

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

**South Africa:
towards
negotiations?**

**See centre
pages**

Solidarity with the Socialists!

Eastern Bloc campaign launches appeal.

The Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc has launched an appeal to support the socialists in Eastern Europe.

The idea is to raise funds for five of the new working class organisations which are fighting for genuine socialism in Eastern Europe. The five organisations are:

- The Polish Socialist Party (DR).
- The Soviet independent union Federation Sotsprof.
- The East German United Left.
- The East German Initiative for Independent Trade Unions (IFUG).
- The Left Alternative in Czechoslovakia.

These groups are desperate for money to get their message across. The situation is moving rapidly. The pounds we raise can have a real effect on the future struggles.

As Petr Kuzvart from Left Alternative says: "We have now got a duplicator. We need a printing press. This is now our major problem."

Milka Tyszkiewicz, a member of the Polish Socialist Party (DR) currently on a CSWEB co-ordinated tour of Britain, speaks about the Polish crisis: "The cost of living has risen by 40% in the last few weeks as the government's austerity measures have bitten."

To protest about government policies we have organised 30,000 strong demonstrations.

But often we do not have the money to produce leaflets and our newspaper. We need to buy office equipment and printing machines to help us in the fight for self-managing socialism."

All the money that is donated to the *Support the Socialists* appeal will go to the Eastern European Socialists. Nothing will be spent on administration costs. For every £10 donated we will send £2 to each of the five groups.

Rush donations to *Support the Socialists*, CSWEB, 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London, SE5.

CSWEB invites labour movement and student organisations to affiliate and individuals to join the campaign: large organisations £10; small organisations £5; waged individuals £5; unwaged £2.

CSWEB is democratically run by its affiliates. The next national CSWEB meeting is at 6pm on Saturday 24th February at LSE, Houghton Street, Holborn, London WC1.



Mass demonstration in Moscow

USSR: what next?

By John O'Mahony

Mikhail Gorbachev's seeming conversion to a multi-party system in the Soviet Union has turned the political tumult in the USSR from simmering to critical.

Gorbachev's latest proposals mean an end to the constitutionally guaranteed Stalinist monopoly of political power, the pillar of the whole Stalinist system.

Upwards of a quarter million people demonstrated outside the walls of the Kremlin in Moscow last Sunday, 4th, the day before the

Central Committee met. They shouted for the resignation of Gorbachev's old-line Stalinist opponents.

It was the biggest unregimented demonstration outside the Kremlin since the Stalinist ice-age began over 60 years ago. Though unregimented, it was not entirely spontaneous; it was fostered by the Gorbachev faction, who secured permission for the demonstration to take place.

Thus they appealed to the people against the old Stalinists, to street

Turn to page 5

Polish socialist calls for solidarity

"It is important for us in Eastern Europe to co-ordinate our struggle against the bureaucracy and capitalist system right across Europe."

"We need a new, left alternative. Our struggle is a struggle for workers' liberty, democracy and socialism across the world."

Jozef Pinior, Tuesday 6 February 1990

Unite the left to meet the challenge of Stalinism's collapse!

EDITORIAL

Much of world politics for a long time to come may depend on what socialists do in the coming weeks.

In Eastern Europe the collapse of the old Stalinist regimes has put politics in flux. Socialist groups compete for workers' allegiance with nationalists, social democrats, pro-Western bourgeois parties, Stalinists-turned-Thatcherites, Stalinists-still-Stalinists, and, often, fascists.

After years of the misappropriation of socialism as the ideology of nasty self-serving dictatorships, the East European masses are unfamiliar with the ideas of socialist democracy. Anti-Stalinist socialists are a minority, on the whole, and for the moment, in the democracy movements.

The undoubtedly more democratic Western European capitalist model is viewed with envy by many in the East. That we may know that their image of Western capitalism is naive, does not change the force of capitalism as an actually existing alternative.

The apparent attractiveness of capitalism makes the work of the anti-Stalinist socialists even harder. With deepening crisis, they may find rapidly growing audiences. But we have to acknowledge their weakness in most of the countries of Eastern Europe, some of which have been starved of political culture for decades.

The socialist groups lack experience, information, and the most basic material resources — printing presses, telephones, typewriters, duplicators, photocopiers.

A priority for socialists in the West is to help those socialists in the East. It is of course in our own interests to do so: a victory for socialists in Eastern Europe would be an incalculable victory for us, while a victory for capitalist forces an incalculable defeat.

So we need a campaign in the British labour movement in solidarity with socialists in the Eastern Bloc.

We need to publicise their activities, organise speaking tours for their representatives, raise money for their organisations. We need to do whatever we can to help them grow into the decisive force in their societies. For the Left, this must be a priority beyond merely one more solidarity campaign to add to all the rest. Upon what we do could hang the whole future of socialism in the coming years and decades.

We could only hope to achieve this solidarity if the Left unites to campaign for it. Isolated propaganda gestures will not be enough.

The Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc took the first steps towards such a united campaign at its 500-strong Conference on 27 January. We call on all the groups of the left to contact this campaign and discuss joint work.

The organisers of the campaign (including SO) have committed themselves to unity. As soon as it proves possible they are willing to dissolve their structures into a broader, more powerful, more representative campaign to build



Death in Azerbaijan. After Stalinism, the alternative may be socialism or barbaric nationalist slaughter.

solidarity with the working class opposition and the left in Eastern Europe.

The stakes are too high for us to afford petty sectarianism, with each different left group choosing its "own" special support effort for some selected group in Eastern Europe.

The tumult in Eastern Europe has implications for Western politics, too. For decades, the Eastern Bloc has seemed to be the "actually existing" proof that capitalism can be replaced, that a different society is possible.

Demoralisation and disorientation must be extreme for the dwindling group of Western socialists who regarded Eastern Europe as a model of socialism. For the much greater number who were critical but nevertheless saw Eastern Europe as some, albeit imperfect, version of the new society to replace capitalist exploitation, the blow must be almost as great.

Those who held no brief for the USSR and Eastern Europe, but find their "actually existing" new society in an idealised vision of some other Stalinist system — Vietnam or Cuba, maybe — are sure to be disillusioned in their turn. And even that minority of Western socialists who insisted long before the recent upheavals that the state-monopoly systems were no nearer socialism than is capitalism — even they will feel the pressure of the deafening chorus of bourgeois triumph-shouting all around us.

The collapse and discrediting of Stalinism can open the way for a great revival of the politics of workers' self-liberation — but only if socialists know how to resist and respond to the bourgeois pressure.

Otherwise that pressure can drive us back a long way.

All political orientations and demarcations on the left must be re-examined in this new situation. Socialist Organiser repeats, with redoubled urgency, our appeal for the left to discuss unity which we first made in June last year.

We need to maximise and unite the force behind the argument for working class socialism as the alternative both to Stalinism and to capitalism.

We need a united left which fights to build a militant rank and file movement in industry.

We need a united left which fights for the politics of working-class self-liberation within the Labour Party.

We need a united left which fights for solidarity with workers' and liberation struggles everywhere, West and East.

We need a united left which fights for workers' internationalism

as our answer to the growing internationalisation of capital, and the 1992 reforms in particular.

We also need a united left to fight to make the labour movement accessible to, and responsive to the demands of women, black people and lesbians and gays.

Single issue unity will always be necessary; there will always be groups on the left which have unbridgeable divisions on one issue but need to unite on another, and we need to learn that unbridgeable divisions on one issue should not exclude unity on another. But single-issue unity is a second best.

We need to fight for unity — which means trying to thrash out a political basis for unity by debate and discussion, rather than just agreeing to disagree.

In every area, we need to take stock of ourselves, and see whether the divisions of the 1980s really correspond to the needs of the 1990s. Let's start now!

The left and the EETPU

Over 1,600 electricians, members of the EETPU, have gone on strike at Ford plants across the UK.

They are on strike over two main issues: the erosion of traditional pay differentials and the imposition of a new flexibility package.

This strike raises some important questions for those on the left who would dismiss the EETPU out of hand as a 'scab outfit'.

Surely, the EETPU is behaving very much as a recognisable part of the broad trade union movement? It is defending its member wages and conditions. It does it in a bureaucratic and sectional way, but hardly more so than the TGWU's Jack Adams has done at Ford's recently.

The EETPU in Ford is fighting flexibility and team working. EETPU leaders Eric Hammond and Roy Sanderson may be keen on 'Japanese' style working practices and single-union deals, but they can still be forced to back action by their members against those techniques.

It is time to rethink for those on the left who still advocate that militant electricians and plumbers should quit the

EETPU. Some breakaway unions can be liberating but the small Electricians and Plumbers Union (EPIU) and the holding branches set up by the TGWU and MSF for electricians have served only to separate activists from the great bulk of the EETPU rank and file. People who are clearly not scabs, but have chosen to stay with this union.

It won't be easy for EPIU activists to get back into the EETPU. The Hammond regime is the least democratic in the British labour movement. But that is where militant plumbers and electricians should be.

London Socialist Forum

Revolution in Eastern Europe — towards socialism or capitalism?

Speakers from the opposition in the Eastern Bloc, Socialism and Revolution (Iran) and Socialist Organiser
7.30 pm, Monday 12 February,
Student Union, Institute of Education, Bedford Way WC1

McKittrick's mistake

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

Suddenly, Colin Wallace is being taken seriously. After years of government denials and media dismissal, it is now established that at least some of Wallace's allegations are true.

There was indeed a 'disinformation' campaign, code-named 'Clockwork Orange', run via the army's Press Office in Northern Ireland in the mid-'70s.

Wallace's other allegations — of plots to discredit Wilson and his government, of army involvement in assassination campaigns, and of a cover-up of sexual abuse at the Kinvara boys home — now begin to look a bit more plausible.

The *Independent* last week devoted more space than most papers to the Wallace case, but regular readers may have been surprised by the absence of anything from Ireland correspondent David McKittrick. This was all the more remarkable, given McKittrick's reputation as an 'expert' on intelligence matters and the fact that his personal contact with Wallace goes back to the mid-'70s — precisely the time that 'Clockwork Orange' was in operation.

Could this strange omission have had anything to do with the *Independent*'s 'investigation' into Wallace's claims, written by McKittrick and published on September 2 1987? These articles fairly comprehensively rejected Wallace's case and — more importantly — smeared Wallace and his fellow ex-army defector, Fred Holroyd, as liars, fantasists and Walter Mitty-type characters.

McKittrick's reputation as an authority on the more byzantine aspects of the Northern Irish situation, ensured that this demolition job was accepted by most of the rest of the media. It certainly helped the government dismiss Wallace and Holroyd...until last week.

Wallace sent a lengthy and detailed complaint to the Press Council in January 1988. This complaint has yet to be heard, due to *Independent* editor Andreas Whittam-Smith's repeated prevarication. Last week's silence from McKittrick can reasonably be presumed to have resulted from length consultations on how exactly to respond to the government's admission that the Wallace story was at least partly true.

Finally, on Saturday (four days after the official admission) an article by McKittrick appeared. The introduction to this piece referred to the 1987 article and the Press Council case, stressing that McKittrick had not dismissed all of Wallace's allegations. McKittrick himself went on to repeat his general doubts about Wallace's reliability.

