

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

For Workers' Liberty East and West

Ireland after Enniskillen

4-page pull-out inside

UCW No sellout! Action now!

See pages 4 and 5

DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS

FAB FIGHT ALTON'S BILL

Kings Cross

Tory cuts kill!

By Jean Lane

We will soon hear the results of the inquiry into what started the fire at Kings Cross tube station which killed 30 people and injured 20 others. We will also be hearing who are going to be the scapegoats.

If the Zeebrugge car ferry disaster is anything to go by, the real culprits will get off very lightly, and the people who work for them, take their wages from them and are themselves put in danger by the activities of the real culprits will take the brunt.

Some facts are clear. Fires on underground railways are not one-in-a-million freak occurrences which can't be planned for. The London Underground has an average of one fire every week — mostly minor, of course.

At Kings Cross itself there had been a fire just a few days before the disaster. Liverpool's underground railway was halted by a fire on the same day as the Kings Cross disaster.

New York's subway had six major fires during a single evening rush hour three years ago. London's Underground has had 18 serious fires this century — one every few years.

Although most underground railway fires are minor, a lot are dangerous. Oxford Circus station had a big fire in 1984 with 1000 people in the station. It is only luck that there were not dozens of deaths and injuries. 14 people were taken to hospital, but none were seriously hurt.

One of the worst underground disasters ever, in Paris in 1903, was caused by a fire. 83 people died.

So fire precautions are a major part of safety on an underground railway. If they are done properly they work. The modern metros in West European cities have never had a disaster like Kings Cross or even Oxford Circus. Older systems like New York and Paris have put money and effort into improving safety, and it has worked. Only a few hours after the Kings Cross disaster, firemen in Paris were doing a routine fire drill in the Metro.

There is no comparable drill in London. Underground staff have only 30 minutes' fire training, and that includes nothing about evacuating people from their underground station in an emergency.

Detailed recommendations for improving safety after the Oxford Circus fire have not been carried out. On the contrary, cuts have weakened what safety precautions there were.

Turn to back page

David Alton's Private Member's Bill to reduce the time limit for legal abortion from 28 weeks to 18 is the most serious attack on a woman's right to choose since 1967, when abortion was legalised.

Almost 6,000 women a year have abortions after 18 weeks. Many of these are young women, who are reluctant to visit the family GP or for whom irregular periods mean they simply do not know they are pregnant.

Older women often assume that changes in their body are signs of the menopause, and it can be well over 18 weeks before they or their doctor realise they are pregnant. Alton's Bill commits them to another 18 years of motherhood.

Alton is disguising his attack on women's abortion rights as a crusade for the rights of the disabled. A proportion of terminations over 18 weeks are of seriously impaired fetuses. Amniocentesis, which can detect some spina bifida, is only effective after 18 weeks of pregnancy. Alton's Bill will force women who do not feel able to cope with caring for a seriously disabled child to do so.

David Alton is a devout Catholic and a committed anti-abortionist. He has made statements affirming his absolute belief in the 'post-conception child's right to life'. His

By Michele Carlisle (National Abortion Campaign, personal capacity)

concern for the disabled is a smokescreen for a whittling-away of women's hard won right to abortion.

A legal time limit of 18 weeks will in fact mean 14 weeks — doctors generally allow a 'margin of error' of 2-4 weeks. As delays in referring women to hospital and long NHS waiting lists mean that 20% of women who have late abortions initially asked for one before 12 weeks, many more women will be affected.

Such women do not want late abortions — the system forced them into it.

Lining up behind Alton in the Private Members' Ballot are two Tory MPs who want to introduce Bills on the protection of embryos and the breaking up of the abortion charities. Alton's Bill is clearly part of an attack on the 1967 Act as a whole.

We may not have God or the Tory Party on our side, but we have a trade union and labour movement which in 1979 mobilised to defend the 1967 Act against the Corrie Bill. We need to take the fight against Alton back into the labour movement and build on the work done in 1979.

The Fight Alton's Bill Campaign (FAB) is an umbrella group of pro-choice organisations and left groups



Stefano Cagnoni (Report)

set up to co-ordinate the fight against Alton. FAB groups are being set up around the country to organise local action.

Join your local FAB group. If there isn't one already — set one up! Leaflet shopping precincts, set up meetings and debates. Find out if your local MP is pro-Alton and if so

picket his or her surgery.

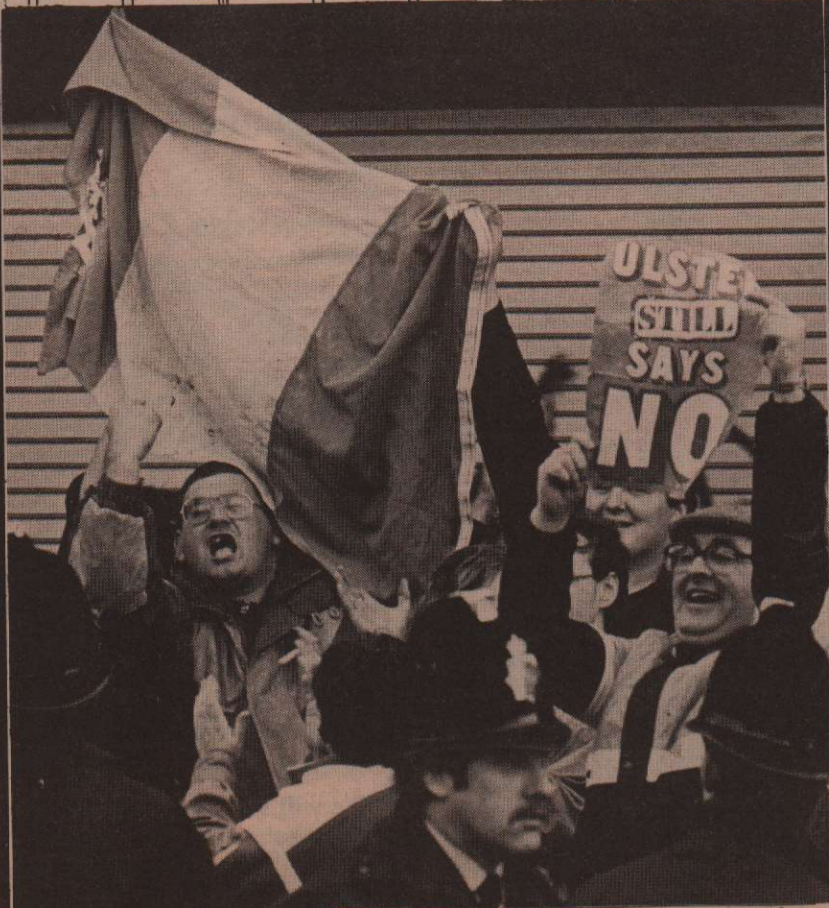
We can win.

Fight back against Alton.

Dates: 16th January, Regional Day of Action. 21st January, National Day of Protest, including a lobby of Parliament, rally in Westminster Central Hall and an all woman torchlight demonstration.

LIMIT THE TIME AND YOU LIMIT THE CHOICE

GRAFFITI



Counter-demonstrators against a march in Manchester commemorating the Manchester Martyrs. Despite threats of a huge Loyalist turnout, only 50 turned up. The march, in memory of Irish nationalists executed last century, went ahead despite a ban. Photo: John Smith, Profile.

Cloth-capped workers?

According to the latest polls, 57% are against poll tax, and only 30% for it. Fully 65% are against privatisation of water and electricity. And two researchers at Oxford University have been poring over the election results of recent decades. In conclusion they "argue from their figures that Labour should not follow the route to 'classless' politics, for this would risk alienating its traditional supporters without guaranteeing

offsetting gains elsewhere. Rather, the lesson of the past 20 years is that Labour does best when it maximises its working class support, for these have also been the elections when Labour has bitten deepest into the middle-class vote". The researchers point out that the stereotype of a monolithic cloth-cap working class in the past is false. Even in 1964, only seven per cent of voters were

manual working class, trade union members and council tenants. (Source: 'Independent', 23 November).

Shaky

New official figures suggest that the stock market crash was not so superficial after all. The "fundamentals" of British capitalism are shaky, too. Industrial investment fell sharply in the three months July to September, just before the crash. Capital spending over 1987 in manufacturing industry still shows a rise of 2.7% to September, but it fell by 5% in 1986, and it is still lower than it was in 1979.

Confused

Love at first sight? A Militant seller was in raptures over the latest Women's Fightback at last week's Labour Women's Conference. Believing it to be a new offshoot of Militant the seller demanded 'How long have we been producing that? It looks really great. Why didn't I get any with my papers this week?' Women's Fightback is available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, at 20p plus 13p postage.

Romanian silence

The official press in Romania has kept silent about mass workers' demonstrations in the city of Brasov last week. A Reuter report, piecing together the information available reckons that 5,000 workers protested, filling the city centre until they were dispersed by police and troops. The workers stormed the mayor's office and burned official files. Some of them had been ordered to work on

Sundays, others to switch to other jobs. Minority grievances may have played a part in the protest, since Brasov is a centre of Romania's German minority. But the main issues were probably economic. Romania is in a terrible plight because of huge imbalances in its economy. Heavy industry is greatly overdeveloped in proportion to the rest of the economy, and the country has a huge foreign debt. The government has responded by cutting domestic electricity and gas supplies to almost nothing (so that as nearly as possible all power goes to industry) and cutting food supplies in order to export as much as possible.

Cheap

For sale, cheap. 472 framed photographs of Neil Kinnock. Labour Party headquarters produced 500 for sale last year, and so far they have shifted exactly 28.



Picket of NUT disciplinary hearing against Inner London Teachers' Association. Photo: Ian Swindale.

Stop Baker's Bill!

After 'consulting' interested parties Baker has finally presented the Great Education Bill to Parliament.

Not surprisingly he ignored all advice from opponents and critics. He was working on the principle that opposition means action, and if there was not going to be any he would just carry on regardless.

Tests at 7, 11 and 14 will mean teaching geared to passing tests, not to helping children progress in their own way. The National Curriculum will be so tightly controlled that these tests themselves will become national.

Children will be forced to take regular tests in Maths, Geography, History, English and other prescribed subjects, regardless of their real educational needs. It will be a mixture of your 'times table', spelling, grammatical accuracy and 'can you remember who was on the throne before Henry VIII?'

This is the sort of education industry wants — not because industrialists want better-equipped workers but because they want obedient, non-militant workers. And those who fail tests from 5 to 16 will know their place by the time they get to work or the dole office.

But just in case some kids still think they can beat the system, the Tories intend to allow schools to opt out of Local Education Authority control. Money will come direct from central government, and if that is not enough parents will have to fork out for extras.

The millions of parents on low pay or no pay will have to stay with the LEAs, with funding cut to the bone.

So the working class will have a tightly-controlled, right-wing education in run-down, under-funded schools. This should help to create the sort of 'harmony' the Tories want in schools — 'harmony' like race-hatred, teacher-hatred, and all the other symptoms of the dog-eat-dog world of the Tories. Instead of anti-racist education, you will get separate schools for Muslims and other minority groups as they try to opt out of LEA-run slum schools.

But the Education Bill is only part of the Tory onslaught. Cleaning and catering services in schools will be privatised. Wages will be cut, schools will fall apart. Poor children will have to say good-bye to free school meals.

In the Further Education colleges the Tories intend to give increased powers to industry to control the curriculum.

You would think the circumstances

By Liam Conway, Socialist Teachers' Alliance

were perfect for an alliance in action of all workers in schools and colleges — NUPE, NALGO, NUT, NAS/UWT and NAT-FHE.

Not so. In fact the leaders of the labour movement like Jack Straw and Neil Fletcher (ILEA) have been trying to outflank the Tories from their right. Labour education spokesperson Straw says that Science, Maths and Language teachers should get paid extra. Fletcher says there is nothing wrong with learning by rote.

But, worst of all, neither they nor the respective union leaders have any plans to defeat the Tories other than appealing to the House of Lords and hoping to get minor changes in Committee stage.

Action is vital, but we must build for it. First we must explain to workers in education, possibly through joint meetings of all school workers, that a fightback must begin before it is too late. We must

counteract the view that the Tories are unbeatable and persuade people that they have to be beaten.

Secondly, at a time when demoralisation is so great, we must also use union channels to undermine and replace the current union leadership.

Because of its unique position as a union dealing only with schools, the NUT is possibly in the best position to give the lead to a struggle against the Education Bill. Unfortunately the NUT is run by the 'Broad Left' who are soaked and drowning in 'new realism'.

But all the places on the National Executive are up for election, and the members could turn against the old, defeatist leaders. Already, Ken Jones of the Socialist Teachers' Alliance has run them close in the vice-president elections.

Teachers are demoralised, but they are also fed up with the current National Executive. A big increase in STA influence on the Executive will not be enough on its own to lead a fightback. But, allied to rank and file activity in the unions and Labour Party, a start can be made towards reversing the disastrous effects of 'new realism' in the labour movement.

Youth Fightback

The left alternative

Youth Fightback's annual national conference will be held in Liverpool next weekend. The conference will be bigger than last year. There will be more discussion and debate. And, importantly, there will be a bigger social with local band 'The Bobs' playing.

The conference will come ten days after what can safely be predicted to be another disaster of a LPYS/Militant "national event". Why do I say that? Because only 500 youth attended the YS lobby of Parliament on 19 November. The YS leadership has proved, yet again, that it has no idea of how to build the YS.

But we have got answers. Over the summer our comrades built their YS

branches in sustained work against the Tories' Job Training Scheme (JTS).

