

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Protest 7 November

GCHQ DAY

Rally called by the TUC: 12.30, Central Hall, Westminster

Strike for trade union rights!

Who are Poland's Tories?

Margaret Thatcher says she supports Solidarnosc. Some Solidarnosc leaders say they admire Thatcher, and Solidarnosc's official policy now is for the free-market economics which Thatcher champions.

All this confuses a lot of people on the left in Britain. The Polish government's moves to shut down the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk should clear our minds.

The Polish government says that the shipyard will be shut down gradually from 1 December. It is the first in a list of 150 big loss-making enterprises to be axed.

The cuts are designed to win Poland more credit from Western banks and to use the harsh discipline of the market to raise productivity. The new Polish Prime Minister, Mieczyslaw Rakowski, is quite open about the politics of it.

He admires Margaret Thatcher: "I would very much like to be a pupil in her school. I would like to emulate her resoluteness or firmness in dealing with unprofitable companies." "Maybe there will be trouble" over the shipyard closures, he added, "but you know Mrs Thatcher had a lot of trouble when she started to close factories and coal mines."

The Polish government should know about that. They sent one and a half million tons of coal to Britain in 1984 to help Thatcher beat the miners' strike, while Solidarnosc's underground committees smuggled out messages of support for the miners.

The Polish government's drive to close the "uneconomic" Lenin Shipyard is exactly like Thatcher's drive to close "uneconomic" pits.

Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa says that the decision to



Polish workers singing protest songs in the Gdansk shipyard earlier this year

close the Lenin Shipyard — the birthplace of Solidarnosc — is politically motivated: "If the decision were taken on economic grounds, other enterprises would be closed before this one."

Undoubtedly he is right — just as a political drive to beat the NUM, one of Britain's strongest trade unions, influenced the Tories' move against "uneconomic" pits. But politics and economics go hand in hand here. The economics of maximum profit-grabbing on a free market goes with the politics of an offensive against strongholds of trade unionism.

Rakowski's offensive will help teach the leaders of Solidarnosc what many Polish workers will know already: that the economics of the profit drive cannot serve the working class. The Polish workers need what Solidarnosc demanded in 1981: a self-managed Republic.

And the closure drive should teach us that the real Thatcherites and right-wingers in Poland are the bureaucrats. Whatever illusions Solidarnosc's leaders and members may have in the West, Solidarnosc represents the workers against the privileged, tyrannical, exploiting bureaucrats.

union rights!

By Trudy Saunders (CPSA, DHSS HQ)

As we go to press, it looks as if the two biggest civil service unions — the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA) and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS) — have won their ballot to strike on 7 November over the Tories' sacking of trade unionists at GCHQ.

As civil servants are taking strike action against the Tories for outlawing trade unions in Britain at the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), Thatcher will be visiting Poland's rulers, condemning them for banning the Polish free trade union Solidarnosc!

We cannot allow Thatcher to take a leaf out of the East Europeans' book. If we let her get away with banning trade unions at GCHQ, who will be next? Department of Social Security workers? Local government workers? Power workers? Nurses?

It is a union-bashing exercise pure and simple.

It is a credit to CPSA rank and file members that the ballot has been won. The right-wing leadership of the union has done virtually nothing to build for a 'yes' vote.

They have even refused to include a large number of CPSA members in the ballot, claiming that to do so would mean the strike was secondary action and would risk an injunction from the Tories!

For fear of the Tories, the CPSA ballot was made a postal ballot. On-



ly militant areas held workplace meetings to discuss the issue. NUCPS leadership showed more guts by taking the vote in meetings.

The TUC leadership, who had always pledged to fight if there were any sackings at GCHQ, have demonstrated that their promises were just hot air. Instead of calling on other unions to take solidarity strike action, TUC general secretary Norman Willis has made it clear that the TUC does not want non-civil servants to break the Tories' laws by taking solidarity strike action. Instead, trade unionists have been asked to 'demonstrate'.

This may prove difficult as the TUC has not even organised a national march and demonstration — only a rally in Central Hall, Westminster and regional demos.

Even the super-scab Eric Hammond has managed to shame the TUC by holding a ballot of EETPU members to take strike action on 7

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WOMEN'S EYE



By Lynn Ferguson

Women and booze

Over the past few months you may have noticed a discussion brewing in the pages of your favourite socialist weekly on the merits and demerits of the demon drink.

As this is an area in which I have some personal experience, I thought I'd add my twopennyworth.

The relation of women to drink in the popular parlance is a weird one. Wine, women and song — that's one angle. It says a lot.

That women don't or shouldn't drink. That women are something pleasant to be enjoyed by carousing men "in their cups". Women don't consume alcohol, they are consumed alongside it.

The less lyrical version of this is the stereotype of the old man down the boozier till closing time, arriving home amorous and incapable or, more nastily, aggressive and violent.

Women are often on the receiving end of the ill-effects of other people's (men's) excessive drinking. Heavy-drinking husbands can mean a beating and no money in your purse. Walking down a street at chucking-out time is at best embarrassing and at worst downright dangerous.

The Tories use this to whip up hysteria about drunken working class yobboes on the rampage. Answer: don't let the proles drink on the streets. Some solution!

But what of women as consumers of alcohol? The mere phrase has a nasty ring to it. A woman who drinks regularly, even, god forbid, gets drunk, is an object of pity and distaste.

She must be a complete slut, a degenerate. If a mother, she's a bad one, and she's probably in need of professional psychiatric help. A man has to be a complete unregenerable sot before he'll get this sort of response.

I've heard some socialist men say they don't like to see women drunk — they find it distasteful and disgusting.

There's a lot of ideas there. Women mustn't lose control. It's not nice, is it? Moreover, women shouldn't really spend money on themselves — a man's entitled to his beer money, a woman who spends money on drink is automatically stealing from the mouths of her babes.

And why is it that men getting drunk are assumed to be 'having a good time' when a drunken woman *must* be drowning her sorrows?

There are exceptions — 'hen' parties, for example. It's alright on special occasions for a group of 'girls' to get drunk — though 'very tiddly' is a nicer way of putting it. But even so, they're an object of amusement, and slight bewilderment.

Women not only suffer from other people's drinking, but from other people's puritanism about drinking and about women.

I go along with Paul Stewart's ideas in his letter last week. The 'Great British pub' is a major part of the problem. Designed *purely* for drinking and mainly for men, it's bound to encourage all sorts of sexist, loutish behaviour.

Places to drink with *real* facilities for children, rather than the token 'family room' with three chairs and a fruit machine would be a major step forward. Pubs designed to be sociable rather than anti-social are what we need.

Forward to true democracy and equality in the drinkplace!



Nurses show anger

Nurses are showing their anger and disgust at the results of their regrading exercise.

Midwives in the North-East walked out on hearing their new grades. Nurses at hospitals in Coventry and Suffolk are working to rule — or 'working to grade'.

Other hospitals ballot this week for 'working to grade' action. In London, nurses at the Maudsley and Charing Cross hospitals will strike for two hours on Thursday. They plan to demonstrate outside Downing Street and hand back their regrading forms.

The nurses are right. They have been

treated badly and cynically by the Tories. The government cheated them by repeatedly refusing to fully fund regrading — management regraded as low as possible.

Even Tory MPs have threatened to rebel and vote against new charges for eye and teeth check-ups. But the Tories don't care about the NHS. They have systematically underfunded it by £1.5 billion since 1980 — that's the conclusion of an all-party Commons Committee!

It was only strike action by nurses that forced the government to concede earlier in the year. Now they are taking action to get what they were promised. Support the nurses!

EETPU members meet

This Saturday dissident EETPU members will meet in Manchester. The open meeting, called by London Contracting Branch, will discuss the issue of whether to stay in the EETPU and fight Hammond's business unionism or whether to join the pro-TUC breakaway EPIU.

What are the main arguments for staying in the EETPU?

Firstly, there is the small size of the EPIU. Although the new union recently won recognition at the Ford Dagenham body plant, such victories have been few and far between. Its leaders say they are on target for 3,000 members by the end of the year. But this is out of 300,000 members of the EETPU. It is a tiny percentage.

The vast majority of rank and file EETPU members have been left to Hammond. They are certainly not all beyond trade unionism.

That leads us to the second argument: the EETPU is *not* simply a scab outfit in the pocket of management and the Tory

party and on a level with the scab UDM.

For sure, Hammond is a keen advocate of class collaboration and no-strike deals. But by balloting electricians on the issue of strike action in support of GCHQ workers, the EETPU has given a more positive lead than the TUC in resisting Tory curbs on unions.

Hammond has his own reasons for this, but his is appealing to the basic gut instinct of trade union solidarity.

The EETPU leaders may tighten their grip and transform the union into a scab outfit — but that hasn't happened yet. And we can stop them if they try — so long as we stay in and fight.

This conference must organise an appeal to rank and file electricians on the basis of basic trade union principles. The logic of a strike call on 7 November can be used against Hammond's ideas of business unionism.

Branches should maintain contact and begin to organise such a campaign.

Meeting: Saturday 5 November, open meeting of EETPU members who want to campaign against Hammond, called by London Contracting branch, Manchester Polytechnic.

MI5's plot against Jack Jones

By Mike Grayson

Jack Jones, who was leader of the Transport & General Workers Union in the late '60s and early '70s, was subject to a smear campaign organised by MI5, and in particular Peter Wright. That is the claim made in a new book, 'The Wilson Plot' by David Leigh.

MI5 systematically lied about Jones, alleging that he was a member of the Communist Party and a Russian agent. Wright wrote: "JJ maintained secret underground contact with the Party and...had secret meetings with KGB officers...JJ was in frequent contact with the wife of a Swedish diplomat.

(She) and her son were Soviet agents..."

It is, of course, reasonable to suppose that many other trade unionists have been lied about in this way. Moreover, according to the Observer's Open File, no less than 30,000 people currently have their phones tapped.

This figure is far in excess of previous government admissions. Those tapped include trade unionists, left-wingers and CND activists.

A huge volume of conversations are taped, and the Gresham St HQ employs 100 transcribers, mainly women. Of course, most conversations are not transcribed: they are kept on computer files and scanned for key words.

These are further examples of the Tory Big Brother state — further attacks on our freedoms.

Sheffield Poly wins

SOCIALIST STUDENT

Last Monday students at Sheffield Poly came out of occupation victorious — all their demands having been met.

Francis Lawn, a member of the Collegiate Crescent Site Occupation Committee, spoke to SO. "It began when the management withdrew porter cover at one site, Psalter lane, after 9.30 pm.

"This meant that their bar, their only recreational facility, would be closed, and art students would lose studio time.

The students from Psalter Lane represented a mood amongst students of opposition to the cuts. This resulted in a Union meeting at another site, Collegiate Crescent, to call a further occupation.

The next day there was an all-sites Union meeting that voted overwhelmingly to take direct action to fight the cuts.

To start with, many people were

against the occupations, but we argued for occupations before and in the Union General Meetings and won our case.

At mass meetings held in the occupations, committees were elected to organise them. The meetings also acted as a forum to spread our ideas and involve the maximum number of students.

We picketed lectures each morning, explaining our case to students. Links were built with campus unions and they agreed to respect our picket lines.

We got no support from the Student Union Executive. When they weren't obstructive, they were incompetent. When we reached an agreement, they couldn't even get it in writing.

In the occupations we had discussion on all issues, but there was general agreement on the way forward. The exception was the SWP, who seemed more interested in recruiting people by posturing than in building the occupation.

Democracy is all-important. Students must be involved at all levels, from picketing to negotiating. Occupations can win, but the arguments have to be taken to students and staff".

Existential yuppiedom, anyone?

Being extremely right-wing isn't necessarily a bar to being a good writer or to having some quite interesting observations to make.

Peregrine Worsthorne, for instance, continually astonishes me with the shrewdness of his *Sunday Telegraph* editorials. Paul Johnson, despite being plainly disturbed, and obsessed by a hatred of "intellectuals", often has something quite interesting to say in his *Daily Mail* articles. A N Wilson's opinions are generally pretty wild but he seems basically honest and shows occasional signs of human decency.

Julie Burchill, the *Mail on Sunday's* star columnist, has none of these saving graces. Her "opinions" are predictable, shallow and mean-spirited.

She constantly claims not to be a "Thatcherite" but that only makes matters worse, because she plainly is the most dyed-in-the-wool Thatcherite of any national newspaper columnist. Either her protestations are sincere, in which case she is self-deluded or they are a thoroughly dishonest attempt to keep her street cred as a "free" and "independent" thinker.

She could scarcely contain her enthusiasm for Thatcher's anti-Europe tirade last month ("a stand against making us all identical, individually-

PRESS GANG

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR

DAILY STAR

THE INDEPENDENT

By Jim Denham

wrapped Euro-portions") and when she wrote about the Tory Party Conference her fawning was only tempered by disappointment at Thatcher failing to give the pro-hanging lobby more than token support.

"Mrs Thatcher has always posed as a populist, but is now being hideously coy about responding to the most popular demand of all. Capital punishment is not murder anymore than taxation is robbery; they are both things agreed

upon by society for the benefit of, and to protect, the greatest number," etc., etc.

Neil Kinnock, of course, is an easy target and even Julie Burchill can make a few telling points against him. But her most frequent jibe — the one she seems really pleased with — is that he ought to be prime minister of Belgium. What Ms Burchill has against the good citizens of Belgium I do not know.

The "Belgian" gag came up once again in an article she did for the 100th edition of the ultra-trendy *Face* magazine.

