

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

### Socialist Forum Revolt in Eastern Europe

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Young Democrats

# Soviet radicals want more than reform



Gorbachev

**“For socialism,  
For free labour,  
for prosperity,  
for democracy”**

Last week Soviet workers voted against decades of bureaucratic repression and mis-management.

In Leningrad's Neva constituency Yuri Solovyev, the local party boss and a well-known Communist Party conservative, was trounced — even though he was standing unopposed.

54% of electors struck his name from the ballot paper. In the Ukrainian city of Zhitomir an independent candidate won 90.4% of the vote, beating four other candidates, all Communist Party members. And in Moscow, sacked party boss and chief reformer Boris Yeltsin won a landslide victory with 89.4% of the vote.

Soviet workers used the election to show their anger at the system which represses them. Had selection meetings not been rigged, the chances are that many more independents would have had the opportunity to stand and been elected.

The opposition and independent candidates are a mixed bunch. None of them yet campaign openly for independent free trade unions and for democratic socialism based

on workers' control.

Some of the radicals do however say things that could never have been said publicly a few years ago. Yuri Afanasaiev, a prominent academic, has written in *Pravda*: “I don't consider the society created in our country socialist, however 'deformed'...” and called for “Hope for socialism. For free labour, for prosperity, for democracy.”

Certainly the workers who voted for opposition candidates did so because they wanted freedom, democracy, equality.

Socialism was not on offer in the election. And many of the things workers are angry about are the direct result of Gorbachev's perestroika.

As Gorbachev has opened the doors to entrepreneurs and to private enterprise, as the yardsticks of profitability and cost-efficiency have been given more scope in the Soviet economy, so living standards for the vast majority have fallen. 15 million Soviet people live on the breadline. Letters to *Pravda* highlight the terrible poverty endured by pensioners, young families, and invalids. One woman wrote to *Pravda*:



Demonstration in Moscow in support of Boris Yeltsin

“In recent times they talk a lot about perestroika, but for us pensioners life has become many times worse. In the evening, when no-one is watching, I go to the garbage bins to see if someone has thrown away any old shoes.” Life for these pensioners is no better than in Thatcher's Britain.

The new cooperatives blatantly profiteer. The introduction of self-financing has meant rising prices. Inflation is rising. The slight political liberalisations introduced

by Gorbachev, though welcome, go hand in hand with attacks on workers' living standards.

This is not socialism! Socialism in the Soviet Union would mean full rights for national minorities, full working class democracy — in all realms of society. It would mean an economy run by the workers, in the interests of the workers.

It would mean full political freedom — Gorbachev's glasnost has not reached over a hundred political prisoners (on official

figures) still languishing in prison.

Gorbachev's reforms have lifted the lid a little on a society long held in an iron grip. They have created openings for people far more radical than Gorbachev.

Gorbachev's own programme is a shoddy combination of Stalinism and Thatcherism. That's a million miles away from socialism.

Socialists in Britain must support the workers and the radicals in the Eastern Bloc who are fighting for workers' liberty.



# Serb chauvinists grab Kosovo

By Lynn Ferguson

**A** sort of calm has returned to the streets of Kosovo after riots last week which left over 24 dead.

The riots broke out on 23 March in response to the agreement to a new constitution. The constitution, adopted by Serbia's parliament on 28 March, restores Serbian control to the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, which have had a considerable degree of autonomy since 1974.

The local government responded to the riots by imposing a curfew, and closing down schools, theatres, cinemas and markets. A ban was put on walking in groups of more than three.

Tanks and armoured vehicles have been a common sight in Kosovo since the strikes of Albanian miners in February, and there are some 15,000 military personnel deployed in the province.

The former party president in Kosovo, Azem Vllasi, who was arrested in the aftermath of February's strikes, is still in prison, charged with inciting the strikes in February and last November. The charge carries a sentence of at least ten years in prison, at worst execution.

The official leadership line in Yugoslavia is that the disturbances in Kosovo are part of a plot formented by the Albanian government in Tirana, aimed at the eventual incorporation of Kosovo into Albania. But this does not wash with most of Yugoslavia's non-



A Serbian soldier in Kosovo

Serbs.

The riots and strikes are more generally seen as an uprising by an impoverished and marginalised population with nothing more to lose. One in three ethnic Albanians in the province is out of work, land prices are rocketing, many peasant families cannot produce enough to subsist.

In a sense, though, for many ethnic Albanians the national question is important, the real reason for the riots is economic hardship and nationalism is only the way the discontent expresses itself.

The troubles in Serbia are having their repercussions throughout Yugoslavia. The more liberal and more prosperous states of Croatia

and Slovenia are openly voicing criticisms of the treatment of the ethnic Albanians, partly out of fear of resurgent Serb nationalism under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, who has aspirations to national leadership.

In parts of Serbia there is a boycott of Slovene goods, and some newsagents are refusing to sell

Slovene and Croatian press. Slobodan Milosevic has publicly denounced moves towards political pluralism in Slovenia.

The rioters in Kosovo are mainly young, jobless Albanians. The riots have been spontaneous outbursts of anger, of desperation — the ethnic Albanians do not seem to have any leadership.

## Did the banker bribe the Ministers?

**Ian Swindale reports from Greece on new developments in the scandal which has linked the country's Socialist Party government with a shady millionaire businessman.**

**T**he Koskotas scandal which has rocked Greek political life since the middle of 1988 refuses to die down.

On Sunday 5 March two local radio stations broadcast a cassette of a telephone conversation between Kathy Koskotas, wife of the embezzler of the Bank of Crete, and Yiannis Mandzouranis, Koskotas's former lawyer. In the phone conversation Mandzouranis admits, without actually naming names, that \$2 million in a Swiss bank account in his own name was destined for Menios Koutsoyiorgas, number two in the PASOK (Socialist Party) government of Andreas Papandreou.

On Monday 6th, Mandzouranis who, as a leading member of PASOK, was formerly general secretary to the Cabinet, was arrested, charged with receiving stolen goods, and held in custody for two days before appearing in

front of magistrates to enter a plea.

Also on Monday 6th, *Time* magazine published what it claims to be an interview with George Koskotas himself, Koskotas is still being held in a US prison awaiting extradition proceedings by the Greek government.

The interview throws some fresh light on Koskotas's background. Born in 1954 in Greece, he moved to America with his parents in 1970. Apparently while at the University of New York, he had his own stationery printed with the imprint of the University. He was fined \$200 and abandoned his studies.

Next he entered the construction business where he employed illegal immigrants. He forged national insurance and tax papers and so kept for himself money that should have

gone to the state. In 1979 he was sentenced in his absence for various offences and in 1980 he was charged with stealing \$40,000 from the government. But Koskotas had returned to Greece before he could be arrested.

Back in Greece and still only 25 years old, he started work as a clerk in the Bank of Crete. When, five years later, the Bank came up for sale, Koskotas bought it!

Koskotas's account of what happened during the next four years contains a number of spectacular claims involving leading members of the government including Andreas Papandreou himself in the embezzlement of the Bank of Crete.

According to the Koskotas, in order to create a large reserve of money, government ministers for three years ordered state enterprises to deposit money in the Bank of Crete. They were paid interest of 2-3% when the going rate of interest was 15%. The difference was paid in cash to various political figures.

In the first year Koskotas claims to have handed over 40 suitcases full of 5,000 drachma notes (£20 notes) to George Louranis, a close personal friend of the Prime Minister, who passed the money on. (Louranis is himself charged with

receiving the proceeds of a crime after two of Koskotas's bodyguards testified that they saw Koskotas take "Pampers" boxes full of money to Louranis's house).

The total amount of money passed on in this way, according to Koskotas, amounted to over three billion drachmas. Koskotas also denies to have personally delivered half a billion drachmas to Menios Koutsoyiorgas. To prevent the embezzlement coming to light, Koskotas claims that auditors in the Bank of Crete were replaced by PASOK supporters.

Koskotas further claims that it was Papandreou's idea that he should launch a paper loyal to the Papandreou family and later to buy up, one by one, the opposition papers. Koskotas in fact bought up two papers as well as launching *24 Hours*.

Andreas Papandreou has announced his intention to sue *Time* magazine for libel, and the government spokesperson has repeated the standard government response to each revelation — that internal and external forces are trying to destabilise the government and undermine the support for PASOK in the run-up to the General Elections on 18 June.

## 87 per cent say 'talk to PLO'

### WORLD BRIEFS

**A**nother opinion poll has confirmed growing support among Israeli Jews for talks with the PLO.

A survey published on 31 March showed only 13% of Israelis against talks under all conditions.

21 per cent were for talks without conditions and 66 per cent for talks conditional on the PLO recognising Israel and ceasing "terrorism".

**M**ahmoud Masarwa, an Israeli Arab, has been charged in a Tel Aviv court with sending Israeli military and police documents to the British left-wing paper *Militant*.

He appeared in court on 29 March after being held in jail since last July. Resolutions for protest can be sent to the Labour Movement Campaign for the Release of Mahmoud Masarwa, PO Box 524, London E2.

**N**icaragua's 'contra' leaders say they will go back to Nicaragua in May and take part in the elections promised by the Sandinista government for next year.

The US government, apparently fed up with giving millions to the 'contras' and getting nothing for it but atrocities and corruption, is pressing for them to return.

**N**ot only Tibetans have been protesting against the bureaucracy which rules China. According to the Security Minister there were "hundreds of

demonstrations and petitions" against rising prices and official corruption across China last year.

The Minister's conclusion was that the police must do a better job of cracking down.

Meanwhile some writers in the Government-controlled press have been calling for 'enlightened autocracy' and 'new authoritarianism' in so many words. Their models are Taiwan and South Korea.

**N**ine thousand riot police stormed the world's largest shipyard at dawn last Thursday, 30 March.

Some of the police smashed through workers' barricades, other landed from the sea at the Hyundas shipyard in Ulsan, South Korea. One thousand strikers had been occupying the yard since before Christmas, demanding better pay and conditions. Some 700 of them were arrested.

## Ulster bigots hail murderer

**M**urdering bigot Michael Stone is hailed as a hero in the latest issue of *Ulster* magazine.

"Michael Stone stood bravely in the middle of the rebel scum and let them have it," says the magazine, published by the Ulster Defence Association. Stone killed two people and injured over 50 when he attacked a Republican funeral in Milltown cemetery, Belfast.

The magazine seems to reflect a shift towards more unashamed bigotry and

violence by the UDA, a Protestant paramilitary organisation which, unlike the IRA, is legal.

In the past the UDA has rejected approaches from British fascists, but this issue of *Ulster* magazine carries a feature praising the 'Flag' faction of the National Front for mounting a counter-demonstration against a Troops Out march in London.

The magazine also has pictures of Irish Republican flute bands in Glasgow, with an appeal for people in the photographs to be identified and boastful threats to assassinate them.



# Relaunching Labour in which direction?

## EDITORIAL

Neil Kinnock says he is "relaunching the Labour Party" as the various Policy Review groups report their findings.

A campaign described as the biggest and largest ever organised by Labour outside an election has been started. There will be a special National Executive meeting on 8/9 May to discuss the reports of the Policy Review groups. The completed Policy Reviews will be published at the end of May, and Labour's national conference will not be allowed to amend them.

It's good if Kinnock's going to campaign against the Tories. 'Big and long' campaigns have been few and far between over the last 10 years.

But we've heard of few plans to mobilise labour and trade union activists against the poll tax, against unemployment, for the NHS, or in support of strikes. Kinnock's idea seems to be a *media* campaign rather than an activist one. What *policies* will Kinnock campaign on? As the Policy Review draws its threads together, the character of the "relaunch Labour Party" is pretty clear.

In a series of lectures last month, Neil Kinnock stressed, in so many words, his commitment to 'free enterprise'. Labour, he said, rejected Tory philosophy which was to let market forces rip; but Labour would only intervene when the market could not take care of long-term or community interests.



Exactly how this differs from David Owen's theory of the 'social market' we don't know. The theory does not even originate with Owen, but with West Germany's Christian Democrats (Tories).

Other 'reviewed' policies include:

- The abandonment of unilateral nuclear disarmament. The key issue, say Labour leaders, is the removal of short-range nuclear weapons from Europe.
- No commitment to restore trade union rights.

On many other issues, Kinnock's policy is vague if not right-wing. *Conference* policies are due to be ignored: no mention of lesbian and gay rights is to be made by Labour leaders for fear of an electoral backlash.

So the Labour Party is to be "relaunch" on a tepid, uninspiring basis — as left-wing MP Eric Heffer warned, as an 'SDP Mark II'.

For certain, we don't just want a return to 'traditional' Labour

values. We do want *new* policies. Kinnock's policies aren't really new — they're just dressed up.

New policies would point Labour in an entirely different direction — towards rank and file action, democracy and control. *Socialism* — control by working class people over every aspect of their own lives — should be Labour's objective.

We need to organise a Marxist left in the Labour Party to fight for that objective — to "relaunch" Labour on a different course.

Daily Express

The Guardian

DAILY MIRROR  
DAILY STAR

## PRESS GANG

### Of tiny importance

By Jim Denham

Do you really care about who owns Harrods? Do you know anybody who does? Maybe I'm just perverse, but I have to admit to finding the whole business rather less interesting than the latest doings of Ms Pamela Bordes.

