

VOTE LABOUR **MAY 5th**

SOCIALIST

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It will be socialism or barbarism!

Defeat the fascists

Vote Labour on May 5

By Mark Osborn

THERE will be several dozen neo-Nazi British National Party candidates standing in the 5 May local government elections, according to an estimate made by the fascist-watching magazine *Searchlight*.

The BNP will run up to a dozen candidates in Tower Hamlets where, in September 1993, they gained the first fascist electoral victory in Britain since 1976, when Derek Beackon was elected councillor.

We urge all our readers to work for Labour during the run up to these elections. We must not allow the fascist BNP to make gains because the left fails to take these elections seriously!

So far the response of some socialist and anti-racist organisations to this crisis has been terrible. The Anti-Nazi League — an SWP front organisation — and the Anti-Racist Alliance are both running “Don’t vote Nazi” campaigns. So it is all right to vote for Tory or Liberal-Democratic racists?

Yet ANL is run by people who say “vote Labour” in elections and ARA by people who are actually Labour Party members.

The SWP is running a campaign which puts it well to the right of the Labour leaders. After all, Smith and Co. dare to call for a Labour vote while the SWP gives out leaflets which effectively say: Vote Labour, Liberal, Tory or whatever, just don’t vote BNP.

Militant is even worse. They are standing no-hope candidates against Labour in wards where their candidacy may well let other candidates in. This is grossly irresponsible.

No. Socialists must work for Labour in East London. And not only in East London or in areas where the fascists present a threat although these have a special importance. A victory for Labour in May — over all the other parties — will help the labour movement revive and recover its confidence.

In itself this will be a big setback for the BNP, who thrive on despair and demoralisation. But it will also be a boost in the fight against the Tories — whose policies open the door for Nazism.

Working for Labour in May, socialists must continue to fight inside the Party for policies with which workers can fight back against the capitalist-made crisis.

Workers — black and white — need jobs and houses. Labour must begin to provide answers for workers. If it fails to, then more and more groups of white workers — like those who voted for Beackon in Millwall last year — may turn away from Labour, the party of the trade unions, and fall victim to the foul demagoguery of the racist right.

You can make a start by helping Labour’s campaign in Millwall. Next day of campaigning on Sunday 10 April. Phone the London Labour Party for details: 071-490 4904.

Adam Keller reports

What the Israeli peace movement is demanding

For a month already, the mourning Palestinian population of the Territories has been subjected to curfew and closure. The number of Palestinians shot to death by IDF (Israeli army) soldiers since the Hebron massacre already equals the number of the massacre’s victims. After the massacre the government of Israel actually increased the oppressive measures which were in force before. This was Rabin’s way of “calming down the situation.”

Condemnation, expressions of shock or the appointment of a commission of inquiry do not make up for the shameful closure and curfew imposed upon hundreds of thousands.

The massacre and the continuing killing of Palestinians constitute a clear proof that the government of Israel and its security forces are incapable of defending the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories.

The government continues to reject even the most minimal Palestinian demands, and in particular the basic demand for protection.

This intransigence and the ongoing violent oppression endanger the chances for peace opened at Oslo, and prove how fragile is the Israel-PLO agreement. The exact identity of the government ministers and their affiliation to right-wing or left-wing parties are of far less importance than the fact that this government gives legitimacy to the continuing killing carried out by the soldiers of the IDF.

In the present situation, and in order to give a real meaning to “the peace process,” the following steps should be immediately undertaken:

1. International protection for the Palestinian population in the Territories;

2. Immediate evacuation of the settlers located at the heart of Hebron and other Palestinian towns, and a clear government commitment to a policy of dismantling all Israeli settlements in the territories;

3. The immediate start of negotiations on the definite agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.

These steps are a necessary precondition for furthering the peace negotiations and putting an end to the occupation.

A petition with the above demands was agreed upon in a Tel Aviv meeting of intellectuals, peace activists, etc. It is being circulated by Gush Shalom and other groups (Women in Black, Yesh Gvul) and by individual members of Peace Now who feel that one Peace Now demonstration — however big — is not enough, and that the peaceminded should increase their public pressure.

Several hundred Israelis have already signed the petition, but there is not enough money to publish it in a conspicuous way. Friends abroad can help us to publish the petition — with ever new signatures — in the Israeli press.

Money sent to Gush Shalom, PO Box 11112, Tel Aviv 61110, Israel — and marked “for the petition” — will be used for this purpose.

We would appreciate an advance notice of contributions being sent, to tel/fax 972-3-5565804.

The government continues to reject even the most minimal Palestinian demands, and in particular the basic demand for protection.

Report from Johannesburg, South Africa:

“Inkatha are launching a pogrom against the working class”

Salim Valley from the Workers’ List Party of South Africa, who witnessed this week’s street fighting in Johannesburg gives us his assessment of the situation.

THE events in Johannesburg over the last couple of days should be seen as part of an attempt by the so-called “Third Force” — shadowy elements in the state and Inkatha — to destabilise the situation.

The Goldstone report which was published last week implicated various generals in supplying arms to Inkatha. This was part of their “Third Force” strategy which was designed to create a reign of terror in the townships. Basically, it’s a pogrom against the working class. What we saw yesterday was an attempt to take the pogrom into the streets of Johannesburg.

Of course the Inkatha people are claiming that it was a peaceful march until they were fired upon by the ANC. But the Inkatha spokesperson who is claiming this, Themba Khoza, was the main person involved in channelling guns from the security forces to Inkatha as part of the “Third Force” operation.

It is basically an attempt by Inkatha to destabilise the situation.

It is difficult to assess what will happen next. We are presently debating and discussing the question amongst ourselves.

The ANC and De Klerk who sat together in the transitional executive council could attempt to send the South African Defence Force into Natal to use force in order to ensure the election takes place.

But DeKlerk is still bankrolling Buthelezi’s Kwa Zulu government.

So despite the verbal threats we doubt that they will send in the army to Natal.

At the moment it’s just not possible to say whether or not the election will still take place on 27 April or be postponed. Whatever happens we can

expect mass repression in the townships. This is happening now with large areas of the townships around Johannesburg being declared “unrest zones” and a mini-local state of emergency being declared.

The danger of civil war still exists from the white right as well.

On Monday (28 March) the same day as the Johannesburg fighting, large areas of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, including Bloemfontein which is a large town, declared themselves a “Volkstaat” and said the election will not take place there. So if Mandela and DeKlerk want the election to go ahead they will probably have to unleash a major wave of repression against both Inkatha and



At least 20 people were killed, and 300 wounded, when Inkatha took to the streets in Johannesburg

the white right. We continue to focus on the need for disciplined defence committees in the workplaces and townships.

“Building a base for socialism”

Salim Valley, of the Workers’ List Party, reports from Johannesburg on the party’s campaign in the forthcoming South African election.

We see our campaign as laying down a marker. It is not a question of winning a huge vote but of building a base in the townships and the workplaces for socialist politics.

We aim to highlight a few main issues like jobs, homes, housing, as well as the ANC’s refusal to challenge the IMF and the old apartheid bureaucrats, not to mention their desire to govern hand in hand with the National Party and the South African bosses.

We have managed to get some real support on the ground.

For instance we collected over 10,000 signatures in just one week. This was part of the official registration process, so we had to have people’s addresses and ID card numbers as well. This is the kind of information people don’t

easily give you.

These signatures were they checked by the state — who are not exactly keen on our campaign. So the 10,000 signatures really represent something in terms of support.

We have also had the opportunity to present our case on TV in programmes like an hour long ‘Agenda’ discussion programme the other weekend. Tomorrow our comrade Neville Alexander, who spent 11 years on Robben Island, will be presenting our case on “Good Morning, South Africa” the main phone-in breakfast TV programme.

We are holding a 500-strong delegate conference in Cape Town this Easter weekend to assess the election campaign and the overall political situation.

Some of our comrades have faced a certain amount of harassment from supporters of the ANC and the South African Communist Party.

For instance a group of our people were physically assaulted and beaten when they were out campaigning in the townships. But we defended ourselves and continued our campaigning activity.

Similarly, one of our comrades who is a shop steward in NEHAWU — one of the COSATU trade unions — was

threatened with expulsion from the union by the local Cape Town Stalinist bureaucrats, but we defended them and the local bureaucrats got a rap on the knuckles from their own national leadership. Other worker comrades have faced similar threats. We also get our fair share of threatening phone calls.

Nevertheless, our comrades are throwing themselves into the campaign. It’s exhausting. We really value all the support and solidarity we can get from comrades overseas, especially as there is a danger of a new wave of repression against the non-ANC/SACP left.

Our people are throwing themselves into the struggle and the need all the help they can get from socialists and trade union activists in Britain.

● A special AWL pamphlet — Solidarity with the South African Socialists — has been produced. It contains the WLP manifesto as well as articles by South African socialists.

The price of this pamphlet is £5, £4 of which will go to the WLP. People can also help the WLP by donating money straight into their account by bank transfer payable to “WOSA”, account no 19979 318433, Ned Bank, 100 Main Street, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Next issue:
Because of Easter holidays, the next issue of *Socialist Organiser*, no595, will appear on 14 April, not 7 April.

The fascist gains in Italy's election

A warning for the left

PRECISE figures for the Italian general election — the first under a new system of voting — are not yet available when we go to press (Tuesday evening, 29 March.)

But it is known that the right-wing block, led by Italy's Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi, won a clear majority — perhaps 330 seats in the 630-strong Chamber of Deputies — and that the neo-fascist party, which is part of the right-wing block, has won perhaps 15% of the overall vote. It has a much larger proportion of the votes in southern and central Italy, where it is strongest.

Now the haggling begins about forming a government. Will the fascists be part of the

government? Already the leaders of the Northern League, who form part of the victorious right-wing block, and who want a federal Italy, have said that they refuse to be partners in government with their fascist partners of the election campaign.

The Italian fascists are not — or not yet — the raging terrorists Mussolini's fascists were in 1920 and after. They do not have the backing of the decisive section of the Italian ruling class. The Italian labour movement is still strong. Nevertheless, this election result is a serious defeat for the Italian working class.

The central responsibility for this defeat lies with the "Democratic Left Party" — which is expected to win, perhaps, 240 seats. Under its

old and very inappropriate name of "Communist Party", this organisation has for decades wasted the strength and energy of the Italian working class. Like the Labour Party of Britain — it has long been to the right of the Labour Party — and the Communist Party of France, the Communist Party of Italy by its passivity and lack of fight has left the way clear for forces which wish to bring about the destruction of the entire labour movement.

As with the growth of European fascism in general, the rise of Italian fascism to the point where it may be about to join the government contains a grim warning for the labour movement in Britain.

Fascism is now a greater threat than it has been for 50 years!

For the socialist left it points unmistakably to the need to get its house in order. The serious parts of that left must break with senseless sectarianism, and turn seriously to the fundamental work of Marxists — the work of transforming the existing labour movement. How? By changing it in the process of struggle, by drawing new, fresh, young forces into it, and by building a democratic and honest Marxist organisation embedded organically inside the one mass labour movement we have.

Italy tells us how urgent this work is. We still have time. But we have not got all the time in the world.

19 March showed what TUC could do

Only action can defeat racism

PERHAPS 50,000 people, led by Labour and trade union leaders, marched through the East End of London in protest against racism on 19 March.

This TUC demonstration was one of the most important events in labour movement politics for a long time.

Denied the right to hold a rally in Victoria Park by the racist Liberal-Democrats who run Tower Hamlets council, the march ended up in Hackney, where TGWU leader Bill Morris demanded the repeal of "racist immigration legislation." His suggestion that instead there should be "fair" immigration laws begs the question, can there be "fair" immigration laws in a society like ours? We would say not, and we demand instead the simple repeal of all immigration laws. But for the leader of Britain's biggest trade union to denounce Britain's existing immigration laws as racist and demand their repeal — that is progress.

A number of black and Asian representatives spoke from the platform advocating black self-defence, and calling on trade unionists for support against the racists. On an official TUC platform, that too was progress.

The leaders of Britain's trade union movement have evidently been alarmed by the growth of the fascist British National Party in East London, and by the growth of fascism throughout Europe.

Yet, the hard truth is that demonstrations and speeches, even good speeches, alone will not defeat the fascists. Fascism in East London is a foul culture nourished above all by racism, but where does racism itself come from? It grows out of the poverty, unemployment, despair and ignorance which pinch and shrivel the



The demonstration was a step forward, but only a start. Photo: Garry Meyer

lives of so large a part of the white working class in the East End of London, and in other areas too.

Dark-skinned, culturally different immigrants make easy scapegoats, but it is social decay and the hopelessness it has bred which turn white awareness of ethnic and cultural difference into the poisonous chauvinism on which fascism can feed.

On 19 March, trade union speakers truly said that fascism is now a growing movement in London because of social conditions in the East End and that an effective fight back has to include an offensive against the Tories

and their policies. Yes. But...

Central in generating the hopelessness and despair that afflicts so much of our class in the East End, and on which fascism feeds, have been the defeats suffered by the working class in the last dozen years, and — more even than defeat, perhaps — the lack of fight from the official labour movement, Labour Party and trade union wings alike, for so many years. Even a limited campaign by the TUC could change that — a campaign by the TUC and the big trade unions for houses, jobs and the preservation of the National Health Service, and

against unemployment and Tory cuts. But will they mount such a campaign?

Without such a campaign, the trade union leaders — and, of course, the shameless, careerist Labour politician Tony Blair who spoke at the rally on 19 March — will be just so many liberal windbags — people who in their capacity of liberals denounce the consequences that flow from what they do in their capacity of no-fight Labour and trade union leaders.

19 March may be an indication that things are changing for the better, but we have a long way to go.

Trade union and Labour Party

branches should demand that the TUC and Labour leaders act as well as talk. We need a vigorous labour movement campaign to defend the National Health Service, and to raise a storm of protest against unemployment and homelessness. Such a campaign could drive the Tories from office. The TUC could organise such a campaign. Demand that it does!

Against the fascists here and now we need to foster a spirit of strong intolerance against all manifestations of racism in the labour movement; and we need to build active labour movement support for black self-defence.

"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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WE SAY

Unite the left! For unity in action and honest dialogue about our differences.

Democracy and Europe

TWENTY-THREE VOTES? Twenty-seven? How many should it be for a blocking minority in the European Community's Council of Ministers?

John Major is making a crisis over this piffling issue in order to placate the Tory right wing. For socialists and democrats the real problem is elsewhere. Why are the major decisions in the European Community taken by the Council of Ministers - that is, by haggling between governments, behind closed doors - rather than democratically?

If there is to be an integrated Euro-economy — and, given the scale and interconnectedness of modern production, there has to be — then it must be controlled as democratically as possible. The labour movement should demand a democratic, sovereign Euro-parliament, and work for a democratic Socialist United States of Europe.

Scrap the racist immigration laws!

IN THE FIRST six months of 1993, 9% of asylum seekers in this country were granted refugee status. In the last six months the number of successful applications fell by a third to 6%.

In the first six months of last year 76% of asylum-seekers were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (a kind of second class version of refugee status). In the latter six months this figure slumped to 22%.

Overall, 14% of asylum applications were completely unsuccessful in the first half of the year, as against a massive 72% in the latter half.

The explanation? In July of 1993 the Tories' Asylum and Immigration (Appeals) Act came into force. All subsequent decision were based upon the criteria of this anti-refugee and anti-immigration piece of legislation.

A breakdown of the Home Office's statistics according to the nationality of asylum seekers underlining the extent to which applications for asylum are judged by the Tory politics of bigotry and nationalist prejudice, rather than international conventions.

In the first half of 1993, 2,365 Sri Lankans were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain. In the second half of the year just 55 were granted ELR.

