

An Arab Woman in America



Page 7

Ken Loach: Cinematic Guerilla



Page 12

For Socialist Renewal!



For Workers' Liberty!

Students against the Tories



Page 11

Israel and the Gulf



Adam Keller Page 7

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

The main enemy is at home!

Benn slams Labour support for Tory war



Photo John Harris

By Tony Benn MP

In August, when we were supposed to be on holiday, very belligerent statements were made by the Front Bench. They never consulted anybody before they made them. I tried, with others, to get the recall of Parliament.

I wrote to Neil Kinnock — didn't get a reply because he was on holiday. I wrote to Mrs Thatcher and she said we don't need to recall Parliament because there is united support for what we are doing.

In the end, when we did get the debate, I rang up the Tory Chief Whip to find out what the motion was going to be, and he told me he had agreed with the opposition not to have a vote.

I went to see the Speaker, and the Tories capitulated.

Turn to back page

Kinnock backs Tories on the Gulf

Stop the warmongers!



The build up to war in the Gulf continues. There is no doubt about it: we are still on course for war.

Never mind the dust-in-your-eyes propaganda war being waged against the civilian population of Britain, Europe and America. Look at what they are doing.

The American brass hats build up their forces in Arabia while Britain sends tanks. These are preparations for war — for an offensive war against Iraq.

The American airforce Chief of Staff Michael Dougan was sacked for sounding off to the media about American plans to blitz Baghdad. He was sacked for talking about it: those

who make such plans and are now preparing to put them into effect are the very people who decided to sack him.

We are on course for a large scale war, a war in which the US and British forces may get bogged down for months and years. It is a war for oil and power in the world, not for the freedom of Kuwait.

It is a war the labour movement has no interest in fighting, and which the Labour Party should oppose. But the Labour leaders stand so close to Thatcher on this that they are identical.

Opposition to the Labour leaders' complicity with Thatcher is spreading in the Labour Party. It is not confined to

the left and the pacifists. Many on the centre and even on the right of the Party condemn the leaders.

Organised opposition to the war is still small, but it is growing. An effective anti-war movement can and will be built. Troops out of the Gulf! Iraq out of Kuwait!

More on Gulf page 7

The mountain gives birth to a mouse

Les Hearn looks at the Environment White Paper

Christopher Patten, the Tories' Mr Green, unveiled his White Paper on Tuesday, the first government environmental strategy ever proposed, in the form of a 300 page book, 'This Common Inheritance'.

That, however, was its only significance, as can be seen from the response of the media. Previewed on Tuesday, reviewed on Wednesday, TCI was completely forgotten by Thursday.

So what does Patten do with his 300 pages? Apart, that is from telling us to re-use plastic bags, switch off unused lights and stop our dogs fouling the footpath. Much of it is a survey of environmental problems, which offers nothing new.

He tells us what the government has done. Naturally, this is pretty thin, and it is mainly about things the government had to be pressurised to do.

Then there is what the government is going to do. This is even thinner. For instance, global warming by carbon dioxide will be tackled by ensuring that CO₂ emissions in 2005 are ... (wait for it) ... no more than today! This we are told, with a straight face, will not be easy. But we are not told why.

The why is this: the government has presided over the (possibly deliberate) sabotage of research into renewable energy, during the years when they favoured expanding nuclear power. Now they promise 1000 megawatts of renewable energy by 2000, a piddling per cent or so. This, they proudly claim, is ten times the present level (if you leave out the 2000 megawatts plus produced by hydroelectric stations in Scotland).

The government now finds itself in this position. The only sizeable concrete suggestions concern greater energy efficiency — in production and use of power, industrially and domestically. The government's own fuel bills will be cut by 15% through efficiency measures, though why this hasn't been done before is a mystery, given their cost-cutting habits.

The contradiction between conservation and profits in the privatised energy



Chris Patten

industries doesn't seem to have occurred to Mr Patten.

So what are we left with? No extra money to encourage public transport; no tax incentives to encourage recycling; no new measures to tackle the problems caused by intensive agriculture; etc. But there are some 350 things listed that ordinary people can do eg:

Put your litter in bins; use trains and buses 'when you can'; plant trees or put a pond in your garden (window box?); buy a car with a catalytic converter.

Many will find these suggestions grossly inappropriate or insulting coming from a government that has rendered public transport a shambles, wrecked local government services and widened income differentials to 1886 levels. However, at least the Tories have an environmental policy. We are still waiting for Labour's one!



Liverpool heads for disaster

By Dale Street

29 Labour councillors suspended. The District Labour Party and the Labour Party Women's Council suspended.

Non-payment of the poll tax running at over 50%. Rent arrears of over £23 million. One rent rise already pushed through this financial year, and another one rumoured to be on the way.

The Council's Anti-Poverty Sub-Committee scrapped. The Special Needs (black people, women and the disabled) Sub-Committee scrapped.

The working party on homes for the elderly scrapped. Funding for the Trade Union Centre cut. Council housing redevelopment schemes at a standstill.

250 jobs under threat in the grass-cutting section of the Parks and Recreation Department. NALGO members on the Council switchboard, in the poll tax office, and in Environmental Health out on indefinite strike. A city-wide half-day strike by NALGO members a fortnight ago despite a court order 'outlawing' the strike.

That is a sample of the

impact of the 'sensible' policies now being pursued by the 'Progressive Left' faction in the Labour Group on Liverpool City Council.

"It seems to be only a question of time before the already high level of conflict erupts into a full scale war"

Labour controls Liverpool City Council. And the 'Progressive Left' controls the Labour Group. Its control of the Group was achieved by the Labour Party National Executive Committee suspending 15 Labour councillors, and then another 14, in order to give the 'Progressive Left' a majority.

The District Labour Party and the Women's Council opposed the suspensions. So the NEC suspended them as well.

Discontent with the appalling record of the 'Progressive Left' is rife in the local Labour Party wards. 'Progressive Left'

councillors face the danger of deselection. So the NEC has taken over control of the reselection procedure for councillors.

The 'Progressive Left' councillors are now attempting to organise a caucus among the local Party membership. Their efforts seem to have met with little success.

Apart from a few non-aligned councillors, the opposition to the 'Progressive Left' in the Labour Group is organised in the Broad Left. All its members are suspended from the Group, and therefore barred from attending Labour Group meetings and sitting on Council committees and sub-committees. A number of Broad Left councillors may be expelled from the Party soon.

The Broad Left councillors are linked to a 'Broad Left' in the local party membership though membership of the latter is by invitation only, and some of its policies (especially on black people and women) are out of line with much of the left.

It seems to be only a question of time before the already high level of conflict erupts into a full-scale war, with the right wing looking for expulsions in the Party and redundancies in the council workforce.



Marching against war

Over 5,000 people turned up to the Stop the War demonstration in London on September 15th. Photo: John Harris

Independent anti-poll tax activists meet

By Lesley Smallwood

The anti-poll-tax campaign 3D held its second national activists' meeting on 22 September in Leeds.

Over twenty areas were represented and discussion centred around organising within the All Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation (ABAPTF) and at the Federation's forthcoming national conference.

Representatives from Lothian told us that non-payment in Scotland has increased since last year and in some areas is as high as 40%. In other areas non-payers hauled up in court have been accompanied by hundreds of demonstrators. In Stoke the process has been so disrupted that summonses are being sent out for September 1991.

The most important discussion centred around 3D's aims and

principles and its relationship to the Federation.

Some representatives raised the idea of splitting from the Militant-dominated federation — which has only 25% of Anti-Poll Tax unions affiliated to it — but the majority saw the task of 3D as building affiliation to the Federation and trying to make the structure and leadership of the Federation democratically representative of and accountable to the Anti-Poll-Tax movement.

3D wants to stop the November conference becoming the Militant rally last year's Federation conference so obviously was.

All anti-poll tax unions should affiliate to the Federation and apply for delegates to the conference before 31 October. Anti-Poll Tax activists should also build for the national demonstration on Saturday 20 October and attend 3D's next meeting on Sunday 21st.

Maxwell tries miracles

THIS SPORTING LIFE

Jack Frain

Cap'n Bob's been trying to buy football clubs again. You probably know about Spurs but how about Jerusalem United? Never heard of it? Well, it doesn't exist yet. It probably never will, but not for want of trying on Maxwell's part. What's the story?

Spotting the 2 Jerusalem teams both 2 million pounds in debt, Maxwell made his move. (He is buying up most other things in Israel these days so why not football clubs? An Israeli car sticker reads 'Maxwell, please buy me'). Bob would stump up the £4 million to save the clubs from bankruptcy as long as they merged into 1 club — to be called, of all things, Jerusalem United. Here he hit trouble.

Merging Hapoel and Betar is on a par with merging Celtic and Rangers. Hapoel belongs to the Histadrut, the Israeli trade union movement. They play in red and are seen as 'Labour's team'. Betar are part of the Likud coalition, play in blue and are backed by Sephardim. The rivalry is long-standing and intense. At the prospect of merger the fans were, as they say, not over the moon, Brian.

The merger was wrecked in the end by the manoeuvring of the liberal Maccabi faction on the Israeli Football Association. Maccabi's man and IFA Deputy Chair Azrikum Milchen cited the rule that any new team must enter at Division 5, thus cooling Maxwell's ardour. When he added that he resented "foreigners dictating terms to the IFA", Maxwell replied in these terms: "Mr Milchen will quickly learn that the dictation comes not from a foreigner but from the basic laws of economics".

The 'basic laws of economics' (in a word profit) are dictating a lot in football these days. That fans watch from crumbling stadia. That Division One is going back to 22 teams (2 more home games per season you see). Even according to the *Correspondent*, that the US organiser of the next World Cup not only wants to split the game into 4 quarters but also widen the goals to make it 'more exciting'.

The 'basic laws of economics' were also cited by those pushing to merge Hibs and Hearts into Edingburgh United. But a 'Hands off Hibs' campaign was set up and has, it seems, successfully, resisted what was a takeover. It seems that fierce club identities is a force the 'basic laws of economics' are finding difficult to deal with.



£1 plus 24 pence p&p from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

In Thatcher's line

This 1990 Labour Party Conference may be the last before the General Election which produces the next Labour government.

Things are going badly wrong for the Tories. The economic cycle has got out of synch with the 4-5 yearly election cycle: and the Tories will not now be able to produce an election 'boom'.

Skilled workers who went Tory in 1979 and after seem to be deserting Thatcher. So are layers of the middle class, fed up with high interest rates and the poll tax. The Gulf crisis has produced no lasting boost — no 'Falklands Factor' — for the Tories.

Opinion polls tell us that Labour will probably win the next General Election.

They haven't won it yet, but the Labour leaders can claim the standing of Labour in the polls as a great triumph for themselves. On one level, it is a triumph.

Not so long ago media pundits like Ivor Crewe were convincing themselves and others that there would never again be a Labour government. Last Sunday Crewe wrote comparing Neil Kinnock to Harold Wilson on the eve of the 1964 election victory.

If that's all there is to it, Neil Kinnock is a great success. *If that is all there is to it, then Harold Wilson was a great success!*

In fact Wilson was an abysmal failure, from a socialist and working class point of view. He was a failure even as a bourgeois Prime Minister, and his failures and Jim Callaghan's, prepared the way for Thatcher's onslaught on the welfare state and the labour movement.

And Prime Minister-in-waiting Kinnock? Kinnock and his team have won acceptance as a possible alternative government not by fighting Thatcher and her policies but by understudying her! They accept Tory policies and promise to respect the "Thatcher Revolution". They have turned the Labour Party into the party of Thatcherism-with-a-human-face.

Nowhere is this more plain than in Labour's refusal to pledge itself to scrap the Tory anti-union laws, under which our trade unions are the least free labour organisations in Western Europe.

No, says Kinnock and his friends, we will not go back to the '60s and '70s! No, the Tory shackles must stay in place to cripple the unions in every serious industrial conflict. Yes, Labour in office will accept the legacy of Mrs Thatcher.

This is a disgrace, and we hope Labour Party Conference this week calls Kinnock and his friends to order.

A Labour government, however right wing, would be a great step forward from where we are now, and socialists should fight for the return of Labour to office.

The truth however, is that under Neil Kinnock and his essentially Tory policies a Kinnock government will be like the Wilson and Callaghan governments — and maybe worse. It is Kinnock who wants to take us back to the '60s and '70s.

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

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser

PO Box 823

London SE15 4NA

Newsdesk: 071-639 7965

Latest date for reports: first post Tuesday

Editor: John O'Mahony

Published by WL Publications Ltd,



Strange friends for Kinnock

A nasty campaign is being waged to undercut and undermine the drive against the ban on SO by some of the people who produce the anti-Israel propaganda sheet Return.

They claim to oppose the ban; but they argue against the "End the Ban!" campaign by alleging that SO itself backed a ban on their magazine at the National Union of Students conference last Easter, and therefore does not deserve the support of people who believe in free speech.

This is a cynical pro-Kinnock political "operation" by people who resent SO's criticism of their ideas on the Middle East. Some of them are far from being left-wingers, but all of them are willing effectively to ally with the right against SO. They feel no scruple about helping the Kinnockites "put over" the ban on SO.

In fact it is not true that SO supported a ban on Return. The president of the National Union of Students, Maeve Sherlock, banned Return by a "presidential ruling" at the end of the conference, so the matter wasn't voted on.

Scurrilous stories and rumours made up of ten parts malice for every single particle of fact are, to our common detriment, routine on the left.

The story that SO supported or advocated a ban on Return rests on the slim factual basis that two SO supporters — out of maybe a hundred who were at the conference — signed a petition being circulated by the Union of Jewish Students asking for the ban.

The Union of Jewish Students has found itself banned in a number

of colleges for its "Zionism", that is, for being Jewish as most Jews are shaped by the events of the 20th century. The banners have been those who share the views of Return to one extent or another.

At the Easter conference, the Union of Jewish Students was playing the game as it is generally played. They were wrong, as were the two SO supporters who — out students who are harassed and badgered at such conferences — signed the petition, but they have better reason than most who play this game.

On our record it is not reasonable to conclude from that episode that SO now endorses and supports the student union culture of "ban your opponent if you can get a majority". For years we have been campaigning against that culture.

We oppose slogans like "no platform" from the point of view of democratic principle and — when it is a matter of combatting fascists and similar racists — of practical efficiency. We have drawn considerable hostility to ourselves by this stand, not least from people on Return's political wavelength.

The Left and the Ban

EYE ON THE LEFT

The rallying of the left to defend *Socialist Organiser* against the Labour Party National Executive's move to ban us has been impressive and encouraging.

All sorts of people have rallied to support our right to exist as a paper and a current of organised opinion in the Labour Party — and not only those like Eric Heffer and Jeremy Corbyn with whom we have had a working relationship over years. Many of those who defend us strongly disagree with us, and some dislike or detest our politics.

Some are on the centre-right or even the right of the Party. They defend SO not out of regard for SO, but out of regard for labour movement democracy and self-respect as democrats.

Phil Kelly, the editor of *Tribune*, told the "End the Ban!" rally in London on 1 September that he had never, ever, agreed with anything he had read in SO! Exaggeration, no doubt. The uneasily defensive hyperbole of one who hears inquisitor Kinnock's posse of witchfinders baying behind the next hill and fears attracting their animosity, perhaps. But still, he spoke at the meeting, and *Tribune* fights the ban.

Ken Livingstone, too, spoke — at the invitation of "End the Ban!", not SO. Between Livingstone and SO there has been nothing but animosity for seven years, and it is unlikely that relations will be a great deal better in the future. But Livingstone, too — and we are grateful to him for it — came to voice his hostility to the NEC's latest step towards making Labour a tightly-policed one-faction party.

