

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

It will be socialism or barbarism!

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Drive out the Tories!

Italy shows how to fight

By Martin Thomas

March 1994: a right-wing alliance wins Italy's general election with a Thatcherite programme.

In June's Euro-elections, they consolidate their support. The new Forza Italia party of Silvio Berlusconi (Italy's Rupert Murdoch) wins 31 per cent of the vote. Its fascist allies in government, the Alleanza Nazionale, win 13 per cent.

Italy's old system of rule, centred on the Christian Democrat party, has collapsed in a flood of scandal about official corruption; but the radical right-wing, not the left, has won out.

December 1994: as we go to press, Berlusconi is frantically offering sops to trade-union leaders to head off an eight-hour general strike scheduled for Friday 2 December.

Even if he succeeds, a huge campaign is certain to continue against cuts in pensions and health insurance. Berlusconi's government proposes to lop £20 billion off the budget.

Already the regime has been shaken by one general strike, for four hours on 14 October. Some

three and a half million people marched in demonstrations across Italy that day.

On 12 November, one and a half million people marched in Rome, in a protest called jointly by Italy's three trade-union federations. It was Italy's biggest demonstration since 1945.

Berlusconi himself is under investigation by magistrates for involvement in bribes paid by his companies to tax inspectors. His brother has already admitted the bribes, and served a jail sentence for them.

His government coalition is in constant crisis. The Northern League — the third component of the right-wing coalition, alongside Forza Italia and the fascists — openly criticises the pension cuts.

In local elections on 20 November, Forza Italia's support collapsed from their 31 per cent in June to just eight per cent.

The issue on which millions of workers — old and young, north and south — have been mobilised against the right-wing government is Italy's welfare state.

All across Western Europe, the systems of health insurance, education, pensions and benefits won by many decades of labour-movement action are being slashed by governments eager to cut costs

and restore profits for capitalism in crisis.

Italy's workers have shown us all how to fight back! Labour movements battered in the 1980s can be revived and reinvigorated round a fight for social provision for social need. Ideas that socialists can do no more today than make small-scale propaganda and wait for a distant future, or that young people today see the welfare state only as an outdated abstraction and cannot be mobilised to defend it, have been proven wrong and defeatist.

Italy's labour movement suffered the battering of the 1980s just as much as any other West European country's. Unemployment higher than in Britain. Trade unions have suffered heavy defeats — losing, for example, the "sliding scale" which protected wages against inflation — though perhaps no single crushing blow like the British miners' defeat of 1985.

The political disorientation of the established left by the collapse of Stalinism in the USSR and Eastern Europe has hit harder in Italy than in Britain. In Italy, the dominant force of the left was the Communist Party. It had distanced itself from the USSR long before 1989-91, but by way of

adapting itself to "democratic" capitalism.

As long ago as the early 1970s it had campaigned for a "historic compromise" with the Christian Democrats, which was then the main party of Italy's bosses. This was the equivalent, for Italy, of a Labour/Tory coalition in Britain!

Then, after 1989-91, the Communist Party shifted further — renaming itself "Party of the Democratic Left". For their March 1994 election campaign, they found even the word "left" in their name too daring. They explained to the voters that they were not proposing a left-wing government, but only a government of reconstruction!

A substantial splinter from the old Communist Party has formed a new "Party of Communist Refoundation", which includes some Trotskyists and other left-wingers — but even that is still far from a clear revolutionary socialist commitment against both capitalism and Stalinism.

Obviously there are reasons why the Italian workers have moved so strongly in defence of their welfare state, while British workers' mobilisations have been smaller: a stronger tradition of big industrial mobilisations for political aims,

fewer laws against such mobilisations, a right-wing government even less solid than Major's crisis-ridden Tories.

None of those reasons are so basic as to put mobilisations like Italy's outside the range of possibility in Britain.

A basic lesson holds good for us: a labour movement battered by mass unemployment and defeats, lacking clear leadership at the top, and suffering from the political disorientation of many of its core activists, can still mobilise massively.

If the great mobilisations are to win, then, of course, the conditions of poor leadership and disorientation among the core activists have to be changed. But those mobilisations, and the fight to maximise and continue them, create huge opportunities to rally new activists, reinvigorate the old ones, and start to build a new leadership for the working class.

Much remains to be done in Italy on that front. In the 20 November local elections when Forza Italia's vote went down from 31 per cent to 8 per cent, the Democratic Left Party also went down — from 19 per cent to 14 per cent — and "Communist Refoundation" did no better than holding on to its six

per cent. The "independent, Green and other" vote ballooned from 15 per cent to 42 per cent.

Many of the workers who have come on to the streets against Berlusconi at the call of the trade unions, like many people angry against the Tories in Britain, are at sixes and sevens about overall political alternatives. The political job of reorganising and re-educating working-class activists remains to be done.

Italy shows us how to fight — and the political work we will have to do to make that fight successful.

This is the last issue of Socialist Organiser before the Christmas/New Year break. Our staff and our supporters will be busy producing and promoting other publications, including the Welfare State Network paper "Action" and a new issue of "Workers' Liberty" magazine. Next Socialist Organiser in early January.

US and Europe divide over Bosnia

By Colin Foster

ONCE again, the murderous national conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia have been made worse by the big powers' jockeying for position.

Following an offensive by the Bosnian government forces (theoretically multi-ethnic, but in practice Muslim-dominated), the Bosnian Serbs are now attacking Bihac, a Muslim pocket in northern Bosnia.

The local Muslim leader, Abdic, has allied with the Serbs against the Bosnian government.

If the Serbs can conquer Bihac, then the stage is set for a further escalation. That conquest will clear the way for a "Greater Serbia" to be formed across a whole swathe of territory, reach-

ing from Serbia proper across most of Bosnia to eastern Croatia.

Eastern Croatia is currently under nominal UN control, though in practice Serb-ruled. A drive for "Greater Serbia" could spark a new war between Serbia and Croatia, and make the UN's position in ex-Yugoslavia even more untenable.

The big powers are more openly divided than ever. The US Congress is pressing for the arms embargo on Bosnia to be dropped, and US planes (under NATO colours) have attacked Serb positions. Robert Dole, Senate leader of the Republicans who now hold the majority in the US Congress, has called for all the UN troops (mostly British and French) to be withdrawn in order to clear the way for further

air attacks.

The European powers remained tied to a policy of effectively backing Serb imperialism as the easiest route to restoring conditions for profitable trade and investment in ex-Yugoslavia.

To restore the multi-ethnic Bosnia which was torn apart by a Serb offensive in 1992 is probably now impossible. All the short-term possibilities are only varying versions of a carve-up producing a Greater Serbia and a tiny rump Bosnian-Muslim state, possibly linked to Croatia.

The US's new stance does not change that framework. It does not even push very hard against Serb imperialism within that framework: the NATO air strikes against the Serbs attacking Bihac were followed by the US govern-

ment conceding that it saw no possibility of stopping the Serbs conquering the area.

The division between the US and Europe does, however, give each side in the war additional reason to continue, in the hope of further support from one big power or another.

Part of the reason for the US's new stance is probably the disarray of the US government after the Republican victory in the elections for Congress. Another must be the US government's desire to placate its Muslim allies, from Egypt through Turkey and Saudi Arabia to Pakistan. A third is that, after the collapse of the USSR, the US no longer needs the NATO alliance as it used to.

No good has come from the whole sorry story of big-power



bungling in ex-Yugoslavia, and none is likely to. The only hope remains, on the ground, for the

workers of the different nationalities to link up against the rival warlords.

Tragedy and conflict in Gaza

By Steven Holt

What makes the present inter-Palestine civil war so terrible is that it has broken out just when progress, albeit slow and uncertain progress is being made towards freeing the Palestinians from oppressive Israeli occupation.

The peace accord with Israel gave the Palestinians nothing like what they are entitled to — self-determination.

But it went some way towards relieving the misery of the people of the West Bank and Gaza and it held the promise of more concessions from Israel later. Partial autonomy was won by the Gaza strip and an enclave on the West Bank.

Under the deal it fell to Arafat to restore order after the intifada. A Palestinian police force has replaced the Israeli army. Order is breaking down again because Arafat has not been able to deliver even the limited promises of the accord. Israeli settlements and troops remain on the West Bank, with no prospect of early withdrawal.

The Gaza strip remains what it was for decades — the largest refugee camp in the world. There are few

jobs there and not even basic social services. So far Arafat has not been able to change the living conditions of his people.

Under these conditions Palestinian youth influenced by Muslim fundamentalism and those who see anything short of extrapolation of Israel as betrayal begin to see Arafat as Israel's stooge.

The Israeli government signed the deal with Arafat when the PLO was losing influence to Hamas. From Israel's point of view it is a gain to have the PLO rather than the IDF fighting Hamas. World support for the Palestinian cause will be eroded by the violence.

No-one on the left should have any illusion in Hamas. With their Islamic ultra-nationalism, they have more in common with 1930s fascism than with the progressive bourgeois-led anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia after the Second World War. Wherever such Islamic fundamentalist groups have attained state power (Iran, Sudan) or control of the parts of a country (Afghanistan, Algeria) they have slaughtered ethnic and religious minorities, trade unionists and leftists and turned all women virtually into slaves. It is one more twist in the tragedy of the Palestinians that their most militant wing now takes on the hideous political form of Hamas.

Tory Budget cuts services and raises taxes

By Chris Reynolds

HEALTH spending will fall a further one per cent below what is needed to keep the same level of services.

Public spending on transport will be cut drastically, meaning higher fares. Government grant to housing associations will be cut. According to the National Federation of Housing Associations, housing associations will be able to build only 10,000 new homes for rent next year, down from 25,000 this year.

Housing benefit will be refused if your rent is above the average for the area: people who cannot find a place with below-average rent will be forced out on to the streets.

Local government budgets will be cut by a further £550 million, at the same time as councils face increased responsibilities for "community care" shifted out of the Health Service.

Student grants will be cut by ten per cent, as previously announced, and a small overall rise in the education budget will offer no room to reverse the trend to job cuts, bigger classes, and school buildings in worse repair.

There will be a further squeeze on dole payments, while employers are offered some hand-outs to encourage them to take on new workers.

Overall, the 29 November Budget cut public spending for 1995-6 by £8 billion from previously-planned levels.

At the same time, the Budget measures and previously-announced tax rises coming into effect next year will

leave almost everyone worse off. According to Labour Party figures, the average family will be about £850 worse off.

The worst tax rise is the second stage of VAT on domestic fuel. Compensation offered by the Budget to pensioners and people on benefits will fall far short of the extra cost. Students and low-paid workers will get no compensation at all.

The aim of the whole package — spending cuts and tax rises — is to clear the way for more income tax cuts for the rich and well-off in the run-up to the next General Election. For the sake of this sordid aim, the basic public services we all depend on — health, education, transport, pensions, benefits — are being chopped down.

Unfortunately, the Labour Party's response, in a leaflet mass-produced for distribution on Budget Day, focussed solely on the Tory tax rises, and solely on the "average" tax rises. Instead of stating a positive Labour message, it was designed only to bounce back the Tories' claims that Tory government means low taxes, and Labour government high taxes.

The Labour leaflet did not denounce the cuts in public spending. It did not expose that fact that VAT on fuel, and other Tory tax changes, hit the poor hardest; overall, the Tories' tax changes since 1979 have left the rich much better off, and the poor and averagely-off paying more tax.

The Welfare State Network's lobby of Parliament on Budget Day, demanding that the Welfare State be rebuilt by taking the resources from the rich, shows how we must fight back.

New book exposes secret police conspiracy against the miners

Abolish MI5!

AS GOVERNMENT spies in the labour movement go, Malinovsky — who was for a time leader of the Bolshevik Party group in the Tsarist parliament — was one of the most successful ever.

The MI5 agent in the miners' union, Roger Windsor, did not get to be as important to the National Union of Mineworkers [NUM] as Malinovsky was to the Bolshevik Party, but he didn't do too badly either.

He was chief executive of the National Union of Mineworkers during the great strike of 1984-5. Think about it. A government agent provocateur was in place at the headquarters of what prime minister Margaret Thatcher called "the enemy within" during Britain's biggest industrial war since the General Strike of 1926!

That Windsor was an MI5 agent in the miners' union, where he worked to sabotage the NUM and where possible compromise it politically, is now conclusively established. Seumas Milne's book "The Enemy Within" (Verso) proves it. It had already been said in Parliament by Tam Dalyell MP.

Windsor's mission was — as one of Dalyell's Establishment "deep throats" put it — "fuck up the NUM."

He was responsible for the original arrangements made by the NUM to avoid the seizure of the union's funds under the Tory anti-union laws arrangements which led to large amounts of cash falling into the hands of the court appointed receivers. It was also Windsor who volunteered to be filmed on TV hugging and kissing Libyan dictator Colonel Gaddafi.

This is the origin of what later became known as the "Scargill affair." Windsor's trip to Libya was in fact an MI5 "sting" operation designed to provide ammunition against the miners'.

It was October 1984. The pit deputies' union NACODS was set to strike and thus close down the Nottingham coalfield and the supply of scab coal. At the same time, according to retired CEBG boss Lord Marshall, Mrs Thatcher had gone a "bit wobbly". The CEBG had calculated that there were only 12 weeks' coal stocks remaining. Thatcher talked about using the troops to move



Semi-militarised police on the streets, secret police agents behind the scenes — the Tory war against the miners. Photo: John Smith, Profile

coal, but Marshall warned of solidarity strikes by power workers if she tried.