Nearly 2,000 asylum applications from nationals of India and Pakistan (not the most tolerant of countries) were decided upon in 1993. Not a single one of them was successful.

From former Yugoslavia, a country torn apart by war and the scene of "ethnic cleansing", concentration camps and mass rape, not a single person was granted refugee status in 1993.

The upsurge of nationalism in many Western countries has led to increased hostility towards foreigners, especially non-White ones. The drive to keep out immigrants has caught asylum seekers in its firing line.

Socialists must demand the Asylum and Immigration (Appeals) Act be scrapped. We must also fight for all immigration laws to be scrapped and for international working class struggle to topple the regimes which force people to flee their own country.

Are all Israelis responsible for Hebron?

INTERNATIONAL Viewpoint is a monthly magazine published from Paris by the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International", the grouping whose best known member is Ernest Mandel. It is a useful magazine; we have in the past reproduced material from *IV* in *Socialist Organiser*.

The national groupings which make up the "USFI" vary quite a bit, but the tendency taken as a whole is by far the most politically and intellectually alive and by far the least sclerosed of the groupings still standing on the basis of "Orthodox Trotskyism" — that unstable amalgam of pre-1940 Trotskyism with the "liberal Stalinist" politics of Heinrich Brandler and Isaac Deutscher, codified at the "Third World Congress" in 1951. Elements of this tendency were much quicker than we were to understand that the only acceptable solution to the Arab-Jewish conflict is the creation of two states — a Jewish and an Arab state — in Palestine. (Others still continue eye-deep in that anti-imperialism of idiots, Zionophobia — *Socialist Outlook*, the British supporters of the "USFI" for example).

All the greater, therefore, was our surprise to find the following sentence in an editorial introduction to an article on the Hebron massacre: "...there are not words to describe such a crime, for which the entire Israeli people is in part responsible..." (March 1994, page 7). The massacre was the work of a lunatic or semi-lunatic. In so far as what happened occurred because the Israeli Government fosters the settlers, including the lunatic chauvinists among them, and because of its general policy, then you could say that a lot of people in Israel are responsible. But "the entire Israeli people" includes large numbers who want Israel out of the West Bank and many who advocate a Palestinian state. They too are "responsible"? No they are not! Not unless they are guilty by dint of the fact that they exist as part of the Israeli nation, sharing in a "collective guilt".

IV's editorial comment is reminiscent of nothing so much as the Third Worldist Maoists of the '60s and '70s, according to whom whole peoples, the British for example, including their working classes, were blamed and condemned en bloc for collective "crimes against the people of the Third World".

Is there any other people on which the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" would pronounce a similar judgement in response even to government or army action? We think not. It is really quite scandalous for people who call themselves Trotskyists to write and publish such things.

Australian left routs the fascists

LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

By Richard Lane

NATIONAL Action, a fascist group, were decisively routed when they tried to demonstrate in the Brunswick area of Melbourne on 12 March.

Originally they planned to demonstrate the previous week during the Brunswick multicultural festival. Solid organising by Brunswick Against the Nazis (BAN) forced them to change their plans. 600 turned up to show their anger, even though we knew that NA had changed their plans. That demonstration then marched to the Coburg office of the Citizens' Electoral Council — a front group for the followers of US fascist Lyndon LaRouche.

Arriving early on the 12th, 25 NA supporters occupied the steps of Brunswick Town Hall and began to wave their flags

and strut about in typical storm trooper style. Whenever they tried to speak their racist filth the counter demonstration yelled them down. At first the police kept us at a distance — refusing to allow anti-fascists on the road. As our numbers grew to 1500 the police gave up and stopped cars and trams in both directions.

As temperatures rose, a couple of attempts were made to have a go at the fascists. It quickly became clear that most of the crowd were not interested in a brawl. Instead a rain of eggs and horse shit descended on the fascists. The police did nothing to stop this — in fact they were quite restrained for the whole demo. One exception was a notoriously violent horsewoman who bloodied the head of one of our number.

The situation was at a stalemate — they could not go anywhere and we could not get at them. Eventually the cops stopped a row of trams and ran the fascists off down a side

street. Our demonstration then fragmented as people poured down the back alleys of Brunswick to catch them. Finally they backed into an open warehouse of the security firm Mayne-Nickless. Form there the cops herded them to Brunswick station, stopped a train, cleared a carriage and escorted them out of the suburb.

This was perhaps the best result possible. They were humiliated and demoralised without our supporters sustaining injuries or arrests. At least six youth they had attracted looked like they would not want to be involved again. Some members of the Vigilantes Motor Cycle Club left after twenty minutes — they did not like being pelted with eggs. Video footage of National Action running away was featured on TV news that night. They will not be able to recruit on the results of this demo.

However, they are not going to disappear either. A few days

later, NA attacked the offices of Latrobe Uni SRC, which had supported the demo.

A broad range of groups and communities participated. A march of Jewish students almost did not join the rally. Their leaders were worried by the prospect of violence. In the end they did participate when it became clear that their ranks were doing so despite the leaders' wishes.

David Glanz, a leader of the ISO (Australian clone of the British SWP), has argued that if the fascists do not organise again then there is not much point in BAN continuing. I think that we have to use this good start to build a broadly based movement that can not only confront the fascists if they mobilise publicly, but can do the day to day work as well. We need to: remove fascist graffiti and posters; monitor harassment of Asians, blacks, etc and do systematic work to counter racism; reach out to other groups in Brunswick and elsewhere.

Liberation: class or Currie?

OUT AND PROUD

By Janine Booth

TWO of the most sickening sights of the recent Parliamentary vote on the age of consent for gay sex were Labour MPs voting against equality, and Edwina Currie being seen as a 'leader' of the campaign for equality at sixteen.

Of course, the reality is that it was not Edwina Currie who 'led' the campaign. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) activists and our heterosexual supporters have campaigned actively and tirelessly on this and other issues of LGB equality. However, Edwina Currie leapt into the media spotlight, with no apparent reservations from the 'aristocracy' of the LGB movement.

The LGB movement should not have such short memories. Edwina Currie supported the infamous Section 28 which banned local authorities from 'intentionally promoting homosexuality' and described our lives as 'pretended family relationships.'

Edwina Currie is a supporter of the Tory Government that has:

- refused to include sex education in the National Curriculum; forced young people to be more dependent on their parents; been enthusiastically supported by newspapers which incite homophobia; increased prison sentences for displays of same-sex affection; created the Child Support Agency; responded inadequately and moralistically to the AIDS crisis; and used homophobia in its election campaigns. Some champion of equality! With 'friends' like this...

LGB liberation is not some-



Outrage demonstrate against the Parliamentary vote

thing that can be achieved in isolation in a capitalist system that is rotten to the core with inequality. Advances in legal rights are possible — and welcome — but there is more to liberation than that. So will we see Edwina Currie supporting parenting rights? Supporting sexual freedom? Supporting the socialisation of domestic work necessary to free personal relationships from economic bonds? Supporting an end to the institutional power of the Church? Supporting full rights for workers and trade union struggles against discrimination? Supporting economic independence for women and for young people? Of course not, she's a Tory.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people will not achieve liberation on their own. And we should not have to fight for liberation on our own. We need to be united with other people in society who are under attack. Strength through unity can be achieved through active solidarity. A glimpse of that unity was seen in the 1984/5 miners' strike, when the mining communities

came to support LGB rights through solidarity in struggle. The strike was beaten by the Tory Government and by the failure of labour movement leaders to put into action the need for solidarity.

It is to the Labour Party's shame that they allowed Edwina Currie to put herself at the forefront of the age of consent campaign. Had the Labour Party taken an uncompromising stance for equality — but ensuring Labour MPs voted with Party policy — and had the Labour Party done so consistently in the past, then it would have been clear that it is the labour movement, not the Tories who champion equality.

Some may claim that the LGB movement should accept support from wherever we can get it. But short-term hypocritical support from Tory MPs is not worth losing support from those who justifiably hate the Tories.

Will pensioners rally to a cause championed by someone who told them to knit woolly jumpers to survive the cold winters? Will working class Northerners support a crusade led by the same

Edwina Currie, who said that poor health was because they had bad eating habits?

By letting Edwina Currie lead the campaign for an equal age of consent, self-appointed LGB 'leaders' give the impression that we care only about our 'own' issues, and care nothing for the hardship and oppression caused by the Tories to millions of working class people. We should not make a friend of the enemy of our strongest potential allies.

The future for achieving an equal age of consent, and for advancing the struggle for liberation, is for the LGB movement to ally with others under attack, and to look to the labour movement. That means cutting links with those who attack and oppress. But this is a demand not just on the LGB movement, but on the labour movement itself. The labour movement must take up the cause of LGB equality, must make itself accessible to the most oppressed and must prove in practice that only socialism and working class struggle can deliver sexual liberation.

Jailed for life for a crime he didn't commit

Free Patrick McLaughlin!

By Alan Johnson

“WE HAVE no hard evidence to convict this man, but we do have circumstantial evidence and I think when you hear it you will smell a trout.”

So began the prosecution's 'case' against Patrick McLaughlin who has now been in prison for eight and a half years of a life sentence, convicted of “conspiracy to cause an explosion”.

The real ‘smell’ is of rotten British ‘justice’ which since 1989 has been forced to admit 21 serious miscarriages of justice against Irish people, including the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, the Maguire/Conlan families.

The solicitor who acted for Gerry Conlan, Gareth Pierce, is also acting for Patrick McLaughlin. She says “In all the occasions that I have acted as a solicitor for an Irish person charged with a terrorist related offence, I have never known a case where an individual has been convicted on so little evidence as in the case of Patrick McLaughlin.

“A campaign for Patrick is the one light on the horizon.”

The campaign — The Friends of Patrick McLaughlin — is based in Derry and last week took a major step forward by winning the unanimous support of Derry City Council to demand Patrick McLaughlin's release, and his transfer to a prison in Northern Ireland pending release.

Patrick McLaughlin was convicted of ‘conspiring to cause an explosion’ following the discovery of an alleged bomb outside the Chelsea Army Barracks in London in November 1985. The package contained the components of a bomb, but it had not been primed. It had been planted by the “Irish National Liberation Army” (INLA).

Inside the bag, which contained the explosive materials, were some personal documents of a person who lived at a flat in Harlesden.

The police raided this flat and arrested 5 people who were later released without charge.

Unfortunately, Patrick McLaughlin had been at a party at this flat the night before the explosives were discovered. He was arrested.

The evidence was very thin. For example: police claimed that Patrick McLaughlin's fingerprint was on a bin-liner surrounding the bomb, but in court the prosecution was unable to identify exactly where on the bin-liner the fingerprint had been found!

They said that the identification sticker had been “lost”.

They admitted that other fingerprints were also on the bag.

Other evidence was clearly either fabricated or, where it could support Patrick McLaughlin's innocence, was not heard in court.

The conduct of the trial judge was appalling. He said the alleged bomb had been planted by the IRA (not INLA). He let unrelated evidence be heard by the jury. For example that Patrick had the letters IRA crudely tattooed on his arm — as “proof” that he was an IRA supporter!

Patrick McLaughlin is an innocent man, framed by an unjust system.

There have been many expressions of extreme disquiet about the case. Patrick Lawlor of the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), the Northern Ireland equivalent of Liberty, has written:

“The case of Patrick McLaughlin raises again the old questions about the conduct of the trials involving Irish people. This case fits into a pattern where Irish defendants have not been given a fair crack of the whip when it comes to political trials. It must also raise the point of just how politically motivated the British judiciary are when dealing with such cases.”

Paul Hill of the Guildford Four has expressed his support for Patrick McLaughlin: “I knew Patrick McLaughlin well when I was in prison in

England. Not only was I personally convinced that he was innocent of any involvement in the Chelsea Army Barracks bomb but, significantly, so were all the other prisoners in the jail at that time.

“I fully support the campaign to get Patrick released and will do all I can to help. I hope others will do the same too.”

And Johnny Walker of the Birmingham Six has said: “I have read the evidence. I have studied the background. I am absolutely convinced that this was another set up.”

The call for Patrick McLaughlin's transfer to a prison in Northern Ireland was put to Derry City Council by his sister who told the council:

“His children are suffering needlessly. Pat is a great stabilising force for the kids, he encourages them but it's very hard to keep regular contact up. His parents are suffering one illness after another and have not been able to visit their son for over a year. Since the campaign has taken off we have



Patrick McLaughlin — unjustly jailed

experienced more hassle entering the country and some visits have been blocked or cancelled.”

As the Friends of Patrick McLaughlin have argued: peace in Ireland cannot be achieved by scapegoating Irish people who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Patrick McLaughlin should

be freed immediately.

Anyone wishing to support the campaign should contact: The Friends of Patrick McLaughlin, 1 West End Park, Derry, Ireland, BT48 9JF. Telephone: (0504) 268846.

• With acknowledgements to Robin Percival for the materials from which this article has been written.

Jailed for no crime at all

Free the asylum-seekers!

By Dale Street

AS WE go to press, 130 asylum seekers remain on hunger strike in detention centre and prisons throughout Britain. Their “crime” is to have fled persecution in their own country and to have sought refuge in Tory Britain.

Asylum seekers and other immigrants can be detained — without being given any explanation — under the Immigration Act of 1971. The decision to detain is taken by an Immigration Officer, who is not accountable to any court or independent review body.

Most asylum seekers who are detained are black and come from African and Asian countries. Few, if any, can find the sureties of £5,000 required to stand a chance of obtaining bail. Around 10% of detained asylum seekers have been held for six months, though some have been held for nearly two years.

None of these asylum seekers has been convicted — or even accused — of any crime. In breach of Human Rights Conventions and United Nations Conventions, they are being detained simply because they are asylum seekers.

In recent months there has been a massive increase in the number of detained asylum seekers. In December 1993 375 asylum seekers were held

in detention. Now the number has nearly doubled to 720.

One reason for the sudden growth is the Tories' general crackdown on asylum seekers in the aftermath of the introduction of new anti-refugee legislation last July. Another reason is the opening of Campsfield House detention centre in Oxfordshire.

With the opening of Campsfield House — run by Group 4 private security, surrounded by a 20 foot high fence, and subject to constant video surveillance throughout the premises — another 200 places for the detention of asylum seekers became available.

But the growth of detention facilities failed to keep pace with the increase in the number of asylum seekers being detained. As a result, over 200 asylum seekers are now held in the remand wings of prisons, including some of the worst in the country.

Frustration among asylum seekers over being detained — without trial or reason — finally erupted a week into March, when a dozen detainees at Campsfield House began a hunger strike and staged a rooftop protest.

Support for the hunger strike quickly spread. Soon a hundred detainees at Campsfield House were on hunger strike, along with another 150 asylum seekers in other detention centres and prisons.

In an attempt to break the strike at Campsfield House, heating was turned off in the rooms of hunger strikers, letters were withheld, and access to solicitors denied. The leading figures in the hunger strike, especially those who have participated in the rooftop protest, were also transferred to different prisons.

In a number of cases solicitors were not even informed of the transfer of their clients, nor of the destination of their removal.

Despite the clampdown by the authorities, the hunger strike continues. 60 asylum seekers are still on hunger strike in Campsfield House, and another 70 elsewhere.

A prison — or a detention centre — is no place fit to hold a convicted criminal, still less an asylum seeker, who has probably suffered imprisonment and torture, and detention without trial before their arrival in Britain.

All asylum seekers should be released immediately. If the Tories are worried about the resulting under-use of Campsfield House, they can fill it up again with all their big business pals who make millions from insider dealing, tax evasion and pension scams.

• Messages of support for the hunger strikers can be sent c/o Campaign to Close Campsfield House, 69 Hurst Street, Oxford OX4 1HA.