The big exceptions to the widespread left-wing solidarity with SO against the newspaper-banners and witchhunters are on the "revolutionary" left. Neither *Militant* nor *Socialist Worker* even so much as reported the NEC's decision to ban SO. And of course neither of them supported the campaign launched by "End the Ban!"

After weeks of silence, *Militant* finally "made the record" with a brief announcement that its supporters would oppose the ban. At that stage, it was more a response to the growing left-wing campaign against the ban than a response to the ban itself, though even such belated and tokenistic solidarity is welcome.

Socialist Worker's only reference to the ban appeared in an interview with Paul Davies, who mentioned it. The Socialist Workers' Party demonises SO to its members and periphery as "agents of imperialism" and "Zionists" (which in SW's eschatology is the same thing, only worse). It even, ironically, accuses us of supporting the witch-hunt against *Militant*! So its response is not surprising. It is, however, a sorry comment on the state of the left.

Less importantly, but in equally sorry fashion, *Socialist Action* has failed to make any protest in its pages against the ban, though its supporters have voted against it.

Beside the r...r...revolutionary left, only the god-alone-knows-what-it-is left current known as the "ILP" has distinguished itself by refusing to defend SO.

We offer our thanks to those who have supported our right to exist and organise for our ideas in the Labour Party.

GRAFITTI

Thatcher's not our sister

WOMEN'S EYE

By Janine Booth

Our decade of rule by Britain's first woman Prime Minister has been a decade of legislation and action detrimental to women's rights.

- * Attacks on women's rights to control our own bodies;
- * Repeated attempts to cut abortion time limits.
- * Moves to block access to donor insemination for lesbians and single women.
- * Women are being intimidated and made to feel guilty about such things as abortion.
- * Violence against women on the streets and in the home continues to be a serious problem — and it is trivialised by misogynist judges and the trash press. Poverty forces many women to stay in violent relationships.
- * Despite superficial liberalisation in real life, women are still expected to be wife, mother and domestic dogsbody. Sexist images in the media and advertising



serve to illustrate our 'second class citizenship'. The abolition of Wage Councils and the reduction of the rights for part-time workers has hit women very badly, concentrated as we are in low paid, casual, non-unionised, part time work. That is quite a record for Britain's first woman Prime Minister. Women's oppression is an international phenomenon.

In the Eastern bloc, in Iran, in Ireland, in Southern Africa, all over the world, women come off worst under oppressive regimes.

Women students face particular issues at college, such as sexual harassment, lack of childcare provision, stereotyping onto certain courses and the fact that all financial cutbacks hit women worst whether it be grants or course closures.

But women don't just suffer — they also fight back. Women campaign for our rights and for equality. Examples such as the German working class women's movement at the beginning of this century and Women Against Pit Closures during the 1984/85 miner's strike show how women have organised together to fight for their rights.

Through student unions women have an excellent opportunity to organise for change. The NUS Women's Campaign exists to provide national leadership and back up women activists in colleges.

Much campaigning this year will be concentrated around the poll tax. This vicious legislation means that women will lose out as low-paid workers, as family

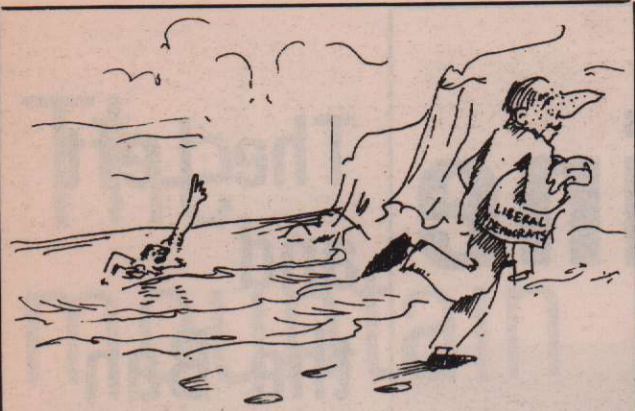
budgeters, as carers for dependents. Women have an important role to play in the battle to defeat the poll tax, and the Tories.

Although the Embryology Bill is past us now it is vital that campaigns for a woman's right to choose are intensified rather than allowed to peter out. It is time to make positive demands for free abortion on demand and the rights of all women to have access to reproductive technology.

Tory words about increased access to further and higher education ring hollow without the action and resources to make it happen. This is especially true for the issue of childcare. Women and mature students will continue to be locked out of education unless we have adequate free nursery provision in every college.

Over the past few months, the NUS Women's Campaign has been transformed from being stagnant and inward looking run by a clique of higher education women to a vibrant campaigning organisation which goes out to all colleges taking up issues relevant to many different women.

If you are a student, help us!



Why the Liberal Democrats are in trouble

conference grafitti

"No doubt we'll have the odd debate"

GRAFITTI

ILP: Party democracy — for some

The ILP chose to title its Sunday fringe meeting "Taking Labour to the Cleaners". "Washing our dirty linen in public" would have been more suitable.

Tony Benn's call for refounding the Party to draw in new forces (peace movement, environmentalists, etc) was ridiculed by ILP speaker Anne-Marie Graham as opening the door to more back-room deals and packing out of meetings.

Questioned on the NEC's Socialist Organiser ban, Graham reaffirmed the ILP refusal to support "End the Ban" unless SO meets ILP demands including "support of conference decision" — like telling people to pay poll tax?

At this, NEC member Diane Jeuda nodded her head so vehemently it nearly fell off.

Whitty debriefed

"It'll be a good week", Larry Whitty cheerily told the pre-conference press briefing, though "No doubt we'll have the odd debate".

Next year: Larry Whitty's perfect conference, with no debate at all? Smartypants journalist Peter Kellner floored Whitty by asking him: "If Conference accepts all the NEC recommendations, then by the end of the week will it have decided anything new compared to 'Looking to the Future'?" After a stunned pause, Whitty

muttered something about "moving on".

Baroness bombs in baliwick

Islington Council Leader Margaret Hodge (plugged in last month's 'Labour Party News', in-flight Front Bench journal) was livid when Islington North's GC refused to back her first-time NEC candidature.

"Baroness' Hodge couldn't understand why this part of her own bailiwick preferred all seven candidates on the Campaign Group slate.

LCC favourite Hodge stands for 'sensible' local government — avoiding media attacks and delivering 'basic' services. In practice, this means doing the Tories' dirty work on poll tax and cuts. 'Efficiency' becomes a mask for cutting low-paid jobs while refusing to challenge top Council bureaucrats.

This year, Hodge has closed an old people's home and now plans to take to court local councillors who don't pay the poll tax.

One of them is Islington North's MP, Jeremy Corbyn!

Walworth Road job insecurity

The same NEC which is trying to stitch-up 'jobs for life for Labour MPs has taken a different approach to its own employees.

Newly hired staff at Walworth Road and in the regions are all to be hired on temporary contracts up to the next election.

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

The idea of a 'relaunch' is a strange one. As Peter Cole noted in Monday's *Guardian*, "launching, like loosing one's virginity, is one of those things that cannot really happen again... but once the word was appropriated by the marketing men and women anything was possible".

Mr Cole can be forgiven a little cynicism, since he was discussing the relaunch of the *Sunday Correspondent*, the paper he edited until his unceremonious sacking last month. Cole was, in fact, a sacrificial offering upon the altar of the money-men who had stepped in to save the paper from folding altogether.

One of 'Son of Corrie's' money-men is now Rober Maxwell who wasted no time in sewing confusion and consternation amongst the paper's staff by announcing that, the *Correspondent* "will now leave the over-crowded 'heavy' market and compete with the *Mail on Sunday*". *Corrie* chief executive Nick Shott reacted with commen-

dable diplomacy, saying "I would like to qualify Mr Maxwell's statement without contradicting it...".

Actually, there ought to be a nice little niche for a 'quality' Sunday tabloid, especially one that maintains the 'old' *Correspondent's* left-of-centre stance and outstanding arts/media coverage. The conventional wisdom, however, is that the *Correspondent* is doomed and it will be all over by Christmas. But if the conventional wisdom proves to be wrong, the implications will be enormous: the 'new' tabloid would necessarily take sales from the *Observer* and the *Independent on Sunday* (both of which are in trouble anyway), perhaps forcing one or both to follow suit and 'tabulate' themselves. The *Sunday Express* and *Mail on Sunday* would also be hurt. Unfortunately, the *Sunday Times* seems impregnable, with sales riding comfortably above the million mark (whether or not the *ST* should properly be considered a 'quality' paper — as opposed to an overstuffed bundle of Thatcherite yuppie propaganda — is a question that space prevents me going into for now).

Anyway, I hope the 'Son of Corrie' succeeds. But I have my doubts quite apart from the obvious misgivings occasioned by the arrival of Cap'n Bob as a major shareholder: there was the following ominous announcement in last week's issue: "Plans include a greater emphasis on leisure, health, fashion and personal finance...".

When is a relaunch not a relaunch?



Cap'n Bob trying to look intelligent

Meanwhile, down at the other end of the Sunday market another 'relaunch' has already happened. Cap'n Bob has agreed (in principle) to a staff buy-out of the ailing *People*.

As a result, former *Mirror* editor Richard Stott has taken over, promising to move away from the 'sleaze market' and return the title to its allegedly honourable traditions of hard-hitting investigative reporting. Early signs have not, however, been encouraging: the first three Stott-controlled issues have all relied heavily upon stories that could have come out of the *News of the World*: "Mistress Yells Foul on Soccer Tycoon: He Moves Wife

into New Love Nest"; "Our Shame by doctor-case Mrs B's dad", etc. The September 16th issue contained not one word about the Gulf crisis (it led on the marriage of Jayne 'Bolero' Torville).

Worst of all, Stott has appointed the Labour Party's soon-to-move-on-to-better-things PR supremo, Peter Mandelson as political commentator: his "People In Power" column reads like a particularly uninspired Walworth Road press handout ("That's not Neil Kinnock's approach. He is not interested in fudges", etc etc etc).

Stott needs to raise £30 million for his buy-out. But if the 'new' *People* does that well, might not the Cap'n reconsider his decision to sell it?

The ideas Walworth Road wants to ban



Subscribe to Socialist Organiser at special rates: £16 for a year, £3 for 10 issues

You can also subscribe to Workers' Liberty magazine — £5 for 4 issues.

Name

Address

Paid: £16 for a year

£3 for 10 issues

£5 for Workers' Liberty

Total

Return to SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Violence and reaction in South Africa

By Robert Fine, author of
'Beyond Apartheid'

This summer in the Transvaal over a thousand people have been killed.

The fighting has centred around the political confrontation between Chief Gatcha Buthulezi's Inkatha party, a zulu nationalist organisation, and the African National Congress. It is a dispute of long standing. Over the last five years some four to five thousand people have been killed in Natal in fighting between Inkatha and the ANC-UDF supporters — though the killing developed a dynamic of its own among militant youth and mafia-style warlords.

The violence is the visible expression of an unfolding tragedy, which could upset the whole 'peace' programme but which is more likely to paint it red — not in the colours of socialism but of blood and authority.

The conventional explanation of the violence looks first to state thugs (security officers) stirring, organising and participating in it. While this is certainly true, it is difficult to see what interest the de Klerk government has in this project; it seems far more likely that the thugs came from the far right seeking to discredit the reform programme.

More important though is that the right wing conspiracy theory cannot explain the violence as a whole.



The second line of explanation looks at the brutishness of Buthulezi's Inkatha movement. More specifically, as Inkatha lost support with the re-entry of the ANC into legality and its likely coming to a share of power, it needed to make its political presence felt.

Inkatha was some time ago launched as a national party — previously it was a local Zulu party in Natal — and is organising hard particularly among migrant workers in the Transvaal.

We also need to look to the role of the ANC, which is reaping the bitter fruit of its own past mistakes and present inability to learn from them. The fighting in the Transvaal started in late July, a few weeks after COSATU called a stay-away in the Transvaal the demands of which were the dismantling of the Kwazulu police, the arrest of the warlords in Natal and the marginalisation of Inkatha. It was a provocative move, accompanied by reports of violent opposition to Inkatha organisers appearing in the

Transvaal.

From the ANC's point of view, this might not matter if it could successfully isolate and beat down all opposition. But the political battle with Inkatha is increasingly turning into a xhosa vs zulu confrontation that bodes ill for any decisive resolution.

Inkatha is well organised, whereas reports of the ANC inside the country are ones of disarray, division and confusion.

Inkatha has shown itself capable of making effective populist appeals especially to poorer migrant workers, claiming their neglect by the ANC and the inutility of the old ANC policies. Ironically, however, the real policy differences between Inkatha and the ANC are now minimal. The ANC is caught, however, in the results of its own nationalist images and 'ungovernability' strategy of the mid-1980s.

"The worst of it is that the ANC seems destined to become more dependent on its new allies in the government"

The worst of it is that that ANC seems destined to become more dependent on its new allies in the government — witness perhaps Mandela's confusion over whether to call for police action in his response to the violence — and that political opposition to the new order is likely to be of the dangerous ethnic populism favoured by Inkatha rather than have anything to do with socialism.

I don't know how far the stalinisation of the trade union left has gone, but the re-grouping of a democratic (non-stalinist) socialist left remains crucial.

An Arab woman in America

The largest group of Arab Americans are post-war immigrants from Egypt. They have only recently begun to find a voice in US politics, a voice which, as yet has little influence outside its own communities. As the Gulf conflict escalates, Arab Americans are coming under attack, and incidents of harassment and violence have been reported in the US left press. Anna Mohammed is an Arab American living in Indianapolis, the heart of the American Mid-West — long the home of political conservatism and reaction.

Anna explains what it means to be an Arab in America now, and looks at the attitude the American-in-the street has to the prospect of war.

Psychologically people seem desperate for war. There is no outrage or horror amongst ordinary people — my friends and workmates — at the thought of people being killed in huge numbers.

The feeling is like old World War II movies — I keep expecting to be asked to buy war bonds!

There are news breaks between TV programmes keeping people informed of developments. High school students are being organised to write to the soldiers, and on the radio people are dedicating records to them.

No-one is fooled by talk of negotiations. When they called up the reservists, everyone knew that

America was going to war.

There is a lot of talk of the 'national interest' and 'national security'. No-one questions that war in the Middle East would be in America's 'national interest', but no-one is admitting that the 'interest' is in maintaining cheap supplies of gas!

I think people are positively waiting for and wanting war. It is difficult to work out what will happen because things are quiet at the moment, but I think that if there is no war people will be disappointed. Of course things may change when the bodies start arriving home.

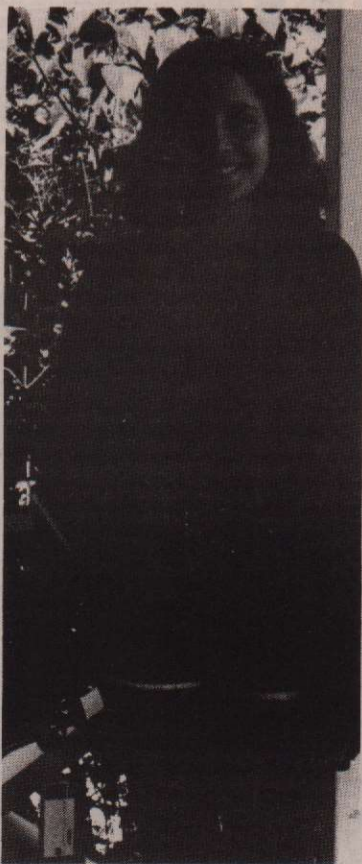
My workmates don't discuss the war in front of me, even though they have no idea which "side" I would be on. The same is true of friends and my fiancé's family. They will talk about the war with him, even though he is against it, but not with me.