For those of you who have not been following this byzantine saga (the Harrods business, I mean, not the adventures of Ms Bordes) it may be worth filling in a little background detail: ever since 1985 when the House of Fraser group (including Harrods) was bought by the Al-Fayed brothers, 'Tiny' Rowland (whose Lonrho group was prevented from buying House of Fraser by the Monopolies Commission) has been devoting his every waking hour to exposing what he believes to be a conspiracy between the Government, the DTI and the fiendish brothers, to deprive him of Harrods.

Why exactly he wants Harrods so much has never been satisfactorily explained. Anyway, last Thursday matters reached a head when the *Observer* brought out a 16-page midweek edition entirely devoted to extracts from the long-awaited DTI investigation into the Al-Fayed's purchase of the House of Fraser.

The DTI have not published the report at the request of the Serious Fraud Office which is investigating the affair. The government and the Al-Fayeds promptly slapped an injunction on the *Observer* to prevent distribution of the special edition but enough got into circulation for everyone who is at all interested to know that its lead story is about Mohammed Al-Fayed and the headline reads 'Exposed: the Phoney Pharaoh'.

*Observer* editor Donald Treford claimed this as a major scoop and pointed out that the *Observer* has quite often produced midweek editions in the past: for instance, at important points during the Second World War and in 1956 after Khrushchev's secret speech.

However, some people were not so impressed. Even Treford's former deputy, Anthony Howard — a firm supporter of the Lonrho/Rowland camp — pointed out (in the *Independent*) that the ownership of a department store doesn't exactly compare with the Second World War or Khrushchev's speech in terms of world historic significance.

And then again, there is the little point that the *Observer* is owned by Lonrho. In fact the DTI document was not secured by *Observer* journalists at all, but had been passed on to it by Rowland himself. "To those outside journalism that may seem an arcane point," writes Howard. "But given the allegation... that on this particular story the *Observer* is no more than a mouthpiece for its proprietors, it still seems to me a central one."

It turned out that even the timing of the special edition had been determined not by any journalistic considerations, but by the need for Lonrho shareholders to hear about it first at their Annual General Meeting. As Howard said: "The only explanation seems to be that Mr Rowland takes his duties to his shareholders more seriously than he views the *Observer's* responsibility to its readers."

Maybe Tiny Rowland is the victim of a massive conspiracy. Maybe the Al-Fayed brothers are charlatans and conmen. Frankly, I don't give a damn. The only matter raised by this whole affair that even vaguely excites me is the ease with which, once again, the government obtained an injunction to suppress the publication of something it finds embarrassing.

Meanwhile sales of the *Observer* continue to decline. Donald Treford should start improving the quality of his Sunday newspaper instead of bringing out ridiculous 'special editions' apparently at the whim of his proprietor.

# Naples of the North

There was no 'comic relief' on 10 March when Kirkby people heard that the Birds Eye plant was closing with the loss of 1,000 jobs. Just to rub red noses in it further, Mrs Thatcher was on hand to tell them it was tough luck.

By not being prepared to sell their labour for less than £136 a week, they have made themselves willing sacrifices on the altar of market forces.

The whole episode summed up the 'North-South Divide' in a nutshell. A Prime Minister making her first visit to Merseyside in five years. The Unilever multinational announcing the closure from a plush hotel 12 miles away from the factory. A workforce expected to choose between third world wages or a life on the dole.

If economic conditions have been improving in the rest of Britain over the past five years, they've been going from bad to worse in Kirkby. A walk around the Town Centre is enough to see how people's lives

have been affected by over a decade of economic decline.

Like their manufacturing counterparts, the major High Street retailers — Boots, Littlewoods, Woolworths, ASDA, etc. — have fled the area to be replaced by 50 pence lucky dip stalls, 'Quik-Saves' and 'pick 'n' mix' shops.

Kirkby is reckoned to be the poorest place in the country. Of the 20 most deprived local authorities it tops the list on 13 out of 15 indicators of deprivation. Unemployment stands at 23.5%, 3 out of 4 people are on state benefits, and educational attainment is the second lowest.

"Welcome to the Naples of the North" might be the appropriate motorway sign for Merseyside, except that today the South Italians are probably better off economically, and anyway they have nicer weather.

The local press have presented the Birds Eye closure as an example of trade union inflexibility. "Town sells its heart and soul for just a fiver extra a week" was just one headline. A Tory MP from the

sticks (there aren't any in the urban areas now) denounced the T&GWU as "Luddites".

Like Ned Ludd of old, the modern trade unionists continue to get a bad press. Birds Eye management gave them the choice of death by gas or death by hanging. They would have to accept 380 redundancies to keep the place open, and worsened conditions for the people who remained.

We can see the attitude of the bosses quite clearly in the statements made by Ken Skinner, the Personnel Director, who admitted that the closure decision had been made two years ago.

"Accept the Workstyle package or sign your own death warrants," said this enlightened employer. "We were simply keeping the factory open for the sake of the workforce. We are not in the business of handing out social security."

The problem for Unilever was not that Birds Eye wasn't making a profit, but that its profits weren't big enough. Unilever could extract more labour out of its Hull workforce at lower costs since 80% of them were part-timers. The rate of profitability, not the lack of it, was the major issue, together with the fact that the Kirkby plant was 30 years old and needed a lot of new investment.

Can the Birds Eye workers go anywhere now except onto the dole queue? They know that any local industrial action they take is going to mean loss of redundancy entitlement — no small thing when there simply is no chance of even a sniff at another job. They also probably realise that the chances of sympathetic action being taken on their behalf in other Birds Eye plants is very slight because the workforce there is in an even weaker position.

If they take action we must support

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

Karl Marx

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## 4 LETTERS

# Glasnost means secret police liberalism

## GRAFFITI

The former head of espionage in East Germany, General Markus Wolf, has publicly come out in favour of perestroika, and has criticised East German leader Erich Honeker for maintaining a hard-line stance.

In an interview on West German TV, Wolf, who was also second in command of the East German equivalent of the KGB until 1987, also criticised censorship in East Germany, particularly the cutting of his condemnations of Stalin's crimes in a television documentary about his father.

Wolf officially resigned for "personal reasons" in 1987. In the context of his recent remarks it seems clear that this was Stalinist doublespeak for being pushed out.

Mikhail Gorbachev's mentor, Yuri Andropov, was head of the secret police in Russia; and the Paris daily *Le Monde* has reported that the KGB opposed the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan.

The South Bank Centre in London is staging three months of cultural events to mark the 200th anniversary of the French revolution.

In 1789 the French aristocracy got it in the neck, and the banner of liberty, equality and fraternity was raised in France.

So, who has organised this event? Prominent names on the committee include La Vicomtesse Luc de la Barre de Nanteuil, Prince Jean-Louis de Favergny-Lucinge, Ruth, Lady Fermoy and Baron Philippe de Rothschild! A patron is none other than the Queen Mother.

Good grief, republican infiltration at the very heart of the British royal family? It's a funny old world.

US-style shopping malls now outstrip parks, museums and zoos as places to take the family for a day out.

Market researchers have found that families often spend as much as five

hours at a stretch in a mall.

More traditional days out such as visiting museums, zoos, or sporting events are becoming less popular.

Isn't there something a bit odd about a society where shopping is seen as a 'leisure activity'?

Shock! Horror! The integrity of the British bobby is being questioned. Those loony lefties again?

No, it's *Daily Express* readers who are losing faith in the boys in blue.

An *Express* poll asked "Do you mostly trust the police not to bend rules in trying to get a conviction?" Only half the respondents said yes — and only 11% trusted them to keep to the rules "just about always".

47% of respondents believed that corruption is not rare in their local police force.

But *Express* readers' biggest grouse is that the police are incompetent. 51% told the *Express* that they approve of vigilante-style 'Guardian Angels' grops on the London Underground.

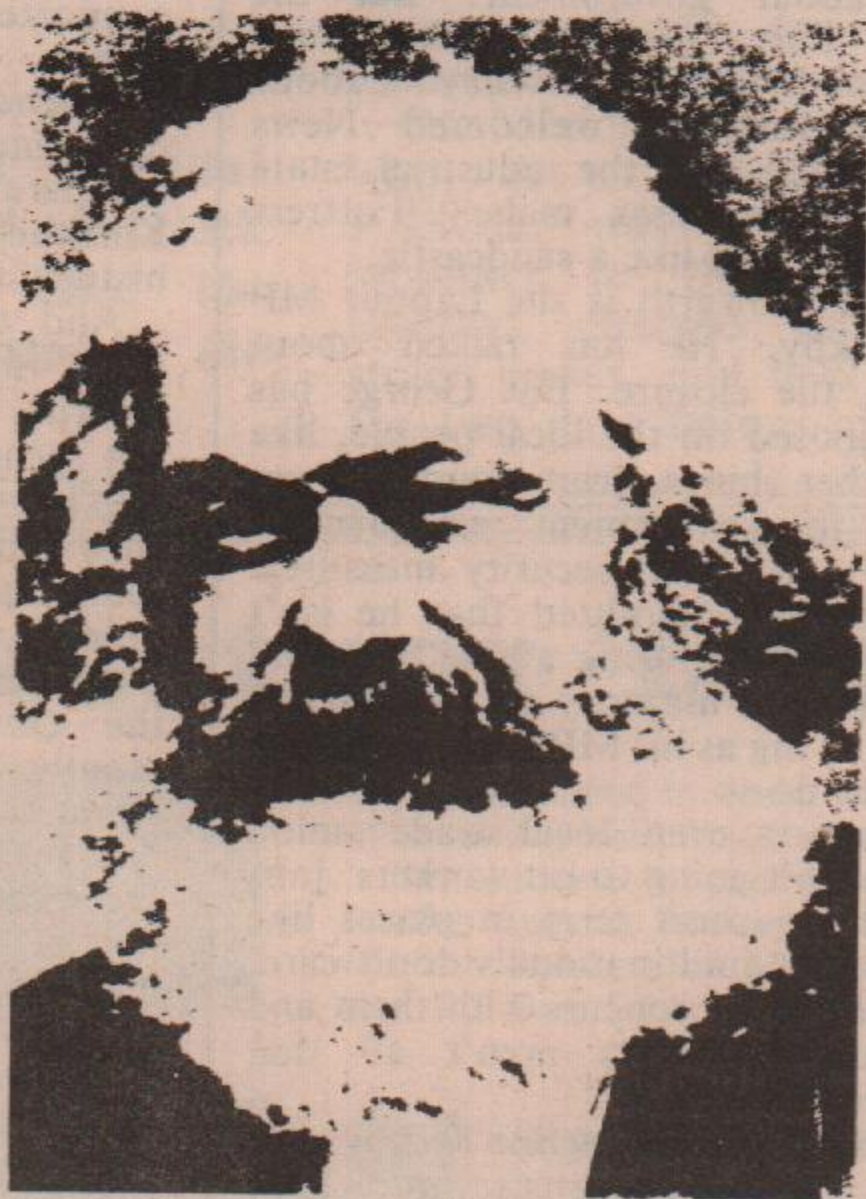
On her arrival in Zimbabwe last week, Margaret Thatcher was greeted by children waving a banner reading "Long live comrade Thatcher". I wonder what she thought of that.



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# Self defence for Afghan workers

## LETTERS

I was surprised to see Tony Dale's letter in SO393 criticising the development of SO's position on Afghanistan marked by the slogan 'Defend the Cities'.

Let's take a look at the situation. After ten years Soviet troops have left. There is civil war between Najibullah's Stalinist regime and the Mojahedin. Both sides are offering some form of 'peace'. Najibullah has offered the rebels local autonomy if they agree to end the war. The Mojahedin are besieging Kabul and the provincial capitals — in an attempt to institute an Islamic fundamentalist regime.

A Marxist approach doesn't consist of taking sides between the Mullahs and the Stalinists. Marxists have to give here and now solutions to take the weak working class forward. In Afghanistan that means a strategy for ending the civil war and building for a permanent revolution. The workers and peasants should not be fighting one another, but should turn against their Islamic and Stalinist oppressors.

Tony opposes military defence of the gains made for the women and the workers in the cities, but calls for 'political defence' instead. Crazy! What is 'political defence'? Perhaps Tony advocates a special edition of Socialist Organiser — headlined 'Please Don't Kill Us' — for Afghan workers to sell to the Mujahedin?

In fact the line between the political and the military is a fake one. Ultimately, the most pressing task for socialists in central Asia is building a workers' party that challenges the Mullahs for the political leadership of the peasantry. That can't be done if the massacres of the working class go on.

Tony says the Mujahedin have mass support. Half right. The Mujahedin is not a coherent political bloc. It is a massive, fragmented and heterogenous Islamic movement against the PDP's regime. The various factions have been unable to settle their differences, or even build a joint offensive to occupy the cities.

We must call for Afghan workers to defend their cities and their rights. Passive 'political defence' will leave them dead. We need a tactical assessment of the situation to take the workers forward.

At best we would argue for independent workers' militias to build a united front with the PDP against the Mullahs, and then to turn the civil war into a revolution. At the least, we would argue for a ceasefire or conditional surrender leading to autonomy for the various tribes fighting Najibullah's regime and for a constituent assembly.