Some journalists (notably Paul Foot and *Private Eye*) have suggested that McKittrick's apparent determination to undermine Wallace's credibility has some sinister ulterior motive. I'm not so sure. People like Wallace (or, come to that, Peter Wright) are shifty characters and a serious journalist would be right to mistrust them. McKittrick has a pretty good record as a serious and well-informed commentator on Northern Ireland. He was one of the few journalists to pursue the Guildford Four case with any vigour. Why can't McKittrick simply admit that he made a mistake when he wrote off Wallace back in 1987? We all make mistakes, after all.

"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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USSR: what next?

From page 1

power against their rival bureaucrats, to mass opinion against the conservative opposition which is very strong, and maybe has a majority, in the Central Committee.

They may have failed to intimidate their opponents. As we go to press on Tuesday evening, 6th, nothing has been resolved in the Central Committee. It was due to end on Tuesday but will go on for at least another day. Resolutions are being redrafted to accommodate the opposition, and that suggests that Gorbachev has had to give ground.

That there is bitter opposition to Gorbachev is hardly surprising. So far glasnost and perestroika have deepened the multifaceted crisis of Soviet society, and solved nothing.

Shortages are getting worse. National conflicts are growing. The Baltic republics are on the point of secession. The occupying army which massacred the people of Baku has stopped outright civil war there, but solved nothing. The Azeri blockade of Armenia continues.

Gorbachev's response is to press ahead faster along his road of reform. His opponents want to bathe down the hatches.

They can fairly accuse Gorbachev of creating anarchy and chaos and of having lost them an empire in Eastern Europe. What they cannot do is offer viable alternative policies.

"Gorbachevism" did not spring into existence suddenly, full-grown, out of one man's mind. Gorbachev and his policies are products of the social forces and contradictions created over more than a quarter of a century of abject failure to reform the Soviet Union's economic structure.

During that period its performance compared to the major capitalist countries with which the USSR has been competing on the world stage has grown more and more feeble.

The USSR depends almost entirely on the West for advanced technology. Productivity in its industry is 40 per cent, and in agriculture only 25 per cent, of US levels. Almost its only exports competitive on the world market are raw materials like oil and gas.

Gorbachev knows he can't go back. As he told Siberian miners on the eve of the Central Committee, "if the party is not renewed, it will recede into the background."

"Others advise us to give up innovations, tighten controls, hold everything tight and return to the old ways. But this is not the way for us. It will keep us forever in the past."

That is Gorbachev's strength against the reactionaries. His other strength, paradoxically, is that things have gone so far beyond what the Stalinist system has been built to handle that if the one-time reflex Stalinist response — massive and unrestrained violence — is at-

tempted, then probably it will provoke millions into outright revolt rather than quell them.

Despite their alarm and their condemnation of Gorbachev, the conservatives also know that Gorbachev is no traitor to the ruling class which he and they serve and lead. They know he is making a determined effort to allow that class to survive while the USSR it has led to such a crisis is modernised.

The conservatives who vote against Gorbachev, or even to dismiss him, will be those who are convinced that *despite* his intentions, what he is doing and now proposes to do will not save the Stalinist nomenklatura but expedite its destruction; even a blind policy of sitting tight would be better.

On the face of it, it would seem that any proposal to abandon the Stalinist political monopoly will immediately or soon send the disintegrating debris of the old ruling party after its spawn and satraps in Eastern Europe. The measure of the gamble that Gorbachev feels forced to take is found in that fact. He knows the danger for his class: only recently he pronounced himself *against* a multi-party system for the Soviet Union.

The breakup of the party must be the most likely outcome. And since the centralised Stalinist party has so far been the main force holding the USSR together, without it the chances of national chaos and the breakup of the USSR must increase.

But national chaos is already developing. The CPSU has begun to break up, along the lines of the nationalities of the USSR with the success of the Lithuanians in giving their party independence from the Kremlin, and along the lines of political factions within the party, which is actually a cartel of the ruling bureaucrats and in no sense a real party.

What Gorbachev proposes is to recognise these facts. He has concluded that the organisation he leads can best face up to them by "accepting" them in order to master them. He has seen that the rigid satrap Stalinist parties in Eastern Europe which would not move were eventually moved by the masses.

He is in the business of fostering change. He wants to make the party and the class he represents boldly ride the tides of transformation and thus survive in modernised form.

Here too, there is no alternative, or rather the only alternative is massive repression, and abandonment of the drive to modernise the USSR. Going backwards economically and socially is no solution, and massive repression is unlikely to succeed in a country where the soldiers, too, have begun to think for themselves, to find a voice, and to organise a trade union (led by a man dismissed from the Army in the early '60s for refusing to order soldiers to fire on rioting hungry Russian workers).

Explicit freedom for political parties in the USSR will accelerate



Siberian miners on strike. Interview next week

the erosion of the ruling party. The bureaucracy will not just melt away overnight — it has not melted away in any East European country, not even Poland — but nevertheless, the irreducible core and pillar of the Stalinist system is the political monopoly, with all that goes with it and was necessary to maintain it.

When it goes, the whole situation is changed. It is a different game entirely.

Gorbachev knows that the monopoly is in effect already gone in the Soviet Union, and his programme now is to win the political struggle for the bureaucracy. Are his chances any better than those of the former state-monopoly parties in Eastern Europe?

The USSR bureaucracy is more like the Romanian than the other East European elites, in that it is nobody's stooge, but an independent force. The USSR bureaucracy has the advantage over the Romanians that it is led not by a madman with dynastic ambitions but by an intelligent reformer.

Like the Romanian bureaucracy, the Russian will not fall like a stone into the abyss. It will fight consciously and tenaciously for its position.

Gorbachev is fighting. His difference with the conservative Stalinists is about how to fight. He wants to ride the whirlwind.

The mass demonstration on 4 February was licensed and perhaps organised by the Gorbachevites, but the people are not theirs to turn on and off like a tap. The mobilisation will continue. Very soon it may be against Gorbachev himself.

The obvious parallel to Gorbachev's use of the masses as a whip against the conservatives is Mao's use of the youth in China in the '60s: the difference is that Mao had

the Chinese Army as a force to control the youth and as a scaffolding within which to reconstruct the party he had smashed.

Nothing like that scaffolding now exists in the USSR. Reliance on the Army is likely to increase if chaos develops, but the Army itself may not hold.

Gorbachev's personal tragedy is that his struggle to break out of the impasse in which the bureaucracy has landed the USSR — a brave, heroic, from the point of view of his class, adventurist struggle — is once again serving to agitate, stir up and mobilise the people who will destroy the bureaucracy he is trying to modernise and save.

In his frantic struggle against so many immense difficulties, he is himself forced to undermine and destroy parts of the bureaucracy. The abandonment of the Stalinist monopoly of power will almost certainly bring it a long stride nearer its final disintegration and destruction.

The unsold stocks of homeless

THE HIDDEN HAND

By Colin Foster

London and New York now have an estimated 75,000 homeless apiece.

Some sleep on the streets, most in disused buildings or in hostels. It's difficult for them to get jobs, beyond occasional casual work, without a home address; impossible for them to find homes without getting a job which gives them some money for a deposit and initial rent; and often impossible for them to get social security.

Begging, theft, or prostitution may be their only ways to get an income.

This pool of misery is increasing, not diminishing. It is a natural, logical and normal result of the "hidden hand" of free market economics.

The capitalist free market means that labour power is bought and sold like apples or armchairs. As with apples or armchairs, the fluctuations of supply and demand will leave unsold stocks. It's worse with labour power, because the "unsold stock" of unemployed helps the bosses to impose speed-up on employed workers and thus reduce demand for workers.

Unsold armchairs are stockpiled; unsold apples are trashed; and "unsold" workers?

In a pure market they are trashed like so much rotten fruit. In fact the capitalists want and need at least a small stockpile of unemployed people kept fit for work.

Help from their families, or from social security, keeps some "unsold" workers on a stockpile ready for use. But now the stockpile is much bigger than the bosses need. Social security and local authority housing have been cut. More and more people have no family willing to help them.

The free market takes its toll.

Those Tories who bother to think about the problem at all argue that homelessness is caused by lack of a free market in housing.

Remove restrictions on private landlords, they say, and the free market will balance supply and demand. The Tories' new housing law is inspired by this philosophy.

But most homeless people produce no market demand for housing, because they have no money. Supply and demand will be perfectly balanced, and those homeless people will still be homeless.

And the free market does not produce cheap housing. In crowded city centres it produces a polarisation between high-rent offices and luxury homes, and slums where landlords achieve similar returns by overcrowding.

Chinese dissident faces trial

Yao Yongzhan, a 19 year-old student detained in Shanghai since June 1989, is about to be put on trial on 'counter-revolutionary charges, according to Amnesty International.

Yao Yongzhan, a student leader in the Economic Management Department at Fudan University in Shanghai, was arrested at Shanghai airport on 11 June 1989 as he was about to leave for Hong Kong, a week after the massacre of Tiananmen Square. The Shanghai newspaper *Liberation Daily* reported at the time that he was arrested because he was the leader of an 'illegal organisa-

tion', that is the Autonomous Student Union formed in Shanghai during the Spring 1989 protests. He was formally charged in late July 1989 with counter-revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

Yao Yongzhan's trial seems to be imminent. Yao Yongzhan is detained in Shanghai No 1 Detention Centre and is said to be in fairly good health.

Yao Yongzhan was born in Shanghai on 16 February 1970. He came to Hong Kong in 1982 to join his mother, with a one-way exit permit issued by the Shanghai police. Though he later returned to Shanghai to continue his studies there, he apparently has had Hong Kong resident status since then.



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6 SOUTH AFRICA

Negotiations? Yes: but who and how?

By Bob Fine

Let us hope that there are no hitches at the eleventh hour. After 25 years in gaol, Nelson Mandela has become a personal symbol of the struggle for freedom. His release will be a triumph for freedom against oppression.

It is not clear what Winnie Mandela means when she declares that her husband will refuse to be released unless certain conditions like the lifting of the state of emergency are met. Refusal to be free is an odd negotiating position, unless release is made conditional on other actions on the part of the prisoner.

Doubtless the South African government is pushing Mandela to perform the role the British made for Kenyatta in Kenya — to travel fast the road from the Mau Mau cell block to the defence of ruling interests. It would seem that to his credit Mandela personally is holding out against the worst of these pressures. The future, however, does not depend on the qualities of the leader alone but on the movement he represents.

In its own terms, De Klerk's was a brilliant speech. He is to PW Botha what Gorbachev is to Brezhnev: the replacement of dead brain matter by movement and thought. His speech took everyone by surprise.

Just before it, the left wing *Weekly Mail* went to press on the note that the legalisation of the ANC was not on the cards. What we got was the legalisation of the Communist Party and the PAC as well, the promised release of all 'political prisoners' (though—rather narrowly defined as those imprisoned purely by virtue of their membership of a banned political organisation), and the suspension of the widely used death penalty.

De Klerk said that he would debate the Communist Party any day, describing them — loosely

translated — as 'pathetic'.

