

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

INSIDE:

The biggest battle since the miners



See centre pages

Why millions live in fear

In the wake of the deportation of Viraj Mendis, thousands of 'illegal immigrants' are under threat from seizure by Home Office snoopers and police snatch-squads.

Police and immigration officials have in-depth files on people living here under the protection of friends, family or religious institutions. Millions of people live in fear — illegal immigrants, people in doubt about their legal status, and even black people whose status is quite legal but who fear harassment by police 'checking up'.

According to a report in the *Observer*, Viraj Mendis was a vital test case for future deportations. The paper's Home Office source told them: "Everything had to wait until Mendis was out of the country. Now the word is to go out and whack them. It is going to be like Mendis — snatched and deported within 48 hours."

Already police have been harassing black people in the street in South London, demanding to know if they have 'identification' — meaning passports.

In one recent incident, many of the cleaners working for a subcontractor at London's Barbican centre just disappeared overnight. The police had arrested them and deported them to Ghana as illegal immigrants.

The *Observer* goes on to say that police computer files are extremely thorough. Those harbouring illegal immigrants could face six months' jail or a £2,000 fine.

These moves show that behind the issue of Viraj Mendis's refugee status was a broader one. All so-called illegal immigrants are under threat.

Even Tories agree that the South African system of pass laws is inhuman. It is a system that prohibits black people from living or, in many cases, working in certain areas. If you are caught somewhere without a pass you can be deported to your homeland; you are an 'illegal immigrant' in a particular area (even now they have officially



Moss Side cops evict Viraj Mendis. Photo Peter Walsh

reformed the law).

Why should such a system be inhuman between different parts of one country, but all right between different countries? If it's reasonable to restrict immigrants to Britain, why not to London?

In fact the whole system of immigration control is as barbaric as controlling population movements between cities.

There should be no illegal immigrants. Anyone who wants to live in Britain should be allowed to do so.

In the 1950s British bosses encouraged black workers from overseas to work in Britain — for low wages, to make profits. Now it is no longer profitable, the bosses tighten up on immigration. And the

focus on immigration as a problem turns worker against worker.

Britain's immigration controls are racist. The people whose movement is restricted or who are in danger of deportation are almost always black. The same Home Office that could not think of a reason to give refugee status to Viraj Mendis is happy to hand a passport to

Zola Budd.

The labour movement must defend black people, including 'illegal' immigrants, from attack. And we must campaign to scrap all immigration controls.

INSIDE: Eye-witness account of Viraj Mendis' seizure by police

Tories plan crackdown on immigrants

Double speak on equality

WOMEN'S EYE

By Lynn Ferguson

Government doublespeak is at its most insidious when women are the subject.

Tory front-bencher Angela Rumbold has made several public statements that employers must change in order to accommodate to the needs of working women. Women workers will be needed more and more over the next decade.

By 1995 there will be a 30% drop in the number of school leavers entering work. Employers must attract and keep women workers.

Rumbold is no feminist, of course. Her motives are the competitiveness and profitability of 'British industry'. But surely her statements indicate some will to make the world of work fairer to women.

Actions, of course, speak louder than words. In the EEC Britain has blocked legislation which would have improved the conditions of women workers no less than *three times*. Last month the British government blocked legislation which would have shifted the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases from employees to employers. As Britain's existing legislation is nearer to the draft proposal than to existing EEC legislation the blocking seems only to have been motivated by ill-will.

But previously Britain was the only country to oppose draft legislation on parental leave. And Britain joined with some other member states in stopping legislation on rights for part-time workers.

But hold on a minute. Didn't the Queen's Speech in November announce a Bill to 'remove unnecessary obstacles to employment, particularly for women and young people'? The government says the Bill is to comply with European sex discrimination directives.

So does it remove taxable status from workplace nursery provision? Provide for better maternity leave? Provide training to enable women to enter male-dominated jobs?

No fear! The Bill is actually about removing protective legislation from women and young people. Oh good — now we have the chance to work all the hours god sends, to work with dangerous obstacles, and in unsafe conditions. Surely real equality would lie in extending protection to *all* workers? But then that wouldn't be profitable, would it?

The anti-abortion lobby have always claimed that they speak for the 'silent majority'.

I've always had my doubts. But a new poll seems to confirm that most people aren't as bigoted as the 'pro-life' fanatics reckon.

According to a Marplan survey, 80% of people are for a woman's right to abortion in "the early months of pregnancy".

And that's not all. Of Catholics questioned, *two thirds* were for a woman's right to choose. So much for Pope John Paul II's moral crusade. Even Sheila Grant, Brookside's token Catholic, has finally broken with the church's moral strictures.

The combined power of church and state can't convince people that forcing women to bear unwanted children is wrong. That's got to be good news.

Put the heat on councils!

POLL TAX

By Stan Crooke

Over 100 protesters turned up last Tuesday (24 January) to lobby the meeting of Lothian Regional Council at which the regional poll tax for the Lothians was to be voted through: £286 per year.

Added together with the water rates and the poll tax figures for the District Council within the Lothians, this will result in an overall annual figure of £393 for Edinburgh, £363 for Midlothian

and £358 for West Lothian.

These are the highest poll tax rates in Scotland (or, as the Tories like to put it, in the entire world).

The Tories claim that these figures are "proof" of "excessive spending" by the Regional Council provides some services not available in other regions, such as free bus travel for senior citizens, its spending can hardly be termed "excessive" or even generous.

In the current financial year, for example, the Council has cut spending on voluntary sector organisations. And its budget for 1989/90, based on the poll tax figure of £286, includes a freeze on staff recruitment, and higher charges for home-helps, evening classes and parking.

The real reason for the high poll tax rates in the Lothians was the discriminatory manner in which the

Tories' Scottish Office have allocated the money which local authorities receive from central government.

By providing smaller grants to local authorities, such as Lothian, to which it is politically hostile, the Scottish Office has left them with the "choice" of a high poll tax or big cuts in services.

But to explain the high poll tax figure in the Lothians (and demolish the arguments that the poll tax will increase local control over Council spending) is not to justify high poll tax rates.

It is made even worse for many by the £4 a week council house rent increase to be introduced by Edinburgh District Council in April.

The poll tax campaigns in the Lothians failed to take up the issue of the council budget. They should

have campaigned around the budget as proof that implementation of the poll tax must mean a bigger financial burden for many individuals and cuts in jobs and services.

The content of the budget adopted at last Tuesday's meeting underlined the fact that only non-implementation of the poll tax is an adequate strategy to protect jobs and services.

Even last Tuesday's lobby was shutting the stable door after the horse had bolted. The budget had already been approved by the ruling Labour Group and by the Finance and General Purposes Committee. Last Tuesday's meeting was therefore nothing but the occasion for a few pious speeches or, in the case of Tories, particularly hypocritical ones.



Women workers' boom

Between 1971 and 1987 Britain's workforce increased by 2.3 million and most of this increase was attributable to women.

In 1971 52% of women in the 25-44 age group worked; in 1987, 69%; and the figure is projected to rise to 75% in 1995. The figures come from this year's edition of the government report, 'Social Trends'.

But though women are working, and the right of women to work is generally accepted, little has changed on the home front.

Even when both partners work full time, most housework is done by the woman in 72% of cases. In only 22% of couples is the housework shared equally.

Not surprisingly, in the light of this, women have considerably less leisure time than men. Unemployed men have on average 88 hours leisure time — unemployed women have 62 hours, per week. Working women are of course, the worst off with under 40 hours leisure time a week.

Women do seem to spend their leisure time more profitably though, being considerably more likely than men to read books.

After all the talk of 'Victorian values' there are some signs that

moral attitudes are tightening up. In 1983 50% of people thought it was wrong for doctors to prescribe contraceptives to under 16s without informing the parents. By 1987 the figure had risen to 60%.

In 1983 62% thought homosexuality was wrong — in 1987 this had leapt to 74% — though, interestingly, this moral disapproval does not seem to have led to demands for more discrimination against gays. If anything fewer people object to gays being employed as teachers, or holding public office, than in 1983.

If you're black in Britain you're far more likely to be out of work. In 1987, 11% of whites were unemployed, 29 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, 21% of West Indians and 16% of Indians. Black people are also more likely to find themselves in jail.

In the light of government plans to crack down on 'illegal immigrants', a statistic to note is that for the past five years immigration to and from Britain has more or less balanced out.

The report also indicates that the British are eating more healthily, becoming less morally permissive, getting into more debt and are very concerned about environmental issues.

The average household is now spending more than it earns, thanks to mortgages, credit cards or bank loans.

58,000 building society borrowers were more than six months in arrears with their repayments last year. In 1987 almost 23,000 of homes were re-possessed, though there was a small drop in this figure in 1988.

Democracy the first casualty

LABOUR PARTY

By John Bloxam

The 'Americanisation' of the Labour Party proceeds apace.

The goal is a large passive membership, controlled centrally and occasionally brought together for media rallies along the lines of American Party conventions. The current leadership have systematically eroded the Party's democratic structures and channels of communication.

Gone are the Labour Party's two main publications — 'Labour Weekly' and 'New Socialist'. Constituency Labour Parties and individual members continue to be

suspended and expelled for their views. Individual membership balloting — a prelude to postal balloting — is being pushed for all the 'important' votes.

Even the pretence of membership participation in the Policy Reviews has now been dropped. All the Policy Forums scheduled for this year, with the exception of the one on women, have now been cancelled.

Now the Party's conferences are threatened. The National Executive Committee is discussing various proposals which include abolishing the regional women's conferences, the Labour Party Young Socialist and the new youth conference, and conferences on the rural areas and for the health advisory group; withdrawing financial support from the Labour Students' conference; and cutting back on the Party's regional conferences or possibly making them once every two years.

Some NEC members are said to be toying with the idea of making main Party conference two-yearly, too.

The main conference that remains untouched is the national women's conference, apparently because of 'serious problems' any proposed changes would cause.

The proposals are part of a £200,000 cuts package, brought forward because of the Party's continuing 'financial crisis'.

Even the leadership accept that the financial problems will only be solved by recruiting more members. But the proposals are scarcely an incentive to join or stay in the Party!

In fact, encouraging new members is not the leadership's priority at all. Their priority is getting their new, complicated reselection process off the ground, to protect sitting MPs and weed out radical candidates.

Oppose the cuts!



The new issue of Workers' Liberty £1.50 plus 22p post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.



Perestroika isn't working

EDITORIAL

Internationally it seems that Mikhail Gorbachev can do no wrong. His arms cuts were a major propaganda victory. Opinion polls show his ever-increasing popularity.

But at home things look considerably less rosy for Russia's reforming monarch. He has had to denounce both the conservatives in the party who would like to halt the reforms, and those who want more than Gorbachev is prepared to offer.

"We must not be backward looking, we must not stand on the sidelines of history," he says. But also, "We must not go too fast. We must not allow our policies to be hijacked by those who want to undermine the leading role of the Communist Party."

Gorbachev is having to fight for

his programme of limited political openness and of economic restructuring.

But in Gorbachev's own terms, perestroika is looking decidedly threadbare. Ethnic conflict and regional demands are burgeoning, with many republics setting up semi-autonomous 'popular fronts' which have latched on to a whole variety of festering grievances.

Amongst ordinary Soviet workers, perestroika is flagging in its (probably hyped) popularity as its immediate effects are felt — rising inflation and declining availability of consumer goods.

Inflation is now at 10% and is rising. Basic foodstuffs are in short supply. In about one third of the Russian Federation, the largest of the USSR's republics, with a population of 143 million, meat and butter are rationed.