How Labour should run industry

THE POLITICAL FRONT

By Alan Simpson, MP for Nottingham South

OVER THE past 15 years, there really has been a big restructuring of capital, and that can be seen in where the funding for the Tory party comes from.

It comes from people who move money internationally and look for tax havens to stash themselves and their loot. These people have no interest at all in a manufacturing base and nor do the Tories. They don't look for their money from manufacturing employers in the U.K., because their backers now are international financiers.

They recognise there will be a transfer of production either to the Third World or to women — but when they say the Third world they mean here, that's how they see it.

Within a commitment to full employment there should be a whole series of additional rights and entitlements set down by an incoming Labour Government. We should reestablish the right to insert local labour clauses. We should look at ways in which the tax system is able to reward industrial democracy and industrial common ownership.

The Tories use the tax system to reward corporate capital. Why shouldn't an incoming Labour government use it to reward a charge in the opposite direction, towards industrial democracy and towards public ownership?

If you ask people what they want, people start with a basic shopping list — a job, a home that I feel reasonably safe in, a living wage, prospects for my kids, a health service education. We should start from that. We explain that we need to develop industries, and we can't do that unless there is a premium put on requiring people to invest in jobs and skills and training. Ask people whether they would favour a Labour Government that would take seriously the issue of local employment, and they'll say yes. Explain that this means a government instructing industry what to do and they'll still say it's absolutely right.

Ask people what they think about the rail, and they want to keep it nationalised. There is no public support for privatisation of the pits.

I think there is a wide support for re-nationalising virtually all the industries that have been privatised. The question is how, because people are terrified about the cost. The simplest way would be for a Government to say it will convert the shares in to debentures: the holders could trade them amongst themselves and receive a guaranteed rate of interest. They would be converted into loans.

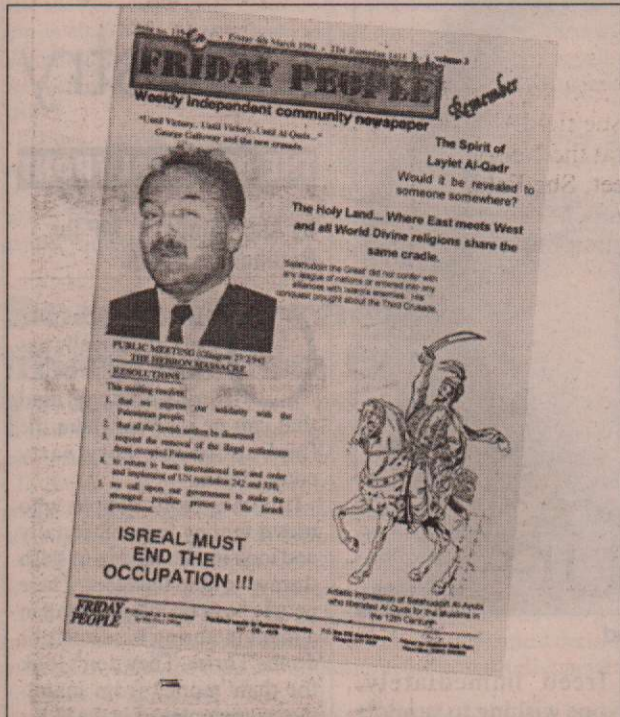
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Is George Galloway a chauvinist?



GRAFFITI



By Cyclops

WHERE the Middle East is concerned, George Galloway, Labour MP for Glasgow Hillhead, tries to pass himself off as just an ordinary "anti-imperialist". He is not, he insists, any sort of Arab or Muslim chauvinist. When reports appear that seem to prove he is a vicarious Muslim chauvinist, Galloway is always quick to cry "misrepresentation by the capitalist press". That — until the evidence of videotape and microphone forced him to back down — was his first response to the reports last year that he had addressed a fawning speech to Iraqi butcher Saddam Hussein, praising his "strength" and "indefatigability" and seemingly urging him on to a new war with Israel: "Until Jerusalem". His standard defence in the labour movement is to say 'judge me on my anti-imperialist record'. Let us judge him instead by how the Muslim press reports what he said at a Glasgow public meeting on 27 February. The "Friday People" (Friday is the Muslim Sabbath) is a "weekly independent community newspaper" published in Glasgow. Its issue of March 4 (see picture) cited Galloway in support of its call for a "New Crusade" of Muslims against Israel.

Excerpts from the "Friday People" report of Galloway's speech: "The guests were waiting for the arousing address of Hillhead MP George Galloway. He did not disappoint them... Galloway was shocked and horrified but not surprised to learn what had happened... [in the Hebron massacre]. 'How could a sane man systematically annihilate everyone there row by row by row aided by the soldiers?'... Galloway then boiled with justifiable anger: 'If Muslim blood is sadly spilled so cheaply talking is even cheaper... I ask the question, what are the Arab and Muslim leaders doing, guardian of the faith and the holy mosques, to those who evicted the Palestinians from their homes in the Gulf following the war there: would Muslim governments act rather than talk?' Realising the fact of the matter and the habit with Israel Galloway added: 'The truth is this massacre would not be the last one or the first one, remember Telal-Za'tar, Ein El-Helweh, Sabra and Chatilla in the Lebanese refugee camps...' Galloway lastly turned to the Palestinians everywhere 'there must be something holy about these people to be victimised so often. We ask God for their deliverance, Thawrah hattal naser, Thawrah Hattal naser...hattal Quds'...." The words above Galloway's head on the cover of "Friday People" are, I guess, a translation of these words of Arabic.

Revenge or reform?



WOMEN'S EYE

By Jean Lane

A MAN OF 31 who was jailed for raping his 13 month old daughter and subjecting her, according to news reports, to 3 hours of physical and sexual abuse, was found hanging in his cell last week.

The first assumption many will come to on reading such news is that the man was killed. Prison authorities have had to go to considerable lengths to isolate sex offenders because of the treatment they get from other prisoners.

The first gut response many may give to the news is; "Good. He deserved it". How a grown man can bring himself to do such a thing to a 13 month old child is beyond the comprehension of most people, decent or otherwise.

But what combination of circumstances turned what must once have been an innocent little boy into a 31 year old monster? And, whatever those circumstances were, was the man reformable into something saner and better.

It may be the case that there are some people of whom we have to accept that society cannot tolerate them in its midst. Even under socialism that may be true. But there are two

issues here.

Firstly, we shouldn't want our system of justice to be based on such cases. We shouldn't want them to be locked up and the key thrown away. Because we must believe that those who have done wrong, not just in the eyes of the state but of everybody, can change.

If we don't, then there is no hope, for instance, for the ten and eleven year old murderers of Jamie Bulger. His parents, on hearing that the boys may get out of prison before twenty years are up, were filled with a righteous and understandable anger. "How can you contemplate, even after so many years, letting out the torturers and killers of my son? These boys are animals and should never get out". Such were the awful words from Jamie's family and friends which struck a chord with everyone who listened to the news. But they were wrong, nevertheless.

If the two boys do not get out after twenty or even ten years are up, this would indicate, not a victory for justice but, a defeat. It would mean that the system was nothing to do with enabling wrongdoers to be confronted with the knowledge that they were wrong and to come to terms with society and with themselves. Such a system would have nothing to do with reform or prevention, but would have everything to do with revenge; an eye for an eye, and would,

logically, be a step towards the return of hanging.

If we treat adult criminals (i.e. those who are responsible for what they do and who have a choice in their actions) in such a way, then child criminals would have no chance because the penal system would be geared to exacting revenge. It would be based on the wishes of the victim rather than on the needs of society as a whole.

Our penal system should not only be based on the needs of the whole of society, but should be accountable to it. We may be glad, in our stomachs, to see the back of the baby-rapist, but who hung him? On whose behalf? By whose decision? And who is to say that they weren't psychopaths themselves and some other victim may well have reason to wish the same were done to them?

The second issue is this. Not only should we want an accountable justice system that protects us from the likes of him. We should also want the circumstances that are changeable, that went towards creating him, to be changed. The society which lets 10 and 11 year olds develop into killers at such an early age, also has a hand in the development of small boys into rapists.

Some people brought up in a dog-eat-dog world do tend to 'eat dogs'. Men who have been abused as children tend to abuse children in their turn. Some men who have been edu-

cated in an ideology that says their role in life is to raise and provide for a family, to have power over women and children, and who are then denied the means with which to provide, and who feel powerless as a result, tend to hit out as a way of simulating power. Men who have been brought up in a warped society which tells them what sexuality they must be, what their sexual role is, and what that of women is, in order for them to be 'real men' tend to have a warped attitude towards sexual relations.

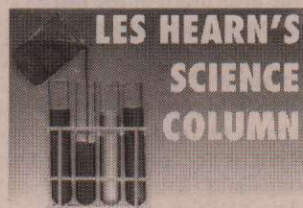
Add to these societal injustices any number of personality, mental, even genetic disorders, and you have the 31 year old man hanging on the back of his cell door having perpetrated some awful atrocity that no-one can ever clearly understand.

It is ironic that the 'hang em and throw the key away' brigade in the government's ranks, who would like to see even more prisons filled to bursting point, are also those who are carrying out a moral crusade against sex education in schools, single mothers, nursery education, and provision in the school curriculum, for sex, AIDS, marriage, crime and society to be discussed and taught.

These are the actions of people who would like to see the prison system based on revenge rather than reform. Whether the child-rapist was reformable or not, that is not in our interests.

Does the ultrasound do any good?

Looking for trouble?



THE ultrasound scan has become routine for pregnant women in the 40 years since the technique was first published. Medical writer Helen Saul, in New Scientist a fortnight ago, collected together the evidence that it is not quite as useful as it's made out to be and even may be harmful. The ultrasound scan involves sending a beam of sound too high for human ears to hear into the abdomen of the pregnant woman. Some of the sound is absorbed to a greater or lesser extent by the tissues of the woman and the foetus. Some will be reflected at the boundaries between different types of tissue and picked up by a detector. These reflections can be converted into a "picture" on a screen which, to the trained eye, reveals the outline of the womb and foetus. The scan can therefore reveal

whether a singleton or twins is or are present. Various measurements can be made to show whether the foetus is growing properly or whether there are malformations. Finally, the presence of moving tissue can be detected by the Doppler effect. Here, the frequency of the reflected sound is changed if the reflecting object is moving forwards and backwards but not sideways. This phenomenon allows the detection of the foetal heartbeat, though the absence of a detectable beat does not necessarily mean that the foetus has died. In a recent case, three women in Wales were told that their babies would be born dead following a negative scan. Happily, this was wrong, though the women suffered much distress before their giving birth. Clearly, the accuracy of scan results is crucial. Surveys of accuracy throughout the world show variable levels. In a US study of 15,000 women, the RADIUS trial, half were scanned twice while the rest only had scans when a medical reason was identified. There was no difference in numbers of babies of low birth

weight or those with gross malformations between the two groups. This indicates that routine scanning is of no benefit compared with selective scanning. However, only one in six malformations was detected by the scanning, indicating that perhaps the skill of the scanners was an important factor. An Australian study involving larger numbers of scans also showed no advantage to routine scanning. The only study showing a benefit to scanning was one in Helsinki where early abortion of malformed foetuses reduced numbers of later foetal deaths and numbers of malformed babies born. This study was better at detecting malformations, some 50% being identified. However, there were nearly the same number of "false positives", where women were told that their baby would be grossly malformed when this was not the case. But can scanning be harmful in itself? After all, energy is being deposited in the growing foetal tissue. Can this cause subtle changes, similar to those of X-ray examinations, which were found to triple the chance of childhood

leukaemia before they were stopped? So far the findings are ambiguous. The Australian study showed a link between low birth weight and numbers of scans while a Norwegian study found a weak link with left-handedness and exposure to ultrasound, possible evidence of slight damage to developing brains. In Canada, a slight link between slowness to develop speech and ultrasound was also found. These are not very impressive findings but it is not possible to say definitely whether ultrasound scanning is safe or not. In view of this ignorance and of the apparent lack of advantage in scanning everyone instead of just those at risk, it would be prudent to restrict scanning to cases where there is a medical reason to do so. This would be where the mother smokes, has had a slow-growing foetus previously or is bleeding during her pregnancy. Improved skill of scanning staff and sensitivity of equipment should be pursued. Also, properly designed surveys should be carried out to see if there is a risk and, if so, how great and of what.

School students strike over education cuts

By Ed, Sheffield

OVER A hundred students from schools across Sheffield boycotted lessons today (Thursday 24 March) to protest against education cuts. We occupied the Town Hall for half an

hour, until the police started chucking people out one by one.

We then marched through town giving out leaflets about the cuts, and had a rally outside the Town Hall.

We stressed the need to fight both government grant cuts and local council cuts,

as well as building a youth and student campaign against racism in Sheffield.

We agreed to hold a meeting at the Nelson Mandela building, Pond Street, Sheffield, at 11am on Thursday 31 March, to organise anti-racist stalls and leafleting the local schools.



Glasgow has some of the bleakest housing schemes in Western Europe and the rest of Clydeside has suffered, too.

The Tories offer no future for youth

FOUR community councils in Clydeside, Scotland, have carried out a detailed enquiry into the situation for youth in their areas.

- They found:
- Male unemployment for under 24 year olds at nearly 40%.
 - Less than one in ten young people were getting qualifications for entry into higher education.
 - Only 20% of households could afford a car.
 - 64% of children qualifying for clothing grants.
 - One third of all households being counselled for debt.
 - Facilities for less than five per cent of local children on any particular evening — and that was before recent cuts.

This dismal situation on Clydeside is a direct result of the wholesale destruction of industry in an area that used to be Scotland's biggest complex of docks, railways, engineering works and shipyards.

In the first half of this century the workers' movement on Clydeside was a byword for militant trade unionism and socialist politics.

Now the population in the areas covered by the study had dropped from 130,000 in 1893 to below 30,000. Youth have no future and cuts have even deprived people of the few local facilities there were.

The picture is the same in many inner cities and old industrial areas.

Youth unemployment has not dropped below half a million for over a decade. These conditions destroy communities. Crime becomes the biggest 'industry'. Fascists can build up support.

The labour movement must start to organise the unemployed and youth on the government's cheap labour training schemes. We must turn the empty rhetoric of the Labour leaders about full employment into policies that can create decent jobs for all.

- A national minimum wage.
- A cut in hours, without loss of pay, to 35 hours a week.
- A massive programme of rebuilding public services.
- End YT skivvy schemes and replace them with real training on trade union rates of pay and full trade union rights.
- Full benefit rights for all including

16 and 17 year olds.

- A minimum grant of £70 a week for all students over 16.

Opinion:

Boxing should be banned!

By Mark, South London

MICHAEL BENTT has suffered brain damage from his recent boxing championship match with Herbie Hide, which ended in boxing's "best" result, a knock-out.

Boxing kills its competitors and causes brain damage and ailments like Parkinson's disease even for the most successful boxers like Muhammed Ali.

All this is a direct result of the main aim of the fight — to damage and if possible beat unconscious a competitor.

