

# SOCIALIST

# ORGANISER

## When Stalin massacred the Trotskyists

see centre pages

## New Labour purge threatened

# We stand for workers' liberty

By John O'Mahony

When he was deselected as parliamentary candidate by his local Labour Party in Birkenhead, Frank Field MP threatened to resign and force a by-election.

This would have allowed the Tories and their press to launch a new carnival of denunciation of the Labour Party, helping them to undo the recent growth of electoral support for Labour.

Instead of standing up to Field, the leaders of the Labour Party decided to allow themselves to be blackmailed by him. As his reward for threatening to do serious damage to the Party, they agreed to start moves to change the result of the Birkenhead reselection.

It was not difficult to find supporters of the semi-banned *Militant* tendency in the Birkenhead Labour Party who could be exhibited as part of a left-wing 'conspiracy' against Field — and thus to begin to reopen the question of who should be the Labour candidate in Birkenhead at the next election.

Field produced a ridiculously inaccurate and libellous 'dossier' on the left in Birkenhead and the whole Wirral district, and the Labour Party leaders duly agreed to investigate.

At its meeting last Monday, 19th, Labour's Organisation Sub-Committee decided that the Party's Director of Organisation, Joyce Gould, should continue to pursue inquiries into seven members of Birkenhead Labour Party to determine whether or not they are associated with *Militant*. She will investigate allegations of "intimidation" at the Birkenhead Labour Party's General Committee meetings.

Joyce Gould will also be investigating supporters of *Socialist Organiser* in the neighbouring Wallasey constituency. That was one of Field's demands.

According to the *Independent* (20 February), "The party's organisation sub-committee agreed to investigate whether *Socialist Organiser*, another far left grouping, should, like *Militant*, be banned from Labour Party membership. Ms Gould's preliminary in-

vestigation found evidence of its influence in the Wallasey party, and the sub-committee will attempt to establish whether it has policies incompatible with Labour's, or organises itself as a party within a party".

During the last general election, Field provided the Tory press on Merseyside with witch-hunting copy against Wallasey Labour candidate Lol Duffy. When asked by the press, he specifically refused to advise Wallasey voters to vote Labour, saying he had "no advice"

Lol Duffy increased Labour's vote by one of the biggest percentages in the whole country, and needed only 279 votes to win against Tory minister Lynda Chalker.

Frank Field is, to put it politely, an arrogant media-cosseted man who has got up the noses of a lot of middle-of-the-road Merseyside Labour Party members. He is anything but a 'moderate'. On some questions he belongs to Labour's loopy tendency.

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The collage includes several covers of the Socialist Organiser newspaper. One cover features the headline "China: all power to the workers" with a photo of a group of people. Another cover says "Unite to support the socialist rebels!" with a photo of a woman. A third cover is titled "Arguing for socialism since October 1978". There are also smaller articles and notices, such as "VOTE LABOUR" and "STOP ALL COAL".



## 2 WEST MIDLANDS POLICE

# The rot goes deep

**Clive Bradley looks at the revelations about the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad.**

**W**est Midlands Serious Crime Squad (SCS) forced confessions out of suspects, forged statements, and tried to incriminate solicitors.

These are the allegations now being investigated, following the Squad's dissolution. Over 50 police officers involved in the Squad have been moved to desk jobs, and everyone who had been in control of it over the last three years 'shifted sideways'.

Senior police chiefs may have lied to appeal courts to cover for the Squad's activities.

But the most famous case of such forced confessions will not be investigated. The case of the Birmingham Six remains unexamined by the enquiry, not to speak of the appeal courts. The enquiry deals strictly with the period since the introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) in 1984.

Last week's World in Action detailed horrific evidence against the SCS.

Clifford Jones was arrested in 1986 for involvement in a burglary in Birmingham. He was denied a solicitor.

Later forensic examination proved that two pages of his statement, in which he confessed to the crime, could have been added after the rest, in which he had, denied all involvement. As a result he was acquitted. But the officers responsible, who are also at the centre of allegations concerning the Birmingham Six, faced no disciplinary proceedings. Indeed one, Detective Sergeant Hornby, was awarded the Queen's Police Medal.

According to police evidence, it took a total of fourteen minutes for Jones' statement to be written and read back to him. Yet when the police were asked to write the confession out in court, the writing alone took 21 minutes. Their evidence was completely discredited.

Glen Lewis is now in prison after confessing to burglary and robbery. He confessed, he said, after being threatened with a hypodermic needle, and in fact only signed blank sheets which were later filled out by the police.

His case, which involved some of the same officers as Jones' was heard before the discrediting of Jones's case. Solicitors believe that if Lewis' case had been heard later, he never would have been convicted.

Paul Dandy tried to kill himself after being charged with a robbery he did not commit. The prosecution withdrew charged against him after a forensic test proved that two pages of his statement had been rewritten. There have been no prosecutions of police officers.

After the Dandy case, the SCS agreed to hand over the transcripts of controversial interviews for examination. Mysteriously, between the police headquarters and the officers of Birmingham Crown Prosecution Services, the papers were lost.

Hasan Khan was arrested in Caernarvon for a robbery in Birmingham, in which he was also alleged to have run through a shopping centre firing a gun. Not only do several witnesses claim he was in Caernarvon at the time, he had also just had two toes amputated!

His statement was taken by one officer in a police car. The statement contains only six minutes' worth of what was supposedly a 45 minute interview, therefore cannot

be very accurate.

World in Action detailed other cases, too, alleging torture and other malpractice by the SCS. One doctor confirmed that Harry Treadaway had sustained injuries likely to have been caused by attempted suffocation with a plastic bag.

Ronald Bolden was arrested in 1987 in a part of Birmingham where a burglary had taken place. He was interviewed by two officers also involved in the Jones case and incriminated. Police claimed he offered them a bribe of £10,000.

Police also tried to incriminate Bolden's solicitors who had been to see another man, Paul Fitzsimmons about his own dealings with the Squad. Fitzsimmons was then in prison. He was later visited by Squad officers and told that he would be rearrested upon his release, unless he claimed that Bolden's solicitors had tried to bribe him to give evidence in their favour. The particular solicitor identified by the Squad, Paul Baker, was later proved to have been in a different part of the country at the time.

Following this case, the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad was disbanded.

Since the beginning of the investigation into the Serious Crime Squad, West Midlands police have given misleading information to solicitors and the appeal court.

Solicitors for John Edwards were told by the police that none of the officers involved in his case were under investigation. In fact the officer in charge of the case was.

It was the same with the case of Anthony Wellington.

A judge hearing the appeal of two men charged with robbery was promised in a letter signed by an assistant chief constable that the investigation was in any case not concerned with forced confessions. Yet this is precisely what is at stake in two cases under investigation, Jones's and Dandy's.

In other words, senior policemen have lied to the court.

One of the striking aspects to the affair of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad is that much of their track-covering was incredibly inept. Clearly, forced and forged confessions were so much a part of their staple routine that they either saw no point in making a convincing attempt to disguise what they were doing, or had long since forgotten how to.

And so the revelations about them had implications not only of the Birmingham Six. Other Serious Crime Squads, like the one in London responsible for jailing Winston Silcott for the murder of PC Blakelock, are certainly just as bad. The shit is only starting to hit the fan.

A key issue is that it is possible for the police to get convictions on the basis of confessions alone. In many legal systems, including for example in Scotland, this is not possible. As well as a confession to the police, there must be some corroborating evidence before a jury can convict.

In England, not only is it possible to get a conviction on the sole basis of confession in a police interrogation cell: the right to silence is increasingly under threat. The Tories want to make it possible for the prosecution to draw inferences from a defendant's exercise of his or her right to silence.

At the moment, if someone refuses to say anything, this can't be held against them in court. This right to silence is based on what is supposedly central to British law — that the burden of proof is on the prosecution: you are innocent until proven guilty.

So the very rights that the people of Eastern Europe are fighting for — due process under law — are be-



Two victims of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad — Seymour Williams (left) and Patrick Smith — who were forced to 'confess' after a supergrass tip-off

ing taken away by our Tory custodians of 'freedom'.

And they must know that the rot runs very, very deep. At its core is the police force's unaccountability. No-one elects them; no one can control them. It is very difficult for outsiders even to investigate them. Following all the malpractice of the West Midlands SCS, there have been some minor disciplinary proceedings, but little else. Officers

guilty of forging confessions have just been given different jobs, or perhaps fined a few hundred pounds.

There have been no prosecutions. The more investigations there are, or course, the better: the more the police are subject to public scrutiny, the more leverage there is to impose more democratic accountability on them.

Equally, public confidence in the

police is now at its lowest perhaps ever in British history, certainly since World War Two. The labour movement needs to discuss alternative, more democratic methods of policing.

Do we need a separate self-contained, professional force at all? Or is it time to start thinking about systems of policing genuinely based on communities themselves?

## Labour against the cuts

### POLL TAX

By Eva Elliott

**M**anchester's Labour Against the Cuts and the Poll Tax held its first conference on Saturday 3 February.

Supported by 15 Labour councillors, the conference was attended by delegates from Labour Party branches, council worker unions, other unions, anti-poll tax unions, student organisations and tenants associations from across the city. It has sparked off the most effective and democratic campaign against the poll tax and its effects on jobs and services so far in Manchester.

The effects of the poll tax in Manchester, as elsewhere, will be devastating. In the first place, big businesses will find their rates bills cut by 31% — about £57m a year — which means an extra £170 slapped on every adult's poll tax bill. On top of this, a levy of £71 per person has been imposed on everyone by the government, to fund the 'safety net' scheme, and to keep the voters in Tory marginals — and Thatcher — happy.

This means that each person has to fork out £241 per year before any local services have been paid for.

An 'acceptable' poll tax rate of £444 is likely to be set by Manchester City Council, yet a rate of £712 would be necessary to maintain services at their present level. As a result, 3,000 council workers will be sacked, and huge cuts in already skeletal frontline services made — and that's on the basis of 95% collection rate. On top of this, council tenants face a £6 a week rent rise.

A previous campaign, Justice for Manchester, supported by the Council trade unions, the Labour Party and Labour Council, did a good job in highlighting the injustices of the poll

tax. However, its opposition to non-payment and non-implementation strategies, and its domination by trade union bureaucrats, meant it was largely ineffectual. For example, it organised a delegation to London to argue against the amount that Manchester had to pay into the 'safety net' scheme. But instead of getting rid of it, or lowering it, the Tories actually increased Manchester's contribution from £56 to £71 a head!

Also, the mass rally Justice for Manchester called on 23 January was cancelled at short notice. The reason why is still a mystery. Rumour has it, however, that Graham Stringer (leader of the council), knowing about the Labour Against the Cuts and Poll Tax Campaign and the ever-growing support from many organisations for mass non-payment, was concerned that the rally could turn into a resistance movement far too confrontational for the council's nervous disposition.

The 3 February conference could start where Justice for Manchester left off. Judging from the comments from the delegates, it is obvious that frustration at the council's passive stand is massive, and there is support for a more active campaign.

The campaign should turn this frustration and anger into a positive and active force against the Tories.

The aims and demands of the campaign, as adopted at the conference, are:

- Support the campaign of mass non-payment
- Call upon the council and the trade unions not to implement the poll tax
- No more cuts — demand adequate central government funding to provide the services we need
- Any system to replace the rates must be based on the ability to pay
- No rent increases

Further activities were also planned. Firstly, a mass lobby of the city council's budget meeting on 28 February. Secondly, it was agreed that the conference should be recalled regularly. It was also agreed that the organisational meetings, which are held regularly,

should be open to anyone wanting to become involved in the campaign.

Speakers from the campaign will address Labour Party ward meetings throughout Manchester to explain the aims of the conference and involve activists on the ground.

The conference opened up the possibility of building a united, democratic campaign against cuts in working conditions and council services, and against the poll tax.

### Lobby of Manchester City Council

9 am

Wednesday 28

February

Called by Labour

Against the Cuts and

Poll Tax

For no cuts, no poll tax, no

rent increases!

**Manchester Socialist  
Organiser Public Meeting  
Labour Councils and the  
fight for socialism**

Monday 5 March

7.30pm

Manchester Town Hall  
Speakers: Pete Keenleyside  
& John Clegg (Manchester  
Councillor)



# Labour right pushes for witch-hunt against Socialist Organiser

From front page

Wirral Trades Council has put out a leaflet chronicling Field's record and explaining why the trade unions have turned sharply against him. It included these points:

**Unemployment:** Frank Field believes that the unemployed should not get their social security unless they are prepared to 'actively seek work'. Birkenhead has 7000 jobless with very few jobs to seek. Unions with unemployed members voted against him.

**Single mothers:** Frank Field says single mothers should not be entitled to any social security unless they are prepared to name their child's father. Community unions voted against him.

**Health service:** Frank Field supports Tory proposals for the NHS, especially GPs having their own budgets. The health unions voted against him.

**Education:** Frank Field proposes that kids, especially from low-paid and unemployed families, should be allowed to leave school at 14.

**Taxation:** Frank Field wants to abolish all tax allowances and lower the basic rate of tax. This would make the rich richer and penalise the low paid.

**Privatisation:** Frank Field supports Tory privatisation policy, e.g. telecom, gas, water, etc. Public sector unions voted against him.

The Trades Council leaflet adds: "The Trades Council repeatedly asked to meet him to debate these eccentric policies but he refused. Just as he refused to join any demonstration held in Birkenhead against the Tories over the last ten years, including the latest one against the sell-off of elderly persons' homes. (He was giving a lecture at Oxford)".

It is a measure of where the Labour Party is now politically that Field is being placated and the left hounded.

*Socialist Organiser* has nothing to hide. We are a current of opinion organised around a newspaper, and we fight for our ideas within the labour movement while participating in the efforts of the broad labour movement to win the objectives it democratically sets for itself.

