

SOCIALIST

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New Tory drive against the unemployed

By Rosalind Robson

THE Government wants to do to the universal benefit schemes of sickness, invalidity and unemployment what it has done to the state pension scheme. It wants to create a two-tier system of benefit: it is running down and cutting the state benefits and encouraging those who can afford it to take out personal insurance plans.

These plans coincide with the Jobseekers Allowance which will be announced in the Queen's Speech this Autumn, and become law in about 18 months time. The Jobseekers Allowance will radically alter the system of benefit for unemployed people in Britain.

It is one of the meanest pieces of social security legislation the Government has introduced for many years. It will mean further cuts in living standards for the unemployed, and also an increase in unemployment as many Civil Service jobs are at risk.

The main changes and effects are:

- Unemployment Benefit and Income Support will be replaced by a unified benefit — the Jobseeker's Allowance. The 'streamlining' accounts for the potential loss of jobs.

- The contributory, non-means-tested element of the new benefit will last for six months. The period of eligibility for Unemployment Benefit has been run down for many years but lasts for one year at present.

- Eligibility for the non-means-tested element will be two years' continuous employment. At present it is one year.

- Unemployed people not eligible for the non-means tested element will be means tested. The ludicrous and miserly lower-rate that exists in Income Support for 18-24 year olds will remain.

By the Government's own estimates, 250,000 unemployed people will be worse off under the new scheme. It will of course hit hard at people under 25 years old. Women with working partners who now qualify for Unemployment Benefit will lose all benefit after six

months.

As well as saving money, the government hopes to fiddle the unemployment statistics and remove even more people from the claimants count.

The money the Government saves on a measure like this is actually a fairly marginal amount in terms of the social security budget as a whole.

But this reform has an important ideological element. The title "Jobseekers Allowance" and the reduction in the "universal" non-contributory part of the benefit rams home the point that the unemployed have some kind of "moral duty" or responsibility to find work and should not go looking for hand-outs from the "nanny state".

Cutting the benefit is also, supposedly, meant to provide an incentive for people to find work.

So this is the Government's short sharp shock for people who have just got the sack and cannot afford to pay for the unemployment insurance policies they now want to encourage.

Working class people in this predicament, say the Tories, should pull themselves up by their boot-straps and go and find themselves low-paid, non-unionised, part-time, short-term, casual jobs. These are the jobs, if there are any at all, they will find.

The next step for the Government has to be Workfare, perhaps for single parents, perhaps for the long-term unemployed.

How can we fight it? We need campaigns like the one being developed in Nottingham. Workers in the Benefits Agency and Employment Service are preparing now to fight the job cuts and the worse conditions that will be a result of this reform. Local job cuts are not likely to be announced for sometime so this kind of preparatory work is crucial.

Most importantly, the Notts workers plan to hold joint meetings with welfare rights group and unemployed workers groups. This kind of campaign links workers with claimants. It is the way forward.



How long can Castro survive?

By Cathy Nugent

MANY PEOPLE, probably numbering in the thousands, have died trying to cross to the USA. Tens of thousands of people have attempted the crossing in pathetically flimsy home-made rafts of wood, polystyrene and old rubber tyres.

The recent accord between Cuba and the US, whereby 20,000 Cubans will be admitted legally to the States every year, appears to have stemmed the tide of refugees.

However there are still over 25,000 people detained at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay where conditions are extremely poor. It is a terrible tragedy of far greater complexity than is presented in the bourgeois press which has feasted on the spectacle of the dying "communist" dream.

For Castro "letting the people go" was a "diplomacy" exercise, a protest at the US's economic blockade of Cuba. There has been some speculation that the US will lift the embargo. That will be a victory for Castro — it may turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory.

Cuba's crisis has been steadily worsening since the flow of aid and trade with the ex-USSR stopped in 1989-90. This aid had kept afloat Cuba's underdeveloped economy and its Stalinist regime.

Over the last four years all the social subsidies, in housing, in transport and welfare programmes have been cut. Only people who work in the tourist industry, with access to foreign currency, have survived the conditions.

Of course the problem of economic development was structured into the satellite relationship Cuba — a small island that could not hope for self-sufficiency — had with the USSR. But it is equally a result of regime's grossly centralised and undemocratic management of the economy.

The underlying reality is that the Cuban regime was and could be no better at providing for its people than any capitalist regime in the Third World has been or could be. When Soviet aid was taken away, all the "progressive" social programmes of the Castro regime — which many of the left had mindlessly declared to be socialist — collapsed.

Castro's government has attempted to see its way out of the crisis by attempting diversification in the economy. The biggest expansion has been in the tourist industry and this has brought with it the problem of inequalities growing-up around access to foreign exchange. Diversification in

any case is too little and too late.

The lifting of the embargo would imply the US is ready to do business with Castro. Maybe this will save Castro. But we must be sceptical about that outcome because of the huge legacy of underdevelopment.

The Cuban regime, because of its origins, always enjoyed more genuine popular support than any other Stalinist regime. Workers remembered what it was like under Batista and had fought to put Castro in power. And the country was small enough (only 11 million people) and easy enough to cushion with Soviet aid for the regime to continue without the excessive repression suffered by people in other Stalinist states. Still, there was no democracy, just state propaganda and edicts from on high, and the regime locked people up too: in 1987 30,000 people were in jail, (the UK equivalent would be 150,000 — three times the number it is at the moment).

When the aid went Castro realised he could not go on ruling as before. But no cosmetic exercise at democracy would be sufficient. And this is what the Cuban people have had so far.

Clearly Cuban society is unravelling and Castro cannot continue to rule in the same old way — although he may go on for some time yet.

In the absence of an independent trade union and labour movement; or the presence of a strong bourgeois opposition inside Cuba, a likely scenario is that there will be a split within the regime itself. That will mean a right-wing military government basing itself on the tourist industry. The mafia and the drug barons will surely follow. All this would be a disaster for the Cuban working class.

Socialists should do everything possible to help the birth and development (when it does come) of independent working-class forces in Cuba. Whilst we cannot forget our hostility to the Cuban regime there is an immediate issue of Cuban self-determination.

We should call for an immediate end to all US immigration control on Cuban refugees, (the people who are now in the refugee camps should be allowed into the country of their choice); demand in the US and Europe that governments provide emergency lifeboats and ferries for Cuban people wishing to cross to Florida so that no more people will be killed. We want an end to the US economic blockade and increased foreign aid for the Cuban people. We should oppose all hostile sanctions and military actions against Cuba by the US government.

Welfare State Network

Rank and file co-ordination to save the Welfare State

Launch meeting: noon to 4pm
Sunday 18 September

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London
(Holborn tube)

Contact: Trudy Saunders on 071-703
3493 or at 22 Maude Road, London SE5

Radical Chains are organising a meeting on:
"Trotsky, Trotskyism and the Transitional Epoch"

A discussion with David Gorman of 'Radical Chains' and Hillel Ticktin & Mick Cox of 'Critique'
Friday 30 September
7pm-9pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn Tube.
Tickets £1.50/75p

Free Malcolm Kennedy Justice for Patrick Quinn!

ON 6 May 1994 Malcolm Kennedy was convicted of the manslaughter of Patrick Quinn in a Hammersmith police cell. Kennedy has always maintained that he saw police officers assault Quinn.

The case in 1994 was Malcolm Kennedy's second retrial. He had been convicted of Quinn's murder in 1991. But in 1992 a *World in Action* programme revealed evidence that three policemen, including PC Paul Giles, had led about what had happened.

On the day of the second retrial began the Crown Prosecution Service told Kennedy's defence that Giles

would not be giving evidence due to mental illness.

Hackney Community Defence Association and Hammersmith Irish Forum are campaigning for a judicial review into the case.

Public Meeting
Halkeri
Community
Centre
92-100 Stoke
Newington Road,
London N16
9.30 Wednesday
28 September

Defend the Welfare State!

LONDON

Sunday 18 September

Launch meeting of
National Welfare State
Network

12.00, Conway Hall, Red
Lion Square, Holborn

Thursday 22 September

Organising meeting for
Islington and Haringay
Welfare State
Campaign

7.30, Red Rose Club, 129
Seven Sisters Road

Thursday 6 October

Launch meeting of
Lewisham Welfare
State Network

7.30, Lewisham Labour
Club, Limes Grove, SE13

Saturday 17 September

Campaign Stall from
11.00 outside the Pizza
Hut, Brixton

NOTTINGHAM

Monday 19 September

Initial meeting of
Nottingham Defend the
Welfare State

7.30-8.30, Queens Walk
Community Centre, The
Meadows

NEWCASTLE

Monday 19 September

Meeting Campaign to
Save the Welfare State

7.00, Walsend People's
Centre, 10 Frank Street

Stop all trains on strike days

THIS Tuesday, 13 September, saw the start of the seventeenth strike in a dispute that has now gone on for over 3 months.

It takes place against the background of the continued danger of a lock-out of strikers.

Railtrack obviously have a coherent strategy. Backed to the hilt by the Tory Government, they are prepared to sit through any number of strikes and are prepared to make huge losses if necessary.

Their aim is to slowly build up scab signalling operations and to encourage a gradual drift back to work.

They hope to be able to divide the determined core of strikers from those who have so far remained solid but who at some point may start to weaken.

When this point is reached, Railtrack will move to impose personal contracts and sack those who resist.

This strategy was spelt out in great detail in the internal Railtrack documents leaked to the press a fortnight ago.

In contrast, the RMT leadership's strategy appears to be that of holding on indefinitely with the one- or two-day strikes every week.

The problem with this strategy is that it puts all the initiative in the dispute in the hands of Railtrack.

As well as standing firm, the RMT should call out all its traincrew and trackworker members on signal strike days.

The Council of Executives must give a clear instruction to all RMT train crew, PWay, S&T, OHL grades not to work on strike days when there is — as there usually is — a safety risk to both themselves and to the travelling public.

This is the logical way to step up the action. It is simply a more forceful and effective version of the existing policy of the Executive, which has already instructed the General Secretary to "advise our members of their legal rights under the 1974 Health and Safety Act and the relevant section of TURER."

Those legal rights include a provision to be compensated by an industrial tribunal for "unfair dismissal" if it can be shown that the worker stopped the job "in circumstances of danger which he reasonably believed to be serious and imminent."

It is obviously much better for the union to exercise the right collectively — in the same way as it can call a work-to-rule — rather than exposing individual activists to the risk of victimisation by doing it themselves.

This kind of escalation would destroy Railtrack's strike-day operation and cement the bond of solidarity between signalworkers and other railworkers.

Some people may claim that such a course of action would open the union up to the risk of sequestration in the



Birmingham signalworkers' picket. Photo: John Harris

courts.

Such "legal advice" would be a counsel of despair. Though no one could sensibly guarantee that the Tory

judges wouldn't try to attack the union, the reality is that Railtrack would have to attempt to prove in court that their strike day services are

safe. Everyone knows they are not!

And even if Railtrack managed that, they still couldn't get at the union's funds because "leaving the danger-

ous part of a workplace" (TURER) is not legally the same as "industrial action in furtherance of a trade dispute" and so outside the scope of the existing anti-union laws.

If this strategy failed, then RMT would have to look at other ways of escalating the action. But first of all the strategy should be tried.

This dispute has become the most important trade union struggle of the 1990s.

As we have argued before, the stakes in the dispute are very high indeed.

If Railtrack win, then perhaps the strongest section of the powerful rail union, RMT, will be defeated, making British Rail a far more enticing prospect for those private profiteers who will only buy up sections of the industry if they think they can make a huge profit out of a divided and disorganised workforce.

Victory for Railtrack will therefore be a major defeat for trade unionism, not just on the railways, but across the whole of industry.

A victory for the signalworkers, however, would blow a massive hole in the Tories' public sector pay freeze and encourage other groups of workers to enter the battle.

Stop all trains on strike days! Lock out must be met with all-out rail strike! Victory to the signalworkers!

Railtrack risks lives

By Tom Rigby

LAST THURSDAY'S train derailment at Bickley in Kent provides clear proof that Railtrack management are prepared to put passengers' and railworkers' lives at risk in order to run services during the signalworkers' strikes. It came on the same day as a train narrowly missed two cars on a level crossing in Nottinghamshire.

According to RMT activists in the Southern District, the Kent accident was the direct responsibility of a scab supervisor from Kent, brought in to work at the Victoria power box next to Clapham Junction station. What happened?

The scab supervisor gave the driver a series of "proceed" signals which were then changed at the last minute when the scab realised that there was another train on the same line, just a

few hundred yards ahead.

This in itself would be a serious disciplinary offence for any ordinary signalworker on a normal day.

The driver was forced to apply the emergency brakes and to reverse back up the line. The train was then derailed because it reversed over points with one wheel following one set of track and the other following the other set.

RMT activists fear a major cover-up. "Expecting Railtrack to hold a proper inquiry into the incident is like expecting the police to properly investigate themselves. It's just naive," explained one railworker.

The incident at Bickley was not an isolated event. It was just one of a whole series of disastrous breaches of safety on strike days:

* Drivers in Edinburgh, frustrated and angry with so many mistakes being made, staged a short stoppage

of work. Inexperienced supervisors had put two trains on the same track heading towards each other! A serious accident was only averted by the quick response of the drivers and the fact that the trains were going slower than usual due to earlier signalling problems.

* A manager working in the Victoria box didn't know how to operate a vital piece of safety equipment. He spent 45 minutes phoning round other managers to find out how to turn it on. Who gave this person his safety clearance?

* Passengers at Sandhills near Liverpool were trapped between level crossing barriers.

These incidents and others occur because Railtrack has managers working signalboxes they are totally unfamiliar with and have not been properly trained to operate.

"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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Striking workers show the way

Stop the repression in Nigeria!

LAST WEEK the Nigerian Military Junta seized control of the striking oil trade unions. The National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the national trade union congress, the Nigerian Labour Congress were all put under the control of the military dictators. The leaders of all three bodies were 'sacked'.