An article in the paper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* reckons that the availability of many consumer goods has declined sharply over the

last year. Washing machines and refrigerators are hardly available. Shoes and clothing are in chronically short supply.

Economic growth over 1988 was officially reckoned at 4.2%. But plan targets are calculated in roubles rather than in items produced. According to the *Sovetskaya Rossiya* commentator this means that many factories have been producing fewer but more expensive goods. The 4.2% indicates not so much a growth in the production of goods, as a rise in prices — identified by some Soviet economists as "hidden inflation".

Small businesses, have been legalised in the form of 'co-operatives'. This has meant increased availability of some goods — but at vastly inflated prices. Hence the co-operatives are not popular with the ordinary people who are forced to buy from them because of the goods or services are unavailable elsewhere.

Gorbachev has managed to blame the failures of perestroika on the obstructiveness of conservative bureaucrats. But a report last summer from leading planning officials cited the problem as Gorbachev's attempts to graft reforms onto existing structures.

Factories are now supposed to be self-financing. But centralised planning and the need to meet targets cuts across this. That consumer price reform has been put off indefinitely means that the self-financing/profitability framework collapses.

Soviet sociologists also think that Gorbachev's land policy will be a flop. Land is being effectively

privatised by allowing farmers to lease land for up to 50 years. The intention of this was to boost the production of basic foodstuffs — to use the carrot of profit to get more food into the shops.

The policy bears some resemblance to the policy pushed in the mid-'20s by Gorbachev's hero, Bukharin. But times have changed, and it looks like only one or two per cent of the USSR's farmers will take the chance to 'enrich themselves'.

There are groups who want to take perestroika to its logical conclusions. The Democratic Union, founded last May, has a programme which calls for an end to the political monopoly of the CP, a multi-party system with free elections to a national assembly, and the right to accumulate capital. It has only around 2,000 members, but its publications, 'Glasnost' and 'Express Chronica' have growing circulations.

Members of the Democratic Union have been subject to vitriolic denunciations and blatant police harassment. Gorbachev's speech indicates his fear of the old guard, but more the fear of what he may have unleashed, the fear that glasnost and perestroika may lead to the end of his own power.

In his speech he said the last year had been a tough one, and that there would be more trials to come, but that it would be worth it. His claims are sounding less convincing by the minute. Maybe now the misty-eyed Gorbachev fans on the British left will learn what the Russian people already have — perestroika isn't working.

PRESS GANG

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR DAILY STAR

THE INDEPENDENT

By Jim Denham

Bare faced Neil

By Jim Denham

In a desperate bid to whip up a bit of interest in this column (other than letters from S. Matgama, aka 'Disgusted of Peckham', suggesting that I am somehow obsessed with Ms Wendy Henry) I thought of introducing some audience participation.

How about 'Palpable Humbug of the Week' or 'Brazen Hypocrisy and Barefaced Cheek of the Week'?

I thought that it would be no contest this week. The outright winner would surely be the *Sun* with its appointment of Mr Ken Donlan, its own managing editor, as 'ombudsman' supposedly to "act as an independent referee to hear and settle complaints by readers".

The *Sun* even got a Mr R. Murdoch to comment on the appointment: "The rest of the press in Britain will be watching this project closely. Newspapers and journalists today face heavy responsibilities to preserve the freedom we all enjoy by living up to the best traditions of British journalism."

When you've finished laughing (or maybe puking) try giving Mr Donlan a tinkle and see if you get a more satisfactory response than the one he gave to Peter Hillmore (Pendennis of the *Observer*), who rang up to complain about the notorious Mackay "interview" (n.n.n.p.d.) a few years ago: "I don't have to talk to you. I don't have to talk to anyone about this."

But the *Sun* has been pipped at the post this week by its stablemate, the *Sunday Times* — or, to be more precise, by that organ's singularly unattractive editor, Mr Andrew Neil. This man knows no shame.

After what has belatedly come out about the ST's role as Ministry of Defence mouthpiece over the 'Death on the Rock' programme, and the humiliating mauling that Neil's toady, Robin Morgan, received at the hands of Thames TV's Chris Oxley in the correspondence column of the *Guardian*, you'd think Neil would shut up about Gibraltar and concentrate on more important matters like 'personal finance', satellite TV and the latest Ferrari.

But no, this week's *Observer* generously allows Neil nearly half a page in which to "reply" to criticism, including protests from his own reporters. Neil's case is not impressive: it starts with an irrelevant and characteristically nasty attack on the *Observer*, goes on to imply a conspiracy between witness Stephen Bullock and the *Observer* to discredit the ST and ends by claiming that the ST's reporting was "vindicated" by the Gibraltar inquest.

The whole point of the ST's hatchet job on 'Death on the Rock' was, of course, to influence the verdict of the inquest in the first place. The Windlesham/Rampton inquiry into the programme is expected to largely vindicate Thames and — by implication — condemn the ST. Perhaps Neil will respond by smearing the Tory *Lor* Windlesham as a notorious "wet" anti-TV-established man.

Meanwhile, I await my reader nominations for future 'Barefaced Humbug' (I've just decided on the name) awards. Anything to avoid work.

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

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823, London
SE15 4NA. Phone 01-639
7965.

Latest date for reports: first
post Monday or by phone
Monday evening.

Typesetting: Upstream Ltd
(TU), 01-358 1344.

Published by Socialist
Organiser, PO Box 823,
London SE15 4NA.

Printed by Press Link
International (UK) Ltd (TU).
Registered as a newspaper at
the Post Office. Signed
articles do not necessarily
reflect the views of Socialist
Organiser.

The winter of selling out

GRAFFITI

How's about this for a refreshing dose of honesty from a trade union leader?

Len Murray was TUC General Secretary during the Winter of Discontent, ten years ago. What is his account of the TUC's role?

"One of the great myths of this period is that union leaders were stirring things up. But that was simply not true. The pressure was coming from below. We were running round like blue-arsed flies trying to control what was happening."

Whoever thought Len and Co. would do anything else?



socialism'. Some sort of socialism where the sick are deprived of their liberty. It makes the Tories' AIDS campaign seem fantastically enlightened.

As if we didn't know it already, two leaks in the past week have emphasised that privatisation means poorer provision.

A draft speech by John Baker, head of National Power, which will take over much of the electricity network on privatisation, showed that profits will come first.

The speech said: "The task of National Power will not be to keep the lights on whatever the cost." So much for electricity being a public service.

A couple of days later a briefing note to a group of Tory MPs known as the 'Friends of Water' was leaked. In it water authorities demanded that they should have immunity from prosecution over environmental pollution after privatisation.

This confirms worries about declining water quality after privatisation.

The Tories' privatisation plans mean that the basic amenities that we take for granted are under threat. In the capitalists' drive for profit, nothing is sacred.

The only country in the world which forcibly isolates AIDS sufferers is — "socialist" Cuba.

All 256 of Cuba's known AIDS sufferers are incarcerated in a sanatorium on the outskirts of Havana. Their isolation is supposedly voluntary — but no-one yet has refused. Not surprising when refusal would mean loss of work, housing and rations.

As 'compensation' for their loss of liberty, those detained live in relative material comfort — it's a 'golden cage', according to one relative. This 'luxury' amounts to the use of a telephone, colour TV and meat 'almost' every day.

The inmates face a life of isolation; some could live for many years yet. They are occasionally allowed a Sunday visit home — with a chaperone, to ensure that no 'hanky panky' takes place.

The head of Cuba's AIDS programme, Dr Rodolfo Rodriguez, said that the policy was essential to the "collective good required by

Tub thumping about terrorism is all very well, but it musn't interfere with profits!

The US government has been forced to make a huge exception to its economic sanctions against Libya.

Five major oil companies have succeeded in persuading the government to allow them to re-open their Libyan operations, which have been closed down since 1986.

The companies have been piling the pressure on the State Department to allow them to operate in Libya. The companies were worried that their assets would be seized by the Libyan government.

The State Department insists that the concession signifies no shift in US policy towards Libya. However, it's going to make it a lot harder for the US to convince its allies to continue economic isolation of Libya.

British children are becoming less and less convinced of the existence of God.

The Reverend Leslie Francis has conducted a survey of schoolchildren aged between 11 and 16 every four years since 1974. In 1974 36% of the pupils said they "found it difficult" to believe in God. By 1986 that had increased to 50%.

In 1974 42% thought God helped them in their daily lives. By 1986 only 25% personally felt this divine guidance.

It seems religious doubt and scepticism are rife among the nation's youth. Even Reverend Francis himself seems to have been affected.

He says that his report's findings either prove the correctness of the Education Act, with its insistence on Christian worship in schools, or show that religious education is totally inappropriate in today's Britain.

He really isn't sure.



Demonstration to mark the seventh anniversary of martial law

Don't trust bureaucrats!

On Sunday 22 January, workers took to the streets in Gdansk to rejoice at the Polish government's move to make Solidarnosc legal again.

The two big strike waves last year, and the clear threat of further working class militancy, have forced the government to allow independent trade unionism.

Before 1980, when Solidarnosc first won legality, genuine trade unions independent of the state had never, ever been tolerated in the bureaucratic state-monopoly societies. Solidarnosc's first period of legality was brief, confirming the view that the Eastern Bloc systems

cannot live with workers' self-organisation.

Since then a small independent trade union has been allowed to emerge in Hungary, but the Polish government's move looks like a manoeuvre to sidestep workers' militancy rather than a sign of genuine democratic intent.

Solidarnosc's top leaders have agreed to talks on the regime's terms — recognition of the ruling party's monopoly of rule, support for its market-orientated economic reforms, and a curb or an outright ban on strikes.

But many rank and file activists in Solidarnosc are not so willing to trust the bureaucrats.

ACTIVISTS' DIARY

Wednesday 25 January
Women for Socialism meeting, 'Axe the Poll Tax'. Speakers include Joan Twelves. St Matthew's Crypt, Brixton, 7.30

Wednesday 25 January
York SO meeting, 'Why socialists should be in the Labour Party'. Speaker John O'Mahony. York University, 1.00

Saturday 28 January
GCHQ demonstration, Cheltenham
Monday 30 January
London Socialist Forum meeting, 'Socialist Feminism into the 1990s'. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, 7.30

Saturday 4 February
'Alternative Policy Review' conference. Queen Mary College, E. London

Monday 6 February
Manchester SO debate with Socialist Outlook on the Eastern Bloc. Details: phone 01 639 7965

Monday 6 February
London SO educational series, 'The New Unionism and the first Marxist groups', Bruce Robinson. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1, 7.00

Monday 6 February
Nottingham SO meeting, 'Why the

PLO went for "two states". Speaker Paul McGarry. ICC, Mansfield Rd, 7.30

Saturday 11 February
'ABC' student activists' weekend conference. Octagon Centre, Sheffield, 12.00. Contact Mark: 01 639 7965

Saturday 11 February
Marxism Today 'New Times, New Thinking' conference. Caxton House, St Johns Way N19, 10.00

Sunday 12 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, 'The struggle for Palestinian-Israeli peace', Sheffield

Sunday 12 February
Socialist Student dayschool. Octagon Centre, Sheffield, 12.00. Contact Mark: 01 639 7965

Monday 13 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, 'The struggle for Palestinian-Israeli peace'. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1, 7.30

Wednesday 15 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, 'The struggle for Palestinian-Israeli peace', Leeds

Wednesday 15 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, Sheffield

Thursday 16 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, Newcastle

Friday 17 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, Manchester

Saturday 18 February
Socialist Organiser Industrial weekend school (two days). Manchester Poly Student Union. Contact

Solidar

Jack Allison, recently returned from Poland, reports on the state of the opposition there

You don't have to be an expert in economics to see that the Polish economy is in crisis. On the black market, for \$20 you can get more than the average month's wages in Polish currency.