I was very afraid when American troops first went in to Saudi Arabia. After all, the Japanese were interned in World War II.

I overheard a lot of people talking about bloody Arabs. Obviously I am worried about what may happen if war starts.

You have to remember that this is the Mid-West. Even the liberals are Republicans here! My fiancé's family, who are politically active Republicans, are a million times more liberal than most people I come across.

My fiancé's father was blinded in World War II and has never seen his children. That family knows what war does to people; but they still support this war. I know people whose relatives are in the military,



and they are supporting the war even though those relatives may not come back.

My father's family and friends also have relatives in the Middle East. They dare not try to contact them, especially my brother who is in Kuwait, for fear of labelling them as Americans. We are worried sick about my brother, but we have no way of getting any word from him.

I was brought up as an American first, but more recently my family have become interested in expressing the Arab part of ourselves. My father has begun to take more of an interest in his religion, Islam, than he did when I was growing up.

Although we did visit Egypt regularly, we were forced to choose to be either Egyptian or American. Joint citizenship is not possible, even when you "belong" to both cultures. In order to live here we had to "choose" to be American.

The new interest we feel in the other part of our culture must have to do with confidence in America — in its ability to accept different cultures and opinions. Arab-Americans now want a distinct voice, a distinct identity — in the same way other ethnic groups have. There are still only a couple of Arab-American journals in the United States.

It should not be necessary to choose, because neither choice would be the full person, the full experience.

I am worried that the war will mean attacks on Arab-American groups and individuals — perhaps not in New York, but here in the Mid-West. Anyone who is not quite white, anyone not a practising Christian, is suspect automatically. The confidence which Arab-American groups had begun to feel will not outlast such attacks.

I am loyal to this country. It is my home even if I have a brother in Kuwait and I am taking classes in Arabic. I hate the thought of war — and I hated America's actions in Panama.

I will continue to assert my right to have these opinions, and my right to find out about my Egyptian "half". But I am worried about the consequences now.

The media are all behind Bush. There is plenty of self-censorship in the press. We see some photographs of what's happening in the Middle East, but obviously we are not getting the full story. The media are all owned by a couple of people, and they "support" the "national interest".

Most of the press stories are about how awful Saddam Hussein is. So there is now a lot of media coverage about Iraqi brutality against the Kurds. Yet two or three years ago, when the Kurds were being murdered in their thousands, there was very little press coverage.

Press interviews with military families are now common, and with soldiers about to leave. All say they want to help America's "national interest", or "make a contribution to the USA".

We're just waiting to see what will happen. It is bizarre that George Bush can talk on Iraqi TV, and Saddam Hussein on US TV, and yet war is still looming ahead of us. It's like the first Christmas of World War I, when they stopped fighting on Christmas Day, fraternised across the divide, and next day resumed the slaughter.

War is going to happen. George Bush has made his mind up about that.

No-one seems to realise that thousands of people will be killed. "The monster" won't just roll over and die like a monster on TV.

The only organised group who haven't come right out and supported the war are the Vietnam veterans. I am looking forward to hearing what they have to say. Those people were really screwed in Vietnam. US soldiers are going to be really screwed again.

It's awful that they will have to find out the hard way.

German workers and bosses: United on a collision course

By Alex Glasgow

October 3 marks the official unification of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany — of East and West Germany.

The unification of the two Germanies comes less than a year after the popular upheavals in East Germany which brought down the Honecker regime and forced the opening of the Berlin Wall.

Although the demand for unification was hardly raised at the time, in subsequent months the demand was raised ever more loudly, and by the time of the East German elections last March it had become the dominant political theme.

In fact, it would be more accurate to speak of the collapse of East Germany into West Germany than of a 'unification' in the normal sense of the word.

No-one should mourn the passing away of East Germany. As the *Irish Times* recently put it, it was a country of "funny money, harsh economic orthodoxy, repression, political police and border guards, absurd pretensions and a pitiful reality".

Industrial production in East Germany was not only technologically backward and inefficient, but also an environmental disaster. Ten million out of East Germany's total population of sixteen million are exposed to acute danger to their health as a result of environmental damage. In the Volkskammer itself (East German Parliament) the level of asbestos dust in the air is 160 times the medically acceptable limit.

The results of the East German elections in March (in which the right-wing parties emerged as clear victors) reflected the desire of the majority of the East German electorate for a speedy unification. The same desire, for different reasons, was shared by many (though certainly not all) West German politicians.

Helmut Kohl, the West German Chancellor (head of government), in particular pushed ahead with plans for

speedy unification. Whereas the West German Bundesbank wanted monetary union after the union of the two countries, Kohl pushed ahead with monetary union (ie the replacement of the East German currency by the West German one), with the result that monetary union occurred on 1 July.

Kohl has also attempted to bring forward the date of the first all-German elections. These elections will in fact occur in December, despite Kohl's attempts to bring them forward to last September. It is easy to see why Kohl wanted to advance the date of the elections: by December the price of German unification will have become only too clear, especially to people in the East.

Unemployment could rise to a massive three or four million out of a total workforce of eight million in what used to be East Germany.

Monetary union has also created, or rather clarified, the sharp differences in pay between workers in East and West Germany: on average the former receive half the pay of the latter. In Berlin the gap is even greater: workers on the Underground in East Berlin receive a third of the pay of workers on the Underground in West Berlin — for the same work on the same railway system.

Women in East Germany are increasingly being driven out of the workplace and into the kitchen. Their right to abortion has received only a temporary reprieve: the more liberal abortion legislation in East Germany (abortion on demand up to twelve weeks of pregnancy) will remain in operation in East Germany for two years after unification, as a 'transitional' period to the more repressive West German abortion legislation being extended to cover East Germany as well.

The cost of unification for the new state is becoming increasingly clear and increasingly large. The so-called 'impetus financing' to cover unemployment benefits in East Germany is already exhausted. The West German government is having to underwrite the payment of old age pensions in East Germany as the resources to pay them can no longer be provided by the collapsing East German economy.

The cost of unity is now estimated at about a hundred billion Mark a year — three times the original estimate.

The workers and the government are thus set on a collision course. Workers in the East will fight to save their jobs and achieve West German wage levels. Workers in the West will fight to prevent their living standards being lowered to pay the cost of unification. And the government will attempt to impose an austerity programme East and West.

Under such circumstances the limited industrial conflicts which have already occurred in recent months could easily mushroom into country-wide strike movements.



New battles like this summer's miner's strike are inevitable

Supreme soviet votes for capitalism

Gorbachev buys time as economy plunges into crisis.

By Stan Crooke

Last Monday (24 September) the Supreme Soviet in the USSR (the country's highest parliamentary body) voted by 305 votes to 36 to empower President Gorbachev to rule by decree for the next 18 months.

The Supreme Soviet also voted to defer a final decision on a package of economic reforms until no later than October 15th.

The background to both these decisions is the growing economic and social crisis in the country. For all Gorbachev's promises and radical rhetoric since he came to power in 1985, the Soviet economy has gone from bad to worse.

According to the American Central Intelligence Agency (which Prime Minister Ryzhkov recently described as a more accurate source of information about the Soviet economy than the Soviet Ministry of Statistics itself) only 50 out of 1,200 basic

consumer goods are readily available in shops.

In the first quarter of this year overall production fell by 1.2%. Soviet state debts are on the increase (up from 10 billion rubles in 1989 to 51 billion this year), whilst the budget deficit increased from 18 billion rubles in 1986 to 92 billion in 1989.

The growing scarcity of basic consumer goods, especially clothing, footwear, food, coffee, toothpaste, and cigarettes, has generated growing social discontent, as well as forcing local authorities to fall back on the re-introduction of rationing. Smokers in particular, have taken to the streets in protest at the shortage of cigarettes.

Alongside of the unrest over the state of the economy, national tensions continue to remain at a high pitch throughout the Soviet Union. Most republican parliaments have declared that their legislation overrides central Soviet legislation. The Baltic states continue their progress towards full independence, whilst the situation in the Caucasus remains volatile. Anti-semitism is rife, especially in the Russian

republic. It is no coincidence that rumours about a possible military coup are not only becoming more frequent but are also being taken increasingly seriously.

In the face of the devastating economic crisis the rhetoric and proposals of politicians and economists have shifted away from the concept of 'restructuring' which held sway in the mid-eighties towards that of 'dismantling', i.e. the

"Rumours of a military coup are now being taken increasingly seriously"

privatisation of land and nationalised industries. Two strategies have been put forward for privatisation.

The more radical strategy is the 'Shatalin plan' which envisages full-scale privatisation in 500 days. Under this plan state subsidies to industry would be slashed and large slabs of it would be sold off to private and corporate shareholders. Prices would be allowed to rise whilst wages

were held down.

The alternative strategy is associated above all with Prime Minister Ryzhkov. It involves state-controlled increases in prices accompanied by a more gradual phasing out of state subsidies for industries than that envisaged by Shatalin. The government would also finance a programme of social benefits.

Until recently Gorbachev has tended towards support for the main thrust of the Shatalin plan. But in last Monday's debates in the Supreme Soviet he struck a more cautious note and opted for an attempt at compromise, by backing an attempted 'fusion' of the two strategies, with a report-back on the final version to be made to the Supreme Soviet by October 15th.

Whether the two strategies can be merged is so doubtful as to be virtually impossible. The Russian President Boris Yeltsin has described an attempt to merge the strategies as "like a snake swallowing a hedgehog". But given the sweeping powers which Gorbachev received last Monday, he can attempt to impose any reform package of his choosing without reference to an approval from the Soviet parliament.

Although there is certainly widespread support for the break up of the state's nominal control of the economy and for the re-introduction of market forces, discontent amongst the working class is certain to grow as the impact of market forces pushes down living standards and creates mass unemployment.

Recent months have seen the emergence of an increasingly powerful labour movement in the Soviet Union. Independent trade unions are spreading rapidly, political strikes have occurred, especially in mining areas, and workers' conventions, such as the miners' congress held last spring, are beginning to speak with increasing authority.

There can be no doubt that the forthcoming attempts at economic 'reform', whether of the Shatalin or the Ryzhkov variety, will produce massive working class struggles. Socialists in Britain must build links with the re-emerging workers' movement in the Soviet Union and give full support to Soviet workers in such struggles.

Australian Labor sells more than principles

Tony Brown and Janet Burstall report from Sydney

The Australian Labour Party held a special National Conference on 24 September to give the government the green light to: privatise Australian Airlines; sell 49% of Australia's international airline Qantas; and merge Telecom with OTC (the overseas telecom company) and then grant a licence to a private competitor.

All this follows the 30% privatisation of the Commonwealth Bank.

That privatisation was decided at a meeting with a secret agenda item on the night of Thursday 23 August.

The secret item was the

insolvency of the State Bank of Victoria (SBV). The Treasurer, Paul Keating, proposed the 30% privatisation of the Commonwealth Bank to fund a takeover of the SBV.

The ALP left was involved, too. Only two weeks earlier Socialist Left member Joan Kirner had been elected by ALP caucus to succeed John Cain as Victoria's Premier after Cain had resigned seemingly in the face of the huge financial problems besetting the State Government. Kirner struck a deal with Keating.

For Keating timing was precious. The size of the SBV's losses were to be announced the day Keating and Kirner made public their deal. If they hadn't stitched it up by that day, there would have been a run on the SBV and quite possibly other banks.

Coming so close after the collapse of the country's second biggest building society, it would have been a disaster for the financial

system and the government.

The Commonwealth Bank holds a special place in ALP mythology. When Labor MP Ben Chifley tried to nationalise the banks in 1949, and accepted defeat after the High Court ruled the move unconstitutional, the Commonwealth remained the sole 'people's bank'.

The move to privatise comes only two weeks after Keating brought down the second successive budget with an \$8 billion surplus. The funds to buy the SBV were clearly available.

Why has the left allowed the 30% privatisation of the Commonwealth Bank?

In a crisis, they had no alternative to stand up and fight for publicly. They have no alternative to a banking system that makes billions of dollars available to rich people, who then get away with not repaying it, while working class people attempting to buy homes are evicted when they can't meet repayments as interest rates skyrocket.



More on Eastern Europe
60 pence plus 24 pence p&P
from PO Box 823, London, SE15
4NA.

Israel, the Palestinians and the Gulf crisis

The eye of the storm

Adam Keller reports from Israel on the latest clashes in the occupied territories and Israeli responses to the Gulf crisis.

Yesterday there was a big meeting in Jerusalem of Peace Now with the prominent Palestinian Arab leader Faisal Hussein. He tried to explain the position of the Palestinians.

He distinguished between the position of the Palestinian leadership and the position of ordinary Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership has never taken a position in favour of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, on the contrary it is for Iraqi withdrawal. It is against the American intervention and it wants to be a mediator.

But ordinary Palestinians feel that the political process is heading them nowhere. Talk of international initiatives and international law had little effect on these people: they feel international law has little to offer them: it leaves them out.

He said that the Palestinians feel that they are living in the jungle. The Israeli tiger is free to eat them. They like the Iraqi tiger which comes to fight the Israeli tiger.

The Israeli opposition to the Gulf War is, I am afraid, quite marginal. Israeli society in general is one of the most pro-US societies on earth. It is not surprising when Israel gets such a large amount of US aid.

The Israeli right-wing is hoping that the US will give Israel a free hand with the Palestinians; the Israeli left is hoping that the US will use its power to force Israel to make peace with the Palestinians. But both sides, in many ways, are orientated to the USA.

There are some groups who have organised small demonstrations — including outside the American Embassy. There are petitions circulating. But we have been unable to mobilise Peace Now, for instance, to support withdrawal of these Americans from the Gulf.

One of the most significant elements of the Gulf issue is what it means for the role of Israel. Israel has been an ally of the US against the Soviet Union and the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East. It is not very useful now the Cold War is over.

The problem now for the US in the Middle East is how to maintain conservative Arab regimes against radical nationalists. In this context Israel is an embarrassment for the United States.

Last week an Israeli reserve soldier was killed in the Gaza Strip. He went home on leave. His unit moved to



Syrian troops train in Saudi Arabia

another place. He drove in his private car. Although that is against army regulations it is very often done.

The reserve soldier took a wrong turning. Instead of going into the military camp he drove into a refugee camp.

The people thought he was a settler rather than a soldier. He was in civilian clothes and he had a gun.

They threw stones at him. He tried to turn round but backed his car into a cart. He injured two boys.

He was in the market place, and hundreds of people were there. They threw stones and then set his car on fire. He burned to death.

The incident was seized on by the extreme right in Likud.

They are dissatisfied with the policy of Defence Minister Moshe Ahrens.

Ahrens has a policy of avoiding big confrontations with the Palestinian population. He has concentrated the army on controlling main roads and the roads which lead to settlements.

Now the extreme right ministers have demanded the destruction of all houses within a 200 metres radius of where the reserve soldier was killed and the immediate deportation of 200 people.

Ahrens was not happy with this idea, and he delayed several days in starting the destruction of these houses.

The Israeli Civil Rights Association then appealed to the Supreme Court. The precedent is that the person whose house is to be destroyed is entitled to a written order and then the right of appeal — first to a military commission and then to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court gave a temporary order to stop the destruction of the houses.

Then on the following day, yesterday (26 September), the general in charge of the Gaza Strip came to the Supreme Court and said that the destruction of houses was not meant as a punishment but was needed as an urgent military matter.