Youth Fightback conference will discuss how to build bigger and better YS actions in the future — against the threats to women's rights contained in the Alton Bill and in work against the threat of a compulsory Youth Training Scheme.

But conference will not just discuss campaigning. The problem with the LPYS is not just that it is a rump — but a semi-Stalinist, right-wing, backward and rotten rump! So we will be sharpening up our politics, too, in discussions about South Africa, Ireland, Iran, how to get socialism and lots more.

So you ought to come! Phone Mark on 01-639 7967 for more details.

1917

How the workers made a revolution



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Arthur Scargill addressing Hedrook and Woolley miners, whose pit is threatened with closure. Photo: John Harris, IFL.

PRESS
GANG

18 years
of bigotry

By Jim Denham

The Sun celebrated its 18th birthday last week. Actually, it lied about its age — it's really 22.

But the soaraway Thatcherite tabloid obviously wants to forget about its misspent — left-wing — youth.

The paper originated, like a Phoenix, from the ashes of the old Daily Herald, a staunchly pro-Labour paper that folded in 1964 due to lack of advertising revenue.

The International Publishing Corporation, which also owned the Mirror, re-launched the paper as the Sun in 1965, aiming at readers who wanted something more substantial than the Mirror but not as heavy as the Guardian. It was a good left-of-centre paper, but it never made profits, and in 1969 IPC sold it to Rupert Murdoch.

The rest, as they say, is history. Murdoch's first editor, Larry Lamb (now Sir Larry, courtesy of grateful Mrs T), described the Sun's post-1969 approach in a birthday special last week: "We acknowledged what many journalists were at that time anxious to forget: that the basic interests of the human race are not in politics, philosophy or economics, but in things like food and money, sex and crime, football and television".

But the Sun is, of course, highly political. Lamb went on to describe how, "over the next few years we were to swing the paper right across the political spectrum. In May 1979 we unequivocally backed Mrs Thatcher in one of the most crucial General Elections of the century.

"It was an election in which the Sun, with its huge and essentially working-class audience of traditional Labour voters, was widely thought to have played a significant role".

Ever since then, the Sun's fortunes have been inextricably linked to those of Mrs Thatcher. In particular, the paper has faithfully reflected the strident nationalism and scarcely veiled racism of its political mentor. There is the annual attack on the Spanish ("the sick senors", etc.), the "Hop Off, You Frogs" campaign when French farmers hi-jacked two meat lorries from Britain in 1984, the depiction of Arabs as pigs that brought the paper a gentle rap over the paper from the Press Council, and, of course, the Falklands.

"GOTCHA" cried the Sun on 4 May 1982 as "our boys" blasted the General Belgrano outside the 200-mile zone with the loss of 300 lives. But then they were only Argies...

The Sun's latest campaign is against gay vicars, or "Pulpit Poufs" if you prefer. On Saturday it informed its readers of ten tell-tale signs to watch out for, including "an undue interest in interior design and a fondness for cats".

The Sun's success will continue just as long as Thatcher's does. Every struggle against this government is inevitably a challenge to the Sun and all it stands for. I don't know about you, but I find that quite a powerful inducement to keep up the fight.



Back Scargill!

I was on the lobby of the national executive meeting during which Arthur Scargill announced he was resigning and standing for re-election. You do not have to look further than the executive to understand Arthur's reasons.

With the exception of two rank and file members, you have a room of men there who do not themselves come under the terms of the disciplinary code and are therefore not personally affected by them.

Every other member of the NUM, however, has the threat of the sack over his head when he goes to work each day. And yet that bunch of men insist on deciding the terms of the fight against the code. The result of those decisions would be laughable if it were not tragic.

At the meeting they had a vote to

By Paul Whetton (secretary, Bevercotes NUM, Notts, in personal capacity)

drop the overtime ban altogether, which got virtually no support. They had a move to step up the overtime ban, which failed. They rejected a motion to take the issue to a special delegate conference of the membership: in other words, letting the men affected by the code decide whether they were in a position to escalate the action or not.

Then they had a vote to leave things as they were, which failed. In the end Scargill had to rule that the status quo operated.

Just before the executive came out, there was a press release announcing that Arthur Scargill was resigning and running again. The election is tremendously important, and not just for mineworkers. His re-election could help galvanise the beginnings of a fightback in the trade union movement as a whole. It will not be the be-all-and-end-all, but it will certainly generate a great deal of interest.

I hope people in the broad trade union and labour movement will lend their support to the re-election of Arthur Scargill as the President of the NUM.

Bevercotes branch has already met and unanimously decided to nominate Arthur Scargill. That nomination will now go to the Nottinghamshire Area, where our nomination will be decided.

What put the icing on the cake was the executive's decision, just prior to Arthur Scargill's announcement that any member wanting to stand for a

position in the union must first resign any position they already hold. That has really sorted out who is serious!

I think somebody will stand against Scargill — probably Johnny Walsh — but until nominations close on 14 December anything is possible.

Walsh is a right-winger who has been trying to build a base in the national executive for some time. He has always had the support of the open right wing, but now he is also finding himself with some of those who were traditionally on the left.

I think that is a tragedy for the areas those men represent, and it is a tragedy for the men to find themselves in a position where they are playing into the hands of British Coal and the Tory government in order to try and get rid of Arthur Scargill.

Remember that those men used the left to get to the positions which they now hold. Now they want to turn their backs on the left and the rank and file that put them there.

Scargill has not yet issued his platform, but I am sure he will be campaigning on no extension to the five-day week, effective action against the discipline code, proper consideration and full amnesty for all the sacked and victimised miners and for an increase in the size of the mining industry. I imagine the main theme will be the need to reject the class collaboration of the 'new realists', and instead to fight the class struggle.

It is ironic that a month before this NEC meeting people were calling for the resignation of Arthur Scargill

because he refused to sit down with the UDM. When he did resign, those same people were begging him not to!

I am sure that the reason he has done it is to break the log-jam on the NEC. He has done the correct thing. Once he is re-elected, he will have a firmer mandate to go back into that NEC and try and get them to implement Conference policies. Maybe instead of arguing about who is the head of the NUM we can get back to arguing about the issues and fighting back against British Coal.

At the moment it is a tragedy to see a union like the NUM, which fought such a magnificent struggle for 12 months against the whole panoply of the state, being reduced to squabbling like the NEC has been.

People have been trying to blame Arthur Scargill for all the problems we face. But he is not the problem — it is an intransigent British Coal and an intransigent government. And on the horizon is privatisation. I think Arthur Scargill is trying to clear the decks because we are faced with a fight for our very lives.

I would love to think there would be an organised, rank and file 'Support Scargill' campaign. Such an organised campaign by the left and the rank and file might very well be one of the pluses of the election. It is also a chance for others — for the women, the sacked men, those whose heads have dropped since the strike — to reorganise and get in the fight again.

I think we should look forward to the election on 22 January. I am sure that British Coal will once again try and disrupt the ballot in Notts, but we can cope with that. I would urge everybody, and not just miners, to get involved in the campaign.

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How to fight discrimination

By Mark Lindsay

A trade union-based conference is being held on Saturday 28 November at the Camden Centre, London, to discuss ways of fighting anti-Catholic discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland.

This will be based on the MacBride Principles of "increasing the representation of individuals from under-represented religious groups in the workforce including managerial, supervisory, administrative, clerical and technical jobs" by:

*Adequate security for the protection of minority employees both at the work place and while travelling to and from work.

*The banning of provocative sectarian political emblems from the workplace.

*All job openings should be publicly advertised; and special recruitment effort should be made to attract applicants from under-represented religious groups.

*Layoff, recall and termination procedures should not in practice favour particular religious groupings.

*The abolition of job reservation, apprenticeship restrictions, and differential employment criteria, which discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnic origin.

*The development of training programmes that will prepare substantial numbers of minority employees for skilled jobs, including the expansion of existing programmes to train, upgrade and improve the skills of all categories of minority employees.

*The establishment of procedures to assess, identify and actively recruit minority employees with potential for further advancement.

*The appointment of a senior management staff member to oversee the Company's affirmative action efforts and the setting up of timetables to carry out affirmative action principles.

U-turn

Freeman probably felt that the modified resolution was just a move to get Labour Party support for the MacBride Principles through he back door and wasn't a real u-turn towards campaigning against employment discrimination as part of "Jobs for All".

Having failed to win Labour Party conference support for their motion, LCI have turned back to their disastrous disinvestment campaign. They are proposing to form a liaison committee, which will probably include MPs like Ken Livingstone, Clare Short and possibly Kevin MacNamara (Labour spokesperson for Northern Ireland) and trade union leaders like Peter Heathfield and Jimmy Knapp (general secretaries of the NUM and NUR respectively).

This will seek to get unions and Labour local authorities to disinvest from companies which refuse to adopt the MacBride Principles.

It is important that socialists make clear their criticisms of such a campaign and instead urge Conference delegates to adopt the following demands as an addition to the MacBride Principles, as a programme capable of uniting the Northern Ireland working class:

*Work-sharing without loss of pay. Cut the hours and share out the work!

*Factories shut down by their owners to be taken into public ownership without compensation and under workers' control.

*A programme of public works, under workers' control and with trade union rates of pay.

Finally, although no mention has been made of the real purpose behind the conference, i.e. to open up debate in the trade unions generally on the question of British withdrawal from Ireland, the LCI will no doubt be

pushing the NUR's policy of British withdrawal in the lifetime of one Parliament, though in a more discreet way.

But to demand slow rather than immediate withdrawal doesn't address the reasons Protestant working class people oppose a united Ireland. Until a solution is proposed that guarantees Protestants rights, and is seen to be doing so by them, they oppose such a united Ireland.

That is why socialists should argue for a federal united Ireland, with regional autonomy for the mainly Protestant area.

MacBride: a strange hero

Sean MacBride is something of a hero on the British and Irish left. Nothing could be stranger.

MacBride, now in his 80s, was a founder of Amnesty International 25 years ago. He has worked for political prisoners over the decades in Ireland. It is hard to find anything else to say in his favour.

As a prominent member of the 1948-51 coalition government in the 26 Counties and then leader of the Clann na Poblachta party, MacBride turned on his own party colleague Noel Browne and drove him out of the government when Browne tried to bring in a limited free health service for pregnant women and babies and their mothers.

As foreign minister in 1949, MacBride offered to take Ireland into NATO, which was set up that year, in return for some loose form of Irish reunification.

Two crucial referenda were held in the 26 Counties in recent years — on making divorce legal and on whether or not to write a ban on abortion into the Irish constitution. (Abortion was already illegal; Ireland's abortions are exported to Britain).

These referenda, especially the one on divorce, were seen as test cases for whether the South really wanted Irish unity. The issue — and Protestants, Jews and other minorities in the South said it plainly — was whether or not the Catholic majority would make its own religious laws the laws of the state, even for those who do not accept Catholic teaching.

MacBride voted against divorce and for writing a ban on abortion into the Irish constitution — that same constitution which enshrines a claim that the Six Counties and all their people are part of 'the national territory'.

Sean MacBride has been a revolutionary nationalist in his time. In the 1930s he was Chief of Staff of the right wing of the IRA. His lifelong commitment to Irish nationalism and to what he understands as Republicanism is deep and sincere. But MacBride is not a Republican. He is a Catholic nationalist.

His long career expresses perfectly the contradictions at the heart of Catholic Irish bourgeois nationalism. Claiming to be Republican, the Southern ruling class has over 65 years constructed a Catholic-confessional state. Claiming to want to unite all the Irish people, they have copper-fastened their state as a sectarian state utterly repellent to the majority of the people in the 'lost territory' in the North.

They talk about Irish unity, but everything they have done in the years since they became masters of their own part of Ireland has greatly strengthened the barriers to unity.

Not long ago there was talk of Sean MacBride standing for president of the 26 Counties. He should have become president because he is a perfect symbol and embodiment of the Southern state.

The politics of

Clive Bradley argues that we must look deeper than the 'politics of the last atrocity'

40 people have been arrested in a massive clampdown on Republicans in Northern Ireland by the army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It is the second anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The round-up, which includes Sinn Fein councillors in Derry, Newry and Armagh, follows the bombing in Enniskillen that killed 11 people. The IRA admitted the bombing, but said it was a terrible mistake. Most people have condemned the bombing. *Socialist Organiser* carried an open letter to Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams calling for the IRA to end its military campaign.

Bombings of innocent civilians cannot be supported by socialists. And such atrocities as Enniskillen cut against the IRA's cause — a united Ireland — by further alienating the Protestant community whose resistance must be overcome if Ireland is ever to be united.