"We tried to be Belgian before, and we weren't happy; Neil Kinnock can only have us heading straight back there. Like the British people in general I don't believe in Thatcherism, but I do believe in Thatcher, given the option.

"It is to her, not her discredited policies, that there really is no alternative. Send her victorious, happy and glorious. Because it's either that or going back and getting excited about making runner-up in the Eurovision song contest."

The Eurovision song contest is another Burchill running gag, with the attraction of being an even easier target than Neil Kinnock. Julie's other favourite topics can be roughly summarised as sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll — all of which, of course, she generally approves of, praising Thatcher for be-

ing "such a disappointment to Whitehouse, Gillick, Anderton and all the sperm-ridden minds of the Right who wanted moral re-armament and got a two pence in the pound tax cut instead."

Reading Ms Burchill's outpourings in the *Mail on Sunday*, the *Face* and elsewhere, you gradually realise why this ex-Anti Nazi League/Rock Against Racism/New Musical Express trendy Stalinist identifies so strongly with Thatcher. Glorification of the individual, ultra-nationalism, authoritarian tendencies combined with a sort of right-wing libertarianism — that's the common ground.

But the worst thing about Ms Burchill is not her dishonesty, her ignorance (does she really believe that hanging "the wrong man...may have happened twice in this country during this century"?) or her selfishness (have you noticed that all her "opinions" are always directly traceable to her own tastes and self interest?)

No, the worst thing about her is that she can't write very well; try this for size: "Forget the mainland, we are all islands and the only bell worth ringing is not one in some pastoral English church tower calling the faithful to communal prayer but the one that says 'I'm on the bus Jack'. Existential yuppiedom, anyone?"

Oh dear. Give me Peregrine Worsthorne anyway.

USSR: 1988 and 1917

EDITORIAL

As we approach the 71st anniversary of the Russian revolution, West German leader Helmut Kohl says that Mikhail Gorbachev will free all political prisoners.

Does this mean an end to the state monopoly tyranny that has crushed the Soviet people for the last 60 years? Is Gorbachev bringing the USSR back to the ideals of 1917? Is he moving to socialism?

In 1917 the workers took power in Russia under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party. The slogan of the revolution was 'All power to the soviets'.

The soviets — workers' councils made up of delegates from factories and rank and file soldiers — held political and economic power. The soviets were a flexible, responsive and accountable form of democracy, with delegates to higher regional and national soviets instantly recallable.

Workers had real control over their representatives. Workers' democracy encompassed not only the political sphere but also the workplace.

Socialism, for the Bolsheviks, meant the economy being run on the basis of what people needed, not on the basis of profit and loss. Democratic discussion would bring democratic and rational planning of the economy. Workers would control their workplaces, rather than be subordinate to privileged managers. "Every cook would govern," as Lenin put it.

The workers' councils would take care of law and order. There was to be no separate police force standing above the workers — the workers themselves were to be armed, forming militias under the democratic control of their community.

Political freedom was central to the Bolshevik programme. They called themselves not only socialists but consistent democrats — and they meant it.

In the dark days of the civil war when 14 capitalist armies invaded Russia in an attempt to overthrow the fledgling workers' state, opposition groups were outlawed. This was seen as a temporary but necessary evil. It was the victory of Stalin and his bureaucratic gang that made these measures permanent and created a tyrannical one-party state.

This was no part of the Bolshevik programme. They were ready to be harsh and ruthless against counter-revolutionaries — but the Stalinist 'workers' state' where all workers'

organisations were outlawed would make no sense to them.

The Bolsheviks were internationalists. They knew that socialism could not be built in one country — let alone in a backward country like Russia.

International revolution was essential. The Bolsheviks created the Comintern as a genuinely revolutionary organisation of workers' parties. Without genuine internationalism, without a revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, socialism could not be built in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was not a single centralised unit ruled from Moscow. It was a federal union of many different nations over a vast geographical area.

The basic programme of the Bolsheviks was for a voluntary union of nations, not for forcible incorporation. They were for full democracy and equality for nationalities including the right to self-determination. The idea of a 'socialist' prison-house of nations was no part of the Bolsheviks' politics.

The rise of a vicious bureaucratic elite under Stalin meant that all the slogans and titles of Bolshevism came to cover realities the opposite of their intentions. All democracy was trampled underfoot. Socialism was redefined as something that could be created in one country. A vast repressive police-state apparatus was created. The prison walls were re-erected for the USSR's nations.

The aim of workers' democracy and liberty was replaced with the drive to industrialise and to consolidate a privileged elite.

Gorbachev is not Stalin. His reforms are important and we should welcome them. But his project is a million miles away from the Bolsheviks'.

Stalin's command economy could modernise up to a point. Now the economy is stagnant. The parody of planning has ceased to work. Bureaucratic corruption and empire building has taken the Russian economy into a cul-de-sac.

Gorbachev wants to change this. He wants to bring in the yardsticks of competitiveness, of profit and loss — the criteria of the West.

This means shaking up the old bureaucratic structures. It means sacking managers and crusades against corruption. It also means some openness for debate and criticism — so that incompetence can be weeded out.

It also means imposing stricter labour discipline on workers. It means job losses, wage cuts, and reducing price subsidies on basic goods. And the 'openness' does not extend to allowing workers to form their own trade unions and political parties.

Gorbachev's reforms should be welcomed in so far as they open up a space for workers to organise. But Gorbachev's is a bureaucrats' programme, not a workers' programme.

To revive the ideals of 1917 workers need a new revolution in the USSR.



Why is Thatcher against Europe?

Child benefit and family allowances in France are about three times as high as in Britain.

Unemployment benefit in Denmark is much higher than in Britain, and is paid for much longer. Italy has many more public holidays, more trade union rights, and more nurseries.

These are the facts which explain Mrs Thatcher's opposition to closer European unity.

Many Euro-capitalists are ready to run the risk of workers demanding a "Social Europe" through levelling-up for the sake of the benefits of a wider market and greater mobility of capital. Mrs Thatcher thinks differently.

She sees Britain's future as an off-shore economy, with decidedly lower wages and social provision than continental Europe and attractive to multinational investors for that reason. She also relies on Britain's links to the US, where British capitalists have much bigger investments than the capitalists of other EEC countries.

So Thatcher is against a "Social Europe", and against any moves for closer EEC unity which could lead to a "Social Europe". And the political debate on the EEC is swinging round through 180 degrees.

In the 1970s the EEC was, or appeared to be, a left/right issue. When Britain entered the EEC in 1972, the left was against it; when a referendum was held on it in 1975, the left was for withdrawal. The champions of the EEC were the Tories and the Labour right-wingers who were later to form the SDP.

Now Thatcher's is the loudest voice in British politics against closer EEC unity; and almost the whole of the labour movement and the left has dropped the idea of pulling Britain out of the EEC.

At the left-Labour conference called by *Tribune* two weeks ago, for example, scarcely a single voice was raised against the idea that we must accept the EEC as an arena within which to fight, and that we must fight for the best possible "Social Europe" for the workers.

It is a left/right issue again — but now the left is "for Europe" and the right is "against".

The EEC is one of those questions where going by left-wing conventional wisdom and common sense is no good at all. In truth it was never a clear left/right issue. There was always a strong strand of right-wing Tory nationalism, of the *Daily Express* type, in the anti-EEC lobby.

When the Tories first proposed Britain should enter the EEC, in 1961, the Marxist left saw the matter clearly enough. "In or out, the fight goes on", they said.

Capitalism "in one country" is not viable in the modern world. Europe's capitalists need to try to create a larger economic unit. It is no business of socialists to help them do that; but it is equally none of our business to champion an "independent" capitalist Britain. Our alternative to the capitalist EEC is not little Britain but a Socialist United Europe.

Every tendency on the Marxist left saw it that way. But then nationalist and insular feeling against the EEC increased — not so much among capitalists, who care very little for nationalism when there are profits to be made, as in the working class.

And, one by one, every tendency on the Marxist left, with the sole exception of the tendency continued today by *Socialist Organiser*, capitulated to that nationalist feeling and started finding "Marxist" reasons for preferring an "independent" capitalist Britain to the capitalist EEC.

Insularity and nationalism has

cost the working class dear. The labour movement has been in nationalist blinkers while the capitalists are already planning and scheming on a European and international level.

In the 1980s, steel industries have been run down drastically all across Europe, in line with a commonly-agreed EEC line. Steelworkers fought back. But they fought back in a scattered way, one country after another — first British steelworkers, then French steelworkers, then German steelworkers.

There was no European steelworkers' strategy. Striking French steelworkers blocked railway lines to keep out German steel. The capitalists were united; the workers were divided.

Now the EEC Commission and the Council of Ministers are working out their plans for 1992, when all customs barriers within the EEC are supposed to be abolished and a "single market" created. The elected European Parliament has little control over the EEC Commission and none at all over the Council of Ministers.

Yet instead of campaigning for the European Parliament to have real powers, and for the workers' parties from all over Europe to unite on working class demands, many socialists in Britain have made it a left-wing badge of honour to abstain from anything to do with the Euro-Parliament! It is as if they believe that ignoring international capitalism will make it go away.

Every evening now on the television, business people tell us that they are preparing for 1992. It's time the labour movement started preparing seriously, too — to win a "Social Europe" by way of levelling-up, to demand that the best conditions won anywhere in the EEC are extended everywhere in the EEC, and to fight for a Socialist United Europe.

'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx

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Jobless and doleless

GRAFFITI

Three quarters of all those who left the unemployment register this summer hadn't actually found work.

The Unemployment Unit — an independent monitoring group — found that between April and June this year unemployment 'fell' by 128,700 but employment grew by only 42,000.

This reflects the large numbers of unemployed people who have been forced off the register by the draconian 'availability for work' requirements or by being put on to other sorts of benefit.

The figures also show a slowdown in job creation. Over each of the previous two quarters, employment rose by 100,000. Moreover, three quarters of the April-June growth was in self-employment.

900,000 mothers will want to return to work over the next seven years — and it looks like employers will have to find ways to accommodate them.

According to David Parsons, of the National Economic Development Office, fewer young people will be entering the labour market in the 1990s because of the fall in the birthrate in the 1970s. Employers will need to turn to recruiting mothers and will have to adapt accordingly.

Some big firms have become more flexible over the years — it is fairly common now for banks to provide a 'career break' structure for women to return to work after having kids without falling off the career ladder.

But on the whole, companies are sluggish about accepting the need to change to fit in with a new female workforce.

The French government has ordered a drug company to distribute a new early abor-

tion pill, after anti-abortionists forced the company to withdraw it.

A month ago the French Health Ministry approved the use of the pill, RU486, which causes spontaneous abortions for up to a month after a missed period. This method would remove the need for many women to undergo anaesthetic and surgery.

Abortion has been legal in France since 1974, but there is still a vociferous anti-abortion movement, which has links with anti-abortion groups in the US and which is increasingly adopting the methods of the US movement.

Strong in the French anti-abortion movement are the National Front and Lefebres anti-Rome Catholic splinter group.

The anti-abortionists were quick off the mark, with a campaign focused mainly on intimidation and threats to the families of employees of the drug company, Roussel-Uclaf. American anti-abortionists backed them up with a threat to boycott all Roussel-Uclaf products. Under such pressure the company withdrew the drug after only a month.

But the French government stepped in, ordering the company to distribute the pill. The French Health Minister Claude Euin, issued a statement saying that such a medical advance was "the moral property of woman" and that no one had the right to withhold it.

Over a third of West Germans want American troops to leave their country.

A poll published by the magazine 'Stein' on the eve of Helmut Kohl's visit to the USSR showed Mikhail Gorbachev to be massively more popular than Ronald Reagan.

Amongst 'better educated' West Germans 70% have a favourable opinion of Gorbachev's foreign policy and 52% had a 'negative' opinion of Reagan's foreign escapades.

More West Germans now think that the military strengths of the Warsaw Pact and NATO are more or less equal — 44% now compared to 24% in 1981.

Cardiff witch-hunt beaten

Socialists fighting the witch-hunt in Cardiff Central Constituency Labour Party won a major battle this week when Plasnewydd ward was re-instated.

The ward was suspended unconstitutionally in February this year. This supposedly happened because of the presence of an expelled member at the ward AGM. In reality it was an attempt by the right wing to 'have a go' at a left-wing campaigning ward and prevent its delegates from taking part in the Constituency AGM.

Their mistake was to take on a left-wing that insisted on fighting back —

not with legal action or Militant style rallies, but with a determined, well-organised 'Campaign against the Witch-hunt' that rapidly gained support locally.

The impact of this fightback caused none other than George Wright the Secretary of the T&GWU Wales Region to denounce the Campaign from the rostrum of the Labour Party Wales Regional Conference earlier in the year.

In the constituency and also at a national level, the right-wing was forced into retreat. A planned 'enquiry' into the ward was dropped on the instructions of Joyce Gould, LP National Organiser and chief witch-hunter. Instead members were subjected to a far-

cical door-to-door card check.

Finally, on Monday 31st, (Halloween night, appropriately enough) the ward held a new AGM and was re-instated.

This is not the end of the witch-hunt in Cardiff Central, however. There have been attempts to proscribe supporters of left papers in the Constituency and currently there is an investigation into the membership application of a Workers Power supporter. As long as socialists are being hounded because of their ideas the campaign will continue.

What will also continue after this week is the campaigning activity of a ward that refuses to accept the guttless, anti-working class policies of either the local Labour controlled councils or the Party leadership.



Papoose bad? Macho worse

LETTERS

The millions of women who are stuck in marriages men who wouldn't know a clitoris if it poked them in the eye, are unlikely to agree with Lynn Ferguson (Women's Eye, SO.377).