At the same time the newspaper houses were closed down, there were further arrests of opposition politicians and a blanket ban was made on the courts being able to challenge the Junta.

Announcing the clampdown, General Abacha who seized power in a coup last year after the previous military dictator, General Badangida, had suspended the "democratic" presidential elections, said in a nationwide broadcast "These organisations [the unions] have embarked on a systematic destruction and strangulation of our economy."

The oil strike which started on 4 July

"The strike showed that it is the Nigerian workers who hold the power to really hurt the military."

has drastically hit the Nigerian economy. 90% of Nigeria's foreign earnings are from oil and gas.

The strike was called in part over economic issues but its central demands focused on questions of political democracy: the release of political prisoners, including MKO Abiola, and the acceptance by the military of the results of the 12 June 1993 elections. The strike had been central to a wave of mass protests following the arrest of MKO Abiola in June 1994.

It was on 12 June 1993 that Abiola

looked certain to win the Presidential election when the military stepped in and shut down the election. Since independence 34 years ago, Nigeria has had 25 years of military rule.

The 12 June election was a long way from being a free election. 33 political parties were banned. There were two candidates, MKO Abiola for the SDP and Bashir Tofa for the National Republican Convention.

Both candidates were millionaires picked by the military and both parties had been set up by the military.

Since then the pro-democracy movement has been gaining. The turning point was Abiola's return to Nigeria in June 1994 and a rally where he declared himself President. Within days he was arrested on treason charges.

At first the oil workers were left to fight alone by the national union federation, the Nigerian Labour Congress (41 affiliates and 3.5 million members).

The NLC's President Pascal Mafyan who in 1990 said "no doubt I am close to people in government the military regime and people in government are close to some of us in the labour movement," attacked the oil workers strike. Pascal Mafyan was arrested in his absence by the national council of the MLF who under rank and file pressure launched a general strike on 2 August.

Only two days later the NLC called off the strike to 'ease tension for discussions with the government'. The military have repaid this stupidity by effectively shutting down the NLC.

In the face of the suppression of the unions the oil strike has collapsed. Yet the strike showed that it is the Nigerian workers who hold the power to really hurt the military.

One tragedy of the strike was the way that tribalism was whipped up to divide the workers movement. Nigeria has 132 tribal groups, and the military used the fact that Abiola is a southerner, a Yoruba, to whip up the northern Hausa-Fulsani



The workers need democracy to create the best condition to fight for their interests

people against Abiola and the strike, focused on the mostly Southern Oil Industry.

This was an early option for the military because aside from the tribal issue, most Nigerian workers and peasants are deeply suspicious not only of the military but also of Nigerian politicians like Abiola. Since independence both military and civilian rulers have looted the government's funds, wasting oil revenues by filling their pockets. The country has a US\$30 billion foreign debt and 116% inflation.

In the last decade the military have been squeezing workers and peasants under an IMF-designed economic policy, but every senior government official still gets to fill his pockets.

Abiola has nothing to offer the poverty stricken workers and peasants of Nigeria. Indeed, until his recent rift with the military he was a close ally of the current ruler, General Abacha.

Of course the workers' movement is right to be the most militant fighter for democracy in Nigeria. The workers' movement needs democracy like a plant needs light to grow.

But the labour movement must not allow itself to be tied to Abiola's bandwagon. The workers need their own political voice, a workers' party that fights not only to kick out the military but to overthrow the Nigerian bosses.

The Brazilian PT was built in this way. Right now democratic demands must be linked with economic demands — make the bosses pay for their crisis!

The key democratic demand should not focus on the 12 June 1993 election result. The election was a farce. What is needed?

- A really free and open election for a National Assembly that will write a new constitution.
- All bans on free expression must be lifted.

- All political prisoners should be released.
- Military rule should end immediately.

With the Nigerian military attempting to smash the Nigerian trade unions and destroy the pro-democracy movement it is vital that the British labour movement shows its solidarity with our Nigerian brothers and sisters.

Oppose military dictatorship in Nigeria!
The government should issue a clear statement condemning General Abacha for the political repression of the Nigerian people
*Picket No.10 Downing Street,
Friday 16 September 6pm.*

An open letter to the left Ireland after the ceasefire



WE SAY

Dear comrades,

THE END of the Provisional IRA military campaign — for now at least — creates a new situation for the left in Britain. It opens doors that have long been closed.

For many years, sections of the British left have felt that they could not sharply criticise the PIRA, and that it would be unprincipled to do other than give it "critical support" so long as it was conducting a military struggle against — or ostensibly against — the British Government. They felt that because of their military campaign the Provos despite the limits of their politics were revolutionaries entitled to our support.

We, of course, came to disagree with that, though initially we shared the belief that the first duty of socialists in Britain was to support even such a flawed and limited national revolutionary movement as the PIRA against 'our own' government. But such a posture leads inevitably to political self-suppression in deference to the narrow petit-bourgeois ideas of the PIRA/Sinn Fein. It condemns socialists to either embarrassed silence

or blind defence of their often indefensible deeds. Belatedly we came to the conclusion that what the working class needs from small groups of socialists — and all the groups, including the SWP, are small groups — is not cheerleading for groups like the Provos, but, above all else, an honest attempt to understand the world in all its complexities. That is the only basis on which we will ever be able to win a socialist revolution in this complex world.

We have acted on that conclusion, telling the truth as we saw it.

Those who disagreed with us on that face a new situation now that the war is — maybe — over. They have to ask themselves what do they really think about Ireland, about Sinn Fein's politics, about the Provisional IRA.

They can no longer hide from these questions behind the "revolutionary" fact that the Provisional IRA was at war with the British Army.

Some on the left will be tempted to denounce the cease-fire as a "sell-out" by the Provos leaders — but such people are hopeless. Others — amongst them, surprisingly *Socialist Outlook* — will support the cease-

fire.

Ireland over the last 25 years constitutes one of the great failures of the British left. Because it has confined itself to pseudo-Republican posturing around such slogans-made-into-icons as "Troops Out", and to reflecting the politics of the Provo-Catholic nationalists, the left has played no independent political role. It has had no analysis of Ireland independent of the old British Liberal /Irish middle-class analysis.

Worse than that, the approach of most of the left meant that discussion of Irish issues was ruled out: ours was not to reason about such things but to lend our weight to those fighting Britain in Northern Ireland.

One result of twenty years of this is utter confusion on the left. Where Ireland is concerned, the left substitutes self-hypnotising lies for both knowledge and policy.

It is hard to believe, but most of those who call for Troops Out still think that thereby they call for a United Ireland. In fact, unless preceded by a political settlement, it would certainly mean civil war and repartition, not any sort of united Ireland.

They talk about ending the "Protestant veto" when, for 22 years, now, since the abolition of Stormont, Northern Ireland has been kept in balance by twin vetoes: the Catholic

veto against majority rule in Northern Ireland has balanced the Protestant veto against any all-Ireland constitution. Both vetoes are backed by force and the threat of force. To advocate anything short of forcing them into a United Ireland is to "accept" in one degree or another, the Protestant veto. Who on the left, cant against the "Protestant veto" notwithstanding, is prepared to openly advocate that? We could go on: the left is awash with such un-thought out nonsense.

Above all else, right now, the serious left needs to examine and discuss its views on Ireland and the Irish question. It needs to step out of the shadow of middle class Irish nationalism and cease to walk in awe of Gerry Adams' "Fianna Failers with guns".

For the left has a great responsibility in Ireland. One million people in Ireland, probably a majority of them working class, say they are British. The British labour movement can influence such people towards reconciliation in Ireland. But the left, by playing the chameleon to Catholic nationalism, has long rendered itself unable to even talk to those Irish workers within the British state.

All that can now change. We urge you to think about the issues.

For ourselves, we are convinced that the working class needs its own democratic solution to the "constitutional question" that divides the people, and

the workers, of Ireland. We advocate a federal united Ireland as a means of allowing the working class to unite and ultimately to create an Irish workers' republic.

We advocate that the Northern Irish trade unions should once again create a Labour Party there. Unless such a party had a federalist policy on the "constitutional question" it would be foredoomed to shatter at the first crisis, as such parties have shattered in the past. But it does not have to be foredoomed.

We have usually found it impossible to even get our ideas discussed on the left. To discuss such things was to betray the "armed struggle". Now that Gerry Adams has "betrayed" it the serious British left needs to take a fresh look at Ireland, and at itself too.

We propose a series of debates and discussion meetings on this question. Alliance for Workers' Liberty branches will approach the local groups of other organisations and propose such discussion.

In every respect the British left has failed the Irish working class in the last twenty-five years. It is time we too made a new start!

**Yours for socialism,
Sean Matgamna
On behalf of Socialist Organiser**

UNISON: time to organise the fightback!

Tony Dale, Manchester and Chris Croome, Sheffield look at the issues facing left activists in UNISON

SATURDAY 17 SEPTEMBER will see a UNISON Fightback conference hosted by Sefton UNISON.

The conference was called after court action was taken by Sefton council against UNISON locally and nationally after an unofficial one day strike against a privatisation threat.

The union nationally have tried to distance themselves from and disown the action. Now, the National Executive is considering disciplinary action against two Sefton branch officers.

Defending the right of rank and file UNISON members to organise and fight back to protect jobs and services must be the central theme of the conference. It also gives an opportunity for the left to reorganise for a campaign to democratise and commit UNISON to a fighting, campaigning strategy.

Public sector workers are facing a harsh pay restraint policy from the government. Local council workers are being "consulted" over their views on a two year pay deal of 1.7% plus £75 now and 1.4% plus £75 from 1 July 1995. The left needs to push for a rejection of this offer and in favour of the rolling programme of strikes suggested by the national leadership.

There are more issues than just the need to campaign for industrial action against a very bad two year pay deal.

The whole process of consultation and decision making is setting precedents for the future and raises fun-

damental question marks over UNISON's claim to be a lay member led union. The union is going through a semi-informal consultation period which lasts two months. This gives a lot of power to full timers and the procedure is so long-winded it threatens to kill off the whole dispute.

What is needed is a delegate conference to consider putting the offer and proposals for industrial action out to a ballot of members.

In Sefton, two local branch officials and UNISON nationally were fined after council workers joined a one day strike against Sefton council's strategy of voluntary privatisation. Following the strike the council voted to rescind its decision to externalise the services.

This attack by the courts using the anti-union laws should be condemned. The trade union movement must defend the right of its members to take strike action, official or unofficial. The decision on whether members strike or not must be their decision to take free of court interference.

In the aftermath of the court decision the response of the national leadership has been to set the ball rolling for disciplinary action against the Sefton Two. There must be no disciplinary action, the right of workers to strike and the right of branches to organise and represent members must be defended.

Equally important is the ongoing disciplinary action against members in Liverpool. Four Liverpool UNISON members are being disciplined for supporting an unofficial strike in Liverpool Social Services over racism at a day centre.

Members don't take industrial



The fightback conference is a chance to work out a strategy to defend our union and our jobs. Photo: Paul Herrmann

action lightly, so when they do act it is the duty of elected representatives — nationally, regionally and locally to support them. Now shop stewards in Liverpool are being disciplined for this. The UNISON leadership is playing a role of policing its own members for the Tories and their anti-union laws. The disciplinary hearings have been postponed from their September dates. Rank and file democracy must be defended by opposing these disciplinary threats.

These and 101 other issues such as cuts, CCT, minimum wage policy, links with the Labour Party, all need attention. The conference comes at a crucial time. Hopefully the opportunity will not be lost.

National action needed to defeat CCT and privatisation

EARLIER THIS year Sefton UNISON struck for a day against a proposed sell-off of the council's technical services department and the privatisation was subsequently called off.

Sheffield UNISON has also successfully stopped a proposed sell-off of the council's Design and Building Services Department, which employs Engineers, Architects and Quantity Surveyors. Following a major campaign, Sheffield Labour councillors voted unanimously on 5 September to stop the sell-off.

It is important to differentiate between these sell-offs, which are under the control of individual councils, and Compulsory Competitive Tendering, which is imposed on local authorities by central government. Stopping the proposed sell-offs in Sefton and Sheffield means that 65% of these services will be required to go out for competition in April 1996 under the government's CCT timetable.

The selling-off of whole departments was once a pursuit solely of the flagship Tory authorities like Wandsworth, Westminster and Berkshire but is now becoming widespread. At least 13 authorities have sold off parts of or their whole technical services departments. At least 10 others are currently considering it and as CCT looms no doubt many more will consider it.

Labour authorities which once were committed to direct labour delivering services are, under pressure of relentless cuts in funding from central government, placing more emphasis on

the 'quality of service delivery', not who delivers the services.

The advance of the 'enabling model' of local authorities where councillors just meet to decide who to award contracts to is meeting no serious, coordinated opposition from UNISON nationally. And, in fact, the widespread acceptance of it is a by-product of the union's own failings. Because there has not been any national coordination against attacks from central government in the form

of cuts and CCT, branches are left to blunt the onslaught as best they can at a local level. The piecemeal erosion and privatisation of local services is happening because there is no national campaign against it. UNISON is fundamentally failing to defend local government jobs and services at a national level. As a result, each branch is having to deal with cuts, sell-offs and CCT as best it can. Piecemeal and patchy resistance, however, is

not enough.

What is needed is national action to defend local authority jobs and services — national attacks require a national response. The starting point for a national fightback must be a national ballot for a day of action against CCT and cuts. Anything less, for example yet another day of action where branches are to find a local issue over which to ballot for action, is no good — this approach was shown not to work at the start of last year. UNISON must start defending local government jobs and services before there is nothing left to defend!

"What is needed is national action to defend local authorities, jobs and services — national attacks require a national response."

The left we have ... and the left we need

AT THE FIRST EVER UNISON conference held this May in Bournemouth there were two meetings supposedly intended to provide a forum for organising the left.

Both meetings were held on the same night, the only major difference between them being that one was held on the West Cliff and the other was held on the East Cliff.

