

# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

*It will be socialism or barbarism!*

Inside this week

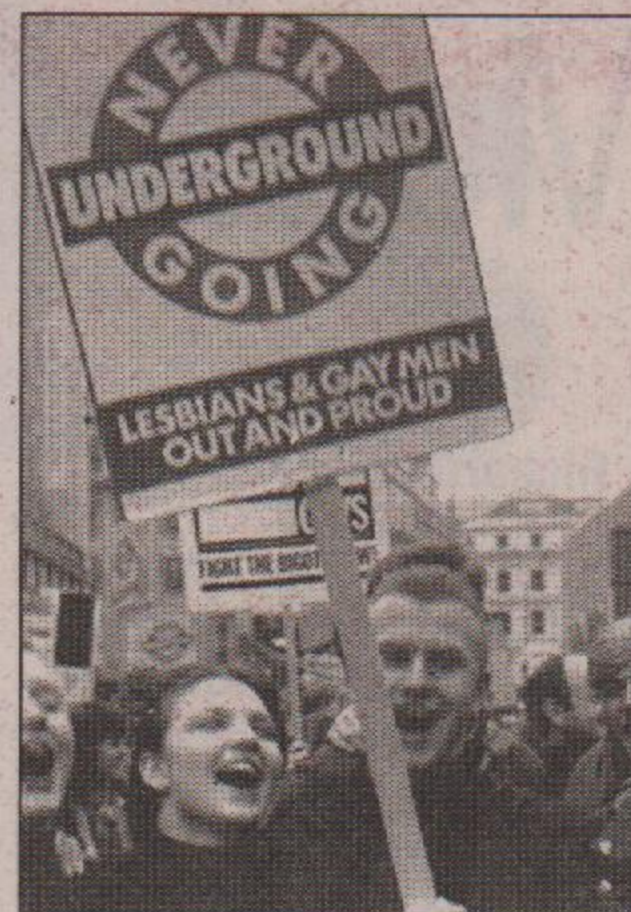


Ireland: what's the answer? • page 3

Youth rights and sex • page 7

'No platform' is not a principle

• page 5



# Stop rail



# sell-off

# madness!

By a railworker

**P**RIVATISATION of the railways will wreck the railway system. The Tories are locked into their dogmas. In the mid-1980s they privatised companies that could generate profit, and did it during years of relative boom. Railways make a profit nowhere in the world, and certainly not during a recession. But everywhere they are regarded as socially necessary.

The Tories do not even pretend that privatisation will make a profit. They are not floating shares in British Rail plc. No-one would buy them, because they could not

expect the usual double-your-money sale the next day.

According to latest estimates, with all the extra bureaucracy - managers', accountants', and lawyers' jobs - privatisation will make the railways cost an extra £500 million.

The bureaucracy is necessary to regulate relations between the companies that will run the railways after April 1994. Instead of one British Rail, there will be 14 Infrastructure Service companies, 22 Train Operating companies, three train and rolling-stock leasing companies, plus Railtrack, British Rail Telecom, and so on.

The Tories promise that through-ticketing and rail cards will remain, but the promise will be impossible to keep. Franchises for train operating companies will run for between five and ten years, but, with the scale of investment necessary to run a railway system needing 20 to 25 years to get a return, no train operating company will invest. The present run-down railway system will get worse.

Continued on page 2

Strikes can stop Tories wrecking public services

# March on 20 November to save the NHS!

By Richard Bayley

THE TUC's London demonstration on 20 November, in defence of the NHS, should be a rallying point for all trade unionists and labour movement activists. Titled "Enough is enough" it can serve as a focus to build support for those in the front line of defending the NHS, such as the workers at University College Hospital,

London who occupied against the threat of closure.

Demonstrations alone will not be enough to save the NHS. Only a government pledged to replace the Tories' missing millions, and to dismantle their health "market", can do that.

In the short term, strikes and occupations will be needed to defend jobs, services and resources.

Nonetheless, a demonstration is necessary and the

defence of the NHS is an issue that working class people have consistently rallied to. Built properly it could rival last October's marches in support of the miners.

Unfortunately that looks unlikely. Originally planned as a UNISON Day of Action. Then the TUC offered to organise it. So far, publicity has been scant and very uninspiring. The TUC has become used to "going through the motions" on the

NHS in the last few years, with the main protest being the sight of Norman Willis cutting a birthday cake, surrounded by Claire Rayner and assorted "soap" stars!

Serious activists must build the protest both inside and outside the NHS, getting a mass of trade union and Labour Party banners on the march. In the absence of TUC publicity trade union branches should produce their own.

## NHS Emergency Day Enough is Enough 20 November

Called by UNISON

Assemble: 11 am, Jubilee Gardens,  
Belvedere Road, London SE1. Nearest tube:  
Waterloo

March 12 noon. Rally: Trafalgar Square

## Stop rail sell off madness!

From front page

Not surprisingly, not one person has yet come forward to take on a franchise, and, despite occasional rumours, there are no management buy-outs on the horizon either.

The real prize for the Tories is the Pension Fund. There is £8.5 billion in the fund, and the government wants half, or over £4 billion - a sum of money that Maxwell could only dream about.

Meanwhile BR bosses send letters to railworkers, always ending with the message that whatever we think about privatisation we should all pull together and make it work for the good of the railways.

And there lies the key. All of this plan rests and relies on workers cooperating. If we don't, it goes down the pan.

Rail privatisation is massively unpopular. The government is massively discredited. It is clear that this privatisation is not "people's capitalism"; it is government plunder. It relies on workers to keep the trains running while accepting wage cuts and worse conditions, as well as job losses, as the only way to cut costs and maybe, perhaps, somewhere generating a little profit.

Railworkers are bitter and angry — and becoming apathetic and cynical. With a lead, the bitterness could instead be channelled into action to defeat privatisation. Even if such action broke the Tory anti-union laws, it would be popular and it could win.

The responsibility to provide that lead rests with the three main railway unions. It is not enough to concentrate on parliament. They should rally their members to fight back now to defend our conditions and jobs and defeat privatisation.

Miles Barter from the National Union of Journalists, and a speaker from Liberty (formerly NCCL), joined a protest against the TV and radio ban on Sinn Fein in Birmingham on 19 October. Photo: Mark Salmon. See also "Press Gang", page 6



## TGWU district backs fight against Labour expulsions

By Gail Cameron

IN RESPONSE to the suspension of six Wallasey Labour Party activists, the Wirral District Committee of the Transport and General Workers' Union have launched a campaign for democracy in the Labour Party.

A report, to be distributed throughout the local labour movement, states:

"The reason for the suspension in Wallasey can be traced back to the defeat of Birkenhead MP Frank Field by Paul Davies in the 1989 reselection contest.

Following his defeat, Field submitted the now infamous dossier which, in addition to some unsavoury tittle-tattle, demanded a re-run and that action be taken against the neighbouring Wallasey Constituency Labour Party

which was likely to select Lol Duffy as its candidate against the wishes of Field.

Birkenhead Constituency was suspended and its officers debarred from office simply because that CLP had the temerity to de-select Frank Field...

Wallasey Constituency has now been suspended following allegations that are remarkable similar to those in Frank Field's dossier. By coincidence these allegations only surfaced following the AGM at which... close supporters of the sitting MP, Angela Eagle, failed to be elected into office.

Paul Davies, who was rigorously investigated following the Birkenhead Selection Contest, has now been suspended from holding office in the Labour party and is being further investigated for doing his job as a union official.

At the last meeting, the committee called upon the union to suspend all payments to the party until the laws of natural justice are adhered to. The resolution is currently being considered by Region 6 executive. Supporters of Socialist Organiser have argued for the TGWU to campaign against the purge in Wallasey, but not to suspend payments.

Support for the campaign against the witch hunts is also growing in local parties. Many wards and the Wirral District Labour Party have condemned the actions of the NEC and have pledged support in fighting the suspension.

Send resolutions of protest to Labour's National Executive, with copies to Wallasey Socialist Campaign Group, c/o Flat 2, 51 Egremont Promenade, Merseyside L45 7PZ.

## What's behind England's World Cup fiasco?

By Steve Mitchell

ENGLAND'S football team are now virtually certain not to qualify for next year's World Cup in the USA.

Some socialists argue that supporting England is reactionary nationalism, and we should be glad that they are doing badly. I disagree. For most fans, watching England is a chance to see players they know playing against the best

in the world. Every fan's favourite topic of discussion is, who should play for England? All football fans think they could do a better job than Graham Taylor, and most probably could.

But the blame for England not qualifying must go higher than Taylor. One reason is that English clubs have to play far too many games each year. 42 League matches is the minimum, and the best players for the top clubs have many Cup and European matches on top

of that.

Little priority is given to the national team. Why? Money! The club chairmen refuse to reduce the number of domestic games because matches mean crowds, which mean cash.

Football needs a change of priority, away from lining the pockets of the rich capitalist chairmen and towards greater control and participation by the fans. After all, would fans sell TV rights to satellite companies, charge extortionate entrance fees, and make clubs

## "Everyone wants unity but the sects"



RACE AND CLASS

By Dion D'Silva

DARCUS Howe's Devil's Advocate Channel 4 TV programme on Wednesday 20 October was riveting viewing — this time for the wrong reasons.

Marc Wadsworth from the Anti-Racist Alliance bickered with Paul Holborow of the SWP/Anti-Nazi League. The audience, including many ARA and ANL people, cursed each other all the way through the show.

Holborow came out slightly less badly than Wadsworth — at least Holborow was flexible enough to apologise for his organisation's appalling treatment of the family of racist murder victim, Stephen Lawrence.

There was no such tactical retreat from Marc Wadsworth, who seethed with factional malice throughout. When Darcus Howe suggested he was being a "goody-two-shoes" — the respectable, police-friendly face of anti-racism — I thought hatred would make his head explode.

We should remember what terrible damage this squabbling is doing to anti-racist campaigning. For example: selling our "How to Beat the Racists" pamphlet on Brick Lane, East London, last Sunday I had three conversations with passers-by who complained about the divisions on the left. One couple who had seen Devil's Advocate were up-in-arms. Everyone wants unity but the sects.

IN THE WAKE of the killings of policeman Patrick Dunne and alleged "drug dealer" William Danso in London last week, the 'Yardie' scare is back with a vengeance.

Never mind that Danso was from Ghana and Yardies are Jamaican gangs, London's god awful *Evening Standard* is hot on the trail of the 'black mafia.'

The Yardie-scare first hit the tabloid press in the mid-'80s when press pressure helped to persuade Scotland Yard to set up a 'Yardie squad'. The squad was later disbanded.

The *Evening Standard* handles the issue in the following way: "Blacks in London are three times as likely to be murdered than whites... Blacks make up 6.8% of Londoners but, during the last three years, 20% of murder victims". The absurd, racist conclusion that the *Standard* draws from these figures is that this proves a lot of black people are involved in violent crime! *The Standard* is playing its part in the demonisation of black youth as drug-dealers and violent criminals.

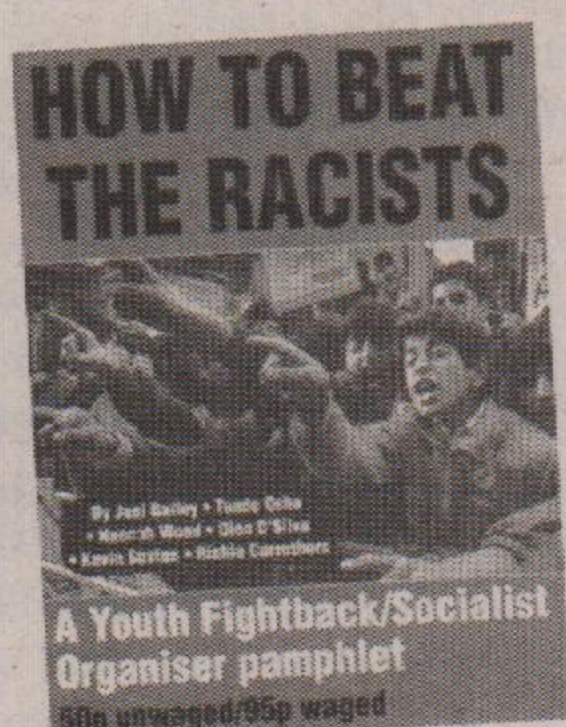
The actual conclusion we should draw from such figures is that black people are disproportionately likely to live in dangerous areas and are routinely subjected to racist violence. We should remember that black people are 30 times more likely to be attacked on the street than whites.

IN 1984 Kailash Kaur and her husband Jang Singh came to visit Britain. While they were here their home in Assam, India, was destroyed in the riots which followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

The family feared for their lives if they returned to India, but their application for asylum was refused. Jang Singh was deported in 1991 and Kailash Kaur was deported last year.

Now the Home Office is trying to deport their 21 year old daughter, who is the sole guardian of her six brothers and sisters, aged between 4 and 16.

A campaign has been launched to oppose this deportation and reunite the Kaur family. Contact Nottingham REC, 67 Lower Parliament Street, Nottingham.



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PO Box 823, London  
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# Ireland: what's the answer

**A**NOTHER ROUND of atrocities has begun in Northern Ireland. The call has been raised again for nationalists, and perhaps also Loyalists, to be "interned" — locked up without charge or trial.

But such repression will solve nothing. It can only make things worse.

There can be no way to persuade Northern Ireland's Catholic minority that they must remain trapped as a subordinate minority, cut off from the rest of the Irish people, within the British-constructed Northern Ireland state.

There can be no way to persuade Northern Ireland's Protestant majority that they should become a subordinate minority within a Catholic united Ireland, cut off from the rest of the British people. They consider themselves British, and no argument about geography, or the virtues of anti-imperialism, can persuade them otherwise.

The argument is not about religion. It is about two conflicting national or communal identities on overlapping territory.

Those are the basic political facts of Northern Ireland. No force short of full-scale war can change them. No amount of pretence by the British government that the problem is only one of police action to put down a few "terrorists" can obscure them.

What socialists should do now, above all, is insist on those basic facts.

Many people in the labour movement will hope for progress from the "Hume/Adams" initiative. At the end of September John Hume, leader of the moderate nationalists in Northern Ireland (the SDLP), and Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein, announced that they had produced joint political proposals which would be put to the Irish and British governments. The proposals have not yet been published, but they have won some support from the Irish government: the Taoiseach (prime minister), Albert Reynolds, described the Hume/Adams document as "setting out the broad principles on which all of us agree there could be a just and lasting peace process established and worked upon".

Adams has signalled a shift in the Provisionals' attitude to the Protestants, and talked about the possibility of an IRA ceasefire. "We have two different political realities on the island", he told the *Irish Times*. "Sinn Fein has been trying to take on board the concerns and fears — real or imaginary — of the Unionists... We must have an Ireland where the diversity of unionists and the rest of us can be accommodated".

Adams condemned the IRA bombing on 23 October, aimed at Loyalist



The IRA attack on the Shankill Road last Sunday has accelerated a new spiral of sectarian killings

leaders, which killed nine people without military connections including two children. "I don't think that what happened... can be excused".

Whether there is a real split between Adams and the IRA leaders — or whether they are conducting a calculated division of labour — we do not know. In any case, what Adams said is right: the bombing cannot be excused. Still less can the IRA's recently repeated threat to attack any workers employed by companies working for the British state forces in any way (builders, suppliers, and so on).

To see such IRA attacks as part of a revolutionary guerrilla war which can drive the British army out or quell the Loyalist murder gangs is to fall into illusions which the Provisionals themselves scarcely hold any longer. The IRA "offensive" (in reality, only a string of desperate but murderously destructive gestures) sends Protestant recruits to the Loyalist bigots. It is nowhere near driving the British army out; if by some quirk it did drive them out, without a political settlement, then the result would be bloody civil war and repartition; and the Provisionals know that, because they call for the British army to disarm the Protestants before quit-

ting.

The military campaign inevitably dominates and shapes everything the Provisionals do, nullifying everything progressive and hopeful in the politics of Sinn Fein/IRA supporters. Not because John Major demands it, and not because of any illusions that John Major will respond in a progressive way, but for the sake of authentic

*"Internment, or more British repression, will solve nothing."*

Irish Republican ideals, the IRA should call a ceasefire.

Talks between politicians from the different communities are better than bombs. Sinn Fein should be drawn into talks. In those respects the Hume/Adams initiative is welcome.

But we should have no illusions. Secret diplomacy is not going to unite

the Irish people!