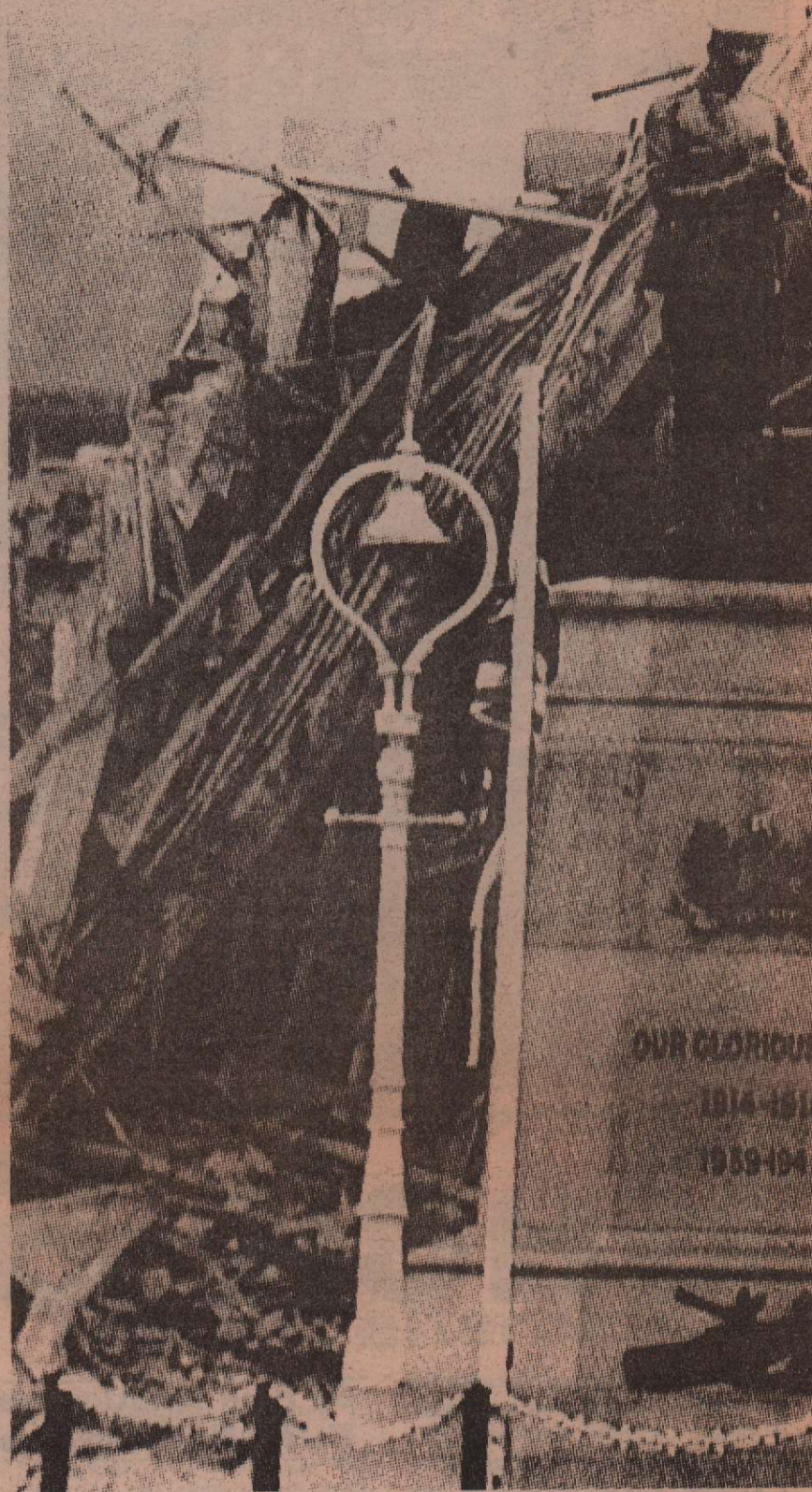
Forget

But justified horror at Enniskillen should not lead socialists in Britain to forget the basic rights and wrongs of Ireland. Too often public opinion in Britain, including on the left, is dominated by the 'politics of the last atrocity'. During the Republican hunger strikes in 1981, support for their cause was widespread. After IRA bombings, opinion always shifts against them. We need a stable, overall view.

The 'Protestant state for a Protestant people', created when Ireland was partitioned in 1920-2, was from the beginning an artificial, gerrymandered state, with a built-in Protestant majority and an imprisoned Catholic minority. The Catholics never wanted to be part of the state, and instead they wanted a united Ireland. Within Northern Ireland the Catholics faced institutionalised discrimination.

Eventually the Catholics revolted. There was a civil rights movement in the late '60s. Initially some Protestants supported it. But many Protestants soon came to see the civil rights movement as a lead-in to 'Rome Rule'. They resisted — violently and bigotedly.

British troops went on to the streets in August 1969. Britain wanted to hold the balance. In practice that soon meant beating down



the Catholic revolt — through internment, house-to-house searches, torture, and no-jury courts.

The Catholics, most of whom had initially welcomed the troops, turned against them. The 'Provisional' wing

of Sinn Fein and the IRA — previously very weak — grew fast to become the major force in defending the Catholic communities against the army, the RUC and the Protestant paramilitaries.

In the early '70s it looked as if things might change. The British government negotiated with the Provisionals. But in 1974 a Protestant general strike smashed Britain's plan for Catholic-Protestant power-sharing in Northern Ireland and tentative moves to a united Ireland. The British government settled in for a war of attrition — and so did the IRA.

Remould

With the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement the British government has tried once again to remould the situation — this time through Dublin-Westminster power-sharing over Northern Ireland rather than Catholic-Protestant power-sharing in Northern Ireland. The Agreement has survived two years of Protestant fury, but as yet has led to almost no real change on the ground in Northern Ireland.

The Catholics remain the oppressed, the victims, the people who have been unjustly treated. Socialists are duty bound to support their struggle, even if we have to be sharply critical of the methods and politics of their most militant leaders, the Provi-

Withdraw the troops!

Statement by the Campaign Group of Labour MPs on Ireland.

The Campaign Group expresses its horror at the continuing loss of life as at Enniskillen. We believe that the violence and bloodshed in Northern Ireland stems primarily from the longstanding British occupation of that country and the partition imposed by force in 1921.

We note that neither emergency powers, internment without trial, Diplock courts, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the use of CS gas, plastic bullets, strip searching, the existence of the Stormont parliament, direct rule, power sharing, the despatch of British troops or the Anglo-Irish agreement have ever succeeded in bringing peace and justice to Northern Ireland.

The Campaign Group is convinced that the supposed needs of Western defence is one of the reasons why Britain remains in Northern Ireland.

We reaffirm our belief in the urgent need for Britain to announce its decision to terminate its jurisdiction in the province and to withdraw all its troops within the lifetime of this parliament, based on immediate negotiations between Britain and Ireland to secure reunification on terms that would safeguard all civil and political rights so as to make possible the realisation of the ancient and undoubted aspirations of the Irish people for a united and independent Ireland.

We call for the introduction of legislation in the British parliament to secure these objectives and to this end we endorse the efforts of those in both the north and south of Ireland who support the working class and believe that in the long run the problems of Ireland can only be solved by socialist policies.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

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What to do

***STOP THE MAIL NOW.** The only way to win the claim is to stop the mail from day one. Action should take place now when the postal workers are strongest, in the run-up to Christmas.

If the UCW EC calls any action, it will only be selective and possibly just involve the 'withdrawal of goodwill'. The immediate demands must be for a complete stoppage where action is called: involve the counter and clerical grades; no casuals allowed in; no diversion of mail accepted. Offices threatened with suspension for refusing diverted mail must immediately come out. The offices out should try to spread the action straight away by sending flying pickets to other offices. Socialist Organiser believes that the most effective action, and therefore the way to win is all-out strike action.

***FOR THE FULL CLAIM.** The claim is for three hours off with no strings.

The EC shows every indication of being prepared to trade off a reduction in hours with worsened conditions. Reject any strings! Call immediate regional meetings to organise opposition to any attempted sell-out and prepare for effective action. Strike action should be maintained until a special conference allows the membership to decide on any offer.

***NO SCABBING.** The Post Office and the Tories will try to organise scabbing to defeat any action. The bosses are preparing, so must the workers! Branches should be drawing up picketing rotas now to stop any strike-breaking and spread the action. The NCU and CMA should be immediately approached to refuse to work with any scab labour or do anything proper to UCW grades. The main threat of scabbing comes from firms already com-

peting on the parcels side, like TNT. Even a limited, alternative private mail service is much more difficult to achieve, but clearly the government and the Post Office are geared up to do as much as possible — probably limited to business users and mainly for propaganda reasons. The TGWU and other unions involved should be immediately approached to refuse to handle scab mail. Effective picketing must also be prepared.

***INVOLVE THE MEMBERS.** The dispute will not be won if action is just left to a handful of activists. Branch bulletins should be in operation already, to supplement regular mass meetings. The EC's timidity and dangers of a sell-out need to be countered; information about what is happening is urgently needed; the arguments about how to win got across.

The propaganda battle will be very important, particularly as the government and media try to use Christmas to whip up anti-strike feeling. Such propaganda can demoralise those left at home during the dispute.

Strike committees should be elected straight away, to ensure that the best activists are involved in the day to day running of the dispute.

***LABOUR MOVEMENT SOLIDARITY.** To defeat the Post Office management and the government behind them, support from the rest of the labour movement will be needed.

Postal workers should immediately contact other unions, Trades Councils, and Labour Parties, to ask for maximum support: moral, financial and help on the picket lines. With the union nationally clearly not geared up for a dispute, and with Christmas approaching and the winter here, financial help could be crucial.

By Pete Keenlyside,
UCW Manchester
Amalgamated
Branch (in a
personal capacity).

It is now over a week since the majority of Union of Communication Workers (UCW) members in the Post Office voted for strike action in support of the claim for three hours off the working week. So where is the action?

Where are the mountains of letters left unsorted, the piles of bags left untipped? The truth is that so far nothing at all has happened.

Instead of organising the members to fight for the claim the leadership of our union has spent the whole time in behind-closed-doors meetings with management. And what about? If the press are to be believed, and that is the only source of information most postal workers have, they are discussing late Saturday and Sunday collections. Wonderful! We send them off to get a shorter working week and they start negotiating for a longer one.

The claim for a three hour reduction is seen by many as the key to a five day week.

I doubt if they would get many of the existing workforce to work Saturday afternoons and Sundays anymore. So what the Post Office is probably after is an agreement to let Associate Grades, sorters, drivers and Postmen Higher Grade do the job.

Not only would they save a lot of money on this — AGs do not get shift allowance — they would also get round the opposition to AG drivers and PHGs that exist at the moment.



In return they would probably be prepared to offer slightly more than the one hour they have offered so far.

These shoddy proposals should have been rejected out of hand. Instead the Executive have used it as the excuse to do nothing.

According to the most recent circular they have only just started to set up the sub-committees needed to run the dispute. They are kidding us that some form of settlement is just around the corner and that it would be wrong to take action while this is being discussed.

Christmas

And meanwhile Christmas is getting steadily nearer. I think what they are hoping for is that, by the time the membership can throw out any deal they might come to at a special conference, the Christmas period will be past and we will have lost our chance. At the UCW Conference on union reorganisation at the weekend, they implied that Thursday's executive meeting will be crucial for action. But I expect they will find some reason to keep putting it off.

At branch level we cannot just sit around waiting for our executive to act. Not only should we be putting pressure on them to begin the action we should be preparing it ourselves.

We need to set up the strike com-

mittees now so it and when the dispute starts in earnest the membership can be fully involved.

We also need to plan the strike bulletins so we do not have to rely on the Tory press for information. Delegations need to be sent to labour movement meetings to build up support for the dispute in the wider movement.

At the moment most UCW members I have spoken to are expecting a sell-out. If things are left in the hands of the executive this is a racing certainty. But it can be avoided if the rank and file are organised to oppose it.

We need meetings in every region to make sure that the sell-out deals with the Post Office are opposed, and that the action is started in a way that is really effective. Where possible these should be called by regional committees or individual branches, but if that is not on then the Broad Left should take on the responsibility for organising them.

As far as delivery staff are concerned the three-hour claim was a minimum one. Anything less is no good to us and we do not want to work Saturday afternoons and Sundays to get it. We want our Saturdays off the same as everybody else. The message needs to go out loud and clear to the executive: 'Three hours off and nothing less!' 'Start the action now!'

UCW
No sellout!
Action now!

The anger spreads

According to recent reports one in six of all strikes in Britain have involved postal workers. They have almost all been unofficial. Both Post Office management and the UCW leadership have complained that postal workers are out of control. Postal workers have been saying 'enough is enough' to the Post Office's ruthless 'efficiency' drive and to their own union leadership's acceptance of it.

Liverpool is one of the main areas of resistance. There have been at least 29 stoppages there in the last 12 months. At last weekend's UCW special conference (on union reorganisation) Socialist Organiser spoke to a Liverpool postal worker, who wishes not to be named for fear of victimisation.

How do you see the situation after the 55% ballot majority for action?

Some people have said it is 'only' 55%. But my view is that it is a yes vote and that is it. Obviously we would have liked it to be bigger but it

is still a yes vote. I think in today's circumstances it is a fantastic result.

When the 55% was announced there was some feeling of disappointment amongst the rank and file. There is a general feeling of the need to fight but that is tempered by a hesitancy about when to fight.

We had a strike in 1971 and, though we lost that strike, it nevertheless had a good knock-on effect on subsequent pay deals.

There is now a problem because of the approach of Christmas. The idea in the resolution passed at this year's UCW conference was to have a fight in the lead-up to Christmas, when we are strongest. But we should have been fighting now. The later it is left, the greater the problem postal workers will have with their own money for Christmas.

If the executive calls any action it will be selective, but that would be very dangerous. It gives the initiative to the Post Office. They could possibly sit out selective action.

Although all-out action might be more painful for the membership, it is also cleaner. Everybody is out. You do not have the problems of suspensions and individuals being picked on. You are out and the issue is either win or lose.

Some might say we never voted for

all-out action. But what they voted for was the shorter working week and now the issue is: how are we going to get it? There is only one way — all-out from day one.

To get this flying pickets from the more militant branches will be essential. I do not think we can win the dispute by staying on the picket lines in Liverpool or the other strong centres. We must also insist that casuals are involved in the dispute and not allowed in the offices. No diversion of mail should be accepted.