The pointless division reflects the legacy of sectarianism on the NALGO left, the ex-members of whom make up the majority of the organised left in UNISON.

For years the NALGO Broad Left was a relatively inactive organisation which was run by Militant. The SWP took it over for the last couple of years of the existence of NALGO. Under the control of the SWP it organised a few rallies which were useless for anyone who didn't just want to build the SWP. When UNISON was established in June 1993 the SWP dropped the Broad Left. Since then there have been two attempts to organise the left in the union.

One, the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting UNISON, involves Militant and is organising some regional broad lefts and plans to bring these together for a national conference sometime in the autumn though, as far as we know, no date has been announced.

The other is the UNISON

Fightback campaign which has organised a few rallies and appears to be run by a few branches in which the SWP holds key positions. The Sefton conference is the latest manifestation of the UNISON Fightback campaign.

There is no rational reason for there being two national initiatives which attempt to organise the left. It is totally unnecessary and totally unproductive.

The root problem is sectarianism.

The SWP and Militant before them both ran the broad left as little more than a front for their own organisation. There is the same problem now with CDFU and UNISON Fightback.

Both groups do not seem to understand that socialists should attempt to build rank and file organisations as serious broad mass opposition groups.

We should attempt to unite the rank and file membership on the broadest possible basis in order to take up the issues of fighting policies and democratic control.

In contrast to both the SWP and Militant who want to set up their organisation as the organisation of the UNISON left, Socialist Organiser supporters and AWL members have argued for the development of an open non-sectarian left in the union. We have also helped build UNITY in UNISON as an effective campaigning newsletter for rank and file

activists.

If UNISON Fightback is to play an effective role in the union it needs to become an ongoing campaign with a clear democratic structure committed to fighting for policies which reflect the desires and concerns of rank and file UNISON members.

The campaign must be branch based to give it a necessary authority in the union and a clear structure of accountability.

It needs to be built in a spirit of non-sectarian campaigning unity. If we can get common agreement on a number of basic issues and campaigning priorities, the involvement of all sections of the left must be actively encouraged and fought for.

Vital though such activity is, UNISON Fightback must not concentrate solely on militant industrial struggles. The fight for democracy and defending members rights is an equally important task facing the left within UNISON.

Any left campaign within UNISON needs to be based on organising and mobilising very broad layers of the union around a number of basic issues. Our perspective must be to transform the existing union into a union which will be thoroughly democratic, based on control by members from below and a union based on a campaigning strategy to defend members and services.

The folly of youth

A NEW book published in France, *Une Jeunesse Française* ("A French youth") produces evidence that the 'socialist' president, François Mitterand, was a pre-World War II fascist, a member of the Croix de Feu and, in the early part of the war, a collaborator with the German puppet regime of Marshall Petain.

Can we expect that one day in Britain someone will publish evidence that Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair was once a member of the Young Conservatives and part of a group sent to do entry work in the Labour Party?

WHAT DO rehabilitated corporate criminals do? Ernest Saunders, imprisoned (even if only ever so briefly) for his part in the Guinness fraud, has fought back against the ill-health that led to his early release from prison to open a mobile phone retail business. Well, it's a step up from second-hand cars, but still two or three down from being an estate agent.

WELCOME TO Tony Blair's new classless Labour Party, typified by his new private office staff, his kitchen cabinet of yes-folk.

At the top there is spin doctor-in-chief Alistair Campbell (who will dissemble on *Newsnight* when Blair is too busy; funnily enough, Blair is always busy when Jeremy Paxman is doing the interviewing).

He was educated in the traditional working-class way at, er, Cambridge. David Miliband was educated at Oxford, Liz Lloyd, at Cambridge, Tim Allen at — funny you should mention it — Cambridge. But let's be fair, Murray Elder and Pat McFadden, did go to Edinburgh University — though that's Oxbridge in tartan.

Wait, this looks hopeful though. Anji Hunter, head of the office, did go to Oxford, only she went to a secretarial college there. And before that? Her colonial rubber planter father had sent her to St. Leonard's, one of Scotland's top girls' public schools.

That leaves just Hillary Coffman, a graduate of the Open University. She is a relic, left over from Kinnock's private office.

WHAT'S GOING on at the *Guardian*? Not only did they review the hagiography of the late Gerry Healy by two of his depleted band of disciples, Corrinna Lodz and Paul Feldman, but they got Ken Livingstone to review it. What's wrong with that, you ask?

What's wrong with it is that he wrote the "celebrity" introduction to Lodz's and Feldman's reverent work!

GRAFFITI

VIVE LA
REVOLUTION

By Cyclops

So far, none of the published letters of protest in the *Guardian* have pointed out that Livingstone benefitted materially from his link with Healy, whose organisation financed "Livingstone's" paper, *Labour Herald*. But Livingstone's fidelity to Gerry Healy's memory is forcing us grudgingly to change our assessment of him. The crassly albeit ineptly self-serving politician shows promising signs on this one issue of turning into an honest nut.

WHAT IS the difference between the US pilot who shot down two of his own air-force's helicopters last April killing 26 people, and the US pilots who killed 9 British soldiers during the Gulf with so-called "friendly fire"? Is it that only the first is a gung-ho maniac who has watched *Top Gun* too many times?

Is it perhaps that bombing people on the ground by accident is a simple mistake that anyone could make, whereas, you have to be really trigger-happy to shoot down helicopters?

There must be some difference, because Colonel Randy May who shot down the helicopters is being charged with negligence, whereas those responsible for the friendly fire deaths have not even been formally identified.

Is it perhaps that the helicopters were full of top brass, whereas the friendly fire victims were just ordinary squaddies driven into the army by unemployment?

FREEDOM OF speech has been banned in Walsall — and that's official. The Conservative Council has outlawed all political and campaigning information stalls from the shopping streets.

The Labour Party, Amnesty International, pensioners' groups and animal rights campaigners are among those affected.

The Tory leader of the Council, Mike Byrd, confessed: "I sometimes wonder if people like Friends of the Earth are on the same planet — people don't want stuff shoved under their noses. I am sick of these people cluttering up the street when traders are trying to make a living."

Byrd is clearly one of those people who will happily cross the street to get annoyed — perhaps he should have T-shirts made for the good subjects of Walsall, saying something like: "Ignorance is bliss."

Blair's street-fighting man

PRESS GANG

THE GUARDIAN TODAY
SUNDAY PRESS
THE WORLD

By Jim Denham

THERE CAN be no doubt who is the second most important man in Tony Blair's New Improved Labour Party: Alistair Campbell.

John Prescott may be Deputy Leader but he's not part of the inner circle. He's just there to glad-hand the union leaders and reassure the party faithful that socialist principles are not being sold out (admittedly, an increasingly difficult task that will tax comrade Prescott's prolier-than-thou salesmanship to the full).

No, Campbell is the real number two. He'll give Blair's kitchen cabinet of yuppies and careerists two qualities it would otherwise lack: politics and an understanding of the Tory tabloids.

Unlike the rest of the Blair clique, Campbell is politically committed to the project

of transforming the Labour Party into a "modern" social-democratic, outfit and has been willing to take a drop in salary of at least £30,000 per year in order to be at the heart of that project. The others have no politics at all — just personal ambition.

And although quite a few of the Blair 'babes' have media experience (much more important these days than boring, old politics) none of them are familiar with the rough, tough world of tabloid journalism. They come from the rarefied worlds of PR and television, while old Alistair (he's all of 37) cut his teeth in Fleet Street.

As poor Neil Kinnock found out in 1992, the sophisticated arts of the PR consultant and the TV producer are no match for the street-fighting skills of the tabloid boys when it comes

to a no-holds-barred, eve-of-election bout.

Campbell's a street fighter in the literal sense as well: when he worked for Maxwell's *Daily Mirror* he punched the *Guardian*'s Michael White for greeting the news of the Capt'n's watery demise with a joke. Now that's what I call loyalty.

STRANGELY, although Campbell was happy to serve the Capt'n, he didn't like the Montgomery regime that followed at the *Mirror*. He jumped ship to join Mike Malloy's *Mirror*-in exile team at the Murdoch-owned *Today*, where he became political editor, and helped turn the ailing tabloid into quite a decent left-of-centre paper. Whatever the rest of the Murdoch empire decides come the next general election, *Today* is now certain to back Labour.

Naturally, *Today* put itself at the forefront of the pro-Blair press chorus during the leadership election. But Campbell's contribution to the campaign went beyond penning effusive pro-Blair columns and editorials. Operating under the code name 'Bobby' he acted as Blair's unofficial media

adviser-cum-minder during the campaign. His appointment as Blair's personal press secretary is a well earned reward.

After the mauling Neil Kinnock got from the press in 1992, you can't blame Blair for wanting a media supremo who knows how to twist arms, threaten journalists and lean on producers and editors. And Blair is far from being the first Labour leader to surround himself with un-elected cronies and "advisers" — Harold Wilson had Joe Haines and Marcia Williams, and Campbell himself was part of Neil Kinnock's clique. But Campbell's appointment, together with Blair's life-long friend Anji Hunter (office manager), David Miliband (head of policy), Tim Allen (press officer) and the various unofficial confidantes-like Mandelson, TV executive Barry Cox and ad-man Philip Gould, confirms the suspicion that Blair's regime will be the cliquiest in Labour history. And the most dominated by media people.

It remains to be seen how Campbell will get on with his old enemies at the *Mirror* and the *Guardian*. But I suspect Blair has ordered against punch-ups.

Population, overcrowding and women's right to choose

WOMEN'S EYE

By Samantha Denton

THE MAN who organised the United Nations' population control conference meeting in Cairo, Aly Teymour, responded to a question from a woman reporter by saying: "Don't worry about it, darling." That sums up the UN's commitment to women's rights!

Clearly this man learnt his PR skills from Jeffrey Archer and his feminism from Ian Paisley. Oh, yes:

Aly Teymour is on the "enlightened" wing of the UN!

Against the Aly Teymours on the opposition team are ranged various bigots and the backward-looking Catholics and Muslims. These have organised mass demonstrations in opposition to contraception and abortion rights.

The UN's target is to stabilise the world's population at 7.2 billion by 2050. They believe the world is becoming "overcrowded."

The idea of "overcrowding" seems to be just "common sense." It is based on the idea that if you try to get 200 people into your own

front room, life would become very unpleasant. So it would.

Theoretically, I suppose, there is a point at which so many people live on the planet that life begins to break down. That point is a long, long, long way off.

Population centres like Mexico City and Calcutta are "overcrowded" not because there are a lot of people who live there, but because the big majority live in unbearable poverty.

The answer to the nightmare rests with the reorganisation of the world so that it runs on the basis of human need, not, as now, private profit.

The question should not be: for or against population control? But rather: for or against a woman's right to choose to have, or not to have, children? And true choice does not only imply educated women who have a large range of contraception available. It also implies dealing with broader social questions.

It may be a rational "choice" for a woman to have as many children as possible if she has a real fear that she will starve to death in her old age unless there are children to look after her. Real choice implies an adequate provision of social welfare.

Stop Major's 'yob' attack!



By Mick, Birmingham

IN A SPEECH last Friday (9 September) John Major made an attack on so-called "yob-bishness", ruling out any link between poverty and crime and outlining new laws to add still more repressive legislation on top of that contained in the Criminal Justice Bill which becomes law in October. Major wants country-wide bans on drinking in public and more prison sentences for "loutishness, vandalism and graffiti". He also said the Government were looking at introducing identity cards.

As the inner-cities crumble and poverty soars, the rottenness of decaying Britain is shown by rising crime. There is an obvious link between poverty and crime in



Major's government has blighted the lives of thousands of youth

inner-city areas where industry has been demolished and mass unemployment has been the norm for decades. Boredom, poverty and lack of leisure facilities mean that many youth turn to petty crime.

All youth have to do is hang about on the street and "drink in public" because that is all there is to do. Already youth get constantly harassed by the police. Now Major wants to make drinking in public and being 'loutish' offences.

Youth will then have to show their ID cards to the police on demand.

The real jobs are not working class youth but John Major and his capitalist gang who have destroyed the lives and hopes of millions, created four million unemployed and driven thousands onto the streets.

The labour movement must oppose Major's attack on youth and go on the offensive against the Tory menace to society!

Labour against the Criminal Justice Bill

By Pete, East London

TONY BLAIR is leading a stampede to the right on the issue of crime by the Labour Party's leadership. It is vital that the left in the labour movement opposes this.

Hundreds of thousands of youth have been involved in campaigning against one of the biggest attacks on our civil liberties for many decades — the Criminal Justice Bill. Yet, when Tony Blair was Shadow Home Secretary, he organised a Labour Party abstention on the Bill in its final reading in the House of Commons.

Left-wing youth in the Labour Party must fight this capitulation to the Tory agenda on crime.

That's why we have launched "Labour Against the Criminal Justice Bill". We are circulating a petition and organising a lobby of the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool where a debate is scheduled on the Bill.

Labour Against the Criminal Justice Bill works inside the Freedom Network — a national network that has been coordinating the campaign for the last two years.

Already we have the support of MPs Tony Benn and Alan Simpson. Many

labour activists are angry about the leadership's failure to fight the Criminal Justice Bill. It is vital that we focus the anger and haul the Party leadership off the Tory's law and order bandwagon.

• Labour Against the Criminal Justice Bill, 9 Love Walk, Camberwell, London SE5.

Stop the Criminal Justice Bill
Sunday 9 October
Assemble: 12 noon,
Embankment, London

Parasites of the week

SENIOR officials of the Student Loans Company have been making the most of student poverty. Pop concert tickets, corporate credit cards, hotel bills — all are being paid for by the Education Department.

Mr Harrison, the Chairman of SLC, has been paid expenses on chauffeur-driven cars, taking his

secretary and 'wife' out for lunch, moving house and employing his son.

It seems the Tories policies in education *do* benefit some people, however it is certainly not students.