And if Provisionals want a socialist or democratic policy, then they must drop their approach of trying to push Britain into forcing the Protestants into a united Ireland.

A similar approach is shared by many moderate nationalists — and it must be probable that it is built in to the Hume/Adams proposals — but it is utopian and counterproductive. With a much greater will for the task, and against smaller resistance, Britain has failed to force the Catholics to submit to the Northern Ireland state. It is not about to coerce the Protestants into a united Ireland; and it is not even desirable that it should try.

No democratic way out can be found by suppressing one community or another. It can be found only by compromise which gives each community the maximum of democratic guarantees compatible with the rights of the other. That means a federal united Ireland, with regional autonomy for the Protestant-majority area in the north-east, and free confederal links with Britain.

To state the way out is also to show that it will be difficult to reach it. The job of democratic, and therefore also of socialist, politics is not primarily to

unite the territory of Ireland, but first to unite the people of Ireland — and, in the first place, the mass of the people, the ordinary people, the working class.

It needs a working-class political movement uniting Protestant and Catholic workers. That movement has yet to be built.

Successive British governments, both Tory and Labour, claim that because of the terrible divisions and problems the British troops in Northern Ireland play a good role, "holding the ring", controlling the conflict. It is a lie.

By house-to-house searches, shoot-to-kill operations, and daily harassment, the British troops have deepened the embitterment of the Catholic community, year after year. Since it is the Catholic community which most resents the status quo, their aim has been to beat down the militants in that community and to force it into sullen submission.

The British troops have not helped the problem. They have made it worse. And for John Major to lecture the IRA on "blackmail" and "violence" is wretched hypocrisy, when Britain's policy in Ireland has relied for so long on sustained violence against the Catholic minority.

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

Karl Marx

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PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

Newsdesk 071-639 7965 (Latest reports Monday)

Editor: John O'Mahony

Sales Organiser: Jill Mountford

Published by: WL Publications Limited

Printed by: Eastway Offset (TU) London E9

Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser and are in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated  
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office

# Not with a bang, but a wimper?

**W**HAT A DIFFERENCE a year makes. Last October, President Heseltine announced the proposed closure of 31 pits with the loss of 'up to' 30,000 jobs and all hell broke loose. 250,000 people marched through central London in protest, Tory backbenchers threatened revolt and Arthur Scargill became a national hero overnight.

Last week, Energy Minister Tim Eggar announced that the future of all remaining deep mines (including the 19 not on last year's hit list) is up for grabs. Labour MPs made angry noises and one John Monks appeared on the television accusing the government of having deceived the nation. Apart from that, the silence has been deafening.

Maybe there will be a delayed reaction and Mr Eggar will get a taste of the treatment that brought on the President's heart attack.

But, realistically, it seems unlikely. The Tories are not fools; they have learned from their mistakes. As the Guardian commented: "This time the strategy is to push through the closures in dribs and drabs, concentrate announcements at a local rather than national level — thus pushing the programme as far away from Whitehall as possible — and to observe the industry's modified colliery review procedure."

All the signs are that the government will get away with it this time. More than 20,000 miners have left the industry since last October and those who remain are weary and disheartened after a year of uncertainty. The enhanced redundancy terms (worth on average around £26,000) which would have expired at the end of this year, have now been extended to 30 April — making it still more likely that miners at the threatened pits will vote for redundancy.

The best chance of a fight back seems to lie with the miners of Tower Colliery, South Wales, who have one of the finest branch leaderships in the British trade union movement.

So how have things ended up in this depressing state of affairs? Some people on the left have already blamed Scargill and the NUM leadership for not having called a strike a year ago. Realistically, however, a strike was not on the cards. After the experience of 1984/85, even the most militant NUM members were unwilling to take action without firm promises of support from the rest of the movement. All the indications were that a strike ballot at the end of last year would have been lost. Scargill was right to concentrate instead upon putting pressure on the TUC and, in particular, the RMT, for solidarity action. And he was right to nurture the 'public opinion' campaign, which was good for miners' morale and kept the pressure on the Labour and TUC leaderships. If Scargill did make a mistake it was in not pushing the idea of "work-in" pit occupations hard enough right at the start, last October.

But in the end the NUM leadership's basically correct tactics were not enough. 'Public opinion' alone does not win industrial battles. What was required was a political campaign, led by the TUC and the Labour leadership.

What we got was Richard Caborn MP and other weasels on the energy select committee giving official Labour support to Heseltine's fancy footwork.

In the end the slow death of the pits has shown us that you can't divorce industrial action and politics. Labour took the political heat off the Tories, and they took advantage. As every serious shop steward should know, once you accept the logic of management's argument you've lost the battle.

## INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

The Russian Party of Labour, led by anti-Stalinist socialists such as Boris Kagarlitsky, is to stand in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Russia on the list sponsored by the Socialist Party of the Working People — basically, a splinter from the old totalitarian Communist Party. Also in this electoral alliance will be the "Union-renaissance" group, which describes itself as "right of centre, based on Russian Orthodoxy." In our view this alliance is a big setback for independent working class politics in Russia. Here we print a cut-down version of a critical assessment of the approach of the Party of Labour, written by Mikhail Tsovma of the trade union information centre KAS-KOR.

**T**HE CREATION of the Russian Party of Labour (PT) last autumn attracted considerable attention from the left both in Russia and in the West.

From the very beginning the party was a rather strange mixture of activists from independent political organisations from unorthodox groups in Communist Party and from old trade unions.

Today we can state that the Russian labourist project was not successful. Two of the main reasons that led to its failure were, first, a complacent attitude towards the processes taking place in the old trade unions and, second, a focus on making political alliances and getting elected to the parliament.

One can only accept the idea that the former official trade unions represent the interests of labour with a big 'but' attached. Yes, it's true that the majority of workers have remained in the old trade unions, but only a very small portion of them consider these unions defenders of their interests. These trade unions traditionally had entirely different functions and such a sudden transformation is simply not possible, especially if we consider the great inertia of the bureaucratic apparatus and the fact that the trade union committees at the workplace have always been, and in the majority of cases still remain, the faithful servants of the administration.

The 'micro-revolutions' that took place in the leadership of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) and also in some city trade union federations, went unnoticed by the rank and file members of the unions. Even the leadership's best proposals have drowned in the bureau-

## INTERNATIONAL

Russian trade union activist discusses "Party of Labour"

# New workers' movement hits problems



Yeltsin with his Defence Minister Pavel Grachev

cratic swamp, not having reached the rank and file. Examples of this are easy to find everywhere — from the chronically unsuccessful autumn and spring 'trade union offensives' to the May Day demonstrations in which only trade union apparatchiks and people who are glad to spend two hours standing with a placard for a little bonus participate.

In the beginning the organisers of the PT did not have a definite programme calling for the old trade unions to become the foundation for a new party. In its programme the PT stated that it strives to politically support "trade unions and the workers' movement" in general. However, today the PT has become more and more the party of the "traditional unions".

The political association "Worker" from Perm, which is one of the most influential left groups in the independent workers' movement, declared that it will have to refuse participation in the PT because the leader of the local union federation, an odious nomenklatura worker and no friend

of the new workers' movement, actively supported the PT project.

The majority of the new trade unions that emerged after the miners' strikes of 1989 suffer from the same afflictions as the old unions although there are some exceptions. Still that doesn't make the old unions a "positive part of society". Even now there is little difference between the old and the new unions, and the difference is growing even smaller. Now unfortunately we can only say that both kinds of union are equally bad.

In a situation in which the politically active part of society is strictly polarised into those who support the democrats and those who want the communists back, the Party of Labour by itself can hardly gain any strong support in the coming parliamentary elections, even if supported by the unions. That's why the labourists have to ask themselves who can be their ally, some sort of 'big brother', to help them get some seats in the parliament.

The events at the end of the last year demonstrated that

the Party of Labour is going to take active steps towards a rapprochement with the moderate wing of the communists.

The PT's focus on the old trade unions and excessive readiness to cooperate with the parties which emerged from the ruins of the CPSU are hardly the only points that deserve criticism. In spite of all the declarations that the PT is looking forward to women's, ecological and other popular initiatives, the main field of activity for it is obviously parliamentary representation. Political struggle, in spite of what they say, is seen primarily as a parliamentary struggle.

There is a party that represents the labourers in the bodies of authority, and there are voters whom the party appeal to with "populist declarations". Maybe this will help to make Yeltsin's course not so hard, but surely to solve the problems that the people in Russia face today, the people should go the other way, starting with a struggle for unions that will really defend their interests.

Abridged from *Russian Labour Review*.

## South African union leaders to stand as ANC candidates

### WORLD OUTLOOK

**T**WENTY leading South African trade unionists are set to stand as candidates for the African National Congress in next April's elections.

Among the twenty is former leftist and treason trialist Moses Mayekiso, who is now in the leadership of the South African Communist Party.

The political basis on which these "workers" candidates will be standing is a statement known as the "Reconstruction and Development Programme"

(RDP).

Although the RDP promises jobs and homes for all, through a crash programme of public works, and the provision of running water and electricity in all the townships, these promises are not worth the paper they are printed on. The reason for this is simple: the RDP includes a get-out clause for any African National Congress national party coalition: "Macro-economic stability is vital to the success of our programme." In other words: "You can have as much change as you want just as

long as it does not upset the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the big banks!"

Even more ominously, the COSATU leadership have said that they want their candidates to be given responsibility for labour, trade and industry, mines and the nationalised industries in a new government.

It looks like the leadership of COSATU are preparing to use the feelings of loyalty that many black workers have towards their unions as a way of selling to them policies that will do little to change their lives.

## 'NO PLATFORM'



The fight against fascism should not be sidelined into single-combat battles between fascists and the hard left

# "No platform" is not a principle

By Chris Reynolds

**T**HE BASIC Marxist policy against fascism is class mobilisation for socialism as the answer to the rise of capitalism which breeds fascism; and a workers' united front for physical self-defence.

Marxists like Leon Trotsky argued against any support for bourgeois state bans on fascists on the grounds that they would be ineffective and inevitably, by increasing the repressive powers of the bourgeois state, facilitate blows by the state against the workers. Nevertheless, Trotsky argued for the fight against fascism to be carried out in a civil-war spirit, with no tenderness for any democratic rights of the fascists.

Why? In more or less normal bourgeois-democratic politics, working-class socialists have a framework to operate mostly through peaceful agitation. Even in the best bourgeois democracy we usually need a constant struggle to stop our own democratic rights being nibbled away, but we have no tactical interest in attacking the democratic rights of other forces within the bourgeois democracy. Things would be different in a revolutionary civil war — but small revolutionary groups have no interest in launching a premature civil war against the capitalist state.

Fascism is different: it grows from the start by violent, unlawful attacks on its opponents and scapegoats. And its forces are irregular, plebeian bands: they can be defeated by the working-class movement short of a full-scale civil war against the state.

The classic Marxist discussions are focused on defending working-class buildings, meetings, demonstrations, newspapers etc. against fascist bands: they relate to situations where the fascists are so strong that 'no platform' is senseless. But their spirit is clearly not one of a purely defensive stance or waiting for the fascists to strike the first blow. Trotsky talks about workers' defence guards going

out to smash fascist meetings (though he calls them "defence guards", not "attack guards"!)

This is the rational idea behind the slogan 'no platform for fascists': fascism is a movement of immediate civil war against the left, against its scapegoats, and against the working class, and war has to be conducted by warlike methods. But 'no platform' is not a principle. It is a tactic.

It is one possible tactic — war knows other tactics than the offensive — and not a principle. To make it appear as a principle is stupid because then we seem not to be striking blows in a war for democratic rights against the fascists, but to be starting our own war against democratic rights.

'No platform for racists' has even more problems as a slogan.

Violent racist groups should be fought according to the laws of war, even if they are not strictly fascists. But racism is a widespread ideology. Any working-class militant knows that you have to argue with racists, not just proclaim that they are beyond the pale. Clearly, we argue in such a way as to make clear that we do not see racism as a normal difference of opinion; and we supplement argument by actions (e.g. various forms of autonomous black organisation.) All that is different from 'no platform'. So also is a rule in a Labour Party or trade union barring racist comments in meetings different from 'no platform'.

There is a grey area, of course. There is a grey area, too, between general racist (or other reactionary) ideas at one end of the spectrum, and direct incitement to violence at the other. But there is a distinction.

And the distinction is important. For once having declared 'no platform for racists' on the grounds that racist ideas are repulsive, offensive, lead ulti-

mately to violence, etc., then why not 'no platform for sexists', 'no platform for Zionists', 'no works by DH Lawrence in public libraries'...

At one National Union of Students conference in 1986 we had one faction of leftists wanting 'no platform for Zionists' and the conference enforcing 'no platform for idiot anti-Zionists' by banning a badge which compared Zionism to fascism!

As socialists we are against this wholesale "no-platforming".

The bourgeoisie has a partial interest in free speech — within limits. The working class has a much more profound interest in free speech. Socialism means the defeat of entrenched

power by the mobilisation of long-downtrodden millions of people who at last dare to have thoughts and dreams other than those handed down by official society: thus it needs free debate. And free speech (real free speech, not the limited free speech available in a society where

a wealthy minority monopolises the media, education, leisure...) is a vital part of the socialism we fight for.

The qualifications? We are not idealists. History proceeds through class struggle. The needs of the class struggle stand higher than any democratic principle; moreover, there is no God, no umpire standing above us, to impose democracy on the contending forces in class war.

But we do not want to make ourselves umpires or censors, limiting speech and thought to what we consider "politically correct".

American Trotskyists have opposed 'no platform for fascists'. Their arguments have shaded into outright pacifism in later years, but the original idea, going back to the early 1950s or late 1930s, had sense

as a tactical approach in the USA.

In a country where civil liberties ideology is strong, and anti-communism is at least as powerful as anti-fascism, to be seen going for the suppression of fascism can isolate the socialists, make them appear as anti-democratic, and open them to witch-hunts. Better take your stand on the right to self-defence and to counter-demonstrate.

In the 1930s, for example, the Trotskyists were influential in an organised workers' defence guard in Minneapolis. They never said they wanted to stop the fascists meeting or marching — only that they wanted to defend the labour movement. But the fact of the defence guard's existence led the local fascists — the 'Silver Shirts' — to declare that they were afraid to meet or march in Minneapolis.

Britain is different from the US. Nevertheless, in some versions at least, 'no platform for fascists' has been harmful.

It has led to a systematic downgrading of the task of cutting the social roots of fascism by a fight for socialism.

Appearing as a principle, it has often led to counterproductive confrontationism (the syndrome represented by 'Red Action' and other groups). Even the best anti-fascist demonstrations have usually been a matter of just the hard left turning up to do single combat with the fascists (or more likely the police). Trotsky emphasised that anti-fascist action must be based on the broad labour movement and not the revolutionary party alone.

By the way it has been posed, it has led straight into 'no platform for racists' in a counter-productive form e.g. attempts to stop racist academics like Hans Eysenck speaking (rather than lobbying and protesting when they speak).

Our basic policy is the defence of democracy, freedom and free speech — especially for the working class — and mass mobilisation for that defence. 'No platform for fascists' is at best one tactical conclusion from that.



## WHAT WE SAY

## We can't afford capitalism

IT'S "THE COUNTRY CAN'T AFFORD IT" time again. We never hear that complaint when luxury hotels are being built, flashy new cars are being launched, or company bosses are being given huge hand-outs.

What "we can't afford", supposedly, is even the present meagre levels of Health Service provision, social security benefits, and pensions.

The Tories are talking about cutting social security benefits in their November Budget, and abolishing the universal state pension over time.

Why shouldn't "the country" be able to afford these things? Despite the Tories' wrecking of industry, overall more wealth is being produced than twenty years ago, or thirty years ago. Technology advances. The same amount of labour can produce more goods and services. With the labour-force available, we should be able to "afford" more.

That is not how it works under capitalism. Although there is labour ready and available to provide the health services and the means for old people to live decent lives, the cost would bite into profits. And, under capitalism, the drive for profits decides. Over the last twenty or thirty years it has become more desperate and ruthless, as capitalist competition has become sharper world-wide.

The Tories say that more high-tech medicine means the cost of health services can rise limitlessly. And the population is getting older, so the cost of pensions will rise intolerably.

These arguments are smoke-screens. No doubt there will always be some new specialised high-tech medical treatments whose availability is limited, but there is not an unlimited demand for hip replacement operations, for example!