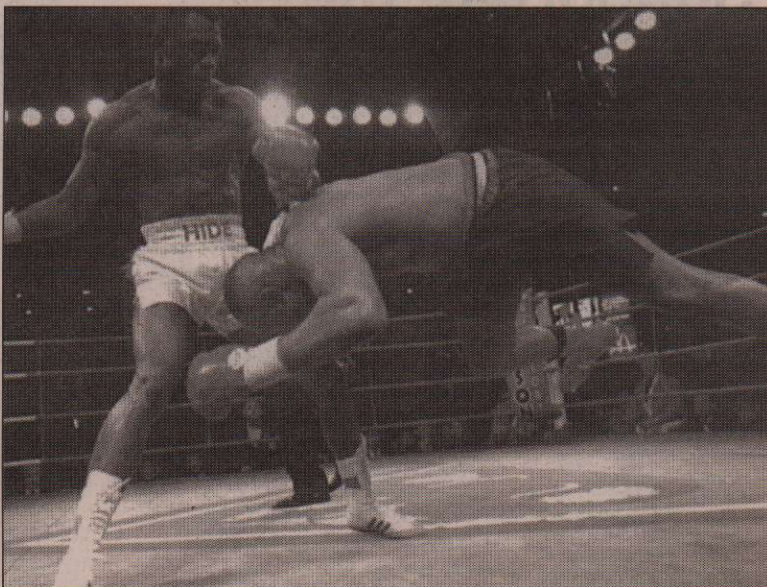
In Ancient Rome strong slaves were

given the 'chance' of a brief life of luxury and sometimes even freedom if they became gladiators in the Roman Circus. They had to fight each other to the death for the amusement of the citizens of Rome.

Today young, often black, working class lads are given the 'chance' to make it by beating each other up in front of an audience.

They can get killed or beaten into a brain damaged mess, but there is also one in a thousand chance they can make it to be champ for a few years.

Boxing is brutal, brutalising, dangerous — the gladiatorial conflict of the wage slaves. The only winners are the promoters and the sports industry.



Michael Bentt has been in hospital since this knock-out blow

No to economic conscription!

By Mick, Birmingham

THE Army has set up a youth club for 11 to 16 year olds. They hope to attract 20,000 youth with adventure weekends and even logo-embossed baseball bats.

Despite cuts, the Army wants to increase the annual intake of young soldiers from 12,000 to 15,000.

The British Army has long relied on economic conscription. Working-class youth from the poorest areas often go into the army as the only chance for a job. Yet these econom-

ic conscripts will be expected and ordered to put their necks on the line to defend the capitalist system whose failure pushed them into the army.

The labour movement must demand that working class youth are given a chance of real training and real jobs. We should also force Labour councils and the labour movement to fight for facilities.

We demand real jobs, real training and real youth facilities, not the bloody-handed help of the bosses' army that helped to murder thousands in the Gulf War.

Youth Fightback is...

... 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

Rebellion

Third Alliance for *WORKERS' LIBERTY* C

Laying the foundation

Chris Reynolds reports from the third AWL conference in London last weekend, 26-27 March.

“AFTER THE collapse of Stalinism in Europe, socialism can be reborn, free from the poison of state tyranny”, argued Socialist Organiser editor John O’Mahony in one of the introductory speeches at the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty conference.

“The old Stalinist and social-democratic answers are discredited, but the fact remains that we live in a slave society.

“When we become aware of that — when we realise that capitalism is a slave society, and a better, socialist alternative is possible — we have a duty to go out and convince others. We have to fight the dominant ideas, which are the ideas of the ruling class.”

“We have to try to unite the left — but we have to fight the left in order to unite it. For today the left, after decades of domination by Stalinism and social-democracy, is corrupt.

“In all this, Socialist Organiser and the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty are central”.

The main perspectives document, moved by Martin Thomas and carried unanimously, argued: “There are not yet hundreds of thousands of workers confident enough to launch a decisive industrial offensive against the Tories and the bosses. There are thousands of workers and youth infuriated by the Tories and open to socialist alternatives. And a great deal in the future depends on how many of those thousands we can recruit, educate and integrate into the only coherent revolutionary Marxist organisation, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty.

“They will not come to us spontaneously. Nor are they gathered together conveniently in some broad movement where we can get to them (as they might, for example, have been gathered in the Labour Left in the early ‘80s). They are scattered. Many are not yet politically active in any regular way.



Supporting the socialists in South Africa

GODFREY M’DINGI from the Workers’ Organisation for Socialist Action in South Africa spoke to the conference about the “Workers’ List” supported by WOSA in the forthcoming elections.

Since 1976, he said, the ruling class had realised that apartheid was dead. But they wanted to find a way of moving to a new regime which would safeguard their property and their profits.

The alliance with the ANC is designed to do that. The ANC is a nationalist, populist organisation. Even its armed struggle was designed only to get the ruling class to negotiate.

Now the ANC has massive funds for its election campaign. But the socialists of the Workers’ List have no rich backers. They depend on the support of other socialists.

The AWL conference voted unanimously to campaign for support for the Workers’ List.

“A spirit of initiative, a willingness to jump into campaigns or start them, is vital for AWL branches if they are to attract new people. That campaigning initiative must be combined with a solid routine of fundamental long-term political and theoretical education, and of labour movement activity.”

“We have to make our own opportunities to win new people.”

In particular, the conference called on AWL branches to turn to campaign activity against racism and for defence and restoration of welfare-state provision.

Trade-union work is central for the AWL, and part of the conference was given over to trade-union fraction meetings which discussed detailed plans in the different unions.

The main trade-union report moved by Tom Rigby noted that “in the period since our last conference our comrades have carried out some excellent political work in the trade unions despite the very difficult objective circumstances”. It highlighted the two rank-and-file railworkers’ bulletins with which we are involved, “Off the Rails” (nationally) and “Tubeworker” (on the London Underground), and the work of AWL members in the civil-service fight against Market Testing.

Arguing for a sharper political edge to our activity, the report said: “We should consciously broaden our orientation in looking for trade-union and workplace contacts.

“Many trade union ‘contacts’ would be better defined as allies. They tend to be 30-something and hold union positions. Many are a bit cynical.

“Obviously we can try to recruit some of these people, but the majority

of our recruits will come from younger workers, or older ones who get thrown into struggles and then start to look round for political answers”.

Student work is also very important for us. The report moved by Jill Mountford adopted by conference noted lessons from the way the Tories messed up their proposals to destroy student unions and had to back down. “The lesson is that the Tories do make mistakes, can be beaten, and are not invincible. Opportunities are missed when the demoralisation of the wider movement is accommodated to and allowed to obscure this.”

Sarah Wellings, an AWL member, was recently elected Women’s Officer of the National Union of Students by 66 votes to 24 for the Labour Students candidate. Building on such successes, the report argued, “we have to be prepared to play a leadership role, both locally and nationally, in the fight back. We have to get ourselves into gear, and by doing so we should reap the benefits of years of consistent work in the student movement”.

In the debate on broader youth work, there was wide agreement on the importance of working with left-wingers in the new Young Labour Groups now being set up across the country, but some dispute about the “Youth United Against Racism” initiative with which AWL members have been involved.

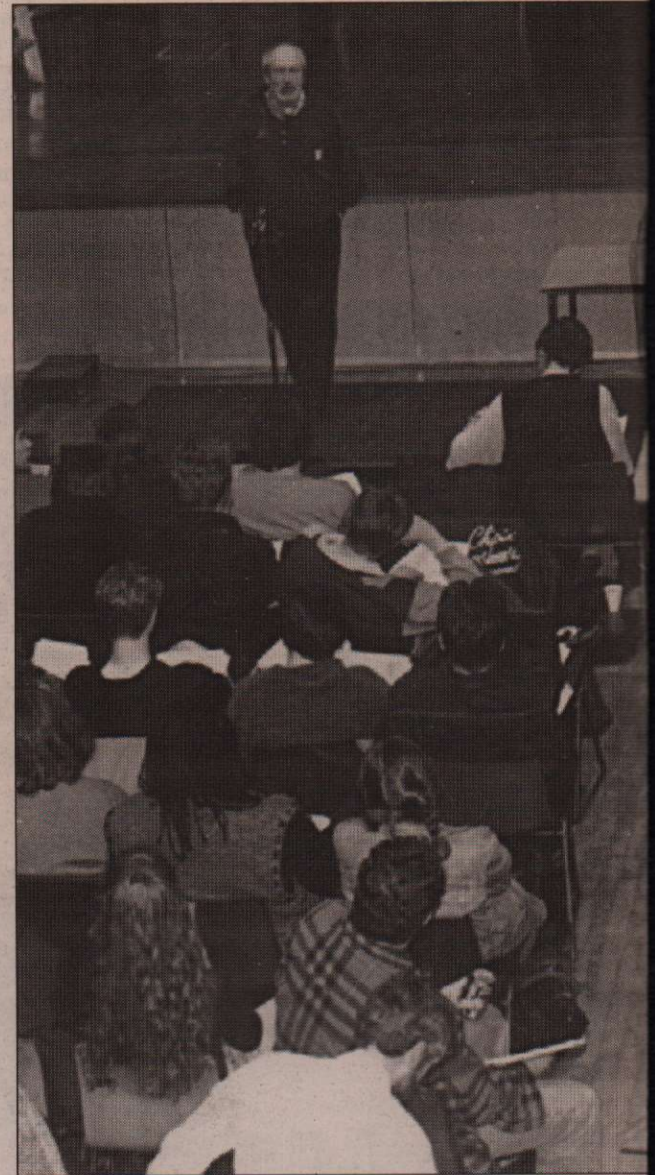
The AWL has argued repeatedly for unity of the anti-racist campaigns. Does supporting a new initiative contradict this? The majority argued that, while we should avoid destructive competition and promote united local anti-racist committees, we must be prepared to make our own initiatives. We can not passively accept a monopoly for the established campaigns which have money, sponsorship, “celebrities”, and so on, the Anti-Racist Alliance, Anti-Nazi League, etc. A minority contended that “an ‘independent’ Youth United Against Racism will completely undermine our existing principled position”.

The most heated debate at the conference was about our orientation to the Labour Party. Socialist Organiser was banned by the Labour Party in 1990, and we have had people expelled, but we remain active in the Labour Party, in defiance of the ban.

The main perspectives document argued: “As before April 1992, the fight to kick out the Tories and get a Labour government is central for working-class politics in Britain.

“We do not counterpose that general political fight to immediate trade-union and other struggles. We do not advise anyone to wait for a Labour government. We do not exclude the possibility of huge unexpected explosions of working-class struggle which will change the whole perspective. We do not give an inch to any illusions about the Labour leaders.

“Nevertheless, the Tory anti-union laws impose tight



AWL members and visitors debate plans for our work

limits on working-class struggle. The fight for the Workers’ Charter of trade-union rights is central - and the only calculable, foreseeable way to fight for it is to fight for a Labour government and to battle to commit the trade unions and the Labour Party to imposing that Workers’ Charter on that Labour government”.

This year, as always, the AWL conference was prepared for by discussions in branch and regional meetings. Nineteen discussion bulletins were produced, with every member having their right to a say.

The main argument in the discussion period was round a proposal that we should discontinue Socialist Organiser and instead centre our activity round a new Marxist paper to be produced inside the Labour Party.

“The ban is having a disruptive effect on our work. Having a Labour Party-legal paper would make our propaganda work more effective... To be a ‘group’ of supporters organised around a paper is no different to being a ‘party’ producing a paper. Those who see a fundamental difference are hopeless sectarians”.

Against this it had been argued that the costs of such an attempt greatly outweigh any likely gains. In the present period, a clear revolutionary continuity and profile are important to win over that majority of our contacts who come from outside the Labour Party. The Labour Party will revive, but there is very little political life in it now. The work we have to do cannot be scaled down to fit Labour Party ‘legality’. In any case, the Labour Party would probably ban any new Marxist paper, just like SO.

After some weeks of discussion, the idea of discontinuing Socialist Organiser was withdrawn; those who had mooted it instead proposed that we assist in setting up a new left-wing newsletter in the Labour Party. The newsletter proposal was heavily defeated.

There was also dispute in the session on Ireland. One speaker argued against the AWL’s call for an IRA ceasefire. “You cannot have a ceasefire without British withdrawal. Northern Ireland is a state based on injustice to the Catholic minority. We want a united Ireland with constitutional guarantees for the Protestants. There can be no peace without justice”.

The majority, however, believed that the IRA campaign

Conference

ns of a new socialism

A new stage in the industrial struggle

Tom Rigby's trade-union report to the AWL conference assessed our situation and tasks. Excerpts:

THE movement appears at a low ebb, but the conditions for a new revival are maturing.

In particular, the public sector pay limit, privatisation, Compulsory Competitive Tendering [CCT] and related job losses are almost certain to provoke some sort of major confrontation in the next period.

The volatility of the industrial situation reflects:

- the huge gap between workers' anger against the Tories and the failure of the Labour Party and trade union leaders to give this resentment any focus.
- the profound crisis facing the Tories. Their attacks on the working class will come from a position of weakness (fiscal crisis, electoral unpopularity, etc.) and reflect the deep crisis of perspective inside the British ruling class.

Any industrial revival can only be sustained and developed on a much firmer political basis than that found in the shop stewards' movement of the long boom in the 1960s and 1970s.

The objective conditions (slump, anti-union laws, government attacks) demand politics in the most immediate and direct ways. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, and our predecessors, have argued long and hard for the formation of an open, democratic, genuinely broad-based, rank-and-file movement in the trade unions and across all the unions.

Such a movement would put a self-liberating instrument into the hands of ordinary workers; with such a rank-and-file movement we could force the union leaders to lead a fightback and where they refuse, replace them.

Several key unions already have fully formed and influential Broad Lefts and rank-and-file groups. They should be linked together through a single co-ordinating centre.

In the NCU (the British Telecom workers union) the Broad Left is a major force and has a majority on the union's executive.

In USDAW (the shopworkers' union) the Broad Left can mount a major challenge to the right wing.

In CPSA (the low-paid civil servants' union) the left has recently come together to mount a united electoral challenge to the existing right-wing leadership. The left stands on a policy of industrial action to defeat Market Testing and privatisation. There are similar developments in the other main Civil Service union, NUCPS.

In the RMT (the main rail union) the left, loosely grouped around the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Union, has made some gains in this year's executive elections. It could still regain its momentum after failing to challenge Jimmy Knapp in this year's General Secretary election.

In the NUT (the main teachers' union) a divided left is at last starting to see the burning need for unity. Some initiatives and campaigns are being explored between the Socialist Teachers' Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union.

In MSF, the technicians' union, the left is also discussing the need for unity.

In the UCW (the postal workers' union) where the organised left is very weak, it is still possible to defeat the executive on the conference floor

— not only on industrial but on political issues as well.

In UNISON (public sector workers' union) a serious open and democratic rank-and-file movement could easily be built. There are two main obstacles: the sectarianism of the SWP and their blatant front, the old NALGO Broad Left, and the traditional weakness of the hard left in the old NUPE and COHSE which make up the rest of the union.

The conditions exist for pulling together and co-ordinating the activists of the different opposition groups across the unions.

Given the very serious class-wide attacks that the Tories are now engaged in — like the three year public sector pay freeze — unity becomes an imperative, burning necessity.

If the left can not and does not unite across the unions to press for a fightback, then what hope have we of forcing the official leaders to unite and lead a fightback?

Activists from the traditional, more bureaucratic Communist Party dominated Broad Lefts are now much more open to discussion and to joint campaigning than perhaps ever before.

With the fall of the old police-state regimes in Eastern Europe, the views of these people are in flux. Their god Stalin is dead once and for all.

The great majority will either drop out or become open right wingers, but a minority will be looking for serious socialist answers.