When the Soviet troops withdrew, it looked as though the cities would fall within days. In fact the cities — filled with refugees, workers and soldiers — have held out through the Mojahedin's weakness more than because of their own strength. The class is incredibly weak, but Tony's conclusion — give up — is wrong.

Tony's Stalinophobic reaction to the



Mujahedin — a threat to the working class

PDP is understandable, if incorrect. Soviet troops were wrong to go in, and should have left, but 'Defend the Cities' is not a formula for 'Troops in'. It means workers' self organisation. It means calls for international solidarity — 'not a bullet for the Mullahs, Arm the Afghan workers!'

It means building a political current in the Afghan workers in solidarity with an international tendency fighting for workers' liberty East and West.

Some of Tony's demands — ceasefire, settlement, democratic assembly — I can agree with. But Tony fails to say what social force can carry that programme through. In 1935 Trotsky declared the idea of abstentionism as the most revolutionary of politics to be a dead one. Let's keep it that way!

Duncan Chapple  
Nottingham

# Two cheers for charity?

I was interested to read Jim Denham's comments in his Press Gang column on the charity fund raiser 'Comic Relief'. He says he has never been one for the Socialist Worker type sanctimonious approach of pointing out that such fund raising does not address the real problems.

I spent my early days in revolutionary politics with Socialist Worker and learned precisely that attitude towards charity. We would sit stern faced in the pub as anyone came round rattling a tin for the deaf, the blind, orphans, a body scanner or whatever, and refuse to contribute.

To anyone with us who didn't understand our attitude we would explain that the state should provide for these people; that they shouldn't have to rely on charity.

But millions of people give millions of pounds each year to charity. In many ways it is big business — but it does show that there is a human desire to help other people you may never see or meet.

Capitalism has in many ways usurped this desire to its own ends, getting basic needs met on the cheap and having a sort of pressure valve that helps to shift the blame when the state doesn't provide. The best example here would be the recent limit placed on the DHSS Social Fund by the government and the suggestion that people should seek

charity where the fund won't meet needs.

Of course we don't think that charity should be relied on to meet needs, there should be state provision that is good and reliable. But meanwhile charity exists, is relied on by people and is widely contributed to.

Certainly the SW attitude is wrong. And it seems to me that Lenny Henry's attacks on government cuts, mentioned by Jim, would have had more impact on people watching Comic Relief precisely because he was trying to raise money for charity.

So what should our attitude be?

Rob Dawber  
Sheffield

# Single mothers beware!

## WOMEN'S EYE

By Rose Mulheran

Single mothers beware! If you are a single mother, and living on income support, you're soon likely to get a letter from you local DHSS office, calling you in for an interview.

The government you see, has embarked upon a new crackdown. Too many 'unmarried mothers' are letting men off the hook. Too many men are getting away with not supporting the fruit of their loins. Too many bastard babies are a burden on the ordinary upright taxpayer.

So — single mothers are to be summoned into DHSS offices for interrogation about the paternity of their offspring. If you know who the father is, then the DHSS can search him out and force him to pay

up maintenance.

After all, why should society support children?

Your Women's Eye correspondent was subjected to just such an ordeal a couple of weeks ago. Having two children 'by different fathers' with both of whom I neither have, nor wish to have, any contact, the situation was obviously difficult. To avoid having to chase up the men involved, you have to say 'I don't know' who the fathers are. In their eyes you're either thick, a slag, or lying.

As it happened, my interviewer was a reasonably sympathetic young woman, rather embarrassed about the whole thing. Mind you, the fact that I was pretty stropy and outraged probably helped me — and may have intimidated her a bit.

She didn't push too much. But 'for the records' she had to have a story. "Well", she said, "would it be all right if I write 'she went to a party, met a man, sexual intercourse took place, she never saw him again'?"

That for my first child. The same story was repeated for my second, stretching the bounds of credibility

somewhat.

For me the experience was not too bad. I knew my rights, I was determined to stick by my story, I didn't end up with a vindictive interviewer. Still the experience was humiliating. For many other women forced through this process it will be embarrassing and possibly downright intimidating.

If you find yourself called in, and do not want to end up suing some one-night-stand for maintenance my advice is to be brazen. Do not let them bully you into admitting anything.

Simply say you do not know who the father is, and stick by it. However unbelievable your story is, they can't do anything unless you name names.

They can't stop your benefit unless they have a name so don't worry about that. And if you need any added inspiration, just think what a crap system it is that is prepared to put women through the mill just to save a measly few quid a week — a pittance in terms of the government's expenditure, a lot to your average single parent.

And remember, we have a right to our financial independence.



# Students need left unity

## SOCIALIST STUDENT

By Dave Barter

**T**here was a shift to the right at the National Union of Students' Easter Conference. But the left had some significant successes, too.

The National Executive was condemned for its failure to lead any rank and file activity against the Tories' proposals for student loans. It was mandated to call a weekday demo this term against the Tories' plans. It must be forced to act on that mandate.

Perhaps most significant was the successful blocking of the Executive majority's plan for the abolition of NUS Winter Conference and its replacement by a powerless talking-shop.

Instead, Conference backed Socialist Student's proposal for democratisation of NUS Conference, defence of accountability, and improvement of rank and file involvement, especially of those who tend to be pushed out and under-represented in NUS's structures.

One part of the Executive's plans for centralising control within the NEC was passed: constitutional changes to allow central control over the finances of NUS Areas, which can be used for political control by the Executive.

In recent years a number of NUS Area organisations have been major bases for campaigning activities and development of under-resources student unions — particularly in the Further Education sector. Now they will no longer be accountable to their affiliated student unions — they can be transformed into local branch offices for a London-based NUS Executive.

We will have to organise for the next conference to prevent these constitutional changes getting the necessary two-thirds majority, and to make sure that a system of adequate central financing for Areas is instituted without undermining of Area's political autonomy.

The elections for NUS Executive marked a serious breakdown of the Labour Students bloc that has held control in NUS since 1982 — a breakdown in favour of the right-wing.

Although they won some full-time positions, the official Labour Students slate proved unable to win more than two positions in the election for 12 part-time members of the Executive.

Socialist Student also won two positions, securing the re-election of Emma Colyer and Paul McGarry.

Right-wing 'independent' Cosmo Hawkes won National Secretary, narrowly beating Socialist Student supporter Liz Millward by 59 votes. Socialist Student supporter Steve Mitchell narrowly lost the vote for Vice-President Further Education Union Development, also to an 'independent'.

The failure of the Labour Students leadership of NUS to run effective campaigns on any basic student issues has led to an 'anti-political' backlash, particularly in the larger universities and polys.

Since 1987, when the Labour Students leadership faction lost their majority on NUS Executive, they have retained control through an alliance with the Communist Party. They have increasingly proved unable to win the arguments at NUS Conference. They depend

more and more on NUS's right-wing to help them beat the left.

Now the drift among the leading supporters of the former 'Democratic Left' is towards pulling Labour Students out of NUS and letting the right-wing take power while Labour Students concentrates on building for the next election.

NUS faces the prospect of depoliticisation and an increase in anti-political witch-hunting.

Against this background Socialist Student has launched an initiative for left unity in NUS.

The left in NUS is unnecessarily divided, with factional spite blocking unity in action on basic

issues like loans and defence of education. Outside of Socialist Student, there has been very little serious attempt by left groups to face up to the present situation in NUS.

In the elections, the Militant and SWP were only interested where they had their own candidates, and seemingly unconcerned at the prospect of Labour Party members being beaten in other contests by right-wing 'independents'.

The Left Unity Conference in Sheffield on 22 April is thus crucial if the left is to face up to its tasks. It must be supported and built by every serious left activist in NUS.

## Big support for left unity

**A**t the Easter conference of the National Union of Students a fringe meeting called by Socialist Student for left unity attracted about 300 people.

It showed the desire of many rank and file student unionists for the left to get together and discuss how we can unite over the major issues facing the movement. We must beat back the attacks by the Tories through loans, poll tax, tuition fees and voluntary membership and also the threat from the right within NUS itself from the likes of Cosmo Hawkes and Tim Clarke.

The National Organisation of Labour Students has shown itself to be incapable of heading off either of these threats. Indeed large sec-

tions of NOLS have embraced the NUS right wing with open arms and seem happy to hand over the student movement to them.

The left, however, has been unable to respond to the Labour Student leaders' ineptitude and unwillingness to take on the Tories. It has for far too long allowed itself to be sidetracked into petty dogmatic squabbling, rather than providing the student movement with the kind of fighting leadership that it needs.

Over 300 people have now signed the letter calling for a conference for left unity. The conference is in Sheffield on 22 April at the University Student union.

The close of registration is 18th April. To register write to 'Left Unity' c/o Socialist Student, 133 Ashford Street, Stoke-on-Trent.

## Support university teachers' pay fight!

By Paul McGarry

**O**ver the next two weeks the Association of University Teachers (AUT) is balloting its members on its exam boycott.

The union's Council recently decided to ballot after rejecting a 7% pay increase from university bosses.

Some universities say, they will award unclassified degrees if exams are not taken. Others are awarding degrees on the basis of past work, and some — such as Leeds and Nottingham — may postpone exams.

The bosses' basic argument is that there is no extra money available in the system after getting an additional £60 million from the government to pay for increasing the offer from 3% to 7%.

The government has come out clearly against any more cash being made available. Indeed, Thatcher has hinted that AUT members should be dismissed for breaking contracts. The AUT insists the money is available.

Caught in the middle of the dispute are 70,000 final year students who should be taking exams over the next few months. Student Unions have called on the lecturers' union to call off its action; the NUS Executive, after clearly supporting the lecturers, has called for binding arbitration and said that exams should be set but not marked until the dispute has ended. NUS also says the government should underwrite the cost of any pay award.

Students must support those

taking industrial action against the Tories. But for the lecturers to win they must gain the support of the students. A number of things can be done.

Firstly, a commitment from the AUT to break government contracts and set exam papers but not mark them. That would give them a level of workers' control over the dispute.

Second, the AUT can link the pay claim to issues such as student loans, privatisation and course closures, uniting with students and



The Labour Students leadership of the National Union of Students has given no lead to student militancy — and the result is that the right is gaining ground. Photo: Ian Swindale

## Polys to go to market

By Liz Millward

**A**pril the first this year was a cruel joke for Local Authorities.

They lost control of the Polytechnics and big Higher Education Colleges to government-appointed quangos — all in the name of greater freedom.

Local people have effectively lost the small amount of say they had over how the college in their town is run. The Tories have set up the colleges as businesses subject to market forces.

And 'market forces' have been shown time and time again to be grossly unfair to the working class, black people, women, mature

other workers against the Tories.

Thirdly, rank and file AUT members can link up with students and Student Unions to launch a campaign aimed at winning the support of those students taking final exams.

Joint NUS/AUT meetings should be organised in every department at the start of next term. Joint leaflets explaining the issue need to be produced and specific problems faced by overseas students, for example, need to be considered.

Labour Clubs need to be made

central to this campaign and should be taking motions to general meetings in support of the AUT.

If the AUT is to win quickly, it should also look to linking up with Public Sector Higher Education unions such as NATFHE who could be striking over pay and conditions following 'independence day' on 1 April when polys and Higher Education colleges formally become independent of Local Education Authorities.

Ironically, poly directors hope to give themselves a pay rise of 47%.

students and everyone else except the small elite with plenty of cash.

Education will be for sale. The government has made it clear that it wants colleges to charge tuition fees.

Another thing which will be up for abolition is basic trade union and student union rights. All the nationally-negotiated agreements are under stress, and in many colleges privatisation of services is just around the corner.

Student union autonomy is under threat with college authorities dictating what can and can not be done, reducing student representation on committees and claiming student union facilities, like catering, as their own.

Funding for the newly privatised colleges will be governed not by

long-term democratic planning but by short-term financial expediency. The new Baker-appointed Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council will hand out money on the basis of courses being competitive and colleges being able to recruit the largest number of students at the lowest possible cost.

In addition, colleges are expected to raise money from business and industry. Concepts like the quality of the education on offer do not come into it at all.

The project will mean a reduction in access and yet more cuts in the education system. The Tories cannot bear the idea that ordinary people have the right to free education. They are making sure that education, like everything else, is only available to the rich.



# We can turn the tide

**Defeats over recent years have led to depression in the labour movement, and some people arguing that continued defeat is inevitable. Sarah Cotterill dissents.**

**D**uring a decade of Tory rule the working class has had many defeats. Two of our best organised sections — the miners and the printers — have lost major battles.

Sweeping anti-union legislation has been introduced, largely unopposed. 'Flexible' working — part-time, temporary, sub-contracted labour — has been increased to cover a third of the workforce. Privatisation in hospitals and local government has divided workers.

At the same time, the working class has changed. The proportion of manual workers has decreased from 75% of the workforce in 1911 to 40% today. The service industries — mainly state services — have grown enormously. White collar workers (typists, cashiers, health workers, office workers, teachers, etc.) are now over half of the workforce. We've also seen the development of mass unemployment.

The labour movement has to respond both to the attacks on our class and to the changes within it. How?

A defeatist response has been argued by the Communist Party magazine *Marxism Today* and its guru, Eric Hobsbawm. They conclude that the working class has been vanishing since the late 1940s. As more people take up white collar jobs, they achieve an affluence which is reflected in a decline in class consciousness and a deterioration of the Labour Party vote.