In a strike we will go immediately to the Trades Council and the Labour Party, to get their support and make sure other workers are not scabbing on us. We need the help of rail workers, transport workers and others.

Obviously it will be much easier to get solidarity action if we ourselves are taking all-out action. With selective action you have the immediate problem of identifying what is and what is not scab mail. If other workers see postal workers still at work, they will be much more reluctant to take action.

Remember what some said during the miners strike: when all the miners are out then we will give them support.

The main threat of scabbing will probably be on the parcels side, where private firms like TNT already compete with the Post Office.

They will also try and move some other mail — not because they will be able to do our job properly, but to try and demoralise the strikers. The Tories' response will be two-pronged. One will be to demoralise our members by scab-herding, and the other will be to try to get the public's back up: 'spoiling our Christmas', that kind of thing.

What will be vitally important is that we keep all the members involved. On picket lines you tend to get only the activists — the real ones, not the paper ones!

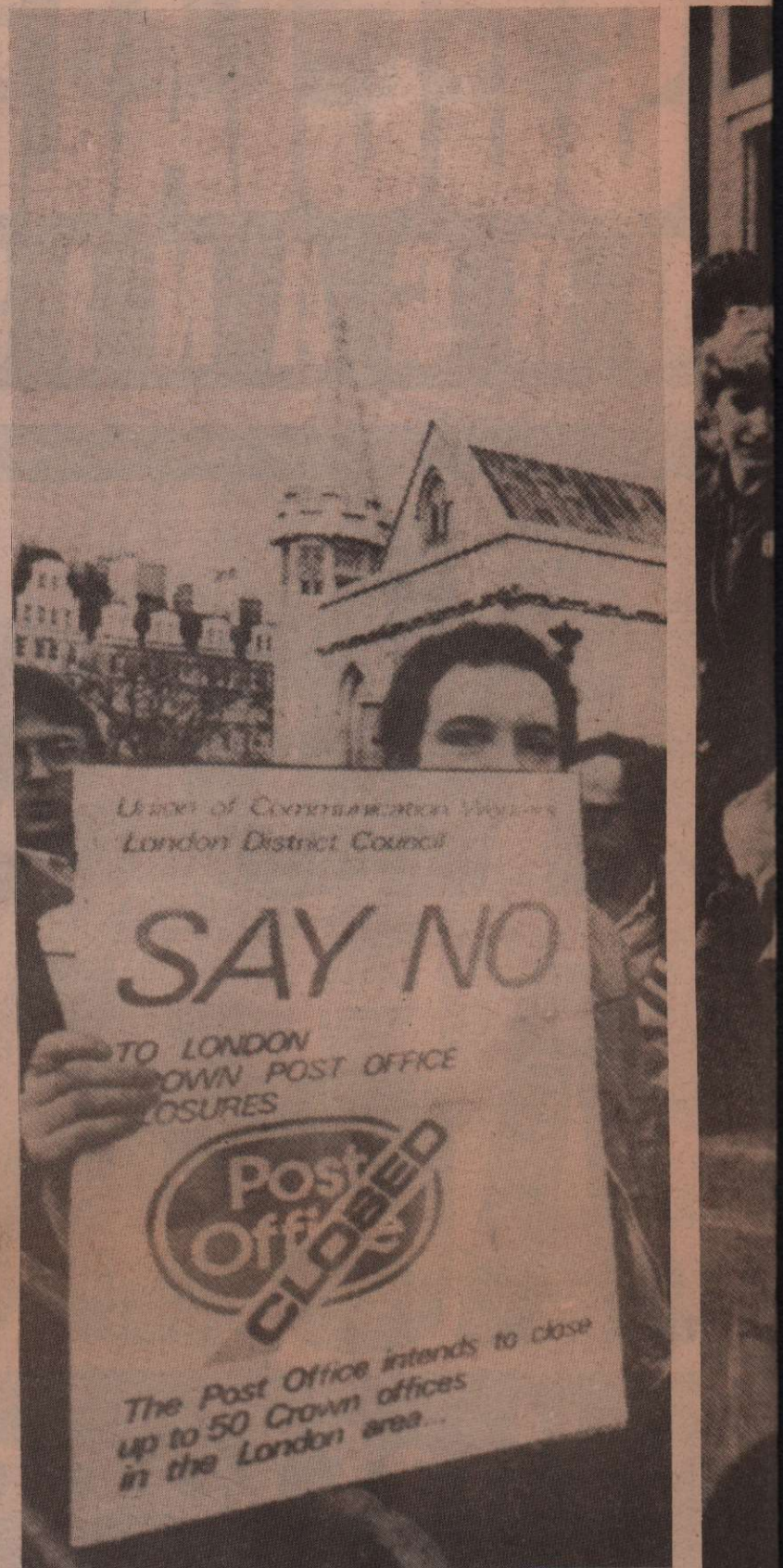
You will not win any strike in isolation: and you will not win if it is just a few activists sitting on a picket line with everybody else going home. We will need meetings of wives, husbands and partners of those on strike, to explain the issues and what is happening.

The union leadership is still in negotiations with the Post Office management and are desperate to avoid a strike. Is a sell-out brewing?

The union has said they are prepared to listen to anything the Post Office says and there are things they obviously want like Sunday working.

The main danger is in trying to get a shorter working week — the average now is 43 hours gross — we are going to end up with 7 days working.

But conference policy is for a



Right: Mount Pleasant strike in '85. Photo: John Sturrock (Network). Above: Protest at Crown Post Office closures. Photo: Andrew Wiard (Report).

Pickets and the law

Current British labour law (the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts and the 1984 Trade Union Act) is the most repressive and restrictive in western Europe.

Industrial action is 'unlawful' if
*It is in support of other workers;
*It is political;

*It is to do with a dispute outside the UK (for example if it is in solidarity with workers who are employed in the same multi-national company — perhaps in South Africa).

Solidarity action is 'unlawful' under almost all circumstances. Mass pickets are also unlawful.

Of course in practice the law has been broken many times. But the threat of legal action — and therefore heavy fines or 'sequestration' of union funds — has been used to cow timid union leaderships.

These are anti-union laws, designed to sap the strength of militants, reinforce conservative bureaucracies, and make it more and more difficult for unions to take action.

The labour movement needs to make them unworkable by all-out resistance to them. The 1970-74 Conservative government under Edward Heath introduced anti-union laws in

the shape of the Industrial Relations Act, which was eventually taken off the statute books after mass opposition by workers had rendered it a worthless piece of paper.

It is still not too late to fight the present anti-union laws.

Labour movement and student activists, should not wait to be approached by UCW members. Invite them immediately to speak to meetings; prepare collections and help on the picket lines now. The work of many miners' support groups is a good model. Start putting out leaflets to explain the postal workers' case now, to counter the government's campaign around Christmas that will surely be organised.

The demand for a shorter working week has special relevance to the unemployed, whose support will also be important if the clerical and counter staff come out and give an affected. Particular effort should be made to involve them in solidarity work.

Many students traditionally do casual work on the post at Christmas, and they could be a group targeted as possible strike breakers. Student activists have a particular responsibility to get the arguments across and organise solidarity in the colleges and universities.

shorter working week with no cost to the membership. Conference policy for 13 years has been for three hours off the working week.

This year a resolution was passed which called for a ballot for industrial action if the Post Office had not conceded the demand by September 1. That was the ballot we have just had.

The resolution also said that the reduction in hours should not be at the expense of existing terms and conditions: what we have now we hold. Finally, any deal should be decided by a special conference.

The union executive opposed this resolution and an amendment which also added the clerical and counter grades to the demand for three hours reduction.

What is the background to the dispute?

In car industry terms we are faced with speed-up, and Post Office management is squeezing us more and more.

They admit that the mail has gone up 25% in the last five years. With productivity deals there has been an increased pressure on the workers.

Something like 80% of the Post Office's costs go in wages: hence the attacks on wages and conditions.

The delivery offices are under the greatest pressure and that is where you are getting most of the lightning disputes.

Also the union's membership has definitely been changing. There is a

high turn-over; in some parts of London nearly 30% a year. The age profile is a lot younger. The memories of 1971 have faded fast.

In the '60s and '70s people used to see the main arena of class struggle as being the car factories, the docks, the mines. The Post Office is now becoming part of that arena. On the postal side, you are talking about an industry that is 99% unionised. We have a relatively democratic union, compared to others. We have a new, young membership. It is an industry which in the last five to seven years has undergone a radical change — automation, much more market oriented business and so on. Much more like a normal capitalist industry. And the result is more strikes, walk outs, and so on.

The Post Office is even beginning to sound like the old port employers, complaining about 'wildcat' strikes. They make agreements with the national officials, which then get overturned by delegates and the shop floor. In the Post Office the bosses have got a union leadership that cannot deliver.

On Merseyside there are now only about 2,000 dockers. There are 5,000 postal workers. It is not always a matter of numbers, but certainly we are talking about a major group of workers. With the exception of the union-recognition strikes — Moat House, A1 Feeds etc — probably the biggest strike in Liverpool over the last three years was our strike in 1985. We were out for ten days.



UCW

No sellout! Action now!

What's changed since 1971?

By Pete Keenlyside

In 1971 members of the UCW (then called the UPW) went on strike for seven weeks. They returned defeated, sold out by their own Executive.

After that, most postal workers said they'd never do it again. Every time you got up to oppose some lousy pay deal or other, the cry went up "Remember 1971".

Yet now the membership have voted to take strike action again. What has changed? A lot of the 'old ones' have retired and young people have taken their place. But the main factor has probably been a reaction to the way the job has changed over the years.

In 1971 we worked just as long hours as we do now. But we certainly didn't work as hard or under as much pressure.

On the letters side, which is all I can speak about, things were conducted at a more leisurely pace. On the walks you had time to talk to people, to pop in for the odd cup of tea and get to know your customers.

If you were inside sorting, although the work was boring, there were ways of breaking it up. Staff could go for a "smoke", chat to their mates or use some excuse to wander round the office for a few minutes.

And heaven help the gaffer that tried to get you to do something that wasn't on your duty. Once the duties had been agreed with the union, that was that. You knew exactly what it was you should be doing almost every minute of your shift.

If it wasn't written in the duty book, you didn't do it. If the duty book said feed the horses (some had been around for a long time), then you disappeared for half an hour or so. In those days we were poor but happy!

Not anymore we're not — happy that is.

Then the Post Office made a loss but served the public. These days it makes huge profits. And that's been done in the time-honoured way — by making the workers work harder.

The first stage was mechanisation. Before 1971 everything was sorted by hand. Then the Post Office came to the union with a scheme for creating mechanised officers. In future, letters would be faced, segregated and sorted by machines. Instead of people, ALFs, SEGs and code sort machines would stalk the sorting office floor. So, in they came, to be followed by ever newer and faster machines such as OCRs (Optical Character Recognition) which can read typewritten script.

Now fewer workers sort more letters at a pace dictated by the machines and ruthlessly enforced. Marx's description of a worker being a mere extension of a machine is a living reality in the Post Office today. No wonder they have difficulty getting people to work the machines.

Stage two was the productivity deal. We used to have a scheme where everyone got a lump sum payment every now and again if by any chance some savings had been made. Now we've got IWM (Improved Working Methods). This is a compulsory scheme and it operates on the basis of individual offices or even parts of offices.

To qualify for payments either the same number of staff have to do more work or, more usually, fewer staff do the same work. This has led to staff selling off tea breaks for a

few extra bob, and in many areas delivery staff can't finish their walks on time even by running round. Even the management have recognised that this has created problems.

But that hasn't stopped them bringing in son of IWM — Revised Revision Procedure (RRP). This operates by using so-called industrial engineers (work study to you and me). It caused a strike when first introduced in Leeds but is now being forced in throughout the country.

Next came the splitting of the businesses. Most people still think the Post Office is one big outfit. In fact it has been split into four — letters, parcels, counters and Giro. Each has its own highly-paid management structure and, believe it or not, they compete with each other.

This means, for instance that when it comes to delivering parcels, drivers on the letters side have to compete with drivers on the parcels side for the contract. This has both the effect of worsening conditions and making the business ripe for privatisation.

And finally there is the use of discipline. With over three million on the dole, management are using the disciplinary procedure as a weapon against the workforce, and interpreting it as they see fit.

Once upon a time the only way you could get the sack was to be caught pinching or by hitting the gaffer. Now, if you're a new entrant, four days off in the first year and out you go. In sorting offices people are being disciplined for going to the toilet too often and for talking on the floor.

What has made things worse is that all of this has come in either with very little opposition from our union leadership or with their active assistance. Mechanisation was supposed to be the means by which we got our shorter working week. The new machines were blacked for four years. Then in the end the leadership got us to accept them for a pittance and we've got nothing for all the newer machines, while the Post Office have got everything.

IWM was actually dreamed up by a member of the Executive, John Taylor. It may have suited his members in East London who had all sorts of non-existent duties to sell, but it's been a curse for the rest of us. Not only do we have to work faster but it divides member from member on the basis of how much payment they get. In London you can get £70 or more a week, and in the provinces often nothing.

And with IWM came Associate Grades, denied overtime and shift payments, and the introduction of casual labour. That's why branches like my own resisted the scheme until we were dragged in, and why we would like to see it scrapped.

Our leadership made a lot of noise about the splitting of the business but did nothing about it. No doubt we can expect the same when it comes to privatisation. And as for discipline, ask Alan Fraser how well they defended him from management abuses of the discipline code.

A successful outcome to the dispute over the shorter working week would achieve two things. It would halt the Post Office drive to turn us into virtual serfs and it would make it that much harder for our leaders to help them do it.