Inflation is running at around 150%, and most people do not have enough to live on.

While I was in Poland the regime announced a 40% increase in heating charges and big price rises on most everyday necessities.

This economic crisis, and the effect it has on workers, will force Polish workers to fight again — even workers who have no links with Solidarnosc or think that Solidarnosc is dead. That is how a Solidarnosc militant in Wroclaw explained things to me.

A strike wave is unlikely to come in the winter. The memory of the strikes after the declaration of martial law in December 1981 is etched too deep. In bitterly cold weather, the state cut off water, electricity and all heating.

The next strike wave is more likely to come in the spring. But who will lead the strikes? Who will take the leadership of the working class?

The strikes of August 1988 were initiated by rank and file workers, but the top leaders of Solidarnosc around Lech Walesa were able to take the initiative and snuff out the strikes on the vaguest of promises in round-table talks with the regime. This is a tragic omen for the next round of strikes, but the shape of the Polish opposition is rapidly evolving.

Over the last year or so many new political groups have emerged, with strong separate identities, taking independent action.

Two distinct strands have developed within the opposition. The division is not on left/right lines, but rather along the lines of action or negotiation. Many of the newer groups, and especially those whose membership is younger, are

Tom: 01 639 7965
Monday 20 February
London SO education series: 'The formation of the Labour Party', Cathy Nugent. Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, 7.00

Monday 20 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, 'The struggle for Palestinian-Israeli peace', Liverpool

Tuesday 21 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, London

Wednesday 22 February
Adam Keller tour meeting, Brighton

Saturday 25 February
Labour Committee on Ireland conference (two days)

Saturday 25 February
National Union of Students demonstration

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

Saturday 8 April
Gorbachev and the European Left conference (two days). ULU, Malet St, London WC1. Contact Gus Fagan, 3C Bridge St, Oxford OX2 0BA

Saturday 29 April
CLPs conference on Party Democracy

Saturday 17 June
Socialist Conference Third Conference (two days). Octagon Centre, Sheffield

Saturday 8 July/Sunday 9 July
Workers' Liberty Summer School, London

Women for Socialism Conference Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 February "Socialist Feminism into the '90s" Wesley House, Holborn, London WC1

Saturday: Starts 10.45am

Plenary with Martha Osamor, SWAPO representative, Bernadette McAliskey, Betty Heathfield and other labour movement speakers

Workshops on the themes of: Women & the Family; Welfare State; Women and Work; Internationalism; Education & Culture

Sunday: Launching Women for Socialism

Discussions on: producing a newsletter; developing regional and national structures; and much more

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osc's new militants

in the "action" strand. This strand includes the harshest critics of the old Solidarnosc leadership's unwillingness to lead a fight.

The groups sharing this view and taking action on the streets, such as demonstrations, include a great range of political views, from the right-wing nationalist Movement for an Independent Poland (KPN) to the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution (PPS-RD) and rank and file workers' groups.

The "negotiation" strand also includes an array of political groups, from the recently legalised Christian Democratic Clubs to the other part of the PPS, around Lipski. This group generally supports the old leadership of Solidarnosc and contains many of the big names of the opposition.

The two strands were often explained to me in terms of a generation gap, and this certainly does exist. It is perhaps also for this reason that the big underground printing houses and most of the old structure of the underground is in the control of the "negotiators". The western media, Radio Free Europe, and western money favour this strand.

An understanding of these strands is essential as the tensions between the strands has led to some very important developments in the Polish opposition.

Soon after it was formed in 1988, the Polish Socialist Party split. This split was not along strict left/right lines, but along the lines of the two strands of the opposition.

One side of the split included a much respected long-time socialist Jan Josef Lipski, a leading figure in Solidarnosc from the early days. This was the "negotiation" group — they even had talks with the regime themselves.

They had far better links, names, contacts and publicity in the foreign press, but only took some 200 people with them. The "action" side of the split took 600 or so people, and the best activists. This group is now the PPS-RD.

The PPS-RD describes the old leadership of Solidarnosc as a second bureaucracy who will not lead any real fight — and indeed do not want to risk their benefits, financial and other, in a real fight with the Stalinists.

The PPS-RD also encompasses many strands of thought from those who want a mixed economy and parliamentary system to a small group of mainstream Trotskyists selling a paper (news sheet) called KRET.

The PPS-RD will be adopting a programme early in this year, and three tendencies will probably present drafts. These will be KRET; a left group who are "interested" in Trotsky's ideas, including several leading members of the party, and a right group. Some in the party, with what seems an understandable syndicalist trend, oppose the adoption of any programme at all.

Another vital aspect of the new "action" strand in the opposition is the development of rank and file workers' groups based on the factory floor organisation.

After martial law much of the union work of Solidarnosc was smashed. However, secret factory committees were set up composed of the best activists in each factory. From these factory committees, town-wide committees were elected, and regional bodies existed too, made up from the town committees.

This system was so organised that no-one knew who was on the body above them, but a union structure of sorts did exist which came into its own in any dispute.



Rally in Warsaw, August 1988

That system has now been run down by the leadership and replaced by a system of open committees in the factories, effectively chosen by the national leadership to replace the secret structures. In many factories the secret committees still work, with the best activists often opposed to the open committees which put over the official Solidarnosc leadership line.

There is a strong feeling that Lech Walesa is trying to change Solidarnosc from a union into a vague catch-all reform movement. Militants are also angry about the August strike and the calls for restraint around the round-table talks. Other grievances include the leadership's opposition to union branches being set up in privately-owned factories.

In some areas the workers have organised themselves as distinct groups calling for more action and organising as rank and file militants. The two such groups I came across were MRKS in Warsaw and Wroclaw, and a group involving workers central to the August strikes in Gdansk, called Riot Solidarity.

PPS-RD often work alongside these groups and in the August strikes tried to help link up the rank and file groups and activists across regions.

Workers' dissatisfaction with the current leadership of Solidarnosc is certainly growing, as the round-table talks for which the August strike was snuffed out have recently been delayed yet again, and the economic crisis continues to deepen.

What is needed now is a rebuilding of democratic and combative national network of workers. This has started to happen and was boosted by the 1988 strikes.

There is also good reason to hope that this time a more consciously socialist leadership will exist.

The British left must work with the PPS-RD and the workers' groups, giving solid support and engaging in debate to help develop clear political leadership of our class in Poland.

During my visit, however, it became sadly clear that the Western

left had shown little interest in the PPS and especially later the PPS-RD. The PPS-RD had been contacted by Western governments and CIA front organisations which they had refused to take any support from, but never on a serious level by the Western left.

My attempt to explain that some people had found the Polish workers' welcome to Thatcher confusing was met with shock. The PPS-RD had held a demonstration against her being welcomed by Solidarnosc. Surely people in the West didn't believe she was a hero of the Polish workers.

I had to explain that we also had propaganda in Britain but what I found harder to explain was why so many on the British left accepted this propaganda about Thatcherite workers, jumping on the chance to write off the Polish opposition and workers as reactionary.

I found it even more distasteful having to explain why, at the same time as many on the British left reinforced their anti-working class bigotry about Poland, they were busying themselves treating one of the world's most powerful dictators, "Comrade" Gorbachev as a saviour.

It is a sad and disgusting indict-

ment of our movement that I had to explain these things to working class socialists fighting one of the world's most vicious ruling classes.

The Western left should build the strongest links possible with the Polish workers in their struggle. For it may well be the victory of their struggle that smashes a link in the chain that enslaves the working class of the whole Eastern Bloc.

A workers' revolution is the only road to socialism, not crumbs of democracy from the Kremlin.

We cannot afford to wait for the British left to realise this simple fact and neither can the Polish workers.

Work or full pay!

Despite all its leaders' talk of collaboration with the regime, Solidarnosc remains a workers' organisation. This is its policy on unemployment.

The Rakowski government plans to close down about 100 industrial plants, without any consultations or advice from leading economic experts. Thus the fate of enterprises is to be arbitrarily determined by the Prime Minister and not by economic realities.

Henceforth, total responsibility for the state of the economy falls squarely on this government. NSZZ Solidarnosc, however, cannot evade responsibility for the fate of the people threatened with unemployment and poverty.

Workers from enterprises slated for liquidation cannot expect anything positive from the official trade unions which have already failed not only to offer support at the Gdansk shipyard, but even to

take advantage of the right to present their opinions prior to the announcement of the decision to close the shipyard.

On the contrary, the chairman of the official union openly supported the anti-worker policies of Prime Minister Rakowski, admitting his personal affinity for such a philosophy of government.

NSZZ Solidarnosc shall defend workers from enterprises set for closure regardless of their union membership. In the event of closures we demand that the government fulfill the following conditions (similar to those applicable to lay-off among administrative staffs):

1. That it accepts the principle that no person made redundant should suffer a loss in income or social benefits, be treated with worse working or housing conditions, or lower occupational status.

2. Persons, for whom the government cannot provide appropriate alternative employment in the same field, should have the following options: (a) the possibility of moving to a new area where there is appropriate employment and (b) occupational training in a freely chosen field, with assured income during the training period, equal to previous wages; (c) a one-off indemnity payment equal to an

annual wage level plus all due bonuses and awards; and the beneficiary would then assume responsibility for finding employment, nevertheless, employment continuity is preserved.

3. Workers residing in factory-owned hostels would enjoy security of tenure until acceptable housing is provided for them in new places of employment; families occupying factory housing gain tenancy rights.

4. Employees with 25 years seniority, as well as the elderly and ill, who might find it impossible to search for new employment, should have the right to early retirement.

5. Employees wishing to engage in entrepreneurial activity should receive necessary financial credits and assistance.

6. All funds for the implementation of these postulates should come from the employment opportunity and training budget which was set up for such purposes. We demand that the government give account of the state of this budget and use it entirely for the purposes for which it was created. We appeal to the workers from affected enterprises, to all working people as well as the official neo-trade unions, to support these postulates.

Gdansk, 12 November 1988.
From Polish Solidarity Campaign Report, Oct/Dec 1988.

The biggest battle since the miners' strike

Sean Matgamna surveys the moves towards a showdown between the Tory Government and dockers, and the background

The Tory Government has drafted legislation to reorganise the system under which dockers are employed — the National Dock Labour Board (NDLB).

According to the *Independent* (21 January), the Tories will push through the new law within the next twelve months, maybe much earlier.

The Tories want to abolish the NDLB. For years there have been rumblings against the NDLB from the port employers and Tory backbenchers. Now it seems that the Government is ready to have a go at abolishing it.

If they have hesitated for so many years, it is because of the dockers' determination to resist the abolition of the NDLB. TGWU dockers voted last year to strike if the scheme is threatened. There were two national docks strikes in 1984 against threats to the scheme.

The NDLB registers all port workers and guarantees that dockers will have a basic minimum fallback wage, whether there is work for them or not. The Dock Labour Board is made up of representatives of employers and workers in equal numbers. It was set up by a Labour Government in 1947 to give dockers some minimal security in employment.

By its nature port work is not steady or constant. Ships come, unload, load and go. Often there are gaps in between.

Before 1947 dockers were hired and fired twice a day, morning and midday, for half a day at a time, as the bosses needed them.

Even in good times there would always be a pool of unemployed dockers. In bad times the pool would swell enormously. Anyone could go and get a job on the docks, without training — in a trade that was extremely dangerous and accident-plagued.

The foremen would stand in the hiring pens, or on waste ground, with tallies to give out indicating that a man was hired, and gangs of dockers would mill around them. Fist-fights between competing dockers were common and normal. So was graft and corruption. The foremen had immense power over the dockers.