The solution? An alliance between Labour and the Alliance parties to defeat Thatcher. We need, they say, to look to new forces outside the working class — women, black people, lesbians and gay men,

peace activists, etc.

When Hobsbawm says the working class is vanishing, what he means is that the manual working class is decreasing. This is true. But for socialists, being working class doesn't mean doing dirty jobs.

The working class is made up of all those who have to sell their labour power to live, regardless of what work they do or how much they are paid. If that is the definition of working class, the working class is thriving, not vanishing. But it is changing.

The number of white collar jobs has expanded — in health, local government, shops, catering, office work, etc. In the past many of these were high-status, better-paid jobs, linked to management. Today they are often worse-paid than skilled manual workers.

Most white collar workers have no control over their work or the resources they work with, and do no manage other workers. Their work has become increasingly proletarianised. Nurses, teachers, civil servants, typists, etc. have the same position in society as printers, car workers, builders, etc. Many now work in large workplaces — hospitals, DHSS offices, town halls, office blocks — and are, or potentially could be, as strongly unionised as factory workers.

Women will be half the waged workforce by the early 1990s. In the 1950s we were only a quarter. The main increase has been in part-time work and in service industries. 62% of part-time workers are women.

Since 1979 the pay differentials between women and men has increased, so women now earn proportionately less than we used to.

There are clearly problems in organising part-time workers but these are not insurmountable. Overall, the entry of women into the waged workforce is to be welcomed, as it brings women into the labour movement.

Capital has invested heavily in new geographical areas like East Anglia, going for 'greenfield' sites where union organisation is weak. The aim is smaller factories, flexible working arrangements and a placid workforce. Compared to the service sector the 'new industries' employ a small number of workers but they are still an important development.

Yes, the working class is changing, and these are real, permanent

changes. But they are changes *within* the class — the working class is being reconstituted, not withering away.

This type of change has been continuous under capitalism, from the early days when most people were agricultural labourers, domestic servants, workers in trade or craft workers, to the times of factories and mines. When Marx wrote *Capital*, far more workers in Britain were domestic servants than factory or mine workers. As production changes, so does the working class.

If anything, the working class is growing, as increasing sections are proletarianised. The working class is divided: full/part-time; employed/unemployed; men/women; black/white. But it has always been so. These divisions can only be broken down by building basic solidarity through joint labour movement activity.

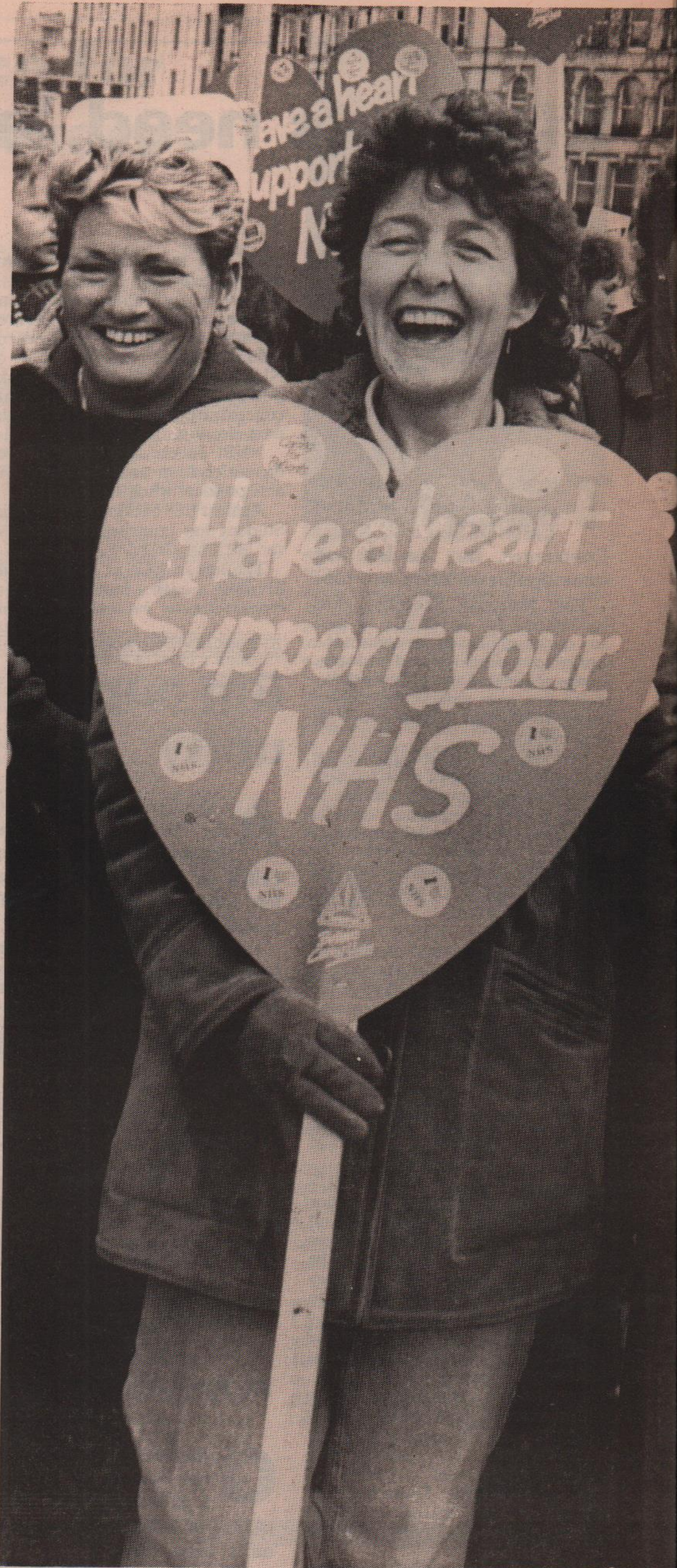
*Marxism Today* looks at the changing working class and the weakening of class struggle and concludes that the working class has got more affluent and less combative:

"It is the ancient myth of the Garden of Eden in which a pauperised proletariat lived in socially and geographically isolated communities: their only consolations were beer, Blackpool, football and fish and chips.

"They packed the union branch meetings and the Labour Party wards and voted on the basis of 'the Labour Party and the union right or wrong'. But then came the fall: they were corrupted by Volvos, videos, television sets and two weeks in Majorca.

"Hobsbawm's noble savages are the haggard, brylcreemed footballers, old before their time, peering worriedly from their old team photographs. Like their too-clever-by-half affluent successors today, the electorate has turned Jack the Lad." (John McIlroy: *Hobsbawm and SDP-Communism*)

The main evidence for the decline of class consciousness is taken from the drop in trade union membership, 2.9 million since 1979. But the falling numbers are mainly due to the collapse of manufacturing industry in the early '80s and a failure of the trade unions to recruit in the new industries. It is not so much a problem of workers leaving the unions in droves (as they did in the 1920s and 1930s), as of well-



Healthworkers: a new battalion of Labour militancy. Photo: Paul Herrmann

organised workers losing their jobs.

What is needed is a fight for recruitment to the trade unions in the new industries. Militancy has to be fought for, just as it had to be fought for in the car industry.

Hobsbawm also points to an increase in sectionalism since the early 1950s. But look at the strikes against the Industrial Relations Act at the start of the 1970s! Back in the alleged Golden Age of the 1920s, none of the miners' strikes until 1926 had the backing of the rail unions refusing to handle scab coal. In these days of decay — 1972, 1974, even 1984-5 — the solidarity has been stronger.

There has always been a lot of sectionalism, but surely today, as trade unionism embraces previously unorganised workers — women, white collar — we have greater opportunities for building solidarity.

The period of defeat is dated from the early 1950s. What nonsense! Since then we have seen the development for the first time of shop stewards' structures in many areas, and workers defeating a government in 1974.

The part of Hobsbawm's argument which has been seized on by many Labour leaders is his assessment that the decline in Labour

Party support is due to increased affluence. This assumes that Labour voting correlates with poverty, which is not the case. For example, more workers voted Labour in the affluent days of 1966 than at any time in the depression of the 1920s and 1930s.

The working class vote for Labour has not progressively declined, but has gone in ebbs and flows. A decline occurred in the early 1950s, in the late 1960s and after 1979. These have all been times when the political attack on the working class has been intense, but has not met with an adequate response from the labour movement.

Hobsbawm's conclusion is that we need an electoral pact with the Alliance parties to create a popular movement against the Tories. Old-style class politics are out.

This idea is not new. In the 1930s the Communist Parties advocated building Popular Fronts with anti-fascist bourgeois parties to defeat fascism. In Spain this meant working class organisations were physically smashed and factories seized by workers were returned to their previous owners. This kind of politics has nothing to do with







## US labour draws the line

From Barry Finger in New Jersey

**I**n what may yet signal the resurgence of American labour, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, supported by the Air Line Pilots Association and flight attendants, grounded Eastern Air Lines on 4 March.

Without the pilots, Eastern's plans for operations at 25% of normal evaporated. Immediately all but 30 of Eastern's 250 carriers and all but 40 of its 1000 flights were halted.

After five days of the shutdown, Eastern's chairman, Frank Lorenzo, confirmed that Eastern had filed for bankruptcy. And this after going on record as being unable to "imagine a set of circumstances that would produce (the bankruptcy statute) Chapter 11."

Later Lorenzo conceded that selling Eastern might be his most judicious alternative.

The immediate issue is Eastern's insistence on \$125 million per year in wage concessions. The airline claims this is necessary cost-cutting to offset its purported \$1 million a day loss.

But the union, despite offering a 15 month wage freeze, refuses to back away from its demand for \$50 million in raises. It points out that Lorenzo has continually siphoned profits from Eastern to his umbrella company, Texas Air.

Moreover, Eastern employees have already foregone \$1.5 billion in wages and concessions in the past decade, and Eastern machinists are currently the most poorly paid of any unionised airline.

As it became increasingly unlikely that President Bush would invoke an emergency 60-day cooling off period, Lorenzo continued his

strategy by floating a bond issue to raise cash against the unions' offensive.

In the immediate aftermath of the strike Eastern share quotes rose. But, drawn by the smell of blood, the other carriers were eagerly taking chunks out of Eastern's shuttle, Florida and Atlanta markets. By the end of last week, Eastern announced its intentions not only to chisel its creditors through bankruptcy, but also to sell off most of its narrow-body aircraft fleet.

What makes this confrontation so significant is that it pits the most left-leaning AFL-CIO union against one of the most outstanding buc-

*"As a symbol of their not-so-kind-and-gentle corporate America, Lorenzo became an irresistible target for years of pent-up working class frustration"*

caner capitalists of the Reagan era. Lorenzo built his reputation by emulating Reagan's suppression of the air traffic controllers' strike and his destruction of their union, PATCO.

Following his 1982 acquisition of Continental Airlines, Lorenzo declared bankruptcy and seized the opportunity that then existed under bankruptcy laws to throw out the union contracts and transform Continental into a non-union enterprise. He laid off most of the employees, reduced fares and, in doing so, accumulated a sufficient fund to purchase more airlines.

As a symbol of the not so kind and gentle corporate America, Lorenzo became an irresistible

target for years of pent-up working class frustration. With union membership as a percentage of the workforce in decline, and with the evaporation of the traditional higher-paying blue collar occupations, it was inevitable that the line would have to be drawn soon and a union offensive launched.

In an example of life imitating art, Lorenzo gives a virtuoso performance in the part of Gordon Gekko from the movie 'Wall Street'.

But if the union movement thought it had identified the perfect villain, Lorenzo plays his role to rave reviews in the bourgeois media, and especially on television. Horror stories of panic-stricken families, stranded vacationers and harried ticket agents are the evening TV fare. Coupled with these are outrageous allegations about union wage scales which purposely blur the distinction between base and overtime pay and which factor in benefits to yield the impression that baggage handlers live at levels only slightly below airline executives.

Then, of course, there are the mandatory interviews with defiant and therefore self-possessed strikers followed by statesmen like businessmen who calmly explain why the public is ill-served by such exploitative union tactics. Lorenzo has slashed shuttle fares below bus rates so it is no wonder that the public in its majority sides with Eastern.

Regardless of public opinion, employers realise that they have been put on notice. Whether the strike is won or lost the costs placed on the company are devastating.

By sheer force of will and dedication, and in the face of a daily barrage of public opprobrium and personal destitution, the striking unionists express a simple but powerful message — union-busting is not an acceptable form of doing business.

### WHERE WE STAND

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

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

**workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.**

**Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles worldwide, including the struggle of**

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

**We stand:**

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

**Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.**

**For equality for lesbians and gays.**

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

**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.**

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socialism or workers' struggle.

At its root, talk of electoral pacts is an attack on the left. While we are arguing against the Kinnockite drift to the right, Hobsbawm tries to undermine us with watered down SDP-type politics.

Our answer is not to accommodate to Thatcherism by adopting wishy-washy politics. The current collapse of Labour's vote and the weakness of trade union organisation are not due to the working class turning into a bunch of yuppies.

Since the start of the century working people have voted Labour because Labour promised reforms. The Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s didn't deliver. Instead — in a situation of world recession — successive Labour governments attacked the working class and offered nothing in return.