Student debts on graduation now average £2,000. Or, roughly speaking, a couple of week's expenses for SLC bosses!

Lancaster students organise rent strike

We won't pay!

By Kate Buckell, General Secretary, Lancaster University Student Union

THIS YEAR Lancaster University are planning to increase student rents by 6%. In addition, many rooms are now en suite to encourage conference trade and thus well above the means of most students. All this at a time when students' grants have been cut by 30% and debt levels of many students run into several thousands of pounds.

At Lancaster we are planning a rent strike, to begin in October, and are in the process of building support for this. We will be taking a motion calling for a strike to the first Union meeting of term and have already sent out a mailing explaining the issues to all new students.

Rent strikes are the only economic sanction students can use. They are also extremely politically embarrassing to the college administration. They receive substantial media attention and highlight the plight of students.

In 1991 Lancaster held a rent strike against a 12.75% rent rise which culminated in a 10-day occupation of the college administration building. In the three years since, rent rises have been half the level they were in the three years before the strike. The college has also been far more willing to involve students at all levels of decision making. Their attitude at the moment indicates how scared they are of similar action again.

Rent strikes can be highly effective but they need to be well supported inside the college and in the wider student movement. It is only when we work together that we win. We are already in contact with York and Bradford and if any other colleges are considering holding rent strikes please contact us so we can build up a support network. This way we can all be far stronger and stand a greater chance of success.

We would also urge other student unions to seriously consider taking this kind of action. Students cannot afford to wait in the hope that a more sympathetic government may be elected. We must force this issue onto the agenda now.

"Rent strikes can be highly effective but they need to be well supported."



YOUTH FIGHTBACK

Rebellion

... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth.

This page is separately edited.

Editor: Mark Sandell

Phone: 071-639 7967

for details of our activity.

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

Youth Fightback is...

Strikers shot and gaoled while ANC mi

This is the new

South African socialists from the Workers' List Party (WLP) report on what Nelson Mandela's ANC-dominated Government of National Unity has been doing since the April election.

The ANC government: the first 100 days

BEFORE THE ELECTION many people hoped that an ANC-led Government of National Unity (GNU) would bring liberation for the mass of South Africans. We argued that it would not. We said that a cross-class alliance such as the ANC would only serve the middle class and the capitalists. We said that through compromise the ANC would tie itself up in the arms of the capitalists and surround itself with apartheid's prison warders. We said that with high salaries the MPs would no longer be part of the working class.

We stood in the elections to put this message across and to argue for a Mass Workers' Party instead.

The first hundred days of the ANC-led GNU have given a clear indication that we were right. The strikes by thousands of workers show that they too do not believe that under the GNU we are now one big happy family. They have shown that they know that we can only be free through our own mass actions.

But these struggles need to be organised.

We must organise groups in every factory and every township linked to the WLP. We must also prepare through political discussion and education.

The election has also shown that we need our own newspaper. *Workers News* has been launched to give a voice to the growing movement.

The WLP has also started a Right to Work campaign. We are calling on all workers to support this campaign and to start building the Mass Workers' Party right now.

The record of the ANC since it came to power justifies the stance taken by the WLP. The WLP will support any reforms or progressive measures taken by the new government which are in the interests of the working class. But we will fight any measures which attack the working class.

During the run-up to the elections, the ANC made many promises. Some people thought there would be real changes. Let's look at what has happened in the first 100 days of ANC-led government:

* In the RDP [South African Republic] the ANC promised to drop VAT on basic

foods. But in the state budget for 1994/95 the government has reduced tax on companies and kept VAT on food.

* Two ANC premiers criticised civil servants on strike in the "homelands", saying that agitators were behind the strikes.

* During the Pick 'n Pay strike police were sent out to support management. Rubber bullets and police dogs were used on workers and hundreds of workers were put in jail. Is this the "new" South Africa or the old regime in the 1980s?

* Mandela criticised workers on strike, saying that they would harm foreign investment in this country. He also supported the view that workers who go on strike are against the RDP. Even before the elections, Slovo called on workers to stop all strikes.

* More and more the view emerging from the ANC-led regime is that workers are privileged people, who are lucky just to have a job. Together with the bosses, these forces are using the RDP as a stick, as COSATU leader Bheki Nkosi correctly says, to "force workers to make sacrifices." It seems that just as workers paid for apartheid, the ANC also expects workers to pay for reconstruction.

* It should not come as a surprise that the ANC supports business against workers. Mandela recently said that the ANC has to accommodate the interests of business because "we won this election, for those who do not know, because of the financial support of big business."

* While workers have to resort to strike action to demand a living wage, ANC

MP's and Cabinet Ministers, as well as the President himself, are earning enormous salaries. Yet during the election Mandela promised to put an end to the "gravy train."

* The ANC-led government has not recognised June 16 as a public holiday. May 31 — Republic Day — was recognised. On June 16 Thabo Mbeki, spent the day in Pretoria talking to the rightwing about setting up a Volkstaat for them. Even Pik Botha was more sensitive. He spent the day in Soweto at a commemoration service.

* In the RDP the ANC promises that there will be freedom of information. In June, Defence Minister Joe Modise got an interdict against the *Weekly Mail* to stop it publishing information in the possession of ex-CCB agents that certain high ranking ANC officials were working for the previous regime. What is he hiding?

* On the coldest night of the year the Johannesburg City Council destroyed the Liefde en Vrede squatter camp. Housing Minister Joe Slovo, who is also a leader of the South African Communist Party, said invasion of land was not acceptable and that squatters were being manipulated by "outside forces."

* Before the elections the ANC said it was against federalism. The seven ANC regional premiers, led by PWV premier Toky Sexwale, are now demanding more and more powers for the regions, so that we will end up with a federal state after all.

* The same Sexwale, speaking from behind the protection of a police caspian called on SDU's to disarm themselves while apartheid's army remains intact.

* SACP leader Ronnie Kasrils, who is now deputy minister of defence, says white call-ups will continue and those who fail to report will be prosecuted. The same Kasrils and Joe Modise are defending huge defence expenditure when the money is desperately needed elsewhere.

* Racism is still widespread in the workplace but the "new" regime says it is not going to take sides.

There is not enough space here to de

Were the elections free and fair?

SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST all-inclusive elections of April this year are now behind us. Many bourgeois commentators called it a "dream result". The results were in fact exactly what the Transitional Executive Council could have planned — an ANC majority, but not more than 66% so that it still looks like a "government of national unity". This way, any party can blame the other partners if they do not fulfil their party mandate.

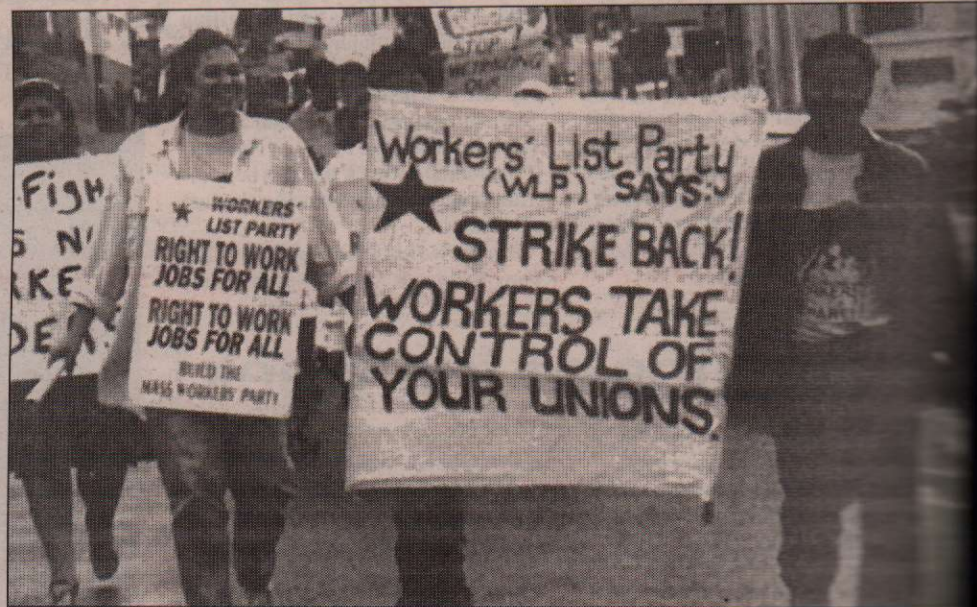
Despite the utter shambles, the elections were accepted as "free and fair". They had to be. The alternative would be the breakdown of the TEC deal and all the sell-out clauses and compromises agreed to by the ANC. How free and fair were the elections?

Only those who do not want to see could agree that the Natal election result was democratic. The results were negotiated behind closed doors.

The ANC leadership in Natal know this only too well. It was difficult for them to swallow this fraud. But the ANC central leadership once again forced a compromise on those below and got the Natal ANC leaders to withdraw their court action against Inkatha. This is after IEC officials pointed to huge fraud by Inkatha. Would the real results have given the ANC the two thirds majority to make the new government just an ANC government? Neither the ANC leadership nor the Nats wanted that.

How much else was negotiated in the election results? Was the Western Cape given to the Nats to give them a place in the "government of national unity"? And how many other results in each counting station were negotiated? What is clear is that those parties with monitors in each polling station were able to look after their votes. The smaller parties who could not do this suffered as a result. The media also blatantly favoured the larger parties, including the newly formed Volksfront.

The bourgeois agenda in the election was quite clear. All bourgeois parties were to be included in the new government and the election results had to reflect this. So they did.



The WLP campaigns for workers' control

ministers get rich

South Africa?



Mandela's government, so far, has been a sorry catalogue of anti-working-class measures

with the endless list of anti-working-class measures of the ANC-dominated government against the people of this country since it came to power. We could mention the shady foreign deals, the granting of amnesty to the murderers of our people, the secret land deals with KwaZulu.

The struggle for workers' rights is not over. Instead the bosses have gained new confidence with the new government and are taking a harder line in negotiations with workers. This is not surprising given

"The struggle for workers' rights is not over. The bosses have gained new confidence with the new government and are taking a harder line in negotiations with workers."

the way the ANC has repeatedly told the capitalists that they are the leaders of society. The record of the GNU so far gives a clear signal of the path the ANC-led regime is on.



The workers need a mass workers' party to link together their struggles against the new bosses and old bosses in South Africa

COSATU: Whose side are you on?

THE COSATU CONGRESS will debate the future of the alliance between COSATU, the ANC and the SACP. The WLP's position is clear. The alliance must end. We believe that many workers in COSATU unions support this position, especially in the light of the ANC's record since the elections. We call upon leadership in the unions to promote open debate on this issue. WLP members within the unions should ensure that our position is clearly put across in all union and other forums.

South Africa is a capitalist society. There are two classes in society: the workers and the bosses. The bosses make huge profits by exploiting workers but they pay themselves enormous salaries. Bosses and workers are forced to struggle against each other. You can only be on one side or the other.

The Workers' List Party (WLP) is on the side of the workers. Our party has only one job and that is to fight for the rights of the workers. We say there are no good reasons for retrenchments, low wages, unemploy-

ment or housing shortages. But we are fighting for more than better wages and conditions. Only socialism can bring true liberation to the working masses of our country. We aim to build a Mass Workers' Party because only with an independent political party can workers win the struggle against the bosses.

The ANC says the bosses and workers can hold hands and be friends. But it is the ANC leadership who is holding hands with the bosses. They have compromised on the lock-out clause. They have sold out the nationalisation of industry. They did not make 16 June a public holiday. The ANC leadership are paying themselves huge salaries in parliament while the working-class lives in poverty. The ANC government has now reduced company tax but has not removed VAT on food.

As long as the wealth of the country remains in the hands of the capitalists the RDP cannot succeed. Therefore the RDP is no reason to keep the alliance.

The ANC and SACP leadership is not on the side of the workers. COSATU therefore must break the tripartite alliance as soon as possible. Instead COSATU, ANC and SACP members should make a clear commitment to support the building of the Mass Workers' Party.

• Note: this appeal was produced for the COSATU Congress that ended last weekend, 10-11 September.

The Congress itself saw lively debate over the relationship between the unions and the ANC-dominated government.

Mandela addressed delegates calling on them to tighten their belts and accept wage cuts.

There was strong opposition to this line but despite the position of the giant engineering and auto union NUMSA, calling for the creation of a mass workers' party linking up with all socialist organisations, COSATU agreed to continue in alliance with the SACP and the ANC.

The Workers' List Party and the elections

THE WORKERS' LIST PARTY was formed as an election front by the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) and the Independent Socialist Movement (ISM). The main aim of entering the election was to call for a Mass Workers' Party (MWP).

From day one of the election we had to work harder than others to get exposure in the media. Nothing parties like the Kiss Party, the Soccer Party and the Federal Party were readily given exposure while we had to fight with SABC and newspapers to give us a chance to speak.

When it came to counting votes our total rose quite well. 50% of the votes had been counted. Then suddenly the total stopped rising and in some regions our vote actually

decreased! A few more votes were added on for the last 50% of the count and we were given just over 4,000 votes. By how many votes were we cut down? We cannot say. Is it a coincidence that our votes stopped?

There were different arguments in the left about what to do in the elections — the left was not united. Some wanted to boycott, others voted for the ANC, others for the PAC. Despite hostility from the bourgeois media the WLP succeeded in popularising the idea of a Mass Workers' Party and in establishing a national presence.

We now have branches in most regions and are daily being approached by new members and groups interested in our programme. Our own members have been motivated by our successes.

No amnesty for the Provisional IRA

HERE IS A real problem with the demand for the release of all Republican prisoners (Sean Matgamna, SO 612).

Socialist Organiser is for the release of all the republicans because it is for the release of all political prisoners, everywhere.

Nevertheless, these prisoners were not jailed for writing books, for their ideas. A number of these prisoners planted bombs which killed people who had nothing to do with the conflict or shot Protestant workers with the thinly veiled excuse that they were "collaborators."

