

Stop the Tory Housing Bill



Special four page pull-out inside

THE NURSES ARE RIGHT!

By Karen Reissman and Mary Williams

Last week a group of nurses in Manchester — members of NUPE — went on strike in protest against proposals the Pay Review Body is about to make.

They propose to take the extra pay which is to be given to nurses working in certain areas out of the payments we now get for working unsocial hours!

This would leave a rate of £1.20 for any unsocial hours we work. Imagine being paid £1.20 extra for working on Christmas Day or New Year's Eve! Its an insult.

The nurses who struck gave notice to management so that their work was covered by agency nurses and patients did not suffer.

Some papers said that this was the first time nurses have been on strike. No, it isn't. During the health service pay campaign of 1983 groups of nurses struck work alongside other health service workers.

At North Manchester there have been lots of strikes over the last few years. There was a one day strike by all staff against a cuts package in December, and there have been a lot of smaller strikes in sections of the workforce. Psychiatric nurses

struck in November and December to defend a member threatened with dismissal, and the psychotherapists struck against victimisation of a steward.

There is a joint shop stewards' committee which has always argued that any section taking action must be defended by all the other staff if any of them are victimised for taking action, and this has been used successfully.

This general level of militancy at the hospital no doubt affected the nurses in their decision to take action.

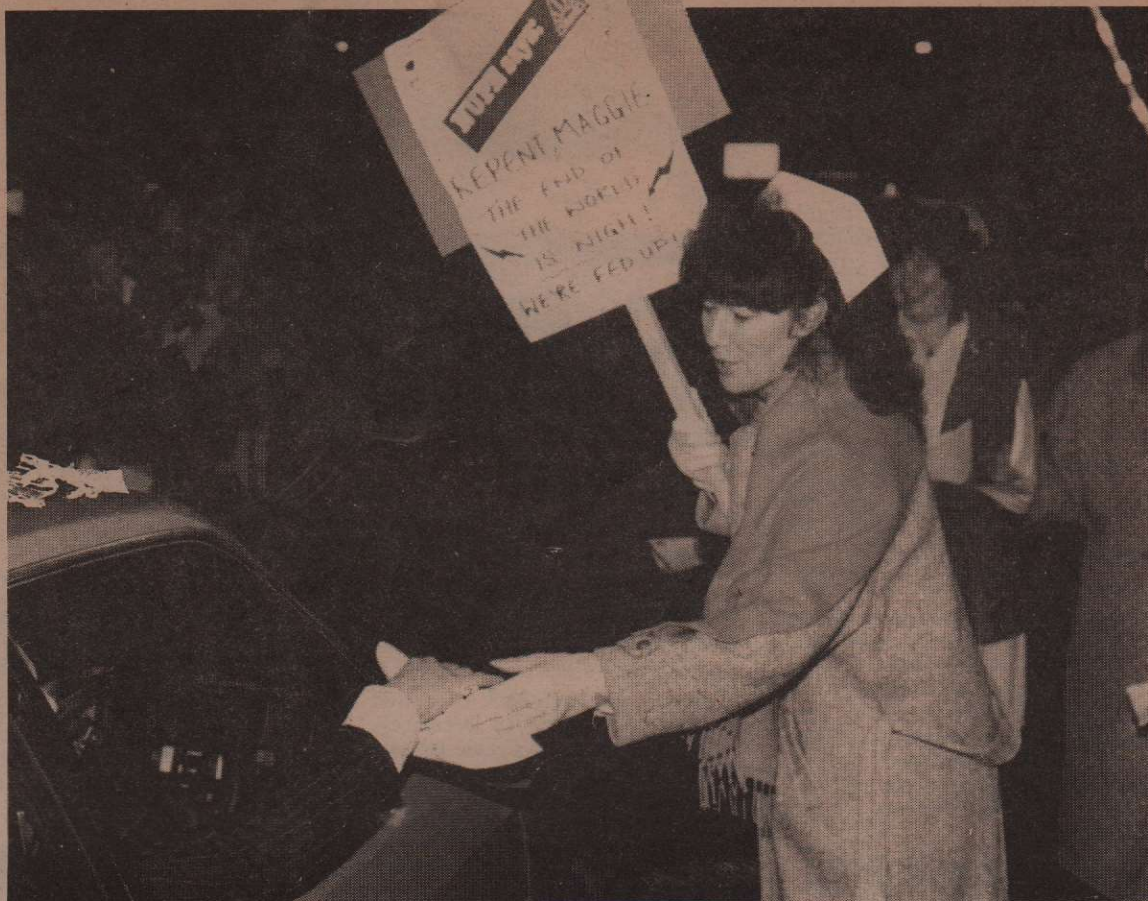
It is interesting that nurses who are always portrayed as putting patients first have taken action over their own pay — not over patients' services.

What is new now is the nurses are very fed up with being pushed about. They realise that strike action is the only way we will get a decent wage rise and an increase in our unsocial hours payment.

In our experience, nurses are learning to see themselves as workers facing the same threats to pay and conditions as other workers, and will respond with industrial action if there is strong leadership from the stewards.

In areas where nurses have taken

Turn to page 3



Nurses picket at North Manchester Hospital. Photo: John Smith (Profile).

Benn says: Fight the Tories now!

By Tony Benn MP

Millions of people who detest the policies of this government are now impatiently waiting for a stronger and more courageous lead from Labour, and for some believable vision of a better future that we could create for ourselves.

It is Tory class politics which have brought back mass unemployment, homelessness and real poverty; undermined our essential services; given financial and business interests control over our future; and eroded our democratic rights and civil liberties.

The last election showed that Labour cannot win if it attempts to appease the establishment by consciously distancing itself, both from the trade unions and from socialism, preferring to rely on pollsters to tell it what to think, and what to say.

We dare not sacrifice everything in which we believe, and degenerate into a party scrambling for 'votes-at-any-price'.

This is what explains the present acute identity crisis within the party, which has led many members to fear that even the 'Labour listens' exercise itself, may lead to the abandonment of some of our basic

values, leaving a great vacuum at the heart of democratic politics, just when those values are most urgently required.

Britain needs clear and practical alternative policies, covering the full range of contemporary issues, advocated with conviction; and these can only come from a strong radical, democratic — and tolerant — socialist party, with an international perspective, closely linked to all those organisations that represent the varied concerns of working people and their families.

These extracts are from a speech by Tony Benn, delivered in Chesterfield on Monday 11 January.

WOMAN'S EYE



These are not our sisters!

By Lynn Fergusson

I don't buy Spare Rib very often. There was a time when I did — I suppose most socialist/feminist women would buy it.

I stopped buying it because I found it irritating — its major political concerns weren't mine.

Well, for the first time in over a year, I've bought a copy. And it's different again.

Take the letters page, for instance. Seven out of seventeen letters were from women academics of one sort or another, asking for women to contact them, essentially as research subjects.

Then, we are treated to four pages on the TV series Cagney and Lacey. Now, I quite like Cagney and Lacey and must admit to recently having bought a copy of Women's Own to discover 'the truth behind the scenes'. But we all need a bit of trivia in our lives, don't we?

It doesn't say, but I'd reckon the Spare Rib article is written by someone on a media studies course.

Did you know that 'the specific meaning that was constructed around Sharon Gless/Christine Cagney, as the object of the male gaze, was subverted by certain sections of the women's audience through an appropriation of that very object for themselves'? No, I didn't either. To be honest, I don't think it matters.

But what, you are probably asking, is the point of this diatribe? Have I simply got an axe to grind against poor old Spare Rib?

No, not exactly. But what does disturb me is what's happened to feminism. Feminism as a movement with which I politically disagree, I can handle. But as an academic discipline, one increasingly divorced from struggle, dedicated to producing 'women's knowledge' for its own sake?

A once lively movement has collapsed into university women's studies courses and local government committees.

A group of women are doing very nicely thank you out of a paper commitment to women's liberation which amounts to little more than reading Virago classics and wearing women's symbol earrings.

I find it sad, and very angering that this should be the case. The campaign at the moment against the Alton Bill shows that women are prepared to fight. There are enormous amounts of energy to be tapped.

More than ever before we need a working class women's movement, a movement which will organise women to fight now. We don't just want equal opportunities, or another feminist analysis of Cagney and Lacey. We want our liberation. What's happened over the past few years is that some 'feminists' don't care anymore.

Alton's compromise

It has become reasonably clear that devout Catholic David Alton is willing to compromise on his Bill to reduce the time limit for abortions from 28 weeks to 18 weeks.

In all likelihood there will be an amendment calling for a 24-week limit, and Alton will accept it. That will massively increase his chance of whittling down the time within which abortion is legal. Alton and his friends will see it as a first step.

24 weeks is already, effectively, the upper time limit for legal abortion. Private abortion clinics have to agree not to perform termina-

tions after 24 weeks in order to receive a licence. In the NHS the position is getting progressively worse, with some London health authorities enforcing a 12 week limit on NHS abortions as a result of health cuts.

Last year only 29 terminations over 24 weeks gestation were performed in the whole of Britain. Most of these were on foetuses so severely deformed that they would have died in the womb anyway, resulting in severe septicaemia in the woman. Such circumstances are excepted from the existing legislation — abortions are permitted after 28 weeks if the woman's life is

severely threatened.

Such facts make it clear what Alton is about. He is willing to accept any reduction in time limits even if it doesn't lead to a sizeable reduction in the number of terminations, as a stepping stone to further attacks on women's abortion rights. There will be other attacks in future.

Alton's Bill is the most serious attack on abortion since the passing of the 1967 Act. Women all around the country have got involved in local FAB groups organising protests against the Bill.

In many areas Labour Party women's sections have been out

campaigning against Alton. The labour movement as a whole must take up the campaign. In 1979 massive labour movement involvement helped defeat the Corrie Bill. That's the way we can beat Alton.

The immediate priority is to defeat Alton's Bill, and defend the 1967 Act.

But health cuts are also crippling abortion services. Whether or not Alton's Bill is passed, we will still have a fight on our hands — against abortion clinic closures, long waiting lists, bed shortages.

Now is the time to go on the offensive.

Defeat Alton — fight back now!



Photo: Ian Swindale.

12,000 march for Lesbian and Gay Rights

Over 12,000 people marched through London on 9 January in protest at Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill which prohibits the "promotion" of homosexuality by local authorities. Clause 28 (previously and confusingly Clause 27) represents the biggest attack on the rights of homosexual men and women since the Sexual Offences Act of 1967.

The march, led by Michael Cashman (Colin in EastEnders), drew media publicity for scuffles near Downing Street, where several arrests were made. What the newspapers did not mention is that more arrests took place at the end of the march. People leaving the final rally were picked off by police. Two lesbians, for example, were arrested for holding hands.

It was the biggest lesbian and gay rights demonstration in British history, drawing support from all over the country. Indeed, the one good thing about Clause 28 has been the flurry of activity it has provoked.

For the first time in many years, an active political movement for lesbian and gay rights has emerged. Thousands of lesbians and gay men, many never before involved in

politics, have been mobilised.

The Bill, discussed in the House of Lords this week, will make the "promotion" of homosexuality illegal. So school curricula that challenge bigoted attitudes, council-funded lesbian and gay centres, even council licenses for gay pubs and clubs, could all be for the chop.

It is a bigot's charter, and must be stopped. Outrageously, the Labour leadership actually supported the clause in the Commons until the last moment.

But the Labour Party and labour movement must unite in defence of lesbian and gay rights. It is pointless talking about 'alternatives' to Tory values if the labour movement cringes in cowardice and allows this kind of assault on a minority's rights to take place. Labour Party conference policy is clear in its support for lesbian and gay rights, and the Parliamentary leadership must be held to account.

Chris Smith, Parliament's only openly gay MP was one of the speakers at the final rally on 9 January. Other speakers included Linda Bellos of Lambeth Council, who promised to defy the law if it is passed. Local authorities are planning to take the issue to the European Court of Human Rights.

Messages of support included one from the entire cast of EastEnders except Anita Dobson.