Workers voted Labour because it promised higher wages, full employment, better housing, and expansion of welfare provision. Instead unemployment doubled between 1974 and 1979; incomes policies led to reduced real wages; Labour pioneered cuts in education, the NHS and local government.

Labour failed to defend working class interests, or even to run

capitalism effectively, so working people didn't vote for it. Instead they voted for the strong, determined policies put forward by Thatcher. If you're going to have capitalism, you might as well have competent capitalists.

Since 1979 Labour has offered half-hearted policies with no weight. No one believes we can get out of the recession without radical policies. Thatcher appears to offer these; Labour doesn't.

We should not paint a picture of a red-blooded working class, straining at the leash, held back only by a right-wing leadership. The working class has been demoralised by a decade of Thatcherism and successive defeats.

We have to fight for a socialist perspective. That won't be done by following *Marxism Today* in capitulating to current working class consciousness and writing workers off as yuppies.

It will be done by a patient, hard fight to win workers away from bourgeois, reformist and Stalinist ideas. That means arguing on the ground now, and recruiting to the trade unions and Labour Party on the basis of a militant fight for our rights.



## 3 ACTIVISTS' PAGE

# 20,000 march against the poll tax

## POLL TAX

By Stan Crooke

**20,000** people marched through Edinburgh last Saturday, in the biggest demonstration to date against the poll tax. The day of the demonstration marked the implementation of the poll tax in Scotland, a year ahead of England and Wales.

The demonstration had been called by the "all-Scotland anti-poll-tax committee", a body set up by the Scottish TUC and comprising the traditional mixture of delegates from the Labour Party, the Liberals, the Communist Party, tenants associations and the churches.

Unfortunately, but predictably, the rally of 15 platform speakers, which closed the demonstration did not put forward any tactics for the next stage of the campaign.

Although some speakers said that they as individuals would not be paying the poll tax, there was no call for mass non-payment, and still

less for non-implementation by Labour-controlled councils or trade unions.

Labour Party leaders in Scotland milk the poll tax for anti-Tory propaganda, but tell Labour groups on councils to implement the tax, and individuals to pay it. Fighting the poll tax is equated with voting Labour in 1992.

This merely plays into the hands of the Scottish National Party.

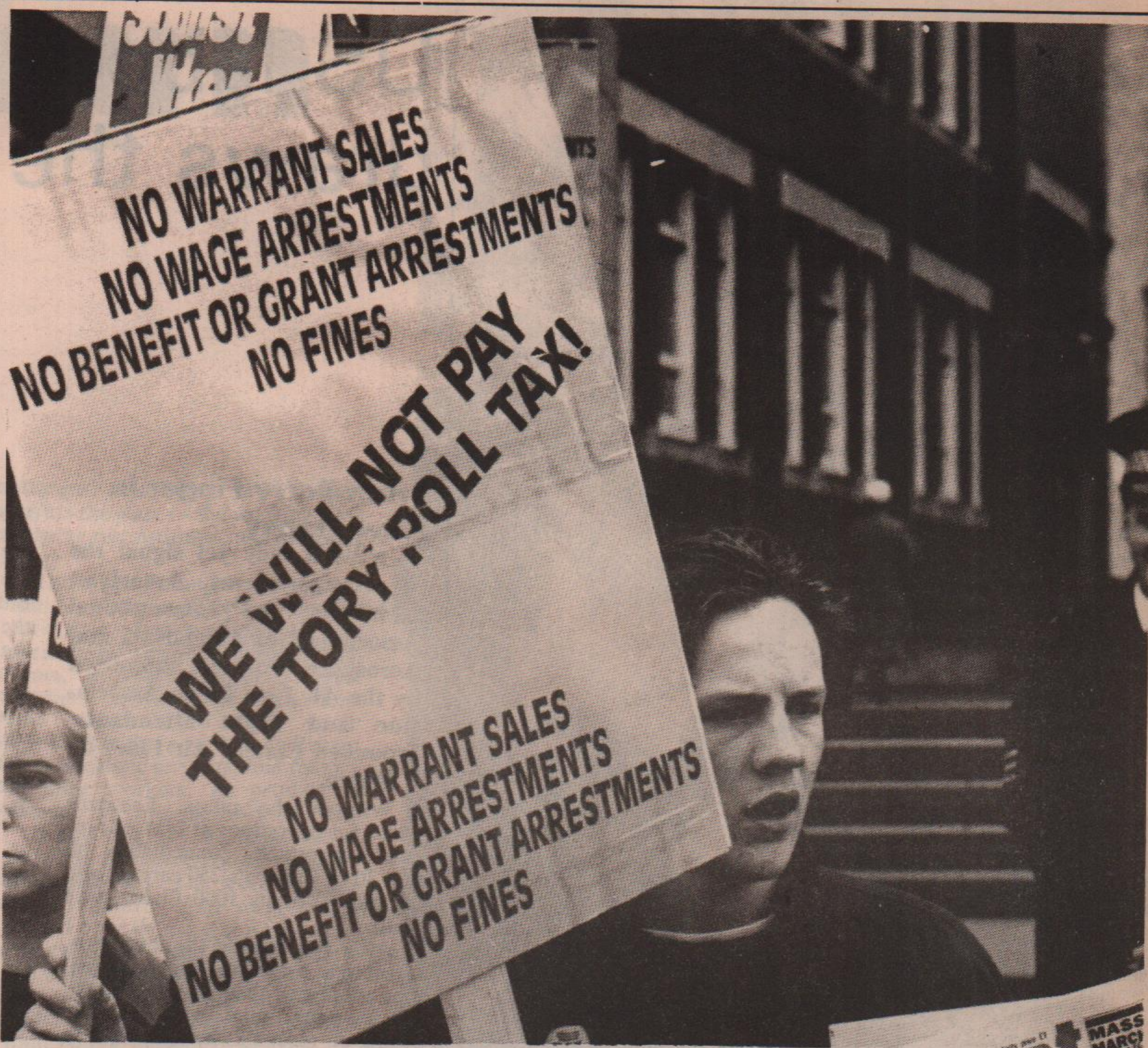
What will happen now in Scotland?

There is widespread chaos. Rebate forms have not been sent out to many people entitled to them. People who have received rebates have nonetheless received demands for the full amount. Others have not yet received a demand for the poll tax.

The extent of non-payment will not become clear for over three months. Individuals are allowed three months to make their first payment and only then is there any possibility of a penalty being incurred.

Anti-poll tax activists in Scotland should:

- continue to campaign in the local communities for non-payment;
- step up the campaign in the Labour Party and the trade unions for non-implementation;
- build links with the poll tax campaign in England and Wales.



## New pamphlet tells how to win

Councils in Scotland have started collecting poll tax, and some councils in England have started to send out poll tax registration forms, though the main registration drive will not be until May.

A new pamphlet from Socialist Organiser maps out 'How to Beat the Poll Tax'. It has proved easy to sell, with a number of comrades selling over 30 each on the Edinburgh demonstration on Saturday 1 April.

The pamphlet gives the facts about the poll tax. It argues that the tax can be beaten by a combination of battles — a drive to build anti-poll tax unions in working class communities, to organise mass non-payment, and a fight for Labour councils and trade unions to refuse to implement measures against non-payers and indeed to refuse to implement the tax at all.

**HOW TO BEAT THE POLL TAX**



60p plus 13p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

## ACTIVISTS' DIARY

### Monday 10 April

Edinburgh SO: 'A Scottish Assembly: is it the way forward?' Windsor Buffet, Leith Walk, 8.30

### Sunday 16 April

York SO: 'Reassessing the Eastern Bloc'. York University, 7.00

### Monday 17 April

'Stop the Merger': lobby of AEU National Committee. Winter Gardens, Eastbourne, 8.30. Contact N Goodwin, 28 Bowling Green Close, Birmingham B23 5QU

### Saturday 22 April

Student Left Activist Conference. Octagon Centre, Western Bank, Sheffield, 11.00. Contact Jill on 01-639 7967

### Saturday 29 April

CLPs Conference on Party Democracy. AEU, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, 11.00. Contact Lol Duffy,

11 Egremont Prom, Merseyside L44 8BG

### Saturday 6 May

Yorkshire SO day school: 'Transforming the labour movement'. St John's College, York, 10.30

### Saturday 13 May

Lutte Ouvriere fete (three days). Near Paris. Contact Clive, 01-639 7965

### Saturday 3 June

Gorbachev and the European Left Conference (two days). ULU, Malet St, London WC1. Contact Gus Fagan, 30 Bridge St, Oxford OX2 0BA

### Saturday 17 June

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

### Saturday 17 June

'Time To Go' Show (two days). City University, London

### Saturday 8 July

Workers' Liberty Summer School (two days). Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19.

### Saturday 12 August

'Time To Go' demonstration on Ireland

## The poll tax man is watching you

**A**ny official list or register is likely to be used to get people for the poll tax — whatever the assurances given when the information was first collected for the list.

Local authorities have compiled registers of school pupils' parents so that they can take votes on schools 'opting out' under the Tories' new Education Act. Education Minister Kenneth Baker declared that these registers would

be used *only* by education authorities.

Now the Department of the Environment has told Isle of Wight county council that it must hand over its register to Medina district council's poll tax officers. Baker's assurances? Too bad. The poll tax comes first.

Not only does the poll tax rob the poor to help the rich. It threatens our civil liberties by assembling information from diverse official lists and registers into one uniform catalogue with the name, address

and other details of everyone in the country over 18.

Another recent incident confirms the point. A man may be fined £200 for refusing to give his girlfriend's date of birth on his poll tax return.

No-one disputes that the woman is over 18 and liable to pay the poll tax. That's not the issue. Poll tax authorities are demanding the date of birth so that they can identify the woman more precisely and distinguish her from other women with the same name.

## SWP offers despair

By Gerry Bates

**C**an Pay, Will Pay' and 'Register Now' are two slogans now being used by the Sheffield SWP in the anti-poll tax campaign.

They now say that they don't think the poll tax *can* be beaten. They write off non-payment and even say that they themselves will pay.

In the local groups they have tried to prevent any action against registration, claiming that people should register at the earliest possible opportunity.

At a local meeting their comrades argued that, rather than discussing how to build the campaign, we should analyse why the campaign was doomed to failure.

This, they argued, was a class

perspective on the situation.

And what was this perspective? Surprise, surprise, the lack of a lead by the Labour Party guaranteed that the poll tax could not be beaten.

This view that nothing can be done without a lead from above was, however, different from the view they expressed at the Sheffield Trades Council. There, SWP comrades not only voted, but spoke against, a motion calling on the

Trades Council to organise a delegate conference on the poll tax. This time they said it must be the grass roots, rather than the bureaucrat leaders, that build the campaign.

A couple of months ago the Sheffield SWP were a major force in the local anti-poll tax campaign but their perpetual pessimism has destroyed everything they have been involved in over the last few years.

## CLPs Conference on the witch-hunt and democracy Saturday 29 April

AEU Hall, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool. 11am to 5pm

Each CLP is entitled to three delegates at £2.00 per delegate. Visitors are welcome.

Contact: Lol Duffy, 11 Egremont Prom, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG

## Sorry!

We made a mistake in no.391. A report on the Labour Committee on Ireland conference referred to the DHSS workers who struck against sectarian violence in August 1986 as members of the CPSA. In fact they were members of NIPSA, the Northern Ireland Public Services Association.





Labour councillors burn poll tax payment books in Edinburgh. But the Scottish Convention had nothing to say about it.

## Playing into the hands of the nationalists

By Stan Crooke

**W**e represent Scotland," declared Canon Kenyon Wright, a member of the Scottish Council of Churches, in his speech which opened the Scottish Constitutional Convention (SCC) in Edinburgh last Thursday, 30 March.

Beer-gutted trade union bureaucrats and pompous politicians, and clerics, took turns at proclaiming themselves the proud heirs of a tradition stretching back through the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of 1842 and the Scottish Parliament of 1689 to the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320.

The names of William Ewart Gladstone, Mahatma Gandhi and Hugh MacDiarmid were all invoked as the spiritual founding fathers of this select gathering, jointly chaired by Labour right-winger Harry Ewing MP and David Steel, ex-leader of the party whose name no-one can remember.

Roddy John McLeod, a member of Commun Na Gaidhlig, sought to address the gathering in Gaelic and demanded that Gaelic be the language of the SCC, but to no avail. No-one could understand him.

Green Party member Phil O'Brien was impolite enough to point out that Labour had won less than 50% of the vote in Scotland and said demands such as proportional representation, a freedom of information act, and removal of all nuclear bases from Scotland, should be taken up by the SCC. Labour MP John McAllion promptly slapped down such dangerous proposals — or "harangue" as he preferred to call

them — as they would only result in divisions which would benefit the Tories.

It fell to the representative of the Communist Party (Eurocommunist variety) to sum up the philosophy of the SCC, when he asked all political parties to forget political differences until a Scottish Assembly had been established.

Issues such as the poll tax or the government's Scottish Homes scheme, both of which were coming into effect less than 48 hours after this circus, were, needless to say, not even touched upon. Instead, the SCC closed by agreeing to have another meeting. In the summer. In Inverness.

Tories, of course, gave the event the thumbs down. This is because they support Thatcher's policies.