And the main reason for higher social security spending is higher unemployment and more "early retirement". Organise the economy rationally, with common ownership and social planning, to provide useful jobs for all, and then "the country" can certainly "afford" decent welfare services.

## Scrap the Child Support Act!

A FATHER HAS WON A COURT DECISION, on a technicality, to cut his child support payments from £473 a month to £120, and the Tory press is denouncing the Tories' Child Support Act.

They weren't so loud when the Act was being pushed through in 1991 (it came into force in April this year), and feminists and socialists were denouncing its effects for mothers.

The Act compels single mothers who are claiming Income Support to name the absent fathers of their children. When a mother complies and a father gets dunned by the Child Support Agency, she does not receive any of the maintenance paid: it is deducted from her benefits.

Many mothers do not want to comply, whether because the father was violent, or because they have friendly relations with the father and do not want to cause trouble, or for many other reasons. If they refuse, their benefit is docked by around £8.50 per week.

But the Tory press is not wrong. The Child Support Act penalises many absent fathers cruelly (and socialists pointed that out, too). High payments can leave them with not enough money to support children they are bringing up with new partners, or not enough money to visit their separated children often enough.

What both parents and children need is a decent society which provides good, cheap, accessible, public child-care; a fair tax and benefits system; economic security to remove the stress which breaks up many families; and support from friends, relatives and neighbours. In other words, the opposite of dog-eat-dog Tory Britain.

## Tabloids shocked about sex

"STUPID AND SHOCKING", SAYS THE *Daily Mirror* about proposals from the Family Planning Association for sex education from the age of four.

Little boys and girls as young as two years old are interested in the sexual differences in their bodies. Then they grow up in a society saturated by the commercial exploitation of sex.

Isn't it right that they should have their curiosity about sex answered as they grow up, rather than having sex kept as a mystery, to be mentioned only furtively?

But if things were done that way, then perhaps the *Mirror* and other tabloids would have to print some news, instead of filling their pages with endless sexual smut.

# 6 Terrible twins

**U**PROAR has greeted the news that American scientists have succeeded in creating two human embryos with the same genetic material. The workers of Air France would probably concur with this verdict, since the "socialist" chairperson of the company is, or rather was until his resignation after the workers won, one Bernard Attali. He had been charged with the task of driving down wages, sacking workers and dividing up the company in preparation for privatisation.

Bernard is the twin brother of that other well known French "socialist", Jacques Attali, who was head of the Bank of European Reconstruction until his resignation for spending more on the Bank's London offices than on economic aid for Eastern Europe, the Bank's supposed role.

If this genetic material were to be reproduced too many times the results could clearly be disastrous. These genetic engineers should be doing something useful — like trying to breed out the propensity for some self-serving bureaucrats to call themselves socialist.

**I**T CAN only be hoped that the workers at Euro Disney follow the French air workers' example. Disney plan to cut 9% of their work force, or 950 jobs. The sight of Mickey, Donald and assorted dwarves occupying the Enchanted Castle, or Dumbo on flying picket duty, would certainly improve the Disney workers' image. And all to the strains of "Hey ho, hey ho, it's off on strike we go..."

**O**UR non-gender-specific agony aunt/uncle feature this week would like to focus on the sad case of someone we'll only refer to as "Edward". He writes:

"My mum and dad have been giving me a terrible time recently, they want me to move out of the family house. They're not short of rooms now that the tourists have gone away, and it's in a really convenient central London location. They're kicking up a hell of a stink about me bringing my showbusiness chums back and some of the family silver getting a little tarnished — but they've cupboards full of the stuff they never use. I think they've never forgiven me for the time my friend Michael stayed over. He slept on a chaise-longue but no-one seems to believe me. They say if I get £96,000 I should be able to afford a place of my own, but after taxes and everything it ends up as, oh, £96,000. And I have to work very hard. Last week I had to go to a gala performance of *Phantom of the Opera* in Manchester. How simply ghastly can you get? Manchester, I mean. On top of that I had to go to four dinners and lunches and things and meet some foreigners. And all the time I had to smile and pretend to be glad to be there. Can you help?"

Certainly, Edward. Leaving home can be very difficult, especially when you're a 29 year-old pampered aristocrat.

## GRAFFITI

VIVELA  
REVOLUCION

By Cyclops

So grow up and get yourself a proper job, somewhere your true worth is valued, Australia or Cyprus perhaps.

**I**F THE British Royal family think they've been on the sharp end of a little media speculation recently they should take a leaf out of Empress Michiko of Japan's book. Having faced a barrage of press criticism she chose the morning of her 59th birthday to go into a dead faint for three hours, and having regained consciousness was unable to speak. The royal spin doctors have put this down to a bout of "great sadness" brought on by the vulgar hacks of Grub Street.

The British Royals have more critics to answer, so steps may have to be more drastic. May we suggest deep coma for Princes Philip and Andrew, and complete loss of the ability to say the word "Yah" for Fergie?

**E**VEN if for the wrong reasons, Boris Yeltsin has decided to do the right thing with Lenin's corpse and mausoleum. The guard of honour has been taken away and the doors shut to the public. Yeltsin plans to demolish the mausoleum built on Stalin's instructions. But what to do with the corpse? His widow insisted that Lenin wanted to be buried alongside his mother. Let's hope that Yeltsin does not accept the offer of \$609,000 from a German businessman who wants to take the mummy on a world tour. Lenin doesn't even have the option of turning in his grave.

**I**T SEEMS that the right wing of the Conservative Party are taking care in the community seriously, offering the behaviourally challenged senior government posts. Ex-Conservative MP Matthew Parris commented last week that "The Parliamentary (Conservative) Party does contain a sprinkling of proper rightists, but unfortunately they are all mad. Poor Mrs. Thatcher kept on trying to promote them but as often as she did they would go of the rails, prove incapable of handling their briefs, alienate their colleagues, get into trouble with boys or women or resign on some matter of principle".

Being surrounded with such a deranged bunch clearly had a bad effect on the Baroness Finchley herself. Parris continues: "Michael Portillo [has] regular lunches with Lady Thatcher [to] keep his right-wing credentials sweet. But I know Michael, and I feel he must know that she's barmy".

# Five years of silly censorship

## PRESS GANG

THE INDEPENDENT TODAY  
THE GUARDIAN  
SUNDAY PRESS

By Jim Denham

**I**N ANY other context it would be hilarious. A man appears on your television screen, speaking. You hear what he is saying, but you do not hear *him*. Instead, an actor's voice — complete with 'authentic' accent — speaks the words while the man's mouth opens and closes, slightly out of sync.

Of course it isn't hilarious at all because this is a news item about Northern Ireland and the man is Gerry Adams. The elaborate re-dubbing of the voice is the result of the Northern Ireland Notice, introduced almost exactly five years ago. Even at the time, no-one seemed quite sure what the purpose of this measure was. Officially, it was intended to ban the "direct reporting of expressions of support" for paramilitary organisations: Mrs Thatcher and her ministers talked grandly of the need to shut off the "oxygen of publicity" from "the terrorists".

Privately, few ministers or senior civil servants would defend the ban. Douglas Hurd, in particular, always seemed slightly bemused when asked to explain its logic (the best the then Home Secretary ever came up with was the need to protect viewers from the "shock" of

actually hearing someone like Gerry Adams justifying IRA violence).

The broadcasters themselves were, naturally, outraged and to a man and woman, condemned it as yet another example of Mrs Thatcher's innate hostility to free speech. But to a man and woman, they all complied. In fairness, they had little choice: the only penalty for a breach of the Northern Ireland Notice was (and is) the complete loss of the right to broadcast. The BBC stood to lose its charter and the ITV companies, their franchises.

Thus, the ridiculous specta-

cle of Gerry Adams opening and closing his mouth while an actor lip-synthes his voice. But does it really matter very much?

After all, we are still allowed to hear what people like Mr Adams have to say. Surely, the very meaninglessness of the ban means it is no real threat to civil liberty and freedom of information?

Maybe. Or maybe not. Tony Hall, head of BBC news and current affairs, writing in last Sunday's *Observer*, pointed out how in practice it *does* restrict viewers' understanding of the issues: Sheena McDonald had interviewed Adams for *On the*

*Record* and had pressed him as to how the 'peace proposals' he'd drawn up with John Hume could be expected to get off the ground as long as the IRA continued its military campaign: "Apparently, Adams sounded nervous in his replies to her questions. But because of the ban our viewers could not hear this. We had to use an actor to voice his comments... How can you judge the veracity or nuances of what someone is saying, other than by hearing for yourself?"

Hall added a further point that is equally important, if less obvious: "We ran the interview at length... but we did so in the knowledge that we were pushing the tolerance of our audience to the limit. It is hard to remain gripped by an interview for 12 minutes when all you can hear is an actor's voice".

We all need more, not less, information about Northern Ireland. Are the Hume/Adams proposals so much moonshine or a real cause for hope? Was the Belfast bombing proof of Gerry Adams' cynicism or an attempt by the militarists to sabotage him? Until this silly, undemocratic piece of censorship is removed, most of us are in no position to judge.

"We all need more, not less, information about Northern Ireland."

# Why I was banned for life

## WOMEN'S EYE



By Tracy McGuire

**I**N MAY I was banned for life from Manchester Metropolitan University Students' Union. The ban was a result of an incident in the union bar in which I was threatened, abused and pushed by a male member of the student union executive until I hit him back.

The right-wing led union executive decided to ban me for

life with 'no right' to appeal, and to take no action against Simon McKeowan, the man involved.

The executive followed no official procedures. There were no independent witnesses and no independent investigation.

A now right-wing led executive has upheld the decision, thrown out my appeal and ignored my allegations against McKeowan.

They even 'closed' an emergency union general meeting of over 200 people last Thursday 21 October because they knew that they were going to lose.

Now I have 'no right' to attend Union General Meetings, join the Labour

Club, women's group, or anti-racist/anti-fascist groups. I am allowed to use the welfare office, providing a security guard takes me there and brings me outside again!

"The allegations made against me were of violence. The real reason is that I am a socialist woman."

The allegations made against me were of violence. The real reason is that I am a socialist woman who disagrees politically with the right wing on the student union executive and is not afraid of speaking out.

The situation has been made even worse recently by an attempt by McKeowan to introduce 'trial by television'.

Simon is currently one of six students having their lives filmed by BBC2 for the programme, *The Living Soap*.

Last week Simon attempted to film the hearing the executive held on the incident and have it filmed on national TV. This was clearly no way to deal with an issue such as harassment.

Eventually, it was decided that the hearing would not be shown, but Simon was still filmed giving his version of events. The programme producer has given me a right to reply.

I do not condone this way of airing the issue on TV, but I was left with no choice. Initially the programme producers were asked not to show anything, but seeing as this is the only interesting thing to have happened to Simon all year they wouldn't let it pass.

Hopefully the programme will give a true account of the incident, and help ensure that my experiences are never repeated in Manchester or any other student union.

• *The Living Soap* is this Friday, 29 October, at 7.15pm on BBC2.

# An equal age of consent

By Paul, Manchester

**G**AY MEN can be legally addicted to smoking, risk their life in the army (provided that they're not 'out') and start drinking, all before they are old enough and 'responsible' enough to have sex with another man.

The age of consent — when we are legally allowed to have sex — is 16 for heterosexuals and 21 for gay men. The law doesn't even mention women having sex with women.

What should socialists argue? Firstly, we should press for an equal age of consent, as exists in many countries across the world. But should it be 16?

I don't think it should be a rigid number plucked out of the air. Peter Tatchell from the lesbian and gay campaigning group Outrage argues for a flexible age, depending on how old your partner is and whether the relationship is "exploitative" or not.

The important thing to remember is that the age of consent is only part of



Protest against Clause 28. Photo: Peter Walsh

the repression of everybody's sexuality that exist in laws and attitudes in our society. Getting an equal age of consent will be an important vic-

tory not just for lesbians, bisexuals and gay men, but the victory will be spoiled by the existence of Clause 28 (which stops schools promoting les-

bian and gay life as natural and acceptable), Operation Spanner, and all the heterosexism and homophobia in this society.

# Sex: our right to choose

By Alison, Sheffield

**Y**OUNG PEOPLE are forever being told that we're not old enough or responsible enough to make decisions about sex. If we're gay we're told we're not old enough until we're 21!

Generally we're not supposed to talk about sex, doctors are often hostile when we ask for information about contraception, and it's even up to our parents if we have sex education at school. What's it got to do with them? It's us who need the information!

The fact is that a lot of young people are having sex and enjoying it, and we talk about it at least 50% of the rest of the time! A repressive atmosphere only serves to make the talk and action less informed, and in times of HIV and AIDS more risky.

All the hush-hush has got nothing to do with our

safety. It's all about the way sexuality is controlled in our society. It's important for society to reinforce norms of behaviour, everyone in their place, having sex with one person they're in a steady relationship with. If people don't live like this, they're made to feel guilty and confused about their sexuality.

Young people are beginning to question these false values and assert their right to determine their own sexuality. That's led, for example, to women not only being more confident about what they can do but also thinking about what they want out of sex and knowing that they can demand that. These changes are good but I think they are limited in the ways they have affected the majority of people.

Sexual liberation is about much more than individual confidence and personal choices. Society does force women particularly into situations where

they can't say no, for example when they are economically dependent on men. Many of the 'No Means No' campaigns miss the importance of this, concentrating on information and confidence boosting for women rather than economic and social change.

For youth too, it's about gaining basic practical rights of independence.

All the Tory clap-trap about family values and good moral upbringing is about telling young people we haven't got any rights in society. We're treated not as individuals who can make our own decision but as property of our parents. It's a way of restricting our rights to work, to decent education, and to a say in what goes on in society.

To achieve sexual liberation and rights for individuals to make choices we also have to change society.

**YOUTH FIGHTBACK**

**Rebellion**

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

**Editor: Mark Sandell**

Phone: 071-639 7967 for details of our activity.

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

**Youth Fightback is...**

## Save our student unions!

# Tories couple fees plan with union-bashing

By Elaine Jones, NUS National Executive (personal capacity)

**S**IX HUNDRED graduates face court action because they have failed to keep up with repayments on their student loans. This is the first batch of court cases since government loans were introduced in 1990.

With graduate unemployment at an all-time high, the prospects of

starting your working life with a large debt and a County Court judgement against you are ever increasing. Frozen grants and no social security benefits mean that many students are working full-time, unsocial hours in very low-paid, non-unionised jobs whilst studying. It is estimated that 100,000 students this year are already experiencing serious financial hardship. This is mainly due to delays in Local Education Authorities admin-

istering grant cheques, but also a lot to do with low grants, high rents, the price of books, etc. Figures suggest that the average student has around £1,700 worth of debts. That may not seem much to MPs on £35,000, but to a student on £2,500 a year it's a hell of a lot.

Tory minister John Patten wants to introduce tuition fees ranging up to thousands of pounds a year for higher education students. He says it's a "moral question" — those who do not benefit from the university system should not be expected to contribute to it, and that students paying tuition fees will be better motivated. Tuition fees will certainly demotivate many school students. If they cannot afford the fees for university, working hard for "A" levels will seem pointless.

The moral question is whether education is a right or a privilege. If the government gets its way, higher education will once more become a privilege for the middle and upper classes. Students from working-class backgrounds will be excluded. Patten no

doubt thinks he's on to a winner here.

The National Union of Student (NUS) is rolling over and playing dead as the Tories plan to smash it and local student unions up. But student unions are the only organisations that can defend and organise students. A fightback against the government's attacks on student unions is the only way to defend ourselves against tuition fees. It should start now, whatever the NUS leaders say.

## How not to debate Israel

Steve, Manchester

**T**HE atmosphere was tense, the debate hostile and the ending both outrageous and farcical!

That was how one the student describes last week's first general meeting of the year at Manchester University student union.

There were two resolutions on Israel/Palestine. The Islamic society's amendment was passed, much to everyone's surprise, and, just before the vote on the substantive motion, the fire alarms were let off.

After everyone had evacuated the building, and a search had been made for the fire, people were filtering back in when the Executive closed the door and called a quorum count. Many people were locked out of the room, queuing on the stairs, trying to get in, when the Executive declared the meeting inquorate and closed it down.

This was a blatant abuse of student union democracy by the Executive and the Union of Jewish Students (UJS).

Although both motions up for discussion were (in my view) dishonest and subjective, students had the right to discuss and decide policy for themselves.

The response of the Islamic society has made things worse. They have laid all the blame on the UJS, in leaflets that are thinly disguised anti-semitic attacks.