It is useful to know whether a man is a sexist pig rather than a clever pig who knows all the pitfalls not to fall into, yes — but only if you are in a position to fight.

Some women may find it easier to cope in a factory or office where the men call you "darling" and grab you as they walk by than, say, in a college where men call you by your name and mauls you in their minds.

But only if a) you are not on your own; there are other women

prepared to back you up, or men who don't like that behaviour; and b) you are confident and able to fight it yourself. If that is not the case, working with macho men can be vicious, destructive and can even lose you your job.

Women going into a Labour Party or a trade union branch meeting for the first time are far more likely to be driven out by the macho man who talks a lot and sneers at their halting attempts to speak or ask questions than by the man — with the baby in the papoose — who appears to know what feminism is all about.

That man may be one who cynically uses the language of feminism to get what he wants and deserves to be attacked for his sexism, too. But the idea that macho-man is "better" in himself is bizarre. It is not better to "know where you stand" if you are not in a

position to fight. It is terrible.

Macho-man is not preferable. He is oppressive; and nowhere more so than in bed, where women are made to feel it is their fault if they have not reached orgasm, and where if she decides to fake it for a quiet life (as all of us have done or do) he doesn't even notice the difference.

Far better the man who is prepared to try to please a woman sexually and, indeed, prepared to talk about it.

Jean Lane
South London

Drink

I was interested to read Stan Crooke's historical survey of the attitude of socialists towards drink (SO 376). However, I fear he has missed out a rather important event.

In the Licensing debate of 15th October 1908, Victory Grayson MP moved that the Commons adjourn to consider the question of unemployment. He was excluded from the House, but the following day he returned to comment: "there are thousands of people dying in the streets, while you are trifling with this Bill."

Grayson was, of course, a revolutionary socialist and, I would suggest, knew a class position when he saw one.

E Jones
London N11

The third man

Lynn Ferguson's article on the 'new man' (Women's Eye, SO 377) was simultaneously feminist and anti-feminist — in other words confused.

Men are unreformable, so let's stick with the ignorant louts who are the worst among them. Seems a bit odd to me, that.

I'm sure that we can convince women who experience emotional

torture, battering and an unconcerned pumping away that this is OK — if only you can handle them, girls.

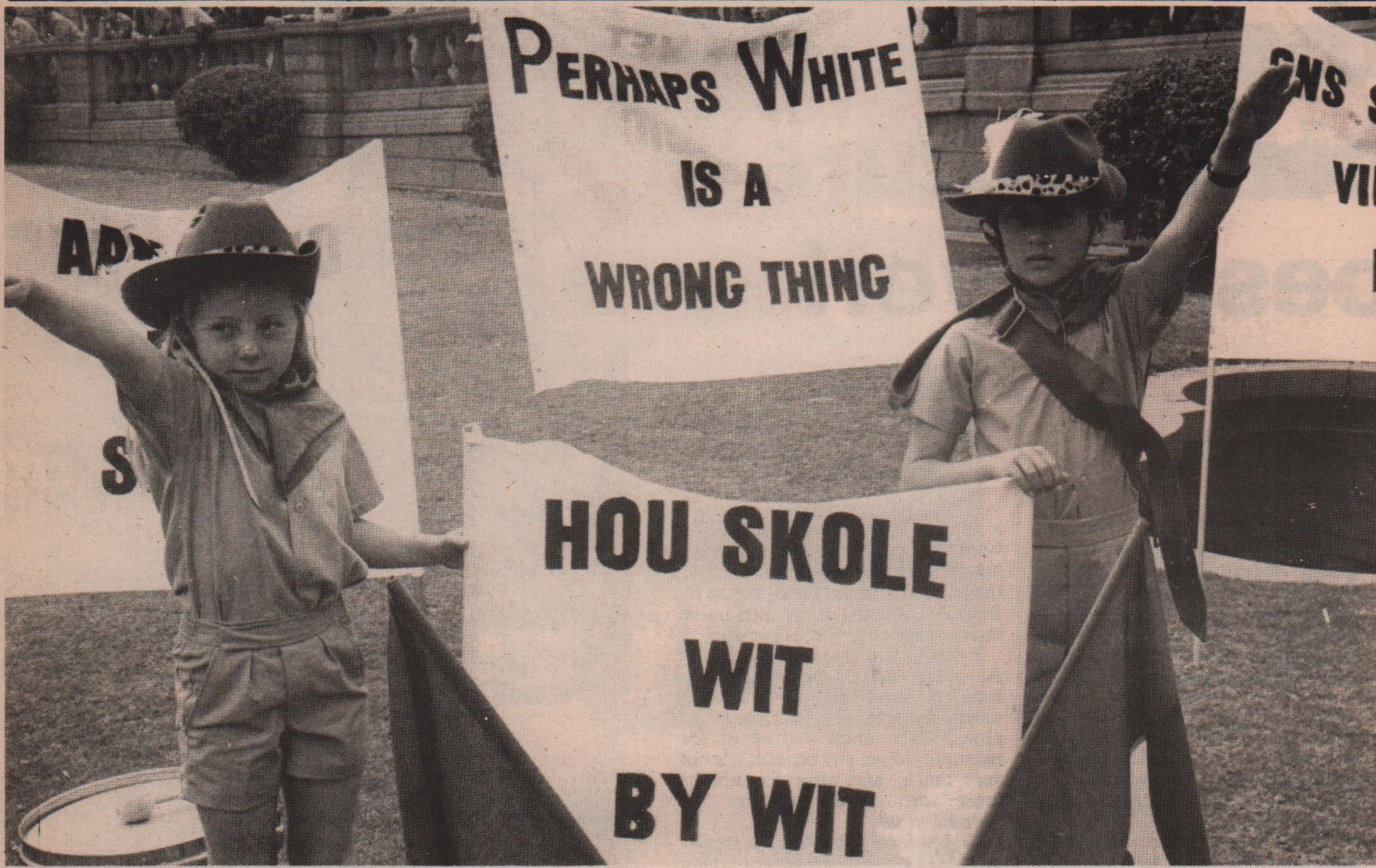
Lynn puts a false choice, anyway — who wants to go to bed with a Briefing man? There are some blokes around who don't wear Mexican jumpers but have some inkling of what to do in bed and, what's more, know how to make a pass without groping your thighs.

Justine Harris
Sheffield

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Far right blocks Botha

By Anne Mack

The results of South Africa's white local government elections have confirmed the trend of last year's white elections.

The ruling National Party has been supplanted by the far-right Conservative Party as the party of Afrikanerdom, while the Nats now rule traditionally "liberal" towns like Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg. This can't please President Botha. There is a long history of South African governing parties being supplanted by contenders on their right.

The Conservative Party now controls enough local councils in the industrial heartland of South Africa — the Transvaal — to block the Botha government's "reform" strategy. It will be more difficult for the regime to pump money into the black townships for urban upgrading — electricity, roads

and sewage, housing, etc — for the purpose of "undermining radicalism".

The Conservative Party intend to block all such "redistribution", thus making it more difficult for the regime to nurture and develop a layer of conservative and compliant black "leaders" at local level.

Botha may try to regain lost ground by launching a political initiative — he must be thinking seriously about releasing Nelson Mandela, the jailed ANC leader.

In the black elections the regime may have got more people to vote than the last time in 1983, but it didn't get the turnout it was hoping for. The poll was quite high in some rural areas, but tiny in the working class heartlands of black South Africa, like Soweto.

Bribery, corruption and intimidation were used to try to get votes out. Boycott campaigners were beaten and detained.

Party workers in the townships doubled as election officers and tellers, and kindly helped the elderly

and illiterate to place their crosses in the right place.

Strange slogans were used to entice people to vote. As one resident of Duncan Village in the East Cape put it: "A woman who did not look

very sober leaned out of the window of a slow-moving bus and shouted at people in the street 'Yizani nizovota utywala bubethwe ngundu' (Come out and vote — there is a lot of liquor)."

Offensive against unions

In June this year three million workers took part in the biggest-ever political protest strike in South African history.

The workers were demonstrating their opposition to the Botha government's proposed new anti-union laws.

Consciously copied from Britain, these laws include many of the provisions of the Tory government's anti-union laws — picketing, solidarity and political strike action are illegal, and unions can face huge fines for 'damages' caused to the bosses during disputes.

Despite the mass protests these laws are now in place, and as a result three unions face big fines for taking part in

the June strikes.

This latest attack is part of an escalating offensive by the state and the employers against South Africa's powerful black workers' movement. Activists have been detained, workers have been sacked en masse and security police have forced their way into union meetings to tell the workers that if they discuss politics in their unions they will be arrested.

COSATU — the giant trade union federation — is holding a summit conference with NACTU, a smaller federation, and with various independent unions to discuss how to fight back against the Labour laws, the state of emergency and the bosses' offensive.

The international labour movement must give them full support.

Israel polarises at the polls

By Clive Bradley

Whoever wins the election in Israel, it won't make much difference. Neither party is in favour of allowing the Palestinian people the right to their own state.

The Labour Party, led by Shimon Peres, talks more about peace and international conferences; the Likud of Yitzhak Shamir is dead set against giving an inch of 'land for peace'. But they are both against recognising the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) of Yasser Arafat, despite the obvious fact that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians see the PLO as their representative.

Whoever wins will not win outright. The 1984 election produced a Knesset (parliament) split down the middle. Eventually Labour and Likud had to divide the spoils in a bizarre governmental job-share.

Both are anxious to avoid a re-run of the last four years, but to do

so will need to patch up deals with the minority parties. Labour and Likud will be looking for deals with far-right religious parties.

The most extreme right-wing party, Meir Kahane's Kach, has been banned for racism. But there are plenty of other parties that are only slightly less fanatical.

The Labour Party is not similar to the Labour Party in Britain. It is not essentially a party of organised labour: in fact, it is the party of the Establishment.

European Jewish immigrants, many of whom saw themselves as socialists, occupied all the dominant positions in the state when Israel was founded in 1948. Jews from North Africa and other Arab countries ('Oriental' Jews) were recruited to the new state as its workers. Arabs, of course, were at the very bottom of the pile (and Arabs from the occupied territories in 1967 even lower).

The right owes its support to three factors. First, it appeals to Jewish workers who see Arab labour as competition by its hard

'anti-Arab' stand. Second, it campaigns on social issues that affect Oriental Jews. Third, it combines this with anti-Labour (ie. anti-Establishment, anti-middle class) rhetoric.

If Labour does well in this election it will be despite factors working against it. The Israeli population is increasingly 'Oriental' (one reason for Labour's decline) and Labour has failed to break into the Likud vote. Its traditional Arab vote is naturally very dissatisfied: Labour's one Arab MP split this year to form his own party.

The issue in this election is peace — more than at any time in the past as a result of the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, which is approaching its anniversary. And although the general shift in Israel seems to be rightwards, a great soul-searching is also taking place. Top generals on the Labour side want to give the West Bank and Gaza (or both of them) to the Arabs that live there.

Some parties to the left of Labour will win seats. Mapam (left

Labour Zionist) and Ratz (Citizens' Rights Movement) are radical within the framework of what is sometimes called the 'national consensus'. They may be able to act as coalition partners for Peres.

The Communist Party-dominated Democratic Front for Peace and Equality and the Arab-Jewish Progressive List for Peace both offer a two-states solution. The PLP includes both socialists and maverick left Zionists like Uri Avnery. The DPFE is very pro-Moscow and the dominant political force in Arab towns like Nazareth.

The far-right is certainly stronger than the far-left, but whether Shamir can (or will) do wide-ranging deals with them to form a coalition remains to be seen.

Although the election itself will not result in big changes, the current crisis in Israel certainly will. Out of the deep shifts in opinion amongst Israelis, a genuinely radical alternative to Labour may emerge. The intifada will not die away: sooner or later Israel will have to find a road to peace.

Tories beat down freedom

By Nick Blake

The government's plans to abolish the right of silence in Northern Ireland and England and Wales amount to the most significant interference with the law of evidence in criminal trials this century.

With it goes the central safeguard of our accusatorial system of trial; the right of silence is no more than the visible embodiment of the burden of proof — the proposition that everyone is innocent until proved guilty. In future the prosecution and the judge at any criminal trial will be able to infer guilt from the fact that a person refused to give the police information in the police station or to give evidence at his or her trial, and the right to silence will be replaced by a duty to offer an explanation.

It is perhaps typical of the authoritarian techniques of this government that such a measure that had been previously rejected in 1972 when first proposed by a committee of judges, in 1980 when the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure reported, and in 1984 when the Police and Criminal Evidence Act was passed, should be announced by way of a press release.

In Northern Ireland laws are passed by orders in Council rather than the full parliamentary process. Tom King has powers equivalent to those sought by the Stuart monarchies in the constitutional struggle that led to the English Civil War. It is perhaps appropriate that it be left to him to inform his 'subjects' that he intends to abolish this right that was entrenched with the downfall of Star Chamber.

Although the need to defeat terrorism is the expressed concern of the proponents of this measure, it is plain that this is intended to be a dramatic shift of power away from suspects generally and into the hands of the police. The abolition will extend to all trials and not just terrorist ones.

It is indeed in the police station that this proposal will bite. Far from being cautioned that 'you don't have to say anything', suspects will now lawfully be threatened that unless they give an explanation things will go against them in court.