We are socialists — that is, we believe that the present root of society — wage labour and the capitalist exploitation that is inseparable from it — should be overthrown and replaced by free cooperative self-managing labour. In short, we believe that the labour movement should fight to achieve what the famous Clause IV(4) of the Labour Party constitution — printed on every Labour Party card — puts like this:

"To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service".

We believe in the class struggle — in the first place, that the class struggle is an irrepressible part of social life that will only be ended by the victory of the working class, and in the second place, that the labour movement should fight to



Wapping 1986. Photo John Harris (IFL)

win that struggle for our side and go on to get rid of capitalism and wage slavery.

You would have to be very obtuse to deny the class struggle in a Britain which has been turned upside down and reshaped over the last ten years by the Thatcherites' conscienceless prosecution of the class struggle from the commanding heights of government. To refuse to want our side to fight back, you would need to have the political and social outlook of the leaders of the labour movement who have given Thatcher such an easy ride for ten years.

We are in the Marxist tradition. We are supporters of the Labour Party — the mass party built by the labour movement over 90 years. We want to change that party and the movement in general so that they aspire to socialism and fight the class struggle to win. Nevertheless, even in periods like this when the labour movement is in political retreat, and the right wing is in the ascendant, we consider it our movement. We remain part of that movement, including the Labour Party.

Of course we are organised. Anyone who produces a newspaper without millionaire backing and yet tells you there is no organisation behind it is an obvious liar. We are an association of people who come together to promote the paper and its ideas. We have an open Annual General Meeting, where an Editorial Board is elected for a year to run the paper and coordinate the local supporters' groups.

The wide range of controversy and discussion in the paper over the 11 years of its existence are proof that we are a democratic association, and not any sort of sect with mini-popes who lay down "the line" and a "flock" who follow.

Any allegation that we are some sort of quasi-Stalinist sect is refuted, for anyone who knows about such questions, by the open discussion of all sorts of political questions in the paper. Supporters of *SO* who disagree with anything in the paper have a greater right in practice to get their objections and criticisms published in a subsequent issue than have the readers of almost any other publication I can

think of in the labour movement.

One of two things: either the Labour Party remains an organisation within which such an association of Marxists — one of many political associations within the Party — has the right to exist; or the Labour Party is now, under pressure of the Tory press and of people like Frank Field, heading straight towards becoming a tightly policed, intolerant sect itself, with a regime not too far away from a version of Stalinist 'democratic centralism'.

*Socialist Organiser* has nothing to hide. We want to remain in the Labour Party. We will seek discussion with Joyce Gould and other Labour leaders to devise ways of eliminating anything in our ways of functioning which they believe may conflict with the broader interests of the Labour Party.

The matter may, however, not depend on reasonable discussion. Therefore we are also launching a campaign in defence of Labour Party democracy and for the right of *Socialist Organiser* to operate in the Labour Party.

## South Africa: negotiations and the workers

**A socialist active in the independent trade unions assesses the talk of 'negotiations' in South Africa.**

**COSATU (the giant independent trade union federation) has no clear position on negotiations.**

But, to the extent that COSATU does have a position, it is to func-

tion as the working-class wing of the broad popular movement rather than as an independent socialist force.

There is a lot of talk of the need for a workers' charter, conceived in terms of trade union rights — but not in the sense of a socialist programme of action for the working class.

The idea seems to be to protect workers' rights in a constitutional set-up which does not guarantee the interests of the working class. But we should be advancing a socialist programme of action for the working class.

Despite some victories on the industrial front, the organised working class has less and less presence as an independent political force. There was no independent input from labour at the recent Conference for a Democratic Future (a broad anti-apartheid front). There was simply a battle between the two populist blocs.

Recent events in Eastern Europe have had some impact in the workers' movement. The Soviet

government clearly favour negotiations. Gorbachev's writings are circulating.

Prominent people associated with the Communist Party are now making speeches about the danger of bureaucracy and the importance of self-criticism and democracy. This may not all be completely sincere, but it does reflect genuine changes.

There are people in the movement who would avoid a Trotskyist critique of Stalinism but who are now prepared to discuss these questions.

But, in the class more broadly, the response has been different. Some sections of the youth and workers have been spiritually inspired by what they have seen on the TV and heard on the radio.

In general the media and the government have used recent events in Eastern Europe to 'prove' the bankruptcy of socialism and the superiority of capitalism. But it's not that easy to convince black workers in this country of the wonders of the market economy.

## Return of the lazy worker

**PRESS GANG**

By Jim Denham

**A**nother encouraging sign that things are returning to normal on the class struggle front: the first sighting in many years of that old favourite, the Lazy Worker (LW).

Do you remember this fellow? Overpaid, sullen, often drunk and usually asleep. Fifteen years ago, LW was a prominent figure in the tabloids' line-up of stock bogey-people, ranking alongside the Randy Housewife, The Dodgy Vicar, the Frightening Blackman and various varieties of Puffs.

In the '80s, the LW disappeared from the scene and was widely presumed to have been driven into extinction by Thatcherism. Last Saturday, however, saw the return of LW in all his glory.

'THE CHUNNEL WORKER-Z-Z-Z' ("another great *Sun* exclusive"). There he was, back on the front page, photographed in regulation overalls and safety boots, in his familiar horizontal-on-a-bench position.

"Workers getting up to £1,000 a week to build the Channel Tunnel are SLEEPING on the job... BOOZING and SMOKING in defiance of strict underground safety rules." A "Chunnel worker" was quoted saying: "Why work when you can have a nap?"

A "management insider" said: "What is going on is an absolute disgrace... it is no wonder the project is behind schedule and costs are so far over the original estimate."

These revelations were clearly the result of extensive and painstaking work by the *Sun's* crack team of investigative reporters and nothing whatsoever to do with any dispute between developers Eurotunnel and contractors Transmanche Link over who is to blame for the soaring costs and missed deadlines.

At this point I should declare an interest. I was myself very nearly a tabloid LW. Back in the late '70s (the LW's heyday) the *Sun* ran a dramatic story about slumbering night-shift workers at the Rover Solihull plant. It caused quite a stir and sackings resulted.

A few days later I was approached by a reporter from the rival *Daily Star*: would I smuggle him and a photographer into the Longbridge plant (where I then worked) and point them in the general direction of likely LW nesting areas? Perhaps I would like to take in a sleeping bag and pose in the prone position myself? They would make it worth my while, of course. For the record, I declined this offer very firmly.

The thought occurred to me then — as it does again now — what exactly is so bad about going to sleep at night? And why do people in car factories (or Channel Tunnels) have to work at night, anyway? Night shifts, after all, are known to be extremely dangerous.

The *Sun's* LW story did, in fact, catalogue the various crushings-to-death and severings-of-limbs that have marred the progress of the Chunnel ("the tunnellers work with the grim knowledge that one of them is expected to die for every mile they bore") but the clear implication was that the fault for all this did not lie at the door of Eurotunnel or Transmanche. Quite clearly, LW was to blame.

Personally, I think if I worked in a place where such carnage occurs with such alarming regularity, I'd be inclined to spend as much time as possible out of the line of fire, preferably asleep. Meanwhile, welcome back to an old friend!

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

Karl Marx

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## 4 LETTERS

# Castro's last stand

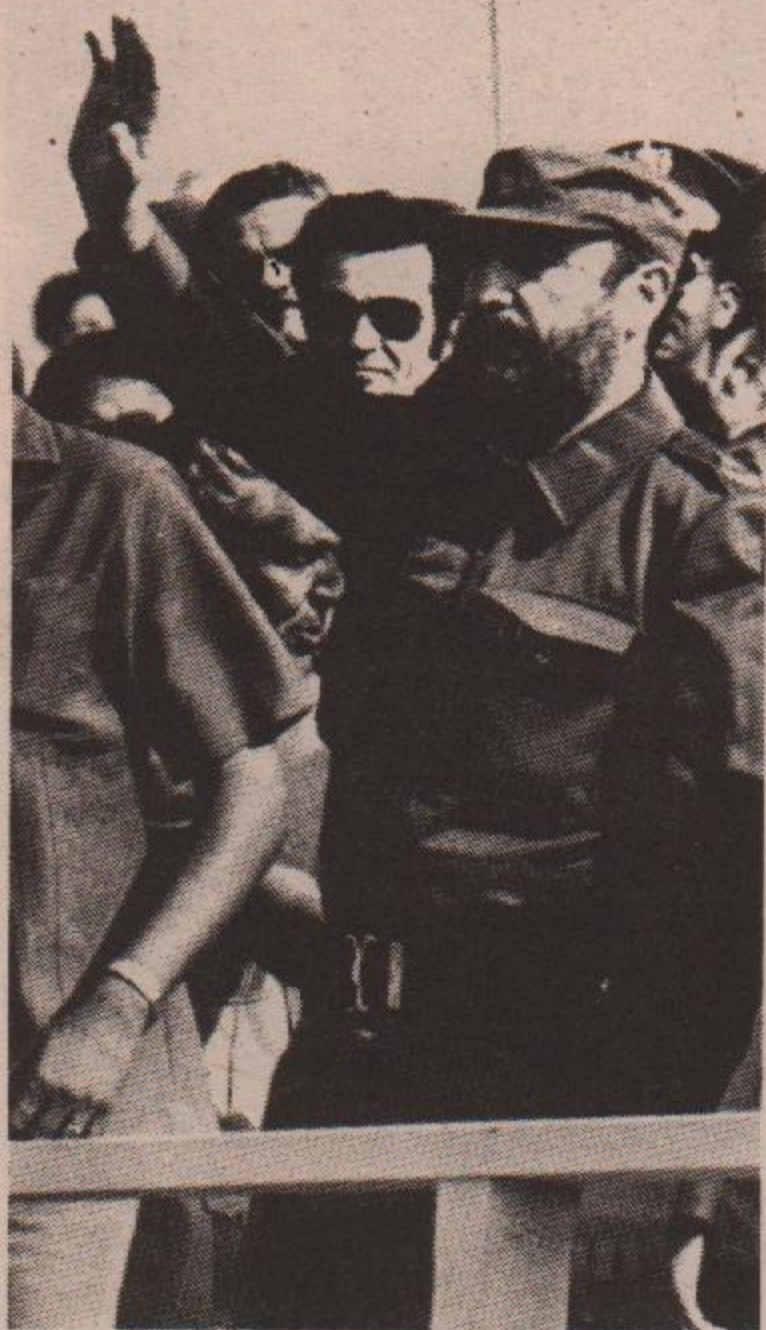
### GRAFFITI

Fidel Castro is these days the hard-line Stalinist of the 'communist world', out of step with the tide of reform.

And he's worried about losing his \$7 billion annual subsidy from the USSR which keeps the Cuban economy afloat.

He recently commissioned a study which 'proved' that the Cuban people could survive on half the food they now eat, if he should have to implement a 'war economy'.

Castro told Western diplomats meeting in Havana that the Cuban people could eat less.



The Bulgarian Writers' Union last week withdrew a demand that all police informers be named.

This was 'so as not to fall out with each other when they learn who has informed on whom'.

Police are to be equipped with a new 'supergun' that is designed to put an end to Hungerford-style massacres. The lightweight rifle has been designed to deal with armed sieges.

Although it is light enough to be carried in one hand, it could knock someone down at 100 yards. Experts call it a bridge between the handgun and the high velocity long-range rifle.

Of course, it could also be carried secretly by policemen who were not involved in sieges.

Britain's police force is still committed to the principle that it is not armed. But in fact, the police are getting to be more and more armed as time goes by.

Well, is a father important or isn't he?

Some of the tabloids say yes, some no, it seems.

Paul Johnson, writing in the *Daily Mail*, insists 'we can't afford a short cut to divorce'. Commenting on the government's decision not to

back 'quickie divorces', Johnson breathes a sigh of relief. Divorce undermines marriage. If people can get divorced easily, who bother to get married in the first place?

And the collapse of the institution of marriage is causing 'the calamitous explosion of that curse of modern Britain, the one-parent family'.

Meanwhile, in the *Daily Express*, Celeste Mitchell turns her pen to the task of character assassinating the mother of recently snatched-and-returned Baby Alexandra. Dawn Griffith, failing to understand that her role for the tabloids was to be a model, caring mother, has continued to get publicity ever since she got her baby back; most recently she was in the news for...a row with her boyfriend.

The concerned Ms Mitchell, who I am sure knows the details of Dawn's private life better than does Dawn herself, muses: 'I pray she has the sense to cut the overwhelming presence of her boyfriend out of her life — and her daughter's.'

She dares to ponder 'the almost unmentionable thought that the wretched woman who snatched Alexandra and cared for her... might just have drafted a happier biography for the child'.

If Alexandra's parents were married, as they are due to be in September, would Ms Mitchell perhaps be more inclined to agree with Mr Johnson?

## Two souls of socialism

### LETTER

I was very sorry to hear about the death of Hal Draper, but pleased to see SO giving some prominence to 'AL's perceptive appreciation of this fine American Marxist.

Draper's pamphlet, 'The Two Souls of Socialism', made a big impression on me when I first read it nearly 20 years ago. It is a compelling (and highly readable) case for working class self-activity combined with consistent democracy, as central and irreplaceable in the creation of socialism.

Draper argues that the distinction between working class 'socialism

from below" and the various forms of elitist "socialism from above", is a more important and fundamental line of divide than the formal name-tags that socialists may give themselves and each other — "reform" vs "revolution", "Leninist" vs "Libertarian", "Trotskyist" vs "Stalinist", etc. Not, Draper stresses, that these categories are irrelevant (he himself was firmly on the "revolution/Lenin/Trotsky" side), but that such categories are often misused. "Socialism from below" is the litmus test for the genuineness of revolutionary pretensions.

As 'AL' notes, Draper was often described as a "Shachtmanite" because of his support for the "bureaucratic collectivist" theory of the USSR and the other Stalinist states. But unlike many anti-Stalinist American socialists

(including Shachtman himself) Draper never became cynical or right-wing.