Students and activists at the college should stand up for democratic and open debate. They should oppose any attempts to scapegoat people because of their religion or cultural beliefs and should hold the Executive accountable for the anti-democratic way in which they closed the meeting.

## Bigot of the week

**JOHN PATTEN**, Tory Education Secretary, is our bigot of the week. Patten is now drawing up plans to smash student unions and has cut the 'Section 11' government subsidy to specialist teachers who help children for whom English is a second language. He came out last week as a flag-waving jingoist.

With the British National Party on the rise, Patten has called for the Union Jack to be flown over every school. He wants to win support back from the Nazis.

John Patten can try to use the Union Jack as a comfort blanket if he likes. It won't stop teachers, students and youth fighting his continuing attacks on education.

## Save Our Student Unions

Lobby of Parliament  
23 November

Students will be lobbying MPs in Parliament over the government attacks on student unions and the subject of tuition fees. All students are urged to build for this event.

Contact Jill/Kev on 071-639 7967 for further details.

## "The class struggle quelled. It cannot



SO no.1 (October 1978) called for resistance to Nazis in Brick Lane; the latest pamphlet takes up the same issue; No.176 (April 1984) called for a general strike to beat the Tories.

"There is no way the last 15 years can be presented as a cheerful story for socialists. Yet we have learned, we have survived and we have expanded slowly... We prepare the future". Gerry Bates reviews 15 years of *Socialist Organiser*.

**S**OCIALIST ORGANISER is 15 years old! The first issue appeared in October 1978. The paper was published as a monthly for 15 months before it went fortnightly in 1980. Weekly publication began in July 1981. We have been weekly ever since, with occasional gaps imposed by poverty. We have brought out several special issues as pamphlets.

In those 15 years the world *Socialist Organiser* was set up to try to change has indeed changed. But it has not changed the way we wanted it to change. It has not got better. In most respects it has got considerably worse — especially for the working class and the labour movement.

Compare the front pages of our first issue and of the last, pamphlet issue. On that first front page we had to appeal for volunteers to go and defend the Bengali community in the Brick Lane area of East London — abandoned to their fate by the SWP-led Anti-Nazi-League, which declined to disrupt a planned rock festival in South London — from a planned fascist (National Front) march. Now racism and fascism are something like a mass movement in parts of western Europe.

But we never promised that things would improve steadily, getting a little better each day. We never believed that socialism would come by gradual step-by-step improvements in society.

The choice is not between cautious, unspectacular progress and wild revolutionary impatience. It is between socialism and barbarism! And we may well be pressed a lot nearer to barbarism before the labour movement is aroused and alarmed sufficiently to mobilise for socialism.

We have had 15 years mostly of defeats. Yet even defeats need not be fruitless. Most of the political lessons which the working class can and must learn in order to win socialism are lessons taught by defeats. Often only the hard experience of defeat can etch away complacency and vague reliance

on muddling through.

*Socialist Organiser* has tried to draw the lessons of the defeats — and to combine them with an undaunted will to resist.

In 1978 Britain still had a Labour government. It was staggering towards defeat in the 1979 election at the hands of Thatcher's radical Tories, but the labour movement was still immensely strong. The unions had over 12 million members.

The key ideas of the reformist labour movement, enshrined in the work of the post-1945 Labour government, were still dominant in Britain — the idea that people were entitled to a job, to full and free health care and to decent housing and conditions; the idea that the unions were entitled to use their industrial muscle; that social greed was bad, not good; that profit was not a god, to whom everything else had to be sacrificed; that ownership and control of key parts of the economy by the elected government were necessary. Such ideas which seem so radical now were the old consensus then.

Unemployment was about a million. If someone had told the people living in 1978 Britain that we would tolerate a figure of three million officially registered as unemployed over many years (and a government which blatantly fiddled the statistics to half-hide the fact that the real numbers of the unemployed is always about one million above the official figure) they would not have believed you. They did not think that even the Tories would bring us hordes of people permanently homeless and condemned to roam our city streets, sleeping on pavements and in doorways and in cardboard cities.

*"When we warned how the ruling class intended things to go, most of the labour movement dismissed us as alarmists, because they did not understand the class struggle."*

In 1978 Labour left wingers could half-plausibly argue — against those of us in *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers' Action* who called for unity with Europe's workers and opposed the anti-EC campaigns of such as Tony Benn — that Britain should come out of the EC so that the British workers' movement would not be hindered from moving on to socialism by the more backward Europeans.

Britain is now a social backwater in Europe, a country of cheap labour and the most savage anti-union legislation in western Europe.

When the left warned, as *Socialist Organiser* warned, how the ruling class intended things to go, most citizens of the labour movement dismissed us as alarmists, if not cranks. They could not understand that Britain's workers faced a return to the dark ages before the health service, before post-war "full employment", even before basic legal rights for trade unions, because they did not understand the class struggle. They did not understand that to dislocate the capitalists' desired way of running things, and to impose big restraints on them, was to face a terrible backlash once the bosses decided they could no longer afford the concessions.

In truth, the left did not "understand" fully either. We saw where things were heading insofar as the ruling class could control them. We saw where they wanted to go, what the Thatcherite Tories represented. *Socialist Organiser* raised the alarm when much of the left responded as if it were only "business as usual".

But we scarcely believed that the Tories could do as much as they have actually done during the last 14 years. We believed that any attempt to do as much would provoke a mass revolt.

**W**E WERE WRONG — or rather half-wrong. There were mass revolts — above all, the great miners' strike of 1984-5. But they were dissipated and weakened by terrible misleadership. They were defeated.

On the basis of a minority vote in the 1979 election the determined Tories set up what was in effect a parliamentary dictatorship. Using their power in a "Jacobin" way, they embarked on a sweeping series of measures for which they had not asked for a mandate, nor got one, even from the minority of the electorate who voted for them. Lying and twisting, hiding their intentions — on the NHS for example, they have repeated the operation in every general election

since.

They have rammed through wave after wave of anti-union laws. They took advantage of the slump that began in 1980 to push unemployment up and weaken the labour movement. They have for political reasons destroyed whole industries and devastated whole regions in order to destroy the militant sections of the working class, whose strength had made the ruling class incapable of running things as they wanted for decades before 1979 — like the miners.

They have systematically undermined and destroyed — and continue to undermine and destroy — democratic local government. On



March 1985: miners join with protesters against

behalf of the rich they have privatised and plundered social resources in a manner and to a degree unparalleled since the great robberies between the 16th and 18th centuries which put millions of acres of common land into the hands of great landowners.

Stealthily, lying through their teeth and their every orifice they have in commission, they have used the old Stalinist "salami tactics" to destroy the health service, a cut at a time — cut after cut after cut to force those who can afford it to abandon the increasingly run down health service.

They have got away with it because of their ruthlessness, their shamelessness and, above all, because of the quality of the opposition they have had to face. The leaders of the labour movement collapsed before them; the terrible slump at the beginning undermined rank and file resistance; once the Tories had got us on the run, they dealt blow after blow after blow, ripping up the work of three generations or more of the mass reformist labour movement.

It need not have been like that!

What *Socialist Organiser* stood for in 1978 was the consistent, coherent, class-struggle alternative to the official labour movement, postures and practices that made it possible for the Tories to wreak such devastation. We warned that Labour was opening the gates to the Tory vandals.

When the Tories were in power we argued that the labour movement would either go on a war footing or be crushed. We advocated resistance with every weapon we had — and we had great weapons, including the general strike — before they had had a chance to bleed the labour movement.

When the left won local government power in major areas, we argued for using the local bases as fortresses against the Tories, mobilising mass resistance, refusing to collaborate with Tory cuts. We separated from the Ken Livingstone left when they opted instead for a policy of foot-dragging collaboration via rate rises and 'creative accounting'.



# gle may be ot be abolished"



the abolition of the Greater London Council. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni

We tried, as Marxists who are serious about the working class must, to put forward perspectives for the broad labour movement.

**A**N INTRODUCTION to a pamphlet of *Socialist Organiser* articles published early in 1980 spelled out what *Socialist Organiser* stood for.

*Socialist Organiser*, it declared, was dedicated to the following basic propositions:

- That a socialist society, in which the economy is owned collectively by the producers who live in a self-controlling and self-administering socialist democracy, is what we want as the alternative to capitalism — which is a system of exploitation of the vast majority by a small class who own the means of production...
- That here and now the alternatives are either the continued deterioration of the working class itself as capitalism rots around us, or socialism.
- That only the working class can create such a system, by taking control of society out of the hands of the capitalists.
- That for this to become possible, the existing labour movement — Labour Party and trade unions — must transform themselves organisationally, by a process of democratisation and by breaking the undemocratic power of cliques, bureaucrats and uncontrollable Parliamentary élites within the organisations of the labour movement.
- That, simultaneously, the labour movement must re-arm itself politically with the ideas of socialism and take as its

immediate goal the revolutionary socialist transformation of society.

- That because socialism is impossible until the working class acts to realise it, and because there is only one working class and one mass labour movement, revolutionary socialists must work and organise within the existing labour movement, built by many decades and even centuries of working-class struggle, to help the workers' political and organisational self-renewal.
- That if those who hold to the basic ideas of revolutionary socialism refuse to do this, they condemn themselves to sterility,

impotent sideline carping at the movement as it has been shaped by history so far, and to sectarian irrelevance in the irreplaceable work of changing that movement.

- That there are in stark logic only two alternatives: either, to fight to change the existing labour movement, including its organic political wing, the Labour Party. Or,

to adopt the project of building one's own 'pure' labour movement from the ground up, in parallel to the one the working class has so far created. And therefore that those who reject the former, and, implicitly, accept the latter, are in fact pessimistic and defeatist about the prospects facing the labour movement in the next historic period... no matter how 'left' and 'revolutionary' be their talk and their view of what they themselves are, and however 'intransigent' and 'uncompromising' their denunciations of the existing labour movement are.

For — so we wrote in 1980 — if we did not

in the relatively short period ahead, succeed in reorganising and politically transforming the existing labour movement, which was the only mass labour movement, and which held the allegiance of millions of the most advanced workers, then the working class would face a historic defeat.

In summary: determined resistance to the Tories; work to renovate the labour movement; opposition to the sterile, self-isolating, sect-building that passed for Marxist politics then.

**T**HOSE POLITICS would have made the difference between victory and the cumulative defeat we in fact suffered.

We were not strong enough to make them dominant in the labour movement. We were able for a while to unite much of the left around commitment to class-struggle politics in broad organisations initiated by us, the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, and the Rank and File Mobilising Committee. We were not strong enough to hold the movement — the local government left for example, most of whose leaders were involved in those broad organisations — to those class-struggle politics.

What do the policies we began with 15 years ago mean today? Exactly what they meant at the beginning. There is no socialist substitute for the work of fighting within the existing labour movement to win its organisations for class-struggle politics.

We do not counterpose such work in the existing movement to the struggle of youth, the unemployed, or specially oppressed groups: but the mass working-class movement has to be the core of any socialist policy.

We work to build an organisation of Marxists integrated into the existing mass movement. Such an organisation, had it been big enough and influential enough, could have turned the tide in the labour movement at the beginning of Thatcher's rule. We learn from the past in order to prepare for the future.

There is no way the last 15 years can be honestly presented as a cheerful story for socialists. To try to tell it that way would be to tell lies.

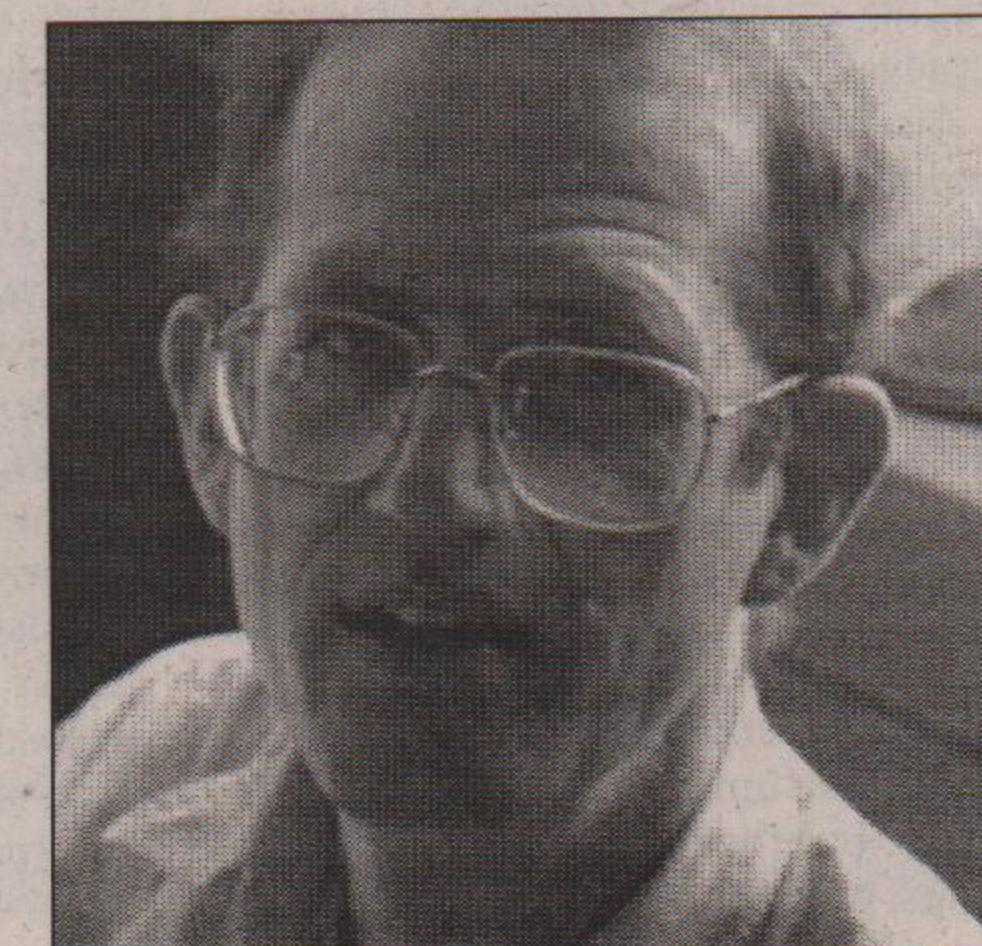
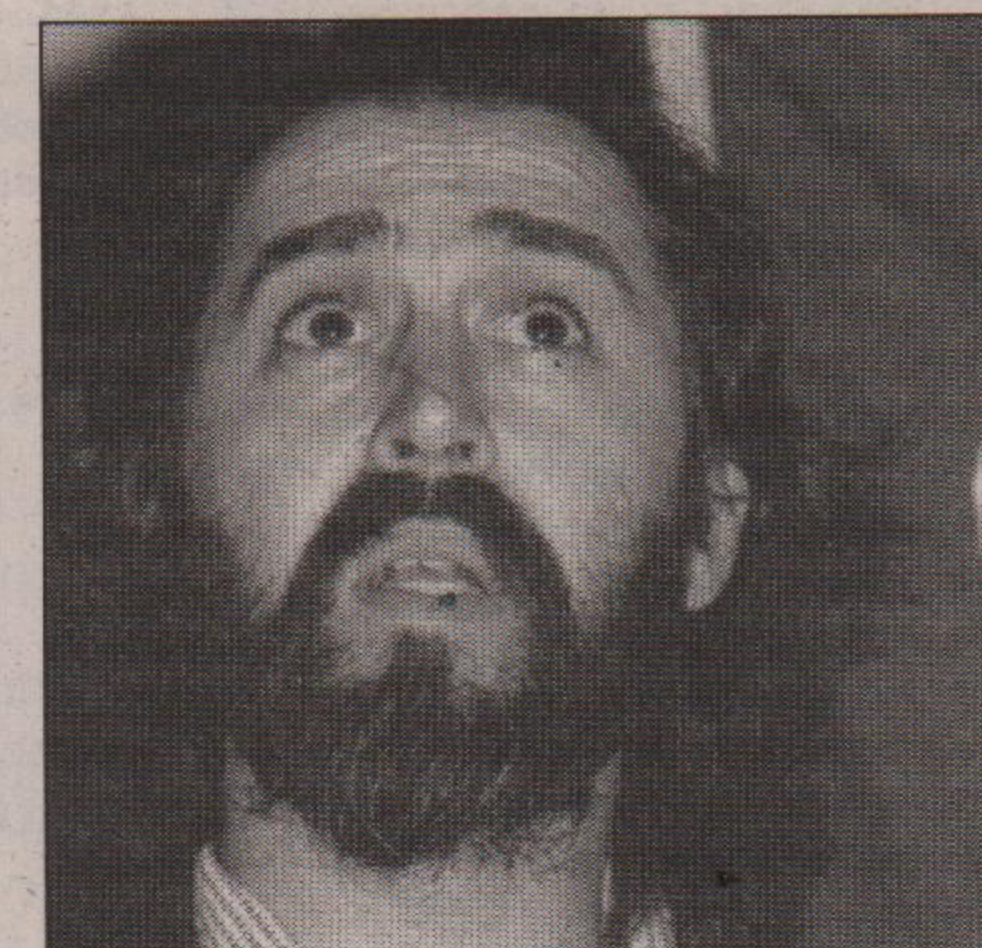
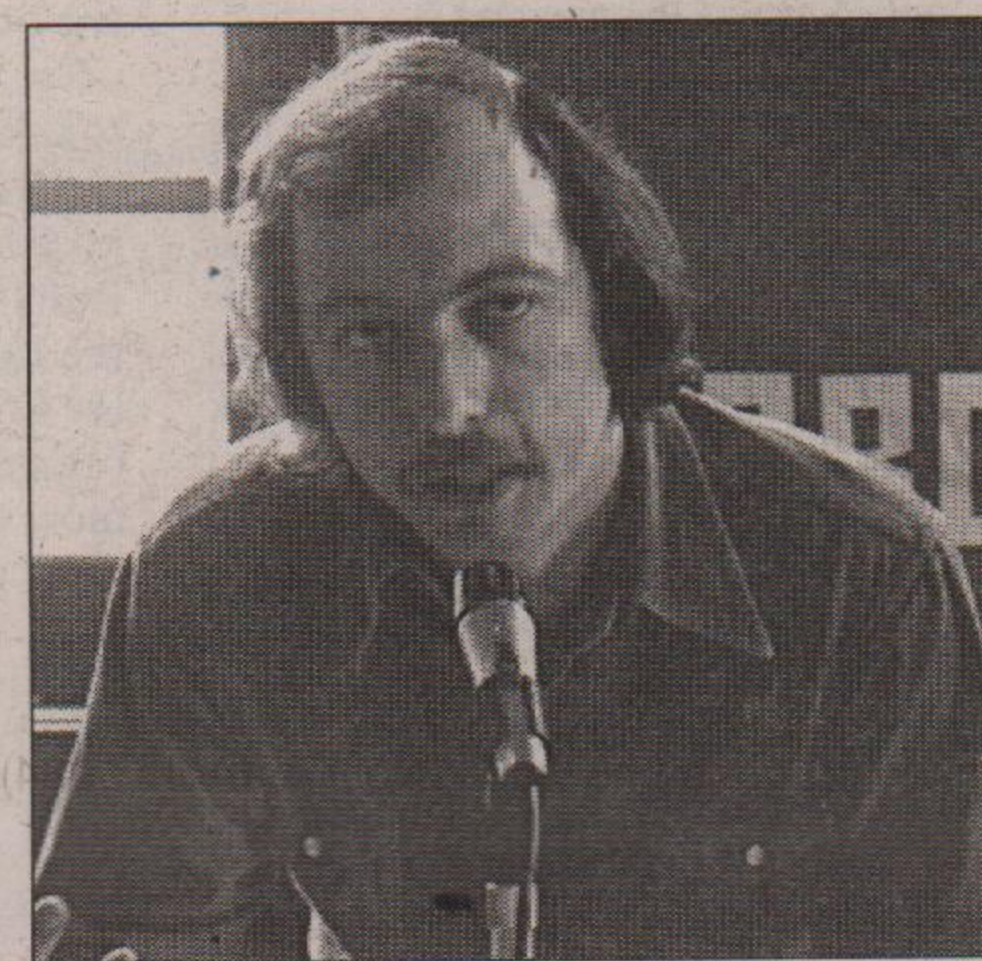
Yet we have learned, we have survived and we have expanded slowly, despite the terrible pressure from the very hostile capitalist world around us. Even if defeats prove that what we said previously was right, that does not protect us from the consequences of defeat for our class. We are of the working class and we cannot thrive where it falters.