Windsor's mission was to provide a propaganda tool to be used against the NUM's leaders in the event of the strike escalating. He worked to fake evidence of the NUM leaders using Libyan money to pay their mortgages while miners' families went short.

In the event the "story" was never needed during the strike but was used again five years later.

All states infiltrate the organisations of their enemies — and Thatcher was right to see the miners and Arthur Scargill as her die-in-the-last-ditch enemies. It is to their eternal credit that they were!

This was class war, and like the Tsar and his ministers, the Tories fought the class war seriously. Not content with sending armies of semi-militarised police to beat down the miners physically and using the media to bludgeon the miners and the labour movement morally and intellectually, they also used infiltration and sabotage.

We in the labour movement had no right to expect anything else. If the timeservers at the head of the TUC had mobilised the labour movement to back the miners, then it would not have mattered much.

The British democracy which the Tories and their Labour shadows like Blair tell us is above classes, has a right to expect better and it has a

"The Tories have scarcely turned a hair at the revelation that they worked illegally to subvert a legal trade union in a legal strike."

right to a proper response from the Tories now that they have been found out.

The contrast between the Windsor case and that of the Tsarist agent Malinovsky is more enlightening about Britain today than the similarity is.

When suspicion about Malinovsky began to be voiced in sections of the Russian anti-establishment press, he was instructed by his police "handlers" to resign, and did so. Proof of what he had been did not emerge

until after the Bolshevik-led workers' revolution of 1917. (The Bolsheviks shot Malinovsky in 1918).

Tsarist Russia was not a constitutional monarchy or a parliamentary democracy, yet mere public suspicion was enough to create such embarrassment for the government that they felt it wiser for Malinovsky to scuttle and run.

The Tories, by contrast, have scarcely turned a hair at the scandalous revelation that they worked illegally to subvert a legal trade union engaged in a legal strike.

When, his work done, they pulled Windsor out of the NUM, they immediately set him to do as much additional damage as he could by spreading, through Robert Maxwell's newspapers, lies about NUM leader Arthur Scargill.

Under the hypocritical banner of "freedom" and "removal of state control", the Tories have moved modern Britain much closer to a police state than it has ever been outside times of war. The Criminal Justice Act is the latest open manifestation of this shift. The Windsor affair expresses a little of its hidden agenda. The Tories are the bitter enemies of the democracy they use as a flag of convenience.

And when all is said and done, Britain's miners have not had much to thank Britain's capitalist democ-

racy for in the last decade. The brutal closing-down, without even consultation, of the last coal mines by the same vindictive Tory government that sent Roger Windsor in to spy on and sabotage the miners' effort to defend themselves ten years ago — that sums up the relationship of Britain's miners to democracy.

With honorable exceptions, Labour in parliament has done nothing to bring the Tories to book for the Windsor affair. Tony Blair and his friends were too busy giving shame-faced tacit support to the Criminal Justice Bill to have time for anything like that. Labour leader Neil Kinnock took pride in giving the prize as "Investigative Journalist of the Year" to the trio of Maxwell hacks who provided the brushes for the MI5 smear job on Arthur Scargill. He has not apologised to Scargill.

The existence in Britain of MI5 — a spying agency run by right-wing crazies and conspiracy maniacs — is a crime against democracy and a permanent threat to it. It should be scrapped.

The labour movement must demand of the next Labour government that it abolish MI5 and all other agencies of state intrigue and conspiracy against the liberties and rights of the labour movement and the British people.



Arthur Scargill

"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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Lessons for today from Trotsky's "Transitional Programme"

Welfare State campaign can revive the labour movement



WE SAY

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

SEVENTY-TWO PER cent of voters believe that Tory MPs are sleazy and disreputable. In the Maples memorandum, the Tories themselves have admitted that most people see them as a government which exists to make the rich richer on the backs of the rest. The Government has been forced to pull back on selling off the Post Office.

"Underneath" the active labour movement — which is still generally depressed — there is a great pool of anger, exasperation, and bitter class hatred against this government. As yet, the anger remains atomised and individual.

This situation is, in the medium term, potentially explosive: sullen anger can quickly turn into positive action, given the right conditions. What socialists do now, by painstaking detailed work, to build our forces, will be decisive for what we can do in the future explosions.

It is vital for socialists to reach out beyond the rather narrow and stale circles of existing left-wing and labour movement activists to new people, people whose sense of outrage at what the Tories are doing is not dulled by years of defeat and resignation.

The depression of the labour movement should not be exaggerated: the signal workers' strike won wide support and ended not in defeat but in a "score draw."

Nevertheless, the depression is a fact. Take Liverpool as an example. The Liverpool Trades Council has collapsed: it no longer functions.

Yet, in the same city, Liverpool, 1,200 people recently attended a campaign meeting over cuts in blood transfusion services. There are thousands and thousands of people who are very angry and would be willing to be active, given a sufficiently solid lead.

You can well imagine that many of those who have been fighting unsuccessfully to keep life in the Liverpool Trades Council and similar bodies are so wearied and disillusioned that they find it hard to respond positively to the big turn-out, and are inclined to dismiss it as a flash in the pan. And if they dismiss it that way, instead of giving the campaign the necessary political core and links to the labour movement, it may indeed be only a flash in the pan.

Marxist socialists have to break such vicious circles. We have to fight against being pulled down by the mood of the tired handfuls trying to sustain Trades Councils and the like, and turn out to the thousands whose anger is fresh.

Trotsky's discussions around the programme of the Trotskyist movement (the *Transitional Programme*) in 1938 are instructive. In the *Programme* itself, he wrote:

"Even among the workers who had at one time risen to the first ranks, there are not a few tired and disillusioned ones. They will remain, at least for the next period, as bystanders. When a programme or an organisation wears out, the generation which carried it on its shoulders wears out with it... Only the fresh enthusiasm and aggressive spirit of the youth can guarantee the preliminary successes in the struggle; only these successes can return the best elements of the older generation to the road of revolution."

The *Transitional Programme* was written at a time when revolutionary socialists were terribly isolated. The Communist Parties, since 1934, had swung their members solidly behind bourgeois "Popular Front" politics. The swing to the left in various Social-Democratic parties in the mid-1930s had been reversed. Fascism had triumphed in Germany and Austria and was about to triumph in the Spanish Civil War; the revolutionary impulse from the French general strike of 1936 and the CIO trade union movement in the USA had petered out.

In the USA — the country Trotsky had most in mind when writing the *Transitional Programme* — the situation was summed up thus:

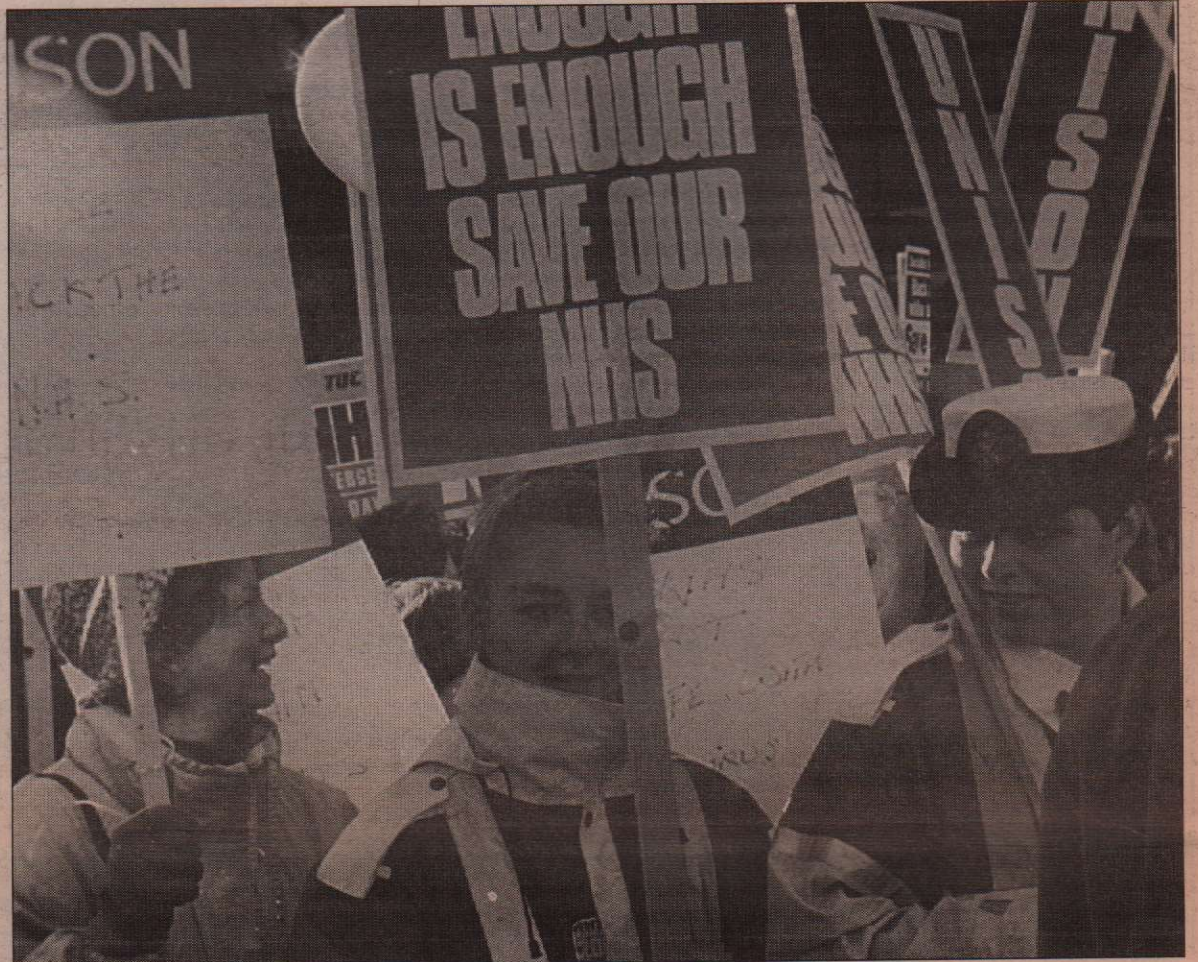
"The workers seem absolutely apathetic about [moving to build a trade union-based] labour party; their leaders are doing nothing, and the Stalinists are for [US President] Roosevelt." To that comment, from an American comrade, Trotsky replied:

"But this is characteristic of a certain period when there is *no programme*, when they don't see the new road. It is absolutely necessary to overcome this apathy. It is absolutely necessary to give a new slogan."

We are now again in a period when "a programme or an organisation wears out, [and] the generation which carried it on its shoulders wears out with it", or "a period when there is *no programme*, when [the workers] don't see the new road." The collapse of Stalinism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, coupled with the recent defeats of the working class in the West, has "worn out" and destroyed the Stalinist or Stalinist-influenced mainstream left wing of the West European labour movements.

Yet the "apathy" and disorientation comes together with a terrible decay of capitalism, a sharpening of the objective conflict of interest between bosses and workers, and deep-seated mass disgust at the established regime.

The working-class movement needs now, as it needed then, to be reorganised and rallied on a new basis. We believe that the Welfare State Network Campaign points towards that new basis. There is a strong parallel with what Trotsky urged his sup-



TUC march for the Health Service, 20 November 1993. Photo: Garry Meyer

porters then to do in the USA.

TROTSKY argued that in America the revolutionaries should initially "concentrate the attention of the workers on [one] point" of that programme — "the sliding scale of wages and hours", automatic inflation-protection for wages and creation of jobs through cutting work hours.

"We can present [a slogan] which is honest, part of our entire programme, not demagogic, but which corresponds totally to the situation. Officially we now have thirteen, maybe fourteen million unemployed — in reality about sixteen to twenty million — and the youth are totally abandoned to misery... We ask that Mr Roosevelt [the president]... propose such a programme of public works that everyone capable of working can work at decent wages. This is possible with a sliding scale of wages and hours.

"Everywhere we must discuss how to present this idea, in all localities. Then we must begin a concentrated campaign of agitation so that everybody knows that this is the programme of the Socialist Workers Party..."

"Naturally this is only one point. In the beginning this slogan is totally adequate for the situation. But the others can be added as the development proceeds..."

"I think in the beginning this slogan [sliding scale of wages and hours] will be adopted. What is this slogan? In reality it is the system of work in socialist society — the total number of workers divided into the total num-

ber of hours. But if we present the whole socialist system it will appear to the average American as utopian, as something from Europe.

"We present it as a solution to this crisis which must assure their right to eat, drink, and live in decent apartments. It is the programme of socialism, but in a very popular and simple form..."

"The campaign will go somewhat in this fashion. You begin agitation, say, in Minneapolis [where the Trotskyists had their strongest trade-union base]. You win one or two unions to the programme. You send delegates to other towns... When you have some success you convoke a special congress.

"Then you agitate that they force the bureaucrats of the trade unions to take a position for or against. A wonderful opportunity for propaganda opens up..."