Treurnicht, the leader of the ultra-right Conservative Party, seemed lost for words, having little else to say other than that his role was to 'defend the interests of the white race' (exactly!).

Eugene Terre Blanche, the AWB nazi, was heard to say 'God, don't tell me that. No, oh no, it can't be true' but god was not listening.

Zac De Beer, the leader of the Democratic Party, said that he didn't want to make any cheap party political points at a historic moment like this, but that his party had called in vain for these reforms for many years.

Maggie Thatcher naturally led the call to declare De Klerk

'Most socialists in South Africa have identified socialism with the extreme wing of nationalism; this is a crucial moment to break that identity.'

regime rehabilitated — she is under the delusion that she is as responsible for the reform of apartheid as she is for the revolution in Eastern Europe — and she was soon joined by President Kaunda of Zambia. They had been pre-empted by the new leaders of Poland and Hungary, who, eager for trade, had already hosted Pik Botha, the South African foreign minister.

Most of the ANC-SACP leaders are talking the language of negotiation. Jo Slovo and Alfred Nzo were appropriately in Moscow to hear the news; they seem to have buried the hatchet after last year's rift with Gorbachev, when the SACP held their conference in Havana.

They now agree with the Soviet Central Committee that it is time for negotiations in South Africa. The only stumbling blocks are more symbolic than effective: the suspension/abandonment of the armed struggle by the ANC (which in prac-

tical terms has been largely inactive for some time now) and the lifting of what is left of the state of emergency (non-emergency laws in South Africa are sufficient to do the dirty job).

Jo Slovo is celebrating the failure of the South African government to split the ANC from the SACP, and apologising for the one or two 'mistakes' he made in forty years of loyalty to whoever ruled the Kremlin.

The extreme nationalist left (the PAC, some hard-line Stalinists, some of the Black Consciousness movement and at least one comment from Winnie Mandela) is busy re-affirming that apartheid 'cannot be reformed', it can only be 'eliminated' and that accordingly De Klerk's reforms are 'irrelevant and meaningless'.

Winnie Mandela is quoted as saying that the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and PAC 'in the prevailing South African climate is simply a recipe for further problems'. From the hard-line wing of the SACP, Pallo Jordan re-affirmed a commitment to people's war and popular insurrection.

It is certainly right to point out that De Klerk is no Santa Claus and that he has his own reasons behind the bearing of gifts — not least the desire to modernise South Africa. This is no reason, however, simply to reject the legal road he is mapping out. The fetish of illegality is no less debilitating than the fetish of legality.

We must learn to distinguish between the boycottism of the ultranationalists and the admission of socialist politics into the democratic movement. We must avoid a simple denunciation of 'fake reforms' (a bad old habit of the South African left) and explore instead the potentialities opened up by liberalisation from above.

For years and years most socialists in South Africa have identified socialism with the extreme wing of nationalism; this is a crucial moment to break that identity. Legalisation of the liberation movement provides a tremendous oppor-

What is happening in South Africa?

This question can only be answered by looking at the background to recent events.

In 1976, the Soweto rebellion of black school students sparked a national township uprising. Ever since then the white racist regime has faced a fundamental problem: how to modernise South Africa, creating a stable balance with a black middle class and a skilled black working class without surrendering white privilege and power.

PW Botha made real but limited attempts at controlled reform from above, but only fanned the flames of black revolt.

For instance, the Botha government's proposals to create tame, controlled unions for black workers backfired. His limited legal reforms were exploited to help build a militant labour movement that now organises well over a million workers.

Other reforms were less substantial. Pass laws went, only to be replaced by 'a new identity card for all South Africans', advertised on billboards in every segregated township and squatter

camp in the country. In the mid '80s, the township rebellion of the students and youth threatened to fuse with the workplace struggles of the new unions. A general strike paralysed the Transvaal (South Africa's industrial heartland) in November 1984. The Botha government turned towards repression.

In July 1985 the first state of emergency was declared. It was intensified in June 1986. Since then, thousands of activists have been detained. Township organisations have been smashed and/or driven underground, and the workers' movement has reverted to purely workplace concerns.

Now FW De Klerk has seized the opportunity to dictate the pace and set the agenda for change.

De Klerk undoubtedly faces external pressures. South Africa's foreign debt is mounting, sanctions are affecting international competitiveness, massive public spending and arms cuts have been forced on the government and exacerbated by the Angola and Namibian war.

But the massively powerful white repressive state apparatus (particularly its leading personnel) is behind the

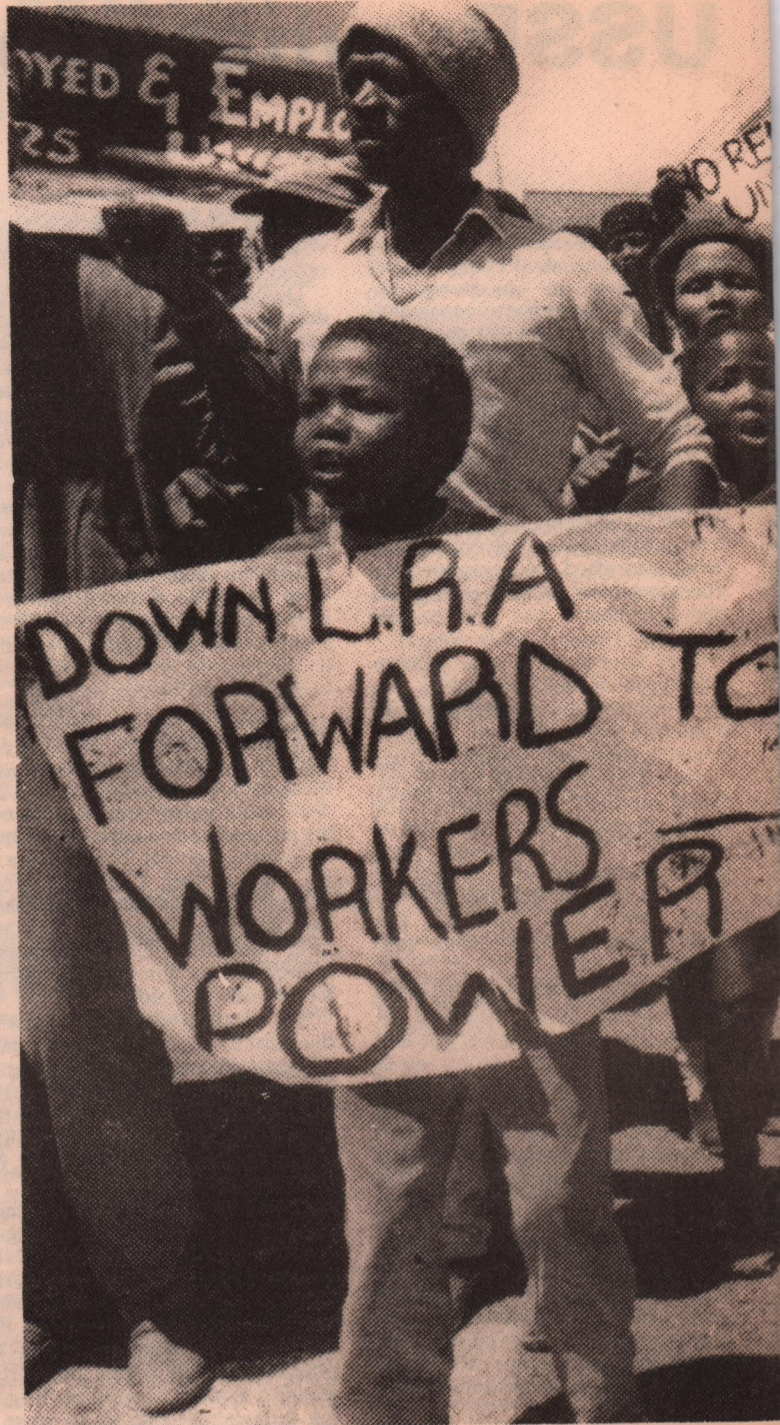
government. De Klerk is not a Noriega or a Honecker. Bush, Thatcher and Kohl cannot pull the plug on him. So he has chosen the present favourable balance of forces to act decisively.

On the other side, the ANC's strategy of 'people's war' has proved ineffective. Under pressure from Gorbachev (who is the movement's main backer but prefers consumer goods in Moscow to revolution in Africa) the ANC has cautiously moved towards a new policy and towards negotiations.

De Klerk's aim, it seems, is to split the black opposition. One socialist active in the independent black trade unions summed up the situation:

"The ANC leadership can certainly anticipate a strong reaction from the youth if they formally renounce or suspend the armed struggle and go for negotiations about anything less than one person one vote in an undivided South Africa.

"There is already a lot of tension between the activists on the ground and those set on a negotiations option. The internal leadership did not expect this kind of rapid legalisation, but rather expected a longer term process. De Klerk appears to be setting the pace."



Workers demonstrate against anti-union laws: a socialist politics means cult of violence with disciplined working class self-defence. Photo: Ata

tunity for the re-construction of socialist politics in South Africa. The boycottism of the radical nationalists offers nothing but a dead-end.

Legalisation will allow the movement to test its strength and popularity with the people. It will allow the growth of democracy both within the parties of the movement and between the parties and those they seek to represent. It will allow for the normalisation of politics in the form of political competition and class differentiation, including the development of a working class political voice or voices.

It will allow for the maturing of a class rather than nationalist view of the state, as not merely an untouchable imposition on the part of foreigners, but as a capitalist power whose overthrow cannot be conceived in isolation from the struggle for reforms.

There is a chance to break from a deeply felt political culture whose article of faith has rested on the strictest counter-position of reform and revolution. There is a chance to link the class struggle for reforms in the here and now to the larger goals of the movement and a more open political discussion of what these larger goals comprise.

There is a chance to bridge the fetishised separation of the economic and the political, so that the lessons of the trade unions may be carried over to the political sphere rather than being isolated in an economic cocoon.

What the unions showed in their response to labour reforms, is that some reforms from above are real gains. If properly responded to, they may serve as a springboard for the movement, as the reform of labour laws was a springboard for the construction of COSATU in the first half of the 1980s, rather than

as the trap set by their architects.

Legality also offers a terrain for workers to examine the record of the Communist Party and other avowedly socialist groupings, and think through the strategic and tactical meaning of democratic socialism in the South African context. The grip of the SACP was closely related to its pivotal role in the armed struggle.

It is absolutely vital for the South African left not to follow the phrase-mongering of those who denounce all negotiations and all forms of political accommodation in principle. It is a recipe for the marginalisation of the left and for socialist politics continuing to operate merely as a militant wing of nationalism.

The main foundations of socialist politics in South Africa undoubtedly-

'It is absolutely vital not to follow the phrase mongering of those who denounce all negotiations and all forms of political accommodation in principle.'

ly lie at present in the trade unions. The trade unions will certainly unite with the political wing of the liberation movement around the battle for certain basic democratic rights. The trade union left will then find itself either trailing the ANC leaders (but wanting a share of the cake as worker leaders), or developing its own identity and concerns within the larger unity.