These prisoners were not conscripts — they were volunteers, they chose to do these things.

All right, you say, we don't agree with them, but they should be released, automatically, despite what they've done.

Is there anywhere you would draw the line against releasing "political" prisoners? An example: a BNP street-



The Republican movement's prisoners are not all 'blameless'.

fighter beats up an anti-fascist on a demonstration. Imagine the nazi was jailed — it sometimes happens. Are you for the BNP's release? If you try to get round the matter by stressing the criminal — I mean non-political — nature of the attack, then you are

cheating.

I think there are limits where beyond which the idea of "freeing all political prisoners" breaks down. Nor is the example of the BNP beside the point. It is very much to the point in Northern Ireland. There are hundreds of jailed Loyalist political prisoners. The Loyalist paramilitaries relate to the Catholics like the murderous racists of the BNP relate to black people in Britain. Are you for their release? What would happen if they were released short of a comprehensive settlement?

I am for a liberal amnesty policy, for political prisoners and for prisoners in general. The vast majority of people in British jails should not be there — Provos and shoplifters alike. But we have never said: we are against the prison system — though we are — and therefore all prisoners should be released now.

Gary Wilson,
London

WORKERS' LIBERTY Public Meetings

LONDON

Wednesday 28 September

**AWL London Forum:
"Ireland after the ceasefire"**

Speakers: from Workers Press and Sean Matgamna from the AWL

7.30, Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross

Saturday 1 October

**"The History of American
Trotskyism"**

For details of reading and venue write to London AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA 12.00-5.00, South London

LANCASTER

Monday 19 September

**"The IRA ceasefire —
will it mean peace?"**

7.30, Albert Pub

NOTTINGHAM

Thursday 22 September

**"The IRA ceasefire —
will it mean peace?"**

Speakers from: AWL, Militant, TOM
7.30, ICC, Mansfield Road

LEEDS

Thursday 22 September

"Education in crisis"

7.30, Adelphi Pub

Thursday 29 September

"After the ceasefire"

7.30, Adelphi Pub

SHEFFIELD

Thursday 15 September

"Is socialism possible?"

7.30, SCCAU, West Street

MANCHESTER

Thursday 15 September

**"The 50th anniversary of the
Warsaw uprising"**

8.00, Unicorn-Pub, Church Street

NEWCASTLE

Thursday 22 September

**"Ireland after the ceasefire —
what next for Irish workers?"**

Speaker: Mark Osborn

7.30, Rosetti Studios (next to Trent House)

News from the Russian labour movement

By Dale Street

ISSUE NUMBER three of *Russian Labour Review* (RLR) is now available in this country.

RLR was launched last year under the sponsorship of KAS-KOR (the Moscow-based Labour Information Centre) in order to analyse developments in the Russian workers' movement from a democratic left perspective.

A split in KAS-KOR — partly engineered by the "Russian-American Foundation for Trade Union Research and Education", an agency set up and funded by the AFL-CIO (American equivalent of the TUC) — has delayed until now the appearance of a new issue of RLR.

Appropriately enough, given the role of the AFL-CIO in splitting KAS-KOR, the opening article in the latest issue of RLR looks at the divisive role of the AFL-CIO and its front organisations in the Russian trade union movement.

This and other articles also cast a revealing light on some of the new "free trade unions" which have emerged in Russia in recent years, and the extent to which they are AFL-CIO-funded gravy trains for small time bureaucrats rather than real workers organisations.

Some recent strikes and trade union struggles, and the likelihood of larger scale confrontations in the future are dealt with in a series of articles which cover disputes at both local and also an all-Russian level.

Three articles analyse in detail last year's fighting around the White House (a deliberately staged provocation according to a well-argued piece by Alexander Tarasov) and the ambiguous response of the trade unions to the clashes.

Finally, two articles debate economic strategy.

The increasingly erratic Boris Kagarlitsky argues for a rather modest version of Keynesianism, and sings the praise of "the important role of the theoretical work of the British economist John Ross".

(This is the same John Ross who led the British ex-Trotskyist organisation "Socialist Action" to wrack and ruin!)

A reply by Eric Lerner systematically dismantles Kagarlitsky's arti-

cle, argument by argument.

Even so, RLR provides valuable insights into the problems involved in trying to rebuild the workers movement in Russia after six decades of Stalinist atomisation, and is well-worth reading.

Order RLR from: Committee to Defend Russian Socialists and the Labour Movement (CDRS), 243 Bellenden Road, London SE15. This issue £3.50 (+36 p&p). Three issues £10 (post free). Supporting subscription £20 (3 issues)

News from South Africa

The first edition of a new publication focusing on the workers' struggle in the "new" South Africa becomes available in the UK this week. *The Struggle Continues — News and Views from South Africa* is a newsclipping service provided by comrades from the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action.

Issue No.1 contains a lot of material of interest on the current strike wave. The *Struggle Continues* will be essential reading for anyone who wants to keep up-to-date with the development of the workers' struggle in South Africa.

Copies can be obtained for £1.50 plus 25p p&p from: WOSA Support Committee, BM London WC1 13XX.

Why you should be a socialist

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

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

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

We stand:

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

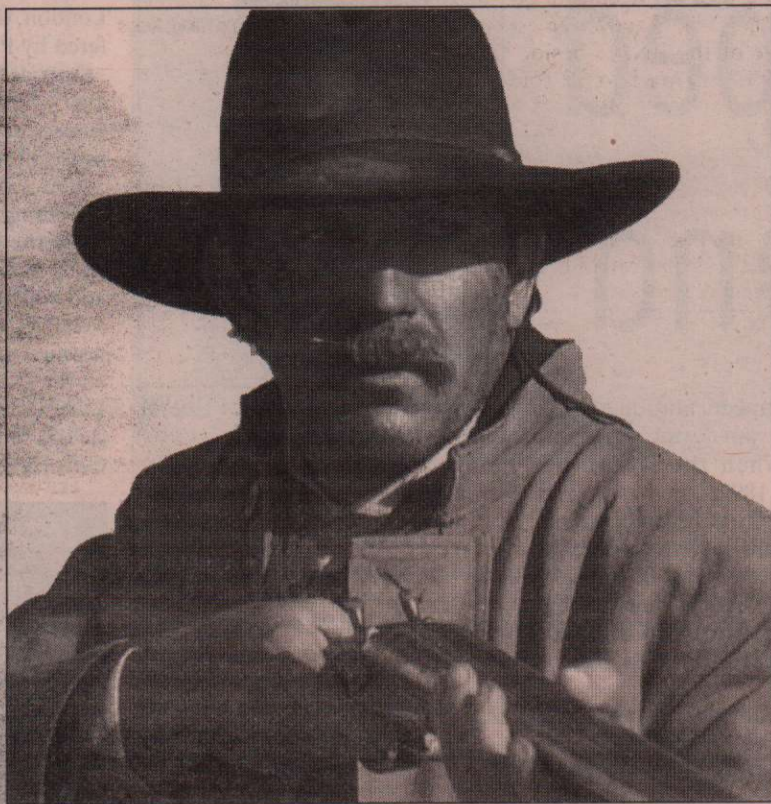
- In support of the independent trade unions and the socialists in Russia and Eastern Europe. We denounce the misery caused by the drive to free-market capitalism there, but we believe that Stalinism was a system of class exploitation no better than capitalism.
- For a democratic united Europe; against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

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

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

Earp is just a well-made western

FILM REVIEW
 Matt Cooper
 reviews
 'Wyatt Earp'
 Directed by
 Lawrence Kasdan



Kevin Costner: does a little very well

WYATT EARP tries very hard to be an epic, and in many ways it is. It weighs in at well over three hours long. It is packed with stunning landscape, zealous attention to authentic detail and impressive set pieces. It takes a broad historic sweep from the Civil War to the Alaskan Gold Rush. And it takes a legend as its subject, Wyatt Earp.

But its flaws are epic too. It is thinly plotted, it relies on form over content and, most of all, it is unsure of its own direction. While claiming to present the real historical Wyatt Earp, it takes the easy road of action and hero worship when the chips are down.

Its attempt to use the Western Frontier in general and Earp in particular as a parable for the US today gets lost in its desire to be an easy-on-the-brain action movie.

The film attempts, but ultimately fails, to disinter Earp the man. It follows him from childhood, besotted with his older brothers and wanting to join them fighting for the Union in the Civil War, through to maturity. First he is an idealistic young man, then an embittered widower robbed by typhus of the woman he loves who is the central core to his life.

It is a damaged and cold Earp who becomes the most famous lawman in Western mythology, "cleaning up" Dodge City with methods that make the Los Angeles Police Department look like community police in pink kid gloves. Then cleaning up Tombstone, where the famous gunfight at the OK Corral took

place.

This film will be likened with the other Kevin Costner nouveau-Western epic, *Dances with Wolves*. But this is *Dances with Cowboys*.

Kevin Costner's acting talent is best described as small but perfectly formed — he does little, very well. But he fails to make the role live on the screen.

The film intends to be more than a western, but all its best moments are simple Western set pieces. Earp's real motivation is both weakly established and narrowly explored. The story is too linear and straightforward for a film this length. There is little except lavish looks and well constructed action to entertain. (Though these are sufficient to make the film work on the ground floor, it never lifts above this level).

The film is occasionally enlivened by Dennis Quaid's wonderfully eccentric portrayal of the tubercular Doc Holliday. Why this libertine, killer and gambler should ever have become friends with the straitlaced teetotaler Earp remains unexplained, like most of the other relationships and human motivations in the film.

The film finally collapses into just a retelling of the Earp myth through which real people drift as ghosts of themselves supporting their legends. The film's characters are unrelated to the society around them. They touch it only with the bullets that they shoot; otherwise they float outside of time and social context.

This film has big ambitions but, in the end, it is just a very well-made, unimaginative Western.

A book that makes me angry

BOOK REVIEW

Mark Osborn
 reviews
 'Black Boy'

By Richard Wright

RICHARD WRIGHT'S book is 50 years old and it is one of my favourites. I started reading *Black Boy* on a bus. When I next looked up I had no idea where I was — I had gone miles past my stop. I crossed the road and went back the way I had come — and did the same thing again. In the end I walked home, the only way to avoid reading *Black Boy* and spending all night with London Transport.

This book will make you very, very angry and may well make you cry. But the most amazing thing about *Black Boy* is that its author could have risen so far beyond his background and that the book should exist at all. Richard Wright was born in 1908 on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi.

1908 was the year of the Springfield race riot. The brutality of this riot directly led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the rebirth of a movement of American anti-racism.

In 1908 the life expectancy of a black man was 34. 90% of American black people lived under the terror of Jim Crow racism in the southern states and the big majority of these people lived in the backward countryside.

The whole social system was moulded to limit black life.

Black Boy is the story of Wright's childhood — the brutality and ignorance that surrounded him, and his unbroken struggle to be free.

The first thing Richard Wright knew was hunger. He is hungry for most of the book. It kept him skinny and made him ashamed.

Then came the growing realisation that white people were unbelievably dangerous. They killed his uncle, lynched and beat black men at will. He existed on the "sheer, thin margin of southern culture." It was reading books that kept his soul alive. Through books he found people who disagreed with the way the South was run. Later, to his amazement, he found a man who fought with words. Up until that point Richard Wright had considered fists and knives to be his only weapons.

The book ends as Wright escapes and leaves for the North.

Wright went to Chicago and later briefly joined the Communist Party via their John Reed Club for artists. The story of Wright's involvement with the Stalinists is recorded in *The God That Failed* (along with Arthur Koestler's and Ignazio Silone's recollections).

Although *Native Son* (1940) is Wright's best-known book, and was genuinely groundbreaking, the central character, Bigger Thomas, is so trapped by his environment it makes a grim, depressing read. I can not imagine *Native Son* being anyone's favourite book.

Black Boy is different. If you like it try Wright's *The Long Dream* next.

America's secret thought police

TV REVIEW

Channel 4
 Mondays 9pm

Geoff Ward
 reviews
 'The Bureau'

QUESTION. How does a shadowy paramilitary organisation like the American FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) make itself seem "open" and "democratic"?

Answer. By inviting a camera team to film a few stake-outs and busts and by allowing serving and former FBI personnel to answer a few questions.

The American government helps out too by publishing a small number of sensitive FBI document after 30 years have elapsed, i.e. when it's too late to change any skulduggery that occurred.

In Channel 4's documentary, *The Bureau*, agents boast that they go after only the most dangerous criminals, yet we are shown them stalking car thieves.

It seems that the FBI teaches new recruits little of its own history. When a job description includes such lofty ideas as 'defending democracy' and 'upholding the constitution' it wouldn't do to confuse Rookie recruits by telling them the truth about the FBI.

Founded by J Edgar Hoover — who denied the existence of the mafia until well into the 1960s — the Bureau remained for nearly five decades Hoover's state within a state and this right-wing bigot used it against anyone he considered to be a "threat to the nation."

It serviced the McCarthys with hunters in the House of Representatives

Activities Committee, violating the American constitution by persecuting communists, militants and trade unionists for their beliefs.

While the mafia was left virtually untouched, the FBI subverted political movements like the black civil rights campaigns and the anti-Vietnam War movement. They virtually destroyed the Black Panther Party.

Hoover personally kept files on American presidents and blackmailed them when necessary — JF Kennedy for example.

Nothing much has changed since Hoover died 20 years ago. Making a sham of democracy, the FBI continues today to use spies, informers, agents-provocateurs, and dirty tricks experts against political organisations.

The Internationale

Rise up, the curs'd of every nation,
 In all your hunger-jails arise!
 The lava-roar of liberation
 Erupts at last to storm the skies.
 Wipe out the past of want and sorrow;
 The house of slavery shall fall,
 And we will build a great tomorrow;
 We who are nothing shall be all!