The medieval monarchs used to pull down the castles of their defeated enemies to prevent these becoming future bastions of resistance to their rule. The government is adopting a similar policy with the institutions of the unwritten constitution of this country that have acted as a restraint on central power. After trade unions, local government, editorial freedom in broadcasting and the press, the artillery is now pounding at the central keep of the criminal law.

While some socialists might wonder why any part of the criminal law is worth defending the answer is that this part of the criminal law is simply a reflection of past historical struggle and the fact that there were some areas of independence from the state that the law was not able to eliminate. Resistance to this impertinent arrogation of power has a long historical precedent, and is vital if there is to be any barrier to the encroachment of the state on the liberty of the individual.

If the state can prove your guilt by your failing to answer any questions it may pose of you, there is no logical limit to what it can and will demand of you in the future.

USA: the Thatcherite future that doesn't work

By Martin Thomas

Whoever wins the US presidential election, the same people will rule. Power will stay in the hands of the bosses of America's big multinational companies and banks.

Those bosses hold sway economically over much of the world, though less so now than in past years. But the US is their homeland.

It is the home of Exxon, of General Motors, of IBM, of General Electric, Du Pont, and ITT, of Citicorp and Chase Manhattan. It is the base of the world's biggest, richest and most sophisticated capitalist businesses.

And it is the country where profit-seeking business has the most free rein. It is the land of free enterprise and the free market, free as nowhere else from substantial nationalisations, major public welfare provision or strong trade unions.

It is the Promised Land of capitalism. It is the model for the land of milk and honey which the Tories promise us as the reward for Britain's travel through the desert of their cuts and job-slaughter.

The US is the showpiece, the shop window display, of what capitalism has to offer to humanity. And what does it show?

Poverty! The streets of US cities are full of beggars, paupers, and destitute people. Researchers reckon that there are two million of them — people living on the streets, without a home, without any income at all.

No other advanced capitalist country is like that. To find a parallel you have to go to the Third World. And for millions of people, life in America is like life in the Third World.

In parts of New York City, infant mortality is around the same level as Malaysia and Guyana. The New York City health commissioner describes central Harlem like this: "In these dilapidated buildings, infants who survived the first weeks of life are dying of pneumonia, freezing to death, falling from windows."

Twelve million American children, and 20 million adults, live in poverty according to official

figures. Those who have a home are crammed into desperate, desolate slums, bleaker by far than the poorest city areas in Britain. In the city of El Paso — a major city, not a remote rural area — 25,000 people have no running water, and 53,000 no sewers.

In the rich, booming city of Los Angeles, the rent for the cheapest housing in the cheapest areas is about 70% of the income of a minimum-wage worker. So two, three or four families have to share a single flat.

Shift workers share beds, one sleeping while the other works. At least 200,000 people live in garages, usually without any plumbing or heat.

Average real wages in the US have been stagnating or declining since the early 1970s. Even in Thatcher's Britain, trade unions have been able to keep wage rises ahead of inflation. But in the US, only about 15% of workers are now in trade unions.

All other things being equal, unionised workers' wages are about 30% higher than non-union workers'; but most workers are not in trade unions.

The steady shift of industry from the North-East to the South and West has weakened the unions. On top of that, many employers have broken unions with a ruthlessness which makes Rupert Murdoch look genteel by comparison.

In Los Angeles in recent years, for example, the union which organised janitors in the city centre has been smashed — and wages cut from \$13 to \$3.50 an hour.

Texas Air, the world's biggest airline, started off by putting its subsidiary Continental Airlines into bankruptcy to clear out the unions, and then went on to halve the pay of workers in the Eastern Airlines subsidiary.

Inequality! The top 20% of American households get nearly ten times the average income of the bottom 20%. The top 20% are on around \$100,000 a year; the bottom 20% on \$10,000.

Even in Thatcher's Britain the gap is much smaller — the top 20% getting about six times as much as the bottom 20%. In the Netherlands, for example, the ratio is four-and-a-half to one.

Insecurity! In the US, as nowhere else in the advanced capitalist world, almost any worker can be sacked at

a moment's notice. A recent Bill in Congress requiring companies to give workers a few weeks' notice if they closed a factory was vetoed by President Reagan as an intolerable interference with free enterprise.

Even comparatively well-off American workers can suddenly be thrown into an abyss. And unemployment in America is an abyss. Only about a third of the unemployed get any benefit; it's not very much, and after six months most unemployed workers get *nothing at all*.

If they can't find a new job — and when unemployment for young Blacks in big cities is around 50%, that's hard — they have to beg, steal...or die. No wonder crime rate in the US are so high.

Deaths through violence in the US's big cities run at 5, 10 or 20 times the rate in Northern Ireland. On the mainly Black Southside of Los Angeles, the drug dealing gangs kill an average of one person a day. Many people in US cities are afraid to walk on the streets or use the underground railway.

Another abyss threatens US workers, too: illness. Thirty one million people in the US have no health insurance at all. Many millions of others have insurance which covers them only partially.

Racism! Some apologists for capitalism tell us that because money is colour-blind, so capitalism is, too. The best sort of racial equality is equality in the market, and do-gooding socialist reform and legislation can only be counterproductive meddling. That's what they say.

In fact capitalism always seizes on divisions in the working class to create pools of low-wage labour — women, black people, immigrants.

Capitalists have to pay their qualified, experienced 'core' workers more than a miserable minimum; but then they want low-paid labour for temporary, casual, part-time or ancillary work. Divisions in the working class help them get what they want.

And so it is in the US's free-market economy. 33% of Blacks live in poverty as against 11% of whites. 46% of Black children live in poverty. The average income of white families is \$32,000; of Black families, \$18,000.

Where Blacks have made some limited gains in the US, it has been thanks to political action winning legislation, not to the wonders of the market economy. The civil rights movement of the 1960s did break down segregation and open the way for more Black people to professional jobs, and that was a gain.

Some Blacks have gained — but only a few. While a few Blacks have prospered, the great majority have been beaten down by America's gradual decay. The proportion of black men with an income of over \$25,000 and the proportion below \$5,000 have both increased.

Between 1970 and 1987, the number of Black mayors in US cities rose from 48 to 303. But the poverty and the misery of Black workers in those cities has increased too.

Repression! "Greed is all right. I want you to know that. I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about it." Ivan



Boesky, author of these famous words, got caught out with his stock-market swindles. But his creed lives on.

Freedom, in capitalist America, means above all free scope for the greed of the rich — and short shrift for anyone who gets in their way.

The US has six times as many people in prison, in proportion to population, as the Netherlands. Half the people in prison are Black, though Blacks are only 12% of America's population. Alone among advanced capitalist countries, the US uses the death penalty regularly.

Unequal

The US's system of punishment is brutal — and grossly unequal. No rich people ever face the death penalty there; if you're rich enough to pay the legal fees, your lawyer will get you off.

In Los Angeles a privately-owned jail offers itself as an alternative to the public jail for rich convicts; if they jib at the prices, the jail owners explain in their advertisements that going to the public jail means almost certainly getting raped by another prisoner.

In its vindictive brutality towards the poor, the US today is more like 18th century England than a modern democracy. The rulers of 18th century England saw the poor in their cities as a "criminal class" and tried to deal with it by deporting as many as it could to Australia.

Likewise, in cities like Los Angeles today, the powers that be see the people who live on the streets, and the jobless Black youth, as a criminal class — and many of them have demanded, publicly and seriously, that this "criminal class" should be deported en masse to remote rural areas of the US.

This proposal for deportation has even been backed by the *left wing* of

official US politics — the "Democratic Socialists of America", a grouping within the Democratic Party. A former leader of the Black Panther Party, now a university professor, chimes in: there is nothing to be done about Black youth caught up in drug-dealing except to lock them away. "They're just not going to make it."

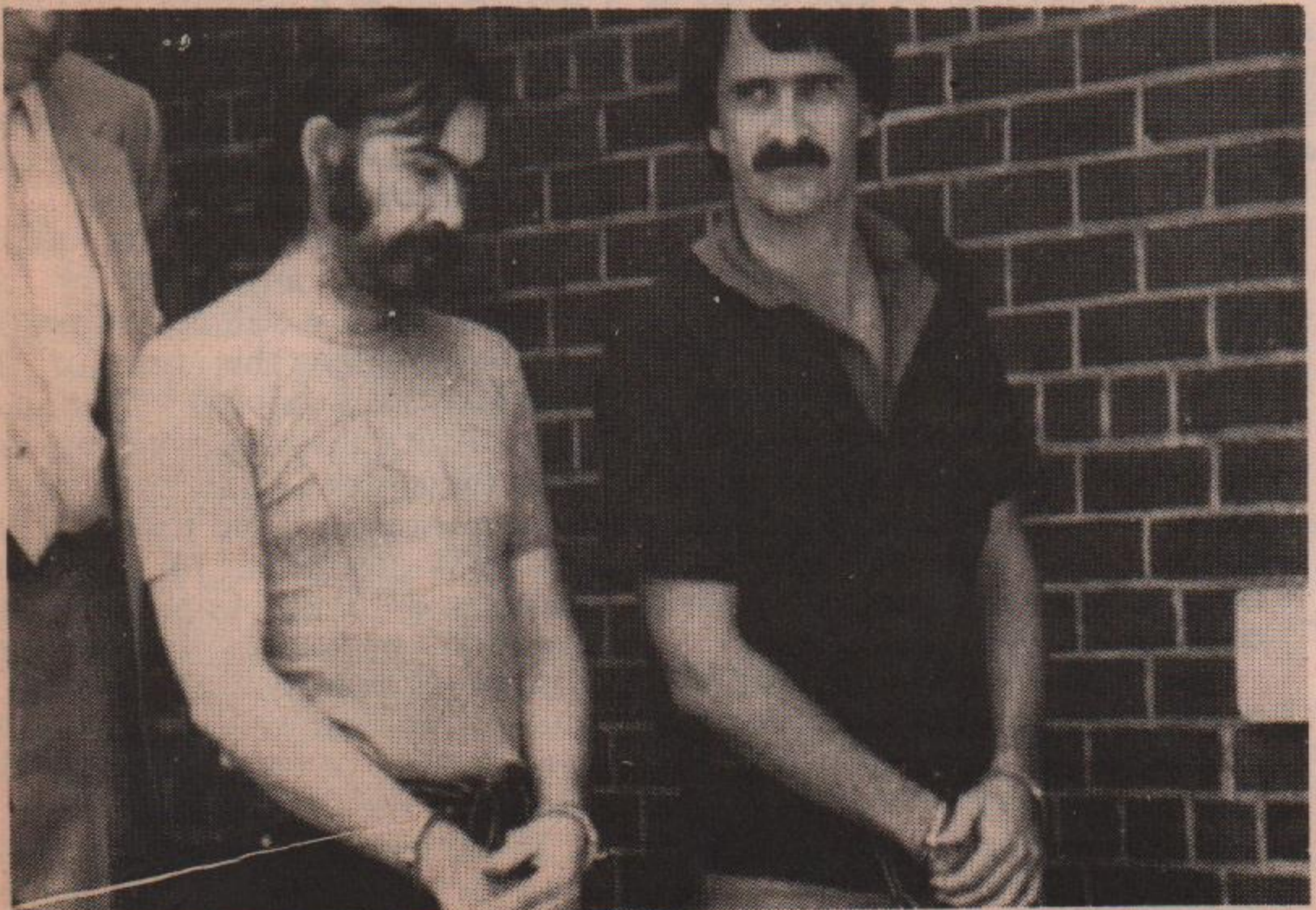
The terrible strain and insecurity of life in capitalist America — and the utter hopelessness of it for so many millions — leads people to seek consolation in religion or drugs. In New York State alone, there are 97,000 children under 16 who are "heavy drug abusers" — and fewer than 150 spaces for them in publicly-financed residential drug treatment projects.

Drugs like cocaine are killing thousands of people — though not nearly as many as alcohol does. Feuding and violence in the vast illegal drugs trade kills many more. No politician, bar a few mavericks, has any answer except to bellow for stricter enforcement of anti-drugs laws.

Liberal

The most damning thing that George Bush can find to say about Michael Dukakis is that Dukakis is "a liberal" — and it's an accusation that Dukakis finds damaging. Where else in the world apart from the US is "liberal" a dirty word? The one-party states, South Africa, and nowhere else much.

Where else could a presidential candidate boost himself by appearing on a platform surrounded by uniformed police, as Bush has done? Where else, apart from the USSR, would a previous job as head of the secret police by a qualification for top office? In Bush's 1980 campaign for the Republican nomination, his supporters used to chant enthusiastic-



US air traffic controllers on strike in 1981: arrested and in handcuffs



"CIA! CIA!", so proud were they of Bush's term as chief of the CIA.

Narrow-minded, mean bigotry flourishes in the American ruling class. Last year a former Education Secretary in the Reagan Administration revealed that White House officials referred to Black civil rights leader Martin Luther King as "Martin Lucifer Coon", called Arabs "sand niggers", and termed the Equal Rights Amendment "the Lesbian Bill of Rights".

Cruel

Poverty, inequality, insecurity, racism, repression: America is a mean and cruel land for the working class.

Why is it like that? American workers have fought back, repeatedly and heroically. What has crippled them so far is the lack of a political labour movement.

Until the early years of this century, a large proportion of ordinary Americans were not wage-workers but independent property-owners, tilling their own farms. Even those who were wage-workers could hope to make good as individuals, by escaping from the working class rather than joining a fight to improve conditions for all workers.

The weakness of working-class organisation gave scope to ethnic divisions in the working class — and those divisions, in turn, obstructed organisation.