We reject, now as in the past, the illusory refuge of sectarian self-promotion in the style of the SWP (and, lately, *Militant*), the foolish and vain quest to "build a party" outside the working class and, frequently, counterposed to it.

The capitalists are triumphant now, but history does, despite everything, work with the left. Capitalism is a savage system. Wage-slavery is its basic cell. The class struggle of the working class cannot be exorcised while that is so. It may be quelled, as it has been quelled in Britain since the defeat of the great miners' strike of 1984-5, by a combination of brutal capitalist politicians and its own wretchedly inadequate and irresponsible leadership. It always revives. The fight resumes.

We have in the last year seen the first stirrings of revival. Socialists are the representatives of the future in the present. We prepare the future. Only those socialists who stay with the labour movement can do that.

*Socialist Organiser* editors in the early years: from top, Mike Davis, Rachel Lever, Andrew Hornung, Martin Thomas. Mike Davis, one of the first editors, parted ways with the paper on the rate rise issue and is now with the Labour Coordinating Committee.



# The SWP and the trade unions

# How not to build a w

The SWP is the biggest group on the revolutionary left in Britain, and claims to look towards the working class. In fact it has wrecked and ruined everything it had in the short period when it began to get a real base in the trade unions in the 1970s. Jim Denham reviews the lessons.

*"What we are obliged to do is not to close our eyes to facts in the name of pitiful schemata, but to see the course of economic development as it really is and to work out trade union tactics on the basis of facts... for the Comintern... tactics consist of periodic zigzags and strategy is the arithmetic sum of the zigzags."*

**T**ROTSKY WAS writing about the Stalinists during the crazy 'Third Period' days of the 1930s, but his comments could equally well apply to the IS/SWP's union work since the early 1970s.

In the 1950s and '60s the International Socialists (the direct forerunner of the SWP) had been a very loose discussion club with little implantation in the working class. But in the late '60s the IS began to tighten itself up and simultaneously made a vigorous turn to the unions and the working class. This was to their credit — and in sharp contrast to many other "revolutionaries" at that time, who tended to look to students, intellectuals, Stalinists and Third World guerrilla movements for "red bases" and "new mass vanguards" whilst all but ignoring the boring old British working class.

IS's 'turn to the class' came to a head around the enormous wave of industrial militancy that blew up in response to the (1971-'74) Heath government's Industrial Relations Act and its succession of 'incomes policies' (i.e. wage restraint). Dockers, engineers, health workers and the miners took militant and often overtly political action in the face of the Tories' attacks. Finally, in February 1974 the miners forced Heath to call a general election in which the Tories asked, in effect, "who rules: the government or the unions?" The Tories lost.

The struggles of the early '70s politicised many trade unionists and exposed the inadequacy of not only the right-wing TUC leaders but also of the mainstream 'left' within the unions, dominated as it was by the Communist Party. The CP and its front organisation, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) were almost entirely preoccupied with winning official positions and acting as cheerleaders for the left wing of the official bureaucracy.

A significant number of trade union militants were looking for something better — for politics that looked beyond merely reforming the system, and that pointed the way to working-class power. IS stepped into the breach and started recruiting trade union militants on a fairly basic level being more militant than the CP and combining that with crude propaganda for a future socialist society. Perhaps a couple of hundred industrial trade unionists joined IS on this basis, but they were important militants, probably the best thrown up by

the struggles of the early '70s. For a period the IS became unashamedly 'workerist': middle-class members, students and 'intellectuals' were expected to defer to everything that the industrial members said or did. In the words of one former industrial member, "we were paraded round the organisation like prize bulls."

For those militants not quite ready to take the step of actually signing up as IS members, there was a fall back position: supporting the "National Rank and File Movement". This was the IS's answer to the LCDTU. Like the LCDTU, it was essentially a front organisation. SWP leader Tony Cliff more than once described the NRFM as a "conveyor belt" into IS.

**T**HE AMBIGUOUS, unprincipled and fundamentally sectarian relationship between the NRFM and the IS was to dog the project throughout its existence and eventually led to its demise.

The other central weakness of the NRFM was apparent at its first conference in March 1974: though dominated organisationally by IS, the whole affair was narrowly apolitical. The main official resolution was a general statement of militant trade unionism which deliberately avoided such 'difficult' issues as nationalisation, workers' control, etc.

Even anti-racism got only a cursory mention. An amendment from Stanton steelworkers (supported by *Workers' Fight*, a forerunner of *Socialist Organiser*) raised the issues of workers' control, nationalisation, racism and women's rights. *Workers' Fight* commented afterwards:

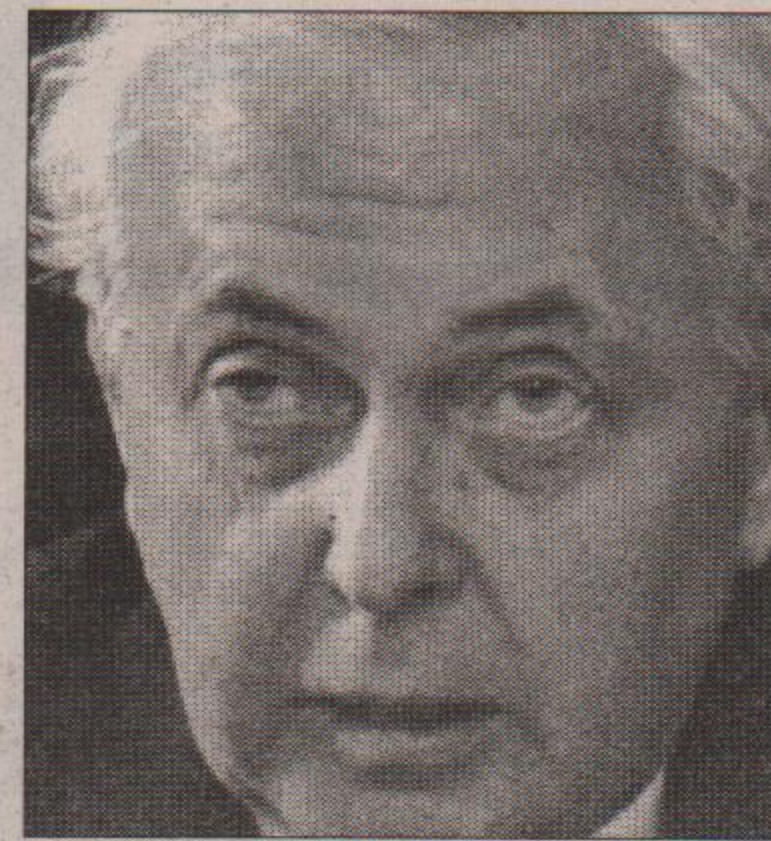
**"Most indicative of the control of IS as well as the politics of IS, was the incredible rejection of the Stanton amendment. It is scarcely credible that,**

**without IS's urging, a conference of militant, politically oriented rank and file trade unionists would have opposed the inclusion in the 'programme' of a rank and file movement of demands for nationalisation. As for the voting down of the section on racism, this is scarcely to be understood except in terms of crude IS factionalism, a refusal to be 'corrected' by another tendency".**

This was not an aberration, or an over-cautious but well-intentioned effort not to foist too much heavy politics on a broad-based movement. It was typical of IS's entire approach to trade union work at the time. IS factory bulletins were almost exclusively concerned with issues like wages, shop-floor conditions, bargaining arrangements and even the quality of the chips in the canteen! These are all, of course, important issues that socialist should devote time and effort to. But virtually no attempt was made to link bread and butter economic issues to an overall socialist programme.

Paradoxically, the 'political' side of IS's industrial work (apart from getting students to sell *Socialist Worker* on factory gates) took the form of loyal and usually uncritical participation in the CP-dominated Broad Lefts, where union elections were the number one priority. In Birmingham, for instance, the AEU Broad Left was actually controlled by IS members from Lucas and other engineering plants. They were all good militants and well respected within the union for their hard work, dedication and organisation skills, but to all intents and purposes were indistinguishable from the better people in the CP at the time. In fact, many of them were ex-CPers and continued to support the CP line on issues like import controls. There was nothing necessarily wrong with any of this, except that IS made little effort to educate such people in even the rudiments of internationalist, revolutionary politics. An IS worker of the time recalls:

**"Our word was law [within IS]. Anyone who dared question or criticise us would be put down as a middle-class wanker. My finest hour was at an IS national conference when I criticised**

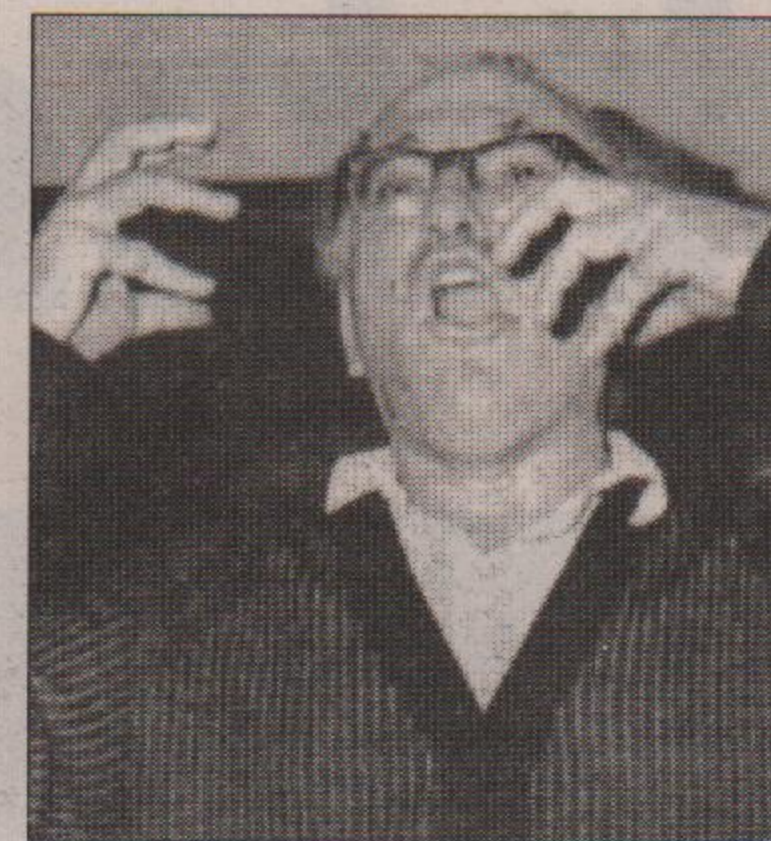


Harold Wilson

the paper for describing people like Arnold Weinstock as 'unpleasant reactionaries'. "Unpleasant reactionaries?" I bellowed. "Talk in language workers understand: call them 'shit-bags!'" It brought the house down. Actually we got away with a lot of pretty boorish behaviour which looking back on I'm not particularly proud of. But we felt we had the backing and approval of the leadership — Hallas, Higgins and Cliff".

**I**S GREW FAST during this period but, inevitably, it was riding for a fall. An ostensibly revolutionary organisation cannot exist for long on a diet of minimal politics, shop-floor syndicalism and trade union routinism. IS had an additional problem: between 1971 and 1974 they had promoted themselves as the most militant anti-Tories. When Harold Wilson defeated Heath in the '74 election, IS was faced with the problem of a Labour government. Politics could no longer be kept on the back-burner. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that for the first year or so the Wilson government didn't seem too bad. Riding into office on the back of the mighty industrial upsurge, they delivered reforms, notably the abolition of the hated Industrial Relations Act.

The return of a Labour government threw IS into political disarray. Anti-Tory sloganeering had been easy, but what do you say about a Labour government — especially a Labour government that hadn't (yet) launched a serious attack on the working class? IS shied away from putting demands



SWP leader Tony Cliff

on the Wilson government (that would have been to sow illusions, said Cliff) but failed to come up with any coherent perspectives except warning of the inevitable attacks to come and making general socialist propaganda.

This political crisis coincided (and interacted) with an ostensibly organisational one: the "AEU row". As has been noted above, the IS's most important industrial base was in the engineering industry in Birmingham and the West Midlands. The Birmingham AEU Broad Left was controlled by IS members. An important AEU divisional election was due to be held in 1975 and it looked like being a straight fight between the right wing and the Broad Left. A number of leading IS members nominated the Broad Left candidate, a leading CPer called Phil Higgs.