There is no saviour high above us,
 No judge, no emperor, no God.
 We, workers, know the way they love us,
 And only we can will our good.
 We'll make the robbers yield their plunder
 And free the soul of man from jail.
 Our breath shall fan the furnace under
 A forge of might that will prevail.

All states and statutes but deceive us,
 Their tribute grinds us to the ground.
 No duty makes the rich relieve us;
 Law for the poor is empty sound.
 The voice of justice ends our anguish:
 'No rights where duties now' says she,
 'No righteous duties shall have you anguish
 In endless requital.'

Discard in their self-complacency,
 The kings of nations: all and all
 Can find in their acceptance

Than living on our blood and toil.
 By us their surplus was created,
 And we decree it be restored,
 Not in their strongrooms dissipated
 By bandits of the workshop and the sword.

The King's foul perfume drugs our senses;
 But, soldiers! Bring the tyrants down!
 Break ranks! Surrender their defences
 To us and make our cause your own!
 If still they reckon to devour us,
 Together we'll soon let them know
 That their own arsenals empower us
 To lay each king and captain low.

We are the party of all labour:
 The whole earth shall be ours to share
 And every race and craft our neighbour.
 No idle class shall linger there
 Like vultures on the wealth we render
 From field and factory, mill and mine.
 Tomorrow's sun will rise in splendour
 And light us till the end of time.

Chorus
 So march, march, the fury
 Of the final fight to find!
 The international's glory
 Shines to all mankind.

The British Liberal tradition that mis-shaped modern Ireland

SOME READERS have questioned our scathing comments on the British Liberal/radical tradition on Ireland (See SO612, "The Liberal tradition on Ireland: a discussion with Tony Benn"). Didn't the Liberal Party try sincerely to give Ireland justice they ask? Yes, but just as the British Liberals and Tories solved Ireland's land problem in a bourgeois way — substituting small peasant landlords for the big landlords — they did everything else in a bourgeois and in a bourgeois imperialist way too.

Thus they created the "Irish Question" in its present form even while they 'solved' it in the old form.

Nor is it unjust to link Tony Benn to the British Liberal tradition. He is proud to claim that tradition as his own and to recall that his grandfather was elected as a Home Rule Liberal in 1892 and that his father later followed suit.

You cannot talk to Benn on Ireland without the feeling that you are also dealing with that whole tradition. Behind Benn, the foremost left-wing advocate of immediate and unconditional British disengagement from Northern Ireland, stand, politically as well as genetically, generations of British liberal politicians, whose traditions on "the Irish question" he rightly sees himself as continuing.

The Liberal tradition on Ireland is despite all the good intentions its various supporters have had — a treacherous tradition, and one which has corrupted British and Irish radical politics.

It is not democratic — not consistently democratic. It disregards the Irish Protestant minority and instead looks for a deal between the British state and the Irish Catholic middle class. This approach corrupts the Irish nationalists, encouraging them to rely on British power to deal with the Irish minority, later it betrays them, because in fact the British state will not coerce that Irish minority.

Thus it was. Thus it is now. Let us acquaint ourselves with that tradition. We need only to look at certain of its high points to appreciate what it is.

Thus it was. Thus it is now. Let us acquaint ourselves with that tradition. We need only to look at certain of its high points to appreciate what it is.

First, let us go back to the year nineteen hundred and twelve. The Liberal Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, dependent for its majority on the votes of the 70-odd Irish Nationalist MPs who sit in the House of Commons, has reluctantly brought in a Bill to give Home Rule to Ireland — to all Ireland, which, as one entity, will be ruled from Dublin by a government whose powers will not be a great deal larger than those possessed by, for example, the then London County Council.

That the Bill will pass is certain, for, in a bitter struggle, Asquith's Liberal government has recently destroyed the veto which the unelected House of Lords used to have over the decisions of the House of Commons. Now the hereditary

peers can only delay the implementation of legislation by two years. They cannot stop it, as they stopped Home Rule when the House of Commons voted for in in 1892.

In fact the 1912 Home Rule Bill will never become law. In the two years up to the outbreak of the World War in 1914, there will be a large-scale semi-rebellion against "Home Rule" led by the Conservative and Unionist Party. There will be plausible talk of imminent civil war in Britain on the "Irish Question".

Backed by Tories all over Britain, tens of thousands of Protestant men in Ulster will arm and drill and pledge themselves on oath to refuse to be ruled by a Dublin government based on the Irish Catholic majority. In 1914, faced also by a mutiny of British officers serving in Ireland, who refuse to be used to coerce Protestant Ulster, Asquith's Liberal government will buckle.

Until 1914 neither the Liberal government nor the middle-class Home Rule Irish nationalists had been prepared to consider any special provision, such as local autonomy, for the Protestant Irish minority. They had proceeded on the assumption that the Irish minority would submit to a decision by the London government, or face coercion by Britain to make them submit. This reliance on British power was central to the calculations of the Irish middle-class Home Rule politicians, who felt safe in their alliance with the "Great Liberal Party". They had reduced themselves to a Liberal tail for more than 20 years in

the expectation of decisive future benefit. They had also exerted pressure on the British labour movement — the early Labour Party itself being also very much a tail of the Liberal Party — by way of the big Irish electorate in Britain, insisting that it give uncritical support to Home Rule/Liberal policies.

Now, faced with a revolt led by a big part of the British upper classes, and therefore

supported by many army and navy officers, the Liberals declared themselves in favour of the partition of Ireland. Shortly afterwards, the Home Rule Party, whose leader was John Redmond, agreed to accept Partition — "temporarily". When war broke out, the issue was put on ice for the war's duration.

Move on now to the Old Bailey, in June 1916. Britain is at war. The Liberals are still in the government, but now it is a coalition Government which includes the Tory-Unionist leaders — Bonar Law, Edward Carson, F E Smith — who, up to the eve of war, had organised rebellion and created private bodies of armed men to suborn the sovereign British parliament. The "Easter Rising" of the Irish nationalists in Dublin, which broke out in late April, has been suppressed.

Even Patrick Pearse, the titular head of the Republican government proclaimed by the Dublin insurgents, had, at the beginning of the Home Rule crisis, been content to accept the limited Home Rule the Liberals were offering. He had been propelled to a belief in physical force by the example and the success of the Orange-Tory rebellion. So had most of the other insurgents. Pearse and fourteen others, Irish



Gladstone: the architect of Liberal politics on Ireland

labour leader James Connolly among them, had been shot out of hand by the British Army after they surrendered.

Now thousands of nationalist Irish men and women have been interned. At the Old Bailey, the last of the leaders of the movement that produced the Rising, Roger Casement, is on trial for high treason.

Having gone to Germany to seek aid for the Rising (the Orange-Unionists had been importing guns from Germany up to the outbreak of war), Casement had landed in Ireland from a German submarine two days before Pearse and Connolly turned out in Dublin, intent on stopping the Rising, which he believed to be foredoomed without serious German help. Captured almost immediately, he had been shipped to London, thus escaping the summary killing suffered by Pearse and his comrades.

On trial for his life this admirable Irish nationalist — probably the most bourgeois of the leaders of the 1916 Rising — faced as his chief prosecutor F E Smith.

Who was Smith? Smith, whose recklessness in fomenting resistance to the Liberal Government up to the very eve of war had made him especially notorious, was now Attorney General and a member of the British Government!

Across the courtroom, Casement, once a prominent British civil servant, who had, like all the Home Rulers, backed and relied on the Liberals, faced Smith, who had helped organise the successful rebellion against the Liberal Government on behalf of the Tories and their



Roger Casement (left) and John Devoy in New York 1914. Devoy was a Fenian of the 1860s who later — for 50 years — organised the Irish in the USA. He is one of the great historic leaders of Irish nationalism



An artist's impression of Roger Casement in the dock at Bow Street Police Court

Irish allies. The Irish nationalist was in the dock — and would shortly be hanged — and the Tory Unionist was his accuser, with the concurrence and backing of his Liberal colleagues in government, who had so blithely betrayed their Irish allies and clients.

The confrontation between those two men in that courtroom symbolises and sums up an entire epoch in modern Irish history.

MOVE ON NOW to our last stopping point in this brief survey. It is the Summer of 1921. The world has changed greatly. The British Government is negotiating with the representatives of an outlawed Irish parliament, Dail Eireann. In 1919, on the basis of a decisive victory — 73 out of 105 Irish seats — in the December 1918 UK general election, the nationalist MPs had seceded from the Westminster parliament and declared Ireland to be a sovereign and independent republic.

For two years the British Army and special British killer squads, such as the "Black and Tans", have continued to occupy all of Ireland against the will of most of Ireland's people. They have waged a war of terror and repression against the supporters of Dail Eireann and against the Irish guerrilla army which defends the Republic.

Despite an unbridled campaign of indiscriminate burning and killing, Britain has been unable to quell nationalist Ireland. There is a powerful international outcry against the "Black and Tan terror". The US Congress has voted in favour of Dail Eireann and against British rule in Ireland.

Britain is still ruled by a coalition government, but now, though Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, is leader of one of the segments of a Liberal Party that has shattered during the war, the Tory-Unionists are the dominant power.

Britain's choice is to escalate repression to the level of rounding up large parts of the nationalist Irish population in internment camps — they have contingency plans for this — or to make a settlement. Be the threat to renew and escalate the war, Britain blackmails a majority of the Irish representatives into agreeing to abandon the Republic, to concede that the King of England is still King of Ireland, and accept the status of a white "Dominion" in the British Empire (with powers much greater than those on offer from "Home Rule" before World War 1), and forces them to accept Partition — "temporarily". By now there is already a functioning Home Rule Unionist parliament in Belfast.

With the Lloyd George Liberals as their front, the pre-war Tory Unionist rebels — Bonar Law is still party leader — win for their Orange allies a partition settlement which creates a Catholic minority in Northern Ireland of about 35 per cent, bigger than the Protestant Unionists would have been in an all-Ireland state.

The Catholics were a majority in Fermanagh and Tyrone and in Derry, Northern Ireland's second city. This was a brutal imperialist settlement rammed through by the rebels of 1912 in alliance with one wing of the Liberal Party against which they had rebelled.

From their own point of view it was to prove very stupid. Today its consequences — the Catholics are now 45 per cent of the population of the Six Counties, and in twenty years could be a majority — make the Northern Ireland unit unworkable. But that is small comfort to its victims, Protestant or Catholic.



British bayonets face Irish people 1920

WHAT HAVE WE learned from our hop, skip and jump across early 20th-century Irish history? That Irish history is entwined, enmeshed, and interlaced with British history.

That Ireland as it is today has been shaped by conflict between Irish "factions" allied to Britain whose fate to a large extent was determined by the constancy or lack of it of their British allies: the Tories keeping faith with their allies, the Liberals betraying theirs.

In their dealings with Ireland, the Liberals corrupted the bourgeois Irish nationalists — before they betrayed them — with the promise that they could, once the Liberals prevailed in London, rely on the British state to coerce any Irish minority that resisted Home Rule. They thereby removed any incentive for the Irish nationalists to seek a democratic modus vivendi with the Irish minority. Instead of applying consistently democratic principles to the internal division in Ireland, the Liberals tried — until faced with revolt — to ignore the legitimate concerns of the Irish Protestant minority. They encouraged the Irish Catholic bourgeoisie — who, like all bourgeois, were eager to seize any advantage they could get — to do the same.

Though Gladstone, who committed the Liberal Party to Home Rule in 1885-6, talked privately of some federal arrangement to accommodate the Protestants, nothing came of it. After Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill passed the Commons and was thrown out by the Lords, the Liberals became wary of Home Rule. In 1906 they had a big House of Commons majority but there was no Home

Rule Bill — not until they lost their majority in 1910 and could govern only with the votes of the Irish MPs.

Then, faced with revolt, they buckled and began the first moves to impose a British imperialist partition which rode roughshod over the rights of the Irish nationalists, and particularly those condemned to be second-class citizens in the "Protestant state". They allowed the Tory rebels of 1912-14 to get the best deal for their own.

The Liberal approach blew up in their faces in 1912, and their brutal though tentative imperialist approach to the Irish minority gave way to a determined, traditionally British, imperialist dealing

with the Irish majority in 1914 and after. And — to reiterate — so thoroughly had the Liberals transmitted and transplanted that approach into the morals and politics of the Irish Catholic bourgeois nationalists, corrupting a segment of Irish nationalist opinion, that they created a current which still flows through Fianna Fail down to the Provisionals today. While denouncing Britain fiercely and defining British occupation as the central problem, nevertheless they still look to Britain to coerce — now the euphemism is 'persuade' — the Protestants.

The political corruption was not confined to Irish bourgeois politicians. During the quarter-century of Liberal/Home-Rule alliance it was made an article of faith in radical circles and in the Liberal-allied early Labour Party that the left did not have the right to do other than back the dominant Irish Nationalists: anything else was British chauvinism. The revolutionary left then rejected such an approach. James Connolly castigated the Home Rule Nationalists in British papers such as *Forward*. For example, when it seemed that the middle-class Home Rulers would have no payment for MPs in their Dublin parliament in order to hinder the development of an Irish Labour Party, Connolly urged the British Labour Party to insist that the Liberal Government write payment of MPs into the Irish constitution, forcing it on the Irish bourgeois nationalists. Yet today it has become an article of faith on the revolutionary left that we must echo the Irish nationalists. This corruption too comes from the "Liberal tradition" on Ireland.

There were, of course, Liberals who took different stands at all these turning points. The story could be continued into more recent times and into the experience of the Labour Party. But we have seen enough to understand Tony Benn's background on Ireland. Among other things, it helps explain Tony Benn's own strange history on the modern Irish 'troubles'.

"It was made an article of faith in radical circles and in the Liberal-allied early Labour Party that the left did not have the right to do other than back the dominant Irish Nationalists."