A socialist movement began to develop in the years before World War I but was pushed back by vicious repression during and after the War and then the tremendous boom of the 1920s. In 1929 the boom broke. By the mid-'30s there is a powerful wave of sit-in strikes and millions of workers joined mass industrial unions.

Many argued for a labour party based on the unions. They failed to do so because of the influence of the

Communist Party which, under Stalin's direction, recruited the majority of the best militants and turned them to support of Franklin Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.

A chance was missed. In 1946-7 the US had another great wave of strikes — it was the biggest strike wave anywhere in the world until the French general strike of 1968 — but there was no political party of the workers to provide direction. The strike wave subsided; the Cold War developed; the combined impact of McCarthyism and an economic boom pushed socialists to the margins.

Most US workers will not vote at all in the presidential election. The overall turnout will probably be less than 50% — and that overall figure

means a turnout of 70 or 80% from the rich and maybe 40% from the working class.

American workers know that Bush and Dukakis give them no real choice. What they do not yet know is how to get a real choice, by creating their own workers' party. But they will learn.

In Western Europe, labour movements industrial and political have, over decades and centuries, forced many concessions from the capitalists. We have erected shelters, makeshift and inadequate but shelters nonetheless, against the dog-eat-dog brutality of capitalism.

Now the Tories are demolishing those shelters. They want to make Britain like the America of Reagan, Bush and Dukakis. We have seen this future — and it doesn't work.

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 worldwide, including the struggle of workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

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.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

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

A test of faith

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

When I heard that the Shroud of Turin, supposedly the burial cloth of Jesus, was only 6-700 years old, I jokingly exclaimed: "It's a miracle!" Now I find that some people are seriously saying the same thing.

The story so far:

A shroud bearing a negative image of a crucified man was first reported in 1350. Initially denounced as a fake, it was later treated as the genuine winding cloth of Jesus after his crucifixion.

Last year, the Catholic Church finally agreed to the destruction of three small portions of the shroud to allow it to be carbon-dated (see box).

Just now, after press leaks, the results of the dating are being published and it seems that the flax used to weave the material was harvested between 1262 and 1384. The carbon-dating teams are 95% sure of this finding and all agree that there is no chance of the cloth dating back anywhere near the time of Christ.

The Catholic Church is not disputing the findings and indeed announced them several weeks ago. Some have wondered why the church agreed to the dating of the shroud. This is to misunderstand the nature of religious faith. Yes, it requires that the miraculous can occur, but it can withstand the scientific explanation or disproof of any number of actual "miracles". It may be that the church welcomes the result of the shroud's dating since it may get over to some of its followers that their faith should not need physical props.

Others are not letting go so easily. They say that the image is too

anatomically correct for the Middle Ages. Details of the crucifixion, such as nail marks on the wrists, are said not to have been known by anyone at that time.

The last point is arguable, to say the least, and, if the shroud was prepared by first wrapping it around a body (live or dead) and then painting the cloth where the flesh touched it, you would naturally get an anatomically correct, negative image. There is evidence that the image is composed of iron oxide (rust), a common pigment in the Middle Ages.

The most ingenious suggestion I've seen is that, at the time of Christ's resurrection, a burst of high energy (supernatural cosmic rays) was emitted by his body. This caused enough extra C-14 atoms (see box) to be formed for the cloth to seem only 6-700 years old.

O ye of little faith....

Carbon dating

This technique depends on the existence of a radio-active form of carbon (Carbon-14). This isotope of carbon has a half-life of 5730 years, ie. after 5730 years only half the C-14 atoms would remain, on average.

Since the earth is constantly older than C-14's half-life, there would be none left now were it not that C-14 is constantly made in the air by cosmic rays hitting atoms of nitrogen (80% of the air).

The amount of cosmic radiation seems fairly constant and so therefore does the amount of C-14. C-14 is taken into living things just the same as the ordinary carbon, C-12, and the ratio of C-14 atoms to C-12 atoms in living things is constant.

This ratio can be measured by taking a known mass of carbon from a living thing and measuring the number of radio-active disintegrations of C-14 atoms in a given time.

Once the animal or plant has died, though, it can no longer take in fresh carbon. The C-14 present at death slowly decays and the ratio of C-14 to C-12 falls at a known rate. Measuring the ratio allows the time of death to be calculated, within certain limits. For a 2000 year old sample, the ratio should have dropped by about 20%. For the shroud, the ratio had gone down by only 5-6%.

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Is the USSR better?

By Gerry Bates

Last Wednesday, 26 October, Socialist Organiser co-sponsored a public meeting in London with the Iranian group 'Socialism and Revolution' and 'Socialist Platform' to discuss 'Reassessing the Eastern Bloc'. It was probably the first time since the 1940s that this question has been discussed seriously among Trotskyists at a level higher than set-piece debates between different factions.

The speaker from 'Socialism and Revolution' opened the discussion by saying that Trotsky's position — that the USSR was a 'degenerated workers' state' — has three faults. It is out of date. It is incomplete. And it is ambiguous.

Marxists have to make our ideas more precise through successive approximations. The USSR is not an open and shut question. Socialist Organiser's contribution could be useful. It is remarkable how on many issues SO and 'Socialism and Revolution' have come to similar conclusions independently and from quite different experiences.

Why is Trotsky's formula out of date? 'Degenerated workers' state' leaves a lot out. What degree of degeneration? How much more has the USSR degenerated since Trotsky's death nearly 50 years ago? How far is it still a workers' state? A concrete analysis is needed.

Trotsky couldn't follow and analyse the degeneration since his death. We must do that. Today you couldn't write about the USSR as Trotsky did in 'Revolution Betrayed' talking about the progressiveness of the plan and how the USSR has achieved great advances while capitalism has stagnated.

Why is Trotsky's formula incomplete? It did not contain an adequate analysis of the transition to socialism. We need to reformulate our understanding of this transition.

Why is Trotsky's formula ambiguous? The term 'political revolution' has been interpreted by some Trotskyists to mean that there is no exploitation in the USSR. But there is exploitation! Some Trotskyists are opposed to overthrowing the state in the USSR, and say they want to revive the soviets — ie the revolution should be limited. But Poland shows that the workers' struggle goes beyond merely a 'political' revolution.

Is the USSR more advanced than capitalism, and closer to socialism than for example the USA? No! These societies are not 'more advanced' than Western capitalism.

Is 'the plan' progressive? What about the needs of the producers? Whose needs does the plan serve?

These notions allow for anti-working class interpretations. We should clean our house.

What did Trotsky mean by saying the USSR is transitional? The working class had been defeated in USSR and on a world scale. But capitalism was in its epoch of decline, and so the fate of the USSR was not decided yet. Thus it was a 'transitional society'.

Now maybe we can still speak of a transitional epoch. But we can't equate a society with that. A society in transition to socialism requires the working class in power — otherwise there is no movement towards socialism. Nationalisation alone is not a measure of movement towards socialism.

So the USSR is not a workers' state.

What is it? We need concrete analysis, collective thinking,

debate. We shouldn't jump to dogmatic new positions. As an algebraic formula, I suggest 'bureaucratised state'.

Some say it must be either a workers' state or a bourgeois state. That's a simplification. You can have peculiar, not fully-fledged, temporary states.

Al Richardson spoke from 'Socialist Platform'. He found the term 'bureaucratised state' tautological and unhistorical. But we should reassess the USSR. Can a crisis go on for 70 years? Can a counter-revolutionary workers' state spread as the USSR has done? Can workers' states result from peasant guerrilla warfare?

Nationalisation can't be the criteria. If it was a question of degree of state ownership then ancient Egypt was a workers' state.

Engels and Lenin explained that a workers' state is a 'bourgeois state without a bourgeoisie'. A workers state defends public property but still property. That's a dialectical formulation.

John O'Mahony spoke from Socialist Organiser. We're talking here about what socialism is. We're against wage slavery, we're against the tyranny of the British state. We're for liberating the workers. Yet many socialists think that the USSR is nearer to socialism than Britain — the USSR where workers are exploited and state tyranny is much worse than in Britain.

They believe that a nationalised economy — even ruled by a bureaucracy — is an advance on capitalism and is in some sense working class.

For socialists, nationalisation is a means to an end. If you have a totalitarian state, you don't achieve the end.

What was Trotsky's position? In 1928 Trotsky said that the USSR was a workers' state because a reformable workers' party ruled it. Later, he analysed an evolving social organism. The USSR was no longer reformable, but it had a fully nationalised economy which depended on the workers' revolution. A political revolution was needed — something profound and thorough — but, with capitalism in decay, the USSR represented the future (said Trotsky) because of its economic expansion, made possible by statisation.

In 1939, Trotsky accepted the theoretical possibility that the USSR might be a new class society. But he said, as it might well be on the eve of its overthrow, it would be ridiculous to call it a stable new society.

Trotsky was killed. By 1945, the USSR had created an empire with 80 million people in it. Instead of analysing this situation, Trotskyists hung onto a dogma.

Then in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc, Stalinists overthrew the bourgeoisie and created also totalitarian regimes (varying in degree). In China for example, the Maoists were conquerors of the workers. They suppressed all liberty.

By the mid-50s there was a nationalised economy in China. They'd created as much as remained of the Russian revolution. But it makes no sense to say this was a workers' state.

Look at the themes of the modern Trotskyists. Many recognise that the Stalinist bureaucracies create their own societies. This is a fact. We have had an epoch of Stalinism. The bureaucracy creates the nationalised economies, not the working class. Even if you use the workers' state label, a new society is being described.

According to Trotsky the ruling bureaucracy was in agonising contradiction to the na-



Eastern Europe today — Lenin made into an icon for a society co-

tionalised economy. To talk of a 'workers' state' where the bureaucracy creates the nationalised economy is to make 'workers' state' just a 'tag' for a new-class society — and to say that new society is progressive.

We should slough off the workers' state label, adopt a clear programme for workers' liberty, and open a serious discussion.

Several tendencies contributed to the discussion from the floor.

Kate Ford from Workers' Power argued that we should defend statisation and planning in the USSR. If capitalists plan, they do it for profit, but the USSR's planning is different. Nothing basic has changed since Trotsky's time.

Defend

SO says to workers in the Stalinist states that there's nothing to defend — the west has higher living standards and free trade unions.

But in fact higher living standards in Britain are due to our imperialism. Our bourgeoisie super-exploits workers in imperialised nations. Imperialism is a form of monopoly capitalism. It holds no real benefits for the international proletariat and must be smashed.

Ray Ferris from Socialist Organiser said that our basic

criticism, our compass must be the working class. Are they free to organise? Can they have political independence? Nationalisation is only a means to an end.

Trotsky said it would be foolish and premature to dub the bureaucracy a new class in 1939. But it's foolish after 48 years to say nothing has changed!

Tom Cashman said he was a supporter of Socialist Organiser who still held to the 'degenerated and deformed workers' states' thesis. But he rejected the versions of 'defence of the USSR' argued by most Trotskyists.

We cannot say: defend the Soviet Union by nuking western workers. That sort of 'defencism' is rubbish. No to the bureaucrats' bomb!

We are for Solidarnosc. We are always with the workers, however backward, against the bureaucracy.

Clive Bradley said that he used to think the main alternatives to the 'degenerated and deformed workers' states' formula created more problems than they solved. But is fact the problem entailed in saying that the USSR, China etc are workers' states is much bigger than the problem of calling them bureaucratic collectivist or state capitalist. Look at Workers' Power on Afghanistan for example. Their opposition to Russian withdrawal is based not on an assessment of the

interests of Afghan masses but on a view of the world divided into progressive and reactionary 'camps'. Independent working class politics disappears.

Alistair Greene from the Spartacist League said that SO were Shachtmanites — or Hefferites.

In the USSR there is full employment and cheap housing. There is something to defend in the USSR — distorted, hampered, hindered and wrecked though it is. SO makes a lot of the industrial development of South Korea, Taiwan, etc. but these are semi-colonies of USA and Japan. They are not independent.

Calcutta

SO's is an Anglo-American standpoint. Look at the workers' gains in the USSR from the standpoint of the poor of Calcutta, and you appreciate them more.

François from Lutte Ouvrière said that he welcomed a lot of the arguments. His tendency had been raising the problems since 1945.

But some comrades are going too far. Trotsky never justified the term 'workers' state', he explained it. Trotsky was addressing those who had supported the Russian revolution and saying this workers' state was not what it should be. If the working class makes a revolution, the state that comes from that is a

Back to white Australia?

Tony Brown reports
from Sydney

Margaret Thatcher's visit to Australia hit the headlines because of the demonstrations against her in Melbourne and Sydney. However, her visit was important for another reason.

Embattled Liberal Party leader John Howard, who had only just returned from a visit to Britain and Israel, was quite open about the fact that he hoped to gain some tips on how to get an anti-Labor government elected in Australia. The core of Thatcher's message was to set the policies and stick to them regardless.