The Scottish National Party also gave the event the thumbs down. This is because they know that the SCC is an empty talking-shop which is not going to get anywhere.

The SCC merely plays into the hands of the SNP. It reinforces the tendency to replace class-against-class politics by Scotland versus England politics. The SCC will fail to deliver anything. Then the SNP can step forward, as the "true" representatives of Scotland.

The labour movement should demand that our representatives pull out of this talking shop and base themselves instead on poll tax non-payers, tenants fighting Scottish Homes, trade unionists defending their rights, and all the other forces putting up a real fight against the Tories.

## Will Scotland go independent?

By Ian McCalman

**R**ecent opinion poll results showing over 50% of the Scottish electorate in favour of an independent Scotland with direct representation in the European Community are a fillip to the fortunes of the Scottish National Party.

Nationalist support turned down after their withdrawal from the Constitutional Convention, but that calculated gamble may have paid off for them.

Their leadership could see no future for them in a convention which allowed them only 8% representation and refused to discuss how to respond in the likely

event of Thatcher refusing Scotland any degree of autonomy.

The SNP leadership reckoned that the Convention was in a cul-de-sac, and that therefore withdrawal was the best option. Despite media pressure and internal divisions, they stuck to that view and it appears to have paid off. This suggests that a substantial body of opinion in Scotland agree with their view that in its present condition the Convention is a waste of time and now favour total separation.

In response to these mounting pressures, the Labour leadership at the recent Scottish conference in Inverness, decided to remit to the Executive a motion on the "dual mandate" which had the backing of a substantial number of Constituency Labour Parties.

Promoted by Scottish Labour Action (SLA), the essence of the "dual mandate" position is that if Labour loses the next general election in the UK, then Scottish Labour MPs should withdraw from Westminster to campaign for an Assembly in Scotland.

Fearful of the degree of support for such a position, Scottish Labour leaders did not dare stifle it or risk a vote. Instead they hived it off to the Executive. The position therefore remains a live issue which will continue to surface in the period ahead.

I believe socialists should support the SLA position on "dual mandate", and mass civil disobedience in Scotland as a legitimate means of protest.

This campaign should also command the support of socialists throughout the British Isles. We should set it in the context of the establishment of a federal Britain.

## The Philippine left in transition

Final part of Joly Macuja's article on the left in Philippines

**H**ow to deal with the Aquino government is an ongoing dilemma.

On the one hand it is clearly dominated by transnational capitalists willing to toe the World Bank's and the International Monetary Fund's line, but it is certainly also less homogeneous as the previous Marcos government.

The congress is dominated by the landed classes, but on the other hand also has progressive elements. The Senate is perceived to be dominated by the urban capitalist class, but would have several progressive bourgeois nationalist reformists not expected to toe the US transnational and military line.

The military is clearly badly split, with considerable faction still of the sentiment that it had a better deal under the more authoritarian Marcos regime structure free of "communist infiltrators" which now (allegedly) occupy strategic positions in government.

How then does one deal with such a government? Does one defend it from the extreme right? From the possibility (though remote) of a Marcos comeback? Or from an outright military takeover, aided and abetted by a US government which apparently is not quite as comfortable with the Aquino administration as it was with Marcos' due to her at times indecisive stance (the most clear the "options open

position" vis-a-vis the US military facilities beyond 1991)?

Does one expose it as a de facto US-Aquino regime, because nothing tangible has occurred aside from economic growth not shared anyway by the masses, and thus call for an all-out people's war, not recognising perhaps that the majority of people (perhaps even as big as 70% from independent surveys) hold the incumbent president still in high esteem?

Does one encourage its liberal tendencies, genuinely recognisable prior to the cessation of peace negotiations with the NDF in the early part of 1987 and still occurring from time to time? The most recent example is a Generic Drugs Act which promises the reduction of prices for medicine despite transnational pharmaceutical protest.

The ratification of a new constitution, the restoration of the old bourgeois-democratic institutions and the holding of national and local elections too may be cited.

What is the mood of the population caught for the past 20 years in the crossfire of a civil war which has taken many Filipino lives, and served to polarise a nation? At this juncture of Philippine history, shouldn't efforts be primarily geared to, and resources channeled to political education work versus continued armed conflict?

Is there genuine space for reforms to be worked out at all, within the context of a socialist project, given the present dispensation? All these (and many more) are present dilemmas which have to be faced by the left, as a whole, and as distinct tendencies.

In a sense the issues that have divided it from the roots in the '60s have continued — albeit within a different context. It is a question of strategy, a question of how one best preserves whatever gains have been made and brings these to greater heights.

The leadership of the various forces are undeniably much humbler and more willing to dialogue and accept criticism from within and without. Not that the sectarian ghost no longer haunts the movements, but as can be evidenced by the united fronts which have been formed in the past two years, there is a greater willingness to subsume one's desire to dominate the movement in the interest of genuinely recognising various tendencies which have something concrete to contribute to the cause of genuine national liberation and, yes, even socialism. In spite of its colourful history, the organised working class movements on both the industrial and agricultural fronts account for perhaps less than 20% of the entire labour force. And there is a lack of "class consciousness" even amongst the most proletarian of organisations, whose day to day running remains strongly leadership centred.

One can cite for example, the unity forged under the Labor Advisory Consultative Council, the labour body which negotiates vis-a-vis government and effectively reflects the united left's voice by consistently fighting for better working conditions, the repeal of anti-labour laws and higher pay; the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform which effectively united all the various left

peasant and fisherfolk organisations in opposition to the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (Republic Act 6657). Similar unities are being forged out in other sectors, as the left realises it has to gear up to meet the challenge of the call to terminate the presence of the US military bases when the agreement expires in 1991.

As long as different ideological perspectives and perceptions of the correct strategy to solve the Philippine social problem are present such unity, even on the tactical level, will have its obvious limitations.

One thing is certain though. Every left formation has used whatever democratic space was (and is) still afforded by the Aquino government to consolidate its forces. Likewise, most realise that it is time to highlight the socialist agenda, the socialist alternative — a call which no-one really ever got around to fully articulate during the Marcos years because of a preoccupation in running against time to dismantle the unambiguously oppressive regime.

Much work has yet to be done in this regard as rightist propaganda tends to label socialists and communists as "godless, violent, chaotic, traitors... etc", deemed unacceptable in a still largely conservative Philippine society.

Perhaps now that the various factions of the ruling Philippine elite have been given adequate time to wield power for better or for worse, the nation will realise that the time has truly come for a Socialist Philippines to be forged, under the leadership of the working class.



Workers' Liberty No. 11 has articles on the Eastern Bloc, 'post-Fordism', Thatcherism, civil liberties, modern architecture and much more. £1.50 plus 32 post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA



# The underside of the aristocracy

## CINEMA

Belinda Weaver reviews the film of 'Dangerous Liaisons'

**D**angerous Liaisons' is the third version of Choderlos de Laclos's tale of intrigue and treachery in pre-revolutionary French aristocratic society; first there was the book, then the play (playing in the West End of London for over three years now) and now the film, given the full-scale costume drama treatment by Hollywood.

The novel, published in 1782, caused a scandal; one Marquise banned the author from her house: "If I were left alone with him, I should be terrified," she told her footman.

Forty years later, it was banned as dangerous. Yet it had long been a bestseller, exhausting several editions, and it continued to sell, despite the moral outrage the very title seemed to provoke.

What was all the fuss about? The book tells of the attempts by two aristocrats, the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont, to ruin a young, convent-bred innocent as a means of revenge on her future husband, who has slighted the Marquise in love.

It also relates the parallel seduction by the Vicomte of the pious Madame de Tourvel. This latter affair is approached as a test of the Vicomte's ability in the wars of love; his prize will be the granting of a night of love with the Marquise, who was previously his mistress.

What caused so much outrage when the book appeared was that the truly wicked characters, the Marquise and the Vicomte, were presented too attractively, their hideous souls not clearly enough condemned. On the other hand, the virtuous characters were presented as foolish, or hypocritical, as subjects for satire. In showing virtue not triumphant, but utterly routed, Laclos was said to be encouraging vice and immorality.



The story damns the heartless, frivolous society of these wealthy, leisured aristocrats, and it condemns their morals and manners too. Laclos's book was part of the questioning of established values that paved the way for the French revolution.

Cecile, the young convent girl, is left utterly ignorant of the world, and so is easy prey for the two schemers. With her considerable dowry, she is considered as little more than a rich prize on the matrimonial market for some lucky man to take and use as he will.

The Marquise and the Vicomte, with their cynicism, are merely realists about what society is underneath the surface veneer of polish, manners and refinement. Though the Marquise is careful to present a virtuous face to the world, she is cynical and corrupt beneath it. But she knows the rules of her world well enough to realise she can never be openly libertine like Valmont; such behaviour would cast her out of society forever. Women

must maintain the fiction that they are weak, sentimental, pious figures, whatever they might do in secret.

The book has the distancing feature of being written entirely in letters; the Marquise and the Vicomte rarely meet. In the play and the film, we are brought much closer to the characters, which makes the action more immediate and shocking.

The sudden close-ups in the film seem to strip bare the characters' souls. For this reason, the script often seems heavy-handed, telling us things we already know. When the characters are able to suggest so much by gesture and expression, there is no need for the kind of over-obvious dialogue that occasionally spoils the film. Perhaps the director, Stephen Frears, was worried that audiences would find the story too subtle; if so, he has bent the stick too far the other way.

The performances are good, with the American accents not too jarring, though John Malkovich's lazy

drawl seems wrong for the quick-witted Vicomte. In fact, Malkovich seems miscast. He doesn't have the physical dash to play a seasoned sexual athlete, and he is plodding where he needs to be elegant and witty.

He is no match at all for Glenn Close's stunning Marquise. Close is really impressive as the implacable, quietly venomous Madame de Merteuil; she acts Malkovich off the screen, even though the film cuts down her role considerably, shifting the emphasis to the Vicomte's exploits. Michelle Pfeiffer is physically right as the sweet, suffering Madame de Tourvel, though she doesn't quite have the experience to cope with the more stilted language of the eighteenth century.

The play was more satisfactory in its scripting, less heavy-handed than the film and revealing more of the Marquise's story. It is certainly worth going back to the book to see what all the fuss was about. It's a very enjoyable, rewarding read.

## Unsafe as houses



### LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

**C**oncern has been growing for some time over the radioactive gas radon. This is released when radioactive elements such as uranium, present in many rocks, decay.

Radon percolates up out of the ground into the air. Being chemically inert, it passes without hindrance through the environment, including in and out of our lungs.

When it, too, decays, it releases alpha particles, which can cause a lot of damage to living cells. If this occurs in the lungs, cancers can be started. The products of radon's decay are also radioactive and, being solids, tend to remain where they are, subjecting the lung's cells to more alpha radiation.

The National Radiological Protection Board has recently quantified the problem. They estimate that 50% of the average person's radiation exposure is due to radon, dwarfing a hundredfold average exposures to fallout (from bombs and Chernobyl) and to radioactive waste.

People in granite areas, such as Cornwall and parts of Scotland, with higher levels of uranium, experience above-average exposures to radon. The NRPB estimates that some 20,000 homes have radon above the "action level". In such homes, doses exceed by 40 times the maximum dose members of the public are allowed to absorb in discharges from nuclear plants.

The result is some 2,500 deaths per year from lung cancer. This is about one-twentieth of the lung cancer deaths among smokers, but is still a significant figure, similar, for example, to deaths from cervical cancer.

So what is being done? Not a lot, says the NRPB's director. Solutions mooted include sealing floors to keep the gas out, or installing sub-floor ventilation.

### Just fancy that!

Hen and turkey chicks reared in intensive care units are happier if given toys to play with and classical music to listen to. Research in Israel shows that toys such as balls and key chains kept them occupied.

As music lovers, the chicks preferred quiet, calming music, without dramatic crescendos. They were less fretful, ate more readily and put more weight on.

### Isn't that sweet?

Horses prefer to sleep with the light on, American researchers have found. The horses, kept in a windowless barn, could turn on the lights for a minute by passing in front of a photoelectric cell. This they did at all hours of the day and night.

I am wondering what the purpose of the research was, though.

## Resignation, wrecking, resistance

### TV

By Vicki Morris

**9 II 5'** (geddit?) on BBC2 is an hour-long magazine programme covering four issues from the world of work so succinctly as to completely trivialise them.

For instance, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" reported on a survey of the job expectations of 1000 school pupils in a variety of age groups, and discovered, predictably, that the closer the child was to leaving school, the more realistic were their expectations for the future.

The programme-makers took issue with the fact the final year was a year-long gap with a response: "When I grow up I want to be a Latin-American boss."

I found the incongruity of this wish with the likelihood of its fulfilment poignant rather than humorous. I suspect a lot of children become resigned to, rather than enthusiastic about, their likely role in society.

The process is speeded by industrial visits to factories, which are fascinating when you see processes through from start to finish, less so if you fix your attention on a boring assembly-line job.

Corrective measures also included the introduction of new technology in the classroom — in reality not as widespread as it could be, and frequently used simply to train people for life in the VDU pool. We also saw a business enterprise class — for the brighter sparks only, I suspect — learning how to sell their money-making ideas to the bank... and, undoubtedly, how to sell their erstwhile classmates and future employees short.