The destruction of the houses was needed to widen a narrow alley which troops were

using.

The law says that if a general testifies that there is an urgent military need then the destruction of houses can go ahead immediately. (But they must pay compensation and find the people alternative houses).

They have destroyed 34 houses and shops. Deportations are still being debated inside the establishment. That issue too, will go to the Supreme Court, which will take time.

We are afraid that a situation will arise that will lead to the Israeli army going into Jordan.

Either the Iraqi army entering Jordan or destabilisation and overthrow of King Hussein could lead to an Israeli entry.

The official policy of the government which has some support amongst the left, is that Iraqi entry into Jordan would be enough to justify war.

The Jordanian King is riding the wave of anti-Western Arab nationalism. There are reports in the Israeli press that he is quite popular in Jordan at the moment — even among the radical parts of the Jordanian public who were always against him.

For Hussein this is a very dangerous game. It is a very unstable situation.

The destabilising factors include the bad and deteriorating state of the Jordanian economy and the refugees coming through Jordan.

The blockade of Aqaba has led to 10,000 port workers losing their jobs in the last week and truck drivers too.

The Jordanians are afraid of the refugees. They are trying to put them in the desert where they will not have contact with the population. These tens of thousands of penniless, desperate people living in awful conditions are adding to the tension in the country.

There have already been reports of confrontations between the population of Aqaba and the refugees.

A new phenomenon emerged today. The Palestinian supporters of the Syrian Ba'ath party have declared their support for Syria making a united front with Iraq and the PLO against imperialist aggression in the Middle East.

I do not think Assad is giving much weight to support amongst the Palestinians. Assad sent armed forces to join the US in Saudi Arabia despite knowing it would be a very unpopular move. It was more important for him to get the US's good will.

The Syrians had relied on the USSR as their main ally. Now, clearly, the USSR is an unreliable ally. Assad is prepared to sacrifice goodwill among Arabs for the goodwill of the US.

Kuwait: deal with facts not scenarios

WRITEBACK

Write to SO, PO Box 823,
London SE15 4NA

Gerry Bates (SO 460) reaffirms opposition to the slogan 'self-determination for Kuwait' on the grounds that the people living there could not sustain a viable

democracy, being a mixture of a 'rentier caste' plus long-term and short-term contract workers.

How does this argument square with SO — quite correctly — calling for self-

determination for the Falklands Isles during the South Atlantic War of 1982?

At a time when everyone from George Bush to Gerry Bates is dreaming up schemes for the future of Kuwait, it seems to me to be rather unfair that the only people

who cannot have a say in the future of Kuwait are the people who live and work there.

With regard to Stephen Ryaptis' objection of SO's passive acceptance of an Iraqi-unified Arab state (see SO 458), should one ever come about (which it won't) the otherwise garrulous Gerry Bates is strangely silent.

The emergence of a powerful pan-Arabist movement would lead to a blurring over of class divisions rather than to 'clearing the decks' for the class struggle.

Gerry Bates waxes at length about possible scenarios in which he would feel obliged to go and defend Iraq. Surely the problem here is that he is dealing with scenarios, not the facts of the case so far, i.e. the conflict between an expansionist sub-

imperialist power and America for control of oil reserves and for regional hegemony.

Although the scene and the level of conflict may, and probably will, change, that is not in itself any evidence of a change in the character of the conflict and the issues at stake in it.

In fact, it is more than 'remotely conceivable' that Hussein and the US knock together a deal: he gets a couple of islands, an extra oilfield, and additional financial support; America gets Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Hussein has always done a good job for Western imperialism so far. And where — another question which Gerry Bates fails to address — would America find a replacement for Hussein?

Stephen Ryaptis
Liverpool

A muddle over Kuwait

Gerry Bates in his analysis of the situation in the Gulf, (SO 460), gets himself into a considerable muddle over Kuwait.

I don't think anyone on the left, (perhaps excluding *Newline!*) raised the demand that Saddam Hussein should invade Kuwait. Although when one considers how effectively the Emir held down oil prices for his imperialist

masters it is hardly a surprise, with hindsight, that he did.

Since he did, matters have changed. Bates notes that if Iraq simply withdrew from Kuwait this "would certainly be claimed as a victory by the US". Indeed it would. And Bush would reinstate the corrupt and undemocratic Emir, or possibly even worse. Labour's front bench certainly supports this position, but surely socialists don't?

Bates goes on to argue that the people of Kuwait should

decide their own future. But he simultaneously points out that Kuwait is not, in any sense a nation. Or it is as much of a nation as the six counties of Ulster. Both were created by British imperialism drawing a line on a map towards or just after the end of the 1st World War.

Bates does hit upon the correct answer when he suggests that Kuwait will need to be included "in some larger democratic unit". Although one might ask, why not

socialist? The best hope for the toilers of Kuwait lies in the working class of Cairo and Baghdad. Of course Saddam Hussein will not take this cause any further forward. But Bush has the power to give out a very powerful setback. Particularly if we show any sign of equivocation in our complete opposition to his imperialist war drive.

Ernest Jones,
London

Labour Party Socialists debate:

The future of the block vote

The block vote is once again an issue in the Labour Party.

Socialist Organiser has consistently

argued for its reform and democratisation and simultaneously for increasing the representation of the

constituencies at annual conference. Reg Race and Bill Hamilton debate the issues.

A new arrangement

By Reg Race

We must remember that a reduction in the power of the block vote will have to be achieved with its concurrence.

This is why many favour the idea of a negotiated reduction to 60% of conference votes; Kinnock wants it, to give the party a less trade union dominated look; and sections of the left want it, in order to increase the influence of the CLPs. Both sides however, want to maintain the principle of the block vote itself; indeed, CLPD's proposition states that it should be reduced to 'no less than' 60% of the conference vote.

If this proposal is activated soon, it will be because it is believed that the power of the left in the CLPs has been broken.

There is no tactical reason to stop us supporting the reduction of the block vote in this way, while also calling for more radical solutions to the problem of conference voting and national affiliations, and which go more to the core of the problem of the trade union relationship with the party.

Many see the block vote as a transmission belt for the values of the political establishment to be inserted into the operation of the Labour Party. Trade unions, it is argued, have been incorporated into the political arrangements for managing the British economy. Their influence over their members is powerful and deradicalising, and it is only under the most extreme conditions that rank and file revolts

against Labour party policy can succeed.

This argument has history on its side. That is why many socialists believe that the Labour Party's whole relationship with working class organisations must be recast. The phantom of millions of votes

"Under the new arrangements the party would have its own 'industrial' organisations with a mass membership inside a particular industry".

cast at annual conference are a dangerous illusion which prevent the Party from having a real relationship with working people, say those who wish to abolish the block vote.

We should not assume that the trade unions are the only potential

links with the working class that the Labour Party might possess. It is possible to foresee circumstances in which the following reforms were introduced:

1. A complete restructuring of the the Labour Party constitution followed by a refounding conference of the Party;

2. Make it possible for community organisations, such as tenants groups, CND, women's organisations, black organisations, etc, to affiliate nationally, and locally to CLPs, which they cannot do at present;

3. Replace national trade union affiliation by creating national 'industrial' organisations, run by the party, of members in particular industries, eg coal, power, insurance, agriculture, etc., with representation at conference and an entitlement to submit resolutions, but with no substantial block vote.

This proposal deals with the block vote by abolishing it; and it deals with the implied 'deal' between the PLP and TU leaderships on the split between responsibility for politics and collective bargaining by abolishing the basis for that split.

Under the new arrangements, the party would have its own 'industrial' organisations, which would be based on (hopefully) a mass membership inside a particular industry; this would break down the artificial barriers between working people within the same industry caused by trade union chauvinism; and it would leave the trade unions with a clear collective bargaining role separate from the political process.



Eric Heffer walks off the platform at the 1985 Labour Party Conference in protest at Kinnock's attack on Liverpool Council

Reform the block vote

By Bill Hamilton (Hackney North Labour Party and Labour Party Socialists, in personal capacity)

There is an emerging consensus in the Party that the trade union block vote should be reduced from its overwhelming dominant position of holding 90 per cent of the votes cast.

The exact level of reduction is up for debate, and ranges from a figure of 70% down to 50% for the block vote.

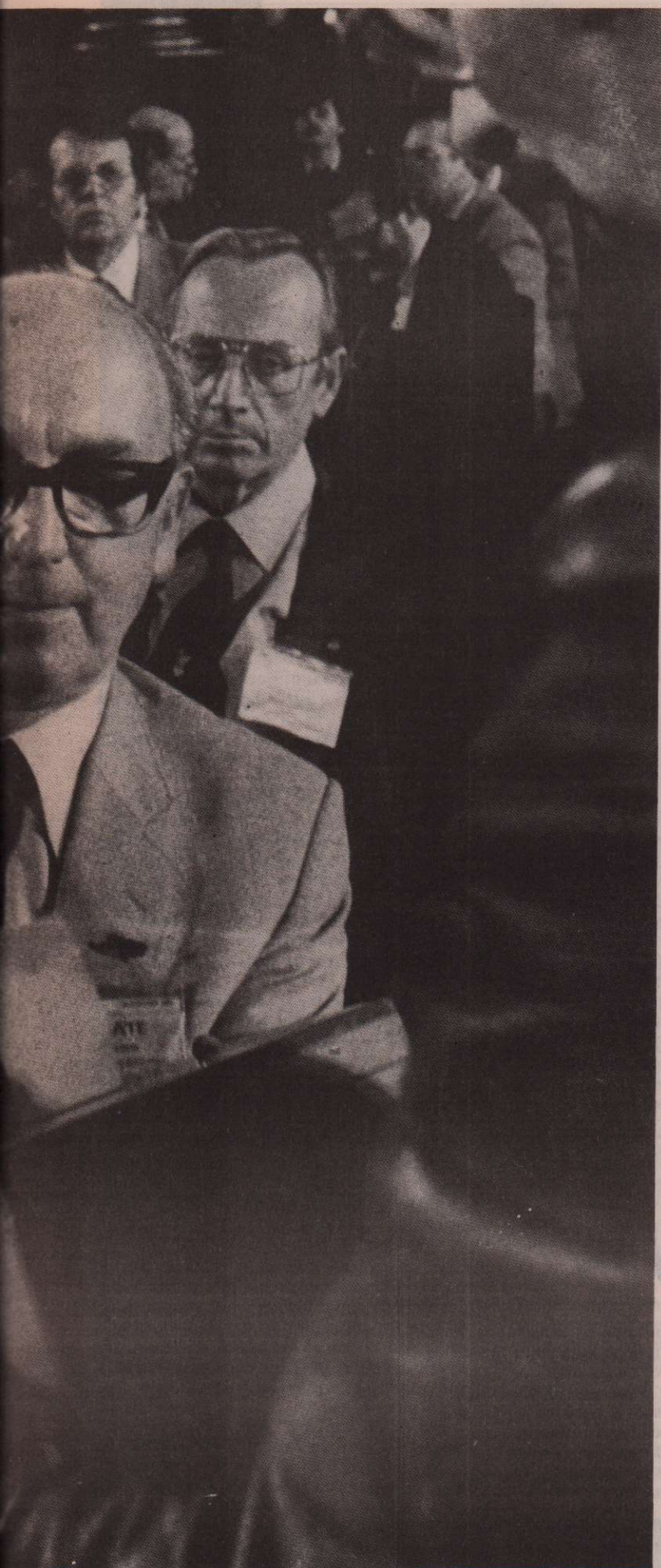
This is an entirely different debate to the argument that the block vote should be abolished altogether. This is clear in terms of the scale of change, 90% to 0%, but is even more important in terms of long-term political consequences. For sure, taking away the trade unions' right to policy-making would result in their withdrawal of

subscriptions and disaffiliation from the Party.

Labour's roots are in the union, not in some mythical past "heroic struggle", but in the

"There is a great danger of creating very dangerous division between Labour Party and trade unions..."

and now. The Labour Party needs a direct structural link with unionists in the front line against the Thatcher government, fighting for better pay and conditions that has been emphasised recently in the union campaigns for fundamental health and safety both workers and service users.



Labour left rallies against ban on Socialist Organiser

Martin Thomas reports on the 'End the Ban' campaign

34 Constituency Labour Parties have passed emergency resolutions for the Labour Party's Annual Conference in Blackpool against expelling Labour Party members for association with *Socialist Organiser*.

As we go to press, it looks as if the emergency resolutions will be debated on Thursday 4 October. The debate will be the climax of an intense campaign waged by supporters of free debate in the Labour Party since the National Executive Committee banned *Socialist Organiser* on 25 July.

The ban was decreed without notice of charges, without notice of evidence, and without a hearing. The letter announcing the ban claimed that the organisation associated with *Socialist Organiser* had been found to be outside the Labour Party rules, but that cannot be the real reason for the ban.

The Socialist Organiser Alliance made it clear as soon as an 'investigation' into *SO* was decided, in February, that it was willing to change its ways of organising if the NEC so wished; and since the NEC decision it has disbanded altogether. The real reason must be the left-wing politics of *Socialist Organiser*.

An 'End the Ban!' committee was set up soon after 25 July, involving a broad range of the left - Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Labour Party Socialists, Women for Socialism,

Socialist Outlook, Labour Briefing, and the Labour Committee on Ireland as well as *SO*.

Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions have been mailed two or three times. Individual Labour Party activists and trade unionists have been mailed and canvassed by phone. A contingent went to the TUC to lobby delegates. Public meetings have been held in most major cities.

The only representative conference of the Labour Party in

"The ban on Socialist Organiser exactly parallels the Labour Party leaders' announced intention to keep almost all the Tory anti-union laws under a future Labour government"

the period since the ban, the Greater London Labour Party Women's Conference, voted against the ban. The National Union of Mineworkers North-East Area and the Bakers', Food and Allied Workers' Union have also passed policy against the ban.

Tribune, the main paper of the Labour Party's 'soft left', has opposed the ban.

Some 55 Constituency Labour

Parties (and the CRS Political Committee) have passed policy or mandated delegates against the ban, though not all have sent in their anti-ban motions as conference emergencies.

Win or lose at Conference, *Socialist Organiser* will not go away from the Labour Party. If sellers of the paper are expelled from the Labour Party, they will continue to work for the Labour Party and to sell the paper to Labour Party activists. They will win two new sellers to join the Party, or from among existing Party activists, for each one expelled.

Banning *SO* will not end argument in the Labour Party on the issues the paper campaigns on. It will simply complicate the argument with a long, destructive and messy series of expulsions of good Labour Party activists.

In moving against *Socialist Organiser*, the NEC responded to the blackmail of right-wing maverick Labour MP Frank Field, who has threatened to force a sudden by-election in Birkenhead and stand against Labour. More generally, the Labour Party leaders are trying to take advantage of the depression of the labour movement after 11 years of Tory rule to get themselves guarantees against left-wing challenges inside the Party to the policies of a future Labour government.

The ban on *Socialist Organiser* exactly parallels the Labour Party leaders' announced intention to keep almost all the Tory anti-union laws under a future Labour government.

But no guarantees will save the Labour Party leaders from the class struggle. The fight goes on!

An irrelevant comment?

The following is the latest correspondence between our editorial staff and the Labour Party's Director of Organisation, Joyce Gould.

It should speak for itself. How and why the Director of Organisation compiled her 'own

files' of 'SO' remains a mystery, since she does not have a subscription to the paper.

'SO' to the Director of Organisation, 7 September.

I am writing to bring to your attention formally the statement by the Socialist

Organiser Editorial Board on 18 August 1990, disbanding the Socialist Organiser Alliance.