Fake left back cuts

By Tony Dale

This week Manchester City Labour Party will meet to discuss the Labour Council's decision to bring the police into the Town Hall to clear anti-cuts protesters.

Manchester Fightback organised a demonstration on 16 December, when the Council was due to vote for 3,750 job losses.

The protest delayed the Council meeting for seven hours. Around 500 people took part in the protest including striking housing workers, college lecturers and students facing swingeing cuts in Further Education colleges.

Manchester, a left Labour Council, has built up a Police Monitoring Unit to try to defend labour movement and working class bodies from unbridled police harassment. But at no point during the demonstration did the Council leaders attempt to negotiate with the protesters. They just called the cops.

It is a small step from implementing the Tory cuts to using the bosses' police against protesters.

When the Council meeting took place it decided to back the cutting of 3,750 jobs "in principle" — whatever that means. These jobs are to be lost any time up to March 1989. In addition, the Labour right wing, Tories and Liberals blocked

to vote for the cutting of the Police Monitoring Unit, the planned neighbourhood offices, and free nurseries, and for a review of the Equal Opportunities Units.

The day after the Council meeting, Sam Darby, the Chair of the Housing Committee, moved a resolution in his Ward Labour Party calling for the expulsion of all Labour Party members on the lobby. The resolution was defeated and instead the Council was condemned

for its use of the police.

Meanwhile the Council will meet on 28 January to vote again on the restructuring proposals. The time until then was set aside for consultation and negotiation. This is an empty gesture. The unions have been told that if they want to save one job they have to identify another to go!

One victory so far has been the agreement of the Council to drop many of the proposed cuts in the

libraries.

Elsewhere the restructuring reports spell disaster for council workers and for the service to the public. After axing the services the Council will quickly aim their axe at the individual rights of workers, through forced redeployment and heavy pressure to take early retirement.

Manchester Fightback, the umbrella anti-cuts group, is meeting to discuss the next steps in the fight to defend jobs and services.

Haringey teachers strike

By Tony Brockman, Secretary, Haringey NUT (in personal capacity)

Haringey's Chief Education Officer has described the cuts in Haringey's education as the "largest-scale cuts and the most quickly made, ever seen in the country".

Haringey teachers are set to take escalating strike action in the next four weeks. In this first week of action, 17

primary schools and three secondary schools were closed on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

If no progress is made on the union's demands, (and at this stage it looks unlikely) the same schools will be called out on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday next week, and an additional number of schools will join them.

The NUT has made sufficient strike pay available so that after four escalation weeks virtually all the schools in Haringey will be closed.

The objectives of the campaign are:

1) A guarantee that there will be no compulsory redundancies of teachers (at present some 200 are threatened).

2) A guaranteed level of supply teaching employment and limitation of the amount of cover. (About 100 casual

supply teachers were in effect sacked last term).

3) No worsening of teachers' working conditions. This would include a limitation on class size and a guarantee of marking and preparation time in secondary schools, and a provision of support teachers in primary schools. (The council wants teachers to hide the cracks that its cuts are causing).

The national union is supporting this strike action, which will be watched closely by other councils which are likely to face cuts too, such as Brent, Ealing, ILEA, etc.

We are not appealing for collections for strike pay but donations to help with our publicity costs would be welcome along with messages of support from other union branches.

Haringey NUT, c/o Haringey Trade Union Community Centre, Brabant Road, Wood Green, London.



Scargill must win!

By Paul Whetton, victimised miner

All the indications, including the Channel 4 poll, give Arthur Scargill a good lead in the presidential election. I think he will maintain it, despite all the dirty tricks that British Coal and the media will get up to between now and the election on 22 January.

The campaign has only really started to roll since just before Christmas — meetings around the country and now the material has just come out, with special editions of Area 'Miners', stickers, etc. There is also some rank and file organisation around the campaign — groups coming together, doing their own stickers and leaflets. I hope that kind of activity will be kept up after the election.

In Notts we are not being allowed facilities on British Coal premises to hold the ballot. We are having to set up our own ballot stations, and at Bevercotes we will be having the rurniture van at the end of the pit lane again.

It means the NUM branch having to write to each individual member, telling them the time and place of the ballot. At the same time we will be urging our members to support our nominated candidate, Arthur Scargill. I do not suppose that British Coal realise they have done us a favour in this respect.

I was in the audience for the debate that Channel 4 TV organised between Arthur Scargill and John Walsh. The programme was recorded on Wednesday in Sheffield. The morning was taken up with a dry run, which went well, with strong comments coming out from the rank and file. In the afternoon when we did the actual filming, it was very noticeable that certain speakers were frozen out and very much 'directed'. Then, when it was shown on Friday, cuts had been made, making it more favourable to Walsh.

But I still think that Arthur Scargill clearly won the argument on the TV, and Walsh never answered any question straight.

Walsh does not know what he is talking about when he claimed that his approach was the only way to recruit UDM members back to the NUM. He has not recruited a single UDM member.

We've recruited 350 at my pit; the lads from Ollerton have done the same; at Thoresby they have recruited 200.

He does not know what it is like to live with that organisation day by day. He should come down and see how NUM members are daily being victimised by UDM people. He might even then agree with what people like myself and Arthur Scargill have been saying all along — there is a place in the NUM for any UDM member; there is no place for the likes of Lynk and



Photo: Stefano Cagnoni (Report)

Prendegast; and we cannot have any truck with the UDM as an organisation.

Despite the difficult conditions here we are recruiting UDM members, but we still have to be careful. We do not want to repeat past mistakes and let ourselves be taken over by them.

Walsh also did not know what he is talking about over 6-day working. Never mind 'examining the concept', we know what it is like. We had it at Bevercotes in the '60s. If they want to 'examine the concept', then talk to those men who actually worked the system about it, and not British Coal.

In Notts I do not think Arthur Scargill has got any problems. He will get a good return here. The only doubt is whether we have the ballot interfered with by British Coal or the police.

I am still barred from the Ollerton and Bevercotes Miners' Welfare for refusing to take off my 'Scargill for President' badge. On Sunday three miners went in to the Welfare with their Scargill stickers on. They were asked to remove them and refused.

Somebody then dished a lot of stickers out, so a lot of people had them. They shut the bar, but people stayed there singing 'Here we go, here we go!' So they had to reopen the bar. On Sunday night a group arranged to go in there again with

their stickers on.

When Arthur Scargill wins, that in itself is not going to solve any problems. It will reaffirm our support for the national president and the policies he has been pursuing. It will underline the supremacy of Conference decisions and the fact that if there are going to be any changes in policy, it is for Con-

ference to decide.

So I would urge every rank and file NUM member to vote for Arthur Scargill. For the 500 loyal NUM members in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, every vote for Walsh will be a vote to sell us down the river. But a Scargill victory will not be the end of the matter.

The nurses are right

From front page

action the Royal College of Nursing, who are not allowed to strike, have lost members. It is now up to COHSE and NUPE members to push their leaders to call for more coordinated action.

But our national union is not giving us any leadership. NUPE and COHSE are not against strike action. NUPE demands the government should withdraw the insulting £1.20 offer. But they have failed to organise anything positive on a national basis. A series of meetings and rallies has been suggested — and if you want to go on strike, you can. That's leadership?

The Royal College of Nursing is still holding back. They are still against striking though it was a very close vote on the issue at their last conference. A large number of

nurses belong to this quasi-'professional' body, and they take the majority of places on the nurses' national negotiating committee.

In fact, the £1.20 an hour offer for unsocial payments is designed to divide nurses from nursing auxiliaries, student nurses, staff nurses and state enrolled nurses (SENs) on lower increments. For them this is a pay rise. But for sisters, long-serving staff nurses and SENs it is a considerable cut.

On Tuesday 12 January the Review Body meets on Tuesday 12 January. They had better come up with something more satisfactory. Enough is enough and this time round a lot more nurses are saying that.

Karen Reissman is Acting Branch Secretary (COHSE), North Manchester General Hospital, writing in a personal capacity.

PRESS GANG

Our 1987 awards

By Jim Denham

Press Gang's coveted Golden Turd award for the year's outstanding contribution to sewer journalism has been won, once again, by Mr Gavin MacKenzie, editor of the Sun newspaper.

The trophy was presented at a glittering ceremony at Ligger's Wine Bar and Nitespot, Isle of Dogs, with all the top names in British journalism in attendance.

Master of Ceremonies, Roland Rat paid tribute to Mr MacKenzie's "total commitment to maintaining the lowest imaginable standards", and his "absolute insistence" upon "backwardness, bigotry and reaction". Mr Rat cited in particular the "completely fabricated and malicious" attack upon a lorry driver who refused to cross the Wapping picket line, described in the Sun as a "pervert" on the basis of no evidence whatsoever.

Stories like this, combined with a total contempt for the Press Council and the NUJ code of conduct, ensured that Mr MacKenzie once again carried off the award.

Most Promising Newcomer honours were shared between Mr David Sullivan and Mr Mike Gabbert who, together, had brought "new depths of illiteracy, sexism and good honest filth" to the pages of a national newspaper.

Were it not for the cowardice of Express Newspapers in removing the Star from the control of the brilliant Sullivan/Gabbert team after only two months, they might well have been in contention for the top award, Mr Rat told an increasingly emotional audience.

The coveted Brown Tongue award, presented each year for the most fanatical, obsequious and totally abject loyalty to Mrs Thatcher and all her works had been the hardest-fought of all the categories. After much deliberation the judges had decided in favour of Mr Paul Johnson, whose celebrated Daily Mail article, "Why Marvellous Maggie Must Rule for a Thousand Years" eclipsed even the efforts of the Sunday Telegraph's Mr Peregrine Worsthorne and the Sunday Times' Mr Andrew Neil.

Mr Johnson's straitjacket prevented him from receiving the trophy in person, but it was accepted on his behalf by fellow Mail columnist Ms Mary Kenny.

An expectant hush, broken only by muffled sounds of belching and vomiting, fell over the guests, as the winner of the final trophy, the Golden Bladder award for the year's most unscrupulous, megalomaniacal, nakedly greedy proprietor was announced. It was explained that Mr Rupert Murdoch was no longer eligible, having won outright for the last twenty years in succession.

Mr Robert Maxwell's masterly handling of the launch and subsequent closure of the London Daily News had made him a "very strong contender".

But finally, the judges had agreed that the Golden Bladder should go to Mr Owen Oyston, whose audacious News On Sunday rescue operation had ensured the continued survival of Owen Oyston as a millionaire.

Award-winners and guests, many now almost prostrate with emotion, then joined in a rousing chorus of "It's a sin to tell a lie", led by the popular singer Ms Samantha Fox and the well-known disc-jockey Mr Derek Jameson. A truly moving occasion.

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GRAFFITI

Dangerous telephones

British Telecom's 'Talkabout' service — a chatline where up to half a dozen teenagers at a time can have 'a party over the phone', according to the adverts, has come under fire.

Not only have shocked parents complained

over the unexpected size of their phone bills, but incidents have been discovered of men using the line to arrange meetings with young girls. On one occasion this resulted in three 15 year old girls being barricaded into a bedroom

overnight and forced to watch pornographic videos.

Oftel, the watchdog body, says it has no powers to do anything about it. So much for the advantages to the consumer of privatisation.

DID YOU CHANGE A GAY?

★ HAVE you ever turned a gay straight? Were you able to seduce someone who was convinced that they could never be normal?

Perhaps it took just one good lover to persuade them that bedtime could be even better with someone from the OPPOSITE sex.

★ Maybe it has turned into a fabulous loving relationship or even marriage. Whatever happened, we want

to hear from anyone who set their sights on someone gay and persuaded them to see straight.

You can call us between 10am and 6pm today on

01-481 3079

★ Do not worry about the cost, we will call you straight back. Your calls can only be received on the telephone number printed above—so please do not ring our main switchboard.