Suddenly and without warning they were informed that IS intended to stand a "Rank and File" candidate, Willie Lee, and that they should therefore withdraw their nominations for Higgs. The leading IS AEU members (and many other IS members) were stunned: this arbitrary dictat went against everything they'd come to expect of IS, as well as making them look like fools within the Broad Left and destroying at a stroke their chummy relationship with the CP.

In fact, the decision to stand Willie Lee did not come out of the blue: it was part and parcel of a wholesale change of line and orientation decided upon by Cliff and a majority of the central leadership, but never discussed (or even explained) to the membership. It was a grandiose plan to transform the IS into the Socialist Workers' Party, which would win over all those militants about to be disillusioned by the Labour government and eventually challenge Labour head-to-head for the allegiance of the British working class.

The bulk of IS's working-class membership recoiled in horror as this 'sectarian' turn became apparent and they were joined by a minority of the IS leadership — notably Jim Higgins, John Palmer and Richard Kuper. The supple-spined Duncan Hallas expressed private sympathy to the rebels and attempted to lure them back into the Cliff camp with various compromises. Hallas's best efforts failed and the rebels (now calling themselves the "IS Opposition") broadened their critique from the AEU question to the entire "SWP turn". By mid-1976 all the oppositionists had either been expelled or resigned. They formed a short-lived organisation called the 'Workers' League' before going their separate ways into trade union routinism, left reformism, or (mainly) inactivity. It was a tragic waste of good militants,

## The "Rank and File" in 1974

From the report in *Workers' Fight* of the first trade union rank and file conference, organised in March 1974

**"RANK AND FILE PAPERS NOT controlled by IS were not invited to sponsor the conference and therefore had no voice in the Organising Committee, which, so far, remains unelected and is obviously selected by the IS leadership. The *Voice* papers were not involved, nor were such Communist Party influenced papers as the *Building Workers' Charter*. The two industrial fraction papers put out by supporters of *Workers' Fight* — *The Hook*, based on Manchester and Preston docks, and *Real Steel News*, based on Teesside and Stanton steelworks — were not invited to sponsor the conference. *The Dockworker*, a paper set up by IS in opposition to *The Hook*, but which has now fallen under the domination of the CP, was not one of the sponsoring papers. The CP itself naturally did not participate, nor, except for a few individuals, did the International Marxist Group. *Workers' Fight* was the**

**only other tendency to participate in an organised way.**

**"... As long as five years ago, when *Workers' Fight* was part of IS, we proposed that IS should take as one of its major objectives the building of a Rank and File movement. We saw it as necessary, and incidentally as a way of building an organised periphery around IS, rather than the approach of the IS leadership of direct mass recruitment into the organisation itself of people with, often, little political education and only a vague idea of what IS was.**

**"Five years later on, IS has anything up to 4,000 members recruited on this loose basis, without selection or tempering and with little education other than the demagogic catch-cries of the IS leaders.**

**"It is this organisation that now seeks to build a rank and file movement. It is probably inevitable that any such movement would be dominated by some political tendency. The question is, which tendency with which politics. The trouble with this movement is that it is IS, with its tailist, line-of-least-resistance politics that is dominating."**

# Workers' party



The SWP (then called IS) recruited a sizeable number of industrial workers in the big struggles of the early '70s, like Sattley Gates (above). But then it wrecked all it had built.

for which Cliff is directly responsible.

**S**WP THEORETICIANS have since tried to explain away the failure to build in the unions and the working class in the '70s by arguing that the 'objective situation' made it impossible:

**"In the wake of the Social Contract, industrial militancy collapsed — the number of working days lost due to strikes in 1976 was the lowest since the 1950s. At the same time the world recession caused unemployment to soar, climbing above 1.5 million in 1977. This was not the environment in which the NRFM could flourish..."** (Alex Callinicos, 1982).

This is, at best, a lame and mechanistic explanation. It fails to mention the IS/SWP's squandering of its impressive industrial base in the early to mid-'70s. And it presents an entirely mechanistic relationship between working-class militancy and the state of the economy. How the class reacts to a slump is determined in large part by its own immediate experiences (which in the mid-'70s were of unprecedented levels of militancy and success) and by the state of its organisation.

For example, the slump at the end of the '20s hit the British working class very badly, because of its defeats in the General Strike of 1926 and after. But in the USA the same slump sparked a successful drive to create mass industrial trade unions.

The official SWP's 'explanation' of the loss of their key industrial militants and the collapse of the NRFM is no more than an excuse for the Cliff's group's failure to give coherent political answers to the difficulties posed by the Wilson government and the Social Contract. After the loss of the "IS Opposition"/Workers League people, and the failure of the NRFM project in the mid-'70s, the SWP (as it now was) became increasingly schizophrenic: on the one hand, bitterly hostile to the Labour Party (even standing candidates — with disastrous results — against Labour) while, on the other, continuing with a generally cautious and self-effac-

ing policy (in British Leyland, for instance).

The NRFM held a conference — after a three year hiatus — in November 1977. This was in response to a series of militant revolts against the Labour government's Social Contract — notably at British Leyland, Heathrow airport, Port Talbot steelworks and in the fire service.

The 1977 conference was actually bigger than either of the 1974 conferences, but again the sectarianism of the SWP led the initiative up a blind alley: this time in the form of a crazy

**"The bulk of IS's working-class membership recoiled in horror at the sectarian turn of 1974... By mid-1976 all the oppositionists had either been expelled or resigned."**

call for a 'day of action' (organised by the NRFM itself!) in support of the striking firefighters. Predictably, the strike call was a total flop and the NRFM was quietly put to rest, its corpse to be formally buried in 1982.

**T**HE LAST manifestation of the SWP's 'rank and file' orientation towards trade unions and industrial work was the "Engineers' Charter", a publication for AUEW activists that continued in existence into the early 1980s. The "Charter" pamphlet, *What's Gone Wrong in Engineering — the case for change in the AUEW*, gives a flavour of the SWP's industrial orientation in 1980. It is a well-produced little document that deals in detail with the internal affairs of the union (previously and

subsequently called the AEU), the general political situation (the Tories had recently got in, but Labour and the Social Contract were still fresh memories), the failings of the recently-ousted Broad Left leadership and the threat presented by the newly elected right-wing leadership.

Along the way, the pamphlet looks back to the 1920s and the Minority Movement (with a whole section devoted to an extract from a Wal Hannington pamphlet) and deals with practical shop-floor problems and arguments under the heading "The members don't want to know".

It closes with a stirring call for a "rank and file organisation [that] builds inside the factories... to replace the leadership with a new one which has its sights set on the transformation of society." Some of the politics are distinctly weird: for instance, the calls for a new leadership are contradicted by bits that seem to argue against having any leadership at all and even against shop stewards having time off the job and access to telephones ("with the 'union' always available in an office and on the end of a telephone, it becomes much easier for management to control the militancy on the shop floor").

Nevertheless, it is an impressive and well-informed publication. These days the SWP would doubtless dismiss *What's Gone Wrong In Engineering...* as reformist, apolitical or worse: there are no adverts for *Socialist Worker*, no application form for membership, no warnings against getting too involved in the internal affairs of the union... just an invitation to take a regular order of *Charter* magazine for your branch or stewards' committee, and an invitation to attend the Charter conference.

Within a few months of the appearance of *What's Gone Wrong In Engineering...*, the Charter and all the other remaining SWP-sponsored rank and file groups within the unions were disbanded and the SWP effectively turned its back upon any serious intervention into the unions.

To be continued next week

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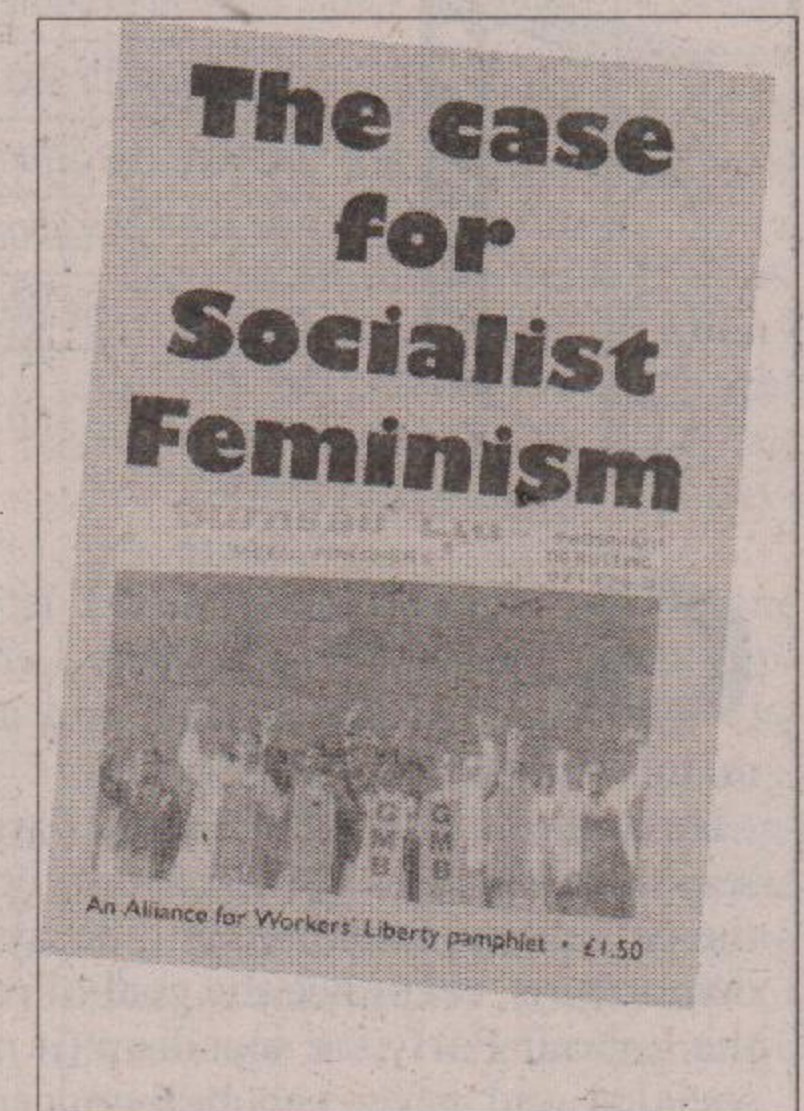
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# The Bandit Queen



Colin Foster  
reviews  
*The Downing  
Street Years*  
by Margaret Thatcher

£25  
Harper Collins

**M**ARGARET Thatcher prides herself on her efforts to kill "socialism". Unlike some faint-hearted ex-leftists, she knows she failed. "I was not among those many Conservatives... who thought that Labour would be displaced by the [Liberal-SDP] Alliance. Socialism represents an enduring temptation: no-one should underestimate Labour's potential appeal". To defeat "socialism", "there was a revolution... to be made, but too few revolutionaries".

Yet Thatcher's Tories did much damage. This is how she saw the state of the "socialism" which she was attacking in 1983. "We had sold thousands of council houses, but 29 per cent of the housing stock remained in the public sector. We had increased parents' rights in the education system, but the ethos in classrooms and teachers' training colleges remained stubbornly left wing. "We had grappled with the problem of bringing more efficiency into local government; but the Left's redoubts in the great cities still went virtually unchallenged. We had cut back trade union power; but still almost 50 per cent of the workforce in employment was unionised..."

She wanted to wipe out that "socialism" — more accurately, gains made by the labour movement within capitalism — across the board, in housing, in education, in local government, in industry.

She wanted to wipe out the stock of good, cheap public-sector housing. No-one would have any option but to take their chances in the free market — to find the money to buy a house; to try to find that money, fail, and fall desperately into debt or be evicted, as tens of thousands have been; to find a privately-rented place, with a high rent and little security; or to sleep on the streets.

She wanted to abolish any rights or autonomy for children in their education, and boost "authority of all kinds — in the home, the school, the churches and the State".

She wanted to abolish local democracy, removing scope for the labour movement to legislate even petty reforms, even in those solidly working-class areas where the Tories could not hope to push Labour out.

She wanted to end effective trade-unionism, and even union membership, so that workers would have no protection against their employers' demands.

On all those fronts, the Tories have done much damage since 1983. But they have not made a clean sweep. And they have not been able to wipe out the "enduring temptation" of socialism, because it is impossible: capitalism is impossible without a working class, and a working class is impossible without working-class resistance to capitalism.

The core of the "socialism" which Thatcher wanted to wipe out was trade-union organisation. Her key victory was the 1984-5 miners' strike.

"From 1972 to 1985 the conventional wisdom was that Britain could only be governmented with the con-

sent of the trade unions. No government could really resist, still less defeat, a major strike; in particular a strike by the miners' union.

"Even as we were reforming trade union law and overcoming lesser disputes, such as the steel strike [of 1980], many on the left and outside it continued to believe that the miners had the ultimate veto and would one day use it.

"That day had now come and gone... What the strike's defeat established was that Britain could not be made ungovernable by the Fascist Left".

Thatcher uses the insult "fascist" to convey her hatred of the miners' union, though in fact it was her government, during that miners' strike, which came closer to police-state methods than any other government in Britain this century. The chapter on the strike makes it clear that its outcome — the miners' defeat — was a close-run thing. The two dockers' strikes, and the vote to strike by the pit deputies (NACODS), could both

have given the miners a decisive boost.

Yet we lost. Thatcher won. That victory allows her to lace this book with the arrogance which every reviewer has noted, even the Tories. "The beliefs and policies which I had pioneered in

Britain were helping to remould world affairs... the Government which I had headed... had restored Britain's reputation as a force to be reckoned with... Britain's standing in the world, and mine, [were] transformed..."

*On all fronts, the Tories have done much damage. But they have not made a clean sweep*



Thatcher fights "enduring temptation". Photo: Paul Herrmann

The facts of mass unemployment, continuing industrial depression, widespread desperation and crime, have no influence on this picture.

"Time and again", she writes, "we were asked... 'where will the new jobs come from?'... The fact is that in a market economy government does not — and cannot — know where jobs will come from..." And that is all she has to offer to the millions whose lives have been wrecked by job-slashing.

In all of 914 pages, there is scarcely a word about what Thatcher's war

against "socialism" meant for ordinary people. The woman who notoriously claimed that "there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families" now measures everything by "Britain's standing, and mine", in abstraction from and in opposition to real, living people.

Who is this "Britain"? The Britain that benefitted was the Britain of profiteers, spivs and exploiters. The Britain that lost out was the working-class Britain which, in Thatcher's words, had "socialism... built into [its] institutions and mentality".

## All about giving up



Alan Johnson reviews  
*Labourism and the English  
Genius: The Strange Death of  
Labour England?*  
By Gregory Elliott

Verso

**G**REGORY ELLIOT is a former member of the New Left Review Editorial Board and a current member of the Socialist Society.

He argues that the left should forget about socialism for now (in profound crisis after the collapse of Stalinism and decay of social democracy), renounce the goal of reclaiming the Labour Party for socialism (it never was socialist and never can be), concentrate on getting the Tories out by an electoral pact with the Liberal Democrats (England is a 'conservative nation', you see, and always will be) and limit ourselves to the democratisation of the British state (the Charter 88 agenda) and the achievement of 'social citizenship' within a democratised but still capitalist European state.

If PR is introduced a 'minoritarian social-

ism liberated from Labourism' (and its 'neuralgic' link to the trade unions) can emerge.

It is the latest in a line of books in the aftermath of a fourth Labour defeat — about giving up. Primarily, giving up on the project which Socialist Organiser has argued for — socialists organising together to go beyond Labourism to a radical democratic socialism by a fight to transform the existing labour movement — in favour of the cultivation of a (not very) radical ghetto in which Marxian verbiage, quotes from Gramsci, and talmudic references to NLR on every page can prepare the way for (200 pages later) the Lib-Labour Pact which would, by the way, "of necessity, be an unequal one, entailing that the Labour Party stand down in seats where it has no hope of winning."

Faced with this optimism of the intellect and pessimism of the will, it is tempting to see John Smith's preference for 'one more heaven' as the pinnacle of political wisdom.

And yet Elliott's book includes much sharp writing and astute analysis of the Labour Party, so astute that he undermines his own prescriptions. Just one small example:

"A Labour Party sales department Christmas catalogue (1989) enclosed with Policy Review documents, intimates Labour's dis-

inctive solution to Third World poverty: 'Our tea and coffee come from areas in developing countries where people are being given the chance to work their way out of poverty through sound marketing and quality control.'"