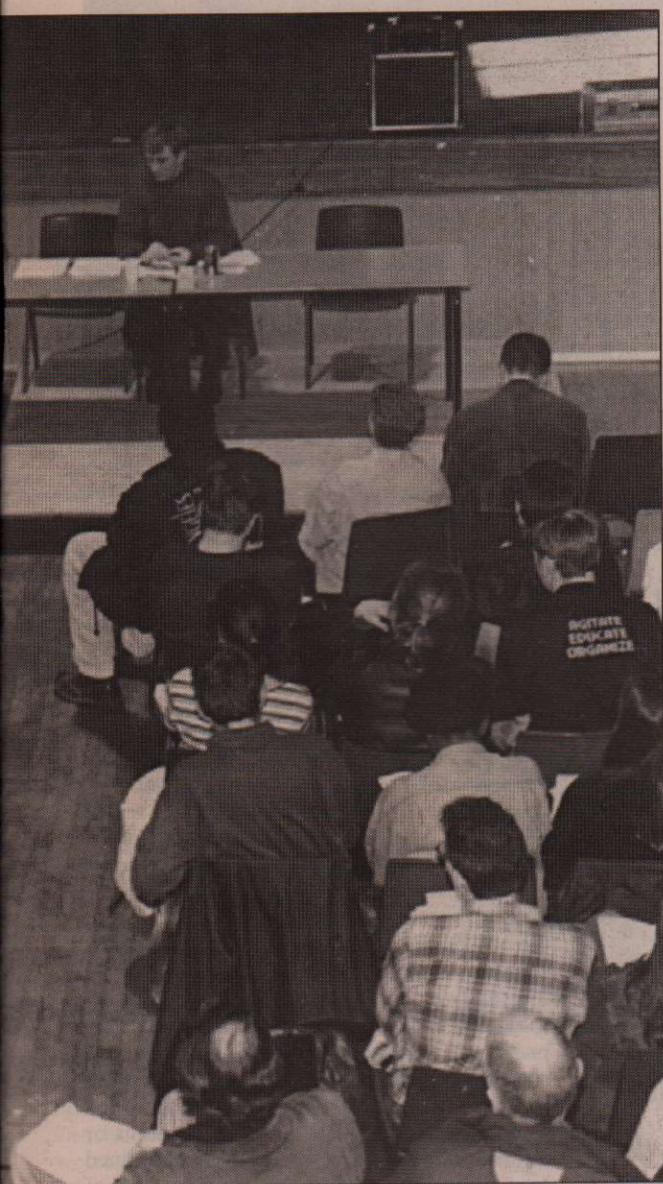
This means that the old division between the broadly "Trotskyist" trade union left and the "Stalinist" left are no longer justified. A new unified left-wing movement can be created — but only if it is based on class struggle unity for the fight against the bosses. Cynical electoral stitch-ups, with unprincipled, diplomatic silences about central working-class issues like trade union democracy, will fail.

The political edge to this movement must be provided by pushing for a

"Labour Must Fight" campaign. A campaign for militant political and industrial action by the TUC and Labour Party to force an immediate general election should be linked to:

- support for all workers in struggle
- support for a one-day public sector strike against the pay freeze, privatisation and CCT in defence of jobs and services
- support for mass action and strikes in defence of the National Health Service
- for a 35-hour week with no loss of pay and a massive expansion of public services so as to reduce unemployment
- for the repeal of all the Tory anti-union laws and their replacement by a charter of positive legal rights for workers like the rights to strike, take solidarity action, to picket effectively and to join a union.

"The political edge must be provided by a "Labour Must Fight" campaign. A campaign for militant political and industrial action by the TUC and Labour Party to force a general election. For a 35-hour week with no loss of pay and a massive expansion of public services so as to reduce unemployment."



does nothing to bring justice. It sharpens divisions in the working class. We need a political settlement. British withdrawal and a continued IRA campaign would lead not to a united Ireland but to all-out civil war and repartition.

The conference ended by committing itself to immediate tasks which included:

- Helping railworkers to work for "yes" votes in the RMT's ballots for strike action around privatisation, and working flat-out to support whatever strikes are organised.
- Working for a Labour vote in the 5 May council elections; building for the "Youth United Against Racism" conference on 14 May.
- Organising AWL branches and their routine activities (education, paper sales, public meetings, contact work, etc.) so as to attract and integrate new people.
- Building for the "Workers' Liberty 94" summer school.

Getting ideas across

"The revolutionary paper is our most important propaganda tool. It is one of the two major ways by which we communicate ideas. The other is by talking to people; and if you get into a serious discussion about changing the world, then usually you can sell the paper.

Low sales almost always mean that we're not doing our political work properly.

We should step up paper sales. Use petitions. Have AWL stalls carrying our publications. Door-to-door sales can develop regular paper rounds.

Sales at labour movement meetings can be increased quite dramatically. Improvements in workplace sales could be made relatively easily. Weekly sales at local colleges will put us in touch with a number of new contacts".

[From a resolution on "What is the AWL?"]



Uniting the left across the unions is "an imperative, burning necessity"

Who was Jesus Christ?

Jesus rebukes the Mother of God



By Rob Dawber

IN MY LAST article it was shown how the idea of the virgin birth has very little support in the Gospels themselves, how what little there is looks like later interpolation, and how the same Gospels in other respects treat Joseph as the father of Jesus. In Mark's Gospel, which makes no mention of any birth, virgin or otherwise, there is one disguised story which implicitly criticises the idea of the Virgin Birth and casts the Mother of God in an unusual light.

Jesus is preaching in his own village and comes into a house (Mark 4: 20-21):

"And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself" (out of his mind)

There then follows a piece in which Jesus argues with the Scribes that his works cannot be those of the devil, as he has been casting out devils himself and Satan could not thus be divided against himself.

Mark then continues (4:31-35)

"There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him calling him. And the multitude sat about him and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee,

And he answered them saying, Who is my mother or my brethren?

And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said Behold my mother and my brethren!

For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother"

The point here is that the word that is translated from the Greek above in 4:21 as "friends" can only in fact be translated as "family" or "kinsmen". The King James Version of the Bible has a note in the margin to that effect. It is his family that thinks "he is beside himself". But if Jesus's mother is privy to a visit from an angel and knows herself to have given birth to the son of God, what is she doing getting the family together to go and restrain her son because she thinks he is out of his mind? It is this embarrassing problem that inspired the idea of translating "kinsmen" into English as "friends".

The author of Mark's Gospel also, by inserting Jesus's argument about Satan not being divided against himself between the part where Jesus' family claim that he is out of his mind and Jesus' repudiation of them with the claim that "whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother", tries to soften the impact of the suggestion that Jesus's mother and brethren are not doing the will of God. But Matthew and Luke's Gospels also sought in their own ways to deal with it.

Mark's "they went out to lay hold on him", which shows that they intended to force him to stop what he was doing, becomes in Matthew (12:46):

"While he was still speaking to the multitudes, behold his mother and brethren stood without seeking to speak to him."

They only want to speak to him, not restrain him.

And Luke (8:19-20):

"And his mother came nigh him, and his brethren, and they could not reach him because of the crowd. And it was told him, thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to see thee."

All in all, this does not accord with the idea of a Virgin Birth but shows Jesus to have been only too human.

Next week: was Jesus born in Bethlehem?

CULTURAL FRONT

The 'back to basics' offensive against modern art

In defence of the 'Brickies'

By Clive Bradley

"WE'VE GOT the Brickies on the run," declared Paul Johnson in a recent issue of *The Spectator*. The Brickies in question are the practitioners and pundits of 'modern art', or 'modernism' more generally, so named because of the legendary pile of bricks in the Tate Gallery.

Echoed by a discussion on *The Late Show* (Tuesday 15 March), the argument of Johnson and his fellow traditionalists (like the controversial Brian Sewell in the *London Evening Standard*) is that modern art in all its forms is dying or dead. It was and is all rubbish. At last we are seeing a turn to common sense, in which — to put it crudely — books have stories, paintings aren't abstract, buildings are nice to look at, a music has a good tune. The art 'establishment' is on the run.

It is linked, clearly, to the government's drive to have 'the classics' taught in schools, by traditional methods. For too long, our children have been exposed to incomprehensible nonsense which is an insult to the sense. Everywhere, the classics are being revived. We get 'Middlemarch' on TV. We get Merchant/Ivory films.

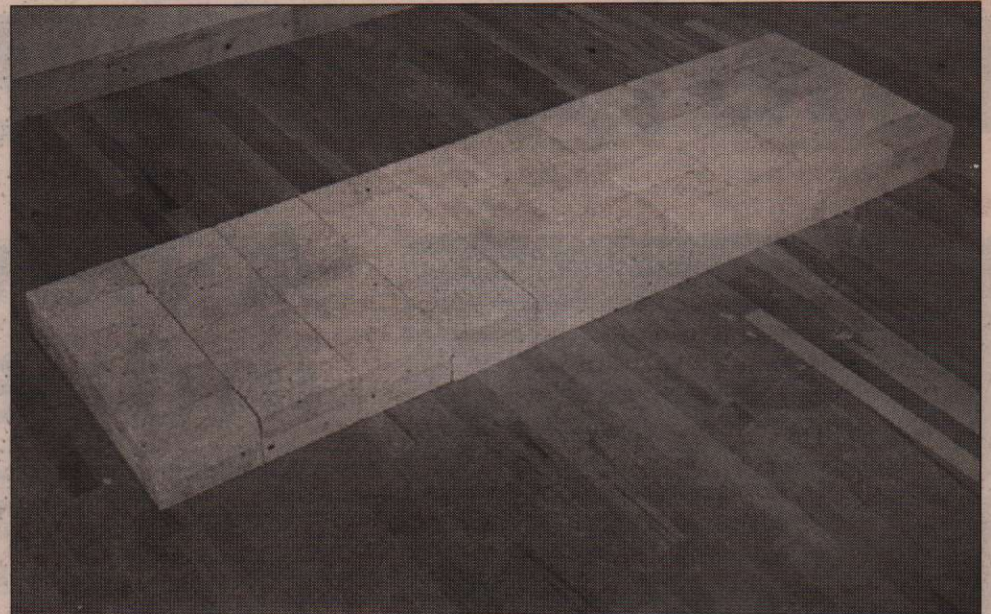
There is an issue there which is and has always been of great importance to socialists. What is the relationship between art and popular culture? Is Art — capital A — for the masses, or is it the preserve of an elite? A secondary issue is our assessment of 'modernism': classical Marxists, especially Trotsky and Lukacs, tended to be anti-modernist, certainly about literature.

'Elite' is a word much used by the traditionalists, but in a hypocritical, demagogic and evasive way: they pose as champions of 'the man in the street'. An equation is made between an elite — a group of people who dominate the arts — and 'elitism' in particular forms of artistic expression. That there is an artistic elite — or elites — is irrefutable. But it is grossly unfair to target 'modernism', or 'the avant garde', or what might be called 'experimentalism', as uniquely elitist.

The types of art under attack encompass a huge amount of what has been produced this century: 'abstract' painting, atonal music (that is, music without recognisable melody and normal harmony), stream-of-consciousness literature, and modernist architecture, which includes post-war council estates. The field of attack is therefore very wide, and the response somewhat problematic: nobody wants to feel that in defending modern painting they are by implication endorsing tower blocks.

And the traditionalists undoubtedly express very widespread opinions — that anyone could paint a modern picture; the modern arts require no skill; taxpayers' money is wasted on them.

But it is a feature of all art, modern or not,



"The traditionalists talk as if for modernists anything weird must be good. This is a gross pastiche."

that to understand and appreciate it fully requires education, in the broadest sense. No art is 'obviously good'. You might hear a Mozart symphony and like the tune — that is fair enough (although your enjoyment is the result of a certain cultural tradition; someone brought up on Papua New Guinea might like it less). But the more knowledge you have about music — historically and technically — the greater your understanding, and possibly your enjoyment will be.

"Art must and will develop: it cannot and must not go into reverse. 'Modernism' is part of the soil on which the art of the future will grow."

So in a certain sense, a deeper appreciation of Mozart is the preserve of a musically educated elite. This is equally true for an appreciation of jazz, hip hop or any other musical genre. It is true by extension for all forms of art. And it is the purest demagogic bigotry to pretend otherwise.

So it is meaningless to hold up the opinion of the 'man in the street' as evidence for the quality or otherwise of art. Of course, the 'man in the street' probably doesn't like abstract expressionist painting. Equally, until very recently the same 'man in the street' didn't like much classical music and didn't like opera at all, but it would be surprising to hear Paul Johnson and his friends denouncing Puccini as 'inaccessible.'

Elitism lies not in the form of artistic expression itself, but in whether or not the artist or the art establishment shows any interest in increasing the knowledge and understanding of the general public or prefers to keep art as the preserve of a few. The modern arts might appear less inaccessible if people were educated to understand where they came from, and were taught the tools of understanding them.

The second absurd assumption made by the traditionalists is that those who are more interested in experimentalism have no criteria at all by which the quality of art is judged. They talk as if for 'modernists' anything weird must be good. But this is a gross pastiche. All

forms of modern art are judged, often by the same criteria as traditional art. Nor is it all the same: within 'modernism' there are different, often fiercely hostile, schools and traditions.

The charge of 'skill-lessness', levelled at the whole of modern art, is ridiculous. Certainly, the skills employed might be further outside everyday experience. But this simply means that new skills are required by the listener, reader or viewer, in order to 'get into' it — just as it took new skills for people to 'get into' opera, as they have done in thousands in recent years, where before they thought it was lots of fat people pulling faces and making ugly noises in their throats.

There certainly are charges to be levelled at the artistic elite, or elites. But the most important of these is that they are craven slaves to fashion, which in turn is the result of the fact that art is produced in a society dominated by profit. Art is bought and sold (as it has been since the beginning of capitalism; before that, in Europe at least, it was generally controlled by the Church). Artists need commissions or funding, and their access to cash is determined to a large extent by the commercial viability of their work.

In literature there is these days a sharp division between 'popular' and 'literary' tradition (although it would be wrong to think this division did not exist in the past). 'Literary' writers generally stand less chance of getting rich. But even in literary fiction, the market holds sway.

The success of all the recent soft-focus English countryside movies is due far less to the trouncing of the modernist aesthetic than to the fact that they sell well in the United States. If they do represent a long-term trend (which is highly unlikely), whatever the quality of the individual films, it is a bad one. Because they represent, like the whole 'back to basics' formula, a retreat to a rose-tinted past which enables us to forget about or simplify the social problems of the present.

How to address contemporary social issues in art is a big problem. But to take just one area, some of the most inventive and important music currently being made is in the field of hip hop — hardly traditionalist heartland. New social realities require new forms of expression, not just a rehash of old ones.

The societies which produced neo-classical architecture, 'classical' music, Realist literature, landscape painting, and so on, no longer exist. In Britain in 1994, we live in a 'multi-cultural' society, which any genuinely contemporary art will reflect in some way. We live in an age of computers, of mass communication and 'mass culture' like cinema and video, as never before. New social realities create new artistic possibilities, and it would be absurd to think that the best art is a copy of the past.

Art must and will develop: it cannot and must not go into reverse. 'Modernism' happened: it produced, of course, some rubbish, as all artistic movements and periods have done. It grew out of what came before and probably even the worst of it was a necessary artistic experience to go through. It is part of the soil on which the art of the future will grow.



Andy Warhol: an artist who was 'commercially viable'. Not all artists are so lucky.

The Chile coup translated into film

House of Spirits

Matt Cooper
reviews *The
House of Spirits*

Directed by
Bille August



SABEL ALLENDE'S epic allegorical novel charts sixty years in the history of an unnamed Latin American country (largely based on Chile) through the lives of four generations and their involvement in the politics and class struggles of that country. Its style is magical realist, using mystical and spiritual themes as metaphors for the reality.

The problem with Bille August's screen adaptation of Allende's work is that the film cannot live up to the book, which is too nuanced, too complex and on too grand a scale ever to be successfully adapted to

"The style is magical realist, using mystical themes as metaphors for the reality".



Winona Ryder plays Blanca

the big screen.

Much of the magical-allegorical material loses something in its translation to the screen, at best seeming capricious and gimmicky and at worst downright silly.