They could squeeze the dockers for money in return for hiring them. They could do deals with publicans to pay out wages in their pubs, thus ensuring good trade.

Poverty, crime, demoralisation, were the results of this system.

But the workers fought back. They began to organise trade unions. A hundred years ago this

year, the dockers began to fight back as trade unionists, with the strike in London — led by Marxists like Tom Mann and John Burns — for the "docker's tanner". (The demand was for a minimum wage of sixpence an hour in old money, 2½p in today's. An average male wage was then around £1.20 a week).

The union began to discipline the dockers around the idea of solidarity — that they would stand together to better their conditions. It also conducted all sorts of subsidiary struggles — for example, the struggle against having wages paid out in pubs, which was a good system for the publicans and their foremen friends but not so good for a lot of children hungry because there was no money afterwards for food.

Substantial changes were won by the union, slowly and painfully. The level of working-class consciousness among dockers became high.

London dockers struck in 1920 to stop a British ship, the *Jolly George*, from sailing with a cargo of guns for the Polish Army which had invaded the revolutionary USSR. In 1936, dockers — a lot of them Irish — trooped to join those in the East End of London who fought the police trying to clear a way for fascists to march into the Jewish quarter. That was the battle of Cable Street.

1947 marked the really big change — the National Dock Labour Board. The dockers had fought their way to the point that the Labour Government set up a system guaranteeing them a small basic wage at all times. Registered dockers would get this money even when there wasn't work, provided they turned up twice a day to have their books 'stamped' (proving availability).

The system was to be jointly administered by the union — the TGWU — and the bosses. The union had 50 per cent of control over hiring and firing. This made most dockers' jobs very secure.

It was not socialism, but it was a long way up the scale of social evolution from the days of drunken and starving men fighting each other for a few hours' ill-paid and dangerous work.

How far the dockers had come was emphasised by the fact that their one-time leader Ernie Bevin, general secretary of the TGWU, was one of the strongest ministers in the 1945 Labour Government.

Yet there were problems too. The TGWU was then the bulwark of the right wing in the British labour movement. It was enormous, undemocratically run, bureaucratic.

It took to the job of helping run the docks in the spirit of the Stalinist bureaucrats who took over Eastern Europe about the same time — except that the TGWU officials did not have the power of an authoritarian state at their beck and call.

They never recognised strikes. TGWU officials organised strikebreaking against unofficial strikes. They could threaten militants with the sack if they did not toe the union line, which would normally be the NDLB line.

For example, in 1954 the entire branch committee of the union in Manchester was hauled up before the General Secretary, Arthur Deakin, who told them to toe the line or he'd have them sacked!

In 1955, 16,000 dockers in Manchester, Liverpool, and Hull left the TGWU and joined a small London-based union, the National Association of Stevedores and Dockers. The NASD was called the 'blue' union, after the colour of its cards; the TGWU was 'the white'. The 'blue' dockers called it "the greatest jail-break in history".

The Dock Labour Board and the employers stood by their friends in the 'white' union, and refused to grant the 'blue' negotiating rights. This was fatal, in an industry where conditions changed so much from ship to ship, hold to hold, and cargo to cargo that a price had to be negotiated for each job, sometimes more than once.

There was a long strike for recognition, which failed. The immediate result was divided trade-union organisation on the docks, and soon afterwards non-unionism made its appearance. Yet militancy did not decline. On the contrary, it grew.

Dockers' militancy was enormously, almost effortlessly, effective in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. In Glasgow and Liverpool there was a system known respectively as 'spelling' and 'the welt', under which it was custom and practice — under the eyes of the foremen, and with their agreement — for half of a gang working a ship to do the first four hours of a shift, and then do what they liked, while the other half did the second part of the shift.

Dockers had the power to shut down the country.

But things were changing. The cargo-handling techniques in the ports were very ancient, little different from ancient Rome — vast armies of men humping cargoes on their backs.

A technological revolution in the 1960s changed all that. Now cargoes were packed into giant containers in factories or special depots, and unpacked in other factories or depots. Dockers just had to roll the giant containers on and off specially designed ships.

This meant the end of most dock jobs over a period of decades. On average containers can be handled in one-tenth of the man-hours of old-style cargo.

Containerisation gave the bosses a great weapon against the dockers, and at the same time a strong incen-

tive to reorganise the ports.

The 1964 Labour Government appointed a Royal Commission under Lord Devlin to investigate strikes on the docks, and then implemented the Commission report to 'decasualise' the docks.

Dockers were to be taken into permanent employment with a particular employer, instead of being hired out for some many half-days by the Dock Labour Board. They would therefore lose a big part of the control the union had over hiring and firing through the Dock Labour Board.

The Dock Labour Board would only be the fallback employer for a pool of unattached dockers who did not have a regular employer.

At the same time such practices as 'spelling' and 'the welt' would go. Thus — so the bosses hoped — the docks could be modernised, with fuller bosses' control that had existed on the docks for twenty years.

And the dock labour force could more easily be cut down over the years, as modernisation took place.

What happened next is one of the most tragic — and representative — experiences of the British working class in recent decades. It summed up the whole story of how we were beaten, and how the great working-class militancy of the '60s and '70s gave way to the present Thatcherite reaction.

Here were the most militant workers in Britain. They had tremendous solidarity. In certain ports a docker had only to run down the quay shouting "Everybody out", and the men would come out to hear what it was all about.

The day-to-day struggle for wages and good conditions had taught them that solidarity was the best way to protect themselves.

The employers were trying to carry out an open and drastic revolution in the ports, openly revoking the elements of workers' control won over decades of struggle. The workers had the strength to stop them.

But the bosses had decisive advantages: a conniving right-wing Labour Government; the trade union officials, who supported the Devlin proposals; and, above all, the fact that the hyper-militant dockers had no real alternative to the reorganisation except defence of a status quo increasingly made impossible by technological change. The charge of "Luddism" (backward-looking opposition to new technology) was a potent one in the mouths of both Labour politicians and trade union leaders.

Yet the dockers' answer should have been obvious and clear-cut: increase workers' control and modernise on that basis, using the advantages of modernisation to benefit the workers. Most dockers wanted the nationalisation of the ports, and most wanted to expand workers' control rather than give full control back to the bosses.

But there was simply no force on the docks with the organised strength to lead that sort of fight. The 'white' union was as



bureaucratic as ever. The v left-wing groups were weak often unclear.

The Communist Party had of influence, but they trailed the 'white' union bureaucrats who, until 1970, still banned communists from being union officials. The major Trotskyist group with influence in the ports — the Socialist Labour League/Workers' Revolutionary Party — was rabidly sectarian and incapable of work. *Workers' Fight*, the Trotskyist group active there, two dockers in Manchester.

So there was no coherent back. Dockers were split up confused by offers of better money. Attempts by an ad hoc rank and committee to organise a national stoppage were defeated.

In the autumn of 1967, Manchester, Liverpool and London struck against Devlin, but it was not enough. The conditions were substantially bettered by the strike but modernisation proceeded and dockers' jobs bled away.

The next, and most recent turning point on the docks came in 1972. Alarmed at the loss of jobs



the waterfront, docks began to picket warehouses outside the dock areas in which containers were filled and unpacked by cheaper non-Dock-Labour-Board labour. But Edward Heath's anti-union laws had just come into effect. Such picketing was forbidden.

In July 1972 five dockers were jailed for refusing to obey a court order to stop picketing. Immediately a wave of protest strikes spread over Britain. A quarter of a million workers stopped. Crowds marched to Pentonville Jail, where the dockers were held. For a few days there was uproar. The TUC decided to call a one day general strike from the following Monday. The Government caved in, and released the dockers.

The anti-union law remained on the statute books, but it was crippled. Labour repealed it in 1974. It was a tremendous victory.

The dockers won a victory, too — the Jones-Aldington agreement. The temporarily unattached 'pool' was abolished; the Government would pay the employers a subsidy to compensate them for hiring surplus labour; and the Govern-

ment would also offer large payoffs for dockers quitting their jobs.

After that, the docks got quieter. Mechanisation was pushed through. The number of dockers declined dramatically, year after year. There are now fewer than 10,000 registered dockers. In the early '50s there were over 80,000. As late as 1972 there were still 43,000.

As Britain's trade has shifted towards Western Europe, ports like Liverpool and Manchester have declined. Previously small ports outside the Dock Labour Scheme — notably Felixstowe and Dover — have become important. Over 20 per cent of trade now comes through non-scheme ports, worked by about 3,000 dockers.

For several years Tories have flown kites about abolishing the Dock Labour Board. Now it looks like they are about to try to do it. It is one more drive to beat down the defences workers have built up over the decades.

It is still not too late to stop them abolishing the Dock Labour Board. Dockers still have tremendous

power, especially in growing ports like Southampton. Although the number of dockers has declined, the amount of trade has risen. Dockers can deal more blows at the Tories where it hurts — in the economy — than most other workers.

Will the dockers use that power? They may do. If they do, and if they take on the Tories, then it will be the most important struggle since the miners' strike of 1984-5.

If that seems unlikely, remember that the miners didn't have an official strike between 1926 and 1970. And then they made themselves felt!

The steady rise in inflation is likely to spur on a revival of general industrial militancy. The slight drop in unemployment will encourage that revival. A fight around the Dock Labour Board could be a key turning point — just as the strike for recognition of the 'blue' union in the mid '50s was one of the pivots of the start of a prolonged wave of industrial militancy that lasted, with ebbs and flows, for twenty years.

Support the dockers in their fight to defend the National Dock Labour Board!

Can the workers rule from jail?

LETTERS

Philip Ward (Letters, SO 382) raises several interesting questions about the USSR, concluding that SO is "heading down a dead end" since its break with the 'orthodox Trotskyist' position, to which Phil adheres, that the USSR is a bureaucratised workers' state.

His first criticism, that SO has not debated the 'orthodox' position but merely caricatured it, is unfair. We defended the 'orthodox' position for many years. We have rejected it because we no longer find it convincing.

Phil objects that we say "defencism = nuke western workers". In fact he quotes from one of our comrades who still supports 'defencism' and who was objecting to other Trotskyists' versions of 'defencism'!

Beyond that, Phil argues three main points:

1) State capitalist/bureaucratic collectivist analysis cannot explain 'problem cases' (Mozambique, Angola) any better than 'workers' state' analysis can. Fair enough, but you could invert the complaint.

What certainly is true is that the working class played absolutely no independent role in the Angolan or Mozambican revolutions. Did it then in the Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban, etc?

Phil's international tendency replies with a resounding Yes. The working class was present in the Chinese revolution, for example, via a 'deformed workers' party' — Mao's CP.

The Maoist party was in reality a peasant-based movement that repressed the working class. To describe such a movement as a 'workers' revolution' reduces the working class to a spiritual presence, expressed terrestrially in any old social class that comes to hand.

No problem Phil points to in our position could be as serious as this one. And this is our main point — not that we have solved the problems, but that the 'solution' offered by 'orthodox' Trotskyism poses worse problems.

Does our position mean that 'radical' Stalinists like the Philippines CP are logically worse than old-fashioned tankies? Not necessarily. We can, after all, distinguish between different bourgeois movements, and do so concretely. Our position does, however, help to avoid the illusions in radical Stalinism that the Mandel current has managed to have so repetitiously. Turn it around: does Phil's position mean that Pol Pot's Cambodian CP is better than the workers' movement in France and Italy?

2) Phil supports USSR withdrawal from Afghanistan from the point of view of the world working class, but considers it against the interests of the Afghan masses. This however is not the view, it would seem, of the Afghan masses, and it is beyond me why basic Marxist principles on the right of nations to self-determination should be rendered irrelevant by the backwardness of that nation and the allegedly proletarian character of its oppressors.

3) Phil argues that without the Bolshevik revolution, Russia today might be a neo-colony like Turkey, and its advances prove the pro-

gressiveness of its property relations. But (a) Russia before 1917 was a rapidly-developing imperial power, and I find Phil's speculation unconvincing not to mention at odds with his own presumable theory of imperialism; and (b) North Korea is not more advanced than South Korea, rather the reverse.

Finally, 'negativism' and 'formalism' are charges I would throw back, in triplicate, at Phil and his co-thinkers. He asks rhetorically, "What happened to the world balance of class forces since (1917)?" Phil presumably thinks things are more favourable to the working class now, one third of the world being proletarian. That is formalism for you.

For certain much remains to be discussed, but ditching the perverse absurdity that various countries are secretly ruled by a working class whose best fighters are in prisons or lunatic asylums is a precondition for a serious discussion.

Clive Bradley
South London

Charter 88

My thanks to Martin Thomas for warning me I'm being taken for a ride by the Democrats for signing 'Charter 88'.

I wasn't actually planning to drop all my labour movement work as a result, and I did actually think it might act as a spur towards the kind of working class-based campaign that Martin wants.

It's all very well Martin saying the labour movement should launch its own campaign, should have launched one long ago — it isn't and it didn't.

'Charter 88' has attracted more than the Establishment that Martin derides. My selection of signatories would include Duncan Campbell, Billy Bragg and Neal Ascherson (whose praises 'Press Gang' was singing not so long ago).

If a campaign to defend, extend and safeguard civil liberties is timely (some would say more timely than debating whether Eastern Europe is bureaucratic collectivist or deformed workers' state), then 'Charter 88' can't be ignored just because it's not perfect. It's where the current focus for these important issues lies.

The chance is there at this stage in the Charter campaign to argue for it to adopt a clause calling for workers' rights to organise, strike and picket — key demands which Martin is quite right to insist upon. And to use the Charter as a means of getting a political debate in the labour movement.

In my view Socialist Organiser does suffer from the kind of "normative" viewpoint referred to by Philip Ward in issue 382. The correctly developed theoretical standpoint is used too often as a yardstick for slugging off what is actually happening as a result of other people's efforts.

Sales of the paper would improve if this attitude was tempered by a transitional approach outlining how to relate in a positive, practical and critical fashion to these other initiatives. Otherwise the paper comes across too often as "holier than thou".

Ian Hollingsworth
Salisbury

There's no ruling class in USSR

Stan Crooke takes issue with one element of our recent arguments on the Eastern Bloc, contending that the bureaucrats are not a ruling class. (Part 3 of Vladimir Derer's article has been delayed and will appear next week.)

A Marxist analysis of society proceeds from, and in fact is, an analysis of the means whereby surplus labour is extracted from the immediate producer.

Marx spelt it out in 'Das Kapital': "The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element..."

"It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers...which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding political form of the state."

There can be only two possible regulators for the supply and extraction of human social labour: direct social regulation (either 'customary' as in feudalism, or conscious as in communism) or the blind workings of the price-form (ie. where the product of social labour has the commodity form and is an exchange value, as in capitalism). In relation to the Eastern Bloc states the problem — both for those attempting an analysis and also for the bureaucracies attempting to rule — is that neither of these two possible regulators operates.

The former (direct social regulation) could operate only on the basis of socialist democracy. Conscious regulation of human labour (ie. planning) is possible only in a situation of free association of the immediate producers. Such circumstances manifestly do not pertain in the Eastern Bloc states. Hence the impossibility of such a

regulator functioning in these states.

The latter (the blind workings of the price-form) could operate only where labour power is a commodity. But for the labour power to be a commodity in the Soviet Union (or anywhere else) it would have to be bought and sold on a labour market, and the wage paid would have to be in return for labour-time.

Such circumstances manifestly do not pertain in the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries. Workers can move around the country, within limits, but this is not the same as the existence of a labour market; and what the worker receives in the pay packet might be a "wage" in name, but in reality, given the secondary and limited role played by money in the Soviet economy, it is more akin to a ration card for withdrawing from the net product produced.

In other words, and put more plainly:

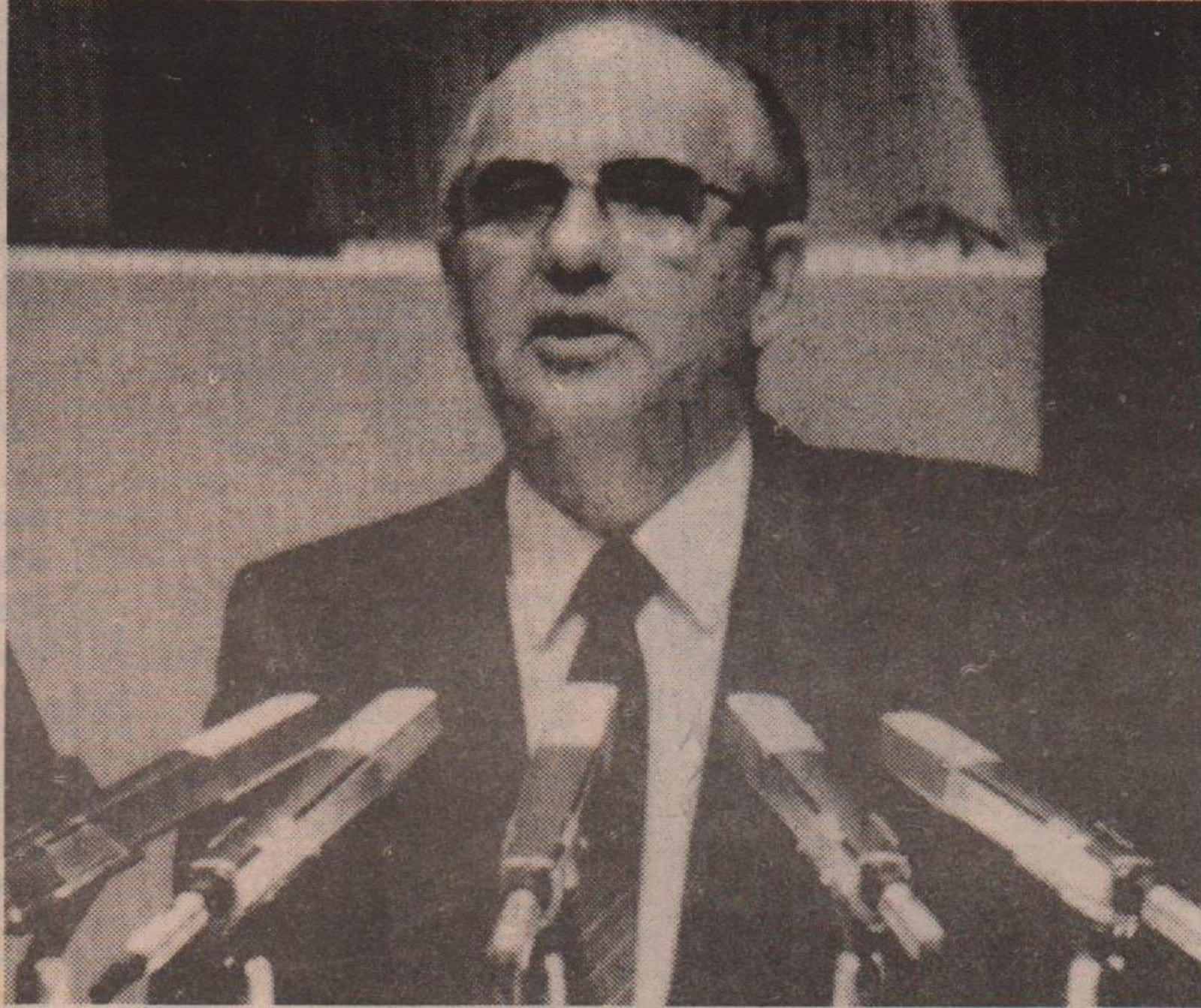
a) Production in the Eastern Bloc states does not take place on the basis of a plan. There cannot be a plan because there is no democracy. (It is true that orders are given, and that some are partially obeyed, after a fashion. But giving commands about production is something different from the planning of production).

b) Production in the Eastern Bloc states is not governed by the workings of the capitalist "free market". This cannot be the case because there is no market (or any other of the categories of capitalism) in these states.

This explains much about the features of the Eastern Bloc states — the atomisation of the working class, the acute instability of the bureaucracies, the low quality of Eastern Bloc products, the constant failure to meet the "plan" targets, the inherent problems in the introduction of new technology, etc., etc. However, the point at issue here is what the above means with regard to the existence or otherwise of a "ruling class" in the Eastern Bloc states.

Just as the defining feature of society is how unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producer, so too, it logically follows, the defining feature of a ruling class (ie. what makes a group of people a ruling class in reality and not just in name) is control over the surplus product.

It is control over the surplus product which is the crucial category,



Gorbachev: no control over surplus product

not oppressiveness (all ruling classes are oppressive; but oppressiveness in itself does not make the agents of oppression a "ruling class") nor "ownership of the means of production" (the belief that "ownership of the means of production" is the criterion of a "ruling class" is a Stalinist invention; Marx himself never said any such thing).

Given that the Stalinist bureaucracy does not, and cannot, exercise control over the surplus product, it cannot be a "ruling class" in any Marxist sense. The individuals who constitute the bureaucracy have no control over the surplus product as individuals. Nor does the bureaucracy collectively have control over the surplus product.

The individual capitalist has control over a share of the surplus produce of society because, by definition, he/she disposes of capital. The situation of the individual bureaucrat in the Eastern Bloc states is quite different. He/she cannot dispose of state property for their own immediate gain because it is not theirs to dispose of. He/she cannot decide what a particular enterprise will produce because (at least nominally) this is decided upon by the "plan".

He/she cannot even act in line with the "plan" because of the fictional nature of the latter. As an individual bureaucrat (in contrast to the position of the individual capitalist) he/she therefore exercises no control over the surplus product.

But the bureaucracy collectively does not exercise control over the surplus product either. As explained above, neither of the two possible regulators for the supply and extraction of human labour function in the Eastern Bloc states. The "plan" does not give them control of the surplus product because, in the absence of democracy, there is no plan.

Nor can the bureaucracy exercise control over the surplus product through market mechanisms, given that these are absent — at least at the moment — from the Eastern Bloc states, and given that the function of money in the Eastern Bloc states, insofar as it has a function at all, is different from its function in capitalism.

In the "system" in the Eastern Bloc states as it exists at present, there is no way that the bureaucracy could gain control over the surplus product:

a) Planning could be introduced only at the expense of the very existence of the power and privileges

of the bureaucracy, and is thus incompatible with the existing set-up.

b) Sheer terror might have allowed for a certain primitive and low-level industrialisation to take place in the Soviet Union, but, in contemporary more technologically advanced society, could not enable the bureaucracy to gain control over the surplus product.

c) Offering "incentives" to the workforce is no solution either; offering more pay to workers in a society where money has little or no meaning is no "incentive" at all; offering more consumer products to workers in a society where such products are virtually guaranteed not to work properly is likewise no "incentive".

The "system" in the Eastern Bloc states is therefore a historical blind alley. It is a historical blind alley in which the ruling stratum, whilst striving to become a ruling class, can never actually become one, because the "system" over which it presides is one which precludes the possibility of it ever achieving that control over the surplus product which is the criterion of a ruling class.

Only in a vulgarised and pseudo-Marxist sense could the Stalinist bureaucracy be termed a "ruling class". Exemplary of this vulgarised and impressionistic approach are the "bureaucratic collectivist" theories of, amongst others, Rizzi and Burnham.

For Rizzi, the bureaucracy was a "ruling class" because it controlled the means of production and behaved as if it owned them: property in the Soviet Union was nationalised, but the "true owners" of this nationalised property was the bureaucracy/"ruling class", given that it held state power. Thus, Rizzi concluded, the surplus value squeezed out of the direct producers went to the new exploiting class en bloc.

Rizzi's starting point was at least basically correct. He quoted the Marxist method for the analysing of society, as outlined in 'Das Kapital' and declared: "We too completely agree that the intimate secret of the social edifice is revealed in the economic form in which surplus value is extracted from the immediate producers."

His shortcoming was to fail to recognise that the bureaucracy collectively did not exercise that control over the surplus product which is the hallmark of a ruling class. (It was an easier mistake to make in the 1930s than now: the Soviet Union was being industrialised in the thirties, and therefore it easily seemed to be the case that it did exercise

control over the surplus product). Burnham's version of "bureaucratic collectivism" was a vulgarised version of a vulgarised version of a class-analysis of the Soviet Union. His definition of a "ruling class" was: that "group of men that controls the chief instruments of production". Such control manifested itself in the ability to deny others access to the means of production, and preferential treatment in the distribution of the products of the means of production. This convenient definition allowed Burnham to declare that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union (and its alleged variants in Italy and Germany) was a new "ruling class".

Burnham's intention was to "prove" that Stalinism/fascism/the American 'New Deal' were really all the same thing, ushering in the epoch of a new "ruling class" in history. In an attempt to achieve his goal he thus had to come up with a definition of "ruling class" broad enough to cover Stalinists, fascist, and American managers. His main work, 'The Managerial Revolution', was thus a book written backwards: having decided in advance upon the existence of a new "ruling class", Burnham then sought the "proof" to back up his initial unfounded allegation. Others, more recently, have pursued a similar approach.

Trotsky himself never really took up Rizzi's arguments about a new "ruling class" in the Soviet Union. (Burnham's book was not published until after Trotsky's death). His attention focused more upon the conclusions which flowed from Rizzi's argument than upon the actual accuracy of this argument with regard to the situation in the Soviet Union itself.

Trotsky dismissed Rizzi's arguments ("We see no reason for following in the footsteps of a writer who has obviously lost his balance.") because, if correct, they would have meant that socialism was off the immediate agenda and that the working class had lost its revolutionary potential for the current epoch.

Insofar as Trotsky refers, in passing, to the idea of the bureaucracy becoming a "ruling class", it is to deny such a possibility: "Symptomatic of his oncoming death agony, by the sweep and the monstrous fraudulence of his purge, Stalin testifies to nothing else by the incapacity of the bureaucracy to transform itself into a stable ruling class."

This assessment is not negated by Trotsky's proposition that "either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society. If the second prognosis proves to be correct, then, of course, the bureaucracy will become a new exploiting class."

But the Eastern Bloc states of today are manifestly not a "new exploiting society" and nor, therefore, has the Stalinist bureaucracy become a "new exploiting class". The Stalinist bureaucracy remains an abhorrent relapse, dragging any society over which it holds sway ever deeper into a historical blind alley.

It is this which constitutes the "mere technicality" which prohibits calling the bureaucracy a "ruling class". Those who today seek to attach such a label to the bureaucracy can certainly find precedents for their efforts in the "bureaucratic collectivists" of the 1930s, but they will not find any ideological legitimacy.

REFORM OR REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE?

A SOCIALIST ORGANISER PAMPHLET 80 PENCE

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Demonstration against seizure of Viraj Mendis. Photo Peter Walsh (Profile)

How the police seized Viraj Mendis

By Tracy Lazard

Sitting in the foyer of the church, at the end of my overnight rota slot, I looked up to see a group of figures running towards the glass front doors, their police helmets glinting in the street lights.

Under the cover of darkness, just before dawn on Wednesday 18 January, over 100 police had surrounded the Church of the Ascension in Hulme, Manchester. Viraj Mendis, a Sri Lankan whom the Government wanted to deport, had been in sacurary there for two years.

Starting the alarm, the first step of our plan in the event of a raid I ran upstairs shaking. Viraj, still dazed from sleep, opened the reinforced door of the tiny sacristy, (his home for two years).

We waited, door bolted, alarms ringing. We knew this was it. Viraj handcuffed himself to the radiator while the police shouted "Open up, we want Mendis". The police began to literally tear the door down, using hydraulic jacks.

All we could do was stand there as the door, the door frame and part of the wall were ripped away. Two policewomen grabbed Karen and me, our arms held behind our backs, and about ten police officers encircled Viraj who was crouched on the floor next to the radiator.

Cutting his hand cuffs, they proceed to drag him out — all 10 of them were needed — down the

stone steps to one of the twenty police vans that waited outside.

A police convoy drove from Manchester to Pentonville Prison in North London in less than 2 hours down the hard shoulder of the motorway. Viraj was forced to spend the second night in prison handcuffed to a chair, the light permanently on, in his underwear.

He was taken to Gatwick on Friday morning and deported at 12.45 back to Sri Lanka.

There he is in danger of death from extreme nationalists in the majority Sinhalese community. They have already assassinated many leftists who, like Viraj, support the Tamil minority.

In the three days from the kidnapping to the deportation on Friday 20th there were demonstrations throughout the country — a non-stop 24 hour picket outside Penton-

ville Prison, a sit-down march of 3,000 people in Manchester, demonstrations at 10 Downing St, Gatwick, Bristol, Birmingham. 800 council workers walked out in Manchester and Newcastle. There were 10 arrests during these protests.

Viraj has helped 20 other people threatened with deportation, and all of them have won the right to stay in this country. The Tory government simply could not bear a successful black political militant. Viraj joins 50 black people a week who are deported from this country.

Viraj did not get anything like a fair court hearing. Not since 1985, has any court allowed evidence about Sri Lanka to be heard in relation to the case. That evidence includes the disappearance of 20,000 people and political murders are counted by the hour.

Viraj — and countless other refugees faced with deportation — can have only 'procedural' issues examined in court.

The decision to raid the church was made at Cabinet level in the full knowledge that negotiations to get Viraj into a third country were taking place. The Cabinet knew that a visa application by Viraj was at the Danish Embassy. Denmark has a far more liberal policy on refugees than Britain.

Home Secretary Douglas Hurd refused to extend the time for 3rd country visa negotiations. He knew no-one especially in Viraj's position could find another country to accept them in a single day.

Why didn't Neil Kinnock utter one word against the actions of this government? Why was the Labour leaders' only response a tepid criticism of the Tories in the *Guardian* by Roy Hattersley — after the event.

The demand for an end to all deportations and immigration controls must be taken up in both wings of the labour movement now: not in some tokenistic way but in day-to-day practice, whole heartedly, consistently and militantly. For every person deported, hundreds await the same fate.

Join the national demonstration against the deportation of Viraj Mendis, and all those threatened with deportation, on Saturday 4th February at Albert Square, Manchester at 12 noon. Don't let this government win! The fight goes on!

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 and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own anti-socialist bureaucracies.

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

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and gays.

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

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.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.

WHERE WE STAND

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

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under

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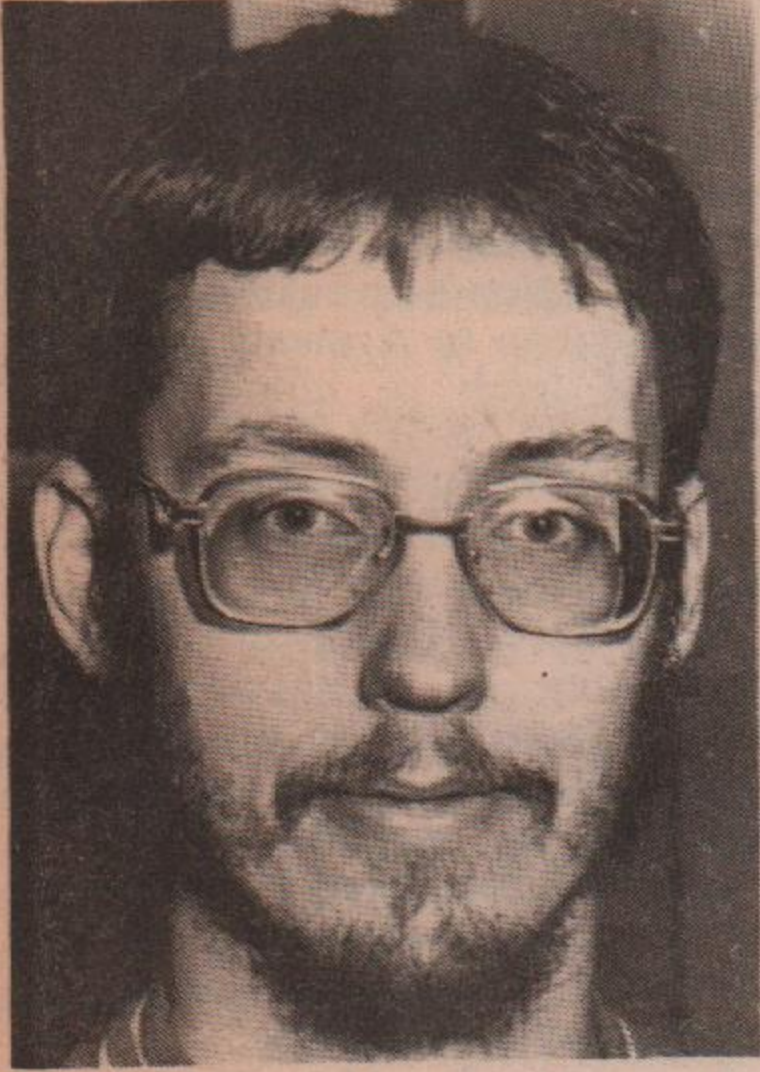
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Smoke puts lives at risk

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN



The evidence against enforced (passive) smoking continues to mount.

US Surgeon-General Dr Everett Koop says that some 19,000 people in the USA die each year from lung cancer and heart disease as a result of enforced breathing of other people's smoke.

This figure could probably be doubled by deaths due to lung diseases. Koop estimates that some 2,500 children die each year because of their parents' smoking, mostly due to pneumonia.

Speaking at the International Symposium on Cancer Research and AIDS in Venice, Koop said: "If you value your child's life and health, don't smoke."

Smoking is the cause of half of all strokes in people under 65 and the cause of nearly a third of all cancers.

On the plus side, Koop told the conference that a third of companies in the US have banned smoking at work and have the right to insist that new employees do not smoke. Many pay for employees to follow smoking withdrawal programmes.

Children are also affected by parents' smoke in Britain. A survey shows that children of smoking parents are about a third more likely to have time off school ill, while smoking children have a three times higher rate of absence than non-smoking children of non-smoking parents.

The British Medical Association has called on the government to take action to protect people from enforced smoking but, judging by the latest furore centred on Edwina Currie (but apparently nothing to do with her), the government will do little.

The row concerned the wish of European Health Ministers to put a blunt warning on cigarette packets — "Smoking causes cancer". Currie was said to have agreed to do this, thus upsetting her boss, the Orwellianly named "Health Secretary", who thought it might upset the tobacco companies.

In fact, Currie was already off the case, being replaced by "Health Minister" David Mellor, who no doubt knows that the health of the Tory Party's bank balance depends largely on "donations" from the tobacco companies.

Rebel without a movement

CINEMA

Bruce Robinson reviews 'Bird', a film about the life of Charlie Parker

Modern jazz was born in New York in the mid-1940s. Charlie Parker was one of the small group of musicians who headed the 'bebop revolution', a radically new way of playing jazz after the swing big bands of the '30s.

Not only was he a virtuoso on the alto saxophone, his style of playing inspired and moulded several generations of players on all instruments.

Yet the music is only part of his story. Parker died aged 34 in 1955. From the age of 14 he was a heroin addict, with all that entails. Any film on 'Bird' has to come to terms with the contrast between the musician, the split-second improviser, the man with a wide knowledge of classical music and literature, the warm friendly, childlike man, and the junkie, often callous to his friends.

He was sometimes unreliable and unable to perform, self-destructive, yet at the same time he was aware of the effects that heroin had on him and concerned that followers of his music might emulate him.

In this film Clint Eastwood tries to tell the story as it was. He starts from Bird's attempt to commit suicide in 1954, following the death of his baby daughter while he was away from New York.

It moves forward to his death and, through flashbacks, back to his first attempts to 'sit in' with older musicians.

There are gaps in story — particularly at Parker's musical peak in the late '40s — but the film is historically accurate.

The idea of a film about Charlie Parker by Clint Eastwood reminded me of a Charlie Mingus tune, 'Gunslinging Bird' subtitled 'If Charlie Parker was a gunslinger there'd be a lot of dead copycats'. A 'biopic' depends a lot on the



Sam Wright (left) as Dizzy Gillespie and Forest Whitaker as Charlie Parker

quality of the copycats, and in this case Forest Whitaker as Bird and Diane Venora as his second wife, Chan, are both convincing lookalikes, and act well.

The problem of the music has been dealt with largely by grafting recordings of Bird's solos onto modern backing groups.

The film shows what a black jazz

musician faced in the US of the '40s and '50s — particularly one playing avant-garde music. Some of the scenes are grim comedy — Parker playing a Jewish wedding to earn a few bucks and putting his jazz phrasing into the traditional dances; a trip to the segregated South in which Parker's trumpeter Red Rodney is billed as 'Albino

Red', the blues singer, to disguise the fact (or at least pretend) that they were a racially mixed band.

Jazz musicians who used drugs were also fair game for the cops, who could threaten them with loss of their livelihood.

On top of the direct racism, Charlie Parker was particularly badly hit by the fact that he never achieved from society the recognition he thought he deserved as an artist.

At the end of 'Bird' he sees a honking 'one-note' saxophone player playing rock and roll to tremendous teenage acclaim and expresses his bitterness with his fists. When on the West Coast he is shown where the classical composer Stravinsky lives, and rings the bell at the gate. Stravinsky opens the door, doesn't know Parker and, looking worried, closes it again quickly without saying a word, symbolically shutting him out of the world of 'respected' music.

The film contrasts Parker's approach to life and music with Dizzy Gillespie's. Dizzy explains why he is determined to succeed by being reliable and making sure that he gives 'them' no excuse to destroy him. Ironically, ten years later Dizzy would travel the world sponsored by the US State Department.

In the '40s and early '50s the revolt against 'them' remained individual and artistic. In Leroi Jones' words, bebop was a cult of "deeply defined non-conformity among many young Americans". Ten years later jazz musicians could — and did — identify themselves with a mass black movement.

Charlie Parker was perhaps one of the most gifted rebels to fall victim to the suffocating conformity of the '40s and '50s.

An off-key wasteland

Edward Ellis reviews 'For Queen and Country'

For Queen and Country' is the story of a black paratrooper, Reuben, who, having served in Ireland and the Falklands, returns to his London council estate to be confronted by violence, drug-pushing and racism.

Applying for a new passport to go to France for a weekend, he discovers that under the 1981 Nationality Act he is no longer British. Although inspired by actual events, it is not a true story.

Nor does it entirely ring true. Life is just *too* bleak. The council estate where Reuben lives is not quite real: its residents can barely move for robberies, murders or kids taking smack on the walkways.

All the characters verge on stereotypes — petty unemployed thieves, gangsterland rich thieves

who've escaped the towerblocks, ex-squaddies with one leg left behind at Goose Green, a prospective girlfriend who hates the sight of guns because her ex-husband used to maim security guards with them, racist cops.

Of course, all such people exist. But 'For Queen and Country' does not have the *feel* of reality. If you compare it to the Soweto-made film 'Mapantsula', for example, this is an *outsider's* view of working class life — in this case, on the North Peckham estate. Almost — I say almost — it is a colour supplement view.

Worst of all, the central character of Reuben is played by an American. Denzil Washington was a marvellous Steve Biko in 'Cry Freedom' and bursts with screen presence. But a South London accent he does not have.

Despite a sterling effort, he comes across as a weird mix between Blackburn and somewhere maybe south of Watford. This is a shame, because it's otherwise a good performance.

I say this not out of nationalistic objection to American actors. It really does *detract* when you're worrying whether or not he will get it right.

Having said all that, 'Queen and Country' is not a bad film. Its aim is to attack the racism of British society, a racism evidenced in particular by state institutions, which even a war hero is unable to escape.

Its aim is at least to explain if not endorse the inner city riots of the early mid-'80s. The film's climax is a Broadwater Farm-type confrontation in which the desperation of Reuben's position is brought home to him.

It is a film also about friendship, centring around a touching relationship between Reuben and Fish, a now-disabled former comrade at arms.

It's good to see a film that at least aims to put across a worthwhile political message, even if its methods are sometimes a bit off-beam and even if it lacks authenticity. Worth seeing; certainly exciting; but don't expect too much.

Ford workers need international links

By Jim Denham

Major car manufacturers like Ford and General Motors are stepping up plans to concentrate production of particular models on single European sites.

At the same time, a renewed drive to increase productivity is under way, with the companies demanding revised shift patterns to allow more intensive use of plant and machinery.

An additional factor is the imminent arrival of Honda and Toyota, with plans for UK plants from which to gain a foothold in Europe for 1992. Like Nissan in Sunderland, they will be looking for single union/no-strike deals and total flexibility.

In this situation the need for a united response from motor industry unions throughout Europe, should be obvious. That's why reports that both the TGWU and MSF rejected approaches from the German union IG Metall, to jointly oppose any major

reallocation of jobs within Europe by Ford, should be of concern to all car workers.

Although European links between Ford shop stewards do exist, the leaderships of both MSF and TGWU have a poor record of pursuing international solidarity, preferring to concentrate on campaigns for import controls — a demand that can only set British workers against their overseas counterparts.

Despite the British unions' claim to have a "good working relationship" with Ford of Europe, production of the highly profitable Sierra is now being transferred from Dagenham to Genk in Belgium, where the company also intend to introduce three shift working.

Belatedly, officials of Ford's UK unions now want an urgent meeting with their continental counterparts to discuss a united response to these developments. Let's hope the TGWU and MSF have now learnt their lesson. The motor bosses work with a European-wide (indeed, worldwide) perspective: we must do the same.



Ford Halewood strikers last year. Photo Paul Herrmann (Profile)

Double act by AEU/EETPU

By Ray Ferris

Engineering bosses insist on linking a pay deal with long-term and drastic changes to working practices — and offer less than the inflation rate anyway!

The unions see Ford's 8.9% as the

going rate. They want a separate agreement to phase in a 35 hour working week.

The negotiations affect the pay and conditions of two million workers — surely a major confrontation was on the cards.

This was the situation in the engineering industry at the end of last week. Now it's all changed.

The right-wing unions, AEU and

EETPU, have used their majority on the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (Confed) to propose just the deal that the bosses wanted: a long-term pay and conditions package. They have even offered to draw up the package themselves!

Instead of looking to the militancy shown by car workers over pay and building support within the CSEU for this year's pay claim, Bill Jordan, AEU President and Confed lead negotiator, spouts about the need for an efficient, competitive and stable industry.

The bosses, of course, interpret stability as a commitment against any industrial action. It is anybody's guess where Jordan's definition differs. Hopefully this latest move will be resisted by the other unions in the Confed.

It is the latest in a series of double acts by the AEU/EETPU, which appear close to merger. As the public enquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster opened, the two union joined a 'steering' committee to press their claims, financially supported by Occidental — the company which owns the rig.

It is another reason to resist the merger — to prevent a new 'super union' in the engineering industry dominated by the politics of appeasement and surrender and based on the destruction of democracy in the AEU.

Activists within the AEU must organise to stop Jordan in his tracks. Last year a revolt among the rank and file and the AEU National Committee stopped his support for management's 'flexibility' — they must do the same again.

IN BRIEF

Activists should campaign for all-out action at Jaguar. The one-day and sectional strikes the official want are not likely to make management back down.

Pay talks at Peugeot-Talbot are still not settled. A leak to a local paper suggested bosses have proposed a 2 year pay deal worth almost 16%.

Fire-fighting officers at British airports are to be balloted for action over management attempts to end national pay bargaining.

Rolls Royce have offered 7.2% in

pay talks, following a three week overtime ban.

Vice-chancellors have offered university lecturers 3% — an offer they themselves describe as embarrassingly inadequate! It has been rejected by the lecturers' union who continue with their exams boycott.

Unions representing over 100,000 hospital ancillary workers have put in for a £15 p.w. flat rate increase. They also want a shorter working week and bigger shift allowances.

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering unions has drawn up proposals for a long-term pay deal and drastic changes to working practices in return for a cut in the working week. Bosses have yet to respond — they also want a commitment against industrial action.

British Coal have announced plans to cut 1,300 jobs in the North West, North Wales and Midlands. Management plan to cut the underground workforce by a quarter.

Lloyds Bank are to review regional pay allowances in a move

which BIFU, the banking union, fears could lead to a breakdown in national pay bargaining. BIFU have put in a 10% pay claim, including a lump sum and new scales for lower paid workers.

A conference of British and French trade unions took place at the weekend to discuss a joint response to mergers between European insurance companies.

A survey by Industrial Relations Services shows basic pay levels rising faster than for three years.

Figures have been released showing that round half of young people are given no training after their YTS finishes. Recent surveys have shown YTS to give inadequate training in the first place.

COHSE members at the Maudsley hospital, South London, have forced a management climb-down. After management backtracked over grading definitions, agreed by both sides, the union threatened to ballot for industrial action, forcing them to give in.

Workers at Jaguar are to be balloted for industrial action over this year's pay claim. Union leaders are recommending a 'yes' vote. Bosses are insisting on a 2 year pay settlement, worth around 4% a year.

That amounts to a pay cut for the next two years.

Socialists and the trade unions



A Socialist Organiser weekend school

Saturday and Sunday February 18/19
Manchester Polytechnic Students Union
Oxford Road, Manchester

For details contact Tom on 01 639 7965 or write to
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Civil service left meets

By Mike Grayson

The weekend of 21/22 January saw the national meeting of the Socialist Caucus, an organisation of left-wing activists (including Socialist Organiser supporters) in the civil service union CPSA.

We face continuing government attacks against civil service unions, with right-wing leaders in our union apparently both unwilling and incapable of starting a fightback.

A good deal of criticism was also levelled at the role of the Broad Left (dominated by supporters of the Militant), which has failed to mount the necessary campaigns amongst the membership.

The theme of the weekend was how to build the profile of the Socialist Caucus, and create a campaigning rank and file organisation. We know that we are only in the very early stages of such a project, but the need becomes clearer every day.

On policy issues, the Caucus reiterated its opposition to the merger currently under negotiation between our union and the chiefly managerial union NUCPS.

We also agreed that we should

continue the fight for reserved seats for women on our union's Executive Committee.