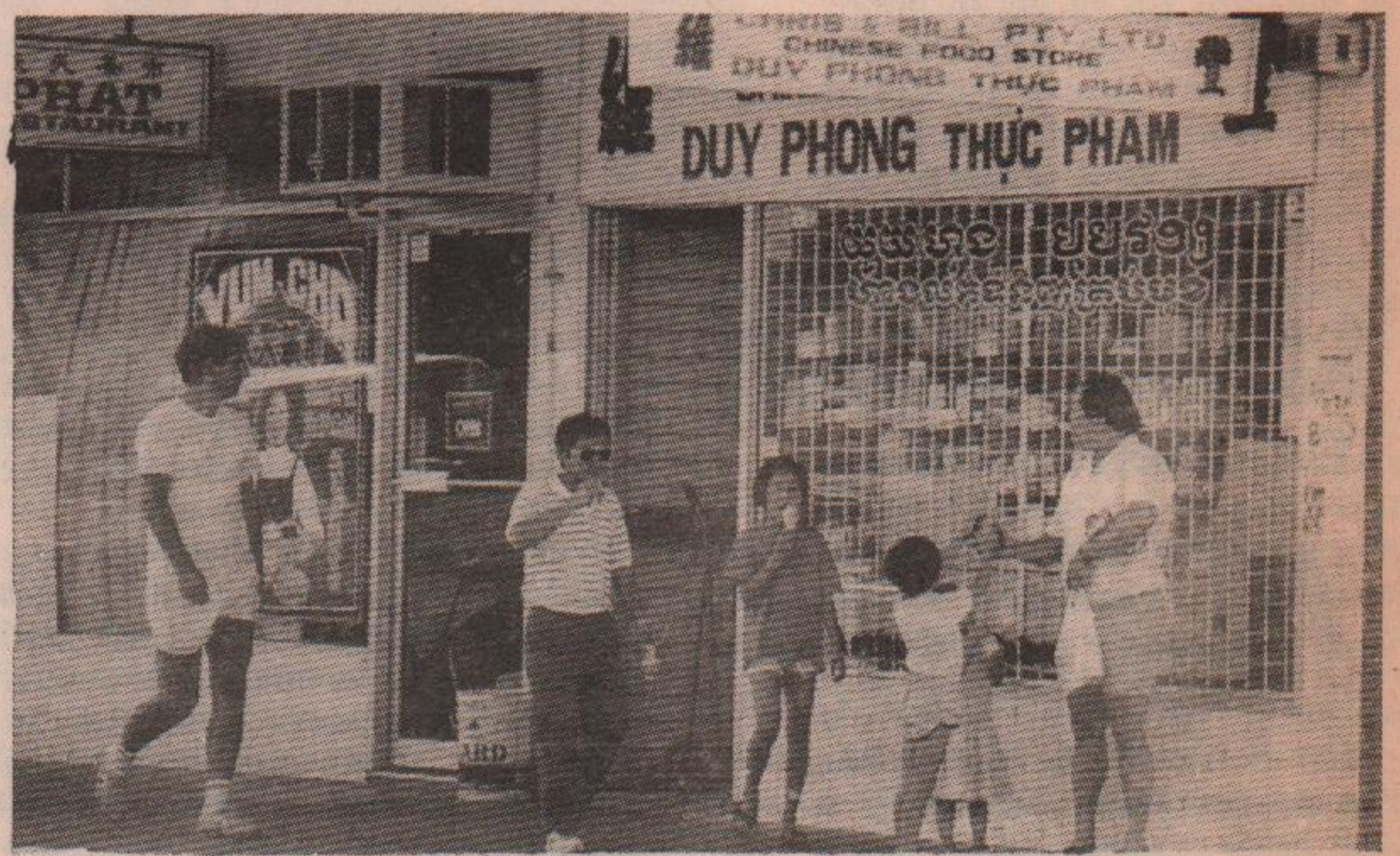
The first expression of this has been the new immigration policy of the Liberal/National coalition. Howard announced that if elected the coalition would restrict Asian immigration to ensure 'social harmony'. This policy shift ends the twenty year old bi-partisan, non-racial immigration policy created after the abolition of the White-Australia policy in 1966.

The change has split the Coalition. National Party leaders Ian Sinclair and John Stone were quick to jump in and stress the need to 're-orient' (sic) Australia's migration to Europe and end Asian immigration. Five Liberal backbenchers (wets who had been sacked by Howard from the frontbench) crossed the floor to vote with the government while two others abstained, and alternate leader Andrew Peacock conveniently absented himself from the chamber.

None of this has fazed Howard, whose reputation now rides on successfully putting the racist policy to the electorate at the next election. But Howard faces other problems.

Some journalists and editors have declared war on Howard's leadership of the Liberals over this issue. Some of this comes from embarrassment about Australia's racist history both towards the Aborigines and towards Asia. But more crucial to sections of the ruling class is the need to integrate the Australian economy with the new industrialising countries of Asia, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and on a different level Japan, which Howard threatens.

Under Hawke, Labor has already altered immigration quotas, reducing those of refugees and family



reunion, and increasing business and skills migration in a bid to appease anti-migrant sentiment. The Liberals are pressing to alter this balance even further, with Howard going so far as to specifically target Asian immigration.

But the assumption is that increasing the business and skills quota of migrants will reduce the intake from Asia is extraordinary ignorant.

Figures produced by the OECD in a survey of Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs) show the fallacy of this view.

In 1980 Korea was producing twice as many university level engineering graduates as West Germany. At levels below first university degree as many engineering students were graduating from Korean institutions as in the UK, West Germany and Sweden combined. And the numbers have increased since then.

The NICs' industrial dynamism has pushed them into higher technology. In 1985 the second and third most important imports into the OECD from the NICs were electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances. The sale of capital goods is also going ahead at a fast rate.

Between 1973 and 1985, the growth of manufactured imports by OECD countries from the NICs grew at an annual rate of 17.8%. But, within that total figure, metal working machinery grew by 37.3%, general industrial machinery by 35.6%, professional instruments by 27.4%, power-generating equipment by 28.6% and specialised machinery by 24.3%.

When 'Manufactured Value Added' (MVA) is measured the performance is more remarkable. From 1973 to 1983 MVA in the NICs grew

at 5.3%. (This figure includes Mexico and Brazil which brings the average down). Korea grew at 11.3%. The only OECD country to average above 2% was Japan at 5.8%. Australia declined by 0.9% while the UK went backwards at an annual rate of 2.9%.

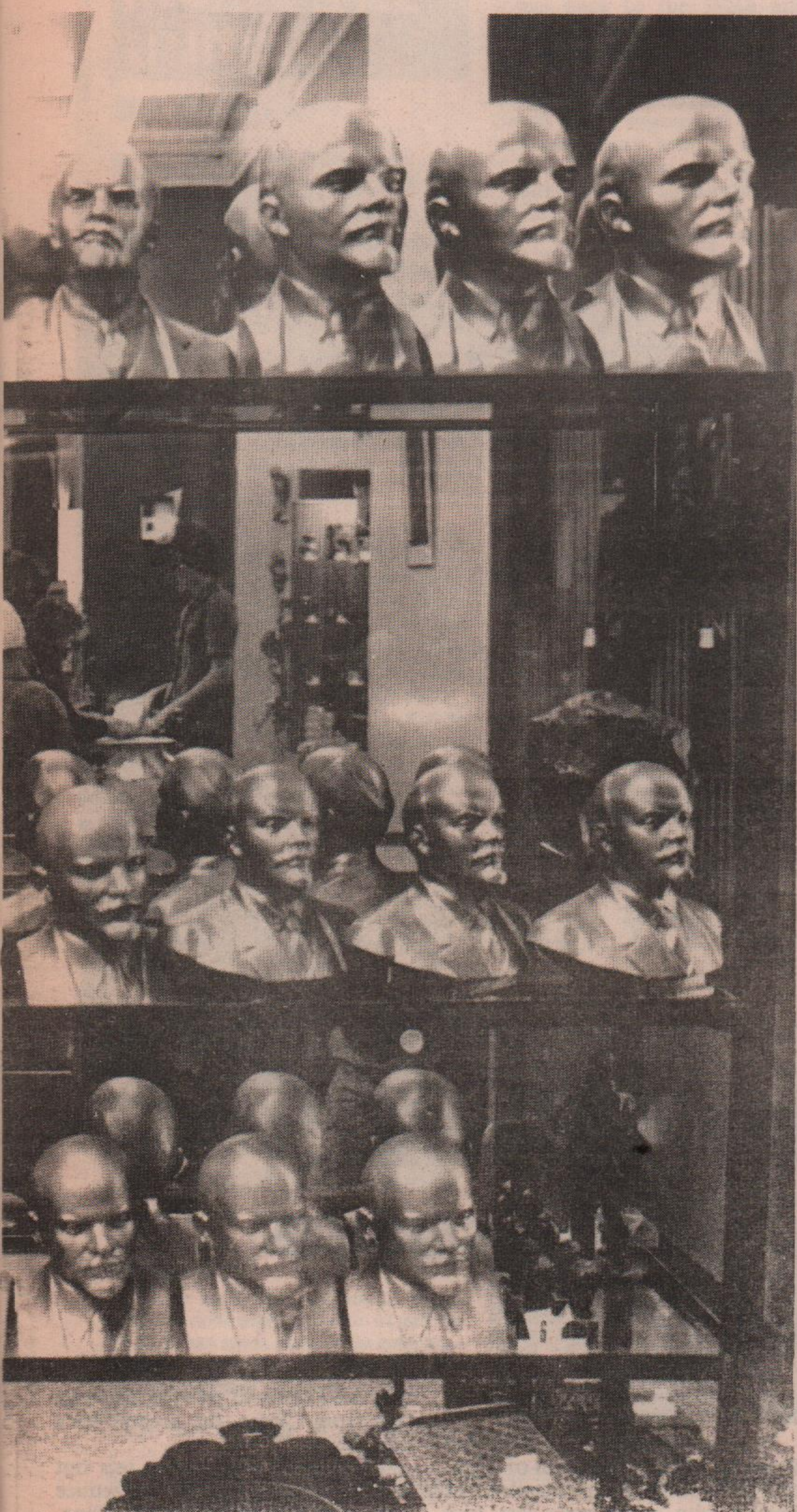
While Australia is running an annual balance of payments deficit of \$11 billion, the four NICs last year turned in a surplus of \$40 billion.

All this only highlights the bind Howard has put himself in. Opinion polls are showing that up to 70% want some form of immigration controls imposed and Howard is now playing his part in whipping up hysteria.

In fact over the past twenty years only 2% of the immigration intake has come from Asia. In attempting to appeal to the racist undercurrent that exists in Australia Howard has put his party at odds with important sections of business who want to trade in the region.

The squabbles have not been confined to the coalition. Within the Labour Caucus one backbencher has spoken publicly in favour of the coalition's policy, and the New South Wales Labour Council's radio station has employed the most vocal anti-Asian commentator as its breakfast announcer.

Hawke also follows the polls and is treading warily on the issue, allowing the Coalition to fight in public while hoping to reap the benefit. But unless the Australian Labor Party tackles the issue head on it runs the risk of allowing Howard and the Nationals to appeal directly to many workers who equate the fall in living standards and the continuing high level of unemployment with too high a level of immigration.



Contrary to all his ideals

workers' state. That's why the USSR is a workers' state.

Martin Thomas of Socialist Organiser asked, how do we assess the statified and planned economies? Are they something for which workers should be prepared to make sacrifices? No.

1. Capitalist planning is for profit. Now you may argue that the surplus in the USSR isn't profit. But for sure the economy is planned around the bureaucrats grabbing the surplus. Why is that better than planning for profit?

2. The conditions for the workers are worse. Compare West Germany and East Germany, North Korea and South Korea. It is not a matter of imperialism. Compare Eastern Europe and Ireland. Irish workers on average have higher wages and more democratic rights.

3. The statified economies do not develop the productive forces faster. Even the bureaucracy doesn't believe they do. There is nothing there to defend. You can argue there is only by reproducing Stalinist propaganda or resorting to mysticism.

Summing up, the speaker from 'Socialism and Revolution' said that none of the defenders of the 'degenerated and deformed workers' states' thesis had replied to concrete questions. How far can a workers' state degenerate? How is

Poland a workers' state?

Nationalisation cannot be decisive. How can you separate nationalisation and workers' management? Anyway there is more nationalisation in Iraq, Syria or Iran than in the USSR. Lutte Ouvriere says the USSR is a workers' state because its origin was a workers' revolution. But workers lost power.

What are the programmatic conclusions? For a start, that we don't say "Defend the gains of the October revolution". That doesn't mean we're for the restoration of capitalism. But we can't just repeat the worn-out formulas of 50 years ago.

Al Richardson said there had been too much moralising about how nasty the USSR is. You can have a ruling but oppressed class, like the colonial bourgeoisie.

John O'Mahony dismissed the Spartacist argument that SO is somehow moved by pressure from the Labour left. What we're saying is very unpopular on the left!

Nationalised property is not necessarily workers' property. Obviously it would be better to put a nationalised economy under workers' control than to restore capitalism. But the key is the working class. In any conflict between the workers and the bureaucrats we're with the workers.

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

Wednesday 2 November
University College London SO meeting: 'Where we stand'. 1 pm.

Wednesday 2 November
Middlesex Poly SO meeting: 'Where we stand'. 1 pm.

Saturday 5 November
Socialist Conference 'Trade Union Solidarity Conference'. Leeds Trades Council Club. Starts 9am, fee £2 to J Seymour, 3 Hill St, Barnoldswick, Colne, Lancs.

Sunday 6 November
SSiN Conference: 'Fight for the right to study'. PCL, Marylebone Road 12 noon.