Our agitation now under the generalised heading *Rebuild the Welfare State* — concretised for example in demands for adequate and equal state-of-the-art health care for everyone, to be paid for out of the pockets of the rich — is a close parallel to their agitation then for the "sliding scale of wages and hours." In conditions of sustained capitalist prosperity, inflation-protection for wages or full employment on the basis of a decreasing work-week may be possible as harmless reforms. In 1938 they were revolutionary proposals. Likewise, a half-way comprehensive welfare state may be possible within a national capitalism when capitalism is booming; in conditions like the

present, a fight for the welfare state has to challenge capitalism and all the parties which defend capitalism.

The call to *Rebuild the Welfare State* now, like the "sliding scale of wages and hours" then, connects with a series of other slogans, from the more petty, detailed and local to the more advanced and revolutionary. It points the way to uniting the working class in a fight for control over social wealth and the organisation of the economy.

It goes hand-in-hand with a fight to "re-found" the labour movement, just as in 1938 in the USA the agitation for a "sliding scale of wages and hours" went hand-in-hand with a fight for the trade unions to form their own labour party.

THROUGH ITS launch meeting, the *Action* newspaper, and local activity in several areas, the Welfare State Network has shown that it is viable.

It can draw in existing activists, run campaigns with an impact, and attract new people. Whether it can be built as it needs to be built — to a movement of the size and impact of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament — remains an open question. But it is certain, already, that we can make it something which contributes seriously to the working-class cause.

Its chances of making such a contribution will be greatly increased if left wingers not in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty/Socialist Organiser join with us in this work. We appeal to groups of socialist and individual socialists to do so.

Wandsworth

Not the brighter borough

Wandsworth in south London is the Tory flagship council. What Wandsworth does first, others do later including, sadly, Labour authorities. Over the next four years the council wants to make £50 million more cuts. The results are explained below by Wandsworth workers

Housing policies in Wandsworth

By housing workers

WANDSWORTH council has just finished moving many of its centrally provided housing services to the local "District Offices." Next April the District Offices are all going to be centralised. The year after that the entire service is going to be divided up into small parcels and put out to tender. Only one thing is certain and that is every change means fewer and fewer staff doing the same or more work.

The purpose of the exercise is to privatise the Housing Service, and to do it in such a way that there is little chance of the in-house bid winning the contract. Once the Housing Department is split up between local estate agents and managing agents there will be no chance of either tenants or workers getting together to oppose rent rises, cuts in service and more privatisation.

Tory councillors have also come up with a plan to persuade tenants to cut their own services. The idea is to provide a "menu" of services for estates — like cleaning, gardening, security etc. — and get tenants to choose which ones they are prepared to pay for. This would be interesting if applied to national government taxes and services, e.g. we could choose not to pay VAT on fuel or for Trident missiles!

Of course, only the most basic services will be eligible for Housing Benefit so a large group of tenants won't have any "choice" at all. Once enough people have been bribed (with lower service charges) or bullied (by being refused benefit) into accepting the most minimal service, another round of redundan-

cies will be announced. As the estates deteriorate the council will say: "But it was the tenants' own choice..."

There is demoralisation amongst the workforce after three reviews in the last few years. It's "dog-eat-dog" with worker competing against worker just to keep a possible future job. Having worked for a Labour council before, I have to say that the council is well-organised — they know what they want and don't just muddle through. That's why Clause Four is relevant. The Labour Party must have an alternative, believe in it and fight for it.

The homeless

THE COUNCIL wants the government to change the law on housing single mothers. But for the moment they must try to house them. Even so, if the baby is under two the mother is offered a one-bedroom flat only. Most of Wandsworth's homeless are put in bed and breakfast accommodation outside the borough away from family and friends. If the homeless are offered one "permanent" or "settled" accommodation this could be in a different borough. Someone made homeless in Battersea could end up in South Croydon. This is exporting the problem.

Recently, more homeless families have been rehoused because the sales policy has been suspended in the wake of Westminster council hearings. Nevertheless, the properties already sold off cannot be bought back.

The council might also try to alter permanent tenancies for council tenants to 5-7 year contracts. As it is, they already pay one of the highest rents in the country.

Working in Social Services

By a worker

IT USED to be considered pretty secure working in the Social Services Department. No longer. Everyone is waiting to hear about the next round of cuts. No one is safe except the Director.

The home helps have been privatised. I don't have much faith in private companies or charities running these services. What if they go bust?

The whole drive is to keep the council tax low.

This is highlighted in the closure of the day centres and the selling off of all the remaining old people's homes. There will be no guaranteed residential care. I think that the private sector will make loads of money out of it, but there has been no guarantee for emergency care. So-called "difficulty" cases will probably end up in hospital. The callousness of it



Wandsworth led the way in selling off council homes

Life after privatisation

IN THE early 80s there was a strike against privatisation of the bin service. Its defeat paved the way for further privatisations and job losses, particularly among manual workers.

Recently, there have been more signs of union life. Despite the difficult conditions, the GMB have

recruited all the refuse collectors who now work for Tylers.

In the last month some have walked off the job and there was talk of a strike. They had had enough. The last straw was to be asked to work up to 7 in the evenings and on Sundays.

The class struggle continues in Wandsworth!

Reclaim Wandsworth!

WANDSWORTH was the forerunner of the Thatcher "revolution." Is it the future for all other councils and national government? Yes and no.

Their idea of a few contract monitors supervising private contractors is the policy for the Civil Service. The result will be worse services, worse working conditions and the erosion of local democracy and accountability.

But you can't export all your homeless, all your sick, all your Labour voters to another country.

Wandsworth Fightback march

Wed 7 December

Assemble: 5pm, Battersea Town Hall

March to Wandsworth Town Hall.

This council can be stopped. There is massive opposition. In fact, more people voted Labour in the last two local elections in Wandsworth than in Lambeth.

The historic labour movement tradition of Battersea and Wandsworth can be reclaimed.

The trade unions and community groups have come together in Wandsworth Fightback. They are organising a demonstration on Wednesday 7 December [see box].

The Labour Party and national unions must argue against privatisation and fight competitive tendering.

We can win them to this policy.

Some facts of life from Warwick

Membership of TUC-affiliated unions has declined by something like five million since the Tories came to power in 1979. And there are worrying signs that the decline has not yet bottomed out. While some unions now seem to have consolidated their membership and are even beginning to make up lost ground — the GMB, for instance, actually *gained* members during the recent check-off exercise — others are haemorrhaging. UNISON seems to be in a state of organisational crisis and the RMT suffered badly as a result of the check-off legislation.

In this situation it is natural and right that trade unionist should take a long, hard look at the state of our movement and how it relates to present-day realities. Unfortunately, the rank and file are rarely involved in such discussions, which usually take the form of bureaucratic navel-gazing and the commissioning of academic studies of dubious provenance. In this atmosphere a new orthodoxy has arisen: the 'AA' model of trade unionism.

This was most clearly expressed in an article in the *New Statesman* last year by Philip Bassett and Alan Cave, which advised unions to become "private sector organisations engaged in providing a range of services for people who wish to buy them." Their models, according to Bassett and Cave, should be "other private-sector providers who do a similar job to them — organisations like the AA or BUPA, who offer people insurance, based motoring and health assistance, just as unions offer employment assistance."

John Monks and Tony Blair are both enthusiastic advocates of this exciting new style of trade unionism, which, naturally, sees no place for collective action at the workplace. But where is the evidence that ordinary workers are attracted to unions because of insurance, pensions, credit cards and the like? Actually, there is none.

Which is why a recent survey by Colin Whitson and Jeremy Waddington of Warwick University is so useful. It involved 12 unions covering the entire industrial and occupational breadth of the British labour force and the largest-ever postal survey of new members, lay activists and full time officials. The questions Whitson and Waddington asked all related to why people join unions and what they want from them.

Surprise, surprise: the two most important reasons were "support in the event of a problem at work" and "improved pay and conditions". The desire for support at the workplace, for instance, was cited by more than 70 per cent of new members. When union activists were asked to state the workplace concerns that their members had requested they pursue, managerial attitudes and abuses of authority were the single most common concern. This pattern was not significantly changed by the introduction of new management techniques like "empowerment" and "human resource management".

Financial services came *bottom* of the list of ten possible reasons for joining a union. Even amongst managers and professional staff, only 8 per cent of new members regarded these as an important reason for joining. It is also worth noting that the desire for collective protection at was highest among clerical and sales occupations and those in 'personal and protective service occupations'. As the authors note, "both of these groups contain large numbers of women in low-paid, part-time and insecure employment. Developing an appeal to these potential members based on their need for collective protection seems likely to be more rewarding approach for unions than one based on individual packages of financial services."

The Warwick survey, in short, reaffirms the central importance of independent, collective organisation at work. It will be interesting to see how the movement as a whole reacts to these findings and — especially — what the likes of John Monks and Tony Blair have to say about them. What cannot be denied is that the survey makes the advocates of 'AA' trade unionism look pretty silly. Maybe we should now demand that Monks and Blair drop their blinkered, dogmatic adherence to outmoded and discredited theories, and face

INSIDE THE UNIONS



By Sleeper

Buster does the honourable thing

"BUSTER" Edwards, one of the Great Train Robbery gang, has hanged himself in a South London garage. It is front-page news in most of the papers. Buster was "colourful", Buster was just a "rogue", Buster was a hero.

Why, in 1988 he even had a film made about his life in which he was portrayed as just a loveable guy by the no less loveable Phil Collins — the overpaid pop star scumbag who promised to leave Britain if Labour won the 1992 election.

Edwards got £50,000 out of the movie. In fact Edwards, who spent his last years selling flowers outside Waterloo station, was a professional criminal. In a £70,000 payroll raid on Heathrow air-

GRAFFITI



By Cyclops

port in the early 1960s Edward coshed a clerk. He may well have been the one who bashed train drive Jack Mills on the head. Mills was a wreck afterwards and died four years later.

Do real people think of Edwards and the others as heroes — or is it just the tabloids with space to fill? The "Great Train Robbers" were no heroes. 30 years ago they murdered a railwayman doing his job.

Socialist Organiser is against the state inflicting the death penalty, even on murderers. But when, as with Edwards, they are obliging enough to hang themselves, we have no objection whatsoever. Except that he should have done it a long time ago.



Thatcherism is dead

PRESS GANG



By Jim Denham

THATCHERISM as a potent, popular force, finally died last month.

The deranged backbench Euro-rebels and their smirking *gauleiter*, Mr Portillo, may calculate that tomorrow belongs to them. They delude themselves. Their posturing cuts no ice outside the inner circles of the Tory Party.

The praetorian guard of the Thatcher revolution was never to be found in parliament, but in the press. The likes of Woodrow Wyatt and Paul Johnson were using their columns to promote a particularly virulent, nationalist brand of Toryism long before Mrs T. ousted Edward Heath in 1976. But three journalists could be said to personify the Thatcher revolution and were themselves creations of it: Kelvin MacKenzie at the *Sun*, Andrew Neil at the *Sunday Times* and the freelance Richard Littlejohn.

It is, as they say, no coincidence that all three rose to prominence within the Murdoch empire and in the 1980s.

MacKenzie was the middle-class lad with an intuitive understanding of Thatcher's working-class constituency and a flair for vulgarity and jingoism.

Neil was a pretentious yuppie who single-handedly transformed the *Sunday Times* from a serious, investigative paper into a bloated bundle of 'life-style' supplements and 'greed is good' propaganda. He also laboured under the misapprehension that he came over well on television and attempted to establish himself as an all-round media personality (the eventual cause of his downfall).

In comparison with these two somewhat ludicrous figures, Richard Littlejohn was (and is) a serious thinker. He is a genuine right-wing libertarian, whose

views may coincide with the mainstream *Sun* 'line' but are usually expressed with a degree of finesse and wit noticeably lacking in the rest of that paper.

It could be argued that this makes him all the more dangerous: unlike, say, Garry Bushell, Littlejohn appeals to your intelligence rather than insulting it.

In fairness, it should be noted that while he shares the *Sun*'s hostility to the European union and all its works, he does not deal in the thinly disguised racism that characterises the rest of that publication. And, as John Diamond noted in the *Guardian*, Littlejohn "shares many views with his paper through conviction rather than professional servility", which probably accounts for why he has remained freelance rather than signing onto the Murdoch payroll.

Since the overthrow of Thatcher, Murdoch's British papers have been in ideological turmoil.

They backed the Tories in 1992 (with the *Sun* running a typically dirty anti-Labour campaign) but soon fell out with Major. Murdoch personally ordered a loosening of the links with the Tories and even allowed *Today* to come out as openly pro-Labour.

Earlier this year, MacKenzie left the *Sun* under mysterious circumstances and Andrew Neil took a "sabbatical" from the *Sunday Times* — supposedly to front Murdoch's TV news operation in New York. Last month it emerged that Neil's TV career was not to be and, simultaneously, that John Witherow, his "temporary" replacement at the *Sunday Times*, was to stay on permanently.

At about the same time, Richard Littlejohn announced his intention to leave the *Sun* for the *Daily Mail*. Littlejohn's successor Stuart Higgins pleaded with him to stay and pointed out that his contract still had over two years to run. It was no good: Littlejohn's mind was made up. His departure confirms the end of an era. The Murdoch press has finally accepted the death of Thatcherism.

Whether the *Sun* and *Sunday Times* switch over the Blair remains to be seen, but if they do they'll surely be pro-Blair rather than pro-Labour (just as they were pro-Thatcher rather than pro-Tory).

Meanwhile, we'll have to wait and see whether Littlejohn's intelligent indignation degenerates into the usual *Daily Mail* why-oh-why bleating.

Tory health market madness

LETTER

I AM writing in response to your excellent article "A sham of social justice" (*SO* 119). I am a UNISON steward within health, and I regularly see the implications of the Tory health reforms.

Fundamental changes to the way that services are now organised as a result of the Griffiths Report and "Working for Patients" legislation means that the principles of market economics are firmly entrenched in the structures of health care.

The Purchaser-Provider relationship between Health Authorities and health care providers now ensures that spending remains within tight budgetary controls, and that where these are exceeded as a result of need, heavy financial penalties are enforced.

Overspends result in temporary or even permanent closure. This was highlighted when our local Trust, Llandough Hospital, was forced to close gynaecology wards due to "over-activity" in the early part of the financial year, this despite the fact that there were still urgent cases awaiting treatment.

Clearly then, treatment is no longer dictated by need, but by financial constraints. We are

told that where local facilities are unable to offer treatment, extra contractual arrangements (ECRs) will ensure that care is found elsewhere. Independent research showed that in up to one third of cases last year, all ECRs were turned down due to limited resources.

The rhetoric of the Tories when implementing these reforms was to maximise efficiency. At best we are being asked to take this on trust as there is now no back-up health regulator to guarantee the public interest or even provision of information. Previously public information is now "confidential." Government quangos now dictate what is in the public interest and what should remain unseen. The reality of course is that the definition of efficiency employed by the Tories is a very narrow one, that of financial savings. It is no coincidence that the only planning in the "Working for Patients" legislation is that of fiscal planning.

No analysis was given to the need for long-term planning and provision for an increasingly elderly population for community care or for the desperately required AIDS [?services]. On the contrary, these are issues which the Tories wish to leave to the mechanism of the market.

Whilst much of this will be of no surprise to you, what is particularly distressing is the recent turn around by the Labour Party who are now weakening in their commitment to reverse the internal market. Whilst openly denouncing the new system they are reticent about plans to change it.

At a recent Party conference, I quizzed Charlotte Atkins, UNISON's Parliamentary Liaison Officer as to the exact plans of Labour regarding the NHS and was told that although Labour plans to abolish the internal market, they will retain the Purchaser-Provider split! Of course, anyone who knows anything about health will realise the internal market is nothing more than the Purchaser-Provider split.

These generalised slogans are designed to hide the real truth, the Labour Party have very little intention of doing very much more than smoothing over the rough edges and halting only the very worst excesses of the market.

The scathing attack on the "levellers' Britain" in the Commission for Social Justice is the agenda of Labour. They denounce the traditional left perspective of being "concerned with the distribution of wealth." They claim it is

now impossible to develop "policies for social justice independent of the economy." This effective submission to the interests of big business in a desperate attempt to become electable is a tragedy for those of us who care about our National Health Service.

The Tories have effected a remarkable *fait accompli* with regard to health, what is a major shift in objective for the NHS dictated by the Tories will become permanent policy now that Labour has accepted that objective. In so doing, they have done a fundamental disservice to both the service users and providers. They have effectively accepted the notion that the problems of the service are caused as a result of organisational structure rather than due to consistent massive under-spending.

The problems of the National Health Service can no longer be concealed by the good intentions of service staff. Real commitment is required from Labour if we are to save not only the ideology of a centrally organised Health Service which is free at the point of need, but also the reality of a well planned, well run NHS which provides ordinary working people with at least a modicum of safety and security.

Cath Jones, Cardiff

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Northumbria University Students' Union

Stop the witch-hunt!

By Janine Booth

NORTHUMBRIA University Students' Union is being disrupted by an outbreak of anti-socialist "red-baiting." Five socialist members of the Executive are being attacked in a right-wing campaign to drive them from office. The five officers were elected on a Labour platform of running active campaigns, and this is what they have been doing — taking coachloads of students to the national

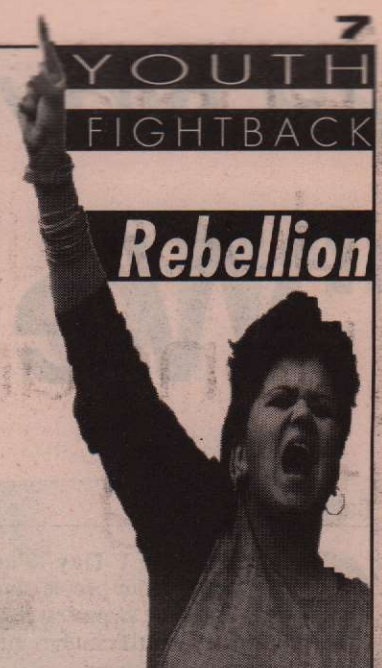
demonstration against the Criminal Justice Act, running the women's and the lesbian, gay and bisexual campaigns, organising a local march against student hardship, and more. This was too much for the right wing, who want the union to run as a business, not as an active, campaigning, representative voice for students. They began their attack by making unfounded accusations about the five Labour Executive officers being responsible for the financial squeeze that the Union faces.

They whipped up hysteria by spreading lies. They held unconstitutional, undemocratic "meetings" which were effectively kangaroo courts. As they have grown in confidence, the Union has been polluted by intimidation, physical harassment and anonymous hate-mail. Terms of abuse like "commie bitch" have been directed at women Executive members. Students have been stopped from going into their Union building if they are suspected of being left-wing! What is happening at Northumbria has shocked

many people in the student movement. Other student unions in the North East have condemned the anti-democratic behaviour of the right wing. If the right wing succeed in removing the five officers, they will try to replace them with people who have already proved themselves to be interested not in campaigning, not in defending students' interests, only in wrecking and back-stabbing. This situation reminds us how important it is for students to have open, democratic, campaigning unions.

Youth Fightback is...

... the voice of revolutionary socialist youth. This page is separately edited. Editor: Mark Sandell Phone: 071-639 7967 for details of our activity. Letters and articles to *Youth Fightback* c/o PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Met police pay damages to young women strip-searched in pub

Hands off young people!

THE Metropolitan Police have been forced to pay two young women £21,000 damages for strip-searching them in a pub toilet in front of male coppers and pub customers. The two, Helen Yaffe and Madlyn Ray-Jones, were only 15 at the time. They were in a London pub when the police raided it with a drugs warrant. The two young women tried to leave, but police stopped them, hauled them into the toilets and searched them in full view. The two women said: "We felt scared and humiliated because we didn't think the police action could be questioned." It was only because Helen and Madlyn took the Met to court that they had any way to challenge this attack on their rights by the police. Solicitor Jane Deighton commented: "It is a tremendous victory for their courage and tenacity."

the absurd current set-up where the police are unaccountable and investigate complaints against themselves.

Youth for Justice...

- demands:
- An end to prosecutions based solely on confessions.
 - Independent and elected police complaints bodies.
 - Elected bodies to control the police with power over operational policy and budgets.
 - Abolition of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

For more details: about our campaign, write to Youth for Justice, c/o 9 Love Walk, London SE15.

Student women lobby Parliament to protest at health cuts
 Tuesday 6 December
 Assemble: 1.30pm,
 Lobby Gate



Helen Yaffe and Madlyn Ray-Jones

29 November lobby of Parliament

"We are the people th

Cathy Nugent reports

ON BUDGET Day, Tuesday 29 November, 500 people came to lobby Parliament, to protest against Tory attacks on the welfare and benefit system.

The lobby was organised by the Welfare State Network.

Pensioners and young people, the disabled and the unemployed, gathered to show their anger at the dog-eat-dog philosophy of this Government, which robs the poor to pay for rich people's tax cuts.

While many lobbied their MPs, a rally was held where speaker after speaker spoke of the growing tide of anger in Britain against what the Tories have done to our Welfare State.

JOE IRVIN, the Research and Education Officer for the Transport and General Workers' Union, talked about *In Place of Fear*, his union's up-to-date survey of the terrible depth of poverty in Britain today.

"The richest 20% of people," he said, "have improved their share from 36% to 43% of all income since 1979. The income of the poorest 20% has dropped from 10% to 6%."

Irvin also spoke about the Job Seeker's Allowance which will replace both Unemployment Benefit and Income Support. "The change of name," he said, "is just a way to disguise a cutback." Entitlement to non-means-tested benefit will be reduced from one year to six months.

The Welfare State Network plans to organise a campaign against the Job Seeker's Allowance in the next few months.

Irvin concluded on a hopeful note: the Tories, he said, were becoming increasingly vulnerable. The fightback was beginning! "This sort of lobby, this type of campaign that is being developed by the Welfare State Network, is what we need."

ALAN SIMPSON, the Labour MP for Nottingham South, spoke about the need to renationalise all the industries and services that the Tories have privatised. This was linked to building a campaign to save the Welfare State. "In 1979," he said, "one child in ten was liv-



Jack Jones

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ing in a household in poverty. Now it's one in three. Two thirds of the population live on less than average incomes. At the same time, the self-appointed and nominated heads of privatised industries can allocate themselves pay increases of £200,000 a year.

"I just heard that the Water Board in the East Midlands has announced that because of a drop in profits they are going to have to make 750 peo-

"It is not the old who make the young jobless, it is not the young who make the old poor. It is the system of capitalism which divides us."

Alan Simpson MP

ple redundant. But when you look at the figures they actually got an increase in profits. They only make a loss when you take away the money they have set aside to pay for redundancies. They are making people redundant because they want to pay themselves a 9% increase in their dividends.

"I grew up thinking that these utilities were ours — the water we drink, the air we breathe, the railways — they were ours. Our inheritance has been sold off. I think that a Labour Party that doesn't understand the imperative of bringing back these services into public ownership is wrong. They are ours, always have been, always should be!"

Alan Simpson, like many other speakers, urged the need for unity: "It is not the old who make the young jobless, it is not the young who make the old poor. It is not the homeless who make building workers unemployed. It is the system of capitalism which divides us.

"The Labour Party in Parliament ought to understand that we are implacably opposed to a system of capitalism. We have a right to a job, a right to an income we can survive on, to decent education. What keeps us going is the knowledge that we survive together, we build together, we protect the Welfare State together or we perish apart."

KATE ADAMS spoke from Incapacity Action, and there were other speakers from disability

campaigns: Clare from Wimminvisible, and a speaker from People First, a campaign of people with learning disabilities.

The Welfare State Network will be combining its campaign against Job Seeker's Allowance with one against Incapacity Benefit, which will be introduced next year.

Incapacity Benefit is a new, all-inclusive benefit, for the long-term sick and disabled. It will mean a drop in living standards for many thousands of disabled and sick people. Incapacity Action launched a campaign against the benefit six months ago.

Kate Adams spoke about the purpose of this benefit reform: "The Government want to force people off invalidity benefit altogether. They claim there is fraud going on, but there is absolutely no evidence of fraud. They are just using lies to pit people against each other."

There will be a new, degrading, test for disabled people to go through. They want to save £1.5 billion by making people fail this test. "This test," said Kate, "just looks at how disabled you are.

"Your age, job experience, ability to travel, skill, the fact that you are a human being, no longer counts. The kind of questions they will be asking are ridiculous things like 'can you pick up a bag of potatoes'. If you say you can, you might fail the test." Increased powers are going to be given to DSS officers and DSS doc-

"I am absolutely confident that we shall live to see the day when this whole rotten system is set aside."

Tony Benn MP

tors who will be specially recruited and trained to "find savings".

Last week the government reintroduced its Disability Bill. This is an extremely watered-down version of the Disabled Persons Civil Rights Bill, which the Tories managed to scupper earlier in the year. As Kate pointed out, the Government displays both hypocrisy and tokenism towards the disabled with this bill. On the day they introduced their Disabled Persons Bill they also brought out the regulations for Incapacity Benefit!

DIANE ABBOTT, MP for Hackney North, echoed this view. "The reason that these changes have been brought forward is to save money. It's not just a matter of being cruel to the disabled. They want billions of tax cuts for the top 10%. They have to save money because they are maintaining a standing army of unemployed."

TONY BENN MP was enthusiastically received when he urged us all to have confidence in the prospect of change.

"We are told every day that the Tories are trying to make us more productive, more competitive. Do not believe it for a moment. The policy of the government is to frighten people into doing what the government wants them to do.

"There are four million people out of work. They are calling them Job Seekers now — next they'll be boasting we have got more jobs than anyone else in Europe! Unemployment is also essential to maintain capitalism. It diminishes the power of trade unions, lowers wages, limits imports and makes people homeless. That is their policy. If you have a job and walk along



Jill Mountford, Secretary of the Welfare State Network

How to Save the Welfare State

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the Embankment and see someone in a cardboard box, you say to yourself, 'If I have a row with my employers and lose my job and my home is repossessed, I'll be in a cardboard box'. This is the law of the market.

"I was going round the new hospital in Chesterfield not long ago," Tony Benn continued. "I was shown round by the hospital manager. We passed a premature baby unit and she said 'oh, Mr Benn, this is the most expensive end of the business.' If premature babies are looked at in economic terms you have to say they'll never make a profit for anybody, and neither would pensioners! We have to have a head-on assault on that philosophy. We are not about managing an unfair system better, we're about changing that system.

"We should not accept that we are rebels. We represent a completely different tradition. It's not the tradition of hierarchy and obedience, of bowing and scraping to somebody above you.

"The trade unions should be galvanised into becoming effective tribunes of the people, mobilising people."

Jack Jones

But we have to say, when we are poor we are entitled to dignity. We are one continuous group of people, dependent on each other."

"This idea that we are on our own, it is a jungle they have created, it's an absolutely evil idea that we have to get rid of. Otherwise we are never going to do what we've got to do.

"This is a very big campaign. It affects every single person. I believe the '90s are going to end quite differently to how the '80s began. There is a mood in this country that is rejecting the rotten philosophies associated with this government.

"I am absolutely confident that we shall live to see the day when this whole rotten system is set aside and we build a society fit for our own people, children and grand children. Good luck."

JACK JONES, President of the National Convention of Pensioners, was perhaps the most popular speaker of the day, a recognition of the work he has done in promoting pensioners' rights over the years. He spoke, in the main,

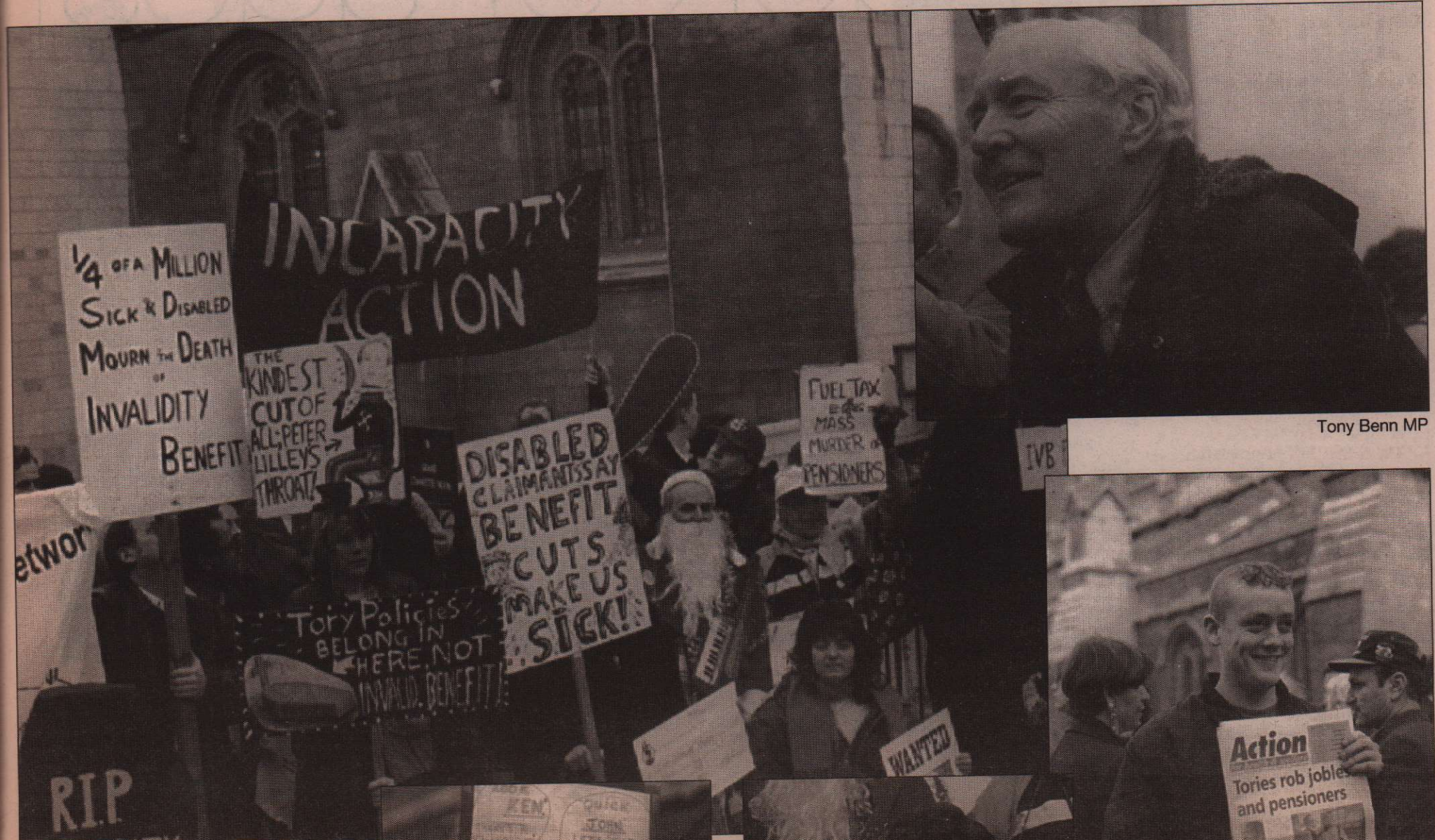
National Welfare State Network Working Conference on

★ Job Seeker's Allowance ★ Benefits for Youth and Students ★ Incapacity Benefit
Saturday 18 February 1994

11 am, University of London Union, Malet Street, London
Tickets are £5 waged, £3 low-waged, £2 claimants, £1 students without grant

Speakers include: Tony Benn MP, Alan Simpson MP
For tickets or more details ring 071-639 5068.

The Tories are afraid of!"



Tony Benn MP

Scenes of the lobby



Alan Simpson MP



The Welfare State Network

can be contacted at 42 Braganza Street, London SE17 3RJ
Telephone: 071-639 5068

Student women lobby Parliament to protest at health cuts

Tuesday 6 December
Assemble: lobby gate, 1.30pm

about this work, in particular the struggle against VAT on domestic fuel.

"The pensioners' movement did find the basis for unity last year. We had 12 or 14 thousand people lobbying Parliament last year and we had mass meetings and we did force a minimum concession, minimum compensation from the Tory government. If we want to see the government withdrawing VAT from domestic fuel it is very important that mass action of that kind is continued and expanded.

"In Italy, on the streets of Rome, they have assembled a million people, protesting about pension rights, on the streets. We ought to be able to do that here. What they did was make sure that they kept the link with the trade unions. The trade unions should be galvanised into becoming effective tribunes of the people, mobilising people. We need to transform the feeling inside the mass organisations so that we can stimulate more activity.

"In the past we had that activity. We fought off attempts to restrict trade union activity through the Industrial Relations Act by having mass demonstrations all over the country. That

sort of thing can be done. It has been done in the past, and can be done again.

"There is a story George Lansbury used to tell about the Titanic. As it was going down, the captain called for the first class passengers to take the first life boats. That is the kind of society the government has created. The young, the old, the disabled all of us should be first class passengers in a better society. That is the kind of society we want."

ALISON BROWN from the Executive of the National Union of Students spoke about the students' campaign to restore grant cuts.

The government has cut grants by 10% for two years now. Many students face extreme poverty, living on under £2,000 a year. They are excluded from any right to benefit: Income Support or Housing Benefit.

Alison told us how we need to fight for the right for education for all. But it is not only the government that needs to get the message. The Labour Party does too.

"In the Commission for Social Justice report there is a proposal to abolish grants altogether, introduce tuition fees, introduce a loan system

far worse than what exists at the moment. We have got to fight to make sure Labour does not adopt these proposals."

After speakers from the floor — pensioners activists, disability activists, a teacher, a worker in the Benefits Agency — KEVIN SEXTON, the Welfare State Network student co-ordinator, and JOHN LISTER from London Health Emergency summed up for the campaign.

We need to build the Welfare State Network in every locality, make links with everyone fighting to rebuild the Welfare State, sell the newspaper of the campaign — *Action for Health and Welfare* — and organise for our conference in February.

It was, said John Lister, "a marvellous start to a campaign that is going to be a real factor in the political scene. It is a campaign that will not only put the pressure on the Tories but make sure that Labour, if it forms the next government, cannot ignore these central issues."

"John Maples was right when he said the government needed an 18 month news black-out on the health service. We are the people John Maples and the rest of the Tories are afraid of."

Violence in films

The muck of ages

Alan Johnson takes up the debate about the violence in such films as Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction"

LIKE THE unruffled *tricoteuses* who sat beside the guillotines of the French Revolution as heads rolled, this audience preferred its pleasures in the raw. And, standing in the wings, the chic, but plebianised, intellectual applauded." (David Selbourne, *The Spirit of the Age*)

Is socialism morally comatosed or is it just Matt Cooper? This question occurred to me after reading his astonishing apologia for cinematic violence-as-entertainment [*Socialist Organiser* 620].

Matt advises Dan Katz to "loosen up" about violence in film today because a) it is normal, b) it is just like the violence in Shakespeare's plays, "keeping the mob in the pit happy", c) films must entertain not only enlighten, and violence entertains, and d) if the audience "gets off" like "baying dogs" on the violence this is not the film makers' fault because e) films don't really matter when it comes to violence, 'society' does, and anyway, f) if we object to the violence it implies we want to censor it which is 'puritanical'.

What's wrong with all this? Visiting my parents in North Shields recently they told me that my old football coach had been beaten senseless when he tried to tell a group of lads to make less noise in front of an old folks' home.

So badly was he attacked he has been forced to retire from work.

They did not relate this story to me with any great shock or surprise. Every single house around them had been burgled since my last visit. I asked why the wall of the next door neighbour was smashed in.

Apparently a getaway van had been abandoned in a chase with police.

Over tea my Dad told me about the 'stick-up' in the Gas Showroom. The night I stayed there I was woken by the shouts of my Dad and the next door neighbour — they had rushed out but failed to stop a thief robbing a car.

The thing is, where my parents live is not even seen as an especially 'bad area'! They shake their heads and read the "Evening Crime" as they call the *Evening Chronicle*.

But while violence of all descriptions is increasing in our

society, popular culture is saturated with its valorisation. That which should be morally condemned is offered up as entertainment. Those who should find themselves vilified now find themselves glorified.

Ironically in the same issue as Matt's defence of violence-as-entertainment Mark Osborn was attacking the very same thing in so-called 'Gangsta Rap.'

And to say, as Matt does, that Hollywood violence is just like the violence in a Shakespeare play is ridiculous. When a large chunk of the cast die at the end of *Hamlet* the audience is forced into a moral judgement.

As Selbourne has said of violence in Shakespeare: "Violence is not the purpose of art, but is purged by it, and fears aroused are also allayed by a sense or restored order, human or divine."

Violence in many Hollywood films is the purpose of the 'art'. Plot is reduced to introducing and then progressively wiping out every character bar one. We are invited to savour the violence, to be excited by the vicarious thrill of it. We are invited to respect it.

The author Brett Easton Ellis has written of a generation raised on the "fleeting pleasures" of "junk culture."

He has said: "It is hardly surprising that this generation has a nihilistic fascination with a culture that is so flagrantly superficial... We are unshockable... This generation has been wooed with visions of violence both fictive and real, since childhood, violence so extreme that it verges on the baroque. Our attitude is 'I dare you to show me'."

Many working-class communities are imploding. This would matter for any decent person. It is a catastrophe for socialists because the kind of working class which can create socialism is pretty much the opposite of the fearful, isolated, and self-hating class which crime and violence on this scale produces.

The mass consumption of the degraded products of Hollywood may not explain this catastrophe but it can't be just patted on the head as harmless 'entertainment'. It plays its part.

In the face of it the left should worry less about the charge of 'puritanism' and rather more about what Marx called the "accumulated muck of ages."



Even Hollywood heart-throbs pack pistols. Top left: Harrison Ford in *The Fugitive*. Top right: Michael Douglas in *Falling Down*. Left: Christian Slater in *True Romance* ("razor-sharp wit, gritty action and modern love").



Violence is ubiquitous. Below: *Natural Born Killers*. Bottom left: Michael Caine in *Get Carter*. Centre: *Reservoir Dogs*. Right: *Yojimbo*, Samurai film



A good Christmas film



Matt Cooper
reviews
Tim Burton's
*The Nightmare
Before Christmas*

Directed by
Henry Selick

THOSE OF YOU who believe that Tim Burton, director of the *Batman* films and *Edward Scissorhands*, is really a purveyor of childlike fantasies for grown-ups could well be right. Although he took no direct part in the making of *The Nightmare before Christmas* all the characters are based on his design and the vision of the film is clearly his. The result is that rare thing, a good children's film.

Admittedly my measure of what makes good children's cinema is a the improper one that their adult min-

ders should be able to enjoy the film too. Far too many people will be forced to sit with the sprogs through the tacky schmaltz of Disney's *Lion King* this festive season. *Nightmare* succeeds because despite its Christmas theme, it never falls into the cheap, anthropomorphic sentimentality of Disney cartoons, nor does it have any Disneyesque subtext.

The story is simple: Jack, the Pumpkin King, rules the town of Halloween. Once a year he and his hordes go abroad to bring terror into the hearts of the people. Not that Jack — or any of the other occupants of Halloween town is genuinely evil: they are simply everyday cartoon characters going about their business.

But Jack is bored, craving something more in his life. While wandering through the animated dreamscape that he inhabits, he stumbles upon Christmas town, and decides that spreading joy is a much better occupation than spreading unhappiness.

So he kidnaps Santa Claus and sets about running his own Christmas.

But Jack's followers are like SWPers trained to denounce Parliament sent on the knocker soliciting votes for Labour. They just don't get the idea, Christmas turns into a warped image of Halloween.

How will it end? Will the children get their real Christmas presents and be saved from their flesh eating jack-in-the-boxes?

To an adult eye the plot is stretched perilously thin in places.