August has tried to remain true to the book's historic sweep. In 1924 the young Esteban Trueba (Jeremy Irons) seeks to marry Rosa (Meryl Streep), the beautiful daughter of a rich but liberal family. Trueba sets off to seek his fortune, returning to find Rosa dead. His youthful ideal-

ism crushed, he flees to the hacienda he has bought and becomes rich and respected (but not by his peasants). Bourgeois charm and status are built on oppression and cruelty, and this is spelt out when Trueba rapes one of his peasants (which results in a bastard son, Esteban Garcia, played by Armin Mueller-Stahl). If Trueba is a repressed and

embittered fortune seeker turned capitalistic land owner, then Garcia is his bastard offspring in the ideological as well as the literal sense.

The antithesis to this is provided by Trueba's marriage to the grown up Clara, sister of Rosa (also played by Meryl Streep). She is the child of bourgeois liberalism and the daughter she and Trueba produce, Blanca (played when adult by Winona Ryder) is the embodiment of this liberal humanism. When presented with the inequalities of society she attaches herself firmly to the workers' and peasants' movement. Blanca becomes childhood friend and later lover to the revolutionary peasant militant Pedro (Antonio Banderas).

In classic tradition the denied bastard son becomes the bearer of the rotten, twisted and bitter side of father. He ends up in the Latin American military.

August ultimately fails to bring his screen adaptation to life because he chooses to have them fight it out on a personal and emotional level, rather than fusing this with the politics of the situation. Blanca sides with Pedro and the People's Front government (modelled on Salvador Allende's Chilean government which was overthrown in 1973) while Esteban Trueba and his son Esteban Garcia are actively involved in the military coup against it. But in the film all this ends up as mere backdrop to the personal story, not as something integral to it.

The politics are still there. The problem is that the characters are allowed to drift into a world of detached melodrama, focused on personal rather than social concerns.

What is left is a passable film that is no more than a pale souvenir of the book.

Not why, but just how it is

Gail Cameron
reviews *Iced* by
Ray Snell



LAST YEAR Ray Snell's first novel, *Iced*, was published in Britain. It joins the work of a new crop of black writers and film makers exploring the late 1980s explosion of drugs and related drug culture in black communities. Directed at a young black readership, *Iced*, like John Headley's book *Yardie* before it, has been heavily marketed in inner city areas across Britain.

Snell has already undertaken a major tour of the country, performing pieces from the book and exploring his motivations for writing the novel. After a 15 year absence Snell revisited his native New York and was shocked by the decimation of his neighbourhood and of several friends in face of the crack epidemic. In many ways Snell describes his novel as a testimony to that experience.

Iced is the story of Cornelius Washington, a 44 year old black crack addict. Written as a stream of consciousness diary, *Iced* weds the double narrative of Washington's life before and after crack. He constantly reminds us that he is no "street kid" but a man "who could have been someone."

Through his often chaotic diary he paints alternate pictures of the once college scholarship student and of the now zombie junkie.

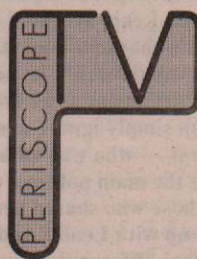
With each shift in perspective we are made with an increasing intensity to feel the disintegration of a person. Human relationships are marginal and brutal. Washington's most "human" relationship is with his crack pipe which he describes as his lover. Sections of the diary are near incoherent as he falls away from rationality into the frantic poisoned world of the crack addict.

Iced is a novel that makes no attempts to explain, nor does it really ask why or how come? It is quite simply a graphic account of an individual's descent into addiction.

And perhaps because of that — though sometimes moving — *Iced* is truly a frightening and thoroughly miserable novel.

Ducking the issue

Paddy Dollard
previews
Guilty by Suspicion



Channel 4
Easter Sunday 9.25pm

THIS ROBERT De Niro film of 1991 was deservedly criticised when it came out for ducking the issue.

The most important Hollywood victims of McCarthyism, some of them immensely talented people, like the writer Abraham Polonsky, really were Stalinists. In *Guilty by Suspicion*, the protagonist, film director David Merrill, is an 'innocent' victim. He had not been either a member or supporter of the Stalinist Communist Party of the USA.

The real issue as it was posed to American liberals and independent socialists — to the American Trotskyists, for example — was a complex one. In the interests of preserving freedom, it was necessary to defend the indefensible, the devotees and dupes of Stalinist totalitarianism, whose party had operated as a gangster force in the labour movement during the '30s and '40s. All of this is faded out here.

Yet *Guilty by Suspicion* is worth seeing. After all, there were many completely 'innocent' people who had their lives ruined by McCarthyism.

Russia without reality



Geoff Ward
reviews
Grushko

BBC1
Thursday 24 March 9.30pm

BBC1'S NEW three-part crime drama, *Grushko*, set in St Petersburg, didn't quite live up to its promise. It offered us neither deep insight into what is happening in Russia today nor a convincing entry in the TV crime stakes.

The story centres around gang warfare. *Grushko*, of the St Petersburg Investigation Bureau (played by Brian Cox) is called in when two bodies are discovered: one of the bodies is a political documentary filmmaker.

One measure of the programme was the amateurishness of its villains. The Georgian gangsters spoke in strange accents, the kind that used to be found in 'Miami Vice', and like the characters in that programme they were laughably macho. We could tell they were 'hard' because they spat food at waiters in restaurants and lounged about in gymnasiums. But even Inspector Clousseau would have caught them nonchalantly throwing a molotov cocktail into the house of someone failing to cough up enough protection money.

At the end of the programme one of them dresses up as a woman road sweep in order to assassinate two villains; the victims simply didn't notice that this 'woman' had masculine-hairy arms and legs.

We're not show the great hardship Russian workers are facing over the market reforms. St Petersburg looks picturesque.

Grushko is the incorruptible honest cop who harks back to the days before the free market and private enterprise unleashed havoc on the Russian people — "the old people were protected under communism but now they're vulnerable". *Grushko* and his daughter argue over what their society has become and why, but their conversations don't throw any light on the matter. They are incapable of raising above banal, homilies concerning 'greed', 'apathy' and 'the market'.

Philip Kerr's book on which the TV series is based does give a reasonably vivid, though sometimes laboured, picture of the squalor of "Wild East" capitalism; to judge from this first episode, all or most of that has been lost in the transfer to the screen.

As it is, the ex-USSR details merely get in the way of the plot. Still, it's worth persevering with

75th anniversary of the founding of the Communist

Russia 1920: the bell

A British revolutionary meets Lenin

In this issue of *Socialist Organiser* and the next we carry extracts from Sylvia Pankhurst's *Soviet Russia As I Saw It In 1920*.

Although overlooked by socialist and labour movement historians, Sylvia Pankhurst was a prominent figure in the British socialist movement at the time of the First World War and the formation of the British Communist Party.

Pankhurst differed from the Communist International on a number of basic issues, as the second of the extracts in particular will illustrate.

This week Pankhurst provides a graphic description of life in revolutionary Russia some 2½ years after the Bolshevik Revolution. The revolution had to spread to other countries if it were to survive in Russia.

Food supplies had largely broken down, and what food was available was of poor quality.

This spiral of decline could be ended only if Russia were to receive assistance from revolutionary regimes abroad. As Pankhurst herself writes: "To the Russian workers these delegations (of foreign revolutionaries) represented the hope of the world revolution, the only hope of peace for Soviet Russia, and the ending of her great hardships and sacrifice."

The purpose of Pankhurst travelling to Russia was to participate in the Second Congress of the Third International, which opened in Moscow in July 1920.

On the outbreak of the First World War, the Second International had collapsed when most of its national affiliates, such as the Labour Party, had lined up with their "own" ruling classes and supported the imperialist carnage. The Russian Bolsheviks played the leading role in proclaiming the need for a new International, one which would not repeat the betrayals of its predecessor.

The First Congress of the Third International was held in Moscow in 1919. Few of the delegates who attended it represented really functioning parties. The congress could themselves do little more than proclaim

the existence of the new International.

It was at the Second Congress that the basic political issues and differences were argued out. A number of them were of particular relevance to revolutionaries in Britain, and these are outlined by Pankhurst in the second extract. They remain an issue of contention amongst socialists in Britain today.

Should revolutionaries join the Labour Party? Pankhurst was opposed to this on the grounds that the Labour Party was a reformist party, whereas revolutionaries should be getting on with the job of building their own socialist alternative.

Lenin did not dispute the fact that the Labour Party was a bourgeois party in its politics. It was a "bourgeois, workers' party," he believed. But it was also the political wing of the bedrock workers' organisations — the trade unions — in Britain. He therefore advocated that revolutionaries take the fight for their politics into the Labour Party.

The debate about whether revolutionaries should take part in bourgeois parliaments was similar in many ways to the debate about the Labour Party.

Pankhurst was hostile to participation given that parliament was bourgeois and also given that there could not be a parliamentary road to socialism. Lenin accepted the validity of Pankhurst's characterisation, but not her conclusion: revolutionaries, he argued, should relate to Parliament as an arena of struggle, rather than simply ignore and denounce it.

Pankhurst — who was an honest reporter — brings out the main political differences between those who shared her views and those who lined up with Lenin. And, despite the very real political differences which separated them, she makes clear her admiration for Lenin's achievements and his relentless search for political clarity:

"He is for attacking every such difficulty, not for avoiding it; he is for dragging Communist controversy out into the marketplace, not closeting it amongst selected circles of enthusiasts."

By Sylvia Pankhurst

PETROGRAD at last! From the train emerged a teeming population; weather-worn peasants from remote villages, their luggage, wrapped in goatskin, sackcloth or coloured hearthrugs; bourgeois illicit traders with handsome leather bags and smart new clothes; students and factory workers.

On the station walls were big notices:

"Fraternal Greetings to the Third International. Long live the world proletarian revolution."

"The spirit of the proletarian revolution breathes throughout the world."

"Workers of all lands unite!"

The people were streaming in orderly file past the barrier, amongst them the bourgeois man and woman who had attempted to invade our compartment the previous day.

"See how we have them disciplined!" said the

young Red soldier...

Outside in the Square of the Revolution, as it has been renamed, was concentrated the little traffic and bustle that there is in Petrograd. A few motors on official business, a few carriages for hire, some porters and travellers with their luggage, standing or sitting upon the steps. Placards concerning the Revolution that swept its way first through the streets of Petrograd, had been pasted so thickly on certain patches of wall that they stood out several inches thick, their edges broken away, brown and brittle.

The once splendid shops on the Nevsky Prospect were all shut up, bolted and barred and needing a coat of paint. Their glory had vanished long before the Soviets closed them. They had fallen into the hands of the small speculators, whose trumpery and incongruously assorted wares — a few little pieces of glue, some bobbins of silk and fish-hooks, an occasional hairnet and packet of safety pins — were still displayed in all their feeble sparseness. Gone indeed are the bourgeois riches of the Nevsky!

In the Soviet shop windows were large assortments of Communist literature, photographs of the leaders, meetings of the Soviets, demonstrations and incidents of the Revolution. A curious combination of photography and drawing was much used, the faces and hands alone being printed from the negative, the figures lightly sketched with brush or pen. Such a portrait of the British Labour Delegation showed Tom Shaw in the centre, looking like a rubicund old Bacchus.

The trams were not running; since they are only brought out at times of special need, there was little traffic of any kind. Most of the pedestrians, both men and women, wore simple Russian blouses of light-coloured stuff.

By the bridge over the Neva the wood paving of the roadway was being repaired. Two great barges were lying in the river a hundred yards or more below the bridge. One of these barges was loaded with logs of wood. Men standing on planks which sloped up to the bank passed these, hand over hand, in unloading them.

The gigantic statue of Catherine surrounded by her courtiers, looked down on the changed Nevsky. The great churches, monuments of the dead past, still retained some of their influence, even in proletarian Petrograd. Some women still crossed themselves as they passed the shrines, but the congregations were small.

In the vast dimness of the Isaac Cathedral, one Sunday afternoon, I saw barely a score of people at the service, and though some of them knelt and bowed many times, so low that their foreheads touched the stone flooring, only a few one- or two-rouble notes were put into the collecting plate. This would have been a poor collection, even in pre-war days before the great fall in the value of money. Indeed, there was an

atmosphere of poverty and decay in the church. The altar cloths looked soiled, their gold fringe was tarnished. Frowsy old artificial flowers lay on the engraved brass images of the Virgin and Child.

Outside in the great square, children were playing around the great stacks of firewood, piled by the Saturday volunteer workers, whose footsteps had not worn away the green blades of grass that had grown up between the stones because the traffic over them was so small. Grass a foot high grows in what were once the busy streets in Petrograd.

In the entrance hall of the Hotel International, once the Hotel des Anglaises, which accommodated foreign delegates and visitors and some Soviet officials, a little woman was on guard, sitting on a high chair with a rifle in her hand. On the point of the bayonet were thrust many tiny pieces of coloured paper. These were the "probusks", or permits to enter, presented by people who came to visit the official residents in the hotel.

The dining-room had been newly decorated in honour of the Second Congress of the Third International; its white panelled walls were shaded by soft sunrise colours. On the tables were pale pink and lilac hydrangeas. The damask cloths were snow white. The glass highly polished. The waiters hovered courteously around, attending to all things with the greatest care. One scarcely noticed that their clothes were shabby.

Breakfast was being served. A smart young Naval officer and a red-haired American journalist sat at the centre table. An American linotype operator was by the window. The waiters laid before each person some black bread, so sour that I, being unaccustomed to rye bread, could only eat a few crumbs of it, two tiny sardines, a glass of weak tea and three or four little pieces of sugar.

For luncheon, later on, the waiters served, with equal aplomb and grace, a small cake of mashed potatoes measuring about three inches by four, covered with gravy sauce and followed by weak tea. For fifty roubles they would also supply a bottle of pink sparkling liquid which they called lemonade, but the taste of which strongly recalled the smell of scented soap. For fifty roubles they also had a purplish drink which tasted like a weak solution of water and mouldy fruit that had begun to ferment. These most undesirable drinks were the only things charged for; the food was all quite free.

Dinner today was an exact replica of luncheon...

For the rest, the hotel had probably changed little since the old days. The furniture, which was in good condition, was as before. The service was good; the beds clean. The traveller might have, cost free, for the asking, a hot bath and



Sylvia Pankhurst



Travelling propaganda library leaving Petrograd, 1921

International

Delegated revolution



The Soviet view of Allied intervention, 1919. White leaders are portrayed as dogs performing at the whim of the United States

the hair shampooed by an expert and dried with a hot air fan in the hairdressers' shop below.

Mrs Pelman, who spoke excellent English, and her colleague, who spoke French and German, were most hospitably attentive to the guests, and at any first sign of illness, called in the doctor who supplied, again without charge, whatever suitable remedies the prevailing shortage had left him.

Soon after my arrival at the hotel came Comrade Kingisepp of the Third International, saying: "Come to Smolny," and away we went in a motor to that headquarters of revolutionary activity which was once a school for noble girls.

Before the main entrance was a most outrageously bad statue of Karl Marx. Young artists of talent who starve unwanted in Europe would find a generous welcome for their work in Soviet Russia.

On the bare white walls of the barrack-like interior of Smolny, hung numbers of red bannerettes. Red guards were stationed everywhere, and without a *probusk* one could not go beyond the office where they might be obtained.

Zinoviev, the Secretary of the Third International, has his office here, and through Smolny pass all the literature and communications to and from the Communist Parties of the world.

The rear windows overlook the Neva, and the green banks where the noble girls used to play.

Across the river is the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, where for many generations revolutionary comrades wearied away long years.