Monday 7 November
Nottingham SO meeting: 'The struggle for socialism'. Int'l Comm. Ctr., Mansfield Road, 7.30 pm

Monday 7 November
West London SO meeting: 'Arabs, Jews and Socialism'. Hammersmith

Town Hall, 8.00 pm
Thursday 10 November
Northampton SO meeting: 'Stalinism' with Geoff Ward. 25 Queens Road, 7.15 pm

Saturday 12 November
SO AGM. Manchester

Saturday 19 November
'Time to Go' conference on Ireland. Camden Centre, Bidborough St, WC1. £5 to Clare Short MP (TTG), House of Commons, London SW1

Saturday 19 November
Nottingham SO weekend. Discussions, walks, good food. Hollinsclough, White Peak District. £12 waged, £6 unwaged: contact Ivan or Rosey 0602 624827

Sunday 20 November
North East London SO meeting: 'Fighting Imperialism: Under Whose Flag?' with Clive Bradley. Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road, 7.30 pm

Thursday 24 November
Northampton SO meeting: 'The Left Today' with Clive Bradley. 25 Queens Road, 7.15 pm

Saturday 26 November
Socialist Conference day school on 'Socialism and Democracy'. Civic Centre, Newcastle. Contact Tessa Gray, 4 Normanton Terrace, Elswick, Newcastle-on-Tyne

Anti-Apartheid Movement Annual Conference. Sheffield

Saturday 26 November
London Socialist Conference day school on Imperialism. Sir William Collins School, NW1

Monday 28 November
London Socialist Forum: 'Labour and the Bomb'. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, 7.30 pm

Saturday 3 December
CLPs conference organising meeting. Merseyside TUCURC, Hardman St, Liverpool, 12 noon. Contact Lol 051 638 1338

Saturday 10 December
London Socialist Organiser day school. Contact Mark 01 639 7967

Saturday 10 December
Socialist Conference: conference against the Poll Tax. Newcastle Medical School. Fee £10 (delegate)/£5/£3 to Terry Conway, 10b Windsor Road, London N7

Sunday 11 December
North East London SO Social, 7.30 pm. Contact Belinda 354 3854

Saturday 25 February
Women for Socialism 2-day conference. Wesley House, WC1.

Saturday 1 April
Campaign for Non-Alignment: 'Out of NATO, into the world' 2-day conference

The sharp end of perestroika

TELEVISION

By Jean Lane

A new series of the weekly programme about the world of work, 'The Sharp End', started last Thursday (Channel 4, 6.30 pm), with a report from Hungary where market forces are being introduced to try to revive the economy.

The state-owned railway company Ganz Mavak, was, until last year, considered a "socialist" model. The workers won trophies and cups. They turned out 90,000 trains and every year beat the Communist Party's production targets.

But in June 1987 someone looked at the books and a myth was blown. The company had been losing money for 20 years. The total debt was £15 million, and something had got to be done about it.

The economy is in a bad way. Wages are being cut, prices are rising and income taxes are being introduced. For the first time, unemployment benefit is being paid, acknowledging unemployment as a problem.

Ganz Mavak was split up into seven firms. Each was given six months to make a profit. Six of the firms did. The seventh, the wagon building shop, which kept the company name, did not. It was declared bankrupt, threatening the jobs of the workers.

Even the official trade union is talking about strike action. Not surprisingly many workers don't trust them. 300,000 workers have left in the last year and some are looking for alternative, free, unions. Alternative unions, and the right to strike, are about to be made legal, and many workers will be willing to use them.

Protest is already allowed on a small scale, especially on environmental issues, but the party is happy to allow people to let off steam about environmental issues if it keeps their minds off the economic crisis. It remains to be seen how tolerant the party will be if the workers take their talk of

openness at face value.

One free trade union, TDDSZ, has already been set up by research and education workers since their official union refuses to fight the cuts in the education budget.

Many workers remembering 1956, are cautious. Their wages have been halved, the price of food is going up. The market economy has hit them very hard. But an economic fight has immediate political implications in East European countries, raising the question, "who rules?"

Perestroika and glasnost were attempts by Moscow to head off steam. But the pressure is still building up. When the lid blows off it will open up opportunities workers everywhere — East and West.

Market forces are also being extended in the West. "A Better View" (This Week, last Thursday, ITV) showed how British TV is to be handed on a plate to the advertisers.

Satellites and cable TV are opening up more channels. But, according to a Government White Paper, advertising companies will decide what's shown and when, because they will be providing the money. As Rupert Murdoch, who has leased four of the new channels, said: "Undercutting ITV's monopoly will provide us with the right kind of programme and the right kind of audience".

The right kind of programme for him, is "Upstairs, Downstairs" and "LA Law".

The loss of direct funding and the deregulation of TV programming means that stations will buy rather than make programmes because it's cheaper. So you may soon have the choice of several stations to watch, but they will all be full of cheap soaps.

The programmes most likely to be cut are: adult educational, childrens programmes, religious affairs, minority group interests, minority sports and current affairs documentaries, because they attract fewer viewers to watch the adverts in between.

The Tories may be pleased about market forces being introduced in Eastern Bloc countries; but their extension here is going to make sure that nobody will know about it! Is that what is meant by the anarchy of the capitalist system?



Does Cleese deserve his millions?

CINEMA

Edward Ellis

John Cleese is possibly the most successful British comedian ever, and "A Fish Called Wanda" is the most money-spinning British comedy ever. Does it deserve the

millions it has made?

In many respects it is a long way from the idiotic surrealism of Monty Python or the manic overdrive of Basil Fawlty or Cleese's last film "Clockwise". Cleese, in fact, is more-or-less the straight man, only recalling Fawlty on a few occasions.

Jamie Lee Curtis and Kevin Kline are two American crooks whose English accomplice has been arrested following a diamond theft. In order both to find the diamond and rip off the English accomplice,

they have to try to get vital information from Cleese, the accomplice's barrister.

Thus Jamie Lee Curtis sets out with inevitable success to seduce him (watched anxiously by Kline, her lover, who is a Nietzsche-reading martial artist with almost no brain).

Via a series of bizarre comic circumstances, Curtis gradually falls in love with Cleese for real.

Much of this is classic farce. At one point Cleese has to manoeuvre his young lover out of his wife's unexpected presence; at another he is found completely naked by a family of strangers. At the climax, Michael Palin (an animal lover who spends the whole film accidentally squashing dogs) wastes desperate minutes stuttering ("Where have they gone? Tell me! Quick!" "They've gone to the C...C...C...")

Yet even old jokes like this one seem fresh when Cleese puts his mind to them; and much of it is genuinely original. It is very funny.

But it's not as uproariously funny as, say, some of the episodes of Fawlty Towers. Indeed the funniest moment is when Cleese reverts to Fawlty upon discovering his wife where the young American sexpot was supposed to be.

Cleese himself has almost no funny lines (which may be a relief to future generations who will not have to endure endless amateur renditions of the Wanda sketch, but it's nevertheless a bit disappointing).

So does it deserve its millions? In so far as anyone deserves millions, I dare say Cleese does. This is good, but not his best.

MARXISM, STALINISM AND AFGHANISTAN



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The great American emptiness

Gordon MacMillan reviews 'Fast Lanes' by Jayne Anne Phillips (Faber).

This book of short stories is as stunning and original as anything else Jayne Anne Phillips has written. In the vein of 'Black Tickets' and 'Machine Dreams', she offers a book that focuses on the people disenfranchised from the American dream and living in the nation's heart.

Her writing contrasts strongly with the consumer culture that

some American writers are preoccupied with. Ms Phillips has managed superbly to encapsulate America to the degree where it becomes a tangible reality. A world, which although melancholically painted black, blue and grey, still manages to retain a distorted and maniac beauty. Ms Phillips's writing is exact and disturbing.

'Fast Lanes' is not only the title and the most impressive piece in the collection, but it is a theme, it is the thread through which the lives of Ms Phillips's characters are weaved. She writes of a world where everyone has been or is in the fast lane.

'How Mickey Made It' is one of the seven highly impressive stories, told vividly and with great colour in monologue through the eyes of a young unemployed punk, looking back and looking forward.

The title story of the collection is by far the most enjoyable piece of writing. A nameless narrator rides for three weeks on a journey through the states, travelling back to see her dying father, with a stranger called Thurman. Taking turns to drive, she speeds recklessly, consumed by an addict's cold hysteria which exposes her ever more to the violence of the fast lane.

Chasing the lines on the road she is struggling not to beat the speed of the Fast Lanes, but to match it.

Fast Lanes is for a while reminiscent of Joan Didion, who still talks about a land where it is easier to Dial-A-Devotion than to buy a book. But where Ms Phillips might write about the great American emptiness, she is shrewd enough to know that the emptiness is actually filled with something.

What happened to the rank and file?

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Whilst clearing out the attic recently, the somnulent one came across a battered and dog-eared pamphlet entitled "What's Gone Wrong In Engineering — the Case for Change in the AUEW". It was published by the "Engineers Charter" and a sophisticated carbon dating process has established that it probably originated from around May 1980 AD.

It's a well-produced little document that deals in some detail with the state of the union (previously and subsequently called the AEU), the general political situation (the Tories had just got in, but memories of Labour and the Social Contract were still fresh) the shortcomings of the recently ousted Broad Left leadership ("Hughie to Power — the Rot Sets In") and the nature of the newly-elected "moderate" leadership ("Boyd and

Duffy — Thugs Not Mugs").

Along the way, the pamphlet looks back to the 1920s and the Minority Movement (with a whole section devoted to an extract from a Wal Hannington pamphlet) and deals with practical, shop floor problems and arguments like "the members don't want to know".

It closes with a stirring call for a "rank and file organisation (that) builds inside the factories...to replace the leadership with a new one which has its sights set on the transformation of society and an end to the subjection of one class by another."

Some of the politics are a bit funny: for instance the calls for a new leadership are contradicted by bits that seem to argue against having any leadership and even against shop stewards having time off the job and access to telephones (With the 'union' always available in an office and on the end of a telephone, it becomes much easier for management to control the militancy on the shop floor").

Who produced this excellent document? Believe it or not, it was the SWP!

You wouldn't know it, though. There are no adverts for Socialist Worker, no application forms for

membership, no calls to give up on the existing labour movement — just an invitation to take a regular order of "Charter" magazine for your branch or stewards committee and to attend the "Charter" conference.

How times have changed! These days the SWP would probably slag off "What's Gone Wrong" as reformist, apolitical or worse, simply because it doesn't call on people to join the revolutionary party, and concerns itself instead with arguments you hear from "moderates" on the shop floor.

In fact, the "Engineers Charter" was the last manifestation of a very serious orientation towards the unions and the shop floor that the SWP (and before it, the IS) had carried through in the 1970s. Within a few months of the appearance of "What's Gone Wrong" the "Charter" and all the other SWP-sponsored rank and file groups were disbanded and the entire organisation turned its back upon serious intervention in the unions.

From then until now, the "downturn" theory has been the SWP's holy writ. Concern with unions has been limited to preaching the futility of fighting to transform the movement and the inevitability of ultimate defeat...unless the "militant minority" sees the error of its ways

and joins the SWP.

The 'downturn' theory has led to some bizarre results, like the denunciation of miners' support committees as 'left wing Oxfam' for four or five months into the miners' strike. It has also resulted in some truly mind-boggling vacillations on the question of union leadership.

During the healthworkers' dispute earlier this year, the SWP opposed the formation of a national shop stewards committee, on the grounds that without the support of the NUPE and CoHSE leaderships nothing could be done.

When Alan Tuffin called off the postal dispute in September the SWP immediately pronounced the strike dead and began the post-mortem, despite the fact that thousands of UCW members in offices like Liverpool and Coventry had rejected the deal and were still holding out.

In contrast, over GCHQ the SWP rejects the idea of campaigning within the structures of the CPSA for a re-ballot for all-out action and instead have hinted at picketing out offices after 7 November.

There is, simply, no logic or consistency to any of this, beyond sheer opportunism: SWP members in the health service and Post Office tend to be fairly demoralised and defeatist while in the CPSA an

ultra-left tendency prevails.

There are some signs of the SWP trying to get its act together in the unions and to rebuild its old credibility among militants. A pre-conference bulletin last year took the Glasgow comrades to task for "propagandist and syndicalist practice" around a bus strike, where the SWP's main intervention had been to denounce the strike leaders for bringing in the Labour Party!

Last month Tony Cliff wrote an article entitled "Dark Clouds with Silver Linings" that warned of a tendency to "approach every struggle that arises today as a defeat. It can lead socialists to argue about how they differ from those in struggle rather than what they have in common."

Given the lousy reputation that the SWP has won for itself (thanks to years of zany antics in the unions) it seems unlikely that it will ever regain the standing it once had among militants, or rebuild the rank and file movement.

The SWP today is a chronically unstable organisation, ultra-left and rightist by turn, guided only by crude impressionism and cheap-skate opportunism. Nowhere is this plainer than in its union work. Actually for an old IS-er like me it resembles nothing so much as those three despised initials Eye..Em..Gee.

No credence to the UDM!

WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

Don't put any credence whatsoever in the elections in the UDM.

I know the UDM, and for its entire life it has done nothing but do as gaffers tell it. It has spent most of its time urging its members to victimise, harass, and put pressure on NUM members in pits.

For Neil Kinnock to give it some



credence by discussing the merits or demerits of candidates in UDM elections — as he has done by backing Horace Sankey against Roy Lynk — is wrong. The UDM is a bosses' outfit, and it needs to be condemned from top to bottom.

I see very little UDM activity now that I'm at Manton. We have only one UDM member here underground, and two or three on the pit-top.

The NUM Annual Conference clearly gave a lead on relations with the UDM, and I think that lead will be endorsed by delegates at the special conference this coming weekend. We should have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with any cobbled-up compromise on the conciliation agreement.

What the Coal Board is hanging over our heads is the threat: unless you talk about some cobbled-up conciliation, we won't discuss wages. I think that is really getting up the backs of them. I think that they will be discussing some form of industrial action, and I would sincerely hope that the delegates will not stand for the sort of deal that was done last time in regards to the so-called overtime ban.