Elliott tears apart the 1988 *Democratic Socialism: Aims and Values* document as a hopelessly contradictory affair. He takes the embrace of the market as an example:

"It is in the conclusion to its reflections on the mixed economy that the incoherence of Aims and Values is most apparent.

'Democratic socialists' it is stated, 'believe in market allocation, but market allocation guided by agreement that the competitive system should pursue the objective of greater freedom, greater equality and greater choice.' The depth of illusion is disclosed: what possible grounds are there for believing the 'competitive system' (euphemism for the unavoidable capitalism) could be governed by an alien vocation bestowed on it by well-meaning politicians?

Realism? If ever there was a utopian project, this is it."

Elliott argues correctly that Labour's current modernisation is "not a repetition of the 1950s but a regression relative to them". In other words Labour is moving, along

with its sister parties from Australasia to Europe and Scandinavia, from the 'Keynesian Social Democracy' of Crosland to "a new orientation: a spectrum extending from variants of social liberalism (meliorism without egalitarianism) to mutations of neo-liberalism (reformism without meliorism)" — in simple terms, a Thatcherite agenda with varying degrees of a 'human face'.

We are not living through a repeat of the 1950s and if we try to think by analogies we will miss what is new.

The book has strengths — the sober analysis of the troubles in Ireland amongst them. Its programme is not so much wrong — the democratisation of the British Ancien Regime should indeed be a priority for the labour movement — as dangerous because it is uncoupled from the fight to make the organisations of the working class fit to fight for power.

Can a new socialist culture be built up while the left calmly calls for the political wing of the labour movement to stand down before Paddy Ashdown's Liberals and welcomes the erosion of the trade union link, while looking to a capitalist Europe to provide a 'social citizenship'?

'Realism'? If ever there was a utopian project, this is it.

# Romance or blood lust?

£8 for a 12-hour day



Cathy Nugent  
Reviews  
*Cutting Edge*

Channel 4  
Monday 25 October

**T**HIS WEEK'S *Cutting Edge*, on seasonal and casual labour on the land, focussed on the efforts of National Insurance fraud inspectors in Lincolnshire to catch up with Income Support claimants earning pitifully small amounts of extra money at back-breaking work.

Anyone they interviewed whose details did not come up on the computer was immediately shipped to immigration authorities.

During harvest seasons in Lincolnshire and elsewhere in the country, farm owners and companies employ special sub-contractors known as "gang-masters" to themselves and their workers, but as "employment agencies" in the new government Citizen-Charter-speak.

The gang-masters (of whom there are an estimated 20,000 in Lincolnshire) hire labour by the day or week, depending on the size of the job the farmer needs doing.

Gang masters will hire labour from inner cities miles away from the rural area in which they operate. They employ people who are on the dole and pay them a fraction of what the farmer-owner pays the gang master for the job. Many of the workers are women.

The work is all piece rates. For example 11.5p for picking a kilo of Brussels sprouts is considered a good rate. But packing the sprouts for a whole day, 12 hour or more, works out at £8 total. Local workers often resent the city workers and see them as undercutting their wages.

The programme interviewed Charlie, who had just been caught illegally claiming. Charlie is an examiner, made redundant when his pit closed. For years he had been moving around the country looking for work on the land. It was impossible to find a long-term job, but when he did find work it was impossible to afford to bring his family to live with him as his wages were not enough to live on or to pay the rent.

What did the dole cops think of the job they did? They understood why people needed to work for extra money, to be able to feed and clothe their families... but people shouldn't claim tax-payers' money to which they are not entitled, should they? In any case the main thrust of their Department's policy was to bring prosecutions against the gang masters.

Oh yes? In the particular "operation" that the programme showed, 203 claimants were caught and only 2 gang masters. Now that is a complete waste of "tax-payers' money"!

Recently I read an article in one of the Sunday glossies about hop-picking in Worcestershire in the 1950s. The article was full of nostalgic rubbish about how working-class people would come from the city to the countryside, bringing their whole family, to get lots of fresh air and benefit from the "togetherness".

There has never been anything remotely romantic about casual landwork: for people living in desperate poverty it is a chance to earn a pittance, to try to cover debts, and afford essentials. It has always been so, and it is even more so today, in the Tories' low-paid, "let the spivs get rich" Britain.



The loner and the dream girl: Clarence (Christian Slater) and Alabama (Patricia Arquette)



Matt Cooper  
Reviews *True Romance*

Directed by  
Quentin Tarantino

**O**NCE UPON a time there was a spotty shop assistant in a video store who didn't hit it off with the girls.

He would sit at home and watch videos, usually martial arts films or violent thrillers. He would fantasise about the violence and imagine himself as the hero. It was a fantasy that he could never realise, so to compensate he started writing screen-

plays. Then one was made into a film.

The film shocked with its violence but won many admirers for its comic book characters and sense of tension and suspense, all learnt from countless videos. It also had a sharp if somewhat politically incorrect sense of humour. The film was *Reservoir Dogs* and the spotty shop assistant Quentin Tarantino.

Why the potted biography? Because without it you cannot understand his new film.

Calling *True Romance* Tarantino's "new film" is misleading. The script predates *Reservoir Dogs* and it is a much more a simplistic formula film.

Clarence, the hero of *True Romance*, works in a collectors' action comic store (Spiderman comics and the like) rather than in a video shop, but he too is a loner who spends his nights

watching samurai swords and Kung Fu kicks ripping flesh and breaking bones on the small screen. That Clarence is Tarantino's alter ego living out a Tarantino fantasy is clear.

On his birthday he goes, as he always does, to the cinema, this time to see a triple feature of *Streetfighter* films.

Now the fantasy cuts in. Into the cinema walks Clarence's (and Tarantino's) dream girl, Alabama (Patricia Arquette). They talk, hit it off, and end up in bed.

Here the fantasy appears to be coming unstuck. Alabama tearfully admits that she is a call girl sent by his boss at the comic store as a birthday gift. But don't adjust your virtual-reality headset, all is well! They are in love and get married the next day.

At this point the film becomes a pastiche of thriller scenes, often with well-known faces cropping up in cameo roles. Clarence kills Alabama's pimp Drexyl (Gary Oldman). He turns for help to his father (Dennis Hopper), who is then tortured to death by a Mafia hit man (Christopher Walken) as Hopper racially abuses him. It is a moderately well-made thriller,

but underneath the slick surface the film is rotten to the core. Tarantino invites the audience to join in his violent fantasy, to share with Clarence his carefree attitude towards his own life and the death of others, and to see this as admirable.

And all the time the girl pouts and simpers those oh-so-important little words "you're so cool". I am not against violence in films on principle, but this puerile fantasy is on a par

with adolescent boys torturing animals for kicks.

This film also displays a racism that is thankfully disappearing from mainstream cinema. Dennis Hopper taunts the Mafia hit man with the history of the Moors' invasion of Sicily and the resulting

"nigger blood" pumping through his heart. The only black people seen in the film are stereotype drug dealers and pimps (for the men) and prostitutes (for the women).

Even the white drug-dealing pimp Drexyl has to think he is black.

This is lazy film-making, using types culled from Tarantino's knowledge of films best forgotten as a source of characters.

Save your money, stay home and torture the cat.

*"This film displays a racism that is thankfully disappearing from mainstream cinema."*



Colin Foster  
previews  
*Just Another Girl on the IRT*

Channel 4  
Friday 29 October, 11.45pm

• THIS FRIDAY, 29 October, at 11.45pm, Channel 4 TV is showing

• ON THURSDAY, 28 October, at 9pm, also on Channel 4, *Critical Eye* will look at the Gulf War.

# Alliance for WORKERS' LIBERTY

## YORK

Monday 1 November

**"Labour Must Fight"**

Details: 071-639 7965

Tuesday 9 November

**"Is Marxism out of date?"**

8.00, Gooderich College,  
York University

## BIRMINGHAM

Saturday 6 November

**"Lessons of Millwall"**

Speaker: John Malony  
7.30, Queens Tavern

## LONDON

Saturday 30 October

**Dayschool**

- Discussions on Trotsky on black nationalism
- Trotsky on fighting fascism

Details: Mark on 071-639 7965

Thursday 4 November

**"Israel, the Palestinians and the peace deal"**

Speaker: Mark Osborn  
1.00, Goldsmiths College

## BELFAST

Saturday 20 November

**"The case for workers' liberty" dayschool**

12.00-5.00,  
Queen's University Student Union

## SHEFFIELD

Thursday 18 November

**"How to fight the racists"**

7.30, SCCAU, 73 West Street

Thursday 4 November

**"How to fight market testing and privatisation"**

Speakers from UNISON and Mark Serwotka  
7.30, SCCAU, 73 West Street

## BARNSELY

Monday 1 November

**"Fascism — what it is and how to fight it"**

7.30, Kingsley Pub

# Stamp out racism and capitalism!

RECEIVED A copy of your magazine *How to beat the racists* with the article about our case.

We are asking supporters to write to their MPs and the Home Secretary demanding this outrageous fit-up is referred back to the Court of Appeal. Despite the fact we have no

faith in the court that is the only place the innocence can be decided, for freedom. That is the key — freedom.

We have, like you have, always been innocent but prisoners of the fascist system.

I agree all must unite to fight. Keep up the pressure on all issues. Racism will and must

be completely stamped out as must capitalist ideas that have ruined humanity.

All the best in struggle,  
Raphael Rowe  
(Hostage)

• Raphael Rowe is one of the "M25 Three", black men serving life sentences in jail for crimes committed (so the wit-

nesses said) by two white men and one black man.

Please write letters of support to the M25 Three:  
**Raphael Rowe MP3660**  
HMP Gartree,  
Market Harborough,  
Leics. LE16 7RP.  
**Michael Davis MP3661**  
HMP Wormwood Scrubs,

Du Cane Road,  
Shepherds Bush SW12.  
**Randolph Johnson MP3903**  
HMP Long Lartin,  
South Littleton, Evesham,  
Worcester WR11 5TZ.

Send copies to the M25 Three campaign, c/o Joanne Rowe,  
Ground Floor, 42b Coplestone  
Road, London SE15 4AD.

# March for our freedoms!

THE British National Party is a fascist party. The British police force is not a fascist force.

However:

- the government allows a free platform for fascists, by allowing the BNP to stand candidates, yet uses 1,000 police shields, helmets, vans, horses, trun-

cheons, metal barriers, and highly trained coppers to prevent opponents of the BNP from expressing their opposition to fascism;

- the government allows the BNP to exist, despite the daily incitement to racial hatred which it puts forward (incitement to racial hatred is of course against the law), but does nothing

to overcome the police framing the Birmingham 6 (the police who did it wouldn't get a "fair trial", it is said).

On 16 October the government used the police in defence of fascism. The police for their part set up a situation which would reassert their authority in the eyes of an increasingly right-wing government. The police blocked every side-street

and every road toward the BNP — and then for good measure blocked the route away from the BNP, which they, the police, had themselves imposed upon the march as late as last Tuesday.

The police set up the TV cameras in such a way that they pointed to the demonstrators, not the police; and then, having blocked the marchers in

on all sides, the police waited for the inevitable bottle-neck. The police at the front-line said "You won Trafalgar Square, we'll win this."

Individual police may be excepted — I saw one help an injured man away, and another try to help direct people away at the end of the route. Individual police may not want the Tories and their rotten system either. But this government has produced this rotten system and bred many of the fascists which are part of it, and uses the police as a whole to back it up.

15 September — and a BNP council election victory. First week of October — and a horrible hang-'em and flog-'em right-wing Tory Party Conference. 16 October — and the police defend the fascists. I hear Thatcher praising the Tory leadership for rediscovering the true faith.

Yes, ordinary people did win as a result of Trafalgar Square, and swept out the poll tax and Thatcher with it. Now we have to regain that momentum: by sweeping fascists off our streets, by reasserting our right to speak and protest and march for freedom, and by getting rid of this rotten government — and its laws and its so-called law enforcement — once and for all.

John Nicholson  
Manchester

# Support the Hume/Adams plan

RECENTLY WE have seen significant developments in the possibility of a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Ireland, following the Hume/Adams talks. I think that these developments mean it's time for *Socialist Organiser* to revise its long-standing policy of calling for a unilateral, unconditional cease-fire from the IRA.

SO's view, as often expressed in the paper, has been that the main obstacle to the possibility of a political settlement has been the bombing campaign of the IRA. Without wishing to in any way justify that campaign, it seems to me that this is now no longer the

case.

Sinn Fein and the SDLP have both said they want negotiations between all parties to the conflict to discuss a solution that would recognise the different cultures and communities in Ireland, and be acceptable to all those cultures and communities.

SO has argued the only way to solve the conflict in Ireland is through a United Ireland, with constitutional guarantees for Ulster's Loyalist (Protestant) community. The way towards this solution now seems to be open if all parties are willing to enter these discussions.

The escalation in Loyalist violence (they have been

killing nearly a Catholic a day recently, far more than the numbers killed by the IRA in the same period) shows that the Loyalist paramilitaries' violence is less a response to the IRA's violence than it is a protest at the possibility of a political settlement being on the horizon.

All socialists should now be supporting the start of political dialogue, with no preconditions.

In addition, it has always seemed to me impossible to ask one of the protagonists in a war unilaterally and unconditionally to stop using arms. What is needed to allow a political settlement is a cessation of armed

conflict by all parties involved, the IRA, the Loyalist paramilitaries and the British Army. If only one of those stops, with no political settlement in place, it would be an inevitable recipe for the violence to continue.

The alternative seems to be to support the Hume/Adams initiative, along with people like the Irish Government, who have welcomed the initiative, and do all we can to persuade others to support a start towards talks between all parties, with the intention to seek a general cease-fire and a political settlement.

Roy Webb  
Southwark



# Why you should be a socialist

TODAY ONE CLASS, the working class, lives by selling its labour-power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the social means of production. Life is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes unemployment, the maiming of lives by overwork, imperialism, abuse of the environment, and much else.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty fights to convince and mobilise the working class to overthrow capitalism. We aim not to create a new labour movement, but to transform the existing workers' movement, trade unions and Labour Party.

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

## We stand:

- For social planning, for a sustainable use of natural resources.
- For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working-class-based women's movement.
- For black and white workers' unity, organised through the labour movement, to fight racism and the despair which breeds racism. For labour movement support for black communities' self-defence against racist and fascist violence; against immigration controls.
- For equality for lesbians and gays.

- In support of the independent trade unions and the socialists in Russia and Eastern Europe. We denounce the misery caused by the drive to free-market capitalism there, but we believe that Stalinism was a system of class exploitation no better than capitalism.
- For a democratic united Europe; against the undemocratic and capitalist European Community, but for European workers' unity and socialism, not nationalism, as the alternative.
- For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.
- For the Palestinians' right to a state of their own, alongside

Israel, and for a socialist federation of the Middle East with self-determination for the Israeli Jews.

- For national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide.
- For a workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, to take solidarity action, and to decide their own union rules.
- For a rank and file movement in the trade unions.
- For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.
- For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

**Civil service: after 5 November**

**We need all-out action!**

**CIVIL SERVICE**

By Trudy Saunders, DsHSS Section Executive Committee

A successful strike on 5 November will be an inspiration to other public sector workers facing privatisation as well as being an indication to the Tories that Civil Servants are prepared to fight back.

Yet in and of itself, 5 November will not force the Tories to back down. Civil Servants must use the strike day as a springboard to building for all out strike action across the civil service. Our ultimate aim must be to link together all public sector unions in united action to beat the Tories.

The responsibility for failure to mobilise civil servants before now against Market Testing lies with the civil service union leaderships. For a number of civil servants 5 November comes too late. Their jobs have already been Market Tested. Many are now experiencing, the realities of life in the private sector — like those workers who lost their jobs, redundancy payments and pensions when the Astra Skill Centres collapsed. Others are working harder and in worse conditions as a result of winning 'in house bids'.

**NCU Broad Left at the crossroads**

**BRITISH TELECOM**

By a central London BT engineer

THIS YEAR'S Broad Left AGM will focus on the central issue facing BT workers. The new appraisal procedure (APR) which will lead to compulsory redundancies.

It is vital that the Broad Left majority on the NEC, and the Broad Left as a whole, gives a clear lead on the issue.

The best way to do this would be to unify the membership by holding a ballot to reject the new APR. This would boost morale and draw a line in the sand. Making it clear to BT that any attempt to force through even a single compulsory redundancy will be met with a ballot for all-out national strike action.

