

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

INSIDE:



**PLO declares independent state. See centre pages**

**STOP CHEATING!**

# Pay the nurses!

**By Steve Perry (NUPE nurses' strike committee, Prestwich Hospital)**

**This Monday, 14 November, 850 members of CoHSE joined the strike by 250 members of NUPE at Preswich Hospital, Manchester.**

This indefinite strike is the largest in any hospital in the country. Nearly all our nurses are out.

Our grievance is the way the grades have been distributed — for example, only three nursing assistants out of 340 in the hospitals have been graded B, all the rest have grade A. It means a pay rise of less than 10% for us.

NUPE's call is for an average of 17.9% to be awarded to all staff.

On the picket lines our morale is high and our resolve is strong. Public support is overwhelming. Over £1500 has been collected in 6 days. Press reaction is, at present, very positive.

There is some internal conflict between NUPE and CoHSE over the running of the strike. But this does not affect the rank and file members who are united across all grades to win regrading.

An overtime ban has been imposed by NUPE, which is supported in spirit by CoHSE. A problem yet to be resolved is that two strike committees exist which only have semi-formal links. This could be cured at a mass meeting on Wednesday 16th where a single rank and file strike committee may be elected.

The strike committees are maintaining emergency cover within the wards and refusing to move their staff from ward to ward. This means management grades have to "act down", that is perform ward duties. Sometimes for the first time in many years.

The strike is very strong and confident.

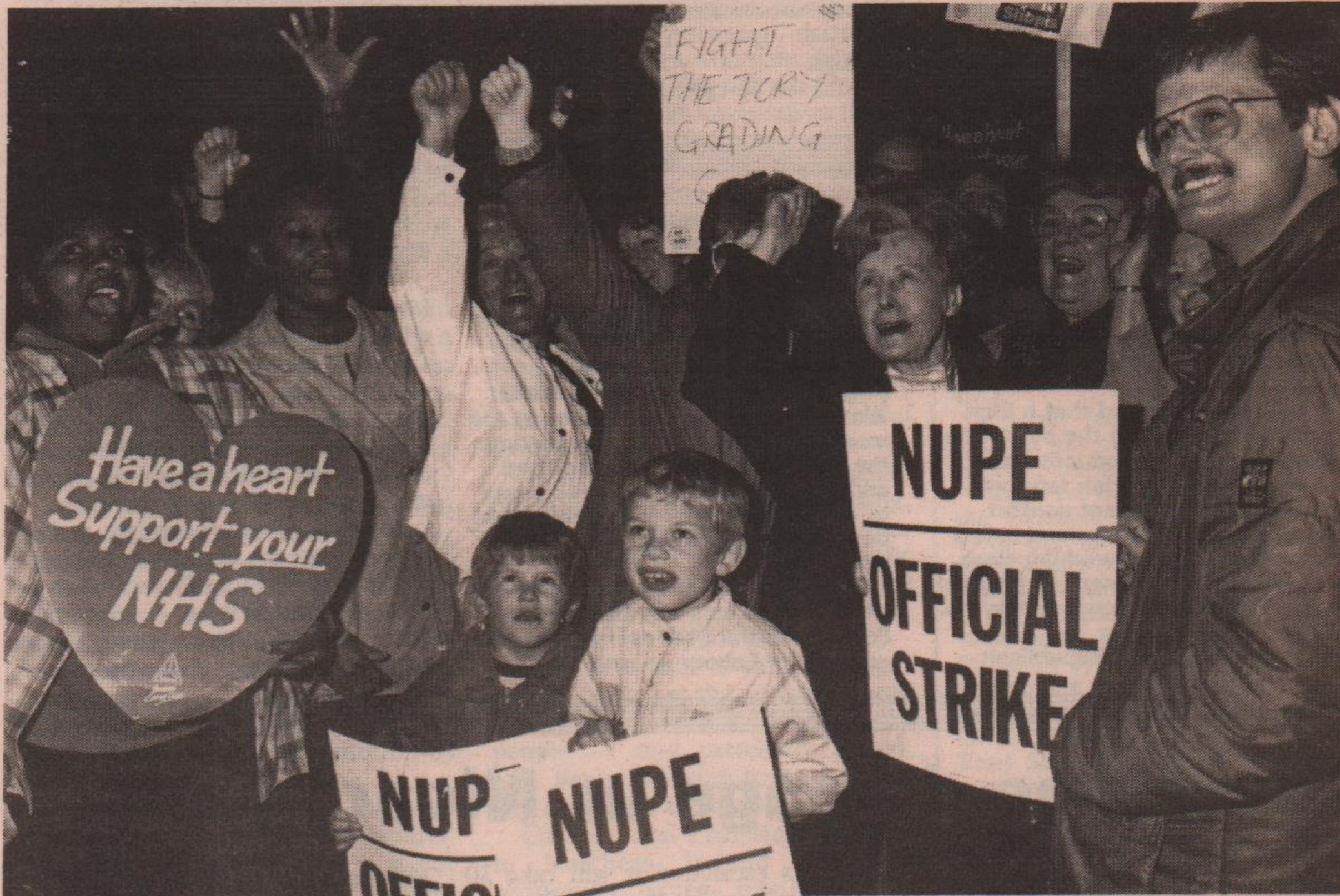
North Manchester General Hospital, Springfields, is entering its second week of action and CoHSE and NUPE there are still very resolute.

Management attempted to close a resettlement ward in the psychiatric hospital at the weekend. But staff and patients refused to go.

The result was that patients and staff were told they were illegally occupying their own ward.

Cover was provided by the pickets over the weekend.

**More on the nurses: page 5**



Prestwich picket. Photo: Paul Hermann

## Action around the country

### ROUND-UP

- All-out indefinite strike action at Springfield psychiatric hospital in North Manchester. The Springfield strikers have been joined by 250 NUPE nurses at Prestwich, Manchester and then by over 800 COHSE nurses at Preswich on Monday 14 November.
- Manchester-wide day of action called for Thursday 17 November.
- 24-hour strikes planned in Wanstead health authority on Wednesday 16 November and in Haringey on Thursday 17 November.

- NUPE called on its 16,000 London nurses to build for a day of action over regrading on 28 November.
- Work to rule at Leavesden hospital near Watford. Management put patients in recreation hall as a publicity stunt.
- Work to grade at Tooting Bec psychiatric hospital — one nurse sent home without pay by management.
- Overtime ban at Horton hospital, Surrey.
- Work to rule at Maudsley and Charing Cross hospitals in London.
- 4 nursing auxiliaries reinstated by management after threat of strike action at Hartwood hospital, Scotland. They had been suspended for working to grade.

- Management closure of an intensive care unit at Birmingham's children's hospital forced nurses to stop their work to grade action. RCN nurses began scabbing after a visit from Trevor Clay. Management had rattled on their promises to review grades. Other nurses in the hospital are still working to grade.
- 3-4,000 nurses at 20 hospitals in Wales have joined protests. (The results of their regrading were issued later than elsewhere).
- Nurses have forced regrading reviews in Burnley health authority, in Plymouth and at Sefton in Liverpool. 60 staff at Whittington hospital, Preston, have been moved to higher grades.
- Nurses working to grade in North

East, North West, Wales, Midlands and elsewhere.

- Evidence of systematic downgradings from Lewisham and N Southwark health authority.
- RCN claim to have evidenced that enrolled nurses and nursing auxiliaries have been placed en masse in grade C, rather than the better paid D or E grades. Towards end of last week RCN leaders put on pressure to call off action and to scab.
- Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke hints at disciplinary action against protesting nurses.
- Royal College of Midwives to hold conference on regradings on 22 November.

# Why Labour lost Govan

**Stan Crooke analyses the Govan by-election, arguing that a turn by Labour to Scottish nationalism would be a wrong response to the defeat**

In the Govan by-election last Thursday, 10 November Labour paid the price for the party leaders' policies of 'New Realism'.

In a 33% swing to the Scottish National Party (SNP), Labour's vote of 24,071 in last year's General Election collapsed to 11,123. The SNP vote jumped from 3,851 to 14,677. A Labour majority of 19,509 was transformed into a SNP majority of 3,554.

The Labour leaders cannot blame anyone except themselves for this defeat.

The Labour Party Scottish Organiser who was the election agent; Kinnock-loyalist MPs who acted as 'minders' for the Labour candidate; Kinnock and Hattersley who came up to Govan to 'help' Labour win; and Walworth Road labour-timers who were drafted in to 'help' run the campaign.

The Labour leadership has promised a full enquiry. A measure of how searching the post mortem will be can be gained from the comment of Brian Wilson, the Scottish Labour MP whose attacks on anti-poll tax campaigning did so much to help the SNP to victory:

*"People in Govan are deeply hostile to everything Mrs Thatcher stands for, and they were offered two ways of turning that into a political statement...By-elections offer that sort of opportunity and we have no grounds for complaint about the*

*outcome."*

None of the excuses which the Kinnockites will have on offer in an attempt to explain away this crushing defeat merit serious consideration. First and foremost they will attribute the humiliation for Govan to the miserable performance of the Labour candidate, Bob Gillespie.

Miserable it indeed was, but that hardly explains the debacle. Gillespie is not more ignorant of politics than many other Clydeside Labour candidates who were elected in 1987. In any case Gillespie was so closely 'minded' by the likes of Brian Wilson and Donald Dewar that he was scarcely ever exposed to the electorate.

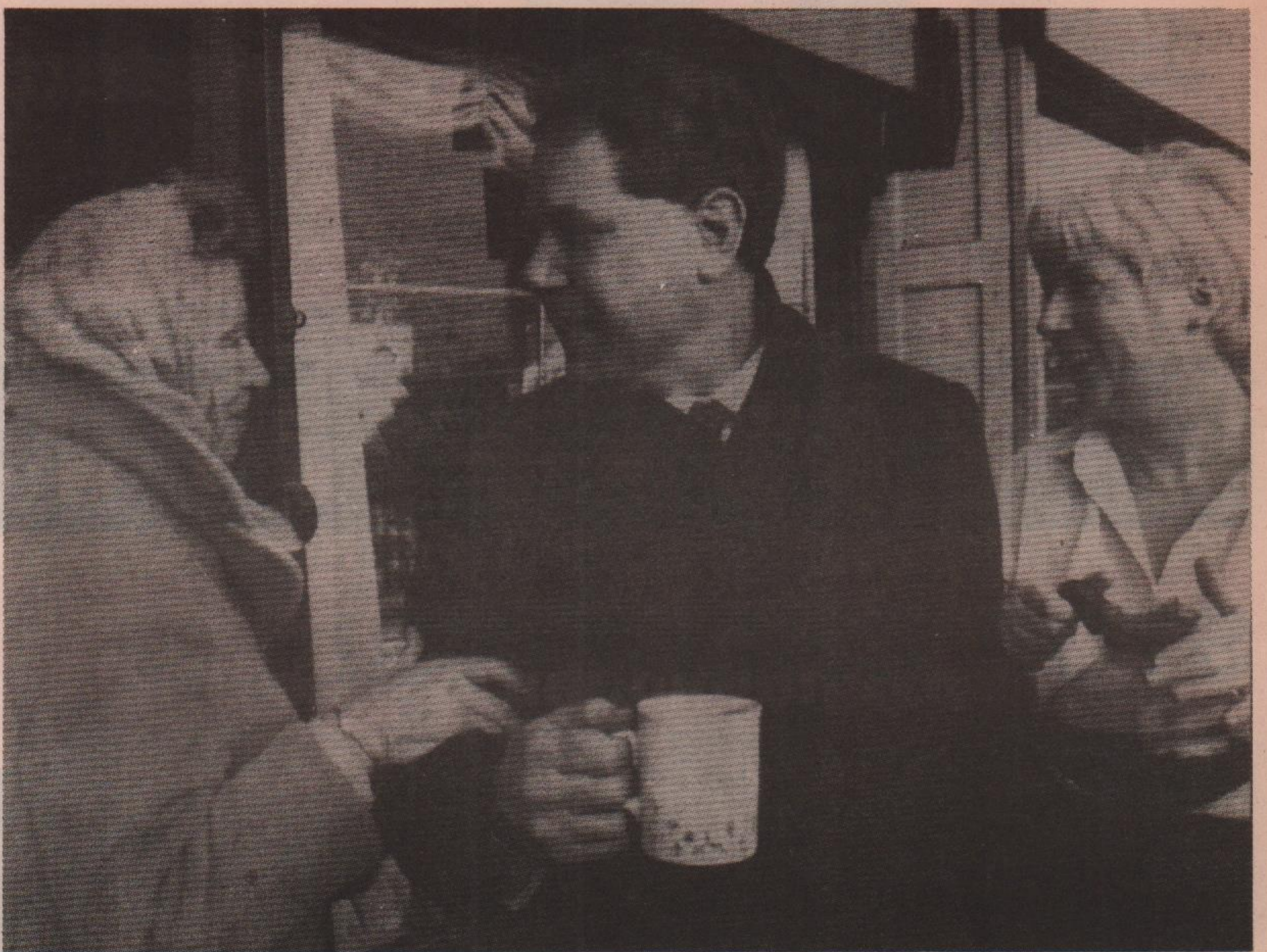
The right wing will also claim that Gillespie's personal pledge not to pay the poll tax (whilst supporting official policy of opposing non-payment campaigning) cost Labour votes. What this leaves unexplained, however is why the votes deserted Labour for — a party which supports non-payment!