As far as I can see, according to the Rules of the Party, this disbanding should settle the matter raised in your letter to me 1 August. I would be grateful if you could let me know how you see it.

One other point. I have recently received a letter from the Walworth Road librarian, John McTernan, advising me that, apparently because of a mistake on our part, the Labour Party library has not received its subscription copy of *SO* since September 1989. This seems to indicate that no-one consulted the library file of *SO* between September 1989 and the date of John McTernan's letter (21 August), and consequently that the entire investigation into *SO* earlier this year, was conducted without any attempt to consult a file of the paper. Can you confirm whether that is the case?

Director of Organisation to 'SO', 19 September

We are in receipt of your letter informing the NEC that the Socialist Organiser Alliance is disbanding. I will report this to the National Executive Committee.

Your comment on the Library is irrelevant, I have my own files on *Socialist Organiser*.

te, don't abolish it!

Even in those unions not formally affiliated to the Party, like NALGO, the Labour Party is a

focus of political action.

The existing structure and mechanisms of the block vote are certainly bureaucratized. They should be reformed. The fight for democracy in the trade unions is anyway an indispensable part of the fight for socialism.

The fight for reform is difficult: and so some people argue that the block vote should be abolished and replaced by some different structure, maybe Labour Party industrial groups. In other words, the formally organised links between the Labour Party and the working class, as they have grown up over 90 years and as they are now, should be abolished.

This view appears to be utopian in its vision of socialists in different industries coming together to express a view on Party matters. How would workers organise collectively in any meaningful way

but in a trade union? The Labour Party workplace branch idea was never meant to supplant union organisation, and, although a good idea, failed miserably in practice.

At the same time, the abolition of the block vote could result in a real move to the right, as passive individual members whose only relationship with the Party is via their chequebook are brainwashed by the media to follow the leadership line.

There is a great danger of creating a very dangerous division between the Labour Party and the trade unions, particularly if Labour wins the next election and fails to meet the needs and aspirations of organised workers. A potential disaster is waiting to happen, with Party members being encouraged to distance themselves from union action and scab on strikes, all the time encouraged by the media.

No, the unions may not be perfect, but we throw away our link with the organised working class at our peril.

A new spiral in the Palestinian tragedy

AGAINST THE TIDE

Sean Matgamna



Proof that God is an incorrigibly malign old bastard, part 2.

A few weeks ago, but in a different political world, before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and before the USA started moving towards war and probably the recolonisation of parts of Arabia, I wrote in this column about the curious feeling I had of living through a period in which history repeats to repeat and summarise — as in the concluding chapter of a well-organised book — the terrible history of the Jews of Europe and the Arabs of Palestine.

The looming war in the Gulf intensifies and strengthens one element in the historical recapitulation we seem to be living through. It adds the terrible prospect of a new spiral of tragedy for the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza, who have surely had more than their share of tragedy, but have now lined up behind Saddam Hussein.

In 1948 the Palestinian Arabs in the area allotted to them by the UN's 1947 partition plan rallied to the armies of the surrounding countries — Jordan, Egypt, Syria — which immediately threw themselves, under the command of British officers in some cases, against the Jewish state in an attempt to conquer and destroy it. Nothing is more natural than that the Palestinian Arabs should have done that.

Irresolvable conflict of interest with the Jews, the sense of displacement and of stinging injustice, together with religious fervour and the banked-up hatreds of decades of conflict with the Zionist colonists, all combined to hustle the occupants of the fledgling Palestinian Arab state into complicity in the drive to destroy Israel.

And as the invading Arab armies were driven back, the Palestinian Arabs paid an awful price. Some fled in terror before the Israeli army, many others were driven out of Arab towns, villages and lands which were now incorporated into the triumphantly consolidated and expanded Israeli state.

At the end of the war of 1948 the Palestinian Arabs still had a state of their own. But not for long.

In 1949 Israel and Jordan got together and carved up what was left of the UN-chartered Palestinian Arab state. The West Bank went to Jordan.

18 years later, in June 1967, Israel responded to a feeble Egyptian attempt to blockade one of its ports with a blitzkrieg which smashed the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and put Israel in control of all pre-war Palestine. The Arabs there have lived under Israeli overlordship ever since.

Neither UN resolutions, nor pressure from the old Stalinist bloc, nor war between Israel and the surrounding Arab states in 1973, nor even the Palestinian Arabs' own struggles — for three years now their intifada — have freed the Palestinians from Israel's colonial grip.

When, after 1967, Israel was offering "land for peace" — acceptance of Israel's right to exist by the Arab states in return for



Those who don't learn from history are likely to repeat it

The UN devastate Korea Autumn 1950. 'Rubble in Korea' by David Hall

some West Bank state — the Palestine Liberation Organisation would settle for nothing but the destruction of Israel and a vague offer of religious freedom and citizenship rights for the Jews in an Arab "secular democratic state". And Israeli politics drifted sharply to the right partly as a consequence of this.

For 13 years now, right-wing governments, or coalitions depending on the right, have ruled Israel, until today the most right wing government in Israel's history holds sway. Those who want to annex the West Bank and expel the Arabs are a power in the land, and in the government.

The PLO recently decided to recognise Israel and settle for a West Bank/Gaza Palestinian state — but the right wing has been strong enough to frustrate even those in the Israeli Labour Party who were willing to talk about it at a peace conference.

And the pressure on the Arab areas from Israeli settlers continued to build up. The

opening up of the Stalinist states, combined with a vast renewal of popular anti-semitism in those states, created the conditions for a big new movement of Jews — comparable almost to the movement of Jews from Russia and Poland in response to the waves of pogroms in 1881 and after.

The Palestinian Arabs viewed the vast new Jewish immigration with mortal fear, and not without reason, combined as it was with a government which includes unashamed advocates of expelling the West Bank Arabs.

It is not surprising that the West Bank Arabs should rally to Saddam Hussein, who challenges the status quo and the other Arab states, who is taking on Israel's friend and protector, the US.

As little surprising as was their fathers and mothers rallying to the Arab armies invading Israel 42 years ago. And potentially as tragic.

The PLO, which is backing Saddam Hussein; those Palestinians in Kuwait who reportedly are active supporters of the Iraqi occupation; and the West Bank Arabs, who are looking to Saddam Hussein as their liberator — they will all suffer terrible consequences when Saddam Hussein is defeated, as in an all-out war, the war the US is openly preparing, he must be.

And what will happen to the Palestinians if their champion Saddam Hussein strikes at Israel with poison gas? In the war now being prepared Saddam Hussein will have nothing to lose by striking at Israel, and possibly a great deal to gain. An attack on Israel will establish him as the Arab champion in a holy war, and put tremendous pressure on the Arab allies of the US.

But in the chaos of war, there is a great danger of an Israeli chauvinist attempt to seize the chance to drive out — or kill — large numbers of Palestinians. (Iraqi gas may do a lot of the killing for them).

The peace movement in Israel considers this a real danger, and has prepared contingency plans to try to stop it.

The chances of history repeating itself must be very great.

George Bush has responded to Saddam Hussein's attempt to link Kuwait with the West Bank with his own talk of a general settlement, which will include a settlement of the Palestinian question after Saddam Hussein is defeated. Bush is concerned to keep his Arab allies, and to counter Saddam Hussein's propaganda.

But afterwards? We can't foresee the "settlement" the Americans will go for in the region. But it would be naive to believe that Bush will look after the interests of Saddam Hussein's Palestinian allies and supporters. He has not exactly been kind to America's own long-time stooge King Hussein of Jordan, caught in an impossible position between Iraq and its enemies.

Nor can the Palestinians rely on Bush's Arab allies. Arab governments have been content to let them languish as refugees because then the question of Israel's right to exist could more plausibly be kept in play. Mass slaughter of Palestinians has mainly been the work of other Arabs — the work of America's new ally Syria as well as of King Hussein of Jordan, who organised the great slaughter in the 'Black September' of 1970.

No: in any of a number of likely scenarios, the prospects facing the Palestinians are grim and terrible.

Socialists and Parliament

Mastering reality — or being absorbed by it

There are two ideas, cherished for more than a century in the British labour movement, which I confess, I have never been able to take seriously.

First is the idea that socialism, the most enormous upheaval in human history — the replacement of a society of inequality, oppression and exploitation by one of co-operation, equality and freedom — can be achieved through Labour MPs trooping down division lobbies in the House of Commons!

Not even mildly intelligent Guardian writers take the place seriously! Thatcher declared that Britain would go to the members of our great Parliaments' were sunning themselves at various holiday resorts! "there are many circles in which Parliament's claim to sovereignty is a mere resort".

Yes, but times of par-



THE POLITICAL FRONT

Alan Johnson

patronising smile from the sophisticated socialists of the born again Labour left. No such cliches for them. Transform the state bit by bit they say, do it very cleverly, over a long period, ensuring that no single 'bit' of transformation alarms the ruling class so they are provoked to violence. Softly, softly.

Over a century ago, William Morris faced this argument. Here is an authority the pseudo-sophisticates of the LCC and Marxism Today will listen to surely. What did he say?

"Those who think that they can deal with the present system in this piecemeal way very underrate the strength of the tremendous organisation under which we live, and the points to each of us their place, and the chance to fit it grinds us down into nothing but a tremendous force. This force: it will not suffer to be remembered, nor to lose its essence without violence in resistance; rather it considers of itself the roof of the world

the roof of the world down upon its head". How serious their reaction is depends on how serious is the reforming government and how much struggle from below it has stirred up. Sometimes an investment strike, destabilisation, flight of capital, accelerated inflation, this will suffice. At other times more brutal action is taken to restore the 'normality' of capitalist relations of production.

Now the other idea I've never been able to take seriously is this: because there is no parliamentary road to socialism, then socialists should ignore parliament.

Related to this is the notion that because the pressures to move to the right become immense in Parliament — as Gramsci put it "Instead of mastering reality they allow themselves to be absorbed by it" — then no socialist should risk exposing themselves to Parliament.

But Gramsci rightly judged this response to the problem to be useless, a mere 'running away from reality'. This idea of fighting on the ground of reality but not becoming absorbed by it is found also in Lenin.

Now, in my view, there is a whole debate to be had about Lenin and democracy. But he would surely have given short shrift to the 'anti-parliamentarians' of the British left. To their like he spoke thus in 1920. "It is more difficult for western Europe to start a revolution than it was for us. To attempt to 'circumvent' this difficulty by 'skipping' the arduous job of utilising reactionary parliaments for revolutionary purposes is absolutely childish. You want to create a new society yet you fear the difficulties involved in forming a good parliamentary group made up of convinced Communists! Is that not childish?... You think my dear anti-parliamentarians that you are 'terribly revolutionary' but in reality you are frightened by the comparatively minor difficulties of the struggle against bourgeois influences in the working class movement."



Eric Heffer walks off the platform at the 1985 Labour Party Conference in protest.

are in receipt of your letter informing the Socialist Alliance that the National Executive Committee is irrelevant. I have my own files on your comment on the Library. I will report this to the NEC that informs the Socialist Alliance. I am in receipt of your letter to SO, 19

Labour fudges while Tories fight:

Students: fight back or go under!

Jill Mountford looks at the Tory attacks and how to fight them

Full time students are now the only group in Britain not entitled to Social Security benefits.

From September full time students lose their entitlement to

- * Housing Benefit — despite their massive rent increases.

- * Support during vacation periods. They must stretch their frozen grants even further and 'top it up' with Government loans and bank overdrafts. They must try to find odd work — despite increasing unemployment.

Over the past decade the student grant has been cut by over 20% in real terms. The Travel Grant was abolished in 1984, Student Loans were introduced this year.

The Tories intentions are that loans make up at least 50% of student financial support by the year 2000. On top of this some sort of 'Pay as you Learn' system (ie. tuition fees) is likely to be introduced within the next two years. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals has drawn the conclusion that tuition fees are inevitable if the Government doesn't increase its financial commitment to Higher Education in the public expenditure budget this Autumn. The University Funding Council has drawn a similar conclusion and is presently trying to deal with the problem (and failing miserably) by increasing student numbers.

The quality of education and training in Britain is undeniably low. Research shows that the reading standards of 7 year olds has substantially fallen and that 18 year olds are not as good as they used to be at spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Britain has one of the lowest standards of post 16 education and training in the E.C. — second only to Spain.



Left Unity supporters lead loans protest

Starved of cash, contaminated with the ethos of the market, the education system under Thatcher is being butchered. It is being carved into tiers where a small elite gets the best and the rest get the scraps. From nursery education through to Polytechnic and University level no section escapes the Tories attacks.

The introduction of Youth Training to replace Y.T.S. is nothing more than a new package for cuts in employment training — an estimated £56 million in fact.

The introduction of Training Credits (ie. vouchers with which a young person buys his/her training) will in reality mean that a tiny minority of 16-19 year olds get something like a proper training while the rest get a second rate YTS. The system depends heavily on employers making up the pifflingly low value of the vouchers to a reasonable level.

And then there's the poll tax. Millions of pounds worth of cuts are being made in the F.E. Sector. Course cuts, college closures, mergers and job losses are at almost

epidemic proportions as a direct result of the Tories tax.

The education system is in a mess, the quality of student lives has reached an all time low. Thousands of students are once more homeless, the vast majority receive no financial support.

"Over the past decade the student grant has been cut by over 20%"

Those who do are increasingly under pressure to borrow their way through higher education.

Most students in all sectors are against loans and the recent Tory attacks. There has been a groundswell of active opposition to the Tories proposals. The rank and

file students in the colleges and Areas have fought hard against loans only to be betrayed by the NOLS majority leadership of NUS.

Content with lobbying MPs and pinning all their hopes on a future Labour government the NOLS leadership has failed to lead and failed to give the student movement the direction it so desperately needs. Instead they have wasted the energies of the student movement on issues such as NUS 'Reform'.

We argue for a mass campaigning union, democratically run, that goes on the offensive against the Tories. We argue that the NUS leadership should carry out mandates passed at the National conference — policies such building a mass non-payment of the poll tax in the student movement.

We argue that NUS nationally and student unions locally should work alongside trade unions in education to fight the cuts and win a better deal for all in education.

So far no political party has made any commitment to universal student financial support. The Labour Party leadership has evaded the issue and has not even promised to abolish student loans.

The fight for an education system free to all those who wish to participate, meeting the needs and aspirations of pupils, students and workers alike still needs to be built.

The Tories know precisely how they want the education system to look. A system that reflects the ruling class' interests and which perpetuates and widens the divide that already exist in our capitalist society.

Labour, on the other hand, has a fuzzy vision that doesn't even go as far as opposing and promising to repeal the Education Reform Law. Nor has Neil Kinnock's Labour Party pledged itself to abolish loans and provide adequate financial support for all students.

There is going to be a General Election sometime during the next 18 months. We have to do all we can to get Labour elected to power, but, we also have to make it clear to the Labour leadership and to the Kinnockites at NUS HQ that the NUS and student movement will defend themselves against attacks from any government.

We have to build a student movement that fights in its own interests and builds links with the labour movement that is with the trade unions and the Labour Party.

Left Unity is the only broad grouping in the student movement seriously geared to such an aim.

The youth we can't forget

By Steve Mitchell, NUS Vice President Further Education Development

A large section of British working class youth at one time or another pass through Further Education (FE) Colleges.

Socialist Organiser has always argued and fought for NUS to organise mass campaigns amongst FE students. Campaigns for the basic rights and living standards of this most down trodden section of students must be central to any socialist perspective for the student movement.