James P Cannon (always a shrewd judge of character) once described Draper as something like "the eternal Young Socialist" — a great compliment from a factional opponent who nevertheless recognised enthusiasm, commitment and honesty. In fact my only criticism of 'AL's piece is that it tends to overlook Draper's long history of practical involvement as an activist in the Workers' Party and, later, the Independent Socialist League.

Happily, Draper lived long enough to see events in Russia and Eastern Europe confirm at least some of his most fundamental beliefs.

Jackie McDonough  
Birmingham

## Romania: second revolution or military rule?

On Sunday 18 February an angry crowd stormed the National Salvation Front's headquarters in Bucharest and temporarily held captive the Vice-President of the Provisional Council of National Unity, Jelu Voican.

Supporters of president Ion Iliescu immediately mobilised pro-government demonstrators in a repeat of the pattern of protests last month.

Iliescu is verbally more confident than he was a few weeks ago, promising that the "counter-revolutionaries" would be severely dealt with. But his government has failed completely to implement an official ban on demonstrations. And opposition — including violent opposition — to the Front continues.

"Down with Communism" continues to be a popular slogan in Romania. And Iliescu's biggest problem is that everyone knows he is a former top official in Ceausescu's regime. The National Salvation Front does not represent any sharp break with the old regime.

The crowds who attacked the Front's headquarters found a Communist flag, considered proof of continued Communist influence, and red-covered books, believed to be Communist, which were publicly burned.

Jelu Voican, who tried to escape with his bodyguards, but was trapped by crowds in a corridor, later told the press:



Crowd storms headquarters of the National Salvation Front

"The people are irresponsibly trying to destabilise the country... Romanian society suffers from self-hatred because of its complicity in the Ceausescu dictatorship."

The protestors were demanding the removal of Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman. Voican, although associated with the old regime, is less of a target.

There is some suggestion that the military authorities that overthrew Ceausescu and put the Front in

power may be itching to play more politics. Iliescu's warnings against "another military dictatorship" are taken to be a reference to possible military opposition, as it is unusual to refer to the Ceausescu regime as a "military" one.

Elections are due in April, to be contested by a multitude of new political parties. So far the lines of ideological demarcation are not very clear. Independent workers' organisation remains weak.

## Equal opps won't pay the childcare bills

### WOMEN'S EYE

By Julia Coulton

Isn't it comforting to know that, despite the Tories, in cities like Manchester where equal opportunities are a top priority, women can still get decent childcare facilities?

Well, actually it isn't because the reality is that Manchester's Labour Council is running down nurseries and forcing them to operate on staffing levels well below their quote. Some will even be shut down altogether this year.

Nursery nurses are among the most dedicated, worst-paid

workers, and Labour councils are relying on their commitment to the children in their care to stop them taking industrial action against the appalling conditions they work in.

Most day nurseries in Manchester no longer provide a hot meal at lunchtime for the children. Far from the council providing adequate resources for the care of our children, they are forcing nurseries to fill more places than they have staff to cover.

Equal opportunities policies are being exposed for the sham that they are in the current financial crisis facing local government. The refusal of councils like Manchester to fight the poll tax means cuts across the board in jobs and services, but areas like childcare will be worst hit because they are not statutory provision.

Women cannot have equal opportunities in employment if there is nowhere to leave the kids when they are at work.

Working class people are faced with no option but to fight back against the slashing of their services. They cannot afford the poll tax, the £7 a week rent increase for council tenants, and the introduction of charges for nursery places which the Labour council is proposing.

Workers in the nurseries will have no choice but to fight against the running down of the service they provide. Parents and nursery workers would do well to look to the recent strike in Islington over unsafe staffing levels in nurseries.

Decent childcare is our right — but we will have to fight tooth and nail to make sure that we get it.

## CLPs CONFERENCE

Saturday 7 April  
Wakefield Town Hall

(Registration starts 10.30am)

Workshops include:

- CLPs Bill of Rights
- Organising Effective Campaigning
- Party Constitutional Changes
- Accountability of Elected Representatives

On the Friday evening before the conference a rally will be held, organised by Wakefield CLP. Further information from CLPs Conference, c/o 11 Egremont Promenade, Wallasey, Merseyside L44

8BG



# Wallasey's reply to Frank Field

The Labour Party Organisation Sub-Committee's decision to call for an "investigation" into *Socialist Organiser* follows from charges laid by Frank Field, the Labour MP for Birkenhead.

Frank Field's complaint is that he was deselected as Labour candidate for Birkenhead. Although *Socialist Organiser* has emphatically supported the right of Birkenhead CLP to deselect Frank Field if it wishes, no-one, not even Field, claims that *Socialist Organiser* played any particular part in bringing about the deselection.

So why does Field target *SO*? He does it to cover his back.

Field gave any CLP adequate grounds for deselecting him in the 1987 general election campaign, when he publicly called on voters not to vote Labour in the neighbouring marginal constituency of Wallasey. Labour missed winning Wallasey (for the first time ever) by only 279 votes. Field's help may have been decisive for Tory MP Lynda Chalker.

Field needs to cover his back. He does it by trying to smear *Socialist Organiser*, and trying to smear Wallasey CLP on grounds of alleged *SO* influence in the constituency.

He also threw in as many other smears as he could think of, in the hope that some would stick. Elsewhere in this issue we comment on Field's smears against *SO*. Here we reprint excerpts from the reply made by Wallasey CLP to the charges against them.

"I have served the Labour Party over the last forty years in every capacity, at ward, constituency and Labour Group level", writes George Clark, councillor, JP, former chair of Wallasey CLP,



The general election campaign in Wallasey

former leader of Wirral Council Labour Group and former Lord Mayor of Wallasey.

"I have been associated with every election since the post-war years, and the last General Election has proved conclusively to me that Wallasey Labour Party is much more active now than all the other years put together — and that is with no disrespect to the people I have served and worked with over the years.

Campaigning that has been carried out throughout the constituency was proved successful by the result in the last General Election when we were within a whisker of beating a member of the government — not just an ordinary Tory

MP but a member of the government.

We failed by just 279 votes. I am convinced had we the backing of the adjoining constituency, through Frank Field the sitting MP, we would have won that election..."

The reply lists the CLP's campaigning activity since 1987. Long before the General Election campaign in 1987, the CLP had started a "Labour Listens" drive, going door to door with questionnaires asking voters' opinions on a range of issues.

In that same year it campaigned to free South African trade unionist Moses Mayekiso, to get a mammogram machine brought into service at a local hospital, to expose the Tories' cheap-labour "Job Training Scheme", and to get a 24 hour accident and emergency service at a local hospital.

It also ran a wide-ranging "Women's Needs" campaign, and got involved in the national campaigns to Fight Alton's Bill and for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc.

Since 1987 the CLP has published a quarterly newsletter, *News from Labour*. It has initiated Anti Poll Tax Unions, run a voter registration campaign, fought to stop the Tories and Liberal Democrats on the local council giving away the council's old people's homes, and mobilised for the Labour Party's national "post a protest" campaign on the Health Service.

"Wallasey Labour Party has consistently supported workers in struggle. Touring speakers, raising solidarity funds, responding to requests for picket lines, have all ensured a close relationship between the Party and the local trade union movement".

The CLP has maintained an active Campaign Committee, and striven to involve all its members. "Whilst the national Labour Party

membership has suffered 'its highest fall since comparable records began in 1981' [NEC report to 1989 conference, p.21], the Wallasey CLP membership has increased by 35 per cent over the last 12 months".

"It hasn't been difficult to get involved in the Labour Party", says Dianne Harris of Seacombe Branch. "Nobody puts blocks in your way.

In fact, there is mostly enthusiasm. In my ward which is predominantly male, if a woman puts her name forward they will show encouragement".

But Frank Field accuses the CLP of being a narrow preserve of the "hard left" and intolerant towards centre and right-wing Labour views.

His evidence is a series of personal smears. The reply takes some examples. "George Clark went bandit and embraced extremism". George Clark, a very well respected figure in the party, is in reality being accused of disagreeing with Mr Field and nothing else...

"John Scully, Ward Secretary (clerk with the TGWU, Liverpool Office) works closely with the 'left' in the Party. He has a relationship with Trish Morrin of Liscard Ward, who has been the constituency assistant secretary".

What is it that John or Trish are accused of? Working with the left? Working for the TGWU? Having been a constituency officer? Whatever Mr Field may desire, none of these things are unacceptable behaviour in the Labour Party..."

Frank Field also alleges financial irregularities. "In fact Wallasey CLP has presented, in an audited form, and had passed by the Regional Labour Party, its accounts in every year".

The crowning accusation is that Wallasey CLP initiated Anti Poll Tax Unions. "We can only plead guilty, with pride!

The Anti Poll Tax Unions are democratic, involve Party and non-Party members, and carry the message of opposition to this appalling tax. Look at the following quotation. Remember that it is part of a 'dossier' asking for disciplinary measures to be taken. Then ask yourself where on earth is our party going.

"A large number of Wallasey CLP members are involved in the Anti Poll Tax Unions in Wallasey and Wirral. These include Edwina Doyle, Janet Furber and Dianne Harris. The latter two members also organised the print and sale of T-shirts for the Anti Poll Tax Union cause."

## Student elections: vote Labour!

By Paul McGarry

When members of the Labour Students leadership faction turn up on a national demonstration of the National Union of Students (NUS) enthusiastically giving out copies of *Labour Student*, you know they are worried.

The motivation behind this frantic activity is not the threat of loans, or the smashing-up of NUS, but the forthcoming NUS Executive elections.

The Labour Students leadership is in danger of losing to a group of 'independents', right-wingers and Liberals. The Green Party is also fielding a full slate. Left Unity is contesting two full-time positions where the Labour Students leadership faction has no candidates — Emma Colyer for National Secretary and Steve Mitchell for Vice-President (Further Education).

In all these elections, Left Unity is calling for a Labour vote.

The battle is between Labour, admittedly often Labour candidates who are thoroughly right-wing and careerist group of people who have made a dogma out of opposition to organised political currents.

Against the 'independent' careerists, Labour is the obvious political choice. A vote for Labour will be a vote for links with the labour movement, for political answers to the crisis in education, and against the CP/Liberal/crypto-Tory alliance which wants to take NUS on a fun-run instead of a demonstration.

A victory for 'independent' presidential hopeful Cosmo Hawkes would be a disaster. It would send a signal to the so-called 'independents' in the colleges that the left is beaten. It would encourage the development of the kind of anti-political yellow unionism that has already led to the abandonment of campaigning and very nasty witch-hunting of the left in a number of student unions.

Labour Students leadership must take much of the responsibility for the rise of these right-wingers in NUS. They voted for Cosmo against Socialist Student supporter and Labour Party member Liz Millward last year, and nurtured the anti-left, anti-political atmosphere that has given the space for the right wing to grow.

They say, in *Labour Student*, that Cosmo is "rabidly anti-Labour, and at heart in favour of returning NUS to an HE student union officers debating chamber where students aren't allowed to get in the way. Hawkes wants to reduce mass activity so that his ego can orchestrate publicity events from Holloway Road while he wheels and deals out of the eye of ordinary students."

This is true. But the Labour Students leadership in practice do much of what they accuse Cosmo of.

Voting Labour must extend to voting for the Left Unity candidates (they are all Labour Party members) in these elections.

Left Unity is organising a Labour Campaign on the terms of the socialist left. Whilst fighting for Labour we fight for policies and strategies that can beat lonas, that turns the student movement out to the labour movement and fight the Tories.

The talk of constructing a left wing campaign for Labour is even more urgent with the Green Party running candidates. They have little to say except that all NUS's campaigns should have a 'Green dimension'. But because Labour Students are so weak they do appear to offer a 'left' alternative. They will also poll from the right. The only way for Labour to begin to unravel this sort of problem is to begin to deliver in NUS.

Most Green groups in colleges have failed to base themselves on student activity — turning instead around 'non-political' issues. A number of Green sabbaticals have become very right-wing.

Apparently Socialist Outlook's little band is backing the Greens.

To take such a position is to forget the central role of the labour movement and to ignore the fight to transform Labour Students into a fighting organisation. Socialist Outlook are disoriented.

In the run up to the elections socialists will have to be very clear about the issue, and keep their sense of perspective. NOLS represent something much better than Cosmo and the Greens.

Keep NUS Labour and fight for a campaigning NUS!

**News from LABOUR**  
BULLETIN OF WALLASEY LABOUR PARTY - MARCH 1988.

**LABOUR IN COUNCIL ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS**

This year we have been successful in many ways. We have won a seat on the Council, we have secured a 24 hour accident and emergency service at a local hospital, we have secured a mammogram machine for a local hospital, we have secured a 24 hour accident and emergency service at a local hospital, we have secured a 24 hour accident and emergency service at a local hospital...

**JOIN THE LABOUR PARTY!**

If you would like to join the Labour Party or help in the campaign, please fill in the form below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to join the Labour Party  
I would like to help the campaign  
Return to: THE LABOUR PARTY, 108 Seaview Road, Wallasey

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"Campaigning that has been carried out throughout the constituency was proved successful by the result in the last General Election when we were within a whisker of beating...a member of the government."  
George Clark

## Another victory against the odds

### WHETTON'S WEEK A miner's diary

I am over the moon for Nelson Mandela himself. His release is a tremendous victory.

But it is a very small step along a very long road for the people of South Africa.

I would hope it would give them all a boost to know that Mandela is freed. The effect that the small amount of sanctions seem to have had shows what we could have achieved if we had imposed full sanctions.

There is a long, long way to go, and I think that things are going to get very much more dodgy before it gets better in South Africa. I can see a lot more bloodshed before freedom is achieved. Now is not the time to start relaxing

sanctions.

The whites are not going to surrender their privileges easily, and bloodshed is inevitable.

But if you had predicted a few years ago that Nelson Mandela would walk free and the ANC would be legalised, people would have dismissed it.

Along with the breaching of the Berlin Wall it shows no matter what the odds, people with commitment and dedication can struggle against the odds and win.