**Sacked civil servants fight on**

AROUND 1000 trade unionists marched through Bristol last Saturday in support of the sacked Arrowsmiths printers and the two CPSA members sacked for supporting a one day strike in opposition to their jobs being advertised in the local Job Centre.

In sharp contrast to the full support given to the printers by the GPMU and the support given to RMT members Sikorski and Stelzner by the RMT, CPSA has been luke warm in its support of Amanda Lane and Steve Goldfinch.

The fact that Amanda is a leading Broad Left activist of 15 years standing probably has a lot to do with the CPSA's attitude. They have turned down requests for all out action by the members at Bedminster Job Centre and are relying totally on the industrial tribunal.

With "support" like that who needs enemies!

The civil service trade union bureaucrats had to be forced kicking and screaming into calling even a one day strike. Pressure has been brought to bear from the number of branches and Sections which have taken strike action. Successful one day strikes in the DSS, DoE and Home Office in July have undoubtedly been a major factor in forcing the leaderships to organise the 5 November action.

The strike in the DSS was particularly crucial. The massive 'yes' vote and support on the day was unprecedented in the recent history of CPSA and NUCPS. The tragedy

was that the Militant leadership on the CPSA Section Executive failed to organise further action in the Section.

The leaderships of all four civil service unions will need to be forced to call further action after 5 November. The greatest pressure we can put on them is to organise strike action in the union branches and Section. We must also demand that if only one union wishes to continue to fight, it must do so alone, and argue for members of other unions to be involved in that action. The biggest "excuse" of the leaderships of all four unions has been that "we wish to ballot

for strike action but the other unions don't".

Market Testing is the biggest threat ever to the workers and our unions in the civil service. We must demand the complete withdrawal of Tory Market Testing plans, the return of all areas already Market Tested to the civil service under common wages and conditions and reinstatement of all those who have lost their jobs due to Market Testing. The first battle is to force the leadership to organise a serious fight. That means building strike action and arguing for blanket non-cooperation with Market Testing wherever possible.

**Airlie sells out Timex**

A MASS MEETING of Timex workers last Thursday, 21 October, marked what seems likely to be the final chapter in the ten-month old Timex dispute in Dundee.

A week earlier AEEU Executive Council member Jimmy Airlie had threatened to cut off all strike benefit, financial support for industrial tribunal hearings, and official recognition of the dispute by the union. This was in order to force the sacked workers to settle the dispute on Timex's terms.

The first vote showed a majority against the deal. But so desperate was Airlie to get the dispute called off that he ordered a second vote. When that produced the same result, Airlie ordered a third vote, producing a small majority in

favour of acceptance of the deal.

One condition of the deal was that all sacked workers should declare their acceptance of it in individually signed statements.

To "encourage" them to put pen to paper, the AEEU acted faster than it had at any time during the dispute itself. It promptly cut off strike pay, withdrew financial support for industrial tribunal hearings, and declared the dispute officially over.

The AEEU also threatened to expel the sacked workers from the union if they continued the dispute.

Last Thursday's mass meeting was informed that 260 workers had so far signed statements accepting the deal. Most of the remainder are now likely to sign the statement as well, although a

few are still determined to take their cases to an industrial tribunal.

The strike committee will also be calling off the consumer boycott of Timex products which was organised on an international scale in the run up to Christmas.

Timex has extended the deadline for the return of the signed statements of acceptance by a week and a half, to 26 October, and has also declared that it will not be bothered if "the response is less than 100%."

Timex's new-found self-confidence is, unfortunately, all too justified. As long as the likes of Jordan, Laird, and Airlie call the shots in the AEEU, Britain's engineering bosses can sleep safely in their beds at night.

**Reinstate Ronnie Keith!**

By Dale Street

"BRITAIN NEEDS strong unions," was Labour Party leader John Smith's message for delegates at this year's congress of the TUC.

Unfortunately, the message does not seem to have percolated back to Glasgow, where a number of Labour Party members are currently playing a prominent role in the victimisation of Ronnie Keith, secretary of the UNISON West of Scotland voluntary sector branch.

In August Ronnie was sacked from Milton Unemployed and Community Resource Centre (MUCRC). During the three years he had worked there he had never received a single written or verbal warning.

The major reason cited by the

MUCRC Management Committee for the sacking was Ronnie's use of MUCRC time and equipment for trade union activities.

But most of Ronnie's work as a union branch secretary was done at home. Work done at MUCRC was during his flexible lunch-hour.

Yet the committee's own figures show that, on average, Ronnie used the word processor to type less than one letter a week for union business, and he used the phone for union business for less than 21/2 minutes per working day.

Who sits on the MUCRC Management Committee? Along with representatives of Glasgow Trades Council, there are Labour District and Regional Councillors and office-bearers in Milton, Summerston and Maryhill Labour Party branches.

Ronnie has already received 100% support from his own UNI-

SON branch, and is winning increasing support from other UNISON branches and from branches of other unions. A campaign to back his demand for reinstatement has also been set up.

The immediate aims of the campaign are to publicise Ronnie's case as widely as possible, win financial support for a hardship and campaign fund, and persuade trade unionists to pull out of the "One Fund for All" (which provides funding for Unemployed Workers Centres) until Ronnie has been re-instated.

The trade union movement in Glasgow must also campaign for a boycott of Ronnie's job.

The Labour Party members on the Management Committee must be pulled into line, and the TGWU should ensure that its member who is currently standing-in for Ronnie should stop scabbing

**Tube victory is complete**

**UNDERGROUND**

By a Central Line guard

LAST FRIDAY (22 October) victimised Central Line guards Ray Stelzner and Pat Sikorski were reinstated in their old jobs at their old depot, Leytonstone.

Re-instatement was ordered by the independent arbitration board set up after the union, RMT, started organising a campaign of one-day strikes on the Central Line.

With Pat and Ray back at work a new chapter has opened for Underground workers.

We have shown that determined strike action can force the tube bosses to retreat. For too long the

local leaders of the RMT have not been prepared to act on strike mandates. But now we have seen the management are not as strong as they would like us to believe. Strikes can win.

The drivers' union ASLEF is holding a referendum this week amongst its members on the London Underground.

It seems that ASLEF full timer Kevin Rose is determined to get backing for the lousy five day week 'deal' he is responsible for negotiating.

Under this deal, only about 100 new drivers' jobs will be created while ASLEF has conceded the principle that any driver can be forced to work for up to 5 hours without a break.

**Support Middlebrook Mushroom strikers**

ON 20 NOVEMBER 1992, 89 women were sacked from their jobs at Middlebrook Mushrooms. On 20 November 1993, the women — still fighting for reinstatement — will be leading an anniversary demonstration in Selby. The women were sacked when they refused to sign new contracts which cut their wages and worsened their working conditions. On 26 October, they travelled to London to picket the Booker Prize ceremony. Booker is the multinational that owns Middlebrook Mushrooms. The women's struggle continues to win support from the labour movement in Yorkshire and a book has just been published about the dispute entitled 'Our Bitter Harvest'.

For more information contact Carol Westerman 0977 661923

**Back from Biosphere**



IT IS NOW about a month since the eight occupants of Biosphere 2, a sort of spaceship based on Earth, emerged after some two years more or less away from the world. Biosphere 2 was to be a sealed ecosystem, set up for research and education, perhaps with the ultimate aim of showing how life could be established on Mars. (Biosphere 1 already exists in the form of Planet Earth).

Costing some \$150 million, Biosphere 2 is a set of linked domes covering some four acres. Different environments occupied these domes, including a rain-forest, an arid zone and an "ocean" complete with artificial waves and a coral reef. The crew grew their own food and recycled everything needed for life.

Crew numbers included a rainforest expert who was in charge of intensive agriculture and animal husbandry, and a whale expert who ran the ocean.

Biosphere 2 has had much criticism as being essentially an ecogimmick. Built by Space Biospheres Ventures, a company set up by a Texas billionaire and a Beat poet with interests in ecology and technology, it was intended to be "ecologically correct" but profitable. No doubt, it is possible to improve on the scientific credentials of Biosphere 2 but, even so, much intriguing information has come out of it.

Firstly, there was the mystery of the missing oxygen. Though intended to be more or less self-sufficient atmospherically, oxygen levels fell from the normal 20% to around 14%, similar to the level found at around 3,000 metres. Extra had to be pumped in. Part of the loss was due to the production of extra carbon dioxide. Since this is a microcosm for what is happening to CO2 levels in Biosphere 1, much useful information should come out from studying the response of Biosphere 2's plants and animals to a small scale "greenhouse effect".

Secondly there were the difficulties in food production. Some of the livestock failed to thrive — in particular, the bees which died out, ren-

dering pollination of some food plants difficult or impossible. There were also pest infestations which damaged some crops. The reasons behind these could have a bearing on the future of agriculture on a world whose ecosystems have been upset by climatic changes or use of pesticides. Unexpectedly cloudy winters also caused crop failure, with the result that the crew had a very restricted diet, leading to considerable weight loss. Despite later improvements, food was always rather basic, with about one egg and one cup of coffee per week. The result is that a group of humans whose nutrition for two years is known in detail

*One possibility might be to simulate the effects of a widespread hole in the ozone layer.*

and which excludes most of the ingredients of the Western diet thought to cause illness. Studies of the health of the crew could supply more information on the role of diet in human health. Already, it seems that

their blood pressures and cholesterol levels are drastically lowered, relative to the average unhealthy Westerner.

More research findings will be published in the next few months, including a study of how the crew's bodies responded to several months of low oxygen with normal air pressures.

Spinoffs, such as new intensive agricultural techniques, waste recycling processes and an indoor air purifying process which uses microbes, could also be commercially available.

Perhaps unfortunately, there were no psychological studies of how the crew interacted with each other. These are planned, however, when a new crew takes up residence. The findings could be of value in predicting how people will get on during trips to Mars, or more likely, during expeditions or missions where a small number of people have to co-operate.

Further research could also involve separating off more sections and manipulating oxygen and CO2 levels to see what effect these have on life forms there. One possibility might be to simulate the effects of a widespread hole in the ozone layer. It is likely that very little ultra-violet light gets through Biosphere 2's canopy. Therefore it should be possible to deliver monitored doses of ultra-violet to sections of the various ecosystems

# SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

## Civil service unions vote for strikes

By Mark Serwtoka, Sheffield DSS

# Strikes beat

# French Tories

By Alan Gilbert

**S**TRIKERS AT AIR FRANCE have forced their boss to resign, and the French government to scrap plans to cut 4000 jobs and slash pay.

"We cannot save Air France while clashing with all its employees", said France's transport minister. "Because we must have social peace, we must change the plan".

On Monday 25th, after the government had backed down, the strikers continued, joined by ground staff at Air Inter and airports authority staff, demanding a written promise that any new restructuring plan would cut jobs only through "natural wastage".

According to the Independent (26 October), the victory "has encouraged unions in other industries to become more militant".

Public-sector workers staged a big one-day strike against job cuts on 12 October, and another is planned for 18 November.

All this is happening in a country where trade unionism is weaker than in Britain (probably fewer than ten per cent of workers are union members, and union membership has been falling faster than here), where unemployment is as high as it is in Britain, and where a new right-wing government has a huge parliamentary majority.

Trade unionists in France have one advantage: trade-union laws there are still much less crippling than in Britain. Their ability to call successful one-day cross-industry political protest strikes, for example, is proof of the stupidity of those who argue that the law is irrelevant and all that matters is the strength of rank-and-file union organisation.

But, though the law matters, it does not decide everything. Tube workers have recently shown how to win by strike action legal even under the Tories' laws. On key issues like rail privatisation and Health Service cuts, unions could and should call strike action outside the limits of the Tory laws, and defy those laws with wide public support.

However much the Tories and the bosses talk about their "enterprise culture", they depend on the working class to produce their profits. If workers unite, we can hit their profits, undermine their power, and force them to back down.



The protest on 12 October paved the way for the Air France victory

**C**PSA, NUCPS, IRSF and NIPSA have all voted for a one day strike on Friday 5 November in protest at Tory "Market Testing" plans to contract-out large sections of the civil service to private profiteers.

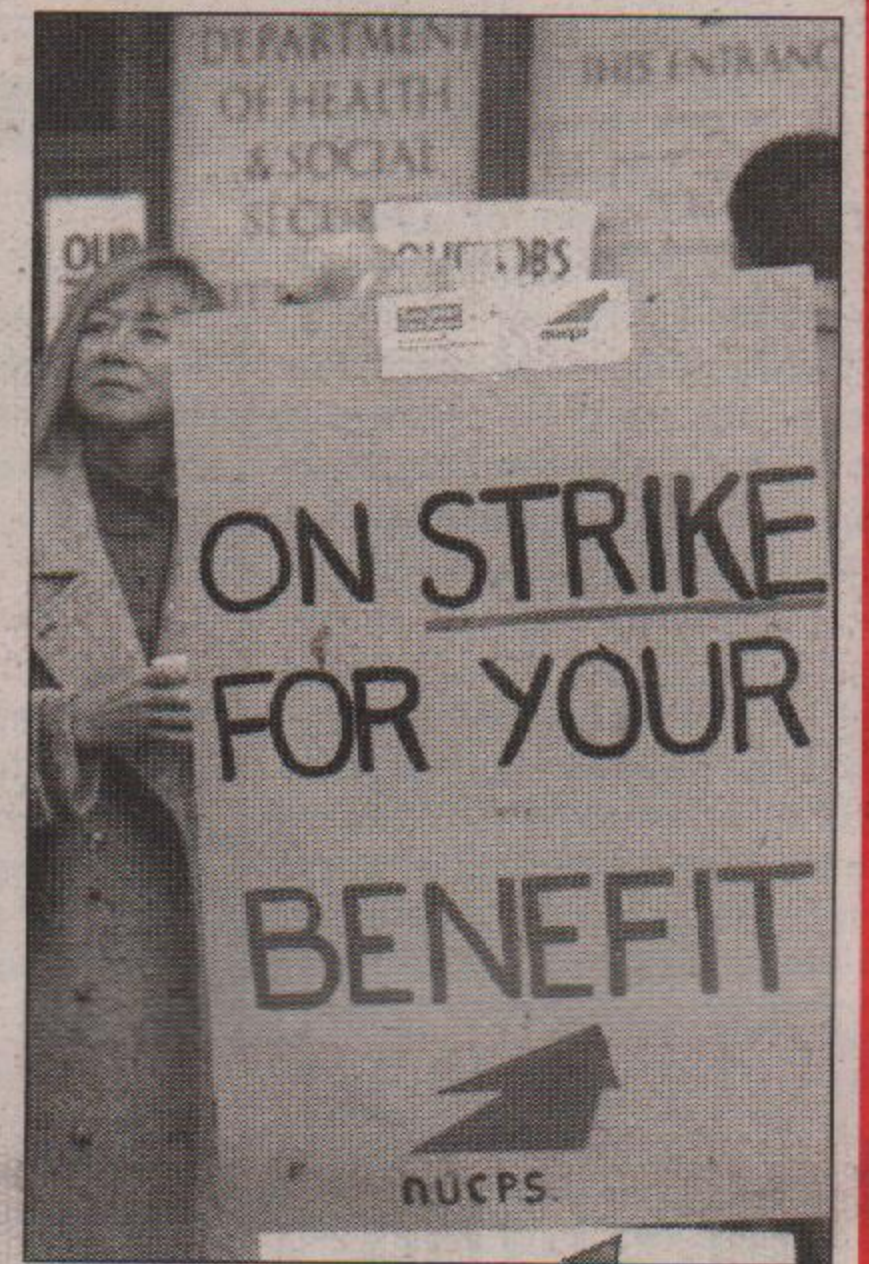


Photo: John Harris

The ballot result (see table below) is a tremendous victory for members and activists across the civil service unions. This is the first strike ballot conducted under the Tories' new legislation which requires the ballot to be conducted by post. For all unions to return turnouts over 50% is a testimony to the hard work of the activists in the branches.

CPSA's turnout was probably affected by the notoriously out-of-date ballot address system which saw ballot papers sent to people who left the service months ago.

The need to use office addresses instead of home addresses is again clearly shown because faults in the system can be more easily rectified.

Work should now begin to ensure picket lines are well staffed and marches/rallies organised in areas which haven't already sorted it out.

Meetings should be held in any office where the level of scabbing could be high in order for the message to be pressed home.

All out on 5 November!

	For	Against	Turnout
CPSA	38201	24815	52%
NUCPS	31552	23307	60%
IRSF	26824	10382	64%
NIPSA	7934	5527	

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