Socialist Organiser aims to provide realistic, serious and militant answers for FE activists who want to fight for a decent education system.

By providing effective answers on day-to-day matters we open up the possibility of winning the arguments for a more general, political militancy: revolutionary socialism.

To build FE student unions we need strong Area NUS organisation. Many convenors of NUS Areas are SO supporters.

NUS Areas are federations of student unions that are able to give practical help to FE College unions: advise them on tactics; help them win extra funding from the college, help win autonomy from the college authorities for FE unions.

We believe FE unions can shake up and revitalise the sluggish routines of the student movement.

We advocate a big drive by National NUS and the Areas to pull new FE and sixth form unions into NUS membership. To do that the NUS must organise campaigns that give serious help to FE student activists.

This means, for instance, fighting to carry out NUS's existing poll tax policy: *Don't Pay and Don't Collect*. Poll tax is leading to massive cuts in local authority education spending — which is passed onto students as cuts in Further Education. NUS must campaign on this issue! Campaigning will create new activists for the student movement and instil in us a new fighting confidence.

A notable thing about the FE colleges now is that only *Socialist Organiser* students have a serious national policy for work in NUS Areas and FE unions. That is why SO seller, Steve Mitchell was elected to the post of NUS Vice President Further Education at last Easter's NUS conference.

By contrast, you will never find an SWP member involved in an Area NUS organisation. The SWP is not interested in building the student movement. All it cares about is recruiting a few individuals. The SWP find they can most easily recruit middle class radicals in the Poly and University Sector: and that's all they care about.

Socialist Organiser's students believe that socialists must create a movement which is fused into the living struggle of the working class and its organisations. A movement which builds those organisations and is not parasitic on them. In this case, we believe that serious socialists must immerse themselves in organising and fighting alongside the working class youth in the FE colleges.

Why we need Left Unity

By Emma Colyer, NUS National Secretary

To build a student movement that can beat the Tories we must unify the left around a single powerful idea: the class struggle.

Many newcomers to socialist politics are confused and disgusted by the sight of conflicts and squabbles which dominate the left. Yet the differences dividing the left are not just 'squabbles'. The attitude we take to parliament or even our position on tactical issues are important because the right or wrong 'position' may make the difference between victory or defeat.

We need to discuss these questions in an open way. Despite appearances, the big vice of the left is that there is very little real discussion on the issues that divide us: petty factional squabbles dominate instead.

But the gut feeling of wanting the left to get together is a good one.

SO students helped initiate Left Unity 18 months ago. Left Unity was a response to the growth of the

right wing 'independents' in NUS and an attempt to meet the need for students to organise against the poll tax and Tory-imposed student loans.

We urged the left to unite around two basic ideas:

- * non-payment and non-collection of the poll tax;
- * direct action against loans.

We believed real gains could be won by students by co-ordinated national action.

In April 1989, 230 activists got together to launch Left Unity and our basic programme of action was agreed.

Left unity is important. By uniting the left for joint action we begin to build a rank and file movement of students fighting at grass-roots level and independently of the foot-dragging NUS leaders.

Left Unity has had success with 4 members on the NUS NEC and ten or so Area Convenors, the serious left is in a stronger position. But the left is not yet united.

Two groups on the left, Militant and the SWP are hostile to any form of joint work. They are sectarian who place the perceived interests of their own group before the interests of the movement as

whole — which would be better served by a united left.

All we can do about that is argue with them, appealing to their reason against their prejudices and dead-end factionalism.

Left Unity has launched a "Campaign for a Fighting Union". Our campaign has three themes:

- * The need to rejuvenate the poll tax campaign that the NUS leadership has let flag. The poll tax must be linked with campaigns around housing, grants and cuts.

- * The need to democratise the NUS — from top to bottom. Now, NUS leaders routinely ignore conference policies when they disagree with them. More students in colleges need to be involved in NUS affairs!

- * The need for a drive to affiliate and organise more colleges, principally in the FE sector.

Your should get your union, executive and Labour Club to support this campaign. In your college set up activist groups and networks of student reps. Put pressure on the NUS leadership to organise seriously against the Tories.

To beat the Tories the student left has to sort itself out!

Ken Loach talks about his new film

The Cinematic guerilla

Cinema

Ken Loach's new film, "Hidden Agenda", caused a furore at the Cannes Film Festival. He talked to Tim Thomas about that film and the rest of his work.

I met Ken Loach in an editing room. A small screen showed workers walking backwards and forwards very rapidly to and from a building site.

Ken and the editor were discussing where to put the voices. It was a long discussion, and there were many backwards and forwards movements.

When they had finally made a decision, Ken and I sat opposite each other across the cutting table. Ken had armed himself with two or three Lion Bars for the interview (in terms of tittle-tattle, I can vouch for him being a chocaholic). Below us, out the window, the crowds were going home down Oxford Street.

I decided to start with a blockbuster question. "As a director, what do you feel are your best achievements and greatest disappointments over the last twenty five years?"

Ken winced — "Oh God!"

He is just like they say he is — immensely self-effacing and all too ready to ascribe his film-making to the collective endeavour of the team.

The film he most enjoyed making was *A Miner's Story*. It took four days. It was an "unpretentious little film" made in August '84 and attempting, by way of the songs and conversations of the miners, to give a picture of the kind of culture that grew up during the strike. He and the film crew went all over the mining areas in that short space of time.

The disappointing moments? These were the ideas he and those who wrote for him had, but could not translate into the medium of film.

I asked him about some of the filmic influences that had fashioned his particular style. Straight off he referred to the Czech film-makers of the '60s, especially Forman (who started out making one of the most touching comedies of that decade, *Blonde In Love*, and wound up corrupted by Hollywood — that's my opinion and not necessarily Ken's), Jiri Menzel (*Closely Observed Trains*), and Olmi's *Tree of Wooden Clogs*. He liked the humour of those films, but most of all he liked the way they directed their actors.

He started as an actor, and I think this has had more of an influence on him than he cares to admit. He moved from acting to become a film director for the BBC.

He likes films that employ non-professionals, mentioning particularly Bresson in this respect, "though Bresson is too cold for me". He attacks the Hollywood system ("never had much attraction for me"). "It exploits by overemphasising effects like music. The films take on a pushy, febrile quality". "Film probably has a minimal effect on the political situation. I just want to raise some questions, contribute to the pool of opposition and perhaps make people angry".

Ken is a little chary about discussing future projects. He is just completing *Riff-Raff*, about a bunch of building workers in London. It was written by a building worker, Bill Jesse, and it is what he was watching on the editing screen. "I thought it was time for a bit of fun".

Another possibility is a film called *Who Framed Arthur Scargill?* (a story that needs "a political context"). Ken's idea is that the new Labour Party thrives on left phantoms and Aunt Sallies. "It needs Scargill, *Socialist Organiser*, etc. to prove to the average *Daily Mail* reader that it is not like them".



Ken Loach

But these films are only ideas in his head. "There's nothing definite". "So the rumour that you and Jim Allen are planning a film on the Spanish Civil War is just a rumour?" He laughs. "Can I mention it?" "Yes, you can mention it, but don't elaborate on it".

I asked him what, beyond the overtly political in his films, were the other important ingredients. He was, he said, concerned with trying to capture the quality of life of people and of working relations especially. "There is a real crack between people who work", and it was important to show it, to record it.

A mass of American films romanticising violence and unconcerned with the realities of everyday working people come to my mind as he emphasises "the crack between people who work". These American movies are increasingly the staple diet of the British cinema. The working class is denied images of its own culture, and instead is asked to glory in the absurd adventures of superstars like Bruce Willis. Loach says that these days, "working relations are invariably coarsened or else ignored on film".

Again and again he stresses that film is a collective endeavour. He is an actor's director in many respects. All people can act, he says, and the danger of the professional actor is that he might lose the vital inner resource of feeling freshly about the situation he's placed in. Ordinary people do not do this.

He had seen Michael Caine giving his celebrated seminar on film acting. He felt it had all been unnecessary.

"People don't need to know that". They just have to believe they are where they are, and the director has to provide the "sym-

"There is a real crack between people who work" and it was important to show it, to record it."

pathetic observation".

It all sounds so simple and so pleasurable. The purpose of film is simple too — getting the audience to identify with the joys and struggles of the characters they are watching. But also, of course, to achieve a grasp of the issues we all share that lie behind those joys and struggles. And this is where Loach's socialist convictions come into play.

Derek Malcolm, reviewing *Hidden Agenda* in the *Guardian* after its screening at the Cannes Film Festival (it won the Jury prize) said, comparing *Hidden Agenda* with *Kes*, that "argument without art is useless in the cinema".

Well, he thought Malcolm's review was "bullshit", full of value judgments and fighting clear of any political interpretation. "Art and politics are not at all incompatible... there was no less thought given to sequence, narrative, light in *Hidden Agenda* than there was in *Kes*".

The majority of British film critics did not have much taste for argument. They preferred political inferences to uncompromising statements. He's heated on this point. "Art is the conscious deployment of certain factors in film-making: light, rhythm, acting. We took no more short cuts with *Hidden Agenda* because it was political".

In *Hidden Agenda* a career policeman not unlike Stalker (who appears now to be a disc jockey on Radio Two) is sent for the same reason and uncovers not simply verification of shoot-to-kill but a much more disturbing conspiracy: that the disinformation and black propaganda employed against the IRA had also been used, during the '70s, against Heath and Wilson.

A right-wing Tory government is installed. Will Kerrigan (the Stalker figure) continue his investigation and arrest Nevin (the Neave figure), or will he, in the end, back down and keep his trap shut?

Ken is well known as a supporter of "Time to Go!" *Socialist Organiser* also backs "Time to Go!" but is mindful of the bloody and negative effects of a prolonged civil war which would end up further from a united socialist Ireland than we are now.

Ken agrees that "there won't be peace

before or after British withdrawal", but "there will certainly be no peace with British state intervention". "The Irish have to solve this problem. Only they can forge a new state".

He himself, he said, is "practically a pacifist". This took me by surprise, bearing in mind the kind of forces he and Allen describe in the film. How can we win peacefully against such authority?

"Perhaps that came out a bit glibly".

There was a difference between wars of liberation and wars of repression. "So your pacifism is not like the Quakers?" "No, no". But he is opposed to the death penalty on principle.

He wasn't going to defend the IRA, in fact if pushed he would condemn the killings. On the other hand he wasn't going to pontificate.

Hidden Agenda is not really about the Irish situation at all. It is about something basic to the idea of the state.

Loach describes the Ireland of *Hidden Agenda* as "a location" — a place from where to begin to tell the story of the conspiracy to get Thatcher to head the Tories and eventually become leader of the government. The streets could be made safe for capitalism by the spread of lies and black propaganda. It began with lies about the Republicans and ended with garbage about Heath's sexuality and Wilson being a KGB agent.

When Kerrigan, the career policeman, finally ends up face to face with Alec Nevin. Nevin tells him, in reply to a question about spreading lies, "All politics is a conspiracy".

This, says Ken, is a "recurring theme in Jim Allen's work". Allen wrote the screenplay for *Hidden Agenda*. They have worked together on several films: *Days of Hope*, *The Big Flame*, *Rank and File*. Throughout their association there has been an overriding formal quality in their work best described as Marxist, where ideas are the expression of class position. Ideas and class become the chief motivating factors in the plot.

The workers have their solidarity, the ruling class can counter this with manipulative skills picked up from the long history of Empire and the dextrous subjugation of peoples. But the conspiracies were not and are not gentle affairs: violence, mercilessness and exploitation are their stock-in-trade.

Kerrigan might only be doing his job, but he has to learn that he is doing it at the behest of forces who will stop at nothing to maintain their control.

What of Ken's general political views? He is optimistic about the changes in Eastern Europe and not at all charmed by Gorbachev.

"Gorbachev is just a different kind of Stalinist. The West has benefitted greatly from him. When he comes over here he never provides us with even a hint of a socialist analysis of Britain".

I asked him about the left here. "It's been in a parlous state for some time. It began when Benn failed in his bid for the deputy leadership and was compounded by the defeat of the miners. The purpose now should be to keep the ideas alive, but you can't do that without making some sort of war against the Kinnockites".

Under the circumstances of defeat there is bound to be a degree of egoism, pettiness and factionalism — "but factionalism also has a positive side. In the end something good and thoughtful will emerge".

Ken took me downstairs and let me out into Oxford Street. He was nibbling his final bar of chocolate — a delicate figure, discreet, receptive and generous.

He doesn't know when we'll all be able to see *Hidden Agenda*, various things have held up the distribution. He waved goodbye and turned to walk back to the editing room and those construction workers jerkily walking backwards to the site.



The picnic

Picnics, privilege and revolution

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Milou in May'

Louis Malle's film, *Milou in May* is lovely. The May is May '68, and Milou is an ageing winemaker, whose bossy mother has just died. With her death comes the need for the family to decide the future of the estate — the rambling old house, the vineyards, the land, with its beehives and trees and stream full of crayfish.

So the family gathers around the

bier, and the squabbles begin. Milou doesn't want to sell; he loves the house, he loves his life there. We can see why; it's idyllic.

But the others don't want to pay to keep the place up. They're practical minded bourgeois; they'd rather sell, and put the money to work.

But then news of the strikes and the street battles in Paris starts filtering through, and something in the air suddenly changes. The news, which worries and frightens them at first, soon comes to seem like a liberation. Pretty soon they're all picnicking on the grass, overflowing with good will and brotherhood, planning to turn the estate into a self-managed co-op for everyone to enjoy. They've fallen in love with their own potential, with their better side.

May '68 comes to seem not just like a liberation for workers, but as a liberation for everybody, a way of ending their isolation and their selfishness, their obsession with grabbing as much as they can for themselves, and a way of helping them to a more shared, more generous way of life. It's a flowering.

But then, the worries set in. Will they, as the middle class, as the enemy, be victimised by the new regime? They start to panic. Finally, they abandon the house and flee, terrified that they'll be caught and punished for their privileges.

When news finally reaches them of the defeat of the movement, they stumble out of their hiding place, dazed and uncomprehending; they can't believe they've survived.

Despite their relief, something has been lost. With the crushing of the revolution, the world seems meaner, their hopes have contracted; gone is the feeling of brotherhood that briefly buoyed them up. They're back to being individuals, isolated, on their own.

Malle has captured many things in the film, not least the sight of the bourgeoisie enjoying their privileges — their music, their houses, their wine, the good life. They take their culture for granted; they wear it lightly, with ease. They're at home in the world.

But Malle also shows what a loss the defeat of the revolutionary hopes was — for everyone.

The family in *Milou in May* weren't the big bourgeoisie, like the capitalist factory owner and his wife who arrive to take panic stricken refuge with them. When the family stopped fighting each other in the brief flowering of comradeship inspired by the newscasts, they were happy. Life was better.

But not afterwards. After the fight they'd had, the capitalists wanted revenge. They wanted blood. They didn't just want the status quo back; they went on the offensive.

Watching *Milou in May*, it's not hard to see where the greedy, self-serving ideas of the Thatcher era came from.

The Americans who stopped America

Lessons for today from the anti-Vietnam war movement

Books

'Out now!' — a participants' account of the American movement against the Vietnam war was written by the late Fred Halstead, one of that movement's leaders. It is an important book for those now faced with the job of organising against the war in the Gulf. Nothing else in history is like the mass resistance — sustained for a decade — within the USA to America's war in Vietnam. It made it difficult for the USA to do what was 'necessary' to crush the Vietnamese, undermined the army and demoralised the army and ultimately, made US victory impossible. The US anti-war movement encountered the problem we have already come up against — divisions around disputes on policy and factional bloody mindedness. They overcame these difficulties. Duncan Chapple reviews Fred Halstead's book and outlines the sort of movement we must now build.