This was false optimism, a picture-giving enormous deficiencies to puff up a few progressive educational techniques and completely failing to mention that real career opportunities exist for very few.

'Opinions' on Channel 4, given by someone who has been a teacher in the British state system for 30 years, provided a more balanced picture.

Ms Poole had welcomed comprehensive schools as progress towards a more egalitarian education system. However, she soon realised that its potential wouldn't be perfectly fulfilled because of lack of consultation with, and training of, teachers, and because of inadequate funding.

Likewise, the government is pushing through its most recent schema with little regard for practicalities, and little consultation with the educational establishment or staff. The biggest obstacle to it fulfilling its aim is this gap between the consciousness of legislators and that of teachers.

The education system has aimed at developing children's individual aptitudes and interests, seeing education as an end in itself, with little regard for "market forces" — including the constraints of the job market.

Ms Poole took the side of the teachers. But her tactics for their

coming struggle were wacky, not to say sinister.

The teacher — "the saboteur in the classroom" — can scupper government plans by carrying on as before, following their own conscience behind a closed classroom door. Sabotage might be helped by the chaos which could follow Local Management of Schools.

Before the programme began, Channel 4's announcer had reassured us that tonight's opinion would be given by a woman who was a member of neither political party nor trade union. This explained a lot of what followed.

This horn-rimmed anarchist is naive to imagine that the education system can be saved by piecemeal, individual sabotage of government plans.

The programme was thought-provoking: I was utterly convinced that the problems it described can only be solved by teachers' organisation and collective resistance, with the open support of everyone who agrees with Ms Poole that education should remain an end in itself, not a mechanism to fulfil the Tory government's plans.



# Merger in the dark

## INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

**O**n April 17 the AEU National Committee meets at Eastbourne. This is, in effect, the annual conference of the union. It will be presented with a set of proposals for amalgamation with the EETPU.

These proposals have been drawn up at a series of secretive meetings between Hammond, Gallacher and Davis from the EETPU and Laird, Jordan and Weakly from the AEU.

Most rank and file members know little about what is going on and what has come out up until now has been largely due to leaks in the *Financial Times*. February's AEU Journal doesn't even mention the matter in its EC report despite the fact that a detailed 10-point plan was presented to the Executive meeting of 10 January.

Last week, Socialist Worker

published extracts from a document drawn up by the AEU leadership for the approval of Hammond and Co. on 26 January. Taken together with the '10-point plan' it gives a pretty clear picture of the fait accompli that Jordan and Laird want to spring on the National Committee this month: they want the general framework of the amalgamation agreed first, after which 'details' can be sorted out over a six-year period.

In effect the AEU leadership is proposing the phased abolition of the entire lay structure of the union and its replacement by EETPU-style 'industrial' and regional committees. The 10-point plan states that: "The industrial structure at District level would have authority similar to that which applies at District Committee level of the AEU." But the 26 January document makes it clear that, "once the powers of the AEU District Committees have passed to the new Regional Industrial Committees and Conferences, the District Committees would cease to function."

Even more worrying is the proposal for national conferences: "There would be a Policy Conference every two years and a Rules Conference every six

years... Conference decisions would bind the Executive subject to the Executive's power to put matters or major concern to a ballot of members" (our emphasis).

In other words, if the joint executive of the new union didn't like a conference decision they could attempt to override it with a ballot.

The little matter of the election of full-time officials (which only a few years ago caused the break up of the AEU/TASS amalgamation) is now no longer any big deal, it seems: "The AEU wishes to elect all full-time officials, the EETPU prefers appointment for officers under their President, General Secretary and Executive Council. The issue should therefore be put to a ballot of the members...the position of all serving full-time officials at the time of the amalgamation would be guaranteed."

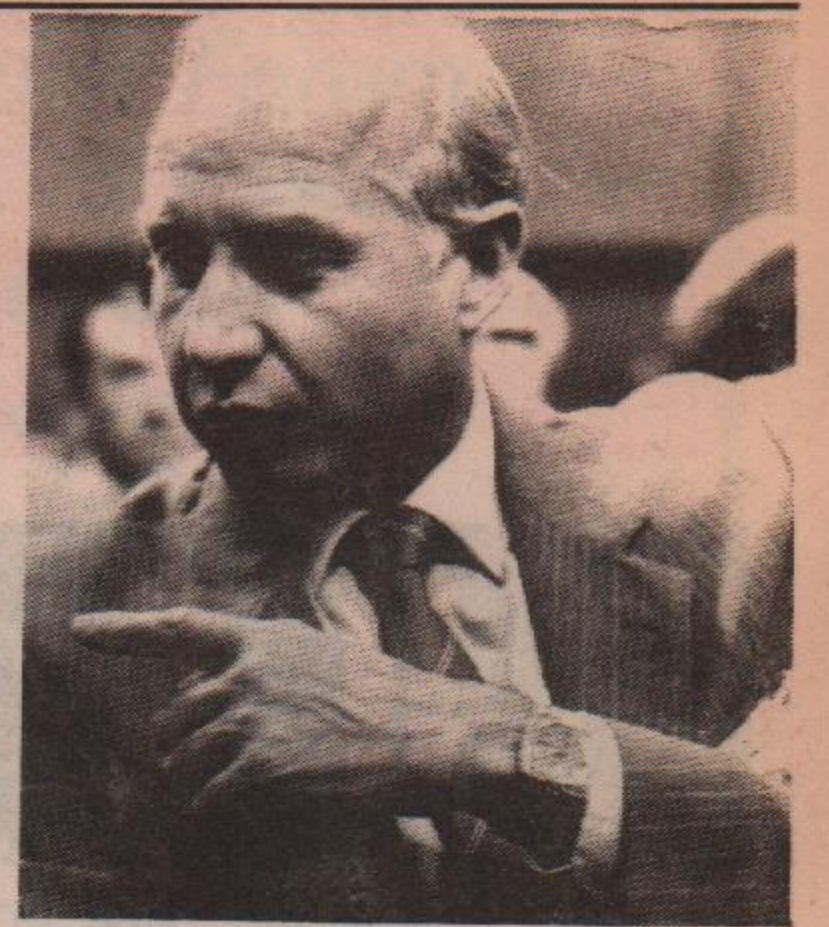
So there you have it: within six years Jordan and Laird want a new union that would have abolished all the old rank and file-based structures of the old AEU, up to and including the National Committee, and might not even elect its officials. In short, it would be the EETPU writ large. Oh yes, and it would — of course — "apply for affiliation to

the TUC". What an agreeable way that would be for Eric Hammond to get back into the TUC.

The 10-point plan was passed by five votes to four at the AEU EC of 10 January. Peter Burns and Nigel Harris of the Foundry section voted against, along with John Weakly and Jimmy Airlie.

It remains to be seen whether this month's National Committee votes to abolish itself....

**Stop the merger!  
Defend democracy in the AEU  
Lobby the AEU National Committee  
Monday 17 April 1989**



Gavin Laird  
8.30am onwards  
outside the Winter Gardens,  
Eastbourne  
Called by Anti-Merger Campaign. Contact N Goodwin,  
28 Bowling Green Close, Birmingham B23 5QU

## Left gains at teachers' conference

By Liam Conway

**T**he Socialist Teachers Alliance and the left gave a bloody nose to the leadership of the National Union of Teachers at this year's Easter Conference.

Conference voted for the election of Deputy General Secretary as well as General Secretary, rejecting Executive arguments that this was carrying out Tory laws.

On Local Management of Schools — LMS, the practice of schools running their entire budget, ie. local management of cuts — there was no need to defeat an Executive priority motion because Conference threw it off the agenda. Instead delegates voted for an unamended Socialist Teachers motion calling for strikes against LMS.

On anti-racism, the Executive were embarrassingly forced to support a Socialist Teachers motion after their weakening amendment had been trounced on a card vote.

Such events left the dominant Broad Left faction in turmoil, incapable of putting together decent speakers and divided amongst themselves. The Socialist Teachers Alliance, on the other hand, was well organised and, for once, looked like a national opposition on the Conference floor.

However, the right-wing have not been defeated. They still control the Executive and Fred Jarvis (outgoing General Secretary) has made it clear that the LMS strike motion will not be carried out. And the left was defeated over salaries. A motion calling for extended strike action to achieve a flat rate pay rise was lost on a card vote, 94,521 to 82,849.

These defeats would be more easily surmountable if the left were united during and between conferences. Tragically, the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the much smaller Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union (CDFU) presented separate motions to Conference and intend to stand

separate candidates against Doug McAvoy in the election for general secretary. The CDFU leadership, around Ian Murch, have rejected STA attempts to forge a united front against the right-wing. Murch seems to have emerged as the CDFU general secretary candidate without the democratic involvement of CDFU supporters.

The STA must now secure as many nominations as possible for Bernard Regan and then try to persuade the CDFU that the left candidate with the fewest nominations should stand down and run for General Deputy Secretary. We should also push for joint candidates in the forthcoming Vice-President and Executive elections.

Beyond elections, both the STA and the CDFU should fight for the implementation of Conference decisions, particularly the strikes over LMS. The various election campaigns can help us prepare for action and build the STA.

Throughout these events we should argue for action and build action against the union leadership and Tory government. The STA should work with CDFU comrades and encourage open debate about the best way forward for the left. Our long term aim should be fusion between all those prepared to fight the Tory cuts.

At a time when Conference has moved to the left, when there is a great deal of anger amongst classroom teachers over pay and conditions, and when the Broad Left leadership is split, left unity is vital if we are to galvanise the membership into action and throw out the right-wing leadership.

On a wider front such unity could play an important role in linking up with other workers in schools. A genuine rank and file opposition in the NUT will need to jettison both the intellectual elitism sometimes associated with the STA and the crude teacher unionism associated with the CDFU, if it is to reach out to the grassroots of other school-based unions like NALGO and NUPE.

With such a perspective we could forge a powerful alliance against new realism and the cuts.

## Stop Jordan's sell-out!

By Pete Radcliff

**O**pposition continues to grow among engineering workers to a major sell-out on conditions being proposed by AEU President Bill Jordan on behalf of the CSEU (Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, or 'Confed').

Whenever engineering stewards have met — either at special Confed meetings organised in Manchester, in East London and in Nottingham on 4 April; or within unions, as at the GMB East

Midlands engineering conference on 17 March, the proposals have been overwhelmingly rejected.

A lobby is now planned of the next round of the CSEU/Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) talks on 12 April.

The proposals submitted by Jordan to the EEF on 2 February this year will give the green light to attacks on engineering workers' conditions.

If pushed through, the proposals will allow employers almost a free hand to extend, without limits, the standard working week at times of peak demand and without the payment of overtime premiums.

They will also deny militant sections of any workforce any rights to indepen-

dent organisation and action by a 'strong recommendation' for all-embracing 'Joint Negotiation Committees' and 'harmonisation of conditions' in all situations.

Yet another proposal extends flexibility of grades across skills. This will both reduce jobs and intensify work.

And all this in return for a two-stage reduction of the average standard working week from 39 hours to 37 hours.

The need for a reduction in the working week has been given an extensive push by Confed standards, with leaflets produced by the CSEU over the last six months. They have correctly pointed out the advantages of a shorter working week to women workers, and to the unemployed, with the creation of more jobs.

However, Jordan's proposed trade-off for the reduction in hours will probably mean fewer jobs in engineering, with more intolerable hours for most women workers.

The Confed leadership have argued that their trade-off is the only way working hours could be reduced given the lack of interest in their 'Unite for 35' campaign. But, apart from the fact that most engineering workers will not even have heard of that campaign, it is not surprising that the '35' campaign did not have much meaning for most engineering workers.

At present there is a standard 39 hour week but 700,000 engineering workers work an average 48 hour week.

Many employers are compelling their workers to work 50 or 60 hours a week. And working weeks of 70, 80 or even more hours are not unknown. A campaign for a shorter working week is meaningless in such a situation if it isn't coupled with reducing and eliminating overtime and drastically improving basic pay.

It is quite clear that such a campaign could never be led by the present engineering union leaderships. Instead they appear doubly determined to push through their proposals when a similar package was rejected overwhelmingly only two years ago.

The arrogance and unaccountability of the AEU leadership is clearly on the increase, with the likelihood of an AEU/EETPU merger. Other union leaderships, such as the GMB and MSF, which may at times oppose these proposals, are doing little to campaign amongst the rank and file against them.

The indications are that unless a major campaign is built by the rank and file and carried into all engineering unions, Jordan's package will go through — with union leaders claiming to oppose, signing in the interests of 'unity of the Confed'!

The call must go up from the lobby of 12 April for an urgent national engineering stewards' conference to organise the fight back against Jordan.

**Lobby the EEF/CSEU:  
Wednesday 12 April,  
Engineering Employers  
Federation, Broadway House,  
Tothill St, London SW1**

The council is sacking half its building workers, yet the Labour group claims that this cut will not affect services!

Six hundred jobs, have been cut in Haringey's building works department.

**M**anchester NALGO leadership is facing the biggest revolt seen for years.

After cutting thousands of jobs and reducing the services available, the Council is now proposing that the first five Neighbourhood Offices extend their opening hours.