The key issues are: first adherence to and extension of the democratic demands of the movement (trade union activists have a

The politics of Nelson Mandela



Bob Fine, author of the forthcoming Pluto book, 'Beyond Apartheid, Labour and Liberation in South Africa', looks at Nelson Mandela's life and struggle.

The struggle is my life", wrote Nelson Mandela in a letter from the underground on 26 June 1961. "I will continue fighting until the end of my days."

On 5 August 1962 he was captured after a tip off by an informer to the police. He was charged with inciting African workers to strike in 1961 and with illegally leaving the country. He was sentenced to five years' hard labour.

In October 1963 Mandela was brought to court from prison to join other underground leaders arrested at a farm in Rivonia. Eight men, including Mandela, were sentenced to life imprisonment for sabotage and conspiracy to overthrow the government by violent means. They were taken to Robben Island to serve their sentences. Twenty-seven years later Mandela is still in gaol.

From his prison cell Mandela became an embodiment of black resistance against apartheid.

Who is Mandela? What was his political role in the liberation struggle? Who was the man behind the image?

He was the son of a chief in rural Transkei. He received a privileged education (compared to most blacks) at a methodist school and

Fort Hare College, where his political life began.

He is said to have rebelled against his family's attempt to arrange a marriage and returned to Johannesburg, where he studied law at Witwatersrand and then practised law with the current leader of the ANC, Oliver Tambo.

He was a middle class African who rebelled against the condition of 'the African nation'.

Mandela joined the ANC in 1944 as a member of the radical Youth League. The ANC was a highly conservative organisation at this time, dominated by chiefs, legalistic in the extreme, thoroughly alienated from the working class.

During the war, for instance, they opposed all industrial action by black workers on the general grounds that they were illegal and would hamper the war effort. This was also the general position taken by the South African Communist Party. Doctor Xuma, the head of the ANC, took little interest even in the mineworkers' strike of 1946.

The Youth League, of which Mandela was soon a leading member, was in favour of mass mobilisation and campaigns, but its political direction was African Nationalist rather than socialist. Its 1944 manifesto, which Mandela helped to write, declared that it was "imperative for the African to view his problems and those of his country through the perspective of Race."

It spoke of the "national cause" of Africans, the need to impart to the ANC "a truly national character", a belief in "the divine destiny of nations", a rejection of "foreign leadership and ideologies" and the unity of all Africans. It sought co-operation with Indian and Coloured national organisations. It saw South Africa as a country of four nationalities and claimed the right of "African self-determination".

It drew back, however, from the racism which it associated with Marcus Garvey's slogans of "Africa for the Africans" and "Hurl the white man into the sea". It described itself as offering a "moderate" nationalism which was "not against the European as a human being — but irrevocably opposed to white domination".

There was little or no class perspective in the Youth League's Africanism. Mandela himself voted for the expulsion of Communists, even though the position of the CP in its support for the South African war effort and its opposition to industrial or community activism during the war hardly displayed a deep class loyalty.

The defeat of the African miners' strike in 1946 was a terrible blow for the movement as a whole but especially so for the black working class.

On the side of the rulers, it paved the way for more militant forms of nationalism, expressed in the Youth League's take-over of the ANC, the 1949 Programme of Action, and a closer alliance between African, Asian and Coloured nationalist groups and the Communist Party.

The Programme of Action claimed the "right of self-determination" for African people and the use of "boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-co-operation" to realise it. No independent working

Turn to page 8

linking the working class struggle for concrete reforms to the overall goal of revolution. Replacing the elitist

good foundation for becoming what socialists should be, namely, the most consistent democrats within the movement); second, the re-coupling of democratic demands to demands over the immediate social and economic misery of the people (trade unionists are well placed to remember that democracy is not just an end in itself, but also a means to the material betterment of the lives of the people); third, the building of a democratic socialist party or parties which combine commitment to the democratic movement as a whole with the furtherance of the particular political interests of the working class (just as trade unions seek to represent their particular economic interests). As in Eastern Europe, the working class does not yet have its own political identity. The potentialities which I have outlined are no more than that.

The worst sectarian folly would be for the left to turn its back on the whole process of negotiation and leave it in the hands of the established political forces. It would be equally folly to reserve negotiations for the established political leaders talking to and with each other at the centre. We should obviously support broad rather than narrow representation, public rather than private dealings, accountability rather than the fait accompli behind closed doors.

The major point, however, is to deepen and extend the art of 'negotiation' among black people generally, to democratise the whole process of negotiation, to turn negotiation into a weapon of the working class.

The use of this weapon is an experience with established roots among black workers in the trade union movement. This form of class struggle will inevitably include a minimal degree of defensive

violence to protect individuals and groups in the movement, but it would be of an entirely different social nature from what is now called the 'armed struggle'. It would contrast with the idealisation of violence and its dissociation from the political class struggle.

Involving the youth 'comrades' in this form of working class self-organisation will doubtless be difficult, but there is no alternative other than either their physical suppression (by the right) or celebration of their elemental rawness (on the left).

Who's who

African National Congress

The oldest national liberation movement in Africa. Banned since 1960 and based in exile, the ANC has very close links with the pro-Moscow South African Communist Party. The ANC, which is now open to people of all 'races', aims to achieve a single, united South Africa with one person, one vote. Their programme is the 1955 Freedom Charter, which includes demands such as: 'The people shall govern', 'The doors of education and culture shall be opened', 'All shall enjoy equal human rights' and 'The land shall be shared amongst those who work it'.

United Democratic Front

An alliance of over 600 community groups, political groups, a few trade unions, etc., the UDF was the main force inside South Africa fighting the regime until effectively banned in 1988. Its politics are pro-ANC.

Mass Democratic Movement

Recently the MDM has taken over many of the functions of the UDF.

Pan-Africanist Congress

Its slogan was 'Africa for the Africans'. Based primarily in exile, over the last couple of years the PAC has recreated some structures inside South Africa.

Black Consciousness movement

A nationalist force weaker than the

ANC. Though it is critical of the ANC's 'liberalism' and talks about socialism, the BCM has not positively defined its politics. Many BCM activists advocate a 'socialist Azania', but remain hostile to the involvement of whites in the struggle.

Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU)

Formed at the end of 1985, COSATU brings together over a million workers from many different unions. It is a 'non-racial' federation, organising workers regardless of 'race', though obviously most of its members are black. COSATU has put a lot of stress on participation in the political struggle. The trade unions include workers from many different political backgrounds — some supporting the UDF (some of the unions in COSATU are affiliated to the UDF), others putting more stress on 'worker independence' and 'worker control'. Over the last four years or so the UDF faction has become more dominant among trade union leaders.

National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU)

A much smaller union federation in which Pan Africanist and Black Consciousness activists are influential.

Cape Action League/Action Youth

Socialist groups who call for a socialist Azania and for the working class to lead the fight against apartheid. In the past they have tended to ally themselves (if not merge) with the left wing of the BCM.

Inkatha

The movement of Zulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. Inkatha almost entirely consists of Zulus, and its main activity is attacking the meetings, organisations, etc., of the radical forces. It is a brutal and reactionary group. Buthelezi is famous for his opposition to sanctions. Inkatha has about one million members.

Other, similar but smaller groups exist in other Bantustans.

National Party

The party has been in government since 1948 when it was elected on a programme of rigid 'apartheid' (separation). Its ideology is Afrikaner (Dutch-speaking) nationalism, anti-English as well as anti-black. De Klerk and his supporters are committed to authoritarian reform. He is backed by the military/police/intelligence bureaucracy.

Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB)

Extremely dangerous fascist movement with a base in the low levels of security apparatus.

Conservative Party

Right-wing split from the National Party. Suspected by some to be 'fake rights'.

Democrats

'Liberal' opposition party of mainly English-speaking white capitalists — that is of the wealthier whites who are critical of apartheid. Support reform, and a 'federal' South Africa, but are opposed to one person, one vote as too radical. Financial backers are keen union-bashers.

The politics of Nelson Mandela

From page 7

class voice was to be heard in this programme.

The CP increasingly subordinated itself to nationalism, particularly after it disbanded itself following the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. The trade union movement was at a low ebb.

"No easy walk to freedom". This was the title of Mandel's presidential address to the Transvaal ANC in 1953. The phrase was borrowed from Nehru.

Mandela had been "volunteer-in-chief" of the Defiance Campaign, a campaign in which 8500 people openly defied the government's race laws and suffered the penalty.

Mandela wrote of it: "Defiance was a step of great political significance. It released strong social forces...it was an effective way of getting the masses to function politically...a powerful method of voicing our indignation...one of the best ways of exerting pressure on the government...It inspired and aroused our people from a conquered and servile community of yesmen to a militant and uncompromising band of comrades-in-arms."

The campaign relied on self-sacrifice and was already winding down when the government introduced whipping and five years' imprisonment for acts of defiance. At this point the stream of volunteers dried up.

The campaign had great impact

'Mandela never explored the particular form in which "the turn to armed struggle" was conducted in South Africa: its alienation from workers and mass struggles, its exclusivity, its cult of violence as the way forward.'

in arousing a moral conscience against apartheid, but it did not succeed in securing the repeal of any of the six or seven "unjust laws" it was aimed at. More important, it offered little to the urban working class beyond the role of admiring onlookers.

For black workers, violation of the law was an everyday necessity and their concern was to avoid the clutches of the police. Many must have been bemused as the volunteers offered themselves up to the police.

The non-violence of the Defiance Campaign was also a problem for workers. When in opposition to the recommendations of the ANC violent riots broke out in the Eastern Cape and a number of Africans were shot dead, the response of the ANC was to deny any responsibility.

As a leading Trotskyist of the time, Baruch Hirson commented: "The philosophy of passive resistance is one that flows from a middle class leadership which places no reliance on the masses...It is a glorification of leaders and elevates them as political martyrs...It stems from the religious philosophy that there can be a moral re-awakening of the rulers and it calls in effect for negotiations and concessions that exclude the broad mass of the people."

Mandela, was not unaware of the

problems. He wrote: "A political movement must keep in touch with reality...Long speeches, the shaking of fists, the banging of tables and strongly worded resolutions...do not bring about mass actions and can do a great deal of harm."

He also advocated the need to "fight unreservedly for the recognition of African trade unions" and called upon the ANC to "make the greatest possible contact with working people." Workers, however, were not seen as an independent force but as one element of the people's struggle.

"Freedom in our lifetime" was the slogan Mandela attached to the Freedom Charter approved by the 1955 Congress of the People. This provided the formal basis of the popular alliance between African, Asian, Coloured and white parties to the Congress Alliance.

In his review of the Charter, Mandela emphasised its multi-racialism: "For the first time in the history of our country the democratic forces irrespective of race, ideological conviction, party affiliation or religious belief have renounced and discarded racialism". It was a great step forward in this respect, but Mandela underplayed the degree of racialism still present in an alliance based on racial groups and oriented to a future society based on "equal status...for all national groups and races".

The formal character of the Alliance as a coalition between races also obscured its class composition, that it was an alliance across classes. Mandela, however, stressed approvingly its non-socialist nature: "It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings among the people on a democratic basis...Its declaration 'The People Shall Govern' visualises the transfer of power not to any single social class but to all the people of this country."