The by-election was part of a pattern of growing disenchantment with Labour in Scotland.

In the 1988 Scottish District Council elections the SNP improved significantly their General Election performance. In Govan itself the SNP vote doubled from 10% to 20%. In local council by-elections the SNP has also notched up a series of successes at Labour's expense. The night of the Govan disaster itself, for example, the SNP won a 'safe' Labour seat in a council by-election in West Lothian.

Aided by confused left-wingers (such as 'Scottish Labour Action') sections of the right wing will attribute Labour's defeat to the failure of the party to pursue 'the Scottish question' energetically enough.

And the so-called "Scottish ques-



SNP candidate, Jim Sillars

tion" was not initially a major issue in the by-election. A poll conducted for the "Scotland on Sunday" paper found the most important issues to be: jobs (42% of those asked), poll tax (41%), welfare benefits (27%), NHS (24%), housing (19%) and Child Benefit (12%). All other topics mentioned rated less than 10%.

In any case, Labour "played the Scottish card" in the closing days of the campaign — to no avail. "For Govan, for Scotland" proclaimed the headline of one of its leaflets. Having cut its own throat by advocating payment of the poll tax, Labour then handed its own electors over to the SNP on a plate — who better "for Scotland" than the Scottish Nationalists?

An exit poll conducted at the polling stations on election day reflected the extent to which Labour had helped shift the focus of the by-election campaign: those rating the poll tax as the major issue fell to 21%, and 32% cited "representing Scotland's interests" as primary.

The Labour Party was the party (along with the Tories and the SLD) which was telling the electorate of Govan: pay the poll tax. Less than two months before the disaster Govan was the scene of the Labour Party Scottish special conference on the poll tax which voted to oppose any campaign for non-payment.

Instead of campaigning against the poll tax, the leaders of Labour's misnamed "Stop It" campaign — such as Brian Wilson — spent their time campaigning against those who supported non-payment.

On Tuesday 25 October, a meeting was held on the South side of Glasgow, convened at the request of Sinn Fein and attended by prominent Sinn Fein activist Joe Austin, to discuss whether or not Sinn Fein should stand a candidate in the Govan by-election.

The meeting agreed that a Sinn Fein intervention into the by-election would be counter-productive and would inflame sectarian tensions. The Catholic/Protestant conflict which dogs Northern Ireland exists also in the Glasgow working class, and without any element of justified nationalist rebellion such as there is in Ireland.

Members of the Irish Republican

Bands Alliance present at the meeting were especially wary of deepening divisions.

Most of the far left present at the meeting, however, were rather more nonchalant about heightened sectarian tensions. In particular the position advanced by the Socialist Workers Party representatives at the meeting is well worth remembering: the SWP urged Sinn Fein to stand and stressed that, if Sinn Fein were to stand, then SWP members would be only too keen to go out canvassing for it!

Maybe when Labour's position on abortion gets to be as bad as Sinn Fein's then the SWP will go out canvassing for Labour as well.

## Hurricane damage in Nicaragua

The first people to arrive back in Britain from Nicaragua since Hurricane Joan struck Central America have brought with them eye witness accounts of the great damage caused as well as an urgent appeal for more international aid to be sent to the stricken country.

Tremendous damage has been done to the country's infrastructure. Thirty bridges have been destroyed, 411 miles of road damaged, 339 schools, 3 hospitals and 10 health centres damaged and 19 health clinics destroyed. Agriculture has also been severely hit — including banana, rice, cotton and sugar cane crops. Fishing and cattle farming have also been badly affected. The damage done to the tropical rain forest is so severe

that it is estimated it will take 30 years and millions of dollars to regenerate.

Bluefields, which was a town of 38,000 people on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, bore the brunt of the hurricane. The town, largely consisting of wooden buildings was virtually flattened by 140 mph winds. Around 95% of all buildings in Bluefields were destroyed, and in the Atlantic Coast South region of which Bluefields is the capital 71,000 people had to be evacuated from their homes.

UK Government bilateral aid to Nicaragua stood at £86,000 in 1986. (Parliamentary answer, June 1988). This compares with £400,000 given in 1977. In 1985 Britain gave £116,000 to Nicaragua whilst giving the neighbouring countries of Costa Rica and Honduras £12.5 million and £3.6 million respectively. This is despite recommendations from aid agencies like Oxfam that more

aid should go to Nicaragua. As Oxfam has commented 'Nicaragua stands out because of the positive climate for development'.

The British government has so far allocated an initial £10,000 to Nicaragua for hurricane relief and a further £250,000 to be divided between all the countries affected by the hurricane. In contrast, voluntary British aid agencies have already contributed £250,000, the Nicaragua Health Fund has allocated £30,000 and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) has so far collected £90,000 for relief work.

A spokesperson for the NSC said "The UK Government should be ashamed of its meagre contribution — especially in the context of declining official UK aid over the years. We appeal to all concerned people to pressurise the government for a substantial increase in UK aid to Nicaragua."

Wilson denounced those who supported non-payment as "Nats or Trots". On 10 November many people in Govan voted accordingly.

The Labour Party won 50 seats in Scotland in the General Election. The SNP justifiably nicknamed them the "feeble fifty".

The Labour Party controls Strathclyde Regional Council. The council has been a Kinnockite model council: no fight against the Tories, no fight against the poll tax, no fight against cuts in local government spending. In Govan last week the electorate decided that no fight meant no vote.

The Labour Party also has total control of Glasgow District Council. The council's appalling record on housing, its abandonment of election commitments in order to virtually give away council land to the private sector, and its media-hype about Glasgow being "miles better" has long been an affront to

the working class and to simple common sense. The Govan by-election was seized upon as an opportunity to tell the labour leaders: enough is enough!

It remains for the Labour left to pick up the pieces. It wasn't so much Sillars and the SNP which beat Labour in Govan as Kinnock and the Walworth Road yuppies. They are quite prepared to sit back and accept Toryism until the next General Election (and beyond). The Govan by-election result showed up the complete bankruptcy of their politics.

Any inquiry conducted by Kinnock, Dewar and their lieutenants into the debacle will be a cover-up. CLPs must demand that the conclusions reached by such an inquiry are circulated round CLPs for discussion and amendment, and a document analysing the causes of the defeat be presented to the 1989 Labour Party conference.

## Nationalist revival

**Ian McCalman argues that the Left in Scotland must now seize the initiative on poll tax and devolution.**

The result of the Govan by-election is a major defeat for the Labour Party in Scotland and a boost to the fortunes of the Scottish National Party (SNP).

Jim Sillars reinforced the victory of his wife, Margo MacDonald, in the early 1970s in creating a swing from Labour to SNP of 30.4%. Repeated throughout Scotland, a swing of this magnitude would see the SNP supplant Labour as the major party in Scotland.

The Kinnock leadership will no doubt focus on the inadequacy of the Labour candidate Bob Gillespie, the choice of the left within the constituency. Clearly, however, other factors were at work.

The SNP campaigned unequivocally on a platform of non-payment of the Poll Tax, a potent issue in an area where the anti-Poll Tax campaign remains strong. Although Gillespie said that he personally would not pay the tax, that was no substitute for an outright non-payment campaign.

The Labour leadership of Donald Dewar, Brian Wilson, John Maxton and others who opposed non-payment has created the conditions for this defeat and the labour move-

ment in Scotland must call these people to account. Whatever their sharp talk and bluster, the reality is that they are the architects of this defeat and others which will likely follow.

The other major issue in the campaign was Scottish self-government. Whilst the majority of the Govan electorate may not necessarily want a separate Scotland, they obviously favour a greater degree of independence within the UK.

But that is also a fluid situation and a recent poll in the Grampian area showed over 40% of those questioned favouring a separate Scotland.

A centre-left SNP with a perspective of an independent Scotland within the EEC may be an increasingly attractive prospect for the Scottish electorate.

The response of the left in Scotland must be to seize the initiative on the Poll Tax and devolution. A campaign which focuses upon refusal of Labour-led regional councils to provide non-compliance, backed up by the Labour Party and the STUC is back on the agenda. That must be combined with a campaign of parliamentary disruption by Scottish Labour MPs.

There is also the prospect of Labour playing a leading role in the Scottish Constitutional Convention which may well produce a major constitutional crisis.

The failure of the labour movement, and the left within that, to address these issues have fuelled the revival of the nationalists. It may now be too late to reverse that momentum.

# Ireland: out of the impasse

## EDITORIAL

**T**his weekend, on 19 November, a new attempt will be made to launch a movement in Britain to help end the war in Northern Ireland.

A conference entitled 'Time To Go' has been called by Clare Short MP and others. It promises a broader and more serious attempt to discuss the issues than previous such initiatives.

A new start is certainly necessary. The Anti-Internment League — launched after the introduction of internment (jail without charge or trial) in August 1971 — did manage to stage some sizeable demonstrations in the early '70s, but since then the crimes and brutalities of British policy in Ireland have passed almost without reaction from the left.

Successive attempts to launch broad 'Troops Out' movements have produced very limited results, despite all the polls showing a majority of public opinion in Britain for troops out. The Labour Committee on Ireland has made some progress in the Labour Party, but not much.

What's the problem? In our view the root problem is that 'troops out' is nowhere near being a sufficient policy for Ireland. On its own it has no clear progressive meaning at all.

Since 1972, despite many important twists and changes, the basic facts in Ireland have remained unchanged, in stalemate. The British Army cannot defeat the rebellious Catholics; the Catholics cannot defeat the combined forces of the British Army and the Protestants; the British Government is not sufficiently energetic, or sufficiently driven, to impose a fundamental rearrangement on the Protestants.

In the 26 Counties of southern Ireland there have been some impressive one-off waves of solidarity with the Northern Catholics — after Bloody Sunday in 1972, and during the hunger strikes in 1981. But the basic facts of the political set-up have not changed.

The two Green Tory parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, remain dominant — as they were in the 1960s. The Irish Labour Party remains a tail of Fine Gael — as it was in the 1960s.

Thus the Irish national struggle remains essentially confined to 10 per cent of the Irish — the Northern Catholics. That does not detract from the justice of their fight. It does limit its prospects.

Any real solution must accommodate the justified democratic demands of both Catholics and Protestants.

The Catholics rebel against being a permanent subordinate minority in a state — Northern Ireland — they have no wish to be part of; and they have every right to do so. The Protestants rebel against the prospect of being a permanent subordinate minority in a Catholic-ruled

united Ireland; and they have every right to do so.

The Irish workers can be united only on a programme of consistent democracy — a federal united Ireland, allowing regional autonomy to the mainly-Protestant areas, and having voluntary confederal links with Britain.

As the bloody stalemate in the Northern Ireland drags on, year after year, the importance of this programme increases.

Militant has long refused to campaign in any way for British troops out of Ireland, instead using general propaganda about the need for socialism to evade the issue. That is contemptible.

But the attitude of those many on the Left who argue that 'troops out' and 'the defeat of British imperialism' are the crux of the Irish question, and all else is pettifoggery and probably 'capitulation to imperialism', is no less empty phrasemongering.

In most national liberation struggles, we can say simply: the imperialist power should get out and hand over to the local nationalist movement. There is no all-Ireland nationalist movement. There is a nationalist movement of the Northern Catholics (10%), regarded with bitter hostility by the Northern Protestants (20%) and sporadic sympathy, but some alarm, by the Southern Catholics (70%).

If British troops quit Ireland tomorrow, there would be a sectarian civil war, leading to repartition.

Self-determination? Unify Ireland? The Provisionals are not strong enough for it. The Northern Protestants are actively hostile to it. The Southern ruling class is certainly not ready to conquer the Protestants.

The scene would be set for the Protestants to re-establish their own Northern Ireland government — as they had, under British supervision, before March 1972. This would involve, at least, a big crackdown on the Republicans, and, probably, mass slaughter and driving-out of the Catholics.

The Northern Catholics would (rightly) resist violently. Dublin would give some assistance in the mainly-Catholic areas of the North.