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



# Vorkuta: where Stalin massacred the Trotskyists

Vorkuta is today a name associated with the recent great strike of miners. In 1938, Vorkuta was the place where the last great massacre of the surviving Trotskyists occurred. There the last of the Bolsheviks who, standing by the programme of the October Revolution, had fought the Stalinist counter-revolution inch by inch, were first concentrated and then systematically slaughtered.

Joseph Berger was a prisoner in the Soviet Union for over 20 years. He tells here about a meeting in prison with Trotsky's younger son, Sergei; about the mass hunger strike of the Trotskyist prisoners — women, men and their children — at Vorkuta, after which they were annihilated by the GPU.

I met Trotsky's son Sergei in 1937. We were both waiting to be interrogated in the Lubyanka.

The waiting-rooms were small bare cells known as "kennels". Normally each prisoner had a kennel to himself but the Lubyanka was overworked, busy officials rang each other up in search of a place for their charges, and sometimes two were made to share. Thus we spent several hours together one night in February.

For me it was a memorable meeting. Sergei had recently been brought back from Vorkuta. His case had been re-opened and he took a gloomy view of his prospects. My own seemed little better, and before long I was in fact sentenced to death. But for some reason Sergei said he had an intuition I would survive, and he gave me a message for his parents, should I ever see them.

He was about 28, a shortish, spare young man with a round face and moustache. Unlike his brother, he had never taken the slightest interest in politics — he had even refused to join the Komsomol. He had a passion for books and was addicted to the circus. As a child, he had once run away and joined a travelling circus.

His relations were naturally worried by his irresponsible ways and even pointed out that they could damage his father's career. But he

remained incorrigible. When his father found himself in the Opposition, he thought it only proved how right he himself had been in his bored indifference to the regime. He did well at school but hesitated a long time over the choice of a career. In the end, he was trained as an architect.

When Trotsky was exiled in 1929, Stalin — in one of his unpredictable moments of generosity — allowed him to take his family and even his archives abroad. Sergei heard the news in some provincial town where he was working. He received an anxious message from his parents. Trotsky took the blackest possible view of the situation in Russia and foresaw the fate of all those who were connected with him. "Think of the worst possible thing you can imagine and multiply it by ten," he said to the friends who saw him off from Odessa. But Sergei was at the time in love with a girl who was unwilling to leave her family, and he refused to follow his parents abroad.

For a time it seemed as though his father's fears for him had been groundless. Not only did he escape the purges of the early thirties, but family friends who still had some

*"The tracks were carefully covered up, for Stalin wanted to be able to rewrite history as well as make it."*

influence found him a job. Only in 1935, after the murder of Kirov, was he summoned by the authorities and asked to make a public repudiation of his father.

They explained that he had only to tell the truth — he had never got on with his parents or shared their views, and he had not accompanied them into exile. All he had to add was that he now regarded them as enemies of their country. He refused on the grounds that he had always been apolitical — this was

the reason for his differences with his father — and he would certainly not join in hounding them now. He lost his job but was not arrested until some months later.

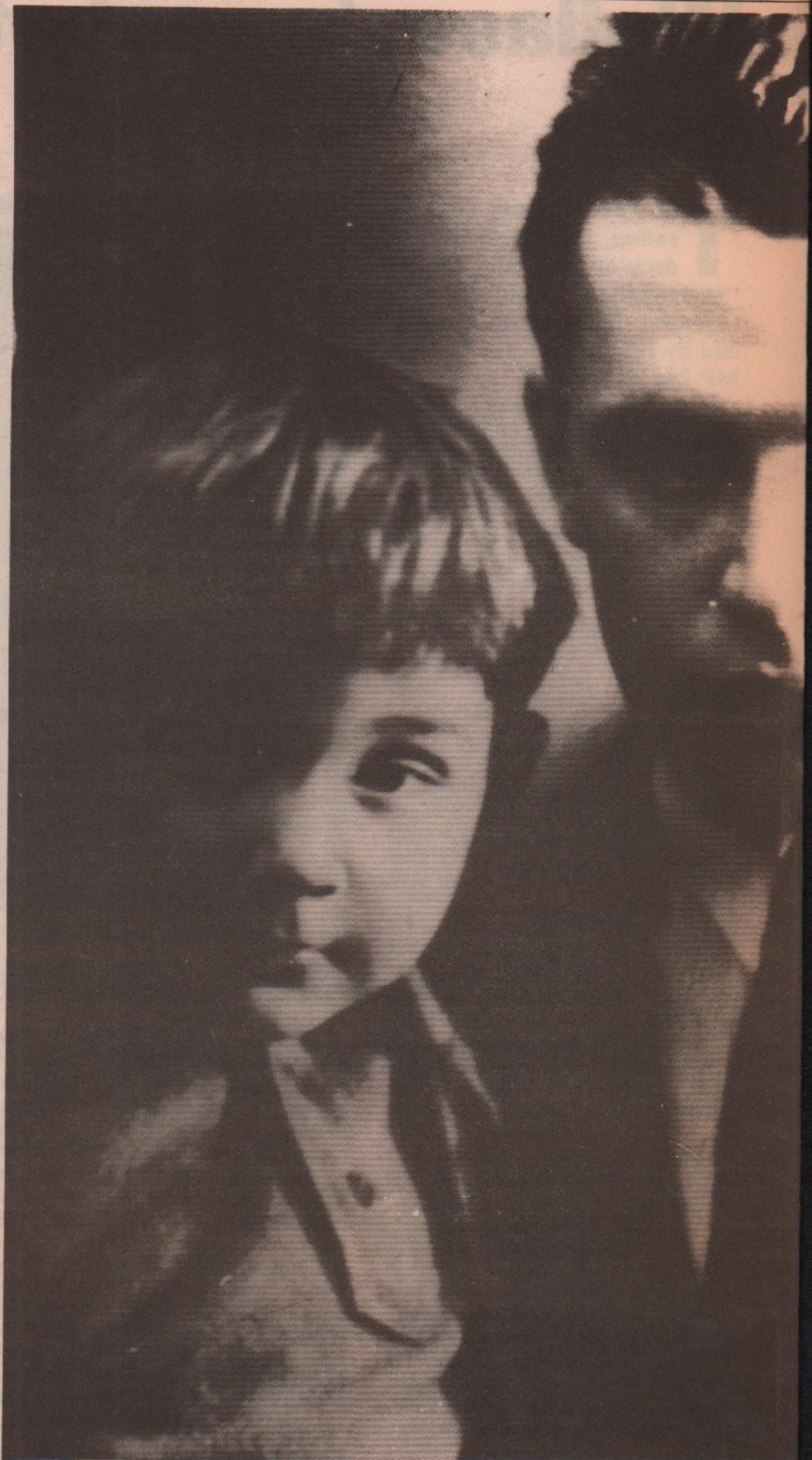
Brought to Moscow in the autumn of 1936, he immediately went on hunger strike as a protest against his arrest. But the investigation was completed within ten days. He was sentenced to five years in a labour camp. In December, he arrived in Vorkuta and for the first time found himself among followers of his father. They filled him with admiration.

While the great majority had "capitulated", there remained a hard core of uncompromising Trotskyists, most of them in prisons and camps. They and their families had been rounded up in the preceding months and concentrated in three large camps — Kolyma, Vorkuta, and Norilsk. Sergei gave me the first news I received of those in Vorkuta.

I was not surprised at the impression they had made on him. I had met several since my arrest. Most of those I knew were intellectuals to whom Trotsky's views — less cut and dried than Lenin's — had appealed from early on. The majority were experienced revolutionaries who had fought in the civil war but had joined the Opposition in the early twenties. A larger proportion than in other parties were members of national minorities, but all of them were fiery internationalists, intolerant of the very idea of local or Soviet nationalism and scarcely able to grasp the concept of nation. Had the term "rootless cosmopolitan" been invented by then, it would certainly have been applied to the Trotskyists.

Purists, they feared the contamination of their doctrine above all else in the world. This had been the greatest obstacle to their cooperation with other groups and, even in the camp, they tended to keep to themselves. They had inherited this attitude from Trotsky. Lenin could be hard or flexible as it suited him. But Trotsky, even in exile, with almost every door shut in his face, could still use his time and his brilliant gifts on venomous polemics with Western socialist leaders. When I accused the Trotskyists of sectarianism, they said that what mattered was to "keep the banner unsullied".

Their fanaticism antagonised the majority of prisoners, and even



Sergei Sedov with his brother Lyova's son. Both perished at Stalin's hands

those whom it attracted were not always made welcome. But their gloomy courage was proof against all temptations and threats.

I remembered a former leader of the Armenian Komsomol. He had received a three-year sentence which ran out in 1937. Every prisoner's identity card bore the date of his release. One day, to my horror, he took out his card and, calmly smiling, altered the date from 1937 to 1987. He explained that he did not of course expect to be alive by then, but that as long as he lived he would remain a Trotskyist and would therefore have to stay in prison. Stalin was right, according to his lights, to keep the Trotskyists locked up. As for them, all they had to do now was to bear witness by suffering and dying for the truth.

When I told such people that, as politicians, they were "opting out of history", they replied: "That's what every opportunist tells us."

Sergei found the conditions in the camp abominable, but his companions gave him a warm welcome for his father's sake and were themselves heartened by his presence. He remained as uninterested in their political and economic views as before, but he spoke with veneration of their independence of spirit and could even say that the weeks he had spent among them had been "the happiest in his life". He wanted his parents to hear about their friends and of his own change of heart, and his mother particularly to know that he was sorry for all the anxiety he had given her and that he was determined to die with dignity. He was shot a few weeks later. I was released in time to write to his mother but not to see her — she died before I reached Paris in 1962.

I heard more about Sergei from a friend of his who had had the same

interrogator. When he asked for news of him, the official said: "If his father sends a wagon-full of gold we might let him go." But this was only a cruel joke. No such offer was made to Trotsky, and Sergei's fate must already have been decided when — perhaps in order to deprive his friends of the moral comfort of having a Trotsky among them — he was brought back from Vorkuta.

Many years were to pass before the world outside heard anything about their last, heroic stand and their death in the Northern forests. The main facts were published in *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* in New York (No.10/11, 1961). I can only add the details I was able to piece together from the stories of Sergei and a few prisoners I met much later. That the extermination of the Trotskyists was decided on and carefully planned in Moscow is shown by the fact that the same system was followed in all three camps. But I heard more about Vorkuta than the other two.

There, in the autumn of 1936, the Trotskyists put certain demands to the authorities, such as to be allowed to live with their families and lodged separately from the criminals (whenever the political and criminal prisoners were mixed, persecution by the criminals was an added torment for the "political"). They insisted that the conditions generally were more degrading than in any jail in a capitalist country.

The authorities refused and threatened them with reprisals. Then in October, the Trotskyists with their wives and children declared a mass hunger strike. With the onset of the Siberian winter and in conditions deliberately planned to break them, this needed almost superhuman courage.

A few sympathisers joined them.

## They did not die in vain!

**"At arctic Vorkuta, where tens of thousands of detainees died from hunger and cold, cursing Stalin and the regime he created, there has been born a workers' movement whose aim is to destroy that system of**

**administrative command. Those men did not die for nothing in the Stalinist camps! "If the past is not to repeat itself, the cohesion of the workers and the unity of their demands constitute our only weapon against the**

**bureaucrats, the functionaries, and the whole administrative system which hangs above our heads and is ready to strike us down so that it can continue to live and to command as before."**  
*Vorkhuta miners' strike committee, November 1939*





The Trotskyists exposed Stalin's frame-ups

Other prisoners, bribed by an extra slice of bread a day or broken by the threat of sharing the fate of the Trotskyists, or even out of "conviction" (I met a few such people), were induced to side with the authorities — this is perhaps the blackest side of the affair. The camp radio broadcast speeches by former "politicals" who had arrived at a position curiously similar to that of some of Stalin's apologists

*'The Trotskyists added to their stock of jokes. One gaunt hunger striker meeting another would ask 'Why are you so gloomy?' The other replied: 'The Gestapo haven't sent me my allowance yet.'"*

Even today, Stalin was the man of destiny. His victory was a historical necessity. Obedience to his will was sacred duty to Lenin. Judged objectively — whether they knew it or not — those who opposed him were "enemy agents". The Trotskyists added to their stock of jokes. One gaunt hunger striker meeting another would ask: "Why are you so gloomy?" The other replied: "The Gestapo haven't sent me my allowance yet." The strike was kept up for three months. Even the children persisted, though the strike leaders,

begged the mothers to stop them because the sight was intolerable to the men.

Most of the strikers survived. Some were forcibly fed. Usually a man can do without water as well as food for about ten days. If he drinks, he can last out several weeks and, if he is forcibly fed, for five or six months, though his health is ruined. (Note: I held a long hunger strike twice, once for 44 days and once for 56 — JB.) Camp doctors boasted that no striker died in hospital; in fact, the hopeless cases were discharged and died a few days later.

After three months nearly all the strikers' demands were suddenly granted. A minority still refused to compromise, but they were overruled. When, a fortnight later, all the concessions were withdrawn, it was too late to begin again, though some tried. The camp authorities justified their trick on the grounds that a successful strike would have made discipline impossible.

The end came in the summer of 1937. A troika (a special investigation commission of three people) arrived from Moscow. The Trotskyists were put on special work and lodged at the brick factory. Some were put through a new and more severe interrogation.

One day in the autumn, the brick factory was cordoned off by special guards. The prisoners were given two days' rations and their transfer to another camp was announced. This was astonishing news as by then the weather had virtually cut off all links with the rest of the world.

All that was known at Vorkuta for some time was that the Trotskyists — in their rags and with their two days rations — were marched off into the forest at night, and that two days later the guards

returned with only a few prisoners who had been included by mistake. But from there the news gradually leaked out.

A day's march away, the convoy came on a set of temporary shacks. There the prisoners were locked up. Their names were checked against a list and then, group by group, they were called out and machine-gunned. Some struggled, shouted slogans, and fought the guards to the last. The guards, as was usual on such occasions, were half-drunk.