Solidarity betrayed

By Dion D'Silva

As Post Office workers prepare for industrial action, the limits that management will go to in attacking workers' rights can be shown by the experience of the Basingstoke strike in 1983.

The strike was against the victimisation of post-office worker Alan Fraser, a Socialist Organiser supporter. The victimisation was part of Post Office management's drive to clear the way for its 'efficiency' drive.

The national union leadership played a shameful role in the strike's defeat.

Traditionally Basingstoke branch wasn't very active. However strike action had led to the reinstatement of a young postman sacked in 1980. This resulted in a change of branch leadership, with Alan Fraser becoming Postal Secretary.

In 1982 a 24-hour strike forced management to reinstate another suspended postman and to increase the number of duties in the office.

Management were now out to get Alan. His signature had been forged on Late Attendance slips and false charges of leaving letters behind were made. In August 1983 Alan was sacked for absenteeism — a total of 15

Solidarity betrayed



LESSONS OF THE BASINGSTOKE POST OFFICE WORKERS STRIKE

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days in a year — nothing extraordinary.

A mass meeting voted by 120-1 to strike. Daily mass meetings were held and strike bulletins produced. Regional Officer Gerry Casey told the strikers that the best they could hope for was to appeal to management on 'humanitarian grounds'.

This was rejected by the strikers who continued to receive tremendous support from other postal workers, health workers and the local Labour Party.

John Taylor, UCW Assistant Secretary at the time, had gained a left reputation for the struggle in the Grunwick dispute, often against the union leadership. Yet he told Alan to accept the bosses' offer of £6,000. Alan refused.

However, after nearly a week on strike and after two votes Taylor convinced the strikers to go back. Many broke down and wept. They knew they could have won.

Subsequently the UCW leadership sought to justify the sell-out by themselves publishing Alan's sick record in a union circular and launching a witch-hunting attack on Socialist Organiser.

Nevertheless the strike had shown that a lifeless branch could be transformed into a fighting, campaigning one. This was achieved through a democratic and accountable leadership.

The strikers had support from other workers who had remembered the solidarity shown by the Basingstoke workers in their disputes. The lessons from this local branch hold good for the national union.

The lessons of 1971

The post workers have been centre-stage in the class struggle before. Their strike in 1971 was one of the great battles between the working class and the Tory government elected in 1970, which was then making a first attempt at what is today called Thatcherism.

The Tories won that battle, as they had previously won a battle against the power workers. It was not until the miners humbled them in early 1972 that the Tories began to lose their confidence. But the post workers could have won in 1971. That defeat has lessons for today.

In October 1970 the union — then called the UPW (Union of Post Office Workers) — lodged a claim for £3 or 15% wage increase, whichever was the greater. Militants wanted a £5 claim.

The Post Office offered 8%. Unofficial strikes took place.

The national strike began in January. It ended 44 days later with no real advances. The right wing UPW leaders believed they were in for a quick strike or more likely just the threat of a strike to bring the government to the negotiating table. They were unprepared for the Tories' intransigence — and for the determination and combativity of the rank and file.

Time and again the strikers went beyond the constraints of the leadership. Strict instructions had been issued that picketing be restricted to four people. There was no law at the time restricting picketing. The union leaders just wanted to keep the strike quiet and respectable.

Yet where serious scabbing took place, at the telephone exchanges dealing with international calls the number of pickets exceeded 100. (Tele phones were then run by the Post Office, rather than being a separate business).

Strike committees also organised regular report-back meetings.

Solidarity was also shown every Thursday at the weekly strike rallies in Hyde Park. Each week these got bigger and more militant in their

By Mick O'Sullivan
outlook.

The rank and file were determined and willing to face hardship. But the union leaders were aghast at the drain on the union funds of a long strike. The UPW was running out of money, and its leaders had no concept of organising a broad campaign for financial support. They seized at the first chance to end the dispute through arbitration.

Many strikers were disgusted. But the experienced militant activists were few and scattered. At the start of the strike mass meetings would enthusiastically cheer the union's right wing leader, Tom Jackson, with chants of 'J-A-C-K-S-O-N, Jackson!' Having decided to go for arbitration, Jackson was able to rush through a vote to return to work.

Strikes need militant and determined leadership. And if the official leaders are not militant and determined, then the best activists must get organised in a rank and file movement which can challenge those officials, explain the issues, and map out a fighting strategy right from the start.



UCW

No sellout!

Action now!

Under the counter revolt

By Greg Birch,
Branch Secretary,
UCW Basingstoke,
(in a personal capacity)

The UCW claim for a three hour reduction in the working week also applies to the Postal Officer and Postal Assistant grades. These are the counter clerks and the office staff in the Letter, Parcels and Counters businesses.

These grades have been affected most by the split of the Post Office into different businesses, creating small, isolated groups of members in branches dominated by the uniformed grades.

The claim for the shorter working week gives us an opportunity to use the strength of the majority to improve the conditions of the minority, especially the counter clerks. Counter staff are under extreme pressure from a management intent on getting maximum productivity at the expense of quality of service.

The threat is not only from privatisation, but also from the increasing extension of work — such as vehicle licencing — to sub-Post Office, and the establishment of sub-Post Offices within chain-store multiples.

Because of the increasing isolation, and the traditional non-militancy of counter staff, we recognised that getting a yes vote for industrial action from these grades would be difficult. All the more reason then that the three-hour reduction for these workers is not allowed to be dropped from the claim.

At present counter clerks work a 42-hour, 6-day week. The majority of this time is spent on the counter serving the public on the whole range of transactions available over a Post Office counter. These often involve quite complex paper work, vigilance against fraud and the usual run of awkward and occasionally violent customers.

With the increasing range of business, counter clerks are being expected to absorb more and more knowledge. All the transactions have to be balanced weekly, yet no more time has been given, and clerks are expected to absorb this extra work into their existing time.

Quite often counters are being deliberately understaffed to meet management budgets and cost cutting exercises. This puts yet more pressure on the clerk.

Counter Postal Officers have become very demoralised. They want to do the extra work and provide the services, but it always seems that they are expected to do it for nothing.

A strong campaign among Postal Officers for a reduction in the working week has to be mounted even now. The power that counter staff can wield is great — for example, stopping the payment of cash, payment of wages and counter services — in relation to their numbers. But traditionally they have been a non-militant grade, especially in the smaller unit. The fight for three hours off can change that.

Students: support the postal workers!

If the postal workers' union, the UCW, does call a strike for a shorter working week, students will have to be mobilised in their support.

Most current students will not have been involved in the support given to workers in struggle by students in strikes like the Warrington print dispute, the miners' strike or even the Wapping dispute.

Local strike support work still goes on but this will be a big national dispute of workers taking on the government.

Students can and must respond to the strike. Every union has access to a local Post Office and local UCW branches. Get-

By Simon Pottinger,
Vice-President
Welfare, National
Union of Students,
in a personal capacity

ting geared up to strike support work, getting students on picket lines, collecting strike funds, helping to produce strike bulletins, or whatever, could do a lot to re-orientate the movement back towards basic political issues and away from the rarified environs of student unions.

There'll be battles in the colleges as well. Many students work on the Christmas post and students are likely to be targeted as a scab workforce. Propagandising on behalf of the postal workers to prevent students scabbing may be crucial. The need to sustain this kind of activity over the Christmas break increases the need to organise ourselves quickly and effectively.

We'll be producing 'Don't scab on the Postal Workers' leaflets for use in Student Unions. SSiN supporters should be organising their Labour Clubs in particular to help the postal workers win.

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty, East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

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

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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For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class based women's movement.

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For equality for lesbians and gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

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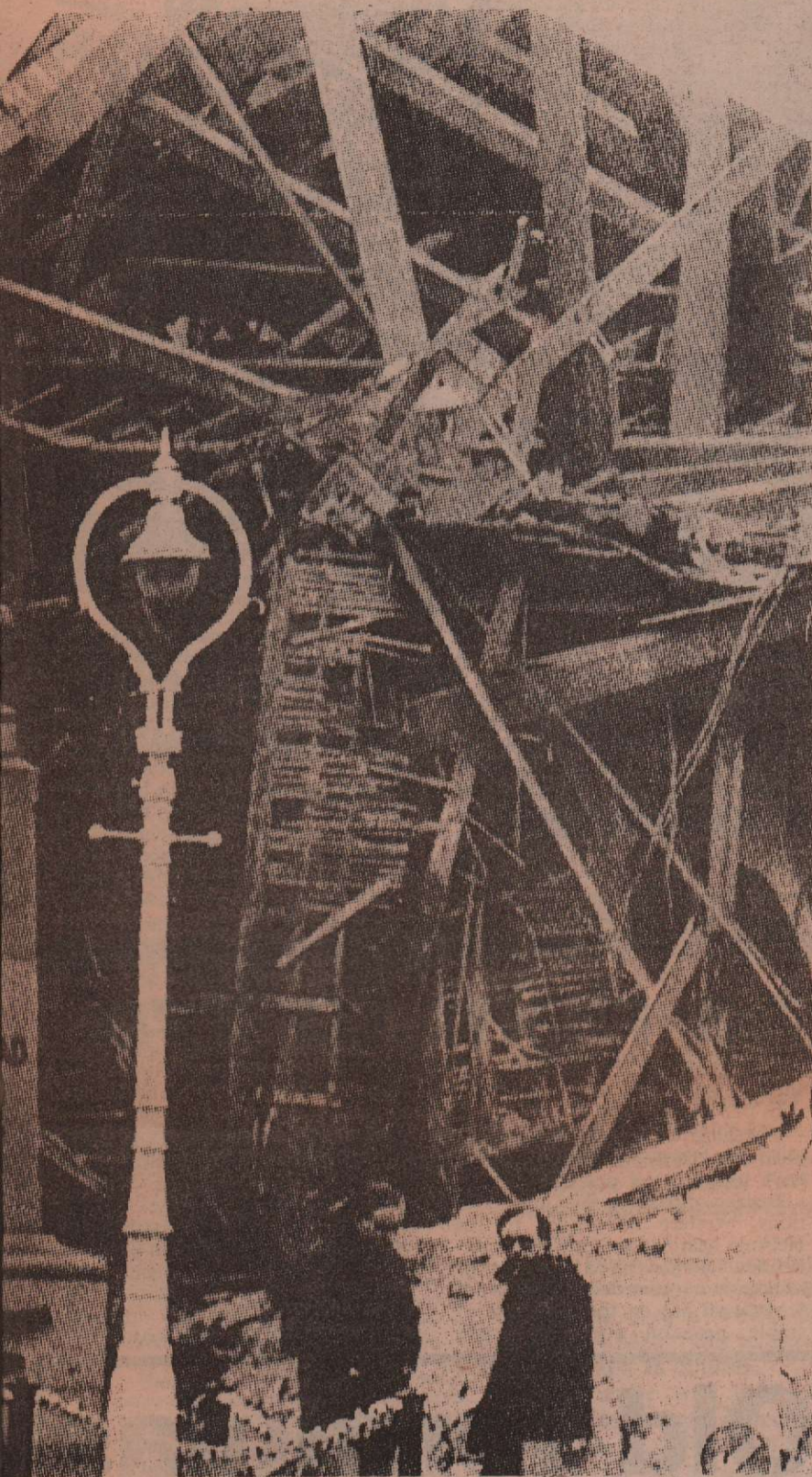
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of the last atrocity

What Sinn Fein says



Dodging the issues

Lynn Ferguson looks at the left's response to the Enniskillen tragedy

THE LEFT'S response to the Enniskillen bombing has been symptomatic of its unwillingness seriously to address the issues in Ireland.

Socialist Worker was typical. From its front-page headline — 'The Bitter Fruits of British Rule' — you would think it was arguing for Troops Out. In fact neither the front-page article nor the editorial, 'The Only Way Out', contained that demand. Instead it argued in fairytale fashion that basic, elementary socialist agitation is the answer — to magically unite the Irish workers and sweep away the problems.

In its issue-dodging verbosity, *SW* left all the major questions unanswered or glossed over in a few banal phrases.

What is the British state doing in Ireland now? What does the British government want? We got a potted history of the last 65 years, with the evil British state duping the Protestants into acting as their agents in the North.

The evidence of the past few years — where the British state clearly draws no profit or strategic advantage from Northern Ireland, and is trying to get some sort of settlement that the Protestants do not like — was completely ignored. Why did the Anglo-Irish deal lead to an Orange backlash? What does this tell us about British government policy towards Ireland? *SW* seems neither to know nor to care.

On the Protestant working class *SW* is particularly incoherent. On the one hand the Protestants are reactionary bigots bought off by the British state. But by magic they can be won over to the struggle for a united Ireland by throwing in a bit of socialist propaganda.

SW's basic argument is that "It is British rule that is the source of Northern Ireland's problems". Sinn Fein has got that right. However, their "methods" will not win sufficient mass support. So what has to be done is to use "socialist politics" to persuade the Southern Catholics and Northern Protestants to throw in their lot with the Northern Catholics. "Socialist politics" are defined as bread-and-butter demands on jobs, housing and wages.

This is an odd jumble of nationalism and economism. *SW* accepts the nationalist view of the issues, and recommends socialism only as a means to the greater nationalist end. Moreover, since when has *SW* reckoned that "socialist politics" are an instant recipe for mass support? In Britain they argue that the

Socialist Worker
Hell on the line
As the crisis deepens... other

THE BITTER FRUITS OF BRITISH RULE



very attempt to win majority support — in ballots and elections — drags you into reformism, and the only true socialists are those who base themselves on the combative minority. Why then in Ireland is it wrong to base yourself on a combative minority, and why then in Ireland is socialism synonymous with winning the majority?