Evangelical heterosexuality

The 'super soaraway' Sun has issued an appeal to its readers. They want to hear from 'anyone who has set their sights on someone gay and persuaded them to see

straight.' Readers who've performed such a valuable task for society are asked to ring the Sun with their tales. Apparently it can take just one good "bonk" to

change someone's sexuality — literally overnight!

The Sun asserts that sex is even better with 'someone from the opposite sex'. I wonder who they asked?

Poverty

Figures from the US show that over the past eight years of Reagan, poor and middle income families have become worse off, whereas the rich have made a packet.

The gap in the US between the top fifth of the population and everyone else has never been wider — the top fifth receiving 43.7% of all income last year. 13.6% of all American families are now officially living in poverty.

Bookburning

The SWP (US) has for some time been clearing the decks of what its leader, Jack Barnes, sees as old outmoded Trotskyism. However, they've recently taken this to its logical extreme.

In November, their newspaper, the Militant, announced they were to 'reorganise' their library. What this meant was that first editions of Trotsky's works, and books by Marx, Lenin and Engels — which had belonged to James P. Cannon were dumped in a skip, to be taken to the New York city dump.

Barnes et al have obviously taken on yet another of the methods of their new Stalinist mentors — book-burning.

From debt to crisis?

According to the latest issue of the US radical journal Dollars and Sense, which went to press before the stock market crash, the US is in grave danger of a slump because of "an explosion of debt — government debt, corporate debt,

household debt, and third world debt. This unprecedented debt build-up overburdens the financial system and makes the possibility of a crash more likely if investors panic and pull their funds out of US financial markets or banks..."

Criminal beggars

Poverty is now a crime. York magistrates last week fined a man £20 for begging on the street. When he couldn't pay, he was locked up

for half a day, and the £5 he'd made from begging was confiscated. He'd been unable to live on his £33 a week sickness benefit.

Even slanders make some

By Michele Carlisle

The Middle East is an emotive issue. It is impossible to see the terrible scenes of Israeli Army brutality against unarmed Palestinian Arab demonstrators which appear on the Television News every evening and not be moved to anger and indignation against the Israeli government and to sympathy and support for the Palestinian Arabs. Not to have such feeling is either to be half dead or to lack the gut feelings of a socialist.

But there is more to socialism than gut feeling. Socialists propose to reorganise the world under the self rule of the working class on a better basis, that of socialism and consistent democracy. To do that we have to think about the world and understand it.

In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank 1½ million Palestinian Arabs are held down by the Israeli Army, denied the right to control their own lives. They face extreme violence when they demonstrate. Their leaders are systematically harried and deported by the Israeli occupying forces. Since 9 December what looks like a powerful spontaneous semi-insurrection has spread through the occupied territories. 30 people have died at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces.

Marxist socialists react to this with the demand that Israel should stop oppressing the Palestinian Arabs and allow the creation of a Palestinian Arab state alongside Israel. There are two nations, so we call for two states. Only such a proposed solution will create the conditions in which Arab and Jewish workers can unite and fight for a fundamental solution to the savage poverty that grinds so many millions of people in the Middle East — the Socialist United States of the Middle East.

Does this seem reasonable to you? The alternative is to look at the tragic Arab-Jewish conflict which has now been going on for six decades and conclude that the Israelis are a bad nation, a nation which doesn't have the right to exist at all and should be overrun and destroyed.

The latter is the working conclusion of many people on the pseudo-Trotskyist left — of Socialist Worker for example, and of Socialist Action.

They react to scenes of oppression such as those on the West Bank not as socialists and democrats who seek a solution which would allow both the competing nations in Palestine to live and coexist peacefully without Arabs being oppressed or Jews fearing being conquered. They react as vicarious Arab chauvinists.

In the National Union of Students they conduct a small scale reign of terror against apolitical Jewish students, harrying and badgering them about the Middle East.

At last December's NUS conference Socialist Organiser backed the drive by Socialist Students in NOLS, who SO support, and others, to break the NUS from the anti-Israeli position it has held for 11 years and commit it to support for the two state solution (See last issue of SO).

Socialist Worker and Socialist Action are very displeased with us. That is their right. But they do not have the right to publish lying and slanderous accounts of our politics. That is what they have done.

Socialist Students in NOLS "started as opportunists and ended up as bigots" commented Socialist Worker's imaginative reporter from the National Union of Students'



conference under the headline: "Helping the racists".

The bigotry in question was SSiN's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in particular its view that the Israeli Law of Return, in Socialist Worker's words, is "not a racist law but merely nationalistic".

Worse, SSiN rejected the "right to return" of Arabs expelled in 1948, or their descendants. And all this "is the stuff that hard, unapologetic Zionism is made of", and "arguments used by hardened racists".

As usual, Socialist Worker's factional hatred of SSiN led them to misrepresent the argument and avoid the real issue.

SSiN did argue that the Law of Return cannot be regarded simply as racist. The Law gives the right of any Jew to immigrate to Israel and be a citizen — which while it is nationalistic is not in itself racist. Other factors lead to anti-Arab discrimination and racism, and it is important to separate out the issues. Would it not be reasonable to expect a Palestinian state to have laws particularly encouraging Palestinian immigration? Would that be racist? In and of itself it would not, even if other laws and practices led to racism towards non-Arabs.

To argue that the Law of Return itself is nationalistic rather than

racist is not to exonerate Israel of charges of racism or oppression of Arabs. It is to think things through.

Likewise with the Arab 'right to return'. The problems of refugees requires an urgent settlement — but is return to pre-Israel a real solution? Either depends upon convincing the Jews to allow the Arabs back — which not a short-term answer at all. C does not depend upon convincing the Jews at all and can be implemented via the military conquest of the Jewish state.

This is the heart of SSiN's disagreement with the SWP — their political tribe. Do the Jews have national rights — or not? If they have no national rights (and national rights include the right to state if they want it, and they play do) then like it or not a programme of conquest and subjugation is being advocated. In fact this is what the SWP are advocating.

Moreover, the high horse about 'immigration control' is a bit rich. The SWP define Israel as a 'big state', meaning a state seized from its rightful owners. How did 'jack' come about except through immigration? How would the SWP have prevented hijack except through limiting immigration?

And how could they justify this? For in fact the British colonial authorities did limit Jewish immigration — in 1939 when the 'jacking' immigrants were fleeing

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Homelessness: the new Tory scandal



Westminster tenants protest at council plans to sell off half its stock.

STOP THE TORY HOUSING BILL!

Hundreds of thousands homeless. Millions packed into overcrowded, high-rent

slums. No chance for young people to leave their parents' houses and make homes

of their own.

That's what the Tories are aiming for. They want to scrap council housing, revive private landlordism, and

let market economics rule — the law of devil take the hindmost.

The results are bad enough so far. They will be much worse if the Tories can push through their new Housing Bill.

Tenants and the labour movement need to fight back now. We want cheap, publicly-provided housing for rent. We want it kept in good repair. We want more of it, and better. And we need it now.

Tory Council leads Yuppie invasion

The Tory Council in Wandsworth, south London, has led the way for Tory housing policy.

Council rents are the second highest in the country (£25-83 per week, compared with the London average of £16.40 per week). Some 7000 council properties have been sold off. Only a third of these have been sold under the government's mandatory 'right to buy' scheme. The rest have been sold off under supplementary schemes, to people who have never lived in them. If no-one in the borough is interested, the council sells them on the open market.

The Tories are quite open about their aim, which has nothing to do with the provision of housing. Councillor Peter Bingle, chair of the Property Sales Sub-committee has said:

"My aim is to reduce the number of council properties in Wandsworth from 35,000 to 20,000 and to make Battersea a Conservative constituency".

Whole council estates have been sold off, brought up to luxury standard, and the flats sold at rates like £106,750 for two bedrooms.

There are now no one-bedroom flats available for less than £60,000. A 3-4 bedroom terraced house built at the turn of the century costs £130-140,000. With people who can afford those prices moving into North Battersea, it was no surprise when Labour MP Alf Dubs lost the seat in 1987.

The homeless have not gone away. Wandsworth stands as an awful warning of what the government's housing policies will mean for working class people. The Tories intend to house the rich, while leaving those who can least afford it to fend for themselves.

Homelessness is now at its highest level for many years. 800,000 people are officially registered as homeless, and the official figures do not count single people or childless couples.

In Britain's cities, 'towns' made out of cardboard boxes are springing up. The old image of the homeless who sleep rough as meths-sodden tramps is far from the truth. The homeless sleeping rough in London include all sorts of people — victims of high unemployment, a runaway boom in house prices and the failure of capitalism to provide adequate housing at a cost people can afford.

13% of those newly registered as homeless in the past year are people who have been evicted from homes they were buying when they lost their jobs and were unable to keep up the mortgage payments.

Councils are increasingly unable to cope with homeless families, and more and more often put them into crowded, insanitary, bed-and-breakfast accommodation. At the end of 1987 there were 12,570 people in bed-and-breakfast in London alone, with a further 3,287 forced to live in unsatisfactory conditions with relatives or friends. It is estimated that a further two million live in conditions officially classed as either unfit for human habitation or substandard.

Bed-and-breakfast hotel owners are making vast profits out of human misery. One hotel — the Thorncliffe at Heathrow — houses an estimated 1000 people in 350 rooms. Sanitary conditions are inadequate, cooking facilities almost non-existent. Complaints of racial and sexual harassment by the private security staff are commonplace.

Harass

The response of Tory councils has been to harass the homeless still further. Westminster Council, which is ahead of the government in its zeal for privatisation, has decided to ship its 'city' of homeless living rough onto a piece of waste ground in Barking. The homeless can expect short shrift from a government which sees the working class victims of its policies as scroungers.

At the same time as homelessness grows worse, the private building industry is effectively grounded. 400,000 building workers lie idle. Public home building has declined sharply since the Tories came to power in 1979 (a problem made worse by the government's insistence on the sale of council houses). The private sector has increased its output by only 1%, giving the lie to Tory propaganda that private enterprise can cure all ills.

Left as it is, the housing crisis can only grow worse. But the government plans to introduce legislation which will make the situation worse for thousands of working class people.

INSIDE:

**Rachman is back
Prices soar
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Scottish homelessness**

Let them buy pe

The Tories' say they will free the working class from what Tory Minister of State William Waldegrave has poetically described as "the dread drug of dependence". (That's council housing to you and me).

The legislation aims to give a fillip to the private sector and finish off council housing by 1991. In addition to further cuts in the money available to local authorities to maintain housing, the government plans to boost landlords by cutting tenants' rights, to push councils into selling their houses and flats or to take them away, and to deny councils cash to build new housing.

Cutting tenants' rights

Rent Act protection is to be removed on all new lettings. At present tenants have some security of tenure and some protection from excessive rents, harassment and arbitrary eviction. Under the new legislation existing lettings will retain this protection, but all new tenancies will not.

Landlords will be able to charge much higher rents on new lettings than those paid by protected tenants.

Landlords will have a big interest in ensuring that existing, protected tenants are given a strong incentive to move out. They can do this by means of harassment ranging from constant unwelcome 'inspections' of the property, through persistent refusal to perform repairs and maintenance, to outright physical intimidation.

A tactic which Rachman is said to have often employed was to deliberately move loud, disruptive tenants into rooms adjoining elderly residents, whose lives were made so miserable that they were forced to move. Or landlords could house known racists in areas where black families presently live, hoping to force them out by that means.

The Tories plan to introduce a new offence of 'harassment' to counter fears of this sort of thing. However, this can be hard to prove in practice, and few working-class families will have the money or the patience to wait for a case to drag its way through the courts.

Rachman is back

The Tories want to revive the private landlord. This is bad news.

The private rented sector has been declining steadily since World War 1 — from 90% then to 8% today.

In 1957 the Tories introduced legislation which reduced security of tenure, in the hope of reviving the private sector. That era ended with the Tories being voted out in 1964 on a wave of rebellion against slum landlordism.