Vietnam was the first war Imperialist America lost. Hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of Vietnamese died in that war. But their fight and the work of anti-war campaigners in the US and elsewhere stopped the war.

"Bombs in Vietnam explode in America" said black US liberal Martin Luther King. What had been a silent generation was brought to life. Millions of Americans were brought together in the anti-war movement. Those people went on to be the core of black, women's, radical and labour movements.

Fred Halstead's book is a hard-hitting account of the rise of the anti-war movement.

He explains the origins of the war and the state of the anti-war movement in America after the years of MacCarthy's witch-hunts. From Johnson's bombings of Vietnam in 1965 through to the bloodbath's end in 1975 he shows us the problems, the methods and the victories of those against the America's intervention.

In the cause of war, the American army drafted eight million people into South East Asia. 300,000 were injured, 60,000 killed. The injustice of the war became clearer and clearer. Today's opponents of the

Gulf War can learn a lot from Halstead's book — especially where he looks at the disputes in the anti-war movement.

In the early '60s right wingers in the movement often fought to exclude socialists from campaigns. But as the movement grew new tensions developed.

Some people opposed the demand for getting the troops out now. Some called for negotiations. Others wanted to turn the anti-war movement into a multi-issue party. Halstead reviews these arguments. Often there would be hot-debates at massive conferences of the anti-war movement. And it's good to see that most times the Trotskyists had the best strategies for the movement.

The American Trotskyists said that mass action had to be the priority of the movement. And they needed slogans that could maximise the numbers of people mobilised.

If you didn't call for immediate withdrawal, or if you called for negotiations to influence what happened in Vietnam. And, on the other side the of the argument, how could you turn a single issue movement into a multi-issue party without diluting the strength of the anti-war activity, or driving people away? You couldn't.

Halstead also looks at how students built the movement. Anti-war campaigners held 'teach-ins' where students and staff closed the colleges down to debate the war and its real roots. In May 1970 a new strategy arose — the 'anti-war' University.

In protest at the shooting of students by National Guardsmen after an anti-war rally at Kent State University 350 universities went on strike. At the Berkeley University campus, 15,000 students and staff voted to 're-constitute' the universities as a centre organising against the war in South-east Asia. They opened up the resources of the campus to the movement. They curtailed academic work to build the anti-war movement. They ended defence work at the University.

The 'anti-war university' strategy was used in many other cities. The May 1970 upsurge shut down or took over 536 colleges. Over 4 million students were involved!

In January 1973 over 100,000 people encircled President Nixon's second inauguration ceremony. Forced half a mile back, their chant of 'Out now!' could still be heard.

Fifteen years away, we can hear the victory call of that movement. Learning from them we can build a massive movement against the Gulf War.

'Out Now! A participants' account of the American Movement against the Vietnam War' by Fred Halstead (760pp Monad Press). £9.95.

A modern Candide

Books

Clive Bradley reviews 'Sexing the Cherry' by Jeanette Winterson

Jeanette Winterson was the author of *Oranges are not the only fruit* which was made into a successful and controversial TV series. *Sexing the Cherry* is her third book — and pretty startlingly different.

It's a kind of modern *Candide*. The central character, Jordan, leaves seventeenth century London to travel a world populated by dancing princesses who fly through the night (and live happily ever after, but not with their husbands), cities ravaged by epidemics of love which cause gravediggers to fall into coffins, so entranced are they by the corpses, people who don't wish to touch the earth and so construct buildings suspended above it, and other marvels.

Jordan leaves behind his non-biological mother, the Dog Woman, who is so immense that when she sits on the scales to be measured against an elephant, the animal soars into the sky. She is caught up in the English civil war, bringing to the Royalist cause her ferocious naivety.

Told that the Bible calls for eyes for eyes and teeth for teeth, she seeks out Puritans, puts out their eyes and pulls out their teeth. It is only after several disappointing sexual encounters of various kinds, that she discovers the male member does not grow back.

Winterson clearly has a remarkable imagination, and tells a dazzling story rich in fairy-tale detail.

I'm less happy with the pseudo-philosophical subtext, full of mysterious, and frankly pretentious references to the nature of Time and Reality, and that sort of stuff. It was long established, in another book of similar imaginative scope, that the answer is 42.



Vietnamese 'suspect' is executed on a Saigon street in 1968.

Alternative cancer therapies

For some years, people involved in cancer medicine both patients and doctors, have felt frustration at the slow progress being made in treating and curing most cancers. In others, survival rates have improved. But in many cases, patients are given treatments of a drastic nature: powerful drugs that harm healthy tissue as well as cancerous; surgery that leaves the patient feeling mutilated — and they still die!



Les Hearn's

SCIENCE COLUMN

Of course, attempts are being made to reduce the side effects of the drugs or to reduce the scale of the surgery. Unfortunately, despite (some would say perhaps because of) these efforts, death rates from the major killers, lung, breast, colon and cervical cancers, continue to remain at high levels.

It was a dissatisfaction with the conventional approach to cancer, the feeling of being a helpless victim where the treatment seemed often worse than the disease, that led to such alternative treatments as were pioneered at the Bristol Cancer Help Centre.

The centre, opened by Prince Charles in 1983, treats some 1500 patients a year with a variety of therapies which aim to heal the 'whole person'.

These therapies include touch, relaxation, meditation, group therapy, counselling and 'visualisation'. Patients are recommended to follow a vegetarian, if not vegan, diet of organically grown food.

Patients may visit for a day, a week or perhaps for much longer periods. Fees of up to £600 per week may be charged but many pay nothing at all.

Since there was little evidence to support the use of these therapies, the BCHC has been regarded with suspicion, scorn and hostility

by some in the medical profession. Others, like cancer specialist professor Karol Sikora of Hammersmith Hospital, have included elements of the BCHC approach in their treatments. BCHC has not tried to counterpose itself to conventional medicine and most of its patients receive usual cancer treatments of anti-cancer drugs or radiation.

Though some of the Bristol approaches seem a bit way out, there is certainly evidence of a strong psychic factor in getting cancer and surviving it. People who have suffered such life events as bereavement or divorce in the previous five years are about three times more likely to get cancer. Of those who have got breast cancer, more survive if who have a fighting attitude than who have an accepting, fatalistic attitude.

Sensitive to its lack of track record, the BCHC decided to commission a survey of its success in treating women with breast cancer. A team from the Institute of Cancer Research, led by Professor Clair Chilvers of Nottingham University, compared the health of 334 women who first attended the BCHC between June 1986 and

October 1987 with that of 461 women who attended three hospitals. All were under 70 at diagnosis and had a single breast tumour. All received conventional treatment.

The health of the women was compared in June 1988 and the result of the comparison was quite sensational. Now, it might be expected that, at worst, the alternative approaches would have no effect. After all, the women were still getting conventional treatment. In fact, women who had attended BCHC were nearly three times more likely to have secondary cancers and nearly twice as likely to die.

There is no obvious explanation for this finding, though some have focussed on the diet recommended by the centre. Some doctors have suggested that the diet may not be providing enough nourishment though Bristol Royal Infirmary dieticians have praised it. Others have said that there is 'not a jot' of evidence that the diet could help and it has been likened to getting a lung cancer patient to give up smoking in the hope that the cancer would go away.

Clearly, further evidence is needed. Were the women suffering from similar types of breast cancer? Is there a connection between time spent at the centre (some had only been there for one day) and the risk of relapse? Was there a difference in psychological type between the two groups?

Users of the centre have been quick to jump to its defence, enthusiastically praising its holistic approach. Even if survival is really less certain at the BCHC, it seems that the improvement in quality of life may outweigh the risks of the alternative approach.

*** This involves making a mental image of the cancer and imagining the body fighting it and defeating it. After surgery, visualisation might involve 'imagining' the operative wound and imagining it healing. There is some evidence that patients using visualisation fare better.**

Drivers get jail, bosses don't

Railworkers protest at double standards

By a rail worker

Train driver Robert Morgan has been jailed for six months over the Purley train crash. He admitted passing a red signal and was jailed for manslaughter.

Members of his union, ASLEF, are considering a work-to-rule — that is, sticking by the rule book about how fast to approach signals and how to respond to them — as a mixture of protest at the decision and self-defence. Such action could cause chaos.

ASLEF general secretary Derek Fullick has called for calm, and fixed a meeting with Transport Minister Cecil Parkinson to discuss rail safety. The last time the union used a work-to-rule, in 1953, British Rail (BR) took the union to court. The judge ruled that a work-to-rule was in breach of railworkers' contract.

But railworkers feel that double standards are being applied. The coroner's inquest into the Clapham rail disaster, in which 35 people died in December 1988, has returned a verdict of unlawful killing. However, no charges are to be brought against British Rail bosses.

The Hidden report into the Clapham crash refused to lay the blame for the signalling fault on the individual who did the wiring, Brian Hemingway. He should not have made the mistake he did, but he was following practices that management had allowed and fostered.

The Director of Signals and Telecommunications (S&T) resigned the day the Hidden report came out, and immediately after the crash the British Rail board accepted full responsibility. Robert Morgan gets jailed; the BR bosses don't.

BR has tightened up routine checking and testing since Clapham — but they have also tried to push

through a wholesale restructuring for workers in S&T.

They demand that we relinquish all control of hours of work, and make ourselves available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; that we give up all job descriptions and be ready to do anything we're asked; that we surrender the right of the union to negotiate our wages, and instead accept individual rates of pay, decided by local management; that we accept no say in promotion based on seniority, but that management be free to promote whomever they see fit.

BR bosses have been fulminating in the media about the resistance of unions with "Victorian" ideas to such change. In fact, the union full-timers responsible for this area would probably like to accept it, but they have been told not to by the rank and file through the AGM of their union, the NUR.

Sacked to pave way for bus sell-off

By John Payne

Bus workers at Camberwell Bus Garage in South London have recently been on strike because of the sacking of the union rep, Roger Barton.

The reason given for his sacking is a 'libelous' leaflet produced by the garage union attacking management. Roger has really been sacked for doing a rep's job in an industry which cannot afford good union organisation if it is to be successfully and profitably privatised.

His real crimes add up to putting out leaflets and posters, informing the membership of what is going on, holding regular

meetings, saving threatened jobs in the garage, and fighting for conditions which are often better than those in the rest of London's fleet.

As bus routes from Camberwell and other garages nearby are put out to tender, wages and conditions are under attack. At Peckham garage the 63 route was won by London Central. Now the bosses are trying to introduce compulsory overtime, longer hours, less money for unsociable hours, longer stretches at a time in the cab etc. It means longer hours for less money.

Bus workers are already driving on the road too tired, too ill or too fed up to be safe. It will not be long before we will be seeing accidents like those we have witnessed on British Rail tracks all around the country.

And who will be blamed? The driver, of course.

With such conditions being forced down our throats, the bosses cannot tolerate an informed and militant union membership, hence the attacks on the Camberwell union.

The union officials are not prepared to fight these attacks. The Peckham drivers have been told to accept the new conditions or see the garage close. This is a threat the union uses every time there is a whiff of dissent in the

air. The union officials too, therefore, do not want an informed or militant membership, because it shows them up for what they are: representatives of no one but themselves and of nothing but their own interests.

Just before Camberwell management decided to sack Roger, his rep's credentials were removed by the union. This was immediately after he upset the local officials by informing his membership of a deal they offered to management on a plate, during the recent pay negotiations.

Two days before Roger's hearing with management, the union agreed to return his credentials, but this was never formally carried out. Management were given a clear signal that they could get away with sacking the rep.

The bus workers at Camberwell showed a great deal of spirit in their support of their rep, keeping up an almost solid strike until the appeal was over. That spirit must now be built on to prevent further attacks the management have in mind on their working conditions. The bosses believe they have paved the way for these attacks by sacking the union rep. The rank and file workers can and must prove them wrong.

Strikes against opting out

Members of CoHSE who work night shifts at the Northern General, Sheffield's largest hospital struck on 24 September.

The dispute is about proposed changes to the night shift which will mean staff working an extra shift each month for no extra pay.

In a ballot with a 73% turn-out, 77% voted for a strike.

Union chair, Steve Taylor said the changes were all part of 'rationalisation' in the lead-up to opting out. The Northern General is due to opt out on 1 April 1991.

One striking nurse said that the strike would "remind people they will be next". The shift changes are the tip of the iceberg. Opting out is the real problem.

NUPE have said they will go through official negotiating channels first.

RCN are not supporting the action.

Town hall battles

Greenwich

The Greenwich housing dispute has spread with 100 NALGO members in 'hey' sections joining the strike. The strike has escalated following the Council's decision to discipline 9 strikers. The disciplinary action has included final written warnings.

In response to this management attempt to break the union, NALGO rightly pulled more sections out on strike.

NALGO has disrupted Council committee meetings to draw attention to the Council's union bashing.

The official NALGO strike is nearly 5 months old. The original issue which sparked the strike was a pay dispute over the poll tax collection. In July the district Whitley Council ruled in

favour of NALGO's regrading claim.

Since July the Council have refused to settle. They turned the dispute into an anti-union lockout.

Now the 174 original strikers have been joined by another 100 strikers. This is a clear message to the Greenwich Council — drop the victimisations, pay the regrading claim.

If the Council maintains their intransigent stance further escalation of the strike will be necessary.

Kirklees

Housing benefits workers in Kirklees have won their strike. Kirklees Council conceded to their regrading claim for extra duties caused by the poll tax.

WHAT'S ON

Tuesday 2nd
Workers Liberty
"Why we need socialism"
Speaker: Mark Sandell
Sheffield University, lunchtime

Wednesday 3rd
* Campaign Against War in the Gulf
Nottingham Poly, lunchtime
* Workers Liberty meeting
"End the Ban on Socialist Organiser"
Newcastle Poly, 3.00

Thursday 4th
* Left Unity:
"Fight the Poll Tax"
Steve Mitchell,
Staffs Poly, lunchtime
* Campaign Against War in the Gulf
Sheffield Poly, lunchtime
* "End the Ban!"
Tom Rigby
Kent University, 6.00

Saturday 6th
* Demonstrate Against War in the Gulf
Assemble 11 Kings Stables Rd

March to US Consulate
Edinburgh
* Demonstrate Against War in the Gulf
Assemble 2.00 All Saints
Manchester
Called by Manchester CAWG

In the future
* Saturday 20 October
Poll Tax March reaches London
* Wednesday 24 October
"Poll Tax: Don't Pay Don't Collect?" Student demonstration
Assemble 12.00 Woodhouse Moor
Leeds
Details from West Yorks Area NUS
Convenor, Mike Fenwick, 0532-452312
* Saturday 27 and Sunday 28
October
Labour Party Socialists Conference
Sheffield

* Saturday 3 November
Campaign Against War in the Gulf
Labour Movement Conference
London
* Saturday 17 and Sunday 18
November
Socialist Movement Conference
Manchester

* Saturday 23 November
Anti-Gulf War National Demonstration
London

1917

How the workers made a revolution



A Socialist Organiser special 60 pence

What really happened in 1917

60 pence plus 24 pence p&p
from PO Box 823, London
SE15 4NA



By Claire Standing and Paul Hampton

Hull Trades Council has set an example with its solidarity work with the workers involved in the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee dispute.

The Trades Council Disputes Committee has been co-ordinating activity through its contacts in local trade union branches and Labour Party wards, setting up meetings, arranging speakers and raising money throughout Humber.