More than that: the history of Northern Ireland has many examples of Protestant-Catholic worker unity around economic questions. That unity has always shattered when the question of the Border was raised. A Protestant worker can very well be convinced about socialism and workers' rights, yet prefer to be part of a socialist Britain rather than a socialist Ireland. You can't dodge the national question by talking about something else — economics — instead.

Our job is to work out a programme to unite the Irish working class. The Protestant workers have their own history and culture, and form a distinct national minority. They have a genuine fear of becoming an oppressed minority in a Catholic united Ireland. Any programme to unite the working class has to tackle this problem, not just sweep it under the carpet.

The fundamental problem in Northern Ireland is not 'British rule', but a deeply divided working class. That has to be the starting point for socialists. We want to see Britain withdraw and Ireland united and independent — because we think that, if the united Ireland has adequate provision for the Protestants' rights, that is the best framework for developing the working-class struggle. But to get it we need to address the issues. *SW* dodges them.

Was Ken Livingstone right?

By John O'Mahony

thirsty *Sun*, which gloated when the British Navy sent a shipful of Argentinians to the bottom of the South Atlantic, or the other Tory rags, to tell a Labour MP what he can or cannot say.

And what is Neil Kinnock's policy for Ireland? He doesn't have one. On paper Labour is committed to a united Ireland — but since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed two years ago, Labour's front bench has re-established a common front with the Tories on Ireland. If Labour were to form a government now, Neil Kinnock would do exactly what the Tories are doing.

He has learned nothing from Labour's record in the 1970s. He has not learned that the status quo in Northern Ireland is fundamentally untenable. Under a Kinnock government, Labour's united Ireland policy would be a dead letter.

Nevertheless, much of what Kinnock said against Livingstone is true! That is the measure of the Labour Left's confusion on Ireland.

Troops out without a political settlement would not lead to a united Ireland, but to sectarian civil war and a new partition. Kinnock is right about that, and Livingstone (together with the Campaign Group of MPs,

whose statement we reprint) is wrong.

The central problem in Ireland is the chronic antagonism and division between the two Irish communities. That predates Partition, and would continue — and express itself murderously — if Britain withdrew without a political settlement.

Partition, and the brutal, uncomprehending, and indifferent policy of successive British governments, have made things worse. Britain's rule in Northern Ireland is a holding operation for the status quo, not a solution.

The only democratic solution is a united Ireland with federal institutions that allow local autonomy to the Protestants. That united Ireland would probably have much closer links with Britain than the 26 Counties have had since their secession from the UK in 1922, but they would be voluntary links, not links secured by British troops on the streets.

Kinnock is right against the dominant view on the left. But Kinnock represents the Labour and trade union Establishment — and he may one day represent the British Establishment as prime minister. Kinnock is incapable of learning.

The serious left can learn. But it needs to learn to deal with the facts of Irish reality.

We reprint here the views of Sinn Fein, from 'An Phoblacht' of 19 November and an interview with Gerry Adams on the Enniskillen bombing

To the deep disappointment of newspaper owners, Livingstone is not alone and his views are popular among trade union activists and those most oppressed by the Thatcher government.

For many years public opinion surveys have shown that the majority of British people want withdrawal. Black communities and trade unionists in struggle have tasted police brutality which has been tried and tested in the Six Counties...

Livingstone represents a growing awareness within the Labour Party that British colonialism in Ireland must end. Many Labour activists now believe that their party must take a confident stand on basic principles if it is ever again to win an election...

By stating that history is on the side of the republican struggle, by reminding Britain of all the other colonies it has left, Livingstone suggested the only course of action which could bring peace to Ireland. It will also benefit British working people in the long run. The rich and powerful are committed to continued colonisation but it's directly against the interests of the vast majority of the British people.

It's not a criticism of Ken Livingstone to say that republicans knew British withdrawal was inevitable long before he said it. His statement and his courage in sticking by it are important because millions of British people need to realise that their army is engaged in a pointless, hopeless task and that their best interests are served by bringing their boys home.

Condemn?

There have been many calls on you to condemn the IRA. Why didn't you do so after the Enniskillen bombing?

It would be hypocritical for me to condemn the Army for any action if I disagree with that action. In my view the IRA are freedom fighters. They made a terrible mistake at Enniskillen. They must not repeat that mistake.

I have no doubt that the Volunteers involved are terribly distressed by the tragic consequences of their operation. That should not stop other republicans being critical of them.

But condemnations would not be part of my criticisms.

Every IRA Volunteer must realise that he or she has the capacity to advance or retard the national struggle. The British crown forces will exploit IRA operational mistakes in a ruthless manner. They have no concern for the civilian population.

Concern for the civilian population must be a key factor in the IRA's deliberations. I deeply regret that Enniskillen happened and my sympathy is with the relatives of the dead and injured. Their dignity in mourning was very moving and their forgiveness, and particularly the words of Mr Wilson, had a deep effect on me and I am sure on other republicans, much more so than the nauseating wave of condemnations that were heaped on us by a wide range of self-righteous political and religious leaders.

They are well versed in the politics of condemnation. They, more than any other element, will ensure, tragically for the rest of us, that Enniskillen will not be a watershed but merely a cynical propaganda exercise of exploitation of the dead.

sionals.

The problem with Sinn Fein and the IRA is that over the years they have settled into fighting a war of attrition as a Catholic, not a working-class socialist or even an all-Irish nationalist organisation. They have given up on any hope of talking to the Protestant workers.

This is understandable. The Protestant workers are often very bigoted. But a struggle based narrowly on the Catholic minority in the North — 10% of all the Irish people — can never achieve a united Ireland. If it is a military struggle, the 'most' it can achieve is to trigger an all-out sectarian civil war — which the Catholics would not win.

A socialist movement needs to be built, which unites Catholic and Protestant workers around socialist aims and a consistently democratic programme for Ireland — a federal united Ireland with local autonomy for the mainly Protestant area.

So long as the Northern Ireland state exists, violence will continue. The deep sectarian hostilities arise in part from the structure of that state. It is possible to build a movement that breaks down the divisions. British socialists can help by distancing ourselves entirely from the actions of successive British governments, Tory and Labour, and helping Irish socialists and Republicans to develop a democratic programme to unite Ireland.

KEN Livingstone brought a storm about his head when, immediately after the Enniskillen massacre, he said that Britain should withdraw from Northern Ireland.

The hypocritical press raged, and so did Neil Kinnock. Livingstone condemned the Enniskillen slaughter, but the press didn't want to notice. A number of Labour MPs demanded that Livingstone, a member of Labour's National Executive, should be expelled from the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Neil Kinnock laid into Livingstone: "British withdrawal would spread the slaughter not only in Northern Ireland, but in the Republic of Ireland and mainland Britain as well".

Now Livingstone is a capable self-publicist. He knows the press game. He is a past master at playing it. His history shows that he is a calculating man, and a self-regarding one.

He must have known what would follow his comments at this time, and he must have wanted it to happen. He must have thought the publicity would be good for his standing on the left. He may be right.

In any case Livingstone should have the right to say what he likes. It is not for the hypocritical and blood-

●Letters

A brilliant editorial

Congratulations on a brilliant editorial re open letter to Gerry Adams. If only we could get copies to every citizen in Northern Ireland, I'm sure a lot of the current fears and uneasiness for the future, which is understandable in their minds, would take on a new meaning.

Yours comradely,
GEORGE CLARK
Chair, Wallasey CLP

Heavier sentences?

Jill Mountford (Letters, SO331), argues that longer sentences for rapists would help deter potential rapists, and protect potential victims. She argues for this to be part of a more general policy, and rejects forms of punishment such as castration.

There is no doubt that Jill's argument has some force. But I'm not sure she doesn't miss the point. Of course socialists are not opposed *per se* to heavier sentences, or even very long sentences, for people who do harm to others. We don't argue that all murderers should be allowed to go scot free; and if no penalty for rapists existed at all we wouldn't consider this to be a good thing.

When rapists get light sentences we protest about it. We are aware of the injustices that exist in rape laws.

But we have a problem. We can comment on unfair sentences, but short of becoming judges, we can't actually lengthen them. The question therefore is: what do we campaign for as an answer to rape? And a campaign for 'longer sentences' would pose a lot of difficulties.

We could campaign for a higher minimum sentence. But that might not solve the question, and might lead to more rapists getting off, as juries could be more reluctant to convict. And sexist judges would probably stick to the minimum.

A more vaguely defined campaign for longer sentences would not help. We might want it to be part of a broader policy, but it would be unlikely to be. For in reality, most of those who argue for heavier sentences do so in isolation and don't understand the wider social issues. Gutter press tabloids that bay for the blood of 'sex fiends' and other 'beasts' are hardly campaigners for women's liberation. The call for heavier sentences in fact forms part of right-wing calls for 'law and order' and so on.

We do have a responsibility to explain that rape is rooted in women's oppression and isn't just a crime of sex-crazed individuals and that therefore individual punishments won't make rape go away.

That doesn't mean that we are oblivious to the real suffering rape causes or should stand in self-satisfaction on the sidelines with the 'need to change society' as a handy cop-out. We should campaign for real changes, including changes in the law (so that rape in marriage is legally recognised, etc).

But we should neither lose sight of our general view of things, nor allow ourselves to aid the 'law and order' backlash fuelled by the popular press.

GERRY BATES,
South London

Apologies

I really must apologise to you and your readers about letters I wrote in your paper some time ago about Derek Hatton.

You called him "Flash Harry from Liverpool" to which I objected. Well I now realise that I was wrong. He seems to have a policy of if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, which has made him, in reality, a 'second-rate capitalist', with his posh cars, etc.

Why, he now even poses for the Sun, scab Tory rag.

Again, I apologise. I was wrong, you were right.

STEVE REVINS
Stafford

Labour women meet

By Belinda Weaver

There was lots of talk about socialism at last week's Labour Women's Conference in Blackpool, but there wasn't much idea about how to get there.

Delegates found it a confusing and disappointing conference. The mood was militant enough, but the energy was undirected.

Walworth Road did their level best to ruin the conference. Already postponed once, the conference was planned to consist largely of workshops, with only a morning (the Sunday) set aside for resolutions. The conference was also planned to be a 2½ days; it ended up as one and a half. If this wasn't bad enough, the subjects permitted for discussion were few.

Northern Ireland was banned; so was low pay. Walworth Road trusted us to talk about child abuse, women's safety, women's health and the poll tax, but obviously didn't want us discussing issues such as the economy which they don't consider strictly 'women's issues'.

This censorship caused considerable anger. Delegate after delegate got up to oppose the Arrangements Report. The arrangements were altered to eliminate the Saturday afternoon workshops and to go straight to resolutions after lunch.

The chairing of the conference was appalling. Chair Irene Gilgallon



Protest in Westminster against anti-abortion meeting. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni, Report.

referred to the delegates constantly as "Ladies". Repeated calls from the floor and a petition did not alter her thinking. She seemed very chary of the word 'women'. When she realised she couldn't use "Ladies" one more time without a revolt, she used "delegates" or "persons". It was ludicrous. She also managed to confuse delegates so much with her convoluted wording that they were often uncertain of whether to vote for or against a motion.

But it was perfect delaying tactics,

perfect frustrating tactics, by the platform. Tempers ran high, but many felt 'what's the use?'

The conference voted unanimously to fight the Alton Bill, and voted against privatisation, the poll tax and other Tory cuts. The mood of ordinary delegates was certainly to the left. Some of the most right wing speaking and voting came from union delegations. A speaker from COHSE supported conference arrangements, despite representing a largely female workforce who are

amongst the lowest paid. I wonder if those low paid members think she was right to refuse to overturn the arrangements so that a strategy to fight for the low paid could be debated.

Some women there began trying to plan an alternative conference. Others planned to organise better for next year. If we are to take on Walworth Road, and demand a serious resolution conference for next year, then we need to get started in our Women's Sections now. Get in there and argue now.

Yuriy Badzyo: 'the right to live'

Yuriy Badzyo was arrested in 1979 and sentenced to seven years in a hard-labour camp and five years internal exile on charges of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda".

The basis for this charge was a treatise entitled "The Right to Live", which examined Soviet nationality policy towards the Ukraine, the falsification of Ukrainian history and the russification of the Ukrainian language and culture.

At the beginning of this year the Soviet authorities requested him to write a petition for a pardon. He refused and instead wrote to M. Gorbachev in June arguing that all the problems he posed in his study still remained unsolved.

In August he received permission to visit his sick elderly mother in the Ukraine from his place of exile. But this permission was revoked when he arrived in Kiev. Badzyo complained to various Soviet authorities about his treatment, which is the subject of this appeal written on 31 August. Badzyo argues that "at the heart of the social and political ideology of my treatise, "The Right to Live", lies the concept of democratic socialism", and "the ideas of democracy, freedom and cooperation are the keynote of all my public statements".

Badzyo criticises the indifferent West:

"And we Ukrainians have learned once again that politicians and the public in the West, and in particular the Western media, treat us as no more than material to be used for propaganda purposes. They "forget" that we are a nation, a separate and self-contained subject of history, with our own legitimate historical needs and interests".

Badzyo believes that: "My world outlook, political conduct, and emotional responses to situations are far from extremist, and I am not prone to immoderate responses to situations. I already knew and now have new confirmation of the sad truth that in terms of the historical needs and prospects of

An appeal by Ukrainian socialist oppositionist Yuriy Badzyo

the Ukrainian people today's world is blind and deaf to our fate." The attempts by the Kiev authorities, "citing an order from Moscow", to prevent him visiting his mother he described as "almost certainly her last chance to see her son and bid him good-bye forever."