These will be longer opening hours on weekdays and the introduction of Saturday morning opening. The NALGO leadership proposed acceptance after the Council offered a reduction in the working week by one hour for Neighbourhood Office staff who would work Saturday mornings.

This offer was greeted with hoots of derision and was voted down by hundreds of NALGO members at a branch meeting on 20 March.

Instead of accepting this result, the branch officers are now trying to scare the membership into submission by calling a ballot on strike action over the issue.

**B**irmingham NALGO has two separate but related battles with the right-wing Labour City Council.

Fifty five NALGO members are on strike in the rate rebate department after a Price and Waterhouse survey led to regrading and pay cuts of up to £2,000 a year — at the same time as the increased workload associated with the poll tax.

In the Housing Benefit section 140 NALGO members have been on indefinite strike since last Thursday, 30 March. The main issue in this dispute is the increased workload after last year's change in the Housing Benefit regulations.

The NALGO branch leadership, which includes a member of the *Marxism Today* editorial board, argued against strike action in both cases.

Both strikes have now been made official.

## TOWN HALLS ROUNDUP

**L**ast Thursday, 30 March, Southwark NALGO members met to discuss the Council's proposed compulsory redeployment policy, a policy which would have almost certainly led to job cuts across the Council workforce.

The meeting followed a successful lobby of the Council Labour group during the previous week where the implementation of the policy was postponed.

Although the postponement could be claimed as a success for the unions, further action still needs to be taken. Unfortunately the NALGO members' meeting was inquorate and no further action could be discussed.

Broad Left supporters have been arguing for a demonstrative day of strike action in order to mobilise for all-out industrial action, and most importantly for joint union action. The right wing branch leaders were positively gleeful that no decision could be taken.

Clearly activists in the union must continue to argue for and build for a fight against redeployment and redundancies and build links with other unions.

Only a militant fight across the council workforce can win!

**T**he Labour council in Haringey North London, has voted a 56% rates increase.

This huge increase is the latest in a series of cuts and cost-cutting measures by the Council over recent months to bridge its £53 million deficit.

Other measures include the introduction of a £13.50 rent increase phased in over one year in three installments of £4.50. The first increase was brought in on 1 April.

Local tenants under the umbrella of the Haringey Tenants Action Group have served a summons on the Council for its failure to enter into a period of consultation with tenants.



# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

# SWAPO fears dirty tricks

Fighting in the north of Namibia, leaving nearly 150 dead, has raised a question mark over the country's future independence. Fierce clashes have been taking place between South African government forces and guerrillas of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO).

The apartheid state alleges that SWAPO broke the ceasefire deal negotiated last year.

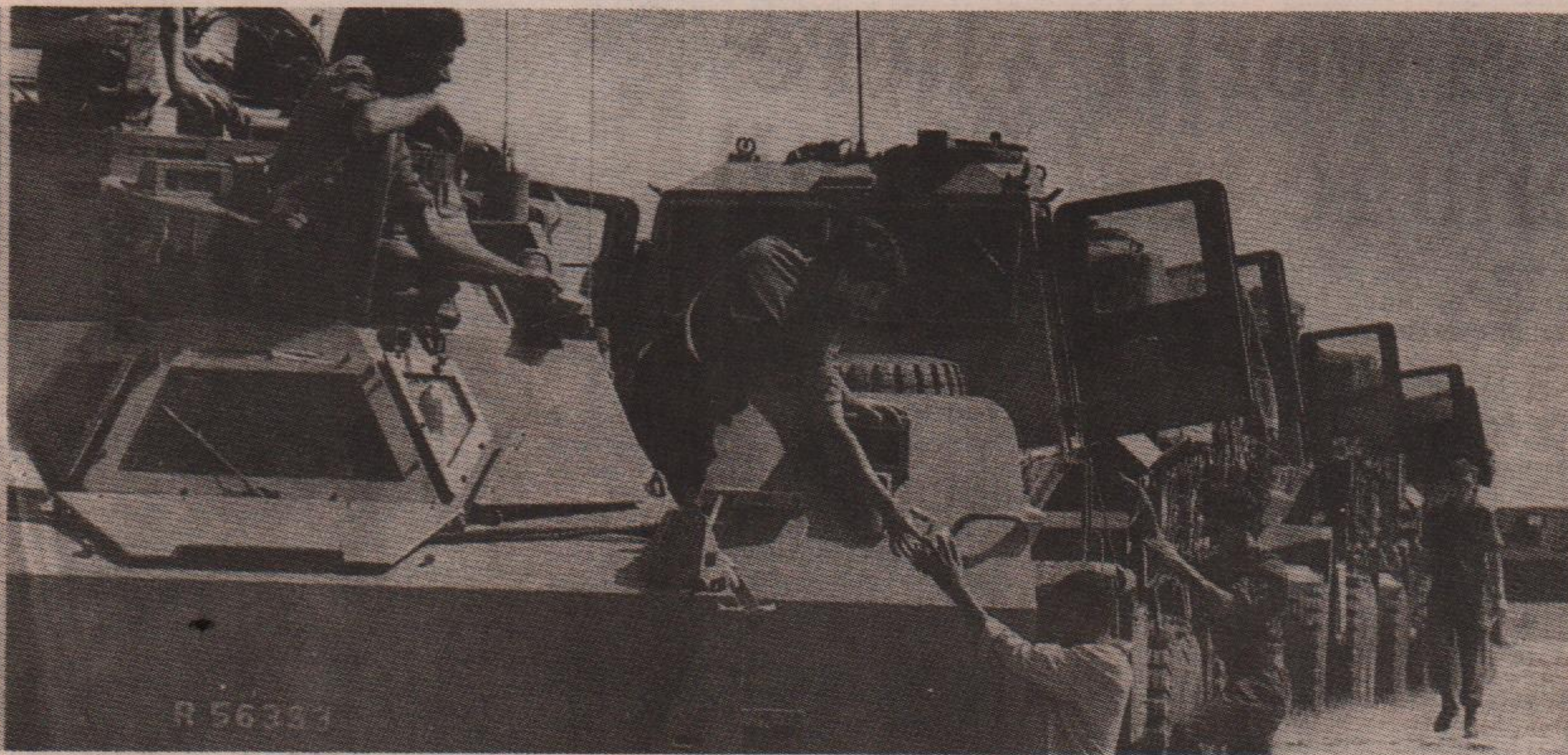
But the South Africans have a far stronger interest in violating the agreement. In the elections due to be held under UN supervision, SWAPO are set to be outright winners.

Current problems may not stall the process. The last negotiated 'settlement', 11 years ago, came to nothing because of South African intransigence. This time, even with provocations, they might not be able to hold things in check.

Two agreements have now been made. The first, UN Resolution 435, governs the general movement towards independence. The second, between Cuba and Angola, governs the withdrawal of 30,000 Cuban troops from Angola.

Cuban troops have been in Angola since 1975, and have played a major role in fighting South Africa's frequent incursions — including inflicting a particularly severe defeat on South Africa in 1976.

Cuban withdrawal is a big concession to Pretoria. So was



SWAPO's agreement (which they have allegedly broken) not to send armed detachments into Namibia from Angola. Already, 3,000 or so Cubans have left Angola. They are all to go by July 1991.

On 1 April this year, the South African army and its proxy, the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF), were confined to their bases, and the release of political prisoners began.

On 12 May, SWATF is to be disbanded. 70,000 refugees are to begin to return. Election rules are to be issued.

The elections are to a body which will draw up a constitution. Only after that are elections to be held

for a sovereign parliament.

UN representative Martti Ahtisaari has promised that "all political parties, whatever their beliefs, must have the chance freely and fairly to put their cases to the public."

SWAPO are not convinced that the UN will be able to guarantee this promise. Ahtisaari's arrival at Windhoek, Namibia's capital, was boycotted by SWAPO, who feared security forces' dirty tricks.

Renewed fighting has, of course, embarrassed Thatcher, who has been making loud propaganda for South Africa's good intentions. Suddenly she had an emergency on her hands — whilst on a visit to the

## Tube workers defy Tory law

By Ray Ferris

Over 400 London Tube workers voted to defy Tory trade union laws last Wednesday, 29th.

They called for a 24-hour unofficial strike on Wednesday 5 April to show the bosses that they mean business.

Union officials were taken aback by the militancy and walked out of the meeting to wash their hands of any illegal strike action. As we go to press, despite pleas from union officials for workers to ignore the strike call, it is set to go ahead.

Drivers of trains with no guards (One Person Operated, or OPO) want a pay rise of £6.43. There must be no strings attached, and they want it backdated from when OPO was phased in.

The meeting insisted that all drivers, even those still working with guards should get the rise in pay.

This explosion of anger is the result of a combination of things. Productivity has soared and wages have fallen in real terms. Safety takes second place to profits — signal faults, broken track, derailments...

With OPO, the pressures of the job have got steadily worse with longer hours, less time to turn trains around, and late meal breaks.

The Kings Cross fire was caused by cutbacks in safety.

Tube bosses are busy preparing for privatisation. New proposals give local crew managers the right to hire and fire on the spot.

The management reorganisation of station grades is a slaves' charter. It includes an "unsatisfactory attendance procedure" under which any day off sick, even with a doctor's certificate, is a disciplinary offence!

Clearly the bosses want to sack people. Already they are cracking down on things like opening the doors on the wrong side — a consequence of no guards and the monotony of the job.

Last year drivers on the Northern Line, still with guards, got the same pay rise as OPO train operators by threatening strike action.

Two lessons are clear. OPO drivers were conned with their 7.5% bribe back in 1984 — it's a lot more work with very little extra pay. And strikes can force the bosses to back down — tube drivers can bring London to a standstill.

We need to make the union leaders fight. The NUR is already due, we cannot let them get away with sabotaging action organised by the rank and file to ballot over station reorganisation, private tendering and disciplinary procedure. This strike must be the first step in a united campaign.

But in order to make their leaders fight, rank and file tube workers must link up and coordinate the struggle inside both the NUR and ASLEF for official strike action.

In the meantime, every worker in Britain should support London tube workers against the bosses' attacks and against Tory trade union laws.

## Rail strike on cards

Three General Secretaries on one platform calling for your support — things must be serious.

For the rail unions — NUR, ASLEF and TSSA — they are very serious indeed.

British Rail bosses want to give the unions a good kicking. They want to scrap the present Machinery of Negotiation which has been in place for decades. They want to scrap national pay and conditions.

They want local pay, performance pay and the right to impose conditions on a docile workforce.

The three rail unions have jointly organised a national tour explaining the bosses' dictats. And they are talking radical — obviously they see their own role as national negotiators falling off the industrial relations agenda.

A strike ballot is on the cards. But we should all remember the lessons of the industry from 1982 onwards. It has not been the rank and file but the leaders who were lacking.

The question has to be put to them — 'are you prepared to fight', seriously and to win?

**Committee Against  
the Massacres in  
Iran, Iraq and  
Turkey**

**Picket of UN Information  
Office, Buckingham Gate,  
Victoria  
1.00, Saturday April 8**

## Talks fail to stop Poland's class struggle

Negotiations between Solidarnosc and the Polish government have had most trouble over the issue of linking wage rises to price rises.

Poland faces a huge economic crisis, which could, over coming months, cause a terrible fall in workers' living standards. 'Index-linking' — automatically increasing wages along with prices — would be vital to protect workers' interests.

Solidarnosc leaders know it would be political suicide to be associated with a deal that resulted in such hardships for workers. Partly for this reason, partly out of an honest wish to defend their supporters, Lech Walesa and the other Solidarnosc leaders have made this their sticking point. And

the leaders of the official state-sponsored unions have felt obliged to side with Solidarnosc on this.

Solidarnosc has a policy on jobs and pay that ought to be adopted by British unions. The central slogans are "work or full pay" and index-linked wages. If Solidarnosc not only insisted upon it in talks with Jaruzelski, but fought for it, this policy could have an enormous effect.

One of the lessons of the Polish events of 1980-81 was that Solidarnosc failed to fight for general, society-wide answers to social and economic problems, even though it had formulated policies on paper. Indeed, Solidarnosc's whole strategy was to shy away from such struggles, believing that the only way to avoid Soviet intervention into Poland was through a "self-limiting

revolution".

The workers could establish control in the workplaces, but the bureaucracy would still control the state. That was the gist of this view.

The Polish working class thus limited itself to defeat. And in a way the current negotiations are a bit of a re-run of that earlier strategy.

The regime has to negotiate, because it is in an economic mess. It would be wrong to imagine that it is about to collapse; but certainly it is weak. And it seems likely that there will be a renewal of workers' struggles — possibly going outside the control of Lech Walesa — in the next few months, in response to the deepening recession.

Poland's rulers are responding to their crisis with more or less Thatcherite policies — closing factories, demanding wage cuts.

Getting an agreement with Solidarnosc — now accorded official recognition — would be a help. Certainly the number of concessions made by them recently suggests growing panics.

Socialists in Britain need to support the forthcoming revolt of the Polish workers without qualification. It remains to be seen how far Solidarnosc will be the vehicle for that revolt, although the signs are at the moment both that Solidarnosc's symbols remain very powerful, and that the Solidarnosc leadership will side with the masses, not the regime.

Within the Polish opposition, socialists like the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution deserve our particular attention and support.