When it was over, the guards poured paraffin over the bodies and the rags and set them alight. For a long time the bonfire burned deep in the forest.

The camp commanders were notified of the names of a number of people who had been shot as bandits, saboteurs or Trotskyist counter-revolutionaries. A few bandits had in fact been included, as well as a number of Trotskyists who had recanted long before.

This was the first massacre on such a scale — others were to follow during and after the war. By the end of 1937 hardly a member of the Trotskyist cadres was left in the three camps — only a few individuals were spared for special reasons.

The tracks were carefully covered up, for Stalin wanted to be able to rewrite history as well as make it. As secretly as the Trotskyists, the heads of the troikas which had condemned them, as well as members of the execution squads, were shot in 1938. The few who escaped by chance were those who had left the service.

In 1939 came the turn of Yezhov, whose orders they had carried out and by whose order most of them had died. The only announcement was of his transfer to another post, but he vanished completely.

## Why the mullahs want murder

### OUT AND PROUD

By Edward Ellis

**T**he Iranian regime last week announced that it wished to see the extermination of all homosexuals.

Ever since the consolidation of Khomeini's regime, homosexuality has been punishable by death. You didn't even get a chance to prove your innocence: if someone said you were homosexual, that was it. The regime's new announcement no doubt will mean more of that sort of arbitrariness.

Why on earth should people find homosexuality so threatening that they should want to kill homosexuals?

I have never been to Iran, but I have been to other Middle Eastern countries, and know something about sexual attitudes in some of them. And it would seem to be a curious fact that although homosexuality is condemned, both by Islam and Christianity, it is 'practised' by lots of men.

I am talking here about men, because the sexuality of women in these societies is, for obvious reasons, harder to find out about.

In Egypt, for example, most men are quite prepared to have sex with foreign men, and, it would seem, each other, even if their attitude tends to be along the lines that any orifice will do.

Yet there is no word in Arabic for homosexual. In Egyptian Arabic there is a word that means, roughly, 'poofter'; but there is certainly no word with any positive significance. Only a very small proportion of the men who have sex with each other identify as 'different'.

In Turkish, apparently, there are two words, one meaning 'active' and one 'passive' homosexual: like most cultures for which homosexuality is a mysterious word, the Turkish language doesn't allow for the possibility that people's sexualities might not be so easily categorised.

The word meaning 'active' —

which is, I think, 'columpera' (apologies to Turkish readers if my spelling is wrong) — is considered a compliment. If you're a columpera, you're a real man. If you're 'passive', though, you're acting like a woman, which, needless to say, is bad.

As a result, everyone wants to be a columpera, but no one wants to be 'columpera'd' which, if you think about it, is statistically difficult to manage.

All this shows how artificial is the idea that homosexuals or homosexual sex are 'unnatural'. Different societies at different times have had very different moral codes, and in some, homosexuality, however precisely defined, has not been at all taboo.

For example, there is a controversy at the moment in Brazil because workers from a particular tribe which doesn't seem to care who its members have sex with, or form lifelong relationships with, are being abused by fellow workers.

An anthropologist studying a tribe in New Guinea discovered that until their early twenties men and women were kept separate, and had sexual relationships with each other. Indeed, according to this tribe's beliefs, men don't have sperm biologically — it has to be ingested from other men. I don't think I need to go into details for the implications of this to be understood.

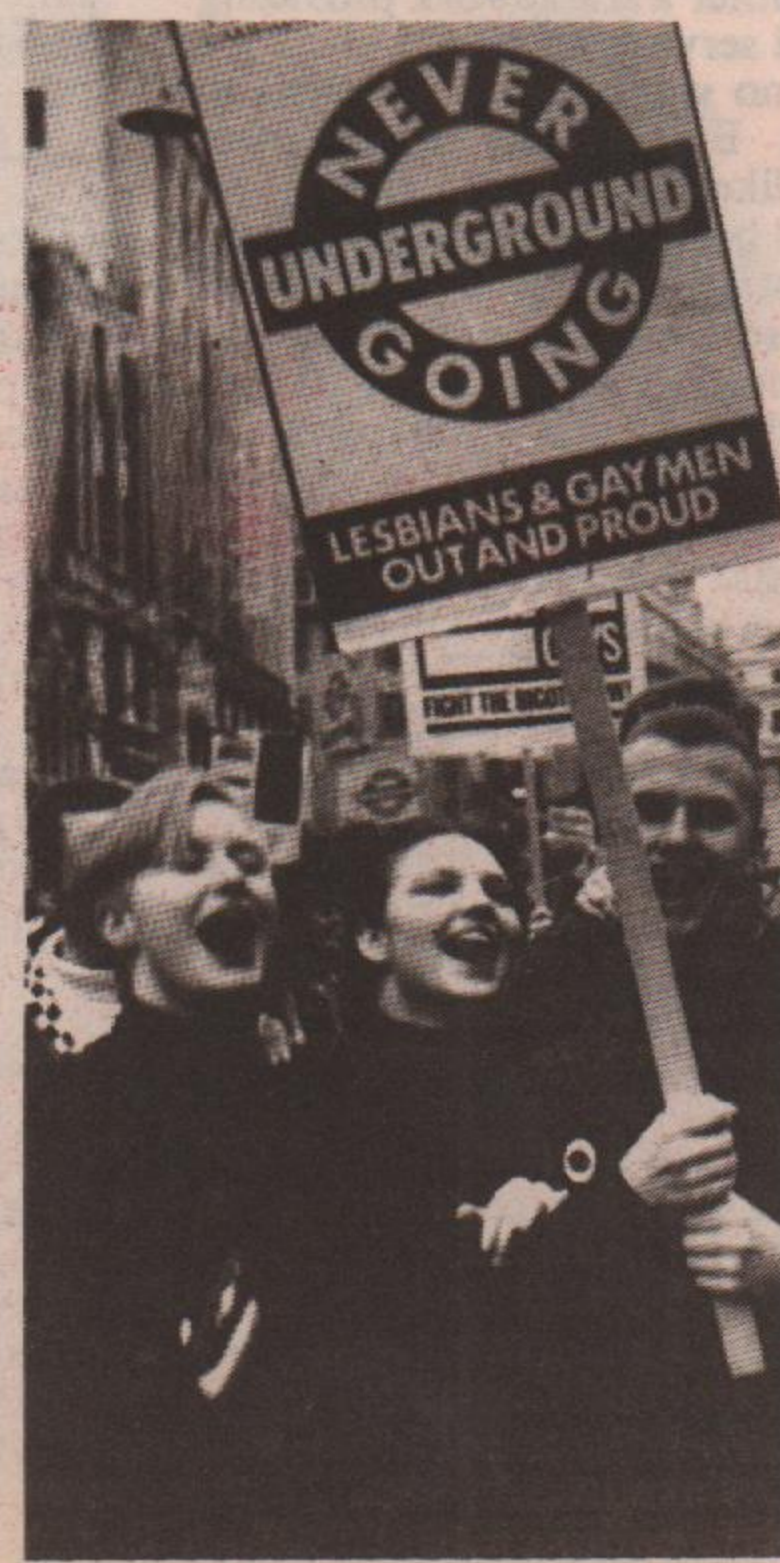
It is only at particular moments in history, in particular social conditions, that some people have a pathological fear of homosexuality so strong that they think it necessary to slaughter homosexuals — a concept made stranger by their presumed conviction that homosexuality isn't a natural condition anyway.

Islamic fundamentalism isn't all that much more extreme than other fundamentalisms in this respect. Like other fundamentalisms, it is immune from rational discussion: on TV recently, an Islamic expert insisted in all seriousness that homosexuality died out in the Arabian peninsula after the coming of Mohamed, and that historical research proved this to be so, although what sort of research you'd have to conduct, the mind can only reel at.

In the United States, right wing politicians increasingly mutter about rounding queers up and putting them in camps. In Britain, one Tory calls for the gassing of homosexuals, and when it was announced, during a parliamentary debate on Clause 28, that the offices of *Capital Gay* had been firebombed, some Tory MPs cheered.

The Tory government doesn't yet say it wants us all to be wiped out, and I'm sure they think the Iranian government is being a bit extreme. But the distance from Section 28 to mass slaughter is, in the last analysis, one of degree.

The British government also believes that homosexuals are less than fully human, less deserving of having their sexuality discussed as a human sexuality in schools, less than equal to others. Most Tories, and most of those on the other side of the House who went along with them, presumably think that just because you're subhuman doesn't mean you should be exterminated. But they and their laws feed the same attitude as that so brutally expressed in Tehran.





# "The workers must become an alternative governing force"

Martin Thomas looks at 'The Self-Management Alternative: Programme of the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution'



Polish workers face austerity from a Solidarnosc government

This is the first socialist programme for 40-odd years from within the Eastern Bloc that comes from a real organised workers' political party, rather than a couple of individuals or a small clandestine group of intellectuals.

The Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution (PSP-DR) is the first workers' socialist party to emerge in the Eastern Bloc. It is the oldest (at two and a half years!) of the anti-Stalinist left groups in Eastern Europe, and emerges from the working class that has the richest experience of struggle in Eastern Europe, from 1956 through 1970, 1976, 1980-1, and 1988 to today.

All this makes its programme a very important document. The drastic conditions in Poland today make it even more important. Workers' living standards were halved, or worse, in the single month of January. Unemployment is rising. People are hungry and desperate. The authoritarian, chauvinist, anti-semitic and fascist right is growing.

If anti-Stalinist socialists do not very quickly find a programme that both relates to workers' immediate struggles and shows them a way to a new society based on workers' self-management, then the prospect is not the gradual emergence of a parliamentary welfare state like Western Europe's, but a harsh authoritarian regime. The programme argues:

*"The process of privatisation and sale of national property which today serves the end of maintaining the dominant position of the nomenklatura must eventually produce systematic changes which will undermine this position.*

*"In such a situation, either there will be Stalinist reaction, reversing the reform process, or the nomenklatura will create, together with the Solidarity elite, a new ruling oligarchy on the basis of representing the interests of foreign capital [with] a place for Poland among the countries of the Third World..."*

*"This process will lead to poverty, unemployment and desperation for millions of wage-earners."*

The text of the programme represents a compromise between different wings of the PSP-DR, and debate is continuing inside the party. Different parts of the programme point different ways on important issues.

It calls for a "Democratic Revolution", but rejects the idea that this can be a matter of "society" as a whole, without class differentiation, against "the state". "The alliance between the nomenklatura and part of the opposition," it points out, "has been concluded in circumstances of intensifying economic and political struggles by working people. The elites of the authorities and of the opposition drew closer together in the face of economic catastrophe and the fear of an uncontrolled social explosion... [The new Solidarity ministers] agreed to act as intermediaries between Western capital and the nomenklatura."

Since neither the Stalinist system, nor its replacement by capitalism, can "meet the aspirations of working people," "their only chance is

to become an alternative governing force." "The PSP-DR is a workers' party."

The programme goes on to call for the transformation of "state enterprises" into "workers' enterprises", run by workers' councils which hire and fire the manager. To bring this about, it calls for "the rebirth of strong trade union organisations in the workplaces", the reestablishment of the independence of Solidarity from the state, and mass strike movements.

Yet the programme does not include specific demands raised in a manifesto from the Wrocław committee of the PSP-DR: the sliding scale of wages (ie. automatic wage rises to keep pace with price rises), a cut in work hours to 35 a week, social control over food distribution, and a general wage rise. It is also vague about the shape of the self-managed system it advocates.

Although it calls for the workers "to become an alternative governing force", and to struggle against the old bureaucrats and the new capitalists, it says that victory would bring not a workers' state but "the Self-Managing Republic — a state which does not express the interests of any social group, but is rather a framework providing law and services to all."

It is no wonder that socialists in Eastern Europe shy away from terms like "workers' state", so misused by the Stalinists. However, the existing state in Poland serves the interests of the bureaucrats and the capitalists. If the workers oust them, the new state will serve the workers' interests and go against the interests of the bureaucrats and capitalists. Neither will the state float in mid-air, neutral between the opposing classes.

The search for a "neutral" state can greatly disorient workers in Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia, for example, there is great demand for a "government of experts". All but three per cent of the people also reject a move to full free-market capitalism. However, all the economic experts now in top positions belong to the pro-capitalist three per cent!

The PSP-DR programme says: "Independent social experts should be introduced to groups taking economic decisions, together with people with a humanistic

background, enjoying social authority." But no experts are neutral or independent.

The same search for some mythical neutral or independent force to stand above society also blurs the programme's ideas about reorganising production. "In all economic systems up until now," it says, "capital in various forms has taken primacy over labour." So we need to "equalise the opportunities of employees in relation to employers."

Yet later on the programme calls for the transformation of "state enterprises" into "workers' enterprises" — not enterprises with an "equal" balance between the workers and the state or private capital.

Shying away from the ideas of a democratically-decided workers' overall economic plan, or a

*"The Polish workers' movement has a rich history. The programme tries to link itself to that history."*

workers' government, the programme relies heavily on decentralisation as a way to economic and political democracy.

Decentralised local initiative is certainly necessary, and not only as a corrective to Stalinist ultra-centralisation. Without strong workers' organisation in the workplace and neighbourhoods, and the ousting of the old bureaucrats by workers' councils in enterprises and districts, all talk of a workers' self-managed republic is so much words in the air.

And democratic planning cannot just be a matter of ousting the Stalinists from the planning offices and replacing them by democratically-elected people. Socialist planning is possible only on the basis of accurate and comprehensive information about costs and technologies. It cannot be built on the basis of the bureaucrats' bungled and corrupt accounting.

Marxists have never proposed to abolish the market overnight; and in Eastern Europe, especially, even a workers' government would need to use the market for a long time to gain economic information. It would need to give market mechanisms more scope than the old Stalinist system. Its economic planning would reject what Trotsky called "the superstition of administrative plan and administrative prices"; it would set broad outlines, but be open to correction and local initiative.

All that said, no modern society can be just a network of small autonomous enterprises and communes. Large-scale enterprises and nationally-planned services are central.