Badzyo wrote to various Soviet departments but he did not receive a single response and he feels "as if we were in a torture chamber". Badzyo states that "even if there were no high-sounding declarations by the government about the revolutionary restructuring and democratisation of Soviet society" he would find it all the more contemptible the way he has been treated because he refused to write a petition for a pardon. Badzyo is not completely surprised as he has "spent a considerable portion of my life amidst a thick fog of official lies, demagoguery, oppression, and abuse".

The way the authorities have treated him is in revenge for his refusal to yield and it seriously questions the "very essence of the government's proclamations about reforms". Badzyo goes on to state: "I interpret what the government has done as serious proof of its true ideological and moral nature, of the real intentions of the initiators of restructuring, and of the possibility and prospects of revolution from above".

Such a disregard for the law, Badzyo believes, "is possible only when public opinion does not exist, or when the authorities know that there will be no reaction from world public opinion". During the 1960s and 1970s, the Ukraine, "has suffered perhaps the harshest repressions and the largest human losses. The reaction of the world to our situation has been and remains outrageously indifferent and self-seeking. Great-power and ethnic egoism reigns in the attitude towards us where one might expect simple human sympathy and

to have produced active solidarity with our plight.

Disregard of the Ukrainian problem and Ukrainophobia cannot but have its historical consequences..."

Badzyo appeals to the United Nations, Western delegations to the Helsinki hearings and Socialist International and goes on to say that "the lasting and sound betterment of international life on the principles of stable peaceful coexistence and

cooperation cannot occur without a complete and genuinely revolutionary democratisation of the Soviet Union, and the democratisation of the USSR is impossible without democracy for the Ukraine, without a democratic resolution of the Ukrainian question, that is, in practical terms, without the attainment by the Ukrainian people of national independence, of real and complete control over its historical existence".

Old formulas

Tony Brown reviews 'Slamdance'.

Slamdance is one of those nasty formula films. You know, the type that has the innocent character who accidentally becomes the centre of a murder case and is soon fighting not only the cops but also a group of corrupt politicians. And just for good measure it all revolves around a sex expose which we never get let in on.

CC Drood (Tom Hulce) is a Los Angeles cartoonist who comes home one day to find out he's been burgled. Unbeknown to him he has evidence about the murder of Yolanda, an ex-girl friend. The murderers need the photo to protect themselves. (Sounds familiar?)

Drood is not very together. He's unreliable, disorganised and unhappily separated from Helen, his wife (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) and daughter.

Remarkably though he manages to pull himself together and uncover the murderer and the interconnections between the cops and politicians. By the end of the film there have been five murders, three burglaries,

countless threats of physical violence, a hint of sex, marriage and retrieval, breakdown and retrieval and a happy ending. You can see it's a bit tiring.

Slamdance is very similar in style and content to another current film, Private Investigator. In each film the formula is the same and we are asked to believe that it's realistic.

But while the formula is routine the details are unpredictable. You never know when a beating is about to take place or another break-in — the viewer is completely at the mercy of the film-maker. When a character becomes awkward they are simply murdered. The violence is gratuitous and both the characters and the viewer is terrorised, leaving an unpleasant taste in the mouth.

The real problem is that there is simply no story to tell, and what there is is never fully explained.

The quality cast never really deliver.

Hulce unfortunately continues on from his Mozart role in Amadeus and too often breaks out into that laugh at the most inexplicable moments. Mastrantonio, last seen in The Colour of Money, is wooden, and Harry Dean Stanton as one of the cops, looks like he's just filling in time. Adam Ant, as the double-dealing best friend, is better but then that's probably because he needs to demonstrate that he's more than just a pretty face.

Save the £3.50.

The dangers of 'Training for Life'

By Jim Denham

The government have taken another big step towards introducing "Workfare" — the US system which requires the unemployed to work for their benefit payments.

Last week the Employment Secretary announced "Training for Life", a new scheme that will replace the failed Job Training Scheme and

the long-established Community Programme.

Training for Life will, in fact, incorporate all the worst aspects of JTS and mark the end of the "rate for the job" principle that made the Community Programme the least exploitative of all the government schemes.

Training for Life will be introduced next September and will cost £1½ billion, but no extra money will be provided: the funding will be raised by cutting back on existing expenditure and merging CP with JTS.

The new scheme will pay "benefit

plus" — a form of work that is thought to mean benefit rates plus between £5 and £10 extra. The DHSS estimates that the cost of going to work each week is, on average, over £7, so a lot of people could actually end up worse off on Training for Life than on the dole!

JTS flopped largely because the unemployed themselves refused to work for their dole. Training for Life will almost certainly suffer the same fate, unless they make it compulsory.

Fowler insists that the scheme will be voluntary but without some form of compulsion the target of 600,000

places will never be reached.

The labour movement must step up the fight against "Workfare": no to "Training for Life", and no to conscription!

Meanwhile, the unemployed and low paid workers will be hit by the decision to extend the period during which those deemed to be "voluntarily" out of work are denied benefit, to six months.

This means that someone who leaves a job "without good reason",

or who is sacked for "misconduct" will be denied all unemployment benefit and 40% of their supplementary benefit for six months. Low pay, dangerous conditions and even sexual harassment are not usually accepted as good reasons for leaving a job! "Misconduct" of course can often mean simply standing up for your rights against a dictatorial boss.

The rule will also affect people who leave government schemes like Training for Life early.

New plan to divide nurses

Yet again nurses are negotiating for another pay rise, but what will be on offer? It seems likely that 'pay spines' will be introduced, dividing nurses yet further.

This new idea will pay nurses more for working in areas of greater responsibility. A staff nurse working in a special care baby unit looking after very sick babies will be paid more than a staff nurse working with long-stay geriatrics. But where does a staff nurse working in a geriatric

MANCHESTER

Fighting back

By Tony Dale

On Friday 20 November, a meeting of over 40 council workers and Labour Party members decided to set up Manchester Fight back, to fight to defend jobs and services in Manchester City Council.

The Council is drawing up plans to restructure all council services by 16 December. The unions have been given less than a month to discuss these proposals. Leading Labour councillors have stated that they intend to ignore any union opposition. The aim of the restructuring is to lose at least another 2,700 jobs and probably more.

'Fight Back' will stand for no cuts, and combine this with working with and supporting fights against individual cutbacks. Direct Works is on the edge of a restructuring dispute. Workers are being transferred from maintenance to capital work and thus lower bonuses. The Direct Works unions are currently discussing industrial action.

Thousands of job losses are planned in education. The student union and trades unions are presently discussing how best to fight back against these proposals.

Manchester Fight Back is calling a lobby of the Manchester City Labour Party on 9 December and the City Council on 16 December.

By Mary Williams, NUPE Cardiff night nurse.

intensive care come in? Or a staff nurse working with fairly ill babies?

It is difficult to attract staff into intensive care work — the turn-over is high — but this is to do with poor staffing levels, the stressful nature of the work, and a lack of real power in decisions concerning the patients.

Working conditions and pay levels need to be improved for all nurses. We all have great responsibilities in looking after patients. Otherwise dangerous divisions will open up — nurses flocking to the higher paid work and leaving the more poorly

paid work behind. We do not want some grade of 'super-nurse'.

The early rumour from the current pay talks is that all unsocial hours payments would be scrapped. However, this was apparently put aside because of the uproar from night nurses. The Pay Review Body, i.e. the government, wanted to pay a basic £1.20 an hour for all unsocial hours work, regardless of grade!

Most qualified nurses are on £4-£6 an hour, and night duty is paid at time and a third with Saturday night at time and two-thirds. Some nurses on permanent nights stood to lose £50 a week!

It is high time we had a decent wage rise, a cut in hours to 35 a week and increased shift allowances. But we won't get that until we go on strike. So leave the Royal College of Nursing, join a proper union and get agitating!

British Gas strike

By Paul Evans, NALGO shop steward, British Gas

On Friday 13 November, 700 NALGO Gas Service staff walked out in support of suspended colleagues in Bolton. They had balloted three to one in favour of action.

The Bolton staff were suspended for refusing to operate a new computer system which British Gas have been trying to introduce for the last 18 months.

The strike was 100% solid, with pickets on all offices. Talks had been taking place all week at British Gas HQ between management and NALGO negotiators.

In a strangely swift turn of events, mass meetings were called for Friday 20 November and all members were advised by their NALGO representatives to go back to work, because the strike was supposedly crumbling in other areas.

Using the tactics of fear and division, the vote to return to work was almost inevitable.

The strikers returned to work on Monday in a very bitter mood — not against their employers but against their very own union.

NALGO should think over its part in this affair very carefully. Sweetheart deals with British Gas management will not be tolerated by a newly awakened rank and file.

Avoiding the real issues

National Union of Students women-only events are strange things, usually revolving around self-indulgent political bantering giving little time to what some of us believe to be the real issues affecting women.

The agenda did highlight many such issues: violence against women campaigns; direct action on sexual harassment; dealing with anti-abortionists; building women's groups; campaigning for childcare; women in the arts; women and AIDS; Thatcher's third term and its effects on women were all workshops which were each repeated three times throughout the day.

Unfortunately there was neither the time nor the inclination for many of them to actually produce something constructive.

The sexual harassment workshop I attended concluded that direct action took the form of a better poster from NUS spelling out what sexual harassment is.

I kept asking myself what women wanted from this event. The Socialist Worker Student Society women

SSiN

By Mary Rawcliffe St Martin's

predictably used it as a political platform, which as usual annoyed everyone else, but in condemning SWSS the whole of the far left was written off. The claim seems to be that women are either committed to women's autonomy in the movement or are committed to a male-dominated, political group in the hard left in which women necessarily come a poor third, the two being mutually exclusive.

The rationale behind this assumption is difficult to ascertain, if these women want to change their situation then by its very nature the movement must be political, yet organisations attempting to do this are automatically viewed with suspicion.

However, there were glimmers of hope: the women's group workshop decided that a strong group was a campaigning group and women shared their ideas and experiences of campaigns undertaken, concluding

that there wasn't a conflict because one leads to the other or ought to.

Campaigning must also be the major strategy in winning childcare facilities and many references were made to campaigning against Alton's Bill, forming FAB groups, etc.

It seems a shame that there is still no strategy to incorporate all these campaigns despite the Women Campaign motion for the Women's Charter being passed at NUS women's conference nearly six months ago.

The idea of the Charter — to integrate all women's campaigning issues into one document — was only notable in its absence.

The day was a vast improvement on last year, mainly due to better organisation, but the plenary session reiterated what we all knew wasn't far beneath the surface: politics is bad and doesn't really have a place in the NUS women's movement.

A point which was made clear many times at the expense of using the discussion productively to formulate strategies for fighting Alton's Bill.

This in itself sums up NUS women's campaign.

After Chernobyl

One fascinating part of the Eastern Europe Solidarity conference was the workshop on Chernobyl, led by Viktor Haynes and Marko Bojcun.

Viktor started with the trial of those "responsible" for the disaster. Curiously, while the shift operators had been publicly blamed, the six defendants were all top management. Charged with exposing workers to radiation and other counts of negligence, the defendants blamed faulty design and construction of the power station. Their detailed defence was only heard in secret.

The history of the plant includes such treasures as: lack of detailed plans; lateness of delivery of materials; defective materials; unskilled labour and management; unrealistic schedules, leading to corners being cut.

Once built, the plant was run with a horrifying disregard for elementary safety. Modified to produce 15% more power, there had been a near disaster the previous year. Protection systems were switched off; shortages of safety equipment were not rectified; few workers attended safety classes. There had been 50 serious safety violations in one six month period.

On the cause of the disaster of 25 April 1986, Viktor brought out the following:

1). The RBMK reactors at Chernobyl had been built for cheapness.

2). They operate on a principle similar to an atomic bomb in that they allow for a rapid growth in the number of neutrons (these cause the chain reaction where atoms of uranium break up, releasing energy and more neutrons).

Thus, huge power surges are inevitable.

3). The operators had been carrying out a planned experiment. Yet, they were interrupted by the grid controller (in charge of feeding electricity into the national grid) who demanded that the reactor be reconnected. When control was handed back, the operators must have been under pressure to get on with the experiment. An unusually large power surge may have been the result, causing overheating of the coolant water. This boiled, making the overheating worse as steam is less able to carry away heat. The result was an explosion.

4). The core was designed with tonnes of graphite (carbon). Steam reacts with hot graphite, making the inflammable gases, hydrogen and carbon monoxide. This caused the second explosion, blowing the dome off and exposing the graphite to oxygen. It caught fire, sending clouds of radioactive fumes over half Europe.

Summing up, the judge spoke of poor discipline and lack of safety procedures. The operators had been described as technically incompetent, reckless, unaware of the danger to themselves and millions of others. So why were they not on trial? They were said to have been punished but no spokesperson could or would say how.

How could the operators have lacked a "safety culture"? Indeed, why had they been employed in the first place? The evidence pointed to the government's ultimate responsibility for imposing a vast nuclear power programme on the cheap. To take one instance, the known lack of



Les Hearn's SCIENCE COLUMN

simulators would account for the poor training of the operators in coping with emergencies. Another factor is the widespread practice of "jobs for the comrades", (Communist Party membership being a prime qualification for a good job, rather than skills.

Marko pointed out that, for Russia, the nuclear power programme instituted rapidly without consulting the people, was unnecessary. Russia has plenty of energy and in fact exports oil and gas. The nuclear industry had led to a run-down of the coal industry in the Donbas region of the Ukraine, despite massive coal reserves.