To all the classes, he argued, the struggle for democratic rights offered definite advantages. What was important was unity, "the united front".

Alliance and unity were certainly necessary, but on whose terms? What was really at issue in the coming years was the class leadership of the movement; was it to be by workers or by the radical petty bourgeoisie? Although Mandela saw that "the workers are the principal force upon which the democratic movement must rely", the strategies, tactics and goals of the movement were in no way determined by the working class.

A clear illustration came in the Election Strike of 1958. Mandela argued — totally correctly in my view — that boycott is an "effective and powerful weapon" but not a principle.

He wrote: "Some people regard the boycott as a matter of principle which must be applied invariably at all times...This is a serious mistake, for the boycott is in no way a matter of principle but a tactical weapon". Some people, Mandela continued, "regard participation in the system of separate racial representation in any shape or form" as impermissible.

This "inflexible principle" was also an error. It was vital to distinguish between "participation in elections by the people who accept racial discrimination...and participation...in order to exploit them in the interests of the liberatory struggle."

In principle, Mandela was absolutely right. Unfortunately, the occasion was not.

Instead of pursuing demands for a pound a day and the end to the pass laws coming from within the ranks of the unions and instead of pursuing the militant anti-pass cam-



Recent artist's impression of Mandela

paigns of the women's federation, Mandela called for participation in the white elections in favour of the United Party and against the Nationalists on the grounds that defeat of the Nationalists was the top priority.

The campaign backfired badly and the strike in support of the United Party was a flop. In the event, the Nationalists galloped home while the UP drifted ever more to the right.

The failure of the Election Strike fuelled a new burst of Africanism and boycottism in the form of the Pan African Congress, which split off from the ANC.

In 1960 Mandela offered his testimony at the Treason Trial. The government had arrested 156 political leaders following the adoption of the Freedom Charter, charging them with participation in a treasonable conspiracy, inspired by international communism, to overthrow the state by violent means.

The trial dragged on for over four years, the last of the defendants being acquitted in 1961. It served its purpose, however, in exhausting the financial and mental energies of the movement at a crucial time.

The court gave considerable space for political statements. Mandela reasserted his commitment to universal adult franchise, his distance from Communism and his non-racialism: "we are not anti-white, we are against white supremacy".

After his release, Mandela was heavily involved in the mass actions which followed the Sharpeville shooting. This was a tumultuous time in South African history, when tens of thousands of workers went on strike and took to the streets.

The Congress Alliance was not prepared for this level of working class militancy. It either left it to its own resources or made inappropriate calls for Days of Mourning and Stay-at-Homes, which drew workers back from initiatives already taken. In 1961, for example, Mandela was still approaching the United Party, offering support to their opposition to the declara-

tion of a Republic.

When the ANC finally called a general strike, it was far too late, the workers exhausted by their heroic efforts. It was also probably on the wrong issue. What was the Declaration of a Republic, the abolition of any position for Britain's Queen, to most blacks?

Mandela celebrated the response still forthcoming in the strike of May 1961; denounced the massive mobilisation of the state to quell it; attacked the opportunism of the

'Alliance and unity were certainly necessary, but on whose terms? What was really at issue was the class leadership of the movement; was it to be by workers or by the radical petty bourgeoisie?'

PAC and pondered the question of the movement's non-violence: "is it politically correct to continue preaching peace and non-violence when dealing with a government whose barbaric practices have brought suffering and misery to Africans?"

The truth is that non-violence was never an option for the mass of black workers.

Mandela went underground to organise the May Stay-at-Home. From there he issued the ANC calls for "a countrywide campaign of non-co-operation with the government".

The plan, he said, was to "make government impossible". But the workers had already suffered a defeat. The strikes were over. Pass burning had turned into queues for new passes. The government itself had severed the possibility of co-operation.

The ANC turned to armed struggle in the form of a sabotage organisation, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation). Although it broke through the bounds of pacifism and legality, its guerrillaist orientation cut against the mass organisation of workers. Instead, reliance was to be placed on small groups of armed men infiltrating into the country.

Mandela, known as the Black Pimpernel, was picked up and tried for incitement to strike illegally. At the trial in which he defended himself, he challenged the validity of the court.

He was "a black man in a white court" and could not expect a fair and proper trial. He was not "morally bound to obey laws made by a Parliament in which I have no representation".

His case was democratic: "equality before the law means the right to participate in the making of the laws by which one is governed, a constitution which guarantees democratic rights to all sections of the population." He appealed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The will of the people, he said, is the basis of the authority of government.

Mandela gave his African nationalism a radical democratic content: "all people, irrespective of the national groups to which they belong...whose home is South Africa and who believe in the principles of democracy and equality... should be treated as Africans". The problem in South Africa was "the conflict between conscience and law".

The government set the scene for violence and this could do "only one thing and that is breed counter-violence". These were the terrible choices he and his people faced.

Mandela was convicted only to reappear on sabotage charges at the Rivonia trial. Here he declared that "violence by the African people had become inevitable" and that "without violence there would be no way open to the African people...All lawful models of expressing opposition...had been closed by legislation. There was no choice, it was a question of 'submit or fight'."

Violence was to be kept to the minimum, sabotage against property not terrorism against persons.

The object as far as he was concerned was not communism or a classless society, but rather the attainment of democratic rights: "I regard the British Parliament," he said, "as the most democratic institution in the world and the independence and impartiality of its judiciary never fail to arouse my admiration."

Mandela never explored the particular form in which "the turn to armed struggle" was conducted in South Africa: its alienation from workers and mass struggles, its exclusivity, its cult of violence as the way forward. He never was able to investigate the reasons for the terrible defeats in the 1960s at the hands of the South African security forces nor of its connection with the annihilation of mass struggle in this period.

He never really understood working class politics or the class reasons for the defeats of the movement suffered at the point of his imprisonment. It was not for ten years or more that black workers found their feet again in the strikes of 1973.

In the wake of this movement Mandela has returned to the centre of the political stage.

James Patrick Cannon 1890-1974

By Duncan Chapple

James P Cannon was born one hundred years ago this week. Until his death in August 1974, he remained one of the leading socialists of the generation shaped by the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Socialist Organiser is one of the currents shaped and influenced by Cannon's ideas and example.

Cannon, who lived just short of 85 years, was uniquely a product of the American labour movement. Cannon was born on 11 February 1890 in Rosedale, Kansas. His parents were radicals and Irish immigrants. His father spent over 20 years in the early Socialist Party (SP). At the age of 12, Cannon was working in a local meat packing house. At 18, he joined the SP — the great radical Socialist Party of Eugene Debs, which had deep roots in the labour movement. Its success was registered when Eugene Debs, SP candidate for President in 1912, gained over a million votes.

As was common at the time for American radicals, Cannon joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the SP. The IWW was active, with its slogan 'One Big Union'. It organised thousands of unskilled and foreign-born workers shunned by the conservative, craft based racist unions of the American Federation of Labour. Cannon became an IWW travelling organiser, arguing for workers' solidarity and militant industrial trade unionism.

In 1919 the left in the SP broke away to found the Communist Party. It wasn't easy. Many CP members were foreign born communists only used to illegal activity in Europe, many not even speaking English. Many of them argued against legal work in the labour movement. This was the time of the 'Palmer Raids', when many thousands of foreign-born leftists were deported and the young American CP was driven underground. But when conditions improved and legal work became possible, many communists made a principle of underground work and denounced those who wanted to take advantage of legal openings as

"liquidators of the revolutionary party"!

Cannon and others successfully opposed these ideas. In 1921 the CP launched a legal party — the Workers Party — with Cannon as its first national chairman.

American Communism was born into difficult times. In 1921 capitalism stabilised after a wave of workers' militancy following the Russian revolution and the end of the war. Lenin's Communist (or Third) International was faced with the task of building stable sections in every country. But the rise of Stalinism prevented healthy CPs being built.

The rise of Stalin and the growing bureaucratisation of the Communist International locked some American Communists into a life of permanent factional gang warfare inside the party.

In 1928, Cannon was a delegate to the Communist International's 6th World Congress in Moscow. At the Congress, he came across Trotsky's 'Criticism of the Draft Programme of the Communist International', which was a systematic criticism of the long record of criminal blunderings which made up the story of the CP's history from 1923.

This document was given to commission members only accidentally. With a Canadian comrade, Maurice Spector, Cannon read the document and was instantly convinced by Trotsky's ideas.

Cannon and Spector realised that siding with Trotsky was a serious business. It was five years into the campaign against Trotsky, who was already defeated and exiled to a remote region of the Soviet Union. Siding with Trotsky meant isolation and expulsion. Smuggling the 'Criticism' out of the USSR — in the teddy bear of a delegate's daughter — they cautiously showed it to comrades in the American CP. Slowly Cannon gained the support of two other members of the CP's leading committee: Martin Abern, a leader of the Young Communist League, and Max Shachtman, a gifted journalist.

Rumours spread in the CP about what Cannon was doing. He refused to confirm them, knowing that this would mean instant expulsion. Eventually the situation became unbearable for the CP leaders. Can-



(Left to right) Arne Swabeck, James P Cannon, Rose Karsner, Sam Gordon, Oscar Coover and Carl Skoglund.

non, Abern and Shachtman were tried for Trotskyism.

The star witness against them was the manager of the CP's bookshop, who said that they had to be Trotskyists...because they had asked for books about China!

Stalin's misleadership of the Chinese Communists during the Second Chinese Revolution (1925-7) was one long series of criminal stupidities and subsequent cover-ups. It was one of the key questions around which the initial nucleus of Trotskyists was organised.

The three drew out the trial until the audience grew to a hundred — and then Cannon boldly came out for Trotskyism, indicting the party leaders in the name of the Left Opposition.

They were expelled from the CP. It was October 1928. Within a week they were selling their own Trotskyist newspaper, *The Militant*, outside the CP offices on Union Street in New York!

The Militant carried all of Trotsky's major articles. Within a year, over a hundred CP members had joined the Trotskyists.

Through the Thirties, they worked hard: first relating to the industrial militants in the CP; then to left currents outside the CP. They did consistent work in the unions. In 1934 they lead a historic and successful battle for unionisation in Minneapolis.

During the rise of German fascism, *The Militant* came out twice and then thrice weekly, telling the truth about the politics of the Stalinists which allowed Hitler to power.

Cannon and his group also played a central role in building the Fourth International (FI), the world party founded by Trotsky in 1938. The Transitional Programme, the founding document of the FI, was put to the FI's first congress in the name of the US Trotskyists.

In later life, Cannon moved to Los Angeles, but maintained membership of American Trotskyism. In the Sixties he saw it filled with youth and students cheered by the Cuban revolution and angry at the Vietnam war.

Their organisation has since degenerated into crypto-Stalinist apologists for Castro's Cuba.

Cannon tried to warn them against holding illusions in Stalinists like Ho Chi Minh and Castro, stressing the need to build working class socialist parties, even in countries where, in his opinion, or in that of the younger comrades, the Stalinists were making or had made an anti-capitalist working class revolution.