There would be mass population movements, a repartition: Ireland would be irrevocably and bitterly split into Orange and Green states. There would be a bloodbath.

The conventional left answer to this, that "There's already a bloodbath", is no answer. Simmering war with hundreds of casualties is different from all-out war with thousands. Different not only in immediate human terms, but also in terms of the implications for the future possibilities of socialism — i.e. of uniting the Catholic and Protestant workers.

The other answer, "Revolutions always involve bloodshed", is no better. There is no comparison between the revolutionary violence of the working class against its exploiters, or of a subject nation against a conquering army, and the



violence of two working-class communities slaughtering each other.

All this does not mean that we should fail to support troops out. British troops have no right to be in Ireland, and do no good there. That the situation and the prospects now are so bleak is in large part Britain's work.

But it does mean that we should couple the call for troops out with a democratic proposal for a solution within Ireland — and condemn those who call for troops out without such a proposal as mindless phrasemongers.

The only conceivable solution given the present facts of the situation or anything resembling them is a federal united Ireland — i.e. an attempt to negotiate between the sections of the Irish people.

Conciliation, realistically, would involve some repression against die-hard Protestant groups. But that is different from straight conquest of the Protestants.

Logically, conquest is the only alternative, given the Protestants' deep-rooted attitudes. But it is not possible — who would conquer them? — and not desirable anyway, from a working-class point of view.

It is possible to evade these issues by wishful thinking. It is possible to assume that at the crucial point the national struggle would magically 'grow over' into socialism, or in some 'dialectical' leap the Protestants would be converted to Irish Republicanism.

It is possible to remain blinkered in a sort of upside-down British nationalism, saying that "the defeat of British imperialism" and its effect on the "balance of world forces" are the things that really matter, and that the fate of Ireland is a secondary issue.

It is possible to resort to a crude theory of the Protestants as pure pawns of Britain, so that their hostility to Catholic Ireland would drain away like water out of a bath once the 'plug' of British troops was pulled out.

But that is not Marxism. It is not honest politics. We will not even be very reliable anti-imperialists if our 'anti-imperialism' is only as strong as our ability to use consoling myths to shield our eyes from uncomfortable facts.

Events since the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985 have had some visible, if unacknowledged, influence on the British Left. No group now, other than the weird 'Revolutionary Communist Party', makes 'Troops Out Now' its central message on Ireland.

*Socialist Worker* has occasional bouts of 'Troops Out' sloganising, but its main message now is similar to *Militant*'s: socialism is the answer, and socialism means uniting Irish workers around bread-and-butter economic issues.

This approach is extremely sectarian towards the national and democratic concerns of the Irish people — and extremely stupid, too. Being sectarian towards issues will not make them go away.

Catholic and Protestant workers in Northern Ireland unite on economic issues regularly and routinely, without that unity in the least diminishing their differences of national allegiance and identity. Striking will not convert Irish Protestant workers who consider themselves British into green-Irish any more than it can convert French workers into Germans.

Publications like *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook* dilute their adherence to 'Troops Out' in a different way, by talking about 'British withdrawal within the lifetime of a Parliament' rather than 'Troops Out Now'.

The element of delay shelters the mind from thought about the danger of sectarian civil war. But what is the delay for? Five years' delay is more likely to make things worse than better.

We need to start discussing seriously. The conference on 19 November should be an opportunity.

## PRESS GANG

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR

DAILY STAR

THE INDEPENDENT

By Jim Denham

## An end to the lobby system?

**L**ast week's public bust-up between Nigel Lawson and gentlemen of the press was as much about the so-called "lobby system" as it was about means-testing pensioners.

After all, everyone knows that this government wants to phase out universal benefits and step up means-testing (or "privating" as it is euphemistically known these days): the question is, did 10 senior political correspondents accurately report the words of the Chancellor, or did they all get it wrong?

On the face of it, this should be a fairly simple matter to sort out: all the journalists took verbatim notes and, there was that now famous tape recorder. Unfortunately, the tape recorder's pause button was left on... or the machine broke down... or the tape was lost... or something like that. Anyway, it turned out that no tape recording was available once Lawson started accusing the journalists of being, in effect, liars and they replied by saying much the same about him.

The shorthand notes were then dug out and published in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Independent*. Suddenly Lawson's charge that the reports had seen "a farrago of invention" was dropped. The Treasury accepted that the notes were "broadly accurate". The argument now revolved around what interpretation could legitimately be put upon Mr Lawson's weasel words ("A tiny minority of pensioners having difficulty making ends meet... Evolution of the social security system... Better targeting... Non-pledged benefits", etc.)

It seems fairly obvious to me what Lawson was hinting at and the Sunday papers certainly had no doubts: "Means-test threat to pensioners" was the headline in both the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Observer*; "Pensioners face cuts in benefits" said the *Sunday Times*.

The difficulty in actually proving what the fat boulder really said lies in the lobby system itself: these are non-attributable meetings between groups of journalists and government representatives (usually the Prime Minister's Press Secretary, Bernard Ingham, but sometimes Mrs Thatcher or one of her ministers) in which kites can be flown and ground tested. But no names, no pack drill. It is a thoroughly corrupt system that, in effect, allows the ministers to use the press as a sounding board for their ideas and opinions, without having to take any form of personal responsibility. Lawson's words this time were attributed to "a senior government source" in the first reports though the *Observer* gave a rather broad hint by printing a photo of Lawson alongside their story.

The lobby system has been extensively used by the present administration (to whose style of operating it is ideally suited) but is unpopular with honest journalists. The *Independent* and the *Guardian* no longer participate and most of the "quality" dailies are increasingly impatient with it. That was, ironically, the main reason that Lawson chose the Sunday papers for his little kite flying exercise. The Sundays are now, understandably, outraged.

Hopefully the whole farcical episode will prove to be the final nail in the coffin of the lobby system. If it does, Nigel Lawson will have made a remarkable (if inadvertent) contribution to openness and honesty in both politics and journalism.

*'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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Tenants from the Waterlow Estate, East London, protest at the selling-off of their estate. The Tories want to push through many more such sell-offs. Photo: Phil Maxwell

## Backdown on HATs

### GRAFFITI

Tenants groups have forced the government to back down over compulsory takeover of estates by Housing Action Trusts.

In July the Department of the Environment announced that estates in six areas — Tower Hamlets, Lambeth, Southwark, Sunderland, Leeds and Sandwell — would be forced into HATs.

Tenants organised vociferous protests because HATs would lead to rent rises and possibly tenants being evicted to allow in Yuppies.

Now the government has conceded that tenants on the targeted estates should be balloted on whether they want to be taken out of local authority control.

Under the HATs scheme £192m has been set aside for "improving" the targeted estates to make them more attractive to housing associations and private property developers. Now it's up to tenants and council workers to tell the government what they can do with the money.

Unemployment and poverty now seem to be a major cause of cot deaths.

Over the past 8 years, baby cot deaths have steadily increased. The winter of 1986 was particularly bad — probably due to the severe cold.

Doctors in Sheffield researching into cot deaths have found that heating is a key factor — families too poor to afford proper heating in the winter are more likely to lose their babies to the syndrome.

Across the country areas with a high percentage of cot deaths are also those with high unemployment. Bradford has the highest general infant mortality in the country at 13.7 per 1,000 live births. East Hertfordshire and Bexley are the lowest at 5.8 per 1,000.

The research also shows that whilst medical care of sick babies has improved over the past 8 years, social factors contributing to sickness have worsened.

As shall we say, idiosyncratic angle on Nigel Lawson's mooted plans to means-test pensions has been put forward by that doyen of all things post-modern, Martin Jacques, editor of *Marxism Today*.

The real problem, according to Martin, is ageism. Why should the "older citizen" (a euphemism on a par with the "fuller figure") be pensioned off in his early 60s?

Healthcare and life expectancy have improved. The world of work is becoming more "flexible" (sic). Why on earth should the older

citizen be "shut out from the prosperity of the Thatcher years"?

It's obvious isn't it? The old should be put out to earn their keep, pensions should be taxable. Hey presto — the old are no longer a burden on everyone else.

Martin, who is clearly trying for a well-paid job in Thatcher's think tank, doesn't go far enough. All the fuss about child benefits assumes that the "younger citizen" is dependent, passive and reprehensibly lacking in autonomy.

Clearly we should utilise the skills and abilities of particularly youthful members of our society, which in bygone days was well utilised, and bestow on them the dignity of labour.

Their lives would be enriched by the experience, new flexible working mean that their schooling needn't be disrupted and, most importantly, they would be financially self-supporting. What do you think of that one, Martin?

Hospital waiting lists have increased by 26% in the last six months. Moreover, waiting time for routine operations varies massively from area to area.

In Crewe, for instance, almost 50% of patients on the general surgical waiting list wait for more than a year. Next door in Macclesfield only 5% have this sort of wait, with 80% having their operation within six months.

The Department of Health has its own answer to this — more "consumer" choice. Information on waiting times in different regions should be made available, they say, so that patients can shop around. The Department blames local health service managers for standing in the way of flexibility.

Some, however, regard the merits of travelling half-way across the country for an operation, and a stay in hospital isolated from friends and family as dubious to say the least.

As John Yates of the Health Services Management Research Centre says: "For basic services one really should not have to travel."

Hungary's Justice Minister, Kulman Kuscan, has compared moves to political pluralism in Hungary to the ending of authoritarian regimes in Spain and Portugal.

He said that the Communist Party had to face "real alternatives", thus the necessity of multi-party politics.

But the reforms are seen as part of a long political process. Hungarian Politburo member Janos Berecz insisted that the reforms would not lead to a split with the Warsaw Pact.

The Soviet line seems to be that each country should decide for itself whether a multi-party system is appropriate to its "needs".

# A nationalist agenda

By Dion D'Silva

Black Sections have been seeking official recognition in the Labour Party for five years. In response to the charge that they are over-concerned about constitutional arguments they have produced the pamphlet 'Black Agenda' to explain the policies of Black Sections on a wide range of issues.

Black people are systematically discriminated against in all walks of life, from education to housing, to employment and the provision of services. Blacks are only 5% of the national population, yet 23% of all prisoners are black. Immigration controls and policing see blacks as the problem rather than racism.

In Birmingham, a survey found that black students are four times more likely to be suspended than white students, and for fewer and less serious offences. Black Sections, however, correctly describe the call for independent black schools as a divisive distraction.

Black Sections do place demands on the state and the next Labour government, often very mild and uncontroversial ones. The Greater London Council (GLC) is painted as the alternative to the present state — an island of socialism in a capitalist world.

This is not surprising since many of the leading members of the Black Sections are heavily involved in the local government left and the "race relations industry".

Black Sections outline the plans of the Tory government and the particular effect they will have on the black community. But apart from proclaiming their opposition and calling for a Labour government to be different, Black Sections offer no strategy for a fightback.

On economic issues, full employment is seen as the "ultimate objective", and they want public ownership extended, but no mention is made about how it will operate.

Another glaring omission is local government. Do Black Sections oppose cutbacks made by Labour, as well as

## RACE AND CLASS

Tory, local councils?

Linda Bellos is a prominent Black Sections supporter. She was also leader of Lambeth Council as it pushed through a cuts package. She had the nerve to justify them on the grounds that this was Black politics — being honest with the black community — rather than white left politics!

Black Sections were paralysed. They did not organise a fightback — on the contrary.

They have no such inhibitions on international issues. They call for understanding of the Irish question, but offer no discussion of the divide between the two communities in Ireland. The issue is simply described as an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggle by a 'Third World' liberation movement.

Black Sections recognise that the PLO accepts a two-state solution in the Middle East but call for the creation of a 'democratic secular' (ie. Arab) state in all of Palestine. Israel is crudely explained as a state based on 'race' or religion and Zionism is equated with discrimination against and oppression of Palestinians.

On closer inspection, the politics outlined in the Black Agenda have more in common with 'Zionism' than the authors would care to admit. Throughout it talks of the Black diaspora — ie. a scattered people dispossessed of their homeland. Battles in Toxteth and Brixton are equated with the struggle of black youth in South African townships and the basic aim is for genuine self-determination and national independence.

On South Africa (Azania), the Black Sections attack the "white colonising left" and the "neo-colonialist" Anti-Apartheid movement. Use of such terms is dangerous and divisive. Quotes from Malcolm X and Steve Biko are used to equate "integration", "multi-racialism" and "non-racial democracy" with "neo-colonialism". "Dogooders", including liberals and leftists, are lambasted for not accepting their

responsibility for white racism.

This is pure and naked nationalism and has nothing to do with working class socialism. While Black Sections are right to point out the role of the Pan African Congress in the liberation struggle and the way it is ignored by the Anti-Apartheid movement, their political identification with the PAC is another matter.