The most notorious slum landlord was Peter Rachman. He and others bought up scores of big, old decaying houses in London at bargain prices. Then they drove out the existing tenants with the aid of hired thugs to make way for new tenants who could be made to pay much higher rents. This expansion of the right of the individual to make a vast profit at the expense of harassed, badly-housed tenants

The government plans to change the face of housing. And working class people will pick up the bill. Neil Stonelake and Martin Thomas report on the planned legislation.

New forms of tenancy

The government plans to introduce two new types of tenancy in the private rented sector — Assured Tenancies and Shorthold Tenancies.

Assured tenancies will provide the tenant (nominally at least) with some security of tenure, but rents will be uncontrolled. Shorthold tenancies will be for fixed terms, but rents will be controlled.

Assured tenancies will in fact be 'assured' in name only. When assured tenancies were introduced in 1980 they were supposed to ensure that tenants were not exploited by unscrupulous landlords by requiring that landlords register with the local council.

The new 'assured' tenancies proposed by the Tories will need no registration by landlords who will be free to put rent up as much as the market allows when the tenancy ends. When nearly one-million are already homeless, few tenants will be in a position to argue or to find alternative accommodation.

'Shorthold tenancies' are to be reduced to six months. At the end of this time the tenancy must be renewed by the tenant. Few tenants will seek registration of the rent, since the landlord will be able to evict them at the end of the six months. In any case the registered rent will not be calculated on the basis of a 'fair' rent, as at present, but at a rate which would give 'a reasonable rate of return' to the landlord.

Resident landlords

The Tories also propose to reduce or remove controls on letting by

resident landlords. At present a tenant can seek a court order to halt eviction and repossession by a resident landlord for three months.

Since many resident landlords are resident in name only, keeping a room in a house for their own use just to comply with the legal technicalities, even the existing legislation offers little enough protection from apprentice Rachmans. In future, tenants will be subject to harassment and eviction at short notice.

Getting rid of council housing

To get a big enough pool of people willing to pay high rents to private landlords, the Tories have to remove our access to cheap rented housing — that is, the public rented sector, which at present houses some five million households.

The government want to get rid of it for two reasons. Firstly, because they want a return to unrestricted private landlordism, which is impossible with a large, cheap public housing stock competing with the private sector. Second, because the provision of housing is one of the biggest local government functions, and an important political weapon in the hands of Labour councils.

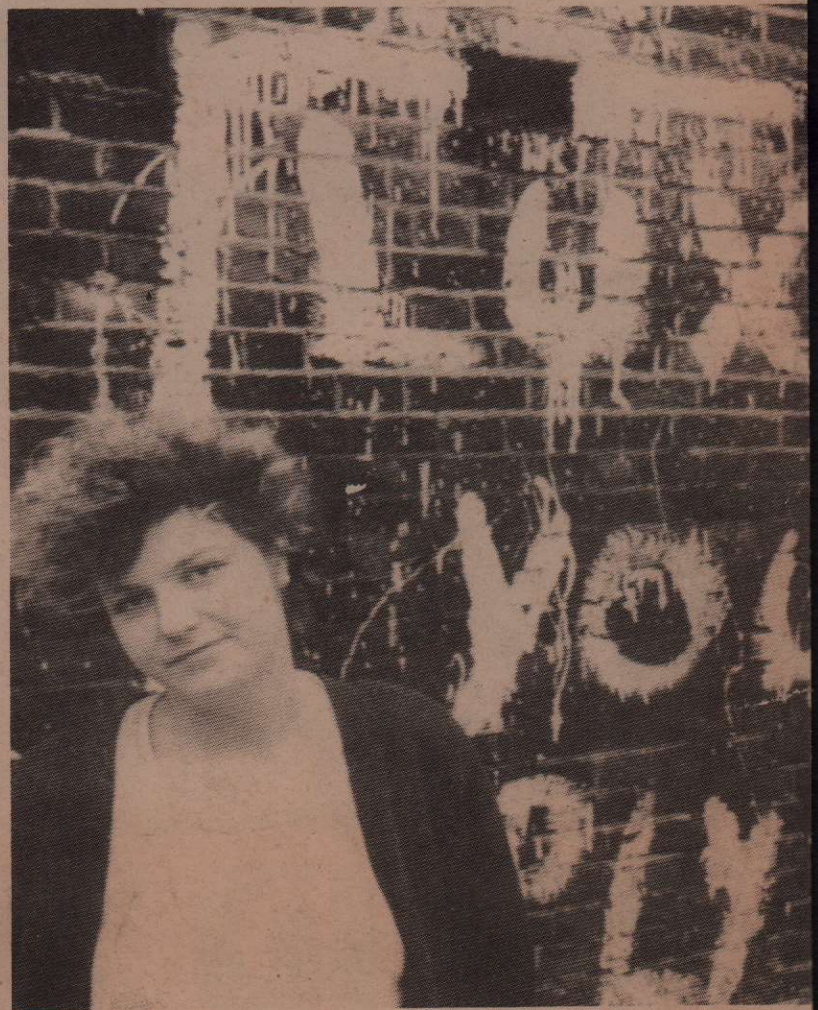
William Waldegrave wants to end the local authorities' role in housing and give the work instead to a mixture of Housing Associations, Tenants' Co-ops and private property firms. The Tories have come up with an idea called 'Tenants' Choice'. There are two main features of this.

1). Tenants will be given the right to ask a new, independent landlord to take over the ownership of their houses from the council. The only form of council housing to be excepted from this will be sheltered accommodation for the disabled or elderly.

In the case of blocks of flats or maisonettes, ownership will transfer on a majority of those voting (which in practice might well mean less than 50% of the tenants). Tenants who continued to object strongly will be entitled to retain their old landlord under a lease-back agreement but the actual owner of the building will be the new landlord.

To push tenants into voting themselves out, the Tories are also introducing curbs on councils to force them to put rents up and to make it difficult for them to manage housing properly. In some cases, housing associations may be able to offer attractive-looking alternatives to tenants, promising better-managed housing at similar rents. If tenants transfer, however, theirs will be 'new' tenancies under Tory law, and they will have very little protection thereafter against big rent rises.

To enable housing associations to offer attractive terms to tenants in the first place, they will need a lot of cash from the government. The



Tories plan to boost the private sector by a mixture of public grants and index-linked private finance.

The City (which has had problems of its own in recent months) has been very wary of putting up the ready to finance Ridley's grandiose scheme. So a large amount of the finance will have to come from the public purse.

In effect the Government will be using public money to enable private landlords to acquire public assets — and then to charge 'economic rents' (i.e. as much as they can) to the tenants.

2. The second thrust of the Tories' plans is aimed at big inner city council estates. These are a thorn in the flesh of the government, tending as they do to elect Labour councillors and MPs.

They have declined rapidly in terms of repair and maintenance, and many have become very unpleasant places to live. This is partly a result of design faults, but also partly because the government has consistently starved local authorities of the money necessary to maintain them properly.

Some councils — like Tory Wandsworth and Westminster, and Liberal Tower Hamlets — have already started evicting tenants from such estates and selling them to private developers, who do them up and sell the flats at high prices. Even before the election the Tories brought in legislation empowering councils to evict tenants for such purposes at 14 days' notice. (The council has to find the tenants alternative accommodation. The result is that the entire flow of council housing falling empty in the borough is used to rehouse tenants from sold-off estates, and there is no accommodation for the homeless).

What about Labour councils who are not prepared to sell off their estates? What if no housing association is prepared to take on the estates?

The Tories intend to set up Housing Action Trusts. These bodies, which would be completely unaccountable and appointed by the Secretary of State, will take over the

running of selected inner city estates from the local council, renovate them, and sell them off to private landlords.

The entire point of the Tories' scheme is to enable private landlords to take over council houses on profitable terms. Since existing tenants will retain protection of some sort, it follows that there is a positive incentive for landlords to drive out sitting tenants. The Tories' proposals don't just encourage harassment and eviction, they depend on it if the scheme is to work as planned.

Ringfencing

To complete the attack on local council's ability to house working class people Ridley plans to force them to raise rents.

In many areas of inner London, council rents are much, much lower than private rents, because council rents do not include an allowance for the huge cost of land in such areas. Without these relatively low council rents, most working class people could not possibly afford any housing in inner London except the most overcrowded and shabby.

To keep those rents low, they have to be subsidised from the high rates which those inner London councils get from big business and wealthy residents. Ridley plans to stop that.

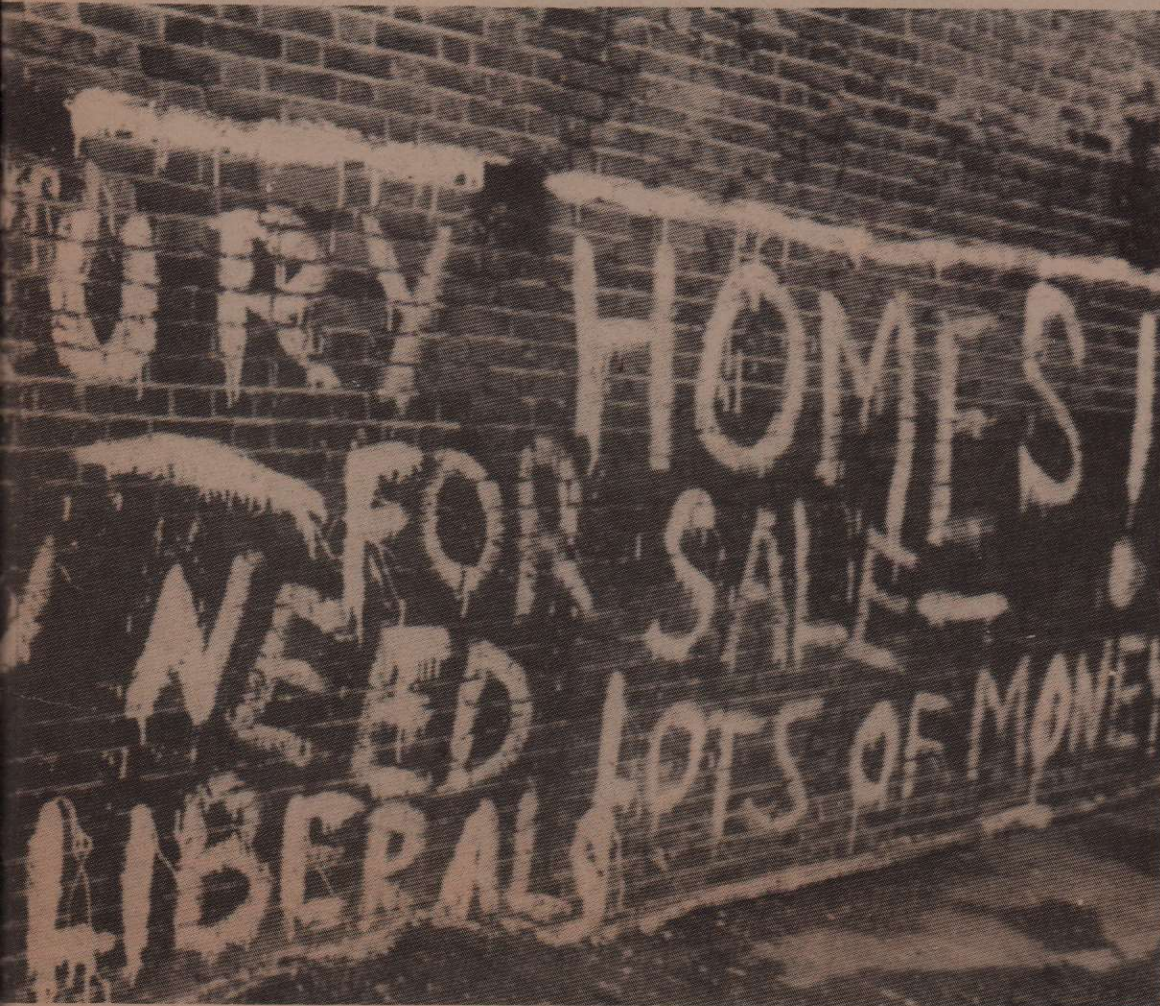
He will put a one-way 'ringfence' around local authority Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs) to ensure that no cash can be transferred to the housing budget from the General Rate Fund (GRF).