On Thursday 20 September two OILC members, Mike Gibbons and Willi Stephenson were in Hull and reported on the latest developments.

Mike said: "I've been on the rigs since 1981, but was run off for two years early on for trade union activity."

"I was on the shop stewards committee on the 'Ten Hook' rig, and a founder of OILC in 1988. In April this year I was victimised and sacked again, but took the case to the Industrial Tribunal and won it."

"Then I was sacked again in August before the current round of action began".

Willi explained: "I got involved with the OILC after talking to Ronnie McDonald and was elected last year as safety rep for the Brent Charlie and the Safe Gothia."

"Though I was due back on shore on 3 August, I stayed for 24 days until our solicitors advised us to stop the sit-in after Shell took us to the High Court. Despite the intimidation — ranging from threat of the SBS to cutting food to one meal a day — morale was kept up by our Entertainments Committee and by singing the Beatle's 'Help'."

"Some of the big companies are using young lads on YTS, to cut corners on pay and safety. They've even docked the £400 cost of their survival training from their

Why the oil workers fight for the union

"Last week a young bloke of 20 had his head ripped from his body by a 60 foot drill. Half an hour after his death a tany message went out calling for people to go back to work as normal."

wages.

"Last week, a young bloke of 20 on the North West Hutton had his head ripped from his body by a 60 foot drill. Half an hour after his death, a tany message went out calling for people to go back to work as normal."

Willi also explained the

lengths Texaco went to suppress a study by Aberdeen University which found the average offshore worker to be a 'sensitive, opera and ballet loving type' in contrast to the 'macho' image often presented. That survey and others have revealed the extent of stress suffered by off-

shore workers on a two weeks on/two weeks off shift pattern.

Solidarity is vital in this dispute. Already trade unionists from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Holland have pledged their full support for the OILC. The conditions for Scandinavian workers are far better than on British rigs. The OILC Women's Support Groups have been involved in a series of occupations, sit-ins and lobbies of the major oil companies and they have also been responsible for raising money for the hardship fund.

Contact OILC (Hull) 0482 449822; (Aberdeen) 0224 210118; OILC Women's Support 041 221 2309.

TUC lets down oil workers

'They're just fat cats'

Eugene Rutherford, secretary of the Liverpool Branch of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee spoke to Socialist Organiser.

Probably four thousand men have now been sacked in the North Sea. They have got to be reinstated before we go anywhere.

We are going for basic trade union rights offshore.

We want union recognition, and the Health and Safety Act implemented.

We came to the TUC Congress to lobby the unions and make them aware. We're going to be their conscience.

The response so far has been pretty poor. They don't want to look at us. They just walk past like we're not here. All I see is fat cats with briefcases. It's annoying me.

The TUC is a big club, very well run, but not for the workers. I'm no radical, but this is sickening me. You see them all at parties, drinking



competitions, standing at the bar, and they look at you as if you're a turd. They're here with their money, but whose money is it? It's the members' money. That's what they're forgetting here.

I think we're on a winner. If Ronnie Macdonald gets no support from the unions to make the strike official, we'll just carry on and do our own thing. We're going to step up the action certainly.

Ronnie Macdonald has done a very good job up to now; and if he goes wrong we'll go away on our own.

United teachers pay campaign

By Liam Conway

On Saturday 15 September, over 50 teachers from some 30 local NUT branches met in Camden Town Hall to discuss the teacher's pay campaign.

The Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union and the Socialist Teacher's Alliance found themselves in wide agreement. How can the left best mobilise the members into action? This was our subject and it was for once, handled without disruptive cries of 'sell-out' or any suggestion of caution.

Indeed it was CDFU members who argued most strongly for maintaining a straight 'flat-rate' claim, as against the Executive's 'flat-rate percentage mix'. Apart from SO teachers, their closest allies in this were the

Socialist Workers' Party, their long-time would-be executioners.

The left-right division on the issue was not along CDFU/STA lines. The most significant aspect of the conference, was the high level of left unity achieved in preparation for the special conference on salaries in November.

The conference was proof perfect that faced with a real battle, the left can settle their minor differences.

And the lesson of the Camden conference? Simply that there should be more such conferences in future to prepare for other struggles such as the defence of jobs and conditions.

Maybe through such open debate and constructive settlement of disagreements the STA and CDFU will come to understand that what unites them is of far greater importance than what divides them.

"The problem is the laws"

Strikers at Hewitts Industrial Ceramics Factory, Stoke on Trent, spoke to SO

The strike is now in its ninth week. Our wage rises are nationally agreed between the pottery employers' federation and the trade unions. When this round of pay rises came up, Hewitts announced that they were pulling out of the Federation.

Instead of the national agreement of 9% rise on basic pay and 9% on bonuses, Hewitts have given only 3% on basic and nothing on bonuses.

When we refused that, we were told it wasn't up for negotiation. We'd either accept that or we'd get nothing.

We've gone through all the proper channels in order to strike. We've had secret ballots; but it hasn't made a blind bit of difference. We were sacked in the second week into the dispute.

The union is talking to ACAS but the management just don't want to know.

We've had a lot of support from the T&G. All Hewitts drivers are members of the T&G, and they refused to cross the picket line. They were sacked.

The union's doing its best but the problem is that Thatcher's union laws have practically made the trade union movement ineffective.

Other support has been in the form of collections. We have received a lot of public support and a lot of food. Jack Ashley, who's the MP for Stoke South, has been down to see us and has given us his support, but we've yet to see Mark Fisher, MP for Stoke Central, show his face.

There are about 100 scabs. That's less than half the workforce. They can't afford to keep it at that level forever.

We're determined to stick this out until we've got our jobs back or the place is closed down.

Stop the CPSA/NUCPS merger!

By Steve Battlemuch

Last Saturday, 22 September, CPSA activists met in Birmingham to plan the cam-

aign to stop the merger between the two civil service unions CPSA and NUCPS.

The ballot starts on 15 October and runs to 2 November. The 'Stop the Merger Campaign' has produced thousands of leaflets and posters outlining the reasons why the merger should be stopped and these have been mailed to every CPSA branch.

Plans have been laid to send speakers to meetings and to leaflet all the big civil service workplaces during the balloting period.

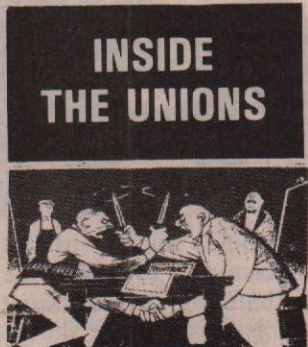
The influx of management grades (NUCPS members) into the CPSA (which organises the clerical grades in the civil service) would create severe problems for a union where the majority of disputes are about local management decisions ie against NUCPS members.

More information, leaflets, requests for speakers etc can be obtained from Steve Battlemuch, Convenor STMC, 191 Burford Rd, Forest Fields, Nottingham, NE7 6AY. Tel: 0602 705788.

Happy days again, at the 'Jolly Fitter'

I have just met some happy car workers. They were happy for a number of reasons, not least because it's the industrial fortnight and also because they'd had a few pints. But most of all, they were happy because at long last things seem to be going their way.

For many years, car workers (or, at least, shop stewards like these fellows) have been glum; redundancies, closures and victimisations have all taken their toll of a once proud and confident shop-floor organisation. The *Marxism Today* crowd



By Sleeper

with their fancy theories about 'Post Fordism' and such-like didn't help. Even dinosaurs have feelings.

But now the feeling is that the worst is behind them —

indeed car workers are once again being seen as the vanguard of working class industrial militancy.

With most commentators (and the CBI) now talking about economic recession as a matter of plain fact and even the pathetic John Major admitting to the likelihood of 'months of low or zero growth' (what's the difference between that and a recession?) it might be thought that the prospects for industrial muscle-flexing were not too bright just at the moment.

In fact, the combination of rising inflation (higher now at

10.6% than when the Tories took over in 1979) a series of recent victories over pay and hours in engineering and the general sense that the government is on the ropes, is all going towards creating a renewed spirit of confidence and combativity on the shop-floor. And this time round, rising unemployment is not a significant factor in weakening the union's hand if only because it is more than offset by the continuing 'skill shortage' in engineering and the motor industry and, anyway, in most plants 'manning levels' have already been cut to the bone. Pay negotiations are also coming up for workers at Jaguar (who will certainly want at least parity

with Fords, since they are now part of the same company), Rover, Peugeot-Talbot and Nissan.

The Rover unions, led by the TGWU's Jack Adams, seem likely to break with tradition and name a figure for their claim (usually, the negotiators just talk about a 'substantial' increase, which can mean anything): it will be at least 12.5%. Adams recently said, "we're not asking for the earth but we will be seeking inflation plus".

Which is why my companions looked so happy as we downed a few pints in a pub called "The Jolly Fitter".

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Campaign against war in the Gulf

By Mark Sandell

Last week I spoke on behalf of CAWG at a 270-strong anti-war meeting organised by Bristol West Labour Party. The meeting was addressed by

local MP Dawn Primorolo, Jeremy Corbyn MP and representatives of the PLO and CARDRI, the pro-democracy in Iraq campaign.

This type of meeting and the anti-war campaign being run in Bristol is

a model for other labour movements. Campaigning Labour parties can make a really big impact by taking clear anti-Gulf war stands and going out into the labour movement and community — advancing the case against war.

CAWG Labour movement conference, Central London, Saturday 3 November. Get your organisation to send a delegation.

By John O'Mahony

The Labour Party leaders banned *Socialist Organiser* last July. Now, within weeks, an expanded *Socialist Organiser* is relaunched!

This is our answer to the witch finders and book burners of Labour's NEC. We are still here.

We pledge ourselves to continue the fight for a socialist labour movement.

Neil Kinnock and his friends can act and talk like the docile understudies of the Tories which they are, but we won't go along with them. We will never let them silence the voice of socialism.

We will fight for a Labour victory in the upcoming General Election. But a Labour victory can be only a beginning. Of course, the Tories need to be defeated, and driven from office. But we want more than that. We want to defeat the Tories, and we also want to defeat and destroy the capitalist system they represent and defend.

By contrast, Neil Kinnock and his friends do sincerely want to defeat the Tories and replace them in office. But in office they themselves will fight to cherish and defend all the essential things the Tories stand for — capitalism with its markets and wage slavery and even its arms industry. Kinnock and company intend to keep the great bulk of the wretched anti-

You can't silence socialism!

union laws the Tories have put on the statute books over the last 10 years.

We want something better than this. We think the working class is entitled to something better than this from Labour and will continue to fight for it.

Socialist Organiser remains in the Labour Party, still fighting for the socialism we have always fought for.

The Labour Party is not the

property of the Kinnock clique, nor the property of the demoralised trade union leaders who act as Kinnock's praetorian guard.

Socialist Organiser is not going to go away and leave the Labour Party to these people.

Mr Kinnock our fight with you isn't over. It's only beginning!

That is the message *SO* sends to the Labour Party leaders.



Benn

from front page

We had a vote. The Front Bench all went with the government, but among Labour back benchers only 71 voted with the government and 74 — 51% — either abstained, voted against or were absent.

What problem would the war solve? Can you imagine the world after the war? After the US flag has been placed in Baghdad, and they have found another American representative to run Iraq and got the Emir back — who has never been elected — what problems does that solve?

At this Conference we have an opportunity to do something we can't often do at Labour Party Conference — and that is to influence the course of world events and make it no longer possible for Thatcher to claim united support, so the whole alliance for war will start to crumble.

(Tony Benn was speaking at Labour Party Conference)

In next week's SO

Peter Tatchell:

A new strategy for Lesbian & Gay Equality

Liz Phillipson

Reports from Algeria on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism

Labour Conference in review

Satan in Rochdale?

Liz Millward examines the issues

The Rochdale 'satanist child abuse' affair is both bizarre and frightening. The press were informed that a series of 'satanic' or 'ritual' abuses of children had been uncovered. The children had been removed from their homes and the police called to investigate the allegations.

At first, the press gave the authority favourable publicity (even if the trash papers milked the story's titillation value). But within hours Cleveland-style parents-rights campaigns were underway, and soon other questions were being asked about the role of the NSPCC and whether the whole affair was the result of social workers' hysteria.

Similar cases have recently been investigated in Manchester and Nottingham. The children were kept in

care for months, and the police investigated the alleged abusers with a view to prosecution. Yet no evidence was found of 'ritual' or 'satanic' abuse. It has been alleged by the 'quality' press that incidents of 'satanic abuse' following the issuing (by the NSPCC) of 'satanism indicators' to the investigating social workers, and that the whole ideas has been imported (via seminars and literature) from American Christian fundamentalist hysterics.

The rights and wrongs of the cases and whether abuse (ritual or not) has taken place will not be settled until 'sometime in 1991'. Some of the children have been returned home. The majority are still in care after 3 months and will stay there until their 'wardship' is settled in court.

Their parents have to convince the court that they are innocent of abusing their children — whether they are prosecuted by the police or not. Police prosecutions are not imminent, and do not seem likely (according to available information) but the parents have already been presumed guilty either of ritual abuse or conniving at

it. Essentially they have been denied any form of 'due process' and have been 'punished' before even being charged.

The children are victims in every sense. They have been removed from home and put in a strange environment, and examined and questioned by strangers. By the time of the wardship hearings they will have been away from family and friends for almost a year.

And of course children's homes have been found to have abusers on the staff in several areas, so the children are not even free from the threat of abuse. Violence and bullying are not unknown in such places either.

None of this is an argument for not investigating child abuse, however, far-fetched specific allegations, may seem to those not involved. There are already far too many vested interests who would like to see the whole issue covered up and forgotten (except where non-white, working class families are involved).

Investigations into the horrors of child abuse attack the basis of the family where children are seen as the chattles of their parents.

Traditional 'values' ie oppressive power-relations are threatened by such investigations — and thus the whole myth on which society is built.

Investigations into child abuse must continue to take place and social services departments must continue to have the power to apply for 'place of safety' and 'care' orders to the courts. But 9 months is far, far too long a time to keep everyone in limbo.

In the Rochdale cases there will be no resolution for another six months. For six months either abusers will be walking the streets or totally innocent people will be victimised. For six months good social work and medical professionals will find their work hampered by the revolting media circus. Bad professionals will remain in place. And the children?

For no other reason than the welfare of the children concerned, these cases must be settled quickly. Britain lurches from scandal to scandal in child abuse cases, and I for one, have no certainty that the children are not harmed still further by every headline.

Why we need the Organiser

WHETTON'S WEEK



A miner's diary

I would appeal to all comrades to oppose the banning of *Socialist Organiser*. People should think about what has happened in the past, and what it bodes for the future.

They started off with *Militant*, then they picked out individuals. And now it's *SO*. The question that's got to be on everybody's lips is:

who's next? In a party that's supposedly committed to socialism, it's a tragedy that we have to spend time and effort investigating people and expelling them.

When the working class is having its nose rubbed in it by the Tories, if there is a central message it should be: elect a Labour government! But though many people want Thatcher out, wanting Thatcher out isn't the same as wanting Kinnock in. A socialist programme laid out by a committed party would encourage people to vote in a positive way.

I've no doubt a lot of comrades are getting a bit down-in-the-mouth. But I'd urge people not to be. As working class militants have said in the past, 'don't mourn, organise!' That's got to be the central message going out to comrades. It's no good shaking your head and walking away. That would satisfy the right wing, but it wouldn't do a fight for a socialist labour movement any good.

We need to organise. A newspaper like *Socialist Organiser* is the ideal weapon for this.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM.