

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

FOR WORKERS' LIBERTY EAST AND WEST

THE SOCIALIST CONFERENCE

Where now for the left?

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Benn's diaries reviewed

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Moses must not hang!

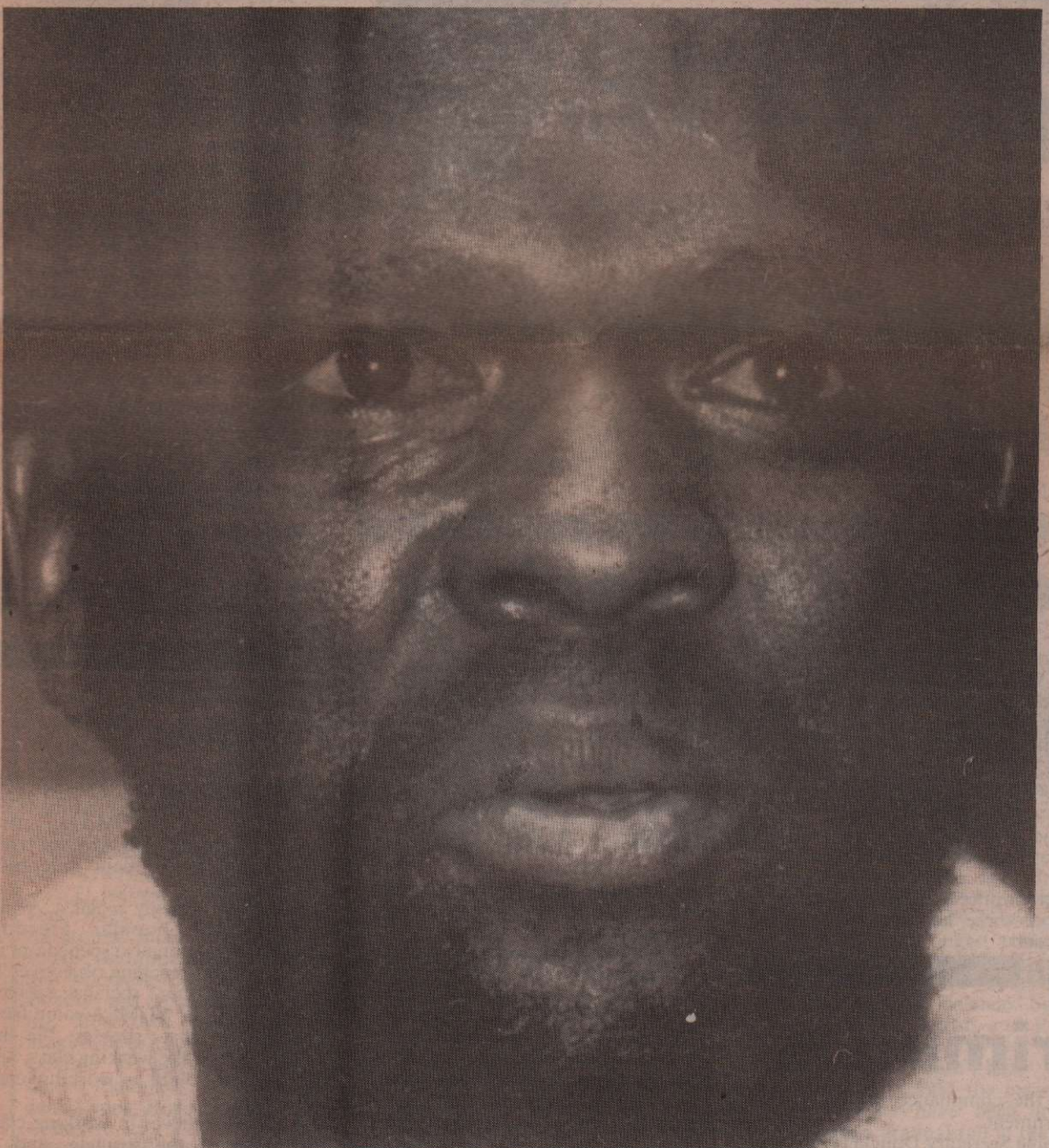


Photo: Ian Swindale

Moses Mayekiso is on trial for his life. The imprisoned general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), along with Paul Tshabalala, Richard Mdakane, Ob-ed Kopeng Bapela, and Mzwanele Mayekiso, is charged with treason.

They had organised the Alexandra Action Committee — a democratic, working-class body that led the popular struggle in Alexandra township.

The trial started formally this Tuesday (20 October) and it is set to last at least nine months. Bobby Marie, a NUMSA

Workers' leader on trial for his life

national organiser explained the significance of the trial:

"This is the most serious attack on our union. It is an attack directed against the involvement of the workers' movement — and workers' leaders like Moses — in community struggles."

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Why I support Eastern Europe solidarity conference

By Eric Heffer

Eric Heffer, Labour MP for Liverpool Walton, was one of the original sponsors of the November 7th Solidarity Conference. He explains why he is supporting it.

Everybody can be pleased at the developments taking place inside the Soviet Union. We should welcome the moves to greater freedom.

A play can now be staged in Moscow in which Rosa Luxemburg is mentioned. Trotsky is now considered a human being, and the other murdered Bolshevik leaders are now being talked about, although not on a

massive scale.

A minor demonstration by the Crimean Tatars met with official hostility and faced some police brutality and beatings but this level of repression is nothing like what existed before.

It is an indication that things are moving in the Soviet Union. I am told that it is quite possible that Gorbachev will rehabilitate Bukharin in a speech in November. If that happens then it raises the question of the rehabilitation of the other leaders, and particularly those on the left of the old Bolshevik Party which Stalin crushed.

But obviously, much more is required — in particular the right of workers to organise free trade

unions. Recently I wrote to the Russian ambassador about Klebanov, the Soviet miner who tried with some comrades of his to form an independent trade union and was thrown into a mental institution. He is still there. The reply I got was no different from earlier times — that he had been certified by 'experts' and so on.

I think we need to be on the side of those inside the Soviet Union who want to open it up. At the same time we must recognise that the Gorbachev people will only want to go so far, because they, too, are part of the bureaucratic set-up there.

We must give full support to all



Turn to back page

Moses: not just an individual case

The background to the trial of Moses Mayekiso is described by Geoff Schreiner, National Education Officer of Moses' union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa.

Comrade Moses Mayekiso is the general secretary of our union, the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA). He is

now facing charges of treason in South Africa — a charge which carries the death penalty.

It is important to situate his trial in the context of what's happening in our country at the moment.

The response of the state to the upsurge in political activity, and the growing centrality of the unions, was the State of Emergency. What this did was to provide a license for the police and the army to enter into the townships and to smash up political and trade union organisations.

Hundreds of activists have been killed...Over 25,000 people have been in detention at one stage or another. It has had a devastating effect.

But the trade union movement has emerged least scathed from the imposition of the State of Emergency...This has put a responsibility on the trade unions to lead the internal struggle against the regime and its

allies, and to make the politics of the working class the politics of the democratic majority of people.

This involves three central tasks. The first is to build unity in the trade union movement. Amongst the black trade unions there are two major federations, COSATU and NACTU, who at this stage haven't merged, and that is clearly a primary task.

Alliances

Second, the trade unions have to build alliances with progressive organisations in such a way that the interests of workers are expressed foremost.

Third, the trade unions have to give some real content to the struggle for an end to apartheid and an end to economic exploitation.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has committed itself to these tasks.

It's for these reasons that our general secretary Moses Mayekiso now languishes in jail facing charges of treason. Moses is undoubtedly a great worker leader, because of his commitment to the struggle, because of the great standing that he has among workers and students — not only in NUMSA and Alexandra township where he lives, but outside as well — and because of the clarity of vision that he has for the future of our country.

The campaign for his release is much broader than one person; it's not only about him. It's about encouraging direct support for the trade union movement in South Africa.

Our union has stated that it welcomes all forms of support in the international arena which are designed to secure the release of Moses Mayekiso, and indeed of all political prisoners. We hope that this can be

carried out in such a way that it builds unity in Britain and internationally, rather than causes divisions. We believe that the fate of Moses should never be used as a political football.

Campaigns for Moses' release launched by the international trade union movement, by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, by the Friends of Moses Mayekiso, etc., should not be seen as alternatives to one another. They all deserve support, as do other initiatives like the sanctions campaign.

Comrade Moses was in court today. He's been brought before the court on three occasions prior to this. Today his trial is supposed to start.

The main charge against him is that he sought to seize control of the residential area of Alexandra and to render it ungovernable by the state — by establishing organs of 'people's power', forming the Alexandra Action Committee of which he was the chairman, organising the residents into yard, street and area committees, forming 'people's courts', launching a campaign against the South African police, the South African Defence Force, the town council of Alexandra and against collaborators with the system, launching a rent boycott, attempting to force the state to accede to their demands, changing the names of streets to Biko, Mandela, ANC, Slovo street, etc.

The primary assumption of the state's case is that Comrade Moses and those accused with him owe at all relevant times allegiance to the South African state. Little need be said about such an assumption, given that the vast majority of people have no say in electing the government which is responsible for making laws in our country.

The ANC, the UDF and COSATU are all cited in the court papers. It's therefore, again, not just a case about an individual, not just about the four other people charged with him. It has much broader significance.

While I appreciate that the left in Britain is under heavy attack, finding ways out of that and building real socialist alternatives must also involve establishing solidarity with socialist causes in other areas of the world.

This is a talk given by Geoff Schreiner to Warwick University Labour Club.

Moses trial From page 1

Moses and his comrades represent the fusion of community and trade union struggles. Moses also represents an explicitly socialist trend of opinion in the giant federation COSATU.

NUMSA is openly socialist. While adopting the popular Freedom Charter, the union also spelled out its own, more far-reaching objectives — for a democratic, socialist society. The majority of NUMSA came from a tradition that stresses the independence of the working class, and the need to build a working class movement.

NUMSA believes in working class leadership of the struggle, and in workers' control, both of their own organisations and in the workplace. The Alexandra Action Committee was modelled on the kind of democracy developed by the trade unions.

Moses' trial is like the great Rivonia trial over 20 years ago that sentenced Nelson Mandela.

The state wants to eliminate Moses and people like him because they stand for political trade unionism. Apartheid wants tame trade unions. So the campaign for Moses' freedom is a campaign for the independence and rights of South African workers.

Moses and his comrades must not be allowed to rot in jail or die. The good work done by the Friends of Moses Mayekiso should be built upon, and the campaign should be opened up to involve all those who want to see Moses freed.

Sri Lanka

An escalating cycle of slaughter

By Clive Bradley

An estimated 20,000 Indian troops are currently bombarding Tamil positions at Jaffna, in the north of Sri Lanka, in an attempt to wipe out resistance by the Tamil 'Tiger' guerrillas.

The number of Indian 'peace-keeping' troops has been boosted as the deal arranged in late July between India, the Tigers and the Sri Lankan government completely collapses.

Communal violence has continued in an escalating cycle in Sri Lanka. Captured Indian soldiers were killed by Tamils following the suicide of fifteen young Tigers taken prisoner; a cyanide capsule is issued to all Tiger fighters. Slaughter of Tamil and Sinhalese civilians has occurred on a huge scale, and thousands have been turned into homeless refugees.

The Tigers have issued a statement denying reports that Indian captives had been 'necklaced' — a form of killing copied from the South African townships, in which the victim is punished by a burning tyre.

In the statement they also offered to negotiate if Indian forces withdraw to their camps.

There is no doubt that Indian troops are in Sri Lanka to serve the interests of the Indian government, part of which requires the beating into submission of the various Tamil guerrilla forces, principally the Tigers.

The pact itself, allowing for autonomous Tamil areas on the island, represented an extension of Indian regional power and influence. A clash between Indian troops and Tamil guerrillas was always likely.

The Tamil Tigers have a brutal communalist ideology that is a long way from socialism, although they are described as 'Marxist-inspired'. As well as indiscriminate massacres of Sinhalese civilians — in response to state-sponsored massacres of Tamils since 1983 — the Tigers have given short shrift to rival Tamil groups.

Nevertheless it is unquestionable that only the full right to self-determination for the Tamils will move towards a solution for Sri Lanka, given the scale of hostility between the two communities. 'Autonomy' such as that in Raiiv Gandhi's past does not satisfy Tamil demands.

In fact, most of the Sinhalese left, far from recognising the right of the Tamils to a separate state, have tended towards, or embraced, Sinhalese chauvinism. Central to anti-Tamil agitation after the pact was announced was the leftist — but Sinhalese chauvinist — JVP, which had staged an uprising in 1971.

The Tamils in Sri Lanka should be granted the right to self-determination including the right to separate completely from Sri Lanka.



Tamil protest in London. Photo: Lanre Fehintola, IFL.

USSR

Workers resist Gorbachev

A strike in a bus manufacturing plant in the town of Likino in the USSR highlights the resistance of workers to the ruling bureaucracy. It shows some of the reality of 'glasnost'.

'Glasnost' means 'openness' — and the fact that this three-day strike in a town near the Ural mountains was reported in the Soviet press shows that changes are occurring. But for the workers 'Gorbachevism' also means wage cuts and a longer work-

ing week.

A state quality control organisation decided to reduce the numerical target of buses produced at the factory in Likino, ostensibly to improve them. Instead of 33-34 buses a day, the factory was to make 20-25.

The loss in bonuses for workers was at least 60-70 roubles (£60-£70) a month. Yet even to meet the new targets, workers had to work an extra two or three hours a day, and all weekend.

Campaign

Nazi war criminals

By Mary Green

A major campaign to put pressure on the British government to deal with Nazi war criminals living in this country was launched last week by Searchlight magazine and the Union of Jewish Students.

Speaking at the launch of Action on War Crimes Campaign, Paul Frosh, chair of UJS said: "We aim to put pressure on the Home Office to take action against alleged Nazi war criminals. We want to bring these people to justice and commemorate the memory of their victims by seeing them tried, preferably in this country."

Evidence collected by Searchlight and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which has been tracking down Nazis for forty years, show that there are at least 17 Nazi war criminals living here

with the compliance of the British government.

Home Secretary Douglas Hurd will soon receive in his mailbag up to 50,000 postcards, featuring Antonas Gecas in his Lithuanian Police Battalion uniform and sporting the Iron Cross. Gecas admits to commanding a platoon which took part in the massacre of Jews in Lithuania and Byelorussia.

"I don't even put 'alleged' before this man's name" commented Gerry Gable, publisher of Searchlight. "He is a war criminal, guilty of the most bestial acts". Gecas has been living safely in Scotland since 1947.

Australia has recently changed its law so that Nazi war criminals can be tried there, and Canada is about to do the same. The Action on War Crimes Campaign is hoping that concerted pressure through the postcard campaign and a lobby of Parliament on 28 November will force the British government to take action here.



It's that man again

By Jim Denham

You can't open a tabloid newspaper these days without seeing the smiling face of Derek Hatton.

Quite often you don't have to actually open the paper. Our Derek is on the front page. Usually it's because he's in the company of a posh young woman (like banking heiress Katie Baring), with whom his name is being 'romantically linked'.

Usually the scene is some swanky night spot, and *always* Derek is looking straight at the camera, grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

Monday's *Sun* carried a rather more mundane 'Bo Derek' story: he has just acquired a personalised number plate to go with his red BMW. After a little manipulation, the number DEG 5Y reads DEGSY, which is apparently what his oppo-ees in Liverpool call him.

Degsy explained: "It is legitimate because I am in the public relations business, and images are important".

I recently asked a long-standing *Militant* full-timer what he thought about Hatton's antics in the popular press. The man became very irate and claimed that I was trying to smear Comrade Hatton and that people couldn't help it if they were hounded by the press and photographed unawares.

I tried to point out that in all the photos of Hatton I've seen recently, he is quite plainly posing for the cameras, and anyway a man anxious to avoid publicity does not hire *Daily Telegraph* editor Max Hastings' PR services at a rumoured £600 per week. The Katie Baring story, for instance, was deliberately concocted by Hatton's advisers to get him into the papers.

So what is Degsy up to? Does he want to get into television? How much of his earnings are going to help the other surcharged ex-councillors? Is he still associated with *Militant*? Why don't they get rid of this charlatan?

I think we should be told.

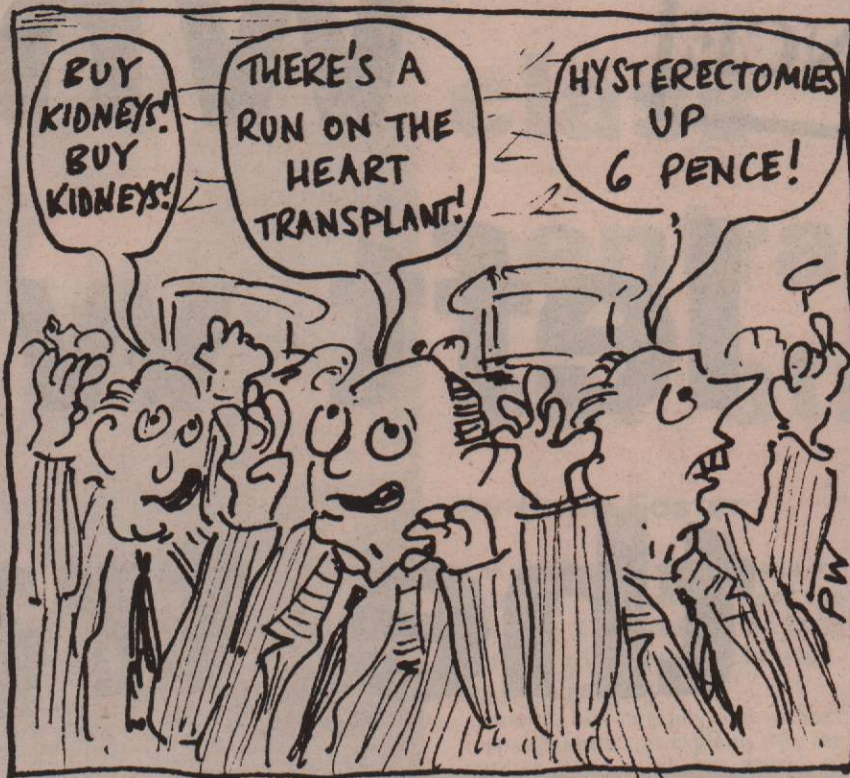
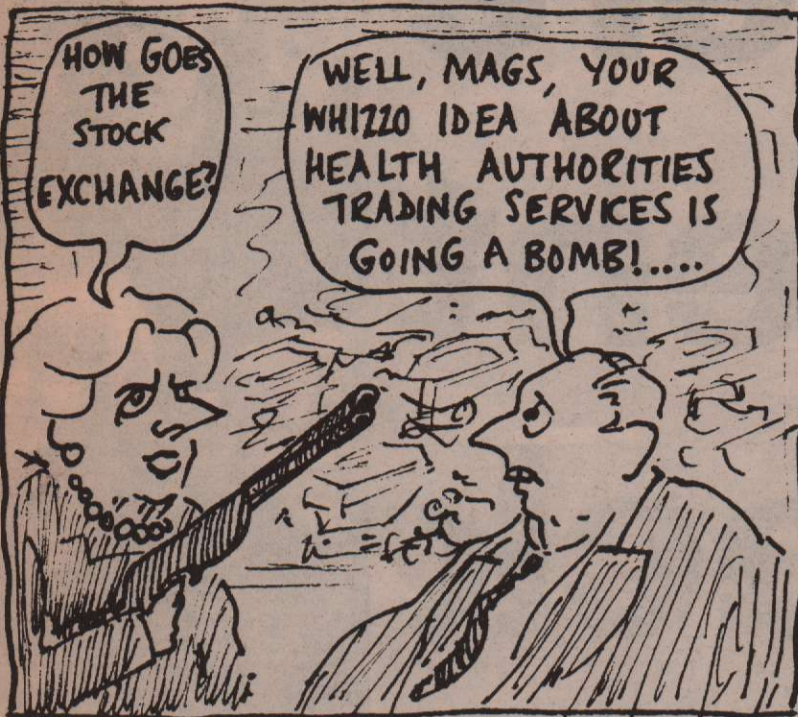
Some people on the left think that anti-semitism is a thing of the past, in Britain at least. They should read the *Sunday Telegraph*.

What would you say was most significant about the Guinness scandal? The fact that it would never have been uncovered at all if Wall Street had the same voluntary system of self-regulation as the City? The fact that these very rich men, who stole millions of pounds, will probably receive lighter sentences than someone who fiddles their social security? The thin and rather vague dividing line between the practices of Messrs Ronson, Saunders, Seelig and Co. and what is considered vigorous, aggressive business practice in Thatcher's Britain?

No. According to Graham Paterson in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the most important aspect of the scandal is that Ernest Saunders, Sir Jack Lyons, Gerald Ronson, Roger Seelig, and their associates Ivan Boesky and Anthony Parnes, are all Jews.

"So sensitive are both Jews and Gentiles to the merest hint of anti-semitism that when this newspaper approached a number of British Jews and asked them about the effects on their community of the charges, we encountered a great deal of anxiety". I wonder why?

BACK FROM VANCOUVER.....



The party's over

EDITORIAL

The fairground whirligig of the casino economy is shuddering to a halt and throwing off many of its riders.

Since 1983, vast fortunes have been made from speculation, as share prices doubled both in New York and in London. Trading in bonds and in currencies also grew explosively.

Profits

This was the Brave New World of Thatcher and Reagan. Brash, hard-driving entrepreneurs would coin big profits, and — so the Tories said — the gains would be distributed widely through people's capitalism, with everyone bar the hopelessly feckless having their stake in the stock markets.

Now someone who put £2,000 into the Government's share offers has seen £1,900 wiped off their gains in a few days. Last November the fairground music turned discordant for the first time when one of the biggest operators on Wall Street, Ivan Boesky, was arrested for insider dealing. Since then many more money-moguls have fallen into disgrace, in London as well as New York — Ernest Saunders, Gerald Ronson, Jack Lyons, Roger Seelig, Geoffrey Collier...

"Just exceptions," they said.



"there's nothing basically wrong with the system". And then on Monday 19 October, Wall Street crashed, falling twice as far as on the first day of the Great Crash of 1929.

It is not certain that the stock market collapse will lead to a general slump comparable to 1929-32. But it is not impossible, either.

The banking system in the big capitalist countries is more secure and resilient than it was in 1929. The capacity of governments to step in and put a floor to slumps by their own spending and enterprise is greater.

But there are also new forms of instability in the capitalist world today which did not exist in 1929.

Capitalism is far more international today than it was then. Huge sums of money fly around the world in international speculation which no government can control or even monitor.

For almost 20 years world capitalism has operated on the basis of an elaborate bluff, using the dollar as international money when everyone knows that the dollar is certainly not as good as gold. The bluff has been based on the strength of the US economy. But that strength is dwindling.

Since 1983 the USA has had a sort of boom, propelled by enormous

arms spending. The increased demand generated by that boom has brought it the hugest trade deficits the world has ever seen, approaching \$200 billion a year. For a while that trade deficit was balanced by a flood of Japanese, British and European capital into the US. But everyone knew that it couldn't last.

Since early 1985 the big capitalist governments have been trying to organise a gradual fall in the dollar's exchange rate against other currencies. The idea was that this would make US exports more competitive, reduce the US's trade deficit, and thus avoid the risk of the dollar's value collapsing suddenly.

Deficit

The dollar has fallen gradually, but the US trade deficit remains huge. Now, as Peter Rodgers put it in the *Guardian*, "A combination of a Japanese withdrawal from new United States investment and a breakdown of the international agreement to support the dollar would risk both a free-falling US currency and exceptionally high dollar interest rates."

This would wreck the already-strained system of world trade. Most of world trade depends on the willingness of capitalists of all countries

to accept US dollars in payment for their goods. If they won't accept dollars, world trade could collapse into a series of one-off negotiated barter-type deals.

A rapid rise in US interest rates, and a slump in US imports, would also unleash disaster in another direction. The simmering Third World debt crisis would become unsustainable, and major banks might collapse as a result.

There are already many signs that the sickly boom which started in 1983 is ending. Fixed business investment was stagnant in the big capitalist economies in 1986. The growth of output in the US and Japan last year was barely 2 per cent. Investment by manufacturing companies in Japan dropped 6 per cent.

If the Wall Street crash spills over into a Tokyo stock market crash, or a collapse of the dollar, or both, 20 October will mark the beginning of a new great slump.

The crash is a stinging and complete rebuff to the right-wingers in the labour movement who have been arguing that Labour must accept the "new realities" created by Thatcherism. Capitalism is as diseased, as anarchic, as inhuman and as chaotic as ever. We cannot afford to tinker with it. We must replace it with working class socialism.

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Where the left went off the track

In 1980, after the democratic reforms were pushed through the Labour Party, Socialist Organiser commented: "It is one of the most important political breakthroughs for the labour movement in decades: but at best it is half a revolution: the opening half. We would do well to remember what Saint-Just said during the French Revolution: Those who make a revolution by halves only dig their own graves."

Seven years later, we are living with the consequences of the left's failure after 1980. The left flopped in local government, in the Labour Party the left has been driven back. In the unions the left is weak.

The movement to democratise the Labour Party, and with it the unions, could have changed the shape of politics in Britain. But it lacked a political perspective; it lacked socialist ideas; and that lack was the root of failure.

For that reason, it is excellent to have conferences like that in Chesterfield, to discuss and clarify socialist ideas, and so avoid future mistakes.

Here and now, there is a felt need for an alternative to 'Kinnockism'. Both in the Labour Party and the unions, there is a continuing shift to the right, and in the wake of the most recent Labour Party conference there will be further shifts under the guise of the 'policy review'. The need for a

The Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Socialist Society, and the Conference of Socialist Economists, have called a Socialist Conference in Tony Benn's constituency of Chesterfield for 24-25 October. It will be a welcome chance for the left to take stock. John Bloxam looks at why the left has had setbacks since its peak in the early 1980s, and draws some conclusions.

coherent alternative has helped make the Chesterfield conference such a big event.

Moreover, many of the briefing papers that are to be discussed show a good beginning. The paper on the EEC rejects the narrow British nationalism of the traditional left. On Eastern Europe, there is a healthy anti-Stalinism. And there is a useful statement of the basic strategic relationship between the working class and socialism.

This should also provide the model for an alternative method of discussion. The Labour leadership's policy review will take place behind closed doors, with hand-picked committees, tightly controlled by Westminster and Walworth Road. Open, grass roots discussion — genuinely open — can be counterposed to this bureaucratic style.

Tony Benn has described Chester-

field as "not a Labour Party conference; it's a conference of socialists." And it is good to involve a broad range of socialists, including those outside the Labour Party.

But the Labour Party is and will be central to any socialist strategy in Britain. Of course many people will be repelled by the actions of the Labour leadership, and to draw them in to joint activity a sensitive approach will be necessary: they are, in any case, right to be repelled.

But the course that many will advocate at Chesterfield, of voluntary self-exclusion from the Labour Party, is a sectarian one. Labour is an integral part of the labour movement as a whole — it is the trade unions' political wing.

One of the main causes of our problems today was the failure of many socialists to fight seriously in the

Labour Party in the past. It should be a lesson of the period since 1980, for example.

Socialist ideas and a fight for democracy in the labour movement need to be combined and integrated. If in the early '80s we had a democracy movement that was politically rudderless, it would be a disaster now to have coherent socialist ideas without a fight to change the labour movement organisationally.

It is wrong for a section of the left to turn their backs on 'mere constitutional change' in the name of socialist ideas. Accountability has to remain a major issue. We need to create a leadership accountable to the rank and file.

There is an understandable mood in the movement to forget 'the politics of denunciation', or a 'theory of personal betrayal', and of course reflex accusations of sell-out as explanation of the situation are utterly inadequate. But it is not 'personality politics' to recognise that the class struggle is fought, in a sense, by individuals. Leaderships do lead, and often badly. We do need a leadership willing to fight for and stand by democratically-decided policies.

Clearly, the argument for democratising and changing the Labour Party has less force now than it had when people had recent experience of a right-wing Labour government ditching party policy. But it is no less valid. Vladimir Derer is quite right to warn that the 'left's response must be to improve its effec-



tiveness, not to abandon political struggle."

What does the left in the Labour Party need to do now? Certain democratic demands inside the party remain to be won — in terms of women's organisation and black self-organisation. And we need to revive the campaign for democracy in general.

The mechanisms of mandatory reselection exist, despite the leadership's success in weakening them. Labour MPs should be made to give regular reports to aggregate meetings, to establish a link between the selection/reselection procedure and the body to which the MP is accountable.

The left should urgently consider having a candidate or candidates for the leadership election next year. There is no principle that insists of us that we have a candidate each year. But our failure to do so since 1983 has helped the Kinnock leadership consolidate itself, and rendered a left-wing challenge on policy less credible. 'Put up or shut up' has been

How yuppie socialism

Martin Thomas reviews 'Out of the wilderness: diaries 1963-67', by Tony Benn. Hutchinson, £14.95.

These, according to Tony Benn, are "the diaries of a socialist-in-the-making".

In 1963, when the diary opens, Tony Benn was a middle-of-the-road Labour politician of long standing, an MP since 1951. In the period covered by this volume, he became, first, Postmaster General and then Minister of Technology in the

1964-70 Labour government.

In 99 cases out of 100, such experience of office drives middle-of-the-road or even left-wing Labour politicians to the right. They identify with the job of managing capitalism.

They absorb the weary realism of the conservative civil servants who surround them. Their stance hardens as they defend decisions made in the corridors of power against criticism from the rank and file.

But Tony Benn, like a very few others, reacted differently. When he was frustrated by the inert resistance of the Establishment to even minor reforms — his attempt, as Postmaster General, to introduce postage stamps not bearing the Queen's head figures largely in this volume — his problem-solving mind turned to more radical conclusions.

Since 1979 Tony Benn has distanced himself decisively from the inner circles of Labour's leadership, and stood firmly with the left on issues

like the miners' strike and the witch-hunt in the Labour Party.

It is hardly a typical story of the making of a socialist. But it is an instructive one. Tony Benn sums up his conclusions in his foreword:

"One of the Labour Party's failings is that it has never seriously concerned itself with State power... State power, ...reflected in the organisation of the civil, military and security services, had prevented Labour Ministers carrying through any but minor changes..."

The centralisation of power within the Labour Party in the hands of Labour Prime Ministers is another conservative factor. The economic power of industrialists and bankers, and the influence of the media, also protect privilege.

Thus "Britain is only superficially government by MPs and the voters who elect them. Parliamentary democracy is, in truth, little more than a means for securing a

periodical change in the management team, which is then allowed to preside over a system that remains in essence intact".

Comparing these conclusions with the ideas that Tony Benn expressed in his diaries 20-odd years ago shows us that, despite everything, Labour's left has made some progress in those years.

After being told by Harold Wilson that he would be Postmaster General if Labour won the 1964 election, Tony Benn wrote in his diary: "I feel like a revolutionary who has been told by the insurgent general that when we capture London I am to take over the Post Office."

Such enthusiasm was common in 1964, even among those who stood much further to Labour's left than Benn. But the political substance of this "revolution" was nothing more than vague talk of modernisation, efficiency, and a bit more welfare.

The Benn of these diaries supports

incomes policy. He enforces it against post workers. He is privately dismayed about Harold Wilson's attack on the 1966 seamen's strike as engineered by "communists", but has no doubts about the principle of opposing the strike.

He thinks that the Labour Party is held back by "the terrible handicap of trade-union leadership", and that "The control of the National Executive of the Labour Party by the trade union leaders...is one of the sources of Conservative strength."

He sees the more middle class composition of the 1966 intake of Labour MPs as welcome evidence that "The Labour Party is in the process of transforming itself into a genuine national party".

He suggests to Harold Wilson that Labour should present itself as "the natural ally of the managers and the people who run industry". He wants the Post Office broken up and freed from political control so that it can



a telling right-wing answer.

Right now, an alternative leadership, clearly standing for the working class against the present leadership, would help the revival of the left at the grass roots.

It is a comment on the left's weakness that the first talk of a challenge to Hattersley has come from the soft-left jockeying for position.

A weakness of the left in the Labour Party has always been its lack of a base in the rank and file of the unions, which it has tended to see as the exclusive property of the general secretaries. The use of the block vote solidly behind Kinnock at this year's conference highlights the dangers. In fact it was the block vote more than any other organisational factor that derailed the democracy movement after 1980. Now, conference has decided to allow reduced fees for trade union levy-paying members. If the left doesn't act, this will be used as a 'Kinnock levy'.

Without big changes at the base of

the unions, and a radical democratisation of the unions, the bureaucrats will hold the Party for the right wing. There is no other way round this problem.

In the first place, and in a sense most important, the political battles will be local. Local Labour Parties need to learn some of the lessons of the last election: the Party generally did best where there were left-wing candidates and campaigning local parties. Where CLPs turn out to struggle, and work with local working class people, new recruits are drawn in — the real raw material for a root-and-branch transformation of the party. The left needs a serious campaigning orientation — away from committee rooms in local government and onto picket lines and demonstrations.

And the left needs to focus on basic issues that affect working class people, organising against government attacks on housing, the poll tax, and so on. Basic, grass-roots campaigning work on local estates and in-

volving local people will rebuild the left.

The Chesterfield Organising Committee's practical proposals — for a Socialist Directory providing assistance in campaigns — could provide real assistance in this.

The defence of local government services and jobs will continue to be a major concern for the left. But as once again the Labour councils themselves fail to present a clear strategy for resistance to the government — or any strategy at all — we should be clear that it will be necessary to support workers in struggle against local councils. Working class people should not be asked to accept cuts implemented by Labour councils in a supposedly benign way.

The Chesterfield conference could provide a forum to put the left back on track. Ideas can start to be thrashed out. We can begin a comradely debate. We need to make sure that we develop a clear direction for the future.

failed in 1964

become more dynamic and enterprising, perhaps in cooperation with private capital. "Somehow one has got to combine profitability for the public sector with the sort of drive and business sense which someone like Lew Grade has got".

Today, even after all the efforts of the New Realists, such views would stand clearly on the right of the Labour Party. In the mid-'60s they did not.

Tony Benn has done us a service by honestly documenting his past views. He shows us that the current attempts by some Labour leaders to return to such policies of classless, technocratic modernism are nothing more than a reversion to old ideas which have failed in the past.

Tony Benn's conclusions, in his foreword, about the State machine, should lead to further conclusions about socialist strategy. The liberation of the working class cannot be achieved by socialists taking over the

existing state machine. It can be won only by the struggle of the workers themselves.

We will have to dismantle the existing state machine and replace it by a new one, based on election and accountability of top officials and an end to bureaucratic privileges.

Socialism requires a democracy much wider than the Westminster system — not only the abolition of the monarchy and House of Lords, but also the creation of a 'workers' parliament' of delegates, mandated and recallable at any time.

So far Tony Benn has not drawn these further conclusions. This volume hints why. The diary records frequent and consistent visits to parties and receptions at Eastern bloc embassies, and private lunches and dinners with Eastern bloc diplomats. Benn indicates that these contacts had been regular since the early '50s.

He is dismayed by the sleekness of

some of these Eastern bloc fat cats, and by the fact that they seem to get on better with the Tories than with Labour: but he regards them as an authentic voice of socialism and Marxism.

Now it is the business of diplomats to talk to politicians, and politicians to talk to diplomats. But Tony Benn's reluctance to support Solidarnosc must have something to do with these long-standing contacts. And if you see the USSR as socialist, then it is difficult to move from rejection of existing capitalist structures to advocating working class democracy.

We still need much more accountability in the labour movement, and many more channels for the rank and file activists to get ideas across to the movement's leaders. Otherwise the major political pole of reference for those leaders who do reject the capitalist Establishment will always be the alternative Establishment of the Eastern bloc.

Making class central to our strategy

By Colin Foster

The most important section in the Briefing Document for the Socialist Conference on 24-25 October is the one on "The working class and socialism".

Briefly, but carefully and without dogmatic bluster, it explains why the working class must be central to socialist politics. Important as women's and black struggles are, they cannot substitute for class struggle. "The working class (which includes both women and men, black and white) has a special position in the capitalist system which gives workers both the most direct interest in opposing capital and the greatest capacity to do so." Only the working class can make socialism.

Centrality

The document, however, is a collection of papers by different authors, of varying political colours. This generates an interesting variety of ideas and questions, but it means that the idea of the centrality of the conflict between capital and labour cannot structure the document.

Thus the section on 'Production, Jobs and Services' — which should be pivotal — is a series of disjointed chapters. They are all valuable in themselves, but they do not add up to a strategy.

The casino economy of international finance is condemned and exchange controls are proposed. The increased mobility of capital, and its more ruthless use of cheap labour both in the West and in the Third World, are analysed. Increased arms spending is shown to have sucked up a big proportion of high-technology development.

The possibilities are discussed for workers to redesign technology to meet their needs rather than capital's. Campaigns are proposed for a shorter working week and safer work conditions. The increased inequality created by the Tories' policies is condemned, especially as it affects women and young people. Problems of public ownership and democratic control are discussed.

The difficulty is that each topic is discussed separately, with a focus on what can be done to get improvements on that particular front. This piecemeal approach is especially unsuitable for dealing with the central struggle between labour and capital — which is what 'Production, Jobs and Services' is all about. The tiger of capital cannot be skinned claw by claw.

The basic objective of labour in its struggle against capital must be the overthrow of capital — the replacement of production for profit by pro-

duction for need. That means a planned economy under a regime of workers' democracy, workers' control in workplaces, and public ownership.

Partial measures have to be located in relation to that basic objective. Marxists discussing this in the Third International, with Lenin and Trotsky, put it like this: we should take up those "demands, based on the deeply rooted needs of the masses, which are such as will organise the masses and not merely lead them into the struggle."

"All concrete watchwords originating in the economic needs of the workers must be utilised to focus and stimulate the struggle for workers' control of production, which must not assume the form of a bureaucratic organisation of the social economy under capitalism, but of an organisation fighting against capitalism through the workers' committees as well as through the trade unions".

This approach — based on the self-liberation of the working class, or 'socialism from below' — gives us some pointers about key demands today. Work-sharing without loss of pay, under workers' control; expansion of public services under workers' control; a charter of workers' and trade-union rights — these are "such as will organise the masses and not merely lead them into the struggle."

In this perspective some of the ideas in the conference document seem not so much wrong as just off-beam. Workers' cooperatives and local enterprise boards may do useful things, but they are side-alleys from the main road of class struggle. A workers' government in Britain, if isolated, would have no choice but to impose exchange controls, but exchange controls in isolation are not socialist at all.

International

The answer to the international casino economy should be international workers' unity. The briefing document's section on 'Europe and the EEC' is far better on this.

"Purely 'national' perspectives for socialist change" such as the old Alternative Economic Strategy are, it argues, ineffective. "The emergence of the EEC as a semi-state is a reality which cannot be ignored by the labour movement". Instead of the old nationalist cry 'Britain out of the EEC' we should propose, not support for the EEC, but "demands for an alternative 'social Europe'... West German level dole payments, Dutch pensions, Danish social security payments..."

The practical internationalism of this section, and the clear class focus of the section on strategy, should form the basis for a new, integrated perspective for the left.

S THE SOCIALIST CONFERENCE

The Shop Stewards

With the outbreak of World War 2, trade union leaders were restored to the corridors of power they had vacated in the '20s

With the trade unions' arch-bureaucrat, Ernest Bevin, at the Ministry of Labour for the Churchill/Attlee Coalition government, the trade union leaders were even more thoroughly integrated into the state in World War 2 than they had been between 1914 and 1918

Anti-strike legislation (Order 1305) was introduced. Employers immediately took advantage of the situation to victimise shop stewards, and there were numerous strikes over this issue. In 1941 the Essential Works Order gave some protection to jobs. Offensive strikes began.

The great majority of workers supported the war, but there was discontent with the way it was being run. Croucher quotes one observer:

"Clydeside workers are also having a war of their own.. they cannot overcome the bitter memory of industrial insecurity in the past ten years, and their distrust of the motives of managers and employers"

The average number of strike days in 1939-45 was well above the level of the depression years of the '30s although most strikes were short, sharp and successful.

The Aircraft Shop Stewards' National Council now attempted to embrace all engineering workers, and renamed itself the Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards' National Council.

Its April 1940 conference was attended by 283 stewards from 140 factories, and the sales of its newspaper expanded. The Communist Party, which initially opposed the war, was an important influence on this movement.

After the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 the Communist Party switched to supporting the war. It opposed strikes and backed productivity drives.

Anti-fascist

This together with the general anti-fascist sentiment which the ruling class exploited, ensured that no movement similar to that of the first war emerged.

In some situations the Joint production Committees set up to draw the stewards into collaboration with management served to legitimise and strengthen the stewards' organisation, however. The stewards were involved more than ever before in the actual organisation and control of work.

A major breakthrough compared with the first war was that most stewards' committees were joint committees on which the skilled sat with the unskilled. Committees had their own libraries and published their own annual reports, although facilities on the whole remained poor

Shop meetings and report-backs were regular and central to maintaining roots in the membership. Most stewards, given the personal and social as well as industrial nature of their members' problems during wartime, developed a close rapport with them.

Factory bulletins and newspapers had a tremendous flowering in this period. Combine committees provided organisation outside the plant in firms such as A V Roe, Daimler, Dunlop, and Bickers Armstrong.

As the war ended, employers attempted to take back many of these gains. In many factories there were redundancies. Another parallel with today: some stewards committees attempted to respond to redundancies with plans for alternative production.

The movement of 1918 had not been recaptured, still less the aspira-

John McIlroy concludes his series of articles on the trade unions with the rise of the militant shop stewards' movement of the '60s and '70s.

tions of the Minority Movement.

The war had ensured that shop stewards representing their members would be once more an essential feature of industrial relations. But the influence of the CP made it probable that it would be on the basis of sectional organisation limited to industrial struggles and with powerful tendencies towards collaboration with the employers and government in the 'national interest'.

The long boom was now to turn that probability into reality.

In the twenty years after the war, the number and organisation of shop stewards expanded continuously.

In 1947 the AEU recorded 19,000 stewards. By 1962 it was about 32,000. In 1961 the total number of stewards in the UK was estimated at 90,000. Research for the Donovan Commission seven years later put the figure at 175,000.

That research also recorded a spread of the shop steward from engineering into the distributive and service occupations. 45% of stewards were still in the metal industries, but 36% were outside manufacturing, including 12% in transport and communication.

The shop steward in the early '60s was a representative identifying closely with his or her work group and bargaining directly on their behalf.

The steward bargained over a whole range of problems affecting the control of work — its organisation, the degree of effort, the level of overtime. S/he was particularly powerful where bargaining was over money, as for example with piecework systems.

In those circumstances, s/he was able to develop a whole range of custom-and-practice controls, which acted for the benefit of the work group and could be exploited on its behalf in the high-demand market conditions of the long boom.

Full employment swung the bargaining power to the shop floor. In short, sharp, unofficial strikes, small groups could jack up their earnings.

In what was called 'wage drift', increases at the local level outstripped the national agreements which continued in the post-war period.

Autonomy

Shop stewards gained some autonomy both from the union and from higher management. As national agreements were increasingly irrelevant, so was the outside structure of the union.

Joint committees of stewards with strong support from the membership were able to establish their own funds, produce their own publicity, and link up across plants.

"Our evidence is that more than two-thirds of shop stewards have at their place of work a committee in which they meet with management to discuss and settle problems, and that two-thirds of these committees are multi-union. Where that is so, the committees are not easily made responsible to a trade union authority outside the factory." (Donovan report).

"In effect the shop steward organisation at Ford was thus involv-

ed in an attempt to establish standards for the rest of labour informally on a 'custom and practice' basis and in the face of disapproval of top management — even if it met with frequent concessions from lower level supervision" (Turner, Clack and Roberts, 'Labour Relations in the Motor Industry').

"In short, it appears to me in the light of the undisputed facts disclosed in this inquiry that there is a private union within a union enjoying immediate and continuous touch with the men in the shop, answerable to no superiors and in no way officially or constitutionally linked with the union hierarchy" (Report of Court of Inquiry into dispute at Briggs Motor Bodies Ltd., 1957).

Hostile

Union officialdom, employers, and the state were alike hostile to strong independent workplace organisation. Lord Carron, president of the AEU, said of shop stewards in 1960:

"These men are werewolves who are rushing madly towards industrial ruin and howling delightedly at the foam on their muzzles which they accept as their only guiding light."

A 1960 TUC report on shop stewards showed the same attitude less graphically. "Unions should be more vigilant, and if after a warning a steward repeats actions contrary to rules and agreements, his credentials (which are his opportunities to do good or in a few cases to do harm) should be withdrawn."

In the same year, a TUC general council member denounced combine committees as 'a challenge to established union arrangements' attempting to 'usurp the policy-making functions of unions'.

Sometimes — as at Ford in 1962 — management were able to push through a hard line and weaken shop floor organisation, demonstrating the inadequacies of sectionalism. More often they successfully accommodated the stewards' challenge.

By the mid-'60s, however, with the UK's economic situation getting worse, 'disorder' in industrial relations was increasingly seen as a key obstacle to the preferred solution — wage cutting through incomes policy.

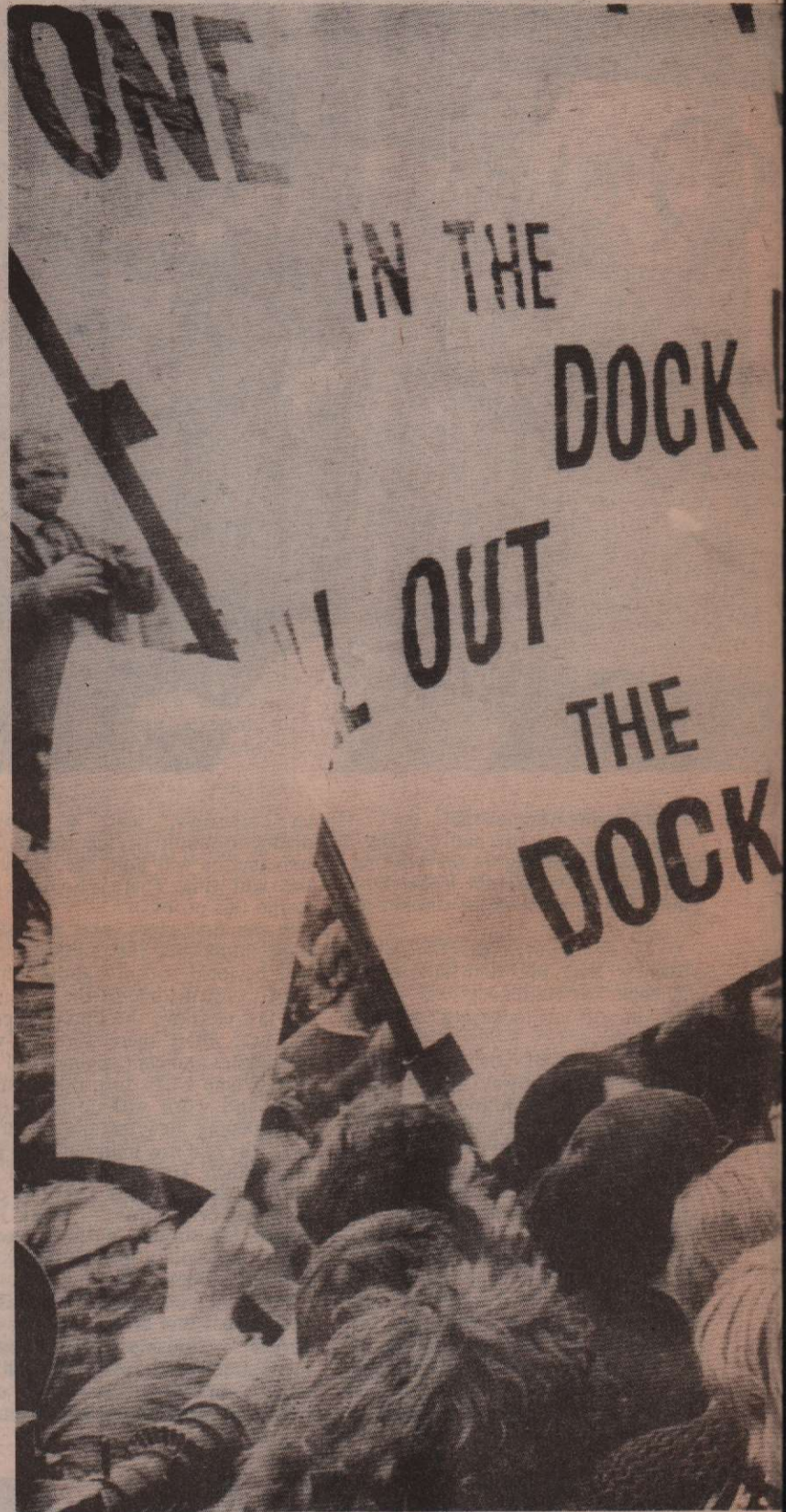
Attention focused on the steward, notably in the Donovan report.

Donovan pointed out that: "for the most part the steward is viewed by others and views himself as an accepted, reasonable, and even moderating influence, more of a lubricant than an irritant".

Their strategy was to strengthen this side of the steward's role. Employers and unions should work together, the report argued, "to recognise, define and control the part played by shop stewards in our collective bargaining system."

Shop floor organisation was inevitable — and it could be helpful. The point was to control and influence it.

The steward could be civilised and drawn away from his or her members by the creation of written agreements, to codify and pin down 'custom and practice', which the stewards would then have to enforce. The replacement of piecework by



The 1972 docks strike. Three of the stewards threatened with jail stand up

measured time systems, work study, and job evaluation, could undermine the power of the section steward and formalise and rationalise the link between work and payment.

Legitimise

Written procedures would legitimise management's decisions because they had been taken after discussion and negotiation. They would draw the steward into more 'rational' argument, and also pull bargaining up from the machine room to the committee room.

Formalised bargaining at plant or company level would lead to a centralisation of power at committee level and a loss of power at section level. The development of full-time stewards; the management-run closed shop with deduction of dues at source; the extension of facilities for stewards; time off for training in industrial relations — these would encourage more 'rational' behaviour, and distance the stewards from their membership.

By the end of the '60s trade union leaders, too, had replaced their earlier hostility to workplace

organisation by an attempt to incorporate it.

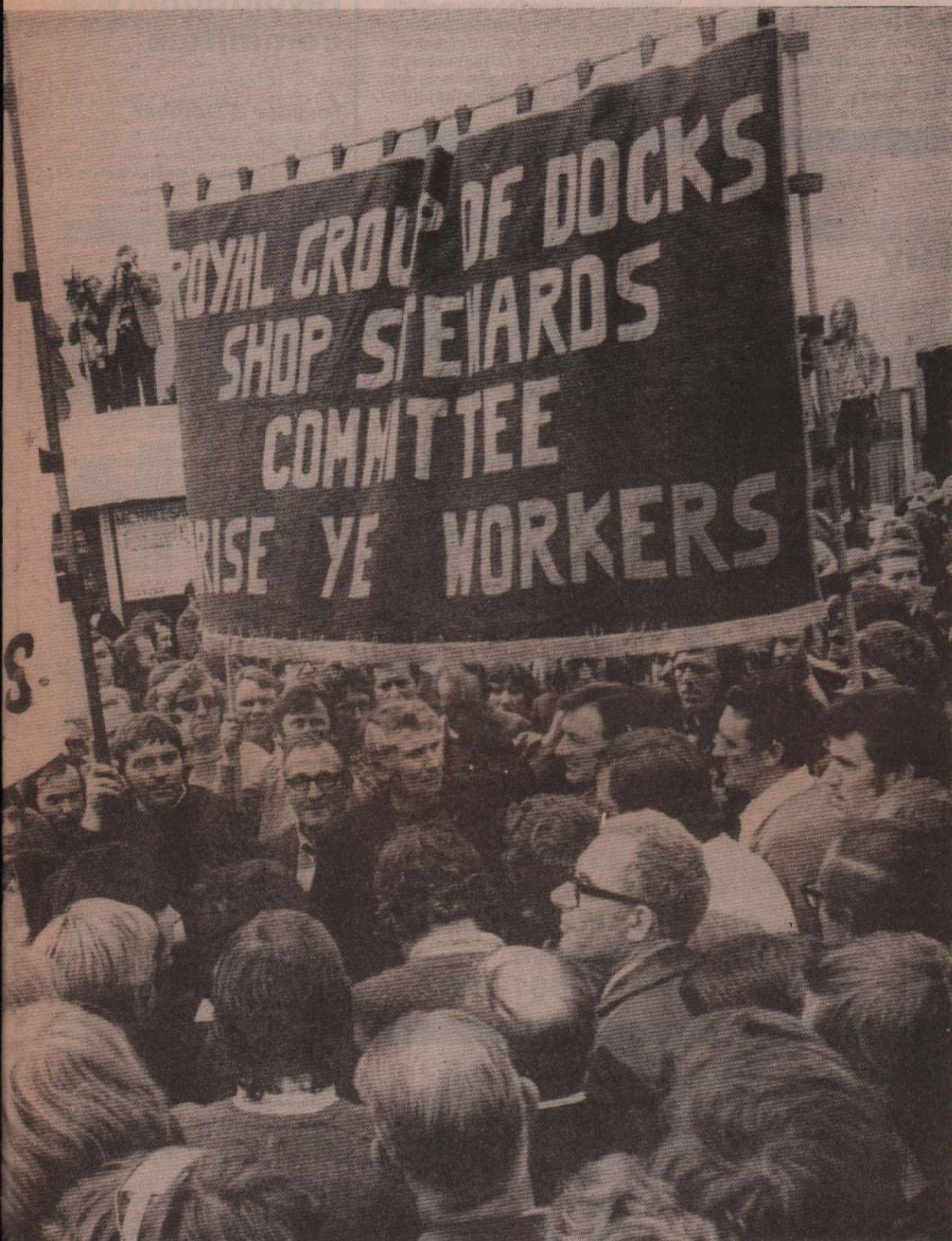
Jack Jones, on becoming TGWU general secretary declared support for "a system where not a few trade union officials control the situation but a dedicated, well-trained and intelligent body of trade union members is represented by hundreds

The bosses had developed understanding that organisation, just like could be used against the worker...

of thousands of lay representatives". The election of Hugh Scanlon as president of the AEU further symbolised a takeover by a generation who believed in the shop steward system, from those nurtured in pre-war defeats.

Even the GMWU leadership came to terms with decentralisation — shocked by its loss of members to the

Stewards' Movement



Under a union banner.

TGWU in Ford, and by the revolt of its members against the union in the 1970 Pilkington strike, when strikers tried to set up a breakaway union. National and regional industrial conferences to involve workplace representatives were introduced in 1969, and a majority of lay representation on the Executive provided for

developed the the workplace like the wider union, first rather than for

by 1975.

The union leaders were, of course, not trying to strengthen the stewards. They were trying to neuter and integrate them. A more controlled steward system means a less controlled, more powerful union leadership. The shake-up in industrial relations, the 15 years of incomes policy under both Labour and Tory govern-

ments from 1964 to 1979, and the large-scale increases in union membership — all led to a further increase in the number of stewards, to their progress into new areas, and to changes in their organisation.

In 1973 the Commission on Industrial Relations claimed that "there were well in excess of 250,000 and perhaps approaching 300,000 shop stewards in 1971."

Study

One study in Sheffield found that the introduction of productivity bargaining in 1968-9 doubled the number of stewards on the Engineering District list.

But the main developments were in the public sector. In the late '60s authorities began introducing incentive schemes for manual workers in local government and hospitals. Agreements recognised stewards for the first time in local government in 1969 and in the Health Service in 1971.

NUPE, the largest public sector union, recognised stewards for the first time in 1970, and by 1981 claimed 23,000. Steward systems were in-

troduced on the docks, on ships and in schools.

Workplace representatives in textiles and shops began to call themselves stewards in 1977. NALGO introduced a shop steward system.

An increasing hierarchy and professionalism of stewards went along with this growth.

Brown, Ebsworth and Terry estimated that in 1976 there were around 5,000 full-time stewards covering manual workers in manufacturing. Their study showed that in manufacturing 62% of all workplaces employing more than 500 workers had full-time convenors. In engineering the figures was 69%, and in the public sector 21%.

Clegg estimates that there were 10,000 full-time stewards in 1973.

Decisions

Increasingly, decisions were taken not by the individual stewards and their members on a section, or by a group of stewards in a department, but by senior, often full-time stewards and the stewards' committee at the level of the workplace — or

even of the company.

Full-time stewards often hold no sectional responsibilities, and no longer share to the same degree the insecurities and work experience of their members.

Involvement in higher union bodies and participation schemes meant that life became one long round of meetings and courses, with perks attached. This was likely to estrange them from, and weaken, workplace organisation.

Some observers saw the success of Labour's Social Contract (1974-5) in its ability to secure growing control of the official unions over workplace organisation. While union leaders were involved in the Social Contract at the top, workplace leaders were incorporated at the bottom.

It was not as simple as that. The strategies of the state and the employers did have a tremendous degree of success. By 1980 much of the structure of workplace trade unionism was management-moulded, management-sponsored.

The bosses had developed the understanding that the workplace organisation, just like the wider union, could be used against rather than for the worker — could be used by capital for its own purposes.

Donovan's insight into the ambivalence of the steward's role, and the strategy of the 1974 Labour government derived from it, yielded tremendous dividends to capital. This is central. But it has to be seen against the political background.

Strong roots in the membership had allowed the stewards to organise a wave of struggles in the early 1970s. But, paradoxically, the favourable economic situation was both an aid and a hindrance.

Muscle

On the one hand it gave the workplace leaders the muscle to go forward. On the other hand the ability to do so and to go round the union leaders (or force them reluctantly to trail behind) reinforced the limitations of the workplace leaders' political tradition, to ensure that no adequate alternative political leadership was thrown up. They never felt the need for it, and unlike the 1920s there was no strong revolutionary party able to win the key layer of stewards to consistent revolutionary politics.

As issues arose the activists turned not to trying to control the Labour Party, or to supporting a new party, but to industrial means, to direct action, alone. Despite the efforts of revolutionary groups, no viable, even embryonic, rank and file organisation, not even a small-scale pallid reflection of the Minority Movement, was established.

It was the ability of the state and the employers to use these crucial political weaknesses against the rank

and file leaders which was in the end to undermine their basic strength.

By the late 1970s, it had become clear that militancy within normal bounds, plus Labour voting according to tradition, could produce no more than Wilson attacking the unions instead of Heath. As it became clear that the economic situation in the late '70s really was worse than that of the early '70s, then all the movement's limitations came to the surface.

The delusion that 'industrial militancy is enough' was dispelled. Vast layers of the militant labour movement had always been vulnerable to appeals to support 'the national interest', etc., and this now took its toll.

The 1972 upsurge halted when the dockers were released. The 1974 upsurge was halted by Wilson.

What was missing was a leadership which would have been able to take the movement forward, to bring down Heath in the first case, to hammer Wilson and establish a workers' government in the second.

No answers

Shop floor leaders had no answers to the arguments of Murray and Wilson that wages cause inflation, that this was the reason why the economy was in trouble, that an incomes policy could help, and so on.

Leastwise, their arguments were not strong enough to carry their members with them and stop the official leadership going with Wilson.

The election of the Thatcher government opened up the use of mass unemployment to undermine shopfloor strength. Building on the work of Wilson and Callaghan, the bosses have victimised steward after steward, pushed back or intimidated one workplace organisation after another.

We have to provide the answers. We have to provide them urgently.

We must base ourselves on, and learn the lessons from, the hopeful signs amid the general retreat; on the minority of workers across industry who are prepared to fight.

We have shop stewards in more workplaces than ever before. We have got to get them moving again — this time on a clear-cut basis of independent and socialist policies.

We have to build a movement that can do everything that the movement to free the Pentonville Five did — and more. We have to answer the central questions of viability, unemployment and union democracy.

We have to do this with our feet firmly planted in the workplaces, and our heads working for a rethink and transformation in the wider labour movement. We have to make sure that this time, a militant upturn means more than just more militancy.

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A timely reminder to British Labour

The November 7 conference in solidarity with workers living under the Stalinist boot will be the biggest such conference staged in the British labour movement for over a decade.

It will be held on the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution at London's Conway Hall.

The conference will be opened by the exiled former regional leader of Solidarnosc, Zbigniew Kowalewski, and Labour front bench MP Robin Cook.

The discussions will range from a session led by Viktor Haynes (author of 'Workers Against the Gulag') and Marko Bojcin around their forthcoming book on the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster, to George Krasso on current developments in Hungary, to an historical view of how workers fought the Soviet regime in the 1930s by Dr. Don Foltz, to the struggle of Soviet Jewry.

This conference is a timely reminder to a British labour movement dominated by great expecta-

tions for Gorbachev's reforms and tending to forget how the changes hit Soviet workers.

In fact there have been a number of strikes reported in recent weeks which detail working class resistance to wage cuts and longer working hours under Gorbachev's programme.

Gorbachev's drive for modernisation may well produce bitter battles between workers and bureaucrats in the USSR and the Russian backyard — Eastern Europe. And the British labour movement is badly prepared

to cope with the basic solidarity — that has been freely given to South African or Chilean workers — that these workers will need.

The reason is simple. Many in our movement think that the Stalinist police states are in some way 'socialist'.

Comrades should be taking up these issues now in the run-up to the conference, attempting to build a really impressive show of support. The conference must be the success it deserves to be, laying the basis for sustained solidarity work in the CLPs and union branches.

1917

YEAR OF REVOLUTION

The military revolutionary committee

Tuesday 3 October

A delegation of representatives from the Petrograd, Kronstadt, Helsingfors, Revel and Narvsky Soviets visits the Minister of Justice and demands the release of imprisoned Bolsheviks. After the failure of employers to sign a collective agreement, the strike by chemists' employees in Petrograd is resumed. In Moscow a settlement is reached between employers and chemists' employees. The Ivanovov-Voznesensk Soviet orders bourgeois homes to be searched for stockpiles of food, in order to help combat the food shortages. A meeting of the 1st Corps of the 10th Army on the Western front passes a resolution calling for soviet power. The Gomel Soviet adopts a resolution demanding an end to the war. 1,000 dockworkers in Sevastopol strike for higher pay; there are only six scabs. Martial law is imposed on Kutais after rioting breaks out over food shortages. A meeting of 600 workers of the Samara metal tubes works passes a resolution demanding convocation of an all-Russian Congress of Soviets and transfer of all power to the Soviets.

Wednesday 4 October

The bureau of the Central Executive Committee of soviets notifies all regional soviets and army committees of the convening of the second all-Russian congress of soviets on 20 October. The Central Executive Committee also publishes an appeal 'To Soldiers and Officers of the Active Army' for further sacrifices in pursuit of continuation of the war. At Kerensky's initiative the Provisional Government resolves to move from Petrograd to Moscow. On the South-Western front soldiers in the 6th Army Corps fraternise with the Germans. Despite Social Revolutionary opposition, the Revdinsk soviet calls for transfer of all power to the soviets. Strikes and rioting break out in Vladivostok as a result of food shortages. A meeting of the Orel soviet passes a resolution of protest against the distribution of anti-semitic propaganda in the town by counter-revolutionary elements. Martial law is imposed in Petropaulovsk and widespread arrests made after rioting occurs as a result of food shortages. After soldiers in the 116th division in the Northern front refuse to carry out orders their leading activists are arrested on the orders of the commander-in-chief of the front.

Thursday 5 October

The Central Executive Committee of Soviets votes down a Bolshevik resolution condemning the Provisional Government and advocating its replacement by soviet power. According to figures published by the Ministry of Labour union membership stands at 502,839.

The Central Strike Committee of chemists' employees in Petrograd organises picketing and distribution of medicines to the seriously ill. In fresh elections for the Tver Soviet Executive Committee, Bolsheviks win six seats, Social Revolutionaries two, and Mensheviks one. In fresh elections in workplaces for delegates to the Minsk soviet, Bolsheviks win over half the places.

In Bokovo-Khrustal region workers protest at the quartering of cossacks in the area; a conference of local soviets resolves to organise and arm Red Guards. The Caucasian regional soviet of soldiers deputies expresses its opposition to the convening of an all-Russian congress of soviets.

Friday 6 October

The soldiers' section of the Petrograd Soviet condemns the government's plans to move to Moscow as an act of desertion; under the pressure of this and other protests the government postpones its planned move. By 37 votes to 3, with 7 abstentions, a Petrograd provincial congress of soviets held in Kronstadt passes a resolution condemning the pre-parliament and advocating soviet power.

Continued on page 10

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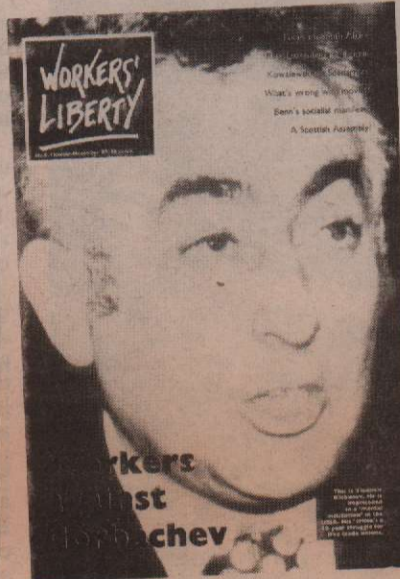
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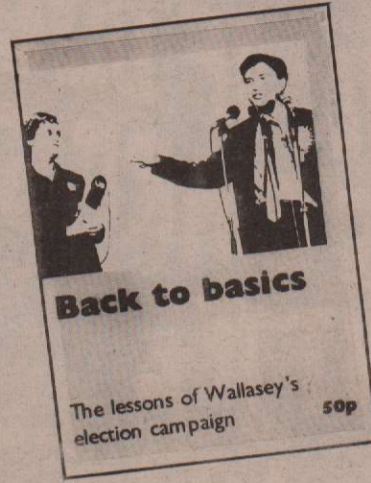
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Socialism can never be built

in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles world-wide, including the struggle of workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-

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Magnificent Four take on Chicago

Just what is 'The Untouchables' meant to be? Is it no more than a juvenile yarn about cops and robbers (or rather, Treasury Department and Prohibition gang)? Or is it supposed to be something more?

If the latter, it is so bad a failure that it is difficult to find adjectives sufficiently abusive. It describes the eventually successful (and presumably historical) attempts by a certain Eliot Ness to shackle the million-dollar bootlegging and associated violent activities of the legendary Al Capone.

Ness, a rough and tough nice guy from the Treasury, having failed to

Edward Ellis reviews 'The Untouchables.'

catch the gangland operators by traditional methods, enlists the help of three valiant sidekicks, who take Chicago — and Capone — by storm.

The magnificent four are the 'untouchables', a group of men so pure of heart that Capone will never be able to corrupt them. They consist, in addition to Ness, of a young Italian rookie cop — the sharpest shot in his class; an accountant (yes, honestly); and a middle-aged Irish policeman played by Sean Connery.

Connery, who just appears one

night on a bridge and for no apparent reason accepts that his destiny is to take on the entirety of Chicago gangland, wanders around alternating between sage, streetwise and lovable advice and extraordinary shows of brute force.