The film is fuelled by a constant stream of inventive animation that adds to the story rather than distracting from it. A series of songs have a style that can only be described as kindergarten Kurt Weill.

Although this film may be a little too frightening for smaller children, no character is genuinely frightening or malevolent (with the exception of Oogie Boogie, intent on having Santa for his Christmas dinner). Put it down as essential Christmas viewing.



Is "Cracker" racist?

Here we present excerpts from a statement put out by Women Against Rape and a comment by Liz Millward

"Cracker" racism is a danger to women

THE EPISODE OF *Cracker* broadcast on 21 November promotes the classic racist stereotype of Black rapist and white victim.

We wrote twice to producer Paul Abbot calling for the programme to be withdrawn on the grounds that:

- Such a drama presents a distortion which promotes racist stereotypes of Black men, undermines Black women and lets the police and other white men who rape off the hook.

- Since Black people are only about 5-6% of the population of Britain, a drama where most of the rape is committed by a Black man is very misleading and dangerous...

- Black serial rapists are rare and there is a long history of Black men being labelled as rapists and disproportionately harassed, arrested and imprisoned compared to white men.

Our worst fears have been confirmed. Not only is the serial rapist Black, but he has sexual problems with his Black girlfriend because of the size of his genitals (a common white obsession about Black men) and this drives him to rape white women. He also comes from a single mother family — a white woman with three Black children — another stereotype of the cradle of crime. He is moonlighting while claiming Income Support.

We object to the misuse of women's experiences of and struggle against

rape, to provide the framework for a racist drama. We were particularly angered by *Cracker's* subtle attack on what the anti-rape movement has fought hard to establish; that most rape takes place in the family and/or by someone the woman knows well, and therefore that the rapist and the victim are usually of the same race. This reality is denied: by the time the police chief reminds a colleague that white women are usually raped by white men, the audience has been shown that the victim is white and the rapist is Black.

We are against hiding any rape — whoever commits it. But by making the main rapist a Black man, the programme diverts public concern about rape into anger against Black people. In this way, the protection of white women is identified with the persecution of Black men. This is dangerous for all women. In particular, for Black women who, besides bearing the brunt of any escalation in racism against Black people, are already discouraged from reporting rape because of police racism. Nothing in future episodes can make up for change or 'balance' this racism which is structured into the plot.

Women Against Rape

We must champion artistic freedom

THE PROBLEM WITH arguments used here against "*Cracker*" in that they would rule out all drama that did not illustrate statistical averages and drama which dared to tackle anything other than the most commonplace aspect or representation of a subject in a way approved of by WAR.

In other words, they lead straight to

sterilising Stalinist nonsense.

They are also, I think, unfair to "*Cracker*". Sure, this is entertainment TV; but it is done with a high level of seriousness to a very high artistic standard.

The mixed race rapist comes from a one parent family, but otherwise he does not correspond to any of the hostile stereotypes of black people I've ever come across. Quite the opposite. Women concerned with the presentation of rape in the media could make a plausible criticism of "*Cracker*" — that this rapist is presented far too sympathetically, as a sort of crazy philosopher.

And he is not the only rapist in this drama. It was plain early in episode two that the other rapist is white, albeit an Irishman. That too, probably, defies statistics and averages.

Certainly, there are things other than the rapes that made me very uneasy watching it, like the scene in the bathroom in which the black rapist drowns a victim. The water is streaming into the bath, tears are streaming down the poor victim's face, the lunatic is mouthing his crazy self-justification, being almost sympathetic (perhaps masochistically identifying with his victim).

I thought: I shouldn't be watching this as entertainment... In all such thing there is an element of obscene collusion by the viewer.

Not often do programmes purveying such matter enlighten as well as entertain, broaden the viewers' understanding as well as titillate. "*Cracker*" often does.

To me it seems perverse that the sisters should direct their misguided fire at what is perhaps the most intelligent and morally serious of the entertainment programmes that deal with subjects like this.

Liz Millward

Tariq's Soliloquy

(Reflection of a fashionable Revolutionary on the fall of Stalinism)

I dreamed I walked with History
Along sure paths already cut and mapped;
I marched with confidence and courage, critical
But loyal and dependable.
On up the long slow hill
I followed my sweet misty mirage
Until it stopped,
And there beneath its shimmering heart I found
A dark nocturnal cavern, deep and wide,
Filled up top high with human bones and skulls,
And on the Hill a foetid, foetal ruin.

I, who dreamed I walked down known sure paths
With History,
Travelling triumphantly,
Inexorably,
The reservations booked,
Down-payments paid,
Safe conducts guaranteed,
The destination sure and set,
Must now begin again!

Now I,
Vicarious power gone,
No Socialist Fatherlands intact, not one,
Must go, if I go,
Since History's lost its wits,
Into the cold, unmapped unknown
Alone
Along a rocky road;
Pathfinding pioneer
Camp follower no more,
I must walk with guilt and with uncertainty,
And play Poor Tom to mad, blind,
wayward History.

Thus, disabused, I reach my age of reason,
Know myself for what I am,
Attain my own full height at last:
Self-guided, I must cut new paths to other hills,
And there help build
Tangible, clean, real things.

Aw — fuck it!

Sean Matgamna



The Petrograd Soviet, 1917: workers educating themselves to become "intellectuals", and intellectuals joining the working class

Heretics and revolutionaries

Alan Johnson reviews "Representations of the Intellectual" (the 1993 Reith radio lectures), by Edward W Said. Vintage, £4.99.

EDWARD SAID, the Palestinian writer and campaigners, denounces the vast majority of intellectuals in the world today as the hired guns of state and corporate power. He quotes the war poet Wilfred Owen: "The scribes on all the people shove/And bawl allegiance to the state."

Using a term from the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, he argues that twentieth-century capitalism creates a vast army of "organic intellectuals", who are essentially servants of the wealthy.

"Critics" are allowed, of course. They are important to preserve the liberal face of power. A small army of reforming intellectuals from equal opportunity experts to ethical investment advisors and social policy analysts use their erudition and training to build careers by advising state and capital how to clean up their acts — but never challenge their right to be centre stage, never locate the source of the problem in the power of state or capital.

Said also warns against the seductive pull of intellectual fashion. He blasts the "smug heedlessness" of the post-modernists who tell us class does not matter as the gulf between the haves and have-nots widens all over the world, and the "preposterous fictions" of the "end-of-history" school. He bemoans the collapse of universalist ideas such as truth, reason, human rights and justice, into a relativist swamp of competing ethnic and gender truths and standpoints.

He also indicts the "Political Correctness" debate as a right-wing fraud to protect the power of dominant groups and deny excluded groups a place at "the rendezvous of victory", and points to the value in widening what we think of as great thinkers and books.

"Be a heretic!" is Said's message. Anything else — especially selling yourself as a hired gun to the powerful — is a betrayal in which the intellectual no longer "speaks the truth to power" but is "denatured by your fawning service to

power."

And yet Said does not draw Gramsci's conclusion that the oppressed need intellectuals of their own. He offers instead the idea of the "exilic" or "amateur" intellectual, refusing to sign up completely to any cause, always maintaining a sceptical independence.

Said worries that if the intellectual "joins up" to a party or cause, acting in its service, then the critical faculties are lost, the independence of thought is gone, and the road to fawning service to some future power has been opened.

"Marxism means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them."

In truth there are many examples in the Stalinist movement and even within the Trotskyist tradition of just that. The history of the Gerry Healy tradition, for example, might be written around the theme of the "servility of the intellectual."

To go beyond Said's invidious opposition between "joining up" or keeping one's critical faculties we must reject an idea often found within the Trotskyist tradition and which, ironically, Said shares.

Trotskyism often imports, from Stalinism I think, the idea that there are two rigidly distinct elements, "intellectuals" and "workers", in an organisation. The founder of American Trotskyism, James P Cannon, spoke of the

Party as divided into "worker Bolsheviks" and "Marxist intellectuals." In this conception can be rooted the idea of the servility of the intellectual at the service of the "worker leadership." Reason and argument can be forced into a poor second place behind the ascribed status, personal weight or bureaucratic manipulation of the "worker leaders."

Antonio Gramsci had a radically different idea.

Gramsci does not abolish the distinction between the workers and intellectuals. However, he identifies it as a problem to be overcome. He contrasts the Marxist approach to that taken by the Catholic Church, in which "the simple people" of the church are never brought up to the level of the church intellectuals, who are, in turn, given the role of the hired guns of the church hierarchy.

Gramsci writes:

"Marxism is antithetical to this Catholic position. Marxism does not seek to sustain 'the simple people' in their primitive philosophy of common sense but, instead, lead them to a higher view of life.

"If it asserts the need for contact between the intellectuals and the simple people, it does so not in order to limit the scientific activity and maintain unity at the lower level of the masses but precisely in order to build an intellectual-moral bloc which makes politically possible the intellectual progress of the masses and not only of a few groups of intellectuals..."

"(This) means working to produce cadres of intellectuals of a new type who arise directly from the masses though remaining in contact with them and becoming 'the whalebone in the corset'..."

Those qualities Said holds dear — truth, sceptical independence of thought, critical examination of all ideas, a refusal to bow to received wisdoms or authority — should be the essential attributes of the intellectual life of a genuine, that is, critical thinking, Marxist organisation.

When the revolutionary party reasons about the world around it and orientates to act, everyone should function as an "intellectual." That is, reason, argument, facts alone will decide the question.

We aim to build a party in which the division

between "workers" and "intellectuals" is overcome by workers becoming "intellectuals" and by "intellectuals" from non-worker backgrounds being tied by party discipline to activity in the working class.

This "party discipline" must include two very different and interconnected "disciplines." First, the intellectual discipline of reasoning within a collective made up of "intellectuals of a new type." It is this discipline most Trotskyist groups fail. Second, such collective reasoning is given, as Max Shachtman put it "richness, reality, fruitfulness and purpose" by the political discipline of sustaining a close and regular relationship to the movements and struggles of the exploited and oppressed. It is this discipline which what might be called the "New Left Review intellectual" fails.

Ultimately, not even the pen of a Said or a Chomsky or a Pilger, nor even of Marxists like Geras and Eagleton, can substitute for the building of a collective of "intellectuals of a new type" rooted in the struggles of the oppressed.



Gramsci

No free speech for Muslim bigots

PLATFORM

By David Landau on behalf of the Jewish Socialist Group

WE WERE surprised at your editorial (SO No.618, 10 November) defending free speech for Hizb-ut Tahrir. You are aware that Hizb-ut Tahrir is thoroughly anti-semitic, has genocidal policies towards Jews and homosexuals, denies the Holocaust, advocates violence towards wives who are disobedient to their husbands and incites racial violence towards Hindus. Muslim women in colleges in Tower Hamlets are in danger of attack from Hizb-ut Tahrir if they are not prepared to conform to its positions on "modesty". Isn't it for precisely these kinds of reasons that Socialist Organiser has a clear No-Platform position towards fascists, or do you now believe that "people who detest free speech and other democratic liberties" for the BNP are giving them "the chance to win sympathy on a spurious basis."

It is important to make a distinction between the defence of free speech for Hizb-ut Tahrir and the question of bans by the state and college authorities. We doubt the wisdom of demanding a ban, not on the grounds of free speech but because it would be seen as an attack on Muslim students in general and creates a polarisation between Muslims and others rather than between the oppressed on the

one hand, and racists and fundamentalists on the other. We, like *Socialist Organiser*, do not see the demanding of state bans as the way forward for fighting fascism either. However, in the event of a ban on a BNP event, especially one brought about by the campaigning of a community under attack from them, we would be surprised if *Socialist Organiser* demanded that the ban be lifted, either on the grounds of free speech or that it would play into their hands. Indeed I think you would support a college ban against BNP meetings. Why therefore do you behave differently with regard to

Hizb-ut Tahrir?

We find your comparison between this ban and moves to ban Jewish societies, peculiar, bearing in mind SO's position on Israel. You recognise that support for mainstream Zionism, and Jewish societies in particular, is not motivated by hatred towards Palestinians, even though these organisations may end up being apologists for the racist violence of the Israeli state. On the other hand, we would not defend the free speech for, say, the followers of Rabbi Kachien, whose anti-Arab racism is certainly comparable to the positions of Hizb-ut Tahrir.



If the BNP should be banned, then why not also Hizb-ut Tahrir? Photo: Paul Herrmann

Freedom for those who think differently

Mark Osborn replies

"FREEDOM is always the freedom for those who think differently. Not because of any 'fanaticism' about 'justice', but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and 'freedom' effectively loses all meaning once it becomes a privilege." Following Rosa Luxemburg, this is our general rule. Respect for the right of free speech is a matter of political health.

What to do with "people who detest free speech and other democratic liberties"? If possible we argue with them and the people they may influence.

The problem with fascists is not so much that they have repulsive views — which they do — but that they are on a "civil war" footing, against the left, Black people and Jews. Free debate is not possible. So arguing with fascist-influenced workers has to be combined with self-defence. The balance between argument and physical self defence will depend on the circumstances.

Our basic policy towards fascism is mass mobilisation of the working-class movement.

Our movement should confront fascists in the name of self-defence — this positively focuses on our democratic rights. It is absolutely counterproductive to drag in our "right" to deny free speech to the fascists. It muddles the issues. And it gives the fascists a political weapon to use against us — their right to speak their views. Only people who do not think this right is important, and who do not understand how powerful the idea is, could be

Arabs, Jews and socialism

The debate on Palestine, Zionism and anti-semitism £3 plus 36p post from WL Publications, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

so dismissive of free speech.