The programme proposes two democratic controls over economic affairs at the national level: a "self-management chamber" of parliament, "representing all workers", as a counterpoint to the main assembly "representing all citizens"; and "referenda, in which the inhabitants of Poland can choose between alternative economic programmes". But referenda have historically served authoritarian, not democratic, governments, and for good reason: they offer the people only a yes-no vote on terms set by the government. Referenda on issues as complex as alternative economic programmes would be doubly open to manipulation.

There is no alternative but the establishment of a flexible, accountable system of working-class democracy, based on mandate and the right of recall at every level, in which different political parties can compete with different social and economic programmes. What the PSP-DR programme seems to do is to concede, reluctantly, the continuation of a central state authority, to assume that it must be bureaucratic and dominated by a privileged minority, but then to try to limit it by calling for independent experts, by maximising local as against central power, and so on.

It is almost like a new version of the "self-limiting revolution" proposed by Solidarity leaders in 1980-1. Then, the idea was that the Stalinists would be left in control of the state superstructure, but Solidarity would enable the people

to take control of the whole of society underneath that Stalinist canopy. Now the idea seems to be a curtailed state hemmed in by workers' and local self-management all around it.

Instead of replacing the existing army by a citizens' territorial army, it proposes a smaller professional army. Instead of elected judges, it proposes a "self-governing judiciary". It proposes no specific measures to break up the civilian state bureaucracy.

The programme proposed is unworkable, as a model of society, and inadequate, as a plan for combating the power of the entrenched state machine.

Each local authority, it proposes, should rely solely on its own local taxes; indeed the national government would have no tax powers of its own, relying instead on a fixed

*"A socialist economy cannot be built workplace by workplace. It cannot even be built in one country alone."*

percentage paid over from local taxes. Each local authority would have the right to veto all national decisions — even investment decisions of national significance, the programme says explicitly.

Such radical decentralisation would make it impossible to run a national railway or electricity supply system, let alone a socialist economy. And it would lead to huge regional inequalities.

The programme envisages an economy where workers' self-managed enterprises would relate to each other through what it calls "a market controlled from below [which] would make possible equivalent exchange". It argues that the market is a good regulator of production and distribution, only under capitalism it is distorted by the rise of monopolies.

However, the capitalist market "leads to unemployment, waste and



## What is the 'Nomenklatura'?

By Duncan Chapple

**The ruling bureaucrats in the Stalinist states are often referred to as the 'nomenklatura'. What does this phrase mean?**

Literally, a nomenklatura is a list of names. In the USSR, the nomenklatura is a list of positions whose ranks are confirmed by higher authority. Where did these people come from? How did they get their power?

*"Surrounded by bureaucrats and careerists many Bolsheviks inside the state machine were far from the workers and their party."*

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Russian workers faced terrible odds. Many of the best democrats and socialists perished in the civil war which followed the invasion of the USSR by the armies of many capitalist states. Many of those remaining were taken from the industrial proletariat to become administrators or party officials.

The taking of power did not mean that the workers suddenly gained all the knowledge that their bosses had had before. For military and technical information in particular, Communist Party (CP) members in positions of power became dependent on individuals often hostile to the revolution and to the ideas of the new workers' state.

As the civil war went on, activity and discussion in the workers' councils withered away, placing power in the hands of communists in administrative positions, and in the hands of ex-Tsarist officials.

Surrounded by bureaucrats and careerists, many Bolsheviks inside the state machine were far from the workers and their party. They soaked up many of the bureaucrats' ideas. They began to see themselves not as the workers' agents against

the capitalists or within the state machine, but as intermediaries independent from both classes. Slowly, a conservative layer within the Communist Party was assimilated into the bureaucracy.

Headed by Stalin, the bureaucrats wanted to consolidate their power. They struggled inside the CP against their opponents, and used their hold on the administrative machinery to install their supporters. Stalin invented the system that makes it possible to do this.

From the early '20s, special departments were created to scrutinise and appoint officials. These were known as the 'Uchraspred'. They organised dismissals as well as appointments within the nomenklatura, drawing up lists of those who would "return to the workshop or the plow".

Where positions had to be elected, Stalin's committees would make "recommendations". In his 1923 book 'The New Course', Leon Trotsky pointed out that the level of appointments had risen to over ten times the number made at the height of the civil war — when elections were harder to organise. "The party is living at two levels. At the top decisions are made; at the bottom information about these decisions is received."

One further development finalised the power of the nomenklatura, the 'Lenin Enrolment'. Between Lenin's death and the following party congress in May 1924, membership rose from around 330,000 to 740,000.

The party was flooded with opportunists who wanted not revolution, but the good positions the Stalin regime could offer. The enrolment was a conscious plan to overwhelm the authority the older party members held.

By 1924, the democratic workers' regime established by the 1917 revolution had been lost to a new bureaucratic layer. It consolidated its power. Inside the party, the nomenklatura raised the slogan of "socialism in one country". Linking with the right, they defeated Trotsky and the left who defended the programme of Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

The next decade saw the Stalinists extend their control. But many of the old generation held onto their positions.

In 1930, 69% of the regional secretaries of the CP, and of its Central Committee were still old Bolsheviks. Over 80% of delegates to the Communist Party Congress in 1934 had joined before 1920, before the end of the civil war.

The old guard's position was strong because of the respect and moral weight its members held. But Stalin and the new careerists rising through the nomenklatura system had no use for them. Bureaucratized though those old Bolsheviks were, they were still not just careerists.

A great purge started with the murder of Kirov, the First Secretary of the Party in Leningrad. Kirov was murdered at Stalin's orders; but the murder prompted the framing, arrest and trial of many old Bolsheviks. Torture and persecution led to Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Bukharin, Radek and other revolutionary leaders 'confessing' to parts in a Trotsky-Hitler plan to destroy the USSR!

Many were murdered, many more were sent into internal exile. The Gulags, Stalin's concentration camps, were massive. The scale of the deportations can be shown by Soviet censuses.

*"Of the 71 elected onto the Central Committee in 1934, only 10 were newly elected and most were members before 1917."*

Between 1926 and 1939, the total population of the Soviet Far East rose by 329%, of Eastern Siberia by 384%, of the North of the European part of the country by 558%. The frame-ups in the Trials of the 'Trotsky-Zinoviev terrorist centre' (1936), the 'parallel Trotskyist centre' (1937) and the 'anti-soviet bloc of the Trotskyist rightists' (1938) built up a massive slave army, up to ten million strong at some times.

Between 1934 and 1939 the Bolshevik old guard was completely removed. Conclusive figures are given in 'Nomenklatura' by Michael Voslensky.

In 1930, he tells us, 69% of senior party secretaries had joined before the revolution. In 1939, 80.5% had joined since Lenin's death in 1924. 80% of delegates at the 1939 congress were still at school in 1920!

Of the 71 elected onto the Central Committee in 1934, only 10 were newly elected and most were members before 1917. In 1939 nearly two-thirds were elected for the first time, and only two were members before the revolution.

The struggle for power over the USSR was primarily carried out within a working class party, the Communist party. But was it a struggle between two sections of the working class? Is, as some argue, the nomenklatura just a labour bureaucracy? The evidence suggests not.

The obituaries of nomenklatura officials in the Soviet press suggest that the overwhelming majority of the first generation nomenklaturists were of peasant origin. One sample of 855 leading officials of the next generation showed that 709 (over 80%) were of peasant origin, while 58 were of worker origin.

The evidence shows that direct power in the Soviet Union was lost by the working class by 1924, held for 10 or 15 years by a bureaucratic layer of old Bolsheviks, and afterwards by a nomenklatura whose members are mainly of peasant or intellectual origin.

Without doubt, the nomenklatura is alive and well today. In the special shops, clinics and other privileges we see proof of its material advantages.

How big is it? Voslensky suggests that altogether the nomenklatura and its families account for 3 million people in the USSR, who command a massive share of the country's resources.

Periodically, it purges itself. Sometimes, as in Poland, we see the ruling layer opening up to absorb some of its enemies — the leaders of Solidarnosc. But their exploiting and dictatorial regimes remain.

The nomenklatura regimes are massively corrupt and devoid of democratic planning. After 40 years the big lie — that these countries were socialist — is finally dead.

Organising together with socialists in the eastern bloc, we must sweep Stalinism away in a struggle for workers' liberty and workers' control East and West.

ecological catastrophes" (as the programme indicates) even without monopolies. It did so in the 19th century, before modern monopolies emerged. And the programme could not prevent monopolies anyway: how, other than through extremely wasteful duplication, could Poland have more than one or a very few railway systems, electricity supply systems, telephone systems, steelworks, car assembly plants, computer manufacturing enterprises...?

Moreover, the market cannot be controlled "from below"; workers' councils in individual enterprises cannot control the relations between enterprises. A workers' self-managed republic would need to control the market from above, through control of the banks, credit, and the state budget.

The programme points out that worker takeovers enterprise by enterprise would leave some workforces with modern, competitive plants, and others with outdated factories doomed to bankruptcy. The inequalities, it says, "can be evened out with the help of taxation"; but how? This would mean market chaos tempered by bureaucratic corruption, as in Yugoslavia's "market socialism".

A socialist economy cannot be built workplace by workplace. It cannot even be built in one country alone. The programme declares that "The PSP-DR is a party of international solidarity, which sees in close cooperation with anti-totalitarian and socialist movements and workers' parties the possibility of liberation from state oppression and economic enslavement"; but it does not follow up that declaration with any detailed international programme.

Although the programme speaks of "the complete destruction of the ruling Party bureaucracy", it also insists that the PSP-DR will proceed "without the use of force". How will the bureaucracy be completely destroyed without the use of force? If it is not destroyed, then (especially with the aid of Western capital), the central state will surely overcome the uncoordinated efforts of local self-management initiatives. The programme is right when it declares that the workers must "become an alternative governing force", and wrong when it fails to follow through that thought.

A revolutionary party has to act as the memory of the working class — the means to sum up the lessons of past struggles and bring them to bear on the future. That task is doubly important, and doubly difficult, in the Eastern Bloc, where decades of Stalinism have not only suppressed the socialist tradition, but also taken its phrases — "workers' state", "planned economy" — and attached contrary meanings to them.

The Polish workers' movement has a rich history. The programme tries to link itself to that history, right back to the foundation of the first Polish Socialist Party in 1892. But from the period between 1894 and the 1930s, it cites only one strand of that history — the nationalist, reformist strand, as opposed to the internationalist revolutionary strand represented by Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches, the Polish Communist Party before Stalinism and the Polish Trotskyists.

The aspirations in the programme are much closer to the tradition of Luxemburg than to the nationalists and reformists. By linking up with that part of the Polish working-class tradition, the PSP-DR will find the way to turn its aspirations into a programme for action. Its doing so will be important not only for the Polish workers, but also for all the workers of Eastern Europe and indeed the world.



Shops for bureaucrats in Leningrad. Photo: Ingrid Gaashon (Reflex)





Alfredo (Philippe Noiret) and Salvatore (Mario Leonardi) as an adolescent

## Growing out of nostalgia

### CINEMA

**Belinda Weaver reviews 'Cinema Paradiso'**

**C**inema Paradiso' starts with a death, but it's full of life and feeling. Set in Sicily, it's the story of Salvatore, a movie-crazy boy who grows up to be a film maker.

He has escaped into a world wider than the small town life of his

childhood, but the death of Alfredo, the town projectionist who first fostered his love of the movies, calls him back to his village.

His journey back there opens up the past, a past he had long left behind him.

The film is obviously autobiographical, but it seems universal. The young Salvatore's pain on first leaving home rings true. Narrow as the life is there, the village is his home, with all the memories and associations that growing up provides. Yet it is also the place he must leave if he is to strike out on his own path through life.

Alfredo never left. Caught up in the spell of the movies he showed,

Alfredo lived in a dream world, with the fatherless Salvatore as his companion and accomplice. Alfredo urges Salvatore to leave, not to waste his life on flickering images and dreams.

But was it the right choice for Salvatore? If success is getting what you want, then he was more than successful. But happiness is something else, it's wanting what you get. Perhaps Alfredo had had the best of it after all.

Home again for Alfredo's funeral, Salvatore begins to question everything in his life. Haunted by the memories and desires of his younger self whose presence he feels all around him, he is as doubtful and uncertain as any adolescent on

the brink of adulthood.

Yet Alfredo was right. Salvatore was right to leave, and there can be no going back for him. His childhood world has vanished, the past is closed. It is too late to regret what might have been. Alfredo's final legacy to Salvatore is the life-affirming message he needs to shake off his melancholy.

The film is gentle, touching and nostalgic, funny in parts, sad in others. There wasn't a dry eye in the house by the end, but it's not manipulative or calculating. By the end, you simply feel you know Alfredo and Salvatore, you feel they've been part of your life, the way the movies were part of their lives.

## A tale agreed upon

### TV

**By Mick Ackersley**

**W**hat is history but a tale agreed upon? asked Napoleon Bonaparte.

There is a series of encrusted myths and tales and 'traditional' interpretations, and then there is historical research.

King Alfred burned the cakes, and a thousand years later an academic burns the midnight oil and proves conclusively that it couldn't have happened.

Much of the history current in the labour movement is a matter of tales agreed upon, images projected, and myths. Last Thursday (15th) you could see the old process of myth-furbishing at work in the modern medium of TV.

The *Comic Strip's* "GLC" told the story of Big Ken Livingstone and his fight against the Dragon Lady Thatcher as it might be bowdlerised into a hack American TV movie. It was extremely funny and very well done, obviously thought up as a successor to the same team's "Strike".

"Strike" was the brilliantly funny story of the miners' strike as it would be recast to meet the "script values" of a typical Hollywood movie. It climaxed with Arthur Scargill making a desperate 160-mile ride from Yorkshire to London, where a benign and smiling Speaker of the House of Commons, dressed like Uncle Sam with a goatee beard, allowed him to take part in the debate and Save the Nation.

The real subject was not the miners' strike, but Hollywood movies.