The accountant, whose closest comparison is Brains in The Thunderbirds, inexplicably becomes a heroic but murderous little monster able to cut a swathe through a host of men with machine guns.

And the young sharpshooter doesn't really do very much at all ex-

cept shoot people, look angelic and cry every now and then when something sad happens.

Indeed they leave a trail of horrendous violence behind them which includes large amounts of bloodied gunge that represents the brains of various villains foolhardy enough to oppose them — although I should add, without fear of spoiling any tension, that both Connery's cop and the plucky little accountant get their brains blown out too, or blood to that effect.

Connery, of course, takes an immensely long time to die, despite his conversion into a collander — just long enough to give his boss the information he needs.

It is his friend's death that really makes Eliot Ness mad — so cross in fact that despite his incorruptibility, he cold-bloodedly murders Connery's killer when given the chance (after a minute or so of self-doubt).

Aha. Do we spot a moral theme behind all this absurd nonsense? Eliot Ness sets out to conquer Capone by at least legal and probably ethical purity. But he ends up just as bad, a violent killer himself who breaks the laws he set out to uphold.

There is a hint of that. Indeed, the whole film gives the impression that it aspires not to be the crass, characterless drivel that it is.

Perhaps not. Suppose I'm wrong. Suppose it's deliberate that Eliot Ness's wife does nothing but look wifely and loving. Suppose it's deliberate that there is not a single event in the whole story that is even slightly believable — it's deliberately silly that in all the various bloodbaths against impossibly superior odds, Ness gets out without a scratch; it's deliberately laughable that a troop of Canadian mounties charging unprotected into a barrage of machine gun fire could do so unscathed...

Maybe. Yet shortly after the mounted cavalry come galloping to the rescue, Ness learns how bad it feels to kill someone. A note of seriousness (although it could be added that it's a lesson he immediately forgets).

Yes, maybe. I could have misunderstood the whole thing. Maybe it's all a joke.

But if that is so, it has to be said that it isn't a very good one. And for a joke it must have been fantastically expensive, as whatever else might be said, 'The Untouchables' has a remarkably lavish period set.

Robert De Nero as Capone is a highpoint, giving a virtuoso performance. But Connery, who can be excellent, is pretty dire (he really should have made up his mind whether he was faking an Irish accent or not). And nobody else has a sufficiently developed character to require any acting.

A lot of hype for a load of tripe.

Humanising the Holocaust

By Michele Carlisle

Schmattes, they called them. The Nazis dehumanised the Jews in the concentration camps in every way possible, even forbidding fellow Jews from describing the bodies of their dead relatives and friends as bodies or people or victims. They were wood or shit or schmattes, the Yiddish word for rag.

Claude Lanzmann, in his nine and a half hour film Shoah humanises the Jews again. He dispenses with the archive material of emaciated bodies, mass graves and jackboots to which many people have become almost desensitized and confronts the viewer with survivors and perpetrators, as they are now, recalling the massacres and the murders of the Nazi years. The film is historical evidence and Lanzmann sometimes literally had to force the survivors to appear, so that their testimonies would not be lost.

He takes them back to where it happened. In Chelmno, Poland, a total of 400,000 Jews were massacred. Because we can understand it better, the figure for survivors is more chilling — two. Just two. Simon Srebnik, who survived a bullet through his head, stands in a bare green field "Yes this is the place". To him, and to us, a field is so familiar that it is hard to believe that it had once been the scene of so much evil and destruction.

Srebnik was a singer as a boy and was known by the Poles who lived near the camp. Many of them



'Portrait of Janek, Age 15'. Franciszek Jazwiecki.

remember him today. Many of them remember the Jews — and are glad that they are gone. The Jews killed Christ and suffered for it, the Jews were dishonest and exploited the Poles. One woman felt sorry for the Jews who were being transported in trucks to

Chelmno. "But it gets on your nerves seeing that everyday".

Mordechai Podchelebnik was the other survivor of Chelmno. He was forced to unload the bodies of dead Jews from trucks. On the third day of doing this, he unloaded the bodies of his wife and

children.

Lanzmann forced Podchelebnik to speak. He did not want to. He smiles all the time. "Why?" asks Lanzmann. The response comes through an interpreter. "What do you want him to do, cry?" And he cries anyway.



George Breitman

A new book celebrates the life of George Breitman, an American Trotskyist who died last year. Breitman was the last of the generation that founded the American Socialist Workers Party in the 1930s.

He was an expert on black questions in the USA, and in particular the life and ideas of Malcolm X. Breitman was also one of the editors of Trotsky's works. But he was expelled from the SWP in 1984 as that party moved further and further towards Stalinism.

He spent his last years fighting the same cancer of Stalinism that he had fought in his youth, now reproduced within the party he had devoted his life to constructing.

The book includes tributes from a wide range of figures, and is published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, which Breitman supported.

'A tribute to George Breitman: Writer, Organiser, Revolutionary'. FIT, PO Box 1947, New York, NY 10009.

Union-bashing at the Telegraph

By Cate Murphy

The Telegraph's move to its new Isle of Dogs plant has seen them launch a concerted union busting operation.

The latest attack culminated in the sacking of the clerical Father of Chapel (shop steward) Steve Penfold. In early August the Telegraph sold off one of its departments, the colour library, to an outside agency, Photosource. The staff were part of the sale. On Thursday they received a letter from management telling them to report to their new boss, Photosource, the following Monday.

Outraged at being treated as slaves, the Chapel called an emergency meeting in work time, to discuss what action to take. For this Penfold was immediately put on a disciplinary charge and the offer of a job at South Quay Plaza (the new Telegraph plant on the Isle of Dogs) was

"withdrawn", i.e. compulsory redundancy from 3 September.

The chapel's response was to start an overtime ban. However, before this had time to bite, the branch moved in and arbitrarily called it off. Meanwhile branch and national officers were brought in to try and do a deal with management without the knowledge of the members.

The intention seemed to be to diffuse the members' anger and to keep the dispute isolated from the rest of Fleet Street — or indeed, the rest of the Telegraph — much as happened over Wapping.

And all the time management were pressing home their advantage: Penfold's dismissal was delayed until the end of October to let anger cool and give mortgages and HP payments time to bite; money is docked for attending meetings in worktime; a "blacklist" of ex-Times and Sun strikers appears to be in operation; Penfold is barred from the new South

Quay plant.

Two months after his sacking, the chapel decided to ballot the members on strike action. Although this would have been a ballot conducted in a vacuum, with no campaign to build it up, it was a positive sign that Fleet Street was picking itself up after the Wapping defeat, and fighting back against attacks on trade union rights and conditions. It could have been broadened out to take in the rest of Fleet Street. Instead, the ballot was suspended halfway through and Brenda Dean was called in to negotiate a "compromise" deal, which judging by her success over Wapping, means the end of the Telegraph chapel!

Pressing

The FoC and branch officials are now pressing for the whole matter to go to ACAS, and the members are left thoroughly disillusioned and

demoralised. And still without representation.

What the branch should do is to take the issue to the whole of Fleet Street and build a proper fighting campaign around the issue of the right to organise, and the right to recognition. If the Telegraph bosses win, all other managements will jump on the bandwagon.

BIRMINGHAM NALGO battle

NALGO members in Birmingham City Council's Housing Department are now into their second month of strike action.

The strikers, Scales I and II clerks, are demanding regrading and improved pay. Some of them take home as little as £60 per week.

Birmingham's right-wing Labour council leadership have instructed the Housing Department management to adopt a tough line. In private, council leader Dick Knowles is saying that he wants to see NALGO broken in this dispute.

The reason for this is not difficult to fathom. The council is planning to implement big cuts, redundancies, and council house sales next year. A confident, militant NALGO branch would be a major obstacle.

The strikers' biggest problem at the moment is their isolation. Two days of action have been held, both of which were highly successful and demonstrated the potential for spreading the dispute to all NALGO members in the City Council. This is what must be done if the council's 'tough line' is to be broken.

CPSA

No to Regional Pay!

By a CPSA member

The government have admitted they have real problems recruiting civil servants in London. This is hardly surprising. Who wants to do a boring job in appalling conditions for virtually no money in an area where the cost of living is rising every day?

The Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA) and the Society of Civil and Public Servants (SCPS) submitted a claim for a 30% increase in London Weighting Allowance. After all, if the government can't get staff they ought to pay more.

The Tories rejected this and offered a measly 4.25%. They have their own solutions to the problem of staff recruitment.

The Tories want to bring in something called Local Pay Additions. These "additions" would be paid to staff in areas where recruitment is a problem. They would be differing amounts and not necessarily paid to all grades. As the CPSA National Executive Committee pointed out, the additions are a "transparent

attempt to divide members by location, office, grade and seniority. They are about driving down our national rate of pay."

Two further moves to destroy unity and lower our pay are 'Regional Pay' and 'Merit Pay'.

Regional Pay is quite simply a blatant attempt to use high unemployment to keep down civil service pay. Pay would be set according to supply and demand for labour in different areas. So, in areas of high unemployment, wages would be lower than in areas of relatively low unemployment. As the CPSA NEC quite rightly says, Regional Pay is no solution to pay problems and would threaten union solidarity.

Merit Pay would mean the system of automatic yearly increments being replaced by 'merit' increments. Only a few 'high flyers' would get them and of course, union activists could expect none at all! Worse still, some could even expect pay cuts.

Again, no extra money is being provided to finance 'merit' awards. One person's pay rise could mean another's pay curb.

Regional, merit and local pay are all blatantly designed to lower pay in the long term and undermine the collective strength of the Civil Service

unions.

The Tories feel confident. Despite a good fight we were unable to get the pay rise we demanded. The CPSA NEC have recently backed down from providing a lead in the fight against Limited Period Appointments. We cannot let the Tories get away with any more. Activists must convince members of the need to fight. We must not back down. The NEC must not back out of this battle.

GRAMPIAN TV

Canteen workers strike

By Martin Donahue

Nine catering workers at Gramplan TV in Aberdeen have been on strike since 5 October over job losses and conditions.

Following the building of a new canteen the employer, Commercial Catering Group, demanded redundancies. Two workers were made redundant. The strikers are demanding their reinstatement and parity with catering workers at Scottish TV

who have better holidays and pay.

Picketing has succeeded in turning away deliveries of mail and goods. However GTV have responded by serving writs on the strikers, banning them from "interfering with the work of the station". Despite this the strikers are calling on all GTV workers not to cross their picket line on the 15th, and are hoping to close down the station for the day.

Donations and messages of support are welcome to Ron Whichlow, 3 Millden Road, Aberdeen.

MINES

New attacks from the UDM

WHETTON'S WEEK



In Nottinghamshire, the attack on NUM members and attempts to intimidate us continue unabated, not least in the Oller-ton and Bevercotes Miners' Welfare.

Since the UDM were given control of the Welfare by the courts they have cancelled the regular order for the Morning Star because it was 'political', and replaced it with the 'non-political' Sun; then they stopped all incoming phone calls, because they claimed too much trade union and political work was being done on the phones, and simply ignored the need to contact people there in emergencies; then they banned branch meetings.

We have had some success in changing that, but there have been cases where branch meetings have been cancelled at the last minute, with very little notice.

The latest attack has been on a comrade who sells Socialist Worker. He has already been made to sell them outside the Welfare, on the public footpath. On Sunday they attempted to bar him completely, and anybody who purchased his paper and carried it on their person. They were threatened with suspension from the Welfare.