Black Sections praise the PAC on the grounds that its leadership is solely black. ANC and SWAPO are tainted because they field white speakers. The principal national task is said to be to regain Azania for its rightful indigenous owners — the African people. At the same time the whites are said to be an oppressing nation!

Totally ignored is the recent powerful growth of non-racial trade unions with militant socialist leaders such as Moses Mayekiso.

The Black Agenda claims that it aims to link the issue of race to class. Many people on the left welcomed Black Sections as a vehicle to organise black working class people and bring them in to the Labour Party.

On cold assessment it has to be said that it has failed. The struggle of the black community continues but they do not look to the Black Sections for leadership. It does appear that the leadership is more interested in constitutional niceties at Labour Party conference than, for instance, organising people to fight local government cuts in Lambeth or elsewhere.

This is because their politics have been found to be wanting. It boils down to pressure-group politics. The centrality of working class organisations is downplayed.

Appeals to join the Labour Party are made only on the basis of being the "best party". Emphasis on fighting the Poll Tax is given to community groups and not to trade union action.

Black people should get organised and join the Labour Party, but not merely on the basis that it is the least bad alternative. Our analysis of society leads to the conclusion that only the working class can begin to eradicate racism, by revolutionising the way society works.

This can only come about by a united working class and that's why the organisation of the class must be made hospitable to black people.

## Outdoing the right wing

### LETTERS

The right-wing would have been proud of them. After only three days, Militant supporters in the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA) have dropped democratically agreed Broad Left (BL) conference policy on GCHQ.

At CPSA Broad Left conference on 5-6 November, delegates passed a Socialist Caucus motion which urged BL supporters to put up branch motions calling on the National Executive Committee to call an official all-out strike in defence of the sacked GCHQ trade unionists from 18 November.

If the NEC refused — as they have done — BL was mandated to argue for all-out unofficial action. The motion also condemned the BL for its failings over GCHQ.

At a London BL meeting only three days later, it became clear that both Militant and SWP BL supporters had no intention of acting on conference policy.

The Militant London BL chair refused to mail a leaflet which had nothing on it except the GCHQ motions passed at conference and a model motion to put at branches!

The chair then refused to go to the vote on whether to mail it out or not! Militant supporters argued that a mailing was being done in Liverpool! But, surprise, surprise! — no such mailing has appeared.

They also argued that there hadn't been sufficient action on 7 November (GCHQ day) to justify mobilising around an all-out strike call from 18 November.

This is clearly ridiculous in view of the massive support on 7 November and misses the point. 18 November is the day the dismissal notices at GCHQ run out. If BL supporters had gone from BL conference and organised around BL conference policy, then we might have been able to force General Secretary John Ellis' hand and organise an all-out strike.

Various London branches had already committed themselves to strike action from the 18th and wanted to pull the BL behind an open coordinating meeting of all those branches prepared to take action.

As it is, the BL is left with doing nothing. At the London BL meeting, the SWP also argued for dropping conference policy. They argued that BL

supporters should go to the planned demo at Cheltenham later this month and build an all-out strike from the mood created around that.

No-one took this seriously (probably not even the SWP).

The unity of the BL broke down over GCHQ, it failed to act as a cohesive force inside the union. Surely the BL should be more than an electoral alliance inside the union.

The BL now needs to look for any openings it can find — and organise around them. The Militant BL leadership should be condemned for ditching BL conference policy and, in any case, they should stop behaving like the right-wing.

Trudy Saunders  
South London

## East Bloc discussion

Herewith cheque for a year's sub to Socialist Organiser and Workers' Liberty. As I told you, when I discontinued subscribing in the Summer, I was stopping because I considered that your periodic attacks on the "bureaucratic collectivist" analysis made nonsense of the rest of your arguments.

I am indebted to Socialist Outlook for knowing that you are now re-opening the question, though not yet decided between the 'state capitalist' and the 'bureaucratic collectivist' theses.

In fact in Simone Weil's original statement of case, and in the versions associated with Rosmer, 'bureaucratic collectivism' was seen as a particular form of state capitalism. It was not until the later forms — Shachtman, Carter and others — that it was suggested that the extraction of surplus value was no longer a characteristic.

Laurens Otter  
Wellington Salop

P.S. I hope, though, the tendency to reformism discernible in the Spring is ending. I have seen too many groups which, because they gave up an outmoded view of the Soviet Union, adopted an even more fallacious view of Western Democracy.

# Nurses: the way to win

By Gerry Bates

**T**he nurses at my hospital are really angry. In fact there's more anger now than there was during the low pay campaign in 1982"

That's how NUPE shop steward Mary Williams summed up the mood amongst nurses as action spread across the country against the Tories re-grading con-trick.

"I know of one sister with over 25 years experience who's set to lose £2,000 a year because of this" said Mary.

Under the Tories "greatest ever pay award" some Nursery assistants will have to work up to 60 hours a week to take home £450 a month (that is around £1.90 an hour!)

Yet scandalously Tory minister Kenneth Clarke said on TV on Monday night (14th) "We are going to deal with all the nursing profession fairly, as we have in the past, and pay no attention whatever to NUPE and CoHSE attempts to bring militancy back into the health service".

He went on to say that nurses had "no excuse to go on strike and endanger the patients".

The arrogance and hypocrisy of the Tories could well fly back in their faces. The vast majority of the British people support the nurses. Back in the spring even the majority of Tory voters supported the nurse taking strike action to defend the NHS.

So there is the potential to build a really powerful movement in support of the nurses.

The nurse's anger needs to be clearly focussed. The NHS workforce traditionally been beset by petty divisions and sectionalism. The Tory re-grading exercise was designed to play on these divisions and make them worse.

To a large extent it has backfired. Those nurses who have received large increases are still very angry that the enrolled nurses and auxiliaries that they work with — some with many years' experience — have been insulted.

The potential for a united fight is there. However, the union officials are wasting it.

As Mary Williams put it: "The officials seem to be really taken aback by the anger. They don't know how to respond. Some have gone into hiding."

Those that do have something to say just tell us to go for local action and get local deals".

What is needed is a national strategy to force the government to back down. Every local victory is important — but a national campaign of action by the health unions will be needed to defeat the Tories and win at least 17.9% for every nurse.

\* The local work-to-grade actions that are spreading like wildfire across the country need to be generalised. CoHSE and NUPE should organise a national work to grade.

This will put tremendous pressure on the government. As one healthworker put it "A well co-ordinated, concerted national work to grade will make the grading system unworkable. Management will be tearing their hair out".

\* Where the mood exists, activists should argue for strike action immediately and use the momentum this can build up to campaign for an official call for an all out strike — with emergency cover — from NUPE and CoHSE.

\* The action needs to be properly co-ordinated. If the officials are not prepared to call the emergency national, regional and district

meetings that are needed urgently then rank and file healthworkers need to do as much as possible to fill the gap.

Instead of CoHSE and NUPE officials calling different days of action they should be meeting together to hammer out a programme of united action. The best way to force the officials to call co-ordinated action is to build unity at rank and file level.

\* In Manchester nurses have set up a city-wide rank and file strike committee. This initiative should be copied elsewhere.

It will mean a lot of work, building from the base, but now is the time to do it. Once stewards committees have been built locally attempts should be made to link them up nationally.

The NUPE and CoHSE leaders are up to their old tricks. In London they have called two different days of action, 28 November and 6 December respectively. This looks like a repeat of the fiasco round budget day earlier this year when both unions called for protests on different days and so helped wind down the action.

Nevertheless, activists should use the official calls to build for one-day strike action as a step towards building up the momentum for all-out action.

\* The Labour Party needs to throw its full weight behind the nurses' action. Neil Kinnock should be touring the country campaigning in support of the nurses, making their case and backing their action.

One recent poll showed Labour neck and neck with the Tories but the lesson of the Govan by-election is that if Labour fails to give a lead in action to working class people embittered and angry with the Tories, it will lose that support.

\* The potential exists for a broad and powerful anti-Tory crusade over the NHS. The health unions should be putting forward a set of demands to link nurses' pay with all health workers' pay and conditions and the defence and extension of the NHS.

\* No nurse must receive less than the promised 17.9% wage increase.

\* For a £70 across the board increase in all health workers' wages and a minimum wage of £150 a week.

\* Demand money to meet all pay increases. Wage increases must not be paid for with cuts in other areas of health service spending.

\* Demand money to meet all costs increases, to deal with new diseases like AIDS and all new technological advances.

\* Take the money from the rich! Trident will cost as much as building 550 new hospitals. Before the crash in October 1987, shareholders were coining gains at twice the rate of the entire NHS budget. Tory tax cuts for the rich amount to more than the whole NHS hospitals budget.

\* No privatisation. Re-nationalisation of all privatised ancillary services.

\* No charges on glasses, drugs and dental care.

\* No two-tier health service.

**Support the Nurses Demonstrate Thursday November 17th. Assemble 11am All Saints, Oxford Road, Manchester**



Manchester nurses protest. Photo: Paul Hermann

## Strike with emergency cover!

**S**trikes forced the Tories to make their original promises on pay earlier this year and strikes are going to be the most effective way to make management and the Tories back down now.

But how should nurses' strikes be organised?

The health service unions' policy is for emergency cover during all strikes. Sometimes militants get impatient with this policy. But the policy is right.

## Scottish strike

By Stan Crooke

**N**urses at two Lothian hospitals struck last week in protest at the nurses' regrading settlement, whilst half the staff at Edinburgh's instrument sterilisation unit struck over the threat of privatisation.

At Gogarburn Hospital, just outside Edinburgh, nearly 50 nursing staff walked out on Monday afternoon (7 November). Nurses at the Royal Edinburgh psychiatric hospital struck the following day. By Friday (11 November), however, the nurses were back at work after management had pledged that individual appeals against regrading would be dealt with within seven days.

The aim of strikes is to hit the NHS management and the government, not patients. If, through exasperation or through bravado, strikers do not organise emergency cover, then that has had effects in one of two ways.

Usually emergency cover is provided by non-unionists, and the strikers do not make any serious effort to picket them out. This means a licence for scabbing.

If a policy of no emergency cover were enforced seriously, then patients would suffer seriously or die.

Don't think that this would somehow stir the government's conscience and make it give in. NHS workers care much more about patients than the government does. If patients suffered seriously or died because of an NHS strike, it would shock and demoralise the strikers, and ruin the strike. The media would seize on the chance to denounce the strikers.

Emergency cover is difficult to organise under trade union control. But it is possible, at least for short periods. Sometimes management is obstructive. But then the union should do all it can to show that it is willing to organise emergency cover and the obstacle is management.

The fact that some officials will try and use emergency cover as a way of sabotaging action should not lead us to reject it.

Does emergency cover make a strike weaker? Not in real terms, because a strike without emergency cover either assumes a lot of scabbing, or would ruin itself. What makes strikes in the NHS weaker than strikes in some other sectors is that they do not hit profits and removing emergency cover does nothing to get round that problem.

The only way round it is for other workers who do produce profits to strike in solidarity with the health workers. That is possible. Dockers, miners and other workers have struck to support NHS disputes. But proper organisation of emergency cover is essential if that solidarity is to be won.

# PLO declares independence

**T**he Palestine National Council (PNC), the Palestinians' parliament in exile, last weekend (12-13 November) both declared an independent Palestinian state and recognised the right of Israel to exist.

This reflects the support of the vast majority of Palestinians for the 'two states' solution to their conflict with Israel, at least as an immediate step.

The decision by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is not a surprise. Indeed, PLO leader Yasser Arafat first put his foot on the path he is now treading in 1974. Ever since then, the PLO has favoured an independent state in 'any part of Palestine' — that is, in the West Bank and Gaza — and international diplomacy.

The 'rejectionists' on the Palestinian side, who reject any recognition of Israel, are now fairly isolated minority. A few hard-line (pro-Syrian) groups did not attend the PNC; mainstream rejectionists were muted in their opposition to the PNC decision. The Popular Front led by George Habbash, explicitly recognised the need to preserve the unity established in the PLO since last year.

Unfortunately Israel has just elected a government of its 'rejectionists'. The new coalition government, with religious fundamentalist parties as junior partners to the secular right-wing Likud party, will be heavier in its treatment of the Palestinians, not more accommodating.

The immediate background to the PNC's decision is the Palestinian *intifada* or uprising in the West Bank and Gaza, now entering its twelfth month. But its origins are much older.

The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza came, in June 1967, as a result of a big Israeli Arab war that left the pretensions of the Arab ruling classes in tatters. Egypt's President Nasser, the foremost radical Arab nationalist leader of that era, was humiliated (and part of his country occupied). The Arab states were proven to be completely unable to free the Palestinians from the 'Zionist entity' that oppressed them.