In Tower Hamlets, for example, rents will have to rise by more than a third. The authorities which subsidise housing in this way tend to be Labour controlled.

Tory authorities on the other hand, frequently transfer money from the housing account to the general rate fund. One Tory authority recently used rent income to build a car park. There are no plans by the Tories to prevent this misuse of public funds.

USING BILL!

Flats for sale!



Socialist housing

The Tory government has made much of the inadequacies of housing provided by local councils. As a means of discrediting the public sector they have denounced bureaucratic management, badly-designed estates, poor levels of repair and maintenance and the bleakness, dirtiness, and high crime rates of many housing estates, some of which are less than 30 years old.

What should be the response of socialists to these attacks?

Much of the theoretical back-up for the Tory propaganda offensive has been gained from the work of Thatcherite Alice Coleman, who carried out a study which correlated

common problems on estates — graffiti, vandalism and so on — with design features. Her conclusion was that houses were far freer from problems than flats, especially blocks where corridors, entrances, and walkways served large numbers of flats. Such blocks may escape problems if the residents are well off and there is a lot of money to spend on staff and on maintenance, and areas with the best-designed housing may have problems if the people who live there are jobless, poor, and desperate; but, all other things being equal, design makes a big difference.

The reason is the lack of contact between tenants in large blocks, poor security caused by an inability to control access to the blocks, and the existence of large areas — corridors, lifts, entrance halls, walkways, open spaces surrounding flats — which are neither private nor as public as a street.

Coleman suggests that existing flats can be made more like houses by 'top-downing' high blocks and restricting the number of flats which share a common entrance, and that new building should be houses rather than flats.

Thus far the evidence is detailed and convincing; but Coleman goes on to claim that it is all a result of central planning and to imply that where housing is publicly owned it will inevitably be bad. She makes the remarkable assertion (unsubstantiated by her research) that houses were better designed in the Victorian era or in the shanty towns of the Third World.

In fact big tenement blocks were a common form of private-landlord housing for workers in early industrial Britain, and most council property is houses. Working-class people in Britain seem always to have preferred houses to flats. In recent years, the most vigorous action based on Coleman's research about housing design has been by

left-wing Labour councils in Liverpool and Islington.

Most of the worst-designed estates were built in the 1960s. Several pressures combined to create that fiasco. Both central government and local councils — especially Labour councils — wanted to rehouse lots of people very quickly. The people rehoused in those estates had often been living in appalling slums, and, whatever the problems of the overall design of the estates, the flats, internally, were usually a big improvement.

The modern movement in architecture, whose glass wall skyscrapers were increasingly dominating city centres, had long had a vague preference for big blocks of flats as somehow more socialistic than individual houses. And — this was probably crucial — the big building companies reckoned that they could build big blocks of flats more quickly and more profitably than other forms of housing. They offered local councils deals whereby building would be cheaper if the council put up enough blocks to make industrialised system-building worthwhile.

It was a fiasco — caused not so much by planning, but by the wrong kind of planning, bureaucratic planning from above.

Since the early part of this century the labour movement has been dominated by reformist ideas. These ideas hold that working class people are basically passive, and are not therefore to be involved in the planning of something as basic as their own homes.

With democratic workers' control over the building, construction and planning spheres, workers could plan the houses they want. At present the house price boom and the restricted ownership of land prevent most workers from ever having any hope of adequate housing at rents they can afford.

Prices soar

While the Tories rant about 'freedom' and 'choice' a boom in land speculation, which they have encouraged, has pushed home ownership out of the reach of most working class people.

In London, house prices rise at the rate of £53 per day and have increased by a staggering 200% over the past year.

While the rest of the country lags behind this, house prices have still doubled and escalating unemployment and low wages in Wales,

Scotland and the North still means that for many — particularly young people — home ownership is a daydream.

It is true that home ownership has risen steadily since the turn of the century (from 10% of dwellings in 1901 to 61% today). But the number of foreclosed mortgages has also increased drastically as the depression bites deeper and more people lose work.

And the number of owner-occupied houses in disrepair has risen sharply as owners find it increasingly hard to pay for maintenance.

Boom city USA?

Los Angeles, the boom city of Reagan's USA, shows us where Thatcherism is going.

Since 1981 federal housing assistance has been slashed by seventy per cent without compensatory support from state or city authorities. Los Angeles has not built a unit of public housing since the controversies of the McCarthy period, and the existing stock of older rental property is being systematically depleted by redevelopment and condominium conversion.

The cheapest family units in the city, in the most dilapidated neighbourhoods, now cost about seventy per cent of the income of a minimum-wage worker.

The result has been universal overcrowding as two or three, sometimes even four, immigrant families are forced to occupy a single family dwelling or apartment. As this tenement strategy has reached its supersaturation point, families have spilled over into a burgeoning black market in housing. In a city where thousands of luxury condominiums stand unoccupied, at least two hundred thousand immigrants from Mexico and Central America are living in illegal garage conversions, typically without plumbing or heat.

In some areas, whole families have to 'hot-bed' — share beds, sleeping in shifts.

The shortest route between Heaven and Hell in contemporary America is probably Fifth Street in Downtown L.A. West of the refurbished Biltmore Hotel, and spilling across the moat of the Harbor Freeway, a post-1970 glass and steel skyscraper advertises the landrush of Pacific Rim capital to the central city. Here, Japanese mega-developers, transnational bankers and billionaire corporate raiders plot the restructuring of the California economy. A few blocks



east, across the no-man's-land of Pershing Square, Fifth Street metamorphoses into the 'Nickel': the notorious half-mile strip of blood-and-vomit spewn concrete where several thousand homeless people live.

Last winter, after a number of people froze to death on the streets, the mayor — at the urging of the Central City East Association of businessmen — ordered police sweeps to destroy the makeshift sidewalk camps that the homeless had erected as protection against hypothermia. A local business leader explained that only the shelters were illegal, not sleeping naked on the street on 0°C weather. 'The camping aspect is what we are trying to get at, the jumble of furniture on the street, the open fires. But no one is telling people they can't sleep on the streets'.

(Adapted from Mike Davis, 'The "Internationalisation" of Downtown Los Angeles', *New Left Review* no. 164).

Out onto the street

If the Tories get away with their proposals, they will lead to a vast increase in homelessness and in overcrowding and inadequate housing.

If rents (which are already escalating where not tightly controlled) rise until the market will take no more, that will drive many working class families out into the street and cause much hardship to countless others.

The private building industry (which is in any case experiencing one of the worst slumps in its history) will fail dismally to build enough houses to meet the need for them. 'Demand' and 'need' are two quite different things. The prices of new houses will rule out any possibility of most working class people being able to afford them.

Young people leaving home will stand even less chance of finding secure accommodation. The number of people who come to our cities in search of work and end up homeless and destitute will increase drastically. The quality of the housing stock will deteriorate still fur-



ther, as the new breed of slumlord envisaged by the Tories will be unlikely to spend much of their increased profits on improving their properties.

As long as housing is organised on the basis of profit rather than human need, capitalists will use it as just another means of exploiting the working class.

Homelessness doubles in Scotland

The government's proposals are different for Scotland, but the housing situation is depressingly similar to that in England and Wales.

There is a huge shortage of accommodation to rent, while the condition of what is available is poor and deteriorating. Homelessness has nearly doubled in three years, despite a falling population and a drift towards England in search of work.

The Tories' Housing (Scotland) Bill makes savage attacks on the security of tenants. Landlords are to be allowed to charge 'key money' and give only two weeks' notice to quit. The Bill will abolish landlords' legal obligation to provide rent books, fair rents legislation and tenants' mandatory right to repairs and maintenance.

Also to go are the existing Scottish housing agencies, the Scottish Special Housing Association and the Housing Corporation of

Scotland. They are to be replaced by a single new housing agency, Scottish Homes.

This body's functions will be to promote owner-occupation, encourage private letting and the break up of large council estates. Scotland has a much higher proportion of council housing than England.

Like an English Housing Action Trust writ large, the main functions of Scottish Homes will be to encourage private capitalism rather

than provide housing.

Tenants' rights and rents will be affected in much the same way as in England and Wales. Private landlords will be encouraged to take over public housing stock and allowed to charge rents to new tenants that are much higher than previous levels.

The government's proposals have nothing to offer Scotland's 30,859 homeless, or to the 200,000 people on waiting lists for homes which they will now probably never see.

Their market offers nothing

According to Environment Secretary Nicholas Ridley: "The pressures of the market will ensure that the right kind of housing is provided in the right place at the right time." (13 June 1986). Unfettered capitalism will provide housing more efficiently than the public sector.

If the demand for housing is there, then the supply will follow provided that enterprising private builders and landlords aren't prevented from doing their jobs by the dead hand of the state.

In fact, the reverse is true. The free market has always offered working class people crowded, insanitary and unhealthy conditions.

Right up to 1945, at least a third of the British working class lived in squalor. Radical improvement came only with mass council housing after 1945.

Slums

A free market will always create overpriced slums in city centres. Workers who do not have the job stability and credit-worthiness necessary to buy a house in the cheaper suburbs will pay relatively high rents even for cramped and seedy accommodation if it is near jobs. The city centre becomes a mix of the rich who can afford to live there, and the poor who can't afford to live elsewhere.

The rapid growth of industrial cities in the 19th Century produced vast overcrowded slums. Workers usually lived in tenements — big blocks divided into tiny flats — or in two-room back-to-back terrace houses. The builders used as little space as possible to house as many workers as could fit in.

Factories

These forbears of Nicholas Ridley threw housing up wherever factories had been built with no regard for the people who were to live in them.

In 1842 in one cul-de-sac in Leeds, 34 two-room houses housed 340 people. The unemployed who came to the towns in search of work had to find space in these conditions as best they could.

Cholera and TB were rife. The houses often had no running water or drains. It was only when the ruling class realised that diseases could spread and kill them, and workers began to organise politically, that conditions were improved slightly.

So the Tory dream of housing provided efficiently by the free market has never held good for the working class. The housing crisis which has hit the headlines in recent years is nothing new; yet the Tories still insist that Victorian times (at the height of which nearly two million people were homeless and in which many others lived six to a room) were a golden era of housing provision.



Ridley

Our answer

Good housing should be a universal right, not a privilege enjoyed only by the well-off. The free market cannot provide this.

Many people don't have the cash or the job security and income to get a mortgage. Even people who do get mortgages are increasingly unable to keep their houses in good repair, and more and more houses are being repossessed because the buyers cannot keep up the mortgage payments.

Council waiting lists stand at 1.35 million. Many councils are unable to house anyone from these lists. They cannot even fit in the growing number of homeless families who have to live in squalid bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The government now wants to reduce council home stocks still further and repeal laws limiting rents and giving security to tenants.

The only way to make sure that everyone has a right to decent housing is to have a large enough stock of publicly-owned housing available at low rents.

Yet the Tories have cut the cash available to councils to the extent that they don't have enough staff to manage lettings and repairs properly.

While millions are homeless or badly housed and the housing stock crumbles, 400,000 building workers are unemployed.

Housebuilding should be organised for need, not profit. A public homebuilding and renovation drive should be launched, organised through council direct labour and a



A homeless family in a Bayswater hotel room in Westminster, the richest borough in Britain.

national building service under workers' control. The big building companies should be nationalised and integrated with the national building service.

Home-building and housing management should be under democratic control. Tenants' associations should have a say in the management, repair and design of housing. Tenants should have a

right to inspect their records in housing offices and legally enforceable rights on complaints and enquiries.

Sales

The forced sales of council housing should stop, and there should be no rent rises, no rate rises and no poll tax. Labour councils should

refuse to pass on Tory cuts in the form of higher rents for working-class people.

The poll tax will penalise the poor to help the rich, and will drive many people off the electoral register.