In his last major work, 'The Revolutionary Party', he opposed those who said that workers in the developing capitalist countries could take power with 'blunt weapons' — reformist or Stalinist parties. "It would be foolish and fatal to hold that workers in the imperialist strongholds will be able to get rid of capitalism under the direction of the bureaucratised, corrupt and ossified Social Democratic or Communist parties. Here the injunction to build revolutionary Marxist parties is absolutely uncon-

ditional."

By then, however, Cannon and his contemporaries were long in retirement. The leadership of the American Trotskyist group didn't listen. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP — not to be confused with a British namesake) in the early '70s was dominated by ex-students who identified radicalism more with third world nationalism than working class struggle.

Between 1979 and '83 they broke with Trotskyism — opting instead the role of press agent for the Cuban, Nicaraguan, Afghan and other Stalinists, and purging those who defended Trotskyism.

In Cannon's last speeches and writings, collected in 'James P Cannon — a political tribute' we can read Cannon defending working class socialism — sotto voce, alas — against those who strangled the SWP.

Cannon died in Los Angeles in 1974 on August 20 — the same day, bar one, Trotsky died 34 years earlier. He was the last unbroken soul of the generation of Marxists forged by the years of the 1917 revolution.

Above all, Cannon remained loyal to the spirit of his rebel youth. His last public speech was delivered in May 1974. He said: "We believe in the socialist future and are confi-

dent that it will be realised. But this will not happen by itself. The perpetuation of capitalism can lead to nothing but destruction in economic crises, wars, and eventual destruction of the entire human race, if it is allowed to go on its course. But we firmly believe it will not be allowed to do that. The working class of the world, whose power is unlimited, will act in time to avoid such a catastrophe by eliminating capitalism and inaugurating the socialist society of the future."

Cannon's writings are still available today. They are a lifeline; a chronicle of building up Marxist ideas in the labour movement. When the history of socialism is written by a working class freed from capitalist exploitation, Cannon will undoubtedly rank with the great revolutionary socialists of our century.

Without the long heroic work of James Patrick Cannon and his comrades in defence of democratic working class socialism and unfalsified Marxism, our chances of rebuilding a mass working class socialist movement would be immensely less than they are now, when the historical space so long occupied by Stalinism is opening up for us, and the tide of history is turning.

Revolutionaries or cheering squad?

"The degeneration of the Communist Party began when it abandoned the perspective of revolution in this country, and converted itself into a pressure group and cheering squad for the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia — which it mistakenly took to be the custodian of a revolution 'in another country'...What happened to the Communist Party would happen without fail to any other party, including our own, if it should abandon its struggle for a social revolution in this country, as the realistic perspective of our epoch, and degrade itself to the role of sympathiser of revolutions in other countries. I firmly believe that American revolutionists should indeed sympathise with revolutions in other lands, and try to help them in every way they can. But the best way to do that is to build a party with a confident perspective of revolution in this country. Without that perspective, Communist or Socialist Party belies its name. It ceases to be a help and becomes a hindrance to the revolutionary workers' cause in its own country. And its sympathy for other revolutions isn't worth much either."

James P Cannon, 2 March 1954



James P Cannon

A moral rejection of New Times

REVIEW

By Clive Bradley

In the new issue of *Race and Class* magazine, its editor, A. Sivanandan, launches a sustained and powerful assault, not so much factual as moral, on the ideology of 'New Times' put forward by *Marxism Today*.

He calls it the 'hokum of New Times', denounces the whole political project behind it as 'Thatcherism in drag', 'an eat, drink and be merry socialism, because tomorrow we can eat, drink and be merry again...a socialism that holds up everything that is ephemeral and evanescent and passing as vital and worthwhile, everything that melts into air as solid, and proclaims that every shard of self is a social movement.'

Sivanandan's focus is that the 'New Timers' simply blot out the world as it is experienced by the poor and dispossessed of Britain, and of the Third World. When they talk about changing culture, they mean the culture of the better-off sections of the working class. Their language, their 'discourse', as they would put it, does not articulate the experience of poor people.

'Who are these people who, in our own societies, "with however little money play the game of using things to signify who they are" unless it is those who use cardboard boxes under Waterloo Bridge to signify that they are homeless?'

Such concerns, says Sivanandan, for the destitute, for the millions living on social security, for the black people who organise a campaign to defend their communities after the death of one of their number in police custody, not to mention for the impoverished masses of the Third World, are right and proper for a 'socialist conscience'.

Even where the New Times addresses such issues, it empties them of socialist, that is political, significance, and converts everything into the quest for identity of individual consumers. So he quotes Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques from 1986: 'With the rise of the Band Aid/Live Aid/Sports Aid phenomenon, the ideology of selfishness — and thus one of the main ideological underpinnings of Thatcherism — has been dealt a further, severe blow.'

But, says Sivanandan, 'all that it shifted was the focus of responsibility for the impoverishment of



Preston engineers trapped in old times, fighting for a 35-hour week. Uninterested in re-appropriating the sphere of consumption and leisure? Photo: John Smith (Profile)

the Third World from Western governments to individuals...In the language of the new Marxists, a discourse on western imperialism was transmogrified into a discourse on western humanism.'

The central theoretical error of the New Timers, Sivanandan argues, is that they dissolve collectivist identities, the starting point of which is class, into fragmented

'The central theoretical error of the New Timers, Sivanandan argues, is that they dissolve collective identities.'

'cultural' identities: all struggle is supposed to take place in the cultural sphere, 'civil society', as if the state did not exist, or at least frame that cultural sphere; in the New Times there is no place for a struggle against and conflict with the state.

So New Times is more concerned

with the 'new social movements' — of women, blacks, gays, Greens — than with class. But it then 'falls into a new sectarianism'. It is not to say that there should be no attempt to redress the balance of racial, sexual and gender discrimination, but that these solutions deal not with the politics of discrimination but its arithmetic — giving more weightage to women here and blacks there and so rearranging the distribution of inequality as not to alter the structures of inequality themselves.'

There is nothing inherently socialist about any of these movements, says Sivanandan, 'if these issues are fought in terms of the particularistic oppressions of women qua women, blacks qua blacks and so on, without being opened out to and informed by other oppressions'; 'to the extent that the Green movement is concerned more, say, with the environmental pollution of the western world than with the ecological devastation of the Third World caused by western capitalism, its focus becomes blinkered and narrow, and its programmes partial and susceptible to capitalist overtures.'

Sivanandan's polemic is forceful and impressive. 'You don't have to live in poverty and squalor to be a socialist, as Beatrix Campbell so derisively implies,' Sivanandan comments acidly, 'but the capacity to identify yourself with those who do, helps.' Indeed.

And there is nothing to be sneered at in Sivanandan's essentially moral case against the New Timers. But there is an element lacking in his alternative that substantially weakens it. Crudely, Sivanandan's own conception of class has too exclusively moral a tone to it; he seems, even, unhappy with the notion of class, aggressive though he is against what the New Timers say.

'The old marxists were...too wedded to orthodoxy to see that the old relations of production were disintegrating...they could not bear to think that it was Capital that was now being emancipated from Labour.' 'The productive forces were pregnant with a new economic and social order...It required Mrs Thatcher to take a knife to the unions before the new order could be born.'

So Sivanandan concludes his assault with a quick survey of the struggles that demonstrate a con-

sciousness among working class people that is not simply consumerist, individualist, and all the other market-based -isms associated with Thatcherism and lauded by *Marxism Today*. He mentions the struggles of black people, in Broadwater Farm and Southall, against the deportation of Tamils, activities of Jewish women in support of the *intifada* and so on.

And no one would wish to diminish the significance of all of these struggles, nor to dispute that they contradict the post-Fordist certainties of the New Timers. But there are other struggles which also contradict them, which Sivanandan does not mention — of London transport workers for better wages, of hospital workers, including the ambulance crews currently in dispute, for more money but also for a better health service, of the

'Sivanandan also has a New Times theory albeit on firmer moral grounds than Marxism Today.'

whole range of working class people who have been involved in 'traditional' class struggles, against the employers and against the state.

Why do these struggles get no mention in Sivanandan's account? Because he also has a New Times theory, albeit one on firmer moral ground than *Marxism Today*'s. I'm not sure every aspect of it is coherently thought out: but Sivanandan seems uncomfortable with 'traditional' working class struggles. He seems to doubt their relevance.

Of course there are many new issues to be addressed by socialists; of course there have been important changes, to the economy, to the working class, even to 'culture', that broad concept so adored by *Marxism Today*. But it is important also not to lose sight of what is not new, or of the elements of newness that do not at all justify the New Timers' conclusions. Sivanandan says that what he calls their 'apostasy' is 'premature'; and so it is. But perhaps it is still more premature than he seems to believe.

Mad cows and Englishmen

LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

The latest news from the world of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is that laboratory mice can catch the 'mad cow' disease just by eating brain tissue from infected cows.

This is a far more worrying finding than the previous one that mice could contract the disease after inoculation of infected material straight into their brains. After all, (some) humans eat cows. Many must have eaten infected material before BSE was recognised, and many are still eating it from cows incubating the disease but not displaying symptoms by the time of their slaughter.

The research that led to this finding was carried out at the Royal Veterinary College. Mice were fed up to about 9 grams of minced brain from cows with BSE over a week. Those that ate most developed symptoms of nervous disease similar to those in mice infected by the sheep disease scrapie.

Autopsy of the 'mad mice' revealed signs of BSE in their brains: protein fibres disrupting brain cells and holes where clumps of brain cells had died.

These findings are important for two reasons:

- they strengthen the assumption held by many scientists that BSE is caused by the same organism that causes the degenerative brain disease scrapie in sheep;

- they show it is possible to contract it through eating infected material. This is in line with the widely-held theory that cows picked up the disease through being fed protein supplements made from various left-over bits of sheep and other unsavoury ingredients.

Potentially more worrying may be the results of similar experiments feeding other parts of infected cows to mice. If they can get BSE from these parts as well, it makes the government's ban on the use of just brain and spinal cord tissue rather less effective.

At present, unwanted bones (including skulls), intestines and other organs are stewed up for hours at pressure cooker temperatures. The water and fat are removed, the latter for use in soap and make-up, and the resulting powder fed to cattle, pigs and poultry as meat and bone meal.

This treatment will kill all bacteria and viruses except the scrapie organism, which resists not only heat but also ultra violet light and irradiation.

So does the scrapie organism get into the meat and bone meal? There is concern that the government ban on brain and nerve tissue is being negated by such slaughterhouse practices as sawing cows' heads in half with chainsaws to remove the brains. Brain tissue is splattered everywhere, and it is difficult to ensure that none gets through.

Is this relevant to us? It has been pointed out by government spokespeople that scrapie has been known for at least two hundred years, and yet there is no recorded case of a human catching it. Humans do get degenerative brain diseases but there is no evidence to link them with scrapie. Why worry about BSE?

The reason for worry is the small but real chance that the scrapie organism, having crossed into another species, will change. The different environment may allow the selection of mutants better able to flourish.

This may well be what happened when the AIDS virus crossed the species barrier into humans. If the scrapie organism has changed in its passage through cows, it may become more infective or less. There is no way of predicting it but, in view of the devastating consequences if it were to spread into people, the utmost caution is justified.