There were a number of consequences of this Arab defeat. Nasserite or quasi-Nasserite nationalism became, gradually, a thing of the past, as the assertive nationalist states moved to the right (including today's 'radical', Syria). Eventually, Egypt itself was to be propelled by its President Sadat back into the Western fold.

But among Palestinians, both in the occupied territories and scattered around the Arab world, there was a profound growth of

nationalism. Previously — since 1948 — the Palestinians had been passive, looking for redress to the greater forces of Arab nationalism. Now a distinct Palestinian nationalism emerged whose focus was on the efforts of the Palestinians themselves.

They thought they would free their country by means of an 'armed struggle' modelled on Third World guerilla movements in China, Algeria or Vietnam.

Different tendencies existed within this Palestinian nationalism. The dominant group, Yasser Arafat's Fatah, was rivalled by self-proclaimed Marxists like Habbash who had evolved from the Nasserite tradition.

The 'Marxists' were more explicitly pro-Russian or pro-Chinese and spoke of 'imperialism' and so on; but all sections of the new Palestinian resistance shared a basic framework for understanding their situation.

The root cause of Palestinian oppression was identified as the creation of the Zionist state (with imperialist support). The Palestinians had lost their land, and the chance to form their own state. Liberation would therefore mean the restoration of Palestine to the Palestinians.

The question of land was (and remains) at the heart of Palestinian nationalism. The framework for Palestinian independence was conceived as the 'land of Palestine' — ie, all of Palestine.

Arab nationalism understood Palestine to be 'Arab land', and the narrower nationalism of the Palestinian organisations never directly challenged this wider definition.

Palestine was always understood to be part of a broader Arab national question, though the post-1967 Palestinian nationalist groups who took over the PLO did pose the issue much more sharply in terms of Palestinian land rather than just Arab land.

The formula employed to express this idea of Palestinian independence was the 'democratic secular state'. This did represent a break from the old Arab nationalist slogan to 'drive the Jews into the sea'.

Jews would be allowed to live in the new Palestine (although there was ambiguity as to exactly which Jews). But it was to be a 'democratic secular' Arab state in Palestine. What did this mean?

A distinction was drawn between the Zionist state and the Jewish people in Palestine. Zionism was understood as a colonial, external power structure imposed on the Palestinian people, comparable to French colonial rule of Algeria. The Jews were defined as a religious group; and the new Palestinian

nationalists insisted that they would be uncompromisingly hostile to the Zionist polity while offering friendship to the Jewish religious group.

Thus they explicitly rejected the idea that Israeli Jews might constitute a nation. Israel's colonial-type origins were considered enough to define the whole of society as 'settler-colonial'. The complete destruction of the Zionist state was the minimum basis for Palestinian freedom. Armed struggle was the way to destroy it.

The 'democratic secular state' slogan represented a particular stage in the evolution of Palestinian nationalism. Both the formula and the strategy to get it have progressively been abandoned as unviable in the face of reality.

In Algeria for example, it could reasonably be supposed that a sufficiently aggressive guerilla war could force the French authorities to abandon the country. It was always highly improbable that Israel would ever give itself up as a result of 'armed struggle'.

The Israeli Jews are a nation whatever you think of the process that created that nation. And increasingly, the Palestinian resistance has come to accept this fact.

The early phase of militant nationalism came to an end in Jordan, where the guerrilla groups had grown too strong for the comfort of Jordan's ruler King Hussein. 'Black September' in 1970, saw the destruction of the PLO bases in Jordan, and shifted the centre of PLO operations, with tragic consequences, to Lebanon.

The Arafat leadership opted for a diplomatic strategy, ie a strategy of negotiation. But if you aim to negotiate with Israel, then you must recognise it. You must abandon the 'secular democratic state' in favour of some formula that allows Israel to continue to exist, in however modified or curtailed a form.

The fact that 'two states' was apparently linked both to diplomacy (as against revolutionary 'armed struggle') and defeat ('Black September'), later the defeat in Lebanon in 1982) confused both the Palestinian and the international left. 'Two states' was seen as a 'right wing' programme, accommodating to imperialism, racism and so on.

Undoubtedly, the PLO's groping towards a 'two states' position has been a bit-by-bit adaptation to changing situations rather than a fundamental reassessment of the nature of the conflict. But to see this simply as a right wing drift would be to misunderstand what has happened, and in particular to misunderstand what has happened recently.

Because the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a classic colonial/anti-colonial struggle, the Palestinian struggle has evolved in the way it has. Precisely at the moment the Palestinian struggle has reached its level of greatest intensity, with the broadest mass participation — and suggesting the greatest chance of success — the movement most explicitly opts for 'two states'.

This is not the dynamic of a

demoralised and defeated movement. Rather it is the dynamic of a militant nationalist movement aiming rationally for independence from Israel, but not its destruction. It is the result of a conflict between two nations rather than a struggle of one nation against an essentially external colonial power.

The declaration of an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, which follows Jordan's renunciation of its past claim over the West Bank, is the culmination of this process. It will mean an aggressive attempt by the PLO to get international recognition for a 'government-in-exile', further isolating Israel.

And it will mean an intensification of the *intifada* itself. The new Shamir government's immediate response will be more

repression. But will it be possible to sustain this in the longer term? As will the Palestinian resilience (which is acknowledged by the Israeli army) ultimately undermine the currently ascendant Israeli right?

For certain the 'two states' policy stands a bigger chance of undermining the right than any other because it directly answers the allegation that the PLO does not recognise the right of Israel to exist. Moreover, an unconquerable uprising could sap the will of the authorities in the occupied territories.

As other internal factors cause problems for the right (such as a new law limiting immigration to orthodox Jews), the Israeli 'hard left', which also favours two states, could grow.

The link between the Israeli left



As an act of solidarity with Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, Adam Keller will be coming to Britain to speak about the prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Adam Keller is the editor of *The Other Israel*, produced by the Israeli Council for Israel-Palestine Peace.

Adam's speaking tour is being organised by the Adam Keller Tour Committee — a body open to all individuals and organisations concerned to help with this initiative.

Contact: *The Secretary, The Adam Keller Tour Committee, Flat 24, Rye Court, Peckham Rye, London SE22. Please send cheques to the same address.*

# Why most Americans didn't bother to vote

By Clive Bradley

**N**eil Kinnock is of the opinion that the trouble with Michael Dukakis' campaign was that it did not have a wide enough appeal — it did not reach out to the 'haves' as well as the 'have-nots'.

In fact the *opposite* is the case: Dukakis did best towards the end of his campaign when he most explicitly appealed to working class voters.

Who voted for Dukakis? 86% of blacks who voted, and 69% of Hispanics voted for Dukakis. On the whole, women voted for Dukakis (according to a CBS/NY Times poll, women's votes were about evenly divided; according to others, Dukakis had a majority among women). Dukakis got the inner city and working class vote, Bush got the suburbs and rural areas.

Bush had a majority among Protestants, Dukakis had a majority among all other religious persuasions and among the non-religious.

As *The Economist* put it: "The enthusiastic Bush voter was white, male, Protestant, rich, educated, small-town, salaried or self-employed." The Democrat voters are 'ethnic' groups, women and poor people.

In fact, Dukakis did not do as badly as the head-count of states would suggest, and made serious inroads into Reagan's constituency.

The majority of Americans do not belong to Bush's constituency as *The Economist* describes it; but about half of those eligible to vote don't bother.



The American political system is characterised by a huge amount of popular apathy. Very large numbers, especially of poor Americans, see no point in voting for one or other candidate. Although the Democrats get working class votes, they are in no sense at all a workers' party.

Both parties fundamentally represent the interests of the American ruling class: indeed, the Democrats were the traditional party of the racist establishment in the South. Dukakis' running mate, Lloyd Bentsen, is known as the foremost spokesperson in Congress on big-business interests.

Nowadays, the Democrats are seen to be more 'liberal' (increasingly a swear word in the US) than the Republicans. But in real terms the differences are not great.

Jesse Jackson, of course, represents a far more radical current within the Democratic Party, but to a large extent the actual role that he plays is to secure support for the mainstream Democrats among black voters. A small 'Jacksonite' splinter attracted little support.

The apolitical razzamatazz of American elections should also be a warning for those in the British labour movement who want to see a more American-style system here.

Undoubtedly, what is needed is a radical break with the two-party system — an independent Labour party that challenges both the Democrats and the Republicans.

How such a party could be built out of the mass of non-voters and Democrat supporters is obviously a large and difficult issue. But it is definitely necessary.

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**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.**

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

**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.**

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

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

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the Palestinian national movement will be decisive over the longer term. The Palestinians need reliable allies, and the closer the alliance the better. A series of trials in Israel now are an attempt to nip such alliance in the bud.

Are there any openings for a socialist movement within these developments? At present, very

Most of the self-styled socialists on the Palestinian side are those who are most hostile to the two superpowers, and almost all of them are very Stalinist. The Sons of the Age movement within pre-'67 Israel is more critical of the USSR, but still identifies the Israelis as a nation.

On the Israeli side, 'socialism' is to be identified as old-fashioned 'pioneer' or kibbutz

Zionism.

And on neither side has the working class emerged as an independent factor. Workers' unity looks a long way off.

But undoubtedly the situation is charged in a way it never has been before. The PLO has declared a government in exile while Israel has the most right-wing government in its history. This must be an immensely **unstable** situation.

And the superpowers' inevitable piecemeal interventions will serve to make it more unstable (the USSR played a prominent role in pushing the PLO to its new stand).

So if the immediate prospects look grim, the medium-term prospects are less so. The Palestinians are nearer the winning of a state of their own than they have ever been before.

# The Eastern Bloc and Trotskyism

**O**ur tendency is part of the 'orthodox Trotskyist' current whose ideas were elaborated between 1948 and 1950 and codified at the Third World Congress of the Fourth International in 1951 — which we have in the past identified as the 're-founding' congress.

We have never ceased formally to subscribe to the ideas about the bureaucratic state-monopoly societies codified at that Congress, considering them degenerated and deformed workers' states. Like every other Trotskyist tendency operating with the Third World Congress codifications, we have over the years established a distinctive record on the state-monopoly systems by way of our responses to events.

We have been characterised from the very beginning of the tendency by our fierce hostility to the state-monopoly systems, and by outspoken commitment to the working class and to the need for a new workers' revolution.

The contrast with some of the other tendencies with the same formulas of post-1951 Trotskyism is stark. The Pablo-Mandel tendency did not come out for a workers' revolution against Mao's bureaucracy until 18 years after it conquered mainland China! The USFI could not bring itself to a wholehearted support of the call by the outlawed Solidarnosc in 1981 for workers in Western Europe to boycott Polish goods, and some strands in the USFI opposed the boycott.

All the 'orthodox Trotskyists', with the exception of a sizeable minority in the West European Mandeliste groups, either welcomed the Russian invasion of Afghanistan or refused to call on the Russians to leave.

To this day sections of the 'orthodox Trotskyist' movement do not believe a workers' revolution to be necessary in Cuba or Vietnam. That is, they see the bureaucratic state-monopoly system as historically progressive, or even a working-class answer, for certain parts of the world today — just as they long saw it as such for China.

On these and other questions we have been at odds with the 'official' Trotskyist movement and its various splinters.

Our interpretation of the 'degenerated and deformed workers' state' framework has, we believe, been strictly in line with Trotsky's interpretation of the meaning of his 'degenerated workers' state' analysis of the USSR. Most of the other Trotskyists have in fact — at various times and for different countries — been in the tradition not of Trotsky but of the Right Opposition of the '30s (Brandler/Lovestone). While criticising the policies of the ruling

**This resolution, with preamble and commentary, was discussed at the Socialist Organiser supporters' AGM on 12-13 November**

bureaucracies, they have believed them to be historically progressive, and identified their interests with those of the working class.

The result has been a broken-backed, oscillating and unstable 'Trotskyism', combining working-class hostility to the bureaucracy (usually) for the USSR with crass illusions in one or other of the non-USSR Stalinist formations, from Tito to Mao to Castro to Ortega. That is not our tradition, nor our history, but it is the tradition and the history of most of our political family.

That is what most 'orthodox Trotskyists' have made over 40 years of the ideas of post-Trotsky Trotskyism. We have swum against the stream within our own historic current.

For many years we have not really made propaganda for the 'degenerated and deformed workers' states' position. It has been something we took for granted and within which we hammered out our positions on current events — from our attitude to 'right-wing' dissidents in the USSR to the invasion of Afghanistan and Solidarnosc. We have more and more relegated the formal framework to the outer perimeter of our concerns.

Where we have used its descriptive terms — 'bureaucracy', for example, for the ruling group — we have given them our own meanings, effectively describing those bureaucracies as fully-fledged class enemies of the working class.