A campaign is needed that links up trade unions, Labour Parties and tenants' associations and to campaign for a socialist approach to housing.

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty, East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built

in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles world-wide, including the struggle of workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-

socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class based women's movement.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER



Britain's death squad exposed!



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r should sense



from Nazism. In retrospect the SWP supports this British imperialist and Arab nationalist ban on immigrants fleeing from the racist murderers. Logically, their own complaint is that it wasn't effective enough!

But if Socialist Worker is blinded to the issues by factional zeal, Socialist Action, predictably, allow factional zeal to blind them to straightforward questions of fact.

SSiN "called for half a million Palestinian residents of Israel to be expelled and the establishment of two racist, exclusionist states" writes expert Polly Vittorini (who goes on to proclaim the rights of "nine (?) million Palestinians"). Such wilful, morally imbecilic lying is hard to take seriously if it were not part of a vicious campaign of lies and slander against SO.

Of course SSiN condemns (and condemns in its motion) the institutionalised discrimination against Arabs in Israel and demands that they have free citizenship.

For Socialist Action, of course, SSiN's position was "reactionary, racist and pro-imperialist" — a judgement produced by their now total inability to see anything in the world outside the grand Absolutes of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism.

Mud-slinging is their forte these days (another report on the rest of NUS conference tells more

downright lies about SSiN). But it is they — and the SWP — who really have questions to answer on the Middle East.

Socialist Organiser has made no attempt to hide our views on Palestine. We consider it to be one of our most pressing political tasks to eradicate a poisonous political cocktail of good intentions towards Palestinian Arabs, ignorant demonology about Israel and the vicarious Arab chauvinist proposal to destroy the Jewish nation state which passes for serious Marxist politics on the pseudo-Trotskyist left.

At NUS conference, Socialist Organiser distributed an 8-page broadsheet spelling out our position, as well as holding a fringe meeting.

We have argued that it is not enough to give support to the Palestinians and oppose Israel. No solution is possible that does not recognise the national rights of both peoples (and if Polly Vittorini thinks recognition of national rights is inevitably 'racist and exclusionist' that's her problem). The stock-in-trade 'anti-imperialism' of the left simply avoids this issue, relying on self-consoling but vacuous and utopian formulas like the 'secular democratic state'.

SO will continue to fight on the left to discredit those views. No campaign of lies, misrepresentation or political libel will stop us.

Afghanistan



Will the Russians go?

EIGHT YEARS ago, on 27 December 1979, the Russians invaded Afghanistan.

Once in control of the capital, Kabul, they put in their puppet Babrak Karmal as prime minister, and shot the dissident Stalinist, Hafizullah Amin, who had made himself prime minister three months earlier in a palace coup.

In the eight years since December 1979, the Russian army and air force have conducted a war of conquest against the peoples of Afghanistan. The big majority of Afghans oppose them, and many are in arms against them.

The USSR is conducting a typical war of colonial conquest, using the same sort of weapons and tactics that the Americans used in Vietnam and the Nazis in occupied Europe. They bomb villages in reprisal for guerilla activity, they destroy crops, they round up groups of hostile people.

Over four million Afghans —



nearly a quarter of the population — have fled across the border to Pakistan and Iran. Yet the USSR has no secure control of Afghanistan.

It has an insecure grip on the towns, no more. The recent siege of the town of Khost by anti-USSR forces shows how weak the USSR's grip is on the country. There are

over 100,000 USSR soldiers fighting in Afghanistan, but Western military experts calculate — and the evidence suggests that they are right — that it would take at least four times that number of troops to have even a chance of subduing the country.

The ruling bureaucracy in the USSR has so far refused to commit itself to such a level of military activity. Perhaps they remember Vietnam, where the US failed to conquer the people despite committing half a million troops and vast amounts of military hardware.

Now Russian government ministers talk openly about getting out of Afghanistan. But will they? They say that it depends on being able to set up a stable 'neutral' regime there before they leave. One idea which has been floating about for nearly a decade is to bring back the king who was overthrown by a military coup in 1974.

Once before the USSR has withdrawn from an occupied territory. In 1955 it withdrew from Austria, after ten years there, as part of the easing of tension with the West associated with the rule of Nikita Khrushchev. So it is not ruled out that it will withdraw from Afghanistan, under a 'neutralist' settlement perhaps guaranteed by the USA.

But the scales are heavily weighted against it. Gorbachev may want to get out and put an end to the drain on the USSR's resources; but the USSR cannot be seen to be driven out.

The rural people of Afghanistan have traditionally borne arms, and have always been very independent-minded towards any national government. They have been at war for ten years, at first against the Stalinist-led military regime which took power by way of an army/air-force coup in April 1978, and then against the Russian invaders. Muslim fundamentalism is very strong among them.

If they force the USSR out, will they then accept a 'neutralist' regime friendly to the USSR? Even if some of them would accept it, who would impose it?

The Afghan groups are notoriously divided among themselves. The Russians would have had a far more difficult time of it if they could have united. What unity is possible in support of a 'neutralist' solution? Who would impose it? The old Afghan state machine was already on the point of collapse before the USSR's invasion: what's left of it now?

Despite all this, the USSR can be driven out. It deserves to be driven out! Socialists must demand that the USSR gets out now! Afghanistan for the Afghans!

Workers' Liberty discusses the Middle East

A debate is raging on the left about Israel and the Palestinians. What attitude should socialists have towards the Israeli state.

What would a democratic solution in the Middle East consist of? The latest Workers' Liberty magazine tackles these questions with an article on the events on the West Bank and Gaza and with two previously untranslated articles by Trotsky on the national question.

Polish socialist Zbigniew Kowalewski contributes an article discussing the results of the Polish referendum on economic reforms, and the prospects for Glasnost in the Eastern bloc.

Continuing the East European theme, Stan Crooke discusses the position of the Crimean Tatars, one of the many oppressed minorities in the Soviet Union.

The last Workers' Liberty contained an article on the modern film industry by Socialist Organiser's

East

film critic Belinda Weaver. The latest Workers' Liberty contains a reply by Edward Ellis, taking issue with Belinda's contention that the quality of films has deteriorated over the years. There has always been a large proportion of bad films.

Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which outlaws the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities is the biggest attack on lesbians and gay men since the limited legalisation of male homosexuality. Clive Bradley looks at the Clause's wide ranging implications for the lesbian and gay community.

Workers' Liberty also includes articles on South Africa, women and the unions, and Sylvia Pankhurst, and lots of book reviews.

It's only 90p — get your copy now!

We need £10,000

Two years ago, we raised £15,000 in a special fund drive to enable us to get new offices, to renovate them to make them usable, and to buy new equipment.

The success of that fund drive has enabled us to expand our activity substantially. Alongside the paper we now have a regular magazine and frequent pamphlets.

More activity means more running costs. A socialist newspaper — without the big advertising revenue of the capitalist press — cannot break even on sales alone. So we draw on our supporters and regular sellers for financial contributions.

Now we're appealing more

widely again to readers and sympathisers. At present we get about £2,000 a month in regular donations. We need more. We need £10,000 over the next three months, up to 31 March.

Supporters in different areas are organising sponsored events, jumble sales, socials, and other fund raising efforts. Supporters in Cardiff recently raised £207 from a kebab stall at a local event. We're also asking for individual readers to make donations — anything from an extra 50p for your paper each week to big cheques.

So far this month we have £1912.20. Send money to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

A bird's tale

To most people *Archaeopteryx*, the fossil bird with teeth and a long bony tail, is a fascinating relic, a link between reptiles and birds, proof that evolution has taken place.

However, to astronomer and promoter of peculiar theories Fred Hoyle, it is nothing more or less than a monstrous fraud, perpetrated to *disprove* evolution in favour of "creationism".

Hoyle's claim has come under critical scrutiny in many quarters, most effectively by Steven Jay Gould writing in the US journal *Natural History*, last year.

The first example of a fossil *Archaeopteryx* was found when a block of lithographic limestone was split in Germany in 1861. It was bought for £700 a year later by Richard Owen for the BM(NH) — British Museum (Natural History).

Lithographic limestone is a very fine sedimentary rock in which details as intricate as the membranes of jellyfish and the hairy legs of arthropods can be preserved. It is certainly capable of preserving feathers, should they be on a dead animal.

But according to Hoyle, *Archaeopteryx* was originally without feathers — an ordinary, millions of years old reptile. Someone had painted a thin layer of limestone cement over the two halves of the block and them pressed in some modern feathers.

Alan Charig, head fossil-keeper at the BM(NH), and colleagues spent some considerable time and effort disproving this "theory". Gould describes their findings, adding his own "2 cents' worth" for good measure. His exposition is a masterpiece of clear thinking.

First, with layers of cement on the surfaces of the split block, it would be impossible for them to fit exactly. Yet Charig has proved an "exquisite" fit. There are hairline cracks filled with deposits. Hoyle claimed this was cracking in the artificial cement. Charig showed the cracks went right into the block, extending with a perfect match through both halves. Further, the deposits in the cracks are crystals of calcite that take far longer to form than the 125 years since the fossil was discovered.

Second, dendrites, delicate tree-like deposits of manganese dioxide cover both halves, overlaying the feathers in some places. A photograph of dendrites on one half printed backwards *exactly* matches the pattern on the other half. The dendrites must have been there *before* the slab was split — and so must the feathers.

Third, feathers are not the only bird-like features of *Archaeopteryx*. There are also the perching foot and "wishbone" typical not of reptiles but of birds. How could a forger have faked these?

Fourth, how did the forger manufacture the ligaments holding the feathers to the tail vertebrae?

Fifth, was the same forger working in 1877, when the next fossil *Archaeopteryx* was found? Were his descendants doing the same trick in the 1950s when the next fossils were found?

When trying to show a motive for deliberate conspiracy by the Superintendent of the BM(NH) Owen, Hoyle fares no better. According to Hoyle, Owen was so vehemently opposed to Darwin and evolution, he bought an obvious fake, hoping its unmasking would discredit evolutionary theory.

Gould sees several objections here. Owen was hardly likely to deliberately endanger the reputation of the BM(NH) when he had just dedicated much effort in getting support for the building of its South Kensington premises. Darwin's theory did not stand or fall with *Archaeopteryx*.

Most damning of Hoyle's scholarship, Owen was *not* opposed to theories of evolution, just to Darwin's. He saw *Archaeopteryx* as support for his own theory of evolution.

Gould is most scathing on Hoyle's apparent ignorance of Owen's true ideas. If Hoyle had spent as little as an hour reading Owen's writings, he could not have made such a blunder.

Gould is particularly annoyed at the waste of a scientist's time in disproving Hoyle's irresponsible allegations and also at the "on the one hand, on the other hand" approach of the press. This has the effect of misleading their readers into seeing the argument as one between two valid viewpoints.

Where Jim Crow reigned

Mick Ackersley reviews 'Eyes on the Prize' (BBC, 7.30 last Sunday)

It is 1955. A fourteen year old black boy from Chicago goes on holiday to visit relatives in the racist 'deep South' of the USA.

He must know something about racism. After all, he lives in Jim Crow America. In that America, the segregation of blacks and whites was commonplace everywhere, and in the deep South it was as rigidly all-embracing as it is in South Africa today.

Yet the boy from Chicago accepts a dare from local Southern black lads to go into a shop and treat the white woman behind the counter as an equal, the way he might behave in racist, but less racist, Chicago. He dares. That night, two men come and take him away in a car.

Some time afterwards his body is found in the river. He has been beaten and shot through the head, and his weighted body has been thrown in the water. He has been so badly beaten that at the subsequent trial for murder of the husband of the shop woman and another man, the defence will claim that the body cannot positively be identified as his.

But the defence scarcely has to bother to plead. The jury is entirely white, and entirely racist. The defence counsel openly appeals to them as 'an Anglo-Saxon' jury, and they oblige with a 'not guilty' verdict.