Haunted by Elvis

CINEMA

Liz Quinn reviews

'Mystery Train'

Jim Jarmusch's 'Mystery Train' is a light-hearted attempt to show how people, places and events are intertwined without us even realising it.

He introduces us to three different stories, linked firstly by the fact that they are occurring simultaneously (though this does not become apparent until half-way through the second story).

The film is set around a derelict, sleazy hotel in Memphis, whose

proprietors are a source of amusement because, despite the obvious squalor of the hotel, they seem to take pride in their appearance and in the running of the hotel.

All the characters are connected by their own personal hauntings of Elvis. One is absolutely infatuated with Elvis, another sees an apparition of Elvis, and another is actually called Elvis, much to his dislike.

There is a small element of suspense, in that each story is held together by the sound of a gunshot heard at the end.

It is quiet, and at times appears slow-moving, so much so that the snoring of a man behind me coincided with that of someone on the film.

Despite this, with blues music interspersed, keeping you chuckling until the end, it is an original and enjoyable film.

Ambulance rank and file debate the way forward

On this page we present a debate between rank and file Merseyside ambulance workers about how to escalate the action.

This debate should be of great interest to all socialists and trade unionists.

The debate revolves around two options: to strike without cover or to attempt to stay on the job, just doing accident and emergency work.

However, there is a third option for escalating the action that avoids the defects of the other two — an all out strike with emergency cover.

This would be the best way of unifying the ambulance workers and escalating the action. It would break down the divisions between those on strike, those locked out or suspended in some form, and those still on full pay.

A national strike ultimatum could also increase the pressure on management to concede some elements of trade union control

over emergency cover. Having every ambulance worker out on strike would make the argument for solidarity strike action from other workers much easier.

It is vital to distinguish this option from that of no cover. We need occupations to prevent lock-outs, and appeals to the army and police to stop scabbing (not just by walking off the job, but by arranging a transfer of emergency duties under workers' control).

Ambulance workers should not be frightened off this option by threats of injunctions or the withdrawal of insurance cover. Let's dare the Tories to jail a professional life-saver for refusing to let unqualified troops and police do their job.

Tactically, it would backfire in the propaganda war, making it much more difficult to convince other groups of workers to take strike action in support.

If the ambulance workers had been on all out strike with no cover during the storms on 25 January,

and had refused to lift the action, can anyone honestly believe that it would not have eroded their base of support?

Major walk-outs would almost inevitably split the ambulance workers' ranks, as many people who are by no means strike-breakers would work to maintain some sort of emergency service. Those who would stay on strike would — whether they like it or not — be forced to accept police and army scabbing as necessary in order to save lives.

Strikes in the NHS are generally weaker than those in, say, engineering, because they don't hit profits. The countless deaths of ordinary working class people as a result of the Tories' NHS policies has not led to a U-turn by this vicious government. They don't care about us.

If they did then they wouldn't let thousands of pensioners freeze to death every winter. The tragedies that would result from the total withdrawal of cover (or provoking enough lock-outs and suspensions

to overstretch the police and army) would not force this evil government to back down.

They have dug in their heels. They hope that if they can stick it out and beat the ambulance workers then they will have halted the pay revolt that has been gathering steam since the Ford strike two years ago. With their economic policies fraying at the edges, Thatcher fears that if they lose this dispute they will also lose the next election.

Therefore, the key to beating the Tories in this battle is to get other groups of workers who do have economic and political muscle to use it.

Let's force the bosses across industry to put pressure on Thatcher to surrender.

Last week the Liverpool ambulance stewards voted to campaign for a national ballot for a strike with emergency cover. Articles from Merseyside Ambulance Worker

Divisive deal for teachers

By Liam Conway

The Interim Advisory Committee (IAC) on Teachers' Pay has just presented its report to the Government.

From the reactions of the press and the National Union of Teachers you'd swear it was a simple percentage rise. The NUT has sent a newsletter into schools containing the basic details, but excluding the hidden message of the report and any hint that we might take action against it.

The award itself is pretty confusing. It comes in two stages — April 1990 and January 1991 — and represents an average increase of over 8%. However, many teachers on the bottom scales will get less than 7% and those that receive extra next year will have to wait 9 months to get it.

But these are minor details. Hidden beneath the trumpeting about 8% is a cocktail of regional pay, plant bargaining and individual contracts. The IAC recommend that schools and Local Education Authorities be given powers to make extra payments above the basic scales and existing incentive allowances.

Such payments should be used for shortage subjects, in shortage areas or, most likely, for just plain grovelling to the authorities.

With poll tax and Local Management of Schools, Heads and governors will have less public money but more power to decide who gets it.

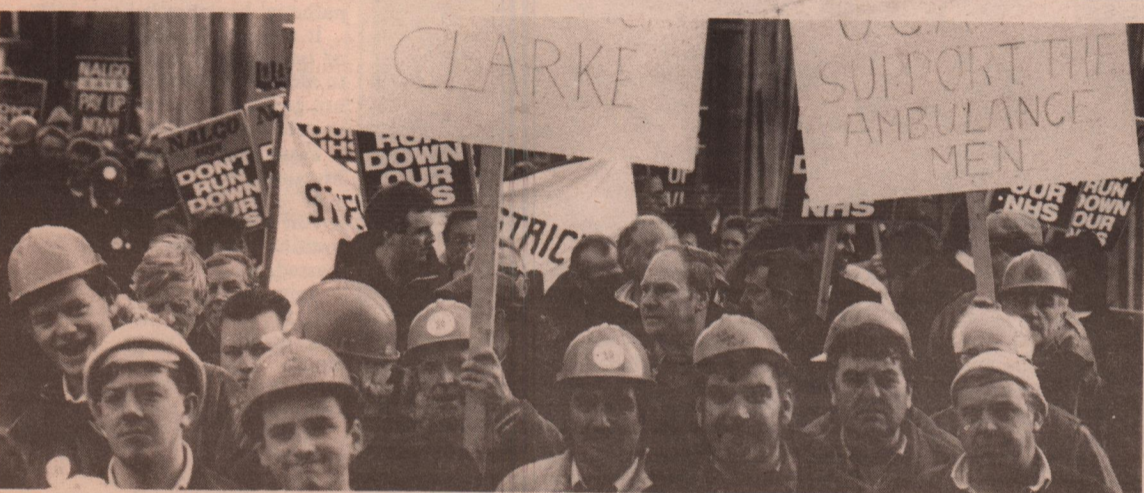
And who will be rewarded? Not NUT activists, not part-time women teachers, not lesbian or gay teachers, not black teachers, not pregnant teachers. These are more likely to get the sack.

It will be teachers like those who arrange sponsorship from local industry and accept the dismantling of state education that get the perks. And with individual contracts who needs a national union?

The second biggest union, the NAS/UWT have at least got some plans for strike action over the basic award, but neither of the teaching unions has begun to grapple with the hidden meaning of the report. Like in the ambulance dispute, the Tories want to divide workersd amongst themselves, and so far the unions are letting them get away with it.

But workers can't afford to see their national union destroyed even if the leaders aren't prepared to defend it. So the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic, Fighting Union must join forces to highlight the bankruptcy of the leadership's 'new realism'.

They must ensure that the membership discover the hidden messages of the report. If this is done successfully, the membership themselves could spearhead the beginnings of a massive campaign of action against the government's pay award and go on to bring down the right wing 'Broad Left' majority in the forthcoming National Executive elections.



Solidarity action. UCATT members stop work at Pilkingtons in St Helens in support of the ambulance workers. Photo: John Smith (Profile)

To strike or not to strike?

There are growing calls in many services around the country for all-out strike action.

Indeed, a number of individual stations have already taken this action. So far, on Merseyside, the call for an all-out strike has not been very great.

It may, however, be useful to discuss at this stage the arguments for and against an escalation to this level. The lists below are not meant to be exhaustive or comprehensive. The intention of this article is to provoke thought and stimulate debate.

- For**
- The resources of the police and army would be stretched to breaking point.
 - Every ambulanceman and woman in the country would be in exactly the same position.
 - The dispute would be brought to a head.
 - Public sympathy on its own cannot win an industrial dispute.

- Against**
- We would lose the exceptionally high levels of public support we currently enjoy.
 - The people who have been supporting us with our bucket collections and petitions would be the very people we would hurt.
 - The press and television would have a field day highlighting the cases where people had died.
 - The amounts of money we were able

to collect from the public to pay wages would decrease dramatically.

As we have said, this is not meant to show all the arguments of either side. We are not advocating one case or another. All we want is for people to be fully aware of the issues involved.

Time to strike

We've been in dispute now for four months yet we are no nearer settling the dispute or achieving our objectives than when we started.

I believe we have acted with the utmost restraint despite all the provocations. We have conceded most of our original claims. We have dropped early retirement, longer holidays, the reintroduction of overtime rates, a shorter working week; and now Roger Poole is

saying our original claim of 11.4% is negotiable and a pay formula need not be linked to the Fire Brigade. The government has conceded nothing and has maintained a hard line against us.

We have escalated the action to such an extent that for most of the country, including Merseyside, a large proportion of staff are on strike in all but name. Roger Poole is now out of touch with the strength of feeling running throughout the country. He has always told the people of Britain that we would never strike, but he has never had a mandate from ambulance staff to make a statement like that.

Ambulance staff have had just about enough of the government's intransigence and strike action will show Clarke that we are determined to fight for what we believe to be our legitimate and fair claims.

Stations in Southern England have already taken the initiative and have gone on unofficial indefinite strike. The next step for the leadership should be to call for a national strike ballot.

Here on Merseyside we should be pressing our stewards for a branch meeting and a ballot for a strike should be called for.

However, we must be clear about the consequences of a strike. Any vote in favour of a strike must be followed up with a firm commitment by individuals to follow it through to the end.

I don't believe a strike would last as long as the miners' strike, but it certainly wouldn't be over within a week or even possibly a month. But it is the only course of action left open to us now and we should pursue it.

Boxing clever

Some stations in some services — albeit a very small proportion — have withdrawn all cover, voluntary or otherwise.

Notably, due to the publicity which it attracted, Crawley ambulance station has withdrawn cover.

I was present at the march in London and noted there was a banner and a party from Crawley. I also noted that they were loudly applauded by large sections of the attendance at the rally.

I think such accolades should be reserved for stations who have taken the revocation that Crawley gave way to, and have not broken ranks and withdrawn cover.

I appeal to all members of the ambulance service not to break ranks, not to withdraw 999 cover, whatever the provocation, but to emulate the real heroes of the dispute, those who have "stood by their posts", without pay, for week upon week.

A movement is underway to enlist support from the rest of the trade unions with sympathy action. This is asked for because we feel we cannot take full strike action so we ask our comrades to act for us.

To withdraw accident and emergency cover totally would invalidate that request.

Stand together, be resolute, be disciplined. Stand by your leaders; especially stand by the people, and they'll stand by you.

BAe — Reject this offer!

Step up the action!

British Aerospace have offered striking engineering workers a 37-hour week.

But the offer should be thrown out of next Monday's (12 February) mass meeting.