Many years ago we formally declared 'defence of the Soviet Union' — in a world dominated by the two nuclear superpowers — as a matter of 'tenth-rate importance'. Since 1980 we have insisted that, 'workers' state' or no 'workers' state', it is an abuse of language to deny that the USSR is an imperialist state.

We have diverged from the 'orthodox Trotskyist' current, too. For it is characteristic of all the adherents of the 'degenerated and deformed workers' states' theory that that theory is a more or less translucent sheath within which exists a radically different theory.

For us, terms like 'bureaucracy' were in fact used to describe classes hostile to the workers: and all the 'degenerated and deformed workers' state' theorists in fact describe the societies they tag with Trotsky's label as a new form of society.

For Trotsky the USSR's bureaucracy was in agonising contradiction with the nationalised means of production because it was in agonising contradiction with the working class; all the post-1951

Trotskyists, in fact, describe societies where the bureaucracy creates the nationalised property, is not in agonising contradiction with it, and is not a usurper. This is clear in all the theories, but perhaps most so in the Militant tendency.

For the 'orthodox Trotskyists', the 'degenerated and deformed workers' states' name-tag functions only to impart the idea that these societies are historically progressive. Where Trotsky's opponents in 1939-40, and later Max Shachtman, said that the bureaucratic state-monopoly systems were new exploiting societies and 'barbaric', the 'orthodox Trotskyists' use the 'workers' state' name-tag to paint essentially the same picture but say that the new societies are progressive and transitional to socialism.

For ourselves, our history has been one of conflict and tension between the implication we inherited from 'orthodox Trotskyism', that these state-monopoly systems, as 'workers' states', were historically progressive and halfway between capitalism and socialism — and our response to all the living issues throughout the history of the tendency, from the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 onwards.

There does not now exist any coherent 'degenerated and deformed workers' state' theory — that is, any 'degenerated and deformed workers' state' theory which does not in fact amount to a radically different theory, a theory (in one form or another) of 'progressive bureaucratic collectivism'.

That is the source of the decades of illusions and disillusion of various groups of 'orthodox Trotskyists' with a series of Stalinist formations. It is the source of the prolonged ideological crisis of the Trotskyist movement. The movement's formula on this question — the formula used for the USSR by Trotsky before 1940 — has simply worn away.

We must conclude:

**A.** The ruling state-monopoly bureaucracies are distinct ruling classes. They have many peculiarities and differences from other ruling classes, but nevertheless they are self-reproducing ruling classes with a distinct relation to the means of production and to the working class.

**B.** Nationalised property alone cannot define a social formation as a workers' state. The vast experience of different sorts of bourgeois states since Trotsky's time makes this clear, even if the use of nationalised property against



the working class in the Stalinist state-monopoly societies had not already done so.

Nationalisation is a means to an end — working class liberation. It cannot bring progress towards that end under the rule of bureaucratic state-monopoly class system.

**C.** The working class and its allies in the bureaucratic state-monopoly societies must make a new revolution which will, in fact, be as thorough-going as the revolution that the workers in a country like Britain will have to make.

**D.** The bureaucratic state-monopoly systems cannot be considered in any sense transitional from capitalism to socialism. In many fundamental respects they are further from socialism than advanced capitalist countries are — most importantly, in their uniform and systematic suppression of the working class, without those activity socialism is impossible and will never be achieved anywhere.

The state-monopoly societies emerge in various ways as parallels to capitalism, not as its successor. They have many of the unmistakable features of historical

blind alleys.

**E.** Socialists in the West must support the working class in the state-monopoly systems in its attempts to organise a free labour movement — support it irrespective of the ideas of such a movement which may, as Solidarnosc shows, develop pro-market-capitalist views in response to the horrors of the state-monopoly system.

**F.** Socialists in the West must support the right to national self-determination in the state-monopoly systems.

**G.** We are opening a discussion. Many questions about the nature of the Eastern Bloc remain unanswered. We will continue the discussion in an open and undogmatic way.

These conclusions in no way demand a change in our attitudes to the living political questions. Sloughing off the worn-out 'degenerated and deformed workers' state' formula merely gets rid of an empty form of words in contradiction with the militant anti-bureaucratic and pro-working class

## ACTIVISTS' DIARY

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

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

**Sunday 20 November**  
North East London SO meeting, 'Fighting Imperialism: Under Whose Flag?'. Speaker: Clive Bradley. 7.30

pm, Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Road.  
**Monday 21 November**  
Oxford SO meeting, 'The Politics of Marxism Today'. 8.00 pm, Wadham College, Lecture Room.

**Tuesday 22 November**  
Northampton SO meeting, 'The Left Today'. Speaker: Jim Denham. 7.15 pm, 25 Queens Road.

**Thursday 24 November**  
Stoke SO meeting, 'Arabs, Jews and Socialism'. Speaker: Clive Bradley.

**Saturday 26 November**  
London Socialist Conference dayschool on Imperialism. Sir William Collins School, London NW1

**Saturday 26 November**  
Anti-Apartheid Movement Annual Conference. Sheffield.

**Saturday 26 November**  
Socialist Conference dayschool on 'Socialism and Democracy'. Civic Centre, Newcastle. Contact Tessa

Gray, 4 Normanton Terrace, Elswick, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

**Monday 28 November**  
London Socialist Forum meeting, 'Labour and the Bomb'. Speakers include Pat Arrowsmith. 7.30 pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1.

**Saturday 10 December**  
Socialist Conference 'Conference Against the Poll Tax'. Newcastle Medical School. £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 two-day conference.

**Saturday 1 April**  
Campaign for Non-Alignment two-day conference, 'Out of NATO, into the World'.





politics we hold. But some questions arise.

Are we for the 'defence of the USSR'? — not for the reason that Trotsky was for 'defence of the USSR' anyway. The conflicts between the USSR and the Western powers since 1945, and the foreseeable conflicts between them in the future, have been and will be essentially inter-imperialist conflicts about rival claims for spheres of influence and areas of domination — not clashes about the principle of nationalised property.

But any Marxist who failed to defend national self-determination against US imperialism in China or North Korea would be a very bad internationalist. And the description of the USSR as imperialist does not even exhaust the issues in the Second World War.

It is a good thing that the pacifist, racist German Nazi imperialists — who believed the Slavs to be subhuman and the destined slaves of the German master race — were defeated and driven out of the USSR. The tragedy is that Stalin

survived and was able to expand the area of his imperialist control, making the people of Eastern Europe enslaved by Hitler into his semi-slaves (to use the words Trotsky used to describe the fate of the people of Eastern Poland occupied by Stalin with Hitler's agreement when Hitler took Western Poland in 1939).

What about the restoration of capitalism? However you assess the prospects of that happening in some of the state-monopoly systems, it is better for the working class if the present bureaucratic property system is replaced by socialisation under workers' control in a democratic workers' state. We advocate this.

But we do not make a fetish of the existing nationalised property, or confuse it with any sort of socialist nationalised property.

Above all, we keep in mind that the working class — in Poland, for example — is more important than the preservation of the existing nationalised property.

The utter *reductio ad absurdum*

of post-Trotsky Trotskyism is those Trotskyists today who defend the Polish bureaucracy — the USSR's satraps in the national subjugation of Poland as well as the direct oppressors of the Polish workers — as the custodians of nationalised property against the Polish workers.

The post-Trotsky Trotskyists have in fact not been Trotskyists. Within the dogmatic framework of 'Trotskyism' they have adopted the politics towards the state-monopoly systems of the so-called Right Communist opposition of the 1930s, who were critical of the USSR's rulers but did not believe that the bureaucracy was a distinct caste and did not believe that the workers needed to overthrow it.

Post-war Trotskyism has been an incoherent, submerged internal dialogue between the ghost of Trotsky and the living representatives of Brandler!

We consider ourselves to be the genuine Trotskyists. We represent the spirit and method of Trotsky, and above all his commitment to the struggle to liberate the working class and the oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states.



## SO supporters meet

**A**t our Annual General Meeting of Socialist Organiser supporters last weekend (12-13 November) we decided formally and finally to drop our description of the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries as 'workers' states'.

We had only ever described them as "bureaucratically degenerated and deformed workers' states", with the emphasis very much on the "bureaucratically deformed"; but all the qualifications and provisos we had to make about the "workers' state" label over the years finally added up to making that label utterly nonsensical.

"Nationalised property alone cannot define a social formation as a workers' state," we decided. "The bureaucratic state-monopoly systems cannot be considered in any sense transitional from capitalism to socialism". The full text of the resolution we passed, and of the explanatory preamble and commentary, are printed elsewhere on these pages.

Very few comrades still defended the idea that the Eastern Bloc countries are any sort of workers' states. A larger minority agreed that they are not workers' states but jibbed at defining the overlord bureaucracies as ruling classes.

Those minority views will, of course, still have access to the columns of Socialist Organiser; and we will be inviting debate from other tendencies on the left, too. There

are many questions still to resolve in the analysis of the Eastern Bloc, and we want an open and undogmatic discussion.

The AGM heard that organised activity by SO supporters in the trade unions has increased markedly over the last year. It adopted proposals to build on this, notably a weekend school for SO trade unionists and a renewed drive to establish SO workplace bulletins.

There was debate about our general orientation. We agreed that the political scene is still dominated by the defeat of the miners' strike in 1985. But the depression in the labour movement is not uniform.

The health workers' struggle, the conference of Constituency Labour Parties held in September, the movement against the poll tax — these are openings we must seize on. If we do our work properly, we can make considerable progress in winning support for the ideas of Socialist Organiser.

We ended the AGM by deciding on a drive to improve the basic routines of organising and doing SO sales, and of seeking out individuals interested in our ideas to discuss politics with.

Such activity is crucial in a period like the present. On it depends our ability to resist the depression which weighs heavily on the labour movement around us, our capacity to make advances in the next year, and our potential for being well-placed when the mass working-class struggle revives — as it surely will.

## Labour and the Bomb

London Socialist Forum Meeting  
Monday 28 November,  
7.30 pm,  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square

Speakers include:

Pat Arrowsmith, Keith Mc Clelland (co-author of END paper to LP Policy Reviews), John Bloxam

# Capitalism in the raw

## CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Colors'

**C**olors' is a film about an American war zone, the ganglands of East Los Angeles. Gang violence has reached epic proportions there. Someone gets killed every day.

Gang members number some 70,000. Loyalty is to the gang's particular 'colour' (usually worn as a headband or neckerchief) and to one's 'turf', the area controlled by the gang. Members survive by drug dealing.

It's a precarious existence. The gangs are formidably armed and only too ready to war with rivals. It's dog-eat-dog.

The film deals with the efforts of the LA police department and the sheriff's office to deal with the problem. The odds don't look good for the police. Their special anti-hoodlum squad only numbers 250. The police are armed to the teeth, but so are the gangs, often with superior weapons.

Spare no tears for the cops, though. The buddy-buddy team who take them on are Robert Duvall as the soft cop and Sean Penn as the tough rookie. When Eddie Murphy posed as a cop in '48 Hours', he sneered at a white man: "I'm your worst nightmare — a nigger with a badge." Sean Penn is a different kind of nightmare, but he's a nightmare all the same.

He's the kind of cop who joined the force for the fun of beating up Blacks and Hispanos. To him women are only good for sex, and even then he doesn't believe in seeing the same one too often, because then "you might have to talk to them."

Duvall is posed as nicer and considerably less violent, but both he and Penn come across as slightly crazy. Their job is much more dangerous than fighting in a real war, and the effort is ultimately futile. A few crooks go to jail for a time, but that's it. Nothing changes; the gangs remain.

One guy isn't even bothered by jail. A friend offers to bail him out but he refuses: "I've got more time than money." Life inside is not

much worse, and it's probably safer.

'Colors' seems a million miles from the fake showbiz of the Bush-Dukakis contest. It seems real, while the Presidential race might be going on in some far away fairy tale.

There's no romanticism in the film. It doesn't glorify the gang life in any way at all. That's the grimness of it. You sit watching it and know it's real and it just seems terrible and wasteful and inhuman. There's not an ounce of hope or spirit in 'Colors', just scene after violent scene, with the violence not so much in the shooting and bloodletting as in the bleakness and decay of the gang's graffiti-smearred environment, the soulless shanty houses and the warped and hopeless human relations.

There is none of the community spirit that you sometimes find in ghettos. There is no family or social structure to rival the gangs, who are constantly at war with each other and the rest of the world.

East LA has 50% unemployment among black youths. Youth are attracted to the gangs for money and for identity, a sense of belonging somewhere in a world that denies them any recognition whatsoever. But the gangs provide no real security; they are much more anar-



Gang members displaying their gang signs

chic and poor and unstable than groups like the Mafia.