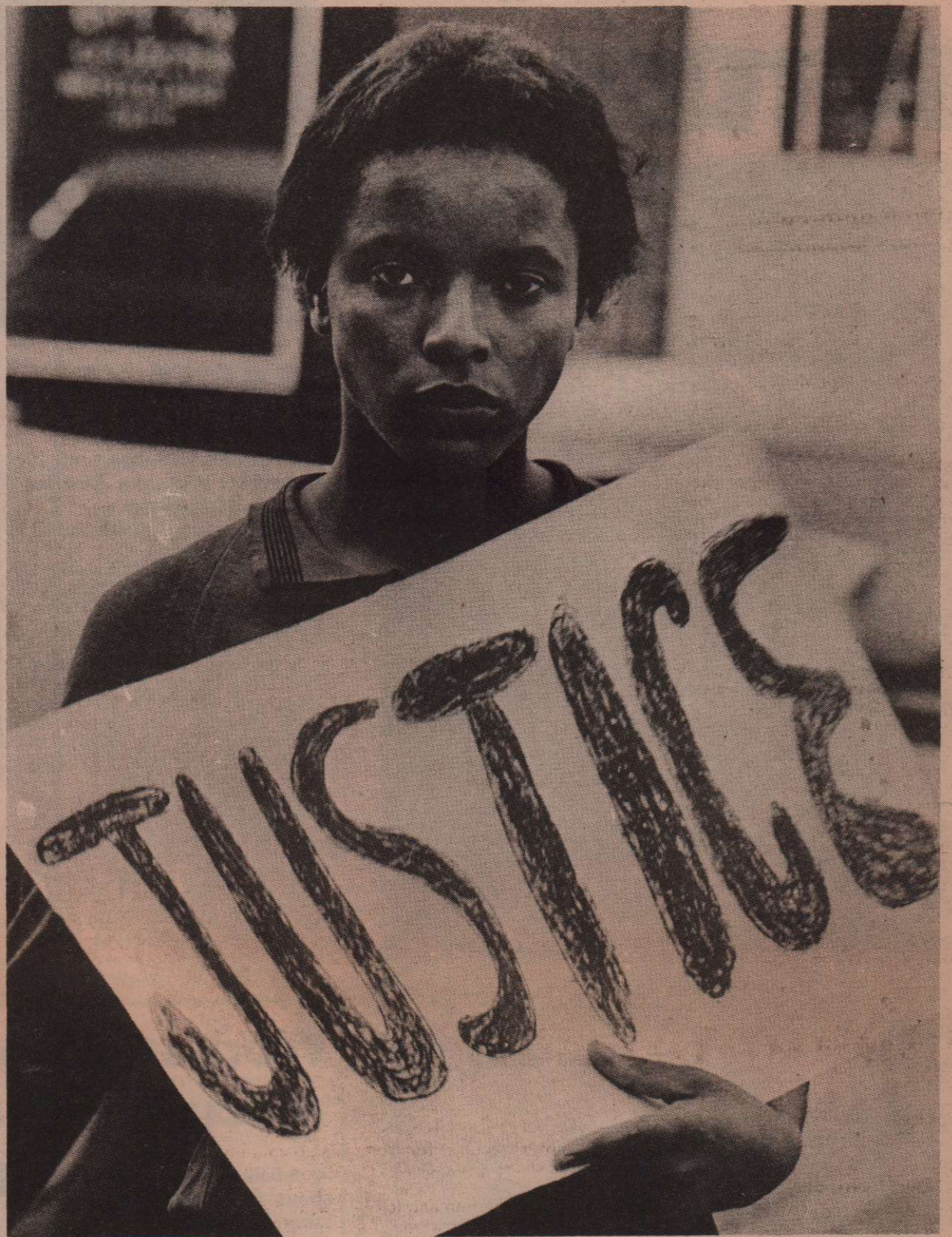
Safe from further prosecution after their acquittal, the two murderers confess a few months later and tell their side of the story to a journalist who gives them \$4,000. They say that the boy got into the car with them without any idea that his life was in danger.

To me, perhaps the most telling detail was the newsreel shots of the two acquitted murderers and their wives. They are relieved. "It's over", they say. Then one of the murderers and the woman who had been mortally insulted because a 14 year old boy treated her as an equal embrace and kiss, as if oblivious of the camera, entwining like a romantic hero and heroine from a Hollywood movie. Maybe that is how they saw themselves.

Their honour had been satisfied. 'A man has to do what a man has to do'. He had done it, and she appreciated him for it. Perhaps they lived happily ever after. Jim Crow America...

But 1955 was also the year the victims of the racist system known as Jim Crow began the most sustained fight back ever against that system.

In Montgomery, Alabama, as in the rest of the South, buses were segregated. It was blacks to the



back, whites to the front, so long as there were seats. If seats were short, blacks had to give up their seats to whites.

One day in late 1955, Mrs Rosa Parks, an activist with the moderate National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, decided she would stay in her seat when a white man demanded she get up and let him sit down. Such things had happened before. This time it sparked a boycott of the buses by Montgomery's 50,000 blacks.

Blacks had to walk long journeys or rely on improvised community transport, but for over a year their boycott remained solid, until the courts ruled in their favour that the segregation on the buses was illegal. The black leader Martin Luther King, who was assassinated 20 years ago, first came to prominence during the struggle in Montgomery.

'Eyes on the Prize' was the first in a series which tells the story of the great fight against racism in the USA. I watched it with a child not quite ten who lives in the East End

of London and therefore encountered racism long ago, at school and elsewhere.

For him racism is an everyday fact of life. Yet he became more and more angry and indignant as we watched and listened. He kept saying to me: 'Why?'

Unfortunately 'Eyes on the Prize' was a bit short on the 'why'. But if you want to know the who, what, where and when of America's modern black movement, watch the rest of the series. Video it if you can.

Much more than a liberal account

Edward Ellis reviews 'Cry Freedom'

Richard Attenborough's 'Cry Freedom' has been criticised as a white liberal's view of South Africa. Indeed on one level it is exactly that — if rather unsurprisingly so.

But it is not *merely* a white liberal account: it is a very powerful and moving indictment of apartheid, and (as far as I know) a more-or-less accurate description of South Africa and South African politics in the 1970s.

The film tells of the friendship between white liberal newspaper editor Donald Woods and black consciousness student leader Steve Biko. It tells, above all, of the profound effect that Biko has on Woods — how Woods' perception of black liberation is radically transformed.

When Woods initially meets Biko, he considers 'black consciousness' to be nothing but the inverse of apartheid, a form of 'black racism', equally to be condemned. But Biko shows him what black South Africa is really like.

He takes him into townships where he has never been before, to see the poverty and desperation he has never seen or understood.

Woods is deeply affected. he becomes a fervent supporter and admirer of Biko and a close friend.

Biko, of course, is murdered by the regime. The second half of the film deals with Woods' efforts to publicise the facts of the Biko case, his arrest and eventual escape from South Africa.

This also has been a widespread criticism of the film — that it begins as a stirring portrait of Steve Biko and his politics and ends as little more than a cliff-hanging thriller. Perhaps.

But the real subject of the film throughout is Woods, and his transformation from naivety to

understanding. Even after his association with Biko, Woods is shocked to find that security boss Kruger is, after all, a glorified thug meting out violence and threats of violence. In the end, Woods is a banned person, for whom the safety and political privileges of white South Africa have been lost. He is a 'kaffir-lover' forced to escape from his own country disguised as a priest.

If 'Cry Freedom' was only a study of the radicalisation of a white liberal, if black people played no part in it, it would indeed deserve criticism. But Biko and other black South Africans are by no means incidental.

Biko is portrayed as an immensely charismatic and powerful personality. The scenes of his funeral and of the visit to the morgue by his wife (accompanied by Woods) are extremely moving.

The highpoints of the film, nevertheless, are the mass crowd scenes, for which Attenborough applies the expertise he previously

demonstrated in 'Gandhi'. 'Cry Freedom' opens with an attack by security forces on Crossroads squatter camp; and ends with a brilliant reconstruction of the youth revolt in Soweto in June 1976.

Both of these scenes will become classics of cinema history. In particular the Soweto massacre — in which the army gunned down protesting school students — is very powerful indeed.

When 'Cry Freedom' finished, the cinema audience gave it a standing ovation — something I have never experienced before, but which is, apparently, the usual reaction to this film. It deserved it. It is a vivid attack on apartheid, an attack which is, moreover, uncompromisingly political — the closing minutes consist of a horribly long list of those who have died in police custody. Of course the politics are liberal; but even liberals can make a case with passion.

'Cry Freedom' is a film of anger and passion which deserves to be seen by everybody.

Yorkshire pit strike



The dispute that brought the South Yorkshire coalfield to a standstill started at Bentley on Monday 4th, the first day back after the Christmas holidays.

The day shift came out in support of three men who had been moved from the job they had been doing for the last three years.

The job involved tunnelling to new reserves. Conditions were bad, with high temperatures and inadequate equipment. Management said that the men were not working hard enough.

They refused to discuss the case with union officials. They sent out letters to the workforce saying 'No amount of industrial action will influence our decision over this matter.'

But at a general meeting the following day, the men decided to continue the strike and picket the other pits in the area calling for their support. This was successful, and eight pits joined the strike.

On Thursday more pits joined the strike, and a meeting of the South Yorkshire Area Panel gave the strike their support and called for meetings at all pits over the weekend. By Friday South Yorkshire Area was at a standstill with two North Yorkshire pits — Stillingfleet and Kellingley — also on strike.

At their meeting on Saturday the Bentley men deferred a decision until the results of the other meetings were known.

The South Yorkshire panel met on Sunday. Delegates reported back on pit meetings. The general feeling had been that miners agreed with the principle of Bentley's action but felt that spreading the strike had been premature. The dispute should

By Karen Waddington

have been taken further with management first.

The panel asked Bentley to return to work and try to settle the dispute. If nothing was gained after the week they should return to the

panel and seek further support.

That night the Bentley men met and were told of an offer from management to try to settle the strike through the disputes procedure. With this in mind, and knowing they could return to the panel if needed, the men voted to return to work on Tuesday morning after all the other pits had gone back.

S Wales' mistake

Already the South Wales leaders are balloting their Area before the election on their attitude to the present overtime ban, presumably aiming to undercut the impact of a Scargill victory. I am worried about what is happening there. I only hope that the Welsh miners realise that to call the overtime ban off is tantamount to recognising the new disciplinary code with all that entails, including sacking NUM officials for doing their job. It is one of the most vicious things British Coal has ever come up with, and we cannot accept it.

In Yorkshire the basic issue in the Bentley strike was local management pushing. From the outside I can imagine that the lads had no option but to take action. Once you allow that kind of thing to go ahead it becomes common practice, and action is the only kind of thing British Coal now recognises. The Bentley miners were quite right.

The action has now been called off, at least for the next week, after the South Yorkshire panel meeting

WHETTON'S WEEK

on Sunday. I was not at the meeting so I do not know all the arguments, and can only hope that the week's limit on negotiations is stuck to. If British Coal is not prepared to back off then the lads need to come out again.

Obviously there are problems with fetching the lads out, then sending them back, then fetching them out again. I would have preferred to see them stick out until British Coal backs off.

I am still involved in negotiations with British Coal in my own case. They have offered me a job at either Manton or Shireoaks. When they made the offer at the tribunal they said transport arrangements would not be a problem. Their latest suggestion is that I should buy a moped!

Teachers

London teachers retreat

Last Wednesday the Inner London Teachers Association Council, Inner London Division of the National Union of Teachers, voted by two to one to suspend its policy of 'no cover' for absent teachers.

ILTA's retreat was forced by the Labour Inner London Education Authority's decision to suspend teachers without pay leading to dismissal and its bowing to Government pressure to adopt a cuts budget and slash 8,000 jobs. Many

delegates who voted for the motion have been advocating and carrying out 'no cover' action for some years, even before it became ILTA policy.

We needed to regroup and to obtain national union backing for fighting the cuts.