Our slogans are designed to build mass movements — to persuade the unconvinced and draw them into action — not just to appeal to the already-existing anti-fascists. We must stress the working class's right to defend itself from fascist violence.

Dave Landau asks "why do you behave differently towards Hizb-ut Tahrir"? He should ask himself why he and the JSG behave differently towards Hizb-ut Tahrir. Why have you not called on the left to break up their meetings?

It is possible to go to Hizb-ut Tahrir meetings and leaflet and argue with their supporters. There is not an immediate physical threat — as there is at a fascist meeting.

It is true that Muslim fundamentalist movements have a lot of the characteristics of fascism. In some countries we would have to physically defend ourselves from them. But right now, in Britain, it is possible to discuss. The way to beat Hizb-ut Tahrir is to address the basic concerns of the young people involved — racism, unemployment and bad housing — in a way that shows them we have feasible answers.

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Militant suggests a "Socialist Federation of Ireland"

Second thoughts on Ireland

AGAINST THE STREAM

Sean Matgamna looks at a shift in thinking on Ireland by Militant, which now advocates "raising the idea that the Protestants would be able to have a high degree of control over their own community" in Ireland as a proposal to help working-class unity

"SOCIALISM IS the answer" — that is a good, general purpose response to most of the horrors we see around us in capitalist society. It is not, in many situations, a self-sufficient answer. Often we need other answers too.

Our programme is not confined to socialist proposals. When the Bolsheviks took power in 1917 they did not say to the oppressed nationalities in the old Tsarist empire — "There, that's all settled now. The workers have power." The workers in power needed a specific policy for the nations long oppressed by the Tsar — self-determination.

Even under a socialist regime, the smaller nations would have the right to secede and set up their own states. This was a matter not of socialism — the socialisation of the means of production under the control of the working class — but of democracy, what Lenin called "consistent democracy."

"Socialism is the only answer" was for long the hallmark of Militant. Whatever the issue — Ireland, gay rights, women's oppression, racism, you name it — Militant was not to be moved from the mindless recitation of a mantra: "Socialism is the answer."

Frequently this led then into reactionary politics. When the Militant controlled the Labour Party Young Socialists, for example, resolutions on gay rights that would have been passed by the Liberals were regularly voted down, up to the late 1970s.

But Militant has had its sectarian certainties and its labour movement routine shattered in the last few years. The latest change is on Ireland. And it's quite a change!

It may be that Militant is moving not to the Marxist understanding that mantra-chanting is not enough, but to the opportunist, SWP-style "build-the-party-on-any-basis" view that the socialist fundamentals should not be allowed to get in the way of recruitment. We'll see.

On Ireland, for a quarter of a century, Militant, true to its nature, has responded to everything with: "Socialism now!" The workers in Northern Ireland were enlisted behind reactionary Catholic and Protestant chauvinist parties butchering each other, but still the immediate answer, said Militant, was "socialism." For Marxists who believe the workers must create socialism, this made no sense. How could workers dominated by the Catholic-Protestant split create socialism as the immediate answer to that split, without any special proposals about the split.

True, Militant never made the mistakes much of the left made by endorsing the "anti-imperialism" of the Provisional IRA (or, as with this paper, mistakenly thinking that our first duty was to support those fighting our own state). But that was only



It is "time for peace" — but how can socialists make "peace" and unity between Catholic and Protestant workers

because Militant never accepted a responsibility to relate to the real world or the immediate issues — apart from bread and butter trade unionism — in Northern Ireland. The political ideas needed to bridge the gap between trade unionism and socialism were entirely absent in Militant.

For our own efforts to come to terms with the realities of Northern Ireland and provide working-class political answers to the issues that dominated the lives of all Northern Ireland workers, they had nothing but sectarian socialist scorn. Recognising that no working-class progress is possible until the working class, Protestant and Catholic, agree on a joint solution to their conflict of national identities, we proposed acceptance of the right of the Protestant-Unionists to autonomy in a United Federal Ireland. Militant said: "Treason to socialism!". Now Militant has had belated second thoughts.

The new line is contained in an article by Lynn Walsh, on behalf of "Militant Labour's Executive Committee" [Militant 21 October 1994]. Much of it is still very woolly and confused. Detailed discussion and criticism of that will have to wait for another occasion. These extracts will inform Socialist Organiser readers of how far Militant has travelled towards a position it used to foolishly denounce as anti-socialist. Unless otherwise indicated, all emphasis has been added.

"TO SUCCESSFULLY separate the Protestant working class from right-wing Unionists and Loyalist paramilitaries the labour movement will have to fight to build working-class unity and put forward a class policy on the national question. To win over Protestant

workers, however, it is vital for the movement to recognise the understandable fears and legitimate aspirations of Protestants.

This does not mean accepting partition of making concessions to Loyalist ideology, but forging policies capable of breaking the reactionary influence which Loyalist leaders exert over sections of the working class.

"It may be that Militant is moving not to the Marxist understanding that mantra-chanting is not enough, but to the opportunist, SWP-style 'build-the-party-on-any-basis' view that the socialist fundamentals should not be allowed to get in the way of recruitment. We'll see."

The Protestants of Northern Ireland hardly constitute a nation. Nevertheless, they are a distinct community with their own sense of identity and consciousness although extremely confused and contradictory.

In relation to Nationalist Ireland the majority consider themselves British and want to maintain the link with Britain. At the same time, fearing that they can no longer rely on the unwavering backing of the British state, there are growing elements of a distinct "Northern Irish" identity.

Imposed unity — even if it were achievable — would transform the Protestant majority of the North into a disgruntled minority in Ireland as a whole. Sectarian conflict and civil war

would result, raising the spectre of re-partition...

The long-drawn-out character of the national struggle, however, has seriously complicated the situation.

While Catholics in the North suffered institutionalised discrimination, the Protestants benefited from their majority status, with a relatively economically privileged position (though sections of Protestant workers in the decaying inner-city areas now face high unemployment and poverty).

Nevertheless, there is a growing fear among Protestants that they will potentially become a minority and themselves face discrimination in a united Ireland. We have to recognise that because of their profound suspicions, most Protestants may not be convinced that their interests would be safeguarded inside a Socialist United Ireland.

To reassure Protestants and cut the ground from under the reactionary Loyalist leaders who play on their fears, we have to raise the idea that the Protestants, if they so desire, would be able to have a high degree of control over their own community, which would safeguard their cultural and religious rights.

Under socialism, with workers' democracy, this would not in any way imply the continuation of Protestant privileges at the expense of Catholics.

Even so, despite all these guarantees, in order to demonstrate that the working class has no interest at all in coercing Protestants into a United Ireland, even on the basis of Socialism, we have to uphold the right of the Protestants, if ultimately they so desire, to opt out of a unitary state. It is quite possible that the question of a Socialist Federation of Ireland will be raised in the future... We do not advocate a federal solution. But... class unity [may] require a flexible approach...

A FINAL comment: posing the problem of Irish division as Walsh does, as a problem to be solved in a socialist Ireland, is a hangover from the old Militant sectarian "socialism." It gets everything back to front. Think about it. A socialist Ireland can only be the creation of the working class — the same working class that is now locked in murderous inter-working class conflict. It will not jump over its own head and magically create sufficient unity to allow itself to make a socialist revolution and then go back to sort out the "constitutional question." Recognition of the distinct identity of the Protestants and proposals for some form of federalism are necessary now in order to help create working-class unity — the unity without which there will be no socialist Ireland. It is a necessary part of our transitional programme for Ireland.

The purpose of advocating "federalism" — not only under socialism, but now — is to allow the class conscious workers of both communities — and both parts of Ireland — to unite now for class struggle on the basis of an agreed democratic solution to the Unionist/Nationalist conflict.

Socialists should not advocate federalism? Socialists do not advocate self-determination. We say peoples have an automatic right to it if they want it. When it is plain that they want it, we fight for it. This general socialist formula — the right to, if they want it — translates in Northern Ireland into a recognition that the Protestant-Unionists do want it. So socialists fight for working-class unity across the divide by proposing a rational, democratic answer to the constitutional question. We fight for working-class unity by championing the right to separation.

History teaches us that without a common working-class answer to the "constitutional question" stable Protestant-Catholic unity in Northern Ireland is impossible above the trade union level. Therefore, socialists in Lenin's tradition do take responsibility for advocating a positive democratic solution to the communal/national conflict. Now, even under capitalism.

Whether Protestant "self-determination" in this sense is realised under capitalism or socialism is not determined in advance. Everything depends on working-class struggle and the level of that struggle: the point of putting forward a transitional programme (as above) on the Catholic-Protestant antagonism is to free the channels now blocked by that antagonism for class struggle.

It is not inconceivable — though I don't think it is likely — that workers mobilised in a powerful working-class struggle involving both Catholics and Protestants — who had agreed on some sort of federal solution to their "national" conflict — would find that, victorious, they could dispense with Protestant-Unionist "self-determination" — that the Protestant-Unionists did not want it after all. But from a socialist point of view, if they want it (Protestant autonomy not the present ridiculous partition, with its 45% of Catholics in the "Protestant-Unionist" state) then they are entitled to it both under capitalism and after we have buried capitalism.

Railtrack sell-off can be stopped

By a railworker

THE GOVERNMENT have just announced that the sale of Railtrack will be completed before the next general election. Railtrack is the new company that now holds some £3 billion worth of rail assets. Chancellor Kenneth Clarke has also made clear that proceeds from the sale of Railtrack form part of his economic calculations for the next two years. In short the Tories aim to use the money to buy votes, to fund tax cuts, at the next general election.

However previous sales and tax cuts have been done from a position of strength. The Tories were selling off profitable enterprises in which the unions had been severely dented if not smashed. They enjoyed popular support and clear majorities in Parliament and they appeared to know where they were going. But this sale is an act of desperation.

Rail privatisation remains unpopular and the union has not been smashed; the main rail union, the RMT, has just fought

Railtrack and the Government to a score draw.

Elsewhere on BR union organisation, whilst dented, remains relatively good. Voluntary redundancies have meant thousands leaving the rail industry and some demoralisation but there is a powerful feeling of anger and willingness to fight when a lead is shown.

British Rail infrastructure services (BRIS) which has a turn over of £1 billion per year, also has to be in the private sector by this time next year according to the Government timetable.

Divisional reps, now the highest level for negotiation, according to a new bargaining machinery agreed by RMT general secretary Jimmy Knapp, are organising resistance in any way they can — in the first place attempting to slow down and hamper the consultation process that BRIS legally has to go through as part of its timetable for privatisation. Many such reps feel encouragement from the Government's step back over Post Office privatisation.

Right now there is a potentially explosive cocktail among rail workers of resentment, demoralisation and anger, brought on by an unpopular Government forcing through an unpopular privatisation, the widespread willingness to take on the Tories, and a lack of lead from the labour and trade union movement. The leaders of ASLEF, RMT, TSSA give the impression of not knowing what is going on the ground.

The leaders of all the unions should throw their weight behind a campaign of resistance at every level on each and every issue. There is plenty to go on from violation of local agreements to victimisation of union reps.

Especially with John Prescott, an RMT sponsored MP as deputy leader, the Labour Party should announce now that it will take the railways back into state ownership without compensation. That would stop railway privatisation in its tracks, it would encourage railworkers resistance on the ground, it would be popular and it would wreck the Tories plans to buy votes at the next election.

Support the TGWU! Boycott Eastern National!

TGWU bus workers tell of how a co-ordinated management union-busting operation has seen large numbers of scabs brought in, in an attempt to break their union

ON 18 November, Eastern National sacked 91 bus drivers from the company's Chelmsford dept for taking part in a few hours strike action in protest against excessive working hours, which the drivers felt were posing a serious threat and to their own health and safety, to the safety of the travelling public.

Drivers were being expected to drive for nearly 5 hours without a break, causing fatigue and stress-related illnesses, and increasing the risk of an accident. Although

feelings had been running high, the drivers did try to minimise the disruption their action would cause to their passengers.

Robin Orbell, the managing director of Eastern National, who became a millionaire almost overnight when the company was privatised in 1986, admits that Eastern National passengers pay the highest fares in the country.

He has been willing to sack 91 experienced local drivers and replace them with an assorted bunch of temporary substitutes — ranging from managers and retired bus drivers, most of whom haven't driven a bus for years, to drivers from other parts of the country, unfamiliar with the local area.

He has been willing to put these drivers in charge of buses without the benefit of the route tuition and vehicle familiarisation

that the sacked drivers used to insist on before going out on the road. How long will it be, we wonder, before all this results in a serious accident?

The 91 drivers must be reinstated.

You can help by:

- Boycotting Eastern National Services
- Writing to the managing director Robin Orbell at Eastern National Ltd, Stapleford Close, New Writtle St, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 0SD or telephone him on 01245 256151
- Expressing your concerns to local newspapers, radio and TV

The TGWU has set up an appeal fund for the sacked drivers. Cheques payable to TGWU (Chelmsford Bus Drivers Support Fund), to: Chelmsford Trades Council, c/o 87 Mildway Rd, Chelmsford, CM2 0DR

Tube fight for a 35-hour week

By a Jubilee and East London tube driver

IN DECEMBER 1992 the Company Plan was imposed on the workforce of London Underground. This meant the loss of 5,000 jobs and the destruction of most of our agreements and working practices.