It was the worst possible form of action. It showed the bosses that we were on the defensive. We need a vigorous and attacking policy, and that means some form of industrial action that is really going to hurt the Coal Board.

Over privatisation, I think the basic fear is the safety will go to the wall.

Even though the vast majority of men who now work in the pits have never experienced private ownership, they still know, from stories from their fathers and grandfathers, what it was like to work for private gaffers in the pit.

They also fear we'll see the bosses playing off man against man in order to maximise profit and to ensure that there's no collective organisation.

I think the Coal Board will come out, the same as it did with its six-day working arrangements, with all sorts of nice promises to sweeten the pill and prepare for privatisation. We've got to get our act together to answer whatever it is they've got to put forward.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire.

Fight pit closure!

By David Martin, Dawdon NUM

I have been working in the North-East coalfield for over ten years, but it seems that the fight is beginning again.

We have recently suffered the closure of one pit. The Coal Board now seems hell bent on closing another.

My present colliery has just had its lifespan reduced by the loss of a coal seam. British Coal say that entering the coal seam would cause drastic flooding problems from the coal seam above. In

that seam there are 11 million gallons of water, a mere puddle compared to the 30 million gallons of water pumped to the surface each week at the first colliery I worked at.

I say that the talk about the 11 million gallons of water is a convenient way of shortening the life of the pit and therefore closing it. There are now only a handful of pits remaining in the North-East.

Can we allow British Coal and the Tory government along with its privatisation policy to close the few remaining pits, taking the livelihoods away from the miners, turning once thriving colliery communities into ghost towns? The answer can only be no.

IN BRIEF

Councils: resistance to Brent Council's £17 million cuts budget continues. There was a one day strike on Monday 31st in support of NALGO strikers in the Housing Needs Unit and Social Services who have been on strike for 4 and 5 weeks respectively. Around 5,000 local authority electricians belonging to the EETPU have rejected a 5.7% pay offer tied to talks on flexible working hours.

NUJ members at BBC TV and World Service have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a 24 hour strike against the reporting ban on Northern Ireland. All BBC journalists are to be

balloted for a one-day strike and lobby of Parliament on November 10th.

This weekend IBA banned part of a Channel 4 programme containing an interview with a Sinn Fein councillor. There is still confusion about the details of the ban.

DHSS 900 Social Security staff in Liverpool struck on Monday against job losses to follow introduction of a new computer system. Demonstrations were also held in London, Edinburgh and Bolton.

Lucas Industries have scrapped national pay bargaining for its 14 car components plants after workers there refused their 6% pay offer. The strike over pay at Lucas Aerospace in Coventry is now in its 6th week.

British Rail plans to dismantle national pay bargaining as a prelude to privatisation, beginning with local pay negotiations for Red Star.

The Civil Service union IPCS has signed a flexible pay deal undermining national pay bargaining. An average 3½% increase will be extended to 12% for areas management find difficult to recruit. This deal will make it harder for members of CPSA and NUCPS in the battle with their leaderships to avoid flexible and long term pay deals.

Citizens Advice Bureaux: 70 CABs in Greater London are due to close in a one day strike on Wednesday 2nd. Management have refused to renew the contracts of 6 temporary workers.

Council backs down

By Tony Dale

Manchester City Council's Housing was brought to a standstill last week when workers walked out over the sacking of a Rehousing Officer.

The worker was accused of altering her own rehousing application. She was called into an investigative interview over the allegations.

This hearing, with indecent haste and scant regard for the disciplinary procedures was turned into a disciplinary

hearing. At the end of the hearing the worker was sacked on the spot for gross misconduct.

On news of the arrival of the dismissal notice the individual's office walked out on strike on Tuesday 25 October. By Wednesday lunchtime the action had spread to half of the Housing Department. At that point, NALGO and NUPE Stewards Committees both called on their members to join the action.

As a result of this unprecedented joint union action the councillors instructed management to back down. The sacking was rescinded and a new disciplinary hearing has been set for Friday 4

November.

This deal was accepted by NALGO and NUPE at meetings on Thursday lunchtime.

One black spot on the dispute was that at the NUPE meeting many people condemned the walkout and defended the actions of management! The main reason for this was that the manager is a NUPE member and the sacked worker is a member of NALGO.

For too long the Housing Department has been dominated by bitter inter-union rivalry. The time has surely now come for this division to be brought to an end by members of NUPE joining the majority union, NALGO.

FIGHT for the RIGHT TO STUDY

Introducing the sixth Socialist Student activists' conference.

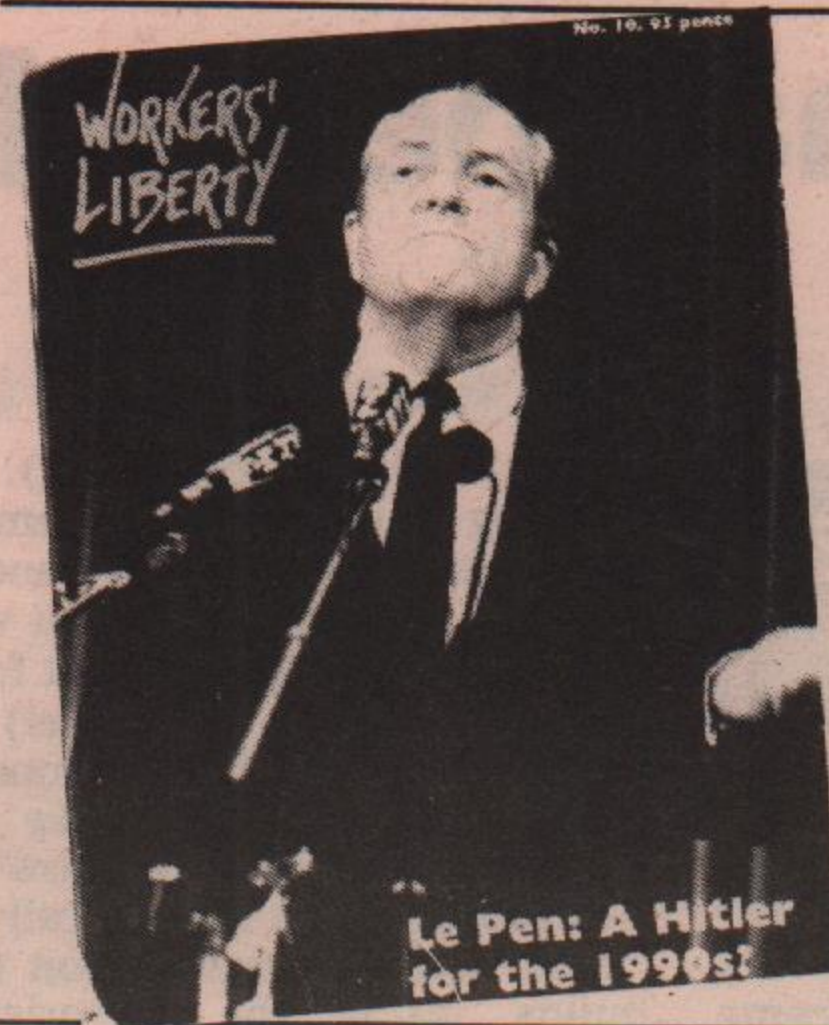
Social: London, evening of Saturday 5th November.

Main Event: Poly of Central London, Marylebone Road, London (Tube: Baker Street). 12:00 — 5:00. Sunday 6th November.

More details of Socialist Student or this activists' conference: write 133 Ashford Street, Stoke-on-Trent; phone 01 639 7967

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Workers' Liberty No. 10 includes articles on the Stalinist roots of left anti-Semitism, the Gulf War, France in 1968, Zbigniew Kowaleski on Poland. 90p + postage, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

The party of child poverty

By Lynn Ferguson

The so-called 'Party of the Family' has decided to freeze Child Benefit for the second consecutive year.

The Tories' propaganda is that Child Benefit is wasteful, that the fact that it is universally available to mothers means that the rich are receiving money which should be targeted at the poor.

This is typical cynical Tory doublespeak for axing child benefit entirely. The scenario of integrating it into the Family Credit system is a joke.

At present only 242,000 families out of a possible 750,000 are claiming Family Credit. The process for claiming is bewilderingly complicated. Many simply do not know they are entitled to it.

Integration into Family Credit is a recipe for child benefit disappearing without trace.

According to the Child Poverty

Action Group, one in five children in Britain lives on or below the poverty line — an increase of 91% since the Tories took office. The present child benefit level of a measly £7.25 a week per child is nowhere near enough — but for many families it means the difference between eating at the end of the week and not.

For many women, even those with husbands in work and earning a decent wage, it is the only money which they can call their own, and can freely spend on their children.

The Government wants child benefit to die of neglect. They lie about wanting to help poorer families, when in fact they get worse and worse off.

In Britain today we are seeing the re-appearance of rickets and malnutrition — not through parental neglect but through need.

Labour must take the initiative in leading a campaign for the retention of child benefit, and for child benefit at a decent level.



Strike for GCHQ!

From page 1

November. Whatever we think of Hammond, this is good.

Elsewhere in the country, small groups of non-civil service workers are preparing to take strike action — with or without the blessing of the TUC. This needs to be built on in the next few days.

Everything possible must be done to make 7 November a success. Civil servants need to hold meetings in all areas, inviting local non-civil service trade unionists along to convince them of the need to strike.

In the absence of a national demo, local demos need to take

place.

And after 7 November? It is unlikely a one-day strike will make the Tories back down. But CPSA and NUCPS leaders have not called for any further action.

We need to put pressure on the union leaders by bombarding them with motions calling for a ballot for an all-out strike from 18 November (the day the dismissal notices at GCHQ run out). We also need to argue for and spread unofficial action where possible.

We must show the Tories that even if the labour movement leaders are not prepared to fight, rank and file trade unionists are.

Brent NALGO resists

Resistance to draconian cuts by Labour-led Brent Council continued last Monday, 31st, with a one-day strike by 3,000 NALGO members.

It was in support of strikers in Housing Needs and Social Services who have been out for four and five weeks respectively. Management have budgeted slightly and are negotiating this week with Social Services staff.

The Council passed a £17 million cuts budget in August. Since then around 1500 jobs have been lost through voluntary redundancies and early retirement. These almost

random job losses have led to severe staffing crises in some areas.

The council have also put council rents up by £7 across the board — the second rise in 12 months. This has prompted discussions between council workers and community groups over the possibility of organising a rent strike.

Nick Krivine of NALGO spoke to SO: "Brent Council has been spineless in not standing up to the onslaught of cuts from central government. Now they're passing them on to us and attacking their own workforce and community."

Support the lobby of Brent Council: 7.30pm, Wednesday 9 November, Brent Town Hall.

Bradford fights the cuts

By Ray Ferris

Tory councillors in Bradford became the new champions of Thatcherism in local government last week.

Amid jeers from the opposition they forced through a £5.8 million cuts package on the casting vote of the Tory Lord Mayor. Debate was cut short by the use of the guillotine.

The Tories plan to cut up to 9,000 jobs over the next 5 years. They will privatise old people's homes and sports centres. Other services will be put out to 'competitive tender' (ie privatised) as soon as possible.

Out will go sub-committees and working groups on equal rights and race relations. Benefit advice centres will close, and council rents will rise by £3 per week — about 16%.

Mrs Thatcher sent a message of support to the councillors led by Eric Pickles (an ex-chair of the Young Conservatives).

White collar NALGO workers struck for half a day. Demonstrators filled St George's Hall for a rally then over to the Council House to show their anger. NALGO and Pensioners groups ran an informal ballot in the town centre on the issue of privatising old peoples homes.

The public voted overwhelmingly against the cuts package went through.

NALGO then decided to ballot their 6,000 members for strike action, possibly indefinite. This decision has since been suspended pending negotiations.

But the issues are clear. The

Tories are sharpening the knives and will only be stopped if NALGO (who have a policy not to implement or administer the cuts) and other council trade unionists stand firm. What better negotiating position than an overwhelming vote for action?

the Tories have clearly aroused the anger of people in Bradford. The Labour and trade union leaders should help focus this anger, build links between council workers and the community and stop the Tories in their tracks. The fight must begin immediately.

King verdict queried

By Emma Jones

The three Irish people sentenced last week to 25 years each for conspiring to assassinate Northern Ireland Secretary Tom King are to appeal against their sentences.

The three had been discovered hanging around the Kings' home by daughter Elisa.

Both the families of those sentenced and defence lawyers have been sharply critical of Tom King. In the middle of the trial, King announced he was going to scrap the right to silence. It was a blatant interference in the trial.

Lawyers have raised the possibility of legal action against King for contempt of court.

The three were convicted on the vague catch-all charge of 'conspiracy'. For what exactly does 'conspiracy' mean? How far is it

reasonable to deduce people's intentions?

In Britain, conviction for conspiracy to murder can carry the same sentence as for actual murder — life; or, as in this case, 25 years. Yet it is necessarily true that people 'conspiring' to murder really intend to go through with it?

Much of the evidence against the three seems to have been extremely flimsy. None of them were experienced IRA members. Evidence that they were on an IRA reconnaissance mission was only circumstantial. None of them has a serious criminal record.

But it was of course politically useful for Tom King to have the courts come down heavily on them.

Martina Shanahan, Finbarr Cullen and John Paul McCann deserve a fair trial. The Tories are determined to undermine basic civil liberties in this country, like the right to silence. The 'fight against terrorism' is their pretext. This trial was an important stage in this process.