In the film, enraged parents try to find ways of stopping the gangs. Yet they recognise that in Reagan's America their children are expendable, that they can end up on the scrapheap and that no-one in

authority will care. Gang members make a joke of Nancy Reagan's campaign slogan, "Just say no to drugs". Why say no? Drugs supply the only entertainment they get.

It's a very bitter film. It's the kind of film that 'tells things as they

are', but without any sense at all of what a solution might be.

The gangs are completely alienated from American society, so their revolts take on no political colour. They are outlaws, living short, violent lives at the bottom of the scrapheap.

## Fascination becomes obsession

Edward Ellis reviews 'Law of Desire'

**N**ormally, Antonio likes girls. But he is fascinated by avant-garde film director Pablo, who is lonely after his lover, Juan, leaves him to go off to the coast to work. Fascination becomes obsession, and Antonio refuses to believe that Pablo isn't in love with him. So, in a sort of Iberian gay parallel to Fatal Attraction, Antonio sets out to control everything in Pablo's life, including Juan, who ends up at the bottom of a cliff.

Pablo is suspected of the murder,

although later attention switches to his sister, Tina (who used to be his brother). Pablo, grief-stricken by Juan's death knocks the memory out of himself by driving into a tree, and in his amnesiac state doesn't realise that Tina's new lover is...Antonio. And so a nail biting climax ensues, as Pablo and Antonio confront each other.

'Law of Desire' is a hilariously camp tangled web of sexual crises. Director Pedro Almodovar has managed to capture the tensions of different relationships incisively and with affectionate ridicule. All the characters are quite likeable, even Antonio, who is a homicidal nut, and even moments of potential horror are pretty funny — Juan's death for example; or Antonio's attempt to burn an incriminating shirt in the toilet without his prying mother noticing.

Two cameo policemen provide a lot of the best lines towards the finale, one an old cynic the other a young (stupid) enthusiast. But star of the show is Tina, played by Carmen Maura. She gives a bitter-sweet performance as the strutting transsexual, checking the size of her breasts and reassuring the naive young girl who accompanies her everywhere not to worry as she was flat as a board too at that age.

It's a film about sexuality, passion and obsession, which loses nothing for being one of those foreign arty films with subtitles. It is very funny, especially in its obvious self-mockery. Pablo receives a letter from Juan which he doesn't find devoted enough — so he types a letter to himself, and sends it to Juan with a note asking him to sign it and send it back.

I must try that myself one day.



## Policy Review tries to junk Green policies

### LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



**W**e are in Phase 2 of Labour's Policy Review, where

ordinary Labour Party members, branches and CLPs have a chance to look at the results of Phase 1 and put in our two penn'orth.

To help us, there is a booklet, *Social Justice and Economic Efficiency*, with the reports of the seven Policy Review Groups, as well as seven Discussion Papers and Response Sheets.

I'm going to look at the report of the Physical and Social Environment (PSE) review group as SO's pamphlet on the policy review, *Socialism for the 1990s*, failed to consider this at all.

The PSE report is a peculiar thing. Claiming to support Labour's 1986 Environment Statement, it talks about the need to develop it and then almost totally ignores it.

This lip service is reminiscent of Labour's environmental 'campaigning' in the last election. Having set aside an 'Environment Day', this was then submerged in an irrelevant kerfuffle over whether Tebbit had said "No-one with a conscience votes Tory". (He didn't

but it's true).

The report gives a sketchy account of the environmental problems facing working people in Britain and the world. The energy industry, a major source of pollution, is not mentioned, still less Labour's policy of phasing out nuclear power, passed by two conferences.

To get these problems put right, the answer is said to be a new planning system, since "market forces alone" (ie capitalism) "cannot ensure a decent environment"! You would scarcely guess from this that the profit system is one of the major causes of damage to the environment.

Polluters will be relieved to hear that "we do not propose to unnecessarily interfere with the management of private enterprises". Conference policy of setting up a Ministry of Environmental Protection is not mentioned.

Throughout the report runs a curious insistence that, for most people, noise from neighbours or dirty streets are as, if not more, important than sea pollution, acid

rain, the spread of deserts, the loss of the ozone layer etc.

On dirty streets, the report says local authorities shouldn't be blamed for not cleaning them. "Individuals must also take responsibility for the mess they help create — and for helping to clean it up".

I find this incredible. Councils have cut back on street cleansing because of government cuts in funding. At the same time, elaborate over-packaging of goods has come in in a big way with the growth of super- and hypermarkets, where even fresh fruit and veg comes in a non-biodegradable plastic film or box or plastic foam dish made with ozone-destroying CFC gases.

There are no suggestions for how to bring environmental considerations into economic policy here or elsewhere. Neither is there any discussion of the job-creating potential of investment in environmental protection.

The 'reviewers' end with a list of issues they will consider in Phase 2, all of which (air pollution, waste disposal, health and safety etc.) are quite adequately dealt with in current party policy.

The Discussion Paper asks such challenging questions as "What should we do about the problem of nuclear waste?" I don't know what sort of answers they are expecting to this. There is plenty of disagreement among experts over the alternatives which include:

- \* forming it into blocks of glass and burying it in stable layers of rock;
- \* putting it into drums in shafts dug into the sea bed;
- \* leaving it where it is under guard until something foolproof can be thought of;
- \* or (my favourite) putting it into rockets and firing it into the sun.

I cannot see that ordinary Labour Party members without specialist knowledge or access to technical arguments are going to come up with anything better.

My impression of the PSE policy review group is of an elephant straining and bringing forth a gnat!

**New Ground: The current issue contains a more detailed look at Labour's policy reviews as well as articles about the inner city environment. Send £1 to 26 Underwood St, London N7 1TJ.**

# Preparing for pits sell-off

## WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

**B**ritish Coal has announced big operating profits. But there has always been a question mark about the way the Coal Board do their sums and announce their figures. They manipulate the figures to reflect whatever image it is that they wish to put forward.

In the past they've used figures to say pits are uneconomic. Now there has

been an announcement that the coal industry is to be privatised, and so the Coal Board needs to produce figures that make it attractive to any investor or any buyer. I would certainly view those figures with a great deal of suspicion.

Tied into that is the fact that the Coal Board are now trying to bypass national agreements and area agreements and negotiate at pit level, bypassing the union organisation and appealing directly to the men by dangling a few carrots in front of them.

Privatisation has already begun. Since the end of the strike increasing numbers of private contractors have been taking over jobs both underground and wholesale on the surface.

They are steadily building up to wholesale privatisation, but at the same time they are already doing it by handing these contracts out to private mining companies and to private companies on the pit top.

## NALGO branches link up

By Nik Barstow

**F**unny how union bosses think! NALGO leaders are prepared to say that "every single penny in NALGO's £16.25 million strike fund will be used to beat Bradford...if necessary." That's what they said at a conference at the start of this month, when Bradford's new Tory council announced its sweeping cuts.

But, funny, they were opposed to the rather cheaper alternative of a one-day national strike to support NALGO branches like Bradford, who want to fight the cuts.

What's more, they spent some time and energy trying to persuade Bradford NALGO to call off their ballot on all-out strike action because they've managed to hold "talks about talks" with Bradford Tory council leader Pickles.

Is this the same Eric Pickles who would be "shoved back into the troglodyte cave from which he first

emerged"? Is this the man who NALGO leaders now want to sit down with for beer and sandwiches? It is. Fortunately, back in the real world, NALGO members have more sense.

At the union's recalled Local Government Conference at the start of November, delegates didn't only agree to call a one-day strike against the Bradford Tories, they backed a call for a national strike against cuts in all councils who are making them.

And, what's more, left it to the branches like Bradford, Brent and the others who are fighting the cuts to decide how best to run the action. When to call it and how to organise it.

Now anti-cuts branches are getting together to put real teeth behind the words of the motions.

Islington NALGO has called a national meeting of delegates from branches facing cutbacks for 30 November — before a national meeting of branches fighting cuts is held — to try to build a rank and file anti-cuts movement in NALGO and amongst council workers generally.

For more details contact Islington NALGO, 23 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN. Phone: 01-354 7470

## Left bookshops strike

By Vicki Morris

**T**he entire staff of Collets Bookshops in London are on official strike.

The dispute started with a one-day strike on 14 October, protesting at the dismissal of Dave Keeley on the grounds of "absenteeism" — he had been off work for 4 and a half months with a broken leg, an absence covered by a doctor's certificate. When he returned to work he was given a written warning.

The management avoided meeting with Dave and an USDAW representative for three months, and, when they finally met, presented Keeley with a dismissal notice.

14 members of staff struck on the 14th. 12 hours of ACAS negotiations produced no backdown by the management who sacked the 14 who had taken action. The entire staff of the London shops voted to go out on official strike from 11 November.

Since then the management has offered to re-instate three of the longest-serving staff who had been dismissed, but the strikers are demanding the reinstatement of all 15 sacked workers. Keeley believes that management have been preparing to break union organisation in the shops, where USDAW have a closed shop agreement.

He says that the Charing Cross Road branch, the showpiece of the chain in London, achieved a profit for the first time last year, in ten years, and has been losing money this year. Management also recently installed a massively expensive computer system which they want to pay for at the expense of the workforce.

The staff are confident that they can win the strike. The management have behaved stupidly throughout, first in their dealings with Keeley and USDAW. Then they underestimated the strength of staff feeling against Keeley's dismissal, and the effect the picket would have on Collets' custom: the strikers estimate that only about five per cent of the usual clientele are crossing picket-lines.

Collets' main suppliers are refusing to supply the shop until the strikers' demands are met. UCW workers at the local Post Office are refusing to deliver post. London staff are visiting Wellingborough to seek the support of the staff at Collets Holdings HQ in their dispute.

Whilst the prospects for success look good, the staff at Collets want support on the picket line, donations to their strike fund, and letters to Collets HQ deploring management's treatment of the staff.

It is all part of a picture that emerges of building towards privatisation, not with a 'bang' but via several approaches at the same time.

I suspect that the Coal Board have got certain pits or certain groups of pits or certain areas that they consider prime. But they've still got what they consider to be dead wood, pits where they can't possibly attract investment or possibly sell — nobody would want to buy them. They need to shut or get rid of this dead wood.

I would not be surprised at all to see within the next two years all these pits that they consider dead wood being told to improve performance or shut.

I suspect that the figure given in the Financial Times of 20 pits closing and 20,000 men losing their jobs would not be far out. It would bring the mining industry down to something like the super pits that we were talking about right at the start of the strike — 50 pits or something in that region that they would be able to sell.

## Bradford education cuts

By Lesley Smallwood

**D**espite assurances from Councillor Pickles that education in Bradford would be safe from cutbacks, a massive attack has already begun.

The Tory Council's first target was the authority's equal opportunities policy. Financial support was withdrawn, all equal opportunities advisers sacked and the equal opportunities committee disbanded.

Cutbacks in the supply budget have resulted in the loss of 40 supply teachers — with further restrictions on support for cover planned. Altogether six advisers have been sacked and many areas of financial support for essential equip-

ment such as books have now been closed.

A massive £250,000 is to be cut from the caretakers and cleaning budget by putting these services out to competitive tendering. School meal prices are to double, causing even further hardship to those people who have already had their right to free meals withdrawn.

The NUT has responded by setting up links with NALGO and attempting to cooperate with the NAS/UWT. The NUT is balloting for a half-day strike and have advised members not to work in conditions they consider unhealthy.

There has been little response from the Labour Group so far, but it is hoped that a Campaign Group can be set up and that links can be made with other trade unions in order to mount an effective fightback.

## Builders' safety protest

**L**ondon's construction industry is in its biggest boom since the early 1970s.

Deaths and serious injuries have risen steeply, too: 37 deaths in London alone last year. Across the country 152 building workers were killed.

The industry employs a lot of sub-contracted and self-employed labour which is notoriously difficult to organise.

Corners are being cut and safety neglected in the rush to win and fulfill lucrative contracts — a recent two-week safety campaign stopped work in one out of every six sites inspected!

Penalties for breaches of safety are very low. A company was charged £250 after a building worker stepped off an unguarded roof to his death. The

average fine is £400 — the price of human life under capitalism.

To help stop this scandal, a trade union-based Construction Safety Campaign has been set up. It aims to improve union organisation in the building industry, increase penalties on contractors for safety neglect and to raise health and safety in the building industry as a central issue — including pickets of sites with poor safety records and strike action over the issue.

A meeting in London has been called for Thursday 17 November, 7pm at the Davenant Centre, 179-81 Whitechapel Road, E1.

Speakers include a Labour MP, Paul Crimmins from the Building Worker magazine, and Alan Dalton from Labour Research.

## Selection in Hertford

**I** want a wider Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals" says Labour's prospective Euro-candidate, Vidya Anand.