AND NOW TO MOSCOW—oh strange city of contradictions—so deeply mediaeval yet, in spite of the Revolution.

The intense heat weighed one down like a heavy cloak. Great forest fires were burning for miles around Moscow, and 60,000 Red soldiers were engaged in beating them out. A smoky haze filled the city.

One rose from the sleeping-car to a strange scene: a great square, a mass of almost motionless people in loose straight clothing, white grey, and dust coloured. Old women sat on the pavement, peddling small green apples, wild berries and other trifling wares. The crowd hung around them. Patient travellers sat in the road beside their luggage. Nothing seemed to move. The roads are cobbled, the walls a sunny blend of pink and yellow, the domes of the churches blue, speckled with gold stars. The churches, rising in the roadway, stand as fortresses of the old world that is swiftly pass-

ing. Inside they are dim and strange; a flat glare of monotonous gold with dark little primitive images painted upon it. The priests, in their robes, have long and matted hair.

At the church with the blue and gold carved canopy, the people, in a frenzy of faith and fear, once tore a priest to pieces because he refused to hang out the ikon they used to kiss. The plague was rampant: the priest feared the spread of infection: but the people thought only of miracles.

The weird Basil Cathedral is like a bundle of footless towers, surrounded by porches and capped by domes that burst into green and yellow spirals, or are covered, porcupine-like, with spikes of green and red. Tapestry-like patterns of painted flower pots and imitation stonework ramble over it. It is like a schoolboy's Christmas nightmare, and yet it possesses a strange barbaric beauty.

The eyes of its architect were put out by the Czar, in order that he might build its like for no other monarch.

With the old superstitions, the old buttresses of autocracy still living within her, Moscow goes

hastening onward in the creation of the newest brotherhood.

The Djelavoi Dvor Hotel blazed with red banners and the watch words of proletarian solidarity in many languages. It was thronged with delegates of the Third International, come to take part in making the world revolution; striving through the crowd of their own numbers that veiled the real Russia like a fog to learn something of this gigantic thing we call the Soviet Republic.

They were greeted in Petrograd by the spontaneous uprising of the proletarian masses, in Moscow by magnificent ordered marching. Children threw flowers in their path, magnificent athletes and wonderfully-wrought pageants were displayed for them. Tremendous indeed

was their welcome: because to the Russian workers, these delegations represented the hope of the world revolution, the only hope of peace for Soviet Russia, and the ending of her great hardships and sacrifice. This welcome was indeed a challenge to the Communists of a hundred countries to play heroic parts.

The delegates thus challenged, thus received with a welcome of awful beauty, seemed a light-hearted, gregarious crowd.

The representatives of each country mostly went together in droves.

The Italians had brought with them, it was said, a special train of tinned and bottled meals and wines. Upborne on the crest of the great popular movement, they were gay and confident.

The English, Irish, Canadians, Americans and others who speak our language, kept first their national divisions, but showed a distinct affinity amongst the entire group, and a marked division from the Germans. This division sprang a little, though they refused to own it, from the consciousness of the racial differences in a closely allied people. There was also the language barrier; but the great irritant was that the majority of the German delegates came from the Communist Party of Germany, the KPD, which still adheres strongly to Parliamentary action, and looks with little favour on the newer forms of insurgent industrialism, to which the majority of the British and American delegates pinned their faith.

The representatives of the Communist Labour Party of Germany, the KAPD, left the Conference early, because the majority view was opposed to theirs.

Souchie, a tall fair young man who represented the German workshop movement, and spoke good English, worked amicably with the British Shop Stewards in Committee, but never became one of the English-speaking fraternity.

Big John Reed, apparently full of radiant health, clear-eyed and good tempered, modestly ignoring his own brilliant talents as a descriptive writer, was consulted by all, and was always ready to serve. Undoubtedly, among the English-speaking members, he was the most popular of our number. The British Shop Stewards showed their respect for him by proposing that he should be the Chairman of the forthcoming Unity Conference in Britain.

The delegates were better fed than the mass of Russians: better fed even than the Commissaries and responsible workers, whose rations had been lately increased, but were still below the standard of the Red Army. Though the delegates' rations were really ample, those who came from the English-speaking countries (the countries which during the War were not forced

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Sverdlov, Bolshevik Party Secretary, addresses Red Army troops, 1918



The shortages become a full famine, 1923

Russia 1920

The beleaguered revolution

From page 13

down to a very meagre diet), were inclined to grumble. They were unaccustomed to rye bread and to Russian food in general. Caviar to them was no luxury, but merely rather distasteful.

To the Russians, the Conference, which sat for a month and met between 8pm and 4am, was an addition to their usual work.

The foreign delegates were left with many leisure hours. Soon tired of sight-seeing, many of them occupied themselves by making tea in each other's rooms with provender brought by newcomers from Norway. They endeavoured to secure a slice or two of the white bread, or a glass of milk kept at the buffet for those who had been given a note for them by the doctor. Eggs, for breakfast, though not always fresh, were hailed as a great event, as a change from the usual bread, butter, cheese and caviar (or occasional "kasha" — a dish made of boiled wheat meal, with a piece of butter on top). Cocoa or coffee instead of the universal tea, were received with enthusiasm, although with each glass of tea there was always a little saucer containing five or six sweets wrapped up in coloured paper. Delegates used to plead for strong tea, "Crepky Tchay," as though it had been really a matter of serious moment to them. Fairly substantial portions of duck, fish, meat, soup, and puddings of various kinds were served for lunch and dinner.

Most of the delegates wore Russian blouses, provided freely on application, after a few days of waiting. These blouses sat less gracefully upon them than on the Russians, most of whom had grown spare and hard by long continued living on bare necessities and by strenuous toil.

Each delegate was supplied on application with 5,999 roubles to spend.

The Soviet paper money is printed in various bright colours with the Soviet Arms — the sickle and hammer in the light of the rising sun, surrounded by a wreath of wheat. It bears in six languages the motto: "Proletarians of All Lands Unite!" 5,000 roubles will buy only a carriage ride or two, or a few pounds of green apples from the street pedlars.

Delegates were also supplied daily with cigarettes, matches, and cheroots. Russian tobacco for the pipe, which everyone reviles, and is a light greenish colour, was served out every few days. There were all sorts of attempts to get a little more than one's due of these small privileges and much competition for theatre tickets and motor cars.

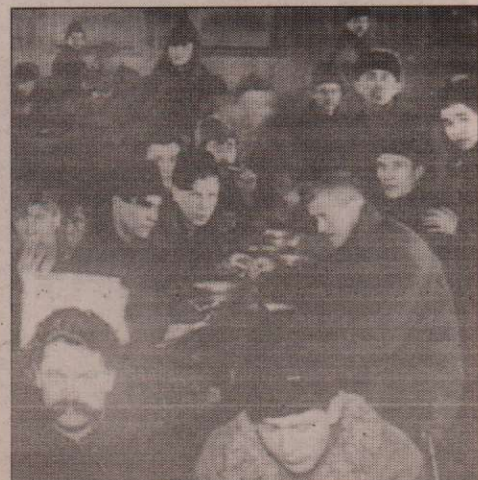
All this, and even the Conference itself, seemed like a vaporous mist through which one must peer to discover the real life of Soviet Russia.

One night, escaping from the perpetual stream of humorous anecdote which fell on one's ears at Djelavoi Dvor, I went off down the banks of the Moscow river with Borodine, the translator of Lenin's *Infantile Sickness of Leftism*.

Big comets with long tails of light, and frequent shooting stars entrapped half my attention. Borodine talked of his long exile in London, and compared the dull visionless life of a British worker, mentally starved, though perhaps comparatively well-fed, with the desperate hungry struggle, lit by tremendous hopes and dreams that has brought Soviet Russia where it is.

In the great, panelled dining-hall of a millionaire's mansion, now occupied by Communist workers, Borodine's meagre supper, a little piece of cold meat and a spoonful of rice, had been left waiting.

But all this was in the yet uncovered future,



Soviet canteen



Bolshevik poster depicts the killing of Wrangel, the last White general crushed by Red Army

when almost immediately after my arrival at the Djelavoi Dvor, a message came: "Lenin has sent for you to come at once to the Kremlin."

THE Commandment wrote out a little pink *probusk*. The motor car took me over the cobbles to the walls of the Kremlin. The Red Guards, five or six of them, checked the car to examine my *probusk*, and three times afterwards I was obliged to display it before I reached my destination. Once, later on, when I walked to the Kremlin to keep an appointment with Lenin, I was stopped for twenty minutes at the gate, because I had only the pass issued by the Conference, which was by that time out of date. Unable to understand the reason why I was being held up, I ran past the guards with their rifles and fixed bayonets, through the open archway to the telephone on the other side.

"You might have been shot," a comrade told me later.

"What would be the use of shooting me; I could not do any harm?"

"It was a woman who shot Lenin!"

Passing the Czar's big bell, which lay on the ground with a piece chipped out of it, the road led to the private apartments of the Czar and the Throne Room where the Congress was held. Looking at the great entrance, one sees a mighty staircase. To-day it was all hung with long red flags blazoned with the sickle and the cornsheaf, and at the end, a painting of "Labour," huge and naked, breaking the chains that bind the earth, hideous and ill-proportioned, but having a certain effective vigour. The walls of the corridors and ante-chambers were lined with photographs, posters and literature. The Russian Communists are indeed great propagandists!

In the innermost of the private apartments of the Czar's, Lenin, with smiling face, came quickly forward from a group of men waiting to get

a word with him.

He seems more vividly vital and energetic, more wholly alive than other people.

At first sight one feels as though one has always known him, and one is amazed and delighted by a sense of pleasant familiarity in watching him. It is not that one has seen so many of his photographs, for the photographs are not like him; they represent an altogether heavier, darker and more ponderous man. In place of this magnetic and mobile being:

Rather short, rather broadly built, he is quick

"Most of the delegates wore Russian blouses [which] sat less gracefully upon them than on the Russians, most of whom had grown spare and hard by long continued living on bare necessities and by strenuous toil."

and nimble in every action, just as he is in thought and speech. He does not wear a picturesque Russian blouse, but ordinary European clothes that sit loosely upon him. His brown hair is closely shaved, his beard lightish brown, his lips are red, and his rather bright complexion looks sandy, because it is tanned and freckled by the hot sun. The skin of the face and head seem drawn rather tightly. There seems to be no waste material to spare. Every inch of his face is expressive. He is essentially Russian with a

Tartar strain. His bearing is frank and modest. He appears wholly unconscious of himself, and he met us all as a simple comrade. His brown eyes often twinkle with kindly amusement, but change suddenly to a cold, hard stare, as though he would pierce one's innermost thoughts. He disconcerts his interviewers by suddenly shutting one eye and fixing the other sharply, almost fiercely, upon them.

I had been sent for to take part in the Commission on English affairs, which had been set up by the Third International.

We sat at a round table in the Czar's bedroom. Lenin was on my right hand, and on my left, Wynkoop of Holland, who was translating the German speeches into English. Lenin has a complete knowledge of English: he more than once humorously pulled up Wynkoop for misinterpreting the speakers.

Bukharin, Editor of *Pravda*, and one of the leaders of the Left in the Russian Communist Party, regarded the excited debaters from other countries with laughing blue eyes. Young and vigorous he had the expression of one to whom life is full of enjoyment. In brown holland blouse with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, he looked like a painter who had just laid down his brushes. During Committee meetings he continually drawing caricatures of the delegates, but no important point in the discussion escapes him. To-day he drew Wynkoop as a solemn, pompous owl.

Radek, who was going to the Polish front in a few days, was also smiling and cheerful, with a detached, dreamy air. One is constantly impressed by the absence of strain or excitement amongst the Russians. These men, standing against a world of enemies, appear to face the situation with perfect calm and much humour.

Zinoviev is of another type: the controversy seemed to bore him. He was a little impatient with the opposition, and criticised, with a tinge of contempt, which he doubtless regarded as salutary, the Communist Parties which had not yet learnt how to appeal successfully to the masses. One of the American delegates said of Zinoviev that he always talks to one as though he were taking a bath.

During an interview he seems generally bent on hurrying away to another appointment. An indefatigable pamphleteer, he was probably, even then, composing another Thesis; but he was ready to enter vigorously into the discussion and to speak at considerable length when his turn came.

His voice is not musical, but he is evidently a very popular orator.

At the great meeting in Moscow's biggest theatre, which was the final demonstration of the Congress, Zinoviev and Trotsky were the principal speakers. Trotsky received by far the greater reception. Coming from the Polish front, with the fall of Warsaw to the Red Army daily anticipated, he was naturally the hero of the occasion. He spoke without effort, no shouting, breathless excitement, but perfect control and ease. Outwardly well-groomed, he had evidently an excellent mental equipment. He proceeded slowly and leisurely up and down the platform, with an ever varied flow of tone and gesture. The still audience listened eagerly, but he spoke so long that at length he tired them, in spite of their great interest and admiration.

Zinoviev, on the other hand, held the people to the last and finished amid a brisk round of cheers.

At the Commission on private affairs in the Czar's bed-room, Zinoviev sat a little apart from the table. He leaned back comfortably on a soft lounge. Beside him was Levi, of the German KPD. The French, the Austrians and others were also represented on the Commission. The Italians, characteristically, were unrepresented because they could not agree on which of their number should represent them. They were nevertheless present in force and took part in the discussion, Bordiga even presenting a Thesis for discussion against Parliamentary action.

Obviously Lenin enjoys an argument, even though the subject may not seem to him of first class importance, and though the adversaries may be unskilled. At present he was in a bantering mood, and dealt playfully with the British delegates. The majority of them were objectors to certain passages in a Thesis now under discussion, written by himself, on the tasks of the Communist Party.

National Union of Teachers conference

Make the leaders fight!

By Liam Conway,
Notts NUT

THIS year's NUT conference is a turning point for the largest teachers' union. It isn't that there is any single, outstanding issue. It's rather that we have now had six years of the Doug McAvoy regime, and the record is not impressive.

McAvoy is using his "militancy" on this year's SATs [the Tory tests] to present a strong, fighting image to classroom teachers because he is up for re-election again in the next few months. The truth is that he was instrumental in blocking action on the tests, despite huge pressure from below for the last two years.

In 1993 the NUT was the last union to join the SATs boycott. The basic reason was that

McAvoy's strategy for the union insisted dogmatically that industrial action was outdated, almost always unsuccessful and, above all, likely to lose members to rival unions. The SATs campaign demonstrates better than anything the folly of that outlook.

Firstly, despite universal "professional" loathing for these tests and all they stood for, there was no sign whatever of the government compromising, let alone withdrawing them. It was only when that popular opposition was fused with action by teachers that we had a really effective campaign against the tests. It was then that the government appointed Ron Dearing to engineer a climbdown. It was then that teachers got hold of the dangerous idea that we could set the agenda and insist on an end to these tests once and for all.

It is crucial that delegates to this year's conference transfer the lessons of the SATs campaign to the major issues facing the union now. The imposition of an effective pay cut yet again has met with outrage in staffrooms up and down the country, but the NUT leadership's response is to repeat tragically their attempts to appeal to the Tories' sense of fairness and to get the International Labour Organisation on our side.

We have spent years and thousands of pounds getting the public and the ILO on our side; the government's treatment of teachers, healthworkers and other public service workers is now widely despised. But this propaganda victory hasn't protected us from a single Tory attack!

Public support can be the basis of successful struggles, but we

must provide a focus by fighting for a living wage, a properly funded education service and an end to all attempts to introduce competition and selection.

All the evidence suggests that delegates could be won to battles over pay, jobs and workload (particularly class size and appraisal), and that the membership will fight where they are supported by a national union.

The current leadership sees SATs as an exception. There is no sign that they have reassessed their basic New Realist position.