Carson signs the Ulster Covenant

More about Ireland from the AWL

A WORKERS' GUIDE TO IRELAND



This pamphlet is dedicated to all the victims of the Unionist British Empire and the imperialist Irish bourgeoisie — Orange, Orange and Green, and Orange and Green alike — and the pro-Unionist movement in 1912. It is dedicated to the Irish Labour movement on both sides of the divide, which must fight to end the British imperialist system and to build the only republic that is not a gross and cynical mockery of the Irish people's right to freedom in the western world.

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- Ireland: the socialist answer £2

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Please add 20% for postage and packing

Democratise the SWP!

One of the most striking features of sectarian socialist organisations like the SWP is their regression to ways of organising themselves which are pre-bourgeois. An infallible Pope and his cardinals give the line and those who challenge it, even in part, are heretics to be put down.

These extracts from the programme of the latest SWP opposition, the International Socialist Group (ISG) show just how far Cliff's organisation has gone. Their "democratisation programme" combines demands we raise in the trade unions against the union bureaucrats with the sort of demands raised by a democracy movement in a country like China — free association, the right to discuss and debate!

The ISG is made up of a small number of recently expelled members of the Socialist Workers Party.

For a democratic SWP

THE IS/SWP HAS not translated its theoretical commitment to working class self-emancipation into its theory and practice of organisation. Instead, under Cliff's influence, it simply borrows elements of Bolshevik practice in a one-sided and ad hoc way to enforce whatever turn the leadership has in mind at the time. The result is that the SWP today is not a democratic centralist organisation capable of developing a revolutionary cadre.

Instead, successive layers of cadre are driven out of the party, or into passivity within the party, every time the leadership makes one of its characteristic 'turns'.

Naturally it is necessary for the organisation to make sharp changes of direction. The problem lies not with the fact that these turns take place, but in the methods used to carry them out and with the internal organisation of the party that has grown up to enforce these methods.

The vanguard and self-emancipation

IN ORDER TO intervene it is necessary for the party to act in a unified manner. This requires a centralised party regime, such that once decisions have been arrived at, they are carried out to maximum effect. Just as necessary to the party is the kind of democratic structure that would allow the rank and file to actively influence the organisation.

This democratic centralism would result in a situation where the leadership would hold influence in the party only to the extent that they could convince the members of the correctness of their perspectives and, crucially, the members would be cadres, capable of acting independently of the leadership; members would have the power to elect the leadership at every level; and every member would have the freedom to communicate with other members to argue their own politics.

The only limits to full internal democracy concern cases in which members refuse to accept the collective decisions of the party, where these decisions concern central organisational and political questions and actively impede their implementation, or where they threaten the security of the party.

The SWP and democratic centralism

NEW PERSPECTIVES are initiated exclusively by the Central Committee (CC), who then implement their perspective against all party opposition.

Once a new perspective is declared, a new cadre is selected from the top down to carry it out. The CC select the organisers, who select the district and branch committees. Any elections that take place are carried out on the basis of 'slates' so that it is virtually impossible for members to vote against the slate proposed by the leadership — comrades have either to vote for the slate as a whole or propose a completely different alternative.

Any members who have doubts or disagreements with the new perspective and who are consequently unenthusiastic about implementing it, are written off as "burnt out" and depending

on their reaction to this, may be marginalised within the party and even expelled. These methods have been disastrous for the SWP in a number of ways:

- Each new perspective requires a new cadre, so that the existing cadre are actively marginalised in the party. The SWP has failed to build a stable and experienced middle cadre capable of acting independently of the leadership. The history of the party is written dualistically in terms of a star system (comrades currently favoured by the party) and a demonology (the 'renegades' who are brushed aside with each turn of the party).

- The CC grows ever more remote from the membership and increasingly bureaucratic in its methods. In recent years the national committee has been abolished (it obediently voted for its own dissolution, on the recommendation of the CC), to be replaced by party councils made up of those comrades active at any one time; district committees are appointed rather than elected; the CC give a distorted account of events rather than admit their mistakes (so the scale of the crisis in the party in 1986-1987 was admitted in documents presented to the international meeting, but not the party rank and file).

When there are political differences, comrades may be removed from their positions in the party, and even expelled, but the differences are never taken to the party itself.

- The outcome is a party whose conferences have no democratic function, but serve only to orientate party activists to carry out perspectives drawn up by the CC long before the delegates even set out from their branches!

- A political culture has been created in which the leadership consists almost solely of comrades who are fanatically loyal to [the CC], willing to follow every turn of the perspective without criticism and permanently wound up into a state of hysteria about the colossal 'possibilities for growth' which the CC claims have existed for years now. These individuals often last for only a short period before they 'burn out' after which they become passive and cynical. Those 'cadres' who do manage to make the transition between perspectives are often the most cynical of all the comrades, prepared to do anything at the bidding of the CC.

- In debates over questions of philosophy, culture and even anthropology an informal party 'line' emerged (i.e. concerning matters in which there can be no question of the party having a 'line'). Often behind these positions lay nothing more than the opinions of this or that CC member, but adherence to the line quickly became a test of party loyalty, and disagreement became a stigma.

- Many militants, especially working class militants with some experience of trade union democracy, etc are repelled by the undemocratic norms in the party and refuse to join, leave soon after joining, or keep their distance despite accepting our formal politics.

- Worst of all, the SWP are training a layer of revolutionaries to believe that the organisational norms of the SWP offer a shining example of democracy, applicable to a future socialist society. Not surprisingly, many people are instinctively repelled by this idea.

- Members are required to operate simply as activists, and so all educationals and cadre schools in the party have been closed down in recent years.

Anyone calling for more educational work is dismissed as 'abstract' and 'theoreticist'. The party's increasing contempt for theory serves to reinforce the domination of the CC across the party — by playing up the importance of the least experienced comrades, who are least able and least inclined to criticise the leadership, and minimising the influence of the existing cadre.

Concretely, a democratic organisation would involve:

- Regular election of all party full-timers with the right of recall. While it would be normal for factions to propose slates for elections, the candidates would be the individuals rather than the slate.

- The right of branches to propose motions to the party conference.

- For a regular internal bulletin, open to all members.

- The right for members to communicate horizontally in the party, to produce and distribute their own documents.

- For an independent Control Commission to review all disciplinary cases (independent of the leadership that exercise discipline) and the right of any disciplined comrades to appeal directly to party conference.

The roots of [bureaucratisation of the IS tradition] lie with the politics of the IS itself: e.g. the interpretation of Leninism adopted by the party, and the interpretation of 'stick bending' that follows from this. The result is an elitist concept of party and class (and hence party organisation).

Effect on SWP political practice: sectarianism

It is impossible for the leadership to maintain a consistent contempt for the party membership without this being translated into a contempt for the rest of the working class.

Having correctly decided to relaunch the Anti-Nazi League

(ANL), the party has run the ANL purely as a satellite of the SWP. In the conference discussion period of 1993 comrades were instructed to make sure that the SWP branches alone organised all ANL work. The recent ANL conference was called the day before the party council to ensure that it was dominated by council delegates. This sectarianism discourages many people from joining the ANL, and ensures that those non-SWP members that do join the ANL do not play an active role in it.

Again, early in 1994 the SWP leadership called an ANL demonstration in Welling, refusing to march on the same day as the YRE. By dividing the anti-Nazi forces in this way, the party missed the opportunity to influence the many Asian and black youths organised by the YRE. In private, members of the CC admitted that the decision was a mistake. In public they defended it, attacking any comrades who criticised this sectarianism for being 'soft' on the Militant, disloyal to the party etc.

We want an independent and democratic ANL, not as a moral principle, but because that would increase the strength of the anti-fascist movement.

This sectarianism is not yet as marked as that of the Communist Party or those orthodox Trotskyist groups who achieved a level of influence in the past (Militant, WRP), but the examples [above] show that it impacts the way the party relates to the movements it is involved in.

Reversing the perspectives: the dash for growth

THE SECTARIANISM AND bureaucratism of the party has been made worse by the kind of 'crisis perspective' it has developed.

After years in which the party's analysis of the 'downturn' allowed it to maintain a fairly sober attitude toward strike movements and campaigns, recent events have not only led the leadership, correctly, to drop the analysis of the 'downturn' they have gone on to inflate the significance of the party out of all proportion. For example, after the protests against the Tory pi closure programme the leadership claimed that if the party had twice the members it could have turned the October 1993 demonstration against closures into a march on parliament, and to quote Cliff, if this had happened "the government would have collapsed." [The kind of argument] that the Tory government manages to survive only because the comrades are not trying hard enough to recruit has led to a 'crisis mentality' according to which all dissent in the party prevents us from building quickly enough and prolongs the lifetime of the government.

The second version of the argument has been that, with the rise of fascism across Europe, and in the absence of a revolutionary left there capable of initiating united front actions to directly confront the Nazis, the burden is on the SWP to build a mass party that would galvanise the European left. This breakthrough for the SWP must take place in the coming months or within a year or so. Otherwise, to quote Chris Harman, we will all soon be in the concentration camps.

Conclusion: for a democratic IS

THESE DISAGREEMENTS with the SWP need to be placed on a firmer basis by providing a thorough account of the history of the IS tradition. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is no longer realistic to expect the party to overcome its problems spontaneously, and that it is necessary to carry out work outside the SWP. This work would take place on the basis of the fundamentals of IS theory (state capitalism, theory of deflected permanent revolution, permanent arms economy, etc), while at the same time criticising the theory of party and class (leadership, democratic centralism) developed by the tradition in the late '60s and early '70s.

Our experience of other groups means that we believe it would be a mistake to set up a long-term agitational orientation toward the SWP — such an approach would soon turn us into merely sectarian critics of the party. In the short-term there is a clear need to put our criticisms of the party to the existing members.

It remains to be seen whether it will be possible to convince even the small number of comrades needed to carry out this work, as the very size of the SWP makes our criticism deeply unattractive to its members. With over six thousand members the SWP is capable of initiating movements like the ANL (even if it organises them bureaucratically) and so party members are understandably reluctant to break with the party out of a fear that they will be driven into the political wilderness.

Nevertheless, even if very few people would be immediately won over to our criticism, it may be possible to maintain a dialogue with a layer of comrades who may be won in the future. In either case we should form an IS group to carry out this work.

- The ISG have produced a publication priced £2.50. Phone 071-249 1009 for details.

- Public meeting: "Campaign for a Democratic SWP", 1.45pm Saturday 17 September at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn London. Speakers: Andy Wilson (ISG), Jim Higgins and Chris Jones (recently expelled from Liverpool SWP).

More on the SWP

A tragedy of the left • A tragedy of the left: the SWP and its splits £2 plus 36p post



• Is the SWP an alternative? 75p plus 19p post



Where now for the signalworkers?

Signalworkers — all-out strike

By a North London signalworker

THIS WEEKEND'S signalworkers' conference is going to be important for developing a strategy that can win. My branch is proposing an emergency resolution instructing the RMT Executive to call for an all-out strike of signalworkers until the dispute is resolved. I believe this is the strategy that can win.

We are also supporting motions which demand the union call on all train crew and track workers not to work on strike days. On the grounds of safety it is now reasonable for the union to do this, and would obviously make the strike much stronger.

We should also be supporting resolutions calling for better conditions and pay, especially those calling on management to reduce overtime. I would move that the RMT call us out on Sundays until

further notice to reduce working overtime. We did it two years ago on the North London line successfully.

The priority at the conference has to be how to win the current dispute, and making sure our own leadership don't back down — we should be demanding the TUC and LP leaders take sides.

At the moment they are showing an inherent weakness, trying to run with the hare and the hounds. They have to decide whether they owe allegiance to the establishment or to those whose support they currently enjoy. We need solidarity to win the strike — if we win it will benefit the whole labour movement and help smash through the Tories' pay freeze.

Stop the job on strike days

By Alliance for Workers Liberty railworkers

THE KEY TASK facing this weekend's signal grades confer-

ence of the RMT is to focus on the need to stop trains moving on strike days. For this reason we will be supporting the emergency resolution from Sheffield All Grades branch. The resolution reads:

"This conference calls on the Council of Executives to continue to stand firm in pursuit of the signalworkers full claim of an 11% Interim pay award.

"We further call on the Council of Executives to issue an instruction to all RMT Traincrews, S&T, P.Way and Overhead Line Grades not to perform any work which may place themselves or any members of the travelling public in a situation of serious imminent danger. We must regard any inexperienced and unqualified person operating signals on strike days as creating such a situation.

This instruction must be clearly conveyed to all members making it explicit that all members are expected to not operate trains or carry out track work on strike days including within possessions which have been taken out after the box has been closed by the

qualified signalworkers."

We favour this option (spelt out on page 3) rather than an all-out signals strike because we feel that given the current level of morale amongst signalworkers, an all-out strike would only be supported by a minority of signalworkers themselves. We believe all out action would thus run the risk of dividing the signalling grades and open up the possibility of a lock-out aimed at rooting out the militant minority of union activists. We know that many people who support all out action share this assessment but continue to advocate it because they can see no other way of escalating the dispute.

Obviously, we are not in principle against an all-out strike. It is a matter of concrete assessment. We simply believe that right now such a course of action would be a serious mistake reflecting the desperation of activists who have spent the last three weeks holding the strike together and diverts attention away from the key task which is stopping the job on strike days.

Drivers union calls off strike ballot ASLEF leadership — the Tories 5th column?

By a Central Line guard

THE ASLEF national executive performed an appalling act of betrayal last weekend. RMT and ASLEF were jointly balloting their LUL members over a 2% pay offer imposed on us.

Management were clearly worried and upped the increase to 2.5%. A joint RMT/ASLEF, and therefore totally solid, underground strike, co-ordinated with the signalworkers would have put huge pressure on Railtrack and the Tories and given the signalworkers a massive boost.

But on Saturday 10 September, the first day after the TUC, with the cheers for the signalworkers fight still ringing in their ears, ASLEF NEC sat down and voted to accept 2.5%. What scum.

ASLEF has just had a referendum of Underground members who voted 71% to reject 2%. This followed an ASLEF conference vote that instructed the NEC not to accept less than 4.7%.