Although over 70% of the union's membership is female, women are consistently under-represented on the leading bodies of the union. Yet many on the left are

unwilling to go beyond talking about workplace creches and the need to have meetings at convenient times.

The Caucus aims to put out a news-sheet — The Activist — every two months, as well as regular internal bulletins for its own supporters.

Town halls round-up

The town hall write-collar union NALGO is to push for £1,200 or 12% pay increase in 1989.

A move for a flat rate increase and a campaign among the low-paid was defeated by the union leadership. The votes of ex-officio members of the National Executive Committee were used to narrowly outvote delegates supported by branches.

Birmingham City Council has dropped plans to close four old peoples homes after NALGO/NUPE campaigning. But the council still plans to chop £2 million off its social services budget.

2,000 NALGO members at Tory Westminster Council are being balloted for all-out indefinite strike action against the council's latest privatisation proposals. The result is expected by the end of the month.

Cuts by Labour-led Camden Council could close the specialist unit for abused children at Great Ormond St hospital. The council claim they have no money to pay for social workers based there.

Joint strike action by NUPE and NALGO made Greenwich Council back down over the victimisation of a black NALGO activist. There has been a series of victimisations as council management try to crack down on the workforce.

Both Haringey and Hackney Councils in London are facing budget crises. A leaked document suggests £30 million cuts planned at Hackney.

Manual workers in Tower Hamlets Council have stopped a management buy-out of the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO).

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Don't burn 'Satanic Verses'

By Eric Heffer MP

Last week Bernie Grant got up in the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting and asked the Front Bench to make its position clear on 'Satanic Verses'.

I didn't know what he was on about because he didn't say whether he was in favour of the book being burned, accommodating the Muslim fundamentalists, or not. He just didn't say.

I said that I hoped we were going to make it clear where the Party stood. This is a time when you have to stand up and be counted.

People like myself, who have very large groups of Roman Catholics and other people with very clear religious positions on abortion in their constituencies, have had to stand up and be counted against them over the years.

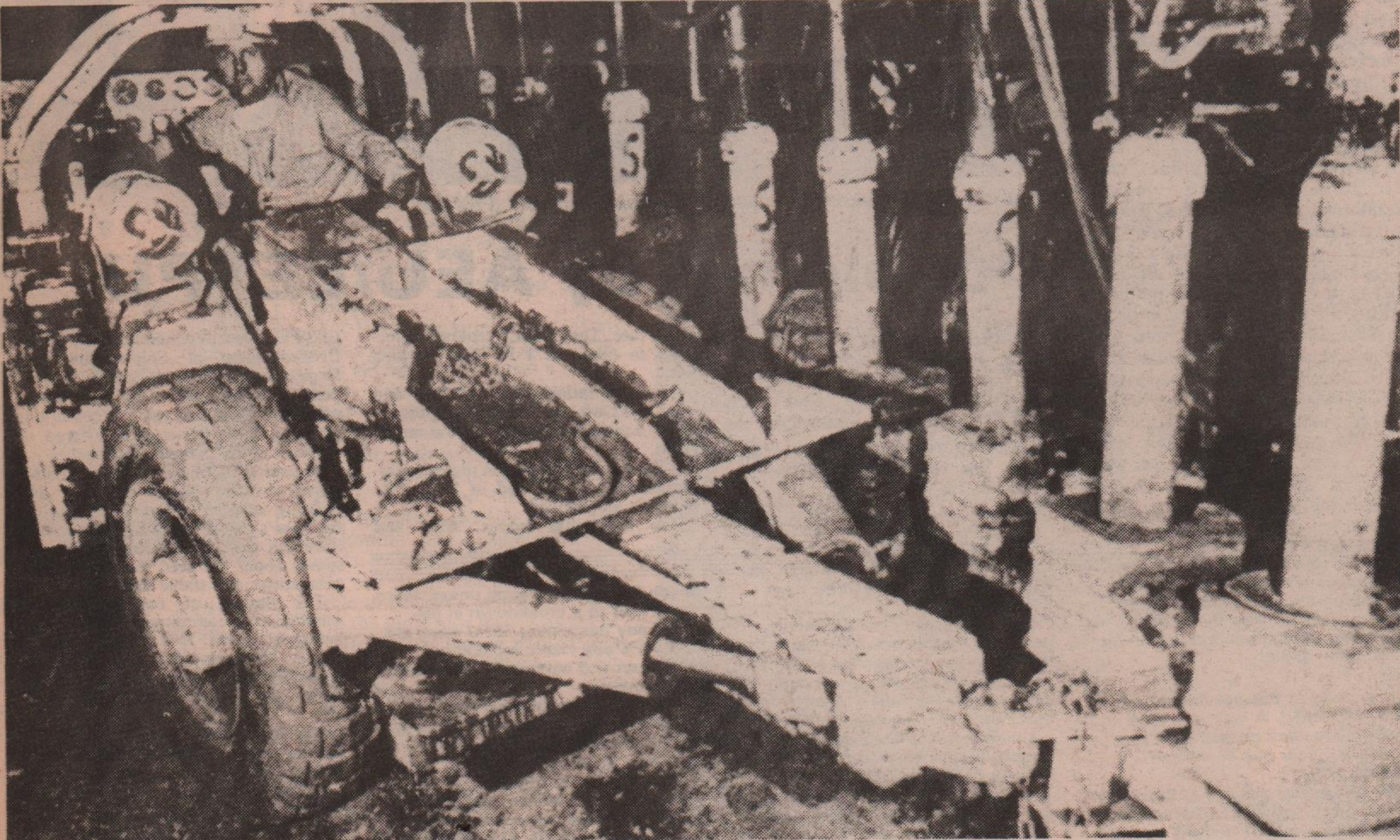
You cannot give way on these matters. I said I hoped people would be just as strong in relation to this matter.

Nobody can accept the burning of books. Once you get the burning of books on this basis — that is the beginning of the end of all civil liberties, human rights and freedom of expression.

What I hadn't know is that Max Madden MP and a few others had put down an amendment to a Tory motion calling for an extension of the blasphemy laws to other religions apart from the Church of England.

We should be for getting rid of all blasphemy laws — not extending them. I didn't know about the amendment when I spoke. I have read the amendment now, and I don't agree with it. *I am not in favour of the burning of books.*

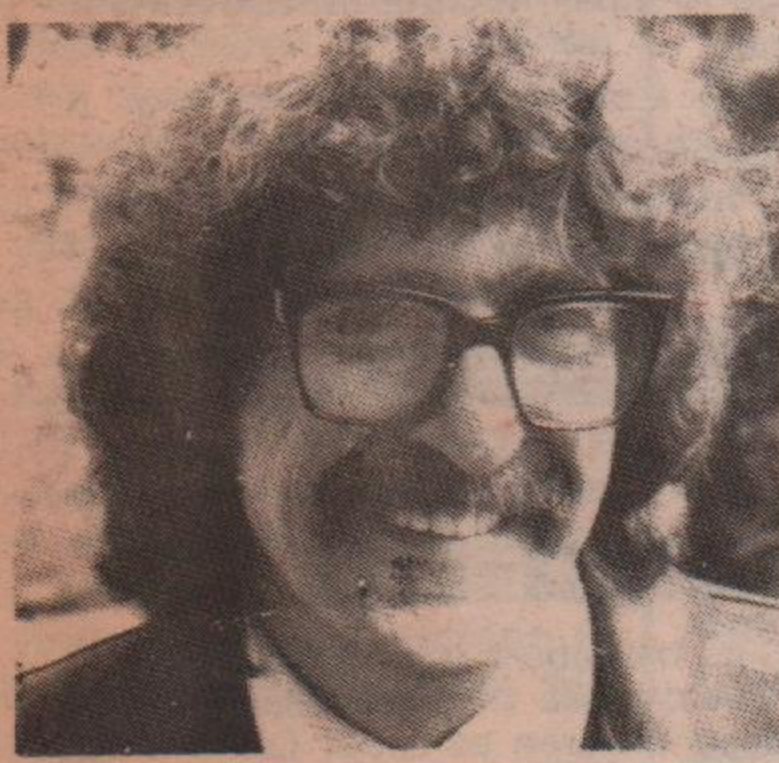
If you begin with burning books, you end with burning people. It's an ABC question for socialists.



The Tories are cutting safety provisions

Coal bosses put profits before safety

WHETTON'S WEEK



A miner's diary

The press gave a lot of publicity last week to the accident at High Moor, Derbyshire, where 10 men were trapped after a roof fall.

But it paid no attention to two serious questions raised by the incident.

Why were there 10 men in a 'blind heading'? The present regulations require a maximum of

nine men in such a situation, although exemptions can be applied for.

The limit of nine is to ensure the minimum number of men in a potentially dangerous situation. They can only get out the way they came in, behind them, and there can be flooding, fire, explosions or falls affecting this area — they need to be able to move quickly and efficiently. Obviously that is more difficult, and more are at risk, if the heading is crowded with men.

This legislation is due to be changed in April, when the maximum number allowed will be raised to 18.

If the High Moor accident had happened in four months' time there wouldn't have been 10 men in that heading — there would have been 18 lives in jeopardy. With the drive to increase productivity and prepare for privatisation, that is the way all health and safety legislation is going.

They were using permanent roof supports at High Moor when the fall happened. What would have happened if they had been using the roof bolts which are widely used in American mining, and which the Coal Board is intent on introducing here as the main roof support? They are cheaper and quicker, but whatever the Coal Board claim, there is no question that they will make the type of fall that happened

at High Moor more common.

The NUM accept roof bolts as a secondary means of support, complementing permanent rings; we are completely opposed to using them instead of permanent supports.

After High Moor, it will be more difficult for the Coal Board to 'sell' roof bolts, but I cannot imagine that will make them think twice. What will be action — as recently at one of the Selby pits, when men walked out after management tried to use roof bolts as the main support.

I have just been to a weekend school at Wortley Hall, organised by the Yorkshire NUM.

Notts NUM members were invited too. The school was on privatisation, and about getting our act together in opposing privatisation of both the electricity supply and coal mining industries.

It is better late than never, but there should have already been a campaign by the labour movement as a whole — and not just the workers in the industries directly involved — to explain the basic arguments.

Everybody is going to be affected, but where are the Labour Party leaders and the TUC? When can we start getting a principled attack on this government? Kinnock,

in his attempt to appeal to everybody, is pleasing nobody.

The media is now full of reminiscences of the 'Winter of Discontent', a term I have never cared for.

The lesson of what happened 10 years ago is a simple one: if a Labour government attacks the working class, who voted it in to begin with, then workers will — sooner or later — fight back.

My one regret at the time was that the resistance was too much in isolated pockets; there should have been much more coordination and generalised action.

If you are looking back at history there are probably more important lessons to be learnt from the experience of Order 1305, the government decree brought in during the last World War outlawing strikes. After it was imposed the number of strikes actually went up; thousands and thousands of workers struck, although it was illegal and despite the bullshit about the 'national interest' and so on, and secured real advantages.

The lesson that you cannot ban the class struggle is one we need to keep very much to the fore today. If workers could take action under those conditions nearly 50 years ago, we shouldn't be frightened about the law today.

Adam Keller

Israeli socialist
Adam Keller will be at meetings in the following towns:

Sunday 12th February — Sheffield
Monday 13th February — London
Wednesday 15th February — Sheffield and Leeds
Thursday 16th February — Newcastle
Friday 17th February — Manchester

Monday 20th February — Liverpool

Tuesday 21st February — London

Wednesday 22nd February — Brighton

Tour Launch Meeting
A Socialist Point of View
The Palestine-Israeli Conflict

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Monday 13 February
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Speakers: Adam Keller,
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