'No cover' and other militant action by NUT members in ILEA schools have been under attack for years, not only by the ILEA, but also by the NUT national leadership. Teachers have been disciplined by the Authority, and suspended and expelled from the national

union, for "unofficial action".

Yet the London NUT membership continued to remain solid, defying national trends, and eventually elected leaders to ILTA Council who were associated with militant unofficial action.

The ILTA leaders were then suspended by the NUT national officers for organising a one-day strike last January against the Tory Bill removing teachers' negotiating rights. The ILEA wasted no time in imposing its compulsory transfer scheme, and, after the general election, started to fine teachers for refusing to cover.

Facing more severe pressure from the Government but continued strong resistance from NUT members, the ILEA embarked on its drastic course of action, which has finally forced ILTA's hand.

The severity of these cuts and disciplinary measures is a testimony of how hard NUT members have fought to defend working conditions, jobs and the education service in Inner London. Refusal to cover for absences is now deemed to be "gross professional misconduct", a disciplinary clause previously only used against teachers for sexual or violent offences against children or major financial embezzlement.

That a Labour Authority has to resort to such a clause to suspend without pay and threaten with dismissal trade unionists taking industrial action to defend jobs and services, is a measure of how sick and bankrupt the Kinnockite "dented shield" policy has become.

All Constituency Labour Parties and affiliated trade union branches in Inner London should immediately demand that ILEA members reverse these measures. All the eight unions threatened by the ILEA's cuts must urgently fight back. Parents and others mobilised against the Government's plans to break up the ILEA must see that their fight is in vain if the ILEA succeeds in pushing through these cuts against its own workforce.

Socialist Worker U-turn

By Cheung Siu Ming, Lambeth delegate to ILTA, (in a personal capacity)

The Inner London Teachers' Association vote to shelve 'no cover' was carried largely because it was argued for by the Socialist Workers Party, who did a complete U-turn.

Before this the SWP had insisted the action should continue. They opposed negotiation throughout last term, on the grounds that there was nothing to be gained. They had refused to look reality in the face, and had irresponsibly attacked the Haringey NUT leaders who called off 'no cover' in order to get national union backing for strikes against job cuts.

Never mind that the issue was democratically put to a mass meeting of members in Haringey, who endorsed their leaders' stand.

Haringey NUT leaders were faced with a simple choice — whether to argue to continue the existing limited no cover action and thereby lose the possibility of official action against the cuts, or to accept that official support was going to be necessary to have any possibility of

defeating those cuts.

ILTA's decision was right, despite the SWP's doubletalk. A minority argued to continue the action so that a school reps' meeting can be called to take further decisions.

This was wrong because time had run out on this option. Members in some schools facing the brunt of ILEA's attacks would have been victimised the next day without any remote prospect of widespread solidarity action.

The political coherence of ILTA, at its peak a year ago, has been weakened by the expulsions and suspensions imposed by the national union. Centrifugal tendencies have re-asserted themselves — rightist as well as ultra-leftist — which prevented ILTA from correctly assessing when and how to negotiate a local supply cover/class size agreement with the ILEA from a position of strength last term.

Energy expended in maintaining the action at school level and in defending the ILTA 8 against expulsion and suspension combined with ultra-left reaction to a definite rightist current emerging on ILTA, all contributed to our failure to forewarn and prepare the London membership for what was to come.

There remains a major task to ensure that the retreat is orderly, so that we can regroup for a fight against the coming budget cuts. Such a fight will be an uphill struggle, because we will have to put pressure to get support from the same National Union Officers who suspended our leaders.

Ford's: vote for action

The 32,500 manual workers in Ford's British plants are to be balloted next week about industrial action against the pay and conditions package offered by the bosses — a three-year deal involving minimal pay rises in return for major changes in shopfloor conditions.

The ballot will be preceded for most workers by mass meetings at which officials will argue in favour of industrial action. The result of the ballot will be announced by the end of January.

The indications are that the officials are right when they predict a large yes vote. Ford's share of the British car market is still rising and profits have boomed and the bosses have helped themselves to large pay rises. But the workers have had low pay rises and job loss despite years of rising productivity. Now they have had enough. The anger and bitterness was plain in the series of strikes and other action that erupted in various plants after details of the bosses' package were announced.

Despite the extent of the unofficial action which must have surprised them, management refuse to budge on the basic elements of their package. They have a lot at stake. Faced with growing competition in a contracting market, they are determined to maintain their market position and profits by driving up exploitation.

The key to their plan is the introduction of so-called Japanese working methods — 'quality circles', 'team leaders' and, eventually, company councils, and marginalised unions.

They also want to tie the workers down over a period — hence the

three-year deal, bring in casual workers at peak times and get rid of more regular jobs.

The bosses probably calculate that the two months of unofficial guerrilla action which have been confined to separate plants and even sections, will peter out without finding a national focus. They also know and are probably gambling on the fact that the union leaders have no stomach for a fight.

If management had been prepared to give them something to enable the deal to be sold to the rank and file, the officials would have settled last week. They offered the company various alternatives, including more money and job guarantees for accepting a three-year deal. The officials publicly expressed sympathy for Ford's need to compete and for more efficient working.

The union leaders clearly see the ballot as a negotiating tool rather than a prelude to a serious fight. It ties them to nothing, not even strike action. They are boasting that a similar ballot in 1985 resulted in management concessions which made action unnecessary.

Ford workers have a straight choice: accept radical changes or beat them back. Beating them back will take an all-out national strike.

Over the last two months action has been taken by workers in all the plants and grades. For the first time supervisors have become involved. Conditions clearly exist for an all-out strike. It needs to be prepared for now in the plants.

The best response to the bosses would be a massive vote for action on the 20th followed by an all-out strike as soon as the result is known.

UCW

After the ballot

By Pete Keenlyside, UCW Manchester Amalgamated (in a personal capacity)

The ballot on the deal over the shorter working week cooked up between the UCW Executive and the Post Office is due to take place over the next week or so. Even the ballot itself is in blatant contradiction to the policy passed at Annual Conference.

That said that any decision on whether to accept the offer had to be taken at a Special Conference. The executive have decided that there will be an individual ballot of all the members.

The reason given for this is that the decision to endorse strike action was taken in an individual ballot, the vote on the offer must be similar. That is ridiculous. There has never been an individual ballot on an offer. Even Tory legislation does not require it, and when Leeds accepted the deal on RRP after having balloted on strike action they did so on a show of hands at a

branch meeting.

This coming ballot will deny branches the chance to amend details of the offer that they would have had at a Special Conference, or even to comment on it in any way.

The Executive's reasoning behind this is obvious. They have calculated that they can probably get a yes vote on an individual ballot, whereas they would have no chance at a Special Conference or even with a branch ballot.

The Christmas holidays have taken the steam out of the opposition to the sell-out. Branch meetings to discuss and vote on it, or a Special Conference might have revived it again.

UCW members should still vote no. Even though the chances of defeating the Executive must be fairly slim, a sizeable no vote would still reflect the opposition to the sell-out that exists amongst the membership.

Branches should also be sending motions censuring the Executive for their conduct to this year's Annual Conference. When I put this to my section committee, the resolution went through unanimously.

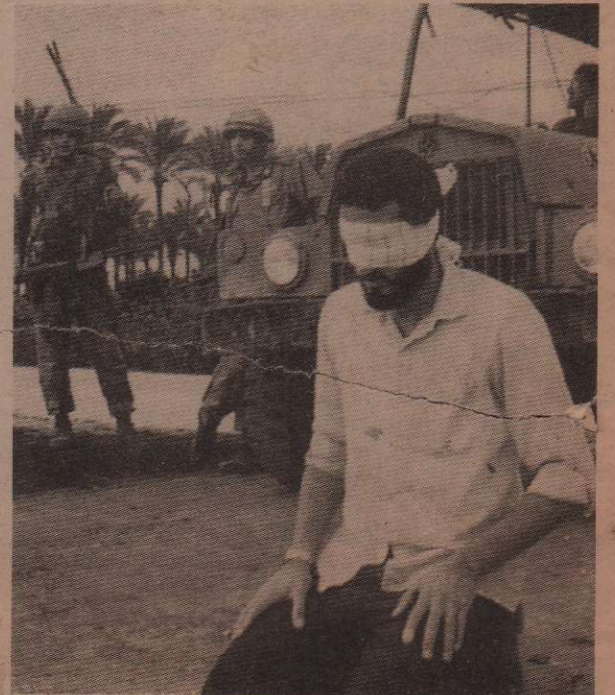
Although it seems the Executive have got away with it again, hopefully enough lessons will have been learnt to make things more difficult next time.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For the Palestinians' right to a state of their own!

For a socialist federation of the Middle East with the right to self-determination for all nations, including the Israeli Jews!

Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza!



The death toll in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza has reached 30. Hundreds of Palestinians have been arrested, facing trials that defence lawyers have boycotted for their blatant lack of justice. Many more have faced 'administrative detentions'. Nine people still face deportation.

But the protests — now generally referred to as an 'uprising' — go on. Indeed, heavy-handed Israeli repression has spurred them on: recent clashes were fired by the threatened deportations. And repression has been heavy — sparking widespread criticism in international quarters usually ultra-friendly to Israel. Hundreds of people have been injured as Arab protesters armed only with stones have fought fully-armed Israeli soldiers.

On the West Bank, far right Israeli settlers — calling for more settlements to be set up as an "appropriate response" to the unrest — have also clashed with Arabs.

The uprising, which began on 9 December when four Arabs in Gaza were killed by an Israeli truck allegedly in retaliation for a previous Israeli death, is the most serious challenge to the Israeli occupation since it began in 1967.

The Israeli authorities have claimed (for external consumption — internally they have been less crude) that the unrest has been fomented by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). In fact the PLO was initially taken by surprise by the depth of the upheaval — although it is a powerful political force in the occupied territories.

The harsh realities of national oppression and terrible social inequality underlie the revolt. Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza — referred to by British Foreign Office representative David Mellor as "an affront to civilised values" — is a sprawling slum, home to 50,000 people whose grinding poverty has driven them to revolt.

The uprising began in Gaza but quickly spread to the West Bank. Arabs living inside Israel have also been mobilised: almost all were involved in, a one-day strike on 21



Israeli soldiers imposing law and order on the Arabs

December in protest at Israeli handling of the territories.

For certain, organised political groupings are playing a role in events. In Gaza, Islamic fundamentalist groups have grown in influence over recent years, and even months, but reports vary as to their real strength. A new unity has been forged between the Islamic organisations and the more secular nationalist movement (which includes, in the occupied territories, the Communist Party), reflected in some of the slogans: "He who throws a stone goes to heaven"; the Islamic Jihad call for "the workers of Palestine to unite".

Strikes have continued both in

West Bank towns and in Gaza. So far the upheaval shows no signs of abating. Will it be enough to force Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories?

At the moment that seems unlikely. In Israel there is a shift to the right in national politics, despite the growth also of organisations opposed to the occupation. The ultra-right Kach movement — which calls for the expulsion of Arabs from the occupied territories — is estimated to get 5% of the vote in the forthcoming elections, as against 1% in 1984. The right wing Likud faction of the 'national unity' government are known to lean towards

Kach positions, whilst their Labour partners will continue to follow them to the right in an effort to maintain support.

Likud believes that the occupied territories are part of 'Biblical Israel' — and that Israel has a historic right to them. The West Bank, for example, is referred to as 'Judaea and Samaria' (in Israel, to call it the 'West Bank' is proof of liberalism).

Counter-tendencies are not insignificant. Peace Now has demonstrated against repression; 160 reservists signed a statement refusing to serve in the occupied territories.

But the Israeli right is dominant

and very powerful. It will take a lot to win Palestinian demands for their own state.

Those demands are entirely justifiable. Peace will never be achieved until they are satisfied. Israel may put down this and future uprisings. But it will not eradicate the Palestinians' demands for their own state.

Israel should withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza, and allow the Arabs there the right to self-determination in a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. It should recognise the PLO as the Palestinians' chosen representative. Only such a political settlement can bring peace to the troubled region.