Second time round, the subject was less Hollywood than the GLC. Ken Livingstone, played by Robbie Coltrane, is a happy beachcomber on the banks of the Thames who stands for the GLC and wins the leadership first time out. He does wonderful things and everyone loves him, except the supernaturally villainous Thatcher.

Whereas the real Livingstone fawned to the Queen in public, this one forms an alliance with a dopey but decent Prince Charles, whom Thatcher sends to the Tower and almost to the scaffold.

It ends with a heroic Livingstone shooting it out with the Army, willing to die in the last ditch for his principles and for the people of London. Then Charles speaks to the soldiers and they all live happily ever after, except Thatcher.

I enjoyed it enormously. The myth-spinning lay not in the invention but in the story's starting point — the assumption that Livingstone stood his ground and fought. He didn't. He spent years promising to fight, and then when it came to it he bottled out on the — publicly stated — grounds that anything else would be bad for his career.

Yet there are a lot of people in the labour movement who still think of Livingstone as "the council leader who dared to fight". This very funny film will have reinforced the myth.

One oddity was the appearance of Tony Benn as a retired gunslinger who had lost his bottle but hovered in the background advising Ken. The comedians missed a trick here in not having a robotic gnome playing one of Ken Livingstone's real background advisers, Gerry Healy of the WRP, who helped keep Livingstone's paper *Labour Herald* afloat, providing an editor and other things.

Maybe the *Comic Strip* plan to do the Gerry Healy Story next, as it might be scripted by Vanessa Redgrave. No doubt Ken Livingstone will have a bit part as a Well Known Name who sits at the great man's feet while the great man makes money from Arab governments by denouncing dissident Arabs and spying on prominent Jews.

## Glowing with health?

### LES HEARN'S SCIENCE COLUMN

**I**rradiating food with large doses of gamma rays kills all known bacteria and fungi. It could thus eliminate much of the food poisoning bacteria that have been causing such problems recently.

Yet most people fear irradiation of food. Out of 7000 polled recently in Britain, 51% thought irradiated food would be bad for them, 6% more than in a survey 6 months before. Only 8% thought it would be good for them.

Irradiation is supported by the World Health Organisation, the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation and the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as the British government's Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods (ACINF). Against it are ranged a variety of consumer organisations, including the Consumers' Association and the London Food Committee.

There are really two questions to answer in deciding our attitude to food irradiation: Is it safe and is it necessary?

The process itself is remarkably simple, consisting in the bombardment of the food with up to 10000 grays of gamma rays, X-rays or fast electrons. Just for comparison, this is about 1000 times the dose to kill a human.

The radiation works by breaking

up molecules into reactive fragments, called free radicals. These then career around inside the bacteria, disrupting key molecules, like enzymes and DNA.

These free radicals are of course also produced in the cells of the food. If the food is "alive", like fresh fruit and vegetables, the normal processes of ripening, sprouting and decay will be delayed or stopped, increasing its "shelf life" and hence its value. Happily, free radicals are "mopped up" in a few seconds and so cannot harm the consumers. However, they can change the composition of the food, altering its taste and perhaps its nutritional value. This is a drawback with any method of food preparation or preservation. For instance, cooking destroys a large proportion of the Vitamin C in food. Some people will therefore only eat uncooked food, despite the risk of food poisoning attached. I myself tend to eschew the raw potato.

ACINF says that foods that can be irradiated safely without spoiling their taste or smell include poultry, seafood, fruit, vegetables and spices.

The above drawbacks are rather minor and in any case not exclusive to food irradiation. But does the technique cause the production of harmful chemicals in the irradiated food?

It is here that the greatest controversy arises.

The expert committees set up by WHO, FAO and IAEA have okayed irradiation at levels up to 10000 grays, stating it to be a safe method of food preservation which "presents no toxicological hazard and no special nutritional or

microbiological problems." ACINF referred to 40 years of research in their conclusion that irradiated food was safe to eat.

The London Food Commission, a radical campaigning group on issues of food quality and safety, criticised these conclusions, saying much of the research quoted has not been published and has therefore not been subject to review by other scientists. The LFC quotes the results of an experiment 15 years ago in India where five severely malnourished children were fed on chapatis made from irradiated wheat.

The children all developed a condition called polyploidy, where some of their cells contained too many chromosomes. Apart from being a rather unethical thing to do to sick children, it is difficult to say what this experiment shows. The polyploidy cleared up after the children were switched to normal food and it is unclear whether there are any health risks attached to it.

Similar experiments on laboratory animals showed polyploidy, as well as damage to sperm, increased incidence of miscarriage and a reduced immune response.

In reply to the LFC's criticism, the WHO suggests that these side effects may be due to loss of vitamins in the irradiated food, citing as evidence its failure to find ill effects where animals were given vitamin supplements with their irradiated food.

One of the WHO's advisers, German food expert JF Diehl, describes the LFC's criticisms as "a lot of half truth and exaggeration". He estimates that no more than 5% of food will be irradiated by 2000 and

hence "the whole thing has been blown up out of proportion".

Diehl also dismisses the claim that irradiation can be used to make stale or spoiled food palatable. "If it smells, irradiation will make it smell worse."

Professor Campbell-Platt of Reading University says vitamin losses are worse during ordinary cooking and that chemicals produced in food by irradiation are produced by ordinary processes, too.

Alan Holmes of the Food Research Association says: "The biggest proof that irradiation is safe is that you can't detect it."

This is not strictly true, though at present the methods being developed are experimental and rather expensive.

The other question still remains, though — is it necessary? The Consumers' Association sees irradiation as a technical fix for a problem of hygiene in the food industry. It is feared that unwholesome food will be disguised.

Obviously, it is better that poor hygiene be remedied, but food contaminated with dead bacteria is not necessarily unwholesome. It depends on whether the bacteria produced any poisons while they were alive.

The other reason for irradiation, to inhibit ripening and increase the shelf life of food, is not necessarily a bad thing either. Many people like exotic fruit, vegetables and spices and these have perforce to be transported large distances before reaching the consumers. If irradiation makes these foods cheaper by reducing wastage, it is difficult to see why it shouldn't be used, as long as the consumers know and have the choice of what to buy or not.

### LEFT UNITY



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# CPSA: A tale of two conferences

How to organise the rank and file...

By Trudy Saunders,  
CPSA

**S**aturday 17 February was an historic day for the CPSA (the union of low paid clerical and secretarial grades in the Civil Service).

Over 80 CPSA branches sent delegates to the union's first unofficial branch-based conference. The conference was called to unite rank and file members in the fight against Agencies (privatisation of the Civil Service).

Delegates came from a whole range of departments, including Department of Social Security, Department of Employment, Department of the Environment, Land Registry, Home Office, MoD, Department of National Savings, Northern and Southern Assemblies and MAFF.

If Civil Service departments are turned into Agencies, CPSA members' jobs, wages, conditions and union organisation are at risk. In one of the opening speeches to the conference a CPSA member from Companies House, Cardiff — the first Civil Service Agency — spoke of the reality of Agencies, including of how a member with breast cancer was given a warning letter for sickness, of bonus schemes being altered (members received a cake instead of £60 as promised), of a black member being victimised, and of threats to force workers to work late.

A report in Saturday's *Guardian* also spoke of the threat to Department of Employment (DE) workers who, when the DE is privatised on 2 April 1990, face Saturday working, amongst other things.

Despite all this, the right-wing CPSA National Executive Committee are refusing to lead any fight against Agencies. It was in the light of this that Merthyr Tydfil DSS Branch wrote to all CPSA branches calling on them to support an unofficial conference to discuss the way forward.

As Mark Serwotka (Branch Secretary, DSS Merthyr Tydfil) explained in his opening speech, not all sections of the left in the CPSA were initially in favour of the conference. The majority group in the CPSA Broad Left — Militant — at first denounced the conference as left lunacy, and called on all members to simply pressurise the NEC to call an official conference and support a Militant initiative — the West Midlands Workshop Against Agencies.

However, it soon became clear, even to the Militant, that neither was sufficient to fight Agencies. After continued pressure from the Socialist Caucus (the independent left grouping in the Broad Left, including Socialist Organiser supporters), Militant agreed to support the conference. As Mark also pointed out in his speech, the fight against Agencies will have to be developed by building a broad-based campaign across political divides, uniting all members. The conference was branch-based precisely in order to bring in politically 'independent' branches. Similarly, it was a delegate conference to ensure that it represented more than just a few individuals putting across a personal viewpoint.

It was in this spirit that delegates rejected motions calling on the steering committee elected from the conference to organise in conjunction with the Broad Left National Committee. As a delegate from DSS Liverpool pointed out, such a move would alienate non-

Broad Left members and branches. In line with this, conference also agreed to call the organisation 'Branches Against Agencies' — the name used when Merthyr Tydfil sent out its original call.

A steering committee was elected, made up of representatives from all sections represented (elected by individual sections), and Secretary, Chair, and Treasurer (elected by conference as a whole).

Conference also passed motions calling for a fringe meeting at CPSA conference, the setting up of a newsletter and circulation of model motions for CPSA conference.

The most important discussion of the day focused on how to fight Agencies. Conference agreed to the strategy of pressurising the NEC to call for official strike action but simultaneously to build for unofficial strike action in the (likely) event of the NEC refusing to call this action.

Preparing for unofficial strike action is vital. At every stage, the NEC have said they will not lead a fight against Agencies. They have attempted to halt any unofficial fightback by threatening both Merthyr Tydfil DSS and members from the West Midlands with suspension from the union. Sadly, some sections of the Broad Left (Militant and the SWP) failed to see the need to pressurise the NEC and prepare the ground for unofficial strike action — it was left to Socialist Caucus and 'independent' branches to win the arguments.

Undoubtedly the Branches Against Agencies conference is a successful beginning. It was built in the face of threats of suspensions from the NEC and little support from the Militant majority of the Broad Left. The aim will now be to unite as many branches as possible in the hard fight which faces us against Agencies.

...and how not to

In complete contrast, the next day saw what can only be described as a farce when the Broad Left held a conference on the proposed merger of CPSA and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants (NUCPS) and on the poll tax. None of the independents at the Branches Against Agencies

conference participated. 'Militant' supporters as individuals rather than delegates from branches or local Broad Lefts, used the day to push through their own motions, overturning previously agreed Broad Left conference policy.

At the outset of the 'conference' (no more than a glorified meeting), Militant supporters voted down a proposal from Socialist Caucus to build support and solidarity for Eastern European socialists and trade unionists.

Things then went from bad to worse and the level of 'debate' degenerated to a Militant supporter quoting from what he believed to be an SWP internal document discussing the poll tax, which in fact turned out to be a Revolutionary

Democratic Group leaflet!

This method of debate was first introduced into the Broad Left by John Macreadie — CPSA Deputy General Secretary and Militant supporter — who uses the right-wing's spying system to gather information on other left wingers. At one meeting of the Broad Left he referred to a Socialist Caucus discussion bulletin which he said the right wing had presented to him.

All in all the whole day would have been amusing if it wasn't so tragic. The 'Militant' majority of the CPSA Broad Left seem incapable of organising a real fight against the CPSA right wing or the Tories. Maybe they'll learn something from Branches Against Agencies.

## Ford: EPIU help management

**T**he electricians who are holding out against the strings in the recent Ford pay deal are right to do so. Their strike — and that by 600 maintenance workers at Halewood and 250 at Basildon — should be supported by all Ford workers.

But the TGWU leadership is doing nothing to support the strikers, most of whom are members of the electricians' union, the EETPU, led by Eric Hammond, which was expelled from the TUC in 1988. The breakaway electricians' union, the small Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union (EPIU) which is affiliated to the TUC, is even justifying crossing EETPU picket lines and scabbing by workers in Belgium.

The electricians voted by two to one for the strike, which is against strings in the recent Ford pay deal. According to the deal, skilled workers' jobs will be cut, and skilled workers in so-called Integrated Management Teams will be expected to do production workers' jobs.

The teams are also divisive: those who work in them will be paid at a higher rate.

Ford has promised increases to unskilled workers — but these payments are not automatic. 'Line workers' will get an extra 3 per cent on top of the 10.3% pay rise. But only if they agree to speed-up and job cuts.

The engineers' strike, if it beats the strings, will make it easier for unskilled workers to fight these proposals too.

The TUC union leaders are playing a disgraceful role. Jack Adams of the TGWU has sent letters out instructing his members to cross picket lines. The AEU's Jimmy Airlie is doing nothing to help the Halewood strikers.

And the EPIU is recruiting electricians who are prepared to cross picket lines. They say the EETPU is 'going it alone' and should stand by the decision of the other unions to accept the deal.

But crossing picket lines is crossing picket lines.

Of course, Hammond hasn't suddenly become working class hero Grade A: he has been forced to back the strike. And he — along with Ford management — serves to gain most from the TUC unions' scabbing.

But the current line up should give cause for thought among activists who supported the EPIU.

The TUC must back the Ford strikers.

## Southwark NALGO fight back

### TOWN HALLS ROUNDUP

By Roy Webb,  
Southwark NALGO

**S**outhwark NALGO members are taking action over the redeployment agreement imposed on them by management.

This agreement means that:

• If your post is regarded as 'surplus to requirements' for financial reasons or because of a reorganisation, management can give you a redundancy notice and you've got 16 weeks to find another job somewhere else in the council.

If you are still without a job at the

end of this time, management will make you one final offer of another job, any job, anywhere in the council, and if you don't take that, then you are out!

• Even if you do find another job, your salary is only 'preserved' for the first three years. During this time you get no pay increases, and at the end of it your pay goes down to that of the post you've been moved into!

At the AGM, NALGO agreed to start selective action across all council departments as a build-up to an all-out strike if this policy was ever implemented.

As the selective action started, management came up with a real shocker and decided to tell two senior managers in the Public Protection Department that they either had to take early retirement or get the sack. As this was happening following a reorganisation for that department, what should have happened is that they should have been automatically given new posts on a 'like for like' basis, the new posts being essentially the same as the ones they currently occupy.