This had resulted in speed-up, longer hours, increased accidents and explosions. One response to this had been the setting up of an independent trade union. In 1975, it had protested against abuse of power and neglect of health and safety regulations. Its leader Vladimir Klebanov had been imprisoned in a "psychiatric hospital" since then.

The nuclear industry had been built so that energy could be sold to Eastern Europe, freeing oil and gas for export to the more lucrative Western market. Meanwhile, the workers had been given no information, had no independent organisations or political rights. Still, they had to bear the consequences of this policy. These consequences included a death toll certainly more than the 31 admitted. Marko and Viktor knew of at least one more, a film maker who had gone into the area shortly after the disaster. His film had been shown and was damaged by the high level of radiation. Two hundred had been seriously injured while future cancer deaths were expected to number up to 100,000.

Water supplies and 2000 square kilometres of land had been contaminated for an indefinite period. 200,000 people had been permanently resettled.

After Chernobyl, opponents of nuclear power started to voice their fears. The "dissident" Moscow Trust Group had its members imprisoned in "mental hospitals", conscripted or expelled as a result. There has been a growth of action committees and ecological clubs in response to Chernobyl. Some have developed a political outlook and attended a recent conference of independent socialist groups in Moscow. Elsewhere, opposition had been expressed to energy schemes (dams, oil wells, reversing the flow of Siberian rivers) which would damage the environment. In Erevan (Armenia), 2000 demonstrated against pollution from chemical factories.

These developments, together with the growth of environmental protest in Poland and Czechoslovakia, could give a powerful impetus to the independent workers' movement in the East, challenging the legitimacy of bureaucracies which poison whole populations. They point towards the need for workers' control of the labour process and the environment and for working people to control the shaping of policies, i.e. for workers' power.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Ethiopia

New famine threat

Mass starvation is again a threat in Ethiopia. This year's harvest has failed completely, and between now and mid-1988 there could be another disaster like

1984, when one million people starved to death.

The area worst affected is in the north of the country, where the people of Eritrea and Tigre

are fighting for independence.

The UN children's agency has just launched an appeal for \$22 million emergency aid.

USSR

Gorbachev in trouble?

"I prefer to describe it as a resignation". In the best traditions of Russian doublespeak, the Soviet ambassador to Britain so described the dismissal of Boris Yeltsin, the Moscow Party boss.

In fact, of course, Yeltsin didn't resign — he was sacked. Exactly why he was sacked has been a matter of some speculation. Yeltsin was a close associate of Gorbachev, a strong supporter of *glasnost* and a firm campaigner against corruption in the capital. His sudden fall from grace might imply more than a personal rift.

There does seem to have been a personal rift, however. Yeltsin apparently had dared to criticise Mikhail Gorbachev's flamboyant wife Raisa, accusing her of developing a 'personality cult' around herself. As well as complaints about her self-consciously extravagant public profile, Yeltsin levelled criticism at her breach of etiquette by visiting a workshop where women are not allowed.

But there is now a tense and suspicious mood in Moscow. The day Yeltsin's dismissal was announced, an exhibition of avant-garde sculpture was suddenly cancelled — "in the interests of the state". A freeze on artistic freedom was signalled also by a frosty article in Pravda complaining that the trouble with Soviet youth today is their obsession with rock music and inexperience at good, hard physical work.

A controversial film about Afghanistan due for release has been put back as the film industry's head waits for the implications of the Yeltsin affair to become clear. Others have been keeping their heads down.

Difficulties

So have Gorbachev's reforms run into difficulties? There are big problems inherent in the reform programme. Gorbachev wants to loosen the stultifying bureaucratic constraints on Soviet economy and society. But too much loosening can encourage opposition to the bureaucrats too much. There have already been reports of strikes.

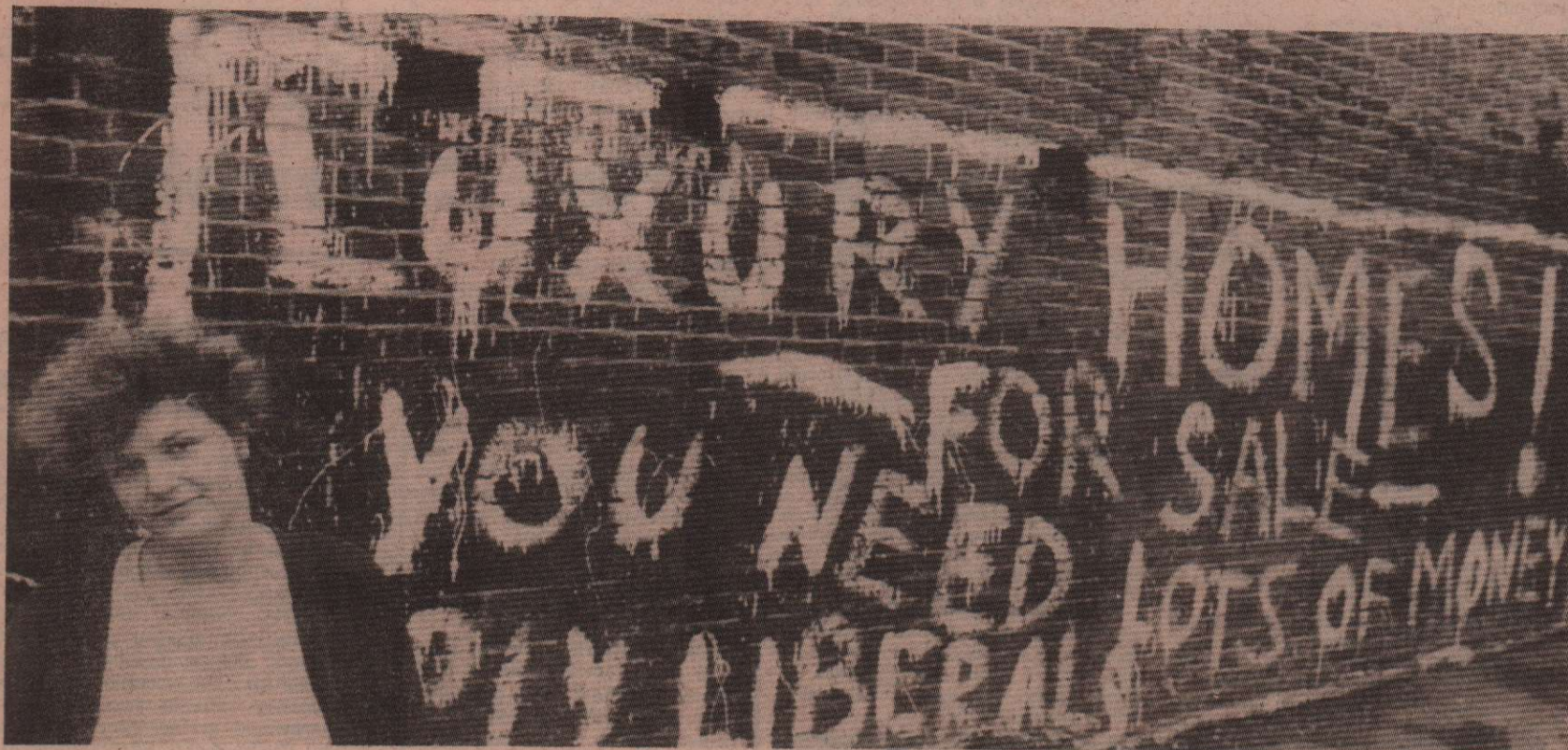
Indeed there have been reports of strikes in support of Yeltsin. The Financial Times (November 20) referred to "unconfirmed reports of a two-day general strike in Sverdlovsk, the industrial city in the Urals where Mr. Yeltsin was party leader until recently, protesting against his dismissal."

At Moscow University there has been widespread student opposition to Yeltsin's sacking.

This is precisely the kind of activity that Gorbachev cannot allow. Restructuring can go too far for his taste. But the basic dilemma will not go away: reform is essential but dangerous.

Following his dismissal, Yeltsin — now in hospital recovering from what was officially described as a mild heart attack, but some say was a suicide attempt — was given a new appointment that left him stripped of his Central Committee position. No doubt more heads will roll.

The Yeltsin affair probably does not signify a serious reorientation by the regime: they have staked too much on the success of *glasnost*. It does express the huge problems and contradictions in putting *glasnost* into effect, and should serve as a sober warning to those on the British left who have allowed themselves to be carried away with enthusiasm for the latest reforming Tsar.



Stop the Housing Bill!

Kings Cross tragedy

From front page

At Kings Cross, according to local Labour MP Frank Dobson, cleaning staff have been cut from 14 to 2 in the last year, and the station staff have been cut from 16 to 10.

London Region Transport have cut staff on the underground by more than 3,000 in the last five years. These cuts include the people who maintain and clean the escalators, the platforms and the ticket office areas. Most trains no longer have guards.

The very line that the disaster started on — the Picadilly line — is being converted into driver-only trains, so there will be no guards to keep an eye on the trains or to direct people away from danger. One driver will be expected to ensure the safety of all the passengers.

When a public service is threatened with privatisation, as London Underground is, the expensive things have to go: i.e. cleaning, maintenance and safety. These things cost money. They don't bring money in.

It is not just from fire that the lives of passengers and workers are threatened. Even now London Underground is threatening to cut the working conditions and lower the safety standards of the track maintenance staff. Two contracts for track maintenance are being put out to tender to private companies and London Underground say they have to make cuts to compete.

At Angel underground station, overcrowding has increased so much that in every rush hour people are in danger of being squeezed off the 'island' platform and under the trains. What is the Underground's response to such problems? They have abandoned all their plans for improving the Angel station — and they have put fares up to drive away passengers (onto the roads, which are much more dangerous than the Underground), and reduce over-

crowding!

London has the most expensive, probably the most run-down and probably the least safe public transport system of any big city in Western Europe. That's privatisation and free enterprise for you.

And the response of the government which demands the running of services for profit so they can be sold off to the highest bidder, is to express regret when, as a result, lives are lost to the terrible extent that they were that Wednesday night at Kings Cross.

Over the next few weeks a lot will be said in the press about which worker didn't do this or didn't do that. One ticket collector has already had "murderer" flung in his face by an upset passenger. But it is not the workers who are to blame. That ticket collector may well not have been alive to take the insult if he had been working in Kings Cross that night.

The workers know more than anyone else what dangers there are. On the very day of the tragedy, London Underground staff at Kings Cross were disciplined for issuing leaflets warning of fire danger on parts of the underground system close to Kings Cross station.

In the Kings Cross tube disaster the representative of the real culprits — shyster number one — visited the scene that the system which she so enthusiastically supports is responsible for, and shed crocodile tears and handed out medals for courage and bravery. Just before she got there, the front of the building was being quickly painted over by workmen "so it will look nice for her"!!

It is like a scene from an old film about the Mafiosi, where they turn up in their best black suits to lay flowers on the graves of the man they have just murdered. And, just like the dons of the mafiosi, they get someone else to do their killing for them so that they can maintain their "respectability" and shed their crocodile tears.

The Tories' Housing Bill will drive another nail into the coffin of local government, and once again the poorest will be expected to pay for it.

The Bill, when it becomes law, will lead to the end of council house building. There is a record number of homeless, and huge waiting lists for council housing, but the homeless and ill-housed will have to take their chances with the free market.

Private landlords will be encouraged to take over council estates and charge 'realistic rents' — in other words, as much as they can get away with.

Tenants in blocks of flats will be given a vote on whether they want to stay with the council or transfer to a housing association or private firm.

Councils will be starved of cash and forced to put rents up so that tenants will be driven towards private landlords.

Even if everyone on your estate wants to stay with the council, you are not safe. The government will have powers to take over estates through Housing Action Trusts, do them up, and sell them off to private developers — whether the tenants like it or not.

The Tories have already legislated

to allow councils to evict tenants at 28 days' notice to sell estates to private developers. The Tory council in Westminster, and the Liberal council in Tower Hamlets, are using these powers ruthlessly.

They want to 'ringfence' local authority Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs). At present, rents are subsidised by many Labour Councils by contributions from the rates — so that council rents in areas like inner London are at levels that working-class people can afford, while private rents are astronomical.

Tory councils, on the other hand, force tenants to subsidise the rates of owner-occupiers by transferring money from the rents.

The new legislation would prevent councils using Rate Account money for home building while allowing the Tories to continue pillaging the housing fund.

These proposals will do nothing for the many homeless, or for those living in crowded and inadequate conditions. It will lead to higher rents, worse conditions and rob local councils of yet another important function.

Tory talk about 'choice' is a sick joke — the only people who will have any choice will be the profiteers waiting to make a killing from cheap sales of council housing.

CND

CND: a slight shift left

By Walter Wolfgang, vice-chair, Labour CND, in a personal capacity

CND Annual Conference took place on 21/22 November in Hackney.

The conference marked a slight shift to the left in CND's emphasis.

The outgoing National Council put forward a strategic resolution, for the first time ever. It did not mention closure of all US bases or withdrawal

from NATO. However Conference carried an amendment to include them.

Other decisions mirrored that shift. Rebecca Johnson from Greenham Common was elected a vice-chair, as was outgoing Parliamentary worker Marjorie Thompson. Both will push a forward-looking left alternative. The other vice-chairs deservedly elected were Paul Johns and Elena Lieben.

Conference rejected an attempt to weaken its commitment against nuclear power.

The mood on the whole was one of guarded optimism. We had possibly gained an INF agreement, but there was terrific opposition to it from the European right.