The proposed deal means a four shift week, bell to bell working, the abolition of all tea breaks and staggered lunch breaks.

Not much after 14 weeks on strike and with BAe under intense pressure from the rest of the European Airbus consortium!

Next Tuesday's meeting of the Confed strategy committee should take note of the feelings of rank and file BAe workers.

The dispute should be escalated within BAe itself with a strike throughout the company and the day should be named for a one-day industry wide strike for the full national claim of a 35-hour week with no strings!

Tories are on the run

WHETTON'S WEEK A miner's diary

The next step the ambulance unions are considering is to lobby all Tory MPs. I'm quite sure that any pressure we can exert on Tory MPs can't do any harm, but I'm not sure what good it's going to do.

It may be that if we were that much nearer a general election, and Tory MPs were merely hanging on to "what the hell's going to get me re-elected", there'd be more point.

I think it's gone beyond that now.

The Tories have really got the skids under them. I welcome any move the ambulance workers make, but they seem to be lacking the political perspective that the government is taking action against them because they're organised in an effective trade union.

It's part and parcel of their battle to smash trade unions. Dockers, seafarers, miners, etc., have had to go under the hammer.

But although they've had a lot of hammer, the trade unions are still in there and still fighting.

The Tories are going to turn their attention to what they see as the soft underbelly, and they've bitten off more than they can chew.

Everybody must be over the moon about the possible decision to release Nelson

Mandela. I would urge a word of caution.

It is a step forward, but only a very small one. I think it was Chairman Mao who said that the longest journey starts with the first step. There is still a very, very long way to go.

I would like to believe that the small amount of sanctions that has been levelled against South Africa has played its part. In the back of my mind I ask myself, if we'd really applied sanctions and really gone to town, what might we have achieved? A damn sight more.

Far from lifting sanctions people must insist that sanctions are strengthened. The release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC is not going to be that significant against the neo-fascist capitalist system that exists in the state of South Africa.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

Solidarity strikes will save lives!

An 86 year old man died in South London after waiting five hours for an ambulance, an inquest was told this week.

His family and a doctor called the ambulance station five times, and were told, five hours before an ambulance arrived, that one was on its way.

The doctor who treated him when he arrived at the hospital was called away to look after the boxing promoter, Frank Warren, instead.

Meanwhile in north London, a stabbed man died waiting for a police van to pick him up. For 35 minutes, Andy Chrysostomov lay dying on the pavement. Fully trained ambulance workers were two minutes away, but junior police would not call them out for fear of disciplinary action.

These incidents show just how badly the army and police are coping with doing the ambulance workers' jobs.

The Tories know the problem: yet they continue to put all of our lives at risk by refusing to concede to the ambulance workers' demands.



We need solidarity action to win the dispute. The TUC should call, at the earliest possible date, a proper full-scale day of strike action, as the first step in an escalating programme of action.

A clear call should be made. When the London busworkers committee organised their action on the 30th, they tried to do it 'vaguely', with little publicity, and a pull in

rather than a clear call for a strike, in an effort to avoid retaliation from the courts.

The end result was patchy action — and it was very unlikely that legal action was made more difficult by the methods they adopted. A clear call gets firmer and more widespread action, and makes it harder for the Tories to use the courts.

Students: all out 15 February!

By Paul McGarry

The demonstration organised by the National Union of Students on 15 February is the central focus in the fight to stop the Tories' plans for 'top-up' loans.

The demonstration is the culmination of two Weeks of Action against loans and in defence of student unionism. Escalating the activity in colleges over the next few weeks is essential if McGregor, the Education Secretary, is to be stopped.

In the run-up to 15 February, activists should organise one or two-day occupations, shutdowns and work-ins as the first stage of organising the latent student opposition to loans. This will also ensure a big turn out on the national demonstration.

Activist groups and Labour Clubs should be pivotal in canvassing halls, organising leafletting, speaking to lecturers and approaching labour movement organisations for support.

In many colleges the union officers will be looking to keep a tight grip on the loans campaign and damp down any action which endangers local 'public opinion'.

At a national level too, NUS leaders are less than happy about having to call any form of direct action. The clique that runs Labour Students generally oppose demonstrations in London because students can not be relied upon not to misbehave and alienate 'sympathetic' backbench Tory MPs.

It follows that the national wave of occupations that will be needed to mobilise students against loans is not going to happen unless activists in colleges organise them.

Plans for Emergency General Meetings need to be worked out now — so the militancy and collectivism generated by the call for the national demonstrations is not wasted.

Joint activity should be organised with the lecturers' union NATFHE, who are themselves pursuing a pay claim, and ambulance workers, who should be invited to speak at rallies and occupations.

Unfortunately for students NUS is paralysed by its bureaucratic attitude to campaigns and the forthcoming election for NUS President.

'Cosmo' Hawkes, the Roy Lynd of student politics, and his Labour Student opponent, Stephen Twigg, seem more interested in their careers than students' living standards.

We will have to organise action which goes beyond these jokers if we are going to beat loans.

Mersey ambulance workers want escalation

Tommy McLaughlin, one of the leaders of the ambulance dispute on Merseyside, told us:

There was a meeting of the Merseyside ambulance shop stewards last Friday (2 February). We agreed to propose to this Wednesday's branch meeting that a ballot be held for a 24-hour strike on Merseyside with no accident and emergency cover.

If the branch gives the go-ahead, the ballot will be held next week, though no date has been set for the strike.

We felt that if we were calling on the other trade unionists to strike for a day in support of us, then we had to be seen to be prepared to do so as well.

We had last week's day of action, which was very successful here, but Clarke has said that it will not make any difference so we need to step things up.

The TUC should be calling a 24-hour general strike, but it will never do so. When members of other unions have called for this, such as the NUR, the leaders of the five unions involved in the dispute have told them to keep their noses out of things. This shows how detached they are becoming from their members.

The ambulance service on Merseyside has now been reduced to a skeleton service as a result of the suspensions imposed by management. About 300 out of a total 500 staff have been suspended.

Even so, the assistant chief officer has claimed that there will still be a full complement of vehicles in use, and that he has cast-iron guarantees that ambulance officers will keep the vehicles on the road!

We are totally opposed to the suggestion of localised pay deals made by last week's meeting of ambulance officers. This would take us back to the situation before 1974, when localised deals were the norm.

It would be a step backwards. It would break up the unity of feeling which exists at present, and help open

up the way to privatisation.

So, except for the London weighting, we're totally opposed to a localised pay structure.

It was galling to hear the announcement last week about the big pay rises for top civil servants and captains of industry. The money which the government has already spent on trying to beat

us shows that this dispute is not just about our own pay deal — it is now about what pay rises other public sector workers are going to get.

Other workers recognise this as well, which explains the tremendous support we have received. Some £4 million has been donated since the start of the dispute, which is probably more than

was collected over the same length of time during the miners' strike.

But our members are now asking what is going to happen next. There is no mood for an end to the dispute, and a return to work. People want to see things stepped up, which is why we will be balloting for a 24-hour general strike."

The tradesman cometh... back!

INSIDE THE UNIONS

By Sleeper

Any socialist discussion of the present strike wave at Ford immediately faces a terminological problem: we have no words to describe the prime movers in the dispute, except 'tradesmen', 'craftsmen' or 'skilled men'.

Somehow, 'craftspersons' doesn't sound quite right. The fact that we have no modern non-sexist terminology with which to describe these workers is less because, as a matter of fact, they are virtually all men, than because since the late '70s the left has not had much cause to talk about these sort of workers at all.

Along with the Tories, the union bureaucracy and the *Marxism Today* crowd, most of the left assumed that the days of militant skilled workers waging guerilla war over differentials were numbered. Roy Fraser and British Leyland toolmakers in the late '70s were generally assumed to have represented the final death throes of an industrial dinosaur.

The comparison with the BL toolmakers did not go down well with

the AEU craft militant from Dagenham whom I spoke to.

"They were a very narrow, backward group who just wanted more for themselves at the expense of everyone else," he protested. The revolt by electricians and craft grades at Ford is not like that at all, he insisted.

As he was a very helpful, friendly guy who I had phoned up rather late at night, I did not argue the point. But it struck me as significant that a good left-winger, involved in a dispute that largely revolves around the maintenance of differentials and the protection of traditional skilled status, should come out with that particular piece of CP-inspired demagoguery about the toolmakers.

In fact the similarities between the two disputes are highly instructive. In both, a relatively small, tightly-knit group of skilled workers feel themselves railroaded into agreements that may be OK for the majority of unskilled and semi-skilled grades but do not take into account traditional differentials and demarcations.

There are, of course, important differences between BL in 1977-79 and the present Ford dispute. The most obvious is that BL was broke while Ford is highly profitable.

Another is that the BL toolmakers were up against a Labour government and its Social Contract, while the Ford workers face a Tory government that, officially at least, has no truck with pay restraint and is supposed to encourage the idea of pay settlements reflecting the

profitability of the company (which ought to put Ford workers in line for a 20% increase...). These differences explain why the Ford electricians and craft workers have yet to experience the savage onslaught from the union bureaucracy that was visited upon the BL toolmakers.

The Ford dispute actually has the official support of one trade union — the EETPU, expelled from the TUC two years ago, and widely denounced by the left as 'scabs', a 'gaffers union', etc., etc. Paradoxically, the small pro-TUC breakaway electricians' union, the EPIU, who are particularly strong in the Dagenham body plant, oppose the strike and are the main weakness in the solidarity of electricians and craft grades.

The EETPU's motives for its stance are, of course, entirely opportunist, but still, perhaps those groups on the left who were so eager to write off the EETPU as something akin to the straightforward scabs of the UDM, ought to reflect on the implications of the Ford situation.

The TGWU (representing the vast majority of production workers) will endorse Ford's 10.2% deal; the only question is whether their national automotive officer, Jack Adams, will choose to ignore the craft revolt or openly condemn it and call for the crossing of picket lines as he did in 1977, when together with Derek Robinson he helped break the BL toolmakers' strike. The AEU's Jimmy Airlie is in a rather

more difficult position, representing as he does both production and craft grades. At Monday's 'consultative' delegate conference of Ford shop stewards, Airlie ducked out of a clear decision one way or the other: he rejected demands for a fresh ballot for industrial action of skilled grades, but agreed not to sign Ford's agreement.

Airlie's refusal to sign actually amounts to very little, as the agreement has to be signed by all the Ford unions and the EETPU is already committed to rejection.

Meanwhile, the EETPU has seized the initiative while formulating the only clear and straightforward set of demands for the strike: 5% craft allowance (on top of the 10.2% national deal), and the rejection of 'Integrated Manufacturing Teams' for all trades.

The high degree of inter-dependence between Ford's European plants and the company's 'Just in Time' policy for sourcing components give the electricians and craft workers tremendous power. Lay-offs can be expected, not only at the 21 British plants but also at Genk (Belgium), Valencia (Spain), Saarlouis and Cologne (Germany).

The issues may seem complicated to outside observers and the workers themselves may not always be clear in their objectives, but here we have a group of workers fighting for a better deal.

We must support them. Maybe we'll soon be talking about 'craftspersons' after all.