Party members from seven Constituencies in Hertfordshire selected Mr Vidya Anand, a 49 year old media analyst to fight the Hertfordshire Euro-seat for Labour at a meeting in St Albans at the end of October.

Vidya Anand, is the first British Asian Labour candidate to be selected for the 1989 European elections. He was born in India.

Mr Anand joined the Labour Party 24 years ago. He has chaired a number of Party sub-committees dealing with health, community relations and anti-racism, and the Co-operative Party in Redbridge, where he lives. He is also a member of the Party's Local Government Advisory Committee. He takes a special interest in care for the frail elderly and in youth and education services. He is Chairman of the European Council of Hindu Organisations.

Eric Heffer MP, whose home town was Hertford, welcomed the selection:

"It is with great pleasure that I hear that my friend, Vidya Anand, has been selected as Labour's Prospective Candidate for the Hert-

fordshire European Constituency. I have known Vidya for many years, and he deserves to be the MEP for the area. He is hard working, and will take up with vigour the issues facing the people of the area, and will be a good tribune on their behalf in the European Parliament."

## IN BRIEF

**GCHQ:** Four civil servants at GCHQ will finally be sacked this Friday 18th for belonging to a trade union.

**Local Government:** Bradford NALGO is to ballot 6,000 members on indefinite strike action beginning in December.

The council is pushing through a £5.8m cuts budget which puts thousands of jobs at risk.

Police were called in to a council meeting in Brent when angry protestors rounded on councillors who are supporting cuts.

300 NALGO council staff struck in Liverpool over sexual harassment of women staff.

NALGO branches facing local government management cuts are making moves toward linking up and hammering out a joint strategy of resistance.

**Car workers:** A four-day strike over the sacking of a shop steward at Jaguar ended on Monday. He accepted improved severance terms.

The dispute by store workers at

## Post Office: let's get serious

By Joe Baxter

**C**ounter and clerical workers remain in dispute with the Post Office over the PO's plans to close up to 750 Crown Offices (main post offices, as distinct from the privately-run sub-post offices).

The PO has flatly refused to modify its aims. Despite this the Union of Communication Workers Executive's ambition is still only to get the PO to treat it as a serious negotiating partner.

This has resulted in the union carrying out the series of 24-hour strikes in different areas of the country designed to cause the minimum degree of disruption.

The strikes are centrally directed, and grades other than counter and clerical staff are ordered to work normally as are counter and clerical grades outside the strike-affected area.

On top of this, the UCW Executive has openly given up on the fight against the PO's first round of closures. They are leaving it up to individuals to make up their own minds on whether or not to accept the PO offers to those affected by this first round of closures.

Consequently there may be demoralisation amongst those members involved in action. Those not involved may feel caught in a kind of limbo, coupled with anxiety over their part in the campaign.

Branches should now bombard the Executive with demands for stepping up the action. They should demand that the Executive endorses actions such as those taken by the uniform grades at South East delivery office in London, when they refused to cross counter and clerical picket lines.

They should ensure that picket lines are set up when the Executive calls them out, and that other grades respect the picket lines by not crossing them.

The PO must be laughing in our faces and it's time to show them we are serious after all.

**O**ver 100 civil servants at Hoxton DHSS, in London, have been out on strike since the afternoon of 2 November.

Workers at the office were issued with a first warning after declaring a job sharing ban — ie refusing to do other people's work. They decided to strike in protest.

Both CPSA and NUCPS members are on strike, they have a joint strike committee and organise twice-weekly meetings to keep everyone informed of events.

If negotiations fail the strikers have plans to call a London-wide day of action of DHSS/DSS offices. The response they have had so far from speaking at other branches, has been positive.

Phone: 01-249 6930 for messages of support or to send donations (the strikers are on 50% strike pay).

Coventry's Brown's Lane assembly plant led to 5,000 manual workers being laid off. Negotiations over pay are still deadlocked. Management are insisting on a 2-year deal.

Manual workers at Austin Rover voted by more than 2-1 to accept a 2-year deal.

**Docks:** 47 sacked dockers at Plymouth blockaded the gates of Commodore Shipping's container terminal and stopped operations.

Dockers have refused a 7.1% pay offer.

A protest rally was organised by workers at Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast against proposed privatisation.

A rally of workers at Shorts Brothers in Belfast was held over privatisation plans.

**Miners:** British Coal management are preparing a new round of cuts which could cost another 20,000 jobs.

The NUM is balloting in December for an overtime ban over this year's pay claim. The South Wales area is recommending rejection of the ban.

Members of the scab UDM have voted to reject a 6% pay offer.

## TIME TO GO!

A briefing conference

Saturday 19 November 1988

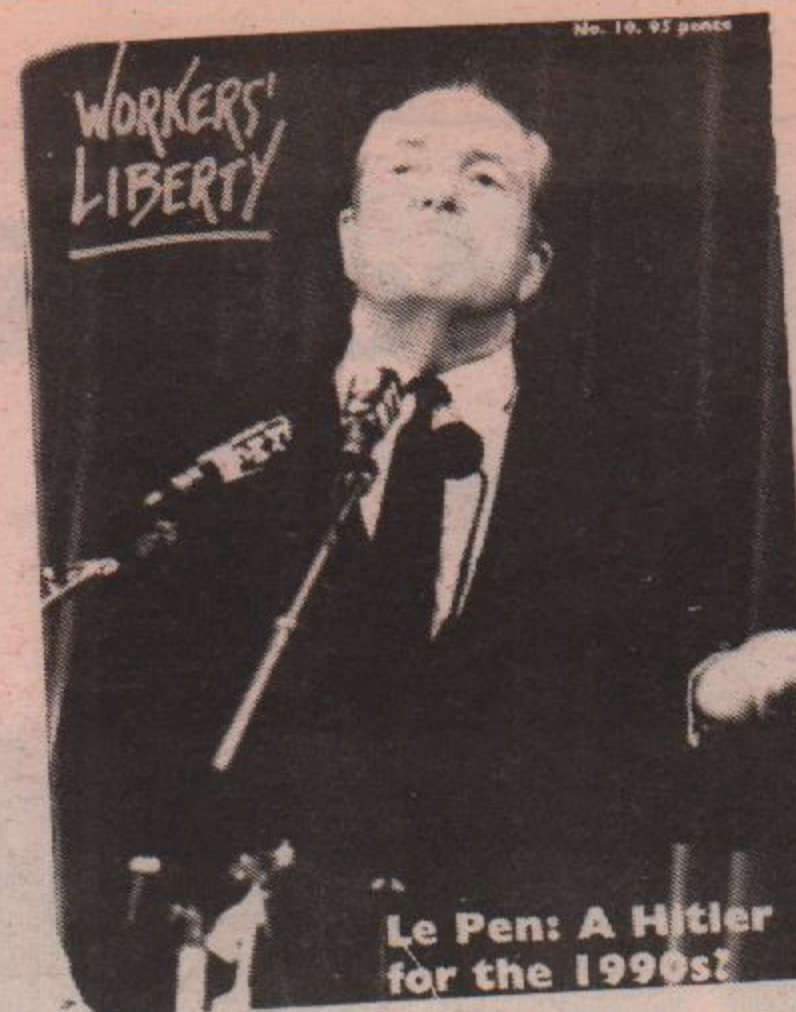
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TWENTY  
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# SOCIALIST

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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 Kowalewski on Poland. 90p + postage, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

# Defend the right to study!

By Paul McGarry  
(NUS Executive, personal capacity)

The Tories' plans to introduce a student loan system by 1990 were unveiled last week by Kenneth Baker, the Education Minister, who described them as "an important step away from the dependency culture".

Students will be expected to take out loans of £1200 over 3 years, repayable within 10 years. They will lose housing benefit and social security over the summer vacation.

The student grant will be frozen, as will parental contributions, so that the top-up loan will increase with inflation over the years.

The reasons for introducing loans are twofold. Firstly, the Tories, under pressure from the Treasury, are looking to reduce public expenditure; and secondly, it fits snugly into the Thatcherite project. Competition and incentives are central reasons given for such a system.

The scheme has been condemned by the lecturing unions, by university vice-chancellors, by polytechnic directors and by the National Union of Students (NUS).

The arguments against loans are simple. The prospect of owing £1200 will inhibit working class students, women and black students from entering higher education. The need to earn higher salaries to repay the loan will discourage

students from taking courses such as the social sciences and arts. And what students are to do for money over the summer vacation remains unanswered.

A loans system will result in an education system less accessible for the less well-off and more orientated towards meeting the needs of business.

Baker's announcement comes in the wake of the leaked government document on the introduction of a voucher-funded higher education sector. Students will be given a voucher which they can 'spend' in the education system.

The value of the voucher will be linked to A-level results, but if you are rich enough you will be able to get on to courses just by being able to pay.

The notion of free state education, providing education as a basic right, is under attack. These attacks, on top of the Education Bill, will also result in fewer jobs for campus workers and a turn away from the critical disciplines to an education system firmly chained to the market place.



Picket of North Manchester General Hospital

The key to stopping the Tories is students fighting back. That means organising and educating; it means taking direct action in the form of occupations.

Student militancy needs to be linked to rank and file working class action both on and off campus. Most importantly, students need strong leadership and strong

rank and file organisations under their own control.

Activists have got an opportunity in the next few weeks to start the process.

The NUS week of action from 14-18 November can be the basis for building this militant action as can the lobby of Parliament against loans on 24 November.

## The truth of Lawsongate

Did he or didn't he? Last Sunday most of the press published accounts of a briefing with Chancellor Nigel Lawson which pointed to the means-testing of more benefits for pensioners, especially the

Christmas bonus.

Lawson responded that the stories were a "farrago of lies". Robin Day suggested, live on Panorama on Monday night, that the official record of the briefing should be published. Lawson replied that no record existed.

Journalists who attended the briefing saw a tape recorder on the table with the tape running and the red recording light on. When the briefing ended they were told that they could check their notes with the official recording.

So the Treasury had to find an excuse. Unfortunately they forgot the first rule about making excuses: only make one — or, if you make more, be sure they don't contradict each other.

The tape was, according to different versions, lost or inaudible. The tape recorder was discovered to be in one version faulty, in another "a fairly sophisticated machine" that the officials present did not know how to operate properly.

Matters were further confused by the status of the briefing. Journalists were told at its outset that it was "off the record" — that the Chancellor could not be quoted by name. Then as they left the building they were caught by the Treasury's chief information officer John

Gieve and told that the briefing was, in fact, on the record.

The increasingly bewildered reporters were later telephoned and told that the briefing had indeed been off the record.

If anything is clear in this confused and tangled tale it is that Lawson, carried away with his enthusiasm to slash the benefits system, let too many cats out of the bag.

Imagine poor Nigel's horror when it finally dawned on him that people might find his remarks on means-testing of OAPs too much to take. No wonder he and his Treasury underlings panicked.

His remarks about means-testing the measly £10 pensioners Christmas bonus to help the "tiny minority" (sic) of pensioners who are "genuinely" poor must, on reflection, have seemed just the tiniest bit miscalculated. 60% of pensioners live below the poverty line.

But it's wrong just to see the whole affair as a bit of a giggle. The Tories have shown a remarkable ability to weather such embarrassments. More means-testing is central to the Tories' benefits strategy, and it's going to take more than a mini-farce like last week's to stop that.

## Bristol against loans

By Julie Sansome  
(Bristol Poly Exec, personal capacity)

At an Emergency General Meeting of Bristol Poly Students' Union held on Tuesday 15 November, 400 students voted in favour of a 24 hour lecture boycott for the following day.

The boycott is in protest at the Tory Government's threat to introduce loans. There will be pickets outside lectures on each of the Poly's sites.

There will be a support meeting and demonstration organised by Bristol Area NUS. The demo will march through the centre of Bristol on Wednesday 16 November.

## 1000 march in Hull

Over 1000 students demonstrated on 10 November in support of sacked Hull university lecturer Edgar Page.

The demonstration, organised by Hull university student union, was demanding the reinstatement of Mr Page, who was the first lecturer to be sacked following the removal of academic tenure.

Delegates from the AUT joined the rally which was addressed by Pat Young (VP Education, NUS), Dianne Warwick (General Secretary of the AUT) and Edgar Page.

**Socialist Forum**  
**Labour and the Bomb**  
**Monday 28 November**  
**7.30 pm**  
**Conway Hall**  
**Red Lion Square**

**Speakers include: Pat Arrowsmith, Keith McClelland (co-author of END paper to LP Policy Reviews), John Bloxam**

Socialist Forum presents the third of a series of monthly discussion meetings. Sponsored by: Socialism & Revolution, Socialist Organiser and Women's Fightback.