The ASLEF leadership have simply ignored these views. As the ballot has been suspended we will never know the result. However all the evidence pointed to good majorities for action from both

unions.

Tubeworkers have been betrayed. This has put an end to a united fight — and probably to any fight — over pay. That's bad enough. But what about the most important strike in a very long time — the signalworkers strike?

Signalworkers have been betrayed because coordinated action by tubeworkers would have massively helped their fight. It makes it more difficult for the signalworkers to win. And if they lose what are the consequences for all BR workers?

ASLEF activists in the Underground have expressed their disgust at this deal. That's not enough. Those responsible need to be thrown out of office.

Immediately if the RMT ballot produces a vote for action, there needs to be a massive campaign for ASLEF members to respect RMT picket lines. That should be a real possibility. If needs be RMT activists should try and recruit ASLEF members so that they can respect the RMT picket lines with less fear of victimisation. This is not an alternative to campaigning for one union on the rail and tube, it's just a tactical way of ensuring maximum workers unity on the ground.

Peterloo Hostel occupation

By a Hostel Worker

WORKERS AT the Mews Direct Access Hostel in Manchester have been in occupation for three weeks now, despite attempts by management to get them out by sacking them, trying to evict them, and cutting off supplies to the Hostel.

Workers were told there would be job losses across the six projects run by First Peterloo Housing Association, and that two hostels would close. This is due to financial mismanagement by Peterloo bosses.

When the closures were announced, residents were asked to leave, but staff, members of the TGWU, voted to keep the hostels running and to continue the service, and this meant actually locking the management out. There are

now 6 workers running the hostel 24 hours a day. Emergency phone lines to the police station, as well as cleaning and food supplies have been cut. Other Peterloo workers have been threatened with the sack if they are seen near the Union St. Hostel.

Last week, management attempted and failed to win a court order to clear the premises.

The workers and residents are demanding a rescue package from the City Council.

The campaign has gained much support from homeless organisations, Labour councillors, and the public. Part of the campaign will attempt to raise the broader issue of homelessness provision in Manchester.

Messages of support to Direct Access Hostel, 1 Union St, Ardwick, Manchester M12 4JD.

Union busting in Sheffield

By an RMT member

BR ARE NOT confining themselves to recruiting scabs.

Guards, drivers, other train crew, those who work on the track are all increasingly concerned about safety. Can they feel safe travelling at 100 miles an hour with an amateur in a signalbox? If they are on track working can they be sure that the trainspotter pulling the levers is keeping them safe?

No they cannot. Especially as BR increases the number of trains they send out on strike days.

It seems strange then that the RMT are not refusing to work in this environment. The explanation is the tight legal framework which shackles unions and makes workers fearful.

Add to this management's use of discipline and the sack for minor offences and you can understand the caution. But even then some workers will make a stand.

A guard in Sheffield Midland station recently refused to work on a bus from the front of the station to the airport.

The bus had been put on in place of a train service that could not run because of the strike.

His reason for refusing was the fact that he was being required to work over 5 hours without a break.

No such roster would ever have been agreed by his union representatives, management had imposed this one to try and break the strike.

The guard was sent home without pay. That night — a sleepless night — meant he was unfit for work the next day and over tired. Two disciplinary notices resulted in him being

sacked.

The local union branch are determined to win his reinstatement.

P.Way rep victimised

GERRY HITCHEN a P.Way grades profit centre rep on Inter-City Midlands Cross County is being victimised for trade union activities. As Gerry's branch newsletter explains:

"An agreement designed to protect members' jobs and earnings in the event of long-term sickness or a major accident has been used to put him out of work.

"Management has turned the '2 year rule' on its head.

"A back problem dating back to 198... has been Management's excuse to tell Gerry that he cannot do his job. They say he can't do look-out duties, he can't do track inspections, or, indeed, any of the other jobs he has been trained-for and doing for the last 7 years, and despite the railway's own doctor passing him fit for these duties!

And so they have laid him off. Management say that he must stay at home for the next two years and draw only his basic wage. If a job does come up within the next two years that he can do (some chance) fine, but if not — it's goodbye!"

Management are using the lay-off as a way to stop Gerry attending meetings as a workplace rep. The local RMT are taking up the issue from the point of view of both Gerry's right to work and the P.Way workers' right to elect their own representatives.

The attack on Gerry will be resisted by the RMT until he is fully reinstated.

A little local difficulty

THIS YEAR'S TUC Congress was little short of a triumph, according to John Monks and the TUC press office. The talk at Congress House is of a "watershed" having been crossed and a "new role" established for an institution that previously seemed to be in danger of collapsing into irrelevance.

Tony Blair and his Walworth Road yuppies are equally pleased and regard the events at Blackpool as not only a PR success but also a major step in "re-defining" the party's link with the unions: expect to hear a lot more of the "fairness, not favours" catchphrase that went down so well with the press.

Actually, for Blair and Monks, the success of Congress was essentially that it wasn't a disaster. The signalworkers' strike, the question of union laws, the minimum wage and the underlying issue of Labour/union links were all potential mine-fields that could easily have blown up in the embarrassed faces of Monks and Blair, giving the Tories a field day and the Walworth Road PR team a lot of unpaid overtime.

In the event, the minefields were negotiated with remarkable skill. The signalworkers were given fulsome support and a special lunch time rally, but no platform speaker criticised Tony Blair for refusing to back the strikers. Tory union legislation was condemned and a 15 point programme of reforms agreed, but Arthur Scargill's call for complete abolition of anti-union laws was rejected. The question of the Labour/union link threatened to turn nasty with the publication of a thinly-veiled attack on Blair by John Edmunds in *The Times*. But even this smoothed over and the GMB General Secretary (once darling of Labour modernisers) was persuaded not to pursue his theme.

The only little local difficulty of the week was the strange business of Alan Jinkinson, the minimum wage and the secret meeting — a rum do, and no mistake. On the Friday evening of Congress, the UNISON General Secretary started questioning Blair's commitment to a legally enforceable national minimum wage, in front of press and TV journalists. He claimed that there had been a "secret meeting" between the Shadow Cabinet and certain union leaders two days after Blair's election in July. At this meeting, according to Jinkinson, a plan had been hatched to ditch the Party's long-standing commitment to a minimum wage set at an initial 50% of male median earnings and rising to two-thirds. Jinkinson claimed that when rumours of the meeting reached him, he had made efforts to discover what had transpired, but had been confronted by a wall of "general amnesia" from other General Secretaries.

The press offices of both the TUC and the Labour Party initially denied Jinkinson's story, but soon changed their tune: yes, there had been a meeting on 25 July, but this was not the sinister "contact group" described by Jinkinson, merely one of a number of "informal meetings between the parties to keep in touch on policy issues". John Monks claimed that there had been no "substantive discussion" of the minimum wage issue. John Prescott denied that the minimum wage had even been discussed. Bill Jordan couldn't remember whether they had discussed the question, but as he didn't support the minimum wage anyway and the meeting hadn't happened, it didn't matter.

The strangest part of this whole business is why Jinkinson had — apparently — encountered such difficulty in establishing what exactly had transpired at the meeting that may or may not have happened on July 25th. UNISON's Deputy General Secretary Tom Sawyer was almost certainly there and even if he wasn't, as one of Blair's key union backers, he'd have had no difficulty finding out the facts. Why hadn't he told Jinkinson? Why was Jinkinson so angry?

The unofficial "line" from Walworth Road (via such Blair-loyal journo as Andy McSmith of the *Observer*) is that Jinkinson had made his remarks "very late one evening, after a dinner".

My bet, for what it's worth, is that people like Jinkinson, Edmunds and Bill Morris are very angry at their treatment by the Blair regime and only just contained themselves at this year's Congress. As for Jinkinson's loyal deputy Tom Sawyer: well, Larry Whitty has just been sacked as Labour Party General Secretary and Tom is said to be very interested in a career move just at the moment.

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

Telecom union prepares for strike action

By a NCU member

THE proposals to change BT engineers attendance patterns is coming to a head in the PC (External Engineers) division. Managers are pushing engineers to sign 'options' to change attendance patterns despite the rejection of all the proposals in a consultative ballot. By signing staff are agreeing to a change in their contract. The NCU is strongly advising members do not to sign.

Despite BT's hard line on this issue they are in a weak position. These proposals have been on

the table for over 18 months, and still they have not been able to implement them. The NCU ballot rejection — a 85% no vote on a 82% turnout — shows how unpopular the proposals are. BT have refused to renegotiate with the union.

If BT engineers in the division presently affected do not hold the line against the company's persuasion then other divisions will have less of a chance when their versions of the CSIP proposals are brought in.

At present the indications are that the majority of engineers affected will not volunteer. The

NCU has threatened industrial action if management force the changes through status quo.

A campaign committee has been formed by the NCU to discuss strategy on the CSIP issue — made up of NEC and local representatives. Branches are organising meetings of staff to back-up the union instructions not to sign.

BT workers have been through massive organisational changes, seen thousands of their colleagues leave under voluntary redundancy, experienced more uncertainty with management pursuing a harder line to staff on

staffing levels and discipline and redeployment. They are demoralised and fearful for their job security and conditions of work. The NCU needs the confidence of the membership if it is to succeed.

Confidence can be built through a clear lead, support from local branches, and honest information to all members.

Within the next few weeks we can expect the NEC to call an industrial action ballot — the strategy will depend on BT's tactics and on the need to give branches time to organise successfully.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Stop attacks on Further Education

By Ed Whitby, Sheffield Area
National Union of Students

NO GRANT, no Income Support, pushed onto crap training schemes and courses, no chance of a decent education.

This is what the Tories offer young people leaving school at 16. Nothing! The Tories' attacks on post-16 education have been massive.

Since 1979 they set about abolishing grants, slashing the education budget and forcing local government cuts.

Cuts in course funding have been the result of the Tories attempting to bring the workings of the free market into education provision.

Students have no rights, and most of the courses are geared to providing cheap, low-skilled labour for local employers. This is what the Tories are most concerned about: making profits.

They don't care if young people have no money, nowhere to live and no chance of getting a decent job.

But the Tories can be stopped.

* We can organise local action: lobbies of Tory MPs' surgeries, demonstrations and occupations.

* We can link up with the workers in education, as well as supporting those like the signalworkers who are already taking action against the Tories.

A focus for the fight against the Tories is the demonstration outside Tory Party Conference on 12 October.

This is an excellent chance to show the Tories what we think, and to involve more people in the campaign to stop their attacks.

We should also be building for demonstrations like the one organised against education cuts by Cumbria and Lancashire Area NUS in Lancaster on 19 October.

Successful demonstrations at the start of term are just what we need to kick-start our campaigns to stop the Tories' attacks.



TUC backs the signalworkers. Why won't Blair? Photo: John Harris

Why does Labour's leader rat on the signalworkers?

Off the fence, Tony Blair!

Dear Tony Blair,

Like many other railworkers, I am not at all impressed by your performance during the signalworkers' strike.

It is not that I expected you to argue the signalworkers' case with deep socialist conviction or burning class hatred. I did — like other Labour Party-supporting railworkers — expect you at least to publicly back the strikes, and to explain the justice of the signalworkers' claim.

After all, the Labour Party is supposed to be the voice in Parliament of the organised trade union movement.

But you have not done this.

Instead, you have gone out of your way to distance yourself from the strike.

You have even gone so far as to argue that the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers' Union should call off its action, and accept whatever ACAS may choose to give us.

As Jimmy Knapp has explained, this is not acceptable. It shows that you are not familiar with the facts of this case.

You do not seem to be aware that:

* Some signalworkers earn as little as £146 per week. And have to work vast amounts of overtime to make ends meet. Whereas Railtrack boss Robert Horton takes home £2,300 per week for a 3-day week.

* Productivity, measured by train miles controlled per signalworker, has increased by 47% since 1984.

* The cost of paying the claim in full would be around £8 million maximum, whereas the dispute has cost Railtrack at least ten times that in lost revenue.

Railtrack management and their Tory backers do not see this dispute as you seem to, as an

apolitical and technical matter about productivity to be solved by arbitration. They see it in terms of the class struggle.

They want to defeat perhaps the strongest section of my union, RMT, in order to pave the way for reaping huge profits through privatisation out of a divided, unorganised and weak workforce.

That's why they've been prepared to spend millions more on breaking the strike than it would have cost to settle it. That's why they are planning to lock out the strikers if they can get away with it.

By failing to spell out these obvious facts you are aiding the enemies of the labour movement.

You are failing to defend the elementary working-class democratic right to strike in the face of a concerted attempt to defeat my union.

You refuse to back the signalworkers even though you know that their cause is extremely popular. The vast majority of the population have been shown to support the strikers in poll after poll — the polls you and your coterie consider so important.

Why then don't you, Mr. Blair — who were elected on the basis not of your ideas but of your media-friendly appearance — seize this opportunity to hammer the Tories?

I, like many other railworkers, believe that you will not support us because you don't really agree with the idea of working-class people fighting back. You think the class struggle is old hat.

Yet working people do fight back, Mr. Blair. A lot of people have had their eyes opened by the signalworkers' strike, people who believed that Mrs. Thatcher had killed off the class struggle in Britain. But nobody can do that.

The quietness in recent years was the quietness of working-class defeat. We survive our defeats.

"We will rise again," wrote Ernest Jones after

the defeat of Chartism. You would not be Prime Minister in waiting, Mr. Blair, if the working class had not proved Jones' prophecy true and gone on to build the Labour Party.

The rail strikers are an indication that the labour movement is reviving. That revived labour movement will at a later stage make the labour movement a hot place for displaced Tories like yourself.

Now, we will defeat Railtrack. We would like to do it with the support of the leader of the Labour Party. But we can, since you give us no choice, also do it without your support, Mr. Blair.

A railworker, Sheffield

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*Protest outside
Tory Party
Conference*

Bournemouth
Wednesday 12 October

*Stop attacks
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