British Coal are backing the UDM up in this all the way. In fact, although the petty dictatorship is threatening to backfire on them — people were coming out of the Welfare on Sunday to buy Socialist Worker out of defiance, although they would never have given a second glance to the SWP — it shows the depth they are prepared to go to stop anybody they see as being active, whether as a trade unionist or politically.

My own view is that as many paper sellers as possible — from SO, from Militant, etc., — should be there next Sunday. Whatever your views about the politics of any particular newspaper, we have a basic right to buy what we want and take it into the Welfare and read it.

In my own case, I am still consulting comrades on the Industrial Tribunal's decision to back up British Coal and refuse to rule for my

reinstatement at Bevercotes, offering re-employment in Yorkshire or compensation instead. Next week I am meeting the Area officials and my legal representatives. My only comment now is that I am not prepared to bow down and accept that trade union activists can be sacked and deported out of the Area.

The weakness of the present overtime ban has obviously given British Coal heart to step up the pressure to break the action — victimising miners who are supporting the union; threatening more pit closures and the rest of it. But this week I want to make a more general point.

The attacks the NUM are facing will not be confined just to miners; other trade unions will face the same. Thatcher has declared that she wanted to wipe socialism off the face of the earth. They are clearly intent on following that through.

There is a message there not only for the majority on the NUM Executive, but also the other trade unions and the Labour Party. What are they going to do about it? What are they going to do about a rotting capitalist system, with the real threat of things getting worse, the danger of war, the strong men waiting in the background?

The Labour Party's policy review

is an excuse to shift to the right. Not surprisingly, the first indications last week reported proposals to fine trade unionists. It is part of a more general pattern. In the NUM, we always expect attacks from the right wing; they are now being given some weight by the Euro-Communists and the Kinnockites. I think they see people like Arthur Scargill and other trade union activists as a threat not only to themselves now, but to the prospects of a future Labour government running the system and attacking workers.

Next weekend there is the Chesterfield Conference for Socialism. If anywhere, that will be the place where the rank and file have a voice. Socialism's firm base is among rank and file trade unionists and rank and file Labour Party members; that is where the debate should be coming from; I hope it gets a proper hearing.

It's a shame it clashes with the Anti-Apartheid demonstration. In the face of Thatcher's latest refusal to consider sanctions and support for the Apartheid regime I hope it is a massive demonstration to show both to the Thatcher government and the people in South Africa that there are people in this country prepared to stand up against apartheid.

Paul Whetton is secretary of Bevercotes NUM, Notts.

SSiN

Agenda for our AGM

The SSiN AGM this weekend (ULU, Sunday 10.30) will be discussing subjects ranging from the lessons of the General Election defeat to the fight against education cuts, to the Fight the Alton Bill campaign. We will also be making plans for a new campaign in support of the NZS, the student wing of Solidarnosc.

The AGM will also be electing a new steering committee.

Available at the meeting will be the latest issue of Socialist Student and copies of the new pamphlet about the history of NOLS, 'A stitch in time'. There is also a social on Saturday night at UCL Union.

Sheffield Nazi

Sheffield University appears to have a Nazi amongst its students. The local LCI conference was smashed up by 4 people on Saturday and one has been identified as a student.

This co-incides with a spate of BNP stickers appearing around the college. The University must make sure that students are protected from Nazi thugs and as that protection cannot be guaranteed while a Nazi student lives in halls and attends classes he must be removed from the University.

Alton Bill

So much for NUS's commitment to fighting the Alton Bill!

At Monday's Sabbatical's meeting, Michele Carlisle NUS Exec member and the NAC student organiser asked for help. She is snowed under with work, speaking at meetings, doing media interviews, organising production of briefings and training days.

The next few month will be crucial in the campaign against Alton and Michelle is one of its central organisers. So Michelle needed to organise cover for her NUS responsibilities — a small share-out of the load to try to make sure areas of NUS work do not suffer too badly during the campaign which NUS supports.

But no — the NOLS full timers and Julie Grant the NUS Women's Officer (!) were not having any of it. Julie said that if this precedent were set she could think of "five more other people" on the Exec who would also want this type of "secondment" to campaigns they were involved in.

Unfortunately it is not true that there is anyone else on the Exec who is a central organiser of this most important pressure group — which because of David Alton's Bill is now centre-stage in British politics.

However students should not be worried about this apparent lack of commitment to fighting for abortion rights. Julie Grant wants to 'extend no platform' to anti-choice groups. Unfortunately not only does this mean 'no platforming' the majority of the population, but also many people who do not support a womens' right to choose but will oppose the Alton Bill — including most of the MPs who will vote against it.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Thatcher backs Reagan in the Gulf

STOP THE WAR!

The attack by the United States on Iranian platforms in the Gulf has raised the stakes still higher in the Gulf conflict. Iran is sure to retaliate: the spiral of attack and response is likely to continue — with results that could be dangerous for the whole world.

The Iranian regime is brutal and reactionary. But Ronald Reagan does not care one jot about the masses

oppressed by Khomeini. He cares only for American profits, power and influence.

Typically, Thatcher has backed Reagan to the hilt. The Gulf War needs to be brought to an end — but it will not be brought to an end by imperialist assault. US and British military presence can only make things worse. We must campaign to get them to quit the region. It is for the Iranian and Iraqi people to deal with their own governments. US out of the Gulf!

Stop Alton!

By Michele Carlisle

This month sees both the 20th anniversary of the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act and a renewed attempt to restrict the terms of that law.

Liberal MP David Alton will be introducing a Bill into the House of Commons on 27 October to reduce the upper limit for abortions from 28 to 18 weeks.

Pro-choice groups are up in arms and we must ensure that the labour movement is mobilised to defeat this Bill.

It is important that we get our facts straight. The vast majority of abortions in this country take place in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. It is a quick and simple operation which does not normally require a stay in hospital.

No woman wants a late abortion, but there are many factors, often out of the woman's hands, that cause delays for women seeking abortions.

6,000 women ever year have an abortion after 18 weeks of pregnancy. Many of them are women who have travelled miles across Europe because they cannot get an abortion in their own country. Their sad journeys prove what the pro-choice lobby has always said — abortion cannot be banned away and women will go to great lengths to exercise control over their own bodies.

David Alton and his supporters are outraged that "foreign women" should be using British hospitals, but seem quite happy at the prospect of British women travelling across Europe or to the backstreets for an abortion the state has denied them.

The state is directly responsible for 20% of late abortions. One out of every five women who have an abortion later than 20 weeks after conception consulted their GP during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. They have subsequently faced delays and unsympathetic doctors who have forced them to have an abortion far later than was necessary.

However, every attempt to improve early abortion facilities has been opposed by anti-abortionists, including David Alton, who by voting against a 1981 Bill to force Health Authorities to provide abortion facilities has played his own part in increasing the numbers of late abortions.

Teenagers make up one-half of the British women who have late abortions — victims of poor sex education and an atmosphere which makes them terrified of the response of doctors and parents.

Older women who misread the signs of pregnancy for the menopause, women whose doctors misdiagnose pregnancy and women who find they are carrying an abnormal foetus — Alton has targeted them all as sacrificial lambs in his crusade to restrict the law.

The polls shows that we cannot afford to be complacent. We must build this campaign with two



Protest against the Corrie Bill, 1979

aims. Firstly, we must win. That means recognising that pressure must be put on MPs, through letter writing and lobbying. Secondly, we must use this opportunity to involve women who would not normally be politically active.

The campaign is being coordinated by the Fight Alton's Bill Campaign (FAB), a broad group of pro-choice organisations, the left, women's groups and some very vocal Liberal women. FAB's remit is simple — defeat the Bill. Several events are being organised to this end. A counter demonstration outside the Life rally at Central Hall, Westminster on 27 October has been called for people, (particularly students) from London.

FAB hopes that other people will use the opportunity to set up FAB groups, hold meetings and give out leaflets in their locality.

Nationally, there will be a lobby of Parliament in January before the Second Reading, when the Bill will be debated for the first time and a national demonstration will be held before the Third Reading, when the final decision will be made, some time in March.

The TUC are being asked to call the march, as they did in 1979 against the Corrie Bill. It is essential that the demonstration is effective and attracts as many trade unionists as possible. That is one of the reasons why it has to be in March and not January.

We need a carefully paced campaign, geared towards the labour movement, not something which is too soon and too small.

Locally, people should call meetings of all interested parties and set up FAB campaigns. This has already happened in Liverpool, the Wirral and Stoke. These FAB groups must organise leafleting, petitioning (FAB will be providing this material), meetings, lobbies of MPs, to build for the national events. Work must start now. We have a real battle on our hands and we must win this one.

No Labour anti-union laws

By Eric Heffer

Last Friday the Independent reported some early proposals from one of the Labour Party leadership's policy review exercises, on employment legislation.

Determined to "convince the public that a Labour government would not lead to a return to the strike-ridden 1970s", the report described the leadership as determined to add teeth to the policies in their election manifesto legislating for pre-strike ballots.

Warming to the theme of state interference in the trade unions, the report described new proposals to fine trade unionists thousands of pounds if ballots were not held, with both union members and bosses able to trigger proceedings in the "industrial court".

In Tuesday's Independent Michael Meacher, shadow spokesperson for employment, complained about the balance of the report but did not deny the reported proposals.

For a start I think it is very dangerous for any Front Bench spokesperson to be making statements and suggesting policies that have clearly not been discussed in the movement.

It would be a development of their present position. They say they are going to repeal Tory policies. They will, formally, but then bring it back in Labour legislation which will include the right of members to take their own union to court.

This is Tory policy on the unions brought in by the back door. This is a very serious thing.

Labour's policy on the trade unions is now not a clear-cut commitment which says: we are on the side of the workers as against capital.

I think they are reviving Barbara Castle's notorious 1969 anti-union Bill 'In Place of Stife'. We must fight it vigorously.

A labour movement conference SOLIDARITY

with workers in the Eastern Bloc



New sponsors for Nov 7th conference include:
 TGWU 6/196 (Salpiss Branch)
 The Socialist Society
 John Frazer MP
 Martin Flannery MP
 Ed Hall (Sec. London Bridge)
 North Staffs Poly Labour Club
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 Mark Howarth (President Lambeth Trades Council)
 Shelton Ward Labour Party
 Heeley Ward Labour Party
 Stoke Central CLP
 North Staffs Poly Students' Union
 The Ukrainian Peace Committee
 Tollington Ward Labour Party
 Dave Merritt (Secretary Labour Group York Council)
 Glasgow Local Association EIS

Saturday November 7th, 11 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.
 Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Solidarity conference From front page

those who want to build independent workers' organisations, who want genuine workers' democracy.

I think it is time that the left in the movement did start taking the issue seriously.

I thought the experience of the miners' union was interesting. They, and particularly Arthur, were very critical of Solidarity in Poland. Then, during the miners' strike, they had the experience of Jaruzelski selling coal to MacGregor and Thatcher, undermining the strike. Because of the experience Arthur Scargill made quite a strong attack on Jaruzelski.

All the workers in this country should learn this lesson: they cannot rely on the state apparatus in those "socialist" countries being a friend of the workers — at home or abroad.

The left in particular must sort itself out on this issue. If we really do believe in workers' democracy and see democracy as a necessary part of socialism, then we must make a stand and come out firmly for the workers in the socialist states. I would hope that all those on the left, who can see that, will give their full support to the conference.