At conference we can give them a bloody nose, and just as important will be long-term struggle to take on the leadership of the New Realists altogether.

That is a task of the utmost importance and one for which the NUT left needs to build maximum unity in its own ranks.

Unite the health campaigns!

HEALTH

By a UNISON member at
St. Thomas's hospital

LAST Saturday, 26 March, a demo to save Guy's hospital called by the SICK (Save it, Casualty in Crisis) campaign attracted 2,500 people, the majority local residents angry not only about their local hospital closing but about the dismantling of the National Health Service.

On the bus going to the demo, a 2-year old kid sitting near me shouted "they're shutting it." When I asked what?, he replied

"my hospital — we're going to kick 'em in."

This demo signifies a new stage in a campaign which until now has been patchy. After the announcement of the closure, several committees were set up, pulling workers in different directions and offering no real lead. All appear now to be involved in the Community Health Council's SICK campaign; and the demo even had token support from the UNISON branch.

If Guy's closes around 750 beds and 2,000 jobs will go. There have already been some redundancies throughout the Trust, and workers are having to

reapply for their jobs under new contracts. However, on a more optimistic note, there have been some small victories.

The Trust has postponed the closure of Martha Ward from 1 April to June. This gives us more time to organise action to ensure that not only Martha Ward but the whole of Guy's is saved.

To save Guy's we need unity with workers at St. Thomas's where many of the scaled down services will go to.

Several people have suggested that the workers in St. Thomas's don't care. This isn't true as their jobs are also under threat. They are, to a certain extent, being alienated from the campaign. These divisions between the hospitals play right into the hands of the Trust and the

Tories. To save Guy's it'll take workers at both hospitals fighting together.

The UNISON branch is a mess. The branch spreads over Guy's and St. Thomas's, which effectively allows the union bureaucrats to do nothing. Branch meetings are not happening and the only reason a meeting at Guy's happened was because 100 members signed a petition calling for one.

The SICK campaign is good, but we need a decent campaign organised by UNISON, other health unions and the Labour Party, in defence of the National Health Service. If this is done nationally, branches would be more likely to fight back locally, and hospitals, like Guy's, could and would be saved.

NCU London strike ballot

TELECOM

By a central London BT
engineer

AT present a postal ballot of all National Communications Union [NCU] London engineering members in British Telecom is being conducted. A "Yes" vote for a one-day strike means a "Yes" vote to save jobs in BT.

The action is being called in response to contractors being brought into London without agreement, contravening a national agreement on redeployees. 1,250 BT workers are "surplus" in London. Instead of retraining and reappointing them to the areas where there are shortages, managers want to bring in contractors to do work they could do. This undermines the job security of all London engineering grades in BT, hence the London-wide action.

This action was (eventually) sanctioned by the Broad Left-led union executive and is the best way of halting BT, giving a clear signal that compulsory redundancies are intolerable. Staff are convinced that the union is right to oppose contractors, but the issue now is whether we can stop them. Members need to be convinced that taking action will be the way to change the current situation in BT with job security eroding away.

The example of NCU members in Girobank shows industrial action can achieve change. This message must be made real to BT workers.

The one-day action is being built as a protest strike — probably on 18 April. However, we need more than this to stop BT.

The issues of non-co-operation if contractors are brought in, and the need for a further ballot must be addressed by the BL leadership on the union execu-

tive. There is common ground in the NCU over jobs; some members of the right-wing faction have been calling time on the voluntary redundancy schemes that have been operating over the past few years, on the basis that BT has gone far enough.

The result of the ballot will be known after Easter. A solid "Yes" vote is vital to ensure members' confidence and to avoid the bureaucratic undermining of industrial action on the basis of a low turnout or narrow majority for action.

Girobank pay victory

By a NCU member

NCU members in Girobank have forced management to raise their pay offer after a programme of industrial action. Two one-day strikes have resulted in a higher percentage offer and one-off payment (roughly equivalent to 2.8% rather than the 1.5% first offered.)

The original pay offer was recommended for acceptance by the NCU executive, but rejected by members. A ballot on industrial action resulted in a "Yes" vote for a series of three one-day strikes (one a fortnight).

It was shortly after the second day of action that management conceded in the negotiations. The largest branch in Bootle was solid throughout the strikes, and executive members elected on the Broad Left slate led the organising of the smaller Girobank Branches in other parts of the country. Also, NCU members in British Telecom showed support for their Girobank colleagues.

This victory on pay, in the context of staff reductions in the banking and financial sector (and within Girobank itself) is proof that union members can fight and win through solidarity.

Barnsley Campaign Against Racism and Fascism

By Fiona Monkman

BARNSLEY Trades Council has set up a broad, united, anti-racist, anti-fascist group in the run-up to the May elections.

A well-attended planning meeting agreed to build the May Day demonstration on 30 April as a March Against Racism, and to hold a launch meeting on 12 April following election nominations.

In the face of increased activity by the BNP on council estates it was agreed that a united campaign, able to mobilise the trade unions, Labour Party,

students and young people, was essential if we are to effectively stop the racists and fascists getting a foothold in Barnsley.

Sheffield Against Racism and Fascism

A SERIES of public meetings are being held with speakers from the labour movement and community organisations in the build-up to the "Sheffield Says No to Racism" May Day march.

The meetings and march are being sponsored by the Sheffield Trades Council, the Sheffield CLP Labour Party women's section, RMT, Area NUS and UNISON No.2, amongst many others.

Brighton buses betrayal

BUSES

THE BALLOT over strike action at Brighton and Hove buses has been lost. There is only one reason why the workers at Whitehawk and Conway St. garages have not felt confident to fight back against imposed schedules and overtime payments: regional and national officers have failed to give the branch the support it needed to win.

One officer, Ollie Jackson, has perhaps played the worst role in this conflict. It is clear, first of all, that Jackson blatantly lied to the branch over the legal situation of management's imposition of the new conditions.

He stated that after seeking advice from TGWU legal officers that management had not acted illegally.

Not only was this false legal information; it later transpired that Jackson had not even contacted the TGWU legal department over this dispute.

The meaning of life, the universe and everything in Region 6

AN extraordinary letter from T&G General Secretary Bill Morris arrived on the doorstep of every single one of the union's branch secretaries and full-time officers last week: "I very much regret the need to advise you on a matter of grave importance relating to a report which the Executive Officers gave to the Executive Council at its meeting on Friday, 11th March" it begins.

Bill's missive then proceeds to assure the reader "that the Executive Officers did not take this step lightly" and that "the constitution and integrity of the union are threatened." The letter announces that the union's legal secretary, Albert Blyghton, is to conduct a "detailed investigation" which will "enable the Executive to determine any appropriate course of action."

At this point you might be forgiven for asking for a few clues as to what this matter of grave importance that threatens the constitution and integrity of the union might be. Unfortunately, Bill's letter is not very forthcoming on this, except to say that it involves "a number of issues concerning the conduct of both Lay and Full-time Officials of the Union in the North-West Region (Region No.6) in relation to the Union's rules, the handling and control of the Union's finances, the presentation of union policy and the organisation of industrial disputes." He might have added, "and the Meaning of Life, the Universe and Everything."

By pure chance, the letter more or less coincided with similarly mysterious reports of unspecified evil-doing in Region 6, published in the *Guardian* and the *Independent on Sunday* — both papers whose industrial correspondents are on good terms with the soft-left of the union bureaucracy. The *IoS* report did go a little further than the Morris letter and named names, viz.: John Farrell (Regional Secretary, General Workers), Tom Hart (Regional Education Officer) and Eddie Roberts (Regional Organiser).

The choice of these three gives us a big clue as to what is going on here: all three are stalwarts of the union's "hard left" — the people who backed Bill Morris against George Wright and the union's right-wing faction during the General Secretary election, but who have been increasingly critical of Bill's cautious and conciliatory role within the TUC, the Labour Party and the union itself.

They are as much a thorn in the side of John Smith and Walworth Road as of Bill Morris and Transport House. For instance, they have mobilised Region 6 in opposition to the witch-hunt presently taking place against left-wingers in Wallasey Labour Party. It seems likely that Transport House's carefully stage-managed attack on Region 6 is at least as much to do with the union's relations with the Labour leadership as it is to do with internal T&G infighting. It is also, clearly, an attempt to convince John Edmonds and the GMB leadership that the T&G can control its "hard left" in the run-up to the merger.

The excuses for the attack seem to be:

- 1) An ill-advised legal action by John Farrell against the T&G leadership.
- 2) The conduct of a few long-running disputes — notably Tanks and Drums, and the Asda cleaners.
- 3) The use of European Social Fund money for a union seminar in Dublin.
- 4) Payments for union advertising on black cabs in Liverpool.
- 5) John Farrell insulting the chair of an industrial tribunal.
- 6) John Farrell swearing at Deputy General Secretary Jack Adams.

It will be apparent to the reader that the above list breaks down into two distinct categories of "offence":

- 1) the handling of monies, and 2) the personal manner of John Farrell.

On the second category, suffice to say that Bro. Farrell would be no-one's first choice as a diplomat or expert on etiquette. He is a former Convenor of Vauxhall Ellesmere Port plant where — regrettably — profane language is not uncommon. But then Jack Adams is a former Convenor of Austin Longbridge and must surely have heard the occasional "Oh golly gosh!" in his time. Anyway, Jack's a big boy and will get over it sooner or later.

The suggestion of financial irregularity is obviously more serious. Let it be said here and now that no-one who knows John Farrell and his co-defendants (even their worst enemy within the T&G) seriously believes that they have been lining their pockets at the members' expense. If (and I stress the "if") there have been any "irregularities" then they will have been of a technical and administrative nature.

Region 6 was the only part of the structure that made a serious effort to put the T&G "Link-Up" campaign (an effort to unionise people like part-timers and Community Programme participants) into effect.

They had considerable success, unlike the rest of the union whose "Link-Up" material lay unused under the desks of full-timers. In doing so, people like John Farrell, Tom Hart and Eddie Roberts may have sometimes adopted a "creative" approach to the union rule-book: but they are not corrupt and they have definitely not lined their own pockets.

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Left challenge do-nothing NUS leadership

Students need a fighting union

By Alison Brown, South Yorkshire Area NUS convenor

FROM 11-14 April the National Union of Students [NUS] will hold its national conference in Blackpool.

This year has seen the most severe attack on student grants since their introduction — and, in response, an explosion of student action across the country, including occupations, pickets and many demonstrations.

The union's leadership, dominated by a right-wing Labour Students faction, have done all they can to defuse, ignore and derail this action.

Where the leadership have refused to fight and give a lead to students, the left in NUS has taken on the task.

Members of Left Unity, the activist left in NUS, pulled together the Student Activist Alliance, which organised the 20,000-strong demonstration on 23 February.

The do-nothing leaders of NUS did all they could to stop student unions supporting the demo, but in most cases they failed even with their own supporters. Jim Murphy, the current President of NUS Scotland and Labour Students candidate for NUS President, toured Scottish colleges to undermine support for the demo, but he failed.

These events have shown more clearly than ever the need for a campaigning leadership. That is why Left Unity is standing a full slate for the leadership at this year's conference.

Already, Left Unity's Sarah Wellings has won the position of NUS Women's Officer at NUS Women's Conference.

Whatever the leadership election results, a national network of activists will be vital to building a mass campaign against the grant cuts. That is why every activist should make a date to be at the launch meeting at conference of the Student Activist Alliance, to build on the base that organised the demo on 23 February.

Contact Left Unity c/o 9 Love Walk, Camberwell, London SE5.



Another big demonstration in Paris is scheduled for Thursday 31 March, in protest at the plans of France's right-wing government to cut the legal minimum wage for young workers. The banner reads: "Youth minimum wage [i.e. the proposed special low rate of minimum wage] = a coffin for 3790 francs." France's right wing, like the Tories in Britain, want to push youth into cheap-labour jobs with unsafe conditions.

Rank-and-file campaign for action

Railworkers: vote yes for strikes!

By a RMT member

THE main rail union, RMT, will be balloting over the next couple of weeks for a series of one-day strikes in defence of job security and negotiating rights, in response to the privatisation of British Rail.

But, despite the fact that there is a left-wing majority on the union's elected council of executives, the appointed full-timers and right-wing national officers are dragging their feet when it comes to campaigning amongst the members on the issue.

As a result, the campaign for a "yes" vote has had to be organised by the left executive members, branches and by rank-and-file networks.

The first issue that the campaign has had to focus on has been the issue of job security. This is how a leaflet from the Edinburgh No.1 branch — based at the main Inter City station — explains the question:

"Will your job be next to go? Thousands of our members each year are having to cope with the stress and uncertainty of losing their jobs as a result of yet another reorganisation. In fact, it is now almost impossible to find someone who has not been 'reorganised' at least once in their railway career. All staff are currently protected under a national and industry-wide Promotion, Transfer, Resettlement and Redundancy [PT&R] Agreement.

"Look around you. You will see colleagues who lost their job with Inter City and are now working for Scotrail. Someone else may have been made redundant with Freightliner and now works for Inter City. Perhaps it's someone who has lost their job with Scotrail and now works for Trainload Freight. Redundant Red Star staff have also been accommodated under the PT&R and are working for Inter City or Scotrail.

"The examples are endless, but the point is that all of these protected moves will not happen in the future. In order to comply with the greedy dogmatic nonsense that is privatisation, the 'railway family' is being brutalised. If you're made redundant with

Railtrack then you will be limited to a mini PT&R only within Railtrack's boundaries. If you're made redundant with BR then you will be limited to a mini-PT&R within BR's boundaries. This will severely change over the year with BR fragmenting into countless little business groupings which will see the shadow franchises becoming totally separate and independent entities. As your business employer retracts so then do your options if made redundant.

"RMT demands an effective industry-wide PT&R for all... that there is a safety mechanism introduced to retain a cross-business PT&R. This umbrella protective body would provide a reciprocal arrangement for all businesses. It would give our members the same level of protection that currently applies and will be governed by an effective Machinery of Negotiation."

Many railworkers believe that such an arrangement is necessary, but they are sceptical about just how willing the union leadership are to lead a really serious fight.

This is how the rank-and-file railworker newsletter *Off the Rails* deals with that concern.

"Question: Last year we struck against redundancies but after two days' strike we were asked to vote again on whether to continue. It got called off. Will that happen again?"

"Answer: There can be no guarantees about whether or not the leadership, the executive, or some of them, will get cold feet again. The right wing of the union, who wanted to believe that a fight was unnecessary, manoeuvred to get it called off. Hence the second ballot. Since then the promises they got from BR have proved to be as reliable as their timetables! Experience and elections have changed the executive and they are now more determined and wise. But to be most certain about not being marched up the hill and then marched right back down again we have to make sure any action is backed up by a strong 'Yes' vote and supported by solid action on the ground. We also need to take control of any strike activity and keep the pressure on the leadership to make sure they deliver."

Many railworkers see this dispute as a direct

political challenge to the government. After all, tying the employers down on the issue of jobs will certainly make BR a much less appetising prospect for the private capitalist sharks who contemplate buying up sections of it after privatisation.

It is vital that the RMT executive stand firm in the face of any legal challenge from BR to the ballot. This could take the form of either declaring the ballot invalid on a technicality — as happened to NATFHE recently because they didn't provide a list of all their members to the employers — or of declaring the strike "political" because it is seen as being against privatisation and then banning it.

The government is very weak. Politically, it would find it extremely risky to seize the RMT's funds after they had clearly won a postal ballot for strike action.

Remember, 83% of the population opposes railway privatisation, so the dispute would be very popular. The government on the other hand are in a weak position. The thing to do with the courts in this case is to test them and, if necessary, defy them.

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