Just prior to implementation of the Company Plan, ASLEF held a ballot for industrial action against the plan. They agreed to call off this ballot on the basis of a promise of a 5-day week for train staff. At the time train staff worked an 11-day fortnight.

My line, the East London Line, was the first line to go to 5-day a week working, in August 1994. This has meant a half an hour increase on the maximum driving time allowed on any train, and an average lengthening of the working day by 42 minutes, as we now cram our 41 hour week into 10 days instead of 11 over a fortnight.

A lot of the drivers where I work were prepared to accept the 5-day week at any cost. Some months back ASLEF held a referendum where train crew voted 4 to 1 to accept a worse deal than we actually are

having to work. These ASLEF proposals were not brought in as management's safety advisors considered them to be unsafe!

But now that we are actually working the 5-day week a lot of the drivers are saying that they can't handle it, that when they get home they are too tired to do anything except go to sleep.

I believe that the way forward is for both major unions, RMT and ASLEF, to campaign for a 35 hour week, as in both unions' policy (on paper anyway). I think this should be tied in with next year's pay claim.

Issues for the left in UNISON

By a UNISON member

AFTER TWO TOTALLY dreadful pay deals have been accepted in Local Government and Health, despite the majority of members voting to reject them, the need for a serious rank and file organisation to fight for democracy in the UNISON is more desperate than ever.

The Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON is holding its first conference in Leeds on 3 December. The CFDU is not the only attempt in UNISON to establish a broad left, and at UNISON's first conference there was the crazy situation of two broad left meetings taking place at the same time, UNISON Fightback on the West Cliff and the CFDU on the East Cliff.

The SWP have set up UNISON Fightback, which they totally dominate through a couple of branches in which they hold the main officer positions. It has no real existence separate from the SWP

and no accountability — for example, its last rally, called around the issue of Sefton, voted overwhelmingly to oppose the witch-hunt in Liverpool UNISON, but this amendment was omitted from the resolutions circulated after the conference.

The CFDU involves most of the rest of the left, Militant, Socialist Outlook, Socialist Appeal, etc., but it needs to broaden its support if it is to become a serious force in the union. It needs to be more than a lack lustre electoral machine like the Militant-led Broad Left in NALGO.

Two key issues that will need to be sorted out at the CFDU conference are the question of the Labour Party and the structure of the CFDU.

Currently half of UNISON (ex-NUPE and ex-COHSSE) is affiliated to the Labour Party, half (ex-NALGO) is not. The lengthy proposed aims of the CFDU do not mention the Labour Party at all. The CFDU should adopt a position of campaigning in the long term for a ballot of all

members for full affiliation the Labour Party and in the short term for members to switch from the un-affiliated fund to the affiliated fund as soon as rules allow (in 1996 for un-merged branches, and immediately in merged branches). The CFDU could also play a key role in campaigning in support of Clause Four.

The structure proposed for the CFDU is not as democratic as it needs to be and gives the impression of being based on making it as difficult as possible for the SWP to take over. At this stage a far less rigid structure should be adopted. The officers should be elected by the conference, and the national committee should be open to representatives of supporting branches, regional left groups, and other campaigning groups like UNISON Fightback and UNITY.

Adopting a structure which is based on a paranoid fear of the SWP will just serve to undermine the whole point of the CFDU — fighting for democracy in the union.

Aliens on the brain



PEOPLE HAVE probably been having mystical, out-of-body experiences since our species first evolved. In the USA at present, there are lots of people who believe they have been abducted by aliens and had odd things done to them. Psychologist and science writer Susan Blackmore, a regular contributor to *New Scientist*, is taking part in experiments to test a theory which may explain some of these experiences. In last week's issue, she described how she found herself in a soundproofed room, wearing a helmet designed to deliver pulses of magnetic field to the temporal lobes of her brain.

These experiments are designed by Canadian neuro-scientist Michael Persinger to test his theory that people who have "psychic" experiences have temporal lobes with high "lability." This means that these lobes of the brain are more "unstable", having frequent bursts of electrical activity. Such people, he says, tend to be artistic, anxious and judgemental, while those with low "lability" rarely show bursts of activity in their temporal lobes and are much less imaginative.

Whether that is true, questionnaires show that those with high temporal lobe lability more frequently report sensations of floating, flying, leaving the body, déjà vu, mystical feelings, odd sensations or hallucinations before a seizure.

Another piece of the jigsaw is that abnormal temporal activity can occur as a result of a lack of oxygen. Persinger believes this may explain why people who have a "near-death" experience feel they have left their bodies. Other sensations such as seeing lights at the end of a tunnel may be due to the lack of oxygen to the vision centres of the brain. This type of scientific explanation of "near-death" experiences was the subject of a previous article by Blackmore which I summarised at the time.

Why should we need an explanation for bizarre beliefs such as that someone has been abducted by aliens? A typical report from the US includes waking in the middle of the night, seeing a "four feet high grey alien with an enormous head, spindly body and large, slanted, liquid black eyes", being compelled telepathically to follow it to a spaceship, being examined in a room full of tables with other people, having ova or sperm extracted painfully, having something implanted in one's nose, seeing jars containing half-human, half-alien fetuses, and seeing a nursery full of silent, sickly children.

There is, of course, an obvious explanation

for persons holding such beliefs. However, people reporting such experiences show no particular signs of mental disturbance or illness. Of at least average intelligence, they come from a wide range of backgrounds.

Scientists like Persinger are looking for a more down-to-earth explanation than that these people really were abducted by perverts from another planet. At the same time, they hope to find out more about how the mind works.

Some "abductees" recall their experiences only under hypnosis. This leads us to the wider question of "false memories." Blackmore points out that all memories are false in the sense that we do not have a video recorder in the brain. We only remember a selection of what has happened and perhaps we actually only recall the most recent "retelling" of an episode, even if it has had bits added or subtracted. Experiments have shown that it is possible to implant false memories which the subject may insist are true, even when the experiment is explained to them afterwards.

This cannot be the whole story, though, as some abductees recall their experiences without hypnosis and anyway people rarely create false memories completely out of the blue. Blackmore raises the question of sleep disturbances, in particular sleep paralysis. The muscles are paralysed during normal dreaming sleep; occasionally, the sleeper can become alert while this paralysis persists. This can lead to very unpleasant feelings, including the sense that one is being squashed, strangled or suffocated.

Sexual feelings can also be involved. Blackmore points to the prevalence of myths of evil visitations during sleep, the actual details being culturally determined. Perhaps the alien abduction experience is the modern equivalent of the incubus of Middle Ages Christendom.

Persinger's experiment was aimed at trying to stimulate temporal lobe activity, to see if abduction-like experiences could be induced. In using magnetic fields, he was trying to mimic the natural magnetic disturbances associated with earthquakes and other seismic events, since these seem to coincide with reports of UFO sightings, abductions and other strange phenomena.

Blackmore reports that she felt as if she were swaying and then being pulled by the shoulders. She also felt as if her legs were being pulled and distorted. She later experienced strong emotions of anger and fear. She at least was convinced that fairly complex thoughts could be unleashed within the brain, speculating that someone experiencing these in the middle of the night might search for an explanation that might include some alien being.

Alternatively, perhaps there really are some odd intergalactic kidnappers on the loose.

Support the Liverpool stewards!

SUPPORT IS FLOODING in for four Liverpool UNISON stewards facing disciplinary action from their union after supporting unofficial action over racism by workers at a day centre.

This includes backing for the Liverpool four from Yorkshire and Humberside and London regions (two of the biggest in the country), who have called for all disciplinaries to be abandoned and for Liverpool members to be allowed to have

the AGM they have denied for two years.

Support has also been won from the National Lesbian and Gay Conference, which voted unanimously to back them, and the National Black Workers Group recently re-affirmed their support.

A lobby has been called of the UNISON National Executive on Thursday December 8.

Details from Cate Murphy 051-638 0133.

Industrial Brief

170 workers at Hi-Tech foundry at Peristone, Barnsley, are currently on a series of one-day strikes over pay and conditions. In an attempt to split the strikers, management have announced 18 lay-offs due to "underproduction" while the action lasts. The next strike will be on Wednesday December 7. For more information, donations, speakers etc. contact Barnsley Trades Council, Race Common Road, Barnsley, 0226 286036.

On Thursday 24 November Barnsley college suspended Dave Gibson, the NATFHE assistant branch secretary, on a charge of alleged financial misconduct.

The charge revolves around use of a 19 pence (second class) stamp. But the action from the college management comes in the wake of enquiries made by Dave about financial mismanagement within the college.

The suspension has now been lifted but the charges remain. A 200 strong lobby of the college on Monday 28 November has been followed by further lobbies through the week by staff and students to the colleges action.

The real reason for the attack on Dave is that he has played a leading part in organising opposition to "pirate" contracts introduced without consultation.

SOCIALIST

To bet or not to bet

ORGANISER

By Joan Trevor

Blair slows his drive to tie Labour to capitalism

We can save Clause Four!

By Tom Rigby

ON WEDNESDAY 30 November Tony Blair and John Prescott presented a 17-page consultative document to the Labour Party's National Executive Committee. The document was designed to underpin their attempt to redefine the Party's aims and objectives.

According to a leak in the *Times* (26 November) the document rejected any commitment on principle to common ownership, supported a competitive market economy, and was very feeble on equality.

As we went to press we did not yet know precisely how Labour's National Executive responded to this paper — we know four members voted against it — nor how the "consultation" on the document will proceed.

But Blair and Prescott are evidently not quite in the position of strength that some of their media "spin doctors" would have us believe.

On the contrary, the powerful rank-and-file campaign in defence of Clause Four (which formally defines Labour as a party of the workers' movement committed to common ownership of the means of production) is seriously worrying the "modernisers."

They appear to be pulling back from the attempt to railroad a new Clause Four through the Party by means of a postal ballot backed up by a campaign by their friends in the mass media.

The document put to the Executive is — at 17 pages long! — not a direct replacement



Labour is not yet Blair's party. Photo: John Harris

for Clause Four, and it is unclear when any proposed replacement will appear.

Up and down the country, wherever Clause Four has been discussed, the overwhelming response from Party activists has been to support keeping it.

It is now up to the serious left to take the campaign to defend Clause Four to every ward and trade union branch in the country.

If we stand firm and concentrate our forces, we can win!

Contact the Defend Clause Four Campaign

c/o National Union of Mineworkers, Miners' Offices, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, Yorkshire S70 2LS; telephone enquiries: 071-582 2955 or 071-708 0511.

Soft-left "new Clause Four" flops

THE ATTEMPT by some "soft left" MPs, including Clare Short and Peter Hain, and the left weeklies *Tribune* and *New Statesman*, to launch a new Clause Four has been a comprehensive flop.

A poorly attended meeting in the House of Commons on Monday 21 November to "redraft Clause Four" saw 30 speakers from the floor with only two positively backing

the "soft-left" rewrite.

Last week's *Tribune* was forced to admit that their new Clause Four was causing division while activists were rallying to defend the existing formula.

Even the *New Statesman*, whose editor Steve Platt looked decidedly uncomfortable during the House of Commons meeting, has started talking about the dangers of a stitch-up.

ON THE whole, better not. But I bet you bought a National Lottery ticket, didn't you?

Camelot shouldn't get 5% of the proceeds. Arts and sports should be funded out of rich people's taxes instead of the proceeds of poorer people's squalid search for glamour and security.

But I bet you *did* buy a lottery ticket.

1.7 million lovely smackers. What would you do with it? See your family and friends right, no doubt.

My mother's friend won a jackpot of sorts when she married the rich man in the village.

She saw her family right but convention dictates that you do not share your bounty with the drinking partners of your former unlovely life.

That said, I don't understand how my mother's friend expected to be happy moving to the big house at the end of the village with a nanny and housecleaner to do for her, and living a lifestyle her friends couldn't share. My mother used to see her drifting around her living room behind the big curtains in the big window. She was desperately lonely. She used to come down to my mum's small flat to chat about the fewer and fewer things they had in common.

What would *you* do with all that lovely money if you won it? Or married it? Or got a good job and "earned" it?

Charities might benefit, just as they do from the National Lottery.

But it is ten years to the week since Band Aid promised to make the world a better place forever and people still starve and people still live so precariously they are at the mercy of the weather, heavy rains which become floods and wash away the homes and bodies of innumerable people.

Imagine being innumerable!

This is lunacy, no doubt about it, and the world needs to be changed. But no benefactor, however rich, will ever spend their winnings improving agriculture and building secure houses so that *no-one* starves any more or drowns in a flood.

Still, the world has to be changed.

People have to run things for themselves and not for profit.

We have to persuade people that that is the way to run the world, and moreover that it is possible to get from here to there.

We have to change people's ideas about the world and what they can do to change the world. And only we *can* change those ideas.

If you are so lucky as to win the Lottery over Christmas, and after you have seen your family right, we hope you will remember your erstwhile socialist friends in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

In the meantime, if you can make a small donation to help our work — a rather surer bet for the future of innumerable people everywhere — send cheques payable to "WL Publications Ltd" to: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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SOCIALIST inside this week
MALCOLM
 Behind the hype
 see page 19

Buses, rail, pits, public sector

STRIKE TOGETHER!

Unite to beat sackings, sell-offs, cuts