This didn't happen. They weren't even allowed to apply for the jobs in open competition, but were told they 'weren't suitable' for jobs which they had designed themselves. As a result no-one in the section felt safe. There are no rules any more. The Section wanted to come out on strike, and the Branch was preparing to call them out on full pay.

The Branch passed by a massive majority a resolution calling for the extension of the selective action to all departments of the council, and for a move to an immediate strike ballot, calling the entire branch out should negotiations break down or a new, unacceptable agreement be imposed. An immediate Branch meeting would be held in the event of anyone being told their pay would be stopped for supporting the action.

Monday 12 February was the first day of the branch-wide selective action, and it went off very successfully, with

massive branch-wide support. Contrary to expectations, management didn't try to escalate the dispute by threatening withdrawal of pay. Now it's a stand-off, and the key issue is the negotiations, where NALGO has prepared a package which takes the best bits from all existing packages already in agreement across other London boroughs. To win this the pressure must be kept up and even escalated.

Activists should call for regular branch meetings to review progress on the negotiations, and to consider escalating the action, possible to an all-out strike branch-wide, if there is no positive result.

The issue links with events in Newham and in other London authorities where cuts are on the agenda. It's time to think about London-wide coordination, and maybe the revival of the London Bridge stewards organisation to link together activists across the capital city. In NALGO, NALGO Action has a vital role to play in getting information round and linking together activists on this key issue.

Councils are telling workers they have to choose between keeping their jobs and a low poll tax, but they can't have both. The introduction of the poll tax always meant more job losses. Now it's time to link the fights on redeployment, redundancy and cuts to the fight on poll tax. We need to raise the slogan 'No poll tax. No cuts'.

All in all, the strong attendance at the Southwark NALGO union meeting and the fact that local authority workers are again prepared to fight looks good at this critical time, and in the build up to what could be yet more action over this year's national pay claim. The claim favours the low paid, with a total flat-rate increase of £1500 a year, but we should be pressing for the abolition of grades one and two as well. Let's have a real campaign to get rid of low pay!

The outcome of this dispute in Southwark will set the tone for the year to come — it's one we must win!

## Busworkers fight for recognition

**At East Midlands Bus Company, management has sacked two union activists and de-recognised the union. Last week a ballot was held supporting 24-hour strikes to get the union back.**

**Socialist Organiser talked to one of those sacked, Dave McCann, about the dispute so far and the way forward.**

**I** think I was sacked for my trade union activities, — for carrying out an overtime ban and not working a rest day man's shift. They wanted me to break that, but I refused and therefore I was sacked. Someone else was also sacked for trade union activities recently.

*Do you think that the company had planned long before to sack you?*

Yes, ever since this management came. They never wanted to negotiate, they didn't want to recognise the union, they never wanted to talk to the union.

We've only met them twice at JNC level, and the first time they announced they wanted 85 redundancies, and eight the second time. All management have ever done is threaten dismissals or sacking people — they never want to negotiate.

*What's been done so far about fighting back, how has the union organised?*

We've campaigned and brought out Busworker — a bulletin on the dispute, produced by the NUR district council. We've balloted members for 24-hour strikes, and got a 'yes' vote. That's the first start now to fighting back. We can't tell the NEC when we want to strike; they tell us when the day is. So it's a case now of keeping the momentum up, and campaigning and keeping the membership informed.

I think that the action should take place within the next week. We've got an NEC member coming up, we're going round the depots, keeping up the momentum, and now we must make the NEC name the date for action.

Management put out a letter saying that they were going to take us to court because, in their opinion, the ballot wasn't valid, and they wanted to get an injunction against the 24-hour strikes when we start them.

As far as we're concerned, the ballot was carried out properly. There's been no back-handing anywhere, we've got a good result and we're sticking to that. Management can't prove what they're saying, so we're not bothered about that. They're just putting fear into people, and we've got to put our own stuff out countering that.

I think the National Union should ignore the letter, it's just an idle threat. I think management are frightened to death. They wouldn't be going round the depots threatening to sack people if they weren't frightened.

I think the main fight is to get the union recognised again. We have got to go and fight to get union rights back in the depot. It may be a fight we're never going to win, but we've got to fight. If we go out with a fight we can hold our heads up high, but if we give in the union will lose its name as far as buses are concerned.

### IN BRIEF

1600 workers at **Harland and Wolf** shipyard in Belfast struck for 24 hours in protest at management's 'flexibility' plans. This is the first action since the yard was privatised last autumn, many strikers are 'shareholders'.

Lecturers at Polytechnics and colleges have ended their exam boycott after voting to accept a new pay deal worth around 7.5%.

**British Aerospace** is playing tough again in the 35-hour week battle. Over 800 workers have now been suspended for refusing to cross picket lines at the Preston plant to do strikers' work.

**Highly paid civil servants** are set to be given pay awards up to 24% in a new 'pay points' incentive scheme. Civil Service unions have said this new system will increase patronage and demoralise those on grades not eligible for the award.

## Manchester benefits strike

**C**ounter staff at Manchester Benefit Service voted on Friday 16 February to suspend their strike action for 10 days as NALGO officials promised to push their regrading claim through the council's Finance Committee within that time. And to support official strike action if the claim is rejected.

The strike proved successful in terms of pushing the NALGO Branch to this action.

The original response of the NALGO officials was to undermine the dispute at every turn, and insist that counter staff waited to try and negotiate their regrading after the poll tax was implemented — when the council will be trying to force through massive cuts.

It was the solid counter strike and the brilliant support of other staff within MBS and from other council workers that pushed the union into action now.

Had the strike continued, however, the other demand of the strike — to stop management's introduction of part-time staff on the counter over the busy dinner period might well have been won. NALGO officials refused to support this demand, and made their support for regrading conditional on dropping it.

Yet it was not only union officials who argued for a return to work at the expense of this demand. SWP members in MBS argued against spreading the strike in the department and for a return to work. Despite the strength of the counter strike, the SWP saw their role as demoralising counter staff and mirroring the role of the union bureaucrats.



# SOCIALIST ORGANISER

## Mersey crews vote to strike

By Stan Crooke

# Ambulances: no sell-out!

**A**s we go to press, on Tuesday evening 20 February, talks are still under way at ACAS between ambulance union leaders and Health Service management.

The talks were the first direct contact between the two sides for four months.

A deal looks possible. According to the press, the union negotiators are ready to accept the proposals floated by the chief ambulance officers a few weeks ago and endorsed last week by some on the employers' side.

As the *Financial Times* reported (20 February): "A fresh impetus was given to the search for a solution by chief ambulance officers about a week ago."

[Health Service chief executive] Mr Nichol recently met with representatives of the Association of Chief Ambulance Officers to discuss peace proposals. Earlier in the month the chief officers met to formulate proposals which are thought to have included a two-year deal worth up to 16 per cent, compared to the nine per cent, 18 month offer on the table.

The Department of Health had previously said that Mr Nichol would only meet the chief officers if he felt their proposals had merit.

The Tories have shown little sign of budging on the issue of a long-term pay system. Ominously, a report in last Sunday's *Correspondent* (18 February) suggested that



the union leaders, and certainly Roger Poole, have given up on this issue.

There is no need for such defeatism. Ambulance workers have massive public support. They can escalate their action without squandering that support or splitting their own ranks if they go for an all-out strike with accident and emergency cover. Solidarity strike

action from the broad labour and trade union movement can force greater concessions from the Tories.

If the negotiators emerge with a deal this week, then the ambulance workers themselves must decide whether it is acceptable. There must be no winding-down of the action until a full national ballot of all ambulance workers has been held.

**Support the ambulance workers!**  
**Lobby the TUC for a one-day general strike**  
**Wednesday 28 February, 8.15am,**  
**Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.**  
**Called by NW London NUPE Ambulances.**

In a 75% turnout, Merseyside ambulance crews have voted 58% to 42% in favour of an all-out local strike with no accident and emergency cover. The ballot result was announced last Monday, 19 February.

The branch's decision to ballot on an all-out local strike was the result of a growing discontent with a lack of momentum in the dispute in the aftermath of the day of action on 30 January.

But the ballot result will not necessarily lead to a local all-out strike.

Local NUPE activist Jeff Clare explained: "There is a branch meeting this Thursday where we will discuss the ballot result. It may well be the case that we postpone any decision on implementing the results until we see the outcome of the decision taken at the national shop stewards' conference held last Wednesday (11 February)."

At that conference Roger Poole refused to allow a resolution from the Merseyside ambulance branch of NUPE which called for a national ballot for an all-out strike to be put to the vote. Instead, the conference agreed to the proposal that ambulance crews should not accept any instructions from management.

This will, in all probability, result in nationwide suspensions of ambulance crews, thereby over-stretching the limited resources of the army and police, and thus have the same impact as a national strike.

As the current issue of the weekly bulletin produced by ambulance crews on Merseyside puts it:

"In the light of recent events, a strike on Merseyside has now lost its importance... Roger Poole ruled out a ballot for a national strike, yet the action that has been recommended, it is hoped, will have the same effect..."

"Although a national ballot for strike action would have made our position a lot clearer, it may well have been lost, and would have divided us further. By this action we will be on strike in all but name, but in order for our action to be successful we must all act as one."

Ambulance chiefs have responded to the ballot result by claiming that a strike would lead to increased use of the police but there would be no need to call in the army. Local ambulance crews themselves, meanwhile, are taking steps to set up an alternative ambulance service with vehicles and equipment provided by Liverpool City Council.

The next stage in the dispute on Merseyside will not be clear until this Thursday's branch meeting. What is clear, however, is that ambulance crews are getting increasingly exasperated at the failure of the union leadership to provide a real escalation in this long-running dispute.

## Ambulance stewards back leadership

By Mark Hateley

**F**rom now on there's no hiding place!" So spoke NUPE's Roger Poole, unveiling the latest union tactics in the ambulance dispute to a packed stewards meeting in London last Wednesday.

With 250 stewards present, representing every ambulance service in the country, it was an ideal opportunity to take stock of the dispute, and map out a path to victory. What, in fact, emerged at the meeting was somewhat different.

The new tactic of "total non-cooperation with management" was immediately announced by Poole, and discussion from the floor was from then onwards dominated by assessing its implications. From the platform, Poole and the other four union full-timers present made it clear that other issues, such as a national strike ballot or solidarity action, were not up for debate.

"Non-cooperation" is essentially a drive to increase the number of crews suspended, from the current 50% level, by refusing to take instructions from

senior ambulance officers. It appears that the union leadership has called a major escalation of the dispute — and this may well be the case.

The new course, however, has crucial limitations and its implementation could bring major problems.

The most important limitation is the rejection of calls for solidarity action from other trade unionists. With polls still indicating over 80% support from the general public for the ambulance workers, a call for a TUC one-day general strike would have tremendous resonance in the labour movement. By insisting that the dispute can be won through purely internal escalation, the leadership may well face demoralisation amongst the rank and file if a breakthrough is not achieved in the near future.

This danger is compounded by the method chosen to escalate the action. A drive to increase suspensions leaves final control of the escalation firmly in the hands of the Chief Ambulance Officers. They have taken a strictly tactical line approach to suspensions up to now, so that crews taking similar action in different parts of the country have faced differing management reaction. This unevenness in the dispute can cause tension amongst ambulance workers and will come to the fore if crews find it

harder to get themselves suspended than they thought.

Even if the suspension drive succeeded, there is a danger that the tactic will lead simply to lock-outs, with inadequate emergency cover. As one steward from Lincolnshire put it on Wednesday: "The aim should be to get locked in, not locked out." Unless the unions can secure emergency cover, if necessary by occupying the stations, then serious splits would open up in ambulance workers' ranks.

The alternative — a strike with emergency cover — would unify the action, and stands a better chance of stiffening it in the shire counties, where it has been weakest than calling on hesitant crews to get themselves suspended and locked out.

Why was this strategy put forward by the leadership?

After 24 weeks of the dispute, militant stewards in areas such as London and Liverpool have questioned the leadership's approach and have called for a national strike ballot. It seems that the full-timers used the considerable respect that Roger Poole has with stewards to diffuse this, by getting him to announce straight away the "non-cooperation" tactic. This helped them resist calls for a strike ballot and solidarity action.

The leadership must have known that once the strategy was announced, the major debate would then be between suspended and non-suspended areas. If that was so, then it was a stupid and dangerous act. Poole was playing with fire.

The unevenness of the dispute is not fundamentally the result of unsuspended crews not pulling their weight, but rather of management tactics.

To tacitly encourage dissension between crews as a way of ensuring the authority of the leadership is very dangerous.

There was one particularly crude attempt made at the meeting to isolate the London stewards (who have been advocates of solidarity action and an all-out strike). TGWU full-timer Danny Brien, from the chair, accused London of "slugging off the rest of the country". They, in turn, demanded an immediate retraction of this slur, insisting that they were "slugging him off, not the rest of the country"! An angry walkout of London stewards then took place, which ended only when this charge was withdrawn.

Greater co-ordination is now required between those areas of the country who are in favour of a strike ballot, so that the call cannot be brushed off in the future as easily as it was last Wednes-

day.

Only a few voices pointed to an alternative way of escalating the dispute: through appeals for solidarity strike action. Poole directly attacked this view by arguing that it was a "cop out". "We are in control of this dispute, if we lose then it will be our fault," said Poole, adding: "We can't go round blaming Normal Willis if we lose this one."

Poole has obviously not been reading January's *Nursing Times* which makes it quite clear that the government are not in any mood to capitulate.

"The cost of settling the dispute this year with a couple of extra per cent would be minimal. And because any award would be for last year's pay round, it could have no impact on this year's 'going rate', which is already well over the much-quoted 6.5%. The government's real object now is to resist any long-term pay formula and, even more important, not to appear to capitulate in the face of industrial action."

In the face of such determination no amount of bravado is going to convince me that ambulance workers can win on their own. Solidarity action from workers who do have economic and political muscle is going to be needed to force the government to back down.